



# A CALL TO ACTION TO SAVE NYEKWERI FOREST: THE POWER OF NOW!

## Preamble:

**Nyekweri forest covering** approximately 1200km<sup>2</sup> is found in Trans Mara Sub-County (in Narok County) and is home to many species of plants and animals. The forest is a critical catchment of the Mara River and offers a perfect breeding ground (maternity) for elephants. It also serves as a migratory corridor to elephants from the Maasai Mara game reserve to Ngurumani in Tanzania. Additionally, the forest supports diverse livelihoods of the adjacent communities through provision of material goods such as water, food, wood fuel, honey, fodder for livestock, and building materials. The basin also generates global public goods/services such as carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation.

However, this environmentally and economically very important national asset is currently being decimated through wanton clear-felling for charcoal with about 1,000 sacks leaving the forest every day. Images emerging from this unprecedented skinning paint a very bleak picture with very limited opportunity to save decades old indigenous trees if there is no ACTION NOW. Although this is a community forest, we urge the government (both national and county) to work with opinion leaders to seek for immediate cessation of “hostilities” to this rich natural heritage as consultations are held for improved and sustainable management of this asset. **THE TIME FOR THIS ACTION IS NOW** lest history judges us very harshly.

## Background information:

Nyekweri forest is a stand-alone forest in Trans Mara sub-county-Narok County. The forest is sitting on the top of Oloololo Escarpment at the Northern tip of the Mara triangle of the Mara National Reserve. It is approximately 1200km<sup>2</sup> (according to Dupoto CFA information). Nyekweri forest ecosystem is an indigenous forest comprising of two forest blocks owned by the Maasai community in Trans-Mara in Narok County. The two forest blocks are separated by Olmerai River that feeds into the Mara River. One block of the forest is managed by the Olerian clan while the other forest block known as Kimindet is owned by the Dorobo clan. The Forest is a communal land under the two group ranches (Olerian and Kimindet).

The forest is a host to diverse number of flora and fauna species (over 100 plant species, is an important dispersal area for more than 200 species of bird and 50 species of wild animals). Additionally, it provides critical ecological services in form of water storage; river flow regulation; flood mitigation; recharge of groundwater; reduced soil erosion and siltation; water purification; conservation of biodiversity; and microclimate regulation. Residents of Lolgorian, Kisii, Nyamira, and Migori depend on this catchment

---

for their fresh water needs. The forest is also a critical catchment of the Mara River and offers a perfect breeding ground (maternity) for elephants. It also serves as a migratory corridor to elephants from the Masai Mara game reserve to Ngurumani in Tanzania. The forest supports diverse livelihoods of the communities living adjacent to forests through provision of material goods such as food; wood fuel; honey and bee-keeping, fodder for livestock; and building materials. The basin also generates global public goods/services such as carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation.

For many years, the forest has been conserved by the local communities in line with their culture, lifestyle and economic activities which are compatible with natural resource management such as pastoralism, honey collection among others. However, recently, external influence and change into sedentary agriculture from pastoralism, has continued to exert pressure on the forest, posing serious threats to the existence of this natural capital.

## Threats facing the forests:



Figure 1: Human settlement inside the forest

**Agriculture/Human settlements:** Extensive clearing of natural forest for human settlement is occurring at a rate that is threatening the very existence of the forest biodiversity. There is continued destruction of the forest to pave way for homesteads right in the middle of the forest. The new forest entrants have started clearing land for agriculture. This is a new land use system that is threatening the forest resources and its ability to support other ecological, socio economic and cultural functions. It is also causing serious deforestation and degradation of the forest resources. The problem is accelerated by the growing population and the shrinking productive land neighboring Nyekweri forest which forces people to migrate from densely populated regions/less productive areas to the forest.

**Insecure land tenure:** Threat from land grabbers have increased over the years. Community land has been susceptible to grabbing by the elites in the community. Despite having a national constitution and associated land legislations that have put measures to safeguard land, there are still threats from land grabbers. This causes fear among the community members and they now intend to convert to private land in order to secure their rights. They have hence initiated land subdivision process and this might compound the threats to this important resource. Human wildlife conflict that is also affecting conservation efforts as the communities see wildlife as enemies-crop raids have been reported severally to KWS officers

**Extensive charcoal burning:** This is a real serious threat with charcoal burning occurring at unsustainable levels. Information from Dupoto Community Forest Association (CFA) about charcoal trade was quite shocking in that the charcoal is exported to as far as S. Sudan apart from supplying nearly all other towns surrounding the forest. Anecdotal information indicates that about 1,000 sacks of charcoal are ferried from the forest each day. THIS IS WHY AN IMMEDIATE CESSATION OF THE WANTON DECIMATION IS NEEDED as the community is engaged.



Figure 2. Charcoal burning at Kimintef

There is inadequate community awareness and recognition of the real economic and ecological values of this natural asset and the integral role the forests plays as a life support system for the great Mara River (which is the main lifeline for the 8th wonder of the world, that is the wildebeest migration) and thus contribution to the national and regional economies. This is exacerbated by weak implementation of existing laws and policies particularly on charcoal burning and extraction for commercial use.

## Call for action: The Power Of Now

- Immediate cessation of the current unprecedented wanton skinning of the forest, which is decimating age-old indigenous trees and which if no stopped will have grave livelihoods, economic and environmental consequences beyond Trans-Mara.
- There is need to organize for community education and awareness creation to ensure that the community understands the value of the resource as well as the impacts associated with the very possible extinction of the forest.
- The involvement of other stakeholders is quite important at this stage as the forest is faced with a myriad of political, social and economic issues. The county government and other government agencies such as NEMA, KWS, KFS should enforce environmental policies and laws.
- The forest needs to be gazetted and possible compensation of the communities done early to enable conservation efforts take charge