

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE MAASAI MARA, KENYA



According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS), 45% of women aged between 15 and 49 have experienced physical violence, and 14% have experienced sexual violence. Reports indicate that about 47% of women have experienced either physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Narok county has 51% of the girls going through FGM and 28% teenage pregnancy.

Gender norms and practices within the Maasai culture contribute to disparities, particularly in land ownership and inheritance customs that favor men. This poses challenges for women, especially those heading households, in terms of accessing and owning land. Land access is crucial for preserving traditional Maasai practices and biodiversity. In the Maasai Mara region, [private conservancies](#) are established collaborations involving local communities, private landowners, and conservation organizations, aiming to protect wildlife, natural habitats, and manage resources sustainably. However, despite tourism being the primary economic activity, Maasai women are notably absent from leadership positions, hindering their representation and the acknowledgment of their challenges.

The aim of this project has been to empower women and youth in the Mara landscape, to ensure their rights are recognized and their position in society and within the families are strengthened. This has been achieved through improved participation in decision making processes, the creation of economic benefits, and empowerment and strengthened self-confidence through the Women in Leadership program.

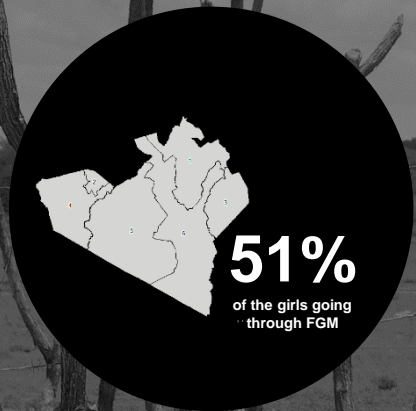


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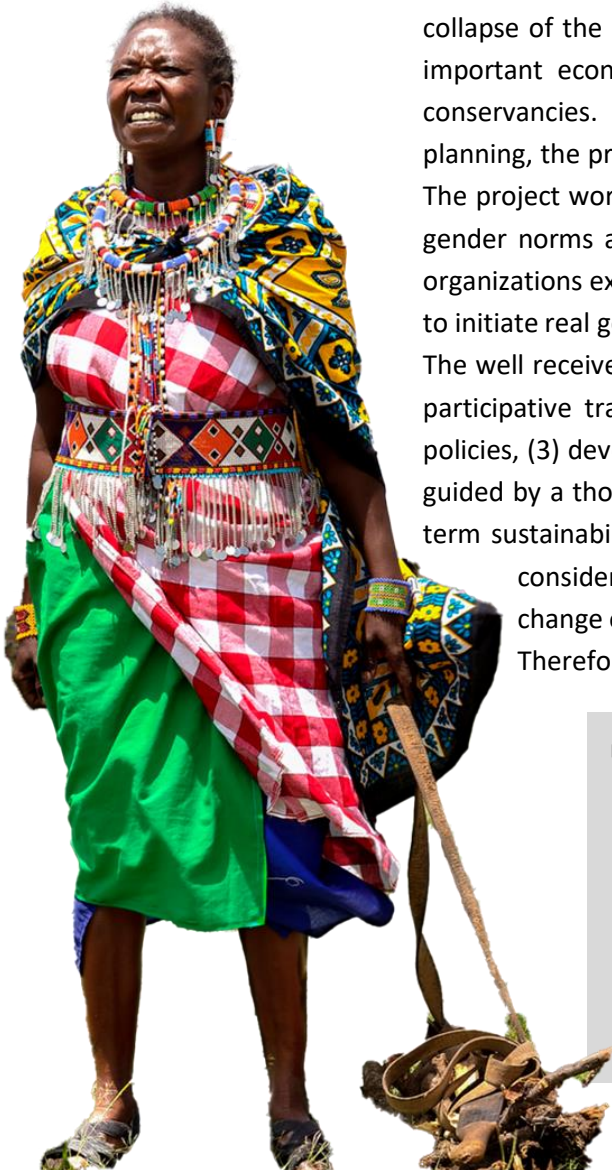
I am truly grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the Women in Leadership Council, providing a profound platform to address advocacy gaps and combat issues like Female Genital Mutilation, Sexual Harassment, and Gender-Based Violence, with a commitment to creating a safer and more inclusive environment for women and girls in our community

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Jennifer Saingeu - Women in Leadership Council member, Naikara village



