

Project Update: November 2009

From the 27-30th October 2009, Friends of Ondiri Wetland Conservation (FOWCON), Millennium Community Development Initiative (MCDI) and the Public Complaints Committee (PCC) held a four-day stakeholders' workshop on advocacy and awareness creation about the environmental problems facing the people of Kikuyu District. This district is home to the Ondiri Swamp, the wetland in which I have been funded by Rufford Small Grants Foundation to initiate community conservation activities.

The MCDI is a local organisation that promotes environmental conservation and sustainable development activities through research, awareness creation, lobbying and advocacy. The MCDI has identified the destruction and pollution of the upper catchment of the rivers that form the greater Nairobi River as serious environmental issues. Some of these rivers have their source in the Ondiri swamp where I am working with FOWCON.

The PCC is established under section 31 of the Environmental Management and Co-ordination Act (EMCA), Act No. 8 of 1999 as an impartial entity charged with the mandate of conducting in-depth investigations of complaints against any person in Kenya on issues of environmental degradation, pollution and destruction. Since its inception in 2001, the PCC has handled hundreds of cases. These have included waste management, discharges of effluent into water bodies by factories and other institutions, construction without the requisite environmental audits, pollution of various types, and many others. The PCC has issued a number of recommendations towards redressing these environmental complaints.

As part of its statutory mandate, the PCC regularly conducts seminars and workshops for the purpose of creating general awareness on environmental awareness among various stakeholders. In this respect, the PCC in conjunction with FOWCON and MCDI organised the four-day workshop to discuss a number of environmental issues at the Kikuyu Country Resort overlooking the Ondiri Wetland.

Stakeholders for this forum were drawn from the general public, civil society, government departments, the provincial administration, local authorities, the private sector especially industries, professionals such as lawyers, financial institutions, parastatals, political leaders, and the media.

The workshop attracted a high attendance with an average of 80 participants per day over the four days. There were many presentations from diverse individuals representing different institutions and interest groups. Two members of FOWCON, Dr Kang'ethe Gitu (Chairman) and Naftali Mungai (Organising Secretary) made presentations on behalf of FOWCON. Dr Gitu's presentation dwelt on sustainable development and how it contributes to environmental conservation. He told the forum that the FOWCON has plans to fence the wetland, establish a nature trail and a museum. He reminded the audience that 25 per cent of the city of Nairobi's water comes from the Ondiri Swamp via the Kikuyu Springs.

I made a presentation on the community conservation options for Ondiri Wetland. The participants discussed the options, among them the establishment of a community conservation resource centre. They urged FOWCON to be in the frontline of spearheading the conservation of the wetland for the community and for posterity.

They noted with concern the pollution threats facing the swamp and the negative impacts of mushrooming settlements following the massive land fragmentation that is occurring around the wetland. However, they were gratified to note that the floral and avian biodiversity of the swamp is on the rise following the recent rains and the tree and bamboo planting that has continued to take place.

On a more positive note, Ondiri swamp has been earmarked as one of the country's wetlands that will be gazetted by the Minister for Environment and Mineral Resources. This means that the wetland will be protected from the threats facing it, which have been listed as intensive agricultural activities and encroachment, pollution, over-exploitation of wetland resources, loss of biodiversity, settlement and urbanization, planting of eucalyptus trees and burning of wetland vegetation.

I and FOWCON have already completed a comprehensive proposal for the swamp and this will be sent to Rufford Small Grants Foundation for consideration as part of a request for continued funding. There is a tree planting exercise slated for this month that will mark the close of the current activities of the grant.

