

## Final Evaluation Report

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Your Details	
Full Name	Anne-Marie Dedeei Ayerson
Project Title	ECO-EMPOWER: Engaging Cultural Opportunities and Empowering Indigenous Women for Preservation and Conservation of Endangered Resources in Ghana
Application ID	42710-1
Date of this Report	14 May 2025

**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. To document and preserve traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of indigenous women in the Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS) landscape.				This objective was fully achieved. Through in-depth ethnographic research, key traditional ecological knowledge held by indigenous women relating to biodiversity and conservation practices in BFMS was documented. Methods included focus group discussions, oral history documentation, participatory mapping, and interviews with women elders and community leaders. This knowledge has been compiled into both print and digital formats and will serve as a valuable tool for future community-based conservation education and knowledge transfer.
2. To empower indigenous women with the skills and tools to participate in primate conservation and sustainable management of BFMS.				The empowerment and skills development component was successfully implemented. A total of 35 indigenous women and girls were trained in biodiversity monitoring, participatory data collection, and primate conservation leadership. Workshops were co-led by trained facilitators and community advisors, combining scientific and local knowledge. They were also equipped with materials (field books, GPS units, data-sheets) and encouraged to take leadership roles in community conservation discussions.
3. To identify conservation threats and extinction risks facing the White-thighed Colobus ( <i>Colobus vellerosus</i> ) and				This objective was largely achieved. A community-led threat assessment was conducted, including mapping of degraded zones, interviews with hunters and farmers, and analysis of

propose mitigation strategies.				historical land use. Major threats identified included agricultural encroachment, firewood harvesting, and weakened enforcement of traditional taboos. While mitigation strategies have been proposed and validated with the community (e.g., firebreaks, community patrols, conservation education), full implementation of these strategies requires additional time and follow-up support beyond the project period.
4. To promote the involvement of indigenous women in conservation leadership and sanctuary management via leadership training and advocacy programs				This objective was fully met. Two women representatives have been formally nominated and proposed to the local sanctuary management committee for consideration and inclusion on the committee, a milestone for inclusive governance in BFMS. Leadership training programs focused on conservation advocacy, community mobilization, and conflict resolution were delivered in partnership with local NGOs. Feedback from both male and female leaders reflects a shift in perception and greater community support for women-led conservation.
5. Strengthen community stewardship and conservation awareness through outreach, school-based education, and integration of women into sanctuary governance.				We implemented conservation education sessions in 4 local schools and hosted a youth soccer, art and essay competition under the theme "Eco Champions." Over 1000 students participated. Additionally, local radio programs reached over 25,000 listeners.

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

### a) Empowerment and Leadership of Indigenous Women in Conservation.

One of the most transformative outcomes of the ECO-EMPOWER project was the successful empowerment of indigenous women as conservation leaders. Over 35 women were trained in biodiversity conservation and participatory sanctuary management. Two

indigenous women were nominated for consideration to serve on the local BFMS sanctuary management committee, a historic milestone for inclusive conservation governance. This has catalyzed broader community acceptance of women's roles in conservation, shifting traditional gender norms and ensuring their voices are included in environmental decision-making.

### **b) Documentation and Preservation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)**

The project comprehensively documented the rich traditional ecological knowledge of indigenous women relating to wildlife behavior, sacred groves, biodiversity indicators, and conservation taboos. This knowledge, which was at risk of being lost due to modernization, was systematically collected through interviews, storytelling, and participatory mapping. It has been archived in both digital and print formats, ensuring intergenerational transfer and serving as a foundation for integrating cultural practices into modern conservation strategies.

### **c) Identification of Key Conservation Threats and Community-Driven Mitigation Plans**

Through participatory assessments, the project identified critical threats to the survival of the White-thighed Colobus Monkey, including habitat degradation, illegal firewood harvesting, and weakened enforcement of traditional norms. In response, the community developed practical and culturally grounded mitigation strategies such as community patrols, awareness campaigns, and firebreak planning. Although full implementation requires ongoing support, these community-led actions have laid a strong foundation for long-term ecological resilience and co-management of BFMS.

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

One significant unforeseen challenge was initial resistance from some male community leaders regarding the active inclusion of women in decision-making roles. Traditional gender dynamics initially posed barriers to open participation by indigenous women. To address this, the team engaged respected community elders and opinion leaders in dialogue, emphasizing the cultural and conservation benefits of inclusive management. This led to broader community acceptance and support for the women empowerment component of the project.

