

# Earth Day 2010: Environmentalism and poverty fighting go hand-in-hand in Kenya

**Kinangop, Kenya (April 22)** – As the world celebrates Earth Day, CARE is demonstrating how initiatives to protect the environment can also help reduce poverty in vulnerable communities. With a joint project in Kenya, CARE and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) are cleaning up Lake Naivasha and improving livelihoods for Kenyan farmers.

The project is called *Payment for Environmental Services (PES)*. Farmers in the Malewa River Basin, which feeds in to Lake Naivasha, are taught sustainable agriculture practices to prevent soil erosion and preserve river banks. For their environmental services, the farmers receive payment from the more prosperous commercial farms downstream on Lake Naivasha for their environmental efforts. The good agricultural practices also improve crop yields so the participating farmers grow more food to feed their families and to sell for income.



“I am able to make enough money for my family and myself through selling milk and potatoes whose production has climbed steeply,” says Hellen Njeri Kagotho, a single mother who farms along the Malewa River. Hellen’s life has changed for the better since she joined the program in 2008.

Payment for Environmental Services is a market-based concept building on the idea that downstream beneficiaries of environmental services should give incentives to upstream land managers for voluntary conservation efforts. Those efforts include rehabilitating and maintaining riparian zones, planting grass strips and terracing along steep slopes, planting trees, all of which improves the quality and quantity of river water. The upstream land owners are small-scale farmers, while the downstream water users are commercial entities such as flower farms and tourism businesses.

Lake Naivasha, the highest lake in Kenya’s Rift Valley, has been shrinking in size for decades and pollution levels have been rising as a result of agricultural operations around the Lake and in the surrounding water systems.

Cleaning up our world and reducing global poverty are not mutually exclusive. That is what CARE and the WWF are proving in Kenya. This Earth Day we all need to recognize that environmental sustainability goes hand-in-hand with economic sustainability for the world’s most vulnerable communities.