

Cameroonian activist Dr Cécile Ndjebet awarded Kew International Medal for her work advocating for women's rights in forest communities

- Awarded to outstanding individuals helping to protect biodiversity for the benefit of people and planet
- Cécile selected for her work campaigning to preserve forests and improve the lives of people that depend on them in Cameroon and wider African region
- Ndjebet was presented with the Kew Medal at the Royal Society last night, saying: *'My vision is a world where we are successful at halting temperature increase and living in harmony with nature. Here, women and Indigenous Peoples take their rightful seat at the table to take action, and youth are taken seriously.'*



L-R: Dr Cécile Ndjebet in front of the Palm House in Kew Gardens as part of her visit. RBG Kew Chair of Trustees Dame Amelia Fawcett awarding Dr Cécile Ndjebet with the Kew International Medal.

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Thursday 20 March: The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is proud to announce the 17th recipient of the Kew International Medal is Dr Cécile Ndjebet, Cameroonian environmental activist and social forester. Cécile has received this award in recognition of her long career campaigning for the involvement of women in forest management and their right to forested lands and resources.

Established in 1992, the prestigious Kew International Medal is an award given to outstanding individuals who have received international recognition for achievements closely aligned with Kew's mission to understand and protect plants and fungi, for the wellbeing of people and the future of all life on Earth. Previous award winners have included Sir David Attenborough (1996), President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón (2017), Mary Robinson (2019), Sir Partha Dasgupta (2021), and Professor Suzanne Simard (2023). Nominations are received from across the organisation and the winner is decided by a selection panel.

On learning of the award, Dr Cécile Ndjebet said: *'Receiving the Kew International Medal is very important to me- it shows high recognition of what I'm doing together with my fellow rural women and the women and girls involved in my African community forest management network. I hope it will mean more engagement, motivation, and commitment to restoring African degraded ecosystems to help us become more resilient to climate change and enhance the livelihoods of our local communities.'*

'The world is experiencing the most challenging time in human history, and we must succeed together in safeguarding the planet. Climate change requires urgent systemic solutions and transitions. My vision is a world where we are successful at halting temperature increase and living in harmony with nature. Here, women and Indigenous Peoples take their rightful seat at the table to take action, and youth are taken seriously. In this vision, I see equitable and sustainable cities thriving. In this world, there is social equality and social justice, cooperation and abundance; there is peace. I see healthy ecosystems and forests providing food, clean water, and supporting livelihoods and economies for communities in Cameroon, Africa and the entire world.'

In nominating Cecile for the Kew International Medal, Dr Sharon Willoughby, Head of Interpretation at RBG Kew said: *'I first encountered Cécile's extraordinary work when researching content for the Cameroon Orchids Festival at Kew in 2023. I felt that her work was extremely inspiring with strong alignment to Kew's values and the changes we are seeking to make in the world – putting people at the heart of protecting nature. I am thrilled that Cécile is this year's Kew International Medal Winner.'*

Cécile grew up in a forest community in Cameroon, where her love and respect for nature began from an early age. In Cameroon, around 70 per cent of women live in rural areas where their livelihoods depend on forests and wild produce, yet in some communities, women can't own or inherit forested land. With Cameroonian forests increasingly under threat from illegal activities, Cécile has dedicated her career to improve conservation and livelihoods through mobilising women to support themselves through agro-forestry initiatives.

She co-founded the African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests in 2009 and today, it has representation from 20 countries across Africa. In May 2022, Ndjebet received the FAO Wangari Maathai Forest Champion Award in recognition of her leading voice on the importance of gender equality in forest management.

Richard Deverell, Director of RBG Kew, *'We are thrilled to select Cécile for this year's medal for her commitment to protecting biodiversity for the benefit of people and planet, in close alignment with Kew's own mission. Ndjebet has garnered global recognition for her tireless work on the ground to conserve the incredible biodiverse forests in Cameroon whilst simultaneously improving the lives of women by campaigning for their right to own and manage land. This type of community-driven environmental action is at the heart of Kew's scientific mission and purpose to find solutions that benefit people as well as nature. I am delighted we can pay honour to Cécile and the transformative effect she's had on women and young people across Africa.'*



*L-R: Dr Cécile Ndjebet digitising a specimen from Cameroon, *Diplazium proliferum*, in Kew's Herbarium. Dr Cécile Ndjebet with children from the Eco Club at Downloads School in Sussex.*

RBG Kew have been working with partners in Cameroon and the wider Africa region to help safeguard its biodiversity for decades with a specific focus on initiatives around community conservation, livelihoods and species protection as well as documenting and understanding biodiversity.

Kew's Madagascar Conservation Centre was set up in the 1980s and today has over 30 research staff working to enhance livelihoods, strengthen food security and find nature-based solutions to climate change. In Cameroon, Kew has a [Tropical Important Plant Areas \(TIPAs\)](#) project, identifying and promoting the long-term conservation and sustainable management of the country's most important sites for plant diversity. Back in the UK, Kew's Millennium Seed Bank in Wakehurst, Sussex holds the seeds of over 2,000 plant species from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Guinea as part of the [Global Tree Seed Bank Project](#), which acts as an important resource for conservation and research.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is a world-famous scientific and horticultural institution and conservation charity, whose mission is to understand and protect plants and fungi for the wellbeing of people and the future of all life on Earth. It is internationally respected for its outstanding collections, horticultural and scientific expertise in plant and fungal diversity, conservation and sustainable development in the UK and around the globe. Kew Gardens, with its 132 hectares of historic, landscaped gardens, is also a major attraction for international and London visitors alike. Dating back to 1759, the site has a rich history and was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2003. Combined visitor numbers with Wakehurst, Kew's wild botanic garden in Sussex, total over 2.5 million per year. Wakehurst is home to the Millennium Seed Bank, the largest wild plant seed bank in the world and a safeguard against the disastrous effects of climate change and biodiversity loss. RBG Kew receives approximately one third of its funding from the UK Government through the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and research councils, with the remaining two thirds coming from supporters, sponsors, memberships and commercial activity including ticket sales. This enables RBG Kew to carry out its vital scientific and educational work. For tickets and membership options, please visit our website. Since implementing a new accessibility scheme for those in receipt of Universal Credit, Pension Credit and Legacy Benefits, Kew has welcomed over 100,000 visitors with £1 tickets across both UK sites.

The Kew International Medal

The Kew International Medal was first established in 1992 by the Board of Trustees and is given to individuals who have made a significant contribution to science and conservation and the critical challenges facing humanity. Previous recipients include Sir Robert and Lady Sainsbury (1994); Sir David Attenborough (1996); Stella Ross-Craig (1999); Margaret Stones (2000); Mary Grieson (2003); Peter H. Raven (2009); Jared Diamond (2012); E. O. Wilson (2014); Dr Kiat W. Tan (2015); Professor Sebsebe Demissew (2016); President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón (2017), Mary Robinson (2019), Sandra Diaz (2020), Sir Partha Dasgupta (2021), Elizabeth Muruma Mrema (2022) and Professor Suzanne Simard (2023).

About Kew Science

[Kew Science](#) is the driving force behind RBG Kew's mission to understand and protect plants and fungi, for the well-being of people and the future of all life on Earth. Over 550 Kew science staff work with partners in more than 100 countries worldwide to halt biodiversity loss, uncover secrets of the natural world, and to conserve and restore the extraordinary diversity of plants and fungi. Kew's [Science Strategy 2021–2025](#) lays out five scientific priorities to aid these goals: research into the protection of biodiversity through **Ecosystem Stewardship**, understanding the variety and evolution of traits in plants and fungi through **Trait Diversity and Function**; digitising and sharing tools to analyse Kew's scientific collections through **Digital Revolution**; using new technologies to speed up the naming and characterisation of plants and fungi through **Accelerated Taxonomy**; and cultivating new scientific and commercial partnerships in the UK and globally through **Enhanced Partnerships**. One of Kew's greatest international collaborations is the Millennium Seed Bank Partnership, which has to date stored more than 2.4 billion seeds of over 40,000 wild species of plants across the globe. In 2023, Kew scientists estimated in the *State of the World's Plants and Fungi* report that 3 in 4 undescribed plants globally are already likely threatened with extinction.