



Warriors, cattle and the climate agenda

For generations the Maasai people have lived and breathed for their cattle, but now their livelihood is strongly affected by climate change, deforestation and land rights issues. How do they survive under the changed conditions?

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It is at the end of the rainy season and the landscape around me should be green. Instead, everything is dry here in the Simanjiro District in the Northern part of Tanzania. It is harvest time, but not a single ripe corncob is in sight in the fields. The long rainy season from March to May and its life-saving rain failed to come.

Hamad Lyimo, District Agricultural & Livestock Development Officer at the district office in the village Orkusemet, confirms the seriousness of the situation. There is drought and famine. The Government is distributing maize flour as food aid, but the help is a drop in the ocean. A small percentage of the flour is distributed to the poorest for free, while other poor families have to pay one tenth of the normal price for a sack. A price many simply cannot afford to pay. Hamad says that the drought this year is the worst, he has experienced since he moved to the area in 2002.

- Local factors that primarily contribute to climate change is logging to produce charcoal and provide firewood, overgrazing and establishment of farms. As a Maasai woman told me, there are no longer enough trees to catch the rain, he says.

The Maasai I meet on my path also highlight burning of vegetation as a cause. Fields are burnt to grow faster, and in the erroneous belief that it will eliminate the tsetse fly who transmits life-threatening diseases to animals and humans. Out of necessity several Maasai have also begun to take fresh branches from trees for fuel, although it is illegal. Previously, they only collected dry and fallen branches.

From cattle to farming and the big city

Maasai are semi-nomads. For generations they have moved their cattle to areas with grass and water - and when the rainy season sets in, they return to their homes.

- It has always been like that, but now we are forced to move our cattle longer and longer away in our search for fresh pastures, says a young warrior Olemoson Moson.

At the same time available grazing areas have been reduced significantly, because thousands of hectares of Maasai land have been confiscated for particularly national parks, large farms and campsites. Recently nearly 20,000 Maasai were evicted from Loliondo in Ngorongoro District, because a foreign investor has acquired the rights to use the area for hunting. Left are desperate Maasai without food, water or shelter. Their homes and stocks of food



Olemoson Moson, Terrat village.

As a result of the changing times, the Maasai themselves are looking elsewhere than cattle. They are not farmers by nature, but now many of them are farming to provide food for the family and to earn money. Lack of experience, equipment and irrigation systems are some of the challenges the Maasai are facing. Civil organisations and the Tanzanian government have focus on the matter. They are trying to improve the production by building capacity through training as well as introducing resistant and new types of crops. However, their resources are scarce and the help does not reach very far. Other Maasai go elsewhere and move to large cities such as Arusha and Dar es Salaam to find work as watchmen, at bars or as tour guides - or to sell traditional Maasai jewelry. Elderly Maasai express concern about this development because the close interaction with other tribes and influences from the outside world to a large extent are changing the Maasai culture. At the same time the salary is low, and many of the young men, who leave, forget their wives and children at home in the boma. Often they do not move back again.

Nomadic life undergoes drastic change

For those remaining in the Maasai plain and in the villages the tendency is a change of status from semi-nomads to more permanent settlers. They no longer have the same freedom to move because of the life as farmers. Other factors are a legal requirement that all children must attend school and conflicts about land rights. The young warriors head out with herds of cattle together with shepherd boys while family members to a higher extent stay in the boma.

Especially in the villages, Maasai claim that children attend school and that the government intervenes with reprisals if they stay away. A talk with shepherd boys out of town and government representatives in Orkusemet, however, shows that there is still a long way to go. The law has shown the direction, and people understand the need for education and training, but in these times - and with many children in a family - it is a huge challenge to pay for uniforms and other school expenses. In one school in Orkusemet there were over 60 students last year - right now there are three. Another challenge is that few children are registered hence the government has no clue how many children *ought* to attend school.

Effect on women's lives

It is early morning at a milk center. Women from far and near wait patiently to deliver their milk. The possibility of selling milk to the local pastoralist organisation Ilaramatak has changed their lives considerably. They now have their own source of income

to provide for their family, and many women have established a small business selling groceries.

However, the milk business is also affected by the lack of rain and the drought. When the cows are away grazing for longer periods of time there is no milk, and the remaining cows only have few drop-lets in the udder. In some areas Ilaramatak has been forced to close centres.

