Project update: November 2025

Field Data Collection and Baseline Surveys

Significant progress has been made in implementing the planned baseline activities of the project. To date, biophysical (ecological) data have been successfully collected within Mahezangulu Forest Reserve, focusing on habitat condition, species occurrence, and indicators of disturbance, in line with the approved baseline ecological survey and threat assessment framework.

In parallel, a social baseline survey was conducted in all three target villages, Mahezangulu, Msamaka, and Mkaalie, using participatory approaches consistent with the project's PRA methodology. The survey captured information on community knowledge, forest use patterns, perceived threats, and local attitudes toward conservation of the focal species and the forest reserve.

Preliminary Ecological Observations

Initial field observations indicate that Saintpaulia ionantha subsp. grandifolia has a highly localized distribution, with most individuals recorded along the Mkaalie River corridor and its associated valley system in Mkaalie Village. This confirms the species' strong dependence on riparian and valley microhabitats characterized by higher moisture availability and relatively intact forest cover.

Conversely, surveys conducted in the upper zones of Mahezangulu and Msamaka villages revealed significant habitat degradation, including clear evidence of forest disturbance and reduced habitat quality. These areas exhibited lower suitability for the focal species and are likely under increased anthropogenic pressure, consistent with the threats anticipated in the project design.

Social Baseline Survey Findings

The completed social baseline survey highlighted clear spatial differences in forest condition and use among the three villages. Communities in Mkaalie demonstrated closer interaction with riverine forest areas, while respondents from Mahezangulu and Msamaka reported higher levels of forest degradation linked to resource extraction and land-use pressure. These findings provide a critical foundation for tailoring community awareness activities, conservation messaging, and future restoration interventions, as outlined in the project workplan.

Figure 1: Photographs illustrating various project activities and the distribution of Saintpaulia ionantha subsp. Grandifolia across different locations.