

**Environmental Impact Assessment  
and  
Environmental Management Plan**

**Date February 14<sup>th</sup> 2019**

**CEPF Grant 109614**

**Grantee:**

**Development Concern (DEVCON)**

**Project Title:**

***Community Action to save Iko-Esai Rhoko Forest***

**Project Location:**

**Iko-Esai Community, Akamkpa LGA, Cross River State, Nigeria**

## **Grant Summary**

1. Grantee organization. Development Concern (DEVCON)
2. Grant title. Community Action to Save Iko-Esai Rhoko Forest
3. Grant number. 109614
4. Grant amount (49,995 US dollars).
5. Proposed dates of grant. August, 2018 to September, 2019
6. Countries or territories where project will be undertaken. Nigeria
7. Summary of the project: The overall objective of this project is to contribute to the sustainable management of the Cross River National Park Oban Division. The specific objective is to strengthen local community's capacity to manage 20,000ha of community forest contiguous with the Cross River National Park Oban Division. The project is divided into three components:
  - 1) Community organizing and institutional capacity building;
  - 2) Forest business development through management planning and implementation, ecotourism, and education;
  - 3) Sustainable livelihoods development.
8. Date of preparation of this document. February 14, 2019
9. **Status of area to be impacted:**

This project is implemented in Iko-Esai, a forest dependent community located around the western edge of the Oban corridor of the Cross River National Park Oban Division straddling the border with Cameroon, forming the Eastern end of the Guinean Forests biodiversity hotspot. This community delineated 20,000 hectares of pristine forest (designated RHOKO Camp) as a community-protected area for Primate Rehabilitation and Reintroduction, including serving as area for environmental and ecological studies. This forest patch provides refuge for the most diverse range of primate species including Gorillas, Chimpanzees, Presus Red Colobus, drills, Guenons and Mangebeys, including forest Elephants, which play very vital role in the rainforest ecology through seed dispersal. The area is also contiguous with the Okpon forest reserve, thus playing a vital role as a buffer between other community land use zones and protected areas – the Park and Reserve. Iko-Esai community require the support that this project is providing to build local community institutional capacity to organize, plan, and enforce community based regulations to ensure sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation. This is necessary as expanding human population and the attendant increased conversation of forests to agricultural land pose a great threat to forests in this area, including community forest and protected areas. The area is also captured in the tourism map of CRS, providing excellent opportunity for community tourism and other benefits that will serve as incentives to this community to continue to contribute to conservation of their forest and nearby protected areas.

## 10. **Approach:**

The overall objective of this project is to contribute to the sustainable management of the CrossRiver National Park Oban Division. The specific objective is to strengthen local community's capacity to manage 20,000ha of community forest contiguous with the Cross River National Park Oban Division.

The project is divided into three components:

- 1) Community organizing and institutional capacity building;
- 2) Forest business development through management planning and implementation, ecotourism, and education; and
- 3) Sustainable livelihoods development.

The following project activities will contribute to realizing the project objectives and effectively

