

## From Somerset to the Serengeti: Supporting a New Living for Maasai Communities

The Maasai pastoralists of Ngorongoro are among Tanzania's most marginalised people, living in extreme poverty. Their remote communities and resource poor conditions were too difficult for most potential development workers, so in 2007 Skillshare International recruited Rebecca Young as its first online development worker. Her virtual placement was with the Irkiramat Foundation (RAMAT) which aims to improve the lives of 10,000 Maasai people.

Skype, mobile text messages and email provided an innovative solution. Rebecca, 26, worked between five and ten hours a week from her home in Somerset to support Yanek Ndoinyo, RAMAT's volunteer manager in Arusha.



Rebecca met her colleagues from RAMAT in 2008.

The villagers' traditional pastoral livelihood, raising cattle and goats, was already hard because they live 13 hours away from Arusha market in the Serengeti National Park, and many speak only a local Maasai language rather than the Swahili used at the market place. However their struggle became almost insurmountable after a three-year drought led to the death of almost 40% of their herd.



Researching potential markets for jewellery.

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Rebecca and Yanek's approach to finding new sources of income was to work with the communities to map their strengths in natural resources, skills, knowledge and infrastructure. Further research pointed the way to income generating activities led by the community's women: bee-keeping, making jewellery and growing vegetables. Together they learned that the most effective way of working was to divide the work according to their strengths; Yanek's local knowledge meant he was best placed to make the case for community education and training provided by the local council, whereas Rebecca focused on submitting funding proposals to international donors and exploring potential markets for the Maasai products.

The placement was so successful that Skillshare International extended it to June 2008, and made plans for further online development workers - to work with Mawenzi Regional Hospital and to support Tanzania's national mental health strategy. Rebecca and Yanek finally had the chance to meet face to face when Rebecca took up a second Skillshare placement in Tanzania in 2008.