

Report of Institutional Strengthening of Community Groups for Conservation of Mangrove and migratory birds in two Communities within Bakassi Local Government Area (LGA), in Cross River State, Nigeria.

BACKGROUND

Wetlands are instrumental to the diversity of life and characterised with high population densities of microbe benthic flora and fauna as they encourage the biodiversity of the zones making it a rich site for bird roosting. The Cross River wetlands however constitute one of the five Important Bird Areas in Cross River State and consists of a number of low-lying, largely mangrove covered islands covering an area of around 665 km² (257 sq mi) with services and functions ranging from habitats for birds, fish, microbes, plants, insects, amphibians and a lot more of marine life; and above all are food banks for species dependants on wetland ecosystems and as well providing a rich source of economic activities for the inhabitants (of over 1,000 persons) within these area Which includes but not limited to harvesting of mangrove for firewood, fishing and other economic purposes like water transportation.

Preliminary desk studies from existing reports and key informant interview reveals that these ecosystem is seriously under pressure, hence, the need to preserve, conserve and protect it through mangrove nursery establishment, education and enlightenment in order to ensure sustainable resource utilization and management through capacity building, awareness creation through the celebration of the World Wetlands Day, importance of mudflats for bird roosting, establishments of mangrove nurseries and the production of IEC materials. The report covers project activities carried out between February and August 2019.





ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT AND RESULTS

ACTIVITY 1: Community entry and sensitization / identification & selection of community interest groups

The meeting commenced at 10:30am with an opening prayer by madam Glory Effangha. This was followed by an opening remark by Rev Anthony Effiong Essien from Akwa Esuk-Iyamba who also welcomed participants. Mr. Samuel Effiong Okon from Edik-Idem community facilitated the introduction of participants. The Representative of the village head of Akwa Esuk Iyamba community in person of Asuquo Bassey Udom addressed and welcomed everyone present stating that the communities are known for conservation activities and wished participants a successful deliberation.

The NCF representative, Mr Emmanuel Owan introduced his team (Miss Blessing Onwordi (a corp member with NCF and Mr. Godwin Ugah from CUSO.) With Rev. Offiong acting as a translator. Objectives of the meeting and the meaning of wetlands and its importance to preservation of biodiversity were highlighted. He also reiterated the importance of wetlands to flood control, climate change mitigation and birdlife as well as the effects of negligence and destruction of wetland ecosystems. Other important issues highlighted during the meeting include:

- The funders (WADDEN SEA FLYWAY INITIATIVE) had great interest in Birds and conservation of mudflats.
- The project seeks to create awareness against indiscriminate felling of the mangrove trees to reduce emission.
- The importance of vegetation cover and mudflats for migratory birds with respect to breeding and feeding.
- Indiscriminate hunting which can lead to the extinction or endangering of some birds species and loss of biodiversity.
- Some birds are foreign to a community and such birds are known as migratory birds and in some cases a ring might be worn on their claws or clothes may be tied to their wings for easy identification for further study.
- The need to have a good knowledge on bird identification.
- The need for training within the lifespan of the project to better equip selected members of the communities on mudflat management, bird identification and mangrove management

Community representatives and leadership present at the meeting were inform about the the need to use town criers to reach out to other people in the communities and also urged the rangers /volunteers members to be selected to assist in creating awareness and ensure that the message

