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### **ABOUT MY ENVIRONMENT WORK**

I come from Tetu which lies on the eastern side of the Aberdare ranges in Central Kenya. Tetu borders the Aberdare Forest which is one of Kenya's water towers and a home to a wide variety of fauna and flora. Tetu came to international limelight as the home and political constituency of the first woman Nobel Peace laureate, Professor Wangari Maathai.

I am a teacher by profession and an accomplished visual artist. Having been born and brought up in the Aberdare ecosystem I have over time witnessed the wanton destruction of the forest by the local community in search of food, fuel, pasture and timber to sustain the vibrant building industry. Over 80% of rural households here depend on fire wood as cooking fuel.

There was also the Eucalyptus menace which caused the drying up of rivers, streams and springs in the area. Local people were introduced to the fast growing eucalyptus trees and they planted them in big numbers in the river beds and water catchment areas. This caused massive drying up of water sources causing untold suffering.

One such water source is the Kiangure springs. This spring is located near my home and my family has been depending on it for clean water for ages.

My grand mother who passed on in 1982 used to tell us that that the spring was there when she was a little girl in the 1890s. It flowed abundantly and was a tributary to the River Gura which originates from the Aberdare Ranges. It flowed for about 3Kms from the source to the river. Due to planting of eucalyptus around the spring in the 1980s, it dried up such that it would flow for only less than 20 metres from the source. This caused a lot of suffering to the water users since we were forced to scramble for the little water available.

On realizing this I mobilized the water users and land owners around the spring in the 1990s to initiate a rehabilitation project that saw giant eucalyptus trees cut down around and near the spring. Land owners introduced indigenous trees and this has revived the spring which is now serving the communities well.

This being a success story, I realized that the same could be replicated in other areas and this gave birth to KIANGURE SPRINGS ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVE (KSEI) named after the spring. KSEI has since seen over 200,000 indigenous trees planted in the Aberdare Ecosystem.

In 2009/2010 we facilitated the felling down of eucalyptus trees in Tetu District after a directive by the Government of Kenya. We continue to replace eucalyptus with indigenous trees.

In 2009 I initiated the Mural project where we educated the local community on the dangers of deforestation and the benefits of afforestation.

Being a visual artist by profession I knew the power of mural art in community education. So far we have painted over 10 murals in schools, public areas, tea-buying centres and shopping centres.

In 2010, we initiated a project to increase tree cover in local schools compounds. This project is called TETU SCHOOLS AFFORESTATION PROGRAMME. We realized that schools were clearing their

compounds in the search for space to expand for fuel to support feeding programmes and timber to construct desks for pupils. As a result tree cover in schools disappeared slowly. This project was started in May/June/July 2010 with support from local tree farmers and in partnership with Environment Online. (ENO) from Finland [www.enoafrica.org](http://www.enoafrica.org) and Panasonic leaf from Japan. 15,000 indigenous trees were planted in 10 schools.

KSEI has also initiated a Bamboo project where we are propagating bamboo trees to be planted for a wetland rehabilitation project.

The eucalyptus replacement project is still on-going. We have more to replace with indigenous trees. The Tetu Schools Afforestation programme is also on-going as we target all schools on the eastern side of the Aberdare ranges.

The mural project is on-going as we target the areas around the ranges/forest where the entry points to the forests are situated.

KSEI was part of the UNEP BILLION TREE CAMPAIGN

[United Nations Environment Programme <http://www.unep.org/> ]

In 2012 we were considered for funding by European Union through Community Development trust fund <http://www.ltsi.co.uk/about-us> to implement the 'UPPER TANA CATCHMENT ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND HIV PROGRAMME'

The overall objective of the programme is to support the upper Tana catchment community in Poverty reduction through improved livelihood systems and the Conservation of Community natural resources and initiatives for enhanced environmental management and governance:

1) Renewable energy promotion-(improved cook-stoves, briquettes, solar, and bio-gas) Under this programme we have enabled 3000 households adopt ICS, 1500 adopt solar lamps, 19 households adopt biogas and 10 secondary schools adopt Biogas technology, promotion and production of Briquettes. Women are saved from long hours of searching for firewood while exposing them to danger like rape.

<http://www.trust.org/item/20150429114132-tnby1>

other programmes include:

2) Environment conservation- tree planting (bamboo, fruits, indigenous tree species) Planted over 500,000 seedlings in the Aberdare ecosystem

3) Environmental education <https://www.apeuk.org/youth-aberdare-art-project/project> . Working with youth groups, schools and community groups to promote environmental education.

4) Climate change and environmental awareness <http://www.paintinganewworld.com/galleries/int-murals-index.htm> . Working with Canadian Organization to create community level awareness on climate change through mural art.

#### 5) Governance & Democracy

The purpose of this program is to create an empowered society that can demand for democratic practice at all levels and participate in governance issues. The main projects under this include Alternative Leadership Programme, Women Civic Empowerment Program, Youth Empowerment program and Natural resource management. The overall objective of this programme is to entrench community participation in governance and democratic processes thereby creating an informed society that can demand for democratic practices at all levels and participate in governance issues.

#### 6) Food Security & Sustainable livelihoods

his project seeks to improve food security and ensure sustainable livelihoods through integrated intervention focusing on:

a) Sustainable Agriculture The main activities under this program include crop diversification, promotion of organic agriculture and initiation of community agricultural extension schemes. Similarly, livestock, fish, and poultry farming are encouraged with emphasis on efficient utilization of the small farm sizes. Over 500

households have benefited with poultry, fish and Dairy goats.. There is emphasis on climate smart agriculture to reduce emissions, improve soil fertility, and conserve our water resources.

b) Community Health & Nutrition

This is an initiative through which KSEI trains community health workers (CHWs), and peer educators to promote health education within the community and hence promote best practices in community health and nutrition

c) Gender & HIV/AIDS Project

Under this project KSEI has in the last three years been involved in awareness creation, sensitization and behaviour change advocacy focusing especially on women empowerment as the most vulnerable group .

d) Water & Sanitation: this component focuses on the improvement of sanitation both at domestic and institutional level. The domestic water supply and quality to mitigate the effects of waterborne and other diseases in the community. This is done through sanitation education and adoption of Integrated Biogas technology and conservation of natural water sources.

**CURRENT PROJECT**

Our current project is the construction of a Community resource and energy centre whose main role is to build the capacity of the community in various environmental and agricultural issues. The centre will be the used to train farmers on better farming techniques.

There will also be an energy centre where to educate the community on Alternative source of energy

I am a graduate in education specialising in fine art and languages.