Awareness Campaign: Helping Forest Communities Face COVID-19

Campagne de sensibilisation : aider les communautés forestières à faire face à la covid-19

AWARENESS CAMPAIGN: HELPING FOREST COMMUNITIES FACE COVID-19 ACTIVITY REPORT Libreville, November 10, 2020

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2 In the foreground, Akoma Bilé Sylvie, Agriculture and Chief of the Elarmintang village. Project focal point “Cacao under shade” (c) Photo: Brainforest

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AWARENESS CAMPAIGN: HELPING FOREST COMMUNITIES FACE COVID-19 A C T I V I T Y R E P O R T Libreville, November 10, 2020 Design: Communication Unit. Writing: Germain Djeuking Review Committee: Executive Secretariat. (c) Brainforest, November 2020

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Member of the Mayela community in Ivindo during the awareness campaign. (c) Photo: Brainforest awareness campaign report: helping forest communities face covid-19 4 Contents
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Authorities .....8 Meetings with Village
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Summary This report presents the activities of the awareness campaign against the coronavirus pandemic carried out by a team from Brainforest, for the benefit of some local communities in Gabon living in forest areas. Specifically, these are the villages of Mamiengué, Mandilou, Oyenano, Kouagnadougou, and Moutambe Sane Foumou in the Province of Ngounié, of Mayela, Bombenda, Masaha, and Ekowong in the province of Ogoué-Ivindo, and of Nylon-ville, Elarmintag, and Okola in Woleu-Ntem. This mission took place from November 12 to 05, 2020. The local authorities met during this provincial journey expressed their appreciation for our initiative, which they also encouraged. The local communities benefited from this awareness operation on adopting barrier gestures against covid-19 with enthusiasm. During discussions, they indicated how the pandemic had impacted their daily lives, while lamenting the absence of accompanying measures from the Government, necessary to cope with it. Keywords: Covid-19, coronavirus, barrier measures, barrier gestures, Local Communities and indigenous populations, Gabon. Distribution of awareness materials to the chief of the village of Okala in Mitzik. (c) Photo: Brainforest awareness campaign report: helping forest communities face covid-19 5 MISSION TEAM DJEUKING Germain (Mission Leader) Malaïka Abeng NDONG Rodrigue

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awareness campaign report: helping forest communities face covid-19 6 Introduction Covid-19 1 is a disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Emerging in China in the Hubei province in Wuhan in December 2019, it spread to the rest of the world at the beginning of 2020. Declared a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” by WHO, Africa was affected starting February 14, with the first case reported in Gabon in mid-March. This date marked the beginning of the shaking of the national economy for Gabon, due to the drastic measures imposed nationally by the Government to stop the spread of the virus. A situation that would significantly disrupt the lifestyle and consumption patterns of all populations. Fearing that the domino effect of the pandemic would lead forest populations, guardians of biodiversity essential to the planet, into an even more difficult cycle of life, international and national organizations mobilized to assist them. It is in this context that Brainforest initiated an awareness campaign among these communities, aiming to encourage them to adopt barrier gestures against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. 1 https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maladie_à_coronavirus_2019 Medical personnel at the bedside of a Covid-19 patient in a coronavirus pandemic care center. (c) Photo: Sonapress

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awareness campaign report: helping forest communities face covid-19 7 In Gabon, Brainforest has been working for over 20 years with the village communities of the country to fight against the deprivation of their rights and the illegal exploitation of natural resources. Its mission, which underpins all its activities, is to “inform and support all stakeholders in sustainable and equitable management of natural resources, particularly in the fields of forestry exploitation, management of extractive resources, and agro-industries in the Congo Basin.” Brainforest's strategic approach relies, among other things, on participatory and networked work, based on partnerships with Civil Society Organizations, local communities, technical services of relevant public administrations, and various experts working in its fields of activity. The advent of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) has slowed the implementation of its activities and also contributes to further weakening forest communities in the absence of solutions. Knowing that these rural populations, especially those living in remote areas, do not always have easy access to adequate health structures, it was necessary to raise their awareness of barrier gestures adapted to their immediate environment. Hence the awareness campaign initiated for them. Installation of the awareness banner by the people of Mayela and the Brainforest team. (c) Photo: Brainforest

