

Planning process for Tana River Delta under way!

Over the last decade the Tana River Delta has been the scene of intensifying conflicts over natural resources. Powerful commercial investors are seeking land and water for biofuel plantations, at the expense of local communities. The 130,000 ha Delta is often seen as a vast and under-utilised area. But in reality it is the homeland of around 90,000 people, who depend on it for their livelihoods. It is also home to biodiversity of global importance: thousands of birds of more than 350 species, two threatened primates, hippos, lions and much more. This year's low rainfall has exacerbated the situation, with pastoralists from as far away as north-western Kenya and Somalia bringing their herds of cattle to the Delta in search of grazing. Local people have died trying to defend their farms from this influx of livestock. They have also been threatened by those who support the planned biofuel plantations, believing these will bring jobs and social benefits.



Dide Waride village life Tana Delta
(NatureKenya)

A solution to break this cycle of conflict is badly needed. BirdLife Partner Nature Kenya has been advocating for development of a strategic land use plan as the mechanism to reconcile competing interests. This vision is now becoming reality, with the launch of such a planning process. Around 65 participants took part in a high-level meeting in the town of Malindi on the Kenyan coast, between 14-17 September, to discuss the need for a strategic plan for the Delta. The Kenyan Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) hosted the meeting, with NEMA (the National Environment Management Authority, Kenya's environmental regulator) and Nature Kenya jointly providing the Secretariat. Key Kenyan government ministries and agencies including NEMA, the Ministries of Finance, Lands, Agriculture, Environment and Mineral Resources, Water and Irrigation, and Fisheries, the Kenya Forest Services and Kenya Wildlife Service, and TARDA (the Tana and Athi Rivers Development Authority) were all represented

at the meeting, together with NGOs, media, and international experts in the fields of land use and delta planning and environmental assessment. "Stringent measures should be taken to tackle some of the critical challenges currently facing Tana Delta, and that local community require formal protection," said Peter Odhengo, of the Office of the Prime Minister, who is championing the planning process. "the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) would appear to be an excellent approach to major developments in assessing the overarching impact it might have on the environment, economy and local communities." The meeting included a field visit to provide the opportunity to see the Delta, and to speak to local people so as to understand the issues at first hand. Participants split into groups, with some visiting the existing TARDA farm in the Delta, and others the pastoralist village of Dide Waride and the fishing village of Moa. A final group led by the OPM's Peter Odhengo visited the farming village of Marafa near the mouth of the Delta, where there is a clear split between a minority who support the proposed Bedford Biofuel jatropha project and have agreed to lease the village ranch (Kon-Dertu) to Bedford, and the majority who say this agreement was made without their knowledge or consent, and is not what they want for the land they have occupied for decades. "The Tana Delta development and conservation impasse can only be resolved through a mutually agreed multiple land use plan. Failure to plan will lead to unacceptable loss of unique plants and animals, loss of traditional livelihoods options, loss of indigenous peoples land and land use rights and loss of the opportunity to plan for tourism development options.", said Paul Matiku, CEO of Nature Kenya "The current unacceptable tragedy of the commons where private sector interests from all over the world have led to a scramble for the Tana Delta could degenerate into serious land ownership conflicts if not managed through a consultative land use planning process. Fortunately, the Office of the Prime Minister has recognised this problem and has taken the lead in not only initiating the land use planning process in the Tana Delta but also establishing a governance structure at the national level that will benefit all deltas in Kenya. With support from the RSPB and DFID, Nature Kenya will facilitate the efforts of the Prime Minister and stakeholders to come up with a land use plan for Tana Delta expected to be ready by December 2012". The meeting closed by adopting a Communiqué. Confirming the launch of the Tana Delta planning initiative, this agreed:

- To the establishment of a local Tana Delta planning process, which will be steered by a local committee, and will involve a combination of strategic planning and strategic environmental assessment (SEA)
- That the output will be a long-term strategic land use plan representing a "truly sustainable" future for the Delta.
- That this process will combine scientific, economic, social and environmental evaluation tools alongside extensive public participation, and will be a collaborative exercise which will take place over the next 18 months, with the support of DfID (UKAid).