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## Community Engagement Workshop in Cameroon *Workshop Report*

In July 2015 PASA held a workshop in Cameroon with the primary goal of identifying effective approaches to produce the long-term changes needed to protect the primate populations in Cameroon. An important outcome of the workshop was the identification of a novel program with national impact: PASA, Ape Action Africa, Limbe Wildlife Centre, and Sanaga-Yong Rescue Center are now planning to substantially reduce human-wildlife conflict by changing attitudes about primates and wildlife conservation throughout Cameroon.

Cameroon is a country of high importance for the conservation of primates. It is home to several endangered great apes: the western lowland gorilla, the cross river gorilla, the central chimpanzee, and the Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee. Cameroon is also inhabited by the drill, the most endangered of the monkeys. Unless major changes are made, it is believed that some ape species will become extinct within decades.

The survival of these primates depends on the development of conservation programs with lasting impact. Since human activities are the root causes of most primate conservation problems, including in Cameroon, a key to resolving the issues is to produce sustained changes in people's attitudes and actions towards wildlife. To prevent the extinction of Cameroon's apes, a new, widespread community engagement program is urgently needed.

Three well-established and widely respected primate sanctuaries in Cameroon – Ape Action Africa, Limbe Wildlife Centre, and Sanaga-Yong Rescue Center – conduct multifaceted community engagement programs. Rather than implementing short-term projects, they work with the same communities for years to produce lasting behavioral changes that significantly improve the welfare of primates and reduce conflict between humans and wildlife.

### **Workshop: Exploring Community Engagement as a Pathway to Primate Conservation in Cameroon**

The workshop was held from July 26 to 29 at Sanctuaire Marial, a monastery retreat near Mbalmayo, Cameroon. The eleven participants included the



director and two community engagement program staff from each of the three PASA member sanctuaries, the PASA Education Advisor and a member of the Board of Directors of PASA. Sanctuary Ape Action Africa hosted the meeting, providing all logistical support.

The workshop included presentations and discussions of the various educational and community programs that the sanctuaries have conducted, and their degrees of success. The participants next examined the outcomes needed to protect Cameroon's primates, and explored potential pathways, future activities and the potential role of local and national partners to achieve those outcomes. The workshop included a visit to Ape Action Africa and meetings with community members involved in various community engagement programs.

The workshop concluded with evaluation of the workshop as well as of the regional, small-group format itself. All participants found the format extremely useful and a beneficial addition to PASA's capacity building program.

## **Conclusions:**

### *Crisis management*

Primate incursion into areas in Cameroon inhabited by humans is viewed as infrequent yet potentially serious. The sanctuaries agree on the importance of developing and maintaining the proficiency of their staff in techniques of conflict resolution in times of crisis, such as inevitable animal escapes. This need can be met through participation in professional training such as that provided through PASA capacity building workshops.

### *Threat reduction and preventive measures*

The sanctuaries further agree that the greatest threat to primates in Cameroon is human incursion into primate habitat which brings premeditated as well as opportunistic killing and capture of the animals. The Cameroonian sanctuaries have collectively developed a portfolio of programs for community sensitization, formal and informal education and economic development which they continue to innovate, evaluate and adapt to local conditions. Future plans include near-term publication of this portfolio as well as selective expansion of the programs at each sanctuary.



### *National strategy*

Through ongoing evaluation and adjustment of their education and community programs, the sanctuaries are confident in their effectiveness. The reach of these programs, however, is limited to local communities while the threats to primates extend throughout the country. The overwhelming conclusion of the workshop was that projects of a national scale are essential to secure the future of Cameroon's primates, and that the sanctuaries will collaborate to forward those projects.

### *Formal education*

The limitations, and often criticisms, of formal education programs are that they reach only small populations and that their impact is not felt for many years. Having run their education programs for a collective 40+ years, the sanctuaries have witnessed their value and positive results. What is urgently needed is for all future consumers, policy makers, etc. to understand the need for and benefits of wildlife conservation.

The key outcome of the workshop was the conclusion that an essential component to producing profound, sustainable changes is to add wildlife conservation content to Cameroon's national education curriculum, and the participants have begun to outline such a project. The intent of the project is not to make short-term changes but instead to educate every student in Cameroon and produce an important and long-lasting shift in the thinking of Cameroonian people.

### *Sensitization via national media*

Awareness of conservation issues is surprisingly low in Cameroon. A series of entertaining films featuring a young boy as the conservation hero has been made available. The sanctuaries agreed to collaborate to advocate for the films being broadcast on national television.



