

A Kijani Pamoja on course to restore the Biodiversity of Kilimanjaro.

The Situation Before BIRA

Before the BIRA framework was established, frameworks to measure biodiversity for financial institutions existed. But these frameworks also had limitations that curbed their use and effectiveness. According to a Dalberg (technical assistance proposal) document, some of these limitations included the tools being quite complicated and requiring internal expertise to apply, which was not always available. Other tools required a large amount of complex data, which was a hurdle to obtain, given the general scarcity of data on biodiversity.

There was, therefore, a gap that needed to be filled by a practical framework for assessing biodiversity losses aligned to investment profitability targets to unlock biodiversity finance and investor interest. A development that has increasingly become the cornerstone for adopting and implementing effective mitigation and adaptation strategies.

The BIRA intervention and Kijani Pamoja Experience

To address the gap, in 2023, a group of five companies and organisations launched an accelerator to attract investment in high-quality biodiversity projects across Africa. This initiative was named the Biodiversity Investment Rating Agency (BIRA).

The Accelerator aimed to jumpstart the creation of economic value in biodiversity by developing investment-ready projects and working with investors to facilitate financing.

In 2023, KP applied for the BIRA Accelerator programme, one of Africa's first biodiversity accelerators. And, months later, it was one of the two organisations selected to participate in the Accelerator. The other being Upembe.

In early 2024, the programme started. And, after completing the Accelerator programme, KP has gained benefits that have enabled it to reach investor readiness. Overall, the investor readiness support and focus of the accelerator were a unique value-add. Indeed, the organisational and investor readiness assessments conducted by Implement and Xilva identified gaps which the Accelerators focused on. Subsequently, the application of remedies to the identified gaps has borne fruit, as seen in the contributions of the Accelerator actors. To illustrate, Dalberg conducted a needs assessment and a high-level assessment of publicly available datasets, required to assess the biodiversity impact of two projects. This resulted in recommendations for improvement to existing MEL frameworks. FSD Africa Investments (FSDAi) offered training in preparing and presenting investment cases using the language of finance. Credit Nature conducted a biodiversity assessment, which included a protocol and data collection framework. They also undertook an assessment using the NARIA

framework and supported the development of a dashboard. They also oriented the KP on how to work in the African context. XILVA conducted an Investor-Readiness Assessment. They also equipped them with skills to prepare documents for presenting their investment case and the discipline to keep, organise and update documents. They also equipped them to manage risks by guiding them to identify areas of high potential risks, or red flags, and guiding them on how to mitigate them. African Leadership University School of Wildlife Conservation (ALU SOWC) peer-reviewed the Biodiversity Assessment and Advisory Support, providing support in developing project-specific metrics and shaping governance for natural resource utilisation. This support helped them learn to use data to inform investors about their activities.

FSD Africa Role

Besides actively contributing to the accelerator activities, FSDAi, in line with its commitment to scaling private sector participation in natural capital solutions, played a governance role and provided the initial catalytic funding to kickstart the project. They also provided the initial data input into the framework and developed the investor deck for the project, and later provided support for raising investments.

Earlier Kijani Pamoja Work

As already noted, Kijani Pamoja (KP), a non-profit organisation in Tanzania, was one of the first participants of the BIRA Accelerator programme. Kijani Pamoja is a Kiswahili phrase meaning “Green Together” Before their participation, KP had already been doing some work in the Kilimanjaro area under the “pay to grow” model. In this model, in the village of Lyamungu Sinde, farmers and residents were mobilised to plant trees. The model arrangement was that after every three months, the tree that farmers planted and cared for was paid 400 Tanzanian shillings. (USD 0.15). This was planned to go on for two years, when the trees would have reached a stage where they could sustain themselves.

As a result of this project, several farmers and residents reaped benefits. The payments received helped supplement the incomes of the beneficiaries. Some pay school fees for their children, while others invest in assets like livestock and building houses.

One of the benefiting groups is Lyana, which covers the villages of Lyamungu and Nalu. It is led by Rebacca Ndanshau, who testifies that participating in the project has brought them benefits, and they are happy with it.

