

Project Update: March 2009

Mobilisation of communities started in on 17th October 2008 and ended on December 13th 2008. We managed to form 13 groups, the community members were more than willing to participate in the training and we attained the average number of 20 people per group. Most of the groups are heterogeneous with mixed members i.e. youths, women and men. Two are purely women's groups and two are youth groups. Most of the groups were not formed from scratch. There already existed as self help groups with different activities. Only five were formed for the purpose of the project. We were able to access all the groups for the purpose of this project through the chiefs and councillors in the areas. Chiefs and sub-chiefs are very influential when it comes to accessing the communities. The area of the watershed that the project is operating i.e. the lower and the middle watershed is in four administrative sub locations hence dealing with four chiefs. They have been supportive.

We used every opportunity to introduce the project to the communities with the leaders' advice. Most of the meetings were informal and we were invited to introduce the project to the people while they gathered for other meetings. One of this was during a meeting in a camp for the internally displaced people from the watershed. There were other activities going on including donations of food stuff, and we got a chance through the local leaders to tell them what we want to do. They received the idea and we set meetings for follow up.

We also discussed with the ministry of education, the project was formally acknowledged and the head teachers informed. They however decided that the school activity should start in second term i.e. month of May; this will be a rainy season so it will be good for any demonstrations and also the term has more activities like sports and encourages clubs activities then.

Training has begun for the community groups. The turnout has been generally good for the training.

The groups that already existed are easy to manage because they have leadership in place and are used to meeting regularly. The groups that were formed through the project had to go through a group dynamics training to help them find a common interest and appreciate that they can continue after the project with other common activities.

Most of the groups are farmers and in this season they are busy preparing land before the rains. As their availability was limited, we waited for long before they came for the meeting at the venue and also spent a little time with them to ensure they concentrated. They are interested in the training and are using the opportunity to air their concerns in other areas too. We have therefore requested the leaders, especially chiefs and councillors, to attend the meetings to take up the concerns that we may not be able to address. For example, one group asked if we can train them how to increase agricultural production on their land. After assessing the concern we agreed they needed technical advice on agriculture and not the general approach we took from an environmentalist point of view. We therefore talked to one NGO that dealt with that directly, and the extension office of the ministry of agriculture.

The groups are already promising to plant trees in the coming rainy season as they understand the causes of the degraded conditions they are experiencing. We have decided to do a follow up in the project and truck the trees that will be planted after our training.

We are continuing with the training and hope to go to schools in May 2009.

Project Update March – July 2009

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School with flowers and trees in the compound

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Sign post at school entrance for waste management

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Huge litter bin for the school

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We just finished working with schools.

We agreed with the ministry of education to work in schools only in the second term (May, June and July). We visited 12 schools in the watershed like we had planned but the programme had to take 2 months instead of three because schools didn't want lots of extra curricula activities in July since they are preparing for end term exams.

We met the pupils and patrons after the evening classes for one hour. 9 schools had environmental clubs and the other three schools are now interested in forming environmental clubs after our encouragement. The teachers asked for support to start them and we discussed about in the project and agreed we will visit them again even after the project is over and encourage them to start with simple activities like establishing and maintaining flower beds in the school compound, we will also link them with environmental networks for schools run by local NGOs.

The group had pupils of ages 10 to 14 years. We had open and participatory discussions on basic environmental issues with the pupils since they are not taught in the regular school program. The areas covered include: air and water pollution, waste management, environmental resources around the school, environmental resources in the area generally and in the country, water shortage issues which are very relevant to the pupils because they experience it, drought and rainfall which are issues in Kenya now.

We also discussed how to solve the problems around and what can be done locally. Pupils in the environmental clubs agreed to meet regularly, link with other schools e.g. on environmental day and plan activities together, plant flowers and maintain the flower beds in the school compounds and at homes.

After they understood the importance of plants in reducing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere; they are interested in planting trees and taking care of them in the school compound. They also promised to share the information with their parents and other pupils and to plant trees at homes too where possible.

The teachers are happy with the sessions because they are overwhelmed with teaching since the free primary education programme started in Kenya. They have a larger workload due to bigger class sizes and have to work harder to maintain good performance. They therefore don't have much time for extra curricula activities even though they know it is important. For the same reason even where environmental clubs existed, they don't have lots of activities and hardly meet.

The challenge facing the patrons as they expressed themselves is funding for the activities that would involve money e.g. tree planting. For the flowers, pupils will bring suckers from homes and keep multiplying them. The free primary education policy has left public schools with no local funds and all their resources come from the central government. With the limited resources, they give priority to education accessories.

We agreed the patrons would discuss with their head teachers to formalize tree planting in school compounds and we will try to outsource for seedlings for the schools from well wishers. This is a program we will have to plan and see the best way to go about it.

The approach of teaching school pupils is very promising in making an impact on conservation at the local levels except for the logistical short comings for implementing the good ideas. The pupils were enlightened and very curious and excited with our visit and wished this was a regular thing.

The ministry of education office is very supportive of the project and is very keen on the impact it will have on the pupils. They are particularly interested in a more intensive programme as a follow up of this which will run for about a year and take the pupils through a complete cycle to create a clear picture. This will also involve more pupils in addition to the club members.

This was a successful part of the project.

We will now work on the remaining training sessions for community groups and organize the stakeholders Forum. We plan to complete in the next three months.