

Mid-Term Project Workshop

7–9 March 2023

Rabai Museum, Rabai, Kilifi County, Kenya

Workshop report

Establishing a biocultural heritage territory to protect Kenya's Kaya forests

Organised By KEFRI, IIED and Rabai Cultural Village



About the event

For more information about this report, or the 'Establishing a biocultural heritage territory to protect Kenya's Kaya forests' project, visit www.iied.org/establishing-biocultural-heritage-territory-protect-kenyas-kaya-forests or contact: Krystyna Swiderska, Krystyna.Swiderska@iied.org

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KEFRI is Kenya's lead agency for research on coastal forests, through its Coastal Region office covering Kilifi and Kwale Counties. It has conducted action-research on Kaya forests, traditional knowledge, traditional crops and sustainable products in Mijikenda communities since 2005, including in Rabai since 2012.

Rabai Cultural Village is a Community-Based Organisation registered in 2013, comprising 26 micro-enterprise groups and a cluster of traditional houses adjacent to Kaya Mudzi-Muvya. It includes Kaya elders as advisors and members, showcases cultural practices, songs and dances, and hosts traditional ceremonies and a community seedbank. Its main objective is to conserve Kaya Mudzi-Muvya and Rabai's cultural heritage.

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Workshop participants, Rabai Museum. Credit: KEFRI.

Summary

The Rabai community in Kilifi county, coastal Kenya is one of nine Mijikenda sub-tribes that settled in fortified hill villages (Kaya forests) in the 16th century. These sacred Kaya forests are remnants of tropical dry forest and are part of the Coastal Forests global biodiversity hotspot and are recognised as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. They are protected by traditional rules and taboos of a Kaya Council of Elders and its Kaya Court — with support from the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) — but are being degraded by strong economic pressures, exacerbated by worsening drought and food insecurity, and erosion of culture. Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI) and the International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED) are working with the Rabai community to address these challenges by supporting a community-led process to establish a collectively governed biocultural heritage territory and a biocultural economy, through a project funded by the UK Darwin Initiative “Establishing a biocultural heritage territory to protect Kenya’s Kaya forests” (2021–2024). The biocultural territory concept and approach is inspired by the successful Potato Park in Peru — the project aims to adapt and test the approach in a very different context in Rabai.

This report provides the proceedings of the mid-term project workshop, held in Rabai on 7–9 March 2023. The three-day workshop brought together Kaya elders, village elders, women, youth, local government Chiefs, officials from county government departments for culture, environment and agriculture, NMK, Kenya Forest Service, a Member of the County Assembly and the Minister for Social Services, Gender and Culture. The workshop reviewed progress with project activities, explored key challenges and strategies to address them, and actively engaged the community in planning activities for the coming year. The project is working in Rabai’s 10 villages, which have about 80,000 residents in an area of about 20,000 hectares, and works with five community researchers (each covering two villages) who are part of the project team to co-design and facilitate activities. It aims to significantly reduce Kaya forest degradation, protect and restore endangered endemic trees and the elephant shrew, triple incomes, revitalise traditional knowledge and culture, and restore agrobiodiversity and butterflies on-farm. The project has: established biocultural heritage territory (BCHT) self-governance institutions at village and landscape level, which include Kaya elders; restored endangered multiple-use trees in Kaya forests and on-farm; trained villagers in sustainable products (brooms, honey, coconut oil); and installed fuel-efficient stoves and briquette presses to reduce pressure on Kaya forests.

The workshop agreed that the goal of the BCHT should be the Mudzini concept — Rabai’s holistic wellbeing concept, which seeks balance between the human, sacred and natural worlds. It was proposed that the BCHT should be guided by Rabai’s traditional values of Kufaana (reciprocity), Soyosoyo (balance between people and nature), Umwenga (solidarity), and Kushirikiana (collectiveness), in line with the Potato Park approach where these values guide all aspects of life. A key customary law for the BCHT should be that cutting of valuable trees such as coconut, fig and mango is not allowed, even on private land, and that permission must be obtained from the BCHT committee before a tree can be cut. This will be a challenge since most land in Rabai is privately owned and Christians do not feel obliged to respect Rabai traditional rules. Inter-religious dialogues and sensitisation were proposed to help address this challenge. The Christian population has increased due to immigration from Mombasa. Proximity to Mombasa has also brought pressure for industrial development and sale of land. Participants felt that the BCHT should have the power to decide regarding industrial development and sale of land in Rabai (which used to be forbidden). The Member for County Assembly noted that industry has polluted Rabai’s water and should be held accountable, and the exact source of pollution should be identified.

Kaya forest degradation is not prevented due to inadequate forest guards, and when Kaya elders approach youths degrading forests they are threatened with violence. Degradation of Kaya forests has got worse due to drought, which leads to poor harvests and the need to buy food, and due to lack of respect for elders’ rules especially by youth and Christian immigrants. To address this, a delegation of elders, youth and KEFRI will visit the county government to request support so that youths can be employed to protect forests and support Kaya elders. Lack of water due to drought is also a challenge for a number of microenterprises (such as beekeeping) and is thought to have contributed (along with disease) to significant death of palm trees, which provide raw materials. Poaching was identified as a threat to elephant shrews, and will be addressed by providing goats to all 10 villages to increase access

to meat and income. Indigenous crops and landraces need to be revived to enhance drought resistance, along with seed sharing.

Erosion of traditional values, knowledge and governance institutions is another challenge for biodiversity conservation — the colonial administration replaced the traditional governance system with Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs, and intergenerational traditional knowledge transmission has stopped due to modern education. The workshop agreed to revive *Rome* — a traditional forum for knowledge transfer to youth through storytelling — at village and household level and in schools. Microenterprises will establish bulk collection centres to shorten supply chains and reduce exploitation by middlemen. Coconut trees have been planted and alternative sources of raw materials in nearby areas were proposed. Participants agreed to develop a common label for all biocultural products and services from the Rabai Kaya forest landscape, and to establish a community fund for benefit sharing where a percentage of the revenues can be reinvested to support solidarity (for the poorest groups, for example) and sustain the BCHT conservation activities beyond the project. They also agreed that the microenterprises should be guided by the following cultural values/principles: collectiveness, equity in benefit sharing, inclusivity, transparency, accountability and sustainability.

A learning visit to neighbouring Kaya Kambe, which is relatively well conserved compared to Rabai's Kayas, highlighted many similar challenges of loss of cultural values and respect for elders' rules that restricted forest access with modernisation of youth and Christianity, and lack of forest guards and support for rituals. Improved conservation was attributed to widespread planting of trees on-farm and use of traditional crops. The next steps include sensitising all community members to enhance buy-in and support for the BCHT, participatory processes to develop BCHT bylaws and registration of the BCHT landscape committee as a community association. Farmer field schools will be held to restore resilient traditional crops based on both traditional knowledge and science. Microenterprises will be initiated, and branding, labelling and benefit sharing will be further developed. Trees restored in Kaya and on-farm will be monitored to establish survival rate post-drought; and support for water provision (boreholes, water pans and check dams) will be sought from the county government kitty and industries in Rabai (as part of corporate social responsibility). Households will be encouraged to do rooftop water harvesting during the rainy season.

Introducing the project and the mid-term workshop

Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI) and the International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED), with financial support from the UK Darwin Initiative, are implementing the project 'Establishing a Biocultural Heritage Territory to protect Kenya's Kaya forests' in the Rabai Mijikenda community. Biocultural heritage territories (BCHTs) are self-determined and self-governed area-based conservation measures, which emerge from Indigenous knowledge, holistic wellbeing concepts, cultural and spiritual values and customary laws for conservation and equity. The Potato Park in the Peruvian Andes is a well-known example, which conserves rich agrobiodiversity, wildlife and biocultural heritage, and provides the inspiration for establishing a BCHT in Rabai's sacred Kaya forest landscape (about 20,000 hectares with over 80,000 inhabitants). The project aims to build on and adapt this Andean biocultural approach to the very different context in Rabai as a pilot, which can then inspire other Mijikenda communities to do the same.

Rabai Kaya forests form part of the Coastal Forests global biodiversity hotspot with a very high level of plant endemism and is currently under severe threat. The project aims to promote conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and genetic resources in four sacred Kaya forests (Bomu, Fimboni, Mudzi Muvya and Mudzi Mwiru) and across the landscape, with a particular focus on threatened endemic trees important for livelihoods, the endemic and endangered golden-rumped elephant-shrew, endemic butterflies, and indigenous vegetables and traditional crops. It aims to establish a collective BCHT governance institution that brings together Kaya elders and village elders from 10 villages to strengthen cultural values, beliefs and customary laws. It also aims to reduce Kaya forest degradation — by strengthening capacity of forest-dependent households to generate alternative livelihoods, restoring endangered trees in Kayas and on-farm, and installing fuel-efficient stoves — and to restore resilient traditional crops and agroecological practices. The three-year project started in October 2021 and is being implemented through a community-led approach. Five 'community researchers' from across project villages are employed by the project as part of the project team to co-design and facilitate activities. They are accountable to village elders and Kaya elders as well as the project.

