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Survival in the Cradle of Life

Africa is a continent notorious for political strife. From the earliest of its tribal wars to the partition of the continent by the great European powers, Africa has rarely been a place bereft of conflict. Historically, Africa has always been segmented, with a multitude of tribes and ethnic groups almost constantly at odds with one another. Even today, as Africa comes into its own as a group of self governing nations, the violence that has always haunted it threatens to counteract all efforts that have been made to sustain peace. The loss of life in Africa on a daily basis is truly staggering. In the Darfur region of Sudan, Arab militias roam the countryside killing men, women, and children of the non-Arab population indiscriminately; the genocides of recent years in Rwanda took thousands of lives, and hundreds of children are left without parents each day as the Aids epidemic rages out of all control. Frequent civil wars kill thousands and make stability in many regions all but impossible. Warlords with no regard for human life set up dictatorships in many countries and rule in appallingly brutal ways, condoning genocides and wanton slaughter to meet their goals. Droughts and desertification have made it tremendously difficult to have an organized agricultural infrastructure in many countries. Industrial pollution is regulated minimally, if at all, and many natural species of wildlife have been driven to extinction. In a place such as this, where both political and climactic events conspire against any sort of organized effort by African governments to provide relief, it is not surprising that many of the continent's people live in acute poverty. On the continent where human life evolved, Africa has, in many places, regressed to its most primitive form, and every day is a struggle simply to survive.

In spite of the chaos in much of Africa, some regions and locales have been spared the bulk of Africa's troubles. Regions have been left alone simply because of their remoteness and lack of tactical importance, while others have organized themselves into coherent countries with democratic governments able to solve internal problems by means other than force. Tanzania is one such country where political strife has been kept to a minimum, although it has by no means been absent completely. Over one hundred and thirty ethnic groups inhabit Tanzania, but over ninety-five percent of these different tribes are of Bantu origin. This common ancestral tie of much of Tanzania's population is one of the major reasons for its lack of internal unrest.

Tanganyika, which is the mainland portion of Tanzania, began its life as an established political region in the era of high imperialism of the early 1800's, when it was claimed as a colony by Germany and given the name *Deutsch Ost Afrika*, or German East Africa. The Germans discovered in Tanganyika a land of breathtaking geographic splendor. It is home to Africa's tallest mountain, Mt. Kilimanjaro, and both its largest and deepest lakes, Lake Victoria and Tanganyika respectively. The Germans celebrated Tanganyika's geological attributes not only for their beauty, but also for their strategic usefulness; Tanganyika's is extremely well physically defended, with high mountains and

huge lakes in the north and west, and formidable mountains in the south. Tanganyika's impressive natural barriers have always, to some degree, isolated it from external conflicts. Even with the advantage of isolation the Germans still had difficulty controlling the population. While the Germans may have had a lasting impact on the region, introducing Christianity and other western customs, the local population always resented their oppressive rule. Tensions between the native peoples and their colonial oppressors came to a head in the Maji Maji War, a brief but extremely bloody revolt in the south and east of Tanganyika. Native resistance to a German forced labor scheme fermented this uprising. The Germans were able to suppress this upheaval, but later lost their east African holdings at the end of World War I. Tanganyika became an English mandate along with several other German holdings in Africa. The English system of rule was indirect. They ruled through African leaders resulting in a situation that was far more palatable to the native population than the direct rule of the Germans. The British continued to rule Tanganyika until 1961 when it became the independent Republic of Tanganyika. In 1963, the Republic of Tanganyika merged with the small island nation of Zanzibar, formerly an independent sultanate, to form the new nation of Tanzania.

The present day economic situation in Tanzania is poor, with almost no utilization of its natural resources and no methods in place for doing so. Most of Tanzania's economy is based directly on agriculture. Eighty percent of the labor force work on farms, and the remaining twenty percent work in industry. The main industries in Tanzania are directly related to the processing of farm goods or production of light goods such as paper or clothing. Although agriculture accounts for more than eighty-five percent of Tanzania's exports, comprises over half of its Gross Domestic Product, and employs most of its population, only about four percent of the country's land is suitable for farming. The primary agricultural products of Tanzania are coffee, sisal, rice, cotton, tobacco, maize, wheat, and bananas; cattle, sheep, and goats are often kept on family farms to provide milk, wool, and meat. Only a few farmers grow cash crops such as tobacco, sisal, and cotton. Most of the country's rural farm families grow edible crops such as maize, wheat, rice, or bananas as well as several varieties of tuber or squash in the more arid regions.

