

# Pilgrimage to a Kenyan Shrine Forest Kaya: a Congo-Japan Joint Research on Ecotourism among the Digo People of the Coast Province

「ケニア東海岸・聖なるカヤの森への旅——ディゴ民族のエコツーリズムに関するコンゴ・ケニア・日本協同調査レポート」

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*Maana kwa ufupi katika Kiswahili*  
(Swahili abstract)

*Mwaka wa 2002, mwezi wa tisa, Mw. Yuji Ankei (Chuo Kikuu cha Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan) Mw. Takako Ankei (Kakamega Environmental Education Program, Japan Headquarters) na Bw. John Kahekwa (Polepole Foundation, D. R. Congo) walisafiri pamoja karibu na Mombasa Kenya. Walikutana na utamaduni wa Wadigo unaoitwa kaya. Kaya ni tongo la babu zao ndani ya msitu. Serikali iliingiza makaya ya Mijikenda katika mali ya kitaifa (National Monuments) kwa mwaka wa 1992. Lakini misitu ya makaya yenyewe ilianza kuharibiwa sana na majengo ya mahoteli makubwa ya utalii au kuenea kwa mashamba ya wenyeji. Viongozi vijana wa Wadigo waliona kwamba makaya yatamalizika kabisa baada ya miaka kumi au ishirini tu, na kwa hivyo waliomba wazee wasimamizi wa makaya kuwaruhusu kuingiza watalii ndani ya Kaya Kinondo. Wazee wanaoabudu sana mizimu ya kaya walikataa mwanzoni. Lakini wameweza kukubaliana kuanzisha utalii mpya unaiotwa “ecotourism”. Wageni wanashauriwa kufuata sheria za kaya: kutovaa kofia ndani ya kaya, kutovuta sigara, kutopiga picha za makaburi na viwi hivi. Watalii wanafurahi kujifunza utamaduni wa Wadigo na kuona aina mbalimbali za miti na mimea yasiyoonekana nje ya kaya. Wenyeji wakifaulu kuendesha utalii huu katika makaya yao, watawapa jinsi ya kujitegemea. Wataweza pia kuhifadhi misitu yao, na wataweza kufufusha utamaduni wa babu zao, na wataweza kuwajulisha wananchi na watalii wote kwamba faida*

*kubwa ya kuheshimu na kutukuza desturi na dini mbalimbali ndio msingi wa amani.*

## Backgrounds for cooperative studies

In September 2002 the authors visited Kenya to study the present status of Kenya’s endangered forests and so-called “community-based” conservation of these forests through the possibility of ecotourism (Ankei, 2002).

Since 1998, Yuji Ankei and Takako Ankei began visiting forest conservation and ecotourism projects in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. They visited more than a dozen locations where there were or had been some projects for conservation.

We, Yuji, Takako and John, first met in Yakushima Island, Japan in August 2001, when we attended a fieldwork seminar for Japanese students and a workshop for local ecotour guides. We were fortunate to welcome four African conservationists from Kenya (Mr. Wilberforce Okeka) and from Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC (John Kahekwa, Dr. August Kanyunyi Basabose, and Mr. David Bisimwa). Refer to Ankei & Ankei (2004) for more detail of our experience in Yakushima. A second meeting of this Kenya-DRC-Japan cooperation was held in Kenya in 2002, and this is a brief report of what we witnessed on the East Coast of Kenya to the south of Mombasa, its second biggest town.

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### Purposes of study

Our visit to Kenyan sacred forests was our first experience to conduct all daily activities together for so long a period, including meals, traveling by car, interviews, and almost perpetual discussions. Our common purpose of this journey was three-fold.

- 1) To find out a way to encourage local peoples to co-exist with the vanishing tropical forests (Ankei, 2002),
- 2) to shift our style of field surveys in area studies, often blamed by local people as arrogant and unfair (Ankei, 2002), to a more sustainable one, and
- 3) to challenge to change our lifestyle itself which causes environmental bankruptcy, war and terrorism in today's world.

On our arrival in the Kakamega Forest in early September 2002, we enjoyed staying with Mr. Wilberforce Okeka whom we have not met for a year since our last meeting in Yakushima. We agreed that our joint research had been quite fruitful and

encouraging as to convince us that humankind can understand and love each other regardless of their cultural and physical differences<sup>1)</sup>. Mr. Okeka invited us to plant tree seedlings of Kakamega Forest as a memory of our Kenya-Congo-Japan joint research, and we all prayed for its conservation and revival (Fig. 1).



Fig.1 : Transplanting a tree seedling to memorize our visit in Kakamega Forest: from left to right, John Kahekwa, Takako Ankei, and Mr. Wilberforce Okeka

Discussion on the relationship between conservation and religions of local inhabitants was also an important theme in our daily conversation during our journey. John and Mr. Wilberforce Okeka are priests in Christian churches, and most of the Digo people are reportedly Muslims. Takako and Yuji are rather trying to be animists than being traditional Buddhists (Ankei, 2004). The following is an example of John's words concerning the messages from the Holy Spirit, for which Yuji and Takako were very grateful.

### Africa as the source of blessings

Yesterday was a brilliant day in a church of Kakamega. I was invited to preach, and when I was preaching, the Holy Spirit was very strong in that church because they believe in God very much. And when I was preaching, I was inspired by the Holy Spirit that told me to transfer this message to you.

I was obliged to tell you this message. I kept quiet, and didn't tell you directly. But every two hours, the Holy Spirit was reminding me of this message. The whole night I was suffering, and this morning I pass you this message:

"Africa is the source of your life. The source of the blessings always comes from Africa. Africa is

your second nationality, and Africa is your second home after Japan. Think of Africans always, and talk about Africans. When you talk of something, mix it with African news and African life, and people will be more attracted to your speech. Present Africa wherever you go. Africa is the source of your blessings.”

#### Methods of study

Narratives were recorded either on field notes, or with a video camera/recorder. Most of the narratives were in our common language Swahili (both Congolese and Coast dialects), and only a portion was in English mixed with a bit of French. In this report they are all translated into English. Vernacular names in Digo language were collected through interviews, and Latin names were added to these vernacular names based on identifications provided by trained guides and reference books as Beentje (1994) and Maundu *et al.* (1999).

