

Female conservationists agree to bridge gender gap in conservation

- By Marianne Carter and Maaïke Manten



Women conservationists involved in CEPF funded projects © Anthony Ochieng

A group of inspirational women conservationists from nine countries, involved in conservation projects funded by the [Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund](#) (CEPF) in the [Eastern Afromontane Hotspot](#) have shared their experiences, identified a gender gap in conservation activities and discussed ways to promote gender equality in the conservation sector, through their own paths to conservation leadership.

The group met recently in Rwanda's capital, Kigali during a four-day event organised by [Fauna & Flora International](#), with support from the CEPF.

"We really have this gender gap in the conservation world. Now we are thinking of what we can do about it," said Madeleine Nyiratuza, a participant from Rwanda, adding that, "during the training I realised we can do something to coach our sisters and children to be involved in conservation."

This group of women in conservation from Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia came up with over 50 practical ways to actively support women to overcome the multiple barriers they face to equal participation in conservation activities. These included mentoring and coaching young women interested in conservation, ensuring thoughtful participation of women and girls from the local communities where conservation activities take place, improving facilities for women at workplaces - including field sites, building supportive personal networks for encouragement and confidence building.

“I’m feeling like I can fly right now. I’ve really been inspired, having all these talented and great women around me this week,” said Fadzai Matsvimbo, who represented BirdLife Zimbabwe.

The women also noted that for their goal to be achieved, they need the full support and understanding of men.

Full of energy, inspiration and the feeling of support, all participants signed a commitment to undertake specific actions back at home, through their offices and projects. One of them, Rosemary Chavula of Lundazi District Women Development Association, has already organised a community workshop in Kodwani village in Zambia and shared her experience and lessons learned during the Kigali workshop with other women in the community.

“The workshop was very eye opening. I have attended some where men were the majority and my contribution was very low,” said Rosemary.

Another participant, Felister Mombo from *For Consult* has been using some of the tools she learnt at the workshop to help build conservation leadership skills amongst fisheries officers in Tanzania, and this is just the beginning.

“You have empowered us more as women to face different challenges,” stated Lilly Ajarova, from Uganda.



The influence of women in conservation © Marianne Carter



What a successful leader looks like © Anthony Ochieng

It is encouraging to see these positive outcomes coming through from the workshop so quickly. A spirit of change is sweeping across the Eastern Afrotropical region – a change that will make a real difference, for good, for conservation in the Hotspot.

“Together we will make women strong in conservation. It is deserved and valuable,” concluded Chantal Shalukoma from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Previously published on the BirdLife International website on 10 May 2017

Note: Some hyperlinks may no longer be active

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.