

## ***Crisis in the Kenyan Woodcarving Industry – options for ecological and economic sustainability***

Conference of the WWF-UNESCO initiative on "*People and Plants*" to be held on 18-19 September 2000  
at the Kenya College of Communications Technology (KCCT), Mbagathi Campus, Tel.: 891201

### **Programme Outline**

#### **Monday, 18 September 2000**

8-9 am	Registration of participants
9-9:30	Welcome remarks – Paul B. Vitta, Director UNESCO Nairobi Office
	Opening of the Conference – Francis M. Nyenze, Minister for Environment and Natural Resources
9:30-11:00	Presentations by Carvers, Forest Department, Oxfam, Ten Thousand Villages, UNESCO
11-11:30	<i>Tea</i>
11:30-12:30	Presentations (ctd.)
12:30-2 pm	<i>Lunch</i>
2-3 pm	Group work: review of problems in the woodcarving sector
3-3:30	Groups presentations
3:30-4	<i>Tea</i>
4-5:30	Group work: recommendations for solving problems in the woodcarving sector
6:30	<i>Cocktail</i>

#### **Tuesday, 19 September 2000**

8-9 am	Presentation of group work: recommendation for problem solution
9-10:30	Review of group presentations
10:30-11	<i>Tea</i>
11-12:30	Plenum discussion
12:30-2	<i>Lunch</i>
2-3:30	Conclusions and recommendations
3:30	Closure

## The Kenyan woodcarving industry: important facts

- The Kenyan woodcarving industry supports approximately 80,000 woodcarvers with an estimated 500,000 dependants.
- Kenyan woodcarvings are worth more than 1.5 billion Kenya Shillings per year.
- The Kenyan woodcarving industry uses over 50,000 trees equivalent to almost 8,000 m<sup>3</sup> of wood annually. This is equivalent to ten trees being felled per hectare of natural closed-canopy forest in Kenya every year.
- Until recently, the Kenyan woodcarving industry relied to about 90 percent on three preferred tree species: mahogany (*muhuhu*, *Brachylaena huillensis*), ebony (*mpingo*, *Dalbergia melanoxylon*) and olive (*mutamaiyu*, *Olea europaea* ssp. *africana*).
- The selective harvesting of preferred species has led to a decline and locally to a collapse of the tree population and contributed to the degradation of forests and woodlands.
- The selective harvesting of mature trees of the preferred species has limited the species' regeneration ability (due to removal of the seed source) and endangers the survival of small mammals, birds, reptiles and insects who depend on these trees for food or shelter.
- The collapse of Kenyan populations of *muhuhu*, *mpingo* and other carving species has caused the problem to be exported into Tanzania, with hundreds of logs being smuggled across the border to meet the Kenyan demand for woodcarvings.
- Because of the shortage of traditional carving woods, carvers have explored the possibility to use alternative species, most of which are fast-growing introduced multi-purpose species grown on farms. These include neem (*mwarobaini*, *Azadirachta indica*), jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*), grevillea (*mukima*, *Grevillea robusta*), mango (*mwembe*, *Mangifera indica*) and others.
- Because of their fast growth, general availability and suitability to produce quality carvings they have been termed "good woods".
- The use of "good woods" has minimal ecological impact. The trees are planted primarily for other purposes than for carving (medicine, fodder, shade, ornament, timber), they can be pruned, they coppice and they grow five times faster than forest or woodland species.
- A neem tree grows to a diameter of 80 cm in 50 years. A *muhuhu* tree requires more than 200 years to grow to this size.
- Carvings from "good woods" can make excellent art objects with innovative designs.
- Large importers increasingly demand for carvings produced from sustainable wood sources. Only "good woods" can qualify as they originate from managed farms.
- The Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) of neem trees with diameters greater than 50 cm in the Kenyan coastal strip is over 200,000 m<sup>3</sup>. This species alone could therefore supply a woodcarving industry 25 times the size of the current without negative ecological consequences.
- To help Kenyan carvers fulfill the criteria increasingly required for export, WWF and UNESCO work with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) to achieve certification for "good wood" carvings.
- At the same time, efforts are being supported to establish plantations of trees suitable for carving.

## 2. The Tentative Agenda

During the discussions with the stakeholders a number of issues which are important for the improvement of wood carving industry came up. These issues and the observations made (by the researcher) during the visits were used when making the tentative agenda given below:-

- (a) Discuss and look for effective ways for involving stakeholders in the wood carving industry and farmers in the planting of “good wood” plant species other local species used for wood carving and any other species for the improvement of the environment.
- (b) Discuss problems which can hinder massive tree planting campaigns and the modalities of doing it and find out the possibility of using community based groups (CBGs) particularly in places where wood carving industry is intense e.g. Wamunyu and the other surrounding areas.



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- (c) Discuss the problem of pricing wood carvings to avoid exploitation of carvers by middle men.
- (d) Discuss the problem of wood wastage and ways of minimizing it.
- (e) Discuss marketing strategies by co-operatives and by individual carvers for the purposes of making them more effective and expand markets. This should include other measures for improving the trade.
- (f) The need for educating carvers, which areas they need education in and the effective approaches to adopt and adapt.
- (g) Discuss the leadership crisis affecting the co-operatives
- (h) Discuss the corruption problems facing the co-operatives and KCCU e.g. in the distribution of orders, elections and the education of voters e.t.c.
- (i) Discuss the use, and the popularisation of "good wood" and its products here and elsewhere (even abroad).
- (j) Discuss the problem of overcrowding and the overtaxing of facilities in working sites which can result to health problems.
- (k) Ways of dealing with wood carving waste.
- (l) Problems of migration and belonging to more than one co-operative.
- (m) Possibility of using wood from other countries (?)
- (n) Way of making "good wood" carving products more appealing to buyers and the preservation measures needed e.t.c.



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11 September 2000

Dear Prof. Mutiso,

**Invitation to participate in Conference on the Kenyan Woodcarving Industry**

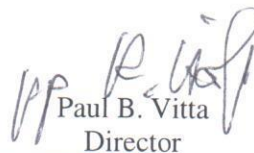
Since 1994, UNESCO and WWF have collaborated with national institutions such as National Museums of Kenya, Kenya Forestry Research Institute, Forest Department and others to help Kenyan carvers operate more sustainably. In particular, efforts were made to promote farm-grown tree species suitable for carving instead of destructively harvested slow-growing forest species. Through certification of products made from sustainably harvested wood, returns to carvers are likely to increase and markets abroad will be opened up. Large buyers increasingly demand for such products. This provides opportunities for Kenyan carvers, both economically and ecologically.

We would be delighted if you could participate in this 2-day conference/workshop which will be held on 18-19 September 2000 at the Kenya College of Communications Technology, Mbagathi Campus. A programme outline as well as a factsheet on the Kenyan woodcarving industry is attached for your information. Please also note that a Cocktail will be served on Monday evening.

We look forward to welcoming you at Mbagathi.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,



Paul B. Vitta  
Director

UNESCO Nairobi Office

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## SUSTAINABLE WOOD CARVING

September 1998

### Wamunyu Co-op

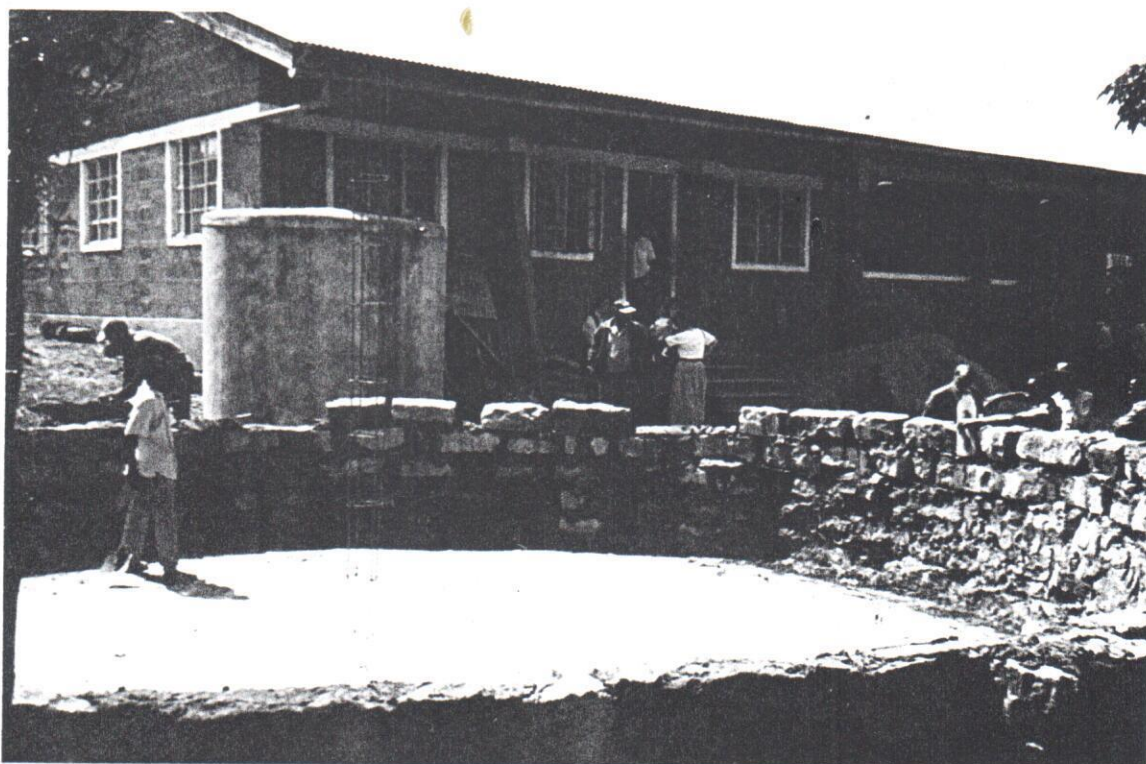
The last report on Wamunyu in April stated that the KCCU board had resolved to jump start the work on the main rain tank which was stalled at the excavation stage. Wamunyu was revisited in May when co-op officers gave assurances that a serious effort would resume. In June progress was noted at last. An enormous tank was underway with walls already constructed to a 4 foot height. The tank was much larger than originally planned and it was reported that in addition to the initial funds of \$2830.00 received via KCCU, the co-op also contributed \$400.00 from their own sources. Still it was apparent that even with the extra cash, the budget for this ambitious undertaking would be depleted by the time the walls reached full height.

In September the KCCU board met to discuss the distribution of reforestation funds which had accumulated in KCCU accounts over the past few months. At this point the Wamunyu tank had reached the stage where internal plastering and casting of a concrete roof slab were still incomplete. It was decided that a further \$2820.00 would be allocated to Wamunyu. This final allocation of funds should be sufficient to complete the tank and prepare the nursery plot in readiness for raising seedlings for the upcoming rainy season.

During a September site visit to Wamunyu it was reported that an arrangement has been secured with government water authorities regarding the use of a borehole which had been recently drilled near the co-op site. This borehole had been equipped with a diesel pump but because there was no accompanying reservoir, water remained at the bottom of the well, inaccessible to the people in the surrounding community. In the deal, the co-op negotiated to make their tank available as the needed reservoir and to this end, plans have been made to connect pump to tank with an underground pipe. The co-op now plans to sell water from their tank to the public and when the tank is depleted of rain water it can be refilled by pumping from the borehole. Perhaps some explanation for the building delays and the oversize construction can be found in this latest development.

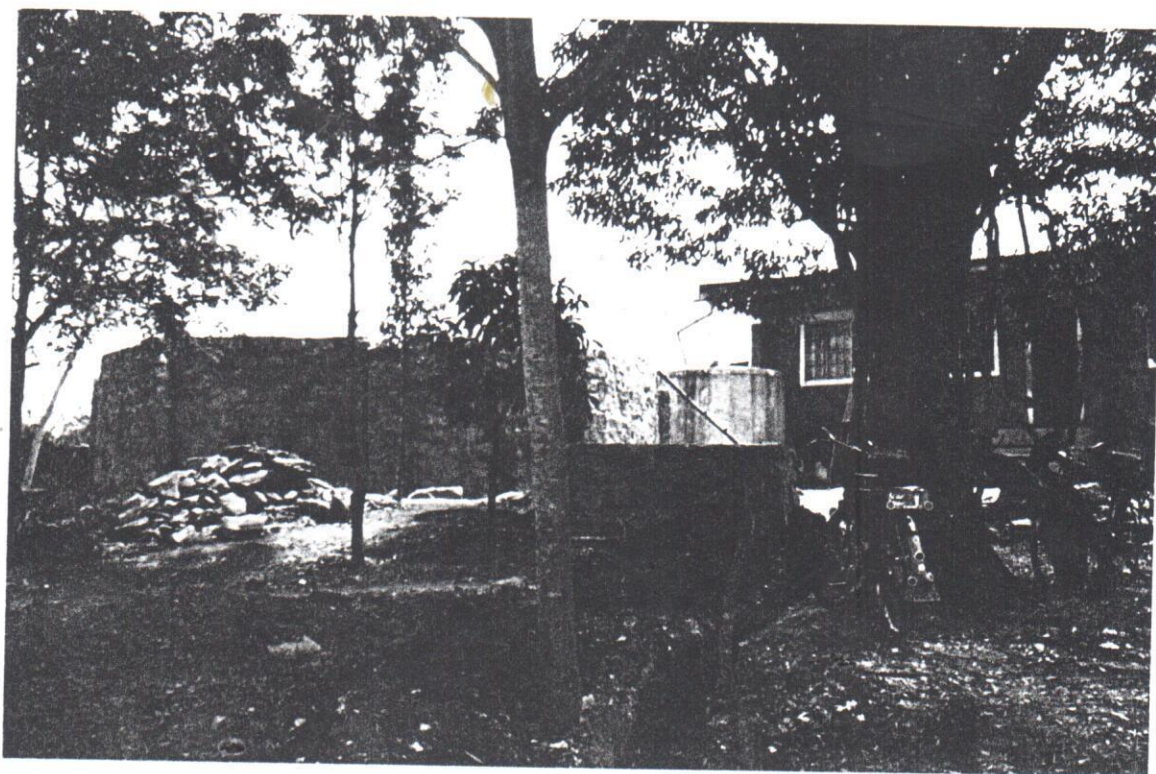
If this plan is managed properly it is possible that revenues from water sales could subsidize the tree nursery and ultimately profit the entire operation. However, there is also a danger that the lure of immediate revenue from water sales will appear more profitable than using that water to raise tree seedlings. It will be important that the management at Wamunyu be reminded that their tank was constructed for the purpose of sustaining a tree nursery. Hopefully all will go well and Wamunyu Co-op will enjoy a profitable tree nursery operation in a very short time.





*Progress on the Wamunyu tank as noted in June.*





*By September the Wamunyu tank had reached full height but still lacked a concrete roof and some internal plastering. The upper photo shows a trench dug for laying a pipe which will connect the tank to the borehole.*



### **Makindu Co-op**

In July a quick visit to Makindu was made to show some visitors a good example of a well run project. Their tank has been in use for several months and is serving them well. The tree nursery continues to expand. Records provided by the Makindu Co-op tree nursery indicate that production has steadily risen from about 2,500 seedlings per year in 1989 to about 7,200 seedlings per year in 1997. The new rain tank will have been in use for the whole of 1998 so it will be interesting to review production figures for this year when that information becomes available.

At the September KCCU board meeting Makindu was also nominated for further funding from the KCCU reforestation fund. Pending their submission of a detailed proposal to the board, \$750.00 will be made available to Makindu to aid in the expansion of their nursery.

### **Nairobi Co-op**

The fledgling nursery at the Nairobi co-op mentioned in the April report suffered a complete washout in a flash flood in late May. The Nairobi Co-op tree nursery was established on the bank of the Nairobi River which forms one of the co-op boundaries. After extremely heavy rains on the night of May 27 the river rose to record levels and flooded the co-op site. During the flooding the river cut itself a wider channel which resulted in a loss of a small area of land on a low corner of the co-op property. A number of carvers' shelters disappeared and many pieces of work were swept away. For several days after the flood carvers searched the river banks downstream in an effort to recover their work. Some items were salvaged but losses were great. All of the seedlings in the nursery plot were included in those losses. Perhaps one of those seedlings will have taken root on the river bank downstream and has marked a beginning of the Nairobi Co-op reforestation program.

Fortunately the nursery plot did not slide into the river and even the fence surrounding it remained intact so in spite of the set back, financial losses to the nursery were minimal. Since the flood co-op members have focussed on tending the few dozen trees planted on the co-op site.

At the September KCCU board meeting the Nairobi co-op was also nominated to receive funds from the reforestation account. Approximately \$1880.00 have been allocated for development of a nursery at the site. Details and progress on the Nairobi initiative will be reported on later in the year.



## Mombasa and Malindi Co-ops

In late August both of these locations were visited. At this point neither co-op had received funding from KCCU for tree nurseries but in September Mombasa Co-op was nominated to receive about \$370 from the reforestation fund. This money will be use to establish and fence off a nursery plot at the co-op site. Work will begin soon. In the meantime there are a few observations from these places that are worth noting in connection to reforestation and the use of good wood.

In Mombasa a substantial volume of neem is now being used by carvers. It was reported that nearly half of the wood now being delivered to the co-op for carving is neem. Without proper documentation it is not possible to substantiate this claim, however, it is apparent that in this co-op neem wood is now more widely used than ever before. Neem wood can be seen in the hands of carvers through out the co-op and there is an entire section of the place dedicated to carvers who use only neem. In the retail showroom there are many neem products however, unlike the mahogany and ebony items, no signs indicate to customers that these products are made from good wood. Indeed, there was no evidence anywhere that the co-op was attempting to inform customers of the significance and meaning of good wood.

In the Mombasa co-op it was also most interesting to note a very active but informal tree nursery program. There could easily be over one hundred small collections of tree seedlings being tended by individual carvers scattered throughout the co-op. Each of these collections may contain only 10 to 20 seedlings but if a total inventory would be made, Mombasa co-op could claim a sizeable nursery operating within its grounds. It was reported that these trees were owned by the individuals tending them and they are ultimately destined to be planted on the private lands in rural areas held by those carvers' families.

Mombasa co-op is unique in that it occupies a piece of land large enough to accommodate many small spaces where water drips from the shed roofs. Seedlings in these places thrive and are always under the watchful eye of the owners. It is quite possible that these seedlings are tended more carefully than seedlings in a large nursery bed. While this sort of nursery operation does have limitations, it is virtually free of any investment in administration, maintenance or infrastructure. This informal operation is definitely an activity to encourage and should be accommodated in the proposed formalized tree nursery program now being planned at the Mombasa co-op.

*Photos on following page: An informal tree nursery at Mombasa co-op and a good wood poster on display at Malindi co-op*







At Malindi co-op it was pleasing to see numerous good wood posters displayed very prominently in the retail showroom and around the carvers' work areas. Though probably representing less than 10% of the total inventory in the showroom, products carved from neem wood were given a prime location on the shelves. The sales people on duty were also very quick to explain that neem is a good wood for carving and they have only recently started to use it in larger volumes. Initially the impression could be gained that the conservation message had taken root at Malindi co-op. However, deeper inquiries about the meaning of good wood reveal that considerable effort at building awareness on this topic is still required at Malindi.

In specific reference to the posters, sales staff indicated that all wood is good, regardless of which species of tree it may come from. The posters were seen as a promotion to tourists encouraging them to simply buy any wood product. It was clear that the conservation ethic represented in the poster was not well understood nor was the problem of deforestation in Kenya fully appreciated by those co-op staff who are in direct contact with customers purchasing carvings.

It should also be noted that most of the tourist resorts in Malindi cater specifically to visitors from European locations where English is spoken as a second language. It is possible that in Malindi the English language posters are an inadequate means for communicating directly to these visitors. This could also be true, though to a more limited extent in Mombasa. Along the coast many tourist locations provide information to visitors in Italian, German and French as well as English. Consideration of language issues will be important in any education program directed to the tourists purchasing carvings at the coast. It was also pointed out that taxi drivers and tour operators are important contacts in any education program as these individuals exert a strong influence in determining where tourists shop.

