

KENYA – ISIOLO COUNTY

LOCAL ADVOCACY EFFORT PREVENTS PRIVATE OWNERSHIP OF PARKS

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Together with Cordaid Kenya and the Partners for Resilience alliance, implementing partner MIDP was able to help repulse the leasing of Buffalo Springs and Shaba Game Reserve – a process which did not include any public participation.

BACKGROUND

In March 2016, after lengthy discussions with multi-disciplinary professionals and brain storming sessions on matters pertaining to the planned leasing of Shaba and Buffalo Springs game reserves by the County Government of Isiolo, Friends of Isiolo Game Reserves (FIGARE) was initiated and established. The organization was later registered as a Community Based Organization (CBO) in May of the same year. FIGARE has 18 members which were drawn from community groups working on conservation, ecotourism, those who live adjacent to the reserves, CSOs, and former civic leaders among others.

PROPOSED LEASING OF ISIOLO PARK

The former Governor, Hon. Godana Doyo together with speaker Mr Mohamed Tubi and County Executive Committee (CEC) tourism Suleiman Shunu came up with a plan to enter into an agreement with African Parks limited of South Africa to manage the Buffalo Springs and Shaba Game Reserve. In the past several years the Parks have been mismanaged by the County Council of Isiolo. The population of wildlife in the Buffalo Springs and Shaba Game Reserve has been steadily decreasing and revenue generation had gone down.

“ the need to manage the Parks was a priority but the process followed was a suspect- there has been no public participation which is a basic requirement. We must get it right from the onset.”

Councillor Dabaso Halkano

However, this trending deal advanced by the African Park was completely biased against the public interest, unviable to generate targeted local revenue while at the same time dangerously skewed in favour of the African Park. It granted the African Park near overhaul of the managerial mandates including highly restricted access to the facility by the County Government of Isiolo without prior consent from the said African Parks. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) did not give consideration to other rightful interests in the parks like hoteliers and employees and above all increase vulnerability of pastoralists who depend on pastures that are around the parks during drought.

“Denying pastoralist access to the Parks especially during the stressful period of drought will reverse the gains made in inculcating the sense of ownership of the wildlife resources in the Parks.”

Former Councillor Buke Golo.



CREATING THE PETITION

FIGARE did not have the financial and technical expertise to engage the County Government of Isiolo effectively. It is on this basis that MID-P assisted FIGARE and members of the public to file a Petition at the Senate and County Assembly to intervene and protect the reserves against the exclusive plan by the County Executives to lease the parks. The support was in line with the Partners for Resilience plan investment goals. As a result, members of FIGARE had a meeting with the Senate Committee on land and natural resources to assess the petition, and the Senate Committee then summoned the County Executive and County Assembly for more deliberations.

MID-P under the Partners for Resilience project linked FIGARE to the media, including print/electronic and local radio FM based in Isiolo. This created massive awareness, provided technical/financial support, strengthened their capacity to engage, and facilitated a consultative meeting that was attended by 40 participants from local CSOs and members of the community to discuss the effect of said leasing and developed an action plan.

FIGARE held a meeting with the current CEC of Tourism Hon. Tiya Galgalo and gave updates on their efforts, shared reports, and asked to know plan/status of the new County Administration on the park leasing.

“we appreciate the work done by FIGARE. We value your contribution and partnership in making our parks tourists destination as it was before”.

Hon. Tiya Galgalo

As a result below is what the new governor Hon. Mohamed Kuti said in his press statement on 8th December 2017.

PRESS RELEASE

Lobby lauds Kuti over plan on game reserves

Isiolo Governor Mohamed Kuti has been praised for dropping plans by his predecessor to place the management of game reserves under a private firm. Friends of Isiolo Game Reserves, a group championing wildlife conservation, said the governor’s decision had instilled confidence towards the revival of Shaba and Buffalo springs game reserves. Group chair Hussein Abduba said before devolution, the parks used to generate revenue of up to Sh150 million annually owing to proper management.

– Vivian Jebet

LEARNINGS

The County Administration has set up a committee with the mandate to revive the ailing Parks. The Chairperson of FIGARE, Hussein Abduba said the following- *“We will continue to play our role as a homegrown lobby and an advocacy group. We will need the support of like-minded individuals and organizations like MID-P. In fact we plan to review the Constitution of FIGARE so that our mandate is expanded to cover conservation and tourism not restricted to the Parks”.* MID-P will continue to work with the members of FIGARE and other grassroots lobby and advocacy groups.

Working with FIGARE we learnt the following:

1. It is more impactful if communities or their grassroots organisations take up advocacy on issues of interest to them while MID-P will provide support in terms of technical and finance.
2. Media is a strategic partner- it can bring out critical issues into the public domain and influence the actions/decisions of leaders
3. Three of the brains behind FIGARE are former Councillors of Isiolo County Council- these are untapped resources

ABOUT CORDAID

Cordaid strives to end poverty and exclusion. We do this in the world’s most fragile and conflict-affected areas as well as in the Netherlands. We engage local communities to rebuild trust and resilience and increase people’s self reliance. Our professionals provide humanitarian assistance and create opportunities to improve security, healthcare and education and stimulate inclusive economic growth. We are supported by 288.000 private donors in the Netherlands and by a worldwide partner network. This gives us the leverage and implementing power to solve problems and create structural change in the most challenging settings.

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