

**Project Title: Understanding the distribution and conservation patterns of poorly studied and threatened fish species in biodiverse Cross River Basin-Nigeria.**

**ID 47294-1**

**Project Lead: Olabisi Tawakalt Atofarati**

**Progress Report**

### **1. Engagement with the local communities and relevant stakeholders**

- The project began with consultations with village heads, during which the objectives and scope of the study were clearly explained while respectfully requesting their approval, in recognition of the cultural importance of many water bodies within the communities.
- Capacity-building training sessions were organized for selected local students and community members to enhance their skills and actively support data collection and species monitoring activities.



Figure 1: The project lead, Olabisi Tawakalt Atofarati meeting with heads of local communities across Cross River region of Nigeria. Photo credit: Olaide Bello.



Figure 2 : The project lead, Olabisi Atofarati, conducting capacity training for the local communities' youths to facilitate data collection. Photo credit: Stanley Okwa.

## 2. Data collection

- Environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling and ecological field surveys have commenced across all eight communities within the Balegete region, Okwa, Butatong, Okwangwo, and Obudu areas of Cross River, Nigeria.
- Data collection is being carried out to understand species distribution patterns, population trends and threats of the threatened freshwater fish species across the Cross River Basin.

## 3. Conservation education and sensitization

- Conservation education programmes have been launched in two local schools, featuring interactive learning sessions and the establishment of conservation clubs.
- Creative educational materials, including books, drawings and paintings, are being used as teaching aids to improve student engagement and facilitate effective learning. About 100 students have been educated and given conservation materials.



Figure 3: Photograph session after conservation-focused educational sessions with students and establishing conservation clubs, aimed at raising awareness on the importance of conserving freshwater fish species in the Cross River Basin.

#### 4. Indigenous knowledge and informal interview

- Engagement sessions were conducted with women's groups and community members to document indigenous knowledge, traditional uses, and conservation perspectives regarding threatened fish species in the Cross River basin.

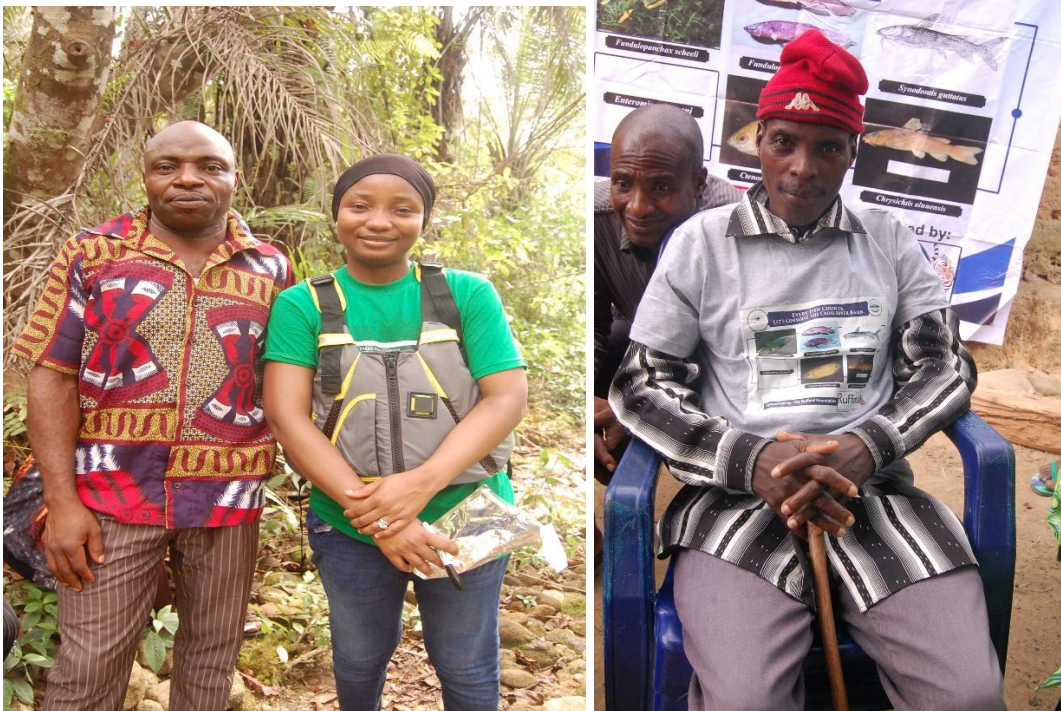


Figure 4: Project lead, Olabisi Atofarati, conducting informal interviews with women and community members to document indigenous knowledge, traditional uses, and socioeconomic drivers of threats affecting threatened fish species in the Cross River Basin. Photo Credit: Stanley Okwa.

### Next Steps:

1. **Enhance Educational Programs:** Expand conservation education initiatives to additional schools and refine program content based on feedback from the initial sessions.
2. **Complete eDNA Sampling and Ecological Surveys:** Finalize environmental DNA sampling and ecological field surveys across all target communities.
3. **Monitoring and Evaluating Project Impact:** Conduct follow-up engagements with community stakeholders and educational institutions to evaluate changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors toward the conservation and protection of threatened freshwater fish species in the Cross River Basin, Nigeria.