

## THE NASHULAI STORY

Conserve Wildlife ~ Preserve Culture ~ Reverse Poverty

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Ric Young

Social Innovation Keynote

EDIT | Expo for Design Innovation and Technology

Toronto / September 30, 2017



## Foreword

*I was invited to give the Social Innovation Keynote presentation at the inaugural EDIT: Expo for Design, Innovation and Technology which was produced by Canada's Design Exchange in partnership with the United Nations Development Program and described as "a 10-day, world-scale biennial design festival". The slides that follow are the images I used for that talk, with my speaking notes incorporated. It's probably about a 10 minute read. There are no bullet points.*

*I wanted to tell a story.*

*The story is about the genesis, purpose and progress to date (as of Sept/ 2017) of Nashulai Maasai Conservancy located in the Maasai Mara, Kenya. I am a cofounder of that Conservancy, along with a man I now call brother, Nelson Ole Reiyia.*

*Something remarkable is happening at Nashulai, a regeneration of wildlife – and a way of life – that was at great risk of being lost forever. Kenya's leading conservation journalist wrote that Nashulai, as the first Maasai owned and directed conservancy in the Maasai Mara, was "a unique achievement that promises to inspire a positive change in the entire East Africa region."*

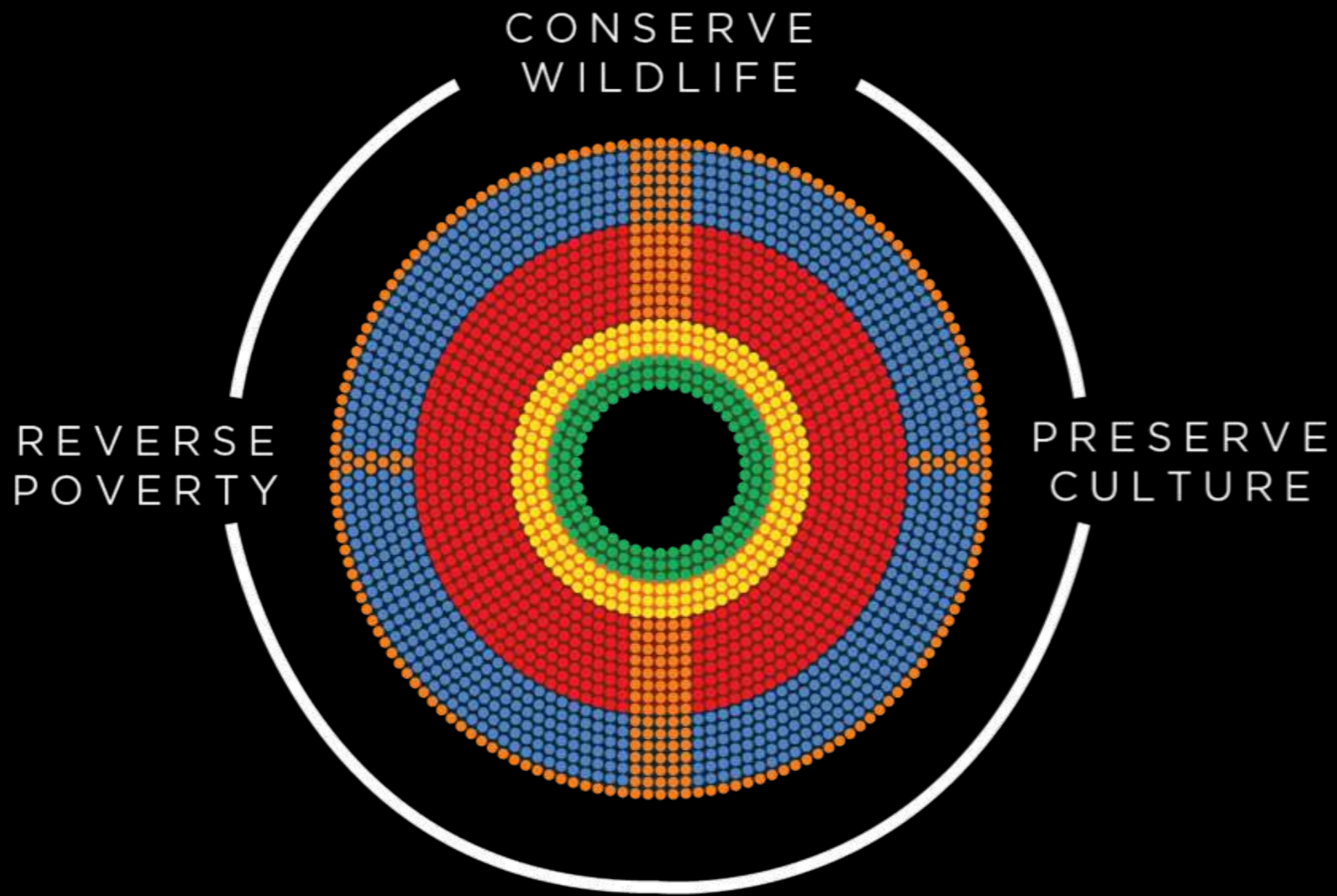
*I believe the Nashulai story has much to offer – both as inspiration and instruction – for all of us who are committed to the pursuit of social change. I have been involved in this pursuit all of my working life, played a seminal role in the development of the field of social innovation and served as Distinguished Visiting Professor of Social Innovation at Ryerson University (2013-2018). I have always been driven by the belief that social change is not only profoundly important at this moment in history, but also profoundly possible. Nothing in my working life has confirmed that conviction more than the Nashulai endeavour.*

