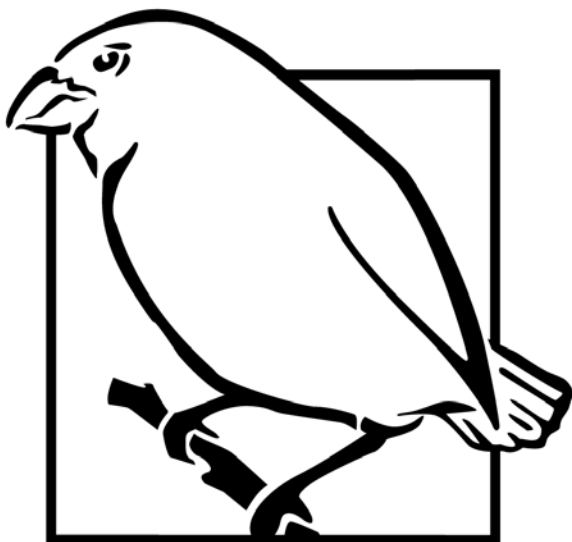


Newsletter

March 2020



Local woman pre-shedding vicuña fleeces, Credit: Omar Torrico, WCS



**DARWIN
INITIATIVE**

 /DarwinInitiative

 @Darwin_Defra

 darwininitiativeuk.wordpress.com

The Darwin Initiative supports developing countries to conserve biodiversity and reduce poverty. Funded by the UK Government, the Darwin Initiative provides grants for projects working in developing countries and UK Overseas Territories (OTs).

Projects support:

- the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS)
- the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)
- the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
- the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)
- the Convention on Climate Change (CCC)



darwininitiative.org.uk



Women are involved in weighing caught lobsters on the beach, Credit: SEED Madagascar

Contents

Publicity and information about the Darwin Initiative	3
A word from Darwin	4
Project articles	5
How women are ensuring that there are Fish for Tomorrow in Lake Malawi	5
Women and youth making big strides in conservation of natural resources in the Yala ecosystem	8
Empowering women in community-based fisheries management in Madagascar	10
Women living adjacent to Mt. Kenya Forest benefit directly by actively participating in forest restoration work	12
Improving vicuña management and increasing fibre quality with gender equity in Apolobamba, Bolivia	14
The changing position and role of women in Tana Delta	17
Non-timber forest product micro-enterprises for competitive forests and livelihoods in Ethiopia	19
Newsletter contacts	22



Members of a community conservation network in Kenya receive biodiversity monitoring training, Credit: G. Odera

Publicity and information about the Darwin Initiative

For more information on the Darwin Initiative please visit [gov.uk/government/groups/the-darwin-initiative](https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/the-darwin-initiative)

For further details about current and completed Darwin Initiative projects, including their final application forms, please visit darwininitiative.org.uk

We also have a blog, that includes news and thoughts on issues being tackled by the Darwin Initiative – both at the project and programme level. You can read it here darwininitiativeuk.wordpress.com

We're also keen to share other Darwin project blogs. If you have a blog you'd like to share on our website, please get in touch at darwin-newsletter@ltsi.co.uk

Publicity and referencing Darwin Initiative

We kindly remind project leaders that if they are publicising their work then it is important that they make every effort to mention Darwin Initiative funding. This is important as it helps us to ensure the Darwin Initiative retains a high profile and secures continued Government funding.



*Sainte Luce beach,
Credit: SEED Madagascar*

A word from Darwin

The equal treatment of individuals of different genders is a fundamental human right and plays an integral role in all Darwin Initiative projects. Gender inequality is not simply a women's issue and impacts people from different religions, cultures and economic backgrounds.

This **International Women's Day** we wanted to celebrate the projects that are actively involving female community members in activities and ensuring that the voices, opinions and experiences of these women and girls are heard.

The societal and cultural roles that women play directly influences their relationship with the environment, with

women in many countries having to directly depend on natural resources to feed their families and carry out household chores. In this edition of the newsletter we feature projects that are challenging these societal norms by empowering women through alternative livelihoods and the creation of all female community groups.

We are proud to support projects that have gender equality at their core and encourage an equal and enabled world.

We hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter!



