

SAFARI'S ENCOUNTER WITH A LANDSLIDE



International Strategy
ISDR
for Disaster Reduction

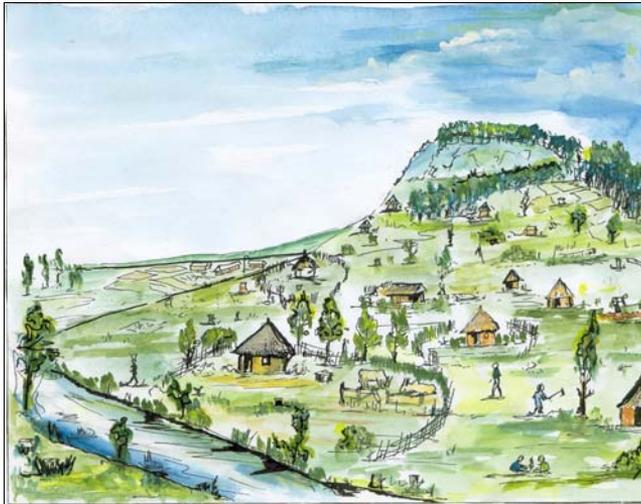


ISDR-Africa Educational Series. Volume 1, Issue 1

International Strategy for Disaster Reduction - Africa
Drought Monitoring Centre Nairobi
Volume 1, Issue 1 2003

Text and Story by
Dr. Robinson Mose Ocharo,
Alain Valency R, and
Yonahton Bock

Illustrations by Arthur Musambai



At the bottom of a tall hill, in a village called Kilima, lives a little boy named Safari. Safari lives with his family, and he has many friends and neighbours and relatives in Kilima.

When the sun shines, Safari and his friends spend the day climbing the hill and playing in the tall grasses. When it rains, Safari likes to sit with his family and to listen to them tell stories.



One night, as Safari was about to go to bed, it started raining. Safari sat on his bed and looked out through the window to watch the rain. He wondered what stories his family would tell tomorrow.

Outside, the wind was blowing and it was raining heavily. Safari saw the trees sway back and forth.

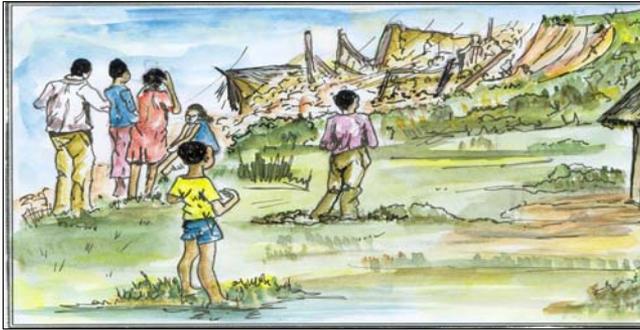
Suddenly, Safari heard a very loud noise outside.



The noise scared Safari.

He quickly closed his window and laid down on his bed. He pulled his soft blanket over his shoulders and listened to the rain.

Soon, he fell asleep thinking about the noise and wondering what had caused it. He slept all night.

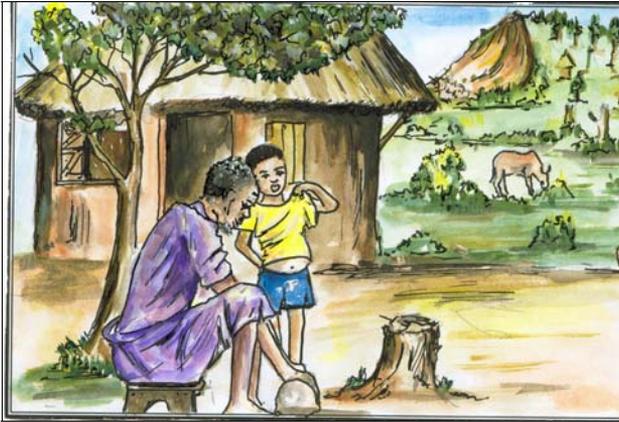


The next morning, Safari woke up. He opened his window and looked outside. Something very strange had happened while he slept. Part of the Simba Hill was not there.

Safari went outside and saw piles of wet brown earth all around his house.

Safari's parents and neighbours were also outside. They all looked sad and they talked in low voices, shaking their heads.

Safari was afraid and wanted to ask someone what was going on.



Finally, Safari decided to go to his grandfather to ask him what had happened.

His grandfather was sitting outside of his house. He was not as scared as the other people in the village.

