



# ECOTOURISM AND PROTECTED AREAS IN CENTRAL AFRICA: A FUTURE IN COMMON

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Tourism has become an important industry worldwide, accounting for 10.3% of global GDP in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). It contributes significantly to the creation of jobs in some countries, especially for women, youth, migrant workers, rural communities and indigenous peoples (Kamga Kamdem *et al.*, 2020). It can drive other economic sectors such as agriculture, transport, construction, and telecommunications (WTTC, 2020). Tourism also is one of the main ways to both integrate protected areas into local and global economies and generate funding to cover, at least in part, their management costs (UICN-PACO, 2010; WTTC, 2019).

Before the crisis resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, the global tourism industry was growing at a remarkable rate (WTTC, 2020). It accounted for 5.8% of all exports and 4.5% of global investments (Christie *et al.*, 2013). In 2020, however, Covid-19 halted this trend and tourism fell sharply around the world (UNWTO, 2020a & e; WTTC, 2021). Various recovery strategies are being considered, but it will not be possible to measure their effectiveness immediately. In the opinion of many experts, the sector may undergo profound change, with an increase in domestic tourism, tourism that is more oriented toward nature and open spaces, and tourism that is more responsible with regard to its impacts (Gössling *et al.*, 2020; UNWTO, 2020d; Bhammar *et al.*, 2021; Spenceley *et al.* 2021).

Africa, covering 22% of the Earth's surface, received about 4% of global international arrivals 10 years ago, when it held 15% of the world's population. Today, its share of international tourism has dropped to about

2%, while its population now represents about 19% of the global total (UICN-PACO, 2010; WTTC, 2020). The continent's overall lack of a reputation as a tourism destination, combined with a lack of tourism products, tourism culture, infrastructure, and accommodation capacity, account for this situation.

Nevertheless, some African countries, such as Morocco, Egypt and South Africa, have risen to the level of Asian and South American tourism countries (Table 1). In sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa is the main tourism destination, receiving over 10 million international tourists annually, and enjoying a very strong domestic tourism sector. In Kenya and Senegal, revenues from international tourism contributed 10-15% of exports. These revenues represented 67% of Cape Verde's total exports, only slightly less than for Sao Tome and Principe. For these countries, the sector is therefore an important source of foreign exchange and a vector of economic development (Cessou, 2021).

**Table 1 - International arrivals and tourism revenue in some major tourism countries worldwide and in selected benchmark countries in Africa**

Country	Arrivals (international tourists) <sup>1</sup>	Tourism revenue	
		(US\$ million) <sup>1</sup>	(% of exports) <sup>2</sup>
Mexico	41,313,000	22,526	5
Indonesia	13,396,000	16,426	8
Morocco	12,289,000	7,782	21
Egypt	11,196,000	11,615	19
South Africa	10,472,105	8,944	9
Costa Rica	3,017,000	3,373	19
Kenya	1,931,000	1,072	15
Senegal	* 1,365,000	496	11

Sources: <sup>1</sup> Year 2018 except \* 2017, UNWTO (2020a); <sup>2</sup> Year 2017, UNWTO (2020b).



Despite its considerable potential, particularly in nature and adventure tourism, ecotourism and cultural tourism, Central Africa is overall very underdeveloped as a tourism region (at the “pre-tourism” stage; Rieucan, 2001). As Viard (2008) noted, the subregion “is not yet considered a tourism destination as such”. Only a few countries have begun to set up proactive tourism policies and strategies, such as Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe, based notably on their protected area networks.

The subregion’s protected areas may be a prime medium for the development of tourism activities, in particular ecotourism and wildlife viewing tourism. Tourism therefore could play an important role in biodiversity protection, providing opportunities for the socio-economic development of protected areas and economic justification for the protection of species and ecosystems (UICN-PACO, 2010; Mossaz *et al.*, 2015; Leung *et al.*, 2019; WTTC, 2019). Wildlife tourism directly accounted for US\$120.1 billion of global GDP in 2018, more than five times the estimated value of illegal wildlife trafficking; when induced effects on other sectors are taken into account, the total economic contribution amounts to US\$343.6 billion (WTTC, 2019). In Africa, wildlife viewing tourism accounts for one-third of tourism revenues.

This type of tourism is closely linked to seeing Africa’s iconic large wildlife in protected areas (mega-herbivores and large carnivores, which have largely disappeared elsewhere). It is the basis for the development of tourism in many countries. This is the case in South Africa and Kenya; in the latter, wildlife

viewing tourism generates about 70% of tourism revenues and accounts for over 10% of formal sector employment, mostly in protected areas (WTTC, 2019). In Central Africa, tourism development also has relied heavily on the existence of biodiversity and forests that remain largely intact, as well as particular species such as gorillas (Viard, 2008). Large trees and vast forests – and plants in general – are quietly attracting attention, and are expected to become increasingly popular features in the tourism landscape.

Protected areas are at the heart of tourism development projects in the subregion, and various partnerships have been formed in recent years, with the support of private operators, foundations and international NGOs. This chapter aims to take stock of some of these initiatives and to make this information available to as wide an audience as possible in order to promote the sustainable development of ecotourism in Central African protected areas.

## 1. Tourism in Central Africa

### 1.1 Macroeconomic overview

In 2017, Central Africa welcomed over 3,000,000 international visitors and generated nearly US\$1 billion in revenue (Table 2; Kamga Kadem *et al.*, 2020). Arrivals and revenues have increased by over 380% since 2005 (from about 800,000 arrivals and US\$262.2 million; Viard, 2008). Although the absolute numbers are still small on a global scale, this highlights the region’s growth potential and recent dynamism.

These figures, although incomplete, illustrate widely differing situations depending on the country (Table 2). In Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe and, to a lesser extent, Cameroon, the tourism sector as a whole has grown significantly and, for the first two countries, has become a pillar of the national economies. In other countries, the sector unfortunately has been

scarcely developed: international arrivals (all visitors combined) remain below 300,000 visitors. Revenues contribute very little to exports or to GDP and employment. However, it should be noted that these figures should be interpreted with extreme caution given the weakness, if not the virtual non-existence, of tourism satellite accounts in most countries.

**Table 2 - Importance of the tourism sector in Central African countries**

Country	Arrivals (international tourists)	Tourism revenue			Contribution to employment (%)
		(US\$ million)	(% of exports)	(% of GDP)	
Burundi	299,000	3	1	5.2	3.5
Cameroon	1,081,000	525	10	4.0	6.4
Congo	149,000	-	-	3.9	5.1
Gabon	269,000 *	-	-	2.9	2.6
Equatorial Guinea	-	-	-	-	-
CAR	107,000	-	-	6.6	4.6
DRC	232,000 *	6	1	1.8	1.4
Rwanda	1,000,000	438 <sup>1</sup>	31 <sup>1</sup>	12.7	12.3
Sao Tome and Principe	28,900	66	72	24.3	23.3
Chad	87,000	-	-	4.2	3.2

CAR: Central African Republic; DRC: Democratic Republic of the Congo.

<sup>1</sup>: US\$498 million and 50% of exports in 2019 (RDB, 2020). - : no data.

Note: figures for the year 2017 except \* (2016).

Sources: UNWTO (2019a & b, 2020a & b), Rwanda Chamber of Tourism (pers. com. 2019), Kamga Kamdem *et al.* (2020).



## 1.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the tourism sector in the subregion

Central Africa has a rich potential for nature-based tourism and ecotourism, both in terms of natural and cultural resources. It also benefits from significant international support in the protection of its natural heritage and the management of protected areas. The subregion also benefits from direct air links with various sending countries.

However, the tourism facilities on offer are not very developed, valued or professional. With the exception of Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe, tourism remains a neglected sector in most national economies, which are mainly focused on extractive industries (mining, oil, forestry) and agriculture. Tourism development policies and strategies are just beginning to be formulated, and governments do not appear to be giving the attention needed to their implementation. This activity continues to face many obstacles, including red tape, complex visa requirements, poor infrastructure, insecurity and armed conflict, lack of specialized skills, lack of investment and an unfavorable business climate (Viard, 2008; Kimbu & Tichaawa, 2018; Kamga Kamdem *et al.*, 2020; Maisonneuve & Poliwa, 2020).

Rwanda has nevertheless managed to overcome these weaknesses and could inspire other countries in their respective efforts. The development of tourism in Rwanda is benefiting from an important natural potential that has been preserved in several protected areas despite heavy human pressure (rural population densities in the country are among the highest in Africa). Tourism in Rwanda is anchored in the national parks, particularly mountain gorilla tourism. The current success also is due to several factors, including the country's stability, proactive policy, efficient institutions, good international connections, development of road and hotel infrastructures, and effective communication campaigns. The creation of the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) has brought together support for private sector development (including facilitating business start-ups and fighting corruption), management and promotion of tourism activities and management of protected areas. In addition, the RDB has signed Public-Private Partnership (PPP) agreements with the South African NGO African Parks Network (APN), which

has enabled the restoration of Akagera Park and the professionalization of the tourism sector on this site.

Elsewhere in the subregion, the arrival of nature tourism professionals and improved visitor reception facilities in certain protected areas are providing opportunities for the development and professionalization of the sector. Despite this, the weakness of the infrastructure, the lack of policies and strategies and the lack of an attractive legislative framework for tourism operators remain handicaps. In general, the political and institutional context is not yet conducive to the development of ecotourism.

## 2. Current and potential tourism

### 2.1 The land of the great apes

Africa is “the” continent of large fauna and the ideal place for wildlife tourism. Eastern and Southern Africa are world famous for the Big Five: lions (*Panthera leo*), leopards (*Panthera pardus*), savanna elephants (*Loxodonta africana*), rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis* and *Ceratotherium simum*) and buffaloes (*Syncerus caffer*). These large mammals, feared and respected, still roam the savannas of Central Africa, but this image does not best reflect the situation in the subregion; the savanna elephant is highly endangered, the lion has become rare, and rhinoceros, exterminated by poaching, are being reintroduced (APN, 2019).

Beyond the Big Five, Central Africa needs to develop and advertise its own brand image. While the subregion contains both savannas and vast forests, it is the forests that could be the means to developing an original image – or trademark – of the destination (Devanne & Fortin, 2011). Gorillas are one of the subregion's iconic species and are already the subject of wildlife viewing tourism, which many visitors dream about (Virunga National Park, 2021c; Saiga, 2021; Visit Rwanda, 2021b). Moreover, Central Africa also is the cradle of the bonobo and home to two chimpanzee subspecies. These are the mammals which are the closest to the human species. Nowhere else can all of these species be found together in one region; Central Africa is truly “the land of the great apes”.

Chimpanzee and bonobo habituation programs have only recently begun, and tourism to view these

two species in their natural environment is under development (Table 3). In contrast, gorilla tourism is well established in the Albertine Rift mountains, generating significant income; western gorilla tourism is more recent. In addition to these sites where great apes can be tracked in their natural environment, several initiatives have been developed in the subregion to host animals that have been poached, which

also allow them to be seen in parks or in semi-liberty. These include bonobos in the *Lola ya bonobo* sanctuary (25 km from Kinshasa, DRC), chimpanzees in the HELP Congo (*Habitat Écologique et Liberté des Primates*) sanctuary in Conkouati-Douli National Park (Congo) or on Pongo Songo Island (Littoral region, Cameroon), and gorillas in the Lesio-Louna Gorilla Sanctuary (Congo).

**Table 3 - Protected areas with great ape tourism in the wild (habituated animals)**

Country	Western gorilla ( <i>Gorilla gorilla</i> )	Eastern gorilla ( <i>Gorilla beringei</i> )	Chimpanzee ( <i>Pan troglodytes</i> )	Bonobo ( <i>Pan paniscus</i> )
Cameroon	Campo-Ma'an			
Congo	Lossi, Nouabale-Ndoki and Mondika, Odzala-Kokoua		Nouabale-Ndoki	
Gabon	Loango, Moukalaba-Doudou			
CAR	Dzanga-Sangha			
DRC		Kahuzi-Biega, Virunga	Virunga	Mbali River Forest (Mai-Ndombe); Salonga
Rwanda		Volcanoes	Nyungwe	

Seeing a gorilla in the wild is a unique experience. While eastern gorilla tourism is well established, western lowland gorilla tourism could also act as a catalyst for the tourism sector in Central Africa, although developing lowland gorilla tourism is somewhat more challenging (see box on this subject). Gorillas accustomed to human presence can play an important role as ambassadors for conservation (Greer & Cipolletta, 2006). They also can promote: 1) increased political

support and international awareness of conservation efforts for threatened species, 2) reduced poaching through constant monitoring of the home range of habituated groups, 3) increased support from donors and sponsors, 4) increased research to better understand the natural history of these charismatic mammals and to encourage research on other species in the same sites, and 5) increased employment and income generation opportunities in rural areas.

### The reality of western lowland gorilla tourism

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#### Mountain gorilla viewing tourism as a model?

In Rwanda, Uganda and DRC, wildlife viewing tourism of eastern gorillas, particularly of mountain gorillas (*Gorilla beringei beringei*), has been very successful. It has contributed substantially to the operating costs of protected areas, as well as the local and national economy of their range countries (Hatfield & Malleret-King 2007; Moyini & Uwimbabazi 2000; Nielsen & Spenceley 2011). The success of mountain gorilla-based tourism has attracted the attention of other Central African countries in the hope that similar revenue could be obtained from great ape-viewing tourism. However, western gorillas (*G. gorilla*) are not mountain gorillas, and lowland forests are not mountain forests.

## The reality of western lowland gorilla tourism

### Western lowland gorilla tourism is more challenging

Most western lowland gorilla tourism projects are the outcome of intensive long-term research programs (Blom *et al.*, 2004; Doran-Sheehy *et al.*, 2007). Lowland gorilla tourism with habituated groups has proven to be challenging and expensive. Complete habituation can take up to eight years, compared to two years for mountain gorillas (Blom *et al.*, 2004; Doran-Sheehy *et al.*, 2007).

While mountain gorilla groups leave clear traces on the herbaceous vegetation, lowland gorilla tracking requires skilled trackers to be able to find the same group every day in the understory of dense forests, especially during the dry season. Moreover, lowland gorillas have larger overlapping home ranges, and they usually live in smaller groups. This makes it crucial to follow them daily, but also makes it more difficult to track the same group of gorillas, which slows the habituation process (Bradley *et al.*, 2008). In addition, western gorillas are sympatric with forest elephants (*L. cyclotis*) throughout their home range. Elephants often are found in the same vegetation used by the gorillas or even near the same trees on which they feed, and can be dangerous when tourists are viewing the gorillas or traveling to and from habituated gorilla groups.

When habituating western lowland gorillas, habituation teams must be very close to the gorillas in order for the gorillas to see them. Due to the dense vegetation and flat topography, it may be necessary to approach as close as 10 meters from them before first contact. Gorilla reactions to such close proximity may then be more aggressive or last longer during the habituation process than with mountain gorillas. It therefore often takes longer to reach the stage where gorillas can be reliably observed without the risk of aggressive charges.

Investment and operating costs can run into the hundreds of thousands of US dollars (Greer & Cipolletta, 2006). Some projects fail to fully habituate lowland gorillas, even after several years of significant financial investment (French, 2009), and others have lost habituated groups due to disease outbreaks (Bermejo *et al.*, 2006). Due to the family structure of western lowland gorillas (one polygynous male), their habituation is also uncertain and represents a risky investment of time and money, as groups disintegrate after the death of the group's only silverback (Stokes *et al.*, 2003). This can negate all previous efforts and investments. In contrast, in multi-male mountain gorilla groups, one of the surviving males becomes the leader of the troop following the death of the dominant silverback (Robbins & Robbins, 2005).

### Some recommendations

Developing a tourism project with western lowland gorillas will be more expensive and time consuming than one with mountain gorillas, and will require dedicated and skilled trackers. The habituation process should only be started once sufficient funding has been secured, over a sufficiently long period of time (at least five years), before opening the groups to tourist visits. This is essential to prevent projects from leaving the habituation area and poachers from killing the gorillas. Large groups with several females should also be selected as a priority. Habituation of a second group also is a good strategy to avoid the loss of the only habituated group if the silverback dies and the group disperses.

## 2.2 The need to diversify the tourism attractions on offer

Having a “flagship” tourist product is not enough: tourism thrives on the diversity of the offer. This diversity is necessary to: 1) arouse new desires in tourists, 2) provide them with varied and complementary experiences, and 3) keep them longer at each site or in the subregion. The diversification of the tourism offer must be considered at the scale of each site, but also at the scale of each country and of the subregion (see the cross-border tourism circuit proposed by the Congo Conservation Company; CCC, 2021). The subregion requires a strategy for diversifying the tourism offer at these different levels, which implies consultation and collaboration between tourism structures (ministries, receptive agencies, etc.).

Virunga National Park illustrates well the potential diversity of tourism offerings (see box). Not all of this potential currently is being developed, particularly due to security constraints (Balole-Bwami, 2018). Although other protected areas do not have Virunga’s extensive geo-biodiversity, all

of them have assets that could be used to gradually diversify their tourism offer. Central Africa is home to many rare and emblematic species, both animal and plant: gorillas, bonobos, okapi (*Okapia johnstoni*), grey-necked rockfowl (*Picathartes oreas*), humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*), large trees such as the moabi (*Baillonella toxisperma*) and impressive lianas, and so on.

Searching for animals in the forest is difficult but can be a unique experience. However, where tracking is not possible, several protected areas have established wildlife viewing platforms in swampy clearings, locally known as *baï* (see box). The important knowledge that scientists have acquired about forest birds in a country like Gabon also has made it possible to develop bird tourism, a niche tourism sector that boosts the reputation of the subregion among naturalists and tourists in search of rarities.

The cultural potential of the subregion also is considerable, with many peoples whose traditions remain alive and which they would be proud to share (chieftaincies of the West Cameroonian Grassfields,

### Virunga National Park: an example of potentially diversified tourism

Virunga National Park in DRC is the oldest park in Africa. It also is the richest in Central Africa in terms of landscape, ecosystems and species diversity (Delvingt *et al.*, 1990; Plumtre *et al.*, 2007). The Virunga Foundation manages the park through a PPP signed with the *Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature* (ICCN) for a period of 25 years (2015-2040). Its objectives are to support the protection of the park and to generate benefits for local communities living on the periphery (Parc national des Virunga, 2021a). It also manages tourism and its promotion.

The park’s main tourism product is gorilla tourism, but other tours and activities are offered to visitors, increasing the park’s attractions and promoting its tourism value (Table 4 and Figure 1). In addition to gorilla viewing, current activities include climbing Nyiragongo volcano and Ruwenzori Mountains, trips to Tchegeza Island and visits to the Rumangabo chimpanzees. The tourism offer also can be complemented by activities on the outskirts of the park, which help to anchor tourism in the region as a whole. Projects to increase the ecotourism attractiveness of the park include the following priorities: further development of gorilla viewing tourism, walking and bird watching tours, chimpanzee watching, additional climbing trails on the active Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira volcanoes, etc.

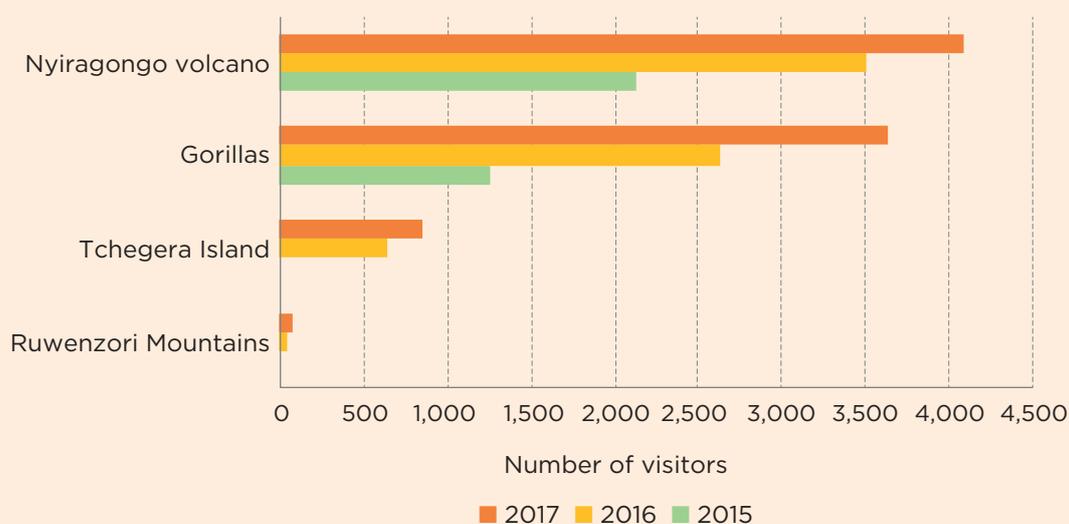
**Virunga National Park: an example of potentially diversified tourism**

**Table 4 - Main current or potential tourism products in Virunga National Park**

Park area	Tourism product	Park area	Tourism product
<b>South</b>	Mountain gorillas (Mikeno). Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira volcanoes and scientific tourism (vulcanology). Gas emission toward Tongo. Tshegera Island (Lake Kivu). Tongo chimpanzees. Senkwekwe Gorilla Sanctuary (Rumangabo). Chimpanzees (Rumangabo). Scientific tourism (primatology).	<b>North</b>	Eastern gorillas (Tshiaberimu). Climbing Mount Ruwenzori Large savanna mammals (Ishango). Walks on Lake Edward and the Semliki River. Sport fishing. Forest walk and canopy tour. Bird tourism and scientific tourism.
<b>Center</b>	Large savanna mammals. Sport fishing (Rutshuru River). Thermal waters (May-ya-moto). Mountain gorillas (Sarambwe). Walk on Lake Edward and the Rutshuru River. Scientific tourism (hydrobiology). Bird tourism and scientific tourism (Lulimbi). Balloon safari. Chimpanzees (Kinyonzo).	<b>Periphery</b>	Caves (Mikeno, Nyamabere, Lume, Mwenda). Thermal waters (Mutsora). Waterfalls (Nyahanga, Semliki). Folk dances. Culinary specialties. Religious sites (Muramba, Mount Mikeno, Tshiaberimu). Cultural site (Ishango) and scientific tourism (archaeology). Historical sites (Cyanzu, Kibati).

Source: from Balole-Bwami (2018).

**Figure 1 - Visitors to the main tourism sites in Virunga National Park from 2015 to 2017**



Source: Fondation Virunga.

the Teke people of Gabon and the two Congos, Aka and Baka Pygmies of the great forests, etc.). This cultural tourism, which could involve at least some protected areas, would make it possible for tourists to immerse themselves in the natural environment with the natives of these regions, the custodians of

ancestral knowledge. However, this type of tourism is scarcely developed in the subregion (with the possible exception of certain regions in Cameroon); to do so, respect of the local populations must be ensured and numerous associated dangers avoided (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2007; Rodary, 2010).

### Wildlife watching tourism from observation platforms overlooking forest clearings

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#### What is a *baï* and where can tourists observe wildlife?

*Baïs* are natural clearings in tropical forests. There are many types, including large (up to 50 ha) permanently flooded marshy clearings, *baïs* on areas of bare soil dotted with extremely mineral rich mudholes, and small open areas (less than 1 ha) called *yangas* (Maisels & Breuer, 2015). Consequently, the fauna that visit these *baïs* varies enormously, as does their tourism potential. Grasses, water and salt attract a variety of animals, including gorillas, forest elephants (*L. cyclotis*), forest buffaloes (*S. caffer nanus*), bongos (*Tragelaphus euryceros*) and birds (Breuer & Metsio Siena, 2015).

