

Chyulu Hills REDD+ Project **Impact Report**

**Q1-Q2
2021**



**EVER
LAND**

**CONSERVATION
INTERNATIONAL**



Chyulu Hills REDD+ Project

Location: Kenya

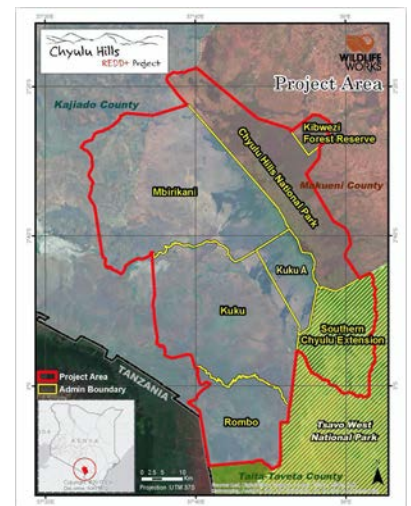
Developer: Chyulu Hills Conservation Trust

Key Partners: Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust, Big Life Foundation, David Sheldrick Trust, Kenya Forest Services, Kenya Wildlife Services, 4 Indigenous Maasai Community Groups: Mbirikani, Kuku A, Kuku, Rombo

Standards: VCS, CCB

Expanding investments for durable conservation results

During the first half of 2021, support for key project initiatives continued despite challenges posed by pandemic restrictions. Support includes funding the Rangers program to maintain patrolling, collecting data and securing operations; supporting livelihood development by issuing and delivering new beehives; disbursing bursaries and scholarships for students in the Rombo and Eastern communities; and making significant investments in a critical fire management plan ahead of the dry season, providing firefighting training to over 300 Rangers (200 community and 100 Kenya Wildlife Service Rangers).



3,066,110 tonnes of CO2 emissions avoided to date
645,497 tonnes of CO2 avoided per year

About the Chyulu Hills REDD+ Project

The Chyulu Hills are a volcanic mountain range in south-eastern Kenya and represent a critical ecosystem in a largely water-deficient arid and semi-arid landscape. They are part of the greater Tsavo Conservation area (TCA) and form a critical wildlife corridor between Tsavo and Amboseli National Parks. The area is home both to Maasai pastoralists and Kamba agriculturalists who have utilized the land for decades. The cloud forest on top of the hills is a unique feature and the landscape provides important ecosystem services to the communities including water provision, carbon sequestration and storage, ethnomedicinal plants, cultural heritage, and biodiversity as well as climate regulation.

The project is 100% owned and managed by local institutions that either own the land or manage conservation and community programs on behalf of the landowners. The nine landowners include four Indigenous Maasai community groups, Kenya's national parks authority (Kenya Wildlife Service), its national forest service (Kenya Forest Service) and three leading Kenyan conservation NGOs: Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust, Big Life Foundation, and David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust. These organizations created the Chyulu Hills Conservation Trust to manage the project and own the carbon credits.



Impact Highlights

Development and implementation of a critical fire management plan

In 2020, there were widespread fires in the project area. These were mainly grassland fires. A review of historic fire data and ground surveys showed that these types of fires are a regular feature of the grassland-savanna areas that have minimal impact on the main forest carbon stocks. With the increasing likelihood of more frequent and extreme droughts due to climate change and the associated risk to the forest, the Project partners developed a plan for preventing, monitoring, and quickly responding to fire outbreaks in the area.

The partners identified critical short-term actions needed to improve 2021 fire season preparation and the Project financed the following resources:

- ✓ Creation of 243kms of roads and firebreaks
- ✓ 2 new 4-wheel drive vehicles to improve fire response capacity and general forest and wildlife protection activities
- ✓ 2 firefighting Water Bowser trailers
- ✓ Fire-fighting equipment for Rangers, including water back-pack sprayers and fire beaters
- ✓ Fire training for 300+ Rangers on fire mitigation, prevention and emergency response
- ✓ Communications equipment and a command-and-control center



Investment into education across the project area



Through outreach and engagement, communities across the project area identified spending money on childhood education as a top priority. As a result, 300 bursaries were awarded to children at the Rombo Group Ranch and 150 bursaries were given to children from the Eastern communities. The total value of the bursaries was about US \$100,000.

The bursary recipients were selected after consultations between the Kenya Wildlife Service Education Warden and local leaders. The process for selecting students had a focus on children from households in financial need and on ensuring gender equity. In addition to receiving scholarships, students were also taught about the importance of conservation and how the financial support they received is connected to the community's role in protecting to Project's Forest and biodiversity.



Beehive distribution and education improving livelihoods



The Project continued developing its beekeeping program with the Kenya Forest Service receiving 420 new hives, doubling the capacity from last year. The Service was also provided with additional equipment, training, and education to continue building capacity for honey production.

