

CHAPTER 10

THE LONG DISTANCE TRADE IN EAST AFRICA

WHAT THE LONG DISTANCE TRADE WAS

1. Trade is the buying and selling of goods and services.
2. The long distance trade however, was the trade in which people who participated moved long distances through the interior up to the coast and back in search for goods.
3. It was a commercial activity between the interior people and the coast of East Africa.
4. It took place before the coming of the European colonizers. It was therefore a pre-colonial trade.
5. It took place during the 19th century.
6. The main traders from the interior were: the Nyamwezi, Yao, Baganda, Banyoro, Kamba, Khartoumers among others.
7. The Nyamwezi provided cheap porters to carry goods from the interior to the coast and back.
8. The Arabs and Swahili traders were the main traders from the interior.
9. The caravans were organised by the coastal traders to reach the interior for goods and then to coast to take the goods.
10. The medium of exchange in this trade was bartering, that is to say exchange of goods for goods. The interior traders would exchange their goods with Arabs goods.
11. However, cowrie shells and coins were later introduced to supplement barter trade, which was proving to be disadvantageous.
12. The items of the long distance trade involved exports and imports.
13. From the interior of east Africa, the traders exported slaves, ivory, bark cloth, foodstuffs, gold, and iron tools among others.
14. Imports to the interior were: guns, wheat, rice, glass and other metallic implements among others.
15. Slaves formed the most important items of the long distance trade. They got them through raids.
16. The interior leaders made sure that the trade routes were secured for the caravans.
17. The long distance trade ran through well defined trade routes which the major ones were the Northern trade route, Central trade route and southern trade route but with smaller junctions.

FACTORS THAT LED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF LONG DISTANCE TRADE IN EAST AFRICA

1. The protection given to the traders by the Arabs who had guns was one of the factors for the development of the long distance trade.
2. The availability of trade items like slaves, ivory, bark cloth, glassware and so on.
3. High demand of trade items like slaves and ivory by the coastal traders prompted the Africans to get involved in supplying the items.
4. Traders themselves were getting high profits from the activity more than other activities.
5. The development of trade routes such as the Northern route, central route and so on.
6. In the interior of East Africa, inland markets such as Tabora, Ujiji and Bagamoyo existed and this boosted the trade.
7. The co-operation between the African chiefs and the influential traders like Mirambo and the Arab traders at first.
8. Presence of well organised Kingdom such as Nyamwezi, Buganda and others who organised the internal traders.
9. Role of men such as Tipu-Tip and Mirambo who organised the traders.
10. Seyyid Said's transfer of his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar and his declaration of Zanzibar as an international slave market.
11. The Arabs had also established plantations of cloves and coconuts at the coast that needed labour. The labour could only be got from slaves provided by the Africans.
12. Among the Africans intertribal wars were common and during these wars war captives were sold into slavery, hence boosting the long distance trade.
13. The existence of money lenders known as Banyans eased the trade. They were able to give the Africans money on credit to start business.
14. The presence of rich Arab families, the Busaidi Arabs increased the volume of the Long distance trade.
15. Presence of cheap labour provided by the African slaves also led to the development of the trade.
16. The development of Kiswahili language that acted as a medium of communication in trade.
17. Existence of local trade within the East African states already, for example Buganda traded with Ankole, Masai traded with Yao and so on.
18. Introduction of cowrie shells as an acceptable medium of exchange made the trade easy.

19. High demand for foreign goods among the East Africans, for example guns, beads, cloth and others. This ensured that African could be willing to accept the goods.
20. Some tribes produced goods in surplus and the need to get rid of the surplus led to development of long distance trade, for example the Baganda produced barkcloth in excess, and Bunyoro also produced salt in excess.
21. Some societies had skills that enabled them to make superior products, for example the Nyamwezi, Baganda and others produced iron tools which they exchanged with other traders.
22. Division of labour among African societies, that is to say, men cleared the gardens and left the work of planting and harvesting to women, among the Nyamwezi. This gave men the opportunity to involve in trade.
23. Introduction of the gun improved security along trade routes and increased slave raids into the interior.
24. The maximum co-operation between the interior tribes and the coastal people especially when Islam was introduced. It acted as a unifying factor.
25. Trade and exchange of goods among the Africans were cultural practices, that is to say it was part and parcel of the Africans.
26. Some Africans also joined this trade due to love for adventure, for example among the Acholi and the Kamba high respect was accorded to someone who had widely travelled.
27. The African leaders joined this trade to create friendship, for example Mutesa I of Buganda and Mirambo of Nyamwezi wanted friendship with the Arabs.
28. The interior people also had plenty of foodstuffs as a result of fertile soils that East Africa had.

Note that the above points also explain why the Africans like the Yao, Nyamwezi and Kamba among others participated in the long distance trade.

ORGANISATION OF THE LONG DISTANCE TRADE IN EAST AFRICA

1. This was the trade carried out between the coastal people and the interior tribes of East Africa.
2. The trade developed around the first half of the 19th century.
3. It involved movement of long journeys from the coast to the interior, hence the name long distance trade.

4. The main participants in the interior included the Nyamwezi, Kamba, Yao, and other tribes.
5. From the coast, came the Swahili people and the Arabs
6. However the trade also involved Europeans like Spanish, British, French, among others.
7. The African chiefs in the interior were the chief negotiators for the items sold to the coastal traders.
8. The Swahili people were the middlemen between the coastal Arabs and the interior traders.
9. The trade, was organised on caravan basis, that is to say, people could organise themselves into large groups and move together as one community in a long line.
10. From the coast, goods like guns, beads, clothes, glassware, gun powder, and others entered the interior.
11. Goods that came from the interior included ivory, slaves, gold, salt and many others.
12. Slaves were the most important items of trade of the long distance trade.
13. They were chained on their necks, arms and feet as they transported them. This was done to ensure that they never ran away or rebelled.
14. The Yao provided gold which they obtained from Mwenomotapa empire in Central Africa.
15. The Kamba provided ivory to the Long distance traders that they obtained by hunting elephants from the forests.
16. The trade had money lenders called the Banyans, who came from India.
17. The trade involved taxation where taxes were paid to the local chiefs.
18. The trade involved goods being carried on backs and heads or head- portage.
19. The Nyamwezi provided labour to carry goods or work as porters to carry goods from the interior to the coast.
20. The main medium of communication was Swahili language.
21. The trade originally was organised on a barter system, that is to say goods being exchanged for others.
22. Cowrie shells were made to shift from the monopoly of barter trade and also to solve its disadvantages.
23. Cowrie shells were later replaced by coins and they served very well as medium of exchange during the trade.
24. At first the Arabs feared to go into the interior due to fear of man-eaters, harsh climate and tropical diseases but at time went on they gained courage and penetrated inland.

25. The Nyamwezi acted as middlemen, who supplied at first, the goods from the interior.
26. With time, the Arabs penetrated into the interior. They were able to interact freely with the Africans who supplied them with plenty of trade items.
27. The trade followed three specific trade routes namely Northern, Central and Southern trade routes.
28. The southern route started from Kilwa through Malawi and was dominated by Yao.
29. The Central route was the biggest and it started from Bagamoyo to Ujiji, then to Buganda. It was dominated by Nyamwezi.
30. The Northern route started from Pangani and Mombasa to Taita hills. Still on this trade route there was a significant route of the Khartoumers.
31. The trading centres in the interior included Tabora, Ujiji and Bagamoyo.
32. At the coast, the major trading centre was Zanzibar.

IMPACT OR EFFECTS OF THE LONG DISTANCE TRADE UPON THE PEOPLE OF EAST AFRICA

1. The effects were both positive and negative.
2. They were also social, economic and political in nature.
3. It led to the formation and expansion of states in East Africa, for example Buganda.
4. It led to rise of strong statesmen like Mirambo, Nyungu-Yamawe, Mutesa I and Msiri among others.
5. The chiefs in East Africa obtained a lot of wealth and this improved their standard of living.
6. It led to prominence of communities like the Yao, Nyamwezi, Kamba, and the Baganda among others. That is to say they became famous and well known.
7. The long distance trade led to the collapse of some states, for example with the long distance trade, Buganda weakened her traditional enemy of Bunyoro.
8. The trade led to introduction of the gun that increased instability in the area. Captured slaves were badly treated, for example they were flogged to be weakened and even killed if they tried to resist.
9. It led to decline of agriculture in some states, for example the Nyamwezi abandoned agriculture and concentrated on trade. Famine then set in.
10. Towns like Tabora, Ujiji and Bagamoyo among others developed in the interior.
11. Because of Arab penetration into the interior, Islam was spread.

