



STRATEGIC PLAN

2024 - 2028

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Executive Summary

The Hirola Conservation Program (HCP) is a unique, grassroots non-profit organization committed to the protection and recovery of the critically endangered hirola antelope (*Beatragus hunteri*) in the semi-arid rangelands of southeastern Kenya.

Founded in 2005 and formally registered in 2014, HCP aims to restore and increase hirola populations through large-scale habitat restoration across the region.

Given the ecological complexity of this landscape, HCP works to conserve the hirola alongside other vulnerable wildlife species inhabiting the fragile Kenya–Somalia borderlands.

The Hirola Conservation Program (HCP) was established to counter decades of severe population declines in the hirola antelope, a crisis driven by historical neglect and escalating environmental pressures in eastern Kenya. Currently, the global hirola population stands at fewer than 500 individuals. This critical decline is primarily driven by range degradation, including invasive tree encroachment fueled by overgrazing, the extirpation of mega-herbivores, fire suppression, and accelerating climate change.

Beyond their primary range in Kenya, hirola populations extend along the volatile Kenya–Somalia border. This geopolitical instability, coupled with cultural barriers among local Somali pastoralists and intensifying human–wildlife conflict, has historically marginalized conservation efforts, particularly since the species resides entirely outside formally protected government reserves.

To reverse this trajectory, HCP has historically focused on habitat restoration, anti-poaching enforcement, and a holistic “One Health” framework. Moving forward, HCP has engineered a comprehensive strategy to secure a sustainable hirola population and resilient habitat. This approach integrates science-led research, targeted species protection, deep community engagement, nature-based solutions, and the deployment of modern conservation technology and innovation.

Our Vision

Establish and sustain a conservation Program to make lasting contributions to the future of the hirola antelope and of the local communities within the hirola's geographic range



Our Mission

To protect and increase the numbers and distribution of hirola through participatory conservation, education, community involvement and international support.

OUR VALUES

Community-Centred

Promotion of Community-Based Conservation which places local Somali pastoralists at the centre of conservation efforts, ensuring they lead in protecting the species.

Integrity of Hirola

Doing the right thing by focusing on protecting the hirola in its natural habitat in contrast to captive breeding.

Research and Evidence-Based Management

Ensuring utilization of scientific research to inform conservation strategies, habitat restoration and monitoring.

Passion for One Health Approach

Ensuring the interconnectedness of wildlife, livestock, and community health through veterinary care for livestock and Hirola to protect the ecosystem.

Team Work for Sustainability and Coexistence

Working together enables us to foster a future where wildlife can coexist with local communities by reducing human-wildlife conflict and supporting nature-based livelihoods.

Restoration Impact

Result oriented reversal of habitat loss through manual removal of invasive trees and restoration of natural grasslands to ensure sustainable impact and resilience.

OUR GOALS

1. Improving Hirola Survival

Restoring >30% degraded habitat through HCP and local community involvement to achieve stable and sustainable hirola population

2. Understanding the right solutions

100% of anticipatory action and strategies are guided by previous and continuous hirola research and conservation initiatives

3. Climate-Smart Innovations in Habitat Regeneration and Bio-Enterprise Development

Promotion of climate-smart innovations integrating habitat restoration, sustainable livelihoods, and ecosystem resilience within the hirola rangelands.

Use of climate and ecosystem data, GIS technologies, and community-led restoration approaches strengthens adaptive management strategies addressing drought, land degradation, invasive species encroachment, and declining pasture productivity.

Development of conservation-linked bio-enterprises such as biochar production, sustainable briquette enterprises, grass seed harvesting, and climate-smart agriculture initiatives improves local livelihoods while reducing pressure on natural ecosystems. Exploration of emerging opportunities in carbon financing and ecosystem-based climate solutions, including carbon credits linked



to rangeland restoration and landscape rehabilitation, supports sustainable conservation financing. These integrated approaches enhance ecological restoration, improve community resilience, strengthen green economies, and contribute to long-term conservation sustainability across the hirola landscape.

4. Build strong collaborations and partnerships

Adopt an integrated approach that brings together government, private sector, local community and regional and international partners and stakeholders to address Hirola

5. Promote a solid GEDSI Framework

Ensure gender equity and equal access to conservation benefits, opportunities and decision making including addressing cultural, structural and systemic barriers and other vulnerabilities



Terminologies used

Local Community:

Residents or people who are mainly pastoralists and agro-pastoralists living in south eastern Kenya comprising Garissa, Wajir, Mandera and Tana-River and Marsabit Counties, where they live and utilize the land for livelihoods.

Community Leaders:

Members of the local community in the hirola rangelands who hold local leadership roles of supporting the community in decision making and engagements with government and other stakeholders. They include village and religious elders, men and women group heads, area chief and others.

Community-owned conservancies:

These are community driven conservancies managed by local pastoralist communities in partnership with Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) and the Hirola Conservation Program (HCP). Some of these include Ishaqbini Hirola Community Conservancy; Bura East Conservancy and Arawale National Reserve (restored through community support).

Hirola Conservation Program:

Local organisation registered in Kenya with the mission to safe and protect the endangered hirola antelope in its natural rangeland in eastern Kenya.

Hirola Conservancy Scouts:

Individuals comprising men and women from the local community contracted to carry out patrols and monitoring of hirola in the rangelands.

Rangelands:

These are drylands or arid and semi-arid areas characterised by grasses, forbs, or shrubs and are ideal for grazing and browsing by local livestock, hirola and other wildlife species.

Community conservancy associations:

Those are community-based organizations that manage community-owned land for wildlife conservation and sustainable development. This includes the North Eastern Wildlife Conservancies Association, based in Garissa among other community organizations.

The current population of hirola is fewer than 500 individuals, having declined from over 15,000 since the 1970s. The remaining population is located in the southern and northern arid and semi-arid landscapes of Kenya and along the Kenya–Somalia border.



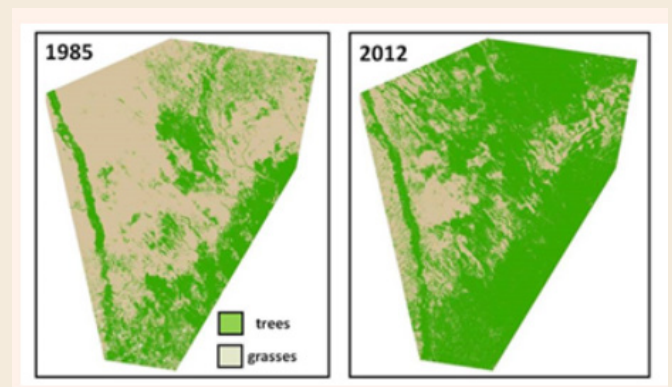
The decline is attributed to habitat loss, degradation, elephant extirpation, climate change and extremes, poaching, and disease. Historically, hirola have persisted in Kenyan ASALs (Arid and Semi-Arid Lands) due to favorable climatic conditions, but these have recently been affected by climate change and extremes

Background



Currently, the remaining hirola population (<500) individuals, have been decreasing since the 1970's from a population of over 15,000 individuals. The remaining population is found in the south/north eastern arid and semi-arid landscapes of Kenya and along the Kenya/Somalia border.

The declines in hirola population are thought to be linked to habitat loss and degradation, elephant extirpation and climate change and extremes and to some extent poaching and disease.



Historically, hirola have consistently persisted in grasslands of Kenyan ASALs due to favorable climatic conditions, which in recent decades have been affected by climate change and extremes.

While Hirola's future seems to be uncertain, Hirola Conservation Program (HCP) contribution to its conservation continues to sustain and promote habitat restoration, anti-poaching, one-health approach and other measures to ensure long-term recovery of hirola.



