Greetings to all The Restoration Initiative (TRI) partners. I hope and trust that everyone is safe and well. In this TRI Quarterly Newsletter we have taken a different approach. Rather than reporting on all the work happening in each of the 11 national child projects, we instead highlight a few stories in more detail. The four feature stories really give a sense for the diversity of landscapes and restoration approaches that our program partners are engaged in.

We begin in the northern part of Cameroon with a story on how the TRI program is helping to incentivize and facilitate community-led restoration using bamboo and other tree species. Then on to the Mulan State Forest Farm (SFF) in Inner Mongolia for an interview with Wang Hui, Senior Forestry Engineer, on how the TRI China project is supporting efforts to restore and improve the large network of SFFs. In Kenya, we travel across high mountain passes with village elders as they meet with neighboring villages to finalize a new sustainable management plan for the Mount Kulal Biosphere Reserve and surrounding areas. Lastly, we climb even higher to the chilgoza pine forests in Pakistan at the foot of the Himalayas to learn about new approaches to restoring and safeguarding forest resources for the benefit of local communities.

At the global support level, the online course on FLR fundamentals, delivered through a partnership with Yale University’s Environmental Leadership and Training Initiative (ELTI), is now underway, with a number of TRI project partners in Africa. Pending the success of this course, we hope to develop additional online course(s) in other countries on priority topics. Global support partners also hosted the first meeting of the TRI Program Advisory Committee (PAC) on 1-2 October, with participation of government representatives from China and Kenya, senior agency staff, the GEF, and other experts. A summary of the meeting and recommendations will be included in the first TRI 2020 Global Progress Report, to be shared with all TRI partners shortly.

Looking forward; it's heartening to hear of the ways in which all TRI projects are moving forward and adaptively managing work in the face of travel restrictions and other COVID-related challenges. I hope to see partners online soon and especially in person, when we are finally able to travel more freely again.

Best wishes,
Joshua Schneck, IUCN
TRI Programme Coordinator
The Waza landscape is part of the dry savannah region in the northern part of Cameroon. Rich in biodiversity, the region also suffers from high levels of poverty and hunger, and much of the area’s lands have become degraded from poor land management practices.

To help address poverty and hunger and support the Cameroon Government’s pledge to restore 12.6 million ha of degraded land, the TRI project in Cameroon is working to incentivize and empower local communities to create small-scale private plantations of bamboo as well as other tree species. The fast-growing bamboo can be used as a wood substitute – thereby alleviating pressure on natural forests – and made into a number of downstream products providing additional income for community artisans. The other plantation species, that include neem, African mahogany, Moringa, cashew, and river tamarind, are a source of food and medicinal products (together commonly referred to as non-timber forest products, or NTFPs).

To support local communities in establishing plantations, the TRI Cameroon project has employed a multi-level strategy, working with both government and community members. Together with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the project has supported the Cameroon Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife in developing regulations and tools for registering small-scale NTFP plantations, as well as regulations covering the processing and transporting of harvested products. By registering plantations, private ownership and use of the harvested NTFPs are legally defined, thereby providing some assurance to community members that their investments in establishing and maintaining these plantations will pay off.

At the community level, the TRI project has provided a number of workshops to train interested community members. Training has covered both establishment and maintenance of bamboo and tree nurseries, as well as agroforestry techniques for establishing plantations when seedlings are ready for planting. The project has employed a train-the-trainer approach. From an initial cohort of 38 farmers, within 5 months, an additional 35 farmers have been trained.

Three community nurseries were established in Makilinguaï Village, Waza Village and Aïssa-Hardé Village, with project funding covering the cost of seedlings. To ensure successful establishment, seedlings must be planted before the end of Waza’s three month rainy season that runs from July to September. As of July, 2020, over 10,000 seedlings have been transported from nurseries to farms for planting in each of the three villages. The total surface area on which these plants are to be planted is estimated to be 25,500 ha of agricultural and forest lands.
China

WANG HUI ON FLR IN THE MULAN STATE FOREST FARM - AN INNOVATIVE NEW FLR-BASED APPROACH

The TRI China project is working to improve the health and management of State Forest Farms (SFFs) which cover 8% of land in The People’s Republic of China, or 77 million ha. Traditional management of SFFs focused principally on wood production with little attention to ensuring healthy ecosystems. Working with seven pilot SFFs, the TRI China project is supporting work to incorporate forest landscape restoration (FLR) principles and practices into the SFF management plans, and to share and mainstream successful experiences within the wider network of SFFs.

