



Empowering Women for Sustainable Conservation of Akanyaru IBA project

[Capacity Building Report]



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Akanyaru wetlands are one of the seven Important Birds and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) we have in Rwanda. However, they were reported as IBA in danger in 2016 by Birdlife International. The wetlands are mostly threatened by anthropogenic activities resulting from population pressure and invasive species such as water hyacinth to list a few. For sustainable conservation of this IBA in danger, Nature Rwanda has received financial support from the Rufford Foundation to empower women as catalyst of change in August 2017. In January 2018, Nature Rwanda conducted knowledge assessment that informed capacity building programme conducted from February through May 2018. Thus, Nature Rwanda has organized four training for 25 members of KOSUMU with focus on specific topics. The topics covered during those training include the introduction to environment, biodiversity and the role women play in the sustainable conservation and management of Akanyaru wetlands resources for socio-economic development, food web, and production of manure from water hyacinth to improve agricultural yield. By contextualizing the training and engaging women during discussions, it is without doubt that more skills and knowledge were acquired by KOSUMU members and the next step is putting into practice the package received during training for effective contribution towards addressing challenges listed above. They have pledged to become practitioners, advocates, and ambassadors for sustainable conservation of this IBA in danger within the community they come from.

TRAINING SESSIONS

- ❖ *The first training focused on introducing the concept of environment, biodiversity and conservation, and natural resources management to KOSUMU members. Over this training, the focus was on Akanyaru wetlands Nature Resources Management and their contribution to sustainable development of the country in general and communities where they come from.*
- ❖ *The second training intended to providing a general overview on the natural resources from Akanyaru wetlands, challenges and opportunities. Moreover, during this training KOSUMU members were introduced to different ways they can contribute on wetlands conservation while stressing on the role of women in sustainable conservation of these resources, and how their conservation can contribute to improving their livelihood.*
- ❖ *The third training intended at enabling KOSUMU members to understand the role of producers, consumers, or decomposers, through food chains and webs in order to understand truly the ecosystem functioning coining the role local community should play to ensure sustainable use of Akanyaru wetland's resources.*
- ❖ *The fourth training highlighted the procedures of water hyacinth harvesting and all steps undertaken while producing manure from water hyacinth and its contribution to improving local livelihood.*

BACKGROUND

Akanyaru wetlands are among the seven Important Birds and Biodiversity Areas - IBAs we have in Rwanda. Those wetlands are very important to the adjacent communities; they provide goods and services. They are also home to endangered and endemic species to the Albertine Rift. Despite their crucial role for Rwandans and their endemism, they are seriously threatened by anthropogenic activities resulting from pressure from increasing population as well as natural phenomenon. Since 2016, the IBA is classified among IBAs in danger by Birdlife International.

Nature Rwanda, with financial support from the Rufford Foundation, is implementing a project entitled “Empowering women for sustainable Conservation of Akanyaru IBA” that aims at disconnecting local communities from Akanyaru IBA for its sustainable conservation while socio-economically empowering women who are major stakeholders in conservation of this IBA in danger. This is being achieved by promoting cooperative Sugira Musenyi - KOSUMU for the conservation of Akanyaru, removing water hyacinth for the restoration and rehabilitation of birds and other animals’ habitat, and promoting off farms jobs through adding value on the cooperative’s handcraft products produced from water hyacinth. The sustainability of this project relies on assessing, documenting and use of indigenous knowledge by the communities for conservation of this IBA.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The knowledge assessment conducted at the beginning of this project revealed that KOSUMU members are not aware of biological diversity that are present in Akanyaru wetland and how they can contribute to its conservation. This pose great challenges in conservation of this IBA in danger as you can’t conserve something you don’t know or worse enough you don’t care about. On the other hand, women are challenged by lacking the knowledge, socio-economic empowerment, encouragement, and financial capacity while they are key stakeholders. The assessment found that some activities are done only by men such as harvesting water hyacinth but rather needed involvement of women for sustainable conserving Akanyaru wetlands.

Therefore, this report shed light on capacity building sessions conducted since February 2018 through May 2018. It is worth noting that the sessions aimed at addressing the gap identified during the knowledge assessment conducted at the begining of the project.