Consequently, habitat restoration, has stood out as an essential measure particularly for large, range-restricted mammalian species in arid African savanna as a direct response to degradation with the support of local communities. To achieve sustainable hirola population and habitat, since 2012, HCP efforts have led to slight recovery in recent years, and substantial populations can be seen in areas of Garissa such as Ishaqbini and Ijara in Garissa County. Although low mortality has persisted, interventions to support Hirolas survival have been successful despite occurrences of frequent droughts.



Notably, HCP is rare conservation initiative in Kenya, established and led by a local expert but also recognized globally. To achieve sustainable recovery of hirola population, HCP has been combining species protection, habitat rehabilitation, environmental education and deep community involvement.

HCP conservation initiatives have fundamentally altered the fate of hirola with promising results where for instance, they have led to the restoration of 10,000 acres of degraded habitat, reversing decades of bush encroachment and regeneration of the grasslands areas that are critical for hirola survival and sustainability for pastoralist herds. Consequently, the fate of hirola is closely tied to the local communities in the rangelands.



The HCP has remained the major organisation committed to the conservation of hirola and the driving force behind the creation of community-owned conservancies spanning over one million acres, including Bura East Conservancy and Ishaqbini Conservancy, home to the first Hirola predator-proof sanctuary. The various conservation initiatives have not only benefitted the hirola but also other threatened species including Grevy's zebra, reticulated giraffes and several other wildlife that coexist in this unique ecosystem. Whereas these initiatives have been effective due to commitment to community empowerment, cultural sensitivity and scientific innovation, there is still a substantial gap in achieving long-term habitat restoration, survival and recovery of hirola.

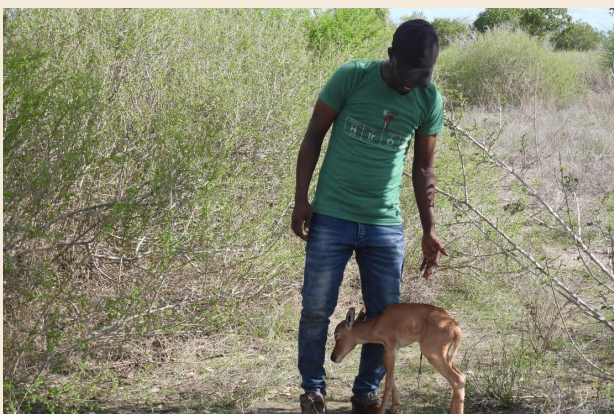
On this account and to address the declines in hirola population and achieve a sustainable ecosystem, the HCP has established the Strategic Plan 2024-2028 which focuses on science-led research, species conservation, local community engagements, nature-based solutions and technology and innovations driven approaches.

Beyond hirola conservation, HCP established the Somali Giraffe Project to support conservation of the endangered reticulated giraffe in the Kenya–Somalia borderlands through habitat restoration, research, anti-poaching, and community engagement.

Highlights on Hirola Recovery & Habitat Restoration

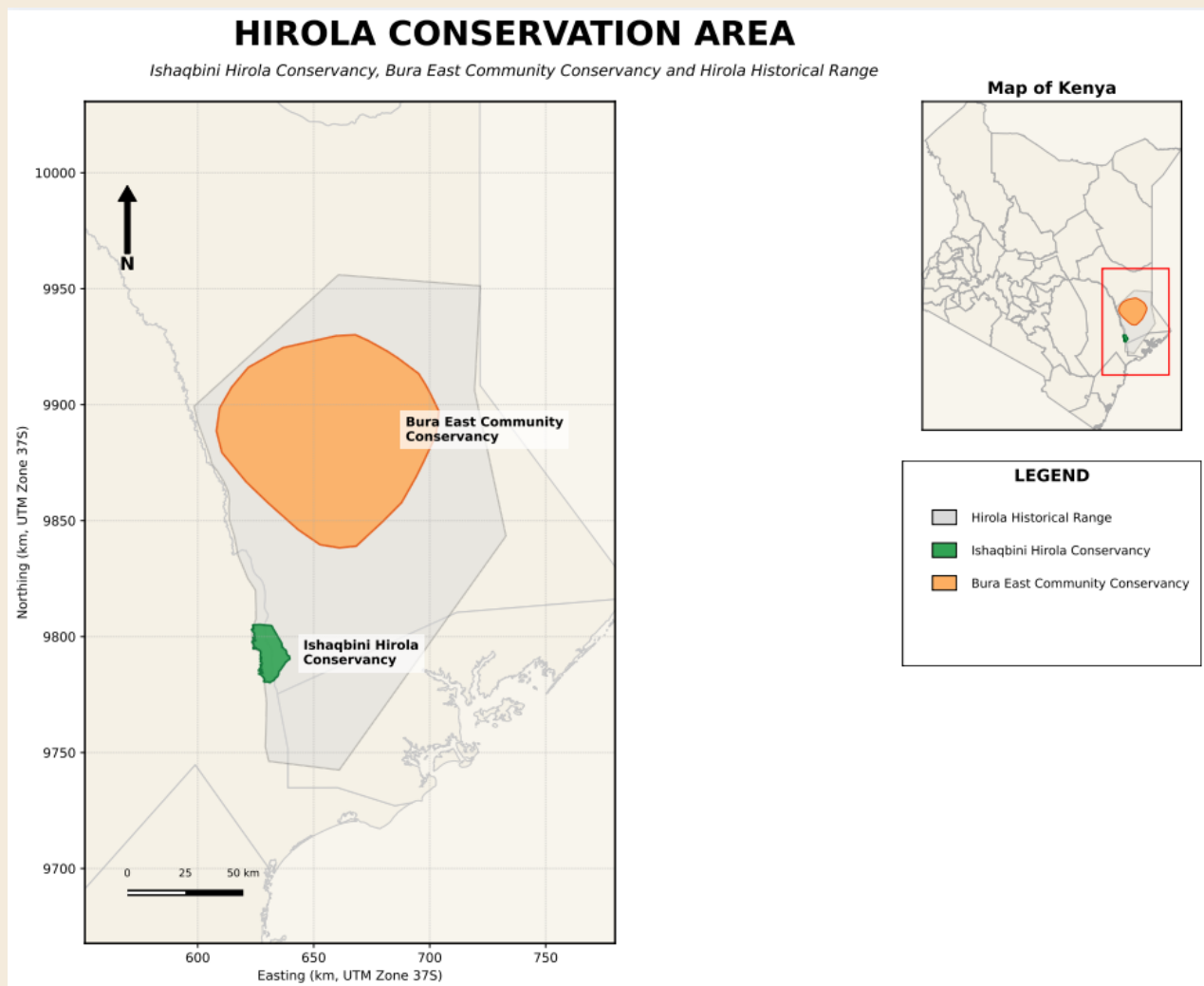
- The Arawale National reserve in north eastern Kenya was established in 1973 to protect and conserve varied wildlife species. Its operations were short lived due to persistent misunderstandings between local communities and the government authorities.
- The protection and management of the reserve failed by late 1980's and thereafter, hirola population had a 95% decline which resulted in hirola being listed as a critically endangered species in 1996 by the IUCN.
- HCP initiated its conservation Program in 2012 following the halting of operations of the Arawale National reserve which was due to a lack of formal protection and management
- HCP carried out research to investigate loss of grass cover across the hirola's historic range from 1985 to 2012 which revealed nearly 300% increase in tree cover. The finding was key to restoring grasslands the hirola rangelands (areas)
- Within the same period, anti-poaching Program was established established to support conservation of the hirola and elephants. Historically, about 5000 elephants and over 100 black rhinos maintained open grasslands for the hirola in southeastern Kenya.
- Establishment of the Bura East Community Conservancy among other community conservancies as a key habitat and conservation strongholds for hirola, strengthening community-led conservation efforts and securing critical rangelands for wildlife and sustainable grazing management.
- Team of 30 rangers and 12 scouts recruited and working with government agencies to ensure the protection of elephants, hirola, giraffes and other wildlife species in the region.
- Somali Giraffe Project implemented through partnership with indigenous communities to strengthen conservation.
- Hirola recovery and action plan 2018–2027 established to monitor and review progress. The plan was overseen by the Hirola Technical Committee with coordination of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) biannually. Further strategic reviews were carried out every two years to ensure the Programs success by 2027.
- Ten-year restoration project launched for Biodiversity and infrastructure and aimed at restoring grasslands in areas where the hirola persist consistently.

