



JUSTDIGGIT

ILCHALAI BUND PROJECT

PROGRESS REPORT 2

**REPORTING PERIOD:
1 AUGUST 2022 TO 31 JANUARY 2023**

Dear Laurens Winkel,

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

A few hundred kilometers west of the Ilchalai 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 rain-water harvesting and revegetation interventions to promote a healthy ecosystem for wildlife and communities.

Besides the greening 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.

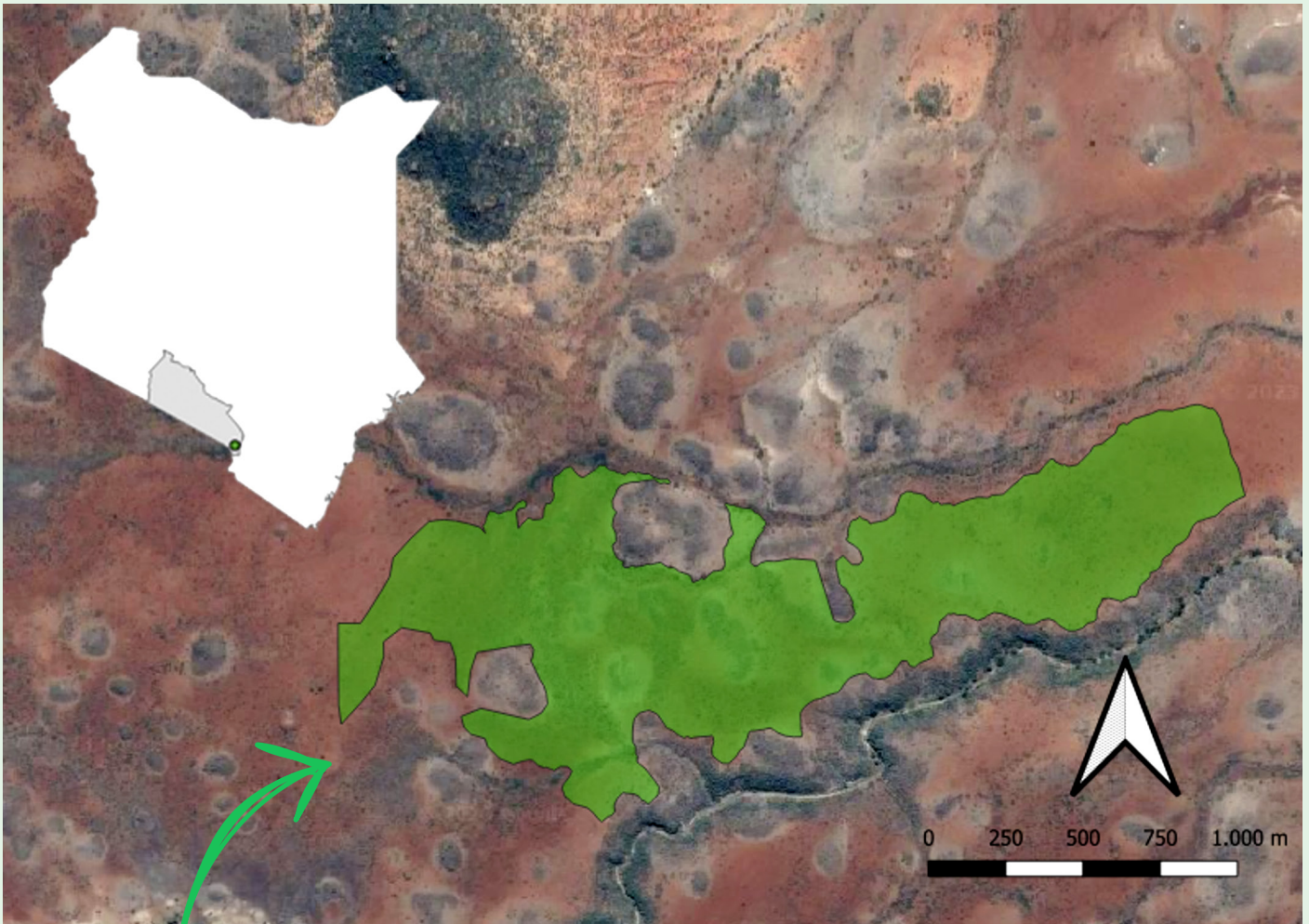
Lastly, we are happy to share that our relatively young Regional Office East-Africa in Nairobi is growing fast. From this office, which opened mid-2021, we are able to manage our projects in East Africa even better, as we will be closer to our implementing partners and project locations. Not only can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

