

# TEN Morans

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Roshni Lodhia | TNC

*In 2018, we brought you #10women - ten stories from ten inspirational women working to end conflict in their communities, protect wildlife in their conservancies, and start businesses to support their families. In 2019, we bring you #10morans - ten stories from ten young warriors in community conservancies who have moved away from conflict and started new businesses, become peace ambassadors conservation champions. These young men, typically the most likely to be involved in frontline conflict and historically the least engaged in conservancy activities, are now influencing positive change among their peers and in their communities. Their outstanding work is supported by NRT 's many valuable partners, principally USAID, DANIDA, The Nature Conservancy and the EU.*



EMBASSY OF DENMARK  
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**“I am proud to be an employer and to have many sources of income. These days, we’re realising that you have to put your money in different places, so you always have something to rely on”**



Motorbike operator, Marsabit.

## Mbau Lekulamahau

Mbau Lekulamahau is a motorbike operator and businessman from Laisamis, Marsabit County. Mbau is one of the 500 morans (correct Jan 19) from community conservancies currently in NRT Trading’s Nabuulu Empowerment SACCO (Savings and Credit Cooperative), which offers basic financial literacy training to conservancy members, as well as a platform for savings and loans.

“Before joining the SACCO, I would make money from the sale of my livestock, but I could never account for where it went,” says Mbau. “Through Nabuulu, I learnt about saving. Now when I make good income from my business, I save it [in the cooperative]. We can save as often as we like and even save amounts as little as Ksh. 100... little by little it adds up.”

Once he’d saved enough, Mbau qualified for a loan. He bought an additional motorbike for his taxi business, and opened a small shop. Diversifying his sources of income has enabled him to reduce his reliance on livestock, and provide employment. “I am proud to be an employer and to have many sources of income,” he says. “These days, as young men, we’re realising that you have to put your money in different places, so that if one fails, you always have something to rely on.”

Mbau has since paid off his loan, and looks forward to accessing more capital in future to expand his businesses. He has also become an ambassador for the SACCO. “Since my fellow morans have seen my success, they keep asking me how they can join and I am more than happy to show them how.”

**“My life has been different this year. I was able to take two of my children to secondary school and remain with enough money for our expenses as well as my farming business. This is something that has never happened before!”**



**Said Hiyesa**

Farmer and entrepreneur, Lower Tana Delta Conservancy, Coast.

Like many in his village, Said has always grown rice, bananas, and coconuts. But for the past few years he has struggled with an unreliable crop, which has left him making some tough decisions. Choosing just one of his children to go to school, for example, or decide between paying an urgent medical bill or transporting crops to market. Without consistent access to water and capital for his farming expenses, Said was struggling. Then in 2019, his community conservancy (Lower Tana) started a micro-loan scheme.

Said mobilised a self-help group of 33 farmers to apply for the loans, which they were awarded after attending financial literacy classes run by NRT Trading. The loans enabled farmers to purchase water tanks and fertiliser to increase their yield, but the training had also given Said another business idea. With the remainder of his loan, he bought rice and coconuts from other farmers who couldn't transport them in time, and sold them in markets outside his home area. This prevented good crops rotting on farms, and ensured his fellow farmers still made a profit.

As a result of his mobilising effort, not only did farmers have a better harvest, but Said's community was the first in the NRT Coast region to fully pay off their micro-loans. Said has since been appointed the best 'Community Enterprise Agent' for his positive influence and spirit.

“My life has been different this past year,” he says. “I was able to take two of my children to secondary school and remain with enough money for our expenses as well as my farming business. This is something that has never happened before!”

**“Running my own business has given me a lot of focus. Most young men... do not have much to occupy their time, and this puts them in a position to be influenced into harmful activities. Now more than ever, they need opportunities such as these.”**



**Paramasie Lesanang'i**

Mechanic and Entrepreneur, Ol Donyiro Conservancy, Isiolo.