Life for a subsistence farm family in Tanzania is challenging in many ways; the country's road system is in such disrepair that the main thoroughfare from the far north of the country to densely populated areas in the southeast is a modest paved road built over a hundred years ago by the Germans. Tanzania has only eleven paved airstrips and slightly over one hundred unpaved ones. This lack of infrastructure restricts trade and leads to further isolation of rural areas. Because farmers cannot trade for many necessary goods, family farms must become as self sufficient as possible. Most subsistence farmers grow only enough to survive; if they do trade, they do so in goods, meaning that they have no actual yearly income. In spite of this, estimates have suggested that a subsistence farmer in Tanzania may see less than one hundred U.S. dollars worth of goods in a year.

Farmers from different regions in Tanzania have vastly disparate ways of life because of the wide range of geographic and cultural conditions. This disparity is illustrated well by the range of staple foods for rural Tanzanian families. Common meals

for a rural family in Tanzania vary from region to region but would typically consist of the crop that a particular family grows. In and around the Lake Victoria basin and Mount Kilimanjaro in the north, bananas are the most commonly eaten food, and can be prepared several different ways. Near the coast of the Indian Ocean, rice is the predominant crop, and it is eaten for nearly every meal. In the northern highlands and far west of Tanzania, maize is the most common crop; it is typically roasted or ground to make corn meal. Throughout Tanzania, it is common for families to keep goats, sheep, and cattle, which they use to supplement their diets with milk and meat.

Despite this wide variety of traditional cuisine, the quantities of food actually consumed in a day are extremely meager by the standards of western countries. An average adult subsistence farmer in Tanzania may only be able to consume one thousand to one thousand five hundred calories per day, and members of poorer families might be lucky to obtain even a fraction of this meager proportion.

People of several different religions populate Tanzania. Thirty percent of the mainland population is Christian, thirty-five percent is Muslim, and thirty-five percent of the population holds traditional African beliefs. Over ninety-nine percent of the population on Zanzibar is Muslim. While the religion of subsistence farmers in different locales may differ, the normal family structure does not. Typical rural subsistence families are composed of large groups of extended family including the mother and father, their children, younger brothers and sisters who are unmarried, and older aunts or parents who are no longer able to work in the fields. Traditionally, the oldest son and his wife inherit the family farm, while the younger children typically must begin a new farm near the old one with their families. If land is scarce, then it is possible that the family farm will be partitioned among the oldest sons. The women do most of the manual labor in the fields while the men pursue trades or maintain the operating capacity of the farm by repairing broken implements or tending livestock. The children of a Tanzanian subsistence farmer are usually required to help operate the farm, leaving little free time for education. In fact, it is common for the children of rural families to have little or no formal schooling; if they are taught to read and write it is by older family members. Eighty-six percent of Tanzanian males and seventy percent of females can read and write their own language, which may be Swahili, English, or Arabic depending on the region. The average size of a Tanzanian farm plot is anywhere from nine tenths of a hectare to three whole hectares. Seventy percent of Tanzania's cropland is cultivated by hand; twenty percent is cultivated with the use of oxen or horses. Only ten percent of Tanzania's farmland is cultivated using tractors.

The greatest problem currently facing Tanzania is its almost complete lack of an efficient infrastructure. Regular travel to remote areas of the country on the extremely poor roadways is all but impossible. Several large rivers cross Tanzania, but marine trade routes in Tanzania are nonexistent. These rivers have always been more of a hindrance to trade than a boon; though many of them are large, none of them are navigable for more than a few miles at a stretch. Tanzania's entire fleet of oceangoing merchant ships consists of just eleven vessels. Almost all of Tanzania's maritime trade occurs at open air markets on the shores of its large freshwater lakes, and consists mainly of farmers using

personally owned small crafts to bring their goods to market. This system of trade is conducted mainly on a personal level with farmers hawking their goods in the streets or from their boats. In regions that border large bodies of water a farmer who does not have a boat is seriously disadvantaged to one who does, because they are unable to bring as many goods to market as quickly. Poorer farmers often use handmade reed boats or barges, rather than animal carts or other terrestrial means of conveyance, to transport goods to market. Marketplaces such as these often have no government regulation, and the sale of large quantities of illicit drugs is commonplace. Air travel is equally inefficient; the scarcity of airstrips capable of supporting large cargo planes severely restricts any possibility of air trade on an economically feasible scale. The majority of aircraft in Tanzania are small single engine airplanes designed to transport small amounts of goods, or several passengers over moderate distances. These planes must often touch down on flat areas of scrubland in lieu of runways, because the majority of villages do not have airstrips of any kind. The most efficient way to transport large amounts of cargo in Tanzania is by rail. Tanzania has two major railroads with several branches; both railroads run from east to west transecting the country and connecting the interior regions with the coast. Rural farmers are often unable to make full use of these railways, because they cannot make the long journeys to the train depots with all of their goods.