To understand how these new ideas and practices make their way into actual changes on the ground, the TRI China project team spoke with Mr. WANG Hui from Mulan SFF – one of the pilot SFFs.

Please introduce yourself and Mulan Forest Farm
I’m WANG Hui. I was born in Hebei Province, and obtained my Master’s degree in Forest Cultivation from the Forestry College of Hebei Agricultural University. In 2011, I was employed by Mulan Forest Farm. I am now a Senior Forestry Engineer and serve as the deputy section chief of the Mulan Forest Management Department.

Mulan is the largest SFF in Hebei Province. It is located in Weichang County on the upper reaches of the Luanhe River on the southern edge of the Hunshandake Sandland in Inner Mongolia. Mulan is important for water conservation and as an ecological barrier against sand-carrying winds headed for Beijing and Tianjin. Since its establishment in 1963, Mulan’s operating area has expanded from 23,333 ha to 106,000 ha, and forest coverage has increased from 35% to 90.6%.

How do you understand the FLR concept?
How does the new plan differ from previous forest management plans?
I think the core of FLR is to rebuild and optimize forest vegetation. Rebuilding aims to restore the degraded forest land. Optimization aims to improve the current quality of the forest landscape to provide a variety of benefits from the forest ecosystem.

Mulan’s innovative plan embeds the FLR approach into the forest management plan and prioritizes water conservation, wind breaks, and sand fixation over wood production. It defines technical and management approaches, and optimizes and quantifies technical indicators.

In addition, the plan directs more attention to public welfare and the socio-economic development of the forest farm. We collected opinions from stakeholders including SFF staff, communities, forest product purchasers, processors, enterprises and others, as well as conducting social research and analysis. We hope this will contribute to improved public welfare and social benefits.
Which elements of the innovative plan best reflect the FLR approach? I think it is comprehensive zoning optimization at the landscape level. Our traditional plan is based solely on forest stands (traditional forest management units). In such a small area and with simple attributes, it is not easy to consider overall ecosystem functions when designing operations. With the landscape vision of FLR, we accomplished landscape scale farm zoning and classified farms into water conservation zones, wind prevention and sand fixation zones, timber production zones, and seedling cultivation zones — according to management objectives. And we designed different management measures in different zones of the watershed unit. For example, in the water conservation zones, we will focus on shrub improvement, transformation to multi-layer forest and restoration of low-quality forests in wind-proofing and sand fixing zones. We also conserve protected nature reserves, survey and monitor biodiversity, and mark precious tree species.

What benefits can be achieved from implementing the plan? How does the community envision the benefits? I think forest quality and ecological services will be improved. Secondly, although this is only a four year project, our awareness is raised and our technical skills will continue to benefit farm management. From now on, we as forest managers will pay more attention to ecological benefits and social responsibility. In the future, we can adjust the plan by ourselves and help other forest farms. Finally, for the community, in our plan we designed forest production activities and account for ecological, social and economic benefits. In addition to direct improvement of the environment and public facilities, this plan will provide more than 700 jobs every year, and indirectly increase community income from timber, herbal medicine, mushrooms and tourism.

How do you think we can mainstream the new plan into other SFFs and communities? Do you have any suggestions? In my opinion, in order to promote the innovative plan, SFFs must address policy, funding, technology and other constraints. You maximize the benefits when you play to your strengths. Secondly, we must improve the abilities of SFF staff. Only when we really understand the concept and plan, can we implement the plan successfully and achieve our goals. Lastly, communication is important. It’s not smart to try to re-invent the wheel — it’s more effective to learn and share.

You have many career choices with such an education, why did you choose to work in Mulan? How do you feel about the project? Does the new plan affect you personally? I have loved forests since I was a little child, and have always studied and worked in the field of forest cultivation and management. Mulan is the largest SFF in my native province and has embraced scientific forest management; and these concepts are relatively advanced. Here I can learn advanced and practical concepts and technologies, and quickly apply my research to practical forestry. And I have accumulated a lot of front-line experience.
I think this project is a platform with broad vision, rich content and cutting edge concepts. Through this project, we have enhanced understanding of world forestry, new understanding of the functions and position of our own forest farm, and more opportunities to share our stories with other foresters internationally.