Japanese scholars and students have conducted numerous field researches in Africa. But Africans have much less access to field surveys in Japan. Our stay in Yakushima Island in the year 2001 was a rare example in which scholars and conservationists from Kenya, DRC, and Japan jointly studied and discussed the issues on ecotourism and conservation of Yakushima (Japan), Kakamega Forest (West Kenya), and Kahuzi-Biega National Park (East DRC). Then, in turn, what can we do anew together in Africa? In fact, in the year 2000, we had already started a Kenya-DRC-Japan joint-research in Kakamega Forest and other endangered forests in Kenya and Uganda with the initiative of Mr. Wilberforce Okeka (Chairman of KEEP, Kakamega Environmental Education Program) and the Friends of KEEP in Japan. Polepole Foundation decided to send Dr. August Kanyunyi Basabose, a primatologist to participate in that joint research (Ankei & Ankei, 2002). Thus, the research in 2002 was the third trial for our collaboration (Fig. 2).

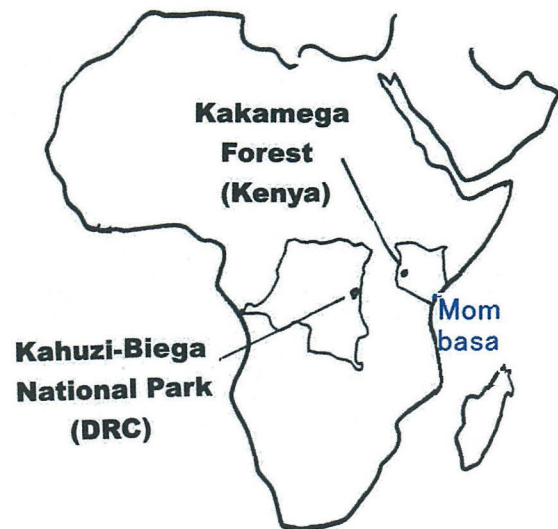


Fig.2 : Map of the study site

The local knowledge published in this paper belongs primarily to the guides and the elders who kindly told us the secrets of their forests. So, it should be handled quite carefully. Concerning these ethical issues of field surveys, a code written by Maundu *et al.* (1999: iv) seemed to us quite appropriate and worthy of quoting.

Be advised that the indigenous traditional knowledge contained in this volume has been given in good faith as a contribution to the common good and furtherance of mutual understanding and the preservation of all life on our planet and not to be used for personal or commercial gain and must be treated with respect and used only for the purpose for which it was “gifted”. Anyone who reads this volume assumes the moral and ethical obligations implied by this statement.

#### Situation of the East Coast of Kenya and the *kayas*, sacred groves

Figure 3 shows a map of national parks and game reserves on the east coast of Kenya to the south of Mombasa (after UNEP, <http://www.colobustrust.org/>). We can see that there remain only small patches of forest in this area except for the Shimba Hills National Park. Tiny patches correspond to *kayas*, or sacred groves of Digo and Duruma peoples. In today’s East Africa, scattered forests are endangered by

clearings for fields and for pastures, and on the east coast, by the development of many deluxe resort hotels (Anonym, 2000).

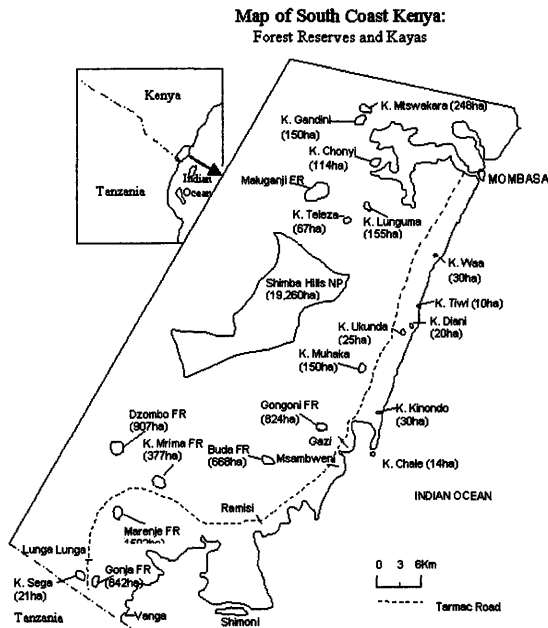


Fig.3 : Map of South Coast Kenya. National Park, Forest Reserves, and Kayas (after <http://www.colobustrust.org/>)

The following is an explanation given by a young local leader for conservation, Mr. Hemed concerning their history.

We Digo people belong to an ethnic group called Mijikenda. It means “ nine villages”, and comprises from north to south the following 9 peoples dwelling the coast and its inland of Kenya: Chonyi, Jibana, Kauma, Kambe, Rabai, Ribe, Giriyaama, Duruma, and Digo. Digo people also live on the northeastern part of Tanzania. Mijikenda peoples are believed to have lived in Shungwaya, which was on the coast of today’s Somalia. Mijikenda and Galla people fought each other about 600 years ago, began to flee to the south. Our ancestors crossed the Tana River. Digo were the first to migrate and arrived southernmost part of today’s Mijikenda territory. Duruma and Digo peoples live in Kwale District on the southern coast of Mombasa, and the other seven peoples remained in Kilifi District, on the northern coast of this city.

Mijikenda people found refuge in the coastal forest, and constructed their compounds

comprising houses, cattle fences, and burial sites. Mijikenda people called their villages in the forest *kaya*. *Kaya* means “home” or “village” in our languages. The most important for a *kaya* and its inhabitants is a magical pot called *fungo*, which contains secret charms for protection. The first settlement in Kwale District is believed to be *Kaya Kwale*, and the second is *Kaya Kinondo* to which my clan belongs. Kinondo is a place name.

Later, near the end of the 19th century, we began to be dispersed from the original Kayas, and formed secondary kayas as *Kaya Ukunda*, *Kaya Diani*, *Kaya Waa*, and so on.

In kayas we can clearly see the site of the main village and tombs even today. *Fungo*, or pots of charms are still in kayas, and continue to have their magical powers of protection.

Scholars have been interested in the fact that the Swahili people<sup>2)</sup> also have oral traditions that a place called Shungwaya was their homeland. Some of them insist that the migrations of today’s Mijikenda people may have begun between 16 and 17 centuries, much later than this oral tradition. Most of the Mijikenda peoples continue to worship their ancestral spirits, but the Digo are much influenced by Islamic beliefs, and a census reported that more than 90% of them are Muslims (Nurse and Spear, 1985).

Mijikenda are the indigenous peoples, and have often been economically dominated by Swahili people, and other politically dominant ethnic groups of the highland.

