



MMWCA@10

VOICE OF THE MARA

8TH EDITION | JULY 2023

THE EVOLUTION OF A LANDSCAPE

A decade of Leading Community
Conservation in the Maasai Mara



PHOTO: FELIPE RODRIGUEZ.

VOICE OF THE MARA

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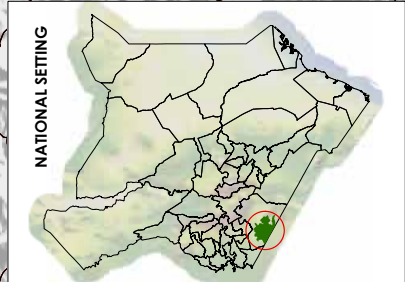
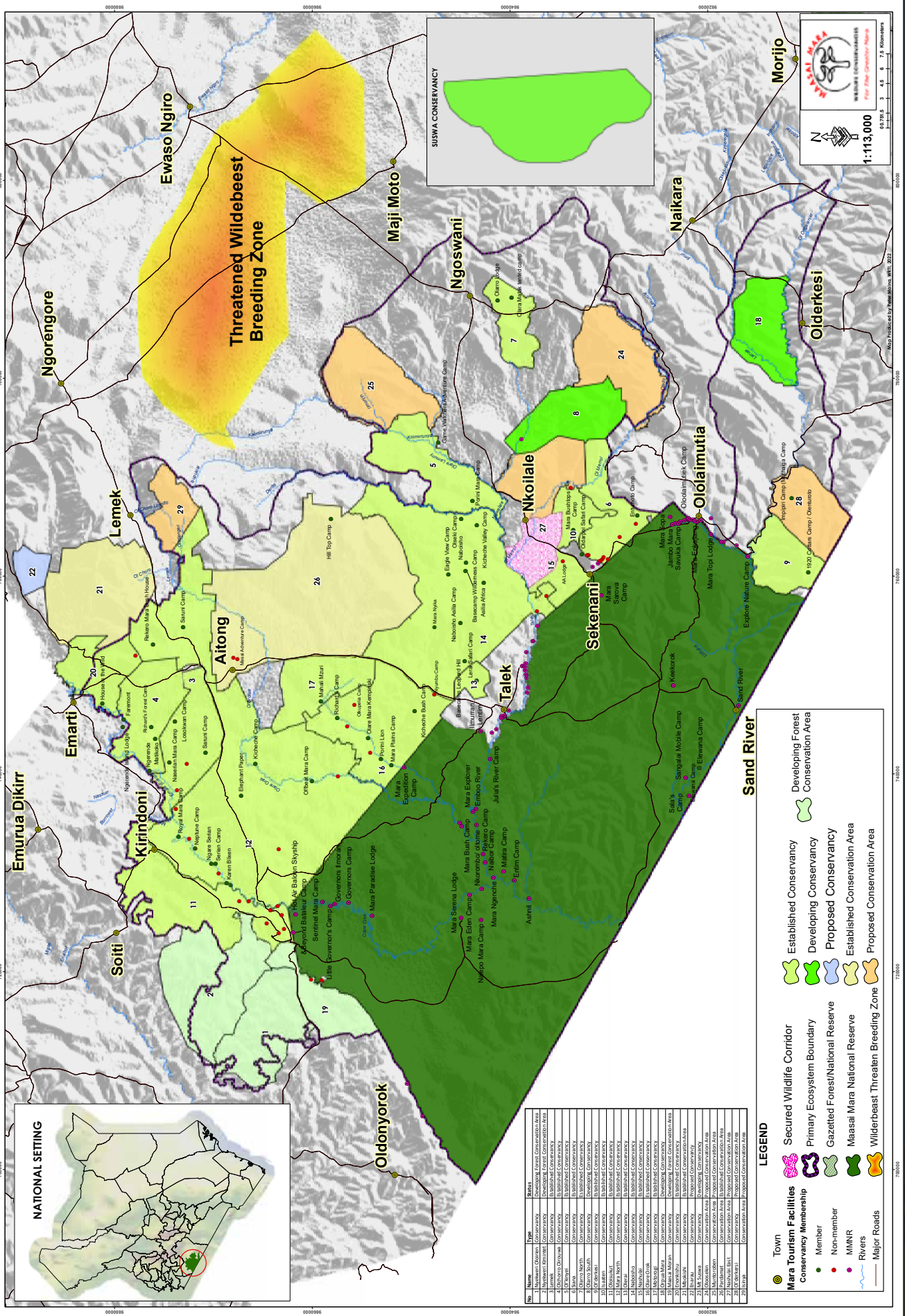
Versatile Photographers

DESIGN, LAYOUT & PRINT

Design Village

Publication of the Voice of the Mara 8th Edition is made possible by the support of the Maasai Landscape Conservation Fund.

MAASAI MARA ECOSYSTEM MAP 2022



1:113,000

 0 0.75 1.5 3 4.5 6 7.5 Kilometers

ID	NAME	TYPE	STATUS
1	Narok Forest	Conservancy	Developing Forest Conservation Area
2	Ngong'ong Forest	Conservancy	Developing Forest Conservation Area
3	Ngong'ong Forest	Conservancy	Developing Forest Conservation Area
4	Ngong'ong Forest	Conservancy	Developing Forest Conservation Area
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29	Ngong'ong Forest	Conservancy	Developing Forest Conservation Area
30	Ngong'ong Forest	Conservancy	Developing Forest Conservation Area

LEGEND

- Town
- Maasai Tourism Facilities
- Conservancy Membership
 - Member
 - Non-member
 - MMNR
- Rivers
- Major Roads
- Secured Wildlife Corridor
- Primary Ecosystem Boundary
- Gazetted Forest/National Reserve
- Maasai Mara National Reserve
- Wildebeest Threaten Breeding Zone
- Established Conservancy
- Developing Conservancy
- Proposed Conservancy
- Established Conservation Area
- Proposed Conservation Area
- Developing Forest Conservation Area

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EDITOR'S NOTE



We are glad you are reading this edition of the Voice of the Mara!

We turn ten later this year. Therefore, some of our stories will be reflective because we want to appreciate our journey to be better equipped for the next expedition. Please read an elaborate piece we did after speaking with one of MMWCA's founding board members, Allan Earnshaw. Also, see the reflections of our CEO Daniel Sopia on leading community conservation in the Mara, and look out for The Nature Conservancy Kenya's Director Munira Bashir's perspective of a fully grown organisation she handheld during its formative years. Our Tourism Partner, Svein Wilhelmsen, has also been taking stock of what's happening, and he has something to say from his observation tower.

But that is not all. This edition depicts an evolving Mara landscape, and we highlight some of the things we have managed to do over the years. We will also give you a little dose of culture, seeing we are at the centre of a cultural boiling point.

Happy reading!

Nadupoi.

Please send us your feedback on email at editor.vom@maraconservancies.org

CEO'S LETTER

Dear Partner and Friend,

It gives me great pleasure to introduce you to the 8th edition of our annual magazine, Voice of the Mara, which offers a glimpse of our journey over the last ten years. This edition allows us to reflect, appreciate what we have done, and dream of new possibilities.

From a nascent organisation of only two staff members, the Association's workforce has grown to 30 and counting. These 30 colleagues, as well as those that joined and left the organisation in the intervening period, have made immeasurable contributions towards the success of MMWCA and the landscape at large. Similarly, our annual budget has grown from USD 100,000 ten years ago to USD 6 million.

At the Association's establishment, we coordinated eight conservancies with a membership of 3,000 landowners, with 97,000 hectares under conservation. MMWCA's membership stands at 22 today, translating to 15,700 landowners, and the area under conservation has grown to 160,000 hectares.

Additionally, in the last ten years, we have moulded a conservation model that has allowed wildlife to thrive and benefit the community. We have cultivated healthy relationships and trust among players within and outside the Mara landscape.

These milestones would not have been possible without the commitment of the Maasai community, which continues to invest their valuable resource, land, in conservation, and the Tourism Partners, who work with landowners to develop premium tourism products that continue to drive business and employment in our landscape. We are grateful and remain optimistic for sustained collaboration in the years ahead. We thank our funding partners, the County Government of Narok and other government agencies, including the Kenya Wildlife Service and the Wildlife Research and Training Institute, for continued partnership. We thank organisations working with us in the Mara landscape with the aim of biodiversity conservation and the betterment of people. We thank you for your friendship and partnership for the period you have been with us for ten years.



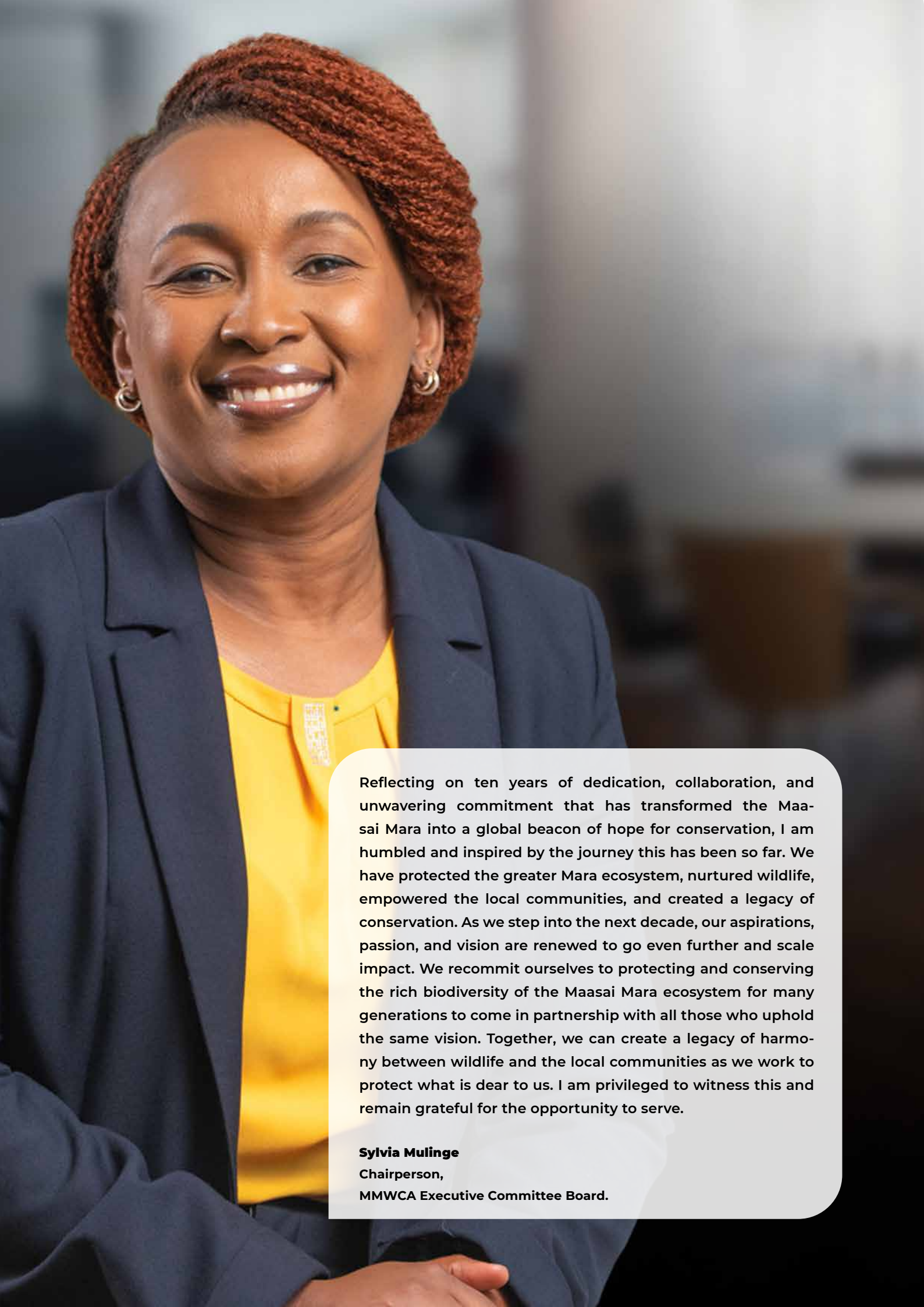
Importantly, we remain indebted to all those who began the good work that MMWCA has institutionalised; all those who conceived and incubated the idea of a regional association for the Maasai Mara.

