

Manda Wilderness Women turn Earth into Art

- By Juliana Castellanos



Beads and other creations of Eunice Kazula from Mbueca village ©Stefni Muller

The Manda Wilderness Bio-Diversity Project is a project being implemented at an [Eastern Afromontane](#) Key Biodiversity Area (Lake Niassa) and aims to protect this priority area for conservation.

The women of Manda Wilderness in Northern Mozambique are turning the earth beneath their feet into objects of beauty that could also earn them some much-welcome cash.

The Manda Wilderness Bio-Diversity Project, run by the [Manda Wilderness Community Trust](#) and funded by the [Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund](#) (CEPF), has its main aims at protecting the Lake Niassa region, a key biodiversity area. By collaborating with 16 communities in the catchment area, it targets five components: conservation agriculture, school gardens, social capital, impact on the long-term conservation plan for the area, and economic development.

And while well-managed conservation agriculture is seen as the main catalyst for economic growth in one of the least developed areas of Mozambique, there are other potential avenues for income – and jewellery could be one of them.



On October 8th, 2015 the Manda Wilderness Community Trust welcomed South African jeweller and designer Stefni Muller to its site alongside the natural beauty of Lake Niassa. Sponsored by the South African StediDrone company, Stefni came to give jewellery lessons to women the Manda Wilderness community. Muller's work takes its inspiration in nature and use of non-synthetic materials, so she came to show the women of Manda that in their surroundings lies the possibility for art.

A group of six women from each of four villages attended a five-day workshop at the Manda Wilderness Agricultural Project farm, the headquarters and demonstration site for the Bio-Diversity Project. Stefni chose to focus on the making of beads, nonetheless, and in line with the conservation education objectives of the CEPF Project, giving the women to make shapes resembling their local flora and fauna once they had mastered this first skill.

"Working with clay and making bead necklaces might seem primitive, but this is far from the truth. With a pilot project such as this one, minimizing risk for both women/Trust/me is crucial and believe me...beads sell!" affirms Muller. While day one of week one found Stefni nervous of what to expect, by the third week, welcoming the women from the village of Matepwe seemed as natural as her designs.

The workshops ran from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon from Monday through Friday. Activities went from the collection of soil for the making of the base material, up to fabricating natural string and, last but not least, stringing.

tefni Muller

The results have been remarkable, producing a first range of finished products for sale. Alongside the stories of the region and of the women themselves, the necklaces will begin to sell at Nkwichi Lodge and online. The object is to create local and international awareness of the richness of the ecosystem, while giving women in this very remote region of Northern Mozambique the opportunity to explore alternative economic activities.

"I like this project as it will help the local women to realize that every nature they have in their community is very helpful, as they can use them to make something for them to sell and get money that can be used to support their families," Says Richard Stephano, Local Community Project Manager for the Trust. "This is one way of helping women to work in groups that also will help them to share ideas when they are in a group."



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Note: Some hyperlinks may no longer be active

To learn more about the development of this initiative follow the Manda Wilderness Community Trust <https://www.facebook.com/mandawildernesscommunitytrust/>,

Stefni Muller's blog <http://www.stefni.co.za/little-travels-my-blog/2015/10/19/going-beyond-what-is-part-one/> and SteadiDrone <http://www.steadidrone.com/>.

See the interactive map of all projects implemented under the CEPF Eastern Afromontane hotspot programme [here](#).

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation. More information on CEPF can be found at www.cepf.net.

BirdLife International, together with the [International Union for the Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\)](#) and the [Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society](#) (BirdLife in Ethiopia) form the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) investment in the Eastern Afromontane Hotspot (2012-2017). The investment will support civil society in applying innovative approaches to conservation in under-capacitated and underfunded protected areas, Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) and priority corridors in the region.