- The Hirola Wildlife Crisis Fund was established in 2021 to provide emergency assistance to wildlife in the volatile region along the Kenya-Somalia border. The fund facilitates rapid responses during prolonged droughts, floods, livestock and wildlife disease outbreaks, cross border bushmeat trade and increased poaching incidences.
- Onboarding of the Hirola monitoring database onto the EarthRanger platform in 2022 to improve real-time wildlife monitoring, data management, incident reporting, and informed conservation decision-making for hirola conservation and habitat management.



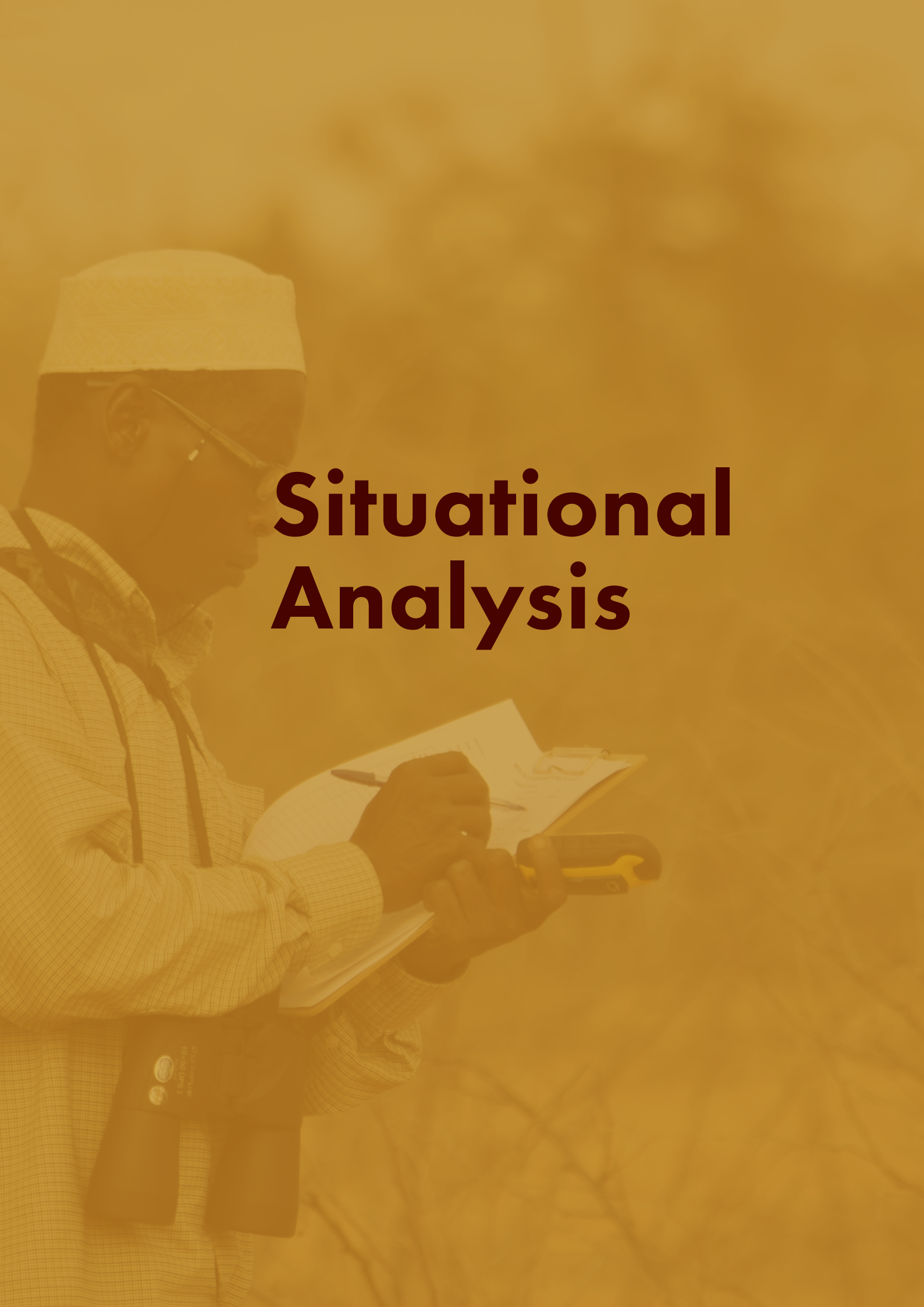


HCP Implementation Region



In Kenya, our core operations areas include Garissa County (Ijara, Fafi areas), and the northern part of Lamu County.

We give special attention to herds in Ishaqbini, Arawale and Bura East, areas in Ijara and Fafi Districts of Garissa County, as these community conservation areas support the largest remaining populations of hirola and contain some of the most important habitats for the species' survival, recovery and long-term conservation.



Situational Analysis

GLOBAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CONSERVATION ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The Hirola Conservation Program (HCP) participates and engages in conservation work as a grass-root and non-profit organization with a responsibility to safeguard the critically endangered Hirola antelope (*Beatragus hunteri*) and other vulnerable species inhabiting the fragile Kenya–Somalia borderlands.

HCP collaborates with different stakeholders from global to national levels on issues revolving around biodiversity conservation, ecosystems, climate change, habitat restoration, capacity building and community engagement among others. Recognizing that the Hirola ecosystem extends across the Kenya–Somalia border, HCP also supports collaborative habitat restoration and conservation efforts within the Somali side of the landscape to strengthen ecosystem connectivity, ecological resilience and long-term species recovery.

Within this context, HCP uses science/research and locally driven efforts to provide knowledge and insights in advising or solving conservation issues. The HCP encourages multi and trans-disciplinary approaches in research, innovation and partnerships in conservation.

GLOBAL ISSUES

At the global level, the Hirola Conservation Program, just like other conservation organisations in the world engages in habitat restoration and species recovery related-issues considering that biodiversity loss, climate change impacts and such issues are emerging as critical global challenges affecting endangered and near-extinct species and the society and national development and other sustainable development goals. Land and ecosystem degradation and related social, economic and environmental aspects, poverty, air pollution are other issues affecting the society in Kenya and elsewhere. The following are some of the main global issues affecting conservation issues:

Biodiversity Loss:

Biodiversity loss is one of the most critical global challenges linked to the sixth mass extinction in history. It is the gradual decline of living species on the planet including the loss of genetic variability within species and ecosystems that support them. It includes extinction of different species.

As a global issue it requires collective action at local, national, and international levels. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) was created to strengthen the linkages between science and policy on biodiversity and ecosystem services. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) contributes to the conservation of global species through monitoring and steering policy and action to reduce biodiversity loss.



Climate Change and Extreme Weather:

Kenya has been experiencing the effects of climate change, including rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, rising rift valley lakes water levels and increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, heatwaves and diseases. This is consistent with global warming and rising temperature trends. UNEP have been working to support various initiatives on addressing climate change impacts. To support global initiatives, the HCP promotes the use of locally available nature-based solutions, the involvement of local communities in conservation, weather and climate information dissemination, and knowledge sharing, among others, to improve adaptation, mitigation, and sustainable development. This can help to enhance the climate resilience of vulnerable populations.

Land Degradation:

Land degradation is a major global challenge that is largely linked to the desire to expand land use and its resources unsustainably, and Kenya has had its share of this problem. Land degradation is the loss of the productivity of land and resources due to a range of factors, including anthropogenic climate change and natural disasters. In Kenya, land degradation is a significant issue in rural and urban areas and manifests itself in varied ways such as overgrazing of grasslands and deforestation leading to loss of ecosystem goods and services.



