

Opening Speech for AWF Vice President, Global Leadership – Fred Kwame Kumah at the MESSHA Science Café at Park Inn Hotel on Tuesday 22nd of August at 9am.

**Fellow Regional Directors,
Conservation partners and colleagues,
Members of the fourth estate,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good morning!

It is indeed a great pleasure to join you this morning and I look forward to the discussions and conversation we are going to have today towards strengthening and empowering the coverage of conservation stories on a deeper scale.

Allow me to begin by introducing you to the organization I represent today. The African Wildlife Foundation is the oldest and largest, pan-African international conservation organization. We were founded in 1961 and we are headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya with representative offices in Washington D.C and 13 other countries.

We are the primary advocate for Africa's wildlife. Our mission is to ensure that wildlife and their habitats endure as an essential part of a modern and prosperous Africa.

It is our conviction that the survival of wildlife and a healthy ecosystem in Africa hinges on one factor – linking Africa's conservation agenda in meaningful ways to the aspirations and mindsets of the African people. This is what AWF truly represents.

With orderlies out of the way, I am here to speak to you about the role of the Global Biodiversity Framework in achieving sustainable development, especially in Africa.

Undoubtedly, nature and its biodiversity underpin all economic activities and human well-being globally. The total benefit arising from nature is estimated to be at least US\$125 trillion annually.

However, the predominant economic models fail to fully quantify and cost the benefits and services that biodiversity offers society. Existing economic growth and wealth generation models are based on unsustainable production and consumption patterns that incur and defer significant social and economic costs with detrimental impacts on people and long-term development.

The increasing gaps in climate and biodiversity financing affirm Africa's missed opportunity to drive sustainable development by unlocking and growing the biodiversity economy.

Globally, the estimated gap for adaptation in developing countries is expected to rise to US\$340 billion a year by 2030, and up to US\$565 billion by 2050 while the mitigation gap is at US\$850 billion per year by 2030.

Additionally, the biodiversity funding gap is projected to be in the range of US\$598-824 billion per year by 2030 growing to US\$4.1 trillion by 2050.

As home to over a third of global ecosystems, nature essentially presents Africa with an untapped investment and green development opportunity and is a key strategic asset that can be used as bargaining power in the global arena. The global biodiversity conservation and climate agenda cannot succeed without Africa and needs to be twinned.

This is where the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was signed by 196 nations on 19 December 2023 in Montreal, Canada to “take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss” by 2030 and to protect 30 percent of land and sea area by 2030.

This provided a mixed outcome for Africa, though on the balance, the agreement has what it takes for Africa and the world to make substantial progress towards reaching the 2030 targets and goals of the GBF.

Let me take you through what this means for Africa as a continent.

A key negotiating position for Africa has been the nexus between the conservation of nature and the meeting of the needs of people with a keen focus on the mobilization of resources commensurate to the ambition of the GBF.

So far, the GBF has delivered on conservation of nature by affirming a global spatial protection target of 30% by 2030 within national jurisdiction and capabilities. Prioritizing restoration of degraded lands (restoration of up to 30% degraded areas) was a key ask for Africa.

Attaining these results within the boundaries national priorities and in respect to the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities and enabling sustainable use of natural resources where appropriate was agreed upon. These conditions suited Africa and were part of Africa’s negotiation positions.

The framework also delivered massively for people on the strength of the rights to sustainable use within the limits of customary use of Indigenous peoples and local communities. The affirmation of sustainable use of wild species and products was a position of the African constituency as deemed necessary within the limits of sustainable development. This was a major win for Africa in terms of its negotiation position and one that aligns with meeting the needs of people.

While there are no comprehensive studies around the true economic value of Africa’s natural assets, in 2018, Africa’s measured natural capital was estimated to be US\$6.2 trillion with its mineral and fossil fuel resources respectively estimated at US\$290 billion and US\$1.05 trillion.

In the energy sector alone, Africa's renewables capacity output is expected to increase from about 27.4 GW in 2023 to over 280 GW in 2035. With an estimated 60% of Africa's GDP coming from natural resources and essential ecosystem services, the continent has enormous potential to benefit further from its natural resources as capital that finances its development ambitions.

Hence why the dedication of 2 targets to the recognition, respect, and safeguarding of the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities and of gender balance and equity (women and girls and young people), and specifically of their rights to land and to their territories, and of participation in decision making is a massive step forward for the GBF. This was however agreed upon within the jurisdiction of countries, thereby limiting its application. That said, the fact that the principle of rights and equity has now been established with the framework is a major step forward.

