

Kuki Gallmann:

"Speak to the Earth, and it shall teach thee"



Kuki on her ranch Ol
ari Nyiro in Laikipia,
which she has turned
into a private
conservancy. Within its
borders is the only
protected forest
remaining in the
locality.

It has become a fashionable trend throughout the world to express negative views about Kenya and the future of its environment.

I believe, on the contrary, that Kenya still has what most of the world has lost. These assets are vital for our planet and must be preserved at all cost. Because once gone, they will be gone forever.

Africa – and Kenya in it – is a continent of extremes. Alongside tragedy, unrest, disease, corruption and poverty – sad realities which are by no means prerogatives of this land – there exists a staggering combination of assets which, in their sum, are exclusive to Kenya, which are its most valuable, irreplaceable works of art: the stunning beauty of its

Italian-born author, poet and conservationist Kuki Gallmann lives on Ol ari Nyiro, the ranch which she turned into a conservancy. Her best-selling book "I dreamed of Africa" recently premiered as a film with Kim Basinger in the starring role. In November 1998, Kuki gave a talk at the National Museums of Kenya which, for various reasons, was not available for publication earlier. This edited transcript of Kuki's talk holds thought-provoking insights for all of us who care about the future of Kenya and its environment.

landscapes, the rare, secret animals, the forests with their awesome trees, butterflies, waterfalls and birds, the savannah, the snow peaked mountains, the reefs, the deserts, the rivers and the lakes bejewelled with flamingos.

Add to that the most extraordinary art gallery in the world: the cradle of mankind, the Great Rift Valley of Kenya.

The factors that inextricably bind all these and makes them unique are the skills, the traditions, the diverse, rich cultural heritage and the spirit of Kenya's gentle, compassionate, wise and extraordinary people.

I want to add my voice to the few who are singing the praises of our land and suggest a few ways to overcome inertia and



Emma with Professor Bräuer of the University of Hamburg, under whom she studied for her PhD and with whom she has collaborated on scientific articles.

peoples from dry and hot environments. Large surface area and small body volume are long term adaptational phenomena important for thermoregulatory efficiency.

Now that Emma has gone the step further to complete her doctorate in Hamburg under Professor Bräuer, she intends to continue further research on new pleistocene sites with an aim to discovering more about the evolution of modern humans. She also hopes to publish her PhD thesis on the transition from *Homo erectus* to anatomically modern humans in the near future. This way her results will be exposed and hopefully critically analysed by other scientists.

"I would like to have my work challenged. The best part about science is that one has to prove one's theory by research and hence any serious challenges to such theories have to be backed by research too", says Emma enthusiastically.

Away from the skulls, skeletons and research, Emma likes to read, travel, make new friends, swim and cook exotic dishes. Dr Mbua is married and is the mother of three girls.

PHOTOS BY NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF KENYA

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Josephine Thang'wa joined the Public Relations Department of the National Museums of Kenya in 1995. She trained in Anthropology at the University of Nairobi, and is the editor of NMK's Horizons magazine. Her greatest interest is in culture and communication, in which she is pursuing a career.

to achieve excellence.

I am here to speak for Kenya and to put forth positive views about the conservation of what is unquestionably its major asset, an astonishing combination of still mostly untapped potential to be found in its natural resources, diversity of ecosystems, wildlife and people: Kenya's environment.

I believe that with:

- The promotion of environmental responsibility amongst the people and particularly environmental education for the youth;

- Competent planning and management of the new initiatives to develop new and competitive approaches to tourism unique to Kenya;

- Innovative research into the sustainable and ecological utilisation of the indigenous flora;

- And imaginative and inspiring professional marketing...

There is reason to hope.

Kenya can attract a new stream of visitors, who seek an alternative focus to their holiday rather than just the conventional safari; create jobs, sell unique Kenyan products, earn foreign exchange, uplift society and living conditions, but more than anything rekindle the pride of being Kenyan.

There is hope if the people of Kenya become involved on a personal level in the protection and utilisation of their inheritance, and are made aware of what is at stake.

