Il Ngwesi Group Ranch
Rift Valley province, Kenya

Il Ngwesi Group Ranch is located in the Mukogodo Division of Laikipia District, in Northern Kenya. The area is owned by Laikipik Maasai pastoralists with a population of approximately 6,500. 80% of the ranch, or 16,500 acres, is conserved for wildlife. Large populations of elephants, giraffes and antelope are supported by the conservation area, while 1 Ngwesi is also home to both black and white rhinos, in partnership with Kenya Wildlife Service. The land reserved for wildlife is managed as a community conservation area, while the remaining 20% of the ranch is used for the grazing of the community’s livestock. In 1996, the Group Ranch established an eco-lodge within the conservation area to encourage tourism. This has generated revenue to support Il Ngwesi’s work, while other conservation-based enterprises such as cultural bomas, artisanal handicraft production and camp sites have been established to cater to Il Ngwesi’s tourists. These initiatives all generate income which contributes to supporting community development projects prioritized by the Maasai community. Funds are allocated for the construction of water projects, schools, educational scholarships and health services. In particular, Il Ngwesi has funded mobile VCT counseling and testing to promote awareness of HIV/AIDS in the communities. There has been a reduction in the number of children out of school, with 27% of children having attended at least one HIV/AIDS counselling session, with 56% tested in a roving tent. The HIV incidence rate is now under 5%, while those who tested positive have received care.

What did we achieve?

Eco-tourism revenues have been used to build several primary schools, while an education bursary scheme has been allocated 500,000KSh per year to support poorer community members in paying school fees. Il Ngwesi will also sponsor secondary school graduates to attend public universities. Il Ngwesi’s work is undertaken with the full engagement of its 634 registered households. An elected Group Ranch Committee oversees all conservation activities, while the Ngwesi Community Trust makes decisions on fundraising and allocation of eco-tourist revenues based on annual general meetings.

A clinic has been built to enhance access to healthcare for the Maasai villagers; Il Ngwesi has also partnered with Lewa Wildlife Conservancy to fund a mobile clinic, ensuring that seven local neighbourhoods are visited once a week.

Holistic land management has eased land use tensions. Cattle can be grazed within a portion of the conserved area during dry season, offering a refuge from drought. Rhodesian grasses have been planted to rehabilitate dirt paths, while soil erosion has been eased through local construction work.

Rules have been established to outlaw tree-felling, poaching and killing of animals, and the use of machetes, dogs or fire within the conservation land. Eight security personnel are employed to enforce these laws, and to prevent people crossing the wildlife area.

What did we achieve?

Il Ngwesi’s HIV/AIDS work has been implemented through a USAID project. Since 2006, 70% of villagers have attended at least one HIV/AIDS counselling session, with 56% tested in a roving tent. The HIV incidence rate is now under 5%, while those who tested positive have received care.

Much work has been done to extend water services for the community, especially to the local schools and for the 20% of the Il Ngwesi area reserved for livestock. Seven water systems have been created, using pipes and taps to pump clean water from river sources.

Voluntary Service Overseas, an international development NGO, has worked alongside Il Ngwesi women to develop the quality and marketability of their artisanal handicrafts.

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