

EMPOWER IMPACT KENYA CBO · NYANGWESO, HOMA BAY

BRINGING OUR ROOTS HOME

The traditions, the morals and the old ways of our people — what they were, why they made sense, and how we live them today.

“Roots do not die. They only wait for rain.”

A BOOKLET FOR THE EMPOWER FAMILY · RIWRUOK E TEKO — UNITY IS STRENGTH

FIRST, OUR NAME

What “Empower Impact Kenya” Means

Our name is not a label. It is a sentence — and it is still being written.



The officers of Empower Impact Kenya CBO at the Empower monument, Nyangweso.

EMPOWERING (the people)

IMPACTING (the people)

— and Lord willing, in time, all of Kenya.

Everything in our name points at **people**. Not projects. Not buildings. People. We exist to put strength back into the hands of our own community — to equip everyday people to design, fund and carry their own solutions, the way our people have always done when they stood together.

And this booklet is about the deepest part of that work. Because long before there was a CBO, there was a **way of life** in this land — a way that held villages together through drought, sickness, death and hard seasons, without any office, any donor, or any written constitution. That way of life is our root system. This booklet names it, honors it, and shows how we are living it again — today, on purpose, as a CBO.

REMEMBER — The CBO is new. The way is old. We did not invent togetherness; we inherited it.

THE HEART OF THIS BOOKLET

The Roots Are the Core — Everything Else Is a Tool

The well is not the point. The chickens are not the point. The buildings are not the point.

Let us say it plainly, the way we say it among ourselves: **Empower Impact Kenya CBO is only the vessel.** A vessel matters because of who is in it, where it is going, and why. Our destination is our roots — our ways, our hearts, our values, our love, our God.

So what is the core of this CBO? It is the old, time-honored ways of our people:

- **Community helping community.**
- **People helping people.**
- **One big family** — where nobody builds alone, nobody eats alone, and nobody is left alone.
- **Love and unity** — not as words on a wall, but as the daily practice of a people.

Everything else we do is a **tool** in the hand of that core. The well is a tool — it serves the old law that water and life are shared. The chicken businesses are tools — they serve the old law that a community feeds itself and shares its increase. The Community Center is a tool — a new dala, a gathering heart. The library is a tool — a new siwindhe, where the young are taught. Tools can change with the times. **The roots do not change.**

> *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"* **— Psalm 133:1 (NASB)**

Why did the old ways exist? Not because our grandparents were old-fashioned. They existed **because they made sense**. They brought the community together. They pooled strength, shared resources, and carried the weak. They are terribly desired today — in a world of locked doors and lonely people, our roots are not behind us. They are the answer in front of us.

REMEMBER — Judge every CBO activity by one question: does it bring the community together as one? If it does not, it is not our work — whatever it is called.

PART ONE

The Roots Themselves

Ten old ways of our people — what they were, why they made sense, and how we live them in today's climate.



A small herd at a Nyanza homestead today. The herds are smaller than they were — the way of holding wealth together still stands.

ROOT ONE

Riwruok e Teko — Unity Is Strength

The oldest sentence our people ever organized around.



Community Youth Day at Nyangweso — the village gathered as one.

THE OLD WAY

In 1922 our people carried this proverb into the city and built the Luo Union on it: *Riwruok e teko* — unity is strength. For nearly sixty years that Union buried members with dignity, paid school fees, and found capital for small businesses. A people scattered across a new country stayed one people, because they decided to.

WHY IT MADE SENSE

Alone, a man is one pair of hands and one man's luck. Together, a community is a hundred hands and a shared fortune: when sickness, death or drought struck one house, it struck a wall of brothers — and broke.

LIVING IT TODAY

- The CBO is our generation's Union: when a member is in trouble, we move as one — quickly, without debate about whether he is "our problem."
- Our WhatsApp groups are the village gathered in one circle. Use them to unite, never to divide.
- Funerals, school fees, emergencies: the old Union covered them by belonging. So do we.

> *"And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart."* **— Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NASB)**

REMEMBER — Unity is not a feeling we wait for. It is a decision we keep.

ROOT TWO

Konyir — Nobody Built Alone

Many hands on one home, and a shared meal at the end of the day.