Joyce Banda encouraging women to join the project, Credit: RIPPLE Africa

How women are ensuring that there are Fish for Tomorrow in Lake Malawi

Women aren't often seen on Lake Malawi in canoes or plank boats catching fish. Nevertheless, they play a vital role in the fishing industry as the main processors and sellers of fish. Some women are even boat owners and hire fishers to catch fish for them. For this reason, Ripple Africa, a UK based charity working for the last sixteen years in Malawi, is making sure that women play a key role in their Fish for Tomorrow project, which aims to reverse the decline of fish stocks in Africa's third largest lake.

This vital conservation project was first introduced in Nkhata Bay District in 2012 and through the support of the Darwin Initiative, it was extended to Nkhotakota in 2016. Over 30% of the 2,000 local volunteers protecting fish species along Lake Malawi's shoreline are women, in the Darwin project area we have more than 100 women now playing an active role in the project. The leadership and guidance provided by the Project Manager, Joyce Banda, has been instrumental in encouraging female involvement in the project.

“ Mothers are given free mosquito nets at clinics - but rather than use them to prevent malaria, many are using them in the shallow waters of the lake to catch fish ”

Sadly, one of the main factors which has led to the reduction in fish in Lake Malawi is the use of mosquito nets. Mothers are given free mosquito nets at clinics - but rather than use them to prevent malaria, many are using them in the shallow waters of the lake to catch fish. The nets are able to provide these women's families with nutritional and financial benefits, as many of the nets are sold to fishers who then sew them together into large drag nets. These catch thousands of baby fish, which do not have the opportunity to reach maturity and breed. The use of mosquito nets is endangering fish stocks and damaging their future as well as that of their children. It is crucial that the message about these risks are communicated to women, and who better to spread that message than women themselves?



Martha Chiwi Female Chief,
Credit: RIPPLE Africa

Martha Chiwi is a female chief in Matumbi - one of the major fish landing sites in Nkhotakota district where a variety of fish species are caught and sold. She feels that Ripple Africa's Fish for Tomorrow project has greatly benefited her and her community, as people are no longer using mosquito nets for fishing. She feels that because so many women are now members of the Fish Conservation Committees, other women in the community now understand how their actions are endangering fish and as a result they are becoming more committed to fish conservation.

Janet Ziadi lives in Kasitu in Nkhotakota District and has been fishing for Usipa, or Lake Malawi sardine (*Engraulicypris sardella*), since 2014. She owns a plank boat with an engine and employs a crew of nine fishers. She used to always use mosquito nets in the centre of her chilimira net (a type of seine net) and didn't make much profit after buying fuel and paying the crew.

However, Janet now understands that the smaller fish need to be left in the lake in order to mature and knows that the larger fish can be sold for much more. She has since changed the mosquito net to a much larger meshed central net and is now making more money per night. With the extra income, she has been able to pay for iron sheets on the roof of her house and can now afford secondary school fees for her children.

Muchedwa Banda is treasurer of the Fish Conservation Committee in Makanja, a mainly Muslim village in Nkhotakota District. Ripple Africa is keen to ensure that women who join the committees are not simply there to make up the numbers but are given the chance to really get involved and have their voices heard. Before the project started here, Muchedwa lacked confidence and felt that as a woman, she could not really contribute to things happening outside the home. But she says that the project has really changed her life, both socially and economically.



Janet Ziadi and a member of the project team, Credit: RIPPLE Africa

Muchedwa has been running her fish selling business since 2010. But in the past two years, her income has increased significantly because she is now able to sell bigger fish for a larger profit. Recently, she has been able to afford to purchase land to start a new business growing rice.

“

I am now able to express my views in the presence of men and also make bold business ideas with the support from my husband. I have left no stone unturned telling others how Fish for Tomorrow has improved my life and that of my family in other aspects. Communities feel fully empowered and have fisheries bylaws in place such that no one is allowed to catch small fish as it was the case in the past. As a member of the Fish Conservation Committee, I have even been involved in confiscation of illegal gears at the landing site

”

Muchedwa Banda

The efforts of Muchedwa and her fellow female Fish Conservation Committee members all along the lakeshore have played a vital role in the project's success. Women are now able to make more money from their fish selling businesses and are ensuring that there are more fish in the lake to feed their families today, tomorrow and for many years to come.

For more information on project 25-009, please click [here](#).



