

Principles of Partnership

Natopiwo Organization (Tanzania) & Natopiwo Partners (U.S.)

The relationship between Natopiwo and Natopiwo Partners grew from years of relationship, reciprocal learning, and shared trust. The following principles name what we already believe and seek to practice. We recognize that partnerships between organizations in the Global North and Global South exist within a long history of colonial and neocolonial dynamics that we seek to actively work against, and the following 7 principles guide our commitment to doing so:.

1. Tanzanian Leadership is the Foundation

Natopiwo (Tanzania) holds primary authority over the vision, strategy, priorities, and implementation of all work in Monduli and the broader Arusha Region. Natopiwo Partners exists to amplify and resource that leadership, not to direct it.

In practice, this means:

- New project ideas originate with or are co-initiated by the Tanzania team, not proposed from the U.S. and adopted as conditions of funding
- Musa Kamaika Meng'arana and the Natopiwo team have final say on all programmatic decisions
- Natopiwo Partners does not create commitments on behalf of Natopiwo without consultation and consent

2. The Communities of Monduli are the Center of Accountability

Both organizations are primarily accountable to the Maasai families, children, women, and elders of Monduli and secondarily to donors, grant-makers, and outside partners and/or evaluators. In all our shared work, we ask: *Would the people of Monduli recognize themselves and their priorities in this work?*

In practice, this means:

- Community voice informs project design and evaluation in Monduli
- We prioritize what communities ask for over what is easiest to fundraise for
- We are honest when donor interests and community interests diverge and we navigate that tension transparently

3. Maasai Knowledge and Culture are Assets, Not Obstacles

The knowledge systems, cultural practices, ecological expertise, and community organization of the Maasai people of Monduli are resources, not problems to be solved. We resist the framing that positions Maasai people as helpless beneficiaries in need of outside expertise.

In practice, this means:

- We do not describe communities as “underdeveloped” or defined by deficits

- We draw on Maasai community knowledge and values in project design, including in our climate and conservation work
- We interrogate our own language before publishing it, asking whether it reinforces or challenges harmful stereotypes

4. Resources and Communication Flow Transparently, Prioritizing the Local in Tanzania

Natopiwo Partners raises and routes funds to support Natopiwo's work. Both organizations communicate openly about money, motivations, and challenges. Funding should not be used, however unintentionally, to exert influence over programmatic direction.

In practice, this means:

- Whenever possible, Natopiwo Partners provides flexible, core support rather than project-restricted funding that locks Natopiwo into specific activities
- Natopiwo Partners works to cover Natopiwo's overhead and operational costs, not just program expenses
- We are transparent with donors about the relationship structure and the fact that Natopiwo sets the agenda from Tanzania
- Both organizations share financial information with each other fully and in accessible formats
- When we face challenges such as funding shortfalls, project setbacks, emergency needs, etc. we name them
- We welcome honest feedback flowing in both directions and we do not create excessive reporting burdens that consume Natopiwo's time and capacity

5. Storytelling Belongs to the People Living the Story

Natopiwo Partners raises awareness and funds in the U.S. by sharing the work. How we tell that story matters and we do not trade in images of poverty to generate donor sympathy.

In practice, this means:

- We share stories only with the consent of the people in them
- We lead with dignity, agency, and achievement, not hardship
- We ask: Would the person in this photograph or story feel proud of how they are represented?
- Natopiwo Organization has the right to review and object to communications content before it is published

6. Volunteers Serve the Work, Not the Other Way Around

Natopiwo Partners and Natopiwo engage volunteers across many roles including visiting Tanzania, serving on the board, writing grants, raising funds, managing communications, and

more. In every case, the volunteer's experience, learning, or sense of purpose are all secondary to the priorities and wellbeing of the communities and staff in Tanzania.

In practice, this means:

- On-site volunteers in Monduli follow the lead of Natopiwo staff in all matters of scheduling, conduct, cultural protocol, and project focus; visits are designed around what is genuinely useful, not around what volunteers want to see or do
- Volunteers do not initiate independent relationships with community members, take photographs, share stories, give gifts, or make commitments without guidance and permission from the Tanzania team
- Board members and grant writers first learn and then represent Natopiwo's priorities accurately and completely; they do not reshape the narrative to fit funder preferences or their own priorities
- Grant applications are not submitted without Natopiwo's review and affirmative consent, regardless of timeline pressures on the U.S. side
- Both organizations are honest with prospective volunteers about this orientation upfront; voluntourism that centers the visitor's experience at the expense of community dignity or staff time is not a model we practice
- When a volunteer's presence or involvement creates burden rather than relief for the Tanzania team, we name that and adjust, including by declining offers of help that might cost more than they contribute

7. The Relationship Precedes and Extends Beyond Any Single Project

The partnership between Natopiwo and Natopiwo Partners is grounded in a relationship that began before any formal structure and that we intend to sustain over the long term. We do not treat projects as transactions, but as outgrowths of these relationships.

In practice, this means:

- We invest in the relationship itself through regular communication, visits, and mutual learning
- We plan together for the future, including how the relationship might evolve as Natopiwo grows
- We work together toward Natopiwo's long-term financial sustainability, including with Tanzanian and other funding sources

A Living Commitment

Power imbalances rooted in geography, history, and global inequity exist in this relationship. While these principles do not eliminate those dynamics, they provide a framework for managing them with intention. We commit to revisiting this document together and to naming when something has felt extractive or out of alignment with our shared values. This is a living document, open to revision as our partnership deepens. Ashe naleng', asante sana, thank you!