The cover features a large, close-up image of the Kenyan flag in the upper right corner, showing the red, black, and white stripes and the white Maasai shield. The background is a wide-angle photograph of a savanna landscape with acacia trees and a herd of zebras. In the foreground, two Maasai men wearing red shuka are walking away from the camera, holding long wooden staffs.

KENYA'S WILDLIFE CONSERVANCIES

BY ADAM CRUISE | OCTOBER 2022

Contents

1. Introduction	..... 1	4.2.1. TOURISM	..... 8
2. Conservancy definition	..... 3	4.2.2. CATTLE RANCHING	..... 9
3. The need for wildlife conservancies in Kenya	..... 4	4.2.3. CARBON SEQUESTRATION AND CREDITING	..... 10
3.1. WILDLIFE DECLINES	..... 4	4.2.4. OTHER BENEFITS	..... 10
3.2. HUMAN POPULATION BOOM	..... 4	4.3. THE ECOLOGICAL ROLE	..... 11
3.3. DECENTRALISATION	..... 4	4.4. A CAVEAT	..... 12
3.4. CLIMATE CHANGE	..... 4	5. Conclusion	..... 13
3.5. TOURISM	..... 5	6. About the Author	..... 14
3.6. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT	..... 5	7. Appendix	..... 15
4. Kenya's wildlife conservancies	..... 6	8. References	..... 22
4.1. BACKGROUND	..... 7		
4.2. THE ECONOMIC ROLE	..... 8		

1. Introduction

Over the past 30 years, wildlife conservancies in Kenya have proliferated. There are currently 167 conservancies covering 11 percent of Kenya's landmass.¹ This is more than the area of national parks, which covers around eight percent of the total area. Kenya's conservancies are spread across various regions encompassing diverse ecosystems from savanna rangelands to forests and marine environments. Two-thirds of Kenya's wildlife populations exist outside formal state-managed areas on land co-habited by humans², thus making the conservation of wildlife dependable on finding ways for local communities to become involved in the management and governance of wildlife conservation.

With wildlife populations in Kenya declining by 68 percent during the last five decades³, conservancies have become important both in protecting wildlife and their natural habitats as well as potentially providing economic and social benefits for impoverished communities living within

and alongside those natural habitats. Kenya's wildlife conservancies play a crucial role by extending natural areas under protection, reconnecting ecological habitat and establishing migratory corridors for species such as elephants and ungulate populations, as well as limiting wildlife and tourist overcrowding in the national parks. Furthermore, conservancies offer economic activities in some of the most remote parts of the country. In places where ranching and agriculture are under stress due to shifting weather patterns, land degradation, or overstocking, conservancies are ideally positioned to offer more sustainable livelihood options.

As a result, wildlife conservancies in Kenya have emerged as a framework that is grounded in the concept that local communities are effective custodians of wildlife and natural habitats if provided with the right incentives, benefits, and decision-making authority to manage their own conservancies.



Local communities, however, bear the costs of living with wildlife especially in the context of wildlife conflict situations such as crop-raiding, livestock predation, infrastructure damage, human injury and death. This is exacerbated by high levels of impoverishment, unemployment, human population increases, drought and starvation, which often force community members to poach wildlife for survival and/or income; or become susceptible to wildlife crime and crime syndicates. Yet, at the same time, these communities are the frontline of defence against wildlife and biodiversity decline. Consequently, they have an innate capacity to protect natural resources and combat wildlife crime. In recent years, as conservancies have mushroomed in Kenya and their efficacy honed, there has been a significant reduction in wildlife poaching within conservancies. For example, there has been a 12 percent increase of elephant populations over the past five years while in conservancies⁴ in the Maasai Mara, lion densities are growing.⁵

For Kenya's national government, conservancy land ownership, governance, and management models are now recognised as a key component of national conservation policy and law. With the formal recognition of conservancies under wildlife legislation passed in 2013 – and in line with Kenya's 2010 constitutional reform promoting decentralisation – conservancies are regarded as a mechanism for empowering local communities to lead conservation and natural resource management efforts. In turn, communities can legally prioritise wildlife conservation as a land use.⁶ Currently, there are 11 regional conservancy associations in 28 counties across the country.⁷ These fall under the auspices of a national association, the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA).

Kenya's conservancies' revenue is based predominantly on non-consumptive wildlife-based tourism. Wildlife-based tourism, which accounts for around 70 percent of Kenya's tourism sector, has become the most important revenue stream for conservancies, accounting for an average of 83 percent of their commercial revenue. In many conservancies, tourism facilities have been established to create an exclusive wildlife viewing experience as an alternative to the mass tourism activities in neighbouring national parks and reserves. The lodges in the conservancies make up for about 16 percent of the total bed-nights spent in all Kenyan safari lodges.⁸



In conclusion, Kenya's conservancies are not only the key to the resilience of its wildlife, but can and, in many cases, do deliver long-term sustainable social and economic outcomes for local communities. These include improved structures for governance and management of community land with secure land ownership rights, and better living standards as well as the inclusiveness of women and youth. The broad spectrum of Kenyan conservancy models, with their common ability to successfully tap into a well-established and lucrative wildlife-based tourist market, are more productive and inclusive than the Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) models of Namibia and Botswana, both of which provide little to zero benefits for local communities (especially for women and young people) amid zonal wildlife population declines.^{9,10}

That said, many conservancies in Kenya are still in a development stage, while others, especially those that are not situated alongside national parks or tourist hotspots, face some challenges. These include lower tourist numbers and tourist investment, effecting a balance between livestock ranching and grazing rights among wildlife, and local governance and equity issues. These challenges are not insurmountable. Already, programs have been put in place to address them. Fundamentally, conservancies remain the most effective means in addressing Kenya's wildlife population decline, biodiversity loss, and land degradation as well as providing impoverished communities with an authoritative means of managing and benefiting from the land they live on.

2. Conservancy definition

The Wildlife Conservation and Management Act of 2013 defines a conservancy as 'an area of land set aside by an individual landowner, body corporate, group of owners, or a community for the purposes of wildlife conservation.'

