



2025

ANNUAL REPORT

INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE AND ECOLOGY

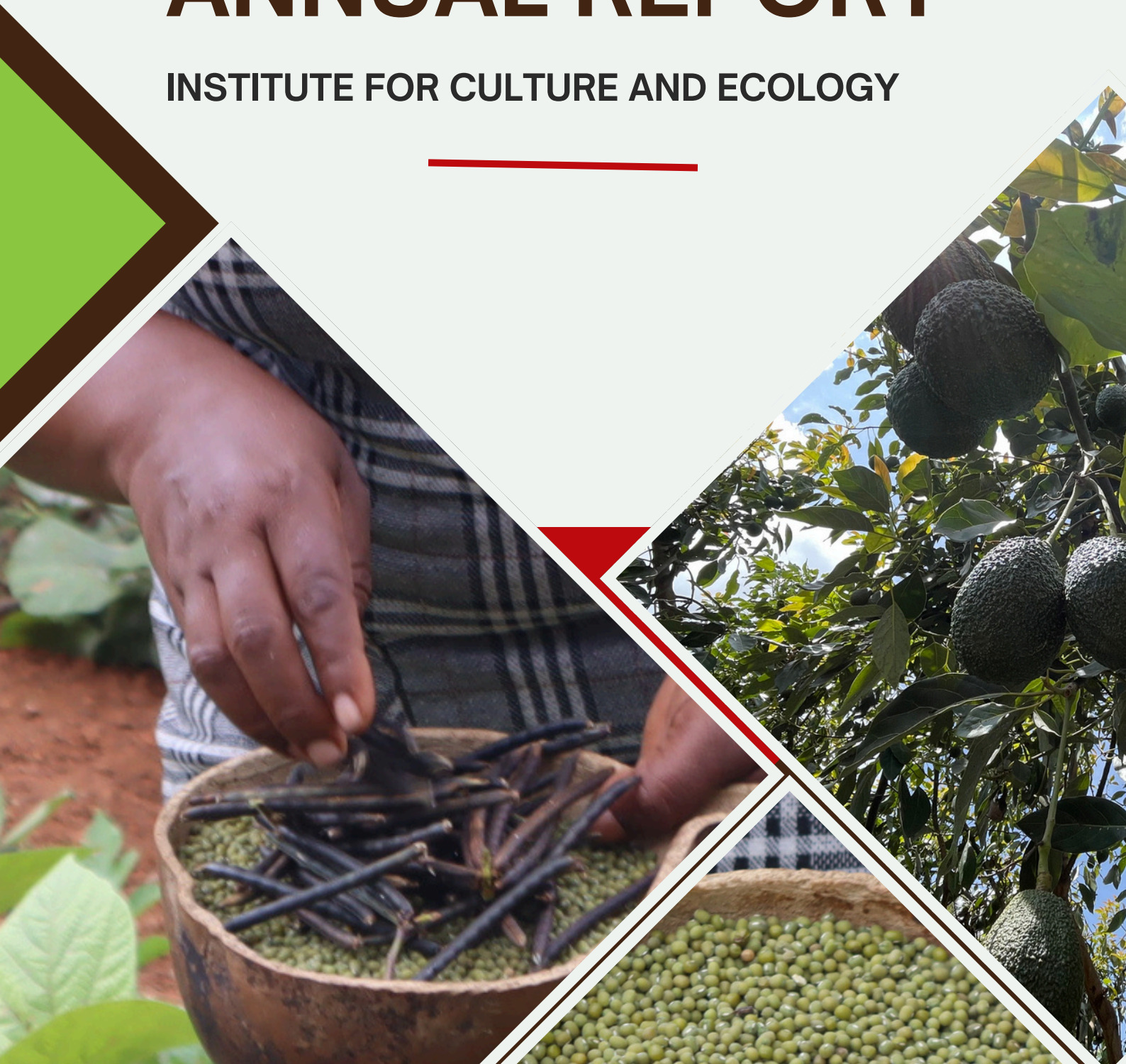


Table of Contents

Message from the Executive Director;	<u>3</u>
2025 Overview;	<u>4</u>
Implementation Status:	
Strategic Objective 1 ;To enhance environmental regeneration and sustainable use of 5 critical ecosystems	<u>5</u>
Strategic Objective 2; To enhance food, seed sovereignty and economic empowerment among 6000 households	<u>7</u>
Strategic Objective 3; To strengthen campaign and advocacy capacities among target communities and to influence decisions, policies.....	<u>9</u>
Strategic Objective 4; Increased strategic collaborations and partnerships.....	<u>11</u>
Strategic Objective 5; To enhance evidence-based programming, learning and adoption of new innovations	<u>13</u>
Strategic Objective 6; To Enhance Organizational Capacity for Effective and Efficient Implementation.....	<u>14</u>
Challenges and Mitigation;	<u>15</u>
Financial Report ;	<u>17</u>
ICE Partners;	<u>18</u>

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world." — Margaret Mead

Message from the Executive Director

As we reflect on the past year, we do so with gratitude, delight, and renewed purpose. Across the landscapes and communities, we serve, we have witnessed the transformative power of collective action in restoring ecosystems, strengthening livelihoods, advancing agroecology, influencing policy and safeguarding indigenous knowledge. These achievements reaffirm our conviction that sustainable development is best realized when communities are empowered to lead, partnerships are nurtured, and nature is valued as the foundation of resilient societies.

This report captures more than the activities implemented during the year—it reflects the meaningful changes achieved through our shared efforts.

From strengthening community ecological governance and promoting climate-resilient food systems to influencing policy and expanding strategic partnerships, ICE continued to work alongside communities, government institutions, civil society, academia, and development partners to create lasting impact.

While challenges such as climate variability and evolving policy environments required adaptability, they also reinforced the importance of innovation, collaboration, and evidence-based programming in achieving sustainable outcomes. As we look to the future, ICE remains steadfast in its mission to foster healthy ecosystems, resilient communities, and inclusive development, ensuring that the actions we take today contribute to a more sustainable and equitable tomorrow.



