

Annex 9

THE MAASAI AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION: THE PERSPECTIVES OF A PRACTITIONER

Phillip Kishoiyian

INTRODUCTION

In opening a conversation (called eating news), “*Ekweni inkishu o oltung’ana*” that is cows and people are all smiles, as in the Maasai greetings livestock come first and people rank second in importance. The Maasai value of one livestock unit (cow) is a premium as in their proverb, “*erisio entawuo nabo o elukunya olee.*” in english, one heifer is the worth of a man’s head.” This value enables them to communicate the premium and worth of their livestock as an investment to the Maasai community. The land (*emurua*) is equated to a boy (*olayioni*).

WHO ARE THE MAASAI

History: The Kenya-Tanzania Maasai people in traditional history belong to their *Naiteru-enkop* (an equivalent to Adam). Their physical environment harsh terrain is arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) reinforces their behaviour, cultural traditions, and customs as survival skills.

Their history in recent memory began at Kerio-Valley (Endikirr-ekerio) ascend into the Kenya highlands and spreads out southwards to cover much of Kenya and Tanzania grazing lowlands (Savannah). The Maasai’s former and current territory bear witness of their occupation through names like, Mt. Elgon (Oldonyio-Looirkony), Kitale (Kitali), Nanyuki (Enkare-nanyukie), Nakuru (Nakuroo), Mt. Kenya (Oldonyio-Keri), Naro-moro (Narook-Imoru), Karatina (Enkare-oo-ntana), Nairobi (Enkare Nairobi), Amboseli (Empussel), Mara River (Enkipai), Serengeti (Siringet), Mt. Kilimanjaro (Oldonyio-Oiborr).

The Maasai socially are divided into two major moieties which transcends across all Maa speakers: Enkaji-enanyokie Illmongi (house of red steers) and Enkaji-enarook Illmongi (house of black steers). The sub-houses within the two-moiety are Losero, Lekesen, Lelian, Laiserr, and Lukumae found in all Maa speaking fraternity.

THE TERRITORIAL CLANS ARE:

“The large territorial and social units based on traditional locality are the *iloshon* (*oloshon* one, is an equivalent of a nation state), i.e. *Ilkeekonyokie, Ilpurko, Ilkaputei, Isiria, Ilkisonko* and so on. Each *oloshon* plays a special ceremonial role in their collective ceremonies and rites of passage for an age-set and performs assigned tasks for *Olmaa* (current and traditional practice). The

olosh is made up of *imurua* (*emurua* singular), each *emurua* in a locality share common pasture and water points/resources.”¹

The men in an *emurua* form networks for collective obligations and responsibilities, whose participation entitle each man the right to water and grass (i.e. participatory democracy). This council of elders in this social unit organizes, decides, and determines when to seek external assistance, if and when necessary for the community good like water, and cattle dips. These peasant herdsman exercise a degree of authority and autonomy in an age-old democracy.²

The age-set grouping found right across the Maa community forms a core to governance, structure, lines of authority and education in handing down the cultural traditions, customs, cultural institutions and indigenous knowledge. These structures established from childhood would ensure resource and environment management from boyhood to the aged-Maasai.³

THE AREA THIS PAPER COVERS

This brief paper ideas and concepts cover much of Kajiado, Narok, Transmara, Samburu, Njems (Iltiamus) and Tanzania in terms of resource and environment management as far as Maasai language is spoken.

THE CONSERVATION TO THE MAASAI

The Maasai structures and indigenous knowledge ensure resource and environment management. The Maasai community held land, forest, water, animals and culture resources as trustees for the present and the future generations.

The Maasai belong to a larger pastoral group that fall under three subsets that differ according to their mobility 1. The sedentary agro-pastoralists who constitute 88 % of livestock keepers, 2. The transhumant pastoralists who visit flood plains during the dry season and go back to their villages during rainy seasons. 3. The nomads who do not practice cultivation, (e.g. Nigeria Fulani and Arab Choa of Cameroon). These later two groups make up for the 12 % of those who depend on natural pastures.⁴

¹ Kishoiyian, P. L. (2002:20) Community Participation in Water development (MA Project, UoN-IDS)

² Ibid.

