

Misrepresentation and misinformation about NRT



In the light of significant misinformation in the press and social media, NRT would like to clarify some frequent misconceptions and facts about NRT and our member community conservancies. NRT's headquarters is well known locally, and we welcome any enquiries about our work.

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1) What is the Northern Rangelands Trust?

The NRT is a community led, non-governmental organisation set up in 2004 in northern Kenya by a coalition of local leaders, politicians and conservation interests, including its first Chairman the then Speaker of the Kenyan Parliament Hon. Francis Ole Kaparo. It was established specifically to support and develop the emerging model of community conservation in the region. Its mission is to develop resilient community conservancies, which transform people's lives, secure peace and conserve natural resources.

NRT is a community conservancy membership organisation. The 33 member conservancies work across 44,000 square kilometres of northern and coastal Kenya. With support from principal donors USAID, The Nature Conservancy, DANIDA, and AFD, and many smaller donors, NRT is supporting and empowering communities to develop locally-led governance structures, run peace and security programmes, take the lead in natural resource management, and manage sustainable businesses linked to conservation. The community conservancies are starting to have a significant impact on building peace, improving lives and managing the rangelands, and their success has helped shape new government regulations on establishing, registering and managing community conservancies in Kenya.

NRT is governed by a Board of Directors, currently chaired by Hon. Mohamed Elmi MP and vice chaired by Dr Hassan Wario, Cabinet Secretary for Sports, Culture and the Arts. The NRT Board includes institutional membership from KWS, KFS, 3 pioneering private conservancies, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Interior. NRT is accountable to an over-arching Council of Elders, which is comprised of the elected chairpersons of all the member conservancies. The Council of Elders is currently chaired by David Lekoomet (Kalama Conservancy), and vice chaired by Omar Godana (Nasuulu Conservancy). NRT is guided and overseen by the NRT Council of Elders, which also includes institutional membership from KWS, County Governments and other local partners and agencies.



2) What is NRT Trading?

NRT Trading is a for-profit social enterprise owned by NRT, whose mission is to identify, incubate, pilot and grow new sustainable businesses within the NRT member conservancies. NRT Trading was established as a limited company in 2014, and now supports the development of direct commercial revenue to communities in three main areas - livestock, beads and tourism. The success of these enterprises is now paving the way for communities to explore other emerging markets, such as fish and mangos.

NRT Trading has also supported the development of a community owned Savings And Credit Cooperative Organisation (SACCO), who members from within the conservancies, including specifically women and young men, are supported to save money, borrow money for business development, and use the financial banking systems available. This is a specific effort to support financial literacy, promote small-scale enterprise, and provide meaningful work for idle hands otherwise engaged in conflict and poaching.

3) What is a community conservancy?

A community conservancy is a community-based organisation, created to support the management of community-owned land, for the benefit of household livelihoods (improved governance and representation, reduced conflict, improved pasture management, improved livestock production, integrated development, enterprise development) and for the conservation and protection of natural resources (including rangelands, forest, marine ecosystems and wildlife).

Conservancies are institutions for building peace, improving lives and conserving natural resources. They do not own land. They do not fence land to exclude grazing or other migrating pastoralists (the two exceptions to this are Sera and Ishaqbini Conservancies, where communities have chosen to protect the highly endangered black rhino and hirola antelope respectively). The conservancy institutions work in support of the landowners - either Group Ranches or under Trust Land tenure agreed with county government. In some cases, several group ranches have come together to form one large conservancy (e.g. Naibunga, Namunyak). In other cases, several ethnic communities have come together to form one conservancy as a deliberate step towards peaceful co-existence (e.g. Nasuulu, Nakuprat-Gotu).

4) How do community conservancies operate?

The basis of the Community Conservancy Model is:

- A self-defined community (e.g. of interest, ethnicity or land ownership)
- Living in an agreed and defined area (e.g. traditional use, or following administrative boundaries);
- Registering and developing a community institution to govern the area as a conservancy (e.g. registered as a CBO with the Ministry of Social Services, or as a not-for-profit company), in order to;
- Achieve the combined objectives of securing peace, improving lives, and conserving natural resources, working with neighbours and partners.



5) How are community conservancies governed?

Each conservancy is governed by a Board of Directors or Trustees comprising community members elected for a three-year term of office from settlements across the agreed conservancy landscape. Locally elected boards govern each conservancy, where local government and other stakeholders are included as observers (*ex officio* members). The Board has ultimate control of all activities and budgets of the Conservancy, assuming oversight responsibilities for operations and development activities within the conservancy, prioritising various interventions including peace and security, rangeland management, alternative livelihoods, enterprise development, etc.

NRT supports the governance of community conservancies through board trainings, leadership capacity-building and mentoring, and support to board, sub-committee and annual general meetings, offering advice and ensuring transparency. Conservancy leadership is not co-opted by NRT, but elected by members of the community. NRT's objectives in supporting community governance are to ensure transparency, accountability, equity and good representation. NRT maintains long and sustained engagement with communities, and decisions are not made by NRT but by conservancy representatives and land-owners.

