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“From Ridge to Reef” with WWF – the global conservation organization

By
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Kiunga Marine National Reserve (KMNR) borders Somalia at the northern tip of the Kenyan coastline. It is an area of natural beauty and a haven for biodiversity. In 1996, the KMNR conservation and development project was initiated by WWF in partnership with the Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) to address effective management of the reserve’s natural resources as well as integrate social needs into environmental conservation.

The area residents are *Bajuni*, a mixture of native *Mijikenda* and Arabs who visited the Kenyan coast from the seventeenth century to trade, and intermarried with the local communities. Kiunga area has unique access problem, with the sea as the most common mode of transport although it could take between two to eight hours from the old historical town of Lamu depending on whether a motorized boat or a wind-driven sailboat is used. Alternatively a tough 4X4 vehicle can be used through the seasonal bush and mud tracks stretching about 200km in the relatively insecure forests of Boni and Dadori National Reserves. The 2 reserves have a history of banditry, and the trucks are completely impassable in the wet season! This alongside minimal government health facilities make it difficult for residents to access health care. In response to this priority need, in 2002 WWF introduced a Population, Health and Environment (PHE) linkages component to the project to assist the Ministry of Health (MoH) deliver quality health care to communities within and adjacent to KMNR.

Under this component, the remote villages on the islands and mainland areas get monthly mobile clinics for immunization for children and ante natal care for pregnant women, treatment of the sick, de-worming and vitamin A tablets as well as family planning services for men and women of reproductive age. Traditional Birth Attendants, Community Health Workers and Community-Based Distributors of Family Planning Services have been trained and updated to best address reproductive and general health services and enhance timely referrals to the far off and limited health facilities. With support from the local community, WWF has built a Ministry of Health approved dispensary at Mkokoni village and engaged a community nurse to serve the Mkokoni and the neighboring Chandani and Kiwaiyu villages.

Kiunga is generally dry and hence characterized by frequent water shortages. To improve access to safe drinking water, the project has upgraded the wells by installing hand-operated pumps after cleaning, treating and covering them. A rain harvesting facility, locally known as *djabia*, has also been built. To curb the high malaria prevalence in the area, vulnerable community groups have benefited from more than three thousand long-lasting insecticide-treated mosquito bed nets provided by the project. Village Health Committees have been formed and trained on insecticide handling skills that enable them control mosquitoes and bedbugs – a common household pest in the area.

***Photo 1: A health worker weighs a baby at a mobile clinic in a Boni village in Kiunga
By: Sam Weru)***



***Photo 2: A treated well fitted with a hand pump at Mkokoni village in Kiunga
By: Sam Weru***



These visible social benefits are bearing fruit in terms of availing the project team an opportunity to preach the conservation gospel. The result has been improved participation of fishermen in protection of turtles with more than 60% of turtle nest reporting and surveillance being done by local fishermen and youth. The KMNR Joint Management Team (JMT) headed by KWS and involving all relevant government agencies and community representatives has been receiving positive responses from the local community. The fishermen are coming up with great conservation ideas like decision to have fish regeneration sites since they have been able to link this with reliable food/fish supply for their families. Women are also coming out to engage in alternative livelihoods that contribute to conservation and provide them with the much needed cash. Cash from flip flop trash deposited on the beaches of KMNR helps women educate their children. The flip flop handicrafts earn participating households up to US\$100 a month. The

handicrafts include necklaces, curtains/hangings, hair bands, bracelets and are made from flip flops deposited on Kiunga beaches from all over the Indian Ocean territory. Fishermen are also working hand in hand with WWF, KWS and the Fisheries Department to conserve corals reefs and other marine habitats through joint research conducted to monitor the health of KMNR marine ecosystem.

Photo 3: A flip flop curtain sample done by the women of Kiunga
By: Sam Weru



Communities in the KMNR catchments have developed advanced levels of resource stewardship. They work more closely with government and non government agencies to improve both human and ecosystem health. The success of the project has been due to the strong partnership that WWF has built with all sectors of government and local community to promote community ownership of the project for healthy livelihoods in a healthy ecosystem.

Where's the link with conservation? Well, WWF's approach has been to focus on improving people's livelihoods because there's a strong link between sustainable livelihoods and conserving the natural world. The core of WWF's mission is *building a future in which people live in harmony with the natural world*. This programme is a great illustration of why doing that is very important. There are sometimes conflicts between what people want and need, and what's sustainable for the environment in which they and all of us live. Unless we find ways to manage that conflict well, the future looks rather bleak - whether for clean water, animal and plant species, the sea and everything in it, or the atmosphere and climate.

For more information on Kiunga project's PHE work, please contact **Sam Weru, Project Coordinator, WWF Kiunga** on wwfkiung@africaonline.co.ke or the author on jmutegi@eikmail.com