WATER! A most basic necessity

Water is life! This may sound like an over-used adage but it rings firmly true. Water is the pulse of humanity - that which drives life. Yet is it a substance that is taken for granted far and wide and further still, violated and misused in a manner that threatens its very existence.

So crucial is water for daily survival that it sits prominently under the Millennium Development Goals; MDG 7; To halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. This MDG is a noble and ambitious goal, taking into consideration that in Africa alone, the entire poverty index of the continent is characterized by lack of access to clean, safe, drinking water.

Without water, there is hunger and starvation, agriculture cannot flourish and thus food security is threatened. Poor rural communities walk for kilometers everyday in search of water. Wars and ethnic clashes persist in many parts of Africa because of control of water-points. Water is such a viable commodity that today in the upsurge of economic growth occasioned by a global scramble for resources, vulnerable communities in Africa are disadvantaged on sustainability of access to clean drinking water.

Then there is the Climate Change Phenomenon. Unprecedented changing weather patterns are throwing the world into a spin. Sub-Saharan African has not been spared. The weather has become erratic and increasingly unreliable that at present, food security (or insecurity) caused by unreliable rainfall is now a priority for survival. In the past few years, this part of the world has been marred by adverse weather patterns defined by violent rainfall...
The region is not entirely blameless. Environmental degradation of natural resources ranks high on the list of destructive practices threatening the environment and by extension impacting negatively on the Climate. Like all developing countries, industrial advancement has contributed largely to this degradation. So have deforestation, uncontrolled mining practices and the pollution of rivers and lakes which would otherwise have been the assurance for sustainable safe, clean drinking water.

Sadly, with this reality is also the fact that Africa’s forests are being quickly depleted while rivers and lakes become increasingly choked under the weight of sustained pollution. Will the much needed water be preserved? As the world’s population increases, so does the demand for access to clean drinking water. As Africa advances towards development, so does the need to preserve and conserve water sources for future generations.

Climate Change is a phenomenon that the world cannot and should not ignore. At the turn of the 21st Century, the world tilted towards the realization that the globe is no longer what it used to be; a shift in climatic order was taking place and it was inevitable that the world pays attention.

The past two decades have been characterized by erratic weather patterns that have left many scientists and environmentalists baffled and perplexed by the complexities of global weather changes. Endless Scientific terminologies and ideologies are unveiled everyday in an attempt to understand the current global weather changes.

Climate Change stands out as a fact. Unprecedented extreme weather patterns are being experienced across the globe. Violent storms, extreme flooding, rising heat-waves and long spells of drought and famine are now headlining across the world mostly with catastrophic results. Africa is no exception. Sub-Saharan Africa remains even more vulnerable to this persisting Climate Change that the situation can only be described as severe.

In the past 10 years, the region has experienced intensive droughts and famines that have threatened the livelihoods of millions of the populace. Africa is dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Rainfall failure therefore spells disastrous endings. At the top of the list is environmental degradation, a fact that is stripping Africa off its ability to sustain itself and its ever growing population.

In the quest for industrial growth and economic expansion, Africa’s natural resources; forests, rivers and lakes have become endangered under the weight of depletion and pollution. For the first time, Water, a very basic necessity that more often than not, is taken for granted is becoming increasingly scarce. Because of this, the continent grapples with threats to food security.

In an attempt to force attention to these issues, this publication explores the issue of water as a natural resource under threat and looks at the different dimensions to it. Conflicts are sprouting out in Kenya because of water, forests are being depleted and water-catchment zones destroyed. Elsewhere, rivers have been so clogged with filth that it is sad to say they are begging to be resuscitated. Water preservation is an urgent need.

In all these discourse, the media as an information tool is at the center of interventions if the delicate challenge of Climate Change is to be dared.

Peace Pen Communication is entirely grateful to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation for seeing the importance of this aspect and supporting this project. PPC commends all journalists and contributors to this publication for bringing these issues to the fore.

This is a must-read copy for all those who care – who must care for the environment.
Why is there diminished media attention to weather & climate change?

By Hellen Mutio

Watching the media coverage of the just concluded Kenya election campaigns and the manner by which the media hogged the political aspects of it, the lingering question remains: what constitutes a big story? The zeal with which politics and wars are covered changes when it comes to telling the climate change story. Unless people die or are misplaced due to floods or hunger, then what is currently happening to our weather patterns carries no weight that would constitute the big story. The media has the power to interest the audience with the news they present and there is no better time than this to talk about the Climate Change story. The weather forecast, for example could be the opening item on the news. Regular programs targeting the same should also find a slot in our program line-up with periodic updates and in-depth analysis which should also feature frequently so that a lot of people understand this phenomenon that is slowly entrenching itself into our daily lives. Setting up charity missions to help the displaced and those hungry should be left to the Red Cross and other charitable organizations. The passion with which we report calamities should be replaced with viewer or listener education on how to curb them in the first place. Our priority should be to research on what has changed in the weather patterns, talk to the experts and find out what is going on, where and how we are messing up the environment, how we can curb this and then present this as a news item on a daily basis. There are experts in any given field and Climate Change and environmental degradation is not an exception. We have the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), the Meteorological Department, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture among others who should be invited to our studios and share their knowledge with us. Examples from other countries should be used as a learning platform and disaster preparedness techniques. They could be encouraged to hold regular media clinics on different environmental issues and practices while giving alternatives this would enlighten and inform the masses on practices that encourage environmental degradation and ways of mitigating this problem.

Changing weather patterns means major changes in the agricultural sector. If farmers are still planting the same seeds they have always planted but the yield is not the same, why are we not calling experts from KARI to advise and educate the farmers that a change in the soil PH needs a change in seedlings? Are we doing anything about calling on experts to advice on water harvesting? By continued portrayal of climate change as a low priority issue for most people when compared to other issues such as the eco-nomy, politics, edu-ca-tion, security, or lifestyles, we as the media are failing in our duty of informing and educating and instead promoting the entertainment aspect. Concern about climate change becomes a non-issue and in the end it is related to unpreventable calamities that are bound to happen without any means of prevention. Again, we fail to point out the unce-tainty about the reality of human influ-ence on the cli-mate. Certain “normal” practices are creating havoc on the environment but as they are considered “normal”, no action is being taken to curb them. Instead, listening to the news becomes another form of entertainment because it seems we are more inclined to shield the listener or viewer from the realities and instead give them soft news. Logging affects our forests which are used as carbon cover, sand harvesting dries up our rivers, green house emissions, private diversion of water flow and waste dumping into our water sources are practices that should be persistently and steadily addressed.

“*There are many pos-sible reasons for declines in con-cern about cli-mate change immediate wor ries such as job security, quality of local schools, crime and eco-nomic well-being of the masses. These have all dimin ished media atten¬tion for cli-mate stories in the past two years. In the face of other pressing con cerns, a public “caring capa-city” for cli-mate change has been tested. Without con tinued atten¬tion paid to global warming/climate change in the media, such concerns may have faded from the col lective public con-science*” (Nelson, 2011).

The above quote shows that people prioritize other worries. Climate change is not one of them. We need to come up with a way to interest them and point out that all the above worries are somehow tied up to climate change. Whether it is prolonged periods of rain or drought, our day-to-day life is affected. Weather forecast should not be made to appear merely as a report on how the weather pattern will be like the following day by pointing out where it will rain or where the sun will be the hottest. It should be an in-depth analysis on the implications of the particular patterns seen and how best to go about it. Climate Change should not be presented only as an international problem; it should be localized so that the listener can identify with it. It should be taken out of the boardrooms to the people so they understand the full implication of degradation of the environment.

*The writer is a journalist and the Programs Manager, Peace Pen Communications.*

Life depends on water, the reservoir depends on you

By Dorothy Anangwe

What is water worth? This may seem to be a simple question, and one that may not appear to be worth a second thought. However, it is a crucial one. Benjamin Franklin once quipped, “When the well’s dry, we know the worth of water.” Indispensable to jobs, the economy, our health, and our communities, water runs through our lives in many ways but, often, it is taken for granted. It is time for this to change.

In recent years, the public has become much more focused on environmental protection, including sustainability and re-use of key resources. Water is not always included in that debate, at least not to the extent that it should be. Unreliable access to clean water and water services, water shortages, and failing infrastructure systems are very real problems that we must work together on to address. The World Health Organization estimates that more than a billion people worldwide lack access to safe water and almost two and a half billion people lack access to sanitation facilities.

The poor, in particular women and girls, spend a significant amount of time fetching water in both rural and urban areas. For example, the 2007 Citizen Report Card survey showed that users of water kiosks in cities fetch water 4-6 times per day. In slum areas, this meant that a poor household spent 112 minutes per day to fetch water at normal times, and as much as 200 minutes per day during times of scarcity. In Nairobi, the capital city, the crisis bites harder.