#### **Good Wood Retailing in Nairobi**

Following the Nairobi exhibition and demonstration of carving with good wood the owner of the exhibition space invited the carvers to remain in the space to retail their products. Since all the exhibition pieces and educational materials were shipped to Canada, copies of the information was reproduced and new good wood products brought in from the Nairobi Co-op. The co-op also provided additional inventory of products made from mahogany, African olive, and some ebony. Sales were modest, certainly not high enough to be commercially viable in such a location, but still significant for the co-op. Sales were also informative. In spite of the good wood promotion, consumers still preferred products made from the traditional hardwood species.



It would seem that when offered a choice of similar products in different woods, consumers perceive good wood as a low quality substitute for the "real" thing. Clearly the environmental message alone is not enough to sell good wood. In order to be acceptable to consumers good wood must be used to develop good quality products that are different from the traditional offering of Kenyan carving.

Due to taxation questions the owner of the building was obligated to cease the retail operation in mid September. His contribution to the promotion of good wood has been significant and highly appreciated.

### **Good Wood in North America**

In late 1997 a 20 foot container was filled with a variety of large sized good wood sculptures selected from the KCCU co-ops. These products have reached retail locations across Canada and reports now emerging indicate that they have been well received. Many of these products were one of a kind or very large and impressive. For these products, good wood has not been seen as a negative factor.

The demonstration pieces completed during the Nairobi exhibition have also been shipped to Canada and should be arriving there soon. As a follow up to the 1997 carvers visit to Canada these sculptures along with videos, posters and promotional information will be put into a travelling exhibition and will be displayed at Ten Thousand Villages store locations across the country.

Following the good wood design competition held across the KCCU co-ops late last year, Ten Thousand Villages USA ordered a number of new good wood products in large volumes. These products began arriving in the USA by mid 1998 and in one particularly notable instance the results were completely disappointing due to damage from mould on the product. Management at the co-op where this batch of work was produced has suggested that the logs they used may have required more drying time than would have been expected had mahogany been used.

This learning experience has some rather direct implications for all the co-ops as they shift to greater use of good wood. Clearly it is important for the co-ops to stockpile good wood logs in order to let them dry adequately before carving. Also, stacking the logs carefully and storing them in sheltered areas to protect against rain would also improve drying. Such changes will mean greater investments in inventories of raw material, more care in managing those inventories and even cash investments to provide shelter in the drying areas. For co-ops operating with a chronic shortage of working capital the temptation will be great to give these requirements low priority. Ten Thousand Villages could

assist here by increasing the time given between advance payments for raw materials to start an order and final delivery of finished products but this is only a solution for one specific buyer. To optimize the use of good wood the co-ops must make adjustments to their production routines and quality control measures as a matter of course.

## Finances

Currently Ten Thousand Villages is completely paid up on all KCCU orders. Since October 1996 when the Ten Thousand Villages began paying KCCU an extra 3% for reforestation the total of all funds collected to date is USA \$11,860.00. KCCU reports that by January 1998 funds were distributed as follows:

Wamunyu co-op	\$2830
Makindu co-op	\$2830
Nairobi co-op	\$ 380

The use of these funds have been documented in this collection of reports. In September the KCCU board met and agreed to distribute the remaining funds as follows:

Wamunyu co-op	\$2820
Makindu co-op	\$ 750
Nairobi co-op	\$1880
Mombasa	\$ 370
total	<u>\$11,860</u>

Upcoming reports will document progress in the use of this latest distribution of funds.

## Posters and Videos

To date approximately 500 good posters have been sent to Canada and the USA for distribution to Ten Thousand Villages stores, 200 posters are being sent to Europe to be distributed through the fair trade network of retailers there, 300 posters have been distributed to the six KCCU co-ops and 200 posters to a variety of Nairobi based institutions, NGO's, businesses and individuals. Both versions of the video have been sent to North America, duplicated and made available to Ten Thousand Villages locations.



## Summary

If wood carvers in Kenya are to achieve a sustainable industry it is crucial that advances proceed simultaneously in reforestation, product design/quality control and marketing efforts. KCCU represents 40% of all the carvers in Kenya and with such an influence it is the obvious local institution to lead in the above mentioned initiatives. As a major purchaser of Kenyan carved wood products and as the major KCCU partner for more than 15 years, Ten Thousand Villages and the Mennonite Central Committee have an important role to play in support of KCCU in these challenges. MCC and KCCU must continue work together to explore the options that can lead to constructive change in this very significant Kenyan industry.



# SUSTAINABLE WOOD CARVING

a collaborative effort of  
MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE  
Ten Thousand Villages  
and  
KENYA CRAFTS CO-OPERATIVE UNION  
Wamunyu and Makindu Co-ops



Jane Snider & Larry Nafziger  
Mennonite Central Committee

## KENYA CRAFTS CO-OPERATIVE UNION (KCCU)

In Kenya the production of handicrafts makes a significant contribution to the national economy. Many types of Kenyan handicrafts are known around the world, but of all these crafts, wood carving may be the most famous. Carving in Kenya is a relatively new phenomenon, derived from the wood working traditions of the Makonde people of Tanzania and Mozambique. Mutisya Munge, an Akamba man from Wamunyu village in the Machakos district is credited with introducing carving to his people after returning home from Tanzania at the end of the first world war. After 70 years, estimates today suggest there are about 50,000 carvers in Kenya, working independently or in co-operatives.

In 1981 KCCU was established as a joint marketing body for three wood carvers' co-operatives. Now KCCU has expanded to include seven co-ops, six of which are dedicated exclusively to wood carving. As such, KCCU represents a total membership of 20,000 wood carvers. SELFHELP Crafts began buying from KCCU in 1983 and now accounts for about 90% of their business.

At KCCU three people work distributing orders amongst the member co-ops, directing packing and consolidation of finished work and then completing all documentation and arrangements for shipping. KCCU is directed by a board comprised of representatives from each of the member co-ops. An executive committee is made up of 4 board members plus the KCCU manager. When orders are received this executive meets and divides the order fairly according to the number of members, specialties and expertise in each co-op.

KCCU operates by adding a 15% markup to the prices charged on products supplied by the member co-ops. This overhead expense covers employee salaries, office expenses, packing materials, local transport, etc. (Member co-ops add a 5 -10% charge to prices paid to individual carvers for services provided at that level, with a net result being that approximately 75% of the price Ten Thousand Villages pays for a carving in Kenya goes to the producers of the work.) In most years the 15% markup added by KCCU exceeds their actual operating costs so the resulting surpluses, sometimes as much as half of the total collected, are returned to the member co-ops.

Deforestation is a serious problem in Kenya which is threatening the very resource that Kenyan wood carvers rely upon for their living. KCCU members have begun taking steps to address this challenge and are working towards developing an environmentally sustainable resource base which can assure a long and healthy future for the wood carvers in this country. The following collection of papers and reports document that process. In time, additional reports will be added to this initial statement which, hopefully, will describe positive progress for KCCU in working towards a sustainable resource for the wood carvers.



Sustainable Wood Carving  
Proposal  
August 1996

**KENYA CRAFTS CO-OPERATIVE UNION (KCCU) request for SELFHELP Crafts (SHC) assistance in fund raising for tree nurseries.**

A great deal of research and documentation has been completed regarding the diminishing reserves of trees used by the wood carvers in Kenya and it is clear that the resource is threatened. Beyond the obvious environmental crisis, the livelihood of the thousands of Kenyan families dependent on carving is at stake. The carvers themselves are acutely aware of this situation as the wood they use is becoming increasingly expensive and difficult to obtain. In the carving communities there is a growing concern for the future of their industry.

SELFHELP Crafts purchases wood carvings from KCCU which is a union comprised of seven co-operative societies, six of which are engaged exclusively in wood carving. In the Machakos region members in two of these co-ops have attempted to incorporate tree nurseries into their operations in hope of giving their business a degree of sustainability over the long term. Attention has been focussed in their communities on raising and distributing the seedlings of fast growing tree species which are suitable for carving. However, to date efforts in both locations have been hampered due to water supply problems in the nurseries.

**Makindu Co-op** has a well established but under utilized nursery which was started about four years ago when Traidcraft provided some assistance in building a water storage tank for irrigation purposes. A plot of land on the co-op site is set aside for the seed beds and an employee is engaged to tend the tree seedlings. These seedlings are sold to co-op members and the public. Demand for tree seedlings is strong but production is limited.

The main frustration to expansion is the fact that the water storage tank is often empty. The tank is supposed to be filled with water piped in via a government maintained service. Unfortunately the government pipe is usually dry. This empty tank is particularly discouraging when a permanent source of water is available in a near by pond. Currently the nursery employee gets water each day by making several trips to and from this pond carrying 20 litre jerricans on a wheelbarrow. The co-op has laid a pipe from the pond to their storage tank but have been unable to accumulate sufficient funds to purchase a pump to move the water. The lack of a pump has been identified as the main hurdle preventing the existing modest nursery effort from becoming a larger scale operation capable of better addressing the demand for tree seedlings in the area. If a pump was procured, members feel that construction of a second storage tank would ensure the viability of an expanded nursery.



Wamunyu Co-op has also undertaken an effort to develop a tree nursery on their site. Again demand for tree seedlings in their community is great and the membership is willing to contribute the labour towards making a successful nursery. A parcel of land has been set aside and prepared for the nursery but again lack of water for irrigation is the problem.

Members of this co-op do their carving work on site in a building which has a very large corrugated iron roof. Calculations considering average rainfall in the area, size of the roof and projected consumption of water for irrigation suggest that collection from the roof could be sufficient for a nursery if an adequate storage tank was constructed. The land for the nursery is downhill from the collection area so simple gravity feed would deliver the water to the site. Members of the co-op are eager to start tree seedlings in the nursery but the co-op is unable to accumulate the funds required to construct the storage tank.

KCCU representatives from all of the co-ops within the union have agreed that the Makindu and Wamunyu initiatives deserve support. Since virtually all of the carvers within KCCU originate from the Machakos region and since most still have families living there, consensus in this decision was relatively easy to achieve.

Compared to more urban locations, the rural based co-ops like those in Machakos tend to suffer economically because their locations do not offer the ready access to the tourist trade enjoyed by their peers in places such as Mombasa or Nairobi. Because of this economic disadvantage, favouring these two co-ops is not inappropriate. Also because the members of these co-ops remain at home with their families they will be in a position to plant and tend new trees on their own land. Given the vested interest in seeing trees take root on their own farms it is more likely that a planting program will succeed in this context as compared to a Mombasa or Nairobi situation where few carvers own or even have access to land.

SELFHELP Crafts representatives in Kenya have received from KCCU preliminary proposals detailing the Makindu and Wamunyu plans for addressing the water problems at their respective tree nurseries. At Makindu the estimated budget for supply of a pump and construction of a second storage tank totals                      USA \$3,500.00. At Wamunyu the estimated budget for the construction of a single large sized storage tank totals                      USA \$3,000.00.

If KCCU wished to generate surplus funds totalling USA \$6,500.00 in one year it would be necessary for them to increase the selling price of their products by three or four percent. (Assuming that their annual sales remain in the range of two hundred thousand dollars.) The application of this environmental premium would ultimately be reflected in the final price when the product is retailed by SHC in North America.



The Kenya Craft Co-operative Union and SELFHELP Crafts agreement.

1. In order to finance the two above mentioned water projects SHC has agreed to pay an extra 3% to KCCU on all wood products they purchase.

This extra charge is added at the bottom of each KCCU invoice to SHC and is designated specifically as a charge for the KCCU reforestation program. KCCU will administer the accumulated funds and assure that proceeds are directed to the intended purposes.

2. With regular KCCU reporting SHC will work to raise awareness and promote this environmental agenda to the North American consumers of Kenyan wood carved products.

Planting fast growing trees species suitable for carving is an important first step towards establishing a sustainable carving industry for the long term. Equally important however, is the need to develop products from these new woods which are acceptable in the market.

3. Currently SHC actively working with KCCU in developing new products and test marketing them in North America. Promotion of products carved with soft woods has become a high priority.



*A cartload of six foot tall "standing elder" softwood sculptures for Ten Thousand Villages being shifted at Nairobi co-op.*



Sustainable Woodcarving  
General Update  
13 January 1997

The following is a brief chronology of events detailing the collaboration of Ten Thousand Villages (formerly SELFHELP Crafts) with Kenya Crafts Co-operative Union (KCCU) in addressing the environmental concerns surrounding the carving business in Kenya.

**Interventions**

**1. Product development utilizing softwood tree species.**

For the past 12 months Ten Thousand Villages representatives in Kenya have worked with KCCU members in encouraging the use of sustainable wood sources for carving purposes. Experimental works using mango, jacaranda and neem wood have been produced and delivered to Canada and the USA. Some of these items received favourable review giving hope that successful marketing may be possible. Some of the less favoured works were critiqued and design feedback provided. KCCU is continuing development of new sample products in response to the North American input.

At this point it is still too early to anticipate the level North American acceptance of softwood products. When these products reach retail outlets in North America, it is assumed that Ten Thousand Villages will provide educational material to their retailers promoting the significance of the use of softwood by KCCU carvers. Hopefully a market will begin to emerge.

**2. Assistance for Reforestation Efforts**

By the middle of 1996 Ten Thousand Villages began investigating options for active participation with KCCU in reforestation efforts. KCCU directors indicated that two of the KCCU co-ops were currently attempting their own reforestation programs with varying degrees of progress and success. Both efforts were frustrated by lack of funds for working capital. In discussions with the co-ops and KCCU officials, requests for assistance on the order of USA \$6,500.00 were developed.

Since Ten Thousand Villages is a marketing rather than a donor organization, provision of grants is not an option. However, in August 1996 an agreement in principle was established whereby Ten Thousand Villages would pay an additional 3%, over and above the going rate, directly to KCCU on all wood carving orders. Ten Thousand Villages agreed to exempt this surcharge from the normal price markups applied to products as they move along the chain from producer to final retailer. The extra 3% charges borne by the consumer in North America would then accumulate in KCCU accounts but ultimately be totally dedicated to addressing the financial requests submitted by the two KCCU co-ops.



In late 1996 and January 1997 KCCU received the first three orders from Ten Thousand Villages Canada and USA with the 3% surcharge applied. When these orders are completed and all invoices fully paid, KCCU will have accumulated funds totalling USA \$2700.00 for the reforestation projects.

In January 1997 a Ten Thousand Villages store in British Columbia Canada opted to make a special donation to the KCCU reforestation program from surplus funds they had accumulated in their retail operation. This generous donation is in excess of USA \$2,000.00.

With surcharges and the donation, KCCU is well over halfway towards reaching the budget indicated as necessary to upgrade the existing reforestation projects.

### Progress indicators

#### 1. Reforestation

With reporting and assistance from KCCU, Ten Thousand Villages reps will document the progress of these reforestation programs. (Anticipated results should include evidence of increased tree seedling cultivation and distribution in both communities. Existing records show current statistics.) Recommendation for continuation of the surcharge arrangement will depend upon the results realized in these efforts over the course of 1997.

#### 2. Product development and marketing

In the meantime Ten Thousand Villages will continue to work at development and marketing of products carved from the softwood species of trees that are being raised on plantations. It is hoped that in time these softwood trees can be managed as a renewable resource for a significant portion of the orders given to KCCU from Ten Thousand Villages. (Anticipated results should include evidence of increasing orders of softwood products.)

Sustainable Wood Carving  
Wamunyu Handicraft Co-operative Society  
Site Visit  
16 January 1997

Within the next few months, KCCU is expecting that funds for the Wamunyu co-op tree nursery project will become available. Members at the Wamunyu co-op are eager to get their project underway and have begun some preliminary work in anticipation of the upcoming financing. On January 16 1997, I accompanied Richard Masila, manager of KCCU to the Wamunyu co-op to record their starting point on the project and to discuss their plans for implementation. We were met by the following officers of the executive committee at the co-op:

Mr. Ikusya Nguku	(chairman)
Mr. Mbaluka Matheka	(vice chair)
Mr. Ndolo Mutiso	(treasurer)
Mr. Mualuko Muindi	(secretary)

The executive committee members answered our many questions and they showed us the site where they intend to construct the rain tank and the plot of land set aside for the tree nursery.

Wamunyu co-op has few cash reserves in their accounts so the work completed to date involves efforts not requiring cash. The labour invested so far has been provided by members on credit to the co-op. It was observed that a site for the rain tank has been cleared and an excavation begun. Similarly the plot of land for the nursery area has been cleared and some of the soil tilled. A row of fence posts have also been set, encircling the plot, but wire for the fence must wait for some cash. It was pleasing to see that the plot size has been enlarged beyond the initial allocation which had been pointed out to us several months ago when the project was initially presented to us. We were also informed that members were excavating, in quarries off site, the sand and stone necessary for building the concrete tank. Transport of this material to the construction site will be arranged when money arrives.

The rainy season in this area begins by April and co-op members hope to have their rain tank completed by that time in order to take advantage of these rains. They also intend to plant the first tree seeds in the nursery during this season. Many of the varieties of the trees planned for cultivation in the nursery can be ready for transplanting within a few months. Transplanting is usually undertaken at the beginning of a rainy season to give the new seedling optimum conditions to survival. Members hope to see the first seedlings from their nursery planted on their lands by the beginning of the next rainy season, sometime around October.



A tree nursery associated with this co-op is a new venture. Co-op members plan to seek advice on running the nursery from government ministries officials, private consultants and input from the Makindu co-op, a sister KCCU co-operative society. Makindu has a small nursery already established (plans are to enlarge this operation in the same KCCU program which is funding Wamunyu) and members there are willing to share expertise with their Wamunyu colleagues through exchange visits. Based on the Makindu experience, it appears that a nursery could become economically viable and self sustaining through the sales of seedlings to co-op members and the general public if a critical scale of operation can be achieved.

Because not all trees are planted for eventual carving into handicrafts, many different species for a variety of uses will be cultivated. The importance of fast growing softwoods for carving purposes was however, raised again. The idea of a competition for encouraging new carving designs utilizing softwoods was introduced. At the next KCCU board meeting the design challenge will be discussed further and opened to all members of the KCCU co-ops.

In summary, the visit to Wamunyu was very encouraging. Co-op members have recognized that their livelihood is dependent upon developing a sustainable resource and they have begun to take steps towards addressing that need. The Wamunyu plan appears to embrace a rather optimistic schedule and budget over runs are likely, but given that the carvers themselves are committed to and in control of the project and its funding it is possible to feel a sense of optimism with this effort. Certainly a decade or more may be required before planted trees will be ready for harvesting but in the meantime attention to product development and marketing of items carved in softwoods will be undertaken.

We look forward to return visits to Wamunyu co-op to see progress on the raintank construction, tree nursery and softwood product development.

