

News release

Kenyan conservationist honored as biodiversity 'Hotspot Hero' by Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund

Leah Mwangi is being recognized for achievements in protecting the country's species and ecosystems

Arlington, Virginia, USA (22 May 2020) – On this International Day for Biological Diversity, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) announces that Leah Mwangi and nine other conservationists from around the world have been named "Hotspot Heroes" for their efforts to protect the world's biodiversity hotspots. The honorees were chosen from the hundreds of civil society organizations that have received grants from CEPF in the 10 global biodiversity hotspots where the fund is currently active.

CEPF is recognizing these heroes as part of the celebration of its 20th anniversary. The fund empowers nongovernmental organizations, indigenous groups, universities and private enterprises to protect the world's biodiversity hotspots—the world's most biologically diverse yet threatened terrestrial regions—and help communities thrive. CEPF does this through grants and technical support for conservation, organizational strengthening and sustainable development.

The Hotspot Heroes and the nongovernmental organizations they work for are making outstanding contributions to the conservation of the hotspots. They exemplify the kinds of dedicated, dynamic people who work to ensure that intact ecosystems can continue to sustain flora and fauna and provide clean air, fresh water, healthy soils, sustainable livelihoods, resilience to climate change and much more.

Ms. Mwangi has worked with the Kenya-based organization [Kijabe Environment Volunteers](#) (KENVO) since 2001. She started as a volunteer but rose to executive director and currently serves on the board of management. Under Ms. Mwangi's leadership, KENVO grew from a volunteer-led organization that focused on deforestation to a nonprofit organization employing 14 people.

Today, KENVO tackles a range of conservation issues across the Kikuyu Escarpment Forest, a Key Biodiversity Area that is home to 17 globally threatened species, seven of which are found nowhere else. In addition, the area covers two water

catchments that hold five rivers, providing water to more than 1 million people, including those in the city of Nairobi.

The forest is part of the Eastern Afromontane Biodiversity Hotspot, which stretches over a curving arc of widely scattered but biogeographically similar mountains from Saudi Arabia to Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

"Leah Mwangi is committed to conservation and sustainable development in Kenya. For her, there is no gap between her organization, KENVO, and the communities in which she works—they are one and the same," said Dan Rothberg, CEPF Grant Director for the Eastern Afromontane Biodiversity Hotspot.

With the help of two CEPF grants, KENVO launched an initiative to connect those "upstream" in Kikuyu—including farmers and foresters—with those "downstream," such as breweries and power companies. The relationship provides incentives for those upstream to implement sustainable practices, including less-intensive agriculture, tree planting and invasive plant removal.

As a beneficiary of the Conservation International program Women in Healthy Sustainable Societies, KENVO has also made great strides in empowering women in the communities where they work.

"The Hotspot Heroes represent the many tenacious, committed conservationists who are taking action every day to ensure the future of the biodiversity hotspots and the people who depend on these vital ecosystems," said CEPF Executive Director Olivier Langrand. "They endure a multitude of challenges—long hours, grueling travel, difficult working conditions, political hurdles and even threats to their lives—in pursuit of a healthy, sustainable world."

"Ms. Mwangi and KENVO are helping communities benefit from a healthy relationship with their ecosystem, which is a crucial source of water for Kenya," said Langrand. "Their long-term commitment to the people of the Kikuyu Escarpment Forest is building resilience in communities and nature, and points to a promising future."

Read more about [Leah Mwangi](#) and the other [Hotspot Heroes](#).

CEPF is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan and the World Bank.

Since 2001, CEPF has catalyzed enduring, locally led biodiversity conservation through US\$250 million in grants to more than 2,400 organizations in 98 developing and transitional countries. Results include more than 15 million hectares of formal protected areas established, at least 890 globally threatened species supported, and more than 3,500

communities benefiting. Learn more at www.cepf.net, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

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Download a photo of Leah Mwangi [here](#). (*Note: you will need to read through Conservation International's terms of use document before downloading.)