Communities mobilise support to protect wildlife, safeguard wellbeing

HIGHLIGHTS

Elephant population stable inside Lobéke National Park

Communities mobilise support to protect wildlife, safeguard wellbeing

Consultations begin to implement accord between Baka and government of Cameroon

Baka leaders mapping out strategy for sensitisation on MoU implementation
Sustaining dialogue with communities and integrating their views and concerns constitute a cornerstone strategy in the effective management of protected areas in southeast Cameroon. In the Jengi landscape, WWF works in a concerted manner with chiefs, civil society groups, local management committees and indigenous Bakas to address issues touching on the wellbeing of local communities. This is done through meetings in villages, sensitisation campaigns, training workshops and support to micro-projects and other community-based initiatives.

One of such meetings held recently between the Conservation Service of Nki National Park and chiefs of Ndongo-Moloundou area located in the south of the Park bordering the Republic of Congo. Nki National Park Conservator and Jengi TRIDOM Programme Manager met with the chiefs to get their views on the management of the park and issues affecting their communities.

Earlier, WWF also held meetings with 15 chiefs in Ngoyla sub-division. Ndongo and Moloundou constitute a hub for elephants, but poaching poses a grave threat to the pachyderms. Discussions with the local chiefs revealed the presence of Malian, Burkinabe and Congolese poachers who use the porous borders to target elephants in the park.

Among the difficulties of the area include difficult access, (Ndongo can only be accessed by water during most part of the year), extreme poverty, absence of income generating activities and suspension of the community’s community forest mainly due to high poaching pressure (need for support to get it functional again). The huge concentration of elephants in the area results in human-elephant conflicts. The Ndongo-Moloundou stretch is the human-elephant-conflict zone of TRIDOM Cameroon with at least one major case of conflict each year.

The chiefs exhorted the Park’s conservation service to consider the preservation of their cultural values in the revision of the park’s management plan.

“The discussion with the chiefs was very fruitful and will help guide our actions. We will have to take into consideration some of their worries as we look forward to revise and push for the validation of the management plan of Nki National Park,” states Gilles Etoga, WWF Jengi TRIDOM Programme Manager.

Community forest managers, CSOs learn best practices

Community forest management in the Boumba and Ngoko Division of the East Region of Cameroon has witnessed significant progress, generating substantial revenue for local communities. However, perceptible weaknesses persist related to governance, community development and improvement of living conditions.

An evaluation carried out on the management of 21 community forests in the Division in 2018 showed that some 3000 temporary jobs were generated producing revenue in terms of remuneration to the tune of FCFA270 million, while revenue made from the sale of wood to economic partners amounted to FCFA10 million.

Some of the weaknesses observed in the report are related to governance (lack of transparency, low participation of women and the elderly) and poor restoration of exploited forest.

In a bid to share the result of the evaluation and reinforce the capacity of community forest managers and civil society organisations, local officials of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) for Boumba and Ngoko with the support of WWF organised a workshop in Yokadouma in May to share best practices. The training focused on the weaknesses observed in each community forest, with MINFOF and WWF facilitators helping participants elaborate action plans to implement recommendations from the meeting.

WWF also distributed a brochure guide on best practices related to the sustainable management of a community forest.

WWF has so far supported over 40 communities including four Baka communities to obtain and manage community forests for their development.
The population of elephants in Lobeke National Park in eastern Cameroon remains stable after four years of high human pressure, a wildlife census has revealed.

The census, conducted between July and December 2018 sought to know the dynamics of wildlife populations and human pressure inside the park and its surrounding zone. The results indicate an estimated elephant population size of 3,500 individuals, down from over 4200 individuals in the 2015 survey estimate. This decrease is attributed mostly to poaching for ivory trade. However, the elephant population remained relatively stable inside the park between these periods with slight decrease of 6.7% in the mean estimate from 1029 in the year 2015 to 960 in 2018.

WWF and the conservation service of Lobeke conducted the inventory with the financial support of the Tri-National de la Sangha Foundation (FTNS) and and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS-Wildlife without Borders). The inventory team covered on foot, a distance of 1800km of which 744km are line transects systematically distributed throughout the park and the management units located in its periphery, covering a total area of 934 884 ha.

Meanwhile, great ape population size is estimated at some 15000 individuals consisting of 83.5% of gorillas and 16.5% of chimpanzees, witnessing a slight increase between 2015 and 2018. This stability is due to the fact that great apes are not among the main poaching targets in Southeast Cameroon because of local customs. The presence of 08 monkey species is confirmed during the inventory; putty-nosed monkey, grey-cheeked mangabey and the colobus guereza being the most abundant species.

A large population of duikers and other ungulates of 188,190 individuals is estimated in the study area with 79,229 individuals in Lobeke NP. Three species of pangolins were also detected during the survey, with the giant pangolin being the most abundant species.

