

## Territorialising Conservation: Community-based Approaches in Kenya and Namibia

Linus Kalvelage<sup>a,#</sup>, Michael Bollig<sup>b</sup>, Elke Grawert<sup>c</sup>, Carolin Hulke<sup>a</sup>, Maximilian Meyer<sup>d</sup>, Kennedy Mkutu<sup>e</sup>, Marie Müller-Koné<sup>c</sup>, and Javier Revilla Diez<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Geography Department, University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany

<sup>b</sup>Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany

<sup>c</sup>Bonn International Center for Conversion, Bonn, Germany

<sup>d</sup>ILR Economics of Sustainable Land Use and Bioeconomy, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany

<sup>e</sup>United States International University, Nairobi, Kenya

<sup>#</sup>Corresponding author. E-mail: [linus.kalvelage@uni-koeln.de](mailto:linus.kalvelage@uni-koeln.de)

### Abstract

Community-based Conservation seeks to strike a balance between nature conservation and economic growth by establishing spatial and institutional settings that maintain and even regain biodiversity while simultaneously allowing for sustainable land use. The implementation of community-based conservation blueprints on communal, often agronomically marginal lands, is in many southern and eastern African countries encouraged by the national government. Despite vast academic literature on community-based conservation, it remains unclear how this re-shaping of resource governance has driven territorialisation in rural areas. To address this gap, this article compares the implementation of community-based conservation in Northern Kenya and Northern Namibia. By doing so, we intend to shed light on the question ‘why does community-based conservation result in different forms of territorialisation negotiated between state agencies, non-governmental organisations and rural communities? We demonstrate how historical preconditions, contemporary project design, and the commodification of natural resources shape territorialisation in both cases in different ways. In Kenya, concerns for securitisation have been driving community-based conservation, while in Namibia it primarily aimed to benefit the previously disadvantaged rural residents. Furthermore, in both regions community-based conservation programmes serve as vehicles to articulate political claims, either to reify traditional authorities, to create ethnically homogenous territories or to define boundaries of resource use.

**Keywords:** community-based conservation, territorialisation, commodification, Namibia, Kenya, working landscapes

### INTRODUCTION

How to organise nature conservation in an efficient, sustainable, and participatory way has been the subject of interdisciplinary debates for decades. Advocates of protectionist approaches plead for a separation between humans and wilderness areas and go so far as to propose half of the world’s terrestrial ecosystems for exclusive use as biodiversity repositories (Wilson 2016; but see Büscher and Fletcher 2020 for a critique). In contrast, new conservationists argue for “pursuing conservation within working landscapes” (Kareiva and Marvier 2012: 962); the environments in which wilderness areas and

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areas of human land use intermingle. The introduction of new forms of commodification, such as payments for ecosystem services and ecotourism, are an integral element of the approach (Büscher 2012). Scholars working in this new area of conservation thinking (Marris 2011; Kareiva and Marvier 2012; Kremen and Merenlender 2018), however, hardly touch upon issues of environmental governance.

Community-based conservation (CBC) is the primary form for implementing the vision of working landscapes. The northern regions of Namibia and Kenya have been outstanding experimental fields of CBC implementation: both countries established a number of major and minor protected areas across communal lands since the 1980s (for Namibia Lenggenhager 2018; Bollig and Vehrs 2021 and for Kenya Hazard and Adongo 2015; Bersaglio and Cleaver 2018).

In both cases, conservancies rapidly developed in areas that were marginalised by colonial and post-colonial state authorities. In the colonial period, much of northern Kenya was administered as the Northern Frontier District (Hazard and Adongo 2015). Investment in infrastructure and development remained minimal throughout the colonial and much of the post-colonial period (Carrier and Kochore 2014) in the district. Similarly, in much of north-western Namibia (Bollig 2020) and north-eastern Namibia (Lenggenhager 2018) pastoral producers were excluded from larger markets, colonial rule was enforced through traditional authorities, and investments into infrastructure, health and education were lacking (Miescher and Voegeli 2016).

After independence, northern Kenya's arid and semi-arid rangelands were the scenes of the drawn-out shifita wars of the 1960s and the 1970s and low intensity interethnic violence since the 1980s (Carrier and Kochore 2014). Only in recent decades, northern Kenya has come into the focus of intensified governmental development efforts, as exemplified by the planned LAPPSET growth corridor (Chome 2020) and nature conservation programmes (Gravesen 2020). In northern Namibia, South African troops were pitted against a liberation front during the 1970s and 1980s, and the civilian population severely suffered under the yoke of the South African army (Lenggenhager 2018). Violence in northern Namibia declined after independence in 1990 and the region was then administered in seven administrative units that became the focus of development projects, notably of conservation projects (Lenggenhager 2018; Bollig 2020).

This article examines ways in which CBC has driven the territorialisation of space. In order to disentangle the complex dynamics of spatial governance, we analyse boundary-making, institutionalisation and commodification processes that are symptomatic of territorialisation. We address the following questions: How did conservancies emerge and who defines and enacts the institutional arrangements? How are conservancies governed and how does this governance relate to other social and political fields? And, how are these landscapes (or other natural entities therein) commodified and who reaps the benefits that CBC promises? Further research probing these questions will lead to an understanding of how and why the

dynamics of territorialisation unfolded differently in northern Namibia and northern Kenya despite being based on the same globally circulated blueprints for CBC. By drawing on these two case studies, we shed light on the socio-ecological reorganisation of landscapes and society in two rural African regions.

To lay out our argument, we first detail our conceptual approach of territorialisation in a conservation context. After briefly introducing the methodological approach, the Namibian, and subsequently, the Kenyan case will be examined. Finally, we discuss commonalities and differences of resource governance in these two working landscapes and highlight the implications for future conservation planning.