All domestic work is performed by women. They build and maintain the huts, milk the cows, provide food for the family, take care of the children and fetch water and firewood. The climate change is making life harder for them, as they must often walk long distances to fetch water and collect firewood. Some carry the supplies on top of their



Ilaramatak Lorkonerei Milk Processing Facility in Terrat village.



School girls studying.

heads - others are lucky to have donkeys as means of transportation. In several villages in Simanjiro, Ilaramatak pumps water from the underground for people to fetch in cans or buckets at a price of 25 cents for 20 litres. The government also drills for water, but lacks the needed equipment to succeed. Some Maasai women have created a business by selling water to people who can afford to pay, and who want to escape fetching it themselves. Payment, however, has led to a sad fate for others, as 12- to 15-year-old school girls have prostituted themselves in order to obtain water. It was discovered when they became pregnant. Maasai are very religious, and if asked what they are going to do about the acute lack of water and food, many answer that they will pray to God and hope for a miracle. Who knows - maybe it will rain down from heaven in the form of coins and banknotes at the climate change summit in Copenhagen in December. However, it is important to remember that money is only a means. It is through the implementation and monitoring of activities, which truly helps indigenous peoples to survive and create a future, the real miracle happens.

Simanjiro and the Maasai

Simanjiro is located in the Manyara Region in Northern Tanzania. The area is one of the most underdeveloped ones in Tanzania. The climate is semiarid and the population is about 150,000 people 90 percent of whom are Maasai. Many live in remote areas far from the beaten track.

Maasai are pastoralists, semi-nomads and a proud cattle people. There are about one million Maasai who primarily live in Kenya and in the Northern part of Tanzania. Maasai speak their own language “maa”, with no written language, but many also master Swahili - the official language of East Africa. Maasai live in a highly patriarchal society and practice polygamy. Women can inherit cattle, but not land - and children belong to the man's family.



Woman fetching water in Orkesumet village. It is harvest time, but not a single ripe corncob is in sight in the fields.





Sarah Lapuda, Orkesumet village.

Indigenous people's fight against the climate

Across the world indigenous people are struggling with the impact of climate changes. They need support and will seek to get it at the climate summit in Copenhagen.

In April 2009, representatives of indigenous people throughout the world attended a summit in Alaska to discuss how climate change affects their living conditions and to share experiences and best practices on how they are adapting. The meeting resulted in a declaration which will be presented at COP15.

- Climate change is very much a reality for indigenous people such as the Maasai. Periods of drought last longer than just a decade ago and within the last six years 60% of their livestock have died. This means that many families do not have enough animals to support the household. Conflicts with other landowners, reallocation to areas with little vegetation and lack of medicine because herbs are no longer readily available, are other major challenges that the Maasai are facing, says Tanzania's representative at the Summit in Alaska, Elifuraha Laltaika, Program Officer of the pastoralist organisation CORDS (Community Research and Development Services) and lecturer in environmental law at Makumira University College, Arusha.

Primary messages

Among the key messages from the summit in Alaska, Laltaika highlights the right to 'free, prior and informed consent'. In brief this means that indigenous people must have free access to information on all projects planned on their land as well as the impact they have on their living conditions. As regards the water projects in Simanjoro and the food aid from the government his comment is:

- I am not saying that it is wrong to take money for water, since there are costs associated with pumping it up, however people should be involved and informed of the calculations behind the amount that they have to pay for 20 litres of water. The same applies to the amount people have to pay for 20 kg maize in food aid. It should be transparent, what the money goes to. People must be involved to give them a greater understanding of what is going on, and to enable them to contribute to the decision-making, says Laltaika and adds:

- Maybe some people will be willing to pay more in order for other poor members of the community to get help for free.

Another important message from the summit is to point out that indigenous people suffer disproportionately from climate change in relation to how much they contribute to them.

- Indigenous people adapt in order to survive, but they need technical and financial support from those who have contributed most to the climate change – the developed countries, Elifuraha concludes.

No own voice at COP15

And how much rich nations should pay to undeveloped countries is exactly one of the major issues in the climate debate. Indigenous people have no special negotiation rights at COP15, but they will be represented by NGOs that both individually and collectively will lobby and speak their case.

The official spokesperson for the indigenous people is the Chairman of the 'United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues', Victoria Tauli-Corpuz. She belongs to the Kankana-ey Igorot peoples in the Northern part of the Philippines.

By Marianne Bubrkal Soerensen