

Saving Matumaini

A story of enviromental conservation and community transformation



Introduction

The purpose of this book is to engage readers with a relatable narrative that highlights the consequences of environmental degradation and the importance of conservation in a creative way.

This book starts with a story of a small village called Matumaini(translated "Hope"). This is the story of Matumaini's decline and the unwavering determination of its people, supported by the invaluable collaboration of government and external partners, to restore what was lost. It is a powerful testament to the resilience of communities and an important reminder of the delicate balance between humanity and nature—a balance that, once broken, demands courage, unity, and collective effort to restore.



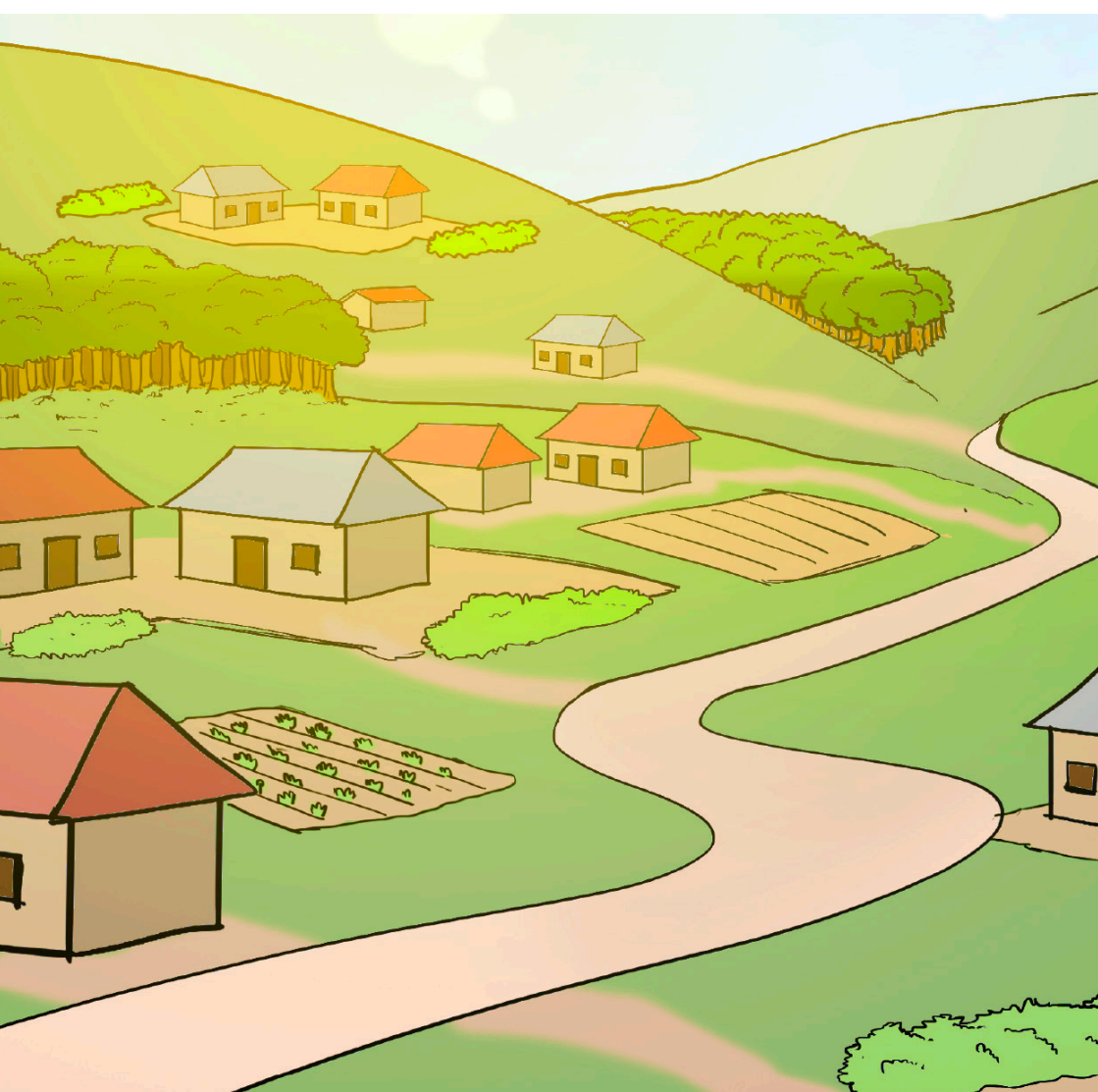
Summary

Matumaini was a village unlike any other—a place where nature and community thrived in harmony. The fields were lush and productive, streams flowed steadily, and the surrounding forest teemed with life. The land provided everything the villagers needed, and they lived in abundance, bound by kinship and a shared pride in their home.