The World Bank reported that over 80% of the land in Kenya is classified as arid and semi-arid, making it susceptible to degradation. Another report by the UNDP supports the concept of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) by United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and promotes sustainable land productivity.

The HCP supports sustainable land use and practices by engaging local communities and county government and other actors in policy implementation and climate actions geared towards minimizing land degradation within sustainable land management practices in crop and livestock and wildlife sectors. Overall, Kenya has adopted and incorporated Sustainable Development Goals across different sectors including the environment as part of its development plans and National Determined Contributions (NDCs) to enable land restoration and other interventions to be implemented.



OTHER ISSUES:

All forms of Pollution

Pollution is another major global challenge affecting human life and environment. Air pollution, water pollution and land pollution are some of the various forms of pollution. Globally greenhouse gases (GHG) both natural and anthropogenic are linked to pollution. Further, short-lived climate pollutants such as black carbon and methane contribute to up to 35% of global emissions attributable to human activities and affect biodiversity, water sources and pasture. Pollution largely alters ecosystems, restricting animals' movement and reducing food quality.



Although there is still limited information regarding the impacts of pollution on wildlife and livestock within the Hirola rangelands, HCP is keen on pursuing research and innovation initiatives to better understand these impacts and ensure sustainability in restoration efforts, particularly in relation to carbon footprints and climate-smart conservation approaches. For instance, air pollution alone is linked to more than 20,000 premature deaths in Kenya every year. To address pollution at the global level various global initiatives have been implemented with the objective of mitigating pollution.

Technological Advancement:

Technology has revolutionized the way people live, work and interact with each other. However, it comes with new challenges and opportunities for the conservation and other aspects.

Post Covid-19 Pandemic & other related health issues:

Since the Covid-19 pandemic destabilized the functionality of many people and economies globally, there is need to invest in research focused on managing and monitoring varied threats from disease causing pathogens linked to climate change and climate extremes before they strike. The HCP will work with government and other actors in strengthening animal disease surveillance systems and also creating awareness among communities and sectors to help address threats to human and environmental health.

Regional Issues

Kenya as part of the African Union (AU) and the East African Community (EAC) shares several trans-boundary natural resources such as lakes, rivers and forests with its neighbors. Cutting across boundaries with different countries and sub-national resources, it is important to promote policies and interventions that provide a win-win situation for all parties and reduces transboundary risks. For example, the great wildebeest migration from and /into Kenya and Tanzania utilizes water and other natures resources that are common between them e.g. the Mara river basin.

Hirola exist and share the Kenya-Somalia boarder, which can be exacerbated by regional insecurity, climate change, and infrastructure development.

Other regional issues include:

Infrastructure Development involving the LAPSSET Corridor or the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport (LAPSSET) corridor project, including the Lokichar-Lamu Crude Oil Pipeline (LLCOP), poses a major risk on wildlife corridors including the endangered hirola.

Climate Change and Drought which is a recurrent crisis within the ASALs of northeast Kenya and south Somalia regions. When droughts are severe and unequally recurring across the region, it causes massive livestock and wildlife losses and tribal conflicts including Water and Pasture Conflict.

Potential Disease Spillover that may be brought about by Livestock-Wildlife Interaction where pastoralists from neighbouring countries in the region share resources with wildlife, leading to disease transmission. Historically, disease outbreaks such as rinderpest, affected livestock and wildlife in most countries.

National/Kenya Issues

Just like at the global and regional levels, Kenya is affected by climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss among other challenges. In particular, frequent and severe weather events like drought and floods have had devastating impacts on agriculture, food & water security, energy, wildlife and livelihoods.

The following are some of key issues affecting Hirola conservation:

Overgrazing and Livestock Competition

In the Hirola rangelands, pastoral and agro-pastoral communities' own large numbers of livestock which share the same water and pasture resources which leads to overgrazing and subsequent land degradation. Livestock compete directly with hirola for resources, leading to degraded pasture. This issue can also escalate and bring community-wildlife conflicts due to competition for water, food and possible poaching.

Massive habitat/land degradation

Between 1980 and 2012, about 300% of the area was affected by tree encroachment which led to over 75% of the hirola's range transforming from open, suitable grasslands to woodland dominated by invasive species, reducing food availability. The extirpation and loss of megaherbivores like elephants is believed to have contributed to increased invasive tree cover.

Historical Predation and Poaching Activities:

One of the consistent issues affecting Hirola and other species is predation by lions and other carnivores which poses a significant threat considering that the current populations of hirola are low. Although poaching has been a threat to hirola, poaching incidences have reduced significantly due to anti-poaching measures in the rangelands.

Droughts and other climate extreme impacts:

Kenya and the Horn of Africa region has experienced more than 10 severe droughts in the last 2 decades with increased frequency in recent years. These and other climate extremes alter rangeland quality and compound the competition for water and food between wildlife, livestock, and people.

Inadequate Protection and Weak Protected Areas

Inadequate protection and weak management of protected areas, community conservancies and wildlife sanctuaries continue to threaten long-term conservation of hirola and other wildlife species within the Kenya–Somalia borderlands. Most hirola populations occur outside formally protected areas, exposing them to habitat degradation, overgrazing, poaching, insecurity, and unsustainable land-use practices. Limited infrastructure, weak governance

systems, and inadequate technical and financial capacity further alter effective conservation management. In response, HCP supports strengthening governance, institutional capacity, ecological monitoring, ranger support systems, and community participation within existing protected areas, conservancies and sanctuaries to improve sustainable conservation outcomes and ecosystem resilience.

Other Challenges:

Potential disease outbreaks due to interactions between environment, livestock and other species have been experienced in the past and can recur. For example, in the 1980s, rinderpest resulted in more than 85% decline in wildlife

Lack of sufficient or limited protected area and regulations in marginalized regions also poses a major challenge due to the financial resources required to provide support infrastructure such as sanctuaries, fencing and others.

Insecurity is an ever-creeping issue affecting the north eastern and hirola range region due to complex socio-economic dynamics of conservation and others aspects.

Cultural Barriers and Remoteness of the area

Cultural barriers and limited integration between local Somali communities and external actors can affect collaboration and implementation of conservation programs within the hirola landscape, particularly in relation to involvement of external experts, researchers, and government agencies. In addition, the remoteness and limited infrastructure within the hirola range continue to affect access, ecological monitoring, security operations, and effective management of protected areas, conservancies and sanctuaries. Socio-economic and trans-boundary issues leading to natural resource conflicts driven by increased demand for pasture and water for livestock.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR HCP

From the analysis, a number of opportunities are potentially available for the Hirola Conservation Program to restore degraded habitats and recovery hirola population. These include the utilization of opportunities such as when the weather conditions are in when the weather conditions are in favour of conservation and local communities' activities. The following are some of the opportunities that can be utilized during the implementation of this strategic plan.

Favourable weather conditions

The arid and semi-arid lands in northern Kenya, just like the rest of the country experience two major rainfall seasons from March-May and October -December. Whereas, severe droughts and occasional fluctuations in the rainfall patterns occur in the region with various impacts on people and the hirola rangelands, there will always be times when the rainfall seasons are good. During favourable rainfall seasons, it will enable us to boost habitat restoration to increase grasslands for hirola, livestock and other wildlife species.

Unique, Unified Local Community relationship with HCP

HCP's strong relationship and long-standing collaboration with local Somali communities within the hirola landscape provides a unique opportunity for successful conservation and habitat restoration. Unlike many conservation areas that experience challenges due to limited community engagement and weak local participation, HCP's community-centred approach enhances trust, local ownership, security, and active participation in restoration and conservation activities. The ability of HCP teams and local conservation leaders to communicate effectively using local languages further strengthens awareness creation, conflict resolution, knowledge sharing, and implementation of restoration initiatives across the hirola rangelands.

Local and international collaborations and support

Due to global nature of conservation for endangered species, HCP has a history of collaborations and partnerships with local and international partners. Their financial and technical support enables the achievement of HCP goals mostly in the short and medium term.

