

**MISA engagement with UNESCO
on Ngorongoro World Heritage Site and
Ngorongoro Lengai Global Geopark
Background and key demands for Paris meeting
September 2024**

The Ngorongoro Division which is simultaneously known as Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) was :

- Designated as a Natural World Heritage Site (WHS) in 1979
- Included in the Serengeti-Ngorongoro Biosphere Reserve in 1981
- Designated as a Cultural WHS in 2010 (for a motive related to human evolution in , Alaitole and Oldupai areas), thus becoming a “mixed” WHS to be evaluated by ICOMOS (culture) and IUCN (nature)
- Included in the Ngorongoro-Lengai Global Geopark in 2018

Through these various designations of the NCA and the resulting decisions and recommendations, UNESCO, the World Heritage Committee (WHC) and their implementing partners IUCN and ICOMOS have developed a narrative detrimental to the Maasai’s rights ; they have, like for many other World Heritage Sites, promoted an approach that targeted local and Indigenous people’s way of life, framing them and their activities as threatening “nature”. These decisions and recommendations have legitimised and encouraged the Tanzanian government’s attacks on the Maasai’s rights, including violent evictions.

This document explores the human rights violations of the Indigenous Peoples living in UNESCO designated areas including the Geopark which extends beyond the NCA borders usually considered by WHC reports.

Negative impacts of UNESCO and World Heritage Committee recommendations include:

- **Limited and reduced access to essential grazing areas including main crater**

- Narratives that livestock and pastoralism are detrimental to the area have fuelled restrictions on access to key grazing areas through zoning and prohibited areas
- Supposed negative impacts of livestock were mentioned in both 2007 and 2008 UNESCO IUCN reactive mission reports
- In 2016, the Tanzanian Prime Minister Mr Kasim Majaliwa had ordered Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) residents to restrain from grazing and accessing salt licks in Ngorongoro, Olromti and Embakaai craters
- In 2019, livestock was banned from Northern Highland forest, Oldupai and Alaitole footprints and Ndotu marshes
- Restrictions are making pastoralism barely viable, depriving people of their sustainable livelihoods and forcing them into extreme poverty and food insecurity.

- **A ban on cultivation**

- Supposed negative impacts of cultivation were highlighted in both 2007 and 2008 UNESCO IUCN reactive mission reports. This led to a cultivation ban in 2008, enforced by the Tanzanian President in 2010. When this led to massive hunger, UNESCO denied supporting this ban. However, in 2011, the UNESCO ICOMOS mission report recommended to continue enforcing this ban which is framed as a way to “control population density”
- This led to a starvation crisis in 2012-2013 and persistent hunger, poverty and food insecurity since then, with starvation periods especially linked to droughts.

- **Removal of social services and eviction plan since 2021**

-UNESCO and the WHC recommendations fed narratives of excessive numbers of residents, cattle and referred to “rampant settlements” (joint mission reports of 2007, 2008, 2019).

-The idea of a carrying capacity study was dropped in 2012 after concerns from residents. However, UNESCO’s 2012 assessment urges the government to set up incentives to relocate NCA residents.

-The 2019 UNESCO-ICOMOS-IUCN mission asked the NCA Authority (NCAA) to control population growth and to complete the “review” of the Multiple Land Use Model, which is the basis for the coexistence of conservation and pastoralism activities.

-Since 2021, this has facilitated and legitimised evictions programs and has fuelled the government’s decision to block the delivery of social services to residents and to demolish social facilities.

- **Increased tourist development, infrastructure and use of natural resources**

-The WHS status has given increased visibility to Ngorongoro as an attractive travel destination. The number of visitors has increased from 20,000 in 1979 to over 725,000 in 2019. Numbers exceeded 1 million over 10 months in 2023- 2024.

-Numerous lodges, campsites and luxury hotels are being built, with considerable impacts on the environment including pollution and diversion of water resources.

-Road development and maintenance focus on tourist uses at the expense of roads needed by residents. Tourism brings almost no benefits to the local Maasai people, who are largely excluded from employment opportunities for fear that they might buy cattle.