*The community members of Nashulai are the real innovators and designers here. And investors too. Because it is their land that lies at the heart of a critical ecosystem juncture. In the words of Dickson Kaelo, head of the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association, Nashulai is "the missing link in the puzzle...the most critical connecting corridor for elephants, lions and other migrating Mara Serengeti wildlife." Much depends on Nashulai. And although the members of the community are poor they have chosen to see their land not as a commodity but as a commons. Each family could have sold off its own parcel of land, made some much needed money and moved away. Instead, they have rallied together to be stewards of this land "where the bones of our ancestors are buried and for the generations of our children yet to come". We should all be indebted.*

*If you are interested in learning how you can support the Nashulai endeavour, please see the contact information at the end of this presentation.*

*Thank you for your interest,*

*Ric Young*



CONSERVE  
WILDLIFE

REVERSE  
POVERTY

PRESERVE  
CULTURE

OUR MISSION

I'm going to tell you a story about an endeavour and a community I'm involved with that has this as its mission: Conserve wildlife...Preserve culture...Reverse poverty ...each dimension profoundly related to the others.

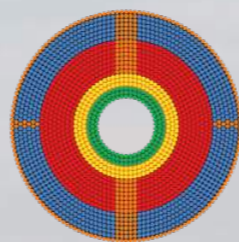
It's a story about regeneration. And in the end, mostly a story about story.

My talk is billed as the EDIT Social Innovation Keynote. Well, this is an example of social innovation as I truly meant it when I was working to develop this field many years ago: tackling complex and consequential challenges and getting to breakthrough.

It's also aligned to the UNDP sustainable development goals that are the thematic backbone of this Expo: building prosperity for everyone and safeguarding our planetary resources for the future. I hope what I share this evening will stand as some proof of possibility in these very challenging times.

But one caveat before I begin: EDIT is an expo and celebration of the role of "design and technology in shaping our future for the better". But I think we've got to be careful these days about thinking in terms of a new savior class – a gang of the most creative, committed and caring who can invent our salvation. We've put our faith elsewhere in the past: Religion or Science, the Market or Marx...it doesn't matter. The most profound social change must always contend with the messy nature of being human. It's not a matter of technology but of hearts and minds.

That's why I'm a believer in the most ancient technology humans ever created for inventing, discovering and deciding our futures. And for rapid prototyping possibilities. And that is story. The thought experiment space. The frontier of our imagination and social coding.



NASHULAI  
MAASAI CONSERVANCY



We're going to end up here.

This is the setting for the story I want to tell. Nashulai - a newly formed and very disruptive conservancy in the Maasai Mara, Kenya...bordering on the National Reserve...and part of the vast 30,000 square km SerengetiMara ecosystem...considered one of the world's natural wonders...home of the largest and most diverse migration of mammals on the planet...and a cradle of our own species...a landscape with an almost primal pull on the human imagination.

And these two young men in red, (Ole Kariankei on the left and Ole Tukai), young friends of mine...they are Maasai, the people who have inhabited this land for centuries...a territory in fact once known simply as Maasailand.

This is where we are going to end up...where the main story take place. But we are going to start a world away from here. Well, half a world, to be more accurate.





Here on the north coast of British Columbia. Near the town off Kitimat. This is the Kitlope River.  
A place of wild and extraordinary beauty...it is the ancestral and spiritual home of the Haisla First Nation.

And I have had the great good fortune to spend time up here on the Kitlope – with a man I am proud to call my good friend.



His name is Cecil Paul. He was born on the banks of the Kitlope River about 85 years ago. In fact the name he was given then was Wachaid. It means "Good River".

When Cecil was just a boy, 9 years old, he was forcibly taken from his home on the river, from his family, his culture and from everything he knew and he was placed in a residential school far away. Like so many others, he suffered terrible abuse, both physical and psychological. He came out broken.

And then he spent the better part of 30 years a drunk. A derelict. Living in a fog of booze to numb the memories, numb the rage. Living much of the time on the streets of Vancouver and coastal towns. In and out of jail.

But eventually he felt the spirit of his grandmother, whom he loved as a boy and was now long dead, calling on him to return to the place of his birth... There was no one living there now. Just wilderness. He sat there, on the banks of the Kitlope, for days, until he could reclaim his own spirit. And then he resolved to give up drinking, to rejoin his people now all living in the village in Kitimat and to help in any way could to rebuild that broken community.

He would say the river healed him. It was the spiritual home of his people. He would go back often when he needed strength.

On one of those visits he saw surveyors tapes – the kind they use to mark out logging roads. He knew what it meant. The Kitlope was about to be destroyed.

"I couldn't let it happen," he said to me. "I vowed that my blood would run in the river Kitlope before I would allow it to be logged. But I also know my blood wasn't enough to stop this catastrophe."

Over the next few years, Cecil played a catalytic role in the struggle to prevent the destruction of his people's homeland.

And, against all odds, they won.



In 1994, the BC government forged an agreement with the Haisla Nation to protect the Kitlope area. It was a big deal. Over 3/4 of a million acres are now protected, in perpetuity. It turns out to be the largest intact coastal temperate rainforest in the world.

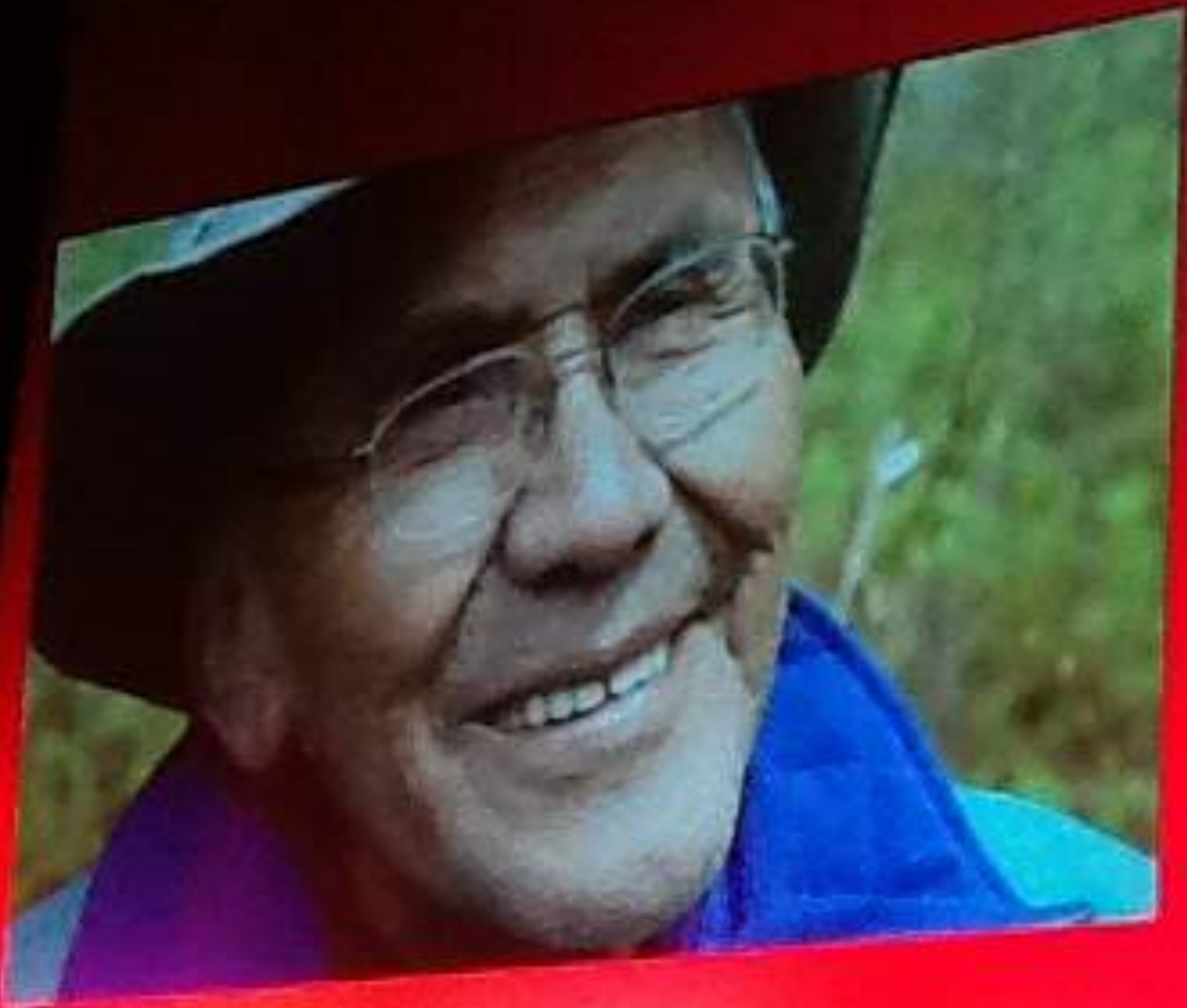
I took this picture of a ceremonial canoe coming ashore at the 10th anniversary celebration of that amazing victory.

"How did you do it?" I asked Cecil. "How did you pull this off? You were a newly reformed drunk, all alone up on that river. No resources, no connections, no power. And you were up against very powerful forces, both corporate and government. Armed with money, lawyers...you name it."

"That's true," he said. "I started this journey alone. But I was in a magic canoe. It was a magic canoe because there was room for everyone who wanted to come on board, to paddle together." And that is indeed what happened. Cecil's moral courage became a rallying force. It took time and many battles, but eventually a few others, then the whole community, some important outside supporters, then even the premier of the province and even the CEO of the logging company joined the canoe. And they accomplished the near impossible. "The Magic Canoe" has become my central metaphor to describe the nature of transformational change.

Cecil said something else to me, too, up on that river that has ended up shaping my worldview. He said to me: "You know you guys [meaning white guys] call it the Kitlope. But in our language we call it Hucshduwashdu Nuyem Jees- which means "land of the milky blue waters and the sacred stories contained in this place". "You think it's a victory because we saved the land. But what we really saved are our sacred stories which are embedded in this land and couldn't survive without it. Those stories contain all of our wisdom for living."

Stories are the precious containers of the human experience.

