

Saving the Critically Endangered Cross River Gorilla: Changing Attitudes and Behaviours through Entertainment-Education Program

Hillary Chukwu

Wildlife Conservation Society, Nigeria Program.

Correspondence: hchukwu@wcs.org

Abstract: The Cross River Gorilla (*gorilla gorilla dielhi*) is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Due to hunting fewer than 300 individuals survive today, restricted to the mountainous forests straddling the border between Nigeria and Cameroon. The main threats to these gorillas are hunting and habitat loss mainly from farming and logging. To complement law enforcement efforts to address these threats, the Wildlife Conservation Society launched the “My Gorilla My Community” program, a weekly radio magazine program that combines entertainment and education to influence attitude and behavior change. This program debuted on both stations of Cross River Broadcasting Cooperation (CRBC) Calabar and Ikom in April 2015 with a target audience of over seventy thousand people living in and around the Cross River gorilla landscape. A survey was conducted in 2014 to establish a baseline of knowledge, and attitudes and behaviours in the target communities. The survey identified important gaps in knowledge, as well as attitudes and behaviors affecting Cross River gorilla conservation that guided development of program content. Interactions with the audience and feedback from listener groups established in the target communities are being used to monitor progress and adapt program design and implementation. A post-campaign survey is planned for 2019 to evaluate the impact of the program by comparing levels of knowledge, and attitudes and behaviours to baseline levels. This paper therefore presents key findings of the baseline survey and progress on the “My Gorilla My Community program”.

INTRODUCTION

Once thought to be extinct, the Cross River gorilla is a unique subspecies of the western lowland gorilla which resurfaced in the 1980s. They are only found in the forests along the borders of Nigeria and Cameroon. Cross River gorillas live in roughly 11 subgroups dispersed amongst the region’s highland areas. This area is recognised as a biodiversity hotspot of global significance –an area with high conservation value. The estimated numbers hover at fewer than 300 individuals, as a result of hunting and habitat loss. Dunn et al (2014).

WCS Nigeria Program has for many years worked with the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon, local communities, and other stakeholders to reduce threats to Cross River gorillas and safeguard their long-term survival through the implementation of a number of activities such as law enforcement, conservation education and community sensitization, community-based conservation, livelihood initiatives, and securing stronger protection status for key forest areas.

To complement law enforcement, WCS designed a conservation education program in Nigeria, beginning its implementation since 2001. The over-arching aim of this program is to increase awareness among the local population about the conservation status of Cross River gorillas and increase local support for conservation of these unique gorilla species. The

program is designed to inspire a change of the people’s attitudes and behaviours towards conservation and the protection of this critically endangered species

METHODOLOGY

This study basically makes use of data from direct field study. It also draws from the WCS *Regional Action Plan for the conservation of Cross River Gorillas* (2014-2019). A baseline survey was conducted in 9 selected communities within the Cross River state gorilla range to examine and evaluate the threats facing the Cross River gorilla as well as how much people living in those areas know about the species. The results from this survey were used as a working document in designing the radio program and other gorilla protection campaign materials.

Theoretical Framework Entertainment Education

Entertainment-Education is a relatively newly derived term curled from a marriage of “entertainment” and “education”. It describes the use of various entertainment platforms, especially drama to educate and enlighten the public. Entertainment education is the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate in order to increase audience members’ knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitude, shift social norms, and change the overt behavior of individuals and communities (W.J Brown 2017). The

strategy of entertainment education is an effective tool to reach to marginalized groups and communities (Singhal and Rogers 1999). The entertainment education strategy contributes to social change in multiple ways. Entertainment education can influence audience members’ awareness, attitudes, and behavior toward a socially desirable end (Khalid and Ahmed, 2014). “*My Gorilla My Community*” is therefore designed with the principles of Entertainment Education. The idea is to educate and enlighten the listeners, especially members of local communities on the various conservation best practices, while at the same time entertaining them thoroughly.

An overview of the threats to Cross River Gorilla Survival

Like most other threatened wildlife species, the Cross River gorilla faces a catalogue of factors threatening their survival in the wild. Hunting, forest clearance for agriculture and timber, and disease are the main threats to Cross River gorilla survival and these problems continue to increase in intensity and extent (ESI, 2011). There are also other subtle threats facing the Cross River Gorillas which might not readily stare

us in the face; such as cultures and traditions of people living in close proximity to the gorilla ranges, natural disasters and environmental factors among others. Hunting is considered the most severe threat to the survival of the Cross River gorilla. More than habitat loss and other forms of threat in some areas, hunting of gorillas for meat as well as capturing them for sales are other hazards greatly affecting gorilla populations across Africa. The Cross River gorilla is even in a more precarious situation due mainly to the nature of their present habitats in Nigeria and Cameroon. The gorilla range in this region is located quite close to people. These people of the forest communities usually depend on the forest for their daily living. These activities include farming and tree logging which results to habitat loss and (or) fragmentations (A. Dunn et-al, 2014). And according to the WCS Nigeria’s MGMC Baseline Survey Reports (2015), they are mostly peasant farmers, as almost half the total number of respondents reported subsistence agriculture as their main activity. Likewise, subsistence agriculture was the predominant economic activity of most of the households, while some also do hunting. Figure 1 shows the major economic activities of the communities sampled.

