Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	AIGNON Lougbegnon Hyppolite
Project Title	Enhancing the forest conservation law enforcement and awareness campaigns: an effective strategy to save fungi in Benin
Application ID	35556-B
Date of this Report	12.10.2022

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
1) Improve law enforcement to curb the destruction of fungal habitats in Benin				This remains to be done to sensitise local populations on conservation laws in Benin.
2) Contribute to the delimitation of fungal habitats with high diversity through installation of wild fungal warning signs to safeguard the fungi in Benin				The participants appreciated the innovation and will give attention to the wild fungal warning signs to safeguard the fungi diversity.
3) Strengthen the knowledge of the local populations about conservation of fungal species through awareness campaigns and popularization of forest conservation law				Local populations are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of fungi.
4) Convince the authorities to take into account the various threats to fungi and will be more open to their integration into development plans to promote mycodiversity conservation				Local authorities are aware of the benefits of fungi and are ready to take more measures for their conservation.

2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a). Exchange with the local authorities and communities on conservation law application to save fungi

Based on the habitat conservation law in Benin, we discussed with the local authorities of the villages near the two target forests of the project to draw their attention to the threats to fungi and conservation emergencies. We have drawn their attention on the agreements, laws and treaties relatives to the forests and species protection in Benin such as:

- Law No. 87-014 of September 21, 1987, on the regulation of the protection of nature and the practice of hunting in the People's Republic of Benin.

- Law No. 93-021 of December 2, 1992, authorizing the ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity, signed on June 13, 1992, in Rio de Janeiro.

- Law No. 93-009 of July 2, 1993, on the forest regime in the Republic of Benin.

- Order No. 601/MDR/DC/DFRN/SA of August 8, 1993, on the application in the Republic of Benin of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

- Law No. 96-012 of July 1, 1996, authorizing the ratification of the International Convention to Combat Desertification in countries seriously affected by drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa.

- Law No. 2002-16 of October 18, 2004, on the wildlife regime in the Republic of Benin.

Two laws drew our attention in particular. Firstly, Law No. 93-009 of July 2, 1993, on the forest regime. After having exposed this law to the local populations, we recalled with particular attention Title 4 relating to "the search for the observation and the repression of infractions" related to the destruction of forests, Chapter 3 defining the actions and prosecutions Chapter 4 on penalties and Chapter 5 on miscellaneous offences. Secondly, we have done the same thing with Law No. 2002-16 of October 18, 2004, on the wildlife regime in the Republic of Benin, while emphasising the failure to take charge of the threats that weigh directly on fungi by these laws and the need for a law on fungi conservation in Benin.

We also analysed their opinion on the importance of placing a section on fungi conservation in the conservation law in Benin.

b). Fungal diversity in Koussoucoingou and Kota galleries forests

The samples collected in the field are distributed into the following families: Russulaceae Lotsy, Boletaceae Chevall., Agaricaceae Chevall., Amanitaceae E.-J. Gilbert, Sclerodermataceae Corda, Clavulinaceae Donk and Tricholomataceae R. Heim ex Pouzar. The high diversity was obtained in Russulaceae with 104 collections dominated by *Lactifluus gymnocarpoides* (Verbeken) Verbeken and *Russula congoana* Pat. Moreover, the lowest diversity is obtained in Tricholomataceae with a single collection. Figure 1 presents some species collected and deposited in the Mycological Herbarium of the University of Parakou (UNIPAR).

c). Wild fungal warning signs

A total of 50 wild fungal warning signs were used to signal the presence of habitats with high diversity of fungi and the various critically endangered species in Benin.

In each target forest, the wild fungal warning signs are installed. These permanent signs are positioned in key places such as the welcome, tourist passage lines, farmers passage lines and loggers passage lines to draw the attention of many people on fungi. These graphics designs illustrate the link between trees and fungi to facilitate understanding as well as environmental destruction activities to avoid the destruction of fungal habitat in Benin.

Fig.1. A. Amanita subviscosa Beeli (NY0049), B. Amanita sp. (HLA0428), C. Amanita sp. (NY0031) and D. Amanita masasiensis Härk. & Saarim.

Fig. 2. Wild fungal warning signs

The most important achievement of this project is the installation of wild fungal warning signs to indicate the presence of habitats with a high diversity of fungi and the various critically endangered species. Also, we can note the providing of information to the local population on conservation laws in Benin and we think that this will mainly slow down the destruction of fungal habitats.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

The difficulties are particularly related to the misunderstanding and lack of information of the local populations on habitats and species conservation laws in Benin. We have therefore taken enough time to inform them and draw their attention to the important articles of each conservation law in force.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

In this project, local communities have participated in awareness-raising activities and the identification of sensitive habitats for the installation of wild fungal warning signs. Through these activities, they benefited from new knowledge on wild fungi and the conservation of natural habitats. During the exchanges, we proposed to forest managers the strengthening and training of forest co-management teams.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, I would like to continue contributing to the conservation of fungi. We are therefore going to involve local communities more in the conservation of fungi and their habitats.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

We have identified and sequenced some species that are probably new to science. Analysis is underway on these species to publish them in open access publications for effective conservation of biodiversity in Benin.

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

Wide sharing of biodiversity conservation research results for environmental education and fungi conservation in Benin.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

The Rufford Foundation logo has been used in all presentations, poster and reports resulting from this project. Also, during the period of the grant we publicised the foundation through our communications to encourage other curators to take an interest in The Rufford Foundation.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

For the success of this project:

Appolon Hegbe and Yannick Nonti played a key role in the data collection and analysis of data on the diversity and distribution of species.

Benoit Ahignon helped us to sensitize people to change their behaviour in terms of conservation of fungi and their habitats.

10. Any other comments?

We are truly grateful to The Rufford Foundation for funding this project.