

**The Albertine Rift Conservation Society**

# **ARCOS' Nature Based Village (NBV) Model**

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**Produced by ARCOS Network, 2018**

*Collaborative Action for Nature and People*



# I. Introduction

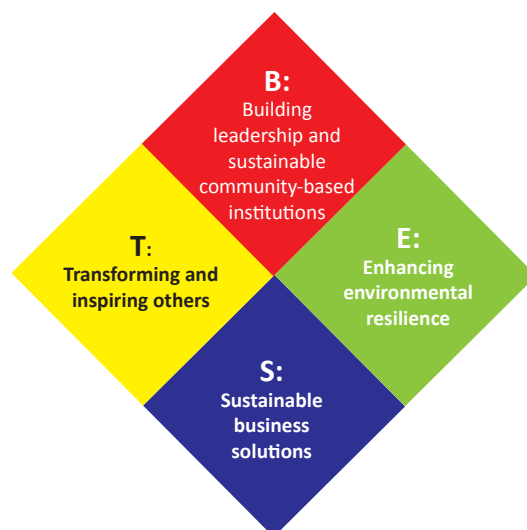


The Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS Network) is a non-governmental organization established in 1995 with a mission “To enhance biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of natural resources through the promotion of collaborative conservation action for nature and people”. ARCOS works with other NGOs, governments, community-based organizations and the private sector to achieve the target pertaining to its mission. Today, ARCOS has programmes extending in the Albertine Rift region, Africa Great Lakes and African Mountains.

ARCOS Network channels its on ground interventions through one of its programmes called “Nature Based Community Enterprises Programme (NBCEs).” The NBCEs Programme aims at promoting conservation and community development by developing good strategies and approaches to enhance community engagement and sense of ownership towards the environment and the improvement of their livelihoods. Our guiding motto for this programme is “partnering for improved livelihoods and environmental sustainability”. Various global movements are rising for sustainable development but the journey towards sound management of natural resources currently seems quite long. Additionally, climate change is affecting the earth in multiple aspects. The major impacts of climate change manifest primarily in the increasing scarcity of natural resources and an intensifying environmental crisis, thus mostly affecting rural communities that highly depend on ecosystems services to survive. Integrating sustainable use of the available resources and restoration of degraded ecosystems in development

agenda remains a responsibility to all development stakeholders including government, development agencies, civil society, private sector and communities. However, the latter need to be educated and empowered financially and technically to ensure successful implementation of on-ground action.

In this regard, ARCOS Network developed an integrated approach named “BEST”, an abbreviation of its four key elements, namely: **B**uilding leadership and sustainable institutions, **E**nhancing environmental resilience, **S**ustainable business solutions, **T**ransforming and Inspiring others.



*Components of ARCOS' BEST Approach*



## II. Elements of an NBV

It is under the “T” component of BEST approach that ARCOS Network in collaboration with local government and community establishes the Nature Based Villages (NBV). ARCOS defines an NBV as a geographically defined village where efforts in integrating environmental resilience and socio-economic development initiatives are concentrated. These villages serve afterwards as model of transformational change toward sustainable environment and livelihoods.

An NBV reflects the following elements:

- **Sound environment management**
- **Socio-cultural system**
- **Economic development**



NBV framework



### a) Environmental management

Through participatory approach, communities in NBVs are involved in identifying environmental threats and in selecting potential solutions to address them. Based on their traditional knowledge and experience, they can tell about changes that occurred over time in their landscapes and socio-economic impacts associated to these changes, as well as suggest potential solutions to address and/or prevent the eventual environmental issues. Communities are the main players to implement and monitor the identified solutions and promote other good practices to enhance environmental resilience in their village and neighbouring villages.

Note that the community groups are empowered through trainings, knowledge exchanges and other technical and financial support throughout this process. Furthermore, communities are provided with technical and financial support to promote climate smart technologies, forest landscape restoration, soil and water management, pollution control, sustainable wetlands management, sustainable agriculture and green energy promotion.



### b) Economic development

Business development and income diversification are also promoted in NBVs. Communities are encouraged and empowered to invest in small business enterprises building on potential value chains in their villages. We support individual/households and community groups (associations or cooperatives) to develop and run sustainable businesses with the aim to eradicate poverty and reverse environment degradation in rural areas. The cooperatives build partnerships with different stakeholders including the local government, private sector, civil society and development partners for successful and long-term impacts.

In addition, the development of local infrastructures is also promoted, and communities are encouraged to participate in the entire process, by providing either in kind contribution or in terms of financial resources.

