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# Empowering women for sustainable conservation of Akanyaru IBA Project

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[Knowledge Assessment Report]



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## **THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*The goal of this Knowledge Assessment was to assess the knowledge of Cooperative Sugira Musenyi - KOSUMU members' on Akanyaru biodiversity and its conservation while documenting indigenous knowledge for sustainable conservation of Akanyaru IBA. This assessment will inform upcoming capacity building planned sessions and also project impacts evaluation at the end of the project. This assessment was conducted in Musenyi sector, Bugesera district where Nature Rwanda is implementing the project entitled "Empowering women for sustainable conservation of Akanyaru wetlands" with financial support from The Rufford Foundation. During this assessment, 25 informants from KOSUMU participated in this one day assessment where 16 were women. To gather information from the informant, questionnaires and checklist were both used. The data were processed and analyzed using excel software. The qualitative and quantitative analysis revealed that the current contribution of women to the conservation of Akanyaru Wetlands is not significant; limited knowledge on the role of Akanyaru wetlands in their daily life, financial capacity and limited knowledge in biodiversity conservation were among issues revealed by this assessment. This requires an immediate and continues capacity building in biodiversity conservation while raising awareness on biodiversity conservation by all conservation actors operating in that area.*

## **BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF THE ASSESSMENT**

The Akanyaru wetlands are among the seven Important Birds and Biodiversity Areas - IBAs we have in Rwanda. Those wetlands are very important to adjacent communities; they provide goods and services. They are also home of endangered and endemic species to the Albertine Rift. Despite their crucial role for Rwandans and their endemism, they are seriously threatened by anthropogenic activities resulting from pressure from increasing population as well as natural phenomenon. Since 2016, this IBA is classified among IBAs in danger by Birdlife International.

Nature Rwanda, with financial support from the Rufford Foundation, is implementing a project entitled “Empowering women for sustainable Conservation of Akanyaru IBA” that aims to disconnecting local communities to Akanyaru IBA for its sustainable conservation while empowering women socio-economically as they are the major stakeholders in conservation of this IBA in danger. This is being achieved by promoting cooperative Sugira Musenyi - KOSUMU for the conservation of Akanyaru, removing water hyacinth for the restoration and rehabilitation of birds and other animals’ habitat, and promoting while adding value on their handcraft products produced from water hyacinth. The sustainability of this project relies on assessing, documenting and use of indigenous knowledge by the communities for conservation of this IBA.

This assessment was conducted in Musenyi Sector, Bugesera district at the Cooperative Sugira Musenyi office on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2018 from 9:00AM. This assessment aimed at assessing the knowledge of KOSUMU members in biological diversity of Akanyaru and its conservation while documenting indigenous knowledge for conservation of Akanyaru IBA. And, the assessment will inform upcoming training that Nature Rwanda is organizing for KOSUMU members under this project and also project impacts evaluation at the end of the project. The assessment was informed by 25 actives members of KOSUMU where 16 were women and 9 were men, all member of KOSUMU. We choose to engage men for sustainability.

## **THE METHODOLOGY USED**

During this assessment, a questionnaire was developed specifically for Cooperative Sugira Musenyi members and it guided the small group or one on one discussions as well as individual response. A note taker and a facilitator for the group Discussion were pointed out prior to the assessment. To supplement the information collected during the discussions, the data collectors used the observation checklist as necessary and one on one discussion were conducted.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Informant's familiarity with Akanyaru wetlands

Women are more familiar with Akanyaru wetlands (68.75%) compared to men (only 31.25%) as they spend most of their time in the wetland surroundings fetching water, washing clothes or collecting fire woods. Men are less familiar with the wetlands because they are not engaged in activities that required them to interact with the wetland; they spend their time running small business or working for money in Nyamata city. It is worth noting that among few men who responded familiar with the wetlands, they are most of them fishing in that wetlands.

