

Intambwe Savannah

Ecosystem Restoration Project
Gakoma, Kayonza



the
Lifescape
project



Project overview

The Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association (RWCA) and the Lifescape Project are jointly implementing a scalable ecosystem restoration model using carbon finance.

The project seeks to achieve:

- **Positive impacts on biodiversity and climate resilience in the pilot area through restoration of savannah landscapes.**
- **A reliable finance stream to support RWCA's community-centred restoration work, as part of the broader vision of Gakoma Conservancy and nation-wide restoration ambitions.**
- **A scalable model for improving and diversifying livelihoods for rural communities, particularly vulnerable groups.**

This project focuses on restoring an area of degraded land in Murundi, within the Kayonza District in the Eastern Province in Rwanda. Kayonza is a priority region for ecosystem restoration, as it's the only province where deforestation outpaces reforestation, with over 20% forest loss driven by agricultural expansion (1). The district is also highly vulnerable to drought, with seasonal crop failures estimated to cost 8.8 billion Rwandan francs (more than USD 6 million) per year. High poverty levels and heavy reliance on natural resources add to social vulnerability (2).

Ecological restoration will boost biodiversity by connecting habitats around Akagera National Park, providing homes for key species, and enhancing agricultural buffer zones.

The project will also channel financial benefits directly to communities, empowering them to lead and benefit from restoration efforts.

Intambwe Savannah supports the implementation of the National Strategy for Transformation (NTS-2) and the National Climate and Nature Finance Strategy (2024-2030) which aims to increase green investment by the public and private sectors, and to mobilise substantial financial resources towards addressing climate change and conserving biodiversity in alignment with Rwanda's development vision. It is also aligned with the updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the revised Green Growth and Climate Resilience Strategy (GGCRS), and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP).



Commencement of restoration activities by the Gakoma community



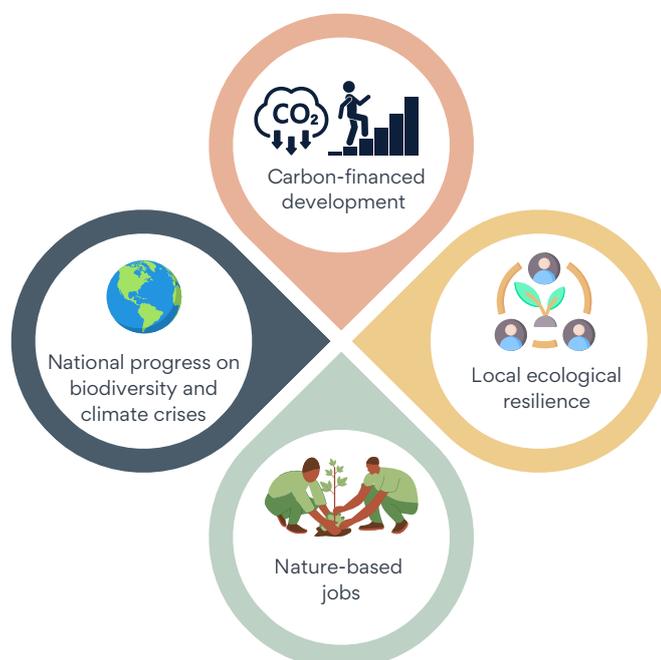
Project Impact



Gakoma community meeting to discuss project activities (Nov 2025)

The pilot will deliver immediate benefits for the Murundi communities, but its main impact lies in its scalability. Once registered under the Plan Vivo standard, it can generate private carbon finance, reducing RWCA's reliance on grants for restoration. Its scaling will provide a way for Rwanda to strengthen its position as a leader in green economic development.

Most households in Gakoma depend on seasonal or informal work, and/or subsistence farming on less than 1 hectare of land. The Intambwe Savannah project expands economic opportunities, through seasonal and permanent jobs, in rural communities where choices are limited and vulnerabilities are high. As well as benefits already observed (community conservation champion employment and improved quality of land) there will be greater resilience of the landscape to environmental pressures, and the provision of finance for development projects including an early childhood learning facility. As the pilot is refined, these benefits will extend across Rwanda's eastern district, supporting long-term sustainability beyond the initial funding period of 3 years.



Partnership team

Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association



Dr. Olivier Nsengimana
Chief Executive Officer



Dr. Deo Ruhagazi
Deputy Chief Executive
Officer



Cecile Kayitanirwa
Senior Habitat
Restoration Manager



Diogene Tuyizere
Assistant Botanist

RWCA has a strong interdisciplinary team of botanists, ecologists, rangers, and community engagement officers. They have a strong track record of delivering nationally and internationally funded restoration projects, with a cross-programme focus on community involvement. Their on-the-ground work includes training and employing local people, supporting more sustainable land use, and linking biodiversity protection with local economic development.

The Lifescope Project



Adam Eagle
Chief Executive Officer



Amelia Holmes
Senior Economist



Petrina Rowcroft
Senior Economics Advisor



James MacGregor
Managing Economist

The Lifescope Project is a UK-registered, interdisciplinary charity working to protect and restore wild landscapes in ways that support both nature and people. Lifescope's work brings together expertise across science, law, economics, technology and culture, and focuses on developing and testing practical approaches to landscape-scale restoration. The organisation works with partners on topics including rewilding law, species reintroductions, ecological economics, biodiversity and ecosystem service valuation, and Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), all focused on linking ecosystem recovery with more resilient local economies. Lifescope also collaborates on applied research and innovation projects, including a four-year EU Horizon-funded programme that began in 2025, focused on ecosystem services and natural capital markets in Europe.

Intambwe Savannah Project Outline

The initial pilot project is being implemented on private land (with the title held by RWCA) and involves restoring 40 hectares of degraded grazing land in Buhabwa cell, Kayonza District, adjacent to a wetland near Akagera National Park.

The Intambwe Savannah project channels financial benefits from international carbon markets directly to participating communities. The pilot combines two connected elements — a restoration blueprint and voluntary carbon market registration, as outlined below.

1. Restoration Blueprint

This component is primarily led by RWCA

The on-the-ground activities involving the ecological restoration of degraded land to improve ecosystem function, is led by RWCA in partnership with local community members. The restoration approach and associated governance arrangements developed through the project are based on RWCA's theory of change, safeguards and protocols. The model will be refined over time and used to support restoration of additional sites.

2. Carbon market registration

This component is primarily led by the Lifescape Project

With a restoration blueprint established, we can pursue the registration of RWCA and the participating communities as a seller of carbon on the voluntary carbon market. Lifescape Project leads the process of ensuring Intambwe Savannah meets the stringent requirements set out by the Plan Vivo carbon standard.

Significant wins



01

First screened PDD on private land under Plan Vivo Standard

First PDD on privately owned land accepted under Plan Vivo. A big milestone, signals trust in our partnership and vision, and an important precedent for scaling within Gakoma Conservancy vision and elsewhere.

02

First Plan Vivo pipeline project in Rwanda

Positions us in the high-integrity end of the carbon market (a space many local projects can't access due to rigorous, time-consuming processes).

03

Completed the Plan Vivo Accelerator Programme

Major skill building for Amelia, Diogène and Cécile particularly. Lifescape now has an in depth understanding of the methods and requirements of PV, and RWCA have skills to handle monitoring and reporting with minimal input from the Lifescape team.

Year 1 – Progress highlights

Year 1 of the pilot project covers the period from Sept 2024 to Sept 2025

- **PIN approved (January 2025)**

- Project Idea Note approval allowed us to continue to develop the project, and be eligible to continue the Plan Vivo Accelerator Programme.
- Cecile Kayitanirwa, Diogene Tuyizere (Rwanda Lifescape Conservation Association) and Amelia Holmes (The Lifescape Project) started the Accelerator Programme, which involved 2.5 hours of training a week, technical project design tasks and 1-2-1 meetings with mentors and experts.

- **PDD submitted to Plan Vivo (August 2025)**

- The completion of a Project Design Document was the culmination of the PV Accelerator Programme
- The completion of the PV Accelerator unlocked considerable amount of grant funding (~ USD 8,000) to cover external validation
- It also enabled ~ USD 4,500 for RWCA + LP each towards staff time



Intambwe Savannah co-leads Amelia Holmes (Lifescape Project) and Cecile Kayitanirwa (RWCA)



Carbon Community Conservation Champions at a project meeting (Sept 2025)

- **REMA Letter of Approval granted (Sept 2025)**

- Ongoing communication and engagement with with Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA).
- With this letter of approval, RWCA has permission to generate carbon credits under the Intambwe Savannah project design.

Year 2 – Progress highlights

Year 2 of the pilot project covers the period from Sept 2025 to Sept 2026

- **Independent validator confirmed (Nov 2025)**
 - We have a Plan-Vivo approved third-party validator confirmed (Amade Real).
 - Amade will visit the site and talk with the project team in June 2026.
 - External validation of the PDD through desk review and ground-truthing is the final step in becoming registered as a seller of carbon.
- **Land preparation and saplings planted on the project area (Nov 2025)**
 - 5,720 saplings planted of 15 native species.
 - 40 hectares restored as the pilot project.
- **Project participants recruited (Nov 2025)**
 - Four formal project participants from the community were identified in Nov 2025, they will sign contracts in Feb 2026.
 - There are 2 women and 2 men, and they will lead the restoration as community leaders - under the RWCA role of Carbon Community Conservation Champions.
 - Four rangers have also been recruited. They will be responsible for reporting on, and protecting the land from natural and human-based threats.
- **PDD screened (Jan 2026)**
 - PDD screened, which has enabled the formal technical review process to proceed.
- **Buyers engagement strategy (Jan 2026)**
 - Calls have been set up and potential buyers already engaged, and the project team has been preparing and refining communications and pitching materials.
- **Scaling strategy (Feb 2026)**
 - Potential partners have been engaged across Rwanda and Kenya to begin discussions on our experience with the pilot and how it could scale across East Africa.



Diogene Tuyizere (project officer, RWCA), on the first planting day of the project.

Project Region

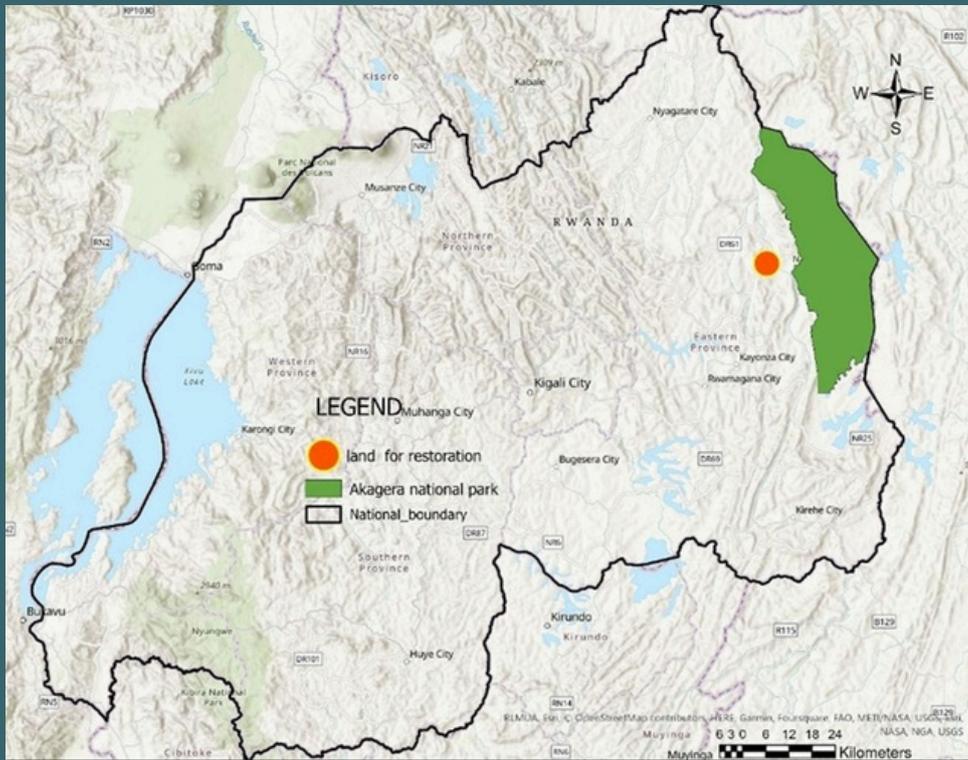


Figure 1. Map of Rwanda with the location of Akagera National Park (green) and Project Area (orange).

