

## **Abindu Sacred Site: Socio-Cultural Capital for Ecotourism Promotion and Community Empowerment in Kisumu County, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

*This work explores the role of cultural heritage in the transformation of the community, support of local livelihood and poverty reduction in Kenya. The study focuses on the use of cultural identity in promoting ecotourism transformation of the local people. Cultural identity has been the driving factor in a community's initiative to manage and conserve its cultural heritage site. The study aimed at examining cultural identity of the site, establishing its potential for ecotourism transformation, identifying the challenges facing the site and developing appropriate strategies for ecotourism promotion. The study used ethnographic and phenomenological methods of data collection. The data was qualitatively analyzed and identified themes with respect to research objectives. The research documented cultural identity of the site as management, conservation and branding tools, identified its potential and challenges for ecotourism promotion, and proposed appropriate strategies for the management and conservation of Abindu site in the study area.*

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Cultural Identity, Mythology, Sacred, Cultural Artefacts, Natural Artefacts

### **1.0. Background Information**

Tourism industry is one of the main earners of foreign exchange and contributes about 10 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 9 per cent of formal employment to the Republic of Kenya at the national level and in 2006 brought in US\$800 million (Republic of Kenya, 2010a). Tourism has been a rapidly growing sector with visitors' number growing by 22 per cent each year between 2004 and 2006, and the volume of international arrivals rising by 23.9% from 1.2 million visitors in 2008 to 1.5 million in 2009 (Republic of Kenya, 2010a; UNCTAD, 2010). However, the main tourism destination of coastal region is currently hit by terrorist attacks from Alshabaab and Mombasa Republican Movements that threatens to cripple the whole of the tourism industry in Kenya. To address the threat of terrorism and in line with Kenya's Vision 2030 diversification of tourism products and services, that identifies cultural heritage as a key tourism product in Kenya, this study will unravel the potential of Abindu cultural heritage site for ecotourism promotion. The study area is located in western Kenya, well within the western tourism circuit, a potential tourism zone as proposed in Kenya's Vision 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2007).

Cultural Heritage may be defined as things, places and practices that define who we are as individuals, communities, nations or civilizations. It is that aspect of our lives or environment which we want to keep, share and pass on to future generations (Onjala, 2011:79). In essence, tangible cultural heritage are the sites, monuments and objects. Intangible cultural heritage are the values, norms, traditions, folklore, music and dance, traditional skills and technologies and the meaning a society derives from them and perpetrates for posterity (Fielden and Jakilehto, 1998:5).

UNESCO has been the world's most important institution responsible for the management, conservation and promotion of world heritage sites, as well as, the establishment of various international conservation charters. This world cultural umbrella has played a significant role in presenting to the general public various cultural properties of outstanding universal value from all corners of the world since its establishment. It has brought together heritage professionals with divergent views and cultural experiences to share and exchange ideas and work together during workshops, seminars and training programmes (UNESCO, 1972).

In Kenya, as in any other countries of the world, cultural heritage is considered as irreplaceable source of spiritual and intellectual richness of all human kind. It is a source of history, identity and life. Monuments, sites, shrines and other sacred places (created or man-made) reflect complex cultural heritage diversity with values emanating from all aspects of belief systems (Odede, 2007:61).

The National Museums of Kenya (NMK) is a state corporation established by an Act of Parliament, the National Museums and Heritage Act Chapter 216, 2006, Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 63. The National Museums of Kenya is a multidisciplinary institution whose role is to collect, preserve, study, document and present Kenya's past and present cultural and natural heritage. This is for purpose of enhancing knowledge, appreciation, respect and sustainable utilization of those resources for the benefits of Kenya and the world for now and posterity. It is the principal cultural institution on whose shoulder is placed the identification, preservation, protection, conservation and presentation of the country's cultural heritage, which is reflected in the various monuments and heritage sites. In Kenya, the numerical strength of potential monuments and sites is great, but only a few of these have been declared national monuments requiring conscious conservation for their sustainability. Abindu is one such cultural heritage site in western Kenya that requires proper management, and conservation for ecotourism promotion, hence, the need for this study.

