

TOPIC: SAVING THE MARA IS SAVING THE MAASAI WOMAN'S LIVELIHOOD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Masai Mara has been in existence since time immemorial and the inhabitants have been the Masai people who depend on pastoralism as their livelihood. There was enough space for both animals and the Maasai people, who lived harmoniously with the animals, but overtime the land space has shrunk and there has been lack of harmony in the coexistence. This has led to change of livelihoods for the Maasai people.

Men have been the sole breadwinners for the family for many years but overtime the roles have changed and the women are now having a hand in provision of the daily bread. The Maasai woman is considered a child in the Maasai community. This means she cannot make any decision in the family and not even in the community at large. She has been considered to be a non-starter in all spheres of life. She has her roles set out and there are boundaries she cannot cross.

The Maasai woman has a role to play in her community and the role she plays is as important as the role the men play in the community. Her traditional role involves child birth, cooking, fetching water and firewood, milking the goats and the cows, building the Manyatta and making sure that her husband and children are well taken care of physically, mentally and psychologically. In the present world her role is changing, but even with her changing roles, the perception the men in the community towards her and her roles are not changing. The perception is in terms of decision making, sitting in boards or committees and her involvement in politics. Due to her changing roles, she then needs to be more involved in higher offices and decision making than the traditional roles set aside for her as a woman.

THE MAASAI WOMAN'S LIVELIHOOD AND SAVING OF THE MARA ECO SYSTEM

ROLES OF THE MAASAI WOMAN

The major everyday roles of the Masai woman include cooking for her family, fetching water and firewood, constructing the Manyatta and doing beadwork.

BEADWORK: Traditionally she would do beadwork for her own beauty, her daughter's beauty and for ceremonial purposes such as weddings, circumcision ceremonies and child birth ceremonies. The bead work today is done by a Masai woman not only for her beauty but also for business. She will bead different designs of necklaces, belts, key holders and other ornaments for purposes of getting money for her table banking and women group and also to buy food for her household. If the Mara eco system is not conserved then this livelihood of beadwork will be endangered. This is because if the tourists cannot visit the Mara because the eco-system has been tampered with, then she will lose her livelihood of beadwork. So saving the Mara will save beadwork which today is one of the Masai woman's livelihood and the tourists who come from all over the world are the main customers.

FETCHING WATER: Traditionally the Masai woman would spend most of her day at home undertaking the roles required of her at home as a woman. She would later in the day move out of home to fetch water from the river and firewood from the forest. In the Masai community, there is no piped water and so most women would fetch water from the river. They would carry about 20 litres or more of water jerry cans on their backs. The water would be for domestic use and at other times one would carry water for use by the animals at home especially the young calves and goat kids which could not walk down to the river to drink water. The Mara and Talek Rivers would flow throughout the year; there would be other streams and seasonal rivers which would make her work easier. But the destruction of the Mau forest and in extension the Mara eco- system has caused suffering to the Masai woman. This is because the rivers are drying more often and the water is becoming polluted. The woman now has to walk for longer distances to access water, making her spend more hours to the river and from the river.

FETCHING FIREWOOD AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE TRADITIONAL MANYATTA: Due to cutting of trees, the woman has a challenge getting firewood for her household use. This has made her roles to be more complicated and she has no option for energy. The only source of energy for her is the firewood, there is no Gas and charcoal is also becoming very expensive and scarce. If the trend continues of cutting trees in the Mara and the ongoing logging in the Mau forest then the role of the Masai woman as a home maker will be highly at risk. There is also the issue of construction of the Manyatta which is one of her biggest roles. The Masai woman is known for her skills in construction of the Manyatta. The construction materials are mainly from the forest. If the forest is not conserved then she will not have raw materials needed for the construction works.

A MASAI WOMAN AS A HOMEMAKER: The Masai woman's role is changing with the changing times. She is now not only a home maker but she is also a breadwinner and a shepherd to her husband's herds of cattle and sheep. This is because it is now mandatory for all children to go to school, so for children to go to school then mothers have to take up the role of the children of herding cattle, sheep and goats. Today a Masai man will marry a woman not so much for marriage purposes but to also bring home a worker. A woman in other words is a worker who has to come and not only work in the homestead but also give birth to children who will increase the family name and property. This is because in the Masai community a woman and her children are considered the Man's property so the more women and children the more property the Man owns.

DECISION MAKING AND GENDER EQUITY

Traditionally, the Masai woman was considered a child, the same still remains today. She therefore is not given a chance to speak up or even to be part of any decision making process in the community. Having women in the committees is done just because the constitution has the one third rule, but they are not allowed to speak up or make any decisions.

CONCLUSION

The Masai women will suffer if the Mara Eco system is not conserved. This is due to the many roles they play in their households and the community at large. It is therefore imperative for all strategies to be put in place to save the Mara Eco System. The Masai women should also be brought on board as major stakeholders in decision making.