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## **Community Conservancies at the forefront to sustain the globally significant Lake Bogoria Landscape, Kenya**

*“A conservancy has dual goals; a place where communities create an institution that collectively takes action for a better environment that benefits people, their livestock, and farmland while protecting wildlife and its habitats” KWCA*

Adjacent to the World's largest congregations of lesser flamingos on Lake Bogoria National Reserve, Baringo County, is Kapkuikui location, in which privately and communally owned lands inhabited by the indigenous Endorois community are located.

Arriving into the edges of the iconic Irong Hill, to the north and overlooking the Geysers at L. Bogoria, a visitor experiences calm and serenity. The sound of birds chirping away, colourful butterflies, Dik-diks run into a nearby thicket and the sound of bees buzzing from the Acacia trees, shows the rich biodiversity. Rock hyraxes can be heard as you climb the rocky hill where caves and other archaeological features can be found. The beautiful scenery of the lowland below, stretching through the Pekkeria irrigation scheme, lies what can be described as a panoramic landscape.

Irong conservancy and Kiborgoch wetland conservancy cover two distinct habitats, a gradient sloping from the top of the culturally significant Irong hill to the wetland, both forming a vital livestock grazing and watering area reserved by community elders for communal use. The wetland's vital role is to retain and moderate the flow of water from the neighbouring rivers. Pythons, waterbuck, zebra, rare sitatunga antelope, hippopotamus and a wide variety of fish species such as mud fish and the African lung fish are swamp residents. The swamp creates a microclimate for papyrus reeds used by women for weaving baskets, hats and mats. The Chelaba spring on the edge of the swamp on Kiborgoch wetland conservancy supplies water to the community's canal irrigated farms. *“Fresh fruits, vegetables, milk, meat, and income from weaving and ecotourism are the benefits derived from the swamp”* says Raymond Kipkemei, Secretary of Kiborgoch Wetland Conservancy.

Further north is Chuine Community Conservancy overlooking Sandai and stretching above the escarpment forming a border with the proposed Arabal conservancy. The grass and shrubs in the conservancy are preserved for livestock grazing during dry seasons, while the acacia trees provide good pollen and nectar for honey producing bees. According to a survey carried out on spatial variation in value of ecosystem services, Chuine was rated second only after Lake Bogoria National Reserve on ecosystem and biodiversity. It is a haven for biodiversity research

and a breeding site for the greater Kudu, a migratory corridor for wildlife from Laikipia to Lake Bogoria National Reserve.

### **A conservation Challenge**

Despite its beauty, the upper midland catchment of the wildlife rich L. Bogoria, has been plagued by decades of environmental destruction; loss of fertile but shallow soils as irrigated cultivation expands. Intensive livestock farming and expanding human habitation has resulted in gulleys, soil erosion and expansion of the poisonous invasive *prosopis* vegetation. Frequent climate change induced floods and extensive harsh drought has also made life difficult for the community around the world-famous wetland.



Landscape of Irong Conservancy

The impacts of this human-induced and climate change-influenced environmental challenge has been felt by the community as well as the L. Bogoria management. As early as a decade ago, the 2007-2012 management plan pointed to the risk of collapse of the lake's ecological processes due to unsustainable resource exploitation and farming systems, poor land use and overstocking which drove communities to abject poverty and wildlife towards extinction. The situation has since worsened and the current Lake Bogoria Management plan 2019-2029 further notes that the threats to the lake creates a vicious cycle that leads to more environmental degradation and sets in motion other processes that magnify the initial impacts. In fact, wildlife loss is experienced across the entire Baringo County. A 2019 World Bank report recorded a catastrophic 85% decline in mammals population since aerial wildlife counts commenced in the 1970s.

### ***Solutions through community Conservancies***

The three community conservancies which cover an area of approx 14,500Ha are critical components for the conservation of the designated Important Bird Area (IBA), RAMSAR site, World Heritage Site and home to over 350 species of birds. While the three conservancies have been established since 2002, they are listed as emerging conservancies by Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA) due to their under-developed governance structures and management capacity to fully operationalize and support both biodiversity restoration and livelihoods and unclear land tenure rights

A recent collaboration between local communities and the Baringo County government to reverse this degradation of Lake Bogoria ecosystem received a boost from GEF UNDP Small Grants (SGP) programme towards supporting community conservation and livelihood initiatives. The governor of Baringo County H.E Stanley Kiptis launched the Kshs 60 million grant to 20 organizations and community groups to secure the Lake Bogoria landscape. For the first time in conservation history, Irong, Kiborgoch and Chuine community conservancies have received direct support of Kshs 2.5 to 3 million each to implement priority projects, with KWCA serving as a strategic partner to develop their governance, financial management capacities and to provide technical support.