The mid-term project workshop was held over three days from 7–9 March 2023 at Rabai Museum. It brought together 60 participants, including a range of Rabai community and government stakeholders: village elders, Area Chiefs, Kaya elders, BCHT village- and landscape-level committee members, community researchers, women and youth, and officials from the county government of Kilifi, National Museums of Kenya (NMK) and Kenya Forest Service (KFS). The workshop was facilitated by KEFRI with support from IIED. It had three main objectives:

1. To review progress with project implementation
2. To explore emerging challenges with project implementation and develop strategies to address them, and
3. To plan project activities for the next year with the community to ensure a community-led approach.

The workshop also sought to contribute to the process of establishing a BCHT in Rabai and revitalising biocultural heritage by providing a platform for Kaya elders to share traditional ecological knowledge and enhance recognition of the value of traditional knowledge, enable dialogue between different villages and stakeholders, and enhance support from government agencies.

Opening session

The workshop began with an opening prayer from a Kaya elder. Leila Ndalilo from KEFRI then provided a brief introduction to the workshop objectives and project objectives, and an overview of the proposed workshop agenda. She explained that the objective of the BCHT is landscape restoration and culture restoration, and to bring Rabai under one kind of management, stressing the need to do this for future generations. Participants shared their expectations for the workshop, which were reviewed at the end of the workshop to ensure they had all been addressed.

Opening remarks from stakeholders

- Linus Wekesa, the Regional Director for KEFRI Coast Eco-Region Research Programme, informed participants that research in Kaya forests is a major priority area for KEFRI and thanked IIED and KEFRI researchers for their effort in promoting conservation and livelihood initiatives in Kaya forest landscapes. He said that KEFRI has been conducting research in Kaya forests for a long time and will continue to support conservation and livelihood initiatives in Kaya forests beyond the Darwin project. He also said that establishing a BCHT is very important, and that microenterprises will change lives in Rabai and conserve natural resources. He welcomed all participants to the workshop and urged everyone to participate in conservation initiatives to protect Mother Nature.
- Daniel Garero, a Kaya elder and Chairman of Rabai Kayas, expressed gratitude to KEFRI and IIED for their long-term collaborative activities in Kaya forests, which have significantly contributed to conservation and livelihood initiatives, and for bringing together all community members into one voice and involving all wards.
- William Tsuma, a village elder spoke on behalf of the village elders. He thanked the biocultural territory project “for bringing our people together”. He said that enterprises (beekeeping, jikos stoves and briquettes) “will benefit our people”, and that “we believe in time, Rabai community will change”. He and Mr S. Munga, a community representative, thanked the Darwin project facilitators for actively engaging community members and village elders in spearheading Darwin project initiatives.
- Abdalla Saha, a local youth, said thank you for actively involving the youth in the project. He requested that Darwin project initiatives be upscaled to other areas beyond Rabai to target more youth.
- A. Abdalla, the Rabai Sub-county Environment Officer expressed concern on the ongoing rampant destruction of Kaya forests and urged all stakeholders to work together towards protecting and conserving Kaya forests.
- Aisha Juma, speaking on behalf of the community researchers, expressed gratitude to the Darwin project for providing employment and bringing together the community. “You have empowered us, we are confident to work with anyone in the community, we can sensitise people. Before we were afraid to talk to Kaya elders. We have been empowered through use of technology — I could not use email before, but now I can.”
- Krystyna Swiderska (IIED), co-lead of the Darwin project, thanked the Mijikenda people of Rabai for welcoming her on their ancestral land. She mentioned that the journey of establishing a BCHT began following a visit by two Kaya elders to the Potato Park in Peru, which spurred the interest to establish a similar initiative in Rabai. However, the geographical, sociocultural and historical context in the Potato Park and Rabai landscape are very different. The BCHT model should emerge from the Rabai culture and be tailored to the local conditions. BCHTs are a community-led approach for collective self-governance of whole landscapes; they ensure that economic development is rooted in conserving biodiversity and culture.
- Lawrence Chiro of NMK reiterated the commitment of NMK’s Coastal Forest Conservation Unit (CFCU) to continue working with other stakeholders in conservation of Kaya forests. MNK is involved in another project ‘Kaya Connect’ funded by Darwin Initiative through BGCI (Botanic Gardens Conservation International).
- Antony Jao, the Area Chief reiterated the need to establish boundaries for Kaya forests to reduce encroachment. He urged community members to work closely with local administration and report cases of illegal activities. He requested for provision of support to Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs to enforce Kaya conservation rules and regulations. He also urged members of the community to embrace their culture to ensure preservation of their cultural heritage. He said that some inspection of houses showed some cracks due to the impact of mining in Rabai.
- Felix Ireri, Rabai Sub-county Agriculture Officer, said that some people take more trees than they plant, and urged people to plant trees.

The Member of County Assembly (MCA) for Ruruma ward, Hon. Naftali Kombo, appreciated KEFRI's efforts in conservation of Kaya forests and thanked the Area Chiefs. He said that the Kaya elders have not been respected enough, and that "when we say culture we just focus on traditional dances, without focusing on how they used to be back then, their importance". "Back then the lives of Rabai people were good, better than today — cultural norms used to take care of our rich biodiversity and it made the land better, but over time we've ignored the cultural norms and the effects of that can be seen. Norms that helped us to conserve culture and environment have declined and that has contributed to the poverty we see today. When we look back over the last 20 years, we've destroyed the big trees on our farms and allowed others to destroy our beautiful trees. Most of us don't respect conservation, only Kaya elders do. Conservation efforts have been left to Kaya elders only to take care of, but they are very few and are not empowered. The effect of Kaya forest depletion has been lack of rain, food and water. If we want to succeed, we need to focus on where we're coming from. Before it used to rain from March until January, but not today. We used to have two months of drought but now we have six months or a year of drought. So the economic status of Rabai has gone down. We want to plant trees but how can we sustain them until they grow, how to get water for the trees? In Ruruma Ward in Rabai, where I am from, we are digging boreholes, we want to make sure the whole ward has boreholes." Mr Kombo mentioned that he has partnered with an investor to excavate dams in homesteads in Ruruma ward, but the initiative stalled due to political interference. "Our people are growing poorer every day because we can't depend on the rain. When there is no water, bees cannot survive, and cows cannot survive due to lack of grass and water (Garissa case study). Rabai vegetation has been depleted from farmland to Kayas.

Mr Kombo noted that in 2013, a proposal on how to protect forests with rules and regulations was developed but it has not been implemented. There are only four forest guards in Rabai, they don't have a car, bikes or a way to communicate, there is no proper coordination, so how can we protect our environment? Nature is the mother of everything, if we don't take care of it we get hunger and poverty, and if there is poverty and no food, kids don't go to school - this happened to a girl in Rabai." Mr Kombo also noted that dilution of Chiefs' powers following the introduction of devolved governance has led to increased incidences of degradation as Chiefs lack the mandate and powers to enforce. Mr Kombo called on KEFRI and IIED to "coordinate with our leaders", adding that as leaders "we need to speak with one voice and work as a team". "The county government has budgeted for tree nurseries, for example mango and other fruit trees, and palm trees, which have been 'our cash crop', so we should plant more trees as this area is friendly to palm trees. We should budget more on palm tree restoration, and find out why palm trees have been destroyed in Rabai and are sick. Industries in Rabai have contributed a lot to this. If we can identify that one company, we need to take action on that industry because we can't afford to lose our cash crop. After this meeting I will have a recap workshop and will involve the deputy county commissioner and all the Chiefs."

Mr Ishmael Kalume, the County Director for Culture said that the County Government of Kilifi (CGK) is in full support of the BCHT establishment process in Rabai. The reason why culture is being lost in Rabai is because there are few Kaya elders and some of them are being killed. He mentioned that the CGK has initiated the process of demarcating Kaya forests and this will be done for all Kaya forests in Kilifi County. He also said that CGK has committed to support the Kilifi county cultural festival whose aim is to promote and preserve the cultural heritage of the Mijikenda community.

Q&A

- Chief: I request that all forests should be surveyed because people are encroaching the forest. Forest guards should be brought from other areas, otherwise our Kayas will be highly degraded. The rules should be very clear — when we see someone taking firewood, they should get arrested. I put on traditional attire and was questioned by the Church, that is very wrong.
- MCA: These questions should be put to the minister when she comes so she can hear them direct from the community.
- Chemuku Wekesa: After this meeting we should take a document to the minister so the minister can take action.

