



Bringing Serengeti partners together for coordinated action

The 5th Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem Stakeholder Forum

Held at
Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania
January 14-15, 2023

Summary of Conclusions

January 2023



5th Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem Stakeholder Forum

MAJOR TRENDS OF SUCCESS & CHALLENGES FACING THE ECOSYSTEM

Green Trends:

- ⇒ Wildlife security and growing populations of elephants and rhinos. Trophy poaching across the system is substantially reduced or eradicated. Extensive patrolling and de-snaring efforts keep bushmeat poaching under control. Enhanced effort to reduce bushmeat demand is needed.
- ⇒ The Government of Tanzania has engaged in transformative pro-active – often deemed controversial – initiatives with a potential to address historic and deteriorating human-wildlife conflicts to the betterment of community welfare and wildlife conservation (e.g., Ngorongoro and Pololetti).
- ⇒ Mara Conservancy's stewardship of Mara Triangle - part of Masai-Mara National Reserve – holds useful lessons in eco-tourism including transparent revenue collection, road maintenance, crowd control, lodge locations and density etc. for other parts of the ecosystem where appropriate.

Red Alerts:

- ⇒ Conserving MARA RIVER flow is of highest priority for the health of the ecosystem. Mara River is the only yearlong water available to the wildebeest. Changes in land use and weather patterns have led to high variability in the river flow. If Mara is dry for 4 days or more it may result in up to 10% loss of wildebeest population and cause devastating cascading effects.
- ⇒ Vanishing Buffer Zones. Expanding population growth and land use changes are rapidly shrinking the buffer zones surrounding the Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem leading to hard boundaries between human settlements and wildlife. Unregulated inholdings within the Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem are a growing source of disruption and disturbance incompatible with the natural integrity of the ecosystem.
- ⇒ Tourism development in dissonance with conservation goals and management plans have displaced wildlife from prime habitats and contributed to wildlife vulnerabilities at critical crossings and corridors.

General observations

- ⇒ Greater Serengeti-Mara Conservation requires inclusion and engagement as appropriate of the critical adjoining natural areas integral to ecosystem processes in the face of rapid transformation of the natural habitat by exploding human population and activities. E.g., Lake Natron, Loita Hills, Loliondo Highlands, Mara River Headwaters, etc.
- ⇒ Endeavor to extend ecosystem protection and research across all reaches of the Greater Serengeti-Mara ecosystem as appropriate.
- ⇒ Facilitate greater engagement, as appropriate, of surrounding administrative authorities with the Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem conservation managers for shared understanding and actions in ecosystem conservation.



5th Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem Stakeholder Forum

Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania - January 14-15, 2023

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

Spirit of Collaboration & Partnership

We, the collective managers responsible for the protection of the natural resources of the Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem (GSME) in the interests of the Tanzania and Kenya nations acknowledge the following observations. Our observations reflect the spirit and structure of our deliberations whereby the scientists share the latest scientific information to preface conservation management and coordination discussions that follow. Under major topics of discussion, scientists' "red-light" concerns are noted and responding concerns, opportunities and successes of conservation actions related to the long-term security of the GSME are acknowledged.

1. Inter-agency Collaboration & Partnerships and Stakeholders Engagement

The inter-agency collaboration among the government institutions of Kenya and Tanzania and public-private partnerships with civil society groups have improved the security of the ecosystem. Our continued dialogue optimizes synergies and reduces redundancies.

We call for:

⇒ Continued strengthening of the Greater Serengeti-Mara Conservation Society to act as a convening and coordinating platform to share knowledge, resources and good practices across the ecosystem.

2. Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem (GSME) science input

GSME benefits from rich and varied scientific studies including extended contiguous time series data.

The core areas of the Serengeti National Park and the Mara Reserve have richer scientific record and information. Similar scientific information for Ngorongoro Conservation Area and critical bordering reserves is needed. Informed decision making on management challenges and conservation priorities will benefit from greater research in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA), Pololeti, Maswa and Kijereshi game reserves which are integral to the functioning of the GSME.

SUCCESS

Science input in management decisions is improving e.g., criticality of the Mara River to GSME, use of prescribed burning in grassland rehabilitation, etc.

THREATS

Making uninformed decisions could lead to unintended results that harm the integrity of the ecosystem some of which may be irreversible.

We call for:

- ⇒ Identifying and addressing ecological research gaps in NCA, Pololeti, Maswa and Kijereshi game reserves;
- ⇒ Greater social science research on socio-economic aspects of GSME in the neighboring communities with particular focus on equitable conservation benefit sharing among stakeholders; mitigating human-wildlife conflicts, etc.
- ⇒ Greater information and integration of archaeological, geological and paleontological science in GSME management decisions.
- ⇒ To establish a framework for sharing of scientific data and information related to GSME among scientists and managers engaged in the ecosystem.

3. Landuse change, borders and fences

- ⇒ **Science – Red Alerts: Expanding human population growth and land use changes are shrinking the buffers of the Greater Serengeti Ecosystem at a rapid rate. Unregulated inholdings within the Greater Serengeti Ecosystem are increasingly a source of disturbance and incompatible with natural processes.**

Alarming population growth in areas adjoining GSME at rates greater than national averages of Kenya and Tanzania pose a rising threat to the integrity of GSME. Increased human activities are rapidly eroding natural corridors for wildlife dispersal and movements that constitute the key ecological attributes of the ecosystem. This has resulted in greater instances of human-wildlife conflicts and exacerbated habitat degradation across the greater ecosystem.

Land degradation is more severe in unprotected areas. Domestic animals are replacing wild animals in the Greater Mara. While the population size of cattle has remained fairly constant, number of shoats (sheep & goat) has increased three-fold from about 200,000 to more than 600,000 over the last 4 decades.

The problem of **hard boundary** – where agriculture or other extensive human activities abut right next to the protected area - is on the increase particularly on the GSME's western and southeastern edge. The negative effects of hard boundaries on wildlife are substantial. About 129.3 km (17.4%) of Serengeti NP boundary is deemed "hard" rendering approximately 1,000 km² of the park area rarely used by the migration because of associated risk. The prospects of reversing the hard boundaries once established in the present environment are negligible to nonexistent.

Reclassification and road developments along GSME's eastern edge including the Pololeti Game Reserve and ongoing voluntary resettlement in NCA hold great long-term consequences for the health of the ecosystem.

Government fencing decisions along hard boundaries to mitigate HWC should be informed by evidentiary data comparing the relative conservation impacts across comparable border control measures including: establishing buffer zones; by conservation friendly village landuse plans;



effective Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) or Game Controlled Areas (GCA); increasing rangers' patrol, etc. Lessons learnt from fencing along the Ikorongo GR border and NCA-Karatu border should be analysed carefully prior to extending any fencing into other areas.

Exploding **Private fencing** of private holdings around Mara Reserve has decimated the Loita wildebeest population from 150,000 (1980) to about 10,000 (2020). It has also impacted the migratory patterns of the larger Serengeti wildebeest population which is spending less time (35 days/year) in the Mara compared to 20 years ago.

Human-wildlife conflict & co-existence

The problem of human-wildlife conflict (HWC) along protected area boundaries is on the rise. They are pronounced along the western GSME border. The largest number of instances involved elephants followed by leopards, hyaena and lions. Retaliatory killings by villagers on predators are of high concern. Retaliatory killings are assessed to be the major reason for declining cheetah population along the SNP/NCA border. Poisoning appears to be the major cause contributing to the precipitous decline in vulture populations across Africa including GSME.

HWC mitigation measures taken in the GSME include; (i) construction of 33 km electric fence along the hard boundary of Ikorongo GR, (ii) increasing rangers' patrols (iii) having a toll-free hotline for HWC alerts and (iv) engaging with communities to demonstrate wildlife deterring techniques and increasing tolerance of wildlife destructions.

SUCCESS

- The Government has taken action of reducing human population pressure in the NCA by offering voluntary resettlement.
- Loliondo GCA has been split between Ploleti GR and the rest of the land allocated to villages.
- Engaging communities has led to greater tolerance by local communities of increased lion prides in NCA (Kope Lion Project).

THREATS

Private fencing around Mara in Kenya poses fatal danger to wildlife movement and is resulting in declining wildlife populations.

The planned hardtop road through Lake Natron and Ploleti GR to the SNP border will dramatically increase traffic and development along the eastern edge of GSME. The proposed development suffers from several shortcomings. There is inadequate scientific information on wildlife movement and seasonal use of the area. There are inadequate land use plans for the region. In absence of research and proper land use plans the development has the potential to have grave detrimental impacts on the health and resilience of the GSME.

