

KIWOCEDU stories

- *Stories and images by Lorna Tulyahawa, KIWOCEDU*

KIWOCEDU TAKES ADVANTAGE OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S MONITORING VISIT TO LAUNCH WHSS PROJECT



The 18th August 2014 made a land mark in the history of KIWOCEDU. KIWOCEDU which is an acronym for Kigezi Initiative for Women and Children Empowerment and Development-Uganda is an umbrella organization for several grass-root women groups in the greater Kigezi that is, Kabale, Rukungiri, Kanungu and Kisoro. It is actively engaged in spearheading women in promoting gender equality, economic empowerment, reproductive health and sustainable nature conservation.

KIWOCEDU, which had hitherto run its budget solely on internally generated resources since its inception and subsequent registration in 2012, had earlier in this year, secured a grant from BirdLife International in partnership with Conservation International, two global brands in the world of conservation. The grant received has helped KIWOCEDU particularly enhance her conservation and economic empowerment projects with three women groups from the three forest adjacent parishes Echuya Forest Reserve ie Ikamiro in Muko sub county and Kashasha

and Kacerere in Bufundi subcounty Kabale district South Western Uganda. This grant has greatly catapulted the team's zeal to further horizons.

It is no mean achievement to launch A CBO project , and have the whole BirdLife International Regional Director (Africa) as the guest of honor. Yes Dr. Arinaitwe Julius was the chief guest flanked by Mr. Mutabazi Henry –Project Manager Echuya Central Forest Reserve. Dr Julius had come for a two day monitoring visit to KIWOCEDU activities. It was during this monitoring visit that KIWOCEDU took advantage to have him as the guest of honor and officially launch the project in each of the communities he visited on 18th August 2014.

Yes such a peculiar phenomenon did set an unprecedented trend which our peers may indeed take eternity to pull off. We are not making any airs here. KIWOCEDU did not fly in Dr. Arinaitwe from Nairobi on our own. He was on a business trip! In fact he had come to monitor & assess the project progress of Bird Life International funded project and we at KIWOCEDU saw it no fitter than to have him commission our activities. What a grand occasion we did have.

The Executive Director KIWOCEDU presented a brief project progress report to the stakeholders. She paid tribute to BirdLife International for having entrusted KIWOCEDU with funds to implement the WHSS pilot project and pledged that her team will work to their utmost to ensure the smooth running of the project and achieving the objective for which funds had been released. She applauded Nature Uganda for having linked KIWOCEDU to BirdLife International and for the support given to the target women groups; she said this made service delivery much easier because of the synergy resulting from this partnership.

Conservation needs women

Among other things, she said that any conservation without women can never be conclusive and meaningfully since most economic and ecological decisions are in one way or another influenced by women. "KIWOCEDU's core programs are women centered because we believe that every decision made whether social, economic or ecological will at the end of the day have a direct bearing on women because women make most domestic decisions although their input is rarely recognized," she said. In her report, the Executive Director enumerated the achievements so far made such as gender awareness creation, training in enterprise development, support with mushroom spawns and handcraft materials with the aim of improving woman's alternatives sources of livelihood.

She also noted one challenge faced since the inception of the project being that area is extremely inaccessible in terms of communication due lack of electricity, it's very steep rugged terrain with no developed road network and lack of telecommunication network that has partly perpetuated poverty in the area. She said this makes transport to the areas very expensive.

Speaker after speaker praised the unique fundamental change ushered in by KIWOCEDU saying that the organization's was timely. They particularly commended KIWOCEDU for putting women at the forefront of the conservation programs saying that women had been ignored for too long.

National Forest Authority

One of the partners of KIWOCEDU who attended the monitoring visit was National Forest Authority (NFA) Coordinator; Mr Venancio Baryamureeba. He welcomed Dr Julius Arineitwe to Echuya landscape which is under NFA. He said NFA aims at protecting the forest and works with people to look after the forest. He noted that while NFA work through Collaborative Forest Management (CFM), NFA does not address the issue of gender. He added that the current compositions of CFMs are mainly comprised of men because the issue of gender is not well addressed properly bringing gender disparities. He noted that NFA recognizes that women are water & fuel wood collectors, look for medicine, interface with the forest to earn their livelihood on daily basis, are pillars of families and when they are not catered for conservation of nature is compromised and families die.