- 1) Community organizing including capacity building for a more inclusive, transparent, and accountable forest and natural resources governance. This activity will enable the community to reorganize their local institutions to address internal capacity issues that is limiting their conservation efforts. Already, the community has formed the Esai Conservation Forum as platform for a robust participation of community members in forest management and biodiversity conservation. This and other relevant institutions in the community will benefit from capacity building and seek to harmonise their efforts for more effective results.
- 2) Review and implementation of Esai's land use plan and by-laws to strengthen the implementation in view of current realities. The community's current land use plan was developed over 15 years ago. Weak monitoring and inability for the community to review this plan has affected effective implementation, and weakened rule enforcement. This activity will support the community to revisit this plan to improve land management and resolve tenure issues that emerged or have been reinforced as the demand and pressure for forest conversion to other land use types increases. As a first step in the implementation of the newly revised plan, this project will work with the community to raise tree nursery of 3000 indigenous species to replant 20 hectares of deforested and degraded forest areas
- 3) Rehabilitation of eco-lodges that are already in existence and had served as educational centre and accommodation in support of eco-tourism. These are five wooden lodges made with local materials but are in a state of disrepair and require rehabilitation. This project will support the community to rehabilitate three of the lodges and re-introduce environmental education activities while collaborating with the Cross River State Tourism Bureau and linking with other agencies and private sector operators to reawaken and support eco-tourism development in Esai. The community's Forest Eco-Guards will be trained to support forest monitoring and the management of RHOKO Camp.
- 4) Promote sustainable livelihoods with focus on value addition for cassava processing, domestication improved species of bush mango (*irvingia gabonensis*), a high economic value non timber forest product, and honey production. Forest clearing for cassava with the accompanying bush burning in the course of land preparation is a major direct driver of deforestation in the project area, while poverty (low income) remains the most mentioned underlying driver. The need for more food and income to meet the needs of growing populations prompts them to convert the forest to farmland. In spite of this, inefficient post harvesting handling undermines farmers' efforts and make lower returns. This project will therefore support the target community with two sets of improved processing equipment for cassava capable of increasing productivity by more than 50%. This will raise household and individual income. The risk of expanding farms to forest areas will be mitigated by implementing the revised land use plan and enforcing the plan's by-laws. The project will also support community members to cultivate improved species of bush mango with fruiting period of 5 years compared to 15 years from wild species. In addition, the project will train farmers on setting up and managing apiaries, which will help to replicate the natural environment for bees' formation. Bush mango and bee farming will combine to not only provide livelihoods support but also help in promoting conservation. Honey harvesting in the wild is a major cause of forest fire and forest degradation in this area.
- 5) Dialogue and town hall meeting on policies, laws, and regulations on forestry, particularly community forestry and biodiversity conservation bringing together target community, Akamkpa Local Government, Forestry Commission, Tourism Bureau and National Park.
- 6)

11. **Anticipated impact:**

The project is designed to have very minimal social and environmental impact. Community organizing will set clear development and natural resource management objectives and strategies that will respect the rights of all community members, both male and female. The project will support physical construction and/or rehabilitation of eco lodges. This activity will focus on rehabilitating existing Eco-lodges which are dilapidated. The materials will be sourced locally without any damage to the environment, especially the protected area. Forestry activities will only include regeneration of deforested areas, principally in secondary forests that the community themselves will identify in their land-use planning process. The process will not limit access to forest and/or forest resources, neither will it require relocation of any settlement but will ensure that community members come together to dialogue and agree on most suitable measures to promote conservation while sustaining the productivity of their livelihoods capitals. The introduction of bush mango is based on the fact that it is an indigenous species with high economic value and ecological relevance. This will serve the dual purpose of increasing income earning for households in the community and promoting agroforestry. No plantations will be established so the risk of one species dominating and altering the natural landscape will not arise. In addition, bees exist naturally in the wild and unsustainable harvesting using fire has been responsible for accidental fire outbreaks in the past. This project has introduced activity on bee keeping for honey production to build local capacity on sustainable apiary. This will not have any negative impact on the environment.

## 12. **Mitigation measures:**

This project generally has very minimal negative impacts. However, to mitigate any that could eventually evolve, the following measures will be observed.

- 1) The Forest management plan will make provision for the continuous use of land in a sustainable manner. There will be no ban on access to forest and/or forest resources, or relocation of existing settlements. The plan will be a consensus agreement among community members and they themselves will set regulations for enforcement, and plan to monitor and review progress to continuously adapt the plan to their realities as they change.
- 2) Forestry activities will avoid the establishment of plantations or monocultures. DEVCON will work closely with community members to adopt agroforestry practices that contribute to agricultural productivity and environmental conservation without causing any damage.
- 3) The rehabilitation of eco-lodges will focus on existing structures on their current sites. Most of the materials will be sourced locally to blend with the natural environment. Management of the eco-lodges will ensure compliance to good environmental practices similar to those in protected areas.
- 4) For bee farming, the materials to be used for the construction of the bee hives will be sourced outside the conservation area, the bees will be allowed to colonize naturally and harvesting will be done in a manner that will not harm the bees, and natural forest will not be affected by the installation of the hives.
- 5) The entire project will be community driven. The project will support the community to reinforce relevant traditional ecological practices and seek ways to strengthen collaboration with other stakeholders to sustain conservation efforts in the area.

## 13. **Actions to ensure health and safety:**

This project has anticipated and will avoid adverse impacts of project activities on the health and safety of the community during the project implementation. Community members will be provided with safe and healthy working instruments like bee suits to avoid dangerous stings. The apiary will be sited away from crowded human settlements to avoid possibility of widespread bee stings. Community members will be adequately trained on how to manage the bees to the point of harvesting to minimize risk to health and safety. All the project activities are not likely to generate any wastes that are not bio-degradable.

