THE RAINFOREST FOUNDATION UK
SECURING LANDS, SUSTAINING LIVES

Briefing
November 2011

Protected Areas

The growth of protected areas in the Congo Basin

The rapid expansion of extractive industries and growing concerns about climate change in recent years has meant the need to protect biodiversity has been increasingly recognized by policy makers. International instruments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have provided a blueprint for more concerted global action on conservation challenges while international conservation organizations like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Conservation International have mobilized huge amounts of funding for forest conservation projects. As a result, the Congo Basin has seen the area of forest under protected area status increase considerably over the past decade. Second in size only to the Amazon, the Congo Basin rainforest covers more than 180 million hectares, spreading across the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), most of the Republic of Congo, the southeast of Cameroon, southern Central African Republic (CAR), Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. The Congo Basin Forest Partnership foresaw around 40% of the entire region being designated under 'landscapes' including protected areas and 'buffer zones'.

Table 1: Protected areas (IUCN categories I to VI) in Central Africa

Country	Number of protected areas	Area (ha)	Proportion of national territory (%)
Cameroon	174	10,437,336	22
Republic of Congo	14	3,513,438	10
Central African Republic	73	17,330,015	28
Democratic Republic of Congo	50	26,314,330	11
Gabon	17	2,431,367	9
Equatorial Guinea	13	590,955	21

Source: FORAF, 2008.

Current macro-level planning in the region shows that these figures are likely to increase significantly over the next few years, with the DRC alone aiming to put 17% of the national territory under protected area status.

