Tembo Power Hydropower Project, Burundi

ARRC Task Force comments on the Chimpanzee field report

28th April 2026

The ARRC Task Force received on April 8th, 2026, the chimpanzee field report of baseline surveys conducted in and around the Bururi Forest Reserve for the proposed Tembo hydropower project in Burundi.

The ARRC Task Force's panel for this project made the following recommendations and comments:

General comments & recommendations

- The area of influence for the chimpanzee surveys was adequate and included the extent of potential direct and indirect impacts of the project on chimpanzees in and outside the Bururi Forest Reserve. The study was based on suitable methodologies for data collection and analysis procedures, although the temporal coverage remains limited (this area has two long wet and dry seasons and two shorter wet and dry seasons) for understanding if chimpanzees use the project area all-year round.
- Based on the survey results, it is apparent that the long-term impacts of the project will aggravate the current stable relationship between chimpanzees and the local communities, especially as the chimpanzees will be facing significant disturbance and restrictions for access to food and water in a core area of their range. This could lead to negative interactions between humans and chimpanzees, and/or inter-chimpanzee group interactions that could be lethal, and reduction in food availability leading to a decline in the population. The project location is also problematic as it further decreases the potential for connectivity between Bururi and other southern forest fragments, which could seriously impede the viability of this population, and the country's remaining chimpanzee population as a whole. Based on these results and considering the proposed location of the project and its infrastructures, it is our assessment that this project cannot readily effectively mitigate its impacts on chimpanzees.
- Considering that the Bururi chimpanzee population is the second largest population in the country, the residual impacts cannot therefore realistically be offset to achieve a net gain as required for great apes by the International Finance Cooperation (IFC). No actions within Bururi Forest Reserve will enable a net gain in chimpanzees, even with extensive forest restoration which would take a long time before any benefits for chimpanzees are tangible (Lourens Poorter et al, 2021), while the population will be declining in the interim. Due to their slow reproductive rate, it is then unlikely the

population will effectively be able to recover despite restoration efforts. And there is no other realistic and cost-effective offset option for chimpanzees in the country.

- Following best practices and IFC performance standards, we therefore highly encourage the project to analyse **alternative options for the placement of the weir and associated infrastructures** outside the Bururi Forest Reserve, e.g. to the west, i.e. downstream along the Siguvyaye river or ideally elsewhere in the country where there are no chimpanzees, and where the social and environmental risks are lower. Avoidance is the first and most critical step of the mitigation hierarchy and considering the potential irreversible and significant impacts of the current location of the project on the Bururi chimpanzee population, one of the few remaining populations of the Endangered Eastern chimpanzee in Afromontane Forest, it is critical for the project to seriously considers alternative options.

Specific comments

- The recommendation to avoid construction activities from Sept-Feb is a good one, but even post-construction the location of the infrastructure is very problematic as highlighted in the report. The only reasonable mitigation is therefore avoidance and for the project to select an alternative suitable location.
- The current number of samples for genetic analysis are insufficient to generate any abundance estimates or to understand population structure, i.e. the number of groups/communities; however, as there is currently no genetic information on this chimpanzee population, any data will be invaluable to contextualize this population with respect to others in Burundi and neighbouring countries.
- In terms of gaps, the report fails to highlight that:
    - There is no information available on the population structure, i.e. number of groups, in and around Bururi Forest Reserve. Such an understanding would imply different project risks to chimpanzees. Nevertheless, whether there is one or several communities/groups, the impact outcome for the population will be irreversible.
    - There is no understanding of the potential for connectivity with other chimpanzee populations to the south, such as those present in Vyanda Forest Reserve. Such information would be useful to understand the scope for connectivity and longer-term chimpanzee conservation in this region.
- We also would like to inform the consultants that evidence suggests avoiding planting crops coveted by chimpanzees within or near buffer zones; crops would not only continue to attract chimpanzees to the forest reserve edge but will contribute to increasing encounters between people and chimpanzees with all the risk that such encounters may entail. This could also promote their dependence and preference for such crops, therefore not necessarily reducing their incursions further away from the reserve boundary to access these crops.

Should you have any queries concerning our feedback and comments, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

Best regards,

The ARRC Task Force panel for this project