

Ox-plows and tractors

AS LONG AS ANYONE CAN REMEMBER, we have tilled the fields in our village with hand-hoes. Animal traction, in the form of ox-plows, is a more recent practice. Oxen reduce the drudgery, but they are worth the investment only if they make the land more productive. They pull a disc plow or weeder, and when these break, it takes a blacksmith to repair them. We do not have a blacksmith in Kambi ya Simba.



We like tractors very much, on the other hand. Ten farmers in our village own tractors at this time. They were fortunate enough either to secure a tractor loan from the Tanzanian government or to reap several large harvests in a row. The government also gives loans for tractor repairs. This shows foresight. It can cost as much money to maintain a tractor as to purchase one.

Filimini Bura Hayshi and his brother bought a Massey-Ferguson tractor in 1995 for 2.5 million shillings (roughly \$4,000 USD in '95). They have turned it into a business:

We charge to plow fields and carry loads, to transport supplies from nearby villages or wood to build houses. Last year, we charged 12,000 shillings (\$12 USD) to plow an acre. Customers come to us; we never have to advertise. This year, with the price of oil higher, I think we will have to raise our price. Still, everyone benefits from our tractors. That is what people say.



Even when aided by animals or tractors, plowing, weeding, and harvesting are hard work. Some people in our village say the labor keeps them young. Others say it makes them old.



A bumpy ride

IN OUR VILLAGE, OUR FEET CARRY US EVERYWHERE. Kilometers and kilometers of dirt paths criss-cross our land. The north end of our village stands at 1,800 meters (5,906 feet), the south at 1,300 meters (4,265 feet). More small valleys than you can count lie between those two points. Walking means going up one hill and down another. Everything slopes, including our fields. We know our footpaths by heart. At night, especially at the full moon, we find our way by a bend in the path, a silhouette of trees, a maize field.



Bicycles also provide transportation, for those who can afford one. They are a prized possession. There may be as many as 100 bicycles in our village; it is difficult to keep track. You will see few females riding bicycles, but we suspect that will soon change.

Wilfred Maho, a farmer and bicycle owner, says:

I dreamed of owning a bike for several years. Last year my crops made me lucky and I saved the money I needed. I searched the streets and shops of Karatu for the right bike, not brand new, not old, one as strong as me. The bicycle I found may not be

perfect, but it makes me happy. When I can, I give other people a ride. The rider sits crossways on the bar in front of the seat, getting off to walk if we come to a hill. I will tell you this: If you ride a bike in Kambi ya Simba, you must know how to patch a tire.

Transportation out of Kambi ya Simba takes patience. Ruts and stones cover the dirt road that connects our village to Karatu, nineteen kilometers away.

A *dala dala* (public bus) makes two trips a day. Passengers of all sizes, vegetables, boxes of supplies, sometimes live chickens—they form a big jumble, one on top of another. The overflow, including humans, joins the luggage on the roof. Most times the trip takes an hour, longer when the bus breaks down.

In 1996, Tanzania had an average of one motor vehicle for every 1,000 inhabitants. The number has increased a lot since then, but it is still low by most counts. Our village of 5,000 has eight vehicles, all of them with four-wheel drive. We have five motorcycles, too. In March and April, the rain makes the dirt road between Kambi ya Simba and Karatu impassable except by foot. Our shoes sink deep into its mud.

Wireless

ELECTRICITY REACHES LESS THAN 10 PERCENT of Tanzania's population. In rural areas, that drops to almost zero. In our village, four small generators



provide all the electricity we have. We run them until they die. They lead short lives.

Yet almost 20 percent of our villagers now own mobile phones (*simu*). Farmers with crops or livestock to sell in markets outside Kambi ya Simba call ahead and find where they will obtain the best price. “It puts me in front,” one farmer says. Our teachers use their mobiles to communicate with each other, with families and friends living elsewhere, and with the world beyond.

In 2003, about 6 percent of Tanzanians had access to a telephone, and 70 percent of these used cellular phones.