Water trades at exorbitant rates of 20 shillings for a 20-litre jerry-can. This is too high considering that water trades at exorbitant rates of 20 shillings for a 20-litre jerry-can. This is too high considering that the lingering question remains; what constitutes a big story? The zeal with which politics and wars are covered changes when it comes to telling the climate change story. Unless people die or are misplaced due to floods or hunger, then what is currently happening to our weather patterns carries no weight that would constitute the big story. The media has the power to interest the audience with the news they present and there is no better time than this to talk about the Climate Change story. The weather forecast, for example could be the opening item on the news. Regular programs targeting the same should also find a slot in our program line-up with periodic updates and in-depth analysis which should also feature frequently so that a lot of people understand this phenomenon that is slowly entrenching itself into our daily lives. Setting up charity missions to help the displaced and those hungry should be left to the Red Cross and other charitable organizations. The passion with which we report calamities should be replaced with viewer or listener education on how to curb them in the first place. Our priority should be to research on what has changed in the weather patterns, talk to the experts and find out what is going on, where and how we are messing up the environment, how we can curb this and then present this as a news item on a daily basis. There are experts in any given field and Climate Change and environmental degradation is not an exception. We have the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), the Meteorological Department, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture among others who should be invited to our studios and share their knowledge with us. Examples from other countries should be used as a learning platform and disaster preparedness techniques. They could be encouraged to hold regular media clinics on different environmental issues and practices while giving alternatives this would enlighten and inform the masses on practices that encourage environmental degradation and ways of mitigating this problem.

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A Delta In Turmoil – The Tana River Crisis
By Moffat Mutero & Harrison Mbungu

It is located in Tana River County in the far Northern part of the Kenyan Coast. It is the second most important estuarine and deltaic ecosystem in East ern Africa. The Tana Delta which covers an area of 163,600ha comprises of a diverse range of habitat that supports a rich diversity of wildlife and plants including coastal and marine prawns, shrimps, bivalves and fish.

The Tana Delta is named after River Tana which originates from Mt Kenya and Aberdare Ranges in Central Kenya and flows between two kilometers and up to 42 kilometers in width. The major ethnic groups living in the Tana Delta area are the Pokomo, many of whom are farmers, and the Orma and Warday, who are predominantly nomadic. The area is generally dry and prone to drought. Rainfall is erratic with rainy seasons in the months of March to May and October to December. However, currently the weather pattern of the area changed drastically in the past 15 years.

Since August 2012 up to January 2013, the Tana Delta hit headlines in both local and international media after over 150 people including nine Administration Police Officers were killed following tribal clashes that erupted between two major communities living in the area. Over 13,500 people were displaced and over 30,000 locals affected by the clashes. 50% of the displaced were women, children and the elderly. The Tana Delta then evolved into a crisis zone. During the six month massacre in the area, the government of Kenya deployed over 3000 General Service Unit officers to provide security and conduct disarmament of firearms alleged to be owned by both Communities. The Government also formed a judicial commission of Inquiry to investigate the clashes.

Unfortunately, to date, the commission is yet to table the report which is said to implicate key political leaders and business persons in the area. Those named in the report are blamed for allegedly inciting the two rival communities. Although various reasons have been raised as the possible root cause of the Tana Delta clashes, the locals in the area have their own beliefs and this is pegged on natural resources. According to 62 year old Aboud Bayo Forwa, a Pokomo elder from Semikaro Village which was amongst the villages largely affected by clashes in the Delta, ethnic hatred between two communities began as a result of drastic change in weather patterns in the whole of Tana River county several years back.

Aboud explained that about fifteen years ago, the Historic River Tana used to be large and aggressive and the demand for water was less since the Pokomos (Farmers) in the lower region depended on rainfall to grow crops while the Ormas (Nomadic Pastoralists) who lived in Wardena, Asa and Wayu villages on the upper Tana river County relied on green pastures which was in abundance at the time. Things changed however as rainfall seasons became long dry periods causing the pastoralists from upper Tana to migrate towards the Delta where there were plenty of water and green pastures. “Because of this climatic change, the Ormas decided to come and graze in our area since they had big herds of cattle and other livestock. We could not allow their herds to suffer from drought and due to our culture we welcomed them as our brothers.” Said Aboud.

Abound who narrowly escaped death during the first clashes in Semikaro village however said they lived well with the pastoralists without any commotion. However, conflict was inevitable because farmers and pastoralists share the same resource. The conflicts were always solved amicably by involving village elders from both the Pokomo and the Ormas in the region.

“There is no respect from our brothers who are pastoralists. The government knows all this but no any step has been taken so far.”

Aboud.

Scramble for resources
He added that when the pastoralist community moved to Tana Delta the residents welcomed...
able rainfall. "Today the river width has reduced unlike before where it used to this caused the decrease in the volume of water that weather conditions even in the entire Tana
The elder who is also a pastoralist complained where the case does not favor us and that is how elders and headmen. "It is our culture to solve cas
\textit{ers} of goats and cattle were moved with their livestock without taking care of the food crops which Poko-
not related to water and grazing land but was a plot by some individuals who wanted to create h-
"There is no evidence of unpaid fines of destroyed crops in the farms of Tana Delta. All the disputes here have been solved. This land is enough for both communities to practice agriculture and pastoralism. We control our own herds and cases of crops destruction by livestock are very minimal. I think the clashes were a scheme by few people who have other interests with the Delta." He Imani. Asked whether he was comfortable with deployment of security officers in the region, Imani said the problems facing the two communities in Tana Delta could only be addressed by the locals themselves through engaging in peace talks, insisting that most problems were social than political. However the Coast Provincial police boss James

The Elder who is also a pastoralist complained that weather conditions even in the entire Tana River County was getting adverse every day and this caused the decrease in the volume of water in the River Tana unlike before where it used to be aggressive due to high water volumes and reli-
Villagers washing clothes along the bank of River Sabaki Picture by Alloys Musyoka

The land question
The intricate question of land in the region has also been listed as one of the possible issues in the Tana River county clashes. Almost all locals in the region do not have title deeds and this has resulted in land disputes between the indigenous inhabitants. Issa Kofa, 45, a peace activist and a resident from Garsen said for almost 50years of independence the communities living in the whole of Tana River County are considered squatters since they live on trust land. He said failure by the government to demarcate land depending on social economic activities of the communities living in the region also contributed to uncontrolled movement of people mostly the pastoralists.
This also brought differences between them and the farmers who solely depend on River Tana for agriculture and fishing. Issa also adds that due to lack of land own-
ership in the region, land grabbers and multi-national companies took advantage and acquired large tracts of land mostly in the Tana Delta which has rich soil compared to other parts of Tana River County. The prominent companies alleged to have acquired land in the Delta are Tana - Athi River Development Authority, (TARDA), Mati International which deals with production of sugar, Bedford Biofuel for production of geotrophus among other companies.

“Our ancestors lived here for many years and up to date nobody has ever acquired a title deed in this County. Now we hear of foreign companies and some land grabbers want to inherit thousands of hectares in the Tana Delta yet we are squatters and that has instilled fear and discord to our communities. Looking at the ensuing clashes, it is as if there is a plan to evict the indigenous by using violence” said Issa.

On his side, the newly appointed National Land Commissioner Dr.Mohammed Swazuri said only 20% of the land in Tana River county was suitable for cultivation while the rest was classified as arid and semi-arid lands (ASALS). “Nearly all the land in Tana River County is trust land and an overwhelming majority of the settlers do not have titles to their ancestral lands.” Said Swazuri.

He however confirmed that the Arid and Semi Arid Lands were only suitable for extensive livestock production or partly for irrigation. He offered assurance and affirmed once the commission comes to operation, the problems of land in the county will be sorted by demarcating and issuance of title deeds and that will also help settle ethnic differences.

The role of Politics

Political alignment in the Tana River County has also been seen as a factor in the ethnic differences in the region and those political games were witnessed in almost every general election. For decades, the Pokomos dominated most of the political scene and this did not please their counterparts from the Orma community who also claimed their right to be in power. Since the 2013 general elections campaigns started two years ago, there had been several political alignments from both communities preparing to clinch political power. This could also have caused hatred between tribes in Tana River County. According to Mr. Dar Abubakar, a victim of the clashes, political alignments triggered more hatred between communities. He blamed the Provincial Administration and police for not arresting politicians who were guilty of incitement during those alignments.

“Some of the politicians funded attackers to instill fear and displace people for their political benefits but no one was arrested.” Said Abubakar. He also accused the judicial commission of inquiry for not submitting and making public the Tana River killings report in time so that those involved face the full force of the law. “How comes up to now the commission mandated to investigate the Tana clashes has not exposed the names in the report?” he inquired. In the just concluded general elections, most candidates from the Orma community emerged winners in almost all seats including the senate and parliamentary positions. This is unlike in the past where the Pokomos had dominated political seats in the former regimes.

However, currently after much intervention from the government and other private initiatives, tranquility in the whole of Tana Delta has been restored and internally displaced persons in various camps in the County are going back to their homes under the tight protection from GSU officers.

The reconstruction of burnt houses belonging to internally displaced persons is being supported by the Kenya Red Cross Society. However, while all these go on, some locals still express fear following allegations that there are those who still possess illegal arms that could be a threat to the ensuing peace.