*Muchedwa Banda,
Credit: RIPPLE Africa*



A section of women from Nyiego CBO sowing seeds at their tree nursery site, Credit: Emily Mateche

Women and youth making big strides in conservation of natural resources in the Yala ecosystem

More than a decade ago, when a couple of women within the Yala ecosystem founded Olalo and Nyiego women groups, all they intended to do was to improve their household living standards. Little did they know they would soon become role models for other women endeavouring to promote stewardship of their natural surroundings.

Through funding from the Darwin Initiative, and with support from Nature Kenya, the two women's groups are now dedicated to the conservation of Yala Swamp, Kenya's largest freshwater wetland, a key biodiversity area and proposed Ramsar site. The groups actively engage in and advocate for conservation through the use of energy saving stoves, fireless cookers, riverine rehabilitation using bamboo and indigenous seedlings, papyrus planting and on-farm tree planting.

"In Siaya County, we are blessed with such an abundant stock of natural resources, trees, wildlife, freshwater both from River Yala and Lake Victoria," states Colleta Atieno Okoth, the Chairlady of Olalo Women Group, one of the vibrant Community Based Organisations (CBOs) engaged in tree nursery establishment. Eager to explain why the group plants trees with so much zeal, Colleta continues,

"As household providers, we depend so much on the natural environment to meet our basic needs, be it food, water, or shelter. For instance, without trees we lose fertile soil through soil erosion and we cannot produce food needed by our families. Can you imagine how catastrophic it would be if River Yala or Lake Victoria dried up or if all the trees are destroyed? There would be no water, no food, our very own survival would be threatened. Protection of our natural resources is vital, we cannot debate about it. Our goal, in line with the national tree planting campaign is to increase tree cover in Siaya County besides growing trees to change the landscape".

“
The rehabilitation effort is ongoing, with more than 91,000 indigenous tree seedlings due to be planted during the long rains in March
”

Colleta's group has been leading a door to door campaign mobilising riparian land owners along the River Yala to plant and take care of trees using locally available resources. The efforts together with 13 other CBOs culminated in the rehabilitation of over 340ha of riparian area along River Yala.



A member of Olalo CBO tends to seedlings at the nursery site in Ndhiha village Gem Subcounty Siaya, Credit: Emily Mateche

The rehabilitation effort is ongoing, with more than 91,000 indigenous tree seedlings due to be planted during the long rains in March.

“Our group began with table banking (informal village banking) as one of the main activities to uplift members’ livelihoods” states Mathilda Juma Owira, Chairlady of Nyiego CBO. “This became ‘our bank’ where we got money to invest and diversify to other income generating ventures including production of tree seedlings, fish farming, value addition on sorghum and cassava”. Under the leadership of Mathilda, Nyiego CBO has established woodlots with over 47,000 assorted trees, enabling members to access low interest loans from the National Uwezo Fund.

“
The group’s initiatives have inspired other women in the community to get involved in conservation
 ”

Mathilda is very determined and has made it her mission to ensure women are participating effectively in various forums that discuss conservation issues. “From our group meetings, members have learnt how to express themselves and communicate effectively. Whenever we have meetings convened at community level or even county level, I mobilise my team not only to attend in high numbers but raise issues and air their views” she explains. The group’s initiatives have inspired other women in the community to get involved in conservation. For instance, women played an active role in the formulation of the Yala Swamp land use plan, and are also spearheading sensitization action plans for the adoption of the plan. As a result of this mobilisation Village Natural Resource and Land Use committees are being formed, with at least 30% women representatives.

“
The two groups have collectively given micro-loans to 59 members to start businesses, with a total of Ksh. 7,920,000 (£60,655) being disbursed
 ”

The committees will form the community governance structure for implementation of the Yala Swamp land use plan. The two women’s groups are not only female led, but also share a strong entrepreneurial spirit. The two groups have come together to form a joint village savings and loans scheme. Since the inception of the scheme in 2016 through a previous Darwin project (21-015), the two groups have collectively given micro-loans to 59 members to start businesses, with a total of Ksh. 7,920,000 (£60,655) being disbursed.

Through our current Darwin project Nature Kenya is committed to providing these groups the support they need to advance their conservation initiatives to build a better, more sustainable world for people and biodiversity in the Lower Yala River basin and Yala Swamp.

For more information on project 26-003, please click [here](#).



