

Reviving Entarara : A story From Raphael Leneo -Chairperson of the Entarara Community Forest Association



My name is Raphael Leneo, and I am the Chairperson of the Entarara Community Forest Association. When I was younger, the Entarara Forest in Kajiado County was a place of incredible beauty. It was dense with lush undergrowth, and the towering trees seemed to stretch endlessly into the sky. I remember how we used to pray under a particular tree called ‘Oretiti,’ a sacred spot for the Maa community. Occasionally, the community would give offerings there, honoring the forest for all it provided. It was not just a place of spiritual significance—it was also a source of traditional medicines that cured various ailments. The forest was, in every sense, an important part of our lives.

But that was then. Today, the 23-acre forest, which is now under the management of the county government in collaboration with the Entarara Forest Community, is under threat. In the recent past, the majority of the trees in the forest were over 100 years old, but today, only a handful remain. It’s heartbreaking to witness. The forest once supported a diverse species of flora and fauna, and its thick canopy created a cool, soothing microclimate in an otherwise hot and arid area. We had everything—water for domestic use, water for livestock, and a place for wildlife to thrive.

But then came the challenges. The problems began in the years between 1965 and 1969 when the land around the forest was subdivided for individual farm holding, and everyone received their share. As people settled, the forest began to suffer. “We used



to have several wildlife species that have since moved due to the destruction,” I often hear elders say. Species like the black-and-white Colobus monkey and porcupines, once common in the forest, have now disappeared. They moved to the Loitokitok Forest and even to Mount Kilimanjaro. In fact, the forest used to be known as ‘Ilkeek Lorkoroin,’ named after the Colobus monkeys that inhabited it.

As more people settled, the forest faced human encroachment, and slowly, it started to lose its grandeur. The once abundant water from the forest’s nearby catchments began to dwindle. What was once a thriving, self-sustaining ecosystem became a place where human activity took precedence, and nature paid the price.

But despite the challenges, there’s hope. In 2017, the Kajiado county government intervened and took a bold step to stop all farming activities within the forest. They removed encroachers, giving the forest a chance to breathe again. That moment marked the beginning of the restoration efforts, and from then on, things began to change.

In 2019, a collaborative effort from various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Environment, the National Environment Management Authority, the Kenya Forest Service, and the Entarara community, helped take the forest to the next step. Together, we planted over 10,000 trees across seven acres of the forest that had been severely damaged. It was not a quick fix, but it was a start—a promise that the forest could heal.

Then, in 2022, the World-Wide Fund for Nature stepped in. They provided tree seedlings and have been supporting us ever since. They did not just bring resources; they also brought knowledge to us. For example, WWF-Kenya has helped the community to be organized into an active conservation agency now known as the Entarara Community Forest Association. WWF has built the organizational capacity of this association including the training of community scouts who now patrol the forest, protecting it from further encroachment. Today, those scouts are the first line of defense, and their presence has helped us keep the forest safe from illegal activities. The forest is being safeguarded, not just by the association, but by the entire community.



One of the most exciting interventions has been the construction of an apiary, thanks to the support from the World Wide Fund for Nature. The bees have colonized much of the 100 hives, and it's a good sign of things to come. The apiary is expected to benefit the community in the long term, offering a sustainable source of income while also promoting biodiversity. The bees play a crucial role in pollination, which will help restore the health of the forest in ways we might not fully understand yet, but we know it is a step in the right direction.

One of the proudest achievements, however, has been the development of the Participatory Forest Management Plan. This plan has been a game-changer in our efforts to restore the forest. It involves the community at every level, ensuring that everyone is engaged in the restoration process and that the forest's future is secure. The Participatory Forest Management Plan has given us a framework for long-term sustainability, helping us to manage the forest responsibly and to protect it for generations to come.



Every time I listen to the birds chirping in the forest now, I am filled with hope. There is something magical about the sounds of nature returning. It is a reminder of how far we have come, and how much work remains ahead. I know the road to full restoration is still long, but I am confident that with the community's dedication, the support of our partners, and the continued protection of the forest, Entarara will one day return to its former glory.

There are still challenges ahead, but with each step we take, we are one step closer to healing this precious piece of land. I am proud to be part of this journey—proud to be working alongside so many passionate people who care deeply about this forest and its future. Together, we will ensure that Entarara thrives again.