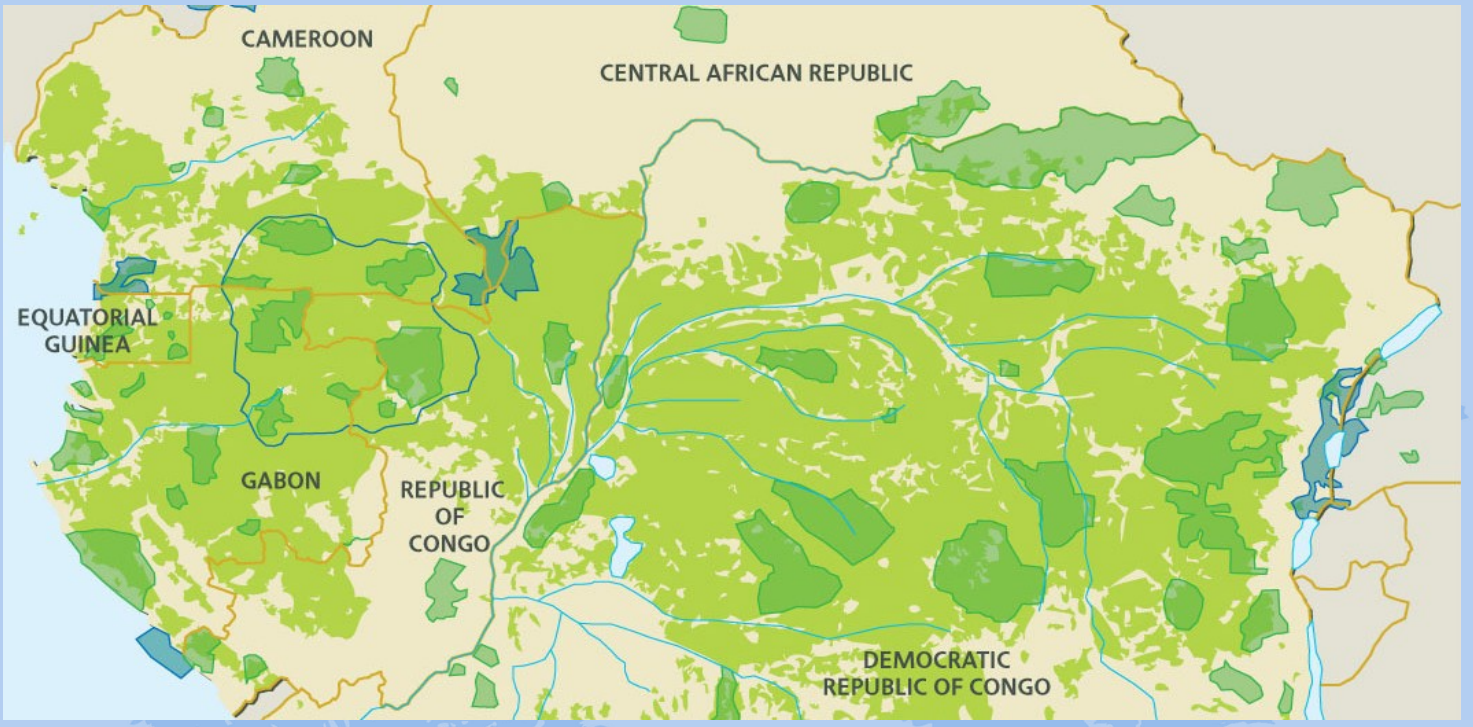
People and parks

The expansion of the protected area network in the Congo Basin has made a significant contribution to forest protection but has been considerably less successful in addressing the needs of forest-dependent peoples. Despite international conventions like the CBD, and operational directives of leading donors such as the World Bank and a number of national laws containing rights and safeguards for local and indigenous populations, the region has in fact seen the proliferation of a strict conservation model which aims to preserve vast 'wildernesses' untouched by humans - even where these areas are actually no less the long-term habitat for indigenous populations than were the North American 'wildernesses' upon which they are modelled. In 2003, M. Cernea and Kai Schmidt-Soltau estimated that between 190,000 and 250,000 people were either displaced or adversely affected by conservation projects in the six Congo Basin countries, among millions of 'conservation refugees' worldwide.

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Although these numbers have been debated, extensive participatory research carried out by RFUK and our regional partners has found that protected areas are often created without proper consultation with, or the participation of, local communities or civil society. Indeed, despite evidence to suggest that traditional forms of forest management have contributed to the conservation or even creation of high levels of biodiversity in the region, forest-dependent communities have often been perceived as threats rather than partners in conservation. As a result, hundreds of local communities have faced eviction or have been banned from accessing customary lands and use of forest resources which today fall within conservation areas. Anti-poaching drives, often brutally enforced by eco-guards, have unfairly penalised traditional hunting and gathering activities whilst offering very little in terms of compensation or alternative livelihood activities. Until recently, remote and disenfranchised communities have lacked proper forms of representation or legal protection.

> *"We are descendents and guardians of the Kongou* (now inside the Ivindo National Park) *and we are asking international public opinion for help. Because we are now banned from the park – our grandsons will not know where to fish or to collect medicines. We have always known that we must preserve the forest for future generations and do not refuse the park but this is our home".*
>
> Joseph Soma, Simon Ayaza and Henri Endjena, village elders from Mbolo 3 on the northern edge of the Ivindo National Park



Protected areas and transboundary cooperation in Congo Basin countries. Sources: UN World Database on Protected Areas, accessed March 2010; UNEP-WCMC Global List of Transboundary Protected Areas, 2007.

The RFUK approach to protected areas

RFUK's regional programme on protected areas is aimed at supporting forest communities and indigenous peoples to participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of protected area policy at the local, national and regional levels. The approach brings communities together with civil society organisations (CSOs), relevant government agencies and other stakeholders to help enact progressive elements of the law or to help advocate for legal reform to ensure better recognition of customary rights.

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RFUK's approach combines the following types of activities:

- Participatory mapping of customary lands and resource use to determine overlapping land use areas and to identify areas of conflict. Where appropriate, members of the administration are encouraged to join forest communities and civil society organisations in facilitating mapping work in order to promote co-ownership of the process and awareness of forest peoples' issues;

- Training of community-based resource persons to explain the maps to relevant stakeholders and negotiate with decision makers;

- Placement of community legal fieldworkers around protected areas to provide legal support and capacity building to forest communities and help to develop culturally appropriate and effective forms of representation;

- Facilitation of tripartite, or roundtable processes to develop innovative and participatory models of protected area planning and management that integrate cultural and traditional use rights and practices; and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) processes;

- Supporting the contribution of remote forest communities in the development of national and international protected area policy and legislation through their active participation in key meetings;

- Monitoring and sensitisation of international donors and key policy makers on 'ground realities' around protected areas through the use of multimedia technologies, interactive maps and community testimony;

- Working with park authorities and protected areas agencies to consider what reforms of policies or regulations can better facilitate better accommodation of protected areas with local peoples' needs and rights; and

- Monitoring the development of REDD schemes and assessing their potential impact on local communities where there is likely to be a significant change in tenure status or resource access.