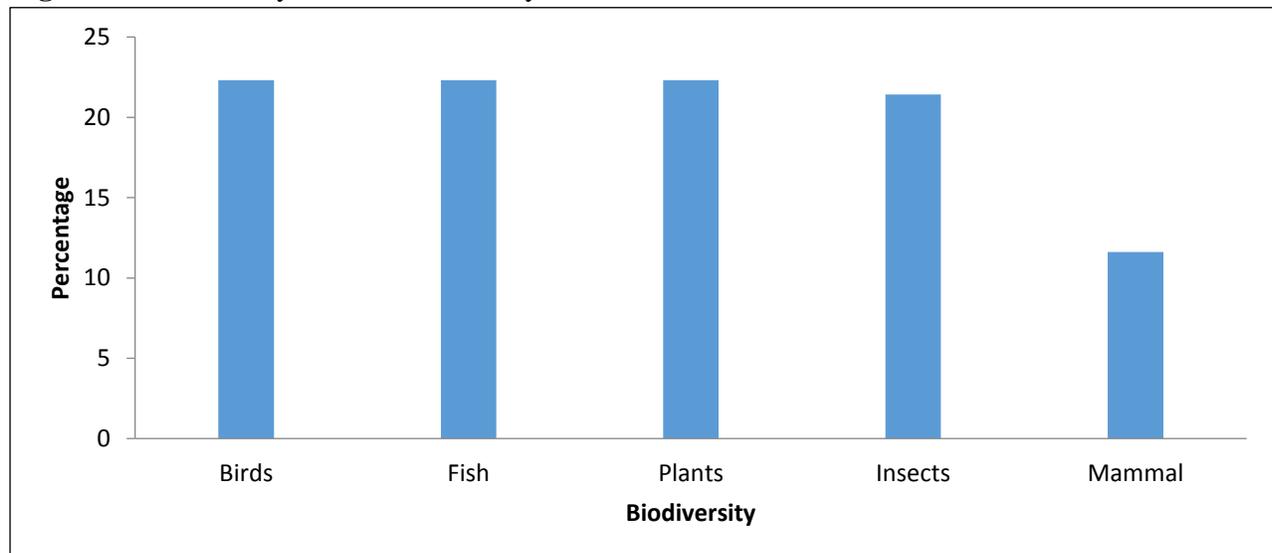
### The perception of cooperative members towards Akanyaru wetlands

Among informant, 62.5% of women perceive the Akanyaru wetlands as home of biodiversity compared to 44.44% for men. On the other side, about 24% and 10% of women and men respectively perceive the Akanyaru wetlands as an agriculture area and home of biodiversity. Few women (about 6%) perceive it as an agricultural area compared to 44% of men. Summarized, women consider this wetland as an important biodiversity area while men consider it as an agricultural area in general.

### Biodiversity observed at Akanyaru wetlands by cooperative members

The biodiversity of Akanyaru comprises of plants, birds, fish that is recognized by all informants (22.32% on each category), and insects by 21.43 % while mammals are less observed (11.61 %) by respondents. This showed a great challenge where they are not aware of biological diversity presents in the wetlands. However, Nature Rwanda decided to build their capacity in this area as you can't conserve or protect something you don't know.

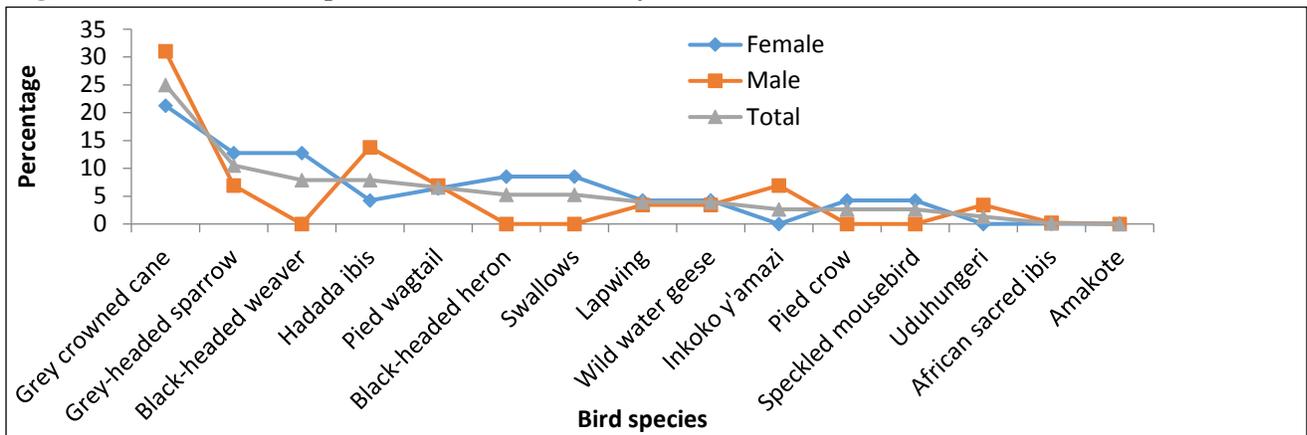
**Figure1:** Biodiversity observed in Akanyaru wetlands



### Birds Species observed in Akanyaru wetlands

Women observed more bird species than men; as among a total of 15 species listed by them, 13 were observed by women, and only 6 species by men. This is due to the fact that they spent most of their time near the wetlands. In fact, the common and most seen bird species is Grey crowned cranes that was observed by at least the quart of respondents. The Sacred ibis, Grey-headed sparrow, and *Hadada ibis* were also observed by many respondents. The following species were also observed in the wetlands as well: Pied wagtails, Black-headed heron, Swallows, Wild water geese, Black-headed weaver, pied crow, Lapwing, Speckled mouse birds, and Black crane.