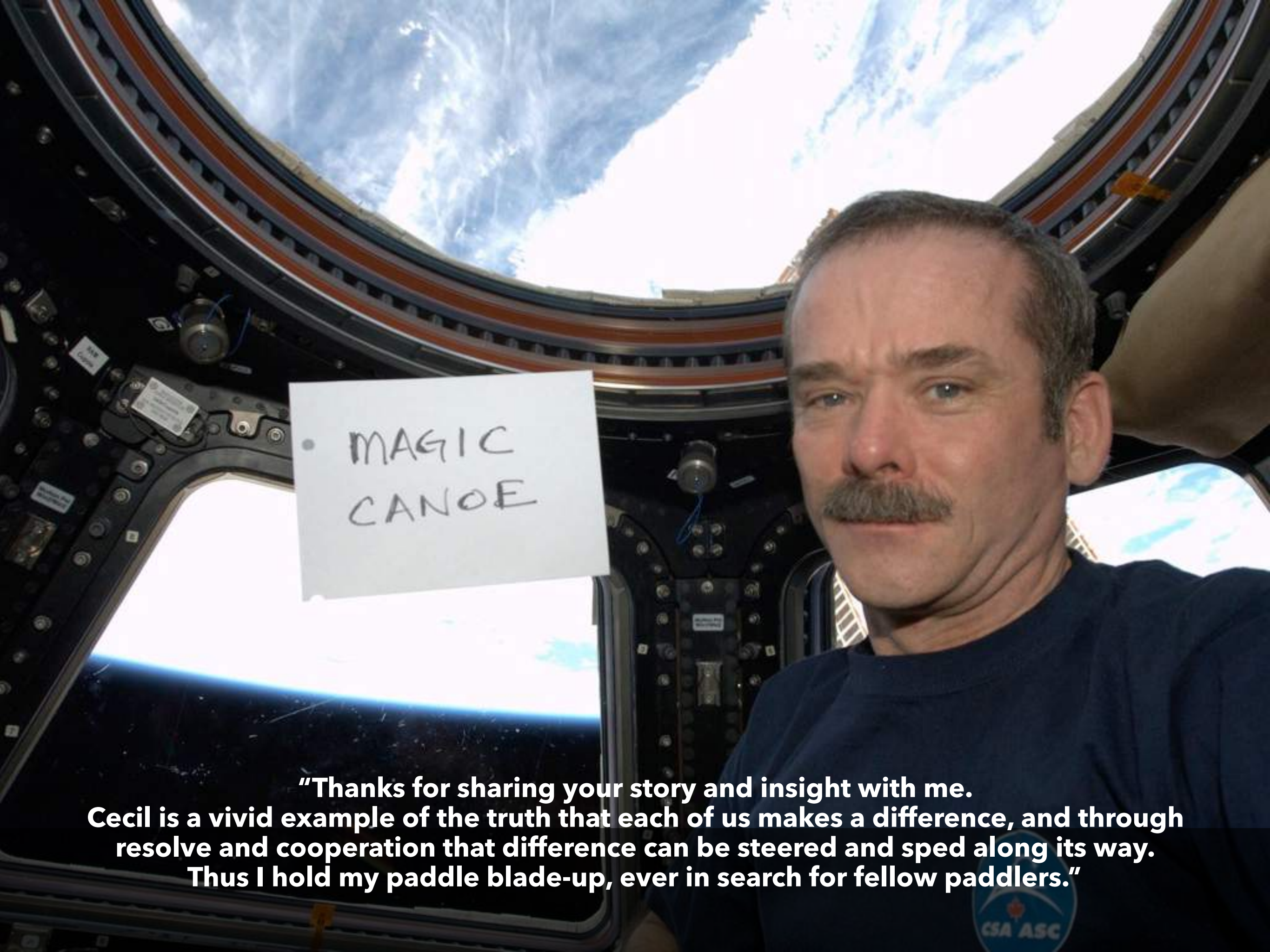


I was invited to give the kick off address at the inaugural conference of the World Indigenous Network in 2013 in Darwin Australia.

With his permission, and his blessing, I told the story of Cecil and the magic canoe.

There were over 1200 delegates, indigenous leaders from all over the world. And the story resonated because so many were facing similar challenges, similar battles – battles for resources, for survival, for what matters, what has value, who has worth, whose rules apply...whose story wins.

I also brought a special message:

A man with a mustache is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark blue t-shirt. He is inside a spacecraft module, with a large circular window behind him showing the Earth's horizon and blue sky. To his left, a white sign is taped to the wall with the words "MAGIC CANOE" written in black marker. The interior of the module is filled with various mechanical components, wires, and panels.

• MAGIC  
CANOE

**"Thanks for sharing your story and insight with me. Cecil is a vivid example of the truth that each of us makes a difference, and through resolve and cooperation that difference can be steered and sped along its way. Thus I hold my paddle blade-up, ever in search for fellow paddlers."**





This is from Chris Hadfield, Commander of the International Space Station. He sent me this selfie and message of support from space. That's our blue planet out the window behind him. And his handcrafted, free-floating Magic Canoe sign traveling alongside him at about 17,000 miles an hour.

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One of the people in Darwin for whom the Magic Canoe story resonated was a man named Nelson Ole Reiyia. A Maasai. He approached me. We became instant friends....Talking at length about the parallel between Cecil's story and the challenges faced by the Maasai. We were serious and irreverent at the same time.

By the end of the conference 3 days later, he had invited me to come spend time with him in the Maasai Mara.



This is Nelson.

Born and raised in the Maasai Mara...son of a nomadic pastoralist...sent to school (as punishment) and had to walk 20kms across the savannah daily as a little boy, encountering some perils along the way, but also encountering community – villagers who took him in when there was danger, looked out for him. He says those experiences shaped him for life. He was an avid student. Became the first boy in the Maasai Mara to attend high school...eventually got himself to university in Nairobi where he started to build a successful career. But instead he chose to return home, to apply his talents on behalf of his people and his place. He has become one of the most respected and catalytic community leaders of his generation.

He is my dear friend. And I'm honoured to say my brother now too. Because I have been adopted by Nelson's section of the Maasai and inducted as a respected elder.

Here...let me introduce you quickly to some of the members of the community. Because to understand this story and the transformational change that's happening here, you need to understand something about the people. And their place in the world.



Maggie, Nelson's wife. Powerful and kind. Along with Nelson, she has been a tireless champion for change, rescuing young girls from early marriage and circumcision, advancing their opportunities for education and empowerment. Wrestling some cultural practices and attitudes into the modern world, while profoundly respecting the heart of what it means to be Maasai.



The Maasai are an ancient and noble people. They are mentioned in the Bible. They were great Warriors.  
And their culture continues to revere – and instill – courage, loyalty, fearlessness.

This my friend, Lepore. A man of very few words. But the heart of a warrior.





