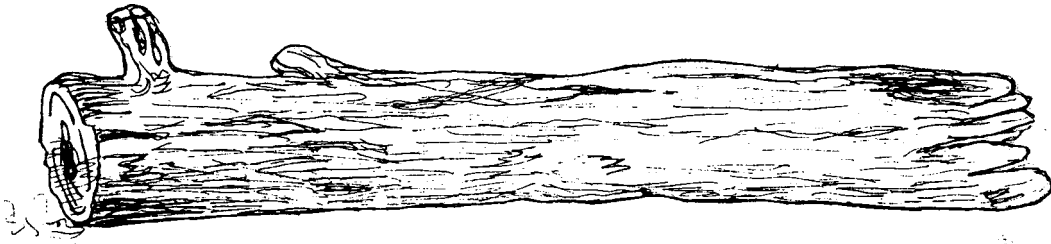


Appendix G

Tradition is like wholesome hardwood. Whether we like it or not, it is always there; culture carved out of nature, carried over from the past, placed in the middle of peoples lives. Hundreds of year-rings of learning passed through its roots. Layer on layer of survival embedded in its trunk.

Tradition is a log - **MAGOGO**



and the elders are sitting on it - **BAGOGO**

is there among the Sukuma people as they are among other peoples. The elders are there alive and talking, worrying about their children and their childrens children - and about the ancestors, of course. Is this romanticism? There they are the old ones, a little forgotten by the gleaming modernity, a little hurt and we, we have made mistakes.

Do we still believe we must destroy the past to be able to create a future?

