

A TRIBUTE TO MARTIN SANING'O OLESANAGO



“A distinguished Maasai human rights defender with magnetic personality, a reservoir of pro-people development ideas with a refined sense of humor, who died on the 1st of March 2021 at the age of 60, was a humble and down to earth man”

ARUSHA - TANZANIA

2021

At first glance, **Martin Saning'o Kariongi Ole Sanago**— a distinctive Maasai human rights activist with a bold temperament, magnetic personality let alone refined sense of humor, who died on the **1st of March 2021 at the age of 60**, looked humble and down to earth. But those who know him well, say he was a unique personality who inspired not just those whose cause he defended, but also people from all walks of life and was an important pillar for progress and development of his community.

As attested by one commentators who shared his comment through Whatsapp messaging APP, Saning'o is hailed for his ability to delve on details of anything, dig to the gist of it, to get things done for the benefit of his community. His approach on human rights was unique and distinctively creative. Olesango has on different occasions used multiple approaches of business development, culture and human rights to succeed in what he was doing.

"Very inspiring; For every course he studied, for every conference he attended and for every workshop he participated there's a project in the community," says Edward Porokwa, one of his student who is the CEO of PINGOs Forum.

Focused and undaunted by challenges, Saning'o who is the founding Executive Director of the Pastoralists Indigenous Non Governmental Organisations' Forum(PINGO)—an umbrella advocacy coalition of indigenous people's organisations, had always trusted his instincts in the quest to serve local communities economically empower marginalised people, especially pastoralists in the Maasai steppe across the northern Tanzania.

With a strong leadership acumen, Saning'o who has held various managerial positions in top human rights organisations and advocacy groups arguably lived his life fully and fulfilled his mission here on earth. When he dressed in his dazzling red shawl, you quickly realise Saning'o— a devout Lutheran, is a true member of the Maasai tribe—an ethnic group known for its semi-nomadic lifestyle and distinctive

colourful beads, red lobes and distended ear lobes.

"Ask any Maasai hawker roaming in the smouldering streets of Dar es Salaam, desperately searching for customers to buy ornaments, they will tell you without mincing a word, Saning'o is a well known and respected figure"

As the founding director of PINGO, a senior lecturer, a founder of Moipo Integrated People's Organisation, a Director of the Institute for Orkonerei Pastoralists advancement, and a founder of Simanjiro Pastoral Education trust, Saning'o played an important role to the society that his people will never forget.

Armed with sharp interpersonal skills and exquisite creative mind honed over the years, Saning'o has for long climbed the leadership ladder, prominently featuring in boards of many organisations including the Legal and Human Rights Organisation(LHRC)—a Dar es Salaam based advocacy group, as a founding board member. Simanjiro Pastoral Education, Trust, Arid Land Resources Management (ALARM) and many others.

Saning'o, who was always driven by his philanthropic mantra was far sighted. In 1991 he founded Pastoralists Network of Tanzania(PANET)—to defend land and economic rights of pastoral communities who are oftentimes pushed on the edge of survival by powerful economic forces. Saning'o, who was gloriously called by the father of heaven on the first day of March, had for the past 30 years deeply involved himself in community activities.

As the nation mourn the untimely demise of this noble man, pastoral communities across the Maasai Steppe in northern parts of Tanzania will certainly remember him for his unwavering resolve to defend the rights of those who cannot defend themselves especially marginalised Maasai women whose rights have for long been trampled on.

With a fine intellect, Saning'o has left an indelible mark in the history of human rights activism in Tanzania and abroad. At the International

Union for the Conservation of Nature conference in Bangkok, Thailand in 2010, Olesanago spoke candidly about the concept of “conservation refugee”

In his remarks, which was aptly captured by Mark Dowie, an investigative historian from California, he was certain that one thing that has displaced more people around the world than war is wild life conservation— which has dire consequences for indigenous people. The soft-spoken human rights defender, who was the only black man in a packed auditorium comprising conservation scientists from across the world, spoke in a slightly accented but perfect English describing how nomadic pastoralists across eastern African have lost swathes of their land to mischievous conservation projects.