6) What land tenure agreements are in place for community land?

Community land tenure and ownership rights have recently been strengthened under the 2016 Community Land Act. This Act addresses weak land tenure rights for local communities, and gives community land the same legal rights as privately owned land. It should also inspire confidence in potential investors, help promote equitable benefit sharing, and reduce the risk of community land being unlawfully sold or taken over. Full implementation of this Act awaits further regulations, which are currently being developed.

NRT has no intention, strategic objective, or legal right to claim any kind of ownership or control over community land. This is entirely a matter for the communities themselves, who have customary, common interest, legal or other rights to community land, all of which will be clarified and strengthened under the Community Land Act. NRT and member conservancies are pleased to have been consulted and advised on the development of this Act, in the interest of the communities who are guardians of this land.

7) Does a community conservancy stop pastoralists using their land for grazing?

No, one of the major objectives of most community conservancies is to manage their land more productively for their livestock grazing as well as wildlife, land which they are free to use as they decide. NRT has no authority to restrict access to community owned land. The purpose of the community conservancies is to provide a transparent and accountable institution that gives voice to majority pastoralist views and



intentions about how they manage and use their land – a significant development in the context of weak traditional institutions or lack of government oversight.

However, as climate change and increasing human and livestock populations put increasing pressure on northern Kenya's rangelands, many of the grasslands that pastoralists rely on have become severely degraded. Many conservancies are now trying to develop planned grazing systems, to rest, rotate and rehabilitate areas of grassland they graze. This may restrict access to certain areas at certain times of the year. NRT provides technical support to conservancies, including advice on grassland management practices that may improve productivity, benefit the pastoralist economy, and complement traditional practices.

A community conservancy is not land set aside for wildlife conservation, but a way of trying to integrate good land management practice that benefits people, livestock and wildlife, providing economic, social and ecological benefits across a landscape. In some cases, communities choose to set aside small areas exclusively for wildlife and tourism, although in many cases they allow access to such areas in extreme drought periods.

8) Does NRT own, control or manage any community land?

No, NRT does not own, control or manage any community land anywhere. NRT is an umbrella membership organisation, and has 33 member community conservancies, all of which are locally owned by communities under the Group Ranch Act or Trust Land legislation (now governed under the new Community Land Act 2016, whose regulations for implementation are now being developed). No private ranches are members of NRT. Thus NRT cannot acquire or control community land, nor dispossess pastoralist land-owners, nor exclude them from grazing their lands, nor appoint its own managers.

9) What is the relationship between NRT and the conservancies?

NRT is the umbrella organisation that was established to support community conservancies in northern Kenya. A community conservancy is an autonomous institution, operated by the communities that live within a self-defined area. NRT supports its member conservancies in a number of ways:

- It raises funds for the conservancies
- It provides advice and guidance on how to manage the land and affairs of the wider community through the conservancy
- It supports a wide range of training and helps introduce and broker relationships between different conservancies and investors
- It monitors performance, providing donors with a degree of oversight and quality assurance.
- It works as an independent third party in support of conservancy partnerships with county and national government, investors and development partners.



10) What is NRT's relationship to Lewa Wildlife Conservancy?

Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is a private wildlife conservancy in Meru County, owned by the Lewa Trust. NRT and Lewa have enjoyed a close working partnership since NRT's inception in 2004, and NRT's headquarters are situated next to Lewa's, in the conservancy itself.

Lewa provides logistical, technical and some programme support to NRT. A joint operations centre combines the NRT and Lewa security support operations, for more cooperative knowledge and resource sharing. This provides an effective point of coordination for information from conservancy rangers on wildlife poaching and livestock theft, information which is shared with and fully supported by the Kenya Police and Kenya Wildlife Service. Lewa assists NRT member conservancies with aircraft and tracker-dog support when requested.

The two organisations share a wildlife vet, seconded by the Kenya Wildlife Service, who is responsible for assisting sick or injured (mainly endangered) species in Lewa and the NRT conservancies. Lewa's successful community education programme is also providing guidance and momentum to NRT's new education programme - which will see schools in conservancies benefit more tangibly from good conservation and development activities.

11) What is NRT doing to promote security in northern Kenya?

NRT works closely with the Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya Police, local government authorities and others to support a community-led approach to peace and security initiatives across the region, using the community conservancy institutions as a platform. The Kenyan security agencies all fully support NRT's work, and see this as complementary to and not usurping their roles.

Each NRT member conservancy employs a team of uniformed rangers from the local communities, who are trained by the KWS Law Enforcement Academy in Manyani, and supported in their standard operating procedures. Rangers play a vital role in monitoring endangered wildlife species, conducting anti-poaching patrols, raising conservation awareness in their local communities, and acting as community wildlife ambassadors. Many conservancies are home to multiple ethnic groups, and all have equal representation in the ranger teams. Some of these rangers are also National Police Reservists - a status granted by the Kenya Police, which authorises them to carry police firearms after undergoing thorough vetting by the respective County Security Committees. They operate under the prescribed law of the Kenya Police Act.