As we begin this new phase, we ask you to continue walking with us. We aim to add 1,000 hectares to the existing area under conservation by 2030, and we want this addition to bring meaningful change in the lives of the people we serve.

I invite you to join us in celebrating a decade of leading community conservation in the Mara.

Ashe Oleng!

Ole Sophia.



Reflecting on ten years of dedication, collaboration, and unwavering commitment that has transformed the Maasai Mara into a global beacon of hope for conservation, I am humbled and inspired by the journey this has been so far. We have protected the greater Mara ecosystem, nurtured wildlife, empowered the local communities, and created a legacy of conservation. As we step into the next decade, our aspirations, passion, and vision are renewed to go even further and scale impact. We recommit ourselves to protecting and conserving the rich biodiversity of the Maasai Mara ecosystem for many generations to come in partnership with all those who uphold the same vision. Together, we can create a legacy of harmony between wildlife and the local communities as we work to protect what is dear to us. I am privileged to witness this and remain grateful for the opportunity to serve.

Sylvia Mulinge
Chairperson,
MMWCA Executive Committee Board.

MMWCA, in the last ten years, has provided a road map and a platform for the Communities of the Maasai Mara not just to realise the fruits of coming together but also the great economic value of partnerships in the utilisation of wildlife resources within their lands and the Greater Mara Ecosystem.

Jackson Ole Mpario
Vice Chairperson & Conservancies
Council Chairperson.



MARA CONSERVANCIES LEAD THE WAY IN BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

By Phoebe Nadupoi

Over 83% of wildlife in the Maasai Mara were found in community conservancies, according to a 2021 census by the Wildlife Research and Training Institute and the Kenya Wildlife Service.

The aerial census counted 15 large mammals, namely: wildebeest, common zebra, buffalo, impala, Thomson's gazelle, topi, Grant's gazelle, elephant, giraffe, eland, kongoni, warthog, waterbuck, Lesser Kudu, and ostrich.

The census report released in May 2022, for instance, indicates that nearly the entire population of wildebeest, found to be the most abundant mammal species, was recorded in community conservancies and dispersal areas comprising 76.0% and 23.0%, respectively. The report highlights a similar trend for the common zebra, eland, Coke's hartebeest and Thomson's gazelle.

The census results point to the vital role conservancies play in protecting biodiversity and the success of their efforts. But the road to the top has been long and winding.

False Start?

A cloud of uncertainty hung over the Mara in 1995 during the subdivision of Lemek Group Ranch. Community conservation bodies were few at the time but were at risk of dissolution as land management moved from a group to an individual for the first time. Several camps in the community land knew it was also a matter of time before they packed and left. And the conservation commu-

nity was equally worried that some stakeholders entertained the idea of fencing the Maasai Mara National Reserve because conservation in the community space was already dead anyway, as the subdivision would bring previous conservation efforts to nought. But Mara's problems were far from over as mismanagement, weak governance and conflict became entrenched in the organisations. Predictably, the Koyiaki-Lemek Wildlife Trust, Olchorro Wildlife Conservation and Management Association and Siana Wildlife Trust collapsed.

When the conservancies associations collapsed and group ranches subdivided into land units, tourism operators and conservation NGOs decried that the Mara was gone.

Luckily, the spell of doom that had momentarily enveloped the landscape lost its power as the Mara residents recalled they drew benefits from conservation; they just needed to visualise success outside of the collective membership. Kaelo further explains that it was not as difficult for the community to retrace its steps back to conservation because there was already a mindset that one could zone the land and leave some places open as they had taken part in land-use planning.

It is this idea that the community could benefit from conservation and that both people and wildlife would

be happy in the arrangement that fueled the reemergence of community conservation bodies, later christened conservancies in the Maasai Mara.

New Beginnings

Mara landowners did not want to remain down after the spectacular failure. They shook off the dust and started afresh. Olare Orok Conservancy was established in 2007 as stakeholders ceased the moment to set up conservancies and, at the same time, addressed the challenges faced by the collapsed entities. The landowners then set up Motorogi the following year with the support of Sir Richard Branson. Olare Orok and Motorogi later merged under one management, forming Olare Motorogi Conservancy. Mara Naboisho Conservancy is worth mentioning because its establishment borrowed from the best practices and lessons gleaned from earlier failures. Notably, the founders borrowed heavily from the winning paper of Ecological Brainstorming (2011), facilitated by Basecamp. Conservancies had grown to eight at Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association's establishment in 2013.

The existence of an umbrella body began bearing fruits as the number of conservancies grew exponentially from 2015. At the core of MMWCA's work is coordination and governance strengthening. MMWCA's CEO Daniel Sopia says the Association invests heavily in governance because it is foundational to the success of any organisation.

Win-Win Formula

The number of conservancies has since jumped from eight to 22 as of December 2022. Sopia observes that community conservancies are the key to success in conservation, but their success lies in making conservation count of the people.

“We exist to grow and strengthen Mara Conservancies for wildlife and livelihood improvement. We have a strong livelihood component because biodiversity can and will only thrive if people are happy.”

Conservancies are increasing every year, and so is the area under conservation. The growth will likely impact the numbers positively, but it is better to await the next census to know what the numbers say because data never lies.

“I am forever grateful my family joined Olare Orok Conservancy. My husband and I have managed to build a permanent house; we have taken our children to school and are doing business in Talek Town. All this has been made possible by the guaranteed income from the conservancy.”



REBECCA RAKWA
Landowner, Olare
Orok Conservancy.

“Conservancies are the only reason landowners have not sold or converted their land to other uses. We believe the land belongs to children and the generations after them. Our land has remained intact, secured and beneficial to us. It’s now a reality that living with wildlife is rewarding in many ways.”



MEIPONYI KETERE
Landowner,
Mara Naboisho
Conservancy.



THE MASTER PLAN: PAVING THE WAY FOR A SUSTAINABLE MAASAI MARA

By Sammy Leposo & Sianto Sikawa



The Maasai Mara National Reserve is a treasured national gem whose popularity straddles every corner of the globe. This magnificent landscape is intricately connected to a vast ecosystem that stretches from the Maasai Mau complex, which is the source of the Mara River, to Suswa and Loita vital migratory routes and Serengeti National Park, which is a southerly extension of the Mara, albeit across an international border.

For years, the county advocated for an all-encompassing management plan for the reserve and the entire ecosystem, with the adjoining conservancies forming an integral cog. After four decades of meticulous research and compilation, the plans have finally materialised, marking a milestone in the 75 years of dedicated community conservation efforts.

It is worth highlighting that previously overlooked areas, like Loita, get special attention. Loita plays a pivotal role as a wildlife corridor, contributing to the overall mammal population in this remarkable ecosystem.

The exponential growth of unmanaged tourism has presented numerous challenges to the Maasai Mara ecosystem. The rapid increase in population

and tourism has exerted immense pressure on the already limited land and other resources. The absence of a proper management framework has led to resource exploitation, unregulated and haphazard developments, and the emergence of unsustainable practices.

The lack of a sustainable management plan allowed unchecked developments to dot the landscape, depleting resources to accommodate expanding urban areas, agricultural practices, and grazing needs. Consequently, this depletion and negative media coverage have adversely affected the tourism product. The outcome has, in turn, dented the reserve's prestige and international reputation.

To address these pressing challenges, key stakeholders developed the Greater Maasai Mara Ecosystem Management Plan and the Maasai Mara Management Plan. The two policy documents emphasise exceptional resource values across categories such as biodiversity, scenic beauty, socio-cultural significance, and economic importance.

The Ecosystem Management Plan comprises five vital management programmes: natural resource conservation and management, tourism development and management, community livelihoods, institutional collaboration and governance, and research and knowledge management. On the other

hand, the Maasai Mara Management Plan encompasses four essential programmes: ecological management, tourism management, community outreach and partnership, and protected area operation. These programmes serve as the pillars of effective and sustainable management.

Implementing the Maasai Mara Management Plan aims to address these challenges head-on by providing a framework to guide management activities and achieve the desired future state for specific aspects of the National Reserve management. The comprehensive programmes outlined in the plans offer strategic directions and practical solutions to ensure the preservation and vitality of the Maasai Mara Ecosystem.

The Maasai Mara plans represent a significant milestone in the journey towards sustainable management and conservation. Through collaborative efforts, effective governance, and a steadfast commitment to sustainable practices, the Maasai Mara community can protect its natural heritage, promote responsible tourism, and secure a brighter future for the iconic East African gem. Indeed, with the enabling frameworks now available, we can address the challenges posed by unregulated growth and exploitation, ensuring that future generations can continue marvelling at the extraordinary beauty and wildlife of Maasai Mara.

Leposo is the Chief Officer for Tourism & Wildlife, County Government of Narok, and Sikawa the Assistant Director, Tourism & Wildlife, County Government of Narok.



Implementing the Maasai Mara Management Plan aims to address these challenges head-on by providing a framework to guide management activities and achieve the desired future state for specific aspects of the National Reserve management.

NAROK GOVERNOR APPOINTS MARA MANAGEMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION TEAM



The Governor of Narok County, HE Hon. Patrick Ole Ntu-tu, has appointed a 9-member implementation committee for the Greater Maasai Mara Ecosystem Management Plan. They include MMWCA's Conservancies Council Chair Jackson Ole Mpario, County Executive Committee Member of Tourism, Wildlife and Trade Johnson Ole Sipitiek and MMWCA's CEO Daniel Sopia.

The County Government and MMWCA launched the plan alongside the Maasai Mara National Reserve Management Plan and the Physical & Land Use Development Plan in March following their gazettelement by the Cabinet Secretary for Tourism, Wildlife and Heritage and Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Lands, Public Works, Housing and Urban Development, respectively.