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Objectives The General objective of the mission was to help the forest communities of Gabon face COVID-19. Specifically, to inform them about the current situation of the Coronavirus while encouraging them to adopt new behaviors to stop the spread of the pandemic. Methodology In all the communities where Brainforest has been regularly intervening for many years, 12 villages were identified. Gatherings took place in community huts or outdoors, following the guidelines for distancing, wearing masks, and the quota of authorized persons. It was in this configuration that the mission team endeavored to educate the members of each village community about the current situation of the coronavirus pandemic, while emphasizing the adoption of barrier measures issued by the Government, through the COPIL. A banner listing all the barrier gestures was installed in each village, along with the distribution of flyers and posters for ongoing awareness after our visit. Soap and masks were also distributed. Mission Execution Meetings with Authorities In the three provinces identified for this awareness and education mission, the reception from provincial authorities was very warm. In the Ngounié province, our various meetings with authorities and communities were facilitated by the local partner NGO Muyissi Environnement. The campaign team was received the next day by the Secretary General of the

Province. He found the initiative interesting while regretting that the awareness campaign on Covid-19 only concerned a few communities among the many in his province. For him, all village communities living in forest areas face more or less the same problems, and planning an activity that does not take into account all the villages can sometimes create frustrations. The wish to receive the field mission reports from Brainforest was also expressed during discussions, to allow the State to regularly monitor the evolution and impact of our activities on the ground. Distribution of awareness materials to the chief of the village of Moutambe Sane Foumou in Ngounié. (c) Photo: Brainforest awareness campaign report: helping forest communities face covid-19 8

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In Ogooué-Ivindo, the same exhortation was on the agenda during the courtesy visit to the Governor. While addressing us with her encouragement, she emphasized the importance for the administration to be aware of the concerns of the populations through the activities of Brainforest, which is a social partner for the State. A partial report was submitted to the Governor's Secretariat of this province at the end of the stay. In the Woleu-Ntem province, the Prefects of Mitzic and Minvoul appreciated the awareness of communities about Covid-19, while praising the constant commitment of the NGO to local populations. Meetings with Village Communities Accustomed to receiving Brainforest teams for issues related to the defense of their Rights and sustainable management of natural resources, the indigenous populations welcomed this other type of meeting, which prioritized health security within their community. The populations of the twelve (12) villages sensitized belong to the following administrative units: Provinces Department Villages Ngounié Tsamba Magotsi Mamiengué, Mandilou, Oyenano, Kouagnadougou, and Moutambe Sane Foumou Ogooué-Ivindo Invido Mayela, Bombenda, Masaha And Ekowong Woleu-Ntem Okano Okala Haut-Ntem Elarmintang, Nylon-ville Village Mayela, in Ivindo. Distribution of flyers, masks, and application of hydroalcoholic gel by a member of the campaign team. (c) Photo: Brainforest awareness campaign report: helping forest communities face covid-19 9

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In each village, at the start of the awareness campaign, the campaign team revisited the genesis of the national news regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. Subsequently, the main message conveyed focused on barrier measures, followed by an exhortation to adopt them, in order to curb the spread of the pandemic, as no vaccine exists to date. The approach to awareness was the same for all village communities, and the team highlighted in the following lines some key points from the exchanges, notably the impact of the pandemic on the lives of local populations. - In Ngounié, for example, in the village of Mamiengué, the Chief states that it is now difficult for them to live with the new conditions imposed by the arrival of Covid-19. "It’s not really joyful; every activity that used to provide us with a living has become difficult. The proof is, yesterday as you passed by, you found this bunch of bananas; today it’s still there, simply because movement is no longer possible, people no longer come and go as usual. Whereas before, it wouldn’t last a day. Without this sale, what will my income be? I will simply have to eat it! And if I eat, there will be no more oil, no soap. There will be nothing to buy the turkey. Already hunting is becoming another problem. Although it is the elephant that destroys the plantations, it is the human who is penalized. At first, we pretended that there would be food kits; we saw that as mockery. You will come to present to a father of a family like me, a box of mackerel, two kilos of rice, half a liter of oil, which I myself buy ten times a day! (...). We live with it, we endure it, we try to adapt, but it’s not really joyful." - In Masaha, in Ogooué-Ivindo, a community member states that "since the arrival of the disease, sourcing food in town has become excessively expensive; even for transportation. There has really been a total change in our lives since the arrival of this disease.