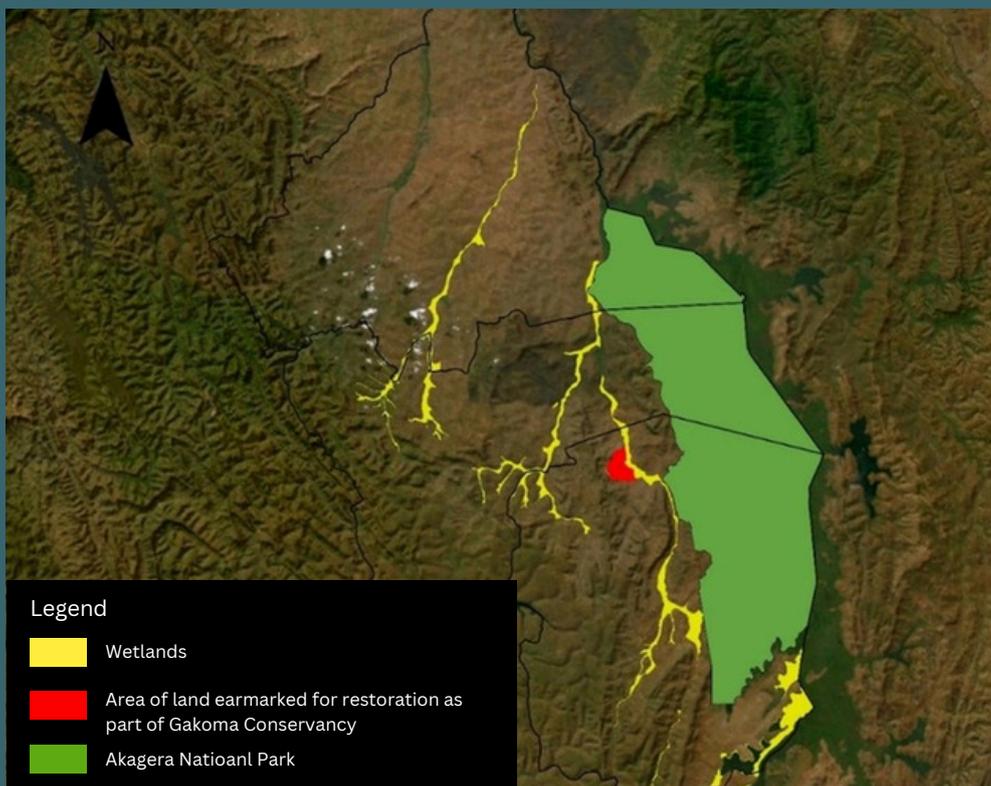


Figure 2. Map of project area (red) within the project region including important wetlands (yellow) and Akagera National Park (green).

Project Area

Sept 2024

The first images shows an aerial view of the wetland where the project land sits within. The middle image shows the extent of land degradation at the time of land purchase. This kind of degradation is widespread across the region.



Nov 2025

These images show the land preparation stage on one of the project areas (with high levels of planting), and below that, are pictures of the land closest to the wetland, where passive regeneration is already showing an increase in biodiversity and vegetation.



Next steps

Carbon finance provides a viable route to fund restoration at scale without relying on short grant cycles. We have chosen to register with one of the most community-focused and stringent carbon standards available, which helps us to structure the project so that revenues benefit Rwanda and flow directly to participating communities. The emphasis of impact is on long-term stewardship of ecologically resilient and productive savannah landscapes.

In the next phase of project delivery, we are focusing on three main areas.

First, we are continuing discussions with prospective carbon buyers to secure forward finance and establish early demand for high-quality credits.

Second, we're moving through the Plan Vivo PDD review process, which will refine the technical and governance aspects of project design, and reiterations across the region and country.

Third, building on the above, we are actively developing the scaling strategy, assessing how the pilot model can be replicated across additional sites while maintaining ecological integrity and strong community participation.

References

- (1) Ministry of Environment Rwanda. (2019). *National forest cover mapping report 2019*. Government of Rwanda.
- (2) Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA). (2021). *State of the environment and outlook report 2021*. Government of Rwanda, Kigali.