

# RESTORE HER RIGHTS

KAMATIRA COMMUNITY FOREST  
RESTORATION BY WOMEN IN  
WEST POKOT,  
KENYA

September 2024

Written by Pastoral Communities Empowerment Programme (PACEP)  
with support from Women4Biodiversity



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## PREFACE

Restoration of biodiversity has become an essential part of the global effort to combat environmental deterioration, especially in light of climate change, habitat loss, and food insecurity. The vital importance of women-led initiatives in biodiversity restoration is the main topic of this case study. In many communities, women are the principal caretakers of land and natural resources, bringing unique insights and traditional knowledge to ecological restoration. Their pioneering work in ecosystem restoration enhances food security, social cohesion, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.

The relationship between gender, biodiversity, and community-driven conservation initiatives is highlighted in this paper. We highlight the

achievements, difficulties, and revolutionary effects that women-led biodiversity restoration programs bring to their local communities and beyond. We believe that using this lens, more study, policy support, and funding for women in leadership positions women in the environmental sector would be stimulated.

The case study's lessons highlight the significance of incorporating gender-sensitive methodologies, community-based practices, and indigenous knowledge into global biodiversity restoration plans. Women-led biodiversity initiatives, are essential to ensuring everyone has a resilient and sustainable future.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Finally, we want to express our gratitude to everyone who is fighting for the restoration of biodiversity and the inclusion of women in environmental projects. The worldwide movement for a more sustainable and just world is strengthened and inspired by your combined efforts.

## ACRONYMS

CFAs	Community Forest Associations
Chepkube	Energy Saving Stoves
PACEP	Pastoral Communities Empowerment Programme
PFM	Participatory Forest Management
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge

A community members shows a medicinal herb found in Kamatira. © Women4Biodiversity

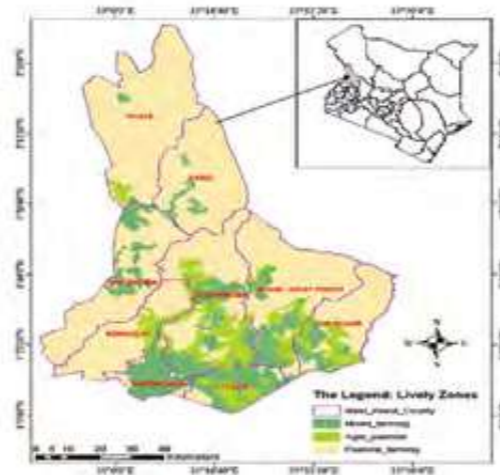


## INTRODUCTION

The Kamatira forest is part of the Cherangani Forest ecosystem which comprises of 14 forest blocks and is one of a major water catchment area lying between Lakes Victoria and Turkana Basins. The Cherangani Forest Ecosystem covers a total of 114,416.2 hectares across three counties of Elegeyo/Marakwet, West Pokot, and Tran Nzoia<sup>1</sup>. In West Pokot, where Kamatira Forest is present, it spreads over 34,380 hectares. The Cherangani forest ecosystem is a biodiversity hotspot where several critically endangered faunal species can be found, including the African crowned eagle, red-chested owlet, lammergeyer, Sitatunga, thick-billed honeyguide, and mountain bongo<sup>2</sup>. In the Kamatira Hills forest ecosystem, livestock grazing and associated activities contribute to forest degradation. The practice of free-range grazing in the Lelan, Embobut, and Kamatira forests is distinguished by large numbers of livestock (cattle, sheep, and goats) herded in the forest, particularly during the dry seasons. Large herds of livestock devastate the undergrowth by trampling and browsing on young trees and seedlings, impeding natural regeneration and reversing rehabilitation efforts in 2020 (Ministry of Environment and Forestry).

The Forests Act (2005)<sup>3</sup> established participatory forest management through community engagement, accompanied by concomitant

institutional and organizational change, most notably the establishment of the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and the formation of Community Forest Associations. The policy encourages communities near forest reserves to use the Participatory Forest Management (PFM) approach. However, gaps remain in inadequate community involvement in conserving and protecting forests in the project area and a lack of community commitment and support. Kenya has a high rate of deforestation, with an estimated 50,000 hectares lost each year. Anthropogenic activities or immediate actions that directly impact forest cover and carbon loss, such as agriculture, urban expansion, mining, logging, livestock grazing, and forest fires, are examples of direct drivers. Indirect drivers include complex interactions between fundamental political, socioeconomic, cultural, and technological processes. Corruption, poor governance, population growth, and land tenure uncertainty are all examples of indirect drivers of deforestation. The proximate and underlying drivers are frequently intertwined, resulting in changes in land cover and land use<sup>4,5</sup>.