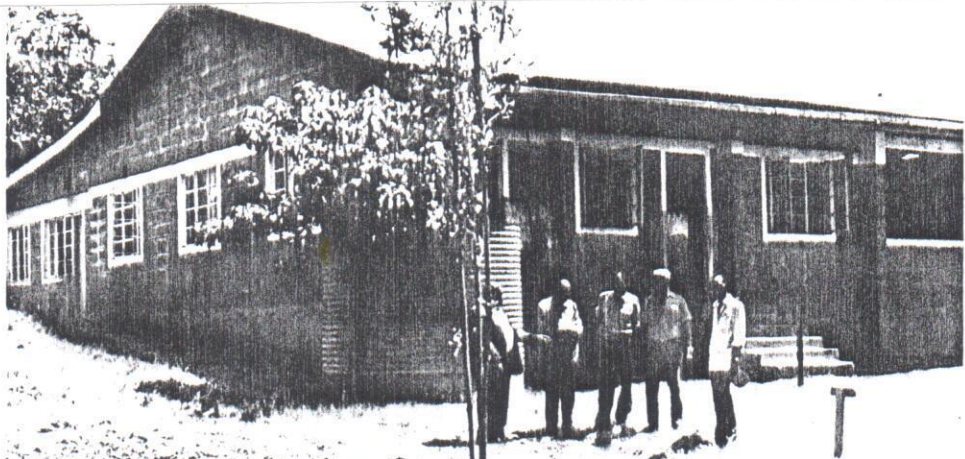
*The photos appearing on the following page were taken at Wamunyu co-op on 16 January 1997 to record the beginning of work.*

*upper: The cleared site for raintank construction. The metal tank at the corner of the workshop/showroom building is rusted out and unusable.*

*middle: Fenceposts at perimeter of tree nursery site awaiting wire fencing. Some of the site that has been tilled is visible at the right.*

*lower: The tree nursery site.*







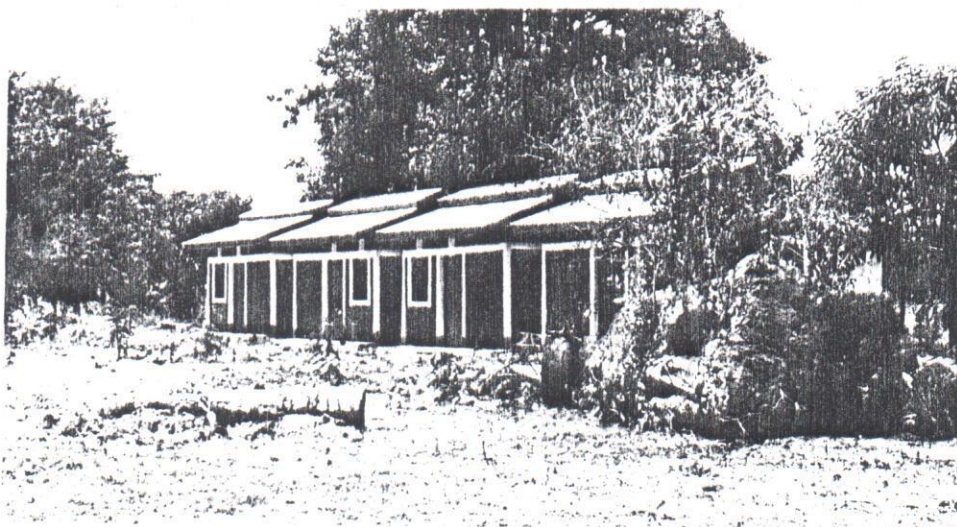
Sustainable Wood Carving Project  
Makindu Handicraft Co-operative Society  
Site Visit  
22 January 1997

We were accompanied by Richard Masila the general manager of KCCU to the Makindu co-op which is located about 200 km east of Nairobi on the Mombasa road. Upon arrival at Makindu we were welcomed by:

Cosmas Mulungye	(Chairman)
Martin Ngungu	(Secretary)
John Moli	(Vice-chair)
Patricu Wambua	(Sales Manager)

We spent a few hours with them as they showed us around the co-op and explained their plans and progress on the nursery project.

Makindu is a small but very well organized co-op with approximately 150 dedicated members. Over the years this co-op has constructed a substantial facility which in addition to the workshop areas includes some stone buildings housing a showroom, office/board room, and a restaurant with outdoor seating. Recently the co-op has begun constructing six "hotel" rooms in hopes of diversifying the base of their income generating activity. Four of these rooms are almost complete and soon to be opened. This co-op has also established a tree nursery on site where many varieties of tree seedlings are raised and sold to members and the general public. Attempts to develop this nursery have been frustrated by a chronic lack of water, however, the existing nursery is already a most commendable effort.

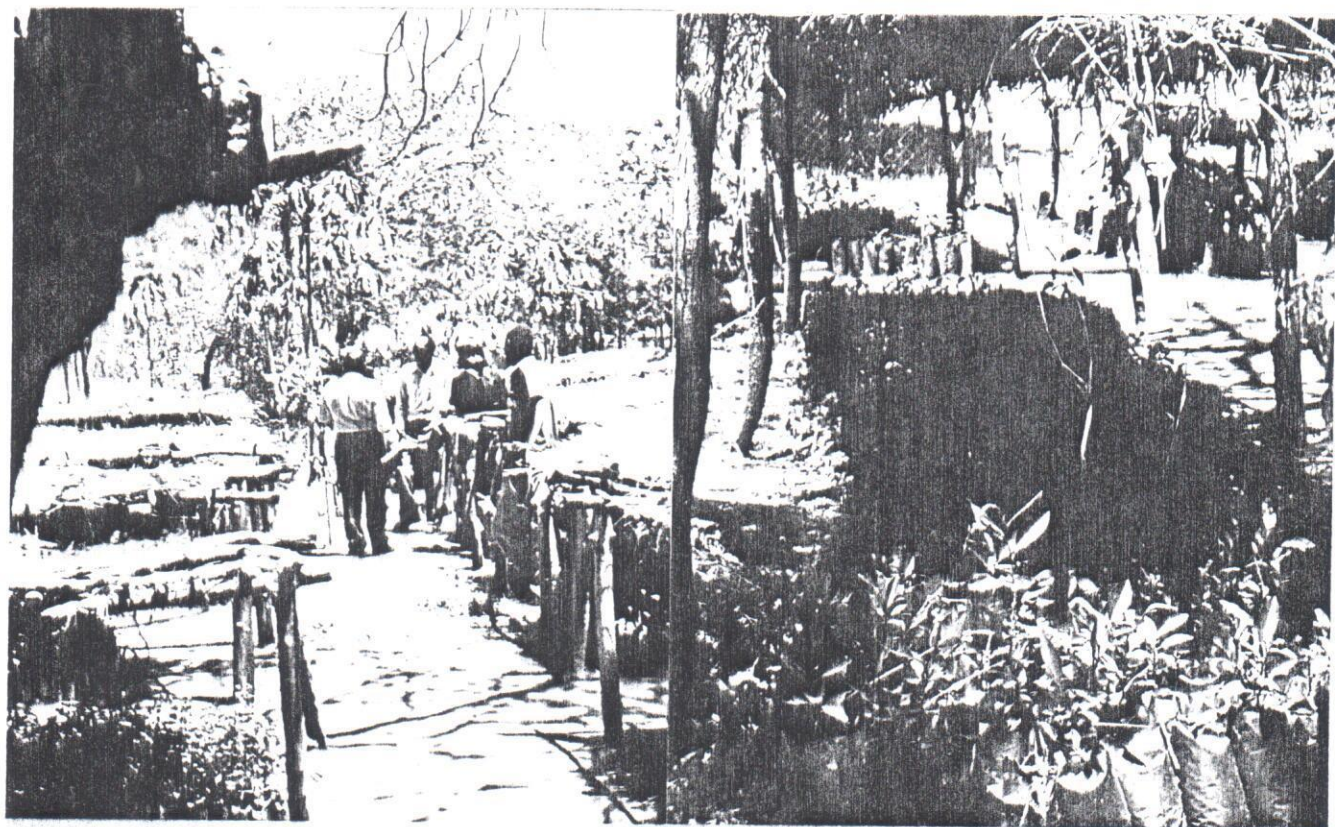


*above: Four nearly complete "hotel" rooms on the Makindu site. Foundations for two more units are complete.*



Changes since our last visit are evident at Makindu. The nursery we visited earlier is now marked out to be expanded to more than double the existing size. Clearing of the land allocated for this purpose is underway. Some materials for the water tank construction have been collected and delivered to the site. This work began last year soon after the agreement to raise funds through sales to Ten Thousand Villages had been reached. The co-op used some of their own cash reserves to get started, but are now awaiting further input before being able to proceed.

At the nursery site we were again impressed by a well organized and neatly maintained operation. Currently the inventory of seedlings is rather high due to the poor rains of the past rainy season. It seems that people were reluctant to purchase new seedlings when the risk of losing them to drought was high. These seedlings will be maintained in the nursery until more favourable transplanting conditions encourage sales. In the meantime seed collection is proceeding in anticipation of the upcoming rainy season and an increased capacity in the nursery. Makindu nursery managers have been keeping very good records on seedling production and sales. We look forward to future comparisons with the records to date. The appearance of their nursery and record keeping also suggest that they will be a valuable source of advise for the Wamunyu nursery management.



above: The existing nursery at Makindu.





*above: The existing nursery at Makindu.*

The Makindu managers were less open than those at Wamunyu in suggesting a schedule for completion of the tank and installation of pump. They are aware that funding is dependent on sales so they indicated that progress will be made as fast as can be reasonably expected. Even though they have two existing water tanks, their first priority is to complete the construction of the new tank, then purchase a pump. Nursery expansion is more labour than capital intensive so that work should proceed at a more or less even pace.

*following page:*

*right: The area being cleared for the expanded nursery is out the front doors of the hotel rooms.*

*left: Heaps of stones collected for tank construction*







Summary  
Wamunyu and Makindu Co-ops  
28 January 97

Both the Wamunyu and the Makindu projects appear to include elements in their project which were overlooked in the initial budget proposals. While unbudgeted items such as fencing, sun shades, tools etc. are essential for both of the operations and should have been considered, the nature of the fund raising does not exclude extras. The plan to raise funds has been based on income derived from projected sales, not a fixed grant. If sales do not meet the projections, the projects will simply require a bit more time to complete, on the other hand if sales exceed projections, cash will be available for extras.

The extra charge arrangement is understood by KCCU and the co-op members as a temporary measure designed to give a quick input of funds to get the work underway, but it is likely that these efforts will require ongoing funding for a few years. Discussions on how a permanent environmental levy can be embedded into the routine pricing of KCCU products are under way, but favourable results must be realized in these two efforts if acceptance of a routine environmental investment is to be achieved.

Makindu and Wamunyu co-ops have been favoured by the membership of all seven KCCU co-ops. KCCU board members representing these co-ops are watching this program carefully. Certainly there is pressure on Makindu and Wamunyu members to make a maximum effort in this endeavor, however, Ten Thousand Villages also has a role in this process by promoting new designs in and marketing of softwood products. Through the combination of reforestation and harvesting softwood trees, then marketing softwood products, KCCU carvers do have a hope of establishing a viable and sustainable livelihood in the foreseeable future. These small steps taken towards that goal are only the beginning.

## Sustainable Wood Carving Project

Wamunyu Handicraft Co-operative Society  
and  
Makindu Handicraft Co-operative Society  
Site Visits  
13 May 1997

In mid May of this year the Nairobi based Ten Thousand Villages representatives joined the executive committee of KCCU to visit four of the six KCCU member co-ops. These locations included Wamunyu, Makindu, Mombasa and Malindi. The Nairobi co-op, the fifth site in this tour, was seen in a later separate visit. The fledgling co-op in Nanyuki remains unscheduled in this round of itineration. A primary purpose of this tour was to strengthen awareness within the general membership of the KCCU co-ops about issues concerning reforestation, use of softwoods as a sustainable resource and new designs.

At each stop the discussion appeared to be well received by the carvers in attendance, who are well aware of the increasing difficulty in finding the traditionally preferred species of hardwood trees for carving. Indications suggest that carvers are prepared to switch to alternative tree species if a market for those products should materialize. (This is not particularly surprising since the carvers are obviously interested in maintaining their livelihood.) A great deal of time at each site was given to discussion of the variety new and unusual design shapes and forms presented at the talks for inspiring new ideas. It was also encouraging to see recognition of the need and the degree of interest expressed by members to embrace reforestry efforts in tandem with carving activities.

In an effort to encourage carvers to experiment with softwoods in the development of new products, a KCCU wide competition was introduced to the members at each location. These individuals are challenged to submit new products made from softwood for marketing to Ten Thousand Villages. A promise was made that the creator of the first new softwood product which is ordered in quantity will be awarded with promotion and publicity as well as a new set of carving tools. The competition will remain open as long as is necessary to see the first order placed.

This tour passed through both Wamunyu and Makindu co-ops, the sites where tree nursery development is being subsidized through funds collected by KCCU on export sales to Ten Thousand Villages. Following are progress reports from both locations.



## Wamunyu.

There has been a commendable effort at Wamunyu since the last visiting this site on 16 January 1997. Some cash inputs have begun to reach this co-op, although at the time of this visit more substantial sums were still in the pipeline as final payments on orders recently shipped were yet to be completed.

Still even with the minimal initial funds, fencing around the nursery plots had been purchased and strung on the previously set posts. On the raintank site (which was an excavation only in January) a nearly completed brick tank is now constructed. This tank, with a volume of about 8,000 liters is relatively small but given the timing of the funds coming available it was decided to proceed with construction of two tanks rather than waiting to accumulate sufficient funds to construct a single large tank. Completion of this first tank will enable some water collection to begin for limited activity in the nursery. Construction of a second tank is planned down a short slope where it will fill from the overflow of the first.

The management at Wamunyu co-op is enthusiastic about this project. Indications thus far suggest ample reason to remain optimistic. We will look forward to our next visit in July.

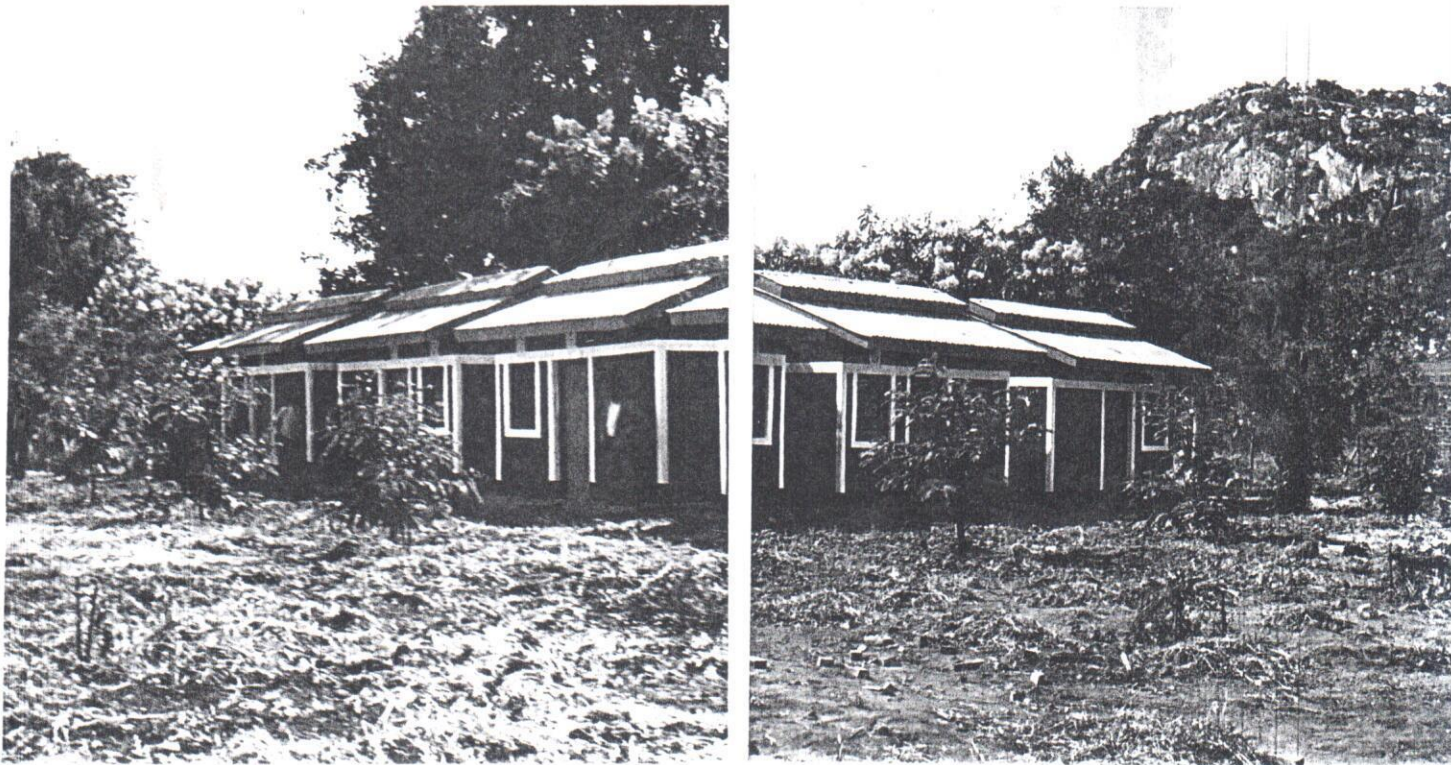


*above: a small raintank under construction at Wamunyu, 13 May 97*



## Makindu

Again there were many indications that the various activities at Makindu Co-op are well managed and carefully tended. Since January two more hotel rooms have been added to the four rooms already finished completing the planned six room development. While the hotel is not part of the tree nursery scheme, the steady progress on this project demonstrates that the co-op is able to set viable goals and work steadily towards them.



*above: the completed six room hotel development*



Like Wamunyū, only initial funds for the tree nursery work have so far reached Makindu. The progress in work observed was mostly labour rather than capital intensive. A large piece of land was completely cleared in readiness to expand the nursery and the piles of stone, sand and gravel for a construction of the water storage tank had tripled since January.

With a rainy season nearing its end the lands surrounding the Makindu co-op site looked lush and green. The tree nursery on site was also in good form. A lot of work had gone into tending seed beds and there was a very large inventory of seedlings on the way. These seedlings were being cultivated on the assumption that a water pump would arrive on the scene before the dry conditions return. With a pump, irrigation with water from a nearby pond can assure the essential water supply. Given the expectation that final payments for some KCCU would soon arrive it is a reasonable hope that a pump will be procured in time.

Makindu managers also provided a detailed record of the tree nursery business. The records they have been providing over the past year show a steady well managed operation and will be a good baseline to measure results arising from the expanded operation after it get under way.



*above and following page: Makindu tree nursery*





### Summary

Both co-ops in this project appear to be well managed and clean running operations. Leadership at these locations is taking the reforestation effort seriously and nursery development work is proceeding at a measurable pace. As reported, by mid May only minimal funds had actually arrived for use by the co-ops but by the end of the month payments from Ten Thousand Villages had arrived at KCCU which included significant funds for the nursery project. In addition to the funds from sales a very generous donation from a Ten Thousand Villages store in British Columbia Canada had just arrived and was delivered to KCCU.

The next visit to these sites is scheduled for early July. By that point these funds should be in use.



## Sustainable Wood Carving

### Wamunyu Handicraft Co-operative Society and Makindu Handicraft Co-operative Society Site Visits 01 July 1997

This visit was timed to coincide with the arrival of Rachel Hess, a Ten Thousand Villages representative in East Africa from the USA. In both the Wamunyu and Makindu locations delegations of officials from the respective co-ops, were on hand to give tours and time for meeting and discussion. Funds for the tree nursery project, which in May, were still in the pipeline, had obviously arrived. In both locations substantial capital investments were apparent and the progress being made most impressive.

