

Project Update: September 2015

Field Update: A view from the *dioura*

We visited traditional gold mining sites in the Kédougou region of south-eastern Senegal. These surveys have enabled us to discover the organisational capacity of these people that allows them to carry out this economic activity very sensitive and complex in a relaxed social climate.

The local Malinke name for these gold washing sites is *dioura*. The residents of these villages were very engaged in gold mining activities. We stayed in villages near these mining sites for several weeks from April-June 2015 and visited the mines on a daily basis. During this period, we interviewed miners and observed their work. The days were long and tedious, but the hope of hitting a rock containing this precious metal motivated the *dioura* workers to persevere.

We found that the mining tasks were organised according to gender and age. Men usually worked within the mining shafts, also known as *damas*, to extract the rocks and load them into bags. Women and inexperienced men monitored the ropes and used them to lift the bags loaded with stones out of the mining pits. These bags were stored until the end of the work week, and then partitioned between the cooperating miners that would grind and sieve these rocks at their respective villages.

These gold mining activities may have serious consequences for the environment, such as the destruction of chimpanzee habitat. Furthermore, the uncontrolled use of chemicals such as mercury in the gold treatment process is a major source of pollution and may represent a great danger for both animals and humans that live in these regions.



Dioura workers in south-eastern Senegal.



Rocks stored in bags and ready to be transported to grinding and sieving areas, usually at nearby villages



Chimpanzee habitat destruction at a dioura



Mercury is used to separate gold from the surrounding rocky matrix