The types of conservancies in Kenya vary and are recognised based on the land tenure arrangements. These include the following:

- **Private conservancy** – set up on private land by a private individual or corporate body for the purpose of wildlife conservation.¹¹
- **Group conservancy** – a single conservancy set up by the pooling of land by contiguous landowners for the purpose of wildlife conservation.
- **Community conservancy** – a conservancy set up by a community on community land.
- **Sanctuary** – an area of land and water managed by government, community, individual or private entity for conservation of one or more species of wildlife.
- **Game ranch** – keeping of wildlife under natural extensive conditions with the intention of engaging in wildlife conservation, recreation and trade.
- **Game farm** – rearing of wildlife in an enclosed and controlled environment for wildlife conservation, trade and recreation.¹²



3. The need for wildlife conservancies in Kenya

1. WILDLIFE DECLINES

In the past three decades, Kenya has lost more than half of its ungulate herds according to data from the Directorate of Resources, Surveys and Remote Sensing (DRSRS).¹³ Wild ungulate herds that once roamed freely have shrunk dramatically in numbers in the south and vanished completely from much of the north of Kenya. Connected habitats have been severed, with herds trapped into shrinking areas, thus jeopardising the long-term sustainability of wildlife populations. Until recently, there has been a sustained decline of many of the charismatic species.¹⁴ Parks in Kenya were originally established in areas in which large aggregations of animals occurred but did not account for the migratory needs of many species of wildlife, especially for the ungulate and other migratory species such as elephants. Dispersal of these herds is a fundamental process that influences the distribution of biodiversity in Kenya's ecosystems and, ultimately, determines whether a species will survive. With only around eight percent of land designated to national parks, wildlife depends more on land adjacent to the parks for continued viability.

2. HUMAN POPULATION BOOM

Kenya's population grew rapidly by approximately 20 million over the past two decades (from 31 million to 51 million people).¹⁵ The country's accelerated population and economic growth are driving increased demand for resources that, as a result, cause biodiversity loss.

However, this could also present an opportunity to harness the huge potential conservancies may offer, especially for a burgeoning youth population that Kenya is experiencing. According to a report in 2015, young people in Kenya within the 15 – 24 age group represented 20 percent of the total population.¹⁶ Conservancies have the potential to sustainably benefit the future conservation successes and the economic needs of future generations.



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3. DECENTRALISATION

Kenya's 2010 Constitution created a decentralised system of government. The main objective was to devolve power, function, resource management, and representation to the local community level. The goal was to increase efficiency, participation, equity, and environmental sustainability by enabling local communities to manage and benefit from local conservation land use.¹⁷

Conservancies provide the best possible model to enable communities to benefit from conservation as a land use. Devolved governance presents an opportunity to increase financial and social support from conservancies, if well-managed.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to biodiversity in Kenya. In recent years, the increase in the frequency of droughts in Kenya has created challenges for food security and water access especially in the arid and semi-arid lands in the north and east, which, coincidentally, are host to a majority of the country's wildlife conservancies.¹⁸ The impact of such droughts and floods have been felt by wildlife populations and local communities through competition over resources. Maintaining the ecological integrity of landscapes and expanding dispersal areas can mitigate some of these threats and will allow for continued mobility across the landscape.

Conservancies present an opportunity for increasing climate change adaptation and resilience among communities and wildlife.

5. TOURISM

Kenya's tourism industry is the leading foreign exchange earner contributing eleven percent of the country's GDP.¹⁹ According to the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife in Kenya, tourism income in 2018 was approximately USD two billion, representing a 31 percent increase compared to 2017. Of this, approximately 70 percent was attributed to wildlife-based tourism.²⁰ Growth post-COVID has been positive and offers huge possibilities to support wildlife conservation in the country.

However, some national parks have become inundated with tourists and tourist facilities. Conservancies, especially those adjacent to the parks, can alleviate the pressure on the parks by expanding the tourist product. In many of the conservancies, tourism facilities have been established to create an exclusive wildlife viewing experience as an alternative to the mass tourism activities in neighbouring national parks and reserves.²¹ Furthermore, tourism could be expanded into more remote areas whose communities would otherwise receive little economic benefits.

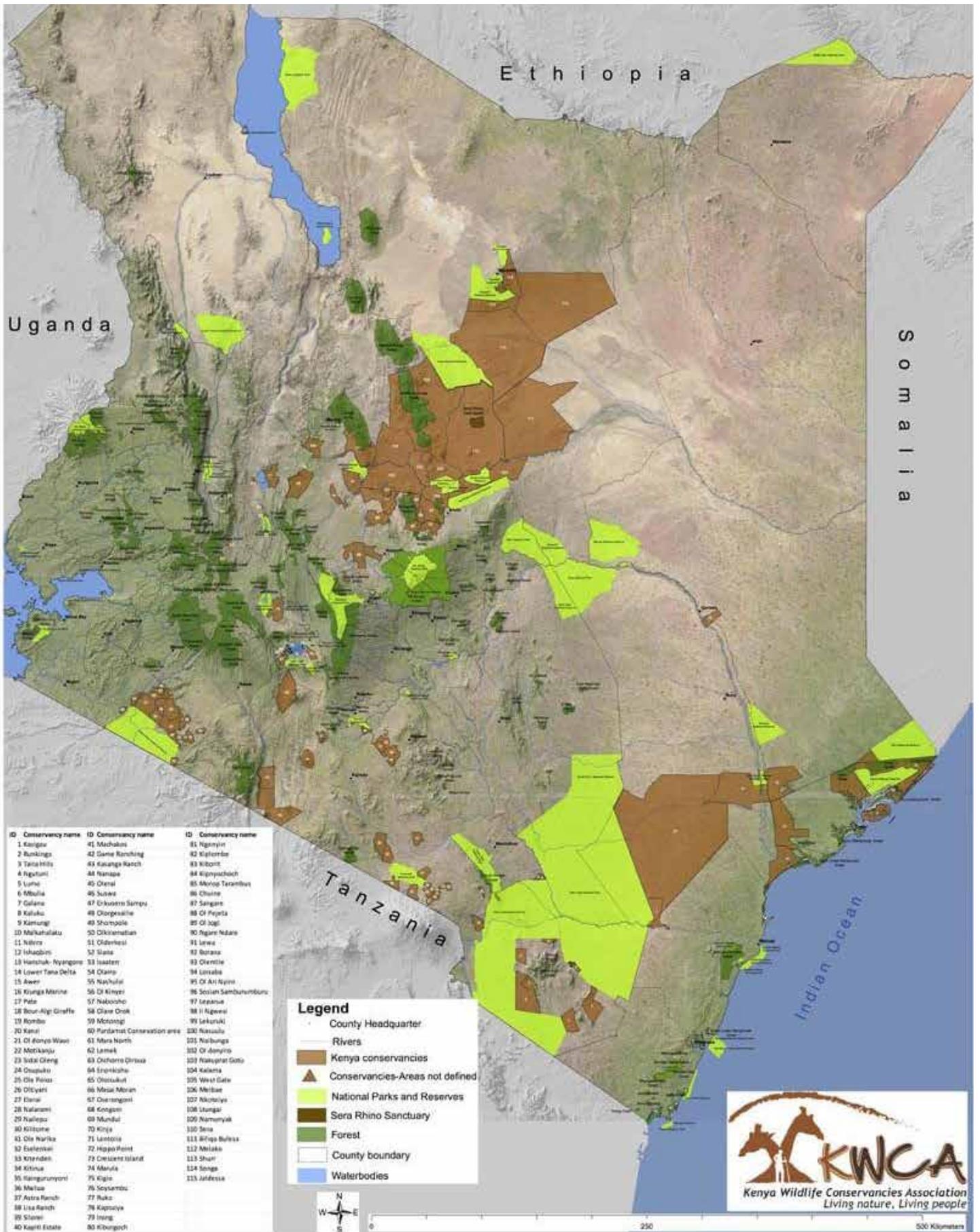
6. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

