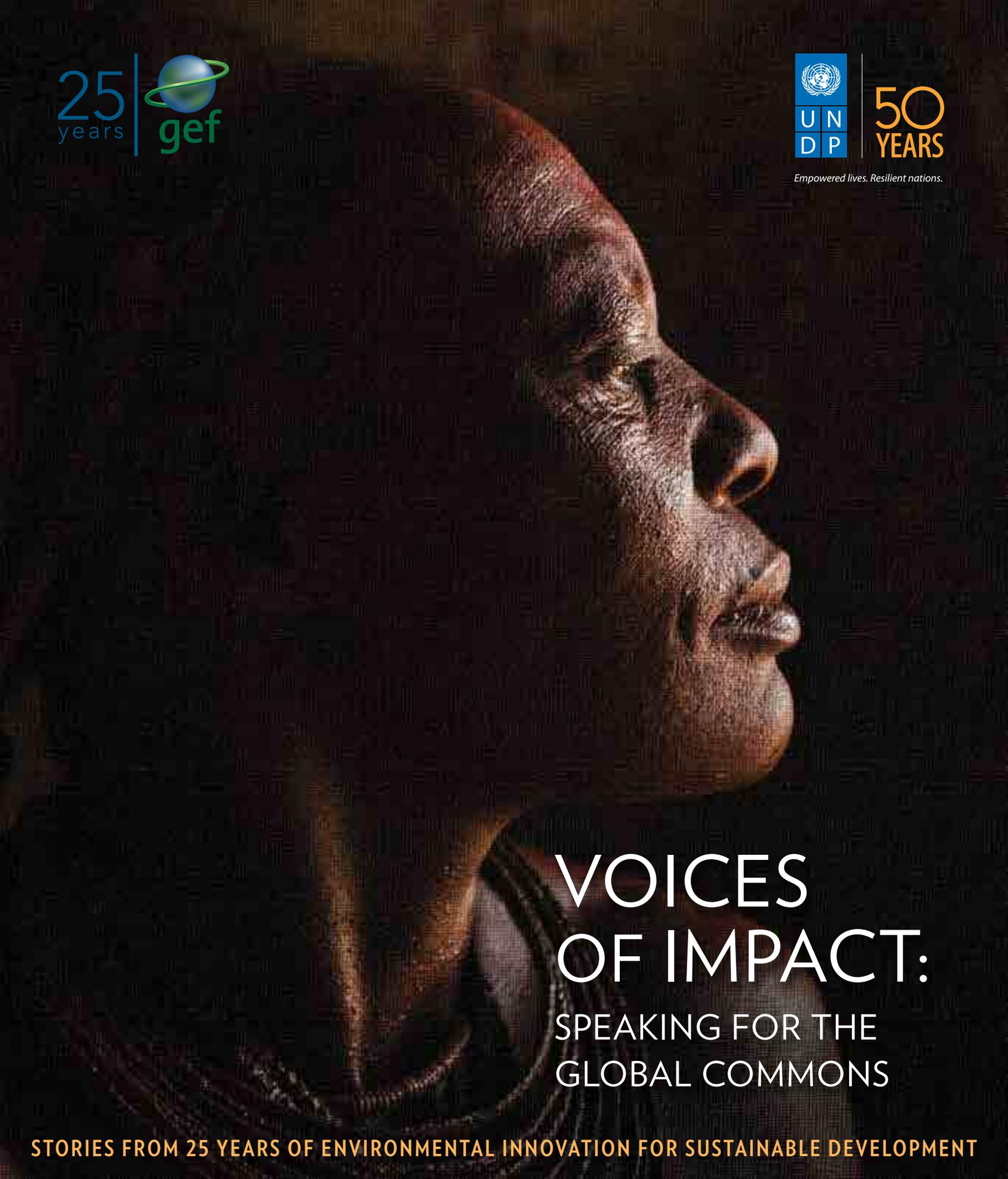




50
YEARS

Empowered lives. Resilient nations.

A close-up, profile photograph of a woman's face, looking upwards and to the right. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of her face against a dark background.