He appreciated KIWOCEDU because they came addressing gender and children issues which are not catered for in collaborative forest management. With KIWOCEDU help through Birdlife funding, women issues are being addressed especially bridging information gaps regarding the role of women towards conservation of nature and sustainable livelihoods. He ended by appealing to KIWOCEDU beneficiaries to utilize resources acquired from BLI funds well for sustainable conservation and livelihood improvement both at group and household level. He said when women are OK; the forest conservers are also OK.

“... When women are OK; the forest conservers are also OK...”

The sub county chairman Mr. Ruribikiye John thanked BirdLife International for the support given to KIWOCEDU to support target women groups. He said the area being hard to reach has been for long ignored by many NGOS and CBOS because of its rugged terrain and poor roads and telecommunication networks. He thanked KIWOCEDU for being one of the three brave organizations working in the area. He told the director that KIWOCEDU right from the beginning of the project had been engaging with local government officials and they are aware of what the CBO is doing for women. He thanked KIWOCEDU for taking the initiative to work where many failed to work.

Mutabazi Henry the project manager Uganda said, “KIWOCEDU is working to ensure women develop. As Nature Uganda, we promise to support your initiatives till they get to the desired level of conservation.” He encouraged women who are seeking similar support to register themselves at Sub County, and start doing something as they wait for other support from outside by putting structures in place for necessary and initiating some income generation activities. He thanked KIWOCEDU for starting initiatives aiming at increasing income levels of women and encouraged them to increase the scope because women’s needs in relation to conservation and family livelihood are diverse.

While speaking on behalf the project beneficiaries, Ms Beinomigisha Alice thanked KIWOCE-U for “pulling them out of poverty”. “KIWOCEDU has trained and supported us women to generate our own incomes and not to over rely on our husbands and forest resources. It has also made us to appreciate the need to participate in conserving Echuya Forest Reserve because we now know that this forest is important for our total wellbeing and how we depend on it in many ways as women in particular.”

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Note: Some hyperlinks may no longer be active

While crowning the ceremony, the Guest of Honor thanked KIWOCEDU team for a splendid display of performance in such a short while.

The function in each of the communities ended up with the local 'Kikiga' and Kinyarwanda traditional dances usually performed when celebrating significant achievements. You really missed Dr. Arinaitwe's antics as he showed that he is a force to contend with when it comes to a 'Kikiga' gig.

KIWOCEDU SUPPORTS GROUPS IN SOUTH WESTERN UGANDA REAPING BIG FROM INDOOR MUSHROOM FARMING



Women in Echuya forest adjacent communities are usually resource constrained compared to men and are also at the risk of malnutrition yet play an important role in family health and conservation of forest and natural resources. Communities around the Echuya forest reserve are among the poorest. They are faced with the problems of land shortage, soil erosion, poor soil fertility, and food insecurity. As a result, they face high poverty levels and hence over depend on the forest for firewood, medicine and always look to the forest as a means of earning their livelihood.

KIWOCEDU recognizes that human beings are part of nature and some of their actions may complement the conservation of nature, it also acknowledges that peoples actions have a great influence over nature which requires that people living in forest adjacent

communities are helped to appreciate the forest value if sustainable conservation is to be achieved.

In a bid to address this overdependence on Echuya forest reserve and other above problems, KIWOCEDU secured funding from Conservation International through BirdLife International, and is currently implementing a new 10 months project around Echuya Central Forest Reserve, South Western Uganda, entitled 'Capacity building and empowerment for women around Echuya Central Forest reserve for sustainable conservation and livelihood improvement'. The project's goal is 'Gender equality embraced in its fullest application to both sexes in sustainable conservation and development programs'.

KIWOCEDU is supporting three women groups from forest adjacent parishes of Kashasha, Ikamiro and Kacerere with special focus on women to engage in economically viable enterprises and conservation related activities that will contribute to livelihood improvement while at the same time ensuring long term conservation of natural forest resources around Echuya forest reserve located in South Western Uganda.

