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East Africa's Treasure

Forest Conservation Project Empowers Community to Restore Mau Forest's Glory

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USAID Expands ProMara

USAID is assisting the Kenya Government (GoK) to restore the forest and watersheds in the Mau Forest Complex (MFC) through a \$7 million, two-year project called ProMara (for the Mara).

On March 25th 2011, USAID/Kenya's Deputy Mission Director James Hope officially launched ProMara at the project's new Mau Outreach Center (MOC), on the outskirts of the forest.

The Mau Forest Complex has a history of illegal and irregular land allocations. In 2009, GoK acted on Mau Task Force recommendations to revoke questionable titles, ordering the eviction of "illegal" settlers from the MFC. This resulted in controversy as well as uncertainty among remaining residents.

The new Mau Outreach Center

"Information is power," says Enock Kanyanya, PROMARA's Program Activity Manager at USAID. And information is exactly what the Mau Outreach Center is providing: accurate information on property rights as well as obligations of key stakeholders in the MFC, plus the role of the forest in the country's water supply, and how residents can improve both their livelihoods and the health of the forest. The center will train community members in conservation-friendly farming, creating job opportunities for residents and evicted citizens nearby.

The outreach center will engage youth in peace committees, peace clubs, and sensitization workshops. "Communities will therefore see concrete results of peace, and peace of mind," says Kanyanya.

The center will also provide the community with legal advisory services and meeting space for local groups, presenting opportunities for residents to discuss conservation, land ownership and responsibilities that come with it as well as gender issues.

History of the Mau Issue

Kenya's Mau Forest Complex (MFC) is the largest forest left in East Africa. Over 30 million people, in Kenya and beyond, depend on water sources originating in the Mau. The Mau Complex stabilizes the climate of a sizeable portion of Kenya's arable lands and provides much of the country's energy.

The Mau supports key economic sectors, particularly agriculture and tourism whose market value is more than Kshs 20 billion a year. The estimated potential hydropower generation in the Mau catchments is over 500 megawatts, more than 40 percent of the total electrical generating capacity of Kenya today. The total value of the Mau would also count the timber, firewood, fodder and medicinal plants used by nearby communities.

Due to continued illegal logging, however, a dozen major rivers are endangered. Decline in dry-season water levels in the Mara River even jeopardizes wildlife in the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem. The drying up of rivers affects Kenya's relationship with Tanzania as well as multi-lateral institutions such as the Lake Victoria Basin Commission and the Nile Basin Riparian Agreement.



http://kenya.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/imagecache/thickbox/IMG_0470.jpg

Evictions from the Mau Forest Complex (MFC) have been highly politicized, thus complicating and slowing down the process. Evicted from the forest area and living in informal settlements, communities are prone to poverty, and unemployed youth are vulnerable to political manipulation.

USAID at Work

USAID is working with the Government of Kenya and non-governmental organizations to help recover the integrity of the Mara-Mau ecosystem for and by stakeholders. "This involves men, women and youth of the Mau leading conservation efforts and fully benefitting from the resources, hence the implementation of the ProMara project," said the Program Activity Manager.

