

**Kenneth Irvine**, is the Chair Aquatic Ecosystem group UNESCO-IHE and was the main organizer of the Kigali Forum on Wetlands which took place 8 to 12 July 2013. He spoke to UNEP-TEEB about his expectations of the forum and his vision for the wise use of wetlands.



**UNEP-TEEB:** *The theme for the Kigali Forum on Wetlands is wise use smart plans. Why this theme?*

**Kenneth Irvine:** The Ramsar Convention speaks of sustainable use of wetlands and wise use and all the contracting parties have committed to the protection of wetlands. 50 of these contracting parties are in Africa. Wetlands are the most degraded ecosystem on the planet mainly for purposes of agriculture, so there is clearly a dilemma between using wetlands for food security and maintaining their natural habitat. Therefore we chose this theme because we need new ideas and new thinking that recognizes and identifies the importance of wetlands and why they continue to be degraded despite the formal recognition of their value by many governments.

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**UNEP-TEEB:** *You have identified three main pillars- research, policy and capacity building to guide the discussions of the Forum. Do you see these as the main elements for developing smart plans?*

**Kenneth Irvine:** In order to understand how wetlands function, which is crucial to understanding how to look after them, we need knowledge. We can only get this knowledge through research. In order to ensure that research feeds into activities, we need capacity building and to disseminate the knowledge to international regional and local governance. Governance is important for the actual management on the ground. Therefore connecting policy to research and following up with capacity building is really essential and important for the wise use and management of wetlands.

**UNEP-TEEB:** *What are the goals of the Forum and what do you hope will be the outcomes?*

**Kenneth Irvine:** We have invited many people from across Africa who have been involved in the management or policy-making for wetlands for a number of years. So there is a lot of knowledge in the conference room. The goal is to identify the gaps and come up with ideas that address the policy, research and capacity needs. We are looking for new ideas. We don't expect the Forum will solve all knowledge gaps, but we hope that different regional or national initiatives will take on board the initiatives developed here. Tangible outputs could include policy briefs, the start of a research proposal/ ideas

or even a pathway to accessing resources. The end of the Forum should produce a road map to get us to the wise management of wetlands.

**UNEP-TEEB:** *TEEB for water and wetlands mentions that the values of wetlands are not mainstreamed into decision-making and provides recommendations for decision-makers at all levels. What are your thoughts about the report?*

**Kenneth Irvine:** I think that the principle that you need to value wetlands in order to protect them is a given. When there are competing demands, having figures on the table that quantify what services a wetland provides and the cost when it is converted for other uses, makes a compelling argument. The financial consequences of not protecting wetlands are enormous, and this report has made huge progress by putting onto the political agenda and bringing awareness of the cost implications of destroying wetlands.

**UNEP-TEEB:** *Visioning is a technique that has been used during the Forum to get participants to critically think about wise use of wetland. What is your vision for a wisely used wetland?*

**Kenneth Irvine:** My vision for wise use of wetlands is there must be a connection between the three levels of policy, from local, national to international. There must be a connection with agreements such as the Ramsar Convention, national implementation of these agreements which normally occurs in ministries of environment or water, and a connection with actual work on the ground led by local authorities and stakeholders. This policy needs to be supported by knowledge and adequate capacity. We need connectivity and to have a sophisticated dialogue, both up and down, to realize and appreciate the vital role of wetlands.