



INTERNATIONAL
LAND CONSERVATION
NETWORK

Participants at the inaugural Africa Protected Areas Congress made a commitment to furthering the continent's conservation movement

*Kiragu Mwangi, ILCN regional representative for Africa
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The inaugural Africa Protected Areas Congress (APAC) took off with pomp and circumstance at the Kigali Convention Centre on July 18. The weeklong event was the result of four years of planning. Thanks to a small army of dedicated organizers, it welcomed over 2,400 leaders and conservationists, representing 80 countries from Africa and abroad. Guests attended educational sessions, established connections with peers, and committed to the African conservation movement.



Kiragu Mwangi at APAC; Courtesy of Kiragu Mwangi

The congress was hosted by the Government of Rwanda, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and the African Wildlife Foundation. It attracted a robust cross-sector audience, with representation from government organizations; national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs); academia; the judiciary branch; development agencies; and Indigenous, local, and youth groups. In addition to the large in-person crowd, over 5,000 guests partook in a selection of virtual sessions.

The event was organized into three “streams”: (1) Promoting effective and well-managed networks of protected and conserved areas in Africa; (2) People and protected and conserved areas; and (3) Africa’s biodiversity as the basis for life on the continent. There were also six cross-cutting themes on governance, conflict, climate change, science, technology and Indigenous knowledge, sustainable financing, and physical infrastructure.

Keeping up with the packed conference schedule took a marathoner’s stamina. Each day was divided into four 90-minute time blocks, beginning at 8:30am and running until 5:30pm. Before the main conference, there were two days of pre-congress meetings for youth, Indigenous peoples, and local communities. There were also several side events, poster sessions, product demonstrations, and special meetings.

Discussions at APAC distilled four critical actions for effective governance and management of protected and conserved areas in landscapes and seascapes within the African context. It focused on strategies that center the unique needs and aspirations of the people who live on, and are impacted by the health of, the continent’s landscapes. These actions are (1) Promote inclusive and equitable governance; (2) Put people at the center of effective and equitable conservation; (3) Mobilize the economic value of protected and conserved areas and sustainable financing; (4) Treat protected and conserved areas as natural solutions to biodiversity and the climate crisis.

The International Land Conservation Network (ILCN) played an important role in facilitating the congress. In sponsoring the event, it enabled six participants to attend in person and two more to join virtually. These attendees from Kigali, Kenya, and South Africa represented NGOs and local community leaders involved in managing conserved areas.

Mr. Samson Silantoi, sub-landscape leader for the Greater Loita Narok Mosiro Community Wildlife Initiative, whose APAC attendance was sponsored by ILCN, described the impact of this support:

‘ILCN’s support to attend the APAC tremendously improved my network of organizations and contacts from across Africa who are already helping make a difference on the work we do in conservation of the Loita Forest, Narok County Kenya. I am very grateful for the opportunity offered by ILCN for facilitating us to bring our voices to Africa’s high table of conservation’.

The ILCN also hosted a Knowledge Cafe on July 21, bringing together an international audience to discuss the role of collaborative partnerships in strengthening the conservation movement. Kiragu Mwangi, the ILCN’s regional representative for Africa, facilitated the session and gave a presentation on the ILCN’s vision for an African conservation network. The audience learned about civic organizations in Namibia, Kenya, and Europe that are actively mobilizing society to better steward its land. The discussion also scoped out the audience’s interest in setting up an African land-conservation community-of-practice. The idea was well received, and many participants were enthusiastic about aiding in the initiative.

Mwangi also served on a panel discussing the role of science, technology, and Indigenous knowledge with respect to protected and conserved areas. Later in the week, he co-hosted a workshop with the International Union for Conservation of Nature World Commission on Protected Areas to promote the Privately Protected Areas Best Practice Guidelines. During the workshop, the commission launched a Portuguese-language translation of the guide.

Congress participants were called on to make a formal commitment to furthering land conservation and protection in Africa. Attendees agreed to “The Kigali Call for Action,” which calls for:

- Multi-stakeholder collaboration, partnering Indigenous people, local communities, women, and youth with government-, civil-, and private-sector powers to sustain wisdom, traditions, diverse knowledge sets and customs to promote effective conservation and long-term resiliency of nature, culture, livelihood, and human well being.
- Mechanisms to address injustice to Indigenous people and local communities. These tools should seek to uplift the voices of these groups and understand their preferred options for redressing their grievances to enable remedies that restore confidence in the relationship between conservation and people. The process should also promote a people-centric approach to African land conservation.
- Direct and fair funding. Mechanisms to provide direct support to Indigenous people, local communities, women, youth, and NGOs should be equitable and efficient in addressing conservation and societal priorities. And,
- Pan-African partnerships to enhance collaboration and cooperation among organizations from across the continent and sectors in promoting protected and conserved area systems in Africa. The network should be consistent with the African Union’s Agenda 2063, which aims for inclusive and sustainable development and a pan-African drive for unity, self determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity.

APAC participants also made seven commitments to action in recognition of Africa’s rich and unique biodiversity and the diversity of its people. These include sending strong messages to COP15 of the Convention of Biological Diversity for the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and to COP27 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, regarding the recommendations and commitments captured at APAC

Following the success of APAC, Mwangi remains on task to maintain the momentum the event created. Guests from 15 countries expressed notable interest in joining the ILCN’s efforts to build an African land-conservation network and Mwangi is following up with these leaders to further cultivate their enthusiasm. Mwangi and the ILCN will be working with these new partners and others to unite around an African chapter of the ILCN and the formation of an African land-conservation network, with a goal of establishing this system within the next five years.

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