

**Congolese association « Les Amis des Bonobos du Congo »
("Friends of bonobos in Congo")
presents**

**LOLA YA BONOBO - Bonobo Sanctuary in the DRC
and
EKOLO YA BONOBO - Bonobo Reintroduction Programme**

Executive Summary

Congolese not-for-profit organisation Les Amis des Bonobos du Congo (ABC, *Friends of bonobos in Congo*) has been working for over a decade for the protection of bonobos, a Great Ape endangered species endemic to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Its sanctuary, LOLA YA BONOBO¹, rehabilitates orphan bonobos, victims of the bush-meat and pet trades. The existence of the Sanctuary enables authorities to enforce existing laws on the detention and trade in endangered species, the only way to start controlling this illicit trade. Located on the outskirts of Kinshasa, the Sanctuary also allows for the education of the urban population, in particular youth, who are tomorrow's decision makers and potential bushmeat consumers. The education program also targets Ministry of Environment officials and other civil servants responsible for the enforcement of wildlife conservation laws. The sanctuary also support behavioural observations on bonobos, contributing to a better understanding of this species which is so close to humans yet of which so little is known.



In the long run, the protection of the species also involves reintroducing socially stable groups of bonobos, rehabilitated at the Sanctuary, into an appropriate habitat in the primary forest of the DRC. A bonobo release may contribute to the genetic diversity of remaining groups or to repopulate zones from which bonobos might have disappeared. In June 2009, a first group of bonobos rehabilitated at the Sanctuary was released at EKOLO YA BONOBO², in line with the guidelines of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and in close collaboration with the local population and relevant authorities.

¹ "Lola ya bonobo" means "the paradise of bonobos" in Lingala, the main national language in the DRC.

² "Ekolo ya bonobo" means "the land of bonobos" in Lingala.

1. History and context of the project

Since ABC took on its first bonobo in 1994, the organisation has been a pioneer in the field. LOLA YA BONOBO is the only bonobo sanctuary in the world. It provides an ideal location for the education program as well as for ethological studies. The new reintroduction program at EKOLO YA BONOBO is also a pioneer initiative (and of course a first for bonobos). In all its initiatives, ABC works in partnership with all relevant Congolese authorities and collaborates closely with behavioral scientists, conservationists and other environmental stakeholders.



BONOBOS, a species found only in the DRC: Endemic to the forest of the Congo Basin, between the Congo River to the north and the Kasai and Sankuru Rivers to the south, BONOBOS (*Pan paniscus* or pygmy chimpanzee) were only identified as a separate species in 1929. Initiated in the 1970's, ethological studies *in situ* were suspended due to the war from 1996-97 and are only just starting up again. Moreover, being very fragile both physically and psychologically, bonobos rarely survive in captivity. There are only about a hundred bonobos found in zoos and research centers worldwide. Thus there remains much to be learned about the species by specialists and the general public.

Why a sanctuary? The expansion of great ape sanctuaries in Africa over the past ten years suggests that *in situ* conservation programs have not had a significant impact on the bushmeat trade and deforestation. LOLA YA BONOBO, ABC's bonobo sanctuary, works in the same logic to help remedy the minimal results of conservation programs.

With about 60 bonobos living in semi-captivity in 70 acres of enclosed forest, LOLA YA BONOBO is unique in the world: It is home to the largest group of bonobos *ex-situ*. Located on the outskirts of Kinshasa, LOLA YA BONOBO is in an ideal location to host educational activities, as well as for ethological studies.

Why a release? Despite its 70 acres of enclosed forest for the bonobos, LOLA YA BONOBO sanctuary can not indefinitely welcome new bonobos without affecting its educational and eco-touristic potential. Furthermore, the reintroduction of socially stable, self-sufficient groups is a chance to maintain the genetic diversity and to repopulate areas from where bonobos may have disappeared. In line with IUCN philosophy, the ultimate objective of a release program is that that released individuals readapt to life in the wild and that their reproduction is viable.

Amis des Bonobos du Congo (Friends of Bonobos in Congo): ABC is the only institution in the DRC officially authorized to receive the bonobos confiscated by the Ministry of

Environment (or received spontaneously), which are entrusted to LOLA YA BONOBO sanctuary for their rehabilitation.