With the funds availed through the grants, the three conservancies are supported to establish their land area, undertake land use planning and prepare management and business plans. While recognizing the challenges ahead, the communities define their priorities and strengthen their governance to engage in land and wildlife conservation, ecotourism, sustainable food crop production and profitable livestock keeping.



Lake Bogoria Conservancies management committee members at a learning visit in Reteti Sanctuary, Namunyak Conservancy, Northern Kenya

### **Scaling up impacts**

The project provided an exciting and educative knowledge sharing opportunity to visit Namunyak and Kalama Conservancies in northern Kenya for the conservancy representatives and a trip to Naboisho, Lemek and Mara North conservancies for Baringo County Conservancies Association (BCCA) committee members. The teams were motivated by the observations made to these landscapes where conservancies are more advanced. Additional training on good governance and financial management resulted in successful democratic elections by the conservancy management committees through Baringo County Government oversight. Kiborgoch has since made progress in delineating the conservancy areas by developing plans to address land boundary disputes and has been able to secure and restore the Chelaba spring. Irong conservancy has initiated mapping of the conservancy rangelands and greater Kudu migratory corridor in partnership with RECONCILE organization. The conservancy has also finalized their plans for the establishment of a camp site facility and are working to engage a private sector partner to market the conservancy nationwide. Chuine conservancy has mapped conservancy resources and sites and recently engaged Arabal community to delineate its northern borders earlier encroached. Collectively the communities participated actively in the review of the L. Bogoria management plan ensuring the 3-year action plan mainstreamed activities to establish new conservancies and strengthen existing ones while improving delivery of the benefit sharing plans. Direct support to the community conservancies has re-awoken interest, not just around Lake Bogoria but throughout the entire County.

*As a clinical officer, often dealing with unwell persons, these new possibilities brought by the conservancy is a source of hope, exposure and purpose for the environment and community”*  
Joshua Komen, Chair, Irong Conservancy

### **A shared Vision for Biodiversity**

Critical to the success of a shared vision for biodiversity in the Lake Bogoria landscape, is the upscaling of these efforts to other conservancies at the county level. Baringo County Conservancies Association (BCCA), established in 2017, promotes coordination of conservancies to grow their capacity to deliver environmental conservation and livelihood goals. The achievements by its predecessors Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) and Maasai Mara Conservancies Association (MMWCA) outlines the critical importance of a community led, landscape level coordinating entity.

As a nascent regional association, BCCA engages and collaborates with the Baringo county government, and development partners to reinforce the value of biodiversity in the county. The association represents 11 conservancies; 5 fully operational, 3 at emergence stage and 3 in the mobilization stage within three landscapes spread around the three national reserves; Lake Baringo, Lake Bogoria and Lake Kamnarok.

Under the SGP-funded Lk. Bogoria landscape project, BCCA has been able to design the County’s conservancy model that integrates community managed lands and community forest associations actively involved in wildlife conservation and management. The association has institutionalized a representative governance structure that has prioritized its growth plans through the inaugural strategic plan 2020-2024. A Baringo conservancies profile recently published by BCCA in partnership with KWCA, demonstrates the current status of conservancies, and serves as a baseline for measuring achievements in the coming years. The profile includes a map showcasing the conservancies, 3 national reserves, community forests, rivers and major towns. BCCA is not only promoting a unified voice for conservancies in the county but building its brand and visibility through their newly established website.

The significant developments achieved by BCCA have been catalyzed by the commitment and partnership of Baringo County government, through which conservancies in the County have received funding since 2016 and whose structure of support to conservancies is being enhanced through a Memorandum of Understanding with BCCA. Of the 47 Counties, Baringo County government (BCG) stands out for its resolve to support conservation efforts.

The shared vision for biodiversity is also demonstrated through a multi-stakeholder collaboration of SGP grantees in the landscape where they promote an integrated conservation approach that improves collaboration, reduces duplication efforts and enhances synergies. With partners such as Kenya Organic Agricultural Network (KOAN), KWCA, Egerton University- Chemeron Drylands Research Training and Ecotourism Centre, a growing network

of environment stewards, conservation partners, private sector and the leadership provided by Baringo County government, the conservation agenda as described in its County Integrated Development Plan is well on a strong footing true to the spirit of World Environment Day 2020; It's Time for nature.



Traditional dancers at Kiborgoch conservancy

