



Final Project Report for ‘The Loita Forest Elephant Conservation Pilot Project – Kenya’ With Financial Support from Jana Robeyst Trust Fund.



Report by: **Mr. Nicholas Mbatiany Baari**

Acknowledgement

Undertaking this project has been a truly life-changing experience for me and it would not have been possible without the support that I received from many people.

I would like to first say a very big thank you to **Jana Robeyst Trust Fund and its entire review committee** for the affirmation on my project proposal and subsequent financial support towards implementing the same. Specific gratitude goes to Yves Robeyst who besides relaying the Trust's messages, kept me busy on project progress update besides our network challenge: all these engagements made us glued on project delivery and keen on set timelines.

I am indebted to the host community (Ilkimpa village) and project volunteer team key among them Mr. Robert Kone and Ms. Oltinayio who facilitated implementation of the two project's programs i.e. beehive fence and elephant conservation respectively.

My thanks also go out to the support I received from the collaborative work I undertook with various governmental organizations/departments and local community based organizations who made the project undertaking easier from their expertise.

I am also grateful to **Ereto Africa NGO** management for the good reception of the project idea, their guidance during implementation and willingness to backstop farmers on the same post the project life.

Background

The rapid human population growth coupled with changing climate has resulted to unprecedented land use change that has pitted human against wildlife and particularly Elephants as they scramble for common space in and around Loita forest: which besides harboring resident elephants, is also a dispersal area for immigrants from the great Maasai Mara Game Reserve during dry seasons. This has resulted in human elephant conflict as the Loita forest adjacent pastoralist turned to agriculture for livelihood diversification to combat food insecurity and hunger. Elephants have also been forced to seek fresh palatable food from farmlands to substitute the reducing feed stock from degraded forest ecosystems. These uncontrolled hostile interaction has drastically changed the community's attitude towards elephants and further fueled by the high number of idle unemployed youth who hurt, kill or collude with poacher to eliminate the treasure turned menace.

Efforts have however been witnessed across the world against poaching both in the wild and market: the climax of this was realized in Kenya when the government burnt 105 tons of tusks. Even as this has immensely deterred poaching across the country, little has been done to contain human elephant conflict: which is a serious death causal factor, particularly in Loita where it's rampant.

The project therefore proposed to erect a bee hive fence at the edge of our pilot village (Ilkimpa) that experiences the highest intensity of elephant invasion to mitigate the persistent human elephant conflicts. The project also envisioned to build both technical and economic capacity of the forest adjacent community through Elephant conservation education and sell of honey from the beehive fence respectively.

The Aim of the project was to conserve the Loita Forest Elephants through development of cheap bee hive fence along farms' boundaries and change community attitude towards elephants through conservation education program.

The main project objectives were:

1. To erect a 20 bee hive pilot fence along Ilkimpa village farmlands to deter elephants' invasion by July 2018.
2. To educate 300 Ilkimpa village community members and school pupils on Elephant Conservation and protection by March 2019.
3. To significantly improve Ilkimpa village youth group livelihood through sale of honey by April 2019.

Project Implementation

The project began with community mobilization meetings from 18th - 20th June 2018 where more than three hundred community members were trained on the idea of using bees to deter elephants' invasion on farms. The reception was very positive and supportive so was the interaction in the meetings (Plate 1). The training was done by the project volunteer team with a Kenya Wildlife Service community warden who explored many other elephants' deterrent methods including chilly buffer zones and fence perimeter oiled ropes soaked in chilly. At the same time 10 youthful community volunteers were selected to benefit from the project beehives and also assist in elephant surveillance (Plate 2).



Plate 1: Community mobilization meeting during project inception



Plate 2: Youth training on Bee keeping and management

After settling on the beehives beneficiaries, further training on beekeeping was conducted by the area agricultural extension officer with emphasis on bee handling during catching, transfer, management and harvesting. Issues of environmental conservation were also reiterated by the project team, Kenya wildlife Service and agricultural extension officers for guaranteed sufficient water and nectar for bees. Thereafter, beehives were delivered to beneficiary farms and erected. The selected sites were two homesteads with highest elephant invasion which would give the best demonstration to the community on how bees and beehive fences deters elephants’ farm invasion. The volunteer youth also registered a self-help group called **‘Ilkimpa Vision Youth group’** to optimize on the economies of scale in the honey production enterprise.



Plate 3: Delivery of beehives to beneficiary farms ready for installation



Plate 4: Installed beehives in one of the farms along the boundary fence.

During July-August every year, elephant invasion is known to be at its pick in the ripe Loita maize farms especially those bordering the forest with almost bare or severely trampled maize fields. This was not the case in 2019 for the two beehive fence beneficiary farms which had exceptionally flourished most certainly due to the bees' elephants' deterrence as shown in photo below. The beneficiary farmers are expecting bumper harvest in the month of October.



Plate 5: Flourishing maize fields of the two farms supported with beehive fences against elephant invasion

The project has brought insurmountable relief to the farmers who would otherwise be counting huge losses and nursing cold related diseases as they guard their farms over cold nights against elephants. The community has seen and tasted for themselves the importance of beehive fence in keeping off elephants peacefully and most of them are ready to replicate the idea in their own farms beginning with cheap traditional beehives due to financial constraints and roll out with time to modernized langstroth for enhanced honey output.

The volunteer youth have also been making impromptu surveillance in the forest to check on elephant security and make reports to the Kenyan government authorities particularly Kenya Wildlife Service. They are however yet to benefit from honey proceeds from the beehive fence due to prolonged drought that hampered honey production by bees.

Challenges were however encountered ranging from prolonged droughts that hindered honey production during the April season to technicalities of bee catching which the youth were continuously learning through the project period. Honey harvested during April season was not of any significant quantity due to the prolonged drought and focus now is in October when good returns are expected. Thereafter meaningful packaging and marketing will be undertaken. The youth group will be backstopped by **Ereto Africa NGO** post project period to ensure sustainability and expansion.

Identified future opportunities in the course of project implementation:

- a) The project will in future explore the use of motion trap cameras to be able to communicate project results convincingly to other stakeholders including distant communities as well as enrich elephant conservation education program.
- b) The project will also in future focus on developing a simple ecotourism program to sustain the already started effort to change the community's attitude towards elephant conservation through its benefits.

Elephant Conservation Education Programme:

Ilkimpa primary school benefited from the project on elephant conservation education program. Training material were developed by the project team among them posters, training modules and schedules. The project volunteer teacher Mrs. Oltinayio was also taken through the training content before implementing the project. More than forty pupils were trained by the project volunteer on elephant physiology, character, importance of conservation and strategies: the pupils were excited and amazed with the training. This was reflected by end of project assessment that showed majority learned about elephants with increased interest and passion on their conservation. Without a doubt, the project has built a strong foundation for future elephant conservation leaders in and around Loita forest.

The project would have had more meaningful impact if the pupils managed to visit the nearby Maasai Mara National Game Reserve to see elephants and appreciate the contribution of tourism to the park's neighboring community. This presents an opportunity for future exploration by the project on environmental/elephant conservation education.





Plate 5: Ilkimpa Primary School Pupils different sessions on elephant conservation education.