

Title A Message from BirdLife's Regional Director for Africa ? Dr Julius Arinaitwe about the proposed destruction of the vitally important Dakatcha Woodland Important Bird Area (IBA) for conversion to grow *Jatropha* - a plant used for biodiesel production which is largely untested and potentially destructive. Kenya is recognised within Africa and globally as a country that takes the environment and conservation of biodiversity seriously. The conservation efforts, particularly targeting elephants and rhinos, have over the years been hailed as a shining example of the determination by the government and peoples of Kenya to protect their biodiversity. These efforts have borne fruit, not only for Kenya, but also for Africa as a whole - Africa owes the survival of the elephant and two species of rhinos, to some extent, to these efforts. More recently, the determination and effort that has been mobilised to enhance forest cover to 10% of the country's area is truly amazing. This has been epitomised by the drive to restore the Mau Forest Complex, a seemingly impossible task that is now well underway. No wonder then, that Kenya hosts some highly acclaimed environmentalists, such as the Noble Prize Laureate Wangari Maathai, well respected conservation institutions such as Kenya Wildlife Service and effective conservation NGOs such as Nature Kenya. It is therefore quite strange and surprising then that Kenya would at this time allow one of her few remaining key biodiversity areas, the Dakatcha woodland, to be destroyed by instituting biofuel production, a land-use that is environmentally, socially and economically untested in Kenya. Experiences from elsewhere in the world cast doubt over the wisdom of this move. In environmental terms, whereas the potential benefits of renewable sources of energy to contribute to climate change mitigation are recognized. In practice, only some renewables can deliver noticeable carbon savings over their life-cycle. Biofuels in particular will often provide minimal carbon savings and indeed some may result in higher emissions than the fossil fuel they substitute. In social terms, demand for bio fuels is leading to the conversion of natural habitats such as grasslands, woodlands and tropical forests on a scale that can potentially become catastrophic. In many cases, this is leading to the displacement of indigenous and rural communities, with limited savings in greenhouse gas emissions. In economic terms, large scale diversion of agricultural land to bio fuels production can have negative impacts on food security; while small-scale development of high-efficiency bio energy applications can, if developed sustainably and integrated with food production and other rural activities, contribute to rural development, improve access to energy and contribute to human and economic development. **In view of these limitations, BirdLife (a Partnership of national independent NGOs in 114 countries including Kenya) has developed a position for any sustainable Biofuels production as follows;**

- Appropriate tools and frameworks on sustainable bio fuel production and protocols for use to ensure bio fuel development delivers substantial carbon savings (at least 60% greenhouse gas savings) in an environmentally and socially sound manner should be developed first.
- A country must ensure bio energy production avoids further encroachment on natural habitats - specifically bio fuel development must avoid areas of exceptional biodiversity, such as Key Biodiversity Areas (including Important Bird Areas (IBAs)).
- A country must ensure that biofuel production is for national consumption and does not threaten food security by taking up lands that are already under food production.

**To this end, BirdLife recommends a precautionary approach for the implementation of the biofuels agenda. In this specific case, BirdLife urges the Kenyan Government to stop the proposed *Jatropha* project in Malindi and to;**

1. Conclude the ongoing process to develop appropriate policy guidance on sustainable bio fuel production before any commercial bio fuel projects are approved.
2. Implement the following as a precautionary approach:
  - Enforce the existing requirement for the completion and endorsement of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in the case of this commercial biofuel project prior to implementation.

- Make it mandatory for production of scientific proof shared and agreed by all stakeholders that the Jatropha crop being planned is economically viable and poses no threat to humans, wildlife and livestock before any development plans go ahead.
- Carry out a cost-benefit analysis to assess whether growing the bio fuel crop will deliver substantial net benefits in environmental, social and economic terms.
  - Serves as a water catchment.
  - Stores and sequesters carbon and therefore has a role in climate change mitigation. (Such areas include forests, wetlands and woodlands.)
  - Contains rare and endangered species or high levels of biodiversity. (Such areas include National Parks, Forest Reserves, Important Bird Areas, Key Biodiversity Areas and sites qualifying for protection under international conventions.)
  - Is currently under food crops or livestock grazing.
  - Has cultural or religious significance to the local people.

3. Reject the bio fuel project as it will deny local communities rights to the land on which they live and threaten the food security of the community and the nation. 4. Reject bio fuel project as it does not have clear compensation mechanisms for damages caused to the environment and people in the event that such projects fail. 5. Not to allow bio fuel production on this land which:

- Serves as a water catchment.
- Stores and sequesters carbon and therefore has a role in climate change mitigation. (forests, wetlands and woodlands).
- Contains rare and endangered species or high levels of biodiversity. (its an Important Bird Areas, Key Biodiversity Area).
- Is currently under food crops or livestock grazing.
- Has cultural or religious significance to the local people.

6. Allow free, transparent and open discussion about the project, without intimidation as has been witnessed in Malindi last week. Dr Julius Arinaitwe, Regional Director for Africa, BirdLife International