### *Regional focus*

While the Pan African Sanctuary Alliance has held workshops for sanctuaries throughout Africa for 15 years, this was PASA's first regional workshop, focusing on a specific area within Africa. By inviting fewer sanctuaries, several staff from each organization could attend and the group was small enough that all attendees could actively participate. The participants told us they appreciated being able to focus on a conservation challenge that was specific to the context of their own country. Based on the success of this meeting, PASA intends to conduct more regional workshops about specific topics, in addition to our regular workshops for participants from throughout Africa which cover broader content.

A valuable output of the workshop is derived from the sanctuaries' presentations about their community engagement programs. Because of limitations of internet connections, electricity, and transportation, it is generally difficult for organizations in Africa to share knowledge with each other. PASA is creating a portfolio of the community work conducted by Sanaga-Yong, Limbe, and Ape Action Africa which can be expanded to include other African sanctuaries and will be shared among the sanctuaries. It will be useful for the sanctuary staff to learn about new approaches and to know who they can contact to discuss the approaches.

## **Future plans**

The workshop participants intend for wildlife conservation content to be seamlessly integrated into Cameroon's education curriculum and to be taught by the schoolteachers nationwide on an ongoing basis. They will apply proven methodologies on a national scale for the first time, to achieve penetration of conservation awareness throughout the country.

The community engagement programs that Ape Action Africa, Limbe Wildlife Centre, and Sanaga-Yong Rescue Center currently conduct in their local areas will support the proposed nationwide project. The sanctuaries' community engagement staff already have a deep understanding of how to inspire Cameroonian people of all ages to care about wildlife conservation and help protect primates. Their experience will be indispensable for designing the curriculum and their accomplishments will demonstrate to government officials that an education-based approach is effective.

The next step will be to conduct a feasibility study, to find the estimated cost and timeline of the project. Depending on the results of the study, the three sanctuaries and PASA plan to collaboratively develop and carry out an implementation plan. This will include writing the conservation curriculum for students of various ages. A project manager may be recruited who is skilled at collaborating with government agencies in Cameroon, managing education programs, and leading successful projects. A lobbyist might be retained to help persuade government officials of the value of the project. Sanctuary educators may act as trainers. Additionally, we will create a detailed budget.

Financial support will be needed to conduct this project. However, once the conservation content has been added to the national education curriculum, the schools will teach the material and we do not anticipate any ongoing costs to PASA or the sanctuaries. This will be a fairly short-term project with very a long-lasting and widespread impact: every student in Cameroon will have improved attitudes and behaviors towards wildlife, and the resulting reduction in human-wildlife conflict will have a vital role in the effort to prevent the extinction of Cameroon's great apes.

## **About the organizations**

Ape Action Africa is home to more than 350 rescued primates, including gorillas, chimpanzees and monkeys. Founded in 1996, the sanctuary rescues and rehabilitates orphan primates, some only days old and hours from death, and provides them safe long-term sanctuary in family groups in large forested enclosures. Ape Action Africa also works closely with neighboring communities to improve their lives and reduce pressures on the forest.

Workshop participants: Rachel Hogan, WIRBA Terence, TAFON Franklin Kwoella

Limbe Wildlife Centre, a rescue, rehabilitation, and reintroduction/release project, was founded in 1993 as a collaborative effort between the Government of Cameroon and Pandrillus Foundation. By providing a long-term solution for confiscated wildlife and working with the local and international community, the project aims to secure the survival of the endangered species of Cameroon.

Workshop participants: *Dr. John Kyang, ATEH Wilson, MOTUMBA Glen*

Located in Cameroon's remote Mbargue Forest, Sanaga-Yong Chimpanzee Rescue Center provides sanctuary in natural habitat for chimpanzee orphans of the illegal bushmeat trade. Some of the seventy-two resident chimpanzees at Sanaga-Yong Rescue Center have been confiscated as infants from poachers or dealers, and others have suffered on chains or in small cages for decades before their rescue. Sanaga Yong Rescue Center is committed to their lifelong care.

Workshop participants: *Dr. Sheri Speede, BIPAN Severin, MOGADU Alfred*



The Pan African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA) is a unique collaboration of African primate sanctuaries, communities, governments, and global experts. PASA includes 22 sanctuaries in 12 countries across Africa which secure a future for Africa's primates and their habitat by rescuing and caring for orphaned apes and monkeys, working to stop the illegal trade in wildlife, promoting the conservation of wild primates, educating the public, and empowering communities.

Workshop participants: *Susan Lutter, facilitator; FAWOH James, PASA Education Coordinator and Ape Action Africa Education Head*