There is no doubt that ABC's activities have resulted in greater knowledge of BONOBOS, both nationally (especially in Kinshasa) and internationally. Every year, tens of thousands of pupils and other visitors discover and learn to respect bonobos by observing them in the forest at LOLA YA BONOBO sanctuary. Many more students learn about bonobos from ABC outreach activities in schools. ABC also collaborates with behavioral scientists, conservationists

and specialized media to help increase awareness of this little known species. Documentaries filmed at the sanctuary have been shown both in the DRC and internationally, increasing knowledge of bonobos and awareness of the bush-meat trade.

International renown: ABC is a member of the Pan-African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA) and is internationally recognized for its work in bonobo rehabilitation and its efforts to educate the Congolese youth on the protection of the environment and the biodiversity of the DRC. Official and diplomatic delegations regularly visit LOLA YA BONOBO sanctuary. The reintroduction program has mobilized the enthusiastic support of many behavioral scientists and veterinary experts, who are assisting in the implementation and documentation of various steps in the release. In addition, the ABC founding president Mme Claudine André and other staff are often invited to present the association's work abroad. These meetings are a good opportunity to reinforce the association's messages for the protection of the bonobo and its habitat.

2. Detailed presentation of the project - LOLA and EKOLO YA BONOBO

The objectives of ABC contribute directly to its long-term goal of contributing to *in situ* bonobo conservation.

ABC Goal: ABC's education, rehabilitation and reintroduction programs contribute to the survival and long-term protection of bonobos in their natural habitat in the primary rainforest of the Congo Basin.

Our association's objectives are as follows:

Objective 1: *Fighting the illegal bush-meat and pet trade in baby bonobos by assisting relevant authorities to enforce existing laws on trade and detention of endangered species.*

The very existence of LOLA YA BONOBO sanctuary allows the Ministry of Environment's inspectors to confiscate (in application of Congolese and international laws on detention and trade in endangered species, including CITES) orphan bonobos that, victims of the illegal bush-meat trade, are found for sale on the streets of Kinshasa. These bonobos are brought to the Sanctuary for their medical, nutritional and psychosocial rehabilitation and care. Without an appropriate place to keep these seized animals, effective enforcement of CITES would be impossible.



Facilitating official confiscations. When bonobos are spotted for sale on the streets of Kinshasa (or elsewhere in the country), the president of ABC or one of the Congolese Sanctuary staff is usually contacted for intervention. ABC then mobilizes inspectors from the Ministry of Environment so that they can officially confiscate the bonobo, which is then entrusted to ABC for its rehabilitation.

Physical and psychosocial support in the Nursery. The confiscated orphans (or those brought voluntarily³) most often arrive in poor health and nutritional condition. The most common health problems are intestinal parasites and respiratory infections (bronchitis, pneumonia), often in addition to malnutrition and severe dehydration, not to mention the stress endured during their capture and captivity. Furthermore, many arrive mutilated (with phalanges, ear lobes, teeth removed for traditional rituals) or suffer from open wounds from the ropes used during the journey.



ABC employs two full-time veterinarians and a nurse for medical care and health monitoring at the Sanctuary. That being said, all the treatment in the world will not save an infant bonobo that has lost the will to live. It is essential to ensure constant psychological attention for youngest bonobos and new arrivals. To this end, a human "substitute mother" is allocated to each bonobo as soon as they arrive at the sanctuary; she will give the bonobo her undivided attention and affection for the weeks or months necessary for the bonobo to regain its confidence. The psychosocial care provided to new arrivals is a vital component of their rehabilitation, given the physical and psychological fragility of bonobos. At this time, ABC employs four substitute mothers.

³ In the past few years, a large number of bonobos have been voluntarily brought to the Sanctuary by their owners, when they found out that possessing these animals was illegal - a clear sign that the ABC's education program is having an impact.

The psychological rehabilitation of the smaller bonobos is further facilitated by socializing amongst themselves in the secure environment of the nursery and under the watchful eyes of the substitute mothers.

Once the little ones have gained self-assurance and have achieved their affective transfer - a process which can take as little as six months or as much as 2 to 3 years - the bonobos, then about 4 or 5 years old, are gradually introduced into the adult enclosures. Most often a small group of infants is transferred together, so that the little ones don't feel too isolated. They are closely watched to make sure the different temperaments in the new group are compatible and so as to remove any bonobo that might have difficulty adapting to their new environment.



