



Conservation, crime and communities:

Olderkesi Wildlife Conservancy, Kenya

Calvin Cottar

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Related project: Community-based wildlife management as a tool to tackle illegal wildlife trade: www.iied.org/community-based-wildlife-management-tool-tackle-illegal-wildlife-trade

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At a glance

COUNTRY	Kenya
LOCATION	Olderkesi Conservancy, adjacent to Maasai Mara National Reserve
SPECIES	Elephant (<i>Loxodonta africana</i>) Maasai giraffe (<i>Giraffa camelopardalis tippelskirchi</i>) Lion (<i>Panthera leo</i>) Leopard (<i>Panthera pardus</i>)
ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE CONTEXT	Elephants are at high risk from poaching Giraffes are under threat for bushmeat Big cats are killed as a result of human-wildlife conflict (livestock losses)
TYPE OF POACHERS	Bushmeat poachers are local and will also poach elephants when the opportunity arises
TYPE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN TACKLING IWT	Community rangers/eco-guards
CONSERVATION INCENTIVE MECHANISM	Performance-based land lease payments

The story so far

Elephants, big cats and Maasai giraffe are among the species to benefit from a community conservancy initiative, in which local landowners are paid to protect wildlife in a key corridor on the south east boundary of the Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya.

After more than a decade dedicated to resolving cultural and political resistance, the Cottar's Wildlife Conservation Trust (CWCT) is now implementing a programme which pays Maasai community landowners of Olderkesi for the lease of 7,000 acres for a designated conservancy.

The scheme is based on lease payments that are competitive with alternative land use, such as agriculture and domestic livestock grazing. During the first five years these payments will finance community projects – including schools, bursaries, a centre for girls and medical support. The money is paid via a direct payment scheme which is not susceptible to corruption.

The agreement promotes a collective liability

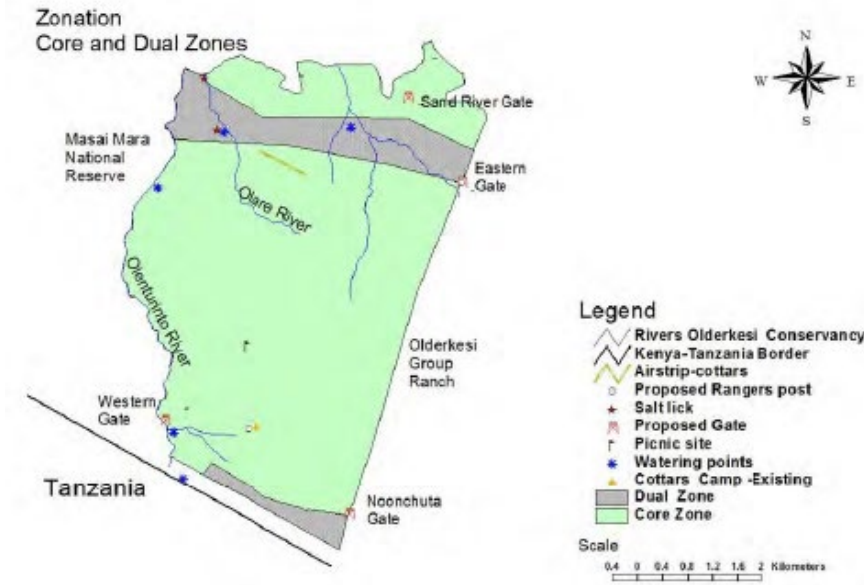
Infringements of the agreed land use – for example, poaching – will trigger deductions in lease payments to the Maasai community leaders who are then responsible for making up the deficit. This aspect of the agreement promotes a collective liability which is a powerful mechanism to enforce land use for wildlife.

The land in question is the Olderkesi Wildlife Conservancy, an important corridor between the Loita/Ngurman hills and the Maasai Mara National Reserve for 3,000 + elephant and thousands of other transient plains herbivores, such as wildebeest, zebra, eland and gazelles. The land also supports a permanent population of around 110 Maasai giraffe.

All wildlife in Olderkesi is threatened by poaching and land use change. Most poaching in the area is to supply the local market with meat protein, and the Maasai giraffe suffers particularly from this illegal

trade. Local market values of all animals poached for bushmeat is thought to be around US\$110,000 (KES10 million) a year.

Those who kill for bushmeat are local, including members of the Maasai landowning community. However, the same poachers may also kill elephant for ivory if they get a chance, using poisoned spears and arrows. In addition, a small group of specialists operate in organised gangs.



