

Ivato Declaration

Conservation of Madagascar biodiversity

(English version)

BACKGROUND

Madagascar's extremely high rates of endemism are well known, with measures of species richness increasing with new discoveries at a rate greater than most tropical countries (1). Unfortunately, this unique biodiversity is severely threatened; nearly 50% of remaining natural forest is now less than 100 meters from an edge. Deforestation, illegal hunting, and collection for the pet trade have pushed many species to the brink of extinction. The pressures on biodiversity have significantly increased over the last decade; with new threats emerging and old ones increasing in scale. President Andry Rajoelina's five-year term, which commenced in early 2019, may represent the last chance to avoid the unique habitats and species to the island being committed to extinction. However, Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world; more than 40% of children under five suffer from stunting. Conservation of biodiversity must therefore contribute to, not detract from, efforts of the country to develop economically.

Insecurity and corruption reduce investment and result in exploitation of national assets without taxes being paid, thus slowing development. The rule of law in Madagascar is in decline. The country fell eight places in the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index between 2016 and 2018. As well as being bad for economic development, the weak governance has serious impacts on the environment. The threats faced by Madagascar's protected areas are increasingly linked to corruption. Illegal logging of precious hardwoods from protected areas attracted international condemnation when it dramatically increased in scale ten years ago. The last decade has also seen an increase in mining within protected areas. The western dry forests are being rapidly cleared for large-scale cultivation of cash crops; recent reports suggest those clearing the land are being paid, and protected, by local elites.

The rampant exploitation of protected areas and species over the past few years, without regard to national laws, does not benefit the vast majority of the Malagasy people. There are also many incidents where illegal activities around protected areas have been linked to insecurity, which directly harms local development. Such insecurity will affect tourism on which the local and national economies depend.

THE PROBLEM

While Madagascar's incredible natural wealth is a source of **national pride**, it is also the country's unique selling point internationally. Tourism is a vital source of revenue (the total contribution of travel and tourism was 16.6% of GDP in 2017), and the President identified the potential to greatly increase tourism during his campaign. The vast majority of international tourists visit protected areas, and wildlife features strongly in marketing by the Malagasy national tourism board. Indeed Malagasy companies looking for international investment often use biodiversity in their advertising, and the President's own election manifesto featured images of baobabs and ring-tailed lemurs. Following the examples of Costa Rica and Rwanda (which have both benefited greatly from tourism attracted by their biodiversity), Madagascar's wildlife could play a central role in sustainable development.

The vast majority of Malagasy people are rural and vulnerable to environmental shocks. Natural ecosystems are well known to contribute to climate change resilience and provide other livelihood benefits. For example, the country's diverse marine ecosystems provide benefits to millions of coastal residents, terrestrial forest can reduce surface water flooding, and recent work from Madagascar shows that bats suppress agricultural pests. **Madagascar without its biodiversity would be a much poorer place economically, as well as in ways that simply cannot be counted.**

The actions to be taken are urgent in view of the degrading situation of the current Malagasy biodiversity, if we still want to keep this national pride. In addition, the population, the national economy and other aspects of development are based on a healthy environment. The current president is surely the last chance Madagascar has to rectify this crisis situation.

WE, the participants from 59 countries who attended the 56th Annual meeting of Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC), held in Antananarivo, Ivato, from 30th July to 3rd August 2019, whose theme was "Tropical biology and sustainable development",

Aware that this unique biodiversity is seriously threatened, that pressures on biodiversity have increased significantly over the last decade; and that new threats emerge as established threats intensify,

Convinced that the conservation of biodiversity should serve, not reduce, the efforts to economically develop the country so as to benefit all Malagasy, and that urgent measures must be taken to conserve this biodiversity and jointly launch the economy on a path of sustainable growth.

WE suggest five positive ways to rapidly improve the state of Madagascar's biodiversity, benefitting both people and nature.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Tackling environmental crime.

