

Community Awareness Report

The Farmers Associated to Conserve the Environment (FACE) in partnership with the Rufford Small Grant (RSG) is implementing a biodiversity conservation project in communities along the Maffa River and the Lake Piso within the proposed Lake Piso Sustainable Multiple-Use Nature Reserve. The project is in the context of biodiversity species protection and habitat conservation as well as mitigation of ecological threats affecting the manatee population of the Lake Piso basin. The duration of the project is one year. The overall goal of the project is to ensure the conservation/protection of the coastal biodiversity species, the West African Manatee- *Trichechus senegalensis*. Its objectives are in two folds: to put in a place a monitoring system for the manatee in the wetlands in the Lake Piso region, and to carry out vigorous community sensitization campaign for the conservation/protection of manatee and its habitat in all communities through town hall meetings, local radio, drama and promotional materials. Supplementary to the objectives will be placing emphasis on pilot community-based ecotourism program in selected communities to help raise the profile of the animal and it's inhabit in general. The project activities include collection of baseline data at key locations, assessments of habitat use and behavior patterns, training targeted communities in manatee monitoring and conservation techniques, and initiating public awareness and education in communities.

PROJECT AREA:



Partial View of Lake Piso

The proposed Lake Piso Multiple Sustainable-Use Reserve (MUR) is about 97,159 hectares (or 240,000 acres) and is situated in the far west corner of Liberia on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. The proposed protected reserve is a very important catchment area with three rivers and several streams emptying into it. It is one of the top three sites prioritized by government to form a part of the Liberia's protected area network. The Lake Piso Basin has gained international and national interest due to a rich biodiversity, a diverse set of project doesn't cover the entire reserve, but rather the western within the Lake Piso basin.

ACTIVITY REPORTING ON

This report contains information about progress made during the project awareness and community sensitization /public awareness component of the Manatee Monitoring & habitat Conservation project. It also provides GPS reading on each of the seven communities the exercise was conducted, key constraints and actions taken to address those constraints during the entire visit.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITY

- To make communities knowledgeable of the project
- To share general information about the manatee and its status
- To document local knowledge that communities have about manatee.
- To collect data of areas/sites within the Lake Piso basin where manatees are frequently seen.

ACHIEVEMENT OF THE ACTIVITY

The project awareness and community sensitization/public education activities began with the initial design and printing of posters/IEC materials. These materials were taken to the field from April 20 to 26 for awareness in seven earmarked communities noted for frequently sighting manatees. These communities included: Sawelor, along the Mafa River, located in Tewor District; Sweetland (Tallah), Kebah, Messema, Wehma, Kumea all in Tallah Township; and Tolsor in Commonwealth District. The awareness content included: giving a narrative summary of the project, stating purpose of the visit, creating awareness on manatee using the posters, dialoguing with the residents to capture local knowledge about the manatee and to document habitat and/or breeding sites of manatee; and a question and answer period to address concerns from the communities and to clear doubts about the project and information provided about the manatee. During the course of the awareness exercise, basic information of the manatee in the Lake Piso basin was gathered from the locals. The West African manatee is known in Vai, the local language spoken by people, as *mboaneh*. It is known to feed on vegetation locally known as *wild cane*, *swamp rice* and mangrove roots. Eleven sites in the Mafa River and Lake Piso, where manatees are mostly seen or thought to breed were named. See the below table

Areas Manatees are mostly seen

Lake Piso	Mafa River
Gebon	Opposite Sawelor
Between Sweetland & Wehma	Tongborlorlor
Gbongay Curve	Bomine
Mbalonen	Confluence of Mafa & Mining Rivers
Jarbolymah	Opposite Kebah

Furthermore, during the question and answer period, two common questions were asked by members of the seven communities: 1. what is the ecological importance of manatee, 2. why protect manatee?

Of ecological importance, manatees are responsible for recycling of nutrients between the water column and the substrate (mud, sand, rock)

Each awareness session ended with commendation to the community for the time and inputs, and a poster was posted on community bulletin for public viewing.

CONSTRAINTS & ACTION TAKEN

The major restraint to the awareness activity was the limited time communities had to be at the exercise. This is because cassava planting, one of their major livelihood activities, has begun. However, the team got prepared early enough and was at the awareness center in time to attract the attendance of significant number of people. Usually, said activity begins 8am or 8:30 am, but the team was set at 6:30am so that by 8am people will stay have sufficient time to go about their normal daily activities.

BASIC INFORMATION

COMMUNITY	GPS INFORMATION			LOCATION	SITE MANATEES ARE MOSTLY SEEN
	Location	UTM	Distance		
Sawelor	29N0240252	0751030	14m	Tewor District	Tongborlorlor, Bomines, Mafa river (directly opposite Sawelor, the confluence of the Mafa & Mining Rivers)
Messima	29N 0245102	0753942	+/- 3m	Tallah Township	Mafa river
Kebah	29N 0244292	0752899	+/- 3m	Tallah Township	Confluence of Mafa & Mining rivers, Opposite Kebah, b/w Kebah & Sawelor along the Mafa River
Sweet Land	29N 0244291	0752999	+/- 3m	Tallah Township	Gebon, b/w Sweet Land & Wehma
Wehma	29N 0243453	0748214	+/- 3m	Tallah Township	Gbongay curve, mbalonen
Kumea	29N 0241890	0749190	+/- 3m	Tallah township	Gbongay curve
Tolsor	29N 0241544	0745665	+/- 3m	Commonwealth District	Jarbolymah, ggbongai curve

SUMMARY REPORT

Activity	Objective	Achievement/progress	Comments
Awareness & Sensitization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To make communities knowledgeable of the project To share general information about the manatee and its status To document local knowledge that communities have about manatee. To collect data of areas/sites within the Lake Piso basin where manatees are frequently seen. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness & sensitization of the RSG project carried out in seven communities (Sawelor, Sweet Land, Kebah, Messima, Wehma, Kumea, & Tolsor) where manatee are reportedly seen frequently Ten sites where manatees are mostly seen by locals identified. They are: Gebon, between Sweet Land & Wehma, Gbongay Curve, Mbalonen & Jarbolymah, in Lake Piso; and Opposite Sawelor, Tongborlorlor, Bomine, confluence of Mafa & Mining Rivers, and opposite Kebah, along the Mafa river. 	Communities have concrete knowledge of manatee especially feeding habits and inhabitat.
GPS Reading	Collect GPS reading for targeted communities	GPS reading for seven communities visited and sensitization and awareness conducted were recorded and documented by the team.	More reading to be collected during the actual survey to other hotspots.