

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Annual Report

1. Darwin Project Information

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| Project Ref. Number | 162/13/031 |
| Project Title | <i>Pioneering an Innovative Conservation Approach in Sierra Leone's Gola Forest</i> |
| Country(ies) | <i>Sierra Leone</i> |
| UK Contractor | <i>Royal Society for the Protection of Birds</i> |
| Partner Organisation(s) | <i>Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL); Forestry Division (FD) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security, Sierra Leone.</i> |
| Darwin Grant Value | <i>£133,900</i> |
| Start/End dates | <i>15 Oct 04 to 30 September 07</i> |
| Reporting period (1 Apr 200x to 31 Mar 200y) and report number (1,2,3..) | <i>15 Oct 04 to 30 Apr 05 Annual Report #1</i> |
| Project website | <i>None, but please see http://www.rspb.org.uk/international/conservation/sierra_leone/index.asp for an article about the project</i> |
| Author(s), date | <i>Alex Hipkiss, John De Marco.</i> |

2. Project Background

The project is located in the 75,000-ha Gola Forest Reserves in the Kenema and Pujehun Districts of Sierra Leone. The reserves are designated as production reserves and have been commercially logged in the past. The civil war in the 1990s ended commercial activities in the area.

Although the overall integrity of the Gola Forest Reserves is not immediately threatened, illegal logging, hunting and encroachment for farming are now on the increase. In addition, if the forest does not come under conservation control, it is only a matter of time before logging rights are allocated to a commercial logging enterprise. This project aims to address this threat over the next two years by obtaining a long-term conservation concession for the Gola Forest Reserves over the next two years – i.e. to lease the rights to its management and exploitation. The project has had the initial go-ahead from the Government of Sierra Leone to develop an overall management plan for the concession for cabinet consideration in 2 years time. Darwin support is contributing significantly to this planning process.

3. Project Purpose and Outputs

The purpose of the project is to establish an innovative, participatory management programme for the Gola Forest, Sierra Leone, using a conservation concession strategy.

The outputs are as follows.

- Knowledge of the biodiversity and natural resources of Gola and the ecosystem services it provides is improved.
- A detailed management plan is developed with the involvement of all stakeholders.
- The capacity of the Forestry Division, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) and local communities to play their roles in the new management arrangement is increased.
- Awareness of the importance of the Gola Forest is raised locally and nationally.

Neither the outputs nor the operational plan have been modified since the project began.

4. Progress

History to beginning of reporting period

As this is the first project report, all prior work has involved project planning and feasibility work. The core of this work was conducted in 2003–4. The work involved as many stakeholders as possible. We carried out rural appraisals, a forest condition survey and a cost-benefit analysis with the involvement of all seven Gola communities, and completed the process with a fully participatory planning workshop. In early 2004, we submitted a concession application to the government; this was approved in late 2004.

Summary of progress

See Annex 1 for a summary of progress. The main differences from the planned timetable are as follows.

| Output indicator | Difference |
|-------------------------|---|
| Research | Research activities have started a little late, due to the time taken for recruitment and other start-up activities |
| Education | This aspect has actually started earlier than planned, both through media and direct contact, as community support is seen as key to project success. |

Achievements during reporting period

The Gola Forest Programme is now up and running, almost 10 years since a previous project ended full operations in 1996 when the civil war escalated and entered the project area. This is in itself a great achievement, as is the support that the project has received from the Sierra Leone government.

For the first time in nearly 10 years there is an active team of government forest guards in Gola, supported by the project and CSSL staff. The guards are now patrolling the reserve. A major issue is re-establishing forestry law within the project area and developing a training programme to help the guards to become more effective. The reserve boundaries in some areas have not been surveyed for 20 years and the team is working to assess and re-establish the boundaries.

In this reporting period, most project staff have been recruited and are now in place. The project office is in the latter stages of extension and renovation. The project is based in the Forestry Division's regional office in Kenema; we hope that the renovated office will remain for the conservation of the Gola Forest in perpetuity.

Project equipment has been purchased both for the field (tents, GPS units, etc) and for the office (computers, satellite phone). Project vehicles (three Toyota Hilux trucks and five motorcycles) have also been purchased.

Project staff have started to develop a database of existing knowledge of the plants, mammals and birds of the Gola Forest and nearby areas. A 12-day visit was made to the project by an RSPB Research Biologist both to discuss research priorities for this project and to assess the capacity of in-country partner staff. The report from this visit is appended as Annex 2. Capacities were found to be limited and it is likely that greater support will be needed than was originally anticipated. A training programme will therefore be designed for the project staff (CSSL development officers, Forestry Division forest guards and other community-based monitoring staff).

Aside from project set-up and recruitment, the major effort in this period has gone into raising awareness of the project, the forest and the conservation concession mechanism among local communities, chiefdom authorities and key local government officials. Although all of these groups have been involved in project development to some degree, it has been necessary to explain more concretely how the conservation concession will work and what we all need to do during this two-year programme. This has been done through an intensive series of meetings, including the following.

