



Facilitating Environmental Community Action Through Forum Theater

Sponsored Arts for Education (S.A.F.E) Kenya

is a Kenyan non-governmental organization that uses theater, film, and education to inform, inspire and deliver social, health, and environmental change. S.A.F.E. works in hard-to-reach communities and focuses on sexual health, gender-based violence, clean water and sanitation, countering extremism, peacebuilding and the environment. Its projects are delivered by three local teams, namely: SAFE Pwani, SAFE Maa and SAFE Samburu.

AREA AND SCOPE

Under its environment program, SAFE Pwani works with seven villages in Ndavaya, Kwale County.

Arts and theater performances were organized for more than

3.996 PEOPLE
from across 7 villages





CONTEXT

Communities in Ndavaya are significantly impacted by environmental degradation and climate change. Poor agricultural practices, including inadequate soil and water conservation, and longer drought seasons have resulted in food scarcity and eroded livelihoods. This has also shaped human mobility patterns, with pastoralists moving further away in search of water and pastures and other community members temporarily moving to nearby cities or other rural areas for work.

RESPONSES

SAFE Pwani seeks to encourage people to remain in or return to their villages by facilitating community action to address the adverse impacts of environmental degradation and climate change.

Forum Theater

The organization stages an interactive performance, *miongo*, to present environmental and social challenges faced by the community. In doing so, it utilizes community stories, vocabularies and structures. After the initial performance and identification of challenges, SAFE Pwani encourages communities to consider what the future will look like if action is not taken. Community members are then invited to change the narrative by identifying areas where they can bring about change.

Ecosystem Management and Livelihoods

Following the performance, the organization holds strategic meetings with the community and other relevant stakeholders to design interventions to address these challenges. Interventions include community training on soil conservation, erosion prevention, and the planting of tree nurseries. The latter, in particular, protects communities against droughts, winds, and flash floods and allows its members to diversify their livelihoods by shifting away from the cutting of trees for charcoal towards woodlot farming. When tree nurseries are planted, communities are encouraged to plan indigenous trees that are able to withstand the climatic conditions of the area. Community members are also taught how to preserve their land for pasture, agriculture and other purposes, as well as fertilize their land through the use of manure.

Community Ownership

Communities are responsible for implementing these strategies. By involving the community at every stage, the organization creates a strong sense of community ownership over these initiatives, thereby also contributing to their sustainability.

“ It is about involving the community to take a key role; it is not about coming from Mombasa and thinking that we have the answers.”

David Kalume

Examples of community action to sustain these initiatives include:

- 1 Maintaining the tree nurseries: more than 3,000 trees were planted in 2022, with another 3,300 expected to be planted in 2023. Even though many of these trees were planted during a drought, the community mobilized to water the trees and, as a result, most of the trees survived;
- 2 Enacting environmental laws and standards at the community-level, including requirements to plant trees as wind-breakers around homesteads and farms;
- 3 Engaging community members as forest and agricultural officers to support sustainable resources management by providing expert advice to communities from within.

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CHALLENGES

Limited or lack of community knowledge around the environment and climate change remains a key obstacle to addressing the challenges faced by communities in Ndavaya. For example, if topography is not afforded sufficient attention and crops are planted in arid areas, crop yields will remain low. Likewise, while communities are often able to recognize that weather patterns are changing, they do not explicitly identify or define this as an impact of climate change. In order to address these challenges, SAFE Pwani organizes workshops to educate communities about climate change by defining it and linking it to the impacts and challenges felt by communities.

Additionally, in some cases, traditional communities are hesitant or unwilling to accept innovative environmental stewardship and management practices. The organization has sought to address potential cultural or religious challenges by aligning recommended preservation and conservation efforts with traditional practices and beliefs.





RESULTS

Forum Theater constitutes a powerful tool due to its cross-cutting nature, as it delivers information in an effective manner to people of all ages, genders, education levels, etc. It allows community members to actively identify issues and solutions, ensuring that resultant interventions are not delivered in an accusatory manner from the outside. To date, 3,996 community members from the seven program villages have attended these performances.

The program has increased communities' knowledge and understanding of climate change and environmental degradation, as well as their desire and sense of responsibility to take action. For example, when strong winds damaged homes in Nydavaya in January 2023, 2,638 community members from the seven program villages rallied to promote measures to take action, recognizing that this had happened because not enough trees were planted around the homesteads.

1,896 COMMUNITY MEMBERS
have attended **18** environmental workshops
organized by SAFE Pwani

The program has further improved environmental conditions within communities by advancing sustainable agricultural practices, with the most recent harvest having yielded a crop surplus (referred to as a “bumper harvest”). As a result, people who went to cities in search of employment are now returning to their villages. The organization has also noted that pastoralists who used to move away from their communities are now increasingly able to remain in place and diversify their livelihoods, including by starting small shops and supporting tree nursery management.

Photos: © S.A.F.E.

The PDD implements the project to “Avert, Minimize and Address Displacement Related to the Effects of Climate Change” (PAMAD) to assist countries and communities facing the challenges of Loss and Damage and Displacement. Under PAMAD, and in partnership with the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations on Disaster Reduction (GNDR), the PDD promotes peer-to-peer learning on effective responses to displacement and climate change in Kenya. The project is supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad). For more information, visit <https://pamad.disasterdisplacement.org>



With the Generous Support of:



More information:

David Kalume: kalume@safekenya.org
<https://safekenya.org>