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WITH PHILIP MWAKIO

Adaptive management adopted in Marine Park

Threats to the fragile ecosystem continue to pose grave danger to the survival of coastal environments. Mombasa's largest marine park at the Jomo Kenyatta Public Beach in the North Coast continues to face a myriad challenges ranging from degradation, pollution to changing environmental conditions.

Though such areas are protected, they must be actively managed to ensure their continued existence. A unique programme by the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) in collaboration with several key organisations aimed at adapting a management initiative is underway.

An internationally renowned conservationist, Dr Jeniffer O'Leary from the American Museum of Natural History is spearheading the exercise.

The programme fundamentally changes the way the KWS

manages its resources," O'Leary says. A visit to the marine park last week provided a first hand account of what plans lay ahead for the programmes that if implemented, will completely change the face of conservation in Kenya.

MANAGEMENT EFFORTS

Adaptive management is a decision making process where conditions are continuously monitored to determine whether management is successful in meeting objectives.

O'Leary explains that while Kenya's marine parks have management plans with broad goals, they lack measurable objectives.

She adds that this has led to difficulties in assessing the success of any management effort. She is currently working closely with Mombasa Marine Park Warden, Arthur Tuda, Peake Luna Limited a reputable water sports



Habib Hakim of Peake Luna Limited with Dr Jeniffer O'Leary. [PHOTOS: OMONDI ONYANGO/STANDARD]

firm with its headquarters at the Travellers Beach Hotel and an Israeli artist, Gaia Veinberg.

The initiative has also been successful in reaching out to schools including writing a story book and printing posters about issues of beach trash and its effects on wildlife. It is also taking school parties on guided tours of the marine park for practical learning.

O'Leary says the first step in adaptive management is to define success with objectives. She explains that once objectives

have been clearly established, park conditions are monitored via surveys of the park's ecology and human use patterns.

FEEDBACK

"If monitoring results indicate that objectives are met then the management in place is effective and monitoring continue because conditions can change," she says.

She stresses that the key feature of adaptive management is strong feedback between monitoring (data) and decision making

in a process described as learning by doing.

Mombasa Marine Park rangers have undergone training as part of the implementation process in park ecology, management principles, data collection (for missing data) and data entry.

The trainings have been successful and have given the KWS rangers opportunities to share ideas on how to effectively monitor the conditions.

It is expected the programme, will be replicated in other marine parks in the country.