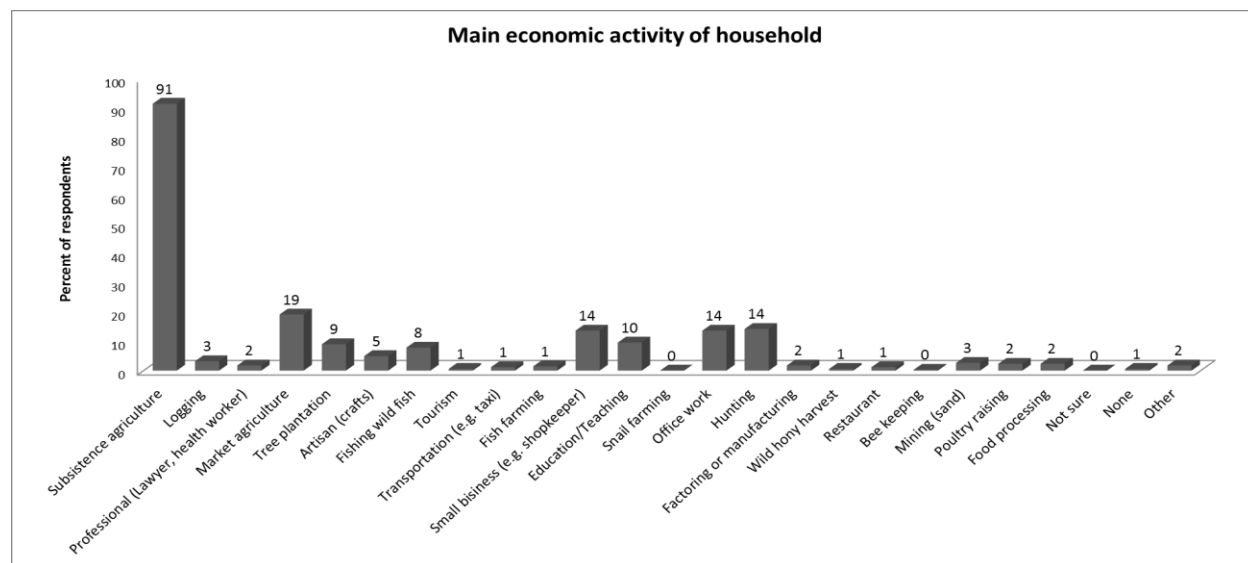


Figure 1: Main economic activity of households (WCS Nigeria’s MGMC Baseline Survey Report 2015)

Interactions with some members of the communities reveal that hunting, to them is not a trade they just learnt, rather, it is something that has become trans-generational, having been passed down to them through many generations. It therefore becomes tough for them to let go of hunting even with the enormous pressures from WCS and other conservation agencies who are working to save the forest and protect the Cross River gorillas.

Diseases form another set of threats to the survival of the Cross River gorillas. Gorillas are highly susceptible to human diseases, and this perhaps is because of the close resemblance of gorillas to human in their genetic makeup. Gorillas share well over 98% genetic characteristics with human. This is why disease communication is possible between them and humans. The gorilla habitats in Nigeria and Cameroon are surrounded by human populations. People

therefore come in close contacts with the gorillas legally or illegally. The influx of poachers, soldiers, local communities, and domestic animals facilitates the spread of disease pathogens in the gorilla habitats. And although there has not been a recorded case of human diseases among the Cross River gorilla population, a research in currently ongoing in this direction. (Bergl, R. A, personal communication, December 15, 2017).

results suggest a fairly high level of knowledge among respondents about conservation issues such as illegal hunting in protected areas, hunting of endangered species, the impact of continued hunting of gorillas and consumption of gorilla meat. About 94% of respondents agreed that it is illegal to hunt endangered species, and 89% affirmed that if the killing of gorillas continues they will go extinct (Figure 2).