12. Swahili culture spread into the interior and this led to loss of African culture.
13. The trade exposed the East African region to outside world. It opened the interior of East Africa to the outside world.
14. It also led to depopulation of East Africa due to slave trade.
15. Inter-marriages were facilitated between coastal people and interior people, giving rise to half castes.
16. New goods of Arab origin like guns, beads, clothes, glasses and many others were introduced. The Africans in the interior enjoyed them.
17. As Arab goods of Arab and European origin penetrated into African communities, African technology was destroyed by the new and advanced Arab skills.
18. Monetary system with the introduction of cowrie shells and coins was introduced.
19. Industries were set up at the coast of East Africa to process some trade items.
20. It exploited the resources of East Africa, for example slaves were exchanged for simple items like beads, cloth among others.
21. The trade led to introduction of new crops into the interior of East Africa like rice, paw-paw, cloves, and Arabica coffee among others.
22. Due to the penetration of Arabs into the interior of East Africa the Kamba and Nyamwezi lost their middleman position.
23. Friendship and cooperation among the East African communities developed. This ensured peace and prosperity (richness).
24. It clearly opened up East Africa for the scramble and partition, because its economic potentials were identified. It attracted the Europeans who later colonized East Africa.
25. The trade later led to improvement in transport and communication. Trade routes developed into better road networks.
26. There was destruction of property due to slave trade raids that was merciless.
27. There was depopulation of animals, for example elephants were seriously hunted for, for ivory and their number greatly reduced.
28. It also increased inter-tribal wars, tribal quarrels and warfare due to introduction of the gun.

PROBLEMS FACED DURING LONG DISTANCE TRADE

1. The problems faced were social, economic and political in nature.

2. They were also internal and external in nature.
3. Heavy taxes imposed by some kings like Mirambo of Nyamwezi discouraged traders.
4. The very long distances that were too tiresome made some traders to loose interest in the trade.
5. Epidemic diseases especially the tropical diseases like malaria.
6. There was the problem of man eaters in the interior.
7. Exhaustion of certain good. Items like ivory due to reduction of Elephants.
8. Communication was indeed a problem, that is to say, few people could speak Swahili language.
9. The Ngoni invaded several tribes in southern Tanganyika and this disrupted trade.
10. Unreliable and undependable seasonal changes rainy seasons and prolonged drought.
11. Quarrels and misunderstandings among traders for the control of the trade, for example Mirambo had problems with Arabs over taxes.
12. The money lenders, the Indian Banyans charged too much interest on their money.
13. Some tribes were too hostile like the Masai.
14. Still the geographical conditions of the interior were poor. Relief like hills, mountains, river valleys, swamps were major problems to the traders during walking.
15. Presence of thick forests disturbed movement from the coast to the interior.
16. Interior traders did not have enough guns to hunt for slaves and elephants for ivory.
17. Bartering as a medium of exchange was not the best form of trade. It was unreliable because one could not know the proper value of the commodities.
18. The slaves could die on their way to the coast due to mistreatment.
19. Some commodities, for example ivory were heavy and difficult to carry.
20. There were also very few porters to carry goods and yet transport system was not properly developed.
21. Lack of food at times for the traders, especially those from the interior.

ROLES PLAYED BY THE AFRICANS IN THE LONG DISTANCE TRADE

Note that: The points for this topic are some how similar to the roles of the Nyamwezi, Kamba, and Yao.

1. The Africans served as porters for carrying trade items, for example the Nyamwezi carried commodities to and from the East African coast.
2. Some Africans organised trade caravans, for example the Yao and Nyamwezi.
3. They provided geographical knowledge to the foreigners. For example the Nyamwezi directed or guided foreigners.
4. They acted as interpreters of foreign languages for the fellow Africans to the Arabs and Europeans who participated in the trade.
5. The Africans signed commercial treaties with foreigners, for example chief Fundikira.
6. They provided trade commodities to foreign traders, for example the Nyamwezi provided ivory.
7. The Africans acted as middlemen during the long distance trade, for example the Yao and Nyamwezi.
8. The Africans also offered comfort and friendship during the long distance trade.
9. The Africans also provided market for the foreign goods.
10. They encouraged trade through acceptance of Islam which united people.
11. They taught the foreigners African languages and vice versa.
12. They carried out raids for slaves to supply to the foreigners, for example the Yao.
13. The Africans also supplied foodstuffs to the foreigners, for example the Yao, Nyamwezi among others.
14. The Africans hunted elephants for ivory to supply other traders, for example the Kamba.
15. Some Africans controlled some trade routes, for example the Kamba controlled the Northern trade route.
16. They provided spears and poisoned arrows that supplemented the guns for security.
17. The Africans encouraged fellow Africans to get involved in the long distance trade. People like the Nyamwezi encouraged other traders to join this trade.
18. The Africans were very good at travelling long distances looking for commodities to supply to foreigners.
19. Some African communities walked as far as Zimbabwe to look for commodities like gold, for example, the Yao expanded the long distance trade to those areas.

