

Nzula Kitaka, Water Scientist and Senior Lecturer at Egerton University, Kenya. Main focus is on research in water systems including wetlands and capacity development in water and wetlands management. She shared her views on how to support policy-makers mainstream the values of wetlands into the decision-making process during the Kigali Forum for Wetlands 8 to 12 July 2013, which took place in Kigali, Rwanda.



UNEP-TEEB: *What is your understanding of wise use and what smart plans?*

Nzula Kitaka: We don't want wetlands to be "No touch" resources, we must come up with plans so that communities can use and conserve wetlands at the same time. Smart plans need to engage all stake holders such as policy-makers, practitioners, educationists. In Africa, even though we may have good policies for natural resources management the biggest challenge is the implementation and enforcement of these policies.

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UNEP-TEEB: *What are some of the knowledge gaps you have identified that prevent enforcing and implementing policies?*

Nzula Kitaka: Policy-makers need to understand the vital role of wetlands and to appreciate the ecological services and functions they provide for human livelihoods. Once this is understood, they can see the cost benefit of managing these resources wisely. Most of the water systems in Africa are highly polluted, whereas if wetlands were sustainably managed, they can provide water purification services with the result that governments may spend less money for clean water provision to their citizens.

UNEP-TEEB: *The TEEB for Water and Wetlands report concludes that wetlands continue to be degraded because their values are not mainstreamed in the decision-making process. How can this be improved?*

Nzula Kitaka: Policy-makers need information on costs, savings and yet this is sometimes a challenge. Ecosystem services valuation is therefore important as it provides this information in economic terms which most policy-makers understand.

UNEP-TEEB: *What are some of the barriers that prevent researchers and policy-makers from effectively engaging?*

Nzula Kitaka: Research should be translated into a language that is understood and can be used by policy makers. We advise researchers that despite having scientific documents and having good results, they need to translate this information into formats understood by local communities and policy-makers. In Kenya through ECOLIVE project, this

barrier was overcome by organizing stakeholder meetings that brought together researchers, government officials, local communities, implementers to interact and learn from each other.

UNEP-TEEB: *The theme of the Kigali Forum is wise use smart plans, what are the key take home messages?*

Nzula Kitaka: A key message is that capacity building is crucial in order to know how to wisely use wetlands or even how to develop smart plans. There is a huge number of people on the ground that still lacks an understanding of how wetlands function and how to sustain them. Sharing ideas and experience is essential to overcome these challenges.