

## **Giving Hope To Youths In Drylands**

About two years ago, Mr. Abdi Ali Hassan was among many youths in the drylands of Kenya who faced a daunting future. Born 30 years ago to a pastoral family in Isiolo County, Mr. Abdi had to confront myriad challenges associated with the marginalized population. Some of these challenges included: acute unemployment; limited access to natural resources, financial hardship, and lack of skills and knowledge to transform economic circumstances.

Due to these challenges, Mr. Abdi had no confidence and lacked hope for a better future. However, his story has taken a different turn courtesy of the Centre for Sustainable Dryland Ecosystems and Societies (CSDES).

CSDES is a partnership between the University of Nairobi (UON) and Colorado State University (CSU) that is funded by USAID through the Higher Education for Development initiative. It was established two years ago at UON with a mission to contribute to sustainable dryland ecosystems and to improved livelihoods through innovative trans-disciplinary education, research, partnerships, policy dialogue and community outreach.

To achieve the mission of the Centre, a number of interns from dryland areas in Kenya were competitively recruited to work with PhD students in different dryland parts of the country. They were expected to assist in; data collection, provide community linkage, assist in organizing community meetings to prioritize local needs, interpret local issues and disseminate back knowledge generated to the community. On the other hand the PhD students were expected to mentor the interns.

Abdi was one of the interns from Isiolo County who was selected in early 2012 to work with Mr. Yazan Elhadi, a UoN Range Management PhD student. Abdi worked closely with Elhadi on his research related to value chains for camel milk in Kenyan drylands, and was an important resource for connecting Elhadi with Isiolo County communities.

By the close of the internship period, Mr. Abdi had acquired skills in conducting research, data analysis and communication. These skills opened many new opportunities for him in carrying out dryland-related research. He has worked as a research assistant with a number of researchers from UoN and Egerton University, and has become a representative for the Kenya Camel Association in Isiolo County.

“As a CSDES intern working with Yazan Elhadi, I interacted with very many people and became confident. I was able to improve my communication skills through the many meetings I organized and participated in. Today I am so motivated, particularly through the mentorship, encouragement and guidance of Mr. Yazan. I am optimistic that my tomorrow will be better,” he says.

Mr. Abdi now dreams of joining a higher education institution to pursue a course in animal health. A young man who 2 years ago had no hope for a better future is proud to have a chance to develop his professional life and impact his community.