

# Investigation into Tasaru Ntomonok Rescue Centre and the V-Day Campaign

## A Response to Community Concerns

Jane Cabot, Kaitlin Noss for the Maasai Community Partnership Project  
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### **Introduction**

The research presented in this report was done at the request of Maasai community members in the Narok area of Kenya. Many non-governmental organizations, particularly from the U.S. and Europe, have come into the region to address the issue of female circumcision practiced within the Maasai community. There are many Maasai community members and Maasai organizations working to address the same issue at a grassroots level; although these groups are very effective they tend to be under-funded compared to outside groups. Over the past few years there has been a growing concern among Maasai community members that a local organization, Tasaru Ntomonok Girl's Rescue Centre, a satellite project of the V-Day Campaign, has been misappropriating funds and neglecting and abusing girls under its care. Many of these claims are coming from girls that have run away from the Tasaru safehouse. Maasai community members alerted outside donors of their suspicions and asked them to investigate. Both donors and community members are concerned that the V-Day Campaign, as the primary funder, has been irresponsible in its management and has neglected to consider the complexity of the local community and this cultural practice. Further investigation is required, but a cursory inquiry revealed that Tasaru is misrepresenting its programs to donors, that girls have been raped and neglected with the knowledge of Tasaru's director, and that funds intended to support girls evading circumcision may be misused.

### **Background**

The V-Day Campaign is a United States-based international non-profit corporation with the mission to stop violence against women and girls around the world. Started in 1998 by playwright and activist Eve Ensler, the V-Day Campaign distributes funds to grassroots, national and international organizations and programs working on such issues as rape, battery, incest, sexual slavery and "female genital mutilation." In the past eight years, the V-Day movement has raised over \$40 million US dollars through performances of the Vagina Monologues and worldwide campaigns ([www.vday.org](http://www.vday.org)).

A prized beneficiary of the V-Day Campaign corporation is the Tasaru Ntomonok Girl's Rescue Centre in Narok, Kenya. The Tasaru Centre is a community-based, non-profit organization intended to serve surrounding Maasai communities by providing a safehouse to girls who seek refuge from female circumcision and early marriage. Tasaru takes an authoritative approach to eradicating the cultural practice of female circumcision; the initiative publicizes that it saves girls by enforcing recent legislation and international human rights laws that illegalize female circumcision. Tasaru publicizes

that it collaborates with local informants and law enforcement to interrupt circumcision ceremonies, and take the girls away to their safehouse. The officers then arrest, fine and jail the fathers under the Children's Protection Act (Njoki, 2005).

In published accounts, the director and co-founder of the Tasaru Centre, Agnes Pareyio, has stated that her work involves driving back and forth from rural villages to the Tasaru Centre to rescue girls from circumcision ceremonies. She has also said that once at the centre, the girls are provided with food, shelter, healthcare, and sponsorships for education at Kenyan boarding schools. Tasaru claims to act as an alternative home for the girls who are rejected by, or needing to escape from, their families and communities.

Tasaru's stated objective is to provide counseling and education about the dangers of female genital cutting. In published accounts, Tasaru states that one of its "core responsibilities is to re-unite girls with their families" by facilitating reconciliation seminars for girls, their families, and community members. Agnes stated for an interview in 2006, "our aim is to not separate girls from their parents and siblings, but to offer them shelter so they are not abused." The organization claims to have reunited more than 90 girls with their families (Karuoya, 2006). Eve Ensler has claimed, in an article posted on the V-Day Campaign's website, that the Tasaru Centre has saved over 4,500 girls from "the cut." These claims about the extensive reach of this organization have launched Tasaru to the front pages of newspapers and contributed to the international recognition of Agnes Pareyio, who was recently honored by the United Nations with the Person of the Year award for Kenya in 2005. The Tasaru Centre's international acclaim has attracted the attention of various donors and aided Pareyio in pursuing a career in politics; she has been elected as the deputy mayor of Narok and is now an elected vice-councilor of Narok County Council.

