

NAMNYAKI PRIMARY SCHOOL



While the Tanzanian government provides free schooling through Standard VII (equivalent of Grade 7 in the United States), children in rural villages often must walk significant distances to and from the closest school. Parents are concerned not only about the physical demand of such a commute, but also about the children's safety. Maasai children also face language challenges when they start school. At home, they speak only Maasai, but all primary school subjects are taught in Swahili, the national language of Tanzania. Essential every day chores also leave little time for studying and completing schoolwork. Girls often spend their evenings carrying wood and water several miles and attending to meals, goats, and cows. And while school attendance is mandatory, attendance is rarely monitored or enforced, so it is up to each family to send its children to school each day.

The IMAGE Project partners with small villages outside of Iringa, Tanzania, to promote the schooling of younger Maasai children. We listened the concerns they had about sending their young children to school. During one meeting, the Maasai women raised the idea of schooling their younger children closer to home. Out of this discussion came Namnyaki – a one-room school house in the Maasai village of Kwale, funded by The IMAGE Project. The Kwale women named the building; *Namnyaki* means *Blessings* in Maasai.

Namnyaki is used primarily as a place for students ages 4-6 to learn before commuting to the government school four miles down the road. The IMAGE Project contracts with girls or women who have completed at least four years of secondary school to teach the students.

Namnyaki also is used to empower the Maasai women in and around Kwale. These women told us that they, too, wanted to learn to read and write for themselves, so that they could have skills that are "equal" to men. The instructor has begun to teach them basic reading, writing, and math skills.