



Staff morale was at its lowest ebb; the revenue base weakened drastically; uncertainty grew astronomically; poaching and insecurity increased in the parks; human-wildlife conflict climbed to alarming proportions; the future of tourism was bleak. And then ... Enter the Strategist. The saga of how DR. JULIUS KIPNG'ETICH, a young management science specialist, appointed to head KWS by the President in December 2004 turned around the Service in less than a decade to the point where it is now **By JOE OMBUOR**

The New KWS in Action

The remarkable achievements the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) has made in the last eight years have laid a firm foundation for wildlife conservation in the 21st Century and beyond.

The critical contribution the wildlife conservation industry makes to national development often goes unappreciated. Yet KWS plays multiple roles in various cross-

cutting sectors in the economy, including the environment, security, water, electricity, health, fisheries, tourism, culture, religion, transport and international conventions.

The tourism industry, which relies on wildlife, is the backbone of the economic pillar in the Vision 2030 development blueprint.

A total of 25% of the country's GDP comes from the industry, of which 15% is

from wildlife, 5% from water and another 5% from electricity, both hydro and geothermal.

In fact, the conservation industry runs neck-and-neck with agriculture when it comes to contribution to the GDP.

To fully harness such a critical resource, KWS continues with the implementation of wide-ranging reforms through various strategic management tools and initiatives to drive conservation and tourism efforts.

Desperate attempt

The steady recovery of Kenya's wildlife from the poaching threat in the late 1980s has been long and torturous. The population of large wildlife species was decimated drastically. For instance, the population of elephants declined by 70% while that of rhinos declined by 90% by 1989.

In a desperate attempt to reverse this trend, the Government appointed a total of 13 different directors to head the KWS from 1989 to 2004. This turned out to be one of



the most traumatic periods in the history of KWS.

During this period, the staff morale plummeted to its lowest ebb; the revenue base weakened drastically and uncertainty grew astronomically; poaching and insecurity significantly increased in the parks; cases of human-wildlife conflict climbed to alarming proportions; and the future of tourism was bleak.

Lack of modern management practices involving developing and documenting a roadmap in the form of a strategic plan likened the organisation to a "ship sailing with no radar", as it operated without clearly defined focus, strategic objectives and targets.

However, all these are now history, thanks to three phases of reforms spearheaded by Dr. Julius Kipng'etich, a young management science specialist, who was appointed to head KWS by the President in December 2004.

In June 2005, Julius introduced the concept of strategic planning for KWS. The three pillars he identified were people, technology and KWS's image. Based on the log frame approach, the Strategic Plan for 2005-2010 focused on science for wildlife management, information for institutional development and marketing for financial sustainability.

How was that achieved? Kipng'etich says devolution and what he calls 'satisfiers', or motivational factors, played a big role.

"We made sure that the organisation's hardware, such as proper housing, good salaries and so on, were in place, but installed software such as team spirit, recognition for excellence and work incentives to enhance their motivation".

Implementing the plan was not smooth sailing. Kipng'etich observes: "It takes a long while to change organisation culture, especially in an environment which had become hostile like KWS".

He explains that the process requires passion, motivation, professionalism, teamwork and, above all, capacity enhancement of the entire workforce.

New focus

The Plan concentrated on institutional strengthening, especially creating order and discipline among a motivated workforce and designing structures, systems, processes and procedures to produce a more accountable and agile organisation.

The results from the 2005-2010 plans started taking effect in early 2006. KWS staff



ensured that the organisation's conservation efforts were guided by the results of continuous scientific research. Information technology was applied to ensure that information was available in a decentralised manner for decision-making and taking appropriate action.

In addition, aggressive marketing through mass media, partnerships, and exhibitions started drawing more domestic tourists. Branding of some 22 national parks and reserves which gave each park distinct identity generated renewed interest from the public and the tourism industry.

Significant achievements in the period include strengthened institutional capacity; improved public image and stakeholder relationship; and the establishment of an endowment fund to augment the organisation's already diversified revenue base. In developing the 2008-2012 Strategic Plan, which marked the second phase of reforms, KWS realised that the log frame approach was limited to activity level and could not relate vision and mission to performance.

A decision was made to change to the balanced score card (BSC) approach, which provided tools that could improve efficiency and productivity.

The focus for the new Plan was also changed to reflect four pillars: People as the most valued resource; new opportunities emanating from emerging technologies; strengthening the KWS image and brand; and aligning KWS operations to the Vision 2030 national development blueprint.

