

Security dynamics in conservancies in Kenya: The case of Isiolo County

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SUMMARY

The community-based conservation model is an increasing phenomenon in Kenya, especially in northern pastoralist counties. This *Working Paper*, the result of empirical research over several years, considers dimensions of inclusion and exclusion and subsequent conflicts around community-based conservancies in Isiolo County. It finds that conservancies are sometimes established to protect a community's interests in and access to community land, including formal claim-making over ancestral community land which may spatially exclude other groups. These dimensions are reinforced by the presence of rangers, of whom many are armed National Police Reservists. Spatial and political dimensions of exclusion also exist to some extent within conservancies due to the need to balance wildlife and grazing needs.

Armed security forces in conservancies have important implications for state sovereignty and control over the use of force. Importantly, a powerful donor-funded umbrella organisation (the Northern Rangelands Trust) is significantly involved in training, equipping and deploying rangers. The presence of well-equipped armed ranger teams may then inadvertently play into resource-based conflict and alter power balances between ethnic groups as is most clearly highlighted on the Samburu-Isiolo border. Sustainability is another concern where donor funding is an important source.

Another concern for the future is Isiolo's position at the centre of the country's infrastructural and economic development plans which threaten to dispossess pastoralists of community land. Land claims and conflicts are set to increase, and arms in civilian hands could plausibly be used in various types of conflict, from ethno-political to community-investor and community-state conflicts.

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Main findings

Community-based conservancies have the potential to empower local communities and increase their participation in conservation

Locally elected boards manage conservancies and assist participatory decision-making on rangeland management, conservation and other livelihood strategies of the conservancy. Conservancies also provide a platform for representation and may assist in the protection of community land, particularly where this is under threat from development projects and private land grabs.

Within conservancies, there are dimensions of spatial and political exclusion for members

Zoning practices within conservancies reserve some areas for the almost exclusive preservation of certain areas for wildlife. These restrictions often but not always harmonise with indigenous systems of grazing management, resulting in disadvantages for some pastoralists. An umbrella organisation, the Northern Rangelands Trust which supports conservancies has a role in decisions on rangeland management and conservation through joint board meetings with member conservancies. These are not always as participatory as intended.

Conservancies introduce new dimensions of spatial exclusion on their boundaries and subsequent local conflicts in society

Conservancies have become a means of protecting a community's interests in and access to community land. Although conservancies are not fenced, the presence of armed rangers acts as a barrier to migration by other communities. This is explicitly acknowledged when new conservancies have been proposed to act as barriers or so-called "buffer zones" against migrations of non-local pastoralists. In some areas,

this has brought peace, as it prevented livestock raids. In other areas, this has increased conflict along contested borders over important resources there.

The lines between defence and aggression are sometimes blurred for conservancy rangers

Armed rangers are involved in wildlife and community security. Since they are community members, they may face difficult conflicts of interest in the context of local resource-based conflict. There are cases where rangers were involved in intercommunal conflict

The presence of conservancy security can inadvertently create power imbalances between historical rivals on conservancy borders, as well as arms races

This has become especially visible since Kenya removed arms from police reservists in all areas except in conservancies. Power imbalances are complicating conflict on the border between conservancies in Isiolo and Samburu counties. In Samburu, conservancies have a longer history and are well established and profitable, are well supported by the government and the Northern Rangelands Trust. This increased support, visible in the number of vehicles and rangers is believed to have been used to support the Samburu herders who have become more forceful and less likely to negotiate with the Isiolo pastoralists.

That a non-state body receiving outside donor funding has an influential role in the management of conservancy security forces poses several dilemmas and has implications for sustainability and state sovereignty

The Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) helps to train and equip rangers, and makes day-to-day decisions on their deployment, under the official oversight of the Kenya Police. However, in practice, the Kenyan state relies significantly on this assistance. In taking this dominant role, NRT risks being drawn into local inter-communal conflicts and even wider conflicts.

There is a risk that well-trained security personnel could pose a danger to the country

With the means of armed coercion in civilian hands and funded by outside donors, there is a risk that if donor funding were to cease, conservancy rangers would seek other livelihoods, using their arms. This dangerous situation calls for a strategy of effective oversight by the government to monitor all the arms in the hands of rangers. Given Isiolo's history of inter-communal and ethnopolitical conflict and its position at the centre of the Vision 2030 national development plans which has already led to intense land speculation and threats of land injustices, there is a high risk of conflict in the county. Arms in civilian hands could plausibly be used in various types of conflict, from ethnopolitical to community-investor and community-state conflicts.

Introduction

Conservancies are an increasing phenomenon in Kenya's northern counties. They are areas of land designated for the conservation of wildlife, collective rangeland management, ecotourism and other livelihood-related functions. These areas are generally in remote and underdeveloped, mainly occupied by pastoralists.

Currently, there are 166 conservancies across 28 counties in Kenya (Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association, 2015). They occupy an area larger than all national parks and have some of the largest numbers of wildlife in Kenya. Conservancies may be privately or government-owned or, most commonly, established on areas of communally-owned land and run by a board of community representatives. Several conservancies in Kenya are set up on the land of former ranches owned by settler families who continue to be important players in the sector. The status of a conservancy has various advantages: a) recognition and representation both nationally and internationally, b) a wildlife conservation function which is favoured by the state and to which the state allocates armed rangers for protection and c) allocation of donor funds, which are often ploughed into the provision of services and assistance of livelihoods. Conservancies may also provide a platform and an incentive for peacebuilding activities.

At the same time, conservancies introduce new dimensions of exclusion and subsequent conflicts in the local society. First and most obviously, there is a reconfiguring of space however minor, from open rangeland in which access is governed by tradition, informal negotiation and sometimes even by the outcome of conflicts, to territories where access is more formalised and restricted, requiring a fixed community membership, thus excluding outsiders to some degree. Second, there is a change in land-use from largely pastoralism to one in which wildlife conservation is a concurrent goal with ecotourism, ranching and other business ventures. Third, traditional political and governance structures which regulate grazing and other matters are reorganised and to some extent replaced by a board, which is elected by community members to manage the conservancy. The injection of funds creates new power dynamics and political

competition within and around conservancies. Last, conservancies by virtue of having armed guards, alter security dynamics, both within and outside the conservancy boundary.

This *Working Paper* examines what dimensions of inclusion and exclusion, particularly spatial inclusion/exclusion, exist in and around conservancies in Isiolo. How do these raise tensions and conflicts and influence security dynamics in these areas? The *Paper* begins by framing the issues with an overview of the literature on conservation and exclusion. A socio-economic and legal background is then given, followed by a consideration of dimensions of inclusion and exclusion inside and outside conservancies. Issues of inclusion/exclusion and security dynamics are closely related because the former can lead to tensions and conflicts. The creation of armed security actors within conservancies is another means of reinforcing patterns of inclusion/exclusion. The *Paper* then explores specific tensions emanating from the role played by the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) in security governance. These are then discussed, followed by conclusions.

Conservancies and exclusion in Kenya

Community-oriented approaches to conservation have often been seen as a solution to the tension between the conservation of wildlife and community interests. They aim to achieve social justice, material wellbeing and environmental integrity (Dressler et al., 2010, p. 4) and have gained prominence since the 1990s when the USAID-supported Conservation Resource of Biodiverse Areas (COBRA) project (implemented in Laikipia, Samburu and Kajiado districts) aimed to bring socio-economic development to communities through the conservation and sustainable management of wildlife and natural resources (Honey, 1998; World Bank, 2000). Ykhanbai et al. argue that community-based conservation can be a “win-win situation.” They note, “Community-owned and managed conservancies present an opportunity for the intersection of development goals and biodiversity conservation in rangelands. The existence of high levels of poverty but also viable tourism resources indicates an opportunity for synergies” (2014, p. 6).

There are 13 different conservancy associations in Kenya, of which the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) is the largest (Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association, 2016). NRT was established in 2004 and supports 39 community conservancies in northern Kenya. NRT enjoys strong support from the government of Kenya and international donors. Its mission is, “To develop resilient community conservancies which transform people’s lives, secure peace and conserve natural resources” (Northern Rangelands Trust, n.d.).