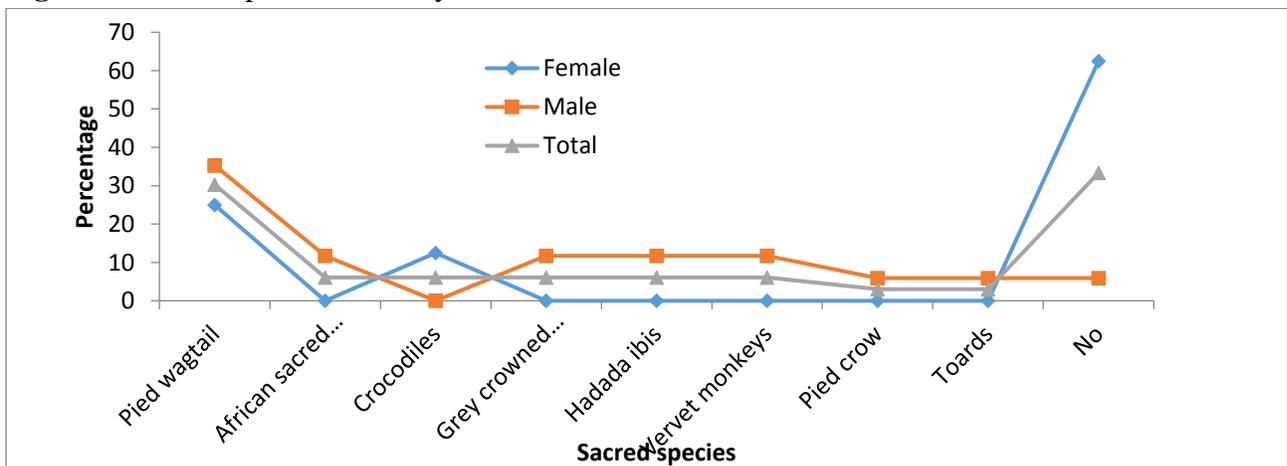
**Figure3:** some of birds species observed in Akanyaru wetlands.



### Sacred species for rituals and beliefs found in Akanyaru wetlands

Men are more aware of sacred species for rituals or beliefs than women. A total of 8 species were mentioned; on the top of that is Pied wagtails (30.30%), and other species listed included Hadada ibis, Grey crowned cranes, Crocodiles, Sacred ibis, vervet monkeys, Pied crow, and toads.

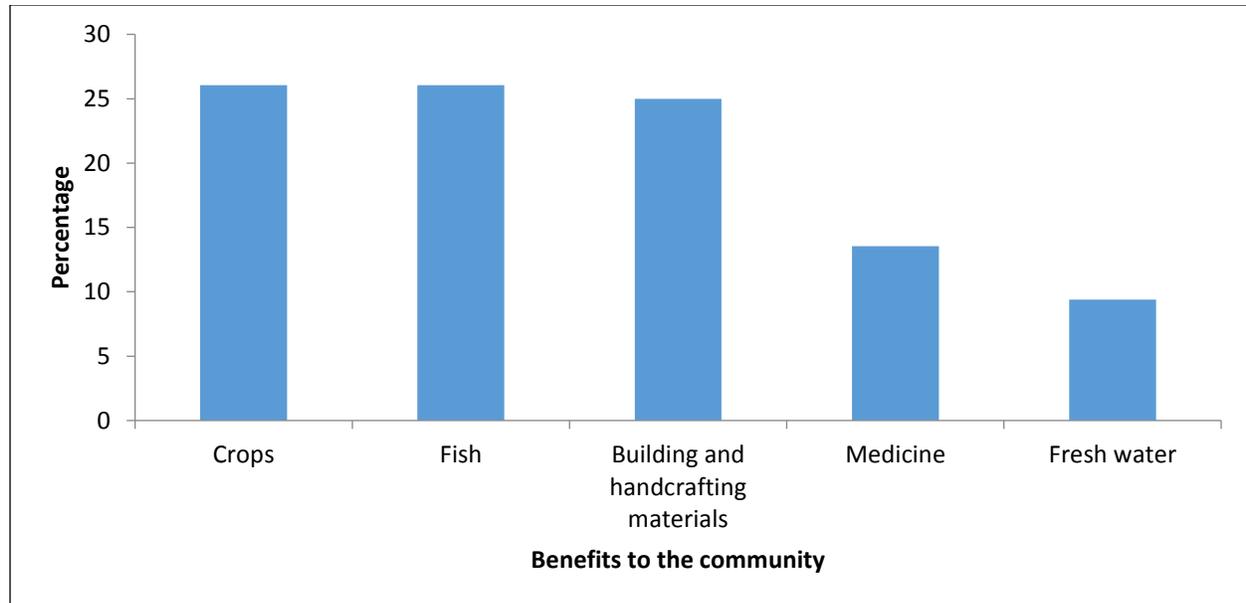
**Figure 4:** Sacred species in Akanyaru wetlands