They are pastoralist - their wealth and way of life is inextricably linked to their livestock, to grazing practices and a fine atunement to the forces of nature upon which their way of life depends.



They care deeply about their past. They respect elders. And revere the storytellers who can bring ancestral knowledge, wisdom and courage to life. Who keep the ancestral bonds unbroken.

The Maasai have been successful at maintaining their cultural integrity in the face of modernity.



And they care profoundly about the future. About a life and a way of life for their children.

A love for children goes deep in the heart of Maasai culture.



As Nelson has said to me:

"It is impossible to keep the future of the Maasai alive without keeping our past alive. If we are cut from the roots we will wither away."





The Maasai story has always been about the relationship to the land, to the people and wildlife who share it.

It's a deep story about how to live – on the land, with one another.

With great respect for all this land has given. And great courage for what it takes to sustain life here.



This is Maasailand. In the Great Rift Valley.

The world the Maasai have inhabited for centuries,  
the kind of world Nelson would walk through daily as a young boy on his way to school.







...As I said earlier it has an almost archetypal pull on our psyche and spirit ...









Like pastoralists, grazing animals need a lot of land to roam.



People come from all over the world to see this majestic display, to bear witness, to experience firsthand the awesome performance of nature that has been playing on this vast grassland stage for millions of years.

This is what they want to see. Wilderness in its timeless glory.

What they don't see, would never want to see, is this:



I'm sorry for this disturbing picture. But I'm afraid it tells an important part of the story. (There's trouble in paradise.) There are huge destructive pressures on this ecosystem now. Climate change. Poverty. Land commodification. And here you see the consequences. The land gets sold off and it gets fenced off. The migratory corridors get cut. The age-old natural balancing act gets disturbed. Wildlife suffers. And so do the people whose life depends on this land. Habitat degeneration is a pernicious problem with profound consequences.

You are not just looking at a poor dead wildebeest here, its paws trapped in a fence, rotting away at the edge of a world heritage site. What you are looking at is a vicious cycle. The breakdown of an age old commons.

The fence does not exist for the purpose of killing wildlife. It exists to demarcate property. But that doesn't make the consequences any less tragic.

This is the tragedy of the commons. When narrower interests override collective ones.

Don't turn away if this picture makes you uncomfortable. Because what you are looking at is the challenge of the modern world. Of the 21st-century. Of our time. How do we protect the precious balance of people and place? How do we stop the degradation that in the end takes us all down? How do we reverse the race to the bottom? How do we rise to the care of our commons?

Well, here's one approach:



[www.themoses.com.ke](http://www.themoses.com.ke)



**80**  
**KPH**



**WAP**



I took this picture in Narok, the local town. Nelson and I were there buying supplies because he was having a big celebration for his own induction into elderhood. We'd been talking so much about the plight of the Mara and the need to do something radical. And then –as if on cue– we drove by this van. We laughed out loud. But who knows, maybe it was a kind of divine intervention, because the irony somehow stiffened our resolve to act.

But I like this picture too because I think it is actually a comment on the way we relate to so many modern challenges. As though power is elsewhere. As though the capacity and even the responsibility to make something happen exists outside of us. We might not call it praying. Maybe it's just demanding, criticizing, petitioning or stamping our feet in righteous indignation and assuming that is how the world will change.

Doesn't work like that.



Nelson's ceremony lasted a day and a night. As per tradition he was attended throughout the ceremony by 4 more senior elders. (Though traditionally a North American very white very urban guy like me would not be one of them...and believe me, I wasn't too useful when it came to the ceremonial slaughter of the ox.)

Nelson and I talked all day with the elders about the idea of forming a conservancy. We were on sacred ceremonial ground. And right in the area that had always been an elephant birthing place. Nelson vividly remembered the quality of this land and its teeming wildlife when he was a boy. He was passionate about the possibility of its regeneration. "And don't you think we know how to do it?", he said. "This is where the bones of our ancestors are buried." The elders were acutely aware of the crisis facing this habitat. But they were not immediately keen on the idea of a conservancy.

Look, the Maasai have been repeatedly marginalized in their own land – first by colonialism, then by commercialization -tourism, which has generated many billions of dollars in the Maasai Mara. But the Maasai are mostly not the beneficiaries. The tourism economy is almost entirely controlled by – and for –others. And even conservation. There are other conservancies in the Maasai mara. Very large tracts of land set aside for the protection of wildlife. That is their purpose. And while the traditional landowners may receive a little money, may even get a school or a clinic and some nice well-meaning charitable perks, they are de facto displaced from their land. The Maasai call them conservation refugees. Up until this point conservation in the Maasai Mara has been like tourism. Someone else has been running the show. Someone else has been calling the shots.

So the skepticism of the elders was not misplaced. But Nelson's vision was clear and his leadership was compelling: to create a new model of Conservancy – one owned, directed and managed by the Maasai themselves. They would remain on their own land. In the end the elders said yes -- but only if the whole thing was done with trust and benefit for the community at the heart of the enterprise.



The next day Nelson and I went to see this man, Ole Kasoi. His land stretched between the ceremonial grounds where we had just been all the way to the edge of the Maasai Mara National Reserve. We sat under a tree and talked for a few hours. For a while he talked about the past. And then he talked about his children. Nelson told him the story about Cecil. And then he talked about the idea of a conservancy where the Maasai would remain on their own land, join together in practices combining ancestral knowledge and modern science, to regenerate the habitat. Where land, wildlife and community could all prosper.

The land doesn't really belong to me, said Ole Kasoi. It belongs to the generations before me and after me. To the flow of time. But my answer is yes.

And so Ole Kasoi whom we call "Two Sticks" and his family became the first brave members of the new conservancy.