Neighbors raising a house frame together in Kenya today — konyir in its oldest form.

THE OLD WAY

When a house was to be raised, a field cleared or a harvest gathered, the call went out and the village came: the *konyir*, the communal work-party. Men, women and youth worked in rotation from home to home. The owner provided food and drink; the people provided the strength. A house could rise in days. This is the soil the national word *harambee* — all pull together — grew out of.

WHY IT MADE SENSE

It turned the biggest jobs of life — building, clearing, harvesting — from one family's burden into the whole village's morning. Nobody paid cash nobody had. Everybody's turn came.

LIVING IT TODAY

- Our build days are **Konyir Days**: the coop expansion, the Center works — called by name, fed with a shared meal, youth working alongside skilled men.
- The call now travels by phone and WhatsApp. The answer is the same as it always was: *we come.*
- Rotate the help to members' own farms and homes, not only CBO projects.

> *"So we built the wall... for the people had a mind to work."* **— Nehemiah 4:6 (NASB)**

REMEMBER — The work party ends at the shared pot. The meal is not a break from the unity; it is the unity, served.

ROOT THREE

The Shared Pot — Cham Gi Wadu

“Eat — share with your kinsmen.” An old proverb, and a standing order.



The CBO feeding program at Nyangweso — the shared pot, carried on.

THE OLD WAY

Food in the old village was never a private matter. The proverb taught at every fire — *Cham gi wadu*, eat and share with your kinsmen — meant a cooking pot was a community instrument. A visitor was fed before he was questioned. A widow's children ate. The last pot of water was carried to the one who could not fetch it.

WHY IT MADE SENSE

Hunger isolates; sharing binds. A village that eats together knows exactly who is struggling — because his bowl is at the same fire — and carries him before hunger becomes shame.

LIVING IT TODAY

- The feeding program is the shared pot with a CBO name. Guard it that way: officers serve first and eat last at community meals.
- Know your neighbors' bowls: our officers should know which households are skipping meals before anyone has to ask.
- Eggs, milk and produce from our own projects reach the vulnerable first by design, not by leftovers.

> *“And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common...”* **— Acts 2:44 (NASB)**

REMEMBER — A full stomach at one gate and an empty one at the next was never our way.

ROOT FOUR

The Dala — A Home Built for Others

The homestead was laid out like a welcome.



A traditional Luo homestead preserved at Kisumu Museum — the huts and a granary (dero) gathered around the cattle pen.

THE OLD WAY

The *dala* — the homestead — was built in a circle around the cattle pen, each wife's house in its place, the granaries standing where all could see the family's provision. When a new home was founded — *goyo dala* — the founding rite included a chicken killed expressly so the new home could **entertain visitors**. A home began by feeding a guest. And our own great tale of Simbi Nyaima warns what becomes of a village that refuses a thirsty stranger: the lake remembers.

WHY IT MADE SENSE

The layout itself taught the values: provision in the open, every house in its honored place, the gate made for receiving. Hospitality was not an event. It was architecture.

LIVING IT TODAY

- The Community Center is our new dala: a gathering heart whose doors open outward, where a visitor is received before he is questioned.
- Keep provision visible and honestly kept — stores, records and accounts where the community can see them, like the dero in the open yard.
- Let every CBO opening, dedication and celebration begin the old way: feed the guest first.

> *"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."* **— Hebrews 13:2 (NASB)**

REMEMBER — A home — and a CBO — is judged at its gate.

ROOT FIVE

The Siwindhe and the Duol — Where the Young Were Taught

Every evening was a school, and the teachers were the elders.



Elder women of a Luo craft cooperative, shaping clay pots — the rememberers still carry the skills in their hands.

THE OLD WAY

The girls slept and were taught in the *siwindhe*, the grandmother's house, where the *sigendini* — the stories, riddles and proverbs — were poured into them night after night. The young men gathered at the *duol*, the grandfather's hearth, and were instructed by the elders in the ways of men: courage, provision, restraint, and the history of their people. Nobody "graduated." You simply grew up knowing who you were.

WHY IT MADE SENSE

A community that teaches its young every evening never has to rescue them later. The elders were the library, the school and the compass — all in one voice the children trusted.