VOICES OF IMPACT:

SPEAKING FOR THE
GLOBAL COMMONS

STORIES FROM 25 YEARS OF ENVIRONMENTAL INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



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Empowered lives. Resilient nations.

UNDP partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone. On the ground in more than 170 countries and territories, we offer global perspective and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations. www.undp.org



The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems. Since then, the GEF has provided over \$15.61 billion in grants and mobilized in excess of \$84.91 billion in additional financing for more than 4237 projects. The GEF has become an international partnership of 183 countries, international institutions, civil society organizations, and private sector to address global environmental issues. www.thegef.org

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EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Adriana Dinu
PUBLICATION CO-ORDINATOR Midori Paxton
MANAGING EDITOR Mandy Cadman
COMPILATION AND EDITING Adriana Dinu, Midori Paxton, Mandy Cadman, Caroline Petersen
REVIEW AND TECHNICAL ADVICE Andrew Hudson, Pradeep Kurukulasuriya, Jacques van Engel, Marcel Alers, Stephen Gold, Nik Sekhran
SUPPORT, PRINTER LIAISON AND PROCUREMENT Estefania Samper, Cathy Maize, Jessie Mee, Erin Charles, Suzy Azafrani Benoliel, Astrid Matias
DESIGN AND ARTWORK Peter Bosman (Guineafolio); pete@guineafolio.co.za
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For a full list of photo credits see page 96.

FRONT COVER Namibian woman

THIS SPREAD Wind turbines, Eastern Cape, South Africa



MESSAGE OF SUPPORT



AS ONE OF THREE FOUNDING PARTNERS of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has contributed significantly to the well-being of our planet's life support systems which are at the heart of the global sustainable development agenda – the stories told by the *Voices of Impact* in this 25th anniversary publication stand as compelling and inspiring evidence of this.

The GEF was established in 1991 to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems. Since its inception, over one third of its grant financing to developing countries has been mobilized by UNDP working with partner countries. These GEF investments have helped to preserve threatened ecosystems and species, build sustainable communities, boost food and water security, address land degradation and develop integrated mechanisms for managing pollution. In close partnership with UNDP, the GEF has also sought to empower women and other vulnerable groups, and respect the dignity, human rights, economies, cultures and traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples.

In this landmark year, which also marks UNDP's 50th anniversary, we are proud to reflect on the successes achieved together. We have made significant progress. But, we also know that there is still much work to do – the global environment continues to deteriorate, threatening the realization of our development ambitions.

Last year, the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement were turning points for the global community. They made clear that protecting the global commons – from land, biodiversity and forests, to the oceans and climate – is essential for sustainable development. And, that we need transformational changes in our energy, urban and land use systems.

Shifting to a low-carbon and resilient trajectory will require co-ordinated, integrated solutions to catalyse the transformation of three key economic systems: energy – how we power our homes, offices and industry, and move goods and people; urban – how we live in cities and build new ones; and land use – how and where we produce food, and what we eat.

Building on the legacy of the past 25 years, as we look to the future, we will work alongside our partners to find bold and imaginative ways to accelerate transformational change, enable new alliances, and create social and economic opportunities to provide the stable planetary conditions necessary for sustainable development, poverty reduction, peace and justice.

The UNDP, as a vital partner, has a pivotal role to play in this ongoing story, as we work together to ensure that individual successes add up to the systematic changes we need to safeguard the global commons for current and future generations. It's the wisest investment we can make.

Dr Naoko Ishii
CEO, Global Environment Facility

FOREWORD

THIS IS A LANDMARK YEAR FOR UNDP, as we celebrate both our own 50th anniversary and the 25th anniversary of our partnership with the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Over the past two and half decades, the results-driven and strategic nature of the GEF-UNDP partnership has contributed to the achievement of high-impact environmental benefits, in support of sustainable development.

