

THE EGI BULLETIN

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Insights

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From the Executive Director



Greetings to you all,

I am pleased to present you with yet another edition of our quarterly newsletter, the EGI Bulletin. In this edition, we present share some highlights from our work, and the successes we have achieved in building new partnerships.

Over the course of 2013, we received support from like-minded partners to implement a number of projects in Manyu division. This enabled us to kick-start our conservation education and community programs in the area. Therefore, as one phase of our beekeeping and agro-forestry projects draws to an end, in this edition of our newsletter we would like to share with you some insights from the field – from beneficiaries of our projects, and staff who have helped to make it all happen.

Our focus in the last quarter has been put towards cementing activities that explore human dimensions of wildlife conservation in communities around Takamanda National Park. Currently, we are implementing an awareness campaign on endangered species and developing a guide to Birds of Takamanda, among other activities. We are grateful to the Park Management there for an excellent working relationship and look forward to transformative action that will contribute to a harmonious existence of man and nature in the area.

As we have always maintained, partnership is a must when one seeks lasting solutions to environmental and conservation challenges. It is therefore our great

pleasure to enter into partnership with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Cameroon Country Programme Office (CCPO) under the Cooperation for the implementation of civil society strengthening program, funded by the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). This partnership that runs until 2017 will build EGI's capacity to effectively implement policy research and action, which is one of the pillars of our organization.

Our research program is growing, and in the coming months, we are planning a number of projects. One of these projects will research the link between herbal medicine and conservation. To prime our readers for future research findings, our Research Analyst responds to key questions in this edition of our newsletter.

We still maintain that access to quality information about the environment is important for proper decision-making, research and policy making. The EGI resource centre is unique as the sole resource centre purely dedicated to environmental literature in the area. Our Research Assistant reports about a library management training she attended, and how her newly acquired skills will contribute to improving our services to the public.

I would like to conclude by saying that EGI is a learning organization, and welcomes comments and feedback to any of the content contained in our newsletter. Feel free to contact us by email, phone, or by visiting our office in Buea.

Happy reading!

Library management training helps to improve EGI resource centre services



On 25 and 26 August 2014, EGI's Research Assistant, Esther Makazi, attended a training workshop organized by Education Information Services International (EISERVI) on library management. The workshop, which took place in Anne Gabony library in Kumba, aimed at providing basic skills and competences on how to set up and manage a library.

Opening the workshop, the Government Delegate Mr. Ngoh Victor Nkelle encouraged people from all age groups and all levels of education to improve their level of understanding, especially outside the classroom by using libraries. The workshop was then facilitated by Mr. Nyenti Andrew and Mr. Sanyi Emmanuel from EISERVI. The organization, which is the local partner of BookAid International, has in the past donated books to EGI's resource centre.

The training outlined basics of proper library functioning and management including: development of libraries, book processing activities, cataloguing, classification, advocacy, marketing and promotion of community libraries. Each of the 32 participants received a training module to guide them in their future activities towards developing and managing a library.

"This workshop was important in that it has given me the necessary knowledge and skills needed to set up and manage a library, which I believe I will be able to use to ensure that EGI's resource centre is used to its full capacity," Makazi said after her training.

In the near future, she recommends reorganization of the resource centre, development of a resource centre policy and an application form for users. In addition, she recommends the establishment of a register, which keeps records on all the available books right from procurement.

Based on these and other recommendations, public users will soon be able to experience a new and more enjoyable user experience when they visit EGI's resource centre.

Q&A: Herbal medicine and nature conservation

The Environmental Governance Institute (EGI) has initiated a research project to explore the linkages between herbal medicine and conservation. In this **Q&A**, the organization's **Research Analyst, Chama Tabi**, responds to some questions on the subject.

WHAT IS HERBAL MEDICINE?

Herbal medicine is the oldest and still the most widely used system of medicine in the world today. It is medicine made exclusively from plants (herbs, shrubs, tree barks, roots, leaves, flowers and fruits). Herbal medicines are used for the management of specific health conditions and they form part of indigenous people's cultural heritage.

COULD YOU OUTLINE SOME COMMON USES OF HERBAL MEDICINES IN CAMEROON TODAY?

Herbal medicines are used for the management of a broad range of health conditions. For example, they are commonly used in the treatment of simple coughs, malaria, typhoid, reproductive health problems in men and women, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Even complex health conditions such as HIV/AIDS are managed with herbal medicines – here, they are used to boost the body's immune system as well as to treat a variety of opportunistic infections.

TELL US THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF USING HERBAL MEDICINES?

