# STRATEGIES TO UNLOCK BUSINESS POTENTIAL OF BIODIVERSITY WEALTH

Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) Senior management held a two-day retreat in Mombasa to lay strategies of optimizing benefits from the country's bioeconomy by unlocking the biodiversity business potential through innovative ways for creation of appropriate enablers and incentives that contribute to ease of doing business.

The senior management discussed gains made by the country and KWS in meeting its obligation on access and share of benefits arising from utilization of biodiversity, efforts on ease of doing business by permitting integration, innovative mechanisms for management, protection and conservation of the country's wildlife heritage.

The meeting was supported by the Global Environmental Facility -Nagoya Implementation Fund (GEF-NPIF)) under the Soda lakes project. The Soda lakes project is 'Developing the microbial Biotechnology Industry from Kenya's soda lakes in line with the Nagoya Protocol' and is among the 13 globally funded projects under the GEF – Nagoya Protocol Implementation Fund (NPIF). The NPIF fund was proposed by Japan presidency for COP 10 after adoption of Nagoya protocol to promote early entry into force and provide practical examples for its implementation. Kenya won the grant through Kenya wildlife service and other beneficiary countries include Argentina, Bhutan, Cameroon, Cook Islands, Colombia, Costa Rica, Fiji, Gabon, Kenya and Panama.

The Soda lakes project is a model project for implementation of Nagoya protocol and it is in the final stage of completion. Key achievements ranging from contribution to legal, policy and instructional arrangements have been realized under the project including showcasing the country's rich biological resources during the Conference of Parties on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Nagoya Protocol to which Kenya is party.

For the last three years over 300 people ranging from local communities, resource providers and users have been sensitized on the country's commitment and obligations under Nagoya Protocol. Kenya ratified Nagoya Protocol on access and benefit sharing of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge in 2014. Nagoya Protocol currently remains one of the key international instruments for biodiversity business transaction in terms of bio trade and gene trade which are key elements for green and blue economy (marine genetic resources). The business is done under recognition of national

sovereignty and contracts referred to as prior informed Consent and mutually agreed Terms.

Kenya’s wildlife in addition to tourism contributes significantly to both global and national economy. Kenya’s rich unique genetic resources from varied ecosystem is feed stock to various sectors such as Agriculture, food industries including flavours, cosmetics, biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries .Some notable examples include the global detergents from enzymes derived from Kenya’s soda lakes, the biocontrols, the famous bacillus strain initially collected from Ruma area, which is now a global product used for genetic modification like in genetically modified maize among many others. Currently large quantise of Kenya‘s wildlife biological resources have been accessed and held in foreign ex-situ collections. These genetic resources are being exploited without sharing the benefits with the country.

The key reasons why the country does not get a fair share of benefits from her resources include resource misappropriation due to inadequate legal frameworks. This leads to ineffective compliance and enforcement while at the same time acting as an incentive and attracting investment in research and development which contribute to biodiversity conservation and livelihoods. Kenya wildlife Service is the competent government authority on wildlife matters under the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act 2013.

Under the Wildlife Act, the Service manages, coordinates and advises the government on all matters of wildlife. At the same time, it grants various user rights in forms of permits and licences including grant of Prior Informed Consent and Mutually Agreed terms on access and share of benefits arising from utilization of genetic resources and associated genetic resources. For the last seven years Kenya wildlife service has granted over 500 research permits for various projects where various benefits to the country in form of monetary and non-monetary have been realized.

In order to maximize benefits in this subsector there is need for strategic positioning in line with emerging issues at global and national level. There are current serious global debates on whether digital sequences derived from genetic resources qualifies for benefit sharing. Kenya and other developing and mega biodiversity minded countries position is that digital sequence is within the scope of Nagoya protocol and therefore its access and utilization deserve a share of benefits with the country of origin.

KWS and stakeholders are undertaking various initiatives which include the wildlife Strategy 2030 that recommends development of a

substantive access and benefit sharing framework, reviewing the wildlife Act 2013, development of appropriate regulatory and institutional frameworks including infrastructure, skills and recruitments. Together with stakeholders, the Endowment Fund under the wildlife Act 2013 has been amended to National Conservation Trust fund, to consolidate all benefits derived from wildlife and direct them appropriately to biodiversity conservation and livelihoods support.

In line with the presidential directive on E-commerce, the Service has initiated internal integration of its licencing and permitting process digitizing the process and also together with key partner institutions such as National Management Authority (NEMA), National Council for Science Technology and Innovation, Kenya Forestry Service , Kenya Plant and phytosanitary Services and Department of Veterinary Services In addition to this, a national integrated online permitting system for grant of ABS permits on genetic resources and associated knowledge is being developed. On completion, the system will contribute to reduced wildlife crimes arising from misappropriation of genetic resources, enhance coordination, increasing transparency, and therefore increase Research and Development applications. This will lead to increased traceability and monitoring on utilization of genetic resources which at the end optimize benefits and contribute to the national development goals as well as to biodiversity conservation and rural livelihoods.

The key partners for Soda lakes project include UNEP, University of Nairobi, Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute, Jomo Kenyatta University for Agriculture and Technology, Moi University, Rivatex, Counties and local communities within the Kenyan Soda Lakes. Together with NEMA, KWS is implementing the ABS activities under UNDP global ABS project and the GIZ ABS initiatives.