

# Tanzania: Selous Game Reserve on Endangered List for four years by 2018 ... and counting

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Tanzania's World Heritage property Selous Game Reserve, Africa's largest protected area, has been registered as a "World Heritage in Danger" in 2014, and UNESCO has retained Selous Game Reserve on the "In Danger"– list since then (2018 Decision: 42 COM 7A.56<sup>1</sup>) due to the imminent threat that a hydro-electric dam may be constructed in Stiegler's Gorge. However, the Selous Game Reserve has been facing another threat as well.

## The Issue of Uranium mining

After repeated postponements of the Mkuju River uranium mining project in the Southwest of Selous Game Reserve, the future of the project seems more than questionable: The uranium exploration boom following the 2007 / 2008 rise of the price of uranium has dwindled away within the past years. ROSATOM, Russia's state nuclear company, had officially announced to postpone the project until 2020, and was officially granted the postponement by the Government of Tanzania.

"Some experts say that Rosatom likely overpaid for Mantra [the company which originally identified the uranium deposit and was later on bought by Rosatom] because completion of this deal occurred three months after the Fukushima nuclear disaster of March 11, 2011, when uranium market collapse could have been easily predicted. Uranium prices have since fallen three-times." ("Russian state corporation suspends \$1.2 billion uranium project in Tanzania", by Vladimir Basov).

In this situation ROSATOM would not be alone: a French state-owned company formerly named AREVA, now re-named ORANO, overpaid for a uranium deposit in Namibia (Trekkopje, by UraMin). After having acquired UraMin, the deposit had to be written down by nearly US\$ 2bn, contributing heavily to a serious loss of AREVA which got over-indebted and had to be bailed out by the French Government with an infusion of 4,5 billion €.

Nicolas Carter, vice-chief of UxC, a serious uranium consultancy company, outlined in a presentation at the URAM (Uranium Raw Materials) Conference in Vienna's IAEA premises in July 2018 that the demand for uranium will remain low for a number of years. He gave a variety of reasons – from major stocks of uranium held by companies and states, to diminished demand due to some 30 Japanese reactors offline since March 2011 (with 26 reactors still in long term outage since 2011)<sup>3</sup>.

The unresolved questions around the Mkuju River uranium project, however, remain: the intended method of mining (open pit or In-situ leaching) is undecided – also noted by the 2018 UNESCO WHC decision – nor are other issues: Among other shortcomings, the Mkuju River Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) does not outline plans for long-term storage of tailings and has no plan how to deal with waste created by ISL.

In the meantime, complaints arise that people whose houses shall be demolished for widening roads for uranium transport in the Songea area never received the compensation they had been promised; at the same time, they are not allowed to do any maintenance work on their houses either, putting them in limbo.

With this outlook on the future of uranium mining, a closure on Mkuju River Uranium Project seems more than reasonable. The area excised in 2012 from the World Heritage site should be re-integrated into the Selous Game Reserve.

<sup>1</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/7229/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mining.com/russian-state-corporation-suspends-1-2-billion-uranium-project-tanzania/>

<sup>3</sup> [www-pub.iaea.org/iaeameetings/56050/International-Symposium-on-Uranium-Raw-Material-for-the-Nuclear-Fuel-Cycle-Exploration-Mining-Production-Supply-and-Demand-Economics-and-Environmental-Issues-URAM-2018](http://www-pub.iaea.org/iaeameetings/56050/International-Symposium-on-Uranium-Raw-Material-for-the-Nuclear-Fuel-Cycle-Exploration-Mining-Production-Supply-and-Demand-Economics-and-Environmental-Issues-URAM-2018)