

**Liberia**  
**East Nimba Nature Reserve Forest Conservation Project**  
**News from the Field**

**October 2016**  
**Conservation International**

**Conservation Agreements**



During the reporting period, conservation agreements with the Gbapaye and Yolowee communities were finally signed! The signing ceremony was held in September, attended by local authorities, influential people and members of both communities. Speeches from local authorities repeatedly emphasized the importance of support for mechanisms to halt illegal activities, indicating their high expectations for these conservation agreements.

Conservation agreements are usually signed for a period of 12

months, after which the terms are renegotiated and the agreement renewed.

As indicated in last quarter's report, the two communities had selected livestock breeding and the provision of Frontline Conservationists (FC) jobs as benefits under the conservation agreements. This quarter, under the conservation agreement, a total of 24 former hunters (12 from each community) have been retained as FC. Under arrangements with and supervision by the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), patrols have been launched in the East Nimba Nature Reserve (ENNR) and surrounding forests. The role of an FC is to (1) patrol forests in the ENNR to ensure no illegal activities are taking place and gather information on biodiversity, (2) support the resolution of conflicts between humans and wild animals and (3) spread awareness regarding preservation and sustainable nature management among local communities. In exchange for these efforts, FC will receive a monthly stipend and equipment for patrols.

Training for FC is planned for the second half of October. Also, travelers from overseas visit ENNR, which is abundant in beautiful nature and scenery. FC can also join sightseeing tours to protect the safety of travelers.



Yolowee village chief signs the conservation agreement



Government officials sign the conservation agreement

### Yolowee Community

Yolowee, formerly Gayepa (Gaye's Town), was established during the Atlantic slave trade in the 18th century by old man Gaye, a warrior from the Mano tribe. The name Yolowee means "under the Yolo tree." Yolowee is one of the 18 communities affected by the demarcation of the ENNR as it is situated very close to the reserve with an estimated population of 433 individuals from 26 households. The people of Yolowee are from two ethnic groups (Mano and Gio tribes) living in harmony with each other who earn a living through slash and burn agriculture, fishing, plaiting of mats, hunting, collecting resources from the forest and chainsaw logging. Like their neighbors along the ENNR, inhabitants of Yolowee believe the forest is an inheritance from their ancestors connected to their livelihoods.



Yolowee chief (a descendent of Yolowee founder Gaya) and villagers participate in conservation meeting



The only elementary school in Yolowee

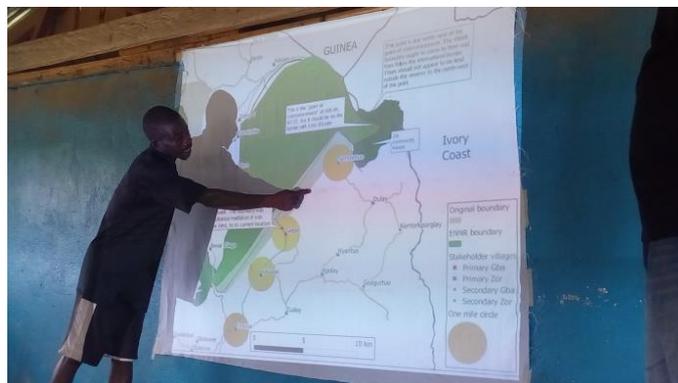
Forests are habitats for different species of wildlife providing sanctuary for most of the cultural and traditional practices of the Yolowee people. The forest also provides food, supports sustenance of water resources and protects the soil from erosion. Animals living in the forest are a source of protein and commercialization. Though no endangered or

protected species was reported being killed or hunted, the use of traps and firearms in the ENNR pose a threat to the species living there.

According to the Yowee people, they have always practiced the kind of nature conservation bolstered by the conservation agreements. These activities include the preservation of certain forests for traditional organizations and schools where no other activities (farming, fishing, hunting, etc.) are allowed. There are traditional schools for male and female students. They not only teach culture, but also how to punish those who violate agreed upon rules. The traditional punishment is highly respected by the locals. Several traditional resource management systems are in place to support conservation efforts. Traditional systems include taboos and totem, some of which vary between tribal groups while others are common across entire regions.

There is also a leadership structure in place with clear traditional and administrative laws for governance. The Yowee village chief, a descendent of the founder, oversees the affairs of the town in consultation with the elders and quarter chiefs. There is a council of elders including women and men responsible for conflict settlement. Particularly significant decisions are discussed in the sacred bush in the forest.

It is important that local social systems are incorporated to effectively conduct conservation efforts.



A young villager discusses ENNR boundaries and surrounding towns with villagers

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