Mushrooms

Among the livelihood improvement enterprises supported by KIWOCEDU, is Mushroom growing. This was selected because: Mushrooms produce yields all year being an in-house business, they are both a source of food and a means of livelihood especially for the rural poor who are constrained with limited resources and alternatives sources of income generation. They are quick maturing, less labor intensive, and require small space to thrive compared to other income generation activities. In addition mushroom growing can be adopted easily by the rural poor because they require less skilled labor. They are not resource straining to produce and are very marketable both in rural and town settings. Making it especially resourceful for the women in rural setting because of readily available markets. More so, mushroom farm houses are very easy to construct by women themselves without needing a lot of support from men.



A total of 750 mushroom spawns were bought and given out to 76 farmers in the three women groups targeted by the project. (21 women from Kacerere parish, 37 women from Kashasha and 18 women from Ikamiro including three men. At group level, each received 100 packets of mushroom spawns totaling to 300 packets. This was to enable benefits of mushroom growing trickle down to all the group members.

From Initial harvests, Kacerere has gone of 16 kgs, Ikamiro 13 and Kashasha 9. Each kg is sold at 6,000 Uganda shillings (usd2.4) earning group total initial income of 228,000 (usd 91.2). This money has been saved on group accounts with intension of expanding the business

once harvest are realized and sales made. Mushroom harvesting lasts between three to four months depending on how well they are cared for with a minimum of two harvest every week.

At individual level, 45 model farmers ie 25 from Kashasha, 10 from Kacerere, and 10 from Ikamiro each received 15 packets of mushroom spawns. The first harvest were eaten but to date they have sold an average of three kgs per farmer accounting to 810,000(usd324) the money at this level is used to meet other family needs in addition to nutritional benefits. Given that this income has been realized in the first two weeks of the harvest which is expected to last three to five months, they are optimistic they will reap big and have their incomes enhanced hence reducing on overdependence on the forest reserve for survival.

Demo's

The farmers supported at individual level, are acting as demo farmers to the community members who are not directly getting material support from the project. Using the knowledge acquired from the project supported mushroom growers; these adopting farmers have been able to grow mushrooms on their own. So far other seven women groups with a total of 189 members have already adopted the enterprise and are requesting for KIWOCEDU technical and material support to enable them scale up enterprise for economies of scale and sustainability purpose.

Angelica 69 years one of the beneficiaries and a grandmother of 8 children says, other than being a source of income to her big family, mushrooms have tasty nutritional soup which she uses as substitute for expensive meat and has kept all her grandchildren in healthy state. Mushrooms reduce malnutrition among children and have medicinal benefits. She says because it's less labor intensive she's found it a good business favorable for her age. She's one of the first women to engage in this business and is regarded as the community role model when it comes to mushroom growing. She says from the sales, she's able to meet the scholastic needs of her grand children three of whom are orphans. Besides keeping herself and the children healthy because mushroom soup, she has trained 17 women who comprise of Kacerere widows group in mushroom farming. They have already have already approached KIWOCEDU for technical and material support to scale up this enterprise.

In a recent visit to Kacerere, one of the KIWOCEDU supported groups, the chairperson Alice Beinomugisha said, "Although we are just beginning to harvest, we are already realizing big harvests from the mushrooms spawns received from the project." She said the first harvest of 21 Kg (48usd) was shared among members each taking a kilograms and subsequent harvest are being sold to group members and the people around them, a market demand which the group is not able to satisfy. Because of the benefits being realized by the group in a short time, there's big multiplier effect of the mushroom growing in Kacerere community. Many women

and men have learned and adopted the enterprise, built shelter and have started the business although on small scale.

Lorna KIWOCEDU Directors says:

"KIWOCEDU is happy that the spawns given to groups two months ago are already bearing good fruits and earning the group members nutritional source and income. In addition, the group farm is serving as a learning centre for other community members who have learnt and adopted the enterprise and has encouraged many group members to



start their own farms at home. This is an encouraging harvest, and because there's more market than what they can produce, this has encourages the group members to start saving money from sales in preparan for reinvestment. Besides the multiplier effect has brought men on board. Initially they used to think it was a women's business, having seen the quick returns, men have embraced the enterprise."

"While the groups KIWOCEDU supported with funding from Conservation International through BirdLife International are just beginning to harvest; a process which will last three to four months, we hope this alternative income will reduce pressure on Echuya forest reserve."