An exceptional set of clearings stretches from northeast Gabon to southeast Cameroon, CAR and North-Congo. Other swampy clearings also are present in DRC (such as in Salonga National Park), but the fauna is much rarer there due to heavy hunting activities. Wildlife observation towers have been built in Ivindo, Lobeke, Nki, Odzala-Kokoua, Dzanga-Sangha and Nouabale-Ndoki. The advantages of wildlife viewing on elevated platforms are the absence of long and tedious tracking, relative safety from large wildlife, better chances of seeing wildlife than in the forest, good elevated views, the possibility to spend the night on the mirador (a very different experience than in daytime), and easier viewing at dawn and dusk when animals are moving.

#### Meeting expectations

Wildlife viewing in *baïs* can nevertheless be difficult. The animals may be far away and not present in large numbers all year round or every day; moreover, they may only appear in the late afternoon when it is time to return to camp (Turkalo *et al.*, 2013; Gessner *et al.*, 2014). It can be difficult to endure the heat and the many insects on the platform, and walking in the forest around the miradors is not advisable as these areas are hotspots of animal activity and it would be dangerous.

Lastly, human activities in the vicinity (logging or mining) and poaching can lead to the disappearance or disruption of the animals' visiting patterns, reducing the possibilities of observation (Stephan *et al.*, 2020). This is the case for forest elephants, which become more nocturnal and suddenly leave the *baï* (Maisels *et al.*, 2015a). To diminish possible frustration, tourists should be aware that they are taking a once in a lifetime glimpse into the life of these large mammals in their natural habitats, and not in a controlled environment like a zoo. Many of these species are critically endangered and being able to see them, even from a distance or briefly, is a privilege.



#### Wildlife watching tourism from observation platforms overlooking forest clearings

##### Some good practices

Even on the miradors, visitors can be very intrusive and disturb wildlife. With increasing demand, it becomes necessary to put in place rules (no smoking or littering, speaking softly, etc.). The presence of tourists should be limited to the platform (if it exists) and the access road. Researchers also must be involved from the very beginning of the tourism activity (participation in the design of the activity, scientific mediation, training of guides, support for monitoring, etc.).

*Baïs* with existing research projects and tourism activities should be monitored and protected at all times (Breuer *et al.*, 2015; Maisels *et al.*, 2015b). Any new observation platform (especially those managed by communities) should only be built where monitoring teams can ensure protection and with a clear tourism development plan. Guidelines on best practices should be established, including for the mirador and any infrastructure construction (Metsio Siena *et al.*, 2015).

Any tourism program should realistically describe what can be expected in each *baï* so tourists have realistic expectations. Additional visitor packages can be created where possible (overnight stay at the *baï*, rental of viewing equipment, etc.). Lastly, *baïs* offer enormous potential for outreach and education; on some sites, it is possible to bring school groups or to allow VIPs to easily observe wildlife.

## 2.3 Infrastructure and services

### 2.3.1 National and regional infrastructure

The development of international tourism requires the existence of good air connections from the main sending countries (those that send international tourists). Generally speaking, Central African countries are fairly well connected to European countries, but not as well to Asian or American

countries. In contrast, inter-African links are both complicated and chaotic. However, thanks to RwandAir, Rwanda has been able to establish reliable and regular connections with various countries including Nigeria, which provides more and more tourists to “the country of a thousand hills”. This African market, which will grow with the emergence of wealthy and middle classes, can only develop if there are better air connections.

The development of regional and national ecotourism also requires improved links within Central Africa itself. In addition to air transport, road and rail links, which often are in poor condition or non-existent, also need to be improved. Within the framework of the major trans-African links, portions of roads have been repaired and tarmacked in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Congo, etc., but the entire network remains partially paved and poorly maintained. For example, access to Odzala-Kokoua National Park (Congo) from Brazzaville remains difficult, forcing the tourism operator, CCC, to fly tourists to the park by private plane from the city, heavily impacting the profitability of the activity. Access to Zakouma National Park in Chad, which is a long way from N'Djamena, also requires the use of charter companies. Only in small countries such as Sao Tome and Principe and Rwanda is road access to protected areas relatively easy, the latter having invested heavily in transport networks.

### 2.3.2 High-end initiatives: locomotives for protected area tourism?

In several countries of the subregion, the States have signed PPPs with private operators, foundations and NGOs for the management of protected areas as well as the development of ecotourism (see Chapter 3). Visitor facilities, logistics and tourism products on offer have thus been greatly improved on certain sites. Despite the difficulties, several professional tourism companies are

beginning to establish themselves in Central Africa, making it possible to develop a higher quality, even luxury offer, which was lacking in the subregion.

The most dynamic area, and the first to attract high quality tourism operators, is the Albertine Rift with its mountain gorillas. While Virunga National Park has several camps and lodges, it is mainly in Rwanda that several private groups have invested in luxury accommodation and hospitality facilities (Wilderness Safaris, Governor's Camp, Mantis, etc.). Volcanoes National Park also offers a wide range of accommodation, from the most luxurious to the most basic, that can meet *all* expectations.

In the Congo Basin, large hotel chains are present and tend to be concentrated in major cities (such as the Radisson group), but they are uninterested in the ecotourism market. Companies specializing in this type of product are not yet well established in the region. The Congo Conservation Company is an exception, having operated in North-Congo for the past ten years in Odzala-Kokoua National Park (see box). It has set up several luxury camps and plans further investments over the next 20 years, including in Nouabale-Ndoki Park (Magoum, 2020). CCC also has established a partnership with Sangha Lodge in CAR, which already allows it to offer cross-border tourism products in Sangha Tri-National (TNS). It thus plans to play a driving role in the development of regional tourism, as desired by the countries (protocol for the circulation of tourists in TNS; COMIFAC, 2019).



## Odzala-Kokoua National Park as a platform for developing regional tourism

P. Telfer, CCC

In 2011, the Congo Conservation Company partnered with Wilderness Safaris to build the first world-class safari camps in Central Africa. Wilderness Safaris is a leading African safari tour operator with over 38 years of experience, operating in ten countries and with over 40 camps. The company has provided Congo with a wealth of experience in the construction and operation of camps in southern and eastern Africa. With government support, the partners embarked on a three-site construction project in and around Odzala-Kokoua National Park. This was the first project of its kind in Central Africa.

At the start of this project, local expertise was limited and the technical skills required were unavailable in the country. The southern and eastern African experts mobilized did not have experience in the context of Francophone Africa. Technically, they were successful in building the infrastructure, but logistically and financially, many mistakes were made due to a lack of knowledge of local and national regulations and laws, including errors due to language barriers. Nonetheless, the lodges were built and opened in 2012, and CCC has been successfully developing its tourism activities in Congo for several years.

With the experience gained and the support of national government agencies, CCC has been able to overcome many of the earlier problems. One challenge has been to market a destination that was unknown and often associated with a negative or risky image. Difficulties in accessing the site (including obtaining visas and regional transport problems) have remained an obstacle to the competitiveness of tourism in Congo. Despite this, the international market has shown growing interest in the dense forests of Central Africa. For this reason, CCC has committed to expanding the destination, developing two new forest lodges (in Nouabale-Ndoki National Park) and establishing links with other regional destinations (such as Sangha Lodge in CAR). This provides the international tourism market with several safe, comfortable and awe-inspiring tours in the African rainforests.