- Ms Agneta Karemba, the County Chief Officer for Gender, Culture and Social Services, said she was disappointed that the “forests conserved by our forefathers are being cut down”. “As a new generation, because of poverty and the need for quick cash, we are going to the forest and destroying it. We need to conserve the forests and market them and then people from all over the world will visit them for research etc. But people lack alternative livelihood means.” She expressed optimism that the Darwin microenterprises will help address this. She also reiterated the need for community sensitisation on the value of Kaya forests to promote their conservation. “Laws can be made worldwide but that will not help us — we need to know the benefits of Kayas, then we won’t destroy them. We have medicinal plants in the forest. We should come up with our own laws for Kaya forest conservation as a community, then it will be very easy to embrace them and make them stronger. The process should be community-led — together we have power — *Umwenga!*”
- Dr Ruth Masha, the County Executive Committee Member and Minister, Gender and Culture expressed joy at the inclusive nature of workshop participants. She informed participants that the Kilifi County Kaya Conservation Management Act 2023 is under development and stakeholders will be invited to give their input into the bill, and welcomed participants to give their contributions when called upon. She also mentioned that the new Act will incorporate incentives for Kaya elders. She said that CGK has initiated the process of branding and demarcation of Kaya Fungo forest and this will be extended to other Kaya forests. She urged members of the community to embrace growing a wide variety of multi-purpose trees on-farm, including indigenous fruit trees, to enhance livelihood and conservation benefits.

Day 1: Establishing a biocultural territory in Rabai — progress, challenges and solutions

Introduction to the Darwin Project and the Biocultural Heritage Territory concept

Chemuku Wekesa (KEFRI), Darwin project co-lead, explained that the Potato Park in Peru is the best-known example of a BCHT, and that BCHTs are a mosaic of land uses that integrate food production, biodiversity conservation and endogenous development. However, Rabai has a much higher population density than the Potato Park and a larger area — with 96,650 registered residents (of which about 80,000 live in Rabai) and 24,809 households in an area of 20,780 ha compared to about 6,000 residents in 9,200 ha in the Potato Park. Rabai landscape has rich food diversity with 59 crop species including 21 indigenous vegetables and 25 wild fruits; Rabai also has ‘dick-dick’ a small wild goat, and over 20 species of butterfly. Chemuku outlined the rationale for establishing a BCHT: the idea is that a BCHT re-establishes traditional governance and stewardship and enables the community to come together to strengthen its rights over land and better control industrial activities to protect the environment, food and livelihoods.

The BCHT in Rabai aims to conserve Kaya forests and in-situ genetic reserves for food and climate resilience, and to establish a community-conserved landscape that is guided by Indigenous holistic wellbeing concepts that integrate conservation and development. The Darwin project aims to support the establishment of a BCHT through a focus on six key activities (outputs):

1. Establishing a BCHT collective governance system that empowers Kaya elders to enforce conservation rules
2. Building community capacity to generate alternative income
3. Restoring endangered trees and elephant-shrew (endangered) habitat
4. Halving fuelwood consumption by promoting use of energy-saving stoves
5. Restoring multi-purpose trees on-farm, reducing pressure on Kayas, and
6. Restoring agrobiodiversity, butterflies and ecological connectivity.

Biocultural heritage territories: Potato Park approach and lessons learnt

K. Swiderska shared experiences from the Potato Park and key lessons that can guide the establishment of a BCHT in Rabai. She emphasised that some of the endemic tree species and the elephant shrew in Rabai Kayas are threatened and that provided a strong justification for UK Government's Darwin Initiative to provide funding for the project. Kaya forests also provide wild foods and wild crop relatives that are important for food security and climate adaptation. She acknowledged the unique culture of the Rabai community and gave examples of the Kaya Court and recognition of Rabai Kayas as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, which provides important potential for tourism. She emphasised that BCHTs recognise and seek to strengthen the interlinkages between biodiversity and culture, and are about communities conserving their landscape based on their traditional culture and institutions (that is, self-governance), and not conventional governance by governments; they involve villages coming together to protect their ancestral landscapes and enhance climate resilience. The Potato Park is rooted in the Inca's pre-colonial holistic wellbeing concept, worldview and values that promote balance with nature and in society. It is guided by an ancient Inca graphic that sets out this worldview — where wellbeing requires balance between the upper (sacred), middle (wild) and lower (human) worlds, and men and women are equal.

In the Peruvian context, six Andean Quechua communities decided to establish the Potato Park BCHT to protect their land rights from the threat of mining. The communities were also losing potato varieties, and engaged in conflicts over natural resources. The Potato Park has revitalised culture and traditional knowledge. Mountains are considered sacred in the potato park and are regarded as the highest authority and are therefore protected through cultural values/principles. These customary law principles — reciprocity, balance, solidarity and collectiveness with nature and in society — guide the governance of the whole landscape and all aspects of life (embedded in social norms and spiritual beliefs). The Potato Park has tripled potato diversity to over 1,000 native varieties and increased food and nutrition security despite severe climate change impacts. It has doubled incomes as the communities have established collective microenterprises with production facilities located in different villages. The microenterprise groups produce biocultural products such as herbal teas, potato shampoo, traditional textiles, and gastronomy based on traditional cuisines. 10% of sales from BCHT products and ecosystem services go to a communal fund, which is distributed fairly among the six villages at the end of each year, in accordance with customary law principles set out in an inter-community agreement for equitable benefit sharing. The communal fund is used to reward those villages that have invested most in BCHT activities, to support microenterprise development (for example, training for the gastronomy group), and to pay a Potato Park administrator. Remaining funds are used to support the poorest groups, such as widows and orphans, in line with the principle of solidarity. The community-led decolonising action-research approach has built strong local organisation, capacity and self-sustainability.

Krystyna outlined key steps for establishing a BCHT based on the Potato Park's experience:

- Cultural reaffirmation/revitalisation; dreaming/visioning by/with communities about collective landscape governance; communities establish a collective association
- Documentation of biocultural heritage — for example, where is potato diversity, sacred places, crop wild relatives, wildlife, water sources, traditional knowledge, traditional institutions
- Participatory mapping to define boundaries and management system
- Microenterprises (especially women and youth) designed in accordance with traditional values — reciprocity, balance, solidarity and collectiveness (rather than western capitalist values)
- Participatory process where communities (that is, villages) develop an Inter-Community Agreement to share benefits based on traditional values (10% to communal fund)
- Reaffirming cultural and spiritual values throughout, using decolonising methods and tools
- Legal recognition: Agrobiodiversity Zone.

Can a similar BCHT be established in Rabai? Krystyna noted that Rabai has Kaya elders with rich traditional knowledge, a Kaya Elders' Court, and the Mudzini holistic wellbeing concept: harmonious relationship between humans and nature, sacred elements, spirits, wild plants, humans, domesticated

plants and animals, and their interactions in the landscape. It has similar cultural values: *Kufaana* (reciprocity); *Soyosoyo* (balance between people and nature); *Umwenga* (solidarity); and *Kushirikiana* (collectiveness). But Rabai's cultural values have been eroded among many youth and middle-aged people and its natural resources are facing strong economic pressures. Despite this, the community's Kaya court has been resilient and Kaya elders continue to preserve their culture guided by their cultural values, which can support the emergence of a BCHT in Rabai.

Progress with implementing Darwin project activities: challenges and lessons learnt

Leila Ndalilo outlined the project activities conducted in year one:

- A free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for implementation of project activities was undertaken and will be done on a continuous basis.
- Baseline socio-economic and ecological surveys have been conducted for monitoring and evaluation.
- Village and community-level meetings have been held as part of the visioning process for establishing a collectively governed BCHT; village- and landscape-level BCHT management committees have been constituted and operationalised.
- A project advisory committee has been constituted and operationalised.
- Meetings have been held with local administration to enhance their understanding of the project and build consensus.
- Training for alternative livelihood activities (broom making, bee keeping, briquette making, and production of energy saving stoves) has been undertaken and the activities are due to be rolled out; and development of enterprise-specific bylaws is underway and they are working on modalities for market linkages.
- Participatory planting of trees in degraded areas in Kaya forests and on farmlands has also been undertaken and monitoring of the planted seedlings is ongoing.

The main challenges encountered include: private land ownership, which poses a challenge to collective management of the landscape; erosion of culture, which is a major threat to preservation of traditional knowledge; low uptake of culture and associated values and traditional knowledge by youth; and industrial development and related sale of land owing to the proximity of Rabai to Mombasa city. Leila further highlighted the lessons learnt, which are key to project implementation, as: the importance of cultural values in enhancing social cohesion, which is key for successful establishment of the BCHT; the need for youth and gender inclusion, and multi-stakeholder collaboration for successful establishment and operationalisation of a BCHT; and the importance of livelihood enterprises in providing economic incentives and reducing degradation pressure on the landscape.