For as long as he can recall, Paramasie has had a passion for motorbikes. “Nobody taught me about motorbikes or how to repair them, I just developed an interest and became very good at it. In my home area, I was known among my fellow morans as the one who could fix any motorbike problem.” But Paramasie never dreamed he would one day make a living doing what he loved, after all, he assumed he’d never be eligible for a business loan. For many years, he had casual low-paying jobs - which left him discouraged and worried about his future.

Then he found out about Ol Donyiro Conservancy’s microcredit programme. “I heard about loans being given out through our community conservancy and applied. I was surprised to find out that the conditions were favourable and that I did not need to have any property to apply, just the backing of the conservancy.”

With the capital, Paramasie started a motor-bike repair shop - enabling him to do what he loves and fill a gap in the market. “People no longer have to send to faraway towns for spare-parts, they can now get parts and repairs right here in our town, saving a lot of time and money,” he says.

Paramasie now views enterprise as a force for positive change. “Running my own business has given me a lot of focus, I am no longer idle, and my mind is focused on how I can expand my business,” he says. “Most young men do not have much to occupy their time, and this puts them in a position to be influenced into harmful activities that endanger their lives and those of others. Now more than ever, they need opportunities such as these.”

**“Being able to provide a home in our community for these elephant calves who would otherwise not survive by themselves is a great source of pride for us.”**



## **Talone Leshalote**

Elephant Caregiver at the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary, Samburu.

A few years ago his job was inconceivable in his home area. Today, he couldn't imagine doing anything else. Talone Leshalote is an elephant caregiver at the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary, the first community-owned elephant sanctuary in East Africa. Reteti rescued orphaned and abandoned elephant calves from in and around community conservancies, with an aim to release them back into the wild when they are fit and healthy.

As one of the Sanctuary's five milk mixers, Talone helps make 112 bottles of milk every day for the 14 elephants in his team's care. Each calf needs to be fed every three hours, with a special blend of milk powder and supplements. This means many early mornings and late nights for Talone and his colleagues, but he doesn't mind. "Knowing that the milk helps the young elephants grow and become stronger is what keeps us going," he says. He is especially fond of Kikwar, a young female elephant who he helped rescue from a water well, and who is now thriving at Reteti.

Talone says he's seen a change in the way his community see elephants over the past few years, and plays an active role in raising awareness about human-wildlife co-existence in his home area of Ngilai, which is prone to human-elephant conflict. "Now, the community is always quick to let us know when they come across an abandoned or lone elephant calf," he says. "Being able to provide a home in our community for these calves who would otherwise not survive by themselves is a great source of pride for us."

**“When I became a ranger, I learned a lot and gained a passion for conservation.”**



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**Mahadh Bwana**

Marine Scout, Pate Island, Coast

Like his forefathers, Mahadh has spent his whole life on the ocean. Becoming a fisherman was the obvious path for him – fishing is the main livelihood of his community, his family, and it was all he knew.

Then a few years ago, his conservancy - Pate Island - started to establish Beach Management Units (BMUs), a collaborative governance structure that encourages a more sustainable approach to fisheries management. Mahadh was voted to represent his local group of fishermen in the BMU for their area. “I wasn’t expecting to become so involved,” he laughs. But he did, and it wasn’t long before Mahadh was approached by Conservancy management and asked if he’d consider becoming a marine scout.

“When I became a ranger, I learned a lot and gained a passion for conservation,” he says.

Mahadh now works to promote sustainable fishing methods and marine conservation. Part of his job is to record and monitor marine life, collecting data that helps inform conservation decisions. Thanks to Mahadh and his fellow rangers, Pate is leading the way for indigenous-led marine conservation.

At the end of 2017, Pate became one of the first community conservancies to establish Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs) - protected sites aimed at securing fish breeding grounds for more sustainable fisheries. Mahadh and his team also work to raise awareness about the consequences of illegal mangrove logging and turtle poaching.

**"I now know the importance of getting a formal education, I did not have that chance but I will keep on championing for parents within our conservancy to take their children to school since [their children] will be future forces of change within our community."**



## **Moses Domoyang'**

Scout and champion for education,  
Pellow Conservancy, West Pokot.

