

World Environment Day

The world today is faced with numerous environmental challenges. Forest degradation, climate change, waste management are just but some of the environmental concerns facing the globe today.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon once said, although individual decisions may seem small in the face of global threats and trends when billions of people join forces in common purpose, we can make tremendous difference.

The world today is faced by numerous environmental challenges. Forest degradation, climate change, waste management are just but some of the environmental concerns facing the globe today. Kenya is no exception to this.? Pressure from the increased human population, demand for fuelwood, building material and other land uses has over the years put a strain on our forests marking decades of continued forest degradation. This almost brought the country to its knees with the forest cover declining rapidly to less than two percent.

The five water towers namely Mt Kenya, the Aberdare Range, Mau Complex, Mt Elgon and Cherangany Hills were the most affected. However, efforts put in place by stakeholders in the Private, Public and NGO sectors in the last decade have seen this trend slowly begin to reverse. Tree planting exercises by corporates, government agencies and NGO's have greatly contributed to the reforestation exercise.

We have seen corporates go a step further to adopt forests and plant trees for a period of time to promote the conservation efforts. For example, the Ngare Ndare forest reserve has been a great beneficiary of tree planting exercises by the Ngare Ndare Forest Trust Fund in partnership with local communities and Safaricom foundation. For the last ten years, the trio has engaged in tree planting exercises at the forest reserve which is part of the larger Mt Kenya forests located in Meru Central.

The consistent efforts to improve the forest canopy saw Ngare Ndare forest which is a catchment area for numerous rivers that flow to the Ewaso Nyiro receive recognition by UNESCO as a world heritage site in the Mt Kenya region.

The model adopted allows the community around Ngare Ndare (there are six villages) to use forest resource e.g. firewood but this is planned and controlled by the Kenya Forest Service and the Ngare Ndare Forest Trust Fund.

Statistics released by the Kenya Forest Service in 2013 indicated that the country's forest cover had risen from a low of 1.7 percent in 2002 to 6.99 percent putting us on a path towards reaching the United Nations recommended cover of 10 percent.

Other than tree planting exercises the Kenya Forest Service introduced punitive fines for anyone found cutting down trees illegally and also made communities living around and near forests key stakeholders and beneficiaries. Working with communities has taught us that forest conservation and management is not a far -fetched idea.

We recognise that the well-being of humanity, the environment, and the functioning of the economy, ultimately depend upon the responsible management of the planet's natural resources. It is for this reason that we must stop consuming more natural resources than the planet can sustainably provide. We must stop cutting down trees for selfish gains and instead adopt a healthy co-existence with our natural resources to allow us realise our dreams.

We are warned that if we do nothing to protect and conserve our environment and with the world's population expected to reach 9.6 billion by 2050, we will need three planets to sustain our ways of living and consumption.

As we mark the World Environment Day under the theme Seven Billion Dreams. One Planet. Consume with Care, let each of us ask what we are doing to protect and conserve the environment. Let us do something positive today for the environment, and let us galvanise our individual actions into a collective power that generates positive impact on the planet as envisioned by the United Nations.

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