

**STRENGTHENING MONITORING SYSTEMS FOR ADAPTIVE
MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION OF FOREST ELEPHANTS IN
OMO FOREST RESERVE, SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA**

PROGRESS REPORT

By

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Introduction

The broad objective of the project is to improve and strengthen monitoring systems for adaptive management and protection of forest elephants in Omo Forest Reserve, Southwestern Nigeria. The specific objectives are to: (i) recruit and train elephant monitoring teams to monitor and prevent illegal activities in elephant sanctuary and adjoining areas; (ii) establish monitoring systems for protection of elephants within the project area; (iii) secure and maintain the habitat of the elephant including their migratory corridors within the project area and; (iv) consolidate the education and awareness raising programme on elephant conservation and management among key stakeholders including policy makers, local communities and other interest groups.

Activities and Achievements

1. Project planning and setting out

The project activities began with a review of project objectives, identifying possible challenges/constraints, and delimitations to successful project implementation. This involved a number of meetings between the project team and the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) on one hand, as well as the project team and some local communities considered critical to successful implementation of the project on the other.

The meetings between the project team and the NCF focused on modalities for implementing the project objectives and its deliverables. Duties and roles towards achieving these objectives were assigned among team members. Cost implications and logistics on proposed activities were also discussed. The implementation of SMART as a monitoring system for protection of elephants within the project area was further deliberated upon. It was observed that there is need to put on hold the operation of SMART owing to the fact that the NCF, Wild Planet Trust and other supporting partners of Forest Elephant Protection Initiative in the project area are already discussing requirements and timeline required to implement SMART in Omo the project area on a long term sustainable basis. However, it was agreed that capacity building and training on SMART may be undertaken pending the later period of its final implementation in the project area.

2. Stepping-up sensitivity and awareness on elephant conservation

The need to step up sensitivity and awareness on elephant conservation in communities within the project area was further established. There was also the issue of illegal communities and the challenge they pose to elephant conservation. It was observed that the major challenge to elephant conservation in the project area come from members of illegal communities who continuously purchase farming rights from community heads generally called the *Baalé*. These communities are deemed illegal as they do not exist in the historical maps of the forest reserve. They also do not have documents that confer any legality on their existence. However, their removal is subject to the willingness of the government to do the needful. It was recommended that the persistence of the forest elephants and other groups of biodiversity can be ensured only if human pressure is reduced within the protected area.

In recent time, there has been mass exit of elephants from the reserve to adjoining communities. Since the event, the government has halted all logging activities within the reserve, though farming activities still continue in some of the core area of the reserve. This again only reiterate the fact that the most potent way forward is to restore the forest habitat by halting all activities that destroy the protected areas. This calls for effective joint action in the removal of illegal communities from the core of the reserve.

The project team in November, 2019 carried out another round of sensitivity and awareness campaign on elephant conservation in communities within the project area. The communities/enclaves visited were those wherein elephants have been reportedly sighted in recent time. These include Atikiriji-odo and Ogunbakin, two communities at the edge of the Omo forest reserve. These enclaves were prioritised as it has been found that the elephants are leaving the preferred core of the habitat where vegetation is being decimated and moving to these edges where farms are already established and the chances of finding human grown foods are high.

The sensitization and awareness campaign involved a preliminary visit to these communities. Meetings were held with the heads of the communities who then mobilized members of their communities for the event. The sessions were carried out in two major languages, Yoruba (which is the major language spoken in the project area) and Pidgin English (spoken largely by indigenes and non-indigenes living in the community). The message focused on the need to conserve the elephants and protect the remaining forest which is the preferred habitat of these elephants. There was also the emphasis on the status of the elephant and the role we all have to play in preventing the local extirpation of the African forest elephant. Finally, there was an interactive session on the role of the people in the event of an elephant invasion or encounter, as well as measures to prevent human-elephant conflicts.

Generally, the outreach programmes were designed to increase understanding of elephant conservation issues, exchange opinions and experiences, and establish a dialogue among sectors of the community. Overall, the outreach has a huge potential towards contributing to the conservation of elephants and other endangered species. The receptions in all communities visited were homely and community members were generally enthusiastic. The benefit in the short-run may not be visible, but in the long-run it surely will. It is an investment for the future. If communities are knowledgeable and understand the importance of conservation, only then would they change their behaviour to support conservation initiatives. In the coming months, we plan to continue the outreach programme in more communities.

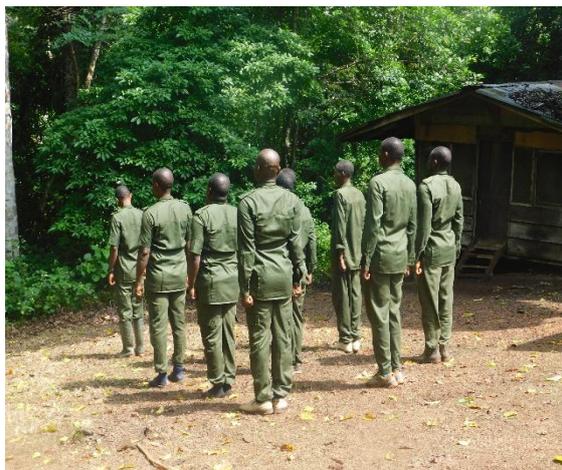
3. Recruitment and training of Rangers

The Forest Elephant Protection Initiative in the project area is supported by several partners including the Rufford Foundation, NCF, Wild Planet Trust and others. Project activities are carried out in partnership with the government. In order to control and arrest the illegal activities occurring in the project area with respect to the forest elephants, the project has employed local community scouts to arrest the further expansion of illegal activities in the protected area. The Ogun state government in its support also employed and deployed some of its forestry officers to the project to support the local scouts. All employed officers were trained, equipped and have begun patrols and enforcement in the protected areas of the reserve. Culprits when caught are booked and transferred to the Ministry of Forestry of Ogun state. It is hoped that this step will help reduce the rate of illegal activities in elephant sanctuary and adjoining areas.

4. Securing and maintaining the habitat of the elephants including their migratory corridors within the project area

The boundary areas of elephant range which required protection from encroachers are already mapped for installation of patrol stations, signage and beacons. Some of signboards have been produced and installed in the reserve. It is hoped that these will further serve as education and awareness signs for illegal farmers and settlers to steer clear of elephant ranging areas and habitat.

PHOTO SPEAK







PARTNERS IN ACTION

OMO-SHASHA-OLUWA FOREST ELEPHANT INITIATIVE

ELEPHANT CONSERVATION PROJECT

HELP SAVE ENDANGERED SPECIES

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OMO-SHASHA-OLUWA FOREST INITIATIVE

"Elephants live in our forest here in Omo Forest Reserve, Ogun State. They are not found in many other places. They are blessings and natural heritage to us, our children and environment at large. The forest itself cannot exist without the elephant because elephants help spread seeds, facilitate seed germination and encourage new growth of many trees. Together we need to join the government to conserve and protect our elephants. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has classified the forest elephant Vulnerable to Extinction - meaning this majestic wildlife may not be seen anymore in our forest. But you and I can stop this from happening. One step is not to allow elephant poachers into our communities because killing elephant is illegal and a serious offence in Nigeria. Another step is to stop deforestation and encroachment into elephant sanctuary within the reserve."

"Erin n gbe ninu igbo Oba wa ni Omo ni Ipinle Ogun. Won ko si ni opolopo igbo miran mo. Erin je ibukun ati oun adayeba fun wa, awon omo wa ati agbegbe wa fapapo. Igbo ko le da wa laisi erin nitoripe erin nfon sio ka, won si tun jeki opolopo igbo wa. Ani lati Fowo s'owoppo pelu ijoba lati se itaju ati idabobo fun awon erin wa. Awon aig agbaye f'ori mo juto idabobo gboogo nikan abemi (IUCN) sopo ipalara ti da ba erin eyi ti ole fa iparusun fun won. Eyi tumo sipe erin lakatabu le di oun ti a ko ni ri mo ninu igbo wa. Sugbon emi ati iwọ le d'awo eyi duro. Igbesa kan ni ki a ma gba enikeni laaye lati pa erin ni agbegbe wa to riipe pipa erin je iwa sipo to lodi si erin to si ni ijiya ni la to ri mo ni abo erin orile ede wa Nigeria. Ona miran ti ala gba da wo iparusun ba erin ni ki a ji na si kiko lo ayi ka wa yi, papa julọ awon aye ti won ti lakale fun erin lati ma gbe ninu igbo oba wa ni Omo"

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NewsFeed

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