Socialization and behavioral monitoring of juvenile and adult bonobos. The adults are housed in three interconnected enclosures (for a total of 70 acres of forest), which allows progressive socialization and the creation of social groups based on affinity. The keepers play a vital role in monitoring the bonobos, making sure each individual has a balanced diet, quickly identifying individuals that might be ill and making sure the bonobos are doing well overall. Each of the three enclosures is assigned a keeper and an assistant-keeper.

Bonobo Nutrition: In addition to medical and psychological follow-up, supplying the bonobos with a well balanced diet is also vital. The bonobos' diet include primarily fruits and vegetables (bananas, avocados, sugar cane, leafy vegetables), with a protein supplement comprised of peanuts, milk or soy porridge. These supplements replace certain protein-rich plants found in the primary rainforest of the Congo Basin, known to be an important part of the bonobos' diet *in situ* but which cannot be found in Kinshasa.

Each bonobo eats more than six and a half kilos of fruit and vegetables each day. With some variations depending on the season, the daily menu of the bonobos is as follows:

- 1 kg of sugar cane
- 10 bananas
- 30 cl of milk or soy porridge
- 2 kg of vegetables (cabbage, sweet potatoes leaves, cucumber, maize, etc.)
- 1,1 kg of papaya



- 1,2 kg other seasonal fruit
- 200 g of peanuts

The infants in the nursery receive a particularly nutritious diet, with a supplement of milk, bananas and honey. Nutritional supplements are also given to pregnant or nursing females throughout the year: The bonobos' standard diet is complemented with extra avocados, onions and bananas.



The fruit and vegetables (more than six tons per month) are bought from vegetable growers in the surrounding villages, a significant contribution to the economic survival of these marginal populations from the outskirts of Kinshasa.

Objective 2: To contribute to better knowledge of bonobos and increased protection of the species through education programs, advocacy and the facilitation of behavioral studies at LOLA YA BONOBO.

Since its creation almost 15 years ago, the motto of ABC has always been "Conservation begins with education". ABC's education program involves the following components:

- (1) Organization of school visits (and other youth groups during school holidays) to the Sanctuary. School groups range from pre-school to university students and come from all parts of Kinshasa. The visits usually last half a day and include a presentation on bonobos, their habitat and protection, direct observation of the Sanctuary's bonobos evolving in an environment close to their natural habitat, projection of documentaries or video clips (particularly on the bush-meat trade), and interactive discussions.



- (2) In addition to visits at the Sanctuary, since 2005 ABC's educators are conducting weekly educational presentations and follow-up visits in the schools. A complementary Kindness Club program, created in partnership with the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), allows us to focus further on educational messages related to animal well-being and environmental conservation, both at the Sanctuary and in the schools.

- (3) Education of the general public: The Sanctuary is open to visitors 6 days a week, with the possibility of guided tours and a didactic education centre where informational materials are posted. The Sanctuary also educates the general public through collaboration on the production of TV documentaries, articles and other media productions on bonobos.
- (4) For the past five years, ABC has also been organizing educational activities and advocacy efforts aimed at DRC government officials and environmental stakeholders. If today's youth are tomorrow's decision makers (and potential bushmeat consumers), government officials are immediately responsible for the effective enforcement of existing laws for the protection of the species.⁴

Initially focused mainly in Kinshasa, ABC's educational activities have over the past few years spread further into the country, aimed at bush-meat trade routes and markets, as well as villages surrounding EKOLO YA BONOBO as part of the reintroduction program.

In complement to the educational program, ABC collaborates with behavioral scientists for a better knowledge of the BONOBO. Researchers can indeed play an important role in support of the bonobo conservation and welfare objectives of ABC. People protect what they respect, and they respect what they understand. Researchers can help us better understand many details of the life and behavior of bonobos, and this new information can be used to captivate visitors, both young and old.



Given the importance of research to promote increased knowledge and protection of bonobos, ABC collaborates with researchers to facilitate non-invasive studies at LOLA YA BONOBO. To this day, the Sanctuary has welcomed researchers and students at all levels from a range of prestigious institutions, such as Harvard and Duke University in the USA, the University of Kyoto, the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Germany, St Andrews University in Scotland and many more. These collaborations have already resulted in the publication of half a dozen articles in peer review scientific journals.



⁴ Although the ABC initially put emphasis on the education of local youth, it soon became clear that the education of those working for the protection of the environment could not be ignored, starting with civil servants at the Ministry of Environment and other relevant ministries. A surprisingly large number of these government officials and other environmental stakeholders, including those devoted to the protection of Great Apes (or even specifically bonobos), have never seen a bonobo in their lives...