### c) Improved socio-cultural systems

The socio-cultural aspect is very important in an NBV since it reflects the mindset and behavioural transformation happening within the community. This transformation must be inclusive to involve all categories of community members - women, youth, marginalised and vulnerable people. Furthermore, the socio-cultural components include health, education, gender and equity, traditional/ local seeds conservation, bio-cultural knowledge sharing and cultural arts and entertainment.

#### Knowledge sharing and NBV scalability

One of the more important things in building a capacity within a community is knowledge sharing. It is through peer learning and participatory knowledge exchange that NBV communities in focal villages learn by doing from each other and from their fellows from other villages around the country or neighboring countries. To contribute in accelerating the process, ARCOS facilitates Community-to-Community Exchange (C2CE) at national/ regional level. C2CE brings together representatives from different community groups (cooperatives) operating in the Albertine Rift region. The main objective of C2CE is to enable participants to exchange information and knowledge on best agricultural practices, biodiversity conservation, sustainable energy solutions, value addition as well as cultural exchange.

Depending on resources availability, the C2CE offers an opportunity to community groups to meet a diversity of stakeholders including development partners, CSOs, Government, and private sector through exhibitions and open days.

These open days enable communities to market their products and services and discuss with stakeholders the eventual partnership opportunities to support their initiatives.

The stability, integrity and harmony of the socio-cultural systems of a community determine their engagement and success towards sustainable transformation of their village and neighborhoods.

### III. Nature Based Community Fund (NBCF)

To ensure successful implementation and sustainability of the initiative in an NBV, ARCOS Network in collaboration with local government, communities and other interested partners in the focal villages facilitates the establishment and management of a Nature Based Community Fund (NBCF). NBCF aims to support sustainable development of focal villages (NBVs) and has four components:

- **Small loans (70% of the fund capital):** Given to community members or NBCEs (cooperatives) operating in the focal NBV to implement income generating projects coupled with environment conservation activities.

- **Incentives (5%):** awards given to best performers among village members who integrate sustainable environment and livelihoods practices at household level.
- **Services of common benefit (10%):** the village members sit together and select a project (to be supported by NBCF) that can benefit all the village members in common or the projects that resolve a problem that hinder the development of an NBV or its members.
- **and Monitoring and Evaluation (15%):** This is important to determine whether the performance of an NBCF is in line with its intended objectives (Improving livelihoods and environment sustainability). It is also important to assess if the fund resources are used efficiently and effectively. This process must involve all key stakeholders including the community, local government and ARCOS Network. The system is flexible and open in a way to allow easy and prompt provision of information and feedback. Monitoring is done regularly through phone calls and field visits involving all actors mentioned above. Furthermore, the data collection for the progress of the initiative is done twice a year using a tool comprised of 14 indicators covering all components of the BEST Approach.