The Baseline Survey

WCS Nigeria conducted a comprehensive baseline survey in 9 selected communities within the gorilla range in 2014 to ascertain their level of knowledge about conservation and gorilla protection. The results of this survey was very useful in the design of the My Gorilla-My Community program. For instance, the

Figure 2 clearly shows the majority of the people as having a fair knowledge about protected status of some wildlife species such as the Cross River Gorillas, this knowledge does not always translate to the willingness to change their attitudes towards hunting and killing these animals. This is evident in the response of the people as shown in Figure 3.

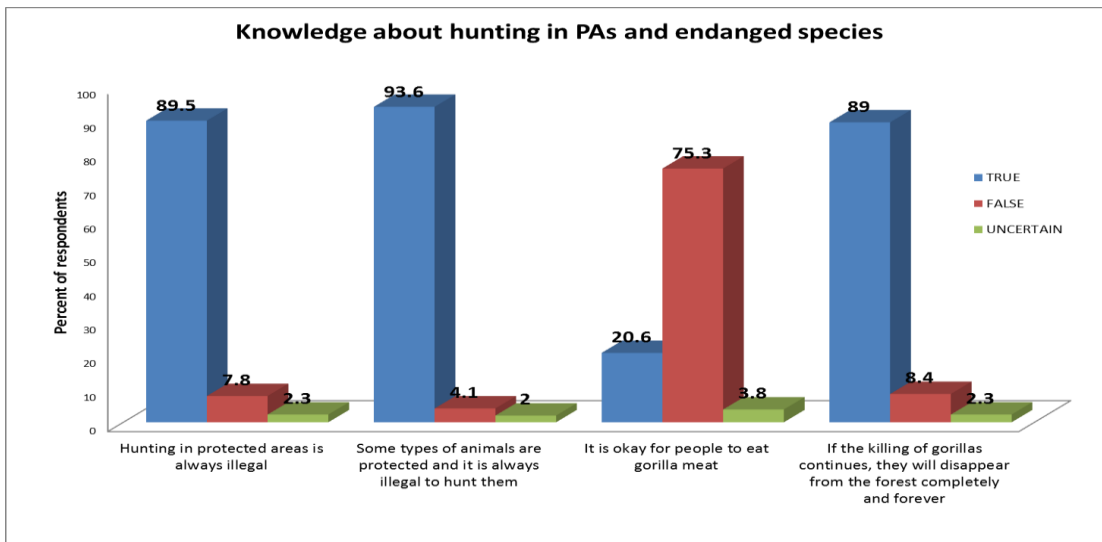


Figure 2: Knowledge about hunting endangered species, hunting in Protected Areas, and perception about eating bush meat

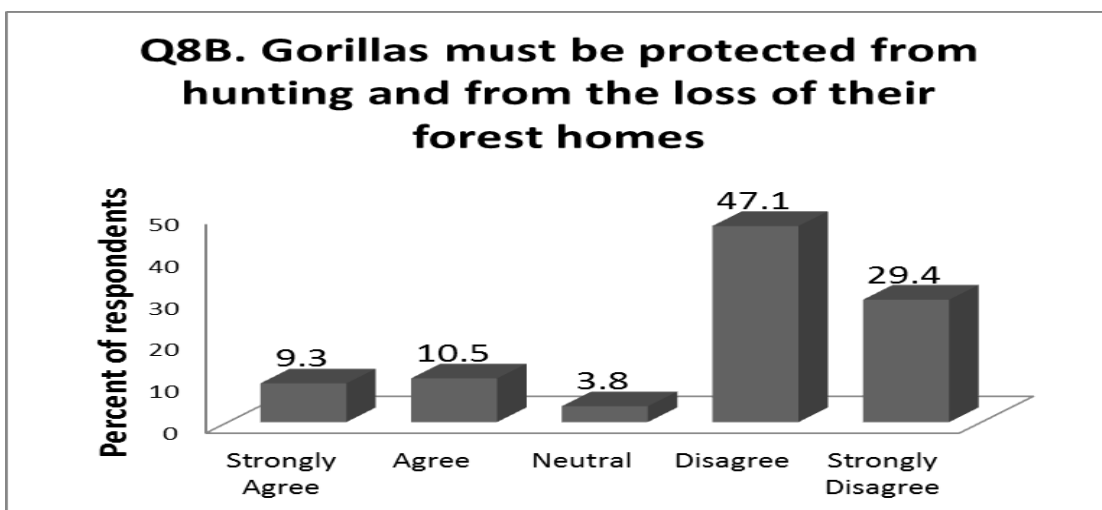


Figure 3: Protecting gorillas from hunting and forest loss.

The campaign program is therefore designed to inspire a change of attitude and behaviors towards the Cross River gorillas and their habitats.

