

THE DISCOVERY OF GAS AND OIL AND ITS IMPACT ON CULTURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES IN MTWARA REGION, TANZANIA

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Abstract

The mechanisms used to achieve advanced level of development would differ from one society to another. This depends highly on the available resources to spearhead the targeted development plans. It has been noticed that not every development strategy can be implemented without impacting other social spheres. It is on this ground that this article reflects on the impact of development projects on cultural heritage resources in Mtwara Region while focusing on the discovery of gas and oil in this region of South-Eastern Tanzania. The reason behind this interest is the fact that Mtwara Region is now emerging as one of the investment centres in the country due to the discovery and extraction of gas and oil. This article is a product of my PhD fieldwork which partly investigated the impact of the discovery of gas and oil upon cultural heritage resources in Mtwara Region of Tanzania. It is likely that a number of cultural heritage resources in Mtwara Region are going to disappear if rescue measures are not taken by cultural heritage stakeholders. Some of the factors leading to the deterioration of cultural norms and heritage resources could be directly attributed to investment projects that to a large extent are implemented without undertaking cultural heritage impact assessment (CHIA).

Keywords: *cultural heritage, cultural heritage impact assessment, conservation, gas and oil, local communities, development*

1.0 Introduction

The cultural heritage of a country constitutes what has been invariably categorised in numerous UNESCO documents as the cultural heritage or property of a country. The underdevelopment of archaeology in Africa has meant that the newly emerging discipline of cultural heritage management is also underdeveloped. The discipline aims at both the protection and preservation of cultural heritage and ensuring that the planning and undertaking of socio-economic development activities does not

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result in the destruction of both identified and unidentified cultural heritage resources (Mturi, 2005). Elizabeth Khawajkie, a UNESCO representative in the Division of Equality of Educational Opportunity and Social Programmes, once wrote, "Learning about past discoveries and advances is an essential factor in locating the present, in comprehending the interconnections between one civilisation and another, and in understanding contemporary world issues and problems" (Khawajkie, 1990:15). Sadly, however, this wisdom is seldom appreciated. What prevails instead is the fallacy that the past, as expressed in disciplines such as archaeology, palaeontology and history, is irrelevant to contemporary social needs and should therefore be given low priority by decision makers (Mapunda, 2005).

Development as a concept has been defined variably by different scholars. Walter Rodney (1976), for example, views development from three different levels. First, he views development at the individual level, implying 'increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well being'. Second, he views development at the social level, that is 'an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships', and third, he views development at the economic level, which happens when members of a given society 'increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment' (Mapunda, 2005). Development can also be defined as the modification of the biosphere and the application of human, financial, technical and other measures for the exploitation of living and non-living resources to satisfy human needs and to improve the quality of human life. The cultural heritage resource is one of the non-living and non-renewable resources that when properly managed, can be exploited by people to meet some of their basic socio-economic, ideological, spiritual and intellectual needs.

This article reflects on the state of cultural heritage resources amid unavoidable waves of globalisation, following the discovery of gas and oil in Mtwara Region. The treatises and sentiments contained in this article are basically the result of development projects taking place in Mtwara Region. These development projects are being driven mainly by the discovery of gas in Mtwara Region. My PhD fieldwork in Mtwara Region was partly to investigate the impact of the discovery of gas and oil on cultural heritage resources. Another point of interest in this study was the realisation that there was mishandling of cultural heritage resources, possibly leading to their ultimate deterioration.

Among the cultural heritage potentials of Mtwara Region include the Mikindani historical site, the colonial legacy histories (e.g. the colonial economy),

infrastructural remains such as the railway line from Nachingwea in Lindi to Mtwara port, Old Mikindani mini-port and other monumental remains such as the Mvita ancient settlement. There are also remains related to sacred places such as the *Limbende*¹⁸ ritual site in Nanguruwe Village, the Mozambique Liberation Movement legacies such as the Naliendele graveyard and camp sites. Other cultural potentials include live heritage resources such as *jando* and *unyago* initiations, traditional dances, ritual practices related to healing and offerings and the famous Makonde wood-carving art.