- Three tours to the six chiefdoms involved, some involving large meetings with local communities and others involving chiefs and other leaders. (The seventh chiefdom, Barri, has not been included in our current programme because it is covered by another programme for Tiwai Island.)
- A tour covering about 30 of the villages closest to the forest, with general meetings held in each village.
- A large, 2-day meeting in Kenema with 10 representatives from each chiefdom to explain project objectives and put in place the promised programme of assistance to community development initiatives. This meeting actually concretised the idea of a conservation concession for many participants.
- Numerous informal meetings with communities by forest guards and other staff while in the field as well as in the office.
- Meetings with key local government officials, including the Resident Minister, Secretary General to the Resident Minister, Chief Administrator of the District Council, and Councillors.

The local government radio station (SLBS) in Kenema has been used very effectively to inform people about the project in general and specific activities, through news items as well as announcements of meetings, recruitment etc.

At the national level, the signing ceremony with the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security for the main project agreement was reported on television and in print.

The time spent in the field and with communities has provided important information on the current condition of the forest, threats to the forest and attitudes of communities, which is helping us to formulate detailed plans.

More importantly, there are signs that the initiation of community development activities is consolidating support among communities for the forest conservation programme.

Much of the Technical Adviser's time is spent on on-the-job training of other staff. More structured training activities will be developed in the next reporting period.

Difficulties encountered

As the project in thus far has mostly been involved in set-up the majority of difficulties are related to set-up rather than any technical aspects. As the project is starting from a very basic level of capacity, much work was needed in recruiting qualified staff and setting up administrative systems. It is evident that training will play a much greater role in the next reporting period, through both on-the-job training and more structured training activities.

Design changes

No changes have been made to the design of the project during this reporting period. However, having passed through the project set-up and establishment phase, and assessed existing capacity, we anticipate that some refinements to project activities and indicators will be needed in the coming months.

Timetable for next reporting period

| <i>Project implementation timetable April 2005 – March 2006</i> | |
|---|---|
| Date | Key milestones |
| Apr-May 05 | Plan forest studies on biodiversity, natural resources and ecosystem services |
| May 05 | Identify target groups and methods for awareness-raising by means of project team meetings |
| Jun 05 | Initiate forest studies |
| May 05 | Initiate awareness-raising activities and preparation/dissemination of awareness-raising materials (intensive awareness-raising in communities started earlier) |
| Oct 05 | Identify the training needs of FD, CSSL and local people by means of meetings with all relevant stakeholders (precise dates to be determined) |

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Jan 06 | Provide 2 weeks of training to 80 people from the FD, CSSL and local communities (number/format may vary following detailed planning) |
| Jan 06 | Initiate preparation of management plan, incorporating a significant role for local communities, with the involvement of all stakeholders (precise dates of meetings and other consultation exercises to be determined) |
| Apr 05 – Mar 06 | Continue awareness-raising activities and preparation/dissemination of awareness-raising materials throughout year 2 |

5. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

Not applicable.

6. Partnerships

Collaboration between UK and host country partners

A key provision for the initiation of the project was the signing of a tri-partite agreement between the RSPB, CSSL and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security (appended as Annex 3). This took several month of negotiation and sets out the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners, project budget and work plan, and the roles of both the planning and steering committees. To date this agreement is working well and is proving to be a good tool in resolving and clarifying positions.

The project team including RSPB, CSSL and Forestry Division is well integrated and functioning smoothly. The three partner institutions are also maintaining a very active interest in project implementation. While this tripartite arrangement can slow down decision-making, it is healthy in terms of ownership and capacity-building. Overall, the relationships are extremely positive, with no problems of note.

In the case of the Forestry Division, the project has resulted in a level of activity in the field that has not been seen for many years, even extending to some staff who are not attached to the project. One of the challenges for the project is to put in place a system that will enable the Forestry Division to continue to develop its role in forest management and law enforcement in the long term.

For CSSL, this is its first opportunity to be involved in a major, site-based conservation initiative. As the Assistant Project Manager is a long-time senior staff member of CSSL, and other staff are involved, the experience derived from the project will accrue directly to CSSL.

Other collaboration

We have developed a close relationship with the management of the nearby Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary. We exchange experiences on a variety of common issues, and plan to share scientific data. There are possibilities to collaborate on training.

The Wild Chimpanzee Foundation approached us for help in starting a programme of drama-based education around Gola on protection of chimpanzees. We carried out a joint fact-finding tour of forest-edge villages, followed by a planning session. Their education programme is expected to start late in 2005, after a social survey.

Project and CSSL staff were consulted by World Bank staff on a preliminary proposal for a protected areas programme in Sierra Leone. If it comes about, this could strengthen the institutions for the long-term conservation of Gola and other sites.

We have collaborated with a Darwin-funded Centre for Ecology and Hydrology project in developing baseline maps for the area. In addition, CSSL is involved in a Darwin-funded capacity-building programme (led by BirdLife) and we will ensure close collaboration with these two projects.

7. Impact and Sustainability

The project has a very high profile within the conservation community in the country, being the most important site-based conservation initiative in many years. The support from government is extremely encouraging. The project is providing an opportunity to engage government and NGO staff in practical conservation action. Forestry and CSSL staff are responding enthusiastically. Three recent university graduates in biology are getting their first working experience in conservation.