GATHURU MBURU
DIRECTOR,
INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE AND ECOLOGY.

2025 OVERVIEW

The 2025 Annual Report presents the progress made by the Institute for Culture and Ecology (ICE) in advancing its strategic objectives through community-led action, strategic partnerships, and evidence-based programming. During the year, ICE strengthened environmental conservation, promoted agroecology and sustainable livelihoods, influenced policy processes, and enhanced institutional capacity. The report highlights the outcomes achieved and the lessons that continue to shape ICE's commitment to resilient ecosystems and empowered communities.

ICE Vision

Empowered Communities living in healthy ecosystems.

ICE Mandate

To promote environmental conservation and natural resources management through buttressing traditional knowledge in community-based environmental and resource management initiatives

Our Mission

To enhance resilience of ecological systems and community livelihoods using diverse knowledge systems.

ICE Core Values

✓ Respect for Diversity

✓ Equity

✓ Accountability

✓ Professionalism



Implementation Status: Strategic Objective 1

To enhance environmental regeneration and sustainable use of 5 critical ecosystems in the target areas by December 2026.

A total of 3,300 assorted herbal tree seedlings were planted in Uplands Forest in collaboration with Uplands Community Forest Association (CFA) members from the herbal user right. The aim of planting these herbal trees was to ensure that in future, they will have a source for their raw materials as majority source herbal products from the forest.

In Machakos County, assorted tree seedlings were planted during the March-April rains in degraded areas in Kilimambogo Hill where 3,000 seedlings were planted. The tree planting was done in collaboration with community members and Kenya Wildlife Service who have been critical partners in the restoration of this ecosystem. In Kivaa Hill, 1,000 tree seedlings were planted. In addition, youth and elders in Kivaa were supported with bee hives which they set up in Kivaa Hill as a means of protecting the Hill from illegal destruction. In addition, the elders and youth will get an income from once they sell the harvested honey.