The Tasaru Centre is located in Narok, Kenya; a town of approximately 40,000 people, mostly Maasai, just north of the Masai Mara Game Reserve, which was recently named one of the 'seven wonders of the world' by UNESCO. Although living in one of the wealthiest districts in Kenya, the Maasai people in the Narok area still see little benefit from the surrounding industry on their land. Crops of wheat, barley for beer production and the Masai Mara Game Reserve, the most visited site for tourism in Kenya, have provided billions of shillings to entrepreneurs from outside ethnic groups. Maasai communities have been left out of this development and the opportunity to profit from and manage their own land largely due to a lack of formal education. Equal access to education for Maasai communities, especially for girls, has become a priority for non-governmental organizations run by both Maasai people and outsiders. Although there are many systemic factors contributing to the lack of formal schooling for Maasai children, the practices of female circumcision and early marriage have been identified, mostly by outside activists, as the primary reason girls are not in school. Many Maasai girls are typically circumcised between the ages of nine and fourteen years old. At this time, a girl is considered eligible for marriage, and if her family makes that arrangement she is often removed from school. Although an increasing number of girls and their families are making different decisions, if a girl does not want to undergo circumcision or be married and her family does not support that choice then she will sometimes run away to seek help.

Tasaru is just one of several options for girls seeking shelter and education in the Narok District, though it is by far the most well-funded and equipped due to the

streamlined funding it receives from The V-Day Campaign. This direct and generous source of funding sets Tasaru apart from the local churches, grassroots groups and schools which focus on the same issue, but which must rely largely on community support. Because Tasaru is well funded and, unlike other programs, has a large facility and public presence in Narok, it is well known by schools and communities in Maasailand, and girls who run away from their families typically run to Tasaru. However, these girls who have sought refuge at Tasaru, and who then have run away from the safehouse back to their families or to Narok, have reported being abused at Tasaru. Community members initially sought to investigate the girl's reports themselves, but found their efforts to be thwarted by Pareyio who, according to communities, wields considerable political influence in Narok. They therefore sought outside help to investigate their concerns.

## **Investigation**

This research was conducted as an independent project with no funding support, political affiliation or expected outcome. The researchers are American university students and graduates in Feminist Studies, Social Justice, and Education. They have helped organize fundraising events for women's causes, including participating in the Vagina Monologues, a production that directly contributes to the funds raised for the V-Day Campaign, and by extension, the Tasaru Centre. The researchers have also done previous research on social problems in Maasailand over the past three years.

Four specific concerns, identified by Maasai community members and U.S. Donors, were investigated: 1) that the Tasaru Center is not actually serving girls in danger of unwanted circumcision and early marriage, 2) that Tasaru neglects and mistreats girls in their care, 3) that Tasaru is profiting from the assault and rape of girls living at the safehouse, and 4) that Pareyio is using funds intended to support the girls for her own personal gain.

This investigation involved interviewing Agnes Pareyio, local community leaders and members, headmasters and teachers of schools, the sitting Member of Parliament from Narok North, church pastors, organization leaders, students, and current and former residents of Tasaru. The majority of people interviewed agreed to speak with researchers only if their names and organizations were not included in this report. These interviewees explained that many people who have spoken out against Tasaru or Pareyio have been retaliated against--threatened, followed, or lost their jobs-- as a result. Interviews with girls who ran away from Tasaru were translated by their current guardians. The researchers stand by the findings documented below and strongly encourage other interested parties to further investigate these claims.

## **Findings**

**1. Evidence strongly suggests that the Tasaru Center does not primarily serve girls in danger of unwanted circumcision.**