In spite of the isolation of rural communities, starvation is not common in Tanzania. If a particular household has a poor crop or other misfortune, and is unable to provide for all of its members, local relatives and neighbors can usually be counted on for support. Most rural communities are extremely close knit; nearly all families are related by blood or marriage. These communities are, however, very vulnerable to the ill effects of crop diseases and catastrophic weather conditions such as drought. When tragedies like this occur, and an entire village or region's food supply is destroyed, rural communities cannot easily obtain outside aid because of their inaccessibility. As a result of this, entire communities may suffer severe famine or starvation, because they either cannot be reached, or relief organizations are unaware they are in need of aid.

The continuing decay of the internal infrastructure has led to ill effects for the people and environment of Tanzania. Subsistence farmers and the rural poor live in primitive and unsanitary conditions; mud huts are the most common dwelling places in the hot, dry regions of the nation's interior. Sewage management in the majority of the country's rural areas is primitive at best, often consisting of a simple hole in the ground or a stream. These unsanitary conditions have resulted in harmful effects on the health and well being of the human population, such as increased numbers of troublesome *Tsetse* flies. These insects often carry African sleeping sickness, a disease that can be fatal.

In addition to these biological threats, climate change caused by human activities has further harmed Tanzania. Desertification of the fertile northern highlands has begun to occur due to improper agricultural practices, primarily soil depletion and overuse of pesticides. This reduction in usable farmland has been disastrous for farmers, causing many to lose their land, and forcing them to move to the urban areas, where conditions

are extremely poor. If this destruction of farmland is not stopped, it may prove to be more than the fragile agriculture based Tanzanian economy can bear.

Roads are the key to Tanzania's infrastructure. Marine transportation alone would never be able to reach enough people to set up a workable large-scale trade network. An aerial trade network could be put into place, but it would be far too costly for the limited funding available to the present Tanzanian government, as would an extensive system of railroads. Even though the government of Tanzania recognizes the need for a well-organized internal trading network, they have been unable to divert enough funds to begin and sustain a real road repair and maintenance program. A private sector company, the Tanzanian Roads Agency, has been contracted by the Tanzanian government to perform the limited amount of road repair, maintenance, and construction that actually does take place. As a result of the very limited amount of repair and maintenance being done to the rural road systems of Tanzania, the infrastructure is simply becoming more and more degraded. This steady decline has resulted in further isolation of subsistence farmers and their communities with all its inherent pitfalls. The decay of the road system changes life little for subsistence farmers; they continue to rely only on themselves and their communities, and will continue to do so until their level of contact with the outside world is increased dramatically, an outcome that seems highly unlikely to occur in the near future.

There are many reasons that a more efficient system of transportation would be worth the cost in labor and currency. With a better system of roads, long distance land trade by semi-truck would become possible; internal and external exchange of goods would flourish. Open access to rural areas would allow the harvesting of previously unexploited natural resources such as gold, diamonds, and natural gas, all of which Tanzania has proven deposits. This utilization of new resources would spur economic growth and allow further strengthening of the internal infrastructure and possibly stimulate large amounts of international trade. The effect on the country as a whole would be extremely positive; poor or subsistence farmers would also benefit greatly from economic growth. If this economic stimulation is achieved, a prosperous Tanzanian government could finally administer to the dire needs of its poverty stricken citizens. A strong infrastructure would allow relief organizations from the Tanzanian government and other countries to easily access locations in need of aid. Long distance trade would allow farmers to replace their regional barter systems with official currency. The introduction of real currency into rural areas would benefit subsistence farmers by permitting them to make transactions over larger distances, and with people who have no use for the raw goods they produce. Non-regional goods and services previously inaccessible to subsistence farmers would finally become available. Farmers who had deposits of natural resources on their property could become wealthy and stimulate the economies of their communities when they invest money into their local systems. This economic growth would encourage surrounding countries to strengthen ties with Tanzania and become important trade partners. This could increase the demand for agricultural products, spurring both an increase in revenue for poor farmers and improvement of farm techniques that could stop, and even reverse, the destruction of arable land, as new income makes adopting these techniques possible for poor farmers.

On a continent riddled with strife, Tanzania is a rare example of a country that has not been plagued with civil wars and internal conflicts. Tanzania's only external conflict since its independence, a brief war with Uganda in nineteen seventy-nine, was handily won by Tanzanian forces, and helped instill a sense of nationalism and pride in its people. Tanzania has never experienced genocide or other major ethnic clash; its people are generally peaceful and welcoming toward strangers. Not only is Tanzania politically stable, it is geographically breathtaking. From the towering mountains and highlands of the north to the rugged wildness of the south, from the great lakes of the east to the beauty of the western coast, Tanzania is diverse and beautiful in many ways. With its abundant natural resources and peaceful population, Tanzania has the potential to lead east Africa, and indeed all of Africa, into a greater age of economic prosperity than was ever thought possible.

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