## TERRITORIALISATION AND COMMUNITY BASED CONSERVATION

In order to analyse empirical findings on the development of CBC in Kenya and Namibia comparatively, we build on the concepts of territory and territorialisation. A territory is expressed in a geographically demarcated space. This space is distinctive, bounded, measurable, and communicable. It is deliberately created in an effort to achieve certain political, economic, or social goals (Murphy 2012: 164). Bassett and Gautier (2014: 2) characterise a territory as "socially constructed space with historical, cultural, technical, and political-economic origins." Territorialisation is related to territory, since it refers to "specific territorial projects in which various actors deploy territorial strategies (territoriality) to produce bounded and controlled spaces (territory) to achieve certain effects" (ibid.). Thus, according to Rasmussen and Lund (2018: 2) the term "territorialisation is a shorthand for all the dynamics that ... re-order space anew." This reorganisation of space is associated with processes of institutionalisation and, in our case studies, with subsequent commodification. As presented by Bassett and Gautier (2014: 2), the "common goal of territorialisation is to govern people and resources located within and around the territory". Territories devised by CBC challenge the existing patterns of spatial control and authority (Rasmussen and Lund 2018).

CBC builds on three basic principles: 1) the demarcation of the conservancy territory; 2) the establishment of democratically legitimised institutions; and 3) the governance and marketisation of natural resources. To understand the reorganisation of space via CBC, it is therefore necessary to look at three dimensions: 1) the boundary-making processes that constitute these newly emerging territories; 2) the rearrangement of institutions that govern natural resources; and 3) the new forms of accessing and commodifying resources.

However, these three dimensions are closely interwoven. CBC territories are socially constructed by international donors and stakeholders (conservation INGOs, international conservation bodies, tourism industry), national agencies (national conservation NGOs, ministries, law makers, regional ministerial staff) and local actors (traditional authorities, upcoming educated elites, the youth, etc.). Depending on the

power relationships and negotiation dynamics between these groups, the demarcation of space can unfold very differently.

The idea of CBC involves a transfer of several land-use and decision-making rights to a defined community and practically to a committee elected by this very community. Conservancies are meant to contribute to community empowerment and communal ownership. However, the community that is recipient of these rights and duties yet remains to be defined. New modes of territorialisation do not enter a social vacuum, but institutionalisation occurs in the context of existing, competing or complementary, institutional arrangements. Often, hybrid forms of spatial governance emerge, amalgamating new ideas of commons management with existing territorial structures (Bollig and Lesorogolol 2016).

Besides bringing about a new form of governance, CBC is also meant to result in the economic upgrading of rural areas through the commodification of wildlife and wilderness landscapes and the linking of these newly defined commodities with private sector interests. With the emergence of conservancies, scenic wilderness landscapes and wildlife are becoming key resources (in addition to pastures and fields which, of course, retain relevance). Previous research has shown that ecotourism companies “employ different techniques of government to secure business-friendly environments and territories” (Bluwstein 2017: 101). For instance, private safari tourism enterprises are capable of promoting the implementation of conservation policies (Spenceley and Snyman 2017). The tourism industry, therefore, “has become a significant user, stakeholder, and element of change in wilderness environments and communities” (Saarinen 2016: 4).

In sum, conservation as a global strategy of environmental governance not only establishes new territories by commodifying landscapes and wildlife, but also brings about new processes of territorialisation. We argue that territorialisation in conservation changes ecosystems and communities by introducing or reinforcing existing boundaries, reshaping the spatial governance through the establishment of new institutions and making wildlife and wilderness a resource apt for global consumption. Local actors strategize to link and hybridise earlier institutions and modes of environmental governance with global blueprints, adjust them to local power relations, and create new territorial set ups. Addressing a gap of knowledge on actual socioeconomic outcomes of territorialisation in conservation landscapes, this article analyses the emergence and demarcation of conservancies, their institutionalisation and the governance and commodification of resources, drawing from empirical findings in two distinct landscapes in Kenya and Namibia.

## **METHODS**

This article builds on findings generated within the collaborative research centre ‘Future Rural Africa’ (CRC228). Scholars from the Universities of Bonn and Cologne cooperate with scholars from partnering African universities in Kenya and Namibia to study the processes of socio-ecological transformation in

rural Africa (<https://www.crc228.de/>). We combine empirical data from intensive multidisciplinary field research in northern Kenya and northern Namibia, collected by researchers from anthropology, history, human geography, economics, and political science. The multidisciplinary approach helps to shed light on interrelations between historical changes, economic processes and sociopolitical dynamics to capture territorialisation. Original data was generated in Kunene and Zambezi Region, Namibia, from 2006 to 2018 (Kunene, see Bollig 2020) and 2018 to 2019 (Zambezi, see Bollig and Vehrs 2021; Hulke et al. 2020; Kalvelage et al. 2020; Meyer et al. 2021), and in Isiolo and Samburu counties, Kenya, between 2018 and 2020 (see Mkutu 2019; Müller-Koné et al. 2020). Data collection included mapping, expert interviews, focus-group discussions, observation, and interviews with individual informants. In addition, secondary sources were examined, among them financial data from conservancies, policy documents, and conservancy reports. The two case study regions were selected because both regions display some remarkable similarities: they were marginal in economic and political respect throughout the twentieth century, rural agricultural and pastoral strategies dominate livelihoods (with notable trends towards a diversification of rural livelihoods in recent decades). Additionally, both the regions have implemented CBC programmes since the mid-1990s. In the following sections, we will first focus on the Namibian case, before Kenyan conservation programmes are examined. Thereafter, the findings will be discussed comparatively and conclusions will be drawn.

## **NAMIBIA**

### **Emerging territories: boundary-making**

Shortly after independence, CBC in Namibia was initially pushed by conservationists. The Namibian government adopted these efforts in the Nature Conservation (Amendment) Act No. 5 of 1996 that provides the legal framework for conservancies in Namibia’s communal areas. The inclusion of communal farmers in the commercial exploitation of the wealth of biodiversity and scenic landscapes was intended to overcome previous injustices caused by apartheid policy that deprived locals from making use of wildlife and profiting from wilderness areas (Schneegg and Kiaka 2018). The number of conservancies increased from the initial four in 1998 to 86 by 2019, particularly in Namibia’s northern regions. For instance, in Kunene and Zambezi, the conservancy-managed lands nowadays dominate the landscapes (Kunene 53% under conservancy governance and in Zambezi 54 % under nature conservation including national parks; calculated by authors).

