Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Lotanna Micah Nneji
Project Title	Saving the last remaining populations of the highly threatened Nigerian montane herpetofauna through conservation education and community awareness programmes
Application ID	43404-D
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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 engage local students in outdoor biodiversity science activities to improve biodiversity literacy			X	To enhance biodiversity literacy among local students, we initiated the "Sciencing Out" outdoor science education program. This initiative aims to foster awareness and appreciation for herpetofaunal conservation in Obudu Plateau (OP) region. Through immersive, hands-on experiences in nature, the program provided foundational knowledge on biodiversity, emphasizing amphibians and reptiles as key indicators of environmental health. In each school, we selected two local schools (Government Primary School Balegete and Pioneer Secondary School Balegete) and involved 30 students in each local schools. Students were trained in structured activities that included species identification, ecological surveying, and conservation strategy discussions. By combining scientific inquiry with outdoor exploration, we empowered students to understand their local ecosystems and equips them with the tools to contribute to biodiversity preservation.
2. To work with local			X	We engaged five local teachers

teachers to create biodiversity learning modules for teaching local students				from each of the two participating schools in our biodiversity literacy program (Government Primary School Balegete and Pioneer Secondary School Balegete). The training focused on interactive teaching strategies, the incorporation of locally relevant biodiversity examples, and effective methods for assessing students' understanding of biodiversity science and education.
3. To engage in community-based programs for field activities and to raise conservation awareness			X	We conducted community sensitization two local schools and five social gatherings with the Balegete, Anape and Bottom Hill communities, all within Obudu. At the schools, interactive sessions were held with students and teachers to introduce key concepts in biodiversity, the importance of local wildlife, and the role of conservation in sustaining ecosystem services. These sessions incorporated engaging activities such as storytelling, visual aids, and question-and-answer segments to foster interest and understanding among young learners. In the broader community, sensitization during social gatherings enabled us to reach diverse groups, including elders, youth, and women. We used these platforms to share knowledge about local conservation challenges, the ecological value of native species, and practical ways residents can contribute to

				protecting their environment. In addition, we trained 8 local people as citizen scientists for the collection of scientifically defensible datasets for herpetofaunal studies in Obudu Plateau.
4. To engage in stakeholder's meeting to develop herpetofaunal conservation plans			X	We held a series of three strategic meetings in Obudu with local chiefs, community youth leaders, and other key stakeholders to collaboratively shape the future of amphibian and reptile conservation in the region. The first meeting served as a platform to build trust and introduce us and our mission. During the second gathering, we shared updates on our progress and listened to valuable feedback from the community. In the final meeting, the focus shifted to the long-term plan, we outlined a shared vision and actionable steps for safeguarding Obudu Plateau's unique herpetofauna and their habitats for generations to come.

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

a). One of the most significant outcomes of our project was the improvement of biodiversity literacy among local youth in the Obudu Plateau region, achieved through the launch of the "Sciencing Out" outdoor science education program. We engaged 60 students in total, 30 each from Government Primary School Balegete and Pioneer Secondary School Balegete, offering them a transformative educational experience that bridged classroom learning with real-world ecological understanding, particularly focused on amphibians and reptiles. Through structured activities conducted in nearby natural habitats, including species identification, ecological surveys, and conservation-focused discussions, students developed a meaningful connection with their environment. These hands-on experiences helped them see biodiversity not as an abstract concept, but as something tangible and vital to their everyday lives. By nurturing curiosity and ecological awareness, the program instilled in these young learners a sense of responsibility for conserving their unique local biodiversity. Ultimately, this initiative has laid a strong foundation for

future community-driven conservation efforts for amphibians and reptiles in the Obudu Plateau.

b). Another significant outcome of our project was the capacity-building of local educators and community members to support long-term biodiversity education and research in the Obudu Plateau. We engaged five teachers from each of the two participating schools (Government Primary School Balegete and Pioneer Secondary School Balegete) in our biodiversity literacy program. The training emphasized interactive teaching strategies, the use of locally relevant examples, and effective approaches to assess students' understanding of biodiversity concepts. In addition to teacher training, we also empowered eight local community members by training them as citizen scientists. These individuals were equipped with the skills and tools necessary to collect scientifically credible data for herpetofaunal research in the region. This dual approach of engaging both educators and citizens has strengthened local ownership of biodiversity knowledge and laid the groundwork for sustained environmental stewardship in the Obudu Plateau.

c). Another key outcome of our project was the successful sensitization and engagement of local communities and stakeholders in the Obudu Plateau. We conducted awareness sessions at two local schools and organized five community gatherings across the Balegete, Anape, and Bottom Hill communities. At the schools, interactive sessions with local students introduced foundational concepts in biodiversity, highlighted the importance of local wildlife, and emphasized the role of conservation in maintaining ecosystem services that support livelihoods. Additionally, we convened three strategic meetings with local chiefs, youth leaders, and other key stakeholders in Obudu. These dialogues fostered a collaborative approach to conservation, allowing community voices to help shape the future of amphibian and reptile protection in the region. This inclusive engagement has not only strengthened local awareness but also built trust and collective responsibility for preserving biodiversity.

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

One of the most significant unforeseen challenges encountered during the project was insecurity during travel to and within the study areas in the Obudu Plateau. Reports of occasional unrest and localized safety concerns created logistical difficulties and heightened personal risk, particularly during transit between remote communities, and to and fro Obudu. This situation not only threatened the timely execution of activities but also posed a risk to the safety of both the project team and participants. To address this, I implemented several proactive strategies. First, I established strong communication with local community leaders and security personnel, who provided real-time updates on safe travel routes and advised on best times for movement. I also adjusted the field schedule to avoid travel during early mornings or late evenings and prioritized group movement over solo trips. Additionally, I engaged trusted local guides who were familiar with the terrain and had strong ties within the communities. These efforts ensured project continuity and team safety.

