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Between Formal Education and Pastoral Life: Educational Experiences and Future Visions among «Young» Maasai in the Arusha Region, Tanzania

GEO 511 Master's Thesis

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Abstract

In Tanzania, formal education is considered a key instrument for promoting individual life prospects and social mobility. Nevertheless, despite the expansion of the state education system, there are still significant obstacles that affect the educational access and pathways of pastoralist communities such as the Maasai. This thesis focuses on the individual experiences of «young» Maasai as well as the perspectives of parents and community elders on formal education and cultural values. This focus on individual experiences and the perceptions of community elders departs from the dominant views of international development agendas that often portray formal education as a universal tool for progress.

This master's thesis examines the strategies «young» Maasai use to navigate obstacles and opportunities in the formal education system with regard to their future prospects. It also analyses how formal education is evaluated by the older generation of the Maasai community and whether there is a difference in perception between the younger and older generations.

The methodology of the master's thesis is based on a qualitative case study in the Arusha region in northern Tanzania. The data consist of semi-structured and unstructured interviews with five «young» Maasai, community elders, parents of «young» Maasai, a teacher and a school principal making a total of seventeen research participants. The results are analyzed using Amartya Sen's (1999) concept of «Development as Freedom» and the Capability Approach to determine the extent to which formal education expands freedoms and capabilities or whether these remain limited by structural and cultural conditions.

The results show that «young» Maasai shape formal education through active navigation strategies between structural barriers, cultural expectations and individual future aspirations. While formal education is associated with economic security and new opportunities for action among the younger generation, factors such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, language barriers and gender-specific norms limit the actual use of these opportunities. Parents and community elders view education predominantly positively but link it to clear expectations of social and community benefits. Overall, the results show that formal education in the context of this research only becomes effective as a freedom and capability under limited conditions and with the application of navigation strategies.

Zusammenfassung

In Tansania gilt formale Bildung als wichtiges Instrument zur Förderung individueller Lebensperspektiven und sozialer Mobilität. Trotz des Ausbaus des staatlichen Bildungssystems bestehen nach wie vor erhebliche Hindernisse, die den Bildungszugang von pastoralistischen Gemeinschaften wie den Massai einschränken. Diese Arbeit konzentriert sich auf die individuellen Erfahrungen «junger» Massai sowie auf die Perspektiven von Eltern und Ältesten der Gemeinschaft in Bezug auf formale Bildung und kulturelle Werte. Dieser Fokus weicht von den vorherrschenden Ansichten internationaler Entwicklungsagenden ab, die formale Bildung oft als universelles Instrument für Fortschritt darstellen.

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die Strategien, mit denen «junge» Massai Hindernisse und Möglichkeiten im formalen Bildungssystem im Hinblick auf ihre Zukunftsaussichten bewältigen. Zudem wird untersucht, wie formale Bildung von der älteren Generation der Massai-Gemeinschaft bewertet wird und ob es einen Unterschied in der Wahrnehmung zwischen der jüngeren und der älteren Generation gibt.

Methodisch basiert die Masterarbeit auf einer qualitativen Fallstudie in der Region Arusha im Norden Tansanias. Die Datengrundlage bilden semistrukturierte und unstrukturierte Interviews mit «jungen» Massai, Ältesten der Gemeinschaft, Eltern von «jungen» Massai, einem Lehrer und einer Schulleitung, insgesamt handelt es sich um siebzehn Forschungsteilnehmende. Die Ergebnisse werden theoriegeleitet anhand von Amartya Sens (1999) Konzept «Development as Freedom» und dem Capability Approach analysiert.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass «junge» Massai die formale Bildung durch aktive Navigationsstrategien zwischen strukturellen Barrieren, kulturellen Erwartungen und individuellen Zukunftsaspirationen aushandeln. Während formale Bildung mit wirtschaftlicher Sicherheit und neuen Handlungsmöglichkeiten für die jüngere Generation verbunden ist, schränken Faktoren wie Armut, mangelnde Infrastruktur, Sprachbarrieren und geschlechtsspezifische Normen die tatsächliche Nutzung dieser Möglichkeiten ein. Eltern und Älteste der Gemeinschaft bewerten formale Bildung überwiegend positiv, verbinden sie jedoch mit klaren Erwartungen an den sozialen und gemeinschaftlichen Nutzen. Insgesamt zeigen die Ergebnisse, dass formale Bildung im Kontext dieser Forschung nur unter begrenzten Bedingungen und unter Anwendung von Navigationsstrategien als Freiheit und Fähigkeit wirksam wird.

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Asante Sana!

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research Interest and Motivation

The motivation for the topic of my master's thesis arose from a combination of personal and academic interest in cultural identity, education and social change. Through volunteer work in Tanzania in 2023, I had the opportunity to gain insight into various schools and the local education system in the city of Arusha, Tanzania. This experience sharpened my understanding of the diversity of formal education and created an awareness of the central but at the same time contradictory role of formal education. The diverging functions of school as a resource for economic and social security on the one hand and as an area of tension with traditional ways of life on the other sparked my interest in further exploring the topic.

I wanted to take a closer look at the significance of formal education and cultural identity and examine different case studies on an individual level as part of my master's thesis. As a result of narrowing down the topic, it was decided to focus on the Maasai pastoralist community. In the traditional Maasai way of life, education, tradition and prospects of future making visibly collide, which offers an opportunity to shed light on the ambivalence of formal education between enrichment and alienation of cultural identity.

In addition to my personal connection to the research area, my research interest is based on the overarching questions of what formal education means in the current global era of change and how it is conceived and applied in different cultural contexts. Formal education and access to school are not universal goods and do not represent neutrality in every respect. A situation- and context-specific perspective must always be adopted in order to recognize possible power relations, value systems and social expectations within the formal education system. The motivation for this work lies in the desire to view formal education from different perspectives and has directed my thematic interest toward Amartya Sen's theoretical concept of the «Development as Freedom» and the capability approach. These concepts allow me to examine the extent to which formal education can expand the freedom of individuals or whether it reinforces and reproduces existing social and/or cultural boundaries. This led to the objective of critically questioning the discourse of «Education equals Development» and embedding it in the thematic and theoretical framework of this thesis. The inclusion of local perspectives and the findings of this work can contribute to an understanding of formal education not primarily and

universally as an instrument for economic improvement, but as a space for cultural negotiation and identity formation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

The Maasai are one of the best-known pastoralist ethnic groups in East Africa. They inhabit arid and semi-arid areas of Kenya and Tanzania and live a semi-nomadic life in harmony with nature and wildlife (Nelson, 2012). The Maasai in Tanzania live mainly in the northern and central regions of the country. In the north, Maasai communities are mainly located in the regions of Arusha, Manyara, Ngorongoro, Longido, and Simanjiro. In central Tanzania, the districts of Kilosa and Morogoro are considered important Maasai areas. In these regions, the Maasai are largely dependent on cattle herding. The Maasai cultivate the land according to local rules and ensure that important resources such as pastureland and water sources are managed and preserved (Nelson, 2012). The boom in tourism, especially in nature reserves such as Ngorongoro and Longido, has led to the establishment of the sale of handmade souvenirs and the performance of traditional dances and songs for payment and is an additional source of income alongside cattle herding. Economic and social dynamics may therefore differ between regions (Rimisho & Matei, 2024).

Common to all regions is the significant impact of climate change on the traditional way of life of the Maasai (Munishi, 2013). Due to the effects of climate change, such as long periods of drought, livestock herding has declined and farming the land is becoming increasingly difficult. The article by Massoi (2015) addresses the fact that the Maasai are also facing far-reaching economic and social changes resulting from the government's policy on land ownership regulations (Massoi, 2015: 113). Economic hardship and prevailing uncertainty pose new challenges to the traditional way of life of the Maasai. According to a study by Munishi (2013), there has been an increase in rural depopulation in recent years, especially among the «young» Maasai. These «young» people are leaving their families and villages in rural communities to seek new opportunities in the surrounding towns. This migration is mainly driven by the hope of better economic prospects and the social influence of acquaintances who have already migrated (Munishi, 2013). In addition to climatic conditions, studies indicate that formal education itself enhances mobility between rural and urban areas. While rural-urban migration among «young» Maasai is primarily caused by structural conditions, formal education increases this form of mobility by enabling access, orientation and social navigation within urban

contexts. Mulungu (2012) describes formal education as a form of aspirational mobility, which creates a space in which formally educated «young» people perceive urban areas as places that offer them broader opportunities for employment and a modern lifestyle (Mulungu, 2012).

Throughout this thesis, the term «young» is placed in quotation marks to indicate that the category of «youth» has a different meaning in the cultural context of the Maasai than it does in the Western understanding. Age attributions among the Maasai are based on social roles and age groups rather than biological age. A detailed explanation of this age group system and its social significance can be found in chapter [3.2].

The threat of reduced African grazing areas in terms of livelihoods and poverty is enormous. According to Bishop (2007), poverty in pastoral communities has increased over the last three decades and is expected to continue rising. The causes of poverty are the decline in herd size per person, land expropriation for agriculture, loss of land due to attacks by wild animals, increasing population density and the increasing commercialization of land and livestock (Bishop, 2007: 186). Bishop (2007) explains in her paper that efforts to address the problems of pastoral societies in Sub-Saharan Africa on a development level have had negative effects on livestock farmers in many ways. The text also describes that critics which view the pastoralist way of life as backward and negative, considers the problems to be inevitable and sees the conflict in the slow pace of change, the opposition to progress, and the reluctance of pastoralists to embrace change (Bishop, 2007).

One of the apparent solutions to the various problems faced by livestock herders is seen in formal institutionalized education. The global «Education for All» (EFA) movement, launched in Thailand in 1990 and reinforced 10 years later by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), has prompted the global population to ensure universal access to quality basic education for every child, youth, and adult in society by 2015 (Pesambili & Novelli, 2021). During this period, concerns were increasingly raised about reaching marginalized groups, including nomadic pastoral societies, which continue to be excluded from formal education processes. According to 2012 estimates, approximately 21.8 million children of livestock herders worldwide have never attended school (Pesambili & Novelli, 2021a). Exact figures for Maasai children from that year are not known. Even though the introduction of the EFA movement has led to global progress and enabled universal access to formal education for many children, the access to education for pastoralists remains problematic due to contextual structures (Orodho et al., 2014). The EFA agenda assumes that formal education is a universally positive path to

empowerment and development. This reflects development paradigms such as Sen's «Development as Freedom», which define education as a key competence for development (Sen, 1999). It emphasizes the transformative potential of schooling but considers formal education to be universally desirable and culturally neutral. These ideas carry the risk of overlooking or ignoring the cultural and socioeconomic contexts of pastoralist communities. This shows that education initiatives inspired by development goals can lead to unintended marginalization and failure.

Many conversations during my fieldwork have shown the advantages of formal education for Maasai children and why education can be important for their future plans. However, the integration in formal education of Maasai children who live in families engaged in intensive livestock herding is fraught with structural and cultural challenges. The educational process in pastoral areas of Tanzania has been strongly influenced by the development narratives promoting the modernization and sedentarization of livestock herding (McCabe et al., 2010). Access to formal education for Maasai children and youth is complicated by factors such as the remoteness of the living areas, lack of family support, cultural tensions between the formal school system and traditional Maasai culture and the lack of flexibility of schools to adapt to the mobility of livestock herders. These structural and cultural challenges not only affect present

access to education but also have implications for the future of «young» Maasai. Formal education shapes their aspirations, identities and future choices, often positioning them between traditional pastoral livelihoods and new opportunities within the modern economy. Pesambili & Novelli (2021) describe the perceived incompatibility between formal education as a path to economic security and the preservation of the traditional nomadic lifestyle as a cultural dilemma. This dilemma describes the conflict between the diverging opinions of mostly different generations as to whether children should go to school, tend to livestock, or take care of both matters in parallel. In the literary discourse on this topic, the focus is on improving access to formal education for livestock herders rather than on the existing dilemma and the effective relevance of education. The text by Ahmed et al. (2015), like Pesambili & Novelli (2021) takes a qualitative approach and refers to various challenges facing Maasai culture in a changing world, thereby also addressing the introduction of formal education. Ahmed et al. (2015) describe the Maasai's response to various threats and the associated solution strategies (Ahmed et al., 2015). The question of access is essential, but it overshadows important views on learning needs and how formal education can interact with and support the livelihoods of

pastoral communities. It seems difficult to adapt educational provision to the sociocultural and -economic needs of pastoralists like the Maasai (Pesambili & Novelli, 2021a).

Apart from the mentioned scholarly papers, which largely highlight structural barriers in the formal education context of the Maasai, much of the existing literature on formal education among the Maasai is influenced by external perspectives. These external perspectives come for example, from non-governmental organizations, government institutions and development actors. These studies often focus on school enrollment rates, dropout statistics and the structural challenges «young» cattle herders face in accessing formal education. These works are valuable for an objective understanding of the situation but tend to represent a one-sided view and portray formal education as a universally positive and necessary path to development. This often overlooks how formal education is understood, experienced and negotiated by the Maasai themselves. Although comprehensive research on Maasai educational practices has been conducted, this thesis offers detailed qualitative research on intergenerational views of formal education among the Maasai, with a focus on negotiation processes in the tension between traditional knowledge systems and formal education. This is a crucial element to create a space that allows serious consideration of formal educational processes in local schools in Maasai areas.

Based on the problem described above regarding formal education and future prospects for the Maasai, the following research questions have emerged:

- *How do different groups of «young» Maasai navigate opportunities and challenges in formal education in pursuit of their future?*
- *How do parents and community members perceive formal education concerning their culture?*

The first research question of my master's thesis examines the role that formal education plays in the lives of «young» Maasai, the prospects it gives them and how they envision their future through it. It questions the long-term effects of formal education on the personal development and social participation. By analyzing the effect of formal education on the future of the younger generation, challenges and opportunities related to the interaction between Maasai culture and formal school education can be identified. It highlights different experiences by the interviewees and create a diversity of educational biographies. The question enables an examination of different life paths and destinies. The aim is to present a broad picture of the realities of life for «young» Maasai by interviewing different individuals with divergent backgrounds and to highlight the differences in their experiences in the formal education system.

The second research question examines the perspectives of the older generation of the Maasai community on formal education and compares them with the views of the younger generation. The focus is on how parents and community elders evaluate formal education and the importance they attach to it. This brings the intergenerational aspect to the front in order to find out what concerns and hopes exist in the communities regarding the future of formal education.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into several chapters that systematically build on each other to answer the research questions: Following the introduction, chapter [2] presents the state of research and the theoretical approach. It presents some conceptual clarifications and discusses the existing literature. In addition, a theoretical framework is created with an introduction to the conceptual approach of «Development as Freedom» and a focus on Amartya Sen's capability approach (Sen, 1999). Chapter [3] describes the study area and research methodology, addresses my positionality and discusses ethical limitations and challenges. Chapter [4] presents the findings of the research and discusses various subtopics that contribute to answering the research question. In a final chapter [5], the conclusion briefly discusses the most important points for answering the research question and provides an outlook on future literature in the field of research covered.

2 State of Research and Theoretical Approach

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

This master's thesis uses various key terms that are understood differently in the research literature. This chapter explains two important terms to avoid ambiguity and prevent misunderstandings and to create a general understanding for the analysis of the thesis. Specific attention is paid to the differences between education and formal education and the global understanding of pastoralism. The following explanations serve as a knowledge base for the thesis.

2.1.1 Differences between Education and Formal Education

Since this thesis deals with access to formal education, this section will examine the ambiguity of the term «education.» The literature by Krätli & Dyer (2009) explains how, especially in political literature, the terms education and formal education are mistakenly used as synonyms. It defines education as a process in which knowledge is acquired. Formal education refers to the process of teaching in a school and implies prerequisites such as physical institutions, financial support and special stability that are not given in education (Krätli & Dyer, 2009: 8-11). It is important to mention that the forms of formal education activities have already moved far beyond the structures of a school building with four walls, chairs and a blackboard. Innovations and technologies make it possible to provide formal education from home through homeschooling or in virtual spaces, further blurring the distinction between education and formal education. Reducing education to formal education can be problematic, as it tends to disregard education that takes place outside the formal school system, for example through parents, friends, traditions and culture. This reduction is often accompanied by the assumption that even poor-quality education is better than no education at all, which can lead to the exclusion of minority groups from the education system. In a system where formal education is seen as the main driver of development, forms of education that take place outside the formal school system can be seen as unimportant and thus remain outside the broader development system (Krätli & Dyer, 2009). This differentiation of education and formal education provides a basic understanding for the following chapters, which explain the areas of tension within the formal education system in the Maasai context.

2.1.2 Definition of Pastoralism

Dong (2016) defines pastoralism as mobile livestock herding for the purpose of production or livelihood. The two main forms of pastoralism can be described as nomadic and transhumant livestock herding, in a broader sense, pastoral herding. Transhumant livestock herding describes livestock herding in which herds move seasonally between winter and summer in order to make optimal use of the grazing land and provide the livestock with as much feed as possible. In pastoral livestock herding, the livestock are kept in one place throughout the year and enclosed by fences. This form of pastoralism does not fulfill the mobility aspect but can still be counted as pastoralism in a broader sense due to its livestock-based way of life. The basis of pastoral organizations is usually formed by a family-based clan structure. The clan is responsible for controlling the territory and managing the livestock. According to Dong (2016) the emergence of pastoralism is described as a complex and multi-layered phenomenon, but hunting is nevertheless accepted as its primary source. In North Africa, pastoralism can be traced back to 9000 BC and in the Andes of South America to 6000 BC. The pastoral lifestyle is mainly found on the Arabian Peninsula, the highlands of Asia and South America, and the arid regions of Africa. The importance of pastoralism encompasses the feeding of large populations, the provision of ecological services, and the preservation of long-standing civilizations. The expansion of agriculture, the growth of sedentary livestock herding and industrial development are putting pastoral life under increasing pressure. The future of pastoral societies around the world is mainly marked by challenges caused by global climate change (Dong, 2016).

2.2 Literature Review

In the context of pastoralist communities, formal education is usually discussed in a comprehensive development context with a view to economic and social transformation. Development measures often reflect a Western-influenced idea of progress and modernization that can be somewhat contrary to the pastoralist way of life. It is therefore important to critically examine development theories in order to identify potential opportunities as well as mechanisms of social transformation and indigenous neglect.

Development interventions were regarded as progressive and generally desirable processes that worked toward improving living conditions, achieving economic growth and modernizing societies (Li, 2007). Development and modernization theory espouses optimism about progress

and an attitude of superiority in which Western modernity is presented as a universal and normative ideal for «*developed*» societies. This view is underscored by the principle of «*catching up*» with the Western path in order to achieve linear development. Eurocentric patterns tend to use developmental hypotheses and arguments that summarize a society's path to growth in simple relationships and rigid patterns (Berger, 1996). Critical literature emphasizes that development is rarely universally applicable and neutral (Li, 2007), (Escobar, 1995), (Ferguson, 1994).

Ferguson's (1996) text «The Anti-Politics Machine» shows how development projects and interventions are often presented as technical solutions but actually contribute to state control and thereby depoliticize social realities. Essential political, economic, social and traditional interrelationships are disregarded, and the prevailing power relations are ignored (Ferguson, 1994: 178-179). Scott's (1999) «Seeing Like a State» also addresses how large-scale interventions focus on making the environment and society legible. This takes place through spatial order such as resettlement, urban planning and nature conservation. Historical, geographical and social/cultural contexts are thus disregarded in development interventions (Scott, 1998). In the text «Encountering Development, The Making and Unmaking of the Third World» from Escobar (1995) raises similar criticisms and describes the concept of development as a phenomenon socially constructed by the West, in particular through the division of countries into *«developed»* and *«underdeveloped»*. Escobar (1995) argues that the Western view of countries affected by poverty identifies purely economic and technological causes for the hardship in these countries and sees the solutions in economic growth, industrialization and democratization, whereby the possible structural triggers for the inequalities are not fully integrated into the solution process. Escobar (1995) criticizes the pathologization and portrayal of societies and countries in the Global South as deficient and in need of transformation (Escobar, 1995: 221).

2.2.1 Development (Education) as a Civilizing Tool

The critical literature on development interventions highlights the simplification and standardization of complex realities. This can lead, either unintentionally or deliberately, to the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems and local practices and to the further entrenchment of existing power relations. An overview of critical perspectives on development interventions forms the basis for understanding the examination of measures in the context of pas-

toralist communities. The following sections examine the literature on development interventions in the context of pastoralism, before discussing the findings specifically in the context of formal education in pastoralist communities in the development discourse.

In her writings, Krätli (2001) shows that between the 1920s and 1980s, literature on pastoralists and development theories was dominated by the assumption that pastoralism is culturally backward, ecologically destructive and an evolutionary dead end. A higher level of development can only be achieved by abandoning pastoralism and adopting a sedentary lifestyle. Even though research from various disciplines in subsequent years refuted some of these views and challenged them in the literature, these myths continue to live on among political decision-makers and in their practices. Due to the persistence of these myths in politics, they continue to exist and be written about, especially in the literature of educators and researchers without specific knowledge of pastoral societies and/or development theories (Krätli, 2001). More recent literature also describes how the pastoralist way of life is considered problematic because it is incompatible with modern political and economic systems. Such a perspective positions pastoralist communities in a light that makes them appear in need of transformation and unsustainable. This legitimizes a variety of development interventions that work toward transforming and modernizing the community (Gebeye, 2016). According to Akall (2021), the crisis discourses such as poverty, drought and environmental destruction are often used as a starting point for constructing development narratives. These narratives portray the way of life of pastoralist communities as inherently precarious and neglect the historical and political factors that shape the vulnerability of pastoralists. The identification of these crises legitimizes «*corrective*» development measures that promote sedentarization and diversification of livelihoods as desirable paths to greater resilience. Akall (2021) criticizes the fact that livestock herding and the mobility associated with it are defined as risk factors rather than strategic resources. Development interventions can contribute to inequalities in terms of educational level, gender and socioeconomic status. Those who have power, capital and connections benefit disproportionately from the advantages of the interventions (Akall, 2021).

Such constructed perspectives of pastoralist communities are closely linked to the conceptualization and subsequent implementation of interventions. The literature by Akall (2021) and Gebeye (2016), which addresses concrete measures for interventions in pastoralist communities in Ethiopia and Kenya, emphasizes that the development of projects and interventions is compiled externally and based on standardized models of progress. The projects focus on administrative control and infrastructure (Akall, 2021). As a result, the measures tend to simplify

complex pastoralism systems and neglect their visibility, favoring forms of production and processes that are more comprehensible to state institutions. This leads to the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems and local strategies that are essential to the livelihoods of pastoralism (Gebeye, 2016). Bonfoh et al. (2016) argue that although the topics of inclusion and innovation are increasingly being addressed in political discourse, they remain anchored in the context of state-centeredness. Mobility is still seen as an obstacle to security and governance rather than a legitimate strategy for securing livelihoods for pastoralists (Bonfoh et al., 2016). Bonfoh (2016) emphasizes that pastoralists must be more involved in intervention initiatives. Interventions can only have a positive impact if they take the perspectives of pastoralists as well as the views of the state into account in a holistic manner. Political and institutional reforms are the basis on which pastoralists' bargaining power in accessing natural resources and reducing pastoralist uncertainties is based. Pastoralist communities are not *«difficult to reach»* if appropriate strategies are applied and pursued. This is mainly due to existing initiatives on the right of mobile populations to access resources and services, international human rights law and the EFA initiative (Bonfoh et al., 2016: 505).

The studies show that the discourse on development in the context of pastoralist communities is not always neutral and that influential political narratives shape intervention strategies. This has an impact on the social services introduced as part of the interventions. When formal education is embedded in the broader framework of interventions, there is a risk that assumptions about cultural change, settlement/sedentarization and social integration will be reproduced and incorporated into the development policy agenda.

In a lot of literature, education is seen as a universal tool for transforming pastoral societies into settled wage earners, loyal citizens, and/or modern farmers. Across the board, all «Education equals Development» approaches discuss the poverty of pastoral societies and the belief that formal education will lead to a positive change in living standards (Krätli, 2001).

While Krätli (2001) criticizes historical narratives of backwardness and sedentariness, Dyer (2014) goes one step further and questions the relevance of international formal education programs. In her book, Livelihoods and Learning: Education For All and the Marginalization of Mobile Pastoralists, Dyer (2014) examines how a pastoralist community in the West Indies uses formal education as an economic and social development strategy. The book describes how current development paradigms complicate the living structures of pastoralist herding groups. The discussion describes the connection between formal education, development and poverty and concludes that international experience with pastoral groups and the provision of

formal education has been disappointing. It identifies a lack of flexibility and relevance to changing political circumstances by development experts and discusses the conceptual positioning of formal education within a development paradigm that excludes mobility as a life strategy. Dyer (2014) argues that, due to its controversial and contradictory role, the concept of formal education must be critically questioned and reexamined. While she refers in her literature to marginalized pastoralist groups in the West Indies, she describes these issues as global problems (Dyer, 2014).

2.2.2 Tensions between Formal Education and Cultural Identity

The contradictions between reality of life and developmental ideologies in relation to formal education can also be observed in the text of Ng'asike (2019) in the East African context of Kenya. Studies on the Turkana, nomadic pastoralists in northwestern Kenya, highlight the importance of reforming the Western-influenced curriculum, which largely excludes culturally traditional and economically marginalized nomadic groups. The Kenyan curriculum, which is based on Western European ideologies, requires children and «young» people to complete an academic education, even though their daily livelihood is mainly secured through the acquisition and application of their indigenous knowledge. It is considered important to incorporate indigenous knowledge and the native language into the teaching at schools with nomadic students in order to reduce these rates. The Kenyan curriculum is heavily dominated by the English language without giving equal consideration to local knowledge and languages. The text also addresses the problem that the materials used in the classroom do not correspond to the local and indigenous culture and the everyday environment of the children, thus symbolizing the tensions between school and cultural identity (Ng'asike, 2019).