We remembered that a series of violent attacks took place in the Coast Province, in the Likoni-Kwale area, from August to November 1997. Precise figures are unavailable and estimates of fatalities vary from 70 to as many as 1,000. Many more were injured and their homes or businesses destroyed. The threat of further violence displaced 100,000-200,000 people (Mazrui, 1997; Mazrui, 1998; Brown, 2002). In this sense, the conservation endeavors of the inhabitants of the Coast of Kenya might somewhat resemble with John Kahekwa’s experience of maintaining Polepole Foundation in the midst of a prolonged civil war that took place after 33 years of Mobutu’s dictatorship in

DRC, we thought. Further, it was rather traumatic for local people that raiders used one of the *kaya* groves as their military base, and the policemen and soldiers entered it to chase them during the Likoni Crisis in 1997. Thus, Digo people have been put in economic and political difficulties, which also brought about a crisis for environmental and religious backgrounds of their *kayas*.

### Mombasa and Diani Beach

The atmosphere is quite different in Mombasa from highlands like Nairobi. Abundant coconut trees tell us that we are facing the Indian Ocean. Palm leaf thatched houses are scattered in fields with tropical fruits. Men walk slowly in their white robes of Muslims, and some women conceal their colorful dresses in a black cloth called *buibui*. The habit of wearing *kanga*, colorful clothes having Swahili sayings on them, is still alive among many women.

From Mombasa we took the Likoni ferry to the south, and after a drive of 29 kilometers, we came to the office of CFCU of National Museums of Kenya. On the beach there were many deluxe resort hotels, we asked the price of several beach hotels, but we could not afford the price of 150-500 US dollar per room per night, which could surpass the annual per capita income of an average Kenyan citizen. These were for Europeans and Americans who come to enjoy an exotic stay on the white beach (Fig. 4). We were surprised to find a local newspaper published in the German language<sup>3)</sup>.



Fig.4 : Nearby deluxe beach hotels

### CFCU and its local staffs

Before our departure for Mombasa, we visited National Museum of Kenya in the Museum Hills of Nairobi, and saw Mr. Patrick Maundu, an ethnobotanist. He told us that he had more and more interest in the scattered sacred forests in Kenya. Since sacred groves of Mijikenda People were well known, we asked him to introduce us to local project leaders for guide and discussion. It is reported that there have been severe pressures against the conservation of *kaya* forest (<http://www.earthwatch.org/europe/limbe/tradvalues.html>).

According to the information given by Mr. Maundu, Mr. Kimaru Elias was the key person to initiate the *Kaya Kinondo* Ecotourism Project. He studied ecology and conservation in Nairobi University and graduated from it. He returned home and is now a tourism officer for the Coastal Forest Conservation Unit of National Museums of Kenya in collaboration with WWF.

We met another young man, Mr. Hemed Mohamed Mwafujo in the office of CFCU. He was a supervisor for *Kaya Kinondo* Conservation and Development Group, and worked for the *Kaya Kinondo* Community Ecotourism Project with National Museums of Kenya. We also had a chance to talk with Mr. Juma O. Lumumbah, the project officer of CFCU.

We introduced ourselves. John talked of the difficulty of conservation when there are no more tourists visiting the National Park because of civil wars going on in his country; Yuji about his adoptive father and his family in DRC; and Takako talked of her study on the rich local knowledge of plants in a village of DRC.

CFCU projects seemed to be quite active and scientific; they have a nursery in which they grow seedlings of endemic or endangered plants in used coconut shells as pots (Fig. 5). Dried plant specimens are prepared and stored for identification and scientific studies. The system of keeping the specimens dry and protect them from humidity was strikingly simple and appropriate; they installed small electric lamps beneath the specimens (Fig. 6).



Fig.5 : Nursery of CFCU



Fig.6 : Plant specimens kept dry over small electric lamps

### Regulations of Kaya Kinondo

Mr. Hemed began explaining the outline of the kayas of Mijikenda people, and the rules that visitors of Kaya Kinondo should observe:

On the arrival of white men, people ceased to live inside the kaya forest, elders still continued to visit kayas for their prayers. On the contrary, younger generations no more believed in the ancestral spirits of their kayas and destruction of the kaya forest began. Trees of kaya forest were cut down; it was divided into plots for sale, and bought by resort hotels and people who needed fields to cultivate.

Elders began their endeavors to conserve their kayas. They first approached NMK (National Museums of Kenya), and Kayas and their forest in Mijikenda territory were registered as national monuments under the supervision of NMK in 1992. At the same time, CFCU (Coastal Forest Conservation Unit of NMK) was founded and it signed a contract for conservation with the elders. In spite of such registration and contract, it was evidently not enough. There has been no budget to construct fences around the kaya, or to pay salaries for patrols. Cutting trees of kayas became illegal and people could theoretically be arrested and brought to court for violating protective laws. But in this way, local people would never prefer to conserve the forest protected by the government.

In 2001, we began a pilot ecotourism project of Kaya Kinondo in collaboration with NMK, WWF and many other organizations. We have two goals of conservation: we should respect our tradition and save it from being abandoned, and should conserve kaya forest from disappearing. If there will be no kaya forest in the future, we will suffer from the loss of our tradition and the loss of mild weather we enjoy today.

Women also organized six self-help groups. They make handicrafts to be sold to tourists. These self-help groups belong to an umbrella group KKCDG (Kaya Kinondo Conservation and Development Group). KKCDG handles these crafts and receives 10% of the income. This money will be used to help construct dispensaries, schools, and digging wells

for better quality water supply. I myself was chosen by the council of elders and was nominated as a supervisor for KKCDG.

Kaya Kinondo has a surface of 30 hectares. In our studies so far, we have found 187 species of trees. Among these species, some are endemic to this area<sup>4)</sup>. Mammals found in Kaya Kinondo are five species of monkeys, wild pigs, suni, and dikdik. There are also some fifty species of butterflies.

We welcome students for the course of training for conservation works. A student is sent from the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya, which is supported by Japanese and other funds. We have 2000 dried specimens of coastal plants, and we are preparing more. We utilize used coconut shells as flower pots.

Kaya Kinondo has ancient footpaths our ancestors created. Every footpath has its own name, and has been used exclusively by members of respective clans belonging to the kaya. I myself belong to the clan of Mwachuma. The senior-most clan is Mbega, which means *Colobus* monkeys, and our spiritual leaders are chosen from this clan. Other clans are Dzugwe and Mwachitoro.

Kaya Kinondo sacred forest is open according to schedules determined by traditional Digo calendar. Digo's week comprises four days instead of seven. Every four days Kaya Kinondo is closed, and nobody can access it.

