

VOICE OF THE MARA

7TH EDITION | JULY 2022



Post-Pandemic Recovery: Building Resilience for Livelihoods and Biodiversity



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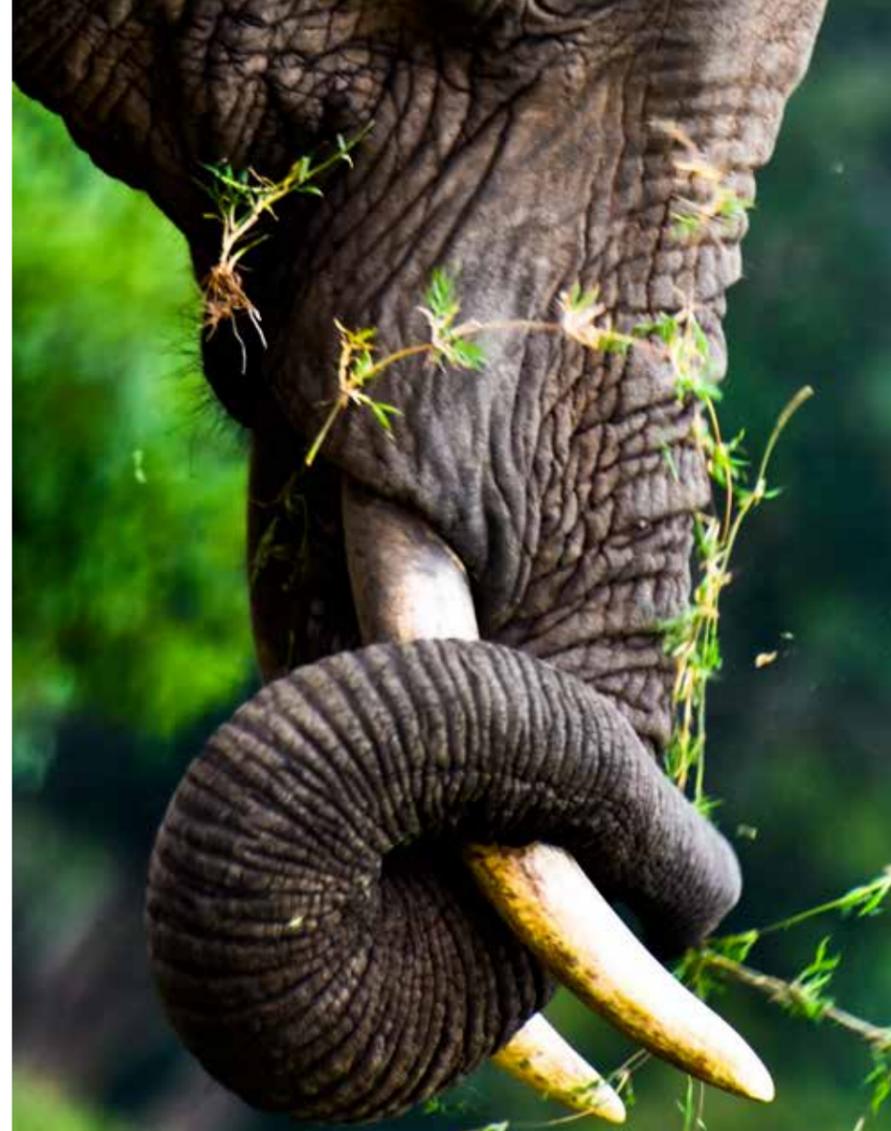


WILDLIFE CONSERVANCIES

For the Greater Mara

VOICE OF THE MARA

7th Edition | JULY 2022



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CEO'S LETTER



DANIEL SOPIA

Chief Executive Officer

Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association

Dear Partner and Friend,

I am glad you are reading the 7th Edition of our annual magazine - Voice of the Mara. We have been in a crisis for a long time until we almost forgot what normalcy is. However painful and challenging the experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic have been, we have not walked out empty-handed. Indeed, the crisis, too, had a silver lining. For us at MMWCA, the bright side was the opportunity to address long-standing governance and management issues across our membership. This issue highlights our coping mechanisms and what we did to remain afloat in difficult times.

The Edition also gives you a glimpse of the benefits, besides lease fees, that our members draw from conservancies. It is heartwarming to note that these are ideas and initiatives driven by the landowners. For example, read about how Conservancies are enhancing access to education. You will also read about the fantastic Mara North Conservancy Consolation Scheme and how it promotes co-existence between people and wildlife or how grazing plans have transformed conservancies into grass banks.

From this Edition, you will notice that we are beginning to talk about carbon. Carbon is one of the areas we consider potentially an additional source of revenue for our members to address overreliance on tourism. We are leading a project called the One Mara Carbon Project in the Mara landscape. Lastly, you will see the progress in developing the Greater Maasai Mara Ecosystem Plan.

Enjoy.

Ashe Oleng!

Sopia.

THE MARA CONSERVANCY MODEL



Partnership

The Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association (MMWCA) has 22 conservancies at different stages of development within the Mara Landscape. The Conservancies are not homogeneous, but they are all based on a partnership between the Landowners and Tourism Partners, with MMWCA playing the coordination role. Landowners in the Mara commit their land to conservation by signing leases and, in turn, get guaranteed income from tourism (paid by the Tourism Partners).

In most of the Mara Conservancies, landowners set aside core conservation areas where human activity is limited but allow for planned grazing in line with established policies. In this case, landowners live outside the conservancy. When the families have no other parcels, landowners at the periphery host them as guided by the host parcels regulations. Landowners in host parcels receive lease payments just like their counterparts whose land is in the core areas.

Several Mara Conservancies provide mixed models that allow humans and wildlife to coexist in the same space. Pardamat Conservation Area first piloted this approach, but new conservancies, including Mara Mbokishi and Olpua, are now implementing the model.

