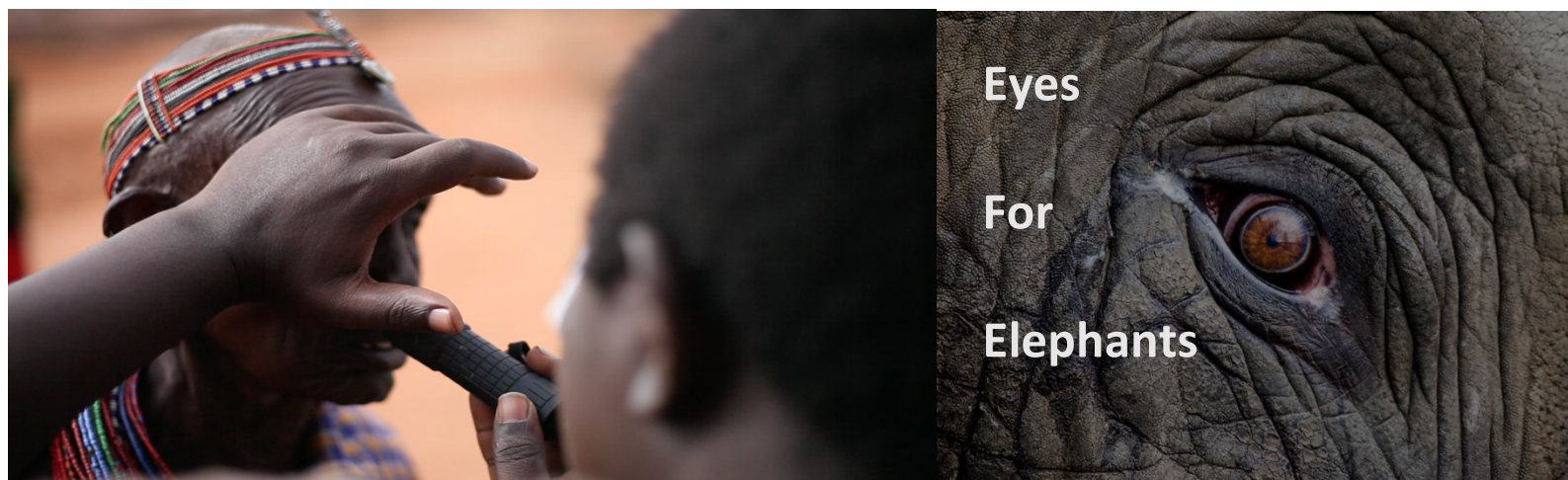




## Masikita Eye Mission 21<sup>st</sup> August – 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2019



The Milgis Trust has just hosted an eye mission in partnership with MEAK, whom we have conducted four other eye missions with us in the past. We had planned our focal point to be Nachola and communities surrounding Baragoi and the Suguta Valley with the aim of improving Samburu-Turkana relations. However, we had to change a year's worth of plans as we discovered that the government had since conducted two eye missions without telling us. Instead, we moved East and were able to cover an area of approx. 4000 square kilometres, reaching more than 30 communities. Stretching from south of the Ndoto's, North to Mount Ngiro and West to Baragoi. This exercise is a conservation effort as much as it is a humanitarian one. All of these communities are living in biodiversity hotspots and co-existing with the resident wildlife. As the saying goes, 'You can't talk conservation until you have dealt with the basic needs of the people' – meaning that restoring eyesight among communities is a big step towards mitigating the everyday life struggles which are known to increase poaching, deforestation and degradation of natural resources.

The role of the Milgis Trust was to use our community-based scouts to identify people with eyesight problems, and then mobilize them for screening and finally transport them to and from the mission base in Masikita. MEAK, headed up by Dee Belliere, provided the expertise, supplies, and medical personnel. The mission logistics were handled by Nargis Kasmani, who has years of experience conducting such exercises. So in all, we were a team of 30.

### The stunningly wild El Barta plains



### Convincing a lady that we are able to help her



A big challenge is the remoteness of these communities – we drove more than 5300 km's between 6 vehicles in total to deliver the service. However, an even bigger challenge was to convince people that we were able to help them regain their eyesight, free of cost. Many people had been blind for so long that they doubted anything could save their eyes. Whilst others were so heavily involved in the circumcision ceremonies that they could not afford the time for treatment, valuing their cultural obligations above their eyesight! We worked hard to make the treatment a viable option for all in need, and were able to deliver 136 cataract operations, 11 trachoma operations and minor treatment for more than 150 other cases. It is safe to say that we overturned every stone in the Milgis ecosystem searching for people with eye problems, and only missed a few.



A large part of the program was to educate communities on how to mitigate problems such as trachoma. We were able to educate people on proper eye hygiene practices, and provide training on trachoma identification that could save eyes before it's 'too late'. Aside from eye problems, we also helped several people with burns and other severe issues. Some cases could have been fatal if we had not found them when we did! Overall, we hope that the mission has played one part in improving the communities attitude towards wildlife conservation. After all it is difficult to care about an elephants problems when you have so many problems of your own. We feel comforted knowing that many people will now be able to see the elephants that they live alongside. The community have been hugely grateful and supportive, and there have been a lot of emotional triumphs along the way!