### **1.1. Research Problem**

Abindu site is located in Western Kenya region, particularly the Lake Victoria Basin, a region that relies on agriculture which has been the mainstay economic activity but is facing adverse effects of climate change (Republic of Kenya, 2010b). Environmental resources are steadily declining, and fish resources are dwindling in the Lake Victoria Basin with expansion of human settlements rendering sustainable livelihood almost impossible to attain (LVEMP, 2005; NEMA, 2006; Kairu, 2001). Tourism sector is recognized to provide sector integration in development, namely; environment, agriculture, manufacturing, wildlife, entertainment, and handicraft; and has potential for moving the economy up the value chain, as well as promote environmental conservation, and generate employment and wealth (Republic of Kenya, 2010b). To address the constraints facing the tourist sector and upscale in 'niche' products such as culture and nature artifacts, it is significant to promote ecotourism. Ecotourism is emerging as an alternative development path that can enhance environmental conservation, promote preservation of cultural heritage as well as provide an alternative source of sustainable livelihood (Weilin & Svetlana, 2012; Hayombe, 2011; Honey, 2008, Goma, 2007). Currently, Abindu site is still revered as sacred, though there is a lot of encroachment by human settlement hence the need for its proper management and conservation for future generations (Plate 1 & 2).



**Plate1: Abindu Site Plate 2: Researchers Observing Human Encroachment at Abindu**

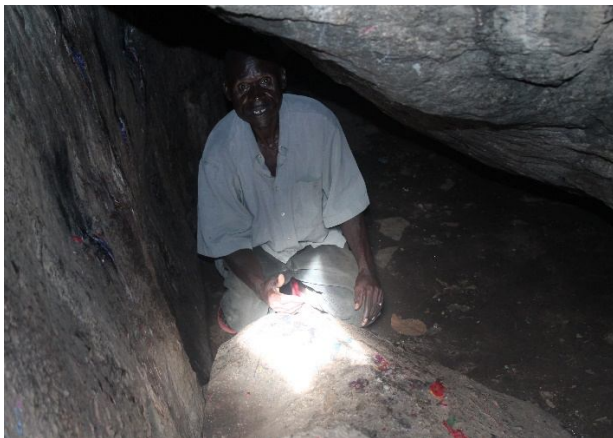
The study aims at establishing cultural identity of the site, its potential and challenges as well as developing appropriate strategies for ecotourism transformation in the area. The site is likely to become one of the major tourist and heritage attractions within Western Kenya if well packaged and properly managed.

This study intends to achieve the following objectives:

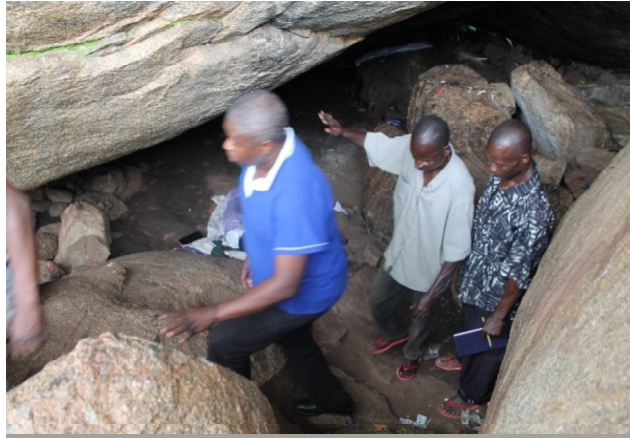
- 1) To establish cultural identity of the site for ecotourism promotion.
- 2) To map out key stakeholders of the site for its proper management.
- 3) To assess the site's potential and challenges for ecotourism transformation and community empowerment.
- 4) To develop appropriate strategies for ecotourism promotion of the site.

## 2.0. Methodology

This section presents detailed information on methods of data collection and modes of analysis suitable for answering the research objectives. This was accomplished through use of the Critical Theory. Critical Theory was applied in the analysis to identify and explain the various facets of cultural identity of the site, to examine the potential and challenges facing the site and underlying community needs and priorities useful in the development of appropriate strategies for conservation and management of the cultural heritage through stakeholder participation. The research was mainly qualitative. The study employed ethnographic phenomenological collections of oral history of the site from elderly members of the host community. It began with the identification of resource persons who were knowledgeable about the site. These were persons considered knowledgeable because they had grown up in the area surrounding the site, had often used the site for different purposes. In addition, they were aged seventy years and above thus could be viewed as custodians of the community's wisdom. Face to face interviews were used collect the myths. Tape recording was done during the narrative sessions. The myths collected were transcribed, and then translated for the researcher's use. Observation of the cultural sites was done through visual inspection of the site to assess the site's content, condition and narrative (Plate 3 & 4). In addition, focused group discussions among the youth, elderly women and elderly men were carried out with special emphasis on the potential, challenges and appropriate management and conservation strategies for ecotourism upscaling of Abindu site to support community livelihood (Hayombe, Agong', Nystrom, Mossberg, Malbert, & Odede, 2012).



**Plate 3: Cave (Fort) Turn into Shrine**



**Plate 4: Researchers and resource persons Inspecting the Shrine**

The primary data was organized into thematic areas using content analysis. Nachmias (2009) defines content analysis as any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages. Kothari (2009) further argues that content analysis consists of analyzing the content of documentary material such as books, magazines and the content of all other verbal material which can be either spoken or printed. Content analysis has been qualitatively used in analyzing primary data. Qualitative content analytical approaches focus on analyzing both the explicit or manifest content of a text as well as interpretations of latent content of texts, that can be interpreted or interpolated from the text, but is not explicitly stated in it (Granhein & Lundman, 2004). In the current research, analysis and interpretation of data was done to develop thematic areas as per research objectives using software called NVivo.

## 3.0. Research Findings

### 3.1. Location and Description of the Site

Abindu sits on a hilly ragged terrain which extends from Kajulu to Ojola and is part of extension of Nandi Escarpment that is 5 kilometers to Kisumu City in Kisumu County (Fig. 1). It is about 1300 metres above the sea level. Abindu Sacred site is situated 12 kilometres North–West of Kisumu City. Kisumu City is the third largest city in Kenya with coverage of 417 km square of which 287 km square is dry land and approximately 120 km square under water (Hayombe, 2011). It has a population of approximately ½ million people according to 1999 census.

The density population is 828 per sq km. with an average growth of 5% largely due to rural urban migration. The population is projected to be 1 million by the year 2015 with the international airport, Kisumu is expected to post higher population.

Abindu site can be accessed from Kisumu through Busia Road off Darajambili junction to Ulalo road that stretches 2½kms to the site (Route C86). The site can also be accessed from Kisumu through Kakamega Road off Darajambili road through Ulalo–Wachara road (Fig. 2). The site measures approximately 12km square and is surrounded by dense thicket of canopies.



