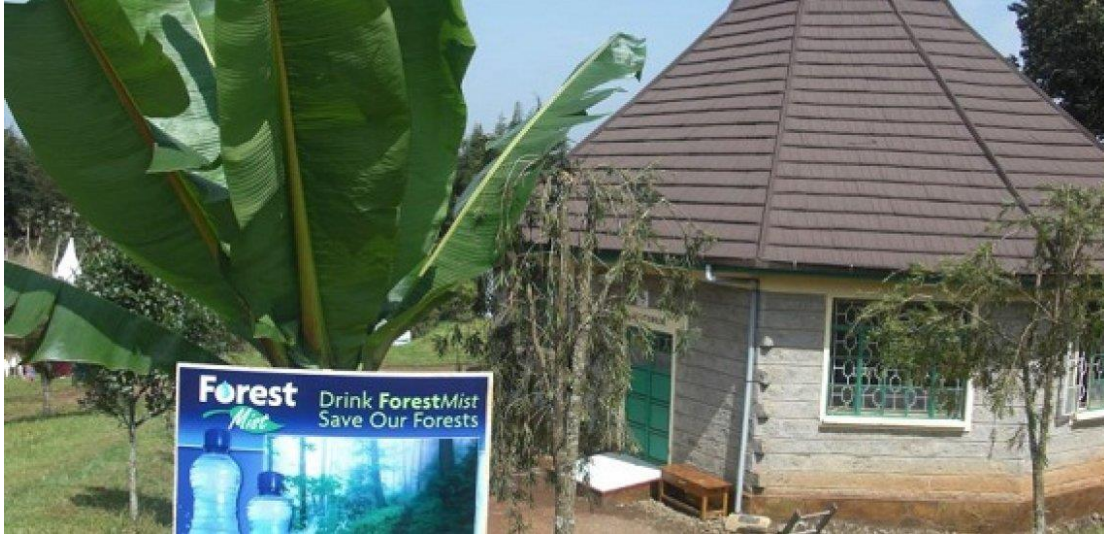


# Drink ForestMist, Save Our Forests

- By Maaike Manten



*Launch of the new water bottling facility at the KENVO Resource Center in Kimende, Kenya (image MM)*

## Water from the forest, for the forest

"Drink ForestMist, Save Our Forests" is the strapline on the drinking water bottle that is the latest product of [KENVO \(the Kijabe Environment Volunteers\)](#), BirdLife's Site Support Group / Local Conservation Group at the [Kikuyu Escarpment Important Bird and Biodiversity Area](#) (IBA) in Kenya. By tapping, bottling and selling pure mineral water from the Kereita forest on the Escarpment, the SSG hopes to also tap into a sustainable source of income to cover its conservation activities.

KENVO has been working for more than 20 years to protect and rehabilitate the Kikuyu Escarpment forests. Starting with a small tree nursery, it initiated the reforestation of 500 hectares of formerly degraded forest. In addition, 80,000 trees have been planted through the KENVO schools programme, and many local community members are now managing their own tree nurseries to meet all the demand. As a result of KENVO-initiated community patrols and improved management of the forest, the level of poaching has declined to almost zero. In fact, thanks to the very close partnerships with the local Community Forest Associations, the Kenya Forest Service and a wide range of other stakeholders, it seems as if the forest is as good as 'safe'. For this achievement, the KENVO founding member and Director, David Kuria, recently won the [Tusk Award](#) for Conservation in Africa.

## Conservation, empowerment and employment

KENVO's work is based on three pillars: besides biodiversity conservation, the group also promotes community empowerment and youth employment. Under the second pillar, KENVO works together with local community groups, farmers, women groups, church groups and the local youth, in various initiatives that combine forest conservation and poverty alleviation.

KENVO is also a longstanding partner in the [Canada World Youth Programme](#), and one of its members, Nelly Mbugua, recently won the [Guy Bordeleau Outstanding Overseas Alumni Award](#) for her Conservation International-funded project on [Women in Healthy Sustainable Societies](#) - empowering local women to take part in environmental decision-making.

But it was the third pillar, employment, that was the focus of the recent events at the KENVO Resource Center in Kimende, on the Kikuyu Escarpment.



*One of the women groups was selling their products at the event on 17 June (image MM)*

## Sustainable nature-based enterprises

"I herewith open the ForestMist Water Bottling Enterprise," the deputy Governor for the Kiambu County, Hon Gerald Gakuha Githinji, said on 17 June 2015 when he officially commissioned KENVO's brand-new drinking water factory. The mineral water is bottled straight from the source on the premises of the KENVO Resource Center. It is mainly aimed for the local market, in order to reduce the ecological footprint related to transport. The local remit will also help with KENVO's effort to recycle the plastic bottles; all sales points will be asked to collect used bottles which will then be recycled into plastic poles.

This water bottling facility is only one of the various sustainable forest-based enterprises that KENVO is either promoting or exploiting itself; it already runs a highly successful honey production line, an [ecotourism venture](#), and a [campsite with cottages](#).

Joan Gichuki of Nature Kenya, who also attended the launch of the new enterprise, said: "This new business



*Happy water (image MM)*

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will help the Site Support Group to become evermore self-sustainable. They will be less dependent on donor funding and will also be able to channel some of the profits towards the protection of the IBA."

## ForestMist

The new water product is aptly named: as soon as the mineral water facility was officially opened and all speeches were made, all protocols observed and the VIPs had left, the weather changed abruptly from warm and sunny, into misty and wet.

It was taken as a good sign by the remaining guests who toasted to KENVO's future with their bottles of ForestMist.



*Mist on the Kikuyu Escarpment (image MM)*

*The water bottling facility was funded by the European Union and DANIDA through the Kenyan Community Development Trust Fund.*

*The Kikuyu Escarpment is also an Eastern Afromontane Key Biodiversity Area.*