1. As described in the Cherangani Hills Forest Strategic Ecosystem Management Plan 2015-2040: [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ke/Cherangani-Hills-Strategic-Ecosystem-Plan-2015\\_2040.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ke/Cherangani-Hills-Strategic-Ecosystem-Plan-2015_2040.pdf)

2. Rotich, B.; Ojwang, D. Trends and drivers of forest cover change in the Cherangany hills forest ecosystem, western Kenya. *Glob. Ecol. Conserv.* 2021, 30, e01755.

3. [https://kenyalaw.org/ki/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/ForestsAct\\_No7of2005.pdf](https://kenyalaw.org/ki/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/ForestsAct_No7of2005.pdf)

4. Geist, H.J. and Lambin, E.F. (2002) Proximate Causes and Underlying Driving Forces of Tropical Deforestation. *BioScience*, 52, 143-150.

5. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment: 2005. *Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: Wetlands and Water Synthesis*. World Resources Institute, Washington, DC

## About Kamatira- Context of the Region and People

This case study report features a women-led restoration process at the Kamatira Forest Pilot site in West Pokot County, which was allocated 5 acres to adapt to plant indigenous trees. This County is predominantly inhabited by the Pokot indigenous people, primarily pastoralists and agro-pastoralists who reside around Kamatira Forest. The forest serves as a water catchment, food, fuel, spiritual and medicinal source for Pokot South and Kapenguria communities. Water and other natural resources in the catchment area are of fundamental importance for the livelihoods of the Pokot indigenous community. Examples of ecosystem services affected by biodiversity are pollination, seed dispersal, climate regulation, carbon sequestration, agricultural pests, disease control, and human health regulation. Also, by affecting processes such as primary production, nutrient and water recycling, and soil formation and retention, biodiversity indirectly supports the production of food, fiber, and drinking water.

The following restoration initiative is being facilitated by the Pastoral Communities Empowerment Programme (PACEP), an organization led by indigenous people that advocates for women's rights, marginalized communities, and youth in the West Pokot Region. PACEP has played a crucial role through its staff and volunteers' experience in organization development, planning and management, finance, monitoring and evaluation, and community development to enable the community to assess the situation and give solutions that are community-driven, avoiding any tradeoffs. One major threat to the Kamatira forest ecosystem is the large-scale logging of indigenous tree varieties that are to be replaced by timber industries. These systems were put in place during British colonial times and have further exacerbated the situation in recent times. The logging industry is a very powerful stakeholder that is also being backed up by the County Government. While democratically elected, the Kenyan Political system involves multi-party governance, which involves the National Government working with 47 county governments. While the National government is responsible for setting up the legislation to protect and conserve biodiversity, the county government is responsible for the implementation of these legislations within their respective counties in line with the larger goals and objectives set under the national plan, especially for soil and water conservation as well as for forestry<sup>6</sup>. In the past, concerning West Pokot County, there was often a conflict between the actual legislation in place and its implementation by the County Government. However, in 2022, with the

newly elected government, there have been positive changes, especially with their engagement and active role in biodiversity conservation and climate change-related activities.

Kamatira community forest is a vital resource that has been diminishing so fast. A region once known for its rich biodiversity has faced significant ecological challenges over the past few decades. Deforestation, pollution, unsustainable agricultural practices, and encroachment have led to the decline of native species and the degradation of natural habitats. There was a need to restore and save the vital, rich biodiversity that, if not protected, would crush the ecosystem balance. The primary aim of this project was/is to restore the Kamatira community forest by bringing back the indigenous trees that have high environmental benefits for the community as it is a significant source of livelihood and rich biodiversity. Kamatira is also a water tower, and most springs originate from Kamatira. Thus, its protection and conservation is essential. The women are the ones who benefit most from the preservation of this forest as they are primarily the ones affected by the loss of biodiversity and forest. That is due to the destruction of water sources and forest resources, which has disproportionately impacted women because they now have to travel far to fetch clean water, which results in insufficient time to engage in income-generating activities. These women no longer get the required herbal medicines for household and livestock use during sickness; there are not enough wild fruits and vegetables. Due to these causes, there is a high malnutrition prevalence among 39 % of children under five years (MOH data). Food insecurity and fuelwood are prevalent. Hence, the community, especially women, live in poverty.



Kamatira Forest in West Pokot, Kenya. © Women4Biodiversity

6. Please refer to Fourth Schedule of the Constitution of Kenya to refer to the distributions of functions between National and County governments

## PRE- RESTORATION MOTIVATIONS & ASPIRATIONS FOR RESTORATION

Indigenous women in the Kamatira forest are deeply rooted in their local environments and have been stewards of the environment. Their intimate relationship with the land gives them unique insights into the local ecosystem. After PACEP adopted 5 acres as their pilot site, the 25 women groups were mobilized to implement the biodiversity in the provided zoned area. These women have made significant contributions to environmental biodiversity across various domains because of the reasons discussed below.