³ Sankan, S. S. (1978), The Maasai, KLB, Nairobi

⁴ Scholte, Paul; The Involvement of Nomadic and transhumant Pastoralists in the Rehabilitation and Management of the Logone Flood Plain, North Cameroon, IIED-Drylands Programme, December 1996. Pg. 2-3.

The Maasai as a rule of thumb don't eat wildlife meat: wildlife and livestock are never mix (meat and milk). They argue that milk and meat will fight in the stomach (wildlife is meat and livestock is milk).

Most Maasai believe that they should not eat wildlife, because it is mixing meat, and milk. This tradition is also found in the Jewish traditions. Warriors and elders practice this art in good and rainy seasons (a form of a holiday). The practice of meat eating and herbal soup drinking in the bush is at designated places (*olpul*).

The *olpul* and a specially sharpen stick both ends (*Iljipeta*) for meat roasting are never burned or destroyed when people leave. Instead, *olpul* is cleaned and *iljepeta* are kept save for the next time (to reduce waste and destruction of natural resources).

One Maasai elder, Jason Ole Sein, about 85 years, is a successful businessman, rancher, and retired educator, has been to *olpul* for the last thirty years, I have known him. His designated place is Ngong Hills (Oloosaiserr) southeast escarpment. His *olpul* has now acquired his name, "Ole Sein" meat place. The environment is intact as Ole Sein and his colleagues kept its surrounding, water, and medicinal herbs protected.

Naiteru-enkop had observed and handed down the message of species selection, the cheetah uses speed to hunt small animals like antelopes (*enkoli*). The lion: female hunts it's prey (kill) and feeds on most animals using strategies not speed.

When warriors' mounts a lion's hunt, the focus is on male lions only for that lion's sport not female lions. The animals that give birth and the plants or plants' parts that reproduce must not be killed or destroyed but are protected for posterity as these replenish the earth and community. In the same vein or case applies to the Maasai enemies concerning women, men would only kill all men and boys but **not** women and girls.

God (EnkAi) gave the first Maasai (*Naiteru-enkop* like the first Adam) natural resources land, forest, water, animals, children, and culture for the community not for individual's ownership. The community in its turn exercised authority and collective responsibility over land resources, livestock and children through a division of labour-men with boys', and women with girls' chores.

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION

Transhumance is a practice of movement from lowlands (*olpurkel*-in wet season grazing lands) to *osupuko* (highlands-as dry season grazing lands). The Maasai would cut grass in the grasslands near the forests to create more open space for livestock and trees outside the forests

(clearing certain trees strategically to open grasslands and ensure livestock security). The only trees to be cut are quick growing trees to create pasture but never slow growing trees.

The movement of all livestock through pastures is by grazing not a continuous move. A shepherd goes ahead of the herd to slow down the movement rapid succession that would destroy the physical environment and eco-systems as land degradation and soil erosion.

The land use and pasture care is managed and controlled in both Kenya and Tanzania by a Maasai practice “*olokeri*” (a portion of pasture is used for grazing certain livestock units at a time) concept. It could be set specifically for lesser stock (sheep, calves, lambs) or greater livestock (cattle, donkeys, camels).

Forests: *Naiteru-enkop* commanded *Maasani* to eat fruits but never destroy trees because the fruits will fail to be accessible and available when it is needed in the next season (for food when hungry, and medicine when in ill-health).

Conserving trees is observed including which one is use for toothpick (*enkike*) and it is specific parts of olive tree (*olorien*) and others. The specified tree parts cut, broken or use for ceremonial occasions and any other purpose must always leave the growing part of the plant to continue growing.

The Maasai use certain herbs for perfumes (*esoongoyo*). *Oleleishua* is one such a shrub used as perfume, sanitary towels, toilet paper, cleaning, sleeping on and for adults and children napkins. This plant is a native of lowlands (*olpurkel*) in the Narok, Naivasha areas etc. It is a plant that is disappearing real fast.

Water points (*illangat*) along the riverbanks or water dams/wells (*esilanke/ilkesumeti* or *immungurri*) were identified and given specific names, all individuals in the community (*emurua*) know. People were not allowed to use these areas anyhow.

The Maasai wear culture, and are indignant (prejudice) of other cultures especially cultivators (*illmeek*) behavior of destroying the soil, environment and deny cattle pasture. The boys (*illayiok*) wear certain berries on their hairstyles (*Illoosio*), to signal to their elders that they are ready for cultural rituals and rites of passage to adulthood.

