



Strategic Plan

2023 - 2025

We work to improve people's livelihoods and to ensure lion's connectivity across the Greater Serengeti Ecosystem, by engaging with the pastoralist communities and applying cultural, environmental and economic values to our conservation efforts.

Content

- 3 Executive summary**
- 5 Mission, vision and values**
- 7 Context**
- 8 Ngorongoro landscapes**
- 9 Our tracks**
- 11 Analysing our situation**
 - 11 Our strengths
 - 11 Our limitations
 - 12 Our opportunities
 - 12 Our challenges
- 13 Meet Lazaro Oletekero**
- 14 Meet Nadine**
- 16 Strategic framework**
 - 18 Goal 1: Cut the costs
 - 20 Goal 2: Realise the value
 - 22 Goal 3: Apply the Knowledge
- 23 Ensuring our success**

Executive Summary

This strategic plan outlines KopeLion's efforts to promote human–lion coexistence in Ngorongoro, a unique protected area, and UNESCO World Heritage site, shared by people and wildlife. The organization seeks to improve the livelihoods of pastoralists while ensuring lion connectivity across the Greater Serengeti Ecosystem by using cultural, environmental, and economic values. The strategic framework of KopeLion is based on three areas of action: cutting costs, realizing value, and applying knowledge.

The organization will use participatory conversations to foster dialogue, build trust and co-create solutions, with a particular focus on youth, to empower community members to take ownership of the process that can lead to a positive shift in attitudes, beliefs, and values that culminate in sustainable change.

The objectives will be achieved by reducing the loss of livestock to lions, preventing the traditional and retaliatory killing of lions, safeguarding lion populations for environmental and economic worth, and funding valuable research on long-term lion population monitoring.

KopeLion's strategy focuses on several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); reducing poverty (SDG 1 and 2) by improving pastoralists' livelihoods, promoting economic growth through the conservation of lions and associated tourism (SDG 8), climate action (SDG 13) and life on land (SDG 15), through promoting healthy lion populations that serve as an indicator of environmental services such as water, fuelwood, grazing, and carbon-sink and a healthy ecosystem. It further addresses target 9 of the Global Biodiversity Framework 2022, by ensuring benefits from biodiversity for local communities.



Maipo ya Wotisha kwa
Umfichi wa Simba (CIP),
MISGYO
#3-2021-06 - 2021-09





Vision

Ngorongoro is a healthy balanced landscape that benefits both people and lions. We envision a future where living with lions is not only possible but it is considered to be economically and ecologically valuable by pastoralist communities.

Mission

To enable lasting coexistence between people and lions in Ngorongoro. We work to improve pastoralists' livelihoods and to ensure lions' connectivity across the Greater Serengeti Ecosystem, applying cultural, environmental, and economic values to our conservation efforts.

Values

- We have a long-term connection and commitment to the conservation of lions in the Greater Serengeti ecosystem.
- We believe that people and large carnivores can coexist by finding the balance between the costs and the benefits.
- We encourage cultural and traditional principles that uphold good environmental practices.
- We enjoy cultivating growth: from each person individually to KopeLion as a respected organisation.
- Our work is led by the Ngorongoro community, including our strong and supportive team.

We propose to add further value to:

Communities: By ensuring that conserving lions is a community choice, that the benefits of protecting them outweigh the loss and that cultural connections with lions are upheld.

Protected areas: By safeguarding lion 'corridors of tolerance' through community areas - maintaining resilient lion populations for environmental and economic worth, and funding valuable research on long-term lion population monitoring.

Tourism and related industries: By protecting lions - Tanzania's biggest wildlife tourism attraction - and the associated local, national and international economies.

Conservationists, donors and philanthropists: By ensuring an effective conservation impact in a highly valued area by an organization that works 100% on the ground.





