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Settled Farmer Oral History: Interviews and Study Report, Wami/Ruvu River Basin, Tanzania



Tanzania Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (iWASH) Program

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Introduction

The following interviews were collected and written-up over a one month period from April to May 2012, under the iWASH program's funding and supervision. There are in total three key interview sites (Makuyu, Kanga, Pemba), all linked to the on-going iWASH program; this greatly facilitated the interview process as a previous relationship had already been established between locals and development workers. The aim of these talks was not to accumulate facts and figures, but rather to find stories of change and how it affects communities and individuals. Although the initial focus was the environmental and social change in the target areas over the past 50 years, the interviews have evolved to cover a wide range of themes according to the interviewees' dialogues and their own sense of what is important. These interviews represent the perceptions of Tanzanian men and women, making them neither right nor wrong. That being said, we have not edited out any contradictions or errors of fact, and all tragedies and disasters are graphically described by those who experienced them. As these interviews were conducted in Ki-Swahili and later transcribed into English, some misinterpretations or confusions may present themselves, for which we apologize in advance. In total, 14 interviews were conducted, of which 10 have been chosen here on the basis of narrative interest. The interview team would like to thank first and foremost all those interviewed who were willing to give their time and share with us their histories. Also, many thanks to the local officials and mobilisers in Makuyu (Mr. Hamza Iddi) and Pemba (Mr. Matokeo) for their precious help in identifying interview subjects and for facilitating our time in the field. Finally, we would like to thank the entire iWASH staff for their constant help, support, and unfailing patience during our time here.

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Kanga

Christian Tarimo (M. 59 years) Kanga

The Kilimanjaro region covers a relatively small area in relation to its constantly growing population. When I was born there – in the Rombo district – in 1953, land was already starting to become a problem. My father owned 2 acres, and by the time I had finished school in 1976, my 8 other siblings were making light work of the crops we grew in the rich soil, crops like maize, beans, yams, potatoes, coffee and banana. Instead of joining them in the field and overcrowding the land, I started a business moving clothes in and out



of Kenya, selling them along the way. I knew I could not go back to work on my father’s farm, between all nine of us, no-one was guaranteed a portion of the land to work independently. In fact, the entire Kilimanjaro region couldn’t offer us much in the way of land.

In school, I had studied the Morogoro region, its climate and vegetation, and I had also been told by friends the soil was rich, and the rainfall lavish. When I heard on the radio the government advertising bare land to cultivate there, in the Turiani area, I saw my chance and took it. At first I was sceptical, but I went there with an official letter from home, explaining my situation. I was then allowed to choose my own land – which I was given free of charge – and build my farm. When I had settled in, I went back to Rombo to marry in 1983, as my parents did not want me to marry out of my clan. I brought my wife back here where she has blessed our family with 5 children.

Kanga is very different today compared to how it was in the past. When I first arrived, everyone lived in mud huts, not a single person had a metal roof. There was no mill in the village, people were having to carry maize all the way to Turiani to have it milled. But what struck me the most was the size of people’s farms, so small considering all the available land. When I built my farm, I made my house big and solid, increased the size of my land compared to others, and I planted a larger variety of crops as the people there weren’t aware the land could sustain them. In fact, I brought many seeds from my home, and taught the locals of Kanga how to cultivate bananas, oranges, coconut and coffee. Along with others from Kilimanjaro, we gave them so much knowledge it earned us the nickname “shamba darassa” (“farmers’ field school”).



“We taught locals how to cultivate many crops, like oranges...”

But the same thing is happening here as it did in Kilimanjaro more than three decades ago. The population is growing as many people are coming to Turiani, for example to work in the sugar cane industry. Eventually these people look to settle. Today bare land is scarce, and so is the vegetation that used to envelop this area. Newcomers need land, and many who already own it try to increase its size. For this, they cut into the forest and along with lumbering and charcoal making activities this has reduced the forest area drastically. At one point we realised we couldn't let deforestation go on in our area anymore, it was starting to affect our lives quite seriously. We noticed a few minor changes like the wind blowing harder as there were no trees to reduce its force; or the temperature increasing to the extent that crops like banana and coffee were suffering, but we put these down to the usual ebb and flow of nature. It was only when the rainfall became unpredictable and started a steady decline that we realised the consequences of our actions.

The trees brought down the rain, and with no trees, the rain cannot fall. Now all our coconut trees need to be watered every day, otherwise they'll die, and our other crops are giving us less and less each harvest. Our water sources have now dried up, and even though it's the rainy season, there's not enough rain to make the rivers and streams flow. Luckily we mostly rely on the new pumps now to get water, they have helped us a lot since we started using them, as we save time and the water is clean so we can drink without the risk of disease.



“We can't let deforestation go on any more, it's starting to affect our community in serious ways...”

All these changes and their negative impacts on the community led to the creation in 2007 of an environmental conservation group : KAECO (Kanga Environmental Conservation), of which I'm the chairman... We make sure people don't cut down trees in our area anymore, and they listen to us as they're more aware now. We also try to encourage people to plant

trees on their land – they can act as demarcation between farms – or replant lumbered areas but this is quite difficult as we are a voluntary organisation, and there's only a certain amount of time we can spare from our work at the farm. Also, we don't receive any support (financial or otherwise) from the government or any other party. I'm sure we could do much more if we had some form of backing, as people are already listening to us...

Another threat which is putting our harvests at risk is the recent influx of pastoralists through our area. Before we had never any such problems, we were always among farmers. In 2011 there was a great drought which affected the whole country. Pastoralists were moving out of their usual grazing pattern in search of water and green pastures. At first there were only a few Massai with at most 50-60 heads of cattle, but Kanga had not been affected by the drought that year, and when the news spread, within two weeks we had more than 3000 heads tracing paths across our fields. The cattle is creating a lot of problems for the whole community, first of all they pollute our water sources by drinking in them, and then spreading urine and faeces around them. Also, the pastoralists take them to graze through our fields, which are then either eaten or destroyed by the massive herds. Sometimes they can do this at night when we are asleep, when we can't catch them in the act.

We've tried getting the local authorities involved, or taking the pastoralists to court, but the Massai and Barbaigi (Mang'ati) are very rich, they can easily pay a million shillings, and as the magistrates are easily corrupted, justice will be forgotten. I experienced this myself, when a Barbaigi took his herd through the young Mitiki trees I was growing, destroying my field. I wasted an entire year of my life trying to take him to court, but the proceedings failed and eventually I had lost so much – not only in legal fees but also in failed harvests – I decided to give up, there was nothing else I could do. Sometimes the Massai will try to buy our silence, so they try to compensate us with a small sum, in reality nothing compared to what they destroyed... We don't have any other choice but to accept the money, as the law will not do anything to help us.

“The pastoralists, the lack of rain, the heat... all these things are having a negative impact on our livelihoods, and we're powerless against all of them...”

All these different threats are exposing us more than ever before to the risk of famine. We had never had one here before 2008, but we only suffered then because of our own greed. In Kanga people had harvested enough to sustain themselves for the whole year, but it wasn't the case everywhere else, where there was such a shortage of food that the price for crops doubled. Without even thinking, everyone sold off their harvest down to the last grain, when they finally realised they hadn't kept anything for their own sustenance!

Pointless situations like these wouldn't occur if the working mentality of people hadn't changed so much. Children live and learn in a different way than we did, they're not challenged enough and this is affecting their willingness to work. For example, in school we had to use our heads to solve math problems, instead they use calculators! The young generation today are so careless, they don't plan for their future and are happy to live day-to-day, doing the bare minimum to have just enough. They don't know how unpredictable the

future is... they need to listen to the elders in the village as our advice can help them understand and prepare for the changes around us and therefore lead better lives.

Sabina Thomas Kibunga (F. 60 years) Kanga

I was born in 1952 in Mrawa, a sub-district of Rombo in the Kilimanjaro region. As a child, I was the only girl in the family, all my other siblings were boys, but that didn't stop me from helping on the farms we owned. On our first farm – the closest to our house – we grew coffee, cassava, bananas, yams and potatoes, and on the second farm which was a lot further away, we grew mostly maize, beans and millet. It was quite common for people to have two different farming areas, as the Kilimanjaro region developed a land problem quite early, and people had to go far from their homes to find bare land to cultivate. It got so serious that by the time I married, my husband was working in Moshi to sustain us as there was no land available at home.



Whilst he was in Moshi, my husband heard from friends that the region around Morogoro was very fertile and that land was available everywhere... He left for Kanga in 1980, and when he found land he stayed there to build our house and our farm. I didn't see him again until I arrived here in 1983! During the time when he was away, the youngest of our three children passed away from *surua* ("measles"), so I came to Kanga with only two. Since our arrival here, I have had three more children, but we lost two of them to TB. Sickiness really seems to prevail in my family, as none of us have been spared, not even me! I remember how in 1997 I fell ill from malaria, it got so bad I started to become psychotic, I nearly lost my mind! I had to be tied up and taken to Turiani to be treated. When my husband died from TB in 2000, it nearly happened again, people thought I was going crazy... in fact they still do!

"When I first came to Kanga, there weren't even any bicycles... But today we have cars, motorcycles; a lot has changed in 30 years..."

But Kanga today is not the same as it was before, as obviously we have had many improvements made to our lives. We're more informed now, and we have better access to healthcare and medicine. The first time I came to Kanga, there weren't even any bicycles! When children were sick we had to tie them to our backs and carry them all the way to Turiani... But look around today, we have cars, motorbikes, we even have tractors we can hire to work in the field! Everything is made easier with these new means of transportation; I remember the dilemma we faced before as to what to do with our harvests. The choice was either to sell them in here in Kanga at the local market, or walk all the way to Turiani, having

to carry our crops, but where the market would give us a better price for our products. Today the choice is obvious!

Kanga has also become much bigger than it was when I first arrived. The population is growing very fast, as more and more outsiders are coming here to settle. This combined with the fact that people have been trying to increase the size of their farms has created the same problem we had in Kilimanjaro: bare land is becoming scarce. People only saw one solution when this started happening, and so they began cutting into the rich vegetation that Kanga used to boast. A search for land quickly became a search for extra-income as lumbering and charcoal burning became more and more common activities.

Soon enough, a large part of our forest had disappeared and yet this had solved nothing: we still faced the problem of an increasing demand for land. The government eventually came in and took responsibility for the forest, they educated us on the consequences of deforestation, banned lumbering and advised us to plant trees on our land so as to bring down the rain done. Luckily, thanks to this initiative, there's less lumbering now. Occasionally we might see someone carrying a few logs on their bicycle, but it's not like before when people would go back and forth with their cars, filling them to capacity!

Unfortunately, there's not much that can be done to reverse this process. The moisture from the trees is what will eventually go on to form the clouds and give us rain. But as there are hardly any trees left, the rains have decreased drastically in both quantity and frequency. Even worse, compared to the past, they have become completely unpredictable! Now we have no idea when the rains will fall and this can have serious effects on our crops as it did last year: the heavy rains were meant to fall during the period when we grew maize, and should have ended by the time we harvested. But we never harvested maize last year as the rains came so late the crops had already dried up. After maize we usually plant rice, but this we couldn't do either as all the fields were now flooded!

“The vegetation in Kanga used to be so green and abundant, but since it's been cut down the rains have faltered, now reaching mostly the mountain and forest areas...”

Rainfall used to be so abundant in Kanga we always had surplus in our stores, but along with the rain these are now steadily decreasing. The heat is more felt now too, as the coolness that used to come from the forest has been replaced by the hot sun. Crops that usually thrive in cold weather such as bananas, rice and coffee are now struggling and returning less and less each harvest. Even people are suffering from this heat, I myself get terrible rashes all over my body! This new heat has also dried up most of our water sources like rivers and wells, which will only flow if there is heavy rain. Before, those who were lucky enough to live near rivers could practice irrigation, but even that's not possible anymore. Fortunately, the pumps we now use to get water came at the right time; they have helped us a lot as the water is clean and available at all times. But unlike rivers and wells, these mechanical pumps can sometimes breakdown which can cause problems for the village.

I don't know what has changed in people's mentality nowadays. We used to have respect for our environment, for other people, and especially for ourselves. For example in my time,

never could a girl be seen acting the way young girls are acting today. They dress up provocatively in mini-skirts and tight jeans, offering themselves to anybody! They treat their bodies like a wasteland... Boys too, they wear trousers which are obviously too big for them – constantly falling down – and they call it fashion. The young generation just doesn't have any respect for their parents' wishes anymore; they consider themselves free to do what they want. But I guess that's just another change among the many we are experiencing, and if we have learned anything it's that there is nothing we can do to fight it, we can only try to cope with it as best we can...

Makuyu

Group interview with Mwajuma Iddi (F. 56 years), Bernadeta Joseph (F. 57 years) and Laika Zuberi (F. 56 years), Tongolo



Tongolo. The mountain and the village it overshadows share the same name



Laika Zuberi and Bernadeta Joseph

Once all three women have arrived, we sit down on simple wooden stools in the shade of Laika's home. We introduce ourselves and all three women seem quite curious about what is

going to happen; whispering and laughing among themselves. After Tony (the interpreter) explains why we are there; why we would like to talk with them and hear their stories, Mwajuma immediately takes the lead...

M – We've all known each other since we were children, as our parents were some of the first people to settle in Tongolo village, which is named after the mountain that overlooks it. When we were children, our houses were close by and we always kept each other company: we went to school together, did our chores together and worked the fields together. Even today, as mothers and wives, we're still close. We help each other out as our lives and living conditions are very similar. Laika and Bernadeta often help me to work in the fields as I'm widowed and haven't got a man to do the farming. Sometimes they also look after my son when I'm busy. I have a small business making "Pombe" (*a local alcohol similar to beer, made from maize and millet*).

L – I too have a business, apart from farming. I prepare food three times a day and I sell it from my home, just like a small restaurant. We all need some other source of income since farming is just not enough anymore. Our harvests are now becoming too small and dwindling every season.

M – This is because the rains have changed so much from the way they were before. In the past, we could more or less predict the rainfall pattern and sow our seeds accordingly. However, nowadays the rain is not only more scarce but also less regular and the season seems later than before ... only arriving in the months when we would normally expect to be harvesting! The rain affects everything about our livelihoods. For example, when the rainfall decreases, even our businesses suffer. If people cannot harvest, they cannot sell, and if they can't sell, they can't make money. No one can buy from us if they have no money!

B – That's quite true that the rains have changed a great deal over the years. I can still remember in 1979, the rain was so heavy it caused floods that destroyed all our crops. But look at the land today...it's dry...almost as if the drought we suffered 12 years ago has just carried on up until today. This lack of rain is giving us smaller and smaller harvests. Today, we can barely harvest 20kg of maize per acre and we have to plant our seeds many times, because the rain won't fall for the first few.

M – Before it was such that all we had to do to get water from our village well was simply to reach down with a bucket in your hand, and it would come back full because the water was so close to the surface. Of course now we don't use that well anymore, it's been abandoned since the modern pumps were installed in our village. But even with these new pumps the work is not easy: the water is far underneath the ground so we have to turn [the pump] for a long time before the water reaches the surface. All this friction wears out the ropes so they end up breaking very quickly, and when this happens, we all have to contribute money for the expensive repairs.



The New village pump, and the abandoned well

L – But this has happened to us before, famine has struck our village because of the lack of rain, it happened in 1974 and then again ten years later in 1984. People suffered a lot in those times, some left the village to look for subsistence elsewhere. Some were so hungry they started eating wild vegetables! We had nothing, not even any flour to make ugali, we simply had to wait for aid. Those with children left them with other families that had even a little food. They would say “If the child lives, let him be yours. If he dies, then it is god’s will...”.

B – The lack of rain has also dried up all the ponds and small lakes around the village, so now there are no more frogs, but I think we are all relieved because they used to be so loud they would disturb the whole village in its sleep! It is also much hotter now with no rain to cool down the area, and the heat brings out the rats that devour our crops.



M – Rats are the least of our worries, It’s the Masai we have to look out for! They’ve always been in our area, and they tend to lead their cattle through our farms. This is another big problem that threatens our harvests. Luckily, most of us have a way to chase them off the land: most farmers who have experienced this danger always carry with them a bow and arrow. The Masai are wary now, as they know our arrows are poisoned but also very powerful, if you shot one from here it could easily reach the village office in Chanika! The Masai only have their clubs, they’re no match for us. Those who don’t carry arrows usually have one of our traditional flutes called ‘filimbi’, they make a sound everybody will recognize, and the whole village will come to help you.

L – All this change is because the population is growing very fast, new people are coming into the area, new houses are being built, strong houses made of bricks...

“The Masai are no match for our arrows!”

B – ...I can still remember before when we all lived in houses with roofs made from makuti, we were constantly worried about leaving our children alone. When we were working in the field, we would always look up towards our houses, any sign of smoke and we would drop the jembe (Hoe) and run back to check for fire!

L – But this population growth, it's not only due to new people, it's mostly our own children growing up and building new homes for themselves. But in either case, those who settle here live off the land, they farm as there aren't many other activities to choose from, and so to get land they go into the forest and cut down trees. Some even use lumbering as an income, and although it's forbidden, the most desperate will go into the forest at night just to get enough income to sustain their families. Our vast forests have been replaced by fields of dried up crops. Some try to increase the size of their farms based on the flawed justification that this will give them a larger harvest, but this hasn't been the case for a long time. The two events are most definitely linked: it's the vegetation that brings the rain, and the unpredictable and lesser rainfall is only a consequence of the on-going lumbering in our area.

M – Our ancestors used to have rituals in days like these when the rain refuses to fall. In the old days, they would go to the nearest crossroads and build a hut right in the centre. The ritual concerned every family in the village, all would come dressed in black 'kanikis'. Every household would then bring a patch of grass from their land, and place it in the hut, where a black sheep would eventually be sacrificed. The rest of the day would be spent drinking pombe to the sound of drums, and praying to the gods for rain. Today we have been converted to more modern religions, and only a few still believe in our ancient traditions, but that is not enough. If the whole community was involved, and these rituals still performed, rain would come so strong we would have to hide in our houses! Too much has changed now...

B – Yes, most of our customs and traditions have become obsolete, even those that brought people together. It seems as if solidarity is a thing of the past, people have turned bitter and only out look for themselves. As a child I can remember how the village would come together around a large fire every night. The heat and the sound of beating drums would chase away any mosquitoes, and everybody would sit and listen to traditional tales told by the elders in the village. I don't know what changed, today the youth are only interested in watching television, trying their best to copy the people they see, not caring what their parents think. Girls are wearing trousers now, tight clothes and mini-skirts. When we try to tell them off, they call us outdated, they'd rather wander the streets, girls looking for boys and boys looking for girls, when instead they should be helping in the fields or at home.

L – In our time, had we ever behaved like this we would have been immediately punished, maybe even shunned from the village!

M – The world is becoming a rotten place. Young people should stop going out and looking for problems, there are many diseases that affect them today like HIV aids, so they need to stop being so careless. Hopefully they will learn that school is for their benefit, it will lead

them to a better life, and maybe one day they will come back and help their old grandmothers!

B – If we're still alive!

***Hamadi Konrad Mbega (M, 67 years)
Chanika***

I was born in Kibati, which was at the time a small village about 40km away from Makuyu. I arrived here in Chanika in 1974, the year of the great famine! No one will forget it: people were forced to eat a type of 'yellow flour' given as aid food from other countries. I had followed my mother here to help her settle in after my father died in Kibati. He was a farmer and today I carry on with the same tradition,



working in the fields together with my family. Chanika is the central village of Makuyu, it actually means 'ripped' as it used to be the first village known as Makuyu, but since then it has been 'ripped up' into many different sub-villages.

We cultivate a large variety of crops, from maize and beans to sunflower and 'ufuta' (*sesame*) to make oil. I used to produce a lot of cotton as well, in fact it was my main crop, but I soon realised that the market for cotton was too unstable. It used to be you could go to the market and find people there waiting to buy the cotton from you, but then suddenly it changed. I could store cotton sacks from three to five years without anyone buying them! But the market has come back now thanks to the government, so people are more willing to grow it, but I don't think I will as they have yet to fulfil some of their promises of equipment and pesticides.

"You could store a bag of cotton for 3 to 5 years without finding anyone to buy it"

Of course, even without help from the government we have access to more technology nowadays, like chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Things have changed so much, I remember in Kibati we had to work the land with our own hands. Today we can even hire a tractor to work the fields, but for that you need the money! I have a bicycle now as well and a solid house with a metal roof. Can you imagine I used to live in a hut with a roof made from 'makuti' (*palm leaves*)?! All these things have made our lives easier and my harvests are normally plentiful enough to sustain my whole family. But all this technology is useless without the rain. Rainfall in the area used to be so predictable, it would start in January when we planted our seeds, and by April it would be so strong you could hardly walk outside! But this year, [May 2012] still nothing... It's the change in temperature that's causing this

lateness of the rain: it's too hot now for this time of year. Usually by June we're all burning charcoal to keep warm!

“The rain would be so strong you could hardly walk outside”

This lack of rain has caused all of our crops to dry up. We only have to look at them to see the famine waiting to fall down on us. It's a warning to ask the government for help. Only a few people will harvest this year, and even for them it will be a small harvest. This isn't only because of the lack of rain, but also because of the Masai (pastoralist tribe). They take their herds through our farms to get to the grazing pastures in the forest. So the cattle end up eating or destroying our crops and the ground becomes very unfertile because of the constant trample of hooves from herds going up to 4000 heads. We used to get up to 10 bags of maize per acre, now we're lucky to get 5. We've tried to get the local officials involved, but the Masai are a rich people, so they turn a blind eye. No one can fight against big money.

“We used to get up to 10 bags of maize per acre, now we're lucky to get 5”

This constant trespassing is a big source of conflict between the Masai and the farmers in Makuyu, and in some cases it can turn to violence. My own son was attacked; struck on the head by three Masai. This conflict has also created a fracture in our community as everybody has a different opinion on how to proceed to resolve the matter. The youth have turned restless and are ready and willing to fight off the Masai, but the elders don't want to see any more blood spilt, and think the best solution is simply to wait for the cattle to pass and hope they move on to greener pastures.

Livestock keepers are also endangering our forests: to make new pastures, they tend to burn the dried grasses near the forest and sometimes this causes forest fires. Lumbering is also a problem, because the forest officers are lazy. They're not monitoring the forest, so people are free to do what they want. All the fruit trees we used to enjoy before have now disappeared, and with them all the wild animals that inhabited the forest. The population used to be so respectful of the environment, so no one would be seen cutting down trees without a good reason. However today, due to the growth in population, more land is needed to satisfy demand. It's painful to see people cutting down trees as we all depend on the environment, but what can we do? People need farms, and when children leave school this is their first concern... Tomorrow it could be my own son looking for land to cultivate.

But the progress is not all one-sided: the population growth and the demand for more water have brought pumps to our community. Today there are at least 5 pumps for every locality, so we don't have to wait our turn at the old village well. We save time and the water we get is always clean so there's less diseases like cholera which used to be a problem in our village, along with 'surua' (*measles*) a sickness affecting mostly small children. I lost three children myself from 'surua', but I am glad to see that people today are more aware of these dangers and have access to medicine to treat themselves and their families.

I never went to school as a child because I was helping my father in the field or taking his goats to graze, but I can see how education is important. I hope that by attending school my

children and grandchildren will grow up to break my family's tradition and become something other than farmers.



Lenati Abdallah Kamletti (M. 75 years) Mkocheni

I was born in Makuyu, which at the time was only a small settlement. It was nothing like the village it has grown into today, reaching and uniting many smaller villages amongst which Mkocheni, where I have lived with my family since 1974. I grew up in Milongue, one of the many smaller villages that used to be scattered around our region. Later, because of President Nyerere's "Vijiji vya ujamaa" ("socialism villages") these villages all disappeared, as people were brought together to live in more centralised communities, places much like Makuyu, and Mkocheni. This helped facilitate our access to social services.

As a child, I lived in a household of 6. I was my father's only son, but my mother had already had 3 children. We were famers, just like today, and everything we grew was for our own and our family's consumption, as the village had no market to sell our produce! Can you believe that?! Today we strongly depend on the market as it is the only place people can go to earn money from their crops. However, I can't say much has changed for me, we still consume everything we grow; a 20kg bag of maize flour won't last more than 2 days in my family!

It used to be that the shops and markets had a fair price for the value of our produce, but today the gap between the price of our produce and that of our other basic necessities is

growing wider and wider. The price of farm produce remains the same but shop prices are constantly rising. Soap now costs 3000 Tsh! A 20kg bag of maize won't sell for more than 5000 Tsh, That's not even enough to keep my family in clean clothes for 2 weeks. As a result of this inflation, I haven't been able to finish building my house and even making flour from my own maize costs 1.500 Tsh for milling.

“A 20kg Bag of maize won't last more than 2 days in my family!”

People say that this is caused by the government raising taxes and that raw materials are getting harder to find. Maybe it's true. Certainly, wood is becoming a rare commodity and trees are being cut down faster than they can grow back, while forests have been replaced by farms for the new settlers. So many trees have disappeared entirely from our region, some bore very delicious and delicate fruits... It saddens me to think that none of my children will ever taste them. Even for firewood, we have to walk at least three hours to collect dead trees or branches. It was a lot closer before. Along with the forest, all the different animals that lived there have disappeared as well, seeking shelter in the far-away remains of the forest. We used to be able to hunt before and we would always have meat to bring to the table. Our old favourites 'dondolo' and 'mbawala' (local antilopes) haven't been spotted in the area for more than 20 years.

“Wood is becoming a rare commodity, trees are being cut down faster than they can grow back”

The temperature is another element where people are noticing changes. It is much hotter now than it used to be at this time of the year in Makuyu. Usually, we expect that the heat starts in October running through to March at the latest, and that by the beginning of May we're already wearing our heavy coats and jackets. But look at me now, just talking is causing me to sweat! This change in temperature is due to the rains. In the past, they were so plentiful that you would never find a single grain of dust in the whole village, everything was muddy! But today the rains have decreased dramatically and have also become very unpredictable. Usually by this time of the year we're experiencing the heaviest rains, but up until today we still have had nothing. Many people can already hear hunger knocking at our door...but what can we do? We have to survive on what we already have and pray to God to bring more rain next year. Otherwise, there will be a great famine as a lack of rain means smaller harvests for us.

“This year we have still not had any heavy rains...many people can already hear the hunger knocking at our door...”

Many people are already suffering, especially those with little land like myself. It seems that year by year my harvests are getting smaller and smaller and it's getting increasingly difficult for me to feed my family. I'm happy with the size of my land though, it's small but manageable and anyway, I don't think I could handle any more, not in my situation. As I don't have any surplus produce to sell, I sometimes work on other farms for a small wage. But I'm getting too tired for that now, so I have to leave the heavy work for my daughter! My granddaughter also works hard to help the family, mostly fetching water from the pumps. It's

a big job as she has to carry all the buckets on her head, one by one back to the house. Sometimes the pumps are very crowded and this hinders our household's water supply: just to wash the children and their clothes, we need more than 12 buckets a day! But we're very grateful for these pumps, as the water is clean, and they're still less busy and are much closer to our house than the old well we had to use before...

I'm very proud of my children, especially when I see other peoples' walking around: the youth are very disrespectful of their elders today. They do not do as they are told. They call themselves the "new generation", but there's not much about them that's new, except maybe the fact that girls today can wear trousers: this was impossible before! Young people today try too hard to imitate outsiders, to be like people from the big cities, the same people they love to watch on television. But why pretend to be something that – clearly – you are not..? In my opinion they need to take into account what their parents tell them, as we elders are wise, and our experiences can help them lead a better life.

Along with my granddaughter and my first son, the three of us work hard to provide for our family, and my wife keeps us together by taking care of the house and the children. But it's not easy to sustain a household of twelve people when only three are able to work... Sometimes people will look upon our situation and take pity, maybe help us with some food or some money, but still we consume more than we can produce. We were thrust in to this precarious situation in 1990, when my wife gave birth to my first son. As he was growing up we began to realize he wasn't developing normally, and eventually we found out from a doctor that he was severely handicapped, both mentally and physically. My next three sons were born the same way. So was one of my grandsons. Life is hard, but it's God's will. My family, my children, they are a gift from god and I pray to him every day in the hope that he may give me a long life so that I can take care of them.

Peter Joseph Semgomba (M. 53 years) Makuyu

I was born in the village of Kiburunge, one of the six sub-villages scattered around Makuyu. My last name, Semgomba comes from my clan, the Semgomba, one of the many clans in our village. Makuyu has always been a big centre for agriculture as the land in the area is very fertile, in fact, the name Makuyu comes from the mikuyu tree which was very common in the area. Today all the trees have been cut down to make room for the crops, as more and more people have been coming to settle here. When I was a child, the trees were everywhere, there were no roads so the trip to the next village could take up to three days because the vegetation was so dense!



“Before you couldn’t even see the top of the mountain from here, as there was so much vegetation”

The rains were very predictable back then. Before sowing our seeds each year, From October to December, we would simply look at the clouds and we could tell whether the rains would be generous, if they would come early or late. Thunderstorms were very useful as well, as they would tell us when the big rains were due. Our grandparents would even take the moon into account to predict the rains, they were never wrong!

According to our predictions, we would plant different crops: if we thought the rains would be plentiful we would plant beans, cotton, maize and sunflower and ufuta to make oil with. Otherwise, we would plant mostly maize, millet, cassava and ufuta. The surplus crops we would then take to be sold at the main market in Makuyu, some people coming in to the village carrying their crops on their heads or sometimes bicycles, tired after their long trip as there were no roads to connect the villages. Sometimes we would place the crops in the store, where eventually a government car would pick them up to sell in one of the bigger cities like Morogoro.

The first Makuyu village store

But today, even those crops with fewer needs are hard to grow, they are drying up as the rains are coming late. We should have had our harvest already! The rains are not only unpredictable these days, but also less generous and this makes our harvests harder and harder to sustain ourselves on. I remember as a child everyone could sustain themselves and their family simply with the crops they grew, but due to the lack of rain the harvests are smaller, and sometimes famine would settle in the village and the government would have to bring food. The best example of this would be the 1973-1974 famine, also known as the “salfeti famine” because of the bags (locally known as salfeti bags) the aid food came in.

Because of this, people in the village have to turn to other activities aside from farming to sustain themselves. For example, many have turned to lumbering in the local forest, as this not only gives them income from the wood or charcoal they make and sell, but also gives them more land to cultivate on. But what is it to have more land when crops do not grow?!

Lumbering isn't the only danger our forests face, as cattle owners often take their animals to graze in pastures near the forest. With the hot season, when the grasses have all dried up, they set fire to them to allow new grass to grow, and sometimes this causes the whole forest to catch on fire! We've tried to involve the government, but there's not much they can do as the people responsible always make the same mistakes.

“The destruction of the environment is like a disease with no cure, as people always repeat their mistakes...”

Our water source is also something that has changed over the past few decades. The whole village used to rely on a single traditional well in Chanika, the central village of Makuyu. Others took advantage of the river and temporary streams depending on how far they were from the well, or how busy it was, but generally speaking the water was quite dirty, certainly not safe to drink, and this led to numerous diseases like the 1996 cholera outbreak. At that time people were not very health conscious, there were no toilets so people relieved themselves in the bushes. Then when the rain came it would wash everything down into the water source. But luckily, thanks to the health officers people are now aware of the importance of toilets and general cleanliness, and they know to boil water before drinking. But today the old, usually overcrowded well has now been abandoned and people are using the new pumps installed by the development projects. These pumps are very good for the village because they are faster, more efficient, and there's one for every street. They also provide us with clean water! Unfortunately, the pumps are expensive and when the rope or the pump itself breaks the whole village has to contribute money for repairs. When the first pumps (pedal pumps) came, some were stolen and sold off to the Massai who tried to use them on their own wells!

Apart from growing crops, I also have a small business where I buy crops from villages that have harvested and sell them to villages that haven't, it's the only way I have to get more income for my family. I also trade small commodities like salt, fish, and clothes that I buy from the nearby villages of Dumila and Magore, and sell in Makuyu from my bicycle. Because of the lack of rain, I now have to invest more in my business to sustain myself and my family. My childhood was marked by the poverty and low income of my family, and by making more money, I'm hoping my grandchildren will not have to lead the same difficult life...



Pemba

Group interview with Saidi Omaru Mngumvu (M.75 years), Said Katuni Solozi (M. 73 years) and Ibrahim Seif Sangali (M. 80 years), Pemba village

One by one, Saidi, Said and Ibrahim arrive and join us in the shade of the village store. All of them have been informed of our visit, but before we can start, we find ourselves thoroughly questioned by the three old men on what the topic of the discussion will be. Once we convince them that we are simply looking for stories of change in the environment and the society, they are able to relax and begin to speak quite freely...

Said Katuni Solozi, born 1939, Kibati

SK – I was born in Kibati, a village about 45km away from Pemba, but my family moved here in 1945 because of the great famine. My father had learned that the soil in Pemba was better to cultivate, and when we came we discovered not only that the land is more fertile, but Pemba is also blessed with 3 seasons of rain, so we could harvest all year round! In Kibati we were limited to growing just maize and beans, but here we were able to grow many more types of crops...

SO – You can grow anything in Pemba! The land is very generous and any crops can grow very easily in our area. In fact, these mountains you can see around us are called the “Usambara” mountains. The name comes from two tribes – the Ungulu who are local to the Pemba region, and the Zigua who originate from Tanga –, it means “fertile soil”. We grow a lot of maize, cassava, potatoes and bananas, all of these we consume ourselves, but we also have many fields covered with beans, yams, and sugar cane as these crops are very good for sale and increase our income. We’ve never had any problems growing here, we always have enough food to sustain ourselves. The only crops that can sometimes be affected by the rain are maize and beans, but otherwise you will find no shortage of potatoes, cassava or yams!

“You can grow anything in Pemba, the land is very generous!”

IS – Anything we don’t consume ourselves we sell at the village market which takes place every Sunday. In Pemba, we all grow more or less the same crops, so the market is really for strangers, people from other villages or towns who come all the way here for our products! I know people who come regularly from Zanzibar to buy our yams, or from the Bahi market in Dodoma for our sugar cane. Neighbouring villages also rely on us, we supply them with the crops they can’t grow because of their soil. Our soil is black and rich, it comes from the mountains so it can sustain many different types of



crops. Try growing cassava on the red soil from the plains, it will never work!

Mze Ibrahim Seif Sangali, Born 1932, Mgomei

When there's a famine in our area, we are never affected... The villages which suffer the most have to come to Pemba for food, even if it's only for cassava to make flour for ugali. Most of those who come don't have any money, so they offer to work on our farms instead. We always give them a fair deal!

SK – I can remember a time when the famine was so serious it had even affected other countries, people had come all the way from Kenya to ask us for food! At one point we realised we had emptied our stores, all the food was gone! The only thing we could do then was to give them their own land to cultivate...

SO – The difference is that these other villages only rely on two crops: maize and beans. Their soil doesn't allow for anything else. When the rains are insufficient, which is happening more and more often, their crops fail... They've cut down all the trees around them, there are no more forests, and that's why their rains are lessening. Our forest is protected, or at least half of it is. The government has a guarded reserve, and the village office of Pemba has independent control over the rest. When people try to lumber in our forest, we make an effort as a community to stop it...



Saidi Omaru Mngumvu, Born 1937, Pemba

IS – People don't even need to lumber, with what we cultivate we have enough to sustain ourselves and get an income! Pemba used to be a small scattered village, everyone cultivating for their own sustenance, but in 1974 the government decided to establish the "Vijiji vya ujamaa" to establish a more central community. At first we were unhappy as we had to give up part of our land for the new arrivals, but we soon saw the benefits of this as we got access to schools and a dispensary. From then on the population started growing exponentially, and people started getting greedy... the market for timber is only getting bigger, as the population is growing still and houses are being built. People see an opportunity to make money and they take it, even if they have enough. It's already affecting our village, the climate is different from what it was like before, it really began to change in 1995...