Moses has no formal education. Like so many children born into pastoralist families in his area, school was never an option. "When I was young, going to school was not as important as herding my family's livestock," he says. "I therefore missed the greatest opportunity I wished to have."

The 25-year old spent much of his teenage years following the rains with his livestock. He admits to being involved in fierce fights over resources and cattle during this time, some of which resulted in tragedy – he has lost friends to conflict, and thinks that limited job prospects outside of livestock is a driving factor in the escalation of violence for many young men.

In 2015, Pellow Community Conservancy was formed in West Pokot. On a whim, Moses applied for a job as a conservancy scout, and got it. "My life turned around when I became a ranger," he says.

Regular duties for Moses and his team involve wildlife patrols, supporting peace efforts, and gathering data on key species. In his spare time however, Moses visits villages in and around the Conservancy to promote another cause close to his heart - education. Organising meetings with women and young warriors, Moses shares his story, imploring families to think carefully about choosing not to send their children to school.

"Some parents from remote areas are still putting pressure on their children to stay back at home to help them with daily household chores," he says. "This is why I have decided to go round persuading them to let their children go to school to allow them to forge their own pathways in life. I now know the importance of getting a formal education, I did not have that chance but I will keep on championing for parents within our conservancy to take their children to school since they will be future forces of change within our community."



**“I want other young men to know that there is another way of earning a living apart from livestock. Raiding and killing each other while herding is no way to live.”**



Farmer and Community Scout,  
Ruko, Baringo.

## Kevin Lesita

Kevin Lesita is a young moran from Ruko Community Conservancy, on the shores of Lake Baringo. In 2009, Kevin lost 16 of his 36 cattle in a drought. His herd was his family's sole income stream, and a huge part of his identity as a young man. He was faced with the prospect of losing more livestock, and even his own life, if he took his herd farther afield in search of what little pasture there was left, as competition for grazing in dry times is fierce.

“I decided to try farming,” says Kevin, “a decision I have never regretted.” He planted maize, and harvested 20 sacks in his first season. Kevin also applied for a job as a scout at Ruko, and got it. Now with a full-time job, he farms and tends a small herd of livestock in his spare time. Kevin says the reliable income is a great relief.

“I can sustain my family and send my children to better schools. Before when I used to purely rely on livestock as a source of income, I wasn't sure if I could return with the animals in the evening since cattle theft was so common,” he says.

Kevin is now passionate about encouraging other young men to diversify their income streams, both as a way of promoting a more sustainable economy and as a way of building peace. Livestock raids between pastoralists, especially during times of scarce grazing, has had a devastating impact on his community. On his patrols, Kevin takes the time to talk to his age-mates and share his story, in the hopes that he can inspire more pastoralists to explore other businesses.

“I want other young men to know that there is another way of earning a living apart from livestock,” he says, “raiding and killing each other while herding is no way to live.”

**"I am able to get through to these young men because I have been exactly where they are. Most of them are looking for a way out, just like I was."**



## Lekopir Lkumban

Peace Ambassador, Melako Conservancy, Marsabit.

"A few years ago, I could not show my face around my home area because of the crimes I'd committed. Today, I am a peace ambassador and business man, helping other young men caught up in crime transition into making an honest living," says Lekopir Lkumban, a Peace Ambassador in Melako Community Conservancy.

For over 12 years, Lekopir made a living from road banditry and cattle rustling. Caught up in relentless conflict cycles and desperate to pay his bills, he saw no other way to earn money, and no way out. "It was not a good life, I was tired of feeling like a target was on my back," he says. "I was told the Conservancy Warden was looking for me and I hid because I thought he wanted to hand me over to the police."

But Melako Community Conservancy Warden, Robert Dokhole, did not want to arrest Lekopir. He wanted to help him turn his life around. For two years Robert tried to convince Lekopir to meet with him, until eventually Lekopir agreed. "I was very shocked when Robert sat me down in front of the elders and local authorities and told me that they wanted to give me a chance to redeem myself," Lekopir says. "They asked me to work with them to help rehabilitate my fellow morans engaged in cattle rustling and banditry."