As an implementing agency of the GEF, UNDP has supported countries in accessing a total of US\$ 5.8 billion over the years in grants from *the GEF Trust Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund, the Special Climate Change Fund, and the Nagoya Protocol Implementation Fund*. Around the world, this funding has enabled countries to deliver quality results for people and our planet. These investments have helped to transform markets, strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities, and address the root causes of environmental degradation. They have also built the capacity of countries to safeguard their natural capital as the foundation of their overall sustainable development.

At UNDP, we are celebrating these successes with a collection of stories told by the people who have made them possible. Taken together, these *'Voices of Impact'* celebrate 25 years of environmental innovation and development impact which have been enabled by the GEF.

The stories illustrate the wide spectrum of GEF-financed, UNDP-supported programmes. These are stories of individual triumph over adversity; community empowerment; industry-wide capacity development and partnership; collective action at the national level; and multi-country co-operation. Some stories focus on a specific issue in a particular country, some deal with cross-cutting issues in a region, and others describe the impacts of the full portfolio of projects in an entire country.

The achievements described are the result of the collective efforts of thousands of people around the world – without their commitment and hard work, we would have no stories to tell. But, as we reflect on our successes, we are mindful that our world continues to face both new and persistent challenges. The outlook for people and our planet is complex – on the one hand we have climate change, serious conflicts, political turbulence, economic inequality, and planetary boundaries being exceeded. On the other hand, we see an unprecedented global consensus about the best way forward – as expressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

At UNDP we envisage a world in which all people can prosper, societies are more inclusive, and the planet maintains the integrity of its ecosystems and is protected from the worst effects of climate change. This is what guides our work. In strong partnership with the GEF, and other partners, we are committed to helping advance the 2030 Agenda and to supporting countries to turn the vision of long-term prosperity, human development, and environmental well-being into reality.



Helen Clark
Administrator, UNDP



Peruvian women and child

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VOICES OF IMPACT: A PREAMBLE

“STORYTELLING IS PART OF THE FABRIC that holds human societies together – stories connect us to our humanity, providing links to what has been, and a glimpse of what might be to come.

Spanning all 25 years of UNDP’s partnership with the GEF, the stories in this anniversary publication represent a small sample of the thousands that could be told. These stories stand as evidence that our work to protect the health of the planet is bringing about real improvements in people’s lives and changes in the way governments, businesses and civil society think about the environment, develop policies and do their work.

The storytellers include people from all walks of life, including subsistence farmers, civil society leaders, captains of industry, environmental practitioners, renowned academics and government ministers. The common thread that binds their stories together is the message of transformational impact that promises a brighter future.

The topics of their stories vary widely, ranging from strengthening the governance of protected areas, to increasing the resilience of vulnerable communities to climate-induced risks, empowering women through sustainable land management, ridge-to-reef approaches to conserving threatened species and improving local livelihoods, building models for community conservation, partnerships for improved management and governance of oceans, renewable energy solutions for greening the reconstruction of war-damaged countries, and reducing the risks to human and environmental health through improved management of harmful chemicals.

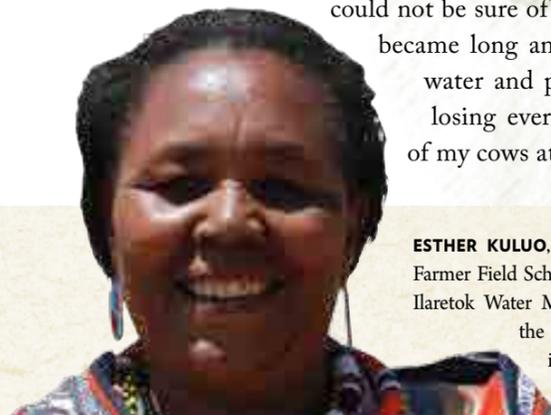
From the foothills of the Himalayas in Bhutan, to the coastal fishing grounds of Cuba, the arid plains of Kenya and the small islands of the South Pacific, the ‘voices’ featured in this book speak of the profound impacts that these projects have had on their own lives, on their communities and institutions, and on the planet itself. The stories speak of strong partnerships involving people and institutions in all sectors of society – these are the *‘Voices of Impact’*, the champions of our shared heritage who are speaking for the global commons. ■

Bringing the land to life

BUILDING GRASSROOTS CAPACITY FOR IMPROVED LAND STEWARDSHIP IN KENYA

“I WAS MARRIED AT A YOUNG AGE – I did not have much say in the matter. After school, I started studying at teachers’ college, but, after only one year, my first child was born and I had to take on my duties as a mother.

