

Project Update: November 2006

An integral activity of our project in as far as the environmental front is concerned is to give a fresh meaning on the need to plant trees and to involve peoples of all walks of life in our endeavour to inculcate a culture of tree planting amongst our people that we work with. Crafts of Africa is actively involved in uplifting the social-economic status of the impoverished grass-roots communities such as the squatter dwellers, urban poor, small farmers, pastoralists and the handicapped etc. who are striving to be self-reliant despite the harsh realities in their daily lives. In spite of this, we have observed with concern that many of the artisan groups that we work with and in particular the woodcarving community seem not to be aware of the importance of tree planting other than cutting the same and particularly the indigenous wood for their trade.

Our immediate and long term objective in as far as this tree planting project initiative is concerned is to lay a concrete base for effective participation of the Kamba people in addressing the tree loss issue. Crafts of Africa is a fair trade organization <http://www.ifat.org> and therefore our focus is to promote fair returns for products and services while utilizing our natural resources in an eco friendly way and for sustainability. Understandably therefore, the project will play a very crucial role of offering a long-term base for economic and social development of the Kamba community and other carving communities in the country and beyond.

This is crucial because in Kenya the Kamba community dominates the woodcarving industry. The industry is estimated to have 80,000 active carvers with an extended family network estimated at a half a million people. Presently the Kenyan woodcarving industry is worth more than 1.5 billion a year. This means those in the industry or in the supply chain have over the years enjoyed the profits originating from the wood cut down to carve lots of beautiful crafts of the world. Be it those we see in tourist shops or galleries world over. In spite of this, not much is taking place on the ground to mobilize the beneficiaries of the woodcarving industry to plant more trees. Yet, tree planting stands to not only benefit the wood carvers in many ways but Kenya and the world at large. Understandably therefore, we need to encourage people to buy wooden home accessories which are preferably made from wood certified as coming from sustainable source.

