

Environmental loss: the cost to Tanzania's economy



EFD STORIES

Environment for Development Initiative

Tanzania

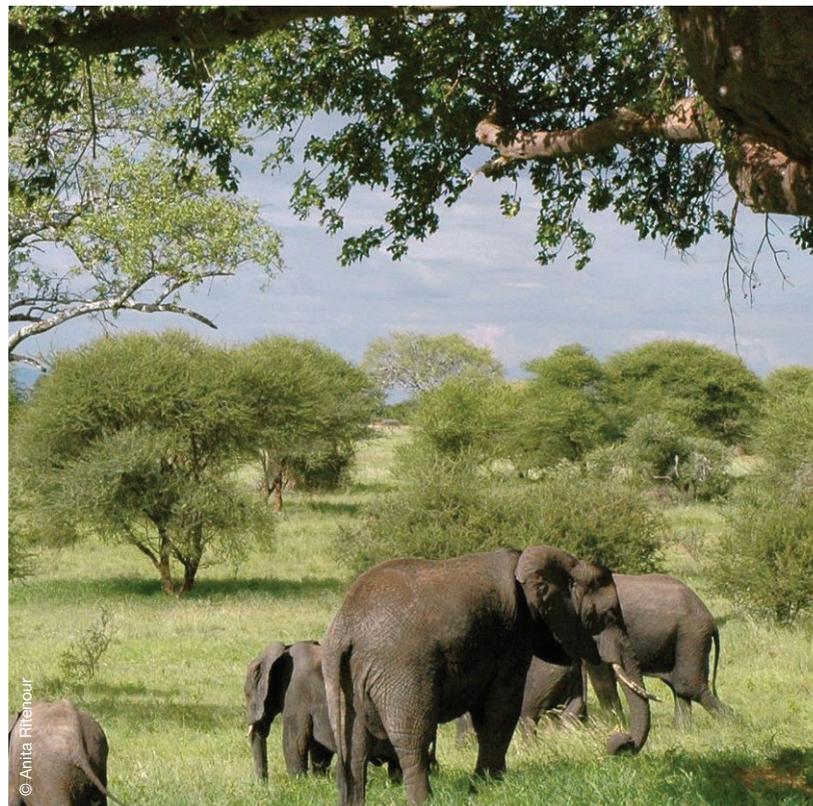
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Much of Tanzania's economic growth is dependent on the natural ecosystems that allow the harvesting of resources such as water, timber, and fish from the environment. However, society often regards these resources as infinite and free, which can lead to their overexploitation, resulting in the ecosystems becoming degraded and unhealthy. The ripple effect can be felt through the entire economy.

This was the key message at the commemoration of the United Nations World Environment Day in Tanzania in June 2017, where local experts spoke on the importance of ecosystems in this East African country, and highlighted the need for conservation and other efforts to avoid environmental degradation.

Razack Lokina, associate professor of economics and director of the Department of Economics at the University of Dar es Salaam, spoke at this event at the invitation of the Tanzanian government. The talk highlighted some of the research by Lokina and his team, who are affiliated with the Environment for Development (EfD) initiative, an international network of environmental economists based in Sweden, with centres in various developing countries.

The UN event highlighted global action around protection of the environment, and Lokina underscored the potential implications of ecosystem degradation in the country. It has become commonplace for society to assume that ecosystem services do not have any value, he said. For example, trees are cut down and water over-harvested without considering all the services



Tanzania's healthy natural environment, such as its diverse wildlife which draw international tourists, are key to supporting the country's economy and development needs.

that are destroyed as a result. In contrast to this view that resources are 'free', the talk emphasised that Tanzania's economic growth is closely tied with the state of its ecosystems. Since the country's economy and development are dependent on the ecosystems, if those are degraded, this affects the whole country.

For example, deforestation leads to a decrease in the water in rivers, ponds and lakes. Water shortages affect economic activity in agriculture, energy and fishing. In addition, loss and contamination of water brings health risks such as infectious diseases. The cost to fix the damaged environment is higher than the cost to prevent environmental damage from occurring. So investing in environmental management is essential for economic development. Lokina

further mentioned that, because the country's overall economy and industrial development depend on natural ecosystems, there is a need to develop appropriate policies in all sectors. For instance, silt in rivers interferes with hydroelectricity, which reduces the energy available for industrial development.

Additional work from EfD Tanzania by Dr Byela Tibesigwa shows the importance of healthy forests for the country's small-scale crop farmers, because of the important pollination services they support. Tibesigwa's research shows that the loss of forests reduces the quantity and value of smallholder crops. This is because forests are the natural habitats of wild pollinators, such as bees, and smallholder farms depend on these to pollinate the flowers of seed- and fruit-producing crops, such as watermelons, oranges, coffee and cucumber. The presence of such wild pollinators boosts the quantity and quality of harvest. For example, in the absence of pollinators, watermelon yield is reduced by more than 90%.

