

Laying the Foundation for Conservation of Kenya's Natural Resources in the 21st Century

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The natural resources of this country—its wildlife, which offers such an attraction to visitors from all over the world, the beautiful places in which these animals live, the mighty forests which guard the water catchment areas so vital to the survival of man and beast—are a priceless heritage for the future.

The Government of Kenya, fully realising the value of its natural resources, pledges itself to conserve them for posterity with all the means at its disposal. . . .

We, therefore, invite other nations and lovers of nature throughout the world to assist us in honouring this solemn pledge.

THE ABOVE PLEDGE BY KENYA'S FOUNDING PRESIDENT, JOMO KENYATTA, on September 18, 1963, shortly after Kenya attained independence from the British, provides a clear example of the Kenyan government's commitment to the conservation of its natural resources.

Forty-seven years later, when Kenya adopted a new constitution on August 27, 2010, and later launched the Vision 2030 development blueprint, the same spirit was re-affirmed by the important role accorded to the environment in national development. Indeed, the history of the Kenya Wildlife Service has emerged as one of Kenya's most inspiring success stories, as I will show in the rest of this article.

Introduction

Since the first national park, Nairobi National Park, was gazetted in 1946, Kenya has seen an increase of more than 60 national parks and reserves as well as conservancies. However, climate change, high population growth, and inappropriate land use practices have caused significant loss of wildlife habitats, migratory corridors, and dispersal areas, greatly reducing the land available for wildlife outside protected areas.

About KWS

The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) is a state corporation established by an act of Parliament, Cap 376 in 1989, with the mandate to conserve and manage wildlife in Kenya's protected and non-protected areas. KWS presides over a system of more than 60 national parks and

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reserves as well as 125 wildlife stations outside protected areas. The protected areas encompass 8% of the nation's landmass.

Reviving conservation

Since its inception, KWS has made huge strides in curbing poaching, enlisting international support for conservation, establishing infrastructure, and developing human capacity. This success has been made possible through the support from the government of Kenya, local and international donors, local communities, and non-governmental organizations.

But our history has not all been plain sailing. Eight years ago, when the head of state honored me with the appointment to preside over the nation's natural heritage, I felt truly privileged—and profoundly shocked.

At age 39, I was relatively young and a greenhorn in matters of conservation. However, as a management specialist from the University of Nairobi, I was certain I was up to the enormous task ahead.

I was to oversee the recovery of endangered species, including rhinos, elephants, lions, and cheetahs, and the restoration of degraded habitats, not forgetting the daunting task of addressing the incredible pressure on wildlife habitats from the fast-growing human population.

I took over the management of KWS at a time when the organization had gone through a period of sharp decline. It had suffered from a high turnover of 13 chief executives within a span of 14 years. This had resulted in low staff morale, lack of clear direction and a poor public image. The organization had also suffered from political interference, poor governance, inadequate management systems and structures, and low revenue occasioned by fraud (KWS 2005). In fact, workers lacked basic supplies to support their routine operations in the field.

Having been weighed down by these challenges, the organization had to be stabilized before fundamental changes could be effected.

The organization chose a phased approach to implementing wide-ranging reforms through a number of strategic management tools and initiatives. We are in the third phase of reforms to drive conservation and tourism efforts in the 21st century.

One early key decision was the Board of Trustees' approval of the *Strategic Plan 2005–2010* in June 2005. This marked the first phase of the reform program that is continuing. The plan focused on enhancing science for wildlife management, information for institutional development, and marketing for financial management. Within the five-year plan, we developed a mission statement that outlined the aim of the organization: to conserve and manage Kenya's wildlife for posterity on a sustainable basis.

The plan concentrated on institutional strengthening, specifically creating order and discipline among a demotivated workforce, and designing structures, systems, processes and procedures to produce a more accountable and agile organization. It also developed a clear organizational structure with clear job descriptions, evaluation procedures, and performance indicators, so that all KWS employees knew what was expected of them (KWS 2005).

The new KWS brand promise was developed and articulated at strategic points within the organization. It contained a clear vision, mission, and expression of core values that was

cascaded to all field stations and national parks and reserves to enable full participation by all staff.

New and innovative programs to engender the brand promise have been implemented. These include daily communal staff tea-break sessions taken in open courts rather than in offices, a director's tea-break session with staff every Friday, quarterly Kamukunji (informal meetings), and organized internal competitions.

Honoring fallen conservation heroes

One factor not generally appreciated by outsiders is the sheer danger that many KWS staff face in discharging their duties. The stakes in wildlife crime are so high that rangers in particular put their lives at risk when pursuing poachers and other criminals. Since 1990, KWS has lost more than 50 rangers while in combat with armed bandits, preventing wildlife crimes, on rescue missions, and protecting people's lives and property from damage by wild animals.

This loss has not been in vain; they have lost their lives for the country and the world at large. To honor these brave people and appreciate their sacrifice, KWS holds a Heroes Day every December 16 at a special monument erected in Nairobi. The commemoration date coincides with the day Nairobi National Park was gazetted as Kenya's first national park. The occasion is attended by families and friends of the departed heroes, KWS employees, government agencies, conservationists, and well-wishers.

The event provides a special occasion to reflect on the lives of those who displayed courage and self-sacrifice in the face of danger, and to celebrate the continued commitment by their remaining colleagues.

An imposing statue of a ranger was erected at the entrance to KWS headquarters in December 2011 to serve as an inspiration to the living heroes.

Ahead of the game

Due to exceptional dedication by KWS staff and an upturn in tourism earnings, the *Strategic Plan 2005–2010* activities were implemented by the end of 2008, well ahead of the 2010 target.

This made it necessary to develop the *Strategic Plan for 2008–2012*, building on the achievements of the previous plan. It is focused on enhanced management that embraces ICT systems, greater institutional capacity, and improved relationship with stakeholders.

The plan integrated the Balanced Score Card approach and deepened emphasis on science, information, and markets. It also extended KWS's focus on people as the organization's most valuable resource, new opportunities arising from emerging technologies, and the strengthening of the KWS brand. Highlights of the new plan included force modernization, the building of forensic and genetic laboratories, and the creation of an information system to provide KWS and other stakeholders with scientific data on which to base wildlife conservation decisions.

We synchronized the new strategic plan with rolling planning cycles as well as the national development goals of the Vision 2030 roadmap. This marked the second phase of the reform process.

Performance management

The government of Kenya's Public Sector Reform Secretariat has directed public agencies to adopt various tools to improve their efficiency and productivity.

Given the breadth and complexity of the KWS mandate and the need to balance the various objectives, the organization chose the Balanced Score Card management tool to guide its management strategy. This is a sophisticated strategic planning and monitoring system that allows every department and employee to report and track progress toward the various strategic objectives (KWS 2008). Once fully implemented and computerized, the Balanced Score Card system is expected to become a nerve center of the organization—showing the user progress, blockages, and what needs to be done to resolve bottlenecks.

Already, KWS is ISO 9001: 2008-certified, an international recognition of the KWS management systems, and a confirmation to our suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders that we maintain robust systems and standards in service delivery.

To keep abreast with developments in management in the corporate sector, KWS has consistently participated in corporate competitions. Since 2007, KWS has won several "Company of the Year Awards" attesting to its success in attaining global competitiveness. This has boosted staff morale and created considerable improvements in operational effectiveness. Winning these awards has demonstrated that public institutions can beat the private ones at their own game (Kenya Institute of Management 2010).

KWS has also been vetted by Superbrand, an independent authority on branding with experience in over 80 countries, and awarded the Superbrand status based on consumer feedback in the areas of quality, reliability, and distinction (KWS 2010: 9). This momentum for excellence is expected to continue as the organization aims for the ISO 14,000 series on environmental standards and ISO 22,000 for advanced quality measures (KWS 2009: 13).