Context

As a protected area and UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) together with the Serengeti National Park and surrounding areas, form one of the largest savanna ecosystems in the world. Characterized by seasonal water availability, the area is influenced by the ongoing wildebeest migration and the coming and going of pastoralist communities living alongside wildlife, including lions. Furthermore, just a few kilometres from the savanna plains and inside the renowned Ngorongoro crater, one can find the most dense, most studied, and most valuable lion population in Africa.

A one of its kind multi-use protected area, the NCA is home to almost 100,000 people living as traditional pastoralists (Maasai and Datooga) who rely on livestock for their livelihood. While lions help generate substantial revenue for the tourism industry, their attacks on livestock pose a significant financial burden to the people living in the area prompting lion killings in retaliation and self-defence.

Human-environment dynamics, including climate change, rangeland degradation, population growth, and direct conflict, have caused the loss of lions from most of their historical range within the NCA. Natural dispersal corridors have been compromised and the crater lions have become largely isolated from the larger meta-population. Because lionscapes (ecosystems that support lions) provide more benefits to humans than the average ecosystems across Africa, they are an excellent indicator of environmental services such as water, fuelwood, grazing, carbon-sink, and tourism revenue. Threats to lions signal underlying economic and social risks to the NCA communities. KopeLion (Korongoro People's Lion Initiative) works to reduce these threats, keep the balance, and enable lasting coexistence between pastoralists and lions. While KopeLion envisages working in NCA for the long term, this strategy will act as a guide to our work over the next three years yet will remain flexible in case of major policy changes.



Ngorongoro Landscapes

The NCA is a spectacular 8,300 sq. km of mountains, gulleys, craters, and short-grass plains. Its natural and cultural uniqueness earned it the status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, an International Biosphere Reserve, and a Global Geopark. With human activity limited to traditional pastoralism, which is compatible with large carnivores, space, and relatively abundant wild prey, NCA is a key hub for the dispersal and connectivity of Northern Tanzania and Southern Kenya's Maasailand lion meta-population. But despite the exceptional natural resources and high revenue earned from tourism, the local people feel that while they are the ones to bear the tough burden of coexisting with large carnivores, they are not engaged in conservation decisions and do not derive sufficient benefits while conflict and poverty abound.



Ngorongoro Crater

The Ngorongoro Crater covers merely 3% of the NCA, yet is at the center of location and attention for any visitor. The crater is thought to have formed about 2.5 million years ago from a large active volcano. People and livestock are no longer permitted into the Crater, but wildlife can move freely in and out.

Ndutu Area

Ndutu lies at the border of NCA and Serengeti National Park. Ndutu is an oasis amid endless grass plains for visiting and resident wildlife. Lions are easily observed, sometimes venturing across the community land to reach the Ngorongoro Crater and beyond. In the dry season, Ndutu becomes a magnet for surrounding pastoralists and their herds for its pasture and rare permanent source of water. In the resulting struggle for resources, conflicts between carnivores, livestock and pastoralists become a daily occurrence.

Multiple Land Use Area (MLUA)

Much of this area is covered by spread-out clusters of settlements and active livestock grazing areas. For lions to pass between Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater, they must pass through the MLUA. Though thousands of people live here, it is still a semi-wild landscape with no physical obstructions blocking lions or other wildlife.

Our Tracks



2011

Started to work in the NCA as part of a collaboration between lion researchers and the NCA communities.



2014

Partnered with Lion Guardians and adopted their human-lion coexistence model. 10 Ilchokuti were employed in 2 wards.



2017

Feasibility study for Conservation Incentive Payments (CIP) Scheme. Over 20 Ilchokuti employed.



2018

First Nduu lion recorded crossing the multi-use area through the established "corridor of tolerance". Agreements extended to work in 4 wards.



2019

Largely stopped traditional lion killing in the NCA. Obtained legal status as KopeLion Inc in the USA and Tanzania, and was granted 501(c)3 charity status in the USA.



2020

Launched a 3-year CIP trial to pay for the presence of lions in 6 villages. Lion pride from Crater settles on the NW rim in the multi-use area. Expanded team.