Q&A

- Kadilo: Forest guards used to be very quick and have bikes and scared people away, but now they are not seen so they don't deter people — we need more forest guards.
- Secretary, Kaya Ribe: youth are threatening women in the forest.
- Mutta (village elder): the government is letting us down because the new officer like the former officer is not active in protecting Kaya forests. We should have a committee in every Kaya and one central committee that can handle conflicts.
- C. Wekesa: The BCHT process is developing a governance framework, it is a pilot but when it works here we can extend it to other sub-counties that have Kaya forests. We propose to register a BCHT Association.

Kaya elders' perspectives on the process to date and the vision for establishing a BCHT

Omar Munga appreciated the Darwin project: “we’ve been trained and have known this project since its inception. This project has brought us together, we were even able to plant trees in the Kaya forest. We started microenterprises to boost us economically. Broom making had a lot of middlemen so the project is an eye-opener because we can make brooms ourselves and sell direct to buyers. We were also trained in jikos-making, and established tree nurseries, now water is a challenge. Goat rearing is also a challenge because it requires water and grass to thrive. Through this system of managing the landscape I’ve known people from 10 villages, so this has brought unity.” He requested the Darwin project to continue empowering the community to manage its natural resources, and said that the BCHT will play an important role in protecting the landscape against external threats, and will contribute significantly to preserving cultural heritage and improving livelihoods through the microenterprises.

Daniel Garero appreciated the role played by the Darwin project in bringing the community together, and so requested the project to extend to some people who are not being reached by it. He noted that the project has narrowed the gap between elders and youth through frequent interactive meetings. He also noted that 20 years ago community forest guards were employed to protect the forests but NMK no longer have the funding needed. He reiterated that the introduction of devolved governance in Kenya has weakened the powers of Chiefs, resulting in increased cases of destruction in Kaya forests: “we used to arrest encroachers with the Assistant Chief but the power to protect forests has been taken away. The forest guards employed now cannot do the job. They are employed because they know the county officials but many are not from the community so they don’t know it.” He asked the County Director to tell the forest guards they need to work in the forest, not on the roadside and so on, and requested employment of competent community forest guards. He called on relevant stakeholders to work together to conserve the Kaya forests, noting “I went to Peru and there all people are under one religious denomination which is their culture. But here Christians say Kaya elders practice witchcraft”.

Mkpba Gwashe noted that “the Kaya forest had been highly degraded but the project pushed us to start rehabilitating them by planting trees in forests. We’ve been working with Rabai Cultural Village and safeguarding degradation of Kaya Mudzi Muvya, so we thank the Darwin project. I don’t know people from other villages but now I know most of them through the project. The youth used to run away when they saw us but now we are eating and working together and young people come to the Kaya forest.” He added that “my vision is to work hand in hand with young people. Bringing young people together and establishing microenterprises will reduce forest degradation; it will be difficult to go to the forest if we have microenterprises”.

Mr Gwashe called for support to facilitate conducting rituals in the forest — “we have one special Kaya and we need a black cow for the sacrifice. When you slaughter in that Kaya, it will rain and diseases will go away. We are facing many chronic diseases today because we are not doing the sacrifice that’s meant to be done in that Kaya”. Mr Gwashe noted that the community lacks appreciation of the value of cultural rituals and does not contribute towards the resources required for conducting the rituals such as livestock and traditional grains. He asked key stakeholders to support the Kaya elders with these requirements to continue performing the rituals. He also noted that “people have encroached the special place where we are supposed to do those rituals. They destroyed that Kaya which is the mother of all Kayas and built houses in it which is taboo. We’ve tried to arrest those people but they walk free the next day.” Mr Gwashe expressed disappointment that corruption of law enforcement agencies often leads to freeing Kaya forest offenders in exchange for money, compromising conservation efforts, and urged relevant authorities to take the required action.

Kaita Fondo expressed gratitude to the Darwin project for actively involving Kaya elders in implementation of project activities and expressed optimism that the project-initiated microenterprises will help deter illegal and destructive activities in Kaya forests.

BCHT objectives, microenterprises and biodiversity conservation: break-out groups

Break-out groups were held to explore key challenges and ways forward with respect to BCHT objectives and governance, microenterprises and biodiversity conservation:

Group on BCHT objectives and governance (Kaya elders, village elders and IIED):

Kaya elders and village elders agreed that the BCHT should focus on Rabai's *Mudzini* concept of holistic wellbeing as its overall goal, as they have already discussed. A Kaya elder explained that *Mudzini* (homestead) is where one is born and raised, it is the centre of everything. "From time immemorial we stayed in *Mudzini* and then we went to the forest for spiritual guidance and then went back to *Mudzini*". In the Potato Park they have adopted *Sumaq Kausay* as their goal — which requires balance between the human, the wild and the sacred worlds to achieve wellbeing — rather than just focusing on economic development. "In Rabai, we need not just economic development but all three — and balance between them — that's *Mudzini*".

The BCHT will be governed through village and landscape committees, so the villages can speak with one voice. Some people on village committees are on the landscape committee. Protecting the territory against external threats should be a key function of the BCHT landscape committee. The landscape committee should decide on permitting industrial development (FPIC) and the sale of private land. There is a need to develop bylaws for effective management of the Rabai landscape and to regulate uncontrolled and unsustainable industrial development, which is a major threat to biodiversity. Kaya elders said it should be forbidden to cut down palm trees and any valuable trees such as mango and fig. Before any tree is cut, people should have to consult the committee and the committee should speak with one voice, even if the decision concerns a family member. "We want to come up with a permit system, so when a tree is no longer productive it can be cut — otherwise people will just say they have permission". Village elders should consult the committee, rather than making individual decisions. Bylaws are needed to promote conservation practices such as tree growing in farmlands, "everyone has to plant a tree", and should also establish alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

A challenge in Kenya in general, including in Rabai, is that ownership of land is not communal and everyone has individual/private land so it will take time to establish a collectively governed BCHT as some people may not want to 'be collective' with their land (that is, abide by BCHT rules). The fact that there are different religions in Rabai is another challenge. Those promoting the BCHT need to go to the community level and do sensitisation about what we plan to do so we don't leave others behind. If a Kaya is encroached, we should take the issue back to Kaya elders, so that is another element (of the governance system). The group emphasised the need to strengthen traditional governance institutions, and for demarcation of Kaya boundaries in collaboration with National Lands Commission to reduce encroachment.

Group on biodiversity and agrobiodiversity conservation:

The group emphasised the need to strengthen cultural institutions, management and values of the Rabai community to improve biodiversity conservation, and for the Rabai community to embrace indigenous crops and landraces due to their resilience to climatic changes and important role in nutrition security. They highlighted the need for continuous preservation and exchange of traditional seeds among farmers to enhance their availability for planting, and for re-introduction of related traditional rituals that previously played an important role in their preservation. Such rituals include rain-making rituals during which these seeds were used and blessed, Kaya cleaning ceremonies, and harvesting ceremonies. "Everyone should conserve indigenous seeds because we believe they are the best. We don't sell seeds, we exchange and share seeds, based on values like *sosyosoyo* and we must restore seeds for the future. Every season before planting seeds we should take them to Kaya forests for prayers because we believe when taken to Kaya forests, seeds will be protected from pests and diseases such as termites." The group recommended community sensitisation on the importance of these crops, particularly targeting younger generations.

Other challenges and solutions:

- Cutting trees for poles and charcoal — the solution is to strengthen customary laws.
- Lack of income/poverty is also a challenge for biodiversity conservation, so starting microenterprises is the solution.
- Lack of respect for elders and cultural governance system — the solution is to bring back intergenerational values.
- Having people of different religions is another challenge for Rabai, so we need inter-religious dialogue.
- Some of our leaders are diverting our people, saying rain doesn't come from trees but from God.
- Members of the community are doing logging — instead we should form farmer clubs and give them tree seedlings to plant and then sell to the loggers.
- Poaching is a challenge — the solution is enforcement of laws, arrest of poachers (of cashews, for example), and restoration of degraded areas.
- Inadequate sources of meat is a threat to the elephant shrew, so to make sure they get meat, the villagers should be given small animals to rear.

Group on microenterprises (MEs):

- The group felt that microenterprises should be guided by cultural values of collectiveness, fairness and sustainability; and that children should not be involved in MEs.
- They identified the need to have standardised sizes of brooms and to collectively agree competitive prices for BCHT products to enhance their profitability. Collection centres were recommended for marketing of BCHT products to avoid exploitation by middlemen: “we need to sensitise the community that we collectively take our product to a central place, not to middlemen”.
- Mass death/drying of coconut trees, which are a major raw material for MEs, is a key challenge. Palms are affected by drought, age, pests and diseases, and overharvesting. Suggestions were made to explore alternative sources of raw materials, for example, from Kaloleni and Digo areas.
- A common label should be developed for all BCHT products to promote the identity of Rabai BCHT. “We should have one symbol for all products so it's known everywhere”.
- The MEs should be governed collectively and ensure gender inclusion and representation of all members of ME groups and village BCHT committees in their governance committees. The ME committees should enforce bylaws on everyone equally.

