“Empowering local communities for the conservation and sustainable development of the biodiversity of the Lake Victoria Basin, the Greatest of Africa’s ‘Great Lakes.’

REPORTING PERIOD

January-June 2015
Introduction

This semester report occurs in the framework of the Jensen Foundation funded project entitled “Empowering local communities for the conservation and sustainable development of birds and biodiversity of the lake Victorian basin, the greatest of Africa’s great lakes (LEP)” through BirdLife International currently implemented by the “Association pour la Conservation de la Nature au Rwanda (ACNR)”, the Birdlife partner in Rwanda.

Project Background

The project aims to promote the conservation of the birds and biodiversity on Akanyaru wetlands in Musenyi Sector of Bugesera district and sustain the ecosystem benefits for the surrounding community. This is being achieved by strengthen existing cooperatives know considered as Site Supports Groups (SSGs) and identify steps that need to be undertaken in order to improve their management while understanding ecosystems changes and pressures on Akanyaru wetlands. It aims also to improve the capacity of local communities on nature resources management and biodiversity conservation for sustainable development.

Project Goal

The goal of this project is to conserve the birds and biodiversity of the Lake Victoria Basin, and sustain the ecosystem benefits that its Important Bird Areas provide for human well-being, by building and strengthening a network of community-based Local Conservation Groups in the area of the project implementation.
Main achievements

- One ACNR staff member participated in the training of trainers on Policy, Advocacy and Site Casework in Africa. The training was held in Nairobi, Kenya from 25th to 27th February 2015. He was supposed to train 21 SSGs on policy and advocacy but he is no longer with ACNR. Therefore, the project coordinator will be the one to train those SSGs member in August 2015.

- On 29th May 2015, ACNR organized a one day in house training on fundraising. The main objective of the training was to build the capacity of ACNR senior staff on Project development, proposal writing and fundraising. 9 staff members and interns participated in this training. This training will be organized every last Friday on the month on various topics aiming to build the capacity of ACNR team.

- ACNR conducted the Assessment on biodiversity threats on Akanyaru wetlands in June 2015. This activity aimed to update the status on biodiversity (the vulnerability assessment was conducted in 2014) and assess potential upcoming threats. Those identified threats, adequate solution and initiative were gathered into a flier for further dissemination during workshops, conference and meeting. The flier will be both in English and Kinyarwanda to reach many people including decision makers and donors.

- On 25th June 2015, ACNR organized a community meeting to work on National SSGs empowerment strategic plan. 22 members of three SSGs working with ACNR in the implementation of this project participated in this one day meeting. During the meeting, they were divided into three groups. Each group provided relevant information which will be taken into consideration during the redaction of SSGs empowerment strategic plan in August 2015.

- On 26th June 2015, ACNR conducted participatory community interview to assess the experience and benefit from the project. Information was recorded for further production of a video compiling the background and the impacts of the project in Musenyi sector. The final video will be edited and shared prior in August 2015.

- One article entitled “Rwanda: Insight from Uganda exchange visit!” was published in the BirdLife Africa newsletter and another article entitled “Building wealth from waste, women initiative in biodiversity conservation” is still under redaction and will be shared early August.

- Through the football tournament; SSGs working with ACNR had engaged themselves to rising awareness on biodiversity conservation among youth as future decision makers and leaders of tomorrow. They gather twice a week for training and spreading information on the importance of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of nature resources.
## Project progress

### Strategic Objectives

**Strategic Objective 1: Strategies developed to address threats to key biodiversity at IBAs in the Lake Victoria basin through community-based initiatives which generate positive incentives for environmental stewardship, and new funds leveraged for projects**

1.1 **Participatory analysis of conservation/ livelihood and NRM Issues and development Community strategies**

A brochure brief with information on Akanyaru wetlands biodiversity; current status, threats, solutions taken and what measures government and other organizations/institutions can do has been developed. The dissemination will be during organized community workshops/conference and meetings. Main target audience will be government institutions and other conservation organizations.