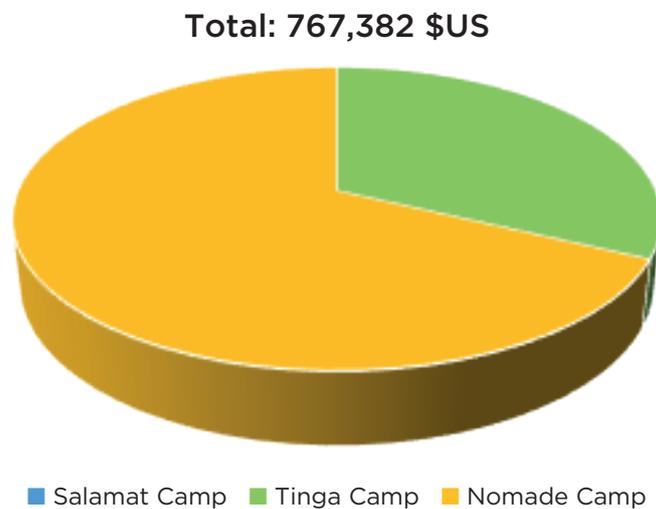
CCC's goal is to develop tourism in the Congo Basin by offering visitors the opportunity to visit remote and unique forests. The planned investments in both countries will increase the tourism potential of the subregion, generating additional employment and tourism revenues. It will create a critical mass to demonstrate to other investors that tourism in the Congo Basin is a viable economic activity that should be undertaken. CCC is willing to make a long-term investment in the Congo Basin, contribute to the development of tourism, and take the risks needed to create a viable business model for the next 20 years. Creating a "Congo Basin" circuit and offering a variety of travel options will allow international visitors to consider tourism in Africa as a new destination, on par with other traditional markets.

**Web link:** <https://congoconservation.travel/>

Other companies specializing in ecotourism are setting up in Gabon, where several agreements have been signed with the African Conservation Development Group (ACDG) in Loango Park, and Luxury Green Resorts, a subsidiary of the *Fonds Gabonais d'Investissement Stratégique* (FGIS). The *Agence nationale de Préservation de la Nature* (ANPN) is collaborating with Luxury Green Resorts to develop high-end tourism services in some parks. This partnership has enabled the opening of an upscale lodge in Pongara National Park and several world-class camps (Akaka, Louri, Ndola) in Loango Park.

This partnership thus is creating a real sustainable tourism product for “Destination Gabon”. Operators such as APN also have developed infrastructure covering the full range of tourism services in Zakouma National Park (Chad), and will support the NGO *Noé*, which has just signed a PPP for the management of Conkouati-Douli National Park (South-Congo). In Zakouma, the luxury product offered (Nomad Camp and related services) generates about 70% of the park’s tourism revenue; the low-end product is currently free for Chadians (Salamat Camp; Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Zakouma National Park tourism revenue in 2018 by level of service (%).



Notes: Salamat Camp - low-end (free); Tinga Camp - mid-range; Nomad Camp - high-end. Source: APN (2018).

**2.3.3 The difficult development of small tourism service providers**

Developing professional luxury tourism structures is necessary to promote the tourism value of protected areas and the emergence of a “Central Africa” destination. However, it alone will not better anchor protected

areas in rural territories. Although high-end facilities hire local staff and train them, developing local skills, tourism is nourished by a diversity of services, from low to high-end. Rural communities will only be able to fully benefit from this dynamic if small structures are expanded.





These rural communities can become high-end operators, but this requires time and the support of qualified professionals. A community association owns a luxury lodge, Sabyinyo Silverback Lodge, on the edge of Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda. However, this lodge is managed by a private Kenyan tourism operator, Governor's Camp, which has entered into an agreement with the association through the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF). Since 2006, the lodge has generated over US\$4 million for the community (AWF, 2021 and Governor's Camp, 2021).

The particular cases of the Akanda and Pongara parks in Gabon are interesting to mention because they are peri-urban parks. Akanda benefits from the diverse accommodations and restaurants available in the capital, Libreville. Meanwhile, Pongara benefits from the dynamics of the city's "seaside resort", Pointe-Denis, located on the other side of the Gabon estuary, with several lodges that range from mid-range to luxury style. Tourism in these two parks should benefit even more from this peri-urban dynamic, and offer forest or mangrove stay experiences for visitors from all walks of life. These peri-urban protected areas can play an important role in terms of environmental awareness and education.

Various small tourism operators already are working around Volcanoes National Park, as well as in cities that have potential for business and family travel (such as Libreville, which can leverage two peri-urban parks). Other small tourism structures requiring little investment also have emerged in Gabon within the framework of whale watching

tourism, for which only a small boat is needed. However, these tourism structures (accommodation, catering, tourist operators) are not or are only marginally involved in tourism in protected areas. When they are, their skills and modes of operation are generally not in line with ecotourism standards.

Tourism activities in protected areas can be a means of enhancing skills and culture, providing income for surrounding rural communities and driving empowerment and emancipation. This could be the case, in particular, for indigenous peoples, who are often marginalized. If, despite a more favorable tourism environment, tourism activities involving the Bagyeli in the Kribi region continue to be dominated by other operators, the involvement of the Ba'Aka in the Dzanga-Sangha Protected Areas (APDS) suggest ways by which indigenous communities could be more involved (see boxes).

However, challenges remain to be overcome, including raising awareness of the role of rural communities in tourism activities that are new to them, increasing their responsibilities and strengthening their skills in tourism management (Tchindjiang & Etoga, 2014). The grip of the State and external private operators, and even international NGOs, on the design and decision-making processes related to tourism activities and land-use planning hinders the effective involvement of rural populations. While these national and international operators play a fundamental role, this role should evolve more toward one of support, supervision and oversight of local operators.

## Creation of community-based tourist circuits as an opportunity for the development and empowerment of the Bakola-Bagyeli (Cameroon)

J. Nke Ndi, CREDPAA

The Bakola-Bagyeli Pygmy population, estimated at about five thousand souls, is found mainly in the South Region of Cameroon. The community's situation is very precarious for many reasons: domination by Bantu neighbors, logging, industrial agriculture, difficulties in accessing land, alcoholism, illiteracy, etc. Despite some support from civil society organizations, religious structures and some administrative services, the Bakola-Bagyeli people remain marginalized and extremely poor.

However, the development of tourism activities in the hinterland of the city of Kribi, a seaside resort but also an important logistics and industrial center, could help to find solutions to some of these problems. Several tourism hubs promoting Bakola-Bagyeli knowledge and culture have been identified: along the Atlantic coast (from Campo to Lobe Falls), the Ngovayang mountain range and the Bidou-Makoure region. The Bagyeli are not only «people of the forest» but also «people of the water». This region could host ecotourism and cultural, social and solidarity tourism, combining water, mountains and forest life.

The Bagyeli's Cultural and Development Association (BACUDA) received support from the Collaborative Actions for Sustainable Tourism (COAST) project between 2009 and 2014. This project trained local guides and created an interpretation circuit of the Bagyeli culture in the forests of Lobe Falls (COAST, 2014). Unfortunately, this type of action remains too ad hoc and does not sufficiently involve rural populations, including the Bagyeli, in their design and decision-making. This would require diverse actors to become more aware of the natural and cultural heritage of the region, sharing of responsibilities, strengthening the Bagyeli's skills in tourism and respect for their rights (Tchindjiang & Etoga, 2014).

All of the projects aim first to sedentarize the Bagyeli, and then to allow them to take charge of their lives. However, these projects, which are financed and designed by the partners, do not sufficiently take into account the Pygmies' way of life. The Pygmies are more concerned with their cultural identity than with the production of material goods. A community tourist circuit project should take into account these cultural aspects, to better embrace the Pygmies' nomadic lifestyle undertaken in small family units, for their needs to be fulfilled.





## Involvement of local communities and indigenous peoples of Dzanga-Sangha protected areas in ecotourism (CAR)

G. Pamongui & L. Padou, APDS

Since 1992, ecotourism has been a strategy mobilized by the protected areas of Dzanga-Sangha (APDS) to improve the livelihoods of local and indigenous people by generating employment and income in order to strengthen links between conservation and neighboring communities (Blom, 2000). In addition to biodiversity-based tourism products (e.g., viewing wildlife species such as forest elephants, lowland gorillas, chimpanzees, bongos, buffaloes, giant forest hog - *Hylochoerus meinertzhageni*, etc.), APDS also offer exceptional cultural resources. Cultural tourism can thus provide visitors with a valuable opportunity to interact with local communities, including the Ba'Aka Pygmies and the Bilo. A range of community activities are focused on their traditional way of life and the appreciation of their cultures.

