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LANDSCAPE VIRUNGA FOCAL AREA
Interim Report: January 1 – April 30, 2008

Project	
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1. INTRODUCTION

The Mikeno Sector of Virunga NP is situated in the south-east part of the park, against the border with Rwanda and Uganda. Virunga NP itself forms the backbone of a large set of interconnected Protected Areas that together form the Greater Virunga Landscape.

The Mikeno sector is home to many endangered species of global value, including the Mountain Gorilla *Gorilla beringei beringei*, which is an important economic asset thanks to the tourism it generates. The southern part of the Park offers many other economical and ecological services. These services are however highly threatened by different types of factors and events. The recent and ongoing armed conflicts have resulted in mass movement of people from more remote parts of the Ituri and Maniema region towards PNVi. These movements of people fleeing armed conflicts have led to the uncontrolled, and mostly illegal settling of people inside the park, as well as unprecedented levels of poaching and deforestation. Mountain Gorillas have been the direct target of several attacks and 10 individuals at least have been killed (two individuals remaining unaccounted for).

The security situation in the recent past in Eastern DRC also meant that DRC Park Service (ICCN) authorities were not in a position to effectively protect the Mikeno sector of PNVi.

As response to this crisis, USAID has issued a grant to WWF as leader of the CARPE program in the Virunga Focal Area. This support has four components:

Component 1. Emergency support to ICCN operations in Mikeno and Nyamulagira sectors

Activity 1.1: Provide support to ICCN law enforcement operations in the Mikeno and Nyamulagira sector.

Component 2. Outreach and Communication



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Activity 2.1 Devise and Implement an ICCN Communication Plan

Activity 2.2 Organize Meetings and a Workshop to Discuss Key Stakeholder Issues

Activity 2.3 Organize a VIP meeting involving key stakeholders (incl. the local government, provincial administration, the army, among others), and several consultation meetings along the Mikeno sector border with traditional leaders, village leaders, farmers and other local people as well as local NGOs and CBOs.

Component 3. Review and Reform of the Current Tourism Benefit-Sharing Scheme

Activity 3.1 Review the national policies in other COMIFAC countries and Uganda, especially similar arrangements in neighboring areas of Rwanda and Uganda (taking into account the trans-boundary dimension) to analyze the legal and policy framework and define options

Activity 3.2 Document the system currently in place, actors, constraints etc. and interview/consultation of stakeholders views on best scenarios

Activity 3.3 Develop a proposal for a new system which is supported by stakeholders; proposal for mechanism for tracking of tourism revenues, management and channeling of funds, systems for use by local communities (traditional chiefs, development activities, crop-raiding compensation schemes etc.)

Component 4. Support small development interventions in the four neighboring parishes

Activity 4.1 Increase the height of Mikeno wall by half a meter over at least 15 km.

Activity 4.2 Support partial rehabilitation of 3 local primary schools

2. HIGHLIGHTS OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During the period January-April 2008, the majority of the Mikeno sector of Virunga National Park, which forms the main geographical target of this grant, has remained under the control of troops loyal to Gen. Laurent Nkunda, generally considered as rebel. This situation is a continuation of the movement engaged in September 2007 when Nkunda's troops invaded large parts of the southern sector of Virunga NP.

As a result, the rangers of the ICCN (*Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature*, the Protected Area Authority in DRC) and the staff of the conservation NGOs,

including WWF, could not enter the Mikeno sector and implement the workplan. Relatively little achievement has therefore to be reported.

However, progress has been achieved on three fronts: improved communication between ICCN and local population; inception of the study on revenue sharing; preparation of the rehabilitation of the Mikeno wall through consultation with local NGOs and CBOs. Progress has also be made on documenting the situation of illegal charcoal trade –through collaboration with Wildlife Direct- and on the preparation of a large scale programme of improved wood stoves to complement the programme funded by USAID/CARPE – through matching funds from WWF-.

The Mikeno Crisis committee (lead by ICCN and comprising of ICCN senior warden in charge of Mikeno and several conservation NGOs) has continued to be operational up to March 2008 and gave support in terms of patrols, fuel and equipment as well as to ICCN efforts in the judiciary.

3. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

Activity 1.1

The “Cellule de crise” has been operational during this period up to end of March, when change in ICCN staff and the completion of the emergency workplan lead to the suspension of the crisis committee. Patrols have continued to be supported as well as food rations and fuel. Specific support from this grant and match funds allowed the payment of ICCN lawyer to proceed with the Goma Tribunal with regards to the gorilla crisis and associated issues. Funds have also been earmarked for a professional audit by Price Waterhouse Coopers on financial and administrative procedure of this unique and innovative joint bank account and management structure as well as a physical control of activities undertaken and equipment supplied. Audit will take place during the next reporting period, as it can not take place until the last set of equipment (ranger’s uniforms) have been physically delivered in Goma; uniforms have been ordered and shipped and should arrive in Goma in early June.

Support in January to March, with important logistical and financial assistance from the Frankfurt Zoological Society- also helped ICCN to continue the very successful seizures of charcoal illegally produced in the Park.

Activity 2.1

The grant helped organize eight meetings where ICCN local staff, local chiefs and 13 CBOs were involved. The aim of those meeting was to identify communication problems between the local communities and ICCN staff in this sector. A frame of dialogue has been set to improve the situation and a communication plan is in elaboration.

Activities 2.2

Traffic of bush meat between Mikeno sector and Goma was highlight as an important issue by the stakeholders. 4 campaigns of sensitization have been organized in four

different villages. The subjects were the protection of the gorilla and others species and the protection of the habitat of those animals. This initiative has conducted to drastically slow down the traffic of bush meat between Mikeno sector and Goma.

Activities 2.3

Preliminary meetings have been organized with the collaboration of ICCN Provincial Direction staff and the Governorate to plan by mid June the VIP meeting program. Guests to this meeting and speakers have already been identify and contacted.

Activities 3.1 to 3.3

Important progress has been made under component 3 of this grant. Several coordination meetings between WWF and other partners have pointed out to the need to coordinate various efforts from conservation NGOs in this area. Two types of studies have therefore been identified; the first one has been completed, while the second one is being developed.

The first activity has been to undertake a study on the current Revenue Sharing system in DRC and has been led by IGCP. A draft report has been produced and will be formally tabled to ICCN and partners at the end of May.

This report looks at the background on Revenue Sharing (RS) in Virunga, at a description of the institutional set up, including actors and NGOs involved and in particular CONCD (*Convergence pour la Conservation et le Développement*). The report also looks at the past system of RS and provides some recommendations.

The second study to be undertaken under the umbrella of this grant is a wider study on current system in the region (including Uganda and Rwanda but that will also include other African countries) with the objective to “externalize” the approach and ensure that approaches in neighboring countries and DRC are similar. By the end of May Terms of Reference will be produced so that we can start to recruit a consultant for this job.

Activities 4.1

Two meetings have been held with a total of 19 organizations that have led to the development of a framework for the rehabilitation of the Mikeno wall. The system ensures that the work is entirely executed by local communities who will derive tangible benefits from employment. It has been decided that efforts will concentrate in the southern part of the Mikeno sector, which is under the control of the central government. It is planned to increase the height of the wall from 1m to 1.5m for a length of 10 km (5km further north are inaccessible because the area is occupied by CNDP rebels). WWF has made available match funds to complement those provided under this grant so that a total of 10km can be rehabilitated through sub-contracts –managed by IGCP and WWF- to local communities.

Activities 4.2

Three schools have been identified for rehabilitation.

4. VARIATION FROM APPROVED WORK PLAN

Conflicts with armed groups and the presence of rebels in this area have delays intervention in Mikeno sector.

With the collaboration of Wildlife Direct, trade of illegal charcoal in Mikeno sector have been better documented and will conduce to a large scale program on improve stove which will reinforce the program funded by USAID/CARPE through matching funds from WWF.

5. WAY FORWARD / PERSPECTIVES

- We plan to provide support to ICCN law enforcement in Nyamulagira sector (Mikeno being very well support in equipment by others partners (London ZS, Frankfurt ZS, Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund and Africa Conservation Fund)). Equipment, food ration, medical kit will be provide to the benefice of 10 patrols of this sector.
- ICCN communication plan will be implemented by July
- VIP meeting is programmed for mid June
- The tourism benefit-sharing scheme currently in place being documented, the next step is to develop proposal which should improve the actual system. ToRs will be proposed for an international Consultancy on this subject.
- Mikeno wall will be elevated by 0.5m for a length of 10km
- 3 schools will be rehabilitated by August