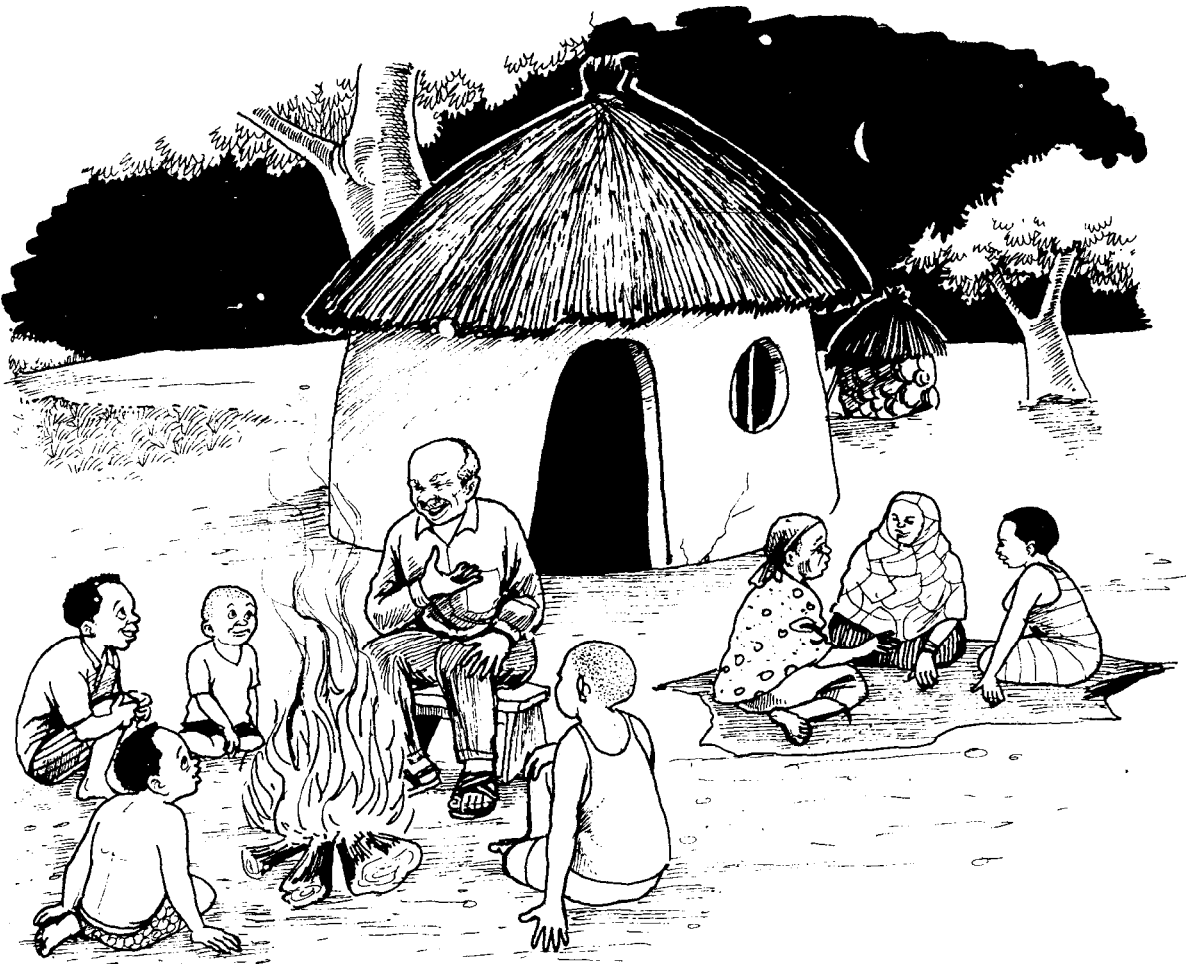


SHI KOME

means in daily parlance among the Sukuma: "The teaching of the elders around the fire." The children of the family and other close relatives met in the evening to discuss important issues and seek advice from the elders. The father and the grand father talked about the knowledge and customs of the ancestors. The women were gathered in a group close by and voiced their concerns. This is how the youth were taught about the tradition of the land through stories and proverbs. How to do good deeds and avoid the bad ones. If a youth had done something wrong he would confess his case and ask his father for forgiveness and blessing with these words:

unilange, unibegeje buhubi wane
unibegeje chiza
"Teach me, correct my error,
correct me well!"

Do we feel so superior, so modern, that there is nothing in it for us to be blessed by an elder.?





THE ELDERS -
ABLE
TO SUPPORT

THE SOCIAL NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

In kuleana we should endeavour to unmask the myth that knowledge is exclusively produced by an elite and remains its private property. Above all we should not think we are the sole proprietor of truth. It is fundamentally important for an activist organization to recognize that knowledge is socially produced and especially knowledge for participatory action and change. Everybody is involved in producing the knowledge needed through their work and application of skills. It was Gandhi who so clearly said, "There is as much brain in the hand as in the head."

Our plan aims to include the local communities in and around Mwanza in a dialogue on the issues of children's rights and child rearing. In so doing we should accept that it is in the nature of participation that we may have to change our ideas as the process evolves.

MODERNIZATION ERODES KINSHIP

Our premise is to work hard to gain insight in the cultural context, to improve the quality of our research and to entertain a more meaningful dialogue with the communities. Here, it is important to distinguish between cultural mores which give children an upbringing integrating them into their society (however reprehensible these may be to outside observers) and those practices which are outside the domain of acceptable child rearing. Every culture has and recognizes rules for what is acceptable child rearing in that culture. The purpose of understanding people's culture is not to find the right telephone number to their minds, but to recognize the human face we hope to engage through a respectful discourse.

Research describes how, over the last twenty years, modernization in East Africa has led to a decrease in the value of children and a consequent rise in child abuse and neglect. (1) This process has contributed to a disenfranchisement of the local community and an erosion of the kinship networks. Often it has meant undermining and diminishing the power women traditionally held while increasing women's workload. The father moves to town to find a job. The mother is left alone to till the soil and feed the family. Frequently she changes to a less labor-intensive crop, for example, from maize, which contains 12% protein, to cassava which contains only 1%. The smallest children are fed gruel of the protein poor cassava which quickly leads to malnutrition and misery. The overall situation has introduced new strains and conflicts in the family structure which have repercussions for the most powerless in the family - the children. The kin network that once served as a safety network for children is clearly weakened. Should not child advocacy endeavor to strengthen these weakening networks to help families through the transition of modernization?

In Africa generally, the arrival of a newborn is a joyful event and children are valued highly. One researcher observes: "In a traditional setting the mistreatment of children is rare. As a result, however, of increasing social

disorganization, parents tend to be less protected than in the past from emotional and physical stress, and instances of mistreatment particularly of neglect, seem to be rising. Why some parents care adequately for their children while others do not, is a complex question, some issues such as the breakdown of social and economic systems are more readily open to investigations than are psychological determinants"2) What is known is that the teachings and initiation into moral and spiritual values, avoidance and taboo practices, respect and social discipline, sharing and consensus making have always been strong in tribal societies.

IDENTITY AND SOCIAL NEXUS

Increasing attention is now being paid nationally and internationally to such issues as children's right to participation and to expressing their opinions freely. It is kuleana's experience that these issues are more complex than often anticipated. There is a need to gain greater insight in the social context of the child. In a sense the child develops within a social nexus, without which it is not a child. The CRC raises this broader issue in several articles. Article 8 points out the need to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her *identity*. Article 9 on education emphasizes the need for development of the child's personality and talents and repeats the point of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural *identity*, language and values ... and article 30 again stresses that the child should not be denied its right to enjoy his or her own culture.

We do not like to hear it, but is it not just this Rudyard Kipling says in his *Jungle Book* about MOWGLI, the child lost in the jungle: without its social nexus the child is nearly an animal?

All youngsters appear to experience the same. There always comes a time in adolescence when you hold your hand to your face and ask the mirror: who am I really? Where or what do I come from? We all recognize it, this strange - and sometimes frightening, experience. The child has a right to know who it is.

