

U3A CAMBRIDGE AFRICA FORUM 2023-2024
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Alan Bird

ME AND THE MAASAI

Peter has given the anthropologist's view for 40 minutes

My first hand experiences with the Maasai 20 minutes

Conscious I am following a retired Head Teacher!

Show maps:

Figure 1 Map from when I previously did the introductory presentation for the Forum at the beginning of each academic year. We have quite a few new members since that time.

-African ethnic group boundaries (greatly simplified) and International Boundaries (derived from the Conference of Berlin 1885). This may help to explain a few things raised by questions last term or may just show how complicated things are! Zoom into East Africa.

Figure 2

-Kenya and Tanzania roads map: Nairobi to the north, Ngorongoro in the west with the conservation area and the Serengeti, Dar es Salaam in the south with Morogoro and Dakawa.

Figure 3

Satellite image of Figure 2 area

Figure 4 Satellite image of my 1976 road trip: Nairobi to Namanga, Ngorongoro, Arusha, Moshi, Kilimanjaro, Voi, Mombassa.

Figure 5 Road map of my road trip

I took one of the last East African Airways flights (the East African Community officially broke up in July 1977 but there were already serious problems by 1976, it reformed in July 2000) from Mogadishu to Nairobi in March 1976. I was on my way back to the UK after having gone to work in Somalia for two weeks in March 1975 and stayed a year. I went via Nairobi rather than on Alitalia via Addis Ababa and Rome. I stopped off in Nairobi with the idea of doing my own safari on public transport. I had very little money. I took the bus from the main bus station in Nairobi (in a bit of a doggy part of Nairobi as it was then known) to do a round trip of Ngorongoro and Kilimanjaro.

It started on a very old East African Bus Company vehicle. Before we got to the Kenya/ Tanzania border at Namanga a couple of Maasai in full traditional attire, complete with spears, marched onto the bus, refused to pay and when we got off the bus at the border they just marched on ahead disregarding immigration and customs. Brilliant, two fingers to European Colonial boundaries, my respect for them was instantaneous.

Show photo of Maasai on the Tanzania/Kenyan border.

We then crossed the border into Tanzania were ushered onto a brand new Chinese bus (the Tanzam railway was under construction 1970-75, the time of no economic strings attached Chinese aid).

Fast forward to 1995. I went to work at Dakawa in Tanzania, north of the regional capital Morogoro. (The best Black Forest Gateau I have ever tasted in the bakery next to the post office). Good live band on Saturday nights in the Morogoro Hotel. We lived on site, and the site office was a mud covered wooden stick hut! (Photo if I can find it?)

Figure 7 Road map of part of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam and west and north to Morogoro. Figure 8 satellite image of the same area. Figure 9 satellite image of Morogoro north and eastwards, the Wami river valley.

It was a study for the rehabilitation of an existing irrigation scheme at Dakawa set up for rice cultivation with a rice mill. The study was funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB). The local consultant was based in Dar es Salaam. I flew via Frankfurt, Lufthansa lost my luggage and it took two weeks for me to be reunited with it. I existed on borrow cloths and what I could buy in the market. I demanded compensation at the airport and got it in US dollars cash!! But did it compensate for the Chinese underpants bought in the local market?

I was tasked with doing an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the proposed intervention following the then relevant guidelines.

Explain EIA: the natural environment, the human environment, interaction, induced change without and with the proposed intervention. Identification of all impacts, quantification of these and valuation. All adverse impacts to be mitigated for by avoidance or adequate compensation. Complication for a rehabilitation of a project that had not achieved its objectives. It had not delivered the positive impacts expected but also not delivered the negative impacts that you would normally expect with an irrigation development.

The big question:

Was there enough water to operate the rehabilitated project, let alone the proposed expansion? The need for water storage (a dam or reservoir of some kind with serious cost and environmental implications). Water demand for rice growing (I had just spent five years working in Bangladesh, the rice capital of the world, three crops a year over a lot of the country). How many crops a year? What type of rice? Upland? High yielding varieties? Agro chemical use? Labour? Mechanisation?

The hydrology work was critical. I had looked at the most detailed maps available for the area (UK DOS of various dates) and noted the dates of the air photography that had been used to make them. There were enormous contradictions over the mapping of flood prone areas which should have flagged up concerns over the great variation in rainfall conditions.

Cloud free time series satellite imagery was not available to us on site at the time. I could have arranged for the best available imagery to be provided but there was not the funding to do this. A typical problem of competitive bidding.

Lowest price normally wins the job as long as other factors do not intervene, like who knows who and the nationality of the funder and consultant but it compromises doing a sound technical job.

-Figure 10 satellite image of the scheme and downstream and upstream areas. This was not available at the time of the 1995 work. Figure 11 Road map of the same area, note the big hole in the network, the Wami (now called the Mjonja) Valley.

- I gave my copy of my report to the African Studies Centre library here in Cambridge

A very big issue was over land rights. The land for the scheme had been taken from local farming people to build the rice farm in the promise that they would be the beneficiaries. Local farmers had been given plots on the rice farm but rich outsiders (some from as far afield as Dares Salaam) had started to obtain land in the scheme. Land had also been taken from the local settled Maasai in the north of the area with the intention of expanding the scheme. The elders pointed out a demarcation post that marked the boundary of their land. These were settled Maasai, although they still had livestock on long distance seasonal migration who were better able to cope with climate change. The village was at the southern end of their seasonal migration route. There were sheep and goats (normally owned by women and girls) that were herded out of the village on a daily basis although these were increasingly being joined by cattle.