Local communities (rangers, scouts and manual labor) provide security and information through direct involvement in conservation activities. Support from the local communities brings religious leaders, village elders, women and youth groups and schools through participatory

engagements and initiatives. Community conservancy associations also play a critical role in the management of wildlife conservation. Over the years, HCP has also had direct linkages with different international partners through grants and other funding for the HCP Programs.

In this context, HCP will continue leveraging on these mutual relationships that facilitate climate financing to improve rangeland quality through habitat restoration and species recovery which also includes livestock alongside wildlife.

National and County government support

The national and county government provides policy and regulatory support considering that HCP works with departments and agencies such as Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Kenya Forest Service (KFS), Kenya Meteorological Services Authority, National Drought Management Authority and County government. The government also participates in stakeholders' forums and help HCP through advice and direct facilitation such as providing security.

Technological innovation and advancement

Technological innovation including GPS and other tools continues to support the monitoring and mapping of Hirola and other wildlife movements and behaviors including supporting anti-poaching activities. HCP will continue to upgrade its technological innovation to improve conservation across its rangelands. Use of varied models and decision-making tools will enable HCP to improve the quality of habitats, health and other aspects. These will bring about sustainable livelihoods for local communities.

Private sector partnership

HCP partnership with the private sector can enable support for conservation by leveraging corporate funding, innovation, and sustainable practices to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss. HCP would work with private sector to spur eco-tourism and sustainable rangelands management, and public-private collaborations to boost funding for hirola and other species hotspots.

Locally available resources

While land is a major means of production, it is not freely available. HCP has been able to establish sanctuaries and conservancies courtesy of public land and especially community owned land which has enabled the HCP to carry out restoration and other conservation activities.

HCP's Strengths

Technical expertise and professionalism in hirola and other species and rangeland management

Over the years, HCP has developed and enhanced its technical and human resource capacity in line with national and international standards to enable the long-term monitoring, analysis and practical knowledge on Hirola and rangeland management. These capacities are crucial in enabling the achievement of the goals of the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan. These include capacities in habitat restoration, breeding and re-wilding, translocation protocols and techniques, population monitoring, biodiversity and ecosystem, water and climate change, land and livestock management, community and livelihood among other areas. HCP is centered on a community-led, scientifically backed approach which uses landscape-level interventions, including manual tree removal, native grass reseeding, and core-area resting to restore degraded habitats. HCP therefore aims to continuously strengthen its technical and human capacity to ensure the long-term survival of hirola and sustained rangelands. In this context, HCP is gradually developing strong evidence-driven information database and best-practices for conservation success.

Robust Local and Community Based Networks and Collaborations

HCP boasts of a magnanimous and diversified team from the local community in the hirola rangeland. Community leadership, solidarity and connection with our conservation work provides HCP with a solid foundation to achieve its vision and mission in the long-term monitoring and management of the rangelands through indigenous knowledge systems intertwined with nature-based solutions and science driven approaches. Considering that a majority of the communities are pastoralists and depend on the rangeland's expansive resources, working with HCP will increase community ownership and responsibility for conservation action.

Team Building and Results Driven Working Teams

HCP hosts one of the most proficient and competent teams working together for common goal to ensure 100% restoration of the Hirola rangelands and recovery of Hirola and other species, as well as boosting of local community livelihoods. HCP's team of technical experts and support staff works efficiently to achieve its mission and targets and especially to seamlessly achieve the goals of the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan. Previous team works were centered on community-led, science-backed, multi-stakeholder approaches, all of which HCP

wish to continue implementing and improving moving forward.. HCP teams bring together, strong local Somali pastoralists, scouts, rangers, other stakeholders and conservationists to carry out sustainable habitat restoration, efficient anti-poaching, and strong livestock grazing systems that also promote better management of the endangered Hirola antelope.

Good working relationship with national and county government

HCP has been working well with both the national and county government considering that conservation supports the preservation of Kenya's natural environment and species alongside helping Kenya meet its global obligations of Sustainable Development Goals (e.g. SDG 1, 2, 6, 13,15, 17) at the national and county levels and beyond. Government institutions such as KWS and KFS play a major role in anti-poaching, landscape conservation and grasslands regeneration as well as influencing policies and decisions on conservation from the global, regional and national level.

Policy and Legislative Frameworks Supporting and Guiding Conservation at national – regional level

There are various policies and legislations that guide conservation in Kenya and thus aligning with HCP. The notable policies and legislations include:

Bottom-up Economic Transformation Agenda

The Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA) in Kenya is the government blue print for development since 2022. It integrates wildlife conservation by promoting biodiversity as an economic stimulant for local livelihoods, improved foreign exchange, and boosting of tourism (target for tourist arrivals is projected at 5 million by 2027). Under BETA, Key strategies include community-led conservation, eco-tourism development, and addressing human-wildlife conflict to balance biodiversity with economic empowerment. Other related issues addressed under BETA include environment conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, halt and reversal of deforestation, biodiversity loss and land degradation.

Wildlife Conservation and Management Act (2013)

This act is the main legislation that mandates the protection of endangered species (Section 47) and facilitates species recovery plans (Section 49), and guides the enactment and pronouncements of protected areas in Kenya.

Wildlife Policy 2020

This policy also known as Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2020, enables community participation, land-use planning, and the establishment of community wildlife conservancies in Kenya to support the protection of species that do not exist inside formal national parks and reserves. In other words, this policy focuses on all other conservancies and parks that are privately or communally owned and managed in order to support government efforts in conservation.

National Wildlife Strategy 2030

This is a strategy which provides a comprehensive framework that is intended to tackle illegal wildlife trade including poaching and also the management of human-wildlife conflict in the rangelands and promotion of community participation and engagements in wildlife protection and especially conservation.

Species Recovery Plans

These are legal management plans with specific, targeted actions, such as the restoration of the Arawale National Reserve or other conservancies. For HCP, these action plans focus on habitat restoration, community-based protection, and anti-poaching activities. For example, HCP key actions include clearing invasive trees to restore grassland and establishing community conservancies like Ishaqbini.

Constitution of Kenya 2010

Whereas the Constitution of Kenya recognises environmental issues that are articulated in Article 42, 43, 69, 70, and according every citizen a right to a clean and healthy environment and read: and the protection of the environment for the benefit of the present and future generations, Article 69 specifically necessitates the government to ensure sustainable management and conservation of the environment and genetic resources.

Kenya Vision 2030

Kenya's Vision 2030 is the country's blue print which supports actualization of a clean and secure environment for all. The vision recognizes the critical role that the environment sector plays in achieving sustainable development. Vision 2030 provided the basis for the development and enactment of the National Climate change Act (2016). Climate change affects all facets of the society including wildlife species.

East Africa Community Agenda 2050

At the regional scale, the East African Community (EAC) Vision 2050 among other things, underscores the need for sustainable, coordinated wildlife management to ensure that regional biodiversity is protected while advancing economic growth. In addition, the EAC 2050 vision encourages the transforming of the regional countries into an upper-middle-income nations. Among the highlight of the vision, are key strategies geared to harmonizing conservation policies, managing transboundary ecosystems, fighting poaching through intelligence sharing, and the leveraging of infrastructure development with environmental conservation. This fits within the vision and mission of HCP of rangeland restoration and recovery of hirola and other species in Kenya.