Not only do they contribute to increased knowledge of the species, the presence of foreign researchers encourages the interest of Congolese students in behavioral studies on bonobos and contributes to the training of national scientists in partnership with international universities. Increasing local capacity at all levels is an essential component of our project.

That being said, even if research contributes to our educational and advocacy objectives, it will always give precedence to our main objective of bonobo rehabilitation and care. To that end, candidates go through a detailed selection process in order to make sure that research projects affect neither the well-being of the bonobos nor the work of staff at the Sanctuary, that they clearly contribute to our knowledge of the species, and that they respect the ethics on non-invasive research.

Objective 3: Reintroduction of socially stable groups of bonobos into a special reserve in the primary rainforest of the DRC.

In accordance with IUCN philosophy, the aim of a reintroduction⁵ is that released individuals readapt to life in the wild and that their reproduction is viable.



Such an initiative cannot be improvised. ABC's reintroduction program is being implemented:

- in line with IUCN guidelines;
- taking into account the results obtained from the reintroduction of other Great Ape species, in particular the reintroduction of chimpanzees by HELP-Congo in the Republic of Congo (*Tutin et al. 2001 ; Goosens et al. 2002, 2003, 2005*);
- taking into account the recommendations presented at relevant international conferences (PASA-CBSG, Holland, April 2006; IPS, Uganda, June 2006; PASA 2007 and 2008);
- with the constant support of a team of high level international experts;
- with the full support and in collaboration with national experts from the DRC Ministry of Environment and from ICCN.

⁵ IUCN distinguishes between an introduction (aiming to establish a species in an appropriate habitat and eco-geographic zone outside of its known range), a reintroduction (aiming to establish a species in a zone that was once part of the natural range of the species but from which they have since disappeared) and a population reinforcement (where individuals of a species are brought into a zone where the species is already present). IUCN, Best practice guidelines for the re-introduction of Great-Apes, 2007. In our case, the project is a reintroduction as no bonobos have been seen in the chosen area for over a decade.

Veterinary preparation

The selection of the bonobos to be released is based on systematic medical exams and follow-up (pathogen research, vaccinations, etc.), as well as behavioral observations. All bonobos preliminary identified for release spend several months in quarantine; are vaccinated against tetanus and poliomyelitis; undergo a complete medical exam and must have tested negative for (among other things) tuberculosis, Hepatitis B, SIV and monkey-pox. These studies are carried out in collaboration with the Max Planck Institute (Germany), the Saint Louis Hospital Center (France) and the National Institute for Biomedical Research in Kinshasa.



Selecting the site

The reintroduction site was selected based on strict criteria which included biophysical characteristics specific to the bonobo habitat, sanitary considerations, socio-economic, legal and logistical criteria, but also and perhaps more importantly, the attitude of surrounding communities.

The EKOLO YA BONOBO release site is located in a forest block belonging to the Pôo community, in the "Maringa-Lopori-Wamba" landscape, near Basankusu in Equateur Province. Its ecological characteristics are ideal: a swampy forest of approximately 20,000 hectares, bordered on three sides by rivers, former habitat of the bonobo though none has been sighted for a decade. The Pôo community proved supportive of the project from the very start. EKOLO is only a small part of the forest owned and used by the Pôo and, used mostly for eel fishing and wood collection, it did not represent an essential economic asset for the community.



In August 2008, an agreement was signed with the Pôo community and the local administrative authorities, allowing ABC to use the chosen site for EKOLO YA BONOBO and committing to protect the released bonobos. In December 2008, the DRC Ministry of Environment recommended the forest for classification as "Special reserve or Centre for the re-adaptation of Bonobos to life in the wild".

Community education and mobilization

ABC launched educational activities on the BONOBO and the risks of the bush-meat trade from 2007, targeting primarily the villages surrounding the reintroduction site. These activities were reinforced in 2009 with multi-media presentations in schools, talks on the local radio, and targeted awareness-raising activities with local authorities

and civil servants. ABC also sponsors the local soccer team, the "Bonobos of Basankusu", which proudly defends the colors of the district while acting as ambassadors for the bonobos... Educational activities in schools and communities, targeting youths and local authorities will be continued for as long as needed.

