



Affordable Housing

How Bamburi Cement is creating a blueprint for the world

The cement manufacturer is showing the world how abandoned mine sites can be transformed into valuable tourism and educational assets

By Tullah Stephen

Mining activities often invoke an ugly environmental image. Companies extract, process and transport precious minerals while leaving behind devastating impact. There are thousands of abandoned mining sites across Kenya. Many of these contaminated and pose serious risks to public and communities they left in their wake.

These mine sites often remain off limits to members of the public. However, in the recent times a number of mining companies are taking over some of these spaces, transforming them into valuable public assets. Bamburi Cement, a subsidiary of Lafarge Group, has shown that vision, sheer will and innovative natural solutions can reclaim landscapes lost to human development. The company has over the years has invested heavily on the restoration of its former mining sites into useful sites for the community.

Bamburi Cement is one of the greatest names in Kenya's construction industry and it has contributed enormously to the development of the country. One of its greatest achievement has been the transformation of Haller Park, one of its sites in Bamburi on the northern-coast of Kenya. A former limestone quarry has been transformed into a one-in-a-lifetime experience popular with local and international tourists. Bamburi Cement, is one of the largest cement producers and distributors across East Africa. And in 1970, the firm assigned Swiss agronomist Rene Haller, long-time manager of Bamburi Cement's garden department, to the task of reclaiming the land. The first step was to introduce tree species that could survive severe conditions. Millipedes and Fauna were later introduced and replanting of

other tree species followed. Fast forward to today, the park consists of a game sanctuary, Reptile Park, small demonstration fish farm area, palm garden, crocodile pens and a giraffe viewing platform. Further, the firm has also been able to transform nearby mining sites into forest trails popular for visitors who want to cycle, walk or jog as they experience an alternative landscape from the beach or empty quarries.

The park's forest trails today are a sanctuary to many animals including giraffes, hippos, giant aldabran tortoises, elands, Oryx, buffaloes and suni, duikers. The parks rich biodiversity is also reflected in the over 400 plant and 180 bird species found in the rehabilitated quarries.

According to Susan Maingi, the director, Corporate Affairs, Communications and Sustainability Development, the company has a commitment to conduct its activities in a responsible manner to protect and enhance the environment.

"It is part of our DNA to recognize that our operations be it extraction, processing and distribution, create several sustainability impacts and benefits. We seek to mitigate these impact through world class sustainability practices and where possible to enhance value for our stakeholders." The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15, issues a rallying call to protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage

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forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. In response to this, Bamburi Cement and LafargeHolcim Group in general has initiated programs geared towards establishing ecosystems through restoration of limestone quarries.

Bamburi Cement limited has mined quarries in Bamburi, Vipingo and Kikambala. These activities have led to over 200 hectares of wasteland that have been rehabilitated. For the cement manufacturer, sustainable business practices are an integral part of the way the company operates. Sustainability according Ms Maingi, refers to following standards of business ethics, committing to a "no harm" policy towards stakeholders while playing an active role in the communities it operates.

By rehabilitating areas like Haller Park, Bamburi Cement recognized that sustainability was a critical business imperative seeking to create value for its business and the community. A passion for people, health, safety and the environment remains at the heart of Bamburi Cement.

According to Ms Maingi, Lafarge's Sustainability Policy is anchored on four main points. These include people and communities, water and nature, circular economy and climate. Under people and community, the firm has initiated a number of projects geared towards health and safety of the people. "Health for us remains our key focus for creating a shared value with the society around us" other areas under this pillar include sanitation and affordable housing which the firm believes is crucial to the communities daily lives.

Bamburi Cement Limited has also partnered with the Kenya Wildlife Services and the Kenya Forest Services for research on quarry rehabilitation, biodiversity management and environmental education among other partnerships. Bamburi Cement through Lafarge Eco Systems also developed environmental education programs intended to improve learner experience. "Haller Park and the Forest Trails are today used by learners and researchers to explore the various flora and Fauna," says Maingi. She adds that academic tours are aimed at enabling students interact with the biodiversity and appreciate environmental conservation efforts."