All land in the Mara Conservancies is privately-owned. Landowners consolidate their parcels and form a conservancy and a legal entity that

gets into a legal relationship with tourism investors. Concerning governance and management, the Conservancies have landholding companies composed of Landowners' Committees and Management Companies, which feature equal representation of landowners and tourism partners. Further, the conservancies have subcommittees that handle grazing, bursary schemes and settlement. These structures foster better planning and enhance transparency and easy decision-making. MMWCA plays the overarching coordination role. MMWCA, among other things, helps conservancies put suitable legal entities in place and ensure the governance structures are sound to make them investable ventures.

Benefits

The distinctive feature of the Mara Model is the direct guaranteed benefit in the form of lease fees each landowner gets tied to the lease agreement they sign. Other benefits include bursary schemes, grass access, consolation schemes (in some conservancies) and credit access on guaranteed income.

Winning Formula

MMWCA exists to grow and strengthen the Mara Conservancies for wildlife and livelihood improvement. When conservancies are thriving, communities benefit, and they, in turn, support conservation.



HOW CONSERVANCIES ARE ENHANCING ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Conservancies in the Mara have become essential for enhancing access to education. One such way is by issuing bursaries for students in high school and higher institutions of learning. **EMMANUEL KISEMEI** looks at the transformational initiative at Mara Naboisho Conservancy.



The landowners were long dependent on livestock to meet most of their needs. The needs overstretched the available resources and, other times, denied many children a chance at learning in school, as parents involved children in transhumance. However, the situation is slowly changing as conservancies adopt bursary schemes to alleviate the burden of school fees for their landowners. One such conservancy is Mara Naboisho.

Mara Naboisho Conservancy established a bursary scheme in 2014 for its 609 members. The scheme is contributory, with each member feeding Sh500 (approximately USD 4.24) into the kitty monthly. Additionally, the conservancy management company contributes Sh4m (33,917.99) yearly, bringing the annual figure to about USD64,903. The management company deducts the amount from the lease fee and the total contributions channelled to the Landowners' Company bursary account.

The bursary fund is administered by a Committee of 16, including the Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer, with the Chairperson playing an oversight role, thereby not a signatory. Part of the committee's role is to authenticate the list of beneficiaries by checking their school admission letters and birth certificates.

The scheme comes in handy for landowners with big families as the number of beneficiaries per landowner is unlimited; each beneficiary receives Sh5,000 (USD 42.2428) twice a year, with the average school fees per term estimated at Sh17,000 (144.07).

The impact of the bursary fund has not gone unnoticed. Deputy Principal at Maasai Mara High School Leonard Rotich observes that the bursaries have contributed to realising education milestones.

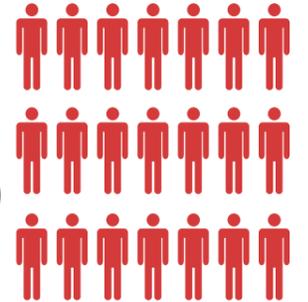
"Our students drawn primarily from the Mara Landscape rely heavily on educational grants. We now experience high retention rates and transition levels due to guaranteed conservancy bursaries."

Leonard Rotich, Deputy Principal at Maasai Mara High School.

EACH BENEFICIARY RECEIVES

**SH5,000
(USD 42.2428)**

TWICE A YEAR

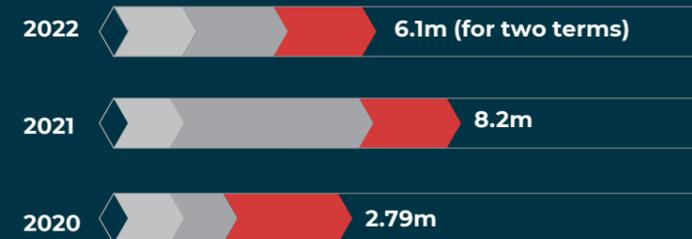


Mara Naboisho, Landowners' Chairperson John Seng'eny, notes that the bursary scheme has done more than help parents sleep easy during school opening. "People no longer sell land or rely on cattle alone to take their children to school." Further, John notes that the scheme has positively impacted the beneficiaries' views concerning conservation.

The reliability of the fund has built trust between the conservancy and the learning institutions. As a result, children can report to school with partial fees as their parents mobilise resources. Further, the scheme has helped influence membership in the conservancies; bursaries motivate landowners to join conservancies.

Rekenoi Soit, the Assistant Manager at Basecamp Eagle View Camp in Naboisho Conservancy, observes that education opens doors for students, paves the way for opportunities and forms part of long-term conservation.

"I benefitted from the bursary fund since my time at high school. The bursary allocation my parents received made a great difference. My success today was aided by the fund, which is the case for many students with whom I went to school. I will vouch for this fund anytime."



BURSARY DISBURSEMENTS

Rekenoi Soit, the Assistant Manager at Basecamp Eagle View Camp in Naboisho Conservancy, observes that education opens doors for students, paves the way for opportunities and forms part of long-term conservation.

"I benefitted from the bursary fund since my time at high school. The bursary allocation my parents received made a significant difference. My success

today was aided by the fund, which is the case for many students with whom I went to school. I will vouch for this fund anytime." - Rekenoi Soit, Assistant Manager at Basecamp Eagle View Camp in Naboisho Conservancy

Besides Mara Naboisho, Pardamat Conservation Area, Motorogi, Olare Orok, and Mara North Conservancies have operational bursary schemes.

Emmanuel Kisemei is a Communications Officer with MMWCA.

CARBON MARKET: POTENTIALLY NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR MARA CONSERVANCIES



In Maasai Mara, the primary income generator for conservancies is tourism, which has been severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. A more diverse and sustainable business model is needed to increase the ability of conservancies to protect biodiversity and alleviate poverty. Interventions co-developed with communities to restore degraded rangelands and improve productivity are critical for the local economy, diversifying revenue and reducing vulnerability to climate change. Carbon credits hold the promise of providing an alternative revenue stream while increasing the resilience of conservancies and creating healthier spaces for wildlife.