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20 Interesting and Useful Water Facts

Did you know......
1. Roughly 70 percent of an adult’s body is made up of water.
2. At birth, water accounts for approximately 80 percent of an infant’s body weight.
3. A healthy person can drink about three gallons (48 cups) of water per day.
4. Drinking too much water too quickly can lead to water intoxication. Water intoxication occurs when water dilutes the sodium level in the bloodstream and causes an imbalance of water in the brain.
5. Water intoxication is most likely to occur during periods of intense athletic performance.
6. While the daily recommended amount of water is eight cups per day, not all of this water must be consumed in the liquid form. Nearly every food or drink item provides some water to the body.
7. Soft drinks, coffee, and tea, while made up almost entirely of water, also contain caffeine. Caffeine can act as a mild diuretic, preventing water from traveling to necessary locations in the body.
8. Pure water (solely hydrogen and oxygen atoms) has a neutral pH of 7, which is neither acidic nor basic.
9. Water dissolves more substances than any other liquid. Wherever it travels, water carries chemicals, minerals, and nutrients with it.
10. Somewhere between 70 and 75 percent of the earth’s surface is covered with water.
11. Much more fresh water is stored underground in aquifers than on the earth’s surface.
12. The earth is a closed system, similar to a terrarium, meaning that it rarely loses or gains extra matter. The same water that existed on the earth millions of years ago is still present today.
13. The total amount of water on the earth is about 326 million cubic miles of water.
14. Of all the water on the earth, humans can use only about three tenths of a percent of this water. Such usable water is found in groundwater aquifers, rivers, and freshwater lakes.
15. The United States uses about 346,000 million gallons of fresh water every day.
16. The United States uses nearly 80 percent of its water for irrigation and thermoelectric power.
17. The average person in the United States uses anywhere from 80-100 gallons of water per day. Flushing the toilet actually takes up the largest amount of this water.
18. Approximately 85 percent of U.S. residents receive their water from public water facilities. The remaining 15 percent supply their own water from private wells or other sources.
19. By the time a person feels thirsty, his or her body has lost over 1 percent of its total water amount.
20. The weight a person loses directly after intense physical activity is weight from water, not fat.

Adapted from Random Facts; http://facts.randomhistory.com
Mombasa: A sinking Island or an environmental time bomb?

By Ruth Keah & Alloys Musyoka

Mombasa is the second largest city in Kenya. The tourist town lies next to the Indian Ocean with a major port and an International Airport. The city also serves as the centre of the Coastal tourism industry. The city is located on Mombasa Island which is separated from the mainland by two creeks: Tudor Creek and Kilindini Harbour.

With a population of over one million people, environmental experts and scientists warn that the city is in danger of being submerged unless strong measures are taken to combat the effects of climate change. According to former Emuhaya MP, a natural resources management and conservation expert, who is the chairperson of Parliamentary Network on Renewable Energy and Climate Change Dr. Wilbur Otichilo, the island and surrounding areas could be all gone in 50 years; wiped out by rising sea levels. “Some islands in the Pacific are already getting submerged. With the ice blocks in the North and South pole melting, there are no reserves to store this water thus flowing into the oceans and raising the sea level,” he said.

He said it is very sad seeing weather patterns have changed and doing us more harm than good, bringing about intense rains earlier in the year than expected. However, the former member of parliament lamented that instead of coming up with strategies to save this precious commodity that is water, the government has misplaced its priorities and is putting the fate of the Coastal people in danger. Dr. Otichilo said this amidst uproar and protests from Mombasa residents who dismissed the sinking phenomena. According to them, rising of global temperatures, melting of ice blocks in the North and South Pole will only affect the oceans hence raising the sea level.

To them climate change only happens when human beings destroy trees hence causing the high rise in temperatures which is now being experienced in most parts of the coast Province. This to them has no bearings to the city sinking, on the contrary the city is becoming hotter with water becoming more scarce. “How can our city sink yet we are hardly experiencing any rains that could cause flooding?” They lamented. To them they are of low lying coastal areas, salt water into coastal ecosystems and into ground water systems.

Climate change is global

Other effects of climate change, he said, include rising global temperatures leading to increased water scarcity, thus resulting into the dryness of ground waters from the lakes, rivers and springs.

He said climate change is a global problem and coast residents have a role to play in mitigating impacts that climate change can have in the area. “We can’t avoid the fact that Mombasa will sink but we can make sure that it doesn’t sink any time soon “he said.

Among the initiatives that the organization has taken to ensure that coast residents are resilient and adapting capacity to climate change is by educating the public on the problem at hand and measures to be taken. Another way is by enabling them to adopt technologies that will make them survive and live with the climate change phenomena. The people also need to be helped to put up initiatives that improve resilience to climate change such as planting of trees and responsible micro economic activities on the environment. He concluded by saying that effects of climate change are not caused by one person and would therefore take more than one person to counter them.

Human activities affecting environment

According to the Coast region Beach Management Unit Secretary General Mr. Salim Ali, global warming effects will not only be felt in Mombasa city but also in other parts of the coast region like North Coast and South Coast. Ali said although the concept has not been clear to locals because of lack of sensitization by the government through its respective environmental bodies they feel the effects will also strike the North coast region and the rest of the coast region. "The big problem here is our government and relevant departments that have not aware that climate change is one of the causes of these adverse rain patterns. Not aware of the impacts of climate change on the environment, the coast residents point of view clearly shows how the government and all stakeholders dealing with environmental issues have a long way in educating the public about climate change.

According to Abraham Wangila, an expert on matters concerning climate change and a programs officer with Eco-Ethics International Kenya, a Non Governmental Organization which deals with conservation of environment, even though there are already danger signs of Mombasa sinking, the move will not come any time sooner. Wangila said Mombasa will not sink in 50 years time but showed some concern that it may sink in future not particularly with the years because of rise of sea levels but by only a few tens of centimeters which he said could result in loss of land due to erosion and inundation

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failed to sensitize locals on environmental issues," said Mr. Ali. Ali lamented that due to human activities in the show lines across the North coast region fishermen have been forced to look for fish far deeper into the Indian Ocean unlike before.

Fishermen in Malindi are mostly affected because this is where Apache Kenya, a company dealing with oil and gas exploration operates. The activities of this company have largely scared away the fish population from the area. He said that since the exploration of gas and oil kicked off in the area, fishermen are forced to sail 77 kilometers from the beach deep into the Indian Ocean so as to at least get some substantial amount of fish. But Malindi district National Environmental Authority Management officer Mr. Samuel Ng’ang’a said that fishermen and all stakeholders involved were informed of the exploration adding that they all agreed that the exploration should continue. “These people came and explained how they are going to work and all issues raised were sorted out during the stake holders meeting where it was agreed the company will be allowed to do their work for a few months then leave,” he added. Ng’ang’a said the oil and gas exploration company have a permit to do exploration and so far nothing can be done although Mr. Ali insisted that fishermen should be compensated by the government.

He said although some fishermen have been able to fish deep in the sea it is a bit difficult due to lack of modern fishing equipments and should therefore be compensated by the government. “We want the government to come up with a program and compensate the fishermen who have not been able to fish depending on how much they get every day because since these activities started here last year fishing has drastically gone down in Malindi,” he posed.

He said that so far in Coast region it is only in one region in Malindi where fish is found and fishermen from as far as Vanga, Lunga Lunga, Shimoni, Mombasa, Lamu and Ngomeni are camping in the area, especially those with modern fishing boats. “All these fishermen you are seeing here are not from Malindi but from other areas because our fishermen here do not have big boats and modern facilities to get to 77 kilometers deep in the sea. All this is caused by that exploration taking place here,” he noted.

Ali pointed out that people who have constructed permanent houses especially along the beaches may get submerged because of the receding land many years to come due to environmental changes. “Many people have constructed private villas and hotels in the receding land which is increasing everyday and as per the environmental experts and our elders, the water will rise back in a few years thus fear of being submerged,” he added pointing to some of the tourists hotels in the area that have been built so close to the riparian land along the shores. He was quick to accuse the government over the increase in unsupervised constructions along the beach saying most of the owners are authorized by government officers and local authority.

NEMA officer Mr. Ng’ang’a however said they approve constructions if they are not within the 60 meters riparian zone which is not allowed by the environmental body. Mr. Francis Kagema an officer with Nature Kenya in the North coast region admitted that human activities along the sea shore has contributed a lot to changes in the environment which in future will cost locals. He especially emphasized the cutting down of mangrove trees for construction materials that have caused soil erosion in the coastal line which is dangerous.

Apart from Mombasa said to be sinking in 50 years, the residents of the Coast region are still at risk of calamities like the Tsunami. “The trees which always grow along the beach have been cut down, people are constructing houses and soil erosion is rife, this means that in case of a Tsunami, people living hundreds of kilometers away will also be affected,” said the officer.

He claimed that government officers through its environmental offices and local government have failed in ensuring that the destruction of the environment does not go on. According to locals, the issue of Mombasa sinking and effects of global warming is too remote for them to comprehend. There is need for spirited awareness efforts for the residents to understand what to anticipate in the face of global climatic changes.

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**Water Board braces for drought at the Coast**

By Moffat Muteru

Kenya’s Coastal region is soon to experience severe weather changes characterized by long periods of drought. As a drought mitigation strategy, the Coast Water Service Board is expected to spend close to Kshs. 500 Million in various hotspots to intercept the drastic weather shift. The Board’s Chief Executive Officer Engineer James Thubu says the board had received Ksh 7 billion from the Word Bank as additional funding to advance water projects and reduce the shortage within the Kenyan Coast.