Let's see our planet for what it really is - a spaceship travelling through the universe with a limited amount of natural resources

that we all share - and see how we, the people of Kenya, can do our part by taking responsibility for bringing about positive environmental policies which will directly affect our way of life, the balance of the planet, and the world we leave to our children.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to dedicate this talk to the memory of my son Emanuele, because he is the reason for my being here tonight.

I speak for Kenya as I do because of the lesson I learned with his death.

In most people's lives, there is, sooner or later, a moment in which one feels a dramatic turning point: a moment of truth, when the sense of our existence and the meaning that we should give it, is suddenly startlingly clear.

This was for me the moment when I looked down at the open, dead eyes of my son, and there I saw reflected the sky, and the sun, and the hills and the leaves of the tree above us.

The world had come to an end for me only. The world - nature - went on as ever. The sky in Emanuele's eyes was the sky of Africa. This was the key.

In the weeks that followed I walked alone along the valleys and savannahs of

Kuki hosted a private rhino sanctuary meeting at her ranch in 1989. Among those present was KP&P Editorial Board Chairman, Esmond Martin (front, extreme right).





Kuki and Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands rhino-watching at Lewa Downs, Northern Kenya, in 1987.

my home in Laikipia and one evening I stood looking down at the cliffs of the Great Rift, at endless vistas of volcanoes and hills and lakes. There was something awesome and sacred in its majestic beauty, the ineffable feeling of being in a cathedral of the spirit, which could absorb my grief in a healing and transforming embrace: something that went beyond life and beyond death, because it was eternal.

I had the intuition that to ensure its survival was more important than anything else. Making a positive difference to the environment of Kenya, with the means at my disposal became my quest, and my mission.

I decided to dedicate my life and resources to do all I could to ensure that the powerful nature of Kenya would be preserved with its cultural richness, for the benefit of its people, so that the end of a promising young life could be the beginning of a new vision. If my son had gone Kenya was still there, and in Kenya I should focus my purpose.

I started the Gallmann Memorial Foundation to prove that the presence and activities of humans in Kenya do not have to mean the end of the wild, and the

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sustainable and innovative utilisation of what is already there is the way forward for the people and the environment. Development can be harmonised with conservation if we only have the humility and wisdom to find out how.

This vision imbued me with immense energy; I realised that the real voyage of discovery does not consist in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

I felt that the most powerful asset Kenya's environment has was its power to heal, and in this revelation was the major solution to help its survival.

And when I became a writer, I chose to emphasise in my books the lyrical Kenya, to inspire and attract visitors to come and find what I had.

We live in a time of change, dominated by the media. Messages of violence, wars,

unease, injustice and abuse come to us a hundred times a day. Negative images fill our lives and enter our homes. In the western world of consumerism, material success has separated people from nature, and being separated from nature is being separated from life: the world needs healing and Kenya can help.

Over thirty years ago, in 1964, Carl Jung wrote:

"As scientific understanding has grown, so our world has become dehumanized... No voices now speak to man from stones, plants, and animals, nor does he speak to them, believing they can hear. His contact with nature has gone, and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied."

To rediscover this connection is what people look for: this is why they travel and this is why they come to Africa.

Something happens to those who visit the bush in this part of Africa; they feel again in touch with their innermost nature, and they are therefore somewhat renewed and uplifted.

Sleeping in a tent with the African sky

above and the African bush around is a privilege worth far more than staying in a five star hotel room in Manhattan.

A few years ago I was one evening driving an elegant socialite friend just arrived from New York along the hills of Olari Nyiro, my home in Laikipia. It was one of those extraordinary sunsets on the edge of the Great Rift Valley, when everything becomes bathed in gold light, there is a stillness in the air and one feels on the roof of the world.

I turned my head to talk to her and saw that she had tears running down her cheeks.

"Are you OK?" I asked.

"I have never felt like this anywhere before. This incredible energy; I feel better that I have ever been; it is not just the most breathtaking place: it is my first time in Africa and it is like coming home."

I knew exactly what she meant. It happened to me and, I am sure, to many of you who are here in this room tonight.

This need to return, to get in touch with our humanity, is a common denominator for all human beings. I believe it is Kenya's strongest appeal to visitors and its strongest marketing tool.

