

**Critical Action Research: Exploring
Organisational Learning and Sustainability in
a Kenyan Context**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate School of the Environment
Macquarie University
May 2008

Abstract

The main goal of this study was to deepen an understanding of exploring organisational learning and sustainability using critical action research methodology in a Kenyan context. The research process involved a group of 23 middle level management employees of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) in identifying and acting on sustainability issues. This group was designed and cultivated as a community of practice for organisational learning purposes. The basic premise underlying the study is that exploring agential, structural and cultural interactions (morphogenetic relationships) through educational interventions (communicative interactions) in a community of practice can deepen context specific understanding of organisational learning and sustainability. I developed this argument by drawing on a complex philosophical framework that brought together assumptions from Archerian social realism, Deweyan pragmatism and critical theory. The framework underpinned three distinct and yet related theoretical perspectives – the Archerian morphogenetic approach, Habermasian critical theory and Lave and Wenger’s communities of practice. The Archerian morphogenetic approach and Habermasian critical theory respectively provided ontological and epistemological perspectives for the study. Lave and Wenger’s communities of practice approach provided both a unit of analysis (the NMK community) and a social theory of learning to complement the Archerian and Habermasian theoretical perspectives.

I generated data within a 14-month period between March 2005 and March 2007 in three distinct but integrally intertwined broad action research cycles of inquiry. During the first cycle, the research group identified contextual issues related to organisational learning and sustainability. In the second cycle the group investigated the issues deeper and deliberated possibilities for social change and the emergence of sustainability. The final cycle delineated social learning outcomes from the study and explored ways of institutionalising social change processes. Throughout these cycles, I explored ways of knowing the social reality of enabling organisational learning and sustainability. The cycles were integral to communicative interactions, which I implemented as educational interventions for developing agency in the NMK community of practice. Data analysis was undertaken

within cyclical processes of entering and managing data, manual coding and developing categories, identifying themes, presenting results and validating findings.

Undertaking a collaborative critical organisational analysis of the NMK revealed various contextual factors that both constrained and enabled participant learning capabilities and reflexivity to address sustainability issues. These factors manifested as contextually mediated issues of communication and information flows, decision making and leadership (governance), staff motivation and development, financial management and the identity and role of the NMK. The research process promoted collective social action and innovation, fostered critical reflections and reflexivity, enhanced democratic deliberations and strengthened systemic thinking capabilities in the NMK community of practice. This study contributes to the body of literature on environmental education in its employment of a coherent and complex philosophical and theoretical framework for exploring organisational learning and sustainability.

Declaration

This thesis is submitted in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Macquarie University. I declare that the work described herein is original, except where otherwise indicated and acknowledged. I further declare that this thesis has not, either in part or whole, been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Abel Barasa Atiti

30 May 2008

Acknowledgements

The realisation of this study was possible as a result of collaboration with many people at the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) and Macquarie University (MU). I am grateful for the tremendous support I received from the management of the NMK. I would like to sincerely thank Dr Idle Farah, the NMK Director-General, for granting me permission to undertake this research and also for allowing me to access the facilities, financial and human resources at the NMK. His overwhelming support for this research project stimulated me to investigate issues that colleagues thought were subversive to surface. I am grateful to all the Directors, Heads of departments and colleagues at the NMK for their support during the action phase of this research. I am greatly indebted to the 23 colleagues who participated in this research as members of a community of practice. Their humour, heated debates and commitment to the research process kept the sustainability spirit in me burning. Special thanks to the top management team and other colleagues who took part in the research workshops. I sincerely thank the proprietor and staff of Langi Langi Cafeteria for providing meals during the research meetings at the NMK.