A poster was shown in the office under the title "Visit Kaya Kinondo Sacred Forest." Here is an extract from the poster that shows the regulations.

1. For the respect of the sacred nature of the site, your security and better enjoyment, you must see the forest with a local guide/Elder. They are prepared, know the sites and general locations and will provide information that is unforgettable.
2. Respect the trails and follow their directions. Do not leave them.
3. This natural and cultural resource that we protect in the forest does not belong to anyone in particular, it is a part of the biological equilibrium of the planet and is for everyone to enjoy. Do not take anything from the forest independently no

matter how small or insignificant it seems to you. The forest receives hundreds of visitors each year and if everyone took a leaf, a rock, a flower or an insect, your children and their descendants would not be able to enjoy the richness as you have.

4. For most of their lives, the animals in the refuge hear only the sound of the forest. The human voice can be traumatic to animals just as a lion's roar would be to you, even if it was not intended to have a negative effect. If you keep from making unnecessary voices, you will discover the magic of sounds of the forest dwellers.
5. Do not leave trash in the forest!
6. In the forest you will become attracted by countless organisms which catch your attention. Remember that if it is not possible to capture your objectives with your photo lens, record in your memory and you will have it always.
7. Keep in mind that when you visit the refuge, your freedom ends where Nature begins. This balance of nature is indispensable to maintain life and evolution. Make your visit become body and tool for this process. Your footprints should be the only evidence of your happy visit.
8. Remember you are visiting a sacred forest, put on modest clothing that are respectful to the sacredness of the site and which will protect you while in the forest.

According to Mr. Hemed, visitors will be given supplementary information concerning these rules and regulations if necessary.

No caps or hats should be worn in the kaya forest. Short clothes of women are not accepted. Dark clothes are recommended. *Kaniki*, or black cloth may be lent to help tourists clothe themselves properly.

No smoking. No hugging or kissing. There are no toilets inside the forest.

Pictures are prohibited in the central parts of the kaya where there are tombs of the ancestors.

These regulations corresponded exactly to what the Japanese have observed when they enter shrines and temples. When we visited a highly conserved primary forest in Yakushima in 2001, we did practically the

same thing, and we even took off our shoes and socks before entering it. The use of local calendars different from the global one may be quite useful to let foreigners know and respect local cultural values. We agreed to these rules and praised the way in which they make the tourist learn the local systems.

### Prospects of the project

Mr. Kimaru came while Mr. Hemed was explaining, and he commented on the background of this project of sacred forest ecotourism.

Here in Mombasa, local people live in miserable poverty. At only one kilometer on the beach there are millionaires who own gorgeous resort hotels and rich tourists from all over the world. Children go to the beach and live like street children, begging and cheating tourists. Do you think that such a situation is fair or not? When I was a boy, I participated in global coastal clean-up campaign. We came to Coca-Cola company, and asked them to help us with something to drink, but the reply was no. They said that they pay tax, and why should they give more. But their tax goes to Nairobi.

Recently I had a chance to visit Costa Rica for three weeks and saw that local people got money from ecotourism, and by paying only one dollar each from their income, they raised funds for schools and hospitals. I learnt that tourism, development, conservation, and peace could be one thing if wisely managed.

I studied ecology but not tourism in university. I would like for Hemed and Elder Mnyenze to explain you about the project of Kaya Kinondo. I hope that you will see what is going on here. Hopefully, Congolese, Kenyans, and Japanese could help each other. Please tell us what you saw in different countries.

Our project is not very old. If it were not for the National Museums of Kenya, our project would not have started. It was made clear that conservation must sustain itself. However, we knew that the budget for national parks or national monuments would not be enough because many people live around the Kaya forest and it would be quite

difficult for them to conserve the forest without some income to help them. We say that hungry people cannot conserve. He must make charcoal, for example, to get something to eat today. We cannot tell people to refrain from killing animals that destroy their fields. Animals finish their yields, and wardens of National Park tell them not to kill them. This means nothing to local people. And if people are hungry, they cannot learn to conserve. Kaya Forests were gazetted as a national monument, but it was not sufficient. As in Japan, our tradition and customs are losing their power of influence. It is being forgotten because people go to church, send their children to schools. They no more behave like elders have behaved. We see that in only two decades, there will be no elders who know our tradition, and then who will practice our customs? That is why we need a sustainable project to conserve our forest. And youngsters should learn that the Kaya is important for us to pray, and at the same time to get some income from it. The income will help us to have better water supply, hospitals, and schools. They will realize that Kaya Forests help them to develop. Then people will stop cutting down trees in the Kaya.

Ecotourism, its background is education. If we can manage to make them realize that these trees are very important because they are seen nowhere other than here, and that they bring us income through ecotourism. We go to hotels, schools, and tourism companies to let them understand the importance of kaya forests. Our kaya forests will remain if many people understand their importance. This is a pilot project whose purpose is to verify if it works. If it is successful, we have other kayas nearby, and we will be able to apply our experience to other Kayas. From Kaya Kinondo, Diani and Ukunda will follow. Another reason to develop other kaya projects is to limit the maximum number of tourists visiting a certain kaya. If there are more tourists, we will be able to send them to other kayas. Our pilot project will continue three years, and one and a half years have already passed. At first stage, we organized Kaya Kinondo Conservation and Development Group, and we endeavored hard to



make the members well informed. This year we have begun introducing tourists in the Kaya. We have begun receiving income, and the money can now be used for construction. We have built a guest house, which you will see tomorrow. Different from mass tourism, we do not receive a lot of money. So, we must look for many different ways to earn income. We think of introducing bees for apiculture in the forest, mamas will sell their hand-made souvenirs to tourists, and so on. After one year, we will sum up all the income and probably we will know that this forest will have brought us a million shilling or at least several thousands. This is what we are planning now.

We have many difficulties because we are at the beginning. We hope that you will help us with your knowledge. It is new and is not known by many people. Many tourists visit Mombasa and here Diani because of beaches. They want to be suntanned. Kenya is famous for wildlife. But we say that you can learn customs and history of the Digo people. This idea is quite new to people and as yet it is difficult to attract tourists. They do not know what Kaya is. Another difficulty exists in members. To make them learn of something needs a lot of time.

We wish to put old Digo utensils, but the interior of the Museum is not yet finished.