LIVING IT TODAY

- **Roots Story nights** at the Center and under the tree: elders telling, youth listening — phones down, hearts open.
- Our elder visits gather the stories before they are lost, and our young people go along to hear them first-hand.
- Teach the *why*, not only the *what*. A youth who knows why the old ways existed will carry them further than we can push him.

> *"Remember the days of old... Ask your father, and he will inform you, your elders, and they will tell you."* — **Deuteronomy 32:7 (NASB)**

REMEMBER — The elders are not the past of this community. They are its memory — and a people without memory has no map.

ROOT SIX

The Dero — Every House Provided For

The granary was filled in the fat season so the lean season could not win.



Farming at Nyangweso today — the harvest still fills the store.

THE OLD WAY

Each wife's house kept its own granary — the *dero* — raised off the ground, filled at harvest, and opened with discipline. In a hard season there was an order of feeding, and the vulnerable stood near the front of it. Storing was not greed. It was a duty owed to people who could not yet see the hungry months coming — including your own children.

WHY IT MADE SENSE

The dero turned one good harvest into twelve months of dignity. A family with a full granary could be generous without fear — provision and kindness grew from the same root.

LIVING IT TODAY

- Our stores, feed stocks and records are the CBO's dero: filled on time, counted honestly, opened by rule — never by impulse.
- Every project keeps its own books the way every house kept its own granary — and the Treasurer's count is open to the officers, always.
- Build the reserve before the crisis: a CBO with a store can feed its people in the lean month and still stand.

> *"(The ant) prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest."* **— Proverbs 6:8 (NASB)**

REMEMBER — Provision is a form of love that arrives early.

ROOT SEVEN

The Law of the Lake — Sharing the Catch

The lake belonged to no one man, so its gifts reached every home.



The omena beaches of Rusinga Island — the catch dried and shared, as it has always been.

THE OLD WAY

Our people, the Jo-Lupo, fished Nam Lolwe under laws older than any county: rules of the fishing clans governed the mesh, the seasons and the access, and elders oversaw the waters. The catch was divided by known shares — the boat, the crew, and those on the shore who had not fished: the widows and the neighbors. The lake fed the village, not only the fisherman.

WHY IT MADE SENSE

Rules protected the lake from greed, and shares protected the people from hunger. A fisherman who kept everything would soon fish alone — and a lake fished without law soon gives nothing to anyone.

LIVING IT TODAY

- In our businesses, shares are agreed before the money moves and counted in the open — eggs, chicks, feed and manure divided by rule, not by favor.
- Widows and neighbors stand in our distributions by design. The shore still eats from the catch.
- We trade honestly — no exploiting the desperate, in fish, eggs or anything else. The old law of the lake is the new law of our market.

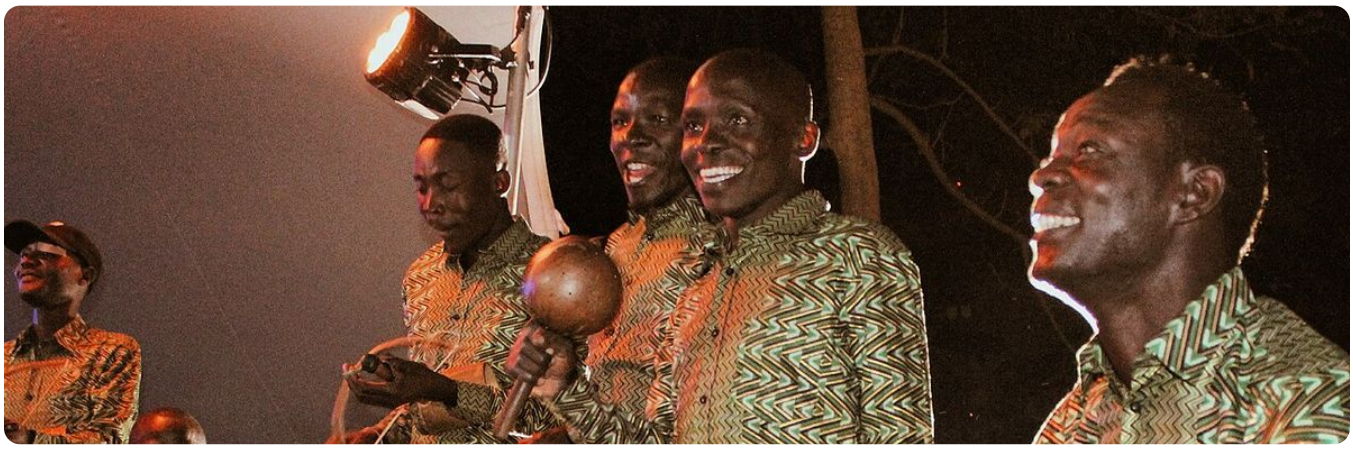
> *"...that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality."* **— 2 Corinthians 8:14 (NASB)**