We call for:

- ⇒ Ensuring village landuse plans are compatible with conservation objectives
- ⇒ Interfacing village landuse plans with district landuse plans



- ⇒ Review of landuse policies particularly in high-use wildlife areas and to clearly identify priorities.
- ⇒ Well-defined and clear landuse zoning, particularly regarding policy on agricultural fences
- ⇒ Incentivizing conservation compatible forms of landuse and income generation – at a scale larger than villages – preferable at district levels.
- ⇒ Sharing of best practices for district spatial landuse planning between Narok and Ngorongoro districts.
- ⇒ Encourage energetic use of village landuse plans and WMA in Ngorongoro District after change of the former Loliondo GCA protection status
- ⇒ Recommend higher protection status for Natron GCA to a game reserve and Ramsar site.
- ⇒ Continue improved protection of ecosystem boundaries using suitable techniques (e.g., graded intensity of patrol effort, buffer zones, strong penalties)
- ⇒ Implementing acquisition of Speke’s Gulf into protected areas
- ⇒ Maintain connectivity and corridors of natural populations and seasonal ranges
- ⇒ Revise protection for wet and dry season ranges as well as refugia for extreme events given current change in human population and climate
- ⇒ Control of poisoning, particularly beyond the core protected areas, should be a national responsibility to protect vultures among other species.
- ⇒ Increasing protection by increasing number of rangers

4. Mara River

- ⇒ **Science Red Alerts: Mara River is the only yearlong water available to the Wildebeest. Climate Change and Land use have led to high variability in river flow. If Mara is dry for 4 days or more it may result in up to 10% loss of wildebeest population.**

The Mara River is the life-line of the GSME and a critical driver of the wildebeest migration. Recent monitoring data suggests decreasing water flow in the Mara River resulting in greater concentration of hippo dung and sediments leading to hypoxia and dead zone along its mouth in Lake Victoria. Furthermore, the number of migratory animals’ crossings the Mara River is decreasing over the last 7 years. Unregulated mass tourism appears to be a growing impediment to wildebeest on river crossings.

SUCCESS

There is notable progress in conserving the Mara River headwaters in Mau Forest. However, concerns remain of unregulated irrigation withdrawals between Mau Forest and Masai-Mara National Reserve.

THREATS

The threat of the Mara River drying up for short periods is real. It is feared that irrigation abstraction for agriculture purposes is on the increase. Drying of the river even for a few days will seriously affect the migration by increasing deaths caused by dehydration and possibly starvation.

We call for:

- ⇒ Legal regulation of minimum reserved flow for Mara River
- ⇒ Reduce water agricultural abstraction to maintain river flow especially during extreme droughts
- ⇒ Reforestation in the Mau, Talek and Sand River watersheds;
- ⇒ Protect upland catchments of the watershed, both forests and grasslands;
- ⇒ Protect forest cover over Loita Hills as watershed for major rivers to the GSME and also for elephant migration
- ⇒ Conducting a thorough analysis for economic trade-offs and cost/benefit of Mara River value in tourism and Lake Victoria fisheries compared to abstraction for agriculture to inform policy makers and regulators.
- ⇒ Explore the transboundary application of a minimum in-stream flow for Mara River
- ⇒ Avoiding use of rivers as hard boundary because ecological processes and ecosystem benefits /services are lost. Both sides of the rivers should be safeguarded by core protected areas

5. Tourism and Revenue

- ⇒ **Science Red Alerts: poor tourism planning and management is negatively impacting wildlife health and movement including wildlife crossings on Mara River and concentrated lodges on the prime wildlife habitat.**

GSME tourism as managed fails to account for equitable sharing of tourism opportunities and revenue and fails to properly account for negative effect of tourism on wildlife movements and populations.

GSME peak tourism occurs in dry season of July and August. Peak tourism coincides with wildebeest in north Serengeti and Mara resulting in high revenues and greatest tourist pressure in these areas. During low tourism wet season, the wildebeest are calving in NCA and Maswa which receive relatively little tourism revenue even though they are hugely important areas for wildebeest.

Recent studies have documented some of the negative effects of unregulated tourism on wildlife. For example, (i) cheetahs' successful recruitment is reduced 10-fold when exposed to high tourist pressure, (ii) mass tourist presence along the Mara River alters wildebeest river crossings behavior by 20%, (iii) tourist lodges and tourist pressure is often concentrated in highly productive habitat,

e.g. Seronera, displacing wildlife to more marginal habitat; (iv) the decline of tourism during the COVID-19 epidemic coincided with expanding rhino use in previously high occupancy tourist areas in SNP.

SUCCESS

Tourism Management by the Mara Conservancy in Mara triangle holds important lessons for the entire GSME. Examples of important lessons include; (i) road management, (ii) tourist distribution to avoid crowding, (iii) managing number of tourist vehicles at wildebeest river crossings, and (iv) reallocating tourist facilities away from the river.

THREATS

The wildebeest migration is the main tourist attraction in the GSME influencing lodge occupancy and tourism revenue. The current trend of wildlife migration is spending less time in the Mara which may hold enormous ramification for tourism revenue of the region.