Since their release in June 2009, the first released bonobos have themselves become the best ambassadors for the protection of the species: dozens of canoes stop by every evening to observe the bonobos swinging in the trees or resting on small beaches along the Lopori... In order to preserve the educational impact that direct observation of bonobos has had on the local population even after the reintroduced bonobos move further inland into the EKOLO forest, ABC is working to set up a small educational sanctuary on TOTAKA island, a large partially submersible island on the Lopori river, where a small group of bonobos that may not be fit for reintroduction might be maintained.

Community Development

ABC is committed to ensure that the reintroduction program directly benefit the local population in the medium and long terms, an essential pre-condition to the security of the bonobos and the sustainability of the project. In the long term, both indirect benefits from the project and eco-tourism will contribute to the socio-economic development of the area. More immediately, ABC has approached institutional sponsors and generous individuals to address some of the most pressing socio-economic needs of the population. In 2008, ABC was able to supply all primary and secondary schools in villages surrounding the release site with text books, blackboards and didactic materials thanks to a grant from the Social Development Fund of the French Republic. In 2009, ABC obtained funding from the Canadian Embassy to equip the delivery rooms at four village clinics. Private donations helped set up village pharmacies and distribute clothing to children... In 2010, priority is to support income-generating activities that are not dependent on the forest.



The bonobo release

The reintroduction of a first group of nine bonobos was conducted in June 2009, a period when fruit is abundant in the forest and well before the annual rise in water from the Congo River floods most of the forest from September to December⁶. ABC initially provided food complements to the bonobos, to ease the adaptation of their metabolism, progressively reducing the quantity provided. Two births were recorded, in July 2009 and January 2010, and both infants are healthy.

⁶ Three bonobos which were more unpredictable were returned to LOLA YA BONOBO in October 2009, in order to facilitate post-release monitoring. This 1st release group thus comprises eight bonobos, including two infants, in early 2010.

In order to induce the fusion-fission social dynamics typical of wild bonobos, during which pubescent females leave their groups (thereby avoiding risks of inbreeding), ABC proposes to release a 2nd group of bonobo approximately 5 km (or 45 minutes in motorized canoe) away from the first release site⁷. This 2nd release is anticipated for end 2010 or early 2011, once all required infrastructures are built and the water of the Lopori River has receded.

Subsequently, when bonobo rehabilitated at LOLA YA BONOBO sanctuary are ready to be released, they can be reintroduced into one or other of these two initial groups within EKOLO YA BONOBO.

Post-release monitoring

Post-release monitoring is a critical aspect of the project, enabling us to evaluate results achieved and the sustainability of the reintroduction as per IUCN criteria. Post-release monitoring is carried out in partnership with researchers and behavioral scientists both for training and supervision of local teams and for the analysis, documentation and publication of the results.

Due to a lack of reliable and safe telemetric methods,⁸ post-release monitoring is carried out through direct observations of the bonobos by two teams of trackers working in rotation from the moment the bonobos awaken to when they settle in their nests to sleep. This technique has been used for decades by the Japanese scientific teams, for instance at the reserve of Luo at Wamba.



Lastly, a geneticist from the Max Plank Institute (MPI-EVA) in Germany has conducted the genotyping of the Sanctuary's bonobos. The identification of the genotype of each released bonobo is crucial for post-release monitoring: It will allow us to determine the paternity of potential births, as well as contributing more broadly to improving current scientific knowledge of the species.

⁷ Mombengele and Nôoke had both been identified as potential release sites in 2008. While Mombengele was eventually selected, in part due to its greater proximity to Basankusu, Nôoke is particularly interesting for ecological reasons: significant areas of land that do not flood and abundance of "beya" (local stems that are one of the bonobos' preferred food)...

⁸ Certain chimpanzee release projects (e.g. that of CCC in Guinea) use collars with a combination of direct and satellite telemetric tracking to locate individuals. However, these collars incur certain risks for bonobos which are much more arboreal than their chimpanzee cousins; they have proven less than fully reliable in these chimp release projects; and the satellite cover of the Congo Basin is still incomplete.

3. Solidarity: The project's benefits to the local population

From the very start, ABC recognized the importance of mobilizing the Congolese themselves in support to bonobo conservation efforts. This concern took particular acuity with the reintroduction program.

