Forest of Hope

FINAL REPORT ON THE GRASP-IAN REDMOND CONSERVATION AWARD

Grant about *"increasing local awareness about the importance of preserving chimpanzees of the Gishwati-Mukura National Park, Rwanda"*.

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REMEMBERING GREAT APES

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FINAL REPORT ON THE GRANT IMPLEMENTATION

1. Introduction

In 2019 January, Forest of Hope Association (FHA) started the implementation of the GRASP-Ian Redmond Conservation Award, a grant co-funded by Remembering Great Apes and Born Free Foundation (BFF). The award was used to increase local awareness about the importance of Gishwati chimpanzees. The main goal of this project was to ensure extensive awareness among local community about the importance of preserving the Gishwati chimpanzees and the best practices to reduce transmissible diseases between people, chimpanzees and livestock. The project was implemented around Gishwati forest the northern part of Gishwati-Mukura National Park (GMNP). This park is home for a number of threatened primate species including eastern chimpanzees (*Pan Troglodytes schweinfurthii*, listed as endangered species on the IUCN Red List); golden monkeys (*Cercopithecus mitis kandti*, listed as endangered); mountain monkeys (*Cercopithecus l'hoesti*, listed as vulnerable); a large number of plant species and more than 200 bird species. The project was implemented during 12 months.

During the project start FHA was visited by Margot Raggett, the founder of Remembering Great Apes and Ian Redmond. These visits were done just to meet the FHA team, visit the Gishwati forest, hear its conservation story, the work being done, and the contribution of this project on this new park conservation.

Fig 1: *Margot Raggett during her visit in the Gishwati forest*

Fig 2: *Ian Redmond with the Vice Mayor of Rutsiro district and Ms. Madeleine in Gishwati*

2. Methodology used

With the supervision and guidance of the FHA founder, Ms. NYIRATUZA Madeleine, we visited 13 eco-clubs in schools around Gishwati and explained to them the components of the project, key messages and why it is needed. From February 2019 through April 2019, we designed and produced education materials including:

(1) 15 posters describing the human threats faced by Gishwati chimpanzees (habitat loss, poaching and diseases);
(2) 15 posters about the key plant species used by chimpanzees for food and nesting;
(3) 15 posters about how chimpanzees play an important role in ecosystem functions (i.e. seed dispersal) and local economy;
(4) 15 posters about the kinds of transmissible diseases between people, chimpanzees and livestock;
(5) 15 posters about the danger of those transmissible diseases;
(6) 15 posters about how those diseases are spread, and
(7) 15 posters about how risks of diseases contamination can be minimized.

We also produced 20 education guides that were used by eco-clubs' members in community campaigns, and 400 brochures about the importance of preserving the Gishwati chimpanzees and the best practices to reduce transmissible diseases between people, chimpanzees and livestock. These brochures were distributed to communities during the awareness campaigns.

Fig 3: the brochure distributed to communities during the awareness campaigns

Fig 4: One of the posters used during the awareness campaigns

In May 2019, we organised a one-day training for members of the 13 local eco-clubs. The training participants included teachers who coach eco-clubs and representative students from each eco-club. During the training, trainees learned how to use education materials, and the best techniques they could use to communicate the message to the local community efficiently. At the end of the training, we have distributed education materials to school representatives and launched the start of the community awareness campaign

Fig 5. Photo taken during training

From mid-May 2019 through November 2019, the eco-clubs members conducted awareness campaigns. The techniques used to communicate the message included visiting the village around schools, organizing focused debates and dances to attract people in the village prior to utilizing education guides and distributing the brochures.

Fig 6. Photo of education campaign

The techniques also included visiting all households and educating people house by house in order to reach as many people as possible in the community. Additionally, we attended organized local meetings and visited places where many people gather such as markets and

shopping centers to gain an opportunity to spread the awareness messages on chimpanzee conservation.

Fig 7. Community members were interested in reading the information on the brochures

Throughout the awareness campaigns, we visited eco-clubs to monitor their work and assess how the community is responding.

3. **Evaluation and achievements**

Considering questions that the community members were asking, it was pretty clear that local people were interested to learn more about chimpanzee conservation, and curious to know more about transmissible diseases between people, chimpanzees, and livestock.

In December 2019 we evaluated the success of the project. We offered a one-month internship to a student from University of Rwanda to randomly select and interview 130 households in local communities (10 households in the village around each school). During this evaluation, each interviewee answered ten questions grouped into four categories: (1) human threats to Gishwati chimpanzees; (2) role of chimpanzees in ecosystem functions and local economy; (3) transmissible diseases between people, chimpanzees and livestock, the danger of those diseases and ways of contamination; and (4) best practices to reduce transmissible diseases. The obtained data on the level of local awareness about the project were analysed and the results are shown in figure 8.