Engineer Thubu confirmed that the fund is divided into grants components which will cater for drought mitigation projects while the loan component will support the supply of materials, consultation fee and procurement. On the grant part, he said the Coast region was facing serious drought crisis mostly in prone areas of Kilifi, Kwale, Tana River and Taita Taveta Counties and the fund was aimed at facilitating digging of bores holes, construction of rain water harvesting tanks, surface water tanks and dams. These projects, he said, will be of great benefit to the locals who complained of water scarcity following extreme change of weather patterns in many parts of the region. “The board has assessed the concern of people living in arid and semi arid parts of this region in view of the expected weather changes.

The situation in various places has worsened and there is dire need to allocate a certain proportion of the fund to fight drought which I believe has been fuelled by the Climate Change phenomena” said Engineer Thubu.
It is hard to live... the situation was not as difficult as it is now. We used to grow our own food but now we can only rely on relief food while our livestock die.

The Coast Water Service Board has various main water sources like Mzima Springs which has a series of four natural springs in Tsavo National Park located in the west of the Park in Taita Taveta County and also the Baricho Water Plant in North coast. However, the pipelines from these sources served mostly urban areas and those who live on the linear settlement. This isolates the vulnerable communities in the rural areas. Engineer Thubu confirmed that it was costly for the board to network pipelines in all the remote environments within the Coast region since the areas were sparsely populated. Residents of these areas deserve drought related projects like dams, boreholes, and water boozers to reduce the water demand.

“We always prioritize areas with big population and most of those areas are urban and those settling in close proximity to our pipelines. In arid areas, the population is sparse and scattered and to reach them all is a huge burden.” He said. The CEO further explained that although the population in the drought prone areas also increased by a bigger percentage compared to several years ago thus causing demand for more water supplies, immense deforestation by the local population has instigated the shortage of reliable rainfall in the area. Over-cultivation, overgrazing and other human activities has also destroyed the ground cover hence subjecting the area to even harsher environmental conditions.

“Most residents get their livelihood from charcoal burning, selling of firewood and timbers and by now the places are just bare without any forest cover. How do you expect to receive enough rainfall if there are no trees which can transpire, saturate the air and bring rain?” Paused Engineer Thubu. A big percentage of ground cover in many areas dried up due to lack of rainfall while other areas were destroyed by overgrazing. The situation is further worsened by the fact that unpredicted rainfall does not bring any impact since there was no sufficient vegetation to manage moisture loss, erosions, growth rates and biodiversity benefits.

According to Engineer Thubu, through the support of the government, the Coast region was given total of eleven water boozers which served fresh water to residents who lived in various difficulty areas in the six counties in the region. He said there were also plans to build a boat with a design of a water boozers to transport fresh water to residents leaving in the Lamu archipelago. Although the demand for fresh water in the Coast region stands at 480,000 cubic meters per day, the Water Board CEO Thubu said the board was making great efforts to increase the supply and this had been facilitated by the rehabilitation of the Baricho Water Plant and Mzima pipeline. This helped the Board to save 5000 cubic meters of water which got lost per day due to leakages from old pipelines. “The board with the last funding from the World Bank supported the rehabilitation of our major aged pipelines and this increased our production from 58 to 88 million litres per day and now the demand stands at 480,000 cubic meters per day in the whole region. Now the additional funding from the same World Bank will facilitate the installation of another parallel line from Baricho Water Plant towards Kilifi and Mombasa.” Confirmed Engineer Thubu. This is much awaited good news for most residents in the drought-prone areas and the urgent intervention by the board is crucial.

Charo Kazungu, aged 66 years old and a Kayafungo area witch said that the Coast Water Services Board’s intended projects will be of great help to the residents who rarely get water even for domestic use. He lamented that the residents travel for long distances in search of water adding that rainfall had been scarce and unreliable in the past few years. For this reason, most people in the sprawling areas, including mzee Kazungu and his family now rely on relief food from the local administration and the Red Cross.

This drastic change of weather has sadly impacted negatively on the communities cultural beliefs where the people term the shortage of rain and lack of water as a curse by “rain witches”。“It is hard to live in this area due to lack of water, rainfall and food. The situation was not as difficult as it is now. We used to grow our own food but now we can only rely on relief food while our livestock die due to water and pasture. We think it is a curse or witches who bear this responsibility” Mzee Kazungu murmured. Last year several suspected witches at Kaloleni in Kilifi County escaped death narrowly after the locals threatened to torch them publicly following allegations that they were the cause of prolonged drought in the area. With challenges such as this, the Coast Water Service Board has got its docket full and is working around the clock to avert the drought and water crisis in the region.
A dying river begs to be saved
By Jeckonia Otieno

It can only be described as a long filthy, stinking water channel that is more of an eye-sore than a pleasant natural resource. What was once a beautiful river traversing the region’s largest city just like the Thames cuts through London has sadly and over the years turned into a sewer trench with no salvation in sight – at least not for now.

The Nairobi River just like any other river in Nairobi is a mess of environmental degradation exacerbated by poor planning that the city has seen since independence. And the death of this source of clean water has been slow, choking and painfully for the last fifty years. Ironically, the name Nairobi was derived from the Maasai dialect. Enkare e nairobi means a place of cool waters. This, historians say was firmly based on the Nairobi River that was then fresh, cool and a sense of pride.

Today, the story of Nairobi River is sad and depressing. When one thinks of the river, one sees black, thick and mucky smelling waters that are more of an environmental hazard than a source of life. Slums and informal settlements seem to find their way around the valleys where rivers pass. This is the scenario of the Nairobi River and two other small rivers. Nairobi River which is the main course traverses Gikombaa, Kamukunji, Kiambiu and finally passes through Korogocho, These are considered the largest shanty towns in Eastern Nairobi. Ngong River which is also part of Nairobi River cuts through Africa’s largest slum, Kibera. It then finds its way across the Mukuru slums before finally joining the main Nairobi River channel before Dandora. At the notorious Mathare slums, another tributary of the main channel which joins Nairobi River at Ngomongo also washes through Mathare, Kariobangi and Kariadutu slums before finally snaking its way into Ngomongo. The Nairobi River with all its tributaries and other small-feeder rivers have therefore been synonymous with expansive slum dwellings – most of which are degraded and flourish in filthy environments. But what really ails the Nairobi River?

This question is best answered by the garbage and filth that seems to be strangling the slow-flowing river without any hope of rectification. The Nairobi River has basically been a dumping site for eons by the sprawling surrounding slums, the industries located alongside its shores as well as a sewer outlet. The filth that chokes the Nairobi River can be categorised into three areas; the domestic wastes that come from the slum settlements including the fact that people defecate along the river banks; the sewerage wastes that in many areas is released into the river and the toxic industrial wastes that come from industries alongside the river. Once in a while, non-governmental organization, government departments and individuals organise to clean up the Nairobi Rivers. The exercises are colourful and spirited; however, they only last a short while and therefore largely construed as public relations exercises.

The persistent lack of proper planning in Nairobi has plagued the survival of the Nairobi River. Because the government has failed to regularise informal slum settlements, the poor along the shores of the river have taken advantage of this lapse and vandalised the river further by encroaching along its banks. Then there is the problem of car-washing bases within the informal settlements where jobless youths take advantage of the water from the river to carry-out cleaning of cars at a price.

In areas such as Ngara Market, car-cleaning on the shores of the Nairobi River is so rampant that the water there is stagnant and greasy. The runoff from the washing yards with all detergents used and all the muck is directed back to the river. This is carried downstream.

Oblivious to the damage caused on the river, the car-cleaners ironically hail the river for being a source of living. Samuel Karanja, one of the car-cleaners says it is easy for him just like many others to throw their waste into the river. The market is crowded and we have no proper waste disposal place, so why not throw them into the river so that they can be washed away downstream?
serious need to rethink planning the city to ensure
the Nairobi River is saved. "It will take serious enforcement to
ensure that everything falls into place because the current plans have
not been followed." He said. However, he says that planning has never
been the problem per se; lack of enforcement mechanisms of the ex-
isting laws is where failure to protect the Nairobi River begins.

There have indeed been numerous concerted attempts to rescue the river but all
these come to naught as the government turns out to be the greatest defaulter where environmental
matters are concerned. This is because the enforcement mechanisms around the protection of
this water source are weak that is why those who pollute the water persist in the same lifestyle.

Ironically, even when the law is defaulted, the Con-
stitution of Kenya is very clear on the protection of
the environment and natural resources such as the
Nairobi River. In Article 69 section (i) it states that the state shall ensure sustainable exploitation,
investment in the slums. The Ministry of Housing is supposed
to ensure that each person has a decent housing as
per the constitution.

The need to ensure that there is harmony in vari-
ounous departments is necessary as the government
tries to clean up the rivers. The National Environ-
nmental Management Authority (NEMA) has a duty
to ensure compliance with environmental laws but
it has not been able to efficiently achieve its goals.

If it had, the Nairobi River would not be so suffo-
cated with wastes. Benjamin Langwen, NEMA’s
Director of Compliance and Enforcement, says that conflicting interests are the major reasons why
Rivers such as Nairobi River would be difficult to
keep clean. He cites lack of proper sanitation as the ma-
jor problem that has contributed massively to the
pollution witnessed in the rivers. Sanitation falls
under the Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company
which supplies water to the public and also takes
care of the collection and treatment of both solid
and liquid wastes. However to do so there must
be properly planned housing which is not the case
in the slums. The Ministry of Housing is supposed
to ensure that each person has a decent housing as
per the constitution.