Also, it’s been a rare opportunity for me to participate in the preparation of the innovative plan. I have met many well-known experts, and learned new concepts and advanced working methods. The goal and problem-oriented logical training has especially inspired me and led to professional growth.

–WANG Hui

Not only WANG Hui, but all members of Mulan’s technical team took full advantage of the opportunity to learn from outside experts.

“The forest farm belongs to us. It’s us who will benefit from the improving environment and improved local economy. The China TRI Project is coming to support us and, of course, we’ll make the most of this opportunity,” WANG Hui proudly said, exemplifying the Mulan spirit cultivated by 57 years of hard work.

Through applying FLR in Mulan, the TRI China project found that success relies on putting people like WANG Hui at the core of the process. The TRI China project will replicate and promote Mulan’s experience across the other pilot SFF’s and, hopefully, beyond.
Kenya - ASAL
Development of an ecosystem management plan for the Mt. Kulal Biosphere Reserve

TRI Kenya ASAL helped the Mt. Kulal Biosphere Reserve Community Forest Association and the local community to develop a five-year (2021-2025) ecosystem management plan for the forested core zone (5,670 ha) and surrounding buffer zone (45,766 ha) of the biosphere reserve in Marsabit County, Kenya.

A small team of traditional Samburu elders walks along a narrow path through the Mt. Kulal Biosphere Reserve forest in northern Kenya on a chilly August morning. The morning mist typical of this elevation (2000m) has cleared. Following shortly behind are two young men included in this important mission to meet villagers from other villages across the forest and share and discuss newly proposed plans for governing and managing these forests.

The small group looks motivated despite the huge task ahead of them. Today they can only visit two villages – Losikiriachi and Mbarnat located on the slopes of Mt. Kulal and accessible only by foot. In the coming days, they will be joined by other elders and visit four more villages on the western slopes of the mountain, each separated by huge gorges several hundreds of meters deep. A week ago another group of elders covered three villages located on the vast lowlands on the eastern side of the mountain, but those villages were relatively easier to reach by 4x4.

The visiting elders have been chosen to carry out their task by a group of about 60 respected elders known as Wazee wa Mazingira (WWM) or the “Elders of the Environment,” who have been at the core of the implementation of the TRI Kenya project on Mt. Kulal. The WWM elders all come from villages in the area, and together they are responsible for the protection of the 5,670 ha mist forest on Mt. Kulal in Marsabit County.

This island of forest forms the core zone of the Mt Kulal Biosphere Reserve, designated as a man and the biosphere reserve by UNESCO and the Kenya Government in 1979. Away from the core zone, the land loses elevation quickly and melts into a craggy, semi-desert bushed grassland, strewn with volcanic rocks. Part of this expansive lowland is the 45,766 ha buffer zone of the biosphere reserve, where villages are situated and also where villagers herd their livestock – mainly cows, sheep and goats, and occasionally donkeys and camels.
Mr. Joseph Lengoiyap, better known as Councilor, is the chairman of WWM and the leader of the team that is meeting the villagers. He has been an ardent protector of the forest since the time he served as an elected county council member (1988-2002). Energized by the training seminars organized by the TRI project, today he has an important message for all the villagers. “The forest is our lifeline. We should use its resources responsibly,” he tells them. “It has been our pharmacy, our only source of water and all our cultural ceremonies are held there.”

He is passionately addressing the youth, some of whom until recently had been ignoring the authority of the elders and extracting the valuable itarakwai (cedar) wood from the forest for sale as well as grazing their animals there.

With Joseph is Chief Hosea Lemuni, who appeals to the youth to take the opportunity provided by the project and establish tree nurseries. He implores them to raise trees such as itarkwai, which used to grow in the settled areas, but not anymore. Chief Lemuni adds that one of their youth group members, Mr. Shukri Lapasicho, was in Meru attending a training on tree nursery establishment organized by the project, and that he would be working with villagers to grow these valuable trees outside the forest.

With the help of the TRI project, WWM from all the main villages and other forest user groups have recently formed the Mt. Kulal Biosphere Reserve Forest Association. Part of the agenda today is to create awareness about this association. Its interim chairman, Mr. Taita Adisomele, says his committee has been driving the development of a five year (2021-2025) management plan for the forest – the Mt. Kulal Biosphere Reserve Forest Management Plan – and that he is now working towards its registration as an official community forest association.