Loss of forests can therefore have unexpected impacts on the wider economy, which in Tanzania is heavily dependent on agriculture. Findings from the pollination study are relevant beyond Tanzania because of the great importance of smallholder farming in increasing

household food security in sub-Saharan Africa. Smallholder farmers rely on wild pollinators found in forests, as commercial pollination is not yet available in the region.

Lokina's work is informed by research being done as part of the Ecosystem Services Accounting for Development (ESAfD) project and the Country Environmental Assessment (CEA) for Tanzania. The CEA is a collaboration between the Government of Tanzania, the World Bank, the Swedish Embassy, the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, and EfD Tanzania at the University of Dar es Salaam. The ESAfD project is a collaborative research effort within the EfD centres in Costa Rica, China, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, and Sweden, with the aim of placing monetary value on ecosystem services.

World Environment Day is the United Nation's principal vehicle for encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the protection of our environment.

Researchers involved

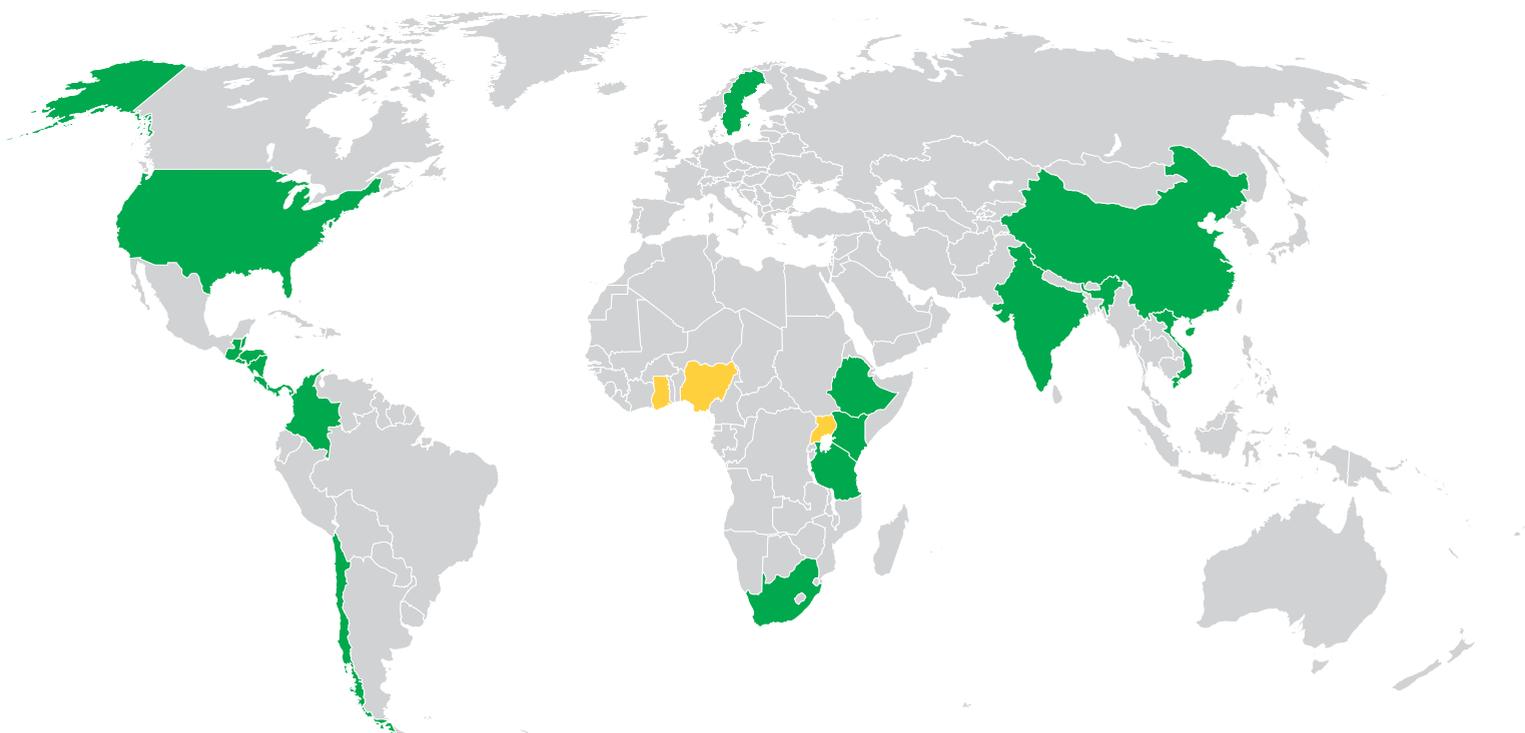
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