Force modernization

KWS has embarked on a number of bold, all-inclusive strategies to protect wildlife populations against the ever-increasing sophistication of wildlife crime. These include implementing a force modernization program based on three core principles: force restructuring, professional force and equipment acquisition, and infrastructural development to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The program recognizes the need for change in strategy and operational tactics, use of post-operation intelligence, and leveraging of information and communication technology. As part of this, we are in the process of establishing a forensic laboratory to support law enforcement and prosecution of wildlife-related crimes.

Harnessing emerging technology

To stay afloat in the fast-paced technological era, KWS has deployed wide-ranging information communication and technologies in decision-making and implementation processes.

For instance, to keep tabs on the movement of wildlife and fortify ecosystem monitoring, KWS is rolling out a georeferenced wildlife monitoring system that will enable rangers to collect vital information on wildlife (KWS 2009).

Partnerships

Over the last decade, KWS has employed a coordinated and participatory approach to conservation that ensures the involvement of key stakeholders while respecting the rights of communities and individual landowners. We partner with various like-minded nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), corporate bodies, and governmental agencies to undertake conservation efforts. One of the most outstanding partnership achievements, steered by KWS and the NGO Rhino Ark, was the completion of the 450-km Aberdare Fence, a project that took a decade (KWS 2009).

KWS has also been instrumental in efforts to repossess and rehabilitate the Mau Forests Complex, the largest closed-canopy forest ecosystem in Kenya. Millions of people depend on the 12 rivers that flow from this large ecosystem. In recent years, it has been under immense pressure from politicians illegal squatters.

KWS is also partnering with private organizations to save endangered habitats, such as Nairobi National Park, which is under siege from the growing metropolis. To restore some degraded habitats, a Ksh40 million (US\$0.5 million) Nairobi Greenline Project was initiated that planted trees along a 32km-by-50m strip that will act as a buffer zone protecting the park from the growing city. This initiative was spearheaded by KWS and the Kenya Association of Manufacturers, and attracted the participation of industries, conservationists, corporations, and the public.

We have also embraced social media—YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and an interactive website—to engage the public.

International engagement

Internationally, Kenya is an active party to a number of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) relating to wildlife resources conservation and management. These include CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), the Lusaka Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on Migratory Species, the World Heritage convention, and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

An example of which we are particularly proud is a recent decision by CITES to entrust the leadership of developing the African Elephant Action Plan to Kenya. Consequently, KWS will host the secretariat that will develop the plan and its accompanying fund for the conservation and management of the African elephant in 37 African countries.

Species management programs

On the species conservation front, a number of management and conservation plans have been developed for large carnivores such as spotted hyenas, lions, and wild dogs, as well as for such marine species as sea turtles. Indeed, Kenya is the first African country in the region to develop national conservation strategies for large carnivores (KWS 2009, 2010). The strategies aim at improving the conservation and management of these species within their existing and potential geographical ranges. These strategies are expected to help ease the pressure facing large carnivores from Kenya's high human population, which has risen from 1 million at the turn of the last century, to 10 million in 1963, to an estimated 40 million this year. This growth has put intense pressure on land use.

Task forces to develop conservation strategies for other large carnivores, bongo, roan antelope, sable antelope, sitatunga antelope, giraffe, and primates have been set up. Management committees on the hirola antelope and Grevy zebra have been launched (KWS 2010).

Over the last 10 years, the elephant population has increased at the rate of 1,000 each year. Within the same time, we have grown the rhino population from about 600 to 920. These are great achievements for endangered species given the escalating insecurity and impacts of climate change.

Visitor experience and customer orientation

Over the last couple of years, KWS has become more people-centered and customer-focused, shaking off the previous paramilitary image. Uniformed professional customer service officers have replaced rangers at park gates to make the visitor experience more pleasant and memorable. This has enhanced KWS brand visibility as well as staff motivation and identity.

