

WHITE MOUNTAIN

Community-led Regeneration of the Kilimanjaro Ecosystem



White Mountain Concept

White Mountain, Oldonyo Oibor in Maasai language, refers to Mt. Kilimanjaro. White Mountain is the name and concept of a Maasai community-led holistic initiative, focusing on regenerating the Kilimanjaro ecosystem, microclimate and its water cycles, and creating healthy and enduring livelihoods for all. Its success will be greatly enhanced by the full and active participation and collaboration of all initiatives (many are Dutch), institutions, organizations and other stakeholders in this area. It will be a huge collaborative effort. It embraces the entire region, Kenyan and Tanzanian, marked by the Kilimanjaro watersheds and ecosystem. This inevitable challenge, with Kilimanjaro as the iconic, freestanding 'water tower' in the middle, has the potential to improve the social and economic realities of millions of people in this region whose livelihood depends upon rain, full water cycles and vegetation.

White Mountain is an evolutionary process and unique in that it identifies the Kilimanjaro whole watershed(s) and eco-system as the optimal landscape for bio-regional regeneration. The holistic, Maasai-led, household-village-landscape and multi-stakeholder approach gives it realistic opportunities for success.

The nomadic Maasai Peoples have a legend. They believe that a god called Engai used to live on the Earth in harmony with all the cattle – which are of huge importance to the Maasai. Then a volcano erupted – Mount Kilimanjaro – and Engai gathered all the cattle and took them into the clouds to save them. However, there was no grass in the sky, so Engai called upon a man named Naiteru-Kop. Engai asked Naiteru-Kop to look after all the cattle and this marked the birth of the Maasai Peoples, who believe that cattle not only provide for their food and wealth, but that the tribe has a holy order to gather and protect all cattle in the land. Engai stayed in the clouds.
--- genesis of Maasai Peoples

Back in the days, snowflakes would fall on the flat summit of the mountain, creating a flow of water. So it was much easier to take the cattle to graze here. We didn't need to go far to find water. Today our animals are forced to walk long distances to get enough water and grass during a drought.'
-- Elisabeth Sangale, Maasai Elder, November 2017.

'There used to be trees on the slopes of the mountain. They attracted the rains. Now most areas surrounding this mountain hold very few trees.'
- Oipa Leboo – Maasai Elder, November 2017.

Context

In research findings dating back 30 years and more, ecologists, biologists and hydro-geologists from well-respected organizations are seriously warning to limit human encroachment around Mt Kilimanjaro, to protect a massive but vulnerable ecosystem and watershed landscape. In the early nineties IUCN and Oxfam warned explicitly to leave the tropical rain forests on, under and around Kilimanjaro intact. Researchers were saying that the rainforests were of crucial importance to the natural water distribution of the entire region and that cutting trees in the foothills would reduce Kilimanjaro's snow cap.

Today, it's clear that not many people took that message at heart. Large scale deforestation for agriculture, plantations, timber, firewood, and others, took place with huge consequences for the entire ecosystem – water, animals, soils, plant life and people. Meanwhile, the nomadic Maasai Peoples with countless generations of pastoralist knowledge and experience in this landscape expressed similar warnings. In the mutual dependency with their natural environment they made essential contributions in keeping and maintaining a resilient, self-regulating ecosystem. However, boundaries created between nation states and for nature reserves, and increased land use competition by others, largely expelled them from playing their role in maintaining this wildlife ecosystem. Today, desertification surrounds them, leading to increasing human-wildlife conflicts. They are caught between the rock and a hard place and their very survival is at stake.



Current realities

All over the planet people are confronted with extremely degraded and eroded land, not caused by natural events, but rather by their own actions. The Kilimanjaro landscape fits that picture too. The resulting climate change and shifting weather patterns only intensify this crisis. The Kilimanjaro bio-regional landscape ranks as one of the severest climate risk areas on the planet. It won't escape anybody's attention that there is something systemic at the root causes leading to this disjointed, dysfunctional eco system, way beyond resiliency and self-regulation and resulting in a degraded and eroded landscape. As is mostly the case with these turbulent, dwindling dynamics, the social fabric is falling apart. The Maasai see their cattle die at an alarming rate and suffer from malnutrition. With time not on their side the spiral downwards is heading to its point of no return.

