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“Solidarity in a competing world —  
fair use of resources”

## Could Cheese Be the Missing Hard, Stable Currency to Fortify Self-Sufficiency of Pastoralist Communities?

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### Abstract

Traditional pastoral existence in Africa has always necessitated close, sustainable interaction with a harsh natural environment. However, growing pressures from climate change, modern economies and land-grabs are forcing many to abandon self-sufficiency for the big cities. One such group are the indigenous Parakuyo Maasai of Tanzania, who traditionally depend on fresh cow's milk as a staple. They are among the few African ethnic groups that still live as small, socially intact associations close to nature. Their life-style thereby places great value on cattle, land for grazing and excess milk that they may be exchanged for other goods. Unfortunately fresh milk is difficult to store and inevitably times of plenty fluctuate with the times of hunger that threaten cultural retreat. Milk storage is particularly challenging in an arid climate without refrigeration and at such times survival takes precedence over prosperity. We describe an ongoing pilot project that has attempted to address these hardships, facilitate traditional subsistence and the economic autonomy of the Parakuyo Maasai. We proposed that a simple solution is cheese production. The “Maasai-cheese” project ([www.vsf.at](http://www.vsf.at)) was implemented in 2011 and instructs sustainable cheese production on the Maasai boma using locally sourced assets, combining Austrian experience of cheese production with Maasai experience of arid dairy farming.

Anticipated gains for the Maasai are becoming realised. These can be grouped as follows:

(i) Family incomes can be assured during hardship. During the dry season Zebu cattle do not produce enough milk that can be sold or exchanged. However, cheese produced and matured earlier can be sold at this time;

(ii) Antibiotic abuse in cattle can be drastically decreased. When cheese is a valuable commodity there is a strong disincentive to treat cattle with antibiotics, which prevent fermentation.

(iii) Cheese is a sought-after commodity in Africa. This pilot initiative is being well received as the demand for cheese in Africa is enormous. In particular, technical know-how has been a limiting factor until now.

We are encouraged that projects of this nature may continue to support and reintegrate traditional African cultures sustainably, without handouts, and foster fair use of natural resources.

**Keywords:** Antibiotic abuse, Maasai, milk, pastoralism, poverty reduction