

Project Update: May 2012

Introduction

This project focuses on promoting participatory involvement of upstream communities in sustainable conservation of Dunga and Nyando wetland ecosystems through enhancing upstream-downstream community cooperation for mutual gains. This goal is guided by the objectives below.

- i. Promote sustainable agriculture by upstream communities to help control effects of poor unsustainable farming methods on the upstream-downstream ecosystems.
- ii. Promote benefit sharing from ecosystem services among upstream-downstream communities to enhance cooperation for conservation.
- iii. Promote and sustain an upstream ecological rehabilitation program to minimise and eventually inhibit the current levels of environmental degradation which are compromising downstream ecological integrity.
- iv. Promote awareness on importance of wetlands and forests in mitigating effects of climate change and how upstream and downstream communities can partner in their sustainable conservation.

In the first quarter of this project year, we have focused on promoting benefit sharing from ecotourism and other ecosystem services between upstream and downstream communities to promote cooperation between these communities for conservation. This has partly helped to initiate a collaborative approach to sustainable natural resource use by communities living within the ecosystem.

Implemented Activities

a) Community and stakeholder meetings

To start off the project, there was need to create awareness about the main goals and mobilise support from key partners. This was done within the last two weeks of February 2012. The meetings mainly addressed issues of awareness and clarifying the role of partners in the project. The following are names of organisations and groups visited.

NAME	Location
VIRED international	Kisumu
Kajulu local administration office	Kisumu
National Environment Management Authority	Kisumu
Kajulu community groups	Kisumu
Dunga community groups	Kisumu
Nyando community groups	Kisumu
Kenya Agricultural Research Institute	Kisumu
Ministry of Agriculture	Kisumu
Ministry of Tourism	Kisumu
Kenya Wildlife Service	Kisumu
Wildlife Clubs of Kenya	Kisumu
Ecotourism Kenya	Nairobi
Janam Peace foundation	Naromoru
Nature Kenya	Nairobi

b) Awareness campaigns

In March 2012, we organised two awareness campaigns on climate change around Kajulu intended to create awareness on the dangers of deforestation and effects of climate change. Methods used to raise awareness included talks one of which the local Member of parliament Mr. Shakeel Shabir

attended, one video show and a site visit. In April 2012, we ran two more campaigns through the local chief's weekly meetings where two chiefs in two locations of Kajulu east and west were involved in the campaigns. Current methods of farming which don't put into consideration the changing climate were highlighted by the local leaders. We also used posters and a video donated by the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya, National Environment Management Authority and Vired international to enhance awareness on impacts of climate change while emphasising alternative sustainable methods of farming for example. Issues on use of water resources and conflicts that arise were also highlighted.

c) Trainings on Sustainable Livelihoods

Two 3-day training courses for two groups have been held. Twenty community representatives from various groups already practising and some interested in ecotourism were trained by a professional company (Janam Peace Building Foundation) which is based in Naromoru, Mt Kenya. Twelve of these were from Kajulu, five from Dunga and three from Nyando area. The training focused on enhancing skills on effective visitor handling in the three sites while also promoting innovation in product packaging and marketing. This was held starting from 4th April to 7th April 2012 at Kajulu and was concurrently done with trying to publicise a site identified to be established as a campsite in future. The following are names of participants:

The second training course was held from 9th to 11th May 2012 trained 20 identified potential bee keepers in Kajulu and Dunga on important skills of bee keeping which was coupled with a field excursion to Nyando where VIRED international has already undertaken a successful community bee keeping venture. This was meant to pioneer bee farming in the sites as an alternative to unsustainable agricultural practices in the sites.

d) Sites marketing for Ecotourism

We have with the support of Lake Victoria Tourism Association managed to exhibit some of the ecotourism products within the circuit through an organised exhibition held at Mega city grounds on 3rd to 5th May 2012. Though the exhibition dubbed "the Nyanza Expo" was held during weekday, our stand was visited by 266 people among who should directly or indirectly promote the products within the circuit. Marketing of the ecotourism products through multimedia like social media is ongoing e.g. we have already sent updates to Walking Trails Kenya, a social media managed by outdoor professionals and this should be published soon to help market the project sites. We are also doing this through strategic partnerships with tourism stakeholders within the region like ecotourism Kenya and ministry of tourism.

Products inventory

Upstream Site visits to identify potential attractions for packaging and marketing are ongoing through nature walks every Saturday. These are currently being done jointly between established groups like Lake Victoria Sunset Birders, Statunga Ecotours, Dunga Ecotourism Association and the newly found upstream Kajulu ecotourism groups. These weekly walks were started officially on 14th April 2012 with an average of six people being involved in the walks. We are currently trying to publicise the walks to help upstream groups already involved to generate income from visitors. From these walks, new experiences are provoking innovation from those already involved with many experienced bird watchers discovering that the area hosts unique intra migrant species of birds while also providing diverse indigenous plant life. Some of the unique bird species recorded include black crowned Tchagra, little rock thrush, black throated barbet, Viellots black weaver and white browed scrub robin while plant life, sacred sites and other geographical features still being documented.

Impacts

Though the implementation is still at formative stage, we have had good indicators of success:

- Establishment of an Association for bee keepers and ecotourism practitioners both upstream and downstream. This will enhance cooperation for livelihood programmes and conservation.
- Incorporation of project programs in the local administration activities thus enhancing awareness on climate change will sustain the climate change awareness campaign.

Future plans

In the coming months, we plan to continue with the products marketing through multimedia, trainings for farming and energy conservation groups are planned in the second quarter of this project. We also want to seek strengthened partnerships so that we are able to start improving the ecotourism infrastructure in the upstream in order to promote proactive engagement of upstream groups in ecotourism for mutual benefit of both upstream and downstream communities. We are already in the process of purchasing five bee hives for trained groups through VIRED international which should be set up within June 2012. Upstream reforestation will also be initiated within the second quarter of the project.

