

CAVS Steps Up Efforts to Protect Dam on Mathare River from Insidious Degradation

The Kabete Field Station of the University of Nairobi abuts the Mathare River to the north. The river is one of three major rivers that flow through Nairobi from the higher and wetter highlands to the west and north-western parts of City. The farm and its infrastructure which include a beautiful dam at its lower end were acquired by the Government of Kenya in the late 1930s. Over the years, the dam has provided wholesome water for crop and livestock production and more recently fish farming. The Field Station in addition hosts experimental and trial sites for researchers from the University and, national and international research institutes such as ILRI, CIP, ICRAF and KALRO which also depend on water from the dam for irrigation. The Field Station has greenhouses which produce high value agricultural produce for local and export market.

In 2008/2009, the College decided to intensify Mathare valley conservation through tree planting along the river and dam. The focus was mainly on planting indigenous trees with medicinal value. A belt of approximately 200 m from the river has been expanded through intensified tree planting and undergrowth grass to reduce soil erosion into the river. This area has been codenamed **UNI-BIOPARK**. To date the College has planted over 8,100 trees comprising about 77 species at the site.

The integrity of the riparian zone of the Mathare River, which is crucial for the provision of important ecosystem regulating services [such as soil stabilization and erosion control, water quality regulation, water flow regulation, natural hazard regulation etc], has until about ten years ago been well preserved. However it is now evident that the dam faces an insidious threat to its integrity due to rapid massive development projects on the opposite side of the University of Nairobi farm, which do not seem to adequately integrate environmental management in their project development.

We hope neighbors along the Mathare River and other interested stakeholders will join the College in efforts to protect the river and dam. The College efforts are supported by the College Management Board, staff and students. Partners in this noble effort include Total Kenya Ltd's Eco-challenge Programme, Kenya Forestry Research Institute and, Standard Bank (Westlands Branch). The College is talking to other partners to join this noble cause of protecting the river and dam from degradation. With the Nairobi Dam experience, the College wants to mitigate such negative environmental incidents on Mathare River and its dam.

It can be argued that the beautiful scenery on the University land has added aesthetic value to the surroundings as online property advertisements for the housing schemes around the section of the dam confirms.