-As more and more land is needed for tourism-related activities, this increases the risk of land-grabbing of the Maasai’s land.

Violations of the human rights of Maasai and other Indigenous Peoples living by UNESCO and WHC and Ngorongoro Lengai Geopark include:

- **No free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) was obtained from Maasai Indigenous Peoples for nomination** of Ngorongoro as Cultural WHS in 2010 and Geopark in 2018, despite these two nominations occurring after the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. Not obtaining FPIC prior to designating an area as WHS or Geopark constitutes a human rights violation as denounced by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights and numerous UN bodies;
- **Lack of involvement, participation and consultation of the Maasai in the management of the WHS**, contrary to UNESCO rules of procedures; Maasai are not duly represented on the NCAA nor in the board of the Geopark;
- **Lack of proper consultation of Maasai Indigenous Peoples during the successive UNESCO-ICOMOS-IUCN reactive missions**, despite their complaints; this has been an issue over the last two decades (e.g. complaint in 2010, 2011, ...); this includes, very recently, the WHC mission of February 2024 and the Geopark mission of July 2024;
- **No recognition of Maasai culture and of Maasai pastoralism as a viable form of land-use management that has shaped the Ngorongoro landscape.** The request by the Tanzanian Government to have the Maasai cultural landscape recognised as culturally significant was rejected by the WHC in 2010. While this request was made without proper involvement of the Maasai, leading to the information submitted being both lacking and partly inaccurate, this recognition could have paved the way for appreciating and protecting the unique contribution of the Maasai people and livestock to the Serengeti landscape and its conservation. This recognition would be fully aligned

with the status of NCA as per the NCA Act of 1959 and its primary objective to support the development of Maasai people, along with tourism and conservation.

- **Lack of involvement, participation and consultation of the Maasai in UNESCO including WHC and Geopark decision-making processes and decisions on the property**, and lack of transparency and communication.

MISA calls on UNESCO, the WHC and advisory bodies ICOMOS and IUCN as well as the Global Geopark Council to:

- Recognise that its recommendations have, over the last 20 years, had a negative impact on the human rights of people in NCA, including their right to food, by encouraging a cultivation ban and prohibiting access to essential grazing areas such as the Ngorongoro, Olromti and Embakaai craters; all these restrictions should be lifted;
- Stop facilitating the displacement of Maasai from NCA including by recommending that incentives be set up to relocate people, and insist that people have a right to stay on their land;
- Condemn the removal of social services in NCA and demand that people's rights to education, health and housing be respected;
- Ensure compliance by Tanzania, the Decision: 46 COM 7 para 25 to 31 in respect of indigenous and local communities rights as a factor for continued listing of Ngorongoro as WHS
- **As a first step, put on the agenda of the upcoming reactive mission to Ngorongoro WHS:**
 - Review the nomination status of NCA in light of the fact that Indigenous Peoples (IPs) have the right to FPIC and that Maasai and other IPs were never consulted and their perspectives including on their relationship with the land were not included; assess the negative impacts of the WHS on the people living within it and investigate alleged human rights violations, in line with WHC decision **46. Com 7 para. 28**; initiate community consultations to obtain consent;
 - Recognise that Maasai people, their culture and pastoralist practices are contributing to the integrity and conservation of the site and should be protected; this implies recognizing that Maasai culture, people and livestock are of outstanding cultural value as described in:
 - [article 5](#): "to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change";or
 - article 10: "to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation" as well as
 - article 3: "to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared";
 - Condemn the lack of involvement, participation and consultation of the Maasai and other IPs in the management of the World Heritage Site, which is contrary to UNESCO's rules of procedures and demand immediate action to ensure co-management by Indigenous Peoples; ensure people's participation and equal representation in management and operation of NCA (co-management).
 - Ensure full participation, involvement and consent of the Maasai and other IPs in UNESCO, WHC and Geopark decision-making processes about Ngorongoro.