Safari asked his grandfather all of the questions he had. Why was mud rolling down the hill? Why were so many trees broken down? Why were other trees uprooted and lying on their side? Why were some houses destroyed?



Safari's grandfather took him to the top of a big rock that stood next to the house. From there, Safari and his grandfather could see Simba Hill and the entire village.

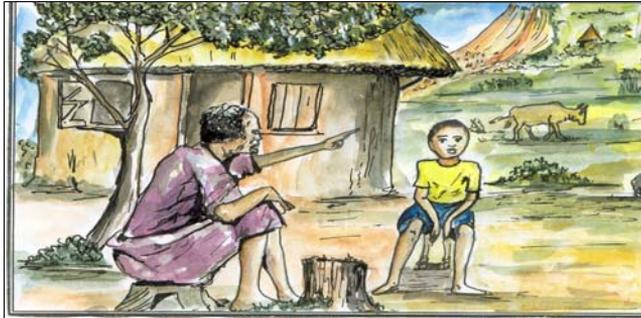
Then, Safari's grandfather told him what had happened. "Last night there was a lot of rain. As a result of the heavy rain, a landslide occurred. The landslide destroyed part of the village."

Safari was confused. "What is a landslide?" he asked.

Safari's grandfather sat down next to Safari and began to explain to him what a landslide is.



He told Safari that a landslide occurs when the soil and rock on a hill become loose and weak. When it rains heavily, a large amount of earth can slide down the hill with great force. The soil and rock can destroy trees and bury houses. Safari's grandfather continued to explain: The soil and weak rock moving down the hill is very dangerous because it destroys everything on its way down.



Safari was confused and had another question. “How come landslides don’t happen every time it rains heavily?”

Safari’s grandfather explained that the rain alone does not cause a landslide. Human activities also make the soil on the hill loose and dangerous.

Safari was curious. “What kinds of human activities make the soil on the hill so loose?”

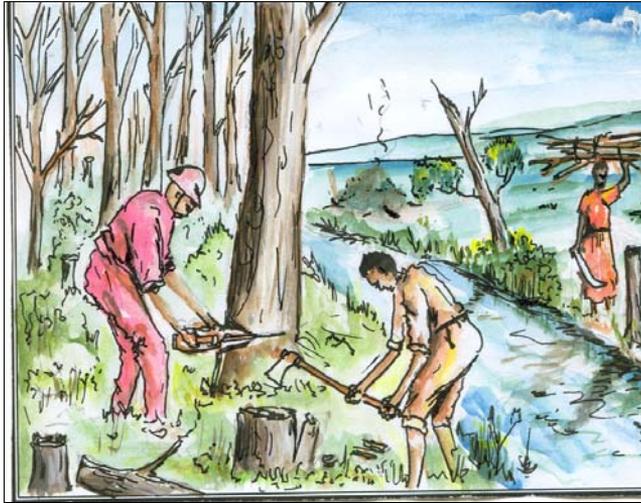
So, Safari’s grandfather began to teach Safari the kinds of activities that make the soil on the hill loose.



“The first activity,” Safari’s grandfather began, “is building houses on top of unstable hills.”

“When people build their houses on unstable hills, the houses add more weight to weak soil and rock.

“When it rains heavily, the soil and weak rock becomes wet and very unstable. The soil and weak rock can slide down the hill and the houses on top of the hill can fall down.”



**“The second activity,” Safari’s grandfa-
ther continued, “is *cutting down trees*
on the hills.”**

**“Trees have deep roots that hold the
soil together. When people cut down
these trees for firewood, charcoal, to
build houses or to mend fences, it
leaves the soil exposed. Suddenly,
there is nothing holding the soil to-
gether. If it then rains, the soil can
slide down causing a landslide.”**



Safari's grandfather went on. "The third activity is *farming on unprotected hills.*"

"It can be dangerous to grow crops on the hill sides. Farming on hill sides must be well planned in order to avoid landslides.

"If, for example, those people working on the hill do not protect the soil by digging trenches or planting trees, when it rains, the loose soil will slide down."



“The fourth activity is **overgrazing animals on the hills.**”

Safari’s grandfather explained that the bushes on the hills have roots just like those of the big trees.

“If cows and sheep and goats and donkeys eat all of the bushes, there will be nothing left to hold together the soil. When it rains the soil on the hill slides down.”

That day Safari learnt a lot about landslides. He now understood why the landslide had happened in Kilima. Although he enjoyed playing on Simba Hill, he remembered that over the past year, all of the trees and bushes had disappeared leaving the space wide open.

