

EDUCATION



Photos/ANDREW KASUKU

CONSERVATIONISTS: Students of St Martin's Kaewa Secondary School interact with animals during a visit to Haller Park, Mombasa.

NEW SCHOOL PROJECT TRAINS GREEN AMBASSADORS

BY ANDREW KASUKU

THE need to train young people on conservation has never been more urgent, especially in the face of a changing climate.

One project has now taken up this challenge.

It is designed as a challenge for schools in dry areas, which are awarded based on the survival rate of trees they plant and the use of innovation in

scholarships, infrastructural developments, water tanks and cash rewards among others.

The programme — dubbed Green Initiative Challenge — is jointly run by Kengen Foundation, Better Globe Forestry and Bamburi Cement.

The first phase started in 2013 and involved 81 schools near the seven folks power stations in Embu and Machakos counties. Each school was given a

planted multipurpose Cassia siamea (Muveshi) and Melia volkensii (Mukau) seedlings in their school plots.

Better Globe Forestry, a private afforestation company, provided Melia volkensii seedlings while Kengen Foundation provided seedlings for other varieties.

“We choose school kids because they will be our conservation ambassadors in future,” says Anthony Igecha, Kengen Foundation senior programmes officer.

Igecha says the challenge has stirred enthusiasm in children because they come from areas where charcoal burning is the main economic activity.

Winners of the first phase, St Martin Kaewa Secondary School, received Sh40,000, a trip to Mombasa and a 20,000-litre

Power Station, the largest diesel plant in East Africa.

They also visited the Fort Jesus, Haller Park and Bamburi Nature Trails in Mombasa, which Bamburi Cement transformed from quarry wasteland into an award-winning environmental park.

“By sponsoring this trip to Mombasa, we want to motivate the students to proactively conserve the environment, not only in their schools but also around their communities,” says Susan Mainingi, Bamburi Cement director of corporate affairs.

Latarge Eco Systems, a product of the cement company, who manage the Haller Park and Forest Trails, says they have more than 430 trees species. Eco-systems and tourism manager Albert Musando says they teach children how such trees clean the



PASSIONATE: Lafarge Eco Systems tourism manager Albert Musando during an interview at the forest trails.

“This is a culture change campaign to make the children appreciate the environment. When they grow and start working, they understand that industries should drive activities with respect to environment,” Musando said.

He says that without rehabilitation, the quarries would have become dump-sites and a health hazard.

The facility receives up to 170,000 visitors in a year.

Other winners were Mwea Primary School, who came second and won a 16,000-litre water tank, Sh30,000 and a trip to Olkaria geothermal station.

Makutano DEB Primary School came third and won a 10,000-litre water tank, Sh20,000 and a trip to Kamburu Dam.

Better Globe Forestry managing director Jean-Paul Deprins says that teaching students conservation gives Kenya a sustainable future.

Students are also planting fruit trees in the ongoing second phase.

This phase targets 919 schools in next ten years and will include

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Kitui County. A total of 120 schools will take part in the challenge every year, with each county producing 40 schools.

The economic tree, *Melia volkensii* (Mukau), can be harvested after 16 years and fetch at least Sh10,000.

Mukau comes in handy for the schools. The wood tree can be used as firewood to prepare meals, consequently reducing deforestation. Kengen Foundation managing

trustee Mike Njeru says the GIC aims to reach up to 140,000 school children by 2018.

Unep statistics show that deforestation deprived Kenya's economy of approximately Sh5.8 billion in 2010.

GIC aims to green 460 acres with more than 300,000 tree seedlings and 100,000 fruit seedlings (passion and pawpaw) during its second phase.

Peninah Mbaluka, travelled with St Martins' students to Mombasa, representing the district education officer in charge of the project in Masinga and Machakos sub-counties.

She says the project has changed the attitude of students towards conservation.

“When I joined the school in form one, we were planting trees as a punishment but now we do it passionately,” says a form four student, Daniel Ngila.

He was made the school environment prefect in form three because of his conservation efforts.