



**FREE THE CHILDREN**  
*children helping children through education*



# Osenetoi

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

Osenetoi is a rural Kenyan village situated in Lemek, a sub-location within Ololunga Division of Narok South District. The community is comprised of approximately 2000 villagers, including 260 school-going children. The area is largely populated by the Maasai, a vibrant group of semi-nomadic pastoralists. The Maasai people, native to Kenya and northern Tanzania speak the Maa language.

Because polygamy is common amongst the Maasai, the average family size is markedly high. The family unit includes the male head of household and two to three wives. Each wife in turn may have as many as seven children. Large families were traditionally considered a sign of prestige and wealth but are also valuable for carrying out household labour such as herding cattle.

With increasing demarcation of their land, the villagers are forced to become more settled and take up permanent homes. Family size has begun to decrease as a result of settlement patterns and also because the community members see the cost of education and health care as prohibitive to having children without sufficient planning.

There are several challenges faced by the community members including female circumcision, early marriage, alcoholism, high unemployment rates amongst post-adolescent youth, and domestic violence. The village has faced recurring drought, with famine hitting the villagers in 1983, 1993, 2000, 2005, and 2009.

## Education

The illiteracy rate in Osenetoi is 80 per cent amongst men and 90 per cent amongst women. Approximately 20 per cent of the village's primary school-age children are not in school. There are only five classrooms currently accommodating the 260 children who do attend school in Osenetoi Primary. Of the five classrooms, only three are permanent structures, while the other two are semi-permanent. The semi-permanent structures need to be repaired and rebuilt regularly in order to keep them in working condition. There are five educators leading classes in Osenetoi for the students. There are 134 boys and 126 girls currently enrolled at Osenetoi Primary.

There are several factors that limit the education potential of children in this community. The most common reasons include a high burden of household labour on children, such as herding cattle, early marriage and unwanted and early pregnancies. These factors in turn result in some primary school dropout.

## Health Care

Health care is a significant concern for the community members in Osenetoi. The most common health problems include exposure illness while herding cattle due to dust and rain, waterborne illness due to poor waste management and hygiene including typhoid, and upper respiratory tract infections as a result of poor ventilation in manyatta style homes. Other illnesses affecting the villagers include malaria, dysentery, pneumonia, tuberculosis, and diarrhea. Drought conditions in the village leads to poor nutrition amongst both children and adults.

The infant mortality rate in Osenetoi is 15 per cent and there is a high incidence of miscarriage. Child under-five mortality is 10 per cent. Maternal mortality is relatively low, however the most common complication resulting in death is placenta retention. This is because most women give birth at home and do not visit a hospital for a check-up after delivery. There are no health care facilities within a 10km radius of the village, nor are there any private practitioners.

## Water and Sanitation

Ill health amongst the villagers is most often a result of poor water and sanitation facilities and practices. None of the households have access to safe drinking water or proper sanitation facilities. The main sources of water for this community include rain water, shallow dams that collect water only during the rainy season, and a semi-protected spring which is a three hour walk from the village. The shallow dams are dug by the community members right outside their homes in preparation for the rains. In the dry season, women and girls have very little time to commit toward their normal activities including beadwork, weaving and school in order to cover the long walk to collect water.

Waste management is another area for improvement amongst the villagers. There is only one latrine for the community which is owned by the chief. At the school site, there are two permanent and 1 semi-permanent latrines, however these are all in disrepair.

## Alternative Income

The average income for men in the community is \$40 USD per month, whereas it is only \$20 USD per month for women. Approximately 70 per cent of the villagers live on less than \$1 or \$2 USD per day. The main occupations for men are animal husbandry, and small-scale agriculture. Women mostly take up small businesses based on skilled crafts such as beadwork and weaving. Only seven per cent of the villagers operate a savings account, and 34 per cent of the villagers are in debt. The main reasons for the debt burdens include loans taken out to expand small businesses, personal household development, school fees, and the cost of livestock rearing.

The main source of food for the community members comes from livestock, household farming, and some purchase of food items at the market. Limitations to agricultural yield are the result of poor rainfall and drought. The drought in turn has led to a high incidence of livestock death. On average, 60 per cent of livestock are unable to survive drought. The only mitigation measure is to move to areas with greener pasture.