However, rehabilitation of the eco-lodges may involve solid wastes that the workers will carefully collect and dispose on designated site outside the protected area. The project will provide protective wears including boots and hand gloves to workers/community members to mitigate risks to health and safety in the course of their work. The project will not involve the use of any chemicals.

14. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** This section aims to outline what steps the proponent will take to monitor and evaluate the impact of the proposed intervention.

DEVCON will conduct regular monitoring of project activities. There will be a monthly progress review meeting to assess progress and record results as they occur. Project staff will work closely with community institutions especially ECO and their ECO-Guards to review progress against work plan, and DEVCON's internal monitoring and evaluation system will frequently keep the project log frame in view to ensure effective and efficient delivery of project outcomes.

15. **Permission of the landowner:**

Community participation is central to the design and implementation of this project. The community has traditional practices of allocating land to development projects. This project will benefit from this provision as it is community-driven. Also, the eco-lodges at Rhoko Camp already exist and only require rehabilitation, meaning no permission for land is required for this particular activity. Furthermore, forestry activities will be carried out on owners' land by the owners themselves to encourage sustainable agro forestry without seeking permission for land.

16. **Consultation:**

DEVCON is implementing this project using a robust and iterative engagement with stakeholders. It held the first of such meeting with Iko-Esai community in a town hall meeting on 7th September, 2018 to elaborate on the project deliverable and expected outcomes. Men, women and youth from the community attended this meeting. The meeting provided the initial platform required to implement the project activities, and clearly defined expectations and roles in the project delivery. The consensus reached at this meeting was the need for the community to strengthen their institutional arrangement, rule enforcement and sustain active participation in the project so they are able to own and sustain the outcomes, especially the areas of tourism development and other economic incentives for the protection of Rhoko Camp.

Again, on 14th September, DEVCON held follow meeting with the community leaders including the Council of Chiefs, Women and Youth Leaders, and opinion leaders of community leaders 14th September. This meeting enabled the community leaders to take decisions on issues and options raised at the general community meeting. These included reorganizing community level institutions to strengthen natural resource management and rule enforcement, community level coordination of the project, sitting and relevant input to the project. The decisions taking at this meeting identified community members for specific roles in the project.

Considering the tourism potential of the target area and the need for integration with government policies and measures, DEVCON met with the Managing Director and staff of the CRS Tourism Bureau in Calabar on 5th September, 2018 to discuss their participation in the project and opportunities to sustain the outcomes of the project. The discussion centered on the State's tourism development plan and the recent investments in community tourism as incentive to sustainable forest management, biodiversity conservation, and economic development option. Already included in the tourism map of the State, the Tourism Bureau is considering best options for supporting Rhoko Camp and Iko-Esai build and sustain their natural and social capital for tourism investment, using this project as a first step.

The community having reorganized their institutional arrangement for community-based conservation by setting up ECO and the ECO Guard, DEVCON met with the board of trustees and management team of ECO on 11th October, 2018 in Iko-Esai. The meeting was the first of several iterations to dialogue and develop their community plans for sustainable forest management and effective rule enforcement, and legal recognition by the State Government. Follow up meetings continued, during which time they finalized the development of the forest management plan and by-laws, and registration as a community-based organization with the government of Cross River State.

Furthermore, on the 8th of November, 2018 DEVCON met with the Controller of Parks of the Cross River National Park and management staff at their Akamkpa office in the Okwango Division of the Cross River National Park (CRNP). That meeting discussed the project's contributions to sustainable management of the Rhoko Camp and adjoining forests contiguous with the CRNP, and need to strengthen traditional ecological knowledge. This meeting led to another meeting again with the Park on 21st November, 2018, this time with the training staff, for hands-on support and training of the ECO-Guard on effective forest surveillance. Within the same period, DEVCON met with conservation and community development professionals in the likes of Mr. Tony Atah of the REDD+ Programme and Dr. Peter Betiang, a senior researcher on community development from the Department of Continuing Education and Development Studies, University of Calabar to solicit support to link the project with the sub-national and national REDD+ strategy and provide practical support to ECO and the ECO-Guards to understand the forestry law in relation to improved community-level forest governance. DEVCON intends to support Iko-Esau community, especially ECO, to adopt the principle of good governance and remaining transparent and accountable to their communities in their approach to supporting community-level forest management and biodiversity conservation.

