

# Commentary: From bandits to pastors

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Boaz Keibarak preaching the gospel in a village in western Kenya. (Photo courtesy of Boaz Keibarak)

The Pokot and Turkana area of western Kenya is a mostly arid region, frequented by severe drought throughout the year, except for a few pockets that receive small amounts of rainfall but cannot produce a mature crop. Raising livestock is the backbone of this region.

Children here grow without going to school. The only education they receive is how to protect cattle from bandits and how to grow their own herds through cattle rustling. Cattle banditry is an old lifestyle among the pastoralists in many rural villages.

Cattle raiding is dangerous. Young bandits have been killed, as well as fathers and sons trying to protect the cows they own. The raiders kill them all and take the livestock. Family clans no longer cry for the cows but for the lives of their beloved.

Families seek revenge against neighboring tribes. In this way, innocent women, elderly people and children unable to protect themselves have been killed. This has birthed continued hatred among the different tribes living across the administrative boundaries of this region.

## **Transformed by God's word**

A satanic agenda is at work when Satan steals youth, makes them bandits and uses them to destroy neighborhood relationships through killing each other (John 10:10).

Saul had a satanic agenda of persecuting the saints. His transformation came through the word of God—the voice of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:1-5), the Word (John 1:1-5)—who stopped Saul, convinced him and transformed him from a satanic agenda to a minister of a heavenly agenda (Acts 9:15).



A former cattle bandit baptized by Boaz Keibarak is now a Christian pastor. (Photo courtesy of Boaz Keibarak)

Like Saul, reformed bandits have been convinced and transformed by the word of God from a satanic agenda to ministers of a heavenly agenda. They have become preachers of Christ.

Since these former bandits know the names of active bandits in their villages, we document the names of unsaved people, including bandits. Then, we hold continued prayer for the identified people and start approaching them with friendly conversation to share the good news of Christ. This is an ongoing activity that may take several months.

Later, a preacher invites other fellow former-bandit preachers from different villages to his village. Together, they evangelize active bandit warriors. Then, we hold an open-air crusade. In this way, we have seen many bandit warriors turning to Jesus Christ.

The conversion takes place as the word of God is heard in their ears, minds, hearts and souls—just as it happened to Saul. Reformed bandit preachers are instruments to deliver God's word. Christ himself, through the power of the Holy Spirit, brings each person into submission.

If someone who wasn't a bandit comes into one of these villages, the bandits think that person is the police. They run and hide. But when a reformed bandit comes into a village, active bandits see that person as one of them and are more approachable.

# Theological education

Since these pastors received salvation as adults and have not been to school, it is hard for them to access theological education because of the qualifications and requirements set by theological schools. This makes the region vulnerable and calls for a home-grown theological college.

Such a school would offer informal education in a local language, so these pastors will be equipped to continue ministering. It also would set a Christian foundation for future generations to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

All reformed pastors have started taking their children to schools to produce an educated generation who will use education as a tool for their livelihood, instead of using guns and banditry as tools for their livelihood.



Village children attending school under a tree. (Photo courtesy of Boaz Keibarak)

Because of the poverty in the area, the village churches start [under trees](#). Some continue gathering under trees for years, because they are unable to build. People don't like to attend when it's hot or rainy. They rely on God to

provide constructions materials to build the church.

Most new village churches also start schools for children under trees. Most schools have been started and supported by churches. When or if a church building is built, churches will use it for the school until the government intervenes or God provides a donor to build another building.

## **Persecution and challenges**

Some village elders resist and reject the gospel and church planting. To continue staying in their villages, you have to adhere to their lifestyle of banditry, drunkenness, polygamy, female genital mutilation, forced early marriage and more. They have mobilized bandit warriors to beat preachers, especially those who left banditry and became preachers.

A beaten reformed warrior moved from his village to an empty village nearby to start another life. It is only him, his wife and children. He visits his former village and has person-to-person evangelism with his close relatives and warriors. When one gets saved, he moves out before the elders chase him out.

Reformed bandit warriors now face a lot of challenges to provide for their family, educate their children, meet the physical needs of their churches, and travel long distances to preach. As a result, some pastors travel far away to harvest gold to earn a living to support their family.

Thus, poverty makes them miss some of the weekly fellowship of their churches and not be active in evangelism. Pray for these pastors, that God will enable them to stay close to their churches and provide for their families.

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