Conservancies in Namibia have to establish boundaries in order to be formally gazetted. The establishment of clear-cut boundaries and management plans is one major incentive for the creation of conservancies, as these provide exclusive use-rights, security and plannability. Although such exclusivity is not clearly enshrined in respective legal provisions, local

actors often assume it to be the case. As a consequence, boundary-making is a central element of establishing conservancies. Boundaries were fixed in lengthy negotiations between communities and their respective traditional authorities, often steered by the local NGO, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation (IRDNC).

The IRDNC was established in the early-1980s in an attempt to overcome Apartheid's conservation approach and facilitated the foundation and operation of a great number of conservancies (Owen-Smith 2011). Traditional authorities were involved in the day-to-day practise of conservation via the selection of community-instituted game-guards. IRDNC did not involve itself directly in the delimitation of conservancy boundaries or the establishment of conservancy committees but facilitated meetings and offered advice throughout the process of conservancy establishment. IRDNC also aids conservancies, once gazetted, to organise management plans, enter into public-private partnerships, and to establish reporting on conservation measures. Once conservancies are economically self-sustaining, the IRDNC significantly reduces its support. Both in Zambezi and Kunene regions, local conservancies partake in larger meetings of conservancies, but they do not establish larger comprehensive organisations that assume managerial duties or institute budgetary control mechanisms.

The traditional authority is always specified in Zambezi, whereas in Kunene, the tapestry of traditional authorities is less hierarchical. In Zambezi, a conservancy typically comprises a set of villages under one traditional authority, or chief and *khuta* (*khuta*=chiefly council, see also Silva and Mosimane 2014). In Kunene Region, there are approximately 40 to 60 traditional authorities, some of whom compete for influence and territory. Occasionally, there are two or even more competing traditional authorities in a conservancy. This has led to the breakaway conservancies under competing chiefs in a few instances. Similar to the pre-independence period, the boundary-making process is closely entangled with the political interests of the traditional authorities.

Chiefly territories in the late colonial period were denoted as wards, a concept that was in use until the 1980s. Archival documents testify lengthy negotiations over these ward boundaries but do not display them on maps. Conservancy boundaries, however, are represented on maps. Primarily it is this clarity of spatial boundaries that traditional authorities, local herders and farmers alike named in interviews as a primary reason to aspire the conservancy status. Chiefs like the boundaries for the reification of their authority over a territory and farmers hope for the reduction of resource competition by excluding 'outsiders' from resource use 'within' the conservancy's boundaries.

In north-western Namibia, conservancies close to Etosha National Park (Ehrovipuka, Omatendeka) and the Skeleton Coast Park (Puros, Orupembe) were established first. Similarly, in north-eastern Namibia the first conservancies were instituted close to Mudumu and Nkasa Rupara National Parks or adjacent to Botswana's Chobe National Park (cf. Figure 1). Communal land further away from protected areas were included later on in both the cases.

Consequently, fewer specimens of charismatic megafauna are present in more recently established conservancies, which, thus, have a weaker potential to attract tourism as an income source. In both regions, we observed that conservation zones beyond national parks are not handled as fortresses of conservation but as parts of working landscapes (Kremen and Merenlender 2018): occasional land use is permitted and, especially during droughts, livestock make use of grazing areas within conservation zones.

Our analysis shows that the more recently established conservancies are notably smaller than the older ones. The size of conservancies in Kunene and Zambezi regions range widely from 73 sq. km to 4,135 sq. km. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) grant, 'Living In A Finite Environment' (LIFE), had significantly contributed to laying the ground for the organisational shape of community-based conservancies. Conservancies formed later, by contrast, have often been dominated more by the concerns of local politics than by considerations for biodiversity conservation. Conservation motives became less salient over time.

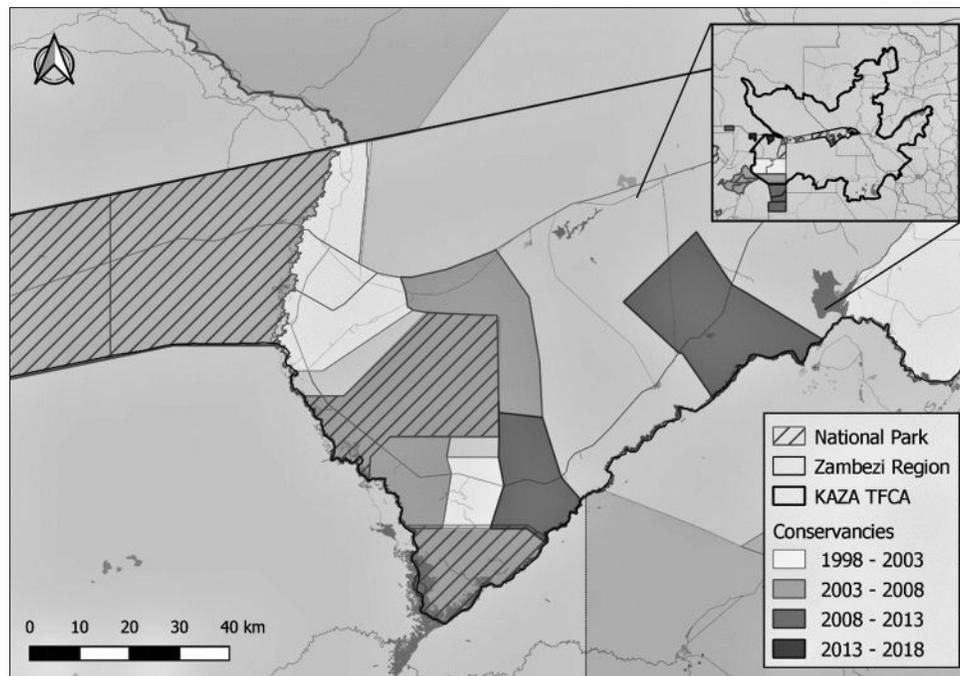
The decreasing size of conservancies reflects a shift from establishing conservancies through governmental and non-governmental organisations, to a grassroots movement in which local elites frame the size and boundaries of the conservancy. Small game-management areas are certainly less attractive for conservation but the small size eases communal resource governance and enhances political control: a group of clearly defined members is certainly better able to reach a consensus on management and expenditure and reflect local political structures than a group consisting of a broad array of members from different localities under different traditional authorities. The small size of conservancies corresponds well to the nucleated territories of traditional authorities and resembles prior wards of the colonial administration. Smaller conservancies are probably more amenable to pursue territorialising strategies as mentioned below than the groups managing larger tracts of land with more heterogeneous populations.