The Greater Maasai Mara Ecosystem Management Plan provides a framework that guides activities within the ecosystem by outlining a zoning scheme and management actions to address threats to the ecosystem.

MARA'S MARKETING STRATEGY DEVELOPED

The Narok County Government and MMWCA will launch an integrated marketing communication strategy for the Maasai Mara in August 2023. The strategy seeks to enhance stakeholder synergy to improve collaboration in tourism and conservation interventions of the Maasai Mara, enhancing visibility and publicity of responsible tourism approaches among stakeholders and promoting the Maasai Mara ecosystem's unique offerings for increased tourist visits and conservation engagements all year round.

NEW PROGRAMMATIC APPROACH: INTEGRATING HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT WORK

The Association is implementing an integrated programme after signing an agreement with Palladium to implement the New Partnerships Initiative (NPI) EXPAND in Narok County. In this regard, MMWCA facilitates environmental integration in implementing the NPI EXPAND in Narok. Specifically, MMWCA is coordinating partners in the landscape to raise awareness of maternal health and family planning services.



Lilian Mutea of USAID during an NPI Expand stakeholder engagement session at MMWCA's Offices. PHOTO: Ian Leshan / MMWCA.





MMWCA THROUGH THE EYES OF LONGEST-SERVING STAFF

By Lemayian Ole Kereto

DANIEL MULI has been in the conservation space in the Maasai Mara for a long time. And when MMWCA was set up in late 2013, he crossed over to continue doing what he has mastered over the years. He currently serves as Senior Programmes Officer in charge of Governance. **MOSES LEMAYIAN** asked him a few questions about his journey with MMWCA over the last decade.

When did you join MMWCA, and what was your role?

I joined MMWCA on January 1, 2014, as a Project Manager for a project Mara North Conservancy contracted MMWCA to implement, funded by the Obel Family Foundation.

What necessitated the formation of MMWCA?

Conservancies needed a voice. At the time, eight conservancies were operating independently of each other. When Kenya enacted the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act in 2013, like-minded individuals, among them Dickson Ole Kaelo, Daniel Sopia, Dr Lars Lindkvist, and Francis Nkoitoi came together to form MMWCA in late 2013 as an association with the eight conservancies being members.

How has MMWCA grown, and what transformation has it undergone over the last decade?

Looking back, MMWCA has grown exponentially over the last ten years and ignited change in the Mara landscape benefitting member conservancies, landowners and tourism partners alike.

We started with eight conservancies and have almost tripled that number in the last ten years.

We started as two staff members at a desk at Mara North Conservancy; today, the team has grown to over thirty staff, boasting diverse expertise critical for this landscape with a fully-fledged office, systems and robust structures. We left Mara North Conservancy when the Obel Family Foundation assignment ended and moved to Nairobi and later to Narok Town. Three years ago, we moved all our operations to Mara Base, Aitong', where we serve our membership and the ecosystem.

In terms of funding, we began with a contractual assignment for Mara North Conservancy, funded by Obel Foundation. We then got assistance from Asilia Giving and later received substantial funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through The Nature Conservancy (TNC) under a programme called "Community Conservancies Seed Grant Program in Maasai Mara." We have since benefitted from funding from the Norwegian Agency for International Development, The Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education, The Liechtenstein Global Trust, Summa Foundation, Basecamp Explorer Foundation Kenya, The BAND Foundation, Kenya Wildlife Trust, Maliasili, Tusk Trust, WWF, Dyrepar-ken, Climate Justice and Resilience Fund, among others.

What for you does the future of MMWCA look like?

MMWCA's future is big, promising, and the world is ready for what the future holds for the organisation. Our member conservancies are approaching self-sustainability thanks to the governance restructuring undertaken by MMWCA. We are now moving into new sustainable and diversified avenues to fund conservation. Our relationship with the County Government of Narok is renewed and meaningful. This relationship has helped us better engage and plan the landscape with a unity of purpose.

Which opportunities have been made possible by MMWCA in the landscape?

MMWCA has surpassed the expectations set ten years ago. The Association has secured land for biodiversity conservation, improved conservancies' governance and



Daniel Ole Muli during a past event.

ignited women and youth empowerment. Today, we have women, youth and men working in conservation at all levels: from junior to management. When MMWCA started, Doris Nairesiae was the assistant programme manager of the Obel project. She transitioned to Olchorro Oirowua Conservancy, serving as the conservancy manager today. The Association has also helped to unlock employment opportunities which were a preserve for a few elites. Now the Maasai Mara community receives a share of the jobs available in camps, lodges and conservancies.

You were with MMWCA during the COVID pandemic. What was that like?

It could have been worse, but MMWCA cushioned conservancies from collapse when COVID-19 struck. The conser-

vancies could not sustain operations as revenue dried up. However, MMWCA, working with core partners, deployed a crisis mitigation strategy and raised funds to help keep conservancies afloat during the crisis period. The Association also worked with partners to unlock cheap loans to partially enable the tourism partners to meet their lease obligations.

Lemayian is MMWCA's Senior Communications Officer;
moses@maraconservancies.org

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR MARA CONSERVANCIES' MODEL

By MMWCA Comms Team

Aitong', Maasai Mara has played host to diverse delegations from near and far that seek to learn about the Mara Conservancies' model. The approach is rooted in the spirit of the Mara that recognises the role and place of the community in biodiversity conservation. As MMWCA and its membership commemorate the Association's 10th anniversary, we take you through remarkable milestones that have defined and refined the Mara Conservancies' model.

The Awakening

Paramount Chief Lerionka Ole Ntutu challenged the revenue collection on community land by the Narok County Council at the exclusion of the community in Court in the early 1990s. The outcome of the matter gave birth to the famous 19% revenue for the community. Although the implementation remains contentious, the idea that the community can accrue benefits from conservation made people realise that conservation was not a preserve of government.

Land Use Planning

Koyiaki-Lemek Wildlife Trust and Olchorro Wildlife Conservation and Management Association developed a land use zoning plan that was never approved as politics got in the way (the group ranches could not agree) but was im-

plemented to the letter. According to Dickson Kaelo, who served as the Koyiaki-Lemek manager, the development process was very consultative. Because the process had the community's buy-in, the landowners implemented the plan after the subdivision without thinking about it. This land use planning came from the work of the African Conservation Centre through Helen Gichohi in 1998, recommending land use planning in group ranches.

Conservation Benefits

The Associations unlocked income that went to communities for the first time at the household level—each landowner received Sh2,500 semi-annually. Kaelo further says Koyiaki-Lemek sponsored 420 students (most conservation leaders today). Additionally, according to Mara North Landowners' Committee Chair Francis Ole Nkoitoi, the Koyiaki-Lemek Trust had an arrangement with Tenwek Hospital that saw the hospital provide medical services for its members. Ole Nkoitoi says they paid an average of Sh30m per year. Other benefits included infrastructural facilities in the landscape, including dispensaries and boreholes. These benefits entrenched the belief that one could manage their land in a manner in which they could reap something from it.



DICKSON KAELO.

“When the conservancies associations collapsed and group ranches subdivided into land units, tourism operators and conservation NGOs decried that the Mara was gone. Many people think it was bad to have associations at that time, but I think it was a necessary precursor; if we didn't have Koyiaki-Lemek Trust, Olchoro Wildlife Association, and Siana Wildlife Trust, we wouldn't have had conservancies today.”

**~ Dickson Kaelo, CEO,
Kenya Wildlife
Conservancies Association.**

Subdivision of Land in Lemek and Collapse of Associations

The subdivision of land spelt doom as the community could not visualise success outside of the collective membership. Predictably, Koyiaki-Lemek Wildlife Trust, Olchorro Wildlife Conservation and Management Association and Siana Wildlife Trust did not survive beyond the subdivision of land. Mismanagement, weak governance and simmering conflict made the organisations degenerate into a dramatic anti-climax. And because Koyiaki-Lemek was already a towering leader, the collapse was dramatic. The Trust had three Landcruisers, an office and rangers trained by the Kenya Wildlife Service. So good was Koyiaki Lemek that it received delegations on learning visits from outside Kenya, including South Africa.

Re-emergence of Conservancies

The spectacular failure provided an opportunity to reflect and learn. But the Mara community was not done yet; they went to the drawing board. As Kaelo notes, a belief was already planted, and people knew they could benefit from conservation. All they needed to do was figure out the “how”. “Again, there was already a mindset that you could zone the land and leave some places open because of that process of creating a land use plan,” he adds.

The establishment of Olare Orok in 2007 marked a new beginning. The founders of the conservancy were keen

not just to set up a conservation body but also to address the challenges faced by the collapsed entities. Motorogi was established a year after with the support of Sir Richard Branson.

Basecamp Explorer Foundation Kenya facilitated an Ecological Brainstorming in 2011, focusing on the learnings from previous experiences. The best practices were implemented in Mara Naboisho. As such, Naboisho was the best version of what a conservancy needed to be at its establishment. The same learnings were implemented in other conservancies, including the successor of Koyiaki—Mara North Conservancy.

Establishment of MMWCA

The Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association was established in November 2013, with a membership of eight existing conservancies at the time. The Association institutionalised and consolidated individual efforts of people who worked tirelessly in the conservation space within and outside the Mara to ensure biodiversity is conserved and people are thriving.

The Association continues to help conservancies to strengthen their governance and innovate to meet emerging challenges and bring about the desired transformational change.



DOWN MEMORY LANE: THE EVOLUTION OF THE MARA THROUGH THE EYES OF A FOUNDING BOARD MEMBER

By Phoebe Nadupoi

ALLAN EARNSHAW has been in the Mara for a long time. As a safari tour guide, he studied the landscape and knew the hideouts of the cats and other majestic species his clients yearned to see. He knows most families, at least by name, can recognise many faces and has been a friend of quite a few. He has seen the Mara morph from a sparsely populated area with three manyattas to what it is today. He briefly chatted with **PHOEBE NADUPOI** on the journey to MMWCA's establishment.

The idea to set up a regional body

Several stakeholders had mulled over setting up a regional conservation body for the Maasai Mara for a while. Ad hoc efforts to set up the body culminated in a defining meeting at the InterContinental Ballroom in December 2012.

A few years earlier, Allan Earnshaw and others started looking at replicating an idea they implemented at the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) while serving on the insti-

tution's Board by creating a community area planning framework. During his tenure at the KWS Board, together with Dr Helen Gichohi and Dr Julius Kipngetich and a couple of other people, they introduced the concept of management plans, called initially "Protected Area Planning Framework" so that each park would have a management plan and that they would all come from a particular blueprint. He felt compelled to transfer the best practice to the community space. "We were like, why shouldn't we do the same in, for example, Olgulului-Ololorashi, which surrounds Amboseli?"



PHOTO: WILLIAM SANKAU / MMWCA.

While exploring the idea with different community clusters, he realised that other regions were organised and had platforms that represented them. The lack of an umbrella body for the Maasai Mara became pronounced.