When hives were distributed to community members, the outreach and engagement effort included sharing information on forest conservation and alternatives to unsustainable forest exploitation and deforestation practices.

There were two objectives for the outreach: 1) to get the best yield for the hives by educating people on how to run and maintain them and 2) making clear the connections between a healthier environment, better colonization, more honey and more revenue, and ultimately better livelihoods from maximizing yields.



Verification, community outreaches and biomass sampling assessment



The project successfully conducted a biomass assessment across the entire ecosystem and project area on the status of the forests. The goal of plot sampling is to collect robust and accurate biomass data (biometrics) that can be used to estimate the total amount of carbon stored in the forest ecosystem and deforestation rates. The data are then applied to the Cumulative Deforestation Model (CDM) to estimate baseline carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) emissions. It is arguably the most important dataset associated with a carbon project because the data are used to determine and issue carbon credits.

SouthPole visited the project to assess the methodology used during the sampling process and ensure that all proper data collection protocols were being used by the project's teams. The leakage assessment plots (located outside of the project area) were also analyzed. This analysis provides data on whether any of the potential fires or deforestation incidents caused noticeable shifts outside of the project area.

The effort involved sampling over 400 plots in a five-month period. The teams of four to five plot samplers were hired from the local communities and trained in the sampling methodology. The Project also engaged the Chief Botanist from the National Herbarium and a team of field botanists who supported the plot samplers by providing taxonomic expertise to identify the species of trees.

Community leaders were engaged in June for the preliminary steps before the community meetings in July. This was done to provide updates on the status of the REDD+ project, inform leaders and community members about the field visit by the verifiers and receive feedback on REDD+ project activities and community support. Initial feedback from verifiers indicated an impressive community understanding on the benefits of the REDD+ Project.



New grants allocated and 2020 grant allocations almost fully implemented



Project partners continued implementing initiatives funded with grants from the carbon project. For 2020, approximately \$1.5 million in grants had been awarded to partners. So far in 2021, another \$1.2 million has been approved for partners and the Project has budgeted approximately \$500,000 for fire monitoring, prevention, training, and emergency response. This includes the construction of firebreaks, fire-fighting equipment, and training for 300 rangers in fire response. The project has now approved or purchased a total of four new 4-WD vehicles for project partners to improve wildlife and forest protection operations and security, including fire response.

The grant oversight and management efforts are evolving so partners understand the application, reporting and review process.





Challenges & Opportunities

Navigating the impact of pandemic restrictions

The COVID-19 pandemic has proved to be a challenge in implementing project activities, especially those that involve large gatherings or outreach efforts.

Throughout 2021, Project partners have consistently communicated to the community the importance of conservation and the benefits from conservation-driven programs. This includes highlighting the importance of safeguarding the environment and reducing pressure on natural resources. During this pandemic, it became challenging to engage the local communities because of the Government's ever-changing pandemic health and safety regulations meant to control infections.

As the community transitioned into their "new normal," the project teams found ways to meet virtually, use social distancing and limit the number of gatherings to keep initiatives running as much as possible during the pandemic.

The pandemic also affected education and the academic school year, delaying the school term and giving students a shorter break between the terms. The Government reopened schools in May and it has been slowly reinstating the system to get it back on track.



Improving inter-community communications



The project has proven to gain legs within the community, with visual and tangible impacts coming from the REDD+ funds. Due to the success and the benefits seen, it has also caused some misunderstandings within the community.

To rectify this, a new Communications team was created. A new Field Communications Officer named Agnes was hired from the Maasai. Agnes will be developing a range of new communications at the community level, for posting on social media and to generate stories for local, national, and international media. As a trusted voice from within the community, Agnes' role has already proved to be extremely helpful in improving dialogue between the project and the community. She is an exceptional example of the power of education and empowerment. Through her leadership and passion for conservation, Agnes is setting an important example in her community.

Additionally, a Nairobi-based communications specialist is assisting with developing a communication strategy that will link to national media.



Addressing human-wildlife conflict alongside pandemic restrictions



In the past year, community members have suffered economic losses from pandemic mitigation measures such as travel restrictions and market closures. This has increased bushmeat poaching at the same time the Project has had to reduce ranger patrolling activities. This has resulted in poaching-related wildlife losses and increases in elephant crop raiding.

The capacity of the program to compensate for livestock losses from predators has also been reduced due to COVID restrictions.

Partners are doing what they can through their ranger forces and teams on the ground to work with communities to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts, and, in response to the impacts of the pandemic restrictions, the project is working to improve the efficiency of the ranger force.



Maintaining key stakeholder relationships



Government entities regularly rotate their internal staff within Kenya. This year there have been changes in senior staffing in the two national parks in the project area and within NGO partners. The Project Office is developing a process to inform new staff about the REDD+ Project and to provide training in how to secure funding through the grant management process. So far, the changeover has been quite positive, with new stakeholders showing proactive interest and engagement in the project.

