

Sustainable Utilization of Cultural Heritage Sites for Posterity in Kisumu County, Kenya

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Abstract

Cultural Heritage sites in Kisumu County are repositories of community cultural belief artifacts replete with myths and legends and rich biodiversity threatened with extinction. These resources can be developed as “Exotic products” in an ecotourism package. There are hardly any community conservation efforts for protecting and conserving cultural heritage sites yet they constitute the only sources of community treasured plant and animals species. The major objectives of the study were to generate information for conservation, sustainable utilization and management of cultural heritage sites in the LVB. The study reviewed Secondary data and used participatory methods as well as field and on-station experiment. This research apart from documenting sacredness and cultural value also inventoried biodiversity of cultural heritage habitats, and sought paths for sustainable development. Sensitization, training in asset management, plant propagation and improved resources harvesting are needed. Value addition with eco-tourism including nature trails, documentation of artifacts, myths and legends and development of “indigenous exotic cuisines” using indigenous vegetables, fruits and other native recipes are suggested. Further interventions may include informal education for capacity building in communities and integration of informal education in school curriculum.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage sites, Biodiversity Conservation, Cultural Artifacts, Mythology, Indigenous Cuisines, Ecotourism

1. Introduction

Although the lowlands of the Lake Victoria region where cultural heritage sites are found, are under catastrophic extent of degradation brought about by indiscriminate bush and vegetation clearances for agriculture; over extraction of fuel-wood, medicine, fruits, craft and building materials{1}. There are hardly any community conservation efforts aimed at protecting and conserving these cultural heritage bush fallows. Regrettably poverty and inappropriate conservation policies prevail {2}. Yet these remnant cultural heritage sites constitute the only source of community treasured plant and animals species and related natural products including vital food supplements, potentially high value fruits and herbal medicinal plants amongst other equally important products {5}. This research apart from documenting sacredness and cultural value also assessed the biodiversity of cultural heritage sites, and other important habitat management attributes. It is also envisaged that adding value to these habitats through activities like introduction of eco-tourism, nature trails and performing art could cause reversals in the poverty curve in this region. The major objectives of the study were therefore to generate information that will enhance community conservation, sustainable utilization and management of cultural heritage sites in Kisumu County.

2. Methodology

The study was initiated with a review of Secondary data. This was followed with surveys, done with the aid of participatory methods to select suitable sites for projects implementation. In Kisumu, 3 sites, namely Kit Mikayi, Luanda Magere and Abindu Cave were selected for investigation (Fig 1).



Fig. 1: Location of Kisumu County in East African Context

2.1 Cultural artifact documentation

Participatory appraisal methods were used for obtaining socio-cultural information. Semi-structured interviews were held with key informants in focus group discussion aided by a checklist to elicit information on origins, meanings and functions of cultural sites, symbols of mythology embedded in the cultural sites, forms of mythology, objects of sacredness, cultural activities that take place at the cultural sites and their significance to conserving these sites and contemporary community perceptions of the cultural sites and their sacredness. Photographs of artifacts at cultural sites were taken (Fig. 2).



Fig.2: Location of Cultural Heritage sites in the Study Area.

2.2 Propagation Experiments

Community priority and high premium species identified facing eminent threat of extinction or that have suffered serious genetic erosion were identified through preference ranking and propagated either through seedlings or vegetative propagation via rooting of cutting and specific conditions for achieving this with various species were tested. Ripe seed were collected in polythene bags and handled according to the needs of the species to enable them retain viability for planting.

3. Result and Discussion

This section presents data, analysis and interpretation of the study of cultural heritage sites in terms of their potential, sustainable development, ecotourism promotion and challenges, capacity building, integration of cultural heritage in school curriculum and biodiversity conservation.

3.1 Cultural Heritage sites for Sustainable Development

Access to cultural sites is denied through taboos and totemic hindrances. A rich diversity of animals and plants species conserved in the sites contrast dramatically with degraded, denuded surrounding landscape. Previous and present results indicate that local communities appreciate the existence of cultural sites. The merits were listed (Table 1). Any artifact held as of a religious concern to the community remains revered only for its supernatural relevance. To regain cultural value, it is mandatory to keep a balance of the indigenous culture with modernity. Fortunately many recently evolved indigenous African Christian religious groups find their faith only meaningful if Christianity is lased with their heritage and hence regularly use these cultural sites for pilgrimage and for meditation complete with offerings and libation (Fig 1). We cannot replace Christianity with African traditional religion (ATR) but we can indeed facilitate enculturation.

Table 1: Use of Resources from cultural sites in Kisumu County

Use	% response	% ranking use of resources from sites			Mean score
		Rarely =1	Moderately=2	Commonly=3	
medicinal	80	0	40	40	2±0.3
firewood	59	0	13	46	1.7±0.4
Crafts	13	0	13	0	0.3±0.2
Rituals	20	20	0	0	0.2±0.1
Fruits	66	0	20	46	1.8±0.4
Building Materials	73	0	73	0	1.5±0.2
Grazing pasture	72	0	26	46	1.9±0.3

3.2 Cultural sites for Eco-tourism

Economic challenges in most Third World countries are the reasons behind the depletion of the cultural sites. The need to derive economic utility from these sites including building stones, timber, medicine, fuel, food, animals feeds, among others (Table 1) encourage misuse of the natural resources that conserves plant and animals species as well as water sources(3). This leads to a cycle of extinction facilitating unsustainability. The indigenous vegetables and fruits are part of the community recipes and cuisines that are exotic to foreign tourist groups and can enhance the ecotourism package at these sites. In this regard that the ecotourism sector is believed to harbor an innate potential that would not only lead to conservation of these sites, but also involve the local communities for both resource management and economic benefits.

