

Tackling the water problem in Laikipia

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The Laikipia District is located northwest of Mount Kenya, straddling the equator at the heart of Kenya's Rift Valley Province. Spanning 9,500 square km, the Laikipia District is one of Kenya's most important wildlife areas, and also contains a large human population. The land here is owned privately and by communities - Laikipia has no official status as a National Park, and humans and wildlife often come into conflict here.

The Laikipia Wildlife Forum (LWF) was created in 1992 to conserve the integrity of the Laikipia ecosystem, by creatively managing natural resources to improve the livelihood of its people. With more than 200,000 members, it carries out a large range of work to conserve Laikipia's unique ecology.

Protecting and restoring Laikipia's essential resources such as forests, rangelands and rivers is an important aspect of LWF's work. Our member groups manage forest and rangeland, and have planted tens of thousands of trees. The LWF also manages critical resources such as water.

In the last five years, decreasing river volumes within the tributaries of the Ewaso Nyiro River has resulted in increased conflicts amongst people, and between people and wildlife. The situation is also threatening important economic and livelihood activities downstream. The worst-affected are the communities of the Samburu and Isiolo districts, where the river now runs dry every year. The LWF is now pushing for the establishment of river water users' associations across Laikipia to tackle

the water problem, and has recently completed five community-based water points around the Mukogondo indigenous forest reserve:

- In the Ilingwesi group ranch, a 25m³ water storage tank has been installed - which benefits almost 450 households in the community in Mukogondo. Water troughs have also been provided for wildlife
- An earth dam has been de-silted and a perimeter fence erected in the Makurian group ranch - benefiting over 400 households. The dam will also attract wildlife and could be a boon for the proposed Oreteti field study centre
- In the 520-member Lekurruki group ranch, a stone weir within the spring valley has been constructed and piping connected to a 25m³ water tank. The weir provides water to the Tassia nature-based eco-lodge
- The Kopio women self-help group was assisted in repairing a water borehole and pump house, and a 50m³ storage tank was constructed at the community watering point. Almost 500 households have benefited from this development
- The Mumonyot community has been assisted in developing water supply from rock catchments, and helped to provide a 50m³ storage tank for communal use. The Mumonyot community is now planning to establish an eco-tourism project

In Laikipia, conflicts between different users arise from accusations over unfair access to river water resources and charges of illegal abstraction. The small-scale farmers and pastoralists, horticultural farms, ranchers and wildlife sanctuaries downstream of the Ewaso Nyiro do not have the same access to the river water as upstream, where wealth and influence often enables unsustainable and excessive water use to take place. Human-wildlife conflicts have also increased due to competition for scarce water resources within the Ewaso Nyiro

catchments. The wider environment within the ecosystem has also been affected negatively by the reduction in water flow through the water system. Wetlands have reduced in size and have lost biodiversity, while others have become seasonal.

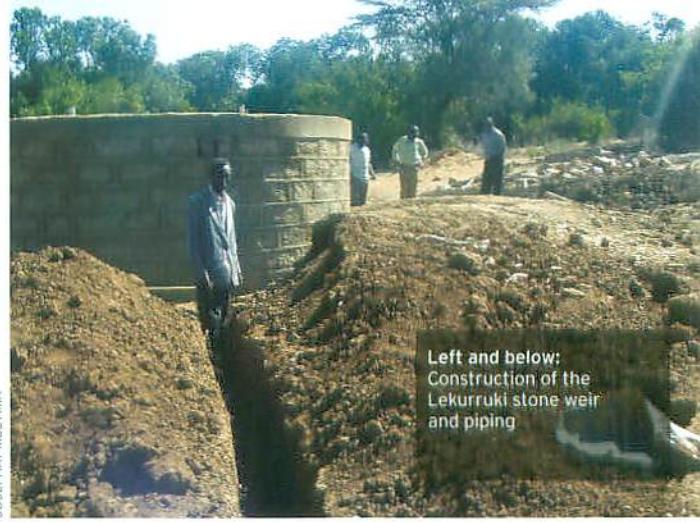
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There are several reasons for the current lack of water. Contributing factors include inappropriate farming methods upstream, over-reliance on river water for various economic activities, destruction of habitat in the catchment areas, poor enforcement of the rules and regulations by the relevant authorities, and a lack of organisational arrangements or structures to resolve existing and potential conflicts.

The LWF is looking for funding to bring the various river water users' associations together and raise their profile. We are helping to develop their organisational skills, to gather information about water use and build their capacity to manage water resources. By doing this, we aim to find the solutions to these problems.

£4,000

Chester Zoo has just made a grant of £4,000 for the LWF's Community Conservation (CC) programme costs for 2006. Chloe Chick and friends are organising a challenge, "3 Peaks 3 Weeks", in January 2007 which will raise money for three East African projects, including the LWF's CC programme in 2007.



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Left and below:
Construction of the
Lekurruki stone weir
and piping



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