### Benefits from Akanyaru wetland to local the community

A larger number of community members who live adjacent to Akanyaru wetlands consider it as a fishing area, cropping area and source of building and handcrafting materials respectively. Others consider this wetlands as sources of medicinal plants and water thou the last was said to be fresh but was due to the lack of other sources of water mostly during prolonged drought in the area.

**Figure5:** Benefits from Akanyaru wetlands to the community



### Threats to Akanyaru wetlands

The major threats to Akanyaru wetlands biodiversity identified by respondents was invasive plant species (by of the quarter of respondents). Water hyacinth poses serious threat to Akanyaru Biological diversity. Other threats listed by respondents include but not limited to intensive agriculture, pollution, and flooding.

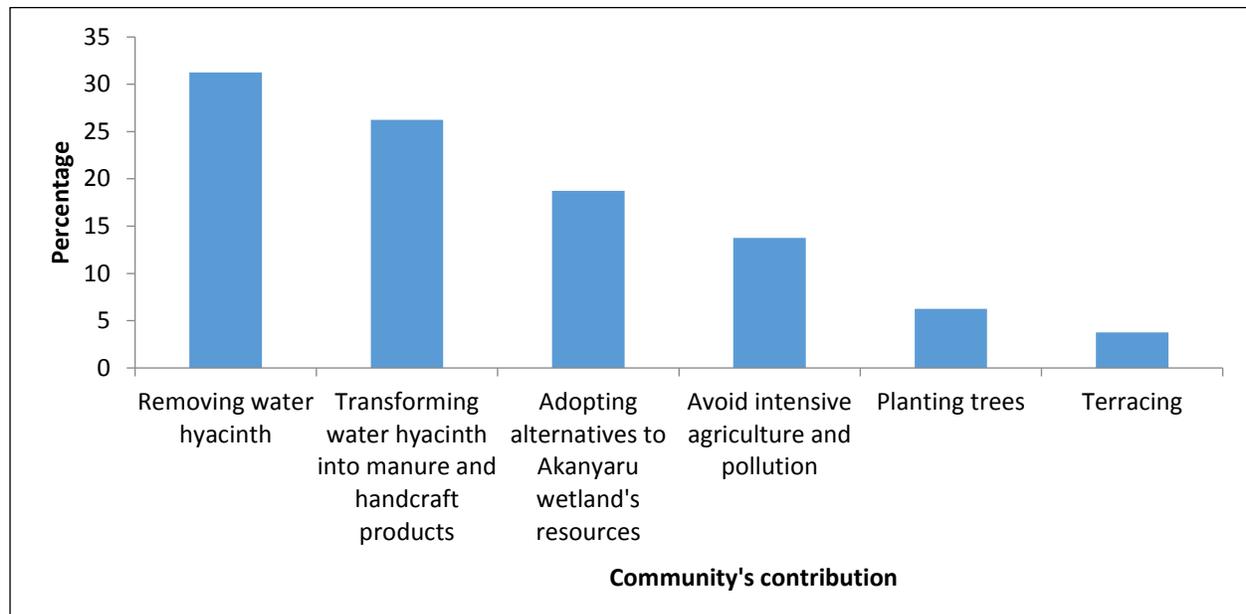
Water hyacinth is perceived as a threat but also as an opportunity to increase yield or sources of incomes by producing manure to increase agricultural yiled or handcraft products respectively. Most of the respondent are aware of the negative impact of water hyacinth on aquatic biodiversity as they are experience the reduction of fishing yield linked to those threats according to them.

### The contribution of local community to the conservation of Akanyaru wetlands

This assessment reviled that men are more involved in Akanyaru conservation activities and applying different technics than women. The main activity used by communities in conserving Akanyaru wetlands is removing water hyacinth and transform them into handcrafts products and manure with 31.25% and 26.25% of respondent respectively. Also adopting alternatives to

Akanyaru resources (17.75%), avoid intensive agriculture and pollution (13.75%), planting trees (6.25%) and terracing (3.75%) on the banks of wetlands.