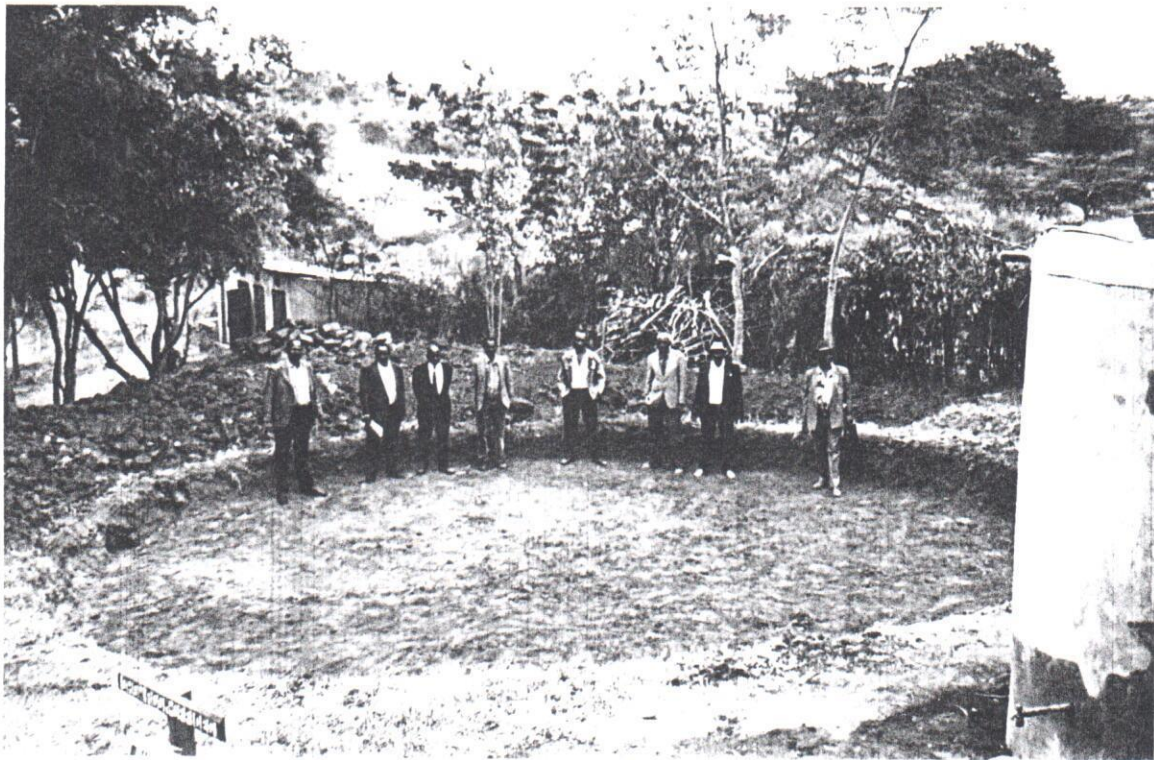
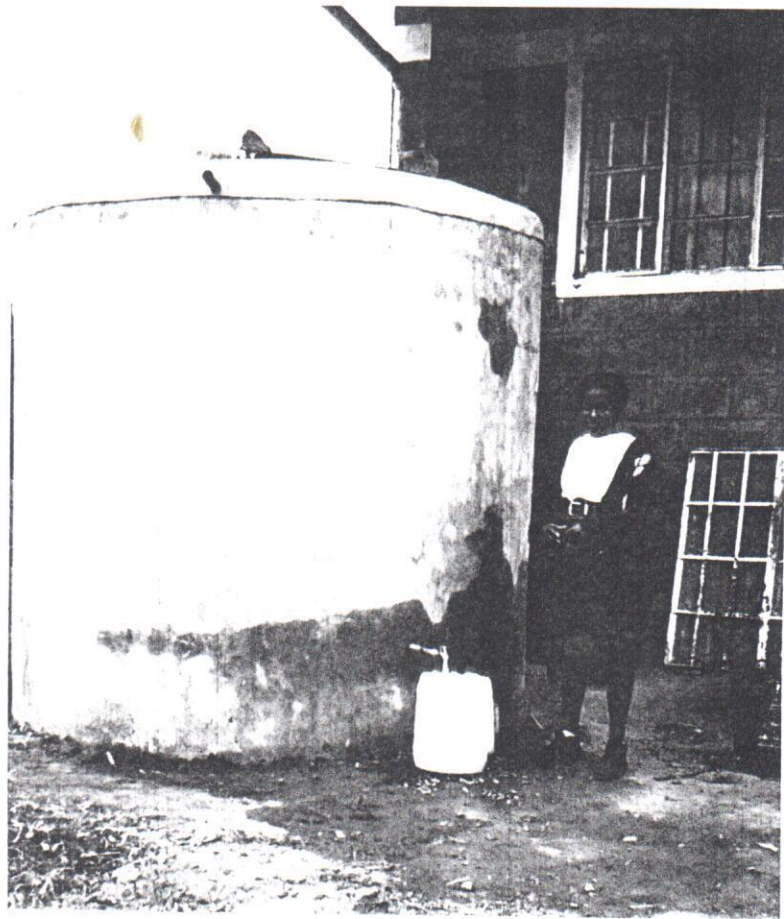
#### Wamunyu

The small raintank reported in May as under construction was completed and holding water. Slightly downhill from this tank was a massive excavation in progress, where the main tank will be constructed. The actual tree nursery area was neatly cleared and fenced. A small sun shade structure had been erected and a few hundred tree seedlings growing under the shade. The Wamunyu managers were very pleased to give the seed beds a spray of water with a hose from their new tank. Since May a municipally supplied water service has reached the co-op site. While this service is a bonus to their effort, it is not a reliable supply and certainly insufficient to insure maintenance of the nursery.

The excavation for the second tank is large and suggests an ambitious undertaking in both financial and structural terms. Some of the building material is delivered but it is not clear if sufficient funds are available to complete the structure in the near future. It would appear that the managers here have decided to be patient, and rather than constructing a smaller tank which may be more immediately affordable, they have, in choosing a large construction which could be delayed by insufficient funding, opted for a longer term approach.

This project is also a significant structural challenge. A large sized tank such as this should be engineered and constructed with rigid quality control measures in place, but this is an unlikely prospect. The directors of the project do however, refer to similar structures including one now under construction at Makindu as models upon which to base theirs. Assurances are given that strict building practices will be observed. Indeed, we do look forward to a timely and successful completion of this phase of their project.





top: the completed 8,000 liter rain tank  
 bottom: excavation for the second Wamunyu tank down hill from  
 the 8,000 l tank (right side of the photo)





*above: the Wamunyu tree nursery with the first seedlings  
below: watering the seedlings*



## Makindu

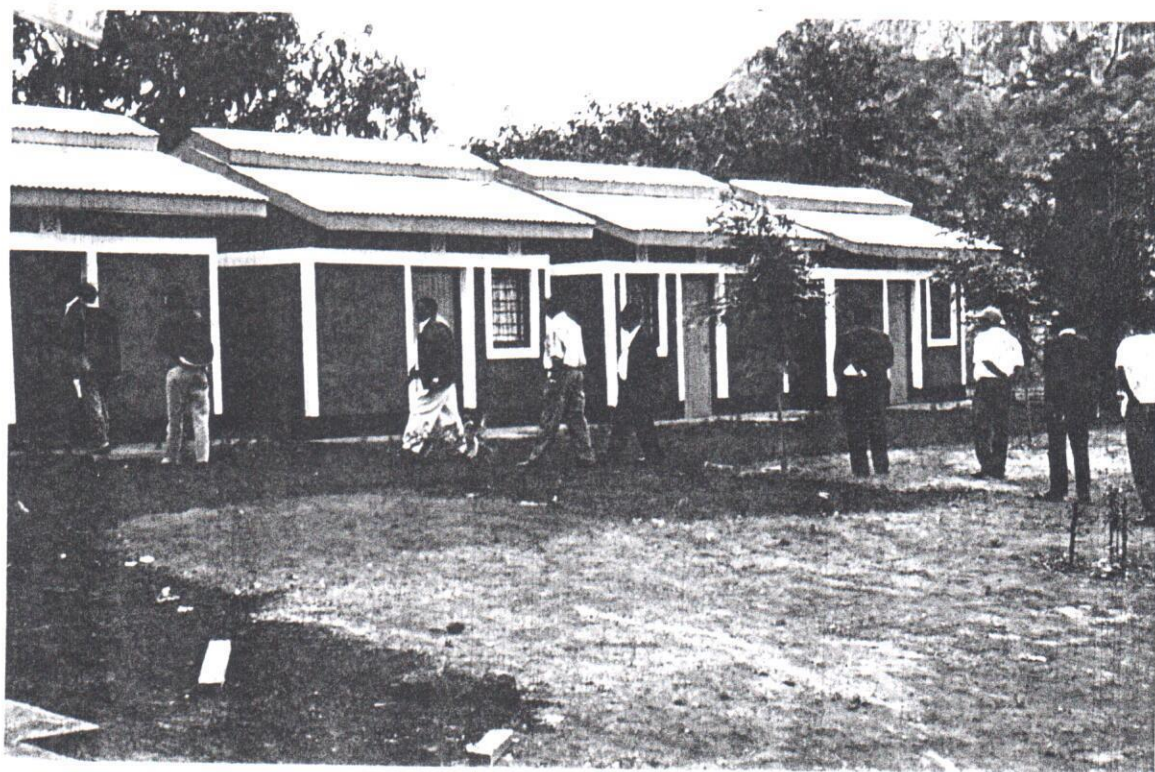
Although it is small, the co-op at Makindu is very active. With each visit there is always noticeable progress on one front or another. The hotel rooms completed in May are clean and neatly finished on the interior. Now work is proceeding on landscaping exterior spaces on the compound surrounding the rooms. With the end of the last rains in late May the tree nursery was full of seedlings being raised for distribution in the upcoming season. Two new developments since May are the purchase of a petrol powered pump and a half completed water storage tank.

A buried hose pipe runs for about 300 meters from the nursery to the off site water pond. At the water edge the pipe emerges from its trench through a concrete apron. When water is required to fill the existing (and soon the new) tank at the nursery site, the pump will be carted to the pond, connected to the hose pipe and operated for a few hours to pump several weeks supply of water. Upon completion of the job the pump will be removed to a secure storage area on the co-op property.

The storage tank under construction will add capacity sufficient to assure adequate water supply for the nursery during the particularly dry seasons when the pond dries. (As was the situation in February and March this year.) The new tank should hold nearly 30,000 liters, enough to almost double the capacity currently allowed by the two existing tanks. It is estimated that an expanded nursery operation at Makindu could require up to 1,000 liters daily, so with the new tank, the nursery could survive two months without water in the pond.

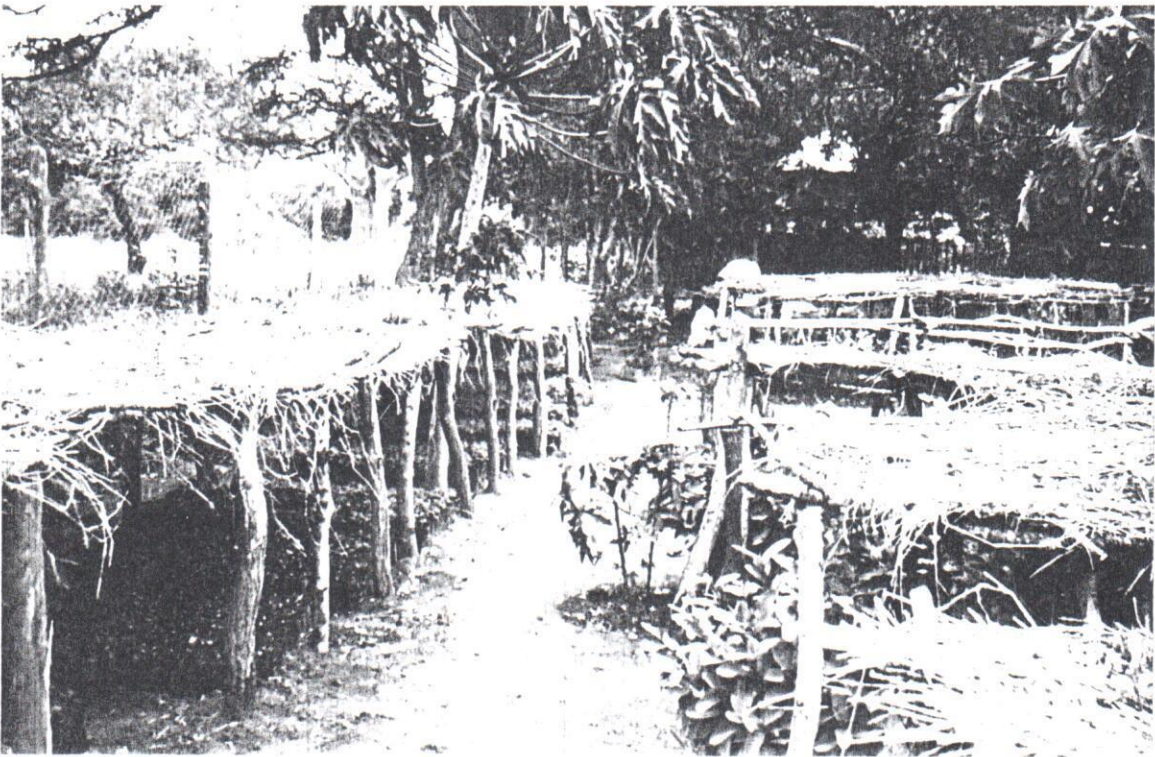
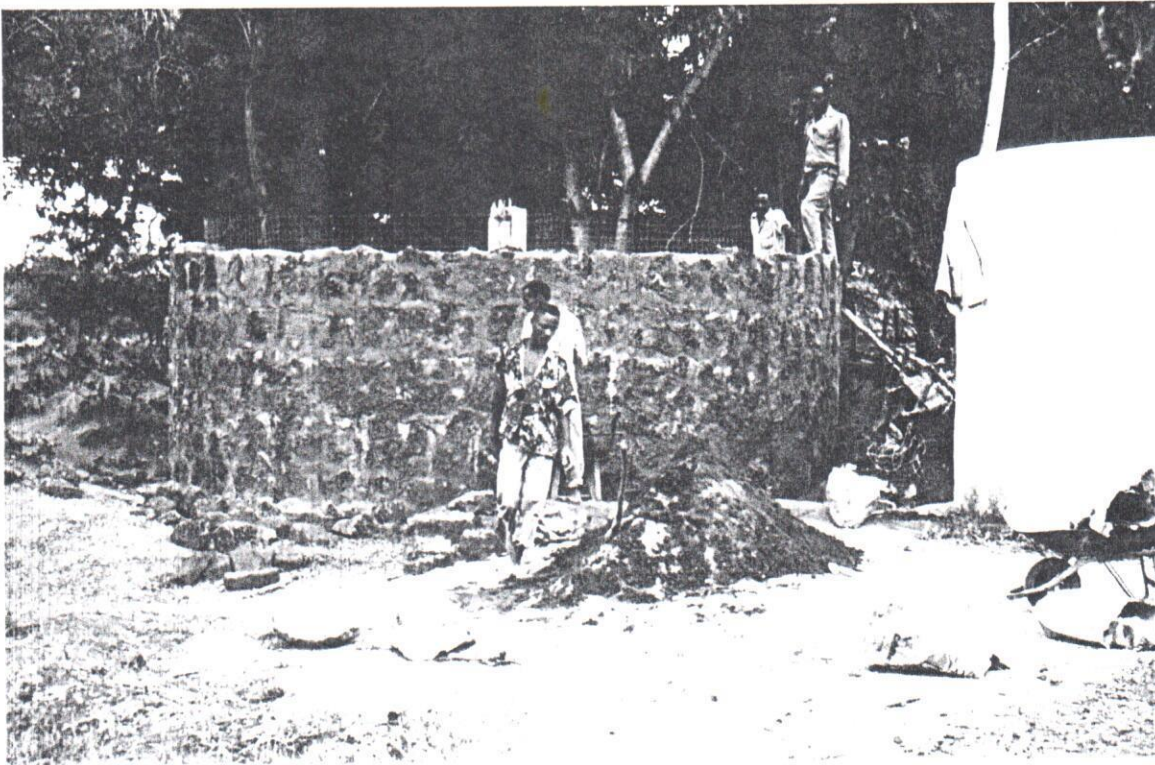
The Makindu tank construction project has progressed to a point where completion seems to be a likely possibility in the near future. In the absence of rigid standards, structural concerns for a tank of this size may be justified, however only a few meters to the side, a sound tank of almost equal size does stand, still holding water after a decade of service, giving assurance that such a construction is possible. As at Wamunyu we look forward to a successful completion of infrastructure so that work in earnest may begin in the development of the tree nursery activity.





above: the entrance to Makindu Co-op  
below: landscaping begins around the hotel rooms





*above: the 30,000 liter tank under construction*  
*below: seedlings in the nursery*  
*following: the new pump*





### Summary

In both co-ops it is gratifying to see evidence suggesting a serious commitment to the project at this stage. Undoubtedly the rapid transformation to site brought about by a completed construction project or the excitement of seeing a new pump deliver water that would have been previously hauled in jerricans on a wheelbarrow are significant milestones in projects such as this. However, perhaps somewhat less impressive, though far more important will be the distribution and nurturing of tree seedlings in the area that can one day be harvested for use by future carvers.

In this early stage the project has received a critical infusion of cash which in the past six months has served to launch the effort in a dramatic way. The work however has barely begun. Raising and ultimately harvesting trees for carving, producing marketable items from those trees and education of producers and consumers on the urgency underlying this effort are longer term objectives that will require a sustained commitment on the part of all the players in this business.



KENYA CRAFTS CO-OPERATIVE UNION (KCCU)  
BREAKDOWN OF SALES for 1996 and 1997  
TO TEN THOUSAND VILLAGES

Sales to CANADA	1996	1997*
Hardwood	\$29,871 (87%)	\$20,458 (67%)
Softwood	600 (02%)	800 (03%)
Non-wood**	3,695 (11%)	9,375 (30%)
TOTALS	\$34,166	\$30,633

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Sales to USA	1996	1997*
Hardwood	\$89,232 (77%)	\$95,580 (63%)
Softwood	0	9,150 (06%)
Non-wood**	27,372 (23%)	46,405 (31%)
TOTALS	\$116,604	\$151,135

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Total Sales USA & CANADA	1996	1997*
Hardwood	\$119,103 (79%)	\$116,038 (64%)
Softwood	600 (0.4%)	9,950 (5%)
Non-wood**	31,067 (20.6%)	55,780 (31%)
TOTALS	\$150,770	\$181,768

\*Includes orders placed up until August 1, 1997.

\*\*Non-wood category includes drums, banana fibre products, push toys, wire products, jewellery and kiondo baskets.

all figures are USA \$

source: MCC Kenya



**SUSTAINABLE WOOD CARVING**  
**Makindu Handicraft Co-operative Society**  
**and**  
**Wamunyu Handicraft Co-operative Society**  
**site visits**  
**26 Nov & 02 Dec 97**

In late November and early December a tour of five of the six Kenya Crafts Co-operative Union co-ops was completed with Richard Masila, the manager of KCCU. The purpose of this trip was to select a container load of large show piece sculptures for the Canadian Ten Thousand Villages program. This tour provided an opportunity to see the latest progress on the tree nursery development at Makindu and Wamunyu, (the last site visits were 01 July 97), as well as conduct some general business and make a few observations.

#### **Design Competition**

The first item of business was limited to Makindu co-op only. During the May 97 tour of the KCCU co-ops a design competition was introduced. As outlined in the 13 May report, KCCU members were challenged to develop new products from softwood. A small reward was offered to the first KCCU member who could develop a brand new softwood design which could be ordered in quantity by Ten Thousand Villages. Many new products were submitted to North America and in a subsequent order from the USA three of the new designs were requested. All three came from Makindu Co-op. On this visit introductions were made to Martin Ngungu and Daniel Wambua who designed two of the products and Kithome Ngundi and Raphael Makumbi who collaborated in the design of the third item.

Arrangements were made for a small presentation ceremony which is scheduled for January when a return to Makindu is planned. The January visit will include twelve North American Ten Thousand Villages store managers who will be visiting Kenyan crafts producers whose products are sold in Villages stores in North America. This event will help to promote the softwood message directly to some of the people who retail KCCU products in Canada and the USA.

#### **Development Education in North America**

At Nairobi Co-op talks were continued with KCCU member and master carver, Stephen Wambua who with Richard Masila had recently returned from an eight week tour of Canada and the USA. Their trip was jointly sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee and Ten Thousand Villages in order to demonstrate and talk about the experience of wood carvers in Kenya with North American audiences. Two weeks were spent in Canadian aboriginal communities exchanging ideas with Inuit carvers. The remaining six weeks was given to a coast to coast tour of Canada with three



stops in the USA. Dozens of Ten Thousand Villages stores and sales were visited and many carving demonstrations and discussions were held. The tour helped to maintain a market interest in Kenyan wood carvings as well as further promote the softwood message in the North American context. The tour was well received in all locations with Stephen and Richard gaining fame and recognition through out the Ten Thousand Villages network. In short, the tour exceeded all expectations and was unquestionably a worthwhile effort.

(see appended Ten Thousand Villages USA and Canada newsletters)

#### Development Education in Nairobi

Given the favourable review of the North American effort the decision has been made to proceed with a similar effort in Nairobi. Depending on budget, two or perhaps three carvers from the Nairobi Co-op will be engaged at an exhibition space in the Westlands area of town for a one month period. During this time the carvers will demonstrate softwood carving and talk to the general public about the use of sustainable tree species in the Kenyan carving business.

The owner of a building which houses a number of high profile tourist shops has made a generous offer of free exhibition space to MCC for special events which will enhance his location. Plans are to open a softwood carving demonstration in his space for the month of February.

#### Softwood use in KCCU Co-ops

In this recent tour through the KCCU co-ops particular interest was given to procuring large pieces of carving work. From the beginning it was stated that a bias would be given to selecting softwood pieces over hardwood. Surprisingly, the hardwood option was very limited. In the five co-op showrooms visited, large pieces (work carved from tree trunks of 18" diameter and over) were carved almost exclusively from softwood tree species. The hardwood pieces on display were often reported as being several years old. In all locations significant volumes of softwood were in the hands of carvers.

