

The Importance of Wildlife Conservancies to the People of Kenya By Kevin Chapman

Kenya has been suffering from a shortage of clean water for many years. According to American University's Global Majority E-Journal,¹ its lack of water is caused primarily by increased demand due to population growth, contamination from dirty objects, and a prolonged drought induced by climate change. Water scarcity has become such a large problem that virtually none has been available for grass to grow in parts of Kenya. Historically, this has posed a problem for its inhabitants, which include the Maasai people, as many depend upon animal herding and the sale of animals for their livelihoods. Many Maasai have been forced to walk around twenty miles just to reach suitable grazing land.

However, per masaimara.com,² even though the creation of national reserves such as the Masai Mara National Reserve played a large role in conserving wildlife, they further exacerbated the problem of grazing land scarcity by taking land from the Maasai people. Furthermore, predators on the Masai Mara National Reserve began to prey upon the cattle of the Maasai. In response to these issues, Maasai tribal leaders established wildlife conservancies to the north of the Masai Mara National Reserve.

The conservancies have become very successful at conserving Kenya's natural features and diverse wildlife. They have also restored much of the grass that was overgrazed by the cattle of the Maasai people. Much of the conservancy land has been leased out to organizations that host safaris which attract many tourists due to the beautiful scenery and animals in the conservancies. The organizations make per-person and monthly payments to Maasai leaders, who give back the money to the Maasai community, mostly in the form of investments in education and development.

Yet many Maasai continue to herd livestock, so they still need suitable grass for grazing. Since the conservancies are well-maintained, some villagers illegally graze their animals on conservancy land. While this helps the villagers keep their cattle healthier, it is ultimately detrimental to the overall well-being of Maasai communities in Kenya. If conservancy land were to be routinely grazed upon, the quality of its grass would decrease, prompting many wild animals to leave the conservancies. An exodus of wildlife would decrease the number of tourists, thereby leading to a decline in revenue that would cause Maasai communities to lose large amounts of needed resources.

It is very important that we plan a financially and environmentally sustainable method to keep the conservancies running while still providing adequate grazing land for Maasai cattle. Keeping this balance would allow Maasai communities to improve the quality of life of their people and enrich everyone involved. When we solve this problem, we will be one step closer to preserving the rich environment and diverse peoples of Kenya.

References:

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2. "Masai Mara Conservancies - Information about the Various Conservancy Areas Adjacent to Masai Mara National Reserve in Kenya." *Masaimara.com*,
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