

JUSTDIGGIT

AMAZON

ROMBO BUND PROJECT

PROGRESS REPORT 1

REPORTING PERIOD:
1 AUGUST 2022 TO 31 JANUARY 2023

INTRO

Dear Miriam Ben Jedida,

To start this progress report, we would like to take the opportunity to thank you again for supporting Justdiggit and our regreening program in Kenya. With this report, we would like to give you a general update about Justdiggit, our regreening program in the Rombo and the impact that has been realized so far – partly thanks to your donation!

A few hundred kilometers west of the Rombo area, we are restoring two large valleys that are a valuable source of grazing land for local communities, together with our new partner SORALO. Here, we are implementing several rainwater harvesting and revegetation interventions to promote a healthy ecosystem for wildlife and communities.

Besides the regreening program in Kenya, we are also working hard to bring back trees on farmlands in central Tanzania. By promoting an easy and cheap way of bringing back trees – without planting – in an agroforestry setup, farmers can incorporate trees in their farmland. This can bring them many benefits, such as an improved microclimate, more sustainable access to firewood, increased water availability for crops and other vegetation and increased soil fertility. So far, over 10 million trees have been brought back.

Lastly, we are happy to share that are relatively young Regional Office East-Africa in Nairobi is growing fast. From this office, which opened mid-2021, we are be able to manage our projects in East Africa even better, as we will be closer to our implementing partners and project locations. Not only can we better finetune the daily project management from here, we will also focus on our African regreening and awareness campaigns and increase our monitoring and evaluation efforts.

We hope this report will give you a good update on newly launched program and the villages that are supported with your contribution. Please do not hesitate to contact us for any additional questions.

The Justdiggit team



FACTSHEET

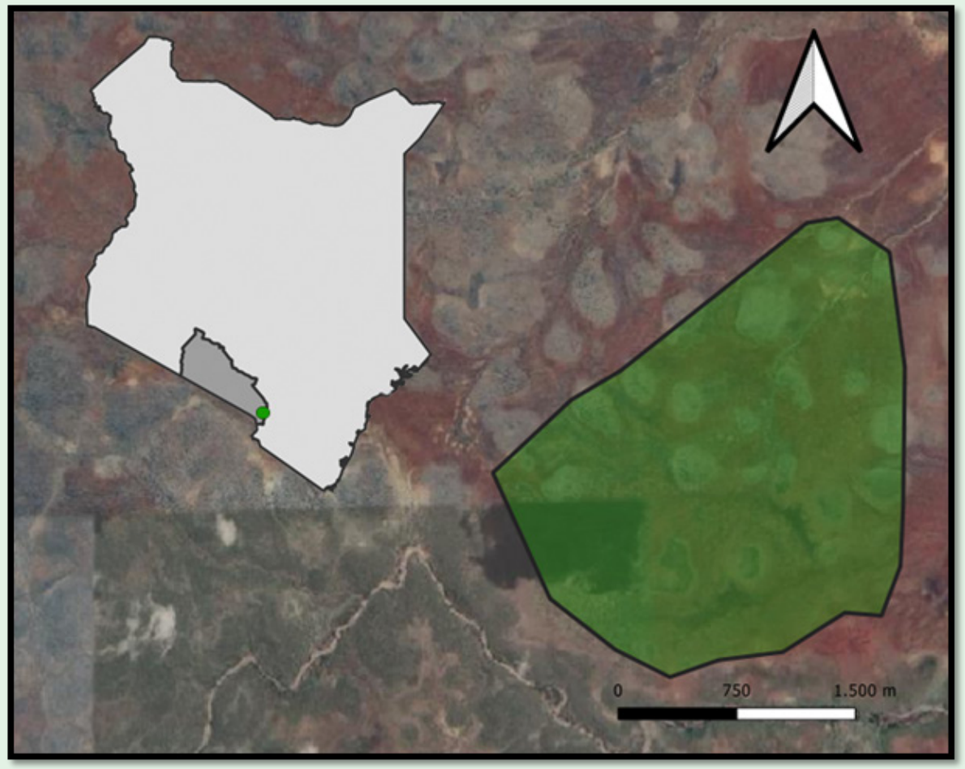

Figure 2: Location of the Rombo bund site in southern Kenya

Location: Rombo Group Ranch, Southern Kenya 3° 4'18.55"S; 37°50'23.20"E

Size of the project area: Target 600 hectares, currently around 500 hectares already covered with bunds

Total # of bunds: Target 48,000, currently 40,800 bunds have been constructed to date.

# of people directly benefiting from the project through temporary employment as diggers, fundi's or technical team members: Total 116 people (of which 53 are youth (between age of 18-35), 43 (37%) are women. Total number of people indirectly benefiting from the project is 464 (direct families of diggers) and the wider community.

OUR WORK SO FAR

1. SITE SELECTION

The JDI team visited the site with our implementing partner Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust to assess the suitability. The suitability of a site is determined by a set of criteria which includes soil type, slope or gradient of the area, distance to closest settlements, extent or severity of degradation, size of the area etc. The site should be far enough from homesteads to minimize intrusion by livestock. It should also not be too far that people cannot reach it during implementation. The soils should also be suitable for vegetation growth and water retention (ideally, sandy – loam soil, equivalent or better) and the slope gentle. After assessing all the criteria in the field and further remote sensing from a desktop computer using ArcGIS software by the JDI technical team it was decided that the Rombo site was best suited for establishing this project.



Figure 2: JDI and MWCT team scouting the Rombo site prior to implementation.



Figure 3: Rombo Project area before restoration interventions.