In Tharaka Nithi County, Ntugi Igaironi Community Forest Association was supported to complete their Participatory Forest Management Plan (PFMP) and which led to signing of a Forest Management Agreement (FMA) with Kenya Forest Service that outlines how the community will collaborate with KFS in management of the forest and how they will benefit during the co-management.

In Meru, a mapping exercise was undertaken in Lower Imenti Forest where key ecotourism sites were identified and mapped for purposes of developing a georeferenced map. The aim was to support the Community Forest Association on planning on how they will sustainably plan utilization of the eco-resources for them to get an income as they conserve the forest.



A Snapshot of Achieved Outputs



Increasing tree cover in five key ecosystems and public spaces

These efforts contributed to ecosystem restoration and mitigation of climate impacts, while also benefiting surrounding communities. Community members and stakeholders were actively involved to ensure ownership and sustainability beyond the project period. Sensitization efforts improved environmental awareness, leading to stronger reporting of illegal activities. In the Aberdare ecosystem, an alliance of stakeholders was formed to advocate for its protection. Community Forest Associations (CFAs) were strengthened, enhancing collaboration with the Kenya Forest Service and reducing forest degradation.



Deputy Chief Conservator, Kenya Forest Service presenting the signed Ntug-Igaironi PFMP to the Ntugi hill CFA Leadership.



A Snapshot of Achieved Outputs



Strengthening 8 community ecological governance systems supporting the management of the 5 critical ecosystems.

ICE promoted indigenous knowledge practices for conservation through sensitization and intergenerational dialogues. These platforms enabled knowledge sharing between elders and youth, leading to increased youth participation in conservation efforts. As a result, young people have been trained and prepared to continue traditional conservation practices, ensuring continuity of traditional ecological stewardship.



During an intergenerational dialogue in Kivaa, Machakos County.

Implementation Status: Strategic Objective 2;

To enhance food, seed sovereignty and economic empowerment among 6000 households in target project areas by December 2026.

Across Murang'a, Meru, Embu, and Tharaka Nithi Counties, 1984 farmers were trained on various agroecological practices aimed at enhancing their livelihood options and resilience against climate change. Some of the trainings offered include, making of bio-inputs, training on value addition of indigenous foods and seeds, goat rearing, making of chicken feed, and making of improved log hives. In addition, forums with value chain actors were held which provided knowledge sharing platforms between farmers and different value chain actors.



During a handover of beekeeping materials at Kivaa hill.

A farmer group in Tharaka Nithi County was supported with 9 langstroth hives with an aim of diversifying their livelihood sources. Bee keeping does well in the area due to favourable climatic conditions.

Farmers in Tharaka Nithi were supported with indigenous seeds for recuperation as the seeds are resilient to varying climatic conditions. Approximately 100 farmers benefited from the seedlings.

Further, in Kivaa Machakos County, 20 youth were trained on beekeeping since they had been

supported with traditional hives which they have suspended on trees in Kivaa Hill as a forest protection measure to reduce encroachment. The empowerment training enabled them make improved log hives. In addition, 1150 assorted fruit seedlings were distributed to community members in Kivaa region to support dryland farming. During monitoring, survival rate of the fruit seedlings was established as approximately 60% which they attributed to long dry weather conditions and inadequate water availability which resulted in drying of some of the seedlings.



A Snapshot of Achieved Outputs



Improving agricultural yields and nutrition

Farmers in Meru, Murang'a, Embu, and Tharaka Nithi counties were trained on diversifying livelihoods to increase resilience to climate change, improve food production, and boost household incomes. About 4,000 beneficiaries adopted alternative livelihood options, while around 5,000 farmers embraced agroecological practices such as use of organic inputs, composting, manure application, and soil and water conservation.

Farmers were also supported with indigenous seeds suited to changing climatic conditions. Sensitization and training led to positive behavioral change, with increased awareness of sustainable food production and environmental conservation.