I am greatly indebted to Macquarie University for awarding me the International Macquarie University Research Scholarship (IMURS) that enabled me to undertake this study. For this I am grateful to the Graduate School of the Environment (GSE) and the Environmental and Life Science (ELS) Division through which this scholarship and research funding was administered. Special thanks to Prof Daniella Tilbury through whose support I secured the IMURS. I am very grateful for the support I received from the GSE during my candidature at Macquarie University. My sincere gratitude goes to Prof Peter Nelson for his unwavering support. Thanks to Dr Trish Fanning, Dr. Anna Lyth, Dr Ros Taplin, Dr John Merrick, Wendy Goldstein and all other GSE staff whose names I have not mentioned for making me feel part of the GSE community. My special thanks go to Gunnella Murphy for her sisterly support and kindness. Special thanks are also due to Jane Yang of ELS centre for her moral support during the last months of my candidature. I sincerely thank the Higher Degree Research Unit staff for their support during my entire candidature at Macquarie. Special thanks go to Leanne Price, Lanna Leung and Jane Kim for their support.

I wish to pay a special tribute to my three academic supervisors, Prof Anne Burns, Prof Heila Lotz-Sisitka and Prof Daniella Tilbury. I am grateful to Prof Anne Burns for guiding me through to completion after taking over from Prof Daniella Tilbury as my principal supervisor. Her constant encouraging words and motivation during the difficult moments of thesis writing made it possible for me to see light at the end of the tunnel. Thanks to Prof Daniella Tilbury for inspiring me to join Macquarie University and also for motivating me to design the study within the area of organisational learning and sustainability. I am greatly indebted to Prof Heila Lotz-Sisitka for her intellectual input that helped me get out of a theoretical impasse. Her critical comments and constant ‘lionising’ kept me on my toes and out of my comfort zone.

I sincerely thank my fellow PhD students at the GSE and Linguistic Departments for their moral support. Special thanks to Maria who shared an office space with me and treated me like a brother. I extend my gratitude to her husband Manuel for his kindness. Thanks to Dimity, Upma, Claire, Vera, Thomas, Justus, Susan, Janet, Tony, Yai, Pushan and many others whose names are not included here. I am greatly indebted to my long time friend Dr Justin Lupele for being a wonderful critical friend. His phone calls from Africa kept me going during moments of despair and academic writing anguish. Special thanks to Asmina of Bath University and Lisa Ryan of Sunshine University. I am grateful to Lisa, Michael, Cathy, Tendai, Sharon and Rick for their support and hospitality. Helen de Silva Joyce needs special mention here for proof reading my thesis. Thanks Helen for your excellent work and big heart. Special thanks to the Munoz family for being generous to me as their tenant. I am grateful to Mira Kim for providing advice on thesis printing and binding.

Lastly I want to express great solid gratitude to my wife and children who braved my long periods of absence especially during the political and ethnic unrest in Kenya. Balancing research work and family life can be a major problem. This study has given me greater insight into the conclusion that being better at studies and better family relations go hand in hand. To my wife and children may the enabling forces of social change and sustainability be with you always.

In loving memory of my father

To my mother, wife and children

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgements	v
List of Figures	xiv
List of Tables	xiv
List of Boxes	xiv
Acronyms	xv

PART 1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES **1**

CHAPTER 1 GETTING A SENSE OF THE RESEARCH TERRAIN **2**

1.1 INTRODUCTION	2
1.2 POSITIONING MYSELF	2
1.3 RESEARCH AIMS AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY	5
1.3.1 <i>Research aims</i>	5
1.3.2 <i>Motivation</i>	7
1.4 PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE STUDY	8
1.4.1 <i>Critical realism</i>	10
1.4.2 <i>Deweyan pragmatism</i>	13
1.4.3 <i>Critical tradition</i>	15
1.4.4 <i>Communities of practice approach</i>	16
1.5 CLARIFICATION OF THEORETICAL CONCEPTS	19
1.5.1 <i>Communicative interactions</i>	19
1.5.2 <i>Critical pedagogy</i>	21
1.5.3 <i>Democratic deliberations</i>	22
1.5.4 <i>Morphogenetic relationships</i>	22
1.5.5 <i>Organisational learning and sustainability</i>	23
1.5.6 <i>Systems thinking</i>	24
1.6 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY	25
1.7 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS	26
1.8 SUMMARY	28

CHAPTER 2 SHAPING CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES **29**

