ROMBO DONOR REPORT

Location:
Rombo Group Ranch 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 33,600 bunds constructed
# 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 ages of 18-35), 43 (37%) are women. The total number of people indirectly benefiting from the project is 464 (direct families of diggers) and the wider community.

IMMEDIATE BENEFITS:

Kenya at large but also this area Rombo area 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 this dry season leaving the communities very vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Restoration projects such as this one in Rombo have brought hope to the people suffering from the effects of this devastating drought. During this implementation period, temporary employment provided so many families (116) with an alternative income/livelihood which has helped them to provide food for their families.
Within the wider community, there has been an awareness created regarding restoration and grazing management. The interest of the wider community to take an active role in the restoration, management, and sustainable utilization of their lands has also increased.

Fig 1: Wildlife and Livestock dying in the drought

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 a few centimeters above the 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 and no new gullies will form. Soil erosion will be controlled and in the long term, there will be the availability of pasture for livestock and wildlife. Increase in 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 outreach. In the long term, this is meant to increase the impact of the project beyond the actual implementation area contributing to the wider ecosystem.

THE PROCESS:

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 for 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.

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

Fig 3. Rombo Project area before restoration interventions

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 an 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 overgrazing. 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 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.

Fig 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 organizing 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 labor.

4. Trainings

Prior to beginning the project, initial training was held for the whole implementation team (one day for the Fundis 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
- Gulley healing

Fig 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 fundis, 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.

Fig 6. Digging of bunds

Fig 7. Digging of bunds

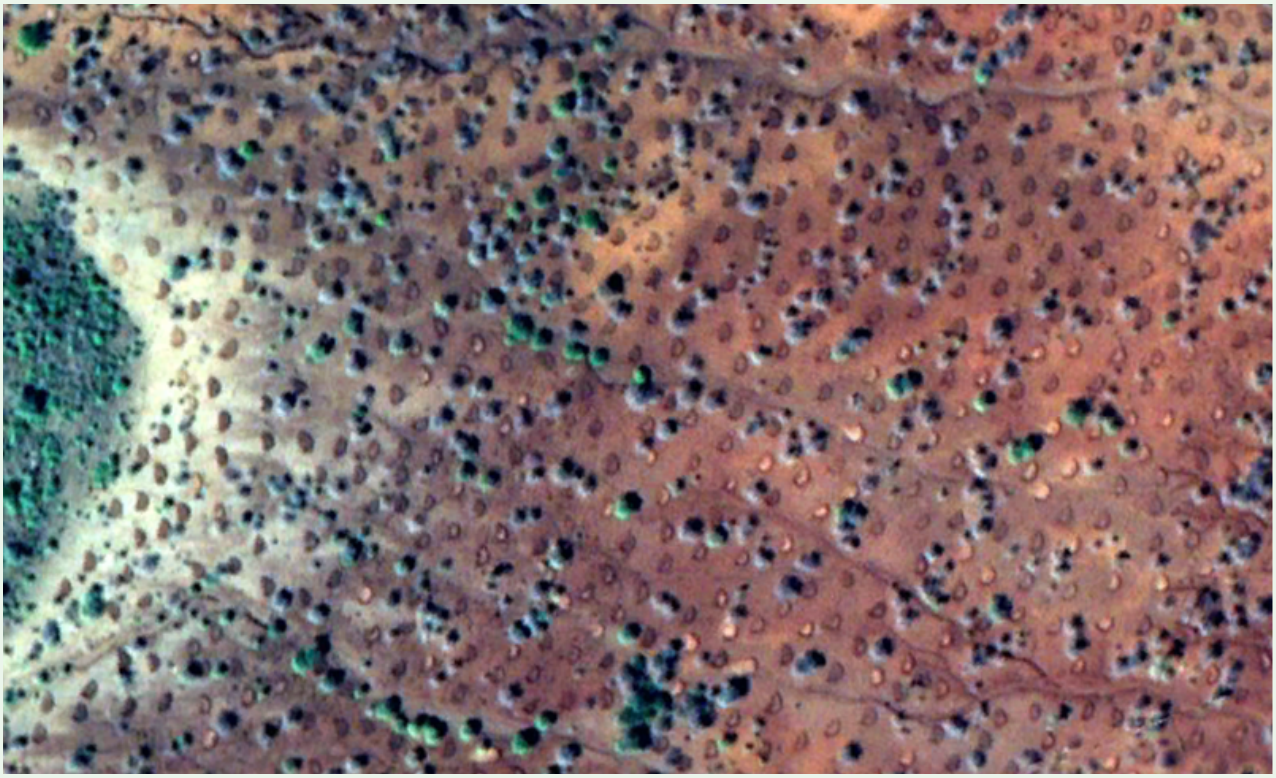

Fig 8. Satelite image of the bunds

Fig 9. Bunds after the first rains. There has so far been only 1 rain shower, which is concerning, we need follow up rains but at least the bunds are holding water and that is great.

Fig 10. First grass sprouting inside the bunds