Species favoured in the various co-ops are as follows:

Nairobi - jacaranda, Wamunyu - jacaranda and itula, Makindu - itula, Mombasa - mango, neem and in Malindi - mango, neem and mkilifi. (mkilifi is reportedly a variety of neem)

While it is difficult to say how much influence the recent wood study efforts have had in this shift from hardwood to softwood, it is safe to say that the carvers have felt an affirmation from the (Ten Thousand Villages) market to experiment with alternatives to the traditionally preferred hardwoods.



## Makindu Tree Nursery

The water storage tank previously reported as under construction is now complete and holding water. The area surrounding the tree seedling beds has been doubled in size and work is proceeding to develop the new plot area into seed beds. The abundant rainfall in the past month has provided for good growth of many hundreds of several varieties of trees in the nursery. Stock records indicate that sales of seedlings to Makindu co-op members and the general public are brisk.

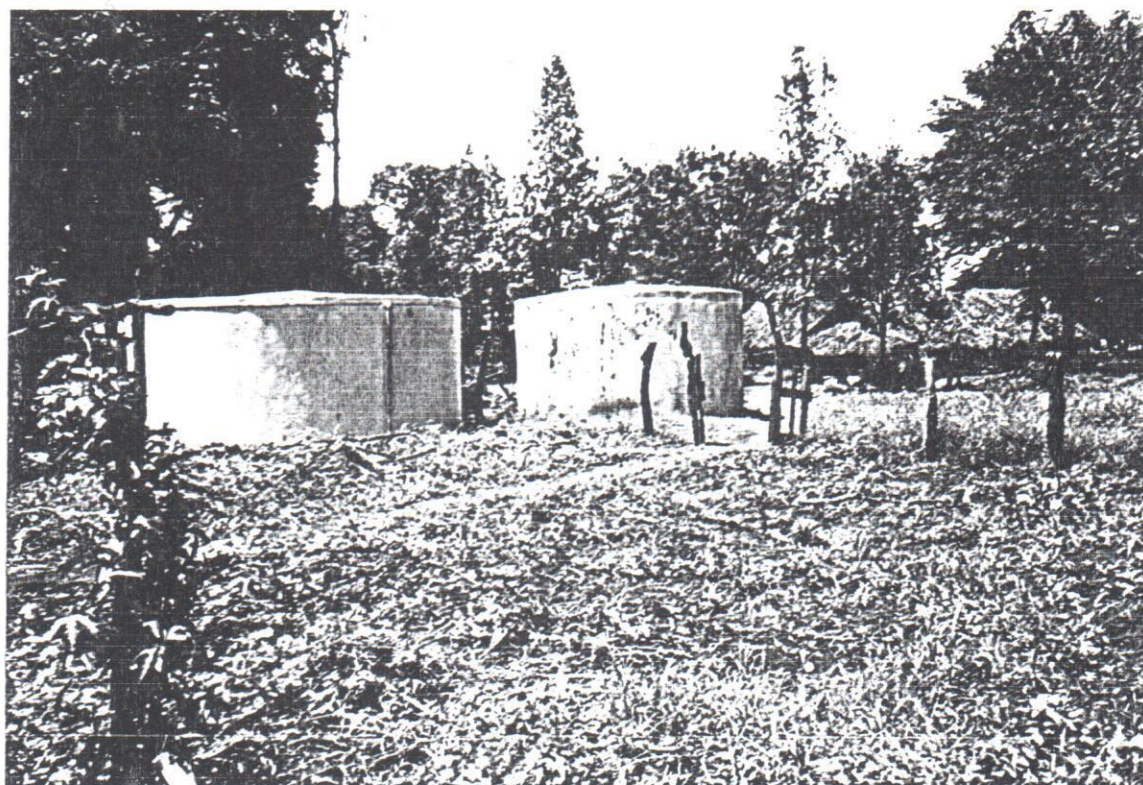
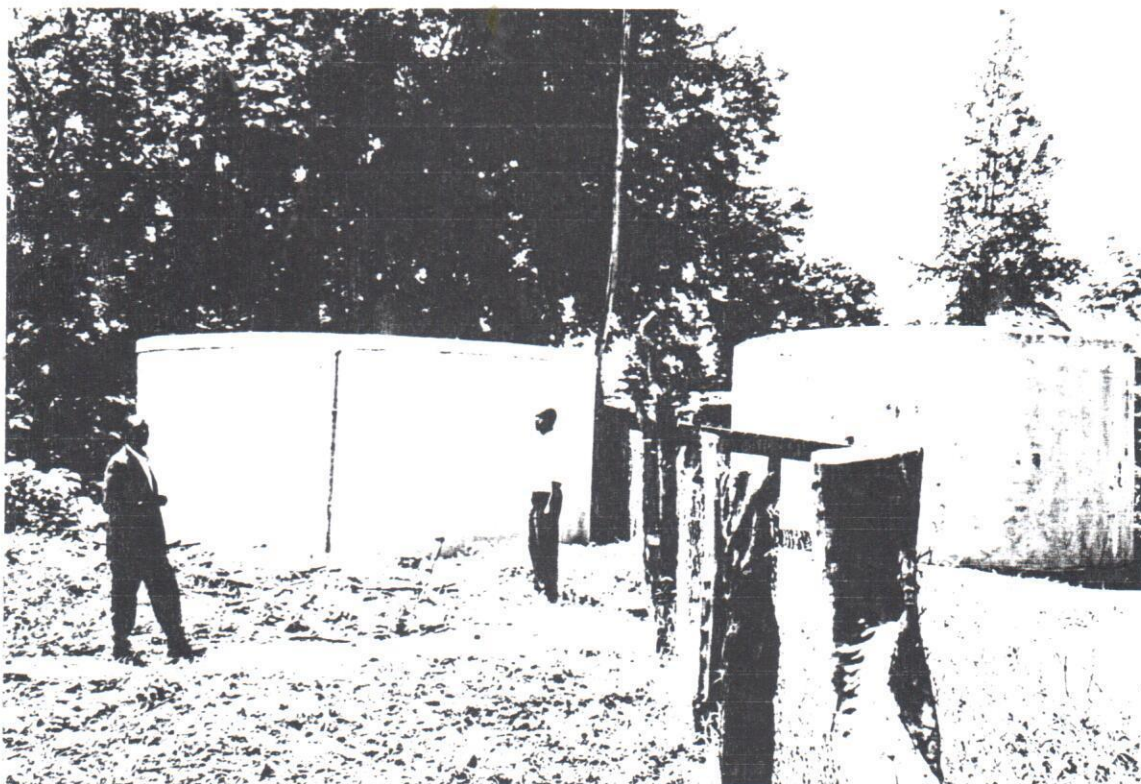
Makindu members are carving with increasing quantities of itula wood though no itula seedlings are being cultivated in the nursery. Makindu managers indicated that itula grows in abundance naturally but conceded that it would be a good idea to start some of these seedlings in the nursery. Still with all things considered, the progress at Makindu is highly commendable.

There is ample evidence that this co-op is making good use of the reforestation funds collected by KCCU on the sales to Ten Thousand Villages. We look forward to their ongoing work.



*The new water storage tank at Makindu, completed and in use.*





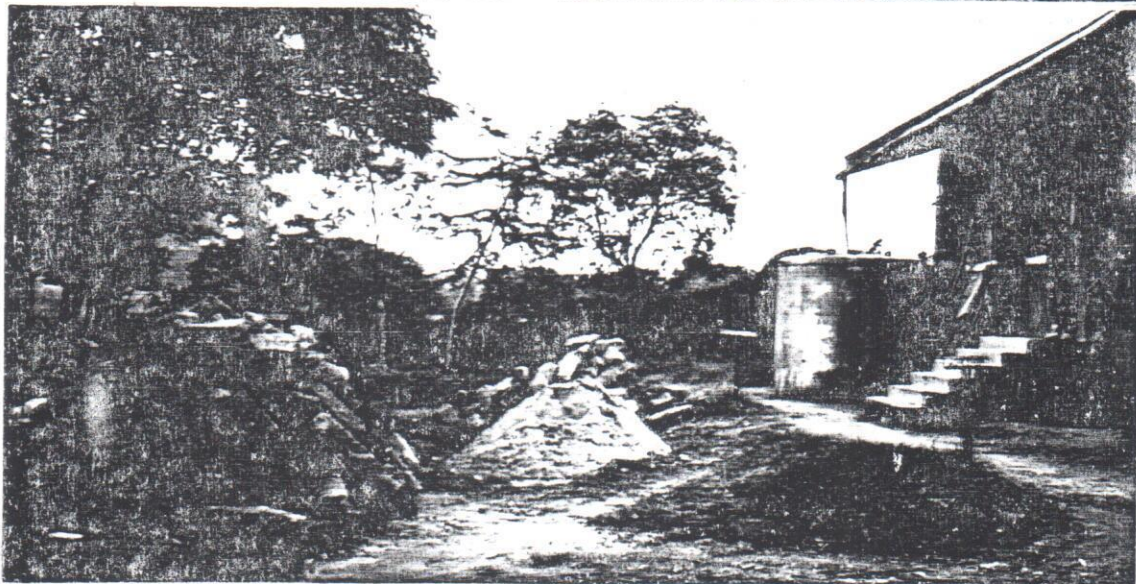
*The new water tank (left) the nursery area (foreground) has been doubled in size and now includes the tank.*



### Wamunyu Tree Nursery

In Wamunyu there is very little new progress to report on since the last visit in July. Other than a large supply of stone and cement for the water tank construction which has been purchased and delivered to the site, there is no indication that any new work has been accomplished in the past five months. Suggestions are that internal co-op politics and the unseasonable rains have conspired to hamper progress at this location.

We are planning to return in January with the Villages store managers tour. We shall look forward to an improved climate at Wamunyu in anticipation of renewed nursery development efforts.



above: Excavation and materials delivered at Wamunyu.  
below: Small tank completed and in use.





# TEN THOUSAND VILLAGES NEWS

November-December, 1997

**Kenya Woodcarvers Leave a Trail of Giraffes, Wood chips, Media Interviews and Friends in their Wake.** Many, many Ten Thousand Villages personnel across Canada were privileged to meet, travel with, learn from, drink coffee with, laugh with and be enriched by Richard Masila and Stephen Wambua last month. Television, newspaper, and radio interviews were the norm from Labrador to Vancouver Island. Store openings, meetings with Canadian woodcarvers, volunteer gatherings, mall, college and university gigs, plus many other demonstrations and activities kept Richard and Stephen on the high lope from sea to shining sea.

Personal memories, professional enrichment for Villages staff and volunteers, greater understanding of the Kenya Craft Co-op Union and its activities, and a better understanding of Canadian markets for Richard and Stephen are the big pay-offs of a learning trip like this. Gary Snider writes about the BC portion of their trip and his report speaks for a lot of us who hosted Richard and Stephen: "Stephen and Richard made a big splash with customers, media and volunteers alike. We were impressed with Stephen's grasp of English, politics, popular authors, geography and world affairs. Born into any one of our families, he would be the over-achieving brother we would both envy and admire.

Richard, gracious and wise, had many insights into the lives of Kenyan carvers and talked about the simple pleasures of Kenyan life: his *shamba* gardens, a large family, good neighbours, many friends.

Between the carving demonstrations we talked about the difficulties of life in Kenya today: the need for democratic reforms, the cost of unrest for craftspeople when the tourists stay away, the constant demand for bribes (KCCU refuses all such payments and suffers for it), and the tribal favouritism that impact everything from a child's academic success to an adult's job prospects.

But of course the visit was more than talking. A local company, Reimer Hardwoods, supplied green logs from their mill—maple, birch, alder and cedar. Stephen preferred the maple and in six hours would transform a rough chunk of wood into a charging elephant or a life-like hippo. Spectators sat in a half circle and were amazed to see the precise cuts that followed Stephen's rapid swings of the adze, chips flying in every direction and piling ankle deep around his feet.

In Vancouver Swahili was the lingua franca when a Kenya-born, UBC-trained doctor arrived. He had attended a private academy just up the hill from Stephen's high school.



TEN THOUSAND  
VILLAGES



The doctor warned them that life in Canada may look alluring but it could be a soul killer for anyone breast-fed by a Kenyan mother. A retired expatriate Nairobi shopkeeper took up the conversation from there and talked about his homeland and the tensions that made the future uncertain. A woman of the Borana tribe joined the circle and quickly pointed out that although she knew Swahili she was really a Somali. "But I know the Somali and Borana people of Kenya," said Stephen, "and you look, talk and dress like the Borana." Ahmed, the doctor, explained that Somalis could claim refugee status in Canada whereas Kenyans could not. Claiming to be Somali, therefore, can be advantageous and expedient in the international scheme of things. The encounter was uncomfortable, but for a moment the complexities and realities of entrance to Canada--something that thousands of people around the world desiring immigration to Canada know far better than many of us--was as close as the nearest wood chip.

Many things we learned from Richard and Stephen were a revelation to us:

1. *Muhugu* is just the Swahili name for mahogany.
2. A carver does not finish his work. Sanding, colouring, and waxing are done by other artisans, often women.
3. Carvers usually work ahead. KCCU stores the products and then pays each carver when his work is sold.
4. The Kenyan carving tradition is 75 years old and was introduced by a Tanzanian who specialized in the *makonde* carving style of his country. Kenyans adapted it to their culture, adding the animal motifs so popular and well-known today.

5. KCCU is huge, representing approximately 20,000 artisans organized into six co-ops. Richard travels almost continually from site to site, and is so knowledgeable that he can look at a cane, mask, elephant or giraffe on the shelf in your store and identify the man who carved it, or at the very least the village it likely comes from.

6. That a trunk pointing up on an elephant brings good luck is news to Kenyans! "They (Canadian customers) tell us it brings good luck," said Richard. "We don't believe in it, but if it's what people want to buy, we'll make it."

Richard and Stephens' visit put a hammer blow to some very patronizing ideas that too many of us hold dear, continues Gary. It will be hard for anyone who met them to think again in the same straight-jacketed way: that people from poor nations are by definition needy, pitiable and unsophisticated. In exact and opposite measure, every stroke of Stephen's adze helped me to renew my belief that our brothers and sisters around this globe are ingenious, generous, and rich in the most important ways. I was inspired. Some of the Kenyan joy for life rubbed off on me and I saw it reflected in many of the faces around the circle.

*Asanti sana*, Richard and Stephen. Thank you for leaving your homes and families behind for eight weeks to share yourselves, your skills and your work with KCCU with us. We are the richer for your visit.





## TEN THOUSAND VILLAGES NEWS

United States Edition

**November 1997**

**Kenyan Woodcarver shows his skills.**

With practiced hands and careful eyes, **Stephen Wambua** used wood shaping tools formed from VW springs to turn a chunk of English Walnut wood into a small giraffe in front of an audience of Akron, Pa., Ten Thousand Villages staff members Wednesday, October 15<sup>th</sup>. A carver who works in a cooperative that is part of **Kenya Crafts Cooperative Union (KCCU)**, Stephen is a master craftsman that can pick up a chunk of wood and "see" an animal inside. From a seven-foot tall giraffe to a small rhino head, Stephen works quickly and confidently to make beautiful creations out of any shape or size of wood.

Stephen learned to carve from watching his uncle. As the eldest brother in his family, society charges him with caring for his sister's three children who live with him. Besides his three nieces and nephews, he has also paid for the education of two brothers. Stephen would like to take some university courses to help him with his understandings of business in the cooperative, but this is not possible right now. Even his brothers, whose education he paid for, are unable to find other work. The income from Ten Thousand Villages orders is key to the survival of both Stephen and his extended family.

Carving from 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. daily, Stephen uses every possible piece to make carvings. After looking at a piece, he begins to carve, using the large chunks taken off first for smaller items made later. The traditional tree used in carving, muhugu, is being cut down for large furniture and is becoming scarce. KCCU is working to find other trees that can be used for carving that are easier to find, and faster to replace.

Another way that KCCU works at maintaining viability is in the operation of tree nurseries. Ten Thousand Villages is helping KCCU with this plan by including a three percent add-on to the price we pay for each carving. By starting their own nurseries, KCCU is working to ensure a future for their artisans. KCCU organizer **Richard Masila**, who is accompanying Stephen during his trip, commented that, "We know this is important work. Our goal is to plant two trees for every one we cut down."

KCCU is also working to break down some social barriers that exist in the woodcarving community. Carving is an art that has long been the domain of men who are members of the Akamba tribe. Currently, several women have progressed through the training process and are full-fledged carvers. KCCU has also worked with cooperatives that are opening their membership lists to other tribal groups. Currently in the Mombasa area, there are six members of other tribes who have worked their way from finishers all the way to carvers. The Union was formed in 1981 and currently impacts the lives of more than 100,000 Kenyans. This is becoming increasingly important as the country is struggling to meet the needs of its citizens.

Currently visiting stores selling Ten Thousand Villages items in the United States, Stephen and Richard have been in North America for more than six weeks, traveling and sharing with customers at Ten Thousand Villages stores in Canada. While there, they were able to spend time with Inuit carvers, sharing stories and techniques.



# Wood carver masters craft chip by chip

JOHN GIBSON  
Special to the Herald

**H**e can carve anything — giraffe, elephant or person. That's why Stephen Wambua, of Kenya, gets to be called a master carver. Wambua was at the 10,000 Villages store in Chinook Centre on the weekend to demonstrate his craft of 18 years.

"He picks up a chunk of wood — not unlike what you'd throw in a fireplace — and then the chips fly while he smiles and furrows his brow," said Doris Daley, co-ordinator of the 10,000 Villages in Calgary, a program of the central Mennonite committee which sells "fairly traded" items from artisans in 25 developing nations.

"Before long something takes shape," Daley added.

She arranged for Wambua, and Richard Masila, president of the 20,000-strong Kenya co-operative carvers union, to visit Calgary as part of a tour. Their trip has taken them from Labrador to Lethbridge.

"It's our gift from God," said Masila, who explained that only the Kamba tribe — one of 42 in Kenya — practises wood carving.

Wambua used birch for his demonstration rather than the much harder Kenyan mahogany. "It's softer, so I can't work as fast," said Wambua.

To the untrained eye, though, he appeared to work very fast. "It's amazing. He never misses," said John Klassen, a 10,000 Villages volunteer.

There are 60 outlets of 10,000 Villages across Canada, three in Calgary. The non-profit stores operate almost entirely on a voluntary basis. They are part of what Daley calls an alternative trade organization.

The concept of "fair trade" is why Masila conducts most of the Kenya carvers' union business with 10,000 Villages.

"They pay fair prices for our crafts, so we can pay our members well," said Masila.



Shannon Oatway, Calgary Herald

**KENYA TO CANADA:** Stephen Wambua carves a giraffe out of a chunk of birch at Chinook Centre.

Daley said operating 10,000 Villages is a challenging venture. "Even though the engine driving us is compassion, we can only do it by being a smart business," she said.

That means business trips — in a 4x4 into the African wilds — to visit participating craftspeople and to recruit new ones.

"It's important for them to hear what's selling and for us to see new designs," said Daley.



