

CASE STUDY 5

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TANZANIA

Organization: Tanzania Natural Resources Forum (TNRF)
Region: Africa

In the Kiteto district of Northern Tanzania, 15 communities of Indigenous pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, smallholder farmers, and hunter-gatherers depend on semi-arid dry-lands dominated by Acacia species. These communities are organized into four interconnected clusters—Kimbo, Napalai, Olengapa, and Alole—whose livelihoods are rooted in natural resource use. For generations, Indigenous knowledge has guided the sustainable management of forests, rangelands, and water sources, providing resilience in a challenging semi-arid environment. Youth and women are particularly central to the vitality of these systems and to ongoing governance efforts.

The pressures on these territories have grown acute. Encroachment on grazing lands by non-resident farmers, population growth, and armed group activity have significantly undermined pastoralist land use. Climate change further compounds these stresses: erratic rainfall patterns, prolonged droughts, and flooding have degraded rangelands and accelerated deforestation and desertification. The quantitative impact is striking. Between 2000 and 2020, nearly 150,000 hectares—over a quarter of the communal land area—were converted from grazing lands and tree cover to crop-lands, eroding the ecological base of pastoralist livelihoods.[35]

35 Potapov, P., Hansen, M.C., Pickens, A., Hernandez-Serna, A., Tyukavina, A., Turubanova, S., Zalles, V., Li, X., Khan, A., Stolle, F. and Harris, N., 2022. The global 2000-2020 land cover and land use change dataset derived from the Landsat archive: first results. Front. Remote Sens. 3: 856903. doi: 10.3389/frsen. ***https://doi.org/10.3389/frsen.2022.856903***

Against these challenges, communities continue to draw on traditional ecological knowledge to maintain territorial resilience. Sustainable land management practices include rotational grazing, soil and water conservation, forest protection, and carefully adapted seasonal farming. Customary rules around shared resources underpin these practices, helping to sustain biodiversity and rangeland health.

A major innovation has been the integration of customary systems with formal legal frameworks. *Certificates of Customary Rights of Occupancy* (*CCROs*) have been issued to livestock associations, legally securing communal grazing lands—including *alalis*, areas reserved for vulnerable animals such as calves and milking cows. Communities have successfully defended their territories in court using these instruments, creating important precedents for pastoralist land governance in Tanzania. Their experiences have influenced national policies, with the government adopting guidelines and regulations that support pastoralist land use planning.

Organizational strengthening has also been central to community resilience. Through approaches such as *Joint Village Land Use Planning* (*JVLUP*), *Participatory Rangeland Management* (*PRM*), and piloting Indigenous *Community Conserved Areas* (*ICCAs*), communities have built governance systems that blend traditional knowledge with legal recognition. Registered Livestock Keepers Associations develop and implement management plans that formalize grazing clusters while maintaining flexibility rooted in Indigenous systems. Women now hold more than 40% of leadership positions in cluster boards and committees, strengthening inclusive governance and reshaping decision-making on land and resource management.

Environmental monitoring tools are increasingly used to document rangeland changes and demonstrate restoration progress, empowering communities to hold external actors accountable. These efforts have delivered concrete outcomes: improved tenure security has increased trust in land use plans, motivating communities to invest in restoring degraded rangelands while protecting territories from land grabbing and speculative pressures. By linking Indigenous governance to legal instruments, the Kiteto clusters illustrate how community-driven strategies can counter threats and secure dryland ecosystems for future generations.