Comments of the ARRC Task Force on the Kong Solar Project in Côte d'Ivoire

May 20th 2024

Thank you for reaching out to the ARRC Task Force regarding the 50 MW Kong Solar Project in Côte d'Ivoire. The initial environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA) that had been accepted was for a smaller project with 30 MW and didn't include sufficient mammal surveys. This project is located within the range of the Critically Endangered Western Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes verus*) and thus surveys are needed to confirm their presence or absence in the project's area of influence. We are therefore supportive of the project to conduct further chimpanzee surveys to help understand their presence in relation with the project's proposed infrastructures.

General Comments

Although the chimpanzee population has drastically declined in Côte d'Ivoire in the last years due to deforestation and hunting, some viable populations remain, for example in the Comoé National Park, also a World Heritage Site, and its adjacent areas, the ex-GEPRENAF project. Chimpanzees are also resilient and can survive at low densities in degraded habitats if the hunting pressure is not too high. Currently, the hunting pressure on chimpanzees in this area is not significant due to the religious beliefs held by the local population, and thus it could be possible that chimpanzees can still be found at low densities in the area of influence of the project.

We noticed that the park authorities for the Comoé National Park were not included as stakeholders, but we feel they should be included in further discussion/presentations to be held by the project given the potential indirect impacts on the park.

Guidance for chimpanzee baseline surveys

Given that it is uncertain at this point if chimpanzees are present within the area of influence of the project, we propose as a first step to conduct interviews and recces (reconnaissance walks) in potential chimpanzee habitats.

a) Determining the area of influence

The area surveyed as part of the initial ESIA was concentrated in the project's direct area of impact. Given that the construction will take several years, and that up to 5,000 workers are expected at the peak of its construction, significant indirect impacts could be expected and could extend several

kilometers outside the direct footprint of the project. One major concern is related to an increase in bushmeat hunting, which could likely extend to the Comoé National Park or its adjacent areas where wildlife is more abundant. Hunters can walk long distance, as well as use motorbikes which can increase the extend of area in which they hunt. The population is in majority Muslim who do not generally hunt and eat primates (although some species may be hunted for their skin and/or for medicinal purposes), but this could change if there is in-migration in the area with people coming from other regions do eat and hunt primates regularly.

Relocation of people is not expected, but some local people are expected to lose their croplands. It is therefore crucial to also include the areas that will be given as compensation to ensure they are not suitable chimpanzee habitats (e.g., gallery forests).

For this first phase of surveys, the area covered should extend 10 km around the project area and include all the area located between the project and the park's western border.

b) Identification of potential chimpanzee habitat

Satellite images will help identify suitable chimpanzee habitats, mainly forest fragments and gallery forests. The flora surveys have identified tree species that are eaten by chimpanzees, such as *Daniellia oliveri*, *Uapaca togoensis*, *Afzelia africana, Parkia biglobosa* and *Detarium senegalensis*.

Several rivers also connect to the Comoé National Park, such as the Farako river. The gallery forests along these rivers connect to other chimpanzee habitat inside the park and should be searched by recces.

c) Methods

Depending on the time available, these surveys could be done by one or two teams, but it is essential that a chimpanzee expert is present in each of the team. They can start first by identifying all villages close to potential chimpanzee habitat and conduct interviews. Interviews can be of the type 'focus-group' but need to include people with knowledge of the wildlife in the area (e.g., local hunters). Questions should be asked as to the presence of primates in the area, and then delve in for chimpanzees, asking when and where they were last seen, if they cross the road, have they seen them kept as pets, if they eat their crops, are they being hunted or used in traditional medicine. etc.

Recces should be conducted in all potential habitats that have been identified (see section b), and in habitats that may be indicated during interviews. Recces should also serve to collect more information on existing threats (e.g., artisanal mining, logging, hunting).

If these surveys confirm the presence of chimpanzees, further surveys will be needed to better understand their abundance and territory boundaries, and these surveys will need to be completed before the start of the project's construction.

Given that these surveys need to start relatively quickly and that we are unsure of the presence of chimpanzees, we have not proposed yet to use camera-traps, but it may be beneficial for the project to use them for a better understanding of the mammal species present and using the area (e.g., elephants).

We would like to see the proposed survey locations and the questionnaire, as well as reviewing the members of the team to ensure that a chimpanzee expert is included, before surveys begin.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information or clarification.

Best regards,



Dr Genevieve Campbell, Lead of the IUCN SSC PSG ARRC Task Force on behalf of the panel for this project