2.0 Geographical contextualisation of the study area

Mtwara Region forms part of the Swahili coast which also includes the off-shore islands of Comoro, Zanzibar and Pemba as well as northern parts of Madagascar (Chami, 2005; Horton, 1996). It borders Lindi Region to the north, Indian Ocean to the east and separated by the Ruvuma River from Mozambique in the south (Figure 1). To the west it borders Ruvuma Region. The region occupies 16, 729 sq. kms or 1.9% of Tanzania Mainland area of 945.087 sq. kms (Hardventure Tourism, 2012). Mtwara Region being part of Tanzania Swahili coast developed an urban civilisation probably from the 9th to 14th century (Chami, 1994; Karoma, 1996). The available evidence for such urban civilisation includes cultural material remains and documentary sources (Chami, 1994; Freeman-Granville, 1975; Ichumbaki, 2011; Masao, 2005; Gabriel Forthcoming). The documents such as *Periplus of Erythrean Sea*, Ptolemy's Geography Travellers' Report, and Kilwa Chronicle have been important sources for urban civilisation of the Swahili coast.

¹⁸ This is believed to be the ancestral spirit who protects the community from any danger. According to oral information this spirit visits the community in the form of a huge snake and lives in a specific site.

3.0 Legislation statements and the state of cultural heritage resources in Tanzania

The Eurocentric conception of cultural heritage management and conservation in Africa starts from the period of colonisation, during the 19th century. In 1863, when the colonial administration was established in Tanganyika (present Tanzania), the colonial governors were aware of the existence of the traditional management of intangible heritage sites. Traditional ways of managing these sites were seen as backward. The Western approach was given priority and regarded as natural, more advanced and therefore progressive (Bwasiri, 2011; Ndoro, 2001a). Scholars argue that the management of archaeological sites during the colonial period was mostly protective and administrative in nature. This approach to the management of archaeological sites ignored the role of the communities and community values associated with sites. Some scholars, e.g. Bwasiri (2011) and Ndoro (2001b) have argued that the pioneering of protective legislation did not aim at preserving the diverse African cultural heritage, but rather to protect a few sites that served the interests of colonialism.

However, there is enough and irrefutable evidence that cultural heritage management and conservation in Africa goes back to pre-colonial times. Ichumbaki (2011), Mulokozi (2005) and Ndoro (2001) have argued that heritage resources were very much valued and protected by using a series of taboos and restrictions. For example, many heritage resources of South Africa were enjoying much protection by local people under the guidance of kings. Cultural leaders or kings were responsible for not only taking care of cultural heritage resources but also using them for normal daily cultural practices. Despite the fact that those traditional conservation practices were assuming sustainability of heritage resources, the colonial government abandoned them resulting to resources deterioration (*ibid*).

In pre-colonial Tanzania, like in many other African countries, heritage resources management and conservation were done by using traditional practices or methods. These practices were either in the form of spiritual values or technical practices (Gabriel Forthcoming, Ichumbaki, 2011; Mulokozi, 2005). Spiritual aspects included specific beliefs or prohibitions which ensured that the site is protected from any activity that would destroy its authenticity. The colonial practice of cultural heritage resources conservation and management goes back to 1900s (Njombe, 1976; Kayombo, 2005). During this time some emphasis was put on

movable cultural heritage resources while giving less attention to immovable and intangible ones.