The technical capacity of the government to control wildlife crime has improved recently through the uptake of different tools, such as the Spatial Reporting and Monitoring Tool (SMART) for protected area law enforcement. New technologies, such as remote sensing and the use of rapid DNA barcoding allowing protected species to be easily identified, could help further. However to be effective, improvements in how the Ministry of Justice handles environmental crimes are needed. Given the challenges faced by the judiciary and prison system, we are certainly not advocating a clampdown on poor farmers who are probably not aware of and break environmental laws. Effective prosecution and significant fines for traffickers (e.g. of rosewood or endangered species for the pet trade), however, must be a priority so these criminals cannot profit illicitly by exploiting Madagascar's natural heritage. Recent attempts to improve prosecution success of those involved in rosewood trafficking in the northeast, through collaboration between a range of stakeholders, point to a way forward.

2) Investing in Madagascar's protected areas.

While it is clear that Madagascar's protected areas have not been completely effective (many suffer from under-investment), they did, on average, slow deforestation compared to unprotected areas at least up to 2010. The recently expanded network is an invaluable national and international asset. The Madagascar Biodiversity Fund has more than US\$75 million invested for the benefit of the protected area system but income from this endowment covers only about 10% of the management costs for the full network. Policy, legal and economic conditions that encourage further investment in nature need to be developed, such as improving infrastructure for tourism around protected areas, payments for ecosystem services and debt for nature swaps. Management of protected areas must ensure local people, who may bear costs from establishment and management, are properly considered.

3) Ensuring major infrastructure developments limit impacts on biodiversity.

Only 13% of Malagasy have electricity and much of Madagascar's transport infrastructure is in a dilapidated state. The country also has considerable mineral resources, which will play an important role in the country's economic development. Madagascar joined China's belt and road initiative in 2017 and the Chinese government has promised significant investment. The existing environmental impact assessment law is more than 20 year old and needs to be revised to explicitly require the use of strategic environmental assessment and the mitigation hierarchy. However, laws also need to be enforced. A recent US\$2.7bn deal between a private Malagasy association with links to the former president and a Chinese consortium involving fishing rights has raised significant concerns and local communities are concerned



that the deal will decimate their livelihoods. A robust and credible planning process is essential to maximize benefits from large investments, while avoiding unnecessary environmental and social costs.

4) Strengthening tenure rights for local people over natural resources.

Tenure has long been recognized as vital for the effective management of natural resources. Madagascar was ahead of the curve in introducing legislation to support community management in the late 1990s; and more than 15% of forests are now under community management. Locally managed marine areas are being increasingly established along Madagascar's coasts and initial reports suggest they can be successful at improving marine resource management. However, legal changes are needed for this type of management to be recognized in national law. Clarifying private tenure can also play a role in improving management. The fact that most farmers living on forest frontiers cannot get certification for their land (the 2005 tenure reforms explicitly excludes land within protected areas), discourages them from investing in settled agriculture, potentially contributing to ongoing forest clearance. Further review of Madagascar's tenure laws, considering the equity implications, could therefore help both local people and biodiversity.

5) Addressing Madagascar's growing fuel wood crisis.

The vast majority of Malagasy depend on wood or charcoal for cooking. Renewable resources (from sustainably managed woodlots and plantations) are already insufficient to meet the growing need, contributing to pressures on protected areas. The situation is projected to worsen as populations continue to rise. The country has made strong commitments to reforestation under both the Bonn Challenge and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. So far, however, while scattered initiatives are making progress, the areas effectively planted remain small. Facilitating investment in reforestation efforts, if sensitively done with firebreaks and other forms of protection, could provide environmental and economic benefits. Since his election, President Rajoelina has expressed great ambition in this area.

SUMMARY

Sustained commitment from the national government is essential. Without urgent action, it will soon be too late to save some of Madagascar's most iconic habitats and species. By making progress in the five areas we highlight, the new President's term could instead result in a turning point for Madagascar's biodiversity. That is why, President Rajoelina, we, the signatories of this document, are asking in the most respectful way, that you and the other leaders of Madagascar take the necessary steps to launch new programs to target the issues mentioned above and ensure the future of the cultural and natural heritage of the island.

03rd August 2019, Antananarivo, Madagascar