While many studies on pastoral and indigenous groups, such as those by Ng'asike (2019) or Dyer (2014), primarily highlight the tensions between state education, sedentary lifestyles and cultural identity and mobility, Keskitalo's (2019) literature not only criticizes similar structures, but also shows how culturally sensitive educational approaches can be actively tested and integrated into formal education. The text deals with the cultural context of the Saami, indigenous nomadic people from an area stretching across Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Russian Kola Peninsula. The work attempts to understand the Saami's indigenous understanding of space and time in the context of a school environment. Similar to the literature presented above, it is argued that the values and ways of thinking of the Saami must be incorporated into the planning of the curriculum in order to ensure culturally sensitive educational approaches. It criticizes

school systems for being based on obedience and efficiency and for being rigid in their structural organization (Keskitalo, 2019: 563). Teaching is characterized by a predefined concept of space and time, which is usually accompanied by a self-contained learning environment. In addition to the criticism, the text also discusses positive examples of formal education in indigenous pastoral communities. It presents how the formal education system is increasingly adapting to cyclical concepts of time in nature and the seasons of the Saami and how cultural knowledge can thus be constructed collectively. In contrast to Western-influenced structures, learning approaches in Saami schools are designed to be more phenomenon-based and flexible in order to tie in with the local and cultural everyday practices of the Saami (Keskitalo, 2019).

In addition to the tension between formal education and mobility and cultural identity, studies have also shown that formal education can lead to cultural assimilation. This makes formal education a mechanism for rethinking cultural identities. The removal of children from their indigenous families in Australia until the late 1960s, known as «The stolen generation» is linked to the educational context and the desire to eradicate indigenous languages and practices. The removal of children from their families was legitimized by government policies and based on assimilation policies that sought to adapt the lives of First Nations to white society and focused primarily on children. This separation of family members caused trauma and loss that continues to shape the community to this day (Manne, 1998).

The Federal Indian Policy in the United States is another example of assimilation policy through education. When Europeans came into contact with indigenous communities, measures were taken to *«solve»* the *«Indian problem».* Forced contracts between the indigenous communities and the government led to resettlement and the creation of reservations. The indigenous communities no longer lived in their familiar homelands but were resettled in distant areas. Assimilation through removal from their homeland was further promoted through formal education in the form of newly established boarding schools. Western values and education were passed on in the boarding schools, which were intended to contribute to the destruction of the indigenous community and its culture (Brower, 2010).

Western-influenced education had and still has an impact on indigenous people and can cause part of the indigenous identity to be lost. The suppression of culture can lead to irreparable damage of self-esteem and the preservation of indigenous communities. These examples illustrate that formal education has played a central role in social and cultural transformation projects in a historical context. Even though today's education programs have changed in form and

objectives, the historical results are still relevant for understanding the prevailing power relations within communities and the education system. In the context of pastoralist communities, formal education is still integrated into development and state-building agendas. This raises critical questions about whose form of education is valued and to what extent, which ways of life are considered meaningful, and to what extent cultural continuity is ensured.

It is a complex issue to develop a comprehensive epistemology on the relationship between formal education and pastoral communities. Because communities and peoples are enormously heterogeneous in terms of their geographical location, cultures and social and economic conditions, an overarching generalization of the findings from the literature would not adequately reflect the complexity of reality and the existing differences. Both a critical examination of the literature influenced by older development theories and an analysis of more recent literature make it clear that formal education cannot be viewed as a neutral path of linear development. Rather, formal education must be embedded in the concept of different life backgrounds, cultural processes and political objectives. As the journal article by Marty (2024) shows, the relationship between pastoral life and formal education is and will remain ambivalent in the future. It opens up opportunities and possibilities, but also poses challenges to the cultural continuity and self-determination of marginalized groups (Marty, 2024).

The literature discussed in this chapter highlights the extensive debate on development interventions, pastoral communities and formal education, emphasizing the accompanying emergence of areas of tension and/or assimilation. Many studies address the structural conditions and political discourses or criticize the Western educational model. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the perspectives and views of pastoral communities themselves. This master's thesis positions itself within the debate by placing the analytical focus on the perspectives of «young» Maasai and their elders in the community. Formal education is not viewed purely as an enabling means to progress. It critically examines which capacities for action are influenced by access to formal education and what impact this has on shaping the future of the Maasai.

2.3 Theoretical Approach

Various approaches were considered in the theoretical background of this thesis. Modernization theory (Rostow, 1959) and human capital theory (Becker, 1964) were examined in order to analyze the connection between formal education and future prospects in the context of pastoral societies. While Modernization theory conceptualizes development as a linear process from traditionalism to modernity, this thesis does not adopt this framework (Rostow, 1959). However, modernization theory is acknowledged as a useful theoretical lens to critically reflect on the universalist assumption of formal education as the ultimate path to modernity. Similarly, human capital theory falls short because it primarily understands formal education as an economic investment that should lead to increased productivity and income growth (Becker, 1964). Both approaches view education primarily as a means of economic development. For this thesis, however, it is central to analyze formal education from the perspective of individual freedom and to understand how it can actively shape the lives and futures of «young» Maasai. This makes it clear that this paper is not about a general discourse on development, but rather about examining formal education as self-determined freedom and its concrete effect on the future prospects of «young» Maasai. Therefore, Sen's (1999) approach «Development as Freedom» and the capability approach developed from it were chosen as the theoretical framework for this paper.

2.3.1 Development as Freedom: Between Empowerment and Cultural Tension

Amartya Sen's theoretical concept of «Development as Freedom» (1999) describes development as a process of expanding people's individual freedoms. This concept contrasts with the development discourse, which focuses on growth in gross national product, increases in personal income, industrialization and technological progress. Sen (1999) emphasizes the central role of freedom in development. Sen's theory removes the concept of development from the macroeconomic context and places it at the center of individual participation and decision-making. There are not two options of free or unfree, but rather a continuum that can be disrupted by unfreedom or unreasonable capacities for action. Chandler (2013) whose critique of the «Development as Freedom» theory will be discussed further in this chapter, argues that the continuous struggle for freedom, shaped by the inner life of the individual, is both the means and the measure of freedom (Chandler, 2013: 85).

Despite existing critiques, Sen's concept of «Development as Freedom» provides a useful analytical framework for this thesis, as it allows for an examination of how formal education is experienced as an expansion or limitation of opportunities, without assuming formal education as a linear or universally positive development outcome.

The core of the theory shifts the focus of development to the individual project of self-realization. This analytical focus centers individual agency, while social, political or legal external factors such as capitalism, power relations and social inequalities tend to remain in the background. Navarro (2000) criticizes that the description of instrumental freedom according to Sen (1999) pays limited attention to the conceptual framework for locating freedom. According to Navarro (2000), the theory lacks the political context and the reference to different religious and cultural forces and actors (Navarro, 2000: 673). In the context of this master's thesis, this critique suggests that while Sen (1999) conceptualizes formal education as an instrument of freedom, additional analytical attention is required to account for the political conditions and cultural prerequisites of pastoral societies. The process of expanding individual freedom lacks a detailed approach to the political context that forms the framework in which individual freedom is attributed its meaning.

In pastoral societies such as the Maasai, whose work, identity and knowledge are based on communal organization, freedom can be seen not only as an individual project but also as a collective and rational practice. Arendt's (1958) concept of freedom complements Sen's (1999) theory by emphasizing the collective, political and public dimension of freedom. This means that freedom and education as part of freedom as Arendt (1958) understands it cannot arise solely through individual empowerment but must be embedded in a social and cultural fabric (Arendt, 1958). The Western-influenced formal school system means the introduction of a certain system of knowledge and values based on individual performance and adaptation to state norms, which can create tensions with the systems and ideas of certain indigenous pastoral communities.

Chandler (2013) focuses on the dimension of power theory and argues that freedom in the modern understanding is understood as a form of self-discipline, thus turning education into a mechanism through which people learn to «regulate» themselves in order to be considered «developed» from a societal perspective. In the context of formal education, this means that the knowledge which is imparted, corresponds to a certain idea of progress and success. This can risk rendering cultural and indigenous forms of knowledge less visible, as formal education

systems tend to prioritize Eurocentric and linear notions of development over alternative knowledge systems (Chandler, 2013).

In summary, it can be said that the concept of «Development as Freedom» describes the overarching framework for Sen's understanding of development as an expansion of human freedom of action. The approach deals with the adaptation and change of people's inner selves in order to acquire ways of thinking and capabilities to make good decisions and thus gain more freedom. This starting point, embedded in social conditions, forms the basis for the development of personal freedom. This freedom can be further expanded through skills and capabilities such as described by Sen (1999).

«Development as Freedom» refers to freedom as a meaning of achieving development and is the fundamental concept by Sen (1999) from which he further developed the capability approach. The capability approach concretizes the concept of freedom and examines the opportunities and capabilities people have to further expand their freedom. This makes the capability approach an analytical tool for measuring and evaluating people's freedom. The overall context makes it possible to view formal education not as a politically driven development phase but as a concrete ability for self-determination and freedom. By combining Sen's framework with critical perspectives, this approach also enables a more nuanced consideration of cultural and structural conditions under which freedom can be realized, providing a theoretical foundation for the analysis in chapter [4] which examines the extent to which formal education leads to the expansion of personal opportunities for the Maasai and what effects the tension between social expectations and cultural identity have.

2.3.2 Amartya Sen's Capability Approach

Sen (1999) developed the capability approach as a normative framework for assessing inequality, poverty and the question of how social institutions should be designed. The utilitarian model of quantitative human development is criticized and the focus shifts toward the individual and what it can do to live a fulfilling life according to its personal values. Functions are described as actions or states that can be achieved by people. They represent their ability to do or be things. Capabilities are closely linked to a person's functions. The function represents a form of an achievement, while the attainment of that achievement is described by the capability. Capabilities are therefore a combination of different functions that can be achieved by a person. Each of these interconnected types of rights and opportunities contributes to improving

a person's overall capability. The capability approach focuses on the effective freedom of people and their choice and exercise of different combinations of functions (Terzi, 2005: 449-450).

The capability approach and the concept of freedom, describe how formal education contributes to enhancing our opportunities and capabilities to achieve a better life. In relation to the topic of this thesis, the theoretical approach refers to the fact that formal education in schools, as well as education policy makers, reinforce this narrative with targeted value attributions to education. The education assessment system depends on exam results. These results determine how much knowledge can be expected from a person (Bessant, 2014). This demand for assessment and knowledge must be critically examined, as it does not take the question of fairness into account. In order to also incorporate the question of equity, it is necessary to examine the conditions under which genuine educational opportunities were available and whether the abilities to achieve educational functions were present (Chandler, 2013). I would argue that this approach requires a supportive environment and the opportunity to exercise one's personal capabilities, which are assumed as a basis by the capability approach. If this supportive environment is not available or if external conditions repeatedly challenge the opportunity to develop one's own abilities, the starting point for achieving individual freedom is not given. This raises the question of whether the desires and hopes regarding education also correspond to the living conditions described by Sen (1999), thus not only addressing how desires can be satisfied, but also raising questions of fairness/equity. Applying this approach to education reveals its intrinsic importance in terms of our free choice of how we want to live and learn, and the evaluation of education based on whether it teaches us skills that help people live a life they value (Bessant, 2014).

Although formal education can be considered a skill that contributes to individual freedom, Sen's framework emphasizes that «Development as Freedom» requires an active removal of cultural, institutional and social sources of unfreedom that prevent the capability from being effectively realized. This means not only expanding access to formal education, but also questioning and dismantling cultural constraints that restrict people's real freedom to make use of it (Sen, 1999). Bessant (2014) criticizes the limited freedom of children who, according to the school system, lack the cognitive maturity and personal responsibility to make their own decisions. This reveals a contradiction between the theoretical system of the capability approach and the real freedom of all individuals. In the field of education, students are largely passive objects of pedagogical care and not active participants in the development process. Effective freedom continues to be limited by power asymmetries and examination structures and children

and young people are denied the empowerment of freedom and postponed to their future of adulthood (Bessant, 2014).

With regard to this work, the approach of education is examined as an additional capability in order to determine the extent to which formal education opens up more choices and opportunities for the Maasai or whether it remains a theoretical construct without practical implementation possibilities. Institutional and social boundaries are addressed in the context of the Maasai's living conditions and raise the question of the extent to which formal education contributes to the expansion of skills in the pastoral community of the Maasai or whether it leads to an alienation of cultural identity and the reproduction of social inequalities. The ability to obtain a formal education opens up new opportunities in terms of access to new sources of income or social integration in urban environments. At the same time, they are restricted or even excluded by economic uncertainties, family tensions and cultural expectations and obligations. This study will address the question of whether the elders view education as a path to freedom and progress for the younger generations or as a catalyst for the abandonment of traditional values and community structures. This ambivalence and the capability approach show that education cannot be understood as development per se, but must be considered in the context of its specific social and cultural framework. This also shows that the expansion of a formal education system does not automatically equate to the expansion of real individual freedom. Chabbott & Ramirez (2000) illustrate, that although empirical studies reveal positive correlations between formal education and individual economic, political and cultural development, these cannot be clearly transferred to a collective level. At the individual level, it was found that formal education has a positive influence on wages, which in turn raises the question of the extent to which wages are a suitable measure of productivity. In addition, formal education has an impact on political activity and reinforces values that are consistent with aspects of modernization theories. Here, the critical question remains open as to what extent this is an indication of development or of increased Westernization (Chabbott & Ramirez, 2000).

McGrath (2010) also criticizes the assumption that formal education automatically leads to development and points out that formal education is understood instrumentally as human capital. Development is usually limited to individual outcomes and does not necessarily lead to social transformation. Formal education is seen as an investment in human capital and serves as an advantage in terms of mobility and income, but it neglects local conditions such as indigenous education and can reinforce inequalities due to dependence on school access based on gender, place of residence and income (McGrath, 2010).

3 Study Area and Methodology

This chapter describes the methodological approach of this study. It focuses on the study area as well as the access to the field, the collaboration with research partners, the design of data collection, the selection and description of participants and the methods used for the data analysis.

3.1 Description of the Study Area

The following chapter describes the study area and the Maasai livelihood in more detail. It is important to emphasize that the Maasai should not be understood as a homogeneous community. Within Maasai society, there are significant differences in lifestyle, access to education, values and traditions. My field research has also shown that many aspects of the traditional Maasai life differ due to different contexts of generations, gender and individual biographies.

To narrow down the field of research for this thesis, it is necessary to briefly describe the geographical location of the study area and the Maasai settlement area in Tanzania. The field research for this master's thesis was conducted in and around the city of Arusha in northern Tanzania, near the border with Kenya. Arusha is described as a thriving metropolis in East Africa and is the socioeconomic and administrative center of the surrounding region. The Arusha Municipal District (MC) is one of the seven districts of the Arusha region and is also its capital (Yankson, 2021). Due to the city's proximity to nature reserves such as the Serengeti, Ngorongoro, Tarangire, and Kilimanjaro National Park, it is strongly influenced by tourism and rural exodus in the hope of better job opportunities. Many of the surrounding districts of Arusha MC are settlement areas of pastoral communities. The districts of Longido, Monduli, and Ngorongoro, which also belong to the Arusha region, are the core areas of the Maasai community (Nelson, 2012). The coexistence of rural and urban realities in the region provides a broad context for examining the interplay between Maasai life, formal education and the realities of life influenced by it. Establishing the base for my field research in the city of Arusha allowed me to travel flexibly and conduct interviews in both urban and surrounding rural areas. This enabled me to gain a nuanced understanding of the different experiences and aspirations related to formal education.

Numerous interviews and informal conversations with various interviewees were conducted in the city of Arusha. Most of the people interviewed in the city originally came from villages further away, such as Kitumbeine or Longido, but were in Arusha City at the time of the interviews. At the same time, the city served as a starting point for trips to the Maasai villages of Engaruka and Lengiloriti, where I conducted further interviews on site. Additionally, more interviews were conducted in Olturmet and Duluti. Although these places are strongly influenced by the mixing of different tribes, the interviews conducted there (*with the local Maasai*) proved to be relevant, because some of the interviewees had settled there due to their current living situation such as for example employment opportunities or studies at the local college. The following map shows the districts of the Arusha region in yellow, the different interview locations in blue as well as the two villages of origin of two interviewees I met in Arusha city in red. The entire Maasai Land, which describes the Maasai settlement area, is not depicted in the map but covers approximately 150,000 km² and extends across the Tanzanian-Kenyan border area of the Great African Rift Valley (Jowell et al., 2018: 704).

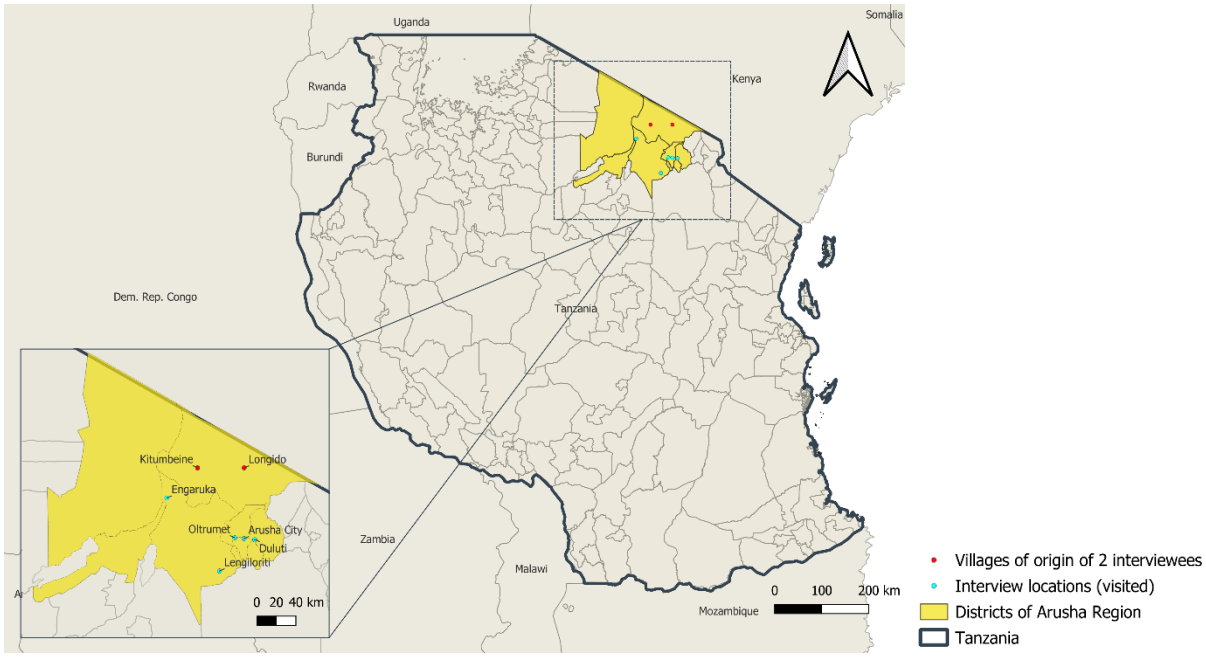

Image 1: Map of Tanzania showing the Districts of Arusha, the Interview locations and two villages of origin of interviewees interviewed in Arusha City (created by Author in QGIS 3.38)

3.2 The Social Structure of the Maasai People

Beyond the geographical location, understanding the Maasai's everyday way of life, which is closely linked to their settlement area, is also crucial to understanding the field research. The Maasai communities live in so-called bomas, which are organized in different sizes and communities of purpose. Typically, these communities consist of two or more men who live together with their families, including women and children. The bomas are characterized by a central, circular fence made of branches, which serves as protection and shelters the cattle at night. Outside this fence are several mud houses that serve as dwellings, as well as another fence that surrounds all the houses and animals, thus providing additional protection (Jowell et al., 2018: 706). This type of construction reflects the social organization and traditional way of life of the Maasai, with a focus on community structures and the protection of the animals. The typical Maasai family is polygamous, belonging to a household with several families where decisions about livestock and grazing areas are discussed together and members can support each other during difficult times. The houses in the bomas are usually built by women and consist of a construction of branches covered with clay, water or cow dung. The houses are usually quite small with only one entrance and no windows. The bomas are not only places of residence but also cultural centers that strengthen the identity and cohesion of the Maasai communities. The construction and organization of the bomas are closely linked to environmental conditions and traditional practices, which underscores their importance for the social and cultural life of the Maasai. They represent the central importance of livestock in Maasai life by placing the animals in the center of the bomas. They also emphasize collective living and reflect the prevailing age and gender roles (Jowell et al., 2018).

Maasai society is structured as polygamous and patriarchal. Men are the heads of the family and the center of the community. They have authority over children and women, formally own the cattle and exercise strict control over livestock herding. However, Maghimbi's text (2024) describes how male dominance is not absolute due to existing matrilineal structures. Matrilineality means that power is not placed in the hands of women, but it strengthens the dominance of men who are connected to each other through maternal ties. The absoluteness of patriarchy is further mitigated by the destigmatization of divorce and by the possibility for women to inherit, own and pass on land to other women. These structures describe the repression of patriarchy in Maasai society (Maghimbi, 2024: 339). Nevertheless, the position of men in the pastoral economy, which will be explained in more detail in the next section, is one of the

central sources of political domination and control of women by men. Women have only a few opportunities for independent and personal legal representation. Before marriage, they represent the ideas and claims of their father and after marriage, those of their husband. By excluding women from any groups associated with privileges, these privileges are systematically denied to them. The entire livestock of a family legally belongs to the father and is controlled by his decisions. Even animals that are allocated to a woman after marriage for her own livelihood belong to the man in the family (Maghimbi, 2024).

Many explanations for the socialization of Maasai men and the asymmetrical gender division of labor can be traced back to the age system, on which the ideology of Maasai identity is based. This age system is also strongly patriarchal and therefore excludes women from participation. Every Maasai man passes through three age groups and the associated subgroups in his life. These age groups are roughly divided into the categories of boys, warriors and elders. In early childhood, from birth to around the age of seven, boys are just kids and are too «young» to look after the animals. This subphase ends when the boys are old enough to start herding cattle. During this time, the shepherd boys herd the cattle and lead them to different grazing areas and back home again. The shepherd boys strive to reach the next age group of warriors. The boys are expected to ascend to the warrior stage after their circumcision. For the Maasai, entering the warrior age group signifies the transition from boyhood to manhood and that they aspire to the pastoral ideals of the Maasai. Being a Maasai warrior involves protecting the animals and the community from wild animals and other enemies and if necessary, engaging in combat to defend the herd. Finally, the warriors ascend to the age group of elders (Maghimbi, 2024). However, social advancement through the different age groups is not always linear, with all men going through the same process and ending up in the same social position. According to Maghimbi (2024), there are also «young» people who rebel against the pastoral life and social structures. Even though the age groups are strictly regulated, some people do drop out of the age class system. In most cases, they flee from the pastoral life and are labeled as outsiders by the rest of society. There is also the option of progressing through the age groups in a non-idealized way. Sons of fathers who own a very large herd or have no younger sons are also circumcised, but they perform the function of shepherds for a longer period of time and do not act as warriors like other men their age (Maghimbi, 2024).

While boys pass through different age groups that go hand in hand with growing social status and responsibility, girls' social position is usually determined at a «young» age by marriage. They do not have a comparable system of age groups. Girls are often robbed of their childhood

through child marriages and pregnancy. These scenarios cause them to skip many stages of their adolescent social development, forcing them into adulthood at a very «young» age (Machange & Temba, 2024). Research by Ndaula (2018) has shown that the requirement for the marriage of a Maasai girl is related to her initiation. Initiation describes the transformation from childhood to adulthood and is not always, but in some cases, associated with genital circumcision. The initiation ceremony is independent of the girl's age and qualifies her for marriage (Ndaula, 2018). Mbwete et al. (2022) also describe that members of the community believe that girls are ready for marriage and motherhood after the ceremony. To escape the belief that pregnancy before initiation brings bad luck, many parents have the ceremony performed before their daughters reach puberty (Mbwete et al., 2022). According to Ndaula (2018), the driving factors behind child marriage among the Maasai are fear of early extramarital pregnancies, corruption and irresponsibility of leaders, poverty and the undervaluing of education. Early forced marriage determines the social role of girls at a «young» age and denies them alternative paths of personal development. The study of Mukiza George et al. (2025) shows that most adolescent pregnancies are mainly due to gender-specific authority in decisions about reproduction, a societal silence about contraception and fear of the side effects of contraception (Mukiza George et al., 2025). Adolescent pregnancies pose health risks and inequalities, and power asymmetries are reinforced as marriages are often arranged by and with older men. In addition, early child marriage has an enormous impact on girls' education and, accordingly, their chances of higher education and additional professional qualification (Machange & Temba, 2024).

The Maasai's conception of age, youth, and adulthood, therefore, differs greatly from Western views on these issues. The Western understanding of different stages of life is mostly biological and can be explained by a person's actual age. The Maasai, on the other hand, are mainly guided by rituals and groupings and the associated social roles, regardless of a person's age (Mbwete et al., 2022).

