

SOME LIKE IT HOT

A CEPF-funded project in Ethiopia conserves indigenous *Cordia* trees through local pepper production

Cordia africana is an indigenous, multipurpose tree species that is found in the montane forest ecosystems of Ethiopia. However, serious deforestation coupled with the extensive exploitation of the species for furniture, charcoal and construction materials, has led to its depletion, and *Cordia* is now a highly endangered indigenous tree in Ethiopia – including in the Sheka Forest Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), also known as '[Metu-Gore-Tepi](#)'. For example, in Bechi village, close to the forest, about two *Cordia* trees are destroyed by each household per annum. There are 1833 households in Bechi.

USD 40,000, no less

With a small grant (USD 20,000) from the [Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund \(CEPF\)](#), God for People Relief and Development Organisation (GPRDO) implemented a project engaging 251 Bechi households in forest conservation activities. The project provided these households with 500 seedlings of black pepper spices that were planted to climb on 500 *Cordia* trees. As a result, the community harvested 5 kg of spices from each *Cordia* tree within the year. The harvested spices were sold at 380 Birr (about USD 16) per kilogram at local markets. Thus, from all 500 trees combined, the community can generate a cash income of USD 40,000 per year. If they would have felled these trees instead, they would have earned USD 11,000 (500 Birr, or 22 USD, per tree), as a one-off gain, after which they would have been left with nothing.

Girmaye Mamo, a beneficiary farmer said: “I was one of the community members who initially described this type of conservation effort as a joke. But, it has been practical.”

Having demonstrated the profitability of conserving the *Cordia* trees for growing black pepper, the local community members raised more than 2,280 new *Cordia* seedlings on nursery sites and planted them within sparsely populated forest areas. The news spread and an additional 1,750 community members within the neighbouring villages copied the new technology. They purchased black pepper seedlings prepared by the Bechi communities.



How black pepper sucks into the *Cordia* tree © Nigussie

Mr. Shewafera Hailu from Yeki Woreda Agriculture Office said: “I am surprised of the friendship between *Cordia* and black pepper spices. My office has decided to purchase the spices seedlings from project beneficiaries to replicate in other areas”.

Globally threatened species

Sheka Forest is not only important for the *Cordia* trees, but it also hosts six globally threatened amphibian, plant, bird and mammal species, including the Endangered [Clarke's banana frog *Afrixalus clarkei*](#) and the Vulnerable endemic [Yalden's rat \(*Desmomys yaldeni*\)](#). Therefore, protecting the forest from destruction is not only good for people, but also for global biodiversity.

Seralegin Abera, Executive Director of GPRDO, said: “On top of improving local livelihoods, our conservation based activities have uncovered a secret of using 12 inches nails with salt to dry up *Cordia* trees in Sheka Forest KBA”. By Ethiopian law, it is forbidden to fell a live tree. So, to avoid problems, local community members used to nail the trees with 12 inch nails to clandestinely dry them up and later seek permission to fell ‘a dried up tree’.



Stakeholders visiting the project site © Nigussie

You can also help!

Seralegin invites all the relevant stakeholders including national/international conservation organizations, governments and community groups to support the scaling up of the achieved results into the remaining villages and districts in the Sheka Forest KBA and into other areas. Find a project proposal, ready for funding, [here](#).

Your support for stopping the nailing of one *Cordia* tree will generate cash income of 1900 Birr (80 USD) for local people in Ethiopia - every year. And it will help with climate change mitigation, too!

For more information, please contact GPRDO at gprdo@ethionet.et or keenbooni@gmail.com.

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Note: Some hyperlinks may no longer be active

Notes

In May 2017, the Tropical Biology Association, together with the CEPF Eastern Afromontane Regional Implementation Team (EWNHS and BirdLife International), organised a training in communication skills for Ethiopian CEPF grantees. This article is one of the products that came out of that training. For other articles, click [here](#).

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 (KBAs) and priority corridors in the region.

Read more [NEWS](#) from the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot!