

Kilimanjaro Land: An Environmental Burden

by Magdalena Ngalza

Kilimanjaro is a land of hard work. Both young and old, male and female, share the same belief in hard work and well-being although, at the end of the day, many women work harder and earn less.

With the little they earn and the many mouths they feed, women spend a lot of energy toiling the land. It is a land of hills and stretches of lowland, a land of women going downhill to farm at five in the morning and returning home in the evening.

I visited this land of contrasts where the rich are rich and the poor are poor. Women are proud of their distant patches of land, where they reap good harvests to feed their families. They sweat but smile, amidst a land shortage which forces a lot of them to live on 1/4 acre plots and farm several kilometers away.

Indeed that has become a way of life which seems acceptable where there are no options. The environment has posed the problem and society has passed it over to women. Seen from a distance, it is difficult to understand the burdens which the environment has imposed on women.

For Kilimanjaro two strong factors combine to make the environmental effect permanent. One is the customary regulation on land and the other is the shortage of land.

Kilimanjaro can be divided into three dominant ecological zones; the upper zone at 1,500-3,000 meters, the middle zone at 1,000-1,500 meters and the lowland zone at 500-1,000 meters above sea level.

People living in the upper zone grow bananas and coffee. However, they need to grow maize as well which is a second staple food crop, after bananas. In order to grow cereals such

as maize and legumes like beans, people have to walk long distances to the lowland zone where they can secure space to grow the crops. This farming movement is an annual activity.

The people in the middle zone have similar crops in their settlements as those in the upper zone but they also need to grow cereals in the lowland zone.

Moving up and down the long distances, carrying heavy harvests on the head, is a traditional responsibility of women. Of late, there has been an increase in the area of farm transport, which is available to those who can afford to pay; the rest walk. Women have to walk up and down daily because they have to attend to household chores, while men pitch temporary shelters and move leisurely between the farm down in the valley, and home up in the hills.

Furthermore, women are the major caretakers of the cows. Collecting hay and feeding them remains the most demanding, but respected, chore. Thus cattle, children and home make it necessary for women to shuttle up and down the hills. Women don't complain, although they are not rewarded, because they are fulfilling their traditional role.

In this system of moving, there is an ideological support by the people themselves. Some women we talked to expressed the necessity of living in the hills as a matter of custom that was unchallengeable.

The hills are cherished as a traditional home of long dead grandparents. So even those who live on the smallest piece of land still feel proud to have that piece.

Government efforts to convince those on the smallest plots to move to

In this system of moving, there is an ideological support by the people themselves. Some women we talked to expressed the necessity of living in the hills as a matter of custom that was unchallengeable.

the lowland zone, which has stretches of empty land, go unheeded. People who were resettled returned to the hills. Others refused any discussion altogether on migration which suggested moving outside the region in order to acquire more land.

The question "How can people refuse free land?" was asked by some of us who did not share the belief which puts clan land *Kihamba* as a matter of life and death.

Although by the end of 1984 many people were already seeing the logic of moving away from the crowded hills, their hearts were still there. Women did not play any role in determining whether or not to migrate. Women have no say in land matters, so the debate was the reserve of the patriarchs. The determinant for migration was not to reduce women's workload but to get more land, make more money and grow more food.

Indeed Kilimanjaro is crowded in varying degrees. For example, Moshi Rural District by 1984, had 234 people per sq. km. while Hai District had 76 people per sq. km. The acceptable standard is 60 people per sq. km. while the national average is 20 people per square km.

As you go downhill, overcrowding declines. Kilimanjaro women who heeded the government call to move to Morogoro are now happy in new environments where they can do the same work using less effort.

Source:

WEDnews, No. 1, 1990. P.O. Box 72461, Nairobi, Kenya, Tel. (2542) 562015, 562022, 562172. Fax: 562175 E-mail (gn:elcidwr).