

MOUNT KENYA SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPE AND LIVELIHOODS PROGRAM (MSULLI)

A scalable model for conservation, climate resilience, and inclusive economic growth



Mount Kenya is one of East Africa's most biologically significant landscapes: a UNESCO World Heritage Site whose forests, rivers, and farmlands sustain biodiversity, water security, climate resilience, and rural livelihoods. As one of Kenya's five major water towers, it provides vital water resources to millions of people and supports important food systems for the country and beyond.

The Mount Kenya Landscape spans six counties—Kirinyaga, Embu, Nyeri, Laikipia, Meru, and Tharaka Nithi—covering **2.7 million hectares** and supporting more than **4.4 million people**, 85 percent of whom live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.

The landscape is under growing pressure from climate change, deforestation, and widespread unsustainable land use. 30 percent of the landscape is comprised of protected areas or under Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs¹), making Mount Kenya a compelling case for investment in conservation to reduce pressure on natural resources while strengthening long-term community resilience.

MSULLI AT A GLANCE:

220,400+

native trees planted and nearly **590 hectares** rehabilitated across forests, community land, and individual farms.

US\$1.9 MILLION+

mobilized, with **21 investment plans** developed and five financing instruments identified to support landscape priorities and enterprise growth.

US\$300,000

capital fund developed with a local micro finance institution to support community access to affordable finance.

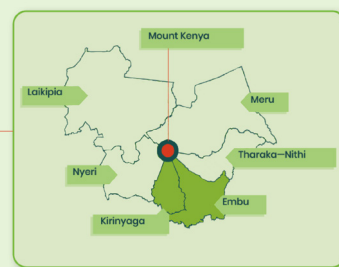
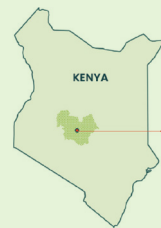
55,000+

people reached through activities including restoration, training, and livelihood diversification.

531

jobs created through nature-based enterprises (40% women, 30% youth).

¹ OECMs are geographic areas that are not strictly protected but managed in ways that yield positive, sustained, and long-term outcomes for biodiversity conservation, ecosystem functions, and important cultural and socio-economic value.



Our work is focused in Kirinyaga & Embu counties

The Rainforest Alliance's Integrated Landscape Management (ILM) approach under MSULLI:

1 Landscape management and governance

We bring diverse land users together through a Landscape Management Board (LMB)—a participatory governance platform where farmers, women, youth, Community Forest Associations, Water Resource User Associations (WRUAs), government, and private sector actors can align around shared challenges, intervention priorities, and collective action. Co-designed Sustainable Landscape Development and Management Plans (SLDMPs) serve as a roadmap to achieving shared objectives.

2 Resilient production and inclusive livelihoods

We strengthen farmer resilience, with targeted inclusion opportunities for women and youth, through regenerative and climate-smart agriculture while promoting diverse nature-based enterprises (such as tree nurseries, beekeeping, and clean energy).

3 Landscape finance

We help farmers and communities identify investment priorities, develop business cases, and connect farmer groups and local enterprises to financing and market opportunities that reward sustainability, quality, and innovation.

4 Landscape restoration

We support restoration of degraded forests, riparian areas, and farms through community-led restoration activities with farmers, schools, and local institutions, helping secure ecosystem services while reducing pressure on Mount Kenya's natural resources.

OUR APPROACH: BALANCING ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH SUSTAINABLE LAND USE AND BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION

Grounded in the belief that long-term conservation of forests, water systems, and biodiversity cannot be decoupled from the surrounding rural economy, our ILM approach supports people and nature by improving farm productivity, resource management and creating opportunities for economic growth. At the same time, we restore forests and riparian areas, supporting overall climate resilience, enhancing biodiversity, and reducing pressure on natural resources. **What this looks like in Mount Kenya:**

FOR NATURE

Regenerative and climate-smart agriculture:

MSuLLi has equipped more than 51,000 coffee and tea farmers with knowledge and tools for regenerative and climate-smart agriculture, achieving adoption rates exceeding 50 percent.

Inclusive landscape governance:

We have convened 42 members into a new LMB, with representatives across multiple high-priority sectors and local communities. Together, they have developed an SLDMP prioritizing restoration and climate resilience actions to 2029.

Natural resource management:

Communities engage in restoration and sustainable management of forests and farms to safeguard water sources, biodiversity, and reduce pressure on protected areas. For example, 475 households worked with multiple WRUAs to restore 42 kilometers of riparian habitat.

FOR PEOPLE

Public and private sector engagement:

We partner with both the public and private sectors, research institutions, civil society, and community groups. For instance, we have partnered with 50 multi-sectoral stakeholders who are actively engaged in landscape restoration activities.

Innovative finance:

We work to create blended landscape finance instruments that pool capital from the non-profit and private sectors into a single fund to support climate-related projects and green enterprises. This mix of capital not only helps attract additional investors by reducing investment risk, it also makes financing more accessible to marginalized groups.

Gender and youth-inclusive livelihood diversification:

All intervention areas engage youth, women, and other marginalized groups in governance, training, and enterprise development, while also enabling access to resources. One market partnership boosted farmers' incomes and resilience through farming herbs and spices, with average income across the participating farmer groups rising by 20 percent.

IMPACT STORY: LIGHTING THE PATH TO A GREENER FUTURE WITH THE UTUGI WOMEN'S GROUP

In 2023, we partnered with the Utugi Women's Group, a 23-member group under the Kangaita Community Forest Association, to shift their reliance on felling trees for fuel. Through trainings on clean energy, leadership, group management, and enterprise development, the group learned how to make briquettes—using locally available biomass from rice husks, sawdust, and other organic waste materials— and retail and install energy-saving cook stoves, known as “jikos” (earning about US\$4 per jiko). They also started selling coffee and tea seedlings to further boost their income. The result is a steady, profitable, women-led green enterprise that reduces pressure on forests while benefiting human health through cleaner fuel.



Click the video link to meet Jane Ndinji, Chairperson of the Utugi Women's Group, and hear her inspiring story.

In 2024, we joined forces with Fortune Sacco, a local micro finance institution, to establish the Mazingira Fund—a US\$300,000 fund aimed at enhancing inclusive finance for green enterprise development. The Utugi Women's Group received a loan of US\$3,870 to expand their operations to meet growing demand. One member, Julia Wangui, shared that income from briquette sales helped her buy ten piglets and build a rental house. She also learned to keep financial records; a skill she once thought was beyond her. Similarly, income from the sale of jikos allowed the group's chair, Jane Ndinji, to establish a coffee and tree nursery business, which now earns her around US\$232 per month from selling seedlings—income that supports her family and inspires others.

JOIN US

We are seeking partners to help accelerate and scale the next phase: deepening impact in Kirinyaga and Embu, while expanding proven approaches across the entire Mount Kenya landscape and other threatened natural landscapes across the country.

**RAINFOREST
ALLIANCE**

The Rainforest Alliance is creating a more sustainable world by using social and market forces to protect nature and improve the lives of farmers and forest communities. We work in 62 countries to promote more sustainable land management practices while cultivating thriving rural economies—the most widely proven strategy to restore biodiversity and keep our tropical forests standing.

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