

# Community resource use in Kibale and Mt Elgon National Parks, Uganda

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Kibale and Mt Elgon are two National Parks in Uganda valued for their biodiversity and tourism potential as well as for the ecosystem service they provide for neighbouring communities (e.g. as water reservoirs). As with many other parks in Uganda and elsewhere, Kibale and Mt Elgon have been confronted with conflicts with their neighbouring communities, which have posed serious conservation challenges. In the last decade, some new conservation strategies have been adopted at Kibale and Mt Elgon to address those conflicts through partnerships between the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), the neighbouring communities and the local government administrations. This paper describes the experience of UWA in implementing such an innovative, collaborative approach to conservation. The initial observations suggest that the approach is effective, that it addresses the real conflicts by providing a package of options and that it brings benefits to both local people and conservation. The paper discusses the components of the new approach as well as emerging issues and concerns.

**NATIONAL PARKS** can be important sources of income through tourism, but for people living around these protected areas, conservation often spells problems. Loss of traditional access to in-park resources or crop damage caused by wild animals can be a constant source of conflict between National Park authorities and the people neighbouring them.

This paper highlights the management strategies developed by Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) for Kibale and Mt Elgon National Parks, in partnership with neighbouring communities and local government administrations. UWA is one of the few protected area authorities which has permitted extractive resource use in Category II Protected Areas (IUCN 1994). UWA has also developed and tested a range of innovative conservation initiatives aimed at addressing conflicts between protected area managers and neighbouring communities, including an institutional framework for community participation in conservation. The strategies developed, the insights gained and the lessons learned from that experience are discussed.

## Conservation in Uganda – the past fifty years

Modern conservation began in Uganda in 1952 with the proclamation of three National Parks – Murchison Falls, Queen Elizabeth and Kidepo Valley. The Golden Jubilee of Uganda's National Parks took place in 2002, and celebrations were held to popularise the importance of National Parks in conserving biodiversity, and their role in economic development in Uganda. The number of Parks has risen from only three in 1952 to ten National Parks and ten Wildlife Reserves today. Yet this history has been varied and has seen a dramatic change in the fortunes of Uganda's protected areas. Between the 1950s and 1970s the parks prospered, with abundant wildlife surrounded by low human populations. The biggest threat was subsistence hunting, but with minimal effects on the National Parks. In fact, the main function of the game department of this period was to protect farmers' crops by shooting trespassing animals. However the 1970s and early 1980s saw lawlessness, internally displaced people, and increasing human populations. These circumstances, coupled with a deteriorating economy, had a negative effect on wildlife management in Uganda, and the killing of wild animals continued unabated under the game control programme and through illegal commercial and state-supported hunting.

With the coming of a new government regime in 1986, the need to consider the human dimension in wildlife management was recognised. The confrontational approach to wildlife

management was questioned, and dialogue was initiated with people whose lives were affected by wildlife management practices and policies. In 1988, conservation programmes that involved people were initiated in the newly formed Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and concerted efforts were made to minimise conflicts between the people and National Parks. In 1996 the institutional arrangements for wildlife management were reviewed. As a result, the Game Department and Uganda National Parks were merged to create the Uganda Wildlife Authority. This move ended extensive duplication of human and financial resources.

Fifty years of wildlife conservation in Uganda has revealed the following important realities:

1. without the participation of affected communities, conservation initiatives can neither be effective nor equitable;
2. a negative attitude of local communities towards protected areas still prevails;
3. many rural Ugandans still depend on in-park resources for their subsistence; and
4. benefits (income) from conservation must be shared with those who are negatively impacted by them.

The legal, policy and institutional framework for protected area management in Uganda has been modified progressively since the mid-1990s to take into account these realities and to forge partnerships with local communities for the conservation of protected areas. The Wildlife Statute (UWA 1996) makes provision for local communities to harvest resources in protected areas, and to be involved in the management of those areas. Another measure introduced in the Statute makes provision for the sharing 20% of gate receipts from National Parks with local communities. In an effort to address the problem of crop raiding by wildlife, a range of animals including bush pigs, baboons and velvet monkeys, were declared vermin, and can now be legally destroyed by farmers if found raiding crops.

These measures are helping to reorientate protected area management from traditional protectionist models which alienate rural people, to a partnership model which puts people at the centre of conservation policies and practice. This aspiration is clearly expressed in the new mission statement of UWA “to conserve and sustainably manage the wildlife and protected areas of Uganda *in partnership with neighbouring communities and other stakeholders for the benefit of the people of Uganda and the global community.*”

But progress in developing these partnerships is slow. A negative attitude to conservation persists and conflicts with local communities in several National Parks are still a major concern for UWA. New approaches are being developed and tested aimed at overcoming these conflicts and changing attitudes to conservation. In the case of Kibale and Mt Elgon National Parks, UWA has been working in conjunction with IUCN to develop strategic partnerships with local communities as a means of reducing conflict and improving protected area protection and management. The strategic approach developed in these two National Parks and lessons learned are discussed in the following sections.

### **Developing strategic partnerships**

Both Kibale and Mt Elgon National Parks are known for their rich biodiversity (Howard 1991). But they are very different in terms of their ecological, socio-economic, demographic and agro-ecological conditions. Kibale National Park (KNP) is a tropical rainforest in western Uganda at the foot of the Rwenzori Mountains, conserved largely for its biodiversity including its rare chimpanzee and forest elephant populations. Mt Elgon, in eastern Uganda on the border with Kenya, is the fifth highest mountain in Africa (4,321 m) and is conserved partly for its afro-alpine ecology and its rare endemic species, but also for its valuable forests and its water catchment functions.

Both Parks are surrounded by rich agricultural lands and have dense neighbouring populations, ranging from 96 to 133 persons/km<sup>2</sup> at Kibale, and from 120 to over 700

persons/km<sup>2</sup> at Mt Elgon National Park. Twenty-seven parishes surround Kibale National Park while Mt Elgon has 62. Many of these communities have traditionally used the forests for a wide variety of subsistence, commercial, medicinal and cultural needs. With the creation of the National Parks, access to the forests was restricted and resource harvesting was prohibited. At Mt Elgon, where the population density around the forest is very high, rainfall is reliable and soils are fertile, the forest was extensively encroached for agriculture during the period of weak governance in the 1970s and 1980s. When the new government began to restore the integrity of the National Parks in the 1990s and evict agricultural encroachers, these evictions were a major source of conflict between people and the park authorities. In Kibale, crop damage by wild animals and the loss of traditional access to forest resources were the main sources of conflict. A further cause of conflict in both Parks was the lack of a clearly-defined park boundary.