According to the UN Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015: 'Poverty eradication is about enabling women to have income security, sustainable livelihoods, access to decent work, and full and productive employment'. Although cultural and social barriers remain, there are a number of supporting initiatives and efforts to promote gender equality in Kenya, such as the two-thirds gender rule and other considerations within the Constitution of Kenya as well as international conventions and treaties.²³

Conservancies, primarily due to their reliance on the lucrative wildlife-based tourist market, offer a unique governing space where women can play a key role in both the use and management of natural resources at a local level.



4. Kenya's wildlife conservancies



4.1. Background

The community conservancy model in Kenya is a relatively new concept. Some regional conservancy associations, such as the North-Eastern Conservancies Association and Western Wildlife Conservancies Association and many individual conservancies elsewhere, are only in the formation and development stage. While some private landowner conservancies, especially around the Northern Rangelands and Maasai Mara areas, have been operating for decades, the concept of community conservancies was only officially recognised in Kenya a decade ago. This occurred with the formation of an umbrella conservancy organisation, the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA), and the subsequent implementation of the Wildlife and Conservation Management Act (2013), which legally approved conservation on community and private land as a land use.²⁴

The process of decentralising conservation management and governance to conservancies outside of national parks and reserves had, however, already been several years in the making. Community conservancies first appeared in Kenya in the mid-1990s with support from non-profits, neighbouring private conservancies, and conservation-oriented corporations as a way of incentivising landowners and communities to be custodians of wildlife. The success of establishing Kimana in 1992, Namunyak and Koiyaki-Lemek Wildlife Trust in 1995, and Il Ngwesi in 1996, all of which offered direct economic benefits from wildlife-related activities to landowners, gave impetus to the growth of the community conservation model. The establishment of group conservancies in the southern counties in the 2000s was stimulated by the need to create wildlife dispersal areas and ensure connectivity of subdivided lands outside the Maasai Mara National Reserve and the Amboseli National Park.²⁵

In the late 1990s, the State-sanctioned Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) led efforts aimed at conserving wildlife by increasing socio-economic benefits to communities under USAID-funded projects. In 2002, the need to establish a national representative body created the National Wildlife Forum and the Kenya Wildlife Working Group with the express desire to set a legal framework for conservancies

within national legislation. In 2011, consultative meetings and a study tour by a Kenyan delegation to Namibia to analyse the Namibian Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) model were undertaken. The key findings created the path for legal recognition of conservancies, streamlining coordination within the sector, and building a national constituency for non-state participants in conservation. A national consultative conference in 2012 approved the establishment of the Kenyan Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA). KWCA membership grew from just two conservancies in 2015 to 121 by 2018 while expanding a territory from around 35,000 hectares to over 4,6 million hectares over the same period. Today, the association represents the majority of the 167 registered conservancies on more than 6,3 million hectares.²⁶

The majority of Kenya's rural poor today have traditionally depended on agriculture, pastoralism, and other natural resource-dependent activities. This dependence, while supporting their subsistence status, exposed communities to the vagaries of weather, land fragmentation and the oscillations of market prices. Furthermore, as the population continued to grow at very high rates, the pressure on land increased and productivity (per person) fell. Also, landholdings were continuously sub-divided across this increasing population. Conservancies began to offer a possible solution by potentially providing a significant reduction of rural poverty because the pattern of development in Kenya has been sufficiently diversified to offer both alternative and complementary economic opportunities to the rural populations. Conservancies and conservancy associations bring divided areas under a broader affiliation thus reducing land fragmentation and poverty levels.

Conservancies in Kenya rely heavily on income generated from wildlife-based tourism. Wildlife-based tourism thrives on a value chain directly dependent on local agriculture, agriculture-related industries, and specialised services. The development of tourism in recent years is thus a part of the transformation from quasi-subsistence into commercial agriculture and brings with it greater integration into the rest of the economy.²⁷ Tourism-related services and employment within conservancies provide a series of benefits that increase the income-potential of community

households, reduce their direct and exclusive dependence on agricultural markets, and make them more resilient to adverse shocks such as drought. The direct and indirect benefits of tourism to the rural economy may thus improve long-term income prospects and stability for all the rural-based population.