Women have prepared tools for nearby markets. Or they exchange their goods for chickens instead of money. If we bring tourists, they are a new market for women, and they need to increase the quality of their products. We need to train them to make handicrafts of better finish. This is another difficulty, and we are looking for places where they can get appropriate training. And we have a problem of training guides. Bringing tourists and make them see is not sufficient as ecotourism. They should be explained by guides, and understand well and ask questions. So guides must know very well trees, animals, local customs, and history. And it will be recommended that they can speak many languages as German and French. There are boys on the beach who can salute in German, French, or Japanese, but explaining in ecotourism needs far more profound knowledge and learning than beach

guides. Apprentices for guides must have zeal to learn well. Although our project is very young, we believe that it will be self-sustaining in a year, and will need no help from outside. This is the line along which we are planning to develop ecotourism in Kaya Kinondo. You are welcome. Tomorrow we will help each other in the Kaya Forest, and will discuss on your programs to visit other sites according to what you wish.

#### A visit to Kaya Kinondo

Next morning, we were allowed to visit Kaya Kinondo, about 10 kilometers to the south of the office of CFCU.

At the entrance of the Kaya Kinondo, a plate was nailed on a tree (Fig.7).



Fig.7 : A plate for a National Monument

It read as follows: National Museums of Kenya. Notice. Kaya Kinondo. This area is a Declared National Monument under the Antiquities & Monuments Act 1983 (CAP 215) . Prohibited any dumping, cutting, burning, defacing, or any other activity that imperils the preservation of this sacred site. There was also a signpost of Kaya Kinondo Sacred Forest Ecotourism set up by the local community (Fig.8).

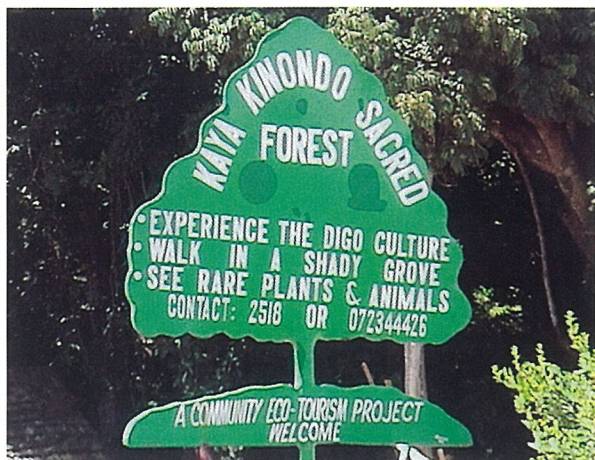


Fig.8 : A signpost of community ecotourism on the entrance of Kaya Kinondo

Mr. Kimaru and Mr. Hemed introduced us to the Elder Mnyenze who was to guide us in the Kaya Kinondo. Elder Abudallah Ali Mnyenze, born in 1932, is the chairman of the Kaya Kinondo Self Help Group, and head of the Kwale Kayas Elders Council.

Takako was helped to wear a black cloth *kaniki* on her trousers (Fig. 9).

He began his speech this way:



Fig.9 : Takako in black cloth and John

Today's guests understand Swahili very well, and we will talk in Swahili and expect to help each other.

This is our sacred forest, Kaya Kinondo. I am its chairman of the council of elders for this Kaya. Five clans are affiliated to this Kaya Kinondo. There are other Kayas: Kaya Nzuni, which is rather destroyed, Kaya Kinondo Ngarani, Kaya Timbwe, Kaya Umoni, and Kaya Chale, this last is located in the highland. But this Kaya Kinondo is the very Kaya in which our ancestors first lived when we migrated from the north. I will explain you better when we will be in the center of this Kaya. Where our ancestors came from, and where they lived, and what they did, and so on. I will explain and you will see them.

At the entrance of this forest, it looks closed with plants, but inside the floor is clear with scattered big trees, as if it were mowed regularly.

This is a new footpath we prepared for ecotourism. At the entrance, there is our museum in construction, and a hut for selling souvenirs made by our women. The place in between two buildings is for welcoming guests with traditional dance and music.

Traditionally, this Kaya Kinondo has four gates or entrances. The first gate is around here, and has been used by families having the names of Mbega, Mwatamba, Mwangogo, and Mwachimundzu. The second gate was at the beach. Since this tarmac road was constructed, the forest below this road was divided into small plots and these plots were sold out in 1975. Now we are obliged to enter from this road. Families Mwachuma, Mnyaza, and Mwanjama use the second gate. The third gate exists to the north in the Kinondo-Chale village, has been used by two families, Dzugwe and Mwachilahu. And from the opposite side is the fourth gate. Only the family Mwachitoro uses it. But the family of Elder Mboni moved to Kaya Dzombo of Giriya people to the north, his family is still counted among us because he was born here. Thus, a total of eleven seats are registered for eleven local families in this Kaya.

Kaya means a village in our language of Mijikenda. Ancestors lived in it, but it became difficult to find land to cultivate, they began to disperse to build their houses in the outskirts of the kaya forest itself. Even if people no more live in the Kaya, the custom of praying in it still persists.

We still come to the Kaya in occasion of prayer. We pray for a variety of things. We pray for rainfall during a drought, and we pray for good fishing. If you want to make your house near the Kaya, you also ask for oracles. For a prayer in the Kaya, we sacrifice a black chicken, a black goat, and a black ox. We sprinkle sesame seeds on their bodies after butchering. We may also pray for troubles of a family level: we may ask the spiritual leader to pray to stop quarrelling or injures. We give him a black chicken as an offering.

I will tell you the background for the regulations of this Kaya. We are not allowed to hunt animals in the Kaya. If a game runs into the Kaya, we stop following it. When we enter for prayer and rituals, we take off our shoes, shirts and hats. But for tourist visit, we only ask you to take off you hats. Don't smoke cigarettes. And there is a place where photographs are prohibited. There is a very old tree, and if you wish to take its picture, please follow the direction we show you to refrain from taking the prohibited objects. Mr. Kimaru will also explain inside. I am not going to explain only by myself until my throat gets dry.

You are welcome to the Kaya Kinondo. I will take a whip, because the leader is supposed to hold a whip when guiding others in this Kaya.

My relative who was in charge of the Kaya rituals deceased in June 2002, and we have not yet chosen his successor. People wanted that I succeed him, but I refused because I have too many jobs to do outside the Kaya.

#### A guided walk in Kaya Kinondo

During our walk in Kaya Kinondo, Elder Mnyenze told us of the secrets of plants and history, and Mr. Kimaru and Mr. Hemed added scientific knowledge

according to what we questioned (Fig. 10).



Fig.10 : Mr. Hemed (left) and Elder Mnyenze (center) as guides

So, the following is an extract of what these three guides informed us during our walk in Kaya Kinondo. As we met with some trees of interest, they were explained on the spot.