The shift in focus resulted in formulation of new strategic objectives in line with the new pillars. In the new Plan, enhancing wildlife conservation still remained a primary objective while attaining financial stability; enhancing partnerships with customers and stakeholders; enhancing quality service delivery; and modernising institutional capacity became new objectives for the 2008-2012 Strategic Plan.

Award winning

For an independent judgment of the turnaround strategies that the organisation had put in place and opportunities to benchmark in 2007, KWS joined the Company of the Year Awards (COYA).

The culture of continuous improvement started manifesting in KWS in 2007, which made the organisation scoop two additional COYA awards in 2008. In that year, the performance of the organisation was visibly better than before as it recorded significant improvement in revenue collection.

These COYA awards were in addition to the INTERPOL Eco-message Award in

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recognition of the organisation's exemplary sharing of information leading to arrest of international wildlife products smugglers.

KWS has also been rated among the top five in a survey of the most respected companies in East Africa conducted by the Nation Media Group in 2007.

The institutional and organisational capacity enhancements which KWS undertook since 2005 not only improved its performance but also increased the capability of its staff significantly.

Fruits of reforms

The reforms KWS has been implementing for the last eight years have borne fruit. For five years running, KWS has had clean bills of health from the Auditor General's office. The organisation has not only won various COYA awards, been ISO-certified but has also been granted Superbrand status.

From a revenue of Sh800 million a year in 2004, the initial restructuring saw the revenue jump by Sh300 million in just six months. The KWS budget has increased seven-fold from Sh1.16 billion to Sh7 billion in eight years.

This has enabled KWS to increase the number of vehicles for conservation operations from 90 in 2004 to the present 712, the majority of the fleet distributed in the 26 national parks, while 16 planes patrol the national parks and other wildlife-inhabited areas. More than 90% of the vehicles are less than five years old to ensure efficiency.

Currently, KWS is raking in a yearly revenue of Sh4.6 billion from sources such as streamlined conservation fees from national parks, 22 of which have been branded through renovation and rehabilitation of infrastructure system, restocking of wildlife and community outreach.

The branding of national parks and reserves has been a morale booster to staff, while adding value to visitor experience. This has won the admiration of the tourism industry, which supports a pricing strategy that reflects the value of the Service and the unique Kenyan tourism product.

Increasing human population, adverse effects of climate change and sophistication in crime as the greatest challenge to conservation but Kenya's wildlife is safe for posterity. In the last eight years, Kenya's elephant population has grown from 28,000 to the current 38,000, an increase of an average of 10,000 new elephants every year. It's a similar success story for rhinos, which have grown from 700 in the year 2004 to the current 1,006.

Whereas main competitor South Africa's loss of its rhino population is moving towards 250 since January, Kenya so far has lost only



five rhinos, three of them from private ranches. Kenya lost a total of 23 rhinos last year, compared to South Africa's 448. KWS support to the communities that coexist with wildlife has risen phenomenally from Sh20 million in 2004 to the present Sh250 million a year. More communities have been brought to the conservation agenda, with a million hectares for wildlife won without the government spending money.

KWS aims to pass 10% of its income to the communities in the form of schools, health centres, water points and other communal benefits. Besides, a new department for Community Enterprise has been set up to streamline relations between investors and communities. This aims at enabling more communities to increase revenue streams beyond livestock.

However, law and policy reforms so vital for the way forward have yet to be passed. Some of the key highlights of the proposed law and policy are on institutional arrangements, compensation and benefits

sharing as well as law enforcement and punishment.

According to Kipng'etich: "We need deterrent laws in place that will treat environmental destruction of plants and animals as economic crimes, because the environment is an important pillar in our economy. It is a pity that existing laws categorize environmental destruction as a misdemeanor.

The new policy will also be instrumental in re-organising the industry into policy, operations and regulation roles.

For financial stability to cushion the organisation from uneven income, Kipng'etich says KWS has set up an endowment fund with a target of US\$100 million as the principal. Interest accrued is expected to cushion conservation during lean times.

Kenya also needs to adapt and mitigate adverse effects of climate change while reaping the benefits of carbon credits from global markets. Asked about the significance of the stellar results KWS has been posting, Kipng'etich asked rhetorically: "What we are reaping today is yesterday's crop. What will tomorrow's crop be?" ■



Joe Ombur is an experienced award-winning journalist with a flair for Science and Education writing. A specialist feature writer, Joe has published articles in the Standard, the Nation and several local journals. His science writing has been recognized with a CNN/Multichoice African Journalism Award in the Environment Category that he won in 2006. He is the only Kenyan winner of the Akintola Fatoyinbo African Education Journalism Award.