Kenya's governmental long-term development goal recognises these factors. The aim is to have 20 percent of Kenya's landmass under conservancy management by 2030 with the goal of establishing a total of approximately 200 conservancies. At present, there are 167 conservancies spread across 11 regional associations in 28 counties. These conservancies benefit the lives of more than 930,000 households and directly employ around 4,500 individuals.²⁸

4.2. The economic role

4.2.1. TOURISM

The contribution of conservancies to the tourism industry suggests considerable potential and scope for future expansion in a specialised market that caters to the high-income and low-volume tourists. They also function to diversify and dilute the wildlife-based experience that has, until recently, concentrated on the overcrowded national parks. A survey of conservancies registered under KWCA suggested that there are around 2,500 beds available in lodges within the conservancies. As mentioned, tourism is the most significant source of income for conservancies, contributing an average of 83 percent of commercial income with buoyant growth in recent years.²⁹



There are signs that income from tourism is growing rapidly in relative and absolute terms. From 2016 to 2017, 69 conservancies with tourism facilities experienced an 18 percent increase in their total income from tourism, earning a total of around USD 10 million. This amounted to an average of USD 220,000 per conservancy. Growth in income was highest in the northern conservancies, who saw a 33 percent increase in tourism income, compared to a 23 percent increase among conservancies in the south.³⁰ Kenya did suffer a drastic reduction in tourism revenue in 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but recovered markedly the following year. Signs indicate that tourism revenue will continue its upward trajectory.

Importantly, individual households within conservancies share the benefits from tourism either directly as revenues from running tourism facilities or through a variety of profit-sharing structures, conservation fees, bed-night fees, or lease-holding arrangements. Conservation fees alone amount to around USD 350/household per annum in conservancies in the Maasai Mara.³¹ This is a notable comparison to the total revenue earned from trophy hunting per household in community-based conservancies in Botswana, which provides less than a US dollar per household per annum.³²

Kenya's conservancies tend to target the high-value international tourist, though there are a growing number of local visitors with much regional variation. In Nakuru County, about 60 percent of visitors are local, and in Narok and Taita Taveta the figure stands at 30 percent, which is close to the national average. On the other hand, in Laikipia, Samburu, Meru, and Kajiado, the percentage of local tourists is much lower (at around 15 percent)—these being destinations that are targeted more to the international traveller.³³

In general, conservancies that neighbour the parks and reserves have higher average bed densities. Bed densities range from six to 20 beds for conservancies in the early stages of development, to over 1,000 in Narok, which is adjacent to the Maasai Mara. The Amboseli and Laikipia regions are also wildlife hot spots, with the proximity to Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Kenya respectively adding an additional attraction for visitors.³⁴



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4.2.2. CATTLE RANCHING

Tourism is not the only source of income in conservancies. Cattle ranching and beef production has, over the past years, gained prominence and offers another way to diversify income sources within conservancies since it has the potential of being wildlife compatible. The purchase of livestock and food from the tourism industry alone amounted to USD 300,000 in 2017 for conservancies.

The farming of cattle is not only a commercial benefit for many communities but in many of Kenya's cultural contexts livestock is more than just an economic asset.

The key challenge, therefore, is to keep livestock herds in balance with wildlife populations, requiring the establishment of grazing regimes and an equilibrium between livestock and wildlife-carrying capacities. There are already a number of successful models being piloted across the country, especially in the conservancies of Taita Taveta, the Maasai Mara and Amboseli in the south and Laikipia and the Northern Rangelands in the centre and north.³⁵

4.2.3. CARBON SEQUESTRATION AND CREDITING

Payments for ecosystem services, particularly from carbon sequestration, have increasingly become a significant revenue source for conservancies. In 2016, southern conservancies earned USD 250,000 from carbon offsets (an average of USD 36,000 per conservancy), and this figure increased by 605 percent in 2017 to reach USD 1.7 million (an average of USD 180,000 per conservancy). This was mainly due to carbon-offset revenues from the Chyulu Hills REDD+ project, a multi-partner initiative aimed at reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation. As the international policy framework around land-based climate change strategies continues to mature, landscape-level conservation will offer opportunities to reap benefits from payments for ecosystem services.³⁶

4.2.4. OTHER BENEFITS

Iconic animal conservation programs (of species such as rhino, elephant, Grévy's zebra, hirola and lion) bring in significant income for conservancies. Partnerships with non-profits such as Grévy's Zebra Trust, OI Pejeta, Save the Elephants and many more provide both a revenue stream and a means to manage conservancy land in order to maximise wildlife conservation, cattle grazing regimes, education schemes and other programs.

Most conservancies are located within pastoral areas where gender inequity exists in terms of access to education and economic opportunities, with traditional livelihood practices limiting women's opportunities outside the homestead. However, as gender empowerment through bursary and education support continues to be promoted through conservancy management structures and tourism, this trend has begun to change. In tourism facilities within the conservancies, 12 percent of the workforce hired were women. This increased to 17 percent in 2017.³⁷

Conservancies also provide alternative sources of income to households through direct purchases of goods and services by tourist establishments, which amounted to around USD 300,000 in 2017. As mentioned, livestock sales and food for tourist establishments raised USD 300,000 in 2017 while cultural activities such as visits to homesteads brought in USD 98,000 and the purchase of beadwork generated USD 33,000 for that year. Tourism facilities have also invested in roads, education, health, and water-related

infrastructure in some of the most remote regions of the country. In 2017, 11 conservancies had invested about USD 240,000 in such activities, suggesting that the indirect impact of tourism in the form of social initiatives may be more significant than direct payments to conservancies in the form of tourism operations.³⁸

A report by the World Bank Groups (2019) states that: 'Income from conservancies is possibly the only drought-proof source of revenue that is available to many of the poor and vulnerable communities in rural Kenya.'³⁹



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4.3. The ecological role

Kenya's conservancies are home to some of the highest densities of wildlife in the country. 18 out of the 20 zones with the highest density of wildlife are in conservancies and not parks.⁴⁰ Around 22 percent of Kenya's ungulate herds and 65 percent of Kenya's overall wildlife populations and endangered species exist on conservancy land while 90 percent of the country's endangered Grévy's zebra and critically endangered hirola, 45 percent of eastern black rhinoceros, and 72 percent of southern white rhinoceros populations are on conservancies.⁴¹ Lion populations in the conservancies of the Maasai Mara are among the highest on

the continent. Conservancies may already be contributing to a reversal in the decline of Kenya's wildlife. A nation-wide census conducted in 2021 recorded, for the first time in many cases, an increase in populations of elephants, rhinos, lions, giraffe, Grévy's zebra, and hirola among others.⁴²

Conservancies encompass and link Kenya's broad range of ecological habitats creating vital migratory corridors for wildlife, especially the great ungulate herds as well as elephants.⁴³ Conservancies now link the ecosystems of the Maasai Mara with Amboseli and in turn with Taita Taveta, Tsavo East and West in the south, while in the north Laikipia and the Northern Rangeland ecosystems provide links from Somalia and the coast through to Mount Kenya and the western Rift Valley and lakes.