**Kimaru:** This is a coral forest. Long time ago, the territory was under the sea. Because of the coral rocks covering the ground, trees cannot grow their roots deep in the soil. Instead they have many roots on the ground. If there is plenty of rainfall and strong winds, it may blow down these shallow rooted trees (Fig. 11).



Fig.11 : Yuji (left) and Mr. Kimaru in the forest

**Mnyenze:** This tree of *ndege* was used to make traditional cloths out of its barks. You peel two feet wide bark and submerge it in the ground. After a week you remove rotten parts, and beat it repeatedly until it becomes soft and smooth. You will find tissues like cotton, and you draw it with your hands to make it into something like a blanket. We wore it around our waist. Red cloth was worn by women, and white cloth was for men.

*Mnguongo* is the name of the tree for this white cloth.

*Kikoma* tree is used to heal madness, or koma in Mijikenda language. We put its leaves and barks in hot water and the whole body of the patient is put in the vapor bath of this tree. The patient will tremble very much, and will sleep afterwards. Once awake, it will take about a month to regain a sane mind. Its bark is also used to cure lung diseases, and to help women to have a healthy birth, and so on. I planted seeds of this tree in my medicinal herb garden.

Lianas of *mgole* and *dokadoka* have good drinking water inside, and we can drink from it even if we have nothing to drink.

**Hemed:** We usually use the gate for Mwachuma because Mr. Kimaru and I belong to this clan. Here is the second gate for the village site. There are no corals here and it was easy to construct houses.

**Mnyenze:** *Mkunguma* is a good tree for building houses. It has edible green fruits on the trunk itself. The fruits are sweet and consumed by humankind and by monkeys.

*Mkwaju*, or tamarind. This tree is often cultivated for its fruits as a sour spice for cooking. Here it has grown very tall (Fig. 12).

*Msapu* is a very old cycad tree resembling a kind of palm (Fig. 13). It does not seem to change since Elder Mnyenze was very young. Digo people believe that it dates back to several centuries ago, when their first ancestors arrived here. According to an oral tradition, an ancestor, a fisherman, found its seedling on the beach, and planted it in front of his house. Every morning he



Fig.12 : A very big tamarind tree.



Fig.13 : A cycad tree transplanted a long time ago

poured water on it after having washed his face. It continued to grow steadily, and has become the biggest tree of this species in Kenya. During a festival, we consume what we sacrificed, if there remains some leftover, we make it a rule to hang it on this plant and never take them out of the kaya.

There are many conch shells on the ground. They were consumed by Digo people who dwelt the kaya (Fig. 14).



Fig.14 : Conch shells consumed by Digo ancestors

*Mkiuzi* is a strangler, which has the habit of killing other trees.

*Mwungo* is a vine having sap used as gum. Its stem can be used as a rocking chair of the forest. Its fruits are sweet and edible. Roots are used to help women to have the strength of birth. Come and enjoy balancing on this vine (Fig 15).



Fig.15 : Nothing peculiar, but still fascinating!

*Mkutawongo* is a shrub's local name meaning “brain knocker”, and has a very strong smell like that of mint. Its leaves are rubbed and put into your nostrils to reduce unpleasant symptoms of cold.

**Table 1.** Plants of *Kaya Kinondo* explained by Elder Mnyenze, identified by Mr. Kimaru Elias

Digo name	Latin name	Description
<i>Dokadoka</i>	<i>Cissus rotundifolia</i> (Forsk.) Vahl.	Liana having potable sap
<i>Kikoma</i>	<i>Diphasia</i> species A	Endemic tree used to heal madness
<i>Mgole</i>	<i>Adenia gummifera</i> (Harv.) Harms	Liana having potable sap
<i>Mgongolo</i>	<i>Combretum schumannii</i> Engl.	Good timber for carving
<i>Mkungu</i>	<i>Terminalia catappa</i> L.	Tree having edible oily seeds
<i>Mkunguma</i>	<i>Sorindeia madagascariensis</i> DC.	Tree having edible sweet fruit
<i>Mkutawongo</i>	<i>Grewia</i> sp.	Shrub with leaves having strong smell
<i>Mkvaju</i>	<i>Tamarindus indica</i> L.	Tamarind tree, cultivated for food
<i>Mnguunguo</i>	<i>Antiaris toxicaria</i> (Pers.) Lesch.	Tree for making bark cloth
<i>Msapu</i>	<i>Cycas thouarsii</i> Gaud.	Cycad, transplanted by Digo ancestors
<i>Mkiuzi</i>	<i>Ficus natalensis</i> Hochst.	Strangler
<i>Mwungo</i>	<i>Saba comorensis</i> (Bojer) Pichon	Liana having edible fruit

**Myenze:** This marsh used to be a spring where inhabitants of *Kaya* drew water. We wanted to revive it, but oracles ordered us adequate sacrifices, and said that the person will die who enters it before a ritual. We have not yet managed to do so.

These words of Elder Mnyenze near the end of the walk made Yuji shudder. He felt like quickly going down to the marsh to take a picture of it, but we recognized the importance of the regulation of following the trails.

The walk took about one hour and half. On our arrival to the gate, fresh coconut juice was served, and women welcomed us dancing. We happily joined the dance in a circle (Fig. 16).



Fig.16 : Enjoying dances with local women

The hut was filled with crafts handmade by local women and *kanga* clothes for retail. We bought some of them (Fig. 17), and the visit ended.



Fig.17 : Women's handicrafts as souvenirs

After the walk Elder Mnyenze invited us to visit his home. His family members welcomed us with traditional music and dancing (Fig. 18).

He had an official certificate in which Dr. Abudallah Ali Mnyenze had a life membership for the *Umoja wa Waganga wa Miti, Shamba* (Association for Herbal Medicines) Kenya, founded in 1986. As a professional healer, he showed a list of diseases he can heal on the wall. The list was very long and covered a wide



Fig.18 : Elder Mnyenze's family welcoming us dancing

variety of the needs of local people. It contained simple symptoms of cough or diarrhea as well as charms of successful love, fishing, cultivation, commerce, and so on (Fig. 19).



Fig.19 : A list of diseases and symptoms that Elder Mnyenze can heal

His household had a nursery for medicinal plants, a well, and baobab trees. He said that he was planning to build a hut there in his nursery so that visitors could have a rest. He just began to sell seeds and seedlings to customers who wanted to plant useful plants in their gardens. He invited us to have lunch, and blended a medicine for Yuji, who had suffered from the ache of the leg joint. He is an authorized member of herbal healers of Kenya, and we were pleased to hear that three of his sons are learning the traditional knowledge and wisdom of their father.