2.1 INTRODUCTION	29
2.2 THE KENYAN CONTEXT	30
2.2.1 <i>Biophysical dimensions: issues and responses</i>	31
2.2.2 <i>Political dimensions: issues and responses</i>	35
2.2.3 <i>Social and economic dimensions: issues and responses</i>	40
2.3 THE NMK ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT	46
2.3.1 <i>Vision, mission and management structure</i>	47
2.3.2 <i>Past and existing organisational changes</i>	49
2.3.3 <i>The role of the NMK in enhancing sustainability</i>	52
2.4 AN OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABILITY	55

2.4.1	<i>Evolution, development and critiques of environmental education</i>	55
2.4.2	<i>Reorientation of education towards sustainability</i>	58
2.4.3	<i>Environmental education as open processes of learning and change</i>	60
2.5	SUMMARY	63

PART 2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY **65**

CHAPTER 3 UNDERSTANDING ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE **66**

3.1	INTRODUCTION	66
3.2	THE ROLE OF SOCIAL THEORY IN CHANGE	66
3.2.1	<i>Drawing on different social theories</i>	67
3.2.2	<i>Views on the nature of organisations</i>	71
3.2.3	<i>Change agency</i>	72
3.2.4	<i>Structure as an emergent stratum of reality</i>	74
3.2.5	<i>Conceptualising culture as an emergent stratum of reality</i>	76
3.3	ARCHERIAN MORPHOGENETIC APPROACH TO ORGANISATIONAL ANALYSIS	79
3.3.1	<i>Origins and phases of morphogenesis</i>	79
3.3.2	<i>Structural morphogenesis</i>	81
3.3.3	<i>Cultural morphogenesis</i>	83
3.3.4	<i>Morphogenesis of agency</i>	85
3.3.5	<i>Critiques of Archerian morphogenetic approach</i>	86
3.4	HABERMASIAN THEORIES OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY	87
3.4.1	<i>Grounding knowledge in human experiences</i>	88
3.4.2	<i>The theory of communicative action</i>	89
3.4.3	<i>The theory of deliberative democracy</i>	92
3.4.4	<i>Critiques of Habermasian theories</i>	94
3.5	ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY	95
3.5.1	<i>Understanding social reality of organisational change</i>	96
3.5.2	<i>Exploring ways of knowing organisational change</i>	97
3.6	SUMMARY	98

CHAPTER 4 EXPLORING ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING AND SUSTAINABILITY AS SOCIAL LEARNING PROCESSES **100**

4.1	INTRODUCTION	100
4.2	ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING: MEANING, THEORY AND SOCIAL CHANGE	100
4.2.1	<i>Meaning, theoretical perspectives and critiques</i>	101
4.2.2	<i>Communities of practice and social learning processes</i>	103
4.2.3	<i>Critiques of communities of practice approach</i>	110
4.3	SUSTAINABILITY: MEANING, THEORY AND CHANGE	112
4.3.1	<i>Meaning and theoretical perspectives</i>	113
4.3.2	<i>Sustainability from a learning and education viewpoint</i>	116
4.3.3	<i>Social learning theory for exploring sustainability</i>	117
4.4	DEVELOPING AGENTIAL LEARNING CAPABILITIES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE	119
4.4.1	<i>Promoting collective social action and innovation</i>	119
4.4.2	<i>Enhancing democratic deliberations</i>	120
4.4.3	<i>Fostering critical reflections and reflexivity</i>	121

4.4.4	<i>Strengthening systemic thinking capabilities</i>	123
4.5	SUMMARY	124

PART 3 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCESSES **125**

CHAPTER 5 CRITICAL ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY **126**