I tried to set up a deal by which the Maasai got access to land on an abandoned government livestock project area downstream and also an access corridor to it. The Maasai were really clued up. There had already been a lot of work carried out on Maasai land rights in Tanzania, some of it by the London based Institute of Environment and Development (IIED). See the references as Figures 22 to 25.

The Maasai chief had just died young but the community had paid for his son to go to a top private college in Kenya to be well educated and be able to represent them politically. He had fallen for a non Maasai whilst at college and had married with the communities consent and brought his new wife back with him and she was accepted by the tribe. A very strong parallel with Seretse Karma in Botswana (See the film "A United Nation").

I was invited to a Maasai wedding and took some photographs of the onlookers outside the church. They had been converted to Christianity (which faction I am not sure) but it was a disappointment as the officiators wore western suits and the bride a white European wedding dress. Photos 12 to 18. The young men played darts in the local bar but treated them like spears throwing them the same way. Getting them out of the dartboard afterwards was pretty difficult!

I made a return visit to the project some 16 years later in 2011-2012 for a USAid project under the new Obama regime's "Feed the Future" programme for Africa. (What do Black Africans know and understand about Africa?) A repeat performance of the previous study but it needed to be updated because of changing rainfall and river flow patterns and also the changed economic environment. Free market economics now ruled with an agribusiness agenda. The rice mill had been sold for next to nothing to a Tanzanian Asian businessman, he just sat on it. No integrated planning as previously. What is an economic size of rice mill? What land area was needed to produce sufficient rice for the mill to operate economically? Where was the rice for the mill going to come from? Again more rich outsiders, some as far afield as Dar es Saalam, had continued to obtain land in the scheme. Local farmers did not have the resources to farm in such a commercial manner. USAid's view was that of Agribusiness. However the Maasai seemed to be happy, as the mooted expansion of the scheme had not happened. Photograph of rice harvesting by machine and Maasai guarding the water gauge station with a new automated one being constructed next to it with a direct telemetered link to a central flood control centre.

The procedures for doing an EIA in Tanzania had by now been formalised, my job was to set up a bidding process to contract out the EIA following the national guidelines and using an appropriately registered local company. There was a problem with the British Irrigation Engineer on the project who thought he could actually carry out an EIA for the project by himself irrespective of the law, instead of concentrating on the issue of if there was enough water available to operate the current scheme let alone expanding it.

My biggest fear was that with the significant public consultation work being carried out local people's expectations and fears would be raised without there first being a commitment by the funding agency to fund the project.

The key question that should have been asked of USAid was how much money are you prepared to pay to do what and under what conditions?

Would the Environmental Assessment work be used as an excuse to not fund the project? Yes it was, as I feared.

In a wider context a protest campaign was underway against the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Worldwide Fund for nature (WWF) both based in Cambridge. Photos of a demonstration in Kings Parade. I asked Prof Bill Adams reaction to it. Remember his presentation to us on the real Lion King and the Channel 4 TV documentary that he took part in. This traces the issue of the Maasai and land rights back to the setting up of the national parks.

Also show a photo of the Kouni travel agent in grand arcade, are the Maasai now just a tourist spectacle? A bit like morris sides in Cambridge, Hemlock at Strawberry fair, Gogs at Mill Road Winter Fair?

Also my eldest sister lives in Southern Spain, a local goat herder has the customary right to take his animals through their land (photo?)
Second daughters place in rural Hampshire/Surrey border, existing customary right of access across their land, people with their livestock, now mainly dogs, occasional horse riders. There are also people who have the right to collect wood on our daughter's land. Customary rights are normally stronger than statutory rights because of precedent, customary rights predate statutory rights. Tell that to Native Americans.

The future for the Maasai. Tourist objects?

Notable Maasai (from Wikipedia)

- [Joseph Ole Lenku](#) – Cabinet Secretary of Kenya for Interior and Coordination of National Government from 2012 to 2014
- [Jackson Ole Sapit](#) - Sixth Archbishop and Primate of the [Anglican Church of Kenya](#)
- [David Rudisha](#) – Middle-distance runner and 800-meter world record holder
- [Edward Sokoine](#) – [Prime Minister of Tanzania](#) from 1977 to 1980 and again from 1983 to 1984
- [Edward Lowassa](#) – [Prime Minister of Tanzania](#) from 2005 to 2008. 2nd runner up to president [John Pombe Magufuli](#) in the 2015 [Tanzania](#) General Elections.
- [Olekina Ledama](#) – Founder, Maasai Education Discovery
- [James Ole Kiyiapi](#) – associate professor at Moi University and permanent secretary in the Ministries of Education and Local Government
- [Linus Kaikai](#) - Kenyan journalist and Chair of the Kenya Editors Guild
- [William Ole Ntimama](#) – Former Kenyan politician and leader of the Maa community
- [Francis Ole Kaparo](#) – Former [Speaker of the National Assembly of Kenya](#)
- [Joseph Nkaissey](#) – Former Cabinet Secretary of Kenya for Interior and Coordination of National Government from 2014 to his death in 2017
- [Nice Nailantei Lengete](#) – First woman to address the Maasai elders council at [Mount Kilimanjaro](#), and persuaded the council to ban [female genital mutilation](#) among the Maasai across Kenya and Tanzania
- [Katoo Ole Metito](#) – Member of Parliament for [Kajiado South](#) sub county
- [Mbatian](#) - Prophet after whom Batian Peak, the highest peak of [Mount Kenya](#), is named
- [Samuel Ole Tunai](#) - Former intelligence officer who served as the first governor of Narok county

Also a recent photo essay on Masai women in the online Guardian:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/jan/02/maasai-women-photographing-their-people>