KENYA

Atlas of Our Changing Environment

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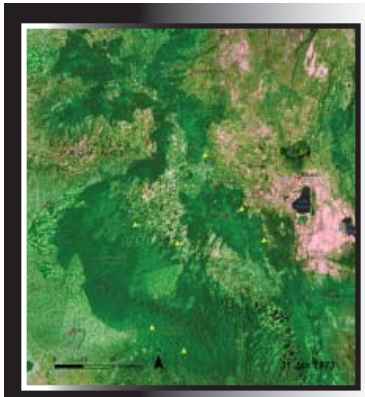

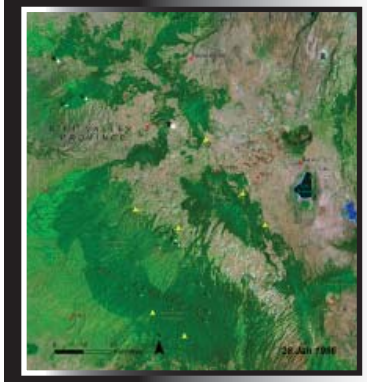

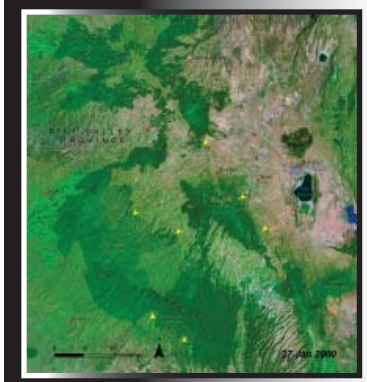

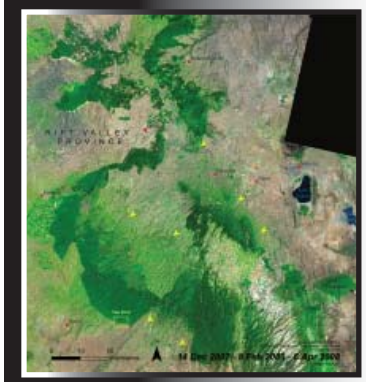

The Mau Forest Complex: Degrading Forests

In spite of its national importance, many areas of the Mau Forest Complex have been deforested or degraded; much of this damage taking place in the past few decades. Degazettement of forest reserves and continuous widespread encroachment have led to the destruction of over 100 000 ha of forest since 2000, representing roughly one-quarter of the Mau Complex's area (yellow arrows). This series of satellite images documents 35 years of incremental destruction of forest area, punctuated by dramatic excisions.

In 2001, 61 023 ha of forest in the Mau Complex were excised including over half of Eastern Mau Forest Reserve. Eastern Mau Forest is the headwaters for the Njoro River which drains its eastern slopes into Lake Nakuru, one of Kenya's prime tourist attractions. One quarter of South West Mau Forest Reserve was excised. The Southwest Mau Forest is the primary source of the Sondu River, site of the future Sondu-Miriu hydro-power plant. All of Molo Forest Reserve was excised.

Between 1973 and 2005, Maasai Mau Forest lost over 8 214 ha of forest within its official boundaries, which were established to protect the forest. Almost 43 per cent of that loss occurred in just two years from 2003 to 2005. Just outside the gazetted boundaries of Maasai Mau Forest nearly 32 000 ha were lost during the same time period. The eastern slopes of the Maasai Mau are a crucial catchment for the Ewaso Nyiro River, as the western slopes are for the Mara River. Forest loss in critical catchment areas for the Sondu, Mara, Molo, Naishi, Makalia Nderit, and Njoro Rivers will result in ecological and hydrological changes, which threaten the sustainable future of areas downstream.

In addition, people have encroached into some 43 700 ha in the Mau Complex's remaining protected forests. The desirability of many of these areas for agriculture attracts a rapidly growing population and has led to rapid conversion of large areas of forest to farmland. Extreme land cover changes such as these can have serious consequences both within the forest and downstream in the form of water shortages, health risks, desertification, habitat destruction, sedimentation, erosion and even alteration of the micro-climate.

Loss of forest at this rate is unsustainable and threatens the security and future development of Kenya. Realizing the goals of Vision 2030 will depend in a very significant way upon the sustainable management of Kenya's natural assets. Kenya's five "water towers" are key among those assets.

Kenya: Atlas of Our Changing Environment

In the footsteps of *One Planet Many People*, and *Africa: Atlas of Our Changing Environment*, this is the newest in a suite of UNEP Atlases that have inspired decision-makers to action through the power of photographs.

This Atlas does two unique things:

- it assesses Kenya's progress towards its own goals of improving the environment to achieve development goals; and
- it delivers a stunning bird's-eye view of environmental change through the use of paired satellite images taken years apart.

In the first case, it demonstrates that the social and economic pillars of Kenya's development plan, Vision 2030, need to be built on a solid foundation of environmental sustainability. Similarly, it teases out the links between the environment and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), showing how the 7th goal, environmental sustainability, underpins them all. In its second unique contribution, the Atlas contains an array of visual tools, including dozens of current and historical remote sensing images, 65 maps, and 229 photographs, that help scientifically document site-specific environmental change at 30 locations across the country.

This Atlas will serve as an important educational tool to enhance local, national, and international knowledge about environmental change in Kenya and to stimulate action at all levels to protect the rich resources that are the base of its culture, economy, and human well-being.