By BENSON MWANGA

Not many Kenyans are aware that the amazing and glamorous cave in Taita-Taveta County played a major role in the country’s liberation struggle.

However, located in the sleepy village of Mwanguwi, Wundanyi Division, one will find caves that once served as a secret hideout for prominent freedom fighters including the late President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta.

It is unfortunate that Kino caves have not been gazetted as a historical site even though they have a unique history.

Yet it is within these caves that important meetings which included intense strategies on how Kenyans would be free from the colonial administration took place.

The deep natural hollow and spacious underground with an opening to the surface inside of a cliff was the place where meetings took place.

Besides Kenyatta, other celebrated freedom heroes who frequented the cave to avoid arrest and strategise on how to wrest power from the colonialists between 1950s and 1960s were the late Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Tom Mboya, Achieng Oneko, Bildad Kagia and Mbiyu Koinange.

Freedom fighters

Local freedom fighters who hosted Kenyatta and fellow liberators were among others Zephania Mkuji Nyambu on whose land the cave is located, Woresha Mengo, Jimmy Mwambichi and Fredrick Maseghe. Today, they are all dead.

Nyambu was the Kanu chairman and founder member of the Taita Hills Association.

The Kino Cave stands poignantly on one of the highest peaks of the idyllic, picturesque Taita Hills. The Hills are home to several holy shrines of the Wataita, some of them hidden in a labyrinth of caves. Despite the impressive history, there is nothing to show for these important facilities. A visit by The Reject found the cave in a sorry state of neglect hence burying its past significance amid calls for its preservation as a historical site.

Once a popular hiding place for freedom fighters, the cave has been encroached on and its once flourishing vegetation cover cleared to pave way for farming, beating its historical value.

It has now degenerated into a den for wild animals like bats, squirrels and mongoose. Residents have accused successive governments of neglecting the site despite its historical importance in the country’s liberation struggle.

“This is the place where Kenyatta and his colleagues would hide when the colonial administration was after them,” says Mr Scaver Kiwoi, 75, pointing the cave to members of the Press who visited the historical site recently.

Area residents, among them three local MPs expressed their wish to have the site along with other caves on the Taita Hills documented and converted into a tourist attraction.

The legislators who include Mwatate MP Calista Mwatela who is also Education Assistant Minister, Dan Mwazo (Voi) and Thomas Mwadeghu (Wundanyi) are calling on the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) to identify and package rare features in the picturesque Taita Hills.

They want KTB to include the sites in the tourism circuit as an initiative that will generate income for the local community.

Other interesting sites include Wesu Rock, Shomoto Caves and Mbololo Forest. Others include the one storey building in Voi town where the late Kenyatta consulted the oracles.

Taita Taveta caves where Kenyatta consulted the oracles

Kino caves in Taita Taveta where the first Kenyan President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta (Inset) and other freedom fighters used to hide during the struggle for independence. The late Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere also used to visit the caves to strategize for independence of his country. Picture: BENSON MWANGA

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Management and staff of African Woman and Child and Media Diversity Centre wishes all readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.
Caves where freedom fighters consulted the oracles

Continued from page 1

used to get accommodation in Maiego area as well as War Memorial Cemeteries in Voi, Maktau and Taveta.

Others include churches like St Marks in Sagala location which has been converted into Rev Ray Memorial Church Museum and Maloso ACK Church built by the early missionaries in Taveta town.

The heroes would come to the district to seek among other things support from the local community and spiritual guidance from local traditional medicine men to overcome the colonial administration.

Spiritual healing

Though many Kenyans might not be aware of the long relationship Kenyatta had with the Taita community, the founding father of the nation is said to have occasionally frequented the district to seek spiritual guidance from traditional medicine men. Says Kiwoi: “At that time Taita Taveta District had become a place of pilgrimage for scores of leaders seeking traditional healing because the area produced seers and medicine men whose fame spread far and wide.”

He adds: “The area produced some of the famous witchdoctors in Coastal region among them tribal leaders like Mvakisha luwa Mkamba and Richard Mwanga.”

The freedom fighters came to acquire charms and consulted the oracle from time to time on various issues pertaining to their welfare and unity of Kenyans including development matters.

Explains Kiwoi: “Kenyatta and other heroes sought protective charms from local witch doctors to avert arrests from the colonial government.”

Cave life

The freedom heroes also came to seek support from the Taita Taveta community in the quest for independence and fight for land rights.

Kenyatta and his colleagues would hide and sleep in the caves for fear of being arrested by the colonialists.

“They would light fire in the cave at night and roast cassava and sweet potatoes among other indigenous food to supplement the little rations provided for them by their hosts,” explains Kiwoi.

Three women would cook and serve indigenous food to the heroes like maize, kinungu, maduma, pure and ndoto among others.

Earthen pots and other utensils that were used to cook for the freedom fighters were reportedly taken away from the cave and preserved at the Kenya National Museums of Kenya, Mombasa.

“The heroes slept on dried banana leaves and sometimes would take night walks where they were able to mingle with people,” say the area residents.

Those interviewed say traditional medicine men mixed charms and gave them to a goat before it was slaughtered. After slaughtering the animal, the medicine man would examine its intestines and release predictive results to the heroes.

One of Nyambu’s sons, Mr Charles Mulekenyi says the heroes would eat the goat’s meat that was coated with protective charms. Libation — a ritual pouring of a drink as an offering to a god or deity — was done using the local brew Mbugara, to appease ancestors and gods in order to make the charms effective to the user.

He says the intestines would indicate when the mzungu (white man) would go back to his mother land (Europe) and leave Kenya to Kenyans.

“The results would tell the truth about what would happen to the enemy and would also give advice about the future,” says Mulekenyi.

He explains: “At one point, the traditionalist predicted that Kenyatta would at one time be arrested and jailed for going against the British rule but would later be released and become the first President of the republic of Kenya.”

The medicine men’s strange powers forced people of all walks of life to come to the district to consult the oracle and also seek protective charms to overcome enemies.

“Kenyatta often consulted the traditional medicine men from time to time on various issues pertaining to unity, land rights and the general welfare of Kenyans. The power of the medicine man was in full control of almost every aspect of life including development at that time,” explains Mulekenyi.

He says witchcraft and sorcery are still very strong and held dear in spite of the indigenous people having embraced Christianity.

Kenyatta is said to have had a soft spot for the community known for obedience as evidenced by the appointment of the late Dr Eric Mgola and Mwattle MP Major (Rtd) Marsden Madoka as his personal physician and bodyguard respectively.

The Kenyatta family also owns the expansive Gicheha Farm in Taveta Sub-District.

Residents argue that despite the fact that Taita Taveta played an important role in the fight against colonial rule, the community has not benefited from successive governments.

They say preservation of the cave as a tourist site would earn the residents revenue and uplift their standards of living.

Despite the fact that Mzee Nyambu and others hosted prominent heroes, their families are still poor as a result of lack of education and employment,” says Julius Righa, 67, the eldest son of the local hero, Nyambu.

The family blames their woes on local MPs during the Kenyatta regime for failing to champion the interests of the local community.

“Kenyatta was willing to assist families of heroes who assisted him in time of need but the legislators then were not interested and instead pursued their own selfish interests,” says Righa.

The Mau Mau chairman in the district Mzee Christopher Kayanda has asked the government to honour the country’s heroes and heroines by improving on their standards of livelihood as a way of appreciating their contribution to the society.

Presenting his views recently to the Taskforce on Criteria and Modalities of honouring National Heroes and Heroines, Kayanda said some people had sacrificed a lot for the country but had been neglected.

Neglect

Families of most freedom fighters were languishing in poverty despite their immense contribution. He petitioned the government to do something about their welfare.

Kayaanda decried the habit of honouring people after they are long dead saying this reflected badly on the country but suggested that family members of the deceased be assisted by the state.

“On the other hand the government already established a heroes’ square at the district level in recognition of local heroes who do not qualify to be national heroes,” Nyanda suggested.

In the past, the caves were used as holy shrines but today they have been rejeted and some are used as criminal dens. At one time a most wanted gangster was gunned down by police and several of his accomplices arrested inside the Shimoto caves near Wundanyi town.

Kenya’s freedom fighters who were detained in Kapenguria after they were arrested during the emergency. From left: Kungu Karumba, Bildad Kaggia, Achengi Oneko, Jomo Kenyatta, Moi (not among the Kapenguria 6 but in the picture), Paul Ng’i and Fred Kubai. Below: Local tourists enjoying the sights at the Kino caves. Pictures: Reject correspondent and Benson Mwanga
AWC bags awards at KEMEP

The African Woman and Child Features Service (AWC) was shining at the Kenya Media Network on Population and Development (KEMEP) fourth annual gala award ceremony held in Nairobi.

Abjata Khalif and Jane Godia bagged awards that included trophies, state of the art laptops and mobile phones at gala ceremony held in Nairobi.

Khalif who is coordinator of the Garissa Content Centre won the best print journalist in the FGM category for the headline story ‘Horrors of the Wedding night’. The story which was published in the Reject newspaper highlighted the plight of young men in northern Kenya who endure psychological trauma from the effects of FGM on their brides which in turn affects their marriages.

Nasra Hussein from The Star FM won the best radio journalist on FGM. Hussein and Abjata both come from northern Kenyan and their stories were a clear indication that the practice is an issue of concern in the area.

Godia won in the special category under the KenyanWoman, an online newspaper published monthly by African Woman and Child Feature Service. There were three winners in this category who included Njoki Karuuya (Gender Agenda) and Denn Okoth (Panorama) both of the Standard Group.

