



PROGRESS REPORT

June 2021

BoatBikeTours

SUPPORTS THE SOUTHERN RIFT REGREENING PROGRAM IN KENYA

JUSTDIGGIT UPDATE

Dear BoatBikeTours,

To start this progress report, I would like to take the opportunity to thank you again for supporting Justdiggit and our new project in Kenya. Before looking specifically into the project that you are supporting, I would like to share a more general update about Justdiggit first.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and all following restrictions have had an impact on our organisation. Our staff has mainly been working from home for almost a year now, but despite that we have been working hard to keep the greening movement growing. Our projects in Kenya and Tanzania have been proceeding, albeit with some changes. Recently, our team in Kenya finished digging over 33,000 bunds in Inkisanjani together with local communities. Of course we did this following strict social distancing protocols.

Also, we are happy to announce that we recently launched our Regional Office East-Africa in Nairobi. From here, we will be able to manage our projects in this region 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.

I hope this report will give you a good update on the progress made in the villages that are supported with your contribution. Please do not hesitate to contact us for any additional questions.

Kind regards,



Marjolein Albers
Director Justdiggit Foundation



PROGRAM STARTUP

For several months now, we have been busy working on the first steps of our new restoration project in the South Rift in Kenya. Although we currently are working on other restoration programs in southern Kenya (e.g. Kuku, OGR, Amboseli), the South Rift is a different landscape with different characteristics. The location of this area is shown on the next slide. To be able to be fully dedicated to and fully understand this new landscape, we are working with a new implementing partner: South Rift Association of Land Owners (SORALO).

SORALO is no new player in this landscape. As of 2004, they are aiming for coexistence between wildlife and communities. They have been doing this through strengthening land rights of communities, promoting sustainable use of natural resources and creating strong institutions that become important actors in this process.

SORALO and JustdiggIt have similar missions and aim to restore degraded landscapes so that both communities and wildlife can benefit from healthy ecosystems. As we speak, we are in the process of shaping our long-term collaboration in this region by creating a restoration plan. As part of this process, we are currently working on an explorative study together with our research partner MetaMeta. This study will help us thoroughly understand the landscape, including the communities that live here.



SOUTH RIFT



EXPLORATION

Currently, we are thoroughly exploring the South Rift landscape together with MetaMeta and SORALO. This exploration contains several steps. Firstly, we are exploring and mapping the region through an elaborate desk study. Here, we will get a better understanding of the communities that live here, of their (traditional) practices and about where they are settled. We will then focus on their agricultural practices, especially about keeping livestock and their grazing management. We will explore the existing vegetation and soil types that characterise the area and will get a better understanding of the climatic conditions. Based on these aspects, we will have a better view on which specific areas are being degraded and where restoration is needed most – and how we can do this.

After this desk study, we will engage with local stakeholders to discuss our findings and understand their point of view on environmental issues in the area. Through workshops, we will get a clear understanding on their interaction with their environment and on their willingness and attitude towards landscape restoration. The role of local communities and institutional players (such as community leaders) in landscape restoration practices is of crucial importance, since they are the ones that need to take care for it in the long run.

When we fully understand the landscape, we will be able to jointly create a solid restoration plan based on which we can embark on a long-term cooperation to restore the degraded areas in the South Rift!



Creating a plan together with the local communities is essential for restoring degraded landscapes

INTERVENTIONS

After completing the explorative study, we will know in which specific areas restoration is most urgent and which interventions are most suitable to realise landscape rehabilitation. At the moment, we expect to use the following types of interventions:

Sustainable Grazing Management

The communities living in the South Rift are mostly pastoralists, meaning that keeping livestock is their most important source of income. Designing sustainable grazing management plans is an important step to take together with communities and their leaders. These plans can prevent further degradation of grasslands and rehabilitate already degraded areas. As part of these plans, which are made together with the communities, certain pieces of land can be set aside for selective grazing (for example only during a certain part of the year) or fully protected from grazing.

Rainwater-harvesting Interventions

In the most severely degraded areas, we implement rainwater-harvesting interventions. Very degraded areas often lost all or most of their vegetation, making them very susceptible to floods and severe soil erosion during heavy rains. With most of the rainwater directly flushing away to lower areas, the amount of water that infiltrates is very limited, strongly constraining the recovery of vegetation. Rainwater-harvesting interventions capture rainwater directly and allow it to infiltrate, which almost directly boosts vegetation growth. Depending on the landscape characteristics, there are several types of rainwater-harvesting interventions. Besides soil bunds, which are mostly used by JustdiggIt, stone lines and contour trenches are other examples of rainwater-harvesting interventions.