Fig. 1: Location of Study Area in Kenya

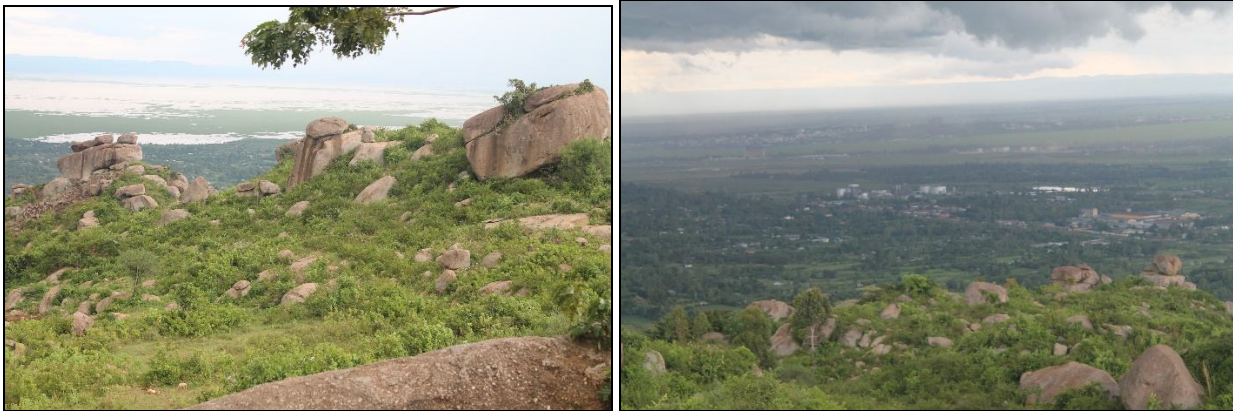


**Fig. 2: Location of Abindu site in Kisumu County, Kenya**

**3.2. Geology of the Area**

The site is located 12 kilometers, North-West of Kisumu City in Kisumu County on the Eastern shores of Lake Victoria in Western Kenya. Lake Victoria was formed by intense tectonic movements during the rift valley formation (Gregory, 1965). The Nyanzaian rock system is the oldest rock in the region, the largest being a triangular block in Kendu-Oyugis-Kabondo (Ojany & Ogendo, 1973:22). The overburden consists of reddish, silty sandy clay deposit, and a superficial organic soil underlain by laterite soil with gravel and pebble inclusions. The granodiorite basement rock in the area is a member of MuriuGranodiorite intruded into the oldest rock of Pre-Cambrian Nyanzaian meta-volcanics. Abindu rock is a granitic or similar to Kit-Mikayi in Seme Sub-County that has more or less similar religious and cultural significance.

The rock tors are spatially distributed along the lake region such as MuhongeMurwe ‘the crying stone’, GanguNyalaji and Tororo plug. They are erosional features formed due to gradual denudation processes over long span of time. Abindu hills are remnants of granitic tors that extend up to Nandi Escarpment in the Rift Valley of Kenya (Plate 5 & 6).



**Plate 5: Beautiful Landscape: Granitic tors Plate 6: View of Kisumu City from the site (on Escarpment)**

### 3.3. Climatic Condition

The climatic condition is modified Equatorial with marked rainfall variation of 700 - 800mm in the higher eastern region (Hayombe, 2011; Ojany & Ogendo, 1973:68). There are two marked reasons, the long rainy season (March - July) and the short rainy period (October - December). The Lakeshore lowlands rise to heights of 1163 -1219m while the inland plateaus rise to heights of 1220m to over 2272m above sea level. Temperatures range from a minimum of 14 - 18°C to a maximum of 30-34°C (Jaetzold, 1982). The Lake Victoria breeze has a strong cooling effect that reduces temperatures in the inland areas.

### 3.4. Site History

Abindu is a Luo word that means caves in one place. Abindu Sacred site was inhabited by the Kipsigis community decades back as far back as 500 years. From oral narrative, it is said that the Luo drove away the Kipsigis from Abindu area to their present settlement in the Rift Valley. As the Luo migrated from the main area of dispersal at Got Ramogi Hill, different cultural groups moved into the Winam Gulf and Abindu was used as a fort by different migrant groups such as the Luo, Kipsigis, and Luhya to ward off their enemies during the occupation and settlement of the region. Linguistic reconstructions indicate that the history of settlement in the eastern side of Lake Victoria Basin can be traced to the Khoikhoi hunter-gatherers who were occupying the lake region in the last millennium BC (Evans-Pritchard, 1949). They were absorbed by the Southern Cushites who occupied the region from 3000 up to 2000 years ago (Abuso, 1980).

The Southern Cushites were gradually assimilated and replaced by the early Bantu and Highland Nilotic groups (Ayot, 1979:8; Sutton, 1973:15; Evans-Pritchard, 1949). From the 15<sup>th</sup> Century onwards, pre-Luo Bantu groups occupied the region and did not have much contact with them until the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ayot, 1979:8). They were later replaced or assimilated by the River Lake Nilotic Luo groups between 1886 and 1914 (Abuso, 1980:56). Today, the region is predominantly Luo, though not far away from the Maragoli, Luhya, and Kipsigis.

### 3.5. Stakeholders Analysis

A stakeholder is someone (or persons, group of people, organization or institution) that has an interest, claim, benefit opportunity, shares, right, control, authority, roles, special capacity, or other legitimate claim on a resource (Hayombe, Odede, Agong' & Mossberg, 2014). Some of the stakeholders are expectations are discussed.

#### Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)

Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) becomes the first stakeholder having indicated interest in this heritage by visiting the site to take care of site's wild animals. The institution was established by a Parliamentary statute through an amendment (No.16 of 1989) to the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act (CAP 376 of 1975). Its overall mandate is to conserve and manage wildlife in Kenya.

The Abindu community is collaborating with the institution to conserve wildlife at the site. KWS has held a stakeholder meeting at the site to upscale the conservation of flora and fauna at the site.

### **National Museums of Kenya (NMK)**

NMK is State Corporation mandated to take care of the Country's Cultural and Natural Heritage. NMK was established through an Act of parliament and operates currently under the Museums and Heritage Act 2006 CAP 216. NMK's interests at Abindu site include working in collaboration with other stakeholder. NMK would like to oversee all forms of conservation, research, marketing and promotion of the heritage to spark beneficial social and economic development. The National Museums of Kenya has carried out an inventory and a conditional survey of the site but is yet to gazette the site.

### **The Community**

The community, consisting of different groups including farmers, business people/groups, and women groups among others, form a category of stakeholders that interact with the heritage almost on a daily basis with the site as their shrine or sacred place of worship. Different religious sects as well as traditional healers draw their power from the site. The local community through their management committee is earning foreign revenue from collections made from both domestic and international visitors. The local committee is entrusted with the management and protection of the site. Apart from conservation, it has the responsibility of providing education to the visitors at the site. While the story may be only a myth to many, it is equally an inspiring lesson to welcome strangers whenever need be. The Elders provide oral narratives to both domestic and international visitors who come to the site. The youth act as tour guides who lead and direct the visitors to various features of the site. Women hold impromptu traditional dances to welcome tourists visiting the site.

### **Tourism Industry**

Ministry of Tourism joins the list of Abindu site stakeholders due to the interest of the tour operators to organize visitation to the destination. This heritage can become a major attraction translating into economic benefits if conditions are improved. Currently, there are no facilities to support vibrant tourism activities. Despite its mythical and cultural significance, there are no other facilities, such as, information Centre, take away brochures and restaurants among others. Development of such facilities would attract more visitors and enhance the status of ecotourism in the region. The influx of tourists would benefit other stakeholders and boost economic status of Kisumu County. This makes Tourism industry an important stakeholder.

### **Learning Institutions**

Schools and other learning institutions form another category of stakeholders. This category benefits from the heritage through educational programs. Visits to the heritage are usually organized as part of history lessons in which the pupils and/or students learn about mythical, religious and cultural values of Abindu site. From the records of visitation, it is evident that different academic institutions such as primary schools, secondary schools, colleges and universities visit the sites to receive practical education experience, carry out research as well as enjoy the scenic beauty of the cultural and physical landscape. Some of the frequent universities are Maseno University, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Moi University and Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, which are carrying out ethnographic research and community outreach.

### **The Scientific Community**

The scientific community, particularly, researchers in different areas form another category of stakeholders. Abindu site contains information that requires collection and interpretation and dissemination to the public. Different scientific interests like the medicinal value of the indigenous plants and the geological formation of the rock outcrop as well as the numerous caves are important sources of information to the public. The site has attracted scientific institutions such as the British Institute in Eastern Africa, the National Museums of Kenya, World Heritage Center, IFRA, Lake Victoria Tourism Association (LVTA), Kisumu Local Interaction Platform (KLIP), and various universities.

### **The County Government of Kisumu**

The Republic of Kenya's Constitution gives the County Government the mandate to promote tourism by enacting legislation for protection and conservation of cultural heritage sites and natural habitats.

This includes policy formulation, development of guidelines and plans that include allocation of budgetary provision and actualization of investment plans for ecotourism transformation in Kisumu County. The County Government of Kisumu has therefore taken keen interest to tap on this virgin resource by proposing a bill to protect cultural heritage sites, developed strategic development plans for managing cultural heritage resources including Abindu.

#### **National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)**

The National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) whose interest is a healthy environment able to sustain biodiversity species of both fauna and flora. It is responsible for the preservation and conservation of environmentally and culturally significant areas. Abindu site presents a serene environment with natural and cultural artifacts that require immediate attention.

