



Forest protection in Nigeria

Conservation of the community forest
Iko Esai and its biodiversity



Nigerian
Conservation
Foundation



Community forest management and livelihood improvement

Project site

The Iko Esai community forest in south-eastern Nigeria is mostly covered with tropical primary rainforest and forms an important buffer zone for the transboundary Cross River National Park. The community forest harbours a rich biodiversity, especially primates such as wet-nosed monkeys and drills, but also rare great apes such as chimpanzees and the endemic Cross River gorilla. Other important mammal species such as forest elephants, buffaloes and up to 350 bird species are also found in the forests. The community forest provides livelihoods for about 12,000 people in the remote and rural region. As a result of the growing local population, the forests are under great pressure: overexploitation and deforestation endanger the habitat for many animal species and reduce income opportunities for people.

Our approach

The project aims to promote community-based conservation and use systems to improve livelihoods and conserve highly biodiverse forests by

- 1) significantly reducing overexploitation of forests through strengthening traditional community-based mechanisms and forest conservation and use laws,
- 2) halting agricultural expansion into pristine forest areas and promoting improved sustainable agricultural practices that increase incomes;
- 3) building the capacity of NTFP sector actors so that their incomes are significantly improved; and
- 4) raising awareness of participatory community-based forest management among the public and decision-makers.



What we do

1. Community forest management

Within the concept of community forest management, the forest use rights are transferred to local peoples to achieve ownership by the community and therefore enhance a sustainable ecological and economic management of the natural resource. NABU and NCF work with the local community to develop a sustainable and long-term forest management plan, promote alternative sources of income from non-timber forest products and train local eco-guards in forest monitoring.

2. Sustainable agriculture

With eight agricultural pilot sites in each of the participating villages in the region, the Iko Esai Project is demonstrating, how sustainable and climate-adapted agricultural methods, such as Agroforestry, are implemented and maintained. Regular trainings are intended to impart further expertise in the sustainable use of the natural resources.

3. Support of women

Women are essential for a sustainable development in rural regions. To create and promote alternative sources of income in the region, 1,000 women are being trained in harvesting, processing, packaging and distribution of sustainably harvested products from the forest in a non-deforestation approach (non-timber forest products). In addition, several female farmers in the local cooperative benefit from small start-up packages for setting up their own businesses.

Forest governance

The 12,000-hectare forest is essential to more than 50 communities across the country as a water producer, supplier of non-timber forest products (NTFP), stabiliser and buffer to the impacts of climate change. In the past, communities had traditional laws that mandated forest protection, sustainable use and management of natural resources and forest products. These laws have been forgotten or their existence is only known to older community members. There is an urgent need to revise the traditional laws in a participatory manner. To develop an adapted land use plan for the sustainable use of natural forest resources, a comprehensive understanding of the community dynamics of the local population and the environment is required. This land use plan will be developed by NABU and NCF together with the local residents to integrate sustainable, long-term forest management in the community.

Project partners

The partnership between NABU and NCF is dedicated to conservation and sustainable development in Nigeria. NABU, as the project holder, and NCF, as the implementing partner, work closely together in a cooperative partnership. Both organisations are active members of the BirdLife International network, sharing common values and objectives, and frequently engaging with each other during annual BirdLife events. Through their collaborative efforts on several projects and campaigns, NABU and NCF have developed a strong and familiar alliance. The funding support is from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).



**COUNTRY /
REGION**

Nigeria / Iko Esai
Community Forest

PERIOD

October 2022 to
October 2025

PARTNER

Nigerian Conservation
Foundation (NCF)

**SPONSORED BY /
SUPPORTED BY**

German Federal Ministry for
Economic Cooperation and
Development (BMZ),
The Nature and Biodiversity
Conservation Union (NABU)

Project title

Community forest
management and livelihood
improvement in the buffer
region of the Cross River
National Park in Nigeria

**With this project we are
contributing to the following
SDGs: 1, 2, 5, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17**

Project partner:



Sponsors:

