

INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

A PHOTO ESSAY



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



BY IMPACT KENYA

VOLUME I

ABOUT **Our Gallery**





The purpose of this photo essay is to document the presence, connection and contribution of IPs and LCs in conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems within their landscapes and territories over the years.

The lands and territories represented are the traditional landscapes of the Samburu, the *IL-Laikipiak* Maasai, the Turkana and the Borana of whom are all Indigenous Communities living in various territories in the northern parts of Kenya.



Our journey of filming and photographing the efforts of Indigenous People in protecting, preserving and conserving their lands, biodiversity and ecosystems began in the traditional lands of the Samburu in Samburu County. We first visited and set camp in **Nkaroni** Community Land. The community in **Nkaroni** Community Land had their land registered as per the Community Land Act of 2016 with assistance from IMPACT TRUST. ICI Project has enabled the sustainability of both the community and organization in ensuring that the IPs know of their rights as a people, their rights in owning and protecting their lands so as to enable them continue with their traditional practices in terms of language, culture and heritage that have enabled them be the custodians and guardians of their lands.



The above pictures show a **Lorora** that was happening in **Nkaroni** in the late August of 2024. The **Lorora** was of a particular ageset of a specific clan of the Samburu. The elders in that particular ageset were graduating from junior elders to senior elders, hence a gathering was needed to bless them and their household as they enter another step according to the rite of passage of a boy in both the Maasai and Samburu communities. The ceremony happens when there is a full moon showing the relation between some traditions, the land and celestial bodies.

This picture shows one of the usage of land by the Samburu, hence depicting that culture and land goes hand in hand in the life of an indigenous community. Stamping a reason why land is of importance to the IPs and hence the reason why they would conserve it for the purpose of the continuity of the culture, heritage, traditions and language.

Before they decide on where the **Lorora** is going to stay, some elders and warriors are sent out to search for a suitable location that has water and is easily accessible by everyone of all ages from young children, mothers, warriors, elders, people living with disability and above all their livestock. When a great location in their landscape is sited, elders set forth to bless the land before it is inhabited by a specific clan.



We then proceeded to **Ngaremara** ward, traditional lands of the Turkana community located in Isiolo County. The Turkana have a traditional ceremony called **Athapan** which is a right of passage for men to transition to a position in which they will be able to marry and partake in cultural ceremonies within their community. The ceremony happens when there is a full moon showing the relation between some traditions, the land and celestial bodies.

The picture above shows a senior elder sitting under an acacia tree. Nothing can happen or go forward without a go ahead from this elder who is respected and recognized in the community.

The acacia trees (big, tall and with wide branches) are of huge significance to the Turkana because they act as sacred sites, cultural ceremony sites, and decision making grounds. This is the reason why they protect and conserve them since without them then that means some of their rituals and traditions will be incomplete.

A well recognized senior elder among the Turkana community in *Ngaremara* ward, who has to be present to bless the *Athapan* ceremony as it begins.



Young men at the *Athapan* ceremony. They have to have feathers from an Ostrich for them to take part in this traditional ritual. An ostrich is one of the cultural keystone species of the Turkana community, hence the reason why they do protect them as their feathers are key and very important in most of their traditional ceremonies.





A photo of a woman applying *Echoto Longorr*, a special type of soil among the Turkana community that is used to apply on the head of men to signify the end of the *Athapan* ceremony, which stays intact for either two, three or four days depending on the clan they come from.



The young woman also goes ahead to apply oil from either a sheep or goat onto the body of the young man before they proceed to have a change of clothes and enter into the traditional hut.

The first photo shows a groom and his best man, while the second photo entails the groom, his best man and friends supporting him at his traditional wedding in *Ngaremara* Ward.

They all must have a traditional cap made of black ostrich feathers and several white ostrich feathers standing tall on the cap. No man can marry without the traditional cap as it is a symbol of authority and being a man in the Turkana community.

This is a second traditional ceremony after the *Athapan* that men must go through before being considered a complete man in the community.

Hence showing the relation between certain cultural ceremonies and cultural keystone species like the ostrich in the Turkana community.





From **Ngaremara** we proceeded to Chari ward, the traditional land of the Borana community.

The photo above is of some of the Borana elders discussing a traditional song that was sang to their land, livestock and livelihood.



One of the elders explaining the **Dheda** system of governance. The **Dheda** system was used to conserve areas of pasture and grasslands so that they can be available to their livestock for the different seasons across their traditional seasonal calendars. This shows the **Borana** community deeper relations with their land, biodiversity and the ecosystems within their territory.



Rivers are significant to all the different Indigenous Communities. They are a source of water for the people, their livelihoods and livestock. Some rivers act as salt licks used to traditionally deworm livestock. Here in *Lkisin* women set out for a ritual called *Lamal* where they pray to their god *Enkai* to help replenish the rivers at *Lkisin* river. This *Lamal* traditional ritual indicates a more spiritual connection between the people, their land and the various natural features within their ecosystems.



Women pouring milk onto the sacred tree as they chant their prayers to their god *Enkai*, at *Lkisin* river in *Lkisin* Community Land.



Young Samburu warriors watering their livestock at a watering point along *Lkisin* river. Watering points are always protected and taken care of because it is a place where both humans and livestock from the communities get their water. There are ways in which they do this for instance no animal is allowed to get in the shallow well dug to avoid fecal materials from dropping into the water which is also consumed by the people. Warriors often go in to fetch water and put it into troughs that the livestock can drink from, while they do this they sing and chant traditional songs often in praise of their largest bulls, cows, sheep and goat.



From *Lkisin*, we travelled to *Ltirimín*, another Community Land inhabited by the Samburu. The above picture is of women heading to a mountain in their land to get barks of a plant called Lokore in Samburu which has very important usage. The number of women going must be four, the women must be considered pure physically and at heart (meaning they should have not done anything considered bad or a taboo by the Samburu).



They carry gourds with milk because they must sing for the tree, pray and bless it before removing its bark. The tree is considered Holy and has to be approached in a very spiritual and careful manner. No one is allowed to go up the mountain that has the Lokore tree. The women when they need to go up the mountain, they must first inform the elders so they can be granted permission.



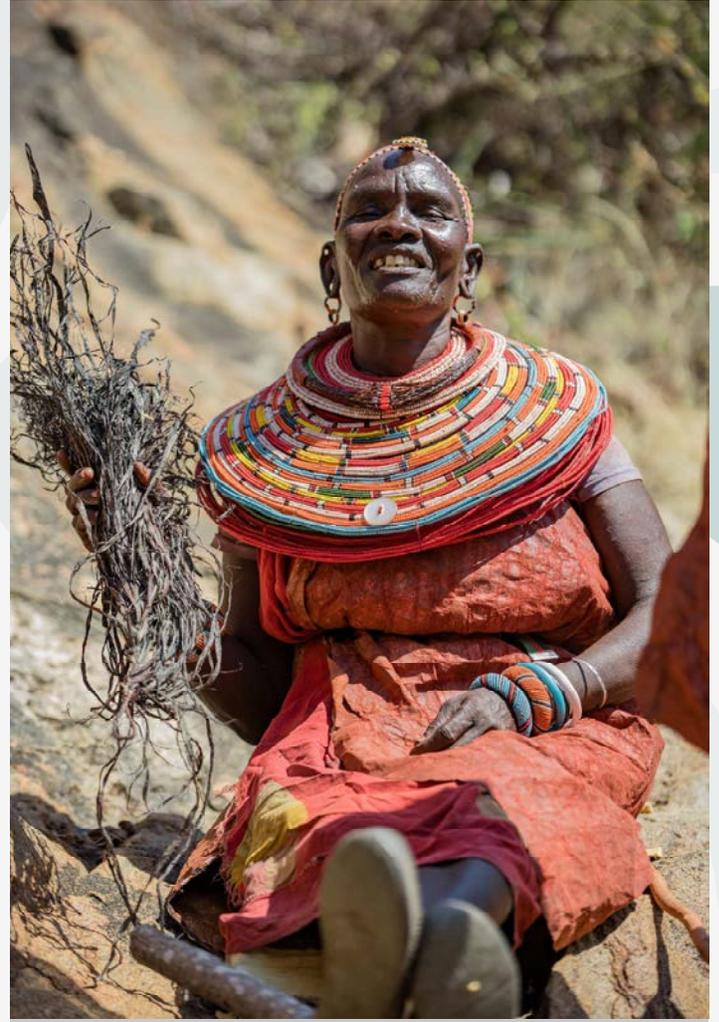
Once the women finish praying to god and they bless the tree. They sway some milk on the tree and woman among the four proceeds to cut the bark only from the tree. The woman has to be so gentle with the tree and she removes the bark in a very slow and soft manner.



She carefully checks on the bark removed, and she carefully sort it out .

The women
then begin their
journey back to
the village.





This two women are holding barks from the Lokore tree, which they had removed several weeks prior to the filming of the documentary. On the previous page that's how a fresh bark from the tree looks like, once removed the women have a speacial way of preparing and taking care of the barks so they can look exactly as it is in the picture.



Back at the village, the women prepare the bark so that they can tie it to a child born a few months before. It is a tradition among the Samburu to do this as the bark of the *Lokore* tree is believed to protect the young child as he/she grows. It protects them from evil eyes and evil people. It is also believed it will aid the child grow in a healthy manner.



Once ready, the mother and her child are asked to sit down. The elderly woman goes ahead and ties the *Lokore* onto the child's waist.



In the same Community Land of *Ltirimin*, warriors show us *Seiya*. *Seiya* is a type of plant found along rivers, in this case the warriors collected the plant from *Seiya* River. This depicts the importance of various ecosystems in Samburu traditional lands and as to why they strive to protect and preserve them.



Seiya smells so good, hence given a nickname the Samburu Traditional perfume. Warriors are known to use it while making a mixture from the red ochre which they use it in their hair and face marking during traditional ceremonies and rituals. The picture also shows red ochre which is a very important type of clay for both the **Samburu** and **Maasai** communities. It is used during cultural ceremonies such as weddings and circumcision.



Once the mixture was ready, the two warriors from *Ltirimin* demonstrate how to do face marking with the red ochre that has been mixed with *Seiya*.



One warrior is drawing some face marking on his fellow warrior. On the right a warrior flaunts his traditional braids which has a reddish-brown color due to application of red ochre and *seiya* mixture. This is a sign of beauty among the warriors who always have to look flashy and good.





From Samburu county we proceeded to Laikipia County. Our first stop was in **Shulmai** Community Land, the traditional lands of the **Yiaku** community. The **Yiaku** are originally hunters and gatherers. Their lands and forests are of great importance as they live with the land, by the land and for the land. They narrated to us of how they would conserve the forests and wildlife. They would do rotational hunting and gathering. Each clan had their specific section of the forest and the land. It was each clan's duty to protect, preserve and conserve their region so as to avoid excessive gathering of wild fruits and berries, as well as do minimal hunting of wild animals. In the current days, it is illegal to hunt wild animals, hence the community no longer practice hunting. They occasionally gather fruits. Traditionally they are known for being good herbalist and beekeepers. They are herbalist because they know every specific traditional herbs and plants and all their usage, this explains more as to why their forests are well conserved. They keep bees both at their homesteads and forests, each individual knows their beehives and territory.



Elders of the *Yiaku* community showing and discussing on a Biocultural map that the community previously had drawn by hand. IMPACT then helped them convert into a digital map and printed version as shown in the picture.



Some *Yiaku* elders performed a blessing and prayer for the land, for their people, their livelihood, livestock and for the women who were going out to pray for the land and to appease their god *Enkai* to watch over them all.



After the prayers and blessings from the elders, women set forth into *Mukogodo* forest.



A traditional ritual called *Lamal* where the *Yiaku* women perform a blessing and prayer to and for the *Mukogod* forest. This signifies a closer relationship of the community with their land.

Women plucking a special kind of grass to use to sway and pour milk as they bless and pray for the forest. This further shows why the entire ecosystem in the *Mukogodo* forest is significant and why the community forest is not only conserved, preserved and protected by the *Yaku* only but by all the Indigenous sub-tribe communities of the *IL-Lakipiak* Maasai living in Lakipia county.



After the prayers and blessings, the plucked grass is placed on the ground to form a circle where the women converge around it, and further blessings and rituals are performed as they pour milk onto the ground hence signifying they are one with the land.





An elder from the *Yaku* community singing a song tied to the land, its people, their livelihood and livestock. It will be one of the songs among many from the various Indigenous Communities that would be used in the documentary. The songs are not just songs but a tribute to the land, to their people, to their livestock and livelihood, praising their efforts of taking care of each other symbiotically.



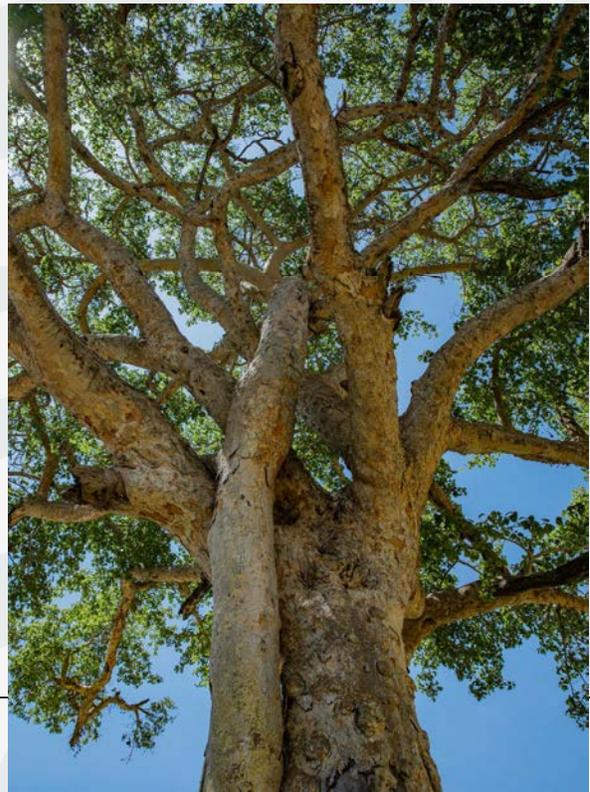


A woman from the *Yaku* community milking her cow at her homestead. This signifies why the land is important to the indigenous people as it is what that holds and sustains their livestock and livelihood.