**Figure 7:** How Musenyi communities contribute to the conservation of Akanyaru wetland



The contribution of women was said to be important (56%), while 24% stated as being less important and 20% as more important. Their contribution is affected by lack of awareness, unable to harvest water hyacinth, and some of activities done by women that effect negatively the wetlands.

Furthermore, 80% of respondents affirmed that men contribute more than women. This shows a big gap where women are not engaged in conservation activities while their contribution should be very significant, this need to be tackled in order to engage the major stakeholders in conservation of this wetland as they are the ones who interact with it at daily basis. This requires increase their awareness and build their capacity for conservation of Akanyaru wetlands.

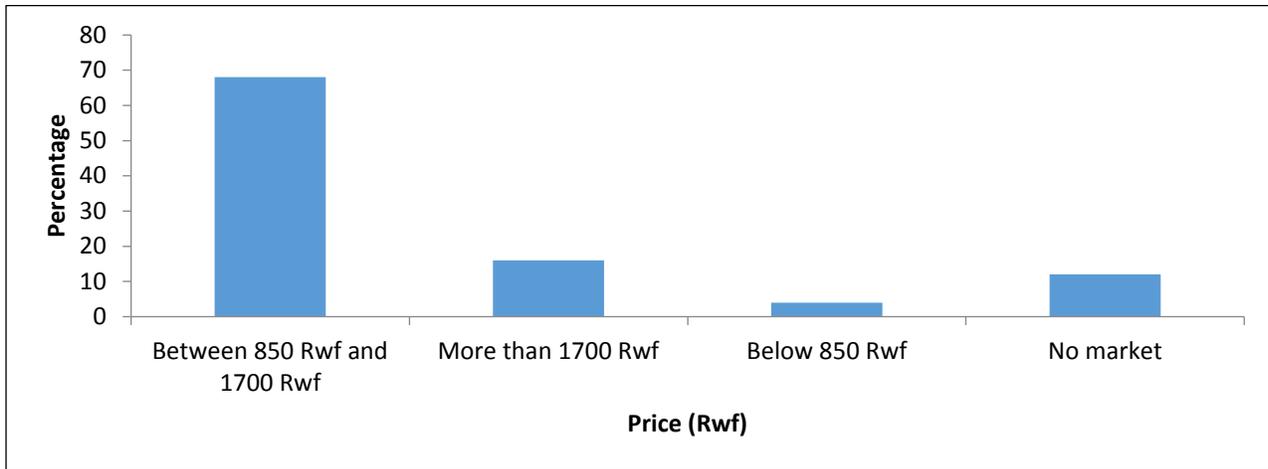
Among the key challenges that are affecting women’s participation in conservation of Akanyaru wetlands; the lack of awareness on the role of this wetlands in their daily life, limited financial capacity, lack of socio-economic empowerment and lack of motivation were listed. Thus, there is need to empower socially and economically women while engaging them in conservation of Akanyaru wetlands at the same time by raising awareness and showing the importance of sustainable management of Akanyaru resources.

**Value range of handcraft products produced by KOSUMU members**

The price for most of KOSUMU handcraft products ranges between 850 RWF and 1700 RWF, but occasionally some products cost less than 850 RWF or more than 1700 RWF. The access to the market was highlighted as the major challenges they are facing while the quality of their products is still critical. While Nature Rwanda through this project will promote their handcraft

products and as they are working with other NGOs to address this issue, it worth noting that the price is relatively small compared to the manpower and resources invested in.

**Figure 8:** Price of KOSUMU’s handcraft products



The price of KOSUMU’s handcraft products is influenced by poor quality of handcrafts products produced, the lack of market place, lack of marketing strategies, and insufficient handcrafts products to conquer the market. This need will be addressed by adding value to KOSUMU’s handcraft products, by producing high quality handcrafts products, and linking them with market in addition to marketing their products on social platform.

## CONCLUSION

Kosumu members have a limited knowledge in Akanyaru biodiversity; they are not aware of biological diversity that are present in Akanyaru wetland. This pose a great challenges in conservation of this IBA in danger as you can’t conserve something you don’t know. On the other side, Women are challenged by lacking of awareness, socio-economic empowerment, encouragement, and financial capacity. It was found that some activities are done by men alone such as harvesting water hyacinth but rather need involvement of women for sustainable conserving Akanyaru wetland.

The problem of financial capacity is exacerbated low price of handcrafts resulting from poor quality handcrafts, lack of media, lack of market place that need to be emphasized on for sustainable conserving Akanyaru while empowering women socially and economically.

**Annex: Photo**



