



Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus and Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund Covid-19 Rapid Response Round - Final Report

Due within two months of the end date of the Rapid Response Round project

(maximum 6 pages)

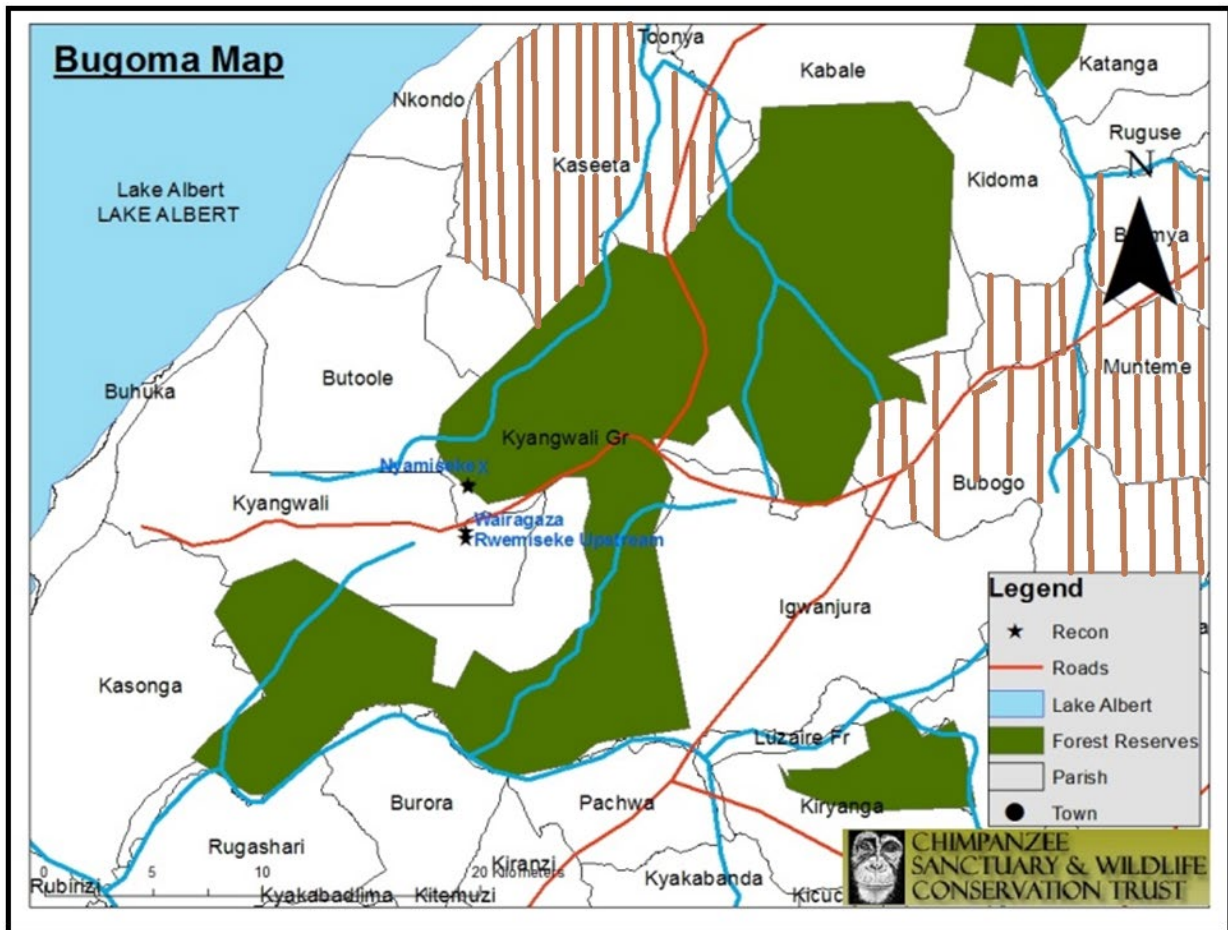
Project reference	CV19RR25
If linked with an ongoing project, please include that project reference here (e.g. IWT001)	25-028
Project title	Assessing COVID-19 pandemic risk to biodiversity and community wellbeing, Uganda
Country/ies	Uganda
Lead organisation	Chimpanzee Sanctuary and Wildlife Conservation Trust
Partner institution(s)	4 Community Based Organisations [established under 25-028]
Start/end date of project	4 th January -30 th March 2021
Which fund was this project relevant to?	Darwin Initiative / Darwin Plus / Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund
Grant value (£)	£59,708.00
Project Leader name	Dr Joshua Rukundo
Report author(s) and date	Dr Joshua Rukundo & Phillip Kihumuro 14 th May 2021

