Small is beautiful but big is better: can PES really make an impact on climate change and mangrove conservation in East Africa?

M. Huxham, J. Kairo, M. Skov, A. Kairu, R. Shilland & L. Ruzowistsky
Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom
Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute, Kenya
Bangor University, United Kingdom
Association for Coastal Ecosystem Services, United Kingdom
Association for Coastal Ecosystem Services, United Kingdom
m.huxham@napier.ac.uk

Since it was launched in 2013, Mikoko Pamoja ('mangroves together') has demonstrated the potential for Payments for Ecosystem Services to support mangrove conservation and community development in southern Kenya. It is the world’s first community-based mangrove conservation project to be funded through the sale of carbon credits and has raised more than 39,000 USD for local benefit. The success of Mikoko Pamoja is founded on prolonged work at the field site, building expert scientific knowledge and high levels of local trust and engagement. For PES to achieve regional and global impact it must operate at multiple sites but there are many challenges in translating and replicating the Mikoko Pamoja model elsewhere. In this paper, we summarise the current status of the project and discuss the prospects for and barriers to expansion of the model. In particular, we consider the technical, political and ethical questions raised by the four areas of: a) scientific foundations, b) governance, c) marketing and finance and d) moral hazard, drawing on a range of scientific and social research as well as lived experience with the project. We conclude with a consideration of prospects for new mangrove and coastal PES projects in the region and elsewhere.