2021

Extended area of work in NCA. No lions killed in the KL area of work.



2022

30 Ilchokuti employed. Open a 2nd 'corridor of tolerance' from the highlands through to Maswa/Makao/Mwiba in south-western NCA.



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KOPPE LION

KODARSHARAO

Analysing Our Situation

Looking back, looking forward

Through years of hard work KopeLion has secured a niche in Ngorongoro, and despite ongoing changes in the Conservation Area, our role is still strongly focused on engaging communities in lion conservation to enable coexistence and connectivity. Our situational analysis clearly defines where we are now, what the future holds, and guides our strategy for the 3 years ahead.

Our Strengths

Trust and transparency: After years of suspicion about the conservation of lions, we have established the trust of Ngorongoro's pastoralists and have fully engaged the communities. 90% of our team are from Ngorongoro and work on the ground, closely connected with the community.

"KopeLion, you have proven beyond doubt that you can keep your word. The Ilchokuti and their work is living proof that KopeLion is at our service and a dependable organisation" Esero Village Leader

Knowledge and skills: Our field team holds a high level of traditional knowledge and skills, which have been enhanced by training to introduce a wide array of further useful and complementary tools e.g., livestock health, climate change, and first aid. We additionally encourage individuals to further their education, both academically and practically, and to pursue new qualifications and certifications using KopeLion as a learning platform.

Collaboration: What we learn, we share – working together with people and organisations at all levels, from schools to universities, wildlife management area authorities to district authorities, tourists to government policymakers, and many other similar community/conservation-focused organisations. We work closely with the lion research project in Ngorongoro, contributing to, enhancing, and applying the science, in a practical setting.

Team: At the heart of everything we do – our team is energetic, responsive, committed and compassionate, and when working with people and lions, this makes all the difference. Confident in their ability, our team members are enabled to work independently.

Our Limitations

Data analysis and dissemination: We're good at data collection but with so much accumulated and recorded, we struggle with processing, analysis, evaluation and dissemination. We need to improve our database management and produce results and outputs that can guide our work, increase our scientific collaborations and inform management and policy at higher levels. That said, working directly on the ground enables us to continuously observe and co-adapt to the fluid environment, its animals and its people.

Staffing: While strong on the ground with our Ilchokuti, we are desperately short of technical staff. Most of our limitations are simply because of a lack of capacity, particularly in M&E, outreach, social science and fundraising. While local knowledge is key to our work, we need to balance it with other specialised skill sets to achieve our goals.

Equipment: KopeLion is operated on a tight, no-frills budget due to financial restrictions. We value every cent, yet our team could be so much more effective if we had, for example, extra vehicles, more lion collars at the ready, a radio set-up allowing for smooth communications in areas with scant phone network e.g. Ndotu.

Our Opportunities

Pastoralism - the culture of conservation:

Conservation ethics are embedded in the culture of pastoralism and in their management of critical resources. The willingness of people in Ngorongoro to engage in finding solutions to coexisting with large carnivores and to environmental degradation is there. Combined with the trust that KopeLion has established, we believe we can together find a positive way forward

A unique area of work and symbolic species:

We have the advantage of working within the world-renowned NCA, as well as with a flagship/umbrella/keystone species, meaning that we have an audience and funders who are easily reached and engaged.

But the fame of Ngorongoro can have the opposite effect: increasing tourism pressure and resulting in donors who assume that both the area and the species are already well funded, or have heard of and want to avoid the political turmoil in the area.

Youth: The youth are the future, and there is no better sector to invest in. Our outreach activities found that youth in NCA are finding it difficult to maintain a balance between their traditions and culture and the modern world.

Unexplored coexistence tools: KopeLion is eager to try everything that might make it easier for people and large carnivores to coexist whether it's new initiatives or learning from others e.g. lion lights, livestock insurance and more camera traps.