Members of Olalo CBO in a strategy meeting on habitat restoration in Lihanda sublocation, Credit: Emily Mateche



*The main catch - a spiny lobster,
Credit: SEED Madagascar*

Empowering women in community-based fisheries management in Madagascar

In the remote coastal communities of Anosy, southeastern Madagascar, fishing provides a vital source of nutrition and income where few livelihood alternatives exist. For example, in the community of Sainte Luce, 83% of households are dependent on lobster fishing as their main source of income. However, the local lobster stock is declining as a consequence of overfishing, which is threatening livelihoods, food security, and biodiversity.

SEED Madagascar is working to identify a sustainable solution through Project Oratsimba. Working with local fishers in the three rural communities of Sainte Luce, Elodrato, and Itapera in rural Anosy, the project supports community-based, sustainable lobster fishery management designed to increase both income and food security.

As part of the project, SEED aims to increase recognition of the important role women play in fisheries management, shedding light on the crucial contribution to lobster fishing made by local women in Anosy. Based on traditional gender roles, men and women carry out different tasks related to lobster fishing. Without the combined efforts of both men and women, the lobster fishing supply chain would be severely disrupted. Despite this, there remains a lack of understanding of the critical role that women play.

Lobster catching is performed by men, fishing from hollowed-out canoes called pirogues. However, these fishers use bait that is caught mainly by women, who use river nets or scrape shellfish from shallow rocks off the beach, with the lobster pots themselves often woven by women. On the beach, women collect and weigh the morning's catch, before the lobsters are passed onto the export companies via local middlemen.

“
Women should be invited to participate; women should be able stand and talk in front of everyone - women have different ideas than men

”

In terms of generating household income, credited on the catch itself, the essential roles women carry out are too often overlooked, undervalued, and relegated to part of a woman's household duties – ultimately undermining their economic contribution. This, coupled with the perception of lobster fishing as “men's work” by both men and women, has led to women being excluded from the lobster fisheries management process.



*Handwoven lobster pots,
Credit: SEED Madagascar*

Nevertheless, there is a clear demand from local women to engage more actively in decision-making regarding the lobster fisheries management.

A female project participant from a fishing household in Elodrato told SEED that “Women should be invited to participate; women should be able stand and talk in front of everyone. Women have different ideas than men.”

To empower the women of the target communities, and to encourage them to participate more actively in the management of their fisheries, SEED is training Women Marine Ambassadors. The training is focused on increasing confidence and improving public speaking skills of the Ambassadors, as well as their knowledge of community-based fisheries management.

The training aims to impart the Ambassadors with the knowledge and skills necessary to inspire other women in their community.

After completing their training, the Ambassadors will lead women-only education sessions on fisheries management, instilling the confidence required to have a stronger voice in fishery management decision-making.

Through shedding light on the essential roles women play in the lobster fishing supply chain, this project hopes that others will be empowered to become more actively involved in community-based fisheries management.

For more information on project 25-016, please click [here](#).



Women in conservation,
Credit: Jeremy Là Zelle

Women living adjacent to Mt. Kenya Forest benefit directly by actively participating in forest restoration work

The forest ecosystem of Mt. Kenya provides vital services to nearby communities, through the provision of fuelwood and water for domestic usage. Nature Kenya is engaging with these communities in an effort to enhance their livelihoods through building their capacity for forest restoration. One of the target groups is women – women are responsible for collecting fuelwood, fetching water and cooking for their families and therefore have a very close relationship with the forest.

Through our Darwin Initiative project we are working to ensure that the community continues enjoying vital ecosystem services. Through project interventions community groups have established tree nurseries, diversified livelihoods through beekeeping enterprises and adopted innovations to reduce fuelwood consumption as they meet household demands. The biggest beneficiaries of these interventions have been women.

Ms. Mary Muriithi, one of the tree nursery attendants at the Hombe Community Forest Association (CFA), said “from the sales of tree seedlings in 2019, I made US\$460, which enabled me to pay school fees for my son.” Another CFA, Gaitu Mweru, is comprised of 112 women and 58 young people. It earned US\$19,500 in 2019 through labour provided by its members during forest rehabilitation activities.

