



Fact Finding Report

Field Research at the Resettlement Site – Msomera Village in Handeni District, Tanzania



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Broken Promises – Relocation Sites for Maasai Facing Evictions Remain Critically Flawed

As the Tanzanian government pushes forward with resettlement plans for so-called “volunteers” from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA), new field research at the proposed relocation site, Msomera village in Handeni district, was conducted in October 2022. This report provides a summary of the situation on the ground and highlights a number of issues and concerns.

Background

Handeni district, an area of 6,534 km² (2,523 sq mi), is one of the 11 districts of Tanga Region in Tanzania with Mkata town as its administrative capital. Msomera is a village in Misima ward of the district. The main tribes in the village are Maasai and Zigua. Msomera village is dominated by the Maasai, including the Kisongo and Parakuya Maasai sub-tribes – which make up approximately 90 percent of the population who practice pastoralism as their main activity. The remaining 10 percent of the Msomera population is comprised of the Zigua and Sambia tribes.

LOCATION INFORMATION FOR MSOMERA VILLAGE

Item	Description
MTAA / Village / Kitongoji	Msomera
Postcode	21810
Ward	Misima
District	Handeni
Region	Tanga
Country	Tanzania

Claiming Msomera is unoccupied – formerly being a Game Reserve area – the Tanzanian government is denying its legal status as a village. It was registered in 1992 under the Village Land Act and has been occupied since the 1980s. The village has a management plan for activities like farming, pastoralism, and settlement and has basic human social services, including a primary school, a dispensary, a church and a mosque.

Before the relocation of the NCA residents began in 2022, Msomera’s population was 6,500. With approximately 2,400 migrants relocated during 2022, the total village population is now 8,900. Given the high number of pastoralists, residents of the village do not till or fence their land for enclosures. This was used by the government to claim that the land is unused and start demarcation, ignoring its use for grazing

cattle. According to the government, the previous residents were illegally residing on a Game Reserve. Longtime residents reject government claims given Msomera's status as a legally registered village.



Beacons placed within villagers' settlement to inform them that the land is for migrants, requiring them to demolish their homes and move elsewhere.

Lack of Water in Msomera Village

Water services in Msomera village are severely lacking and cannot accommodate the influx of new residents. For a population of 8,900 today, there is only one water tap collection point – resulting in insufficient access to water for domestic uses including drinking water. The drilled tap provides very salty water – a shock for migrants from the highlands who previously enjoyed cold clean potable water. Former NCA residents who migrated report stomach problems after consuming salty water for drinking or cooking.



The only water tap collection point in the Msomera village.

Longtime residents sell water collected from rainfall at a price of 1,000 TSh [US\$0.43] for 20 liters to the new migrants from the NCA. Some families are forced to travel 12 kms roundtrip by foot or motorbike to collect water at the nearest collection point, and others report that tank can be empty for two to three days at a time.

Government promises to improve water sources remain unfulfilled. In March 2022, the NCA started drilling for water at Orkung sub-village, outside of the resettlement area in Msomera. While the site was successfully drilled and a solar panel installed for the pump, water has yet to come.

Lack of Grazing Land and Water for Cattle



Congestion of cows at water trough, which has led to soil erosion.

The addition of 6,000 cattle from the NCA – to the existing 24,000 heads of cattle belonging to the locals, has put additional strain on limited grazing resources. A large part of the land, previously used for grazing, has been taken by the government and allocated for settlements to be built for the Maasai who migrated from the NCA. Land that is available is dry and bushy and not suitable for grazing. Previously, the livestock migrated outside of the normal grazing areas. Now almost every inch of the land has been granted to newcomers from the NCA – resulting in starvation of the cows.

There is only one small cattle trough for water near the village center, which constrains access of large livestock herds from the grazing areas. Walking long distances in search of water and grazing land is negatively impacting the health of the cattle. This has lowered their prices and milk production. Men now spend most of their time looking for grazing pastures for the livestock and have less time for other economic activities.



Sign prohibiting human settlement and grazing.

In this arid region of Tanzania, dry season is particularly difficult for the livestock. This has fueled conflict between the previous residents and the Maasai pastoralists moved from the NCA, since both require access to pastures during the critical drought period. All pastoralists are incurring additional costs of buying feed from farms for their livestock. Despite government promises, no veterinary services for livestock have been provided.



Both sheep and cows starve as the bushy area produces less grass to feed the increased numbers of livestock.

Forced by Cuts in Vital Services in the NCA, Maasai “Volunteer” for Resettlement

In an effort to drive the Maasai away from the NCA, the Tanzanian government continues to cut vital services. In October 2022, the government drastically reduced health services. The Endulen Church hospital – the only hospital for nearly 60,000 pastoralists – was downgraded to a clinic. Ambulance and emergency services were discontinued and all government nurses, therapists, radiation specialists were relocated to other areas. Care for mothers and newborns and ultrasound services have also been discontinued. Only two doctors are left in Endulen.