But over time, unchecked activities began to take their toll. Trees were felled faster than they could regrow, streams turned into dumping grounds, and the fertile soil that had sustained generations was eroded away. Slowly but surely, Matumaini began to change. Hunger, disease, and hardship replaced the once-simple and carefree life. The villagers, who had unknowingly pushed their environment to its limits, found themselves grappling with the consequences of their activities.

Recognizing the dire situation, the government and key partners stepped in to support the village's recovery. With a shared vision of sustainability, these stakeholders provided critical resources, education, and technical expertise to guide the villagers in restoring their environment. Together, the villagers and their allies worked tirelessly to rebuild what was lost and ensure a more resilient and balanced way of life.







THE EARLY DAYS OF MATUMAINI.



Matumaini was a village nestled on the rolling hills and plains of the northern region of Uganda. A constant flow of water streamed down from these hills, providing the village with a reliable water source. The surrounding natural forest was the source of a fresh breeze that cooled the area, even during the sweltering heat of the tropical dry season, when other parts of the country experienced extreme temperatures.

The streams continually nourished the land, giving Matumaini an advantage: off-season harvests. The villagers cultivated gardens and harvested crops throughout the year. The fields yielded bountiful harvests, and although the land was constantly cultivated, it remained productive, providing ample food to sustain the community.

Life in Matumaini was simple and carefree. Everyone knew each other, and a strong sense of kinship existed among the residents. Most evenings, children played freely in the community, except on rainy afternoons. Life here was simple yet abundant.

AFTER MANY YEARS SOMETHING CHANGED.

A time came when the villagers of Matumaini were introduced to charcoal as a more efficient alternative to firewood. They were informed about the growing demand for charcoal in

towns and cities. Consequently, the villagers learned the art of charcoal-making—cutting trees into logs, digging pits, stacking the freshly cut logs, and smothering them with earth to create a slow burn that transformed the logs into high-quality charcoal.



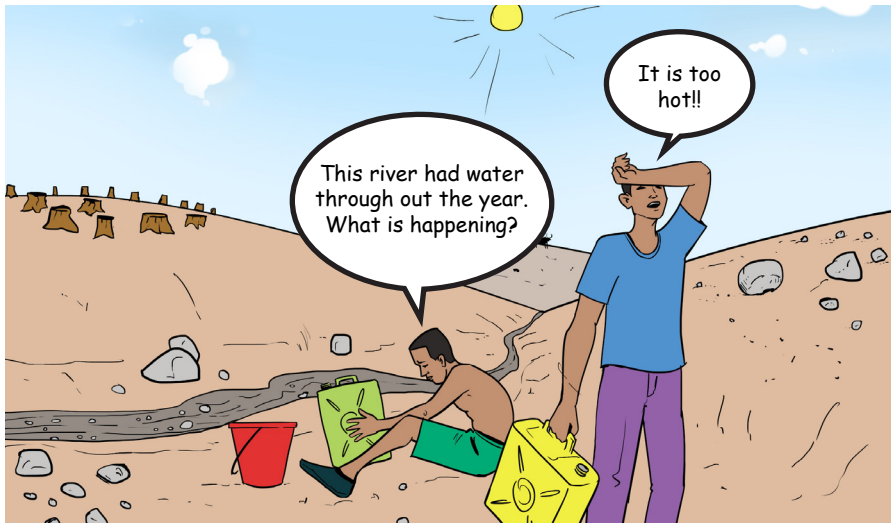
At first, the charcoal trade seemed like a blessing. The forests surrounding Matumaini were abundant with trees, and the villagers eagerly seized the opportunity, cutting down trees with enthusiasm. Farms expanded into the once-forested lands, and streams began to serve as dumping grounds for waste.



TRACKS LEAVING MATUMAINI IN THE EARLY MORNING CARRYING LOADS OF CHARCOAL BAGS.



As time passed and deforestation activities intensified, so did the problems they brought. The once lush and vibrant forest that surrounded the village began to disappear, leaving the land bare and vulnerable. Without the trees to anchor the soil, erosion set in, washing away fertile land. Streams that once flowed steadily became seasonal, and water scarcity began to affect both the crops and the villagers' daily lives.

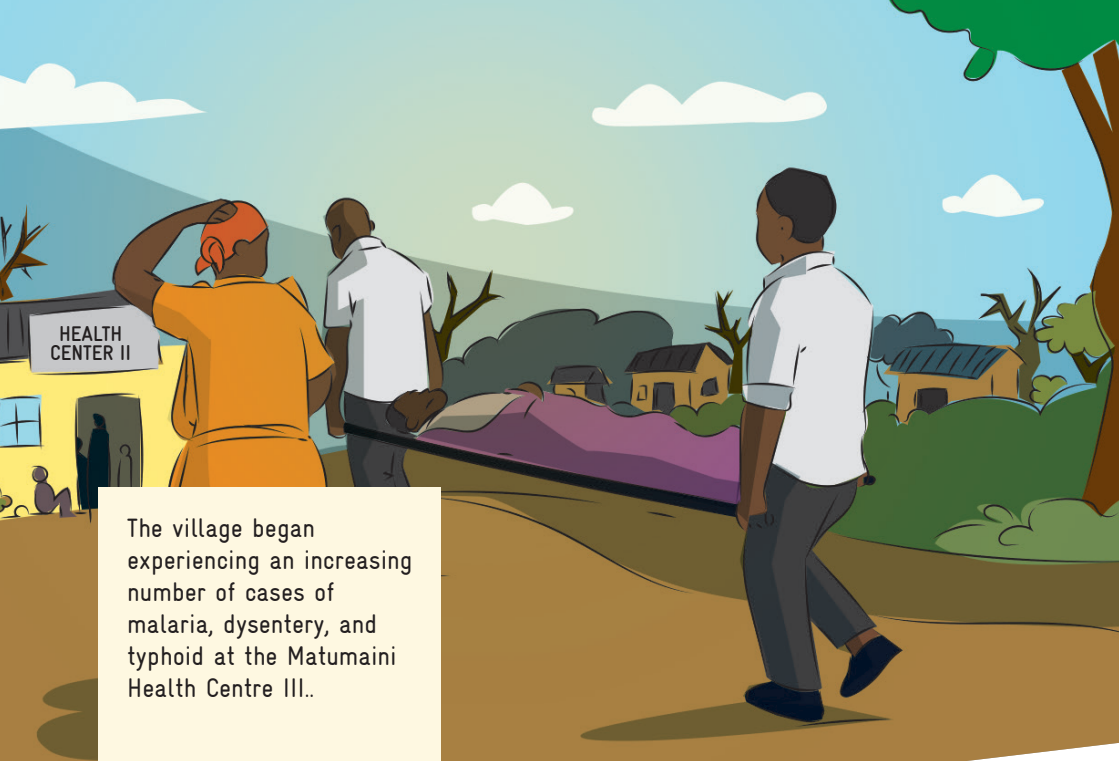


**AN AUGUST TO
REMEMBER!!**



"Matumaini had never experienced floods in all its existence. But one day, in the month of August, the rains were particularly heavy and because the continuous erosion into the rivers the village flooded causing people to be displaced from their homes.





The village began experiencing an increasing number of cases of malaria, dysentery, and typhoid at the Matumaini Health Centre III..





Kofi, an elder in Matumaini, confided in his fellow elders about his deep concern over the intense heat that year. These incidents prompted the village elders to realize that they needed to take action to restore their community and protect their way of life. However, they were unsure of the exact cause of the problems and how to address them.

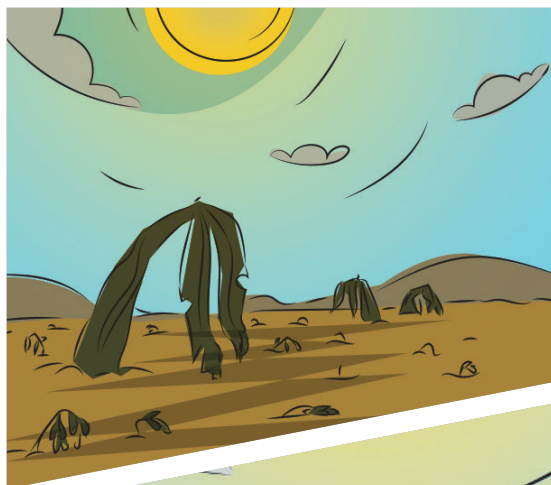


The food yields have greatly declined. The harvests have not only been reduced to only one season a year, but have also decreased drastically in quantity.

In fact, some families were unable to produce enough food to sustain themselves.

Jabez, Kofi's fellow elder, drew their attention to the declining food yields. The harvests had not only been reduced to only one season a year but had also decreased drastically in quantity. In fact, some families were unable to produce enough food to sustain themselves.





MORE PEOPLE BEGAN TO SPEAK...

The women in the village, who relied on cultivated crops for their income, were also severely affected by the poor harvests. Amara and Sanyu, for instance, could no longer sell vegetables from their gardens, leaving them with no means to support their families. This left many households in despair as they struggled to make ends meet."



Due to flooding, droughts, and low crop yields, famine struck Matumaini. Women who relied on selling vegetables at the village market could no longer earn a living. Many residents of Matumaini, including men, the elderly, youth, and women, began migrating to nearby villages, hoping for better conditions

The elders decided to seek help regarding their situation. They sent a message to Alem, a community development worker at the district office. Alem responded and suggested they call a village meeting. Development partners and others, would join in the initiative and offer to work and support the district local government to create sustainable solutions facing the common citizen of Matumaini village . For this case, several development partners were to work and support the government to provide sustainable solutions to the people of Matumaini village to curb the effects of environmental degradation.

The elders called for a village meeting, which took place under the mango tree at Kofi's compound, one of the few trees left in the village that still provided shade. The community development worker and his team arrived and began addressing the villagers about the challenges they were facing. Mr. Alem was scheduled to lead the first session, but he asked Elder Kwame to explain the difficulties the village was experiencing. Kwame explained how they were going through very difficult times, including constant livestock losses, reduced or no harvests, a harsh climate, the spread of disease, and poor sanitation.



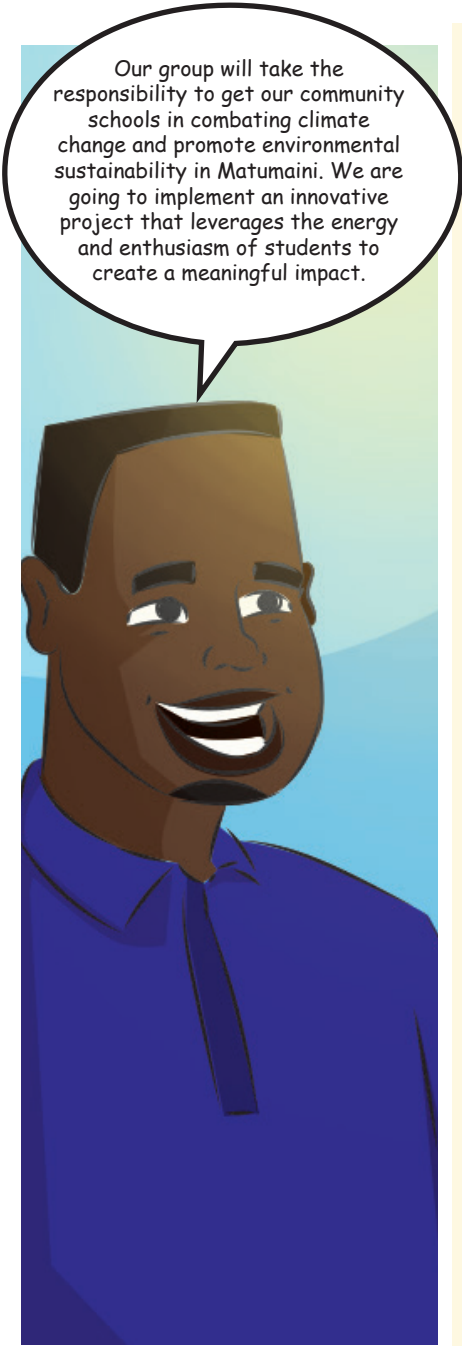
"I'm glad our elders have brought us these people, and they've opened our eyes to what the problem has been all along. I think we have heard enough. It is clear that the cutting of trees for charcoal, poor farming methods, and poor waste disposal are what has caused all these problems. We must stop this now!"

MORE PEOPLE ROSE UP IN AGREEMENT...

By the end of the session, the community understood that the cutting of trees for charcoal, poor farming methods, poor waste disposal had led to all the problems Matubaini village was going through. It was an eye-opening realization. More than ever, they were determined to act and restore their community to its former glory.



As she spoke, you could see the sentiments of the villagers, from the oldest to the youngest. Their faces were marked by years of struggle and hope. You could see the fear in their eyes, but also a glimmer of something else—a spark of readiness for change.

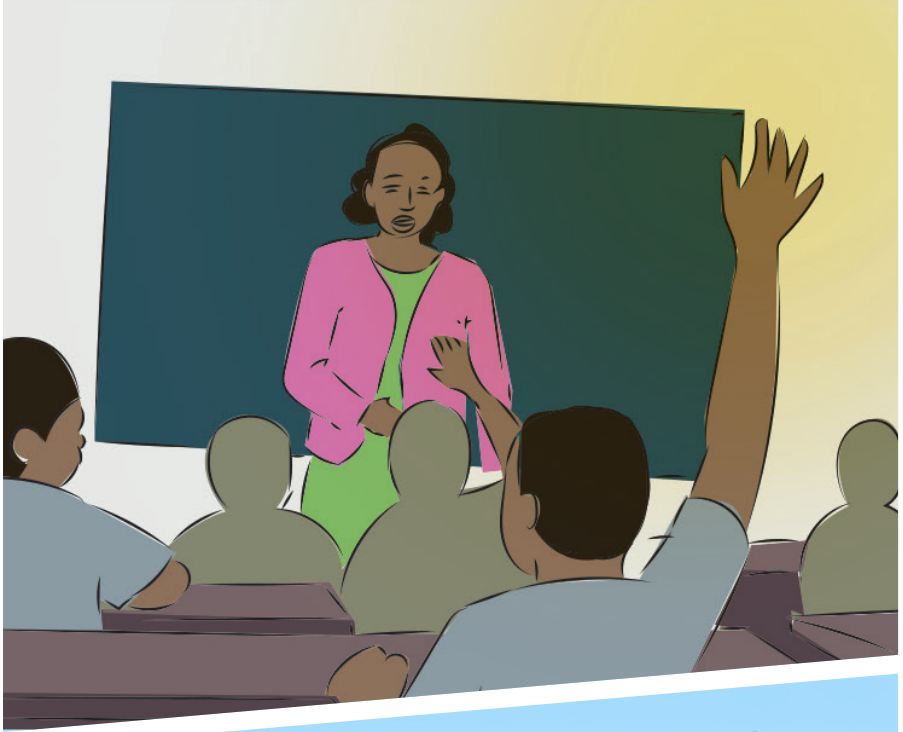


Our group will take the responsibility to get our community schools in combating climate change and promote environmental sustainability in Matumaini. We are going to implement an innovative project that leverages the energy and enthusiasm of students to create a meaningful impact.

Anaan, a member of one of the community development groups stood up and said, "our group will take the responsibility to get our community schools in combating climate change and promote environmental sustainability in Matumaini. We are going to implement an innovative project that leverages the energy and enthusiasm of students to create a meaningful impact."

"With the active participation of children, the group will establish nursery beds within the school grounds. Guided by experienced members, the students would learn essential skills such as seed selection, proper planting techniques, and care for the growing seedlings. This hands-on approach would not only nurture the students' understanding of environmental conservation but also instill a sense of responsibility and teamwork among the young participants who are the future of Matumaini."

Once the seedlings are ready, the group will extend their impact beyond the school gates. Instead of selling the seedlings at prevailing market rates, we will strategically price them much lower to make them affordable for families and farmers in the community. This pricing model would ensure that even the most economically disadvantaged households could access high-quality seedlings for reforestation. Additionally, every student involved in the initiative could be tasked with becoming a tree-planting champion in their household, further spreading the reforestation efforts at a grassroots level. The children's involvement would not only provide them with life skills but also foster a culture of environmental stewardship that continues to ripple across the community."



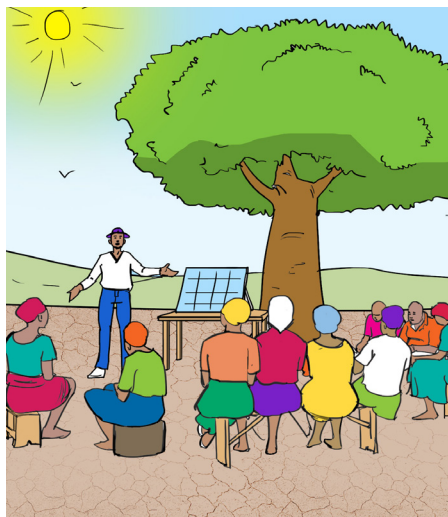
We shall adopt practicing climate smart farming, planting more trees, managing waste disposal and using sustainable energy sources like solar and improved cook stoves to protect the environment. By working together, we can build a healthier, greener future for our village.



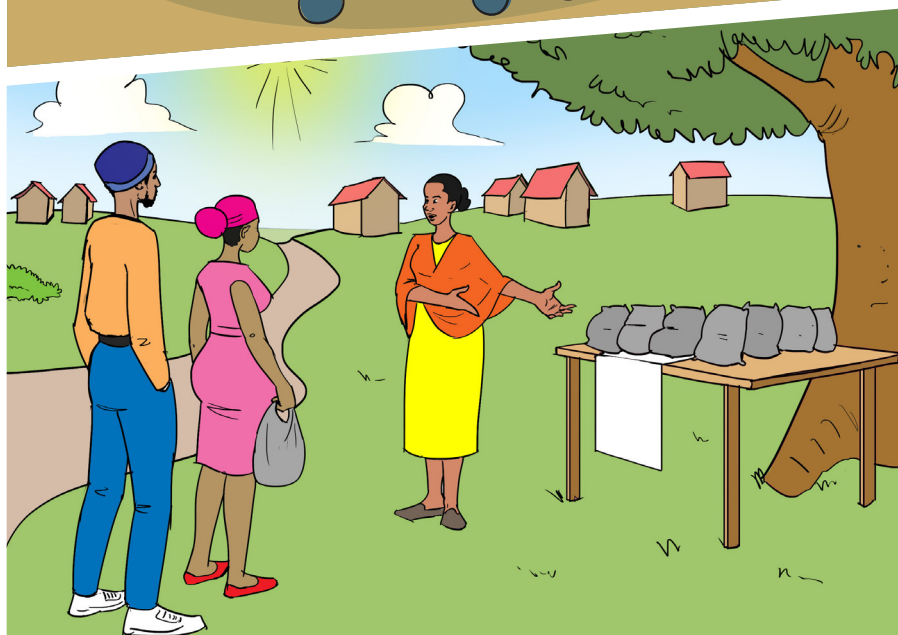
Joseph, who worked with a non government organisation addressed the meeting, outlining their commitment to the involvement of schools in restoring Matumaini.

," He went on to say that "As we have learned, environmental degradation leads to numerous problems, including health issues, food insecurity, and migration, we need enforce strict regulations on environmental pollution and promote the use of sustainable energy like solar and improved cook stoves"

He emphasized the importance of community involvement. "We will have regular campaigns to engage everyone directly in preserving our environment. Together, we can make a difference."



Joseph concluded with a call to action. "We shall adopt practicing climate smart farming, planting more trees, managing waste disposal and using sustainable energy sources like solar and improved cook stoves to protect the environment. By working together, we can build a healthier, greener future for our village."



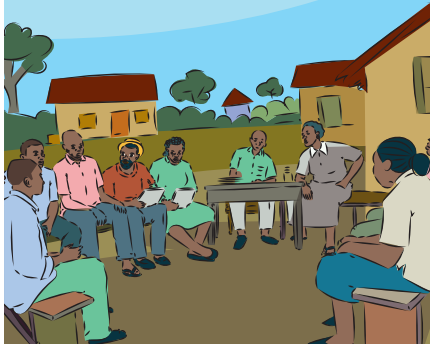
In collaboration with the district local government, “We will establish skills training programs targeting unemployed youth. With the help of community development officers, we will foster vocational training in areas like technology, healthcare, and entrepreneurship. These programs will equip our youth with skills for meaningful employment and self-reliance, providing an alternative to the charcoal trade.

In addition to these initiatives, we will integrate training in renewable energy skills through . These skills will empower youth to develop and manage sustainable energy solutions such as solar installations, energy-efficient cookstoves, and biogas systems. This not only provides employment opportunities but also contributes to reducing dependency on unsustainable energy sources like charcoal.

We will also prioritize climate-smart agricultural practices . This includes training in innovative methods like conservation agriculture, agroforestry, and irrigation management. Additionally, youth will be taught to produce environmentally friendly briquettes as a clean, affordable alternative to charcoal.

By integrating renewable energy and climate-smart agriculture into our youth skills development initiatives, we aim to create a generation of environmentally conscious, skilled individuals who can drive economic growth while protecting the environment. These efforts will not only enhance youth employability but also contribute to sustainable community development.”

Kofi added “We have vast land available to set up institutions, training centers, and apprenticeship programs.”



Kwame added and said "The flooding section of our village is also our responsibility. We must remove garbage from the streams and designate a proper place for waste disposal so that our water streams can flow freely again."

Through their efforts, the villagers of Matumaini were able to restore their environment, promote sustainability, and build a thriving, responsible community.