This is a classical example of why it is important for
various government departments to cooperate for
the good of achieving clean environmental goals.

Apart from burst sewer pipes, rivers in Nairobi are
also substantially polluted upstream as agricultural
activities such as the use of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. “Even though there are
buffer zones, these cannot prevent rain water from
washing the chemicals into the rivers,” states Lan-
gwen.

He laments that it is very difficult to ensure compli-
ance to rules and regulations that could preserve
the environment unless the government makes the
environment its priority. And until this happens,
saving the Nairobi River sadly still remains a mi-
rage.
Residents despair over filthy Nairobi River
By Jane Okoth

The stench is unbearable not to mention the dangerous narrow slippery paths you have to follow when making a trip back to your house as children gracefully play around the small corners bordering their homes. This is what the resident of Kibera face each day – their lives are defined by the unrelenting stench. The Nairobi River which passes along Mbagathi road directing itself to the many streams which are adjacent to one of Africa’s largest slum settlements is a menace to the people of Soweto area in kibera slums.

Phyllis Awuor a resident in Soweto seems to be okay with her present situation despite the dangers paused to her and her family by living so close to the banks of the filthy Nairobi River. Her house is next to a filthy, blackish and ever-smelly stagnant stream and it will be worse for her if heavy rains are to be experienced. Phyllis has been a resident of kibera for the longest time born and schooled around the area and even married with four children. She recalls that initially, many years ago when she was still a little girl, the river served many purposes like washing, bathing not to mention the fresh air experienced. However, this is no more, thinks to the massive pollution that has long since almost entirely clogged the Nairobi River.

Phyllis says she does not have anything to worry about because she is used to her present destitute life. In slums like Kibera, the poverty-stricken people have very little choice for comfort. Ironicaly the rains are a ‘total relief’ to them because the garbage is washed away directing it to the Nairobi dam which in turns fills up the Nairobi River. “We have tried as villagers to take measures to clean up this river or help in proper garbage disposal but the efforts seem futile. You cannot always be helping the community alone when no one else is helping and you have to earn something to sustain yourself because nothing is for free nowadays. I see people throwing all sorts of garbage here and I also do the same after all, what am I to do?” Phyllis despairs.

Another desperate resident of Kibera is 21 year old Joseph Odhiambo who lives in an old shanty just across Phyllis’s house. Joseph is one of the millions of unemployed youths who live in the slums. Tall, thin and dressed shabbily like many other lads in the sprawling slums, Joseph does not seem to have any problem with the river as long as he earns his daily bread, he says. Asked if the filthy situation of the river worries him, Joseph admits that diseases like cholera, typhoid and malaria are common in the area but he says he is a “survivor”.

He however acknowledges that the river needs to be cleaned up and a lot needs to be done to preserve it, however, like any jobless youth in Kibera, Joseph is not ready to volunteer his services but is ready to work with whoever will pay him to do such
a job as cleaning up the Nairobi River. “I cannot do it for free because I am jobless and need to earn my daily bread.” He affirms adamantly. He recalls one project that was initiated a year ago in an attempt to find proper garbage disposal which he says had very little progress. Like his neighbor Phyllis, Jo - seph is relieved when it rains heavily because then all the garbage is washed further away and the River is “temporarily cleaned up”. The rains are however not a blessing to the many squalid shacks along its banks because when it rains heavily, people’s structures are swept away by the floods and often lives are lost and property destroyed.

Rose Atieno one of the village elders says that a lot needs to be done to salvage the Nairobi River as soon as possible before it is too late. “The government has to employ our youth to do this job. The reason why our rivers and streams are polluted is because of lack of proper waste disposal” she explained. Rose attributes this to the politicians who make a lot of promises when campaigning but end up disappointing the people by not delivering on any of their promises. She says this is the reason why the idle and jobless youths have grown defiant even to volunteer to do anything because the politicians themselves have not delivered on any of their promises. “We don’t want to be electing politicians who sit comfortably in their houses with their families while we the electorate are left here to suffer. There are so many projects that have been started for cleaning-up the Nairobi River but they fail because of either corruption or misman - agement.” She adds.

Rose calls for tougher laws to be formulated and implemented on environment sanitation and hygiene so as to rectify the pathetic situation. Rose recalls that she found the river very helpful and useful when she was young. “We used to bathe, wash clothes in this river but now we cannot even look at it. It is nauseating. This is a looming disaster but we have nowhere else to go. We are affected by many waterborne diseases but this hopeless situation leaves us with no choice”.

He admits the prevalence of water-borne diseases and skin diseases attributing this to the filth of the Nairobi River. However, like the rest of the resi - dents, Naphtali says he has lost hope because the prevalent poverty has dehumanized the people to a life of not caring for their environment.

In a related discussion, the Kibera division district officer Joel Mwangala has blamed the residents of Kibera for their present pathetic situation. He said that no efforts have been made by the residents to ensure that they all live in a clean and safe environment. He is now challenging the people of kibera to be responsible as far as garbage collection is concerned and also be mindful about their health.

Fun Facts About Water

- Penguins can convert salt water into fresh water.
- It takes a ton of water to make 1 lb. of sugar.
- 84% of a raw apple is water.
- A snapping turtle can only swallow when it’s head is under water.
- A rat can go longer without water than a camel.
- A gallon of water weighs 8.34 lbs.
- Elephants can smell water up to 3 miles away.
- A jelly fish is 95% water.
- Water expands about 9% as it freezes.

*Adapted online.
A dying river in pictures - Photos by Jeniffer Wachie

A section of what used to be the Nairobi river is now reduced to a stream of raw sewerage and a dumping site - Photo from PPC Library
A dying river in pictures - Photos by Jeniffer Wachie
A forest struggling to survive against a string of human assaults

By Cyrus Akhonya and Lillian Mukoche

It is the only tropical rain forest in Kenya today but there is very little to celebrate for Kakamega Forest in Western Kenya is a shadowy image of its former self. Much needs to be done fast to save this natural resource or soon its existence will only be confined to geography text books.

The forest has almost been brought to its knees by activities which include illegal logging, charcoal burning, hunting and human encroachment. Poor or non-existent legislation is also to blame for its sorry state of affairs. It is unbelievable that a forest which once sat on 200,000 hectares of virgin land has been reduced to a paltry 14,000 hectares! This is mind-boggling to say the least. The neighboring Malava forest covers a paltry 9,000 hectares. It is another pitiable state of affairs.

According to Mr. Wilberforce Okeka, a tour guide in Kakamega forest, selfish human interests have forced animals, insects and birds out of the forest thus endangering the eco-system. “Elephants, guerillas, buffaloes and chimpanzees can no longer be found in this forest,” he said. Mr. Okeka laments that it is unfortunate that human need for land ownership has superseded the need to accommodate wild animals who are the bona fide owners of the forest.

Historically, the Kakamega forest has been regarded as a medicinal hub for an array of ailments but soon the locals will be forced to look elsewhere for their herbal remedies. A diverse collection of medicinal trees and shrubs reside within the forest but are fast disappearing. The trees in this fast fading forest were not only used as herbal remedies. Some were used for cleansing and other traditional purposes. One such tree is known locally as Mama Mutere or Mukhunya (Measopsis eminii). The Municipal Council of Kakamega has benefited a lot from revenue collected as a result of tourists flocking to the forest to experience first-hand its allure of rare tree species. The dangers posed to the only surviving Mutere tree has forced the locals to act to save it. Five years ago, a prayer ceremony was conducted to appease the gods to rescue its life. An elaborate burial ceremony is in the offing as soon as it takes its final bow by drying up or falling.

“Had we used this tree for charcoal or sold it for timber we could have earned about twenty to fifty thousand shillings, but through tourism, the tree has earned us revenue of over Sh.100,000,” he noted adding that it still attracts tourists from all over the world despite its current state.

The forest is home to over 510 species of butterflies and 488 species of birds. Owing to its richness, many birds from Europe fly in to make it their temporary home for half a year before flying back after the honey-moon is over. Okeka says that the destruction of the neighboring Maragoli hills which used to be home to hundreds of the feathered winged creatures is to blame for the loss of a bird species which was unique to Kakamega conservancy. It could not and can never be found anywhere else. There are snakes which can only be found in two places in Africa: West Africa and Kakamega are great tourist attraction. The snakes are said to be harmless.

All the animals are mutual beneficiaries of the forest but insects too have not been underlooked. The forest used to have many species of insects but it has reduced tremendously due to hostile human activities. The insects are useful in decomposition but insects too have not been underlooked. All the animals are mutual beneficiaries of the forest but insects too have not been underlooked. The forest used to have many species of insects but it has reduced tremendously due to hostile human activities. The insects are useful in decomposition.

The forest has almost been brought to its knees by activities which include illegal logging, charcoal burning, hunting and human encroachment. Poor or non-existent legislation is also to blame for its sorry state of affairs. It is unbelievable that a forest which once sat on 200,000 hectares of virgin land has been reduced to a paltry 14,000 hectares! This is mind-boggling to say the least. The neighboring Malava forest covers a paltry 9,000 hectares. It is another pitiable state of affairs.