# TY

EDITOR 328-4411



Apple DENTAL CENTRE

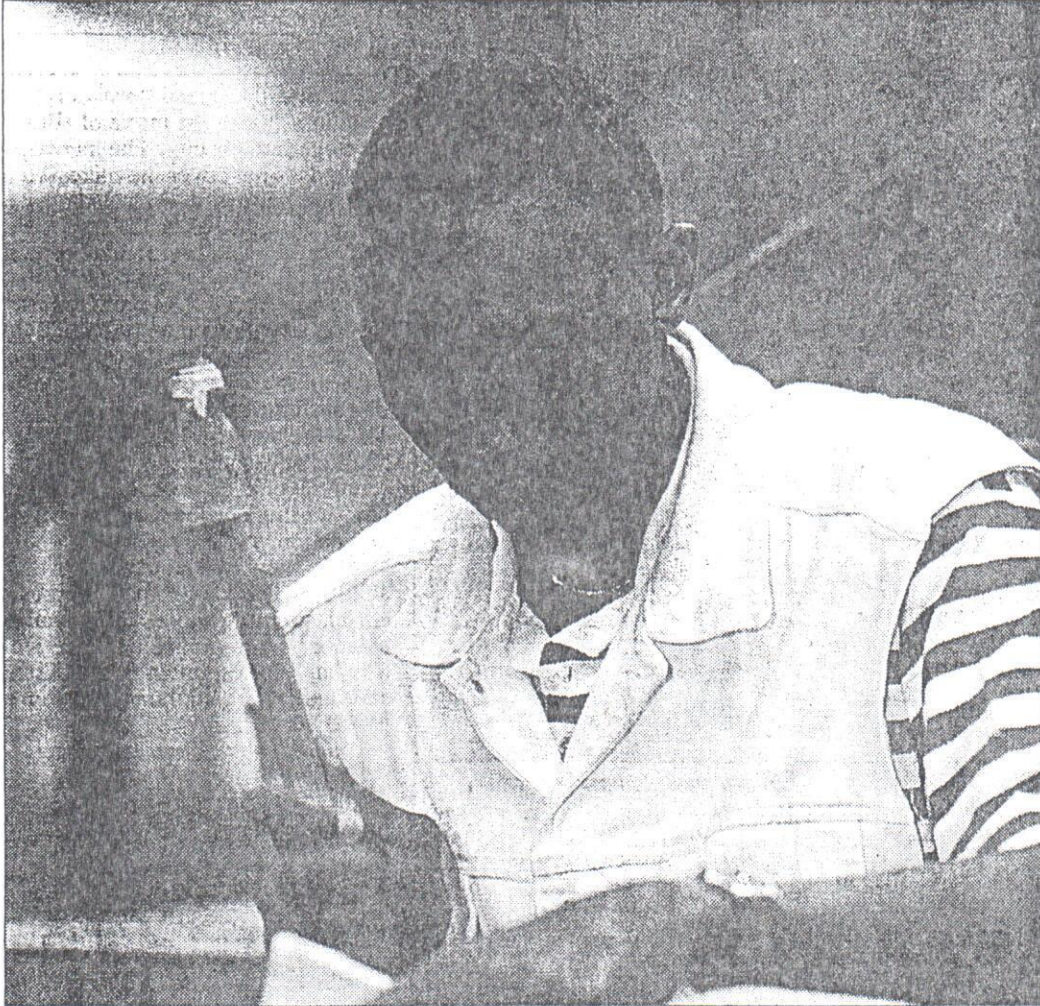
Dr. Pam Schulte

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## Precision craftsmanship



HERALD PHOTO BY DAVID ROSSITER

**NEW LIFE FOR WOOD:** Master carver Stephen Wambula from Kenya carves a giraffe during a recent demonstration at Lethbridge Community College. Wambula and Richard Masila, president of the Kenya Craft Co-operative Union, stopped in Lethbridge as part of a two-week North American tour as guests of Ten Thousand Villages stores. A highlight of the trip was a workshop Wambula got to take in with Inuit stone carvers in Labrador.



Southern Sun Times  
Fridge News Sept. 24/97

Sept. 27 in gym 2, 500 11 St. S. Details:  
Lyle, 345-3196.

### Free film showing

See The Philadelphia story, 7:30 p.m.  
Sept. 26, theatre gallery of the Leth-  
bridge Public Library.

### Woodcarvers visiting

Two woodcarvers from Kenya will  
be demonstrating their craft from 3  
p.m.-8 p.m. Sept. 26 at Ten Thousand  
Villages in Centre Village Mall.  
Details: 327-8087.

26 The Meliorist  
Sept 25/97

Kenya Wood Carvers at U of L  
Richard Mafila, Manager of Kenya  
Crafts Co-operative Union, and  
Steven Wambua, Master Carver, will  
be coming to the University of  
Lethbridge on Friday, September 26.  
The Master Carvers are coming to  
Canada to tour Alberta, and have cho-  
sen the U of L as one of their stop-  
overs to showcase their talents.  
Everyone is invited to watch as  
Richard and Steven carve wooden  
animal carvings. The excitement  
starts at 11:30 am in the atrium.

A2 - THE LETHBRIDGE HERALD - Friday, September 26, 1997



- Mike LeBlanc and the Wakeup Team
- Traditional Country Music

## What's The South's Top Activities Today and Tomorrow



**1** Two woodcarvers from Kenya  
visiting Lethbridge on a cross-  
Canada tour, will demonstrate  
their craft from 3 to 8 p.m., today at  
Ten Thousand Villages in Centre Vil-  
lage Mall. Details: 327-8087.

**2** The Philadelphia Story, the  
1940 classic film, will be shown  
at 7:30 p.m., today in the Leth-  
bridge Public Library theatre  
gallery. Admission is free.

**3** Rainbow Riding Centre, home  
of the Lethbridge Handicapped  
Riding Association, will hold its  
Rainbow of Dreams Auction at 7  
p.m., today in the Lethbridge Exhi-  
bition 4-H Building. To donate items or  
for more information, call chairperson  
Connie Berezay, 752-4951; Joanne  
Perlich, 328-9872; or Jean Lapointe,  
345-3640.

## Kenyan wood carvers coming

Let the chips fly where they may.

On Friday those chips will fly at the  
Centre Village Mall when two wood  
carvers from Kenya demonstrate their  
craftmaking skills.

Richard Masila, president of the  
Kenya Co-operative Carvers Union,  
and Master Carver Steven Wambua are  
already in Canada exchanging wood-

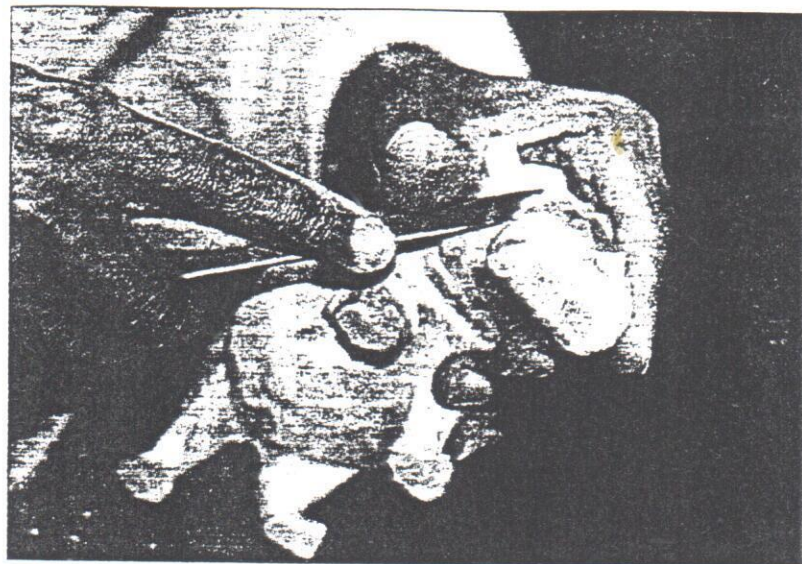
working know-how and traditions with  
carvers in Labrador.

They'll only make one appearance in  
Lethbridge Friday from 3-8 p.m. at the  
Ten Thousand Villages, a non-profit  
Third World gift shop.

Additional information is available  
by calling 327-8087.

Leth. Herald. MONDAY, SEPT 22/97





# Carving out a future

Master carver Stephen Wambua says wood carving is a symbol of a new Kenya in which skilled craftspeople can earn a living.

By **Grant Kerr**

**S**TEPHEN Wambua slumps low in his chair, long, lean legs stretched out before him, his large feet resting easily on a thin log of maple.

In his left hand, Wambua holds a hippopotamus, carved from a cylinder of wood not unlike what he was using as a foot rest just hours ago. His right hand gently holds a small file he is using to shape the head of the wooden beast.

As he methodically goes about his craft, a local carver marvels at the creation Wambua has turned out in little more than two hours.

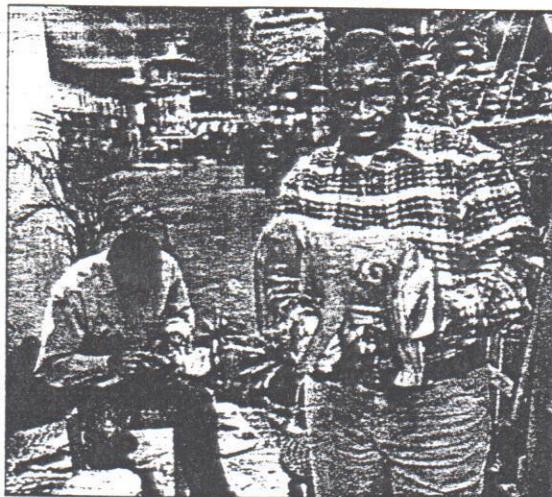
"I couldn't do what he does in two hours," the man says, watching Wambua work. "It's unbelievable."

It's been a tough couple of weeks. On his first trip to Canada, Wambua has been crisscrossing the country on a tour sponsored by Ten Thousand Villages, a chain of shops dedicated to selling Third World products at a fair price to both consumer and producer.

Every day finds the Kenyan carver in a new city and a new store, displaying the kind of craftsmanship that goes into what appears on the shops' shelves.

Last week, he made stops in Saint John and Moncton.

At age 30, Wambua is already a master carver. In his native Kenya he turns out as many as three carvings a day at a massive Kenya Crafts Co-operative Union (KCCU) workshop in Nairobi, earning the equivalent of



TOP, Stephen Wambua uses a file to carve a hippopotamus. RIGHT, Wambua uses an adze to chip away at a piece of maple. ABOVE, Richard Masila, manager of Kenya Crafts Co-operative holding a finished carving. (Peter Walsh photos)

about \$20 Canadian for his work. That's a reasonable day's wage in a country in which more than one-third of the 30 million citizens live in poverty.

The KCCU employs 20,000 people and Wambua is one of the best. He started his vocation 18 years ago as a school boy, introduced to the art by his uncle. Back then, it was curiosity that led him to pick up a carving knife. But for years, it's been a way to earn a living.

The oldest of four boys, Wambua supported his family from an early age, helping his mother raise his three siblings. Much of his income has been used for basic necessities. He helped put his brothers through school, one of whom is also carving.

Asked if his brother is as good as him, Wambua says, "Maybe he's better," smiling cryptically.

Wambua makes an average of 25,000 shillings a month, the equivalent of about \$555. Of this, 6,500 shillings (\$144) goes toward rent. Of course, it's impossible to compare pay scale and cost of living of the African nation to this one.

"I just survive," he says of the living he makes. This is coming from a man who is on the board of directors for the KCCU, which is made up of seven Co-operatives.

Despite having a long history in neighbouring African countries, wood carving dates back only 70 years in Kenya. In past generations it was passed down within the family. Now it's a significant form of commerce for the impoverished country that is largely agriculture based.

**'Y**OU take what is not the hippo away and you leave the hippo," Wambua says patiently as he whittles away at his creation.

Using just three adzes (a type of wood axe, pronounced "ads"), a couple of files and a knife, Wambua can create anything from an intricate walking stick to his largest creation, an eight-foot giraffe. "There is nothing hard. It just needs some care," he says.

Watching him, it's not hard to believe.

Like any talented artist plying his craft, Wambua makes wood carving look effortless. He whittles away, rarely taking his eyes away from his project. Several times he leans back in his chair and emits a mighty yawn.

Wambua can carve a bird on request, a gazelle, a ceremonial mask, or an elephant. But it's not just a matter of picking up a piece of wood and shaping it into an animal or human.

"The wood has to speak for itself. I have to consult the wood and see what it says," Wambua says.

The length, diameter and flow of the wood all determine what shape it will take. He works primarily with *muhugu*, a hardwood tree related to mahogany, and African olive wood. Canadian maple isn't his usual medium.

First Wambua shaves off the bark with a large adze, then uses the smaller ones to shape his work. Two sizes of files give the piece its contours and a knife the detail work.

Traditionally, the head of an adze was fashioned from the armour-like hide of a rhinoceros, but with the hunting of that endangered creature now illegal, crafts people have resorted to using metal.

Many of Wambua's tools have stories of their own. His largest adze, Wambua forged from an old car

spring, while his 18-year-old saw half its original size. It used to be a saw, but has shrunk to about 18 in. use and sharpening, its jagged teeth angle from the handle.

The saw carries great sentiment who can carve most anything out. Wambua recently lost his prized tool in Saskatoon. "I almost went crazy," he said, he had left the tool at a television had been interviewed.

The shop in which Wambua labours, it's a massive shed with benches, dirt floors and waist-high carvers the option to work with



**O**FTEN is Wambua's fellow carver Masila. Masila is a carver in Kenya who has served in the British stationed in Tanzania rich wood 1919, Masila Kenya an passion w Fascinating neighbour carvers as their knowledge generation Kenyan g recognize commerce first Co-op "We can't the art," Richard Masila

Wambua on the Ten Thousand Villages, which has 50 locations in Canada and North America, accounts for 20 per cent of his business.

Some of the work in the Saint John workshop is somewhat crude, although all of it is made in the Nairobi KCCU workshop, a massive displays Wambua's, Masila's and other workers' creations.

Wambua could tell you who can explain that an artist's style is a writer's anarchic notepad scrawl.

He doesn't make mistakes, either carving, your mind is set on what you if you make a mistake, the mistake to me and nobody else."

The first mistake would be selection of wood. Wambua cautions that know avoided, as are logs with cracks. "It to be carved," he says.

Wambua has four apprentices and claims he could take even the clumsiest and turn the individual into you follow what I tell you, anybody carver."

Not everyone would agree. "I saw, a knife and a burning wood piece those crude instruments," the local offers.

Wambua has lost track of how much created, but estimates it would be a

Wood carving has become a me for Kenyans. Masila says, "We are We are earning a living."

Grant Kerr is a reporter for The St. John's Globe.



## PEOPLE

spring, while his 18-year-old saw has shrunk to about half its original size. It used to be a full-size carpentry saw, but has shrunk to about 18 inches through constant use and sharpening, its jagged teeth running at a steep angle from the handle.

The saw carries great sentimental value to the man who can carve most anything out of a piece of wood. Wambua recently lost his prized implement in Saskatoon. "I almost went crazy," he says. As it turned out, he had left the tool at a television station where he had been interviewed.

The shop in which Wambua labours employs 1,800 workers. It's a massive shed with hundreds of work benches, dirt floors and waist-high dividers, giving the carvers the option to work with whom they want.

**O**FTEN toiling by his side is Wambua's best friend and fellow master carver, Nzambu, grandson of Mutisya Munge, the founding father of Kenya wood carving. Munge served in the First World War for the British and was stationed in neighbouring Tanzania, a country with a rich wood-carving past. In 1919, Munge returned to Kenya and brought his new passion with him.

Fascinated, his friends and neighbours soon became carvers as well, passing on their knowledge through the generations. In 1964, the Kenyan government recognized the art's commercial potential and the first Co-operative was formed.

"We call him the father of the art," KCCU manager Richard Masila says.

Masila accompanies

Wambua on the Ten Thousand Villages tour. The chain, which has 50 locations in Canada and 200 stores across North America, accounts for 20 per cent of the KCCU's business.

Some of the work in the Saint John store is a bit crude, although all of it is beautiful. At the Nairobi KCCU workshop, a massive showroom displays Wambua's, Nzambu's and all the other workers' creations.

Wambua could tell you who carved what, too, explaining that an artist's style is as distinctive as a writer's anarchic notepad scrawl.

He doesn't make mistakes, either. "When you start a carving, your mind is set on what you are doing. Even if you make a mistake, the mistake will only be known to me and nobody else."

The first mistake would be selecting the wrong kind of wood. Wambua cautions that knots are to be avoided, as are logs with cracks. "After that, it's wood to be carved," he says.

Wambua has four apprentices studying under him and claims he could take even the most artistically clumsy and turn the individual into a decent carver. "If you follow what I tell you, anybody can become a good carver."

Not everyone would agree. "I can't do with a band saw, a knife and a burning wood pen what he can with those crude instruments," the local carver observer offers.

Wambua has lost track of how many carvings he has created, but estimates it would be more than a thousand.

Wood carving has become a metaphor for a new life for Kenyans, Masila says. "We are no longer beggars. We are earning a living."

Grant Kerr is a reporter for The Saint John Times Globe.



Stephen Wambua: 'The wood has to speak for itself. I have to consult the wood and see what it says.' (Peter Walsh photo)



**SUSTAINABLE WOOD CARVING**  
**April 1998**  
**Wamunyu, Makindu and Nairobi Co-ops,**  
**site visits**

**Wamunyu Co-op**

Wamunyu Co-op was last visited in December 1997. At that point it had appeared that progress on their tree nursery had stalled with little new development since July 1997. As of December a single small water storage tank has been completed and an area of land for a tree nursery was cleared, fenced and put into limited use. The materials for the construction of a large tank which had been purchased and delivered to the site, and the excavation for the construction of the large tank remained untouched. KCCU will make an attempt to re-energize the project during the KCCU AGM scheduled for the end of April. The next site visit planned for Wamunyu is early May.

**Makindu Co-op**

In January 1998 Makindu co-op was a stop for a tour group comprised of twelve Ten Thousand Villages store managers who were visiting Kenya from the USA and Canada. The newly constructed tank which was in use, and the expanded and thriving tree nursery provided the visitors with a good first hand look at what is happening with the extra 3% KCCU adds to the selling price of their wood products. Also during this visit the four winners of the recent "good wood" design competition were awarded with an assortment of carving tools selected to compliment their standard kit of carving tools. The tour of the tree nursery, the ceremony for awarding the tools and a number of speeches highlighted the partnership between KCCU and Ten Thousand Villages and emphasized the importance of reforestation efforts and the use of good wood for carving to both co-op members and the visitors alike.

**Nairobi Co-op**

In a surprise development a tree nursery has sprouted at the Nairobi co-op. Work here began early in the year with a small start up fund provided from the KCCU reforestation account. As of February a plot has been cleared, fenced off and opened with a few potted seedlings. It is pleasing to see such an initiative take root. Progress will be followed with great interest.





*above:*  
The new tree nursery at the  
Nairobi Co-op.

*right:*  
Makindu carver, Daniel Wambua  
works on a copy of his winning  
design.





## Finances

The following summary outlines the distribution of funds received by KCCU for reforestation from Ten Thousand Villages payments during the period of Oct 96 to Jan 98.

Wamunyu co-op	USA \$2830
Makindu co-op	\$2830
Nairobi co-op	\$ 380
total	USA <u>\$6040</u>

The above figures provided by KCCU agree (within 2%) with MCC records of Ten Thousand Villages payments. The small discrepancy noted can be attributed to varying currency exchange rates.

KCCU did not provide detailed accounting of specific expenditures but observations on regular site visits suggest the funds have been directed appropriately. In the initial KCCU proposal dated August 1996, construction of a large tank and purchase of pump at Makindu was estimated to require \$3,500 and the construction of a single large tank at the Wamunyu was estimated at \$3,000.

Makindu has completed the construction of their large tank and made significant expansions to the tree nursery area with a total expenditure of \$2830. Compared to the August 96 estimate where a single large tank construction would require \$3,000 it would appear that Makindu has done well.

The pump which was earlier reported as being purchased by Makindu through Ten Thousand Villages payments also ended up receiving funding from TraidCraft. As a result of this double funding for the same item, the Ten Thousand Villages contribution provided for the pump was re-allocated amongst the three KCCU tree nursery projects. The double funding for the pump was rather un-expected as some years ago Makindu's request to TraidCraft for a donation of a pump had gone unanswered. In light of that response, the pump was included in the Aug 96 proposal to Ten Thousand Villages but when TraidCraft funds appeared a responsible action was taken and the cash received via Ten Thousand Villages was re-directed.

At Wamunyu, a tree nursery area is established, the small water tank completely constructed and work has begun on the large tank. Funding received to date at Wamunyu is USA \$2830. Undoubtedly additional funds will be required for labour to complete the construction of the second tank, but assuming these labour costs remain within reasonable limits, Wamunyu should also show good results for the money spent in comparison to initial estimates.

The Nairobi initiative is so far a very modest undertaking, but it does mark a beginning.



## Exhibition

A Nairobi exhibition featuring the carving of good wood was planned to open in February to build an environmental awareness in the local market. After some delays the event finally got under way by 24 March in Viking House, a building located in a very popular craft marketing area of Westlands in Nairobi. The owner of the building offered an empty store front for the exhibition as a donation to the environmental cause.