This severely lowers the medical care available for pastoralists in the NCA who had previously relied on the hospital for a variety of health services, including care for HIV/AIDS and other diseases as well as emergency services.

The latest move by the government builds on its creation of an ongoing hunger crisis by heavily constraining grazing areas and banning home gardens in the NCA. Resources for education have also been cut. On March 31, 2022, the local government ordered that TSh195,500,000 [~US\$84,000] in COVID-19 relief funds, initially marked for public schools within the NCA, to be transferred to the Handeni district. Additionally, NGOs are reportedly less willing to fund development projects in the NCA, given the government’s push for people to leave the area. The Maasai are struggling to survive in the land they have stewarded for generations.

Additional Issues

1. No new health facilities: Despite government promises, no additional health facilities have been built. There is only one old dispensary, which now serves about 8,900 people.
2. Lack of consultation and consent: Residents of Msomera were not consulted about relocation of NCA residents to the area. Neither were the local residents involved in decision making about the land given to the new occupants. One villager from Ngorongoro, Irkeepusi ward, shared, “I was given a house, constructed inside the boma of Parakuyo people and we have been having conflict. When I called the district land officers, they gave me another house. I demanded another house to be safe.” A resident of Msomera shared, “We didn’t agree with the government plan to give our land to Ngorongoro people but we have no means to object because the government authority is too big. We can’t fight against them.”
3. Displacement of previous residents: The government is grabbing land from earlier occupants to give to the newcomers. Thomas farm, a large property owned by previous Msomera residents, was identified as the place to develop a new market and police station. The area has been demarcated without the free, prior, and informed consent of the owners of the farm.
4. Lack of social and environmental impact assessment (EIA): No assessment was done prior to resettling NCA residents to the area.



Houses constructed amidst bushes, which is unusual in Ngorongoro.

5. Problematic location of new houses: the government constructed houses in middle of bushes and shrubs. Afraid that the shrubs and thick bushes may attract dangerous wild animals and snakes, the new residents set fire for clearing. The Zigua and Parakuyo, residents of Msomera, are blaming the NCA migrants for intensive and unplanned fire which will trigger dryness and desertification of the area.



Fires were set to clear bushes and shrubs around homes, an activity not welcomed by native pastoralists.

6. No electricity: Despite promises by the Prime Minister, there is no electricity in the area.
7. Lack of schools: Only one Primary and one Secondary school has been constructed despite government promises of building more than four Primary and Secondary schools.

8. High military presence: Due to fear of criticism and to prevent media from visiting the village, the government has deployed military (JKT) to the village. Only government approved media can visit Msomera.
9. Spread of diseases: Maasai who moved from Ngorongoro report living in a harsh environment – which is different from Ngorongoro. They are not familiar with high temperatures or accustomed to diseases like Malaria and Typhoid.
10. Loss of traditional livelihoods: Pastoralists who moved from Ngorongoro are forced to find new economic means to sustain life given the area is not suitable for pastoralism.
11. Separation of families and breaking of social ties: Families are being split up when a family member moves to Handeni, leaving behind others who remain in their settlement in the NCA.
12. Community disruption: In the NCA, Maasai enjoyed deep communal ties with their community – sharing essentials such as water, medicine, and food with each other in times of need. With relocation to Msomera, this sharing has ended along with the end of their community.

Conclusion

The serious issues raised in this report have been known since May 2022, when the Oakland Institute published [*Flawed Plans for Relocation of the Maasai from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area*](#). Over the past year, the government has failed to address any of the critical faults with its plans. Msomera village still lacks water and adequate grazing areas for the livestock. Government promises around improved water, education, and health facilities remain unfulfilled. Despite these failures, approximately 2,400 people have already been moved to Msomera village with more on the way – putting an immense strain on the limited resources.

The failure of the government to consult previous residents in Msomera village before moving NCA migrants into the area is fueling the prospects of a serious conflict over scarce resources. When the military eventually departs the area, it is very possible there will be retribution against newcomers from the NCA by villagers who have lost access to land and pasture. This is an urgent situation that must be addressed before serious violence occurs. All avenues of international pressure on the government must be immediately implemented before it is too late.

Traditional livelihood practices of Maasai pastoralists cannot continue in Msomera and mass relocation of the Maasai there will mark the end of their way of life. Instead of false promises to trick the Maasai to leave the NCA, the government must lift the livelihood restrictions driving poverty and starvation in the NCA and allow Maasai to remain on their ancestral lands.