

Project Update: June 2012

Background

Despite Kenya being a signatory to international treaties on the conservation of sea turtles and having national laws protecting marine turtles, turtles are still being extensively exploited and mangroves are destructed. The project aim is to enhance the conservation of sea turtles and mangroves by promoting sustainable utilisation of marine resources through enhanced community participation. The project will promote and encourage sustainable fishing practices to reduce the pressures of overfishing and illegal fishing that threaten sea turtles. To enhance mangrove conservation, the project will initiate the establishment of woodlots on community farms so as to reduce pressure on mangroves.

Five of the world's seven species of marine turtle are found in Kenyan waters: the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), olive ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), and loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*). Under the national laws and policies, sea turtles are recognised as flagship species for environmental conservation as all threats to sea turtles encompass the general threats to our marine environment. It is from this perspective that national and international laws were put to protect the sea turtles.

Despite all these national laws and policies, regional agreements and international conventions, sea turtles are still under threats.

Marine environmental degradation, destruction of mangroves by the community and deliberate hunting of sea turtles in the entire coastal area still occurs today. Sea turtles play a vital role in the ecology of the complex marine and coastal ecosystems they inhabit and upon which human populations depend. It is apparent that a higher percentage of the numerous threats facing sea turtles are human caused. Although it is an uphill task to completely eliminate destructive human behavior, this can be changed through promotion of sustainable resource utilisation, community empowerment and targeted education and campaigns and enhanced stakeholder and community participation.

Implemented activities

Enhancing Sea turtle conservation

The programme facilitated and was a component of awareness programmes to the local community on sea turtle and general marine conservation. The bycatch release programme has been well received by a majority of local fishermen who have agreed to work with the project to protect sea turtles in-water and monitor nesting turtles. The collection of turtles from fishermen and the release events themselves, attracted community interest and the project is getting reports on fishermen behaviour towards sea turtles. As a result of this positive cooperation with the local community, the project field staff were shown bones and shells of killed turtles. Reports from these people are that sea turtles are slaughtered for meat by some fishermen. They proved that gill net (juya) fishermen have been slaughtering turtles in their sail boats and only bring their meat home. Things like shells for the slaughtered turtles can only be washed ashore a few days later.

Though these reports and evidence on sea turtles killings, the project intensified its meetings with fishermen in every landing site as shown in the table below;

| Landing site | Number of fishermen |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Kinyaule | 27 |
| Bwampwani | 19 |
| Muyu wa kaye | 16 |

In these meetings, the attendants were informed of the importance of sea turtle and general marine conservation for their livelihoods. They expressed that they are facing several challenges including illegal fishing methods e.g. poison fishing, discarded bycatch, pollution from the nearby salt farms and lack of proper fishing gears. The project staff informed them that we are working with the fisheries department and fishermen census in all landing sites has been planned where all fishermen will be counted and the type of gears used will be recorded.

From April to June 2012, six green turtles were captured and released back to the sea. A 105 kg green turtle was found washed ashore dead and the project staff were contacted and buried it. Turtle shells and bones of killed turtles were also found thrown in the bushes and photos taken.

The project's artisanal bycatch release programme with its core incentive payment element proves to be very effective in turtle conservation and protection and plays a great role creating awareness on general marine conservation.

Woodlots establishment and mangrove planting

***Casuarina* Seedlings**

All of the five groups have been engaged in raising *Casuarina* tree nurseries that have seen full participation in nursery management. The project has been working with the local community and the Kenya forest service in monitoring the growth of the seedlings to ensure their health status before planting to farms. An on-farm 1-day training has been organised for July 2012 where farmers will be shown how to plant and take good management of established woodlots. Together with the forest officer, the project contacted several visits to the tree nurseries and engaged the local groups to ensure that the young trees are properly tended and managed for a good success rate when planted.

A spot count in all tree nurseries was done and the total number of seedlings recorded as shown below;

| Group Name | Number of seedlings in nursery | Comments |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Kinyaule conservation | 3000 | Other 1500 died due to diseases and poor management |
| Omega self help | 500 | 2100 died due to lack of water |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|---|
| Upendo support group | 2700 | 1250 died due to water problems |
| Kadzuyuni conservation | 1500 | |
| Muyu wa Kae conservation group | 8200 | 1800 die to lack of water and poor management |
| Total | 15900 | |

When planted 15,900 seedlings that will cover a total of 20 acres of land. This will after 3 years start benefiting the local community. More nurseries with other tree species are planned to be introduced by October 2012 so that they can be planted next year during the long rain season.

Mangrove restoration

The project has worked with the local community and put in place mangrove tree nurseries within the proximity to the depleted areas. The community was engaged in seedling collection as the seed season was ending by July. The project made available potting bags that were distributed to groups for the nursery establishment. So far, mangrove seedlings in nurseries waiting to be planted are:

| Species Name | Number of Seedlings |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Ceriops tagal</i> | 7167 |
| <i>Rhizophora mucronata</i> | 32 |
| <i>Bruguera gymnorhiza</i> | 314 |
| <i>Avicinia marina</i> | 34 |
| Total seedlings in nurseries | 7537 |

When planted, the acreage of rehabilitated area will be a total of 90 acres. A plan by the forest officer has been drawn that will see a massive planting of these seedlings with the involvement of the local community, schools and other stakeholders.

Conservation education, awareness and advocacy

The project organised and held seven community and fishermen meetings in five villages of Fundisa location. These meetings were attended by mostly men as women were busy in their farms since it is farming season following the long rains that come at such a time. In these meetings, the project staff explained to attendees on several issues including sea turtle conservation/protection, beach patrolling, net release and fishermen incentives/nesting sea turtles, sustainable fishing methods and the entire marine environment. In these meetings it was emphasised that environmental conservation is very vital in coastal communities' livelihood system. Project staff described the food web and showed that any destructions a marine related species has an effect to the food web at this will also affect the local community. Despite the level of education and understanding capabilities of the local community on issues pertaining conservation and depletion of natural resources, those present in these meetings decided to be instrumental in ensuring that marine life and mangroves are conserved.

The school outreach programme was active with schools having been visited and sensitised on the marine environment. Class lectures were conducted with students engaged in question and answer sessions. Teachers have been given information materials on marine environment for project sustainability.

In targeting the youths, the project facilitated in a one day seminar together with the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya. The seminar was attended by over 50 youths both women and men. The seminar focused were discussed were based on advocacy on marine environmental issues. The project staff did a presentation on mangrove degradation in the project area. Participants expressed their willingness to participate in future planned mangrove planting events.