"I used to attend meetings at the East African Wildlife Society or what was called the Kenya Wildlife Working Group, and it was at one of those meetings I called a couple of

rafikis from the Mara to say, look, everybody is organised here, Athi-Kapiti are talking, Laikipia people are talking, Northern Rangelands are talking, where is the Mara – the most important part of the country in terms of wildlife and, indeed, for tourism?" Allan was mainly concerned that, at that time, people were talking about potentially reopening trophy hunting or doing bird shooting. "I said, where is your voice in this situation?"

Other significant occurrences that accelerated the establishment of a Mara Conservancies association include an Ecological Brainstorming, better known as the EcoStorm meeting of July 2011, organised by the Basecamp Foundation. The meeting resolved to not only talk about the need for an umbrella body but also take concrete steps to actualise the idea. There was also the process of amending the wildlife law, and a review team was going around the country soliciting views, and there was no collective body that would speak for the Mara. Around the same time, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) took some people from KWS to Namibia to look at the conservancies' movement. A key observation from that visit was how the Namibians organised their conservancies and the existence of umbrella bodies. During the formation of regional conservation bodies in Kenya, there was an attempt to fashion the names of regional bodies around the Namibian ones.

In yet another coincidence, Allan happened to be the Vice Chair of the Kenya Land Conservation Trust as the quest to establish a regional body persisted. The Chair of the Trust was Prof Patricia Kameri-Mbote, while Dr Helen Gichohi, who had served on the KWS Board with Allan, was the President of the African Wildlife Foundation, where the Kenya Land Conservation Trust had its offices. Helen played a key role in developing the first land use plan for the Mara. This incidental convening provided another opportunity to pursue a common goal. Several other people at Kenya Land Conservation Trust were invested in conservation and land law. So when Allan asked if they could use the organisation to facilitate the registration of Mara's regional body, they were happy to help.

December 2012: InterContinental Ballroom

The Nature Conservancy had sponsored a meeting to help bring the various conservation stakeholders together for the all-important agenda.

"I happened to be the guy with the mic, and I said who is for it (the idea of setting up regional bodies) and who is against it?" Allan recalls. He further says that some rival groups were trying to set up simultaneously with the same idea but not as unifying. The meeting affirmed the need for umbrella bodies and established three organisations: Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association which would serve as the umbrella body for the regional bodies; the Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association (MMWCA) and the Taita Taveta Wildlife Conservancies Association.

“ I was on the phone with Dickson Kaelo to see if he could be the Mara representative, but he said he was engaged as he hadn't finished his masters. We had a few people in the meeting, including Francis Ole Nkoi-toi, and they unanimously picked Daniel Sophia for the Conservancies Council Chair position. ”

MMWCA's Formative Years

The pursuit of a regional body was fruitful. The Mara stakeholders finally had an umbrella body to coordinate and speak for their conservation organisations which had acquired a new name: conservancies.

But the founders were confronted with the reality Swahili people captured in the proverb: *Kuzaa si kazi, kazi ni kulea*. The new outfit, MMWCA, had no money or staff to run its operations. But the founders were determined to avoid getting stuck.

Asilia Camps and Lodges, a key MMWCA partner to date, raised the initial USD100,000 for the Association. "We paid up for the film crew to come and interview Dickson Kaelo on basic stuff like what a conservancy is, what MMWCA is, and what's going on," Allan explains. The product was a 5-minute film screened during the Go2Africa event, a tourism expo in Cape Town. "One way or another, people put money into it, and there was MMWCA's first cheque." The first Chair was Dr Lars Lindkvist of Basecamp Foundation, and he hired Helen Gibbons as the first Chief Executive Officer. The initial MMWCA board members came from existing conservancies.

At MMWCA's establishment, several conservancies were already in existence, including Olchorro-Oirowua, Siana, Olkinyei and Olderkesi. Other conservancies at the time were Olare Motorogi, Mara North and Naboisho. But the latter embodied the governance arrangement that is the hallmark of the Mara conservancies. This governance arrangement presents a 50:50 representation of landowners and tourism investors.

Over the years, the Association has helped establish and develop conservancies to work on governance to strengthen the institutions.



My great experience is growing up with most of the families and many of the people who are now running the Mara.

ALLAN EARNSHAW PHOTO: WILLIAM SANKAU / MMWCA.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

First Visit to the Maasai Mara

I visited the Maasai Mara for the first time in 1969 after high school with friends in a borrowed VW Kombi. We explored the Mara, crossed the border into the Serengeti, went to Ngorongoro, Lake Manyara and returned to Kenya via Amboseli.

Education

I studied Human Sciences at Oxford University in the early '70s.

Career

I worked as a professional safari guide for about 35 years, starting in 1974. I served on the Board of the Kenya Wildlife Service from 2005 to 2008 and continued with full-time conservation work after that.

What he loved about safari tour-guiding

What I liked in my safari life was getting to know a lot of our clients on an individual friendly basis, and showing Kenya in all its facets and all its glory was tremendous fun because it is such a highly diverse country.

Why Mara people christened Allan Earnshaw Mzee Kijiji

My great experience is growing up with most of the families and many of the people who are now running the Mara, whether it is the Sopias, Kaelos, Kisemeis and Soits, or whether it is Paramount Chief Ntutu, Senior Chief Koriata, Chief Seng'eny, again, all the group. I have known them all since I was a young man. The number of people was small enough that you knew everybody. Many people call me Mzee Kijiji, and they say that because their fathers knew me, and they know that my history is intertwined with theirs.

Why the Maasai Mara is Important

The lease arrangement is unique to the Mara, and admittedly, the Mara has the most iconic wildlife and the largest number of camps. Still, it was unique in its investor landowners' relationship. As investors, we needed long-term leases because if you want a quality product, you want to invest as much as possible. At the same time, we said these landowners might change their minds or renege, so we were as nervous and weary as the landowners. One of the most beautiful parts of the story is that the landowners and investors have come to trust each other. The underpinning strength of MMWCA is a solid business relationship between tourism investors and landowners.

Why Mara Conservancies Matter

From a wildlife perspective, even though the Mara National Reserve borders the Serengeti to the south, in itself, it is too small to act as a reservoir of wildlife if, for example, the areas around it, for argument's sake, would have been fenced off, were to be ploughed up, were to be turned into towns and cities. If the Reserve was not surrounded by conservancies with the same goals of protecting wildlife and encouraging tourism, it would be a disaster for the Reserve. Similarly, if the Reserve were to disappear, we as conservancies would be in trouble from the wildlife perspective because neither of us is big enough to support a significant wildlife population. And that is why I like the Greater Mara Ecosystem Management Plan concept because it looks at the surrounding areas as a single ecosystem; you see the same in, say, the Greater Kruger Ecosystem, not just Kruger National Park.

If the Reserve was not surrounded by conservancies with the same goals of protecting wildlife and encouraging tourism, it would be a disaster for the Reserve.

The most transformative impact of MMWCA in the last decade

The building of an administrative base in base at Aitong', Maasai Mara because, while the landowners have their deals within conservancies with the tourism partners, they need a voice and a representative who can carry out projects bigger than any conservancy and be able to negotiate and be held in high esteem by government authorities. I think MMWCA, both the executive, under Daniel Sopia and his team, and the successive boards have done an excellent job of projecting that united image at the county and national level. Again, seeing respect amongst our donors and partners grow makes me happy because it shows MMWCA is stable organisation. Not only has MMWCA established itself, but it is growing, changing and innovating.

Final Word

Conservation and living with wildlife are very dynamic, and we are adapting. I see our conservancies developing the most enduring model: human-wildlife and livestock coexistence.

INTERVIEW

MUNIRA ANYONGE BASHIR is Kenya's Programme Director for The Nature Conservancy. She is a thought leader who has enjoyed an illustrious career in conservation and served for a long time with the Kenya Wildlife Service. She was the Chief of the Party for the first major grant MMWCA received in 2015. She shares her reflections on the Association's journey over the years and ideas for the future with PHOEBE NADUPOI.

You started interacting with MMWCA when it was a crawling baby, and you held its hand when it was making its baby steps. How do you see the grown-up baby?

I remember when we were first invited to that region to come and support MMWCA; it was a very small outfit. There were two people. We only had a little financing as The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Still, we were able to partner with the Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association for six years under the support of USAID. And our role as TNC was to build the capacity of the Association. And from where I sit, we did a good job because I was the chief of party for that programme. So, our job was to put institutional systems for the Association in place so it could stand independently. We were able to build the capacity of MMWCA as a regional organisation, and as I speak in various forums, I speak of MMWCA as a model regional association.

MMWCA is a one-stop shop for the Mara ecosystem, Kenya's jewel for wildlife conservation. It's where we have wildebeest migration. And MMWCA has grown from two staff to over 20 staff. And these staff members have incredible skills to manage one of this country's most important ecosystems of wildlife conservation. One of the things that I admire about MMWCA is that community-led conservation is that it is investor-driven. The community owns the land, and the investors lease land from communities. And the communities can benefit from conservation right into their pockets at the household level. And this gives the community the right to say, "We need to protect wildlife because it's taking my children to school, and it's putting food on the table." I have seen other regions in the country coming to the Mara to learn. I remember I have also organised groups outside this country, for example, in Zambia, where people from the government and the community visited the Mara, and they came out with memories and ideas of what they could replicate in their country.

What was the most intriguing part of your engagement with the Association and Mara Conservancies?

During a reconnaissance trip to the Mara ahead of a biodiversity project we implemented with MMWCA, I saw a board full of men, and I was like, "Where are the wo-

men?" And I was clear that I wanted to see women in decision-making organs.



MUNIRA ANYONGE BASHIR PHOTO: THE NATURE CONSERVANCY.

You have been in the conservation space for a long time. In your view, what is the contribution of conservancies, and is there an aspect you directly attribute to MMWCA?

When we look at Kenya, wildlife benefits people because tourism is the second tourism earner for Kenya and contributes to the sustainable development goals because revenue earned from tourism goes into a central kitty. We see hospitals and water provision at the community level through a budget allocation.

But then, when you look at conservancies, Kenya is a signatory to the Higher Mission Coalition by putting 30% of the land to conservation. And the bigger part of that is under wildlife conservancies. And so, as tourism is the second foreign earner and the product is wildlife, and wildlife lives on people's land, those two are related. So, when I look at nature for people and people for nature, Kenya is one of those countries that pay a lot of attention to wildlife conservation, and it is one of the areas we need to develop for communities that are looking at wildlife in a way that benefits them.

Additionally, when you look at the 30% as a target, there is 8.2% under the national parks and game reserves, about 2.1% under protected forests, placing Kenya at about 21%, out of which conservancies cover 11% of the area under conservation according to 2016 statistics by the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association. We are now looking at the remaining 9% to achieve the target, and science shows that this 9% will come from conservancies. We are looking at wildlife corridors and dispersal areas.

Further, conservancies have expanded access to employment, especially in the tourism and hospitality industry.

You say that you support community conservation at TNC. What's community-led conservation?

For me, who has been in conservation for a long time, and my work has leaned towards working with communities, and when you look at Kenya, a lot of wildlife is outside the protected areas, that is, national parks and reserves and hosted on people's private land. And to appreciate wildlife, they need to benefit from it and own it. In Kenya, we say wildlife is a national heritage. What does that mean to that mama in the village or that pastoralist in the ecosystem, such as Amboseli?