Africa Union Agenda 2063

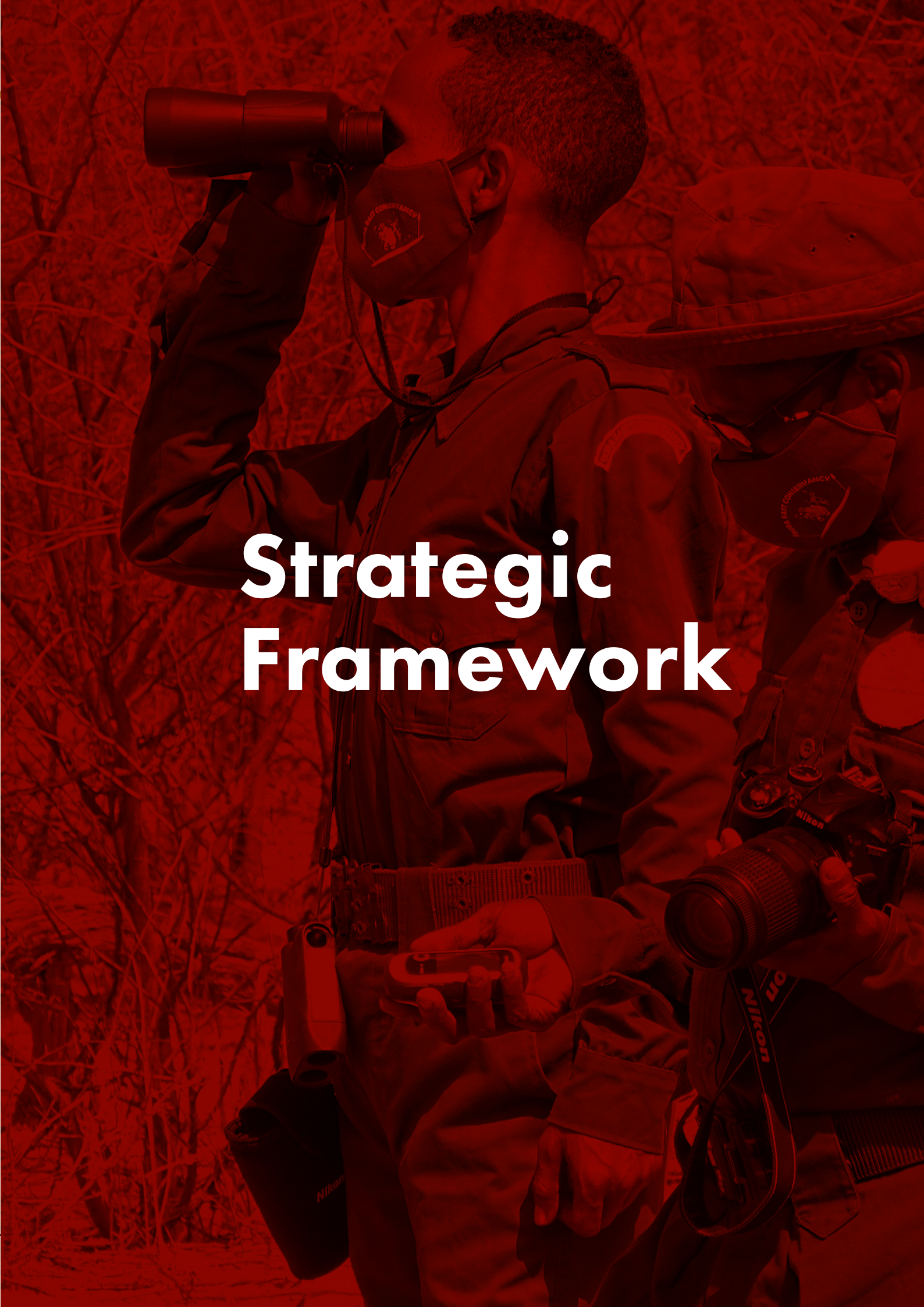
Africa Union Agenda 2063 is aimed at ensuring that all Africa's unique natural resources, ecosystems, biodiversity, and wildlife species are protected, healthy, and valued by 2063. It promotes sustainable wildlife management into socioeconomic development, promoting climate-resilient economies and promoting community-driven conservation initiatives. Some of the key aspects of this Agenda are highlighted in the African Union Wildlife Strategy. Other key aspects for wildlife conservation include:

Aspiration 1 & 7 which reiterates that natural resources are sustainably managed and valued for biodiversity-rich environment. Specifically, the African Union Wildlife Strategy, intends to control illegal trade to ensure wildlife remains a pillar of rural development. Other aspects of the agenda include; protection of biodiversity, policy and governance, and threat mitigation addressing biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution and combating desertification.

Global Policies and Frameworks Supporting Conservation

HCP aligns its conservation work with global policies, frameworks, and organizations that promote biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, habitat restoration, and sustainable development. HCP is a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and supports global biodiversity targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

HCP also contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Its work in ecosystem restoration, sustainable land management, biodiversity protection, and community engagement supports international efforts on climate adaptation and endangered species protection in dryland ecosystems.

A person wearing a dark jacket with a patch on the sleeve and a face mask is looking through binoculars. They are holding a Nikon camera in their left hand and a small electronic device in their right hand. The background is a field of dry grass. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

Strategic Framework

How we demonstrate our values

For more than one decade, the hirola community comprising Somali Pastoralists, Scouts, Rangers and the HCP technical team has been working in Hirola rangelands of Garissa County where hirola occur outside formally protected area. Through these, we (the HCP) have established a strong in-situ Program which we identified as the ultimate solution to curb on-going hirola declines.

The issues affecting hirola and its habitat include degraded landscapes, over-grazing, predation, water scarcity and climate change extremes (drought etc) among others. As a solution to our ten-year restoration project we addressed degradation, by leading the community in the restoration of 10,000 acres of degraded habitat, reversing decades of bush encroachment and regenerating the grasslands critical for hirola survival and sustainability of pastoralist herds.

We did this by: physical cutting, uprooting or breaking of branches to restore grassland on a scale of hundreds of hectares in designated priority areas within the hirola range; planting of native grass seeds on a scale of hundreds of hectares and marshalling community to protect elephants (in the form of anti-poaching squads and enhanced communication between villages).

This was to encourage elephant herds to reside within the community lands and curb tree encroachment. Simultaneously restored areas had the impact of controlling overgrazing especially following the creation of community-owned conservancies spanning over one million acres, including Bura East Conservancy and Ishaqbini Conservancy.

The conservancies provide home to the first Hirola predator-proof sanctuary. These efforts not only benefit the hirola but also other threatened species including Grevy's zebra, reticulated giraffes and several other wildlife that coexist in this unique ecosystem.

Specifically, a team of 30 rangers have been dedicated to the protection of elephants, hirola, giraffes and other wildlife in the rangeland working together with our scouts and other agencies to ensure all security/poaching incidents in the entire range are monitored collectively between government and local groups. This created a collaborative approach to security incidents concerning human-livestock-wildlife interactions.

Thanks to all these initiatives and our team, plus the communities and the values we embrace which enabled us improve the rangeland and hirola population in line with our values centered on community, hirola protection, passion, research and other values.



In saving the worlds most endangered antelope, the local communities have always expressed strong support for heightened conservation, and protection of not only hirola but the elephants and other wildlife. They always say since it aligns with their cultural beliefs, passion and respect for nature, then it becomes their cardinal duty and responsibility to ensure they keep them and their habitat a safe place.



Value Proposition

Central to the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan, the Hirola Conservation Programme (HCP) pushes for the long-term recovery of the critically endangered hirola antelope, whose population currently stands at fewer than 500 individuals within the eastern rangelands of Kenya and along the Kenya–Somalia border. There is urgent need for restoration of this rangeland ecosystem through Somali community-led, science-driven approaches and technological innovations. Analysis of long-term satellite imagery across the hirola’s native range revealed nearly 300% increase in tree cover over the last 27 years, significantly hampering hirola recovery and grassland restoration.

HCP conducted large-scale experiments to guide strategies for hirola reintroductions and establish some of the demographic and ecological drivers impacting hirola survival and recovery. Among other findings, the programme uncovered mechanisms suppressing hirola recovery through resource selection, habitat degradation, and landscape changes. Alongside these factors, climate change extremes continue to pose major threats to species recovery and ecosystem sustainability.

On this basis, HCP focuses on socially and culturally inclusive community-led, “One Health,” and science-driven approaches to restore degraded land, support hirola recovery, improve livelihoods, and reduce human-wildlife conflict.



