



Newsletter: April 2010 Douglas McFalls

USA: P.O. Box 45751 – Seattle, WA 98145 Tel. 206.227.0082

Tanzania: P.O. Box 410 – Mtwara, Tanzania

Kenya: P.O. Box 142 – Loitokitok, Kenya

Email: Douglas@ADEAAfrica.org

www.ADEAAfrica.org

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Yikes! Did I really let three months slip by before sending out another email. So sorry!

Since leaving the Maasai I've return to Mtwara to prepare and implement our MaKuYa exhibition in Dar and prepare for the festival in late July. I see this is lengthier than a truly strategic newsletter, but I hope you enjoy and learn from it. As for me, I am well and blessed with too much on my plate. I am weighing (and praying) about what is the best plan of action for me after the festival is over. Please read on and enjoy learning a little about village life in Tanzania.

MaKuYa
2010

MTWARA
TANZANIA




Traditional Performing & Cultural Arts Festival
Tamasha la Ngoma za Utamaduni



30 July - 1 August
The Boma Stadium, Masasi, Mtwara
10 am - 6 pm

Vikundi vya ngoma kutoka makabila matatu makubwa ya mkoa wa Mtwara yaani. Wamakua, Wamakonde, na Wayao. Pia, michezo na maonyesho ya bidhaa zenye asili ya Tanzania.



Traditional dance performing troops from the Makonde, Makua and Yao tribes of Mtwara, Tanzania. Also games, exhibits of traditional culture and products from Tanzania.



MaKuYa in Dar
28 May -12 June 2010

Alliance Française, Dar es Salaam

Exhibition showcasing traditional tribal culture, including masks, artifacts and extensive interviews with Makonde and Makua elders

The centre for African Development through Economics & the Arts
tel: 0784 503 076 / 023 233 4427
makuyafestival@gmail.com
makuyafestival.blogspot.com

“MaKuYa in Dar”



From May 28 – June 12 ADEA hosted our second ‘MaKuYa in Dar’ exhibition. This event allows us to showcase the cultural work we are doing in southeastern Mtwara to promote and preserve the cultural heritage of the area. This year’s MaKuYa in Dar proved to be a great encouragement to

the ADEA/MaKuYa team in many ways. The response from the visitors was very positive. Tanzanians expressed their excitement in learning many things about their own people and culture that they did not know. Families enjoyed the interactive nature of the displays and artifacts. And international visitors were delighted to find such an informative and interesting display of artifacts, images and explanations of traditional Tanzanian life. The addition of the short “How the Makonde and Makua Used to Find a Spouse” documentary was of particular interest with many visitors encouraging us to produce a documentary.



There were several special visitors who will play a roll in the expanding work of MaKuYa: The Regional Commissioner of Mtwara, and the District Cultural officer of Masasi (the host town of this year’s festival)

have expressed the importance of establishing similar permanent

museums in Masasi and Mtwara districts. A New York City professor may borrow some of our pieces for a 2012 exhibition on African figurative art. A British journalist, experienced in producing radio programming, is helping Philipo Lulale to put a program proposal before the BBC. Two Norwegian members of SAMP (the intercontinental museum network) have given us their contact for possible future sharing of ideas and resources. And a staff member of the National Museum of Tanzania joined these women and was pleasantly shocked and complimentary in finding such an exhibition in Tanzania.

One of our great discoveries was our own team member’s, Dominic Chonde’s, natural gift and passion to be a museum guide and curator. This has opened the door to the viability of establishing a cultural museum in Mtwara that will be successfully managed and cared for.



Wild Foods “If you want to know what is safe to eat, watch the monkeys” - A very intense Rat Trap

Documentation of the Stories, Traditions and Experiences of the Elders:

The joy in seeing these elders animated and delighted that someone cares to hear their stories and document their culture is, for me, the most rewarding aspect of this project.



Why this project:

Few regions of Africa have been untouched by the outside world, even fewer have populations still living that can remember life with minimal foreign influences; but Mtwara, Tanzania is one such place. The reason for this might be explained by the late development of the region because of the German and Portuguese desire to maintain a “buffer zone” between their colonial holdings, and thus avoided development along the shared, Ruvuma River border. It could also have been due to the inhospitable climate, malaria and poor farming conditions that discouraged the settlement of European settlers; or possibly the mythical fierceness of the Makonde people. Whatever the reasons, Mtwara’s late development has left it with a rich reservoir of empirical knowledge of a “purer” African life and traditional culture in the minds of its elders. Some of these elders are old enough to remember life prior to woven textiles, corn and matches. There are countless stories on how life was lived and perceived; unique, not just from tribe to tribe, but village to village. Their perceptions on birth, death, marriage, pregnancy, courtship, superstitions, and the power of witchcraft provide an intriguing and ethnologically important alternative perception of life. Practices related to medicines, food, illness, dance, music, storytelling, and justice also have interest and shape their unique identity. But if this information remains undocumented, it is lost forever when that generation passes away.



Philipo Lulale (ADEA Co-Director) & Daudi Makiwa (My “son”)

The Not So Ordinary, Ordinary: Artifacts

Many of the life artifacts of the Makonde and Makua are not in themselves so exceptional: a gourd bowl, a clay water pot, a bracelet woven of tree bark. But the richness is found in the meaning attached to an item be it a magical charm that protects a child from evil spirits, a seat or object of symbolic honor to a leader or expectant mother, their connections to rituals meant to bring health to a person, protection from evil, or an object to mark an event. Our interviews have helped me to understand that these seemingly “simple” people have created an intangible culture that is not “simple” at all.



