

Reto-o-Reto Project

Pastoral livelihoods and wildlife conservation

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An Urgent Need for Effective Policies

Although in an early stage, the Wildlife Conservation Lease Program has been embraced by the community and is visibly improving conditions for both livestock and wildlife. Yet the programme faces daunting challenges outside its control. Rapid urbanization and rising land prices near good roads, shopping centres and the Nairobi National Park still form powerful incentives for landowners to sell or develop their land.

At this point, strong policy on land use and planning is necessary to counter these negative trends. Any policy should take into account that the majority of people in this area are Maasai pastoralists, and that pastoralism is compatible with wildlife conservation. Conservation is a goal of economic significance to the nation as a whole.

A master plan for the area, including zoning for different land uses—designed by government officials in coordination with landowners, researchers and other stakeholders—is the most important priority for retaining livelihoods and maintaining the integrity of this ecosystem.

An effective, comprehensive plan would:

- Minimize land-use conflicts through zoning.
- Provide for continued pastoral livelihoods of the majority of the residents of Kitengela along with conservation of wildlife and other natural resources.
- Support shared resources, including water points, salt licks, and the wetlands.
- Support community game scouts to curb poaching.
- Create conservation easements for wildlife movements.
- Purchase land for conservation in critical areas near the park and tarmac roads where settlement is most attractive.
- Carefully plan for both urban and rural development.
- Plan for providing urban and rural infrastructure such as roads, schools, health centres, telephones, water, sewage, electricity... while minimizing pollution and land degradation.

Reto-o-Reto is part of the project, “Better Policy and Management Options for Pastoral lands; Assessing Trade-offs between Poverty Alleviation and Wildlife Conservation”, funded by the Belgium Government, the US National Science Foundation and the Department for International Development (DFID). This project takes an integrated research approach, linking ecological, land-use and social economic data, by synthesizing existing knowledge on agro-pastoral systems and filling knowledge gaps.

This brief is one of a series of policy and information briefs that explores issues related to the sustainable development of pastoral landscapes, improving the livelihoods of agro-pastoralists and also protecting wildlife species and landscape diversity.



Images: International Livestock Research Institute

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Reto-o-Reto

In the Maa language, “Reto-o-Reto” means “I help you, you help me.” A collaborative research programme of over 50 institutions, facilitated by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Reto-o-Reto is working in five pastoral regions in Kenya and Tanzania to support communities to develop more prosperous and sustainable futures.

Depending on local requests Reto-o-Reto community facilitators enable the Maasai communities in Kitengela, Amboseli and Mara in Kenya, and Tarangire-Simanjiro in Tanzania, to make better decisions on the use of their land and other resources to safeguard their future.

This is done through provision of better information and access to appropriate innovations and expertise.

Conservation in Kitengela:

keeping land open for people, livestock and wildlife

In Brief

Pastoralists can take most of the credit for the survival of savanna wildlife herds in Kenya until now, since herding livestock is usually compatible with wildlife. Wildlife tourism in turn is a top foreign exchange earner for the country. But changing land use and tenure arrangements threaten the existence of both the pastoral way of life and the large wildlife herds and migrations, particularly near growing cities and towns.

In Kitengela, south of Nairobi National Park, a consortium of community, government, private and other organizations is pioneering one approach to help both pastoralists and wildlife thrive. Under the Wildlife Conservation Lease Programme, The Wildlife Foundation pays pastoral families to lease their land. Families who participate may continue to graze livestock - but agree not to fence, develop, or sell their acreage. Strictly voluntary, the programme now leases 8,500 acres from 117 families; another 118 community members, with more than 17,000 acres, are waiting to join. The programme aims to lease and conserve 60,000 acres - enough to allow the seasonal migration of wildlife to and from Nairobi National Park.

Background

People and wildlife have lived together in East Africa since humans first evolved. Today, Kenya’s famed savanna wildlife owes its survival largely to the fact that Maasai communities keep livestock and respect wild animals. Maasai tradition does not include bushmeat, significant agriculture, or fencing of individual plots.

This wildlife is now the main draw for the 1.4 million visitors to Kenya each year. In many years, tourism is the nation’s top earner of foreign exchange, bringing in US\$ 560 million in 2004 and providing over 100,000 jobs.

But whether wildlife and wildlife-related earnings persist in the 21st century and beyond will depend largely on the continued good will of pastoral communities as well as policies on land use and tenure.



Wildlife and livestock grazing together

The Athi-Kaputiei Ecosystem

Even in wildlife-rich East Africa, the Athi-Kaputiei ecosystem stands out. A century ago, observers noted that Athi-Kaputiei featured the “most spectacular concentration of wildlife” in all of East Africa. The ecosystem still supports a long-distance migration of large numbers of wildlife - all the more remarkable since a mere fence separates the animals from burgeoning Nairobi.



Map showing Nairobi National Park and the dispersal plains. Arrows show the traditional wildlife migratory movements through the ecosystem

The Challenges

Today both the pastoralist life and ecosystem in the Athi-Kaputiei plains are under threat from changing land use and tenure.