The technical capacities of HCP teams and expertise have enabled better understanding of the underlying dynamics and processes driving hirola population declines, habitat degradation, and restoration challenges.

From lessons learnt since the start of conservation efforts, and from gaps and barriers identified within the hirola landscape, HCP continues to improve existing systems and accelerate innovative approaches comprising AI, GIS, remote sensing, and other scientific tools interfaced with community-driven conservation, nature-based solutions, and indigenous knowledge systems. HCP also intends to strengthen and expand restoration efforts into the Somali side of the hirola rangeland through cross-border interventions, partnerships, and governance approaches recognizing that the hirola ecosystem extends beyond Kenya and requires collaborative transboundary conservation efforts.

Our value proposition therefore seeks to achieve the following key aspects:

- Preventing irretrievable biodiversity loss including preventing hirola extinction and strengthening large-scale habitat restoration through reduction of tree encroachment, bush clearing, reseedling of native grasses, ecological monitoring, and restoration of degraded rangelands to achieve sustainable ecological impact.
- Empowering local communities through conservation leadership, local and indigenous knowledge systems, improved livelihoods and employment opportunities including scouts, rangers, conservationists and tour guides, while strengthening conservation education through the Hirola Wildlife Education Centre and reducing human-wildlife conflict and disaster risks through the “One Health” approach integrating wildlife, livestock, ecosystem and community wellbeing.

This will ensure ecological, social and environmental impacts are achieved for HCP, hirola, and local communities across the broader Kenya–Somalia rangeland ecosystem.

Theory of Change

Longterm Goal/Impact for HCP

Prevent the extinction of Hirola and establish strong and sustainable and robust population in its native range of eastern Kenya.

OUTCOMES

Habitat and Ecological Restoration:

1. Curbed and reversed invasive tree encroachment through reduced woody cover and grassland cover in the Ijara and Fafi sub-regions in Kenya.
2. Improved survival and population growth rates of more than 30% of the baseline by enhancing higher survival of the newborn and through improved nutrition within predator-proof sanctuaries.
3. Accelerated and increased rangeland quality through improved forage availability open access to sub-optimal areas by hirola.
4. Effective establishment of new and viable hirola herds dependent on newly restored or protected, predator-managed habitats

Community and Social Stability:

1. Sustainable involvement of local Somali community in Range Management through active participation rangeland restoration activities including manual removal of trees and other measures
2. Minimized Conflicts between Local Community and Wildlife due to structured mitigation of competition between livestock and other species through planned grazing patterns that allow coexistence with pastoralists
3. Improved local technical and other support capacities with strengthened community knowledge and skills on conservation management

Improved Institutional and Strategic Orientation:

1. Establishment and Implementation of a Hirola Recovery Strategy for medium and long-term (>20 years) which outlines a phased plan for the long-term survival of Hirola.
2. Highly Advanced Anti-Poaching Enforcement using modern technology to increase surveillance and security and leading to zero or reduced poaching of hirola and elephants
3. Improved coordination and collaborations between the local community, HCP and the county government on conservation of Hirola and local tourism, leading too improved income, employment and livelihoods

Other Outcomes

Reversing by 85%, the population decline of Hirola that occurred over the last several decades.

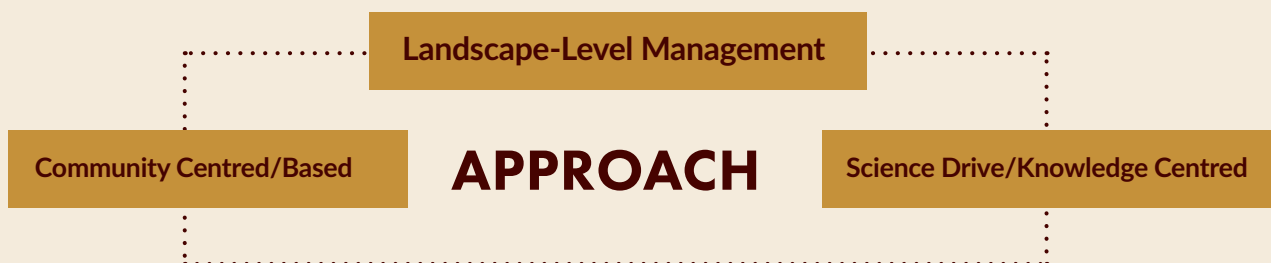
Core habitat areas established and hirola re-occupy their historical range with the impact of improved socio-economic status of local pastoralists.

Maintain and expand predator-proof sanctuaries, like the one at Ishaqbini, which has proven successful in increasing populations, to act as a source for reintroducing animals back into the wild

Consolidated Community-Based Conservation, where local Somali communities benefit from and lead conservation efforts including employment as rangers, scouts and guides, access to water (boreholes) etc.

Strengthened organisation operations and management of conservation work through improved policy and regulatory guidelines on endangered species

Reverse more than 300% increase in tree cover and transform the rangeland to a more productive and sustainable savanna/grassland habitat for hirola, livestock and other wildlife species



Objectives

Main Objective

The main objective of the Hirola Conservation Program is to protect and increase the population and distribution of the critically endangered hirola antelope (*Beatragus hunteri*) in eastern Kenya through participatory community-based conservation, science-driven research, and habitat restoration.

Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives for HCP implements its mission which will be achieved in the five-year plan period (2024-2028) within the framework of its constitution. HCP's strategic plan will be centred on five strategic objectives.

Strategic Objective 1: Protection and Increasing of Hirola Population

This objective will be implemented through several activities namely:

- With establishment of Ishaqbini Hirola Sanctuary in 2012–2013 on community land, the predator-free environment (Predator-Proof Sanctuary) with an original population of 48 individuals, the HCP has grown the numbers and will strengthen the safety and protection of hirola by improving the quality of pasture and reproduction and survival rates during the strategic plan period
- HCP will upscale population monitoring and research through conducting continuous surveillance, both aerial and ground surveys, and track population demographics (birth rates, health) using GPS satellite collars and other tools
- Overall, this objective will prevent the possibility of extinction of the hirola through enhanced protection, increasing hirola population, and increasing their species distribution through community-based Programs.



Strategic Objective 2: Landscape Level Habitat Restoration for Hirola

This objective will be hinged on continuing improved efforts within the ten-year Programs to reverse the 300% increase in tree cover. Activities include;

- Increase community participation to upscale manual tree removal to bridge the gap of more than 250% increase in invasive tree cover,
- Carry out more grassland reseeding of utmost 10,000 hectares of land with native grass species preferred by hirola
- Establish water points through maintaining boreholes or water pans for water within sanctuaries and thus reducing the need for hirola to travel to degraded areas,
- Enhance restoration of Arawale National Reserve to revitalize habitat quality, enhance protection and benefits for wildlife and community to improve livelihoods and reduce conflicts.



Strategic Objective 3: Community-Based Conservation and Livelihoods

This objective is hinged on ensuring conservation is community centred in order to ensure increased local community ownership and improved livelihoods.

Activities include;

- Increase by 20% the number of pastoralists supporting and participating in HCP restoration Programs and activities.
- Increase engagement of local community in the “Herders for Hirola” program by training Somali pastoralists in wildlife ecology and conservation. This will enable herders monitor and provide information on hirola sightings mostly outside the formal conservation areas, and also raising awareness among their neighbors.

- Carry out livestock support and vaccination among pastoralists communities to build rapport for conservation programs at the community level, with targeted treatment of a population of more than 100,000 livestock to reduce disease transmission between livestock and wildlife species
- Carry out employment of the local community members as rangers, research assistants, and range restoration technicians, through a formal HCP capacity building Program to boost income and livelihoods of the community. We hope to increase employment by 5-20% during the strategic plan period
- Promote alternative livelihoods program by training the local community on market-based skills, such as tour guides, tailoring, and entrepreneur skills
- Promote community participation in nature-based bio-enterprises including biochar entrepreneurship, beekeeping, wood chip management, grass seed harvesting, sustainable briquette production and other nature-based livelihood initiatives that support habitat restoration, climate resilience and improved local livelihoods.



Strategic Objective 4: Anti-Poaching and Security

This objective intends to strengthen anti-poaching surveillance and wildlife and community security in the hirola rangelands. Activities targeted include:

- Increase community scout daily patrols through additional rangers to complement current 30+ rangers. HCP will enhance trainings on patrols, monitoring and detection of threats, removal of all forms of snares, and arresting people involved in illegal activities in the rangelands

- HCP will update/upgrade its technology on tracking of ranger movements, poaching and real time monitoring and identification of hotspots of poaching and logging areas
- Enhance collaborations and partnerships with the KWS to jointly implement anti-poaching activities and related issues

Strategic Objective 5: Research and Monitoring

Research and science-driven approaches are at the centre of hirola conservation. Activities to address this objective include:

- Collect and analyse data from use of GPS Telemetry, Satellite imagery and other tools especially from collars for tracking animal movement, habitat identification and selection and analysis of other range information in the hirola rangeland
- Enhance breeding and monitoring of hirola population indicators including birth rates and herd demographics and health to enable achievement of stable populations
- Conduct quarterly habitat assessments to identify and quantify habitat degradation, tree /bush encroachment of invasive species like *Acacia reficiens* and *Prosopis juliflora* across the hirola
- HCP will enhance research on animal diseases through the One Health Approach including zoonotic and other diseases as well as surveillance of wildlife, livestock and people to minimize disease outbreaks.
- Conduct quarterly or other phased surveys and assessments of community perceptions and needs related with range restoration and hirola recovery alongside livelihoods and related information. The assessments will also include that of other stakeholders and government actors, in order to ensure a holistic approach to hirola conservation.



Leadership Survey Questions and Responses received

The partnerships with the stakeholders have helped HCP achieve its goals and strategic objectives especially in organizing and supporting the Programs, meetings, field visits, workshops, and technical and strategic planning among other things.

1. What is your perspective on the current approach used in community-based conservation?

Community-based conservation has played an important role in protecting wildlife and promoting local participation in conservation activities. The approach has helped increase awareness among local communities and improved cooperation between conservation organizations and residents. However, there is still a need for stronger community empowerment, better benefit-sharing mechanisms, and increased involvement of local people in decision-making processes to ensure sustainability.

2. On conservation, do you feel that the current investment in hirola conservation is a good use of funds and resources?

Yes, investment in hirola conservation is justified because the hirola is one of the world's most endangered antelope species. Protecting the species also helps conserve its ecosystem and other wildlife within the same habitat. However, conservation funding should be balanced with investments in community development, habitat restoration, research, and anti-poaching measures to achieve long-term success.

3. In your opinion, what environmental or other factors do you think drive hirola habitat degradation, selection, and movement?

Several factors contribute to hirola habitat degradation and movement, including prolonged drought, climate change, overgrazing by livestock, human settlement expansion, invasive plant species, and habitat fragmentation. Competition for water and pasture also influences hirola movement patterns as they search for suitable feeding and breeding areas.

4. What do you feel is the progress made in the restoration of hirola range and population recovery since the establishment of HCP and restoration of Arawale National Reserve?

There has been notable progress since the establishment of conservation initiatives such as the Hirola Conservation Programme (HCP) and the restoration of Arawale National Reserve. Awareness about hirola conservation has increased, habitat restoration efforts have improved some areas, and monitoring systems have become more effective. Although population recovery remains slow, these initiatives have created a stronger foundation for future conservation success.

5. What, in your opinion, are the critical gaps hindering recovery of hirola?

Some of the major gaps include inadequate funding, limited research data, insecurity in some conservation areas, habitat degradation, weak enforcement of conservation policies, and insufficient community incentives. Additionally, climate change and disease outbreaks continue to pose significant threats to hirola recovery.

6. Do you think the current approaches to conservation of hirola and other species are adequate in increasing the population of the hirola?

Current approaches have contributed positively, but they may not be fully adequate to ensure significant population growth. More integrated conservation strategies are needed, including improved habitat management, stronger partnerships with local communities, enhanced security measures, and increased scientific research to guide conservation planning.

7. In the context of the various challenges facing hirola conservation currently, what strategies or measures should be used to address the challenges?

Key strategies should include strengthening community participation, increasing conservation funding, restoring degraded habitats, improving anti-poaching initiatives, expanding research and monitoring programs, and promoting sustainable grazing practices. Education and awareness campaigns should also be enhanced to encourage local support for conservation efforts.

8. What, in your view, is the long-term solution to hirola conservation?

The long-term solution lies in creating a sustainable conservation model that combines habitat protection, strong community involvement, scientific management, and government support. Long-term conservation success will also depend on addressing climate change impacts, reducing human-wildlife conflict, and ensuring that local communities benefit directly from conservation initiatives.

Community Survey Questions

This survey aimed at assessing the perceptions of the local community and leadership regarding Hirola (*Beatragus hunteri*) conservation with the aim to obtain information that can guide the formulation and development of the strategic plan 2024-2028. The questions revolve around rangeland management, hirola and other species recovery, socially acceptable strategies on habitat restoration, among others. The following gives one example and responses of a participant during the field survey.

1. Where do you reside in Garissa and are you aware about Hirola antelope?

ANSWERS: I reside in Garissa County and yes, I am aware of the Hirola antelope. It is one of the common species we see in the region and is important to our ecosystem.

2. In your opinion what is the most significant threats to hirola and livestock in your region?

ANSWERS: The main threats to hirola and livestock are drought and the reduction of quality grazing land. Drought makes water and grass scarce, while bush encroachment reduces the quality and availability of pasture for animals to feed on.

3. As a resident of Garissa, what is your perspective on conservation of hirola antelope?

ANSWERS: Hirola conservation is important because the species is not common and part of our natural heritage. Protecting hirola also helps preserve grasslands and supports biodiversity in the area.

4. Do you feel that the local community are sufficiently engaged in the management of the hirola conservation efforts?

ANSWERS: We are involved to some extent, but more engagement and awareness programs are still needed to ensure communities actively participate in conservation efforts.

5. Increased tree cover is a major threat to the grazing-dependent hirola. How do you think the problem should be solved?

ANSWERS: The problem can be solved through cutting invasive trees and planting more grasses.

6. Have you participated or wish to participate in manual bush clearing to restore grasslands for hirola and livestock?

ANSWERS: Yes, I would be willing to participate in manual bush clearing because it can help improve grazing areas for both livestock and hirola.

7. Historically, among the local pastoralists, bush burning was used to reduce tree cover especially during dry seasons. Do you support or oppose the use of controlled burns to reduce tree cover and why?

ANSWERS: I support controlled burns if they are properly managed because they can help reduce excessive tree cover, restore grasslands, and improve grazing conditions.

8. Community based conservancies (CBCs) have been promoted as part of solutions to habitat degradation, climate change and other threats facing Hirola. What is your perspective regarding CBCs in protecting hirola and its habitat?

ANSWERS: Community based conservancies are important because they encourage local participation in conservation, help protect habitats, and support sustainable management of natural resources.

9. What would you like to be done to ensure there are no human-wildlife conflict during rangeland restoration?

ANSWERS: There should be proper community involvement, awareness programs, fair resource sharing, and restoration planning that benefits both wildlife and local pastoralists.

10. In light of your response to question 8, would you support grass reseeded efforts to improve grass cover for livestock and hirola grazing?

ANSWERS: Yes, I support grass reseeded efforts because they can improve pasture availability, restore degraded land, and reduce competition between livestock and wildlife.

11. How do you think your livelihood has been affected by reduced open grasslands?

ANSWERS: Reduced open grasslands have negatively affected livestock grazing, reduced pasture availability, and made it more difficult for our communities to sustain their livelihoods.

Hirola Conservation Program

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