A community committee was formed to follow through with the meeting's resolutions. The committee included the LC1 chairperson, the parish chief, the sub-county chief, the District Environmental Officer, and the Community Development Officer. The committee also aimed to attract development partners who are instrumental in supporting community-led projects.

The collective commitment to restore and sustainably use the land was strong, with villagers pledging to plant trees and nurture the land back to health. With the committee's guidance, the villagers began their work. They planted native trees—species that had once thrived in the forests, their roots deep in the soil, ready to restore the balance that had been lost.

They terraced the hillsides to prevent further soil erosion, working together under the hot sun to build barriers that would hold the earth in place when the rains came. They cleared the waste from the streams, picking up the garbage that had choked the waterways and hindered their flow.

A NEW CHAPTER

The first rains, after months of waiting, came as a blessing. The skies darkened and opened up, pouring down life-giving water on the thirsty land. The villagers watched in awe as the streams that had once been dry began to trickle back to life. The water, now cool and clear, snaked down from the mountains, nourishing the earth and carrying away the remnants of the past.

As the days passed, the changes became more apparent. Birds, once absent from the barren landscape, returned to nest in the young trees. The trees, though small, grew stronger with each passing day, their leaves spreading wide to catch the sun. The villagers saw signs of hope in the vibrant green of the new growth and in the return of wildlife that had long been missing from their world.

The land, too, began to heal. Crops, once stunted and struggling, now grew tall and healthy. The soil, enriched by the trees' roots and the terracing, was no longer washed away by the rain. The village's fields, which had once been barren and dry, now yielded abundant harvests. The farmers' hard work and sacrifice had started to pay off, and there was a sense of pride in the air.



This restoration had a profound impact, especially on women who were disproportionately affected by the effects of climate change. As the land regained its fertility and crop yields increased, women who had previously struggled with poor harvests and food insecurity saw direct benefits. With higher crop yields, women were able to harvest more produce for their families, ensuring better nutrition and food security. The surplus from their farms also opened up opportunities for income generation through the sale of excess crops, giving women more financial independence and the ability to invest in their families' well-being.

The improved farming techniques and sustainable land management practices allowed women to focus less on the daily challenges of securing basic resources and more on building stronger, more resilient livelihoods. The village, once struggling, was now a place where women could thrive alongside their communities.

Moreover, as the village began to prosper, families who had left due to the harsh conditions started to return. Many resettled, bringing new energy and hope to the community.





A FEW YEARS LATER...

Years later, the elders stood at the edge of the village, watching the transformation unfold before their eyes. They could see the change in the land, in the people, and in their hearts. They had discovered the problem (thanks to the efforts of the district local government together with different development partnership organisations); they had made a choice—a choice to protect their future, heal their environment, and ensure that the generations that followed would inherit a world that was not only livable but thriving. It was a hard-fought victory, but it was theirs.

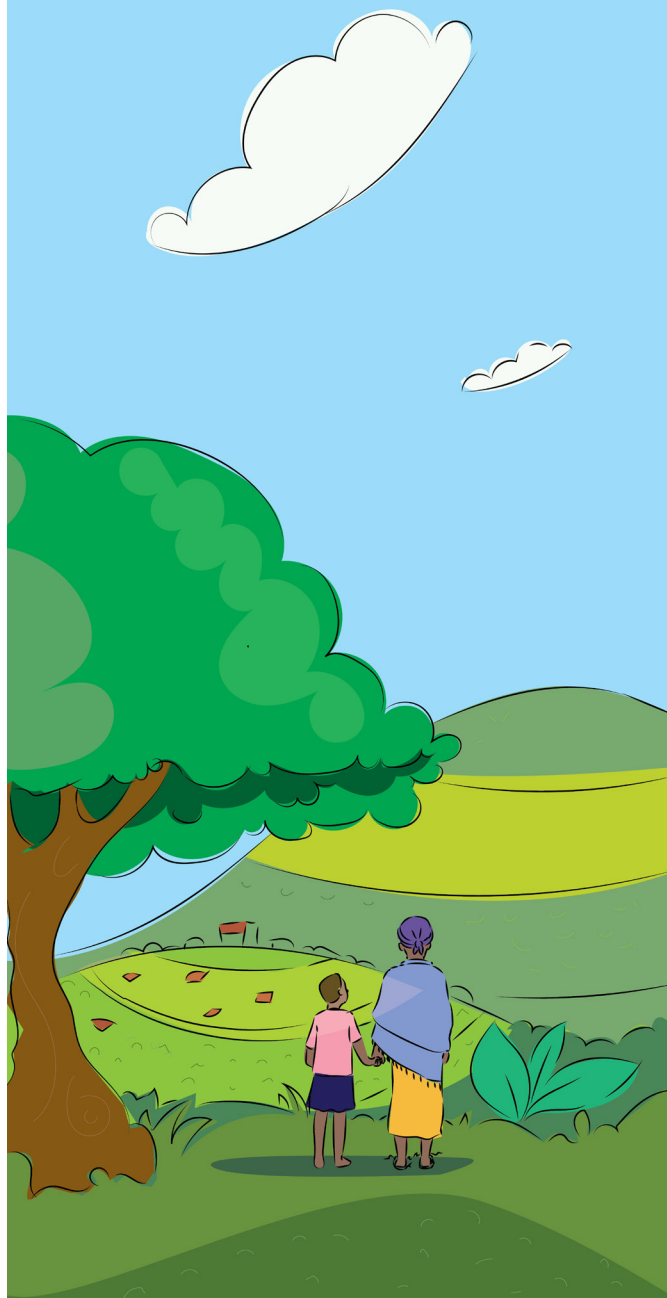
And so, the village thrived once more, its people bound by the resolve to protect their world and honor the balance of nature. The forest, though scarred, began to grow back. The people, now wiser and more joyful, understood the preciousness of what they had restored. The ban on cutting trees for charcoal had been the turning point, the decision that changed everything. It was a new beginning—one rooted in hope, unity, and a deep respect for the land they called home.

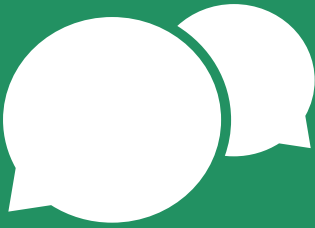
The transformation wasn't quick, nor was it easy. But as the years passed, Matumaini began to look more like its name—"Hope."

One day, a young boy asked his grandmother about the single mango tree that still stood in the center of the village. "Why is it so special?" he asked.

His grandmother smiled and said, "It reminds us of where we came from and what we almost lost. It was under that mango tree that the elders gathered one evening to discuss what had befallen our village. Together, they found a solution to restore a village that had once become a devourer of its own citizens, turning it back into a habitable place. That tree is a reminder to us that if we care for our home, our home will care for us."

The boy nodded, gazing at the tree with awe. Around him, Matumaini thrived once more—proof that even in the wake of destruction, a community united in purpose could create something beautiful.





Let's reflect and take Action.

Having read the story of Matumaini and how the community together overcame the challenges caused by deforestation, here are a set of 10 questions that should help inspire reflection and action on environmental conservation while remaining concise.



1

What were the key human activities in Matumaini that contributed to environmental degradation, and how can you identify similar issues in your own community?

2

How did the villagers' collective effort to restore their environment lead to positive changes? How can your community collaborate to address local environmental challenges?

3

What specific actions, such as reforestation or sustainable farming, can you take to help restore the natural environment in your area?

4

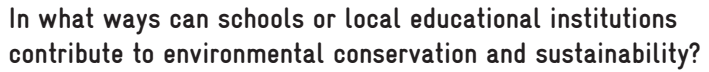
The community engaged youth in environmental efforts. How can you involve young people in local sustainability projects or teach them about environmental responsibility?

5

What lessons can be drawn from Matumaini's story that you can apply to prevent environmental harm in your own community?

6

How can you promote and use renewable energy sources, such as solar or improved cook stoves, to reduce dependency on unsustainable practices like charcoal use?



What long-term actions can you commit to in order to protect your environment for future generations, and how can you encourage others to do the same?

This book was an initiative of Blaze Media with substantial contributions from GIZ Uganda's "Green Team," and the Rotary Club of Gulu City, aimed at raising awareness about the causes, impacts and mitigation measures of climate change and promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships for joint action in forest ecosystem management.

The Green Team Uganda was a task team under the GIZ Sector Network Rural Development (SNRD) Africa's Working Group on Climate and Nature. It was composed of staff from GIZ Uganda's Promoting Rural Development in Uganda (PRUDEV), Better Migration Management (BMM), and Employment Promotion for Women for the Green Transformation in Africa (WE4D) projects.

In collaboration with the Rotary Club of Gulu City, the Green Team Uganda implemented the Northern Uganda Green Schools for Climate Action Project in Gulu, Uganda. This book was developed within the framework of this project. The project piloted a School-Based Tree Nursery Business Model to promote climate change adaptation through tree planting.

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