

# LEARNING FROM THE MASAI

Communities, traditions, rites: Whether in Silicon Valley or on tribal lands in Kenya, some lessons remain the same.

**—WHAT DO** a Masai tribal chief and his warrior companion have to do with SAP? Plenty. In a time of rapid change, individuals, society, and even corporations are deciding which traditions to keep and which to discard. To make these tough decisions, it is helpful to understand how others in the global community are handling these issues. On the most basic level, the Masai tribe of Kenya is facing many of the same issues we are encountering in the fast-paced business and technology hub that is Silicon Valley. It's not always about which latest BlackBerry widget or iPod will improve one's life.

SAP got a glimpse of the issues facing the Masai as the company played host to two visitors from the nomadic tribe — Shaman and Chief Salaton Ole' Ntutu and his warrior companion Sabore Oiye — as part of a recent San Francisco Bay Area Future Salon. Salaton was in the United States to forge a link between his tribal community and that of the Silicon Valley. His mission: to educate on the ways of his people, and to educate his own people on sustainable development and land conservation. More than 80 people at the Palo Alto location turned out to hear the Masai speak. Mark Yolton, senior vice president of the SAP Community Network, and Mark Finnern were involved in the planning and hosting of the visit.

During his visit, Salaton spoke with many groups about his culture and background, including traditions, rites of passage, and the life of a warrior. He continues to live in the traditional ways of his people, for example by wearing the traditional attire of the Masai. In addition to leading a village, Salaton works on social and economic issues and outreach programs, such as these visits to other cultures.

For thousands of years the Masai have practiced a sustainable way of life that is now under threat. As warriors they have decided to rise to the challenge. They depend on cattle and goats for their livelihood and are vulnerable to climate change like sustained drought. They want to improve their quality of life without destroying their culture. They want to fight the loss of their tribal lands.

Throughout the visit, one thread of wisdom kept coming up: the importance of being rooted in one's community and the strength one can derive from that. It's what makes diversity so essential to any successful and sustainable society, from the individual to the corporate level. □

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### **Boldly Creating a World that Works**

The Future Salon is the brainchild of Mark Yolton, an SAP colleague whose day job at SAP Labs in Palo Alto focuses on virtual online communities. Future Salon provides a monthly forum and related wiki for people interested in exploring the world of tomorrow and influencing the future. At the Future Salon, participants discuss global issues and network for change. SAP sponsors the Future Salon as part of its Silicon Valley strategic industry sponsorships program. The events are open to the public.

[www.futuresalon.org](http://www.futuresalon.org)



**1.** More than just the wealth of diversity: Masai Chief Salaton Ole' Ntutu (right) and Sabore OIye gave lessons in building sustainable communities.



**2.** Head of SAP Community Network Mark Yolton (center) says he learned a lot from the Masai during their visit to Silicon Valley.