4.4. A caveat

The World Bank Group report also states that while conservancies are critical for preventing wildlife declines and providing community economic and social upliftment, there remains a need for strong governance structures with transparent and equitable benefit-sharing systems to be put in place.⁴⁴ This, however, is not the case for many of the established conservancies, especially those around the national parks, and essentially applies only to those that are still in the development stage.

A further challenge is that investments in conservancies carry high risks and, as such, require patient capital. This is because investors must take a chance on both the prospects of attracting tourists to a new location, and engage in a host of public good investments to build community support and fill crucial infrastructure gaps such as schools, clinics, roads etc. These issues may suggest the need for innovative investment mechanisms, such as green bonds and risk guarantees, to shift the risk-reward balance, especially in areas that confer high ecological benefits, such as wildlife corridors.⁴⁵



5. Conclusion

The establishment and promotion of community conservancies in Kenya offers the most effective means in securing and rehabilitating wildlife habitats, and migration corridors as well as providing economic benefits for local communities, many of which are impoverished. Already, in areas such as the Maasai Mara, Amboseli, and Laikipia regions, high wildlife densities on conservancy lands have led to significant wildlife-based tourism operations outside of national parks, which have provided considerable benefits for those community households.

Although tourism is the primary income-generating source for most, conservancies and their regional associations are exploring other ways to innovate and create income from other sources. Carbon credits for carbon sequestration with preserved biodiversity and other projects have demonstrated returns from conservation through payments from ecosystem services. Cattle ranching, which also offers additional opportunities, is more complex in the context of degraded land, increasing population numbers and cultural factors. Thus, there is a need to balance livestock numbers with wildlife populations but, if successfully implemented, could prove productive as an alternative for communities as an additional economic source to wildlife-based tourism.

The tourist hotspots in the south of Kenya (Maasai Mara, Amboseli and Tsavo) have well-maintained infrastructure and offer easy opportunities for tourists to travel by road or by air. The south also hosts high wildlife densities and benefits from strong marketing. Such potential also exists in other destinations, especially in some areas of the north, east and west (Laikipia, Northern Rangelands, coast and Rift Valley), which also host some of the highest wildlife numbers in the country as well as coastal experiences. In many areas of these regions, however, significant investment in marketing strategies, good governance and transparency in economic and other benefits are required if the community conservancy model is to be a success.

The signs of conservancy effectiveness throughout Kenya's regional conservancy associations are promising. While there are many (mostly developmental) challenges that differ from region to region, Kenya's community conservancies overall appear to be the solution to preventing the decline in wildlife populations, loss of biodiversity and community impoverishment. Wildlife community conservancies in Kenya seem to be developing into a conservation success story. In the future, this may be the model that could be applied elsewhere in Africa, especially in those countries where the community-based conservation models have failed due to an over-reliance on consumptive-based wildlife utilisation and trickle-down economics.



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About the author

Adam Cruise is an award-winning investigative environmental journalist, academic and author. He has contributed to a number of international publications, including National Geographic and The Guardian covering diverse topics from the plight of wildlife in Africa to polar bears in the Arctic and coral reef rejuvenation in Indonesia. He has a PhD in Philosophy specialising in environmental ethics from Stellenbosch University in South Africa and is the editor of the online Journal of African Elephants.



Appendix

REGIONAL CONSERVANCY ASSOCIATIONS AT A GLANCE

1. THE NORTHERN RANGELANDS TRUST (NRT)

The Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) covers 4.9 million hectares of land across Northern Kenya and the coast. It supports 33 community conservancies that host 460,000 pastoral communities from approximately 11 dominant tribes. NRT's mission is to build resilient community conservancies, transform lives, and secure peace and conservation of natural resources.

In 2016, NRT supported conservancies with a total of USD 7.1 million for conservancy operations. The ultimate goal is to create financial sustainability, with the hope that conservancies are able to finance a third of the operations through commercial enterprise, a third through government funding and a third through donor funding. County governments, such as Samburu and Marsabit, have historically provided significant infrastructure development grants to conservancies, but in 2016 a new 50 percent cost-share model with the Samburu county government has been developed to support operational budgets in Nkoteiya. This shows a step in creating deeper engagements and practical development agendas at the county level.

NRT provides conservancies with operational support through a network of regional managers, rangeland coordinators and research and monitoring officers. NRT monitors the management and programmatic performance providing landowners and donors with a degree of assurance and oversight.

Regional directors provide governance and management support to conservancy management and boards. They ensure that conservancies operate as legal entities in a transparent and equitable way for its members. They attend meetings and act as a sounding board and problem solvers for conservancy management.

Rangeland coordinators work with conservancy staff to plan annual wet and dry season grazing plans at a conservancy

and regional level. Conservancies form contiguous spaces for pastoral movement, and frequently experience movements of livestock from outside. This requires proper planning to direct and track movement and numbers, and estimate the availability of pasture. Additionally, 70 percent of these rangelands have been classified as severely degraded. NRT, is working with the Grévy's Zebra Trust to rehabilitate rangelands through planned grazing, bunched herding and grass re-seeding. Around 870 hectares have been cleared and reseeded since 2012.

Wildlife COMMS, a devolved community-based monitoring system, has been one of the more successful monitoring systems within the Kenyan landscape. It involves the ranger network entering wildlife sightings, numbers and carcasses on a data sheet which are then uploaded into an MS-Access database for localised use in monitoring wildlife presence and numbers and planning security operations.

NRT Trading, the commercial arm of NRT, supports enterprise development within conservancies. The Livestock-to-Market program, which buys cattle at a premium from conservancies that depict good governance, generated USD 520,000 in 2016 that went directly to 1,195 participating households that sold 2,037 cattle to NRTT.

