

## **Project Update: September 2009**

We have now successfully covered community training on:

1. Environmental issues around the watershed;
2. Benefits from well maintained environmental resources; and
3. Positive contribution to conservation by community.

All the sessions have been covered in a participatory manner. The community in the watershed is generally interested in conservation particularly because they have faced severe impacts of forest degradation this year. The watershed is in Mau Forest complex that has raised national and international interest due to encroachment and destruction it has faced and the effects being experienced now in most parts of Kenya since it is a major watershed. The area has not received rainfall this year and most people's livelihoods are dependent on rain-fed agriculture. They therefore don't have enough food, water is scarce and livestock don't have sufficient fodder. The destruction in this watershed and others in Kenya has this year affected electricity production and Kenyans are contending with power rationing. With this background, environmental conservation efforts are now well embraced by the people living in the watershed.

A few times the people were not able to attend our meetings/trainings since they had to spend a lot of time searching for fodder, water and food for their families and livestock. My team was very keen on getting ideas on conservation from the community members so that they can own the process and participate willingly. When they don't attend meetings we went to their homesteads and would find somebody to talk to.

The people want very much to plant trees on their farms each year until they achieve a basic 10% of the land under trees. We involved the Ministry of Agriculture through extension office for advice and follow up on the best way to develop on farm forests e.g. the species, the farm planning and intervals to accommodate other agricultural activities on the farms. This will be integrated with rehabilitation of the generally dilapidated agricultural lands.

We did a visit round the watershed mainly to see the river bank destructive cultivation, siltation on the river bed and erosion.

The project served to advance the agenda of peace and reconciliation by the provincial administration officers who attended some of our community meetings. This has become important for the government following the post election violence that was experienced at the beginning of year 2008 in the watershed and other parts of the country. This related well with environmental conservation since it was clear to them all, that when the surrounding environment is degraded, the effect is felt by everybody irrespective of their ethnicity and livelihood focus.

The final activity was the stakeholders' workshop. This brought together different organizations/agents working in the watershed to advance the agenda of environmental conservation in one way or another. Issues on follow-up of what the communities have so far were discussed. The Ministry of agriculture committed to support the farmers with skills to establish on farm woodlots. The Kenya Forest Service is willing to donate tree seedlings from their nurseries to committed farmers. The groups will continue to operate and will get support as groups and not individuals. This was preferred to ensure that neighbours encourage one another and to course an impact with the volume of trees when they are finally grown. The provincial administration has a

role since it is now a government policy that people must acquire a permit to cut down trees on their farms. Any tree growing is government property irrespective on whose land it is growing on. The permit is given by the local chiefs after assessing if the tree is old and ready for harvest. They have to therefore work with the communities and the forest service to protect any planted trees.

The community members and schools also attended and planted trees in a public garden that is managed by the local authority. The district commissioner presided the meeting and planted a tree of honour courtesy of the project.

There were speeches from Ministry of Environment representative and Education Officer. They urged the people to unit in the effort to take care of our immediate environmental where we live. The Education Officer said even though environmental studies is not formerly in the school curriculum, we should use all avenues to ensure our children get to understand environmental issues and the value of well managed and conserved environment.