1.2 **Local-level management plans**

The community adaptation plan will be printed out in August 2015 and dissemination will be during conferences and meetings from the beginning of September.

1.3 **Strategic partnerships for implementation of community plans.**

ACNR through the implementation of this project works with local communities and Musenyi sector representatives (Sector social economic development officer, civil society representative, agronomist, Cooperative business development officer, Environmental facilitator, and one stop center which is the government institution to expedite the district urban development) for sustainable implementation of community plans. ACNR monitor continuously SSGs and communicate regularly with local representatives for community plan implementation.

1.4 **Fundraising for plan implementation**

After the training held in Kenya in 2014 and organized by BirdLife International, ACNR staff members have been trained on project management and planning. They are currently writing proposals in order to implement the fundraising plan developed in community strategic/action plan. Those proposals will be submitted according to the donor calendar and the main focus is on biodiversity conservation, nature resources management, sustainable development and other related topics.

**Strategic Objective 2: Capacity of local organizations at IBAs in the Lake Victoria basin built for effective management, sustainable use and monitoring of the IBAs where they live**
2.1 National SSG/Local Empowerment Plans
ACNR conducted community meeting on Thursday, June 25\textsuperscript{th} 2015 to work on the National SSGs empowerment strategy in Nyamata, Bugesera District. The main objective of the meeting was to gather relevant information for development of the National SSGs empowerment strategy. It has been an opportunity to gather information as well on current biodiversity threats on Akanyaru wetlands in Musenyi sector. The National strategy plan is under redaction and will be shared in August.

2.5 Capacity building workshops/Training
In February 2015, ACNR participated in a regional training on policy and advocacy. The main goal of the training was to improve capacity for Policy, Advocacy and Site Casework in Africa.

In May 2015, ACNR organized in house training on project development, proposal writing and fundraising. Nine ACNR senior staff members participated in the one day training on project development, proposal writing and fundraising.

However, the training of 21 SSGs on policy and advocacy was postponed in later August due to time constraints and SSGs availability for participation in two day training.

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<th>Strategic Objective 3: Local organizations in the Lake Victoria Basin that are effectively networked for sharing of experience and good practice</th>
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<td>3.2 Networking and communications plan</td>
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ACNR follows continuously the progress of legal registration of KOSUMU and KABAMU SSGs to Rwanda cooperative agency. Those two SSGs work with the Sector cooperative promoter and LVB Project coordinator to finalize all required documents at different level to ensure successful registration of those SSGs in due time. During the last community meeting held in June, the representative of those two SSGs committed themselves to ensure legal registration of their respective cooperative for its sustainable development.

| 3.3 Networking activities and exchange of experience/LEP website/project newsletter |
ACNR organized a field visit in Musenyi sector on 26th June 2015 in order to conduct participatory community interviews to project experience and quantify benefits for the project. We visited SSGs respective site and discussed with them their experience and benefits gained through this project. Pictures and video footage were recorded in order to produce a documentary movie for illustration.

Moreover, one article on Uganda exchange visit “Rwanda SSG members: insights from their Uganda exchange visit” was produced and shared with BirdLife Kenya for
publication as ACNR contribution to the BirdLife Africa newsletter and one article “Building wealth from waste, women initiative in biodiversity conservation” is under redaction and will be shared.

### Strategic Objective 4: Local and national governments, regional and international forums informed of the importance of local organizations for the sustainable management of environmental services

#### 4.1 Community advocacy strategies

ACNR is currently collecting background relevant information to strengthen community advocacy strategy by identifying relevant information on local community reporting, awareness rising, environmental protection and promotion, and biodiversity threats in order to increase capacity on good reporting, awareness raising especially on biodiversity conservation, nature resources management and related policies for the community sustainable development.

#### 4.2 Community advocacy with relevant forums

During the community meeting held on 25th June 2015, ACNR gathered and continue to gather information on the new upcoming threats to biodiversity of Akanyaru wetlands in order to produce a policy brief to share with stakeholders. The main output will be a strong alliance between SSGs working with ACNR through district development plans and government systems.