



Darwin Initiative/Darwin Plus Projects Half Year Report (due 31st October 2020)

Project reference	24-001
Project title	Improving forest governance for Cross River gorillas and Nigerian farmers
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Nigeria
Lead organisation	Wildlife Conservation Society
Partner(s)	1) Conservation Association of Mbe Mountains; 2) Cross River State Ministry of Climate Change and Forestry; 3) Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria (CRIN); 4) Boki Local Government Area
Project leader	<i>Inaoyom Imong</i>
Report date and number (e.g. HYR3)	<i>HYR3</i>
Project website/blog/social media	Website: https://nigeria.wcs.org/ Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/CRgorilla/ Twitter: https://twitter.com/WCS_Nigeria

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

Output 1. Local farmers have been trained to increase efficiency of existing cocoa farms
During this reporting period, 83 more farmers were trained in improved cocoa farming methods, bringing the total trained to date to 686 in all the nine Mbe communities. Refresher training was also provided for previously trained farmers. Some of the trained farmers also serve as trainers of other farmers. The training covered shade management, soil fertility management, and phased replanting of old farms. It also covered practices that reduce the need for pesticides, and highlighted the environmental consequences of chemical pesticides. Pesticides are wrongly used by farmers due to lack of awareness of their negative impact on the environment.

In addition to training, 44,300 seedlings were distributed to 229 farmers. Farms supported by the project are monitored to ensure compliance with the terms of agreement, ensure that farmers are applying the sustainable practices that the project is promoting and that the seedlings provided are planted only on agreed existing farms thereby avoiding deforestation. WCS staff visited and 293 farms visited during this reporting period. During the visits, relevant information is collected and stored for future monitoring.

Output 2. Local women's groups and young men trained in improved bush mango collection, processing, storage and marketing.

Refresher training was organized for the nine women's groups; , one in each of the nine Mbe Mbe communities, covering sustainable harvesting, processing, storage and marketing of bush mango. Unsustainable practices such as cutting down trees to collect fruits and harvesting in core gorilla habitat, which leads to disturbance, were discouraged whereas harvesting only mature fruits that drop to the forest floor outside the core conservation area were promoted. The training emphasized the importance of protected areas in biodiversity conservation. The women were also trained in proper drying and storage of bush mango to produce good quality seeds. Well-dried bush mango seeds stored and sold after the harvest season fetch much higher price

than fresh seeds sold during the harvest season. To improve their negotiating power with bush mango merchants the project supported the women to form bush mango cooperatives. The cooperatives were registered and their members were trained in financial management, record keeping and marketing. Market surveys were conducted to identify suitable large markets where the women can sell their bush mango at a good price. A dedicated bush mango market was identified and the women registered with the market to gain access. Two stores have been built for the groups to store bush mango. The groups were also provided with wheelbarrows and tarpaulins to facilitate transport and drying of bush mango seeds.

Output 3. Protection of the Mbe Mountains is enhanced and community land tenure secured through legal recognition of 127km² as a “Community Managed Wildlife Sanctuary”.

The project continued to support ongoing survey and mapping of the Mbe Mountains conservation area, including clearing of the boundary and planting concrete beacons along the boundary as part of the process to achieve legal recognition of the Mbe Mountains as a community wildlife sanctuary by the Cross River State Government. WCS continued to work with the Conservation Association of Mbe Mountains (CAMM), the Cross River State Forestry Commission and the Ministry of Climate Change and Forestry as key stakeholders in the process. The project also supported quarterly meetings of CAMM to discuss issues affecting conservation of the Mbe Mountains. Reported cases of illegal activities were discussed at these meetings and offenders sanctioned.

Output 4. The effectiveness of law enforcement interventions of WCS and local communities is improved for Mbe Mountains ecosystem.

Despite challenges of Covid-19, we were able to keep law enforcement patrols going throughout the project period following government health and safety guidelines as well as protocols developed by WCS, thereby ensuring that gorillas and other endangered wildlife in the Mbe Mountains were effectively protected from poaching during a difficult period with increased risk of poaching. The patrols were planned using information from previous patrols and intelligence gathered from surrounding communities, adapting patrol strategy as necessary to ensure effectiveness. Using SMART, WCS monitored patrol effort (measured as kilometers walked and number of patrol days completed), as well as hunting pressure (measured as encounter rate of signs such as wire snares, hunting camps, and empty shotgun shells discarded by hunters). During this reporting period, 50 anti-poaching patrols were completed covering a total distance of 2,143 km. Twenty-two offenders were apprehended and reported to CAMM for sanctions, including 6 hunters and 10 loggers. The patrols also destroyed 2,804 wire snares and 12 hunting camps (Table 1). WCS provided refresher law enforcement training for the Mbe eco-guards in the field each month during patrols, including training in the use of SMART law enforcement data collection.

Table 1. Hunting signs recorded for the period 1 April to 30 September 2020.

Sign	# of Observations	Encounter Rate/km
Gunshots heard	5	0.002
Set wire snares	2,804	1.308
Empty cartridges	337	0.157
Hunting camps	12	0.006

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for Covid-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The ongoing boundary survey and mapping of the Mbe Mountains conservation area was disrupted by two of the nine Mbe communities who believe that they have contributed more land to conservation area than the other communities have, and have been trying to persuade the other communities to contribute more land to be included in the conservation area without success. However, the issue is being addressed by CAMM and it is expected to be resolved soon. Having CAMM as partner and working with the communities through the association has been helpful in managing the diverse interests and expectations of the nine communities that own the Mbe Mountains, and ensuring the effective conservation of the area.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of Covid-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

Due to Covid-19, we suspended certain project activities that involve close interaction with people in local communities including our livelihood work with cocoa farmers and women groups as well as aspects of the Mbe Mountains community wildlife sanctuary gazettelement process. Consequently, we had a low rate of spending on the project budget. However, after careful review of the local Covid-19 situation, we have been able to restart implementation of suspended activities following government approved health guidelines and protocols developed by WCS, and we expect to increase our rate of spending over the coming months.

2c. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

Due to delays caused by Covid-19 the average spending rate on the project during this reporting period was low resulting in an underspend on the project budget. However, based on careful evaluation of the local Covid-19 situation and safety measures that have been put in place, we have been able to resume suspended activities with plans in place to significantly increase our rate of spending over the next couple of months, including increasing the number of field teams and the frequency of field visits for project implementation.

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with LTS International through a Change Request. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to Darwin-Projects@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 25-001 Darwin Half Year Report**