Wild beans collected when food stores are low



Water gourds for transport



Makua Clan leader (Mwenye) funeral bed and bark wrapping cloth



Makonde sculpted water pot for the husband



Ebony hammer for making bark cloth



Metal stringed wood and gourd Bango (likely distant relative of the American Banjo)



Starting fire with sticks



Grass Bracelets

Below are a few of the display tags from the exhibition:

MRIPWI - PROCREATION TIMER - NKOLOLA: (Makua)

This piece of wood was used as a measure of time.

If a married couple fails to produce children, an approximately 1.5 meter length branch is cut from Mripui tree and presented to the wife. She is to burn the end of this wood in her normal cooking fire until it is finished (approx. 3 months). If at the end of this period, the wife still fails to conceive, the marriage is dissolved. It will be assumed that the man is unable to impregnate the woman and she is free to re-marry without fear of stigmatization.

Mripwi ni mti ambao ulikuwa unatumika wa wachumba wa kimakuwa kama kitimo cha kumpima ndoa yao.mti unakuwa 1.5m kila wanapopika jikoni wanautumia mpaka unaisha.ukiisha bila wanamke kuwa mjamzito ndoa inavunjika.inaonyesha zaili mwanaume anauwezi wa kumpa mimba mwanamke, na mwanamke yuko uhuru kuolewa na mtu mwingine.



IKALI - WATER GOURD OF A INITIAL PREGNANCY - KATA:

This gourd (along with a necklace) is presented to a girl/woman who is experiencing her initial pregnancy. She, and she alone, is to use this gourd for drinking water until the child's delivery. These two items are presented to the girl by her grandmother (or another elder woman) at a special morning party attended only by women who have been pregnant themselves. The event consists of singing and also birthing exercises that the expectant mother will practice until the delivery time.

Along with receiving these items, the girl's head is shaved. After the event the expectant girl is to stay near her home and not to socialize with anyone other than close family members until the birth. After the child is born it is given the gourd to play with (and destroy). The necklace is buried with the umbilical cord and the hair from the child's initial haircut.

Kata ni kikombe cha kitamaduni ambacho mwanamke aliyepata mimba ya kwanza kwa ajili ya kunywa maji mpaka atapo jifungua upewa pamoja na shanga. Upewa kata na shanga na mama yake au mtu mzima katika jamii na ufanyika sherehe ambayo udhuriwa na wanawake ambao ni waja wazito. kuna kuwa na nyimbo pamoja na mazoezi ya kujifunga ambayo mjamzito atafanya mpaka wakati wake wa kujifungua ukifika. kisha mwanamke mjamzito ukatwa nywere zake. baada ya sherehe kuisha mwanamke mjamzito halusiwi kuwa na jamii anatakiwa kuwa kwao mpaka atakapo jifungua. baada kujifungua mtoto anapewa kata kucheza nayo na kuiharibu. shanga na nywere kutoka kwa mtoto na kitovu ufukiwa chini.



MWAU - KATA - WATER GOURDS:

These small gourds were used for drinking water (and occasionally ladling it, though they are small). In some villages there are gourds for men and others for women. The women would drink from a half gourd, shaped like a bowl. The men drank from gourds like this one, with handles. (Hmmm? They wouldn't tell us why, but they did blush).

Hiki ni kibuyu kidogo amacho hutumika kwa kunywa maji ya kunywa (katika matukio muhimu, ingawaje ni kidogo). Baadhi ya vijiji vibuyu hivi vipo kwa wanaume na wanawake. Wanawake vibuyu vyao ni nusu na vina muonekano kama bakuli. Vya wanaume ni virefu na vyenye mshikio. Ni aina nyingine ya upawa unaotumiwa na watu wote.

MWAPU – LARGE CLAY WATER POT - MTUNGI:

Used to store and transport water.

A SYMBOL OF DEATH: On rare occasions when participating in the two to three month Makua circumcision ceremony, a boy might die. It was only on the concluding day, when the families came to collect their sons that a family would be informed of the child's death by someone bringing a Mtungi full of water and breaking it in front of the parents.



MBUA - SURGICAL KNIVES - MVERE: (Makua)

These sharp reeds are used for cutting the umbilical cord of a newborn. After 3-7 days the remaining cord attached the child's stomach is removed. A respectable elder woman or a midwife keeps the Mbua. This item is kept secret, and is an item not to be shown casually. These knives were given to us after the approval of the Mwenye (clan elders) as our intent is to educate and document a wide variety of aspects of their culture. The fabric kept around the case is used to tie the umbilical cord. The umbilical cord is kept by the child's maternal grandmother. After forty days, the child's hair is cut. The hair and the umbilical cord are then secretly buried by the bibi (grandmother) on the family home grounds. They believe that this will cause the child, throughout his or her life, to yearn for their home.

Spiritual Note: How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and strong, because someday in your life you will have been all of these. - George W. Carver

Douglas

PS: I made a quick visit to the Maasai schools during the refreshing visit of my nephew and niece on their way to the World Cup. Though the challenges of spaces remain – the teaching was very strong and encouraging!