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## PASTORALS, FORESTS & CONSERVATION.

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### Abstract

The subject of Conservation has in the 20<sup>th</sup> century been a permanent Agenda in the world. Many projects are now requested as a rule to incorporate environmental issues in their programs especially Forests and other "biodiversities". To some group of Ethnic groups of Africa however especially the pure Pastoralists like the Masai wherever they are by nature conservationists especially in the forests & wildlife sectors. This paper has the Masai in mind and tends to demonstrate how the Masai for a long time have been conserving the Forests by using it sustainably. The paper does not incorporate any quantitative data properly since I'm not done any research in terms of quantitative data but have the indigenous knowledge & observations.

### SOCIAL CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES OF MAASAI.

The MASAI are the main Pastoral Tribes of Northern Tanzania and Southern Kenya. They are therefore known as cross-border tribes and their main occupation is Pure Pastoralism. History shows that they have been migrating from the North ever since and if left unchecked, they could go as far as Cape-town of South Africa. They are commonly known as 'Nomads'. But Nomads or not, as far as Conservation is concerned, the Masai like many other Pure Pastoralists of the world are very much compatible with Biodiversity.

This is mainly due to their SOCIAL CULTURAL and SPIRITUAL VALUES, which is in various dimensions:

### CULTURAL DIVERSITY

CONSERVATIVES! LAGGARDS! Ever since Time in memorial the Maasai have been said to be conservatives, Resistant to change hence 'undeveloped', Reluctant to mix, and what have you! It is these characteristics of the Maasai which contribute to their 'Friendliness' to Environment including and especially the FORESTS. The new ideas from either New comers or Development pollutes and disturbs their cultures including those of depending on the Forests for their livelihood and social cultural behaviors which binds them together as an ethnic group strong and unchangeable. This happens to be in line with Conservation.

### VALUES AND BEHAVIOURS

The Values and Norms of any society govern and steer their Behavior. The values and norms of the Maasai are related to the forest in one way or other. Among the believed residences of the "BLACK CREATOR" [GOD] are the 'Thick/Dense' FORESTS. When one dies he/she is taken to the Forest with a Sacrifice of an appropriate livestock slaughtered ready for The "ENGAI NAROK" to accept and take away. Certain rare [Endangered] species of trees are said to be GODS of the Maasai and

DOOMED are those who dare to be near, let alone cut the particular species of the tree unless visiting them officially with the necessary preparations during the Time of WORSHIP.

Several RITUALS like circumcisions are part and parcel of the Forests. The young boys are taken to the Forest for the Adulthood teachings so that the GODS witness that the Society has performed their duty. During the times of worries and grief, help is sought from the Forest by all categories of the Maa people. Such grieves include famine; drought; defeat in wars; lack of children due to infertility, disease outbreaks etc. Men elders, Youth [MORAN], Women, all go to the Forests to Repent and seek forgiveness and help.

To protect the sacred area from the innocent children, who have not yet received the Initiation training, Elders use stories and myth to children at night to frighten them from visiting the Forests lest they cut the trees. This is CONSERVATION by all Focus groups. Here we are talking of semi-human creatures like 'Nemulo, Lemereru etc.' for those who knows the language!

All these Social Cultural and Spiritual values shape the Maasai behaviors in conserving the Forest because of the values the community attach to the Forests. They know that without the Forests their livelihood is endangered.

## TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE.

The Maasai are also well known for their history long traditional knowledge of various plants for healing both human and livestock. It is one of their coping mechanisms for lack of modern medicine facilities. It is not an impossible thing to find a Maasai more than eighty years old who have never seen or tested an aspirin let alone other modern medication despite the fact that they live in very unfavorable conditions in-terms of sanitary standards. Plants, herbs, leaves, roots and all parts of some species of trees are used as medicines. Some are commonly known to the whole society but some are only known by the so-called medicine men. Most of these plants come from the forest. The Maasai value the Forest as much as others value hospitals and medical facilities. It is very unfortunately that this knowledge is not documented but the society has its own way of making sure that the knowledge is passed from one generation to another.

Modern conservation techniques call for restricted passage to the Forest. The Maasai Traditional conservation also apparently restricts the free passage to the Forest. Much as they like their livestock, they don't take them to some types of forest, especially the mountains. These are reserved for other uses as explained above. This is an equivalent to the modern Land use/management practices. Nobody taught them but technique just trickled along as traditional knowledge. Rotational grazing are also practiced by the Maasai despite the fact that the land tenure system is communal. Dry season grazing areas, as well as wet season grazing areas are agreed in a participatory way, and reasons given. Everybody abides to it and the program is passed from one generation to another. The social traditional leadership helps in law and order, hence nobody defaults usually but if it happens, community norms are used to correct the situation. All in all, the local Indigenous and traditional knowledge is the means used by the Maasai to solve most of their problems and to conserve. Since this is not documented, the knowledge is passed from one generation to another, and norms are the governing organ.

## SUSTANABLE LIVING.

Years and years have seen this community survive through many generations without any significant fragmentation like other societies. This is sustainable living. The Maasai, the Forest, the wildlife and all its Biodiversity coexist in a sustainable way. This is mainly due to their land use pattern of being pure pastorals.

Other alternative land use like crops, Agropastorals, etc. would not have fitted the environment they live in. The Maasai like all other pastorals of Africa behave and live the way they do as a coping mechanism for the environment in order to conserve and live a sustainable life. It so happens that the areas occupied by the Maasai are semi-arid to arid. No body else but them or communities living the way they do would survive sustanably in such localities.

Nomadic way of living and the communal land ownership are also some of the main contributors to sustainability in living. The so-called conservatism is also another often forgotten and criticized conservation mechanism. Their large stocks are their 'Banks' and their simple way of living minimizes their need for hard cash and hence no felt need to destroy the environment for food, sophisticated shelter, transport, other such so called 'modern needs and wants' or generally put 'values'.

## FOREST-DEPENDENT COMMUNITIES.

As already mentioned above, the Maasai are clearly dependent on Forests in many perspectives. Some values are social, cultural and spiritual. These are mainly direct values.

Others are indirect, hidden and long-term. The most obvious example of these is the Forest being the water source for their livelihood. Water dams, chacos, pastures, etc are all located in the plains but collect the water mainly from the upper forest, and the Maasai know that. Their temporary localities therefore, are always below mountains by default. When they meet they always ask each other in which mountain do they live or which mountain supplies their water. The young 'Morans' even swear or brag on the mountain from which they dwell. Most mountains in East Africa that are within the Maasai localities have Maasai names up to now. The mountains with their Forests also act as their bench marks as travelers. Maasai mainly use the local herbs for medicines. All these are obtained from the forests, mainly being the roots and leaves of trees. All the traditional events (praying and sacrifices offering to God/gods) are done in the forests (usually thick forests). The houses they live in; are all built by using forests products: wood for walls, doors, windows and all the furniture and grasses for thatching. Even the most common belonging of a Maasai Man (a stick) is wood!

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