

Project Update: August 2010

Adjacent to the Mpanga gorge, the only natural habitat for *Encephalartos whitelockii* in the whole of the world, are peasant communities living in scattered settlements. The communities' livelihood is dependent on socio-economic activities such as cultivation of food crops and livestock keeping at a subsistence scale. Charcoal burning has also served as an alternative to meeting livelihood needs for some people in the community. The continuous dependency on land and its resources for livelihood has previously mounted into degradation of the cycad habitat due to activities by the local communities, at the expense of conserving the cycad population.

Since the inception of the project in February 2010, efforts have been made to raise awareness on the ecological and conservation importance of *Encephalartos whitelockii*. An awareness meeting was successfully held with community members. Other subsequent activities that have been conducted so far are; capacity building for local communities mainly in the areas of seed selection, collection and processing of cycad seeds for propagation, trainings in planning and preparation of a good nursery bed.

Collections and processing of seeds for propagation started in February 2010, and the activity is on-going alongside propagation in the established nursery. This is so because the availability of mature seeds is varied. The limited population of mature and reproducing cycads does not permit a "one time" collection of seeds in massive numbers. Seeds are being collected, processed and sowed in the propagation plots in the nursery based on their availability and collection intervals.

Apparently an estimate of 500 seedlings have successfully emerged out of the soil. Following the regular nursery management practices that include; weeding, watering and hardening-off among others, the mature seedlings are routinely transplanted into potting tubes and put under the shade (covered with a nursery net on top).

Still to be done:

- Seed collection and processing for propagation which is an on-going activity as explained above.
- Nursery management i.e. in the propagation plots for sowed seeds and germinated seedlings as well as for the potted seedlings under the nursery shade.
- Continued awareness raising.
- Production of poster to be used for awareness raising. A template of the poster was developed in July, 2010, and consultations from colleagues in the conservation fraternity between the months of July and August, 2010, are to be accomplished soon. The purpose is to seek for individual opinions on whether the publication (poster) to be produced would portray and convey the intended message to the public. The collective opinions will be considered to revise the template and have the final production ready during the month of September, 2010.