

Project Update: March 2023

Stakeholders' engagement at Emi woro Community in Bassa Local Government, Kogi state

The first visit was made to the Emi-woro community in the Bassa Local Government area of Kogi state, Nigeria to discuss the vulture conservation project. The team met with the head of the community and group to discuss the project's objectives and potential benefits to the community and global health (Figs 1-2). During the meeting, the team gained insightful information on the hooded vulture in the community, the local perception of the species, and the state of the vulture population in the area.

The community members expressed their deep connection with vultures, which they regarded as an integral part of their community. However, they also revealed that there is an increasing demand for vulture body parts in their community, with people from the metropolis coming to the area to search for vulture parts. The community members were uncertain about the reasons for this demand. Additionally, they shared that a vulture egg can be sold for as much as \$181, making it a lucrative business in the community. These factors have contributed to the decline in the vulture population in their community.



Figure 1: Meeting with the community head of Emi-woro community (Alhaji Ibrahim Hassan, seated in the middle) in Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi state Nigeria.



Figure 2: Conversation with the head of Timber loggers in the community.

Stakeholders' engagement at Kpokap Community in Zango Kataf Local Government, Kaduna state

The stakeholder engagement at Kpokap Community in Zango Kataf Local Government, Kaduna state, was a success. The team had the privilege of meeting with the local head of the community, Mr. Joshua Goni, who took them to various vulture breeding sites. Interestingly, one of the major roosts is a tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) located in his compound, which has been consistently used by the vultures for years. The breeding tree also holds historical significance for the community as it was the former ancestral palace of the king of the entire kingdom.

During the meeting, Mr. Goni shared with the team the local perception of vultures in the community and the challenges the species faces. Despite the community's non-hostile stance towards vultures, people from the metropolis and hunters come to the area in search of different parts of the vultures. Mr. Goni expressed concerns about the rapid decline of vultures in the community and elsewhere.

Mr. Goni also discussed the challenges faced by the hooded vultures in their community. These include the consistent demand for different materials associated with vultures, with every part of the vulture being important for local medicine and charms. Additionally, the preferred tree used by the vultures for breeding is also under threat due to logging.

The tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) is an economic tree used for making caskets, chairs, and other wooden materials, and its high demand has significantly reduced its numbers within the community.

However, Mr. Goni pledged the community's support to ensure the success of the vulture conservation project by providing the necessary assistance and information on vulture activities. The community is committed to sustaining the programs that will be implemented to stop the gradual loss of the hooded vulture population in their area.



Figure 3: Mr. Joshua Goni having a talk with the Team members on the activities of Hooded Vulture in their community.



Figure 4: Silk-cotton tree (*Ceiba pentandra*), in Hausa it is called *Riimii*.



CHALLENGES

First, the federal government cashless policy has taken a toll on the project as access to funds has been difficult, we only have to rely on cash transfers and at some other point making those transfers are hampered by poor network coverage. However, we've been able to source physical cash for basic expenses while heading to the field.

Also, the preparation for the 2023 general elections and slight political tensions in some areas in close proximity to the study sites have resulted in halting the project till after the election. The project will commence fully again on the 25th March 2023 when the next phase of the project will kick start.