

# Impact of Culture on Human Development: An Analysis of Select Kenyan Communities

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**Abstract:** This article engages in the development debate and whether culture inhibits development or whether culture is in fact a driver of development. It focuses on specific Kenyan communities and what they consider as a way of life and heritage, how these heritages have inhibited the quest to development. Cultural practices are often seen to be legitimizing context of tradition; however, they may not be sustainable developmental practices in the modern world. Issues of climate change, resource conflict and the increase of crime have rendered this rudimentary and backward. To explore the development agendas of these communities, the paper specifically looks at the three human development indicators and how structures of the traditional societies clash with the modern structures. The conclusion is that instead of development actors discouraging such a way of life, they can actually incorporate policies that would take advantage of these traditional structures as it brings a sense of ownership.

**Keywords:** Culture, Development, Kenya.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally defined as the capacity of a national economy whose initial economic condition has been more or less static for a long time, development has undergone a major shift. From the old school measurement of a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), scholars have argued for the concept of human development. The usual measurement of country's overall degree of development was regarded as a poor indicator for social achievements because of its deficiency in information on conversion of a country's wealth to basic needs. The United Nations (UN) developed the concept of Human Development (HD) identifying the following measurement variables: health, education and material wellbeing culminating in the Human Development Index (HDI). In 2010, however the UN updated the HDI to replace the arithmetic mean with geometric mean as the aggregation formula, adult literacy rate and gross enrollment ration was replaced by years of schooling and an inclusion of measures of inequality in health, education and income distribution. This illuminated Sen's idea of functioning and capabilities (Martinez, 2012).

The capability approach sees human life as a set of "doings and beings" called "functionings" and it relates the evaluation of the quality of life to the assessment of the capability to function. Simply focusing on commodity based accounting of the quality of life cannot do this valuation exercise. The capability approach is premised on two claims: the first is that the freedom to achieve wellbeing is primary and the second, that freedom to achieve wellbeing is to be understood in terms of people's capabilities to do and be what they have reason to value (Desai, 2001).

Capability, according to Sen (2003) reflects a person's freedom to choose between different ways of living and represents a person's freedom to achieve various functioning combinations.

This essay has a two-fold objective: (a) to make a comprehensive review of culture and its interactions with development and human development and (b) to analyse the culture of select Kenyan communities against the capabilities approach following the works of Amartya Sen.

The paper proposes a methodology of analysis of human development and culture entailing three main steps. The first is an analysis of culture as a driver in human development; the second is an analysis of culture as a constraint to human

development and finally a presentation and analysis of the evidentiary data from the Kamba, Maasai, Pokot and Somali communities in Kenya.

## II. DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Adesoji (2005) describes development as multi-dimensional; referring to positive changes which affect the majority and which lie in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres of societal life.

The overall agenda of development consists of two relevant objectives, first to enhance human abilities and second to create conditions for human development. Human abilities are evident in the quality of life, the expanse of knowledge of individuals and social groups and the extent the population is afforded decent living. To create the conditions of human development, a state must allow and ensure political participation and community life, maintain environmental sustainability, human rights and security as well as gender equality.

According to the UNDP Human Development 2015 report overview, the Sustainable Development Goal Number 8 objective is to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. SDG 8.9 specifically on the necessity to devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products (UNDP, 2015).

McNeil (2007) argues that human development has been successful but faces the threat of excessive quantification. Relatedly, the HDI supplements this and has been seen to be devised to explicitly rival Gross National Product. Throughout, HDI was improved and variants developed relating to more specific themes related to gender. Sen explained the success of human development was a reaction against a narrow utilitarianism:

“In the intellectual victory that utilitarian accounting achieved in mainstream moral philosophy, quite a bit of the work was done, often implicitly, by the trumped-up belief that it would be somehow analytically mistaken, or at least ferociously clumsy, to have many different things as being simultaneously valuable” (McNeil, 2007 p.16)

African cultural capital is massive and a force for global growth, specifically in creative industries. Policy makers must now focus on culture as a means towards prosperity, peace as well as a driver of democracy and a deterrent of violent conflict which impacts on human development (Dalby, 2013).

## III. CULTURE AS A CONSTRAINT TO DEVELOPMENT

Geert Hofstede, a social psychologist and anthropologist poses culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Dalby, 2013).

According to Iraki (2010), culture encapsulates, without being reduced to what a community values or cherishes in a particular time. It also entails, norms and standards, which regulate the adherence to those values or desirables.