The aim is for visitors to encounter traditional cultures that still resist outside influence and to share experiences with these rural communities while immersed in the vast forest of the Congo Basin. Several sites have been identified and developed by local and indigenous communities with the technical and financial support of the park administration (liana bridge, visit to waterfalls, etc.). A range of activities are offered to visitors (net and crossbow hunting, dances and songs, storytelling evenings, discovery of medicinal plants, collecting honey and harvesting raffia palm wine, camping in the forest, etc.). In addition, there are other services that are more private than community-based, such as the rental of cars by local businesses and the manufacture and sale of art objects and handicrafts made from plant resources (necklaces, bracelets, etc.). These products, resulting from the traditional know-how of the Ba'Aka and Bilo, are sold at the craft center built by the APDS for this purpose.

The craft center also serves as a reception and tourist information center. Tourists are welcomed and put in contact with the communities providing the services. The communities are in charge of organizing the proposed activities. Trained local (Ba'Aka) tour guides and trackers, who work at the visitor center, accompany visitors around the park and reserve.

This approach allows local communities and indigenous peoples to participate and be actively involved in the implementation of activities following a partnership management model, where initiatives come from both the communities and the park administration. Ecotourism provides opportunities for local people to benefit in terms of revenue, employment and private investment. Through ecotourism, local communities receive additional direct and indirect income that contributes to improving their living conditions and encourages them to participate in conservation and sustainable natural resource management.

Two interesting sets of initiatives are those of FIGET (*Fondation Internationale Gabon Eco-tourisme – Giuseppe Vassallo*) in Ivindo National Park, and those in and outside protected areas carried out by local associations gathered under the GSAC Alliance (Alliance for the Conservation of Great Apes in Central Africa; see boxes). These initiatives are still very fragile and require financial, technical and professional support in the medium to long term. Their survival also depends on their ability to withstand tourism crises such as the global crisis in 2020 and 2021 (see section 5).

Another experience, in Gabon, sheds light on the difficulties of setting up tourism activities in rural areas of Central Africa. Between 2003 and 2006, the European Union funded a community-based ecotourism project in the Sette Cama region, south of Loango National Park. The project aimed to reduce poverty in this area through the development of ecotourism activities. It supported the establishment of a village cooperative, *Abietu-bi-Sette Cama*, enabling the community to actively participate in tourism and derive financial, educational and socio-professional benefits. The project trained nearly 45 people (hotel, restaurant, handicrafts, guiding) (Payen, 2012). However, a few years after the project ended, almost 75% of the local people originally involved had left the activity sector, with the number of direct jobs dropping from 39 to 9 between 2006 and 2012 (Payen, 2014).

The failure of this initiative was due in part to problems of accessibility and poor national infrastructure, rendering it difficult for visitors to reach the area. However, other reasons also must be considered such as: lack of communication and misunderstandings between local tourism actors, failure to take into account the expectations of rural communities, lack of knowledge and confusion of the roles of each actor, deficient logistics outside the control of rural communities, insufficient support over time for real ownership, lack of transparency, coordination and rebalancing of powers, and the absence of clear contracts between the parties to institutionalize the rights and duties of each stakeholder (Payen, 2012 and 2014). All these elements, both technical but especially socio-anthropological, must be taken into account in future community tourism support projects.

However, while community-based tourism has not yet taken off in Sette Cama, the above-mentioned project did train various people in several fields. These individuals have acquired skills that could either be put to good use elsewhere or serve as a basis for reviving the activity locally. This will only be possible if tourism governance is improved and better shared among all stakeholders, with or without the support of one or more private operators.

### FIGET and ecotourism development in Ivindo National Park (Gabon)

G. Gandini, FIGET & J. Okouyi Okouyi, IRET-CENAREST and FIGET

#### History

FIGET is a foundation under Gabonese law that was created in Libreville in 2000 at the invitation of the Gabonese government. In 2001, the government made a 120 km<sup>2</sup> area available to the foundation for the development of ecotourism in what later became Ivindo National Park (established in 2002). Within the framework of tourism activities, which began in 2005, FIGET collaborates with several villages in the Makokou region (Loa-Loa, Melondo Milélé and Truhaya), IRET (*Institut de Recherches en Ecologie Tropicale*) and ANPN.

#### Activities

The foundation has built a small tourism facility at Kongou Falls. Totally integrated into the forest, it is composed of several bungalows with a total capacity of 12-14 beds. Several tourism itineraries are offered to visitors, allowing for a variety of activities and levels of physical difficulty. Guides from the villages lead tourists through the forest to discover its richness and the traditional uses of forest resources, including wildlife observation in *baï's* and a trekking circuit through the entire park.



#### FIGET and ecotourism development in Ivindo National Park (Gabon)

From 2014 to 2019, FIGET hosted between 90 and 120 tourists per year (except in 2016 due to internal organizational problems). Revenues have ranged between 20 and 30 million FCFA/year (between US\$37,000 and US\$55,000). Tourism activities ceased throughout 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. FIGET also received regular financial support from the Trust the Forest foundation from 2005 to 2015.

For several years, tourism has been managed by local communities through a village cooperative. This activity represents an important source of income for these communities. It also provides funds for the State (park entrance), and allows external service providers to work, especially for the transport of tourists and the provision of meals.

#### Future prospects

FIGET's ecotourism project is one of the oldest tourism structures within the country's protected areas, in place for nearly 17 years. Tourism directly involves the local population of the park, which has taken over its management, in an original manner. The strong sense of ownership by the villages of the tourism activity has led to increased protection of the forest and wildlife. Since 2005, several hunters and former poachers have become tourist guides and have become the strongest defenders of the elephants and gorillas.

This initiative has demonstrated that a small, local reception facility can be set up in a protected area far from traditional tourist circuits and can contribute to rural development. However, an insufficient number of visitors and the fact that operations ceased in 2020 raises questions about its long-term survival. Contextual elements, beyond the control of FIGET and rural communities, also impact the economic viability of the activity, such as Gabon's limited development of tourism, the high cost of living, the absence of air transport between Libreville and Makokou, etc.

In order to be sustainable, this type of initiative must: 1) receive long-term support for local communities to fully take ownership of the activity (awareness, organization), 2) be professionalized to allow the emergence of small local tourism facilities (training), 3) benefit from the tourism dynamics developed by larger structures (partnerships, marketing), 4) benefit from an "insurance" allowing it to overcome crises like the one currently being experienced (support fund for small structures, for example).

Website: <http://www.gabonrightroutes.org/>

## GSAC Alliance ecotourism initiatives

### G. Tati, GSAC Alliance

GSAC Alliance is a young network of Central African civil society organizations working for the protection of great apes: gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos. This network brings together several organizations in Central Africa. These organizations have been created by rural communities that operate in or around protected areas.

Ecotourism is seen by GSAC Alliance as one of the key responses to conservation issues in relation to community expectations. All of the sites have ecotourism potential, but to date only three ecotourism initiatives are operational.

#### Observing bonobos in Mai Ndombe (DRC)

*Mbou-Mon-Tour* (MMT) is a leading bonobo conservation association. Ecotourism activities have not yet been organized, although reception and accommodation facilities have been put in place. The association focuses its efforts on the protection and habituation of bonobos, as well as on securing their habitats. Three bonobo observation sites are operational. The number of tourists is still quite low, but the increase in attendance between 2018 (20 people) and 2019 (32 people) indicates that the site is starting to become known and is attractive; only 14 people visited the site in 2020 due to the Covid-19 epidemic, which also impacted the habituation work with the bonobos (reduction in the number of trackers and contact time).

#### Gorilla tourism in Moukalaba-Doudou Park (Gabon)

The PROGRAM (*Protectrice des Grands Singes de la Moukalaba*) community-based ecotourism approach was launched in 2014 and gradually consolidated up to 2016. The site received between 100 and 150 tourists per year, mostly from Gabon. Following technical restructuring between 2017 and 2018 (organization and capacity building of guides), the gorilla habituation program slowed down. During these two years, the number of visitors dropped drastically (to about 50 people/year). In 2019, habituation work with two groups of gorillas resumed (30 tourists registered), but in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic led to the suspension of contact activities with the gorillas, which are vulnerable and susceptible to human disease agents. Today, three groups of gorillas are habituated or are in the process of being habituated: a group historically cared for by PROGRAM, a group habituated by IRET, and a group that has become familiar with the presence of humans by frequenting surrounding villages.

