

### 34. Local environmental stewardship and restoration of wetlands in Uringu ecological zone, Meru County, Kenya

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#### Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore local environmental stewardship efforts being employed for protection of the diversity of wetland habitats, flora and fauna within Uringu ecological zone. The study explored factors that are either enabling or inhibiting the success of environmental stewardship. The study carried out interviews through a focus group method with 65 members of Kieiga Conservation SHG, a local community based organization(CBO) involved in environmental conservation within Uringu ecological zone. The study focused on restoration of two types of wetland through afforestation of Kieiga forest, which forms part of Nyambene ranges. The 10 year old afforestation project by the CBO focused on restoring rivers and swamps. The study observed that well managed wetlands improve water quality as well as serving as important nursery and breeding areas for animals, fish and birds. Wetlands also serve as a good Source of food such as fish and rice. The study further observed that two springs that had dried up prior to the reforestation project were now restored and some members of the neighbouring community had harvested piped water for their homes. Members were asked to indicate their perception on the benefits accrued from the restored forest. On a likert scale of 1-5 the responses yielded the following results: A source of animal grazing and watering points( mean of 4.2),source of fuel and building materials (4.1), domestic water supply (4.68)),Research and education (3.3),recreational and aesthetic sites for bird watching, hunting, and fishing(3.8) Key challenges and threats to wetlands identified in the study include encroachment for settlement and agriculture ,pollution, Over-exploitation of wetland goods and services and other human land degradation practices. The study recommends Construction of water pans by local CBOs to store storm water in order to create more watering points, Encourage appropriate and sustainable land uses that can be easily supported by the fragile environment, Promote water and soil conservation measure to curb soil erosion and reclamation of river banks through restoration of indigenous trees.

**Keywords:** *environmental stewardship, wetland restoration, Sustainable land use.*