Stephen Wambua and Lucius Masilo, two carvers from the Nairobi co-op brought in some grevillea logs and began carving in the store space where they worked for two weeks to produce a number of items carved from a "good wood" tree species. During this time they demonstrated their carving skills to the public and answered questions about the importance of carving good wood. After the two weeks of demonstration, an opening ceremony was held to officially launch the exhibition called, "Carving Good Wood". The exhibition included completed works, and works in progress, as well as information and photographs detailing the KCCU reforestation program. The MCC budget for the event was small and provided compensation to the carvers for only the two week demonstration period, after which the exhibition was to remain open to the public without carvers until the end of April.

The demonstrations and exhibition were advertised in a number of craft shops and hotels around town and invitations were sent to a few individuals on a rather short mailing list. Several newspapers were sent briefing material and invited to attend the opening or visit the demonstrations. Only one paper sent a reporter and an article (appended to this report) did appear a few days before the exhibition opening. The opening was attended by about 50 people who listened to speeches, viewed the carvings and printed material in the display, watched the slide show about the wood study produced by the National Museums of Kenya and enjoyed refreshments provided by Viking House owner.

Response to the demonstration and the opening were well received; comments in the visitors book were generally positive though a few noted that the exhibition deserved greater publicity. The owner of the building was very pleased with the attention that the demonstration was giving to his place and extended his offer of the free space for several more weeks. Given that there was a ready market for the carvings that were produced the decision was made to sell those items and use the proceeds finance a prolonged demonstration. It is now planned to continue the demonstrations along with the exhibition until mid May.

In the meantime interest has been expressed by Ten Thousand Villages about having the exhibition made available for touring through Ten Thousand Villages stores in North America. The exhibition would be a good follow up to the tour that the KCCU

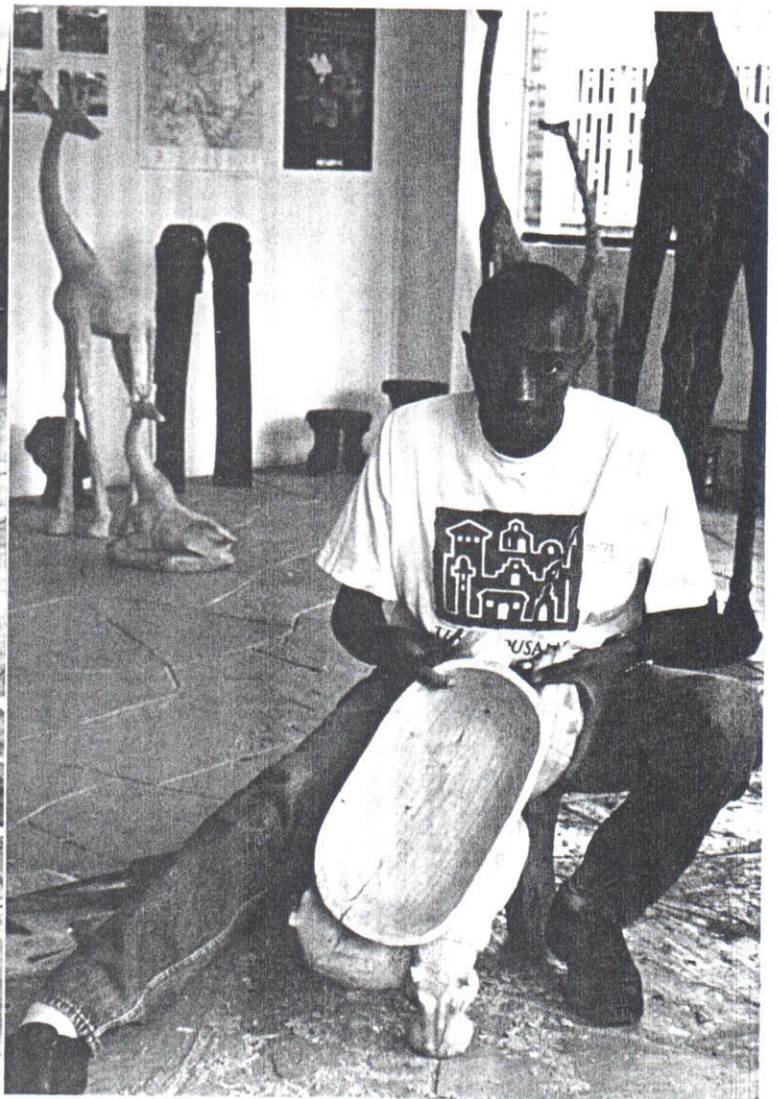


manager and a carver made through North America late last year. Currently the display material is being reproduced and additional good wood carvings commissioned so that at least two complete exhibitions can be included in a container being shipped to Canada in early May.

Appended are some of the photographs and information which accompanied the display.

*below:*

*Lucius Masilo (left) and Stephen Wambua (right) demonstrate carving skills for the Viking House exhibition*





# CARVING

## GOOD WOOD

visit

VIKING HOUSE to see MASTER CARVERS  
at work

### DEMONSTRATIONS

March 24 to April 11

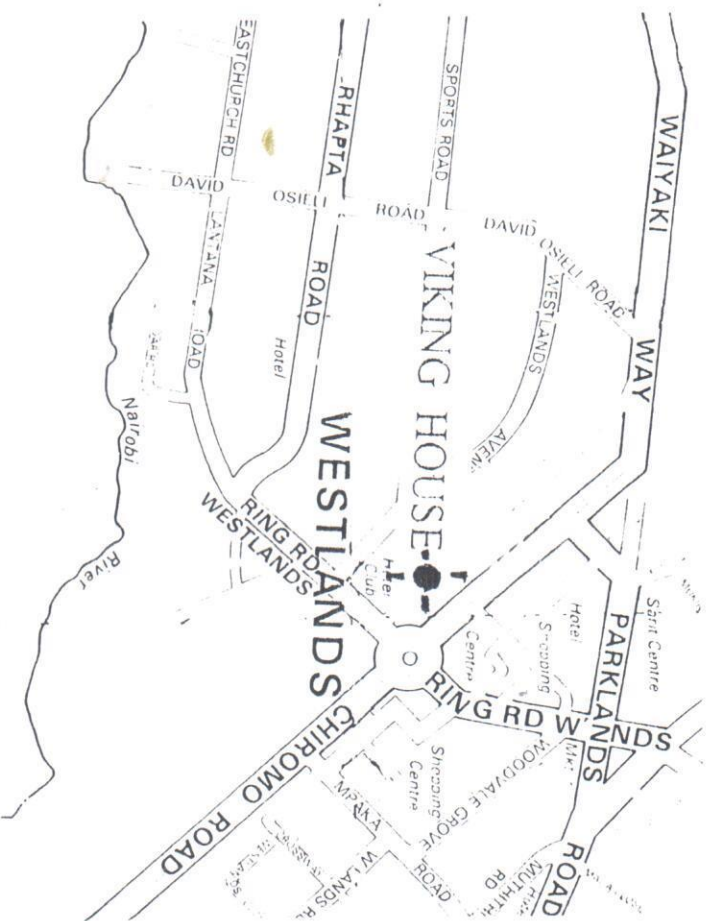
### official EXHIBITION opening

April 8 at 6:00 pm

discover

what wood carvers are doing about forest conservation

why you should ask for good wood carvings





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Environmental Conservation  
and  
Carved Wood Crafts

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you are invited to attend  
the opening of an exhibition featuring  
the use of environmentally sustainable wood

CARVING GOOD WOOD

please join us at Viking House  
April 8th 1998 at 6:00 PM

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Welcome to

## “CARVING GOOD WOOD”

All of the items on display in this room are carved from the wood of fast growing species of trees which can be cultivated and managed as an environmentally sustainable resource for future generations of carvers.

Please inquire for more details.



# WOOD CARVING IN KENYA

In Kenya the production of handicrafts makes a significant contribution to the national economy and provides meaningful employment to many individuals working in the jua kali and small scale business sectors. Many types of Kenyan handicrafts are known around the world but of all of these crafts, wood carving may be the most famous. Wood carving in Kenya is indeed a big business; recent research has concluded that there are more than 50,000 Kenyan wood carvers and that each carver generates an additional 5 jobs in activities supporting the carving. Thus wood carving contributes in whole or part to the livelihood of over 300,000 Kenyans. (Obunga R., Sustainable Development of Wood Carving Industry in Kenya, NMK 1995.)

Traditionally Kenyan carvers have preferred a few selected hardwood tree species for carving. (Typically ebony, mahogany, african olive have been favoured.) Unfortunately these species tend to be slow growing and have become over exploited due to increasing demands from harvesters seeking wood for construction, furniture and fuel purposes as well as for carving. As a result, deforestation has become a very serious problem in Kenya. The carvers are keenly aware that this is an issue that affects all Kenyans and especially them as their own livelihood is at stake.

The Kenyan wood carving industry is highly organized with nearly 20,000 individuals (or 40% of the total population of carvers) maintaining membership in six wood carving co-operative societies located from Nairobi through Machakos to the coastal region. These six co-ops have an established umbrella agency known as the Kenya Crafts Co-operative Union (KCCU) which serves as a joint marketing and regulatory body for the individual co-ops. Through KCCU, the carvers are addressing the challenges they face due to deforestation. In conjunction with a number of interested organizations, KCCU is active in educating its membership about deforestation issues as well as by implementing reforestation programs at three of the co-ops and by promoting the use of fast growing tree species for carving. (Mango, neem, jacaranda, grevillea and itula are viable options available in most areas.)

For a meaningful shift to environmentally sustainable carving it is essential to educate both the producers and the consumers of carved wood products. The KCCU carvers are taking steps towards change at their end of the industry, but their efforts will only succeed if consumers respond in kind by requesting sustainable wood products when purchasing. The Viking House exhibition, "Carving Good Wood", is one step in promoting a greater awareness of the environmental issues at stake in this sector. Through efforts such as this consumers can be informed and encouraged to buy responsibly and by so doing, participate in maintaining a future for both carvers and forests in Kenya.

For more information on how you can obtain "good wood" carvings, whether for personal purchases, local retailing or international exporting, contact the general manager of the Kenya Crafts Co-operative Union (KCCU) at tel. 761745 or PO Box 67530 Nairobi.



# THE WOOD STUDY

The Kenyan wood carving industry is a highly visible and important sector of the Kenyan economy but until recently there has been little study given to its dynamics.

In response to the growing deforestation problem which threatens the survival of both the carvers and the forest resource, a study group comprised of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI), the Kenya Energy Non Government Organization (KENGO), the Kenya Crafts Co-operative Union (KCCU) and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) was established to examine the problems facing the carving industry and to identify and propose actions that could make the woodcarving industry more sustainable. The two year study was implemented in mid 1995 under the auspices of the National Museums of Kenya and jointly funded by the People and Plants Initiative of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Royal Botanical Gardens, KEW (UK).

The study collected baseline information to determine meaningful assessments of the forest resource used by the carvers and to disseminate information as a means of creating awareness about the sustainability of the wood carving industry in Kenya.

The study provided significant findings in a number of areas including the identification of alternative woods suitable for carving which could be managed on a sustainable basis as a source of wood for future generations of carvers. At the production end of the carving business these findings led to the development tree nurseries and reforestation efforts at carving co-operative sites, and the promotion of the alternatives woods for carving. On the consumer side, it was clear that efforts were required to encourage the purchasing of environmentally sustainable carved products, and to introduce the notion that the consumer must share in the cost of reforestation.



# KENYA CRAFTS CO-OPERATIVE UNION

KCCU is an umbrella organization representing six major wood carvers co-ops from Nairobi, Wamunyu, Makindu, Mombasa, Malindi and Nanyuki. KCCU was formed to facilitate export marketing for the member co-ops and to perform some regulatory functions. KCCU is governed by a board of directors elected from each of the member co-ops. Daily activities are overseen by a general manager and an administrative assistant.

The combined total of all carvers in the KCCU family of co-ops is about 20,000 individuals or roughly 40% of the total of all carvers in Kenya. With these numbers KCCU is clearly very well-positioned to wield a very significant influence in the Kenyan wood carving business. Carvers face many challenges in their lives but perhaps the issue of deforestation is the most crucial of all, as without the resource there is no future for a carver. In an effort to address the problem of deforestation, KCCU is actively promoting:

- i. education and awareness building in each co-op,
- ii. the use of sustainable species of wood for carving
- iii. the establishment of tree nurseries at the co-op locations.
- iv. the implementation of a 3% surcharge on all sales which is used to finance reforestation programs in the co-ops.



# MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

MCC is a relief and development agency of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in North America. Job creation is an MCC program priority in East Africa and part of this job creation agenda includes the marketing of handicrafts to North America through the MCC Ten Thousand Villages program. Ten Thousand Villages is a non-profit alternative trade organization which seeks to provide vital and fair income to Third World people by selling their handicrafts and telling their stories in North America.

In Kenya, Ten Thousand Villages is not only the major export market for KCCU products, but also a committed partner to KCCU. Ten Thousand Villages representatives have worked closely with KCCU in developing new products, providing North American market information and in educating the North American market about realities facing producers.

For the past several years the issue of deforestation in Kenya has been a major concern in the Ten Thousand Villages marketing program but it has become apparent that balancing carvers jobs with conserving the environment is not necessarily a conflict. Considerable effort has been dedicated to experimentation with environmentally sustainable alternative tree species for carving and it has been determined that viable options do exist.

Each year Ten Thousand Villages is increasing the proportion of orders of KCCU products which are made from the alternative woods. At the same time KCCU is developing an ever strengthening reforestation program with the 3% surcharge collected on sales to Ten Thousand Villages. It is anticipated that as the alternative species are cultivated and managed by the KCCU membership a sustainable resource of timber will be established in order to ensure a livelihood for future generations of carvers in Kenya.



# TREE NURSERIES

For the past 18 months KCCU has been charging a 3% surcharge on all products sold to Ten Thousand Villages. The funds collected are entirely dedicated to a reforestation program in the KCCU member co-ops. The KCCU board meets regularly to determine how these funds should be distributed and to date three co-ops have been selected to utilize the proceeds.

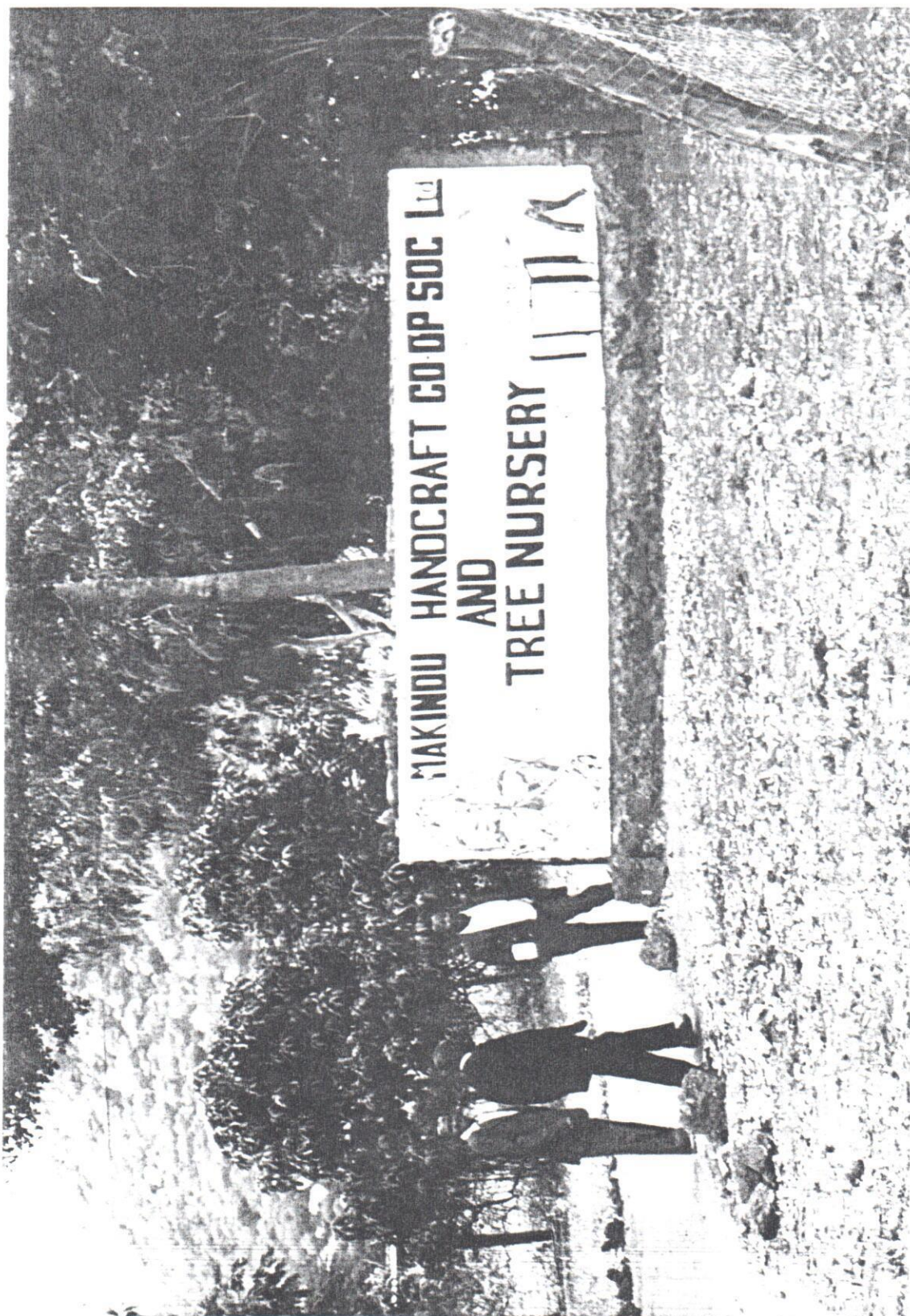
Though it is a small co-op, Makindu has succeeded in building up a well managed tree nursery over the past decade. In the past year the "reforestation surcharge" collected on export sales have been sufficient to construct a second water storage tank and expand the existing nursery. Many varieties of trees in addition to those suitable for carving are raised at the Makindu nursery. These seedlings are sold to co-op members and the general public.

In an effort to promote the use of good wood, Ten Thousand Villages recently sponsored a design competition open to all members of all the KCCU co-ops. The winner would be the first carver whose new design would be ordered in quantity for export to North America. In the end three new designs were ordered resulting in three winners. All of these carvers were members of the Makindu co-op.

Wamunyu co-op started work on their nursery when the first funds from the reforestation surcharge on export sales began to arrive. Their first task was to complete a small rain storage tank which could provide water for the construction needs of a second much larger tank. The small tank has also enabled the beginning of a few small seed beds in the new nursery area.

Nairobi co-op is the third of the KCCU co-ops to begin a tree nursery. Work here has just begun but the initiative is a positive development.





