

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN COMMENTS TO ICOMOS

THE GEDEO CULTURAL LANDSCAPE (ETHIOPIA, THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF)

IUCN provides the following comments to ICOMOS based on a review of the nomination dossier and two external desk reviews. Located within the vast Gedeo traditional agroforestry system, the nominated property encompasses 29,620 ha. The Gedeo Cultural Landscape is found in the vicinity of Bore-Anferara (national forest priority area) and Loka-Abaya (national park, IUCN category II), but it does not overlap with either of these protected areas.

The wider area is home to a population of over 1.5 million people, making it the most densely populated zone in the country. The Gedeo's unique sense of identity has been preserved and is related to their dependence on the natural resources within their rugged landscape. Agroforestry covers 94% of the nominated area whilst a small area of 27 ha (0.09 %) is covered by sacred forests under traditional protection. The Gedeo have adopted diverse livelihood strategies, supported by rich agroforestry practices adapted to natural and social conditions. The fertile soils and the sharp altitudinal gradient create varied ecozones that favour a rich and diverse biodiversity. IUCN therefore notes that the Gedeo Cultural Landscape includes important natural values. Gedeo is part of a larger region considered to be a domestication area for Coffee (*Coffea arabica*) and Enset (*Ensete ventricosum*). Ethiopia has been suggested to be the origin of these crops and others like Teff (*Eragrostis tef*), Noug (*Guizotia abyssinica*), and Anchote (*Coccinia abyssinica*), as they were or still are found in nature. In addition to their spiritual and cultural value, the four sacred forests play an important role as refuges for traditional medicinal plants and indigenous floral diversity hosting endemic and threatened plants. The nomination lists 107 tree and shrub species in these four forests, out of which 22 are species for medicinal use. The nomination dossier and management plan note the presence of threatened species within the wider Gedeo region. IUCN notes the presence of Critically Endangered species such as the White-headed Vulture (*Trigonoceps occipitalis*), and the White-backed Vulture (*Gyps africanus*). Endangered species with decreasing population trends include the Lappet-faced Vulture (*Torgos tracheliotos*), the Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*), and the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*).

The relationship that the Gedeo have with their land as explained in the nomination file is symbiotic. However impressive this traditional relationship has been between the Gedeo and their land, including the effectiveness of their traditional natural resource management strategies, the resilience of the entire agroforestry system has limits imposed by space, environmental conditions and biological constraints. With the highest rural population in Africa relying on finite resources, the sustainability of this agroforestry system is in question. Populations are increasing which has been identified as key driver for threats to the nominated area. Farming activities are even expanded into the sacred forests as a result of population pressures and changing cultural practices. While the nomination suggests that traditional knowledge has helped to mitigate the effects of climate change, IUCN notes the sustainability of the livelihoods based on agroforestry and associated biodiversity may further erode in future.

The natural values of the nominated property are managed by federal and regional laws, as well as proclamations specific to the Gedeo cultural landscape. For example, trees in these forests cannot be cut without the permission of Songo leaders. A management plan has been developed as part of the nomination process with local and traditional committees included into the management. The acceptance from local administrators, elders, traditional leaders, women and youth representatives that all these threats are affecting the cultural landscape is an important and welcome step in finding solutions to address them. However, funds for the protection of the agricultural landscapes depends on individual landholders and elders as well as ritual leaders with zonal administrative institutions supporting as needs arise. IUCN also notes that there is a tourism plan and regulation under implementation.

IUCN recommends that ICOMOS in its evaluation raise with the State Party the urgent need for a coherent strategy including monitoring plans to address the major threats affecting the natural values of the nominated property. The strategy should be designed and implemented with the Gedeo people in respect of their traditional knowledge and livelihoods. To safeguard the natural values and traditional livelihoods of this cultural landscape, an integrated and sustainably funded effort is needed that involves all the landscape's stakeholders and ensures biodiversity in sacred forest areas and the agricultural systems in the larger landscape is monitored and conserved and that the tourism plan and its regulation consider the carrying capacity of the agroforestry systems.