Despite the enormous focus on age groups among boys mentioned above, the most important element of Maasai culture is the cattle herding on which the entire livelihood of the society depends. The pastoral lifestyle of the Maasai is strongly influenced by the keeping, buying and selling of livestock. The animals, mostly cows, donkeys, sheep and goats, are passed on to the sons or given to the girl or woman as dowry at the wedding. Environmental conditions limit alternatives to cattle herding. Due to drought and destruction by wild animals, farming and cultivation are extremely difficult. The Maasai's income consists mainly of livestock selling

and various small businesses, such as the sale of jewelry, firewood, medicine and other goods (Mollel, 2011). The larger a Maasai's herd, the more wealth he is attributed with. The entire community is shaped by the influence of wealthy cattle owners. The more animals a Maasai owns, the better he is able to reproduce his herd, as he is structurally better able to cope with the death of animals due to disease, wild animals, or drought. Maasai who own few or no animals are often forced to leave the pastoral life behind and migrate to the city to find work. In order to build a successful livestock business, a Maasai must acquire knowledge about water sources, diseases and pastures. The division of labor in livestock herding is extremely gender-specific. For a «young» man, building up a large herd is only possible with the support of his wife, as she takes on many of the important tasks. In addition to building houses, managing finances, raising children and procuring and cooking food, women are responsible for milking, counting and reporting livestock diseases. They also take care of feeding and caring for the young animals (Nelson, 2012). Their expertise in herd management and animal care is therefore essential for the preservation of the herd. Only with the support of his wife, a Maasai man is able to build up a healthy and large herd and thus achieve a higher social status in society, regardless of his age. This division of labor is also linked to the polygamous lifestyle of Maasai men. A Maasai man who has several wives has more human power and better chances of building up a larger herd and advancing in the livestock industry. For the Maasai, owning a large herd means not only financial security but also political power. A «young» Maasai from a family with a lot of cattle is more likely to be elected as a representative of an age group than a Maasai from a family with few cattle. Older Maasai also have more influence on community affairs because of their wealth in the form of animals. These Maasai livestock structures show that animals are not only seen as herds, but also as an economic investment, a political voice and part of cultural identity (Bishop, 2007).

Another important component of Maasai social life is the system of cultural knowledge transfer. Indigenous Maasai education is not provided by an external institution but is part of their everyday lives. Since this work deals with the significance and perception of formal education, it is essential to also understand the basics of the indigenous education system. An overview of indigenous forms of learning provides the basis for a better understanding of the current concept of education and for analyzing the dynamics between formal and informal education in the context of social processes. Much of the literature about indigenous education among the Maasai refers to the period before the introduction of the Western school system. The texts deal with historical cultural systems and describe conditions and procedures in the past tense.

Many elements of indigenous education are still practiced today, but not always with the same exclusivity. Because two education systems exist in parallel, the indigenous education and formal schools, indigenous education cannot be continued to the same extent as it was before the introduction of state schools.

Indigenous education is not uniform and can vary depending on factors such as region of origin, socioeconomic situation or teachers. Nevertheless, the following section attempts to provide an overview of the most important goals and content of formal and informal indigenous education among the Maasai. «Maasai indigenous education begins at birth and ends at death» (Perista Kerubo, 2016: 13). This sentence highlights the central importance of indigenous education and how it permeates the entire life of the Maasai. The type of teaching, the place of teaching and the skills taught in the indigenous education of the Maasai depend on their gender and their position in the age system (Bonini, 2006). But the overarching goal of Maasai indigenous education (MIE) is to prepare the younger generation for adulthood and the responsibilities that come with it. MIE aims to help individuals become responsible persons and suitable members of society in the village, the tribe and their own households. Through the teaching of values, skills, customs and attitudes, «younger» Maasai are taught to fulfill social functions and to treat other people, especially older persons, with respect. Depending on the location, children learn to cope with environmental conditions and strengthen their survival skills. The MIE aims to promote good morals and social acceptance. Accepted values include hospitality, generosity, and honesty (Perista Kerubo, 2016). Expectations of the younger generation are defined by moral laws and social norms in society. Through this, MIE seeks to strengthen the Maasai community and create a unified consensus among its members. Furthermore, it is the goal of MIE to adapt the Maasai to their environment at a «young» age so that they learn how to deal with it and how to benefit from it. They are taught to care for their environment, how to lead a good pastoralist life and to value animals and livestock herding. In summary, the MIE helps to raise children to be independent individuals and prepares members of the community with different skills for life as pastoralists and Maasai (Perista Kerubo, 2016).

In indigenous education, a distinction can be made between formal indigenous education and informal indigenous education. Informal indigenous education describes the lifelong process in which attitudes, values, and skills relevant to everyday life in society are learned. This form of education is promoted by the community, extended families and participation in and observation of social events. Through a collection of shared songs, stories and wisdom, attitudes are

preserved and passed on. Maasai children learn through informal indigenous education primarily by observing and imitating older members of the community. By involving children in productive work, they are able to learn important procedures. Informal indigenous education consists of teaching traditional customs, and children are taught to appreciate and imitate the customs and behaviors of Maasai society. Informal education focuses on teaching children and «young» adults how to find and take their rightful place in the group (Bishop, 2007).

The difference between informal and formal indigenous education is that the children are aware of the learning process involved in formal education and that it is carried out by specially selected teachers. The children received specific training in herbal medicine, construction work and midwifery. The practices related to the respective subject areas were passed on to the younger generations by experts. Informal indigenous education served as a supplement to the formal indigenous education they received. In addition to the specialized teachers who taught the various practices, parents nevertheless played the most important role in indigenous education. All Maasai children are taught by their mothers until the age of seven. After that, the mothers continued to be responsible for the girls, while the fathers take over the role of education for the boys. The parents are always supported by other members of the community (Krätli & Dyer, 2009).

Mothers teach girls how to cook, run a household and explain to them how marriage works. Fathers teach boys about family history, geography and natural features of the region, how to use weapons, how to interact with other communities and how to raise livestock. Other children of the same age could also contribute to the education of other children. They explain and demonstrate how to behave in certain situations and how traditions and customs are actively practiced. Other adults in the community were also expected to take on parental roles or act as caregivers to other children and treat them with appropriate parental care. Great importance is also attached to respect and pride in the community, as well as the preservation of essential resources (Krätli, 2001). The indigenous education of the Maasai can essentially be described as a community-based system in which what is learned cannot be separated from everyday life. The focus is not on individual self-realization, but rather on strengthening the social fabric and collective identity.

3.3 Access to Fieldwork

In January 2023, I completed a five-week volunteer assignment in Arusha, Tanzania, where I contributed to environmental projects. As part of practical initiatives in public gardens across the city, we took care of plant maintenance and cultivation. The organization I worked with organized school campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of environmental protection and presented different approaches to sustainable practices. We also worked on maintaining and improving the local green spaces and vegetable gardens in the schools. During my stay in Arusha, I was able to build some personal connections with local people. Two of these contacts were able to help me establish connections to potential interview partners for my research. Thanks to their extensive network and insider knowledge, I was able to find suitable interviewees as well as research partners. Through a person I met in Arusha in 2023, I got in touch with Anne, a community worker from Tengeru Arusha. After several phone calls from Switzerland to Tengeru, Anne agreed on a collaboration and helped me find the right people for my fieldwork. Anne has inquired about potential interview partners and informed them about the background of my research and was able to arrange some interviews before my arrival in Tanzania. The precise selection of interview partners will be discussed in the chapter [3.4]. Additionally, Anne accompanied me in organizing and traveling to some very remote Maasai villages and introduced me to the respective interview partners. Through her community work, which sometimes also takes place in Maasai villages, she was able to announce our visits in advance to the community elders and obtain their consent for our visit. Anne's valuable support and extensive network were crucial in establishing contact with the villagers and gaining their trust. Furthermore, Anne speaks fluent Swahili and understands a lot of Maa, so she was able to assist me as a translator during several interviews. After the interviews, we used to discuss the interview situation together and were able to clarify any misunderstandings that arose during the interview.

3.4 Methods of Data Collection

3.4.1 Target Group of the Interviews

The target group for my interviews consisted of Maasai of different ages and social positions. Interviews were conducted with «young» Maasai, some of their parents, community elders, a

chairman and a principal and a teacher of two public schools with a large number of Maasai students.

A very detailed interview of «young» Maasai people enabled a more precise examination of their perceptions and views on formal education and their future prospects. To this end, twelve people were interviewed using a comprehensive questionnaire. The five case studies form the core of the data in this study. The interview guide was structured in a way as to obtain as much information as possible regarding the access to and the views on formal education and prospects for the future. The selection process for the «young» Maasai individuals was conducted with careful consideration to ensure a balanced representation of all genders and diverse educational backgrounds. This approach aimed to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives within the community. When interviewing parents, I paid specific attention to confirm that their children were currently enrolled in schools or universities to maintain a direct connection to the ongoing educational system in Tanzania. The selection of other community members for interviews was based on qualitative criteria rather than rigid standards, allowing for a more inclusive and representative sample.

3.4.2 Semi-structured and Unstructured Interviews

The qualitative interview approach, combining semi-structured and unstructured interviews, was used to facilitate the answer to the research questions, as both of these methods offer different advantages. Semi-structured interviews allow space for narrative storytelling by the interviewee and enable an examination of biographical patterns and determining their subjective perceptions. Unstructured interviews offer the interviewee the opportunity to share their personal experiences freely and without being guided by the questions from an interview guide. In addition, the spontaneity of the conversations creates an open space for unexpected topics and aspects that could be relevant to the research (Longhurst & Johnston, 2023). Therefore, the empirical data for this study was drawn primarily from eleven semi-structured and three unstructured interviews. Table [1] provides an overview of the interview partners and some background information on the interviews.

The semi-structured interviews were based on interview guides with key questions on different categories and topics. The guide helped me to focus on my research question, while still leaving enough room for follow-up questions from my side or interesting stories from the interviewees.

The fixed order of the questions provides structure and at the same time allows for the necessary flexibility (Helfferich, 2009). The guidelines are attached in the appendix [A-D]. Most of these interviews were planned in advance and recorded with an audio device and transcribed afterwards. Six of the interviews were conducted in Swahili with some English parts with the help of a translator and the rest of the interviews were in English. The transcripts were consistently documented in English, ensuring clarity and uniformity across all records. I ensured that the interviews were conducted in environments where the interviewees felt comfortable and where they could totally focus on the interview as well as where I could provide good acoustics for the audio recordings.

The unstructured interviews mostly arose from very spontaneous situations. In three cases, a chance encounter with a person who was interesting for my research led to an informative conversation. These interviews were not based on a interviews guide with predefined questions and were not recorded with an audio device. They were more like a conversation between two people about the topic of my research question. The location of the interviews was decided at very short notice. In most cases the interest in the topic of the thesis developed during a previous conversation, which meant that the interview was usually conducted directly on site. Because the interviews were not recorded, there was no need to ensure a quiet noise level and the conversations could also be conducted in busy restaurants or on the open street. Despite their spontaneity and lack of specific preparation, the unstructured conversations proved to be extremely insightful and a crucial addition to the data collection. The unstructured interviews were always conducted in English and therefore did not require a translator. After the interviews, the information from the conversation was summarized and written down as quickly as possible in my field diary to ensure that no information was forgotten.

After each semi-structured and unstructured interview, I took some extra notes in a field diary about the interview situation, the location and any special observations that might have stood out. Documenting my observations helped to contextualize the data and served as a reminder for the background information during data analysis. The field diary also functioned as a record of my own position, allowing me to reflect on my positionality, emotions and potential preconceptions.

Semi-structured Interviews				
Information about the interviewees		Information about the interviews		
Inter-viewee	**Category**	**Recorded / transcribed**	**Location**	**Date**
Lemali	Case study	yes	Duluti	28.05.25
Ngipuyoni	Case study	yes	Engaruka	02.06.25
Naomi	Case study	yes	Engaruka	02.05.25
Olekaley	Case study	yes	Selelah	05.06.25
Devid	Case study	yes	Arusha	16.06.25
3 Mothers	Elders	yes	Engaruka	02.06.25
Chairman	Elder	yes	Engaruka	04.06.25
Father of Lemali	Elder	yes	Engaruka	04.06.25
School Pricipal	Teacher	yes	Oltrumet	30.05.25
Teacher Engaruka	Teacher	yes	Engaruka	03.06.25
Unstructured Interviews				
Pseudonym				
Samwell and Loshiro	Elders	no	Lengiloriti	12.07.25
Joseph	Youth	no	Engaruka	01.06.25
Emmanuel	Elder	no	Arusha	18.06.25
Juma	Youth	no	Muriet, Arusha	19.06.25

Table 1: Information about the Interviews conducted

3.5 Methods of Data Analysis

The entire chapter [4] presenting the Findings of this thesis is based on the methodology of the qualitative content analysis. A combination of deductive and inductive approaches, a multi-stage process of category formation and coding, was chosen for the data analysis. This means that the first phase of coding was based on main categories from the interview guidelines. In the next step, the categories were differentiated and further developed on the basis of the collected data. The category-based coded data from the transcripts were then evaluated and combined in a meaningful way for the findings chapter (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022: 129). The categorization of the code thus forms the structure for chapter [4]. The Coding was performed using MAXQDA 24. MAXQDA 24 is a software that analyzes qualitative data such as text content through coding. The license required to use the software was provided by the University of Zurich for free. Even though the coding process did not start until after the fieldwork, part of the data analysis such as reflection, processing and classification of impressions took place during the data collection in the field. This allowed me to maintain a certain degree of

flexibility with regard to the research question and to make minor adjustments on site. In this way I was able to benefit from a learning process adapted to the situation and avoided the danger of becoming entangled in a fixed research structure.

3.6 Positionality

In the following paragraph, I will critically examine my own role in the research process and the ethical framework of my work. More specifically, I will discuss my assumptions prior to my trip to Tanzania and my positionality before, during, and after the fieldwork. In a further section, I will discuss the ethical framework and then address the limitations and challenges that emerged in the process of my work.

3.6.1 Positionality before the Fieldwork

As the process of this master's thesis has shown me, research should be viewed as an ongoing endeavor. Research is not a finished product that ends after the collected data has been processed and is completed with the publication of the results. Continuous reflection on the initial ideas of a concept, on fieldwork and data collection, on the results, on the interaction with the participants, as well as the own positionality, ensures that research does not end after a certain point. The idea of value-free research, which assumes that knowledge can be generated independently of the background and perspective of the researcher and the participants, is challenged by the concept of positionality. Research opens up a shared context between researcher and participant, which can be shaped and influenced by their identity and personal perception. Not only does one's own perception or that of others play a central role, but also the expectations of how others perceive us (Bourke, 2014). The research process is shaped by my own bias and can be constantly controlled through reflection. Awareness of prejudices enables me to imagine how certain research situations might unfold and how contact with the research participants can be established.

In the first part, I will explain which assumptions and considerations regarding my positionality were relevant prior to the fieldwork, and in the second part, I will reflect on my positionality during and after the fieldwork.

As a «young» white woman from Switzerland, I want to gain an insight into the educational and future prospects of «young» Maasai. Given my position as a Western-socialized student,

it is essential to critically reflect on my role in the research process. My academic background, shaped by the Swiss school system, has convinced me that education is an important tool for economic success and social recognition. However, initial literature from Bishop (2007) suggests that such Eurocentric assumptions may not correspond to the way the Maasai themselves understand education, economic independence, and meaningful life paths. My physical appearance and the assumptions that participants make about me might have elicited certain expectations and reactions. Interview participants might have been inclined to express their commitment to formal education because they associated me with Western ideals. On the other hand, they might also have become more reserved for fear of having to defend their traditional way of life. However, these possible reactions are based solely on my assumptions. It is therefore crucial not to approach field research with the idea that education is inherently desirable or universally empowering. Instead, I wanted to focus on the lived experiences and different perceptions of the Maasai with regard to education and their visions for the future.

Another central aspect of my positionality is my linguistic limitation. Since I don't speak Maa or Swahili, I relied on external translators to facilitate communication. This reliance posed the risk that important nuances got lost in translation and that the interpretation of meanings could change. To mitigate these issues, I worked closely with trusted local individuals who helped me put the answers from the interviews into a cultural and linguistic context.

My role in the community could have been perceived in different ways. My positionality was also determined by the relationship I had with my interviewee. Due to my different cultural background and different skin color, I am positioned as an outsider in this research. These perceptions could have shaped the dynamics of research and influence people's willingness to speak openly. To foster trust and create an environment of respectful exchange, I approached the research not as an expert, but as a fellow learner. Through interest and openness, I built relationships that allow participants to share their perspectives freely and without pressure or prejudice. I strived to make my own role transparent and open to ensure that the research process is as cooperative and ethical as possible.

Furthermore, I am aware that my position goes beyond the scope of the interviews. My behavior in everyday life, my clothing and my interaction with social spaces during the field research can influence how I am perceived and whether people feel comfortable in my presence. I strived to integrate myself respectfully and sensitively into the local context by observing the customs.

3.6.2 Positionality and Reflection during and after the Fieldwork

Considering my positionality before the fieldwork helped me to take different perspectives on my perception and how I am perceived on site. The question of my positionality was present throughout the data collection process. During my visit to a Maasai village my position was questioned several times. The villagers approached a community elder, with whom I also conducted an interview, and asked questions about the background of my visit and the interviews. These questions made my positionality and outsider status explicit and public. I was an outsider who studied the life and views of the Maasai people on formal education and who also differed significantly in terms of looks, background and language. At first, I perceived these questions as a challenge to my position. Over time it became clear that it was less about examining my Western-influenced personality, but rather about curiosity, mutual respect and the desire to develop a common understanding. Through these experiences, I realized that my initial assumptions about my role and positioning were incomplete. I was able to create awareness of my initial outsider position and through this establish a transition to an outsider-insider continuum trough self-reflection and discussion with research partners.

Due to better cultural understanding and learning a few sentences in the local language after a few weeks on site, it felt as if I reached a new state of better access to the community and the trust of the participants. Sharing certain values and experiences from my time as a student with some of the interview partners, who were also at university or the same age as I was, led to a common ground. I later realized that I actively tried to find commonalities and agreements in the participants' realities to reach a better connection. The circumstances of different social roles, ethnic affiliations and life have always made me aware of my outsider status. I remained formally outside, but I increasingly gained trust and access to perspectives that were previously inaccessible. At the same time, I maintained an analytical distance that allowed me to critically reflect on the research and carefully classify the insights that I gained.

In summary, my positionality which is shaped by cultural, linguistic, and social differences, influences this research. By acknowledging these dynamics and practicing continuous self-reflection, I am able to conduct my research in a way that considers insider and outsider dynamics and takes the voices of the Maasai community into account.

3.7 Ethical Framework

Research in human geography requires careful consideration of ethical issues. There is a responsibility to minimize risks for both researchers and participants, to conscientiously highlight social inequalities and power asymmetries rather than exacerbating them and to reconcile differing expectations within a common framework. Research and data collection must be conducted and processed in a transparent manner. Ethics is not understood as an additional element of research but is incorporated as a fundamental dimension throughout the entire research process (Müller et al., 2025).

In preparation for my fieldwork, I completed the Guidelines on Ethics and Safety in Fieldwork for Researchers in Human Geography of the University of Zurich (version 2022). The document is attached in the appendix [E]. Together with Dr. Asebe Debelo and Dr. Shona Loong, we discussed the answers and they were approved by them. The document serves as a risk assessment of personal safety in the research situation and as a basis for reflection on ethical principles. The importance of consent and data confidentiality was particularly emphasized. We also reflected on how expectations can be communicated realistically and how this can prevent misunderstandings.

The ethical dimension of the work is not only anchored in formal guidelines but is also based on my attitude of sensitivity towards the participants who are at the center of the research. The principle of «do no harm» also served as the basis for the research and obliges researchers to recognize unintended negative consequences of the research work at an early stage and to take appropriate measures if necessary.

During the interviews, I asked some very personal questions and addressed emotional topics such as discrimination, forced marriage or dropping out of school. These topics have led to answers that have evoked strong emotions and a sense of involvement in me. Compassion and empathy led to a strengthening of the trust between me and the person being interviewed and at the same time they had a selective effect on my perception. I was aware of the ethical principles and tried to avoid questions that could trigger extreme emotions or to phrase them very sensitively. In the case of emotionally charged statements, I only asked further questions when I was given a clear signal from the interviewee that this was okay.

The principle of «do no harm» forms a central basis of social science research. It obliges researchers to identify potential risks or unintended negative consequences of their work at an

early stage, to reflect on them, and to take measures to avoid harm to participants, local communities, and also to the researchers themselves. Social science research emphasizes that ethics must be understood as a continuous, process-oriented space for negotiation that goes beyond formal approvals. With this in mind, in y research I have combined institutional guidelines with a reflexive practice that aim to ensure responsible and respectful research (Israel & Hay, 2006).

3.8 Limitations and Challenges

In the following section, some ethical and methodological limitations and challenges are presented and it is briefly explained what impact they had on the fieldwork and results of this work.

During the process of finding interview partners, I established criteria for the selection of the interview partners. Since Anne, my research partner was on site in Arusha, she contacted the potential interview partners based on my criteria and asked them to participate in the interviews. This form of sample search can be a form limitation, as I did not select the individuals directly, which creates a certain degree of dependency. However, the interview partners were only contacted again and asked to participate in a definitive interview after a consultation with me.

A difficulty that arose during the interviews was the gender-specific power dynamics. Several women stated that they could only participate in an interview as a group and not individually, as the men would not allow them to freely express their personal opinions. These interview situations were characterized by social hierarchies. It was not possible to conduct individual interviews with women under these circumstances, which may have limited the diversity of perspectives. Still, it felt like the women were very comfortable with each other and understood each other/got along well, so despite the group interviews the openness was not lost.

The time limitation of the fieldwork to 8 weeks and the reliance on contact persons automatically led to a limitation of samples. Although the content of the work is based on exemplary and not representative results, there is always a risk that certain perspectives will remain underrepresented. In addition to the time perspective, the element of logistics also had a certain limiting effect on the sample selection. The plan to conduct interviews in remote regions presented me with practical challenges. I was dependent on various modes of transportation, as well as current weather conditions and local infrastructure. Not all of the Maasai villages that were the focus of my research were accessible to me. Due to a lack of public transportation or

accommodations on site, or due to heavy rainfall, I could not conduct interviews in some villages that I had planned to. These aspects had an impact on limiting the depth and range of my data.

4 Formal Education Between Ambition and Ambivalence

This chapter discusses the findings of this research in relation to the research questions presented in chapter [1.2]. The overall aim of this study is to find out how formal education shapes the future of «young» Maasai and how this is perceived within their community. It addresses two overarching questions on *how «young» Maasai navigate opportunities and challenges in formal education, and how parents and community members perceive formal education concerning their culture.*

The findings in this chapter is divided into two main parts, each dealing with one of the research questions. The findings are presented descriptively but also follow an interpretative and theory-driven approach. This method to analyze the data links the statements of the interview partners to the theory presented in chapter [2.3]. Based on Sen's (1999) «Development as Freedom» and capability approach, the analysis of the results attempts to examine how formal education expands the freedoms and opportunities of the interviewees or to what extent they get restricted. At the same time, it addresses the tensions between empowerment and traditional/cultural values. The combination of theoretical considerations and empirical data from the interviews discusses formal education as a space for negotiation between tradition, collective belonging, individual aspirations and how this shapes future prospects. The main part of the results is based on interviews from the five case studies. The case studies involve individuals between the ages of 20 and 30 years, who have different educational and family backgrounds. The statements of the interviews with the community members *(parents, elders)* will be used in the first part of the findings for additional information and mainly to explain the generational perspective on formal education in the second part of the findings. The interviews with the principal and the teacher from two different schools will primarily serve to provide context in the findings.

4.1 Introduction of the Case Studies

This chapter works with selected case studies individuals who exemplify the different perspectives of «young» Maasai on formal education. The statements discussed below are not intended to generalize, but rather to provide a deeper understanding of individual experiences in the subject area of this thesis. The case studies represent different educational paths, places of birth and genders. Through this, the study attempted, as far as possible within the scope of this work, to reflect the diversity and heterogeneity of the life realities of «young» Maasai. The individuals are briefly introduced below in order to contextualize their statements in the further part of the analysis of the findings.

Case Study 1: Lemali, male

I met Lemali, who is 25 years old, at a restaurant near the main street in Duluti. While we eat, Lemali tells me a bit about his studies and his family. After the meal, we walked to his student accommodation, sit down at a table outside and started the interview. Lemali is the second oldest brother of seven children. In his early childhood, from the age of five to nine, Lemali lived with his grandmother and looked after the family's cattle. At the age of ten he attended primary school at his grandmother's request and graduated in 2016. After his graduation he immediately started secondary school and in 2021 began a diploma course at Duluti College in Animal Health and Production. He is now in his final year of study. He would like to find a job to save some money so that he can move back to his home village and work with the cattle and apply the knowledge he has learned during his studies.

Case Study 2: Ngypuioni, female

Ngypuioni grew up in Irerendeni and is 20 years old. I meet her at her house in her family in-laws' Boma. She recently became a mother to her third child and she also takes care of the half-orphan baby. During her childhood, she spent her time at home helping her mother with household and family care tasks. At the age of 13, Ngypuioni was able to attend primary school thanks to the support of a teacher in the village. She was a very good student and enjoyed going to school. She told me that she became pregnant soon after graduating from primary school and therefore had to get married to her husband. Due to her age and because she now has to take care of four children, she no longer has the opportunity to complete secondary school.

Case Study 3: Naomi, female

I meet Naomi, who is 21 years old in Engaruka, the village where she grew up, at the Boma of a friend of her mother. During her childhood, Naomi had to help her mother, who has a walking disability, with tasks such as fetching water, cooking and building the house. She attended primary school at the age of 7 and later went to secondary school. She told me that she was supposed to be married against her will, but that she was able to escape the wedding, for reasons that are unknown to me. Since she achieved very good grades in secondary school, she is now waiting to be accepted into high school.

Case Study 4: Olekaley, male

On my bus trip from Arusha to Engaruka, I meet Olekaley for the first time. We arrange a meeting for the next day and then he gets off the bus one stop before me. The following day, Olekaley travels from Selela to Engaruka and shows me the nearby cultural sights. Afterwards, we sit down at a table outside the accommodation where I was staying and begin the interview. Olekalay grew up in a village called Kitumbeine, in an exceptionally large family as the half-brother of 78 half-siblings. After graduating from high school, he was selected to start a bachelor's degree in tourism and cultural heritage at the University of Dodoma. After a year of study, he returned to his village to take care of his parents. Today, he is 26 years old, has two children and works as a volunteer ranger in Ngorongoro National Park.