Stories of change: participatory M&E

The project is using a participatory M&E approach alongside the more top-down log-frame, where communities decide what to focus on and conduct M&E themselves. This is in line with the community-led BCHT approach and is something the communities can do themselves after the project ends. Using the ‘most significant change’ approach, the community identified the following key areas to monitor: increase in household incomes; enhanced adherence to cultural values; enhanced conservation of Kaya forests; and enhanced capacity and involvement of women and youth in nature-based enterprises and community decision-making processes. L. Mwabaya, a community researcher presented short videos of stories of change. Each community researcher recorded five video interviews with different villagers including Kaya elders using smartphones. The videos highlighted community perspectives of the benefits they have derived from project activities in the last year, as well as their recommendations for further improvement of the project.

In one video a woman from Mleji village said she has been to several training meetings, for broom making for example, and that she is aware of the importance of establishing a BCHT and is taking the initiative to educate other community members. She said the project had contributed to conservation by planting trees. In another video, a woman farmer said she was trained in beekeeping and making fuel-efficient cooking stoves, and that the project has brought people together. Another villager said that

beekeeping was very close to their heart but before they had a lot of fear, that 1 litre can fetch 400 KES, and that honey is good for health. The workshop participants agreed that the videos represented their perception of the project.

Discussion and summary

Lawrence Chiro (NMK): Without Kaya forests, where would Rabai be? BGCI is paying Indigenous community members to collect indigenous seeds and the seeds will be bought by the project and distributed to the community.

William Ngale: We found that Christians only wanted to help Christians and did not want to engage in collective action to establish a BCHT as they say Kaya forests are not their religion. Kenya's new Competence-Based Curriculum includes Indigenous knowledge, which will help address this.

Krystyna Swiderska (IIED) — summary of the day:

- We heard from the group discussions that Kaya elders and village elders feel that the goal of the BCHT should be Mudzini, not western development; and that more community sensitisation is needed to promote community buy-in and support for the BCHT approach.
- We also heard that industrial development and sale of land (due to proximity to Mombasa) are key threats to Rabai's biocultural heritage and BCHT. There is a need to engage community members in developing inclusive bylaws that give powers to the landscape-level committee to decide on proposed development projects within the landscape to mitigate against their negative impacts.
- We heard about the negative impact of Christianity and other religions on Kaya elders' reputation. Inter-faith dialogues were proposed to enhance appreciation of Rabai cultural heritage and address the negative impact of religion on traditional knowledge erosion, and the Darwin project may be able to support these.
- The community made suggestions to have common collection centres for BCHT products, standardise sizes and prices of products, and have a common label for all BCHT products; the project will support these good suggestions.
- Suggestions were made for rearing of small animals such as goats and rabbits to reduce poaching of elephant shrews — support for goat keeping is planned, but members of the community were not very receptive of the rabbit-keeping idea during project co-design meetings.

Day 2: Field visit and learning exchange with Kaya Kambe

A field visit was arranged to Kaya Kambe near Rabai community to learn from their experience because Kaya Kambe is better conserved than Rabai's Kaya forests. The main aim was to learn about their governance system, threats to Kayas and how they are dealing with youth inclusion and biodiversity conservation. The Kambe community presented as follows:

Chair of the Kaya Kambe Council of Elders: "We're happy with this collaboration and hope it can be sustained. We would like the visitors to pay the Kaya access fee. We inherited this Kaya forest from our ancestors, who managed the Kaya through taboos, customs and beliefs passed down generations, regarding forest access, use and the governance system. Anyone who went contrary to the rules was punished and people adhered to the rules. Then the threat of modernity came and the youth who were more educated decided to go against the rules and they think the elders are backward. As a result areas are currently being degraded by youth compared to before. So people no longer adhere to culture, they are more inclined to pursue modern education. We requested forest guards to protect the forest but as they are not very effective we tell Kaya elders to enforce the rules themselves. Initially if anyone needed poles etc. they would ask but now the youth are not asking permission and are causing a lot of destruction. Respect for elders has really declined especially among youth. We are asking for support to recruit community scouts because most forest guards spend a lot of time in their office and not enforcing on the ground. Now the elders are also asking for support for conducting rituals in Kayas because they no longer get community support for this so they need money to buy chickens, goats and cows to perform rituals. Our role as elders is to ask for blessings on behalf of the community (for

example, to ask for rain) but currently the youth associate this with witchcraft which is not the case. So we are worried that over time our Kayas may be threatened because of destruction by youth. Most of the work we do is voluntary, we would really appreciate it if we can be supported to do rituals. Now the community members say they are saved and are Christians and can no longer contribute.

There are designated days when we come to conduct rituals, and after we conduct rituals we normally receive rains. Kambe Vitune is the name of this place, it is an area of plenty so we have a good harvest. Members of the community used to dedicate Wednesdays to conducting rituals and cleaning Kayas, whether they are Christians or other religions. But now they have begun breaking rules, for example, farmers may not farm on Wednesdays but they send their farm workers. We request different stakeholders to come and join hands with us to conserve the forest. We have restricted areas in Kayas; when you get inside the Kaya there are many illegal access routes to sacred areas where access is forbidden. When a youth entered a sacred area in the forest to harvest traditional straw he got lost for several days and died. Initially we were many Kaya elders and now we're only a few, including a few ladies. Through rituals we are able to prevent natural disasters from harming the community."

Kaya elder, Kambe: 'We are grateful to God and the ancestors for giving us this beautiful forest. We're doing our best to conserve it and we really respect it. We are putting in a lot of effort but there are a few people destroying in the Kaya — we have reported it many times but no action has been taken. We think it is because of this destruction that there is no rainfall, it is like punishment from elders. Instead of preserving sacred sites some people have no respect for them, they are going there to take resources and using them as toilets. So we may need demarcation and possible fencing of the Kaya. Forest officers have been employed but they just get salaries and don't perform their role. Reporting illegal activities is a waste of time, so I have lost hope.



Kaya elder from Kambe presenting to Rabai elders and visitors. Credit: KEFRI.

Coordinator for Kaya Kambe Cultural Village: "Kayas are a safe place and should never be associated with witchcraft. Kaya elders have different ranks with different roles. Because of strong attachment to the forest we've been able to overcome diseases like Covid and livestock diseases. Kayas to us are not just forests but home to our ancestors. Before among Kaya elders there were fortune tellers who would tell the community about forthcoming disasters. Drought is also a factor in forest destruction — people are looking for grazing grounds and so are taking cattle to the forest. Our

cultural centre was inspired by Kaya Mudzi Muvya (Rabai Cultural Village) and we aim to replicate it here. We need the community to drive and to have its own agenda to conserve culture. So it's a centre to revive Kambe culture for the Kambe community, and we have some artifacts for the community. We're all teachers including Kaya elders — when others come we teach them. We spend a lot of time looking after this village — we have a tree nursery, we have to replace old trees that are dying. Water is a major challenge, we need support to get water. We went to report to Kenya Forest Service (KFS) that people are cutting trees but have not seen any action so this needs to really improve. KFS and the county environment representative should be proactive in responding to our reports. We also provide traditional songs and dances. We need support to increase the number of traditional houses. We have elephant shrews here and a lot of monkeys (58 acres).”

Q&A and discussion

Q: In Rabai, the Kayas are heavily degraded but here they are well conserved, how have you achieved that?

A: We have youth volunteers who we don't pay and others we work very closely with to conserve the forest and report illegal activities to authorities. Also rituals are conducted to prevent illegal activities. We had a similar discussion a couple of years ago — some Kambe elders were called to Rabai to assist them and when they disseminated lessons to people in Rabai they said they are Christians and will not follow the rules. When the youth got lost in the Kaya for seven days and then died a few days later, people got scared to enter the forest so that also helped.

Q. The Kaya elder said before there were many elders but now there are few, what factors contributed?

A. Most Kaya elders died and we are now encouraging the youth to join, and they are joining. It's a process, there are a number of stages to become a Kaya elder.

Q. Are you allowing women to take firewood?

A. Yes but on designated days and elders must be here to monitor collection otherwise they are not allowed.

Q. Do community scouts become Kaya elders?

A. We would appreciate it if Kaya elders can be recruited as community scouts. We have our own forest guards, our ancestors help.

KFS: We have never been here to conduct any patrol. We respond best to reports from our guards. Our office has no forest guards, we have to rely on forest guards from Malindi. We've heard that there is a lot of destruction going on, only in the recent past, like the last three years. Devolution has interfered with forest protection, since devolution there is now a county environment officer, so there is confusion about who has the mandate. Devolution weakened KFS' extension wing.

Rabai Kaya elder (young): We came here to learn and we are a bit disappointed as you mentioned that your cultural values and practices that help to conserve Kaya Kambe are a secret. What about agrobiodiversity, can you tell us about that?

Rabai Kaya elder: Happy that we've been able to learn quite a lot. When we go home, we will have our own meeting to discuss what we can do based on what we've learnt.

