

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES USED BY TANZANIANS

A PERSONAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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In Tanzania, we have adopted many sustainable practices out of necessity, not by choice. In my country, many people, including my family, struggle to meet our daily living expenses, forcing us to look for low-cost sustainable solutions in an effort to reduce our expenses, some of which are quite innovative. While these solutions have come about to reduce costs, many of these approaches also have the added benefit of having a low impact on the environment.

Agriculture and Livestock Farming

Subsistence farming, which involves owning or renting a small plot of land to grow crops, is very common in Tanzania. I am a subsistence farmer, and I grow bananas, maize, beans, and other vegetables. Subsistence farmers primarily grow crops to feed their families, but any leftover produce is sold at the market.



Figure 2: Maize husks stored for animal feed

Farmers, like myself, rotate our crops to make sure the soil is as **fertile** as possible. For example, we might plant banana plants and vegetables for one season, and then, in the next season, we would grow beans that put nitrogen back into the soil.

Animal feed

Nothing is wasted in my country. Maize (corn) is a **staple food** in Tanzania and in many parts of Africa. Once the corn has been harvested, the husks are removed and dried to be used as animal feed for cattle and goats (Figure 2).

Cow dung makes excellent fuel

Cow dung is high in organic matter, making it very flammable. Maasai are pastoralists, meaning that we herd cattle and goats. As a result, we have a lot of cow dung! Of course, dry cow dung is a renewable resource, making it an ideal fuel source. However, it is important that burning cow dung is done outside because it produces harmful gases such as carbon monoxide.



Figure 4: The market

Food

Many people buy their food at local markets because it is often cheaper. When food is grown nearby, it does not need to travel long distances to reach buyers. This helps keep transport costs low and reduces the amount of greenhouse gases released during transportation, making locally grown food a more environmentally friendly choice.

Given that the food at the market is fresh, it doesn't need to be wrapped in plastic, which is important because our landfills are full and our waste management systems have difficulty coping with the waste generated by people (Figure 5).



Figure 5: The rubbish truck

Our Low Carbon Lifestyle

Most Tanzanians, like myself, have a low carbon footprint. I don't own a car, so I use public transport to get around. My home has two rooms — a bedroom and a living room. There is one tap, an outdoor toilet, and a shower for the compound that I share with other households. To have a shower, I first need to heat the water over a fire, as water isn't plumbed into the shower. Like many others, I don't own a fridge or other kitchen appliances, so my energy use is very low.

Although we are used to it, living a low-carbon life is challenging. It means that we have to shop very regularly because we don't have room to store much food or have a fridge to stop it from going off. Without appliances and hot water, it takes us longer to cook food and clean up. We can't have many possessions because our houses are very small.

Living sustainably without a fridge

Many Tanzanians live without a fridge, so this controls what we eat. We eat a lot of dried sardines and beans. Eating meat such as beef or goat is reserved for special occasions, and we **slaughter** the meat ourselves. Without a fridge, the meat has to be eaten all at once, so family and friends are invited to share in the feast. We also eat every part of the animal, such as the intestines, heart, and liver. We don't waste anything.

We have a plentiful supply of milk from goats and cows, so to prevent milk from spoiling, we **ferment** it. Firstly, the milk is boiled to kill potentially harmful bacteria. We then leave it in a container for bacteria to break down the milk, making it sour. Fermented milk is cooked with beans to make traditional Maasai foods.

Biodegradable crockery

The gourd tree is a native tree in my country. It produces very large fruit, which can be almost a metre in length! The bottle gourd tree produces fruit that can be eaten, but it can also be dried and hollowed out to make a container. The gourd containers might



Figure 5: Gourd fruit

be used to eat ugali, a stiff porridge-like food made from maize, while Maasai people traditionally use gourds to store milk. Some tribes even make their own cooking pots from mud!

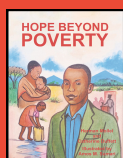


A Maasai warrior wearing traditional shoes.

Did you know?

Maasai Shoes

Maasai shoes are an excellent example of how waste materials can be reused to create something that is highly functional. These open shoes are made from old tyres, which are highly durable and can be used in any terrain. The open style suits the warm climate. They can be worn through water, which drains away quickly, and the tyre tread provides grip over slippery surfaces. They are thick enough to provide protection when walking over rocky areas and are comfortable enough to run in to chase cattle. These shoes are very cheap to produce and, of course, help to keep tyres out of landfill.



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Images courtesy of Catherine Duffett