However, conservancies may also exclude certain groups. They do so in three overlapping, interdependent ways:

- 1) *Spatial exclusion*: Regarding spatial exclusion in the context of pastoral mobility, Moseley and Watson (2016, p. 464) point out that while conservancies do not exclude communities, there is a kind of territoriality about them. Conservancies define those who are part of the recognised community and those who are not and who “may experience reduced access and exclusion”. This may exacerbate conflict, particularly in disputed border areas between different groups (Okumu, 2014; Greiner, 2012). The presence of armed guards (scouts) reinforces the dimension of territoriality.
- 2) *Economic exclusion*: As Pas Schrijver explains, *the boundaries existed before, but their meaning and how it is interpreted is what has changed. The boundaries now become a marker of who is entitled to the benefits and who is not (...)* a more rigid understanding of spatial boundaries demarcated on the land, leading to a closed engagement with space (2018, p. 18). Greiner (2012) stresses the same point and conceptualises the establishment of a community-based conservancy as a kind of “resource upgrading of a common pool resource (pasture) which tends to augment interests in it” (p. 416). Thus, he notes, conflict is often more about the potential value of the resource than its scarcity. The injection of external donor funding to support livelihood projects, schools and health services also creates benefits which outsiders are not necessarily entitled to access.
- 3) *Political exclusion*: Community-based conservation may consolidate the power of elites and even provide opportunities for local elites within communities which exclude others. Enns acknowledges that it is not only national parks and reserves which have this effect, noting that “(...) conservation has come to play a critical role in the consolidation of power and control over land by both state and non-state actors at the expense of historically marginalised groups” (2017, p. 8). In the Masai Mara area, some elders have been able to make unilateral and even secretive decisions to lease communally owned group-ranch land to conservation investors (World Bank, 2020). Galaty (2011) notes that the appropriation of rangelands by actors who use political means to achieve what would normally be socially and economically impossible challenges pastoralism most critically. A variety of actors may be involved, including those whom he refers to as “environmental imperialists”, who promise to use the land or preserve flora and fauna better than the Africans. According to Wright et al. (2016), wildlife conservation and tourism are prioritised over pastoral livelihoods, customary land use and systems of management which have historically conserved wildlife. Thus, pastoralists are dispossessed of land or the rights to administer land as they see fit.

This *Paper* focusses on spatial and political exclusion and its effects on community relations and security dynamics. Field research began in 2017 and took place in Isiolo County on several occasions from 2017 to 2020. It consisted of around 80 interviews and focus group discussions with various conservancy employees including guards, local elders, community members, civil society and faith-based organisations, NGOs, donors, county and national officials. In Isiolo, there are five community conservancies—Biliqo-Bulesa, Nakuprat-Gotu, Leparua, Nasuulu and Oldonyiro. For his field research, the author chose three of these: Biliqo Bulesa, Nakuprat-Gotu and Leparua. He chose Biliqo Bulesa because of political tensions and conflict dynamics which he was aware of before he started with the research, and the latter two because of their proximity to the planned LAPSSET (Lamu Port, South Sudan, Ethiopia Transport) Corridor. Finally, each provided a unique perspective in terms of ethnic mix (outlined below).

Conservancies in Isiolo County

Isiolo County is located in the centre of Kenya, almost directly north of Nairobi. It is home to several pastoralist groups (Borana, Somali, Samburu and Turkana) and others such as the agriculturalist Meru, who constitute the majority in Meru County to the south of Isiolo. Relationships between these groups are characterised by cooperation and conflict and are influenced by drought, land-use changes and benefits of development, as well as illicit small-arms flows.

Most of Isiolo land is rangeland, and the majority of its residents practice pastoralism and rely on mobility and access to water sources and pasture for their herds, with animals outnumbering people more than 10-fold.¹ In terms of land tenure, it is largely community land, held in trust by the county government for the collective land-holders, that is the community members. Under this system, it is relatively easy to dispossess communities of their land through agreements made without their participation. Constitutional change in 2010, followed by the Land Act (2012) and the Community Land Act (2016) attempted to counter this by recognising community land tenure as being equal in status to private land tenure. Furthermore, the Community Land Act makes provision for group registration of communally owned land and compensation directly to the registered group. However, the implementation of the Act has been slow. Few people are also aware of the Act, yet development projects move ahead and, in some cases, were agreed long before constitutional changes were made. Land speculation and land grabbing are high in the county and have alarmed local residents.

Since 2008, Isiolo County has found itself at the geographical and strategic centre of Kenya's emphasis on infrastructure development for economic transformation. In concrete terms, the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor, flanked by a 50 km wide special economic zone, and possibly a resort city whose water needs would be served by a twin dam complex on the Ewaso Nyiro River (Government of Kenya, 2012b) are expected to be

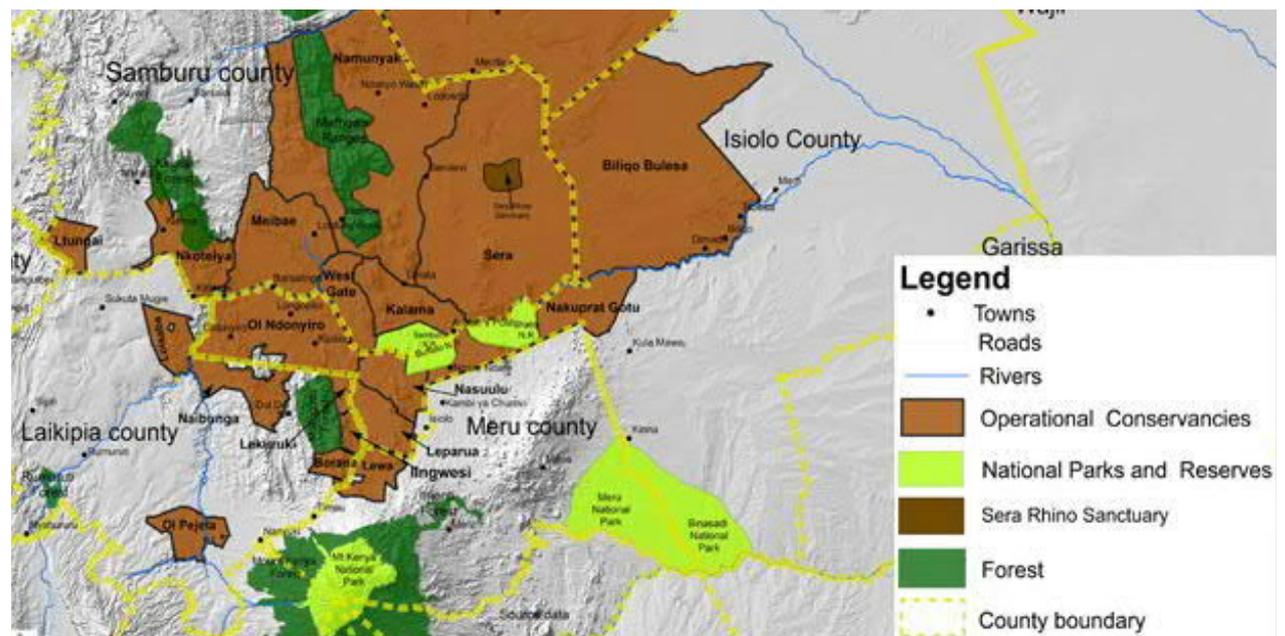
situated in the county. The river itself is also under threat due to deforestation, agriculture and settlements in the Mau Forest, a 400,000-hectare protected area further south, which is one of Kenya's important water towers (Government of Kenya, 2009). There are several road-building projects, of which one, the Isiolo-Moyale road has already been completed. The new developments herald both opportunity and inequality through dispossession from community-owned land and resources, exclusion and other unwanted socio-cultural impacts.

The three conservancies under consideration are described below, with further information on size, population and number of armed rangers provided in Figure 1. All have similar wildlife species, including predators such as lions, cheetahs and wild dogs, and grazers such as elephants, buffalos, giraffes, elands, oryx, gerenuks, Grevy's zebras and plain zebras (Northern Rangelands Trust, 2019). Of these, the elephant is listed as vulnerable and the Grevy's zebra, wild dog and giraffe are endangered species (Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association, 2016). Isiolo conservancies, unlike their Samburu counterparts, do not yet have any significant tourist infrastructure, though have benefited from fees for bird-shooting activities in the past (Nakuprat-Gotu Wildlife Conservancy, 2015; Biliqo Bulesa Community Conservancy, 2017).