Kijani Pamoja Leadership

The success so far registered by KP cannot be separated from Sarah Scot, the leader of KP, who was introduced to BIRA by a friend. Her personality exhibits several attributes that have enabled KP to succeed where others would have failed. She had a well-prepared mindset, which oriented her to the understanding that being the first cohort of the accelerator would involve active participation in the design of the accelerator, which made her immerse herself fully in it. That aside, her team spirit and selflessness enabled her to hold her team together and motivate them to action. For instance, during times when the organisation lacked sufficient funds, she chose not to give herself priority but shared the little available resources with the rest of the team.

Results and Impact

Results

The Investor readiness support and focus of the accelerator were a unique value-add. This is due to several developments.

- This support has enabled KP to have a relevant framework to measure and communicate its ecosystem impact.

- The accelerator helped demonstrate the market for nature payments and unlock conservation funding for KP. Indeed, the support provided by all the Accelerators facilitators and specifically by Axum in investor engagement and feedback incorporation enabled them to generate an attractive offering to investors, leading to fundraising that bore fruit when, in October 2024, KP got a positive response from UBS Optimus Foundation, which offered a grant of USD 150,000. In the same week, they got another funding offer from the Swiss Family Office of USD 240,000. Securing these funds just 3 months after participating in the accelerator was phenomenal.

Besides these tangible results, KP also derived several other benefits from the accelerator programme. They learned how to pitch and prepare their case for fund solicitation, equipped with the skills and discipline to prepare, organise, and present their documentation; they have since been able to approach investors with confidence.

They also learnt the language of finance and how to talk to prospective investors. Participation in the Accelerator programme also helped them to build their capacity and confidence to talk to prospective investors. Further, KP learned to identify their risk and put in place the requisite mitigation measures, which was very important as they presented their case to investors. At the individual level, there was investment in growing the team's capacity and skills. Some team members have been able to go to South Africa for a 6-week internship with the Environmental Engineers.

Other positive developments are at the KP nursery at Weruweru, where KP is preparing 30,000 seedlings to be planted in an area of 5 hectares over one year. The planned area to be planted is Kimashuke and Hai, in the Kilimanjaro region. Some of the targeted beneficiaries are schools, hospitals, and government offices. This will be part of the KERI project. The planting is planned to start in October 2025.

Impact

It is still early to see the full impact of the BIRA Accelerator project; nonetheless, some immediate impacts have been demonstrated. The Kilimanjaro Ecosystem Restoration Initiative (KERI), led by Kijani Pamoja, was catalysed through the Biodiversity Investment and Research Accelerator (BIRA). BIRA challenged the project's founder to look beyond carbon and explore innovative financial mechanisms for large-scale restoration, laying the groundwork for one of Africa's first carbon-stacked biodiversity initiatives. Anchored in the Kahe landscape of northern Tanzania, KERI integrates ecological science, community stewardship, and financial innovation to restore 2,000 hectares of degraded land.

At the organisational level, KP employs about 19 staff. This implies that funds trickle down to society through these jobs, resulting in improved lives and livelihoods. For instance, one of the employees, who works in the nursery, got a loan and bought land to build a house. Sarah adds that the benefits have not yet reached the broader community at large, but the prospects look very good.

Lessons learnt

KP's participation in the BIRA Accelerator has come with lessons to learn for the organisation. These may be summarised as follows:

- Team participation was meaningful. The accelerator programme needs to be embedded throughout the entire organisation, rather than being exclusive to top management.
- What one puts in is what one gets. The facilitators will not give you all the answers but would rather motivate and inspire you to generate the appropriate solutions to your situation.
- Creating a lasting impact on the community takes time, which calls for patience and management of expectations.
- For an organisation to reap the benefits of the accelerator, there is a need for building relationships with different partners, from whom they will learn, even lessons not directly taught.

Way forward

Kijani Pamoja believes in the power of synergy to combine strengths, expertise and resources with others to solve what they believe to be some of the most pressing environmental challenges of the century. In line with this, Implementation of activities continues, and more funding solicitation is in the pipeline. The various players of the KERI initiative continue playing their roles. These players are: GroundTruth, a scientific partner; Credit Nature, a scientific partner; TPC Ltd, a private sector partner; FTK, a Long-standing local NGO partner; Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS); the Pangani Basin Water Board (PBWB); and local community members.

In consonance with KP's belief in synergy and its mission to restore degraded ecosystems and empower local communities, the journey that KP started, accelerated by BIRA, is on course and progressing steadily. The future looks promising.