The forest used to have many species of insects but it has reduced tremendously due to hostile human activities. The insects are useful in decomposition.
for their survival in this forest which has two big rivers flowing through it. Their very survival entirely depends on about fifty springs originating from the forest. Yala and Isiukhu Rivers both originate from Nandi escarpment and share the springs equally. River Yala drains into Lake Victoria while River Isiukhu connects to River Nzoia before finding its way to Lake Victoria. The number of the springs could be more had the forest not experienced destruc-

...charcoal or sold it for timber we could have earned about twenty to fifty thousand shillings, but through tourism, the tree has earned us revenue of over Sh.100,000

tion. The forest plays a pivotal role in filtration of water which is now piped for domestic use. The springs have attracted fish an indication that the project can be viable. In terms of rainfall, Kakamega forest receives more than 2,000mm per annum and has an altitude of between 1500 and 1700m above sea level. It is flat and undulating with its highest point being Liranka hill 800m high. Its climate is constant dry and warm, and rarely experiences a biased weather condition. “We always have rainfall at short intervals. The forest has a way of controlling its need for water,” said Okeka. Over and above, Kakamega forest has been a key station in research studies concerning plants and animals. Most researchers from local and international learning institutions have found their way to this forest to learn on the forest succession and medicinal research. The community has however not fully embraced the importance of Kakamega forest as a medicinal hub.

“Due to modernization, many people view the use of herbs as a form of medical intervention as witchcraft,” said the tour guide adding that more sensitization to the community is needed. The handful members of the community who still believe in herbs have done more harm than good to the forest by crudely harvesting the medicine on trees. Their crude methods have witnessed the instant drying up of the trees. According to Okeka, the manner in which they de-backed the trees was harmful subjecting the trees to infections which in the end led to rotting of the stems.

Efforts to sensitize the community members have always hit a snag as those concerned are slow in implementing the strategies. “The process of harvesting roots and barks should be done with a lot of care just as a human operation and the ‘wound’ treated and dressed,” he said.

In spite of all these shortcomings, the number of tourists visiting the forest has increased compared to twenty years ago when the forest was devoid of infrastructure. Unlike then, the trails have now been cleared and even some named. For instance, there is Mama Mutere Trail. Tour guides have been put on standby on this trail which is among many others. This has brought a sense of organized process before one is allowed into the forest.

According to Dominic Otieno, the head of Western Conservancy, involvement of the community has catalyzed the preservation effort. “We now involve the community through community forest associations where we have programs such as plantation establishment and livelihood improvement formerly known as the Shamba System.

This has given the community a sense of ownership and members are now on the forefront in conserving the forest,” he says. In general, Western Kenya relies on rain-fed agriculture and Kakamega forest plays an important role in ensuring constant rainfall. Its protection and conservation is not optional and efforts should be combined from all stakeholders both local and international to ensure water availability for food security.
Kakamega forest is located in an area rich in cultural and traditional beliefs. However, this same culture has negatively and positively contributed to the current state of the forest. To begin with, the forest is rich in medicinal herbs. Almost all the plants and animals found in Kakamega forest are a cure to an ailment or a situation. In the process of harvesting medicine, many people have rendered the trees in a worse state especially in situations where the back or the root is the medicine. They have stripped the trees off this important aspects without a care on the implications. Many trees still have the wounds several years after de-backing took place. Fortunately the forest management has come up with packages to sensitize those concerned on the best practices when harvesting from medicinal trees. Also, culture has been a major road block that prevents women from planting trees. The luhya community that surrounds Kakamega forest does not condone the practice of women planting trees. The forest cover especially in the homesteads could be more than what it is today if the situation was different as the women are best placed to plant and take care of trees to ensure they have firewood. However, sensitization through community forest associations are gradually helping to change this cultural belief and women are now taking up the role.

Since culturally, women are the ones responsible for looking for firewood for domestic use it would be of great benefit if they are mobilized to preserve the same trees that they need for both medicine and firewood. Ironically, even though herbal medicine found from trees and vegetation from within Kakamega Forest has historically been acceptable, modernization is challenging this belief. The herbal medicine is now associated with witchcraft. This has derailed efforts to access local market for the few processed herbal medicine. Wilberforce Okeka, an Education Assistant at the Kakamega forest reserve feels this twisted perception is costing the immense potential of Kakamega forest.

"We would be having our own pharmaceuticals but perception has blinded our people who don't realize that what they buy as modern medicine basically originates from forests such as Kakamega forest" Okeka lamented. Also traditionally, the forest has been traditionally used as a cleansing site for those who committed various offences against the community like incest, adultery, murder and even theft. Yet to some, the forest is a home to evil spirits. Still to others, the forest is believed to be a holly place with specific tree species treated with revered. Still to others, the forest is believed to be a holly place with specific tree species treated with revered. This, and the idea that the forest is a source of rain makes many opt to conserve it as it is a special home for God.

It is the belief of conservationists around the forest that much more can be done to enhance and preserve Kakamega forest taking into consideration its diverse attribute. All these issues can be addressed by sensitization through community forest associations. "What derail us are funds but the community can be too vital only if it is informed to understand its role in protecting and conserving the forest", said Aggrey Mambili, the organizing secretary Mu-ile-shi community forest association. Mu-ile-shi is a community forest association involving the community in forest conservation.
Community registers success in efforts to rescue a dying forest

The survival of Kakamega forest is threatened by over-reliance by the local populace on the forest for firewood, timber, medicine, water, vegetables, grass, meat and least but not last, land for cultivation. Without quick effective interventions, efforts to save the forest may be in vain. The only rain-forest in Kenya occupied over 200,000 hectares of land but as at now, it dejectedly sits on 14,000 hectares. The desire to address increase in population superseded the importance of the forest in the past years leading to reduction in size.

Nyayo Tea zones introduced during the Nyayo era consumed a large portion considering huge revenue aspect from the sale of the ‘green gold’. Cultural aspects have also contributed to the encroachment of forest land. Human based solutions have however been brought on board to address the issues and this has seen the forest regain its face. The community is now taking charge of the forest through community forest associations which are now taking the lead in conserving the forest. Such an association is Mu-ile-shi which represents Municipality, Ilesi and Shinyalu divisions which are bordering the forest in Shinyalu constituency. Aggrey Mambili, the organizing secretary of Mu-ile-shi is one of the beneficiaries of this program and hope to plant about 200 hectares of land.

We are also sensitizing them on the use of energy saving jikos to reduce consumption of firewood and the role played by Kakamega forest in ensuring that we have enough rainfall.

The project will see the introduction of bamboo as a main alternative raw material for forest products. “The plant has over 2,500 products among them are those produced from timber and we intend to promote the plant on farms and knowledge on how to extract and market its products,” explained Odhengo. The Mama Mutere tree believed to be the mother of all Mutere species - Picture by Ian Lukoye

He said the over Shs.3.6b will be used to rehabilitate the forest land in Kenya which is still far below 10%. “We hope to network with the community in increasing forest cover where we hope to plant at least one million seedlings per year across the country for a five-year period,” he said adding that the funds will also be used to fence the forest land to maximize the survival ability of the trees planted. Lack of care has seen some areas repeat the tree-planting exercise for more than three times without reflection.

Another key is training the community on alternative energy sources, and also alternative sources of wood related products. Odhengo says the program will create a network between the community and both local and international organizations to provide knowledge on production and managing. This he says will be one way of reducing concentration on forests whose role in ensuring there is adequate rainfall cannot be overlooked.

The project will also aim at individual community members through their groups as relying on the forests alone cannot meet the targeted percentage of the forest cover in the country. Odhengo has asked the community-based groups dealing with environment related issues based to liaise with forest department to access the support. All these efforts by the Government are provoked by the realization that climate change is really taking effect with drought seasons being experienced more than before. Trees are the only assurance of water availability which is the back bone of life.

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brought on board the Kenya National Cleaner Production Center KNPC, United Nations Industrial Development Organization UNIDO, and the Department of International Foreign Development DFID. It is partnering with Institutions and community organizations in raising awareness on environmental concerns. Mr. Peter Odhengo, who is in charge of the program in the Prime Minister’s office, says the initiative has gone a long way in rehabilitating forest land in Kenya. The most successful story is the financial support from the Norwegian Government. “The Government of Norway has entered into agreement to give Kenya US $42m for conservation of the forests,” said Odhengo when he recently launched the program in Kakamega forest.

Nyayo Tea zones introduced during the Nyayo era consumed a large portion considering huge revenue aspect from the sale of the ‘green gold’. Cultural aspects have also contributed to the encroachment of forest land. Human based solutions have however been brought on board to address the issues and this has seen the forest regain its face. The community is now taking charge of the forest through community forest associations which are now taking the lead in conserving the forest. Such an association is Mu-ile-shi which represents Municipality, Ilesi and Shinyalu divisions which are bordering the forest in Shinyalu constituency. Aggrey Mambili, the organizing secretary of
Mu-ile-shi says they are now in charge of the forest and human interference has been minimized. “We are now working with Kenya Forest Services (KFS) and Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) in ensuring that the community takes part in managing the forest. Currently, the community members have been allocated 301 hectares to cultivate food crops as they take care of the trees under a program ably called Plantation Establishment and Livelihoods Improvements (PELIS),” he said.

The group has also partnered with well wishers to establish a tree nursery which earns them a living through sales of the seedlings. Mambili says that their main clients are Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Government institutions which buy the seedlings on large scale and distribute them for planting. Through these, the concentration on forest trees has been lessened as members of the community have planted trees on their farms.