Biliqo-Bulesa Conservancy

Biliqo-Bulesa Conservancy was established in 2007 and is bordered to the south by the Ewaso Nyiro River and borders Sera Conservancy in Samburu county in the west. The Borana ethnic group occupies the conservancy. It contains six village centres about five to ten kilometres apart (Buliqo Morarra, Deimaa-do, Buliqo, Builessa, Goda, Awaasitue) and the Kom Springs, which are an important resource for Borana and Samburu pastoralists as well as other pastoralists from Marsabit County to the north. There is a campsite at Morarra and a forest along the banks of the

¹ \ Interview, senior official in Ministry of Livestock, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

Box 1**Reserves and conservancies in Isiolo**

Source: Detail used with permission from Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (2016)

Ewaso Nyiro River which has Doum palm and acacia species and has been reducing due to deforestation for timber, firewood and charcoal production (Biliqo Bulesa Conservancy, 2017). In Biliqo-Bulesa, there is a strong movement against NRT, led by professionals and local leaders.

Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy

Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy was established in 2010 from the two areas of Nakuprat and Gotu, uniting Turkana and Borana communities who reside in 13 village centres (mostly on the Nakuprat side). There is a campsite at Bojidera. The conservancy is very close to the land planned for the LAPSSET corridor and thus is currently troubled by land speculation and grabbing which is threatening pastoralist livelihoods and wildlife. The area is also attracting other

pastoralists such as the Garre who are camel keepers who mainly reside in Marsabit County, but are also very successful traders from Isiolo up to Ethiopia. The completion of the Isiolo-Moyale road has further enabled them to expand their business.² The northern border of the conservancy is the Ewaso Nyiro River where local entrepreneurs use its water for small-scale irrigation.³ The southern border is the contested Meru-Isiolo boundary. The two sides of the Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy are almost separate due to the presence of the Buffalo National Reserve in its centre. The Buffalo Reserve has been affected by the Isiolo-Moyale road and will also be affected by LAPSSET, both of which have a disruptive effect on animal migration corridors. On the other side of Nakuprat is Shaba National Reserve, which accounts for the clustering of settlements in the Nakuprat area between the two protected areas of Shaba and Buffalo.

² \ Interview, World Bank Consultant, Nairobi, 28 March 2019.

³ \ Observation, March, May 2019.

Leparua Conservancy

Leparua Conservancy is a small conservancy, created in 2011 within the Isiolo Holding Ground (otherwise known as the Livestock Marketing Division or LMD) abutting Lewa Conservancy in Laikipia. The LMD is a 124,200-hectare piece of government land, adjacent to Isiolo town. It occupies parts of Burat and Oldonyiro wards and borders Laikipia, Samburu and Meru Counties. It has historically been used as a buffer zone for disease control and an area for quarantining and livestock marketing purposes. In the present day, it is occupied by a number of users including

different ethnic pastoral groups who often dispute with one another over pasture and water (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock Development and Marketing, 2006).

A new abattoir on the ground is currently near completion and is likely to bring opportunities for pastoralists to sell their cattle, but could also exacerbate cattle raiding.⁴ There are five different ethnic groups within the conservancy itself, and the area is an important wildlife corridor previously troubled by poaching, which has improved since the establishment of the conservancy (Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, 2011).

Table 1
Conservation areas in Isiolo County

	Year established	Size (ha)	Population	Ethnic groups	No. of rangers	No. of armed rangers
National Reserves						
Bisanadi	1979	60,600				
Shaba	1974	23,900				
Buffalo Springs	1985	13,100				
Conservancies						
Biliqo-Bulesa	2007	376,657	4,781	Borana	30	15
Nasuulu	2011	34,568	4,262	Borana, Samburu, Turkana, Somali	26	unknown
Nakuprat-Gotu	2010	72,418	5,240	Borana, Turkana	27	20
Leparua	2011	33,550	8,590	Ndoro, Turkana, Somali, Borana and Samburu	26	18 or more
Oldonyiro (Narupa, Nampicho, Naapu and Nanapa sections)	2016-2018	115,518	15,388	Samburu (majority), Turkana	21	unknown

Sources: Northern Rangelands Trust, 2017; Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association, 2016; Kenya Wildlife Service, 2018; Lewa Wildlife Conservancy. 2011 and interview data.

4 \ Interview, official from Ministry of Livestock and Agriculture, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

Inclusion and exclusion in Isiolo's conservancies

To understand the dimensions of inclusion and exclusion relating to conservancies, it is worth considering pastoralists' perceptions of territoriality within their landscape first and then to examine how the management structures of conservancies affect pastoralists.

Although the boundaries of customary land are not formally documented (as yet), pastoralists do not consider everywhere to belong to everyone; rather, there is an understanding, albeit disputed at times, that certain groups own certain portions of customary land.⁵ The Borana claim customary ownership and exclusive grazing rights to almost all of Isiolo County (Boye & Karhaus, 2011). This is largely based on colonial government policy in which they were allocated all of the land of Merti, Garbatulla and Kinna. However, the Samburu claim to have been earlier occupants of the district, having been displaced by the Borana on the directive of the colonial government. The Turkana claim rights to settle and graze in certain areas (mainly in Ngaremara) based on their presence there since colonial times, while the Somali claim only access and user rights and ownership of certain areas in Isiolo Central (Boye & Karhaus, 2011). Even though there is a general acknowledgement of these claims between the different ethnic groups, resource-based conflicts between the different groups occupying the same land occur sometimes. These may at times take ethnopolitical and territorial dimensions (Mkutu & Boru, 2019). Grazing management systems contain some provisions for managing this inter-ethnic competition.

The longstanding Borana system of grazing management known as the *Dedha* system remains important and has been well preserved in the county and even strengthened in recent years to protect pastoralist heritage and communal land tenure in the wake of development projects (Cormack, 2016). This system entails rules for judicious and considerate use of water sources, pasture and forest, to limit overexploitation and also taxes migrating pastoralists who wish to use the land. It forms an integral part of agreements,

such as the 2001 Madogashe Declaration, a peace deal brokered by local elders and government representatives of Marsabit, Isiolo, Mandera, Garissa and Tana River Counties (then districts) (Menkhaus, 2014). The system extends down to the village level, with the *Ola* being the smallest unit overseeing around ten to twenty households, followed by the intermediate unit, the *Arda*, and the *Dedha* overseeing a larger area approximating a county ward.⁶ The Borana expect pastoral groups entering Isiolo County from outside to respect the *Dedha* system and practice negotiated access. However, especially at times of climatic pressures, these do not and, instead, forcefully demand access by using their arms (Mkutu & Boru, 2019). The 2016 Isiolo County Natural Resource Management Bill institutionalised the *Dedha* system by creating a council of elders who would advise the county government on natural resource management. A Borana elder noted that there has been a long delay in the enactment of the bill, and that some have tried to obstruct it.⁷ This may be because *Dedha* system objectives could conflict with development objectives and, more pertinently, because *Dedha* is a Borana institution, which might make non-Borana suspect that Borana interests could dominate in the county.

In the context of open rangelands that have been subject to customary law and continuous negotiations about user rights and temporary access of different pastoralist groups, it is generally neither possible nor desirable to fence conservancies. However, sometimes community members, such as those in Biliqo Bulesa fear that conservationists, namely NRT, have a plan to take and fence their land or use armed guards to keep them out of it. This fear may partially stem from negative experiences with wildlife reserves and parks (Government of Kenya, 2012a) such as restriction from accessing pasture and water, and brutal treatment by Kenya Wildlife Service guards (World Bank, 2019), but also because of insecurity surrounding the Samburu-Isiolo border, partly attributed to conservancy security forces (see following chapter).

5 \ Phone interview, peace worker in Isiolo, 23 April 2019.

6 \ Phone interview, civil society expert on drylands, 11 November 2019.

7 \ Interview, an elder from Merti, 12 May 2019.