These conflicts have acted as a catalyst for developing a conservation strategy based on partnerships with local people, district authorities, and civil society. UWA recognised that no one single community conservation strategy would resolve these conflicts. As a result the approach consisted of various combinations of the following:

- **Strategy 1** – allow local communities to harvest and manage selected park resources through collaborative resource management arrangements.
- **Strategy 2** – develop and test deterrents to keep wild animals from entering crop fields.
- **Strategy 3** – clearly-delineate park boundaries and enter into agreements with neighbouring communities to utilise boundary trees in return for protection of the boundary.
- **Strategy 4** – reduce pressures on the protected areas by collaborating with district authorities and NGOs in promoting environmentally sustainable development outside the protected areas.
- **Strategy 5** – sensitise and raise awareness regarding the importance of conservation, with a particular emphasis on environment education for school children.

### ***Strategy 1 – allowing local people access to park resources***

Collaboration between management authorities and local people has been seen as a tool in facilitating biodiversity conservation (Borrini-Feyerabend 1996; Bennett 1999; Barrow *et al.* 2000). Failure to do so has resulted in a lack of local interest in conservation, therefore hindering its implementation (Davey 1999). The underlying principle of collaborative resource management is that benefits, responsibilities and decision-making powers are shared, to varying extent and through a range of approaches, among some or all of the stakeholders in resource conservation (Scott 1998). Models have been developed for collaborative resource management (CRM) which allow people access to selected resources under certain conditions. In return the resource users undertake to monitor and regulate resource harvesting levels and to protect the resource use areas. It is a 'rights for responsibilities' arrangement which empowers resource users to manage the resources on which they themselves depend. Formal agreements are negotiated and signed by UWA and by the resources user representatives.

Between 1996 and 1998 a number of agreements were developed and tested in both Mt Elgon and Kibale and a process for CRM was developed. Kibale National Park has entered into eight agreements, involving 29% of surrounding parishes. Of these, three agreements were for harvesting wild coffee in the park by people in Mbale, Kabirizi and Nyakarongo parishes (each parish consists of about 10 villages), one agreement allowed extraction of multiple resources such as papyrus, craft materials, medicinal plants, grass for thatching and access to crater lakes for fishing at Nyabweya, and four agreements allowed placement of beehives inside the Park.

Mt Elgon National Park has entered into three agreements that provide access to a wide range of subsistence resources such as firewood, and an additional 21 agreements are awaiting



*A woman collects firewood in Mt Elgon National Park. Photo: Sean White.*

approval by UWA. With this, Mt Elgon National Park will have involved 20% of its surrounding parishes including over 10,000 households in collaborative resource management agreements.

As it was new and innovative, the process of negotiating agreements has also been slow. It was necessary to train park staff to conduct the CRM process, including group dynamics, participatory resource assessment and negotiation skills. Numerous meetings were required to identify all resource users, gain their trust, familiarise them with the concept of CRM and help them to negotiate the terms of resource-use agreements. These early agreements took approximately two years to negotiate but currently the process is reduced to about six months as the staff is better skilled. Resource management agreements for single resources, such as the putting on site of beehives, are less complex than those for multiple resources and take less time.

### **Initial impact of CRM**

The agreements have enabled local communities to gain access to much needed resources, but the real measure of success is how well the communities have responded by fulfilling their responsibilities to protect the area and regulate resource harvesting. In both Parks the resource use committees have shown initial enthusiasm in undertaking their responsibilities. At Mt Elgon for example, the resource use committee at Tangwen Parish devised a system of monthly permits to regulate entry to the forest by their members, and to control the quantities of resources harvested. They carry out regular forest walks to check on the status of the forest and to ensure members are complying with the terms of the agreement. However, the communities do need the support of the UWA rangers especially in the early stages of implementation.

At Kibale, local communities have been cooperating with park rangers in protecting the forest. They reported over twenty illegal incidents to park management (Box 1). In some cases, the users have arrested the poachers, confiscated their tools and handed the offenders over to local council and park management. Local communities have also removed several snares and put out fires in the park. Such actions on the part of local communities were unheard of before the agreements, and have contributed to reduced park management costs in CRM sites.

### **Box 1. Sample letters received by Kibale Chief Warden from CRM groups on illegal activities**

*"This is to tell you that when we went in the Park we saw four people pit sawing timber around Lake Kiribwato. We are therefore calling you to come and patrol the area. The resource users reported to me of that illegal activity."*

General Secretary, LC II, Nyabweya Parish, June 6, 2000

*"There are five people who are in the Park hunting. We saw them while we were checking coffee areas. Bring Rangers and we will arrange to catch them. Come quickly before they come out of the forest."*

Resource User, Nyakarongo Parish, March 2, 2000

*"Madam, we are informing you that people are burning charcoal in the Park. Please arrange to send Rangers for patrolling. We shall guide you to show the areas and the people involved."*

LC II Office, Kiziba Parish, November 8, 2000

*"I hereby inform you that after Mweya coordination meeting we patrolled the Park and found that pit sawyers had split a tree in the Park but upon seeing us they ran away. So, we collected their tools and handed them over to the office of LC II. We have in our possession two machetes, one rope and one file for sharpening. We wanted them to come so that we may get them to your office. But they never showed up."*

User Group Member, Kakooga

*"We do not run away or hide from Park Rangers as we did in the past. Now, we work together to stop poaching and illegal activities such as pit sawing or unauthorised resource collection."*

A resident neighbouring Mt Elgon NP

Empowering local communities to manage selected park resources has engendered a sense of responsibility, thereby boosting their image and status. Furthermore, with the formation of specific resource user groups, there has been an increase in interaction among the members. Resource use meetings have provided a forum to discuss issues related to both resource use and other social matters. The protected areas have benefited through improved community relations, reduced law enforcement effort, and a reduction in poaching and illegal use. Thus, CRM has also contributed to building social capital in neighbouring communities.

### **Strategy 2 – problem-animal management**

In Kibale, the loss of crops to park animals is perhaps the biggest source of conflict between local communities and protected area managers. The problem is less severe in Mt Elgon but is still a cause for concern.

In Kibale, UWA in collaboration with local communities, tested a number of deterrents to keep the park animals from entering the farmers fields. They included digging a trench, live fencing with Mauritius Thorn (*Caesalpinia decapetala*), placing sharp objects, scare-shooting and growing buffer crops such as tea and soybean that are not easily eaten by wild animals. Of these, the trench and Mauritius Thorn fencing were found to be the most effective measures to deter bush pigs and elephants. The placement of sharp objects (stones and sticks) was found to be impractical and expensive. Scare-shooting to deter animals was discouraged as this could cause panic among people already plagued by periodic rebel activity. In November 2001, local communities, with the help of KNP, dug a 7.5 km long trench. The community contributed 30% of the cost in the form of labour. This initiative, in which UWA and the residents along the boundary worked together to tackle the problem animal issue, has noticeably improved park – people relationships, and reduced the amount of crop raiding by elephants.

### **Strategy 3 – demarcate park boundaries through boundary agreements**

Poorly-defined park boundaries are a major source of conflict between parks and people. The problem was particularly extreme in Mt Elgon where the boundary was obliterated by past agricultural encroachment. The high density population and fertile soils ensured that disputed areas were hotly contested. During a resurveying exercise in 2000, when the true boundary was found to be outside the existing boundary (i.e. in farmers' fields), the resulting conflict was extreme and resulted in a number of court cases. Similar cases arose in Kibale and other National Parks, and this prompted UWA to undertake a major review of park boundaries nationally resulting in the de-gazetting of some disputed areas in 2001.

At Mt Elgon, UWA has entered into partnerships with some five communities adjoining the park to protect and manage the boundary which consists of five lines of *Eucalyptus* trees planted at 2 m spacing. This is done through formal boundary management agreements that allow people to plant crops under the boundary trees, periodically harvest rows of boundary trees, and manage the coppice re-growth. The agreements have provided an incentive to people to protect the boundary and have brought benefits to both local livelihoods and to conservation.

*Building an elephant trench outside Kibale National Park. Photo: Purna Chhetri.*



#### **Strategy 4 – partnerships to reduce pressures on protected areas**

In both Kibale and Mt Elgon, UWA is working in partnership with IUCN and the neighbouring district authorities to promote sustainable development in parishes neighbouring the parks. These projects, which are also working with local NGOs, have helped to reduce pressures on the parks by promoting the growing of alternatives and substitutes for park resources and by promoting revenue-generating enterprises based on the parks such as beekeeping and local tourism. The main activities being promoted are:

- agroforestry to reduce pressure on the parks for firewood, poles and timber and other tree products;
- beekeeping (honey production) which helps to reduce the incidence of forest fires from wild honey hunting;
- improved farming systems including soil fertility management;
- domestic pig farming to generate income, provide meat for household consumption and to provide a readily available substitute for bush meat in Kibale;
- growing coffee for cash income around Kibale National Park; and
- fruit growing for cash income and household consumption surrounding both Kibale and Mt Elgon National Parks.

Unsustainable development outside the Parks forces people, especially during times of environmental stress, to resort to Park resources for food, subsistence products and even to generate cash income. By collaborating with the district authorities to promote environmentally sustainable development outside the Parks, UWA is helping to reduce pressures on the Parks, and is contributing to livelihood security and improvement. The integrated conservation and development projects around Kibale and Mt Elgon National Parks (funded by the Dutch Government and NORAD respectively) are also supporting the districts to develop their environmental planning and management capacity and to incorporate environmental concerns into development planning. These measures to support environmentally sustainable development are targeted specifically at supporting conservation through reducing pressures on the Parks.

#### **Strategy 5 – sensitisation**

The education and sensitisation of local communities regarding environment and conservation issues was given a high priority by both Parks.

Regular dialogue with local communities and their political representatives was undertaken to explain the wildlife management policies and laws and to explain and discuss Park management actions which impact on the communities. Indeed, when developing the long-term management plan for Mt Elgon National Park in 1999, an extensive series of consultative meetings were held with communities neighbouring the Park. It has been found that regular dialogue also provides a forum in which to discuss potential conflict issues and can also act as an important conflict-mitigation measure.

In addition, methods such as community workshops, radio broadcasts, posters and road shows were used to spread conservation messages to communities. At Mt Elgon, a residential environmental education centre was set up in cooperation with IUCN, and this has provided very successful short courses for school children on environmental issues, educating a new generation on the value of conservation.

#### **Emerging issues and challenges**

The experience in Kibale and Mt Elgon has shown that local communities can take on the responsibility for protection and regulation of resource-use areas and that collaborative resource management does bring significant benefits to local people living around protected areas while

improving local attitudes to conservation. However, there are still problems, with implementation that need to be resolved and the processes themselves are still evolving.

Developing the agreements is a long and costly process involving training of ranger staff, collection of data on resource users, sensitisation of resource users and negotiation of terms and conditions of agreements. To date this has been achieved through technical and financial support from IUCN and donors. It remains to be seen if this can be sustainable in the long-term.

### ***Collaborative resource management***

Observations from both Kibale and Mt Elgon suggest that ranger interest fades once agreements have been signed, and that the back-up support to resource use committees which is critical in the first months, is inadequate. This may be partly because community conservation rangers are few in number, and are constantly under pressure from local communities and UWA to negotiate and sign new agreements. Collaborative resource management (CRM) necessitates the provision of adequate financial and human resources, which at the moment are not prioritised in National Park budgets. Indeed, the Park's community collaboration unit remains with inadequate human and financial resources to carry out its expanding duties. In the early stages of implementation the Resource Use Committees, despite their enthusiasm, lack experience and do not have the capacity to effectively undertake their responsibilities to regulate and protect the resource use areas. If they are not closely monitored and supported by community conservation rangers, there is a danger that they will get disillusioned by problems they are unable to solve, and consequently lose interest.

At Mt Elgon, only about 20% of communities have access to resources through agreements (including those which are now ready for signing). There is a strong demand from the remaining communities to develop agreements quickly so that they too can have access to

*The Chairman of the Resource Use Committee of Kapkwai (Mt Elgon) makes a point about the use of tree bark in traditional medicine. Photo: Sean White.*





the Park. The shortage of community conservation rangers is delaying this process, leading to frustration in communities. There is a tendency on the part of the rangers to rush the negotiation process and to develop agreements too quickly without the necessary degree of consultation and sensitisation.

UWA is gradually moving towards a more partnership-based approach. Mt Elgon has 57 law enforcement rangers and nine community conservation rangers, whereas Kibale has 30 law enforcement and five community collaboration staff. This current deployment of staff is an indication of the higher priority still given to protection compared to developing local partnerships. The number of community conservation rangers is inadequate to cater for the support needed to implement existing agreements and to negotiate new agreements, which local people are demanding. In addition, rangers receive para-military training that prepares them for law enforcement duties, but not for community conservation. It is now necessary to reassess human resource requirements. Community conservation is more demanding in terms of skills and staff capacity than law enforcement, and more importance needs to be placed on training staff in community conservation skills.

### ***Crop raiding by problem animals***

In terms of problem animals, the institutional responsibility for their control is still unclear. Although the UWA Statute (1996) clearly delegates the task of tackling problem animals outside the parks to local government, there is a lack of expertise or capacity to take action. Local people feel that it is the government's responsibility to manage wild animals, because the UWA Statute stipulates that all wildlife belongs to the state, or because people know that killing wildlife is an offence. However, in reality local people have taken it upon themselves to kill animals such as baboons and bush pigs to save their crops.

In Kibale, elephants cause widespread crop damage while chimpanzees are a danger to humans, in particular children. Their high conservation status means that neither animal can be designated as vermin, and UWA needs to be responsible for their management. This also raises the issue of compensation for the damage such animals cause. At present, UWA policy does not allow compensation for crop losses from Park animals. One option is to redirect a proportion of the income from chimpanzee tracking to compensation for crop damage, or UWA could lobby local authorities to provide tax rebates to communities that suffer from crop losses by wild animals.

### ***Destruction of natural resources outside the Parks***

Another conservation threat is unsustainable land use outside protected areas. Current conservation initiatives are mainly directed to protected areas with little being done to conserve forest fragments that survive beyond the boundaries. Once such remnants are destroyed, pressure on resources within protected areas will increase. It is important that protected area managers try to adopt a more holistic approach to conservation by establishing links enabling them to work together with other relevant institutions. For example, more formal relationships could be made with other institutions responsible for land use, aimed at implementing a more holistic approach to conservation and land use at the landscape level.

### ***Revenue sharing***

UWA's policy of allocating 20% of the entrance fees to surrounding local authorities is a good example of sharing benefits from conservation. However, the actual amounts shared are small, as they are limited to gate fees only and do not include a wide range of other sources of revenues such as trekking fees, camping fees etc. For example, KNP earned a total of USD 116,300 in the year 2002 but only USD 7,800 was given to adjoining communities. In 2001, the amount was even less due to prevailing insecurity. As can be seen from Table 1 tourism numbers are still not

**Table 1.** Revenue sharing: Kibale and Mt Elgon National Parks.

Year	Kibale National Park			Mt Elgon National Park		
	revenue Visitors	Total (20% of (USD)	Revenue shared (gate fee)	Total Visitors	Revenue revenue	shared
1999	815	79,988	269	1,278	66,022	0
2000	1,156	34,930	865	1,928	127,255	2,857
2001	1,824	52,499	1,617	2,028	255,492	4,571
2002	?	130,900	11,050	3,234	322,499	3,885

adequate to yield a significant income to surrounding communities. An additional concern is whether this money will actually benefit those directly affected by conservation along the Park boundaries. A difficulty with this type of measure is that the benefits target the community level, whereas losses due to problem animals are incurred at an individual level (Mugisha 2002). It is recognised there is a need to increase the amount under this scheme to yield tangible benefits, and to focus the benefits where the problem lies.

## Conclusions

The strategies that have been developed at Kibale and Mt Elgon to address conflicts between UWA Park management and the people living around the Parks are bringing benefits to both local people, and to conservation. These benefits have been achieved through the partnerships which UWA has developed with the people neighbouring the Parks and with local government administrations.

The lessons from the experience in Kibale and Mt Elgon are:

- strategic partnerships with people neighbouring the Parks, developed through collaborative resource management arrangements, help to reduce conflicts and improve Park/people relationships;
- partnerships with district local government to promote environmentally sustainable development outside the Parks, help to reduce people-pressure on the Parks;
- negative impacts of Parks on local people such as crop-raiding by wild animals must be addressed through prevention or compensation; and
- revenue-sharing is a good mechanism for sharing the benefits of Parks with local people but the focus and scale needs to be revised.

The new models for CRM offer an exciting prospect of neighbouring communities actively conserving National Parks, and taking responsibility for managing their margins or buffer zones. UWA has recognised that although the authority to manage protected area resources lies with the agency, the ultimate success of its conservation efforts depends on the support and positive attitude on the part of the people who live on the boundaries of the protected areas.

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# An impressive yet vulnerable comanagement partnership in Congo

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The Conkouati-Douli National Park, Congo, offers a rich example of how a successful management partnership can be developed even while facing some of the most challenging conditions in the world. The paper illustrates a number of practical lessons in the process and describes the concrete results achieved. Despite the enthusiasm and hard work of the involved parties, however, these results remain vulnerable. Too much power is still in the hands of external actors who can readily decide to reverse the participatory approach and adopt counter-productive forms of 'repression' of illegal activities. A clear national policy in support of participatory management settings is needed, as well as renewed, coherent and relatively-long term support to the field initiatives that, like in Conkouati-Douli, are opening the way to real management partnerships.

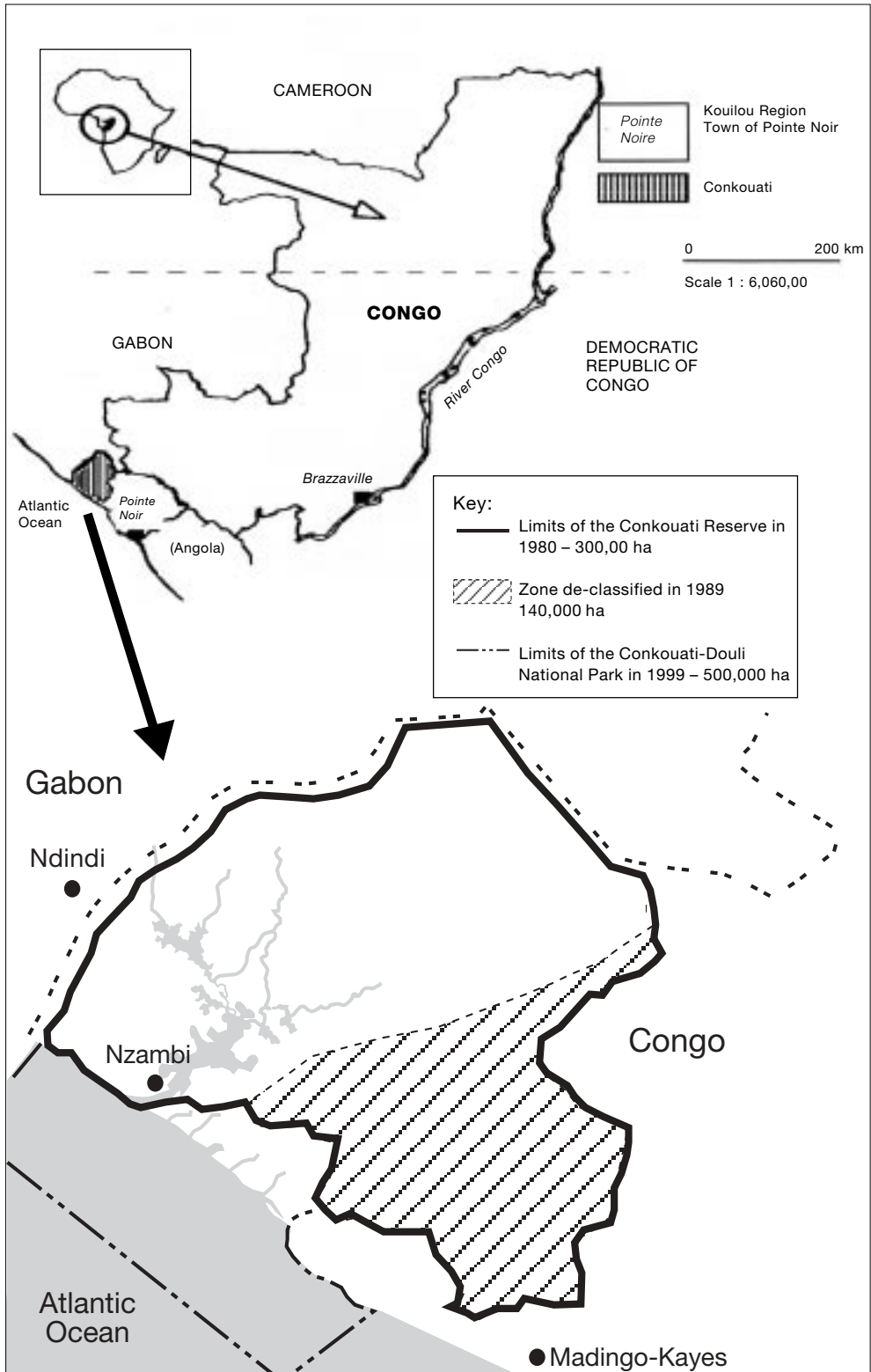
**THE TERRITORY** that today comprises the National Park of Conkouati-Douli, Congo, (see Figure 1) hosts a magnificent natural wealth, encompassing multiple and interdependent ecosystems at altitudes ranging from zero to eight hundred metres. Its innumerable flora and fauna species render it not only rich, but include a high degree of endemism, featuring new taxa for the flora of Congo and numerous protected mammals (primates, elephants, manatees), several marine turtle species and very numerous species of fish (marine, freshwater and estuarine).

The territory is home to a dozen communities—totally dependent on the use of local natural resources and surviving through a traditional lifestyle—who possess both an intimate knowledge of their environment and unique skills which ensure their livelihoods. The local residents know every corner of the land and coast as well as the local fauna and flora. They relate to them through their social customs, including traditional rules of use and some magical taboos. In contrast with their integration into the local environment, the communities of Conkouati consider themselves abandoned by the state, and are waiting impatiently for recognition and support. At times this can be poorly expressed, or expressed with violence. In fact, we can find in Conkouati an abundance of energy in the local community... an energy that can well be employed either to build or to destroy. This energy represents a potential wealth of ideas and capacities for the management of the territory and its resources, but it needs to be nurtured and channelled.

## A difficult national context and a critical local context

In 1992, when the basic documents of the national programme for the management of natural resources in Congo were finally ready, a climate of strong socio-political tensions and violent clashes characterised the country, which was just emerging from the one-party communist state regime. The country has scant experience in terms of civil society associations and 'projects' and its notions of collaborative management amount to what was discussed within the triad 'technical experts-party-unions'. The protection of nature and the sustainable use of natural resources are far from being national priorities. The Project for the Management and Conservation of the Protected Areas in the country (PROGECAP) of the Global Environment Fund (GEF-CONGO) established at Rio in 1992 finally came into being in Brazzaville in 1994. It has already accumulated a number of delays and is victim to a widespread lack of political will and creative ambition. The five national protected areas (PAs) that are beneficiaries of the GEF grant are entangled in endless conflicts over who has power over whom or what. One of these PAs, the then Faunistic Reserve of Conkouati, is plagued the most by these conflicts, as the area sits within the jurisdiction of the political opposition to the government administration in charge at the time.

**Figure 1.** Location of Conkouati-Douli National Park.



In Conkouati, tensions are possibly even higher than in Brazzaville itself. The local communities perceive themselves as completely abandoned by the state. There is no administrative authority in place, nor a system of police. There are no communication facilities, nor means of transportation deserving of this name. There are no schools, no health services and no agricultural services. The Faunistic Reserve of Conkouati has never been visited by Water and Forests Ministry staff, who are located less than 100 km away. There is no protected area manager (Conservateur) nor any warden patrol or surveillance. The reasons for the creation of this protected area of 300,000 ha, in 1980, were actually void of any environmental considerations. The aim, at the time, was to protect the border with neighbouring Gabon. Indeed, in 1989 the protected area was reduced to half of its original size under the pressure of timber exploiters and oil prospectors. Each modification was conceived and executed by distant authorities, without even minimal involvement of the local residents.

***The key actors misunderstand and distrust each other***

In 1994, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the organisation chosen by PROGECAP to promote the sustainable management of Conkouati's natural resources, arrived to confirm a critical state of affairs. To the external eye, the protected area appears as a place of anarchy, a kingdom of poachers. Besides some 'heavy' and ineffective Village Committees set up by the old administrative system of the one-party state, the official village organisations seem insignificant. Local clans gradually restore their original powers and try to reinstate themselves, and the social fabric is severely damaged. Certain villages are almost completely abandoned, with 90% of their people living in the heart of the forest, where it is easier to exploit the wildlife resources.

The central government is not keen to see any improvement in the situation in Conkouati, basically because it does not wish to offer any help to its political opposition in the area. On the other hand, the local political parties do not have any particular reason to promote the conservation initiative either, as they receive benefits from the already well-established logging companies. The local administration, lacking finances, is at times susceptible to corruption and is certainly envious of the international conservation organisations and their means. Indeed,

*An inner lake of Conkouati-Douli National Park. Photo: Christian Chatelain.*



they are struggling to survive, and are not in the least interested in Conkouati – a sparsely-inhabited territory, virtually cut off from all normal means of communication. In all, the communities of Conkouati are purely and simply abandoned. They have only themselves and their survival skills to rely on in a socio-economically hostile environment.

In this situation, the arrival on site of the IUCN component of the PROGECAP GEF-CONGO had little effect. The resident people believe that ‘the project’ has come to forbid hunting and fishing, to resettle the villages outside of the protected area, to build fences and barriers, and so on. Their first reactions are at the level of their fears, and included roadblocks, personal threats and even the sequestration of the Chief Technical Advisor for a few days.

## **Organising and negotiating towards a management partnership**

### ***Promoting an environment favourable for dialogue***

From the beginning participatory management is taken as the desired setting for the protected area and, as a first step towards it, a large emphasis is given to social communication activities. The IUCN staff recognises the importance of traditional systems of resource management and the need to offer a minimum of social support to destitute communities. These are crucial decisions. In addition, two other decisions are significant – the first is the recruitment of a person native to the region, with good communication skills, who becomes the ‘face’ of the project for the communities in the protected area. The second is to invest time and resources in analysing in detail the beliefs, preconceptions and practices of the local residents with the help of an anthropologist, also native to the region. The need to continue this dialogue will remain throughout the process, but these key choices in social communication are vital in determining a new partnership climate between the main actors.

### ***Promoting a better comprehension among the actors***

The social communication process gradually creates some new and positive perceptions of the social actors with respect to one another. The ‘project’ becomes to local eyes a set of resources and opportunities, including the opportunity to control external access to their local territory. Gradually, former enemies discover that they had interests in common and can become allies; the fear of exclusion was transformed into collaboration for improved management of natural resources. Thus, while the local actors and resource users in Conkouati understand the intentions of the project staff, the latter understands that the natural resources are being ‘appropriated’ at different levels and by different institutions. The agents of the state, which at the beginning of the initiative had perceived the local residents as a group of environmental predators and irresponsible poachers, begin to change their mind. At the same time, the local residents, who had not considered the state as anything more than an institution to forbid, repress and steal, moderate their opinions. Slowly, a mutual trust starts to develop between the project and the local residents. More in-depth work can begin, engaging the parties vis-à-vis one another so that they become ‘partners’, who work together for mutual benefit. The ‘command and control’ approach of the state and the ‘laziness’ of the local people face one another over the negotiating table. The parties are obliged to find solutions together – not as police and robbers but as social actors sharing an interest to maintain the abundance of natural resources in the reserve.

### ***Helping the parties to perceive the natural resources as a common patrimony***

The people of Conkouati have norms, rules and perceptions with respect to their forests, lagoons, wildlife and fisheries. These are very different from those of the Water and Forests Administration. In fact, they represent for every actor a set of strategic tools, to be deployed according to the circumstances. The system of reference is continuously changed and manipulated according to the social position of actors and the interests at play. By recognising such norms – deploying the rules, understanding the perceptions, studying in detail who has rights over what and by virtue

of what entitlements and means – it is realised that at least three levels of ownership lay claim to the same natural resources. The first is the level of the lineage, defining the clan rules of appropriation over the land. The second is the level of the village, which presides over the rules of resource management. The third is the level of the state, which, through its agents, attempts to impose the body of prevailing law. With the arrival of the IUCN project, a fourth level suddenly materialises before the local eyes, a level potentially powerful, more or less allied to the state and with the capacity of destabilising the whole system and appropriating for itself all of its values. That the clans, the villages and the state can dispute among themselves the access to the resources is still conceivable but that is unthinkable for an external project. An external project cannot and must not touch the local patrimony, as it has no entitlements over it. This reaction is very positive. It is in fact to the local patrimony that the project needs to pay attention, and the project engages in what at times is referred to as ‘patrimonial mediation’.

### ***Negotiating participatory management agreements***

The patrimonial mediation work, essentially a work of conflict management on the basis of the common interests to maintain the local patrimony of natural resources, is long and complex. It is often a case of one step forward and two back. The process begins by identifying all entitled actors, and with them making a preliminary evaluation of the status of the natural resources. Everyone realises that they are all threatened, and that they all wish to maintain the abundance of the natural resources. From there, each group of actors (or ‘stakeholders’) develops a proposition for the management of those resources, basically a voluntary form of zoning, with each zone having different rules of resource protection and /or use. At first, the propositions may seem at odds, but the project staff discusses with the relevant stakeholders the pros and cons of each perspective and develops a compromise solution that is progressively refined and finally accepted by all. A comanagement institution, the Comité de Gestion des Ressources Naturelles de Conkouati (COGEREN) is then formally established. It includes representatives of the local

*One of the many meetings in Conkouati during the early efforts at establishing a climate of mutual trust and dialogue. Photo: Christian Chatelain.*





communities, of the state administration, the NGOs locally active in environment and development issues and some locally elected officials. The legitimisation of the institution and its deliberations are accomplished through the signing of a Comanagement Charter by the national and local authorities and in a number of social rituals by which the local chiefs are publicly engaged. A real partnership is born.

### **Partnership results**

The partnership established at Conkouati emerged from hard work through a long and complex process<sup>1</sup>. Behind it was neither the simple application of a methodology nor the carrying out of a set of neat activities orderly listed in a project document. Rather, the partnership was the fruit of a common learning process by which all involved parties managed to judiciously combine their knowledge and skills, their energy and wisdom.

### **Five institutional agreements**

1. A Zoning Plan, defining an eco-development zone, a temporary protection zone and a strict protection zone.
2. A Comanagement Charter signed by the local representatives of the three major authorities with responsibilities for the protected area (the Regional Director for the Ministry of Forest Economy, the Head of District for the Prefect, and the Chief of the Nzambi Village for the resident communities).
3. The Comité de Gestion des Ressources Naturelles de Conkouati (COGEREN) uniting representatives of the administration, the communities and the NGOs dedicated to development and environment as well as some locally elected officials. COGEREN has further established a Steering Committee and an Arbitration Committee.
4. A Management Plan, elaborated on the basis of the zoning plan and progressively including three Special Agreements on the manatees, the marine turtles and rattan.
5. A Decree, classifying the protected area as the Conkouati-Douli National Park.

### **Three special agreements for the protection of endangered species**

COGEREN developed three specific agreements that were realistic and promising for the intelligent protection of resources estimated to be endangered and/or particularly valuable. These agreements are simple: each is summarised in a few pages plus a map, but carry the strength of the consensus among various parties, from the administration to the chiefs, to the local associations of resource users. They are tailored agreements, developed through long and difficult negotiations of mutual rights and responsibilities, which required the preliminary effort of all parties just to be discussed. Specifically, the agreements prescribe the following:

**Marine turtles** – all species of marine turtles found along the coast of Conkouati (*Dermochelys coriacea*, *Lepidochelys olivacea*, *Chelonia mydas*, *Eretmochelys imbricate* and *Caretta caretta*) are protected by the Washington Convention (CITES) and the Bonn Convention (Convention on Migratory Species). However, no text in Congolese law refers directly to them and they were customarily subject to poaching that could at times claim 75% of eggs deposited (the eggs are consumed locally). The COGEREN agreement defines some Zones of Strict Protection (no killing, no capture, no collection of eggs) along the coast and other Zones of Partial Protection (see Figure 2) where some rules of collection are to be respected by the local residents. The local residents are the only ones allowed to collect eggs (for local consumption only, according to

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1. For more information on this process see: <http://nrm.massey.ac.nz/changelinks/cmnr.html>. The Conkouati process benefited from support in 'learning by doing' and exchanges within a learning partnership (supported by GTZ and the IUCN) comprising several sites pursuing comanagement settings in the Congo basin.

quotas set by the Park management). Even in the Zones of Partial Protection, the capture and killing of turtles is strictly forbidden. Only turtles accidentally captured and found dead in the fishing nets can be consumed locally. Turtles captured alive have to be freed. Turtle eggs and carapaces cannot be sold. It is even forbidden to carry lamps on beaches at night. Specific sanctions are applied to anyone breaking these rules.

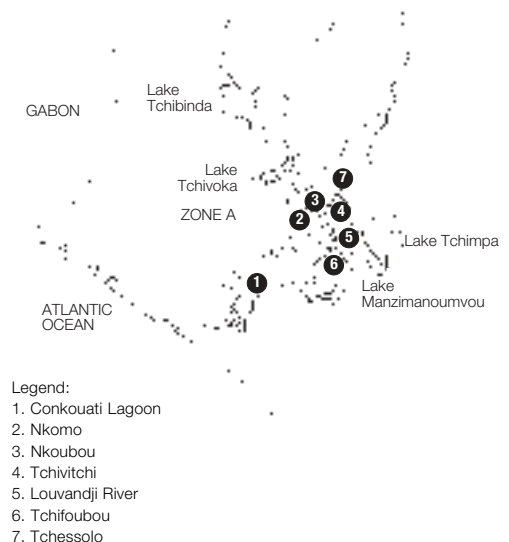
**Manatees** – the manatee is listed in Appendix 1A of the CITES Convention and is protected by Congolese law. The last specimens in the country (*Trichechus senegalensis*) are found in Conkouati-Douli National Park. The COGEREN agreement takes into account the fact that this animal is perceived by many local residents as sacred. The agreement reinforces the law, forbidding or limiting certain types of fishing practices that disturb the animal in its habitat (for instance the practice known as ‘tapping-tapping’, by which the fishermen cause fish to concentrate in a part of the lagoon by making a tapping noise on the water). The agreement also includes the establishment of several strictly protected zones including manatee habitat (see Figure 3); the prohibition of netting at the confluence of the arms of the lagoon; the determination of an open and closed season for certain types of fishing practices; a system of sanctions for the infringements of these rules; and a manatee monitoring system.

**Rattan** – besides its natural role in the ecosystem, rattan (*Eremospatha* sp.) plays an important part in the socio-economic life of Conkouati. It is the raw material for many artefacts, such as chairs, beds, baskets, nets, it is also a roofing material, and is utilised by more than 80% of local residents. The objective of the COGEREN agreement is to prevent the over-exploitation of this resource by the adoption of rules that forbid cutting it in the Zones of Strict and Partial Protection and totally exclude its commercial use, in accordance with National Park rules. The utilisation for local purposes is authorised only for the rattan found within the zones of eco-development, and even there only according to quotas fixed by an ad-hoc management body at village level. Sanctions are established in case of rule infringement, graded according to the status of the resources.

**Figure 2.** Marine turtle management coastal zoning in Conkouati-Douli National Park. This zoning is the result of negotiations among local communities, Park Management and Forestry Administration.



**Figure 3.** Location of Zone A under participatory management for the protection of the manatee in Conkouati-Douli National Park.



### ***Sharing power and enhancing sustainable livelihoods***

The process that developed the participatory management institutions had two other major, if perhaps unintentional, results. The first is a certain restoration of moral standing between the state (manager) and the residents (poachers/predators) in Conkouati. The second is an effective step towards improved local options for sustainable livelihoods.

Ten years ago the Conkouati residents lived in a disconcerting and anxious state of limbo. They were closed to innovation, lacked interest in organising themselves and were basically unaware of the opportunities they could have grasped to pursue the very changes to which they aspired. At that time the forest service was squarely set in a centralist mode of management, focused solely on timber and wildlife and employed only repressive means to 'ensure' conservation. The process that led towards setting up the participatory management institutions in Conkouati is unique in Congo, and quite revolutionary, in the sense that it is the first example in which power-sharing has occurred between the Water and Forestry Administration and local communities. Besides opening avenues for mutual recognition and respect, this also contributed to a new sense of local identity and self-respect for the local residents, a re-evaluation of their moral standing vis-à-vis the rest of the country.

Regarding the strengthening of local livelihoods, it needs to be acknowledged that an enormous disparity exists between the immense natural wealth of the protected area and the great poverty of the people who live in its heart – a phenomenon all too common in Africa. For several decades the territory of Conkouati attracted waves of business operators and state agencies, all interested in exploiting timber and oil. Little or no return 'trickled down' to local level, and there has been little overall communication or social support. The economic poverty of the area has always been related to local apathy and a lack of social organisation. This is revealed by the scarcity of local associations, the absence of collaborative systems to secure food or means of livelihood in difficult times, the lack of places where people can regularly communicate, exchange ideas and negotiate common solutions, the absence of community representatives in decision-making regarding the exploitation of natural resources, local ignorance of the real issues determining both the rules and practices of that exploitation, the isolation of the communities, the passive acceptance of external pressures over local resources and the very poor knowledge of ways in which the local environment can support livelihoods. Comanagement, and the related processes of self-awareness, organising, negotiating and learning by doing, opened a door for the resident communities to improve their chance of sharing control over their resources and, indeed, benefiting from their sustainable use. This has been an essential step for them towards a fulfilling and secure economic future.

### **Some impressive results ... yet vulnerable and under threat**

The participatory management results in Conkouati form a coherent, inter-related body and find their institutional strength in two fundamental tenets: the communication and dialogue among all concerned social actors and the assumption of responsibilities by them towards the conservation and sustainable use of the natural resources. The signing, at the highest state level, of documents developed by a large number of actors at the local level, is proof of the power of a local dialogue and a sharing of responsibilities. In the field, the fact that new forest exploitations have been decided on the basis of the advice of local communities, and their terms of reference discussed with community representatives is another encouraging sign. The specific agreements for the protection of manatees, marine turtles and rattan, and the application of the spirit of these agreements prior to their actual signature, can be regarded as further success.

Most of all, the communities of Conkouati have gained a new understanding about their land, the National Park now being central to their identity and livelihood, and a sense of pride and ownership is engendered. This result is impressive when seen in the perspective of the beginning of the process, when the lack of communication and social organisation rendered the future of



*A fisherman returning home to his village inside Conkouati-Douli National Park. Photo: Christian Chatelain.*

the protected area extremely precarious. In those days, the IUCN project could only ‘hope’ for the engagement of local actors in management. A few years later, the members of the COGEREN and the residents of Conkouati developed a patrimonial vision of their natural resources and began talking about their own comanagement setting with understandable pride – a major achievement.

The comanagement results in Conkouati, arresting and impressive as they are, remain vulnerable and are, even now, under various forms of external threat. It is true that a participatory management system is an evolving process, which can hardly ever be considered ‘finished’, which needs to adjust to ongoing constraints and which must adapt to the changing interests and realities of the parties concerned. It is also true, on the other hand, that some influential interests, basically opposed to the sharing of power with the resident communities, are capable of sabotaging participatory management in a variety of direct or subversive ways.

With regard to the comanagement institutional arrangements, further improvements are needed to achieve the effective inclusion of some important actors who, until now, have only been ‘watching from outside’. These include business operators (timber companies, oil companies, transport companies) and certain state agencies and services (fishing, tourism, environment).

Surprisingly, however, another major improvement regards the role played by a major conservation NGO that came into the area after the end of the IUCN project. The Park management would improve immensely if a more sophisticated understanding and appreciation of the local participatory setting could be encouraged by this NGO. Unfortunately, instead of valuing the advantages of the situation it found in place, the personnel of the NGO chose to follow a more conventional and outdated ‘protectionist’ and ‘repressive’ approach. In Conkouati, given the experience before and after the development of the comanagement partnership, such an approach is clearly inappropriate and bound to be ineffective. Indeed, it is undermining hard-won mutual trust and comanagement arrangements, and consequently having a negative impact on local biodiversity.

The IUCN project concluded its work in 1999. From then until 2001 COGEREN activities continued with the financial support of the Netherlands Committee of the IUCN (it was at this time that the specific agreements for the manatee, the marine turtles and the rattan were fully developed). Subsequently, experts from the new conservation NGO and a new Park Manager

(who was non-native to the area) entirely changed the management style. This has so far prevented both the official signature and the application of the agreements—in particular the agreement for the protection of marine turtles—a bizarre result when one considers that one of the objectives of the relevant NGO is the protection of this very animal. Even more worryingly, the efforts of the Park management have been re-focused entirely on the armed repression of poaching, introducing into the area a new level of ‘appropriation’ over the resources: the one of the armed forces called in to carry out the repression. The wisdom of involving in conservation a poorly-paid, armed militia in a country just out of civil war is to be queried. Far from eliminating poaching, it appears that this ‘repression’ has actually increased it. The armed forces have simply become a new layer in the system, taxing each poached animal that gets out of the Park, and encouraging the poachers to hunt more than before. In fact, a sort of quasi-alliance has been established between the armed police and the poachers (who are not members of the local communities and come from outside the Park) with the first becoming the taxing protectors of the second: a great result indeed! Understandably, the sudden change of approach has resulted in reduced enthusiasm from the local communities, previously accustomed to maintaining close links with COGEREN. It would be truly unforgivable if they were made to lose interest altogether after the long process that managed to involve them effectively and sincerely in conservation.

In November 2002 the newly-elected representatives of the constituencies that compose COGEREN (the mandate of the preceding ones had expired) gathered for a general meeting. They elected a new Steering Committee and a new Arbitration Committee and adopted an action plan dedicated to maintaining the achievement of comanagement in Conkouati, to strengthening their own institutional capacity and to pursuing both the local conservation engagements and some new initiatives to diffuse information and capitalise on the achievements of the past. Hopefully, COGEREN will receive increased support in the future and will be allowed to continue its pioneering work in the country. Ultimately, only a clear national policy in support of participatory management of protected areas will be able to assure its future, but it is significant and highly encouraging that, even in the absence of such

*A river path through the forest in Conkouati-Douli National Park. Photo: Christian Chatelain.*



a policy and while facing counter-productive management decisions and new threats, COGEREN is still alive.

The experience of the Conkouati-Douli National Park demonstrates that a participatory management arrangement is possible and can be successful even when facing some of the most challenging conditions in the world. It also demonstrates, however, that in the absence of specific policy-backing and continuity of support for the time it takes to adequately gain a strong foothold, such a comanagement partnership remains vulnerable to external threats. The conservation advocates interested in preserving the natural wealth of the area have a clear path to follow: restore as soon as possible a more effective and sensible management approach, and regain the trust and cooperation of the local communities.

We believe that the experience of Conkouati deserves to be widely advertised. On the one hand such transparency will help to give it its due credit and to attract further badly-needed support. On the other, it will also convey important lessons, and a concrete example to other protected areas willing to adopt a participatory approach towards more effective, equitable and sustainable management.

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