ROLES OF SPECIFIC AFRICAN COMMUNITIES IN THE LONG DISTANCE TRADE

THE YAO

1. The Yao were the major long distance traders in the southern part of East Africa.
2. The Yao had developed love for travelling which enabled them later to get involved in the long distance trade.
3. The Yao are remembered as the most active East African slave traders in the 19th century.
4. The reason for the above was not only the growing demand for slaves at the coast, but also the nature of Yao society. Several ambitious rulers raided their neighbours for slaves.
5. The most famous chief among the Yao was Mataka I who is said to have had 600 wives. Mponda was also one of the Yao chiefs.
6. The Yao became so powerful as dealers in slaves that very few Arab and Swahili traders entered their territory. They therefore supplied slaves.
7. The Yao controlled the southern trade route and ensured peace and security.
8. They acted as middlemen between the coastal Arab traders and the interior traders.
9. They also supplied ivory during the long distance trade.
10. They would exchange their trade items for beads and mirrors. They therefore provided the largest market for the Arab goods.
11. They also provided gold to other traders which they obtained from Zimbabwe.
12. When Swahili culture penetrated inland, the Yao became their agents to spread this culture, especially in Southern Tanganyika. Kiswahili later became the major means of communication.
13. They also employed Swahili secretaries as record keepers in business.
14. The Yao also sold live elephants to the Arab traders who highly demanded for them.
15. By walking as far as Zimbabwe to look for commodities like gold, the Yao expanded the long distance trade to those areas.
16. The Yao established many trading posts or trading centres in the areas of Southern Tanganyika.

THE NYAMWEZI

1. The Nyamwezi community lived in central Tanganyika.
2. They were very active traders during the long distance trade.
3. It was probably about 1800 that the Nyamwezi first long distance caravans reached the coast.

4. By the 1830s several Nyamwezi caravans were regularly reaching the coast with ivory, copper, slaves and iron works.
5. The Nyamwezi stayed at the coast in large encampments, trading and farming until the next dry season, they returned home carrying cloth, beads and other trading items.
6. They kept animals and therefore supplied animal products to the coastal traders.
7. The Nyamwezi were the best middlemen known during the long distance trade. The Arabs and other Europeans feared to enter into the interior; the Nyamwezi therefore collected the goods that they sold to them.
8. In the middle of the 19th century when the Zanzibaris and guns arrived, the Nyamwezi greatly increased their slave raiding. They therefore supplied slaves to the coastal Arabs.
9. The Nyamwezi trade route from Ujiji to Bagamoyo via Tabora (Unyanyembe) was the busiest in East Africa.
10. They set trading posts along the coast of Lake Tanganyika, for example at Ujiji.
11. Some of the Nyamwezi moved to Katanga especially in the Shaba region thus connecting East Africa to well established trading networks in central Africa.
12. By the 1850s some Nyamwezi merchants had established trading posts on the far side of Lake Tanganyika. Msiri was one of them. He settled in Katanga with his wealth and established an own empire.
13. The Nyamwezi also offered labour to carry trade items to and from the East African coast.
14. They offered protection to the caravans since they were in control of the central trade route.
15. They also accommodated the Arab traders who penetrated inland. They therefore offered conducive trading atmosphere.
16. The Nyamwezi offered market for the Arab goods, for example they exchanged their goods with the Arab goods like clothes, guns, glasses, mirrors and many others.
17. They supplied copper to other traders which they collected from Katanga region in Congo.
18. They also hunted for elephants and supplied ivory to the long distance traders.

