

# Building Resilience in East Africa: A Community-Led Approach to Climate Adaptation



In the picture: Monica Mwende. Photo cred: LM International / Eva Nordenstam von Delwig

In the face of climate change, water takes center stage, especially in the arid landscapes of Tharaka in Kenya and the Mpwapwa Region in Tanzania. The relentless sun beats down, revealing the stark realities faced by these communities.

In both regions, a pioneering initiative is taking shape, poised to make a significant impact in the face of climate change. This community-driven, bottom-up, regional approach, known as the 7-Pillar Resilience Model, is set to address transboundary challenges and build climate resilience where it is needed most. It was initially implemented in Tharaka, developed by International Aid Services Kenya (IAS K). The results in Tharaka are successful which enables its replication to other contexts, like to the Mpwapwa Region. The model covers natural resource management, governance, infrastructure development, peacebuilding, education, community health, and economic empowerment. It empowers communities to take control of their futures and adapt to the changing climate in various ways, especially in terms of food security and water management.

In Tharaka, Kenya, the unreliable rainfall has brought about a food scarcity crisis. The changing climate has disrupted the once-predictable rainy seasons, leaving many struggling to make ends meet. With access to water severely limited, people turn to various jobs to support them and their families. Their daily struggle often ends with empty stomachs and hope pinned on the rain.

Food insecurity is a grave issue, with children going to school hungry, devoid of breakfast, and risking dinnerless nights. LM International is therefore supporting a school meal program in Tharaka, adapting mentioned model, and it is a lifeline for these children. In a region where food prices continue to rise and aid is dwindling due to conflicts elsewhere, this program ensures that children do not go to bed with empty stomachs.

The impact of this is profound, and it is not just about food; it is about the opportunity for education. School performance is on the rise, and dropout rates are decreasing. "Education bestows children with the opportunity for a better life, and this benefits society at large," says Patrick Gitonga, the principal of one of the schools benefiting from this food project.

Meanwhile, in the Mpwapwa Region of Tanzania, the story is all too similar. A changing climate has led to seven major droughts in the past 15 years. The consequences are evident, with communities battling drought, rising temperatures, and resource management challenges. In a land where reliable access to water is a distant dream, a community-driven approach to climate resilience is vital. Along with this, water management is a critical challenge where knowledge around effective planning, coordination, and centralization of water resources management is lacking. Innovative solutions that empower local communities are therefore key to addressing this challenge.

"As a mother, I will use the rainwater harvested to plant vegetables to feed my family" says Christina Msanjila from Kazani village.

Monica Mwendé's story, a resident of Tharaka, is an example of the project's impact. She and two other families in the village are collaborating to create a substantial reservoir that will ensure water for crops and livestock. Monica eagerly shares her optimism, envisioning controlled crop cultivation and the security of readily available water. This project, implemented by IAS Kenya and supported by LM International, is changing lives. It is an ambitious and holistic approach with a long-term vision – to create a more resilient society through community-led initiatives and knowledge exchange. By focusing on the right training, learning visits, and community-centered practices, the project aims to ensure that the community's needs remain at the forefront, with a specific focus on strengthening their ability to respond to future challenges effectively.

As we gear up for COP28, these community-led initiatives in Tharaka and the Mpwapwa Region showcase the power of resilience in the face of climate challenges. These projects are a testament to the transformative changes that can occur when communities, local governments, and organizations join hands in the fight against climate change.