The main objective was to protect the forest by implementing measures to help curb the encroachment, such as sensitization by creating awareness in the community on the importance of the forest, engaging stakeholders, government, and various civil society organizations to develop forest preservation measures. Some of the considerations to ensure women were at the forefront of this restoration initiative were:

- **Direct Linkages to Livelihood:** Women are the primary caregivers for fuel wood collection, water gathering, and tending to household gardens and livestock. Women in Kamatira understand that forests, such as water, are vital to supporting their basic needs. As a water catchment area, the forest is the primary water source for their daily use. They have been actively involved in protecting the natural resource.
- **Food Security:** Kamatira forests provide essential food resources such as fruits and vegetables. Being a natural forest, Kamatira allows communities to access forest products such as fruits and natural plantations that may serve as vegetables for consumption. Women protect the forests so that they continue to be a food source.
- **Indigenous Knowledge Keepers:** Women, in particular, are the keepers of knowledge about traditional medicines. They have been responsible for passing it on from one generation to another. Some of these traditional medicines cure stomach kidney-related ailments and aid with maternal health, both pre-and postpartum, and menstrual health. Kamatira forest is a primary source of traditional herbs, and women are key knowledge holders passed down from generation to generation. However, with the degradation of the forest, these knowledge systems will cease to exist and, therefore, are pivotal for women to protect and restore these forests. The women also use the knowledge of the forest resources to create utilities meant for households, including weaving baskets and ropes used for everyday work. This knowledge system drives them to depend on the Kamatira forest for sustenance, livelihood, and health. It's a tradition still widely practiced and depended on by many community members. This was acknowledged by one of the members of Upper Kamatira group.



Yemti (Pokot name) is a medicinal plant found in Kamatira. © PACEP

A landscape view of Kamatira in West Pokot, Kenya. © Women4Biodiversity

A major part of the community women's efforts is to reintroducing indigenous plants back to the ecosystem. © Women4Biodiversity

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*My daughter is studying to be a nurse in Nairobi. But she still knows these traditional medicines as she grew up with them. However, in recent times, with the large-scale deforestation and replacement of timber varieties, we are losing these medicinal herbs. Soon, our future generations may not even carry these knowledge systems because we don't have these plants available*

Irene Arono  
from Ara Masaai (Upper Kamatira),  
October 2023

”

- **Traditional Beliefs:** The Pokot community believes that the forest is a sacred area where prayers, among other cultural practices, are performed. The women protect the natural forest to preserve their cultural values and beliefs. The forest is an integral part of their identity and culture, so there is a dire need to protect their territory.
- **Income Generation:** Many women in Kamatira derive income from forest resource activities such as selling forest products such as fibers from reeds for making baskets, herbal medicines, fruits, anti-insect repellents, harvesting of wild honey, and engaging in eco-tourism ventures such as forest sightseeing of caves like Room Tano (Kapsamor cave). The economic contribution incentivizes them to protect forest resources for future use.
- **Climate Change Mitigation:** Kamatira forests play a significant role in mitigating climate change, which is a global concern. Women's active involvement in protecting and preserving the forest contributes directly to global efforts to combat climate change and promote resilience in the face of environmental changes.

Around Kamatira forest, women have been majorly dependent on the forest in various ways, but they are sidelined regarding policies and decisions affecting the forest and its conservation. To strengthen their

capacity to lead and influence various decisions in policy as well as to ensure that the restoration process was led by women, some of the measures undertaken simultaneously were:

- ❖ Register Community Forest Associations (CFA) in the villages where restoration initiatives were taking place to manage and share resources sustainably among community members
- ❖ Identify the women leaders, activists, researchers, and organizations involved in the restoration process
- ❖ Interview key stakeholders to understand their motivations, challenges, strategies, and successes in promoting biodiversity conservation (See Box 1)

## Box 1

### Key Findings from Interviews with Key Stakeholders

#### Perspectives from women of different backgrounds, ages, and roles within the community

PACEP interviewed essential stakeholders to support biodiversity conservation, including old women, young women/ women leaders, youths, government officials, and various line departments. Their goals, difficulties, plans of action, and accomplishments in protecting biodiversity through community-led projects are all detailed in this study. Their viewpoints offered essential insights into how various actors might support environmentally sound practices. Some of these findings are:

#### Older women Engagement

##### Women's Motives and Perspectives

Women (50+) stressed the importance of preserving biodiversity to maintain livelihoods, especially in rural areas where people depend on local ecosystems, woods, and water supplies for fuel, food, and medicinal plants. Numerous older women mentioned having a strong cultural bond with the land, which inspires them to participate actively in conservation initiatives.