REMEMBER — What is caught together is shared by rule. What is shared by rule never starts a quarrel.

ROOT EIGHT

The Night Watch — Guarding One Another

In the old village, nobody slept unguarded — and nobody guarded alone.



Luo musicians keeping the night with song — the old gatherings taught the village to stay awake for one another.

THE OLD WAY

The young men's house, the *simba*, stood by the gate for a reason: defense. Through the night the watch turned, season by season, so that cattle, children and grandmothers slept in peace. To keep watch over a neighbor's home was not a favor. It was the rent you paid for living among people who kept watch over yours.

WHY IT MADE SENSE

Safety was a shared duty, so danger met a village, not a victim. And the young men learned, night by night, that manhood means standing between your people and harm.

LIVING IT TODAY

- Our youth stand guard in the modern ways: watching over the site and the flocks, walking with our girls so they reach school safely, and keeping the phone-tree that wakes the village in an emergency.
- The watch is also spiritual and social: we notice who is missing, who is sick, whose door has stayed shut too long — and we go.
- Guard the CBO's name and goods the same way: what belongs to all of us is watched by all of us.

> *"But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night."* — **Nehemiah 4:9 (NASB)**

REMEMBER — To guard one another is not a program. It is what brothers do.

ROOT NINE

The Elders' Council — Settling Matters Together

Before a matter became a feud, it became a conversation under the tree.

THE OLD WAY

Our people had no king. Disputes went to the *jodongo* — the council of elders — and to the local court of the *doho*, where a matter was talked through until the truth stood up and both sides could walk home. The aim was never to crush one side. The aim was to restore the peace of the village, because the village had to harvest together next week.

WHY IT MADE SENSE

A quarrel settled by wisdom costs an afternoon. A quarrel left to fester costs a generation. The council kept the community one — by hearing everyone, slowly, in the open.

LIVING IT TODAY

- Settle matters inside first: officers, then elders, before any dispute is carried outside the family.
- Our meetings follow the old pattern: every voice heard, no rushing, the decision explained to all — the community watches its leaders reason, and trusts what it can see.
- Restore, don't crush. The person corrected today is the brother we build with tomorrow.

A proverb of the fireside: *Jaduol oyie wang'e* — the elder's counsel is received with respect, for the elder has seen where the path leads. Our officers lead best when the elders' wisdom is in the room before the decision, not after it.

> *"Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in an abundance of counselors there is victory."* — **Proverbs 11:14 (NASB)**

REMEMBER — We do not win arguments against our own people. We win peace with them.

ROOT TEN

Nobody Left Alone — Widows, the Sick, and the Elderly

The true measure of the old village was how it treated the one who could not repay.



Keep Her in School — the gift itself: pads, books and a uniform, ready for school. The girls we serve are never photographed for this campaign; their dignity stays theirs.

THE OLD WAY

When a man fell sick at harvest, the village sang in his field — the work party came with songs and finished his harvest for him. When a husband died, the widow and her children remained inside the family's care, not outside its fence. The elderly were not a burden to be managed; they were the honored heads of the home, fed first and consulted always. The old way had a simple test: *find the one who cannot repay you — that is where the community shows what it is.*

WHY IT MADE SENSE

Every person in the village knew his own day of weakness would come. Caring for the helpless was not charity from the strong; it was the covenant that made everyone safe.