SK – It's the warning signals that have changed, not the climate! We had our own way of predicting heavy rain in the past. Pemba is surrounded by three large mountains, and in the past, if all three of these were covered with dark clouds, we could always expect very heavy rains, thunderstorms even, but lately our method has been failing continuously...

IS – The rainfall has changed too! You only have to look at this year for a blatant example: we should be experiencing our heaviest rains of the year in these months. If that were truly the case you would never have made it into Pemba, all the roads would have turned to mud!

The rain is nothing now compared to the way it was before, look at how our harvests have turned out over the years, our surplus used to be enormous compared to today! The rain is enough, but far from plentiful, we still have surplus to sell but our income is less...

“The rain is nothing now compared to the way it was before, look at how our harvests have turned out over the years!”

SO – The heat also plays a part in our shrinking harvests... We usually have a predictable year-long cycle for the temperature in Pemba. The heat starts in October, and by April it begins to fade, the cold slowly replacing it so that by June it's cold enough to wear heavy jackets and build fires in our houses! The cycle is still in place, but I feel as if it should be colder for this time of year... Unfortunately the cold also brings with it more sickness to our village, like flu, and before we get used to it, the whole village will have dry, often severely cracked lips... But because there are fewer mosquitos than in the warm season, there is also less malaria.

SK – Malaria isn't even a real problem here anymore! The government has brought us mosquito nets, and the whole village has been educated by health officers on the importance of sleeping under those nets. Education has changed everything, before we were lucky to go to school and learn something, but today, even if it's available for nearly everyone, children are still reluctant to go, even when they're told by their parents. And it's not only school, you could tell a child to do anything today, and later you'll see him playing football !

IS – All the morals have changed with the new generation, but what do you expect, they're growing up in a different time, it's only normal that there is a certain change!

SO – That's true, but what is that has changed them to such an extent that they won't even respect their elders anymore?! Don't you remember how we feared our fathers' words when we were small? If we did not do as we were told, we would certainly regret it! We were taught to respect and help each other, to plan for the future, not just to think about the present. Solidarity was present everywhere, we helped each other in difficult situations as eventually the time would come that we would find ourselves in the same shoes. It's not like today, people especially younger people are less and less willing to help others, unless of course there's a promise of money!

“Don't you remember how we feared our fathers' words when we were small? If we did not do as we were told, we would certainly regret it!”

IS – Change is inevitable, I think we can see this for ourselves, but everything we do today is to prepare for tomorrow, and that's what the youth need to remember. They need to observe their ancestors, their elders, and take example on how we behave, learn from our wisdom. The world is changing very fast, but you cannot go forward without looking back...

John Nikas Honero (M. 66 years) Pemba

I was born in 1946 in Pemba, a village spread out over many hills of the Turiani mountainous area. My parents had made it their home and ours as well, all nine of their children. Education was a new but important subject in our lives, and my parents made it a point to send us there every day, and when I passed my standard 4 exam I went to a middle school in Mhonda. Unfortunately, my luck changed, and I failed my secondary exam, but was lucky enough to find work with my elder brother, working in a textile factory in Dar-Es-Salam.



I stayed there for 20 years until the industry closed down. I had started a family then, I didn't know what to do, so I decided we would come to Pemba where my family would give me land to cultivate, and be close to my mother as she was too old to work the fields by herself. It was a logical choice for me, as in my family we have always been farmers, even in Dar-Es-Salam I was growing some crops in our garden! But I never expected the changes I saw when I came back here... These changes had started long before I left Pemba, but today they are more obvious than ever! I can remember one day in particular when I actually witnessed and experienced the change taking place in our area, and this was after Tanzania's declaration of independence, at the beginning of Nyerere's presidency. The whole country had come together in a new sense of identity, and in celebration, schools such as mine had organised various events, competitions, tournaments... Our group had travelled far to Kibati, and at the end of the day, we had emerged as victors and our prizes, as small as they may seem today, I will never forget... For the first time in my life I drank soda, and my classmates and I were treated to our first-ever car-journey! Many people will look upon these changes and only see small things, mere details, but for me this development is huge! You have to remember, 50 years ago we didn't have much of anything, but look today, every aspect of our life has been modernised, improved: motorbikes are everywhere, mobile phones, electric mills to make flour, our new water source... Even these sofas we're sitting in are new! We also have many more facilities and services like schools and a local dispensary. All the hours we used to spend walking for water, for medicine, crushing the grain, carrying the crops, we can now spare for other activities. Due to all this development, Pemba is not even a village anymore, we have earned the status of "Ward"!

"Today these changes are more obvious than ever!"



Another change I think many will pick up on is this: the conversation we are having right now... No one has ever offered to listen to us directly, to take the time to see how we live, how we work, the challenges we face... And for that I'm thankful...

But still there are many improvements we have to make: the schools need teachers and books, and the dispensary needs doctors and medicine. The water project has helped a large part of the community, as clean water is available at all times, but for those whose homes are located far from the pump, wells, rivers and streams are the only option. I myself use a small river that traces its bed near my home, and although it's sometimes dirty, the water is usually drinkable unless there's been any heavy rain... But this hasn't happened yet, and in fact, the village is starting to worry. You see, Pemba depends on three seasons of rain, and at the moment, we should be experiencing the heaviest rains of the year, in normal circumstances it would be so muddy the cars wouldn't reach the village, but look outside now, it's just dust! The rains have turned less and less generous each year for a while now, and it's starting to affect our crops. This year we planted maize which has now dried up for lack of rain. Last year it was the same situation with our beans, but whatever the crop our harvests are getting smaller and smaller. Luckily, the government has brought us "special" maize seeds that will grow faster and require less water, we have planted them already, and now we can only wait and hope...

"In normal circumstances, it would be so muddy no cars could reach the village!"

This entire situation is something we've brought upon ourselves. We know it's the trees in the forest that provide us with the rain, yet people have been cutting them down with increasing speed. What else can we do? Since the government divided the forest in 2, a protected reserve and a village area, lumbering is becoming more and more common in the village forest, and the reasons for indulging in this activity are many: the population in Pemba is growing, we need more houses and thus, more building materials. Land is also an issue, people need it for farming, and every new field cuts deeper and deeper into the forest. Also, when people tend to their fields, they often end up burning all their waste, but the wrong wind can easily blow the flames towards the dry grasses of the forest, and then we all pay the price... Lesser rainfall is not the only consequence of the thinning land cover, a lot of animals have disappeared as well, their natural habitats replaced by our crops... But I can't say anyone is saddened by this, as bush pigs and monkeys were notorious for eating or destroying our crops, mbega monkeys loved to steal our yams and baboons were especially keen on sugar cane!

This destruction of the environment is endangering our livelihoods, and we need to sit down as a community and talk about all the changes we are experiencing, try to find a solution or at least a way to prepare for the hardships we'll certainly face in the future. Along with the environment, the rains are also evolving, and so is the temperature: people can notice the heat increasing, as in the past, in these same months we were all locked up, shivering in our houses!

But to find such a unity in our village today is a feat easier said than done. Before perhaps... The way people think now has changed like everything else, the kindness and solidarity people used to show towards each other has been replaced by an unforeseen need to get ahead, to get rich. When I was growing up in Pemba there was no money! We had no need for it, I don't even think anybody knew what it was, but somewhere along the way it has seized control of everything... We used to have a practice known as "Kiwili": those of us who were late in planting or harvesting would call their neighbours over and cook a big meal to share after working in the fields.