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

The Justdiggitt team



FACTSHEET



Location:

Kuku Group Ranch, Southern Kenya - 2° 43.158'S 37° 37.754'E

Size of the project area:

153 hectares

Total # of bunds:

42,200

of people directly benefiting from the project through temporary employment as diggers, fundi's or technical team members: 117 people. Total number of people indirectly benefiting from the project is about 500 (direct families of diggers) and the wider community.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The southern part of Kenya, surrounding mount Kilimanjaro, are predominantly characterized by endless grasslands. Maasai communities and their livestock, as well as countless wildlife heavily depend on these landscapes, green pasture and abundant drinking water. Yet, by a combination of a changing climate and unsustainable land management, these landscapes are heavily degrading.

Kenya is already highly susceptible to climate-related hazards, and in many areas extreme events and variability of weather are now the norm – rainfall is irregular and unpredictable, while droughts have become more frequent during the long rainy season. The arid and semi-arid areas are particularly hard hit by these climate hazards, thereby putting the lives and livelihoods of millions of households at risk. Even now, the short rains expected between October and December of last year have failed, raising our hopes for the longer rains between March and May this year.

In addition to climate change and varying weather patterns, the biggest driver of land degradation in these areas has been overgrazing. When land is overgrazed, the diminished vegetation can no longer keep soils together, making it susceptible to soil erosion.



Figure 1: Project site prior to project implementation

Also, without vegetation, water can no longer easily infiltrate the soil. With rainfall events becoming more erratic, this leads to surface runoff, loss of topsoil and even floods.

Because of its decreased infiltration capacity, the soil is left dry again soon after the rains. This vicious cycle in time aggravates the degradation of the landscape, diminishing the ecosystem services on which communities and wildlife so heavily rely.

In order to try and reverse this cycle, JustdiggIt and their local partners apply a number of restoration interventions – nature based solutions – that are cheap, accessible and easily applicable for local stakeholders. In southern Kenya, in this case in the Kuku Group Ranch in the Chyulu Hills, this includes digging of semi-circular soil bunds and laying stone lines along the contours of the slope. These interventions help retain rainwater, slow it down and allow it to infiltrate so new vegetation has the opportunity to grow and develop. By digging tens of thousands of these bunds, we aim to restore ‘the Ilchalai’ plot, a bare area of land of about 521 hectares. In this report, we will tell you more about the work we have been doing so far.



Figure 2: Photo of Ilchalai bunds site after the rains in December 2022.

ACTIVITIES

Last year, all 42,400 bunds were dug by local community members. Yet, besides digging, a lot of other activities have taken place. During this reporting period, the following work was done.

1. CREATING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Several meetings with community members were held to strengthen the support of the community for the project. Firstly, a community meeting was held in September 2022 with 30 participants. The aim of the meeting was to give an update on the progress of the project and discuss the seeding of the remaining bunds. It was decided to commence with the seeding on the 24th October 2022 for a period of 2 weeks. The meetings were impactful and well received by the community members. The communities also put emphasis on the source of income from the temporary employment and how important this was for them, especially during this prolonged extreme droughts.

Furthermore, a Grazing Committee meeting was held to discuss the protection of the site and sustainable grazing practices. Grazing committees are formed by community members and play a major role in our projects. Since they decide the grazing rules – where to graze livestock, and when – it is of crucial importance that they are properly aware of the project, good grazing management, their responsibilities.

Lastly, a leaders meeting was held with 8 participants. Involvement of local leaders is very important, since they can make or break the project with their local influence. The protection of the site was discussed, and the leaders committed to provide their continued support for the project. The leaders understand the need for restoration and expressed their gratefulness for this program.





Figure 3: Community meeting in Ilchalai



Figure 4: Community members walking with a big bag of grass seeds.

2. BUND DIGGING, SEEDING AND STONE LINES

During the previous reporting period, all 42,200 bunds were dug, covering an area of about 153 hectares. Also, a large part of the bunds were already seeded with grass seeds. Heavy erosion has depleted the natural seedbank of the soil, so additional seeds are often needed to speed up the regreening process. In this reporting period the remaining 12,000 bunds were seeded and are now waiting for the rains to come.