VOICE OF THE MARA (VOM) highlights the potential the One Mara Carbon Project holds for the Mara. We spoke to Tarn Breedveld, Chief Executive Officer at Greater Mara Management, and Joshua Wafula, a Carbon Fellow at the Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association.

VoM: What is the One Mara Carbon Project?

Tarn Breedveld:

One Mara Carbon project is a grassland management initiative that seeks to capture and preserve carbon in soils and vegetation. This will generate carbon credits which can be sold to create a new revenue stream, diversify livelihoods for the Maasai community and build resilient conservancies.

VoM: So, how do you capture carbon in soils and vegetation?

Joshua Wafula:

In the Maasai Mara ecosystem, grasslands can capture carbon in root biomass and conserve carbon by reducing soil erosion. Sustainable grazing helps the grass to regenerate and capture more carbon. Healthy grasslands are the key. If grasslands remain healthy, they provide grazing for wildlife and livestock while capturing carbon into the soil. If a grassland is overgrazed, grazing is impaired, and carbon capture is not optimal.

VoM: How will you ensure sustainable management of grasslands – are you coming up with new interventions?

Tarn Breedveld:

We're not developing new interventions to manage grasslands. Holistic grazing management has been a traditional pastoralist strategy for centuries: graze a particular area and let it rest to allow grasses to regenerate. By measuring the impacts of different grazing management strategies on soil carbon, we can help identify the best approach for each conservancy to ensure they can balance the needs of wildlife and livestock while maximizing the value of the carbon stored in the soil. Overgrazing leads to poor grasslands and low carbon stocks, but under grazing is not ideal either. The balance will be the key to success.

VoM: Have you taken the necessary steps for the project to take off?

Joshua Wafula:

Yes, measuring changes in the grass, soils, and carbon is very important, and we're already developing the tools to measure the impact. We have initiated baseline studies to update these tools to help inform conservancies and community members on the best management options.

VoM: You talked of carbon credits as an alternative revenue stream for conservancies. How does this work?

Joshua Wafula:

A carbon credit is a tradable unit representing one ton of greenhouse gas (e.g., carbon dioxide) emissions reductions or removals. The credits are purchased by companies, individuals, and other entities to offset their carbon emissions. By implementing sustainable grassland management practices, the conservancies will capture carbon from the atmosphere and generate carbon credits. An independent market regulator will then verify the amount of carbon captured and issue carbon credits which can be sold in the carbon markets.

VoM: Seems like a complex process. How will you ensure the local community is fully engaged?

Tarn Breedveld:

Full participation of local communities is essential for the success of the project. Communication about the effects of different management practices will be equally crucial for conservancies to make informed decisions on managing their grasslands. Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association is an important starting point for engaging landowners, and we are currently developing a detailed community engagement strategy to be rolled out in 2022. We will also train and engage youth and women from different conservancies to collect soil samples and monitor changes in carbon stocks. On the communication front, we're currently generating interesting communication materials for translation into Maa. We also engage experts with experience in landscape restoration initiatives to guide the process.

VoM: And finally, are you implementing the project in all conservancies?

Tarn Breedveld:

For the project to make economic and ecological sense, it must be implemented at the ecosystem level. We hope that all conservancies will participate. This is because the costs to set up the project are pretty high, and there needs to be consistency in grassland management practices. Each conservancy will be heavily involved in how this works in their area to ensure the project meets the needs of the existing stakeholders, tourism operators and community members.



“Capacity development of the local women and girls to understand and follow through Carbon credits as alternative means for revenue will be key to the project’s success. Our women are ready; our girls are flexible and will benefit from the project and influence perceptions and decisions, as they are main users of resources.”

Angela Sanau, Senior Programme Officer, Gender, MMWCA.

“The carbon project will help strengthen the resilience and ensure the sustainability of our conservancies. Conservancies will unlock a new frontier. Grass won’t be for livestock grazing, as has been the case, but for carbon capture and trade. The project presents an opportunity for us to showcase the critical role that MMWCA plays in supporting conservation efforts by bringing about interventions and approaches that are compatible with the way of life of the local community. The result is expansion of conservation areas and sustainable conservancies and conservation areas.”

Eric Reson, Chief Programmes Officer, MMWCA.



Mara institutions get school infrastructure support

Nine institutions will benefit from a school infrastructure improvement project that costs about USD2.98 million (Sh338.53 million). MMWCA implements the project in partnership with Human Practice Foundation. Construction is underway at Ololomeei and Nabosho Primary Schools. The initiative will benefit about 4,500 students.

OPEX support ends after two years

Conservancies will, from July 2022, meet their operating expenses (OPEX) as MMWCA's support ends. Conservancies have received USD 2,973,412 in OPEX support since July 2020. The support consisted of two tiers. Tier one covered ranger salaries, rations and medical costs, and motor vehicle running costs, while tier two field management staff salaries, administration expenses and landowners' expenses. While MMWCA entirely covered tier one in the two years, it covered 60 per cent of tier two until December 2021, and the support dropped by half in the first Quarter of 2022, marking the end of tier two support.

MMWCA's Offices Fully Move to Aitong'

MMWCA moved offices entirely to Mara Base in Aitong' to better serve our membership. The move has made MMWCA more accessible to its members and enhanced operational efficiency.

Wildlife Tourism College of Maasai Mara's first intake

The Wildlife Tourism College of Maasai Mara opens its doors to students for the first time in August 2022, marking its inaugural intake. The College is a successor of Koyiaki Guiding School and comes up with a ramped-up curriculum and approach. The College will deploy experiential learning and cross-cultural immersion while facilitating research and an innovative sustainable financing model.



Strategic Plan 2021 - 2025

MMWCA's NEW STRATEGY

MMWCA started implementing a strategic plan that provides a five-year road map (2021 – 2025). The strategy outlines six goals that focus on governance improvement, creating new conservancies and opening wildlife corridors, regional and national frameworks, communication, diversification of revenues, and institutional strengthening.