The Nature Conservancy is involved in finding solutions around sustainable funding. Please tell us about it.

Working closely with the government, we asked ourselves, as TNC, yes, we have partnered with the government to put 30% of the land under conservation, and we asked ourselves how effectively we were managing the 21% we already have under conservation and how are communi-

ties benefitting. One of the major challenges we identified was sustainable financing, which manifested during the COVID crisis. We started thinking about putting a mechanism in place for sustainability and perpetuity so that we don't end up in a COVID-like crisis where conservancies could not meet their operation costs.

So, together with other like-minded partners under what we call the Enduring Earth (an alliance that seeks to support a healthy planet and provide long-term financing for conservation, economic diversification, and community prosperity), we are implementing what we call Project Finance for Permanence in other countries such as Costa Rica in Latin America. Costa Rica is an excellent example of the Project Finance for Permanence thriving, as they have a sustainable mechanism to fund communities conserving nature and biodiversity. In Africa, we are working with the governments of Kenya and Gabon to implement Project Finance for Permanence. This idea means we are considering conservation planning and covering the remaining 9% gap to attain the 30% target. The end product of Project Finance for Permanence is the establishment of a conservation trust fund, and this is a co-creation between the Government of Kenya, enduring Earth Partners, and communities. We have also brought the private sector on board because wildlife is a national heritage belonging to all Kenyans.

Besides sustainable financing, what else do we need to do to accelerate impact in the coming decade?

To accelerate impact, we must build grassroots organisations conserving nature in this country and where we have the people. Kenya's conservation industry is fairly organised: there is the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association at the national level and 12 regional bodies, including MMWCA, under it. I would love to see these organisations' capacity being up-scaled. If we have the ability at the community level because that is where we have the natural resources, our wildlife will thrive.

What would you love to see in the coming decade?

We have seen women in the Mara take up different leadership and management roles, but it is about more than just the positions. It is about sitting at the table and making decisions. It is about being there when budgets are being proposed and approved. When I first went to the Mara, little was happening in this regard. But I am glad that Mara now has a thriving women's forum, and we even have women sitting on the national conservancies' body board. But this is not enough; I would like to see a 50/50 representation because we are all equal and should have equal opportunity in all aspects of the development of this country.

OUR PARTNERS' VOICES



H.E. HON. PATRICK K. OLE NTUTU
Governor, County Government of Narok.

“ MMWCA plays a pivotal role as a key partner of the County Government of Narok, demonstrating its indispensable contribution to the preservation of the Greater Maasai Mara Ecosystem. Serving as a vital catalyst for development, the Association's commendable efforts have seamlessly complemented our endeavors to meet the socio-economic requirements of our community. We wholeheartedly pledge to fortify our partnership with MMWCA, aiming to amplify the influence of our collaboration for the ultimate well-being and prosperity of our constituents. ”

“ USAID is a proud partner and long-term supporter of MMWCA, and it's been a pleasure seeing the growth of MMWCA and its member conservancies. MMWCA has led the way in demonstrating what a successful partnership between landowners, tourism partners, and donors could and should look like. Its work is proof that we can all partner to meet our individual goals of biodiversity conservation, development, and economic growth. While not without challenges, MMWCA has grown from a small grassroots organisation to a global leader in conservation and one that is protecting a world-renowned biodiversity jewel. My hope is for MMWCA to continue expanding the amount of land under the conservancy model in ways that benefit women and girls and protect the most significant wildlife corridors, so not only the southern migration can be saved but someday the northern migration may return, too. The pressure is now on for MMWCA to sustain its success and protect the Mara over the long term. This would be a success that all of us can share in, so we hope for many more years of this productive partnership. ”



AURELIA MICKO
Former Director, Kenya & East Africa Environment Office, United States Agency for International Development (USAID).



WILSON ODHIAMBO
General Manager, Mahali Mzuri Management Ltd,
Virgin Limited Edition.

“Over the last ten years, we have seen MMWCA consolidating the Mara conservancies together, some of which existed before the establishment of the Association but were struggling. To me, MMWCA came in to adopt children without parents. Ten years later, we can see the unity and our activities better coordinated. Additionally, the tourism facilities within the Mara Conservancies have flourished because most have the leadership to look, especially into conservation and community matters. I think the most significant achievement for me over the last ten years has been managing the community for tourism operators. As a result, we are always at peace as tourism operators as we know there is a body that oversees the community issues, thereby giving us peace of mind; as investors, we feel that our investments are secure and we can invest more. So, there is a lot to celebrate; it’s been quite an incredible journey.”

“Women in the Mara landscape have seen change. MMWCA has brought about participatory leadership by empowering women to have their voices heard and influence decisions about natural resources management. Ten years ago, women did not know they had a seat at the table, but now they do; they are conservancy managers and landowners’ committee members, and they are planning the Mara landscape for their children and posterity.”



PENINNAH TAKI
Chairperson, National Conservancies Women Forum.



THORSTEN HUBER
*Project Manager, COVID-19 Emergency Support to
Conservancies in the Maasai Mara Region.*

Wildlife Conservancies in the Mara form critical buffer zones and wildlife corridors for the Maasai Mara/Serengeti ecosystem. They are a unique example of a successful conservation model designed for the well-being of wildlife and communities. MMWCA has made tremendous efforts to support the Mara Conservancies and the communities in the landscape. The German Cooperation, through GIZ, supported COVID crisis mitigation interventions in the Maasai Mara, and we are delighted that conservancies are thriving after such a challenging time. We applaud MMWCA for all it has achieved over the years, including its support for its member conservancies and communities in the landscape.

As MMWCA turns 10, we reflect on our partnership since 2016 and are proud to be associated with an organization that took on the vital role of championing the community-led conservation model in the Mara. We have seen MMWCA grow from having 12 member conservancies to 22 and counting. The team has not only grown in number but also in experience and expertise, wildlife is thriving, and thousands of Maasai families in the Mara are also benefitting economically and socially from the work done by MMWCA.

We look forward to supporting MMWCA as they continue registering more land under conservation, developing and implementing alternative livelihoods in the ecosystems through carbon credits, and attracting and retaining talent to push this work even further.

Wishing you success for the next 10 years!



OLIVER KARIUS
*Chief Executive Officer & Partner
Liechtenstein Global Trust Venture Philanthropy.*



HELPING YOUTH FIND FOOTING IN THE MARKETPLACE

By Moses Lemayian

The MMWCA internship programme is one of the avenues the Association invests in young people in the Maasai mara and beyond. The programme allows young graduates to have first-hand experience in the marketplace and hone their skills in a professional, engaging space.

The Association's Chief Administrative Officer Rosebell Abwonji (inset), says the internship programme is central

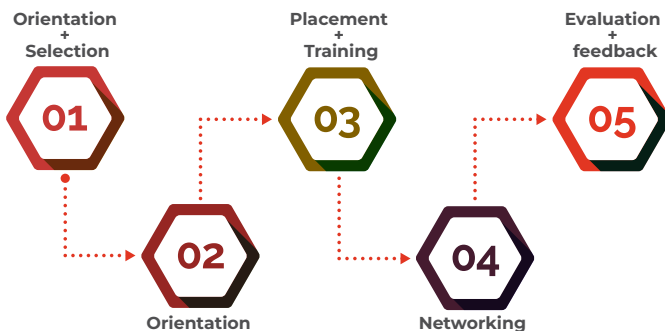


to sustainability as it nurtures talent to create leaders for the future who will propel the protection of natural resources for generations to come.

ROSEBELL ABWONJI.

The students are placed in different departments for six months, where they have opportunities to network and collaborate with other young conservationists from the region and other conservation organisations.

Programme Structure



The Association successfully ran an initial two-year internship programme that saw 20 interns work with MMWCA. But, the Association extended the scope in 2023 to cover conservancies with the support of the Swedish International Development Agency through the Integrated Management of Natural Resources Project. With the enhanced coverage, about 100 youths will benefit from the programme, with 44 interns currently serving at the conservancies and an additional six at MMWCA.

Working at MMWCA has been life-changing for me. I have made great career strides since joining the organisation four years ago. I am forever grateful my career was founded in a result-oriented, community-led and rooted organisation. The internship opportunity provided me with a platform to strive for better and contribute to the well-being of this (Mara) ecosystem.



SOYIAN KEIWUA
Finance Officer, MMWCA.



ALEX LEKISHON
Communications and Grants Assistant, Laikipia Conservancies Association.

“MMWCA internship programme shaped my writing and communication skills. I had a rewarding opportunity where I gained invaluable skills and specifically appreciated MMWCA’s role in communicating and documenting impact while driving change in the landscape I call home.”

“It’s a life-changing opportunity for youths in the landscape. The opportunity shaped my career. I learnt report writing and was equipped with financial management skills and project management – aspects that assisted me in getting gainful employment at Mara Lemek Conservancy as an administrator at a time when covid-19 ravaged jobs, and revenue from tourism came to a stop. By affording youths from Maasai Mara these opportunities, MMWCA continues to cement its role in influencing positive change and building a generation of talented individuals to take care of biodiversity and the people.”



DANIEL KIPEEN
Administrator, Mara Lemek Conservancy.



UNLOCKING ENTERPRISE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE MAASAI MARA

By Sharon Shetishoe

Women and youth got little direct benefit, specifically lease payment, from conservation. Lack of substantive benefits results from structural issues that see the title holders, the majority of them men, receive lease payments, with other family members benefiting indirectly. This outlook is slowly changing as women and youth embrace alternative revenue sources.

In Mara Siana Conservancy, Purity Letura leads the Sokodel Group, which makes sustainable sanitary towels. The group runs the “Mara Days for Girls”, an initiative to eliminate the stigma and limitations associated with menstruation so women and girls have improved health, education and livelihoods. Women and girls are empowered to pursue opportunities and achieve their goals by eradicating menstrual-related barriers. Purity says that they are in the business of turning periods into pathways.

“The next step is constructing a honey processing plant in the Olderkesi Conservancy and Sanitary Towel Tailoring workshop at Siana.”

Sokodel group is one of the formations that unite women to explore enterprise opportunities and learn. The Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association has facilitated the formation and adoption of the existing groups focusing on changing local merry-go-rounds to more high-end schemes that allow group members to access cheap and affordable, non-collateralised loans as an entry point in addressing barriers to financial resources. The Association offers technical support in building groups' structures, monitoring savings, loaning procedures and ensuring that group members utilise the loans they borrow in enterprise development. Eighteen groups have successfully undergone training, 10 have fully transitioned and are accessing loans, while eight are in the pipeline to gain from the credit services.

Mary Naing'isa, an official of Balanite Group in Aitong' says they are transacting business more professionally. “We started as temporary groups with no governance structure, no bank accounts and without financial prudence. We have since reorganised and gone through restructuring to access financial loans,” she concludes.

