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The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), which funds nongovernmental efforts to conserve the world's most biodiverse and threatened ecosystems, has officially launched the Ethiopian component of its five year, \$9.8 million investment plan in the Eastern Afromontane biodiversity hotspot.

Characterized by a series of montane "islands" and high plateaus, the hotspot stretches over 7000 kilometers and covers 15 countries, from Saudi Arabia to Zimbabwe.

"We are eager to work with the organizations and communities of the Eastern Afromontane hotspot to help them secure the future of their natural resources and their own livelihoods," said Patricia Zurita, executive director of CEPF.

Because of its geographical position, range of altitude, rainfall pattern and soil variability, Ethiopia has an immense ecological diversity and wealth of biological resources. This variety of ecosystems offers suitable environments for a wide range of life forms. Ethiopia is unquestionably a critical region for animal diversity: while more research is still needed, biologists have already recorded 22 mammals, 27 birds, and 17 amphibians that are endemic – meaning that there are found nowhere else in the world but in Ethiopia. Likewise, the flora of Ethiopia is immensely diverse: over 7000 species of plants have been recorded in Ethiopia, from which 12 percent are probably endemic. The diversity of organisms in an ecosystem provides essential foods, medicines, and industrial materials. As much as 40 percent of modern pharmaceutical medicines used in the developed world are derived from plants or animals. In Ethiopia, no less than 80 percent of the rural community and a significant proportion of the urban dwellers depend on herbal medicines for their primary health care. In addition to foods, medicine, fuel wood, and construction materials, natural ecosystems (especially forests) provide wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities, prevent soil erosion and flooding, and help to provide clean air and water. Biological resources are also important biotic checks to pests and diseases and serve as defense line against global climate change.

The launch event, hosted at the Alliance Ethio-Française in Addis Ababa, was organized by the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (EWNHS), one of three nongovernmental organizations in the region that are implementing the CEPF strategy. The other two organizations are BirdLife International and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The event, which took place on the 1st of March 2013, commenced with a workshop session to present to all potential grantees the CEPF strategy for Ethiopia – a strategy designed through extensive consultations of stakeholders. After the workshop, the Ethiopian investment plan was officially launched in the presence of representatives from Ethiopian governmental authorities (the Environmental Protection Authority, EPA, the Amhara/Oromia/SNNPR Regional States, and the Institute of Biodiversity Conservation, IBC), civil society organisations (environmental and development NGOs, academics, private sector) and the donor community. The European Union and the French Development Agency, two of the seven global donors of the CEPF initiative, were represented at the event.

"I am extremely happy to see that CEPF is stepping in to capacitate civil society to play a decisive role in safeguarding the unique but threatened biodiversity of the Eastern Afromontane hotspot - of which 40 percent of the landscape occurs in Ethiopia!" said Mengistu Wondafrash, Executive Director of EWNHS. H.E. Mrs. Brigitte Collet, Ambassador of France to Ethiopia, declared: *"We consider that the model developed by CEPF, which supports local organizations and communities, brings an invaluable contribution to the protection of our planet's most diverse and most threatened ecosystems."* After these words, Mrs. Collet officially launched the investment phase of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund for the Ethiopian part of the hotspot.

CEPF will call for grant proposals from civil society groups ranging from small farming cooperatives and community associations to international organizations.

CEPF is currently seeking proposals for projects aimed at (i) mainstreaming biodiversity into wider development

policies, plans and projects to deliver the co-benefits of biodiversity conservation, improved local livelihoods and economic development, and (ii) initiating and supporting sustainable financing for the conservation of priority sites.

For more information, please visit the CEPF website: www.cepf.net/grants
www.cepf.net/where_we_work/regions/africa/eastern_afromontane or visit the Eastern Afromontane Facebook and Twitter pages: facebook.com/CEPF.EAM • twitter.com/EAM_Hotspot

About the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund: *The CEPF is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation. www.cepf.net*

About the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society: *EWNHS is not-for-profit grassroots indigenous national-level conservation NGO, re-registered and licensed as an Ethiopian Resident Charity (Reg. No. 0720) in accordance with the Charities and Societies Proclamation No. 621/2009. EWNHS is one of the most prominent in Ethiopia advocating for wise use and conservation of biodiversity, natural resources and environment. www.ewnhs.org.et*