One area of confusion for community members is the legal basis of conservancies, which is not a new kind of land tenure, but rather a system of land-use recognised by law, the 2014 Wildlife Management and Conservation Act No. 47.

Within conservancies, however, there may be some restrictions (though it is usually impractical to create a fence). A member of the board in Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy explained that the conservancy has three zones: One zone where grazing is freely allowed, a second zone reserved for dry times, and a third zone for animal breeding which is only accessible in absolute crisis. The Conservancy Management Plan shows a core area on the Gotu side along the Ewaso Nyiro River which spans around 14,000 hectares or about 20 per cent of the conservancy (Nakuprat-Gotu Wildlife Conservancy, 2015) This is said to be reserved for wildlife and is only accessible for livestock during severe droughts. At these times, only a small quota of animals from each household may enter, which usually includes weaker or young animals. It was noted that negotiations between the elders and the herders are ongoing on this issue.⁸ Outsiders can also graze their animals within the conservancy subject to negotiation as would have been the case before the conservancy existed.⁹ Grazing committees decide on members' access to different parts of the conservancy. In the case of Nakuprat-Gotu, the grazing committee worked closely with the Dedha elders on the Gotu side,¹⁰ while on the Ngaremare side, elders (many of whom are Turkana) are also represented on the board,¹¹ in line with NRT's objectives for grazing committees. In Biliqo Bulesa, however, some community members felt that the system advocated by NRT was too restrictive and did not follow the traditional *Dedha* system.¹² Thus there is evidence of exclusion as a result of human-human and human-wildlife competition, which is enforced by elders under the guidance of NRT. Political power, membership (based on ethnicity) and age all play a part in the decision-making process.

Despite its ideals, NRT acknowledges that the community-based conservation model places some new restrictions upon pastoralists. It noted: "There is a clash between the cultural and traditional aspects of nomadic grazing systems and the more closed boundary systems that conservancies promote to manage rangelands" (Northern Rangelands Trust, 2018, p. 8). NRT's view is that the rangeland is not only degraded and threatened by the climate but also by overgrazing, which is a threat to wildlife as well as to pastoralists. Hence, NRT suggests planning grazing better and to fence certain spaces in to allow regeneration. A second challenge acknowledged by NRT is armed inter-communal resource-based conflict. In 2017, as a result of these challenges, NRT stated its intention to phase out grazing committees and leave decisions on rangeland management to boards and managers.

Community-based conservancies are managed by the communities on whose territory they are established. They have a board, elected from among the community members, and a management team. As an umbrella organisation, NRT also has a board that consists of the chairpersons of the conservancy-level boards, which is accountable to a council of elders again formed by elected representatives from each conservancy (Northern Rangelands Trust, 2018). Elders on the council are elected based on status and respect in the community (which also relates to wealth) and the ability to articulate the views of the community. The budgets of conservancies are decided at annual meetings with the presence of the Council of Elders, the NRT board and donors. Conservancy management structures, therefore, recognise and work with accepted governance structures, but unavoidably reinforce existing power dynamics through the injection of money and other benefits.

The boards in the study areas were ethnically representative. In Nakuprat-Gotu, 12 board positions are shared equally between the two ethnic groups, the Borana and Turkana, and there are four chiefs on the

8 \ Phone interview, conservation staff member, Ngaremare, 7 May 2020.

9 \ Phone interview, staff member in a conservancy, 2 November 2019.

10 \ Phone interview, staff member in a conservancy, 2 November 2019.

11 \ Phone interview, conservation staff member, Ngaremare, 7 May 2020.

12 \ Interview, officer from Chari Advocacy Program, 6 May 2019.

board.¹³ In Leparua Conservancy, the board is reported as being democratically elected, gender-sensitive and ethnically mixed.¹⁴ In Biliqo Bulesa, there is only one ethnic group, but communication and participation at the local level have broken down. A civil society officer stated that there had been no annual general meeting of the board for several years, leaving some community members feeling 'vulnerable' to the influence of the NRT.¹⁵ A senior county administrator hinted at internal divisions within conservancy management in Biliqo over the large amounts of money involved and implied that most management conflicts are about money.¹⁶ Political competitions and in-fighting within the Biliqo community are likely behind some of the negative feelings directed against NRT.

Several people interviewed raised concerns about the top-heavy nature of conservancy management structures, with NRT dominating decision-making. An elder who had been part of a conservancy management noted that the council of elders had an important and respected role.

*NRT have their own structures; they have their CEO, region coordinators (...). But whatever they do, they refer to the council of elders. They are the decision-makers, they collect the views of community conservancies and bring it to the council of elders' meeting.*¹⁷

However, some believed that the council of elders was too weak to influence decisions,¹⁸ and that the conservancy boards were dominated by NRT's agenda. "The manager is employed by the board while indirectly, it is NRT that employs the manager. The board is illiterate and is a rubber stamp".¹⁹ A conservancy staff member said of the NRT meetings, having attended some:

*They are elite dominated. (...) Everything is in English, and the council of elders cannot read. In most meetings, the elders are snoozing; all they need is an allowance and food. An elder signs off an amount of money, and he has no clue.*²⁰

Again, while the management structures of conservancies appear to be representative, there is evidence of exclusion, partly as a result of differences in levels of education and language barriers, but also because of who is holding the funds. It is not clear what efforts have been made to overcome this. This affects the conservancies allegedly represented and allows NRT to dominate.

In summary, despite measures to prevent it, conservancies have dimensions of spatial inclusion and exclusion through the formalisation of outside boundaries and zoning within conservancies. There are economic and political dimensions to this because livelihoods are influenced by spatial inclusion and exclusion, and because board members make grazing management decisions, committee members, elders, and ultimately NRT which may disadvantage those at the ground level whose livelihoods are more dependent upon livestock. These dimensions are exacerbated by the presence of armed rangers (see below).

13 \ Interview, board member in Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy, 23 March 2019.

14 \ Interview, an elder and a herder, Ngarisilgone village, Leparua, 22 March 2019.

15 \ Interview, officer from civil society, name withheld, 6 May 2019.

16 \ Interview, senior county administrator, Isiolo, 6 May 2019.

17 \ Group interview Northern Rangeland Trust, former member of the Council of Elders and member of the board, 7 September 2018.

18 \ Interview former senior administrator, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

19 \ FGD, County Ward Administrators, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

20 \ Interview, staff member in a conservancy, September 2019.

Armed rangers and security at the inter-communal level

Conservancies have their own security teams consisting of rangers (also known as scouts) to protect wildlife and conservancy communities. In all the conservancies run by NRT, there are 768 rangers, of whom around half are said to be armed (NRT, 2018). These armed rangers have the status of National Police Reservists (NPR), a force that was established in 1948, and their arms are provided by the state. Legally, NPRs are under the authority of the police (Police Service Act 2011) and are mandated to supplement the role of the police. In reality, they often do police work in rural towns because police are thin on the ground. In recent decades, NPRs have been recruited from amongst rural (mainly pastoral) communities, to provide security for livestock and communities in camps or on the move. The force has been in many ways highly effective and trusted by community members but is also riddled with problems including lack of training, poor payment (until recently there was no pay at all), under-resourcing, low levels of professionalism, lack of oversight and poor arms control resulting in banditry and stock theft, and the potential for politicians to interfere with recruitment and activities, pushing for members of their own ethnic group to be recruited, and arranging for NPRs to guard their interests. In recent years, the NPRs have been recruited from among conservancy communities and allocated as conservancy rangers (though not all rangers are NPRs).

Although NPRs are officially under the authority of the police, NRT plays an important part in training and resourcing those allocated to conservancies. Rangers are trained, resourced and paid upwards of 15,000 KShs (US \$105) by NRT and given uniforms, vehicles and other equipment, food and benefits such as free medical care.²¹ Furthermore, 70 NPR rangers have been organised by NRT into rapid response teams known as “g” teams (named from 9-1 to 9-6). According to NRTs statistics of security incidents since 2012, these teams focus on anti-poaching activities and pursuing livestock theft (NRT, 2018, p. 33).