But what are we going to do if the disease persists?" And another adds, "Soap for washing hands is not something everyone can procure all the time in rural areas, let alone hydroalcoholic gel. We have entered a period where hunting is closed, and we all live, as you know, from hunting and gathering; and if hunting is closed, I can no longer go get a gazelle to be able to buy soap, let alone salt, to survive. So how do we wash our hands regularly? 2 Video link on the campaign: https://youtu.be/KtxbMsqUnJI awareness campaign report: helping forest communities cope with covid-19 10

? (...) ; where are the accompanying measures? That’s what we are asking you. The last time the government came, it was to distribute one fish for each family. But do you think one fish can feed a household? There’s no need to entertain us; the population is really used to this song." - In the village of Mayela, still in Ivindo, an elderly man, speaking about access to masks, expressed himself in these terms: "Not everyone has access to this mask; maybe those who go to town, but there are many who do not go there; how can we equip them with masks? Everywhere else, there are donations, but in our village, never has a vehicle stopped, never has an authority come to distribute these masks. They came to the cantons but skipped certain villages; for example, they skip Mayela, go to Bengoué, skip the other village, and so on. So it wasn’t regular; there was a part of the population that was really disadvantaged." - In the North, in Haut-Ntem, the Chief of Nylon-ville village emphasized that since the closure of borders, food, transportation, and healthcare have become difficult: "merchants can no longer make purchases, we have difficulty getting treated, transportation costs have become very high. To move around, we must obtain authorization from the prefect." In Elarmintang, a farmer from the "Cacao under shade" project indicated that "since the arrival of covid-19, work has been blocked. We are a cooperative of 18 people, and we were told that we can no longer be in groups, that we must only transport two people per motorcycle." In the village of Okala, an employee of a logging company stated: "We were put on technical leave for three months, and until now, the company has not called us back." The examples above noted during exchanges in some target villages show how the coronavirus pandemic affects local communities. This situation is, with a few exceptions, the same for all populations in forested areas. awareness campaign report: helping forest communities cope with covid-19 11

Difficulties Throughout the campaign, the awareness team did not encounter any major difficulties. In some villages, we had some surprises with a number of participants sometimes exceeding the quota of 10 members authorized by the administration. The team had difficulty managing these unexpected numbers and making adjustments to satisfy all communities with masks and soap. Conclusion At the end of a long journey through the provinces of Ngounié, Ogooué-Ivindo, and Woleu-Ntem, the campaign team raised awareness among the populations of twelve villages, most of whom live in Gabon's forested areas. Although these populations have not recorded any cases of Covid-19 to date, the team noted the enthusiasm with which they followed the exhortation to adopt barrier measures. There is no doubt that covid-19 negatively impacts citizens across the territory. However, for local communities, this seems to be an additional burden, especially in the absence of accompanying measures, which they have continuously demanded during each of our visits. Already on the not-so-easy front of claiming their rights against certain logging and mining operators, they must now endure the harmful effects of the restrictions imposed by the Government to contain and stop the spread of this pandemic. awareness campaign report: helping forest communities cope with covid-19 12

Annexes Campaign materials Banners, Flyers, A2 Posters, HELP THE FOREST COMMUNITIES COPE WITH COVID-19 to WASH hands regularly with water and soap COUGH OR SNEEZE into your elbow GREET without shaking hands AVOID TOUCHING YOUR FACE WEAR A MASK Key players in the conservation of biodiversity and the fight against illegal exploitation of natural resources, the local communities and indigenous populations of Gabon, already marginalized, could see their living conditions further deteriorate with the spread of COVID-19. This awareness campaign is made possible thanks to the financial support from EIA CALL 1410 in case of illness! WASH HANDS REGULARLY WITH WATER AND SOAP COUGH OR SNEEZE INTO YOUR ELBOW GREET WITHOUT SHAKING HANDS AVOID TOUCHING YOUR FACE WEAR A MASK HELP THE FOREST COMMUNITIES COPE WITH COVID-19 to STOP-COVID19 C O R O N AV I R U S HELP THE FOREST COMMUNITIES COPE WITH COVID-19 WASH HANDS REGULARLY WITH WATER AND SOAP STOP-COVID19 C O R O N AV I R U S HELP THE FOREST COMMUNITIES COPE WITH COVID-19 COUGH OR SNEEZE INTO YOUR ELBOW GREET WITHOUT SHAKING HANDS, STOP-COVID19 C O R O N AV I R U S HELP THE FOREST COMMUNITIES COPE WITH COVID-19 WEAR A MASK STOP-COVID19 C O R O N AV I R U S HELP THE FOREST COMMUNITIES COPE WITH COVID-19 STOP-COVID19 C O R O N AV I R U S HELP THE FOREST COMMUNITIES COPE WITH COVID-19 MAINTAIN A DISTANCE 1 m of 1 m Video spot (http://www.brainforest-gabon.org/medias/?id=46) awareness campaign report: helping forest communities cope with covid-19 13

Some Campaign Photos awareness campaign report: helping forest communities cope with covid-19 14

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