Expanding partnerships: Without communicating, sharing and learning with others, our work holds little value. We encourage and support collaborations at the individual, community, local, national and international levels, and in both traditional and scientific arenas.

Our Challenges

Conflict of Interests: There are changes and uncertainty for the local communities, while attempts to lower the human and livestock populations and conserve the area for wildlife and tourism are made in the NCA, and political upheaval ensues.

Climate change: Erratic weather patterns are affecting the pastoralist way of life in Ngorongoro. Unpredictable rainfall and more frequent droughts are additional drivers for increasing land degradation, invasive species and conflicts that directly affect livelihoods and increase poverty.

Cultural change: Pastoralist values are changing from the collective to the individual, and traditional leadership is also threatened by more institutional positions. Increasingly, the pastoralist youth begin to question their culture and their future.

Increased human pressure: Population growth and immigration and high stocking rate adds to rangeland degradation, increase conflict with large predators and poverty in Ngorongoro, where pastoralism is one of the few permitted livelihoods.



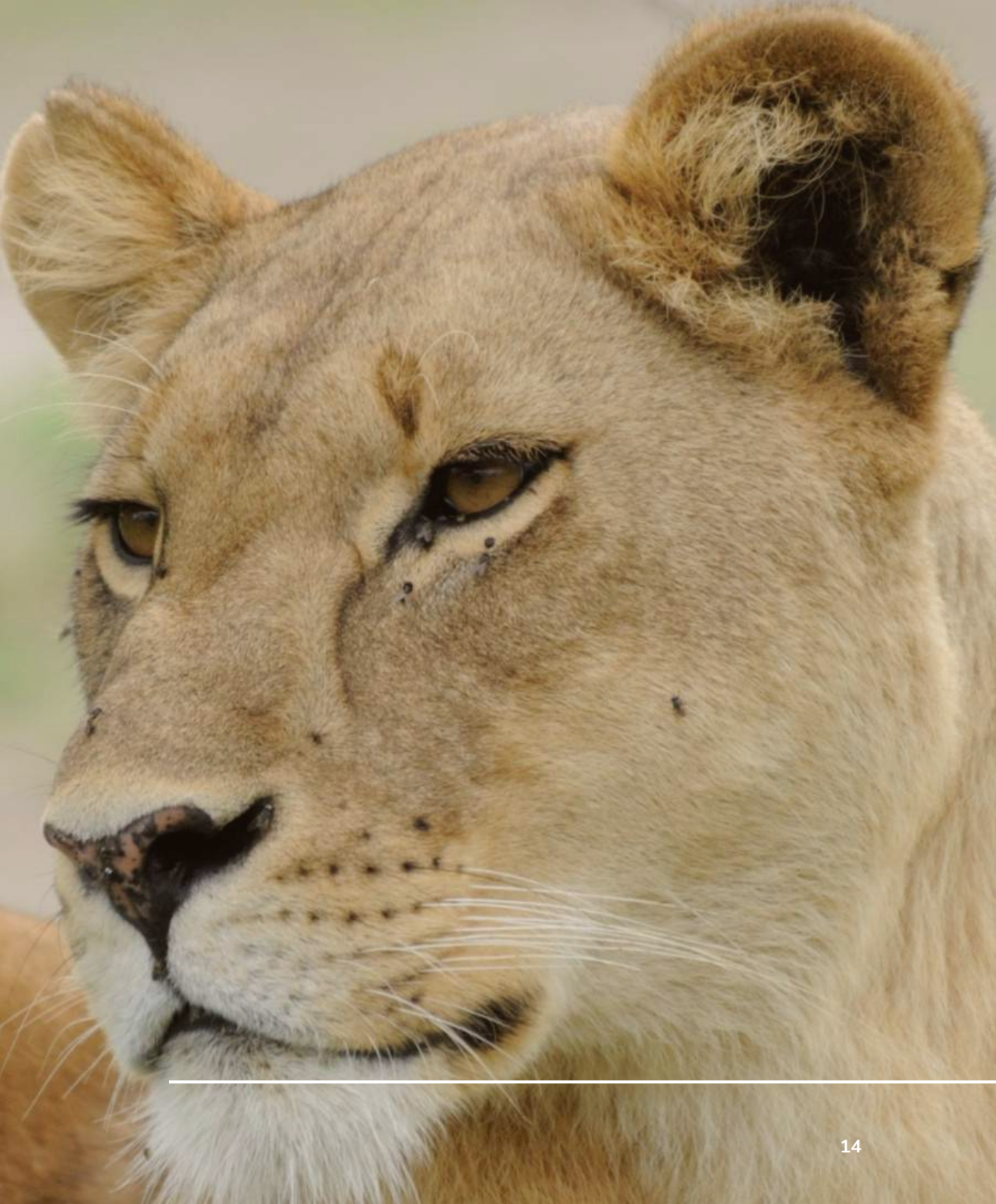
Meet Lazaro Oletekero

Our team is made up of experts from both Ngorongoro and wider, many of them former lion hunters employed to actively reduce conflicts and to help protect people, livestock, and lions.

We call them Ilchokuti (Guardians, in the Maa language), and they are fully field-based and each working in his home community.