5.1	INTRODUCTION	126
5.2	CRITICAL SOCIAL RESEARCH: ASSUMPTIONS, BACKGROUND AND CRITIQUES	126
5.2.1	<i>Underlying philosophical assumptions</i>	127
5.2.2	<i>Critical theory as a process of critique for social change</i>	130
5.2.3	<i>Critical theory as a 'school of thought'</i>	133
5.2.4	<i>Critiques of critical theory</i>	135
5.3	CRITICAL ACTION RESEARCH AS A METHOD AND EPISTEMOLOGY OF CHANGE	136
5.3.1	<i>Action research: origins, features and methodological principles</i>	137
5.3.2	<i>Epistemological foundations of action research</i>	144
5.3.3	<i>Critiques of critical approaches to action research</i>	146
5.4	RESEARCH TECHNIQUES	147
5.4.1	<i>Focus groups</i>	149
5.4.2	<i>Workshops</i>	152
5.4.3	<i>Keeping a researcher journal</i>	154
5.4.4	<i>Semi-structured interviews</i>	155
5.4.5	<i>Participant observation</i>	156
5.4.6	<i>Use of photography</i>	156
5.4.7	<i>E-mail communications</i>	156
5.4.8	<i>Document reviews</i>	158
5.4.9	<i>Informal interactions with colleagues</i>	159
5.5	QUALITY AND VALIDITY IN CRITICAL ACTION RESEARCH	160
5.5.1	<i>Enhancing quality through reflexivity</i>	161
5.5.2	<i>Ensuring validity in action research</i>	163
5.5.3	<i>Enhancing trustworthiness in action research</i>	166
5.6	SUMMARY	167

CHAPTER 6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCESSES **169**

6.1	INTRODUCTION	169
6.2	AN ACTION RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCESS OF INQUIRY	170
6.2.1	<i>Early research design decisions</i>	170
6.2.2	<i>Subjecting research design to the scrutiny of peers</i>	172
6.2.3	<i>Doing action research in and on my own organisation</i>	173
6.3	FIRST CYCLE OF INQUIRY: IDENTIFYING CONTEXTUAL ISSUES	177
6.3.1	<i>Initial planning and gaining access</i>	178
6.3.2	<i>Forming a research group as a community of practice</i>	179
6.3.3	<i>Data generation: critical organisational analysis of the NMK</i>	181
6.3.4	<i>Social learning outcomes</i>	187
6.4	SECOND CYCLE OF INQUIRY: DELIBERATING AND ACTING ON CONTEXTUAL ISSUES	189
6.4.1	<i>Planning stage</i>	189
6.4.2	<i>Data generation: interventions for organisational change</i>	190

6.4.3	<i>Social learning outcomes</i>	199
6.5	THIRD CYCLE OF INQUIRY: DELINEATING AND INSTITUTIONALISING CHANGE	200
6.5.1	<i>Planning stage</i>	201
6.5.2	<i>Data generation: delineating and institutionalising change processes</i>	201
6.5.3	<i>Social learning outcomes</i>	206
6.6	DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	207
6.6.1	<i>Cyclical processes of data analysis</i>	207
6.6.2	<i>Data interpretation and dissemination of findings</i>	211
6.7	ADDRESSING ETHICAL AND POLITICAL DILEMMAS	213
6.7.1	<i>Participant selection and obtaining consent</i>	214
6.7.2	<i>Anonymity and confidentiality</i>	214
6.7.3	<i>Conflicting and different needs</i>	215
6.7.4	<i>Political dilemmas</i>	217
6.8	SUMMARY	218
PART 4	CONTEXTUAL ISSUES AND SOCIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES	220
CHAPTER 7	CRITICAL ORGANISATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE NMK	221
7.1	INTRODUCTION	221
7.2	IDENTIFYING CONTEXTUAL ISSUES WITH THE PARTICIPANTS	221
7.2.1	<i>Social and political analysis</i>	222
7.2.2	<i>Morphogenetic analysis</i>	225
7.3	EXPLORING ASSUMPTIONS, VALUES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY	230
7.3.1	<i>Envisioning a sustainable future NMK</i>	231
7.3.2	<i>Interpretations of sustainability in context</i>	235
7.4	INQUIRING INTO THE MUSEUM IN CHANGE PROGRAMME	238
7.4.1	<i>Participant views on Museum in Change</i>	238
7.4.2	<i>Power relations within the Museum in Change Programme</i>	244
7.4.3	<i>Drawing lessons from the Programme</i>	248
7.5	EVIDENCE OF SOCIAL LEARNING PROCESSES	251
7.5.1	<i>Generation of new ideas, values and identities</i>	251
7.5.2	<i>Development of participant learning capabilities</i>	253
7.6	SUMMARY	254
CHAPTER 8	DELIBERATING AND EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES FOR CHANGE	256
8.1	INTRODUCTION	256
8.2	ISSUES OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FLOWS	256
8.2.1	<i>Enabling and constraining contextual factors</i>	258
8.2.2	<i>Collective actions on communication improvement</i>	263
8.2.3	<i>Evidence of social learning processes</i>	267
8.3	ISSUES RELATED TO DECISION MAKING AND LEADERSHIP	272
8.3.1	<i>Enabling and constraining contextual factors</i>	272
8.3.2	<i>Possibilities for democratic forms of governance</i>	275
8.3.3	<i>Evidence of social learning processes</i>	277