Tourism to Kenya could be marketed as a pilgrimage to the land of our origins, a spiritual retreat to regain our own humanity, to find energy and purpose, and – for some who have gone through personal tragedy - healing and peace.

Kenya indeed has what the world desperately needs: the power to inspire.

But for this appeal to retain its power, landscapes must keep their pristine uncontaminated aesthetic character, they must remain untarnished by the pollution and environmental degradation that normally go hand in hand with industrial

development.

The necessary industries should remain confined to the areas where already nothing remains of the original wilderness. Wild and untouched land with attractive geographical features should not be given over to environmental contamination as this would be tantamount to killing the goose that lays the golden eggs.

It is imperative therefore that the biodiversity of this country be preserved as an asset, and this can only happen if the people of Kenya become the financial beneficiary of these assets and hence take responsibility for its management and conservation.

Like never before, this is a period of extremely sensitive public opinion worldwide to matters of environmental impact.

It is an awareness and an awakening that is happening simultaneously in every part of the world, partially brought about by information, concern for the perceived fragility of our ecosystem, and mostly by the sensational accumulation of environmental crimes which affect directly the livelihood of communities throughout the planet.

In Kenya, like elsewhere, the environment is endangered by lack of education and planning, pollution, greed, subdivision of marginal land, and cutting of forests.

Generations of environmental mismanagement have resulted in land degradation and brought about climatic changes no one can ignore.

As a result, a deep concern and a growing awareness have arisen - starting like all revolutions, at the grassroots - of the importance of communities becoming the arbiters of their own development and conserving and utilising their own precarious natural resources.

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It is not just on a handful of scientists and a few wealthy individuals or politicians that the ultimate conservation of the environment depends.

I understand that just 4% of the world surface supports over 8000 protected areas. This is insufficient to preserve animal and plant life in isolated situations. Unless the communities are involved there is no hope.

Communities need to improve their living conditions, see prospects for their future generations, and unless they are instilled with the importance and direct advantages of environmental responsibility, wildlife – the majority of which is still outside protected areas – will

Kuki sitting on one of the black rhino skulls collected on her ranch. Ol'ari Nyiro is a registered black rhino sanctuary, supporting the largest indigenous population of black rhinos outside Kenya's national parks and reserves.



one day only be confined to the islands of the parks, glorified zoos. The local people will mostly not be able to have access to it and will see wildlife as something remote, beyond their control, alien, not to be touched, not to be proud of. The elephant will be seen as the enemy, just the thief that comes in the night. The wildlife will lose.

But there *is* hope.

Recently the Kenya Wildlife Service, which does not have sufficient resources to look after wildlife outside protected areas, started a partnership programme – a system by which land owning communities take over the responsibility of managing their own wildlife resources and start viewing wildlife as an asset rather than a liability.

The local Kenyan populations can – and must – become the protectors of their own land.

We are all aware that there are a great number of starving people in the world. And it is an urgent human duty to increase the available supply of foodstuff. Rich arable areas must be put to optimum use in food production. But much of Africa's land has poor, dry soil, and the rainfall is insufficient. Often this same land has great environmental, scenic or cultural value in its pristine state, and this must not be converted to farmland. Ecotourism schemes off the beaten track, birdwatching, camel treks, lodges such as that at Il Ngwesi in Samburu built out of local materials, and cultural centres, are beginning to mushroom on community land. They bring unexpected returns to the tribal and rural people who, having suffered the results and seen all the disadvantages of subdivision of arid land, have become its strongest opponents. Already, wildlife scouts are chosen by the community and trained to look after the community's wildlife.

Other ideas for holistic tourism-related initiatives could be:

- The development of what could

evocatively be called the Great Rift Valley Conservancy - areas selected for their environmental integrity - where organic products like honey, essential oil extracts and cosmetics, crafts created to international standard with local materials, and any activity linked with the traditional knowledge and way of life of the local people, could be developed and marketed with a recognisable logo and quality label. This is an attractive and major opportunity to investigate.