## Box 1

### Obstacles

Women are utilizing traditional knowledge to support biodiversity, especially in agroforestry and seed conservation. To exchange resources and expertise, they have advocated for traditional food system revitalization to enable the communities to be resilient. As such, they have modeled the growing of sorghum and millet, which are drought and pest-resistant. Besides these, they have also transferred indigenous knowledge on food propagation, harvesting, and preservation to young women. Traditional arts and crafts have also been taught to young women to enable them to earn income and for use in the household. Beekeeping and small livestock rearing have also been inculcated to the younger generation as an alternative livelihood.

### Success/Achievements

Women-led organizations have successfully restored damaged areas by working together to plant native trees and establish community nurseries. These initiatives have strengthened community resilience and biodiversity by increasing the availability of regional food crops and improving the soil's ability to retain water.

### Young women Engagement

#### Incentives (18-49 years age)

The young women are driven by a desire to protect ecosystems for future generations and ensure long-term environmental sustainability. Many see the preservation of biodiversity as a chance to combat climate change and enhance local economies by implementing eco-friendly programs like sustainable tourism and agroecology.

### Obstacles

Young women frequently encounter obstacles like restricted access to technology, land, and money. A generational divide may also hamper the engagement of conventional conservation knowledge with contemporary techniques.

### Techniques/ Strategies

Young women are using social media and technology to promote community action and increase knowledge of biodiversity. Additionally, they are collaborating with academic institutions to acquire technical know-how and capabilities. The young are also pushing for the creation of environmentally friendly entities that support biodiversity goals and generate employment, including ecotourism, agroforestry, and renewable energy.

### Achievements/ Success

The young women have played a significant role in promoting awareness campaigns that have raised community involvement in conservation initiatives. Numerous youth-led projects have successfully restored local ecosystems and given young people employment possibilities by establishing indigenous tree nurseries and selling seedlings to get income. Examples of these projects include tree-planting campaigns and the creation of kitchen gardens. The rearing of chicken and the construction of Chepkube have been taken seriously by young women as an alternative livelihood. Promoting increased participation in policy talks was also emphasized as a critical strategy.

### Women Leaders

They are working to push for gender-responsive policies across sectors linked to biodiversity and to facilitate free and fair participation of women in decision-making spaces to empower Indigenous and local women. Women leaders at all levels are trying to mobilize to increase funding and technical support for biodiversity programs through incentives.

Despite the differences in goals and difficulties encountered by each group, the interviews with essential stakeholders demonstrated a shared dedication to advancing biodiversity conservation. While youths are spearheading creative solutions and awareness efforts, women are essential to the restoration of the local ecosystem. To guarantee that conservation initiatives are successful, government agencies and line departments are striving for improved policies, providing a conducive working environment and collaboration during the implementation of the project by providing technical support.

## RESTORATION PROCESS – STORY OF SELF-STRENGTHENING & DETERMINATION

The restoration process was carried out after considering the needs of the community and after conducting a thorough baseline survey of the various stakeholders involved in the process. This ensured that the entire process was community-led and driven by those whose lives depended on the restoration and protection of the Kamatira Forest.

This restoration process also took various aspects of food security, livelihood security, and health of the communities into account, which was important for women to continue with the process. The following were the various initiatives undertaken leading to the actual restoration.

### Needs Assessment

In March – June 2021, PACEP initiated the process with a comprehensive needs assessment within the Kamatira community. This entailed detailed research on the significant issues affecting the forest and the gaps that hinder its preservation. PACEP also engaged with the local community to build awareness of the importance of the restoration process and encourage the communities to own and participate in it.

Some of the critical discussions revolved around understanding the existing conservation practices, prevalent challenges, and the willingness of women to undertake conservation and biodiversity protection. Since immemorial, Indigenous and local communities have practiced sustainable land management, using indigenous ecological knowledge to maintain balance. For instance, techniques such as agroforestry, which integrates trees with crops and livestock, were commonly used to enhance soil fertility and protect forest ecosystems. Traditional fire management practices

helped prevent uncontrolled wildfires that could have devastated plant and animal species. Many indigenous cultures have practices of saving seeds from the most robust plants to ensure resilience and crop diversity. This ensures that local crop varieties are maintained, especially for drought-resistant plants like sorghum and millet. Also, some indigenous communities maintain specific areas of forests as sacred, ensuring that they are not exploited and allowing the preservation of biodiversity, water sources, and medicinal plants.

Traditional communities practice crop rotation to avoid soil depletion, alternating between crops like millet, legumes, and root vegetables, ensuring the land remains fertile. Water harvesting techniques are traditionally practiced to manage rainwater sustainably. These systems often capture rainwater in ponds or terracing fields to improve soil moisture. Crop Rotation and mixed cropping methods conserve biodiversity and strengthen community resilience against environmental changes.