Godia, who is also the Managing Editor of the said paper, was awarded for her contribution in highlighting gender and development issues and particularly in pushing for women’s empowerment and advancement.

The event was graced by many dignitaries and journalists who are keen to see issue of population and development highlighted in the media.

Speaking at the function, Assistant Minister For Higher Education, Dr Kilemi Mwiria asked journalists to continue highlighting population issues in their work because they play a role in determining government budgets for essential services such as schools and hospitals.

Mwiria said the war against FGM can only be won if MPs stopped political reengineering of the practice. He admonished politicians who do not speak up against retrogressive practices such as FGM because they want to save votes. He argued: “Society must respect family values and practices that infringe on women’s rights should be discouraged as they interfere with progress.”

According chief judge, Ms Carolyne Kwamboka the event was getting bigger with every subsequent year. “The entries have grown tremendously from 15 media houses in 2008 to 24 this year and we are proud of the work Kenyan journalists are doing.”

She challenged development partners in government and non-governmental organisations to extend support on issue based journalism.

Speaking on the need to involve men in the fight for gender equality, Chair of the National Commission on Gender and Development Dr Regina Mwathe emphasised on the need to involve men in the gender agenda. Khalif’s article on men protesting the negative effects of FGM on women is an example of such efforts. Mwathe highlighted the need for journalists to make the family recognised as a pillar of vision 2030.

Other dignitaries at the function included assistant minister Youth and Sports Affairs Kabando wa Kabando, Patricia Nyaundi CEO Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission and Dr Boniface K’Oyugi, CEO National Coordinating Agency for Population and Development.

The award ceremony was officiated by the KEMEP chairman Charles Kerich. Among the key sponsors were United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Safaricom and German Foundation for World Population (DSW).
Art of dhow building threatened with extinction

By KIGONDU NDAVANO

When observed at sunset from the Malindi Bay beach wall, shoreline waters are normally interesting as several wind propelled dhows emerge from one side of the Vasco da Gama pillar with their white sails shining through the winds at speed.

Those watching are able to see tired fishermen doing their last manoeuvres with the large white sails to slow the dhows before bringing them to a stop.

The dhows create an attractive impression of the coastal sea. The colourful wooden vessels dominate the shoreline and sandy beaches where they are abandoned, floating, parked or undergoing repairs.

Decline

Today, however, there are not many dhows at the Coast. It seems that the traditional dhow building industry, an art that has been historically popular among the Swahili communities in the Coast now faces collapse in Malindi and other parts of the region.

Since the early 1960s, the Malindi shorelines have for years rivalled Lamu Island when it comes to dhow building activities. There have been large yards up the beach plots of Watamu, Mayungu, Ngomeni and Malindi Bay. Presently silence pervades the shoreline.

The sea has been eroding large sections of the coastline denying dhow builders and fishermen space to park the vessels. The largely growing tourism industry has seen beach plots owners opt to build hotels and villas up to the high water mark.

Marine environmentalist, Mr Athman Seif argues: “Modern, lighter and more attractive glass boats have gained popularity drastically reducing the percentage of dhows built annually.”

Seif, who owns two fibreglass vessels notes that large and small dhows in various stages of dilapidation litter the Malindi coastline because repairs for the vessels have become expensive due to the high cost and shortage of good timber.

Numerous mukari sheds which in the past covered many a shoreline shielding dhows under repair from the sun are today few while many have collapsed on abandoned vessels. There are certain places where bushes have covered many of the now rotting fishing dhows.

Malindi Beach Management Unit chairman, Mr Yusuf Aboud operates a single boat after his second dhow broke down four years ago. The vessel has remained in disrepair at the Mbuyuni Beach for lack of hard wood that is supposed to be used for repairs.

Six years ago Malindi Bay Beach which covers at least half a kilometre would have about 15 dhows under construction. Today not even a single vessel is repaired. Few dhow enthusiasts have been making fresh orders for new boats.

“Many dhows have been abandoned or incompletes while some builders have re-sorted to building smaller ones which do not have the capacity to venture deeper into the waters of the Indian Ocean,” notes Mr Hassan Mshah, a fisherman.

“Preference for modern vessels coupled with low numbers of customers seeking to acquire Swahili dhows seems to have conspired against the traditional dhow building culture,” explains Mr Mohammed Bakari. He says the unavailability of suitable indigenous wood from the Msaaji, Mng'ambo and Mnguvi trees has also affected the dhow building industry.

Forests in Lamu mainland normally provided timber for building the vessels. However, heavy harvesting of the trees has left little raw material for the dhow building. The situation has been made worse by a government directive that outlawed logging as a conservation measure.

The few boat builders who still carry out the art say the little good wood which reaches the market is too expensive and many cannot afford to buy it.

Malindi dhow owners say building a simple medium size vessel takes about a year to complete because the amount of wood filtering into yards is poor and unpredictable.

The owner of two old dhows, Mr Abdalla Shari says boat building families in Malindi and Lamu have abandoned the art as fishing has become less profitable and orders for new vessels has reduced.

Says Shari: “Young people who learnt the art from their fathers have turned to the more lucrative openings in tourism contributing to the sharp decrease in skilled dhow builders.”

A Malindi boat builder Mr Shafi Ali, 50, remembers learning the craft under the guidance of his late father, Mr Ali Ahmed Fundi. Ali’s father earned the name ‘Fun- di’ from his unmatched skills in building dhows in Faza Island, Lamu District.

“He was a master in boat building and the stories of some of the vessels he originally constructed using some of the best woods suitable for dhows over 80 years ago are still being told,” explains Shafi.

Notable among these are MV Tashrifia and MV Shaminu, huge dhows that were specifically made for fishing.

Shafi says: “My father also worked with a famous boat builder Mr Bilal Bakari to build huge vessels which would be acquired by wealthy merchants. He added: “These would be used to ferry cargo between Kenya and Arabian countries.”

Shafi admits the art of Swahili dhow building has collapsed. Dhows damaged at sea are being left to waste without repairs. Most beaches from Lamu to South Coast are littered with abandoned vessels that are now at various stages of disintegration.

Says Shafi: “The old and abandoned dhows have been cannibalised to provide wood for the few vessels being built or those undergoing repairs. This is a bad practice that has destroyed the art of dhow making.”

Dhow owners indicate that while some 30 years ago Malindi had more than 15 boat builders, only three remain. Others have retired or abandoned the art out of frustration caused by lack of orders, raw materials and good income from the vocation.

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Art of dhow building threatened with extinction

Continued from page 4

Most boat lovers prefer the expensive, lighter and longer lasting fibre glass vessels unlike the aged Swahili dhows normally built with what is described by many as cheap wood from Neem trees. Vessels built with wood from the Neem tree last only five years.

The lighter and engine installed fibre glass boats done in modern factories owned by foreigners have been gaining popularity in the fishing, goggling and leisure vessels industry.

Four years ago, the Fisheries Department acquired a small fibre glass boat at a cost of KSh10 million. According to boat builders, such an amount would have been adequate for acquisition of several wooden vessels with a sail and outboard engines.

Shaif says that to build a medium sized fishing dhow today would take up to one year and cost between KSh200,000 and KSh450,000. He says when the industry was vibrant, such a vessel would cost at least KSh35,000 and would take a mere two months to construct.

Shaif says boats built with the wood from indigenous tree remain in the sea between 20 to 25 years if they are properly maintained.

Preservation

Another boat builder Mr Hussein Syengo of the wooden goggling boat who normally ferried tourists to the Marine parks admits that dhow building has been failing.

In 2006, I built 10 vessels for various investors but since then with the failing tourism we are forced to survive purely on minor repairs,” explains Syengo.

Increase in road transport between coastal towns has also reduced the popularity of dhows. A lover of dhows Mr Ali Bakari says the continued opening up of the roads connecting South and North Coast has eased road transport and led to lack of interest in the boats which for centuries remained the only means of transport between coastal towns and the outside.

Bakari recalls when he was growing up as a young boy and Malindi was one of the most popular ports with huge locally built vessels ferrying cargo between Kenya and various Arab countries. Cargo from Kenya comprised agricultural produce including millet and sorghum.

"Large dhows, some built by experts in Malindi and Lamu were busy ferrying large amounts of cargo to and from Kenya from the Malindi coastline,” explains Bakari. He says vibrancy in sea transport has become history within less than 50 years and dhows are disappearing.

More than 200 dhows in Malindi alone have been withdrawn from the Indian Ocean yet some of the vessels were so popular about 20 years ago that they even attracted Italian investors who either acquired or hired them to ferry tourists to various sea excursions.

Investors

Malindi tour guide, Mr Hakim Aidarous, who for years hired dhows to tourists for leisure excursions notes that the vessels which were viewed as interesting pieces of art by the Swahili are no longer popular among foreigners.

Wealthy Italian hotel owners interested in sailing closer to the shoreline to entertain their guests no longer use these vessels as they did in 1970s. “Today foreign investors have acquired fibre glass modern outboard or in board luxury items from their own local builders,” notes Aidarous.

Aidarous like many Malindi residents says the government and National Museums of Kenya should consider the Swahili dhows as an important art faced with extinction. He warns: "Soon we shall be looking for old photographs to put on Museum walls."

Fishing vessels also face the death knell

By KIGONDU NDAVANO

Demand for vessels can at times turn out to be interesting because seasonal fish availability in the sea can attract a sudden surge in building of dug out canoes and simple small vessels.

Such vessels gain popularity with the number of fishermen venturing out in the Indian Ocean.

Compared to dhows which venture deep into the sea, fishermen say that simple dug out canoes which nearly faced extinction are making a come back because of the better catch they record while fishing in the safer zones closer to the shoreline.