“
From the sales of tree seedlings in 2019, I made US\$460, which enabled me to pay school fees for my son

”
Mary Muriithi

In 2019 forest restoration actions were promoted to ensure that the fuelwood supply was sustainable. As a part of this initiative women were encouraged to adopt fuelwood efficient cookstoves. In total, 400 women made the switch and are now reporting the benefits of using these cookstoves.

Ms. Lucy Wangechi, a member of Gathiuru CFA, said "by using this cookstove I have been able to save on time and money. I used to collect firewood from the forest three times a week which has now reduced to once a week. This has enabled me to have time to set up a small business." Ms. Ann Gaitenga from Meru CFA reported that the fuel-efficient cookstoves produce less smoke compared to the traditional stoves she used before.

“
Women are now better placed to fill leadership positions where they can voice their concerns and positively contribute to community-led initiatives
”

To diversify livelihood options, Nature Kenya has supported women who are members of the CFAs to take up beekeeping as a nature-based enterprise.

Ms. Millicent Irura gained an interest in beekeeping through the capacity development programmes supported by Nature Kenya. As a result, Millicent successfully established 13 hives in 2019 and was able to harvest 63kg of honey and earned US\$310 in profit.

Our experience of mainstreaming gender in community-based organisations has resulted in increased community engagement in forest restoration activities and has been yielding positive impacts.

Women are now better placed to fill leadership positions where they can voice their concerns and positively contribute to community-led initiatives. Through this project Nature Kenya continues to nurture and mentor community groups to ensure that inclusivity is achieved.

For more information on project 25-031, please click [here](#).



Community members being trained on Beekeeping training, Credit: Martin Njogu



Women vicuña handlers, cleaning fiber fleece, Credit: Eleanor Briggs, WCS

Improving vicuña management and increasing fibre quality with gender equity in Apolobamba, Bolivia

The vicuña is a wild South American camelid whose fibre (or wool) is one of the finest in the world. These animals require large extensions of pastures, wetlands and water sources for subsistence. Due to the vicuña's specific habitat requirements, conservation efforts for this species also simultaneously promote the conservation of the fragile ecosystems of the high Andes. Our project works with women and men from 15 communities affiliated with the Regional Association of Vicuña Management Communities in the Apolobamba protected area in northwestern of Bolivia.

The project has supported training in preventive veterinary practices and the treatment of domestic livestock diseases that can also affect wild vicuñas. These workshops were attended by 219 people (33% women and 67% men) from ten communities.

“ The project ensured that both women and men were encouraged to attend, and through supervision attendees were encouraged to learn how to apply medicine and treat their livestock ”

In addition to the workshops, a total of 180 people (35% women and 65% men) from ten communities also participated in field schools. During the field school sessions, the project ensured that both women and men were encouraged to attend, and through supervision attendees were encouraged to learn how to apply medicine and treat their livestock.

“

the project has taken the necessary steps to provide added value to the vicuña fibre obtained through training in pre-shedding techniques, which will increase the quality of the fibre

”

347 people (42% women and 58% men) attended workshops on good vicuña management practices, to promote animal welfare during vicuña herding, capture and shearing. In addition, 15 communities were trained in shearing with electric machines, teaching women and men the correct techniques for shearing and how to produce a more homogeneous fibre length to reduce the time animals are handled, thus reducing their stress.

In the first quarter, the project has taken the necessary steps to provide added value to the vicuña fibre obtained through training in pre-shedding techniques, which will increase the quality of the fibre.