“IT is comforting to know that the decline rate of species like the elephant has slowed down. However, poaching pressure is still very high and as such we need to urgently improve our anti-poaching strategy in the park and its periphery if we hope to stop the haemorrhage,” states Dr Zacharie Nzooh, WWF Cameroon Biomonitoring Coordinator.

The result of the study was validated during a workshop organised in Bertoua on June 7, involving representatives of the central and decentralised services of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), government technical and financial partners (WWF, ZSL, TNS Foundation and WCS), and logging companies (SEFAC and CTSC).

To ensure effective management and reduce human pressure on wildlife, participants at the validation workshop recommended a review of the functioning of the Technical Operational Unit of the South East (UTO-Sud-Est) and concertation platforms between the different actors. They also recommended a public-private partnership governance model for Lobeke.
Lobeke shares milestones, perspectives with visiting German Delegation

Lobeke National Park recently shared its milestones, challenges and perspectives in delivering its conservation work with a visiting delegation from the German Embassy in Cameroon, German Development Bank (KfW) and the TNS Foundation (FTNS).

The German mission led by Madam Steinbrinker engaged in a series of meetings with the Lobeke Conservation Service, WWF, Baka leaders, women, and community forest and wildlife management committees. Discussions from these meetings highlighted efforts at ensuring the participatory and rational use of natural resources in the landscape with complex issues and varied actors.

The visit came at a time the Lobeke Conservation Service was on the verge of elaborating a new five-year strategic plan focusing on promoting eco-tourism and ensuring infrastructural and socio-economic development of communities.

Key issues were the implementation of a memorandum of understanding signed between indigenous Baka and the government of Cameroon relating to their access right into protected areas, promotion of a complaint mechanism that addresses cases of abuses of Baka rights and support to local communities.

WWF collaborates with public and private partners to promote local management committees, concertation and decision-making platforms.

WWF collaborates with public and private partners to promote sustainable forest management, income generation and poverty alleviation.

Lobeke National Park is part of the Tri-national de la Sangha (TNS) landscape spanning Cameroon, Central Africa Republic and the Republic of Congo.
Poachers’ trails, elephant corridors mapped out in TRIDOM landscape

Routes used by poachers and traffickers to access Minkebe National Park in Gabon through the Ayina River have been identified and mapped out. The poachers’ routes were tracked during a field reconnaissance mission aimed to assess the state of the river (its navigability) to enable field teams plan future bi-national (Cameroon-Gabon) surveillance missions. The routes used by poachers are also migratory corridors for elephants that commute between protected areas in Cameroon and Gabon.

Organised poaching gangs take advantage of the porous borders between the two countries to orchestrate the killing of elephants and transportation of their tusks to big cities like Yaounde and Douala.

Following the first phase of the trip that covered a distance of 102 km (Djoum-Avebe), four small waterfalls; 16 fishermen’s camps and eight hunter’s camps were also identified and mapped.

This important data will guide the conservation service of the Dja Biosphere Reserve and the Minkebe National Park in Gabon to jointly protect these areas.

Similar missions were carried out in May to identify and map out wildlife corridors in Nki and Boumba Bek national parks. Five wildlife corridors were geo-referenced and mapped around Youmbi clearing in the south of Nki National Park.

Identification and mapping was also carried out in the Pondo Complex of clearings in Boumba Bek National Park. The work enabled the bio-monitoring teams to determine sites to place camera traps to film wildlife; ease understanding of wildlife dynamics around the clearings, determine corridors for the migration of large mammals and enable the park conservation service to put in place an effective surveillance system to protect them against poachers.

Baka share experience on community forest management

Experience gained by indigenous Baka of Yenga and Mambele villages in managing a community forest in East Cameroon is now serving other Baka communities.

Baka of Mboli Village that obtained a community forest in November 2018 recently undertook a trip to Yenga to learn from their experiences. WWF facilitated the experience sharing visit. Twenty-four Baka including seven women (all executive members of the respective community forest management bodies) participated in the meeting on June 24 in Yenga Village.

Discussions dwelled on implementation of a simple management plan, running of a community forest account, involving different components of the community, organising meetings and reaching decisions, community development and accountability. Some difficulties Yenga and Mambele face include low capacity of villagers in forest management and wood exploitation, use of forest navigation tools and negotiating with business people. They expressed need for constant follow up and technical support by partners such as WWF.

“The exchange was enriching and will enable us kick-start activities of our community forest with ease. We have to ensure scrupulous management of our community forest to change our housing and living conditions,” states Mbisa Denis, Mboli Community Forest Operations Officer.

