

CLIMATE LAND INTERACTIONS PROJECT (CLIP)



BACKGROUND NOTES ON THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION FOR THE K-12 CURRICULUM MATERIALS ON LAND USE AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN KENYA

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FOREWORD

The Republic of Kenya is a country of contrasts.

- Its human history spans time from the origins of the human race to the recent design of Kenyan cars.
- Its topography reflects the role of Africa as the center of Pangaea the area from which all other continents have broken from; and yet earthquakes illustrate that geological forces are still shaping its land.
- Kenya's landscapes and ecology span a wide range of biomes, stretching from the glaciers on Mount Kenya (Photos 1-7), through montane rain forests and savanna, to the deserts of the north and the eastern coastline.
- It is a country in which wild animals abound and where for many people domestic animals such as camels, cattle, sheep, and goats are an essential part of their livelihoods.
- Most people are farmers and herders, and yet rural life involves an ever wider range of economic activities. There are also large commercial farms and modern industry. Its people are thus both bound to very local and traditional ways and engaged in the world economy.
- Some parts of the country remain remote and inaccessible while Nairobi is an important hub on global airline routes.
- Above all and most troubling economically, politically, and socially, Kenya is a country of extreme contrast in wealth, and in access to and control over resources. Large numbers live in desperate poverty while a few, immeasurably rich people control vast wealth, resources, and political power.



Photo 1: Mount Kenya from the North



Photo 2: Bamboo Forest



Photo 3: High Forest

Aberdare Mountains



Photo 4: Savanna, Kajiado District, SE Kenya



Photo 5: Isiolo District, Northern Kenya



Photo 6: Desert west of Marsabit, Northern Kenya



Photo 7: The coast, Lamu Island

The theme of contrast will run throughout this presentation of Kenya. It is from the opportunities and tensions of these contrasts that present-day Kenya has emerged and from which its future will be made. As we look at the present situation and contemplate the future, we will be forced to consider in particular the implications of the contrast between people in terms of access to wealth and power.

INTRODUCTION

Kenya is located in East Africa and borders the Indian Ocean, and the countries of Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania. The equator passes right through the middle of the country (Photo 8).



Photo 8: The Equator near Nanyuki

The map of Africa (Map 1) indicates where the equator passes. The country has an area of 582,646 square kilometers. It is a country with an estimated mid-2008 population of 38 million (Population Reference Bureau 2008). Most of the population lives in the one-fifth of the country that receives enough rain to support crop production. People work as farmers and herders in rural areas, while the towns have vibrant economies with markets, manufacturing enterprises, banks and other services, and government offices.

Kenyan society is a rich mosaic of cultural diversity consisting of more than 40 ethnic communities, each with its own language and traditions. The national language is Kiswahili, a language that developed as a result of East Africa's trade and cultural

interaction with the Indian Ocean world. The language of instruction is English throughout the school system, though in some areas instruction is provided in indigenous languages in the first three grades. Schooling from the equivalent of 7th grade in the US is in English. As a result, most children and young adults speak at least three languages, that of their own people, together

with Kiswahili and English that are the official languages in Kenya.

Map 1: Africa



Kenya has long been an important trading country. For thousands of years it was part of the Indian Ocean trade between Africa, the Middle East, India, and China. The ships that carried the trade, known as *dhow*s, regularly called at ports on the Kenya coast. More than a thousand years ago, migrants from southern Arabia settled in coastal Kenya, and through their interaction with local people developed trading centers and a coastal way of life influenced by other Indian Ocean societies. Later, traders traveled inland from these ports to bring slaves, ivory, and food from the interior. Over the last century, Kenya has come to play a central role in the colonial and modern economies of the whole of East Africa. The landlocked nations of Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda import and export goods through the country. Relief supplies to the war-torn areas of southern Sudan are shipped through Kenya.

Modern Kenya continues to play a central role in East Africa as a trading country, both through its manufacturing and commercial sectors, and as the country with which the most foreigners are familiar. Its image influences the way many people around the world view East Africa.