Weathering climate change in East Africa: Archaeological perspectives on local and regional resilience, vulnerability and sustainability during the late Holocene

Paul Lane*[1]

[1]Uppsala Universitet [Uppsala] (Department of Archaeology Ancient History) – P.O. Box 626, SE-751 26 Uppsala, Suède

Résumé

"Weather" and "Climate" are quite different things – or so we are regularly told. We can all experience good, bad or indifferent weather, and wrap those experiences into our biographic memories and narratives. We have all heard that "climate change is now", even if some are sceptical of the veracity of such a statement. But, even though we can experience different climates by travelling to different parts of the world, we are also cautioned not to equate unusual weather with climate change, because, as NASA's website tells us, the difference between the two is"a measure of time". Archaeology is an excellent means of understanding how humans responded to past climate change, how they "adapted" over the long-term, and can provide insights into what current climate change may presage. But, what can we tell about how people in the past "weathered" such change and so made it "normal"? What do archaeological traces at the local level tell us about the resilience of populations at a wider landscape scale, and can we infer different degrees of vulnerability from these traces? Resilience is about accommodating change, rebounding from socio-ecological disturbances, and about domesticating the unusual and the extreme, anticipating the unexpected. Using data from East Africa this paper examines how archaeologists conventionally understand past climate change, and asks how might we re-think the material record of adaptive behaviour to better understand what it means to live through an era of rapid climate change? The paper will conclude with a discussion of why such knowledge about the past may be helpful for the future.

Mots-Clés: Resilience, Landscape, East Africa, Livelihoods, Farming, Pastoralism

*Intervenant