“We are also sensitizing them on the use of energy saving jikos to reduce consumption of firewood and the role played by Kakamega forest in ensuring that we have enough rainfall,” he added. The forest officers have confirmed reduced charcoal-burning within the forest courtesy of the association. The community is now informed of the importance to be on the frontline in safe-guarding the forest. “We now understand that the safer the forest, the safer we are in terms of getting rainfall and sustainability of our rivers,” said Ayub Lushula a resident of Shinyalu. He adds that they are now friendly to the forest management as PELIS program ensures that they have food and at the same time the trees survive. He says they are also free to buy grass for thatching and for animal feed and pay a small levy to the station. According to Wilberforce Okeka, the research and education assistant at Kakamega forest, the move has saved the forest a lot because the community used to set the grass ablaze in bitterness for being denied access,” he said. Not all who buy the grass use it directly but rather they sell it to earn a living. This has further reduced criminal activities especially those threatening the survival of the forest. The major hindrance to saving the forest has always been inadequate funds. The association believes that the alternative income source is the only way to reduce interference with the forest and allow it to serve its purpose of ensuring enough rainfall. “The Kenya Forest Act 2005 recognizes the community forest associations but it doesn’t have any vote head for the same. This makes us stagger in our efforts,” said Joseph Mbai, the vice chairman Mu-ile-shi Community Forest Association. The main source of funding has been the previous Government-funded Kazi Kwa Vijana program which saw the Government purchase seedlings for planting in various towns and institutions. The association is appealing to well wishers to come up and enable it expand the activities.

“We need to establish fish farms within the forest as we have seen the fish enjoy clean water from the springs. This can be a very economical project in terms of income-generation. We can also distribute more seedlings to the community members in the entire catchment as many people are unable to purchase the seedlings due to financial constraints,” said Mambili.

Okeka confirms this saying that even the medicinal herbs can be processed and sold cheaply to residents. “The medication people seek from abroad is a product of processed herbs which originate from this forest,” he said citing the Red Sting wood and Prunas Africana locally known as Mwilitsa which he says is a cure for prostate cancer.

Mu-ile-shi has partnered with well wishers and is in the process of establishing an eco-tour centre within the forest. The donor has however partly donated seats and tents for the site. “We still need funds to put up the site which we hope to incorporate other activities like entertainment, bull-fighting and historical apparatus,” said Mambili. The community is positively embracing conservation and protection of Kakamega forest. However, inadequate financial base has derailed their efforts. One thing is clear, much support is necessary for the assured survival of Kakamega forest.
Politics Threaten Kakamega Forest
By Cyrus Akhonya and Lilian Mukoche

Political interference has been a pain in the neck for the survival of Kakamega forest. Just like other cash crops attracting public attention in various parts of the country, so have the trees in the forest. For all intents and purposes, the politicians have exploited the forest to solicit votes from the locals. Consequently, the implementation of Forest legislation geared towards safe-guarding it has met a barrage of resistance from political big wigs. Political leaders have been heard not once or twice but severally accusing the forest department for denying the community unfettered access into the forest.

“We want the forest management to allow our people to graze their animals in the forest and also collect dry woods for firewood and charcoal without any interference,’ a prominent politician from Shinyalu was quoted saying recently. He argued that the forest sits on community land and therefore, his people have a right to access it. According to Mr. Wilberforce Okeka, the forest’s research and education assistant, the dry woods are of significant value to the stability of the forest. “Everything in this forest is interdependent.

The fallen logs decompose and transform into organic matter which is food for insects, birds and other animals. They also support soil fertility,” he said. Scrupulous people use dry wood as an excuse to access the forest and then wreak havoc on its flora and fauna. To avoid deforestation and other illegal activities, it is only safe to deny people access to the forest. On grazing, Okeka says the forest is home to many wild animals which are not friendly to domesticated ones. Associated to this, it is not safe to allow grazing in the forest. Furthermore, the forest is being rehabilitated through planting of trees and allowing the animals to graze means destruction of the young fragile trees.

Survival of medicinal shrubs can also be threatened if domestic animals are allowed to graze in the forest and trample on them. The forest management says that there is much to benefit from if the political class sensitized the community on the importance of conserving the forest. “The leaders should push the Government and donor community to pump in more funds for processing herbs and also introduce eco-tourism centers within the forest,” he said adding that the income would be more than collecting firewood. He however appreciates the fact that the community is now enlightened thanks to the Forest Act which created room for networking between the community and KFS. Through organizations such as KFS, the community carries out internal sensitization on the importance of protecting the forest especially in ensuring there is enough rainfall for food security. “They are the ones taking care of the forest on our behalf and as a result we have witnessed a tremendous decrease on criminal activities which contributed to the destruction of the forest," concluded Okeka.

Waterless Nairobi
By Barbara Nyende

Nairobi city has many issues to grapple with not forgetting the water scarcity issue that has continuously rocked the city. The water crisis is a major source of concern to both the residents and the government.

Many households go several days in a month without water trickling in their taps. This has forced residents to dig deep into their pockets in order to purchase this precious commodity. Water vending carts dotting every corner of some estates and long queues at sporadic water points is what welcome one into most Nairobi estates.

Margret Wanjrui a resident of Ongata Rongai, says she has to part with three hundred shillings weekly to take over by destroying the water pipes and also introduce eco-tourism centers within the forest. If not for the water scarcity issue, she says, she would have collected dry woods for firewood and charcoal without any interference. As the residents find it quite frustrating to buy water, the sellers smile all the way to the bank. The vendors buy water from different sources at between $5 to $10 per liter container and sell to desperate buyers who urgently need the water at exorbitant prices.

Water vendors again sell the commodity at very exorbitant fees. Many households go several days in a month without water trickling in their taps. This has forced residents to dig deep into their pockets in order to purchase this precious commodity. Water vending carts dotting every corner of some estates and long queues at sporadic water points is what welcome one into most Nairobi estates.

As the residents find it quite frustrating to buy water, the sellers smile all the way to the bank. The vendors buy water from different sources at between $5 to $10 per liter container and sell to desperate buyers who urgently need the water at exorbitant prices of up to $50 shillings. The water vendors get the water from wells whose hygienic conditions are doubtful. There are chances of this water being contaminated with bacteria, viruses and parasites that cause diseases posing serious public health dangers to the residents.

Wanjirui’s case is one of the seventeen million Kenyans who do not have access to clean water according to a report published in 2010. The report released by Samantha Marshal in collaboration with the World Bank stated that water scarcity is mainly caused by recurrent droughts, poor management of water supply and a sharp increase in population growth.

This can also be attributed to the fact that Kenya is generally land and 80% of it is arid and semi arid. The entire population basically depends on the 630 millimeters of rain per annum which needs to serve the growing population.

Even as different organizations come in to build water reservoirs they are again turned into business hubs. The residents blame the Nairobi Water Company for laxity in their work as they allow cartels to take over by destroying the water pipes and again sell the commodity at very exorbitant fees.

According to Patience Muriuki a resident of Kahawa Sukari in the outskirts of Nairobi water in the city has become such a precious commodity that even with the rains they still have to part with high amounts of money to purchase water.
Nairobi residents receive water through the piped network and pump water from their own deep wells. However, water is not equally distributed. Wealthier users with access to piped water use much more than average, while those without access to piped water receive much less. Half of Nairobi’s population lives in slums like Mathare and Kibera which is among the largest slums in Kenya. Here, the population largely depends on water through the water kiosks.

These kiosks are however controlled by individuals who also try and exploit the residents forcing them to rely mostly on river water which is normally highly polluted and contaminated. However it is the poor of Nairobi who suffer the more. A resident from the affluent estates in Kahawa sukari does not experience water shortages. “We rarely get water shortages here,” Pamela Andalo says. Causes of water shortage in the country are due to the prolonged droughts. As much as Kenya is generally a dry country as experts say. It does have prolonged droughts; the worst that occurred was in the 2001. Climate Change experts attribute this change to global warming which has become a major source of concern to policy makers and scientists who see a bleak future when it comes to issues concerning water.

The high population growth is also a major cause of water scarcity. As the population grows there is a big strain on the water sources which means less accessibility. The same population is one that causes climate change. According to Dr Laban Ogalo the director IGAD Climate Prediction and Application Centre (ICPAC ) climate change is generally caused by the finger prints of man.

As the World marks the World Water Day every March 22nd, Nairobi residents have nothing to celebrate as they do not have sufficient access to clean water. Much has to be done to save the residents from the jaws of water scarcity in the city that is considered as the green city under the sun.

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25 tips for climate change journalists

1. Know your audience.
When you sit down to write a story there is only one person that matters and it is not you, not your editor and not the person you just interviewed. It is the reader or listener or viewer – someone who are unlikely to ever meet. They are the most important people in the world. Be familiar with their level of knowledge about climate change and about the things they care most about. If in doubt, assume your audience knows nothing. But never make the mistake of assuming that they are stupid. The classic error in journalism is to over-estimate the audience’s knowledge and under-estimate their intelligence.

2. Understand the basics.
If you don’t have a thorough understanding of the key topics, your audience never will. You need to know and understand the greenhouse effect and the various sources of greenhouse gases. You need to understand the kinds of impacts that a warmer world could bring, and the difference between risk and vulnerability, and between adaptation and mitigation. If you don’t know these things know you can train yourself with online courses such as the News University’s one or the Earth Journalism Toolkit.

