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Cultural Influence of Forest Perception and Forest Use among the Tiriki Community in West Kenya

BARBARA TAUBERT, JÜRGEN PRETZSCH

Technical University of Dresden, Institute of Internationale Forestry and Forest Products, Germany

Abstract

Although globalisation is ongoing rapidly, in Kenya forests can be identified, which are managed by local people in a traditional and sustainable way. It is assumed, that the related perception of forest use is based on specific values and attitudes. The aim of this paper is to investigate intangible forest related values and attitudes of the Tiriki. The sacred community forests of the Tiriki are described as rich in biodiversity. The study investigates cultural constructs that influence the perception and use of these forests. It is investigated which role traditional and religious practices play in this context. Main emphasis is given to contemporary connections of the Tiriki and ‘their’ sacred forests. Traditional and modern intangible values are investigated to understand the importance of sacred forested places and to elucidate differences to governmentally administered forests.

Based on a case study approach the following data collection methods are being applied: review of documentary material, accompanying community members to spiritual places and activities, photographs, group discussion, semi-structured and narrative interviews. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using the software MAXqda2.

The analysis of the interviews reveals that forest related intangible values can be classified and hierarchically structured taking reference to Bagatzky (1986). On the highest level of abstract principles the common sense and the closed canopy as well as a selection of special indigenous tree species of sacred forests as cultural places can be identified. On lower levels the direct protection of the forest and related practical rules are clearly stated (e. g. who is allowed to perform which activities inside these forests). The Tiriki are known to obey their simple rules very strictly (common sense). This will be illustrated with examples.

With the further data analysis tangible indicators of culturally appropriate forest use will be derived and may be used for the formulation of guidelines for sustainable forest management.

Keywords: Attitudes, cultural impact, forest use, perception, sacred forest, tiriki, values