Community participation in Payment for Ecosystem Services: Lessons from Mikoko Pamoja carbon-offset project

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Mangroves are tidal forests that have been exploited for building poles, firewood and also serve as nursery grounds for fish. Increased demand for their wood products pose a threat to these ecosystems. Mikoko Pamoja is a small-scale initiative managed by Gazi Bay community with the aim of generating long-term incentives for conservation of critical mangrove ecosystem through sale of carbon credits. Since 2013, Mikoko Pamoja has empowered community to participate in mangrove forest surveillance, reforestation of degraded mangrove areas, monitoring of replanted forests and community education in an initial 117ha of mangroves. The project is verified by plan vivo standards to generate 3,000t CO2-equivalent of carbon credits worth US$12,500 per annum in the voluntary carbon market. Through community consensus, income generated has been channeled towards improving education, water and sanitation, and also conservation. However, illegal harvesting, plummeting prices of carbon in the international market as well community over-expectations regarding carbon financing remains to be a challenge. To counter this, Mikoko Pamoja has increased community surveillance to minimize illegal activities and continues to build community awareness of ‘beyond carbon’ benefits of mangroves – including their roles to fisheries and shoreline protection; that are enhanced by healthy mangrove forests. Whereas other mangrove restoration initiatives have failed elsewhere, Mikoko Pamoja's presence of a transparent benefit sharing mechanism and strong community organization structure has bolstered community efforts in mangrove restoration. Lessons and experiences drawn from Mikoko Pamoja initiative clearly demonstrate that PES is an innovative way of managing mangroves. The initiative has also attracted attention regionally and has inspired development of similar PES projects.