Increased household incomes among households

Farmers were supported with income-generating materials and livestock such as beehives, honey harvesting equipment, goats, chicken, and fruit trees. To enhance sustainability, farmer groups ensured members benefited through shared livestock offspring and collective enterprise support. ICE also promoted

common interest marketing groups to help farmers aggregate produce and access better markets and prices, although some farmers remained hesitant due to past negative experiences with group marketing.



A display of traditional seeds from the Atharaka Community.

Implementation Status: Strategic Objective 3;

To strengthen campaign and advocacy capacities among target communities and to influence decisions, policies and programs on Natural Resource Management (NRM), Food Sovereignty (FS) and relevant emerging issues in target project areas by December 2026.

ICE continued to strengthen community and institutional capacity to influence policies and decision-making processes that support sustainable natural resource management, food and nutritional sovereignty, and community rights. Through strategic policy engagement, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and community empowerment, the organization advanced an enabling environment for agroecology, conservation, and cultural heritage protection.

To strengthen collaborative landscape governance, ICE convened the interim committee of the Aberdare Forest Landscape Restoration Alliance (AFLAREA) to review the Alliance's progress and agree on strategies for sustaining stakeholder engagement. The meeting resolved to broaden membership by sensitizing additional stakeholders across the Aberdare landscape on the Alliance's mandate and value proposition. Regional engagement forums were subsequently planned to expand participation and strengthen coordinated restoration efforts.

In Kiambu County, ICE continued to engage the County Department of Agriculture and other key stakeholders to advance the development of the Kiambu Agroecology Policy and Bill. These engagements contributed to the progression of the legislative process, with issues raised by the County Assembly Agriculture Committee addressed collaboratively by partners and the legal team. By the close of the reporting period, the Bill had advanced to the public participation stage, marking an important milestone towards the establishment of a supportive policy framework for agroecology in the county.



During stakeholders forum in Kiambu County during the development of the Kimabu County Policy and Act.

ICE also continued to facilitate county-level policy dialogues on the conservation of River Kathita, a culturally and ecologically significant river that traverses both Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties and hosts fourteen sacred sites. In Tharaka Nithi County, the organization engaged County Executive officials in developing a roadmap for public participation on the proposed Culture and Heritage Policy, strengthening institutional commitment to the protection of indigenous cultural heritage and associated natural resources.



A Snapshot of Achieved Outputs



Community Advocacy Networks Actively Influencing Policies

In Tharaka Nithi County, communities collectively advocated for the sustainable management of River Kathita, petitioning the County Government to strengthen regulation of upstream water abstraction. Their engagement was aimed at improving compliance with sustainable water abstraction practices, which would result into increased downstream water flows and enhanced protection of this critical ecosystem.

ICE also strengthened institutional platforms for policy engagement through the establishment of Agroecology Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MSPs) in Murang'a and Kiambu counties. The platforms bring together farmers, government agencies, civil society organizations, academia, and private sector actors to coordinate and advance the agroecology agenda. During the reporting period, the MSPs played an important role in supporting county-level agroecology policy processes.

In Murang'a, stakeholder engagement has continued to contribute to the collaborative implementation of Murang'a County Agroecology Policy and Act, while in Kiambu, collaborative efforts with like-minded actors in Agroecology continued to support the ongoing legislative process.



Members of the Murang'a Agroecology Multi-Stakeholder Platform (AE-MSP) engage in roundtable discussions to refine action plans for the Thematic Working Groups

Implementation Status: Strategic Objective 4;

Increased strategic collaborations and partnerships on NRM, FSEE and CAL work by December 2026

Strategic partnerships remained central to ICE's approach to programme delivery, enabling the organization to expand its reach, strengthen policy influence, mobilize resources, and enhance knowledge exchange. By working collaboratively with government institutions, development partners, research organizations, community networks, and learning institutions, ICE reinforced collective action towards sustainable natural resource management, agroecology, and community resilience.

As part of its resource mobilization strategy, ICE partnered with representatives from the Wangari Maathai Institute (WMI) to engage the Embassy of Japan on opportunities to support the advancement of Synecoculture, an innovative agroecological production approach originating in Japan. The engagement provided valuable guidance on potential funding pathways and culminated in a joint commitment by ICE and WMI to develop a collaborative funding proposal.