They provide natural solutions that can be as or more effective than comparable pharmaceutical drugs with little or no side effects; herbs have the potential to benefit a variety of body systems simultaneously e.g. immune system and digestive systems, hence eliminating the need for multiple pharmaceuticals with multiple side effects. Furthermore, they are cheaper, easily available and can be consumed without prescription. However, there are also some arguments against herbal medicines. Some people feel that the exact chemical content of plants remains unknown to the healers. There are also fears that the acquisition and use of herbal remedies destroys the plant itself and contributes to extinction of valuable species. Some concerned citizens also feel that the use of herbal medicine has increased charlatanism (fake healers), who put many innocent lives at risk.



WHAT FACTORS ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE DECLINE IN THE USE OF HERBAL MEDICINES?

One important factor which is contributing to the decline in use of herbal medicine, and which EGI would like to address, is the depletion of valuable species. Increased usage caused by greater awareness on the usefulness of herbal medicines resulted in a massive rush for specific species. This resulted in their near extinction. Also, the knowledge on herbal medicine was hardly documented and was passed orally from one generation to another. As knowledge about medicinal plants reduces, we also see a decline in their use. Lastly, the advent of modern medicine with its larger scientific claims has a negative impact on the use of herbal medicines.

WHICH MEASURES HAS THE GOVERNMENT OF CAMEROON TAKEN TO SAFEGUARD THE TREASURE OF HERBAL MEDICINES?

In recognition of the important role played by herbal medicine in Cameroon's health sector, the GoC and WHO have signed a convention to draw up a strategic plan for the valorisation to traditional medicine in Cameroon. This National Strategic Plan includes the development and integration of Traditional Medicine in healthcare in Cameroon and calls for collaboration between conventional and traditional practitioners. This paved way for herbal medicine to be officially recognised as a healthcare provision sector in Cameroon. In spite of these governmental actions, the union between herbal medicine and modern medicine is still fraught with conflicts and a number of issues still need to be resolved if herbal medicine is to be used to its full potential in Cameroon. Firstly, there is need for a regulatory mechanism to control the safety and quality of products and of herbal medicine practice. Then there is the issue of educating the general public about safe and effective herbal medicinal therapies. And of course, we still need to create an evidence base on

safety and efficacy of herbal medicine and its products. Finally, there is still a strong need to document herbal medicine and the associated medicinal plants.

CAN INCREASED USE OF MEDICINAL PLANTS CONTRIBUTE TO NATURE CONSERVATION? HOW?

For increased use, it is important that plants are made available in large enough quantities and at low enough prices. If prices are too high, it will be cheaper to collect from the wild. Therefore, to take the pressure off wild stocks, the cultivation of alternative sources of supply will be crucial. It turns out that most of the collectors of medicinal plants are low-income individuals who are forced to over-exploit the resource as one of their few income earning options. At the same time, increased use creates a market and also provides an incentive for traditional healers and collectors of medicinal plants to grow their own plants in order to increase their income. An exploitation of this situation will go a long way to relieving some of the pressure on medicinal plants in the wild and as such to contributing to conservation generally.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT CONTRIBUTE TO PROMOTING THE CONSERVATION OF MEDICINAL PLANTS IN CAMEROON?

The project will show the importance of medicinal plants in the daily life of the people in Manyu. Because knowledge on medicinal plants has hardly been documented, the project seeks to document and preserve such valuable knowledge for future generations. Moreover, traditional medicines also have the potential to form the basis of pharmaceutical drugs for the treatment of a range of diseases. Thus the loss of these potentially valuable genetic resources ultimately affects the whole of society. By highlighting these different issues, the project will contribute to developing a strategy for the conservation of medicinal plants in Manyu and in Cameroon as a whole.



“We want more seedlings,” say village communities of Mamfe Central sub-division

“We were facing difficulties in getting plants like mango, kola nut, bitter kola, plums and timber, but with this project, we see Manyu division transforming into an agricultural society in the next 20 years.” This is the statement of Ayuk Humphrey Tambe, a man from Bisongabang, who volunteered to steer an agro-forestry project in his village.

Since 2013, he and other volunteers have been active in ensuring that their villages receive, plant and care for seedlings.

He is speaking at the volunteers meeting, which regularly takes place at the main nursery in Nchang village, and brings together representatives from 11 villages in Mamfe Central Sub-division of Manyu division.

The project was initiated by the Environmental Governance Institute (EGI), with the support of the Rufford Foundation, and it has been facilitating the acquisition and distribution of seedlings for the past 15 months.

“My role as a volunteer in the agroforestry project is to help other farmers to easily cultivate njangsang, bitter kola, kola, mango, bush mango and plums, among others,” says Emoh Daniel Emoh, another volunteer from Okoyong village.