And then...



*"the missing link in the puzzle...  
the most critical connecting corridor for elephants, lions  
and other migrating Mara Serengeti wildlife."*

And then...I came back to Canada and Nelson began talking with the community – the disparate landowners and families who would have to come together to form a viable conservancy. There were about 70 landowners in an area of about 6000 acres. Now let me be clear: This is small in comparison to other conservancies in Kenya.

But it turns out it is an absolutely critical parcel of land – lying at the very heart of three great protected areas. As Dickson Kaelo, head of the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association, described it:

*"the missing link in the puzzle...the most critical connecting corridor for elephants, lions and other migrating Mara Serengeti wildlife."*

And it was at imminent risk of being lost forever.





From my perspective, this is the single most important picture in my presentation. It's not the most dramatic obviously. But this is where the future lies. Where it always lies. Human beings coming together to discuss and decide what to do. The future lies in the animating quality of our imagination, and in the strength of our willingness to work on it. It lies in our collective capacity for wisdom, vision, courage, creativity, and commitment. In the new social compacts that are the heart of transformative change.

And these people around the tree – well, they are poor. A dollar a day poor. Which means they are scrabbling every day to meet the most basic sustenance needs for themselves and their children. In Maslow's hierarchy terms that should make it difficult for them to rise to higher purpose. I guess Maslow never met the Maasai.

I want to stress this: My deepest beliefs about everything that is possible with community are affirmed right here. As much as any laboratory in Silicon Valley, this is what the incubators for the most significant 21st century innovation will look like.

Within a few short months Nelson had almost the entire community signed on. He is truly a great community leader. And then a council of elders was formed and they developed the bylaws that would govern the Conservancy, a return to communal land with rotational grazing practices and strict principles for wildlife protection and habitat rehabilitation.

It was under this tree and in meetings like this that Nashulai was born – the first Maasai conservancy in the Maasai Mara. A powerful new model for community-led conservation – for ecological, cultural and economic revitalization.



*"the first ever community-owned wildlife conservancy...  
a unique achievement that promises to inspire a positive  
change in the entire East Africa region."*

Kenya's leading conservation journalist, John Mbaria, described Nashulai as "a unique achievement that promises to inspire a positive change in the entire East Africa region."

Nice! Only one small glitch: we didn't have any money. A lot more community members had come on board a lot more quickly than we ever anticipated. And we needed to begin making the lease payments. My wife and I are not wealthy people, but we figured if this community – into which we had been so welcomed – could rise to the opportunity then so would we. So we drew from our own resources for the first round of payments. Carpe diem, as one would say.

Also for what it's worth I was determined that we not reach out at the beginning to the usual round of funding organizations, foundations or established NGOs in the conservation space. Self determination was the critical ingredient to transformational success here. What was happening at Nashulai – on the ground, within the community – was powerful. Something was being born. Yes support was desperately needed. But something imposed from the top down was exactly the opposite of what was needed.

As Nelson and I said, "We need to own our story from the outset."



We were right to stake our value on our story.

Avaaz, the world's largest online activist network, took up our cause. Within a few short weeks almost 60,000 Avaaz members from all over the world had made contributions in support of Nashulai. The money gave us some gas in tank.

But I ask you to think also about what it meant for people who had been economically marginalized for so many generations in their own land, to realize that they did not stand alone. That their bold story had the power to attract so many others from around the world.



Nashulai Maasai Conservancy  
Official launch: 28 November, 2016

This was all just over a year ago. And our official launch ceremony was last November. So how's it going?

Well, it's early days obviously. And we have miles to go before we sleep. But here's a bit of a progress report from the journey so far:

PARCEL NO	NAMES	ID N	ACS	SIG HC	NO
2846	NEKAPASOI SUMARE		50		1
3476	TIARINGOT KIOK		140		2
3240	PASUA KIOK		178		3
3304	SUMATA KIOK		120		4
3305	OLE TOMBO		30		5
3699	ROINKAI KIOK		85		6
2542	RIAMET KIOK		150		7
3150 1599 3150	MPATIHAN SATIAMBELA		36		8
3045	KOIKEREN SUMARE		14		9 P
3302	KUDA SOIT		10		10
3047	RUMPAS SOIT		10		11
3048	MAINKA SUMARE		6		12
2526	KARTELA KASOG		150		13
2525	HASUN/KARANGA KIRROKOR		75		14
2518	KASAINR KIRROKOR		150		15



***“Wildlife has been in free-fall across most of Africa. Only local people can reverse the downward spiral.”***

We've secured the full 6000 acres. Signed 10 year renewable lease agreements with each landowning family.

And all the community members have agreed to a set of bylaws - created by our council of elders - to govern the shared use of land between people, livestock and wildlife. And they chose the name, Nashulai, which is a Maasai word that means a special place where people, livestock and wildlife can live in balance and mutual benefit.

By the way while our model is unique, it aligns to the leading-edge thinking in ecological science. Here's a quote from the Journal of Applied Ecology last year: “Wildlife has been in free-fall across most of Africa. Only local people can reverse the downward spiral.”



We've hired a dozen community members to work as the team of Nashulai scouts. Their job is to monitor and protect the wildlife, to conduct wildlife and birdlife surveys, to prevent any poaching by outsiders, and to work with the community to promote the lands use systems that advance ecosystem regeneration.

These guys were put through an intensive 3 month training process by our park warden, a Maasai elder who also used to be an officer in the Kenyan army.

Four of these fellows used to be poachers.



  
**NABRYEKINDI**  
MOTIVATIONAL PROGRAM

**Here's to strong women,  
May we know them,  
May we be them,  
May we raise them**

**Here's to strong women,  
May we know them,  
May we be them,  
May we raise them**

There are now 30 community people employed by Nashulai.  
Some working on conservation. Some, like here, on social development.