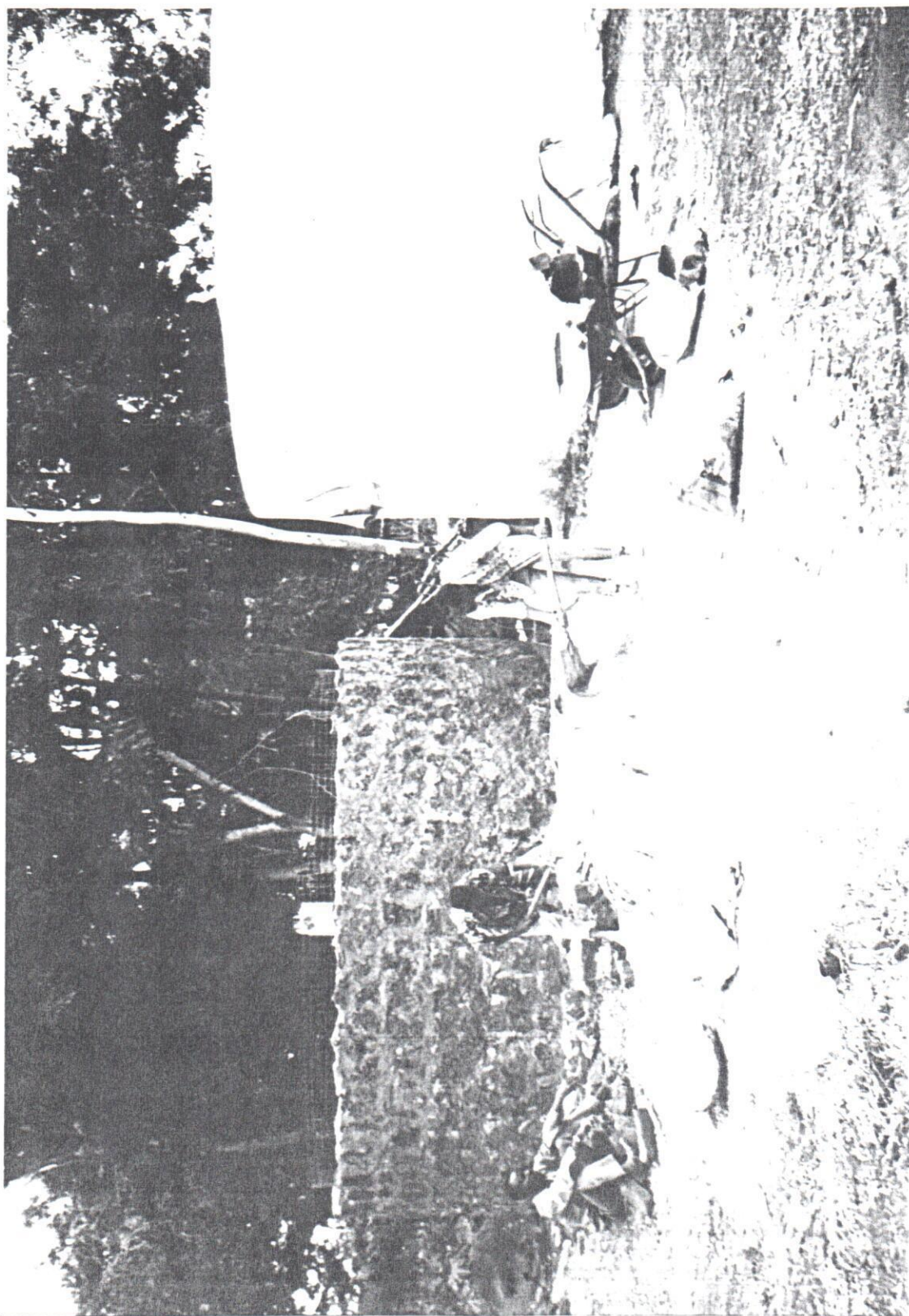
The Makindu Handicraft Co-op is located a few miles east of Makindu town along the Nairobi - Mombasa road.





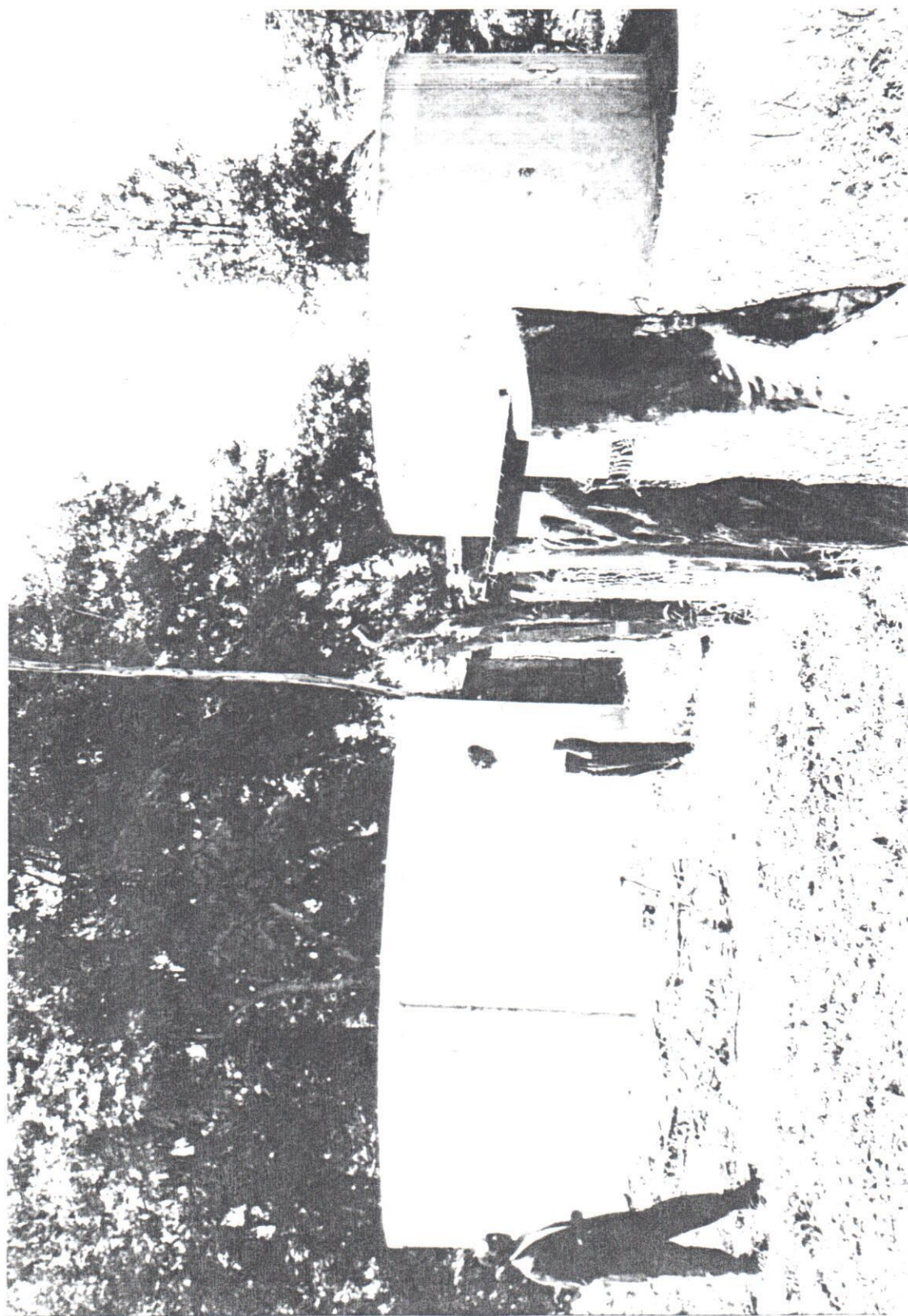
The well established tree nursery at Makindu Co-op.





A second water storage tank under construction at Makindu co-op will provide enough additional water storage capacity to almost double the size of the co-op tree nursery.





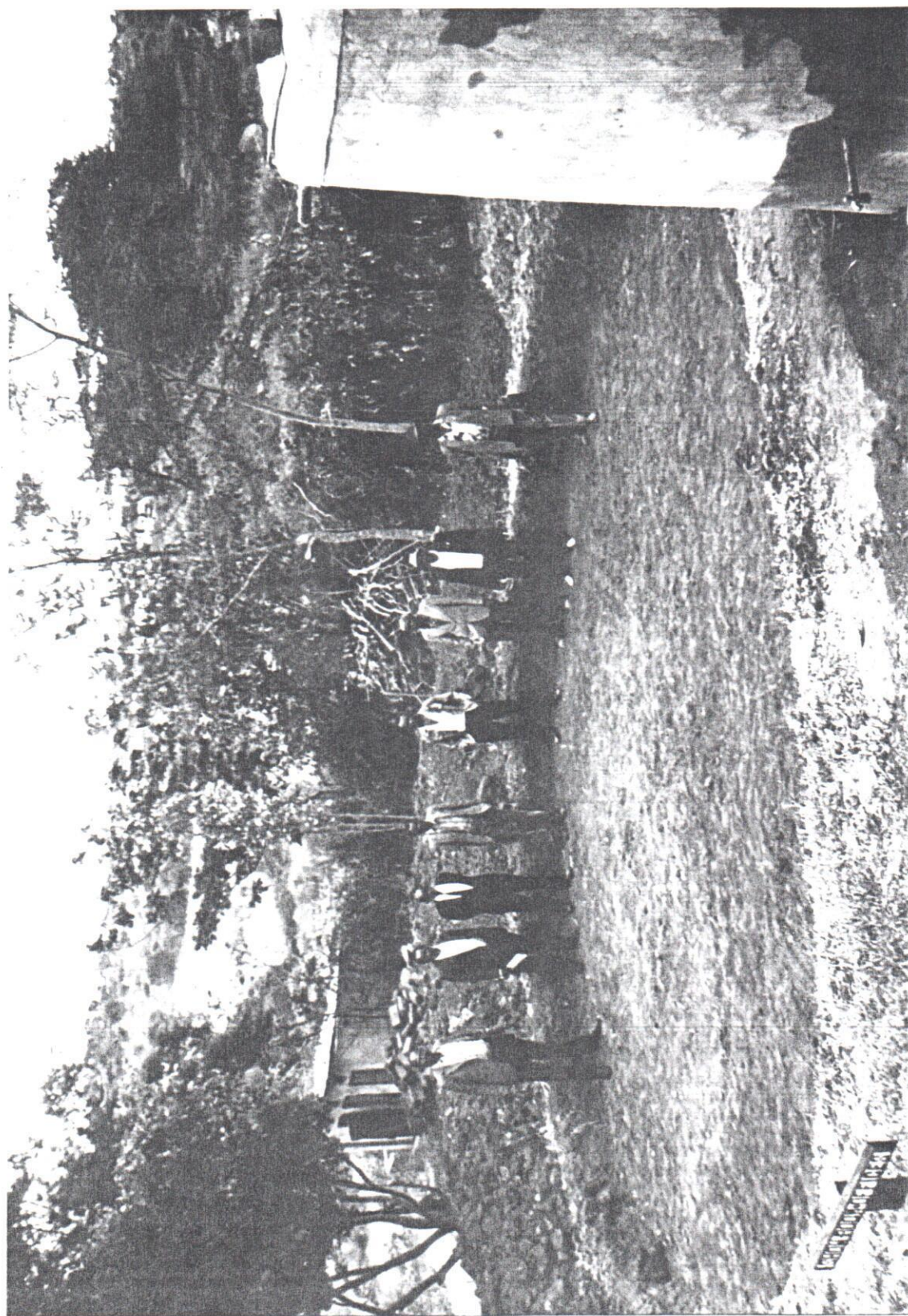
The completed tank is included within the boundaries of the expanded nursery plot.





Makindu carver, Daniel Wambua works on a copy of his award winning design from a recent competition in which new "good wood" products were featured





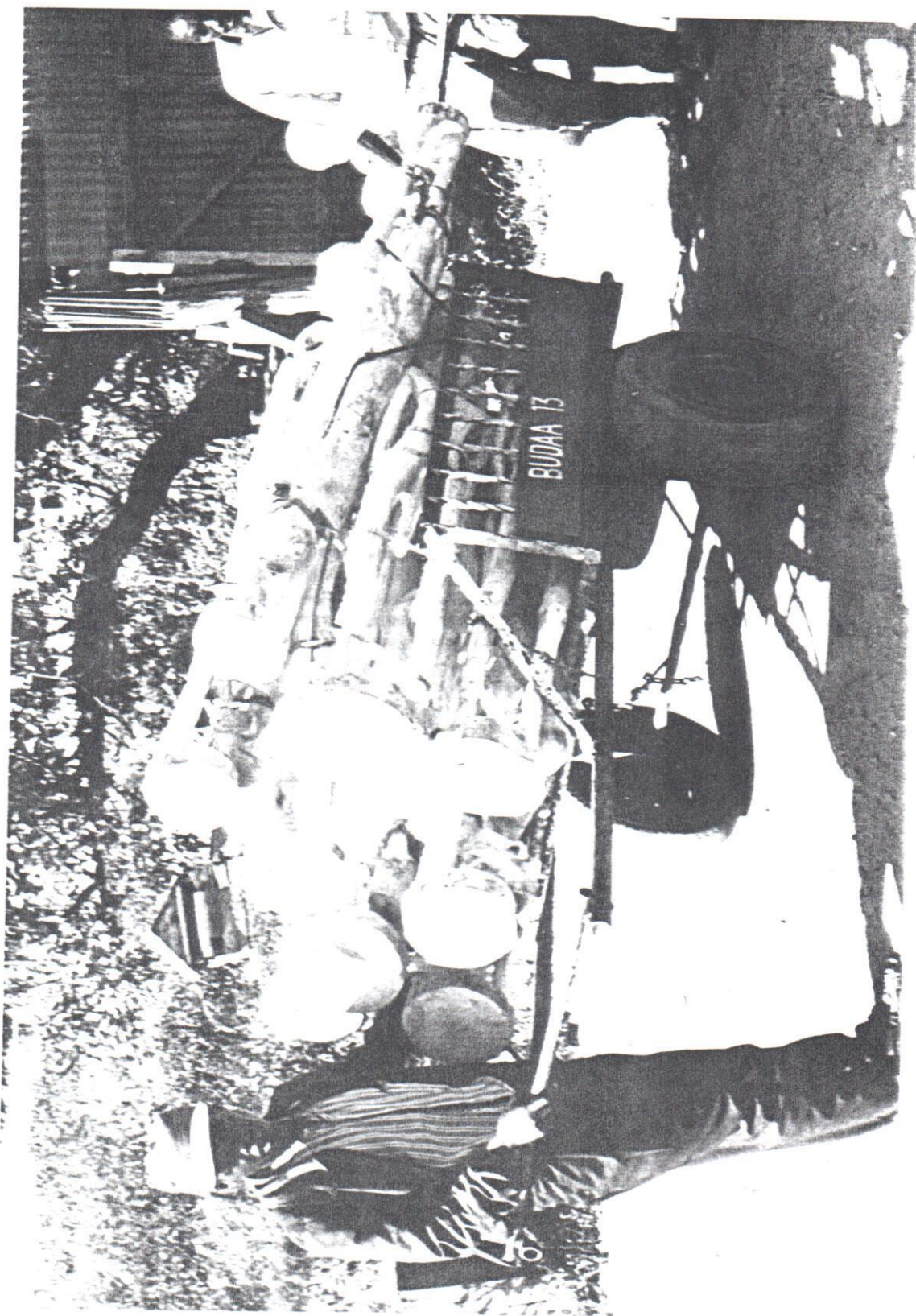
A newly constructed water tank (right) above an excavation for the main tank at Wamunyu Co-op.





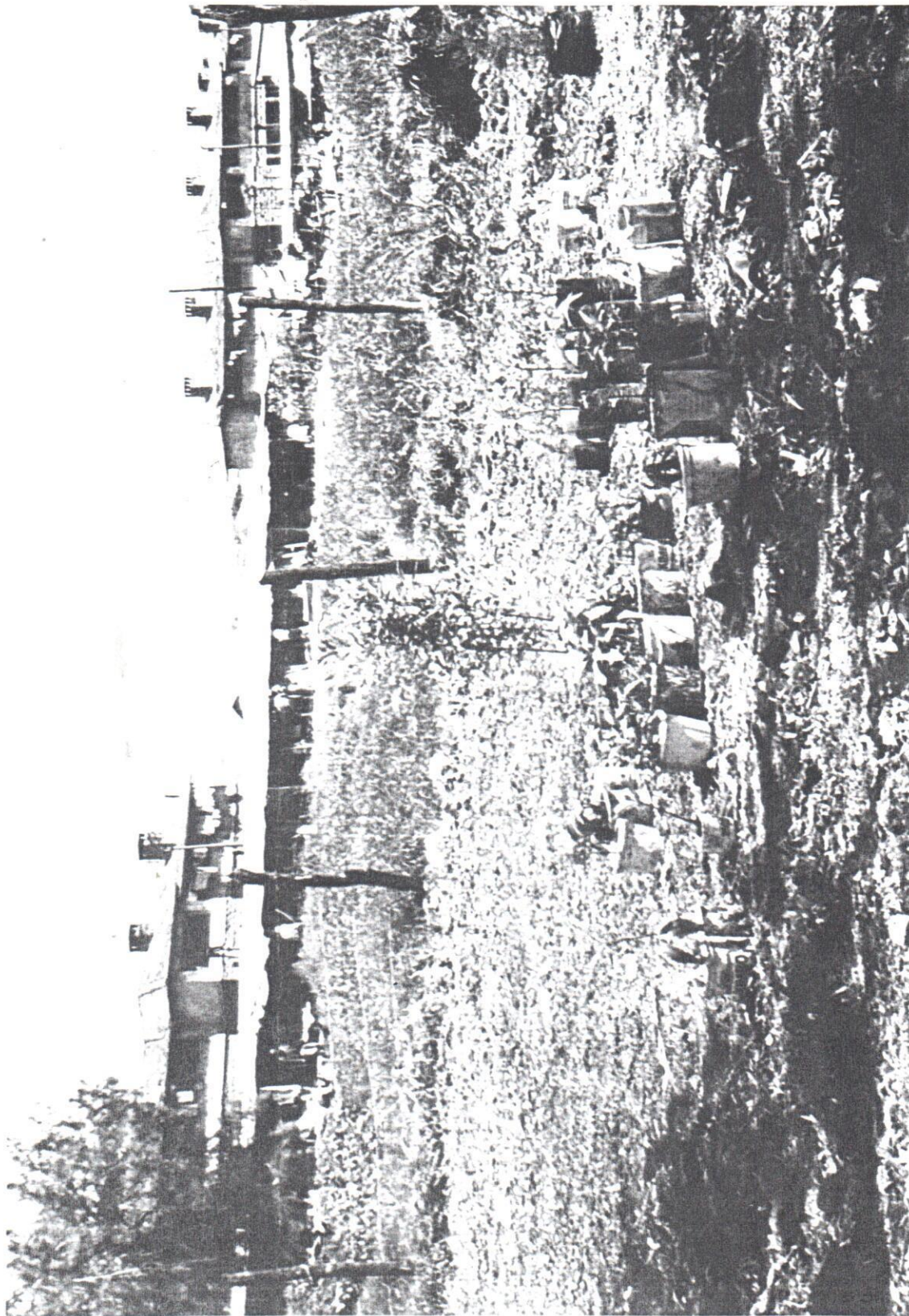
An inaugural watering of the first seed bed at the Wamunyu Co-op, attended by co-op officers.





Sculptures carved from "good wood" being shifted at the Nairobi Co-op.





The fledgling tree nursery recently established at the Nairobi Co-op.



# THE PEOPLE

Fair, Frank and Fearless

K. 266 NAIROBI

April 3-9, 1998

Weekly

## Wood carvers enjoined in fight against deforestation

By TERVIL OKOKO

**F**aced with the ever rising demand for wood materials by building contractors, environmental lobby groups who are concerned with the depletion of forests and other rare wood species and wood sculptors all over the world, are now going for what they call a meaningful shift to environmentally sustainable carving.

Your carving of a zebra can now be made out of a mango tree as you enjoy the fruit, an exhibition of wood sculpture, titled *Carving Good Wood*, reveals.

Traditionally, wood carvers have preferred a few selected hardwood tree species for carving. However, the current trend in environmental management and competition for these hardwood species greatly militate against such practices. The preferred species, typically, ebony, mahogany, African olive and oak, tend to be slow growing and have become over exploited due to the increasing demands from harvesters seeking wood for construction, furniture and fuel purposes as well as for carving.

The exhibition that opened at Viking House, Westlands featuring works by master carvers, opened on March 24 and continues to April 11. According to a study, wood carving contributes in whole or part to the livelihood of over 300,000 Kenyans and it is this fact that makes the exhibition as relevant as any other life-affecting policy-formulation function.

The exhibition, which was organised by the Kenya Crafts Co-operative Union (KCCU), which is an umbrella group consisting of more than 20,000 individual artists and six member organisations drawn from Machakos, the Coast region, Nanyuki, Malindi and Nairobi, was actually a showcase of what carvers can do with wood without necessarily interfering with the environment. Through the KCCU, the carvers are addressing the challenges they face due to deforestation.

In conjunction with a number of interested organisations, the union is active in educating both its members and the public on the need to implement reforestation programmes at three of the co-operatives and by promoting the use of fast growing tree species for carvings such as mango, enema, jacaranda, and greville trees as viable options available in most areas. The exhibition was sponsored by MCC, a relief and development agency of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Churches in North America.