With the support of WWF, four Baka villages (Yenga, Mambele, Assoumdele and Mboli) situated at the peripheries of Lobeke, Nki and Boumba Bek national parks have obtained community forest of up to 15,000 hectares that they solely manage.

WWF has so far supported some 40 communities in the East Region of Cameroon to obtain community forests to promote participatory management of forests around protected areas.

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Concerted efforts are underway to combine ecological methods with traditional knowledge to sustainably manage natural resources around Nki and Boumba Bek national parks in Eastern Cameroon.

Cameroon’s Institute of Agricultural Research for Development (IRAD) and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) through the Kyoto University are partnering to experiment this innovative approach to natural resources management in the area.

The project, presented to local inhabitants, government authorities and NGOs in Grie recently, aims to experiment a model approach to managing wildlife resources on the one hand and improving the production and transformation of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) on the other. Three communities – Grie, Zoulabot Ancien and Mambele – all situated at the peripheries of Nki and Boumba Bek national parks, stand to benefit directly from this pilot phase of the project.

Research relating to the project that is supposed to last five years started in November 2018 by trained officials from IRAD, the University of Yaounde I, Douala and Dschang, MINFOF (Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife), and the University of Kyoto and JICA. For its success, the implementers count on the inputs and support of the conservation services of Nki and Boumba Bek, logging companies and partners like WWF.

The project hopes to improve the wildlife conservation strategy and cost in the East Region, strengthen the capacity of local MINFOF personnel and provide opportunities for Cameroonian students to carry out field research.

Local officials of the Ministry of the Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED) and WWF have joined forces to tackle air pollution in Yokadouma in the Boumba and Ngoko Division of the East Region of Cameroon.

MINEPDED and WWF mobilised over a hundred people including students, representatives of the National Youth Council and civil society actors to take action to reduce air pollution in the town during manifestations to commemorate World Environment Day 2019.

Participants dismantled a huge garbage heap, undertook an awareness walk in the major streets of the town and planted trees in front of some offices as symbolic gestures the population should emulate. The manifestations took place on June 11 instead of the 5th due to the Moslem feast of Ramadan.

The activities carried aimed to reduce air pollution in the town, in line with this year’s theme. Even though Yokadouma is surrounded by forest, urban development, industrial activities and poor waste management are posing health threats to inhabitants.

MINEPDED Delegate for the Boumba and Ngoko Division, Francis Sangkwa, identified poor waste management as one of the sources of pollution in the town. “Human actions contribute to destroying the environment, particularly the air we breathe. We can live in a healthy environment by properly managing our waste,” states the MINEPDED Delegate.

MINEPDED officials also carried weeklong sensitisation campaigns targeting enterprises and structures whose activities contribute to significantly pollute the atmosphere.

Similar WED actions were undertaken in the cities of Bertoua and Yaounde.
Central Africa and Cameroon in particular are known worldwide for their rich, dense forests with iconic wildlife, but little is known of the impact these ecosystems are currently reeling under as poaching and illegal wildlife trade increase. Forest elephant populations have declined by over 70 per cent in Cameroon due to poaching between 2010 and 2015 (WWF survey report, 2017), a statistic that illustrates the challenges facing the forests, its wildlife and the many local and indigenous communities that depend on them.

Social imbalances, already a challenge due to the historical marginalization faced by many of the country’s indigenous communities, are further increasing as organized wildlife crime syndicates attempt to lure vulnerable people into poaching, providing, at times heavy, arms and ammunition.

With the economic, social, security and environmental impacts beginning to show, local communities are starting to step up. Foremost amongst them is a common initiative group for conservation and development around Cameroon’s Nki National Park and its surrounding zones, known in French as GIC CODENZOP.

Composed of representatives from the local indigenous communities, the group recently organised a meeting to discuss support and solutions for wildlife crime with local administrative authorities, traditional rulers, mayors and conservators of Nki National Park and the Nyoya Wildlife Reserve and law enforcement agencies with the support of WWF in the town of Abong Mbang in the East Region of Cameroon.

“We are appalled at what is happening to wildlife and the impact it is having on the environment and people in our area,” states Sodja Denis Achille, Coordinator of GIC CODENZOP. “We are seeking support and engagement from conservators, Judicial authorities, sub divisional officers, mayors, chiefs of gendarmerie brigades, traditional rulers and representatives of indigenous Baka people. This will enable us effectively denounce and take legal action against those found to be involved in poaching and obtain compensation from acts of poaching,” Sodja adds.

The local authorities are responding as well. “We have to advocate for civil damages to be effectively awarded by the courts to local communities who are suffering the collateral damages from poaching because of their proximity with the wildlife resources,” states Mewol Marcel, Assistant Mayor of Nyoya Council.