Lazaro is one of the Ilchokuti coordinators. Living in the beautiful highland area of Misigiyo, on the way to Endulen, Lazaro has taken on his role with determination and pride. He is a skilled trainer of the new Ilchokuti, teaching them literacy, GPS, and telemetry tracking, as well as how to treat wounds. Lazaro is passionate about treating livestock wounded by predators and is, therefore, a valued member of his community.

“We benefit a lot from having lions in our area. The Conservation Incentives Program (CIP) trial pays our community to keep lions safe, and we’ve used these funds for projects that benefit people within our community, such as providing secondary school students with mattresses and trunks and books.”



Meet Nadine

Nadine is a female born in early 2012 in Ndutu's Twin Hill pride to Nayomi. In 2015 she and Nayomi made up the initially very small pride. Then, together successfully raised 7 cubs. By mid-2017, four juvenile males of the neighbouring Masek pride started hanging out with them, and the Twin Hill pride rapidly increased up to 17 lions.

Nadine and her pride are very resilient and have survived very dry years and continue to prosper and evolve through births, deaths, male takeovers, infanticide, and drought.

Nadine and her pride sisters had eight cubs in March 2020 following busy encounters with a 4-male coalition from the Ngorongoro Crater that had arrived in Ndutu. Another litter of 3 cubs in 2020, is thought to have been sired by a second coalition from the Crater. Nadine and her sisters manage to raise their cubs despite the many lurking new males, and people and livestock that come into the area during the dry season.

When livestock is around, Nadine and the pride mainly feed on the proportionally far fewer wild herbivores – a selective behaviour that helps immensely in keeping the balance between conflict and tolerance and needs constant close watch by our Ilchokuti.