The Beadworks program embarked on a 'star-beader' strategy and paid out USD 30,000 in 2016 to 1,352 women participating in the program.

Tourism is the dominant income earner for conservancy community funds that support infrastructure development, provide bursaries and health support and also contribute to conservancy operations. In 2016, tourism contributions to the conservancies amounted to USD 430,000.

Critical and threatened species such as the hirola and black rhino have successfully been re-introduced into the NRT community conservancies and their numbers have steadily grown.

NRT primary partners and programs are as follows:

- The Grévy's Zebra Trust was established to address an urgent need to conserve Grévy's zebra in the community rangelands of Kenya and Ethiopia.

- Ewaso Lions is dedicated to conserving lions and other large carnivores by promoting co-existence between people and wildlife.
- Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is the heart of wildlife conservation, sustainable development and responsible tourism in northern Kenya and its successful working model has provided the framework on which many conservation organizations in the region are based.
- GIZ is working with local and international partners to train young people on technical and vocational education and training, to equip them with appropriate skills to meet the demands of the labour market, especially the private sector. Other areas of support include renewable energy, good governance with a focus on combating corruption, peace-building and migration management.
- Ol Pejeta Conservancy is a caretaker of the land, safeguarding endangered species and ensuring the openness and accessibility of conservation for all through innovation and empowerment.⁴⁶

2. LAIKIPIA CONSERVANCIES ASSOCIATION (LCA)

The Laikipia Conservancies Association (LCA) covers 350,000 hectares comprising 24 conservancies serving almost 12,000 households.

LCA is a member-led organisation established in 2019 with the goal of bringing together conservancies in Laikipia to address common challenges and amplify individual impacts. As one of the most important wildlife areas in Kenya, the future of Laikipia as a conservation landscape depends on conservancies. These institutions form a diverse mosaic, with different land tenure, governance, and management models, yet are aligned through recognition that a collaborative vision and management approach is critical to the future of conservancies as the core of a broader conservation landscape that supports people and wildlife.

LCA's primary partners and programs are:

- 2030 Water Resources Group is a unique public-private-civil society collaboration. It facilitates open, trust-based dialogue processes to drive action on water resources reform in water stressed countries in developing economies. The ultimate aim of such reforms and actions is to close the gap between water demand and supply by the year 2030.
- NEMA is the principal instrument of government in the implementation of all policies relating to the environment.
- County Government of Laikipia's mandate is to promote, foster and protect democracy and accountability for self-governance with respect to the rich diversity for development and accessibility of services.
- Space for Giants protects Africa's elephants from immediate threats like poaching while working to secure their habitats forever in landscapes facing greatly increasing pressures.
- National Drought Management Authority vision is to build a safer and disaster resilient Laikipia by a holistic, pro-active, technology driven and sustainable development strategy that involves all stakeholders and fosters a culture of prevention, preparedness and mitigation
- Kenya Forest Services conserves, develops and sustainably manages forest resources for Kenya's social-economic development.
- Centre for Training and Integrated Research in ASAL Development is concerned with research and training to design strategies for sustainable development, promote land use planning for sustained livelihood and optimal resource use, foster sustainable resource use and management for improved productivity and promote non-farm, non-pastoral enterprises, infrastructure and related services.
- Zeitz Foundation aims to create and support sustainable, ecologically and socially responsible projects and destinations around the world to achieve long-lasting impact and sustainability through the holistic balance of Conservation, Community, Culture and Commerce (the 4Cs) in privately managed areas.
- East African Wildlife Society is a membership-based public benefit organisation that seeks to enhance the conservation and wise use of the environment and natural resources in the East African region.
- Permaculture Research Institute offers advice and information on establishing Permaculture Educational Demonstration sites, which operate as education centres that seek to replicate themselves across their respective surrounding regions.
- African Wildlife Foundation together with the people of Africa, works to ensure the wildlife and wild lands of

Africa will endure forever.

- Mpala Research Centre (MRC) receives hundreds of students, educators, and scientists from around the globe each year, conducting research on everything from parasites to elephants. The unique set up of Mpala allows for researchers to use the land as a 'living laboratory' in which to conduct experiments and answer pressing questions on conservation and wildlife.⁴⁷

3. South Rift Association of Landowners

South Rift Association of Landowners (SORALO) covers an area of 124,084 hectares and comprises of 13 conservancies and 148,169 households.

SORALO functions as an important bridge between the Maasai Mara and Amboseli. In this area local Maasai communities have always lived with their livestock alongside wildlife, forests and grasslands, maintaining a landscape of exceptional biological and cultural diversity. This rangeland hosts one of the richest large mammal populations on earth, including both wildlife and livestock. This co-existence is enabled primarily by the communal and semi-nomadic form of local land-use, which encourages mobility to ensure survival. Today, this is an increasingly threatened landscape, confronting a growing population, a culture in transition, and land-use changes that threaten both wildlife and their livestock.⁴⁸

The conservancies (core conservation areas) alone cover 124,000 hectares, however the entire area of interest spans 650,000 hectares. The core conservancies of Shompole and Olkiramatian host over 50 percent of Grant's gazelles and wildebeest, over 40 percent of impala and ostrich and over 30 percent of zebra found within the area of interest.

Lion numbers have also increased within the core conservancies from ten to forty known individuals that have been monitored through the 'Rebuilding the Pride' program.

SORALO approaches wildlife conservation primarily through understanding challenges to community livelihoods, and assisting to promote appropriate and compatible land uses with wildlife conservation such as pastoralism and tourism. Through its Resource Assessor program, SORALO has trained Maasai youth on ecological monitoring.

Endangered and near threatened species such as the African elephant, cheetah, rhino and wild dog are found within the conservancies. Through the scout network, poaching numbers have also reduced from an approximate high of 90 percent in 2012 to 73 percent in 2014.