Kambe woman: Women Kaya elders go to the forest but not to the same parts as men (especially the sacred areas); and men and women have different roles. About agrobiodiversity, we grow traditional crops, such as cassava, green grams, beans, sorghum.

Chemuku Wekesa (KEFRI): We would like to arrange another exchange visit as we did not have time to enter the forest. Kaya elders from Rabai and Kambe should have a meeting among themselves and we would be willing to support it.



Workshop participants meeting with Kaya elders in Kaya Kambe Cultural Village. Credit: KEFRI.

Rabai participants' reflections on the Kaya Kambe field visit

Participants noted that they had learnt a lot from the field visit to Kaya Kambe and highlighted the following:

- KFS felt that the Kaya elders in Kambe really comply with traditional rules and regulations governing the Kaya, and that is why Kaya Kambe is better conserved. The Chair of the village BCHT committee in Mikahani also noted that there are useful lessons for Rabai to embrace to reduce forest destruction.
- Other village elders noted that the collectiveness of the community and women's participation seems weaker than in Rabai; and that in Kambe there are few Kaya elders, whereas in Rabai Kaya elders are replaced on a clan basis, which ensures they can be replaced.
- A Kaya elder observed that Kaya Kambe really looks good and well sustained, but this may be because some water springs sustain that environment. He felt that Rabai is doing better "because we have more Kaya elders and all clans are represented". He noticed that in Kambe many trees are planted in homesteads, so that decreases dependence on Kaya forests. He urged Rabai residents to plant more trees on farmland to reduce pressure on Kayas.
- Another Kaya elder said that the Kambe forest is well conserved, but he got the impression that their culture is weaker than Rabai culture. He didn't see the Kaya elders looking authentic — it looked like they just came together. He said the women looked timid and appeared not to be actively engaged in the activities of Kaya elders (more like casual labourers).
- A third Kaya elder noted similarities in the way Kaya Kambe is managed, but "the procedures for conducting rituals in Rabai are different". He added that Rabai is better off because it has a functioning traditional court, which is respected even by the conventional justice system. Decisions of the court are binding and even Chiefs look to the traditional court to handle some cases (especially family disputes that touch on traditions). Membership of Rabai Kaya Elders' Council is through clans, and there is good representation and their interests are taken into consideration. Each Kaya elder deals with different issues based on the clan. The Kaya elder also disagreed with a

former Rabai Chief who said that Kaya elders in Kambe have a stronger cultural attachment than those in Rabai during the visit. He said that Chiefs should not condemn Kaya elders publicly as Kaya elders are like their fathers, and that the Kaya elders would like to summon him to the Kaya Court on Monday so he can apologise and pay a fine. Another participant from Rabai felt that the Kaya Kambe elders hid some information and may not have been fully honest, and noted that Rabai has four Kaya forests, which shows its Kaya elders are really trying.

- A village elder noted that Kambe elders focused on money and were not respectful to visitors, and didn't look organised, so Rabai is doing better. "There is a procedure for requesting a Kaya elders' fee, you don't just demand it so outrightly, it is against the culture."
- Youth and other participants observed a lack of cohesion among the elders and a lot of hostility among the Kambe hosts. They noted that the cultural village coordinator was overruling the Kaya elders, which is unusual. They also noted that the cultural village coordinator was unhappy as he had not been involved in planning for the visit, so he wanted to cancel the visit; there was a conflict, which the Rabai cultural village coordinators and a Rabai Kaya elder helped resolve. They noted that there is more cohesion among the Rabai community compared to the Kambe community, and that is a key enabler to the process of establishing a BCHT. Kadilo (RCV) agreed that Kambe elders have less understanding of their culture than Rabai Kaya elders, as he found in 2007 when he was in charge of mobilising several community groups and formed an umbrella in Rabai sub-county for all cultural activities including Kambe. Kambe has lower population density, grows lot of trees on-farm and grows a lot of traditional crops, more than Rabai, which has been influenced by migration. Kambe grows huge areas of landraces. These lessons need to be applied by the Rabai community for enhanced conservation of Kaya forests and agrobiodiversity. The Kaya elders said they have meetings on Monday and Wednesday and will reflect on the lessons and agree a way forward on how to borrow from what they have learnt.

Kaya elders' vision for the BCHT and its guiding values/principles

Omar Munga, Kaya elder, Bemunga clan:

- We need to transmit our values so they can have more authority in the rest of the community. One objective is to revive Rabai culture, especially the *Rome*, which has been lost for some time. Rome was a knowledge transfer platform between elders and youth. We want to revive Rome to conserve our culture and natural resources including our Kayas. One reason for erosion of culture in Rabai is that there are so many immigrants from other communities, which has diluted Rabai culture. We're at war with modernity because of a large number of immigrants and the influence of their culture. So we have to really work hard to revive our culture. We encourage people to disseminate Rabai culture to neighbours.
- Our culture has a lot of advantages but is threatened by religion, modern education and the high number of immigrants due to proximity to Mombasa. Our culture has helped us avert disasters, for example, locust attack on crops was averted through rituals. We conduct rituals in different Kayas for good rain. Kayas are not just a source of fuelwood and biodiversity conservation but are very critical in preserving Rabai culture.
- Children are taken through the education system very early and hardly have any time for Rome and interaction with elders. Religion is also a barrier — I am also a Muslim but my grandfather taught me so much about culture that I was able to become a Kaya elder. Most people, especially youths, are not very attracted to becoming Kaya elders due to lack of economic incentives as it is voluntary. Elders should create time to transmit knowledge to kids from a young age.
- Values: In the past people never relied on cutting trees or deforestation to sustain their livelihoods and didn't have as much drought so they had plenty of food. So now the need for sustenance is what is disturbing the balance — food requirements are much higher than before. Also, the coconut tree was much more productive, so children could eat coconut and they had food in storage. Diseases have also increased, and drought, so people are buying a lot of modern food because of poor harvests. So people are very dependent on illegal logging and charcoal to meet their economic needs and that is disturbing the balance between people and nature.

Jose Mobuya, Kaya elder:

- Traditionally they used to conserve the forests. Before, Kaya forests had very huge trees but the population was relatively low. Now there is a lot of population growth so unlike before when firewood was readily available, now demand for firewood is driving destruction in forests. Before firewood extraction was done by Kaya elders, and women were only allowed to collect dead wood on designated days and times, and people would adhere to that. But now people don't adhere to that and collect firewood for commercial use, and that is putting a lot of pressure on forests. The main economic activity was coconut wine tapping but now coconut is no longer productive and there is drought, leading to poor harvest, so there is a lot of economic pressure on Kayas. So poor agricultural productivity is a major driver of Kaya forest destruction.
- So we are urging for personnel to protect Kaya forests, but we don't want outsiders, they should be people living close to Kayas to create employment opportunities. The county environment officer and KFS should work with communities to pay community forest scouts. People are no longer scared of Kaya elders — youths cutting trees threaten Kaya elders if they get close to them.

Kaya elder:

- Youth are not so receptive of culture; before, elders used to share freely with youth in Romes. Younger boys and girls would sit with grandfathers and grandmothers respectively and be taught about cultural values. So they were able to learn about cultural values at a very early age, but because of the current schooling system this has stopped. We were motivated by the Kaya Kambe visit and will put in place strategies to revive culture.
- In Kambe there are only four Kaya elders but the youth play a critical role in bringing information to elders for forest monitoring. There is a need for the youth in Rabai to join forces with elders to try and protect Kaya elders; youth can play a critical role in surveillance as there are not enough guards.
- Now it is March and elders need to conduct rituals in the forest but can't do this alone as they need support from stakeholders to provide inputs for rituals — chickens etc. I am optimistic that if we conduct the required rituals we will have good rains for the harvest; and we are asking for support for rituals.

Responses from youth:

- Frederick: The biggest threat for youth is unemployment. We are willing to assist Kaya elders to protect the forests but we need training and would appreciate if we can be compensated — things are very tough, we are very hungry and need to eat.
- Charlotte: Happy to help.
- James: We are grateful to Kaya elders for welcoming us. We've learnt that elders mean well and don't associate with witchcraft. Youth should learn to embrace their culture so they can pass it to future generations; they should not only focus on money.

Village elder:

- When youth have no income it is difficult to work with them to conserve forests. Kaya forest conservation is a community issue, but the community seems to have given up. The Darwin project has established various microenterprises and the community should participate in them to generate income.
- We also need to learn about the best varieties of coconuts. All the initiatives require water — we need water for improved coconut varieties but water is expensive in Rabai.

Chief of Mikahani: Forest guards should be employed by the county government of Kilifi as that is more sustainable — we need to lobby the county government for this.

Retired Chief: The minister yesterday committed that from this workshop we set up a commission — a small group of two youths and two Kaya elders should go to the county office and make a request on the number of guards required. Before, if we committed something in Kayas we would feel very uncomfortable and need a ritual from Kaya elders but that is not happening now. There is economic corruption and those who stopped practising traditions are lost so we need to go back to traditional beliefs and values.