The efforts to conserve and manage monumental cultural heritage resources in Tanzania started in 1930s (Gabriel Forthcoming, Kayombo, 2005; Mturi, 1982). This was the time when the colonial government enacted the Monumental Preservation Ordinance. The Government of Tanzania enacted a law famously known as the *Antiquities Act No. 10 of 1964*. This Act which was later amended in 1979 and 1985 aimed to “provide for preservation and protection of sites and articles of paleontological, archaeological, historical or natural interest and for matters connected therewith and incidental thereto”. This Act has been considered by some scholars as the basic legislation for management, protection and preservation of both movable and immovable cultural heritage resources of the United Republic of Tanzania.

According to Mturi (2005) cultural heritage management in Tanzania is underdeveloped. This also applies to the sub-discipline of Rescue or Salvage Archaeology. This underdevelopment can be attributed to weak institutional framework and legal shortcomings or ambiguities. Conservation is basically aimed at the rational and sustainable exploitation of resources to ensure long-term survival and wellbeing of both present and future generations. Today, what is seen on the ground is quite different from what would be the expectation. The cultural heritage resources in Mtwara Region are facing substantial deterioration partly due to the discovery of gas and oil in the region.

4.0 Consequences of the discovery of gas and oil on cultural heritage resources

Some multi-national investors are scrambling to invest in Mtwara Region largely due to the discovery of gas and oil. Some construction works for investment projects are in progress including a gas processing plant at Madimba Village (Figure 2), the Dangote cement industry at Hiari Village, and many other economic investment undertakings that depend on gas. Many of the gas-related projects seem to cover large areas of land which are part and parcel of the local community's life history and cultural heritage. It is so unfortunate that local communities are obliged to shift to other areas to give way for these development projects. It has been the government's emphasis that plans are underway to make Mtwara Region one of the key investment centres in the country given opportunities opened up by the discovery of gas and oil. For instance, in his public address during the opening ceremony of the Dangote cement industry project, the Prime Minister Hon.

Mizengo Kayanza Peter Pinda emphasised that people should be prepared for the upcoming economic transformation in Mtwara Region¹⁹.

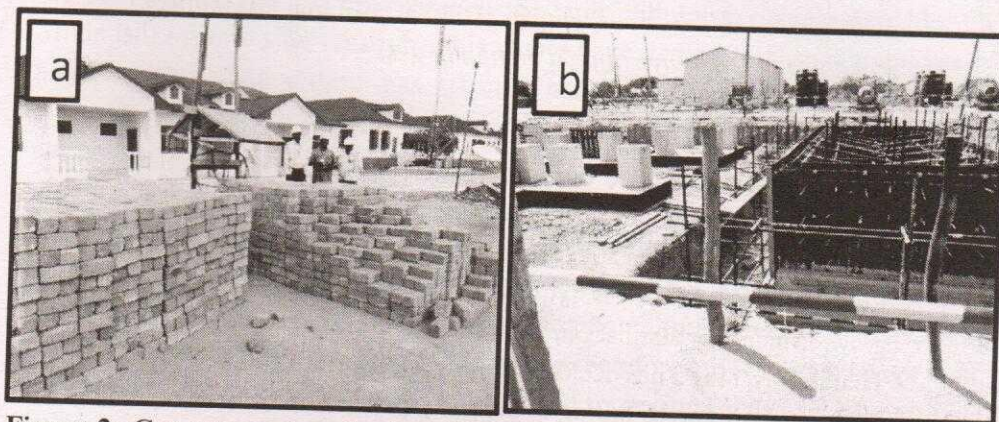


Figure 2: Gas processing plant at Madimba: residential area (a), and gas processing area (b)

It is very unfortunate that most of the projects being established in Mtwara Region provide insufficient consideration to the likely impact on cultural heritage resources. In other words, the cultural heritage industry does not seem to be a priority in the economic strategies. Instead, all the development plans underway, especially those related to gas and oil resources are undoubtedly a threat to cultural heritage resources. For instance, the gas pipeline from Mtwara Region to Dar es Salaam has affected some cultural heritage resources which are part and parcel of the local communities' life history. During this study it was observed that some graves were exhumed to allow for the passage of the gas pipeline (Figure 3). This exercise was done under the auspices of the Tanzania Petroleum Development Cooperation (TPDC). The exhumed dead bodies were re-buried in other areas as recommended by the owners of the graves. It was noted that the owners of these graves were given a compensation of Tshs. 150,000 per grave²⁰. One of the grave owners was asked to comment on the act of exhuming the graves and he had the following response:

Kimsingi hatufurahii kitendo hiki kwa sababu ni kinyume na utamaduni wetu. Kadiri ya utamani wa Makonde inakatazwa kufukua maiti. Tulipewa pesa kiasi cha Shilingi 150,000 kama

¹⁹ Prime Minister's speech during the inauguration ceremony of Dangote cement industry, on 2nd June 2013 at Hiari Village.

²⁰ Mr. Francis Mkuti, Personal Communication at Ziwani Village, on 12/08/2013

fidia kwa kila kaburi. Kila mwenye kaburi alitakiwa kufukua kaburi la ndugu yake. Kwa kuwa ni kinyume na utamaduni wetu hakuna aliyekuwa tayari kufanya hivyo. Ndiyo maana TPDC wameamua kuleta timu kutoka Dar es Salaam ili kufukua makaburi yote kwenye njia ya bomba la gesi²¹.

Translation: In fact we are not pleased following what they have done because it is contrary to our culture. According to the Makonde culture it is prohibited to exhume a grave. We were given money amounting to Tshs. 150,000 as compensation for each grave. Every grave owner was required to exhume his/her relative's grave. Since it is against our culture no one was ready to do this. That is why TPDC has decided to bring a team from Dar es Salaam to exhume all graves falling in the gas pipeline route.

Comments were sought from TPDC representatives on how the gas project was going to take care of cultural heritage resources encountered in their project area. Following is part of the conversation between the researcher and the TPDC officer:

***Researcher:** What do you normally do in case you encounter cultural heritage resources when laying the gas pipeline?*

***TPDC Officer:** We are not interested in cultural heritage resources. Our priority is gas and not anything else. So, whenever we encounter anything including those cultural heritage resources, we discuss and negotiate with the affected community on the required compensation and not otherwise. If those things are movable we compensate and remove them following any suitable procedure they suggest, just like what we are doing with the graves. What is important for us in this exercise is to maintain the gas pressure from here to Dar es Salaam.*

***Researcher:** Does it mean that if the gas pipeline were to pass through a monumental site such as the Mikindani historic site it would involve demolishing it?*

***TPDC Officer:** Definitely!*

²¹ Mzee Hassan Mbaraka Personal Communication, on 12/08/2013

It is obvious from the conversation with the TPDC officer that cultural heritage was being given less consideration compared to natural resources. It is lucky that the gas pipeline did not pass through the built cultural heritage assets like the Mikindani historic site; otherwise this would have damaged these monuments of historic value. The project has affected not only cultural landscapes due to clearance of the route but also local communities have been displaced from their cultural environment.

The impact of the discovery of gas and the economic expectations attributed to it are now obvious in some areas of Mtwara Region. For example, the influx of investment projects in Mtwara Region is affecting cultural heritage landscapes as most of these projects are industrial and would therefore cover large tracts of land. As a result, clearance of these areas has affected some ritual sites which have direct cultural connection to the local communities. Some of the local community informants complained that some ritual sites had been cut down by investors hence affecting the system of their ritual practices. There is also extensive demolition of monuments in the Mikindani historic site due to stone quarrying for commercial purposes (Figure 4). This is definitely due to construction of modern houses as a result of the new developments coming into the region, associated with the discovery of natural gas.