A. Numbers of girls saved from circumcision appears to be exaggerated.

1. The numbers reported by the V-Day Campaign and Tasaru are inconsistent and impossibly high. The V-Day Campaign has purported the rescue of between 2,000-4,500 girls by the Tasaru Centre. Agnes Pareyio herself claims that the center has rescued 680 girls since its establishment. Community members report that even this lower number is greatly exaggerated, in light of local population numbers for in this region of age likely to undergo circumcision. Maasai community members often told the researchers, “*we know our own girls,*” and asked, “*where do all these girls come from?*” and “*why have we never seen them?*”
2. Community perceptions and this research suggests that the number of girls served is much lower than the claims of the V-Day Campaign and Tasaru. A broad variety of Maasai people in Narok town report that the Tasaru Centre is typically “*quiet*” and “*empty.*” All girls that were interviewed as former residents of Tasaru reported that only 10-17 girls were present at any given time. However, volunteers and visitors report that many more girls are present during their stays at Tasaru. This team of researchers seconded this perception during their visit to Tasaru on July 18, 2007. The safehouse showed no sign that more than a couple girls lived on site. The researchers found that the 48 beds in the dormitory had no mattresses, blankets or pillows, and many needed mending. Outside the building four broken beds were lying in the grass. Pareyio told the researchers that the beds were recently removed for fixing, however the grass underneath was long and yellowed.
3. Girls and the community report having been paid to show up and pretend to be residents at the safehouse for Tasaru’s media events and donor visits. This is the claim of the current Member of Parliament for Narok North, Ole Ntimama, who says that his constituents have reported such corruption from Tasaru for several years. During an interview with another prominent community leader who also works on issues of girls’ education, researchers were told,

*“She [Pareyio] has really got almost no people there, but as soon as she hears that there are donors or whoever coming, then she goes and gets girls, pays women some money to be there, and then after that they are gone, there is nobody there.”*

A local church minister that has facilitated foster family placements for girls running away from Tasaru told researchers,

*“When they have visitors, they collect the girls. It’s a business, it’s run like a business.”*

Girls who have run away from Tasaru reported that they experienced a change in treatment by Tasaru staff when visitors were present at the center.

*“When the visitors came to the rescue center, that week this girl [is saying that she] experienced highly, highly loving attention from people at the center. If they want anything, they will be given. They were highly comforted, but after the guests left, they took back the chukkas [Maasasi clothing] that they were given while the guests came. When visitors are there, they would bring the girls together with the visitors to eat at one table, but they were not allowed to talk to the guests even if they wanted to. They could only eat together [with the visitors]-a nice dinner with meat.”*

Pareyio told researchers during their visit that the grounds were quiet, and she invited them back to visit to see the safehouse *“busy with girls running around, playing ball, lots of laughter. This place is just full of girls.”* She insisted that they not drop by without calling and set an appointment in advance.

B. Tasaru misrepresents its programs to donors by exaggerating the services provided to girls in need

1. Tasaru provides donors with an illegitimate list of girls being sponsored for school. Of 58 girls supposedly sponsored by Tasaru only x number are legitimate. For example, Agnes provided potential donors with a list of 58 girls currently attending boarding school being sponsored by Tasaru. A cursory look at this list reveals that of 9 girls said to be attending Siana Primary Boarding School, (more research)\*\*\*\*call on Monday morning.
2. Tasaru does not routinely rescue Maasai girls from their villages to prevent circumcision rites. Tasaru is very well known throughout Maasai communities, however no one interviewed--girls, community leaders, and teachers from different parts of Narok District--believes that Tasaru goes into communities to rescue girls. All parties interviewed understood that if girls want to be rescued they had to get themselves to Narok. Typically this involved walking as many as *“hundreds of kilometers”* through potentially dangerous wildlife-inhabited territory.

Pareyio told the researchers that there was a comprehensive peer-educator program throughout the area and that she personally picked up girls from their villages.

J. Cabot: *“How many girls have you driven and gotten in your jeep?”*  
Pareyio: *“Since we started... Well there are those girls who have gone through the family reconciliation, for those there are very many, but those have been rescued...last time we took the numbers it was 680 girls that we have saved.”*

J. Cabot: “Wow, 680 girls! And you drove and got each one of them?”

Pareyio: “Yes, I did!”

(Later in interview)

J. Cabot: (*speaking to Noss and K. Cabot*) Did you see the mural with the picture of the blue jeep on it...she told me that she drives and gets girls.

Noss: Wow, you yourself?

Pareyio: Yes, I do

J. Cabot: How many girls have you gotten in the jeep?

Pareyio: Oh I can't even count them because over December, you don't sleep.... 'come-pick-come-pick'

K. Cabot: How do they call you? How do you know to get them?

Pareyio: In every village we have the peer educators. They are friends of the project. So these are the people that report and tell me “there is an incident here, can you come and rescue?”

