# [***How Kenyan coastal villagers are cashing in on carbon credits***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67PW-6MN1-F00C-64HJ-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Kiswahili speakers in East Africa have invented a new word, 'hewa kaa,' to describe carbon credit.

Hewa kaa is a commodity villagers in Kenya's coastal region are selling to international corporations as monetary incentive for them to reduce their carbon emissions. When asked what business these villagers are in, they say, "We are selling air."

The villagers are part of Mikoko Pamoja - Swahili for '***mangroves*** together' - which is a development initiative in the Gazi and Makongeni areas of the south coast of Kenya. This pioneering project promotes the conservation and sustainable use of ***mangrove*** resources to achieve three goals: mitigate climate change, conserve biodiversity and enhance community livelihood.

Mikoko Pamoja conserves 117 hectares of state-owned ***mangroves***, representing almost 16 per cent of the ecosystem in the Gazi Bay. During the 20 years from 2013 to 2033, the project seeks to protect 107 hectares of natural ***mangrove*** forests and conserve 10 hectares of red ***mangrove*** plantation that were established in denuded areas in the early 1990s.

The carbon benefits from protecting and planting ***mangroves*** are substantial because ***mangroves*** retain carbon in their biomass and lock it into the marine mud. According to the Equator Initiative, more than 1,500 metric tons of carbon per hectare are stored beneath the ***mangrove*** forests, which is more than eight times that of terrestrial forests.

As a result of these efforts, Mikoko Pamoja became the first-ever ***blue carbon*** initiative in the world that sold carbon credits from ***mangrove*** conservation activities for community development, according to the Equator Initiative. With most credit trading projects based on terrestrial ecosystems, going 'blue' includes conservation and restoration of ocean-based carbon sinks, such as ***mangrove*** forests.

Set up in 2002, the Equator Initiative is a UN-led, multi-sectoral partnership that brings together governments, civil society, academia, business and grassroots organizations to recognize and advance local, nature-based sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities.

Why ***mangroves***?

***Mangroves***, also called the 'blue forests,' typically grow in the intertidal zone along tropical and subtropical coastlines.

About 75 per cent of ***mangroves*** worldwide are concentrated in just 15 countries, and barely 7 per cent lie in protected areas, according to Equator Initiative. These trees are essential for both human and marine life.

***Mangroves***:

Provide a nursery habitat for much commercial fish and shellfish during their early life stages and contribute to abundance of seafood.

Support accumulation of tree debris and bacteria in the water and are an essential food source and refuge for juvenile fish; the knotted ***mangrove*** roots protect fish from predators. As such, ***mangroves*** help to sustain the fishing industry upon which coastal communities depend for livelihood.

Act as a buffer between land and sea. When strong waves turn towards land, ***mangroves*** diffuse their force protecting the shoreline and human settlements. This prevents erosion and reduces damage to infrastructure.

Protect water quality by removing nutrients and pollutants from storm water runoff before they reach seagrass habitats and coral reefs. Their complex systems also shelter a range of wildlife species, including birds and honeybees.

Serve as high-quality carbon sinks, a critical resource for climate change mitigation.

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Plan Vivo, an organisation that helps communities plant trees and generate carbon credits, validated Mikoko Pamoja to sell at least 3,000 metric tons of CO2 equivalent per year from 2013 to 2033. This arrangement is expected to generate annual revenue of about $130,000.

Forward-thinking businesses buy the credits, NGOs, universities and individuals who are looking to manage their carbon footprints, while supporting people and nature.

Mikoko Pamoja has funded pumps, providing clean drinking water for several hundred children in primary schools in Gazi and Makongeni and nearly 5,400 people in the broader community. The project also has helped with the purchase of textbooks, sports uniforms and other learning materials for 700 children.

The Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute is working with communities on the ***mangrove*** project. Dr. James Mwaluma, a research scientist and oceans and coastal systems expert at the institute, describes the collaboration: "Not only are we replanting ***mangroves*** where others have been cut, we are involving communities in selling carbon credit to the international community."

Dr. Mwaluma speaks highly of the Mikoko Pamoja project whose revenue from selling carbon credit is being ploughed back into the community for building schools and hospitals.

Before its launch, access to clean water and education materials in Gazi Bay village was a privilege for the few. The project has seen more than 30 per cent of carbon credit profits in education, clean water supply, ***mangrove*** reforestation and equal employment opportunities for the majority of people in Gazi.

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Mikoko Pamoja is one of many community-based projects that are supported by the Kenyan government's Blue Economy strategy that aims to unlock the potential of sea-land opportunities in the coastal region for sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth. It also plans to create employment, while conserving and sustainably using coastal and marine environments.

With 640 kilometres of coastline, Kenya is poised to harvest from the Indian Ocean at an industrial scale, benefiting communities along the shore. Some villagers are selling carbon credits to the world market and restoring corals that humans and climate change have damaged, while others are growing and selling crab meat and farming high-value fish.

Dr. Mwaluma says that youths in Dabaso, further north on the coastline, benefit from the many programmes the initiative is supporting.

'In Dabaso, young people from this village are involved in growing crabs and producing crab meat that they sell in their own restaurants. Their customers are mainly tourists that visit the northern coastal towns of Watamu and Malindi. They have created a business that generates, on average, $360,000 a year and has pulled them out of a vicious circle of poverty.'

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As a flagship project, Mikoko Pamoja's model is being replicated in Vanga Blue Forest, 60 km south of Gazi Bay, close to the border with Tanzania. The expansion in Vanga will effectively triple the area of ***mangroves*** protected and the number of carbon credits sold, further increasing revenues.

Good science, community buy-in, communal entrepreneurship and government support have been identified as building blocks of the project that could be replicated by other ***mangrove*** areas in Africa and Latin America.

Since its inception, Mikoko Pamoja participants have consistently shared their experience in the region, exchanging visits with communities in Gambia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Senegal and Tanzania.

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