My Gorilla-My Community (MGMC)

WCS Nigeria adopts a diversified approach to protect the endangered Cross River gorillas and save their habitat. Over the years, WCS Nigeria uses law enforcement and community sensitization to achieve this. Working with partner organizations with funding from donor agencies, WCS Nigeria launched an innovative behavior change communication program, using multiple approaches involving Entertainment-Education (media campaign) as well as direct community advocacy to sensitize people, especially members of local communities about the need to protect the remaining Cross River gorillas and their habitat. The program aims to positively influence the knowledge, attitudes and practices of people towards conservation of Cross River gorillas.

Key Objectives

Forest conservation and protection of the endangered Cross River Gorilla is not the exclusive duty of WCS or other conservation agencies in Cross River State of Nigeria. It is in fact everyone's duty. Members of local communities also have a role in this. Therefore, among other objectives, WCS Nigeria hopes to use the campaign program to inspire a gradual change of attitudes and behavior amongst community member; and to motivate long-term social change in favor of Cross River gorillas. In specific terms, the MGMC campaign program is designed to:

1. To raise levels of awareness and promote Cross River gorillas as a unique heritage.
2. To develop the capacity of local communities to effectively engage in advocacy to protect the Cross River gorillas and their habitat.
3. To influence positive attitude and behaviour change among the target audiences and promote adoption of environmentally friendly livelihood activities.

Target Audience

In Nigeria, the program targets the 120,000 inhabitants in and around three gorilla sites: the Okwangwo Division of the Cross River National Park (45,000), the Mbe Mountains (30,000) and Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary (45,000). These are communities who live in close proximity to, and depend on the forest for their survival. Majority of the residents earn their livelihoods through hunting, fishing and subsistent agriculture.

The Radio Program

The media campaign includes the production and broadcast of radio serial drama (*Linda's Joint*) as well as a discussion program *My Gorilla-My Community*. These programs have been running on the 2 stations of Cross River Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC) Calabar and Ikom. The programs address critical gorilla and habitat conservation threats in a compelling and entertaining way. It is an hour long pre-recorded weekly radio show comprising of different segments including drama, expert interview, vox-pops music, facts & Figures and quiz.

The radio program made its debut broadcast in April 2015. Since then, three (3) seasons of the program have completed broadcast while the 4th season is currently airing. Each season of the program consists of 26 episodes, hence upon the completion of season 4 in May 2018, *My Gorilla-My Community* would have posted a total of 104 episodes within 4 years.

PROGRAM DESIGN

The program highlights the threats to Cross River gorillas and their habitat. It creates awareness about gorilla conservation with a view to motivate them towards protecting the endangered Cross River gorillas. It also promotes sustainable livelihood activities that reduce pressure on the forest.

The media campaign program includes:

- **Linda's Joint:** This is a weekly drama episode with themes focusing on the various lifestyles which people should either avoid or adopt to encourage environmental safety and wellbeing and protect the forest and wildlife. The characters are drawn from the examples of everyday people while the drama is designed to convey conservation messages as well as entertain the listeners. The language of the drama is simple English, interlaced with pidgin and local dialects of the target population, in tune with the individual character profiles to ensure greater audience appeal.
- **Radio Magazine show:** The radio magazine is a weekly audience participatory show. The program provides a platform for listeners to interact with experts in forestry, wildlife conservation, tourism and agriculture as well as local political leaders. It serves as a tool for aggressive advocacy, providing the listeners with information on international conservation, best practices and guidelines on how to reduce harmful activities such as illegal hunting and

deforestation, while encouraging new opportunities for sustainable livelihoods such as bee-keeping, intensive agriculture and ecotourism. The program encourages local communities to adopt actions that are good for the environment, the people and wildlife. The magazine program consists of segments, with the drama *Linda's Joint* as the major focus, taking up a quarter of the 1hour show. Other segments include: Interviews, Music, Roving Reports and Feedback.

- **The Social Media:** The program also engages the social media community through the use of various social media platforms to further gorilla protection campaign. WCS Nigeria has active presence on Facebook and Twitter. The *My Gorilla-My Community* and *CROSS RIVER Gorilla* facebook pages are great platforms to interact with the facebook community about global conservation best practices.

Community Advocacy Visits

Apart from the radio drama and discussion components of the campaign program, WCS also uses the tool of direct community advocacies to further the sensitization campaign. The target communities are those who live within and around the gorilla forest range and most of these communities are located in the Boki area. The advocacy visits are designed to engage the community members and their leaders in meaningful dialogue so as to fashion out how best they can support conservation and also find out what their conservation challenges are. The advocacy visits create a conducive platform for community members to freely discuss their conservation challenges, creating good insights about what could be done differently to ensure that the forest is safe for the survival of the Cross River gorillas.