3. Team up
To tell the story of climate change well you need to understand the science, the politics, the economics and more. But no-one can excel in all of these aspects. Even superheroes achieve more as a team. So team up with other journalists. Time journalist Eric Pooley has urged media outlets to create climate policy teams that include environmental science reporters, political reporters and business and energy reporters. This mix, working together, would be able to combine their strengths to report more effectively on these three angles, which are deeply connected but usually reported on in isolation.

4. At the same time, you can specialise
Pick a specific subtopic and immerse yourself in it. Aim to be your country’s leading journalist on that subject. It could be biofuels, or climate-related insurance, or adaptation in the agriculture sector, or health impacts of climate change, or low-carbon technology in the building sector...the list is almost endless.

5. Stay focused
Remember that a story will only ever say one big thing, so don’t try to cram in too many details. Also, don’t lose track of the big picture. With climate change there is a big risk of “information overload”. Journalists who report every twist and the turn of the story may find that after two years nothing has really changed. Keep asking the fundamental questions about whether the news you are reporting has a real bearing on how the climate change story will ultimately develop. And beware of smoke screens such as promises of action or finance which either never become real or are not big enough to have any real impact.

6. Drop the jargon
You may need to understand what CDM, REDD and UNFCCC mean but your reader/listener/viewer almost certainly does not. If your interviewees use jargon, be ready to ask them to simplify their language. Ask them how they would explain their views to their grandparent or an 18-year old. If your interviewee speaks in complicated terms, remind them that while they have been working on climate change for years, you have been researching your climate change story for just a few hours. Most experts would prefer to give you a simpler message in their own words than have you simplify things for them.

7. So K.I.S.S. every sentence
Keep it Short and Simple. Use short words, short sentences and short paragraphs, and remember that no one will ever complain because you have made something too easy to understand.

8. Get connected to share knowledge and learn from colleagues
Join networks of journalists, like the Earth Journalism Network, the African Network of Environmental Journalists or one of the many national associations of environment or science journalists (see here and here). Get a Little Black Book (or better still, a database) Good contacts are key to good journalism, and you can’t keep quoting the same person. The Climate Change Rapid Response Team and the American Geophysical Union’s Climate Q & A Service (which has 700 scientists waiting to answer your queries) both exist to support journalists who need experts to comment on climate science. The Climate Change Media Partnership’s Roster of Experts is another good place to find new contacts.

9. Subscribe to mailing lists
Join the IISD Climate-L mailing list where thousands of climate specialists share their latest reports and information about events. For information on the UN change negotiations you can subscribe to the Earth Negotiations Bulletin or Climate Action Network - International’s Eco newsletter or get news and briefing papers on the talks from the Third World Network.

10. Become an ace salesperson
Your editors need to give you the space and time to report on climate change. But greenhouse gases are invisible and climate change is a process. This makes it hard to excite editors, especially if they think climate change is “just an environment story”. So use different angles — climate change is relevant to politics, business, the economy, health, the weather, agriculture, food, water, trade, travel, lifestyle, sports, etc., etc. And have some hot dates. Keep a calendar of news pegs to hang your stories on such as international meetings, anniversaries of events, the international day of forests, etc., etc.

11. Wear climate change glasses
For every new policy, new invention, new anything,
12. **Remember that climate change itself does not need to be the story**

It is the context in which so many other stories will unfold. You don’t even need to mention the climate to tell a good climate change story. You will probably have more success with editors – and attract more readers – if you keep climate change out of your headlines and opening paragraphs. After all, typical “climate change” stories may repel an important and sizeable audience that has been either turned off by doom and gloom, or has a political reaction against the climate-change narrative. This story by Stefano Valentino is certainly a climate change story but it does not even mention the word climate once.

13. **Be visual**

Many climate and environment stories are complex, but they are often also photogenic, or can be illustrated with engaging human stories. Use all the resources you have to bring the story to life – headlines, photos, graphs, maps, sidebars.

14. **Humanise, Humanise, Humanise**

More than anything else, people care about their health, their wealth and the future of their children. Climate change is relevant to all three of these things, so try to think in those terms when you are working out how to tell your story, both to your editor and your audience. And make the abstract real. Putting a price tag on action or inaction will help, especially if you do it in terms people readily understand (like the price of bread or petrol). For example, have faith. I don’t mean that you need to pray that your editor will take your story, I mean think about religion. It is something that 80% of people alive today say they believe in, and it is a perfect entry point for some climate change stories.

15. **Prepare hard for interviews**

The more you know about your interviewee and your subject in advance, the better the interview will be. It will be a conversation of equals, not an attempt by you to keep up with what you’re hearing for the first time. Explain yourself. Let your interviewee know who your audience is, how you work, what your deadline is and what will happen to your story.

16. **Get a second opinion – and a third**

For every PhD there is an equal and opposite PhD. For every politician there is a paymaster. Your interviewees can be wrong. They can be biased. They can have vested interests. Ask yourself why they are saying what they say and whether they stand to gain from you reporting their words. Seek the opinion of other experts from other institutions. As a reporter, you have a double responsibility: both to the truth as politicians and professors may see it, and to the truth as you perceive it.

17. **Seek the truth Always be skeptical of everyone you meet and everything you’re told – but never cynical**

Don’t refuse to believe what somebody tells you, but ask them for evidence to back up what they say. Watch out for vested interests and remember that people do lie. Everyone has a motive to lie... or tell only part of the truth. Remember this classic advice to journalists: the one question a reporter needs to ask themselves when interviewing a politician is: “Why is this lying bastard telling me this particular lie at this particular moment?”

18. **Remember that balance is not the same as impartiality and that everyone is entitled to their own opinion but not their own facts**

It is important to bear this in mind when reporting on the science and the politics of climate change.

19. **Quote varied voices**

Climate change affects everyone and everyone can respond to it in a different way. Think about both gender and generation. Climate change will affect men and women in different ways. Young people and old people are both more vulnerable than healthy middle aged people. They also have different perspectives. Very old people have long memories and can describe decades of change. Young people will inherit the problems of climate change and so may have powerful perspectives. By speaking to many different kinds of people about climate change you will get a richer understanding of it, more story ideas and new angles that you can use to tell the story.

20. **Localise the global**

International meetings, foreign scientific research and extreme climatic events in other countries can be localised and made relevant to your own audiences. Nongovernmental organisations, universities and scientific journals around the world all produce press releases about climate change, so contact press officers and join their mailing lists to get story ideas and to stay updated with what is happening worldwide.

21. **But don’t be seduced by press releases – do justice to them**

Too often journalists will copy-and-paste a press release and just add their name in the byline. In doing so, they do a disservice to their readers. A press
“You will probably have more success with editors ± and attract more readers ± if you keep climate change out of your headlines and opening paragraphs.”

24. Climate Change News
release is not a story. It is just information that contains the seeds of story that you must nurture yourself. While international press releases may be relevant to you, they will never have been written with your specific audience in mind... Localise them and make them relevant to your audience.

22. Follow the pack
Keep on top of the climate-change story by reading the work of other journalists who are covering it well (you will find some great international stories at IPS, Reuters AlertNet, The Guardian, New York Times and the BBC but there are also many good reporters covering climate change for national media around the world). Use social media such as Twitter to find out what people are saying about climate change and to share your own stories.

23. Follow the money
Climate change is a story about hundreds of billions of dollars... Where is that money for adaptation and mitigation? Who controls it? Who spends it? Who makes sure it does what it is meant to do? Who funds the NGOs and the politicians? Which companies stand to profit from action to address climate change? Which stand to lose? Follow the money and you will find all the elements of a good story.

24. Remember your audience
Before you finish your story, read it through. Put yourself in the shoes of a typical member of your audience and imagine what questions they might ask about your story. Then answer those questions in your story before you sign off on it.

25. Remember, climate change is not the only environmental problem
It is just one of many symptoms of a much bigger challenge, which is the unsustainable way we are living on Earth and managing our natural resources. Other symptoms are abundant — declining fisheries, deforestation, pollution, extinction of species... the list is long — and if journalists are to fulfil a public service remit, they must do much more to explain the causes and consequences of these problems too. But that is another story. (Mike Shanahan).

Peace Pen Communications and the Climate Change media Initiative

By Hellen Mutio

In early 2012, Peace Pen Communications with the support of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation offered journalists a platform to share challenges they faced in reporting climate change. This was done through holding and interacting with vernacular radio journalists in five different regions in the Kenya. The first day was held in a conference set up where the journalists and climate change partners exchanged ideas, challenges, shared experiences and strategize on how to make Climate Change the big story in the newsroom.

The journalists were challenged by the facilitators on possible reasons why their stories never saw the light of day and procrastination and lack of self confidence stood out. The media participants also embarked on site visits where they saw first-hand illustration of environmental degradation and interventions to curtail the same. Here, they got their questions practically answered by expert facilitators.

Later the participants were sent out to the field to undertake various assignments based on the lessons received on reporting climate change. After replicating these projects in six different counties in Kenya; Nairobi, Mombasa, Malindi, Kakamega, Kisii and Meru PPC with the support of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation culminated the project with the launch of a Media Handbook on reporting Climate Change in November 2012.

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