Case Study 5: Devid, male

I meet Devid at his workplace in the bank in the center of Arusha. Devid was born in Kenya near the border to Tanzania and is now 27 years old. He told me about his first school experiences in 2002 under a tree in his village, as there was no school nearby. Devid then attended primary school at a boarding school in Kenya and secondary school in Tanzania. It was a rather difficult time for him, living away from his family and not being able to visit them during the holidays, as he did not know where they were staying at the time due to their pastoral lifestyle. Because of his good school grades, he was able to attend high school and then study computer science at the university in Dar es Salaam. Today, Devid works in a bank and lives in Arusha.

4.2 Navigating Formal Education: Opportunities and Challenges for «Young» Maasai

Even though education is compulsory in Tanzania, access to formal education can be extremely difficult for Maasai children. Due to their different life situations, some children face additional challenges. This chapter examines how the different case studies navigate challenges in formal education in pursuit of their culture and their future. By presenting the access to formal education and the associated experiences from the case studies, this chapter provides an understanding of the associated obstacles and opportunities of formal education, which helps to better understand the visions, wishes and perspectives for the future.

The number of students from the Maasai community has risen steadily in recent decades (Marty, 2024). However, an overview of the existing literature shows that this expansion does not automatically go hand in hand with stable educational biographies or uniform living conditions. In many cases, formal education is characterized by poor infrastructure and curricular content that does not correspond to the reality of life in pastoralist communities (Coles, 2009), (Pesambili, 2020). Under these conditions, «young» Maasai develop diverse paths, experiences and motivations to formal education. While some «young» Maasai were only able to access formal education at great personal risk and with structural and financial limitations, others were able to draw on social relationships, family support or existing educational opportunities that facilitated their entry into the school system. Motivations rang from the hope for greater social mobility and an intrinsic interest in learning to external expectations and compulsory education due to government regulations. The diversity of motivations is also reflected in their experiences. While some «young» Maasai see formal education as an opportunity to find their orientation in a changing world, others report feeling overwhelmed or unable to apply what they learned in school to their later professional lives. Formal school thus becomes a social space in which belonging and recognition are renegotiated, but under conditions that are not equally accessible to all (Coles, 2009).

4.2.1 Educational Experiences of «Young» Maasai and Their Motivations for Attending School

Different areas of social life are regulated to different degrees. While leisure time allows for open personal organization, working hours are more strictly regulated. The formal education of children falls into a category that is heavily regulated by international, national and regional laws, regulations and guidelines. Even though formal education has many advantages for individual students as well as for society, attending school also comes with certain restrictions on immediate freedom. Students have limited opportunities to choose the type of education, the location or the form of classes at school (Hart, 2012). From a capability perspective, these restrictions do not necessarily contradict freedom, as they may contribute to the expansion of substantive freedoms in the long term by enabling the development of a person's capabilities. Building on this structural understanding of formal education as a regulated social sphere, the following section focuses on the individual level of educational opportunities and motivations of the case studies within this sphere.

Olekaley's educational path illustrates the example of a person and their intrinsic motivation for formal education. He describes formal education as an opportunity to gain experiences beyond one's familiar spatial and social context and to explore new realities of life. *«I felt like I need to see new people in the world...wearing this kind of clothes [pointing at me]. In my village, you don't see that*» (*Olekaley).* The decision to leave the family in order to go to school was driven by a desire for new experiences, reorientation and social openness. Since there is no school in his home village and the negative perspective of his parents on formal education, Olekaley was willing to take a significant risk and travel alone as a «young» boy to the nearest larger village with a school. Olekaley described his experiences of this journey as follows:

> *«I just started walking two days and nights. I climbed the tree because it was so dangerous in the place that I slept, because of the wild animals… During the morning, I started walking again with only one shoe. I had one shoe and one cloth. So, I walked along the way up to Engaruka for two days.»*
>
> - *Olekaley*

Upon arriving in the new village, he was enrolled in the formal school system of the village of Engaruka. Reflecting on his experience, he describes the significant effort and risks as worth it. Driven by an intrinsic motivation to explore new life realities, he enabled himself to fulfill this desire and achieve his educational goals. It is interesting that his early motivation for formal education was not triggered by external incentives. According to his accounts, he is the

only child in his extended family to have completed a formal education and his village is located very remotely from surrounding civilization. Therefore his motivation was based on just an idea of formal education and a worldview that he did not know from personal experience. It was most likely based on fragmented observations and an imagined future outside his personal environment. Lessmann (2014) emphasizes that education plays a crucial role in transforming future-oriented aspirations into the ability to act. By expanding individuals' capabilities, imagined life courses can increasingly be pursued even under structurally limited conditions (Lessmann, 2024).

Devid's experiences with an educational system took place in an informal learning setting in his village in Kenya, where he grew up. He explains: *«I started my education nearby my home, but under the tree because we had no access to schools» (Devid).* In his hometown, children were taught by selected community members. After a few years, he transitioned into a formal education system at a boarding school, far from his family and his known environment. Initially, Devid had no motivation to visit a formal school because neither he nor his parents saw any benefit in going to school. As he reports, his attendance was not driven by personal motivation but was a result of government educational organizations. This external pressure negatively affected his personal experiences and his parents' perspectives. He describes his experiences during that transition as follows:

> *«I didn't see the importance or purpose of going to school because I didn't feel like I'm lacking something. In our community, by that time, we were forced to go to school by some Organizations from the government. The parents they didn't even want us to go to school. So our parents not being happy about this, that was horrible. I didn't enjoy my school until, I think to university level.»*
>
> - *Devid*

The initial rejection of Devid is reflected in the findings of a study on Maasai education in Kenya by Nishimura (2019). This study shows that early formal education was often introduced by government and external organizations. It describes how this imposed pressure initially led to a negative attitude and was perceived as being detached from local realities (Nishimura, 2019). Devid's statement also indicates that his motivation has changed over the years. His rejection of formal education in the early years was based on the fact that formal education did not align with his life reality and therefore did not provide any motivation or benefit for him. It was only during his university studies that his perspective and attitude changed. Devid developed a deeper interest in learning. The content of the learning topics at university became more aligned with his personal interests and was increasingly linked to future actions and career opportunities in the field of computer science.

Naomi began her formal education in primary school in her home village and later transferred to a secondary school located a bit further away. She shares that she always enjoyed going to school: *«I was so happy to start school because I really wanted to go and play with other kids» (Naomi).* Despite her enjoyment of school, her educational biography is marked by significant challenges. Naomi was subjected to the pressure of an early marriage. She was able to avoid the marriage through measures unknown to me. She faced challenges that are common for girls and «young» women in the Maasai community including practices such as forced marriage, gender preference or female genital mutilation (Zakayo et al., 2022). Despite these difficult circumstances, Naomi was able to continue her formal education and successfully completed secondary school. At the time of the interview, she was waiting for a placement at a college. Her career goal is to become a lawyer to support the girls and women in her community. Naomi promotes an understanding of formal education that is supported not only by individual ambitions but also by social responsibility: *«The important thing now is to get education so I can help those who are passing many challenges» (Naomi).* She sees the positive aspect and her motivation for formal education in the knowledge and skills she has acquired enabling her to support other members of the Maasai community. She is focusing on her education to achieve personal goals, but at the same time she is focusing on the opportunities offered to her by formal education to overcome the communal challenges the Maasai are facing. Naomi's statement underscores the findings of studies by Ndaula (2018) and Raymond (2021) that examine Maasai girls' participation in formal education. Both texts describe the form of social orientation in relation to formal education that is described by Naomi. For girls in particular, formal education is seen as an opportunity to take on responsibility and help other community members in situations in which they are usually powerless. Prevalent inequalities and power relations should be highlighted, and girls want to escape patriarchal oppression and be perceived as valuable members of society (Raymond, 2021) & (Ndaula, 2018).

Lemalis emphasized that his desire for formal education came from an independent decision and he did not feel any pressure from his parents or community members. Attending primary school at an early age gave him a sense of personal maturity and the opportunity to pursue his desire for knowledge. *«It was my choice to go there. It was comfort for my brain. I felt like now I am mature and I want to get skill and knowledge about education» (Lemali).* Lemali derives motivation for attending school from his personal goals and well-being. However, this motivation extends beyond personal feelings and is closely linked to social and cultural belonging.

Similar to Naomi, Lemali also has a strong sense of future orientation and responsibility towards the Maasai community. He intends to apply his formal education and professional goals within the context of the Maasai community. Particularly in the fields of pastoralism and cattle herding, he sees opportunities to strengthen the Maasai way of life through his studies in Animal Health and Production. *«Because in the Maasai society we are keeping life stock, so I want to be a professional to help my community» (Lemali).* Lemali finds his motivation for formal education both in personal and societal aspects. It serves as an expression of scope for action and self-determination, leading in Lemali's case to collective support and trying to secure his community's future.

Ngypuionis educational journey began at the age of 13 in primary school until the sixth grade. She shared her motivation for formal education with her mother. Both women viewed formal education as an opportunity to acquire practical skills that could later be used to establish their own business. By learning entrepreneurial activities, they aimed to ensure a self-sufficient and regular income. *«… to learn skills like entrepreneurship and education. So she can manage he own small business and programs that will help her in the future» (Ngypuioni: translated).* Despite her motivation, Ngypuioni was unable to continue her educational pathway. Due to pregnancy during her adolescence, she had to drop out of school and marry her current husband. Ngypuioni explained to me: *«So I was never even ready for marriage I didn't want it. But I became pregnant and got married and that's what happened» (Ngypuioni: translated).* The termination of school was not at her own wish but was due to social and family obligations as a mother and wife. *« …now I have kids, there is no other option, I have to take care of the kids. But personally, education was priority for me» (Ngypuioni: translated).* Particularly for Maasai girls, this form of school dropout is very common (Raymond, 2021).

Ngypuionis interrupted educational path cannot be understood only as an individual experience but must be contextualized by gender-specific power relations and decision-making structures. As explained in the text by Maghimbi (2024), men are the decisionmakers about women, children and the entire household. This male dominance is also strongly reflected in the decisions about the responsibilities and value attributed to boys and girls (Maghimbi, 2024). Men in the Maasai community have a significantly stronger social and symbolic position of power and status, which is reflected in family decision-making structures and in communication behavior (Raymond, 2021). With regard to formal education, this power relationship is evident in the question of whether girls are sent to school or not. While Bonini (2006) describes how the

focus of indigenous education depends on the gender of the child, the accounts from the interviews on formal education seem to show a similar situation of gender dependency in formal education (Bonini, 2006). Both female case studies emphasize that it is much more difficult for girls to attend school than for boys, as no importance is attached to educating girls through formal education. They talk about the fate of many Maasai girls and speak from a more general perspective:

> *«The Maasai society should be taught and shown the importance of education for their kids. Because they have a bias they think only men are supposed to be in school and no girls are supposed to be in school. So they need to be trained and change their mindset that they see it's really important to send the kids to school and not only one gender.»*
>
> - *Naomi*
>
> *«There are very big differences, because a girl in the Maasai community they are not valued. They are only taken as a tool and for granted. They think a girl will be married, there is no importance for them to go to school.»*
>
> - *Ngypuioni*

The gender-specific division of roles stipulates that daughters move into their husbands' bomas after marriage, where they are responsible for everyday tasks and remain at home. Therefore, no advantage or value is seen in educating daughters and sending them to school. Even though the number of girls in schools is steadily increasing, informal discussions have shown that attitudes toward girls' schooling remain negative (Bonini, 2006). Parents who want their daughters to receive a formal education often act cautiously or resist the idea of sending their daughters to school. Apart from the role of girls as wives and mothers and their work requirements in society, parents are hesitant to send girls to school because it takes them out of their familial environment, where they can be protected and controlled (Krätli & Dyer, 2009). In this context, Krätli & Dyer (2009) state that girls-only boarding schools in particular can counteract this problem. The girls are among themselves and there is no longer any danger of being attacked or injured on the way to school. The school principals recognized that parents are more willing to send their daughters to school if they have the option of attending a girls' boarding school, as this ensures greater safety for the girls (Krätli & Dyer, 2009: 56). The decision to enroll a child in school depends on gender and on the parents' previous experiences with formal education (Yao, 2018).

The various experiences and motivations presented by the case studies demonstrate a consistent connection between formal education and their visions for the future. Regardless of what triggers their motivation, formal education is perceived as an opportunity to shape one's own future and actively open new forms of action. The idea of formal education, whether during primary

school or in retrospect, is consistently associated with personal future prospects. Formal education serves as a tool to rethink life plans within social, economic and ecological contexts. Therefore, I would generally associate the motivation for formal education described here with a desire to reduce uncertainties and dependencies, as well as to negotiate alternative life paths.

General motivations and factors positively influencing the choice to go to school

The experiences and motivations discussed in the previous chapter are based on the individual educational biographies of the case studies. The analysis of the results has also revealed some recurring patterns and motivations that are common factors of motivation, extending beyond personal and individual experiences and pointing to broader social and structural dynamics.

Role Models

In different cases of «young» Maasai, role models have played a positive role in the educational pathway. Some of the case studies were motivated to go to formal school or take certain courses at university by the opportunities presented by role models. I was told that role models act as intermediaries between the somehow unfamiliar promises of formal education and the concrete life forms and opportunities. On one hand, role models promote the general motivation to start school and on the other hand, it presents an example of specific careers or educational paths. Especially for «young» Maasai whose parents do not see the importance of formal education but who still want to attend school, role models can be an important motivational factor. Naomi told me that a friend of the family inspired her to pursue her current career aspirations.

> *«There is a sister of a friend who is a lawyer, so I was impress and wanted to be a lawyer as well. I have performed to be a lawyer in school so I will become a lawyer one day.»*
>
> - *Naomi*

This statement shows that Naomis personal educational achievements were positively influenced by a female role model, motivating her to strengthen her individual skills. Due to the gender-specific dimensions within the social roles in Maasai community. I would interpret that especially for «young» women, role models from in- or outside the family can challenge normative ideas about marriage, motherhood and career aspirations and therefore demonstrate more alternative life paths.

There are examples of older Maasai who have attended secondary school and lead successful professional lives. According to Marty (2024), regular attendance of formal education among Maasai communities began with the generation that is currently between 40 and 50 years old. This indicates that this cohort is educationally diverse, including individuals with relatively

high levels of formal education as well as others with little or no formal education (Marty, 2024). As a result, there is no cohesive older or previous generation with shared educational experiences that could systematically support the «young» Maasai after they graduate from college and serve as role models. Despite the few examples, there is a lack of role models from the parental home or among relatives regarding formal education which reflects the relatively short expansion of formal education among the interviewed Maasai people. Olekaley told me: *«Nobody advised me, nobody inspired me to go to school» (Olekaley).* In cases of the absence of role models from the older generation, younger generations often have to find their own way and gain experiences independently, navigating the formal education system without established routes or guidance from their social networks. Coles' (2009) text also discusses the possibilities of role models in relation to access to formal education for Maasai. The Text points out that Maasai teachers are one of the best role models and motivations for Maasai children to attend school. I have also observed that most teachers at schools with almost exclusively Maasai children come from other areas and tribes (Coles, 2009).

The educational decisions and future visions concerning role models, as discussed in this section, can be analytically understood through the text by Lessmann (2024). Lessmann (2024) describes that individuals develop different futures and courses of action not through personal motivation but through socially learned skills. The ability to aspire something is viewed as an social agency. Consequently, aspirations arise from shared experiences, social negotiation processes, collective responsibility and role models. The ability to pursue goals is a collective skill that involves the development of collective intentions (Lessmann, 2024: 572). The role model mentioned by the case studies serve as central resources for the community. Through them, educational decisions can be made more confidently and the feeling of risks by the individuals can be reduced.

Economic Stability

The interviews also reveal that the prospect of improved career opportunities and the associated economic stability are motivating factors for formal education. Both the case studies and the interviewees from the older generation associate formal education with the hope of a secure income and better opportunities in various professional fields that are not especially part of their traditional structures. *«So my dreamlife is to complete this course and be a big professional» (Lemali).* The pursuit of a professional career illustrates how economic and occupational motivation are reflected in individual ambitions concerning formal education. The vision

of future employment links personal achievements with the expectation of contributing to both individual capital and the collective common good. One of the mothers also addresses this expectation, emphasizing the connection between motivation for formal education and supporting the community and family.

> *«They wish their children to go away and find jobs. Even to drive people in tours or to work in other sectors. Because when they get jobs they will send money and the kids will pay some helpers to help the old parents. So they have big expectations for their kids.»*
>
> - *One of the three Mothers: translated*

Formal education is therefore seen as personal capital but also as a strategic resource that should open up long term prospects and create financial security.

> *«He is so much waiting for the children with a bright future and a beautiful life. With good houses and a good job. And through the job the can buy shoes, dresses and nice food. And they wish the kids to have a bright future not the life he has.»*
>
> - *Father of Lemali: translated*

Even though the two statements are coming from elders within the community, they also reflect the views of the interviewed «young» Maasai. Better opportunities in the job market through formal education not only contribute to personal wealth accumulation but also enhance social security within the community. This underscores a significant intergenerational responsibility. Formal education is linked to expectations regarding the abilities and opportunities to support one's family and reduce financial vulnerability. It plays a crucial role in fostering economic stability and social cohesion among community members, especially in a context where traditional roles and modern aspirations intersect. From the perspective of the capability approach, the statements can be interpreted as that formal education is expected to enhance people's capabilities in achieving their goals. These expectations relate to the real opportunities that arise in terms of financial security and increased autonomy. The improved capabilities should be translated into meaningful outcomes that correspond to both their individual aspirations and their collective responsibilities (Hart, 2012).The motivation for economic stability can be seen as a forward-looking navigation strategy. By linking formal education to future employment and financial security, one could interpret that current costs, risks or uncertainties are justified by a certain vision of the future.

Sen (1999) describes the importance of freedom to enter economic markets and become an active part of them in his theory. This makes an important contribution to development, regardless of whether and to what extent market mechanisms actually promote economic growth or

industrialization. Freedom of economic exchange plays a central role in social life. Sen (1999) emphasizes that markets are important, but that «Development as Freedom» requires that the exclusion and deprivation of marginalized groups, as well as their cultural contributions and critiques, be taken seriously and not that a one-sided market-based way of life be presented as superior (Sen, 1999). In the context of the interviewees, this perspective highlights that aspirations for formal education and market participation are less about adopting a market-based lifestyle per se than about gaining access to economic security and reducing structural vulnerability, while remaining embedded in cultural frameworks.

Nutrition

Based on observations and reports from teachers during my visits in schools, it has been observed that many students associate school attendance with immediate benefits. One of the most significant advantages is the provision of meals at school. School meals during the lunch break, which children spend at school not at home, help in ways as in concentration, contribute to overall physical well-being and also serve as a fundamental motivational factor for children. Teachers and the principal are aware of the positive impact of providing meals and intentionally use this as a strategy to encourage children to attend school. The principal of a school in Oltrumet reports: *«So we are trying to motivate the kids trough food. That impresses them to start and to come to school» (Principal Oltrumet).* Olekaley supports the principal's statement with his own experiences.

> *«Because sometimes a lot of kids are inspired with food in the school, like us even. Since we were in school, we were just after food. If we see that today, they are going to cook rice, I go to school very early in the morning.»*
>
> - *Olekaley*

Olekaleys statement illustrates how food acts as a tangible incentive for children to go to school. He describes an anticipation he associates with food and thus with school, which motivated him to attend classes. In the context of food security, food contributes to the presence of students at classes and shapes the everyday meaning of formal education for children. Food provision transforms school attendance from a long-term investment into a short-term survival strategy, particularly under conditions of food insecurity. This form of navigation highlights how educational participation is closely intertwined with basic livelihood needs. At the same time various interviewees pointed out that the motivational factor of the meals is fragile and uncertain because often the meals are not sufficient for all students or the portions are too small. It’s difficult for children to reach their full learning potential when they are hungry. If a school

does not have the financial resources to provide meals for all the students, the incentive to continue attending school is weakened. One teacher reported about the inadequate food supply in some schools: *«And that's the most difficult thing that they have to walk so far and then they get no lunch» (Teacher Engaruka).* As Lemali explains, parents are also expected to contribute financially to school meal, which is not feasible for many families or households. As a result, some children have long school days without food, which is making attendance at school less attractive.

> *«You know there is a big challenge of food in school in Tanzania. At least this school provided the food. But in most schools they don't eat anything. Because the parents are supposed to contribute but they are poor. So sometimes the students stay at school for 8 hours and eat nothing.»*
>
> - *Lemali*

Schools that can provide meals have higher attendance rates than schools that cannot offer meals to the students during the lunch break. This is confirmed by the teachers I interviewed, as well as by the systematic review and meta-analysis by Wang et al. (2021) on the impact of school meals on the educational and health outcomes of school age children and adolescents in low- and middle-income countries (Wang et al., 2021). But if this provision of meals is interrupted, parents take their children out of school. This demonstrates that the opportunity to receive formal education is also connected to basic living conditions. Given that children walk long distances and that food has a positive impact on children's health, performance and attendance, it would be the responsibility of the authorities to ensure an adequate supply of food for the children (Pesambili & Novelli, 2021: 6).

Above all, improved opportunities on the job market, role models and Nutrition are motivators for starting a formal educational pathway and facing the challenges and barriers of everyday school life the. The case studies reported that new perspectives on their own community, its way of life and their personal role in it, helped them find motivation to attend a formal school.

4.2.2 Challenges and Barriers for «Young» Maasai in Accessing Formal Education

Many Maasai children encounter significant barriers to accessing formal education. These challenges are often compounded by their pastoral lifestyle and cultural practices, which can create additional obstacles for some children and requires specific navigation strategies. The analysis of access to formal education offers insights into the specific challenges faced by Maasai children. During the examination of interview transcripts, several challenges emerged, which can

be broadly categorized into two groups: structural-economic challenges and cultural-social challenges.

Long journeys to school, lack of infrastructure and poverty are among the structural-economic challenges, while the cultural-social challenges are linked to the expectations and norms of the Maasai community, such as adaptation to new environments, family obligations and the focus of livelihoods on livestock herding. Both categories are closely linked and cannot be described completely separately from one another. The economic situation can influence cultural expectations, while cultural ideas shape structural obstacles. Therefore, the two categories will be examined in more detail below as intertwined barriers to formal education based on the statements of the interview partners.

Lack of financial resources

In almost all the interviews, insufficient income is described as a factor that significantly influenced access to formal education for Maasai students. These challenges are not a reflection of the Maasai way of life or individual choices but rather highlight structural and economic inequalities. Many Maasai families I interviewed have an income that covers their daily living expenses. School fees, uniform costs and the payment of learning materials therefore represent a major financial burden. One interview was conducted with three mothers at the same time. The following statement comes from one mother in this group interview.

> *«Yes money is a big challenge, because a woman who is selling things like this [women selling us some cake before the interview] is the one who is trying to help her kid going to school…There are big obstacles especially for joining secondary school. At the primary level they can at least go but when they reach the secondary level we have no money to keep the children going to school.»*
>
> - *One of the three Mothers: translated*

This statement shows that there is a significant difference between access to primary and secondary schools. School fees for primary schools in Tanzania were abolished in 2001 (Bishop, 2007). While there is/might be a primary school in the village where the interviewees live, children must attend a boarding school once they reach secondary school age. This change from a local school to a more expensive boarding school is a huge financial difficulty for many Maasai families. In some cases, parents cannot afford the school fees and therefore their children return home after their primary school graduation (Martinez & Waldron, 2006: 412). Especially in families with many children, the question arises as to how many children can be afforded a formal education and which children have to stay at home to support the family. The interview with Lemali has shown, that formal education is not always a continuous process.. *«I would like to continue but there is a problem of the school fee… when I get a job and collect*

money for school fee then I go back» (Lemali). As a result, school attendance is sometimes interrupted, with pauses being used to get a job and save enough money to continue the studies. Bishop's (2007) study also describes the difficulty of accessing formal education due to financial constraints. The text explains that the Maasai and Non-Maasai have different understandings of poverty and wealth. Some non-Maasai interviewed in the research of Bishop (2007) say that the Maasai value their cattle so much that they would not sell them to improve their financial situation. For them, being rich means being rich in animals (Bishop, 2007). But this assumption from Bishop's text (2007) is questioned by a statement made by one of the mothers.

> *«There are changes especially for me as a Mother. When children go to school and especially when my son goes to college there was a time when I was selling land to pay the school fees and also I sold a lot of animals to help the children go to school.»*
>
> - *One of the three Mothers: translated*

The statement shows that her family is concerned about the children's access to formal education and that they are willing to sell personal property, land and animals to send the children to school. This statement indicates that the mother is willing to make material sacrifices, while also highlighting structural inequalities. The sale of land and livestock does not ensure sustainable access to formal education. Instead, it emphasizes that, despite high motivation, formal education remains a significant personal and financial risk for many families. Although Bishop (2007) argues that Maasai parents are reluctant to sell their animals to finance their children's formal education, my interviews paint a different picture (Bishop, 2007). The behavior of the mother interviewed illustrates that cultural preferences and the desire for formal education can overlap. Nevertheless, the enormous economic risk remains despite a strong motivation. My research has shown that economic barriers can be more decisive for access to formal education than cultural values regarding the number of cattle to be owned. Financial barriers are attempted to be actively navigated through adaptive strategies such as selling animals and land, prioritizing formal education over cultural practices or interrupting formal education to generate income. Overcoming these challenges is not always a linear process and is characterized by interruptions, setbacks and high personal risks. Sen's (1999) argument on transaction, markets, and economic unfreedom discusses that economic unfreedom in the form of poverty can make a person a victim of violations of other freedoms. Neither Lemali would have had to interrupt his education, nor would the mother have had to sell land and animals to pay for school fees, if access to formal education had been possible without this. Economic unfreedom can lead to social unfreedom and conversely, social unfreedom can promote economic unfreedom (Sen, 1999).