#### **Kenya Tourist Board**

Kenya Tourist Board working in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism is another stakeholder that whose interest would be the development of infrastructure to promote tourism around the region. It has expanded its marketing tourist products to include cultural resources from western Kenya region away from the traditional coastal and Maasai Mara tourist destinations. The extension of this circuit will include Abindu site.

### **4.0. The Ecotourism Potential of the Site**

#### **Natural Artefacts**

The site has numerous wild animals such as birds, unique insects, hyenas, leopards, monkeys, Baboons, antelopes, porcupines, rabbits, hares, squirrels and many venomous snakes. However there is potential conflict between human beings and animals. Hyenas are a menace. Baboons are destructive, monkeys up root and harvest the crops. This will escalate to full human-wildlife conflict in the not too distant future.

Moreover, the site is located on the extension of Nandi escarpment that provides beautiful scenic landscape of the Lake Victoria shores and the expansive Lake Victoria with its wetlands and beaches (Plate 7).

At Abindu, the aerial view of Kisumu City is very clear, one is able to see far up to Odino falls and SonduMiriu

Power Plant as well as the prominent Nyabondo Plateau at the end of Kano and Nyakach Plains (Plate 8). The great Got Huma in South Nyanza is very clearly seen. Abindu has best site for a recreation facility such as a picnic resort or eco-lodge.



**Plate 7: Scenic view of Lake Victoria Plate 8: Engravings on the Massive Abindu Rock**

#### **Cultural Artefacts**

The site has pegs which were used by the Highland Nilotes to tether the cattle. Pottery remains that are still found at the site include globular pots and earthen-ware dishes as well as earthen ware plates.



The site also exhibits unique sacred symbols such as a giant engraving embedded on the massive rock of Abindu site as well as an artistic design of a spear executed on the top of the highest rock at the site (Plate 8). Other forms of rock art found at the site include Sword and shield engravings. These engravings conform to the information from oral interviews regarding inter-tribal wars over land ownership between the River-Lake Nilotes and the Highland Nilotes during the historical settlement of the Lake Victoria region.

### **Religious Pilgrimage to the Site**

The religious significance of the site is underscored by the presence of spiritual inscription of the 12 loaves of Bread that is symbolic of Jesus reference to the bread of life (Plate 9). The symbols tend to connect the site with the River-Lake Nilotic migratory route from Southern Sudan. It further points to a possible interaction with the Jewish community where the religious traits were borrowed and later moved or imported into Eastern Africa.



**Plate 9: Rock Surface with the 12 loaves of Bread**

The rock engraving supports the current use of the site by different Independent African Christian Religious Sects such as Church of Christ in Africa, Coptic African Church, African Pentecostal Church, RohoMsanda, RohoFweny, Nomia Church, Israel Deliverence Church, Legio Maria, RohoMaler, and Din YaMsambwa (Plate 9, 10 & 11). Most of the sects' followers believe their prayers are always answered due to the supernatural powers associated with the site and its perceived connections with the Hebrews and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. They go to the hill top of Abindu Cave to pray, fast and meditate in the solitude and quietness of the site. The religious adherents also draw holy water from one of the wells located in the midst of the site for spiritual cleansing of their church members during worship (Odede, Hayombe, Agong', Mossberg, 2013).



**Plate 10: IncenseBurnt at Abindu Shrine    Plate 11: Entrance into historical fort at Abindu**

### **Unique Cultural Rituals and Identity**

Abindu site is a haven of herbal plants that are exploited by traditional healers. Numerous medicine men who believe in the supernatural powers of the site to upscale their healing power in the society. It is a sacred place where rituals and cultural activities are undertaken by the local community. During long spell of droughts, the elderly would converge at Abindu and perform cleansing rituals by slaughtering animals in the form of sacrifices. It was feared that whoever sets eye on Mama Abindu would not lead any better life there after or dies abnormally or instantly gets insane. They would also pray for gods of Abindu through Mama Abindu to have a bumper harvest or good crop yield. In the past, the inhabitants used to converge at the site during inter-tribal warfare to strategize and offer sacrifice to the gods for success and victory over their enemies.