The good news is, based on experience in similar situations, that we can turn the tides. And the key to it is to give the social system a head start, because the regeneration starts right there! It is the Maasai people who live on and with the land that have the potential to reverse the dramatic situation. The Maasai, on their ancestral land, still hold the knowledge to 'read' the environment and are only a step away of making useful contributions to the natural wildlife ecosystem of Kilimanjaro.

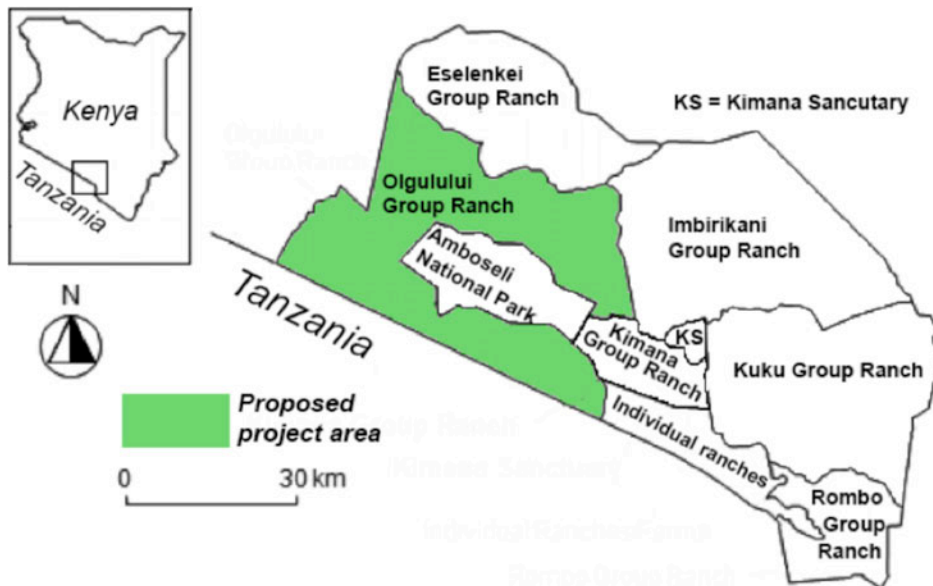
"Indigenous Peoples, the world's smallholder farmers, fisher folk, pastoralists, and forest dwellers are the frontline custodians of bio-diverse landscapes and increasingly so, healers of the land. With them lies the true regenerative power of our societies!" -- Frank Heckman, Embassy of the Earth



CARE FOR THE EARTH

Call for help

In the summer of 2017 a call for help from a Maasai community just South of the Amboseli National Park in Kenya reached the Embassy of the Earth. Within a week a small delegation from the Amboseli community visited the Greening Africa project in Tanzania. Experiencing and learning first hand from tribal peers and others in Tanzania they returned to Amboseli determined to start a similar project on their homeland. With 40 kraals and the Olgulului Group Ranch Council on board, all the preliminary ground-work done, they are now eager to embark on this new journey.