Long walking distances and Lack of school supplies

According to the statements made by most of the interviewees, the long walking distances and the lack of school supplies effect the everyday education and learning of the students. The teacher and the principle I interviewed confirm that there are no other school buildings in the wider vicinity of their schools and that many of their students therefore have to walk often several kilometers and spend multiple hours each day to reach the school. As the school principal confirmed, the long distances are not only due to the remote Maasai villages, but also due to land exploitation and spatial changes. When land is sold from a Maasai family, the family must relocate further away from existing infrastructure and the school. *«Years back Maasai Students were so many more than now. They are selling land and then they have to move to other places more far away from the school» (Principal Oltrumet).* These conditions make access to formal education even more difficult, exhausting and time-consuming. The principal did not disclose any further information regarding the land sale. Therefore, I would interpret the statement of the principal with the text from Saruni et al. (2018). The study findings show that existing conflicts between farmers and pastoral communities are due to unclear village boundaries, blocking of routes for cattle herds and double allocation of land to multiple individuals. The reasons that the conflicts exist are because of the late actions of government officials, moral misconduct and corruption (Saruni et al., 2018). The lack of land for pastoralists is also due to investments in Maasai land. Many areas of the Maasai's land are located in protected areas or national parks, which means the Maasai are denied full control over the land (Munishi, 2013: 95). These conditions lead to changes in land ownership and show that economic pressure, conservation policy, land regulations and corruption contribute to land sales and expropriations and thus to spatial marginalization (Saruni et al., 2018). According to the study and the principal's accounts, access to formal education is also influenced by developments in land and expropriation dynamics.

A «young» Maasai man told me in an informal conversation that when he was still going to school, he had to walk a very long and dangerous way to reach the school building. On some days, he and his classmates encountered wild animals on the way. There was no way to make their journey to school safer and they were forced to walk the same route every day. The combination of long journeys to school, hunger and physical exhaustion can lead to children only being able to attend classes irregularly. They often fall asleep during class and miss the lessons they have traveled so far as the Father of Lemali confirms: *«They just sleep and are not able*

to study» (Father of Lemali: translated). But even in cases where there are school buildings and students attend classes, basic equipment is often lacking. Because students from many surrounding villages attend the same school, there are not enough classrooms for the large number of students. There is a shortage of chairs and tables, learning materials cannot be provided for all students and there are extremely high student-teacher ratios as the teacher explains: *«And in one class, we have got more than 120 people, it's a lot of work» (Teacher Engaruka)*. Olekaley describes the situation of the lacking school supplies from his own experience at the boarding school:

> *«They don't have enough books in schools. And not enough classes, maybe they also need more teachers and more water. If they have these things everybody is happy to go to school, here it's very different. In the dormitory you have to sleep down. Even myself. I slept down on the floor until I finished in my class 7. So it is important to have such things. Bed and mattress.»*
>
> - *Olekaley*

The lack of basic infrastructure and learning materials significantly affects the quality of education and everyday learning conditions. According to Setwin et al. (2021) overcrowded classrooms, insufficient seating and inadequate accommodation in boarding schools create an environment that is physically demanding and hinder a learning-friendly atmosphere. These conditions not only undermine students' motivation and concentration, but also place considerable strain on teachers, who are expected to manage large classes with limited (Setwin et al., 2021: 149). The deficits in infrastructure are a sign that formal education which is although officially available to some extent, does not guarantee automatic access to high-quality formal education. This is not a criticism of the teachers' performance, but rather the conditions under which they must work. In response to long distances and inadequate infrastructure, students overcome barriers to formal education through physical endurance, early independence and collective coping mechanisms, such as walking to school in groups. These strategies reflect resilience, but also show that difficulties are normalized as part of formal education.

I would have liked to learn more about the conditions in the school buildings. However, it was somehow difficult to obtain further information from the teachers. It was striking that the interviews with the teachers were significantly shorter than all the other interviews. The teachers both spoke about the lack of food and school supplies, but their statements were always very short. I would interpret these answers to mean that the teachers were aware of overcrowded classrooms, lack of infrastructure and lack of resources and may have wanted to avoid discussing these issues openly. Too open criticism of the school system by teachers could be seen as

inappropriate and could cause repercussions from the government. I would therefore explain the brief responses not as a lack of willingness to reflect, but as restraint and social security.

Cultural-Social Challenges of Formal Education

The interviews of the research showed that, in addition to structural conditions, cultural and social factors also play an important role in the access of «young» Maasai to formal education. The obstacles presented in the next section are intended to highlight the deeply rooted livelihood and responsibilities of the Maasai community. These factors should not be understood in a negative sense as insurmountable barriers. Nevertheless, they show that, in the cultural context, the formal school system can lead to tensions and challenges that affect everyday school life and consequently the success of formal education.

Lack of parental support

The interviewees referred not only to material and financial, but also to the missing emotional and parental support as a recurring challenge. Without moral encouragement, the start of formal education for Maasai children can be especially difficult. In some cases, the children's desire for formal education conflicts with the parents' ideas and expectations. One interview partner that I do not mention by name describes a situation in which attending a formal school is perceived by the parents as a rejection of cultural values and responsibilities. The parents' resistance to the child's desire to attend school was expressed in emotional distance and ultimately in the withdrawal of recognition as a family member.

> *«I ran away from the family to go to school because my father didn't want to send me to school. But then they found me going to school. Actually, that did not change their mind, but they were so annoyed. They wanted even to fight with the teachers. They asked, why are you keeping this guy to teach education? They actually left me and they don't even recognize that I'm from their family, because I don't accept what they want.»*
>
> - *One of the interview partners*

The circumstances described by the interview partner, show that a lack of parental support can occur in the form of active rejection and/or passive neglect. The interview partner had to take an enormous risk and actively oppose the family in order to fulfill the personal desire, and in doing so, socially and emotionally put themselves in a situation of vulnerability. The family situation by one of the other case studies offers a possible explanation for the parents' reluctance to provide support. In this context, formal education was evaluated based on its effective usefulness for the survival of the family and social roles. If this utility is not present, there is

no prospect of support, especially for girls whose educational success is often measured by traditional gender-specific responsibilities.

> *«It's because when the father sends the first born that was a girl to school, she didn't make any impact, she was not clever, it was a big disadvantage for the father. So, he said because of this I will never send any girl to school. He says that educating a girl there is no importance.»*
>
> - *Ngypuioni*

It shows that the father has no confidence in formal education and the impact it can have on children. He did not see the importance of the knowledge and skills taught in formal schools for the roles and tasks in their Maasai community. Furthermore, the statement indicates that for some parents, a child's education can even be a financial disadvantage if the child does not benefit positively from school. Similar situations were also highlighted in the interview with the school principal. She emphasized that some students have trouble maintaining motivation because their parents do not actively support their education or it is not a priority in their daily lives. *«They love to study but some are afraid because parents are not aware of education so they don't emphasize for their kids to go to school» (Principal Oltrumet).* The uncertainty of the students is further reinforced and also contributes to irregular educational progress. The analysis of the findings from the text by Pesambili & Novelli (2021) states that teachers describe the lack of parental support as the biggest obstacle to academic progress in local schools. Parents did not want to accept that they had to spend their money on school supplies for their children, which they consider unimportant in some cases (Pesambili & Novelli, 2021).

In cases where parental support is ambivalent or completely absent, «young» Maasai navigate their desire for formal education through resistance or emotional and physical distancing. Some leave their families temporarily or permanently, while others try to reconcile their parents' expectations with their desire for formal education. These navigation strategies are often associated with considerable emotional vulnerability and social risks. While teachers, students and literature describe insufficient support in everyday life, the elders and parents I interviewed express a strong normative obligation to support formal education. Their statements reflect a general willingness to finance and support the formal education of their children and to recognize its importance for future livelihoods which is a strong factor influencing the students' academic performance (Ohol et al., 2023: 607). In chapter [4.3] the perspectives of the community elders are discussed in more detail. The discrepancy between the lack of support described in this subchapter and the statements of community elders suggests, that this conclusion

cannot and should not be generalized to the entire Maasai community. It underscores that Maasai parents' attitudes toward formal education are heterogeneous and shaped more by socioeconomic realities than by cultural resistance alone.

Cultural distance

Another obstacle to everyday school life for Maasai student is the cultural distance they have to experience. The distance between the school and the students homes, as well as the lack of school buildings, can lead to the fact that students have to leave their families and villages to attend boarding schools. For the Maasai student, this means that they have to adapt to a new physical and social environment, which in some cases differs significantly from their usual livelihood. *«Number one difficulty was being apart from my family… missing the culture and our life» (Devid).* Several case studies described how the transition to a boarding school was associated with uncertainty and having to adapt to new circumstances. They found themselves in a new environment defined by different rules, languages and a different pace of life. For some, this is a major challenge, especially when they are separated from their families and cultural life for the first time.

> *«I came from a day school and then I got selected to go to boarding school at secondary. So that was the hardest time for me. To sleep at school and not being with my family and also the new environment.»*
>
> - *Ngypuioni*

The quote from Ngypuioni and the literature from Godoy-Leal et al. (2025) on the Disagreements Between Indigenous Family Education and School Education illustrate that dealing with experiences in the formal education system is not only a cognitive process for Maasai students, but also a highly emotional one. They refer to a loss of familiar living conditions and discuss a geographical distance but also a dimension of cultural distance (Godoy-Leal et al., 2025). School may be perceived as a space filled with ambivalence, accompanied by uncertainty, fear and emotional strain. Experiences with disciplinary practices and new social norms can create cultural distance and challenge the sense of belonging within the school environment. Lemali described an initially uncertain relationship between his life as a Maasai and formal education. *«It's a trauma. I went to school but then students get beaten with a stick so I thought it's better for me to go back and take care of the cattle. I went back home and then I thought I should get back again to education. So I got confused» (Lemali).* The educational biographies of Maasai children do not always follow a linear path under challenging conditions. They are often characterized by interruptions and/or transitions between the school environment and pastoral life.

Depending on how much contact one has already had with school for example through older siblings, entering the formal school system can cause culture shock. The conflict and back and forth between school and the traditional way of life creates tension. On the one hand, Lemali is aware that he wants to go to school and is motivated to do so, but on the other hand, he sees attending school as a loss of familiar values and ways of life. The infrastructural factor of the few school buildings and the long distances to school cannot be viewed from only a geographical perspective, but must be discussed in close connection with an emotional dimension. It is not just a question of effective accessibility, but of adapting to a new standard of living and negotiating two different worlds. According to Chandler (2013), formal education should empower students. At the same time, however, it also exerts control and power over them, as illustrated by the form of discipline described by Lemali in his statement. Despite the extreme changes Lemali decides to resume his school career. This state of development clearly shows that the individual is the central agent of decisions regarding freedom, but the possibilities for effective action are defined by the level of support from social structures and, in this case, the way teachers treat students (Chandler, 2013: 73).

Language barrier

The aforementioned spatial and cultural shift in the focus of life from home to school also has a linguistic component. The linguistic shift from the native language Maa to Swahili is a challenge that was mentioned in many interviews. Swahili is the main language spoken in Tanzanian primary schools and English in secondary schools. This means that Maasai students are forced to learn a new language that is not their everyday form of communication. Ngypuioni explained to me that before she started school, she was able to attend a government program where Maasai children are taught Swahili.

> *«Some teachers are in a special program in Tanzania, for school with kids from pastoral communities where they teach the kids Swahili first before they go to study. So before we start the real classes we have to cross the program. So then the teachers know how good you speak the Swahili language.»*
>
> - *Ngypuioni*

After receiving this information, I asked all following interviewees and the schools I visited whether they were familiar with this program. All interviewees answered no. Ngypuioni is therefore the only interviewee who had the opportunity to attend a language course before starting school. For all other case studies, the language barrier posed enormous challenges, especially in the early days of school. Devid explained: *«So by the time I started schooling, I just knew Maasai language. So I had to communicate with some other students in case I need*

something» (Devid). The text by Ng'asike (2019) on the educational context of the pastoralist community in Kenya, as well as the text by Pesambili & Novelli (2021), both describe situations in which pastoralist students were forbidden to speak their native language at school and that the language was removed from the entire school curriculum (Pesambili & Novelli, 2021: 5). In some cases, students are even punished if teachers notice that they are speaking their native language (Ng'asike, 2019: 28). These conditions were not addressed in my interviews. The language barrier was more about the feeling of exclusion because they do not speak the same language as the other children at school. Devid told me that: *«My first subject to love was math because it dealt with numbers only, not languages. So I experienced a bit of exclusion because of the communication barrier» (Devid).* The language barrier is a form of exclusion and also a question of understanding the content of the courses. It is difficult to follow the school material and meet the requirements if you do not understand the language of the course. The school principal describes the language situation in her school as follows:

> *«Maybe for those who come from villages far away the native language is an issue. The teachers are trained from the government so there is no syllabus for Maasai teachers. They are only trained to teach in Swahili. So if a child comes speaking a different native language, he or she will learn from other kids how to speak Swahili.»*
>
> - *Principal Oltrumet*

The statement from the principal highlights that multilingualism is viewed not as an institutional resource but as a deficit of individual students. For children who do not have access to the mentioned preschool program, where they learn Swahili, the full responsibility for language acquisition is placed on the Maasai students themselves. This approach replaces essential systematic linguistic support by other children and classmates. At the same time, linguistic differences and inequalities are regarded as inherent and normal aspects of the daily school life of Maasai students. The fact that children teach each other the official school language appears as an established and functioning mechanism. Consequently, the exclusion caused by language remains invisible and is normalized.

The fact that some Maasai are unable to communicate with other communities can lead to isolation. Not knowing Swahili or English prevents the Maasai from fully participating in school life and society and above all from actively contributing to topics outside their community. If you cannot read or write and do not speak the language of other communities, you are more vulnerable to exploitation and fraud. Therefore, linguistic exchange and learning Swahili are of enormous importance for Maasai students. It was explained to me that language is important to all case studies because it has also opened up new perspectives. Devid tells me:

«Education comes with knowledge and knowledge comes with interaction. So they feel more comfortable with a leader who is exposed than a leader who just knows the culture» (Devid). His eloquence enables him to explain and bring different things closer to his community. As the leader of his age group, this is an important skill because many people value his opinion and he is able to represent the problems and needs of the Maasai to government officials and state employees. This confirms what Cole describes: «As more Maasai students engage with the formal education system, there will be more interactions with outside communities» (Coles, 2009: 64). However, Cole's (2009) perspective should also be viewed critically. Viewing education primarily as a means of integration via dominant languages carries the risk of an assimilationist approach, in which Maasai students are expected to adapt linguistically and culturally to the existing education system without any form of adaptation by schools to their realities of life. Phiri et al.'s (2024) study on the effect of using local languages as a medium of instruction on the academic performance of learners in Solwezi, Zambia, reflects my observations of teaching in the schools I visited. Despite improved communication with other communities through learning other languages, Phiri et al. (2024) describes, that using the local language as the language of instruction contributes to an improvement in student performance, as it allows them to follow lessons more easily and quickly. In addition, speaking a familiar language boosts students' self-confidence and motivates them to participate more in class (Phiri et al., 2024). Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a reflection of the speaker's culture and identity. If teachers cannot speak the local language, they may find it more difficult to connect with students on a cultural level, which can lead to feelings of alienation and disinterest among learners (Phiri et al., 2024). The study shows how important speaking the local language can be for students and that this has a positive effect on academic performance. Since Maa is not spoken in schools in Tanzania, the Maasai are dependent on learning Swahili and English. Only with the additional language skills the Maasai students are able to shape everyday school life and be an active part of it. They can communicate with other Non-Maasai children and lay the foundation for understanding what is happening in the government and politics of their country. Learning new languages has an impact on the interactions and communication between the Maasai and people from other communities and enables them to integrate more easily into other communities and the economy in Tanzania, should they choose to do so. Nevertheless, it should be noted that while additional languages are a helpful tool in daily life, teaching in the local language during the early school years could contribute to greater confidence and engagement on the part of the Maasai.

Child marriage and Pregnancy

Cultural expectations and gender-specific ideas are decisive factors in the educational biographies of the Maasai. For girls and women, this not only creates a general challenge in terms of access and context of formal education, but also a restriction that is deeply rooted in social role models. In this context, I would like to address the issue of child marriage and teenage pregnancy. Both of these phenomena are common occurrences in Maasai culture and are part of the perception of a girl's role and life and are having an enormous impact on girls' access to education and their personal future.

The paper «Child Marriage among Maasai Girl Students in Tanzania: The Case of Kilosa District» by Ndaula (2018) shows that child marriage is still practiced in Maasai society and that there is no set minimum age for marriage. This means that girls can be forced into marriage at a very «young» age, starting at 6 years old. Ndaula (2018) explicitly emphasizes the humiliation of children through child marriage and that they are thereby deprived of their fundamental rights (Ndaula, 2018: 56). The Tanzanian government stipulated in Children's Act No. 21 of 2009 that children have the right to live and grow up with their parents, family or guardian in a caring and peaceful environment. In many cases of child marriage, pressure and persuasion by community members are key approaches used to convince girls and their parents to agree to a marriage. With the help of traditional beliefs, this pressure can lead girls to accept marriage and choose it over school. The fear of pre-marriage pregnancies also causes both girls and their parents to agree to marriage during childhood or puberty (Ndaula, 2018: 57-62). The statement of one mother confirms these findings:

> *«At the time she was at school it was not so important for the children to go to school. So when she reached primary 7 her mother said she can't help her to continue school because of money and the life they are living. They had to get married.»*
>
> - *One of the three Mothers: translated*

According to the Tanzanian government, child marriage and child pregnancy are the two main reasons why girls drop out of primary or secondary school (Ndaula, 2018: 51). In many cases, child marriage goes hand in hand with teenage pregnancy. Research by Mechange & Temba (2024) has shown that insufficient knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, socioeconomic challenges and the influential role of peer groups are the main causes leading to teenage pregnancy. The conditions are increasingly reinforced by entrenched gender norms that favor

male dominance and hinder the ability of girls and «young» women to improve their socioeconomic conditions (Machange & Temba, 2024).

Child/teenage marriage and pregnancy are deeply rooted social structures that have a direct impact on the educational paths of girls and «young» women in Maasai society. The forced transition from adolescence to wifehood and/or motherhood at a «young» age changes everyday responsibilities and expectations. Family life and the duties of a mother are very difficult to reconcile with regular school attendance. This severely limits or even completely prevents the access to formal education. These circumstances are illustrated by Ngypuioni. She describes her situation as follows:

> *«So I started school when she was 13 years old. I fought but later the age made me to get pregnant. I didn't know about the issues of pregnancy. So I gave up at School. Because most kid at my age have already completed secondary education. How can I go back to school with the kids. And the system is also not allowing it. For you it would be okay to get pregnant, get the baby and the leave the baby with the parents and continue the studies. But not here.»*
>
> - *Ngypuioni: translated*

Ngypuioni explains that formal education is very important to her personally and she enjoyed going to school. However, due to the structural burden of her new role as a mother of four and wife at the age of 20, her desire to complete her formal education became unattainable and her personal scope for action with regard to formal education was reduced to a minimum. In addition, the statement makes it clear that there was no awareness of the extent of the changes brought about by pregnancy. Due to a lack of education, «young» women are often unaware of the consequences of marriage and pregnancy (Ndaula, 2018).

Both female case studies and one mother interviewed were confronted with the issue of marriage and/or pregnancy at a «young» age. Although their life paths have taken different courses, this section and the statements of the interviewees show that child marriage and pregnancy bring about profound changes and have a significant impact on further access to formal education. The individual stories make it clear that gender-specific roles and structural conditions can greatly limit the scope of action in the school context. Nevertheless, the interviews also reveal moments of resistance, delayed compliance and a desire to return to school, suggesting that even under restrictive gender norms, educational autonomy is not entirely absent but rather structurally suppressed.

The interviews covered many of the case studies' personal experiences with formal education and the associated challenges. The statements showed that formal education is accompanied by a process of negotiation, characterized by structural, cultural and social challenges. Formal

education represents an environment that differs from the Maasai cultural way of life and its fundamental structure. According to their accounts, when Maasai students attend school, they enter an environment where the language, the rhythm of time, the authority structures and the social norms differ from their everyday lives at home. These daily differences in reality require Maasai students to adapt and be flexible to navigate and reconcile the logic of school with their pastoral everyday life. The focus on individualized learning, new forms of communication and routines at school repeatedly created tension for the case studies between their cultural identity and formal education. In this area of tension, they had to find a way and strategies to negotiate their everyday lives between cultural norms and their personal ambitions.

In order to illustrate the extent of this ambivalence more clearly, I would like to discuss the initial findings in the context of the theoretical framework of this paper. An examination of the effective access to formal education for Maasai from the perspective of the capability approach highlights the impact of the existing framework conditions. Even though school attendance is mandatory in Tanzania, the freedom and ability to access formal education does not depend solely on the provision of education. Rather, it depends on the cultural, economic and social conditions that support or restrict the individual's capacity to act. Due to the structural and economic difficulties discussed, capabilities according to Sen's theory, so the actual combination of functions consisting of physical access to a formal school, financial affordability, linguistic understanding and social support, are limited by external influences. The Maasai cannot fully exploit the extent to which formal education is actually available due to other/additional circumstances. Formal education exists in theoretical form but can be limited in its effectiveness in practice to enable genuine freedom. Access to formal education is always linked to structural and cultural challenges and therefore to concerns about food security, financial insecurity and long walking times, a lack of support, language barriers, cultural distance and Child marriage and Pregnancy. According to Sen (1999), real educational equity and freedom in the context of the capability approach only occur when the institutional conditions are in place to enable learning and to effectively utilize the positive effects of formal education. Structural and cultural constraints limit the ability to take advantage of the actual opportunities offered by formal education. The findings of this chapter show that formal education has the potential to expand capabilities, but only under the condition of removing forms of unfreedom, as discussed in Sen's (1999) theoretical concept of «Development as Freedom». The chapter corresponds to Sen's (1999) view that unfreedoms such as poverty, irrational social injustices and gender discrimination must be eliminated in order to supplement opportunities for economic

and political freedoms of individuals and, at the same time, to promote individual action to overcome challenges (Sen, 1999).

4.2.3 How «Young» Maasai Navigate a Challenging Present and Uncertain Future

The educational experiences reveal a clear tension between cultural continuity and social change. The following chapter aims to examine this tension in more detail and show how the case studies perceive their cultural affiliation and how the formal school environment can on one hand support their culture and on the other hand lead to a form of cultural identity disengagement. According to Mollel (2011), formal education is a central element in the transformation and deformation of Maasai culture. Mollel's (2011) interviews with Maasai people have shown that most of them experience both positive and negative changes of formal education in relation to their culture (Mollel, 2011: 41). This finding is reflected in the answers of my interview partners. From my outsider's perspective, it is not possible to make decisions or judgments about which aspects of formal education have a positive or negative influence on the cultural identity of individual Maasai. Therefore, I will in the first part discuss the influences of formal education on Maasai culture that are perceived as positive by the interviewees and in the second part, I will address the aspects that, according to my interviewees, are perceived as a way of turning away from their cultural identity as Maasai.

Sen's (1999) interpretation of cultural identity reveals different meanings and aims to avoid viewing cultural identity as something original and fixed. Every cultural identity is the result of a process and can therefore continue to change. According to Sen (1999), individuals and their identities are all different and cannot be attributed to something absolute. The concept of defined culture and cultural identity carries the risk that some individuals will be considered absorbed and excluded. There should be no fixed, one-dimensional interpretation of cultural identity, because different interpretations also imply different models of identity for a community and leaves room for the existence of different models in different types of groups. This shows that different cultural identities exist within an individual. Thus, the individual can be a member of a group but not its property. They can become aware that cultural identity has undergone change and will continue to do so, even if they are not always aware of these changes themselves (Sen, 1999).

According to statements from the interviews, formal education provides information on health issues and thus helps to protect people and animals from deadly diseases. Knowledge about nature conservation and sustainable cattle herding is deepened and ensures a focus on the long-term preservation of their livestock. This point is particularly important in pastoralist communities, whose main source of income depends on animals. According to Mollel (2011), formal education additionally has led to the Maasai becoming better informed about their rights as citizens in Tanzania and enabling them to make greater use of these rights (Mollel, 2011). My interview partners tell me that formal education has given them a better understanding of numbers, enabling them to run their businesses in a more profit-oriented manner and build up their own businesses more quickly. This has made them less dependent on subsistence farming. Devid tells me a short story from his father's life, who experienced difficulties in business because he couldn't read and write:

> *«For those who don't know how to write, they had some tick boxes… So mistakenly not knowing what to do he just drew something. He told the translator, that he wants the red bull but the document said something different. So by the time he received the bull, he was unfortunately black. So I think that story clicks in his mind that this is a lot of ignorance, which is a burden to his life. Number two, he was doing also the beef supply. If you supply meat they first slaughter and then measure the amount of kilos. So the numbers of kilos they told him was different from the actual amount. It made him understand that something was fishy…Oh, is it because I don't know how to read and write. So I think that's the point where my dad recognized that education is the best thing.»*
>
> - *Devid*

Devid's account of his father's experiences is a good example of how skills learned in formal education such as reading, writing and math are undoubtedly considered valuable abilities. It demonstrates the positive effects of formal education in everyday situations and also leads to greater recognition and importance even among fathers who at first did not support formal education.

According to Otto & Ziegler (2006) and their perspective on the capability approach, the father's experiences can be described as an expression of fundamental capabilities, since literacy is seen as a key factor in the capability approach with regard to education. Literacy is considered a prerequisite for opening up effective opportunities for action. The abilities of reading, writing and math are not only technical skills but also simplify economic decisions and offer a kind of protection against exploitation. In this sense, this reflects Sen's (1999) understanding of education as an elementary capability that not only has an instrumental effect but also forms the basis for the development of further skills (Otto & Ziegler, 2006).