Witchdoctors also go to the site to communicate with ancestral spirits and cast spell from those possessed with evil spirits. Sorcerers also visit the site to exorcise the evil spirits from those who are possessed. Customary marriages are consummated through traditional weddings that are performed at the site by both Independent African Christian Churches and Traditional Medicine men. Wizards frequent the site to draw their power from the supernatural forces at the site as well as to practice their witchcraft.

### **Mythical Narratives of Abuor Adett: Founder of Abindu Site**

The narratives from the informants indicate that the site traces its cultural significance from 1970s, the community received a visitor who had strange, and unique behavior. The stranger had several identities and would transform from a human being to either, a wild cat, leopard or hyena. When the security personnel wanted to arrest him because of his strange identity he changed into an old man with one amputated hand who was holding a small dead tortoise. He evaded the security personnel due to their inability to clearly identify him. This narrative can be authoritatively be followed through Lake Victoria Tourism Association (LVTA) and Kenya Television Network (KTN) narrative: “The western Kenya tourism circuit has a new member! LVTA has recently discovered an ancient spiritual retreat on the hills overlooking Kisumu city whose history offers holiday makers much more than leisure. Our Nyanza reporter Fred Omulo visited the mysterious caves of Abindu in Nyahera and filled following story” (KTN, December, 15<sup>th</sup> 2012).

Oral interview revealed that his name was AbuorAdett who hailed from the then well off family of Kagola-Ulumbi village in Gem Yala. He is quoted to have said in Luo “JAKAGOLA MAOK NINDI E AGOLA”, meaning “a person from KAGOLA family who could not sleep in a hut or cottage”. He traversed the wilderness on foot to reach Abindu Hills from Gem-Yala. During his long journey, it was at Sinyolo that his supernatural powers were manifested long before his arrival at Abindu Caves. At Sinyolo area, he used his mystical powers to resolve the issue of lost keys of SinyoloSchool by just pointed one head boy by name OTEE OTWALA. The keys were found hidden in a thicket. He pointed at a student, Tom OcholaMenya as a pen thief which was very true. He had stolen a pen from a classmate as retaliation against the student whom he suspected of stealing his jembe.

AbuorAdett then pointed at the person who had stolen the *jembe* and directed the students to check the suspect's bedroom where the stolen property was recovered.



**Plate 12: Rock Engravings at Abindu Site**

On his arrival at Abindu Caves, AbuorAdett insisted that he wanted to meet the first President of Kenya, the late Jomo Kenyatta. On realizing that it was not easy to reach the President, he then directed the Luo community living at Abindu area to reach out at the doyen of multiparty politics, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, which he could not accomplish. Lastly, he finally managed to hold a meeting with her Worship the Mayor of Kisumu Mrs. Grace Aketch to whom he disclosed what he had foreseen and crowned by explaining the rock engravings (rock art) on top of a massive rock at Abindu Sacred site. One of the survivors who was sent to Mayor Grace Aketch still lives to tell the story. Narratives have it that a Wilikister Omollo Achola who declined to deliver the message to the Mayor, was cursed by AbuorAdett. The victim immediately lost her memory and became mentally disturbed.



**Plate 13: Abindu Rock Art**

Over so many decades, none of the members of Abindu community could read the writings above the rock. It was on 24<sup>th</sup> August, 1970 at around 14:30 pm that the reading and interpretation of the engravings was done. AbuorAdett read and interpreted the rock art engravings from left to right and informed the community that they were engraved in Arabic (Plates 12 & 13).