To facilitate this role, volunteers were trained by foresters from the divisional delegation for forestry and wildlife (MINFOF). Among other things, they learnt the importance of tree nurseries for agro-forestry practices, how to

select seeds, create nurseries and care for nurseries. "We have learnt a lot. Previously we were just planting, but we now know there are dimensions and demarcations, the distance from one tree to another," says Emoh.

During their meetings, hosted by the community resource person Mr. Stanislaus Takangyong at the main nursery at Nchang, they also get an opportunity to discuss their progress, share ideas on how the project should run and share some of the responsibility of caring for seedlings before actual distribution takes place.

So far, the villages have received njansang (*Ricinodendron heudelotii* spp.), orange (*citrus* spp.), cola (*Cola vera*, *Cola acuminata*, *Cola nitida*), bitter cola, bush mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*), mango (*mangifera* spp.), and monkey cola. Meanwhile, three species of timber trees have been nursed and distributed to the participating communities. These include doussie (*Afzela* spp.: *Afzelia bipidensis*, *Afzelia pachyloba*); njabe (*baillonella toxisperma*) and Azobe (*Lophira alata*).

The regent chief and volunteer of Mfaitock II village, Eyong James Tabot has high ambitions for his village. When they received their share of seedlings, their action was quick and decisive. "We have planted our own seedlings, we prepared the site, and the project is welcome," he explains. The village has planted the seedlings in their community farm.

Out of the nine villages which have collected seedlings, his is the only one that has used community land, while the rest have distributed seedlings to individual farms. Although Eyong is thankful for the seedlings his village received, he has grand plans, and he does not hesitate to state what his village needs to ensure that these plans are realized.

"Usually, seedlings like bitter kola are very scarce to get. I am not happy about the

quantities you have given us because they are few. We need more, because we are really committed to the project and have prepared enough space on our site for planting," he says. Others like Ayuk say they would like more bitter mango and bush mango seedlings.

They may have a point. Large areas have been set aside by villagers, and the seedlings supplied in the pilot phase were insufficient to cover this need. In an effort to establish viable supply structures, EGI has committed itself to train community members on selecting healthy and viable seed, establishing village nurseries and setting up mechanisms to manage and distribute these seedlings all across their villages.

"A village-based approach with community seed-banks will be more sustainable in the long-run. Participating village communities will be able to nurse the type of trees that are most in demand, and it will reduce the hurdles of transportation, so villages such as Eshobi and Eyang-tui, which have not been active because of bad roads, will be better served," John Takang, the EGI Executive Director, comments on the plans for the next phase of the project.



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We need more, because we are really committed to the project and have prepared enough space on our site for planting

Eyong James Tabot (Regent Chief of Mfaitock II Village)

Practice makes perfect: Community initiative groups learn all about bee keeping

The rainy season is just ending, and Ruth Mobia, EGI's Community Programs Officer, is eager to head out and find out how the beekeeping project is going on. The roads are still wet, and she must brave sudden rainy showers as she shuttles between towns and finally hitches a motorcycle ride to the final destination, that is located deep in the forested area of Manyu division.

Nkhogo and Aja villages are home to members of three common initiative groups that received beehives and other beekeeping gear in 2013. With the help of a local beekeeper, called Mr. Mbounyam Hans Besong, Mobia held workshops to train them on beekeeping. The members were taught about different types of hives, their advantages and disadvantages, bee species, colonies and even how conflicts arise between bees.

They were also educated on the kind of food to give bees and harvesting processes. The training was done to ensure that bee farmers improve practices and ensure good honey harvests.



Even if a business is good, it will rarely succeed without a solid business plan and strategy. This is the message that trained group members said they took away from another workshop that Mobia held on business management. She taught them what strategies to use when doing business in a group and the important role that rules and regulations play in running a group business.

Bee farming is a business like any other

Making good on the common saying that practice makes perfect, Besong and Mobia helped the group members to select appropriate sites for their apiaries, and helped them to set up the hives in a way that would keep away predators and pests, and protect

Strength in numbers- building networks with other bee farmers

them from the vagaries of the weather. "Bees are so sensitive in choosing their habitats. They tend to look for homes that are well protected from invaders to form their colony," explained Mobia. Everyone got a chance to demonstrate their practical skills, with the two trainers giving a helping hand when required.

In order to improve their chances at success even further, EGI has been building partnerships with bee keeping experts to source additional technical knowhow. Mobia visited Bonakanda Bova Bee Farmers Group (BOBEEFAG) for an introductory meeting and attended a workshop to refresh her own skills.