3. SETTING UP THE RANGER STATION

During the *maintenance phase* of the project, protection of the site from grazing is the main objective. The grass seeds that have been sown need time to establish well and also the naturally occurring vegetation needs to be allowed to regrow once the bunds have collected water after the rains. For this reason, MWCT rangers, coming from the local communities, are already employed from the start of the project and live onsite to ensure this protection. The work of the rangers is not to “police” the community members, but to spread and reinforce the restoration and grazing management awareness to the communities. Essentially, they act as advocates of the project to the communities.

4. OUTREACHES AND CAPACITY BUILDING OF THE GRAZING MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE AND COMMUNITY

The land in Kuku Group Ranch is communally owned, and therefore the common grazing areas are free for everyone to use. In order to manage the common grazing areas well, the community elected the grazing management committee, to take authority over the common grazing areas and guide the grazing regimes. When the project is handed over to the community, after the maintenance phase, it is the grazing management committee that will be in charge of enforcing the grazing guidelines that will be developed for the site. For this reason, we embarked on outreach and capacity building of the grazing management committees which will continue quarterly, or when there is dire need for the next two years. This will get the committee ready and capable of managing the site once fully restored.



Figure 5: Grass sprouting in a bund at the bund site in Ilchalai after the December, 2022 showers.



Figure 6: Stone lines at the bund project site in Ilchalai

BENEFITS

1. REALIZED BENEFITS

The Ilchalai restoration project in Kuku Group Ranch improved the livelihood of 117 community members who were employed as casuals during the digging period at the time of implementation. Six community rangers have also benefited by employed for two years through the project. Using an average household size, we estimate this positively impacted the livelihood of about 500 community members. More awareness has been raised in the community on restoration and grazing management. Interest of the community to take an active role in the restoration, management, and sustainable utilization of their lands has also increased. Also, the capacity of the grazing committee has been increased through the workshops, and more that will follow, so they can become advocates and influences of sustainable land management to the communities.

2. ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

Before the project the area was very dry with no vegetation cover. In the case where there was vegetation, it was poor quality annual grasses with stunted growth that could only reach carpet height. 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 and no new gullies will form. Soil erosion will be controlled and in the long term there will be availability of pasture for the livestock and wildlife. Increase in productivity of the land.

Communities will gain more knowledge and understanding of the importance of land restoration, sustainable land management and different restoration interventions. Adoption and replication at the individual level will also be promoted through education and outreach, and capacity building on implementation. 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 7: Bunds dug in Ilchalai

NEXT STEPS

As said, the October-December rains have unfortunately failed. Yet, grass seeds were planted in the freshly dug bunds. There is a risk that some of the seeds have already germinated after a short rain shower, after which they died from the prolonged drought. It is therefore crucial that the seeds are properly observed in anticipation of the next rainy season, to understand whether additional seeds is required.

To ensure long-term sustainability of the impact made with this project, it is crucial that the communities take ownership and apply sustainable management of the sites. To make sure of that, and to promote replication and natural diffusion of restoration interventions, there will be a strong focus on raising more awareness creation and empowerment of community members.

Lastly, monitoring and evaluation of the intervention site will continue. Continuously collecting data and insights from the field allows us to learn from the progress of the restoration and whether additional interventions may be required. We can then apply the lessons learned in future projects!

We would like to thank you again for your valuable support, which allows us to do our work! The next and final progress report will be send in one year, in January 2024.

SUCCESS STORY

A relief for the extreme drought!

As you drive along Ilchalai bund project, within the neighbouring village in Olorika, you will meet Paul Sipaya, a 45 year old husband and father to his 4 children – 2 girls and 2 boys. He attests to the relief he has found in converting his 2 hectare tomato farm into semi-circular soil bunds. So far, he has already dug 110 soil bunds! It been especially beneficial since he uses the grass to feed his cattle within the homestead and this has helped pull through this severe prolonged drought due to the failed October-December rainfall. Paul replicated the semi-circular soil bunds from Ilchalai bund project and was so inspired that he hired the project diggers and fundi's to do the same at his farm, which he had been using to grow. In addition to having grass to feed his herd, Paul says the bunds have proved to be a good way to reclaiming his land by bringing back vegetation and increasing soil productivity, as well as healing gullies. He is hopeful that more community members will buy into applying semi-circular bunds and to experience the benefits of protecting their land. Bravo Paul!!



Figure 9: Photos from Pauls tomato farm now converted into bunds!

THANK YOU!



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