From down it reads

**DAALMAL HAM**

Read from top:

**DAALMALHAM**

It was read as DAALMALHAM, without explaining the meaning to the crowd except Mama Grace Aketch (Plate 6). More astonishing revelations can be disclosed by her who had an eye ball with AbuorAdett. AbuorAdett predicted that on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1978, a prominent person in Kenya history shall be pronounced dead – it was the founding father MzeeJomoKenyatta. He predicted that the teaching methodology in Mathematics shall change drastically where  $1+1 = 10$ - Binary system of Mathematics years later. He said that Luo tribe had not mourned enough over the death of the late Tom Mboya but they were yet to mourn the murder of another Luo hero and it came to pass on the 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1990. Dr. RobertOuko, former Minister for Foreign Affairs in Kenya Government, disappeared exactly on the eve of 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1990. He not only died a Luo hero, but also a world renowned hero. He also predicted that South Africa shall be ruled by the same imprisoned Nelson Mandela he came to be world's best ruler. He predicted that United State of America shall be ruled by a black American of Kenyan origin and today Barrack Obama is the president.

He would know in advance when and who were coming to arrest him that made him to avoid arrests. One time he submitted to the spy agency but when he entered the vehicle, it could not start its engine. When he alighted, the vehicle started to move. In another incident, he was arrested but vanished before reaching Wachara Primary School before reaching the Police Station. Sandwiched between the arresters, they just realized the suspect was nowhere.

Once he told the community that he wanted to show Mama Abindu to those whose ages were over 90 years who had nothing to lose in life. Two elderly members volunteered, namely, MzeeOukoMboga and Mzee was OngalaAbungo. They went into the caves strong and talking, but when they came back, they were disillusioned, confused, and mumb till their deaths a year later.

#### **4.1. Challenges Facing Abindu Ecotourism Destination**

During the focused group discussions, the various stakeholders came up with key challenges affecting the management, utilization and ecotourism promotion of the site. Some of the challenges presented include:

- Visitation to Abindu site is still hampered with impassable rural access roads that lead to the site during the wet rainy seasons in the region.
- Abindu has remained unknown globally due to poor infrastructure, insufficient networking and lack of international collaboration, low level of literacy and lack of awareness of its cultural and touristic value have deprived Abindu from being a great world tourism destination.
- Business opportunities have not been exploited with limited community engagement in eco-ventures.
- The site has wild animals like monkeys and baboons that are a menace to neighbouring farms and is source of human-wildlife conflict. Human wildlife conflict is common especially where community are not allowed to harvest dead wood for firewood. Large reptiles such as snakes (python, black mamba, cobra, puff adder) sometime cause harm to the people living within the site environment. There is human-wildlife conflict since most of the animals attack and feed on crops cultivated by the community around the site.
- Community participation in the management of the cultural heritage is motivated by empowerment and employment concerns, which are currently lacking at the site. This is a threat to sustainability of the cultural heritage site and its conservation for posterity.
- Accommodation facilities are lacking within the site environs since no lodge has been constructed and most visitors have to back to major urban centers.
- The community feels neglected and divorced from their heritage because few of them have been employed or given any economic rewards despite the numerous visitors that come to the site.
- Lack of organized youth group to participate in cultural and natural heritage conservation and management as well as site branding.
- Lack of proper branding and image creation of the site to upscale ecotourism visitation to the site. The site has no signage, posters or brochures to attract visitors to the site.

#### **5.0. Appropriate Strategies for Ecotourism Promotion of the Site**

- Capacity building of the local people on cultural heritage to due to the low level of domestic tourists coming to the site.
- There is need for provision of electricity in the area lighted up the site for camping purposes and picnics.

- Construction of cottages to be used by visitors to rest and replenish themselves during their visits to the site after a long journey on the hot tropical environment of the Lake Victoria Basin.
- Employment of the locals as site guards, tour guides and site managers to assist in the management, conservation and branding of the site.
- Educate and upscale the local community management committee for the local people to oversee the management, conservation and the daily operations of the site.
- Involve the local community in ecotourism eco-ventures such as the construction curio shops for sale of local craft and art.
- Roads should be improved Darajambili road through Ulalo–Wachara road to motorable standards or all weather road to increase access to the site
- The community needs the development of Luo Gallery (Luo Kit gi Timbe) as depository for cultural artifacts and exhibition of the narrative documentation of the mythology.
- The community proposed the construction of a water pond (Yao) under the auspices of UNESCO to address the water scarcity for both human and livestock in the area.
- The community has requested construction of Library to enhance reading culture in the neighborhood.

### ***Acknowledgement***

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