Several community members reported that Tasaru came into communities not to intervene at circumcision rites, but only to take photographs. A well-respected pastor at a church in Narok, who is strongly opposed to the circumcision of Maasai girls, and wished to remain anonymous for “*fear of retaliation*” by Pareyio, told researchers that members of his parish have reported,

*“Tasaru comes to the village and takes pictures of girls at [circumcision] ceremonies but doesn't actually save them. Tasaru does this for the media. She [Pareyio] pays the owner of a village and they agree to set up a pretend rescue, but then Tasaru leaves the girl to be circumcised.”*

3. Community members report that many girls that participate in Tasaru's program have already been circumcised or are not at risk of forced circumcision. A prominent community leader in Narok, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of “*retaliation from Pareyio,*” reported,

*“There is no matron [at the safehouse], they have no nothing, she [Pareyio] doesn't pay for their school fees, and the children just stay [there]. You know, most of them have already undergone FGM, and she brings them here, just to make sure that the donors think she has got some people she is protecting. It is true. I am telling you please, we are very, very upset.”*

## **2. Tasaru has neglected and mistreated girls who are in legitimate need of safehouse services.**

A. Girls who have a legitimate need of rescue by Tasaru have been turned away or rejected by the safehouse.

1. Tasaru has turned away girls in need. One girl reported walking over 100 kilometers in search of Tasaru's services and arrived at the safehouse late at night and was told at the gate to come back in the morning for "admission or no admission." Her story was corroborated by a Maasai man who found her later that same night hiding in the bushes near his house and he asked her what was wrong,

*"She told me, 'I collided with my parents, so I went to Tasaru and was told to come back in the morning.'"*

The head minister of a church caring for girls that have left Tasaru, told researchers that Pareyio has made arrangements with parents to send girls back to their families for circumcision and marriage if they pay her. He described one instance when Tasaru took a girl from a prominent family from his care. Pareyio threatened the girl until she agreed to be married. The minister explained that Pareyio intervened to secure her political standing with the family.

*"One time we had a girl, she was brought to the camp [church] and she wrote a note to the pastor about how she was going to be forced to be married. The lady [Pareyio] and another prominent leader came to the police and the girl was taken from us and taken to Tasaru because it was a big prominent case. They confused the girl. Tasaru convinced her to get married. The parents were ashamed and there was a deal going on. The parents paid Tasaru to get their daughter back. Agnes took the girl from [my church], convinced her and then sold her back to her parents. [My church] does not accept bribes. They threatened the girl to denounce her desires... the girl was told to honor her parents. The prominent people said they would take her parents' property, take their land if she didn't get married. Tasaru convinced her."*

2. Tasaru profiles girls for admission and services based on their previous education levels. Five girls that were rejected by Tasaru reported that they were assessed by staff, one by Pareyio herself, and told to leave because they did not have enough schooling to be admitted to the safehouse.

*"After that Agnes came, and during that time they did the interview, there were seventeen of them, and those of them who had not been to school were told that there was no vacancy for them. So those who had been to school were taken to school, but the rest of them, there were 6 of them including [this girl], it had been a month, and then they were told there was no vacancy for them and they were told to go back to their parents. That is when [this girl] had to come out of that place."*

Another girl reported that during her assessment Pareyio "threatened" her saying,

*“You must go back home because we are not ready to undertake people here, you have to go back because you have no education, you will go back to your parents.”*

The girl said she responded to Pareyio, *“what am I going to do back with my parents, they have rejected me.”*

B. The services Tasaru provides to girls in need are inadequate and can lead to reckless endangerment.

1. Tasaru is not educating girls as reported. Tasaru claims education to be a priority in the safehouse program and tells donors directly that girls are being sent to school. Pareyio told researchers,

*“So I continue paying the school fees for the girls because I want them to have role models, and I am equally promoting girls education because that is the only way that some of these girls will survive.”*

Girls interviewed reported that they were not given scholarships for school.