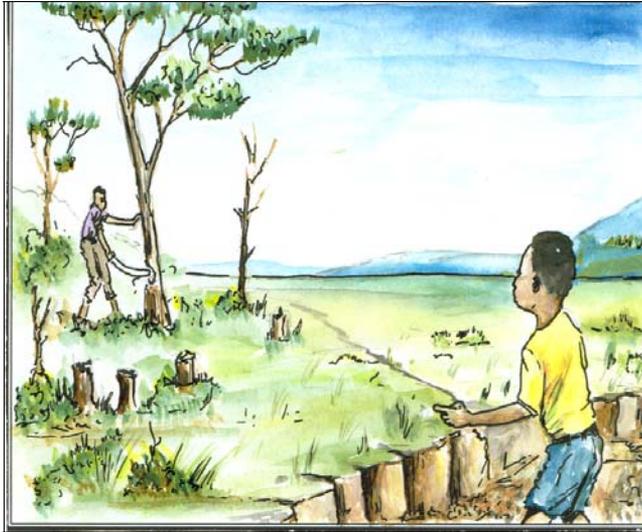
Safari was very upset because the landslide could have been prevented.



He decided that he wanted to do something to prevent future landslides.

Safari started to become interested in the environment around his village. He began to ask his friends if they would start to take safety measures to prevent future landslides.

Some of these safety measures included:



1. Stop cutting trees that are growing on the hills. The trees are very helpful in holding together the soil.



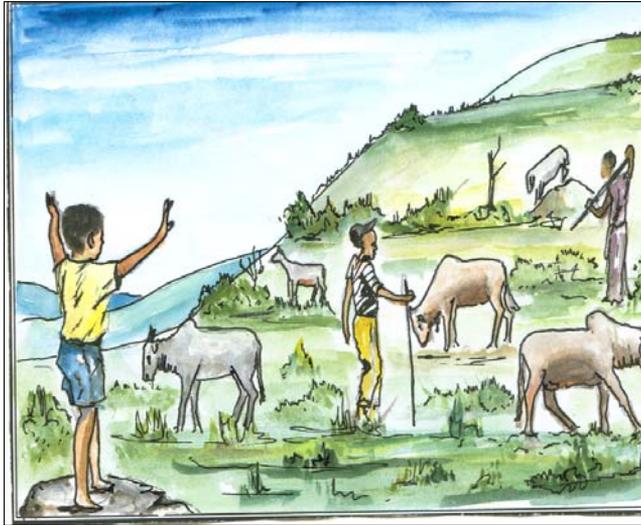
2. Encourage friends to plant more trees on the hill to protect the soil there. If a tree is cut down, plant a new one. Planting trees with friends can be fun.



3. Be aware of the dangers of farming on unprotected hills. When you dig there, the soil becomes loose and the crops can be washed away.



4. If farmers must grow their crops on unprotected hills, encourage them to dig trenches around the hill to protect the soil from sliding down.

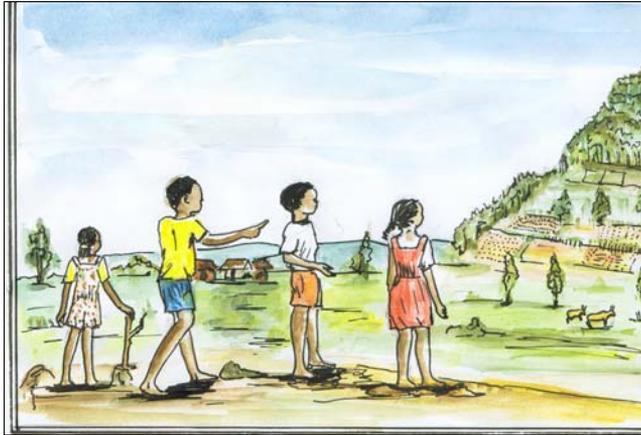


5. Be aware of where animals are grazing. If you see a hill that looks unprotected, move the animals to a different hill. Don't overgraze animals on the hills.



Safari began to share his new knowledge with his friends and with family and neighbours in Kilima.

Over the next year, the village began to recover from the landslide. Because of Safari's work, the village began to take better care of Simba Hill.



They planted trees on Simba Hill making the soil there stable. Safari's family stopped grazing their animals on the Simba Hill. Neighbours built stronger houses which could not be destroyed easily by a landslide.

Today, Safari's friends come from all over to learn from him how to prevent landslides.

What can you do?



UN / ISDR Africa

PO Box 47074, Nairobi, Kenya

UN Complex Block U Room 217, Gigiri

Email: isd-r-africa@unep.org

Phone: +254 2 624101

Fax: +254 2 624726