Therefore, four training sessions were organized for 25 active members of KOSUMU since February through May 2018 aiming at building the capacity of KOSUMU members for sustainable conservation of Akanyaru wetlands. The theme covered were (1) Introduction to environment, biodiversity and the role of women in sustainable conservation of Akanyaru wetlands, (2) The impacts of sustainable management of Akanyaru wetland's resources to the socio-economic development and the role of women in conservation, (3) FOOD WEB GAME - The role of local community to the sustainable use Akanyaru wetland’s resources, and (4) Producing manure from water hyacinth to increase agriculture yield.

METHODOLOGY

The trainings were organized over the weekend to facilitate community participation, with three sessions on the first day and two sessions on the second day. Each session was designed to last about one hour thirty and minutes divided into four main parts which are introductory presentation for about 15 to 20 minutes, small group discussion composed by three to five individuals for about 40 minutes, group presentation and open discussion for about 20 minutes, and conclusion and take away message by the trainer for 5 to 10 minutes. The trainers were from University of Rwanda, Nature Rwanda and independent researchers in the disciplines of agriculture, environmental, and biodiversity conservation.

TRAINING 1: Introduction to environment, biodiversity and the role of women in sustainable conservation of Akanyaru wetlands led by Prudence Ndabasanze, Executive Director of Nature Rwanda

The main goals of this two-day training were to introduce the concept of environment, biodiversity and conservation, and natural resources management to KOSUMU members. Over this training, the focus was on Akanyaru wetlands Resources Management and their contribution to the sustainable development of the local community and the country in general.

The five presentations delivered during this training covered the concepts of the environment, biological diversity and conservation, nature resources management, and the concept of sustainable development with the focus on Akanyaru wetlands.

“Akanyaru wetlands are very important in our daily life, it is the source of food we eat like fish, sources of raw materials we are using in our cooperatives, and mostly the source of water although it is not clean” explained Marie Claire Bazubagira, an active member of the cooperative for over the past five years while presenting on behalf of her group. Because of its importance in their daily life, Musenyi community members are aware of the threat those wetlands are facing. “This wetland is greatly threatened by water hyacinth that increases overtime...” stressed Ridivine Uwimanirora during group discussion. Interestingly, KOSUMU members know what they can do to tackle challenges that this wetland is facing. “We must conserve these wetlands for our own interests and that of our children’s as it is the sources of foods, water, and other materials that we depend on.”, coined Esther Kabatesi responding to the question asked by the trainer. Moreover, local community now are aware of the interests that will arise with its conservation. “If we conserve those wetlands, we will attract tourists and generate income through job creation, revenue sharing and other initiatives.” Marcel Sekamana added while Liliane Tuyizere concluded saying “We ‘women’ are among key stakeholders for sustainable conservation of those wetlands as we interact with these wetlands at daily basis and then therefore engaging us in their conservation will led to tangible results.”

In addition to presentations, group works were organized in order to engage participants and contextualizing the training to tackle local issue. Each group, was given time to reflect on what they learnt and respond to a specific question raised by the trainer, and share their findings with the whole group. Thus, the group discussions led to the measures that can be taken for sustainable conservation of Akanyaru wetlands including the removal of water hyacinth in the wetlands and transform them into handcraft products and manure that should be promoted; planting trees and fodder in the buffer zone to reduce erosion, grazing and bush burning should be reported, and agriculture encroachment should also be addressed by decision makers, to list a few.

TRAINING 2: The impacts of sustainable management of Akanyaru wetland's resources to the socio-economic development and the role of women in conservation
by Iradukunda Christella Suavis, Independent Researcher

The main objective of this one-day training was to provide a general overview on the natural resources from Akanyaru wetlands as well as challenges and opportunities. Moreover, during this training KOSUMU members touched on how they can contribute to its conservation while promoting the role of women in sustainable conservation of these resources, and how their conservation can contribute to improving their livelihood.

The presentations delivered during this training highlighted the role of women in conservation of Akanyaru wetlands, how they can start contributing through KOSUMU, and how they can use Akanyaru resources for their social and economic development in a sustainable way. It was stressed that for sustainable conservation of Akanyaru wetlands, documenting its natural resources and their contribution to the wellbeing of local community is of great importance.

