



## SUPPORTING BUTTERFLIES, TREES AND PEOPLE

**A butterfly farm in Kenya demonstrates how insects can bring sustainable benefits to communities living near forests. A small grant for the construction of a visitor centre and educational activities managed to strengthen the conservation of a biodiversity-rich and threatened coastal forest. The project helped to further raise local incomes from tourism in addition to butterfly rearing and boosted local and international support for conserving the forest in a financially critical period.**

The Kipepeo Project is a community-based butterfly farming project in the margins of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest on the north coast of Kenya. This forest is of global importance for biodiversity conservation. In the early 1990s, a survey revealed that the majority of the local community wanted the entire forest cleared for settlement and the forest was invaded by farmers on several occasions. The Kipepeo Project was set up with a 50,000 dollar grant from UNDP-GEF in 1993 to change community attitudes to the forest by giving them a stake in its conservation. Kipepeo trained farmers living next to the forest to rear forest butterflies. Butterfly pupae were purchased from the farmers for export to the live butterfly exhibit industry in Europe and the U.S. Cumulative community earnings from 1994 to 2001 exceeded 130,000 dollars with significant positive effects on both livelihoods and attitudes. Butterfly monitoring indicates that there have been no adverse effects on wild butterfly populations.

**ACTIVITIES** In order to increase and diversify biodiversity-related income sources, and to help Kipepeo bridge a period of financial uncertainty, IUCN NL funded the project *People, butterflies and trees*. Being close to a coastal tourist hotspot, tourism was seen as a promising source of additional revenues. Project activities included building a visitor centre alongside the butterfly facility, promoting the farm among hotels and an educational programme for local schoolchildren and tourists. In the first year after the opening of the visitor centre, visitor numbers increased by 45 percent and tourism revenues doubled, benefiting the centre itself, free-lance tour guides and farmers who supplied the centre with pupae for



Local children with butterfly net and rearing cage. All photos: Kipepeo project.

display. Many tourists commented that the visit had opened their eyes to the social aspects inherent in conservation efforts.

The educational programme led to the establishment of more local Wildlife Clubs than anticipated and over 50 school and university groups from other parts of Kenya visited the butterfly farm. This in turn stimulated the local schools to engage in other environmental activities such as beach clean-ups and tree planting, and they received donations from other organizations.

**IMPACT** A second survey of farmers' attitudes showed a very significant change, with 84 percent supporting the conservation of the forest. Local willingness to fight for the forest was shown when the government considered suspending its protected status and local farmers, hoteliers and tour managers voiced strong opposition. Internationally, a video about the project was shown on over 80 television channels world-wide and in 1998 the Kipepeo project received the Dubai International Award for Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment.

With help from the National Museums of Kenya and funds from BirdLife, the project became financially self-sustaining in 1999. It has expanded its operations to three other areas within Kenya and is being successfully replicated in a nature reserve in Tanzania. Kipepeo is now diversifying its products to include honey from domesticated and wild stingless bees and silk from domestic and wild silk moths, with funds from GEF and USAID.



**Grantee:** East Africa Natural History Society (now Nature Kenya) (Member of IUCN)

**Project:** 'People, butterflies and trees' (1996-98)

**Grant size:** € 50,000

**Category:** Income generation

[www.kipepeo.org](http://www.kipepeo.org) / [www.naturekenya.org/Kipepeo.htm](http://www.naturekenya.org/Kipepeo.htm)