Today, Lekopir is a proud peace ambassador and business owner. He has helped foil numerous cattle rustling attempts and helped several morans get out of conflict and into enterprise. "I am able to get through to these young men because I have been exactly where they are," he says. "Most of them are looking for a way out, just like I was, but have nobody to help."

Above all he feels immense gratitude to his community. "I will never forget what they did for me, and I am just grateful to be making up for the years I lost."

**“We need trees for the survival of present and future generations, that is why I have set myself out to champion against charcoal burning and logging in our area.”**



## Lokeno Toriepe

Tree champion, Ltungai Conservancy, Samburu.

Unlike most of his peer group, 25-year old Lokeno Toriepe spends his free time talking about trees. Toriepe is a Pokot from Ltungai Community Conservancy, where poverty rates are high. A driving force, Toriepe says, behind the illegal deforestation for charcoal production that is fast degrading the landscape he loves. “Most of the community rely on livestock,” he says, “but deforestation contributes to environment degradation, and this affects livestock a lot.”

A livestock herder himself, Toriepe has seen the strong connection between the health of the land and the health of cattle. That is why he now leads campaigns to sensitize his peers on environmental issues. “We need trees for our survival,” he says. “That is why I have set myself out to champion against charcoal burning and logging in our area.”

Two years ago, the Kenyan government imposed a ban on logging and charcoal burning, and with the support of the Kenya Forest Service (KFS), community conservancies are beginning to tackle this complex issue. “We reached out to the charcoal burners who argued that they did not have any other income,” says Toriepe. “We listed its effects and how it would impact their livelihoods in the future, and encouraged them to resort to other alternative income generating activities.”

Through NRT-Trading, the community of Ltungai are now able to access loans to help them start up or grow businesses, and diversify their farming. This is helping reduce reliance on charcoal sales. “Initially, we used to see sacks filled with charcoal lined up for transportation,” says Toriepe, “but owing to this campaign we’re not seeing as many.”

These small successes are what keeps him motivated with his mission. “Although it’s getting better, we still have a few who are engaging in the illegal activity,” he says, “so I will keep going!”

**“My life changed after quitting cattle rustling, I can now walk freely. I hope my story can influence other herders to coexist and share the limited resources amicably.”**



## Erupe Lobun

Peace ambassador; Nakuprat-Gotu Community Conservancy, Isiolo.

A wanted ringleader of a cattle-rustling ring, and an outspoken voice of anti-conservation – Erupe Lobun is the first to admit his transformation to preacher and peace ambassador is the stuff of fiction.

2011 was the year Lobun changed his life. He'd spent 10 years on the run from authorities, as well as herders who blamed him for stolen livestock. One of his close friends, a fellow cattle-raider, had just been killed in a botched stock theft. He was mourning, and he was tired of running.

Trying to find a way out, Lobun turned to religion. At the same time, the communities in his area were coming together to form Nakuprat-Gotu Community Conservancy, an alliance between the Borana and Turkana ethnic groups who wanted to put years of conflict behind them. Lobun had previously been outspoken against this alliance, and its link to conservation. After all, conservation and cattle surely couldn't go hand in hand?

His newfound dedication to religion gave Lobun the space to think and reflect. He started to talk to his former peers about non-violent conflict resolution, and ways out of cattle rustling. In those early days, Lobun says he received death threats for trying to persuade cattle-rustlers to turn their lives around. "The threats didn't scare me," he says, "I just wanted us to have peace."

Lobun is now a preacher, and uses his position to promote peace and unity between the Turkana, Samburu, Borana and Somali communities in his area. "My life changed after quitting cattle rustling, I can now walk freely," he says. When Lobun found out that the NRT Peace Team were recruiting peace ambassadors, he didn't think twice before volunteering. Now in his spare time, Lobun travels around conservancies supporting dialogue sessions between warring groups, and telling his story to inspire others.