Strengthening MMWCA - County Relations

MMWCA and the Narok County Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to provide a structure and framework for effective and efficient collaboration. The MoU includes cooperation in environmental conservation, community development, tourism infrastructure, research, and support to community initiatives in the Greater Mara Ecosystem.

The parties have since worked together to align the County Spatial Plan to the Greater Mara Ecosystem Management Plan. Further, the development of the management plan is in the final stages and has received endorsements from the County Executive, Kenya Wildlife Service and the Kenya Wildlife Service Training Institute.

The MoU was a much-needed boost for the Greater Mara Ecosystem and will significantly enhance ecosystem conservation.

ROLE OF CONSOLATION SCHEMES IN PROMOTING HUMAN-WILDLIFE COEXISTENCE

Conflict is part and parcel of all relationships. With about 25 per cent of all wildlife found in Kenya domiciled at the Maasai Mara Ecosystem, The Maasai Community have had their fair share of conflict with nature. But just like in any good relationship, the parties have considered possibilities and made compromises. **PHOEBE NADUPOI** talked to a few stakeholders from the Mara North Conservancy to explore the impact of their livestock compensation scheme.

Nalakiti Sengeny is one of the 750 Mara North Conservancy landowners. Her home borders the Maasai Mara Game Reserve, making it a prime location for human-wildlife conflicts. "My livestock gets attacked in broad daylight," she says. She has had countless encounters with predators and recounts the most outstanding incidents. Like in 2018, lions killed a cow that had just calved. They invaded yet again in 2020 and took her bullock. Around the same time, cheetahs attacked and killed five sheep. A hyena found its way into the pen and recently killed three goats. They stopped it before it could cause more havoc and let it go. That is what they do with predators now: free them.

"Previously, we would kill a predator that attacks our livestock, but now we only report." Nalakiti states.

Sparing the life of a predator that has killed livestock is, perhaps, the hallmark of tolerance for a community that places such a high premium on livestock. And whereas the value the Maasai community attaches to livestock hasn't changed a bit, there is a shift in how the community sees wildlife.

Another member of the Mara North Conservancy, John-

mark Ole Nabaala, tells me that conservation is "the other cow we are milking" and thus choose to trade-off occasional losses caused by wildlife for the broader conservation benefits.

Raphael Kereto has worked as Field Monitoring Officer with the Mara North Consolation Scheme since 2013. The Consolation Scheme had a false start in 2009 because no monitoring systems existed. Still, it took off in 2013 when by-laws to guide the compensation process, and verification mechanisms were implemented.

"Before the establishment of the scheme, people retaliated whenever a lion or hyena killed their livestock, but now, instead of looking for the lion, they look for me," Raphael reveals. This effectively makes him and his colleague predator representatives. They get calls at any time – 11pm, 2am any time.

How it works

Landowners and Tourism Partners raise about Sh2.5 million (USD 21,922.12) annually. A landowner pays Sh100 per ha per year. A landowner with 150 acres pays Sh500 (USD4.38) per month, and the tourism partners match 40 per cent. The consolation scheme is overseen by a sub-committee

of the Landowners Committee that draws representation from five administrative sections of the Conservancy. The Scheme has guidelines that inform the day to day operations, including stipulating the amounts to be paid for various animals and the conditionals for payment of consolation.

The sectional representatives are responsible for coordinating sectional landowners' engagement meetings – barazas – on a need basis to discuss issues pertinent to the Scheme.

Raphael would tell you, for instance, that they would have to rule out negligence. A landowner receives 50 per cent of the consolation amount for poorly constructed bomas. And where a massive loss is reported and the incident attributed to a poorly built boma, the Scheme puts up a better structure in place of the consolation amount. A landowner would also not get compensated if found to have contravened the grazing plan. The grazing plan designates blocks within the Conservancy where landowners graze their cattle at designated times. If predators kill a cow in an undesignated grazing block, a landowner does not receive the consolation money.

Verification is undertaken in a typical crime scene investigation manner. For day-time incidents, the affected landowner is required to leave the scene of the incident untampered until the monitoring officers arrive for verification. This enables the officers to examine the scene for insights into the incident. They consider, among others, the killing style and tracks to determine the predator that killed.

"For instance, a lion has to kill first before it begins to eat while a hyena will eat an animal alive until it dies and an examination of the scene offers," Raphael illustrates. Raphael tells me of an incident where a landowner reported a case, but an examination of his home, the alleged place the incident took place, revealed otherwise.

"We noticed the animals were ferried on a motorbike from a different place. It later turned out the animals got lost and were eaten elsewhere, but the owner transported the carcass home." Raphael narrates.

It happens that the hawk-eyed officers noticed blood on the motorbike before even looking at the carcass, and they were able to reconstruct the incident.

False claims remain one of the challenges the Scheme has to contend with.

In cases where the incident happens at night or the area is far, and the scene is far, the monitoring officers direct the affected landowner to take pictures and carry the carcass home (for examination) if the incident has happened outside his home.

Nalakiti says she has received the consolation money due to her, but it is only a fraction of the value of the animals she has lost. But she is not keen on reporting to the state organ responsible for compensation. I ask her why.

"But where do we report? Have we ever even seen the wildlife people here? She wonders.

Her relative, neighbour Sinoya Ole Seng'eny, holds the same view regarding compensation. When I probe him to find out if he has ever filed a request for payment with the Kenya Wildlife Service, he asserts that he hasn't and seeking help is not probable in the future. He said it would cost him a lot of resources, including time, yet he doesn't know anyone who has ever been compensated. "How do you file a complaint when they are inaccessible? He wonders.

Sinoya's home sits on a wildlife corridor, making him more susceptible to attacks. In September 2021, hyenas killed 22 sheep, for which he was paid Sh44,000. He is unhappy because he had changed his breed and says a ram would

have fetched almost the entire amount he got for consolation. And that is where the challenge lies.

