

**REPORT OF THE “OTTER AWARENESS CAMPAIGN AND CONSERVATION
EDUCATION PROGRAMME” HELD ON 25 TH AND 26 TH OF MAY, 2022 AT THE
GOSPEL FAITH MISSION INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTER, IGBOKODA, ILAJE,
ONDO STATE, NIGERIA.**

BY

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Background:

Otters belong to Order Carnivora and Family Mustelidae. They are a unique group among carnivores due to their adaptation to semi-aquatic mode of life (Kruuk, 2006).

Globally, there are 13 extant species of otters of which three are limited to Sub-Saharan Africa. Two species are known to occur in Nigeria; the African Clawless otter and spotted-necked otter (Francesco *et al.*, 2005).

Ondo State's rich and highly diverse aquatic resources are declining due to unsustainable exploitation and mis-use. The two species of otters inhabiting the riverine communities of Ondo State are decreasing on a daily basis as a result of illegal hunting, water pollutions, habitat fragmentation/loss and faulty or bad perceptions. Thus, conservation of Spotted-necked Otter and African Clawless Otter in their natural habitat is of high priority wherever they occur to ensure their survival. It is therefore vital to sensitize/educate the Fishermen, Farmers, Youths and Students on the importance of otters and the protection of their habitat.

Location

The event was carried out in Igbokoda, the headquarter of Ilaje local government area of Ondo State.

Methods

- On-site visitation to Araromi seaside to sensitize/educate Fishermen, Farmers, Boat and Canoe transporters using well-detailed pictures of otters and educative materials (English and Yoruba) was carried out on the 25th of May, 2022.
- Students from Ilaje High School, Royal Achievers School and Pure Wisdom college were invited for the Otter Awareness Campaign and Conservation Education Programme held at Igbokoda, Ilaje, Ondo State.
- Handbills with information on facts about otters, threats, conflicts, importance of otter conservation both in English and Yoruba was shared among the participants during the event.

Achievements

1. The most significant outcomes of the event is the contribution of the critical information and knowledge on otter populations in the area. Prior to the project, very little is known about the importance/value of otters. The sensitization programme increased Participants' awareness on the ecological and economic importance of Otters for effective habitats management and development of non-consumptive initiative such as ecotourism in the area.
2. Information on strategies and guidelines for fishing gears regulation as well as alternative livelihood such as Ecotourism, Aquaponic, and Mini livestock farming was presented to the fishermen and students during the 2-day event for sustainable otter management in the riverine areas.
3. Team Otter Club was launched/established among the students in the selected schools to increase teenagers/youths involvement in otter conservation programme.

Budgets

Note: 1 £ Sterling = ₦ 525. 40

Item	Number	Budgeted Amount	Actual Amount	Difference	Comments
Branded Otter Shirt @ £ 5.71	6 shirts	28.55	34.26	+5.71	Increase was due to the quality of the shirt and digital printing on it.
Large size banner	1	9.52	9.52	0	Was in line with budget
Educative Handbills (English and Yoruba)	50 copies	9.52	9.52	0	Was in line with budget
Transportation		13.0	30	+17	Increase was necessary to convey students from their schools to the venue due to rain.
Stipends and compensation		9.52	9.52	0	In line with budget
Refreshments	50 participants	19.0	19.0	0	Was in line with budget
Communication Airtime and submission of invitation letters to schools		5.71	5.71	0	Was in line with budget

Convener's meal @ £ 1.90 for 4 days		7.60	11.4	+3.80	Increase was due to cost of food and additional day
Total		102.42	128.93	+26.51	The additional cost was taken from convener's money

Challenges

Bad/faulty perception among the locals about otter was a major threat. There is yet no strict conservation effort to protect otters in the area. Most of the locals are illiterate which makes otters' awareness programme difficult. Insufficient funds was a limiting factor in reaching other communities where otters' presence have been established.

Future plan

I will like to continue working on otter's distribution, threat/conflict mitigation and conservation along the coastal communities in Ondo State, Ogun State, and Lagos State of Nigeria. The status of Otter is at a precarious level such that if no conservation intervention is undertaken within the next few year, it is likely that the population of this top predator and keystone species in South-western Nigeria may not recover.

Conclusion

I wish to sincerely appreciate and acknowledge the International Otter Survival Fund (IOSF) for the grant. I believe this event is significant to any future project on otter in Nigeria.