

Umoja Uaso Women Group

Web 1:

<http://umojawomen.or.ke/>

Web 2:

<http://fk-umoja.org/>

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P.O Box 559-60300

Isiolo, Kenya

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

RE: 5 Years Freundeskreis Umoja-Friends of Umoja e.V. (FKU)

The above subject matter refers;

Umoja Uaso Women Group fraternity would like to acknowledge the impeccable support of **FKU** for its ability to turn around progress and development in the organization.

The group consisting of 38 women has realized tremendous and augmented development in its physical environment and improvement of socio economic and standards of living status of its members living together in a women-only village and it is with great pleasure that the group would like to register the many milestones accorded by **FKU**.

Just to give a brief background of the organization, Umoja Women lives in a village located at Samburu County in Kenya, away from major cities and trading centers. Within the Kenyan devolved system, Samburu County is typically overlooked and underrepresented, receiving limited government funds and assistance. This is evident in the lack of infrastructure and government services in the area. As the land is sparsely populated, it is often difficult to distribute any resources to remote communities. The education system is under funded; schools lack sufficient classroom space, supplies, and teachers. Health care facilities are few, under funded and often difficult to reach, and those available are inadequate for people requiring sophisticated treatment. Women, as their families' primary caregivers, are saddled with the responsibility of traveling with sick members and waiting long periods of time for treatment.

Many Samburu, especially women, receive little formal education. Further, pastoralism forces some young children to stay home to take care of the family's livestock. In each consecutive level of schooling (primary, secondary and tertiary – colleges/universities), the female to male ratio decreases.

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The Samburu people practice polygamy, meaning that a man may have several wives. As such, a woman as young as 12 years old usually marries a man who is in his 30s, although she can also marry an elder well into his 60s, as long as he can pay the girl's family the appropriate dowry, usually in cows and goats. As such, young women are treated as property and are bought and sold in exchange for livestock and they cannot inherit from their fathers neither would they be allowed to own property.

Marriage generally cannot take place until a young woman is circumcised. If she refuses either circumcision or marriage, she will likely be beaten and shunned by her family.

Most women in Samburu County have experienced some form of spousal abuse. Many of these experiences occur within relationships, due to a woman's vastly subordinate role in society.

Many of Umoja's members have suffered abuse at the hands of their husbands, and for this reason fled them! By living together in a self-declared gender-based violence-free village, women are collectively safer. While some men come to Umoja to attempt to abuse the wives who have left them, the women in the village have the power to stop this, and in fact chase the men out themselves, they also acquired vast land claiming their entitlement to own a property, set up schools for education and securing brighter futures of their children as well as tourist camping site where they accrue revenue from. The school they own is called *Umoja Muehlbauer Academy*, named after the first German donor that helped construct the first four standard blocks, Mr. Josef Muehlbauer, President Muehlbauer GmbH & Co. KG and Muehlbauer Foundation

In the above light, the societal inequalities culminated to the formation of the village "Umoja" founded in 1990 by Rebecca Lolosoli as a pure women's village and offers its residents and their children protection against violence and oppression to this day. At the same time, the women of Umoja make a significant contribution to the development of the entire region with their pioneering projects.

With the support of *Freundeskreis Umoja e.V. - Friends of Umoja (FKU)* since 2015 it was when Umoja was given another breath of fresh air attaining a second phase of momentum in its causes with systematic series of activities, development and progress in its agenda.

This turnaround is attributed to Ise Stockums, regarded the passionate heart and soul of FKU Management Team. They injected the new energy and growth of Umoja exponentially. Umoja would therefore like to acknowledge and recognizing **FKU's** efforts by listing but just a few as follows:

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1. Formation of *Freundeskreis Umoja e.V. - Friends of Umoja (FKU)* in 2015 in Germany and recruiting over 50 dedicated members to date with zeal and passion to support the organization's cause
2. Ise Stockums as founder became the Chair Lady of the foundation to date and through her leadership many goals were achieved
3. *Freundeskreis Umoja e.V. - Friends of Umoja (FKU)*, managed to mobilize resources for Umoja Uaso Women Group, Umoja Muehlbauer Academy and Umoja Campsite by initiating and progressing the following projects:
 - a. Support of 12 teachers' salaries and wages courtesy of donors and scholarship programme school fees, this also includes 3 cooks, a watchman and a gardener
 - b. In 2016, **FKU** supported the academy in constructing 2 temporary classrooms as the school population was steadily growing, pending plans to source adequate funds to construct the needed 4 extra standard classrooms to create appropriate environment for learners as envisaged by Ministry of Education quality assurance guidelines in Kenya
 - c. In 2017, **FKU** began a scholarship programme of supporting 20 girls every year from vulnerable background joining Grade 1. The beneficiaries have to sign an agreement alongside their parents of not getting the girls to undergo FGM, early marriage and practicing other retrogressive cultural practices. Today the programme boasts of supporting 79 girls and 7 boys and is regarded as pioneering in the fight against FGM.
 - d. In 2017, **FKU** helped the school to be connected with National Grid providing reliable source of power.
 - e. In 2017, **FKU** offered a new lease of life to Umoja fraternity by influencing a donor to sponsor drilling of Solar powered borehole that provided constant and adequate supply of clean and safe drinking water to the village, the academy, the gardens and the camp site resolving the once perennial acute shortage of water that left people with no option but sourcing water from contaminated flowing Ewaso Ng'iro River
 - f. In 2019, **FKU** supported construction of a commodious and equipped stone wall school's food store with charcoal natural cold room annex that enhanced bulk purchase of school meals cutting on cost of

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middlemen. The charcoal cold room provided a storage of perishable products for weeks without going bad; saving on cost on buying and operating a modern electric refrigerator

- g. **FKU** transformed the livelihood of Umoja Women from depending on jewelry sale, cultural tourism and livestock keeping only to adopting the following:-
 - i. Agropastoralism by initiating gardens planting food crops ensuring food security for the village and the academy as well as provision of balanced diet. The gardens operate 2 greenhouses, sack gardens and tub beds. They are watered by irrigation courtesy of the drilled borehole
 - ii. Due to COVID-19 global pandemic, the women lost income from tourism and jewelry sales and **FKU** suggested and financed the production of Alovera liquid and bar soap in the village, providing an alternative economic venture.
- h. **FKU** supports budget for purchasing school meals enabling provision of varieties of food menu promoting good health of school children in the academy; it also supports several other administrative and operational budget items.
- i. **FKU** is promoting girl child and women empowerment by supporting anti FGM workshops sensitizing schools girls and women in the community on demanding for their rights and space in the male dominated Samburu society.
- j. **FKU** has been reaching out to partners and supporting Umoja Village renovations during damages caused by calamities like floods and heavy rains. Umoja Camp was face-lifted by refurbishment of 4 cottages to hospitality standards increasing demand of reservations hence raising revenue for the women. Unfortunately now interrupted by COVID 19 pandemic.
- k. In 2018/19, partnering with Tatort Verein e.V, **FKU** developed strong networks and was able to access German Government funding from BMZ to support construction of 4 standard classrooms with an office annex providing the school with a complete blocks of classes as per the Ministry of Education quality assurance guidelines in Kenya.
- l. **FKU** is currently assisting with securing and protecting Umoja Women vast land property amidst threats of encroachment and land grabbing by hostile neighbouring community people.

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m. **FKU** is currently providing donations for food supply to UUWG fraternity to prevent starvation.

In the above radiance in brief, **FKU** through the imminent leadership of Ise Stockums and the entire management team, is continuing addressing the transformative development agenda in Umoja setting the organization at a high level in Samburu County influencing opinions and decisions that empowers girls and women, claiming right for women to inherit and own property, providing education to vulnerable girls and children, food security and balanced diet and improving socio-economic and standard of living of Umoja Women with their families for the better.

It is in our prayers that *FKU* may be able to continue the immeasurable support and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Kind regards

Rebecca S. Lolosoli

Founder and Chairlady, Umoja Uaso Women Group