"I am now able to bring in more updated technical solutions and help the community beekeeping trainer in solving their problems effectively," Mobia said after the workshop. She made good on her promise during the training. Group members had been asked to wait for two weeks for the hives to colonise naturally. In her regular interaction with them, they had been anxious that some hives were still empty.

After the training

As Mobia approaches the first village, Aja, she is eager to get to the apiaries to see how the bee hives have held up during the rainy season, and to start artificial colonization of empty hives.

"The main purpose of this project is to replace hunting with beekeeping. This cannot be realized if the hives are not colonized," Mobia explains the rationale behind this exercise.

First however, she has to inform and sensitize some community members individually on how and why it is necessary for the artificial colonisation to be done. This was aimed at identifying those who have bee colonies in their farmlands. They realize that most of those with dead trees in their farm considered the bee colonies that had found a home there a nuisance, and had been trying to get rid of the pesky inhabitants by spraying, burning and other unfriendly practices.

She discovers that some group members, afraid that their hives would get damaged through the long rainy season, have transferred them into their homes for storage, awaiting the dry season. She helps them to set the hives up and use aluminium sheets to cover them properly, so that they can be assured that no harm will come to their hives.

"I will be back soon"

Next, with selected members from the groups, Mobia sets out to implement her latest plan to catch the bees and transfer them to a friendlier neighbourhood – the apiaries that she and group members had set aside for them.

She spends a few weeks shuttling between Aja and Nkhogo villages, until finally, they have seven hives colonized. The smiles on group members' faces are all the assurance she gets that they are on track. That, and the expectations that some of them express, are well coined by Mr. Ayuk Etta, a hunter from Nkhogho, who says, "If we can get to a point where we gain more income, there will be no need for some of us to go out to hunt late at night which exposes us to so much danger just to get our daily bread."

Another bee farmer, Mr Bisong Elvis explains the value he places on continued training. "Bee keeping has its own challenges. The last time we tried it, we faced difficulties feeding the bees during the rainy season, and we ended up getting very little honey. When EGI delegates people to visit the villages and see how they can help us, we are going to be better prepared to face the challenges."

As Mobia climbs on to a motorcycle taxi, ready for a bone-jarring ride to the bus station to travel back to Buea, she leaves the group members with the assurance that she will be back to help them through these challenges. Until then, she and Besong, the local beekeeping expert, are only a phone call away.

From intern to research assistant

Esther Makazi narrates how her internship prepared her for a career in research

When I knocked on the door of Environmental Governance Institute (EGI) in January 2014, I was looking for a place that could help me determine and develop my skills. I was fresh out of university, and I knew that if I wanted to make the correct career choice, I would need some orientation. I started my internship on 1 February 2014, not knowing that I would stay at EGI long after my internship. This is the story of how my internship prepared me to join the EGI team as a Research Assistant.

Researching on people, the environment and governance

During the first few weeks, I had to read and understand different environmental concepts, and make notes for discussion with staff members. As the weeks passed, I did desk research on various topics, such as environmental and participatory governance, as well as community approaches towards biodiversity conservation.

Armed with this information, I developed a concept explaining how communities can be approached and how they can be involved in conservation practices. I am glad to say that my ideas were incorporated



into EGI's implementation plan. I also did some work on forest governance and compliance with forest laws and policies in Cameroon and on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) in Cameroon.

Events to promote environmental awareness

EGI celebrated World Wetland Day (WWD) on the 5 February 2014 in Government High School Bolifamba and World Water Day commemorations on 22 March 2014. In both cases, I was involved in organizing the events and even in creating awareness during school environment club meetings. Such activities were very important for me as an individual because I had the privilege to meet many students and interact with them face to face. I never imagined I could stand at the front of a classroom and talk to students but thanks to EGI, I discovered that a person's talent does not depend on his or her imagination but on their skills.

I got the chance to apply my theoretical understanding to practical situations, and most of all, I saw the efforts of my work being discussed seriously by experienced staff, and where possible, being incorporated into activities.

Communicating with the public

EGI shares activities and progress with the public through the internet (Face book, e-mails), media (radio and television), newspapers, talk shows, just to name a few. During my internship, I learnt the techniques of doing increasing interaction and knowledge sharing with the public, and even wrote some articles.

I cannot pretend that it was easy. Internship requires hard work and dedication, and a willingness to interact and question things. I encountered many new things, and had many lessons to learn about implementing technical tasks, using different types of software and even writing different types of documents.

By the end of my internship, I had a better understanding of what it entails to pursue a career in environmental research. I also realized just how much work needed to be done to get the information and data needed for making decisions out to the people. I am proud to say that my work was evaluated and found to be very good, and when I concluded my four month internship, I was offered the position of Research Assistant.

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