#### Tracking gorillas and chimpanzees in Mayombe forest (Congo)

This initiative was launched in 2015, in the Loaka area, about 150 km from Pointe-Noire. Ecotourism is being developed by the *Centre de Ressources de la Biodiversité et de l'Ecotourisme* (CERBE), a platform for the implementation of the actions carried out by the association ESI-Congo (Endangered Species International-Congo) in the town of Magne. ESI-Congo and the rural communities involved benefited from the assistance of the association *Azimuth Voyages* and the company Ethicalia, based in France. Depending on the year, between 15 and 30 people visit the site. Expeditions into the forest are done in small groups of 4 to 6 tourists during stays that last from 4 to 10 days.

#### GSAC Alliance Ecotourism Initiatives

##### Perspectives

Most GSAC Alliance members intend to better promote ecotourism, but the development of this activity is being hindered by limited financial means and revenues which remain too low. The existing sites receive too few visitors and are only suitable for clients with low or average requirements in terms of services.

Among the many challenges facing GSAC members is the need to: (i) set up viable economic models that contribute to the development of communities while supporting conservation; (ii) build reception/accommodation facilities and organize activities that guarantee the safety of animals and people; (iii) draw up business plans; and (iv) transfer appropriate skills to actors from rural communities so that they can become professional.

Website: <http://alliance-gsac.org/fr/>

### 3. Ecotourism in Central African protected areas

#### 3.1 Tourism revenue

Among the three countries that could be described as “tourism destinations” in Central Africa (Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Cameroon), it is – unsurprisingly (see Table 2) – Rwanda that makes the most of its protected areas. The Rwandan parks alone attract considerably more tourists and revenues than any other country in the subregion (Table 5). Only the two parks in eastern DRC (Kahuzi-Biega and especially Virunga) benefit from both the attraction of eastern gorillas and the East African tourism dynamic.

Many protected areas in the subregion receive fewer than 100 visitors annually (numerous sites in Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, DRC). These low numbers are due to a variety of factors, such as lack of commitment by the States, the remoteness and degraded state of transportation routes, the non-existence of reception and guide infrastructure and staff, non-existent marketing and even security problems (see paragraph 5). Often, only a small number of protected areas can be or are visited. Nlom *et al.* (2013) estimated that 5,200 tourists visited ten Cameroonian protected areas in 2012 (out of 28 protected areas surveyed at that time; Hiol Hiol *et al.*, 2015),

including over 4,000 visitors to Waza and Mount Cameroon sites alone.

In most cases, the revenues generated by ecotourism – when there are revenues – are not yet sufficient to support a viable tourism sector (see the CCC, FIGET, and GSAC boxes) or contribute substantially to protected areas’ management costs; the situation is similar to that described in the late 1990s (Wilkie & Carpenter, 1999; Blom, 2000). However, in several parks, tourism activities have become profitable and part of the operating costs are covered by the revenues generated, as in Zakouma National Park (APN, 2018b). Better still, in some protected areas, such as Virunga National Park and the parks of Rwanda, tourism is profitable and helps finance their operations and even that of other protected areas.

Since the beginning of 2000, the number of visitors to Rwanda’s three parks has increased from 3,800 to over 110,000 tourists, and tourism revenues have jumped from US\$300,000 to nearly US\$29 million (Figure 3). Much of this revenue comes from the Volcanoes National Park and gorilla tourism (box and Table 6). A great number of visitors also enjoy the savannas and large wildlife in Akagera Park. The park welcomed more than 49,500 visitors in 2019, with record revenues of US\$2.5 million; a new luxury lodge was opened that year, further increasing the park’s appeal. These revenues allow 90% of the park’s operations to be self-financed (APN, 2020).

Table 5 - Recent tourism attendance and revenue in some Central African protected areas

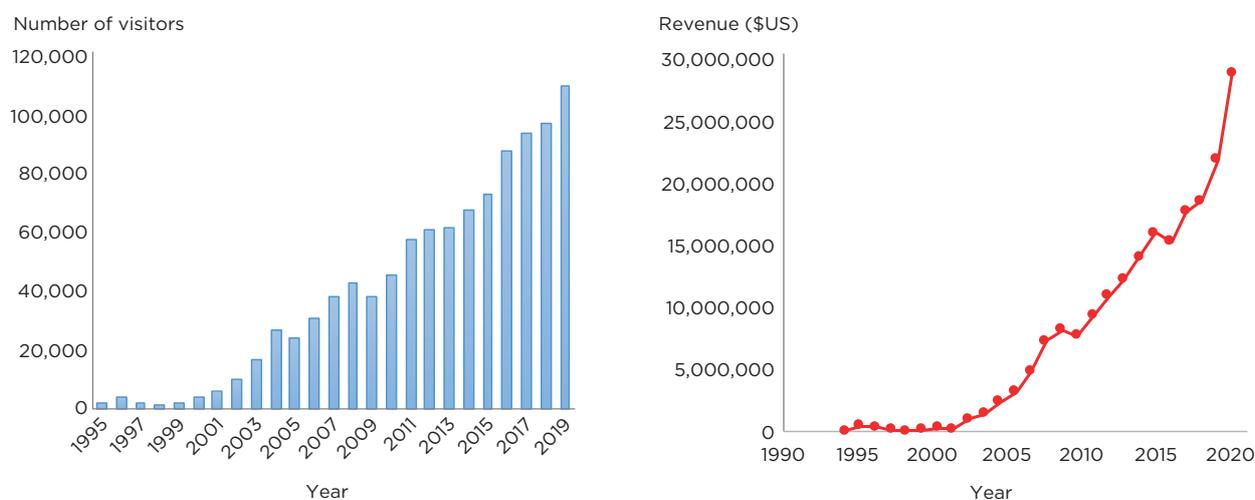
Protected Area	Visitors	Revenue (US\$)	Protected Area	Visitors	Revenue (US\$)
<b>Cameroon</b>			<b>DRC</b>		
Waza	0	0	Garamba	0	0
<b>Congo</b>			<b>Rwanda</b>		
Odzala-Kokoua	205	680,800	Kahuzi-Biega	1,500	900,000
<b>Gabon</b>			<b>Rwanda</b>		
Ivindo	87	51,495	Akagera	44,066	2,000,000
Loango	600	739,176	Nyungwe	14,371	500,000
<b>CAR</b>			<b>Rwanda</b>		
APDS	415	196,504	Volcanoes	36,000	17,200,000
			<b>Chad</b>		
			Zakouma	3,890	767,382

Notes: figures corresponding to the year 2018 except Kahuzi-Biega, Virunga, Nyungwe and Volcanoes (2017). Some figures are estimates as sources are not always accurate (Odzala-Kokoua) or they only concern some of the tourism operators (Ivindo, Loango). In some cases, a significant number of visitors were welcomed free of charge (Zakouma, for example). Sources: Ndayishimiye (2018), APN (2019 & 2018), Maisonneuve & Poliwa (2019), Okouyi Okouyi & Gandini (2020), Scholte (2021).

APN's strategy of securing Akagera Park, developing revenue from tourism and supporting surrounding rural communities is bearing fruit (APN, 2019 and 2020). The park's wildlife resources also have been restored with the reintroduction of lions and black rhinos. All of these elements, combined with the establishment of professional tourism management, the arrival of a luxury operator and effective marketing, have enabled the

tourism business to grow significantly. This model is certainly not applicable everywhere in the same way, but it can provide food for thought for other protected areas in Central Africa. It is currently being replicated in certain sites, such as Zakouma Park and Odzala-Kokoua Park. Gabon is trying a similar approach which already has produced some interesting initial results in Loango National Park.

Figure 3 - Visitors and tourism revenues generated by Rwanda's national parks from 1994 to 2019



a) Annual number of visitors

(b) Annual revenue

Sources: RDB.

## Gorilla tourism in Volcanoes National Park (Rwanda)

Tourism began in Volcanoes National Park in 1974, already with the intention to act for the conservation and the sustainable development of the human communities living around the park. The main attraction for visitors is the opportunity to enjoy an unforgettable experience with mountain gorillas in their natural environment.