"When I was a child, there was no money in Pemba, we had no need for it!"

Today this mutual-aid has disappeared, it's pointless to ask for help without offering money in return... The youth today are preoccupied with mobile phones or television, when they should realise the luck they have of being in school. If they could learn to take their time and think, they would predict certain things people who lack education cannot... The young people of today will grow up in a different world, and they need to take responsibility and establish their place in the community. To achieve this they have to accept what their elders have to offer in terms of wisdom and advice... As children, our morals and values were transmitted to us through small tales, told late at night in the warm glow of a large fire surrounded by the entire village, people holding their breaths, waiting to hear the elder speak... I have a particular story in mind, one young people today should hear more often:

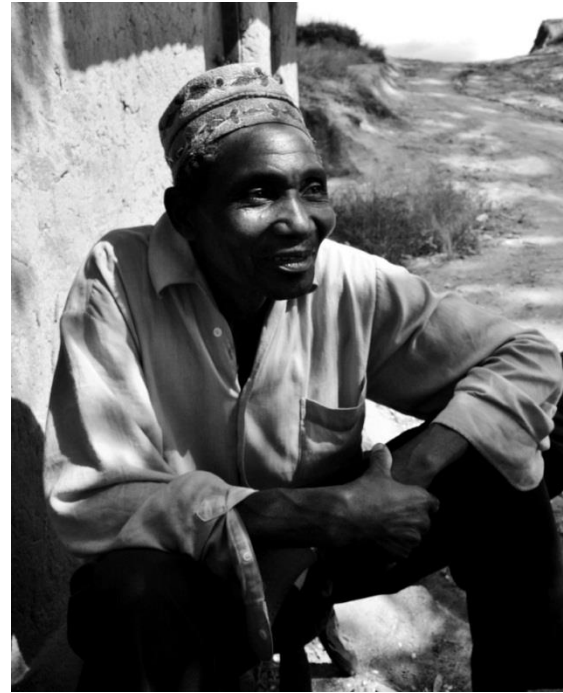
Kasseke and the elephant

Once, in a time when animals could speak freely, unhindered by humans, there lived two great friends, who, despite their differences had known and cared for each other since they could remember. Kasseke was a bird, small and frail compared to the elephant, who made the earth tremble with each of his steps. They were accustomed to each other's homes and families, and one night Kasseke and his wife had been invited by the elephant to a special meal. Upon their arrival, the elephant noticed he had no more oil to fry the food with, and desperately looking for an alternative, he burned himself on the hot pan, where he then saw oil which had flowed from his own foot. Content with this solution, the rest of the evening went by fast, and on their way home Kasseke and his wife talked about what they had seen the elephant do. Impressed, Kasseke made sure he would run out of oil for the next dinner they would invite the elephant to. When the time came and Kasseke began to cook, sure enough he had run out of oil, and in an attempt to imitate his companion, he placed his wings on the hot pan. But Kasseke's frail body was not able to withstand the burning heat, and to everyone's dismay, he died instantly.

The moral of this story is that no matter how big or small you are, there is no reason to imitate others as we are all different, and so are our limits...

Ramadani Ali Zuberi (M. 69 years) Pemba

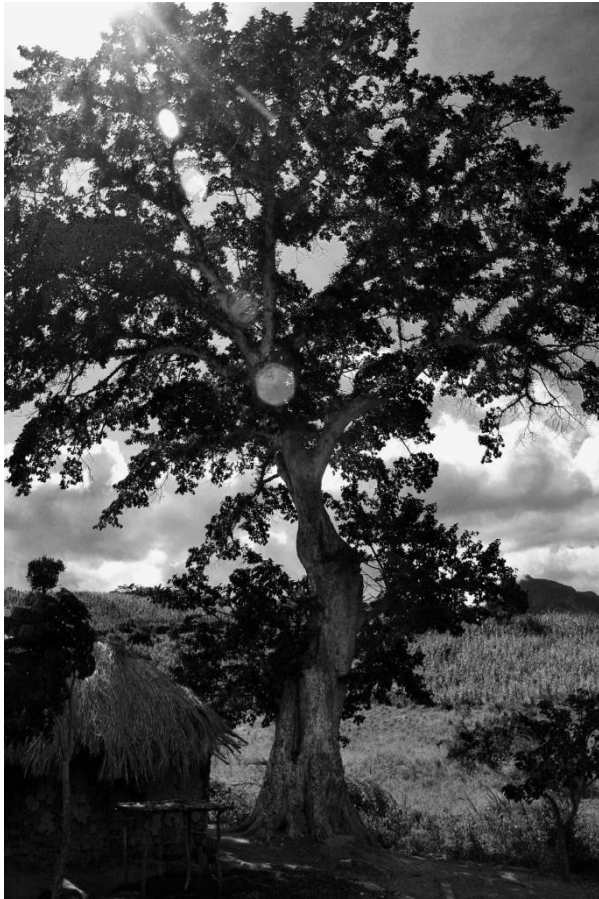
I was born here in Pemba in 1943, and – along with my 7 siblings – I grew up here and made it my home. I went to primary school from the age of 10 for three years, but my family couldn't afford to send me to secondary, so naturally I stayed and helped in the fields. My family has always sustained itself through agriculture, so it's only normal for me to follow in my father's footsteps. Before she died, my wife blessed us with 8 children, today already adults and living their own lives. To lose your wife is something you can never forget, but to lose your son is something even harder to accept, especially if he leaves a family behind. My daughter-in-law is now a widow, and the only way I could see to help was to take her youngest child – my grandson – into my household to feed him and teach him our ways.



In my fields, I grow crops like maize and beans for personal consumption, and banana and coffee to sell. Coffee is a good crop to have here, as not many people grow it anymore. My coffee beans are very special as they're grown in a completely organic way, I don't use any pesticides or herbicides. Back when we still had the cooperative union, 20kg of coffee could fetch up to 5000Tsh, so with the two 120kg bags I could get for every acre, it was an important source of income for me. Unfortunately today, the union has dissolved, there's no fixed price so I have to accept the little people may offer as I know it could be a while before anyone else tries to buy my stock. The market for coffee has become too unreliable.

“With the coffee market the way it is, I have lost my main source of income... at the same time, our other harvests are becoming less and less generous.”

My other crops are also giving me less and less income as the harvests in Pemba have not been very generous lately. We are all farmers here, all we depend on is agriculture so smaller harvests not only reduce our income but they also expose us to the risk of famine. I remember a particular time in 1979, when a famine caused by lack of rain had struck the entire country. Our neighbouring villages were more seriously affected by this famine as they only have 2 main crops, maize and beans, which had both failed that year... Luckily, we in Pemba have been cultivating multiple crops for a long time, and our stores of banana, cassava and yams helped save many lives. People had come from very far to escape this famine: I remember one old man in particular... He had travelled – on foot – all the way from Arusha, and was on his way to Turiani to see his son when he walked through Pemba. I noticed him when he climbed the big tree in front of my house and started to eat its fruits... He claimed no food had passed his lips since he started his journey 6 days ago!



“The old man sat in this very tree eating its fruits, no food had touched his mouth in the six days since he had left Arusha...”