Enhanced skills have increased the enthusiasm and commitment of group members. For instance, Melua Kaurra from Olderkesi Conservancy notes, “I know my bee hives like I know my cattle. I know which bee hive has more honey and at what time of the year. Honey is our new milk. Camps and lodges buy from us our ready-made and packaged on-site. In our group, we resolved to save a percentage of the sales, plough back profits, and set aside a fund to ensure girls dependent on members attend school.”

The Association's programme to train women seeks to empower women economically and bridge a gender gap occasioned by the land tenure system. Few women receive direct lease payments as title deeds are registered under men. MMWCA's capacity building is designed for women groups who engage in various nature-based enterprises in the Maasai Mara. The training exposes the groups and individual women to run profit-making businesses through business identification and positioning, development of business plans, and budgeting by enhancing knowledge on savings, product marketing and packaging. The programme equips women with start-up kits that help increase productivity and hence improve returns. In Olderkesi Conservancy, Ositetei, and Oltulelei Beekeeping enterprises, run solely by women groups at Olderkesi Conservancy, have enabled the women from the border conservancy to earn profits from bee-keeping.

In addition, MMWCA collaborates with the National and County Governments to build referrals and linkages pathways. This partnership has aided the groups to benefit from the National Women Enterprise Fund, Uwezo Fund, Youth Fund and National Government Affirmative Action Fund. Today, five women groups have successfully accessed loans from the Women Enterprise Fund. The



Noormeshuki Kereto, Rose Sairowua and Helen Schutte of Naboisho Camp hold Mara's largest Enkarewa. Photo: Asilia/Maa Trust.

loans are going into internal group loaning mechanisms following the Village Savings and Loaning methodology widely trained on.

“Since the introduction of Village Savings and Loaning Associations to our groups by MMWCA, we have realised better financial management, improved creditworthiness and eased access to facilities from banks and government institutions. Closely monitoring our finances has reduced over-dependency; we are now creditworthy and responsible for the affairs of our group and our businesses,” says Manuela Leparmarai.

Manuela resides in Endotoo Village and is a Japan B Women Group member. She runs a beauty and cosmetic business in Aitong’.

The Association now seeks to scale these interventions in the Mara, following the successful implementation in a few conservancies. It is encouraging to see men support women to reach their full potential. We are eradicating some cultural barriers that sidelined women and girls.

Sharon is MMWCA's Gender and Enterprise Officer
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SECURING THE FUTURE THROUGH YOUTH TRAINING

By Nemasira Sairowua

Heads often turn when Charity Lemein drives by in her safari Toyota Landcruiser. Sighting a female safari guide is a rarity. Well, not that much anymore, but it is still uncommon. Charity is one of the seven safari guides working for the Ishara Luxury Camp in the Maasai Mara.

Charity, who says she proudly serves as a guide, has been in the field for six years. “I was fortunate to get a scholarship from the Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association to study safari guiding at Koyiaki Guiding School in 2018 after high school.” She completed her bronze-level guiding course. She further explains that the scholarship allowed her to carve out her path in the male-dominated field of tour guiding and discover her true passion—wildlife. “I can proudly say I have the best job in the world,” she enthuses.

Charity now boasts of being among an elite group of female guides in the Mara region, bringing transformational change. Charity says she trains others on wildlife conservation, sustainable travel, habitat protection and restoration. “I am a devoted mother of two beautiful children and a breadwinner to many, especially my family,” she adds.

Charity is among 2,257 beneficiaries (1,689 female) of a four-year youth empowerment programme called the Mara Vocational Training Programme MMWCA rolled out

in 2018. The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education funded the initiative through Basecamp Explorer Foundation Kenya. The programme sought to enhance the employability of the youth, especially women. In this regard, MMWCA partnered with the Narok West Technical Training Institute, Mara Training Centre, Mara Discovery Centre, Koyiaki Guiding School, Karen Blixen Cooking School, The Maa Trust and Maasai Mara University to realise the programme’s objective.

The programme support went beyond educational grants to cover curriculum development and certification for partner institutions, strategic planning and governance, sustainable financing, capacity building for trainers, course delivery and project management, and monitoring and evaluation.

The programme has increased the number of local youths employed in the tourism sector, which is significant because youth employment at the Maasai Mara reduces overreliance on land leases from conservancies and pressure to convert land uses. Young people currently constitute most of the Mara Conservancies and MMWCA workforce.

Nemasira is MMWCA’s Senior Grants Officer
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CHARITY LEMEIN
Safari Guide.

ADDRESSING GENDER DIVIDE THROUGH POLICY AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

By MMWCA Comms Team

The membership of landowners committees, critical conservancies governing organs, for Mara Conservancies were all men. Interestingly, it was a normal thing because, in any case, men owned the land as the titles were in their names. They were thereby perturbed when the push for women's inclusion started.

The Association had an uphill task of persuading the men why women needed to sit on the committees and preparing women to rise to the leadership role. It was particularly challenging for the existing conservancies with committees, as including women meant reconstituting the membership or altering the committees. The Association began sensitisation of the community and later specific training for the appointed women leaders.

The Association has successfully helped conservancies achieve the two-third gender rule, with 90 women serving in various landowners' committees across the conservancies. But, as MMWCA's Chief Programmes Officer Eric Reson notes, having women on the committees was not enough, "even if women were recruited into the committees, they still had a lot of capacity issues because they could not speak before the men, hence still disadvantaged even if they sat on the boards." The Association set up a Mara Women's Forum to serve as a platform for the capacity-building of women leaders.



ERIC OLE RESON.

Women leaders have advocated for the employment of female rangers and equitable distribution of bursaries.



ANGELA PASWA.

There was, therefore, an urgent need to build their capacity to engage and make decisions. The Association tailored programmes to address this challenge, and the effort to make women's voices count continues. However, there has been some success in this regard: "Women leaders have advocated for the employment of female rangers and equitable distribution of bursaries," says MMWCA's Senior Gender Officer Angela Paswa.

Eric also notes a lack of a mechanism for incorporating women in leadership. "Nothing in the constitution or articles of association of the conservancies or the trust deed addresses women's representation, and we are simply invoking the two-third gender principle."

Eric explains that the constitutions of conservancies defined landowners as people with title deeds. So the first intervention was to find a way of ensuring that women are also described as landowners.

"We started with the conservancies we have restructured to define who a landowner is, and the spouse of a landowner was included in the definition of a landowner. Effectively, the spouses of the landowners have members of the conservancies," posits Eric.

Women will henceforth participate in the annual general meetings of the conservancies and legitimately be represented not by appointment but by right because the specific conservancy's constitution gives them that right.

Restructuring the Women's Forum

With the new arrangement recognising women as landowners, the Mara Women's Forum will be registered as a trust. It will also transform from an exclusive capacity-building forum for women leaders to cover all the women landowners (including the spouses of males who hold titles).

The Association will help conservancies to set up women's caucuses in the conservancies. The women's

caucuses will have elections at the conservancy and cluster levels and hold annual general meetings.

The MMWCA's Constitution now requires that at least of the three cluster representatives should be a woman. Further, the Women's Forum Chairperson sits on MMWCA's Executive Committee.





WHY MAASAI MARA REMAINS A SIGNIFICANT CULTURAL AND WILDLIFE HUB

By Tiwaine Ole Nchoko

In September 2016, while attending the Global Walk for Elephants and Rhinos in Talek, Maasai Mara, an old man rose to speak during the lunch and speeches session that followed the trek. He thanked the walk organisers for doing what he said the locals had done for as long as he could remember; wildlife conservation. That got me thinking. Whereas government agencies have been at the forefront of wildlife conservation, the role played by the local community cannot be gainsaid. The history of Maasai-wildlife coexistence is long, largely undocumented, and seldom discussed. Long before Maasai Mara National Reserve was established as a wildlife sanctuary in 1961, the local community had lived in harmony with the wildlife for years. The idea of coexistence may sound like a contradiction due to the pastoralist and nomadic lifestyle of the Maasai. The herbivores and browsers in the wild compete for pasture with cattle, while the carnivores prey upon them when a chance arises. Even in cases where the local community takes up crop farming, and some in the Mara landscape have tried, the threat of decimation by free-moving wildlife is real. All these scenarios constitute a complex, potentially toxic relationship between wildlife and the community living in conservation areas. Maasai Mara National Reserve and the adjoining conservancies tell a different story.

The harmonious relationship between the Maasai and wildlife is historical and laden with cultural anecdotes. As a general rule, Maasai people did not eat game meat; most still don't. As such, a Maasai man has little or no motivation to kill a wild animal. The only cultural practice that involved killing wild animals was one called Olamayio, a more adventurous than strictly obligatory step in the life of a young Maasai man, involving the hunting and killing of lions for nothing more than their mane and the bragging rights that came with it. In song and chants, members of an age set paid glowing tribute to their compatriots who speared and killed lions. The community limited the casual practice to the warrior period occurring roughly every decade, during which it moulded age sets. Olamayio, as we know it, ended abruptly when go-

vernment laws and policies became better known to the populace, and conservation, as we know it today, began taking root among the Maasai people.



The Writer Photo: Versatile Photographers / MMWCA.



Sights of the Ilmeirishi Ageset members in procession to Emanyatta oo Lorikan (establishment of seats) during the Olng'esher Ceremony of 2020 at Nchurra e Abori, Narok County. Olng'esher is a rite of passage from the warrior stage to junior elders. Photo: Tiwaine Ole Nchoko.

But, the most exciting aspect of the relationship between the Maasai people and wildlife is the identification of clans by totems. Among the Purko, who comprise most of the community living around Maasai Mara, each of its five clans associates with a wild animal as a totem. For this article, we will take the example of the Iltaarosero clan, whose totem is a hyena. Legend has it that the clan's father, Losero, was born a twin. His mother left him in the forest where she had delivered and took home the other twin. When she reported leaving the baby in the forest, elders dispatched a search party. After a day of difficulty searching every inch of the forest, the search party found the baby under the care of a hyena. And so the baby was named Losero because he had been lost in "osero" (thicket), and the hyena became the clan's totem. To date, the clan is called Iltaarosero, borrowing its name from "Losero".

As far as the circumcision of boys went, the circumciser was a man called "Oltorroboni," a demonym for a largely hunter group of people whose assimilation by the Maasai we will not delve into here. On the morning after a boy or boys had faced Oltorroboni and not twitched a nerve, they would be served a mixture of milk and blood as their first meal. In the case of a few families whose bloodline does not sit well with common rituals, their sons were taken for circumcision at Oltorroboni's home or one belonging to his relations, and instead of the mixture of milk and blood, they would be served a wild animal's steak, mostly a zebra's for that was the favourite of the Iltorrobo people. When Iltorrobo stopped killing wild animals and started drawing benefits that went into their bank accounts instead of their stomachs, they improvised a more ecologically sound alternative for the boys who went to their ho-

mesteads for the circumcision rites. They started feeding them honey for that little but symbolic meal, and mother nature has been grateful for their ingenuity.

There is a long-running joke among the Maasai that long ago, gazelles, buffaloes, and zebras belonged to women. Gazelles were the equivalent of goats, buffaloes the equivalent of cows, and zebras were the women's beasts of burden. One day there was a feast in the village, and all women were so engrossed in it that they forgot about their earthly possessions. That is how their animals ran to the forest, never to be domesticated again.

