



The Green Belt Movement in Kenya



Wangari Maathai, environmentalist and founder of the Green Belt Movement.

The Green Belt Movement (GBM Kenya) was established in 1977 by Professor Wangari Maathai, under the auspices of the National Council of Women of Kenya. Its mission is to mobilize community consciousness for self-determination, equity, improved livelihoods and security, and environmental conservation.

GBM works in nine districts nationwide (Bungoma, Embu, Kisii, Machakos, Maragua/Muranga, Meru, Nyeri, South Nyanza, Trans Nzoia). While planting indigenous tree has always been the focal activity, GBM programs have expanded to include civic education, advocacy, food security, Green Belt eco-safaris, and “women and change” activities. Through these projects GBM Kenya has succeeded in promoting environmental consciousness, volunteerism, conservation of local biodiversity, self-empowerment, community development, and accountability.

USAID/Kenya Partnership with the Green Belt Movement East Aberdare Forest Rehabilitation Project

The Aberdare Mountain Range stretches over 125 km from Nyahururu in the north to Limuru in the south. It has two main peaks: Oldonyo Lesatima (4,001m) and Kinangop (3,906m). The Aberdare area borders six districts of Kenya’s Central Province - Nyeri, Murang’a, Maragua, Thika, Kiambu and Nyandarua, and Laikipia District, in Rift Valley Province.

The forest contains a high diversity of forest types – closed-canopy, bamboo, sub-alpine and alpine vegetation. The Aberdare Range is internationally recognized as an Important Bird Area. The mountains are home to a number of threatened and endemic species, such as Jackson’s mongoose and the golden cat. Other large mammals of international conservation importance are the bongo (a large, secretive antelope), black rhino, elephant, leopard and the giant forest hog. Hundreds of tributaries from the Aberdare Range and Mt. Kenya pour their waters into the Tana River, Kenya’s largest river and along which hydropower plants, generating over 55% of Kenya’s electrical output, are located.

The Aberdare Range is the source of drinking water for millions of Kenyans, including the population of Nairobi. The area is considered one of the last complete ecosystems in Kenya,--and among the most threatened. Forested watersheds are losing their capacity to store rainwater. Downstream suffer a high incidence of riverbank collapse, flash floods, and topsoil erosion. This is largely due to unsustainable farming methods, removal of streamside vegetation buffers, illegal logging and poor management of forest plantations. The forest’s rich biodiversity and its ability to provide ecosystem services are diminishing as a result of these unsustainable activities.



Planting indigenous trees is one of focal activities for GBM programs

USAID/Kenya has supported the Green Belt Movement's (GBM)'s East Aberdare Forest Rehabilitation Project since 2008.

Funding: USAID: \$526,138
GBM: \$ 77,418

Project Area: Gakanga and Zaina area on the eastern part of the Aberdares

Objectives of the East Aberdare Forest Rehabilitation Project

1. To restore degraded areas of key watersheds in the Aberdare ecosystem
2. To conserve biodiversity and support livelihoods of participating communities and assist communities adapt to climate change.

The GBM works by mobilizing communities next to forests to rehabilitate degraded watersheds. The project aims to rehabilitate 2,000 hectares (ha) by planting two million indigenous trees. The project is expected to benefit 3,000 impoverished households through training, income generating activities and improved availability of water and fodder. Women are 90% of project beneficiaries.

Achievements

1. 1,700 ha of degraded forest areas have been rehabilitated by planting two million trees along rivers, water-catchment areas, public lands and on private farms. The rehabilitated areas show improved conditions: some 60 formerly dried-up streams have begun to flow again.
2. The project is achieving targets at minimal cost and has integrated agro-forestry and food crops-- increasing the resiliency of beneficiary households.
3. The community has earned over US\$ 80,000 in revenue from selling tree seedlings.
4. Monitoring of trees with GIS technology as well as close surveillance by youth "green rangers" show significant tree growth and improved ground vegetation.

The project has strengthened community forest associations, enabling them to co-manage forest areas with the Kenya Forest Service.

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“We are very fond of blaming the poor for destroying the environment. But often it is the powerful, including governments that are responsible.”

–Wangari Maathai