### **Institutionalisation: governing conservancies**

The previous organisation of communal tenure was characterised by the dominance of traditional authorities and the framing of access in terms of kinship and ethnicity. The institutional changes brought about by CBC manifests in clearly defined membership and in the election of a committee.

Membership is well-defined and applies to each individual. Applicants have to prove that they have been residing in the community for at least five years. This opens possibilities for excluding recent and even long-term immigrants from the political establishment. Conservancy membership usually involves the linkage of a household head to a traditional authority, i.e., a person A 'belongs' to chief Y. Therefore, membership specifies patron-client linkages and serves as a reification of chiefly authority over a community.

During colonial times traditional authorities and their councillors were empowered to govern all natural resources



**Figure 1**  
*The formation of conservancies in Zambezi region, Namibia. Own illustration*

besides wildlife, that was specifically managed by state authorities. Traditional authorities were established via kinship, inheritance, and patronage and had life-long tenure. Under conservancy legislation, a committee that "is representative of the community residing in the area to which the application relates" has to be legitimised via democratic elections every third year (Nature Conservation (Amendment) Act, 1996: 4). Our research demonstrates a high rate of fluctuation of office holders after elections.

The conservancy committee is responsible for the sustainable management of game and the distribution of benefits. On average, committees have about 10 members but range from seven (e.g., Torra in Kunene) to 38 (e.g., Salambala in Zambezi). Interestingly, conservancy committee members do not necessarily belong to the community elite nor are they the most powerful and wealthy members of the village. According to a survey in the Kunene Region (Bollig 2020: 286), conservancy committee members are typically 30 to 45 years of age, male, and have a fairly good education. Many have previously been formally and informally employed but have not succeeded in establishing themselves permanently on the formal job-market. Through the creation of a new institution, the conservancy committee, a section of the population—young educated men and also women—gains agency; earlier this demographic had no platform to articulate its interests but had to leave decision-making to elders and traditional authorities.

Conservancy committees consider it to be very important that conservancy managers come from the village. Ownership and the sense of belonging are rated highly. The conservancy's resources should be administered by insiders, that is, by those whose personal and political identity are tied to local

authority structures. Our data reveals that conservancy managers in the Zambezi Region were paid salaries of between NAD2,200–2,500 (USD170–193) per month, which is a little more than a game guard would receive. Yet, they bear all the responsibilities attendant to a major programme and handle annual budgets of one million NAD or more. These conditions make the engagement in conservancies unattractive for qualified people.

Formally, traditional authorities are not themselves required to be part of a committee, and many traditional authorities nominate ex-officio representatives to the committee. However, in all tenure issues, committees attempt to coordinate their decisions with the traditional authority. When the conservancy engages in public-private partnerships such as tourism businesses, traditional authorities are involved. Committees do not replace traditional authorities but the powers of traditional authorities are reified and their role in the governance of rural natural resources has been strengthened by the conservancy programme. Committees have turned into a parallel institution of decision-making, which often seeks to co-opt traditional authority but occasionally also adopts oppositional points of view.

### **Commodification—making money from conservation**

Besides the establishment of boundaries, the controlled commodification of a bundle of natural resources (wildlife, wilderness landscapes but also valuable trees) is another incentive for communities to form conservancies. Access to wildlife ensures participation in global tourism; wildlife tourism, both hunting and safari tourism, is the main source of revenues for conservancies. 'Enterprise

officers' are designated by the conservancy to attract and handle investor relationships. The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) and NGOs like IRDNC support conservancies by providing legal advice for the formulation of joint-venture agreements with lodge owners and hunting outfitters. According to Namibian legislation, private entrepreneurs are not allowed to erect lodges and camps within national parks (where these exist, they are solely run by the parastatal entity, NamParks) and hunting on communal land is prohibited outside conservancies. This led to a rapid development of tourism in communal conservancies since the late-1990s (Breul et al. 2021).

Hunting outfitters bid for an annual quota of game species and market these quotas to trophy hunters on the global market. Quota fees are paid directly to conservancy management and are exempt from taxes. Hunting trips to shoot elephants (*Loxodonta Africana*) and buffaloes (*Syncerus caffer*) fetch high prices (USD 10,000–40,000) and account for most of the revenues generated from trophy hunting (Gargallo and Kalvelage, 2020).

Conservancies usually enter into benefit-sharing agreements with lodge companies. These contracts fix payment transfers and enforce employment for conservancy members. Employment is usually restricted to low-wage jobs such as gardeners, housekeepers, or receptionists, since community members often lack the adequate educational level and training to hold management positions.

In Kunene and Zambezi combined, there are currently 50 conservancies. For 39 of them, financial data is available in the annual reports of NACSO (NACSO 2017). In 2017, these conservancies generated USD 2.6 million from hunting (USD 1.4 million) and safari tourism (USD 1.2 million). Only USD 130,000 was derived from other sources, such as craft sales or plant utilisation, indicating the conservancies' high dependence on the tourism sector.