Today, the animals remain in the wild. But they are a source of lease fees for men and women. The revenue from wildlife goes into bursary kitties and public infrastructure such as schools and dispensaries. The Maasai, on their part, have never stopped caring for the wild animal. Save for a few isolated cases when wild cats have mauled a sheep or a cow and anger preceded the locals to take revenge, it has been a cordial relationship. In the few instances when wild animals have visited their former homes for a diet change, their previous owners have known better than to kill them. They now file reports of any such attacks, and the leadership of the conservancies has and continues to improve the mechanisms by which consolation is paid to the affected pastoralists, hence sustaining, even strengthening the conservation model and watering the ever-blossoming relationship between man and beast.

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THE CALENDAR

There are three main seasons, namely the long rains, the season of drizzles and the short rains. Each month within the seasons is named after the main expectation of the period as follows:

The Long Rains — Nkokua

1. **Oladalu** The hot dry sunny month.
2. **Arat** The month of scarcity when slight rain might fall and cause scattered pools of water in valleys.
3. **Oenioing'ok** Bulls become fierce and drive cattle home during the day. They have to be tied and left at home.
4. **Olodoyorie** Nkokua – A very wet month. In the night the little cluster of stars known as Plough—Nkokua—is visible.

This leads us to the next season, the period of drizzles, the mid-year season.

The Drizzling Season—Oloirujuruj

5. **Oloilepunye** Nkokua—It is still wet but the rains are abating.
6. **Kujorok** The whole countryside is beautifully green and the pasture lands are likened to a hairy caterpillar.
7. **Morusasin** There might be hail if it rains, but the hailstones are very small.
8. **Oloiborrare** Pools of water become very clear.

The Short Rains—Oltumuret

9. **Kushin** Little white and black birds, which feed in the midst of cattle, appear.
10. **Olgisan** Rain falls in highland areas.
11. **Pushuka** Certain herbs ripen, many trees shed their leaves and flowers bloom.
12. **Ntung'us** This is the end of the year.

Each month has thirty days, divided into fifteen “bright” ones and fifteen “dark” ones. The eighth day of each half is known as “the day of changing” since it is the middle day of each half.

Excerpt from *The Maasai* by S.S. Sankan (pp.64-66). *The Maasai* is the English translation of *Intepen E Maasai* by the same author.

Proverb

Erruash olenkaina enaimurruai (Maa)

An elephant can be impeded by grass. (English)

Meaning: Do not overlook small things because they can easily bring you down.

FROM MY OBSERVATION TOWER: REFLECTIONS OF A TOURISM INVESTOR

Pardamat residents call him Oloishorua because they have known him as a generous giver. At the same time, the Loita named him after the Maasai spiritual leader – Oloiboni – Mokombo, who hails from Loita because of his close association and friendship with Oloiboni. Oloishorua Mokombo, whose official documents read **SVEIN WILHELMSSEN**, came to Kenya backpacking with his friends 41 years ago. Fell in love with the Maasai Mara and promised himself to return. He came back in 1996, but this time, he lingered. He shares his thoughts with PHOEBE NADUPOI on why he stayed and much more.

How did you end up in the conservation space?

Like so many people I have met, it is pretty emotional; you come to this part of the world and are captured by it – I mean, the wildlife, the people and the nature. I was here for the first time in 1982, quite a long time ago, kind of backpacking in Africa, and I always remembered it. Then I was back in 1996 with my oldest daughter when she was ten. I befriended the late Mzee Ole Taek in Talek village, and he became a partner, and we founded Basecamp on New Year's Eve in 1997. So, it has been 25 years.

What did you seek to achieve—did you have an end in mind?

Not at that time. I was thinking about how we define ourselves at that moment, and we defined three core values: we want to be passionate about what we are doing, we are reliable, and we want to be fair. And if you think about the first one, we have been driven by passion. So instead of defining a strategic end, it came alive as we moved on.

But, of course, in the early days, it was about setting up a showcase, Basecamp as a model, but showcasing on a small scale. It was the first gold-rated camp in Kenya by the Eco-Tourism Society of Kenya.

As we all know, the big game-changer was the privatisation of land in the Mara, which threatened the whole ecosystem because, as you know, people are entitled to do with their land as they like. Still, it also held the clue to sustaining it because you could enter into lease agreements. So we were very much a part of that early movement. In our case, we managed five cabins next to Koyiaki Guiding School, inside what is now Naboisho; it gave us a foothold to becoming a partner.

So, our first big endeavour together with Dickson Kaelo, Mzee Ole Kereto and Mzee Ole Soit and other leaders was



SVEIN WILHELMSSEN.

to be instrumental in setting up Mara Naboisho. And that conservancy was standing on the shoulders of other successes because there were other conservancies before us, and we needed to build each other. You cannot see one conservancy as a success; it was a movement. But, in all fairness, the most significant contribution for Naboisho was 15-year leases which was a big increase because, before the establishment of Naboisho, it was usually up to five years, so the new leases signified the Maasai started thinking long-term in terms of committing land for conservation of wildlife. Secondly, we did some good things on the governance structure; equal representation between the tourism investors, landowners, and an independent chair. And thirdly, we also contributed to developing the controlled grazing plan for cattle inside the conservancy. There were elements that Naboisho added to the (conservancy) movement, which was very important; it was, in all modesty, awarded the best-managed community conservancy in Africa by Responsible Travel in 2016. So, we got this recognition, but one has to look at it as a contribution to the wider movement.

The Basecamp concept I founded in 1997 always had two legs: one was the responsible tourism operations with 12 camps today as Saruni Basecamp after we joined forces with Riccardo Orizios of Saruni Camps in 2021. Ten of these camps are in four conservancies in the Mara—Naboisho, Pardamat, Lemek and Mara North.

The other leg is Basecamp Explorer Foundation, and we contribute at the broader ecosystem level focusing on new conservancies MMWCA initiates and leads. The support could be setting up the legal structures, as we have now done in Oloisukut and Nyekweri, or it could be initial grant funding for the initial period of leases. It could also be support for rangers' salaries or small infrastructure needs and livelihood support.

You have been in the Mara landscape for over 20 years, seen the establishment of conservancies, their umbrella body – Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association (MMWCA) – and witnessed their growth. What do you consider an outstanding achievement of MMWCA?

MMWCA, with all its members, is an enormous success. It is not only a success for Kenya but Africa and beyond. To have established a very complex set-up within a short period with private ownership of land and work on an ecosystem level, benefitting not only a few people and not only the landowners, is extremely difficult. And it is a complex legal setting with all these dynamics. So, it is an extraordinary success, and one should always remember that despite the shortcomings and issues here and there, we are underfunded and running out of the wall down the

hill. The success should always inspire us: the landscape secured is more than 1,600 KM², and there are more than 15,000 landowners in 10 years. And the Maasais are investing for the long-term in this model and on behalf of the next generation. And for now, about five conservancies are waiting to join the Association.

Considering this model, the level of leases, and the concept of controlled cattle grazing inside the conservancies, I am convinced we have done something right; otherwise, people would not have signed up voluntarily.

In addition, success is the global showcase of grassroots mass mobilisation for people, nature and wildlife.

The second aspect is the level of fundraising that was delivered while building up from scratch. We are not a professional fundraising organisation where you bring the best fundraisers on the planet, this is done bottom up, and it is a tricky game. We have some of the best donors in the world supporting it, so fundraising has been a great achievement. The management of the COVID crisis was extraordinary. The glue was tested between the tourism partners, landowners, MMWCA, and donors—a huge success story. The partnership with the national and Narok County Governments is gradually growing; I think the newly gazetted management plan and the memorandum of understanding are part of the big success story. So, this success story is layered; it has interlinked levels because you cannot do this in isolation from the Kenyan authorities. But the core of the whole thing is the partnership between the tourism partners and landowners. If that trust is not taken care of and continuously built, it will not work. So we should not forget that this is a sustainable business case. We have close to 50 tourism investors in all these conservancies working with landowners. We are not a typical development project; I call it coming together—naboisho.

What was the Mara space like before the creation of conservancies and the establishment of MMWCA?

First, the type of tourism was colonial, the guides were in Khaki uniform, by and large, everybody, and then there were fewer Maasais and more people from other parts of the country. Nothing wrong with that, but it didn't have the feel of being community or looked community-based. I remember we started recruiting only the Maasais and had them wear their traditional clothing back in 1997. We had Big Moses Saiyialel and Tonkei Ole Taek. That was a significant change.

The second significant change was population pressure, which now is entirely different, as illustrated by all the



fences we have been able to pull down. Lastly, from a tourism point of view, wildlife was limited to the National Reserve, but today we have an unmatched, very exclusive product and wildlife experience in all these conservancies. And that didn't exist. If you take the case of Naboisho, in 2010, when it was first signed up, it wasn't a fantastic wildlife area because land use and management were poor. So, converting these areas into supreme wildlife spaces is a huge change.

You have done incredible things in this landscape. What is success to you?

Success means standing in front of the first 40 students with their principal, Morris Nabaala and seeing the shiny eyes of the students who have just enrolled at the Wildlife Tourism College of the Maasai Mara, seeing their enthusiasm and belief in themselves and the future.

Success is after a challenging process with Lemek Conservancy, hearing the Board led by Saning'o Ole Koriata say they are delighted with this partnership with me and glad to go forward together. Landowners trust and want to work with us, which is a success.

Success is, and it happened to me only a couple of months ago; a guest walking to me and saying, "I am taken by this experience that I have included your foundation in my will. When I pass away, you will be one of the beneficiaries".

Success is when the key donors we depend on for expansion say, "This is well done, and we will increase our support and the duration of our help.

What has made you stay in Mara for that long?

It's wildlife because it would not be about social issues only if I chose to work here. The beauty of African wildlife, the large mammals, but what I also find encouraging is that the politicians and the general public are starting to appreciate what the scientists have said for a long time that you can't solve the nature crisis and the climate crisis if you keep on destroying nature because nature is our best vehicle to reduce the enormous negative effects of climate change. Nature still absorbs 50% of human-made carbon (credits) emissions. So, if you destroy nature, you can't replace it. There is no technology; there is no compensation scheme; forget it. The most efficient way of

solving the climate crisis and temperature increase is to conserve nature, and when you preserve nature, wildlife thrives. All these conservancies are proof of this. But I am also intrigued by the Maasai culture, the myth, and the history.

On top of that, I am increasingly curious, interested and motivated by seeing the transition the community is going through. Because typically, when you have to go through such a rapid transition in the culture, it goes wrong. Often you are left with a few spokespersons, but the major population in a strong culture somehow evaporates. So, the core part of the culture is gradually destroyed. Most of the population still observes the Maasai core values and wants to take ownership. To be an observer and, hopefully, a supporter at some level of that transition is extremely interesting.

The biggest challenges include youth unemployment, gender issues and climate change. Also, from my observation tower, I think the level of monetisation of the landscape through individual leases—money does something to people; money does something to the culture. It makes people move away from collective thinking; it becomes more about “me and myself”.

