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**1. Introduction:**

Over the last 20 years, about 2000 hectares of gazetted forests have been lost annually. This has been taking place for the establishment of horticultural plantations (mainly for flowers and fruits), the planting of fast growing exotic trees ie. , Pine and Eucalyptus, new human settlements, and over-exploitation for firewood and charcoal burning for subsistence and commercial purposes. It has also been noted that communication purposes where roads and railway lines go cutting through the forest is another contributing factor, not forgetting the ever growing trend of urban development.

These losses of forest cover have a severe impact on the biodiversity. Given the above outcome, strident measures have to be taken to help in averting the situation. The emergence of conservation clubs, action groups etc, have actually helped a great deal in conserving the existing forests and the replanting of new ones in the country. A lot more is needed. The birth of the Green Belt Movement preceded many community based organizations, which have so far been able to tend seedlings and the actual planting of over 20 million trees.

**2. Importance of Indigenous Forests:**

Forests are important in a number of factors, these include:

**(A) Biodiversity;**

This refers to the different plants, animals, microorganisms and the ecosystems in a certain region. They provide habitat for a wide range of species both animal and plants; some are very rare and endemic. An example of such is the Sokoke Arabuko Forest along the Kenyan coastline which houses the Scops Owl species with no other forest in the world housing it.

**(B) Water Regulation and Conservation:**

Many forests are situated on high rainfall areas. The trees and their litter help the rain water to drip into the soil slowly, hence elevating the water table for the regulation of the water runoff. In this case the forest retain the rainfall water like a sponge slowly releasing it into the rivers and streams for an ever-flowing activity. Anytime a

forest is destroyed, the amount of rainfall changes rapidly. It also causes unexpected flash floods due to the disappearance of the litter layer on top of the soil.

At the same time, the streams and the rivers undergo a gradual siltation process resulting to acute water shortages. The trend may eventually result to a complete drying of the stream or river.

**(C) Soil Conservation:**

Besides the prevention of the runoff, tree roots help in binding the soil particles together, which in turn prevents soil erosion. The litter from the leaves and the decaying logs helps in the moisture retention and provides humus respectively. Most of the trees in the forest help in fixing nitrogen in the soil which in turn gives a high productivity. Wind erosion is also reduced since the trees act as windbreaks.

**(D) Soil Nutrient Cycling:**

Trees form a very important part of nutrient cycle, ie carbon, oxygen and nitrogen. They use light energy from the sun to convert water and carbon dioxide into sugar, and then provide oxygen as a by-product. The oxygen released is then used by all the living creatures for respiration. Trees also help to keep the carbon dioxide and the oxygen levels in the atmosphere stable.

Were trees to be reduced greatly, the atmospheric carbon dioxide would greatly increase, thus posing a very negative change in the global climate. The carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is of great importance for life to exist on earth, but too much of it can lead to global warming. This happens because the carbon dioxide trapped in the atmosphere absorbs heat that would radiate into space and thus keep the earth warm. The global warmth increase has drastic consequences among them: the reduction of the sea ice, rise in sea levels, and vegetation changes. Tree species like Albizia and Accacia Albida contain nitrogen-fixing bacteria in their roots, which help in adding nitrogen to the soil hence improving its fertility.

**(E) Forest Products Provision:**

Well over 4.5 million people in Kenya are estimated to use forests for subsistence and commercial purposes.

This include wood products eg, timber, poles, fuelwood and chacoal. Others are non-wood products among them water, fruits, honey, medicinal herbs, fodder for livestock and animals for wild food purposes.

**(F) Public Amenity and Recreation:**

There is no better place that offers natural beauty, peace and tranquility for recreation such as picnics, out door private studies and other activities, than our forests. The Nairobi Arboretum is a living example with scores of people thronging the place on daily basis. Tourism if developed in forests can also generate a valuable foreign income besides creating employment. A good example for this is the Tree Tops and The Ark, both situated deep in the Abedare Forest in Central Kenya.

### **3. Type of Trees Planted**

During the planting activity (Plant for the Planet Project) thousands of trees were planted countrywide, as the campaigns were vibrant. The Total Eco Challenge had done a great job in mobilising people from community-based organizations, youth and action groups in the actual planting activity countrywide. Forestry and Environmental clubs in schools comprised the largest number of volunteers. Cosmos Education Kenya Branch also took part in the exercise. CE Kenya was the group in charge of the schools.

Quite a wide variety of trees were planted both indigenous and exotic. In the grid below, we have carried out a report of just a few trees, which were planted in large numbers. We have six columns, with each column having useful information about particular tree species. Although we have thousands of species of the trees, we have featured only a few in each category according to uses and commonness.









Young Pine Trees ready for Planting  
Please note the Tamarindus Indica (Tamarid) at the fore-front



The Cordia africana (The Cordia tree)



The Eucalyptus Saligna (The Sydney Blue Gum)



The Nairobi City Park





The Graviella Robusta (Sicky Oak)



The Nairobi Arboretum Rules and Guidelines



The Giant Bamboo