Staff from ICE and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) at Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park after a collaborative tree planting event.



A tree planting activity at Ol Donyo Sabuk National Park with the Game Warden.

ICE also deepened its partnership with PELUM Kenya in advancing the agroecology agenda, particularly in Kiambu County. Through this collaboration, consultative forums and stakeholder awareness initiatives were convened to support the development of the Kiambu Agroecology Bill, contributing to its progression towards the public participation stage. The partnership strengthened multi-stakeholder coordination and reinforced advocacy efforts aimed at creating an enabling policy environment for agroecological transformation. ICE further strengthened

collaboration with the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and other conservation partners by supporting the Ntugi-Igaironi Community Forest Association (CFA) to finalize and launch its Participatory Forest Management Plan (PFMP). The plan provides a structured framework for collaborative forest governance by clearly defining the roles, responsibilities, and benefit-sharing arrangements between the Community Forest Association and KFS, while promoting the sustainable management of forest resources.



A Snapshot of Achieved Outputs



Strategic collaborations and partnerships

Collaboration also extended to county governments in strengthening cultural heritage conservation. In Tharaka Nithi County, ICE convened a multi-sector dialogue bringing together community representatives and senior county officials from the Departments of Culture, Agriculture, Trade, Environment and Water to explore opportunities for increased investment in culture and heritage. As a result, the Kianda community received a water storage tank and support to participate in the Tharaka Nithi Annual Cultural Festival, providing an important platform for preserving and showcasing Tharaka cultural heritage.



Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Forestry of Kenya, Deborah Barasa receiving a publication by ICE on Forest Biodiversity during World Environment Day 2025 at Tharaka University

Implementation Status: Strategic Objective 5;

To enhance evidence-based programming, learning and adoption of new innovations, obtaining evidence needed for ICE programmes in target project areas by December 2026

ICE continued to strengthen evidence generation and organizational learning to inform programme design, policy engagement, and adaptive management. By investing in research, staff capacity development, and improved knowledge management, the organization enhanced its ability to generate credible evidence and promote innovation across its thematic areas.

As part of these efforts, ICE commissioned a desktop review on the community forest biodiversity registration process in Kenya to examine the challenges affecting biodiversity registration and identify practical recommendations for strengthening the process. The study, undertaken by consultants from Kenyatta University, is expected to provide evidence that will inform policy dialogue and support community-led biodiversity conservation. For detailed report, visit ICE website; www.ickenya.org



During a capacity building training on research and documentation

Enhanced Generation and Application of Knowledge

To further strengthen organizational capacity, staff received specialized training in research methodologies and Geographic Information Systems (GIS), equipping them with practical skills for data-driven planning, spatial analysis, and evidence-based decision-making across programme interventions.



During a documentation of a Invasive Species in Lower Imenti Forest and their Ecological Impacts in Lower Imenti and Ntugi ecosystems.

Implementation Status: Strategic Objective 6;

To Enhance Organizational Capacity for Effective and Efficient Implementation of its Mandate by December 2026

Strengthening institutional capacity remained a key priority in enhancing ICE's effectiveness, organizational resilience, and long-term sustainability. Investments in governance, staff development, resource mobilization, and operational systems continued to position the organization to deliver its strategic mandate more effectively. The ICE Advisory Board continued to provide strategic oversight and guidance through regular governance meetings that reviewed organizational performance and progress towards the achievement of ICE's vision. The deliberations informed strategic decisions aimed at improving institutional effectiveness, accountability, and programme delivery.

To further strengthen governance, Advisory Board members participated in a capacity-building programme on organizational governance, enhancing their understanding of their oversight responsibilities and equipping them to provide more effective strategic leadership.

In addition, staff and Advisory Board members participated in resource mobilization training to strengthen institutional capacity in proposal development and fundraising. The training enhanced participants' skills in identifying funding opportunities and developing competitive funding proposals, contributing to the submission of several proposals during the year.



