

Kiborgoch Swamp: the lifeline of Mochongoi

World Wetlands Day – February 2 2021



Kiborgoch Community Wildlife and Wetland Conservancy is one of the very few wetland conservancies in Kenya. The conservancy is located in Lake Bogoria ecosystem, Mochongoi ward, Baringo County and covers 2,880 acres half of which is a wetland. The wetland comprises of the Kiborgoch swamp, two main springs i.e. Lorwai and Chelaba and other small turtle springs. The swamp is home to wildlife such as greater Kudu, crocodiles, pythons, waterbucks, zebras, sitatunga antelopes, and hippopotamus. Fish species such as mudfish and the African lungfish inhabit the wetland, and over 300 bird species found in the conservancy, make their homes in the papyrus reeds. Vegetation species found in the wetland consist of the southern cattail and the floating papyrus reeds. The community considers the swamp as its water tower given the value and benefits it provides.

The community fore-fathers protected and reserved the wetland as a grazing and watering area for communal use during the dry seasons. The swamp acts as a 'sponge' by retaining water and moderating its flow to other neighbouring water springs and rivers in the ecosystem. It plays an important role for the survival of the rich biodiversity and livelihoods and provides other ecosystem services for the local community.

The economic and ecological benefits of Kiborgoch swamp.

The main spring, Chelaba located at the edge of the conservancy is used to supply water to the community canal irrigated farms. In addition, women heavily depend on the swamp to support their livelihoods. Chelaba women group who are members of Kiborgoch conservancy, harvest *Kutwe*- papyrus reeds from the spring to make floor and table mats, and hand woven baskets. *Moiguitye* the roots of the papyrus reeds are used for medicinal purposes to treat colds and flu, while grass species such as *Chebulinye* and *Larawe* are harvested to make hand woven hats, baskets and roofing for traditional houses.



The papyrus reeds and grass are also used as livestock feed during dry seasons and for sieving dirty water flowing from the source upstream, to clean water downstream to the community farms.

While the swamp provides ecological and economic benefits to the community in sustaining their livelihoods, it is under severe pressure and rapid degradation as a result of human encroachment, illegal logging, charcoal burning and biopiracy. Private farms have expanded around the wetland with cases of water over-abstraction for irrigation and logging reported. The situation is exacerbated by climate change induced droughts, causing the swamp to dry up.

With the support of [UNDP's Global Environment Facility, Small Grants Programme](#) (UNDP – GEF/SGP) phase VI project for Lake Bogoria Landscape, Kiborgoch conservancy received a grant of Kshs 3 million towards the conservation and rehabilitation of the Swamp. Kiprono Lobole, the conservancy vice chairperson together with members of the conservancy management committee, have been using the SGP resources to sensitize the communities on protective measures of the swamp and to implement restoration activities.

“As stewards of the land that was left to use by our forefathers, we have the sole responsibility to protect it for future of the generations to come.” Kiprono says. He adds that *“The survival of wildlife and community livelihoods is dependent on the restoration of the wetland.”*

Through the UNDP – GEF/SGP grant, Kiborgoch conservancy has constructed a protection box at the source of Chelaba spring and have began the process of

rehabilitating the adjacent watering trough for livestock and wildlife to use during the dry season.



In addition, a trench will be dug to divert surface water away from the spring protection box and fence off the spring source to avoid contamination. The conservancy management committee has partnered with Kenya Forestry Research Institute to purchase grass seedlings and trees for planting at Chelaba springs as part of reforestation.

Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA), the umbrella body of conservancies in Kenya trained the 15 member management committee members on conservancy governance and financial management which has resulted in the prudent management of the GEF grant. The committee has been able to utilise the funds and report effectively through proper bookkeeping and documentation.

According to the secretary of the Conservancy Raymond Kipkemei, good governance is critical to the success of a conservancy. *“Since the training, the committee has incorporated the governance principles of transparency and accountability which has seen the growth of the conservancy.”* He says. The conservancy also held its first by elections in 2019; the current committee of 15 is comprised of representatives from the 3 locations which Kiborgoch is located and 6 out of 15 committee members are women. Also incorporated into the management committee are 3 council elders to support onboarding of the new committee members.

A warden and 11 conservancy rangers were competitively recruited through a fair and inclusive process. This has seen a decrease in bush meat, illegal logging, and charcoal burning resulting in increased wildlife species including sightings of the rare Sitatunga antelope which were initially very difficult to locate.

The conservancy rangers are among the 3,500 ranger beneficiaries of the Economic Stimulus Programme launched by the government to pay their half salaries to cushion the impacts of COVID-19 on community conservancies. The role of the rangers deployed is to protect the conservancy, including the wetland from logging, water abstraction, pollution, encroachment and land grabbing. A few of the lesser flamingos have now moved from Lake Bogoria National Reserve to Kiborgoch Swamp. There are now 4 resident greater Kudus that reside in the conservancy.

A good working relationship has developed between the Lake Bogoria warden and the conservancy. The rangers conduct wildlife and community monitoring activities on a daily basis and a monthly progress report is submitted to the warden in Lake Bogoria. This progress has increased the confidence and value of the conservancy to the community members increasing the membership by 30% in the last one year.

Raymond a member of the management committee, believes the protection of the swamp should be increased given its local and national significance. *“The full potential of the swamp has not been fully explored. There is need to conduct research and studies to promote its economic, social and ecological value. We also urgently need a management plan to guide the access, use and benefits of the swamp and springs.”* Raymond says.

The future of Kiborgoch conservancy looks bright. UNDP-GEF/SGP, the county government, national government through its line Ministry of Interior and national coordination, KWS, Baringo County Conservancies Association (BCCA) and KWCA

will continue to support the residents of Kiborgoch swamp to protect their swampy habitat, and benefit from its sustainable use.



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