iNCLUSiVE CONSERVATiON iNiTiATiVE

ICI-KENYA BIENNIAL PROGRESS REPORT

Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) in the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin, Northern Kenya

UHIFADHI WA KIASILI | RAMAT ANG' | AYUOKOR | HORSA BULCHA

Project Title: Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) in the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin: UHIFADHI WA KIASILI| RAMAT ANG' | AYUOKOR| HORSA BULCHA

Implementing Organization: IMPACT KENYA

Project Period: [2023 – 2027]

Current Review Period: Year 2 of 4

Project Goal: To advance inclusive conservation by strengthening Indigenous Peoples' leadership, integrating traditional knowledge systems, and promoting co-governance models for biodiversity in the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin.

ABOUT
THE PROJECT

The GEF-7 Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) is a global project that aims to support Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs & LCs) to secure and enhance their stewardship over an estimated area of 7.5 million hectares of landscapes, seascapes and/or territories with high biodiversity and irreplaceable ecosystems. The project directly provides resources and supports 'hands-on' experiential learning that will enable IPs & LCs to define and demonstrate an inclusive model for conservation. In this model, IPs & LCs are recognized and empowered as decision-makers and key actors at all levels of conservation action, from local action on the ground, to national policies that impact their rights, to global fora that define conservation and sustainable development targets and approaches for environmental action.

ICI is implemented through sub-projects, which are primarily site-based investments identified among the 7 Biocultural regions of the world, with significant amounts of funding allocated to 9 initiatives from 12 countries for the implementation of cross-cutting global activities. These initiatives have identified local priorities, developing inclusive, culturally appropriate processes for decision-making, strategies, and implementing action.

Amongst the 12 countries where ICI is being implemented, IMPACT is responsible for the implementation of the 4-year ICI project (2023-2027) in the Mid Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin in Kenya. The project covers the scope of 24 Community Lands in 3 counties i.e., 13 Community Lands in Laikipia North, 4 Community Lands in Isiolo North and 7 Community Lands in Samburu East, which are ancestral territories of the Maasai, Samburu, Borana and Turkana ethnic communities. The project has been named "Uhifadhi wa Kiasili / Ramat ang' / Ayuokor / Horsa Bulcha," which roughly translates as "Our Conservation" and reflects the cultural diversity and ethnic languages within the sub-project scope.

The goal of the sub-project led by IMPACT is to support the self-strengthening of pastoralists in the 24 Community Lands within the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin, so that they can better manage their territories using their own knowledge systems and in accordance with their own aspirations while also delivering global environmental benefits (GEBs). This project will also guide pastoralist communities in pursuing official recognition of their land as an area conserved by IPs & LCs, should they wish, in the form of Indigenous Communities Conserved Areas (ICCAs) or Territories of Life. ICCA designation would provide formal recognition of IPs & LCs' connections to their territories and further equips them to secure and manage land and resources within their territories in line with their own aspirations.

The Mid Ewaso Ng'iro Basin is a vital ecological and cultural landscape in Kenya, home to diverse IPs & LCs and rich biodiversity. Across the river basin, IMPACT Kenya has demonstrated years of commitment and dedication to support self-strengthening and self-determination rights of pastoralist and other IPs & LCs. IMPACT has built its core purpose around addressing the needs and priorities of the communities it serves, primarily focusing on inclusivity and building capacity, agency and movements around peacebuilding, human rights, governance, land and resource rights. This has sustained our mission to advocate for and influence policies and practices that most impact the rights of IPs & LCs in the landscape.

The mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River basin has been sustainably and collectively managed and conserved by Indigenous pastoralists communities across time, using Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) and systems. However, these systems have been weakened by conservation policies that have disrupted traditional land tenure and natural resource governance systems and restricted herd mobility – introduced during the British colonial

and post-colonial era – and further challenged by climate change and other emerging development challenges in the landscape. Combined, these processes have negatively impacted pastoralists' relationships with land and resources.

For example, the colonial administration's Crown Lands Ordinance (CLO) of 1902 enabled the alienation of land and dispossession of Indigenous pastoralists from the Laikipia Plateau forcing them into 'native reserves' and implementing grazing and marketing schemes to reshape pastoralists in the image of colonial ranchers. These forced settlements have had lasting negative impacts on communities, their governance systems, and nature conservation in the Mid Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin, as seen in the Laikipia Plateau, where over 40% of the land is occupied by large private properties, which are owned by colonial settlers and foreign investors and primarily used for wildlife conservation, elite eco-tourism and cattle ranching.

In response to the failure of colonial era interventions, significant changes were implemented to land and natural resource governance across Kenya's northern rangelands after Kenya's independence. These include establishment of group ranches and trust lands, a hybrid of land system that aimed to return ownership and control of certain areas of land to pastoralists within the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin. This regime further undermined traditional systems and perpetrated land injustices, inter-ethnic conflicts, insecurities, human-wildlife conflicts and loss of livelihoods. Recently, there has been growing recognition and support for Indigenous pastoralist communities in their fight for inclusion and recognition in both policy and practice. Kenya's new constitution (2010) and Community Land Act (CLA) (2016) reflect shifts in thinking about mobility and customary institutions for managing dryland resources. These policy changes also highlight the national and global biodiversity benefits of dryland ecosystems managed by and for pastoralists, elevating pastoralist rights and issues on local, national and global policy agendas.

Ultimately, the subproject seeks to reverse the effects of the colonial and post-colonial era and change the narrative of land management, governance and conservation practices in the landscape, that were often introduced and imposed as foreign or complex concept to communities, undermining their ITK systems and structures. Land and natural resources, including biodiversity in the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin, could be more sustainably and better managed if pastoralist systems were recognized, strengthened and supported both internally (i.e. within pastoralist communities) and externally (i.e. by conservation agencies that tend to impose new governance types or structures that are inappropriate and ineffective). This will in turn, mend pastoralists relationships with their territories while also contributing to improved global biodiversity outcomes.

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

In 2023, IMPACT began implementation of the ICI-Kenya and has been supporting self-determined practices and approaches to ensure conservation efforts align with pastoralist knowledge, values, and aspirations in the Mid Ewaso Ng'iro Basin since. These approaches are anchored in a coherent framework for inclusive conservation, developed through initial community baseline consultations and surveys conducted during the Project Development and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) phase. This framework serves as a model of inclusive conservation, and is structured around five interlinked components designed to strengthen IPs & LCs self-determination and leadership in conservation efforts across the Mid-Ewaso ecosystem. These components include:
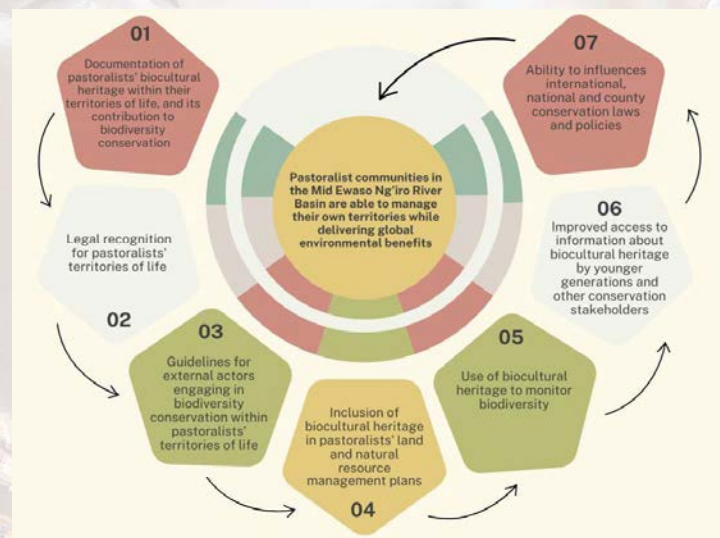

Figure 1: ICI-Kenya outputs and outcomes

✔ **Component 1: Documenting Presence:** Collect information that evidences the contributions of pastoralist communities to sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation across time;

✔ **Component 2: Declaration and Legal Empowerment:** Supporting communities in ensuring their territorial claims to land and resources are legally recognized by authorities;

✔ **Component 3: Management Plans:** Guiding communities in developing a strategy for managing land and resources using ITK, including identifying ways to address key threats and achieve biodiversity conservation, cultural integrity and other environmental benefits;

✔ **Component 4: Monitoring and Evaluation:** Working with communities to establish community-based monitoring and evaluation systems (CBMIS) using cultural indicators to keep track off and evidencing ecological, cultural, and social changes within territories of life;

✔ **Component 5: Ongoing self-strengthening, communication and advocacy:** Preserving and communicating information for future generations and other conservation stakeholders about pastoralist communities' contribution to biodiversity conservation.