GENDER AS A QUALITY FEATURE OF OUR WORK



The BMZ funded project ‘COVID-19 emergency support for wildlife conservancies in the Maasai Mara Region’ (PN: 20.2292.9), aimed to stabilize the income of 16 wildlife conservancies in the Maasai Mara region, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the collapse of the international tourism. Tourism is the key economic pillar for wildlife conservancies in Kenya and the second most important economic sector in Kenya. The project (GG-1) sought to enhance inclusive governance in these male-dominated conservancies. Recognizing the potential positive impacts on social rights, such as access to education, healthcare, and family planning, the project focused on promoting the empowerment of women and young people through gender transformative actions. The project worked closely with the [Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservation Association \(MMWCA\)](#) and [The Maa Trust \(TMT\)](#) to change gender norms and strengthen the voices and position of women and youth in decision making processes. Work done with both organizations exceeded the requirements of the offer to BMZ - the GIZ team recognized early on the importance ‘to go an extra mile’ to initiate real gender transformative processes in the Mara as otherwise the long-term future of the landscape is at risk. The well received approach followed included for each organization (1) strengthening of gender capacities of partner organizations: participative trainings and capacity building, (2) participatory development of comprehensive gender and youth strategies and policies, (3) development of gender responsive approaches and activities for implementation and mainstreaming. The approach was guided by a thorough examination of existing gender-specific roles, with the integration of young people seen as vital for the long-term sustainability of the conservancy business model. Considering the short actual project duration of 2.5 years, the results are considerable. However, the team felt this falls short of real impact on the ground and wanted to strive for more fundamental change on the ground, and at the same time challenge persistent gender norms on the ground. Therefore, more had to be done...

“ Gender aspects were pursued far beyond what was foreseen in the proposal; on the GIZ team's own initiative, the aspect of diversifying the income opportunities of the local population was linked to strengthening the role of local women, and a small part of the resources was used on their own initiative to launch a "Women in Leadership" initiative, the initial successes of which I was able to see for myself. From my point of view, this proves that in most (if not all) projects, the issue of gender equality can be successfully addressed if it is approached with sufficient commitment, creativity and seriousness (and not as box-checking). ”

Daniel Guenther - Head of Development Cooperation, German Embassy to Kenya

INTERVENTIONS

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Maasai women's underrepresentation in leadership roles (e.g., member of conservancy board, landowners' groups, etc.) in the Maasai Mara prompted GIZ, in collaboration with a local NGO called *The Maa Trust*, to establish the Women's Leadership Council. Comprising 25 local women selected for their leadership potential, the council empowers women by ensuring a diverse representation in terms of age, clans, and geographic areas. The initiative also includes the formation of a Girls' Leadership Council for those under 18, recognizing and nurturing leadership potential at a younger age. The Women and Girls in Leadership initiative empowers Maasai women in the Mara region, incorporating Maasai culture into the council's structure and addressing practical needs, such as childcare, while raising awareness among husbands about the new roles undertaken by their wives.

Results so far are staggering; women have created their *save space* to discuss ideas and challenges, and far more relevant, strengthened their self-confidence. These women and girls are now standing up for their rights and ideas and do not shy away to convey these messages publicly. This dynamic has also reignited the Women Fora under MMWCA; these used to platforms for selected women of influential husbands ('*Window Dressing for Donors*') without meaningful impact. With the Women's Leadership Council in place, women start to speak out in these fora and advocate for women's concerns.

IMPLEMENTING FEMINIST CORE PRINCIPLES

The overarching objective of the gender equity initiative in the Maasai Mara landscape was to reduce gender inequalities and empower women by addressing challenges related to livelihood opportunities, resources, and skills. This was achieved through initiatives such as training Maasai women in enterprises like beekeeping/honey value addition, mushroom and soap production, connecting them to markets, and providing business skills through the *Street Business School* mentorship model. The project recognized that gender disparities were influenced by various factors across multiple sectors, including conservation, education, healthcare, and human rights, and adopted an intersectional approach to understand the complex interactions among these sectors and their impact on gender equality. Acknowledging challenges faced by girls, such as cultural norms and early marriages, an



Image: Nick Spollin Photographer UK

understanding of intersectionality. The project team also recognized gender norms and power relations as influential determinants of gender inequality, emphasizing the need to confront broader societal and systemic factors perpetuating gender disparities in the Maasai Mara landscape.

The Cooperation with both, MMWCA and TMT on gender fell on fruitful ground and has been embraced. Especially TMT has observed a strong boost in terms of gender empowerment and has advanced the implementation of the gender action plan that was developed with support by GIZ.



Empowering women through capacity building on gender mainstreaming, access to resources and skills to accelerate employability and job creation for economic empowerment.

→ Resources

Strengthening gender responsive governance and leadership by ensuring women's participation in decision making processes of conservancies and all levels.

→ Representation



Promote gender responsive and inclusive culture and working environment that is free from gender-based violation and support alternative rights of passage instead of FGM.

→ Rights



The success factors in addressing and mitigating gender norms and inequalities in the Mara landscape included

1. **Inclusive Advocacy and Collaboration**: Working with both men and women as advocates for women's empowerment and gender equality, along with local organizations, brought about collaborative approach that engaged diverse stakeholders in addressing harmful social and cultural norms.
2. **Male Engagement Training**: Conducting "training the trainer" sessions for male champions on gender equality was a successful approach. This training aimed at empowering men to become advocates and leaders in promoting women's rights and empowerment within their communities.
3. **Women and Girls in Leadership Initiatives**: The initiative that brought women from various backgrounds and social standings together created a platform for them to express their challenges and perspectives. This fostered confidence among women and provided a space for their voices to be heard.
4. **Gender-Transformative Dialogue**: Facilitating dialogue sessions within households to reflect on key gender norms and power relations proved to be another successful strategy. These discussions emphasized the importance of gender equality in both social and economic development, aiming to transform and challenge existing norms.

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