The value of Lazaro & Nadine

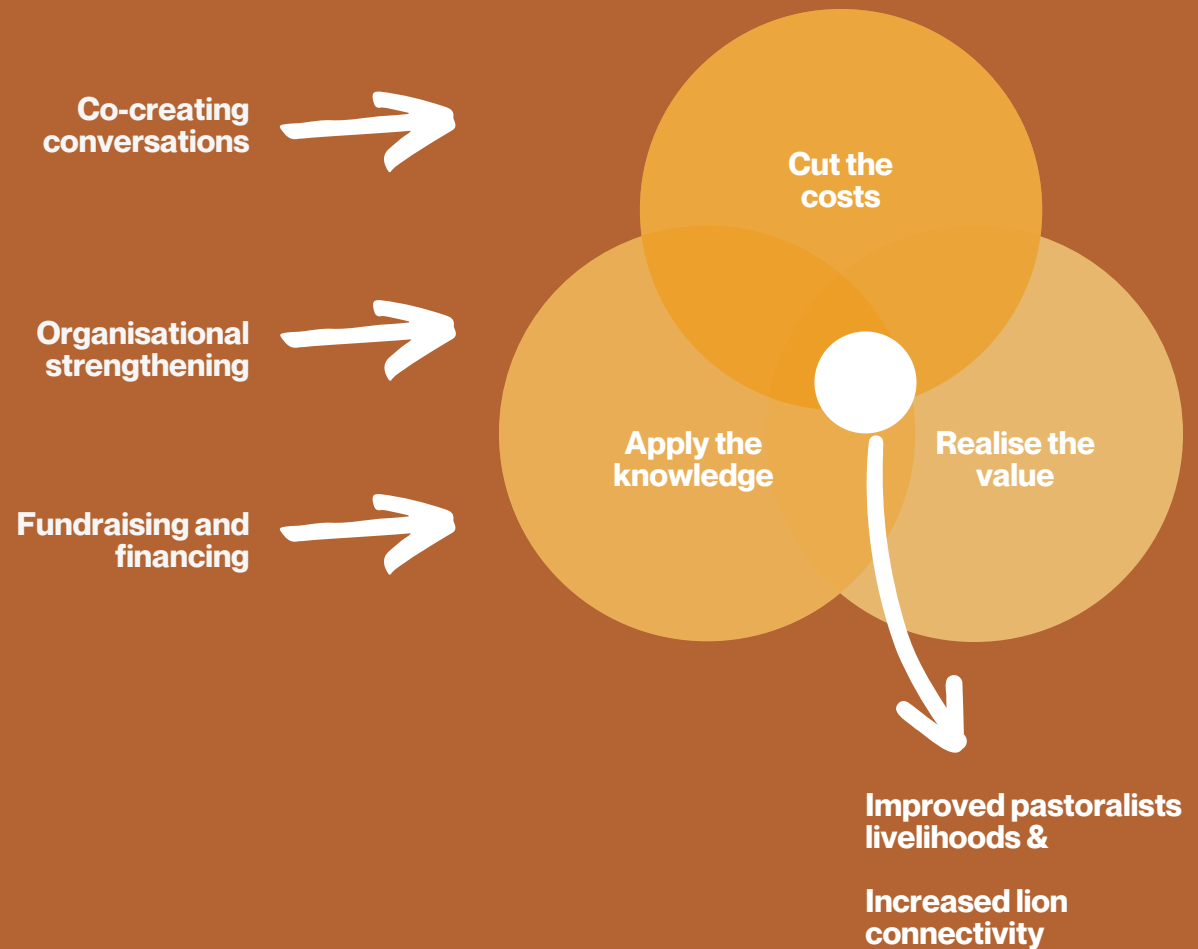
Lions like Nadine attract millions of dollars in tourism revenues each year. Together with the landscapes they roam and live in, they additionally help maintain many other services such as water sources, carbon storage to mitigate climate change, and to support food security, as outlined in the Lion Recovery Fund's 'The New Lion Economy', helping to secure the livelihood of 300 million people in sub-Saharan Africa.

Nadine and the rest of the lions also contribute to the preservation of culture. Their long history of interconnectedness and coexistence with African communities is something to preserve and build upon. Beyond culture, iconic lionesses like Nadine can help gain access to different funding streams to support livelihoods and sustainable development.

As Tanzania and many other countries in Africa experience the loss of ecosystem services and become more vulnerable to climate change, supporting Nadine and the work of Ilchokuti, like Lazaro, can turn the risk of biodiversity loss into an opportunity for coexistence.

Strategic Framework

In a world of diminishing space, lions' future is increasingly tied to shared landscapes. As a unique protected area shared between people and wildlife, Ngorongoro, part of the Greater Serengeti ecosystem, is a significant place to study and build a sustainable model for coexistence, ultimately ensuring metapopulation connectivity. Working together with long-standing culture and traditions, and in challenging landscapes, KopeLion bases its efforts on three areas of action, to cut costs, realise the value, and apply the knowledge.