A fisherman in Malindi, Mr Ali Mwbanadi says at least five canoes are built by boat builders along the Malindi bay beach every six months.

The smaller vessels are easier to build and have gained popularity due to the ease through which they are able to venture into shallow waters and catch shallow water fish species.

Although the few boat builders still practising the art, they have discovered cheaper wood which they get from the neem and the mango trees. However, these too are becoming scarce due to heavy harvesting by furniturer makers in Malindi.

Acquisition of many plots which hosted large neem and mango trees by foreigners who fence them and cut down the trees to create space for construction of private villas and houses has worsened the situation.

The once attractive Ngulawas (small dug out boats with two outriggers that help them balance) with their imposing outriggers which could be seen sailing into the shoreline after fishing expeditions are a rare find in the beaches. The entire Malindi coastline extending more than 80 kilometres has only two vessels of this kind.

The Mutori fishing dhows — vessels with long narrow front — which were known for their speed have all disappeared. The same applies for the Mitingulu which for years were the main means of ferrying cargo between Kismayu in Somalia and Kiunga in the North as well as to other coastal towns of the South Coast.

Various cuts of timber suitable for boat and dhow building are selected directly on the tree before they are cut hence according to the boat builders, the now collapsing industry has a special way of conserving trees and discourages cutting of entire trees.

The changing fortunes where the fish catch has been going down for years has also affected investments into dhows with many fishermen abandoning the industry altogether. Those still interested in the industry are being forced to consider acquisition of larger fibre glass vessels which need powerful engines.

The more than 60 Malindi marine park sailing goggling boats are all built in the modern simple style and with marine plywood and other treated woods.

A goggling boat owner for more than 20 years, Mr Abed Twalib, admits that the Swahili vessels could soon be extinct because modernisation of boats has forced them out of business.

Even the skill of repair of the broken down dhows normally inherited from family elders and builders has been dying as many a youth lack interest in dhow building.

When boat builders in Malindi and Lamu were busy, each would have at least three trainees, but young men are also avoiding the art altogether.

Mr Mohammed Shari who operates three fishing dhows says: “Young men who used to admire and appreciate learning boat building skills and protecting the industry from collapse are now avoiding it all together and opting for alternative sources of income.”
While Kenya has earned a lot of her foreign exchange from tourism, the sector remains unexploited. The country could gain more if it improved on the neglected historical sites that could earn the communities in the areas some income.

When Prince William of Britain said he had proposed to his fiancée at the Rutundu Log Cabins near Lake Alice at the foot of Mt Kenya, many Kenyans did not even know about this tourist site. In this issue, The Reject team looks at various aspects of tourism which include the good the bad and the ugly. The Kino caves of Taifa Taveta where Jomo Kenyatta and other freedom fighters used to hide. The ranches of Laikipia that are denying the government the much needed income; In this issue, we also ask could wildlife farming offer the supplementary income? In addition, new routes are being created to open tourism space further. These among others are ventures that many Kenyans could engage in.

As Kenyans get into the festive season, communities are asking that these historical sites be rehabilitated to give them a chance to be part of the tourism sector.

Councils engage in joint action plans

By HUSSEIN DIDO

Last year’s performance of Samburu and Isiolo county councils was encouraging and more effort is being put to promote domestic tourism.

To this effect Samburu and Isiolo county councils have formed a joint conservation area management plan aimed at increasing their earnings from the tourism sector. This will also spur the Northern tourism circuit.

The plan will help in sharing resources and economic benefits apart from conserving biodiversity of tourism in the sector.

Addressing participants during the launch of the plan in Isiolo, Dr Philip Muruthi from the Africa Wildlife called on the councils to step up their marketing strategy to promote tourism products in and outside Kenya.

He said: "The plans developed from the two councils by the Africa Wildlife Foundation will target tourism development as well as ecological, community partnership, security and protected areas operation programmes."

Speaking at the launch, Assistant Minister for Internal Security, Mr Simeon Lesirma said the Government has put in place measures to promote and refocus domestic tourism which contributes about 30 per cent to tourism revenue.

"The councils must work closely together so this can be achieved through proper strategies and measures to ensure the sector generates more income," explained Lesirma.

He observed that some hotels in the region were reporting over 60 per cent in terms of bed occupancy. Out of these, majority were local tourists.

"With Kenyans developing interest in domestic tourism, the obvious possibility is that this country may not rely so much on international arrivals as is the case at the moment," said Lesirma.

The growth of the domestic and international arrivals rose to 1,490,448 in 2009 up from 1,197,932 in 2008.

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Manager of Sarova Shaba lodge, Mr Robert Ondara and Mr Abdi Boru, Isiolo County Council senior game warden said security had been restored in the region. They urged Kenyans take the opportunity of sampling diverse products offered in the northern part of the country.

"Shaba is the jewel of northern Kenya. It is home to lions Elisa and her cubs. This park is the Hollywood of Africa as many international films have been shot here," said Boru.

Among films shot at the Shaba are Born Free and To Walk with Lions, all revolving around the life of Joy and George Adamson and the lions Elisa and her cubs. Others are Out of Africa and CBS’s TV series Survivor Africa.

Ondara said the park and its adjacent Buffalo Springs and Samburu parks offer exciting landscapes for tough challenges. They also host the rare big five species — grizzly zebra, reticulated giraffe, Somali ostrich, Beisa oryx and greenuk.

By ELIUD WAITHAKA

The government could be losing millions of money through illegal tourism in the country.

A survey conducted recently by Laikipia County Council revealed that a majority of white settlers in Laikipia District carry out tourism activities without government knowledge.

It was discovered that majority of these ranchers who own thousands of acres of land have constructed lodges in their farms where they conduct tourism activities, denying the government its due revenue.

Some of the over 20 conservancies have even totally refused to remit returns of conservancy fee and livestock cess to the county council.

In one of the ranches licensed to breed livestock (Sahiwals), a farmhand who did not want to be named for fear of reprisal said tourists are charged between KSh8,000 and KSh30,000 per night.

It is believed that some of these lodges have been in existence for the last ten years, operating incognito.

In another ranch that capitalises in livestock rearing, the manager is said to be solely doing bookings for tourists abroad and the workers, including the assistant manager, are not involved.

The employees especially the enlightened ones cannot divulge any information concerning these conservancies and any effort to get insight into what is happening becomes futile.

According to the government’s gazette notice, a conservancy that keeps wild animals is supposed to remit KSh500,000 annually while those that concentrate purely on livestock are charged KSh100,000.

Tourists from abroad book and fly directly to these ranches since some of them have airstrips and they are said to be ‘guests’.

Tussle

Laikipia County Council has of late been involved in a tussle between its revenue department and a conservancy over non payment of revenue.

According to council chairman, Mr Joseph Koroni, the conservancy has refused to obtain game ranching permit which is a requirement as per the Kenya gazette notice 2008. The notice issued by the Ministry of Local Government dictates that Laikipia County Council collects revenue from private ranches and conservancies that hold wildlife.

On that note, the management of one of the biggest conservancies in the larger Laikipia has flatly refused to obtain the permit that cost KSh500,000 annually.

However, the conservancy through its chief executive officer has written to the council demanding a clear explanation of the fee being charged.

A complaint letter seen by the Reject addressed to the Council with a copy sent to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government and the conservancy’s board claimed that “…the Conservancy was not prepared to pay the invoices claimed as they were in dispute.”

Further, the letter claimed that the Conservancy had written several letters to the Council seeking clarification and it would not be forced into paying mandatory invoices that it considers to be illegal as a result of intimidation by the Laikipia County Council.

This was after a revenue officer from the council and two police officers from Nanyuki Police Station illegally entered the over 90,000 acre Conservancy demanding the payment and outstanding arrears amounting to over KSh1.2 million.

The County Council has now sued the sanctuary which is best known for rhino breeding. However, there are some ranches that have paid the money.

However, despite the tussles some of these conservancies contribute a lot towards community projects as corporate social responsibility.

Communities living around these conservancies especially the Maasai complain of neglect by the management which they accuse of denying them job opportunities.

They say people from other areas are imported to work even as casual labourers, a chance they feel should be given to them as priority.

A resident of Diga division in Laikipia East District, Mr Charles Mwangi complains that “wildlife from these ranches destroys our crops and even getting work there for our children is a nightmare. They should consider our plight as neighbours and seek good relationships.”
A rare bird sanctuary lies on the foot of Mt Kenya

By JOSEPH MUKUBWA

This is where you will find an oasis of peace while communing with nature. The Park, situated about 110 kilometres from Nairobi via the Muranga’s highway, is not known by many. And sadly, the locals have not taken advantage of it.

Wajee Nature Park, which includes a nature trail and bird sanctuary is located in Mukurwe-ini District of Nyeri County. The mythical site of the home of Mumbi and Gikuyu, the first parents of the Agikuyu, can be seen in the far distance on the left as you continue to Mukurwe-ini township from the road to the park. Mt Kenya can be seen in the distance on a clear day.

Serene

One can enjoy the nature trail accompanied by the resident naturalist or even on their own or explore the trails and tunnels through Wajee for a view of the local flora and fauna. The place also offers a peaceful site for picnic. The grounds can also be used for a quiet moment of reflection or an organised worship service. Due to the low temperatures, a camp fire is much appreciated at night.

An enormous grass thatched rondavel serves as a gathering place for meetings and large group occasions. The area is also used for watching wildlife movies.

The Park started in 1992 was owned by Jagi Gakunju, Chief Executive Officer of African Air Rescue (AAR) until two years ago when Wildlife Clubs of Kenya (WCK) took over. This 20 acre gem was the inheritance of its father bequeathed him. The old man had an unusual love for trees and preservation of the environment.

He maintained not only the indigenous trees found on the site but planted many exotic species, making it a forest retreat that has attracted over 126 species of birds. These include some of the world’s rarest birds such as the Hinde’s Babbler, a threatened local species, the African Wood Owl as well as the seasonally migratory Black Caps and Eurasian Bee Eaters.

The senior Gakunju named the Park Wanjii but residents nicknamed it Wajee, and this is the name that has been adopted.

Nature park

Gakunju is a man of multifaceted talents. He is a trained lawyer, an avid conservationist, an experienced mountaineer, a keen ornithologist and photographer. He was determined to maintain the forest and turn the facilities into a nature park and camp.

“The Park is mentioned on the endangered birds list as one of the few places in Kenya that harbours the rare Hinde’s Babbler. Not only does the Park entice bird lovers, it also attracts naturalists as entomologists and lepidopterists who have appreciated the wide variety of birds and butterflies found here,” says Edwin Kanake, an education officer with the Wildlife Club of Kenya.

Hinde’s Babbler is a bird endemic to Kenya. Due to the cleaning of its natural bush habitat over the years caused by intensive farming, the number of sites where it can be found within the country have reduced to 71. It has been mentioned in the ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book as being on the endangered bird’s list.

The bird was initially only found in parts of Kitui, Mwingi but due to encroachment of its habitat, it is now found in Wajee, parts of Karatina and lower parts of Mt Kenya in Kirinyaga district.

The Park is now being used as an education centre for environment and nature conservation. It also hosts the Wildlife Club of Kenya central region office. Students from learning institutions visit the Park for education programmes.

Wajee Nature Park set between Mt Kenya and Aberdares is internationally recognised as an Important Bird Area (IBA).

The Park has one family of six birds out of the 2,000 found globally. Some birds migrate from as far as Europe and Asia for breeding purposes.

An oasis of tranquillity, the park is also home to squirrels, velvet monkeys, civet cats, jackals, porcupines, hares, mongooses and bushbacks.

Accommodation

The original family home built on stone in 1941 provides three family size rooms for those staying over night. Two white washed grass thatched twin bedded rondavels are also available, charmingly situated amongst flowering shrubbery, with bird baths and feeding tables on the grass in front to facilitate more relaxed bird spotting.

All rooms have electricity and running water is available including ablution rooms. A camping ground for up to 20 tents is also available. Tents, mattresses, ground sheets and camping stoves are available for hire.

As we wandered around we discovered the Tortoise Sanctuary which is home of several African tortoises. The residents pay KSh200 and non-residents KSh300 for the nature trail. For spending a night, visitors are charged KSh500 per person, per night.

The facilities are basically geared to the self catering traveller but there is a fully equipped kitchen for those who want to hire for KSh150 per day. The charges were recently adjusted slightly but are still affordable.

Children will love the forest as tunnels have been cut out of the undergrowth for them to treasure hunt as well as special bird spotting walk.

Many of the trees have been identified and labelled by the staff of the National Museums and the ornithological Department apparently makes several trips annually to ring and record birds.

Students take an educational walk in the Wajee Nature Park. The Park is home to a variety of bird species and offers peace and tranquility to the visitors.

Picture: Joseph Mukubwa
Waterfall in Eldoret cries for recognition

By CHRISPINUS OMAR

Except for first year students from Moi University and a handful of visitors being shown around, to those familiar with the site, Asururiet Waterfall is not a popular tourist attraction.

The waterfall is located at Kess, about 36 kilometres south of Eldoret town in Uasin Gishu county. The natural phenomenon, whose water levels increase during the long rain season has remained untapped for many years. Yet with its magnificent rocks that leave the water flowing along River Kesess with a refreshing look, the facility could turn around the region’s economy.

The water fall whose Kalenjin name, Asururiet means flowing peacefully originates from Kesses/Lessos dam. It flows downstream through the Asururiet-Moi University farms and is shared by Ketiplong, Kesses, Asururiet, Pendura A and R, Tulwet and Sambul farms. The water level reduces during the dry seasons, which falls between November and March.

Gazetted

University students who visit the area during their orientation and when on picnics as well as some area residents now want the Ministry of Tourism to move in and gazette the falls as a tourist attraction site.

A spot check in the area revealed that women from neighbouring communities wash clothes on the banks of the river. Youth and men in particular also drive their animals to drink water as others graze by the river banks.

“The waterfalls is a great natural site and if protected and well publicised will see many local and international tourists pitch tent here,” says Mr Geoffrey Khalwale, a second year student.

Khalwale suggests that the university in conjunction with the community can solicit for funds and construct recreational facilities like swimming pools and hotels among others that can cater for tourists visiting the area. The facilities will further help create job opportunities for the locals.

Mr Evans Amukune points out that the locals can be encouraged to invest in various businesses that will besides generating additional income for the country in terms of revenue, will improve living standards of the people in the area.

He regrets that those who visit the site usually carry packed meals and those without are forced to leave early because there are no food establishments.

“Once the place has been fenced off, proper structures put up and security improved in line with the Government’s requirements for any tourist facility, we shall have tourists flocking to not only enjoy the waterfall but the serene climatic conditions of the region,” explains Amukune.

He adds that other entrepreneurs will move in to take advantage of the emerging business opportunities once the area is recognized by the Government and marketed both locally and abroad.

“The river has not been of much help to the locals because they experience enough rainfall throughout the year and the waterfall is the only unique feature that if well harnessed can be an income generating resource.

Area Assistant Chief, Ms Sally Birigen says unlike the popular Thompsons Falls in Nyahururu that has claimed many lives, Asururiet Waterfall has registered very few deaths over the years.

“For the last 22 years that I have been here, I have only heard of one case where an adult drowned while trying to cross a bridge that runs across the river,” explains Birigen.

Another area resident, Ms Josephine Chebet challenges the Government to consider diversifying from wild animals interested in.

“Our local breed of livestock is great for some foreign tourists. The chilly weather experienced in this area during certain seasons of the year can be fascinating even to some Kenyans especially those who come from dry areas,” she points out.

Eldoret South MP Peris Simam says her constituency is blessed with enormous resources for tourism and all that is needed is commitment without over-relying on Agriculture.

"Let us not assume that the North Rift region is only good for crop production when we have unlimited options to diversify our financial sources," says Simam.

She cites Ngara and Sinap in the constituency as other places worth mentioning when talking of propelling the tourism sector in the region to great heights.

“Communities residing in these areas are willing to invest in tourism if proper measures are put in place so they are assured of good returns,” explains Simam.

Advocacy

The legislator says there is need for advocacy campaigns to be mounted in the area to sensitise area residents about how well to utilise the natural resources available in their areas.

While launching the North Rift Tourism Guidebook in Eldoret last year, Tourism Minister Najib Balala said the event marked a crucial milestone in the development of tourism in the region.

The minister said the book was an important reference material for tourists keen to explore untapped sites in the region, which is commonly associated with agriculture.

The guide is available in the region’s tourist office in Eldoret town and it also provides information to investors interested with the tourism sector.

“Why should such a wonderful place be relegated for cattle grazing and washing of clothes? This is not a common river that should pass unnoticed.”

— Geoffrey Khalwale
Majestic Hell’s Gate remains forever amazing

By GEORGE MURAGE

Located around 90 kilometers from Nairobi, Naivasha town has become a hub of both local and international tourists. From Lake Naivasha to the fascinating and breathtaking Hell’s Gate National Park, Naivasha is a ‘home far from home’. A town associated with the horticultural industry and mainly roses, many a time the ‘thorns’ and not the roses have hit the headlines. However, within the lakeside town is beauty, breath taking sceneries, untapped geothermal power and a source of livelihood to thousands of families.

Naivasha, a corruption of the Maasai E-nasipata (leaving waters) was found in 1884 for the Western world by Joseph Thomson. Between 1937 and 1959 this beautiful, peaceful fresh water lake was used as a landing place for plane passengers destined for Nairobi.

Today the lovely lake town, with its cool climate, has become a resting point for Naivasha residents and tourists looking for peace. Next to the lake is the ever amazing Hell’s Gate National Park located 100 kilometers north-west of Nairobi.

It is named after a narrow break in the cliffs, once a tributary of a prehistoric lake that fed early humans in the Rift Valley.

Diversity

Among the various national parks in the country Hell’s Gate is popularly known for standing in a class of its own.

Visitors have the choice of driving, walking, camping, cycling and rock-climbing within the park while horseback safaris can also be arranged.

The Park with an area of 68 square kilometers was gazetted in 1984 and was previously used for grazing by members of the pastoralist community and wild animals. Its popularity is perhaps marked by the high number of visitors.

According to the senior warden in charge of the park, Mr. Nelly Palmeris, about 100,000 local and international tourists visit the Park annually. Of the number, 65 percent are local tourists. ‘They hope this number will increase’.

But what makes this park so unique? Despite its name, the Park provides the ideal venue for a day trip for those from Nairobi or even Nakuru.

“This is a truly panoramic picnic spot and an evocative camping site located deep in the bush,” says Palmeris.

Located on the floor of the Rift Valley, the small park provides endless bio-diversity and it is one of the only two parks in the country that allow one to walk or cycle without a guard.

Beautiful scenery

Some of the spectacular scenery in the Park include the towering cliffs, water-gouged gorges, stark of rock towers, scrubbed volcanoes and the rising plumes of geothermal steam.

On entering the Park, one is welcomed by the 25 metre high Fischer’s Tower rising high in the sky and is used by novices in rock climbing.