- The establishment of health farms where paying visitors would rejuvenate their bodies with Kenya-produced (and exportable) natural herbal products, local hot springs, mineral waters and spas, and thermal mud. The construction of inspiring spiritual retreats in places of mystical beauty, for people to meet again the silence and mystery of their own souls, and find the meaning of life, should get attention from entrepreneurs and investors.

- The creation of international top quality arts and music festivals featuring a combination of African, western and eastern performances.

- International marathons and world class sporting events is another enormous attraction for those wealthy visitors who are not just interested in seeing wildlife.

The preservation of cultural heritage is to be regarded as a conservation priority: unpolluted humanity is an endangered species. One must learn to utilise what is already part of the ecosystem. Kenya's biodiversity supports a tremendous variety of plants, the traditional uses of which are known to the old people; this risks becoming a dying skill... (while) cosmetics of natural origin, perfumes from new flowers, essential oils, and herbal medicine both for human and veterinary consumption are the fastest growing branch of cosmetic and pharmaceutical

companies, and represent a tremendous potential for a sustainable income.

A strong emphasis on research into Kenya's incredibly rich ethnobotany must be an immediate priority.

The Gallmann Memorial Foundation assisted by the Herbarium of the National Museums, has already recorded the invaluable herbal knowledge of the Pokot tribe.

The young generation must realise that no tree can thrive without roots, and that the preservation of their inheritance, and of the traditional knowledge of their forefathers, is an ecological necessity.

At the base of everything is, of course, education: we can only care for what we know, and protect what we understand and cherish.

"At the base of everything is... education: we can only care for what we know, and protect what we understand..."

Follow the trail with us. The people who know Kenya better.

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Years ago I built on Ol'ari Nyiro a Wilderness Education Centre in memory of my son. There we host every year, free of charge, thousands of Kenyan schoolchildren to see their first elephant, to walk in the wild, to get to know and understand the environment of their country and why they, as individuals, should be its caretakers. Each of these children is an ambassador for the cause because, more than anything, they are

acquainted with a concept or discipline than tackling this at the source, by making this an integral part of the compulsory school curriculum, beginning with primary schools.

It is people of less privileged background that are – because of the sheer needs and constraints of their existence – the threat to the environment through poaching, felling of trees, pillaging of shells from coral reefs, illegal charcoal

Kuki with neighbouring wildlife conservationists Mike Webley (left) and Karl Ammann (right) on Ol' Jogi Ranch, Laikipia, in July 2000.



proud of belonging to and identifying with a country of such rich natural heritage. So that this scheme is sustainable we host as well students from every part of the world for a unique African experience: this is an immensely successful scheme, and wilderness centres of African Field Studies for students should be born throughout the country.

If its environment is Kenya's major asset, Kenyan citizens should learn all there is to know about it. Kenyan children should learn from the open book of nature before the writing becomes blurred.

For years I have been campaigning for the introduction of Kenyan ecology in local schools as an obligatory subject.

There is no better way for a country to ensure that all its citizens become

burning, and so on. This is the majority of the citizens and most are unlikely to be able to afford further studies. It is the children who must be taught what makes Kenya unique and the ways in which they will personally benefit as adults from a wholesome ecosystem sustainably managed.

Children are impressionable. A seed of interest planted in a young mind – and the environment is a fascinating subject – will surely germinate and bear invaluable fruit in the future.

It is about the pride of being Kenyan, the dignity of being African, the joy of our surroundings, the responsibility for our land, and it is about our survival.

It is encouraging for me to note, at this moment, that the government, who is

reviewing now its school system, has taken to heart this concept, which the President has personally endorsed. In June 1996 President Moi made a directive for the Minister of Education to ensure that environmental education is encompassed in the syllabus at every level of education.

I have been assured that serious steps are now being taken by the Ministry of Education to introduce this topic in the new curriculum. I applaud this courageous and historic initiative to ensure long-term environmental conservation at all levels in Kenya, as the most positive and responsible decision ever reached in this field.

Margaret Mead once said:

"A group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

There is truth and pride in this. And may I add, with humility and optimism:

"Speak to the Earth, and it shall teach thee".

For Kenya's sake, let us believe we can learn.

PHOTOS BY ESMOND MARTIN



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