Lazaro Xumay Gidri has found a way to link a generator to digital technology and make money:

I bought a generator in Arusha for 250,000 shillings (\$250 USD), along with a satellite antenna, television, VCR, and two fluorescent lights. I set everything up in a room in

the center. For 300 shillings (30 cents) people can charge their mobile phones. At eight in the evening, people come to watch the news on satellite TV. They pay 100 shillings (10 cents) for ten minutes of news.

With the VCR, I show American action movies and movies from Nigeria. I charge for that, too. For football games, the cost depends on the stakes, from 200 to 300 shillings per game. Fuel for the generator costs me 2,000 shillings (\$2) a day.

In much of our country, the world of electricity and digital technology still seems far away. Firewood accounts for 92 percent of the nation's total energy consumption. Kerosene lamps provide the light for our village.

Solar energy, we are learning, may one day meet our needs. We just acquired a small solar battery, which powers one light bulb in an office in the village center.





Made by hand

MOST PEOPLE in our village just want enough. The market for fancy goods does not exist. We have three carpenters, each with an apprentice. That is plenty, because we do not have much furniture. A table, a few chairs and benches, a bed frame or two—our homes do not have space for more than this.

We have rope makers, too, and they do a steady business. They weave sisal and fiber from leaves into thick coils. We use rope to tie livestock to trees or to tether animals as they graze. A good rope for livestock lasts six months. The rope we use for tying firewood lasts a year.

Making clothes on foot-powered sewing machines gives the most opportunity for business here. In our village, twelve women do the sewing, stitching mostly female clothes. If you have seen our *kangas*, the cotton cloth Tanzanian women wear for skirts and tops, you know how much bold patterns and bright colors mean to us. Even the pleated skirts of our school uniforms are bright orange.

In cities like Arusha, males dominate the sewing business. They set up shop on the



sidewalks, making men's trousers and jackets in full view. They sell what they make in open-air markets, competing with vendors selling *mitumba* (used clothing).

Paskalina William has owned a sewing machine for two years. She sells dresses in a *duka* in the village center:

To become a seamstress, I went to vocational school in Mbulu for a year. I buy fabric from special stores in Arusha, not from the street stalls that sell common cloth. I make clothes for girls and women. I sew everything from *sari za shule* (school uniforms) to wedding gowns. Some clients prefer a white gown, others prefer colored.

I follow patterns that I keep in a notebook, but sometimes I create my own design, from pictures in my head. The money is good. When a dress I sew makes a woman feel special, that is good too.

Singing and dancing

IN JOY OR SORROW, WE AFRICANS SING AND DANCE. Our adult choir, *kwaya* in Swahili, performs as often as it can. "We sing for our hearts," one member



says. They sing and dance with a purpose as well—to educate, uplift, inspire, and warn. One song they perform is called "*Historia ya Ukimwi*." It tells how HIV/AIDS came to Tanzania from two Ugandan businessmen, and how it affects our families and society.

Like the adults, we sing for our hearts too. This year, our school choir won first prize at the district choir com-

petition. We beat 50 competitors, many from schools larger than ours.

As much as we like making music, we like listening. Day and night, music from battery-operated radios drifts from a house here or there or from a *duka* in the village center. The sounds of *Bongo Flewa* (Tanzanian hip-hop), *Juma Nature*, or religious hymns tell you who is controlling the radio dial. At school, we listen to the latest songs whenever we can. We dance a lot, and some of us rap.

John Elibariki, a student at our school, wants to be a musician. He enjoys hip-hop but also sings in the school choir:

Our choir, *ukwata*, practices after school for several hours, five days a week. For the district competition, we prepared two songs. The first was the national anthem, “*Wimbo wa Tajifa*,” which we performed as a church hymn. The second, “*Sikieni Watu Wote*,” is an educational song. It tells the dangers of AIDS, alcohol, and drugs. It begins with the word “*Sikieni!*” (“Listen!”)

For musical instruments, the village keeps two guitars and twenty drums spread out among our three churches and school. Some people also play homemade drums.