- Formerly communal land is being subdivided into private plots, leading to the sale of individual properties, conversion to farmland, and fencing.
- A new Export Processing Zone has brought industrialization and urban development.
- Encroaching urbanization is raising the price of land dramatically, leading again to more subdivision and sales to outsiders.
- Quarries are being dug to provide building materials for the rapid development. They damage the environment, and create unsightly and unsafe pits; explosives crack bedrock, and create loud noise.
- As non-Maasai settle the area, poaching for bushmeat has increased.
- Crop farming in this area depletes and erodes the soil. After farmers move on, the land remains unusable by livestock or wildlife for some time.
- Because of privatization, subdivision and fencing, land for both cattle and wildlife is vanishing fast. The movements of both wildlife and livestock are increasingly constrained.

These changes severely threaten the livelihood of local Maasai, a group that has inhabited the region for hundreds of years. The changes have also caused major losses of wildlife; Kitengela area has seen a 70% loss in wildlife in the last 25 years.

An Innovative Response:

The Wildlife Conservation Lease Programme in Kitengela

Recognizing the value of the highly threatened Athi-Kaputiei ecosystem, a diverse group of partners is working to reverse these negative trends. The partnership is led by The Wildlife Foundation and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and supported by the Department of Resource Surveys and Remote Sensing (DRSRS), Friends of Nairobi National Park, Athi-River Mining, African Conservation Centre, African Wildlife Foundation, Olkejuado County Council, Kitengela Ilparakuo Landowners Association (KILA), and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI).

In the Kitengela community, the consortium has devised an innovative way to maintain open areas for livestock and wildlife, and at the same time improve residents' livelihoods.

Launched in 2000, the Wildlife Conservation Lease Programme (WCLP) encourages and helps pastoral landowners to:

1. retain ownership of their land
2. leave land open, uncultivated and unsubdivided
3. graze livestock sustainably
4. share both pasture and water among livestock and wildlife, and
5. allow free movement of livestock and wildlife.

For the foregone economic opportunities of fencing, selling, or farming their holdings, the programme pays landowners US\$4 per acre per year. For a household with an average of 100 acres of land, this translates to roughly KSh30,000 per year. This income supplements livestock income, helping families pay fees for modern necessities including secondary school and college.

Residents participate in the lease programme on a strictly voluntary basis. Many are eager to join, not only for the payments but because the program helps them continue the traditional way of life: raising livestock and sharing the land with wildlife.

The Wildlife Conservation Lease Programme started with two landowners and a combined 214 acres; it now includes 117 members and their holdings of 8,500 acres.

It is better for us to work to save these animals, because they came before us. Even the names of our lands remind us of this: 'The River of Lions,' 'Crocodile River,' and 'The Place of Zebras.' - Pushati, a Maasai elder from Kitengela

The Wildlife Foundation makes payments three times a year, timed to coincide with school openings, when school fees are due. Participants receive their funds in a public gathering attended by community and local leaders, Kenya Wildlife Service and other conservation partners. Thanks in part to community sensitization about women's roles, more women than men receive and control the lease income.



Meeting of a school which benefits from the lease programme

Lease payments play a significant role in participants' lives, protecting them from the impact of drought and helping them retain their livelihood. For instance, during the drought of 1999-2000, the Kitengela community lost more than half their collective livestock. During this period, income from the lease programme amounted to nearly 80 percent of household income for participants. This critical support enabled participants to continue to buy essentials and pay school fees. The WCLP also particularly benefits poorer livestock keepers, contributing significantly to their livelihoods.



Community meeting held to discuss the lease programme

Successes of the Lease Programme

Although the target area of 60,000 acres has yet to be achieved, the lease programme is proving popular. Currently 118 members of the community, with more than 17,000 acres, are waiting to join. In other words, the program is set to double in terms of participants, and triple in terms of acreage, over the 2004 numbers.

So far, conservation achievements of the lease programme include:

- More grazing area for livestock and wildlife dispersal.
- Lower grazing pressure on the land, allowing once eroded and degraded land to recover.
- Reduced human-wildlife conflict, since more open land is available.



Significant socio-economic results include:

- Increased support to livestock husbandry - which is the main livelihood of the community in the dispersal area.
- Substantially increased household income among participants.
- Higher secondary school and university enrollment, thanks partly to the increased income. Recently several young people whose school fees had been paid by the lease programme were admitted to public universities.
- Renewed sharing among community members of pastures, water and salt licks - a cooperation halted after privatization began.
- More favorable community attitudes toward wildlife conservation.
- Increased empowerment of women to manage household resources, since women receive most of the lease income. Decades of research show that income in the hands of women directly benefits families more than income controlled by men.

Map showing the areas currently under fence and the lease programme

In a vote of confidence for the WCLP, Kenya Wildlife Service has incorporated leasing as a community conservation tool in its new five-year management plan. It intends to use the method in key areas near other national parks.

Despite these successes, the trend of losing wildlife has not yet been reversed; programme participants agree that expansion of the programme is critical to reverse this loss of wildlife. Future efforts need to lead to the creation of an endowment fund alongside other conservation friendly income generating activities for sustainability.



Woman receiving a cheque from the lease programme