### Prevalent Challenges:

- **Loss of Traditional Knowledge:** Younger generations are often disconnected from traditional conservation knowledge due to urbanization, education that prioritizes Western models, and the degradation of indigenous cultures.
- **Climate Change:** Shifts in weather patterns have made traditional farming and conservation methods more difficult, as droughts and erratic rains affect the viability of indigenous crops and tree growth.
- **Land Degradation and Deforestation:** Overgrazing, monoculture farming, and deforestation for fuel and agriculture have degraded land, making it difficult to maintain traditional agroforestry systems and affecting biodiversity.
- **Market Pressures and Modernization:** The push for cash crops and monoculture systems (e.g., maize, commercial logging) has reduced the land available for indigenous crops like millet and trees critical to local ecosystems.
- **Gender Inequality:** Women, often the custodians of traditional knowledge, are excluded from decision-making processes in modern conservation efforts. This limits their role in ensuring the sustainability of indigenous practices.

This provided valuable insights into creating awareness and facilitation programs that address specific community needs and sustainably utilize the resource.



Stakeholder Engagement:

From 2021 to 2022, PACEP identified and engaged key stakeholders within the community, including community leaders, women's groups, local authorities, and other relevant entities. Building partnerships ensured a collaborative approach and facilitated the smoother implementation of awareness and training initiatives. The National

Biodiversity Strategic and Action Plan (NBSAP) was analyzed, and gender gaps were found, especially in capacity building. A recommendation was forwarded to the county government NEMA office to plan gender-focused training to promote inclusivity.

Training on Group Dynamics and Cohesion

PACEP organized 44 trainings between 2021 and 2024 for the women and the community to understand the importance of leadership, always having constitutions and bylaws that govern them, and giving them directions in all aspects and challenges they will need guidance. This included facilitating establishing and strengthening community-led governance structures, including the Community Forest Associations (CFAs), and ensuring that diverse voices are represented in decision-making processes. These trainings also utilized existing indigenous knowledge

such as agroforestry, Traditional Ecological Knowledge(TEK), sacred groves, customary fire management, traditional crop varieties, water management systems, and sustainable harvesting practices to create culturally sensitive and easily understandable educational materials such as biodiversity traditional songs pamphlets that are written in English and translated to Indigenous/ local languages with respect for the culture in mind. These methodologies aimed to highlight the health, environmental, and economic benefits of the Kamatira forest and the economy.

Box 2

Ensuring Women's Inclusion: PACEP's role towards Capacity Building and Leadership Development of Women from Kamatira

The organization provided women with leadership and technical training in agroforestry and conservation. This would allow them to play active roles in decision-making and implementation processes. Some of the engagements included:

- **Supporting Women's Cooperatives:** Establishing or supporting women-led cooperatives in tree nurseries and traditional food systems empowered women to lead conservation efforts. This could also improve their economic opportunities.
- **Promoting Gender-Sensitive Policies:** The organization advocated for policies that ensure equitable land rights and access to resources for women, enabling them to participate fully in conservation activities.
- **Utilizing Traditional Knowledge from Women:** Women hold vast knowledge about seed saving, water management, and food processing. The organization incorporated this knowledge into its conservation strategies, ensuring it is preserved and passed on.
- **Income Generation Initiatives:** Creating programs where women can generate income from sustainable forestry products or traditional foods can enhance their livelihoods while promoting conservation.
- **Gender-inclusive Workshops and Community Engagement:** Engaged women and men together in workshops that address the importance of women's roles in environmental conservation and decision-making. This helps shift cultural norms and ensures both genders are active participants

Conduct Awareness Campaigns:

Launch targeted awareness campaigns using various channels such as community meetings, radiobroadcasts, social media, and printed materials and engage local influencers and opinion leaders

to amplify the connection between environmental conservation practices and improved health, livelihood, and economic savings.

Establishment of Tree Nurseries and Kitchen Gardens

Training and demonstration of tree nurseries were carried out in Upper Kamatira in Ara Masaai Village and Lower Kamatira within Adoket Village, where women were trained and helped to establish tree nurseries with both Indigenous species<sup>7</sup> like *Chuchwen (dovyalis macrocalyx)*, *Kpwo (croton macrosachus)*, *lamaiywo/Reperwo (syzgium guineense)*, *Mokongwo (Grewia villosa)*, *Reper (syzgium cordatum)* and *Lokotetwo (carissa spinarum)* and exotic tree species like *Cypress(Cupressus lusitanica)*, *Pine (Pinus patula)* amongst others as to reduce the cost of reforestation by avoiding buying of tree seedlings. This also ensured that the women could use the nurseries to grow medicinal herbs and trees that they use for everyday use, which were diminishing

due to the rapid destruction of the Kamatira forest. Kitchen gardens were introduced to the community as an alternative way of livelihood to reduce dependency on forest resources, thus reducing the footprint on the utilization of Kamatira forest. Sustainable agriculture projects that have increased crop yields, improved food security, and reduced reliance on environmentally harmful farming practices were also implemented. PACEP also developed a Nursery Establishment Booklet<sup>8</sup> that provided a step-by-step description of the entire process and a template for keeping records of the saplings grown in the Nursery and Kitchen Garden. This booklet was distributed widely within the community.