On average, conservancies generated an income of USD 60,000 in 2017. However, the figures range wide from as low as USD 350 (Okongoro conservancy) to as high as USD 260,000 (Torra conservancy, NACSO 2017). Income depends mainly on access to scenic landscapes and wildlife, the primary resources of wildlife tourism. While hunting tourism can be conducted at any location that is home to big game, safari tourism depends on attractive landscapes, which are often to be found in national parks. In Zambezi region, 14 out of 15 conservancies are formed on the bank of a river and seven are directly adjacent to a national park thereby tapping into prime wilderness areas with abundant wildlife and significantly high biodiversity. Therefore, conservancies close to national parks garner the highest incomes.

In 2017, conservancies in Kunene and Zambezi region spent USD 2 million on operational costs (salaries, allowances, capital costs, running costs, other costs). Benefits paid to members totalled USD 850,000 and included direct cash pay-outs amounting to USD 220,000, community project investments of USD 440,000, human-wildlife conflict offset payments of USD 100,000, funeral assistance at USD

20,000, and other benefits worth USD 70,000. In many cases, conservancies pay sums to traditional authorities. In total, USD 75,000 directly flew to traditional authorities and their bureaucracy (in 2017). Besides the opportunity to demarcate their spatial authority, these funds may also incentivise the support of traditional authorities for the CBC programme.

CBC is associated with the promise of inclusive development, but benefits mostly those who get hold of a permanent employment by either the conservancy or a tourism enterprise. In Zambezi and Kunene, a conservancy budget of USD 2.7 million is used for a population of 97,704 (USD 27,70 per capita/annum). However, most livelihoods rely on crop production and, during focus-group discussions, members claimed that the compensation scheme for the damage and loss of yields caused by wildlife is not sufficiently compensated by the conservancy (Hulke et al. 2020). Since CBC legislation shifted the responsibilities for wildlife from the national to the communal level, conservancies are now faced with such dissatisfaction.

Summing up, the introduction of CBC to Namibia was supported by international donor organisations and driven primarily by nature conservation concerns, but more recently formed conservancies reify local traditional authorities' territorial claims. Yet, the newly formed institutions also enable the political articulation of young, educated men. By holding positions in the conservancy, they take control of the considerable returns derived from hunting and safari tourism. Along with a more political motivation, these aspired returns are the main incentives for local residents to establish conservancies.

## KENYA

### Emerging territories: boundary-making

A policy committed to CBC was initiated in 1990 by the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), a semi-autonomous state agency established in 1989 with a mandate to conserve and manage wildlife in Kenya (Western et al. 2015). Funding came from the European Union and USAID through the Conservation Resource of Biodiverse Areas (COBRA) project. Private owners of large ranches, too, began converting their farms into conservancies and established their own community outreach programmes (Mkutu 2005). The first northern conservancies, Il Ngwesi in Laikipia and Namunyak in Samburu County, were substantially supported by the private tourism industry. In 2004, the Speaker of Kenya's National Assembly, who was also the Chair of a prominent private conservation-oriented ranch's Board of Trustees, proposed the establishment of a support organisation to extend the CBC model to other areas (NRT 2013). It was only in 2013 that community conservancies became a recognised land-use form through the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act (RoK 2013).

Both private and community conservancies cover about 11% of Kenya's land mass, totalling more than 6.3 million ha. (KWS 2018: 131; KWCA 2020). Conservancies have

increased from ten in 1991, all on private ranches, to 230 in 2014 (Western et al. 2015), out of which 76 were community conservancies in 2020 (KWCA 2020). Since the mid-2000s, CBC projects have begun to mushroom in the communal rangelands of the northern Rift Valley, a region predominantly inhabited by pastoralist groups (Figure 2).

Conservancy boundaries mostly run along existing administrative boundaries, such as wards, locations or group ranch boundaries and are thus based on earlier forms of colonial and post-colonial boundary making. The colonial ‘territorialisation of ethnicity’, and the rigidification of ethnic boundaries (Schlee 2013: 858), continue to prevail in post-colonial Kenya. Earlier episodes of administrative boundary making had the goal of diminishing conflicts along contested boundaries, the consideration of electoral committees, or the needs and affordability of infrastructure projects. Territorialisation arguably received a new thrust when community conservancies were established. These boundaries were usually not negotiated, but rather conveniently established along existing boundaries.

The northern rangelands have long been sites of recurring armed confrontations in the form of cattle theft, inter-communal attacks (particularly during election periods), anti-stock theft, anti-poaching operations, as well as anti-terror missions by state security agencies (e.g., against Al Shabaab). Accordingly, the creation of conservancies in northern Kenyan rangelands is to some extent motivated by ethnicised security concerns (NRT 2017).

Facing increased development interventions in the area due to for instance the LAPSSSET project (Chome 2020) and associated influx of private investments, the desire to

bolster communities’ land claims also plays a major role (Mkutu 2020a).

### Institutionalisation: governing conservancies

Private persons, communities, and umbrella organisations can apply to the County Wildlife Conservation and Compensation Committee in order to register a community wildlife association (RoK 2013: §40, 1, §65). County governments can also create conservancies under county management (Mkutu 2020a). The legal requirements entail a constitution that describes the governance structures of the conservancy (RoK 2013: §40, 3c), and a legal description of the conservation area including a description of how it recognises customary land or natural boundaries (RoK 2013: Part 2, 1).

Most community conservancies are integrated with umbrella organisations such as Kenya Wildlife Conservation Association (KWCA) which coordinates political representation for conservancies vis-à-vis the Kenyan state at the national level (Western et al. 2015). In the northern Rift Valley, 39 community conservancies form part of the Northern Rangeland Trust (NRT). The NRT is funded by international development agencies and is run by a Board of Directors with 19 members including high-ranking government officers, representatives of international conservation organisations, an NRT peace ambassador, and the Assistant Director of the KWS (NRT 2020a). The Board’s composition reflects a pattern symptomatic for conservation in Kenya. The NRT has established close links with the Kenyan government as well as national and international conservation organisations and donors.