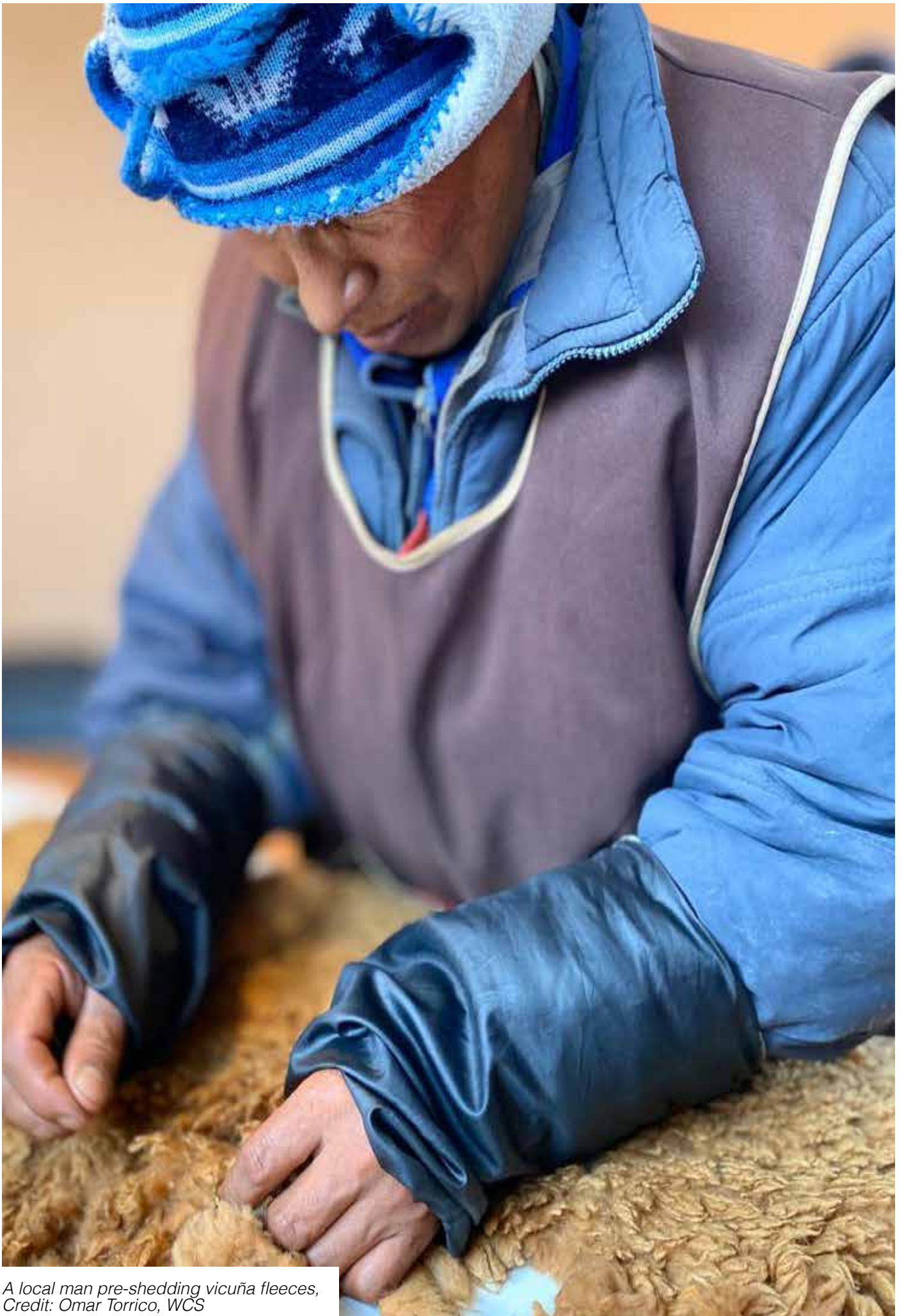
Management of vicuña fleece, Credit: Humber Alberto, WCS

Through community involvement, the project has been able to ensure that local communities, species and the Andes ecosystems benefit.

For more information on project 26-021, please click [here](#).



Vicuña capturing in the Apolobamba protected area, Credit: Omar Torrico, WCS



*A local man pre-shedding vicuña fleeces,
Credit: Omar Torrico, WCS*



Ozi women fish farmers cleaning their fish ponds, Credit: G. Odera

The changing position and role of women in Tana Delta

The Tana River Delta is a vast wetland, inhabited by communities with interests and economic activities that are as diverse as they are. There are farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk and a few hunter gatherer communities. Despite their differences, one common thing among these communities is their patriarchal nature. The women are hardly involved in decision making, even when these decisions influence themselves and their families directly. This was true even for the few, well educated women in the society.

“
The loss of a healthy ecosystem means that women often have to travel further to collect these goods, risking their health and wellbeing in remote areas
”

In 2013 the Tana Delta Conservation network (TDCN) was formed. This was spurred on after the communities realised that they needed to mobilise themselves to save their land from investors who had little to no regard for the environment or the local people. At that time, the involvement of women in any decision making was poor.