Sustainability is integral to the project strategy through the high emphasis on training and skills transfer, and also through the planned establishment of a trust fund to support ongoing conservation of Gola indefinitely.

8. Post-Project Follow up Activities

Not applicable.

9. Outputs, Outcomes and Dissemination

Some planned activities are starting late (particularly research activities), but no significant output targets have been missed. Awareness-raising activities have been very intensive, as have efforts to initiate community development activities.

Our most important target is the communities around the forest, whose cooperation is essential to forest protection. We have been working intensively to meet these communities directly, and also using the local radio station very effectively to communicate news and announcements. The radio uses English as well as the local languages (Mende and Krio), thus is the only medium that reaches most of the rural and urban population.

The Gola programme has been highlighted in other fora, including workshops on the National action plan to combat land degradation. The signing of our basic agreement with the Minister was carried on national TV. An initial staff meeting has been held to prioritise other target groups, and identify appropriate messages and media.

Table 1. Project Outputs (According to Standard Output Measures)

| Code No. | Quantity | Description |
|----------|-----------------|--|
| 8 | 6 months | Technical Advisor in-country since October 04 |
| | 9 days | Project Manager in Sierra Leone to review project progress |
| | 12 days | Research Adviser in Sierra Leone to design research and training package |
| 14a | 1 | 2-day meeting held in February with chiefdom representatives |
| 14b | 3 (not planned) | Gola programme discussed in other fora, including national action plan to combat land degradation |
| 15a | 1 | News article prepared on signing of general agreement with Minister, December 2004 |
| 15b | 6 | Several project events and activities have been covered by SLBS radio reporter for inclusion in daily news |
| 18a | 1 | SLBS TV coverage of signing of general agreement with Minister, November |
| 19a | 1 | Interview of project managers by SLBS Kenema, January |
| 20 | (£60,924) | None of this capital spend has been Darwin-funded |
| 21 | 1 station | Renovations ongoing (office renovations are nearly complete, but work has not started on a field station) |
| 23 | £107,483 | Co-funding provided by Conservation International and RSPB |

Table 2: Publications

| Type * | Detail | Publishers | Available from | Cost £ |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|--------|
| (e.g. journals, manual, CDs) | (title, author, year) | (name, city) | (e.g. contact address, website) | |
| None as yet | | | | |

10. Project Expenditure

Table 3: Project expenditure during the reporting period (Defra Financial Year 01 April to 31 March)

| Item | Budget | Expenditure | Balance |
|------|--------|-------------|---------|
|------|--------|-------------|---------|

The project has started more slowly than expected, which is why many of the expenditure categories show significant underspend. This is particularly true for the conferences and seminars budget line, as most of the planned meetings and workshops are still to be undertaken.

Budget variance is most notable for salaries, where an underspend of more than £5,000 has occurred. This is due to over-budgeting of CSSL staff costs and the late recruitment of many CSSL project staff. Conversely, significant overspend has occurred on the travel costs budget line. This can be traced to the high travel costs for the paramount chiefs in the project area. The project team will soon be asking the Darwin Secretariat to approve budget transfers for the remainder of the project to counter the over-budgeting on the salaries budget line.

We have requested a carry-over of £5,000 into the 05/06 financial year, for which we are awaiting approval. This will be spent on a series of research activities that we were not able to undertake during the first 6 months of the project.

11. Monitoring, Evaluation and Lessons

Monitoring is almost a daily activity of the 3-person management team, who refer to the logframe and workplan in planning detailed activities. A system of 3-monthly staff meetings has been put in place to review progress and plan the following period. The project partners (RSPB, CSSL and Forestry Division) monitor progress informally through regular communication and field visits, and will do so more formally through the Planning Committee. A meeting of the larger Steering Committee will be held in April 2005 to provide an opportunity for feedback from other government departments and chiefdom authorities.

To date, monitoring has been mostly at the level of activities. At this early stage, it is not possible to demonstrate impact at the level of the project purpose. Measurable indicators will be reported in the subsequent period.

It has become apparent that the effort required to put in place agreements, staff, logistics and systems for this project to become operational was underestimated – in fact the process is still ongoing. There is a need to focus on tasks most critical to project success, because of the lack of highly skilled personnel as well as time constraints.

12. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project during the reporting period (300-400 words maximum)

■ I agree for ECTF and the Darwin Secretariat to publish the content of this section

This project is located in the 75,000-ha Gola Forest Reserves in Sierra Leone. It aims to address the growing threats to these reserves by establishing an innovative, participatory management programme using a conservation concession strategy. It is being run by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone and the Forestry Division of the Sierra Leone Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security.

It may be too early to talk of achievements after only 6 months of work (only 3 months with most of the project team). However there are some positive developments. The historical relations between the partners have allowed a project team integrating all three partners to be assembled and to work smoothly. There is very strong political support in the government, an opportunity that should not be squandered. There are signs that community support and buy-in, which was tentative during the planning stages, is strengthening now that development activities have been initiated.