

New partnership to safeguard Malagarasi River System

- By Jean Paul Ntungane



Malagarasi River ©Anthony Ochieng

At a length of 475 kilometres, the Malagarasi River is the second longest river in Tanzania, and with a basin area of 130,000 square kilometres it has the largest watershed of all of the rivers flowing into Lake Tanganyika. It is one of the priority [Key Biodiversity Areas](#) (KBAs) in Tanzania, because it hosts a variety of rare and threatened species such as the Sitatunga (*Tragelaphus spekii*), the Endangered Nile crocodile (*Crocodilus niloticus*) and the Vulnerable Shoebill (*Balaeniceps rex*). Seven out of 20 fish species found in the river are on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Despite its importance and the services it provides, such as provisioning of water and food, the Malagarasi River faces many urgent threats, mainly from development activities such as salt mining, hydropower dam constructions, and pressure from agriculture activities. Nobody argues the fact that local communities need development, they need electricity, employment, food, etc. – but how do you ensure that these benefits are achieved without damaging the river's biodiversity? The World Bank's [safeguards policies](#) provide mechanisms to ensure effectiveness and sustainability of development projects while preserving the environment for the current and future generations; they help assessing projects' adverse impacts to people and the environment, and also provide measures to prevent or mitigate those impacts.

Applying safeguards

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) runs a small grants programme in the Eastern Afromontane Biodiversity Hotspot, which is managed by the BirdLife International-led Regional Implementation Team. This team provided two small grants to [Nyakitonto Youth for Development Tanzania](#) (NYDT) and [Governance Links Tanzania](#),

both local Tanzanian NGOs working in the Malagarasi River System KBA. With these grants, the two organisations worked together and created awareness about the World Bank safeguards policy on Natural Habitats and on Environmental Impact Assessment. A new local multi-stakeholder partnership was formed among local community conservation groups, private sector entities, local authorities, and the media.

This grouping was then trained on the importance and application of relevant safeguard measures, in order to be able to adequately respond to emerging issues threatening the Malagarasi River System. Local members of the partnership are now actively working in each of the three districts along Malagarasi River, encouraging farmers to respect buffer zones along riverbanks, and are working on local plans to address urgent issues.



Solar lakes © Jean Paul Ntungane

Conservation impact!

Among the members of the new partnership are the local government and the Tanzania National Environment Management Council (NEMC). These agencies participated in the various stakeholder meetings and events, and subsequently encouraged one of the major companies along the Malagarasi River, Nyanza Mines, to shift from the use of firewood thermal energy, to solar salt lakes in the process of extracting salt from the brine. This will save thousands of trees that used to be cut down every year for supplying the factory with the necessary firewood. A great achievement of all people involved!

And this is only the beginning. The new partnership for the conservation of the Malagarasi River System will continue to coordinate, monitor and enforce the implementation of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and environmental laws to safeguard this unique Key Biodiversity Area. Good luck to them!

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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.