### Who should conserve the forest?

After the walk, we had two discussions. One was with the Administrator of CFCU, Mr. Lumumbah, and the other with Mr. Kimaru.

**Juma:** It will be difficult to persuade local people to conserve the forest around them. But now, they have begun to realize that we are talking about their own forest, and their own heritage. The forest is their heritage, and it is up to them to conserve it.

**John:** It has been so because forest belonged to the government, and not to people. And the government officers came with whips to beat local people for punishment. The problem is that the local community has not regarded the forest as their property so long as the government is concerned with its conservation. They began hating government policies for conservation.

**Juma:** Until today, forests belong to the government. So, if people see somebody entering the forest to destroy it, there are few people who will report to the government about this destruction. Because it is the government's property and it will look after the forest if it regards it as necessary. But in the case of Kaya, people are told that the forest is theirs, things are quite different. They will conserve themselves, and they will report if they find destruction. We will no more need policemen to guard the forest.

**John:** It is exactly what we have looked forward to and have waited for. You know, in Kahuzi-Biega National Park of D. R. Congo, I have worked as a park warden. There were also rangers to patrol the park. When they discover a footpath, they follow it until they discover traps for animals, or people who cut down timbers for firewood, rangers arrest them. Then they are brought to the gate of the park, but the arrested may be uncle, aunt or grandparent of inhabitants. They are heavily beaten and fined. All these bring about poverty of the inhabitants. That was why I created POPOF (Polepole Foundation) with my own contribution. The purpose of POPOF is to give an "injection" to local people thanks to which they come to love their environment. And

at the same time we intend to give an injection to the local government to integrate local people in their conservation efforts. This is how we managed to depend on policemen to conserve the forest and its wildlife.

**Juma:** As for destruction, we see that the destruction is not so important as to bring the person to the government court; we simply bring the person to the traditional council of elders. Elders give judgment and advice not to repeat what the person committed.

### **The making of Kaya Kinondo Ecotourism Project**

We were invited to the house of Mr. Kimaru, and he explained how he could manage the project to be started.

**Kimaru:** I made a feasibility study before starting the ecotour project itself. We chose Kaya Kinondo. I also examined other Kayas as candidates. There are Kaya Chale, Kinondo, Diani, Ukunda, and so on. People who did not know well told me that Kaya Kinondo might be difficult. After my research, we had many meetings. Not only the elders, but also younger generations were invited to such meetings because Kayas do not belong to elders only. Kayas belong to all the inhabitants. Elders are custodians who have taken care of the Kayas. They represent the inhabitants and take care of the Kayas. We invited a lot of elders and other inhabitants to have open discussions. Finally they came to consent, and we could begin our effort of conservation and development in Kaya Kinondo. Naturally, we could not arrive at one hundred percent of consent this way. Minorities were persuaded to look carefully at what will happen by the introduction of the project. For everything we asked elders for permission, to put benches in the forest, for example. In case they refused, please remember what I told you yesterday, that we are in the stage of transition. We are no more in the age of our ancestors. And they say that tradition is dynamic; it is not at a stand still like a tree. It changes itself according to the change of times.

We should wake up ourselves. And we were afraid that the Kaya will disappear in twenty years to come if youngsters no more like Kaya and its tradition. They may be attracted by Islam or Christianity, or they prefer working around resort hotels at the beach. We wished to find out a way in which youngsters will also be attracted by the Kaya and approach it, so that Kaya could survive. Those who said no will also be pleased if they witness that the project does not destroy the forest.

After the meeting was over, elders told us to give them one week to discuss for themselves and to decide their final opinion about the project. We could not know what they discussed or did during that time because it was their secret. The elders called us, and we were told that they agreed. They said that we need a festival to begin the project with in order to pray for blessing from the sacred spirits of the Kaya. This project was new, and nobody knew if it was accepted by the ancestors to allow foreign visitors in the Kaya. And, if we do something, we must cooperate to come to a good end. We sacrificed a black chicken, a black goat, and a black ox to ask the will of the ancestors. Prayer was made in two ways: if the new project is accepted, let us succeed in it, and in case it is not accepted, let us withdraw from it slowly.

### **Wrath of the Spirits of Kaya Kinondo**

Recently we received an email from Mr. Kimaru, entitled "Powerful Spirits of Kaya Kinondo." It narrates the aftermath of a trial of an arrogant entomologist from a country of Europe in 2002. The file name for this email was "*ajabu*", meaning "miracle" in Swahili.

The Digo people consider maintaining good spirit-human relationships really important. This is why the rules and regulations must be strictly observed at Kaya Kinondo. Anybody who refuses to comply with these rules will face the wrath of the spirits who dwell at this sacred place.

The spirits of Kaya Kinondo have proved to be mighty to such people. One researcher who was

using the Kaya had very little belief in what the natives believe. One evening, this man wanted to use a generator to light the Kaya for his research. Since the spirits do not accept unnecessary noises, the Kaya elders did not allow him.

The man ignored what the elders said and instead co-operated with the Kaya guard, who for some reasons (may be monetary) took the generator deep inside the Kaya. What followed then suggested that the spirits are very strong and anybody should respect what other people believe. First, the generator refused to start. Then in no time, the researcher fell very sick and collapsed. He and the generator were carried out of the Kaya. Once out, the generator worked. The man then gained consciousness but did not return to finish his work. He quickly arranged for the earliest flight and flew back to his homeland. Nothing has been heard from him.

Now it is apparent that the rules have to be known and followed. For all activities that are to be done in the Kaya, the elders who are the custodians of the culture and traditional beliefs must be consulted. A good example is like the Kaya Kinondo ecotourism project. Since the Kaya was established more than six hundred years ago, no foreigner was allowed in the Kaya but when the Ecotourism started a major cultural prayers had to be organised to request for guidance from the ancestors. After the ceremony foreigners are now safe to visit the refuge, however, they must follow very strict regulations as given by the Elders.

Kimaru Elias, Tourism Officer, Kaya Kinondo

He concluded that we should all respect local cultures and beliefs however absurd they may look to us. Seemingly old-fashioned traditions may have some important meaning for the cultural and biological diversity of humankind.

