

Community based insitu-conservation of an endangered monkey species (Red Capped Mangabey, *Cercocebus torquatus*) occurring within the Mbiakong Ikpa River Basin, Uruan L.G.A, Akwalbom State, Southern Nigeria.

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Introduction

The project was geared towards the conservation of the Red capped mangabey, *Cercopithecus torquatus*, a rare monkey species (and other important wildlife species) occurring within Mbiakong Uruan wetlands. The Red Capped Mangabey was previously thought to have gone locally extinct between central Ghana and the Nigeria-Cameroon border but it has been re-discovered within the wetlands, although very few in number. Agwantibgo, *Arctocebus calabarensis*, Bush baby (*Galago senegalensis*) which are also rare primate species have also been found within the area. Human activities on the wetland such as deforestation (tree cutting), hunting, bush burning, slash and burn (unsustainable Agricultural practices) have had adverse effects on this species, thereby making them threatened. The project which commenced since 2016 adopted the following conservation strategies: participatory planning with relevant stakeholders; community education; conservation status review (finding out ranging patterns, locations with population strongholds); local capacity building in conservation practices; modeling for sustainable; environmental friendly agricultural practices that do not support further forest/habitat destruction (agro forestry, organic farming); capacity building on alternative economic activities among commercial wood harvesters/pro-poor forest dependents; promoting the use of fuel efficient cook stoves to reduce fuel wood consumption; habitat restoration by planting of indigenous tree species; enforcing; supporting traditional/cultural activities that could enhance nature conservation.

Objectives

The main aim of the project was to create awareness among locals; strengthening local capacity to enforce conservation efforts; building local capacity in conservation practices as well as providing support in traditional agriculture. The objectives of this project were:

- To sensitize the locals on the need for endangered species conservation.
- To plant 2000 indigenous tree species to restore degraded forest land.
- To build local capacity (and provide support) in conservation practices, (organic farming, agroforestry, adoption of fuel efficient cookstoves) that could support habitat conservation.
- To conduct a population study on the species in order to generate data this would help in further conservation planning for the species.
- To maximize yield in the farm lands, by providing the local farmers (for about 100 farmers) with crop seeds.

Methodology

- Participatory workshops held with 100 community elders/leaders/women and youth representatives; Interactive meetings on primate conservation needs.
- Community awareness and education: About 2000 locals reached with conservation messages: engaging school children in distribution of awareness materials (flyers/posters); educational billboards mounted at strategic locations within the locality; outreaches conducted using megaphones and establishment of a Wildlife Viewing Center.
- Developing community in conservation practices: up to 100 farmers trained in agro forestry and organic farming (forest friendly agro practices).
- Tree planting: Up to 2000 economic trees were planted in degraded forest lands, farm lands, to enrich the habitat while also increasing food availability on the locals: African Pear (*Dacryodes Edulis*); bush mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*); Guava (*Psidium guajava*); kola nut (*Cola nitida*); African star apple (*Chrysophyllum albidum*); Citrus.
- 100 local farmers were provided support in crop production (with crop seedlings provided as incentives) and snail farming as livelihood alternatives to commercial trading with firewood.
- A borehole was provided to provide water for domestic use by the community people.
- Biodiversity survey conducted to determine ranging pattern and sites with primate population strongholds.

Results and Discussions

- Increased awareness and conservation knowledge among the locals (over 2000 persons) through Participatory workshops, educational flyers/posters, Children Monkey Theater Group.
- Local capacity enhanced to address and mitigate threats to the species: Participatory management of the species with the locals.
- (Ranging pattern and locations with population strongholds for the species determined (100 individuals) for continuous monitoring.
- 2000 economic trees were planted in degraded forest lands and in farm lands.
- Reduced deforestation within the core habitat, with 15ha of land sustainably managed.
- Adoption of fuel efficient /Biomass stoves helps to reduce fire wood exploitation rate: with up to 200 women using it.

Conclusion and Future Work

- Cutting down of forest for fuel wood is one of the main drivers of deforestation in the community.
- Increasing the use of fuel efficient biomass stoves helps to reduce cutting down of forest for fuel wood.
- In local conservation effort, when community people are properly integrated at the initial stage their contributions (ideas, suggestions as well as in-kind supports) would help give further direction and drive to sustain the project.
- Conservation efforts when designed to also meet community basic needs (e.g. water provided by the project for drinking/domestic use), improved cooking triggers strong community support.

References

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Fig 1: Biomass stove Demonstration in Mbiakong community in 2016