*“When she reported there, she was just there that one day, she inquired about education. She was told that there is no money nowadays, that the donors are not sending money, so she decided to just spend the night there before she figured out somewhere else to go.”*

When education was provided for girls, it was not by trained teachers, but by other girls at the safehouse who had limited schooling.

*“When she was there she stayed for three weeks and during those three weeks, somebody who volunteers, another girl who had gone to school, that was the girl who was teaching them. They were told there is no funds to take them to school, so the girl was told to teach them. So for those three weeks, she was taught by another girl. She did not go to any school, same as that girl who volunteered and who was teaching them.”*

Pareyio told the girls that the reason they could not go to school was because *“the white people”* were not sending money. When the researchers, who identified themselves as part of the funding community in the U.S. for V-Day sponsored programs, recently asked what Tasaru needed money for, Pareyio did not mention that Tasaru was experiencing a shortage of funds for education, but responded,

*Pareyio: We need a toilet now, a flush toilet.*

*Noss: Are those expensive?*



*Pareyio: They are not very expensive, but we need the money to do that because we need the money to construct a flush toilet.”*

2. Tasaru’s reconciliation program is inadequate and harmful to the girls. Girls that were eventually rejected by Tasaru because of a lack of education were not able to return home to their families. The girls that researchers spoke with reported that Tasaru did not attempt to facilitate reconciliation with their families. One girl was receiving scholarships from Tasaru to attend school and her funding was abruptly cut-off. She was not able to go home because there had been no reconciliation provided by Tasaru.

*“Agnes told her she doesn’t have any help for her, and she decided to take her back to her home, but she was not accepted back home, so she decided to run away back to the town, and she went back to Tasaru to try and explain her problem with her father. At that time, they told her, you can go anywhere because we don’t want you back, we cannot host you here.”*

Another girl reported that reconciliation was never an offered or intended service of the safehouse. She reported that when the girls requested to go to school and were denied, they were “*threatened*” that if they did not stop complaining, Pareyio told them,

*“You will go home, you will go home”*

Reconciliation is often made more unlikely when Tasaru arrests the parents of girls undergoing circumcision. [This is the first we are hearing about this—do we have evidence that Tasaru arrests parents?] Another local organization leader explained in a written article,

*“I have seen young Maasai children nearly starve to death because their parents were sent to jail...the activists leading this movement have failed to understand the cultures behind the practice, and their ignorance is dangerous. Legislation, particularly the criminalization of FGM and other external pressures that do not take local culture into account, can have deadly consequences (Olekina, 2005, p. 1)”*

3. Tasaru does not follow-up on girls that leave their program leading to reckless endangerment. Many Maasai community members have reported that girls leaving Tasaru are not able to return home because there is no reconciliation program and are forced to become prostitutes in Narok town. M.P. Ole Ntimama reported,

*“A place like this [Tasaru], she has no parental care, she has no nothing...and there comes an issue: some of these children who come here [gesturing to Tasaru] end up in Narok town being prostitutes. I’m telling you, believe me because I am telling you the truth.”*

This trend among girls leaving Tasaru and turning to prostitutions was seconded by several local pastors, organization leaders in Narok town and the head of a local girls' school.

C. Tasaru neglects the basic needs of girls.

1. Girls are not fed adequately. All girls interviewed reported being hungry throughout their stay at Tasaru. They drank “*only black tea without milk*” for breakfast and generally ate one meal at dinner consisting of either ugali or rice with sukuma or cabbage. The girls reported eating no meat unless visitors came to the safehouse.
2. Tasaru denies medical care to girls in need. One girl interviewed left Tasaru because her scholarship was revoked when she reported having eye troubles.

*“She is saying that when she was there, she was taken to boarding school and during that time she had eye complications, she had eye diseases. So she spoke to Agnes [Pareyio] of her problem, and from that, Agnes told her that she doesn't have any help for her, and she decided to take her back to her home, but she was not accepted back home... She [Pareyio] told her, that there is no money, that the muzungus [white people] the donors are not sending money. Due to her problem, she was told there is no way you can be helped here, so she was sent away and told to go back home, she was told, ‘we cannot assist you.’”*

When asked by the researchers about her role as a caretaker for the girls Pareyio stated that Tasaru pays for the girls medical bills, saying “*it is my responsibility....I am everything to these girls.*”

**3. Tasaru has financially benefited from the sexual assault of girls living at the safehouse and is believed to have protected its assets by covering up reported rapes.**

A. Tasaru does not provide adequate security for the girls.

A pastor in Narok town told the researchers that he knew girls who had run away from Tasaru because there was no supervision at the safehouse.