As is usual for Maasai, I have always relied on keeping livestock for my livelihood – as much as I might have wished to grow crops, this area is too dry for that. But, relying only on animals gave us many problems. We used to move from one place to another searching for grass for our cattle – finding water became a big challenge, especially during the dry periods. Our cattle and goats grew thin, and some died. It became risky to depend on livestock alone because we could not be sure of the rains, the droughts became long and there wasn’t enough water and pasture. I was afraid of losing everything, so I sold most of my cows at a loss.



ESTHER KULUO, is a member of Ilaretok Farmer Field School, and is Treasurer of the Ilaretok Water Management Committee in the Rift Valley of Kenya. Now in her sixties, Ms. Kuluo is a mother of seven children and resides in Suswa, Narok County.

About two years ago, I was given a new chance. Some project officers came to our community looking for a group of farmers who they could work with. At first it was difficult, because the group was made up only of men – in the Maasai culture, women were not allowed to join the same groups with men. But, the project officers helped us form Ilaretok Farmer Field School (FFS) with 56 members – men and women! We were trained in new ways to farm.

Our lives have been made better in so many ways. We now have a borehole and a water pan for holding rainwater. Before, it would take about four hours to go to the river for water, but now we can get water in a much shorter time. So I have more time to work on the farm, look after my livestock and dig terraces. It is also better for the children – they no longer have to fetch water at the river after school. Instead, they can spend time on their schoolwork – and stay out of trouble!

Before, our land was being depleted of ground cover, and the soil would wash away. Now we can grow grass for our animals – we didn’t know before that grass can be *planted*, we thought it just grows by itself. But the project enlightened us and gave us seeds and I have gratefully taken this up. We have planted fast-growing trees for woodlots, so we no longer cut



Farmer Field School members preparing a demonstration plot for experiential training in Suswa, Narok County

used to get at the market. We can now cater better for household needs such as paying school fees and buying food. I am proud to say that last year I could pay the fees for my last-born child who is at the university.

Since joining the Farmer Field School, we feel safer working together and see good changes in our homes. We have even started a savings group through which we buy utensils for use in our homes.

Women now have a voice! Before, a woman would

not stand and address a gathering of men, but what we have done with the Field School has made it possible for women and youth to be involved in decision-making, both in households and in the community. Our skills and talents have been sharpened and many of our members have even been elected to serve in leadership positions in the community.

I can truly say now: *‘mambo si kama zamani’* (‘things are not like in the past’) – our lives are better.” ■

MAINSTREAMING SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT IN AGRO-PASTORAL PRODUCTION SYSTEMS IN KENYA.

Land degradation is a barrier to sustainable development, especially in drylands, which account for about 80 percent of the land-surface of Kenya. Sustainable Land Management (SLM) is a comprehensive approach to addressing land degradation through improved land stewardship, with benefits for both the environment and the people who depend on it.

Working in support of the Government of Kenya, UNDP has helped develop and implement a project to address chronic poverty, hunger and

land degradation by building capacity for sustainable land management, especially amongst women. The project, of which Ms Kuluo and her community were beneficiaries between 2010 and 2015, worked to improve carbon stocks, promote water conservation and climate-smart agro-pastoral practice in order to enhance food security, build sustainable livelihoods, and restore the ecological integrity of arid and semi-arid landscapes.

The objectives of the project were achieved

through knowledge-based land-use planning and community-based experiential learning using the Farmer Field School model, bringing direct benefits to 11,448 farmers (two thirds of which were women), and indirect benefits to 243,633 community members. Over 100,000 hectares of degraded land were rehabilitated through pasture re-seeding and tree planting. The work was funded by the GEF, with co-finance from the Government of Kenya and civil society partners.

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