

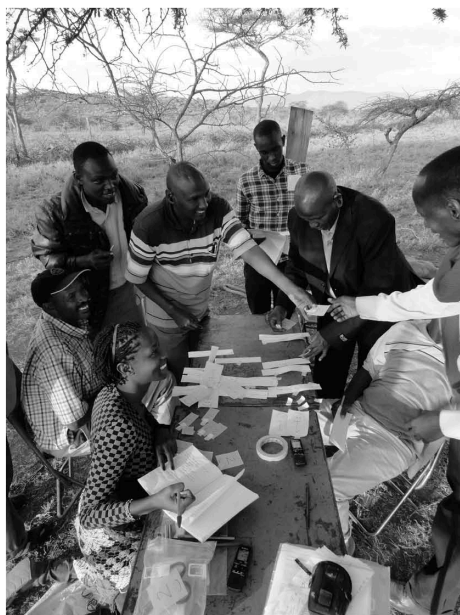
SEEKING STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION: AN EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVANCIES IN KENYA

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During the summer of 2014, I traveled in Kenyan Maasailand to assess the status of six community-based conservancies for my Master's thesis. I collected information about the projects by speaking with conservancy managers, game scouts, and other stakeholders to evaluate community involvement and to work towards recommendations for improving the projects in the future.

Community-based conservation is a prevalent and often successful approach to conservation in Africa, and Kenya has over 150 such conservancies. These conservation institutions created on the ground are vital, because over 70% of the wildlife in Kenya is found outside of national park boundaries. Since most of the diverse wildlife coexist with people, these programs driven by communities to promote conservation are extremely important.

For my fieldwork, I was busy with focus groups, interviews, and time getting to know the Maasai group ranches in the South Rift valley of Kenya, which



are hard at work growing conservation. Lying between Amboseli and Maasai Mara National Parks, this region is an essential corridor for sustaining wildlife populations. These six community protected areas represent true community-based programs driven by local leaders and local participation. My project was an opportunity to support these institutions.

With the intention of assessing stakeholder participation in community-based conservation on these group ranches, I collected community leaders' opinions and perspectives on what is currently happening in their conservancies as well as what may happen for them in the future. I had focus group discussions with the conservancy management committees and the community game scouts. Also, I interviewed other opinion leaders who are not involved in the conservancies but are community members with important perspectives. These leaders included government chiefs, traditional Maasai chiefs of different age sets, women's group leaders, head teachers, and church pastors in each community. In total my research included 10 focus groups with 55 participants and 36 key informant interviews. The many conversations in each site allowed for me to get diverse views on the communities' projects.

After completing my data collection in the Rift Valley, I could see that these communities are each in different stages of their conservation projects. They have different issues to address in order to promote resource, wildlife, and environmental conservation. Subdivision of land was a major issue influencing the capacity for communal conservation projects. Also, illegal resource use, such as logging and wildlife poaching were major problems in many of the sites. The interviews and focus groups in each area brought out their unique and pertinent problems to be

addressed by management and community participation for each community. This evaluation of the community conservancies identifies these problems to be addressed by protected area management and educational outreach and to promote accountability and community participation.

The next step for my project will be to distribute reports of my findings for each community and the region. Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the current programs and analyzing differences in stakeholders' perspectives will aid managers in improving benefits and ensure the long-term success of the communities' programs. This dissemination of results is my priority to ensure that the project supports conservation improvements at each site and promotes stakeholder collaboration to augment the conservation success in the region.

By offering a new method for analyzing activities associated with effective community-based conservation, I hope this project will enable managers to improve their conservancies. This study contributes to a proactive discussion and analysis of community-driven projects in East Africa in the hopes of enhancing the conservation potential of conservancies by facilitating the implementation of truly participatory policies.

Lily Maynard is a second-year M.S. student in the Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation and a FLAS Fellow (2013-15). Support for this research was provided by the UF Tropical Conservation and Development Program, the Angel Fund, and the Vogel Trust.