

Short history of Kenya–Belgium collaborations and the marine science landscape in Belgium

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Belgium and Kenya have a long tradition of collaboration in marine sciences. This has to do with the 'Kenya–Belgium Project in Marine Sciences' or KBP. 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' in 1985. The KBP knew different successive phases that together ran continuously for more than 15 years, and it knew different simultaneous spin-off projects, with ramifications to many other European and East–African countries. The scientific output was significant. Many Kenyans were trained in Belgium, obtained MSc and PhD degrees, and many Belgian students and professors visited Kenya for collaborative research. This has resulted in a community of people who know, respect and trust each other, and who have sometimes established long lasting friendships. Many of the people that were active in KBP as young scientists now have important positions in KMFRI, in VLIZ, in the universities or in the Flemish and Kenyan ministries, even in international organizations like IOC. This is the strongest possible foundation to build upon. It's now up to this generation to transfer knowledge to a new generation of young Kenyans and Belgians, to create a new Kenya–Belgium marine science community.

This presentation will provide the short history of the collaborations between Kenya and Belgium but also give an overview of the current Belgian research groups conducting marine, coastal and/or estuarine research with an emphasis on those research groups that had, have or are interested in collaborations with Kenya.