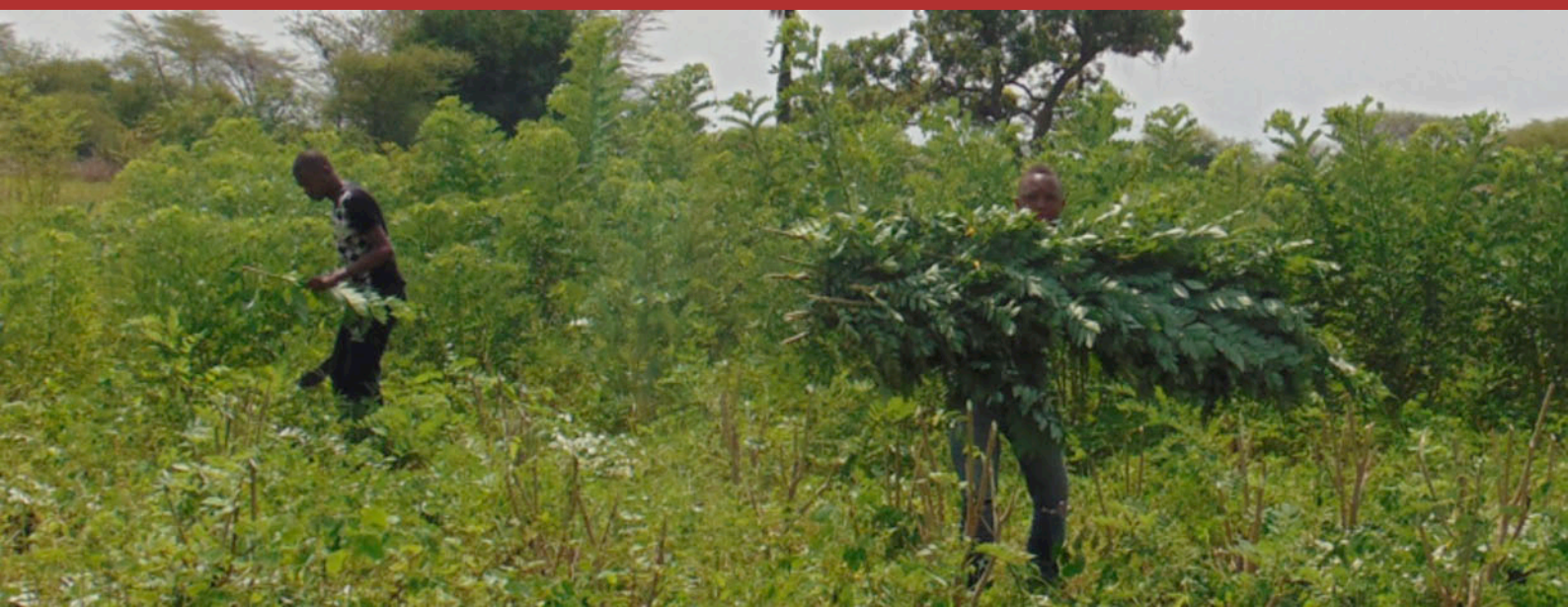


Greening Africa

Greening Africa is an off spring of **Pachamama Raymi**, a non-profit civil association based in the city of Cusco, with projects in Peru, Nepal and Tanzania. Its work is based on the idea that rural poverty and environmental degradation are linked. With the Pachamama Raymi methodology, over the last decade, hundreds of the most impoverished communities on the most degraded and eroded land in Peru grew toward prosperity in a healthy environment in 3 to 5 years. People, households, communities in charge! New information, peer learning, healthy competition is the name of the game. An extremely effective, community-led and ecosystems based approach, originated and developed by Dutch agricultural engineer Wim van Immerzeel. More recently, Pachamama Raymi, reached out to Tanzania with a project known as “Greening Africa”.



Like in Kenya, much of Tanzania is deforested and degraded, mostly by how the rural population manages its natural resources. Degradation results in poverty. Changing local management practices to regeneration can result in eradicating poverty and creating prosperity. Pachamama Raymi has developed a methodology, which over the years has become very effective and efficient, only needing three years to change natural resource management of a majority of the population. During these three years, people start to abandon free grazing and find more profitable businesses by creating fodder banks for dairy and meat production. Fodder banks greatly increase soil fertility, while degraded grasslands become available for massive tree plantations. Pachamama Raymi's target for its first project in Tanzania is to achieve one hectare of forested area per family within three years. To date, it has worked with 2,500 families in four villages, in Babati district, Manyara Region who already planted 500,000 timber trees (on about 500 hectare) and 230 hectares of fodder trees.