It is argued that culture epitomizes our lives, desires, frustrations, ambitions and freedoms we seek. To better explain the developmental complexities facing Africa, Andrews (2009) posits that culture cannot be ignored. He articulates that culture influences economic behaviour, political participation, value formation and evolution, and it also gives people a sense of identity or association.

Fukuyama (1997) theorizes that the ability of a society to unite people depends on their norms and shared values. Where people are closer to each other in terms of ethical values, they form groups more naturally and more easily, and consequently these groups are also more likely to generate income. The evolution of culture emanates from the idea of a shared social objective (Rodney, 1973).

Kaaliku (2005) explores what is meaningful to the people and what they can identify with. He attempts to: establish whether capital formation or the balance of goods are socially and culturally meaningful; whether the people identify with such issues, wealth, and whether a pacific person would rather help his family, relatives and friends. This, he called the pacific paradox and it showed that culture is an important aspect of development and will affect development and what we do. If culture is not taken into account as well as a deep understanding of the interplay between culture and development, progress remains slow. Different paths of development should be informed by recognition of how cultural factors shaped the way in which societies conceive their own future and choose the means to achieve those futures. Development embraces not only access to goods and services but also the opportunity to choose a full, satisfying, valuable and valued

way of living together, the flowering of human existence in all forms and as a whole. The choice can also be for a different style of development; a different path based on assessed resources and different values from those of the highest income countries.

Iwara (2015) examines the backwardness associated with the truncation of African cultural modes of development and the unsuccessful adaptation of Western systems introduced by colonial powers. Some of the lost cultural values identified include: the African languages for thinking and development processes; sense of community life for effective community organization and development, which also would have culminated in the evolution of an ideology and for state development in Africa. Some of the challenges posed by the destruction of Africa's cultural values especially language and conceptualization, traditional religion are sense of community life, social capital development and democratic systems.

The perpetuator of this change is the colonization process that presented Western culture to the African continent. The colonial masters presented themselves as the possessors of a higher and superior culture, while the African culture was presented as inferior. Africa was caught in a quagmire of new cultures, ideologies, attitudes and values. It was against this background that Africa lost some of its traditional or cultural trajectories of development as the era of colonialism and subsequent neo colonialism and subsequent neo-colonialism that sets in (Iwara, 2005).

#### IV. CULTURE AS A DRIVER TO DEVELOPMENT

Culture practices seem to contribute significantly to the socio-economic progression or otherwise of various communities in Kenya. Mareng (2010) notes that according to customary laws of most ethnic groups in Kenya, a woman cannot inherit land and must live on the land as a guest of male relatives by blood or marriage. Additionally, communities that deny girls formal education, due to the fact that their education is not valued as that of boys face economic income shortages. The lack of education for women brought about by these cultural practices mean that women do not have the right to choose what they want to do with their lives. A good example is the Maasai community, whereby fathers make decisions for their daughters, thereby leaving them with little or no choice about the direction that their lives would take.

Mungai and Ogot (2012) note that in terms of entrepreneurship, in Africa, local cultures especially with regards to gender may hinder the development of entrepreneurial culture. Considering the various cultural and structural challenges and obstacles facing women, someone may quickly conclude that women are usually discouraged from venturing into enterprise development. First, early socialization practices emphasize the primary role of women as mothers and wives, influencing girls' total expectations for future participation in the labor force and the choice of career paths. Second, an African culture is mainly seen as a barrier to development because it perpetuates culturally sanctioned biases against women and provides excuses for men, resulting in lower participation for women in business activities

Cultural practices have also had an effect on the social aspect of society especially dietary practices. Chege et al (2010) notes that in the Maasai culture men normally move with the livestock in search for pasture leaving women and children behind. This takes two weeks to three months limiting the children adequate access to the immediate animal products like milk and blood leaving women to struggle while providing food for the family on their own. The Maasai do not sell animals or animal products, thus limiting income generation for the family. This places a challenge on the food sources to the household, as income would improve the food basket through purchases of other foods. In addition, Maasai culture prohibits the consumption of wild animals, chicken and fish which limit the food scope, leading to food insecurity especially when there is none or minimal animal products. The Maasai believe that land is only for grazing and not cultivation. This has in turn contributed to low crop production, which consequently leads to low consumption of food crops and slow progression of efforts to promote agro-pastoralism.

Evidence from Kenyan communities

##### *A. The Kamba Community:*

The Kamba, are classified amongst the five largest ethnic groups in the country, along with the Kalenjin, Luo, Luhya and Kikuyu. They make up 11 percent of Kenya's population. As they reside in a semi-arid environment that makes agricultural enterprise problematic, they have been involved in long distance trade during the pre-colonial period. As a people, they have special skills and a very rich entrepreneurship development potential. (Bwisa & Ndolo, 2011).