7. The Indigenous Species are named with their Pokot terminologies and their scientific name.  
8. Can be retrieved here: <https://www.women4biodiversity.org/kenya-report-2/>



### Seed Banks

Women were trained to collect seeds from forest trees. This allowed them to propagate and raise more trees, especially ones that had been destroyed, thus giving the species a chance of survival. They

also sold the seeds to other tree nurseries, which earned them income and facilitated the exchange of indigenous varieties of seeds.

### Energy Saving Stoves (Jikos or Chebkubegh)

Chekubegh is a traditional brooder constructed in a kitchen. It serves two purposes: a cooking stove that utilizes energy efficiently to warm chicks and ensure their growth and rearing. Establishing these energy-saving stoves was a good measure that ensured women reduced their reliance on forest fuel resources.

These stoves can be developed using local materials (See Box 3), and the adverse health impacts caused by using traditional stoves can be addressed. Women were trained on building *Chekubegh* within their homes, usually, spaces for community building, as women groups moved from one house to another, helping each other construct the stoves. A training manual was also developed and shared widely during the training session for broader outreach.

#### Box 3

#### Materials Used for Energy Saving Chekubegh\*

- 50 to 60 clay bricks
- Kuku net chain link
- Timber offcuts (magogo)
- Old blankets
- Clay mud (To be prepared a day before use)
- Sand (one wheelbarrow)
- Water
- Nails /binding wire
- Measuring tape

As mentioned in the Training Manual developed by PACEP



Constructing Jikos is a process that requires team effort.  
© Women4Biodiversity

### Reafforestation Process

The restoration is being carried out on 5 acres (2.2 Hectares) of the Kamatira region, part of the Koitumo region. Women from two villages—one from lower Kamatira (Adoket) and one from upper Kamatira region (Ara Masaai)—support the work being carried out.

In the first phase of reforestation in 2022, over 1500 saplings (a mix of timber and indigenous trees) were planted. However, a brief drought impacted the survival of almost 300 of them. It was understood

through this that the indigenous varieties could withstand harsher climatic conditions than the timber varieties. However, in 2023, during a plantation drive in September 1800, more saplings were planted as the region received adequate rain. The Ministry of Water and Natural Resources also recognized the restoration region and has demarcated it for further development.

### Sensitization Workshops:

During the restoration phase, sensitization workshops were specifically designed for women. These workshops addressed common misconceptions, dispelled myths and taboos, and highlighted the advantages of transitioning to energy-efficient environmental conservation and forest resources. Some of the taboos practiced within the Pokot community are rooted in patriarchy and often put the women at a disadvantage, including a lack of economic freedom to support the household, increasing their dependence on forest resources to support them from their sale to secure necessities like sanitary pads. Young girls

are often impacted, preventing them from receiving formal education due to menstruation and other norms practiced by the communities.

PACEP facilitated an open dialogue to address participants' concerns and questions and ensure the women were adequately supported in their journey toward empowerment and recognition. Addressing social norms was necessary to sensitize men and encourage women to take on more leadership roles, ensuring that the community-led conservation and restoration initiative was gender-responsive.

### Monitoring and Evaluation:

Established a robust monitoring and evaluation system to assess the impact of awareness and training programs. Feedback was collected from participants, and the translation success rate of the restoration process was assessed through regular

surveillance of the restored regions by community members, volunteers, and staff, as well as the use of energy-efficient stoves and the measurement of changes in health indicators and environmental impact. (See Box 4 for more information)

#### Box 4

#### Indicators for Monitoring Restoration Impacts

During the implementation of the biodiversity restoration process at the Kamatira restoration site, specific indicators were used to evaluate the effectiveness and state of the restoration work. These indicators aid in monitoring development, assessing ecological impact, and directing subsequent interventions.

The primary indicators are as follows:

- Diversity and Abundance of Species found in the restored area relative to reference ecosystems or baseline data showed restoration success.
- Restoration success was evident in the pilot site, as the number of important species, particularly rare, endangered, or essential to the ecosystem, have increased.
- The group members who visit the forest can witness healthy, diverse plant cover, improving ecosystem resilience and providing habitats for wildlife. Youth groups noted that several different types of monkeys have been seen in the forest.
- There is an increased volume of water in the rivers, which have Kamatira forest as their source.
- Seedlings are growing in the forest, which indicates the presence of pollination and Seed dispersal.





