

Collaborative conservation: pastoralists as conservationists



 Pastoralists and other livestock keepers are too often pitted against conservationists. Parks are sometimes created to keep livestock and people out, and there are frequent stories in the media about pastoralists invading conservation areas during drought, sometimes resulting in conflict and violence. Pastoralism is of course not compatible with a style of conservation that encloses and excludes, but extensive livestock-keeping can be central to more people-centred conservation approaches.

Unfortunately, ‘fortress conservation’ still dominates much current practice and is even being promoted as a solution in COP15 biodiversity protection debates. With its origins in the conservation movement in the USA – and the establishment of the first national park in Yellowstone – exclusionary conservation became the model through the colonial era to the presentⁱ. It is having a resurgence today resulting in significant ‘green grabbing’ⁱⁱ under the banner of biodiversity protection and environmental conservation.

Lessons from ‘community-based’ natural resource use and co-management arrangements have not been learned. In response to the failure of colonial-style conservation approaches, new approaches were developed, such as the famous CAMPFIRE programme in Zimbabweⁱⁱⁱ. Communities with longstanding claims to such conservation areas were compensated through hunting or tourist revenues as part of a benefit-sharing deal facilitated by local government. However, the experience of such programmes has been uneven. Benefits often did not reach local people, with money siphoned off by elites and local authorities.

With both public and private conservation organisations arguing for expanding protected areas, now with large backing from climate finance through offsetting projects, the old colonial fortress conservation is back in vogue. Pastoralists are frequently excluded from grazing lands in the name of conservation, with livestock impounded and people arrested^{iv}. It is no wonder that pastoralists object to these exclusionary forms of conservation^v. Even if there are a few concessionary community projects and alternative livelihood initiatives thrown in, violence against local communities, now redefined as poachers, is sometimes brutal^{vi}.

As part of the post-2020 biodiversity action plan, the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People^{vii} is urging all countries to protect 30% of their area by 2030. Areas targeted are deemed ‘low human impact’ areas, where limited numbers of people live, but these may be dryland or ‘wasteland’ areas used by mobile pastoralists^{viii}.

The most effective conservation areas across the world are managed by local people, not by militarised parks authorities and well-armed rangers behind large electric fences. This has been long recognised, but earlier lessons are frequently forgotten. As part of the COP15 deal, it would be much better to put 30% of the world’s land surface under the control of local people, aiming for collaborative conservation that support livelihoods and biodiversity^{ix}.



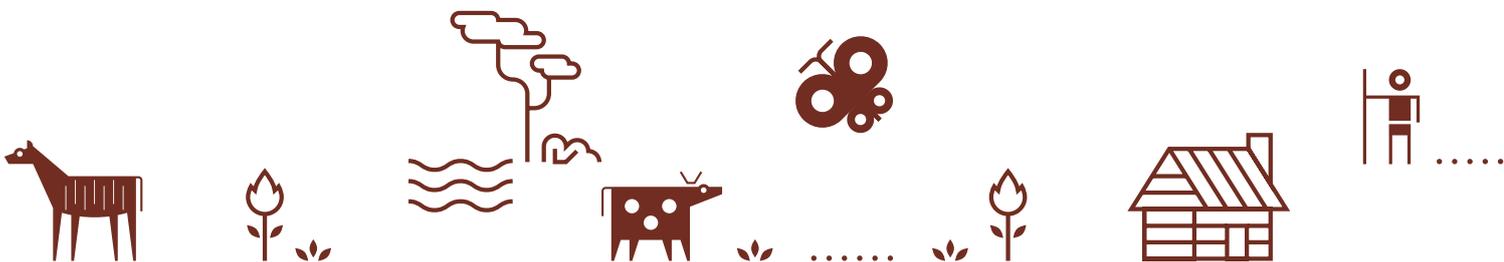
Traditional pastoralism in Borana

Source: Masresha Taye

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?

1. Creating **mixed use, integrated landscapes**, bringing down the fences and allowing livestock and wildlife to co-exist. This is the vision of transfrontier parks^v, which allow more extensive landscape connections to be maintained, enhancing the biodiversity especially of large, migratory species. While disease transmission risks may increase (such as the transfer of foot-and-mouth disease from buffalo to domestic livestock), this can be addressed through 'commodity-based trade' approaches for the marketing of livestock products^{xi}.
2. Focusing on **bio-corridors** and facilitating **transhumant routes** offers win-win solutions outside protected areas, enhancing ecosystem connections, facilitating the dispersal of plant species and supporting biodiversity^{xii}. With such corridors central to transhumant livestock systems, pastoralists have an incentive to protect and sustain them, resulting in joint benefits for conservation.
3. Emphasising **co-management and joint use of landscapes**, including Benefit-sharing between conservation and livelihood objectives. Such efforts should not be seen just as a buffer area strategy, but as integral to conservation objectives. For example, enhancing pastoral livelihoods through ensuring access to land and grazing, especially in drought periods, as well as sharing benefits from tourism or hunting revenues, means that livestock users become directly involved in conservation and committed to it.
4. While making use of rangelands, pastoralists can act as rangers^{xiii}, alerting authorities to commercialised poaching, protecting water sources for joint use by wildlife and managing grazing for multiple use. Rather than the most knowledgeable users of the ecosystem being excluded from it, they can be involved in protecting it. Such a collaborative approach instils trust and commitment and reduces conflict in ways that an exclusionary, militarised alternative does not.

Pastoralists co-existed with wildlife long before national parks and wildlife conservancies were established. The plans emerging from COP15 must avoid the dangers of exclusionary conservation through protected areas and explore the possibilities of collaborative, inclusive and 'convivial' conservation with pastoralists at the centre^{xiv}.



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- ^v For studies of this phenomenon in northern Kenya, see Schetter C. et al. (2022) Frontier NGOs: Conservancies, control, and violence in northern Kenya, *World Development* 151. doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105735; Mkutu, K. and Mdee, A. (2020) Conservancies, Conflict and Dispossession: The Winners and Losers of Oil Exploration in Turkana, Kenya, *African Studies Review* 63(4): 831-857. doi.org/doi:10.1017/asr.2020.2 For opposing views, see Northern Rangelands Trust: nrt-kenya.org/about-nrt and Oakland Institute: bit.ly/3mXlaFo.
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- ^{ix} Ashoka Mukpo, Mongabay (2021). bit.ly/3xEK5Tx
- ^x See www.sadc.int/document/sadc-tfca-brochure
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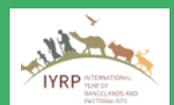


Find out more

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