Indeed, long distance trade as early as 1950s consisted of fine wood carvings to Britain and the United States of America. In this colonial period, the Kamba people noted the interest in the Maasai figurines among tourists visiting Kenya. With this knowledge combined with their skills in wood carving, they launched the massive “sale of the Maasai”. The Kamba came only second to the Makonde of Tanzania in the use of the Maasai image globally. (Mutie, 2003).

The Maasai images have been used in the widespread promotion of tourism in Kenya, a sector which in its best years, superseded horticulture and agriculture exports. (Foster et al, 2000).

Mutie (2003) notes the paradox of the international fame of the tiny Maasai community in its culture and identity with the striking anonymity of the Kamba people who are hardly known outside East Africa.

Indeed, business development education has lacked for close to half a century. This made marketing, financial management, business planning and price fixing a complex task resulting in losses if not low returns. (Mutinda & Kiumbuku, 2014).

As a developing country, Kenya is faced with constant fluctuating real GDP growth rates and an increased population living below the poverty line. These challenges have influenced the Kenyan Government’s promotion of entrepreneurship as an engine of growth. (Bwisa & Ndolo , 2011).The Economic Recovery Strategy Paper for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERS) 2003-2007, the Government has simplified business licenses. The preparation of the Sessional Paper No. 2 of 2005 on “Development of Micro and Small Enterprises for Wealth and Employment Creation for Poverty Reduction” solidify the efforts in making entrepreneurship an engine for development. (Bwisa & Ndolo, 2011).

According to (Mutinda & Kiumbuku, 2014) in their case study among the weavers and carvers in Mwala County, through Government led initiatives, majority of the population (63.6%) have received business related advice from institutions such as the Ministry of Cooperative Development, MS Kenya and the Area local chief. Business development services have also positively impacted this society through the Small and Micro Enterprise Programme (SMEP); Ministry of Co-operative Development and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Mutinda & Kiumbuku, 2014).

In a rural Kamba community, family life is central to the grouping. Entrepreneurial motivation emanates from the need to care for the family not just the individual and thus the essence of collectivism (Bwisa,& Ndolo, 2011). The focus on the family nucleus is strong.

Uncertainty avoidance, is another cultural indicator that determines a group’s level anxiety towards future events. The degree of tolerance towards this factor is evaluated within a community, as an ambiguity continuously unfolding as time lapses (Bwisa & Ndolo, 2011). In the Kamba community, failure and responsibility are both not looked at holistically. While they embrace competition, success or failure is perceived as a result of the intercession of extraordinary powers (Bwisa & Ndolo, 2011). The invocation of spiritual powers to increase innovation, to deter competition is common. To them, success is not always achieved through hard work.

According to Rodney (1973), Europe developed in the absence of pure bureaucrats to maintain any egalitarian tendencies as in China. This resulted in the incubation of capitalist ideas and the creation of the first groups of wealth activists – keen only on acquiring vast amounts of wealth. However, the isolation of African communities resulted in a different trajectory of development.

Hofstede introduces the masculine cultural dimension of a community. Masculine cultures consist of two correlating values, which are high ambition and the level of entrepreneurship. These wealth activism tendencies are valued, esteemed and recognized (Bwisa & Ndolo, 2011). Such materialism among the Kamba is not strongly characterized. Instead, low masculinity leads to entrepreneurship as means to deal with issues of nurturance in the communal setup.

### ***B. The Maasai Community:***

According to OECD (2009), in Kenya, “cultural manyattas” were developed around the Amboseli National Park to help marginalized groups of the Maasai community. The Maasai people earn money from these special homesteads where tourists come to visit, hear and experience Maasai culture. Each manyatta has a central market where people sell their craft products. The cultural manyatta is a co-operative, and on arrival, each tourist pays an entrance fee. On entering, the tourists are welcomed with song and dance by Maasai women. A resident guide will then show them around the manyatta, there are demonstrations of Maasai life and towards the end of the visit; the warriors stage a dance, which the visitors are

permitted to join. The Association for Cultural Centers in the Amboseli Ecosystem (ACCA) seeks to generate ideas and implement decisions that are favorable to the local community with a view to improving their incomes accrued from tourism activities while enhancing the dignity of Maasai people and protecting the ecological integrity of the Amboseli ecosystem

#### ***Land Rights:***

According to Taraiya (2014), the Maasai have customs regulating the occupation of land. Such natural laws recognized the rights of the descendants to control and use the land and water resources in accordance with the agreed norms. Traditional land rights reflect the social constraints, and hence such land rights deliberately forge effective solidarity among occupiers and users to practice sustainable management and conservation. The landholder, according to Maasai custom, is the community itself. The individual member has the limited right to use community land along with other members. However, a member has no right to sell, lease, or charge money for use of any portion of the community's land. The community itself has no such right either. It cannot alienate, lease, or charge for use of its land, because under customary law, land has no monetary value. The land is held in trust by the community for its members, both present and prospective.

