



# Grass Seed Banks as Landscape Restoration Enterprises

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## Business case 3



# INTRO

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Justdiggit and partners work on a range of interventions to the restore degraded rangelands in the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem in Kajiado county, Kenya. This is a vital ecosystem for wildlife and the Maasai pastoralists and their livestock. The grasslands in the region have suffered from heavy overgrazing and erosion.

We are giving the Maasai communities options to break the negative spiral of land degradation and restore their fertile grasslands. The essence of this program is to provide options for economic opportunities and value chain additions that go hand in hand with restoring the degraded grasslands. One of the successful examples are community led grass seed banks that provide opportunities for women to earn a sustainable income while restoring degraded areas.





## TECHNIQUE

Grass seed banks built on the traditional Maasai concept of an Olopololi: a small part of the communal rangelands set aside for a specific purpose, in this case to grow grass seeds.

A grass seed bank is typically around 10 ha and located close to the homesteads so it's easier to protect and carry out maintenance if necessary. The land is ploughed, grass seeds are sown and harvested to be sold. The area is protected by a so called 'living fence' of local shrubs to keep out wildlife and livestock.

The grass seed bank is managed and maintained by a group of 10-20 members of the community (typically a women's group). They are trained in the grass sowing and harvesting and business skills.

The grass seeds can be used by the community to restore other degraded parts of their land or they can be sold for use in other restoration initiatives (e.g. government programs within Kenya, NGOs working on restoration within Kenya and international buyers) or to be used for infrastructure programs (e.g. to stabilize embankments).

There are several options to organise the sale of the grass seeds: e.g. by setting up a cooperation with an existing seed seller, or to set up our own cooperative or commercial enterprise that will purchase the seeds from the community groups, store them at a central facility and organise the sale and distribution of the seeds to buyers. Currently we are exploring the most suitable approach.

We will assist the women groups in setting up cooperatives, connect them to (inter)national markets and explore the most suitable and scalable way to arrange the offtake of grass seeds. Either by setting up a MoU with an existing grass seed seller who will buy the grass seeds directly from the women, or by setting up a venture that will facilitate the buying and selling of the seeds for the women.

# AREA VISION:

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Over the past years we have successfully demonstrated the potential of landscape restoration activities in the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem and the positive impacts these have on the society, the local economy and on the environment. Now we want to bring this to scale and leverage the value chain additions. This requires a 'patchwork' of interventions that fit the different parts of the group ranch and that can jointly help to restore the full landscape and combine these with investments in value chains and restoration enterprises that will function beyond the life of the project and will be critical to maintaining an economically and ecologically sustainable ecosystem.

To spread the awareness and uptake of the restoration activities and enterprises we will organise exchange visits and horizontal learning between communities in which they can learn from each other's experiences and see what could work in their own community too. These exchange visits will be accompanied by events in which a 'video road show' is organized which travels from community to community and shows them the importance and potential of landscape restoration, showcases successful existing initiatives from neighbouring communities and instructs them on how to engage.

Through these initiatives the degraded landscapes are no longer sad stories about climate change or population pressure, instead they are tools and instruments for investment in sustainable production.

## Average annual costs and benefits

Average annual costs and benefits of a typical grass seed bank supported by a professional grass seed bank cooperative

Income		Costs	
Sale of grass seeds	€ 8.522	Setup cost of grass seed bank (10 year loan, 5% interest rate)	€ 1.018
Sale of hay	€ 117	Yearly costs to maintain and harvest grass seed bank	€ 1.483
		Grass seed enterprise manager (1 per 20 grass seed banks)	€ 500
		Business developer grass seeds (1 per 20 grass seed banks)	€ 500
<b>Total income</b>	<b>€ 8.639</b>	<b>Total costs</b>	<b>€ 3.501</b>
		<b>Annual profit</b>	<b>€ 5.138</b>

## Additional non-monetary benefits

Additional non-monetary benefits of grass seed banks

<b>Restoration of degraded rangelands</b>	Both direct and indirect: grass seed banks are constructed at highly degraded rangelands and the grass seeds are used to restore grass cover in other areas too.
<b>Women empowerment</b>	Grass seed enterprises are women-led. The women receive business and financial literacy training and the income of the grass seed banks increases their status and say in the community.
<b>Improved resilience</b>	Apart from the grass seeds they also produce hay. This hay can be used to feed their livestock during droughts.
<b>Increased biodiversity</b>	The grasses and surrounding living fences increase vegetation cover (especially in the dry season) and attract animals such as insects, butterflies and birds.
<b>Opens up other ways of income diversification</b>	The protected environment and lush surroundings of the grass seed bank create opportunities for bee keeping and other related activities.

# COST AND BENEFITS



“ Through these initiatives, the degraded landscapes will no longer be sad stories about climate change or population pressure. Instead, they are tools and instruments for investment in sustainable production. ”

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“ This all gives hope to the communities that their livelihoods and culture can be sustained in this vital ecosystem and presents sustainable economic opportunities for young people to engage in landscape restoration enterprises. ”

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# CONTACT

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