

Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) and Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI) renew the Kenyan - Belgian collaboration in marine sciences

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Marine scientific research is essential to allow the appropriate management of marine ecosystems and the services they provide. It is now clear that developed countries (i.e. with financial resources and research means) and developing countries (i.e. with invaluable natural resources) need to work together to achieve valuable scientific information. In 1984, the Belgian Government established such collaboration with Kenya, named "The Kenya - Belgium Cooperation in Marine Sciences". The Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) were the first cooperating institutions. During the collaboration more than 70 scientists from KMFRI graduated from Belgian universities. Likewise, Belgian students were sent to Kenya to collect field samples for their studies. A high variety of species and habitats were investigated such as sea grasses, mangroves, algae, oysters, prawns and nematodes and some research efforts could be put into practice. For example, in 1993 the largest oyster farm in Africa was built at the coast of Kenya (Gazi Bay) and in 1994 ten hectares of mangrove trees were reforested after a severe degradation of the habitat was observed. Now, almost 30 years later VLIZ and KMFRI signed a new Memorandum of Understanding targeting the revival of the Kenya - Belgium collaboration. Firstly, this project is aimed at the assessment and collection of all the historical literature that resulted from the collaboration. But also recent publications concerning marine scientific research in Kenya are targeted. The literature will be made accessible through the VLIZ database IMIS (Integrated Marine Information System). Secondly, data archaeology and data rescue will be implemented at the level of student theses, as these data sets are often forgotten. Valuable data sets will be identified, recovered and made accessible through IMIS. Simultaneously, WoRMS (World Register of Marine Species) will be updated with Kenyan species described in the documents and the VLIZ Gazetteer (i.e. an online editable standardized list of marine geographic locations) will be updated with investigated marine regions in Kenya. The use of these databases will allow the user to efficiently search, query, and download documents, datasets and research information of interest. So far, fifty key people (i.e. scientists who were part of the collaboration and/or active in marine research in Kenya) have been identified and invited to cooperate in the collection of historic documents. Roughly 400 references of reports, theses and publications on marine sciences in Kenya have been brought under in a special collection in IMIS named "VLIZ-KMFRI collaboration in marine sciences". Newly obtained documents are being digitized and, if allowed, added to the collection. Also, thirty theses have gone through a first scan for the data archaeology exercise. In addition, two hundred references have been selected from queries in Web of Science and added to IMIS in a special collection named "Kenyan Marine Research WoS". Finally, a website will be launched dedicated to the VLIZ-KMFRI collaboration in marine sciences where all documents and information will be made available to the wider public. These multiple efforts will largely facilitate on-going and future research of the marine ecosystems of Kenya.