OUR WORK SO FAR

2. CREATING COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING AND BUY-IN

Getting the buy-in of the community is critical in ensuring the success and proper maintenance and sustainability of the project even past grant funding. Prior to beginning implementation, we held a series of community and leaders' meetings to ensure a common understanding of restoration and its purpose, and the interventions proposed for the site. The following steps are involved in the community engagement process;

a. Group ranch officials and leaders' meetings
The initial point of contact with the community was through the elected Group Ranch Officials and leaders. JDI together with MWCT expressed the interest to them to bring a new project which aims to restore degraded land within Rombo Group Ranch.

b. Community meetings
An initial community meeting was held to discuss the desire to implement the project in Rombo. This began by creating a common understanding of the state of the area in terms of degradation and over grazing. The project team explained to the community the need for the interventions, and the roles that they can play for actively and passively restoring their degraded lands. This includes physical interventions like the semi-circular soil bunds, reseeding, laying contour stone lines and healing gullies. The passive interventions were highlighted as grazing management and allowing the site to rest from grazing for at least 2 years. The project team also explained how the interventions work, the meaning of restoration and tied it to the old traditional grazing management practices of the community, like the Olopolois or "grazing reserves" for better understanding. Once the community had reached a point of understanding, a go ahead was given to proceed with the project.





Figure 4: Community meeting with leaders in Rombo.

3. THE SELECTION OF THE CASUAL WORKERS

The community leaders held a meeting with the community and came up with a list of people to work on the project. The project required 10 fundi's, 6 technical team members and 100 diggers. The role of fundi's is to supervise the diggers, ensuring good quality bunds and keeping track of the number of bunds each person dug. The selection criteria for fundi's and the technical team are simple, they need to be literate, have a basic understanding of English and have strong leadership and organising capabilities to lead a team of diggers. The role of the technical team is to draw out the bunds ensuring the correct spacing, layout and measurements are followed, taking into account the slope of the area and the general flow of water when it rains. They are also responsible for the construction of contour stone lines in and around gullies and together with the fundi's serve as the link between the JDI project team and the community helping to solve any issues that may arise during the implementation of the project. Diggers do not have to be literate, but they need to be in good health, physically strong and able to do manual labour.

4. TRAININGS

Prior to beginning the project, an initial training was held for the whole implementation team one day for the Fundi's and Technical team, and another day for the diggers. The training included:

- Background to land degradation and restoration
- Bunds as an intervention
- Structure and layout of the bunds;
- Bunds dimensions and drawing
- Bund digging
- Seeding
- Laying stone lines
- Gully healing



Figure 5: In the field training of the fundi's and diggers.

5. BUND DIGGING, SEEDING AND STONE LINES

After the training, the digging of the bunds commenced. We had 100 diggers, digging 6 bunds every day, and working 6 days a week. We also had 10 fundi's, one head fundi from Maasai Wilderness Conservation Trust and 6 technical team members on the ground each day to supervise the work and ensure the correct spacing and quality of the bunds were achieved.



Figure 6: Digging of bunds at Rombo.



Figure 7: Ongoing bund digging.

OUR WORK SO FAR



Figure 8. Bunds holding water after the rains in December 2022.



Figure 9: First grass sprouting inside the bunds.



6. CURRENT PROJECT STATUS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Despite the poor rains experienced during the November to December 2022 rainy season, bund digging and grass seeding has been ongoing and will come to a conclusion in February 2023, ready for the March – April rainy season, which we hope will be better than the last rainy season. As shown in the photos below the drought has been persistent and near catastrophic. This once again stresses the significance of this very vital restoration program in areas like this. Climate change still remains a major challenge and its effects are costly to the livelihoods of the community and losses experienced detrimental even to the wider Kenyan Economy.





Figure 10: Rombo digging ongoing in anticipation of the March to April 2023 rains.

To ensure continuous community support for the project, several meetings were held in December 2022 with the local grazing committee and the community. The purpose of these meetings are to create a forum for the community to voice their concerns if any and further to create support and promote community ownership of the project and ultimately ensuring sustainability through individual adoption and voluntary participation to land restoration activities and sustainable land management. During the grazing committee meeting the protection of the project site were discussed.

OUR WORK SO FAR





Figure 11 Grazing committee meeting held in December 2022

EXTRA INCOME IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Kenya at large, but also this area in Rombo Group Ranch in Southern Kenya, has been hit by an extreme drought as can be seen from the images below, wildlife and livestock have died in large numbers the past dry season (June- November 2022) leaving the communities very vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Restoration projects such as this one in Rombo has brought hope to the people suffering from the effects of this devastating drought. During this implementation period the temporary employment provided so many families (116) with an alternative income/livelihood which have helped them to provide food for their families.

Within the wider community there has been an awareness created regarding restoration and sustainable grazing management. Interest of the wider community to take an active role in the restoration, management, and sustainable utilization of their lands have also increased.





Figure 12 Wildlife and livestock dying in the drought.

OUR WORK SO FAR

ANTICIPATED FUTURE BENEFITS

Before the project interventions the area was very dry with no vegetation cover. In few cases where there was some vegetation, it was poor quality annual grasses with stunted growth that could only reach a few centimetres above ground. Through the bunds intervention, we anticipate the site will be covered with good quality vegetation including perennial and palatable grasses, shrubs and trees; gullies will stop expanding and begin to fill up over time and no new gullies will form. Soil erosion will be controlled and in the long term there will be good availability of pasture for the livestock and wildlife and overall, an increase in the productivity of the land.

Communities will gain more knowledge and understanding of the importance of land restoration and different restoration interventions. Adoption and replication at the individual level will also be promoted through education and awareness creation. In the long-term, this is meant to increase the impact of the project beyond the actual implementation area contributing to the wider ecosystem.



Figure 12: Satellite image of the bunds.