The consolation scheme is designed to provide solace to the landowner as they await justice. Sinoya's most significant loss dates back to 2013 when he lost 119 goats and sheep. Predators did not stop. He would lose a couple of sheep now, three goats at another time. The losses reminded him that wild animals are not good neighbours, but he has to tolerate them because they too have a right to be there. The losses have made him take three steps ahead and two backwards, prompting him to think of a way to forestall unnecessary quarrels with these difficult neighbours who do not respect other people's space. He toyed with ideas and decided to construct a house to keep the predators at bay in the night.

Johnmark Ole Nabaala thinks the Scheme has served him well. The last consolation payment he received was the last quarter of 2021. He received a payment of Sh6,000 for three goats eaten by hyenas in September 2021.

The consolation scheme has proven popular in the landscape. Mara Naboisho Conservancy started a similar initiative a couple of years ago. John mark wonders why a government-backed plan cannot do as well.

QUICK FACTS

- The Mara North Consolation Scheme serves about 750 landowners.
- Landowners determine the consolation amount per animal (goat/sheep and cow).
- Raises about Sh2.5 million annually.
- Pays between Sh300,000 and Sh1 million per quarter.
- No consolation is paid for lost animal or those attacked while owner in contravention of grazing by-laws.
- If a false claim is made, the amount is deducted from the claimant's lease payment

NAVIGATING THROUGH A PANDEMIC: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

BY ROSEBELL ABWONJI

While most of the world came to a sudden halt at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association staff worked tirelessly round the clock. The emergent need for funding to secure conservation activities within the landscape was urgent. The backbone of conservation within the Maasai Mara is based on tourism revenue, and visitor numbers drastically dropped as countries imposed travel restrictions to contain the spread of the virus. As camps and hotels remained closed, local inhabitants within the Mara found themselves at a loss with no work or income to support their families. Conservancies were on the brink of collapse as they grappled with the sudden loss of revenue and the immediate need to meet their operations.

Uncertain on how long the imposed confinement would last, MMWCA staff quickly took to remote working, linking up with partners and colleagues through platforms such as

Zoom and WhatsApp to communicate more frequently. As a result, despite the anxieties associated with the unknown, productivity was high.

As organisations scaled down or shut their operations, the workload increased at MMWCA. The umbrella body for the Mara Conservancies had to rise to the occasion and save its members from collapsing. The scale of the pandemic was unprecedented, and the future was uncertain. It was no longer tenable to work remotely throughout. Certain things required physical meetings. Consequently, MMWCA acquired personal protective equipment to support mandatory physical meetings and developed guidelines aligned with the Ministry of Health protocols. Additionally, MMWCA created awareness of the virus amongst member conservancies.

In response to the crisis, MMWCA, working closely with partners, developed a crisis

mitigation strategy to help conservancies meet their basic operations costs. The support aimed to ensure conservancies remained intact throughout the crisis. Similarly, MMWCA conducted an assessment to establish the needs and governance state of the Conservancies. The support was anchored on the willingness of Conservancies to address the identified challenges. Consequently, the Conservancies experienced exponential growth as longstanding governance issues were finally addressed, including holding general meetings and implementing inclusive governance structures.

The Conservancies have emerged from the crisis more robust, and MMWCA more innovative in addressing the challenges in the Mara landscape.

Rosebell Abwonji is the Chief Administrative Officer at MMWCA.





MARA GRASS BANKS

The longest drought in more than 30 years affected pastoralists and communities living in Arid, and Semi-Arid Lands, leading to unparalleled losses, including the death of 1.5 million livestock and other significant losses. The Maasai Mara was, however, cushioned from these shocks. The landowners of Mara Conservancies had grass for their cattle to feed during the eight-month-long drought. **PHOEBE NADUPOI** shares the experiences of a couple based in Mara Rianta, Maasai Mara.



HOW CONSERVANCIES ARE SAVING PASTORALISTS DURING DRY SPELLS

As the drought intensified in most parts of the country in the last quarter of 2021, thousands of cattle from Suswa, Mosiro and even the highlands of Mau and Melili trooped to the Mara Conservancies. The migration into the Mara by herders was unprecedented, and it begged the question: how does the Mara preserve grass enough for cattle and wildlife even when rains fail for months?

Grazing plans are the winning formula for pastoralists in the Mara. The plans determine how many animals can feed in a block and how long, thereby guarding against overgrazing and overstocking in one area that would lead to the destruction of grass cover. This arrangement ensures that animals have sufficient grass available while providing timely grass regeneration and reducing erosion on the rangelands.

Tipira Ole Sengény is a landowner at the Mara North Conservancy and serves as Grazing Committee Chairperson for the Mara Rianta Section. An accomplished pastoralist, Tipira's life revolves around grass; if he is not grazing his livestock, chances are he is in a meeting to determine grass management. Tipira's business is grass, and grass is his business. He notes that his conservancy, like others in the Mara, allows members to access grass for their cattle and get lease fees.

"Who would have thought setting aside land for wildlife conservation would have been this rewarding?" Tipira wonders.

He observes that the grazing plan his conservancy implements allows the landowners to have pasture throughout the year, noting that it is something that pastoralists from other areas could emulate. So successful is the grass management that the conservancies have now to withstand pressure from non-landowners from far. For instance, in the last quarter of 2021, Tipira says they received about 30,000 cows from Loita, Suswa and Mosiro. However, the migration into the Mara brought its own share of challenges. Tipira says the visitors' cows transmitted diseases to resident herds, and the herders polluted the environment.

"We had to clean up the conservancy and rid it of bear cans and flour packaging papers," Tipira concludes.

You can speak for hours on end with Tipira about grass because that is his business. And he will tell you how, before the establishment of Mara North Conservancy, they took their cows to as far as Kehancha in Kuria, Migori County. He will tell you how they lost countless numbers to diseases in those unfamiliar spaces or how their livestock was stolen. But his wife, Nashilu Sengény, a bubbly conservation champion, will show you how grass management has changed the bottom line.