Radio Jingles

To complement the radio drama and discussion programs as well as other WCS gorilla protection activities, radio jingles were also produced and broadcast. Four (4) different versions of radio jingles were produced and aired to further enhance the gorilla protection campaign. Two of these jingles were produced in English while the other two were made in *pigin* with messages bothering on forest preservation and gorilla protection. The idea is to discourage people from engaging in activities which are considered dangerous to the survival of the

endangered Cross River Gorilla and to encourage the listeners to take active parts in preserving the forest which is the natural gorilla habitat. These radio jingles are broadcast on both stations of CRBC, Calabar and Ikom and began airing in October 2017. The different variations of the jingles were scheduled to broadcast concurrently on both stations for 1 full quarter (October to December 2017).

Campaign Materials

The gorilla protection campaign also included the design and production of stickers, T-shirts and caps branded with gorilla protection messages. Over the last three years, 600 branded T-shirts, 260 caps and 1000 stickers have been produced and are being distributed to the public as part of the campaign.

Introduction of Alternative Livelihood Options

Local communities depend heavily on the forest for their daily living. They make use of the forest resources to survive and in fact they virtually cannot do without the forest. This over-dependence also has its dire consequences on the survival of the Cross River gorillas who live in these forests. Diverting the people's attention away from the forest would therefore go a long way to protect the gorillas. This however does not always happen easily. Nevertheless, one way to achieve this is to guide the local communities towards other means through which they can also earn good living without necessarily depending on the forest. WCS Nigeria has therefore introduced various livelihood alternatives to some of the target communities. These include the introduction of animal husbandry, training career hunters in other skills such as beekeeping and snail rearing as a way to make them leave hunting. Local farmers are also being trained on various farming methods which are more sustainable as well as introducing them to small scale businesses all in the effort to make them depend less on the forest.

Monitoring and Evaluation

WCS Nigeria has developed a number of monitoring tools for the program. First, there are a number of feedback channels for the radio programs, including a dedicated phone line and the social media (a facebook page) through which we generate direct feedbacks from the audience. The project also has a dedicated email account.

In addition, we have also set up Listening Groups in 6 selected communities and equipped them with small radio sets so they can monitor the programs broadcast. Feedbacks are gathered from these

various sources every week and used to monitor the progress of the program.

Part of the monitoring and evaluation plans also includes regular direct interactions with the community members and other stakeholders in Town Hall Meetings, here, issues and challenges around the project are thrown up and trashed out while suggestions are made on how best to move on with the program activities, while a comprehensive end-line survey for the program is scheduled for 2019.

Outcomes of the Gorilla Awareness Program

The effort of WCS Nigeria at protecting the endangered Cross River Gorilla has been hugely rewarding. The multi-dimensional communication approach has also proved to be efficacious. Having run for 3 years now, there are good indications that the MGMC radio program is gradually having the desired impact on the audience, especially on the members of the local communities. Although a formal impact survey is yet to be conducted, some mid-term evaluations have been carried out to monitor the success of the program so far. In addition, listening groups have been set up in 6 of the target local communities to help monitor the broadcast of the radio programs. These groups are visited periodically and discussions are held with them on issues arising from the radio programs. This exercise has been helpful in monitoring and evaluating the impact of the program.

The results indicate as follows:

- ✓ More people are now becoming aware of the conservation status of the Cross River gorilla.
- ✓ More persons, especially from the local communities are now gradually recognizing the Cross River gorilla as a threatened species protected by law.
- ✓ There are growing rates interpersonal communications on conservation issues among members of the target communities
- ✓ Many have started to embrace the alternative livelihood options advocated on the MGMC radio show

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, saving the endangered Cross River Gorillas is by no means an easy task. However, this task is achievable, provided that the right kinds of efforts are put in towards achieving it. The approach of WCS Nigeria in protecting the Cross River gorillas and saving the forest where they live is not only commendable but has also proved to be

efficacious. The baseline survey results have shown that while the people may be knowledgeable about conservation principles and the conservation status of the endangered species of Cross River gorillas, this knowledge does not always automatically translate to the ability and willingness to change their attitudes and behaviours in order to guarantee the safety of these animals and their habitats. The radio program has helped to reach out to a wide range of audience in real time with the desired conservation and gorilla protection messages. The direct community advocacy visits has also helped to bridge the gap between members of target communities and conservation agencies; removing the barriers of media-dark limitations, while the other campaign materials helps in not only furthering the campaign outreach, but also serves as a form of gratification to the local communities.

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