Greening Africa meets Embassy of the Earth

Several years ago Frank Heckman, founder and director of Embassy of the Earth, met Wim van Immerzeel in the Netherlands. Listening to his approach of 'growing prosperity', the guiding principles, profound knowledge of fully functioning ecosystems, passion for mapping, modeling and relevant data and his trigger to support the poorest of the poor on the most degraded, depleted land, put him on the edge of his chair. 'What makes you do this? Why do you even want to do this? 'After rock bottom, the only way is up!', was his short answer. In these circumstances the potential for improvement is extraordinary. The sky is the limit. And what a track record this modest agricultural engineer from Wageningen University has!

Embassy of the Earth's mission is to restore the human relationship with its natural environment. To support communities to, instead of constantly trying to adapt to change, change to be adaptive! To have the capacity to respond openly, flexibly and effectively with their environment, as a social eco-system. Embassy of the Earth is well known for its role as a 'social architect' in very diverse contexts ranging from local communities in India to ministries in The Netherlands. Managing and working with stakeholders in complex environments or crises. Supporting communities of problem owners to act upon their own professed futures.

Embassy of the Earth and Pachamama Raymi are partners in Amboseli. With complementary skills and knowledge, but with the same objective and understanding. Allowing the people whom it concerns, to take charge of their own lives and future. Local people are meeting their challenges, attaining the necessary results, with newly acquired skills and knowledge, building on their own knowledge, skills and vision for the future. With increased confidence and deeply motivated they'll put the bar even higher the next time. A community of people evolving and progressing to restore its livelihood and environment. In a time-span of three years a level of self-reliance is achieved. The 'champions' of one community will be the teachers for the next one, thus rapidly expanding projects across the region.

Social eco system

Starting work at community level makes a lot of sense. What's not always clear is that communities who are successful in rebuilding their livelihood, restoring the natural habitat become social eco systems. In their strife for concrete accomplishments, such as planting trees, water catchment, managed grazing and much more, they re-set their relationship with their natural environment. They have increased, through their achievements, the capacity to respond flexibly and pro-actively to the changes and challenges in their environment. And will do so again and again. They are resilient and actively adaptive. This is a huge transition and the guarantee for sustainable performance;

Seeing the whole from Uhuru Peak

Looking down from Kilimanjaro over her bio-regional landscape, containing her many ecosystems and watersheds the question arises: 'Oldonyo Oibor, what do you need?' And from her belly she answers: 'Allow me to be who I am. Heal my wounds, let me breathe!'

'Asking the land' is something Indigenous Peoples all over the world do, every day. And the answers they 'hear' often fills them with grief and pain. As they experience it in their own bodies.

Looking down from so high opens up our perception, getting a sense of the whole. In truth, the bio-regional landscape we see from the top is a fine web of relationships. None of it stands alone. Understanding these relationships requires work and the ability to sit with the 'moving ground', letting the answers emerge in due time. The adagio is: the whole organizes the parts. Welcome to the world of Open Systems Thinking, a key pillar under the Embassy of the Earth.

The video [White Mountain - Greening Kilimanjaro](#) shows the challenge from the Kilimanjaro ecosystem perspective.

Local global dynamics

The right thing to do now is to look at the whole, challenged system of Kilimanjaro. All watersheds and all ecosystems. It helps us to relate to the immense nature of it all, begin to understand the web of relationships, differentiate between the importance of phenomena, appreciate traditional knowledge, welcome expertise and begin to see the common ground.

'[...] rivers depend on forests. And forests need their plants. Without plants - trees clothed in epiphytes and grasslands at high elevations - monsoon clouds will not release their moisture. Without plants, water will not sink into the land to feed the rivers, sources and aquifers, nor will the local thundershowers form.'

--Suprabha Seshan, Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary



THE WHOLE ORGANIZES THE PARTS

So, when projects, initiatives on the ground on the local levels take place, such as in Olgulului, Amboseli, there is a clear understanding and relevance to the purpose and future of Kilimanjaro. In every little step, in all other efforts anywhere on the land we are working for the same future. When shared objectives emerge, people start to collaborate across boundaries.

Organizations, institutions, politics, business, agriculture, Indigenous cultures, pastoralists, small-farmers, initiatives, (foreign) projects and others, they all comprise the whole. They all hold a piece of the 'eco puzzle' that needs to be solved. And on that level we shall have to work. Work that will lead to embracing common ground. Something we all agree on. Going forward to define the purpose, a statement that is shared and gives meaning and motivates to design the possible future of Kilimanjaro.



