

Batere community gets involved to the protection of giant pangolins of Africa (*Manis gigantean*) through a customary approach of conservation

One local ngo of conservation, Rural Synergy – Peasant action (RSy-PA), works for the protection of giant pangolins and his other small species as well as the local development of peasants in DR Congo. She works in common and perfect agreement with *Batere* community of *Melaw* groupment in the territorial district of *Batere*. This territorial district include 64 villages and three big groupments including *Melaw*, where are actual areas of conservation (*Mukaw, Lekaa, Djook and Isabla*).



The conservation takes place in four big forests whose *Mukaw* and *Lekaa* for giant pangolins, *Isabla* and *Djook* for small pangolins. Altogether sixteen (16) villages are around these forests and they spoil the wildlife, consequence of extreme poverty. The fauna of these forests is threatened by traditional hunting (traps, wildfire and net) for the domestic consumption, otherwise the poacher uses gun for selling wild meat. On the other hand, the flora is threatened by those who cut trees for domestic energy and for making coal for sale.

For fighting against these threatens RSY-PA carry out to sensibilize populations to good habits of environment and to activities of development as well as to the watch of holes of giant pangolins. The aim of these activities is to involve the community in the fight against these threatens and the management of her natural resources.

Sensibilization of the local community

For protecting giant pangolins and fighting against his trade, RSY-PA promotes and strengthens us and customs of the community of *Batere* in waiting the formation of her members to the modern and scientific watch of holes. RSY-PA uses **tradi-customary protection** of giant pangolins which consist to apply to populations her own customary principle according to what, it is strictly banned to hunt or to kill this totem species of the clan of customary chiefs of the community. Even though it is not banned to eat his meat, but it is not allowed kill for fear of being subjected of evil lots as it is death of members of the family or house on fire. That is the first reason of collaboration between customary chief and RSY-PA and the exploitation of traditional principles.



Envolement of the local community

Through activities of sensibilization done by RSY-PA, *Melaw* groupment got involved through his chief Dear sir **Samuel Melaw** by the signature of a declaration of commitment in the name of his community.



In addition, he has also designated very good hunters of his groupment who were recruited and formed by RSY-PA and transformed to patrol men of forests and guards of holes. The chief Melaw has also taught the chiefs of lands of each village of his groupment, bordering of forests of conservation, to work each one of them with his population in the protection of pangolin through the respect of traditional principles and instructions of RSY-PA. He invited them to stop killing and eating pangolins, to stop frequenting and destroying forests where live giant pangolins, to take off traps and to denounce recalcitrants. His children and nephew, potential successor have inserted RSY-PA, some like members and others like patrol men. One of chiefs of land also got involved like patrol men.

In our forests of conservation, he completes the research, the identification and the watch of holes as well as the daily inspection of the holes to verify the frequentation and to remove eventual obstacles and to fight threatens.

Research of holes

Patrol men search holes in forests in walking along streams which make favorable ecosystems to giant pangolins. After being discovered, holes are identified and put under watch. Each patrol man is attached to specific forests which he controls in need to organize and to do his work.



Identification of holes

RSy-PA has formed his patrol men, with them, they have brought out a local system of watch which consist to:

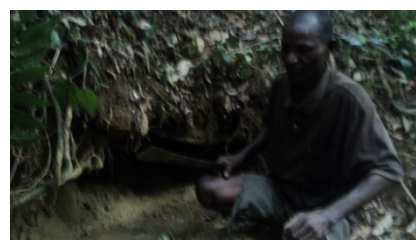
- Identify and to name each hole. It is about to write (initial of patrol man/initial of the name of the forest/hole's number according to the order of discovery/GPS coordinates). For example: *OM/MK/1/18°39'07.42" E* which means OSSO Melaw the patrol man/Mukaw the name of the forest/the first hole discovered. This system allows to find easily the shelter and especial to value the work of patrol men;



- Visit holes after each two days, the first will be the morning and the second will be afternoon every week. This visit aim to prevent hunters to put traps and to verify if the hole is still frequented.

Watch of holes

Actually, 7 patrol men are already at work and watch 39 holes. Each one manages at least 5 holes. There, they do a regular watch of three times a week; they collect signs and other data written in the technical form which will be brought to the person in charge of programmes and to the chief of basis. At this stage, results of this work are presented like it is in this board:



Board of situation of holes

Period	Discovered holes	Holes under watch	Banned holes
2010 - 2012	4	4	0
2013 - 2015	17	13	4
2016 -	26	22	4
Total	47	39	8

Inspection of forests and holes

Patrol men also inspect neighbor forests and savannah to remove traps, to manage wildfire and to look for eventual hunters and poachers. Together with chiefs of villages and notables, they indicate to villagers, places that are not to deforest, to burn and to frequent for avoiding destruction of pangolin's habitats. A common management of forests, in which live giant pangolins was installed.

Since 2014, 37 traps have been removed whom 16 in the forest *Lekaa* and 21 in *Mukaw*, and 12 traps are directly installed to catch giant pangolins, at the entrance of their holes and other 15 in different places in forests.



According to the villagers, with the technical support of RSY-PA, they will constitute local committees of development and of conservation (LCDC) in need to help the ngo RSY-PA in his action and to work for the local development. For RSY-PA, this interaction is to assure a lasting and common management and also to value natural resources which belong to this community.

For the moment, RSY-PA evolves with the support of advice of some technical partnerships as it is Species Survival Commission (SSC) – Pangolin Specialist Group (PSG) of the International Union for the Conservation of the Nature (IUCN) and Africa Pangolin Working Group (APWG).

In perspective, RSY-PA suggest , in accordance with the rule in Democratic Republic of Congo, local community forests (LCF) to assure more of protection and of commitment of the community in the preservation of her natural resources.

It is true that this community and customary approach used by RSY-PA Batere community, is unique in Democratic Republic of Congo while, she is unquestionably new for what is about the protection of pangolins in this country. Activities are opened for partnerships and researchers who wish to support actors or to do researches on pangolins and local communities.

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