OUR KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

This section outlines key achievements made during the first 2–years of sub-project implementation (Jul' 2023 - Jun' 2025), first relaying two overarching achievements followed by achievements related to specific components of the sub-project.
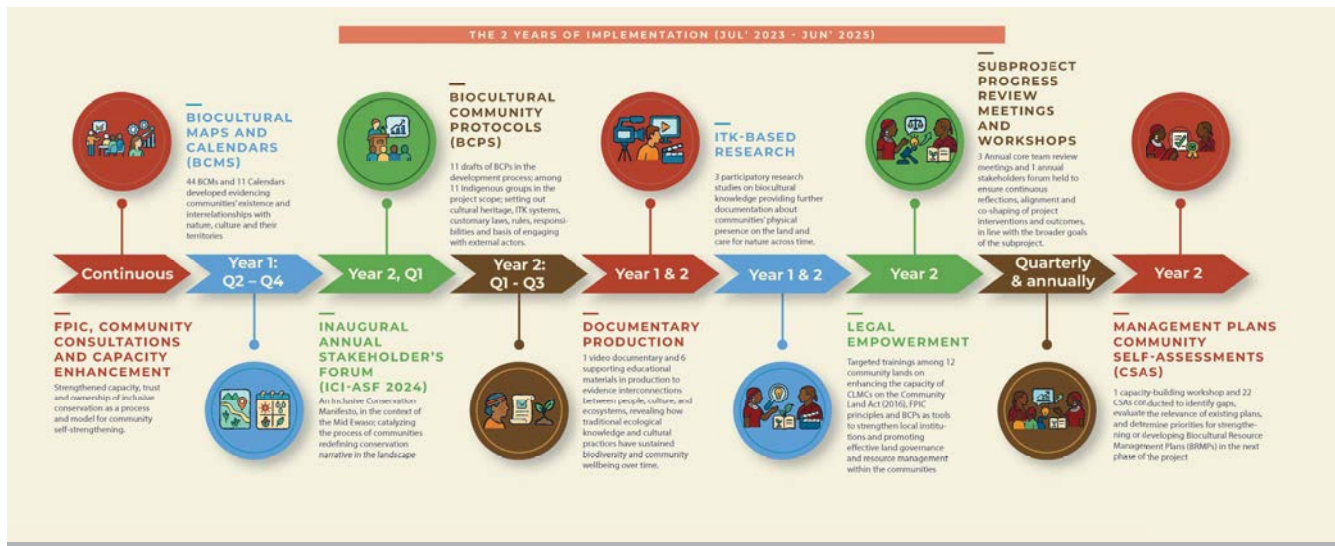
Commitment to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), Community Consultations and Capacity Enhancement among Participating Communities

A key achievement of the project has been the consistent and embedded practice of FPIC, community consultations, and capacity strengthening among all participating communities. Rather than being a one-off process, FPIC has been upheld as a continuous and foundational approach throughout the project cycle; guiding the design, planning, and implementation of all interventions. This process has ensured that participating communities remain well-informed, have adequate understanding to effectively participate, shape or implement interventions, and are empowered to make collective, informed decisions that reflect their values, priorities, and consent.

This achievement reflects our deliberate commitment to Indigenous Peoples' rights, agency, and decision-making, as well as a recognition that without FPIC, then conservation can never truly be inclusive. Communities have been actively engaged at every stage, beginning with early awareness creation and Project Development Phase (PDP 2022-2023). This ensured that all community members, especially elders, women, youth, and Indigenous knowledge holders, could fully understand the nature, scope, and potential implications of project activities. In parallel, the project has invested in building the capacity of communities to critically assess and engage with introduced

interventions. This entails tiered and targeted capacity building workshops and meetings designed to engage all levels of community structures; from the grassroot staff i.e., Community Resource and Link Persons (CRPs and CLPs), community leadership and its assemblies, and the larger stakeholder community.

Additionally, time, effort and community-centred approaches have been invested in supporting dialogue spaces, strengthening local governance structures, and enhancing communities' ability to make informed, collective decisions. To promote inclusive participation, adaptive programming approaches have also been employed to ensure vulnerable groups are meaningfully represented, by both action and voice. These efforts have strengthened trust, legitimacy,

and ownership of project outcomes, and laid a solid foundation for long-term sustainability and accountability. Our achievement in this area is illustrated by the fact that some communities have delayed their involvement in certain components of the project or opted out of certain activities altogether. We recognize such acts of agency as a success as communities are truly informed and able to exercise their rights in the context of this project.

By centring FPIC and consultation as ongoing, participatory, and community-led processes, the project has not only complied with ethical standards but has also strengthened the resilience, voice, and leadership of Indigenous Communities within conservation and development initiatives.

Targeted stakeholder engagements

In some key areas of implementation, particularly around land registration, boundary disputes, and governance overlaps, targeted stakeholder engagements proved essential. These engagements created vital spaces for dialogue between communities, local authorities, and relevant government agencies, allowing for a clearer understanding of the legal, political, and historical challenges affecting Community Land claims. Through these focused interactions, the subproject was able to identify practical entry points for community leverage, including opportunities for collaborative problem-solving, alignment with ongoing county processes, and the reinforcement of community voices in decision-making spaces. These engagements also helped to mitigate potential conflicts of interest, clarify institutional roles, and foster greater transparency and trust among all actors involved in the landscape.

COMPONENT 1

Development of Biocultural Maps (BCMs) and Biocultural Seasonal Calendars to evidence Indigenous presence and stewardship

The second major achievement of the project has been the co-creation of 44 Biocultural Maps (BCMs) and 11 Biocultural Seasonal Calendars with participating Indigenous Communities.

BCMs represent the interdependency between biological and cultural systems, resources, knowledge systems, etc. Rather than focusing on political boundaries and the spatial reach of territories, BCMs reveal how specific groups of people are connected to, and play a role in sustaining, the natural world. For example, BCMs may highlight sacred sites, grazing zones, migration routes, water sources, and areas of ecological and cultural significance. These maps serve not only as evidence of IPs & LCs' sustained presence in a landscape, but also as living records of their contributions to biodiversity conservation, land stewardship, and sustainable resource management over time.

The process of developing BCMs was participatory and grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing nature. It involved respected Indigenous Knowledge Holders, who were carefully identified and selected by their own communities to serve as 'BCMs Mappers'. These individuals played a central role in guiding the mapping process, ensuring the maps produced reflected culturally grounded knowledge, lived experiences, and community-defined priorities.

In parallel with mapping activities, we undertook the development process of Biocultural Seasonal Calendars, with production process still being in progress. This activity has enabled communities to articulate and visualize how nature – such as pasture, water, medicinal plants, and key species – are accessed, used, conserved and governed across different times of the year. These calendars reveal

the intricate connections between ecological rhythms, cultural practices, and Indigenous governance systems, shedding light on how communities adapt to seasonal changes while maintaining both biological and cultural diversity.

A key strength of this achievement was the deliberate inclusion of youth, who were actively engaged through hands-on training in mapping technologies, cultural documentation, and spatial storytelling. This not only built local capacity but also fostered meaningful intergenerational knowledge transfer, connecting younger generations with ancestral knowledge and responsibilities for land and ecological stewardship.

An additional value to the process was the meaningful recognition of the unique knowledge and perspectives held by women; separate and intentional engagements were held to ensure their voices, roles, and relationships with biocultural resources were meaningfully documented.

Each participating community followed a similar structured approach. Women and men held separate mapping sessions to develop past and present BCMs and Biocultural Seasonal Calendars, ensuring that gender-specific knowledge, experiences, and relationships to biocultural resources were clearly articulated and documented. These separate maps were later brought together and integrated into comprehensive community maps and calendars, reflecting a richer, more inclusive and holistic understanding of the landscape and seasonal lifeways. These spaces allowed women to share their experiences and insights, particularly around resource access, seasonal changes, caregiving, and custodianship practices often overlooked in mixed settings.

Together, these tools have been instrumental in documenting the deep-rooted presence, knowledge systems, and conservation practices of IPs & LCs within the landscape. BCMs and Biocultural Seasonal Calendars represent powerful community-generated knowledge products that not only strengthen Indigenous self-representation, but also offer credible and grounded tools for informing conservation planning, land rights advocacy, policy engagement, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Participatory research on biocultural knowledge to support community monitoring and stewardship

Another key achievement of this period has been our participatory research on biocultural knowledge with communities in the sub-project landscape. The purpose of this research is to provide further documentation about communities' physical presence on the land and care for nature across time. This research will also inform the community-based monitoring and evaluation systems (CBMIS) that will be established as part of Component 4 of the sub-project. Three participatory research projects have been undertaken during the first 2-years of sub-project implementation:

✔ *Cultural keystone species:* This research aimed to identify the species of animals and plants most integral to cultural heritage of IP and LCs in the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin, along with the role that IP and LCs play in the survival and conservation of these species. We used participatory methods to document culturally important animals and plants and their uses. We identified 20 cultural keystone species through our conversations with knowledge holders (N=91), including cow, sheep, goat, lion, elephant, kudu, umbrella thorn tree, African Olive tree and Strangular fig tree.
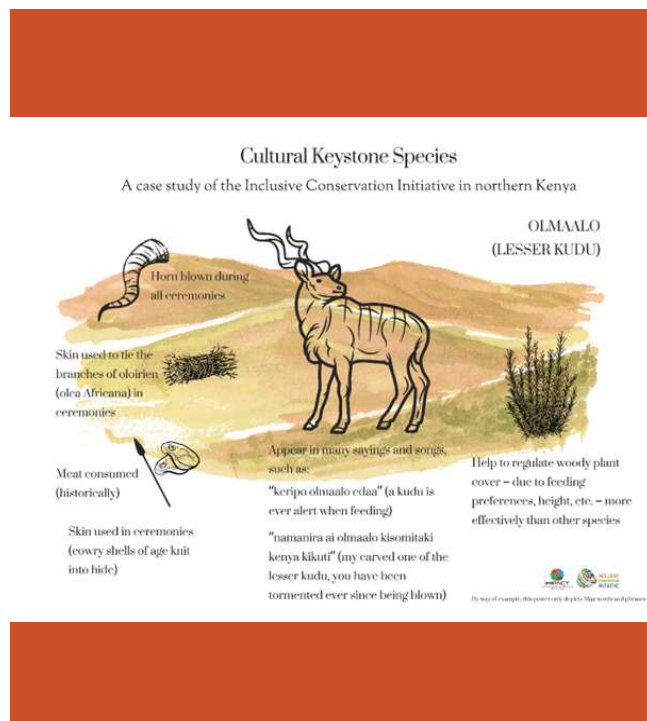
✔ *Biocultural practices:* The purpose of this research was to document practices IP and LCs in the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin use to manage their land and natural environment. We have worked with knowledge holders in the landscape to document the knowledge, innovations, and traditions of IP and LCs that inform land and natural resource use and management, along with the traditional and contemporary institutions and governance systems that guide land and natural resource use and management.

✔ *One Health knowledge and practices:* One Health refers to the relationships between animal, human, and environmental health. Because wildlife, livestock, and humans frequently interact in the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin and the maintenance of healthy livestock is vital to pastoralist livelihoods, pastoralists are highly attuned to wildlife health and disease. However, their One Health knowledge and practices are poorly documented. In this research, we used participatory methods to identify what Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin place-based knowledge of wildlife health and disease, including knowledge of clinical symptoms, species affected, transmission routes, emerging or re-emerging disease risks and understanding of disease dynamics.

Each of these projects involved participatory research, including key informant interviews, walking interviews, focus group discussions, participatory observation of the environment and review of existing literature, documentation, and research. An open and participatory approach was used in all of these, which allowed for the research to be guided and shaped by the priorities and interests of IP & LCs and provided opportunities for shared learning and cross-validation. Provisions are being made to ensure findings are accessible to communities and will ultimately be stored in secure knowledge hubs managed by or for IP & LCs in the sub-project area.

Each of these research projects evidences the role of IP and LCs as custodians of the environment in the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin. The knowledge generated through this research will be used to inform the community-based monitoring and evaluation systems (CBMIS) and also enhance cross-sectoral and intergenerational knowledge sharing. The knowledge products produced based on this research are detailed in the 'Data, Knowledge Sharing & Learning Platforms' section of this report.

Documentary production – "Evidencing the existence of pastoral communities and their contributions over time in the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin"

As part of documenting presence, 19 Community Lands, representative of all the indigenous groups in the scope, were engaged in a video documentary production process that will contribute to the creation of audio-visual and supporting educational materials that evidence communities' enduring presence and contributions to biodiversity conservation across time. These products offer a dynamic narrative of community-developed Biocultural Maps (BCMs) and seasonal calendars, enriched through narrated site visits to culturally significant keystone features, such as species, landscapes, and sacred sites, identified and valued by local communities.

These materials will highlight the interconnections between people, culture, and ecosystems, revealing how traditional ecological knowledge and cultural practices have sustained biodiversity and community wellbeing. To enhance intergenerational learning and knowledge transmission, the initiative will produce five short themed Edu-videos (10–15 minute) to further explore gendered relations to cultural resources, Indigenous knowledge systems that safeguard biodiversity, ecological monitoring using seasonal calendars, and rituals that uphold cultural keystone species and sites. Additionally, demonstrating the tangible impacts of inclusive, community-led conservation on both biodiversity and community well-being.

Complementing the video content is a curated photo essay featuring high-quality images, contextual captions, and case narratives that further document cultural keystone features and traditional conservation practices. Together, these media products provide powerful, community-authored evidence of Indigenous presence, agency, and environmental stewardship in the region.
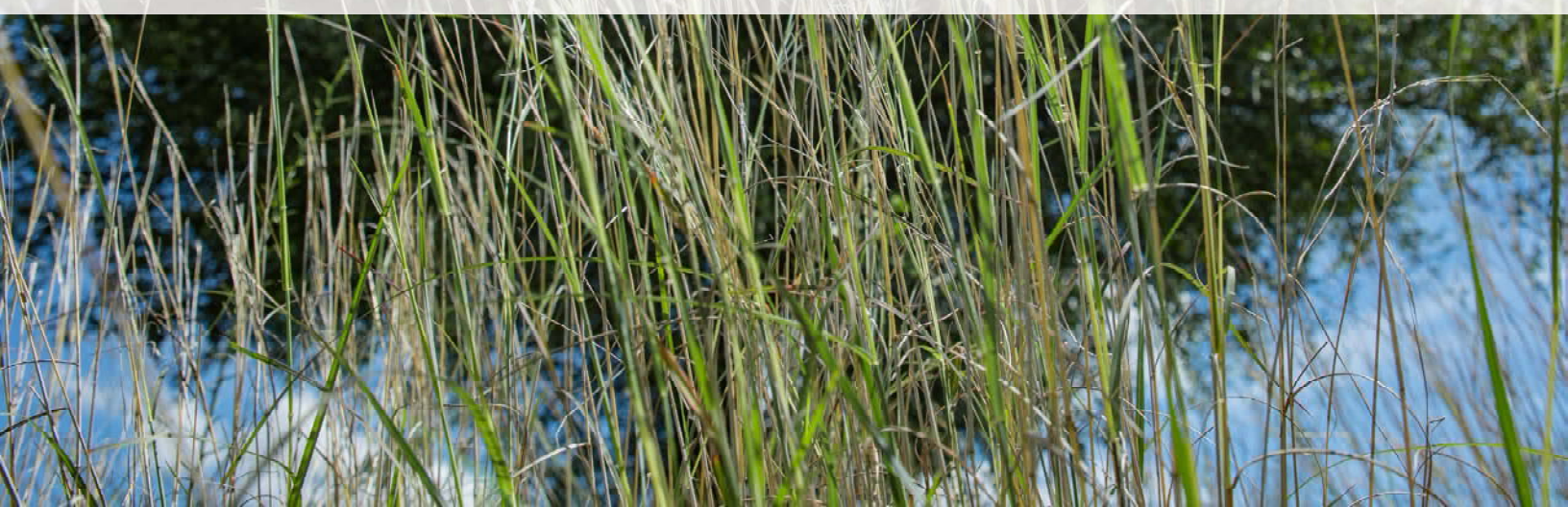
COMPONENT 2

Development of Biocultural Protocols (BCPs)

Biocultural Protocols (BCPs) are community-authored instruments that articulate their customary values, traditional knowledge, resource management systems, and cultural heritage. Rooted in local governance and spirituality. BCPs serve to safeguard biocultural territories and establish clear terms for external access and engagement, grounded in the principle of free, prior and informed consent. These living documents aim to ensure communities' rights are respected while reinforcing self-determination, equitable benefit-sharing, and sustainable development of their lands and resources.

The process of BCPs development followed a structured and well-coordinated process, grounded in intensive capacity building for both the subproject team and the participating communities. This approach ensured that the process was not only comprehensive and informed, but also genuinely participatory, enabling communities to lead and contribute meaningfully at every stage.

To build internal capacity and understanding of BCPs development, a foundational learning exchange visit was conducted by the subproject core team. The visit involved engagements with two Indigenous groups i.e., the Ogiek and Aweer community hosted by the Ogiek People's Development Program (OPDP) in Nakuru and Save Lamu in Lamu County respectively – which are organizations with experience supporting community-driven BCPs. Through field visits and dialogue with the communities, the team gained practical insights into participatory methodologies, adaptive strategies, and challenges involved in drafting and implementing BCPs. This exchange shaped the subproject's approach and affirmed the value of centering IPLC knowledge and leadership.

Additionally, a targeted training, planning, and streamlining workshop was convened to support and align the consultants facilitating the BCPs development process. The workshop aimed to ensure that the consultants were adequately oriented on the overarching goal, principles, and vision of the subproject, enabling a harmonized and community-centred approach across all the Indigenous groups. This preparatory step was critical in establishing a shared understanding of the participatory methodology, consent protocols, and documentation standards, thereby reinforcing the subproject's commitment to inclusive, rights-based, and locally grounded processes throughout the BCPs development.

Following the preparatory phase, the core team engaged 19 Community Lands grouped into 11 indigenous groups across the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin. Each group participated in a two-day community-wide meeting focused on awareness-raising, capacity-building, and collective consent toward BCP development. Communities reflected deeply on the value of BCPs in revitalizing traditional laws, protecting their territories, and reinforcing

cultural identity amidst growing external threats and internal erosion of customary governance. Each session culminated in the self-selection of 15–25 BCP drafters per group, ensuring inclusive representation of elders, women, youth, PLWDs, and community leaders.

These engagements marked the transition into the BCP drafting phase, during which selected community drafters participated in a 3-4 days intense and structured process guided by a matrix and grounded in the validation of existing data and information. As part of the practice to recognize the unique knowledge and perspectives held by women, separate and intentional engagements were conducted to ensure that their voices, roles, and relationships with biocultural resources were meaningfully documented and reflected in the BCPs. Through this process, 11 BCPs were drafted and are in the process of compilation.

Through the implementation of Component 1 on documenting community presence, the project established a strong foundation of biocultural data and knowledge, which continues to inform subsequent components, including the development of BCPs. The drafting process primarily relied on this existing information to support communities in articulating their rights, responsibilities, and priorities related to their territories, traditional knowledge, biocultural and genetic resources, cultural heritage, and customary laws and protocols.

Through being the authors and central to the process, communities have expressed strong ownership and eagerness to implement the protocols as tools for legal empowerment, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and protection of Indigenous landscapes. Alongside technical support, communities also emphasized the need for paralegal training, post-drafting implementation support, and long-term partnerships to ensure BCPs move beyond paper into practice, advancing both rights-based conservation and local resilience.

Community Land registration and legal empowerment

As part of our commitment to strengthening Indigenous-led land governance, the ICI subproject has conducted a series of community capacity-building workshop and barazas for Community Land Management Committees (CLMCs) across the landscape. While some of the trainings were conducted at the request of CLMCs, they were particularly crucial for committees undergoing leadership transitions or elections, as well as for those in the process of pursuing land registration.

In 12 Community Lands, the targeted trainings were crucial in enhancing the capacity of CLMCs on the Community Land Act (2016) and related governance issues, including their roles and responsibilities, and land rights. This step was vital in strengthening local institutions and promoting effective land governance and resource management within the communities.

Additionally, the trainings broadened the committees' capacity by introducing complementary governance tools such as FPIC and BCPs, both of which are critical for understanding legal land rights, dispute resolution mechanisms, and how to effectively assert community autonomy over land and resources. This knowledge equips communities to make informed, collective decisions, defend against encroachment or misappropriation, integrate Indigenous governance, and promote sustainable land use practices that uphold both present and future generations' wellbeing.

COMPONENT 3

Laying the groundwork for Biocultural Resource Management Plans (BRMPs) through community self-assessments

Management Plans (MPs) are a critical tool for guiding how communities govern, protect, and sustainably use their land, natural resources, and biocultural heritage. However, aligning with the overall goal of the subproject, MPs serve not only as planning documents but also as frameworks for aligning conservation efforts with community-defined priorities, cultural values, and Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK). By clearly outlining land-use strategies, biodiversity protection measures, and cultural governance systems, MPs will help communities assert their stewardship, strengthen internal decision-making, and engage more effectively with external actors and development partners.

To support the process, we aim to facilitate communities to develop Biocultural Resource Management Plans (BRMPs) OR to review existing MPs into BRMPs. These are community-developed planning tools that integrate the management of natural resources with the protection and promotion of Indigenous cultural values, knowledge systems, and governance practices. Unlike conventional resource management plans, BRMPs are holistic and culturally grounded. They support communities in asserting their rights, guiding development decisions, addressing threats such as land encroachment or biodiversity loss, and promoting intergenerational knowledge transfer; serving as both practical planning documents and expressions of community stewardship.

To initiate the process, the subproject facilitated Community Self-Assessments (CSAs) on MPs to lead structured reflections among CLMCs and local authorities, with the aim of assessing the current status of MPs among communities. Additionally, the CSAs assessed the extent to which biocultural elements and Indigenous knowledge systems are integrated, the responsiveness to gender and cultural dynamics, community health and security,
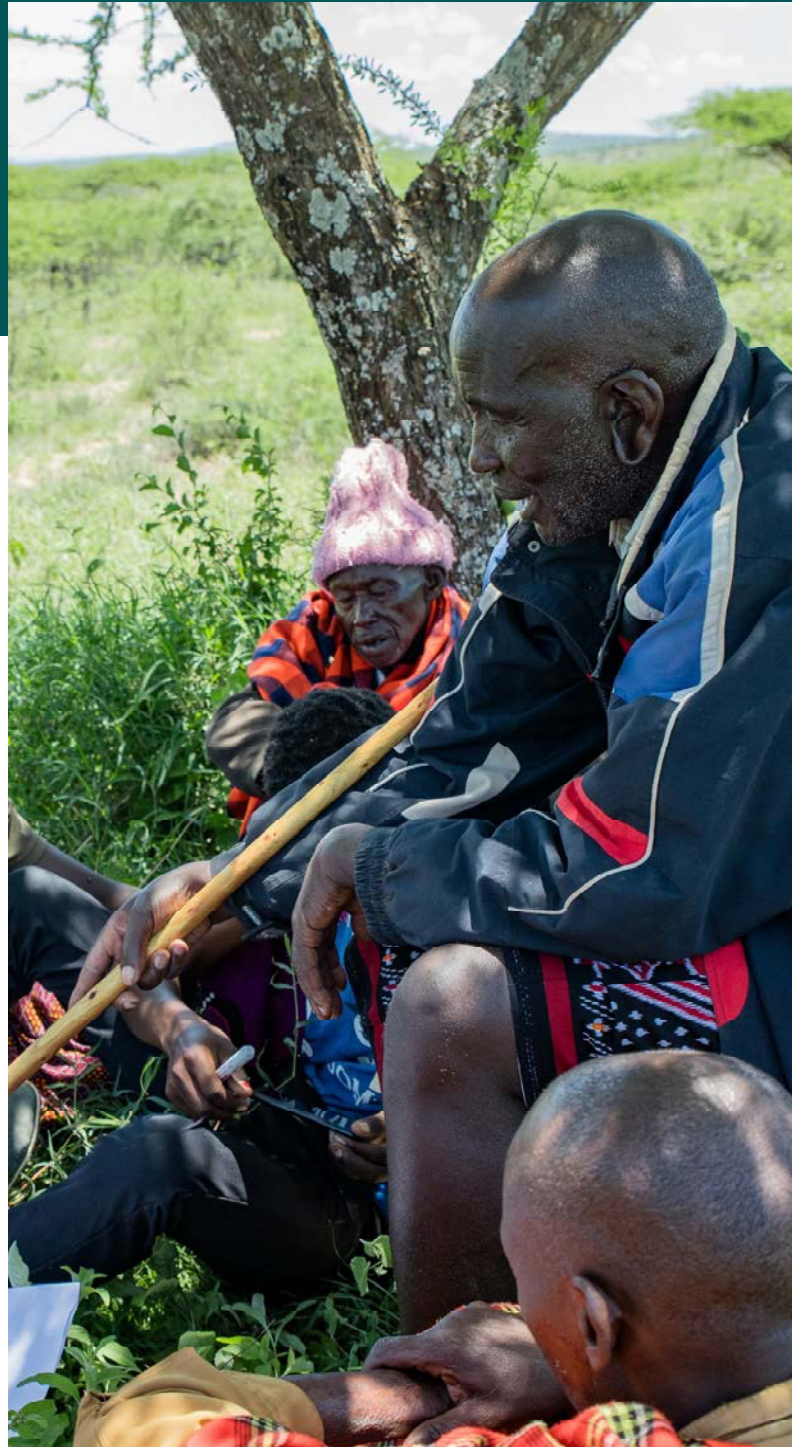
and the overall alignment of existing plans with the communities' visions, values, and long-term aspirations.

Paralegals, Community Resource Persons (CRPs), and Community Link Persons (CLPs) were trained on the Community Self-Assessment (CSA) tool, including key aspects of research ethics and community safeguards. This training equipped them with the knowledge and facilitation skills needed to lead the CSA process across 22 Community Lands (13 in Laikipia, 4 in Isiolo, and 5 in Samburu), ensuring that the assessments were conducted in a participatory, respectful, and culturally appropriate manner. This exercise was also an act of delegating leadership and guidance by intentionally relinquishing power to communities, enabling them to lead the activity as part of a broader process of community self-strengthening.

These participatory processes have enabled communities to identify gaps, evaluate the relevance of existing plans, and determine priorities for strengthening or developing Biocultural Resource Management Plans (BRMPs) in the next phase of the project. Additionally, the process helped assess the uptake and impact of the ICI, and reinforced the role of community-led planning as a foundation for long-term conservation and sustainable development.

COMPONENT 5

The Inaugural Annual Stakeholder's Forum (ICI-ASF 2024)

The 1st Annual Stakeholders Forum (ASF2024), held in July 2024 to mark the end of the 1st year of implementation, brought together over 80 participants, including community representatives, civil society organizations, conservation actors, researchers, county and national government agencies working across the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin.

The Forum marked a significant milestone in the implementation of the ICI Kenya subproject, providing a space to reflect on Year 1 progress, share key achievements, and collectively define priorities moving forward. The event served as one of the first major gatherings in the region to convene such a diverse and representative group of stakeholders around the theme of inclusive conservation.

Over the three days, participants engaged in a series of presentations, discussions, and participatory dialogues. Key activities included sharing knowledge products developed in Year 1, such as community-led biocultural maps, seasonal calendars, and cultural keystone species research, and discussing the importance of these tools in evidencing Indigenous Peoples' presence and conservation contributions. A tour of these knowledge products allowed participants to interact directly with the outputs and understand their relevance to Community Land and biodiversity governance.

Central to the Forum was multi-stakeholder dialogues on defining the meaning and practice of inclusive conservation. Participants, working in stakeholder-specific and mixed groups, discussed definitions, principles, best practices,

and barriers to inclusion in conservation efforts. These conversations culminated in the co-creation of "A Manifesto for Inclusive Conservation – contextualized within the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin" - a living document capturing the collective vision of communities and stakeholders for a conservation approach grounded in Indigenous rights, knowledge, and governance systems.

The manifesto was further synthesized into a blog post and a brief "an Inclusive Conservation manifesto Brief" which outlines 5 key foundational principles i.e., i). territorial autonomy; ii). leadership in governance; iii). Fair benefit sharing and direct financing; iv). respect for Indigenous knowledge and v). respect for rights and customary institutions.

See link to the blog post: https://inclusiveconservationinitiative.org/the-first-annual-stakeholder-forum-for-the-inclusive-conservation-initiative-in-kenya/

The ASF2024 event successfully fostered shared understanding, strengthened relationships, and laid the foundation for continued collaboration, reflection, and learning in the years ahead. It affirmed the critical role of Indigenous Peoples in leading conservation efforts and established an inclusive platform for dialogue, strategy, and advocacy moving forward.

GENDER, SOCIAL INCLUSION, SAFEGUARDS AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

In recognizing diversity, the design and implementation of the project continues to be shaped by inclusive, representative, culturally relevant and sensitive efforts. Commitment to gender and inclusion is reflected in our responsiveness in; i.e, structuring of activities through intentional targeting informed by contextual learnings, utilization of separate sessions incognizant of cultural and power imbalances of various groups, flexible implementation guided by communities' dynamics such as cultural events and market days as well as strengthening communities' institutions, women, youth and men through capacity building engagements.

Inclusion went beyond participation. It entailed incorporation of gendered generational knowledge, diverse perspectives, systems such as customary structures and formal governance, as well as cultural heritage. This is a step towards ensuring ownership and sustainability, enabling IPs to lead the design and actively shape both the processes and outcomes in line with their own priorities and aspirations.

Mainstreaming of the above is guided by several safeguards' frameworks and FPIC principles continuously integrated in all stages of the sub-project. This approach was meaningful in protecting community-determined contributions as well as minimizing potential risks not only those limited to environment and resources but also those associated with exclusion in participation, infringement, disregard o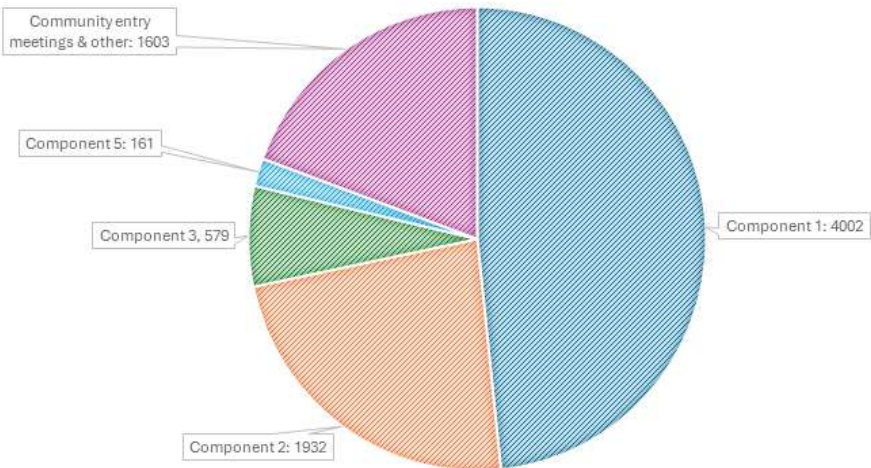r minimizing value of knowledge, beliefs and practices. For instance, documentation process was community-led, in that, the content was informed by voluntary contributions where communities had the liberty to determine exclusion or inclusion of some information in their biocultural protocols based on their priorities.
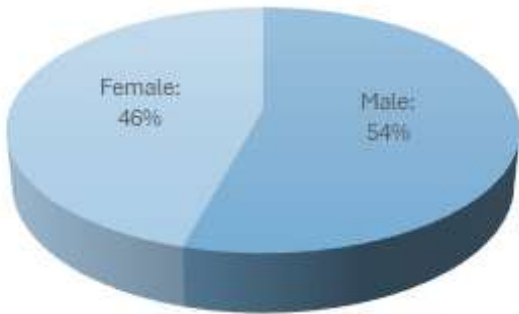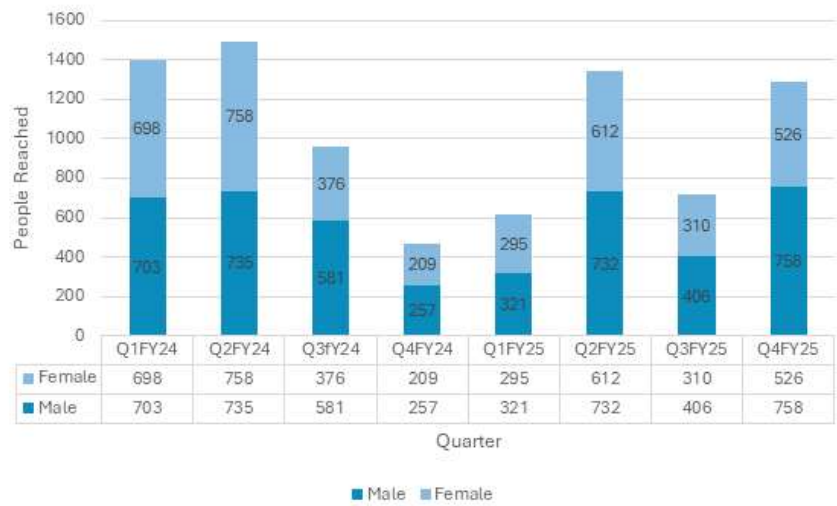
For effective and inclusive implementation, the sub-project leveraged on collaboration with relevant stakeholders at community, county, national and regional level. This was further strengthened by the Accountability and Grievance Mechanism (AGM) mainstreamed across activities for accessibility to raise concerns, feedback or seek redress. Regular awareness was done in a participatory format, alongside the delivery of various activities being conducted, and in the locally understood languages, providing accessible, timely and culturally-appropriate mediums and channels for reporting and responding.

PEOPLE REACHED PER COMPONENT

Community entry meetings & other: 1603

Component 5: 161

Component 3, 579

Component 2: 1932

Component 1: 4002

People reached per quarter

Quarter	Q1FY24	Q2FY24	Q3fY24	Q4FY24	Q1FY25	Q2FY25	Q3FY25	Q4FY25
Female	698	758	376	209	295	612	310	526
Male	703	735	581	257	321	732	406	758

Male   Female

Female: 46%

Male: 54%

INSET - COMMUNITY LAND LEVEL

SAMBURU COUNTY

ISIOLO COUNTY

LAIKIPIA COUNTY

IMPACT Kenya
Climate Change, Adaptation and Resilience Program.
Inclusive Conservation Initiative Mid Term Project Review
Interventions.
2025

IMPACT
Indigenous Movement For Peace Advancement &
Conflict Transformation

iNCLUSiVE
CONSERVATION
iNITIATiVE

SCOPE OF ICI

LAIKIPIA COUNTY

LEGEND -INDIGENEOUS GROUPS

- Community Lands
- County Boundary
- Ilngwesi
- Ildikir
- Lewaso
- Lmomonyot
- Yaaku
- Nkiloriti
- Turkana
- Oldonyiro-Samburu
- Leparua-Ilngwesi
- Samburu
- Borana
- Ngilai- Sarara, Ngutuk Engiron Comm

INTERVENTIONS - INDIGENEOUS GROUPS LEVEL

Chari CL

SAMBURU COUNTY

ISIOLO COUNTY

ACHIEVEMENTS

Biocultural Maps

Legal Empowerment (Biocultural Protocol)

Documentary Production

ITK Based Research (Cultural Keystone Species)

Biocultural calendars analysis and consolidation workshops

Community self-assessment and consultations on Management Plans (MPs) (All)

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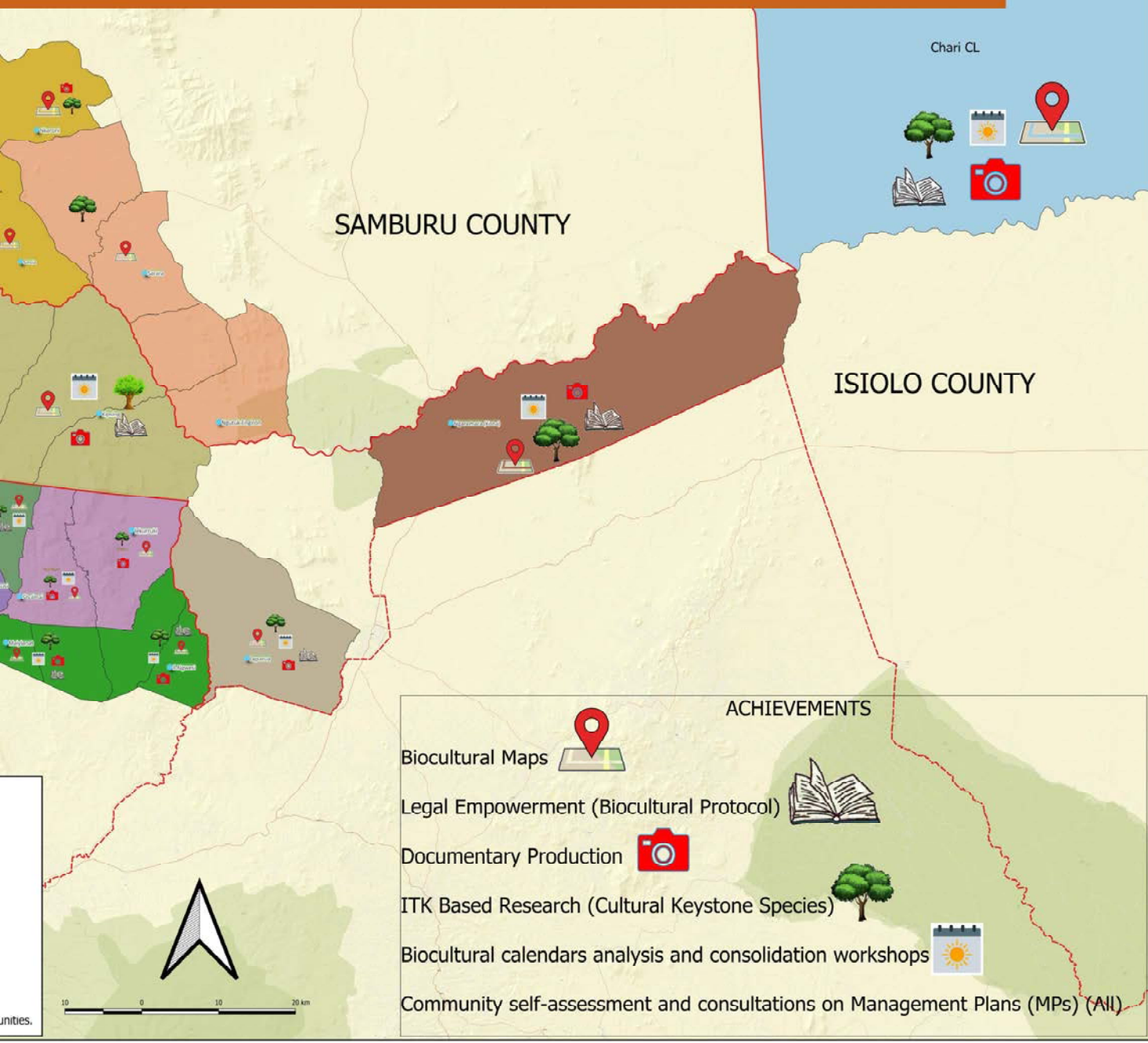
DATA, KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND LEARNING PLATFORMS

The sub-project has prioritized data, knowledge sharing, and continuous learning at the core of its strategy to strengthen IP and LCs agency, representation, and leadership in conservation. Our work is founded on and guided by participatory research and documentation, ensuring the design, implementation, integration and decision-making are deeply rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems, values and principles.

All data and information collected from communities are thoughtfully repackaged into accessible formats that can be directly applied in local planning, governance, resource management, advocacy, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. The subproject recognizes that knowledge, both Indigenous and contemporary, is a vital asset in strengthening community-driven conservation systems while contributing to more inclusive, informed, and culturally grounded policy and development approaches.

In this section, we outline the specific knowledge products and platforms for learning and knowledge dissemination that we have produced through this project.

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

1. **Biocultural maps and biocultural seasonal calendars:** We have produced 44 biocultural maps and 11 biocultural seasonal calendars (in production process) with participating communities. These knowledge products exist in both digital form and hard copy. These maps provide evidence of traditional and contemporary use and care for the landscape. These maps have already proven useful for supporting land claim processes; for example, they can inform government spatial planning activities or communities in acquiring land titles The process of creating these maps also allows recollection of the past, and consideration of the present through inter-generational dialogue. Furthermore, the maps support documentation and archiving of community knowledge.

2. **Cultural keystone species field guide:** The purpose of this field guide is to serve as a tool to be used by pastoralist communities across the Mid-Ewaso

Ng'iro as they see fit: for example, to document their relationships with and practices of care for bioculturally significant species; to share this knowledge across generations; and to advocate and attract support for conserving the species they view as important through the methods they understand as appropriate, compared to the more charismatic species and exclusionary models predominant in the region. Beyond this, the guide might also be used by conservationists, tourists and visitors, and everyday people within the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro to learn new things about less familiar species from diverse perspectives.

3. **Biocultural community protocols (in progress):** We have produced 11 biocultural community protocols (BCPs). BCPs are tools developed by local communities to assert their rights over their land and territories, resources and knowledge, and to guide how these resources are accessed and used by others. They are a way for communities to codify their customary laws and values related to their biocultural heritage. They are often most useful for communities when entering negotiations with external parties.

4. **Academic publications:** We have published one academic article based on our research studies so far, titled 'Weaving knowledge to support wildlife health surveillance in Kenya's pastoral rangelands'. This article will appear in the forthcoming volume of Conservation Biology. Further publications on cultural keystones species and biocultural practices are forthcoming. The goal of these publications is to help elevate Indigenous knowledge from the project area as a credible and legitimate knowledge system on par with knowledge from the mainstream (western) conservation sector.

5. **Community biocultural reference books (in progress):** We are in the process of compiling 5 community biocultural reference books – tailored to each community in the subproject area. Reference books will serve as archival resources and learning tools within communities, providing a record of the knowledge gained through this project. They will include: BCMs; seasonal calendars; information about cultural keystone species and biocultural practices; and BCPs. Reference books will serve to safeguard knowledge that is not yet documented in writing, facilitate the integration of Indigenous knowledge in decision-making and support knowledge transfer between generations.

6. **Audio-visual resources (in progress):** We are producing a documentary that documents the presence of IP & LCs in the sub-project area, along with their role in delivering local and global environmental benefits. Five short themed edu-videos (10–15 minute) are being produced to complement this documentary, which explore further theme, such as gendered relations to cultural resources, Indigenous knowledge systems that safeguard biodiversity, ecological monitoring using seasonal calendars, and rituals that uphold cultural keystone species and sites. Complementing the video content is a curated photo essay featuring high-quality images, contextual captions, and case narratives that further document cultural keystone features and traditional conservation practices.

LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION PLATFORMS

1. **'Community Knowledge Products'** page on IMPACT Kenya Website (In progress): To increase public accessibility and transparency, IMPACT Kenya is preparing an online Community Knowledge Products portal on its website. This digital space will house key outputs from various projects, interventions and processes at the local, national and regional level. The page serves as an open-source knowledge center for community members, partner organizations, researchers, government actors, and global conservation and development allies. This page will be regularly updated with ICI knowledge products, reflecting a strong commitment to making information accessible to all and amplifying Indigenous-led conservation experiences to a broader audience.

2. **Annual Inclusive Conservation Summit:** As part of its multi-stakeholder engagement strategy, the ICI subproject pioneered the "Annual Stakeholders Forum (ASF)" – a convening space for communities, civil society, policymakers, and conservation practitioners who live and work in the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin. The ASF has since been redefined and institutionalized as the Annual Inclusive Conservation Summit (ICS), a dedicated platform aimed at deepening and elevating community leadership and ownership.

3. **Building a Community of Practice:** The ICI subproject is actively and steadily nurturing a Community of Practice (CoP), to foster co-learning across disciplines and geographies, grounded in lived realities and Indigenous systems. In the long term, the goal is to have a dynamic, multi-stakeholder community made up of IPs and their institutions, researchers, policymakers, conservation actors, and development partners, guided by a common agenda, inclusive conservation. This will be a space for community-driven learning with engagement structures to encourage peer learning, adaptation of best practices across contexts, and amplify IP and LCs' voices at all levels, creating sustainable systems of accountability, trust, and knowledge exchange that are critical for sustaining inclusive conservation efforts beyond the life of the project. One notable example of this is our involvement

in designing curriculum on 'Inclusive and Rights-Based Approaches to Conservation and Development, Indigenous Peoples in the African Context' in partnership with the Institute of Development Studies-University of Nairobi (UON). This course will provide students and conservation professionals with capacity-building on inclusive conservation in theory, policy and practice.

4. **Collaboration with Indigenous Knowledge Holders (IKHs):** A group of IKHs from communities in the subproject landscape are involved in this project. IKHs are recognized and supported not just as knowledge or expertise bearers, but as agents of intergenerational equity and drivers of policy reform. They play a critical role in bridging ancestral wisdom with contemporary challenges, interpreting changes in ecosystems, guiding the application of Indigenous knowledge, and transmitting practical Indigenous knowledge/ skills to youth. During the first 2–years of sub-project implementation, IKHs participation and leadership has been central in shaping implementation processes and co-creation of tools such as Biocultural Community Protocols (BCPs), Biocultural Maps, and cultural keystone species research.