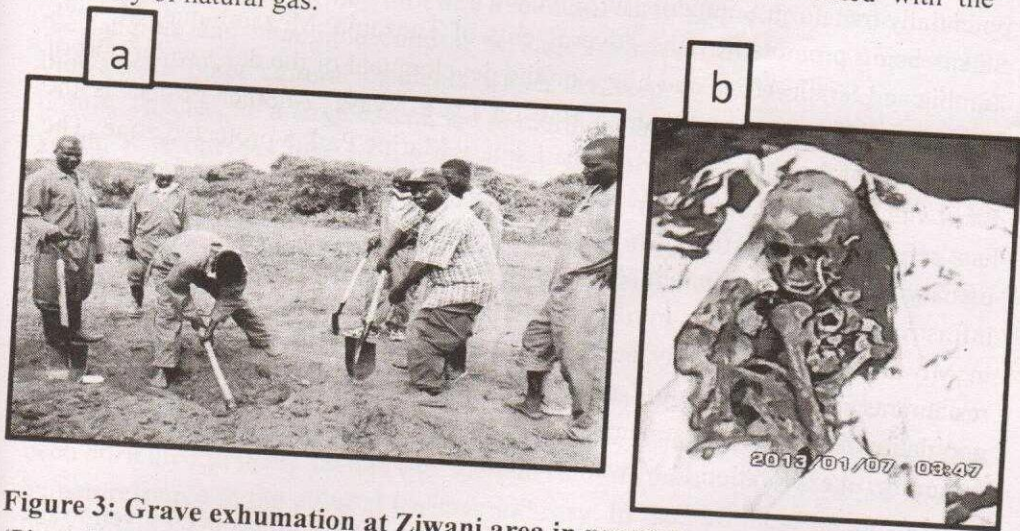


Figure 3: Grave exhumation at Ziwani area in progress

(Photo by the Author (2013))

- a) TPDC team exhuming a grave from the gas-pipeline route
- b) Human skeleton exhumed from a grave ready for reburial

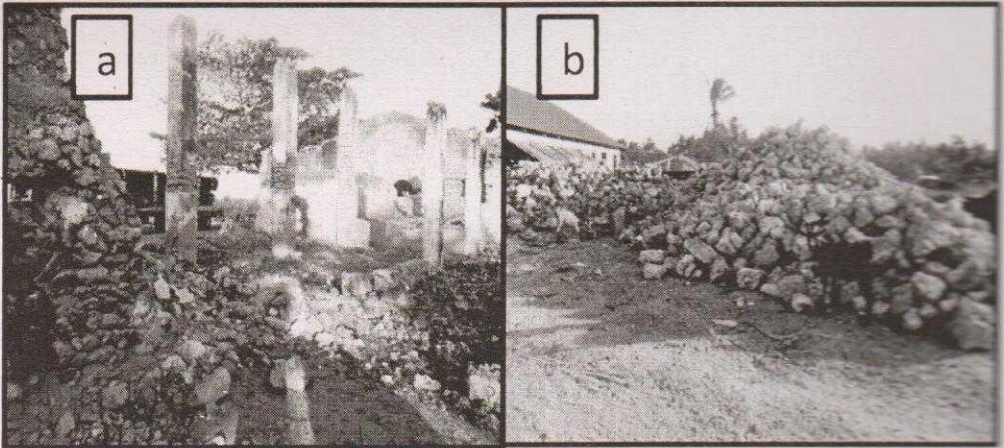


Figure 4: Stone quarrying in the Mikindani historic site monuments
(Photo by the Author)

Apart from its wealth in gas and oil resources which has created investment opportunities, Mtwara Region is becoming attractive to many other industrial investments. These include, as mentioned earlier, the Dangote cement industry, fertiliser industry, Mtwara Corridor Spatial Development Initiatives (SDI) aiming at promoting trade and investment in the region. The initiative is expected to potentially transform Southern Tanzania and adjacent Northern Mozambique. The SDI is being promoted by the governments of Tanzania, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia and South Africa and hinge on the development of the deep-water port of Mtwara and the road to Mbamba Bay on Lake Nyasa. Another project is the declaration of the Mnazi Bay Ruvuma Estuary Marine Park a protected zone. The Park which includes the last 45 kilometres of the coastline to the Ruvuma River has 11 villages bordering the Republic of Mozambique (Mnazi Bay Ruvuma Estuary Marine Park General Management Plan, 2005). There are many other infrastructural investments in response to the socio-economic growth taking place in Mtwara Region. Wealthy people are busy investing in hotels, guest houses, restaurants and transport of different standards to cater for the increasing population. All these investments come as a result of the discovery of gas and the on-going oil exploration in Mtwara Region.