WHAT ARE THE MAASAI STRATEGIES?

The Maasai observed seasons and studied the stars from their lunar calendar. They observe the herbivores' behavior after rains long grass grow and hide carnivores. The herbivores move from long grass to community shorter grass areas where they could see predators easily. The respective home range or animal territorial claim accompanies species concentration and this overflow to community land sparks movement of people too.

This concentration of herbivores in the community is a signal to move livestock away from the wildlife migratory routes (corridors). When the wildlife move away, the Maasai burn grass to kill ticks and dangerous disease carrier pests' prior to them returning (a form of shifting cultivation).

The shoats, cattle and donkeys do not know how to escape the danger posed by lion/predators. A place by the name Kitengela became a no go zone for wildlife as the Maasai declared that lions outside the park that prey on their livestock deserve death (seven lions were killed) before a truce was reached between the Maasai and KWS.

In the middle of this conflict, between KWS's-wildlife and Maasai-livestock, need to form an association arose, named "Kitengela consolation scheme to mediate and compensate the Maasai and save the wildlife. An initiative by "Friends of Nairobi National Park" (FONNA) that pay Kshs. 370 per acre per month as a permanent solution is sought to this conflict.

ISSUES OF CONSERVATION

There are setbacks to ensure resource and sustain environment management. The central government has well-articulated policies and local authorities great bylaws. However, certain elite and managers entrusted to these institutions and resources see it differently. The implementers fail policy strategies and do not plough back revenues to the management of community natural resource management appropriately. The environment is all the poorer because ownership of goals by those entrusted to its care are not committed to the execution of the policy requirements.

The land use and its resources seem to attract interference from land grabbers, and political interests without a legal framework to meet the challenge of human land greed. The respective neighbouring communities more often than not are not aware of their rights and responsibility of conserving these valuable resources and environment.

The county councils who are legal trustees lack capacity and fail to act in the interest of the community (or so it seems). The local authorities don't give guidance on the land carrying capacity livestock numbers, regulate and advise against illegal camp sites in wildlife sanctuaries, and/or discourage cultivation as inappropriate around and near game parks.

The local councils' factor is to blame for misappropriation of community accruing benefits from revenues charged and collected from wildlife sanctuaries and forests products together with the subsequent community hostility against conservation initiatives.⁵

CHALLENGES-PROBLEMS AND CONSTRAINT

In recent years the local media has highlighted incidences of real challenges in the Maasai well being as confronted by "development and modernizing" external forces. The Maasai face modern global demands that has destabilized their comfort zone with no mitigation measures insight. The forces enshrine in "Development" one of the oldest and most powerful of all the western ideas." Central element to this perspective is the idea of evolution conceived as first, directional and cumulative, secondly, predetermined and irreversible, thirdly, progressive and finally, immanent with reference to the nation state.⁶

The Maasai sense of indigenous knowledge in conservation face this range of challenges:

⁵ Daily Nation/ Tuesday, May 18, 2004 (National news column)

⁶ Civicus; Civil society at the Millennium, Civicus Kumarian Press, 1999.

- *Land use practices (LUPs) –land sub-division, urban centres and permanent settlements*
- *Fencing, building, and crop farming a threat to livestock and wildlife (Maasai huts and villages were user friendly to conservation)*
- *The people changing lifestyles to embrace monetary and market commercialization of land and culture (modern conservation rivals the Maasai cultural conservation knowledge and ideas)*
- *Interference with the wildlife migratory corridors (Nairobi National Park to Amboseli and Maasai Mara) Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) may contemplate buying that land for a corridor*
- *Factory, towns and slums, discharge pollutants to waterways and Eco-systems both as effluent and waste material*
- *An emergence but gradual systematic poaching-“pot-poaching”-from slum areas use snares that pose threats to wildlife and livestock alike all the way to big game “bush-poaching” for butchery and commercial purposes*
- *Lions food-web (food chains) is interfered with, so lions and other predators move to community following the limited prey and then find livestock and crops en-route their path (Nairobi National Park’s lions and Narok Maasai Mara’s elephants are examples of resultant conflicts)*
- *The Mao forest complex which is the source of Mara River, Ewuaso-Ngiro South, Emaalo, and other streams to Nakuru, Sondu Miirio are all drying up, (Ewuaso-Ngiro North share this same predicament)*

