**Eramatare  
A Maasai philosophy for preserving life**

What we call conservation today has been a natural lifestyle for the Maasai

Maasailand is home to abundant wildlife, and home to the Maasai pastoralists. There is an evolutionary relationship between pastoral livestock keepers and wildlife, this has enabled adaptation and influenced the environment without jeopardizing its sustainability and the interdependence between humans and other forms of life.

eramatare: It is a philosophy, pertaining to how Maasai have survived in the savannas, with their cattle and alongside wildlife for hundreds of years. It is a complex and holistic approach to the protection of life.

# Forest Governance **Traditional rangelands management tools**

Controlled settlement both with locational plans and seasonal movements

Water

Burning

What was this view of life: It included nature, which in itself can be broken down into habitats, plants, wild animals and birds, the weather and the cosmos. It includes people, with which comes family, social systems (age sets, clans and sections). It includes livestock, and its management practices (where do you move, when, how to avoid conflict, managing herd dynamics, managing for milk yield, managing as a source of money today, uses in traditional ceremonies as a kind of social status). Social capital – gives you the status, because this status carried with it a symbol of leadership and management, the main currency for marriage i.e payment of dowry. Your decisions will hold more weight since you have demonstrated good management skills.

Eramatare starts with a land use plan, includes a wet and dry seasons grazing areas and in place primarily for grazing management. This is built around a clear and deep understanding of the landscape, the resources available that need to be utilized to maximize production and avoid risks and threats. In each area you have settlements, but in very strict areas. People were only allowed to settle in an area where your cows can then roam in front without interruption. Then you have olopololi and olokeri close to home for small stock. You can never live in the middle of your grazing area. You cannot graze adult stock in the olopoloi and olokeri. These are rules which allow for good management of the grazing resource. These rules apply for everyone, even outsiders. Water is used as a key management tool. Maasai believe livestock should not be allowed to have continuous access to water otherwise the cattle will eat too much. They should walk to water, and not necessarily drink every day. This is adaptive to the area and the season. In hot times they need to drink more. This is the big picture, a framework of operation with which there is then space.

Individual and family decisions are allowed, based on maximization of milk yield and avoidance of disease and wildlife conflict. Requires knowledge of the areas, plant species and presence of wildlife and diseases. Location of your home will be a choice but within the bigger plan. Home choice also influenced by availability of local materials, out of flood risk, proximity to water, availability of donkeys for water transport.

Home – made of local materials, house and fence easy to put up given that one had to move to at least three locations in a year following seasonal patterns, the settlement in particular locations might also change from time to time.

How is this knowledge shared through generations - i.e how is eramatare passed down through generations? It is enshrined in the traditional religious beliefs, taught and enforced through traditional systems broadly through a well-organized rite of passage and enforced through a regulation system with fines and taboos to deter and punish wrong doers

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**Environmental Management:**

Nature, With regards to trees – traditionally trees were used for fencing, firewood, medicine, and housing. But you can only take branches and dead wood but no cutting from the stem, so that you can harvest the resource sustainably, so you do not destroy your resources.

**People: (needs more explanation)**

Livestock – managed by individuals, as an asset for their family, but protected communally. At the individual level, one can make choices about the species of livestock to keep (traditionally driven by family preferences, now also economics plays in). Individuals can also decide, within he bigger plan, where to settle, dependent on what the area holds for them, how they understand the area, and

Outcome of eramatare – is the protection and continuation of people (Maa people), their livelihood base (livestock) and the animals.

**FEMALES:** In terms of people – rules about how women were treated (as the agents of continuation of the population), they were not allowed to go to war, men are not allowed to beat women with any force.

The biggest crime one can do is to kill a woman, even in times of war where the Maasai fought with their enemies either from the Maasai intertribal wars and other neighboring groups women and children were not allowed to be killed.