On the 9th and 13th of November, DEVCON met with field officers of the CRS Forestry Commission who have direct responsibility of supporting community forestry and biodiversity conservation in the State. DEVCON focused the discussion on supporting Iko-Esai, especially the ECO-Guards, to begin implementing their forest management plan with priority attention on raising indigenous tree nurseries and replanting on degenerated sites.

As a very important factor to engendering sustainable forestry and improved forest governance in CRS, DEVCON designed this project to encourage the participation of (Akamkpa) Local Government where this project is situated. On November 26th DEVCON met with ... to elaborate on the project and the role of the LG in line with the CRS Forestry Commission Law 2010. While there is a statutory gap in the LG's arrangement regarding forestry issues, which currently is under the Department of Agriculture unlike at the State level that has a Commission dedicated to forestry, the LG recognized the relevance of the forest to their economic development and the need for sustainable utilization. This forms a critical foundation for further policy dialogue in participatory forest management in CRS.

Though not an initial plan for this project, DEVCON worked with Iko-Esai community to engage with neighboring communities to share experience and build cooperation/collaboration required to manage larger forest blocs in the area. After several visits to individual communities, DEVCON mobilized 12 communities within the Okpon/Iko/Ekuri forest bloc to a meeting in Iko-Esai on 6th October, 2018. Village heads, youth and women leaders, and at least one opinion leader from each of these communities attended this meeting. The discussions centered on drivers of forest loss, weak rule enforcement, encroachment from neighboring communities, the relevance of management plans and the need to sustain the newly formed collaboration to protect the culture, livelihoods, and environment in the target areas. This level of engagement is able to sustain over 100,000 ha of pristine forest in the localities (already Ekuri has 33,000ha and Iko-Esai itself 20,000ha, only 2 of the 12 communities accounting for over 50% of the estimated figure).

17. **Disclosure:**

At the level of project design, the community and DEVCON identified possible risks and required safeguards for the project. During inception before project implementation, DEVCON discussed these safeguards at focal meetings with community leaders and at community town hall meetings. The safeguards also formed part of the discussions with the National Park, Forestry Commission, and Tourism Bureau.

18. **Grievance mechanism:**

DEVCON proposes this grievance redress mechanism in order to ensure that grievances and complaints on any aspect of the project are addressed in a timely and satisfactory manner, and that all possible avenues are available to community members and other stakeholders to express their grievances and seek redress. As the project design is simple with very minimal risk, so is the grievance redress.

DEVCON will be the grievance focal point for the project, directly relating with stakeholders and partners. Where stakeholders, including communities, government, civil society and groups within them or others outside have grievances or queries on any part of the project, they will direct their concerns to DEVCON, specifically to the Executive Director with the following contact information: [devconning@yahoo.com](mailto:devconning@yahoo.com)

All grievances addressed to DEVCON must be handled within 10 working days. Failure to do so, or if the aggrieved is not satisfied, they may to escalate the grievance to CEPF regional implementation team with the following contact information: [ruth.akagu@birdlife.org](mailto:ruth.akagu@birdlife.org)

At the community level, where grievances are interpersonal but with potential links to and impact on the project, the Village Head and his Traditional Council of Chiefs will be the grievance focal point. DEVCON's field officer is expected to be aware of grievances handled at this level and appropriately document and report on them. The Traditional Council of Chiefs will address all grievances addressed to them within 10 working days. Failure to do so, the grievance may be referred to DEVCON.

Project-related grievance on the part of other stakeholders, including government and civil society will first be addressed to DEVCON after which the concern may be escalated to CEPF regional team if DEVCON does not respond and/or is not able to address the issue(s) within 10 working days.

On the other hand, where DEVCON is the aggrieved party, DEVCON will channel their grievances to the Village Head and his Traditional Council of Chiefs on the part of the community, or heads of institutions where other stakeholders and/or partners are involved.

To enable community members and other stakeholders and partners be aware of this grievance redress mechanism, DEVCON will make a copy of this document available to the Village Council, ECO, Youth and Women's groups in the community. In addition, DEVCON will elaborate on the GRM process during community town hall meetings and focal group meetings during project activities. Posters will also be produced demonstrating details of the GRM. The GRM will operate at all levels of the project, and will be included in project progress reports.