

Kenya:

Aloe growing takes root in Laikipia

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The Laikipia Wildlife Forum considers the commercialisation of local indigenous aloes as a "conservation enterprise" opportunity, linking the commercial benefits from the crop to benefits for local communities, range and rehabilitation and the conservation of aloes themselves. This in turn will expand areas for sustainable land use and in time increase space for wildlife in the ecosystem.

As a cash crop to supplement incomes in semi-arid areas such as Laikipia, aloes are unique, being both locally indigenous, needing very little care and being well known as a plant product to the people of the area. Aloes are rapidly becoming the galvanising reason for local pastoralists and small-holders to begin to rehabilitate their environment. The hope is that the products from the local indigenous aloes such as Aloe secundiflora will one day stand alongside well-known aloe species such as Aloe vera, which is not native to Kenya. The promotion of the Kenyan Aloe sector started with the establishment of the Kenya Aloe Working Group (KAWG) in 2004, which has been hosted by Laikipia Wildlife Forum since its inception. Much of the group's work has involved lobbying the Kenyan government to allow the commercialisation of indigenous aloes - a process requiring changes in national law, reviewing the traditional industry and markets that exist based on the wild harvesting of aloes and the assessment of the commercial potential of indigenous aloes.

Grant

Chloe Chick and the 3 Peaks 3 Weeks team have raised enough money to cover the whole of the core costs (salaries and overheads) of the LWF's Community Conservation programme for 2007. This means that future donations can be put towards some of the actual activities facilitated by the CC programme, including the aloe project described above.



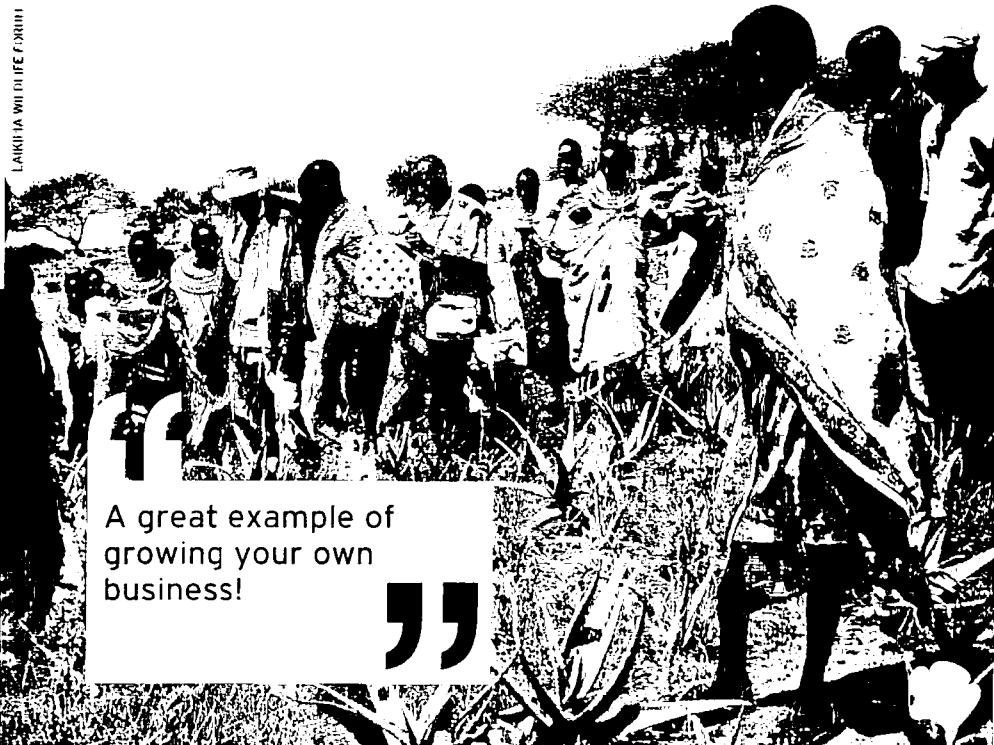
Right: Laikipia's education bus is now a familiar sight in local reserves, taking community groups to visit sustainable projects

Work has progressed well in Kenya where, so far, seven community bio-enterprises have already been established selling aloe-based natural and herbal products locally. Currently it is still not yet possible to consider exports until legal requirements have been sorted out, but the process to become a registered aloe producer is now in place, and groups are signing up with the Kenya Wildlife Service in anticipation of the legal changes to be approved by the Attorney General's Chambers.

The KAWG, with support from development partners like DANIDA, the Aga Khan Foundation, SNV and the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, has launched promotional posters providing easy extension messages on aloe growing and processing. The working group has partnered with USAID for a two-year promotion campaign which will see farmers in wildlife dispersal areas adopt aloe farming as a way of supplementing their living. In these dry areas, traditional crop farming is often frustrated by frequent droughts and / or the raiding of crops by local wildlife.

There is now one commercial nursery where quality seedlings can be obtained with ease. This was set up in Laikipia with the support of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum and now has several hundred thousand seedlings ready for sale. The Laikipia Wildlife Forum, through the USAID FORREMS project, is assisting small-scale farmers and pastoralist groups to get started. In 2006 the Laikipia Wildlife Forum was able to supply them with 30,000 seedlings, and during the course of 2007 it is hoped that a further 70,000 will be planted.

In January this year the Laikipia Wildlife Forum facilitated a very successful Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop to advise on processing aloe as a way of adding value to the raw materials currently being harvested. These products will serve both domestic usage and income-generating purposes. Attendees of the workshop, mainly women from the Rumuruti Women's self-help aloe group, gained skills needed to produce aloe cosmetics and detergents. They can now make aloe toilet soap, hand and body lotion, hair shampoo, hair treatment, hair conditioner, washing detergents, and toilet disinfectants. During the week of training the women sold the products they made locally in Rumuruti town - making a profit which they invested in more raw materials to make more products for their new found aloe business.



A great example of growing your own business!