

## The role of cultural values to the Tanalana people from the Mahafaly Plateau region, southwest Madagascar

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The aim of the poster is to explore the importance of cultural values to Tanalana people's wellbeing. Our research focuses on the Tanalana people, a major ethnic group in the Mahafaly Plateau region, whose main livelihood activities are agriculture and animal husbandry. The poster presents a synthesis of results from in-depth research about Tanalana's social structures, decision-making processes, cultural perceptions of natural resources, and traditional knowledge. Research is based on a qualitative social sciences approach; 1,170 semi-structured interviews constitute the basis of analysis, next to insights from observation and group discussions conducted with local people.

Alongside economic considerations, there are important social and cultural aspects that contribute to the achievement of wellbeing in Tanalana society. First, social affiliation to a clan, lineage, or family is central to people's wellbeing. The social affiliation is identified by the earmark of their cattle (*vilo*), led by the traditional institution *hazomanga* and social rules and norms. *Hazomanga* is the denomination for (a) the holy pale, where rituals are accomplished, (b) a knife used for rituals, (c) the clan or lineage origins, and (d) the clan or lineage chief. Second, the influence and role of invisible authorities on the socio-economic and cultural life of the Tanalana is crucial. There are different kinds of supernatural powers: God (*Andriananahare*), nature spirits (*tambahoake* and *koko*), recently deceased people, and the ancestors (*matoetoe* or *moedo*). In order to achieve wellbeing, people seek to build and keep a long-lasting relation with these divinities by honoring them through rituals. According to the local beliefs, any non-respect of these cultural values can break up the super-natural relations, which will deeply disturb the society. To avoid a divine punishment, people seek to respect their ancestors' rules such as taboos, ancestral patrimonies and respect of older relatives and parents.

These findings show a specific sense of cultural values in Tanalana society. Cultural values provide orientation to the people and their understanding of the environment. They determine natural resource use decision-making and shape people's ecological knowledge. Values such as taboos and respect for ancestors also have an influence on the sustainable use of natural resources. Their consideration in sustainable land management in the Mahafaly Plateau region is therefore necessary so that local people's wellbeing is fostered. Further research is recommended to promote this integration process.

**Key words:** cultural values, human wellbeing, Madagascar, sustainable land management, Tanalana society