Serah Munguti, the Nature Kenya Advocacy Manager, says “no women attended the first meetings we convened to sensitize communities on conservation and development in the delta. We had to insist that the meetings would not go on without representation from women. Even then, the women would come to the meeting venue and sit very far away, often with a village hut between them and the rest of the meeting!”

The initial TDCN interim committee had no women representation, probably because women did not realise they had a stake and say in solving the issues faced by their communities. Nature Kenya recognised that the contribution of women was very important to the management of the delta. Women are major collectors of environmental goods such as firewood, herbs, medicines, thatch material, and water – however through this direct relationship with the environment women often suffer the most when it begins to degrade. The loss of a healthy ecosystem means that women often have to travel further to collect these goods, risking their health and wellbeing in remote areas.

The Kenyan constitution requires that people of one gender (men or women) should not represent more than two thirds of membership at any level of governance.

To encourage female participation in the conservation and development agenda in the Tana Delta, Nature Kenya started by capacity building the initial team emphasising the important role women would play in leadership. Through these trainings, the interim team alongside Nature Kenya field staff, embarked on awareness exercises that culminated in the first ever democratic elections of TDCN in 2014. That election resulted in an office where women had 40% representation in the executive committee. Under our current Darwin Initiative project we have seen an increase in female representation, with 50% of the TDCN leadership now made up of women.

“
It’s not like we were unaware that our land was going to be taken from us and that our natural resources were at risk. The problem was that back then, nobody explained to our husbands what roles we could play as they believed our place was in the kitchen. We thank God that today our contributions are appreciated at all levels. Even the county government consults us by virtue of the positions we hold in TDCN

”
Zainab Gobu

When asked why they kept a low profile initially, Zainab Gobu, the first elected group treasurer says “It’s not like we were unaware that our land was going to be taken from us and that our natural resources were at risk. The problem was that back then, nobody explained to our husbands what roles we could play as they believed our place was in the kitchen. We thank God that today our contributions are appreciated at all levels. Even the county government consults us by virtue of the positions we hold in TDCN”.

TDCN is now at the centre of community representation and is recognised as the official community voice on conservation and development matters in Tana Delta. The female leadership has empowered other women in the community to get involved in various nature-based enterprises. “This has given the local woman a chance to contribute economically to the well-being of their families and it makes the woman be respected by their husbands and other immediate family members” says Dolphin Komora, the secretary to TDCN

The main activity of the TDCN is the establishment and strengthening of indigenous community conserved areas. This involves the management and administration of natural resources at the village level – originally this would have been seen as the men’s responsibility however through the TDCN women leaders have become involved and now make up 30% of the committee.

Empowered women have over time built up the courage to venture into activities that have been traditionally male dominated. Originally women in Tana Delta relied on men to provide them with fish. Their role would then be to process and prepare the fish and then sell it. However, the changes in the weather patterns have resulted in the decline of the number of fish caught. Through our project we have helped women set up six aquaculture ponds. Through support from the Kenya Marine Fisheries Research Institute, feeds are formulated using locally available materials, to complement commercial feeds. Despite the recent recurrent floods that have reduced the availability of fish markets, the women have already harvested 96kg of fish valued at Ksh. 28,800 (£215). These fish are one of the main sources of protein for these women and their families.

Nature Kenya will keep working with communities and give special attention to the women and other vulnerable groups to ensure that their voices are heard and that their issues are adequately addressed.

For more information on project 24-013, please click [here](#).



Women from Harakisa Community Development Group harvesting kales, Credit: Ken Gitonga



Selling black peppercorns in the local market, Bench Sheko Zone, Credit: Indrias Kassaye

Non-Timber Forest Product micro-enterprises for competitive forests and livelihoods in Ethiopia

Wokinesh Danil beams broadly, showing off the certificate, presented to her by the woreda (district) Officer for Women and Children, that states the micro-enterprise she is a member of. The micro-enterprise was established in Gide Bench woreda in southwest Ethiopia is one of eleven set up to develop more diverse livelihood incomes from a wide variety of Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) value chains, with an emphasis on benefitting women.

Initiated with the support of the Darwin Initiative Wokinesh's micro-enterprise is involved in the sustainable harvesting and processing of forest spices such as timiz (long pepper) and kororemia (Ethiopian cardamom) for the local, national and potentially international markets. Other micro-enterprises harvest and market other forest produce such as honey, fruits and jams.

