

Project Update: January 2009

The month of January 2009 which is the second month running of the project was marked by some major activities as follows:

- Radio talk shows and slots over the provincial station of Cameroon Radio and Television Corporation (CRTV)
- Door-door sensitization and distribution of T-shirts carrying education messages
- Plenary meetings open community sensitization
- The Publication of a Brochure on Great Apes and distribution to the local communities
- Monitoring

Weekly Radio Talk Shows and Slot over the Provincial Station of Cameroon Radio and Television Corporation (CRTV).

The radio talk shows and slots continued for the entire month of January 2009 and the witnessed the astute participation of conservation experts like retired journalist and worker with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and local elite in the person of Mr. John Chamy. As a benign gesture the radio station has decided to run the project campaign slot on daily basis instead of twice per week as initially. This gesture has gone a long way in educating the public on the need for protecting the great apes (chimpanzees) of the Tubah Upland Forest.

Door-to-door sensitization and distribution of T-shirts

On the 19th of January 2009 the project team alongside with volunteers, Tubah council's natural resource officers carried a door-to-door intensive sensitization of the following communities or settlements found in Bambui: Ardo settlement and Muslim cattle grazers, farmers in the forest area and the Fengue settlement. The villagers received flyers, T-shirts, tracks and great apes brochure.

During the day volunteers sensitized the community dwellers on the importance of protecting the chimpanzees in their natural forest habitat. Hunting and bush burning was a focal issue and alternative sustainable activities. Bush burning was discouraged among the farmers, cattle grazers, hunters, beekeepers and those who set fires for evil intentions. Some farmers were very hostile and unwelcoming from the beginning as volunteers approached but later became very docile after there were enlightened, educated and sensitized. These farmers in abject penury that carry farming in the forest see the forest's fertile land as their only ultimate source of income and fear losing it, but when they gradually learn that they can engage in alternative and sustainable income generating activities such as beekeeping, the rearing of cane rats, snail farming ecotourism and pig rearing warmly welcomed the objective in helping to protect the great apes (chimpanzees). A pivotal strategy used is making the local people see the importance of the forest for them (provision of water, food, wood for fuel, medicinal plants, protection against erosion, improving soil fertility, regulating climate etc.) and to actively be involve as actors in the management of the local forest resources and thus in making the local people be part of the solution.

A situation is cited of a farmer who said that “for the past 20years, chimpanzees had never existed in the Tubah Upland Forest” but confessed after receiving education talk that he had seen 5 chimpanzees just a few days behind.

At the end of the day’s sensitization overture, most villagers or people warmly welcome the initiative a brilliant and first of its kind for a completely different approach is used, that of sustainable use of the forest which favours the survival of endangered chimpanzees. It should be remarked that slashing of forest and bush fires have reduced markedly owing to massive sensitization of the villages.

Plenary meeting/Open Community sensitization

Open community sensitization and interactive discussion with Abongfen farmer union

An open community sensitization was held on the 27th of January 2009 with a local farmers group (union) that has a membership of about 800 that carry farming in the Tubah Upland Forest. They are settled around an area which is particularly dense called Abongfen. During this interactive discussion and sensitization bush burning was hugely discouraged with the major cause highlighted. The practice of a farming system commonly called “Ankara” was also discouraged. With the Ankara system grass is gathered and covered with soil and burnt as a method of improving the fertility and crop yields but which does not last for more than two years after which the piece of land or farming area is abandoned and another thick pristine forest area is destroyed for farming purposes (shifting cultivation highly destruction to habitat for great apes). Other methods which are not harmful like composting (manure) are encouraged. The farmers raised the following problems they face:

- Enormous destruction of their crops by grazer’s cattle and huge fires resulting from grazers as well.
- The lack of farm products (materials) to practice sustainable and eco friendly farming systems
- The startup capital and knowledge or skills to practice bee farming

Proposed solutions from farmers themselves

- * Training in beekeeping and the provision of initial capital (bee hives, equipment) to startup beekeeping
- * Training in improved farming techniques and provision of farm materials/equipment (inputs)
- * Farming zones should be separated from grazers distinctively to prevent conflicts and a consequential further destruction of the forest which in the same vein endangers the great apes (chimpanzees)
- * Transhumance be encourage for grazers and pasture improvement program for grazers

Open community sensitization and interactive discussion with Kedjom-Ketinguh Population (Down Village)

The village of Kedjom-Ketinguh because it’s too large in size and population numbers (about 250000 inhabitants) was divided into two sections down village and up village with sensitization meetings scheduled for both sections on two different convenient dates. The meeting of down

village (Kedjom-Ketinguh) took place on the 29th of January 2009 at a village square called Chuba. That for the up village has been slated for the 5th of February 2009.

During this sensitization meeting and interactive discussions a lot of important questions were raised. The local population was very welcoming and very eager to learn. The following were the questions raised by the people and through interactive discussions viable solutions proposed:

- How to collectively work for the protection of the Tubah forest and the great apes
- How to alleviate poverty
- How to give a halt to bush burning
- How to do farming without carrying the *Ankara* system
- What are the importance of Great Apes (chimpanzees) to the community and to mankind

Ten community promoters (volunteers) with five for the *down village* and five for the *up village* respectively were nominated by the general community to help in achieving the objective of the campaign. These community promoters are people with high desire and commitment to serve community interest. During this meeting the local population had the opportunity to ask questions to a local chimpanzee monitor called Mr. David Achomochi regarding the lives of the chimpanzees found in the Tubah Upland Forest and the threats they particularly face. At this meeting the population was educated on the major causes of bushfires and mitigating measures and they are as follows:

Causes of Fires

- Fires set by hunters
- Fires set by grazers for new pastures and destruction of ticks
- Fires deliberately set for evil intentions
- Live cigarettes buds carelessly dropped by smokers
- Temporary cooking fires of farmers that grow into bush fires

Effects:

- Habitat destruction (homes for chimpanzees)
- Destroys food and food sources for these chimpanzees
- Total scorched land

Mitigating measures

- Ban use of fires for hunting Gambian rats for it is usually uncontrolled
- Heavy traditional fines be set for those who set fires for evil intentions
- Thoroughly clear surroundings of fire places in the farms and isolate them from dry materials through which fire can "creep" out
- Ban use of fire torches
- All parents and adults ensure that matches are kept from your children and parents are well punished otherwise

During this meetings brochure on great apes, leaflets, slogans and T-shirts with alert educating messages (Save Our Great Apes, Save Tubah Forest and Save Yourself) were shared to the people. All the persons who receive the T-shirts unanimously agreed that they will wear their T-shirts and participate at this year's **Youth Day Celebration**, that takes place every 11th of February nationwide (Cameroon). The people have decided to organize a **match parade** as a means of getting the message of protecting the great apes (chimpanzees) of Tubah Forest to a larger mass of the population.

The Publication of a Brochure on Great Apes (author Christian Tabifor).

A publication was produced "Great Apes Brochure" to help in educating the population about the great apes, the particular problems they faced (threats), proposed solutions. This brochure on great apes has been very beneficial and more and more people are particularly curious and interested in reading and learning more about these animals and possibly finding a durable solution.