

Project Update: November 2012

Activities

Stakeholder meetings

In this quarter, we held five meetings with seven community groups and supporting partners including the local administration through the chief's office, ministry of agriculture, ministry for social services, culture and development, VIREC international and Wildlife Clubs of Kenya. Through these meetings, various community groups were identified to be involved in various planned development project activities. Through these meetings, activities were planned for Nyabondo, Gita and Filter sub locations of Kajulu East.

Training on sustainable Livelihoods (Agriculture/bee keeping and Water and Energy)

The last two quarters realised three 4-day training courses for farmers and household energy users on conservation/ sustainable agriculture, beekeeping as an environmentally sound and income generating activity and sustainable energy and water resources use. Through our consulting partners, 20 farmers were engaged in practical lessons on farming especially in high gradient areas. One farm belonging to one community member was used as a model demonstration on how agriculture in sloping areas is to be done.

Twenty farmers were also trained in beekeeping, an exercise carried out with the help of a community trainer on bee keeping from VIREC international. Seven bee hives were initially installed for a community cooperation group (Kajulu bee Farmers Association) formed after the training.

Energy and water conservation training for household groups mainly women and youth helped establish a community awareness and training unit for the whole Kajulu community women on energy and water conservation methods. These involved practical training outdoor that also resulted into four households getting free energy saving stoves and one fireless cooker to the local church pastor. Demonstration on water saving agriculture with regards to digging ridges and canals around farms, digging pits and water pans and step terraces to reduce run off speed. Demonstrations also involved instructing farmers to make bunks around bigger plants like banana stems to help in water retention.

Ecotourism promotion activities (Social media, organized excursions to Kajulu), developed business plan for the site.

Kajulu escarpment is endowed with so many natural resources that can be used for sustainable tourism. These can be used to minimise concentration of many community members on agriculture which threatens the entire ecosystem of not well practised. We believe directing a lot of this effort towards tourism could benefit more members of the upstream community thus helping to reduce the level of threat on downstream biodiversity through extensive agriculture. We have within less than a year made strides in linking upstream tourism potential to downstream ecotourism development which has seen substantial improvement in the number of ecotourism activities already taking place in Kajulu. Through the weekly bird walks in Dunga area, we have managed to create a new link thus extending the circuit to include weekly bird walks in Kajulu, biking excursions and hiking. This has been possible through vigorous marketing by Statunga Ecotours through posters, the social media and strategic partnerships with Walking Trails Kenya, a social media company working to promote nature walks around the country, Ecotourism Kenya, Dunga Organics (offering kayaking services) then linking visitors to the upstream circuit. This has seen four of our trained upstream ecotourism guides taking up guiding as an income generating activity with at Kshs 14, 000 earned by these guides in 7 weeks of guiding.

School outreach

Though this was not initially planned, during transect walks across Kajulu we realised that the level of awareness on environmental issues in the area was very low. Schools in the area had many clubs but no environmental club was noted in six schools we met. We therefore decided that our conservation efforts in the area will be futile if we didn't involve these future leaders. We thus consulted Wildlife Clubs of Kenya and ran a 3-day mobile education programme in Nyabondo primary and secondary schools, Obuolo primary and school and Kindu RC primary school for 2 days. This was aimed at having the schools register as members of Wildlife Clubs of Kenya to start receiving frequent visits and educational material on natural resources conservation.

Challenges

- Involving line government ministries in important activities came with several challenges with failures to participate in important functions like trainings despite several efforts of invitations and information. A good example is the failure of the ministry of agriculture office in Kisumu to respond to invitation to facilitate training for farmers despite several visits to the office and having discussions with some of the officers. This we are trying to address through linking established community groups to respective government departments.
- Not as many community members as we desire are benefiting from ecotourism activities that we are trying to promote. Only a section was trained on these skills and not sufficient markets have been reached to satisfy the available skills. We continue to market the area and linking it to available attractions in the region.
- We have planned upstream rehabilitation through reforestation. Most of the deforested sites upstream have been turned into farms by upstream communities. This has delayed the planned rehabilitation activities. We are currently engaged in awareness campaigns in the area focusing on importance of forests in mitigating effects of climate change. This we believe will eventually help in mobilising sufficient community good will in organising an efficient rehabilitation exercises.

Project Impacts

Through partnerships enhanced out of these, Ecotourism Kenya has sent five student interns to Statunga Ecotours and Lake Victoria Sunset Birders to be mentored by the programme. One of these has taken up Kajulu as a site for her undergraduate project research and has also developed a business plan for establishment of an eco lodge for the community in the area. The hosting of the students has enhanced strong partnerships between the three organisations so that both LVSB and Statunga Ecotours are being considered for an Eco Warrior Award 2012.

Increased number of schools seeking services and membership to Wildlife Clubs of Kenya with Kindu RC registering as a member already. This is going to increase level of environmental awareness in the area through the schools since teachers are starting to talk about environmental awareness in their lessons and also during community meetings.

Biking around Kajulu hills by tourists and adventure lovers has been on the rise due to extensive publicity of area by the project and our partners.

School outreach in Kajulu through mobile education unit by WCK has started from the influence of discussions prompted by this project. This has seen at least four schools taking interest and their patrons visiting WCK office in Kisumu town.

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 also plan three more school outreaches in nine schools around Kajulu escarpment to campaign for soil conservation.



