

Kaya forests of the Kenyan Coast have long been regarded highly for their cultural heritage values as well as natural resources. Most of these Kayas are now inscribed as world heritage sites. While many forests in Kenya have undergone tremendous degradation, Kaya forests on the other hand, have been one of the best-conserved forests in Kenya owing to their sanctity and significance to the Mijikenda community (Githito, 1998). However, in recent times, (Adongo, 2007) this has changed as a result of global changes and challenges encompassing the social, cultural, economic, political as well as environmental aspects. It is interesting that the same people who initially conserved these forests, today show apathy towards their conservation and are indifferent towards sustainable utilization of this natural heritage resource, endowed with immense biodiversity values. Today, land use pressures compounded by the impacts of global changes and challenges threaten the existence of these unique forests. Again, the indigenous institutions mandated to control access to the forest resources have been weakened. Presently, almost 50% of the original area of the Rabai Kaya forests has been cleared (Nyamweru, 2007) and people continue to extract forest products from them on an unsustainable level. Have these sites lost their sacredness, or has demand for natural resources and environmental stress coupled with conservation and management regimes overridden the cultural heritage values that initially protected these forests? This paper examines the concept of functional integrity as a lens through which to view resource dynamics while illuminating its implication in the sustainability of natural resource.