INTERVENTIONS: POSITIVE/NEGATIVE (LINK-DESTROYED)

The Maasai courage when resolute they stop at nothing as we see demonstrated in these recent conflicts:

- *Kitengela Maasai–Nairobi Natinal Park lions vs. livestock conflict-Kajiado*
- *Narok stadium-Enkare-Ngiro South elephants vs. community conflict-Narok*
- *Olkaria geo-thermo development (KenGen) vs. community interests conflicts-Narok*
- *The Magadi Soda Company vs. community interest conflict-Kajiado⁷*

⁷ The right of peoples and nations to permanent sovereignty over their natural resources was affirmed in the 1962 General Assembly Declaration on Permanent Sovereignty Over Natural Resources No 1803 (XVII), 14th Dcember 1962. The term peoples to whom this

- *Naimina Enkiyio Forest Maasai community vs. conservationists conflict-Narok*
- *The Mara Triangle Maasai community vs. private management conflict-Trans Mara*

The technical support that is available for the Maasai in Kenya has not been seen in the positive light. There hasn't been sufficient education efforts to create reasonable community awareness:

- *Financing and natural management by IUCN, WB, etc. has created resentment and fears from the community⁸ who prefer ecotourism as resource management as it was with "Naiteru-enkop" laws of conservation under Maasai trustees*
- *Information to market and access environment products has been taken advantage by the elite and middlemen traders in relevant industries*
- *The networking of CBOs, NGOs, CSOs, commerce and Government departments to enhance and build community capacity to manage on their own is inadequate too*
- *Enabling policy, institutional and technical support for resource development has not been supportive fully to the course of the Maasai resource management*

CONTAMINATED WATER AND SOILS

Nairobi is a city on the former *Enkare-nairobi* where Maasai from Oololaiserr mountains (Ngong Hills) and *Kaputei* (Kapiti plains) brought their livestock for 'sweet cool water.' All that is now history. It is now a chemical effluent and waste discharge which contaminates or pollutes water and soil bodies in an environment for its sediment house pollutants (e.g. heavy metals). That can be potentially hazardous to life and a real threat to the existence of human life. In such way that water soluble chemicals may increase salinity or alkalinity beyond human, animal and aquatic Eco-systems life tolerance. Its flow eliminates certain microorganisms that are helpful for soils' air supply and general aeration.⁹

principle applies had in mind nation states within the context of decolonisation, but it is now equally understood to refer to people within a nation state. There thus exists both an internal and external dimensions. See Salomon M, *The right to development: obligations of states and the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples*, MRG, London, 2003, at page 35

⁸ The lease is for Land in Magadi is total area of 220 000 acres which completely shuts out the Maasai community from the Ngurumani escarpment which acts as its dry season grazing grounds. In any event, the Ngurumani escarpment has also been privatised and is under the use of several top notch hotels.

⁹ Hinrichsen, Don (2000:3-7) Population and the Environment: the Global Challenge; Pollution and Health Risks, Population Reports Special Topics, Series M, No. 15, page 7.

Water borne-diseases (dirty water diseases) are a result of using this water contaminated by human's chemical effluent discharged in urban waste, posing a formidable challenge to clean environment.

THE CHALLENGE OF DESERTIFICATION

Thorny still is the issue of the alarming rate at which Kenyan forest heritage is receding. The trend that begun at independence in 1963 and in 2004, Kenya has lost 878,885.3 acres of forestland. This systematic depletion of Kenya's forest-cover impacts negatively and contributes to the nation's diminishing water resources. It is believed the electricity power crisis of 2000 is a combination of drought and soil deposition in hydroelectric power dams or water reservoirs.