Nashilu explains that their cows now have enough feed and, as a result, produce more milk. She is among the women who supply the local coolant at Mara Rianta. With the conservancy ensuring the supply of grass all year round, Nashilu has more time on her hands to do other things.

"We now have more time for our children, business and other activities in our neighbourhood," she says.

Communities that embrace grazing plans are poised to benefit from the economic gains of maintaining healthy grass cover.

Tipira, like many Mara landowners, walks happily to the bank at the end of every month after the conservancy pays the lease fees. This is something few women do as the majority of landowners are male. But now, Nashilu too walks to the bank at the end of the month because the cows have enough grass, thus producing more milk allowing her to supply the coolant.



COLLABORATING TO INVEST IN CONSERVATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

BY JOYCE NYARUAI

In Kenya, the wildlife conservation sector, which is strongly dependent on tourism, was among the most affected by the impacts of COVID-19, with earnings in tourism decreasing to USD 781 million in 2020 from USD1.3 billion in 2019. However, the sector received substantial government investment to mitigate the pandemic's impacts. Notably, the national government allocated Sh5 billion to the tourism sector to provide soft loans to refurbish tourism facilities, Sh1 billion for 5,500 wildlife scouts under the Kenya Wildlife Service and Sh1 billion towards supporting 160 wildlife conservancies to protect conservation efforts from an imminent collapse

National Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund

The Wildlife Conservation and Management Act, 2013 establishes a National Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund to provide reliable and long-term funding to national parks, reserves and conservancies. The Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife has since developed guidelines to establish the Fund. The Fund will be crucial in mitigating the impacts of climate change, fluctuating tourist income and international economic recessions. The Fund will also support the protection of endangered

species, habitats and ecosystems, wildlife security operations, and community-based wildlife initiatives.

While the Trust Fund is the first step by the government towards financially supporting parks, reserves, and conservancies, the Fund is still in its early stages of development. Therefore, it may be inadequate to meet the needs of the conservancies and address the challenges faced by nascent and emerging conservancies.

To address the likely challenge of accessing the Fund in its initial start-up, the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA) is working with the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife under the Global Environment Facility – United Nations Development Programme's "Combating Poaching and Illegal Wildlife Trafficking in Kenya through an Integrated Approach, 2018 – 2023" to support the establishment of a Small Grant Facility for Conservancies in Kenya to offer sustainable financing to wildlife conservancies. The project will pilot the implementation of the grant facility in Maasai Mara and Taita Taveta landscapes and upscale the support to other landscapes.

The grant facility shall target nascent and needy conservancies to support their operations

and core conservation interventions such as employment and facilitation of community ranger teams.

Africa Nature-Based Tourism Platform

KWCA is among 11 African Community Based Natural Resources Management and non-governmental organisations working with WWF-US to establish an African Nature-Based Tourism Platform to connect funders to communities and Small and Medium Enterprises. They are most in need of funding to build the resilience of the nature-based tourism sector during and post-COVID.

Through this project, KWCA supported WWF-US to develop a data tool for conservancies to better collect data across the country to understand the impacts of Covid-19 and financial needs. Among the nature-based enterprises identified by conservancies included beekeeping and honey production, livestock enterprises and product value chain and carbon credits as sectors compatible with wildlife conservation. The data was cleaned and uploaded to the platform, where it will be housed and made available to donors and other platform supporters.



"If we neglect this ecosystem and fail to support the rangers' salaries, this conservation effort will be lost overnight because we will have nobody to protect the ecosystem."

Hon. Najib Balala, Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife commenting about the Government stimulus package.

Project Finance for Permanence

The Nature Conservancy and other conservation organisations are working with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and the Kenya Wildlife Service to implement a Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) in Kenya. PFP will provide durable financing for achieving the greatest conservation outcomes, increasing community livelihood benefits, and building climate resilience for Kenya's people.

PFP uses project finance techniques to mobilise resources, institutional commitments and other conditions for successful long-term conservation. Kenya is committed to meeting the Convention on Biodiversity 30x30 goal to increase the area under conservation to 30 per cent by 2030.

Conservancies provide an opportunity to meet 30x30 target by expanding and designating additional wildlife areas and habitats. Implementing PFP requires government endorsement and private sector partnership to mobilise funds through sustainable financing mechanisms such as green bonds, Global Carbon Funds, Debt Conversion, biodiversity offsets and local financial institutions funding. The Nature Conservancy is working with KWCA to participate in the feasibility assessment on community engagement.



The writer is the Communication and Development Officer at Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association.

RESTORING A SMILE

BY CHIMWEMWE MLOMBWA



Leah Silantoi comes from the small but important Talek Centre that sits along the Talek River next to the Maasai Mara Game Reserve. She grew up walking about 10 kilometres a day to collect clean water as the Talek River is contaminated. The available water had high fluoride levels, making her teeth yellow.

To help bridge the gap, Hardwick Dental Teams from the USA, in partnership with Basecamp Explorer Kenya, facilitated a free dental clinic in February 2022 at Basecamp Talek to help restore the smiles.

Leah was among 216 members from Talek who benefitted from the opportunity to get dental treatment. The doctors served 216 members of the community and performed over 800 procedures. Additionally, the members of the communities received 500 toothbrushes and toothpaste. The clinic allowed Leah to enhance her beautiful smile.





THE BLACK MAMBA: A HERO'S COMPANION

Conservancy rangers and scouts in the Mara have come a long way. Today's ranger has tools of trade ranging from patrol vehicles, motorbikes, smartphones, and walkie-talkies. **PHOEBE NADUPOI** spoke to Joseph Ole Koisikir, a decorated conservancy ranger, to draw insights from his experiences.

