

**REPORT ON THE ELEPHANT CONSERVATION PROJECT AROUND THE KORUP
FOREST RESERVE IN MUNDEMBA
REALISED IN COLLABORATION WITH THE JANA ROBEYST TRUST
FROM MARCH 2017 TO AUGUST 2017.**

With the aim to increase the communities awareness on the importance for a peaceful co-existence between the community and the elephants of the Korup forest reserve that has witnesses a dramatic drop in the elephant population due to poaching and the destruction of the habitat of this specie threatened by extinction if concrete measures are not taken to preserve them, this project was carried out in 5 villages (Irat, Makeke, Mana, Akwasa, ebang) in the process of finding lasting solutions to the habitat destruction, poaching and effective ways of preventing human elephant conflicts (HEC). To resolve the problem of poaching, the project provided the community with alternative sources of protein by training them on how to breed snails to increase their income and have other sources of income. To monitor and solve the problem of HEC, the communities were provided with tools such as Community Based Problem Animal Control techniques to avoid any direct confrontation with the mamal. Also the project helped the communities to identify strategies to limit encroachment into reserved land.

Human elephant conflict is monitored

Human elephant conflict monitoring protocol was implemented for the first time in these communities. Affected farmers' households only were included in the survey. A total of 35 households were affected by elephant. Crop raiding is prevalent mainly in the rainy season when most agriculture is undertaken. Overall the most commonly grown crops in the villages are Cassava, bananas, corn, beans, sweet potato, groundnuts, cocoa, and palms. Plots destroyed by elephant ranged from 0.5 to about 4 ha. Of the properties that were subject to crop-raiding 85% were within less than 50 m to forest edge. Furthermore, the proportion of properties receiving crop-raiding decreased with increasing distance from forest edge. Therefore, the difference between the occurrence of crop-raiding on properties located at 100 m or less from forest edge, and crop-raiding on crop located more than 200 m from the forest edge was significant.

Deterrent methods and mitigation strategies are tested

13 community members were trained on short-term mitigation methods that might best be employed to limit human elephant conflict situation. Methods currently used to scare elephants from farms were rudimentary. Most farmers (61%) rely on setting fires around their farm. Other traditional methods recorded were beating drums (6%), shooting firearms (6%), and guarding the fields at night (6%). These methods were chosen by local farmers because they were the only ones known and available to them. Participants explored the current situation of Human–Elephant conflict and discussed the problems of current Problem Animal Control mitigation including farmer's energy and time to apply such methods. The participants were then exposed to the Community Based Problem Animal Control (CBPAC) techniques. Methods promoted included using a barrier of string with tin cans to scare elephants and warn farmers.

Practical training took place in key area at Makeke village where CBPAC demonstration plots were established for practical demonstration of selected PAC techniques. Participants identified the animals they felt were a problem within the area. They then detailed the specific problems for each animal in turn, and finally ranked the animals according to the severity of their problems. This exercise was designed to focus everyone upon human-wildlife conflict, and to consider the process of ranking problem animals objectively. Concrete project to assist farmer from wildlife depredation was layout.

Explanation of Wildlife Policy and Regulations to Target Populations

We organised one workshop on Cameroon's 1994 Wildlife Law on April 2017 under the auspices of the Divisional Officer for Mundemba Sub-Division. During this workshop we raised awareness and improve local understanding about the content of the law and its legal provisions in wildlife exploitation. Over 30 participants representing hunters, bushmeat traders, traditional rulers, councils, NGOs and relevant government departments such as the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife. Besides, the disadvantages of poor hunting practices were explained and participants came up with strategic recommendations on better community wildlife utilisation and management to enhance improve local livelihoods in the project area.

In addition, we prepared and distributed 650 fliers on the law as well as 70 posters with information and pictures of some endangered species of primates and the legal implication of hunting them. Over 500 people currently have an idea about the law as people pass on information to others in the project area.

Introduction of Viable Alternative Micro-enterprises to Hunting

In a bid to tackle poverty that drives illegal Elephant/wildlife exploitation, we introduced a micro-enterprise activity as substitute to hunting and bushmeat trading. Our intention here is to provide local communities, particularly hunters with alternative sources of income and nutrients that could reduce pressure on wildlife resources.

Training of Trainers on Snail Farming Techniques

- ✓ With the hired services of a snail specialist, we organised a training of trainer's workshop on snail farming in the month of May during which 8 group representatives gained practical knowledge and skills in snail farming techniques.
- ✓ In addition, 56 people (26 men, 19 women and 11 youths) have been trained through five on-farm training sessions. Aspects treated include: the importance of snails, steps in snail farming, housing and farming methods, installation feeding, farm management, record keeping, reproduction and pest management. Trainees are currently sharing their skills and experiences with others in villages.
- ✓ 5 group snail farms with 3,532 snails have been established with hunters groups in 5 villages. Local people will soon start generating income from the sale of snails.

The following outcomes have been achieved.

- ✓ Local communities are more aware and informed about national forest and wildlife regulations and better understand the legal implication of hunting/trading in endangered and protected wildlife species;
- ✓ Many people are now equally aware about the dangers of current hunting practices and methods on wild animal species, particularly the elephant;
- ✓ Community members can now use standardised data collection and analysis protocols to monitor elephants and prevent conflict.
- ✓ The communities know the techniques of human elephant conflict prevention
- ✓ Local capacities have been built in alternative micro-enterprises (snail farming) other than hunting. These enterprises are very promising to contributing to poverty alleviation as people already engage in them.

Challenges

- ✓ The first main challenge we faced was that of the political crisis that has been going on for 10 months now in the English speaking zone of the country. The government suspended the internet and banned all meetings. This considerably slowed down our plan of action and activities as we had to carry forward meetings some times.
- ✓ Communities were expecting compensation for crop damage as they felt this was the purpose of the project and were trying to cooperate with the project team for that to happen. Two months after the beginning of the project, we had to organise two meetings with relevant communities to explain its purpose and expectations. During these meetings we tried as much as possible to ensure that common understanding has been shared and each community member adheres to. These unforeseen situations caused some delay in the smooth execution of the project.
- ✓ The agricultural extension worker assigned to deliver the training on cane rat breeding was transferred to another region and his replacement has not been appointed till date. For this reason, we could not do the cane rat workshop that was promised by the delegation.

Way forward

- ✓ To definitely put an end to human elephant conflict, future elephant conservation projects in this area should consider the Beehive Fence Strategy that is scientifically proven to be an effective strategy of keeping the elephant away from the communities. This strategy has been tested in a few countries with great success and can be replicated in Cameroon.
- ✓ The income generating activity that serves as an alternative source of income to poaching should consider all the members of the community for this strategy to be effective. Given our limited financial resources, we could not allow everybody who was interested to participate in the snail farming workshop.
- ✓ Children should be involved in conservation education at a young age as this will in still in them respect for wildlife at a very young age.
- ✓ The local communities and government should consider developing the ecotourism potential of this national park. This can serve as a more sustainable way of getting the population involved in the conservation of the elephant and wildlife in general and also engage a career in ecotourism.