

Kenya Reforestation Project

Sequestering carbon, providing habitats & helping local communities

Kenya Reforestation Project – Additional Information

This project is based in the Great Rift Valley and is run by the Escarpment Environment Conservation Network (ESCONET). ESCONET's aim is to effectively mobilise and build the Great Rift Valley community's capacity to rehabilitate, conserve and protect the natural ecosystems and promote the sustainable maintenance of a clean, healthy environment.

The Kikuyu escarpment forest, with its great mixture of both large and small wildlife – including animals, birds, and butterflies – had been the beautiful gateway to the Great Rift Valley until degradation struck. This environment is also the main source of water and livelihood for the neighbouring communities.

In just a few years, wanton and deliberate destruction of the escarpment environment through charcoal burning, logging for timber and fuel wood, ring-debarking of medicinal trees and overgrazing, virtually depleted the forest vegetation cover. This in return, resulted in the drying of springs/rivers/streams, soil erosion, emigration of wildlife/birds, scorching sun, human-wildlife conflict and the scarring of once a beautiful scenic landscape that generated some income through tourism.

The worst result from this environmental destruction was the ethnic clashes witnessed recently between the pastoral Maasai and the farming Kikuyu over use of the dwindling water resources at the base of the escarpment. This resulted in unnecessary deaths, injuries, loss and destruction of property and displacement of many families.

The communities have become even more dependent on the forest for their livelihoods due to the negative climatic changes. The Maasai have to bring their cattle to graze in the forest and with the loss of flora and fauna, the tourism income has dwindled.

This project aims to plant indigenous trees on the worst degraded areas to restore the forest. Over 20 different species of native broad leaf trees are planted, including *Olea Africana*, *Cordia Africana*, *Ehretia Cymosa*, to restore the forest. This not only has benefits for carbon sequestration and for wildlife, but also for the local community. The project itself and the restored forest provide greater opportunity for new skills and employment, with regular income from a sustainable occupation. The forest also improves water regulation through greater water retention and groundwater recharge, as well as reduces soil erosion and averts landslides.

Since the project began, over 180,000 trees have been planted. The trees have survived extraordinarily well and nowadays other community-based organisations are becoming involved in tree planting for benchmarking tours.



Within the local community, there have been noted changes to the livelihood of some of the team members who were previously dependent on selling forest collected firewood but who are now sustainably occupied as forest defenders, enjoying a better social status of a regular job and income, which also includes being dairy cow owners which is prestigious.

Some additional of the welfare and empowerment initiatives, such as indigenous chicken rearing, zero-grazing cow and planting of avocado fruits, are now bearing fruits with alternative incomes for the members. All the members are now comfortably bringing up their children, most of whom are in school and in colleges.

Following a recent party celebrating 10 years for the tree planting, the project leader, Mburu Waiganjo reported that members reflected on the desperate life that they had lived before getting involved in the project, especially the women, who had had to walk for kilometres in the forest, dodging forest guards and dangerous obstacles to collect firewood and sell it to the shopping centres for very little money.

As a result of this planting, there has been a drastic change in the formerly hugely degraded forest to the thick, healthy, and species-rich forest. Biodiversity on the project site has improved tremendously with a noted abundance of bird species, chameleons, many butterfly species, dik diks, antelopes, red forest duikers, hares and elands.

The improved biodiversity has also supported local farmers that are benefiting from the increase in insect life which are evidently useful in pollination of crops in the forest-adjacent farms.