“Our ways of farming pollinated diverse seed species and maintained corridors between ecosystems,” Olesanago told a legion of ecological scientists

He spoke passionately for indigenous peoples like the Maasai, who have for the last 200 years seen their land plundered by foreign interests despite being original conservationists themselves, who have for decades learnt to coexist with wildlife. Saning’os strong arguments in such international gatherings helped changing the narrative, now that corporations worldwide are increasingly concerned about uneasy relations with indigenous people, and have seen the need for fairer relationship with native people living in areas of high biodiversity notably the Maasai.

He was among the first masai human rights defenders to throw his weight pastoralists in Loliondo when their rights were violated and spent his life defending nomadic Maasai and their causes. He was the first to recount their pains and torments when their fate was in limbo, and the first to document their suffering on CNN and other Television programme.

Saning’o was a front-line human rights defender who eloquently

defended marginalised pastoralists through various organisations including the Legal and Human Rights Centre, the Faculty of law of the University of Dar es Salaam (Prof, Issa Shivji, Ibrahimu Juma, Dr Ringo Tengajust to mention a few). Some of the landmark cases he had helped defending include those involving pastoralists in Mkomazi, Hanang, Loliondo, Loongai, sukenya, Tanzania breweries case in Loliondo and Ewas tukuta terrat.

His vast experience has helped influenced key policy decisions and changes of the legislations governing land and protected areas. Racked by acute water shortage, local residents in numerous villages in Simanjiro , Longido and Same will probably not forget how Saning'o has always been of assistance.

He has also been involved in construction of classrooms and other buildings in more than 50 nursury, primary, secondary schools and even technical colleges in those districts.

Like other Maasai heros/heroines such as Edward Moringe Olesokoine, Moringe Ole Parkpuny and Maanda Nole Ngoitiko, Olesanago's contribution to the society is expemplary. Guided by his philathropic mantra, he had for instance, paid for studies for more than 500 students from poor pastoral communities in various stages from nursury school to university in Tanzania and abroad.

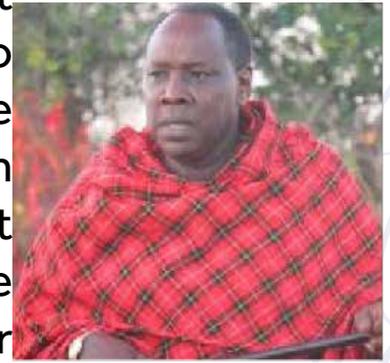
Olesanago, who's the founder of the first community radio in Tanzania in 2001, had also pioneered five milk processing plants in Simanjiro, Same and Longido districts—which continue to benefit women from pastoral communities. Interestingly, during his life, Saning'o did not hesitate to assist others. He would, for instance donate 500 heads of cattle to 100 pastoral families. He had also established solar power project at terrat village which had benefited more than 100 households and businesses.

Because of his activism and exemplary service to the society, Sening'o was in 1997 awarded the Canadian Human Rights Foundation Award.

He was also awarded in 1998 Land Rights of the Millenium Award, in Canberra, Australia. In 2003 he scooped Ashoka Fellowship Award for his amazing community creativity.

Other awards, include the Edward Moringe Ole Sokoine Award on Investigative Journalism, Issued by the Media Institute of Southern Africa(MISA-TAN) in 2005, global innovators award by Expo in Dubai in 2018, the best 10 entrepreneur award by schwab Foundation in collaboration with World Economic Forum in Abuja in 2014.

Born in December 12, 1960 at a sun-fried Orkesumet village in Njapai ward, Maasai district, Saning'o was a first born in their family. From his humble beginning Saning'o obtained his primary education at Simanjiro Primary School nestled at Emboreet village between 1968 and 1974. In January 1976, he joined Lutheran Junior Seminary in Morogoro for his secondary education , where he completed in 1979. A year after he joined Mazengo Secondary School in Dodoma for his high school education majoring in Physics, Chemistry and Biology combination, better known for its acronym- PCB.



He started working as a community volunteer shortly after completing his national service training. He was particularly keen to help people with eye problems in the remote pastoral communities in Simanjiro, Kiteto, Monduli and Ngorongoro. In 1986 Saning'o joined Mvumi hospital in Dodoma where he received basic training in optomology.

As a diligent student, Saning'o was awarded a certificate of completion which was a glimmer of hope for his academic future since it opened other doors that led him to visit east Germany for a study tour under the sponsorship of the Lutheran church.