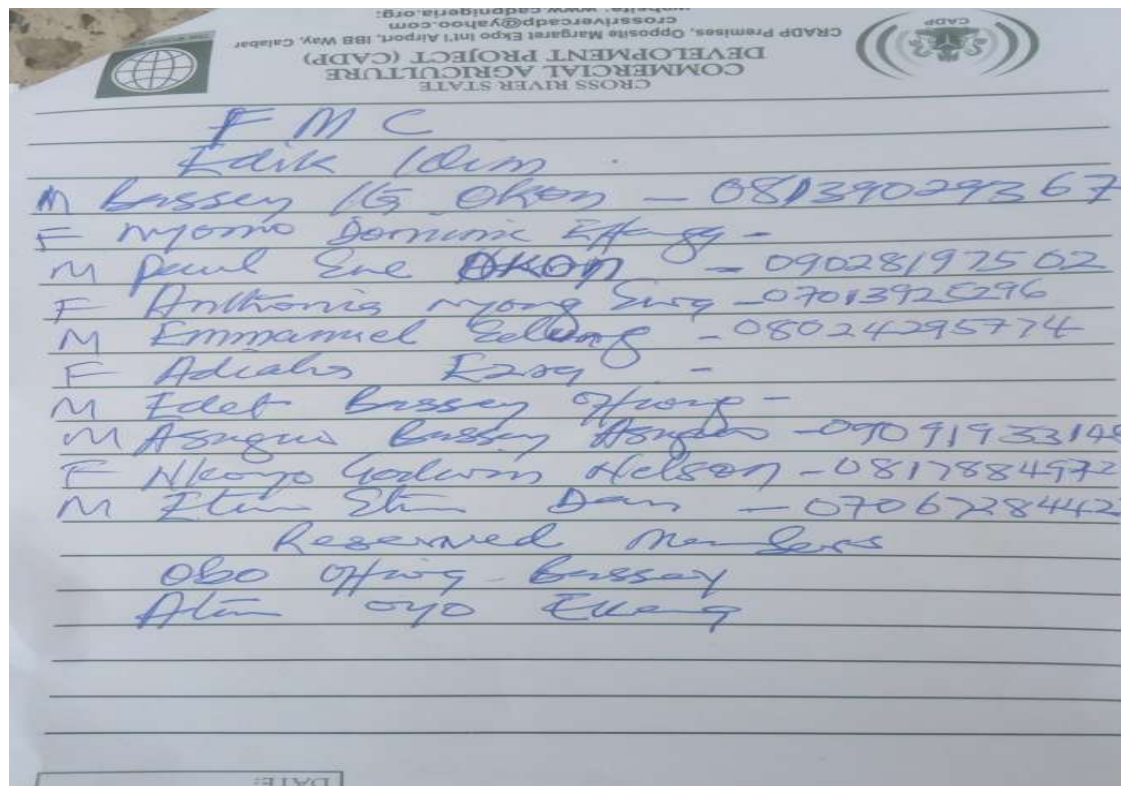
gets to the community people. This was followed by the facilitation of the selection of ten persons' each from the two communities as rangers/volunteers for the protection and restoration of Mangrove as well as bird monitoring and protection.

The village Head of Edik Idem community in person of Chief Dominic Ekpenyong emphasized that the ten persons' chosen from each community should be people that are very active and advised that the selection of these persons be transparent so that the people don't accuse him of nepotism which has happened in time past. Twelve people each were selected from the two communities.

See list of selected community members to act as rangers/volunteers below:

MEMO		DATE:
AKWA ESUK EYAMBIRA		
S/N	Names	Phone numbers
1	Edet ASUGBO Edik	08020878769
2	ASUGBO Basse M	08022203391
3*	ESSIEN Efiang Essien	08081387872
	David Edik Okon	
4	Otu Edem ASUGBO M	
5	Francis Edet Basse M	09020647078
6	Victoria ASUGBO Essien F	08124851549
7	Mercy Efiang Edik F	07089712152
8	Sylvia Essie Efiang F	08025930444
9	Mary ASUGBO Basse F	08085941316
10	ESSIEN Efiang Essien M	07086050842
11	ASUGBO Basse Edet	08129541543
12	Mary Otu Edem	

Pix 1: Names of volunteers from Akwa Esuk Eyamba Community



Pix 2: Names of volunteers from Edik Idem Community



Pix3: Showing selection process of community volunteer



Pix 4: Showing cross section of community participants from the two project Communities during the community entry and consultation meeting

ACTIVITY 2: Celebration of World Wetlands Day 2019

The 2019 World Wetlands Day (WWD) was celebrated in Edik Idem community (Bakassi LGA) with the two communities to highlight the importance of wetlands and mudflats, its benefit to man and the proliferation of wild life as well as its importance to birdlife and climate change mitigation. The occasion was attended by community chiefs from the two communities (Akwa Esuk Iyamba and Edik Idem) and their respective representatives as a third and nearby community (Akwa Esuk Mba who also indicated interest) and took part in the World Wetlands Day Celebration. Highpoint of the event was a procession to the beach site where a clean-up exercise and also some tree planting demonstration followed by group photograph and a procession back to Edik Edem community where the two communities met and were sensitised on the importance of the WWD.

The Village head of Edik Idem, Chief Dominic Ekpenyong expressed gratitude for the knowledge imparted and promised to do anything possible in his capacity as a village head to ensure the protection of the mangrove and mudflats from further destruction.



Pix 1&2 shows participants displaying placards with inscriptions about wetlands in the community And at the bank of the beach



Pix 3: A procession from Akwa Esuk Iyamba beach



Pix4: Group photograph of community representatives after a talk show at the town hall



Pix 5&6 shows participants in a sensitization walk through the community and by the major highway



Pix7&8 shows community contact persons of Akwa Esuk Iyamba (Reverend Offiong), the contact person for Edik Idem community Mr Bassey Okon and Mr. Owan of NCF

ACTIVITY 3: Awareness campaign/training on importance of mangrove conservation and management to biodiversity

This session/training workshop highlights the importance of mangrove and mudflats to climate change and migratory birds. During the training session, a community member noted that she has some time ago spotted a bird within the community with a ring on the leg but in recent times have not seen any. Mr. Godwin Ugah who facilitated the awareness/training workshop started by describing what mangroves are, their global distribution pattern, where they grow mostly within the regions of the world as well as the weather or temperature or conditions that are favourable for their growth, adaptation pattern and its importance to climate change and community livelihoods. The resource person also went further to emphasize the following:

- Different zones where different species of mangrove exist which includes: coastal zones, middle zones and inland zones;
- The five main mangrove plants that exists in Nigeria ranging from which includes but not limited to: The Red Mangrove (tall), The Red Mangrove (dwarf), The white mangrove, Combretaceae among others with photographic illustrations for easy understanding.
- That Nigeria's mangrove ecosystem he noted is said to be the largest in Africa spanning about 10,000 square kilometres from Badagry in the west to Calabar in the South-South of Nigeria.