KWS has developed strong customer orientation and conducts regular competition analyses and market intelligence. Systems used for measuring changes in customer trends include KWS visitor statistics analyses, Kenya Advertising Research Foundation quarterly reports, tourism satellite accounts, monthly industry tourism trend reports by the Kenya Tourist Board (KTB) and United Nations World Tourism Organization, among others.

As part of the KWS revival and to prepare the ground for park entry tariffs review, a branding program was started in 2005 with the aim of giving each park a unique identity. The program, now covering 22 national parks and reserves, has created new systems, signage, visitor accommodation, and infrastructure, and has received positive feedback from the tourism industry, communities, and other partners. Covered under the program is retraining of staff to improve service delivery and to support community projects in three areas: water, health, and education (KWS 2005).

The refurbishment of the parks and reserves is in line with Kenya's Vision 2030 development blueprint, which seeks to make tourism a leading contributor to the economy. The goal is to place Kenya among the best tourist destinations in the world, offering a high-end, diverse, exclusive, and distinctive visitor experience.

The huge investment in branding has shown good returns in improved service delivery, increased park visitation, good customer feedback, and more positive community perceptions of wildlife, as well as providing a unique identity for each protected area. However, one of the biggest challenges KWS is tackling is to tilt tourism earnings in favor of communities living in wildlife areas.

Visitor safety

The safety of local and international tourists within protected areas and other areas is ensured through enhanced visitor security patrols and operations. KWS works closely with Kenya's Tourist Police Unit and other stakeholders in the tourism industry to ensure that the parks and reserves remain safe and secure.

Financial management

Until a couple of years ago, KWS relied heavily on the government, tourism revenues, and

the goodwill of development partners to fund its operations. In the course of eight years, the KWS budget has increased sevenfold. For a record six years, we have had a clean bill of health from the National Audit Office. At the same time, we have transformed KWS into one of the most transparent organizations in the world. Staff recruitment is corruption-free, enabling us to select the best people and to build public confidence in our operations.

The organization's new thrust is devising innovative sources of funding and creative solutions to support conservation. The revenue trend has been upwards due to park entry charge adjustments, an increase in tourist arrivals, and marketing, as well as compliance with financial and procurement procedures.

KWS has sought creative ways to cushion conservation activities from the variability of the tourism industry without compromising the core business of managing and conserving wildlife. Towards this end, KWS established an endowment fund in 2009. It serves as a mechanism through which Kenyans and the rest of the world can contribute to the conservation of wildlife and its habitat against the vagaries of international economics and trends in tourism. The fund has registered phenomenal growth, starting with Ksh20 million (US \$250,000) in 2010 to Ksh60 million in January 2012. KWS projections indicate that the initial target of US\$100 million by 2020 will be achieved, increasing the organization's capacity to wean itself off over-reliance on unpredictable tourism earnings (KWS 2010).

The success of the fund is a clear indication that both local and global communities value Kenya's natural heritage, of which KWS is privileged to be the custodian. It's this human charitable nature that KWS is tapping into to enable it discharge the mandate of protecting wildlife for the current generation and posterity. Through the fund, KWS seeks to boost its ability to enhance the conservation of Kenya's biological diversity (KWS 2010). Diversifying revenue streams will not only broaden funding sources but will also provide a buffer against unanticipated events such as abrupt declines in tourism and shifts in development partners' priorities.

Corporate citizenship and environment

KWS has implemented corporate citizenship and social responsibility policies based on the existing wildlife legislation. The key components include prevention of adverse environmental impacts; strengthening compliance with national legislation and regulations; promotion of the use of eco-friendly and efficient technologies; enhancing education of employees, stakeholders and communities; and auditing for continual improvement. (Kenya Institute of Management 2010). Part of this initiative includes providing health facilities, public education and awareness, and clean water. An important outcome of this initiative is the reduction of poverty and improvement of the livelihoods of communities living around protected areas.

More land for wildlife

In collaboration with partners, KWS has managed to acquire more than 1 million ha of land for wildlife conservation under community conservancies. The latest acquisition is the 17,000-acre Laikipia National Park donated to KWS by the Africa Wildlife Foundation and The Nature Conservancy. Another is Kenya's first voluntary land easement adjoining Nairobi National Park.

We are seeking more community land for conservation. The Mount Kenya East Pilot Project is jointly implemented by KWS and the International Fund for Agricultural Development with the aim of reducing poverty around Mount Kenya and the Tana River catchment basin through sustainable natural resource management practices.

Stepping into the future

Going forward, Kenya faces huge environmental challenges in various key areas: food security, water, energy, and pasture for livestock. We are also working with other stakeholders on alternative sources of energy, moving away from charcoal burning that has depleted many forests. We are encouraging commercial tree planting and educating communities to conserve the environment and use natural resources in a sustainable way.

We are reviewing human settlements along wildlife corridors and dispersal areas with the aim to minimize effects on the environment and wildlife.

A distinctive characteristic of our mandate is that the challenges never go away. Climate change, a volatile global economy, population pressure, capricious land use policies, and poaching are threats that will be with us for the foreseeable future.

Despite these challenges, KWS is well-positioned to face them. The new constitution provides strong justification and direction for conserving wildlife for generations to come. It provides for a devolved structure in which natural resources are managed at two levels: national and county.

We are also embarking on the protection of critical national water catchments of Mau Eburru and Mount Kenya. Loita Forest in Narok and Marsabit are also within sight. KWS will provide leadership and engage other stakeholders in protecting key water catchment areas.

Phase III: KWS 2.0 strategy

In the third phase of our reforms, we have realigned our strategic plan from aspiring to be a world leader in wildlife—a task that we feel has largely been accomplished—towards “saving the last great species and spaces on earth for humanity.” We’ve dubbed this the “KWS 2.0” strategy.

The new focus puts greater emphasis on the urgency of protecting our natural heritage from the threats of a growing population, climate change, wildlife crime, and abuse of the environment.

To achieve this vision, we will focus on three priority areas of the new strategy, namely: conservation stewardship, people excellence, and collaborative partnership. All our initiatives are aligned to these strategic focal areas.

Improving and aligning our intangible assets and our organization’s readiness to improve critical processes depends on having the people with the right attitude, character, capacity, and aspirations.

Executing this strategy and achieving our strategic results will depend on engaged leadership at all levels, interactive communication among all employees, and strong adherence to our core values of passion, professionalism, innovation, and quality.

Our success will be defined by the impact on execution of our mandate. This will be

achieved through enhanced ecological integrity, improved wildlife industry governance, reduced human–wildlife conflict, enhanced collaboration with our stakeholders, and strengthened law enforcement and security.

In this third phase of reform, the organization will be rolling out a number of initiatives to establish a sound financial footing to support conservation activities. These include revision of pricing to reflect the true value of products and services, and diversification of revenue streams. KWS is in the process of refreshing the domestic tourism campaign and leveraging branded parks by segmenting and repositioning them to meet market demands. Plans are also underway for increasing points of service delivery, including encouraging tourism investment in key strategic areas outside national parks.

KWS will also impress upon the government the urgent need for enacting appropriate legislation and policy, engage the treasury for budgetary support, and extend partnerships for funding in Kenya and abroad. KWS will also strengthen relations with communities living near wildlife areas as well as ensure they benefit from the presence of wildlife in their areas. Internally, we are working on having employees with a greater passion for the job, ones who are well-paid, well-equipped, well-housed, and knowledgeable.

With the new constitution, provisions of Vision 2030 development blueprint, endowment fund, and the expected review of wildlife policy and legislation, wildlife conservation in Kenya will have a more enabling environment to play its rightful role. We are particularly keen on new benefit-sharing arrangements with communities and other stakeholders as well as more responsive institutional arrangements. The new policy and bill are also expected to sharpen penalties for environmental crime.

The conservation journey ahead of us is still long. A lot needs to be done to heal the fragile planet from climate change and other challenges. KWS has a good foundation for an exciting future full of hope and promise.

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