On the agenda today is to discuss the newly proposed management plan, especially the rules governing the use of forest resources, including fines set by elders in case one breaks any of the rules. The management plan defines how the community will manage the forest, including the sustainable use of the resources therein and ecotourism development.

The meetings in Losikiriachi and Mbarnat each concluded with a traditional prayer led by an elder, and punctuated after each statement with the chorus ‘Ngaai’. In the prayer the elder implores the God of Mt. Kulal and of the forest to listen to their wishes, give the community plenty, keep disasters away, but also curse those who would destroy the forest.
Pakistan

COMMUNITY RULES FOR COLLECTING CHILGOZA CONES FROM COMMUNITY FORESTS

The chilgoza forests in Chitral, Pakistan, are protected forests, where the local communities have established rules for harvesting of timber, grazing of animals, and use of non-timber forest products, especially chilgoza nuts, medicinal plants and mushrooms.

Chilgoza nuts are consumed locally and sold on both national and international markets. Local communities derive a substantial part of their income each year from harvesting the chilgoza cones. However, unsustainable harvesting of the cones is a problem. This includes harvesting un-ripe cones and over-collection of cones, which together leave an insufficient quantity of seeds for natural regeneration. The cutting of the full branches is also a problem, as it results in damage to the tree and further harvesting of unripe cones.

In order to address these problems and ensure equitable distribution of benefits from the chilgoza forests, the local Chilgoza Forest Conservation and Protection Committees, with support from the TRI Pakistan project, have established new rules and regulations for the collection of the cones.

The most important of these rule is that no one can start collecting the cones before the date established by the committee. The committee keenly observes a number of factors for deciding a particular date, keeping in mind the ripeness of the majority cones on the trees. Once the committee is certain of the date, they announce it publicly and the local collectors are allowed to start cone collection. In addition, the committee also shares rules governing harvesting the cones, including prohibitions on branch cutting and collection of unripe cones, and leaving 5-6 trees per hectare as a seed source for natural regeneration, mainly on degraded sites.

The rules are displayed on prominent places in the villages. A key aspect is that only local people can collect the cones, and no one can bring labor from outside of the valley to organize large scale commercial harvesting. This gives equal opportunity to all community members to collect the cones and promotes equitable distribution of benefits to the vulnerable and poor segments of the community. This local governance also contributes to the restoration of the chilgoza ecosystem as the rules prevent the over-exploitation of cones and damage to the trees.

The rules are strictly observed by the committee and fines or penalties are imposed. The heavy fines imposed by the committee are utilized for the rehabilitation of the degraded sites. It is hoped that the new rules and regulations for the chilgoza harvesting will ensure good income to the local people and also provide for long-term restoration of the chilgoza ecosystem.
PROJECT UPDATE

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The TRI DRC project aims to promote activities that preserve and/or improve the capacity of land in the mountainous areas of South Kivu affected by degradation. It is based on the ecosystem approach and is being implemented in Kabare Chiefdom (Kabare Territory) and Ngweshe Chiefdom (Walungu Territory).

Progress and updates:

- The FLR strategy for South Kivu Province is being finalised.

- Socio-economic surveys have been conducted in the project area to determine the baseline situation of the project indicators.

- Two participatory missions to set the criteria for choosing the target groups as well as the criteria for choosing the beneficiary households were completed.

- Diagnosis of the legal provisions for FLR and a diagnosis of land tenure to determine the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities for governance arrangements was conducted.

- FAO, in collaboration with the faculty of Agronomic and Environmental Sciences of the Evangelical University in Africa (UEA) and the provincial ministry in charge of the environment, organized a training on participatory land use mapping called “MAPATHON” in August. This workshop was attended by 20 people including assistants from universities and state technical staff.

- Specific consultations were held with Pygmy Indigenous Peoples to ensure ownership and integration in the planning stage of project interventions.

- A mission to identify and map the areas to be restored was carried out in September 2020 in the Cicheke site in Walungu, and in the Kabare site in order to locate areas of at least 1000 ha under restoration by November 2020.

Consultation on restoration activities in an indigenous community. TRI DRC