Previous work in the southwest through an earlier Darwin project **19-025** focused on the protection of these forests and the wild coffee gene pool found within them.

This was achieved through the development of community based participatory forest management institutions and the establishment of marketing co-operatives to add value to the wild coffee value chain.

“ These initiatives succeeded in improving local livelihoods as well as reducing deforestation to 0.18% per annum in community-managed forests compared to 2.6% in forests with no community management ”

These initiatives succeeded in improving local livelihoods as well as reducing deforestation to 0.18% per annum in community-managed forests compared to 2.6% in forests with no community management.



Bayush Tuga, member of Medemer NTFP Cooperative, Credit: Hailemariam Nadew

Through the work achieved by the previous project it was recognised that the beneficiaries of the coffee value chains were predominantly men. In order to maintain reduced rates of deforestation and to promote sustainable livelihoods through cooperatives and forest groups it was clear that a broader range of forest products that benefitted both men and women was needed. This is being addressed by focusing on developing value chains which enable economically excluded local women to create micro-enterprises targeting new local, national and international markets.

Ethiopia is a highly patriarchal society and previous projects have struggled to actively involve women. The traditional role of women, coupled with their family and household responsibilities, have acted as a barrier against their active participation. Changing cultural norms takes time and these issues are still impacting on levels of project participation and the empowerment of women. To tackle these challenges, the project has encouraged increased involvement from women by actively working with the staff team on the ground to ensure that women are the central focus of the project, and through engagement with the Women and Children's Office (WCO) at the woreda level.

In addition to the women-only micro-enterprises trading in honey (traditionally seen as a man's crop), ten other mixed gender micro-enterprises have been established in which a minimum of 51% of the membership is female.

By contrast, existing coffee co-ops have an average female participation rate of only 18%.

Through this project the WCO has actively participated in project consultation and training sessions. The active engagement of the WCO office has reassured women members, and has promoted the idea that women should be able to express their opinion 'without fear or hesitation'.

Farmer Tirunesh Shenka Aity is the female chair of the Abyi Angisken honey micro-enterprise which was established in 2019. Tirunesh participated in a 'training for trainers' course led by Apinec Agro Industries, a private sector project partner, on bee keeping and the use of transitional bee hives. These transitional hives are made from locally available materials (wood, mud and straw), and can be easily built and due to their location (on the forest fringe) are more accessible for women.

“
the project has encouraged increased involvement from women by actively working with the staff team
”

Tirunesh was selected by Apinec as 'best trainee' for her participation in the classroom and practical engagement in making transitional hives with other male participants. Returning from the training, she has recruited and trained the other female micro-enterprise members and collected 8,000birr that will enable her to buy the best quality honey next season. Tirunesh's micro-enterprise has also adapted eleven traditional hives into transitional ones, increasing the volume of honey harvested and the income made whilst still protecting the forest.

The use of participatory methods to identify which NTFPs should be developed and which private sector partners should be involved in training has helped to ensure that women's voices are heard and that their experiences are taken into account. As well as having a positive impact on women's lives and providing leadership opportunities for women such as Tirunesh and Wokinesh, work to date has also succeeded in changing gender-based assumptions of project staff. One of the project staff members stated that "we have learnt that when we give the chance for women to participate in all activities they can do better than men members... so we have learnt from this project to give the chance to [women to] participate for other projects too".

For more information about project 25-013 please click [here](#).



Local woman pre-shedding vicuña fleeces, Credit: Omar Torrico, WCS

Newsletter Contacts

The Darwin Initiative Secretariat (Defra)

The Darwin Secretariat is based in Defra and includes Tim Pryce, Siriol Leach and Scott Nelson.

If you have any general queries about how the Darwin Initiative operates please e-mail us at darwin@defra.gsi.gov.uk

For any queries on project applications or existing projects please contact our Darwin Administrators (LTS International) at darwin-applications@ltsi.co.uk or darwin-projects@ltsi.co.uk

This newsletter is produced quarterly. To include an article on your project please contact us at darwin-newsletter@ltsi.co.uk

The UK Government's Darwin Initiative aims to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of resources around the world including the UK's Overseas Territories. Since 1992, the Darwin Initiative has committed over £166 million to 1,169 projects in 159 countries.