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Natural hazard risks in Central Africa: a transdisciplinary approach towards disaster risk reduction

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Natural hazards have significant impact on society (people, assets, services, livelihoods and economic growth). Over the past decades, natural hazard disaster risks have increased globally. Due to high population densities, frequently on the rise and combined with high societal vulnerability, natural hazard disasters disproportionately hit regions of the Global south. In addition, these regions are environments where natural hazard and disaster risks are under-researched, and where the population remains under-informed. This is particularly the case of Sub-Saharan Africa: multiple challenges, such as economic development, population growth, environmental issues, and climate change associated to natural disasters risk, are burdened by scientific data scarcity associated with the lack of widely disseminated knowledge to the public. This has a significant negative impact on development.

To cope such a context, the Royal Museum for Central Africa works in partnership with 10 Central African institutions. In DRC, this partnership involves the Institut Géographique du Congo (Kinshasa and Goma), the Goma Volcano Observatory, the Centre de Recherche en Sciences Naturelles Lwiro, the Université Officielle de Bukavu, the Université de Goma and the Civil Protection (North and South Kivu); in Burundi, with the Université du Burundi; and, in Uganda, with the Mbarara University of Science and Technology.

The overall long-term objective of the partnership is to contribute to mitigating natural hazards and associated risks in Central Africa. More specifically, it aims to develop knowledge, expertise, awareness and support for local, national and regional initiatives by following three specific objectives: 1/ academic training of PhD and master students, in order to strengthen the local scientific knowledge regarding risk understanding and assessment, in support to local universities, 2/ hazard and disaster data collection through the development of two citizen scientists networks in collaboration with the Civil Protection in charge of disaster risk prevention and management, to promote long term data collection, storage and analysis, 3/ improving awareness and risk preparedness with the use of a natural disaster risk awareness-raising board game in secondary schools and the implementation of two local geohazards information centres, opened for the general public, in collaboration both with disaster risk managers and scientists of the region.

To summarise, the RMCA's partnership aims to target a wide range of stakeholders concerned by natural hazard risks and disasters, from academic or research groups to citizens and policy

makers, in the concern of enhancing disaster risk communication, and contribute to the development of risk culture. The impact of the tools implemented will be analysed with a view to contributing not only to the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Action, but also to supporting the Sustainable Development Goals.