8.4	ISSUES OF STAFF MOTIVATION AND DEVELOPMENT	280
8.4.1	<i>Enabling and constraining contextual factors</i>	281
8.4.2	<i>Possibilities for enhancing staff motivation and development</i>	285
8.4.3	<i>Evidence of social learning processes</i>	287
8.5	ISSUES OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	291
8.5.1	<i>Enabling and constraining contextual factors</i>	291
8.5.2	<i>Possibilities for improving financial viability</i>	294
8.5.3	<i>Evidence of social learning processes</i>	295
8.6	ISSUES OF IDENTITY AND ROLE OF THE NMK	296
8.6.1	<i>Enabling and constraining contextual factors</i>	297
8.6.2	<i>Possibilities for improving the NMK identity</i>	300
8.6.3	<i>Evidence of social learning processes</i>	302
8.7	INSTITUTIONALISING SOCIAL CHANGE PROCESSES	306
8.7.1	<i>Enabling and constraining factors</i>	307
8.7.2	<i>Possibilities for institutionalising social change processes</i>	309
8.8	SUMMARY	313

PART 5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS 315

CHAPTER 9 ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY 316

9.1	INTRODUCTION	316
9.2	IDENTIFYING AND ACTING ON CONTEXTUAL ISSUES	316
9.2.1	<i>Structural and cultural conditioning</i>	317
9.2.2	<i>Social and socio-cultural interactions</i>	322
9.2.3	<i>Social and cultural elaboration</i>	326
9.3	REVIEWING ASSUMPTIONS AND EXPLORING CRITICAL ALTERNATIVES	330
9.3.1	<i>Assumptions and values on the identity and role of the NMK</i>	332
9.3.2	<i>Assumptions and values on governance systems</i>	333
9.3.3	<i>Assumptions and values on communication</i>	336
9.3.4	<i>Assumptions and values on human development</i>	337
9.3.5	<i>Assumptions and values on financial management</i>	338
9.4	KNOWING THE SOCIAL REALITY OF ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING AND SUSTAINABILITY	338
9.4.1	<i>Promoting collective social action and innovation</i>	340
9.4.2	<i>Enhancing democratic deliberations</i>	341
9.4.3	<i>Fostering critical reflections and reflexivity</i>	342
9.4.4	<i>Strengthening systemic thinking capabilities</i>	343
9.5	IMPLICATIONS FOR EXPLORING ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING AND SUSTAINABILITY	344
9.5.1	<i>Cultivating communities of practice for organisational learning</i>	344
9.5.2	<i>Emergence of organisational learning sustainability</i>	346
9.5.3	<i>Institutionalising social change processes and sustainability</i>	349
9.6	SUMMARY	352

CHAPTER 10 REFLECTIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 353

10.1	INTRODUCTION	353
------	--------------	-----

10.2 REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS	353
10.2.1 <i>Core action research project</i>	354
10.2.2 <i>Thesis action research project</i>	355
10.2.3 <i>Limitations</i>	357
10.3 CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY	359
10.3.1 <i>Ontological implications</i>	360
10.3.2 <i>Epistemological implications</i>	361
10.3.3 <i>Methodological implications</i>	363
10.3.4 <i>Pedagogical implications</i>	364
10.4 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	365
10.4.1 <i>Implementing further social changes at the NMK</i>	365
10.4.2 <i>Further research</i>	367
10.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS	368

