



AS IT IS

## Kenya's Maasai Turn from Lion-killing to Olympics

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The Maasai people are easily the most identifiable in Kenya with their very colorful clothing. They raise animals and live near some of Kenya's most visited wildlife parks. Their hunting has often been considered a threat to some wildlife populations.

It is traditional for a young Maasai man, called a moran, to kill a lion with a **spear** to prove himself as a man. With the kill, a moran would earn a "lion name" and approval among young women.

But the Maasai appears to be ending the tradition of hunting lions with spears. Instead, young Maasai will compete in **javelin** throwing at an event called the Maasai Olympics.

Mingati Samanya, at the age of 69, is one of the Maasai **elders**. During his youth, Samanya killed two lions to show he was a man. That is how he received the "lion name" Mingati in the Maa language.

Samanya is now among the elders who are pushing young Maasai to do something different to prove themselves. That includes taking part in javelin throwing, jumping, and other activities during the community Olympics.

On Saturday, at the Kimana Sanctuary near Mount Kilimanjaro, young men and some women competed for **medals** and money.

"During our time, we killed lions and did not **benefit** with anything. Right now, when the morans throw a javelin and run, they get money," Samanya told *The Associated Press*. The money, he added, could help provide for their families.

Vivian Nganini attended the Maasai Olympics while wearing a traditional wedding dress. She said girls of today prefer the modern moran.

“At least when they run, they can win some money and be able to take care of their wives and children,” said the 22-year-old.

The Maasai Olympics also are part of wider environmental protection efforts.

“The cultural side of warriors wanting to kill lions ... is solved by this event,” said Craig Millar. He is with the Big Life Foundation, an environmental organization.

The lion population in parts of the Kimana Sanctuary has increased 10 times over the last 20 years, Millar said. He credited various measures like anti-**poaching** laws and payment programs to ease the loss of Maasai-owned farm animals to **predators** like lions.

But other dangers remain for wildlife. Parts of Kenya and East Africa have experienced four straight seasons with little rainfall. Hundreds of elephants, wildebeests, zebras and other animals have died, said a recent report by wildlife officials.

During such long dry periods, the risk of human-wildlife conflict increases. But communities living near parks are pushed to protect and exist with wild animals.

Baba Sito is an elder who lives near the Kimana Sanctuary. “We now understand the benefits of wildlife to the country’s economy and direct benefits to us, the Maasai, who live near the parks,” he said.

I’m Dan Novak.

*Dan Novak adapted this story for VOA Learning English based on reporting by The Associated Press.*

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## Words in This Story

**spear** — *n.* a weapon that has a long straight handle and a sharp point

**javelin** — *n.* a long spear that people throw as far as they can as a sport

**elder** — *n.* a person who is older

**medal** — *n.* a piece of metal often in the form of a coin with designs and words in honor of a special event, a person, or an achievement

**benefit** — *n.* a good or helpful result or effect

**poach** — *v.* to hunt or fish illegally

**predator** — *n.* an animal that lives by killing and eating other animals

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