SORALO primary partners and programs are:

- African Conservation Centre's mission is to conserve biodiversity in East Africa and beyond through the collaborative application of scientific and indigenous knowledge, improved livelihoods and good governance through development of local institutions.
- Borderland Conservation Initiative aims to conserve large, free-ranging elephant and lion populations along the Kenya-Tanzania borderland through coordination of conservation efforts and cooperation between key interest groups.
- Elephant Voices advances the study of elephant cognition, communication and social behaviour, and promotes the scientifically sound and ethical management and care of elephants through research, conservation, advocacy and the sharing of knowledge.
- Mara Elephant Project saves and protects the African elephant population in the Mara by combatting the operations of poachers and fostering positive human-elephant relations.
- The Mara Predator Project is building an identification database of lions in and around the conservancies north of the Maasai Mara National Reserve. By tracking individuals, they identify pride home ranges and population trends for effective conservation techniques.
- Lion Guardians is a conservation organisation dedicated to finding and enacting long-term solutions for people and lions to coexist across Kenya and Tanzania.
- Save the Elephants conducts vital research on elephant behaviour and ecology and pioneered GPS radio tracking in Africa to provide fresh insight into the life of elephants.
- PAMS (Tanzania) support meaningful projects that conserve biodiversity, wilderness, habitats and ecological processes through actions that benefit nature and communities.⁴⁹

4. AMBOSELI ECOSYSTEM TRUST (AET)

The Amboseli Ecosystem Trust (AET) covers an area of 190,607 hectares comprising 19 conservancies and 86,811 households.

AET brings together the communities and organisations of Amboseli to develop land use practices that improve livelihoods and well-being through the coexistence of people and wildlife. This is in an effort to keep the Amboseli Ecosystem rangelands open, diverse and healthy for the benefit of people and wildlife.

- It does this through development of the Amboseli Ecosystem Management plan that entails a landscape approach to directing:
- Ecological Management: Zonation of the landscape into different land-uses determined to conserve areas of exceptional resource values. This allows for the development of activities (tourism and wildlife, agriculture and livestock) most suitable for the type of vegetation, microclimate and water resources available in the area.
- Tourism Development and Management: Sustains Amboseli as a leading tourist destination in the country by creating programs that have minimum adverse impacts, ensuring equitable benefit sharing for the community, enhancing tourism experiences and diversifying tourism product.
- Community Partnerships and Education: the maintenance of community conservation areas through contiguous landscapes remains critical for conservation. Creating awareness on human-wildlife conflicts, environmental education and improving livestock conditions aim to safeguard and rehabilitate rangelands.
- Security: In partnership with the BigLife Foundation, AET is pioneering the use of a smart phone based application, WILD, connected to a cybertracker interface, to collect, track and map wildlife sightings within community conservancies in real-time. This sophisticated system streamlines both security and wildlife monitoring operations in conservancies.
- Ecosystem Operations: The Amboseli Ecosystem, through its partnership with the Amboseli Conservation Program, hosts the longest running biodiversity-monitoring program in Kenya. Monitoring

transect lines on vegetation data enhances understanding of climatic, animal and human impacts on conservation and provides a sound scientific basis for management. This action plan creates a centralised avenue of creating systemic impact across the ecosystem, and allows for effective collaboration and communication.

AET's primary partners and programs are:

- Amboseli Conservation Program conserves Amboseli's wildlife and its ecosystem to the benefit of its people through ecosystem research, tool and capacity development and influencing conservation policies and practices.
- African Conservation Centre (ACC) is dedicated to the development of African Conservation excellence. ACC places emphasis on a three-tier approach of integrating Knowledge, Environment and Livelihoods in resolving principal problems facing Biodiversity Conservation in East Africa.
- Africa Wildlife Foundation works to ensure the wildlife and wild lands of Africa will endure forever by working with local communities.
- Big Life Foundation seeks to conserve and sustain the wildlife and the wild lands of the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem of East Africa through innovative conservation strategies that address the greatest threats while – at the same time – satisfying the economic interests of the resident Maasai people in ways that improve the quality of life for the entire community.
- International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) saves individual animals, animal populations and habitats all over the world by providing hands-on assistance to animals in need.⁵⁰

5. RIFT LAKES CONSERVANCY ASSOCIATION

The Rift Lakes Conservancy Association covers an area of 447,377 hectares and comprises 25 conservancies and 20,458 households.

The association brings together community and private conservancies and ranches in Nakuru and Baringo Counties to secure wildlife corridors and habitats while generating benefits to the landowners and communities.

Rift Lakes Conservancies Association was registered in April 2014 to bring together conservancies located within the floor of the Rift Valley. The association brings together community and private conservancies and ranches in Nakuru and Baringo Counties to secure wildlife corridors and habitats while generating benefits to the landowners and communities.

Kenya's great Rift is one of its most recognised geographical features, extending for about 6,000 kilometres. The great Rift contains spectacular lakes, valleys and mountains, among which Mount Longonot, Hellsgate, Lake Naivasha, Lake Elementaita, Lake Baringo, Lake Nakuru and Lake Bogoria are recognised as important bird areas. Conservancies in Nakuru are under private land holding while those in Baringo are under community lands.

Rift Lakes Wildlife Conservancies Association is composed of 10 nascent community conservancies in Baringo county and 15 more established private conservancies in Nakuru county. The association was established to coordinate stakeholders involved in wildlife conservation and provide a shared platform for stakeholders to participate in the conservation of the iconic natural resources.⁵¹

6. ATHI KAPITI WILDLIFE CONSERVANCIES ASSOCIATION (AKWCA)

Athi Kapiti Wildlife Conservancies Association covers an area of 14,646 hectares and comprises 10 conservancies and 1,777 households.

AKWCA is still in its nascent stages. This expansive dispersal area around the Nairobi National Park (NNP) includes the 6 ranches to the south, that amount to a block some 3.5 times larger than the park. It also creates a key corridor for wildlife movements between NNP and the Kajiado and Amboseli plains.

Over the last 20 years, the Athi Kapithi ecosystem has undergone rapid and drastic changes that have affected land use, mostly driven by expansion of human settlement, increased fencing, wildlife poaching, and construction of physical infrastructure has increased sand mining and quarrying. Although these changes have generated economic opportunities for some, they have come at a greater cost to wildlife and to pastoral livelihoods in general;

a recent study by a group of scientists at the University of Hoheinheim in Germany provides evidence of the imminent collapse of the localised migration of the wildebeest unless the issues are addressed.⁵²

7. THE MAASAI MARA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCIES ASSOCIATION (MMWCA)

The Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association (MMWCA) covers an area of 179,202 hectares and comprises 13 conservancies and 106,102 households.