They are equipped with vehicles and helicopters and receive specialist training from a private security company called “51 Degrees” consisting of relatives of the family who runs Lewa Conservancy in Laikipia County.²²

Because of the presence of these armed teams of rangers and security equipment, communities enjoy the benefit of security forces closer to home and are safer than those outside of conservancies. Referring to the time taken for police to arrive, an elder was grateful for the availability of security teams with vehicles: “Now there is a car, which you call, no need to wait for Isiolo police. This is a big benefit”.²³ A businessman in Isiolo town likened the “g” team to the military in terms of their number and efficiency in responding to threats such as cattle raids:

*In all the 27 conservancies it's like an army. At each village, there are police reservists who are the first people to follow the [raided] cattle. The 9-2 will join [the local team of reservists] before the national security does.*²⁴

The security dimension of conservancies is one of the most important in the opinion of members. An NRT survey which summed up community opinions on the main benefits of conservancies confirmed that these were security, transport and student bursaries (Mokku, 2019; NRT, 2017). Staff in Nakuprat-Gotu echoed this: “We do appreciate the conservation; it has set us free as a community from depending on government for security and development”.²⁵ A county administrator confirmed that the community wants the conservancy to provide them with security:

*There are areas with no mobile phone coverage. You have Yamicha which borders Marsabit and Sericho which borders Garissa and Wajir. The grazing system cannot control people from Wajir and Garissa-Modogashe area, so Yamicha want a conservancy.*²⁶

The point they make here is that it is not an option to call the police to protect communities from incursions by Somali armed groups

22 \ Interviews with conservancy staff in Isiolo and Samburu, 2019-2020.

23 \ Interview, elder in Leparua Conservancy, 22 March 2019.

24 \ Interview, businessman, LMD, 21 March 2019.

25 \ Interviews security staff in Nakuprat-Gotu conservancy, 8 September 2018. See social media comments at <https://web.facebook.com/Isiolo-Newswire/posts/isiolo-mcas-want-nrt-conservancies-to-re>

26 \ Interview, county tourism official, May 2019.

21 \ Interviews security staff in Nakuprat-Gotu conservancy, 8 September 2018.; interview, businessman, Isiolo town, 21 March 2019.

who do not respect the Borana *Dedha* system. The communities know that they are on their own when it comes to attacks and cattle raids, and a conservancy with armed rangers looks like a good way to remedy this. In Biliqo Bulesa Conservancy, where many do not feel that they are benefiting from the conservancy, an official in the County Cohesion department said: "It is just a small number of Borana who accept conservancy, due to fear and the need for arms".²⁷ In this case, they saw security as the only benefit of the conservancy.

The exact role and responsibility of conservancy NPRs seems rather unclear.²⁸ NRT, as well as many respondents of all cadres, acknowledge that they play a decisive role in both conservation security and community security. Their role in community security often takes the form of policing in conservancies. For example, in 2016, there was an incident in which a young armed Samburu man entered Leparua Conservancy and robbed a Ndorobo man of his phone, groceries and a motorcycle key. In response, Leparua rangers grouped together with Il Ngwesi conservancy rangers from Laikipia and pursued him. After an exchange of fire, the Samburu was killed.²⁹ Police often rely on the assistance and superior equipment of conservancy security teams (NPRs and other trained rangers employed by NRT) to do policing in and near conservancies (Mkutu & Wandera, 2013). However, similar to NPRs outside of conservancies, there is a possibility for misuse of arms, especially when the NPRs are in financial need. An NRT board member was worried:

*You have given them a gun, but there is no armoury. He [takes it] to his home. Some of them are abusing human rights, though NRT may not be aware of this. It is easy to get illegal bullets to fire so that these can't be tracked, and you cannot be held accountable.*³⁰ Community members in Gotu concurred that rangers were known to have misused their arms.

*Sometimes they cannot afford to accept just sitting to wait for Kshs 15,000 (US \$150) every month. So instead, they use their guns for other, illegal, activities.*³¹

The "9" teams also raise concerns. A conservancy staff member said:

*There is little awareness about the rapid response teams. They are well equipped, but who is monitoring them? Are they truly answerable to the state and police?*³²

Albeit legally, NPRs, including the "9" teams, are under police authority, there is no specific law that guides NPRs based in conservancies. Practically, NRT headquarters in Lewa Wildlife Conservancy makes deployment decisions about "9" teams, while the police oversee the allocation of firearms and ammunition.³³ An observation by the author of a vehicle in Gotu area carrying the 9-1 ranger team and not one police officer further supports the assertion of the relative independence of these teams from the police.

It appears that security is one of the incentives for communities to establish conservancies under NRT: Conservancy NPRs are more empowered and resourced than non-conservancy NPRs. However, non-conservancy NPRs complain about the lack of training, delay in getting uniforms and guns, inadequate supplies of ammunition, and a delay in getting their small salary. In fact, from May to July 2019, the government took arms from thousands of non-conservancy NPRs, which included the 130 NPRs from Isiolo, for vetting, biometric registration, marking of guns and redeployment as a more regularised force. This, however, has led to an increase in livestock raiding in various places (Hansard, 2019; Otieno, 2019a; Otieno, 2019b; Ndanyi, 2019). At the time of writing, these arms had not been reissued. The conservancy rangers were not required to disarm though no explanation was publicly given for this. The local military power is in the hands of conservancy security teams and ultimately NRT, which thus has significant influence in the security landscape at the community and county levels. The implications of this influence will be considered below.

27 \ Interview, official in County Cohesion Department, Isiolo, 17 October 2018.

28 \ Interview, KWS warden, 10 May 2019.

29 \ Interview, businessman, LMD, 7 May 2019.

30 \ Phone interview with an NRT board member, 21 September 2019.

31 \ FGD with the community, Gotu, 8 September 2018.

32 \ Interview, staff member in a conservancy, September 2019.

33 \ Phone communication with former conservancy board member, name of conservancy withheld, 29 January 2020.

Therefore, despite their apparent role in conservation, armed conservancy rangers are more often involved in community security and other policing-type duties than in fighting poachers. Despite this, they are not closely supervised by the police; rather, their activities are largely supported and governed by a non-state entity, that is NRT, and funded to a significant extent by donors.

What then is the impact of conservancies on conflict dynamics in Isiolo County? In some cases, where two or more ethnic groups have been supported to jointly manage one conservancy, the conservancy has provided both a platform and an incentive for building peace. Respondents within Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy, formed from Nakuprat (Turkana) and Gotu (Borana) areas universally stated that the conservancy has brought peace:

We have lived together for seven years as one community working together and building trust among ourselves. Before that, we were enemies who stole from and killed each other (...). There might be mild cases of conflicts, but the elders try to handle those before they escalate into major conflicts. The two communities have also produced peace ambassadors (Borana and Turkana) to work with NRT, and these peace ambassadors ensure that the communities here continue to talk out and work out their differences in a diplomatic way for the sake of this conservancy, sharing leadership roles, board positions and jobs.³⁴

It was also said that a conservancy prevented pastoral raids. Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy is located in the narrow “panhandle” of Isiolo County, bordering Meru County to the south and Samburu County to the north, and traditionally there has been reciprocal theft of livestock between Meru and Samburu county.

Samburu used to cross to Meru and banditry was high (...). The creation of Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy [blocked] the raids. (...) Banditry will return if the conservancy is done away with. That is why we support NRT.³⁵

However, this is not always the case. A focus group participant in Buffalo Reserve stated: “Cattle rustling is normal; the only problem is that conservancy is adding fire”. There seem to be two or more ways in which this can happen. First, it has been suggested that conservancy member pastoralists sometimes get involved in raids with their own guns, and rangers may be blamed for this. Second, armed rangers may get involved in activities such as livestock recovery after raids in which the lines between defensive and offensive behaviour become blurred.

Most allegations of rangers’ involvement in inter-ethnic conflict relate to events in Kom Spring, which is about 30 km from the Samburu-Isiolo border in Buliyo Bulesa Conservancy.³⁶ Kom has historically been kept as a drought reserve and is accessed by herders from Isiolo, Samburu and Marsabit. According to Isiolo respondents, visitors should seek permission from the Borana communities, although community members of Wamba in Samburu claimed that Kom was Samburu territory.³⁷ The area is a valuable dry-season grazing area and contested and has seen various conflicts, but this has allegedly become worse since the establishment of conservancies,³⁸ as a former Ministry of Livestock official explained,

Kom neighbours Samburu. Isiolo [Borana pastoralists] went and found that the Samburu people had infiltrated the area. The Samburu attacked those from Isiolo with guns. They [the Samburu] are supported by politicians and the conservancy. Water pans are located on border points. When your water and pasture are being used by others, it creates conflict. There are [dry] seasonal grazing areas, but your neighbour uses it during the wet season, which causes conflict.³⁹

The official was referring to the fact that a government of Samburu County’s Act supports conservancies by supplying them with vehicles and funding development. He may also have been referring to the fact that Samburu conservancies (particularly Sera

34 \ Interviews, security staff in Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy, 8 September 2018; confirmed by board member in Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy, 23 March 2019.

35 \ Interview, Member of County Assembly, Isiolo town, 7 May 2017..

36 \ See <http://asal-resources.geodata.soton.ac.uk/node/18528#-map=8/0.884/38.191&layers=R>

37 \ Interviews in Wamba, Archers Post, December 2019 and February 2020.

38 \ Phone interview, civil society expert on drylands. 11 November 2019.

39 \ Interview senior official in Ministry of Livestock, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

which is on the border with Biliqo Bulesa) have more NPRs than conservancies in Isiolo.⁴⁰ He also believed that conservancy rangers were participating in the Kom conflict, supporting Samburu herders. Another respondent similarly noted that cooperation and resource-sharing between the two groups had apparently been disrupted by the power differential between the parties. As an elder said: “There used to be coordination in the dry season between Samburu and Borana, now Samburu come heavily armed by NRT”. He alleged: “NRT vehicles have been seen intervening on Borana side on behalf of Samburu, with many arms”. He also stated that the presence of conservancy-based security personnel has, in fact, exacerbated the cattle rustling conflict.⁴¹ A 2019 report by a local NGO suggested that sometimes, members of communities from outside the area, from both Borana and Samburu sides actually go on raids (IMPACT, 2019). The civil society officer said: “In the past, they could face each other, but now one is overpowering the other”.⁴² As a result, community members feel let down by NRT because the conservancy has failed to bring the peace which had been promised at its inception.

A 2019 report by Waso Professionals Forum claimed that NRT deployed Samburu rangers to guard restricted parts of Buliqo Bulesa Conservancy following a dispute over the fencing of the Kuro Bisan Oowo Spring in Kom. NRT strongly deny this. The report also accused NRT of causing an escalation in inter-communal conflict and supporting armed attacks in which NRT rangers were participants. The community members in Buliqo Bulesa posit that Samburu pastoralists have encroached far (70 km) across the county border into the conservancy which hinders them from grazing their cattle. The report recorded nine raids and 63 killings by Samburu herders, along with thousands of stolen livestock since the conservancy was established, which the authors of the report claim have often been facilitated by conservancy

rangers (Waso Professionals Forum, 2019). In one such attack in 2014, the authors say that 4,800 livestock were raided, and four Borana pastoralists were killed by Samburu *morans* (warriors), with assistance from NRT rangers (Waso Professionals Forum, 2019). NRT did not respond to this allegation but noted that conflict had pre-dated the establishment of the conservancy in 2007, though, as noted above, the situation is allegedly worse. They referred to “9” teams as well-trained and trusted and noted that their operations were carried out with the oversight of the National Police Service (NRT, 2019). This is technically true, though as mentioned earlier, the extent of oversight by police may well be as weak as that of regular NPRs.

There are a variety of views on the involvement of rangers in the events in Kom. One member of a community-based organisation said that “9” teams had been involved in killings while another said that there was no evidence of this.⁴³ County ward administrators were also confused as to the identity of people carrying sophisticated arms who were guarding the cattle in Kom. They thought perhaps they were either NPRs or government soldiers.⁴⁴ The case of Kom is complex and deserves more attention. It is not clear to what extent Samburu Conservancy rangers are involved in the conflict with Isiolo communities. The main players from Samburu are likely to be armed *morans*. What seems possible, however, is that rangers support their own ethnic group when there is conflict. In an often-quoted incident of 5 May 2019, Samburu Conservancy rangers got involved in a cattle recovery operation in Loruko, near the Samburu border. The operation turned out to be a revenge raid by the Samburu on the Turkana.⁴⁵ While it is not clear how much the rangers knew of this, the events sparked bitterness at the amount of support given to raiding Samburu in contrast to other groups.

40 \ Fieldwork in Samburu County, December 2019 and February 2020.

41 \ Interview, elder from Merti, 12 May 2019.

42 \ Phone interview, civil society expert on drylands. 11 November 2019.

43 \ Interview, officer from Chari Advocacy Program, 6 May 2019.

44 \ FGD, County Ward Administrators, Isiolo town, 9 May 2017.

45 \ Interview, staff member in a conservancy, September 2019.

There is also a perceived imbalance of power within NRT in favour of the Samburu—many Samburu hold senior management positions in NRT. As noted by another respondent: “The NRT CEO is Samburu and is accused of conflicting interests. When Samburu cattle are raided, he will use all means to recover them. When Isiolo cattle are raided, he does not”.⁴⁶

A Bishop in Isiolo town commented:

*I have no problem with conservancy except the issue of ethnicity balance, its ok. So that if there is conflict, everyone is protected. People are so sensitive that clannism is a major issue. In big functions, if you prepare seating arrangements, people want balance. Rangers need to be checked. They need to be mixed not tribal, Isiolo is cosmopolitan.*⁴⁷

Many respondents implied that through the direct involvement of conservancy armed rangers and “g” teams, this strength was being used to alter the balance of power in interethnic resource-based conflict. Responding to these allegations, NRT emphasised their position of neutrality and stated that they do not recruit or arm rangers at all, that this is done by the police (NRT, 2019).

As a result of the Kom situation and other grievances of Biliqo Bulesa communities, there is a high level of anger addressed against NRT itself which has divided opinion amongst residents, policymakers and commentators in Isiolo.

46 \ Interview staff member from a conservancy, Nairobi 28 March 2019; similar statement made in interview, official in County Cohesion Department, Isiolo, 17 October 2018.

47 \ Interview, a Bishop, Isiolo, 16 October 2018.

NRT and security at the community level

A civil society representative in Biliqo Bulesa explained the position of his organisation: “We want our own system to manage our own conservation. NRT’s way of managing and controlling our resources is bringing insecurity between Samburu and Borana. We do not trust NRT (...). Some leaders have been compromised by NRT”.⁴⁸ Social media has been ablaze with similar opinions, including extreme allegations that NRT leaders have a hidden agenda to access recently discovered gold in the Kom area (Waso Professionals Forum, 2019). An opinion circulating amongst Isiolo professionals and elites on social media reads:

*The crafty and ever manipulative conservationist has from nowhere resurfaced in Kom area in the company of the 9-1, 9-2 death squad team, threatening the hardworking residents of Merti sub-county trying to eke their livelihoods from the recently discovered gold reserves and ordering them to quit the area in three days or else face the wrath of the dreaded 9-1, 9-2 killer squad.*⁴⁹

It is difficult to determine exactly what happened in this incident, but it illustrates the extreme mistrust of NRT’s motives. It is important to note that the same people who condemn this action may have an interest in Isiolo’s wealth themselves, particularly in the context of development in the north. Several people interviewed claimed that NRT had bribed leaders and also local radio.⁵⁰ Another extreme allegation was that conservancy rangers have been implicated in the kidnapping and torture of youths who, it was rumoured, have been taken to the NRT headquarters in Lewa.⁵¹ A politician gave a detailed description: “There is a special place, cells within other counties. It is organised into three stages 1,2,3; it depends on your criminal case where you are taken. It’s not clear who, but it’s claimed NRT vehicles are used”.⁵² These accounts were said to have come from

those who had managed to escape, and while the author believes that these are misunderstandings of unrelated events, they have been included to illustrate the current tensions and suspicions.⁵³

Talks between NRT and Biliqo Bulesa community representatives took place in February 2019 but did not lead to any resolutions,⁵⁴ and throughout 2019, the relationship between the two parties deteriorated further. When the research by the Waso Professionals took place, it appears that some local leaders attempted to mobilise youth to disrupt it (Waso Professionals Forum, 2019), suggesting that opinions even within the Biliqo Bulesa area are divided. Following the publication of the report, NRT moved to sue the Waso Professionals Association over allegations that NRT were using Samburu conservancy rangers against Borana pastoralists to dispossess them of their land, but were persuaded to sit and talk with the Borana Council of Elders instead. This approach appears to have calmed the situation since no further developments have been made public.

