

Kenya-Belgium cooperation in the framework of marine sciences

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Belgium and Kenya have a long tradition of collaboration in marine sciences. In the early eighties of the last century, realizing the importance of the world ocean, and the many services it provides to society, and recognizing that marine sciences are an essential enterprise in the development of a better world, the Belgian Government asked Professor Philip Polk to travel to Kenya and to investigate the possibilities of scientific collaboration. This mission resulted in the start of the 'Kenya-Belgium cooperation in Marine Sciences' (KBP) in 1985, which knew different successive phases that together ran continuously for more than 15 years. The project was very successful with a significant scientific output. It knew different simultaneous spin-off projects, with ramifications to many other European and East-African countries.

To revitalize this long lasting collaboration, the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI) and the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) recently signed a formal Memorandum of Understanding for bilateral collaboration in the field of marine sciences. This VLIZ-KMFRI collaboration will promote partnership in following areas:

- Development and execution of collaborative research projects.
- Undertaking joint field work, research expeditions, experiments, monitoring and observation programmes.
- Exchange of expertise and exchange of staff, technical experts and students, including capacity building.
- Exchange of data and information.
- Jointly producing derived products from research, data and information.

In May 2013 the government of Flanders donated its old research vessel Zeeleeuw to the Government of Kenya, which renamed it RV Mtafiti, the African Swahili word for researcher. VLIZ installed navigational and sampling equipment on board and provided training of technical and scientific staff. The arrival of this oceanographic research vessel will be a major asset for KMFRI, who will manage the ship, and for marine science at the East African coast in general.

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, in particular its programme on International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange (IODE), also has had long collaboration with KMFRI. Building on the Marine Information Exchange programme between Kenyan and Flemish institutions established in the framework of the Kenya Belgium Project in Marine Sciences in the 1980's, IODE has developed a robust 'Ocean Data and Information Network for Africa - ODINAFRICA'. With the support of the Flanders - UNESCO Science Trust fund, ODINAFRICA has focussed on the development of capacity and infrastructure for the collection, processing, archival, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of data and information products. This included the establishment and equipping of the Kenya National Oceanographic Data and Information Centre (KeNODC). Staffs of KeNODC and the KMFRI library have been training on a wide range of topics related to marine data and information management. Support was provided for strengthening of the sea level observation network, preparation of the Kenya Coastal and Marine Atlas, and development of databases and directories crucial for the integrated management of the coastal zones (e.g. oceanographic data, marine species, experts and institutions, and projects). ODINAFRICA also facilitated the repatriation of data collected in Kenyan waters from other regional and international data centres.

References

<http://www.vliz.be/projects/kenya/>