Olekaley also reports changes through formal education on a moral and social level within his Maasai community. In his statement, he describes formal education as an input for critically

questioning some cultural practices that are still carried out in the Maasai community. Formal education and social contact with students from other communities contribute to a certain extent to rethinking and fundamentally questioning practices such as female genital circumcision, child marriages and pregnancies (Madodi, 2024). This increased capacity for reflection from an outsider perspective becomes apparent when cultural norms, practices and rituals collide with newly acquired knowledge and new ethical questions.

> *«We have early marriage, it's not important to our culture. So through education I learned that actually it should be banned form the Maasai culture. Because the girls are married with 8, 10 years by the elders or by the young men, that is not really good. We also have genital circumcision also for women. And they're still practicing, it's too dangerous today for the Maasai.»*
>
> - *Olekaley*

This quote is a particularly striking example of how formal education and engagement with other cultures can lead to critical reflection on aspects of one's own culture. All case studies, whether they have completed their education, are still waiting for their degree or have dropped out of school, show a fundamentally positive attitude toward formal education. In the interviews, it is clear that these positive views are mostly anchored in thoughts about their own future, their community and the next generation. The statements about the positive effects of formal education can be discussed on different levels. Future effects of formal education were mentioned in financial and cultural terms, as well as in terms of pastoralism. In addition to economic stability, Lemali also wants to ensure greater ecological security through his skills learned at the college. He wants to put his knowledge of animal health and production in the Maasai community into practice and find ways to change cattle herding and adapt it to current climate challenges.

> *«The challenge for Maasai is that during the summer season a lot of the cattle die because of the drought. This is not a good business. They die in summer and start producing new ones in winter. I want to change this and find a way that they survive summer.»*
>
> - *Lemali*

The way Lamali wants to change cattle herding could be seen as an act of modernizing pastoralism. However, Lemali does not view his intention as an aversion from their cultural livestock herding practices. Rather, it is an attempt to preserve pastoralism and the Maasai's livelihood in the long term under changing climatic conditions. As extreme weather events such as rainfall and droughts become more severe, traditional pastoral livestock herding is becoming increasingly difficult and dangerous for both humans and animals (Munishi, 2013). Lemali's view of the impact of formal education on his culture clearly illustrates an expansion of space for action. In relation to the capability approach, this can be understood as that formal education has

expanded Lemali's capabilities and real opportunities for alternatives to his traditional way of life in order to make Maasai culture sustainable for the future and not neglect the livelihood of pastoralism. Resilience to droughts and animal diseases can be strengthened through adapted grazing practices, improved health measures and better protection from wild animals. The seasonal loss of animals, especially in summer, can be mitigated by combining the Maasai's extensive traditional knowledge about their animals and how to care for them with new forms of formal knowledge. This example from Lemali shows that formal education does not always require cultural assimilation, but can expand freedoms within one's own culture. Despite extreme climatic changes, attempts are being made to preserve pastoralism as a central way of life through a transfer of knowledge between experienced Maasai cattle herders and the expertise acquired during studies (Zinsstag et al., 2016).

Lemali's perspective, views formal education as a form of supporting cultural resilience and is reinforced by a statement from Olekaley. He describes how important it is for him to preserve Maasai culture while also being prepared of future changes. He expresses his thoughts as follows: *«The lifestyle that we had before and the one which is coming, it is quite different… The world is going to change. We need to educate our people» (Olekaley).* He describes how formal education has given him a kind of freedom that allows him to preserve his culture while actively adapting it to external conditions. He sees himself as an example of how culture and future-oriented educational paths can come together. Olekaley also understands formal education not only as an individual strategy for mobility, but also as a collective resource and an opportunity to shape the Maasai cultural community in a sustainable way. Overall I would say that the case studies use formal education as an additional resource. Economic, cultural and social spheres of action are being reinterpreted and experienced in new ways. A higher school enrollment rate means better access to secondary schools and better employment opportunities, especially for the younger generation of Maasai (Ahmed et al., 2015: 303). In addition to the individual advantages, such as securing the future and better income opportunities, the focus is above all on the well-being of the community. New freedoms are being used to try to preserve important cultural practices and make necessary adjustments to redesign practices that are from their point of view outdated or threatened by climate change.

In addition to the positive effects of formal education, the interviews also clearly showed that this hope for positive change is accompanied by tensions and restrictions. According to the case studies, the formal education of Maasai children leads to stress and high pressure due to everyday school life, social expectations and cultural practices. The next section addresses the

ambivalent experiences with formal education in relation to Maasai culture. It attempts to highlight the complexity of preserving culture and the school patterns that can lead to cultural neglect. The points listed here are described negatively by the Maasai interviewed in the context of their culture.

The educational structures in the schools I visited are based on Western-influenced teaching content. The structures of the schools are not adapted to the cultural values of the Maasai and no Maasai traditions, skills or customs are taught. Mollel (2011) as well as the literature on «The stolen generation» in Australia or the resettlement of indigenous communities by the Europeans in the United States describes how these conditions in schools can lead to people in the Maasai community not learning to accept their culture, but instead taught that their culture is uncivilized and based on superstition (Mollel, 2011), (Manne, 1998), (Brower, 2010). The education system is not completely compatible with a nomadic pastoralist lifestyle and an environment in which formal education denigrates pastoralism is highly problematic for Maasai children (S. Krätli & Dyer, 2009). Devid explains some aspects in which he thinks formal education conflicts with the culture of the Maasai:

> *«We have our system of education. Because when an elder of 100 years passes away, we believe that he knows a lot. The person has to transform the knowledge to us before passing away. Maybe predicting rains, drought seasons or how to solve disputes… Some of your Maasai knowledge, which is really important for your community maybe gets lost because there is no time for the elders to teach the young kids when they're at school and not around the village…If I had kids growing up in town, with whom do you think they'd be interacting more. Other people in town. So the kid will not get the time to study the tradition. So it comes to a point that the larger number of percentage, our tradition and customs will be going apart.»*
>
> - *Devid*

Devid expresses his concern that important Maasai knowledge, which is passed on from elders to younger generations, may be lost if children spend less time at home. This negative effect is even more extreme when children are sent to boarding schools at a very «young» age. As a result, they spend almost no time at home and may gradually lose touch with Maasai culture. This concern is supported by literature on indigenous knowledge systems. They point out that the indigenous knowledge is mainly passed on orally from elders to «younger» Maasai and is increasingly at risk of being lost. The passing on of indigenous knowledge is strongly tied to everyday pastoral practice and intergenerational presence (Jacob et al., 2004).

The discussion about financial security and a higher standard of living, can reinforce this negative effect on the indigenous knowledge and leads to the Maasai migrating from rural to urban areas, which can result in geographical and social distance from the community and less attachment to it. Academic success can also lead to the Maasai studying in cities far away from

their home villages or even accepting scholarships abroad. After returning from a stay abroad or a period at boarding school, Maasai may consider their customs and traditions to be outdated and become critical of their own culture (Mollel, 2011: 42). Lemali also talks about the situation of Maasai students loosing contact with their tradition:

> *«Education is somewhat conflicting with Maasai culture, it is not that we see education as a problem, but the consequences of it. Education is like more of exposure. By the time you go to school and meet some other people, you start getting used to the life they are living. So you find that it conflicts with our traditions]. Education as part of just getting training and profession that's a good thing. But the bad thing of education is the generalization of the culture.»*
>
> - *Lemali*

Lemali's statement describes his critical reflection on the consequences of formal education on his culture. The statement reveals an interesting distinction between formal education as a process of acquiring knowledge and as an institution of socialization. The exposure and conflict is not only caused by the school itself, but also by the dominant lifestyles considered as the standard within the educational structures. The process of adopting other norms, languages and behaviors can lead to a gradual distancing from Maasai tradition through adaptation and/or internalization. The used term of generalization of culture by Lemali indirectly describes the school not only as a place of learning and teaching but also of reproduction of cultural hierarchies.
This perception is also described in the literature of Karaoulas (2025) in which it is said that education serves as a mechanism of integration and socialization, defining the position of the individual in society by conveying cultural values. On the other side, our perception of what we consider «civilized» is heavily influenced by the dominant cultures and ideologies (Karaoulas, 2025).
Formal education is seen as a gateway to knowledge, financial security and a way to protect the community from climate change. It is clearly an essential resource for the future of «young» Maasai. Nevertheless, there is a certain concern that formal education could lead to an erosion of Maasai cultural practices over many years and generations as Devid explains:

> *«We need education, it's a very good thing. But also we don't want to lose our culture and tradition. We are not talking of two to three years. We are talking of the generations and generations. It's very difficult for me to lose my culture and traditions. Just simply because I have started school growing up there. But talking of my kids, first, second, fourth generation. I think they will lose. So we need education very hardly, but I don't know how you can make it well that we cannot lose our traditions.»*
>
> - *Devid*

Formal education is not described as the universal driver of cultural loss. Rather, it is a process that has the ability to change social dynamics and renegotiate and shift affiliations and values. For the case studies, it is not a question of choosing between formal education and tradition. It

is a question of how they can find a way to combine formal education and tradition under difficult and often externally determined conditions.

The following subchapter shifts the focus from the effects of formal education on culture to the effective manners and navigation within the case studies. It examines how the case studies actively navigate cultural tensions and uncertain futures concerning formal education. The case studies do not passively accept or reject formal education but instead strategically interpreted and utilized it.

Return to the villages as a Strategy of Navigation

Lemali's vision for the future can be seen as a strategy for navigating the tensions between formal education and cultural identity. By returning to his home village after completing his studies, he aims to counteract the separation from his community that he is currently experiencing. Lemali tries to overcome the difficulties of the formal education system by thinking about his future and knowing that he can apply his institutional knowledge in his community on relevant topics. The fact that he uses his formal education as a resource for maintaining pastoralism and thereby maintaining his social and cultural affiliation can by indicated as cultural navigation. Lemali describes his future vision as follows:

> *«I like to go back to my village. The most of my community stay there so I want to go back. Yes I want to do my practice there in the village and show them what I learned practically.»*
>
> - *Lemali*

Devid can also imagine his future in his home village. However, specific conditions must be met for him to return. His approach to formal education is linked to a vision of the future in pastoralism. With its conditions and strategies, it aims to counteract environmental pollution, land scarcity and economic uncertainty. Formal education helped Devid understand his perspective of a from his point of view «good life». His navigation is leading to a break with his culture, but rather at a restructuring of pastoral practices:

> *«How do I define the better life of me. If I get a good home at my village, and if I get a good number of cows, not less of 300 or 400. I'm a bit educated so if I get a good grazing place sort of a ranch rather than this movement of pastoralism and if I get the consistent flow of income, then that's all to me. That's my dream for my future… If those things are set I'll go back.»*
>
> - *Devid*

Both Lemali and Devid want to or can imagine themselves moving back to their home villages in the future, far away from the cities where they are currently studying and working. This corresponds to the results of Munishi (2013), that a frequent migration pattern among «young» Maasai is characterized by the fact that they work for a short time in cities before returning to

their local households and invest in their cattle (Munishi, 2013). The visions of the two male case studies show how they are using their formal education to shape lifestyles that incorporate their traditional values and a form of change for their community. Formal education has not led them to break with their traditional way of life, but rather to adapt to climatic and social changes. The future way of life of both case studies depends heavily on their educational background. In both cases, formal education is a key factor in shaping the future. Both express a desire to combine what they have learned in the formal system with a willingness not to abandon traditional culture. They both want to continue living their Maasai culture, but make their way of life more sustainable and resilient.

Role Models and Responsibility as Strategies of Navigation

Lemalis and Devid's return to their home village is a personal decision for them, but it also has to do with the possibility of motivating other Maasai children to attend formal school. Wanting to be a role model in the community is used as another navigation strategy. For the case studies, formal education is a deliberate means of providing social orientation for future generations and influencing educational decisions within their communities. Education is described as a practice that goes beyond one's own life. Lemali sees himself as a concrete role model and refers to himself as such: *«I want to go back and help them on how to take the children to school. And I hope they see me and want to be like me…» (Lemali).* Not only the case studies themselves, but also the families and community members see the Maasai who have undergone formal education as potential role models. Their educational achievements are evaluated individually, but also symbolically represent other children and parents in the community. Naomi describes a similar self-perception as a role model for «younger» children but she doesn't see herself living back in her home village: *«If I get more education, I might come back and be a role model for others. For those who doesn't want to send their kids to school or for the kids that want to be like me. Maybe I will come back to visit but I am not interested to come back and live here» (Naomi).* Naomi does not see her personal future in the pastoral way of life. I would interpret that Naomi sees formal education as an opportunity to no longer have to return to her old life. Presumably, the difference in the future plans of the male and female case studies can also be attributed to their experiences in their «younger» years. While all case studies use their formal education to give something back to their community, the male case studies had different experiences in early childhood and adolescence than the girls and could therefore possibly imagine returning to their homeland better than the female respondents. The different visions of the future with regard to returning to their villages among the male and female case

studies can be explained by gender-specific power relations and the interest in self-empowerment. While the male case studies can imagine returning to their home village, Naomi associate formal education more strongly with autonomy, freedom of choice and physical distance from social structures that they may have perceived as restrictive. Takayanagi (2016) emphasizes that formal education for women strengthens their ability to make strategic decisions, thereby leading to greater empowerment and well-being. Naomi's desire not to return permanently to her village of origin can be interpreted in this sense as an expression of increased agency (Takayanagi, 2016). Formal education opens up new social spaces for her outside the pastoral community and enables her to distance herself from traditional gender roles. At the same time, this spatial distancing does not mean a break with the community. Naomi's self-image as a role model for younger girls shows that her commitment is not tied to physical presence. Rather, she aims to question existing power relations and be a voice, especially for girls and young women who are often marginalized within the community.

The statements from Naomi and Lemali show that the role model function and a certain form of obligation towards the community are used as a navigation strategy to ease cultural tensions between formal education and traditional livelihood. An attempt is being made to present formal education as a personal and social resource and not as a alienation from the community. The case studies aim to create acceptance within their community and ensure that resistance to formal education is reduced. It is also clear that this is a forward-looking strategy that was not part of the educational decision of the case studies from the beginning of their schooltime. The desire to act as a role model is coupled with a sense of obligation and probably developed later in the educational process, which is shown by Leamlis statement: *«My basic need is to get education fast and then I like to provide for the family, sometimes I feel responsible because I got education but I like it» (Lemali)*. Most likely this desire and responsibility developed after the first positive effects of formal education were recognized by the case studies and personal scope of action could be expanded. In this case, navigation is not a hands-on or static plan, but a form and process of dealing with expectations, obligations and the desire to show other community members their knowledge.

Encouragement of Girls and Women as a Strategy of Navigation

The interviews, observations and informal conversations with women show that girls and women believe that their attitudes and convictions regarding the value of formal education can influence other women in their community. They are convinced that formal education enables

girls to escape domestic violence, child marriage and pregnancy. Naomi's statement sums up this view of formal education among women.

> *«Because in my community, when you help a lady or a girl you can educate the whole community. So that's a very important message for me.»*
>
> - *Naomi*

Formal education can help to expand the choices available to women and girls and therefore indirectly protect them from early marriage and pregnancy. But the effective scope of action for women and girls and its expansion is still limited by sociocultural and societal factors (Raymond, 2021). My observations have shown that women try to support girls in their educational processes, but their social function depends on other external factors. Women I talked to highlighted that formal education can have a positive impact on girls' safety. Nevertheless, they lack the necessary appreciation and seriousness of the predominantly male society to proclaim their message loudly and enforce it in the long term. They have the skills, but they are denied the freedom to use them (Raymond, 2021: 181). Raymond's (2021) study «Girls' participation in formal education: a case of Maasai pastoralists in Tanzania» corresponds to my experiences of women in certain aspects. The study states that formal education has an impact on girls' well-being and identity, but also contributes significantly to the development of the nation. Where in reality, girls are still far from enjoying unhindered access to education. Raymond (2021) postulates that education policy in Tanzania should take greater account of girls' experiences and perceptions and offer them the opportunity to raise their voices and exercise power (Raymond, 2021: 182). By addressing girls' education in terms of national development, Raymond (2021) automatically embeds the thematic in the classic development discourse and reproduces a narrative in which the value of formal education is measured against its contribution to economic growth and state-building. An interpretation of my findings from conversations with women and girls has shown that their desire for formal education stems from their own realities of life and not from national development goals or external expectations of modernization. It is a sign and expression of personal self-determination and a way of living out their own capabilities. It is about expanding the real freedoms that girls and women in the Maasai community consider valuable. Formal education is a central factor in creating opportunities for them to take control of their own lives and futures.

In terms of the capability approach, these observations can be understood as an expression of different possibilities for transforming formal educational resources into actual ways of being. Different individuals with the same formal educational background and a similar bundle of

functions have different potential to transform this bundle into a way of being that is valuable to them. Sen (1999) describes that owning a bicycle does not automatically enable mobility, but that the ability to ride a bicycle is also required. This means that two individuals have greater or lesser influence about the conversion of a resource such as a bicycle into a means of transportation. In a term of the education context that means that different individuals can transform their educational resources into different ways of being (Sen, 1999), (Hart, 2012). For example, two Maasai of different genders, have the same educational qualifications, they may have different opportunities to use their resources and convert them into employment. Their choices may be limited by personal characteristics or in combination with cultural values and norms or family commitments (Hart, 2012). Due to the gender-specific conditions and the fact that women are discriminated on the labor market, it can be more difficult for women to work in certain professions or even to obtain an educational qualification and find employment. It is clear that gender-specific norms and expectations in particular can act as key conversion factors that enable or restrict the use of the same educational resources in different ways.

Adaptation to social change as a Strategy of Navigation

The navigation strategies discussed above further illustrate again the positive views of case studies regarding formal education and arises the question of what these positive views and navigation strategies are based on. I would argue that both the return to the home villages and the desire to be a role model and encourage Maasai girls, as well as all other strategies in dealing with cultural identity, the future visions and the strategies to handle opportunities and difficulties of formal education, are based on an adaptation to changing social, technological and ecological conditions. Olekaley clarifies his perception of the pressure of change and sees formal education as a form of modernity and a necessary response to global developments: *«Because nowadays we go to the technology, higher technology is coming… so we need changes» (Olekaley).* Lemali understanding of modernity in pastoralism is based on his formal knowledge without questioning his pastoralist culture. The text by Zinsstag et al. (2016) describes that pastoralism has not been surpassed by «global progress», but rather it has adapted very well and will continue to adapt to the lifestyle of local and regional conditions in a modern society (Zinsstag et al., 2016).

> *«I want a modern way of keeping cattle. I love the culture but I want to do it in a modern way. Because I go to school so I know how to do it in a modern way.»*
>
> - *Leamli*

In contrast to the male cast studies, Ngypuioni understands modernity as a feeling of independence and self-determination. Her vision of the future is not completely but more strongly differentiated from the traditional forms of life and the housing of the Maasai: *«I want to be a businesswomen and to have a modern house… Where the world is going that's where I want to be. I love modernity» (Ngypuioni: translated).* The different perspectives and ideas of modernity indicate that adaptation to changing living conditions is not a uniform strategy. Modernity is selectively appropriated and individually interpreted. From a theoretical perspective, this selective and situated engagement with modernity resonates with critiques of a singular, eurocentric understanding of modernity. According to Wijngaarden (2021) development scientists have argued that dominant conceptions of modernity are often presented as culturally neutral and universal, while in fact reflecting Western historical experiences and normative assumptions. More recent approaches emphasize the existence of multiple modernities, highlighting that modernity is interpreted, negotiated and lived differently across social and cultural contexts (Wijngaarden, 2021)

Read in this light, the case studies' references to technology, modern housing or new forms of pastoralism do not simply reproduce external development ideals. Rather, they reflect context-specific reinterpretations of modernity that are grounded in everyday challenges, future aspirations and collective responsibilities. The statements in the case studies agree to a certain extend with the prevailing development narratives discussed in chapter [2.2.1] which associate social progress with technological progress, productivity and modernity. A critical perspective describes this connection as part of the development discourse, which has a specific idea of what is considered desirable and progressive (Escobar, 1995). However, the statements in the case studies show that the idea of modernity is not accepted uncritically but is reinterpreted and related to the lived reality. They describe modernity as a tool and a way to adapt their cultural practices to changing conditions. In this sense, I interpret pursuit of modernity as a form of self-regulation, in which the case studies align their efforts with societal developments and increasing modernity (Chandler, 2013). The statements are strongly focused on the well-being of the community and cultural continuity, in contrast to the criticized notion of modernity and development.

The case studies have thought about what a fulfilling future would look like for them and have come up with their own interpretations of what constitutes a «good life» for them. Formal education does not ensure uniform ideas about the future. The visions of their future lives held

by the case studies are diverse and shaped by different desires. Personal values, goals and experiences create a framework in which the various future paths of the case studies can unfold. Navigating the future depends on external conditions, but is mainly defined by the subjective perception of belonging, freedom and ambitions.

The analysis of motivations as well as challenges and barriers and navigation strategies in relation to the capability approach offers an alternative concept for thinking beyond access to education and analyzing the potential of individual freedom in and through formal education. Not all «young» Maasai can participate equally in formal education or benefit equally from it (Hart, 2012). The capability approach also recognizes that not all individuals will be able to use the capability provided by formal education to the same extent and in such a way that they can all reach the same benefits. The results have shown that not all that goes on in formal schools does necessarily lead to a purely positive outcome for all students. As described in this chapter, some educational experiences, such as for example exclusion or dropping out of school due to pregnancy, can further reinforce existing social inequalities, particularly in terms of class, gender and culture.

The chapter [4.2] has shown that freedoms are according to the theory of «Development as Freedom» not only a goal of development but also a central means to development. The evaluative significance of freedom and its recognition, forms the basis for a further understanding of the interrelationship between the different types of freedom. According to Sen (1999), political freedom is understood as freedom of expression and free choice, which contributes to the promotion of economic security. Social opportunities in the form of education and health facilities, facilitate economic participation. Economic freedom in the form of opportunities to participate in markets and production can generate personal prosperity and public resources for social services. This shows how different types of freedom can be interdependent (Sen, 1999). This interactive dynamic is reflected in the results of this work. If the necessary conditions are given and cultural and structural barriers can be overcome by navigation strategies, formal education can be used as a capability by «young» Maasai. With sufficient social opportunities, individuals can effectively shape their own futures and support each other. They do not need to be viewed primarily as passive recipients of the benefits of sophisticated development programs (Sen, 1999). In this way, formal education can strengthen social freedoms such as literacy, linguistic skills and self-confidence. These freedoms, in turn, open up economic opportunities, for example through better income opportunities or entrepreneurial activities. While the

political and social freedom can be strengthened, through knowledge of rights and the articulation of interests to state actors.

4.3 Community elders and Parental Perspectives on Formal Education and Culture

The following chapter focusses on the second research question and discusses how the community elders perceive formal education in relation to social change and their culture as Maasai. The analysis is based on the perspectives of the older generation, including a group interview with three mothers, an interview with the case study Lemali's father and an interview with a local chairman, who holds a leadership position within the village. In addition, findings from two informal conversations with elders of the community are used for contextualization but are not directly quoted.

The educational experiences of the elders help to reflect on their personal experiences and expectations of the younger generation in case of formal education. The focus is on the perceived relationship between cultural identity and social responsibility, as well as on possible tensions arising from the demands of a formalized education system.

4.3.1 Elders' Lived Experiences with Formal Education

The interviews with the elders of the community reveal varying experiences with formal education. Many of these experiences differ from the educational backgrounds of the interviewed Maasai from the younger generation. The elders report very limited or no access to formal education. While the obstacles to formal education discussed in chapter [4.2.2] were also prevalent among the elders, family obligations and the opinions of their parents were the main factors in the decision whether or not they were sent to school. Some elders attended elementary school, while others never went to school at all. Their educational histories serve as a starting point for their current perspective on formal education and for identifying differences with the perspectives of the younger generation.

The experiences shared by Lemali's father illustrate how limited the access to formal education was for him. During his childhood, he always wanted to go to school, but his father forbade him to do so. Despite never having been to school, he learned to speak Swahili fluently through contact and casual conversations with other children and people who could speak Swahili.

> *«I never attended school... I would have loved so much to start school but my father refused me to start… I was a clever child. So the language of the good Swahili I am speaking is not because of school but I used to learn it from the pastoral, I was listening to some words and learned from the friend and other people.»*
>
> - *Father of Lemali: translated*

The statement clearly shows that he was excluded from the education system because of his parents and their generation-specific logic. He would have been personally motivated, but his parents did not consider formal education to be important or desirable in a pastoral context. He was denied access to school and his desire for education remained unfulfilled, which could be the reason why he now supports the education of his children and the next generation. When asked if he would like to send all his children to school, he replied, *«Yes, very much» (Father of Lemali: translated).* He sees his role as the father of the family as making decisions and sending the children to school. This positive attitude is distinctly different from the negative attitude and lack of support, especially of fathers, towards their children's education discussed in the previous chapter (Pesambili & Novelli, 2021a). Of his 19 children, 12 are already in the formal school system, while others refuse to go. However, he would like to encourage them to go to school as well and some of his children are still too «young» for school.

The mothers/women interviewed describe different educational experiences. Most of them did not attend school or had to drop out after primary school at the latest due to social or economic conditions. The women show a similar motivation, in the fact that they would have liked to continue their formal education but lacked the real opportunities to do so. As with the younger generation, a common reason for dropping out of school was a lack of financial resources. Their families did not have the money needed for school fees and materials. In the case of the mothers/women, I do not know whether their brothers had more opportunities than they did in their educational paths. The question is whether the family prioritized the brothers due to patriarchal household structures or whether all siblings suffered equally from financial constraints. However, it can be said that the women interviewed were also taken out of school early due to early marriage and the responsibility for taking over the household. This effectively prevented them from returning to school. Despite their difficult educational backgrounds, the women show that they greatly value formal education. All of them speak positively about their own children's formal education. The women had only limited access to schools and would like to see this access improved for their own children. They hope that formal education will open up alternatives to the structural constraints that some of them had to experience.

