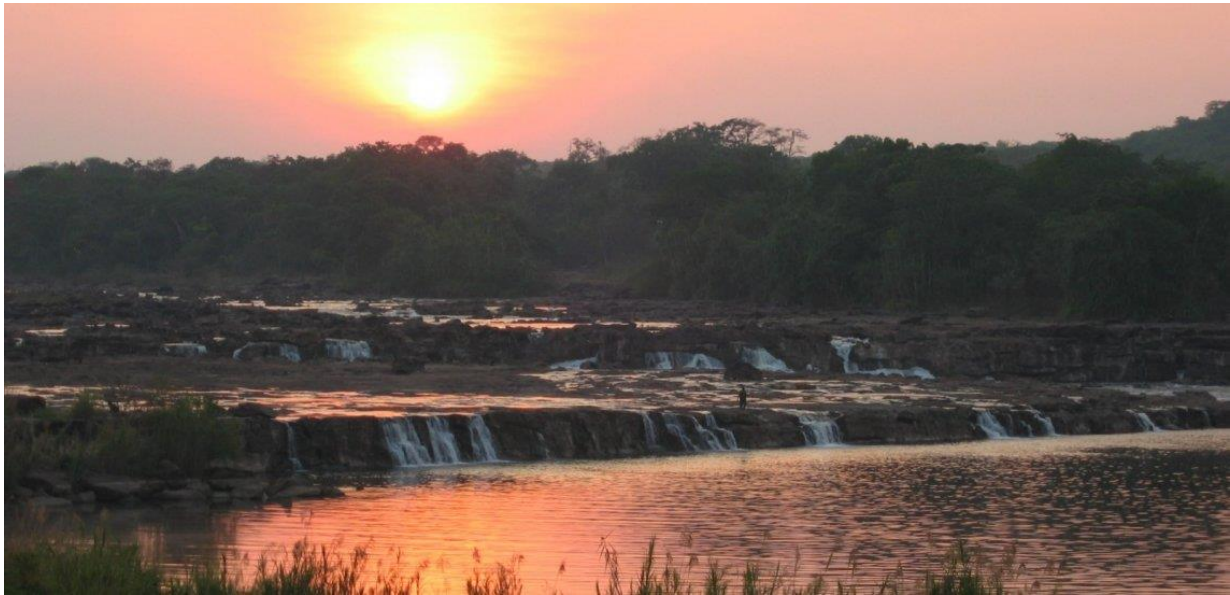


Malagarasi river finds favor with local women

- By Anthony Ochieng



Igamba Falls on the Malagarasi River, Tanzania ©John Friel

The world needs more women in conservation, do you agree? I agree, why? Women still are the main users of natural resources in the African rural setting. In the Malagarasi River basin in Western Tanzania, a CEPF-funded project – through the small grants programme managed by BirdLife International – builds on this understanding and has engaged women to ensure that one of the world’s most important parts of the Eastern Afromontane hotspot is conserved.

Malagarasi River is one of the largest and most important wetlands in East Africa. The basin has five main rivers, the Malagarasi, Moyowosi, Kigosi, Gombe and Ugalla which drain an area of 9.2 million ha. There are two relatively large lakes associated with the flood plain, the Sagara and Nyamagoma lakes. The wetland habitats are surrounded by very extensive miombo woodlands and wooded grasslands which are part of a larger region of forests and wetlands covering about 15 million ha in Western Tanzania. The Malagarasi River System is both an important Ramsar site (Malagarasi-Muyovozi Wetlands) and a Key Biodiversity Area in the [Eastern Afromontane hotspot](#).

The site is extremely important for large mammals, migratory and resident water birds, fish and plants. It also provides a range of services to local communities – water, fish, meat, honey, grazing lands, etc. However, as in many such places, the natural [integrity of the Malagarasi River basin](#) is increasingly threatened by unsustainable anthropogenic activities such as agricultural encroachment into wetland areas, overfishing and illegal fishing, and increased

eutrophication and sedimentation of the riverine habitat due to waste discharge from extraction industries such as salt and limestone industries along the riparian areas of Malagarasi River.

What can women do about this?

[Women involvement in conservation](#) still has a long way to go. This is attributed partly to the male dominance in most rural African communities and the association of women to specific chores in the homestead, making it difficult for them to attend and participate in conservation meetings and events. [But overcoming these constraints can be very beneficial](#) – as proven by the women in the Malagarasi River system. Because these women use the resources from the River system on a daily basis, they are excellent watchdogs, noting everything that is happening in the area. To channel this local knowledge and use this to protect the KBA, a Civil Society Organization (CSO) in Tanzania, [Nyakitonto Youth for Development Tanzania \(NYDT\)](#), trained the local women in biodiversity awareness, environmental safeguards, and explained how and when they should inform the authorities on any illegal activities they observe. This has placed women as important advocates for the conservation efforts of the Malagarasi River.



Women participating in the District Multi stakeholder workshops © Joel R.Nkembanyi

Talk talk talk

[NYDT established three Multi-stakeholder Task Forces](#) at district level, with the mandate to enforce and advocate for environmental laws and application of EIAs and environmental audits to the existing small and large industries that are working along the Malagarasi River system. The Malagarasi women are part of these task forces. But they are also members of other networks, and they have shared their new knowledge about the River system's unique biodiversity value with their women and church groups, their families, and the wider community. They talk about the need to safeguard the system at every opportunity, and include the request to report any illegal activities along the Malagarasi River to the Multi-stakeholder Task Force, who will be able to use the information to advocate for proper action.

The women in Malagarasi understand why it is important to protect the Malagarasi River system, and to use the natural resources it provides wisely. We can only hope that the others will also learn...

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Note: Some hyperlinks may no longer be active

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, through its Regional Implementation Team in the Eastern Afromontane biodiversity hotspot, started providing 'rapid response fund' grants of maximum USD 10,000 in July 2014. These grants are issued to fund projects that aim to protect Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) under immediate and urgent threat. The main idea behind these grants is "to support the role of civil society organizations in the application of site safeguard policies and procedures in order to avoid or minimize / mitigate ongoing and emerging threats on critical biodiversity habitats".

See the interactive map of all projects implemented under the CEPF Eastern Afromontane hotspot programme [here](#).

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation. More information on CEPF can be found at www.cepf.net.

BirdLife International, together with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (BirdLife in Ethiopia) form the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) investment in the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot (2012-2017). The investment will support civil society in applying innovative approaches to conservation in under-capacitated and underfunded protected areas, Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) and priority corridors in the region.