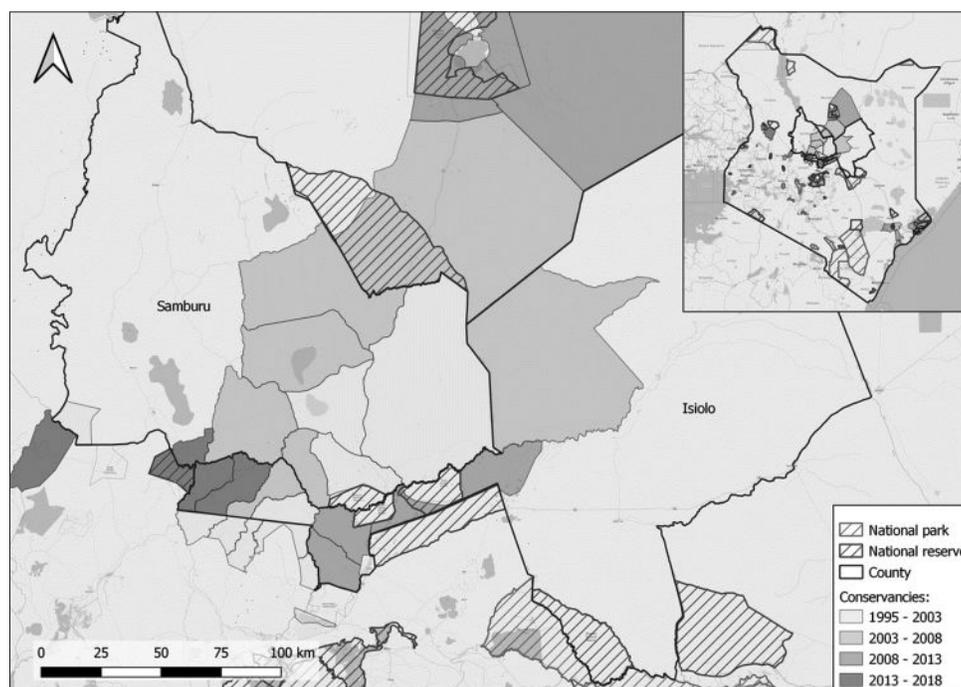


Figure 2

Community Conservancies in the Northern Rift Valley. Source: adapted and lay-outed by V. Glasow, BICC, based on Mkutu and Halakhe (2018)

Community conservancy management in Kenya occurs at both the levels—at the umbrella organisation (such as the NRT) level and at the community level. The NRT Council of Elders is formed by the chairpersons of the 39 community conservancies. Formally, the Council is the top decision-making organ for the NRT, controlling NRT budget decisions. However, in practice, and due to the low educational level of many Council members, these decision-making processes tend to be dominated by the NRT directors (Mkutu 2020a).

Each conservancy is managed by a Conservancy Board, made up of one elected person per location (known as a zone), as well as the respective chiefs (non-elected), a manager (appointed by the board), and a representative of the KWS. In some occasions, the NRT dispatches a person to facilitate board meetings at the local level. Tenure for board members lasts for three years and can be repeated once. The persons elected are often among the most powerful local ‘owners of cows’, or respected elders who play a major role in the management of livestock herds’ mobility. However, land governance in rural Kenya is currently in the process of change due to registration of parcels of community land under the Community Land Act of 2016. The boundaries of these gazetted community lands often coincide with conservancy boundaries.

Members of Parliament or members of the County Assembly also exert some degree of informal influence on decision-making, through elders and local administrators in the corresponding areas. Community conservancies usually have between 15 and 40 employees, most of whom are rangers. Other employees include the manager, grazing coordinator, finance manager, and a warden. Some of the more established conservancies, particularly those with strong conservation activities, have more employees—even up to 140 (e.g., Namunyak in Samburu County). A manager in Nakuprat-Gotu receives USD 350 per month (comparable with a junior teacher or nurse).

Conservancy managers attend planning meetings at the regional level that usually last for a week. This is where budgetary decisions are made, which are then approved at annual meetings in the presence of the Council of Elders, the NRT board, and donors. The conservancy income is split into two separate accounts, 40% for conservancy operations and 60% for a community development fund. The local management decides about budget allocations to infrastructure projects, bursaries, or other projects following approval by the community at the annual general meeting (AGM). Budget allocation, however, does not always go undisputed, as transparency is lacking in the handling of budgets in some instances (Mkutu 2020b) or managements cannot be made accountable for benefit sharing since elections are not regularly held (Mkutu 2020a).

Zoning plans drafted by the conservancies stipulate core conservation areas, buffer zones, wet and dry season grazing areas, degraded areas in need of rehabilitation, and settlement areas. Although grazing decisions are primarily made at the local level within the conservancy, these decisions are coordinated by the Rangelands Department at NRT

headquarters. In an attempt to rehabilitate rangeland, the Rangeland Department monitors the level of degradation of rangelands, water points, invasive species and mobility migration. Despite these efforts, adjacent pastoralist groups occasionally do not stick to the conservancy’s grazing plans and ‘use guns to stay.’

NRT’s role in rangeland management is contested: on the one hand, we recorded numerous statements (particularly in social media) that reject the NRT’s role in rangeland governance and raise concerns about security. On the other hand, a KWS warden claims that the work of the NRT in conservation management is vital, and KWS would never be able to replace it.

### **Community conservancies and conflict management**

NRT assumes the qualities and renders services typical of a parastatal organisation, most visible in the conflict management. According to the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act of 2013, KWS rangers are paid and equipped by NRT and assume the role of ‘combating illegal activities, including poaching’ (RoK 2013: §41b) in national parks, reserves, and wildlife conservancies, and are assisted by ‘community wildlife scouts’ (RoK 2013: §41d). Three hundred and seventy-seven of a total 791 NRT scouts have been trained by KWS and NRT (NRT 2020b: 27). In the northern Rift Valley conservancies, local community members carry arms in their function as National Police Reservists (NPR). Together with unarmed rangers, these reservists serve both wildlife and community security functions (Mkutu 2019, 2020a). From its headquarters at Lewa Conservancy, NRT is engaged in deploying elite ranger teams in the event of severe insecurity, such as poaching, but more often during inter-communal conflicts. Pastoralist communities benefit from this arrangement. Inside conservancies, NPRs are able to protect their cattle from being raided (Mkutu 2019).