Olderkesi Wildlife Conservancy Zonation

Trade values of transient animals are hard to predict

The international market value – essentially illegal elephant ivory – could be between US\$20–\$40 million (based on current rates of US\$5 million for ivory from a big bull). Accurate trade values of transient animals are hard to predict; the numbers of elephant on conservancy land at any one time varies between 200 and none.

As well as poaching, the trend in Olderkesi to subdivide and fence land for farming and livestock has a significant impact on wildlife; the big cats at high risk from retribution killings for livestock losses.

The conservancy scheme is based on giving the

local community financial incentive to ensure wildlife protection within the conservancy area, by preventing poaching and stopping the fragmentation of land for farming.

The deal was struck after more than ten years of painstaking negotiations with the Olderkesi Maasai community; 3,400 registered members collectively own an area of 106,000 acres, and make up one third of the population living on the land. They stand to gain from community development and infrastructure, and a steady income stream, paid for by the lease fees.

The key to success was persuading the whole community to agree that a single land unit of 7,000 acres should be managed as a wildlife conservancy, as opposed to being subdivided into small plots for farming and livestock.



Olderkesi Wildlife Conservancy community scouts, trained by KWS (Calvin Cottar)

Winning over all the members has needed hundreds of community meetings and dozens of field trips over many years. Maasai leaders influence opinions, but do not make decisions for the community. Even minimal level opposition to a proposed project can considerably delay its implementation. On community land, just 1 per cent of the members can block a plan. At Olderkesi, even when 98 per cent of the community were in favour of full implementation, it took more years of negotiating to win over minority resistance.

It is up to the elders to police and fine culprits

Since that has been achieved, CWCT, as lessee, applies control of land use and pays the Maasai elders (the lessors) who act on behalf of all the community members. If payments are reduced, due to infringements, it is up to the elders to police and fine culprits (who are usually members of their community or local area).

CWCT raises money to cover the conservancy lease, management and operations by charging entry fees to tourism partners and from benefactors. The conservancy has a team of locally sourced scouts, runs a small undercover unit, and liaises with rangers from the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and the Mara Elephant Project when evidence of poaching is found.

The Maasai community supports these operations, which help ensure they get their full lease payments. This amounts to US\$10,000 (KES 1 million) per month for the Olderkesi community members, and there are additional rewards for information that leads to the capture of poachers, guns and ivory stocks.

The terms of the agreement mean that families and their livestock living within the area are being moved out by June 2015, and this relocation is currently underway.

However, the scheme includes provision for controlled livestock grazing during the wet season when tourism is low.



Tourism raises funds for conservancy lease (Calvin Cotter)

What works and why?

The project is still in its infancy it is a little early to judge results, but positive early indicators include a rise in the game count in the conservancy area, and the halting of fragmentation, fencing and farming.

For now, lease payments are high enough to be competitive and the community see themselves as partners in conservation rather than being victims

of government-enforced wildlife protection. New methods of making these payments, designed to guard against corruption, have been put in place – in spite of resistance from the Maasai elders some of whom would like the land fully available, years round, for their cattle (90 per cent of cattle in Maasailand is owned by the 10 per cent of the elders).

Long term success will depend on whether the community decides that land for wildlife is economically worthwhile over time, and whether the rewards are worth the risks of protection.

Kenya's recent crackdown on wildlife crimes has dramatically raised fines and penalties and increased the rewards for informers. At the same time, ivory poachers have become more ruthless and violent; where they were once welcomed in villages, their tactics are now turning villages against them.

The general climate of better security works in the conservancy's favour, but it remains vulnerable to other external factors: if prices for wheat and maize rise, the returns from wildlife protection may not be enough.

Challenges

- Short term political interests inherent in Maasai culture, and the nature of decision-making on community land.
- The polarised nature of the Maasai community in Olderkesi, which comprises a small minority of very rich cattle owners and the vast majority living in poverty.
- The legacy of Kenya's historical heavy-handed approach towards local people in the name of wildlife conservation.

Lessons learnt

- There is no quick fix to setting up a community conservancy; 100 per cent buy-in is key to success, especially in pastoral communities, and this takes time.
- Protracted discussions make it more difficult for influencers and leaders to back down when decisions are made.
- Collective decision-making process means that results are likely to be more lasting than deals struck with individual landowners.
- A secure source of funding is essential.

COULD THIS WORK ELSEWHERE?

The conservancy scheme has been implemented in a way that could be repeated on any other community-owned land in Kenya. The project area has every possible feature of pastoral lands, and also borders a national reserve and a neighbouring country.