### Health of the Women and their Community

- ❖ The Kamatira Community owns the process and has become good biodiversity stewards, which has enhanced the process's success. This indicates the long-term sustainability of the process and increased ecosystem benefits to the Indigenous and local communities who rely on it for food, water, fuel, medicine, recreation, timber, and spiritual purposes.
- ❖ While working on the restoration, women realized that they had to reduce exerting pressure on the forest resources. For that, they started alternative livelihood initiatives that included keeping poultry, beekeeping, and the establishment of kitchens. Alternative livelihood initiatives and forest resources, such as nutrient-dense foods like fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds, have improved household income security and income generation. These have also improved women's and their community's health.
- ❖ Women from Kamatira have improved ties within their communities, which has aided in preserving cultural heritage due to restoration that has inspired them.
- ❖ Restoration initiatives offer learning experiences for kids and adults alike, encouraging a more profound comprehension of sustainability and environmental care.

### Follow-Up and Support:

Maintaining regular follow-up sessions to provide ongoing support and address the challenges women face in adopting energy-efficient cooking

practices and group bee-keeping initiatives. These initiatives foster community building and shared responsibility for sustaining positive changes.

### Advocacy and Scaling Up:

Advocated for policy changes that support adopting environmental conservation and prohibit illegal logging at regional and national levels. Between 2022 and 2023, PACEP facilitated five sessions with 20 women and government officials to attend "The West Pokot Climate Change Regulation and Action Plan" development forum to contribute to the development of the paper and ensure that gender perspectives are included. Women were

able to influence the outcome of the regulation to be gender-responsive, and women were able to get official positions in each of the 20 wards of the County and also represented in the highest committee at the County level. The regulation above is an "ACT" that women are proud of. In 2024, PACEP networked with other organizations in the County to push for Gender Policy, which is now being advocated to be passed in the assembly.



Women have started tree nurseries to earn extra income. © Women4Biodiversity

## POST RESTORATION

### Strengthening Community-led Governance Structures

Community Forest Associations were part of the Participatory Forest Management approach recognized under the Forest Act 2005. This approach enabled communities to actively engage in the decisions and co-management of forest ecosystems in Kenya. A CFA consists of different subsections depending on the user group, such as beekeepers, gatherers, herbal dealers, ecotourist handlers, and livestock keepers.

With the two CFAs being registered in Kamatira, the next step in restoration is to ensure that community-led governance mechanisms are strengthened. This involved setting up zoning of the

restored areas, including restrictions on harvesting, grazing, or human activity to allow for regeneration and protection from poachers in the region. In November 2023, three women from the women's group were elected to be part of the CFAs, allowing them to be in decision-making positions for the next three years until the next election. The CFA, with the community, has recognized the need to restore larger areas in Kamatira forest in the future and is expanding the restoration work beyond the initial area.

### Organizing Intergenerational Dialogues to transfer knowledge to the Next Generation:

PACEP organized intergenerational dialogues that provided an essential platform for sharing traditional ecological knowledge between elders and the youth. The dialogues ensured that indigenous knowledge on biodiversity, sustainable land use, and conservation practices was preserved and passed down to the young generation. Elders contributed a wealth of experience on the importance of native species, traditional farming

techniques, and ecosystem management. For instance, sharing knowledge on the importance of conserving the tree species, herbal medicine used, respect for the sacred places fostered, and a deeper appreciation and understanding of biodiversity to the younger generations, ensuring that the knowledge continued to shape sustainable practices for future generations.

### Engagement of Youth Groups within the Restoration Work

Youth groups played a pivotal role in the restoration process. Their involvement brought energy, creativity, and a long-term commitment to conservation work. Youth-led initiatives include tree planting, habitat restoration, and the establishment of indigenous nurseries. Youth help integrate modern technology and social media to raise awareness effectively and mobilize community members toward restoration.

As such, youth residing in Kamatira Forest were involved in the project to support the acceleration of biodiversity conservation. This engagement of the youths in the Kamatira forest restoration project not only accelerated the conservation of the forest but also made future environmental leaders who are interested in maintaining the balance between development and ecological preservation.

### Traditional Innovations

Traditional innovations were adopted, such as using half moons and mandala structures to collect water and conserve soil in members' households. To ensure food security, they adopted traditional food systems, like planting millet and sorghum, which are resistant to drought and pests.



Mandala Garden construction and planting tree in the centre for effective soil and water conservation © Women4Biodiversity



Community members have also initiated Community Forest Association, a voluntary service to protect the Kamatira Forest. © Women4Biodiversity

### Community Incentives:

PACEP has been exploring the possibility of providing incentives to encourage the adoption of environmentally energy-efficient cooking stoves.

These could include subsidies, discounts, or community recognition programs, which effectively motivate behavior change.

### Continued Challenges and Threats:

Recognition of rights for women remains an issue within the Pokot Community as it still roots itself in patriarchal norms and values. A woman's agency is constantly undermined as customary decision-making bodies seldom include women's voices. These further trickle down to institutional levels as men are often invited and engaged in policies and discussions at the county level. The added burden of handling household-level work also prevents Pokot women from actively contributing to any meetings and decision-making processes.

There have been concerted efforts to raise awareness of the inclusion of women at the community level and formal decision-making bodies. These awareness-raising workshops also aim to bring a fundamental shift in the existing norms by engaging men and challenging dominant narratives of the role of women within their community. It also includes addressing equal and effective participation of women, their tenorial rights, and gender-based violence, which are prevalent in the region.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

**Acceptance and Assimilation of Conventional Knowledge Systems:** The organization/funder should actively encourage the documenting, preserving, and applying traditional knowledge in biodiversity conservation, such as agroforestry and sustainable harvesting, by allocating resources to support these initiatives.

**Programs:** The organization and its partners should create programs that promote Gender-Responsive Conservation Initiatives that include men and youth in preserving biodiversity, emphasizing the necessity of gender parity in all endeavors.

**Tools for analysis:** The organization should be supported with tools and capacity to analyze its partners and stakeholders, enabling it to understand where to go for specific issues.

**Established Community Forest Associations (CFAs):** CFAs' structure and capacities should be strengthened to enable them to help with local planning, policy development, and biodiversity management. These organizations should be facilitated in seeking authority from the County government to co-manage conservation areas, raise issues, and offer solutions.

**Encouraging Collaboration and Policy Advocacy:** The organizations, their network, and partners should put more effort into promoting laws that acknowledge the importance of gender parity, indigenous knowledge, and youth involvement in ecosystem restoration processes. They should work with international organizations and government institutions to develop policies promoting equitable and long-term biodiversity conservation approaches.

**Collaborations:** Encourage collaborations between groups and partners to create conservation initiatives combining cutting-edge scientific methods with time-honored customs. Collaborations of this kind will improve the sustainability and efficacy of biodiversity initiatives.

**Long Term Financial Support from the Funding Partners:** Provide communities with the knowledge and resources they need to promote the conservation and restoration of biodiversity in their local areas. Organizations that receive long-term support can better plan and carry out their activities, produce long-lasting effects, and fortify their operational bases. Additionally, it encourages adaptability and resilience in the face of changing obstacles. Further, there should be flexibility in using

the financial resources accorded to the grantee to allow for better planning for activities and different sections of the organization.

Exchange visits should be encouraged because they enable organizations to learn from one another and, in some instances, acquire expertise from colleagues. Additionally, supporting indigenous women in attending relevant regional and international conferences.

**Capacity Building:** Raising knowledge of legal frameworks and rights about access to natural resources and biodiversity should also be a part of capacity building. Training on effective communication and the use of different media forms is essential. Additionally, training should be provided on monitoring and evaluation to provide capacities to the CBOs and communities to have a robust evaluation tool. Proper evaluation enables communities to make rightful decisions on their initiatives. Implementing an organization's institutional strengthening needs to be prioritized, and a percentage of resources should be allocated.

**Decision-making spaces:** More women need to participate in local and higher-level decision-making forums to influence women's inclusion in environmental governance and equitable sharing of natural resources. Women should be given tailored and focused programs to close the capacity gaps.

Ecosystem Restoration is essential to preserving biodiversity health, supporting food security, human livelihoods, and climate change resistance. This can be made more equitable and sustainable by acknowledging Indigenous knowledge systems, encouraging gender-responsive activities, involving men and youth, developing Indigenous/local skills, guaranteeing inclusive decision-making, and making long-term, meaningful collaboration possible through financial resource support. In the end, protecting biodiversity ensures that future generations inherit a healthy and balanced natural world, which makes it both an environmental requirement and a social responsibility.



The community of Upper Kamatira. © Women4Biodiversity

## ABOUT PACEP



Pastoral Communities Empowerment Programme (PACEP) is an Indigenous-founded and led non-governmental organization with a membership that is passionate about long-term sustainable and self-determined solutions. PACEP was formed to implement its project intervention programs to reduce

poverty and strengthen women's leadership and environmental governance through socio-economic empowerment initiatives, advocacy, capacity building, and training for grassroots Indigenous women and youths in general to sustain their socio-economic and livelihood status.

## About Women4Biodiversity

**Women4Biodiversity**

Women4Biodiversity believes that 'Living in Harmony' with Nature needs to take into account the roles and contributions of women and girls to achieve transformative change. This requires addressing gender equity and needs to embrace the holistic solutions and the recognition of women's human rights to achieve it. Our work

involves building synergies around the work of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and other international arenas to provide direction for more coherent and inclusive processes while ensuring their proper implementation.