According to Badgerow (2014), Maasai identified cattle, land and children as the materials essential to economic and biological survival. Ultimately, livestock seems to provide the cornerstone to well being for the Maasai. With respect to the perception of the Maasai on their own condition, one thing that stands out is their vulnerability to shocks. Participants explained that the dependency on livestock establishes a de facto dependency on rainfall. When there is insufficient rainfall, their primary source of income and sustenance can be devastated, thus affecting their wellbeing.

Badgerow (2014) also notes that the Kenyan legal system has both directly and indirectly condemned certain elements of Maasai culture. Privatization of land is a key component to the neo-liberal capitalist model and considered indispensable to economic well being however, In failing to make allowances for alternatives, such as by establishing 'cattle corridors', the Kenyan government has effectively dismissed nomadic pastoralism as economically unviable and consequently imposed constraints on the Maasai livelihood system. Consequently, this has exacerbated poverty among the Maasai and undermined their status within the extended community.

#### ***Education:***

According to Rono, Rotich & Mutisya (2014), about 60% of Maasai children in rural areas do not attend formal schools and only 8% of all girls in rural areas of Maasailand have had a chance to complete secondary school education. The Maasai Association argues that the greatest obstacles to girl education are Female Genital Mutilation and early marriages. They further note that these practices impact negatively on the future of girls' young generation, affect the attainment of development goals, in addition to making it difficult for families to escape the poverty trap.

#### ***Health:***

WHO (2013) notes that there are many health concerns associated with FGM including HIV/AIDS, tetanus, urinary tract infections and infertility, childbirth complications and death among others. These in turn undermine the realization of SDG 3 of promoting health and well-being. In addition, a WHO study showed that there were higher newborn death rates among mothers who had FGM, at an extra 1 to 2 perinatal deaths per 100 deliveries.

It can thus be concluded that culture has had both negative and positive impacts on the Maasai people. On one hand, the positive impact is felt in terms of tourism earnings while on the other hand, health, education and property ownership seem to be negatively affected.

#### ***C. The Pokot Community:***

The Pokot community in the Northern part of Kenya is well known for its cattle rustling activities. The practice is often seen to be in the legitimizing context of tradition; however, it is also not a sustainable economic practice in the modern world. Issues of climate change, resource conflict and the increase of crime have rendered this rudimentary and backward (The inside story on Emergencies, 2014). Belluci (2007) cite the alienation and denial of education opportunities towards some communities especially those peripheral to the epicenter of power as having contributed to the continuity of the practice. The impact of culture on education is assessed through the scope of self-determination, innovation and development and patriotism.

***Self-determination:***

Post-colonial government of Kenya selectively laid the foundations of enhancing education for political participation. Belluci (2007) argues further that the new leadership extended sowing the seeds of ethnicity and differentiated development. In this context, culture excludes a community from attaining self-determination having been ignored in the circles of political elite. The alienation cites Bollig (1990) were as a result of inter - ethnic wars between the tribes living in the semi arid northern parts of Kenya namely the Pokots and the Turkanas. The assumption is then that a community that practices this culture is myopic in developmental agendas and is excluded from decision making of policies that impact them. The Pokot culture places value on the act of raiding of cattle and the Werkoian a clan within the tribe are the great oracle are consulted for advice on social aspects of the society including the formation of circumcision age sets, farming, deployment of livestock and raiding for cattle (Conant, 1966).

***Innovation for problem solving and Development:***

Bollig and Osterle (2008) argue that making institutional and socio-economic transformations in a community should be incremental as it results in changing the resource pool management that had ramifications on the political and ecological aspects. The failure of resource management among the Pokot, they argue, is not attributed to individual behavior or lack of knowledge but rather structural problems, which prevent successful communal management. Lack of economic diversification would prevent the emergence of stable social institutions.