From *Shulmai* Community Land, we proceeded to *Tiamamut* Community Land. This is inhabited by one of the subtribes of the *IL-Lakipiak Maasai*. The photos above show one of the sacred sites and scared tree for the community to go pray and perform rituals.





Women from *Tiamamut* Community
Land praying under the sacred tree.



This is *Morpusi* Community Land, inhabited by one of the sub-tribe of the *IL-Lakipiak* Maasai.



Women from *Morpusi* Community Land praying for and blessing the land.



A beeper from the community at **Morpusi** Community Land, climbing up a tree to harvest some honey. Certain tree species are good for installing beehives and also good for the bees, hence they are protected and preserved.





After the prayers and blessings from the elders, women set forth into *Mukogodo* forest.



Later in the evening we went to one of the homestead, where a grandmother was telling stories or if you prefer in the local dialect it is called *Nkatini* to a group of young children. Some songs, stories and riddles were told to children as a form of education on their land, ecosystems and biodiversity. Knowledge of how to take care of the land would also be transferred to them.



We later proceeded to *Maiyanat* Community Land which is also inhabited by a sub-tribe of the *IL-Lakipiak* Maasai. The elders were discussing and showing the area of coverage of their land.





The elders discussed how land has supported not only their livelihoods but also their heritage and culture as a Maasai. They narrated on how they practice rotational grazing in various areas of their lands to avoid over-grazing. The elders have a traditional system that guides the warriors as they migrate from one place to another in search for pasture and water.





This is one of the watering points of the *IL-Ngwesi* community a sub-tribe of the *IL-Lakipiak* Maasai at Maiyanat Community Land. A warrior is fetching water for their cows to drink, this shows the relationship between the livelihood of the Maasai and their land. Pointing out that land is not just a necessity but a part of their livelihood, way of life, culture and heritage.





A storytelling session where elders are narrating various forms of *Nkatini* that are related to their land and everything living in it and why its important to preserve, conserve and protect the biodiversity in the various ecosystems within their territories.





Elders and a woman from *Koija* Community Land showing and discussing about their land, biodiversity and ecosystems and how they traditionally guard and conserve them.



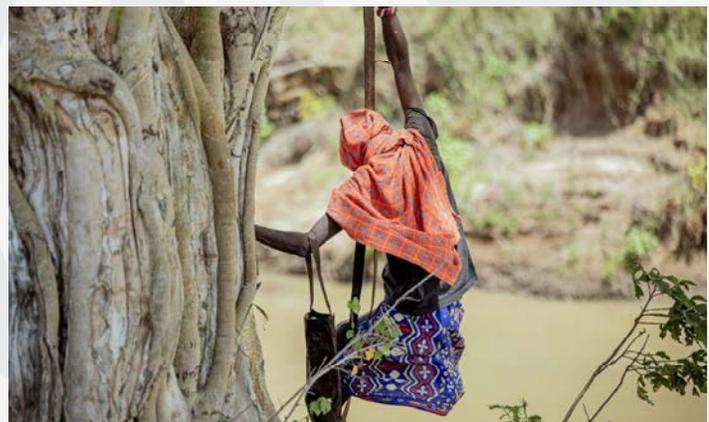


Four elders and four young girls partaking at a traditional ritual and prayers under a sacred tree in one of their sacred sites in **Koija** Community Land. This area and the tree are protected and conserved as it is tied to their spirituality as a Maasai.





One of the renowned beekeepers in *Koija* Community Land is climbing a tree that has one of his beehives so he can harvest honey. This tree species is considered good for both the bees and beehives.





The beekeepers after a good harvest they have to perform a ritual of applying some of the honey harvested to some special stones called "*Soito Naeli*" in their native language as a form of thanksgiving and thanking their god *Enkai* and mother earth for provision of food.





Women from **Koija** Community Land making traditional gourds. The gourds are an important item in all the aspects of Maasai life, from their livelihood, culture, rituals, traditions and heritage. The gourds are harvested from a special kind of tree that grows naturally in their ecosystem. The gourds are of different shapes and sizes hence have various meanings and used differently, in the various cultural ceremonies and rituals.





An elder from **Koija** Community Land, known for his traditional prowess of singing, sings a song in tribute to their land, biodiversity, ecosystem, their people, livelihood, livestock, culture, language and heritage.







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