I think the main cause of famine is the lack of rain which hinders the growth our crops. This lack of rain is in turn caused by the relatively small area of land occupied by the forest today, as opposed to the way it was before. In the village, we use two main resources daily: water and wood. Firewood can be collected quite easily from dead or dried up trees, but as for timber, people are cutting down more and more trees in the forest. Lumbering wasn't as intensive before as it is today, as we had a forest officer from whom permission was needed to cut down trees, and even then, only certain specific species were designated for lumbering, and others strictly forbidden. But today there are no more forest officers, they were all transferred by the government who instead,

divided the forest into two halves: the official government reserve, and the village forest over which the Pemba office has independent control.

Because of the lax restrictions that ensued, a large chunk of our forest has been replaced by farmlands and the wood sold or used locally to build more houses for the increasing population. The trees that were protected before for their rareness have now disappeared, trees like *Mivule*, *Mkangazi*, and *Mkinga*. Many animals have also left the area, their habitat threatened. These mountains used to be crowded with wild animals, great hunting game like buffalo and antelopes, also monkeys and even lions and leopards. But they have all fled, scared off by our activities.

“Because of lax restrictions, lumbering has become a profitable activity, but this at the cost of many plant and animal species in our forest.”

The moisture that usually comes from the trees in the forest – eventually to form rainclouds – has therefore strongly lessened, and with it the rain. In Pemba, we rely on three rainy seasons a year, and at the moment we should be getting the heaviest rains of the year, but even though the clouds are present, we have yet to receive a single drop! The lesser rainfall in the village is not only affecting our crops, it's also drying up our water sources: the wells, rivers and streams we used to rely on to supply us with water have now dried up, and will flow only during the rainy season.

But luckily, we have a whole new water source now, and it was brought



and built here by our community with the help of the iWASH program. When we were told about this opportunity, the whole village was willing to help build the new system, which takes water all the way from the mountains and brings it straight to our village! The work was hard, we had to

carry stones, pipes and cement on our heads all the way up the mountain to the building site, but we all knew it would be worth it: today we not only have access to water at all times, but it's also clean, even treated, so we can drink without worry! Some "fundis" (*technicians*) in the village have also been taught how to repair the pipes, and others how and when to treat the water. Today, we're not dependant on the project anymore, and we don't have to disturb them every time there's a problem!

This water project was very good for our community, not only because of the direct benefits to our daily lives like saving time and getting clean water, but also in the sense that it brought the whole community together for a common purpose. Helping to build the water project was a selfless act, for the good of the whole community, and this is something we don't experience as often anymore. People used to be united, solidary... We would help each other out on the fields and all that was demanded in return was maybe a warm meal. At the time our first priority was to help our neighbours, as one day they could help us in the same way, but today people don't think that way, everyone is after one thing: money. Apparently it's important to be wealthier than your neighbour, to surpass him in every possible way... People need to come back and realise the importance of standing together as we are all equals, and – more often than not – we find ourselves in the same situation...

Sophia Jacobo (F. 73 years) Pemba

Like my mother and father, I am a native of Pemba. I was born here and so were all 9 of my siblings, but today only my younger sister and I remain. I spent the first fifteen years of my life living in Maskati, a village not far from Pemba, where I attended primary school. When I passed the standard 4 exam I was sent to Mhonda middle school where I studied for two

years. At the end of my second year, my mother became very ill and I was faced with the choice between continuing my studies or going back to be Pemba to take care of her. It may seem like a difficult choice – especially today when education is such an important matter – but for me it was easy: my family is far more important than my studies, so I came back here to be with my mother. I don't regret my decision, I know I made the right choice. In my family, we have always sustained ourselves through agriculture, and when I married my husband and I worked the land like everyone else. I am a hard worker, I know our land, what it needs and how to work it, and I know how to use a jembe, so even after he died in 2002, I was never affected by famine!

“When my mother fell ill, I know I made the right choice to come back and be with her, family is more important than studies...”

We have a big advantage now compared to the past, when we used to suffer from famines quite frequently. Back then – like everyone else – we only grew two crops: maize and beans. When some years, both of these crops would fail, famine would surely ensue. At some point, I think during Nyerere's presidency, the government brought us a new idea through farm officers, and this new idea changed everything. They taught us that our land was very fertile, and that it could sustain a greater variety of crops than we thought. We started to plant yams, cassava, bananas, even coffee! Thanks to their input, we were not only able to avoid famine, but we could also have an income from our newly-abundant surplus. On a good day, a big bag of bananas can sell for up to 8000Tsh at the market, with that we can easily find some beautiful cloth to bring back home!

Sometimes of course, I'll find there's no more food left in my house, but instead of suffering for a whole year like before, now I only have to wait a few weeks until the next crop is ready to harvest. But today, despite our varied crops, our livelihoods are still endangered by a whole new threat: the sun. The sun is so much more powerful today than it used to be in the past, it's also much more abundant and all this is causing our crops to dry up because of the increasing heat. It used to be that it was hidden most of the time by the heavy rainclouds that were constantly hanging over our village, but these have disappeared now and this has diminished the rainfall, year by year, putting our crops even more at risk.

“The lack of rain – combined with the heat of the sun – is causing our crops to dry up, and this is greatly affecting our harvests...”

I don't know what has caused this change: people used to be aware of the importance of the forest, they respected the environment as they knew it brought the rain. But today it's like they have forgotten what we were taught. The greed of some is pushing them to lumber in the forest, selling trees for more income. Some are also simply trying to expand the size of their farm, and a lot of people are specifically planting yams in the forest as it's the best place for them to grow.

Luckily, these changes are too recent to affect me seriously, and anyway, I have other sources of income with which I can sustain myself. For example, in my spare time I weave Doum palm into long strips, which turn into rolls I can then sell for up to 6000Tsh! These rolls – when they’re assembled – make up the ground mats you can see for sale at the market. But this is quite recent... Soon after I came back from Mhonda, I got involved in the local church here in Pemba, and I ended up becoming a catechist, at first teaching young children about religion, but then increasingly I found myself working with young couples to marry, advising them on how to behave in accordance to god’s will when they are married... This wasn’t necessary before, as our traditional teachings made sure people behaved in a morally decent way, but today our old teachings have disappeared since the youth aren’t willing to listen to us anymore. The older generation are strongly discouraged by this lack of respect... When we were young we used to greet any elder with the term “shikamoo” which showed our respect, but in turn we are called “outdated” by the young people of today...

“These rolls of Doum Palm can sell for 6000Tsh!”

It’s a different world than the one we grew up in... Even when we try to tell our young girls not to run around with boys, they never listen. They don’t know that we have experience in such matters, and by the time they realise we’re right, it’s already too late and they have to stop their studies to come back home because they’re pregnant. After I became a catechist, the village office chose me to be one of the village’s midwives, I’ve seen all these changes happening, mothers becoming younger and younger... but this doesn’t affect my wage, I still get 3000Tsh for every baby delivered!





“Young girls don’t listen to us when we warn them about boys, they think we have no experience!”

Our traditional ways of life are slowly being replaced by modern ways, people – especially the youth – are going to the big cities and learning new things, and as they can’t make out the difference between what is right and what is wrong, they bring these new elements into all our lives, regardless of what others may think... But I’m not complaining against all aspects of modern life: gone are the days when we had to walk all the way to Pemba, today we have motorbikes to carry tired old woman like me! But I think it’s important that young people learn to respect and help not only their elders, but each other as well. They have to stay in school and learn because the world is constantly changing and we will not always be around to teach them.

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