LIVING IT TODAY

- Keep a living list: the widows, the sick, the elderly and the struggling households of Nyangweso — visited, fed, and prayed for by rota, not by chance.
- Our girls stay in school, our elderly are visited and honored, and our sick are carried — this is not a side program of the CBO. It is the CBO proving its roots.
- The elderly need us, and we need them: every visit to gather their wisdom must also leave their home better than we found it.

> *"Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress..."* **— James 1:27 (NASB)**

REMEMBER — Nobody built alone. Nobody ate alone. Nobody was left alone. That is the whole law of the roots in one breath.

PART TWO

The Tools in Our Hands

Every project of this CBO is a tool. Here is the root each one serves.



The Afridev hand pump — a tool. The law it serves — water shared by all — is a root.

PART TWO

Tools Change. Roots Don't.

Hold every project up to the light of the root it serves.



The flock at Nyangweso — the chicken businesses are tools of provision, sharing and honest trade.

- **The well** serves the law of the lake and the shared pot: water — life itself — held in common, drawn by all, guarded for the weakest first.
- **The chicken businesses** serve the dero and the shared pot: provision stored honestly, eggs reaching the vulnerable, work for willing hands, and shares counted in the open.
- **The motorbike and trailer** serve the watch and the work party: errands carried for the whole community, so distance stops deciding who gets helped.
- **The Community Center** serves the dala and the siwindhe: a gathering heart — classrooms like the grandmother's house, meetings like the grandfather's fire.
- **The library and the stories** serve the teaching root: the rememberers' wisdom written down before it is lost, and poured into the youth.
- **The pads program** serves “nobody left alone”: our daughters kept in school, in dignity, carried by the whole village.

The technology of today serves the same roots. The WhatsApp group is the new fire where the village gathers. The phone is the new drum that calls the konyir. Mobile money lets a son far away share the catch at home in seconds. Photographs and written records back up the memory of the elders. We do not fear the new tools, and we do not worship them. We *steer* them — the way a boatman steers a vessel — toward the shore our grandparents knew.

REMEMBER — When a tool stops serving its root, we fix the tool — we never bend the root to fit the tool.

PART THREE

How We Carry It — The Team's Part

Roots are not carried by talking about them. They are carried by practice, repeated until the young ones crave them.



Lake Simbi Nyaima, here in Karachuonyo — the lake of our own hospitality tale. Our ground itself teaches the old way.

- **Lead hands-first.** Officers work in the line, not above it. The Chairman's hands get dirty before his mouth gives instructions.
- **Remind, never lecture.** We stir a craving for the old way with stories, not scolding. A people who crave togetherness gather themselves.
- **Honor the elders as Root Keepers.** Visit them, record them, read their stories aloud, and let their names stand in honor. Oldest first — the rememberers will not wait forever.
- **Never shame the watchers.** The one who only watched this time gets invited to the table before the work line. Next time, he may stand in it.
- **Keep the guardrails.** We never ask the village for money. We never call our people backward or helpless. We never scold or shame — not in a meeting, not in a post, not in a sermon illustration.
- **Prove it in the open.** Records, receipts, photographs and reports — the community trusts what it can see, the way it trusted the dero standing in the open yard.

> *"Only be careful... so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen... but make them known to your sons and your grandsons."* **— Deuteronomy 4:9 (NASB)**

REMEMBER — We are not going back. We are bringing the best of where we came from — forward.

THE CLOSING WORD

One Big Family

Community helping community. People helping people. That is the whole of it.

Strip everything away — the projects, the plans, the papers — and what remains is a family that remembered itself. A family does not invoice a brother for help raising his roof. A family does not check a widow's worthiness before feeding her. A family does not let its elders sit alone with everything they know, while its youth wander without a map.

That family is who we are. It is who Nyangweso was, on its best days, for a thousand evenings around a thousand fires. And it is who we are becoming again — deliberately, joyfully, together.

EMPOWERING (the people)

IMPACTING (the people)

— and Lord willing, in time, all of Kenya.

Riwruok e teko — unity is strength.

Roots do not die. They only wait for rain.
Team — we are the rain.

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Unity · Opportunity · Progress

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