There were communication barriers during interviews and focus group discussions with some elderly indigenous women who primarily speak local dialects unfamiliar to younger team members. This initially affected the documentation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). To address this, the project recruited respected local women and retired teachers fluent in both the dialects and English as community liaisons, greatly improving communication and participation.

Another unexpected issue was the low initial turnout during school-based conservation outreach programs. This was due to competing academic schedules and unanticipated exam periods. To tackle this, the team adjusted program timings in consultation with school

authorities and conducted make-up sessions on weekends and after-school hours, which led to improved engagement and enthusiastic participation from both students and teachers.

A challenge arose from technological limitations. While the team planned to use mobile devices and simple digital tools to capture and store data, poor mobile network coverage in certain areas of the sanctuary delayed real-time data upload and syncing. As a solution, data was first logged manually on paper in the field, then digitized during evening sessions at the project base with stronger connectivity.

These challenges, although unforeseen, were effectively mitigated through strong community collaboration, adaptive planning, and proactive problem-solving by the project team and partners.

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

The ECO-EMPOWER project placed community engagement at its core, especially focusing on the inclusion of indigenous women, youth, and local leaders in every phase of the project. From inception to implementation, the local communities of Boabeng and Fiema were not just beneficiaries but key collaborators and co-creators of solutions.

Local involvement began with participatory stakeholder meetings, where traditional authorities, community elders, women leaders, and youth representatives were consulted to shape the project approach. This ensured that community voices were reflected in the objectives and activities of the project.

A major outcome was the empowerment of over 50 indigenous women and girls through hands-on training in biodiversity conservation, traditional ecological knowledge documentation, and community-based monitoring. These women, who previously had limited roles in formal conservation activities, are now actively involved in species conservation habitat protection advocacy, and sanctuary co-management. Their confidence and leadership capacity were visibly enhanced.

The community also benefited from awareness campaigns, school outreach programs, and local workshops that emphasized human-wildlife coexistence, forest protection, and cultural conservation. These engagements led to a renewed sense of ownership over the sanctuary and increased commitment to sustainable resource use.

Through collaborative fieldwork, cultural celebration of conservation norms, and open forums, the project deepened community pride in their biocultural heritage and laid a strong foundation for long-term stewardship of the Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary.

#### **5. Are there any plans to continue this work?**

Yes, there are strong and well-structured plans to continue and scale up the ECO-EMPOWER project following the successful completion of the first Rufford Small Grant phase.

Building on the key achievements, such as the empowerment of indigenous women, strengthened local conservation structures, and enhanced ecological knowledge, we are now developing a follow-up project under the Second Rufford Grant. This next phase will focus on addressing major threats identified in the BFMS including agricultural encroachment, firewood harvesting, and weakened enforcement of traditional taboos using the co-created mitigation strategies proposed and validated with the community leaders (e.g., firebreaks, community patrols, and scale up of conservation education and outreach to neighboring schools and communities). We will also expand ecological monitoring to capture seasonal dynamics of *Colobus vellerosus*,

A core component will involve co-creating a community conservation action plan. This participatory roadmap will formalize women's leadership in biodiversity protection, define community-based enforcement roles, and integrate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) with modern strategies to curb illegal hunting, poaching, logging, and wildlife trafficking.

We also plan to train and empower more indigenous women as conservation ambassadors and build their capacity through livelihood interventions such as eco-tourism, nature clubs, and native plant nursery development.

In addition to maintaining strong collaborations with the Ghana Wildlife Division, NGOs and CBOs, we will strengthen partnerships with traditional authorities, local assemblies, and relevant government agencies to ensure multi-level support. These actors will play a vital role in enforcing local conservation bylaws, scaling up educational efforts, and embedding women's voices in sanctuary governance.

The community conservation women's network established in the first phase will also be formalized to sustain outreach, advocacy, and peer learning. Furthermore, research outputs will be published and shared through journals, conferences, and policy briefs to influence wider conservation discourse.

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

The results of the ECO-EMPOWER project will be shared through a comprehensive strategy involving community feedback sessions, local stakeholder meetings, and the distribution of printed reports and policy briefs to institutions such as the Ghana Wildlife Division and the District Assembly. We will also conduct visual presentations in local languages using posters, infographics, and video documentaries to ensure accessibility at the grassroots level. Research findings will be submitted to peer-reviewed journals and presented at relevant national and international conservation conferences. Additionally, highlights will be published on the websites and social media platforms of Wild Fauna Foundation and partner NGOs, as well as aired on local radio stations to reach wider audiences to further share our project outcomes and lessons learned.

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

Looking ahead, several key steps are essential to ensure the sustainability, impact, and scale-up of the ECO-EMPOWER project.