There are active programs for education and gender equity.



As a combination of our monthly lease payments and salaries, Nelson estimates that we have created economic benefit for 2000 people. "We are already breaking the back of poverty here," he says.





We've got a big clean water program underway now. We've just secured the deal to develop the system that will pipe from spring water from that mountain to all the small villages in Nashulai.

What does that mean? There will be clean safe water and proper sanitation for everyone who lives in the Conservancy area. Until now people have had to get their water from a river which is very polluted. Waterborne diseases have been a scourge of the community. All that will change very very soon. The pipeline construction will begin within a matter of weeks.



All the fencing in Nashulai has now been taken down. Over 20 kms of it.

And because of the rotational grazing and other land use practices that have been implemented, the grass cover in the Nashulai area is improving markedly.



Good grass means good grazing. So herbivores like this impala are returning in droves.  
As Nelson says, they vote with their feet.



During the the great migration this year there were more wildebeest and zebras at Nashulai than anyone could remember for decades. Our scouts estimated the numbers at about 10,000. Two years ago you would hardly have seen any of these animals here.

But here's an even more telling indicator:





We're starting to see a lot of animal births at Nashulai.

And that wouldn't happen if the wildlife didn't feel at home here.



According to our scouts' wildlife census, 100 giraffes have now made Nashulai their home base...



And we've got 5 families of elephants who have taken up residence. 50 in all.

The scouts know the matriarchs. And there have been 10 newborns in the last three months.



You know, it's not just ecosystems that can regenerate - but human systems too. Communities can rise up. Rise to a collective hope – and discover the moral courage to pursue it.

And that is what is happening at Nashulai now. Let me tell you 2 quick stories to make the point:

A year and a half ago, the community members started to receive the monthly lease payments for their land. This is the first regular income any of them would have ever had. And believe me it is not very much. But the community came together for a meeting and they made a remarkable decision. They decided that the way out of poverty was not just in meeting daily individual needs, but in building better possibilities for the future. So they created a bursary fund for the education of Nashulai's children. It's unprecedented. Every month every family makes a contribution. \$5.00 per month.

By the end of the year \$4500 was given out to help kids get into secondary school and university. This is making a huge difference. But most especially for girls – because families are now encouraged to keep their girls in school and on a path to the highest level of education rather than sending them off to early marriage.





2nd story: I won't show you a picture because its really too gruesome. A few months ago there was an unusual but devastating incident. Three young nomadic lions went on an rampage, broke into a village corral at night and slaughtered all of the livestock. 300 goats and sheep. This was really cataclysmic. The village's entire wealth and source of sustenance was wiped out overnight. And the people's despair was matched by their rage.

For pastoralists like the Maasai, livestock is their wealth, their sustenance and central to their way of life. And for the people of this village it had all been wiped out overnight. Just try to imagine it. The mood that morning. Their despair was profound. And so was their rage. They wanted revenge. To go out and kill the lions that had slaughtered their stock. This is what would have happened in the past. But word about the slaughter had already got around to all the other villages in the Conservancy that morning. And Conservancy members started showing up at the village. One by one. And then by dozens. And each one came with a gift – a sheep or a goat, or two if they could afford it, for the people who had been wiped out. By the end of the day, every member family of Nashulai had made a contribution. And the village's entire livestock herd had been replenished.

This was not just an act of generosity, but of solidarity.

As though the future of everyone depended on it.



You see, Nashulai is not just a physical place. Not just 6000 acres in the savannah. It is a communal endeavour. A commons. And just as the whole ecosystem ultimately depends on the life of the soil where so much of the invisible magic of regeneration happens – on the nutrients below that ground that give life to the grass that attracts the herbivores that bring the predators, so too with community.

It is in the bonds of trust and reciprocity, connectedness and courage where the deep regeneration work takes place, and upon which our wellbeing ultimately depends.

These are the lessons we encode and enact in our stories. And as Nelson said to me, “on that day we wrote a new chapter in the Nashulai story.”

Our truest stories – the ones that capture our attention and our hearts – are always tests of character. Always stories in which moral courage and moral clarity are called into play. Why? Because that is what our future always hinges upon.

And so this brings me full circle. What my friend Cecil said to me on the banks of the Kitlope. Why it resonated so powerfully with Nelson in Darwin. Because it is a universal truth. We make our stories and they make us.

"OUR NEED FOR  
NARRATIVE CONFERENCE  
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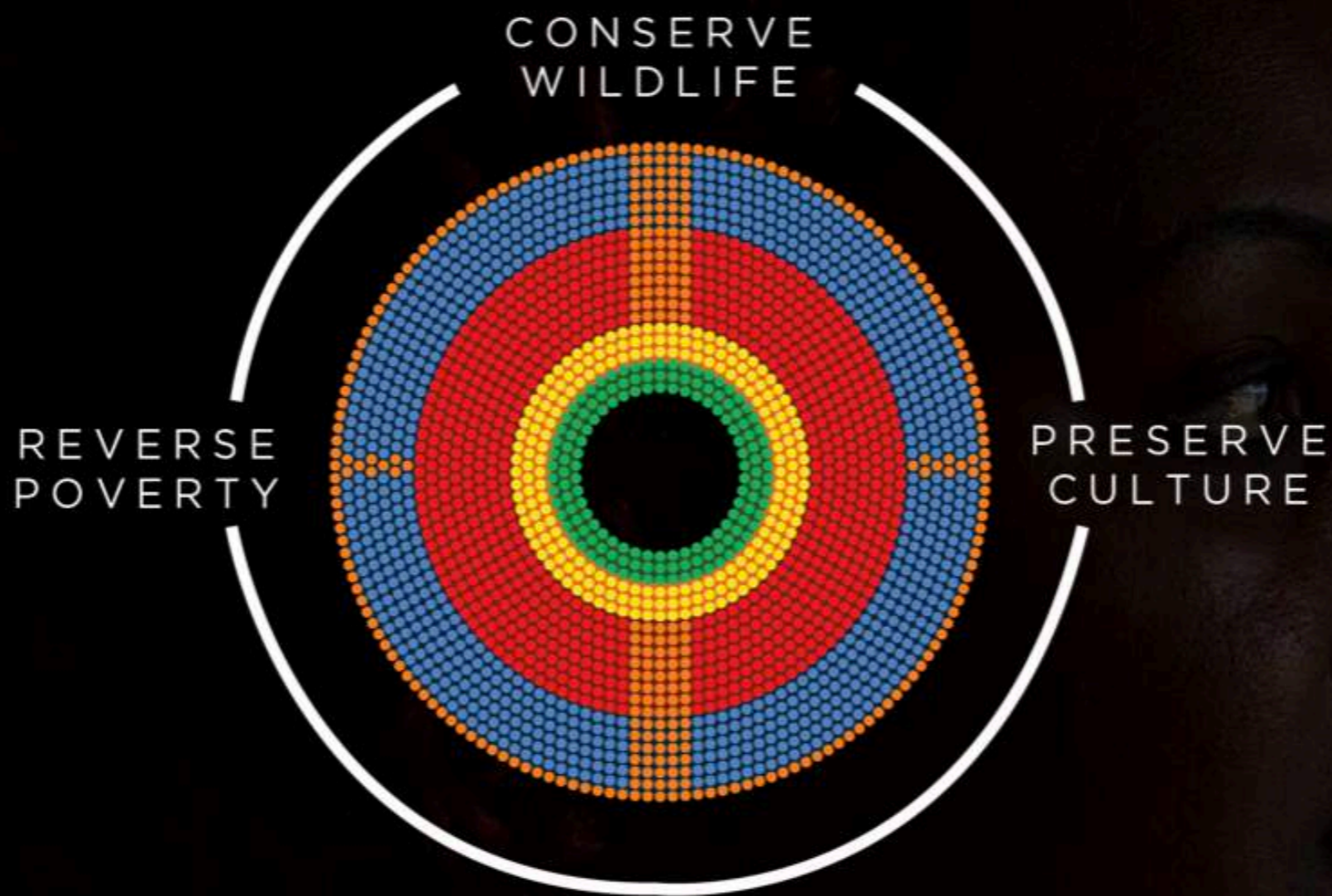
This is an idea that people like Cecil and Nelson understand intuitively. It is a deep part of their cultures.

But its not just indigenous people. It's all of us. All of our brains are wired for story. The quote on the blackboard behind this young Maasai warrior is from one of the world's leading neuroscientists, Michael Gazzaniga. He's spent a long time mapping the brains of people just like you and me. And you see what he says:

"Our need for narrative coherence is hardwired. Narrative coherence helps us to navigate the world...It tells us where to place our trust and why. It enables us to find our bearings in possible future realities."

Our brains are made for stories because it's how we process the world. How we forge a common understanding that allows us to forge a common path. How we relate yesterday to tomorrow.

# NASHULAI



OUR MISSION



And so let me conclude the story of Nashulai with the project we are now undertaking that will be at the very heart of the whole endeavour. It is something Nelson and I began plotting when we first met. We call it The Stories Cafe – or, in the Maasai language, *Netti Apa*, which means “Once long long ago.” It’s how every Maasai story starts.

The Stores Cafe will be the knowledge centre and headquarters of Nashulai. It is the place where the community will gather, where the stories of elders – rich with traditional wisdom – will come together with leading-edge conservation science; where the old stories will inform the new journey; and where the next generation can become engaged early in their culture and care for their place.

And architecturally, too, it will be a model for integrating indigenous culture and sustainability in a 21st century expression.





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The architect is a young man named Alykhan Neky, who is just completing his MA at Ryerson University. He’s from Kenya originally, and came with me a couple of years ago on a visit to Nelson and the community in the Mara. He began working on the Stories Cafe for his MA thesis, deeply exploring Maasai vernacular building methods. This rendering doesn’t do it justice. He has given an exquisite response to the brief, a community complex in the round, reflecting the traditional form of Maasai gathering and governing, called Enkiguena.

Alykhan has not only designed a building but a way of building – profoundly respectful of local culture, local materials, local capabilities and local aspirations. It is not only sustainable. I believe it will be transformational in this part of the world.



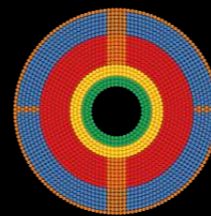
That is our hope for the entire Nashulai endeavour. That in the the ways we succeed – and even the ways we stumble on the path forward – we are framing a new story of possibility. That others will look to Nashulai and see a story not about the tragedy of the commons – but about the recovery of the commons.

A regeneration story.

The community members of Nashulai are ordinary folk. But they are actors in the fundamental narrative of our time. How do we rediscover a sustainable relationship between people and place? How do we do this in a way that draws the best out of us rather than the worst? So much is at stake now.

And we are all part of the narrative. Like Cecil, like Nelson, like the community of Nashulai, part of the age old human challenge to make a life worth living, to make our way together on an uncertain path, to make sense of our journey and to make some kind of meaning in the endlessly strange mystery of our sentient presence in this vast universe.

That's what our stories are for.



NASHULAI  
MAASAI CONSERVANCY

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