It is common to see both the young and old easily climbing to the highest point of the tower with the help of trained guides in a matter of minutes.

The rugged volcanic plug is all that remains of the ancient volcano named after Gustav Fischer, a German explorer.

According to the Maasai who claim that the Park was their ancestral land, the rock is a petrified figure of a chief’s daughter. The story goes that the girl was on her way to get married and had been warned against looking behind lest she would turn into a rock.

And just like the biblical story of Lot, she went against the community’s taboo against looking behind and took one last glance at her home and took one last glance at her home and then designed and constructed. The construction is already over and the underpass which allows elephants to walk through the Park passes the power plant and huge steam pipes are common in most parts.

There are also two nature trails at Hobley’s Volcanic and Ol Basta rock tower which are spaced up by beautiful picnic sites at various points within the Park.

The Park boasts of providing some of the best, secure, scenic, accessible and well-equipped campsites in the country. The facilities include picnic benches, sheltered picnic areas, shower blocks, water taps, latrines and rubbish bins.

Those wishing to camp in the Park are advised to come with drinking water, picnic items, walking boots, binoculars, hat, sunscreen and guide books.

The Park is accessible any time of the year. For those who love bird watching, an incredible 103 species of birds have been recorded here.

The massive cliff in the Park is home for thousands of swift birds. It also provides a unique breeding ground for vulture, agur buzzard, Verreaux eagle and the rare Lammergeyer vulture.

There is the Mervyn Carnelly raptor which is a unique bird viewing hide that incorporates a one-way window. This allows visitors to view and photograph the raptors, a breed of birds of prey at exceptional close range.

Examples of rarely seen wildlife in the park include lions, leopards, and cheetahs. Hyraxas, African buffalo, zebra, eland, hartebeest, Thomson’s gazelle and baboons are also common in the park.

Elephant corridor offers sanctuary to the jumbo

By JEFF MWANGI

The elephant population has been reducing at an alarming rate prompting efforts to save the jumbo. The elephant is at risk because of its tasks that are popular for ivory. Save the elephants in Mount Kenya region is a vital new elephant corridor. Located north of Mount Kenya, it will provide a lifeline for the animals. The movement of these elephants between the highlands on Mount Kenya and the dry low country to the north and west minimises human-wildlife conflict.

The re-opening of migration routes is a major attraction at the game reserve. Below: Mother and son walk through the breathtaking gorge during a tour of the Park. Pictures: George Murage

The re-opening of migration routes is a major attraction at the game reserve. Below: Mother and son walk through the breathtaking gorge during a tour of the Park. Pictures: George Murage
Hidden away, lies a treasure in the Nairobi Railways Museum

By OMONDI AKUNO

It is not often that one associates historical and touristic sites with a city like Nairobi. However, in down town Nairobi lies one significant building that is a quite spectacular hidden place, less frequented and one that not many people know about.

If one is interested in the history of the country’s railways or just wants a nice place to visit then this is it.

The Nairobi Railways Museum is easily accessible from the Nairobi Railway Station entrance. It is rarely crowded as not many people visit it.

First timers

There are people like Gabriel Anubi, 22, a resident of Kawangware who have never even heard of it, leave alone visit the place. “I am here to have a look at what the Museum has in store as I have never seen a coach before,” says Anubi.

The Railways Museum was opened in 1971 for the preservation of the history of the railway system. It is currently stocked with photographs, relics and records of events and facilities that have been used since the beginning of the railroad.

Inside the museum, under the main gallery section, there is a collection of small items ranging from manual type writers, field compass, binoculars, cooking stove and punch card time clock among others items.

In addition there are items that are models of coaches and ship, the seat used by the Queen of England on her royal train in East Africa in 1950s, bicycle and wheeled trolleys as well as trophies are also exhibited.

It also has in stock cutlery that was used in the first coaches during the early 1900s. Some of these are large plates that were used for serving meat and salads while the smaller ones were for vegetables. Salt, pepper, mustard and oil servers are also on display.

There is a display of a menu typed on a piece of card paper that lists some of the meals which include celery soup, mashed potatoes and French beans, cabbage and roasted potatoes, fried fish and tomatoes sauce, roast leg of mutton and stewed fruit. These were served in the early days when the train carried passengers from the Coast into the hinterland.

Photograph

The Museum has a resource centre that is an archive of black and white photographs adorning the inside walls of the museum. Some of the photographs date back to the early 1900s when the construction of the railway line was taking place.

The pictures show how Africans and Indians worked on the construction of the railway line while other photographs show a variety of carriages that were used in the country at that time.

From the photos, one is able to tell that the work they were doing was difficult as a result of harsh climatic conditions, rough terrain and wild animals.

Another photograph shows what Nairobi looked like during the 1900s. At one point there was a railway line passing across Kenyatta Avenue, which is a road today.

But one photograph that might attract attention is one showing two lions resting on a piece of rock, perhaps waiting to pounce on their next victim. These wild animals were a major threat to railway line construction workers and played a big role in delaying the entire process.

Outside the museums main building is a collection of locomotives, coaches, carriages and wagons. Some of these include carriage Number 301 that built Tanganyika railways and wagon number 4201 built by the Vulcan Foundry in England in 1923.

Exhibitions

Also exhibited is a coach Number 12 built in 1899. It is from this coach that police superintendent Charles Henry Ryall was dragged while sleeping by a man-eating lion at Kima Station, 400 kilometres from Nairobi on June 6, 1900.

Perhaps this is why movie makers and documentary producers from all over the world love this site. It is here where one of the coaches (No. 301) was used in the shooting of the movie Out of Africa.

Museum visit

Currently there is an ongoing construction on the extension of the railway building in Nairobi where a resource centre will be established so that scholars, researchers, students among other enthusiasts can access information on the railways history. For those who would love to buy something from the museum, one can get a variety of postcards, photographs, railway video tapes, magazines and booklets at a small fee.

If you feel that you want a ride on a coach, there are refurbished ones that will take you to your desired destination be it the coastal city of Mombasa or to the Rift Valley town of Naivasha.

The museum is open Monday to Sunday including public holidays from 8.00am to 5.00pm.
Kisauni’s forgotten pillar in a derelict state

By DIANA WANYONYI

Many years ago a pillar was constructed Mnyuchi area, Mwishomoroni in Kisauni District. Nobody seems to know much about the significant historical site that people hardly consider its importance.

The isolated pillar could be one of the oldest since it has an Arabic inscription which means it could have been built in 1331 and used as a watch tower to keep enemies at bay and also direct approaching ships.

The ruin, situated near the Indian Ocean, opposite the Tudor Creek, is marked with tightly knit roots of a tree on top of it although its white walls are cracked and peeling.

Mr Mohammed Kur Sadhau, 76, who found his way to Mombasa from Faza in Lamu started seeing the pillar when he was 15 years old.

Architecture

Near the pillar there was a five bedroomed house which was built by Arabs where Sadhau lived before it was demolished a month ago following a land dispute.

“I lived in this empty old cracked house with my family. Many people were afraid to come close to the pillar and the house because it was bushy and it was dominated with black monkeys everywhere giving it the nickname Mnara wa Manyuni meaning pillar of monkeys,” explains Sadhau.

The house was originally owned by a great leader of Oman of Saudi Arabia who used stairs from the sea shore (now crumbled) to reach the house.

“This pillar had stairs that could enable one to reach its top to put up fire as a signal to give green light to approaching ship to dock or leave the harbour,” explains Sadhau. He adds: “But now the stair is worn down due to erosion and age.”

The Arab name of the pillar means “The stairs.”

The ruin could be one of the oldest in the Indian Ocean since it has any significance in the community, says Katana.

Katana says plans are underway to start deeper research and investigation in the area in order to know if they are of historical significance. He adds: “If the research feedback will be positive, the National Museums of Kenya will make it part of our historical sites.”

According to a resident of Mwishomoroni, the oldest men who could have told the story are all dead. Sadhau is the only one who has an idea about the forgotten pillar in Mnyuchi area.

Women to benefit from tourism fund

By RACHEL MUTHONI

Millions of shillings are to be spent to boost tourism in Koibatek District.

The Tourism Trust Fund (TFF) will spend eight million shillings to start tourism projects for women in the district.

Acting Chief Executive Officer Mr Sammy Kibet said the project, which has already kicked off will benefit more than 100 women.

Already, the Fund has invested another KSh4 million on a conference centre as well as buying maps and a vehicle at Mogotio.

Speaking in Nakuru, Kibet said the money which has been released will be spent in building stalls for selling curios and possibly a guest house near the equator.

By targeting women, the Fund will have gone a long way in reducing poverty levels in the semi arid areas.

While places like Marakwet, Baringo, Samburu and Keiyo had a lot to offer for local and international tourists, little had been done to market the area as a way of creating jobs for residents.

Farmers urged to venture in wildlife farming

By KARIUKI MWANGI

Other than relying on agricultural and livestock farming, farmers have been urged to venture into other forms of income generation to help them improve their standards of living.

This will enable them develop themselves economically and stop relying on foreign aid. According to an assistant director of the Kenya Wildlife Service on Mountain Conservation, Mr Robert Njue, there are many avenues that farmers can explore and these include wildlife farming.

“They can engage in chameleon and guinea fowl rearing as well as bee keeping among other areas that can earn them income as attractions,” explained Njue.

He said the mountain conservation area has a high economic potential in extraordinary flora and fauna that the residents can take advantage of and use to generate income.

The Arusha used to trade in ivory, clothes, dates and farm products as well as exchange of goods. According to the Arabic calendar, this year is 1431 which means the pillar is slightly over 100 years old.