However, such securitisation does not come undisputed, since already existing tensions among pastoralist communities in the context of politicised struggles over ethnic territories can be enforced (Bersaglio and Cleaver 2018). Since conservancies in Samburu County were established earlier, the equipment with arms from the NRT is more advanced. Samburu capitalise on these imbalances in the degree of militarisation between the two ethnic groups to enforce their interests. Isiolo communities resent the fact that Samburu conservancies seem to be better supported, as those conservancies in Samburu County were established earlier.

Not all conservancies are ethnically homogeneous. NRT claims that CBC can contribute directly to peaceful conflict resolution within heterogeneous communities, through shared decision-making and benefits, the employment of former raiders as rangers, increased numbers of security personnel to deter crime, and through targeted peacebuilding activities. In order to foster peaceful conflict management, NRT has 76 Peace Ambassadors drawn from community conservancies, who are meant to contribute to peace-building

among pastoralist communities that are members of NRT conservancies. However, these efforts display mixed results; several instances of cattle raids, involving a heavy police intervention and several deaths among community members in conservancy territories, were reported in Isiolo County during the period of research (2018–2019) (Mkutu 2020a).

### **Commodification—making money from conservation**

The operational budget of the communal conservancies in northern Kenya under the umbrella of the NRT sums up to USD 321,507 and is used for a population of 47,079 (USD 7 per capita/annum, NRT 2020d). Compared to Namibia, tourism is less developed in the conservancies in northern Kenya. One fundamental reason is the hunting ban from 1977 in response to declining wildlife numbers (Cockerill and Hagerman 2020). Another reason is insecurity, recent terrorist threats in Kenya have led to major downturns in international tourism (Buigut 2019). Yet in some more established conservancies in Laikipia and Samburu, external investors operate lodges for tourists through lease agreements entailing royalties on a per bed/night basis to be transferred to the community conservancy board.

In light of meagre returns from tourism, conservancies receive substantial support by the NRT through a number of development interventions that aim to strengthen the market participation of community conservancies in northern Kenya. Examples include the ‘Livestock to Market’ and the BeadWORKS programme run by NRT Trading (NRTT), the NRT’s trading department.

The NRTT buys cattle from pastoralists in community conservancies, fattens them and sells them to markets in Nairobi (NRT 2020c). In 2019, pastoralists from NRT community conservancies sold 1,532 cattle to NRTT, earning a total of KES 62 million (USD 620,000) (NRT 2020c). The small number of cattle sold indicates that pastoralists hesitate to engage in this type of marketing (cf. Bersaglio and Cleaver 2018).

Over 1,000 women in nine conservancies sell beaded jewellery and accessories to NRTT under the BeadWORKS programme. The income of the women’s groups nearly doubled between 2018 and 2019 reaching KES 9.1 million (USD 91,000) for producing more than 100,000 items (NRT 2020d). The value per item is on average USD 0.91 and a substantial part of these earnings are required to buy the necessary beads. From the fees and taxes generated through marketing projects, the county governments support conservancy operations and community projects (NRT 2020d).

To sum up, the demarcation of Kenyan conservancies largely followed pre-existing colonial boundaries. KWS plays a major role in the operations of conservancies and has, through the weaponisation of NPRs, a say in security issues. The majority of the conservancies does not experience tourism-driven economic growth, but is able to accrue funding from external donors.

## **DISCUSSION**

The hybridisation of CBC blueprints with existing institutions have led to different territorialisation patterns in Namibia and Kenya. This entails varying relations between the nation state, traditional authorities and NGOs, and different modes of commodifying nature.

In both countries, international NGOs have introduced globally circulating CBC blueprints. In Namibia, shared conservation concerns led to an arrangement of a local NGO with traditional authorities resulting in the establishment of the first wave of conservancies. Lengthy negotiations were needed to define the boundaries of these new territories. The opportunity to set legal boundaries and, therefore, spatially manifest inherited governance mobilised further traditional authorities. Since these motives became more dominant, smaller territories, with less conservation impact, emerged.

In Kenya, the implementation of CBC was initiated by international NGOs. Characteristic for Kenyan conservation is a close entanglement between the nation state and the powerful conservation parastatal KWS. Similar to conservation efforts in Tanzania (Bluwstein 2017), the establishment of conservancies in Kenya was also driven by private actors from the tourism sector. Conservancy-making built on pre-existing boundaries thus cementing ethnically largely homogenous territories. While some authors go as far as claiming that CBC is a type of land grab by the conservationist organisations (Ogada 2020), our results suggest that ethnic communities capitalise on CBC to substantiate their land claims and reinforce inherited boundaries.

Regarding processes of institutionalisation, a significant difference in conservancy governance in both countries occurs in the relations of traditional authorities, newly established conservancy committees and the nation state. In Namibia, the positions of traditional authorities are well established. Traditional authorities in Namibia are a counterpoint to governmental administration and substantial for local affiliation and belonging. Traditional authorities inherit their office from their fathers or uncles—the government is not involved directly in their selection, although party politics are alleged to impact the selection of chiefs and councillors increasingly. While some traditional authorities receive state remuneration, many do not. They occasionally compete for power amongst themselves but rarely against the state. Such internal competition also influences territorialisation at the local level.

The position of chief in Kenya is meant to mediate between communities, including their ethnic-based authorities, and higher levels of the government administration. In contrast to Namibia, however, all local chiefs are state employees (i.e., they are not necessarily local elders) who have to struggle for influence against and, occasionally, with other institutions of traditional authority that are more accepted by communities, such as councils of elders, local politicians, and traders.

Many decisions in Namibian conservancies are made at the level of the individual conservancy. In Kenya, NRT is backed

by KWS and maintains considerable influence over decisions related to resource governance: subsidies, commodification through small-scale income generation measures, and nature protection through armed rangers. NRT not only organises economic activities, but influences the establishment and the layout of conservancies, including their security functions.