**WILDLIFE:**

With regards to wildlife, Maasai believe you should not kill any wildlife. Eating of any wild meat was a taboo. It was said that if you are in the habit of eating wild meat, you will not have good luck in your livestock, thus keeping people invested in livestock. For children out playing, or testing wild skills, in the same manner the female is respected for their roles in the continuation of the population, the rules are you are not allowed to kill females or young of wild species a very similar practice to how they treated themselves as human beings, Wildlife was seen as integral to the system, and it was believed that wild herbivores were prey for the carnivores, creating a buffer between the carnivores and the livestock. Elephants were values for their role in creating and maintain water pans and grass lands. Wildlife was also seen as an indicator to a healthy landscape. If wildlife (particularly the grazers) were in the area and thriving, then livestock would too. However grazers were also seen as competition for grazing, but there was an understanding that nature would balance things out, with droughts and predators. It is also true that perhaps space was more available and wildlife came and went with the seasons.

**Managing coexistence and HWC**. The aim is to minimize conflict with wild animals. The main example is with the lion. Lions were seen as high potential for conflict. Lions were allowed to be hunted if it became a livestock raider (more than two times and it could be hunted). Lions were also allowed to be killed if it took a donkey, because the belief is that as donkeys graze close to home, the lion is too familiar with the home and could potentially be a threat to human life. The third reason lions were allowed to be hunted was part of the traditional lion hunt, which only occurred every five years or so, as a new age set of morans were undergoing their training. This training was to help them know how to face a lion if this situation ever occurred when you were out herding. However, the key part of the ceremony was to bring back the mane of the biggest lion possible. This would mean that in reality this was likely to be an old lion, past his reproductive capacity, and the most likely to become a risk to livestock and people due to the fact that he is likely to be without a pride, possibly without teeth and unable to hunt wildlife easily. The end result is thus a culling of potential problem predators, and thus an indirect reeducation in the potential for human-lion conflict. In addition the process of the hunts, undertaken in traditional red garments and often with morans covered in ocre, reinforced fear of Maasai into the lions in general, keeping the space between lions and people.

Other mechanisms for minimizing conflict is evident in the design of the enkang:

**FENCE:**

Livestock are places firmly in the centre, within a fence, then the people and their houses outside of this, then a final fense around the outside. You ensured the entrance to the enkang was next to a house, to make sure that this weak link was well guarded. Lions are most afraid of people so this was capitalized upon.

**BELLS:**

Livestock is actively herded at all times in the field, and some cows are fitted with bells, to warn lions of the presence of the cattle and their herders.

**Cows Home in night:**

Cows were always brought back in good time, before night fall, when predators were then starting to become active.

Land Subdivision -

**CHANGES:**

Eramatare is all about sharing, and how to live communally and how to preserve life in totality. With a mindset change from we to me, this core of eramatare will start to change. We can see this starting to chip away at edges, both driven from internal and external pressures. Current changes / challenges / modifications – the big game changer is the change to economic values replacing traditional values. This goes hand-in-hand with a change in mind-set from communal to individual beliefs. This will ultimately affect the broader notions of the preservation of life in totality which is the philosophy of eramatare.

**Levels of information sharing**

Illomon, When Maasais meet, they try to know one another. Before talking about anything they want to find out: who are you, from which clan, where do you come from. Then they talk about your health, about your cattle, where are your people, the environment in which you live and rain. So, the important topics of discussion are: identity, well-being, livestock and environment. This is how they meet, greet and respect.

**Laleenok,** the Maasai understood the importance of information for decision making. Laleenok is a small group of people who were sent out to check on things be it pasture fields if livestock was to be moved or

Elders-

**Enkiguena;** each section of the Maasai had its own territory and an autonomous political structure based on division of the society into age sets. The senior elders of the section who formed a governing body within the section consulted and made collective decisions. They meet in the shade of a tree which is conspicuous so that everyone needed could find it unless it is an unusual meeting which occasionally happened in times of war. Within the enkiguena, all the elders shared equal status and the voice of all will be heard in patience and respect. Material wealth, usually counted by the quantity of cattle, may give some elders a degree of influence not shared by the less fortunate members, and hence their views may carry greater weight.

Other important elements

How the system is held together

Respect/ Enkanyit an important element

Reciprocity – Banking on each other and being your brother’s keeper

Traditional religion and the environment

Oreteti (Fig tree)

Prayers for rain

The effects of economic notions to the life preservation ideology

**Why have the Maasai been able to create a unique and special culture?**

Milk Pastoralist, ability to depend on milk as the main food.

The rift valley landscape with two rain seasons every year sustaining milk production throughout the year which could be an advantage over other groups that live in similar situations, the topographic variation also giving them different resources that can be used in different times of the year.