

Identifying and Building on Synergies: A *win-win* Strategy for Natural Resources Conservation and Project Sustainability



Background

The Pro-poor Community Eco-Tourism Window for sustainable Ecosystem Conservation, Community Participation and Wise use of Mabamba Bay Ramsar Site project (Mabamba Pro-poor Eco-tourism Project) supported by Rufford Small Grants for Nature Conservation and implemented by Nature Palace Foundation aims at laying a firm foundation for Ecosystem conservation, Community Participation and wise-use through the eco-tourism window by improving collaboration with tour operators, expanding the tourist attractions, documenting indigenous knowledge and developing institutional capacity of community associations.

The Home Herbal Gardens is an approach to Plant species conservation that was initiated through the Poverty Alleviation and Health Care Promotion through Conservation (PHPC) Project that was implemented by Nature Palace with support from Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) in the year 2007. The Home Herbal Gardens program aims at counteracting the rapid loss of plant resources through habitat destruction and also promoting participation of community members in conservation of species while upholding their knowledge and appreciation of medicinal plants. The initiative involves growing of medicinal plants in households as *home* or *backyard* gardens. Participating households identify species they use most in treatment of common ailments and grow them around their homes, so that next time they need them they do not go looking for them in the wild – where chances are that they may fail to get them when they need them. Because the PHPC project and community members developed a structure to continue with project interventions even after the project life by initiating the Tweekembe Herbal Medicine Promoters Association, the Home Herbal Gardens Programme has continued to grow and participating households have since made more and more collections of plant species in their gardens.

Identified Synergies

While the Mabamba Pro-poor Eco-tourism Project aims at laying a firm foundation for Ecosystem conservation using the expansion of the tourist attractions, documenting indigenous knowledge and developing institutional capacity of community associations, the Home Herbal Gardens, provides an opportunity for visitors/tourists with interest in plants, herbal medicine and botany in general. Indigenous knowledge documentation and sharing is also an integral part of the Home herbal gardens approach which can also complement the objectives of the Mabamba Pro-poor Eco-tourism Project.

It is on this notion that the project decided to build on these synergies to achieve greater participation, Natural Resources conservation and Project Sustainability.

Mutual Benefits:

A number of mutual benefits were identified.

- I. **Expansion of the Tourist attractions base:** By adding Home herbal gardens and agro-tourism in general, there will be a wider menu of tourist attractions that MWETA has to offer. This will result into:
 - Increased Income of tourist guides, the association (MWETA) and households participating in the Home herbal gardens program and agro-tourism in general;
 - More community participation in eco-tourism activities as more and more households are brought on board;
 - Improved Livelihoods resulting from increased incomes.
- II. **Reducing the pressure on the wetland resource, that is likely to increase with increased in-flow of tourists:** Because tourists are offered a broader menu to choose from, it so happens that some chose agro-tourism and other options. In the end fewer visitors enter into the wetland. Alternatively, those with interests with other options are first taken to tour those and in the end spend less time in the wetland.
- III. **Improved Conservation of Plant Resources:** Because participating households in the Home Herbal Gardens program realise an opportunity from the eco-tourism activity, they will be motivated to increase their collections and conservation activities and to come up with innovative ways of satisfying their visitors. Households not participating now may also be encouraged to participate – leading to greater participation.
- IV. **Overall Project Sustainability:** Since the two projects support each other and are managed and supported by community structures, the sustainability potential is enhanced.

Way Forward:

An exposure and Learning tour was organised for tourist guides that were trained under the Mabamba Pro-poor Eco-tourism Project. At operational level, the tourist guides and participating households got a chance to chat out ways how the integration of the two approaches can best be achieved. Nature Palace Foundation is facilitating the institutional frameworks and official collaborative terms that need to be agreed on between Mabamba Wetland Eco-tourism Association and Twekembe Herbal Promoters Association.

About Nature Palace Foundation and Botanic Garden:

1. Nature Palace Foundation:

Nature Place Foundation (NPF) is a not-for profit Community Development and Human Well being Focused organisation that operates on the principle of blending Conservation with Development which stems from our Mission and Vision. NPF is accredited by Global Environment Facility (GEF) and we are members of the international and regional networks like Cleanup the World (CUW), Arid lands Information Network (ALIN), The East Africa Communities Organisation for management of lake Victoria (ECOVIC) and Climate Change and Development Network (CDN). NPF is implementing the *Pro-poor Community Eco-Tourism Window for sustainable Ecosystem Conservation project* at Mabamba with MWETA and other partners. This project is supported by **Rufford Small Grants for Nature Conservation**.

2. Nature Palace Botanic Garden (NPBG): Established by NPF in 2001, in the Wakiso District, Kasanje Sub-county NPBG has a major focus on conservation of floral species that are very essential to the welfare of local poor communities in terms of medicinal and food values. NPBG is a registered participant in the world-wide implementation of the International Agenda in support of Plant Conservation, Environmental Awareness and Sustainable Development.

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