NRT employs 3 mobile security teams, known as 9-0, 9-1 and 9-2. They specialise in anti-poaching and stock theft, working closely with the Kenya Police, KWS and individual conservancy rangers. These multi-ethnic teams are all recruited from within existing conservancies and serve in their home areas. The local background of these teams has proven to be one of their greatest strengths enabling a local community entry to policing, bringing stability, reducing ivory poaching, breaking cycles of retaliatory stock theft, supporting the police and KWS, and also operating as National



Police Reservists. All the mobile teams are armed and trained by the National Police Service and answer directly to the District Police chain of command.

12) What is NRT doing to promote peace in northern Kenya?

Alongside security operations, NRT's dedicated peace team works with conservancy management, local elders, warrior and youth representatives to broker peace deals and promote non-violent conflict resolution. A team of elders from the NRT Council of Elders acts as peace ambassadors, bringing together conflicting factions, enabling peace dialogue, promoting peaceful co-existence, seeking self-generated solutions to local grievances, and maintaining strict political, ethnic, religious and other neutrality.

Over the years NRT has built a reputation for neutrality, even-handedness, trust and practical solutions to conflict. These conflicts are often triggered by competition for grazing and water, ethnic hostility, historical grievances over conflicting claims to communal land. In the build up to the 2017 national elections, coinciding with the widespread drought in 2016-2017, there has been a significant upturn in conflict across the north. In areas where the community conservancies operate, the NRT Council of Elders, the NRT peace teams, and the Kenya Police (County Commissioners and Community Policing Department) have been working tirelessly - and successfully - to contain conflicts through peaceful dialogue.

13) Does NRT provide rangers with weapons?

No. NRT does not have the authority to arm rangers. Only a minority of conservancy rangers are armed, and those that are have been granted National Police Reservist status by the Kenya Police. This means they are provided with government weapons by the police, can carry these arms while on duty, and can make police arrests. NRT's role in this is to support the community conservancies with oversight of the rangers' Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), working conditions and reporting procedures, which are all approved by the Kenya Police.

14) Isn't NRT doing work that should be the responsibility of the government?

The county governments of northern Kenya are increasingly responding to demands from their constituent communities, and have plans to support new community conservancies in Samburu, Marsabit, Laikipia, Isiolo and Wajir. County governments are supporting peace, security, livelihoods development, infrastructure, services and investment in these conservancies. NRT is providing technical advice to county governments on the same, and helping to train the conservancy boards and rangers.

NRT supports the conservancies to engage more closely with the county budgeting process, including the ward administrators and ward-level planning processes. The elected ward-level Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) sit as ex officio members of the conservancy boards, so the links to the ward budgets and plans can be reinforced. NRT is also being consulted by county governments in the drafting of environmental laws.



In the future, NRT would like to see a more significant role for county governments in supporting the community conservancies.

15) What is NRT's relationship with the current crisis in Laikipia

The current crisis in Laikipia is centered on the invasion of private conservancies and ranches, and not community conservancies. This is not driven by the exclusion of pastoralists from NRT community conservancies – they are not excluded or denied access to community lands. However, the current drought, the high numbers of livestock and illegal weapons, and the serious long-term degradation of the northern rangelands are contributory factors.

Where NRT has member community conservancies adjacent to like-minded private conservancies, NRT is trying to develop effective models of private-community partnerships (e.g. Loisaba, modeled on the successful Lewa/Borana experiences). Some private conservancies are also institutional partners of NRT's (e.g. Ol Pejeta). In the wider northern landscape, NRT is supporting the community conservancies to address some of the underlying drivers of natural resource conflicts, especially in finding long-term responses to the degradation of the pastoralist rangelands.

16) What is NRT's relationship to the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association?

Historically, Kenya's conservation sector had three main stakeholder groups: Government (mainly the Kenya Wildlife Service), private ranches supporting wildlife conservation, and local and international NGOs. Community landowners were not significantly represented nationally until the formation of the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA) in April 2013. The establishment of KWCA was supported by The Nature Conservancy, NRT and many others.

KWCA is a landowner-led national membership organization, which acts as a forum and national policy advocacy agency where private and community landowners have a unified voice, share experiences and actively participate in developing policies, legislation, standards and capacity building for protecting and benefiting from wildlife.

NRT and all its member community conservancies are members of the KWCA (www.kwakenya.com).

17) Are any of the conservancies UNESCO World Heritage Sites?

Only one of the NRT member conservancies is currently listed as part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In 2013, Ngare Ndare Forest Trust was included, along with its neighbour Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, in the existing Mount Kenya World Heritage Site. This nomination was submitted by the Government of Kenya.

World Heritage status is a prestigious recognition for places of outstanding universal value to humanity that, as such, have been inscribed on the list to be protected for future generations to appreciate and enjoy. The World Heritage Committee



considered Lewa and Ngare Ndare Forest, which are connected to Mount Kenya, for their outstanding natural beauty, as well as their varied and impressive ecosystems and biodiversity.

World Heritage status does not in any way forfeit land from landowners.