

Project demonstrates community livelihoods can be improved by conserving biodiversity

Title

BirdLife International through its partners in three countries; Kenya (*Nature Kenya*), Ethiopia (*Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society - EWNHS*) and South Africa (*BirdLife South Africa*) recently concluded a livelihoods project funded by Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECID) The aim of the project has been to improve the livelihoods of local communities through sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources at six sites in the three countries, while influencing policies at all levels. It also focused on enhancing the resilience of community livelihoods and conservation activities that reduce climate change vulnerability while at the same time reducing pressure on natural resources.

The project focused on sites: Yala Swamp (Kenya), Dakatcha Woodlands (Kenya), Abijata Shalla (Ethiopia), Berga Wetlands (Ethiopia), Wakkerstroom (South Africa) and Chrissiesmeer (South Africa). These sites are important for key species of birds including globally threatened like Clarke's Weaver (*Ploceus golandi*) or endangered e.g White-winged Flufftail (*Sarothrura ayresi*).

In spite of the importance of these sites, multiple challenges existed, including over-harvesting of resources, ecosystem degradation, invasive alien species and threat of habitat conversion for bio fuel production. Strategies adopted to address these challenges included formation, strengthening and capacity building of Local Conservation Groups; development of micro-credit schemes; grain reserve management; soil and water conservation measures, biodiversity monitoring and advocacy at site, national and international levels.

Livelihoods benefits of the Project

Ethiopia

- In Abijatta Shalla area, the monthly income of 40 men and 10 women improved by

- 140% from 50 (\$2.76) to birr 120 (\$6.63) from grain trade following the establishment of a microcredit scheme. \$5,000 was injected into a microcredit scheme.
- In Berga wetlands, the monthly income of 9 men and 3 women increased by 67% from birr 150 (\$8.30) to birr 250 (\$13.90) from cattle fattening implemented through a microcredit scheme.

South Africa

- The monthly income for 2 men and 13 women operating the Igugulethu Vegetable garden in Wakkerstroom improved by 50% from 100 Rand (\$12.20) to 150 Rand (\$18.20).
- The monthly income for 5 men operating the Indalo Wood Carving project increased by 67% from 300 Rand (\$36.50) to 500 Rand (\$60.80)
- Events catering equipment worth \$5,860 were purchased for Ulusha Event Management Cooperative at Chrissiesmeer.

Kenya

- In Yala, five new papyrus products were developed (lampshades, stools, magazine racks, chairs, trays). The SSG earned Ksh 15,000 (\$178.10) in the initial year of the project.

Biodiversity Benefits

Ethiopia

- In Abijata Shalla, 20 hectares of land was set aside and rehabilitated from serious degradation through exclosure. The rehabilitation exercise paid off with the practice being replicated in private land holdings. The enclosed area experienced drastic restoration with high rate of regeneration of indigenous trees being recorded. In addition, some wildlife species started moving into the area.
- In Berga, 10 acres of land was fenced off for rehabilitation and 35,000 seedlings of *Acacia abyssinica* planted. In addition, a tree nursery with approximately 100,000 seedlings was established and seedlings distributed.
- Hillsides in Berga were rehabilitated by planting 3,500 assorted tree seedlings in a stretch of 20 kms.

South Africa

- The wood carving project used invasive tree species and recycled dumped used furniture. This reduced the impact of invasive species and environmental pollution by dumped old furniture.
- Work at the project sites involved creating awareness and advocating for biodiversity conservation through events such as the World Bird Migration day and World Environment Day
- Secretary birds, all cranes, both flamingos, Denham's Bustard and the African Fish Eagle benefited from a community biodiversity monitoring scheme.

Kenya

- In Yala, papyrus use declined by 50-60% after training of local groups on efficient use of papyrus.
- Local communities better appreciated Clarke's weaver as an endangered species in Dakatcha . The communities now see birds as a potential source of income through eco-tourism.
- Formation of Charcoal Producers association in Dakatcha contributed to a significant reduction in illegal charcoal production from 10 lorry-loads per day to about two per day.
- Campaigns against a massive biofuel project in Dakatcha by Nature Kenya led to its withdrawal.

Apart from livelihoods and biodiversity benefits, the project succeeded by influencing various policies at national and international levels.

Conclusion

The Euro 500,000 investment by AECID in three countries has led to improved lives and livelihoods as well as better managed natural resources. Human capacity to conserve fragile environments as well as sustainably use these resources has been boosted. The project has also resulted in tangible policy outputs at local, national and international levels. *By **Ken Mwathe and Venancia Wambua***