Concentrations of Tourism structures and use on high value feeding areas and river crossings for migration is displacing the wildlife to more marginal habitat to the long-term detriment of the populations.

We call for:

- ⇒ Support exploring ways of strengthening the legal force and fidelity of General Management Plans (GMPs) to accommodate science-based tourism strategies to optimize resource protection and tourism revenues;
- ⇒ Strategies for allocating large permanent tourism infrastructure to the edges of protected areas (not inside). This initiative will develop employment opportunities, stimulate local economy and provide a natural buffer to protected areas
- ⇒ Stronger zoning and periods for tourism to protect ecologically sensitive locations (Mara River crossings, best quality grazing areas and sensitive species (rhino, cheetah));
- ⇒ Diversify tourist experience and promote low-volume high-value tourism policy.

6. Poaching and illegal activity

The high rate of illegal offtake of wildlife for bushmeat is alarming. Studies indicate wildlife loss by snaring exceed 100,000 per year. Wildebeest have the highest offtake but greatest population impact is on buffalo. Most killings occur during the dry season when the migration is in the western part of the ecosystem with a hard border. Snare density are highest in Maswa GR and along the hard western boundary.

Illegal livestock incursions into GSME is still of high concern. It is of great concern in NCA, Pololeti GR and Mara Reserve though the trend is declining in Serengeti NP and Maswa GR.

SUCCESS

Sustained prevention of illegal grazing in protected areas over the last 5 years has shown significant success as indicated by fire data.

THREATS

Illegal offtake of wildebeest is at tipping point with a slight increase or in an environmentally stressful year may cause significant population decline. The GSME buffalo population growth is limited by poachers' offtake. Snaring is also suspected to have a significant impact on population dynamics of non-target species especially lion and hyaena.

We call for:

- ⇒ Improving the efficiency of ranger patrols to curb poachers by investing in modern technologies e.g., use of surveillance drones, camera traps and CCTV in poachers' hotspots.
- ⇒ Promoting interagency collaborations on intelligence and coordinating anti-poaching efforts, tools and strategies.
- ⇒ Sharing intelligence information between conservation areas and between managers and researchers.
- ⇒ Increasing protection measures by increasing number of rangers.

7. Carbon Credits

Carbon credits offer a promising new source of revenue. Carbon credits hold high promise in GSME buffer areas for alternative incentives for communities to practice conservation practices. However, particular attention is needed to ensure that carbon sequestration and preserving natural ecosystem processes are complementary and not in conflict. Unintended consequences of promoting carbon sequestration techniques in ignorance of natural ecosystem processes e.g., planting trees in natural savannah or grasslands should be avoided. Soil carbon sequestration in savannas is currently valued at US\$ 8/ton. Serengeti can potentially sequester 700,000 tons/year amounting about US\$ 5.6 million.

SUCCESS

There are active organizations such as Carbon Tanzania and One Mara implementing carbon credit schemes in the vicinity of the GSME and their experiences hold valuable lessons for application in GSME.

THREATS

In absence of requisite scientific research there is a high risk of unintended consequences.

We call for:

- ⇒ Exploring dual tracks of continued research in carbon cycles across GSME processes and assessing the suitability of protected and community areas to be eligible for carbon credits



under the agreed Tanzania and Kenya national frameworks for carbon credits based on Glasgow COP.

- ⇒ Exploring carbon credits for Loliondo village land and vegetative rehabilitation with voluntary resettlement of resident communities of NCA.

8. Transboundary Coordination Priorities

8.1. Draft MoU on “Transboundary Collaboration for the Management of Mara-Serengeti Ecosystem as a Transboundary Biosphere Reserve” was introduced to formalize and advance on-going coordination.

The scope of the MoU is limited to conservation cooperation and does not address Tourism. Draft MOU proposes (i) promoting joint actions aimed at conservation and sustainable management of the Mara-Serengeti ecosystem as a “Transboundary Biosphere Reserve” (TBR) and (ii) setting up institutional arrangements for the joint action and management of the ecosystem, among other with a focus on enhanced cooperation in trans-boundary law enforcement and sharing of information on wildlife research and movements.

Approval and signing of the MoU will be pursued at higher administrative levels of both Kenya and Tanzania governments. Adoption of the MoU will formalize and broaden the scope of existing informal collaborations.

8.2. Masai-Mara’s quest for World Heritage Status (WHS) is on halt until a GMP for the proposed area is endorsed by respective authorities. This is a requirement that has to be submitted together with the WHS application document.

