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**Community-Based Documentation of Indigenous Knowledge (IK),  
Awareness and Conservation of Cultural and Genetic Diversity of  
the Bottle Gourd (*Lagenaria siceraria*) in Kitui District, Kenya**

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**Abstract**

The Bottle Gourd in Kitui District, Kenya is known locally as “Kitete” and refers to the species *Lagenaria siceraria*, *Cucurbitaceae*. Kitui District of Kenya, which is inhabited by the Kamba people, is a region that combines ideal growing conditions for Kitete with rich cultural knowledge about varied uses and types. For the Kamba people of Kitui District, Kitete is a key item of their material culture and it is found in virtually every aspect of their traditional life.

Kitete is grown to produce a great variety of containers and is also consumed as food.

Its use and value of late has been greatly undermined by the use of plastic and other related manufactured containers. This has caused an erosion of local knowledge and therefore threatening the local varieties of Kitete with extinction. The use of clay-sealed Kitete containers to store seeds for planting has been an effective local practice for cheap and safe chemical-free storage of seeds. The reduced availability of Kitete is having a negative impact on seed storage and food security in Kitui villages.

The Kamba culture is intricately intertwined with Kitete and therefore loss of its knowledge and the species would mean loss of the key items of this Kamba culture. Recent surveys have shown that the transfer of Indigenous Knowledge IK to the young generation is much less than before. Interest to use the plant among young families is also less. Any efforts to conserve the local varieties of the species would therefore need to go hand in hand with transfer of knowledge from the older to the young.

A two-year project aimed at “conserving the diversity of bottle gourd and its associated Indigenous Knowledge (IK) through awareness creation, increased cultivation, documentation and dissemination of IK” has been initiated. This project is being implemented by Kyanika Adult Women Group (KAWG) at a local village in the eastern part of Kenya.

The aim of this study is to present the method used to achieve IK and bottle gourd conservation as well as constraints and achievements of the project.

**Keywords:** Biodiversity conservation, Bottle gourd (*Lagenaria siceraria*), CBO, *Cucurbitaceae*, IK documentation, Kenya, PGR