Located in the village of Kimwenza on the outskirts of Kinshasa, LOLA YA BONOBO sanctuary contributes to the local economy in multiple ways:

- The sanctuary's bonobos eat more than six tons of fruit and vegetable each month. These fruit and vegetables are bought almost exclusively from local vegetable growers. This is an important and regular source of income for the population of Kimwenza, an area well suited for vegetable production, but which is relatively isolated from the urban markets of Kinshasa, 25 km away.
- The Sanctuary receives over twenty thousand visitors every year, half of them during the weekends. These visitors often buy fruit and vegetables from local growers and also visit other local recreational sites (Lukaya Falls and Lac Ma Valle), thereby contributing to the local economy.
- In addition to the thirty or so permanent staff at the Sanctuary, ABC employs a large number of daily workers, particularly for the maintenance of the site and construction work. This is a regular source of income for the underprivileged population of surrounding villages.
- ABC's educational program benefits the schools and youth groups of Kinshasa, including those located in Kimwenza and other neighboring villages.

Since 2008, the reintroduction program has benefited the local population both indirectly (through the creation of jobs and increased demand for local produce) and more directly:

- ABC employs close to twenty staff between EKOLO (trackers and eco-guards), the base camp and the administrative liaison office in Basankusu. Trackers and eco-guards are recruited from the Pôo and other surrounding villages. ABC also hired scores of temporary labor during the construction work for the project.

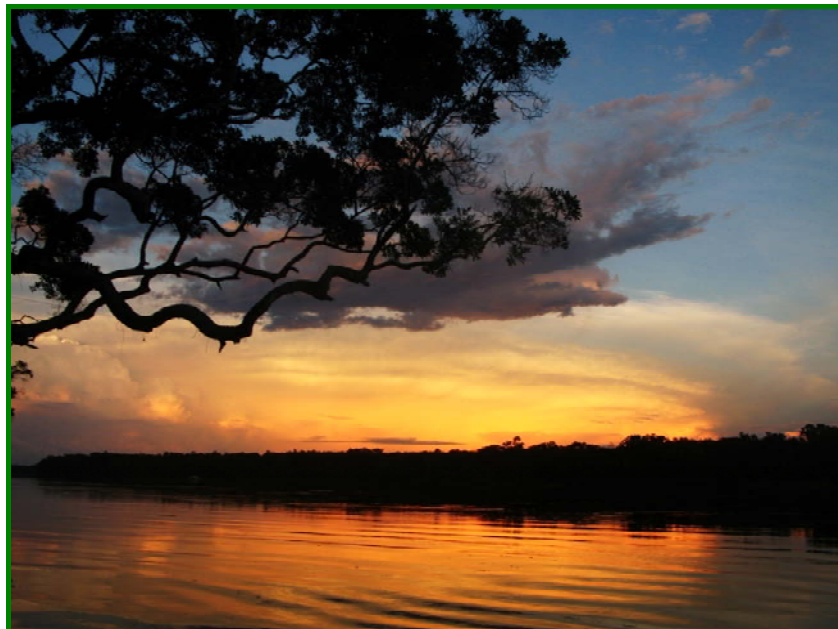


- ABC purchases a significant amount of fruit and vegetables for the bonobos and for the staff. The presence of ABC staff and volunteers has created real long-term economic opportunities for the local population.

- Once the project fully established and security conditions permitting, the international attention generated by EKOLO YA BONOBO should also create opportunities for developing eco-tourism in this amazingly beautiful part of the DRC.

Micro-projects conducted in 2008 and 2009 have included the following:

- ABC secured support from the French Republic's Social Development Fund (FDS) in 2008 to improve teaching and learning conditions in local primary and secondary schools. In total, 9 primary and 3 secondary schools in Pôo and Kodoro villages received a full complement of text books for all grades, plus black boards and other didactic materials.
- ABC also supported the construction of a new 6-grade primary schools at Elonda village (the village where our base camp is located) by contributing local roofing materials and providing all text books, blackboards, notebooks and slates for the students.
- ABC supported the creation of revolving community pharmacies at two local clinics by donating an initial stock of essential medicines and helping train management committee.
- Funding received from the Canadian cooperation (CIDA) allowed ABC to procure essential maternity equipment and supplies for the three local clinics.
- ABC also provided support (including but not limited to t-shirts with conservation education messages) to the local soccer teams; and has mobilized support from a number of individuals and corporations in Kinshasa to collect and distribute significant amounts of children's clothing in villages surrounding the release site.



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