*“Something we heard about is sometimes they are left alone, and at times they were being attacked, by outsiders who come in the center. So we are talking about security of the area. The girls who are coming here are complaining that it is not a feasible place to live. There, they are all alone, with no matron.”*

Three girls verified the pastor's report during interviews with the researchers, all stating that there was no matron on site while they were staying at Tasaru and that there was "no security there."

B. Girls have been raped while staying at Tasaru and at least one Tasaru employee financially benefited from these assaults.

Six girls reported having been sexually assaulted by boys who attend The Narok Boys Academy located next to Tasaru. The boys regularly came to the gate of Tasaru where they had an arrangement with the night guard to pay money in exchange for being allowed into the safehouse. Once inside the dormitory the boys verbally harassed, physically assaulted, and raped the girls while the guard waited outside. During the incident described below, by a girl who later escaped to a local church, the boys came and assaulted 10 girls residing in the dormitory.

*"When she reported there, she was just there that one day, she inquired about education. She was told that there is no money nowadays, that the donors are not sending money, so she decided to just spend the night there before she figured out somewhere else to go. It was at that time, that night that the boys came, they paid the night watchman so they could be allowed into the center. When she was caught by a boy, she freed herself and ran to the toilet. But the rest of the girls did not manage to escape, so the boys did to them whatever they wanted. The next morning she woke up and came here."*

When researchers asked who was supervising them during the rapes all the girls that were assaulted reported that the guard never responded to their screams and that the matron never intervened.

*"They are saying that there was a matron, but even when they screamed she could not do anything for them. She would just go to sleep. She was just as young as they were so she too was afraid to come out, that she too would face the same thing, so she was afraid. She was just as young as they were, she hid because she feared that the same thing would happen to her."*

Another girl reported that during her 3 week stay at Tasaru the boys were allowed in once a week, and each time they assaulted and raped all the girls staying in the safehouse.

C. When several of the girls reported the rapes to authorities, community members state Pareyio intervened, covered up evidence, threatened people who attempted to investigate and allowed the rapes to continue.

In 2005, 2 girls who were raped at Tasaru fled to a local church and were taken to the hospital by the pastor and examined by doctors. The doctors confirmed that the girls had been raped and the hospital records were given to

the local police and a formal report was filed. The case was never brought to court and the hospital records and police report are now missing. The pastor reported that Pareyio was responsible for blocking legal proceedings.

*“We took them [the 2 girls] to the police and the doctor and it was true—they were raped. With the police the girl were interviewed without me by a lady from the police force to make sure the stories matched. They compared the girls’ testimonies with the doctor’s records, and it was true. She [Pareyio] wasn’t touchable because she won an [United Nations] award and she’s a politician. And so nothing happened. The newspapers wouldn’t report it. The lady has everything, all the information. Those who work with her started to threaten us at the church. It’s corruption. Maybe she paid something.”*

In early 2006, 2 other girls that were raped at Tasaru fled to the neighboring house of a woman who works for the Narok County Council. The morning after the rapes occurred, the woman took the girls to the police and a report was filed. Officers went to Tasaru to investigate, but the investigation was stopped. Pareyio is, and was at the time these rapes were reported, an elected member of the Narok County Council. Co-workers told the woman that Pareyio was going to have her fired for *“causing trouble for that lady [Pareyio].”* In order to keep her job, the woman had to go directly to Pareyio and promise that she would not *“threaten her organization by pursuing the matter further.”* The woman wishes to remain anonymous in this report for fear of *“further retaliation and losing her job.”*

#### **4. Community members report that Pareyio is misappropriating funds intended to support the girls being rescued from circumcision.**

##### A. Pareyio’s lifestyle and living expenses have changed since working with the V-Day Campaign in a way that has aroused community suspicion.