Recently constructed soil bunds, ready for the rains



The difference in vegetation cover within soil bunds, before and after rains

INTERVENTIONS

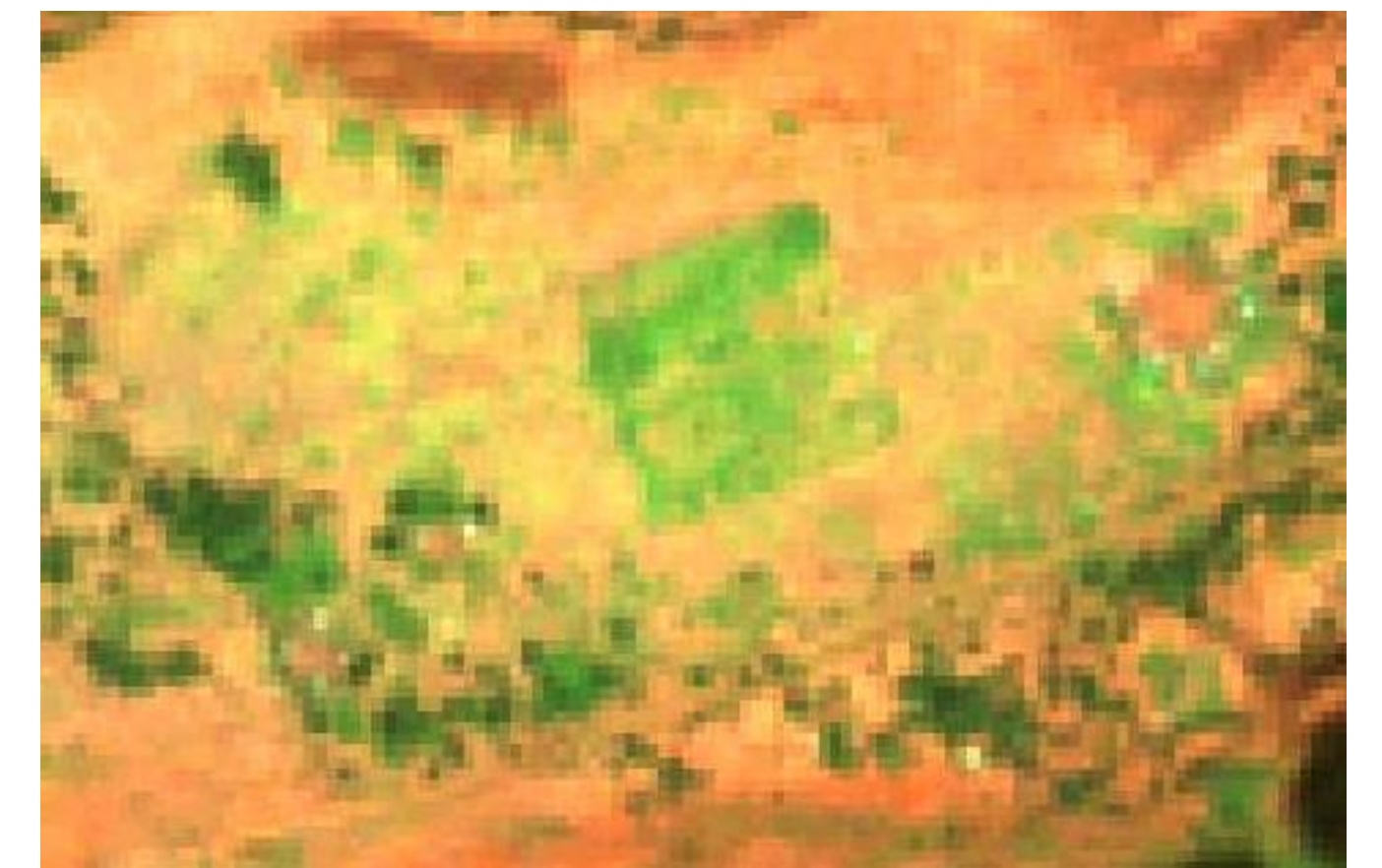
Grass Seed Banks

In other project areas in Southern Kenya, we have set up several Grass Seed Banks. The concept of a Grass Seed Bank is relatively simple. A piece of land, approximately 25 acres in size, is carefully managed and fenced to protect it from grazing animals. Group of women, living in local communities, are then trained on how to properly grow grasses and harvest the seeds. In other projects so far, JustdiggIt has purchased the grass seeds yielded by these women and used these seeds to kickstart vegetation growth in recently constructed soil bunds. Apart from technical skills on growing and harvesting grasses, these women groups learn how to find a market for their product, learn to negotiate and how to best to store their product to ensure the highest quality. Besides harvesting the seeds, the grasses can be dried into hay and be used as animal fodder or be sold to other farmers as well.

The advantage of this intervention is that it directly benefits both the communities and the environment. By promoting vegetation growth and actively protecting the area, soil degradation is being counteracted, soil quality is improved and even (soil)biodiversity is enhanced. The intervention areas are relatively small, but they are experienced as 'green oasis in a desert landscape'. Although the implementation of these Grass Seed Banks was very successful in other project areas so far, the suitability of this intervention depends on the results of the explorative study.



One of the women groups within the Grass Seed Bank



One of the Grass Seed Banks in Kenya, visible from space

OUTLOOK AND IMPACT

Although the interventions have a different nature, they all contribute to the same goal: to restore degraded and degrading landscapes. The goal of the current exploration study is to develop an integrated plan in which these interventions are combined in such a way that they complement each other towards their shared goal. This restoration process starts with the regeneration of grasses and reduction of destructive and degrading processes such as soil erosion. The interventions we described directly contribute to this by reversing the deteriorating process of land degradation. As the vegetation returns, soil quality improves and rainwater will infiltrate more easily, allowing for more plant growth. While seasons pass, litter from grasses and other plants is decomposed and is turned into organic material in the soil. This process, in which CO₂ is absorbed from the atmosphere and stored in the soil, strongly improves soil health and increases its resilience. Practically, implementing these interventions will over time lead to a healthier ecosystem that is more resistant to droughts, intense rains and other extreme conditions. Involving local communities is of crucial importance here. Since they are the main users of these landscapes, apart from wildlife, they need to be enabled to interact with their environment in a sustainable way. Long-term sustainable use of grasslands will, besides our direct interventions, therefore be a key concept in our restoration plan. After finishing the restoration plan, we plan to start the implementation of the interventions as soon as possible. The first work is expected to start in September.

The next progress report is scheduled for December 1st 2021. In that report, we will update you on all our activities in this area.



Soil bunds filled with rainwater



THANK YOU!

