



## Camels provide farmers in drylands with milk and income

### Notes to broadcaster

In the extreme droughts of 2000, many of the cattle owned by a Maasai community in Kenya died. The community started to look more favourably on a livestock animal that had survived the drought: the camel. Camels can survive droughts by browsing on leaves other animals cannot eat. A lactating camel can go for twelve days without drinking water. Camels are resistant to most diseases.

The camel can be milked up to 4 times a day and produces milk for 12 months of the year. This constant source of milk becomes a reliable and consistent source of income and a nutritious food for the family and the community at a time when other food may be in short supply. These kinds of non-traditional customs and resources can be especially important to communities, including pastoralist communities, who are faced with decreasing land and water resources because of the process of desertification.

The following script is based on an interview with Mr. Kipaseyia of the Kajiado district in Kenya. Mr. Kipaseyia is a livestock farmer and chairman of a primary school in Komiya in Magadi division of Kajiado. He introduced camels to Magadi. The interview highlights some of the advantages of camels for farmers in arid and semi-arid environments. The interview was conducted by Sharon Sian Looremata of the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) in Kenya.

### Start of program

**Host:** Good morning (evening, afternoon), Mr. Kipaseyia. Welcome to our program today.

**Kipaseyia:** I am very happy to be here and talk about the benefits and the wonders of camels.

**Host:** Camels are not native to this part of Kenya, I believe. How were they first introduced?

**Kipaseyia:** In 1995 there was a bad drought. We - the Maasai people - had to think of other ways to live. I knew that camels would do well here.

**Host:** So you started raising camels?

**Kipaseyia:** Yes. At first many people did not like the idea. They called camels dirty, ugly animals. Some even said they could not drink from the same water source as other animals. But after a while they changed their minds and some families began to see the benefits.

**Host:** What could have happened to make the people change their minds?



**Kipaseyia:** There was another drought. In this drought, most of the livestock died. But the camels survived. Families with camels still had plenty of milk to drink. They even had extra milk to sell during the driest season. Neighbours flocked to my homestead to get milk for their young children. Everyone wished and longed to have a camel.

**Host:** Really, I had no idea that camels were such useful animals. What allows them to survive, even when other animals are dying?

**Kipaseyia:** The camel can browse on leaves other animals cannot, so it survives even in severe droughts. It's perfectly suited for dry lands. Also, a camel can be milked four times a day all year round. Even when the rains fail and cows have little to eat and give little or no milk, the camel still provides milk.

**Host:** The camel sounds like a truly wonderful animal. Do camels get many diseases?

**Kipaseyia:** Unlike cattle and goats, camels are more resistant to diseases. This is one of the reasons why many of the Maasai in this area are interested in buying camels despite the fact that they are more expensive to buy than cattle. Many cannot afford a camel, I know. But they are happy that they can buy camel milk from me. You know, we even named our school after a camel ... the name of our school -- Enkomia -- means camel.

**Host:** Do people in the community like camel milk?

**Kipaseyia:** Camel milk is medicinal and very nutritious because camels feed on all types of herbs and leaves. We believe that the herbs in the milk keep us healthy and free from a lot of diseases. If all families could own two milking camels, hunger in this dry region would be a story of the past. Everyone would have a continuous supply of milk and their health would improve. Camels can produce ten litres of milk per day, if the animal is healthy and there are lots of leaves to browse.

**Host:** How has the camel benefited you personally?

**Kipaseyia:** My wife sells milk at the neighboring township and makes almost two dollars [use local currency] each day. Since she sells milk throughout the year, she has a constant income unlike the other women who rely solely on cows for milk. This has allowed us to buy household utensils, pay for medical care, pay school fees, and join a revolving loan fund.

**Host:** All this thanks to a camel! The camel sounds like a real blessing for communities in dry areas. Thank you for telling us about your experiences.



**Kipaseyia:** You are very welcome. And please, try some camel milk.

**Host:** (sound of host taking a drink) Umm ... delicious. Thank you. And thank you for listening. Good day.

### **Acknowledgements**

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