1. Project Summary

COVID-19 hit Uganda at a critical time. Farmers were preparing for their normal agricultural season and the Chimpanzee Trust was progressing with project implementation of the Project 25-028(main project). This project therefore focused on addressing the challenges related to human wildlife conflict in the Bugoma landscape. Increased agricultural action and population in the landscape exerts pressure on the existing forest resources and therefore threatening the survival of chimpanzees in the corridor forests. As such, efforts have been undertaken to address this conflict through innovative approaches to conservation. One of such approaches has been the adoption of sustainable farming methods and creation of non-palatable buffers along the forest area to reduce conflict. This is in addition to awareness raising and engagement with other partners. The main project 25-028 had initially provided farming inputs in form of seed to farmers to plant. However, given the impacts of COVID-19 related to travel restrictions, an increased urban to rural migration, farmers either consumed the seed as a form of a safety net or didn't get opportunities to monitor and manage their farms appropriately. This therefore challenged the project implementation. Additionally, there was increased suspect about the linkages between COVID-19 and overall biodiversity implementation in the landscape especially related to *increased resource uptake, the potential linkage between wildlife and COVID-19 and the impact of the socio-economic livelihoods.*

The project thus linked to the 25-028 through accelerating the implementation of actions and assess the impacts of COVID-19 on the potential implementation and related actions.

Actions were therefore implemented in the Bugoma Landscape of Western Uganda-one of the major areas still hosting wild populations of chimpanzees. The area is under pressure of increased forest conversion for both commercial[sugarcane] agriculture and subsistence farming.



2. Project Achievements

The project was conceptualised to build on Project 25-028(main project) whose overall outcome was to develop a scalable community adaptability program that supports people to avoid, minimize and mitigate wildlife-caused damage and improve livelihoods of frontline communities around the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) in Western Uganda. The targets therein were challenged due to the COVID-19 impacts on the communities. As a result, the Rapid Response Grant has been able to accelerate implementation of the previous targets that had been delayed by COVID-19 impacts.

The aims of the project were;

To increase the awareness of the COVID-19 virus, its effects and assess the risk to human and primate community health. The project shall investigate the prevalence of the virus/disease in the area to predict the risk to communities and primates as well as the impact of the pandemic to livelihoods and biodiversity in Bugoma Central Forest Reserve landscape.

The project started with an Inception meeting that brought together 27 stakeholders representing government agencies, private sector, conservation NGOs, media from the Bugoma landscape [see inception report]. During the meeting held on January 22nd 2021, participants provided guidance and ideas for effective project implementation and were informed about the proposed

actions. From the meeting, these stakeholders formed bedrock for engagement and project implementation.

Specifically, the project

- a) Sourced and distributed quality seed of non-palatable crops to over 320 farmers in the Bugoma landscape. This was undertaken through a bottom-up approach; where individual farmers indicated what specific non-palatable crop, they preferred. 70kg of onion seed with capacity to plant 35 acres of agricultural land has been distributed to 70 farmers. Additionally, 250 farmers across the Bugoma landscape were provided with Irish potato seed totalling to 75,000kg with ability to plant 125 acres of land. In total 160 acres of agricultural farm has been planted with non-palatable crops. Out of these, 70% were women. The recipients of the seed followed a selection criterion that focused on benefiting those members of the established community associations from 25-028 who had not previously got any inputs(see attached guidance on farmer selection)
- b) Sampled and ring tested 222 community members through a voluntary testing scheme for COVID-19 as part of the assessment of the impact of COVID-19 and linkages with zoonotics in the landscape. Using both the Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDT) antigen tests and a second sample collected and transferred to the Central Public Health Laboratory for confirmatory tests, the results indicated no prevalence of Covid-19 at the time of assessment. 53.2% of those that participated in this voluntary exercise were female. Out of the results, some of the recommendations that the public health experts provided related to Chimpanzee Trust working with the local government health teams to develop a risk communication and social mobilization strategy for addressing prevention and control of COVID-19 infection transmission and Biodiversity conservation initiatives. This should highlight the need for management of zoonotics and other potential diseases but complimenting the awareness raising already being undertaken through the radio stations. Additionally, it was recommended that with the current COVID-19 vaccination program, the Trust needs to work with Ministry of Health to ensure the population in their area of operations are vaccinated.
- c) Supported the assessment of the impacts of COVID-19 on the socio-economic livelihoods of the individuals in the Bugoma landscape. Working with 185 respondents sampled across the 4 project parishes, the results indicate an increased curtailment on access to social services brought about by restricted movements; changes in feeding with communities depending more on home-grown foodstuffs and less to foodstuffs bought from the market; retardation of education with schools due to lockdowns leading to drop-out but also an increased access to forest products and more agricultural labour available to the farming households.
- d) Executed an assessment of the impacts of COVID-19 on the biodiversity in the Bugoma landscape. The results indicate that there were more incidences of Human-Wildlife Conflict and encroachment for forest products during the lockdown were high during the COVID-19 lockdown. It will take some time for recovery especially on the biodiversity management and people's wellbeing in the landscape.

The consultant work was undertaken through an open bidding process where a call was [made to the general public](#) to express their interest and proposals were submitted and evaluated according to set criteria

- e) The project has equally established a farmer monitoring framework to assess the implementation of the actions. Randomly selected individuals out of the beneficiaries have been visited to assess their readiness and steps undertaken to grow and manage the non-palatable seed that they were provided with. A first monitoring has already been undertaken and highlights that 80% of the farmers who received inputs had already

planted by the monitoring time [March 2021] and that 50% were practicing early planting. Further details are contained in the monitoring report attached.

The project supported the raising of awareness aligned to conservation and zoonotic disease transfer as a means of minimising spread in communities and transmission to wild chimpanzee populations in the Bugoma Forest Landscape. Specifically crafted messages focusing on the linkages between zoonotic and wildlife conservation were recorded and aired out for a period of two months at one of the leading local FM stations. Spice FM-with a listenership of over 4 million people across the Albertine Rift [Western Uganda, Eastern Congo and Northern Uganda] aired these sessions during the peak times of the day to capture the listenership.

Overall, the project has reached out to approximately 750 households directly with agricultural inputs, ring testing, understanding of COVID-19 through the various expert surveys. Indirectly, this translates to close to 3000 individuals. This is exclusive of the ones reached through radio programs.

An audit of the project was duly conducted at the end of the project period to assess the value for money delivery of the project. Attached to this report is the audit report.

3. Lessons learnt

- a) The use of the community-based organisations that were established reduces the burden of project implementation from the Field Officers. These organisations support the mobilisation and monitoring of the actions on ground and work as a linkage between farmers and the Project Management Unit.
- b) Although there were delays in the remittance of funds, the Chimpanzee Trust was able to mobilise resources to ensure that project activities were executed in time and through best practices.
- c) There was a change in personnel as the originally designated Project Manager [Mr Kasozi Nebat] moved on just before the start of the Project to another organisation. We were able to get a quick replacement to support the project. Mr Kihumuro Phillip oversaw the project implementation with support of the Field Assistants in the landscape.
- d) The project adopted new approaches of doing work given the COVID-19 requirements e.g social distancing and reduced masses to gather. We adopted the use of digital data collection methods using KoboToolbox and use of radio and other multi-media services to engage and reach out to people. These reduce the time spent interfacing with communities and simplify data collection approaches.
- e) The project has also highlighted the need for setting up a robust and all-inclusive monitoring system at the start if results are to be achieved and outcomes observed. It was essential given the short turn around for project activities to ensure that monitoring frameworks and guidance are established and followed through. Working with the community-based organisations and village champions,

4. Other comments and feedback

The project faced challenges with initial funding. There was an initial delay in the transfer of advance funds for the project, which were further delayed by complications with the bank transfers, due to both the political climate in the country, with authorities wary of NGOs receiving funds from European countries in the election period, as well as miscommunications with the bank, following the opening of a new GBP account by the project. However, the bank was able to provide financing for the project to enable activities to proceed, using the grant agreement as collateral.

The time period for the assessments as well as submission of final reports and dissemination of results to stakeholders, was a little challenging to the consultants, but they were able to deliver

in time. A workshop to disseminate these results shall be organised in due course to the relevant stakeholders.