Another elder from the Maassi community whom I was able to interview was a local chairman. According to reports, there are several chairmen in one village. They are the decision-makers on important organizational issues and they assume a leadership position in the communities. They are officially elected and are respected and highly regarded by the members of their community. In the case of the chairman I interviewed, he has been in this position for many years. He actually wanted to retire some time ago, but the community is convinced of his abilities and wants him to remain in the position of chairman for longer. He describes his responsibilities as follows:

> *«I am a chairman in this village. I am supervising the groups, I am making sure they are well organized and they are using well their resources. They collect some money and when they get an amount I always makes sure they have sold the animals and bought new ones. And when they have made an advantage in money they divide it between each other. So I am responsible in leading and advising.»*
>
> - *Chairman: translated*

The chairman attended primary school and had to drop out after 7th grade. He had to leave school because his name was sold to another child. There is an unofficial system in which parents of a child who has failed the exams in school can buy the name of a child who has passed. This allows the child who failed to continue attending school under the name of the other child.

> *«My name was sold to another person because my father wanted him to take care of the animals. Here in Tanzania there is a system of selling names of those who performed. When you perform someone is coming to your parents and say they want to buy your performance and give it to their child. So the child will go with the name of someone who performed. And then the child will be renamed the same name. So that happened to me. I completed and I passed primary school but the name was sold by my father so I remained in taking care of the cattle.»*
>
> - *Chairman: translated*

For people outside the Maasai or the Tanzanian community, this story may sound very absurd. However, it was not the first time that someone told me that a child's name had been sold. While it may be difficult to process and comprehend this story and these circumstances, they must be taken seriously, because it reflects a person's reality. Due to the sale of his name, the Chairman had to end his school career early after primary school. Today, the Chairman has six children of his own. He tells me that it is very important to him to send all his children to school, four of his children are already attending school and two are still too «young».

> *«If I had money I would send them all to school and never let them remain here in the cultural tradition. We are living this way because we have no changes of living. Because of money life is hard, otherwise we don't want to let the children live in those traditional ways of live.»*
>
> - *Chairman: translated*

This statement clearly shows that the chairman's attitude toward formal education stems from an assessment of the realities of life and future opportunities. For him, formal education is an

alternative way to improve the realities of life. The statement also reveals that, whether consciously or subconsciously, the chairman supports the narrative that formal education is a path to development, improvement and progress. The statement that children should not remain in the tradition reflects the thematic portrayal of tradition as backward. In doing so, he aligns himself with development theories that present formal education as a path to social transformation and modern ways of life. However, it should be noted that his attitude does not purely follow external development logic. His vision of being able to send his children to school does not come solely from a belief in progress, but also from his everyday experiences marked by material and economic insecurity. Formal education is seen as a strategy to reduce the structural dependencies and vulnerabilities of the Chairman's reality and that of his environment. In this way, the Chairman creates an environment in which formal education is understood as an individual capability and an expansion of opportunities, while at the same time prioritizing formal education over tradition as a medium for development.

4.3.2 «We don’t see any disadvantages»: An Intergenerational Dialogue

Negative views of formal education among the older generation are discussed in detail in the existing literature. The group of elders who do not consider formal education necessary prefer the indigenous education of their community to formal education. Pesambili (2017) cites the fear of elders that Maasai children will become alienated from their traditional culture as the main reason for the negative perspectives (Pesambili, 2017: 162). According to the people interviewed by Pesambili (2017) with negative attitudes, formal education leads to educated children that no longer identify as Maasai and view their community as uncivilized and less educated. Other texts, such as those by Kaunga (2005), also describe how it can be difficult for nomadic communities to fully embrace formal education, as people who benefit from formal education do not return home, view their traditional way of life as primitive or cannot find employment (Kaunga, 2005). The idea that Maasai who have gone through the formal education system are lost to the community and have gone astray is the central driver of the negative attitude toward formal education. This negative perception is reinforced by direct negative experiences with formal education from the elders (Pesambili, 2017). The negative reactions associate formal education with a loss of identity and culture. Bonini (2006) also describes how some parents and elders see formal education as a tool that weakens traditional knowledge and pastoral culture and neglects traditions (Bonini, 2006). Furthermore, it is mentioned that elders with a negative attitude do not recognize any positive effects of formal education in relation to

pastoralism or the Maasai's livelihood. According to them, the skills taught in formal schools are not useful to Maasai individuals or their community. They see no relevance in school subjects for their livelihood or their economic production system (Pesambili, 2017). A clear distinction is made between indigenous education and formal education.

According to Coles (2009), it could prove difficult and take a long time to change the opinions and attitudes of the older generation (Coles, 2009: 102). This naturally raises the question of the extent to which their opinion needs to be changed and what effective impact this will have on the cultural identity of the Maasai. Although existing literature shows that many Maasai elders are skeptical about formal education, it can be said that without exception, all elders interviewed for this thesis expressed positive views about formal education. Both, those who attended school themselves and those who did not, agree on the importance of formal education. This discrepancy between the existing literature and the uniform results of my interviews suggests that the attitudes of Maasai elders are not homogeneous and are highly context-dependent.

> *«We don't see any disadvantages. The advantages are that it will be helpful for the community…»*
>
> - *One of the three Mothers: translated*

This clear statement from the interview with the women/mothers shows that formal education is understood as a communal benefit. It can have positive effects for individuals, but the women/mothers view clearly refers to the positioning of formal education as a collective good. The fact that they see no disadvantages in formal education contrasts with the concerns and fears of some community elders from the literature described at the beginning of the chapter and indicates a shift in attitude towards formal education.

> *«I am expecting from the boys and girls who went to school to have an understanding of themselves. Because with education they can budget for their live when you give them some money. Because they have gone to school the know how to use it wisely. And if the girls get married in the marriage they should try to do something that will help them and support their life. So because of education I am expecting his children will be able to handle life.»*
>
> - *Father of Lemali: translated*

Lemalis's father also sees formal education as an opportunity to better cope with everyday difficulties. Reading, writing and handling money are considered key skills that help children lead independent and responsible lives. The same expectations apply to both boys and girls. This indicates that formal education is viewed as gender-neutral. Nevertheless, there is still the idea that girls will become wives and mothers and take care of the household. According to the father, formal education should help them achieve greater economic independence despite their life situation. This statement also describes formal education as a key factor in achieving

greater security and stability within existing social and cultural structures. It is intended to promote the development of his children's everyday skills. His opinion corresponds with that of other parents I talked to in informal conversations, who view education as a prerequisite for navigating a changing world.

> *«People should respect and value education. If you don't respect that education is something important nothing will be done. I wish people to respect education so that there will be a change.»*
>
> - *Father of Lemali: translated*

In this statement, Lemali's father expresses a further wish that formal education is respected and valued, which indicates a form of moral obligation. In his view, formal education should be firmly anchored in society and regarded as a social norm. He also positions formal education as a prerequisite for social change. In his view, positive change in Maasai society can only be achieved by changing the negative attitude toward formal education. This suggests that he desires change and transformation. He does not elaborate on what exactly this change entails or from where/in what areas it should lead, but formal education is identified as a central element of the process (Gimbo et al., 2015).

It is interesting to note that boys and girls are included equally by all the elders I interviewed in both the idea of change and the importance of formal education. The father spoke out in favor of all children having equal access to formal education. The education of girls is just as important as that of boys, as girls also contribute to the well-being of the family. Raymond's (2021) literature also describes how men stand up to convince other community members, especially males and to ensure that girls should also participate in education. The change in Maasai fathers attitudes is giving new outlooks to the prospects for girls' formal education (Raymond, 2021). Temba et al. (2013) confirm this statement and discusses that even though comparatively few fathers hold this opinion, the impact of their contribution to improving the position of girls in the education system is enormous (Temba et al., 2013). Further findings from the literature by Raymond (2021) show that many men hide their opinions and views from the rest of the community, which stands in contrast to the findings of this thesis. While the men interviewed in this research openly expressed supportive attitudes toward girls' participation in formal education, Raymond (2021) shows that some men fear that expressing a positive opinion about girls' education will be seen as contrary to the culture of the community. They are more hesitant to openly share their opinions (Raymond, 2021). This juxtaposition highlights that the attitudes of Maasai men toward girls' education are influenced by social risks associated with expressing their beliefs publicly. However, it would be misleading to interpret the

findings of this study as evidence of a fully realized gender-equitable transformation. The interviews of this study reveal that support for girls' formal education continues to be rooted in gender-specific expectations such as marriage and motherhood. Formal education is therefore not seen as challenging gender roles, but rather as an opportunity to enable girls to perform their socially defined roles in a more responsible and secured manner. This aligns with the discussion of Chisamaya et al. (2012) that addresses that prejudices against girls arise, are further deepened and reproduced by the interaction between the family, the community and political and economic systems (Chisamya et al., 2012). Despite the limitations mentioned before, both the results of this study and the literature point to an uneven but significant change. While Raymond (2021) emphasizes hesitation and social risks, Tema et al. (2013), Chisamaya et al (2012) and the results of this thesis point to emerging spaces in which support for girls is communicated more openly. These spaces are context-dependent and fragile, but they offer opportunities for change. This trend gives girls hope that the situation will continue to change in the future (Chisamya et al., 2012).

Although the elders' attitudes are predominantly positive, they also point out structural problems in the interviews. The support of the elders is essential for Maasai children's access to formal education, but this support alone is not effective enough if the political and economic conditions make it difficult for children to pursue an education. Some community elders, express a lack of trust in state institutions and the government. One interviewee described corruption as a key barrier, preventing financial resources intended for educational purposes from actually reaching the school projects.

> *«There is a big challenge of corruption in the government. Sometimes when there are funds to help our community the leaders who the budget is sent to, they just take it. They don't care about us.»*
>
> - *One of the elders: translated*

This statement illustrates that the problems in access to formal education also have a political and administrative dimension. Allegations of corruption are eroding the elders trust in state actors and their support. The text by Mwakalinga (2025) addresses the misuse and embezzlement of school funds as a form of corruption in education management in Tanzania. Corruption leads to poor performance in teaching in schools and to below-average implementation of government-funded school projects (Mwakalinga, 2025: 12). Furthermore, corruption in education has a direct impact on the qualifications of students and the bribery of teachers in the education system of Tanzania. In the long term, corruption has a detrimental effect on the performance of all those involved in the school system and on the country's educational progress (Rao &

Georgas, 2016). The Maasai elders are aware of these governmental conditions regarding the school system and fear further consequences of corruption.

This perception can be understood in the sense of Sen (1999) as an expression of limited social and political freedom. The shared values and norms of the Maasai can influence social characteristics as well as regulations and political outcomes. Sen (1999) argues that prevailing norms and values then affect the absence or presence of corruption and the level of trust in economic, social and political relationships. The communication of values enables the exercise of freedom, but these values are influenced by public discussions and social interactions, as described above in the example of corruption in education. This not only creates an administrative problem but also restricts participatory freedom (Sen, 1999).

Maasai are looking for active ways to counteract the challenges mentioned. One example is the chairman, who uses his role as elder and leader to launch local initiatives. The chairman reports that the education of the children in his village is so important to him that he visits all the bomas in the village and asks whether they have children and if so, whether they go to school or not. If the children are of school age but do not attend school, he tries to talk to the parents and explain his views on formal education to them. He has thus made it his personal mission to ensure that more children have access to formal education. Through his own commitment, he has noticed the differences compared to his own childhood. He mentioned that a major change has taken place. «*So there are big changes for education compared to my times. We had no opportunities. But nowadays a child can go to school and come back to support other kids» (Chairman: translated).* He, like many other elders in his village, is very satisfied with this form of change and would like to see it continue. However, he believes that personal commitment is only the first step toward achieving long term, sustainable positive change. To further expand on this, believes that structural adjustments and a clear educational vision for the village are necessary. In this context, he describes the developments he believes are necessary to strengthen access to formal education and integrate children into the education system in the long term. The expansion of local educational facilities, early education opportunities and further options after secondary school are of particular importance.

> *«There are many changes we want to see. If we get a school especially for the early child education so the small kids can start going there and train there mind instead of staying at home for long and waiting to join school. And the other thing is that I wish there is higher education. When the kids come from secondary school and they stay at home during the day they meet with others who have not been to school and then they change their mind. So during holiday they get distracted. And some girls are even stolen*

for marriage. So we need institutions for them to go during the vacation were they can go and learn some life skills. This will keep the kids going, we don't want to see them at home doing nothing.»

- *Chairman: translated*

Formal education is generally considered necessary in order to face the challenges and complexities of a changing world. Above all, the ability to read and understand information and contracts relating to land or animals is by the elders considered essential in order to protect the land and the Maasai community and to continue to benefit from livestock farming (Woodhouse & McCabe, 2018).

Based on the statements discussed, I would emphasize that the position of elders in the Maasai community as decision-makers and knowledge mediators is crucial to the general understanding of the educational reality in the Maasai community. Contrary to the statements of the younger generation, the views of the elders are not based on their own school experiences, but on their insights and experiences gained from positive examples set by individuals from the younger generations. It is probably the personal lack of formal education among the elders that may have led them to emphasize the value and importance of it so strongly in their statements. Their attitude is according to them the result of reflective observations as well as the challenges and changes brought about by social change.

A possible theoretical explanation for the results of the second research question and the consistently positive opinions of the elders can be discussed on the basis of the capability approach. The capability approach is embedded in an understanding of development that links formal education leading to freedom by removing forms of unfreedom and the institutional participation of individuals. This approach privileges those forms of knowledge that are already privileged in the global development discourse, such as the Western-influenced formal education system. Based on this starting point, it can be argued that elders and their positive attitude toward formal education are not defined by a sense of general empowerment or cultural progress. The positive attitude rather seems to arise from observable and thus concrete effects (Gimbo et al., 2015). Access to improved income, better opportunities on the labor market and greater self-determination are drivers of this positive attitude. As a result, elders do not regard formal education as the only legitimate form of knowledge and the only way of life. This also becomes evident in the way educational participation is negotiated in everyday practice. The Chairman explains: *«Nowadays we are telling kids to go to take care of the animals during weekends. So they can study during the week but during Saturday and Sunday they have to go with the cattle» (Chairman: translated).*

In the interviews I asked the community elders and the parents about their thoughts on the influence of formal education on their traditional livelihood and the potential issues of cultural alienation. None of the interviewees expressed concerns or spoke specifically negatively about the impact of formal education on their traditional practices. When asked about the impact of formal education, the interviewees cited only positive effects. It could therefore be concluded that the respondents do not have an acute fear of losing their culture through formal education. Formal education is seen as something useful that promotes the expansion of personal capabilities. However, it is important to critically examine who actually benefits from the expanded scope of action and under what conditions this process takes place. This is because in a context in which narratives of empowerment exist, as described by the elders, a form of expectation and pressure always arises. Lemali's father expressed himself as follows: *«So if a child goes to school he or she will come to help himself and the child will come to help the community» (Father of Lemali: translated).* When Maasai children get additional skills through formal education to supplement their indigenous education, it is expected that these skills will also be put to use. They must set a positive example and not disappoint their parents and the elders of the community, otherwise the attitude may arise that formal education is not worthwhile and was a poor investment. Many Maasai of the younger generation interviewed said that they feel responsible not only to their families but also to their entire community. On the one hand, they feel a high level of responsibility to continue to take care of the cattle and their cultural obligations during their school years while also performing well at school. On the other hand, they often mentioned that after graduating from school, they will provide for their families, either financially or through their physical presence. These conditions show that the high expectations placed on Maasai children and «young» Maasai by their culture can be further increased by the elders' ideas about formal education. It is expected that those who acquire skills should also use them effectively. One of the mothers, has high expectations of her son and his formal education.

> *«So I think that education will have a big impact like for example my son is about to complete college. After completing college he will come back. Because he is now an educated person he will get a job and get money and start taking care of my and his siblings. So it has a positive impact.»*
>
> - *One of the three Mothers: translated*

The mother sees a clear advantage in the fact that her son has completed formal education and will therefore be able to contribute to the family income in the future. She expects her son to move back to their village after his graduation and take care of the animals and the family there. It should be noted, that the positive effect of formal education for the mother is linked to the

condition that her son returns. Her statement leaves the question open if she would also view formal education as positive if her son moved to the city after completing his education and built a new life there, away from his family and his home village.

The interviews show that community elders link formal education for the younger generation with the common good of their society. Formal education serves not only for personal self-fulfillment but also as a resource whose benefits extend beyond the individual. In this sense, formal education resembles a common good whose value is constituted precisely by its collective significance (Gracia-Calandín & Tamarit-López, 2021). In terms of the capability approach, this view of the community elders means that formal education expands individual capabilities but does not go hand in hand with unlimited freedom. Formal education opens up new scope for action, but capabilities remain normatively framed and are bound to collective expectations.

Another possible reason for the purely positive views lies in the specific location of the study area and the villages where the interviews were conducted. In interviews and informal conversations, it was pointed out to me that larger villages with schools that are closer to urban infrastructure or have more frequent contact with government services tend to have a more open and positive attitude toward formal education. I was told that skepticism toward formal education is higher in more isolated and remote areas. *«There are some who think education is not important. In the deep villages of the Maasai but here in the village everyone is positive to education» (One of the three Mothers: translated).* There would be far fewer positive voices in the more remote villages, where formal education would be perceived as a greater threat to cultural identity. The elders I interviewed had increasingly observed the positive effects of formal education through examples and role models. These visible and traceable effects play an important role in ensuring that formal education is perceived as a resource rather than a risk. It also shows once again that skepticism can only be overcome when concrete examples of success are observed in the immediate environment. In even more remote locations without schools, there is a lack of role models and positive examples. This dynamic can be described as a kind of vicious circle. Without access to positive experiences, the rejection of formal education persists and without a change in attitude, access to formal education is not actively promoted. In villages with no or very difficult access to schools, both real and perceived opportunities for action are limited. This also prevents the potential benefits of formal education from being experienced at all. As a result, formal education remains something irrelevant or even threatening to tradition and culture.

It is interesting that the findings regarding the second research question, contrary to some of the literature, do not reveal any significant difference between the generations in their assessment of formal education. The community elders discuss similar conditions, opportunities and difficulties of formal education for students from the Maasai community. The interviews with both the younger and older generations discussed the relevance of formal education for individual future opportunities and for improving the living conditions of the community.

While the literature discussed predominantly highlights skeptical and negative opinions of the older generation regarding formal education and its impact on cultural identity, the data collected in this research painted a very consistent positive picture. All elders interviewed expressed positive views and consider formal education to be an important resource for the community to secure the future generations. These differing results between the discussed literature and this work do not highlight a contradiction or a refutation of one or the other results. It shows that perceptions within the Maasai community are heterogeneous and depend on local conditions and experience. The positive attitudes discussed in this thesis reflect the perspective of elders who have observed or directly experienced the positive effects of formal education. In order to obtain a comprehensive picture, the mainly positive views I have discussed, as well as the more critical perspectives from the existing literature, must therefore both be taken into account. Attitudes towards formal education must be reported in a differentiated manner. However, between the younger and older generations interviewed there is no significant intergenerational difference. There is cross-generational support for formal education based on individual hopes, conditions and expectations.

5 Conclusion

This research shows that «young» Maasai use active strategies to navigate the opportunities and challenges associated with formal education. It also shows that «young» Maasai have different versions of educational biographies. Even though these varied and opened up different future prospects, they were and are all characterized by continuous negotiation processes between structural constraints, cultural expectations and individual visions of the future.

Long-term motivations in the formal education of the «young» Maasai were mainly based on an intrinsic desire to learn new skills, the hope of financial stability through job opportunities and the opportunity to be a role model for other children in the Maasai community. In addition, the provision of food by the schools is/was more of a short-term motivation for attending school. The motivating factors also represent opportunities and chances for the «young» Maasai to secure their future livelihoods or gain recognition in the community. However, the educational experiences of the case studies are also significantly marked by challenges. Financial insecurity, long and dangerous walking distances to school, inadequate infrastructure, language barriers and a lack of support are the most frequently cited challenges. These factors have the ability to limit the actual opportunities to continuously and successfully benefit from formal education.

The case studies presented different strategies for navigating the difficulties and opportunities of everyday school life. These strategies include temporarily interrupting formal education or selling livestock or land in order to finance school fees, physical endurance and collective strategies such as walking to school in groups, the encouragement of girls and their access to formal education, as well as conscious adaptation to social change. The data from the case studies show that gender plays a central role in shaping the implementation of these navigation strategies. In many cases, girls' freedoms are further restricted by gender-specific power dynamics such as early marriage and pregnancy. As a result, their scope for action in the field of formal education is more limited and more often characterized by interruptions or permanent exclusion from the formal education system. Overall, it can be highlighted that a future-oriented vision is inherent in all navigation strategies and actively shapes them. Decisions to navigate the strategies are driven by the anticipation of future opportunities and the hope that formal education will enable a more secure life path.

The results of the second research question show that the interviewed parents of «young» Maasai and other community elders view formal education as predominantly positive and do not

perceive it as a fundamental threat or alienation of their culture. Formal education is understood as a useful skill that expands knowledge, promotes economic security and strengthens the community in the long term. This finding challenges some assumptions that consider formal education as an antithesis to traditional life or suggest that indigenous communities fundamentally oppose formal education or development. Instead, the perspectives of parents and elders indicate an aspiration to engage with formal education in ways that enhance livelihoods and strengthen the community without disrupting Maasai cultural practices.

Despite the positive perception of formal education, it is linked to clear expectations from the older generation. Sending one's own children to a formal school is seen as a collective investment and is linked to the idea that what is learned will be used for the benefit of the community. Expectations include financial security for the family, application of knowledge in the community and a return of the formally educated «young» Maasai to their home village. This can create normative pressure and a sense of responsibility that makes freedom of education ambivalent. Formal education is encouraged by community elders, but its legitimacy depends on its visible benefits for the family and the community.

The capability approach enables formal education to be examined as a usable resource. The educational biographies of the case studies show that individual capacity for action in the form of motivation, resistance and educational decisions does exist, but that it can be structurally limited. Capabilities in the context of formal education depend not only on attending school but also on social, cultural and economic factors that support their use and development. The capability approach not only serves to describe inequalities in the education system, but also helps to explain why formal educational opportunities can lead to different outcomes under equal or unequal conditions. It shows that education as a capability depends on the distribution of conditions under which education can be translated into a valuable way of life for the individual. Although Sen (1999) already emphasized the importance of education for society, the capability approach provides an opportunity to rethink formal education in an innovative way and to broaden the strategic horizons beyond political guidelines and standardized tests (Sen, 1999). It offers a tool for reflecting on injustices in the education system as well as in society as a whole. Sen's (1999) concept of «Development as Freedom» complements this perspective and shows that formal education can be understood as an individual good but also as a component of social development. The results of this thesis have shown that, in the context of the Maasai, formal education is aimed at individual income and mobility but is also strongly linked to collective expectations. In this sense, development as freedom does not mean an alienation

from cultural ways of life but an expansion of real opportunities for action and choice. However, this freedom is unevenly distributed and limited by structural factors.

Across both research questions, it can be said that integrating local realities, languages and knowledge is of enormous importance for culturally sensitive formal education. This type of education is in line with the agenda for social justice, which focuses on an education system that responds to different world views, diverse knowledge and cultural backgrounds of indigenous learners (Aikman et al., 2011). Multilingual education should therefore be understood not as an obstacle to integration, but as a prerequisite for active participation. The creation of guidelines and practices based on Maasai culture and traditional knowledge are crucial to their success and sustainability (Pesambili & Novelli, 2021b). The desire for more Maasai teachers also indicates that recognition and cultural representation are key factors for educational attainment. The preference for culturally sensitive education also goes hand in hand with Maasai's desire to be able to apply the skills they have acquired in a cultural context. Culturally sensitive education makes it possible to evaluate educational processes in terms of social justice, identity formation and long-term opportunities for action, rather than defining education solely in terms of enrolment rates or qualifications.

Further research is needed to explore how teachers working in Maasai Land can use indigenous knowledge, traditional teaching methods and local languages to supplement their teaching. This could reveal the extent to which such approaches could be effective and how the need for Maasai's navigation strategies in the context of obstacles in the formal school system can be mitigated.

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7 Appendix

7.1 Appendix A: Interview Guide Case Studies

Interview guide for semi-structured interviews for community elders:

- Introduce myself:
- Explain the topic:
  This interview is to collect data for my master's thesis. In my master's thesis, I explore the perceptions of formal education among the «young» Maasai in Tanzania and the significance they attribute to it for their future. My aim is to understand the compatibility of formal education with the traditional, semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Maasai, as well as the tensions and opportunities that emerge from this dynamic.
- Ask for verbal consent:
  Would you like to participate in this interview?
  If you have any questions or comments after the interview, please do not hesitate to contact me.
- Start recording:

Opening questions Interview 1:

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself, where are you from? What was your childhood like?
- What kinds of responsibilities did you have growing up – in your family or in the community?
- What would you say are the most important skills / capabilities needed to live a fulfilled life as a Maasai?
- What is important to you personally in life?

Main questions Interview 1:

- Can you briefly tell me which different schools you attended and what your educational background and training have been like so far?
- What memories do you have of your first time at school?
- What was your daily routine like when you were attending school?
- Did you also have to work or help at home while going to school?
- How was the dynamic / relationship between the children of different tribes or origins?
- What were your biggest personal difficulties during your time at school and how did you deal with them?
- What were your greatest personal successes / the best moments during your time at school?