Another significant step in the right direction was the recognition of the principle of sustainability across food systems and productive sectors (Agricultural, Aquaculture, Fisheries, Forestry) and of the need to address consumption patterns that mark the real drivers of biodiversity loss.

A further acknowledgement of the role of nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches in providing appropriate solutions opens up space for creativity and innovation in addressing the challenges and opportunities of the GBF.

Africa's demand for a recognition of digital sequencing information on genetic resources within the framework of fair and equitable benefit sharing on the utilization of genetic resources was taken up. This was also a huge win for Africa! As this expands the base of opportunities and resource mobilization for developing countries.

The role of and responsibilities of businesses was in sharp focus through the recognition of their contribution and their responsibilities for accountability within legal, administrative and policy frameworks provided by governments. Formally recognizing the contribution of businesses to biodiversity was a positive step forward.

Africa also benefited from a commitment to phase out harmful subsidies (up to \$500 bn) and a commitment to transfer technology, skills and enhance capacity building towards the delivery of the GBF.

Despite these major strides a significant obstacle to the GBF is the fact that we still have inadequate resource commitments for its delivery. We have been here before with the financial commitments made to support the GBF falling short of what was required.

Unless something changes significantly, it will be difficult to reach the agreed upon targets by 2030. Especially as developing countries have the burden of existing pressures of climate change, poverty alongside debt burdens to carry. There will not be enough resources to carve out the necessary budgetary support to achieve the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Biodiversity has the capacity to mitigate and potentially avoid these climate change shocks if adequately invested in it as the key strategic asset and comparative advantage that it has to the continent.

In summary, the sustainable use of natural resources through a diversified biodiversity economy can promote conservation outcomes and sustainable development, providing employment and important financial resources (for climate change adaptation, mitigation, and development), as well as reducing risk and building resilience economically and environmentally.

So, how does the role of media as agenda setters and decision makers in their respective media houses come to play?

You, my friends, wield the power to shift the narrative for ensuring conservation is given the priority and attention it deserves in order to push for the much-needed transformation.

I run the risk of sounding like our AWF CEO, Kaddu Sebunya at this point but it would be a disservice in my role at AWF if I do not reverberate the messaging that - There is no question that Africa needs to develop to meet the needs of its people.

Africa's need for economic development is non-negotiable.

We simply cannot afford to ignore the urgent need for us to recognize that most of Africa's wealth is above ground.

It is the role of media to continue speaking about the linkages between conservation and other highly prioritized sectors such as health, education and infrastructure development as the continent grows.

Our natural resources are the foundation of all life and development. When we manage them sustainably, health, wellbeing and economic prosperity are possible. When we deplete them in the name of progress and development, all life is at risk. This includes our children and youth globally, whose futures are shaped by what we leave them as a heritage.

What Africans need to know, is that conservation management and diligent environmental stewardship, are fairly reliable proxies for broader good governance. These facts can only best be presented through the fourth estate in order to promote public discourse and push for accountability amongst our leaders.

For so long, the conservation story has been told, but not with an African perspective. But even then, mostly through the lens of science and animals.

With less of the African people, cultures, heritage, use, knowledge, aspirations – all as part of conservation. And this is a role we need to reclaim.

The way we produce and consume food, and the choice of energy, and the blatant disregard for the environment entrenched in our current economic model, is pushing us to the limits of the continent.

That is why with just the stroke of a pen, you, members of the media determine who makes or breaks the headline. That is why their role in bridging the environmental voice is extremely critical.

As it currently stands, coverage on environmental news has improved immensely and we have you to thank for that, but you have only scratched the surface.

In order to alter the narrative, we need a MONUMENTAL SHIFT – African conservation leadership MUST reverberate from every corner in Africa so as to tilt and reset the African mindset.

Once Africans begin to see more news and content on our nature and wildlife, the conversation will definitely begin to change immensely.

Especially is they see their fellow Africans telling Africans why conservation is important.

Today, as we join hands to champion a new narrative for conservation that puts people at the center of development initiatives, we need to collectively interrogate what is working and how to pivot sooner rather than later as we hold ourselves accountable at all levels.

You, my dear friends are the thread that weaves the African voice – hold this responsibility with pride – because you determine what the future of Africa will be like; just by the messages and words you publish on your respective platforms.

I therefore encourage you to shift your thinking, shift your approach towards amplifying the African voice to awaken the conservation spirit in all who view your content.

The ball is therefore in your court dear friends, to turn the lenses on yourselves and ensure you are representing Africa, its wildlife, forests, and rivers in your editorial meetings as you pick the next agenda.

Thank you and I wish you all the best as you continue on this journey!