Many Maasai people in Narok, including elected officials and prominent organization leaders, reported that Pareyio’s lifestyle has changed *“dramatically”* since working with Tasaru. The director of a local Maasai non-governmental organization, who wished to remain anonymous *“for fear of political retaliation,”* explained that,

*“These recent amenities easily cast Pareyio in the top 1% of wealth in Narok. She used to be like any other woman in Narok who walks to get places and spends moderately. But today, she drives a really expensive car, she owns many properties, and so much land. You know, her wealth has benefited her three sons too. They now all drive expensive SUVs, live in their own houses, run their own businesses, and manage her wheat crops. And where do you think she got this money? There is no way she’s getting that money from her salary from that organization. I’m a director of an NGO and if you are spending that much on yourself, but you are also telling girls you can’t pay*

*for their school because there are not enough donations, then there is a big problem.”*

Community members interviewed repeatedly told the researchers that this level of wealth is unattainable for people in Narok, outside of relationships with “*large foreign corporations.*” The director of another Maasai non-governmental organization working in the area told researchers,

*“[Pareyio] has planted acres and acres of wheat, which obviously is not enough from her salary, or [her salary] from the council. Even if she is stealing money from the council it is still not enough to do all that.”*

Several community members in informal conversations with researchers commented that when questioned by local people in Narok town about her sudden wealth, Pareyio responds,

*“This is my circumcision money, go find your own money.”*

#### B. Tasaru avoids transparency in its financial management.

M.P. Ole Ntimama, urged by directors of local organizations of varying political backgrounds. attempted to respond to concerned constituents by advising Pareyio to organize a community committee that would assess her allocation of Tasaru’s funds. He reported that he told Pareyio,

*“You must have a community committee, from the community, which will be appraising you, which will know where you are getting the funding, which will know how you are spending this funding, and so forth. Then, she [Pareyio] refused completely to incorporate any community group into this work. She has refused to listen to the [Maasai] community.”*

A pastor at a local church told the researchers that when Tasaru was first established, his church worked in partnership with Pareyio, but soon broke off the partnership because of Tasaru’s “*fishy business.*” He told the researchers,

*“We had different priorities. Our primary goal is to promote the character of our girls, and hers was something very different. It was about money.”*

The pastor wished to remain anonymous in this report because people in the Narok area are “*afraid of her [Pareyio].*” He explained that if the church was seen as taking a stand against Pareyio the church could lose members.

#### C. Pareyio provide donors with inflated figures of the costs of caring for girls.

When the researchers inquired about the costs of school fees for girls being supported by Tasaru, Pareyio provided them with hand-written statistics. She

claimed that Tasaru spends “31,000 shillings per girl per year” (approx. 443.00 USD) for secondary school and “12,000 shillings per girl per year” (approx. 172.00 USD) for primary school and an additional “3,000 shillings per girl” (approx. 43.00 USD) per year for shopping needs. These fees are allocated for tuition and boarding costs.

Pareyio calculated that her annual expense for the 58 girls currently under her care is 1,345,000.00 KSH, or roughly 19,215.00 USD

The researchers spoke with the head teachers of two schools in Narok District, one of which has received several girls sponsored by Tasaru. Both school directors reported to researchers that boarding fees for primary school are 6,000 Kenyan Shillings per student per year. Even these lesser fees would not be incurred if girls whose scholarships were paid for by Tasaru actually lived at the centre and attended day school, rather than boarded at other schools in Narok, as Primary school through class eight is free in Kenya. However, a good number of the girls appear to be boarded out rather than live in the safehouse because they are, as discussed above, friends and relatives of Agnes Pareyio, not girls seeking shelter and a safehouse.

