

Promoting Tree Growing for Climate Change Mitigation as a Platform for Public Education and Community Outreach Programme for Environmental Conservation in Narok County.

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ABSTRACT

Globally, the forest cover is estimated at 21.4% while in Africa, it is approximately 9.3%. In Kenya, forest cover is a measly 1.7%, way below Africa's and global averages. Most of Kenya forests are in her protected water towers, including the Mau Forest Complex (MFC). The MFC is a critical ingredient of the Mara-Serengeti ecosystem, which supports countless wildlife, local and national economies through wild-based tourism, both in Kenya and Tanzania. However, the MFC has witnessed immense environmental degradation in the recent past due to the burgeoning human population. The situation is not dissimilar in the wider Narok County, where part of the MFC falls. Consequently, many hitherto natural areas have been, and continue to be, converted into small- and large-holder farms, pastoral lands, and human settlements. The resulting environmental degradation, especially from wind- and rain-driven soil erosion, is unprecedented in scale. To help in mitigating some of the adverse anthropogenic impacts, including climate change, on the environment, we established a tree nursery at Maasai Mara University. Specifically, the project seeks to inculcate environmental conservation values in local schools and communities through tree planting, and robust public education and community outreach programmes. The role local communities and school children/students can play in environmental conservation and challenges to environmental conservation are identified and discussed. The project recommends that Narok County establishes specific Habitat Action Plans to spearhead management and conservation of forests, wetlands, grasslands, and other critical habitats for the persistence of biodiversity and local livelihoods dependent on healthy ecosystems.

Key Words: Environmental conservation, forest cover, Mau Forest Complex, Habitat Action Plans, tree planting.

Conference Thematic Area: Geo/Agrobiodiversity and Sustainable Conservation, Utilization and Management of Drylands and Wetlands.