THE ELDERS AS A SOCIAL MIRROR

In these times of social disruption and the collapsing social support networks of kinship and clan, we could say it in another simple and practical way: The child has a right to grandparents - and uncles and aunts too.

The single rural mother with a husband in town is the one who can testify to the need for that. There are mothers who have barely filled forty and yet have given birth to 11 to 12 children. There was a time when the grandmother could take over the sulking toddler and suckle the baby for comfort too. And out of her face grew the lullabies, the songs and the stories and later the dances while aunts and friends of the family joined in the joy. Grandfather bent over all the events and out of his face came the proverbs and the rules of the tribal lore and Grandmothers face with all the wrinkles had endless riddles to tell. Slowly the small child discovers

itself in the expressions of the faces it is surrounded by and especially in the expression of the faces familiar to it, the nearest and closest faces. For the small child life is all in the eyes of these others. In this way *identity* and community survival was ensured from generation to generation. In Africa the arrival of a newborn has always been a joyful event. It is important that child rights advocates bear that in mind. As the elders reported during the Shi Kome: "When a newborn arrives the cooking fire is put out and a new fire is kindled and the new fire must not be put out before 8 days have passed when the newborn is introduced into the community.

The baby is not the private property of the parents but becomes part of the larger social entity. Through the coming-out ceremony, it is given the social gift of belonging to many. You are what you are in the social nexus, and in this circle of faces always around you the elders become the social mirror in which you are reflected, not as an individual, but as a person. Because, do not forget, an individual is what you are unto yourself, a person is what you are unto others. In a sense the elders are inside time and yet beyond. With the distance of age they are capable of reflecting the past and the present. For time is not a line with an arrows head. Time is a loop. We come from the past - zamani and we pass through the present - sasa - in a loop and then we return to the past. In this world-view the future - if there is a name for it - is not something in front of individuals, but within us as a social collective, including even the ancestors. Probably, there is some learning to take from that. There may be many reasons for why we should not romanticize the role of the elders, but nor should we refute the fact that they are still there - as grand parents.

One of the kuleana staff members attending the Shikome said it this way *"Elders have a big role to play in my life. Their life tells about mine and I get to know more about myself. Education about life has to start with the elders"*

THE ELDERS - ONE APPROACH TO CHILD ADVOCACY IN THE COMMUNITY

The development paradigm of modernization has never had much room for the elders, except frequently for derision. They have been the ignorant superstitious and intransigent ones, who did not understand the blessing of the new ways; local tyrants who held the population back. There is a big hurt left among the elders in Tanzania society. We should ask ourselves, how did it happen? It may be so that for the hurt to heal, tradition must be validated. It is the task of kuleana to strengthen civil society for the benefit of children. Our definition of civil society should it not include also the traditional structures, the social safety net the children need so desperately?

Only recently has there been a recognition that indigenous knowledge has a great contribution to make in environmental protection, agriculture or health to mention some disciplines, and the elders are now identified as

the custodians of that knowledge. There is good reason to believe they have also valuable experience in child rearing.

The paradigm of modernization has been operating also on another premise which has proven itself largely misguided, namely the idea that we cannot communicate without some form of media technology - more and bigger posters, educational films in colour, megaphones or 4 wheel drive information vans. The simple fact is that human beings do not communicate through media but through *trust*. Especially on the local level the issue is not which medium to use, but how do we establish a situation of trust! As so much media-research demonstrate to have effect even media depend on *trust* and *credibility* among the public. 3)

So, how should we describe the approach to child advocacy through the elders in the community? Some main points emerge very clearly:

a) Accept the elders just as they are, and respect them. Like ourselves they have their prejudices, but they must have done something right since they have survived long enough to talk to us.

b) let the elders organize the meeting themselves. They know very well how to do it, facilitation, procedures, rituals and all - regard them as an underutilized resource.

c) A small group of respected elders will perform well as steering group. Let them propose participants from a wide area within one days travel. Check the selection with the traditional leaders. The wider the area the more the message of the meeting is spread when the participants return to their homesteads

d) Budget with redundancy. If you plan for 60 participants you will experience that 90 arrive by word of mouth and let them be welcome. The steering group will sort out the hangers on.

e) Let the elders eat well, treat them to traditional food and beer. Inspire those who remember the old songs and dances. Enable yourself to listen and communicating well by validating peoples own way of feeling good and being happy.

f) Don't set your own agenda or a strict timetable, but give your main themes for the steering group to handle. The fundamental tenet of your meeting with the elders is not to teach or preach, but to ask for advice because you really need it.