Regardless of all these investment strategies, little attention has been given to the rescue of the cultural heritage resources which are indeed in great danger of destruction. Local communities have little voice upon protecting their cultural heritage resources. The establishment of these investments is accompanied by some restrictions that ostracize the custodian communities from accessing their cultural heritage resources. For example, during the interview some local

communities complained that their land including ritual sites had been taken by the investors. The discovery of gas and oil and the mushrooming of industries in Mtwara Region have led to the influx of multi-cultural populations. These include both investors and job seekers who in one way or another affect the living cultures of the indigenous populations of the region. No efforts have so far been put in place to develop and promote the cultural heritage industry as another area for income generation. Consequently, most of the cultural heritage resources available in Mtwara Region are deteriorating at an alarming rate due to lack of rescue measures prior to the implementation of these development projects. Similarly, living cultures of the Makonde communities, such as *Jando* and *Unyago*, traditional dances and wood-carving are in danger of being absorbed by western cultures.

5.0 Conclusion

The new developments taking place in Mtwara Region may be culturally overlooked, but their impact remains devastatingly a reality. From the preceding discussion, one finds that the discovery of gas and oil in Mtwara Region though economically a blessing as it is generally conceived, its impact on cultural heritage resources is also noticeable. If measures are not taken to mitigate the situation, the discovery of gas and oil may turn into a 'cultural curse'. Apart from impoverishing the tangible and intangible cultural heritage resources, the wind of investment blows with other cultural elements which are contrary to the African cultural norms. This has, to a large extent, led to moral deterioration especially among the youth. It is obvious that no one can resist this pressure of development partly coming under the shadow of globalisation, but the hosting communities should be considered part of the economic transformation taking place in Mtwara Region and they are the ones to ensure sustainable conservation of their cultural heritage resources.

Basically, there has been but uneven measures upon conservation and preservation of cultural heritage resources in Tanzania. In some instances, this unevenness has been attributed to many factors that include lack of funds and shortage of trained human resource in the cultural heritage industry. In fact, all these factors are but little holding given the impoverishment of cultural heritage resources resulting from establishment of development projects as it is evident in Mtwara Region.

There is a rarity of analysis as to how these development projects endanger cultural heritage resources. There is a need to revisit our cultural heritage management policies to suit the speed of investment and its resultant impact especially at this

eve of the discovery of gas and oil. Much conservation efforts and investment interest have been directed to natural heritage resources in expense of the cultural heritage resources. For example, the dawn of the discovery of gas and oil exploration has been accompanied by confiscation of land from local communities under the umbrella of investment, with meagre compensation given to the landholders. This situation creates both economic and cultural heritage loss as the local communities remain ostracised from their original land but also excommunicated from the cultural heritage resources found in the grabbed land.

It is therefore the responsibility of every person of good will to the future of cultural heritage resources to play a deserved role in the conservation and preservation of these infinite resources. There is a need of mutual cooperation between professionals and local communities in Mtwara Region to enhance a smooth implementation of the projects related to discovery of gas and oil. This is to ensure that they are implemented without jeopardising the future of cultural heritage resources. This can be achieved only when clear assessment of the value of cultural heritage resources is mutually made by both professionals and local communities prior to the implementation of the intended investment projects. By so doing, the cultural heritage resources in Mtwara Region will remain not only cultural resources for their own sake but also economic resources through cultural tourism.

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