Conservancies are an instrument for keeping a core part of the Maasai culture, particularly the aspect of thinking collectively. There is no more collective grazing, but you can still keep the core part of your culture through the conservancy because you would have to have about 80%

of the landowners agree to form a conservancy.

What's next for Svein? Any more “mountains” to conquer?

If I limit my answer to the Mara, then it would be the buffer zones. All the core conservancies need buffer zones, and climate change will increase that need because wildlife will need a wider area for food and water. So, we will be supporting MMWCA in implementing the Greater Maasai Mara Ecosystem Management Plan.

Secondly, although this would be a decent hill, not a mountain, I will focus on putting the newly-established Wildlife Tourism College of the Maasai Mara on the world stage.

Is retiring from active conservation something that has crossed your mind—will you hang your boots anytime soon?

No. And it's simple for me; when you have found your purpose, then retire from what? You must re-invent yourself if you are in good health and feel relevant. My mother passed 100 years, and I told her I would beat her. I am 69, so I still have 40 years to go.

Anything else you would like to say?

The Mara Conservancies' model has given the local landowners a tool to sustain their land ownership. We want to support this, believing local landownership is one key element for the long-term conservation of nature & wildlife.



PHOTO: FELIPE RODRIGUEZ.

MARA TOURISM COLLEGE OPENS THE DOOR TO FIRST COHORT

By Morris Nabaala

The newly established Wildlife Tourism College of Maasai Mara (WTC) welcomed its first 40 students to its campus at Pardamat Conservation Area on May 4, 2023. The students are pursuing various academic programmes, including tour guiding, front office, housekeeping, food and beverage services and wildlife management.

“While growing up at Mararianta, I wanted to join the Mara Safari Guides space. I am proud to be in the first class of WTC. Here, I will make my time count and live my dream.”



ABIGAEI KETUYIO
Student.

An elated Abigael Ketuyio (inset), one of the 16 female students at the College, could not hide her joy: “While growing up at Mararianta, I wanted to join the Mara Safari Guides space. I am proud to be in the first class of WTC. Here, I will make my time count and live my dream.”

The College is a successor of the Koyiaki Guiding School, famed for churning out world-class safari guides. However, there was a need to diversify skills beyond what the Guiding School was offering. Additionally, Koyiaki was at the heart of Mara Naboisho Conservancy, with limited space for expansion, necessitating relocation to the new Pardamat site.

The lack of skills in the Mara was the push factor to set up a college, as most jobs went to communities outside the Mara. “I attended a workshop where a report commissioned by the European Union was presented, and I learnt that locals had only 2% of the jobs,” recalls Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Chairperson Dickson Kaelo, the then Manager of Koyiaki-Lemek Trust. A small group of stakeholders, including Jackson Looseyia, Ron Beaton, Rusei Ole

Soit and Dickson Kaelo, conceptualised the idea of a training institution and outlined what they needed to do to actualise it.

“We distributed tasks to ourselves: Jackson Looseyia was to think about how the curriculum would look like; Ron Beaton was to look for the money; I was responsible for getting the community’s contribution, so I needed to convince the Koyiaki-Lemek Wildlife Trust to allocate a percentage of their revenue for building the school. Rusei Ole Soit was to go and convince the group ranch to allocate land. We went about our tasks,” Ole Kaelo says.

The Wildlife Tourism College of Maasai Mara, just like its predecessor, is looking to bring transformation change to the Maasai Mara.

The community and partners, including MMWCA, Base-camp Explorer Foundation Kenya and the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association, have established the College to scale the impact of the Koyiaki Guiding School.

The expanded scope under WTC will ensure the availability of different skill sets in the tourism sector, especially in the Maasai Mara. The new College builds on the successes of Koyiaki Guiding School and drives towards increasing the employability of the Mara youth. Besides

WTC is unparalleled in its curriculum offerings, experiential learning, and cross-cultural immersion while facilitating essential research and an innovative sustainable financing model not seen elsewhere in East Africa. The College is looking at training 120 students in the next three years.

WTC Unique Features.

- A student, teacher, and graduate exchange programme with the Southern African Wildlife College and other participating universities;
- Integration of global and local Maasai students for mutual benefit;
- An on-site research hub with participants from 5+ key international universities; and
- A profit-sharing model which supports local students’ scholarships and operating expenses.

Nabaala is the Principal of WTC; morris@wtcmara.org





MMWCA'S CEO ON LEADING COMMUNITY CONSERVATION IN THE MAASAI MARA

By Phoebe Nadupoi

He was a celebrated Safari Guide doing what he loved in a landscape he knew, like the palm of his hands. Then, he got thrust into an emerging space and took up conservation leadership. **DANIEL SOPIA** has been at the helm of Mara Conservancies' regional body since 2017, helping communities to create and develop conservancies as a sustainable form of land use, highlighting the need to continuously invest in the landscape for people, nature, and climate. **PHOEBE NADUPOI** chatted with him and now shares his thoughts about leading conservation in the Mara.

You were a celebrated Safari Guide then you got thrust into conservation leadership. How did that change you?

That transition changed me from a business-focused to a community-focused person; I became a nurturer, mentor, and leader. But the change was natural as I had worked in the tourism industry and understood the potential impact of tourism in transforming community livelihoods through conservation. That realisation made my transition from tourism work to supporting the community to explore ways they could benefit from tourism. Conservation was the vehicle through which the community could benefit from tourism.

Conservancies were already transacting business before the establishment of MMWCA, as there were eight conservancies by 2013. What has changed since MMWCA's establishment?

MMWCA was able to provide better coordination and amplify conservation benefits to the local people, which led to a mindset change and eventual behaviour change resulting in the establishment of more conservancies. More and more people came out to put their land into conservation.

Besides coordination, we strengthened conservancies' governance, ensuring they had proper structures in place and could bring landowners together, as well as ensuring there was equity and clear benefit-sharing mechanisms.

Why does MMWCA's work count?

MMWCA gives a voice to the conservancies and plays an advocacy role, thereby acting as a link between the community, government, and other critical players. MMWCA brings the much-needed resources to fill the gap that tourism leaves.

What's the role of the Maasai Community conservation? (What's the investment of the local community? What price do they pay for the protection of biodiversity?)



DANIEL SOPIA.

The Maasai are conservationists by nature and have taken wildlife as part of nature with a right to live, and their way of life has enabled coexistence between people and their livestock and wildlife. Indeed, the Maasai community has contributed to the successful biodiversity protection in the Mara, but they have paid the price. The interactions with wildlife have cost them lives and livelihoods, yet they have chosen to have their land in conservation to protect natural resources. The Maasai have made sacrifices for the sake of the country and the world at large.

What gets you out of bed in the morning?

What motivates me is the success and the achievements we have so far recorded, the benefits that the communities are getting from conservation, and the thriving wildlife numbers because of the work that we are doing. These things energise me daily and give me the confidence that our efforts are not in vain.

What are you most proud of about the work of the Association in the last ten years?

I am proud of the relationships we have cultivated amongst various stakeholders who are critical to the well-being of the Maasai Mara Ecosystem, bringing together the community, tourism investors, and the government, among other key players. I am glad we have spearheaded these relationships, which is part of our coordination work, given the community a voice in the industry, and put them at the centre of conservation to make decisions in using and managing natural resources.

What three lessons can you share from your leadership journey and that of MMWCA?

One is that when people come together for the common good, there will be notable results and success. The opposite is true: poor communication and lack of coordination lead to fragmentation, conflict, and unsustainability. The other lesson is that when people come together, they have a voice and can influence important decisions. Coming together also allows us to achieve more; we have notable results because of the collaboration between the community, government, and the private sector.

The Mara Conservancies' model has proven to be relatively stable; what do you consider threats and challenges we need to manage for conservancies to thrive?

We must ensure that communities continue to benefit as it is a fundamental prerequisite to thriving conservancies. An uncoordinated approach and poor relationships

are major risks that can reduce the recorded success and achievements. So, the other vital thing is to ensure the relationships between key players in the conservation space are coordinated well, sharing ideas and lessons and that each stakeholder is meeting their responsibility. Another threat is the changing policies because it can undo the success realised and slow the momentum. So, having a favourable policy environment ensures conservancies and conservation areas continue to thrive and that the people bearing the cost of living with wildlife benefit from it.

What's the future like for community conservation in the Mara?

The future is promising because of the community's goodwill and the support, relationship, and trust we have built between various stakeholders in the Mara. These important aspects are the foundations upon which Mara's future will stand; therefore, we see more conservancies coming up and more people benefitting in the coming years.

What are MMWCA's priorities for the coming decade?

Our biggest aspiration is to increase the area under conservation for people and wildlife to thrive. We are also looking at strengthening institutions to manage conservancies and conservation areas sustainably for the prosperity of all. Lastly, we will scale our engagement of women and youth as they play a significant role in realising these aspirations.



PHOTO: FRANK KETERE.

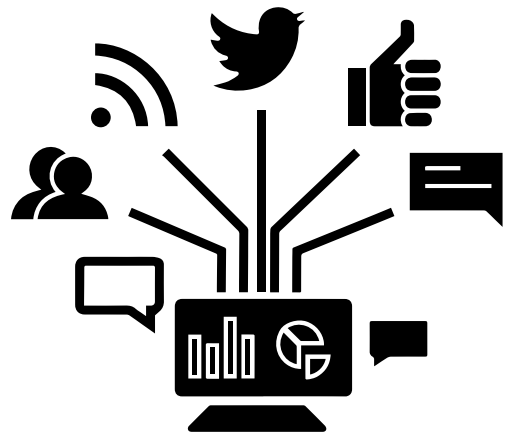


Inaugural Maa Cultural Festival:

The County Governments of Narok, Kajiado, and Samburu are hosting an inaugural Maa Cultural Festival at the Maasai Mara Game Reserve (Sekenani Gate) from August 21 to 24, 2023. The festival brings together Maa communities across the country to provide public space and platform for cultural expression and enjoyment, spaces for creating, producing and distributing cultural goods and services.

One-Mara Marketing Strategy Launch:

MMWCA and the County Government of Narok will launch an Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy for Mara on August 22, 2023, during the Maa Cultural Festival.



MMWCA@10:

MMWCA will host stakeholders for its 10th-anniversary commemoration at its offices in Aitong', Maasai Mara, on November 24, 2023.

Annual UltraMARATHon:

The UltraMARATHon is charitable event, with all proceeds going towards conservation and community development initiatives in the region. The event will take place in Lemek and Mara North Conservancies on December 2, 2023.





MMWCA staff optimisation workshop.



Outreach: 1) PS Kevit Desai awards MMWCA during 2022 Mara Day Celebration; 2) International Women's Day Celebrations 2023.



Mara Conservancies rangers passout in Manyani.



Greater Maasai Mara Ecosystem Management, Maasai Mara Management and County Spatial Plans Launch.



Livestock vaccination in Maasai Mara.



Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change & Forestry Soipan Tuya during World Wetlands Day 2023 celebrations.

OUR PARTNERS





PHOTO: AASHIV SHAH.



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