

# From Wildlife Legislation to Community Awareness and Mobilization

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Conservation strategies in Kenya have evolved over the years to deal with emerging issues. Initially, the main activities focused on wildlife protection and law enforcement, as at the time, the main conservation challenges were hunting and poaching. The Kenyan government's position towards wildlife conservation was first clearly stated in 1965, when the government recognized that approaches tending to harm rather than to preserve the physical environment needed to be curbed through education and legislation.

Although the prevailing trend in wildlife policies was to focus on maximizing tourism, human aspects in wildlife conservation have become increasingly recognized. One can witness a shift from the traditional wildlife management paradigm of preservation by law enforcement, to modern conservation approaches which are based on community involvement.

The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) was formed during an era of extensive wildlife poaching which led to a severe reduction in elephant and black rhino species. New challenges, including the destruction of biodiversity and wildlife habitats as a result of a change in land use, had also emerged. KWS was commissioned to protect and manage wildlife – for the people of Kenya and as a world heritage – and to accomplish her mandate. In the process, KWS realized that law enforcement on its own, without the involvement of the people, would not be effective. Community involvement through education and mobilization were given high priority as management tools in this endeavor. To date, tremendous results have been achieved in community involvement and benefits can now be realized from conservation based projects. People now comprehend the importance of conservation. This in turn has helped to reduce some of the conservation challenges.

The education activities of KWS include park interpretation, formal lectures and talks and social marketing

Daisy addressing a school in an anti-bush meat campaign session.



campaigns among communities living in wildlife areas. There are nine education centers across the country which addresses areas with specific issues. However, with about fifty protected areas and vast unprotected areas with wildlife resources, these centers are barely adequate in having an effective impact on wildlife conservation. The Education Center/Nairobi Safari Walk at the KWS Headquarters supports needy areas by supplying educational resources and programmes aimed at enhancing the support for conservation. Occasionally, conservation campaigns are conducted – with the help of the area managers – to address prevailing conservation challenges.

Additionally, community mobilization is used as a tool to persuade communities living in wildlife areas to participate in conservation efforts. Education on its own does not result in behavioural change and community involvement. Therefore mobilization seeks to encourage action. This calls for education on the value of wildlife, as well as capacity building on the ways in which to derive benefits from the resources without depleting them. Hence community projects are initiated with the assistance of stakeholders. By doing so, socio-economic benefits may be realized which consequently enhances the appreciation of the existence of wildlife. Some of the activities that have been initiated include eco-tourism projects, fencing off farms from wildlife habitats with wildlife proof fences, plant nurseries, cultural projects and education bursaries.

Conservation can only be achieved if the people get involved. Involvement of local communities requires education. People must comprehend and appreciate the benefits to be had from protecting and managing wildlife resources. ♦