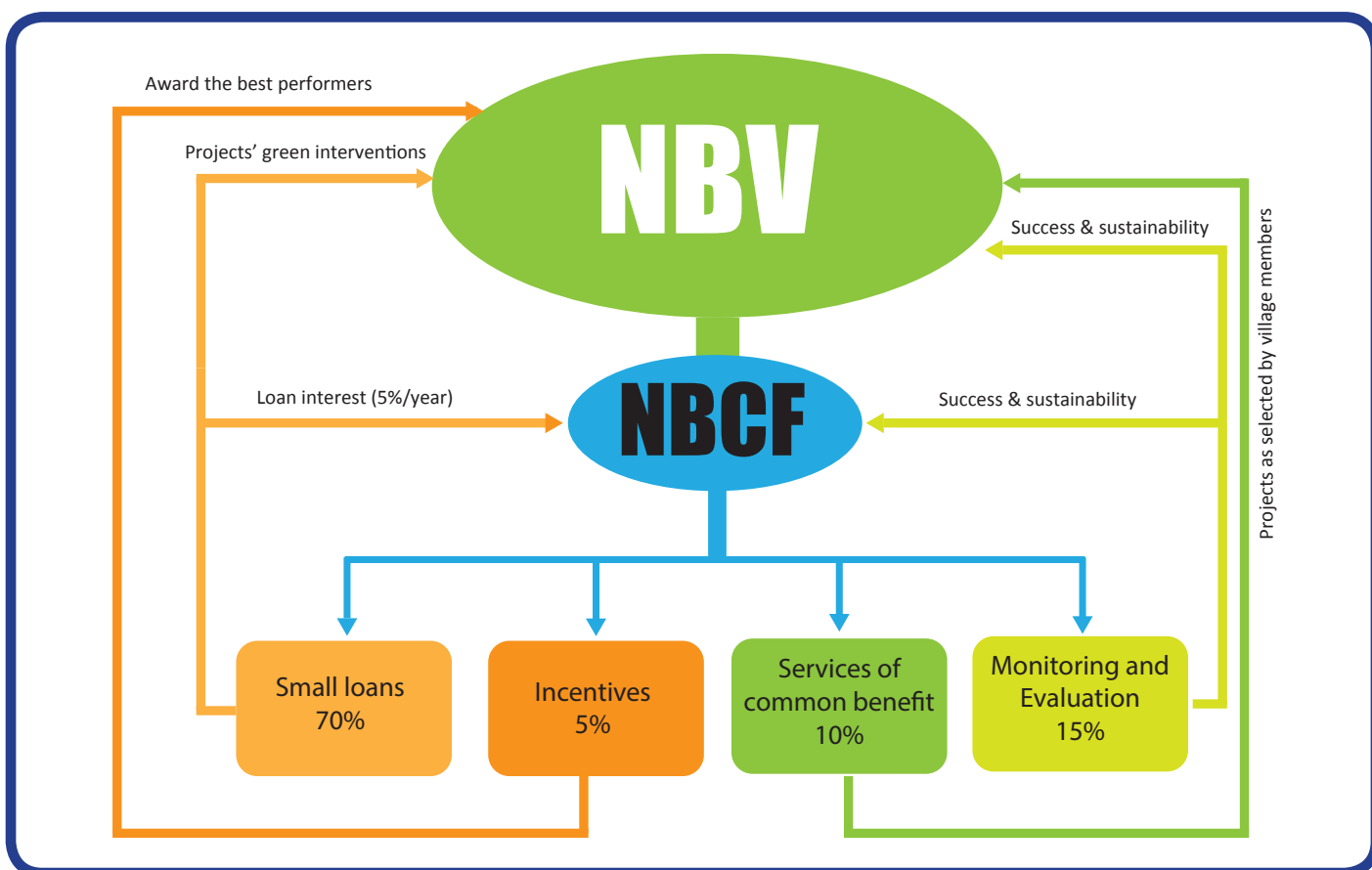
**Note:** To be given a loan, the proposed project must be nature-based and profitable, as well as show its contribution to environmental resilience. The interest rate is 5% but also the pledged environment conservation activities in a project are counted as interest to the loan.



ARCOS staff and NBCF beneficiary during monitoring and evaluation exercise in Bugesera. Photo: ARCOS, 2018



NBCEs explaining what they do during the Community to Community Exchange. Photo: ARCOS, 2017



*Nature Based Community Fund (NBCF) framework*

### a) NBCF governance

The NBCF is a revolving fund established for and managed by the village members. The NBCF's governance is made of three structures:

1. **General Assembly:** This is the main structure of NBCF governance. It is composed by community members in an NBV. All village members are eligible to be members of the NBCF; however, as mentioned in NBCF regulations, they are required to register voluntarily.
2. **Executive Committee:** Is responsible for day to day activities of the NBCF. It is composed by 6 community members elected by the General Assembly.
3. **Advisory Committee:** Composed by 7 members including representative of 1) District; 2) Sector; 3) Cell, 4) Village; 5) NBCE1; 6) NBCE2; and 7) ARCOS Network.

The NBCF scheme is summarized in the above figure

sustainability of focal villages through the BEST Approach. This involves a long process to raise awareness of local communities and build their capacity in terms of technical skills and capital investment through NBCF, which expose them to and incite them to get involved in a diversity of opportunities that afterwards lead them to sustainable development.

Stakeholders collaboration is required at every step of the entire process to ensure that potential actions are decided and implemented fairly and effectively, and all key parties play their roles in harmony and share the same vision.

The vision of ARCOS through this initiative is to contribute to building sustainable villages at national and regional level. So far, ten pilot NBVs were established in western and eastern Provinces of Rwanda. Six (6) among these NBVs were established in Rutsiro, Bugesera and Kirehe district with initial funding from the Rwanda Environment and Climate Change Fund (FONERWA) in 2016 and the other four (4) were established in Rutsiro district in partnership with World Resources Institute (WRI) in 2018. This is a process that may require time and a lot of efforts, however through collaborative action, the initiative can be supported and scaled further.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Local communities are very important players in the development process. In recognizing this and attempting to assist them in their progress, ARCOS Network uses the Nature Based Village model. It engages communities in planning and implementing good practices to ensure socio-economic development and environmental





**Do you want to join us and create more NBVs around the country? Contact us**

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*Partnering for improved livelihoods and environmental sustainability*