#### **Respect of cultural and biological diversity as a basis of peace: a conclusion**

Based on a two-year field survey among the Kauma people of Mijikenda, Kikuchi (1994: 138) reported

that there was a revival movement for Kaya Kauma aiming to restore its 6 entrance gates to enable them to perform their rituals in it. Young Digo leaders told us that gazetting of kaya forests as National Monuments was also the results of their movement to defend their tradition from disappearing. Now, they have managed to find a possible solution: conservation of their shrine forest through ecotourism. A way in which local people can preserve the biodiversity handed down by their ancestors. They are trying to create a new tradition of inviting tourists to take part in the revival of kaya forests through ancestor worship and animistic practices. Mijikenda peoples have been treated as political minorities in the history of Kenya, and they have suffered from harassment and violence (Mazrui, 1997; 1998).

Digo leaders for the movement of revitalizing their kayas were fully aware of the importance of cultural (and of course, economic) advantages as a basis for community-based conservation. The basis for ecotourism is to learn to respect local biological and cultural diversities (Ankei, 2002); in Costa Rica Mr. Kimaru learned that it is also the most secure basis for peace.

Since childhood John Kahekwa has listened to radio missions speak of Mombasa, a charming place on the east coast of Africa. So he has long dreamed of a chance of visiting it, but as an ardent Christian, he was in fact a bit afraid of Muslims dwelling in the region. After our visit to Kaya Kinondo and elsewhere around Mombasa<sup>9</sup>, John came to a happy conclusion that Mombasa was a land of promise for him "where milk and honey flow." He cherished his stay in Mombasa and its people, and loved to be friends with people who believe in Islam and/or ancestral spirits (Fig. 20).

Most of Digo people are Muslims believing in a variety of local spirits; whereas we are son of a Buddhist bonze (Yuji), animist practicing traditions of indigenous peoples (Takako), and fervent Christian priest (John). We appreciated that such a peaceful interchange of peoples having different cultural and religious backgrounds was possible. Our pilgrimage to a Kenyan shrine forest, Kaya Kinondo, convinced us that mutual understanding is the



background for the survival of today's endangered cultural diversity and biodiversity, and that ecotourism could be an answer if properly planned and managed by local communities. Digo people's case of sacred forest ecotourism gives us a clue to changes for a new type of collaboration aiming at a more sustainable and peaceful lifestyle for us all, human beings.

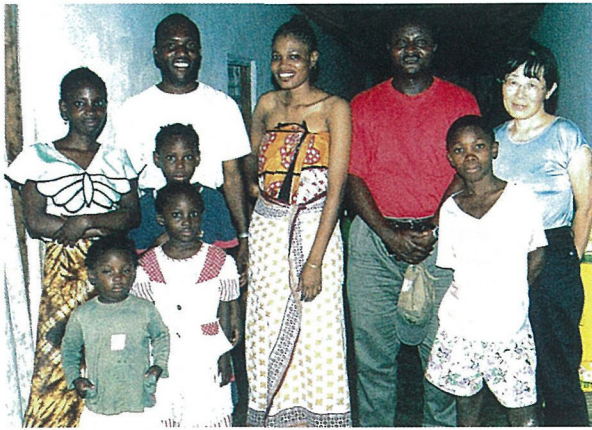


Fig.20 : John and Takako with the family and neighbors of Mr. Hemed

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### Notes

1. We already experienced that we can understand each other regardless of our religious background. The following is an extract of conversations with Mr. Wilberforce Okeka in Kakamega Forest about our experience in Japan.

**John:** I'm very happy to meet you here in Kakamega, Kenya; as last year we traveled in Yakushima and Southern Japan together. Here we are naturally in our skin as God created us. When our Japanese friends arrive in Africa in their skin, our people are much surprised by the difference of skin colors. Children will surround them and shout, "See, white men, white men!" They may try to watch and touch you, but they don't understand why your skin is not like ours. On the contrary, when we traveled in Japan, we met with a lady, who accompanied us in Yakushima Island. She was quite astonished by the African skin I wear, and she tried to rub my arm to verify if I didn't stain myself. But I was accepted as if I were a member of her family, and everybody was pleased to know that we are not different inside. I thanked them and took the Holy Bible and read a paragraph from it. They were more delighted than before, and said that His words are not much different from the way in which their gods and holy spirits guide them. This lady in Yakushima accompanied me wherever she went, and made me sit near her. When her son came, he could speak a bit of English, and she told him to ask me what I felt in my mind. I answered, "I am delighted as ever since I am welcomed as a family member here." She and her family were also very glad to hear it. Do you remember that during our journey to Kagoshima, we had a chance to visit the big camphor tree? Visitors asked us to take their children in our arms and took pictures of us. The women said that they were so lucky to see

black men to hug their children. It was one of my best souvenirs in Japan. Just as a Swahili proverb says, “*Tembea, ukaona* (Walk around, and you will see).”

**Wilberforce:** I remember that one of the mothers said, “This may be our last chance to meet with Africans in our life!” In this world, you may be different from others, but all of us are almost the same in humanity. The only difficulty is to understand each other.

2. The Swahili people living on the East Coast Kenya and Tanzania and islands like Pemba and Zanzibar are famous for having a distinctive cultural heritage. Their mother tongue Swahili is widely used as a *lingua franca* in East Africa. The language grammatically belongs to the Bantu language family with abundant vocabulary borrowed from Arabic. It originally was a pidgin of local languages and Arabic used by traders coming from the Arabia Peninsula. Archaeological sites of the ancestors of Swahili people on the east coast of Africa date back to 8<sup>th</sup> century (Nurse and Spear, 1985).

3. After our stay, one of these gorgeous hotels around Mombasa became a target of terrorism against tourists from Israel, and bombs killed Kenyan girls who worked as dancers in the hotel (Cherian, 2002). It is also reported on the newspaper that many children including boys from local villages provide services for tourists as sex workers (Mayoyo, 2004).

4. Burgess *et al.* (1998) reports that the proportion of endemic species in these kaya forests is very high: vascular plants (37 percent endemic, 554 species), millipedes (80 percent endemic), molluscs (68 percent are endemic, or 86 species), forest reptiles (51 percent endemic, 24 species), and birds (10.5 percent endemic, 9 species). In total, 782 species in eight biological groups are endemic to these coastal forests of Kenya.

5. Since 1998, we have visited Bamburi Nature Trail, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, and Tsunza Mangrove Restoration Project along the north coast of

Mombasa. In 2002, Mr. Kimaru and Mr. Juma kindly brought us to nearby conservation and development projects on the south coast of Mombasa as Colobus Trust in Diani, Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, and Mangrove Conservation Project by Kenya Marine and Fishery Research Institute, Gazi Laboratory, and the results will be reported in a separate paper.

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