"There is a need to ensure the conservation of biodiversity alongside the preservation of cultural beliefs of those that live on the periphery of the (Waka National) *park. Mapping is a tool that has given a real voice to those who are often excluded from decision making processes – and we will ensure that they are involved in the development of the management plan for the park".*

– Benoit Enzengui, Manager of the Waka National Park in Gabon.

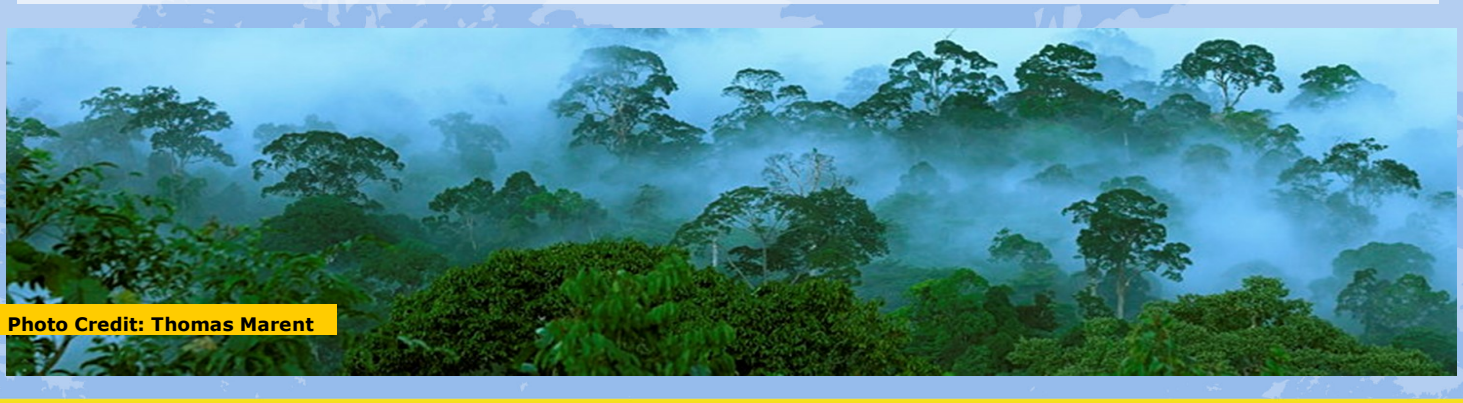


Photo Credit: Thomas Marent

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Some Success Stories:

Dja Reserve (Cameroon)

Participatory mapping and associated activities helped to create dialogue between local communities and park managers around this World Heritage site, leading to a reduction of violence against local indigenous Baka groups, greater recognition of customary rights in the area, and the implementation of a livelihoods support programme by the relevant international donor.

Mbaéré Bodingué National Park (CAR)

Our support for community-led advocacy work halted the displacement of local communities from their ancestral lands inside the park as well as resulting in the suspension of the validation of the park's management plan which was developed without adequate consultation with local populations.

Itombwe National Reserve (DRC)

Our work helped establish tripartite processes aimed at preventing the displacement of communities living in the Itombwe Massif, and led to a process of participatory zoning of the area to determine the boundaries of the new national park, taking into account community land use areas.

Minkebé National Park (Gabon):

Our support for local partners helped develop new and innovative forms of participatory management, which for the first time in Gabon are enabling local communities to participate in planning and decision making processes around the park.

Congo Brazzaville

Our long term collaborative support and work with indigenous advocates and government officials led directly to the development of a groundbreaking new national indigenous peoples' rights law which protects land and resource rights in forest areas, including inside protected areas.

"The project has helped the State to think about critical issues concerning indigenous and local communities, and thanks to the work of civil society, the Government has been encouraged to take into consideration the various questions raised by the NGOs"

El Hadj Abacar Nyakanda, High Commissioner for Human Rights and Good Governance, Central African Republic



Photo Credit: RFUK

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