Mangrove conservation more valuable than ever thanks to carbon trading

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When a proven ecosystem restoration method also helps reduce poverty and build economic resilience, governments will often back them as a win-win solution. The UN Environment Programme, the Kenya Forest Service, the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute and partners recently launched the Vanga Blue Forests Project on the Kenyan coast, a groundbreaking initiative to trade carbon credits from mangrove conservation and restoration.

"The whole of this village and other nearby villages depend on fishing. And the mangrove forest is the actual breeding area for the fish,"Â says Vanga chief Kama Abdallah.Â "If the mangroves are destroyed there would be hunger,"Â adds Vanga resident Mwasiti Salim. In June 2019, the Vajiki Community Forest Association participatory forest management plan was launched in Vanga, as part of the project supported by UN Environment through the Global Environment Facility Blue Forests Project and the International Coral Reef Initiative/UN Environment coral reefs small grants programme. According to the plan, mangroves in Kwale County will be co-managed by the Kenya Forest Service and the Community Forest Association. UN Environment helped develop the plan while the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute provided technical support to the community. The management plan includes the sale of carbon credits on the voluntary carbon market, verified by the Plan Vivo carbon trading standard. It builds on the success of a similar project in Gazi, a community just a few kilometres north, which has been trading mangrove carbon credits on the Voluntary Carbon Market since 2012.Â "Globally, this is one of the first projects that is trading carbon credits from mangrove conservation and restoration,"Â says UN Environment mangroves expert Gabriel Grimsditch.Â "The project will conserve and restore over 4,000 hectares of mangroves in Kwale County and support the livelihoods of over 8,000 people in fishing communities in the area through community development initiatives,"Â he adds.

Mangroves are rare, spectacular and prolific ecosystems on the boundary between land and sea. They support a rich biodiversity and provide a valuable nursery habitat for fish and crustaceans. Mangroves also act as a form of natural coastal defence against storm surges, tsunamis, rising sea levels and erosion. Their soils are highly effective carbon sinks, sequestering vast amounts of carbon. Yet mangroves are disappearing three to five times faster than overall global forest losses, with serious ecological and socio-economic impacts. Current estimates indicate that mangrove coverage has been halved in the past 40 years.

Fishermen from Gazi, near Vanga, on the Kenyan coast. Photo GRID-Arendal.

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