Chairman of a village BCHT committee: the youth should engage in income generation activities such as tree seedlings — I have a tree nursery raising seedlings and making a lot of money. The community needs to re-evaluate itself and start changing its attitude especially the youth.

Village elder (woman): Traditionally there was *chikokoto*. This could rally the community behind a ceremony or any activity good for the community, so it would be good to go back to *chikokoto*. There used to be a lot of consultation of the elders by youth but that has stopped — the youth just make decisions without consulting elders.

Community researchers:

- A reward could be given to elders in the form of palm wine to encourage them to continue doing *chikokoto*.
- When the colonial administration introduced Chiefs and Assistant Chiefs they replaced the traditional governance system and that has killed the culture of people and practices.
- Christianity has had a negative impact on Rabai culture — most of the Christian community will not contribute to Kaya conservation. So we are living like people from the North and have lost traditional knowledge, for example, only a few women can prepare the traditional Chora recipe.
- Kaya elders are no longer respected to arbitrate community disputes because they didn't go to school. So we need an attitude change across the whole community.
- Elders are always trying to do their best to help the community. The community should be proactive and not wait for IIED, KEFRI or the government; we should start doing things on our own. This project is bringing a lot of opportunities for youth employment.
- Elders should not be blamed — their governance system has been weakened because most Rabai members have refused to embrace culture. For example, they previously conducted ceremonies that required community members to contribute chickens or face a fine. However, currently when elders request chickens they are arrested and taken to the police. That discourages them from promoting traditional culture.
- Religion should not make the community lose their culture and practices; we should feel good when we put on traditional clothes. When they do *chikokoto* some families will rebuke the elder and say they don't want to associate with such satanic issues.

KFS: Thanks the Darwin project, which has brought many beneficial activities — for example, tree planting, which can generate a lot of money.

Kaya elder (Harry Mudigo):

- Rules and regulations used to be strictly followed — you could collect firewood for three months and then the forest was closed for three months. But all this has changed because the population has grown and youths have embraced the digital age and no longer support traditional practices. Youth have embraced Christianity and that is killing Rabai culture. The Kaya elders who used to play *chikokoto* are all sick, so there is no one who is a specialist to do that and that is an issue of succession.
- Kaya elders are still committed to doing rituals in four Kayas — the fifth Kaya has been cleared and no longer exists. Destruction of Kayas is not by outsiders but by youth from Rabai. The current drought may be partly attributed to forest destruction because even sacred sites in Kayas have been destroyed. Even though this project is running for three years, we are requesting that it runs for fifteen years.

Day 3: Developing strategies to address challenges and planning next year's activities

Summary of the last two days

- The BCHT should be anchored in the Mudzini concept as its main objective, which means that economic objectives (such as industrial activities in Rabai) should not dominate but be in balance with other elements, such as nature and sacred.
- Both village-level and landscape-level committees will manage the BCHT — and Kaya elders should play a major role in guiding decisions in both. The landscape committee should deal with issues that cannot be addressed at village level, including regulating extraction of natural resources on farmland and in Kayas and should play a role in decisions regarding industrial development and sale of land.
- Not everyone may embrace the BCHT approach, so more sensitisation is needed in all villages, to get support of those with contrary opinions, and to change attitudes towards Kaya elders.
- Traditional knowledge transfer needs to be revived through Rome and chikokoto needs to be revived; youth should embrace traditional ways. Duality — that is, co-existence of Rabai and other religions — needs to be promoted; and traditional governance systems (such as the Council of Elders) and cultural values (for example, *Soyosoyo*/solidarity and *Umwenga*/collectiveness) need to be strengthened.
- Challenges affecting Kayas include witchcraft being associated with elders who are not respected as they are illiterate; drought, leading to reduced yields and income from farming and coconut trees; and lack of employment. Youth have threatened and attacked Kaya elders on the pretext of them being witches.
- People should be asked to embrace conservation of Kayas on specific days. We need to develop a proposal for county government (MCA and minister) asking for youth scouts to be capacitated and employed; we need to change attitudes of youth to increase appreciation of elders.
- Kaya Kambe is better conserved due to tree planting on-farm and growing resilient traditional landraces for food security, which reduces pressure on Kayas.
- Water is a major issue — some initiatives need water pans, boreholes or other measures. Seed sharing is important for sustaining agrobiodiversity.
- Strategies are needed to conserve the habitats of the elephant shrew and reduce poaching of them (for example, by rearing goats).
- More coconut trees need to be planted as a long-term strategy to support income generation.

Strategies and actions for addressing challenges to establishing a BCHT in Rabai

Youth inclusion in the BCHT process and support for forest scouts

The following strategies were suggested to ensure youth inclusion in the BCHT process:

- A youth and Kaya elder (Garero) visited the Minister of Environment last year at the county offices to discuss their needs but he was not available so they met with the Director for Environment. Another courtesy visit needs to be organised with KEFRI and Kaya elders. Young people at the workshop should embrace the project and work hand in hand with the BCHT committees, before visiting the minister.
- MCAs represent villages and have a kitty for community initiatives. They could introduce a priority to support youth scouts to take care of Kaya forests. Bringing MCAs on board has an added advantage as policies cannot be approved without MCA support.
- There is need to develop a clear proposal on youth needs and required areas of support before presentation to both local leaders and the governor.

- Representatives from youth, Kaya elders and KEFRI should engage ward administrators and ask them to lobby MCAs to support the youth initiatives. All four MCAs in Rabai sub-county should be involved. The MCAs can then present the youth proposal to the county assembly and county governor for ratification.
- KEFRI should assist the Kaya elders and youth to contact their local MCAs since it is difficult for the community to access them directly. MCA Naftali offered to convene a meeting inviting all MCAs to meet with community members and develop a road map for actualising the BCHT and addressing existing challenges. They will make use of this opportunity before proceeding to meet the governor with clear resolutions from the meeting with the MCAs.
- An all-inclusive meeting for youth should be held so that they can develop a common agenda for their support.
- All young people who are encroaching Kaya forests should be registered into a group and given the mandate to protect the forest. Youth are engaged in destructive activities for livelihood needs. There is a need to empower them economically and sensitise them.
- The youth should form a well-organised group and then it will be easy for them to go to the governor as the governor is a politician and needs numbers (of votes). There is a group called Rabai Youth Information Centre — it can select representatives to visit the governor.
- Representatives to meet with the MCAs and visit the governor should include youth and Kaya elders from all 10 villages in Rabai sub-county to strengthen their voice. Rabai Youth Information Centre has representatives from all 10 villages, All youth should be encouraged to join the group. Kaya elders could lead the youth delegation to the governor — for example, Daniel Garero, who brings young people together from the whole sub-county to do conservation — but first they should meet with the MCAs, otherwise the MCAs could sabotage the process.
- As BCHT village and landscape committees have been established, they should also decide how to approach the governor and so on.

Addressing water challenges (boreholes, water pans and check dams)

Rabai is experiencing increased drought and water shortages. Water is important for tree restoration, beekeeping, goat rearing, coconut trees, crop survival and so on. The following strategies were proposed for addressing water challenges:

- As there are rivers across the sub-county, water dams should be constructed to harvest and store rainwater. The county government has responsibility for water issues, so they can contact local MCAs to fund this through the ward development kitty (a fund for development projects such as provision of water).
- There is a need for rainwater harvesting and conservation at household level. Individual members of the community should be encouraged to do rainwater harvesting on their roofs during the rainy season.
- Conservation tillage should also be undertaken at household level and traditional varieties used to mitigate negative effects of drought on agricultural productivity.
- Local companies/investors can provide support for construction of water pans and desilting of check dams as part of corporate social responsibility. Mining companies dig under the water table so that water could also be cleaned and used.
- Water challenges will be discussed during the proposed joint meeting with MCAs, in addition to youth support issues.

Strengthening effectiveness of BCHT village- and landscape-level committees

The following strategies were proposed for strengthening the effectiveness of BCHT committees at village and landscape level:

- Legal registration of the landscape-level committee (LLC) will make it easier for it to take the lead; and a constitution needs to be developed to guide operations of the LLC.

- Group ranches in Taita Hills bring all villages together — for a long time they were separate villages but came together to form the Taita Landscape Association.
- To ensure people respect the landscape committee, there is a need to sensitise the community and local leaders (including Chiefs and the devolved government) on the BCHT committee and its role.
- The county government needs to be actively involved in the BCHT process to ensure acceptance and also due to the sensitivity of land issues. “When every administrator in the sub-county is aware of the BCHT landscape committee it will be easier”. The community must be actively involved and everyone in Rabai must be sensitised to get their blessing.
- Landscape-level committee members should pay courtesy visits to ward administrators and sub-county administrators to enhance awareness of their roles.
- A conservation (Mudzini) plan needs to be developed to protect the Rabai landscape.
- The National Land Commission should be consulted with during registration of the BCHT association for coherence.

Reviving Rome: traditional intergenerational traditional knowledge transfer forums

Rome used to be very functional during the elders’ time but now it is lost. There are Christian and Muslim women who don’t adhere to Rome and spread negative sentiments about traditional Rabai culture. Children spend very little time at home, so they don’t have adequate time to be taught about culture, values and so on through Rome. The school curriculum has reduced times for Rome. Modernity has also changed young people’s attitude towards Rome. Due to lack of Rome there are young men who are not responsible, and women who don’t stick to the original rules. “Everything is going bad so we need to bring back Rome immediately”.

The following strategies were proposed for reviving Rome:

- Kaya elders should convene village-level meetings to sensitise elders, parents, youth and village committee chairs on the importance of Rome. They need to sensitise young people because the traditional dowry system has changed.
- Family meetings/gatherings should be used as avenues for reviving Rome.
- Kaya elders should hold separate meetings for men, women and youth to sensitise them on the importance of *Rome*. Administratively we have Chief barazas/informal village meetings, and village committees can join their meetings one day a week and that way they can easily revive Rome.
- NMK can offer a platform to bring elders and young people together once a week or once a month.
- Some villages are already practicing Rome at village level, so workshop participants should initiate Rome in other villages.
- Parents should take responsibility to organise Rome weekly or monthly at household level to transfer traditional knowledge and culture, because some elders are facing strokes and some children are not behaving well and going against cultural norms. Rome is about storytelling, you don’t have to wait for Kaya elders.
- Women used to sit with their grandchildren in Rome to educate them on good behaviours when the children slept in their house (for example, why they should respect elders).
- “Lets walk together” is written on the Kaya elders’ traditional sarong — this is a symbol of Rome. It means if you are a Christian, Muslim, learned or not learned, we need to walk together through the journey of Rome.
- Undertaking collective activities at household level provides good platforms for Rome. Not all children are at boarding school — it is possible to start Rome with those in day school, for example on Sundays when they don’t go to school, and during the holidays.
- Parents should start Rome with their children from a very young age and mentor them on good morals. Most young people don’t know about traditions and go against many things (for example, wedding and dowries are even paid through MPESA mobile money transfer platform).

- The Kaya Court conducts weekly Romes after their court cases every Monday. This should be promoted.
- A proposal could be made to the Education Ministry to include Rome in school syllabuses to use storytelling to portray Rabai culture. Kaya elders could be given a day a week to initiate Rome sessions in primary and secondary schools. The curriculum already includes a focus on traditional knowledge.

Cultural values to guide microenterprises and branding of BCHT products

Collectiveness, equity in benefit sharing, inclusivity, transparency, accountability and sustainability were identified as the most important cultural values or principles that should guide the operations of microenterprises.

The following proposals were made for branding of BCHT products:

- There should be a common BCHT label and brand name for all products, for example, Rabai Kaya forest landscape.
- The community requested more time to come up with a sustainable name. Community researchers will compile suggested names and a final decision will be made in a joint meeting.
- BCHT products should be labelled as environmentally sustainable and the label should be attractive to buyers and captivating.

Planning for activities in year 2

Participants reviewed progress with implementation of planned activities and identified key activities for year 2 as follows:

1. Microenterprises

- For jikos stove-making enterprises, soil sustainability testing is currently underway and feedback will be shared with the community. A new soil harvesting site (Lutsangani) has been proposed.
- Members of the broom-making enterprise have developed a draft benefit-sharing agreement, and broom bulk collection centres have been identified to minimise the supply chain. The benefits will be distributed as follow: 10% of proceeds to go to the communal fund for solidarity (to support poor groups); 5% of proceeds to go towards environmental conservation initiatives; and the remaining 85% will be equitably divided among group members.
- Proposals were made by K. Swiderska for a common communal fund for all microenterprises to invest a percentage of their proceeds to support BCHT activities beyond the project. She proposed that the funds could be managed by a woman.
- Briquettes training has been completed and briquette presses will be installed next week.

2. Tree restoration

- Monitoring of planted areas will be done by a KFS officer (Truphena). Initial monitoring was done by Truphena and community researchers at the end of the rains, and further monitoring is needed following prolonged drought. Survival count will be done during monitoring.
- Farmers who take good care of their trees and have the highest level of survival will be given a prize. Commitment by farmers in taking care of trees will be assessed. Drought severity in some villages will also be taken into consideration. All planted trees will be assessed, guided by an existing list of beneficiaries.
- Kaya elders will also get a reward for the best conserved trees in Kaya forests. The Project Advisory Committee will determine which Kaya should be given the prize and the type of reward to be given.
- The proposed reward system is in line with the presidential tree planting award scheme for the best performing tree farmers. Youth are encouraged to establish tree nurseries to benefit from the scheme.

- A green certificate is issued/awarded to the best performing tree farmers under the presidential scheme, which has very many benefits and should be embraced by farmers.

3. Agrobiodiversity restoration

- Farmer field schools (FFS) will be organised with support from Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Organisation to promote the restoration of indigenous varieties and landraces and will integrate both western science and traditional knowledge.
- Farmer field and business schools is a new initiative that builds on FFS and has a business orientation. There are existing FFS in Ruruma, Mwele and Kambe, and the Darwin project can build on these initiatives.
- However, it is important that all BCHT initiatives including FFS are guided by and strengthen Rabai traditional knowledge, cultural values and the Mudzini concept, and not only by western knowledge and market/business orientation. FFS should incorporate Kaya elders to sensitise farmers on the importance of agrobiodiversity, traditional knowledge and cultural values, and should target informal local markets (for example, neighbours).
- Farmer field schools should integrate both tree nursery and agrobiodiversity conservation training, and should support farmer groups registered with the Ministry of Agriculture in every village. Tree nursery training will also be provided by Kaya Connect, but only for specific species (not fruit trees).
- Proposals were made for free sharing of seeds among farmers in different villages through FFS and seed fairs. Priority crops for FFS and seed sharing include coconuts, cassava, Mtsunga (vegetable) and cowpeas.

Local government support and closing remarks

Rabai Chiefs expressed full support for the BCHT process. The workshop provided a good opportunity for strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration, which is key for the success of the community-led BCHT. Meetings will be held with other Rabai Chiefs, ward administrators and sub-county administrators to inform them about progress and planned initiatives and build consensus. Since most members of the Project Advisory Committee participated in the workshop, it was agreed that the next Project Advisory Committee will be held in September 2023.

Closing remarks

Kaya elders expressed full support for the project, and called for unity: “if we can work together we can go far”. Krystyna Swiderska (IIED) emphasised that the BCHT should be a community-led process (that goes beyond the Darwin project), hence the community should play a central role in decision making, and that KEFRI and IIED are facilitators of the process and not decision makers. She reiterated that participants had agreed to focus on ‘Mudzini’ as the main objective for the BCHT in Rabai and that the concept is very important in ensuring a balance between the human, wild and sacred worlds.

She noted that the Darwin project aims to significantly reduce degradation of Kayas and to triple household income for Kaya-dependent households, but there is only one and a half years of the project remaining to meet these ambitious goals.

Getting long-term funding for the BCHT process — for example, for 15 years as requested — may be difficult, but the community could set up a communal fund to sustain BCHT conservation and livelihood initiatives beyond the project period. She reiterated the importance of values such as accountability, transparency and self-sustainability in guiding project initiatives.

Linus Wekesa (KEFRI) noted that “we Africans have been told by colonisers that everything about us is bad, that we need to adopt western ways”. He appreciated the importance of the Darwin project’s community-led approach in empowering the community and urged the community to play an active role in spearheading project initiatives. He also appreciated the role of KEFRI and IIED in facilitating the process.

He reiterated the unique roles of Kaya forests in conserving biodiversity and supporting local livelihoods and expressed gratitude to the Darwin project for funding the project.

He urged members of the Rabai community to embrace tree farming in the wake of perennial droughts and food insecurity in order to enhance agricultural productivity and resilience to climate change.

Finally, he expressed his gratitude to all community members, Kaya elders and various organisations for their active participation, and for making the workshop a success.

Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), in collaboration with IIED, is implementing the project 'Establishing a Biocultural Heritage Territory to protect Kenya's Kaya forests' in the Rabai Mijikenda community. Rabai sub-county forms part of the Coastal Forests global biodiversity hotspot, currently under threat. The project aims to conserve biodiversity and genetic resources in four sacred Kaya forests and across the landscape. It also aims to enhance livelihoods and establish a community institution for collective governance of the Rabai Biocultural Heritage Territory.

The mid-term project workshop brought together the community and key government agencies to review progress and challenges with establishing a collectively governed biocultural heritage territory in Rabai and develop strategies to address them.



Event Materials

Food Systems, Natural Resource Management

Keywords:
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