ICE staff during mid-term review of the Organizational Strategic Plan.



Part of ICE staff and Advisory Board Members during mid-term review of the Organizational Strategic Plan.

Challenges and Mitigation Measures

Implementation of programme activities was affected by several contextual and operational challenges that influenced the pace and scope of delivery across some intervention areas. Nevertheless, ICE worked closely with partners and relevant government institutions to identify practical mitigation measures and sustain progress towards programme objectives.

In Machakos County, the development of the Culture and Heritage Policy experienced delays from County Government processes, which slowed the policy approval process. Since the draft policy had reached an advanced stage, progress remained dependent on the resolution of the institutional impasse. To maintain momentum, ICE continued to engage the County Directorate of Culture while facilitating dialogue between county officials and rights holders in Kivaa. These engagements enabled the identification of alternative opportunities to support community priorities relating to culture and heritage, despite the delays in the policy process.



Clearing of Invasive species Lantana camara and Tithonia in Lower Imenti forest.

In Meru County, resources initially allocated for tree planting were redirected to the removal of the invasive species *Lantana camara*, which posed a significant threat to the survival and growth of tree seedlings planted during the previous year. Consequently, no tree planting was undertaken during the March–April rainy season, resulting in a reduction in the planned area for ecosystem rehabilitation. To strengthen long-term restoration efforts, ICE continued to collaborate with the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) in exploring the implementation of the Tree Establishment and Livelihood Improvement Scheme (TELIS). The scheme enables community members to participate in the restoration of

degraded forest areas by nurturing indigenous tree seedlings alongside seasonal crops, thereby reducing restoration costs while promoting community ownership of forest rehabilitation.

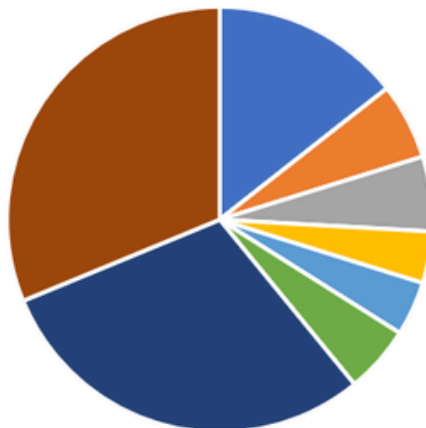
Nationwide demonstrations also disrupted programme implementation by affecting staff mobility, field operations, and engagement with stakeholders. In response, ICE adjusted staff work schedules and implementation plans to ensure the safety of personnel while minimizing interruptions to critical programme activities. The prevailing operating environment also affected the broader civil society sector, with increased scrutiny of some organizations during the period.

Despite these challenges, ICE maintained close coordination with partners and continued implementing priority activities through flexible planning and adaptive management approaches.



Financial Report 2025

2025 FINANCIAL REPORT



- Objective 1: Natural Resource Management
- Objective 2: Food, Seed Sovereignty and Economic Empowerment
- Objective 3: Campaign and Advocacy
- Objective 4: Networking and Partnerships
- Objective 5: Research and Knowledge Management
- Objective 6: Institutional Development
- Project Administration and Monitoring
- Office Administration

ICE PARTNERS



A photograph of an elderly man, Elder Wathome, kneeling in a grassy field. He is wearing a light-colored, patterned long-sleeved shirt and dark trousers. He is focused on planting a small green seedling into the soil. The background shows a vast, open landscape with rolling hills under a clear sky. A speech bubble is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing a quote. A green and black geometric shape is in the top left corner.

“Our ancestors protected these hills for us. Today, we plant these trees so that those who come after us will inherit a living landscape—not memories of one.”

Elder Wathome, Kilimambogo Community.



"When women lead the stewardship of nature, communities thrive and forests endure."

Contact us today

-  info@icekenya.org
-  + 254 723 684 523
-  www.icekenya.org
-  Garden Estate, Off Exit 7, Thika Road

To follow us...



This is a publication of the Institute for Culture and Ecology.