



Photo 1: Completed and powered section of the electric fence

Kakamega Forest Fencing; NETFUND's Mission to Preserve Kenya's only Tropical Rainforest

Kakamega Forest, Kenya's only tropical rainforest, once stretched in dense, unbroken beauty. Its canopy towered, its undergrowth teemed with life, and its rivers carved shining paths through the western highlands. Yet over time, this living treasure began to fade. Trees fell to the axe for firewood, wildlife retreated from encroaching farms, and the hum of biodiversity grew quieter. What appeared endless proved fragile a rare ecosystem under siege.

For the communities living on the forest's edge, the destruction was not driven by greed but necessity. Firewood meant warmth and food. Small plots carved from the forest meant survival. Each act seemed minor, yet together they chipped away at a priceless inheritance the last remnant of a tropical rainforest in Kenya.

But unlike other forests that vanished entirely, Kakamega has endured. Its rivers like Isiekhu still wind through the undergrowth, and Ishikulu Mountain still rises, wrapped

in myth and mist. That endurance, however, is not by chance. It is the result of deliberate intervention, partnerships, and persistence with the National Environment Trust Fund (NETFUND) among those leading the charge.

Fencing for Protection and Renewal

Under the Kakamega-Kibiri Forest Fencing and Conservation Project, NETFUND has taken a decisive step to safeguard this fragile ecosystem. Working alongside the Kenya Forest Service, Kenya Wildlife Service, Rhino Ark, and the County Governments of Kakamega and Vihiga, the Fund is constructing a **117-kilometre** game-proof electrified fence a visible symbol of protection and renewal.

So far, 15 kilometres of the fence were completed in Phase One, with 21.2 kilometres of the 34-kilometre Phase Two now fully constructed and powered, stretching from River Yala through Shikusa to Kibiri. This fence is more than a boundary; it is a barrier against illegal logging, a shield against encroachment, and a promise that nature can recover when given the chance.

Already, the transformation is visible reduced human-wildlife conflict, safer habitats, and new shoots of growth in once-trampled areas. The forest is slowly breathing again.

Communities at the Heart

NETFUND's model places people at the heart of conservation. The fencing project has created jobs for 30 local residents, including 19 women, injecting **KShs.3million** into the local economy. In nearby Maragoli Hills, where NETFUND supports the restoration of degraded forest land, 82,500 indigenous trees have been planted across **80.8 hectares**, creating work for over 400 locals. These initiatives have strengthened livelihoods, promoted inclusion, and built a culture of environmental stewardship within the communities that depend on these forests most.

Through continued engagement, residents are beginning to view the forest not as a resource to exploit, but as a shared treasure to protect one that can provide long-term opportunities like beekeeping, tree nurseries, and ecotourism.

A Call to Finish What Has Begun

The fencing of Kakamega marks progress, but the work is far from done. Large sections of the forest remain open and vulnerable, exposed to the same pressures that once brought it to the brink. Completing the remaining stretches and maintaining those already built will require greater partnership, more funding, and collective will.

NETFUND's success in Kakamega and Maragoli Hills proves that restoration is possible when communities, government, and partners move in step. What is needed now is scale to turn these local victories into lasting protection for Kenya's only tropical rainforest.

As the country pursues the **15 billion Tree Growing Campaign**, Kakamega stands as both a test and a testament. A test of our resolve to protect what remains. A testament to what is achievable when partnership replaces apathy.

Now is the time to finish what has begun to strengthen the fence, deepen collaboration, and secure Kakamega as a living sanctuary for generations to come.



Photo 2: Ongoing section of the electric fencing