“Women have to play an important role in conservation of Akanyaru wetlands as we are the ones who interacts with it most of the time. We can contribute in many ways; for example, by planting erosion control and agroforestry trees, and advocating starting within our family...” quoting Chantal Akimana during her presentation. Conservation is not limited in space and time according to KOSUMU Members. *“There is no specific time to conduct activities intended to conserve Akanyaru wetlands, we can do them any time we get an opportunity in order to multiply impacts”* coined Jean Pierre Munyejabo.

The benefits of sustainable conservation of Akanyaru wetlands include but not limited to poverty alleviation through handcrafts and manure produced from water hyacinth that generate income and increase yield respectively, improved health through using clean water and getting clean air, and access to households' materials needs at their basis such as bags, hats, and ornaments.

The group discussions have led to the following conclusions:

- ❖ KOSUMU members can contribute to the removal and transformation of water hyacinth into handcraft products and manure to increase their income and agriculture yield respectively.
- ❖ At household level, different measures can be taken to improve the conservation status of those wetlands such as advocating in their communities starting from their respective family and raise awareness on the role that everyone can play for conservation of Akanyaru wetlands.
- ❖ Encroachment, dispose of non-biodegradable wastes, grazing and bush fire were listed among threats to Akanyaru wetlands and reporting to concerned authority was encouraged.

TRAINING 3: FOOD WEB GAME - The role of local community to the sustainable use of Akanyaru wetland's resources led by Thomas Kanyempura from Nature Rwanda

This game intended at enabling KOSUMU members to understand the role of producers, consumers, and decomposers, through food chains and webs in order to understand truly the ecosystem functioning coining the role local community should play to ensure sustainable use of Akanyaru wetland's resources.

The trainer introduced the game and instructions to participants; 41 cards of four different colors were distributed as follow: 26 green cards for producers, 9 white cards for herbivores, 4 red cards for carnivores and 2 yellow cards for decomposers. It is worth noting that each player had to respect game instructions and then behave as the organism presented. Prior to playing that game, training participants were introduced to the game, shown the four types of cards and their respective role was explained. In playing the game:

Producers collect nothing, but chased by herbivores and decomposers.

- Target: To survive

Herbivores must collect as many producers as possible, and chased by carnivores and decomposers;

- Target: collecting more producers to survive

Carnivores must collect as many herbivores as possible and avoid decomposers chasing them.

- Target: collecting more herbivores to survive

Decomposers must collect as many as possible as producers, herbivores and carnivores as possible, they are chased by none.

- Target for collecting as more as possible producers, herbivores and carnivores.

After introducing the game, 16 cards for producers, 5 for herbivores, 2 for carnivores, and 2 for decomposers were distributed and the remain cards were reserved to serve as backup in case taken

by consumer and hold by the trainer who served as the sun providing energy to all. The time spent for both playing and discussing on the game were an hour thirty minutes each followed by group discussion.

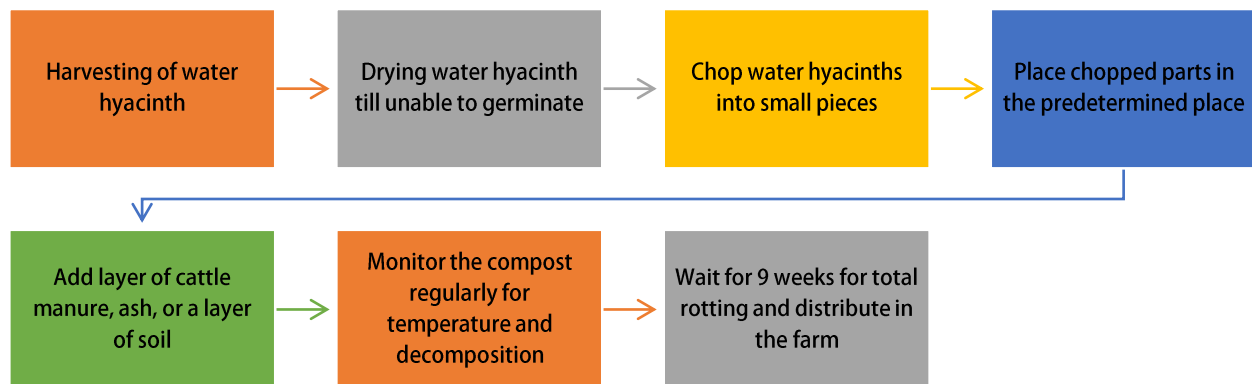
Finally, the facilitator together with trainees identified the following insights from the game based on questions formulated related to effective analysis and linking the game with the reality in the nature. The discussions led to:

- ❖ The main adaptation used by those chased was running, escaping and hiding; and these were found impossible for all biodiversity especially plants, and biodiversity adapted to a specific habitat. Therefore, participants were encouraged to use Akanyaru resources in sustainable ways as they can't run from them most of the time.
- ❖ Everything in nature depends on another, and once one element is disrupted, the entire ecosystem is destroyed. Therefore, to preserve Akanyaru wetlands, local community should be encouraged to protect each species mostly those threatened in order not to interrupt the ecosystem.
- ❖ Ecosystem goods and services benefit and sustain human life on earth, and for sustainability, natural resources must be used wisely and efficiently mostly by local community as they are the ones who interact with it often.
- ❖ Everything has specific habitat and requirements in nature, therefore require protecting and conserving every component of the environment for sustainable conservation and development.

TRAINING 4: Producing manure from water hyacinth to increase agricultural yield by *Patrick Mugiraneza, University of Rwanda*

The objective of this session was to document the procedures and challenges of water hyacinth harvesting, highlight all steps undertaken while producing manure from water hyacinth, and its contribution to improving local livelihood.

Water hyacinth is a herb which grows in wetlands and large water bodies, and threatens the biodiversity. After introducing the threats that water hyacinth pose to Akanyaru ecosystem and local community specifically, participants were taken through the major steps in manure production from water hyacinth as in the figure below:



This manure can be used directly during plantation or used as mulch near crops.

After the presentation, Group discussions came to some conclusion: KOSUMU members can remove water hyacinth and transform them into manure and handcraft materials and prevent their regeneration, mobilize the community about the nuisance of water hyacinth and methods to eradicate them. Two obstacles were highlighted such as low financial capacity and lack of awareness, but the last was addressed through today's training and along this project implementation. The lack of financial capacity is rooted in materials and poverty of families. It was noted that changing attitude was the best approach, also acknowledging the value of Akanyaru wetlands in terms of goods and services to the community and biodiversity value, link it with the bright future and the next generation.

CONCLUSION

Akanyaru wetlands are one of the seven IBAs in Rwanda. These wetlands are home to enormous biodiversity including some threatened species. They also support the livelihood of more than 100,000 people who live around them. The overexploitation of Akanyaru wetlands resources has put it in danger with urgent conservation need. Thus, for sustainable conservation of those wetlands, and at the same time building capacity of local community through KOSUMU, this project is being implemented by Nature Rwanda with the financial support from the Rufford foundation.

The trainings have contributed to the documentation and increased understanding of the role of women in conservation, and has also promoted awareness on biodiversity and natural resources of Akanyaru wetlands in the community, and acknowledgment of the role of local community members in sustainable use of Akanyaru wetlands' resources. KOSUMU members learned components of the environment and the role of each component in ecosystem viability, and how human activities impact the environment unless sustainably managed. The training also increased awareness on effective removal of water hyacinth in Akanyaru wetlands, transform them into

manure and various handcrafts for improving their livelihood, and KOSUMU members became aware of the role of sustainable management of Akanyaru wetland resources to their socio-economic development.

Based on comments and appreciation from KOSUMU members, the training has answered their questions they have been wondering themselves for a long time and covered the gap in sustainable conservation of Akanyaru wetlands while ensuring their active participation in conservation of the wetlands.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on brief and informal assessments by trainers, the following recommendations were presented:

- i. We have to make environment conservation everyone's concern in order to multiply impacts mostly in community around key Biodiversity Areas – KBAs / Important Birds and Biodiversity Areas – IBAs.
- ii. In order to achieve sustainable conservation of Akanyaru wetlands, it was recommended that local community should be empowered prior to disconnecting them to that wetlands
- iii. To increase self-reliance through removing water hyacinth from Akanyaru wetlands, transform them into manure and various handcraft materials to increase yield and generate income.
- iv. To be ambassadors and advocators of Akanyaru wetlands by sharing information so that it should reach to the rest of the community for successful and sustainable conservation of Akanyaru wetlands.

ANNEX: PHOTO GALERY









