

Project Update: February 2011

The first step of this project has been implemented from January to February 2011. It consists in introducing the project to local communities of Oueme Valley and gather updated information on the current damage of otters, friendly mitigation strategies, fish preferred by otters, stakeholders involved in conflicts mitigation, alternative activities to compensate otters' damage, methodology of conflicts' costs evaluation, other animals causing damage on fishery materials, fishery materials frequently destroyed by otters, and current months of high damage of otters. Village assemblies, focus groups and individual interviews were conducted in Gangban, Oueme Valley with 32 fish farmers. Ten fallows were listed as sites where otter damage is currently high. This information will be compared with the previous database on otter damage to identify where experimentation will be done for this project. All fish farmers recognise that otter damage has increased during the last 10 years. Fourteen fish species were listed as frequent in fish farmers' harvests and were ranked according to their abundance. Fish farmers revealed that otters are not selective in the choice of fishes. A fish farmer says "Otters destroy fishery gears, eat our harvest and remaining fishes escape". Another exclaims "They eat all species of fish". However 78% of participants recognised that *Protopterus annectens* is eating in abundance because of the species size and its slow capacity to escape. All participants identify the period from August to December as the best moment for otter damage in the valley.

A total of 95% of participants listed gear as the material which is most affected by otters. All of them noticed that otters destroy fishery materials at the afternoon and early in the morning. They also identify four other species considered as fishery materials destroyers and explain how they differentiate each species' damage. Three strategies were listed as friendly for conflict mitigation and were ranked according to the local perception of their efficiency. However, only two could be considered as friendly. Each participant estimated for the last year the cost of otter damage on their materials. Six alternative activities were proposed by participants to be promoted to compensate for otter damage.

All those data collected will be compared to our database in order to define all the aspects which will be include in the second phase of data collection. As planned with fish farmers of Hlan River, the same methodology will be applied next week to gather data which will be used for the second phase.