MMWCA spans across the Greater Maasai Mara Ecosystem where almost 25 percent of the country's wildlife is found. MMWCA was formed in 2013 to create a common and unified front for landowners and tourism partners to strengthen conservancies, raise issues and create large-scale impact.

The Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association's (MMWCA) mission is to conserve the greater Maasai Mara ecosystem through a network of community protected areas for the prosperity of biodiversity and wildlife, the regional Maasai population, recreation and tourism. Their core purpose is to enable strong and thriving conservancies across the Greater Mara Ecosystem.

The organisation has identified goals to guide their work. These are centred on:

- Sustaining, developing and creating conservancies and conservation areas
- Facilitating, coordinating and implementing conservation and social development
- Advocating for a better conservancy framework
- Fundraising

Around 12,800 members have been registered within the 14 conservancies supported by MMWCA, with a total of 106,000 conservancy beneficiaries within the landscape. The Mara conservancies are composed of 13 group conservancies and one community conservancy (Olderkesi), pooling land resources of 13,625 landowners (from 3,000 in 2015) in a contiguous landscape. The conservancies furthermore support 60-70 percent of local job opportunities, employing 258 rangers and injecting USD 464,500 annually through their salaries.

In addition, the Mara conservancies directly paid over USD 3 million in 2016 (up from Ksh 330 million in 2015) in leasing fees to households. This forms a significant direct income to communities.

The strong tourism infrastructure (40 facilities) has also provided employment for 861 individuals. The 14 conservancies contributed USD 380,000 in 2015 and USD 590,000 in 2016 toward community development projects. Project highlights include 105 teachers trained, 9 classrooms built, 200 guides sponsored through Koiyaki Guiding School and 916 books distributed.

The Mara is categorised as one of the wonders of the world due to its characteristic biodiversity. Community conservancies have been shown to host increasing lion densities. The Mara conservancies, which are connected to the national reserve, offer prime habitat for ungulates that migrate across the Mara-Serengeti ecosystem. The conservancies expand the ungulate habitat. A recent aerial survey (2019) by KWS indicated a 91 percent increase in elephant numbers within the Maasai Mara ecosystem since 2014. Creating this continuity in landscapes supports the local pastoral populations, while new value addition activities such as Mara Beef creates incentives for good range management and livestock conditions.

MMWCA key partners and projects are:

- The African Wildlife Foundation, together with the people of Africa, works to ensure the wildlife and wild lands of Africa will endure forever.
- Basecamp Foundation, Kenya, is a for-community-benefit foundation that supports innovative approaches to community economic empowerment, access to water, access to clean energy, access to education, access to health services and health education and appropriate technologies
- Kenya Wildlife Trust was established in 2007 by leaders in the Kenyan safari industry, with the principle aim of strengthening the connection between conservation and tourism. They have established predator-monitoring projects in the Maasai Mara such as the Mara Cheetah Project and the Mara Lion Project.
- Mara Beef raise top quality Meat products on the Mara Beef Farm, as well as within the Enonkishu

Conservancy on the edge of the Maasai Mara. The animals are all grass fed, feeding on an irrigated forage mixture.

- Mara Elephant Project saves and protects the African elephant population in the Mara by combatting the operations of poachers and fostering positive human-elephant relations.
- The Olare Orok & Motorogi Trust was set up in 2009 to work with communities and other key stakeholders to uplift communities and enable the successful conservation of the Maasai Mara Ecosystem.
- Rangeland Solutions is a not-for-profit social enterprise working to improve the environment and the livelihoods of African pastoralists.
- Seiya Limited's aim is to continue to develop community conservation into a sustainable and profitable model to protect the Greater Mara Ecosystem.
- Serengeti Watch was initially formed to oppose a commercial highway across the Serengeti National Park. It is a permanent non-profit organisation that will monitor the Serengeti and bring world opinion and support to bear on vital issues.
- WWF's mission is to conserve nature and reduce the most pressing threats to the diversity of life on Earth.⁵⁹

8. TAITA TAVETA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCIES ASSOCIATION (TTWCA)

Taita Taveta Wildlife Conservancies Association (TTWCA) covers an area of 358,337 hectares and comprises 33 conservancies and ranches and 33,897 households.

Established in 2013, TTWCA works with ranches in Taita Taveta county. These ranches were organised as hunting blocks before independence and later converted to cattle ranches. Together, they formed the Taita Taveta Ranches Association registered in 2008. Poorly performing cattle ranches led to KWS engaging with land owners to conserve wildlife to enable income generation through wildlife-based tourism as well as livestock production.

KWS facilitated visits to conservancies in Laikipia and Samburu counties to benchmark development of conservancies. This led to the ranch owners resolving to convert their ranches to wildlife conservancies that support cattle ranching as well in 2012. With support from

Kenya Land Conservation Trust, the ranchers developed a constitution to govern the upcoming association of conservancies and in 2013 registered TTWCA.

The conservancies are critical wildlife corridors between Tsavo East and West national parks.⁵⁴

9. BARINGO COUNTY CONSERVANCIES ASSOCIATION (BCCA)

BCCA, an important bird landscape providing habitat for 500 different species, is an association in its infancy. It covers an area of 163,700 hectares and has a current membership of 11 conservancies – five being fully operational, three at a proposed stage and three at a formative stage. There are 75,100 beneficiaries. The conservancies are spread within three landscapes, the highlands in the south, the larger eastern and northern wooded rangelands and the lakes system comprising Lake Baringo and Lake Bogoria.

10. NORTH EASTERN CONSERVANCIES ASSOCIATION (NECA)

NECA is in its formative stage. The aim is to work closely with Somali pastoralists and landowners to conserve this unique landscape and wildlife for the benefit of communities.

11. WESTERN WILDLIFE CONSERVANCIES ASSOCIATION (WWCA)

The Western Wildlife Conservancies Association (WWCA) is the youngest regional association formed under the guidance of KWCA. It is currently in its nascent stage of development. WWCA is located within the larger western Kenya, Nyanza and North Rift. It currently hosts 16 conservancies covering an area of 31,164 hectares at various initial stages of development.⁵⁵

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