It was found in this study that cultural sites in Kisumu County were rich in myths and legends (Fig 2.). In a number of cases, the mythology is presented with repertoire of performing art which undoubtedly enriches the ecotourism package of these sites. The mythology has been documented and can provide exciting components to an ecotourism package. In most instances, the nature communities have been excluded from management of sites and forests, which they once held sacred. This exclusion besides depriving the communities of the sacred role played by these sites, has also encouraged poaching of wild animals, and illegal timber extraction, fruits and herbs harvesting. This has heightened depletion of indigenous plants and animals in these sites.

It is observed that the World Bank has included cultural heritage conservation components in some of its projects. However, opportunities for improving site security and sustainability has not been achieved, firstly due to lack of information and also due to poor institutional coordination (4). It is also observed that countries in Sub-Saharan Africa tend to be mainly concerned with cultural artifacts and often to a lesser degree with site protection (Taboroff and Cynthia, 1993). In most African countries, there are no specific agencies assigned to protect cultural heritage and especially sacred sites. It is upon this background that the tourism industry can positively be employed for beneficial purposes to the cultural sites and the communities around these sites. This will aid local, indigenous and traditional people safeguard their heritage as well as economically benefit from their efforts.

3.3 Informal Education for Capacity Building

Culture is handed down from generation to the next. Most of the cultural norms and values have been overshadowed by modern Education system as well as western/ modern approaches to life. There is an eminent information gap about cultural observation in the present generations. The community elders, who once were bestowed with cultural wealth and subsequently in charge of informal education for enhancement of traditional / cultural values, are dwindling, and their knowledge most a times regarded as overtaken by time (7). This means that cultural sites specifically sacred sites are culturally losing meaning, and may only be valued for satisfaction of economic wants. This fact evidences our prior observance that, the cultural artifacts are important to people, but not the sustenance of the sites. It is therefore imperative for development practioners to introduce informal leaning centres as well as pursue avenues of recovering the information gap on cultural heritage sites. The few remaining elders could be of great help in tapping knowledge and information that will authenticate the existing academic literature.

Using stake-holders workshops, the study explored the need for informal education as one way in which the capacity of both development partners/practioners, as well as the local populace can be built in a bid to manage the sites for both sustenance of biodiversity, as well as sustainable socio-economic development. It was observed that communities were oblivious of the potential for income generation such as ecotourism though they acknowledge that they were already receiving in-come from site visitors in some cases.

Indeed at Kit Mikayi site in Seme Sub-County, local communities have introduced Visitors' books and categories of fee charges to various classes of visitors (Fig 2).

3.4 Integration of Informal Education in School Curriculum

The specks of African Traditional culture once taught in our school curriculum, including traditional tales, riddles, taboos, songs, proverbs among other African oratures, are in most schools role of cultural heritage, which is embedded in ATR, as Mbiti (1975) observes that religion is part and parcel of human life. It is by far the richest part of African heritage, and dominates the thinking of African peoples to such an extent that it has shaped their cultures, their social life, their political organizations and economic activities. The inability of generations to recognize this role is evident in the destruction of the environment generally and cultural sites in particular.

In a bid to reclaim manage and upgrade the important ecologies for sustainable development, this study has documented a wealth of folklore, mapped and geo-referenced cultural artifacts' in Kisumu (Fig 4) and explored possible avenues of integrating cultural studies in the existing formal education curriculum in a stake-holders workshop.

3.5 Cultural sites and Biodiversity Conservation

The convention on biological diversity, adopted at the 1992 Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro acknowledged the need to protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with conservation or sustainable use requirement (Article 10). The common question asked is whether environment conservation can be based effectively on cultural values and traditional belief systems. While it is generally true that proven scientific ecological approaches for conserving plant and animals' ecology have had some success, it is conceded that a better result for the environment could have been achieved with integration with community participation. In this regard an evaluation of the state of plant species diversity with respect to community priority species for the conservation was undertaken during this study (Table 2). Subsequently seed propagation methods for selected community priority species have been developed (Fig.2).

Table 2: State of plant species diversity at the sites

Plant name	Plant type	Use	Rate of use	Current status
Tetradenia riparia	T	Medicinal	3	1
Tamarindus indika	T	Fruit	1	1
Artocarpus heterophyllus	T	Fruit	3	3
Erytherina abyssinica	T	Medicinal	1	3
Entada abyssinica	T	Medicinal	1	2
Spathodea campanulata	T	Medicinal	3	3
Citrus limon	T	Fruit	1	2
Acacia hokii	T	Medicinal	1	2
Morus alba	T	Fruit	1	2
Vernoca amygdalina	T	Medicinal	2	2
Canarium schweinfurthi	T	fruit	3	1
Tagetes	H	medicinal	3	1

Climbers Rate of use: 1= rarely used; 2= moderately used; 3= commonly used **Current Status:** 1= Endangered; 2= Rare; 3=Abundant.

These techniques are destined for dissemination through nursery training workshops to enable communities undertake cultural site enrichment planting where possible as well as individual's farmer domestication for conserving these priority species. In this regard, dissemination approaches that enable hitherto neglected indigenous species to be planted alongside established; commercially viable species will need to be promoted in mixed rather than in pure stands.

4. Conclusions

It is concluded that it is the highest time scientists, sociologists, development agents, policy makers and implementers explored alternatives avenues which can beef up the efforts of biodiversity conservation. The efforts should more so be geared towards enhancing sustainable development which can not and will not happen until local communities with their indigenous resources such as these cultural heritage sites play a central role. All the results presented and discussed here provide a template for an immeasurable potential as a source of findings that will stir policy implementation for effectual management of our biodiversity in cultural sites in Kisumu County, Kenya.

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