For readers who want to pursue the issue of the elders and early education of children we have included a note for discussion in Annex I. Further, in Annex II is a note for discussion enlightening the issue of Sukuma child rearing. Annex III and IV contain the original guidelines and information points issued to staff members in kuleana.

DISCUSSION THE SUKUMA WAY

During our initial consultations with the elders it emerged quickly that they are well acquainted with organizing meetings effectively. In fact modern organizational development facilitators or consultants have

something essential to learn from them. The preparatory meeting of twelve elders commenced by itself as meetings do in the traditional Sukuma way. There is no chairperson who calls the participants to order. People are disciplined in meeting behavior by traditional habit and seat themselves casually around on stones or stubs. An elder person introduces the theme and delivers his introductory deliberation. Then he nods to or makes a movement of his hand in the direction of another person, who subsequently delivers his opinion and in turn points to a third person to participate in the deliberation. In this way the word is passed from one participants to another until everyone has spoken. This is a participatory procedure which keeps each person alert and attentive as nobody knows who will be pointed out for speaking next - and consequently it ensures that every participant has an opportunity to speak to the subject in a relevant manner. The group has little tolerance for persons who wander off into irrelevance. When everyone has spoken a particularly capable elder, generally accepted as a spokesman, sums up what has been said in a verselike, pointed manner. Participants agree to each point by unisonally exhaling a strong "iiih". When this ritual is over a consensus is considered established. A representative of a separate group of women was in the process called on to state their viewpoint.

MAKING PEOPLE FEEL AT EASE

If you want people to feel welcome and at home you do it their way. There was no public figure invited as guest of honor. The elders were told *they* were all together the guest of honor. People camped themselves around on grassy sports in the many traditional houses and pavilions at Bujora. Live animals, 3 bulls and 5 goats were brought in to honor the guests as custom is. A black goat was sacrificed early in the morning to bring good fortunes to the meeting. The food was simple enough, but it was the Sukuma favorite dishes. For breakfast *N'homba ya Bulegi*, warm gruel of sorghum, for lunch and dinner the standard fare was meat with *bugali* and *rice*. And for the breaks *walwa* - the traditional millet beer or sodas were much appreciated.

Throughout the program traditional songs were intoned by the elders. In the evenings there were a series of traditional dances from harvest dance to snake dance.

THE GREAT SHI KOME

Also the big meeting was characterized by the same smoothness of organization seemingly casual but in fact thoughtfully arranged. One hundred and fifty seven elders, whereof fifty were women, traveled the long distances to Bujora. That was fifty seven more than planned for, but they were, indeed, all very welcome. The connotation of "elder" stretches over a long timespan from 45 to 80 and beyond. The women were on an average younger. The participants came from many places in Sukuma land, such as Misungwi, Magu, . Kwimba, Sumve, Mwanza Vijijini, Bujora, Sengerema and Mwanza itself - all strategic for kuleanas advocacy work and particularly for reintegration of street children.

Physically the meeting was organized in a big workshop hall at Bujora with corrugated iron roof, not ideal in the hot sun, but providing enough shade to make it survivable. As a concession to modernity and for practical reasons the women were taking seats intermingled with men. For the same reasons participants were asked to seat themselves in groups district wise. At the end of the hall were seated the "*Bagogo*", the "men on the log", the five elders who represented the meeting authority and steering group. They were largely silent, but interjected the occasional comment when the discussion started heating up. The main theme, purpose and ground rules of the meeting was introduced by one of the elders. Later a kuleana elder introduced the more specific themes into the discussion. Largely the deliberations proceeded in an eager and good humoured way. People clearly knew that good and sincere advice was expected from them.

THE "*NINGI*" THE POET/SINGER WITH THE FLY WHISKS

The few times the hall became too heated and the statements bent towards bickering the Bagogo elders sent in the "*ningi*" - a poet/singer/dancer who picked up on the various statements and elaborated these into a singing/ridiculing poem appealing much to the laughter of the participants. As his verses progressed he developed a singing refrain which the audience quickly caught on to and soon he interacted rhythmically in song with the whole hall. He demonstrated in a remarkable way a facilitation method for recreating the mood of consensus in the audience.

THE "*NAMIJI*" THE TRUTHSAYER WITH HIS STAFF

Another facilitation technique the elders used to reconcile the audience. The "*namiji*" could also be called the consensus-maker. He had a perfect memory, repeating in a verse like manner the essence of the statements made, marking the rhythm with his carved staff - followed by the confirming "iiih" from the participants. Then he reiterated the consensus issues and literally couched the audience into a tuneful song giving rhythm and music to the mood of consensus. The exercise was repeated several times throughout the two day deliberations and each time with an equally profoundly moving effect. Kuleana staff members were awed by the incredibly precise memory of the '*namiji*' and the elegance with which he phrased his summing-up. There were many shining eyes. Consensus may be about creating rational agreement, but it is also about moving and being moved.