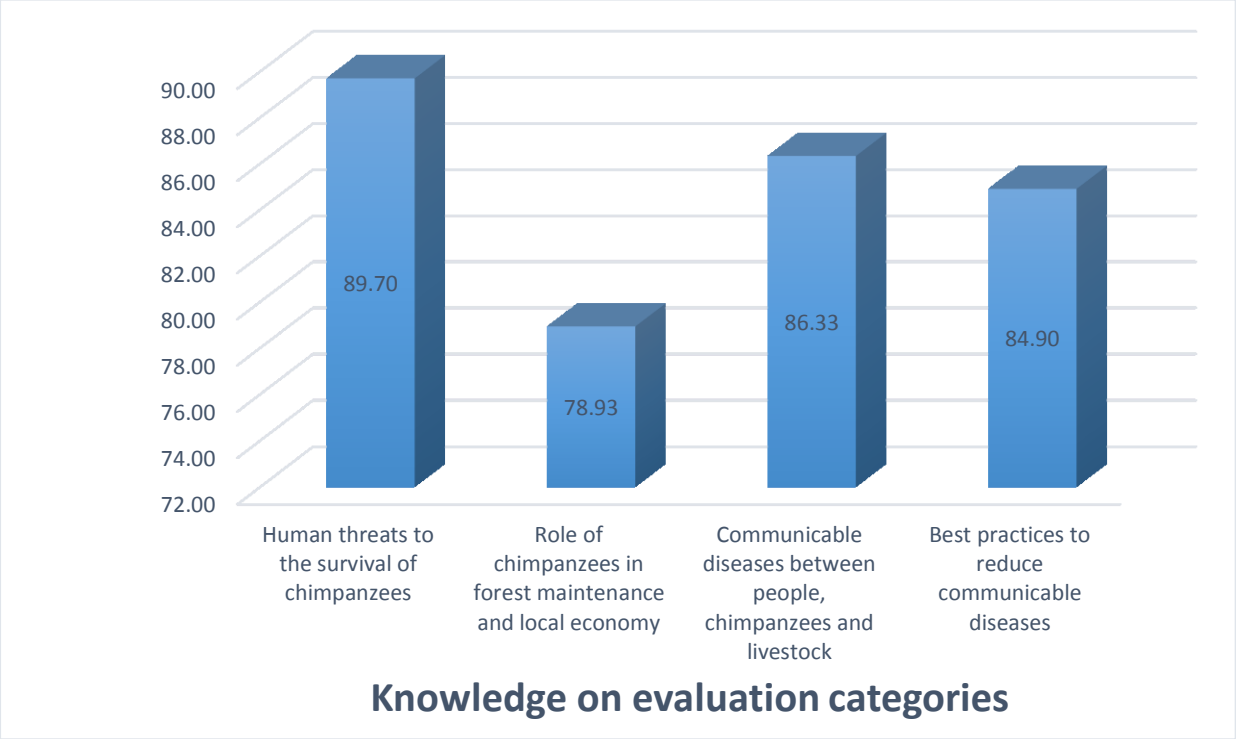

Fig 8. The level of community awareness about the project

Based on recorded responses, about 91.8 % of the interviewees confirmed that they fully understood the project conservation message. The total number of households in the involved 13 villages around schools is 1,989 with an estimate of 12,628 people (Rutsiro/Ubudehe categories 2017). The results (score on the level of awareness) shows that the project has been successful. Considering the project target, about 84.97% gave enthusiastic responses about the importance of preserving the Gishwati chimpanzees and the best practices to reduce the transmissible diseases between people, chimpanzees and livestock. It is a bit early to confirm that this project has had an effect on reducing local pressure on Gishwati biodiversity especially chimpanzees. However, we are confident that it significantly contributed to the behavior change of the local community towards conservation, as observed in the decline of illegal human activities reported by the park protection team during the last six months of 2019. Thus, we believe this project generated positive change in local community's attitude toward the conservation of the Gishwati biodiversity, which was originally at 75% in 2017.

Besides learning through this initiative conservation message, students also gained extended knowledge about effective communication methods and improved their critical thinking on how to spread the information they learn to their colleague in schools and their community. *"This topic was really interesting. I am happy that I made my contribution in educating my parents and our neighbors about the prevention of transmissible diseases"* said Jacqueline Hirwa, a student from one school eco-club when asked about what she is proud of upon completion of this initiative. We are confident that this message will continue to be spread out; given the commitment that students demonstrated and the importance they put on this message.

To motivate Eco-clubs' members, this community outreach initiative was combined with annual eco-clubs' competitions organized by FHA to evaluate their performance. The annual prizes were given to eco-clubs that transmitted the message best as measured by their own community ranking in proving best answers to the evaluation questions. Among the prizes that FHA gave out include: uniform for schools sport clubs, soccer balls, radio receivers for eco-clubs, and each participant on the competition received a notebook to be used in their studies.

Fig 9. Each participant of the competition received a notebook

Fig 10. The overall winner of the competition received radio receiver and sport uniform

We are thankful for this GRASP-Ian Redmond Conservation Award that made a significant contribution to increase local awareness about the importance of Gishwati chimpanzees. In our community education program, we always plan community outreach for awareness about the importance of the conservation of protected area and biodiversity. FHA will continue to write grant proposals to support students' activities in the community. If granted, the funds will build on this project achievement to maximize local awareness about the Gishwati Mukura National Park biodiversity from the current throughout the future generations.

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