Political elites also have their varied opinions about conservancies and about the role of NRT in overseeing them.⁵⁵ Community members recalled that a parliamentary senator had suggested that conservancies are important and should be legislated and funded by the state.⁵⁶ The county government is currently in the process of developing a bill to support the conservancies.⁵⁷ However, a senior administrator noted when citing the plan to establish three new conservancies: “It costs 10 million a year to run a conservancy which the state cannot afford”.⁵⁸ Some community leaders reasoned that NRT has assisted

48 \ Interview, officer from civil society, name withheld, 6 May 2019.

49 \ WhatsApp circulated by research assistant in Isiolo, 15 November 2020.

50 \ Interview, officer from Chari Advocacy Program, 6 May 2019; this was also noted by a county administrator, a conservancy employee and a political technocrat.

51 \ A resident near Isiolo town noted that his brother disappeared, and the signal was traced to Lewa Conservancy. Security interviewed later suggested that he may have been linked to poaching, October 2019.

52 \ Interview a serving Member of the County Assembly, 7 May 2019.

53 \ People from Isiolo have actually disappeared. One body of an Isiolo man was found in 2018 in Tsavo National Park. Allegations have been levelled against KWS officials (in their anti-poaching fight). Since NRT often works together with KWS, this may account for the allegations. See Wesangula (2020) and MUHURI (2019).

54 \ Interview, officer from Chari Advocacy Program, 6 May 2019.

55 \ Former ward administrator, Isiolo, September 2019.

56 \ FGD community and conservancy leaders in Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy, 23 March 2019.

57 \ Interview, senior county administrator, Isiolo, 6 May 2019; FGD community and conservancy leaders in Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy, 23 March 2019.

58 \ Interview, senior county administrator, Isiolo Town, September 2018.

in the provision of community security and fulfils a role that the state cannot fill.⁵⁹ Other politicians, including the governor of Isiolo⁶⁰ strongly oppose NRT. To quote the governor himself:

*In my last 18 years in leadership, I have maintained that NRT is causing animosity through conservancies. They give people vehicles, guns and communication gadgets, which cause insecurity.*⁶¹

It is worth noting here that the speaker is inaccurate in that conservancies are armed by the Kenyan state, not NRT. His main point, namely that NRT is responsible for causing insecurity, may, however, have some political motivations as the following paragraph explains.

Another politician echoed claims previously noted that NRT has neo-colonialist aspirations: “They want wealth, they want land”.⁶² The background is that conservancies were established before county governments were established. The latter are finding that conservancies are difficult to bring under their jurisdiction.⁶³ One concern for the county government is the large amount of donor money (in excess of US \$375,000 in 2017) allocated to Isiolo conservancies alone (NRT, 2017).⁶⁴ Operations within conservancies which are beyond the oversight of the state also raise questions for the county government, such as the private airstrips which are run by most conservancies with tourist facilities. In Isiolo conservancies, there are three airstrips in Biliqo Bulesa and one in Nakuprat-Gotu, while Laikipia and Samburu conservancies have several. A Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) warden commented that conservancy airstrips can potentially transport poached animal products,⁶⁵ though this by no means suggests it is happening. In a speech in 2019, a women’s representative for Isiolo implied

something similar, though it is important to note that there may be a political motivation for these statements since the issue of conservancy is becoming a very emotive one.

*This NRT is not following any law; it has not engaged with the Isiolo leadership or with the local community. (...) They are exploiting our minerals. Why am I saying that? I am in the transport committee in parliament. When we walk here, there are about four airstrips, which are not regulated by the county government, and yet the county represents the national government. For an airstrip to be operated in an area, it is necessary for the permit to be provided by the [national] government through Kenya Civil Aviation Authority (...) unless that changed the other day. The County Commissioner’s office that represents the government has never given any permit to operate an airstrip. The Kenya Civil Aviation Authority came before my committee and said that they did not give any permit here in Isiolo. But they operate four airstrips, every day they descend here, and we do not know what work they are doing. They are doing illegal activities in Isiolo.*⁶⁶

Sometimes, NRT rangers help KWS by relocating animals in times of drought and with other logistics.⁶⁷ However, some noted that NRT are actually beginning to dominate the conservation landscape and surpass KWS whose capacity is limited.⁶⁸ The County Executive for Tourism noted that there is now competition between reserves—which are run by the counties—and conservancies for tourism revenue. He said that while tourism in national reserves had been an important revenue generator for the government in the past in Isiolo, bringing in as much as KShs 200 million (US \$2 million), this has dropped to 84,000,000 (US \$840,000) in the last seven years. He attributed this to the presence of conservancies.⁶⁹ It is worth mentioning that Isiolo conservancies are not the main competitors for tourism but those in Laikipia and Samburu.

59 \ FGD community and conservancy leaders in Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy, 23 March 2019.

60 \ Interview, a county tourism official, May 2019.

61 \ Mt. Kuti governor of Isiolo during the launch of infrastructure for peace report, March 2019.

62 \ Interview, Member of County Assembly, Isiolo town, 7 May 2019.

63 \ Phone interview, an NRT board member, 21 September 2019.

64 \ This was derived from NRT figures on 2017 total operating budget of 42,025,000 KShs in Isiolo conservancies, and that the proportion of the total operating budgets of all NRT conservancies which is derived from donor funding is 88 per cent.

65 \ Interview, KWS warden, 10 May 2019.

66 \ Rehema Jaldesa, Women’s Representative for Isiolo County, public address given in Isiolo, April 2019.

67 \ Group Interview with staff of Buffalo reserve, 22 March 2019.

68 \ Interview, KWS warden, 10 May 2019.

69 \ Interview, county executive for tourism, Isiolo County government, September 2018.

NRT's strength and influence as well as its ability to attract funding is also a disadvantage for other conservation civil society organisations: "NRT wants to dominate, not build the capacity of the local NGOs. Those in charge of Il Ngwesi [community conservancy] approached an investor/donor, without going through NRT, and NRT did not like this, so Il Ngwesi pulled out".⁷⁰ Others felt that it was natural and appropriate that the most capable organisation should be the one entrusted with the responsibility, and that going through NRT avoided duplication of roles: "If your structure is disorganised, what do you expect? NRT will empower you, protect your property, what is yours (to do)? That is why communities work with NRT".⁷¹

The issues of conservancies and the dominant role of NRT in overseeing them raise a wide variety of opinions and allegations, which themselves reflect a variety of interests and agendas. At the level of the state, there is evidence of a competition for power with NRT, which currently manages donor funds, security forces and airstrips. However, the county government, amongst others, also acknowledged that the state currently has limited capacity in these and other areas. As Bersaglio and Cleaver (2018, p. 471) note, quoting civil society personnel in Laikipia, NRT has been referred to as the "new government in the north" as a result of its ability to provide services which the government cannot.

70 \ Interview, board member in Biliqo Bulesa, Multimedia University, Nairobi, 29 March 2019.

71 \ FGD community and conservancy leaders in Nakuprat-Gotu Conservancy, 23 March 2019.

Discussion and conclusion

This section summarises how conservancies affect dimensions of inclusion and exclusion, and how this and the presence of armed rangers have complicated security dynamics in Isiolo County, with important implications for the future.

Spatial inclusion and exclusion

Conservancies are different things to many different people and groups. According to the community-based conservancy ideal, they are a space and an institution from which conservation together with rangeland management and other livelihood activities can be carried out. To protect these interests, the existence of security forces is considered justifiable. Another model becomes clear in the case of Isiolo County, where conservancies may become a means of protecting a community's interests in and access to community land, including claim-making over ancestral community land, and a means of enforcing these through armed security.