5. **Engagement in national and global movement-building for inclusive conservation:** The ICI-Kenya sub-project is contributing to the formation of a concrete and functional movement on inclusive and just conservation nationally and globally; for example, through our own participation and by supporting community participation in national and global events, such as the Biodiversity COP. By connecting local voices with regional and international advocacy platforms, the project supports Indigenous Peoples in shaping global conservation narratives. This movement amplifies calls for recognition, equity, and justice in conservation policies, and builds solidarity among communities defending their territories, rights, and worldviews. It leverages Indigenous-led data, knowledge, and lived experiences to influence decision-making spaces, from the county-level policy to global biodiversity forums.

KEY REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

The first 2–years of sub-project implementation has revealed important lessons, insights, and opportunities for strengthening inclusive conservation practice. While the subproject has made significant strides in empowering communities, several emerging needs and areas for improvement have been identified. These reflections are critical for shaping future engagement, fostering sustainability, and building a strong foundation for landscape-wide collaboration, governance, and learning.

- **Strengthening inter-county collaboration:** There is a need to build stronger networks and relationships among the three counties to support joint learning, shared decision-making, and peaceful coexistence. A landscape approach grounded in ITK systems offers a culturally rooted way to rebuild trust among ethnic communities and address shared challenges holistically.

- **Growing recognition of Indigenous-led approaches:** Communities recognize that the Indigenous community-led methods adopted by the project are unique and impactful in supporting cultural restoration, protection of livelihoods, and long-term self-strengthening. Tools like Biocultural Maps, Calendars, and Cultural Keystone Species research have deepened community ownership and participation.

- **Inclusion is an intentional, gradual, and always incomplete process:** While participation of diverse groups is acknowledged and deliberately supported, inclusion and participation remain a work in progress. Capacity building engagements aligned with communities' values and systems presents an opportunity for voluntary, meaningful and sustained inclusion and participation.

- **Conservation as a lived reality:** Communities perceive conservation to be inseparable from their day to day lives. They recognize that erosion and disregard of cultural practices and customary institutions directly impacts how resources are conserved and managed.

- **Strengthening awareness and accessibility of the Accountability and Grievance Mechanism (AGM):** There is a clear need to raise awareness about the AGM to ensure it is well understood, easily accessible, and actively utilized by communities and other stakeholders. Improving visibility and understanding of these channels will promote transparency, build trust, and provide a safe channel for addressing concerns or conflicts, ultimately contributing to smoother project implementation.

- **Continuous capacity building:** Sustained training and mentorship are essential for communities and their institutions to enable informed decision-making, collective consent, and long-term knowledge transfer.

- **Strengthening government engagement:** Engagement with both National and County governments is key for ensuring legitimacy, reducing conflict, and fostering trust and ownership among communities and their leadership. This also helps align project activities with broader legal and policy frameworks.

- **Fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration and coordination across the scope:** This is necessary to minimize parallel or conflicting systems and to maximize resource sharing. This is particularly important in areas like Isiolo, where competing and complex land issues and interests present ongoing challenges. gaps and challenges still exist in ensuring continuous engagements and exchanges with stakeholders across all levels. Strategies to ensure continuous engagements will help sustain momentum, provide updates, share emerging learning, and strengthen accountability throughout the year. These regular exchanges will deepen cross-learning, foster collaboration, and keep community voices at the forefront of decision-making processes.

- **Valuing Biocultural Maps (BCMs):** There is a growing need and recognition of BCMs not only as evidence of existence but also as vital visual tools for preserving and transmitting Indigenous knowledge across generations.

- **Promoting ongoing learning and knowledge dissemination:** There is a strong need for consistent learning about the subproject's strategies and tools, as well as active dissemination of knowledge materials. This builds trust, maintains transparency, and strengthens the overall community knowledge base.

FUTURE LOOKING

During the first 2-years of the project, we made significant progress on Components 1 and 2 of the projects in line with our proposed working plan. Now, moving into the latter half of the project, we will shift towards a focus on Components 3, 4 and 5. Below we describe in-brief the work we will undertake with IP & LCs in the sub-project area over the next 2-years. We also describe key outputs/knowledge productions that will be delivered through this work.

Component 3. Management plans and demo projects

Management plans outline the specific approach a community uses to manage their territories to deliver community benefits and global environmental benefits. Although many of the 24 communities that are part of this subproject already have management plans in place, these plans often do not include adequate consideration for the role of Indigenous knowledge in management or include reference to biocultural resources and practices. During Year 2, we began the process of facilitating communities to develop Biocultural Resource Management Plans (BRMPs) or to review existing management plans to include consideration for biocultural resources and Indigenous knowledge. This process will continue into Year 3.

During Year 3 of the project, we will also identify specific projects that community would like to undertake that demonstrate how their own knowledge and aspirations can be used to deliver both community benefits and global environmental benefits. These demo projects are meant to both evidence the benefits of managing land and resources using ITK, and supporting the scaling of IP and LCs biocultural practices. Over the coming year, we will work with participating communities to agree on a process for selecting demo projects to implement and support, and we will then support communities in implementing these demo projects.

Component 4. Monitoring and evaluation

During Years 3 and 4 of the projects, we will begin working with communities in the subproject scope to establish their own community-based monitoring and evaluation systems (CBMIS). These systems will allow participating communities to monitor, evaluate and share how they steward their territories and to document and report the ecological, cultural, and social threats they face on an ongoing basis. This information

can be used by communities themselves to monitor their territories or shared with relevant authorities, such as government actors.

The first step of this process involves deciding how communities would like to monitor their territories: the system we design needs to be accessible and easy-to-use, as well as sustainable. We will work with communities to decide if the CBMIS should use hand-written records, recorded oral observations (e.g. captured through story-telling and participatory video) or a digital system (e.g. mobile phones and handheld devices).

Once the system is agreed upon, information and knowledge gained through Component 1 of the project will form the basis of what is monitored. For example:

- Cultural keystone species counts: Communities may choose to monitor cultural keystone species, using point counts, timed species counts, transects and species lists as simple techniques to approximate the biodiversity and species richness of an area a few times each year. Over time, this type of monitoring and evaluation can help make informed predictions about populations sizes and growth, demonstrating how communities help to conserve species that are important to them; or,

- Territorial threat logs: Communities may choose to set-up monitoring and evaluation systems that allow them to monitor and report significant events, such as outbreaks of wildlife disease or when water sources (e.g. springs; rivers) run dry. Such systems allow communities to report events with the date, time, location and a detailed description of the event. Events can then be mapped, compiled and reported monthly and annually. This type of monitoring and evaluation system can be a useful way of mobilizing resources and support to address threats to communities' territories.

Component 5. Ongoing self-strengthening, communication and advocacy

During Years 3 and 4 of the project, we will continue to support communities in the sub-project area with preserving and communicating knowledge about their contributions to sustainable land management and biodiversity. We will also provide capacity building to communities, so they are prepared to influence county and national decision-making processes about inclusive conservation in their territories.

During Year 4, each community will also be supported in establishing a Local Knowledge Hub, where evidence and materials produced throughout the project can be stored and referenced in the future. These knowledge hubs will be established in existing facilities identified by communities, such as schools or local government offices. We will also establish an Indigenous Knowledge and Resource Centre at the landscape-level during Year 4 of the project. This knowledge centre will act as the region's inclusive conservation knowledge repository and learning space, hosting workshops, research collaborations, policy dialogues, exhibitions, and mentorship programs related to inclusive conservation over the coming years.

Finally, as the project progresses, we will continue preparing knowledge products with communities, such as school curriculum; children's workbooks; cookbooks; local/Indigenous field guides; pamphlets; or educational films. Select community members will be provided with training in using these materials to evidence their contributions to sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation and secure their place in the landscape. IMPACT's website will provide a virtual platform to host and store digital knowledge products, while Local Knowledge Hubs will be provided with hard copies. Links will also be built with other institutions that work to protect cultural heritage in Kenya to ensure the legacy of this project and to support the dissemination or project outputs, such as the National Museums of Kenya.

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