Search Conference

Embassy of the Earth has a long history as social architect – 25 years of designing and convening gatherings of people to look at possible futures with the hindsight of their history, the context of their direct environment and the dynamics of the world. Many of these gatherings were about water, watersheds, rivers and delta's.

Only a few months ago, October 2017, a similar gathering, Search Conference, took place in Gundar Basin, Tamil Nadu, South India. Gundar Basin stretches 300 km from the Western Ghat Mountains to the coast. Also a drought stricken area in crisis, degraded and eroded land, families migrating to the city slums. Three hundred people came together for three days from all six districts of the Gundar Basin and came out with a crystal clear vision of what the future should look like, strategic statements to give it direction and actions to make it happen. This can also be done for the Kilimanjaro ecosystem and landscape. After having visited the Greening Africa project in Tanzania, several Maasai communities in Amboseli have already been guided through such a process by Embassy of the Earth, for their part of the landscape, and are now ready for action. (see attached proposal)

Back to the future

Often people think: can we even do this? Getting all these different factions together? The answer to that question is simple. We have no choice. The time to regenerate the earth is now. It is already five past twelve on the climate clock. The good news is we can and are well equipped to pull this off, on a large scale. We just have to pull the available knowledge, skills and resources together. Human beings are 'hardwired' to dream, think, build, produce, adapt and move collectively in extremely effective ways.

We are now inviting you to look at and work with the larger Kilimanjaro system with all key 'problem-owners'. It will lay the groundwork for coordinating all (local) projects and other important initiatives and efforts. Attract, generate and distribute necessary resources. And foremost, change the landscape back into its potential of a biodiverse, fully functioning eco-system with full water cycles. In the best possible timing. And we, the people, will be part of that, each in our role, honoring those who have been with this land since time immemorial.

Frank Heckman
Wim van Immerzeel
Leo van der Vlist

Annex: Network of experts available for advising the White Mountain:

The Embassy of the Earth is well connected to a large network of experts willing to advise the White Mountain initiative. These include:

DHAN Foundation is India's largest professional development organization with a long track record of enabling the poor to uplift themselves in large parts of India, deeply motivated by Gandhi's be the change you want to see in the world. DHAN and Embassy of the Earth co-created a community-led project to regenerate the Gundar Basin ecosystem in Tamil Nadu, South India. dhan.org

Leo van der Vlist - Netherlands Centre for Indigenous Peoples, is trained as lawyer and has almost 30 years of experience in working with indigenous peoples worldwide, is member of the international board of Forest Stewardship Council and currently researcher on scaling up regeneration initiatives around the world.

Suprabha Seshan - Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary, internationally recognized as the keeper of the 'gold standard' for biodiversity, profound understanding of ecosystems – from the roots through the earth level to the canopy. gbsanctuary.org

Laurence de Bure - a lifetime agricultural pioneer and land healer - inspiring, involving and educating young people to take their place and care for the planet. Driving force behind the acclaimed Hopi Rain catchers initiative. Initiator of the Land Healer Foundation. waterockl3c.com

Agricultural Biodiversity Community - ABC - network of eighty NGO's in Africa and Asia, including DHAN, connecting more than three million smallholder farmers, fisher folk, pastoralists and forest farmers. Exchanging knowledge, experience and skills on seeds and technology, cooperatives, markets and trading, policy and governance. agriculturalbiodiversity.org

Regeneration International - overturning 'business as usual' by uniting rural farmers, ranchers and herders and connecting them with health, environment and justice minded consumers. Creators of the Regeneration Hub, presenting regenerative projects around the world. regenerationinternational.org

Artists - White Mountain intends to involve artists from all directions and is already connected to some artists. Through 'deep listening', artists can hear, see or move what's underneath, hidden. Perceive in openness, attentiveness, intuition and have the faculty to express the process through another angle, add a new perspective, open up eyes to another reality, make us smile.