

Naning'oi Girls Boarding Primary School

Naning'oi is a girl's boarding school and a rescue centre, which protects young girls of the local Maasai community in Mosiro Kajiado West and the neighboring Mosiro in Narok East Constituency. The girls are often escaping from child marriage and female genital mutilation. As Naning'oi is the only centre catering solely to girls in a 500km² radius, girls as young as 12 have walked through the arid land for days, at risk of being mauled by wild animals to seek refuge. Despite best efforts, the girls are still vulnerable.

When funding was guaranteed (since the year 1999 when it was founded), Naning'oi was a center where girls flourished and got to escape from the female genital mutilation and early forced marriage. In 2009 however, funding started to decline and in 2014 responsibility for the institution was formally handed over to the community and the Kenyan government. Unfortunately, the story of the school and rescue center has been one of decline ever since funding started to fall. In 2017, Naning'oi had suffered such decline that it was on the brink of closure. Enrollment had fallen from almost 500, to below 56 girls. Women of the community, however, led by Selina Nkoile who was born and raised up in Mosiro, a pioneer, beneficiary, and a graduate of Naning'oi, stepped in to try and save the center through the community based organization – Nashipai Maasai Community project. Enrollment is back up to ~350, and growing very fast. Yet Naning'oi's future is far from certain. This project and seeks to restore Naning'oi, guarantee its future, and give more Maasai girls from Mosiro an equal opportunity to education, enjoy the right to be free from early and forced marriage and all other forms of gender - based violence.

The school will have the much-needed infrastructures, security, sanitation, food and healthcare as well as overall sustainability to keep girls in school and support them to achieve their dreams.

Girls' Situation in Mosiro

There are over 200 girls currently seeking refuge at Naning'oi. These are girls who cannot return to their homes for fear of being forced into marriage, or subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM) therefore stay in Naning'oi all year round. An example of one such girl is Lasoi, who was forced to undergo FGM before being married against her will to a much older man. This 'husband' beat her and left her for dead in a field. She was found in the evening by a passer-by and was later brought to Naning'oi school and rescue center. Lasoi is eleven years old, she has recovered from the beatings and her physical scars are healed, the emotional trauma will last years. Many of the Naning'oi girls are runaways. Often, some girls learn about Naning'oi through local Maasa radio shows which broadcasts about girl's rights and the work we are doing at Naning'oi. This emboldens young girls like Gladys Koshal and Naseyio Koshal, two sisters aged 11 and 13, respectively, to reject the future of a forced marriage. They heard of Naning'oi on a radio broadcast about girl's rights and ran away from child marriage to be educated. Some have particularly grueling journeys to Naning'oi. Kokoyian Mpoke and Reson Mpoke walked for 3 days through the semi-arid area of the Masai Mara to reach Naning'oi.

Security is still precarious for the girls. Girls who have run away from child marriage, are under constant threat of their 'husbands' or families returning to kidnap them away from their homes. Regrettably, this happened in June last year to 11-year-old Nankini, who had run away to Naning'oi a day before her planned wedding. Three days later, her mother and step-mother stormed the school with machetes and abducted her. Nankini was handed over to her supposed 'husband', who raped her before she could be rescued and taken back to school.

Child marriage is illegal in Kenya. Yet there is no police presence in Mosiro, where Naning'oi is located. The community takes the law onto its own hands; and the rights of girls unfortunately does not take great importance in that law structure (although that is slowly, positively, changing)

Despite the situation at Naning'oi, there is still an increasing number of girls running away to the facility for refuge and to get an education, but the school lacks the capacity to sustain these girls, who almost all have no support from their parents.

These cases are extreme but unfortunately all-too common.