Population growth attributes to the scarcity in resources and not able to meet daily subsistence consumption needs such as milk, meat. Bollig (1990) argues that perceived absolute livestock numbers are also necessary for achieving personal development life goals such as marriage. Livestock is perceived scarce in relation to high consumption of livestock in prestigious social transactions such as bride price, initiation and promotion ceremonies.

***Governance:***

The large-scale infusion of guns used for cattle herding protection and raiding raises a new level of armament in the North West part of Kenya as neighboring and bordering communities scale up on the arms. It creates a total disrespect for will and power of elders in favor of the will and power of weapons. Warlordism is power leadership created through possession of weapons and a retainer army that now determines the authority in the area (Mirzele, 2000).

Eaton (2010) highlights the development in the economic greed and sustainability of it post cold war era. There is the rise of the 'traider' a commercialized raider who operates between Northern Kenya and the Karamoja area of Uganda. Most of these traders occupy space at the social institutions level and view commercialized raiding as a new opportunity for economic development. Community leaders are unable to exert control of the process and police are unable to monitor the markets effectively.

***Theory of tragedy of Commons:***

Theory based on the 'population problem' by Hardin (1968), individuals of a population who do not have any claim to all to any part of the resource share a common resource act independently according to self interests contrary to the common good of all by depleting or spoiling the shared resource.

***C. The Somali Community:***

The Somali community in Kenya occupies what is mostly referred to as arid and semi-arid areas. The Somali pastoralists rely on livestock as a source of income and basic sustenance. They mainly herd goats, sheep, camels and cattle. This type of livelihood supports a big number of the Somalia community in North Eastern Kenya. In this regard pastoralism is recognized as part of the people's cultural heritage.

***Pastoralism:***

Pastoral livelihood is considered as the most efficient use of the dry lands (Fratkin, 1986) and for the pastoralists to survive they have long devised coping strategies, which is the nomadic way of life. This usually involves a system of herding throughout the year where the communities are in constant search of grazing land.

Statistics from African Union's policy framework for pastoralism show that there are 268 million pastoralists living throughout of Africa. They are living on 43 per cent of Africa's land mass and contribute between 10 to 44 % of the GDP of the countries the live in (African Union, 2010).

The Somali pastoral communities have a lot of opportunities that they can benefit from in regard to this type of lifestyle. However, these communities face economic, environmental and socio-political challenges that hinder their capacity to harness these opportunities. Specifically the challenges including prolonged poverty and food insecurity, low human capital and poor health standards, high vulnerability to climate changes, underdeveloped infrastructure, insecurity and low levels of livestock productivity (ReSAKSS Working Paper No. 12, 2008).

Since they are always on the move, they barely have access to the basic social amenities such as health and education ensuring they lead precarious livelihoods. In recent history, we have seen the drought condition in Kenya because their livestock to become increasingly weak, easily contract diseases and end up dying at alarming numbers leading to catastrophic consequences for the Somali pastoralist who solely depend on their animals.

Pastoralism has not benefited favorably from both the process and outcome of policy development. Usually, they are ignored and even when they are considered, pastoralism is viewed with doubt. In this regard, development policy planners have tried to either ignore or change pastoralism, establishing exit strategies that are disguised in the form of legislation and policy (Idris, 2011).

Until very recently, there was a total lack of government institution that represent pastoralism. Pastoral production as system has not been represented in any syllabus, which clearly shows all experts are unaware of pastoral production system except life experience of those with pastoral background. Pastoralists have always been left on the margin of development as government services such livestock veterinary extensions have been inadequate.

Reports indicate that despite the fact that more than 75% of Kenya's livestock are in the ASAL areas, they are served by fewer than 10% of livestock service staff. This is mostly because the ASAL areas are considered a hardship post and few veterinary staff want to work there (Young, Kajume and Wanyama, 2003). Another assumption would be that the government considers pastoralism a backward way of life and not worthy of government investments as they have always been left on the margin of development.

### III. CONCLUSION

Our analysis of the aforementioned communities reveals that the culture does indeed fall on both spectra of development as seen through the capabilities approach. By the mere fact that culture and various practices within it, is seen to inhibit capabilities as is seen with the Maasai and Somali, we can conclude that it asphyxiates human development of the populace in these communities. On the other hand, the Kamba Community through their culture are seen to flourish and as such, their capabilities tapped.

We aver that in consideration of policy, as well as parameters of other indicators used to determine human development, culture cannot be ignored. If we consider that culture affects all other indicators, then determination of its extent in decision making at all levels of analysis in the international system is imperative. A deeper understanding of culture and how it affects human development is definitely sure to inform policy making that ensures a wider array of functionings catered to.

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