In furtherance to this, emphasis was made on the importance of mudflats as feeding and breeding grounds especially for migratory birds that are moving from the west to the southern part of the world in search of food and good breeding grounds during particular seasons and encouraged community members to be careful and sensitive while interacting with this ecosystem as birds can also support enrichment of a particular ecosystem by carrying food in its mouth from one

location and dropping in another location thereby enriching the biodiversity of that area as well as encourage ecotourism, and income generation. The training also took into consideration the harsh economic realities propelling increase destruction of mangroves and mudflats, population pressure resulting to overharvesting of mangrove for firewood and other economic purposes for various livelihood purposes hence stretching the ecosystems resilience level, reducing the high sequestration capacity and destroying good breeding ground for a variety of species including birds. Hence, the need to preserve, conserve and protect it through education and enlightenment. Participants were also sensitised on the dangers of their activities on the wetland ecosystem and the importance of mangrove to both humans and water birds which can further attract interventions that will boost ecotourism and economic potentials and also advised on available mitigation strategies.



Pix2: Showing the resource person and some community members during the training



Pix3: Showing cross section of some community members during the training session



Pix 4: Showing NCF coordinator during his opening remarks

ACTIVITY 4: Mangrove tree nursery establishment

The 5,000 indigenous tree nursery establishments of fast growing mangrove species meant to enhance bird roost, shelter and breeding ground within the two communities (Edik Idem and Akwa Esuk Iyamba) was welcomed with great excitement by the communities and especially by the community rangers/volunteers. This was demonstrated in their participation in establishing the nursery from land preparation to filling of poly pods as well as sourcing for seedlings and the

participation of women generally was high. The selection of the nursery site was done by each community at least to accommodate 2,500 tree seedlings in each community..

Species of seedlings planted include: the red and white mangrove. Reasons advanced by community members for selection of species are their fast growing abilities and the fact that they can also be used as energy source especially for cooking.



Filling of poly bags for mangrove tree nursery



Inspection of gathered seedlings by community
Community chairman at Bakassi LGA



Arrangements of poly bags and planting of



already grown mangrove nursery seedlings

ACTIVITY 5: PRODUCTION OF IEC MATERIALS

IEC materials of various types were printed and distributed to community members to paste on walls, stickers for doors of buildings, motor bikes and vehicles and some to be distributed in schools and pasted on other public buildings for other residents and passers-by to view as a source of information. Over 500 stickers, handbill and posters were produced and distributed.



NIGERIAN CONSERVATION FOUNDATION



Inner page of handbill



Front page back of handbill



Sample of Stickers produced



Sample of Posters produced

ACTIVITY 6: Capacity building on identification, monitoring and data collection for migratory birds

Irrespective of the heavy down pour which ushered the day, community members still came out for the training. The workshop commenced with a video clip on the evolution and life of birds. The consultants took participants through the goal and objectives of the workshop which include: Capacity building on data collection of water birds, to create awareness on mud flats and migratory/water birds conservation, learn about birds and how to identify them in their habitats, improve participants understanding of birds, enhance bird identification skills and basic field technics in birding as well as what they expect to achieve at the end of the exercise which include: Basic bird identification skills; Narrowing birds down to groups; Basic field ethics and Data collection skills. The presentation was cantered on participants being able to identify, monitor and collect bird data.

Other issues that were addressed during the two day training and workshop include:

- Why we should be involved in bird identification
- Bird topography, field marks and features
- What defines a birds: General Characteristics
- Various means of identifying birds
- Birding ethics, field rules, equipments and important materials
- When and where to monitor birds
- As well as the use for data sheets for bird data collection during transect, point count and water bird data collection.

Some of the birds projected on the slides were even identified by community members through their local names and the quick features to look out for were highlighted. Also, the use of “playback” in bird identification as a skill was emphasized. The two day workshop ended with a field work where community members were asked to on their own practicalize the use of binoculars and data entry sheet to test the knowledge acquired during the training.



Cross section of community members at the workshop



Practical field session on bird monitoring, identification and data collection



Community members during the training session

ANNEX 1

Data sheet for water bird count

Site code	Site name	Day	Month	Year	Species name	Species code	Method	Count	Ice	Tidal	Water QUALITY	Disturbance	Lat	Long	National code