

Project Update August 2009

The project is proceeding according to plan despite a few hitches here and there. The main hitch has been the protracted drought that has gripped the country, and this has meant that some of the trees and bamboo have had to be watered. The project has engaged two casual labourers to keep watering them until the onset of the short rains which are expected in September/October 2009. However, the trees are doing well and so is the bamboo. From the way they are growing, it is expected that the swamp will look quite different in the next year or so. According to forecasts by the Kenya Meteorological Department, El Nino rains are expected which means that the normally short rains will be unusually heavy. This will be a boon for the project as more trees and bamboo can be planted with a guarantee that they will receive adequate water for sustained growth. Efforts to elicit support from other organisations have not been very successful although some have pledged to help in buying some tree and bamboo seedlings during the rainy season. The lukewarm support can be largely attributed to the economic downturn facing the country as drought and hunger continue to bite. The education and communication campaign has been very successful and public awareness about the swamp has risen considerably. More than 500 posters have been printed and these have been displayed in both public and private places e.g. schools and shopping centres (see pictures).

For the first time, the logo of the Rufford Small Grants Foundation has been used in the posters. The posters also include the friends of Ondiri Wetland Conservation (FOWCON) information although a logo for the organisation is yet to be designed. This is underway. Efforts are also underway to start tree nursery work so that more seedlings can be available in the future. Women of the Maai Moru Women's group are already preparing the nurseries and seeds have already been purchased from the Kenya Forestry research Institute (KEFRI).

Despite government warnings against encroaching on wetlands, a number of grass harvesters are still invading the swamp to harvest fodder for their livestock. This is having a negative impact on the ecosystem as it exposes the cleared areas of the swamp to increased solar radiation and thus increased evaporation. The encroachment of the *Eucalyptus* is expected to be halted soon when the government is expected to issue orders banning the planting of these trees less than 30 m from the water's edge. The directive has already been put into force along rivers but not in wetlands yet.

It is expected that the next phase of the project will be an intensification of the community education initiative. It is also expected that the Community Education and Resource Centre will be started then. We are hoping that a well-wisher will donate some office space within Kikuyu town for this purpose since the project resources are not enough to rent a building at this stage.

On a more positive note, the project has attracted the interest of Ecotourism Kenya. Ecotourism Kenya is a civil society organisation that was founded in 1996 to promote ecotourism and sustainable tourism practices in Kenya. Founded with enormous industry support, the society was charged with the responsibility of providing the

required support for the development of ecotourism and sustainable tourism in the country. Today, the society continues to pursue the vision of making Kenya's tourism sustainable, in terms of concern for the environment and the welfare of local populations. As a membership organisation, Ecotourism Kenya brings together individuals, community-based organisations (CBOs) and corporate organisations in a forum where they can discuss the concept of ecotourism and use this knowledge to improve practices in their respective fields. Earlier this month, the Membership and Communications Officer at Ecotourism Kenya sent an e-mail message in which she sought to interest FOWCON to join Ecotourism Kenya and efforts towards this are ongoing.

