


ARTS FOR PEACEBUILDING; THE NAMOE EBOKOT JOURNEY

Namoe recalls having a normal childhood growing up. To him, stealing, cattle rustling, and always being destructive were not frowned upon. On the contrary, they were glorified and rewarded. He fondly remembers together with his friends; they would move to several mathenikis in Moroto and Koboong to raid. Along the way, he left his friends behind, dead, never to be heard from again. He considers himself lucky, and he credits his survival to the several government programs that enticed them to leave his cattle raiding days behind. His story started with a priest in his village that always encouraged them to get involved in village savings and donor associations by participating in dramas and other community activities. These engagements saw Namoe changing into the leader he is today.

Namoe heads a group of 35 members aged 18 to 40 years. Of the 35, 20 are men, and 15 are women, all former cattle rustlers that have now embraced Arts as a way of life. The group is called Lomonja (meaning from the bush). They are a group that thinks, works and fights for peace using the arts. They have a vision to see more peace groups formed among the Karamojong pastoral communities.

According to Namoe, engaging in the Arts is much more effective in promoting peacebuilding; It is beneficial both financially and symbolically. The road to cattle rustling leads to death, but the arts bring life, unity in the community and a chance for a better future for now and future generations. It is an escape from the harsh realities and violence-prone tendencies that plague the Karamojong pastoral communities. Ebokot says the Arts are a newfound wealth for the Karamojong community. The income received from the handcrafts is sustainable. However, the little earned through cattle rustling after the bloodshed, sweat and death is not sustainable!





Namoe's journey in the Arts has seen him prioritize peacebuilding as one of his major duties in the community. Through his cap knitting and bead weaving project, he has purposed to promote dialogues with his brothers and sisters, still engaging in cattle rustling so as to embrace peace as they engage in art activities that will see them live a long life. His Arts and craft project there has led to a considerable decrease in cattle rustling and the destruction of the neighboring communities. He hopes that the work he is doing now will act as an incentive to entice all those still in the bush to come back home and participate in similar activities.

Namoe says the best way to promote or start peacebuilding is to begin at the household level. Growing up in a peaceful environment fosters the growth of constructive ideas instead of destruction. He shares that sadly, this was the crucial lesson he and friends, that have now passed on missed out on learning when growing up.

“Conflicts at home are the reason for long lasting violence. If there is no peace at the family level, children will go out and engage in all types of bad behaviors in the kraals. A person who has peace gives out peace, a person without peace gives out chaos. Arts symbolize peace and every community should embrace them for lasting amity,” Namoe says.

Arts have changed Namoe's way of thinking. He now sees what education can do for his community. With the money he generates from the crafts, he hopes to send all his children to school, so they too contribute positively to the betterment of his community, instead of engaging in violent acts like cattle rustling. Looking into the future, Namoe hopes to encourage cattle rustlers from the neighbouring Karamojong communities, Kenya and beyond, to take up the arts as a way of life. Through community engagements, he hopes to continue interacting and talking to them all about peace.

Engaging in the Arts has enabled Namoe to travel to areas like Kampala, where he noticed a considerable difference in the people and what a thriving peaceful community feels like; safe and secure. His newfound knowledge has helped him pick up different ideas to incorporate into his crafts. These have not only made his craft skills unique but have also transformed and increased the income he generates from them. He wants to instill this in his community. He is hopeful that Karamoja will gain city status like Kampala one day, with skyscraper buildings and thriving businesses. However, this change and development can only happen through education and proactive peace initiatives like the Arts.

“If people are peaceful, there are many opportunities.”

As one of the few survivors, Namoe has seen the difference the Arts have made in his life, the lives of his children and the lives of former cattle rustlers. He says if he has a chance to be invited to speak on radio or Tv, his song will be ‘Arts for Peacebuilding! ‘