Chief Curator of Fort Jesus Museum, Mr Jimbi Katana says there is need to carry out more research in Mwishomoroni area as it is rich with cultural sites. “We need to carry out research on the pillar to know if it has any significance in the community,” says Katana.

The larger Kisauni District is rich with historical sites like the Free Town area where the slaves were released during colonial era and intermarried to start their new life.

Katana says plans are under way to start deeper research and investigation in the area in order to know if they are of historical significance. He adds: “If the research feedback will be positive, the National Museums of Kenya will make it part of our historical sites.”

According to a resident of Mwishomoroni, the oldest men who could have told the story are all dead. Sadhau is the only one who has an idea about the forgotten pillar in Mnyuchi area.

End of snippet...
Sector to get boost through agro-tourism

By PAUL MWANIKI

When the word tourism is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is wildlife and beautiful sceneries that comprise the larger part of what the country has to offer in this industry. Few Kenyans would really understand rural tourism, a product that is being developed to tap into the industry through day to day lifestyle of the communities intending to feature in the business.

In Chogoria, Meru South one such project being developed through a joint partnership of Kenya Federation of Agricultural Producers (KENFAP) and the community.

This is purely a community based rural project which was started in 2005 and is located along the equator on the windward side of Mt Kenya.

The most striking features to any visitor are the well pruned green and lush vegetation of tea plantations, scenic hills, rivers, waterfalls and caves which combine uniquely with the imposing Mt Kenya.

Beyond the impressive landscapes and rich biodiversity, this region is a water catchment area for two of Kenya’s most important rivers, the Tana and Ewaso Nyiro.

Rural tourism

The project which has been dubbed “Kilimo Talii, Swahili for agro-tourism aims at providing alternative and additional income through rural tourism while at the same time promoting and preserving the fragile eco-system of this mountain region.

Most people living around Meru are farmers and in rural tourism the proposed products need be linked to the lifestyle of the host community so it can create a dependable product.

Tea is the unique selling point at Kilimo Talii as a destination besides other attractions.

“It has a very strong connection with hospitality. Offering a cup of tea at source can provide a yearning experience to visitors,” said Mr Stephen Gitau from KENFARM.

“Tea is also associated with the distinctive equatorial climate where the environmental conditions are crucial hence the focus on the project is tourism and conservation,” said Gitau.

He added that the project site coincides with the Mt. Kenya climbing route known as the Chogoria Route.

Relaxation

With this, most tourists can relax at the Kilimo Talii cottages before or after the adventurous journey on Africa’s second largest mountain.

This idea was hatched from the Community Management of Protected Areas Conservation (COMPACT), a project of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) that aims at conserving Mt Kenya as a world heritage site.

COMPACT project coordinator, Mr Fred Kihara told the Reject that Kilimo Talii at Chogoria is proving that agro-tourism is yet to be a ventured business.

“The project started just as a way of showing tourists visiting Mt. Kenya the way of life of those living around it but as days have gone by we find that these people will even run it on its own without depending on the mountain goers,” noted Kihara.

He said that taking tourists through lessons of tea farming to the time it is plucked and taken for processing leaves is a desired experience by the visitors.

Agro-tourism was being introduced as a pilot project and others are expected in the rich mountain biodiversity as well as entry of the equally rich Laikipia plains and northern Kenya eco-system as tourist destinations.

The whole project is set to benefit the community who are expected to buy shares from KENFAP, who are the initiators.

“The community around Chogoria and Meru will finally own this facility by purchasing part of the shares which are owned by KENFAP and we will leave them to run it and only assist with some logistics,” noted Gitau.

During a recent visit by former National UNDP coordinator Ms Tomoko Nishimoto who has since then been appointed as the global director with United Nations Environmental Programme, the people were called upon to own the project and help in implementing the project.

Support

Nishimoto said that she would be the first to camp and spend nights with her family and friends once the project is complete and even promised to bring more visitors from Japan.

The project also got a boost from the Nithi CDF kitty with Mr Kareke Mbiuki, who is the area MP promising that by end of the year it would be connected with electricity.

Kareke said the Government was supportive of such initiatives. “The Government is planning of how a place like Kisumu can also benefit from tourism activities considering that we have the second largest fresh water lake but few tourists visit there,” he noted.

It is with this much optimism that we have the Reject wondering if the project is going to feature in the business.

Neglected sites that dot ridges of Murang’a

By RYAN MATHENGE

Somewhere in the ridges of Murang’a lies a forgotten site. The few who know about it only associate it with the local names of the site. Makarwe wa Nyagathanga remains a forgotten historical site due to poor publicity. Makarwe is a tree at the Shrine where beautiful birds called Niyagathanga used to rest. There are people who associate the site with introduction of the Catholic Church at Tuthu area where the first mass was read. The site on the slopes of Aberdare Mountains is 110 years old and is currently referred to as the Millennium Shrine. While not regarded as a tourist attraction, it remains an important place where many of the Catholic faithful visit.

The tough female chief of Murang’a, Wangwu Makeri is claimed to have been buried within this site. So was paramount chief Karuri wa Gakure and the first Murang’a colonial DC Francis Hall.

At the historical site, lies incomplete buildings that were abandoned by the County Council of Murang’a despite more than KSh17 million being used to put them up.

The site is currently under management of Gakuyu village community, County Council of Murang’a and Green Belt Movement. In ushering the new millennium, many from the community including Nobel laureate Prof Wangari Maathai visited site.

Set backs

A number of people are disadvantaged in visiting the site because reliable public service transport is not available.

Murang’a county tourism officer, Mr Joseph Kung’u, says a lot of sensitisation is being done to create awareness on historical sites. He says Murang’a has many of the historical sites like Mau Mau caves in Wanjerere area which were used during the struggle for independence. A British aircraft is said to have dropped a bomb in this village killing hundreds of people.

The British soldiers dropped huge powdered bombs while pursuing tens of Mau Mau fighters suspected to have been hiding in the caves and had declined to surrender.

“We have a lot of historical sites that people can come and write about,” says Kung’u during an interview with the Reject.

Another attraction area is on the slope of the Aberdares where former Mau Mau Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi used to hide on top of a tree in Mwigio wa Raha area in Kangema. The tree was the watch tower he used to monitor movement of the colonial soldiers before attacking them. The marked trees remains an attraction despite many people lacking information to link it with struggle for independence.
Church's presence in Kenya.

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rarely visit. The spot was 16 years ago in 1994 when the

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Hannington near a tree known locally as

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are called for renewal of the grave's significance. Picture: Paul Halisi and internet

This place should be our spiritual shrine and not

any more yet it has the same significance,”

ilm over 150 years of Anglican

tial: Hannington’s gravestone which is 200 metres from Anglican Church Mumias town.

his arrival

According to church records availed by the Bishop of Mumias ACK Diocese, Beneah Salalah, Hannington arrived in Mombasa in 1885 before moving to Ugan-

d the mission's station for the new Eastern Equatorial Africa diocese.

September the same year, he arrived at Elureko village in the present Mumias Dis-

where he met Nabongo (King) Mumia.

The Nabongo received him well together with 50 of his helpers. They stayed at the

place for one more week before leaving for Uganda.

On his departure, Bishop Hannington is said to have promised Mumia that the

British government would protect him in case of attacks from the enemy tribes. In

the goodwll, Mumia gave him additional helpers and advised them not to

er from Uganda from the eastern side because local residents regarded those entering from that direction as enemies. In addition, the

Nabongo also wrote letters introducing Hannington to the Kabaka of Buganda.

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Promoting Africa through art

By KIGONDU NDAVANO

Malindi based Italian art promoter Armando Tanzini has for years made Malindi-Kenya and Africa popular through a slogan “Do not forget Africa”.

He does this through art in which he promotes his pieces by sending them to international exhibitions and art collectors in Europe by use of a Map of Africa made from various African raw materials.

In the art gallery within his house near the Vasco da Gama Pillar, Tanzini guides many artists into producing original, sometimes crude pieces of art.

Due to the huge number of pieces sent to Europe, art collectors have started getting privately interested in ‘Africa’ making the map marketable as a piece of art.

Today, great innovations by a local artist who has also borrowed heavily from Tanzini has seen what may have appeared as useless ordinary objects being turned into money.

Form four graduate Bernard ‘Rambo’ Rambo has for the last one year adopted an art where a cross-section of what could be easily ignored as useless is converted into marketable piece of art.

Using broken pieces of glass, plywood, dry dark Casuarina tree seeds, dry coconut fronds and a number of different colours although he prefers the golden coloured paint more, he is able to make beautiful artwork.

Rambo has been making good sales. He explains: “The pieces retail at between KSh10,000 to KSh20,000 and are quite popular with Italian tourists and residents who buy them as decoration for their luxury private villas and cottages.”

Rambo explains: “The time spent making such pieces of art depends on the amount of raw materials to be stuck together and collection of such items.” He adds: “One piece takes between two to three days.”

Rambo displays his work along the Malindi Bay Beach Road where it attracts both customers and art admirers.

The great Vasco da Gama pillar slowly being eaten away

By KIGONDU NDAVANO

Historical sites are meant to be protect and taken care of as they not only remind a people of their history but they also act as an income generating activity.

However, the same cannot be said of the Vasco da Gama Pillar in Malindi. Years after the government promised to rehabilitate the pillar and protect it from erosion, the historical site which remains the greatest marketing tool for Malindi’s hospitality and tourism remains unprotected. It is now under threat of total destruction by strong tidal waves.

This despite the fact that scientists warned that climate change is now causing a rise in sea levels that could destroy huge investments along the Kenyan Coast.

