

The Loita Maasai

Enguserosambu in Maa language means a stripped plain. The Loita Maasai of Enguserosambu are livestock keepers. Divided by the international border drawn by the colonialists, they now live in both Kenya and Tanzania and continue to practice their traditional life style. Enguserosambu Ward, in Loliondo Division, in northern Ngorongoro District, is composed of four administrative villages, Enguserosambu, Naan, Ng'arwa and Orkiu juu with a total population of 6,758 people [2012].



Livestock is family owned while land is a communal resource. The political system and authority traditionally lies with the council of elders and age-set spokesmen elected for their leadership qualities while *Oloiboni* (foreteller) wielded spiritual powers and authority. The age-set structure is the fundamental organization principle of the Loita Maasai; it instills values of egalitarianism, sharing and respect. Reference to the age-set, chronology dating back to the mid 16th century is the only way to ascertain what year an event took place since elderly Maasai do not tend to think in terms of years.



The Loita are more traditional in lifestyle than other Maasai sections. They reside on a 2000m high plateau which extends to the southern part of Narok District and Loita division in Kenya. Loita Maasai have tenaciously clung to their culture and have always been aggressive towards outside influences which may have negative impacts on their culture. They are a people with an independent way of thinking that is faithful to their kinship and regard their culture with high esteem. The Loita Maasai have an intimate knowledge of the environment that

is acquired from childhood through herding and spending time in the forest especially during age periods such as warriors. The community manages the environmental and social balance in nature through taboos and other social sanctions that prohibit over utilization of environmental resources particularly wildlife and medicinal trees.

Among the Loita Maasai, ceremonies play a significant role in enhancing harmonious interaction between local culture and biological resources. For example ceremonies are conducted in the forest where traditional species collected there play an important role. The collection of ceremonial plants is done by local elders as it requires observation of certain rules and

indigenous knowledge of sustainable collection. Such practices form the basis of forest conservation in Enguserosambu. This intimate relationship between the Loita Maasai culture and their environment ensures preservation of their cultural diversity and conservation of biodiversity for future generations.

Like other indigenous communities, the Loita Maasai demonstrate traditional ways of interacting with their environment which transmit culture and indigenous knowledge from generation to generation. Their indigenous knowledge system therefore plays a significant role in enhancing community values as well as forming the benchmark for cultural diversity and biodiversity conservation at local level and promoting mutual interaction between human and their environment.