The Mao Forest Complex, East Mao and South West Mao life support water, is an important water catchment and conservation area which is drying up pretty fast. The local rivers arising from here,¹⁰

- *“Molo to Lake Baringo*
- *Njoro (Shura) provides water to flamingos at lake Nakuru*
- *Ewuaso Ngiro South water feeds Narok Town residents and Lake Natron's flamingos; and*
- *Nangores (enapuyapui swamp) is stream the head waters of Mara River that supports the Maasai Mara National Reserve wildlife and Maasai livestock population Kenya/Tanzania.”*

ENVIRONMENTAL MICRO-CLIMATE EFFECTS

“The story of deforestation in 1999 reduced the flow of Turkwell and Ewuaso Ngiro North by an estimated 13 % the highest in 30 years. The state had ignored warnings of consequences of forest allocations to environment. Kenya was faced by a catastrophe, if further allocations and forest excision continued with only 1.6 % of its land under forest.”¹¹

The created High Aswan dam reservoir on Nile River, in Egypt is examples of microclimate effect errors that should be averted. Aswan dam reservoir cuts down silt to the delta reducing the productive capacity of the Nile valley delta. Where, the current Mediterranean Sea marine life

¹⁰ Daily Nation, No. 12910; Environment Disaster, Monday January 21, 2002: 1, 4 and 5.

¹¹ Ibid.

has been negatively affected by lack of sediments carrying plankton and organic carbons.¹² The Kenyan Lakes Nakuru, Baringo and Elmentaita's marine life and flamingoes face similar grave dangers, experienced in the Egyptian delta on the Mediterranean Sea.

CONCLUSION,

Clearly, there has been a paradigm shift from a sole state-centred natural resource management to an upsurge of a people's centred partnership in resource management, development, and environmental conservation.

Sound natural resource management practices and sustainable development of such resources is an approach seeking to draw people and resources into full active involvement and participation in their own development. Citizens taking a passive position in natural management and environmental conservation is no longer the global approach.¹³

The Western developmentalism concept has introduced into natural resource management and gave shape development of a Non-Discouraging Model of global processes. Where it's motivation is to build autonomy, freedom, well-being and justice at a number of levels so that ordinary men and women can realize these values; "on the creation of a just world order,"¹⁴

However, the Maasai pastoral groups' mobility whether sedentary agro-pastoralists (livestock keepers), or transhumant pastoralists (dry and rainy seasons' nomads) has been adversely curtailed and challenged by modern world development trends.

The principles and laws God (EnkAi) gave Maasani (Naiteru-enkop) for the care of natural resources land, forest, water, animals, children, and culture for the community benefit not for individual's ownership are on trial. The Maasai community's free exercise of authority, discretion and collective responsibility over land natural resources, livestock and children has been thrown into confusion and disorientation.

¹² Biswas, Asit K., (1978) Water and Society: Conflicts in Development. Water Development, Supply and Management, Vol. 2, pp. 283-297. Pergamon Press Ltd. , Great Britain.

¹³ The Kenya National Development Policy Plan 1994-1996

¹⁴ Development as Social Transformation, Reflection on the Global Problematique by 10 contributors-Herb Addo, Samir Amin...(pg. 204-270.) *Mats Friberg and Bjorn Hettne.

The current world trends in science, technology, and factors beyond the community control are yet to recognize and factor in Naiteru-enkop's (Maasani) indigenous knowledge (wisdom) of natural resource management and environment conservation.

Where does that leave the Maasai's indigenous wisdom in conservation? The "green alternative" (civil society organizations) is gaining currency in the world development, compared to the blue, it is much less articulated, less discussed and less politically organized. The blue (market, liberal, capitalist) and red (state, socialists, planning) are they, the options? all seen in the dominant western development paradigm.

The Brandt Commission Report, a Keynesian solution to world poverty proposes a "Massive Wealth Transfer (MRT), where rich and poor move forward together rather than the poor receiving handouts and benefits at the expense of the rich world was the strategy of the "New International Economic Order, (NIEO)."

A radical change of all that was under "Global Reagonomics", was that developed communities were advised to liberalise their economies, encourage their entrepreneurs and find out their competitive advantages that are required to move towards the market pole axis.¹⁵ In the light of the world global issues, the Maasai people may have to redefine whether "Ekweni inkishu o oltung'ana" that is cows and people are all smiles, or "eishira enkishu" that is cows are groaning. "...We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of child birth right up to the present time..."¹⁶

*The following ideas were shared in separate discussions and am thankful to them:
Ole Maaki, M. Ole Sena, S. PhD, Leina A. Parmeris, N. Ole Ntete, J.
Singoieie, K. and Ole Tiampati, M.
For any errors and shortcomings are mine, PK.*

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ NIV Bible, (1978:841) Romans 8:18-22 "Future Glory"