

Project Update: September 2023

In implementing the project, several activities were carried out. Some were carried out in collaboration with local stakeholders, local organisations and project site authorities.

1. Project presentation in the project area

Members of the project team, members of the NGO SOS Biodiversity and its President joined the local communities on Thursday November 10, 2022, in Iladji (a village bordering the Dogo-Kétou forest) for the project launch.

After welcoming remarks by the Delegate of Iladji, Mr. KAKPO briefly introduced the NGO SOS Biodiversity. For the most part, the communities remembered the NGO and the activities carried out in the past project.

The programme continued with the following points:

- Presentation of the present project by its coordinator: the project was presented to the communities through its objectives, activities and partner "The Rufford Foundation."
- Organisation of communities to achieve objectives.
- Description of major activities: nursery production of seedlings (endangered native species) and beekeeping are the main activities to be carried out with the community.

After these various points had been discussed, the communities agreed on the principles of the project and the planning of activities was defined with the communities.

At the end of this contact stage, the delegation visited CEG Iladji to follow up on the 1 ha plantation of *Acacia auriculiformis* planted on June 17, 2021, as part of the first phase entitled "Dogo-Ketou Forest (Benin): Contribution to its conservation through resource status assessment, training and local community empowerment".

The project team met with CEG Iladji officials, the Director Mr AREDEKOU Emmanuel and the General Supervisor Mr ADEGBITE David. This unannounced visit ended with moderate satisfaction. Around 60% of the plants survived, but with an average height of over 2 m. It was noted that 90% of the plants that survived persisted in the agroforestry system that had been set up. Under conditions of low resource availability for plantation maintenance, the agroforestry system is proving highly effective. This system will also be used in this second phase.

Photos from Activity 1 below:



2. Raising awareness among local communities about biodiversity conservation and the Dogo-Ketou forest and its natural resources

As part of the project, an awareness-raising session was held on December 27, 2022, in Effèoutè with the communities bordering the Dogo-Kétou forest. The session was mainly held with the "Mandjè kobadjè" women's association, in the presence of the village's elected representatives. This association specialises in the production of cassava flour, known locally as Gari. This activity consumes a lot of wood, generally illegally collected from the forest.

The members of the community present were made aware of the importance of the forest and the need to preserve it for future generations. Emphasis was placed on environmental preservation and the sustainability of natural resources.

A crucial step was also taken with the formalization of the women's association. The NGO SOS Biodiversity's Focal Point, Mr. Ordo Bordeau Segbozo, oversaw the formalization process, ensuring continued support and sustainable development for the "Mandjè Kobadjè" association.

During discussions with the women, the project team promised that the "Mandjè kobadjè" association would be trained in beekeeping and provided with beekeeping equipment. This ecological activity will improve and diversify the association's source of income. The women also asked for support in formalizing their association.

Photos from Activity 2:





3. Training local communities in Dogo-Kétou in nursery management and seedling production

As part of the implementation of the project's objectives, the project team organised a training course in nursery plant production, aimed at building the capacity of around twenty young people and women. This initiative took place on March 8, 2023, in the heart of Kétou center. The main aim of the training was to enable participants to master production techniques for native plants such as *Pterocarpus erinaceus*, *Azelia africana*, *Khaya senegalensis* and *Caesalpinia bonduc*, as well as agroforestry species of interest such as *Acacia auriculiformis*, *Terminalia superba* and *Anacardium occidentale*. These species have been carefully selected for their crucial importance in the restoration of degraded land around the Dogo-Kétou forest.

The training was orchestrated under the expert supervision of Mr. MOUNZOU Faustin, an experienced trainer in this field. Thanks to his teachings, participants acquired essential skills in nursery plant production. Over 500 pots were successfully sown by the participants, representing a significant step towards regenerating the region's degraded land.

This training represents not only an opportunity to learn and develop skills, but also a concrete investment in the preservation of local biodiversity and the restoration of the

Dogo-Kétou forest ecosystem.

Photos from Activity 3:



4. Training in Beekeeping implementation and donation of equipment

More than just a day of celebration, International Women's Day (IWD) took on a profound meaning, providing an opportunity for serious reflection and resolute action to reduce inequalities between women and men. With this in mind, the project team has included its project "Conservation and Enhancement of the Biodiversity of the Dogo-Ketou Region (Benin) and Empowerment of Local Communities through Nature-Based Solutions" (CCFDK2).

On March 8, 2023, in the village of Effèoutè, located on the edge of the Dogo-Kétou forest, the project team and members of the NGO SOS Biodiversity organised a beekeeping training session specially dedicated to the women of the "Mandjè kobadjè" group. This initiative was carried out in collaboration with the Effèoutè village chief and his advisors, who gave their enthusiastic support to this undertaking.

Over the course of the day, members of the women's group were equipped with 15 beehives and beehive stands, a gesture that embodies the project's vision of empowerment and sustainability. Under the careful guidance of trainer Vincent Adjibode, the women installed the hives to the highest standards.

Beekeeping was chosen for its ecological characteristics and its potential as an alternative income-generating activity. For the women of the "Mandjè kobadjè" group, this training marks the start of a new economic opportunity, while helping to preserve the environment.

In closing the training, the group's President spoke on behalf of all the women, expressing their gratitude to the project coordinator, the members of SOS Biodiversity, its President, and the financial partner, The Rufford Foundation. She also expressed the group's renewed commitment to investing further in honey production, while taking careful care of the hives. This initiative promises not only to strengthen the women's economic self-sufficiency, but also to contribute to the preservation of local biodiversity.

Photos from Activity 4:





5. Raising awareness and planting trees

The planting of the trees produced in the nursery took place during the commemoration of the International Day for Biodiversity (IDB2023), under the evocative theme "From agreement to action: Rebuilding biodiversity". The project team, together with members of the NGO SOS Biodiversity, with the support of the Ouémé-Plateau Forestry Inspectorate, orchestrated a series of awareness-raising and tree-planting activities. These significant events took place on May 22, 2023, at the Collège d'Enseignement Général (CEG) ILADJI and the École Primaire Publique (EPP) ADIGOUN.

On the morning of the said day, at CEG ILADJI, some fifty enthusiastic students were mobilised for this special occasion. They had the opportunity to learn about the crucial importance of trees and the Dogo-Kétou forest for their local environment. They were also introduced to the various stages of tree planting. This awareness-raising session was brilliantly led by the project manager.

In all, around 400 seedlings, including indigenous, agroforestry and endangered species such as *Azelia africana*, *Pterocarpus erinaceus*, *Khaya senegalensis*, *Acacia auriculiformis* and *Anacardium occidentale*, supplied by local communities, were planted by the students. It is essential to stress that this activity was carried out as part of the "Conservation and Enhancement of the Biodiversity of the Dogo-Ketou Region (Benin) and Empowerment of Local Communities through Nature-Based Solutions".

Photos from Activity 5:



