Kenya Turns to Nature to Drive a Fair and Green Economic Transition

Figure 1: Participants pose for a group photo during the Just Transition Training in Nanyuki, bringing together stakeholders to share knowledge, experiences and practical approaches towards an inclusive and sustainable transition that leaves no one behind.

As climate change places growing pressure on Kenya's ecosystems and rural livelihoods, the country is advancing a development approach that seeks to protect nature while creating jobs and expanding economic opportunity.

At the center of this effort is **a Just Transition**: a shift to a greener economy that is fair, inclusive and responsive to the needs of workers, businesses and communities. For Kenya, where millions of people rely on forests, rangelands, water towers and other natural resources, the transition is not only an environmental priority. It is also an economic and social imperative.

The National Environment Trust Fund (NETFUND), the national implementing entity for Kenya's Nature, People and Climate Investment Plan, is leading efforts to turn that ambition into practical action. The programme is using Nature-based Solutions to restore degraded ecosystems, strengthen resilience to climate change, support green and decent jobs, and improve livelihoods.

Initial implementation is focused on the Ewaso Ng'iro North Basin and the Upper Lake Victoria South Basin. These priority landscapes offer an opportunity to show how investment in nature can protect biodiversity while strengthening local enterprises and helping communities withstand climate shocks.

To advance the work, NETFUND convened a five-day introductory workshop in Nanyuki, Laikipia County, on **delivering Nature-based Solutions for green and decent jobs through a Just Transition approach**. The meeting brought together representatives of national and county governments, development partners, research institutions, civil society organisations and local communities.

Supported by the International Labour Organization, the World Bank, the Climate Investment Funds and other implementing partners, the workshop launched a broader process to develop Kenya's Just Transition Framework and Action Plan. The framework is expected to guide implementation of the investment plan and ensure that the move to a green economy delivers shared benefits.

Opening the workshop, NETFUND Director of Resource Mobilisation Dr. Njagu recognised the contribution of partners in strengthening national and county capacity to implement Kenya's climate agenda. He also challenged participants to move beyond discussion and translate learning into visible results. **"We need to move from workshops to action,"** Dr. Njagu said, urging participants to apply the knowledge and lessons gained to interventions that create lasting benefits for communities and the environment.

The workshop combined policy dialogue, technical learning and community engagement. Participants examined how ecosystem restoration can generate employment, improve climate resilience and create new economic opportunities. Their discussions focused on ensuring that communities, workers and enterprises are not passive observers of the green transition, but active participants and beneficiaries.

A field visit to neighbouring conservancies brought the discussions to life. Participants observed community-led restoration practices, including semi-circular bunds, earth structures that capture rainwater, reduce surface runoff and improve soil moisture. As water infiltrates the ground, grass can regenerate, providing pasture for livestock and helping restore degraded rangelands. The intervention is simple, but its potential impact is significant. Healthier rangelands can improve livestock production, strengthen food security and reduce pressure on fragile ecosystems. They can also support nature-based enterprises and additional income opportunities for rural communities.

Participants during a field visit to Naibunga Conservancy engage in an on-site discussion, gaining firsthand insights into community-led conservation efforts, sustainable land management practices, and biodiversity protection initiatives within the conservancy.

The visit underscored a central message of the Just Transition agenda: **climate action must be judged not only by policies, strategies and investment plans, but also by the difference it makes in people's daily lives.** That principle is especially important for pastoralist and other natural resource-dependent communities. A transition that overlooks their realities could deepen existing inequalities. A successful transition must instead help them adopt sustainable land-management practices, diversify incomes, gain new skills and access financing for emerging green opportunities.

Pastoralist representative Moses Nokisho gave voice to those concerns during the workshop. Having relied on livestock throughout his life, he asked what the transition would mean for families whose wellbeing depends on healthy rangelands and livestock production. His intervention highlighted the need to design climate policies with communities, rather than for them.

The meeting demonstrated the importance of collaboration. Government institutions bring policy direction and public investment; researchers contribute evidence and technical knowledge; development partners provide expertise and financing; and communities offer practical experience grounded in local realities. Bringing these perspectives together can produce solutions that are both scalable and responsive to local needs.

The proposed Just Transition Framework and Action Plan will provide a national roadmap for aligning ecosystem restoration with social and economic priorities. Its success will depend on whether it can move from principle to implementation-creating decent work, supporting local enterprises and restoring landscapes at a scale that communities can see and feel.

Kenya's green transition is therefore about more than reducing emissions or rehabilitating degraded land. It is about **investing in people, strengthening local economies and building a future in which environmental stewardship and prosperity reinforce each other**.

If sustained by strong partnerships, adequate financing and meaningful community participation, the Nature, People and Climate Investment Plan could become a practical model for climate action that protects ecosystems while ensuring that no one is left behind.