- Has it been clear to your parents since you were a small child that you would go to school?
    - Who decided whether you would go to school or not?
- How important was education for your parents / other family members?
- Did your parents and family support you in going to school, or was it difficult?
    - How has the support been shown ?
- Do you have siblings?
    - If yes, how do you think their experience with school was (or is) different from yours?
- To what extent would you say your expectations and ideas about schooling match or differ those of your parents?

Opening questions Interview 2:

- What are you doing at the moment – are you in school, working, both?
- When you think about how your time is divided between different activities (school, work, home), how do you feel about that balance?

Main questions Interview 2:

- Have there been moments when you feel/felt most comfortable or confident at school?
- How do you experience the role of your culture in school or university?
- To what extent is for you formal education compatible with a traditional life as a Maasai?
- Are or were there things in your culture – like clothing, language, or customs – that are not accepted or welcome in school?
- Are teachers trained in intercultural communication or pastoralist-specific contexts?
- Have you ever experienced any form of exclusion at school?
    - If so, how did this show?
- If you could change something about your school or your environment to make it more inclusive, what would that be?
- How do you experience the expectations placed on you by your family or community ?
- Are the expectations you face in school different from those in your family or community?
- Can you describe a situation where you felt caught between what your teacher expected and what your family expected?
    - How do you make decisions when these expectations clash?

- Do you think your success in school affects how people in your community see you?
- What kind of recognition or respect do you wish to receive – from your teachers, your family, or society?

Opening questions Interview 3:

- When you think about your future, what kind of life would you like to live?
- What kind of place do you imagine yourself living in?
    - What would your daily life look like there?
- Are there people whose lives inspire you or your ideas about your own future?

Main questions Interview 3:

- What role does formal education play in your vision of a good life?
- In what ways do you think education has already changed your personal path?
- What are the most important things you want to have or experience in your future life?
- When you compare what you want for your life with what your parents or elders wanted for themselves, what similarities or differences do you see?
- Are there parts of your identity that have changed over time – through school, travel, or other experiences?
- What parts of your Maasai identity are most important to you – and how do you live them in your current life?
- Are there things you feel responsible for – in your family, in your community, or in your generation?
- Would you like to bring something you have learn through formal education back to your community or contribute in a certain way?
- What changes do you think are necessary to improve education and access to education for Maasai?
- What would you like to pass on to your younger siblings (or future children) about education?
- Would you like to continue your education?
    - If so, in what direction?
- Is there anything else you would like to talk about that is important to you?

7.2 Appendix B Interview Guide Parents

Interview guide for semi-structured interviews for community elders:

- Introduce myself:
- Explain the topic:
  This interview is to collect data for my master's thesis. In my master's thesis, I explore the perceptions of formal education among the «young» Maasai in Tanzania and the significance they attribute to it for their future. My aim is to understand the compatibility of formal education with the traditional, semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Maasai, as well as the tensions and opportunities that emerge from this dynamic.
- Ask for verbal consent:
  Would you like to participate in this interview?
  If you have any questions or comments after the interview, please do not hesitate to contact me.
- Start recording:

Opening questions:

- Can you please introduce yourself briefly?
- Can you tell me something about your family?
  - How many children do you have and how old are they?
- Can you tell me about the different roles of the members of the family and how the family is structured?
- Have you ever attended school?
  - If yes, how many years have you been to school and can you tell me about your experiences?
  - If not, what were the reasons you didn't go to school and would you have liked to go?
  - How do you think your life would be different now if you had gone to school?

Main questions:

- Do your children go to school?
  - If yes, how far away is the school and how do they get there?
  - If not, what are the reasons why they do not (yet) go to school?
- What are the biggest obstacles for children who would like to go to school but can't?
- When the children are at school who takes over their responsibilities at home/with the animals?

- What changes do you see in how land, livestock and money are managed when children spend more time in school?
- What impact does formal education have on your traditional livelihood?
- What advantages or disadvantages do you see for your children when they go to school?
- Is there support or resistance from the extended family or community?
- To what extent does (or does not) formal education fit in with your family's traditional values?
- Has formal education changed anything in your family?
- Do you see differences between the decision of formal education between daughters and sons?
- Are there certain expectations for girls or boys in your family when it comes to formal education?

Final questions:

- What do you wish for your children's future?
- What changes do you think are necessary to improve formal education and access to schools for Maasai?
- Is there anything you would like to say to the government or schools to give your children better educational opportunities?
- Is there anything else you would like to talk about that is important to you?

7.3 Appendix C: Interview Guide Community Elders

Interview guide for semi-structured interviews for community elders:

- Introduce myself:
- Explain the topic:
  This interview is to collect data for my master's thesis. In my master's thesis, I explore the perceptions of formal education among the «young» Maasai in Tanzania and the significance they attribute to it for their future. My aim is to understand the compatibility of formal education with the traditional, semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Maasai, as well as the tensions and opportunities that emerge from this dynamic.
- Ask for verbal consent:
  Would you like to participate in this interview?
  If you have any questions or comments after the interview, please do not hesitate to contact me.
- Start recording:

Opening questions:

- Can you tell me about yourself and your role in the community?
- How has your life changed in recent years?
- Have you ever attended school?
    - If yes, how many years have you been to school and can you tell me about your experiences?
    - If not, what were the reasons you didn't go to school and would you have liked to go?
    - How do you think your life would be different now if you had gone to school?

Main questions:

- What would you say are the most important skills needed to live a fulfilled life as a Maasai?
- Can you tell me how elders transmit their knowledge to younger people?
    - And in what context, schools or in private settings?
- Do you think that formal education complements and strengthens these skills or does it weaken them?
- What do you think about the role of formal education for Maasai today and how has it changed over the years?
- To what extent is formal education in line or at odds with traditional Maasai values?
- Are there examples where formal education helps to preserve traditions?

- How do you see he balance between formal education and maintaining the pastoral life/tradition?
- What are the biggest obstacles for children who would like to go to school but can't?
- How do you see the relationship between older and younger generations?
- Do you feel that younger people today think differently about foraml education than they used to?
- What do you expect/wish from «young» Maasai who go or have gone to school?

Final questions:

- What changes do you think are necessary to improve formal education and access to schools for Maasai?
- What do you wish for the future of your community in terms of formal education?
- What advice would you give to «young» people in your community?
- Is there anything else you would like to talk about that is important to you?

7.4 Appendix D: Interview Guide School Principal and Teacher

Interview guide for semi-structured interviews for School Principal and Teacher:

- Introduce myself:
- Explain the topic:
  This interview is to collect data for my master's thesis. In my master's thesis, I explore the perceptions of formal education among the «young» Maasai in Tanzania and the significance they attribute to it for their future. My aim is to understand the compatibility of formal education with the traditional, semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Maasai, as well as the tensions and opportunities that emerge from this dynamic.
- Ask for verbal consent:
  Would you like to participate in this interview?
  If you have any questions or comments after the interview, please do not hesitate to contact me.
- Start recording:

Opening questions:

- Can you give me a brief overview of your school?
- Approximately how many Maasai students attend your school?
    - How has this number changed over the years?

Main questions:

- What difficulties do the Maasai students face during their school day?
    - Or in general?
- What gender specific challenges face the Maasai boys and girls?
    - Do you have a specific case in mind?
- Based on your experience, what are some strength that Maasai students bring into the classroom?
- How are traditional values and practices of the Maasai addressed or integrated in school life?
- How are teachers trained in intercultural communication or pastoralist-specific contexts?
- How do you experience the collaboration with the families of Maasai students?
- Are there any specific programs or support measures for pastoralist communities?
- Have you observed the impact of any specific educational policy on pastoralist students?

- What are some limitations or barriers you face as a school when trying to support students from diverse cultural backgrounds ?

Final questions:

- What changes do you think are necessary to improve formal education and access to schools for Maasai?
- Is there anything else you would like to talk about that is important to you?

7.5 Appendix E: Guidelines on Ethics and Safety in Fieldwork for Researchers in Human Geography

Universität Zürich[UZH]

Department of Geography
Human Geography

Guidelines on Ethics and Safety in Fieldwork for Researchers in Human Geography

Version of 29.12.2022

Human Geography fieldwork questionnaire

Please fill out the following form in order to plan your fieldwork. Rather than a checklist, this questionnaire is meant as a platform for discussion and feedback, which serves both you, your supervisor and the fieldwork counsellors to evaluate such questions before, during and after your fieldwork.

If you have questions regarding your fieldwork that are not covered in this form, please raise them with your supervisor or with the field work counsellor. If you have suggestions for additional questions that would be useful for this survey, let your supervisor or fieldwork counsellor know. This form is continuously being updated.

To be filled by the researcher and discussed with the supervisor:

Name of student	Sophie Kappeler
Supervisor	Asebe Regassa Debelo
Faculty member	Benedikt Korf
Location of fieldwork	Arusha Tanzania
Date of fieldwork	Mai 27, - July 13, 2025
Date of meeting	Mai 23, 2025

Research framing

Do I want to include my research partners in the development of my research aims, research questions and methodology, i.e. adopt participatory elements in my research design? How will I present/explain my research in the field? If partial disclosure of my research object is necessary, how will I justify this decision? And how will I go about the potential harms of this decision? How will I make sure that my research questions and terminology are respectful? How will go about the possible expectations (and/or frustrations) that my research generates?

My research design includes semi-structured and unstructured interviews with Maasai in Tanzania. While the overarching research question is already established, I will consider the participants' perspectives and experiences in depth in the interviews. Their responses will significantly inform the analysis as I draw out the different perceptions of formal education and attempt to determine how these influence and shape the future of young Maasai. When I meet the potential interviewees, I will present my work and research question and explain why I am in the field and the aim of my research. I will make sure that my interview guide provides enough space for the participants to express their own perspective and that no leading questions or implications arise from my views. I will familiarize myself in advance with the relevant literature and existing studies and adopt a professional terminology that avoids discriminatory or problematic terms. Should it happen that participants point out misunderstandings or insensitive questions, I will adapt my wording accordingly. The research may raise expectations among participants, both in terms of the results and the process. To avoid frustration, it is important to set clear and realistic expectations. My work is purely for scientific knowledge and does not aim to bring about political or social change in the field of education for the Maasai. If participants express frustration, either with their own situation or with the research itself, I will give them the opportunity to express their views and will respond sensitively to their concerns.

Positionality

What power do I estimate to have over research participants from my position as a researcher, volunteer or host? What vulnerabilities and/or dependencies do I have? What perceptions and imaginations do I expect to generate through my background and identity markers (culture, gender, group, nationality, age)? How will I deal with this during as well as 'outside' work? How will I anticipate the possible security risks that this positionality provokes for all people involved (research participants and researchers)?

As a young, white woman from Switzerland, I endeavour to gain a perspective on the educational and future prospects of young Maasai. Therefore, it is essential to reflect on my own position in the research process, because the concept of value-free research, which excludes human subjectivity from knowledge generation, is challenged by the concept of positionality. Through my education in Switzerland, I have developed an understanding of education as an indispensable means for economic success and social recognition. However, an initial literature review revealed that this Eurocentric notion may conflict with the Maasai understanding

of education and economic independence and the ideas and images generated by my identity and presence are central to this re-reflection. My Swiss origin and my academic background could lead to either an increased approval of education-related topics being expressed to me or to participants behaving rather defensively, as they fear having to justify their traditional way of life. Consequently, it is crucial for my research not to view education as a universal and desirable means of improving future prospects, but rather to focus on the perceptions and understanding of the Maasai. My linguistic limitations are central to my positioning. I do not speak Maa or Swahili and am therefore dependent on external translators. It is therefore important to work with local people who can help contextualize the statements of the Maasai interviewees. I will use a field diary to continuously reflect on my work and critically evaluate my own position and role in the research process. As a western-socialized student, I bring a outside perspective that differs from the experiences and realities of life of the Maasai. This can influence how my questions and my presence are perceived. In a community with its own social structures and traditions, it is possible that my role as a researcher will be interpreted differently. To create an atmosphere of trust and open discussion, I will design my research in such a way that the participants can freely express their own perspectives and experiences. It is important to me not only to act as a questioner, but to understand the exchange as a mutual learning process. Through long term interactions, I want to build trust and make it clear that my aim is not to evaluate existing structures or confirm preconceived assumptions, but rather to understand different perspectives on education and future prospects. I will also have to be aware of my positioning outside of my direct research situations. My behavior in everyday life, the way I dress or how I move around in social spaces could influence how I am perceived and how willing people are to talk to me. I will therefore strive to integrate myself respectfully and sensitively into the social fabric, observe local customs and present myself in a way that is not perceived as patronizing or distant. To summarize, my research will be strongly shaped by my positionality, both in terms of power relations and in terms of perceptions and dependencies. By being aware of these dynamics, striving for a reflective and respectful research approach and integrating an ongoing process of self-reflection into my work, I can contribute to conducting an investigation that is as fair and ethical as possible.

Doing no harm

What harm could potentially come out of my research? To whom specifically? (e.g. marginalised/social minority groups, research assistants, physically vulnerable groups, myself, other researchers…)? How do I anticipate this? Ethnography and anthropology can be intrusive in people's (including one's own) lives – how can I anticipate this? How can I maximise the benefits emerging from my research? How flexible am I in my research method? Do I have a plan B?

My research focuses on perceptions of and access to formal education within Maasai communities in Tanzania, particularly from the perspective of young Maasai and their families and community members. While my aim is to gain valuable insights into educational challenges

and opportunities, potential risks for different groups involved need to be considered and minimized.

One potential risk is for the participating Maasai families, especially young women who are interested in education or are already integrated into the formal school system. Education can be a controversial topic within the community, especially if it is perceived as a threat to traditional ways of life. Young women who choose education may face social pressure or resistance within their families or community. To avoid this, it is crucial to conduct interviews and discussions in a protected environment, to ensure anonymity if desired. Challenges could also arise for local research assistants and translators, especially if they act as intermediaries between me as a researcher and the community. They might get involved in difficult conversations or face social pressure themselves, especially if certain members of the community are critical of education. For myself as a researcher, the field also presents challenges. As a young, white woman from Switzerland, I am perceived as an outsider, which could lead to mistrust or distance. At the same time, my research could be seen by some as interfering in internal social and cultural affairs. I will consciously communicate in a culturally sensitive way and regularly reflect on my own positionality. Furthermore, I will take safety precautions to ensure my personal safety, especially when traveling to remote areas. Another key ethical issue of my research is the potential intrusion into people's lives. There is a risk that my research may unintentionally influence existing social dynamics and, for example, exacerbate existing tensions between pro-education and anti-education groups. Therefore, I will try to conduct my research in such a way that it is perceived as valuable and acceptable. This includes conducting interviews in a respectful and non-invasive manner and always making sure that participants feel comfortable. I will remain flexible and consider alternative methods if unforeseen challenges arise. If face-to-face interviews cannot be conducted as planned, I will use alternative methods such as focus groups or informal discussions with key people in the community. If access to certain regions is limited, I will try to cooperate with organizations that are already working with Maasai education projects. If the dynamics of the interviewees change, I will adapt my questions accordingly to ensure respectful and ethical research.

Overall, my research is based on careful planning, a conscious approach to cultural sensitivities and constant reflection on my own role as a researcher. Through transparent and respectful communication and close collaboration with local partners, I am able to minimize potential risks while creating a safe environment for myself as a researcher, the participants and the handling of my fieldwork.

Informed consent and voluntary participation

Do informants know what their participation in my research entails? Do they understand that they are free to pull out at any time? E.g. do any gatekeepers "force" them to speak with me? Have they become dependent on me – e.g. through research compensation? Do they know what happens with the data (storage, kind of analyses and publications) during and after research (see points 6 and 10)? Do I need to remind them that they can pull out?. Do I need an informed consent form and is the form I suggest using adequate (for instance, using appropriate language)? Do I have to inform others or need an informed consent form of others (e.g. parents in

case of doing research with minors or head of an institution in case of doing research with particular employees and so on)? If I am using social media, have I considered the implications on consent and voluntary participation (e.g. blurred boundary between public and private space)? Does my research entail deception of participants at any point? If so, is this necessary and why? How will I anticipate this?

Before the start of each interview, participants are informed about the purpose of the research, and how their data will be handled. As many Maasai have an oral culture, consent can be given verbally. It is emphasized that there will be no negative consequences if someone does not want to participate or does not want to answer questions. As the interviews are voluntary, they are not remunerated, which means that there is no financial dependency between the interviewees and me as the interviewer. The audio files of the interviews as well as the transcripts are stored on an external hard disk. Only I and the research team have access to the original data. If social media or phone numbers are used to contact or collect data, I will ensure that the boundaries between public and private space are respected. Transparency is a fundamental ethical requirement of my research. Should misunderstandings or unintended influences arise during the field phase, I will openly address these and adapt my approach.

Anonymity and confidentiality

How will I communicate to my research participants to what extent my research will be confidential and anonymised (→ see point 4 on informed consent above)? Have I taken the necessary steps to keep promises of anonymity and confidentiality? Is it necessary to anonymise the field site? What harm could come out of (not) doing so?

It will be clearly explained what will happen to the interview data and who will have access to it. Should any aspect be unclear, participants will have the opportunity to ask questions or to withdraw from the interview at any time. The locations where the interview was conducted will be visible in the transcript and in the paper, provided that this is done with the consent of the participants. However, at the request of the interviewees, the transcripts can be anonymized by changing the name and location, based on the preferences of each individual participant.

Data protection

What problems could arise with recording and storing my data? How do I protect my data during and after field work from data loss, theft as well as from people who should not have access to them? Who needs access to data during and after research (research team, supervisor)? Who owns the data I collected? (If nothing else is agreed upon in writing, the UZH policy is that raw data belongs to all members of the research team. I.e. they all have the right to continue using the raw data and publishing results from it, even after leaving GIUZ). What will happen with the data after finishing the thesis? Which data can I make available openly and which not? (→ see section D on data protection below)

To minimize the risks when collecting and storing data, it is crucial to protect the data appropriately during and after fieldwork. To protect the data from loss, theft and unauthorized access, I use encryption, regular backups and clear access controls. The physical security of storage media, such as laptops or USB sticks, should also be guaranteed. Access to the data should be clearly regulated. At the University of Zurich, raw data is typically regarded as the joint property of all members of the research team. This arrangement allows team members to utilize the data even after they have departed from the institute, provided that all participants agree to uphold confidentiality. Once the research is completed, the data should be archived or deleted in accordance with institutional and legal requirements. It is important to determine which data can be made publicly available. Data that has been anonymized and does not contain personal information could be published under certain conditions, while personal or non-anonymized data should not be published without the explicit consent of the participants.

Field assistants

What information do I have to include in the contract with my field assistants (legal, payment, but also informal terms of reference)? What are my available legal options of employing my field assistants? Do I have the necessary documents for employing my field assistant prepared (⇾ see section C administrative fieldwork preparation and the template contract for research assistance abroad in section E)? What agency and role status does the field assistant have in the research? How do I anticipate potential risks that the research generates in terms of my research collaboration? Do I have a platform to discuss issues that may emerge? Are mutual expectations agreed upon (in terms of overstepping 'limits' or taking risks)? What receipt and refund policy for expenses have I agreed upon?

In my field research, I will probably work with two local people: a contact person who will support me in arranging further contacts within the community, and a translator who will accompany me linguistically and help me to conduct conversations in Maa or Swahili. Even if a formal contract is not mandatory in all contexts, it is important to me to make clear and transparent agreements to ensure fair and respectful cooperation.

I will therefore clarify the most important framework conditions with both people verbally - before the start of the fieldwork. This includes information about the type of cooperation, such areas of responsibility (e.g. translation, mediation, organization of meetings), appropriate remuneration and the time frame of the cooperation. Informal aspects such as mutual expectations of how to treat each other or how to deal with challenges and opportunities to withdraw are also discussed openly. I will make sure to offer fair remuneration in line with local standards and to reimburse expenses (e.g. transportation costs, telephone charges) if necessary.

It is essential to see the transaltor not just as a technical assistant, but as an active research partner whose perspectives and assessments can enrich the analysis. In order to facilitate a trusting and open collaboration, I will schedule regular reflection meetings in which any misunderstandings, challenges or uncertainties can be discussed. I will also address potential risks, such as crossing emotional, cultural or physical boundaries when dealing with sensitive

issues or hierarchical structures. It is important that my field assistants do not feel under pressure to provide information that may be ethically questionable or personally damaging

My aim is to build a cooperative, respectful relationship with my supporters that is based on mutual appreciation, transparency and fairness.

Personal health and safety

Do I have the necessary gear? What are my first steps in the field? How do I get from A to B? Do I know what to do if I get sick in the field? Do I have my health insurance and necessary vaccination, medication and first aid gear ready? Am I at risk of becoming isolated? Do I have possibilities to build up a support system (e.g. timetable, places to hang, contacts to pursue, access to internet)? Am I in danger of being harmed by anyone in the field (research informants, assistants, authorities)? Do I know what to do in case of emergency (e.g. embassy, contacts on the ground and at university)? In what case do I mobilise them? If any of my field sites are in risk-prone areas, do I have a research safety protocol in place with my supervisor (→ see section D below)?

To conduct the interviews and create the transcripts, I only need my cell phone, my laptop, a pen and paper. On site, I will mainly be using public transportation. I have already gained experience with these modes of transportation from my first trip to Tanzania. If I need to get to a place that is a little further out and is not served by public transport, I will hire a private contact as a driver. I have already received the recommended vaccinations for Tanzania and I will take daily tablets to prevent malaria. I am already aware of the side effects of the tablets and I know what symptoms to expect. I will have a first aid kit with me in case of illness or injury. Should my condition be so serious that I need to go to hospital, I will reach out to my emergency contacts in Tanzania and Switzerland to discuss the appropriate course of action.

To avoid the feeling of isolation, I plan to stay in a hostel in the beginning of my field work. This will give me access to the internet and the opportunity to meet new people outside my research radius and exchange ideas. Furthermore, I am in contact with people my age from my previous trip to Tanzania, whom I can meet during my free time.

Writing and dissemination

Does the information I plan to release based on my fieldwork have benefits and/or contain potential harm? Could my research findings be problematic and for whom? Will I need to censor some results and why? Am I clear about who owns my findings and my data? Am I happy with the confidentiality arrangements I have made? How do I plan to anonymise my informants? Does this influence the kind of analysis I am able to make? Are my research findings openly accessible to the public? Is it possible to make my collected data available to the public or for future research (e.g. by storing it in a digital repository)? Are my plans on how my data will be used and shared in line with what I plan to tell my research participants before asking them for their informed consent?

The objective of my research is to enhance the understanding of the educational and future prospects of young Maasai. While the findings may provide valuable insights, they also pose certain risks, including the potential for misinterpretation or unintended political instrumentalization. Consequently, I will carefully consider the manner in which I present my findings to avoid any unintended harm while preserving the integrity of the key results.

Ownership of the data rests with me, but I will respect confidentiality and protect participants through anonymization if desired. This may limit the analysis, but is necessary to maintain ethical standards. My results will be publicly available, although I will consider targeted sharing with local organizations if it is in the interest of the community. I do not plan for long term storage of the raw data to address privacy concerns.

Giving back beyond academic writing: sharing results

What is the best format to maximise the benefits of my research findings (to the research participants and other parties who might be interested)? How do I make sure that the knowledge generated travels back to research participants? Does this jeopardise the promises of confidentiality or anonymity I made? How will the information released best benefit the audience? Does it have a potential to do harm?

My research will be documented in my Master's thesis, which will be accessible through the University of Zurich's databases. In addition to the academic publication, participants should have the opportunity to receive a summary of the results. This summary can be provided in either written or oral form, depending on what is most suitable for the participants. If there is interest in the findings, these could be presented in a collaborative exchange facilitated by my contact person in Tanzania. However, it is essential to ensure that no unrealistic expectations are set, particularly concerning potential practical or political changes. The research aims to contribute to knowledge production and reflection while respecting the self-determination of the Maasai and avoiding the promotion of external agendas.

Giving back beyond academic writing: supporting research participants

Do I compensate participants? What material compensation can I supply for time and energy? What problems could emerge with compensation (e.g. making participants dependent on me financially and less able to pull out of the research)? How could I handle these? Am I engaging in activism or feeling responsibility to making changes? What are the consequences of my public engagement with the way my research results are perceived in the field?

This scientific work prioritizes the collection and analysis of data. To maintain the integrity of the research and prevent dependencies and unequal power dynamics, no financial support will be provided to participants. However, as a token of appreciation, I plan to offer participants a small material reward. Furthermore, the research aims to add value for the Maasai community by incorporating perspectives on education and development that may have been overlooked in previous discussions.

To ensure a clear distinction between my research and activism, I am committed to conducting my research transparently and on a scientific basis. This commitment includes a continuous reflection on my positionality, ensuring that the data collection and outcomes remain unbiased by my personal beliefs and convictions.The research follows an ethically reflective approach that takes academic knowledge production and the interests of the Maasai into account. By facilitating an open exchange of findings, the research not only aims to confirm or enhance existing theories but also serves as a platform for amplifying Maasai perspectives.

8 Reflection on the use of AI

Various software tools were used during the research process and while writing this thesis. DeepL was used to translate complex English texts into German in order to understand them better. DeepL was also used to translate German words and expressions into English to support the writing process of this thesis. Furthermore, ChatGPT was also used for translation and to display very complex texts that were not entirely understandable even in German in a somewhat simplified version. ChatGPT helped in some cases to find a suitable transition between two text passages, but was not used to generate content texts from the ground or to create quotations. Mendeley Reference Manager was used to organize the different sources and present the bibliography in a consistent manner.

9 Personal Declaration

«I hereby declare that I have composed this thesis independently and without unauthorized assistance. I affirm that this work, in whole or in part, has not been submitted for any other academic degree or qualification. All sources used, whether quoted verbatim or paraphrased, have been duly acknowledged.»

Date: 28. January 2026

Signature:

Sophie Kappeler