

ALBERT LOTANA LOKASOLA:

IMPROVING HUMAN HEALTH AND CONSERVATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO.

In the remote forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Albert Lotana Lokasola is helping improve human well-being by bringing much-needed health services to the communities living in and around the Kokolopori Bonobo Reserve. Officially recognized by the DRC government in May 2009, the Reserve is a high biodiversity wilderness area covering an area about the size of Rhode Island (4785 square kilometers). Located 300 miles southwest of Kisangani, the Reserve contains bonobos, a rare and highly endangered great ape species that is as closely related to humans as chimpanzees. In addition, the Reserve is highly valued for its biodiversity, including several other flagship species such as leopards, elephants, Congo peafowl, Tshuapa red colobus, and salonga monkeys.

Lokasola founded a nationally recognized organization called Vie Sauvage, or Wild Life in English. He serves as the president of the organization and works with international organizations to foster conservation and rural development in an integrated, holistic approach. As a native of Kokolopori, he believes that “the forest, men and wildlife live together and should be protected together.”

In partnership with local residents and supported by the Bonobo Conservation Initiative, Lokasola and Vie Sauvage established the first medical clinic in the area in 2006. They garnered support for a doctor, nurses and supplies from the Indigo Foundation in Australia and the Kokolopori-Falls Church Sister City Partnership. Before the clinic was founded, community members had to walk or bicycle more than 50 miles to get to the nearest hospital in the territorial capital of Djolu. Now the Kokolopori clinic serves the 8,000 people who live in 30 villages along a 40-mile road in the Reserve. One of the clinic’s goals is to help improve women’s health by training and equipping midwives



Albert Lotana Lokasola in the Kokolopori Reserve, DRC. credit: Sally Coxe

and by providing access to other health services. Malaria and poor nutrition contribute to high maternal and child mortality, and women in Kokolopori do not yet have access to reproductive health services such as family planning.

Vie Sauvage articulates integrated health and conservation messages through their community education projects. They are also working with the community to prevent malnutrition by planting fruit trees in agroforestry fields to produce supplemental food supplies. At the same time, these trees will create corridors for animal/wildlife movement and protect the genetic flow. They also create a sound micro-climate for people, sequester carbon dioxide and filter the air. Through these efforts, Vie Sauvage and the people of Kokolopori are demonstrating the critical links between human well-being and conservation.





Building along the road in Kokolopuri village serves as a “message drum” for sending messages from one village to the next. Credit: Ingrid Schulze.

Vie Sauvage has garnered resources and participation from diverse partners—most notably the Kokolopori-Falls Church Sister City Partnership and the Indigo Foundation— which work together to support the clinic and fund medical staff salaries, training, supplies and equipment, and infrastructure improvements.

According to Lokasola, Vie Sauvage and partners are currently exploring potential partnership opportunities to integrate family planning and reproductive health into existing activities. His hope is that by providing these much-needed services, the community will be healthier and this critical ecosystem will be sustainably preserved.

For more information, please refer to www.kokolopori-partnership.org. The Kokolopori project is also profiled as an innovative conservation and development approach on pages 311 to 326 of the recent Conservation International publication, *Indigenous Peoples and Conservation: From Rights to Resources*.