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Enonkishu Conservancy, Mara Beef, Ecotourism, and the Mara Training Centre

As the Mara Serengeti ecosystem's unique and complex grasslands are increasingly under threat what are the options for ensuring that there are attractive and viable incentives available for pastoralists to ensure their long term commitment to sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices. One such endeavour is the Enonkishu Conservancy, which works with local communities to improve their resilience by conserving natural resources, wildlife and heritage, through sustainable and commercial livestock enterprises.

With tourism and livestock being the major economic drivers in the region, it is important that neither negatively impacts the other and Enonkishu is playing a major

role in ensuring this does not happen in the Mara Serengeti. This hypothesis is at the core of Enonkishu Conservancy's work as expressed by Tarquin Wood,

Managing Director of Mara Beef and one of the founding members of Enonkishu Conservancy, who avers "we all want to see prosperous regions and rural economies, which encourage investment and add value to an industry which the Maasai people place their pride in."

Established in 2013, Mara Beef has fast become a model for good cattle and rangeland management. The company rears top quality beef on the Mara Beef Farm as well as within the Enonkishu Conservancy on the edge of the Maasai Mara with the aim of promoting sustainable cattle ranching based on good practice as well as being

a consistent supplier of high quality beef to wholesalers and consumers throughout the country. Mara Beef works in partnership with the Enonkishu Conservancy to promote sustainable natural resources management, with a focus on integrated management of wildlife and livestock. The promotion of this integrated approach among communities in the area aims to spread the economic and financial risks, increase resilience to extreme weather conditions and increase food security through supplementary income. There is evidence that this approach holds enormous potential benefits for wildlife conservation and livelihood security. As evidenced by the case of Enonkishu Conservancy, where controlled livestock grazing and improved breeding and herd health has positively impacted on wildlife numbers and local biodiversity as well as on the socio-economic environment. The approach is increasingly gaining traction and interest among the local community, with and community members keen on working with the conservancy. "The conservationists and pastoralists need to work together," says Moses Nampasso, a landowner and professional guide working in the Enonkishu Conservancy.

Aside from promoting the sustainable grassland management benefiting both wildlife and the local communities as well as raising cattle, Mara Beef additionally links pastoralist communities with high value markets in key cities using Mara Beef's existing and well-developed marketing and distribution systems, in a manner that is reliable, predictable and commands significantly higher prices. Currently, Mara Beef products are available at the Meatery Deli in most Naku-matt outlets, Tusky's deli's as well as Naivas and Game supermarkets.



Rangeland Management

In 2014, the Enonkishu Conservancy was one of the few institutions selected from a pool over 90 applications from 25 countries to become a Savory Hub, a member of the global Savory Network. Following the selection, Enonkishu management underwent training at the African Centre for Holistic Management (HM) in Zimbabwe to learn the Holistic Management approach, developed by Zimbabwean rancher Allan Savory – to heal grasslands. Within 18 months of integrating HM in the Enonkishu Conservancy and Mara Beef farm, there have been more positive changes in the health of the grasslands than the landowners have seen in the past decade. The improved health of the grasslands has resulted in increased number of wildlife species returning to the area, ranging from diverse kaleidoscope of butterflies to herds of elephants and everything in between.

Sustainable management of resources, both flora and fauna, has enormous impact on ecosystem health, which in turn generates benefits at various levels and humans can learn from animals as espoused by Savory, who insists that humans need to mimic nature. Savory contends that herbivores like cattle and sheep can

actually restore degraded lands.¹ To demonstrate how wildlife can and do improve health of grasslands, Savory argues that when herbivorous wildlife, which often roam the grasslands as tightly knit herds, are being chased by predators, they trample the hard surface of land thus loosening the soils enabling the soils to absorb water like a sponge and additionally, their dung fertilizes the plains thus improving overall health of the land.

Savory advocates carefully rotating livestock in different paddocks to feed on grass at the optimum time of its growth for the optimum amount of time. He states that animals left alone in one place for extended periods of time chew their favourite grasses down to the roots, killing them and causing erosion. Ultimately, he says, overgrazing is not about the number of animals on a fixed amount of land, but the amount of time the plants are exposed to grazing and the amount of recovery time in between. This is an issue among pastoral communities, including the Maasai, who are the predominant community within the Mara-Serengeti ecosystem as explained by Musa Kiseer, an HM community trainer in Enonkishu Conservancy, who explains that, "Despite various recommendations that in order to survive, the Maasai pastoralists must reduce their livestock, the Maasai have yet to reduce their livestock herds and as such, the land might continue to deteriorate and they could be left with less to sell."

Holistic management does not just entail rotational grazing, but also promotes decision-making

¹ More than 3 million people have viewed Savory's TED talk, https://www.ted.com/talks/allan_savory_how_to_green_the_world_s_deserts_and_reverse_climate_change, since it was posted.



process for planning around several variables, including ecological variables, such as wildlife numbers, prevalence and pervasiveness of poisonous plants at any given time, water restrictions, etc. HM is as such, contextual and focused on results and does not prescribe to a specific ranching method.

Impact and Partnerships

As an organization, Enonkishu is keen on collaboration and works closely with other stakeholders. Currently, Enonkishu is working in partnership with the World Wildlife Federation (WWF) and UNESCO-IHE under their Mau Mara Serengeti (MaMaSe) project, and Enonkishu Conservancy was selected as a pilot project and demonstration site for Sustainable Rangeland Management in the region. Enonkishu has set

up sound ecological monitoring systems and undertakes monitoring on a quarterly basis focusing on rangeland health index incorporating several biological indicators including wind erosion, vitality of shrubs and key species, and percentage of vegetation cover. Each indicator relates to ecological processes and correlates with key environmental services provided by grasslands such as soil stabilization and biodiversity – not just plants, but also micro-and mega fauna and wildlife, above and below the ground.

In 2016, the Mara Training Centre was built with the support from the Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund Grant. The centre offers training in relevant community-based land use enterprises, with a major focus on Sustainable Rangeland Management and Livestock Production. “We aim to work with a range of different communities around us to help them fulfil their aspirations as more commercial livestock producers, in a wildlife-livestock integrated system and with the opportunity to work with the marketing and processing facilities of Mara Beef, so improving their market linkages and value chain access, as well as the eco-tourism linkages,” Says Doug-

las Kamaru, the Manager of the Enonkishu Conservancy.

Enonkishu Conservancy and Mara Beef are exposing and propagating a method of land and resource management that regenerates land through production instead of depleting it. The vision is to strengthen rural communities, protect wildlife and decrease the risk of catastrophic hazards such as, droughts and floods, whilst improving soil health.

With the dramatic increase in biodiversity and wildlife following the implementation of the regenerative grazing practices in the region, Enonkishu hopes to attract more visitors to see the positive impact of the work of the conservancy. Following a decade of low wildlife population, Enonkishu Conservancy now has abundant herds of herbivores, a resident pride of lion, elephants seeking refuge in the forested hillsides, and the rangers are working hard to ensure the increasing wildlife population have a safe and secure environment, with pastures that will support the wildlife as well as community livestock based on holistic grazing plan. Additionally, the increased wildlife population has improved tourist numbers, which has generated positive socio-economic outcomes for the local communities. Visitors to Enonkishu are housed in the conservancy’s House in the Wild, located within the Enonkishu Conservancy along the banks of the Mara River, whose serene environment, often leaves guests feeling inspired and motivated about the conservation efforts being undertaken within the Mara.



www.marabeef.com
www.enonkishu.org
www.maratrainingcentre.com
www.houseinthewild.com