Conservancies in Isiolo are not fenced, and contrary to what might have been expected, there is some evidence that systems of reciprocal grazing arrangements with neighbours have been preserved. However, where it is desirable to restrict access or exclude outsiders, the means to do so now include the presence of armed scouts. The creation of a conservancy and the use of its security forces to restrict access is explicitly acknowledged when new conservancies are proposed to act as barriers or so-called "buffer zones" against the influx of Somali pastoralists into Borana traditional grazing lands.⁷² The momentum for the formation of conservancies is likely to continue, pushed both by NRT and by pastoralists given the increasing competition for land and the attraction of a well-resourced community security force. Conservancies can even become a strategy in localised arms races.

Despite measures to prevent it, conservancies have dimensions of spatial inclusion and exclusion through the formalisation of outside boundaries and zoning within conservancies. There is evidence that restrictions often but not always harmonise with indigenous systems which employ close grazing and rotation of cattle and reservation of certain areas for drier times (Bersaglio & Cleaver, 2018). There are economic and political dimensions to this because livelihoods are influenced by spatial inclusion and exclusion and because board members, committee members, elders, and ultimately NRT make grazing management decisions, which may disadvantage those at the ground level whose livelihoods are more dependent upon livestock; there was evidence of hardship amongst some pastoralists as a result of this. However, this is not equal to saying that conservancy models of grazing management are not working, given that drought in 2017 undoubtedly brought hardship all over the north, leading pastoralists to move into restricted areas.

Security dynamics

Community-based conservation has reconfigured and made security dynamics in Isiolo County more complicated in several ways, for instance, by introducing NRT, a powerful non-state entity with a significant role in the oversight of armed community security operations, an increasing number of state-armed actors and a changed balance of power between certain ethnic groups.

Echoing Greiner's (2012) observation about conservancies on contested boundaries, the allocation of well-resourced armed NPRs to conservancies in a relatively resource-rich conflict-prone area near the boundary (e.g. Kom) has raised tensions and heightened insecurity. At the same time, however, in Nakuprat-Gotu, where two groups have come together in one conservancy, the model has provided a platform for peacebuilding and an incentive to work together to profit from the conservancy. Therefore, the impact of a conservancy on armed conflict may be determined

72 \ This term was used by a former county official, interviewed in 2017.

by factors such as ethnic homogeneity of the conservancy members, proximity to traditional rivals and the location of the desired resource, amongst other things.

In the era of “fortress” conservation (Adams & Hulme, 2001, pp. 4-5), security forces had a simple mandate: To keep animals and tourists safe by keeping people out. With community-based conservation, security forces are still there, but their role is undoubtedly more complex. While having a role in wildlife protection, they are also members and friends of the community and act in their interests. They remain similar to the regular NPRs in that they are locally recruited and take on supporting policing roles in community security and managing banditry on roads. Since anti-poaching operations are few, it could be argued that conservancy NPRs are essentially community security forces but funded and overseen by a non-state entity. This has important implications for state sovereignty and control over the use of force.

Like regular NPRs, conservancy NPRs are also disconnected from the police, and this independence, combined with their local connectedness, may induce them to act based on livelihood needs and ethno-political affiliations. There are several allegations of this, particularly in the context of cattle recovery operations. Vehicles, planes and personnel from conservancies and NRT headquarters then become involved in defensive recovery operations which may appear to be, or may indeed be, acts of aggression. This confusing situation is even more troubling when it is indirectly connected to NRT, a non-state entity in receipt of donor funds from foreign states, whose political power and influence in northern Kenya is growing. It is also troubling to see how, inadvertently, the Samburu have become dominant in military and political terms simply because they have had a longer history with the conservancy movement and the associated donor funding.

An underlying assumption of this *Paper* is that security provision is the role of the state, or at least, if outsourced, is best closely overseen by the state. This also assumes that the state is likely to be more impartial in administering law and order as opposed to

private or indigenous security forces that are more likely to act in their own interests. Kalyvas (2006) observed that local militias always morph, becoming involved in ethnic battles, political agendas and private functions and are often accused of unprofessionalism. Some of this can apply to NPRs. Kalyvas notes: “Though engaged primarily for ‘protective violence’ they often mete out ‘predatory’ and abuse violence, including extortion” (p. 108). He also notes that militias can escalate conflict as they use their powers to fight personal and local conflicts (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 108). Schuberth, talking about community-based armed groups notes that they may become “...a threat to the stability they were expected to transform” (2015, p. 1). It has also been noted that states often like to use non-state security actors because they get to wash their hands of them when things go wrong, or they may even use them to do their dirty work (Mitchell, Carey & Butler, 2014). However, in the case of Isiolo “9” teams, while the research done for this *Paper* was able to confirm their deployment in police jobs such as anti-stock theft operations, NRT are keen to emphasise that NPRs are ultimately responsible to the police (NRT, 2019), implying that NRT would also wish to distance themselves from the ill effects of armed violence by rangers.

The implications of increasing the number of well-trained armed actors in Isiolo County are also important to consider. This increase and the creation of specialised security teams have altered the balance of power between rival ethnic groups and led to increased vulnerability to attacks and difficulty in accessing disputed resources. This could, in turn, lead to localised arms races in conservancies and outside. These arms could come through illicit channels (arms markets) but also through licit ones, as the creation of new conservancies may be a strategy proposed both by communities and county government administrators for acquiring arms. Lock (1999, p. 8), writing on the privatisation of security, argues that “private security is self-promoting, inducing feelings of insecurity outside protected areas. The commodification of security is contagious since efficient security at one end of the spectrum results in a concentration

of criminal energy at the other end of the spectrum". He goes on to note that Illicit availability of small arms then empowers the competing coercive forces.

Further, if conservancies cease to be sustainable and are closed, what will happen to the then unemployed armed and well-trained personnel in the county? Some are likely to find work as private security guards or set up their own security companies, while others may opt to use their skills for road banditry or livestock raids (Agade, 2015). This dangerous situation calls for a strategy of effective oversight by the government to monitor all the arms in the hands of rangers. Yet, even if disarmed, it is relatively easy to acquire another weapon through illicit channels, so the danger persists.

Sustainability and conflict risks: Implications for the future

The economic and development visions of the future for Isiolo County and Kenya more widely contain changes such as large-scale infrastructure, livestock marketing and an expansion of the tourism sector, amongst others. When land is needed for infrastructure projects, for example, the presence of a conservancy with wildlife conservation functions and a collective management structure may protect the land to some extent. If conservancies translate into registered portions of community land under the Community Land Act (2016), this may also grant members direct payment of compensation. However, the equitable distribution of such money among conservancy members will present new challenges and may create new conflicts.

Conservancies attract considerable donor funds and bring in revenues, attracting various beneficiaries, advocates and political actors. Little (2014) says that while community-based conservation rhetoric is about community improvement, it still remains dominated by outside agencies, and relationships with the community and conservation organisations are patron-client arrangements rather than equal partnerships. Bersaglio and Cleaver (2018) make a similar point based on their findings in Laikipia, that the various actors in and around conservancies are

bricoleurs who shape institutional arrangements, but that those who can make the best of this, are those privileged by historical patterns of access and accumulation and power structures. Thus even progressive, democratic and transparent institutions can reproduce and reinforce inequalities. Accordingly, some community members in Isiolo County are in a state of confusion, frustration and suspicion, disadvantaged by their lack of capacity to participate in decisions about the rangeland which sustains them, opting for community-based conservation out of necessity rather than preference.

Ultimately, the conservancy movement has introduced a powerful non-state entity—the Northern Rangelands Trust—with a significant role in the oversight of armed community security operations. In a county where development projects threaten to displace and exclude local communities, their role clearly raises critical security governance concerns at the community and inter-communal level that need to be addressed.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BICC	<i>Bonn International Center for Conservation</i>	BICC
BMZ	<i>German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development</i>	BMZ
COBRA	<i>Conservation Resource of Biodiverse Areas</i>	COBRA
KShs	<i>Kenyan Shillings</i>	KShs
KWS	<i>Kenya Wildlife Service</i>	KWS
LAPSSET	<i>Lamuamu Port, South Sudan, Ethiopia Transport Corridor</i>	LAPSSET
NPR	<i>National Police Reservists</i>	NPR
NRT	<i>Northern Rangelands Trust</i>	NRT
US	<i>United States</i>	US
USAID	<i>United States Agency for International Development</i>	USAID

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