GIC CODENZOP is one of four community-based groups within the Dja-Odzala-Minkebe (TRIDOM) transboundary landscape that WWF is supporting within the framework of a project dubbed “Protection of elephants and great apes in TRIDOM: support to local communities and wildlife law enforcement agencies to combat wildlife crime. The three others are the Association of Baka of Boumba and Ngoko Division (ASBABUK), and two community wildlife resources management committees, known by its French acronym as COVAREF.

Spanning three years, the project aims to increase the engagement of local communities living in the Cameroon segment of TRIDOM landscape in the efforts against wildlife crime. This is done through providing legal support to enable the communities to appear as civil claimant in wildlife cases before competent courts and seek damages for prejudice suffered from poaching.

Communities involved in the project have therefore been provided a legal counsel to help them in the process.

“The interest shown by the communities to defend their forest against poaching is encouraging. With appropriate support, we will witness more communities around protected areas in the TRIDOM landscape championing the efforts to curb wildlife crime that is rapidly undermining the forests and biodiversity they – and all of us – depend on,” says Alain Ononino, WWF Central Africa Head of Policy for Wildlife Crime.

“We are appalled at what is happening to wildlife and the impact it is having on the environment and people in our area”
Wildlife corridors will henceforth feature in Cameroon’s land use plan following government’s endorsement of a proposal by WWF.

A wildlife corridor is a link of wildlife habitat, generally native vegetation, which joins two or more larger areas of similar wildlife habitat.

WWF has identified and mapped out these corridors in the Cameroon segment of the Dja-Odzala-Minkebe (TRIDOM) landscape spanning protected areas in Cameroon, the Republic of Congo and Gabon.

In a bid to ensure that wildlife habitats and migratory corridors are preserved, WWF lobbied the Ministry of the Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT) to integrate them in the country’s land use plan.

MINEPAT endorsed WWF’s proposal in a workshop organised on 27 and 28 June in Mbankomo in the Centre Region, involving key government ministries including Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), the Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development (MINEPDED), Mines and Technological Development (MINMIDT) and partners such as UNESCO and UNDP.

In 2017, WWF signed a partnership agreement with MINEPAT to ensure respect for environmental norms in the implementation of a Programme for the Management and Integrated Development of the Dja Mining Belt and Adjacent Border areas in the South and East regions of Cameroon known as PADI-DJA. Through this agreement WWF will advise the government on issues related to environmental best practices and respect of indigenous people’s rights.

Large mammal species such as the elephant migrate within the sub region following particular routes that if not protected could expose them to greater risk of poaching and destruction of their habitats. Government’s endorsement means that before any development of infrastructural projects are undertaken within the area, steps would be taken to protect these important corridors as well as species that use it, particularly elephants.

“This is an important step in protecting large mammal species and their habitat with the TRIDOM landscape. We will continue to lobby to ensure that concrete measures are taken on the field to protect wildlife habitats,” states Durrel Halleson, WWF Cameroon Business and Industries Coordinator.

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WWF and partners are active on the field to fast track the process for the implementation of a historic MoU signed between indigenous Baka and Cameroon’s Ministry of Forests and Wildlife (MINFOF) in February 2019.

MINFOF local officials have begun putting in place a concertation platform involving logging companies, sports hunters, conservation services, NGOs and Baka leaders. WWF that worked tirelessly to see this agreement come to fruition has been on the field holding meetings with Baka leaders.

In a meeting with WWF recently, Baka leaders (all members of the Association of Baka of Boumba and Ngoko Division, ASBABUK), said they were poised to carry out sensitisation in villages to raise awareness among Baka on this vital document.

“There is much excitement within Baka communities about the MoU but most Baka do not know what it entails. We have to go to every village concerned and sensitisie all Baka on the importance of the agreement,” states Ernest Adjina, President of ASBABUK.

WWF is working with local stakeholders to ensure a speedy and effective implementation. “WWF is ready to work with the different stakeholders involved in this process and ensure a speedy and effective implementation of the accord. WWF is ready to support the Baka in this process to make this MoU a reality,” states Moise Kono, WWF IP Officer.

ASBABUK and MINFOF signed the historic agreement in February 2019 after years of concertation and lobby initiated by WWF. Following the agreement, Baka have access right to three national parks in the East Region of Cameroon; Nki, Boumba Bek and Lobeke.

Further to the agreement WWF signed a partnership accord with Cameroon’s Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) in April 2019 to protect and promote the rights of indigenous people around conservation sites in the country.

**With support from:**

**Contact**

Southeast Forest Programme—Cameroon  
P.O. Box 6776 Yaounde  
Website: www.cameroon.panda.org  
Facebook: www.facebook.com/WWF Cameroon  
For further information kindly write to Ernest Sumelong, Jengi Communication Officer  
Email: endjomo@wwfcam.org