8.3. Relocations in NCA.

In the effort to address growing HWC in NCA, the Government of Tanzania initiated a process for voluntary relocation. The NCA human population grew from about 8,000 (1959) to more than 110,000 (2020) with more that 810,000 heads of livestock. The NCA settlements are increasingly marked by permanent structures.

We call for:

- ⇒ Concluding the Mara-Serengeti conservation MoU
- ⇒ Harmonious and expeditious execution of NCA voluntary resettlement and to its successful lessons across the GSME.

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Stakeholders of the 4th Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem forum;

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|--|--|---|
|  <p>GREATER SERENGETI CONSERVATION SOCIETY</p> |  <p>MAASAI MARA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCIES</p> |  <p>LAND OF DIVERSITY</p> |
|  <p>KWT KENYA WILDLIFE TRUST</p> |  <p>WILDLIFE RESEARCH & TRAINING INSTITUTE <i>Discover Beyond</i></p> |  <p>MARA ELEPHANT PROJECT</p> |
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|  <p>MAMLAKA YA HIFADHI YA NGORONGORO CONSERVATION AREA AUTHORITY TANZANIA</p> |  <p>HIFADHI ZA TAIFA TANZANIA NATIONAL PARKS</p> |  <p>MAMLAKA YA USIMAMIZI WA WANYAMAPORI TANZANIA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY TAWA</p> |

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Annex

What is the Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem?

The Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem (GSME) refers to the contiguous wildlife and forest protected areas and associated watersheds surrounded by the lakes Eyasi, Manyara, Natron and Victoria straddling the equator across Tanzania and Kenya. GSME includes the following protected areas: Serengeti National Park; Ngorongoro Conservation Area; Pololeti, Maswa, Kijereshi, Ikorongo and Grumeti game reserves; and Makao and Ikona Wildlife Management Area in Tanzania. Masai-Mara Reserve and Masai-Mara Conservancies in Kenya.

What is the Society for Serengeti Ecosystem Conservation (SSEC)?

The Society for Serengeti Ecosystem Conservation is a Tanzanian NGO with Registration No 2069 dedicated to preserving the integrity and resilience of the Greater Serengeti Ecosystem. It is also registered as a non-governmental organization and a charity in the United States and United Kingdom respectively. Its vision is to ensure a resilient and thriving Greater Serengeti Ecosystem to the benefit of the local and global community. Its mission and motto is ‘Serengeti Forever’.

To ensure that open inter-agency dialogues and partnerships exist among all stakeholders committed to the preservation of the Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem.

Participants of the 5th Greater Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem Stakeholder Forum (in alphabetical order)

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Meeting program and agenda

| Start Time | End Time | EVENT /THEME |
|-----------------------------------|----------|--|
| Friday, January 13, 2023 | | |
| Afternoon | | Delegates arriving at Ngorongoro Serena Wildlife Lodge |
| Evening | | Welcoming remarks and review of agenda |
| | | Dinner |
| Day 1 | | |
| Saturday, January 14, 2023 | | |
| 08:30 | 08:45 | Welcome Remarks |
| 08:45 | 09:15 | Scientific Committee - Overview, land-use, borders and fences |
| 09:15 | 11:00 | Land-use change, borders and fences * Relocation of communities and livestock in NCA * Updates on Pololeti GR (formerly Loliondo GCA) * Fences and livestock incursions |
| 11:00 | 11:15 | Tea Break |
| 11:15 | 11:30 | Scientific Committee – Mara River |
| 11:30 | 12:30 | Mara River updates |
| 12:30 | 13:30 | Lunch |
| 13:30 | 13:45 | Scientific Committee – Tourism |
| 13:45 | 15:00 | Tourism; capacity and diversification (limits of acceptable use) |
| 15:00 | 15:15 | Tea Break |
| 15:15 | 15:30 | Scientific Committee – Connectivity & coordinating management |
| 15:30 | 17:00 | Protected Areas General Management Plans; coordinating, harmonising and legalities |
| Day 2 | | |
| Sunday, January 15, 2023 | | |
| 08:30 | 08:45 | Scientific Committee – Climate and carbon credits |
| 08:45 | 09:45 | Climate Threats and Funding Opportunities |
| 09:45 | 10:45 | New developments in Kenya and Tanzania |
| 10:45 | 11:00 | Tea Break |
| 11:00 | 12:15 | Transboundary Coordination Priorities |
| 12:15 | 12:30 | Scientific Committee – Summary and alternative futures |
| 12:30 | 13:00 | Miscellaneous and Wrap Up |
| 13:00 | 14:00 | Lunch and Send Off |