Environmentalists in Malindi have called for immediate campaigns to protect the historical Vasco da Gama Pillar which is facing the risk of collapse due to erosion from heavy waves.

Six years ago, the Public Works Department placed estimated protection cost at KSh17 million after the Malindi Green Town Movement, an environmental lobby raised alarm over the heavy erosion towards the pillar. The National Museums of Kenya under whose docket safeguarding the pillar falls, insists that it has no funds to protect the pillar. The NMK charges a fee for those entering the area where the pillar is situated.

The chairman of the Malindi Green Town Movement Mr Godfrey Karume is now calling for urgent measures to be taken to protect the pillar which has been attracting about at least 10 busses full of domestic tourists including students from upcountry schools in the recent past.

Erosion

The coral rocks holding the pillar have been heavily eroded and cracks have developed less than one metre to the pillar. The path leading to the historical site, now managed by the National Museum of Kenya, and where tourists are charged to enter has about a metre completely eaten by ocean. This means the pillar could end up being an island.

The pillar, which is more than 500 years old, was built by the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama and remains the most important tool in marketing Malindi as a tourist destination. This is because the coastal town hosted Vasco da Gama long before tourism became popular. It was partially protected through concrete pillars in the 1970s.

The corals which were intact five years ago have been eaten from underneath by the rising sea level and strong waves and a narrow path leading to the pillar has less than one metre remaining.

Kitui yeering to exploit its natural resources

By BONIFACE MULU

Kitui and Mwingi Districts want to start exploiting coal deposits in the region.

According to Kitui County professionals the area has enough coal deposits that if exploited can help lift standards of living.

According to Dr Joseph Nzomoi, acting chairman Kitui Professionals Forum, there are vast coal deposits in Mwingi and Mutitu Districts within the vast county.

“The county has deposits of other minerals that include limestone in Mutomo District, Iron ore and several others are to be found in the county,” Nzomoi explained.

A lawyer from the region, Mr Eric Kyalo Mutua said there are laws and policies that govern operations of the coal industry.

“Although Kenya intends to engage in coal mining soon, it lacks adequate policy and legal frameworks to direct the industry,” Mutua explained.

He listed the seven types of coal which are peat, lignite, sub-bituminous coal, bituminous coal, steam coal, anthracite and graphite.

Mutua revealed that in 2006 the world faced a shortage of coal with about 6,743,786,000 tonnes.

In reiterating the need to exploit coal, Mutua said 40 per cent of the world’s electricity comes from coal. “About 68.7 per cent of China’s electricity comes from coal; 53 per cent for South Africa and 49 per cent for the US, explained Mutua.

South Africa is the fifth largest coal producer in the world. Due to use of coal as fuel for power generation, electricity in South Africa was four times cheaper than in Kenya. Coal is also used in the smelting industry to make iron and steel.

In 2001, the Government started exploring coal in parts of Kitui and Mwingi districts.

The two were speaking during the Kitui Professionals Forum meeting held at the Kitui Multi Purpose Development Training Institute. The meeting was chaired by Mr Temi Mutia, Strategic Planning Consultant. The forum was recently launched officially at the same venue.

Nzomoi said professionals from the county should offer civic education to the people to enable them be part of the nation’s level of 85 per cent resources. He urged that this participation should also go to the international level.

Civic education

He reiterated that the District Development Plans (DDPs) in Kenya have been prepared since 1974 as a means of implementing the National Development Plans into district specific projects and programmes. The district development programmes are a mirror image of Vision 2030.

“In 2008, during the preparations of the current District Development Plans, Kitui County had four districts which included Kitui, Mwingi, Mutitu and Kyuso. Since then additional districts have been created in the county by the government including Mutitu, Katulani, Ikutha, Muumoni and Nzambani,” Nzomoi explained.

He said agriculture dominates the county since 80 percent of the people depend on it for their livelihood. The climate of the county is arid and semi-arid with very erratic rainfall.

“The annual rainfall ranges between 500 -1050 millimetres with 40 per cent reliability. The long rains come in March-May and short rains come in November-December,” Nzomoi explained.

All the six constituencies in the county had been represented at the function. The professionals asked the local Members of Parliament to cooperate and work with them towards progressing the Kitui County for the benefits of the local people.
Manga Escarpment: A mark of cultural history

By BEN OROKO

The Western Kenya tourist circuit is endowed with rich historical sites which have cultural significance to the local communities. However, majority of them seem to have been forgotten and underutilised for the benefit of the immediate communities.

One such important historical site that seems to have been forgotten is the Manga Escarpment. This site has great cultural significance to the Gusii community.

Rich culture

The Escarpment, said to be the community’s umbilical cord, is situated in the newly created Manga District within Nyamira County. Mzee Peter Mugoya from Kianogos sub-location says Manga Escarpment has both historical and cultural significance to the community.

“The Escarpment has a rich cultural history and significance to the community since it is culturally believed to be the origin of the Gusii community,” explains Mugoya.

He regrets that though the Government and other stakeholders have not played a significant role in the preservation of the Escarpment as a tourist attraction, the local community has taken a leading responsibility in ensuring the community’s rich history is not interfered with.

Mugoya wants the ministries of National Heritage and Tourism promote Manga Escarpment as tourist attraction in the Western circuit.

However, there are plans by the Government to rehabilitate Manga Escarpment’s 50-year-old Baraza Hall with a bid to transforming it into a community museum.

Unknown to many Gusii residents, there is a unique cultural cave locally called En-goro A-mwaga (an insatiable cave) at the Manga Escarpment which has cultural significance to the community since this was the only point where they would seek cleansing intervention to start a new life after burying their evil past at the site.

Previously no one could visit the site without collecting and tying firewood together with traditional thatching grass (obonyori) and then throwing it into the cave after saying their problems that needed the spirits’ intervention. It was only after this that the cleansing would be done.

“If one had problems in his/her life, they would collect firewood and tie with traditional thatching grass before visiting the site for cleansing,” explains Mugoya.

Cleansing

Mzee Nyakundi Masankwa concurs with Mugoya saying one could not visit or face the cultural site without the firewood since it was a sacred place.

The site was not for offering sacrifices but was purely a cultural site where Gusii people sought forgiveness and cleansing through intervention of ancestral spirits believed to have lived at the site and were directly linked with God.

“The cultural cave could not be filled with firewood thrown into it by those who sought cleansing at the site. Immediately after one threw the firewood into the cave, it would disappear as the ancestral spirits would take it to God,” explains Masankwa.

He reiterates: “If the firewood disappeared immediately after it was thrown into the cave, it was believed the ancestral spirits had taken the firewood to God signalling acceptance of one’s prayers for cleansing from the evil past and new beginning.”

“If a woman had a problem giving birth, she could collect firewood and tie them with green traditional thatching grass in three knots before visiting the site to announce her problems.”

If the woman’s prayers were accepted and she was cured, she would later collect firewood and accompany it with the first hair shaved from the child she was blessed with and take it to the site as thanksgiving,” explains Masankwa.

At the top of Manga Escarpment is Ige-na Monto (human being-shaped stone) an historical stone that resembles a seated person seen from a distance. Though the physical features of the historical stone have been altered through weathering and human activities, formerly it resembled a human being seated when someone approached it from a far distance, terrifying some passersby who had no knowledge about it.

“Old men from the community liked taking traditional beer (Buaaa) while seated on the stone as they basked in the sun,” explains Masankwa.

Another significant point at the Manga Escarpment is a copter-shaped giant stone locally identified as Rigena ria Menge (Menge’s stone) named after a local musician who could climb on the stone when composing Kamba Nane or Obokano songs meant to educate local community members moral values in the society.

On some occasions Menge would be forced to stand on the stone and compose songs mocking women who did not want to get married and men who feared to be circumcised.

New route to Mt Kenya set to expand tourism

By DAVID KIAIRIE

As the residents of the various counties strategise on how they will harness the unexploited and underutilised resources available in their areas, residents of Embu and Mbale who form the Embu County are exploring possibilities of venturing in the lucrative tourism sector.

The community, which largely depends on agriculture for livelihood will soon get a share of the tourism revenue following the launching of a new route to climb Mount Kenya from Embu.

The route, which was launched recently by the Tourism Trust Fund, is set to be in operation within less than two years.

Benefits

According to the Fund’s acting chief executive, Mr Sammy Kibet the new route will enable climbers to avoid the height attained through Kianjokoma market, some 17 kilometres from Embu town.

“It will then meander into Mt Kenya Forest through Thambana and Irangi spurring major development and economic growth,” explains Kibet. Climbers who use this route that has been identified as economically viable will be able to clearly see the Lenana peak as they ascend.

Presently, over 40,000 tourists who climb the mountain annually use Chogoria, Naru Moru and Sirimone routes in Meru and Nanyuki respectively. With the new route, the tourist load will be distributed to the communities around the Embu area.

“The Tourism Trust Fund will establish an information centre at Irangi area in Mt. Kenya Forest and an eco-lodge facility at Thambana, both of which are meant to serve tourists who will be climbing the mountain from the Embu route,” explains Kibet.

The new climbing route’s feasibility study has already been funded to the tune of KSh1.5 million by the Fund is expected to promote domestic tourism, market the local community’s culture, help in forest conservation and create job opportunities.

The climbers will also be able to visit Mau Mau caves, watch birds and engage in activities like sport fishing and avi tourism.

Martin Wachira, a local youth group leader says the new route will offer great opportunities to the youth who will get jobs as tour guides and porters.

“There are many talented youths who will earn income through selling carvings, drawings, acrobat performances and dances,” explains Wachira. He adds that this will keep the young people engaged and free from criminal activities.

