

Project Update: March 2025

Project ID: 44008-1

Project Title: Community Sensitization and Mobilization for Conservation of Vulnerable Rukwa Tilapia (*Oreochromis rukwaensis*) in Tanzania

Introduction

Community sensitization and mobilization for the conservation of the vulnerable Rukwa tilapia (*Oreochromis rukwaensis*) in Tanzania is a project funded by The Rufford Foundation, to support the restoration of the vulnerable Rukwa Tilapia in Lake Rukwa. The project has three specific objectives; (1) To sensitize Lake Rukwa communities through environmental education, raise conservation awareness and mobilize social events towards community participation in the protection of *Oreochromis rukwaensis* and its ecosystem in Lake Rukwa, Tanzania; (2) To improve the development of sustainable resource use practice through training and establishment of alternative and resilient economic activities for the sake of protecting *Oreochromis rukwaensis* and its ecosystem; (3) To assess the current social, economic, political and environmental threats facing *Oreochromis rukwaensis* and its ecosystem in Lake Rukwa, Tanzania. To achieve the given objectives, the following activities were implemented between November 2024 and March 2025.

2. Project Activities Update up to March 2025

2.1 Introduction and preliminary site visit Phase

Before the project commenced, the project team members contacted relevant authorities to inform them about the project, its objectives, logistical and administrative support required. Communication was initially conducted via mobile-phones and official letters. Subsequently, the project team members from Tanzania Fisheries Research Institute-Kigoma centre; travelled to Rukwa to meet with local authorities, including the Rukwa Regional Administrative Office, Sumbawanga District Council, and ward/village level leadership. The local authorities were elated with the project and agreed to provide necessary logistical and administrative support required for the project implementation.

The team also collaborated with the ward fisheries officer, who served as the local liaison, providing valuable on-the-ground guidance and participatory mapping of the potential sites for the project activities.



Plate 1: A project team meeting with Ward Executive Officer during introduction and planning meeting for the project.



Plate 2: A leading Research Team during a planning meeting

At this stage, the team also communicated with the leaders of beekeeping groups and associations, requesting their participation in project workshops. Specifically, the respective leaders were asked to share their technical expertise and experiences regarding beekeeping with fisheries stakeholders during the upcoming workshop. The beekeeping leaders agreed to participate actively in the workshop.

Additionally, the project team made visits to the study site along Lake Rukwa area to observe the conditions around the Lake and the fishing activities involving Rukwa Tilapia (*Oreochromis rukwaensis*). As shown in Plate 3,4 and 5 it was apparent that there is a prevalence of multiple unsustainable fisheries practices, ranging from the capture of juvenile fish to overfishing and water pollution; the activities threatening this vulnerable fish species.



Plate 3: Fish landings along the Lake Rukwa coastline



Plate 4: Sun-drying of juvenile fish species at Muze landing site-Lake Rukwa



Plate 5: Dr. Happiness Anold (PI) (in light blue Tshirt) participating and observing fish processing activities along Lake Rukwa.

2.2 Preparation of Project Materials

During this period (October 2024 to February 2025), the team actively designed and produced materials needed for project execution. These materials included t-shirts, fliers, brochures, presentations, posters, stickers, tree seedlings, and beehives.



Plate 6: Some of the materials prepared for the project activities; (a) poster (b) brochures (c) tree seedlings (d) beehives

2.3 Awareness and Sensitization Workshop for the Conservation of Vulnerable Rukwa Tilapia

This workshop aimed to inform community members around Lake Rukwa about the importance of conserving Rukwa tilapia and its ecosystem. During the workshop, the socio-economic and ecological value of Rukwa Tilapia and its ecosystem were highlighted to raise awareness among local communities, fishermen, environmental activists, government officials, school childrens, and NGOs.

Moreover, workshop participants were educated on the threats facing Lake Rukwa and its endemic rukwa tilapia species (*Oreochromis rukwaensis*) which is currently vulnerable to extinction while highlighting the ecological and socio-economic consequences of its decline. Participants were further mobilized to promote sustainable fishing practices, habitat and environmental conservation methods. Sustainable fishing practices which adhere to the fisheries and environmental policies and regulations were emphasized. Furthermore, education on the impact using illegal fishing gears, overfishing and sustainable fishing were provided to fishers. Proper wastewater treatments before discharge to the lake, sustainable agriculture were encouraged to sustain the lake and its resources. Community participation in conservation initiatives was further sensitized during this important workshop.



Plate 7: A group photo of a project team and some of the workshop participants at Muze Village

2.4 Afforestation Campaigns at Mkuyuni and Ilanga Primary Schools

Afforestation campaigns to more than 100 students at Mkuyuni and Ilanga Primary Schools were conducted. These campaigns aimed to install a conservation spirit in pupils. Pupils, who typically range in age from seven to fourteen years old are mainly the cornerstone of the nation's social and economic development over the next ten years. These campaigns emphasized the importance of tree planting in combating deforestation, promoting biodiversity conservation, control erosion and land-based pollution, water quality purification and climate regulations. In these two campaigns, 100 tree seedlings were planted by pupils around lake Rukwa and within their school compounds to help them kick-start the afforestation journey around their surrounding environment. Pupils participated in tree planting activities to help them gain hands-on experience for sustainable future



Plate 8: Dr. Happiness Anold (PI) distributing tree seedlings to pupils at Ilanga primary school



Plate 9: Tree plantings at Mkuyuni and Ilanga Primary schools