For 36 months, Joseph Ole Koisikir led a solitary life in Koyiki-Lemek, what we know as Mara North Conservancy today. He did his patrols on foot, but he was atop his Black Mamba Bicycle most of the time. He dressed like a civilian, so few people knew what he was up to. And so whenever Kenya Wildlife Service officers ambushed criminals or forestalled mischief before it could happen, people were awed because it sounded like magic. Ole Koisikir understood his territory like the back of his hand.

His peers, like Ole Sopia Loorgiso, were armed with a spear, arrow, bow, and song. But for Ole Koisikir, the European China-made Black Mamba bicycle has remained his trusted, durable tool and companion. The bicycle gets its name for its appearance in motion – snaking through the savannah, tracks and plains of East Africa like the coffin-shaped snake of the Elapidae family. You would easily spot Ole Koisikir riding into the horizon of the Siria escarpment; the unending pers-

pective of Kirrindon and Esoit areas in Oloisukut Conservancy must have provided him with the much-needed hope and energy to help in securing Koyiki-Lemek.

The Black Mamba Bicycle is now 30. Today, he rests at Ole Koisikir's home in Endoinyo e Rinka. Ole Koisikir must have told him, "Well done, my faithful servant, so rest here so that you become a constant reminder of what we were able to do."

The solitary life was not part of the grand plan. You see, Ole Koisikir belonged to the General Service Unit, a prestigious branch of the Police. The Maasai have a particular name for the elite unit – Irgeem. Endoinyo e Rinka village in Pardamat Conservation Area has been proud of Ole Koisikir's stature since 1976 when he joined the unit. He belonged to Irgeem. When the bravest of the Mara are counted, Kasaine's name will always make the top count.



Despite the prestige that came with his role, Ole Koisikir opted for early retirement from the Elite Unit after about 20 years of service. He hoped to contribute to the success of the then newly created Koyiki-Lemek Wildlife Trust. Everything looked promising then. President Daniel Arap Moi ordered the subdivision of group ranches. Landowners had begun seeing the potential of conservancies as revenue earners. Born and bred in Koyiki, Ole Koisikir would bring agility and discipline. And, indeed, he would be a part of this success.

All looked good until the mismanagement, and bad governance rocked the boat. After the collapse of the Koyiki-Lemek Trust, everybody but Ole Koisikir left. When asked why he remained, he said, "Mayieu entoki nabatata" (I don't want to watch a good initiative fail). So, when failure mocked asking why he left the role his villagers wished for, he decided to stay on, hold on to whatever was left of Koyiki-Lemek, and see what would happen. On the side, he farmed wheat in Lemek and Ololulunga to sustain his family. Today, Ole Koisikir is the Chief Warden at Nashulai Maasai Conservancy, one of Mara's 22 conservancies. His skill, discipline and courage are reflected in the Mara Conservancies rangers' work, many

of whom he has trained in Mara North Conservancy, Pardamat, Naboisho and Nashulai.

The three years of solitude at Koyiki-Lemek have taught him wild animals are friendly if only humans take time to study animal behaviour. Additionally, from the Koyiki-Lemek Trust experience, he has learnt that great institutions can come tumbling down if they lack sound governance structures.

Today, as he looks back on the road he has traversed, Ole Koisikir is proud of the institutions the Mara Conservancies have turned out to be. He describes conservancies as inkishu naalepo pooki kata; tolameyu o tolari (Conservancies are like a cow that gives milk at all seasons).

He has received a fair share of accolades, awards and endorsements for his work. In 2018, he received the African Paradise Rangers Award from the Alibaba Foundation and Paradise International Foundation. He has also been featured in local and international publications.

Phoebe Nadupoi is the Chief Communications and Fundraising Officer at MMWCA.

THE SILVER LINING IN THE COVID CRISIS

BY PHOEBE NADUPOI



"The conservancy model has grown from a simple gentleman's agreement into a solid business. Conservancies are changing lives, and the good thing is that the communities themselves are at the forefront of conservation."

Dickson Kaelo – Chief Executive Officer, Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association.

Tourism is slowly recovering, but the impacts of Covid-19 are still evident. The thought of what could have been had help not come remains a significant catalyst for change. Change to institute changes that strengthen the institutions of conservancies to enhance their capacity to weather storms. Olchoro-Oirowua, which turns 30 this year, and its neighbours Lemek and Enonkishu constitute a vital buffer zone. This defence belt borders the maize and wheat plantations of Munyaas and Ololulung'a. These conservancies have an automatic border responsibility shielding the ecosystem from practices incompatible with conservation. The Covid-19 crisis weighed on them heavily, threatening the stability of the entire ecosystem had there been a delay in saving them.

But the northern conservancies were affected more partly because they were not in their best form. They three had different degrees of vulnerabilities. For instance, Lemek Conservancy lacked basic management structures and bank accounts for the Conservancy and its rangers and key management staff. Lemek also did not have a legal entity. Olchoro-Oirowua shared some of Lemek's challenges. Despite being the oldest, it did not have structures, and the landowners divided revenue collections monthly based on what was collected. Of the three northern conservancies, Enonkishu was the least vulnerable. However, it also lacked long-term lease agreements. Long-term lease agreements are necessary for a conservancy to be an investable venture.

According to Olchoro-Oirowua Manager Doris Nabaala, the landowners entertained departing from the conservancy regime for other land uses as tourism revenues dried up at the onset of the pandemic.

MMWCA leveraged lease relief and operational expenditure support to strengthen conservancies. This was possible because a fundamental precondition for accessing the support was commitments to governance improvements backed by improvement plans outlining steps for fulfilling eligibility requirements around governance and inclusion and a board resolution signed by all members committing to the conditions set.

Amidst the pandemic, MMWCA facilitated critical improvements. Notable achievements include registration of legal entities and land auditing – to pave the way for lease signing – and signing of long-term lease agreements. In this regard, Lemek and Olchoro-Oirowua landowners have since signed lease agreements for 25 years, while Enonkishu Conservancy landowners have since signed 15-year lease agreements.

With the institutions now secured, Lemek will continue showing off its expansive, wildlife-rich plains. And as long as Olchoro-Oirowua and Enonkishu are in excellent health, Kileleoni Hill will continue receiving visitors from near and far who want a bird's eye view of the magical ecosystem. Also, Kofi Anan and Queen Elizabeth, the wide-mouth Rhinos, at Olchoro-Oirowua Rhino Sanctuary will continue to breathe easy because their home is safe.



DE-FENCING PARDAMAT FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND LIVELIHOOD IMPROVEMENT

BY GIDEON PESI



Land fragmentation and fencing are top threats facing conservation in the Mara. Fencing prevents wildlife from accessing critical resources, including water and saltlicks, inhibits access to breeding grounds and exacerbates human-wildlife conflict. Gideon Pesi, Community Liaison Officer at Pardamat Conservation Area, tells us why the Conservation Area was established and efforts at play to forestall these challenges.

The establishment of pioneer conservancies in the Maasai Mara Landscape was a first in conservation. Landowners of established conservancies needed an area to settle in, and the plains at the base of Pardamat hills were the choice. Families were allocated land, and land fragmentation began. The landowners needed to secure pasture for their livestock. So they thought, but an ecological tragedy was on the offing. Fences were coming in the way of the Maasai community's way of life, migratory animal species got strangled to death on an unimaginable scale, and something urgent needed to happen. The answer was to create a conservation area suitable for human occupation and open to wildlife.

"In 2016, hyenas invaded our homestead and killed 130 sheep and goats. It is the biggest singular loss we have had to endure. However,

since the installation of predator-proof bomas, our flock have been safe from night predation."
- Nalotuesha Enole Solol

Pardamat was perhaps one of the most fenced places in the Maasai Mara by 2016. Landowners fenced for varied reasons: to reduce human-wildlife conflict while building grass banks. Although the fencing by tensile wire and wood poles achieved its objectives in the short term, it began to restrict the livestock numbers people could keep. As a result, a concerted effort to remove fences started to gain momentum. Landowners appreciated the model of removal of fences at scale as this created confidence in the fair, sustainable and benefit accruing approach that is the backbone of the Pardamat Conservation Area.

In 2016, The Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association, with the support of the United Nations Agency for International Development through the Nature Conservancy, embarked on a project to establish a mixed-use model, with a primary goal of opening up the closed spaces and setting up Pardamat for human and wildlife coexistence. However, the removal of fences was received with resistance as landowners were concerned about grass, and it wasn't an easy conversation.

But the determination to protect one of Mara's key corridors came with incentives: total compensation of the fencing fee, enrollment in the land leasing arrangement and construction of predator-proof bomas at a highly subsidised rate. Over time, people warmed up to the idea leading to the removal of fences on over 4000 acres.

We now see more gazelles, zebras and giraffes on the plains of Pardamat. The migratory corridors for elephants have opened up, and access to water points has been realised. The sale of land for use incompatible with conservation has come to a near stop, as landowners have stable, guaranteed payments. As a result, parents can partly meet their financial obligations, including paying school fees from the lease fees. And the youth have wages from the de-fencing in de-fencing exercises.

Livestock is not left secured, and predator-proof bomas are installed. So far, about 80 homesteads have functional predator-proof bomas complete with chain-link reinforcements. The predator-proof bomas have resulted in reduced cases of human-wildlife conflicts, and we continue to receive landowner endorsements of the predator-proof bomas.

"I have come to appreciate my decision to remove the fence on my farm. I have grass for my cattle even during the drought season and I have extra benefits as I shy space with wildlife." – Mzee Oloontobu.

The contribution of the Pardamat Conservation Area landowners to the ecosystem's health is a testament that landowners hold the key to conservation. However, the efforts to secure this critical area for biodiversity can only be enhanced through strategic partnerships to ensure gains are not lost.

The writer serves as Pardamat Conservation Area Community Liaison Officer.



CLOSING WORD

EMERGING STRONGER: LESSONS FROM COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BY DANIEL SOPIA

Recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts has been sluggish. The poor global economic outlook characterised by recessions and soaring fuel prices and the occasional re-emergence of Covid-19 are making us adopt cautious optimism.

But the last couple of years has taught us a thing or two. First, as a people, we realise that we are resilient and creative more than we had thought. Amid the uncertainty brought about by the novel virus, we reasoned together. We came up with innovative ideas that enabled us to stay afloat and address the day's challenges. Consequently, we marshalled support by deploying a crisis mitigation strategy and raised USD 2,973,412 that supported conservancies in operational expenditure.

Collectively, we appreciated the need to have sound governance structures. For instance, our northern conservancies of Olchoro-Oirowua, Lemek and Enonkishu that lacked guaranteed income for the absence of the requisite structures are now investable ventures. They are investment-ready because we worked to improve institutional systems and develop long-term leases. The three conservancies would have collapsed if help had not arrived on time. But through the support of our partners, we secured lease grants that helped to keep the conservancies intact during the crisis.

Another critical lesson we picked from the crisis is that our conservation model needed strengthening. Following the loss of revenue due to tourism collapse, conservancies were affected. Even for conservancies with guaranteed income, we negotiated reduced rates due to the unforeseeable circumstances that prevented tourism partners from fully meeting their lease obligations. As a result, we are now considering other sources of revenue, such as carbon credits and mulling over new ideas around sustainable financing.

Finally, the crisis taught us that we are better together. The Mara model's strength lies in the partnership between the landowners and tourism partners. It is a symbiotic relationship that has proven itself over the years. Importantly, we saw landowners forgoing half the payment during the crisis. Similarly, tourism partners took loans to meet part of their obligations to uphold the relationship.

Given the above, there was a silver lining in the Covid-19 pandemic. Amidst the crisis was our opportunity for growth.

Daniel Sopia is the CEO, Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association

Please send us your feedback
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MMWCA's FUNDING PARTNERS 2022





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