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UN-backed conservation project helps save Tanzanian forest



27 July 2010 – Thousands of hectares of fragile mountainous forest in north-eastern Tanzania have been preserved through a recently completed seven-year biodiversity project managed by the United Nations Development Programme ([UNDP](#)).

The Eastern Arc Mountains project, financed by the Global Environment Facility ([GEF](#)), was concluded last month after an independent evaluation reported that at least 10,000 hectares of forest had been saved from destruction, and that the rate of forest loss had been reduced by 10 per cent.

River flows from the Eastern Arc are the main source of water for at least a quarter of Tanzania's population. They produce more than half the country's hydro-electric power. Water, electricity and non-timber forest products from the area generate over \$175 million every year, according to UNDP.

The Tanzanian Government has nominated the forest ecosystem for recognition by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) as a World Heritage Site.

The project was selected because an estimated 70 per cent of Eastern Arc's rich and unique forestland had been destroyed mainly through farming and timber harvesting. Only about 5,400 square kilometres of the original 23,000 square kilometres of forested area remained on the mountains.

UNDP worked on the project with the Tanzanian Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic bodies and village administrations, to develop community-based conservation initiatives.

Conservation efforts included the preservation of the Uluguru native reserve in Morogoro region, a popular tourism destination and home to more than 100 unique plants, bird species, mammals and amphibians.

Some 300 people from 10 villages in the region were trained in new methods of agriculture and livestock husbandry.

“The Eastern Arc strategy defines what the Government and other actors in Tanzania need to do to ensure the conservation of the Eastern Arc mountains and their global biodiversity importance,” said Nik Sekhran, principal technical adviser for biodiversity and ecosystems at UNDP.

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