Goal 1: Cut the Costs

The loss of livestock to lions is reduced, the traditional and retaliatory killing of lions in Ngorongoro is prevented and sanctions on traditional killings continue to be upheld.

Our Ilchokuti are at the core of our work. Their continuous monitoring of lions and communication of their whereabouts to their community is valuable to assist herders in protecting their livestock. While traditional lion hunting (Alamayo) has been largely abolished, the retaliatory killing of lions still happens as a result of losing livestock to lions.

Objective 1

Minimize human-lion conflict.

- Local pastoralist warriors with traditional and ecological knowledge are employed as Ilchokuti to:
 - Warn herders of current lion presence.
 - Find and return lost livestock to owners.

- Treat livestock wounded by carnivores.
 - Repair breached livestock enclosures.
 - Stop lion hunts.
 - Attend all depredation events to prevent any retaliatory hunts
- Additional support is provided in areas of high conflict to assist with the protection of people, livestock and lions.
 - Conversations have been facilitated that address how to manage potential increases in conflict e.g. climate change, land degradation, and greater competition for resources.
 - A high level of engagement is facilitated between the warrior age set groups, their elders and traditional leaders to discuss and reaffirm their ban on the killing of lions (both ritual and retaliatory), its celebrations and its meaning to the next generation. Positive attitudes to lions and ecosystem services are promoted.

Objective 2

Support and improve traditional pastoralist practices that enable coexistence with wildlife.

- Build naturally reinforced livestock enclosures in partnership with the community.
- Encourage people to remember basic safety customs when living with wildlife, using different communication channels e.g. film, posters, and meetings.
- Develop tools together with pastoralists in NCA that keep carnivores away from livestock e.g. lion lights, noise makers etc.

Target: Livestock losses are reduced to 50% of 2022 levels, there are no traditional killings of lions in NCA and retaliatory lion hunts are reduced to 10% of depredations.



Goal 2: Realise the Value

Communities are fully engaged in lion conservation and recognise their worth.

The costs of living with large carnivores are well documented and understood, and yet the benefits are less obvious. We aim to boost the benefits, both tangible and intangible, to ensure that lions are perceived to bring a net gain to pastoralist communities in Ngorongoro.

Objective 1

Further, explore our model for conservation incentive payments (CIP):

- Finalise counts, payments & utilisation of funds for the current 3-year CIP trial.
- Follow-up knowledge, attitudes and perceptions survey (KAP) to understand any changes in community attitudes and perceived tolerance towards carnivores relative to the CIP trial.

- Facilitate a final workshop with all stakeholders to present and discuss the final CIP report and decide the way forward.
- Share recommendations further.

Objective 2

Quantify and promote the value of biodiversity outcomes from lions in NCA:

- Stimulating environmental learning plan developed and disseminated in primary and secondary schools across NCA.
- Use film as a medium for sharing and distributing information through night film shows across NCA.
- Co-create conversations at different levels of pastoralist society to promote lions and their related ecosystem services

Objective 3

Engage NCA tourism to link communities to benefits from lions through innovative new ventures:

- Organise sponsored talks to tourists on lion conservation and coexistence from members of the community.
- Develop a community youth theatre group to perform plays about coexisting with lions in hotels.
- Cost share environmentally-themed school trips to the crater with tourism organisations.

Target: KAP survey indicates at least 40% of the community in the KL area of work have more positive feelings towards lions than in the 2019 survey.



Goal 3: Apply the Knowledge

Use scientific and traditional knowledge to design, implement, measure and apply to our work to enable human-lion coexistence.

The lion population in Ngorongoro Crater has been studied almost continuously since 1963, and the Ndotu lions since 2010. The aim is to recognize every lion individually and follow them throughout their lifespan, for detailed data on population trends and status. This provides excellent opportunities for measuring the effects of coexistence strategies in multiuse zones including connectivity across large landscapes, and ultimately the impact on the lion population itself. We partner with and fund the Ngorongoro lion research project, providing them with useful information from the field and utilising their findings to inform our coexistence work - ensuring that people choose to support lion connectivity across the Greater Serengeti Ecosystem.

Objective 1

Continue to collect information to measure trends in:

- Lions populations in NCA.
- Knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of traditional communities towards lions in NCA.

Objective 2

Use what we know to jointly design, implement and measure conservation and coexistence tools with the NCA stakeholders:

- The working group created at the village level is discussing, exploring and contributing to solutions for carnivore coexistence.
- Work closely with the NCA and District authorities to ensure that up-to-date information is available to inform human/carnivore coexistence and conservation strategy and policy

Objective 3

Disseminate useable and relevant information, both academic and non-academic, using a range of communication materials and channels:

- Continue to collaborate with the lion research team and with academic institutions and partners to support the production of scientific publications on lion populations and a human/lion coexistence model.
- Create engaging educational resources for primary and secondary schools.
- Communities are kept informed about KopeLion coexistence work through meetings, films and reports.

Target: At least 3 strong stakeholder collaborations contribute to effective new activities/plans/policies, at least 5 academic papers are published on human-lion coexistence in Ngorongoro, a strong communication strategy with accompanying materials is active.



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Note

Location

36 N 0775367
UTM 9650091

Elevation

2207m

Map

Done

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Ensuring Our Success

Guided by our situational analysis, Kopelion needs to focus on the catalysts that will enable us to reach our strategic goals. By addressing our challenges, we will make sure that we can make use of the opportunities that await.

Co-creating Conversations

Participatory conversation involves bringing together different stakeholders, including pastoralists, local leaders, researchers, and policymakers, to foster dialogue, build trust and co-create solutions and will underpin all our work, with a particular focus on youth. This approach recognizes the importance of local knowledge, values, and practices in addressing complex problems and seeks to empower community members to take ownership of the process that can lead to a positive shift in attitudes, beliefs, and values that lead to sustainable change. In the context of Ngorongoro pastoralists, transformative behaviour change could involve adopting better grazing practices, embracing alternative livelihoods, and ending retaliatory lion killing. A series of activities will be launched under our objectives to promote active participation, open dialogue, and respectful listening.

Organisational Strengthening

With a solid foundation now in place, we will invest further in the development of KopeLion to make it more effective and more resilient. The continued strengthening and empowerment of our team members and their transition into people that plan, organise, share, report and communicate with communities is essential for the future of lion conservation in Ngorongoro.



Increase capacity of our technical and support staff

- Increase our staff to include at least two M&E/Outreach positions and one Finance & Admin Assistant.
- Formalise a system for staff development & reviews.
- Find support for at least one Tanzanian MSc student and one PhD student to study with the research project

Shift to become a more community led organisation

- Invest in more leadership training, exposure and opportunities at the management level.
- Expand the KopeLion Board of Directors to include additional members with pastoralist backgrounds/strong grassroots capacity.

Improve KopeLion's Field and Management Tools

- Invest in one more vehicle to cover the increase in outreach activities and the full-time need for a vehicle in Ndotu during the conflict season.
- Develop a stronger technical communications network in the Ndotu area to help combat the conflict in the dry season.
- Ensure the field team is adequately equipped with well-functioning tools.



Financing & Fundraising

We estimate a budget of USD 1,725,000 will be needed to execute this three-year strategic plan. With a diverse fundraising strategy in place, we currently source our finances from conservation foundations, multi-lateral donors and smaller individual gifts.

Our aim is to secure more long-term donors and philanthropists interested in investing in NCA and its community, while still relying on the smaller, much valued flexible contributions for our everyday operational costs.

Fundraising Strategy will include:

- Increase funding by 30% in 3 years
- Focus on raising funding awareness & value to tour operators & accommodation
- Invest in dedicated fundraising communication materials
- Expand our team's ability to fundraise, including Management and Board members.



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