Growth

Clerk to the Embu County Council Samuel Kibaara is happy that the new route will earn the local authority revenue running into millions of shillings. “We shall collect revenue at entry points and from the tourist lodge which we shall construct and lease to a private entrepreneur,” says Kibaara.

The route will spur growth in the area as local farmers will get tenders to supply food that will be used in lodge along the route to the mountain while others will be employed in the hotels to serve the tourists.

Farmers, residents and matatu operators are also set to benefit as the roads to the route will be all weather enabling smooth transportation of farm produce, goods and tourists.

The new route is an initiative by the Embu County Council assisted by Rumu-enjes Member of Parliament Ms Cecily Mbarire, who is also an Assistant Minister for Tourism.

The local authority has teamed up with the ‘Tourism Trust Fund, Kenya Wildlife Service and the Kenya Forest Service to ensure the new climbing route is a success.

The business community is also expected to reap from the venture. The Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch chairman, Mr Johnstone Nyaga says traders in the area will now get a share of the tourism income.

“Tourism is one of the major sectors that is driving the economy of this country and we now have an opportunity to bite the cake,” says Nyaga. He reiterates that traders in Embu town who normally depend on coffee and tea as well as civil servants will have an alternative source of income.

The business community has already formed a group known as the Embu Tourism Development Organisation whose members have an interest in tourism.
Self help group reaps the fruit of hard work

By GILBERT OCHIENG

Started six years ago, a community based organisation that was nurtured amid challenges has every reason to smile. They are now reaping the fruits of their labour as the project has started to bear fruit.

Members of Bumanyi soap processing self help group from Nasira sub-Location, Busia County have every reason to wear a smile on their faces.

Bumanyi Community Interest Group was formed in 2004 with only seven members. It was officially registered with the Department of Social Services on April 7, 2005.

The group's chairperson, Ms Alice Nyongesa says the members' main objective was to establish a foundation of self reliance by engaging in income generating activities so as to bring the dependency syndrome to its death bed.

“The Department of Agriculture identified our village, Bumanyi, as one of the focal areas and gave us a grant of KSh120,000 under a programme known as ‘Njaa Marufuku Kenya’ in 2006,” explains Nyongesa. She adds: “We withdrew KSh75,000 that was spent on a three day training workshop conducted by field officers from the Department of Agriculture.”

Soap making

The group was trained on soap making as well as Tie and Dye. The membership has since increased to 22 — five men and 17 women. The members unanimously agreed to contribute KSh500 each totaling KSh11,000 to facilitate further training in Uganda where they were subsequently taken through the soap making process and how to manufacture cassava starch for ironing clothes.

“Apart from soap making as well as Tie and Dye, the group undertakes several activities like scones and cake baking. We sell these to local shop owners and individuals,” says Nyongesa. The group also engages in table banking and farming. They also carry out livestock spraying at a fee of five shillings per head.

Originally the group planned to manufacture bar soaps but was forced to change direction to soap making as it was more easily. The group now makes liquid soap that they can use in rolling out the policy at the grass-root level.

“Sales of the soap increased from KSh200 and KSh300 per week from sale of soap as well as cakes and scones which have a ready market. “Our first customer is our stomach. During the agricultural field days, we grab the opportunity to sell our products to participants and members of the public,” says Damas. He says their products are in high demand.

Nyongesa underscores the importance of the group's activities. “Our mission is to work extra hard as a team, focus on the future and that of our families in collaboration with the relevant government departments to eradicate poverty,” she concludes.

Better lives

A village elder known as Dismas Odhiambo says the group has brought the community together and uplifted their standards of livelihood. He can pocket between KSh200 and KSh300 per week from sale of the products they make. Apart from soap making, the group also bakes cakes and scones for sale. Picture: Gilbert Ochieng

Diarrhoea continues to claim the lives of children

By TITUS MAERO

As the world leaders prepare to take stock of the progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the battle of reducing child mortality by 2015 is yet to be won.

“Diarrhoea remains the second leading cause of death among children under the age of five years,” said Dr Godrick Onyango, Western Provincial Director of Medical Services.

Onyango pointed out that the disease is second only to pneumonia as the cause of death among children even as the MDGs call for drastic reduction in child mortality.

He said diarrhoea remains prevalent in Western Province due to poor sanitation facilitated by among others lack of clean safe drinking water which allow diarrhoea causing pathogens to spread more easily.

“Health conditions alone will not be enough as long as children continue to remain susceptible to diarrhoea. He was speaking during the launch of the Policy Guideline on the Control and Management of Diarrhoea Disease in Children below the age of five years in Western Province at the Kakamega Golf Hotel.

Onyango said evidence had shown that children with poor health and nutritional status are more vulnerable to serious infections like acute diarrhoea and also suffer multiple episodes every year.

“Acute and prolonged diarrhoea exacerbates poor health and malnutrition in children thereby creating a deadly cycle,” he explained.

The launch of the guidelines at the provincial level marked the first step in rolling out the policy at the grassroots level where the disease burden is greatest.

“Our main objective is to transform the group into a cottage industry that will provide employment opportunities especially among the jobless youth in the area,”

— Alice Nyongesa, Chair Bumanyi Community Interest Group
ACK gets set for its own varsity

By ERIC MUTAI

The Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) intends to build a church university at Kanyuambora in Mbeere North district.

According to ACK archbishop Eliud Wabukala, the university will be operational before August next year before it takes the first load of students.

Speaking at the proposed site when he received 100 acres and a conceptual paper from the ACK University steering committee, Wabukala said that the church will also set up campuses in other parts of the country.

Expansion

“This main campus is just the beginning as we will expand theological colleges to prepare them to become campuses of the ACK University,” he explained. He said the university will help absorb hundreds of students who seek varsity education in foreign countries.

Kenyan students have been flocking into Ugandan and Tanzanian universities after they fail to secure places in the public universities. Wabukala said that the idea of a fully fledged Anglican University has been long overdue and that the church will put in place mechanisms that will see its realization within the stipulated timeframe.

The church should become the cornerstone of the value systems that will see the country achieve industrialization by 2030,” said Wabukala.

The varsity will sit on a 100 acre piece of land where the St John the Baptist Kanyuambora ACK Church, Kanyuambora Boys’ secondary school and Polytechnic currently stand.

The other facilities in the compound will continue offering their services and will form a part of an integrated institution.

Wabukala called on area residents to ensure their children get education and benefit from the facility. He said young people should be encouraged to attain quality education and shun miraa business that is common in the area and has seen many boys drop out of school.

Opportunity

“You are also going to benefit from this university as a market for your produce. I urge you to go into agro-economics and vegetable farming,” he urged the residents.

Chairman of the steering committee, Rev Dr Gideon Githaiga who also doubles as the director of the provincial board of education for the Anglican Church said other churches had established universities in different regions and the Anglican felt left out.

“As you know, we have a 50 per cent stake at St Paul’s University and other denominations own the other 50. We wanted to have a university we own in entirety,” said Githaiga.

Kivuti is also the chairman of Embu and Mbeere leaders who have been agitating for the Embu Agricultural Staff Training (East) to be upgraded to a university.

Residents want electricity to enable them go green

By PAUL KIMANZI

If residents of Kitise, Makuene District, were to get electricity today, they would paint their land green.

The residents say they have relied so much on relief foods but would now like to invest in agriculture.

Water project

The community is running the Kitise Water Project which may collapse because there is no electricity to pump water. They currently rely on a small generator which may not survive for long due to too many breakdowns.

The water is pumped from Athi River which passes through Ukambani. The project is based in Kitise Location but members of the group running the project say the generator cannot pump the water beyond a certain point. So every member has to draw the water from that point.

“A generator would have made it possible to pump the water to our homesteads, making the water cheaper and enable us do irrigation,” said Mrs Nelly Nziozi, a project member.

A 20-litre jerrican costs seven shillings, which is often beyond their reach given the poor economic background of the land.

Commitment

Those involved in the projects have vowed that if they were to get electricity, they would change the history of the area and the negative perception that they cannot produce agricultural products.

“We are suffering amid plenty,” said a local resident Paul Nziozi, as he referred to plenty of water around their area but was of no use to them.

Poor roads puts travellers at mercy of rain

By PAUL KIMANZI

If vehicles headed for lower part of Makindu district will reach the upper parts, rain will tell. A matatu driver puts it, ‘when it rains, we will not cross over’.

This grim picture paints the poor road infrastructure that travelers in Makueni have to endure particularly when it rains.

The worst point is at River Kiangini, which connects Makueni and Kilwezi constituencies. What could have saved the situation is a bridge that was being constructed but was never completed.

Vehicles which use Wote-Makindu road, about 24 kilometers, are forced to take a ‘U turn’ when they reach the bridge after down pour. This road passes along various stages like; Mbuvo, Kitise, Athiiani as well as lower parts of Makindu and Kathonzweni locations.

Earlier in the month, my brother was forced to spend a night at Makindu as he travelled from Mombasa to our home in Kathonzweni when they received a call that the river was flooded,” recalls Janet Ndunge.

Drivers from Wote have to confirm that the river has not flooded before they can proceed with the journey once they arrive at Mbuvo. The same applies for vehicles coming from the opposite side.

A business man identified as Ken Kilonzii from Kitui County admitted he withdrew his vehicles from using the road due to its poor state as one of his Nissan Matusu nearly broke down after using the road for barely a month.

“If this situation continues, we will forever remain underdeveloped,” said Paul Nziozi, from Kitise location, who is a part time lecturer.

Area residents are calling on the government to address the matter.