THE KAMBA

1. The strongest long distance traders in modern Kenya were the Kamba.
2. At first they increased their elephant hunting to obtain ivory to barter with the Nyika for cattle.

3. Then by the early 19th century they had developed a wide spread and valid trading system.
4. They controlled the Northern trade route of the long distance trade.
5. They therefore provided security to the coastal traders and other traders who used the route.
6. They acted as middlemen between the Arabs and the interior tribes like the Kikuyu, Embu among others.
7. As hunters and farmers they provided other long distance traders with meat, grains and beer.
8. As iron workers the Kamba traded in arrow heads, iron ornaments and other implements in long distance trade.
9. Their arrow poison made from snake and scorpion venom mixed with liquid from the bark of a certain tree was considered the best available.
10. The Kamba merchants traded north in Samburu country and south to Uzaramo but the Nyika would not let them reach the coast.
11. The Kamba had no tradition of slavery, however as they grew rich, some Kamba communities bought slaves from the coast to do their farming.
12. The most important Kamba trader was Kivoyi.
13. In 1830s and 1840s he made a great name for himself as a hunter and a trader. Kivoyi had a large number of followers and slaves and organised caravans around Kilimanjaro beyond Mt. Kenya.
14. The Kamba set trading posts inland. These acted as collection centres for goods for the Arab traders.
15. They offered markets for the Arab goods, for example clothes, beads, and guns among others.
16. The Kamba controlled the trading activities to and from Kikuyu land and made the neighbouring Masai people pay them taxes.
17. By 1870, the Kamba dominance in trade had begun declining. Ivory was harder to obtain, Zanzibaris were organising their own caravans to the North West, the Kikuyu Embu and other people wanted to trade directly with the coastal merchants.
18. Nevertheless, the Kamba were important in the commercial life of East Africa until the colonial period.

COLLAPSE OR DECLINE OF THE LONG DISTANCE TRADE DURING THE 19TH CENTURY

1. Death of important leaders and organisers like Mirambo, Mutesa I, Nyungu- Yamawe, Msiri among others.
2. The Abolition of slave trade that had been a major activity also led to its decline.
3. The coming of the Christian missionaries with their anti-slavery campaigns dealt a blow to the trade. They advocated for a legitimate trade.
4. The Ngoni invasion of East Africa disrupted heavily the long distance trade. They created a lot of instability that discouraged other traders.
5. The burden of heavy taxes by interior chiefs discouraged most participants.
6. Inter- tribal wars led to the decline of the long distance trade. They exposed the traders to insecurity.
7. Colonisation of East Africa disorganised the trade the more. East Africa fell under the control of European powers that were not in support of slave trade.
8. The introduction of the guns among the East African communities to a small extent increased insecurity that disrupted the long distance trade.
9. Trading items like ivory got exhausted or finished and this could not make the trade to continue.
10. The construction of the Uganda railway from Mombasa up to Uganda made slaves useless for transport.
11. The insecurity brought by Ruga-Ruga also led to the decline of the long distance trade. They began terrorizing the long distance traders especially after the death of Mirambo.
12. Wrangles, conflicts and quarrels between the Arabs and communities like Nyamwezi over payment of Taxes ended the peaceful co-existence and it affected the trade greatly.
13. The introduction of cash economy or use of money which replaced barter trade affected the progress of the trade because some communities could not afford this monetary system.
14. Tropical diseases, for example malaria and sleeping sickness scared the traders especially those from the coast, hence decline of the trade.
15. Unfavourable climate in the interior also was a problem, especially heavy rains and prolonged drought.
16. The presence of wild animals in some areas that sometimes scared traders and even killed some of them, also led to the decline of the long distance trade.

17. Some traders were not comfortable with Kiswahili language. They failed to learn it, yet it could help in communication during trade.

Revision questions

- i. What was the long distance trade?
- ii. Describe the organisation of long distance trade in East Africa.
- iii. What were the factors responsible for the development of long distance trade?
- iv. What were the effects of the long distance in East Africa?
- v. What problems were faced by the long distance traders?
- vi. Why did the long distance trade decline?
- vii. What role did any TWO of the following societies play in the organization of the long distance trade: a) the Nyamwezi b) the Yao c) the Kamba?
- viii. Why did a) The Yao b) The Nyamwezi c) The Kamba join the long distance trade?