Saning'o who had insatiable appetite for learning joined Kimmage University in Dublin, Ireland for one year between 1988 and 1989 to pursue a degree in development studies.

He thereafter joined London university institute of ophthalmology for his advanced degree in eye care between 1989 and 1990 . His quest for knowledge did not end there. He kept on educating himself in various fields of study in community development in Kisii Kenya in 1991. He has also studied solar power electricity in Nairobi Kenya in 1992.

As a right defender, Saning'o had the opportunity to study human rights in Montreal Canada, social communications ,finance management, community radio managment, ICT, Management of civic organisation, land policy, indiginous people and their land rights and many other fields. Between 1999 and 2000 he joined Moshi College of cooperatives for his post graduate Diploma in cooperative management. He has also participated in numerous local and international conferences in many countries including Italy, South Africa, Sweden and Thailand.

Between 2005 and 2007 he joined the University of Southern New Hampshire in the United states for his masters degree in community economic development. In 2009 he pursued a course in community trade in Amsterdam, Netherlands. In 2014 he joined Havard Business School in Boston for his Executive education on Strategic Perspective for Non Profit Managment. Through the so-called Ashoka Fellowship Saning'o participated in production of various respected documentaries by BBC, CNN, Aljazeera and Brazilian & Africa Film Documentary.

"If you look at his record you will realise that he has the project for every course he took. Even a one day training he attended, there's a project behind it in rural areas. For example, renewable energy, education, land right, information technology, water, health, entrepreneurship groups, women groups, milk and meat processing factories, environmental projects etc. For every litle thing he learned ameimplement. He has put in practice every bit of learning, which is quite rare. He is one of his own kind

Says Edward Porokwa CEO of PINGOS.

Saning'os passing has reverberated to as far as the parliament of

Tanzania where officials described his death as shocking and a setback to the entire nation.

"He was a real brother, mentor and icon of our country," says James Sapali, the private secretary of the deputy speaker of the national assembly

In his heartfelt condolences James millya former Simanjiro member of parliament, said the maasai community has lost an icon who devoted his creativity and see to it that his dream is realised for the benefic of his people.

"The old man was an eye opener, it was hard to establish a community radio here by despite the barriers from the government then stemmed from lack of understanding of that concept, Martin succeeded in his quest to establish Orkonerei" he said

Hon. James Millya (a survivor of COVID-19) cautioned Tanzania to seriously protect themselves against the coronavirus pandemic especially a new strain of the deadly virus which took the life of the man the maasai community perceived as a savior.

"This is not a cheap disease, the medicines and its protocols are expensive to an ordinary mwananchi" he says

At his funeral held on Friday at Terrat village, a sombre mood engulfed mourners and those who had attended. At some point the pastor, who led the service attempted to console the bereaved family as he read from the holy scriptures in the old testament especially the book of Job where God says the bound is set job 14:5

"A person's days are determined, you've decreed the number and his months and have set limits he cannot exceed"

Olesanago noble contribution to the society as a human rights defender and innovator, were not without a cost. He has on different occasions faced many obstacles, some threatening and others were stalking him or tightening the screws on him. He has won. As it was for other

human rights defenders, and regardless of all what he was doing for the community Olesanago could not escape the mishaps of being a human rights defender.

" In 1990's I was a small boy, and clearly remember Saning'o was arrested on the order of a certain leader for his relentless effort to defend the rights of our people. As a child attending that meeting I can bear witness on how he was treated with disdain by those on power despite his goodwill to the society" says Millya

As we moan the death of this noble man, the nation has lost a fearless defender of rights and a great model. May his career set an inspiring example for his family, friends and other defenders to tell the truth in the face of unjust occupation of communal Maasai land.

We pray that our father of heaven may ease the anguish of everyone's bereavement, and leave us only the cherished memory of a noble son of Tanzania, and the sacred pride that must be ours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the alter of freedom.

FORWARD EVER TO VICTORY - REST IN PEACE OUR BELOVED BROTHER

Narrated by Edward Porokwa, PINGOs Forum, Onesmo Olengurumwa, Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition and Kizito Makoye for Masai Heritage Institute.

"OUR CULTURE OUR DEVELOPMENT "