

## A Father's Eyes Opened

by Justus Koech, World Vision Kenya

Like a blind man whose eyes are opened, Jonathan Kapelengura, father of 7 girls and 1 boy, is passionate and excited to share what he can now see from World Vision's Kenya Big Dream project training. He is a natural leader and influencer in his community of Kamaiko village, in the remote area of North Pokot, 3 hours from the nearest town of Kapenguria. It is one of the most beautiful and unexplored parts of Kenya.

Jonathan is a perfect change agent against the Pokot culture and mindset that view girls as a means of wealth through dowry. Fathers marry off their daughters at an early age, denying them an education or a future. In this culture, the allure of dowry and community respect for sending a daughter through female genital mutilation (FGM) and marriage is too much of a reward to resist.



Jonathan laughs with his wife Elizabeth and several of their children, grateful that mindset change has come to North Pokot

This world view is based on age-old traditions and is responsible for placing women's status below men. "I didn't see women and girls as having any important role, other than giving birth and working domestically," confessed Jonathan. That explains why sending a daughter for mutilation and marriage became so normal. Stories abound of young girls being forced into FGM and child marriage so that their brothers can go to school using the proceeds from their kid sister's dowry. The trend is so common that schools see a sharp drop in girl students from grade 5 onwards, the age that girls are forced to undergo FGM and marriage.

Thankfully, the Kenya Big Dream is working through mindset change dialogue trainings (C-Change) to adjust the world view of the community. Jonathan echoing his learnings said, "I have come to realize that we didn't know the true value of women. The women are seen as nobody but just there.

Men would just decide to sell the family cows or marry off the girls without informing them (wives) and if they questioned, we told them off." But the C-Change training is opening their eyes and changing their mindset. "We were practicing FGM not knowing its negative impact on the girls. But we have now realized it has no value, and there is no need to continue it and so we are saying no to FGM," quipped Jonathan.

Instead of men sitting under trees all day while women worked, C-Change is helping men see the value of teamwork. "We now value working as a team and sharing our authority as men with our wives for the betterment of the family," Jonathan says. Women, too, are learning to change and have stopped encouraging FGM and child marriage. Elizabeth, wife to Jonathan, shared how women are also saying no to FGM. "I wish to thank World Vision because they have brought us teachings and we are now taking our children to school so they have a better future," she says. This is echoed by their daughter, Chemosop, 9. "I am in class 2 in Kasepa primary school. My father told me to stay in school," she said in a cute, innocent voice. Kenya Big Dream is opening the minds and as it were, the eyes of the people to change and protect children. Jonathan and his Kamaiko village C-Change class are planting the seeds of hope for the girls in Kasei.