1. Development of a Community-Led Conservation Action Plan: One of the most critical next steps is co-developing a formal conservation strategy with the full participation of indigenous women, traditional authorities, and local stakeholders. This plan will institutionalize community roles, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), and local bylaws for managing and protecting Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS).
2. Strengthen and Institutionalize the Women's Conservation Network: Formalizing the women's conservation committees will ensure they are recognized by local authorities and able to advocate for local support, access resources, and sustain peer learning.
3. Enhance Scientific Research and Monitoring: Conducting long-term ecological monitoring, including seasonal surveys of *Colobus vellerosus*, habitat quality assessments, and behavioral studies, will help generate evidence to guide management decisions and conservation strategies.
4. Strengthening Law Enforcement and Advocacy: Collaborating with local assemblies, the Ghana Wildlife Division, and traditional leaders to strengthen community enforcement of local bylaws will be vital in addressing illegal hunting, logging, and wildlife trafficking.
5. Expansion to Neighbouring Communities and Schools: Extending conservation education programs to adjacent communities and schools will promote region-wide conservation consciousness, especially among youth.
6. Women's Empowerment and Livelihood Support: Continued capacity-building for indigenous women through leadership training and sustainable livelihood programs (e.g., NTFP collection, Climate Smart Agriculture, Agroforestry, eco-tourism, reforestation nurseries, bee keeping etc) will help integrate gender equity into long-term conservation success.
7. Mobilizing Resources and Scaling Partnerships: Securing additional funding, expanding partnerships, and building on existing relationships with institutions will be essential to grow the initiative and replicate it in other threatened landscapes.

Together, these next steps will deepen ecological resilience, promote inclusive conservation governance, and ensure the protection of this critical biodiversity and cultural heritage hotspot.

**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?**

Yes, The Rufford Foundation logo was prominently displayed on all official project materials including banners, posters, flyers, T-shirts, reports, and presentations used throughout the



ECO-EMPOWER project. The Foundation was fully acknowledged in all community outreach activities, training sessions, and during school-based education programs.

Additionally, the Foundation received notable publicity across multiple platforms. We publicly acknowledged Rufford's support during stakeholder meetings with traditional leaders, local assemblies, and the Ghana Wildlife Division. Local radio stations also aired interviews and announcements that credited the Rufford Foundation as the primary funder. The Rufford Foundation's contribution was recognized as vital in supporting grassroots conservation and empowering indigenous women in biodiversity protection.

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

**1. Anne-Marie Dedeei Ayerson – Project Coordinator:** Led the overall planning, coordination, implementation, and monitoring of the ECO-EMPOWER project. She supervised field activities, liaised with partners and stakeholders, ensured deliverables were met on schedule, and provided leadership to the entire team.

**2. Esther Adwoa Asantewaa – Community Engagement and Conservation Education Coordinator:** Coordinated all community engagement and conservation education activities. She facilitated school outreach, managed community workshops, and led behaviour change communication campaigns, working closely with local groups and youth.

**3. Portia Ama Bansa – Cultural Heritage and Gender Empowerment Lead:** Led the design and implementation of all gender empowerment activities and cultural heritage documentation. She facilitated women's workshops, developed empowerment strategies, and supported traditional knowledge integration into the conservation process.

**4. Ama Gyamfua – Field Assistant:** Assisted in ecological data collection, community interviews, and coordination of community-based monitoring activities. She supported day-to-day fieldwork logistics and played a vital role in mobilizing local participants.

**5. Appiah Isaac – Field Assistant:** Provided field support for research activities, ecological surveys, and logistics. He also assisted in community consultations, supported documentation efforts, and coordinated communication between the team and local stakeholders.

### **10. Any other comments?**

The ECO-EMPOWER project has been an inspiring journey that not only deepened our scientific understanding of the critically endangered Black and White Colobus Monkey (*Colobus vellerosus*) but also significantly elevated the role of indigenous women in community-led conservation efforts. The success of this project is a testament to the value of integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation science.

We are particularly grateful to The Rufford Foundation for believing in our vision and supporting grassroots conservation efforts in one of Ghana's most culturally and ecologically significant sanctuaries. The project has built a lasting legacy of community ownership,



empowered women conservation leaders, and laid a strong foundation for continued ecological research and sustainable livelihoods through conservation.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the prospects of scaling up our activities through a second Rufford grant and additional partnerships. We are confident that with continued support, the ECO-EMPOWER project can serve as a national model for gender-inclusive, culturally-rooted conservation in West Africa and beyond.

Once again, we thank The Rufford Foundation for their generous support and look forward to strengthening our partnership in the years to come.