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

Local communities in and surrounding Obudu Plateau played an integral role in the success of our project. From the outset, we prioritized inclusive participation by engaging local chiefs, youth leaders, local school proprietors and other stakeholders through structured consultations and regular meetings. This grassroots involvement ensured that our objectives aligned with community values and cultural practices, fostering trust and shared ownership of the conservation goals. Community members were not just passive participants, they were actively involved in all the steps of our projects, both as citizen scientists and research assistants and they supported the community-based awareness programmes in schools and communities. As a result of their involvement, community members have gained increased awareness of biodiversity of Obudu Plateau and environmental stewardship. Our project provided capacity-building opportunities, including training as citizen scientists for the species identification, habitat protection, and data collection. Local students benefited through hands-on fieldwork experience, which not only enhanced their scientific literacy but also sparked interest in conservation careers. Furthermore, by promoting eco-conscious practices and potential for eco-tourism, the project has laid the groundwork for future sustainable livelihood opportunities. In short, the project has empowered the Obudu communities to become stewards of their natural heritage while simultaneously enhancing their socio-economic and educational outcomes.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

There are clear and purposeful plans to build on the foundation laid by this project. One key direction involves launching community empowerment programs that target local individuals currently heavily engaged in deforestation as a primary source of income. The aim is to offer alternative, sustainable livelihoods, such as agroforestry, or biodiversity-related enterprise, while raising awareness about the long-term ecological costs of deforestation in Obudu Plateau. By involving these individuals directly in conservation-focused training and income-generating activities, we hope to transform them into active custodians of the environment. In addition, we plan to establish a biodiversity digital classroom for local students. This space will serve as an engaging, technology-enabled learning hub where students can explore biodiversity through interactive modules, virtual field experiences, and locally relevant content. This initiative will deepen biodiversity literacy, inspire environmental stewardship, and bridge educational gaps in under-resourced rural communities. Together, these plans aim to drive long-term, community-led conservation.

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

To ensure the broader impact and accessibility of our findings, I plan to share the results of this work through both academic and community-based channels. Academically, I intend to publish a peer-reviewed paper titled "Evidence for the Effects of Community-Based Interventions and Biodiversity Literacy on Herpetofaunal Conservation." This publication will document our methodology, outcomes, and key lessons, contributing to the growing body of research on participatory conservation and education in biodiversity hotspots as ours. At the community level, I will share a detailed Conservation Action Plan with local chiefs and stakeholders in the Obudu community. This plan will summarize the project's key insights and offer practical,

culturally appropriate strategies for sustaining amphibian and reptile conservation, while laying plans for further works for long-term protection of our study area.

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

A key next step is the establishment of a biodiversity digital classroom tailored for local students in the Obudu Plateau. This initiative will serve as a dynamic, technology-enabled learning hub designed to deepen biodiversity literacy and environmental awareness among youth. The classroom will feature interactive educational modules, virtual field experiences, and curriculum-aligned content, all adapted to the local context. To ensure authenticity and relevance, we plan to integrate field datasets collected during our herpetofaunal surveys, allowing students to engage with real data from their own environment. The content will be further enriched through the use of locally sourced digital images and videos of amphibians, reptiles, and habitats documented during the project. This approach not only bridges classroom learning with real-world science but also celebrates the region's natural heritage. Ultimately, this digital classroom will nurture ecological curiosity, promote digital and scientific literacy, and inspire long-term stewardship among the next generation.

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?

The Rufford Foundation logo was featured in several materials produced for this project. These included T-shirts, branded exercise books, and conservation awareness materials such as banners and posters. The use of the logo was intended to acknowledge the Foundation's support and to raise awareness of its role in promoting grassroots conservation initiatives. All materials were used during community engagements, school-based activities, and public outreach sessions to enhance visibility and foster a sense of credibility and partnership throughout the project.

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

A. Engr. Kelechi Precious Ilobi (Role: Field Survey Specialist & Biodiversity Storytelling Trainer): Engr. Kelechi is a former trainee from our previous Rufford Small Grants (RSG) projects and has been actively involved in various amphibian conservation efforts across Nigeria. In this project, he contributed his extensive expertise in amphibian and reptile surveys and field photography. His deep familiarity with the Obudu Plateau area, along with his exceptional photography skills, were instrumental in documenting species and habitats. He also played a key role in training local students in biodiversity storytelling, using visual media to communicate conservation themes.
B. Mr. Patrick Ekpeh (Role: Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator) Mr. Ekpeh, a dedicated park ranger, served as a crucial liaison between the project team and the local community members. He coordinated stakeholder meetings and ensured that project activities aligned with existing conservation frameworks and community expectations.
C. Mr. Francis Akor (Role: Community Liaison and Outreach Coordinator): As a native of the Obudu Plateau, Mr. Akor provided vital local insight and

facilitated smooth engagement with community members. He was responsible for coordinating community participation, assisting with outreach activities, and supporting the formation of the local citizen science group.

10. Any other comments?

Our project was a resounding success, achieving its primary objectives in biodiversity education and community engagement.
One of the core activities involved field surveys, during which we observed and documented a diverse range of amphibian and reptile species within our study area, highlighting the ecological richness of the Obudu Plateau.





Group Picture Team Members and community members