

## Carbon project to raise thousands for African community

A PIONEERING carbon project aiming to save endangered African forests is set to generate thousands of pounds for a local Kenyan community.

Edinburgh Napier University scientist Professor Mark Huxham and Dr. James Kairo from the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI) expect to generate \$12, 000 a year after receiving the final, independent verification needed to set up a carbon offset scheme in Gazi Bay.

The area, 30 miles south of Mombasa, supports mangrove forests that are amongst the most productive eco-systems on Earth.

Thought to be the first community run project of its kind in Africa, 'Mikoko Pamoja' meaning 'Mangroves Together' in Kiswahili, aims to generate and sell carbon credits to companies and individuals looking to improve their green credentials.

More than 30% of revenue raised will be channelled in to a special community benefit fund, headed up by local representatives, for spending on community projects. The rest of the money generated will go towards employing a project coordinator and local labourers to help protect an initial 117 hectares of mangroves and re-plant lost trees along Gazi's coastline.

As well as offering crucial nursery habitat for marine life and protecting the coastline from storms and tsunamis, mangrove forests are natural carbon sinks. Able to lock and store CO<sub>2</sub> in their sediments, the forests help lessen the impacts of global warming. Their carbon storing powers are thought to be on average five times that of tropical rainforests.

Professor Huxham said: "Mangrove forests are one of the world's most threatened natural ecosystems, with 20% lost in Kenya in the last quarter century. When mangroves are destroyed, usually for building materials or for fuel, the carbon that has been stored in the forest soil and in biomass, built up over thousands of years, is released in to the atmosphere contributing to climate change."

*Mikoko Pamoja* will be officially launched on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> October after receiving formal accreditation from Plan Vivo, an organisation supporting communities to manage their natural resources more sustainably.

Dr Kairo said: "Investment in Mikoko Pamoja is a demonstrable triple win for community livelihood improvement, biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation. Protecting mangroves through Mikoko Pamoja will not only mitigate impacts of climate change, but more importantly will enhance income for communities whose livelihood is tied around mangrove ecosystem."

Backed by international NGOs - Earthwatch Institute, World Wildlife Fund, The Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme, AVIVA PLC and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), Dr. Kairo and Prof. Huxham have spent the last decade working with Southern Kenyan communities to protect the disappearing mangrove forests in their areas.

Prof. Huxham said: "Thanks to the work of Earthwatch volunteers and local people we've built up an excellent relationship with nearby communities. Mangrove trees are a really important part of everyday life in Gazi Bay and also have spiritual importance to local people.

"The money raised for local development will be spent on projects decided by local people themselves – we have already invested heavily in education and water supplies."

Recognising the value of *Mikoko Pamoja*'s potential to improve the lives of poor people in East Africa, the UK's Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme has awarded a new research grant, to fund a similar project in Tanzania.

The Director of ESPA, Professor Paul van Gardingen said "Mikoko Pamoja's success illustrates the way that science can improve the lives of the poor in developing countries. The long-term partnership between world-leading Kenyan and UK researchers has significantly improved our understanding of how healthy Mangrove ecosystems are essential to the lives of poor and vulnerable people in Kenya.

"Their commitment to work with local communities, supported by Earthwatch and Aviva PLC has helped to turn research into reality. I am very pleased that ESPA is providing new support for this team to extend their work to benefit many more communities in Kenya and Tanzania."

**ENDS**

#### **Notes to Editors**

*Mikoko Pamoja* has been possible thanks to various grants provided by AVIVA PLC, and the UK Government through ESPA, the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), Department for International Development (DFID) and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

An official launch is to be held on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> October in Gazi village with senior civil servants and politicians set to attend.

The Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme ([www.espa.ac.uk](http://www.espa.ac.uk)) is a global development research programme funded by the UK Government, supported by the Natural Environment Research Council, Department for International Development and the Economic and Social Research Council. ESPA aims to provide new, world-class research evidence demonstrating how ecosystem services can reduce poverty and enhance well-being for the world's poor.