NRT, to some extent, controls community-based organisations and takes on qualities of the state: it supports local pastoralists in the sale of their livestock, acting as intermediary and offering support to resolve conflicts without violence. In terms of security, the state, with its low capacity to police these areas, benefits from the presence of rangers who are paid with outside funding.

Regarding commodification, there are vast differences between the two cases. In Namibian conservancies, the benefits from public-private partnerships are directly transferred from private enterprises to the conservancy management without any further state interference or taxation. However, critics claim that the annual returns from conservation are marginal and do not effectively compensate farmers for harvest and cattle losses due to human-wildlife conflicts (Drake et al. 2021; Hulke et al. 2020). It is evident that members who find employment in the conservancy or tourism sector benefit more than others. In Kwandu conservancy, for instance, women are more vulnerable to wildlife impacts due to their marginal economic status and on average profited less from the conservancy's income (Khumalo and Yung 2015). Yet, there are financially stable conservancies in Namibia that overcame dependence on external donor-funding, thus leading to a higher degree of autonomy.

Tourism activities in Kenyan community conservancies are limited: few conservancies are directly engaged in ecotourism and trophy hunting has been prohibited in Kenya since 1977. Little income directly emanates from conservation, and conservancy economics are barely connected to conservation goals. NRT facilitates the sale of livestock to urban markets and acts as an intermediary for trade, thus benefitting individual livestock owners. A major source of income for many conservancies is the NRT subsidy and the employment of conservancy members as rangers has an effect in a region marked by low employment figures.

Conservancies in Kenya apply a different mode of commodification than Namibian conservancies: instead of selling wildlife for consumption to international tourists, Kenyan conservancies market their conservation success to raise funds from external donors (Büscher 2014). As a result, Kenyan conservancies are more dependent on donor money than on private sector engagement.

In Namibia, there are two drivers of territorialisation at the local level: first, the commodification of wildlife and wilderness landscapes and second, traditional authorities' aspiration to cement spatial claims. Contrastingly, security concerns drive territorialisation in Kenyan conservancies. CBC in Kenya is thus motivated by the protection of ranges and livestock rather than by tourism development alone. Such protection is all the more pressing given that Kenya has announced an ambitious

development agenda (including a massive transport corridor) in the northern counties, and conservancies can be seen as a way to help secure land and/or compensation. Therefore, by marketing conservation to international donors, conservancies compete with intruding investors and wealthy actors, both from within the communities and from other parts of Kenya, who seek privatisation of communal land.

## CONCLUSION

In both countries, CBC facilitates processes of territorialisation by adding layers of institutionalised local decision making to pre-existing institutions. Conservancies rapidly developed in spaces that were marginalised by colonial and post-colonial state authorities and where administration was based on various forms of traditional authority. Fuelled by the expansion of the commodification and the tapping of external resources, existing institutions translate and appropriate uniform global models and create hybrid forms of spatial governance that serve the political aims of existing or emerging rural elites. In this way, new conservation territories emerge.

CBC programmes serve as vehicles to articulate political claims, leading to the reification of traditional authorities (in the Namibian case) or the reinforcement of ethnic boundaries (in the case of Kenya). Chieftaincies and tribal kingdoms are, in a sense, propelled into the age of the working landscapes of conservation and anthropocenic conservation. Their territorial claims are well established and made, by and large, conjointly with the aspirations of conservationists.

Further, CBC committees provide an important institutional interface for conservation NGOs and international donors, who may otherwise be reluctant to interact directly with traditional tribal authorities. The institutionalisation of conservancies has filled political and administrative gaps left 'open' by state institutions thus triggering contemporary processes of territorialisation. In Namibia the CBC blueprint was used to commodify wildlife with the aim of economically benefitting previously disadvantaged residents of rural areas. In Kenya, the objectives were similar. Against the background of interethnic violence, however, the impetus for conservancies has increasingly become about securitisation.

Revenues from ecotourism and trophy hunting in Namibia are substantial and certainly broaden economic prospects for a good number of households, but they are not sufficient to have a broad stimulating effect on the household incomes of the wider population. This could potentially lead to the formation of new rural elites that are able to capitalise on this new form of spatial governance—the role of specifically young educated men in conservancies deserves further investigation. In contrast to this the Kenyan conservancies described mainly subsisted on donor funding channelled to the community which substantially strengthened the position of the leading NGO. In both cases, diversification of income sources has the potential to reduce conservancies' dependence on external actors and create institutions that are better equipped to articulate the interests of local residents.

The establishment of conservancies creates a space where local interests are articulated and negotiated vis-à-vis traditional authorities, the nation state and international donors. This entanglement of global CBC blueprints with territories displaying limited presence of the nation state and dominant traditional authority structures leads to a hybridization of institutions.

Given the different contexts, it is not surprising that CBC in our two case studies, although starting off from the same vision, are not producing the same outcomes. However, a comparative approach is useful to reveal the interrelations between the demarcation of space, the governance system and resource use in conservation territories. Furthermore, it is important considering the hybridisation of incoming with pre-existing institutions to understand the motives and drivers of territorialisation.

Clearly, the CBC blueprint idea is far from being a ‘one size fits all’ approach for improving the state of nature and livelihoods of the rural poor. Our findings suggest that the construction of ‘working landscapes’ for conservation purposes requires careful examination of local institutional contexts and available resources. Otherwise, there is the threat that emerging institutions become hijacked by competing interests, with potentially undesirable outcomes for both biodiversity and local livelihoods.

### Author contributions statement

All authors contributed equally to design, data collection, analysis and drafting of the manuscript.

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### Declaration of competing/conflicting interests

The authors declare no competing interests in the conduct of this research.

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### Research ethics approval

Research in Namibia underwent ethics review and was permitted by the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology (permit number RPIV00292018 for Carolin Hulke, Linus Kalvelage and Javier Revilla Diez; RPIV00362018 for Maximilian Meyer).

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