

Grassroot women groups advocate for change in Kikuyu Escarpment

5 February 2015, Kiambu County stakeholders forum organised by KENVO

This forum brought together participants such as the Kiambu County Director for Natural Resources, the Ward administrator, conservation officers from various wards in the county, agriculture officers, forest managers, women in natural resources management, members of CFAs (Community Forest Associations) as well as WRUAs (Water Resource User Associations).

"The CI-WHSS-supported women were really involved in the debate of natural resources in Kiambu County and they raised some issues to the policy makers. Some of the issues were:

1. One of the grassroots women raised a concern on the garbage littering in the towns and specifically addressed the question to the environment officer for Lari Sub-County. To solve the challenge of garbage in Lari, the officer committed to work together with women in solving the issue of garbage.
2. One representative of the women made a presentation on what they had been doing in Natural Resources Management and the County Director for Natural Resources Management committed to work with the grassroots women to ensure all natural resources in the Kiambu county are mapped.
3. Because 'our' women shared their experience in Natural Resources Management, other women in the forum were encouraged to be more active in environment conservation and Natural Resources Management in their respective areas."



One of the grassroot women (Joan) addressing a preparatory meeting at the KENVO office



Women discussing serious issues with the County Director and the Environment Officer for Lari

Story and images by Nelly Wangari (KENVO)

Previous news:

The participation of women in decision-making and management of natural resources is taking shape in Lari-Sub County, Kenya. This is being facilitated by the Kijabe Environmental Volunteers (KENVO) in collaboration with the Grass Root Organization Operating Together in Sisterhood – GROOTS Kenya, under the “Women in Healthy Sustainable Societies (WHSS)” programme, funded by Conservation International and managed by BirdLife International.

The KENVO/GROOTS project aims at building the capacity of women to be involved in the management of natural resources, and it will form a network of grassroots women in the Sub-County to advocate for environment conservation in the area.



The project kicked off in May 2014 with a range of focus group discussions with local women from various areas of the Kikuyu Escarpment, geared towards identifying the gaps and barriers in matters regarding leadership, knowledge on different environment policies and acts, women rights and access to natural resources as well as environmental issues in the Sub-County.

'Men for women'

A new grassroots network consisting of 45 members (of whom 10 are men who call themselves 'men for women') has been formed in the Sub-County. Since the onset of the project, the group has been meeting to discuss key issues regarding empowerment of women and providing more leadership roles to fulfill the gender parity obligated by the constitution: commonly known as '*tokenism*'. During one of their regular meetings on 24th July 2014, the group met to provide feedback on the gaps identified in their previous meetings in areas of health and agriculture. Among others the group discussed the inadequacy of staff and delays in getting medical equipment at the health center. As a way of addressing this the group agreed to lobby for the upgrade of the health center to a district hospital. Inaccessible markets was one of the major gaps identified in agriculture.

The women pointed out that they are denied the opportunity to attend various capacity building meetings about the environment, resulting in them to lag behind in taking leadership roles. Additionally, it was highlighted that women are oblivious of the different policies in

regard to environment conservation. To ensure gender mainstreaming in environment conservation, KENVO, through the WHSS project, has been at the forefront in ensuring that women are always present in different capacity building meetings such as a recent workshop on the available eco-tourism sites in the Kikuyu Escarpment as well as a Participatory Forest Management workshop that was held in the month of July. Through such meetings women are able to learn and build their capacity that help them make informed decisions.



Pupils from Matathia Primary School (in Kikuyu Escarpment) using waste to promote conservation (another KENVO project)

Proactive

The project coordinator Nelly Wangari called upon the women to be proactive about different issues in the community ranging from agriculture and health to land management and conservation, and to increase their presence in areas where women are affected by ill managed institutions and activities. She further stressed on recruiting more members to the network to ensure that women will be increasingly involved in the management of natural resources and environment conservation in the Lari Sub-County.

Story by Ibrahim Mitole (CLP policy intern, BirdLife International) and Nelly Wangari (KENVO)