

Project Update: December 2017

The project is ongoing in two sectors neighboring the bamboo zone of Nyungwe National Park which is the natural habitat of the vulnerable Hamlyn's monkey *Cercopithecus hamlyni*. We received the funds for this project on 19th July 2017 and started the field work on 24th July. We first made a site reconnaissance trip and some preparations including prior contacts and discussion with local collaborators, including local authorities and park workers at the site. As we set our office in Ruhuru sector, we met the authorities there first, and then we traveled on different days to Busanze and Nyabimata sectors for contact and information.

Our project has two permanent workers in the field, a project assistant and a local facilitator. The former, Felix Niyonzima, has an MSc in Biodiversity Conservation and is well experienced for the work and the latter is a person from the local community who is among volunteering people linking the park and communities. I included three students from Biology Department in the University of Rwanda to be funded by our project. Two of those students were also hosted for internship. We discussed three research topics with them and are their final research projects for completion of BSc level:

- 1) Assessing conservation efforts and actions on the Hamlyn's monkey and the bamboo habitat in Nyungwe National Park,
- 2) Impact and efficiency evaluation of the incentive strategies to reduce illegal bamboo collection threatening the Hamlyn's monkey in Nyungwe National Park,
- 3) Status of current threats to the Hamlyn's monkey and the bamboo habitat in Nyungwe National Park.

In the sampling design, we selected three cells in Ruhuru sector and two cells in Busanze sector considering the prevalence of concerns about bamboo. In each cell we selected all villages; all of them had five villages except one in Busanze sectors that had six. In each village, six households were selected at random based on records of households kept in cell's offices - we interviewed 156 households. Some adjustments occurred in the field design due to the conditions we encountered and the discussion we held with our collaborators (RDB and WCS) who were overlooking the project sites in terms of education and awareness to the community regarding the bamboo issue. We decided that we would leave out one sector called Nyabimata, and consider only Ruhuru and Busanze sectors. We also found it more practical and efficient to combine all interview questions about the project in one interview paper for each household instead of considering separate sections for each specific objective.

Most interviewed people were subsistence farmers and their level of education was low, mainly ranging at the primary school level, while a significant number included those who even did not attend primary school. We interviewed chiefs of households but sometimes we missed men at their homes and interviewed their wives. Interview data to representatives of households indicated that most people were less aware of bamboo propagation activities that took place to address the case of its illegal collection. Most people reported that they knew how illegal bamboo harvest was

an issue for the park's management, given the efforts put in place by park's authorities for that cause. They revealed that most people who needed bamboo were poor and depended on it for subsistence, even if some others refused to abandon for reasons of sticking to traditions. Almost all people claimed that they needed bamboo in their woodlots, but could not know how to grow them better than in the past if they did not have training on proper handling and monitoring to ensure the success as most past attempts were unsuccessful. Some people could also say that improvement of their livelihoods and development opportunities could help them definitely abandon bamboo use for better alternatives.

The results indicated that about six cooperatives were concerned with Nyungwe protection and awareness about Nyungwe bamboo protection in Ruhuru sector while only three cooperatives had a link with Nyungwe and environmental protection in Busanze sector. While fewer community groups in Busanze were active for the protection of Nyungwe, we realised that illegal bamboo use was more prevalent in that sector than in Ruhuru based on information and direct observations.

Bamboo in Busanze was mostly seen as bamboo products that are being traded to the local markets, mainly baskets and ceiling mats.

The last field work which comprised surveys of cooperatives in Busanze was completed on 6th December 2017. We are taking a short vacation and will continue field work in early January 2018. We can estimate that we are just between 60% and 65% of progress regarding all field activities and timing for successful completion is well planned.

We had some particular observations and participated in a formal event about the bamboo of Nyungwe. We realised that the forest site of bamboo has almost been without research-based monitoring for about 7 years and that concerned authorities have not been active in promoting collaborative solutions to the bamboo issue. In places we passed by, we also witnessed that most past attempts to propagate bamboo failed, while the almost the only bamboo thriving better is the one that was in place before such actions intended to reduce illegal bamboo use. After all, we realised that there was not only bamboo cutting as concern about encroachment on the Park, but also livestock grazing, grass cuts, and firewood collection. On 22nd August 2017 we participated in an event organised by park's authorities with different stakeholders in order to document in the field the status of illegal bamboo collection from the park. This team included, among others, the park authorities, police, prosecutors, agronomists, local leaders, and security forces witnessed the situation in the forest which appeared even worse than thought before.

We cannot fail to mention some challenges we met but which luckily did not impede the effective progress of the project after being addressed. Such challenges were related to the lodging place, a misunderstanding and some resistive attitudes to our project in the beginning, and the issue of relocating between the two sites. The first was addressed by finding a lodge which is also our main project office that was more suitable and secure between the local communities, and the second was solved by sitting together with park authorities to adjust whatever necessary and

clear confusions, while the last was dealt with by deciding temporary relocations from our main office to Busanze for field work.