## **Concluding Remarks and Recommended Actions to be Taken**

Circumcision is an issue of concern both within and outside of Maasai communities, but the V-Day campaign and the ensuing corruption of Tasaru has alienated and disempowered community members in their attempts to address this issue. Maasai communities are already advocating for cultural change around the practice of circumcision and early marriage, and these communities provide the most competent leadership for this work. The leadership that has emerged around this issue has included teachers, ministers, educated women and men, and some traditional community leaders. Their approach tends to be rooted in Maasai cultural decision making and conflict resolution processes, which ensures that individual perspectives are recognized, and listened to with deep consideration. Many individual stories attest to the typical success of reconciliation efforts between girls and their families when conducted in the context of Maasai communities, with the participation of the entire community. In every case revealed to the researchers, girls were enabled to avoid circumcision and early marriage and, where financially possible, allowed to attend school. This approach takes time, but the outcomes are more sustainable because a girl is empowered through the process, and communities reach consensus that cannot be undone. Western organizations, such as The V-Day Campaign, have a proclivity to impose their own sense of urgency and models of social change that may not be relevant or effective in Maasailand. The cultural incompetence of many outside organizations often results in more harmful consequences than beneficial change.

As western feminists, it is the opinion of these researchers that the V-Day organization shares responsibility for the harm inflicted on girls at Tasaru. Eve Ensler’s activism has been successful in furthering women’s liberation and empowerment in the

U.S. because the work came out of her experience and perspective of being a woman in the United States. But that perspective should not presume to speak for Maasai women. V-Day has fallen short in its oversight of the project by oversimplifying the circumstances surrounding circumcision and marriage and the importance of community relationships. V-Day funneled resources to a single individual, a westernized Maasai woman, and built a partnership with her in opposition to communities, on the assumption that community leadership could not be trusted but had to be subverted in order to 'rescue' girls. By doing so, V-Day has privileged one perspective, created animosity and denied the community at large the opportunity to care for their girls and maintain relationships with their daughters while addressing a complicated situation. The only role for the community in the V-Day model was to be invaded and disempowered. The funding provided by V-Day had a corrupting influence that has rippled through the area, raising and dashing hopes of girls, undermining other more effective efforts, and creating a climate of fear and mistrust between Maasai people and outsiders.

Maasai communities typically recognize, and are appreciative of, the concern of outside organizations for the welfare of their children, and stress that there is potential for collaboration. The success of partnerships, however, depends entirely on the degree to which outsiders trust a spectrum of local leadership, and share power and resources equitably. Programs that are based in communities do exist in Maasailand for girls who refuse circumcision. We have seen profound examples of good, honest work being done by communities leaders who put runaway girls up in their own homes, treat them like their own children, go door-to-door collecting shillings to raise money for their educations, and who walk many kilometers through dangerous terrain to help them reconcile with their families and retain their culture. These seek to maintain girls in the larger web of relationships while helping them access the resources they need to attend school and avoid circumcision and marriage. To achieve this, the organizations sustain a constant dialogue with the community as a whole.

The V-Day organization and its supporters are morally obligated to address the abuse of Maasai girls through the Tasaru centre, to take appropriate legal action, and to undo some of the harm perpetrated on Maasai girls by finding other, better options, for providing the assistance that was promised. There is great potential for future collaborations between those who care about the well-being of Maasai girls, within and without Maasailand, and many local groups are in place that do not have international connections, are not savvy about fundraising, and not seeking recognition, but who are using their marginal resources to care for Maasai girls in trouble everyday Beginning with them, communities and outside funders can dialogue about ways to distribute resources and make decisions so that the maximum number of people can benefit.

A final note: The researchers are aware that this report might be taken as one more piece of evidence that African based NGOs are not trustworthy, subject to corruption, and therefore to be avoided in favor of internationally directed efforts. However, it is our conclusion that in spite of its claims, Tasaru is not represent a local, community based effort. Rather, it represents the worst kind of collaboration possible between large, western NGOs and corrupt individuals, claiming to represent communities, but really only looking to profit for their own gain. A diversity of perspectives exists among men, women and children in Maasailand about circumcision, and the community is alive with dialogue about the issue, and adults can be found to support girls who say "no." True

collaboration is possible. We feel hopeful that it will be pursued, and that Maasai girls finally benefit from the genuine concerns of all of those who care about their well-being.

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Research conducted by Jane Cabot, Kaitlin Noss, Katelyn Cabot  
Report compiled by Jane Cabot & Kaitlin Noss

For additional information on personal communications contact [JaneKCabot@yahoo.com](mailto:JaneKCabot@yahoo.com)