

Building Local Capacity to Sustain Cross River Gorilla Conservation in the Cross River Headwater Area in Cameroon



Project leader facilitating workshop on conservation leadership with local conservation leaders

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Introduction

The increase in biodiversity loss warrants an increase in capacity and effective policies to be able to meet the challenges. Insufficient local capacity to sustain conservation efforts is a major challenge in most developing countries and particularly in the Cross River gorilla Landscape in Cameroon. Promoting local leadership in Cross River gorilla (CRG) conservation is very imperative. Despite the urgent need in crafting policies for the survival of this critically endangered species (CRG), there is limited local expertise to sustain conservation efforts. Using an integrated community-led model (ICLM), the aim of this project was to empower local community members as conservation leaders. This will go a long way to contribute to local capacity necessary to sustain the conservation of the Cross River gorilla and other endangered species in the landscape while minimize the implementation cost of conservation action in the long run.

The project builds on the argument that for conservation actions to be successful local people participation is imperative. Local participation in conservation projects in the tropics has largely been unsuccessful because of the conservation-centric approach, which is regarded by the local people as a motive from conservation implementers to deprive them from enjoying the livelihood benefits of the forest. Working on community conservation projects for over ten years, with focus on the CRG Conservation, and in collaboration with local community members, RCESD is presenting in this project an integrated community-led model to conservation. This model targets conservation challenges from a development perspective. It acknowledges that conservation should not be addressed in isolation of wider local development challenges. The local people are in a better position to develop and design solutions to combat development challenges including wildlife conservation.

Aim of the project

The main objective of this project was to enable conservation leadership through an integrated community-led model ('lens of the local people').

The specific objectives included the following:

- To develop an integrated local development agenda for the Cross River Headwater Area using a participatory inquiry approach.

- To identify and build local leadership for the implementation of local development needs in line with the Cross River gorilla conservation
- To develop an implementation mechanism that will sustain the integrated community-led model.

Action results

Through a participatory inquiry approach the project team worked with different stakeholders in the community to identify their development needs. Needs identification was through focus group discussion with different stakeholders. Village meetings, formal and informal conversations with key informants in the local communities was also be used.



Consultation meeting with the traditional leaders



Consultation meetings with local people

This was followed by need identification working sessions involving local development experts, conservationists and representatives of different local stakeholder groups.



Project leader facilitating needs identification workshop

Based on the workshop for need identification the following priorities directly linked to the conservation of the CRG were identified:

- To develop and monitor the marketing and non-timber product as to improve available income to local people.
- To train potential community members and integrate them into the project management team
- To develop entrepreneurial skills that could enable the local people to add value the farm produce
- To promote agroforestry and sustainable agriculture practices in the local community.

The needs identified above were in line with the expectations of the local community members, which included the need to fully participate in conservation strategies and policies and the need for sustainable livelihood options in the midst of wildlife conservation. During the identification workshop, the above mentioned priorities of the local people were adequately considered in the discussion sessions and strategies suggested on how they could be progressively addressed.

In line with the objectives of the project and the needs identified above, a local team consisting of 12 members were nominated by the key informants participating in the workshop to receive training and to work in collaboration with the project implementation team to execute development actions aim at sustaining conservation actions. The identified local conservation leaders were trained on bio-monitoring and eco-tourism development techniques.



Trained local leaders together with trainers and community leaders

Below is the list of trained local conservation leaders ('gorilla guardian') and the corresponding villages they represented. In some villages, two individuals were selected due to the high population ratio in the villages compared to the other villages.

Table 1: List of gorilla guardian and their corresponding villages

S/N	Village	Gorilla guardian
1.	Manta	Anthony Tambo
2.	Batambe	Acho Martin Ashu Joseph
3.	Bancho	Takie Michael
4.	Baiya	Takie Bernard
5.	Kunsu	Abia Sampson
6.	Kunkun	Enow James Tippa Ashu Joseph
7.	Tava	Kaya Simon
8.	Eshubi	Ngwa Solomon Misumbani Samuel
9.	Ngah	Ngwa William

The selected Gorilla guardians were trained on basic bio-monitoring skill including data collection and recording for gorilla conservation.



Data collection and recording session with Gorilla guardian

In collaboration with the local community members, the project team is currently holding talks on how to engage relevant stakeholders including community developers and entrepreneurs to support the development of a sustainable strategy for the Cross River gorilla conservation in the project area. However, the progress has been heavily retarded by the ongoing Anglophone crisis (fighting between armed groups and the government military), which has limited access to the project area.