REFERENCES 370

APPENDICES 396

APPENDIX 1 – MEMBERS OF THE NMK COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE	396
APPENDIX 2 – NON RESEARCH GROUP PARTICIPANTS AS <i>CORPORATE AGENTS</i>	399
APPENDIX 3 – A SAMPLE FRAMEWORK FOR CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS	401
APPENDIX 4 – A SAMPLE OF WORKSHOP PROGRAMME AND GUIDING QUESTIONS	402
APPENDIX 5 – SAMPLES OF PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN DURING THE RESEARCH PROJECT	404
APPENDIX 6 – INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM	406
APPENDIX 7 – SAMPLES OF DATA ANALYSIS	408
APPENDIX 8 – DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS	411
APPENDIX 9 – EXTRACTS FROM ETHICAL APPROVAL APPLICATION	414
APPENDIX 10 – FINDINGS FROM WORKSHOP 3 ON ISSUES OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT	417

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Philosophical and theoretical frameworks of the study	9
Figure 2.1	A wheel of interacting global concerns	31
Figure 6.1	Core and thesis action research projects of the inquiry	176
Figure 6.2	Presidential launch of the Museum in Change Programme	196
Figure 6.3	Data analysis in critical action research processes	208
Figure 9.1	The NMK as an emergent stratum of social reality	331
Figure 9.2	Exploring social change processes in a community of practice	339

List of Tables

Table 3.1	Three perspectives to organisational change	68
Table 5.1	Research workshops held during the study	152
Table 5.2	Documents reviewed during the study	158
Table 6.1	Major research events of the first cycle of inquiry	182
Table 6.2	Major research events of the second cycle of inquiry	191
Table 6.3	Research events of the third cycle of inquiry	202
Table 7.1	Dimensions of power at the NMK	223
Table 7.2	Structural and cultural conditioning at the NMK	226
Table 8.1	Contextual factors that constrain information flows	262
Table 8.2	Possibilities for improving communication	264
Table 8.3	Collective actions plans on management staff briefings	267
Table 8.4	Developing the NMK organisational learning capability	310
Table 8.5	Addressing fears of change in a community of practice	312
Table 10.1	Philosophical and theoretical implications of the research	359

List of Boxes

Box 7.1	W1 group exercise on critical analysis of the NMK	222
Box 7.2	W1 envisioning workshop group exercise on a sustainable NMK	231
Box 7.3	Views of C1 on drivers of change at the NMK	242
Box 7.4	Power relations within the Museum in Change Programme	244
Box 8.1	Changing social reality through communication improvement	268
Box 8.2	Participant assumptions on decision making and leadership	273

Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
BGCI	Botanic Gardens Conservation International
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CKRC	Constitution of Kenya Review Commission
CSRP	Civil Service Reform Programme
DEC	Directors Executive Committee
DFRD	District Focus for rural Development
EHS	Environmental Health and Safety
ERSWEC	Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
EU	European Union
FG	Focus Group
GSE	Graduate School of the Environment
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRDC	Human Resource Development Committee
IEEP	International Environmental Education programme
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPR	Institute of Primate Research
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KACA	Kenya Anti-Corruption Authority
KANU	Kenya African National Union
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MU	Macquarie University
MUWA	Museum Welfare Association
NARC	National Rainbow Coalition
NEMA	National Environment Management Authority
NMK	National Museums of Kenya
NMKSP	National Museums of Kenya Support programme
NPEP	National Poverty Eradication Plan
PRGF	Poverty Reduction Growth Facility

PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
REEP	Regional Environmental Education Project
RISSEA	Research Institute of Swahili Studies in Eastern Africa
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SAPS	Structural and Adjustment Programmes
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDESD	United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WHO	World Health Organisation
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WWF	World Wildlife Fund for Nature