Gorilla tourism is one of Rwanda's flagship tourism products (Visit Rwanda, 2021b and c). It is managed, as is all of Volcanoes National Park, by RDB. The activity is highly regulated: reservations must be made in advance (30% of clients book directly on the internet compared to 70% via a tour operator) and clients must respect a set of strict rules (Visit Rwanda, 2021a). Twelve gorilla families are currently visible to tourists, and six visitor permits can be issued per gorilla group daily. In 2018, 10 gorilla families were visible and the number of permits was limited to a maximum of 20,000 permits per year (Leung *et al.*, 2019); this maximum since was raised to just over 35,000 annual permits (Visit Rwanda, 2021b).

Fees have risen dramatically since the 1980s: from US\$230 to US\$375 in the 2000s, the rate for international visitors doubled a first time in 2012 (US\$750) and a second time in 2017 (US\$1,500). Up until 2017, the country had maintained different prices for international tourists, foreign tourists residing in Rwanda and national tourists; in 2017, the tariff was raised to US\$1,500 for all, including nationals. As a temporary measure in response to the international tourism crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, RDB introduced a new temporary fee schedule, effective from February to 31 May 2021, again differentiating between several categories of tourists: US\$1,500 remains the fee for international tourists, US\$500 for foreign residents and African Union nationals, and US\$200 for Rwandans and East African Community (EAC) nationals.

Revenues from gorilla tourism directly amounted to more than US\$19 million in 2018 (Table 6), not including all of the ancillary expenditures made by visitors (hotels and restaurants, other tourist activities, transport, guiding...). These revenues fell sharply in 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, but the revival of tourism in early 2021 offers hope for a recovery (Visit Rwanda, 2021a).

Table 6 - Gorilla tourism in Volcanoes National Park

Year	Number of permits delivered	Revenue (US\$million)
2016	22,219	15
2017	10,240	15.36
2018	15,132	19.2

Source: Bizimungu (2019) from RDB.

In a few favorable cases, tourism revenues could approach or even equal those of Volcanoes National Park. An assessment of the potential revenues from tourism of Virunga National Park showed that they could surpass US\$10 million for visitor permits alone, and almost US\$250 million if all items of expenditure by international tourists (transport, lodging, catering, various services, etc.; Balole-Bwami, 2018) were included. These estimates should be interpreted with caution as they represent a maximum potential, and do not consider any infrastructure, security or marketing constraints of the destination. However, they do highlight this potential and the knock-on effect of tourism on the economy as a whole.

### **3.2 National versus international tourism**

In addition to international tourism, and tourism by foreign residents, which are undeniable drivers for the growth of tourism in protected areas, the importance of national tourism must be noted. The first step is to make nationals aware of the richness of their natural heritage and its importance, both in terms of biodiversity and the ecosystem services it provides. It also involves demonstrating that this biodiversity is more valuable alive than dead. However, it also is a question of responding to the aspirations of increasing numbers of people in both urban and rural areas who wish to rediscover their natural heritage and enjoy nature with their families. The growth of urban populations and of middle

and affluent classes in Africa is leading to a growing demand for recreation, reconnection with nature and encounters with natural heritage.

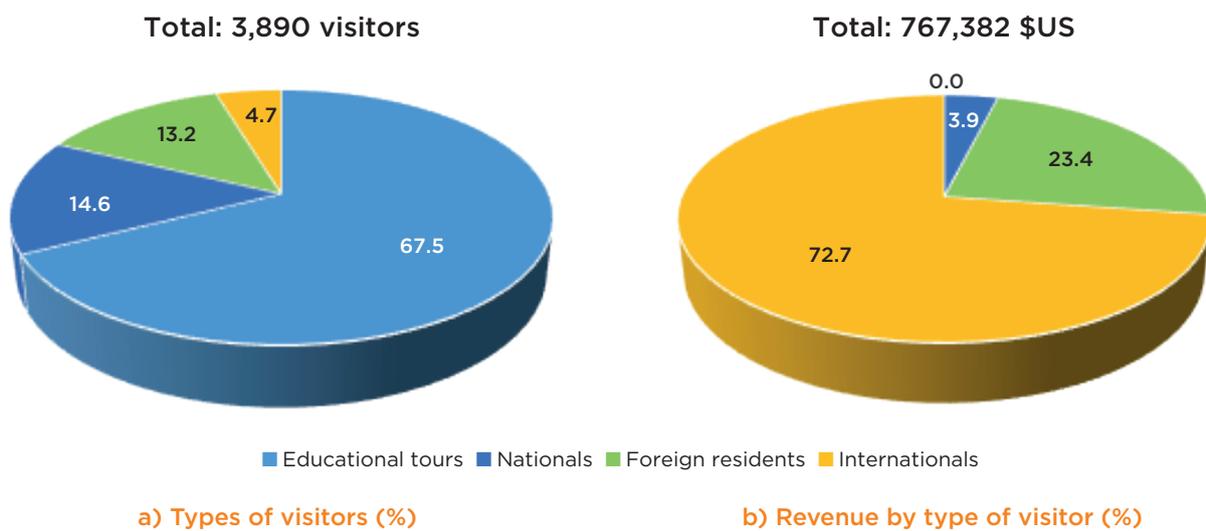
In several of the subregion's protected areas, environmental education programs are being set up in schools, in partnership with teachers, and visits are organized for schoolchildren (Garamba, Nouabalé-Ndoki, Zakouma, Akagera). More than 2,000 school children, 320 teachers and local leaders participated in environmental education sessions in Akagera Park in 2019 (APN, 2020), and over 500 school children visited Garamba Park in 2018 (APN, 2021).

Moreover, in some sites such as Zakouma Park, part of the tourism infrastructure is dedicated to national visitors. One of the park's three camps, Salamat Camp, is intended primarily for children and environmental education programs, particularly for the communities surrounding the protected area. Entry and access to the services of this camp are free for all Chadian citizens, which also encourages national tourism. The camp has safari vehicles that allow visits to the park to be organized under good conditions. This low-end infrastructure is fully funded by luxury tourism (Nomad Camp) and allows many Chadians to discover the park and its wildlife, with more than 80% of visitors being nationals (Figure 4a). However, some of these national visitors are shifting away from Salamat Camp to the mid-range camp (Tinga Camp), which accounts for about 4% of tourism revenues (Figure 4b). Although this figure remains low, it shows that there is a national demand.





**Figure 4 - Tourism attendance and revenue in Zakouma National Park (Chad) in 2018**



Source: APN (2018).

A study conducted in Cameroon a few years ago already noted this phenomenon (Nlom *et al.*, 2013). At that time, Waza National Park was the protected area receiving the highest number of tourists (Table 7). Even so, the number of visitors traveling across the entire country to Waza was 2.3 times less than those traveling to Mefou Wildlife Park, 45 km from Yaounde. And if these figures are compared with visits to the zoo-botanical gardens of Limbe (70 km from Douala) or Yaounde (Mvog-Betsi), the differences are even more important. These two semi-natural urban spaces see several tens of thousands of visitors per year: over 110,000 visitors, mainly Cameroonian, visited these two gardens in 2012; foreign visitors

(residents and internationals) are few, although they constitute the majority of tourists visiting protected areas (Table 7). The case of Mefou Park is interesting because it is a wildlife park (with primates) located in a forest that could be classified as a protected area; 30% of its visitors are “national”, including resident foreigners but also Cameroonians.

If only entrance fees are considered, the gardens of Mvog-Betsi and Limbe and Mefou parks were generating far more revenue than all of the protected areas at that time (approximately US\$170,000 vs. US\$65,000; Figure 5). However, if one looks at all tourism expenditures as a whole, the ratios are more balanced and even reversed (US\$3.1 vs. US\$3.9 million; Figure 6).

International ecotourism has the potential to grow substantially in the country, but in the absence of a real commitment from the State, it continues to stagnate. Since tourist numbers in protected areas have changed little since 2012, it is reasonable to say that

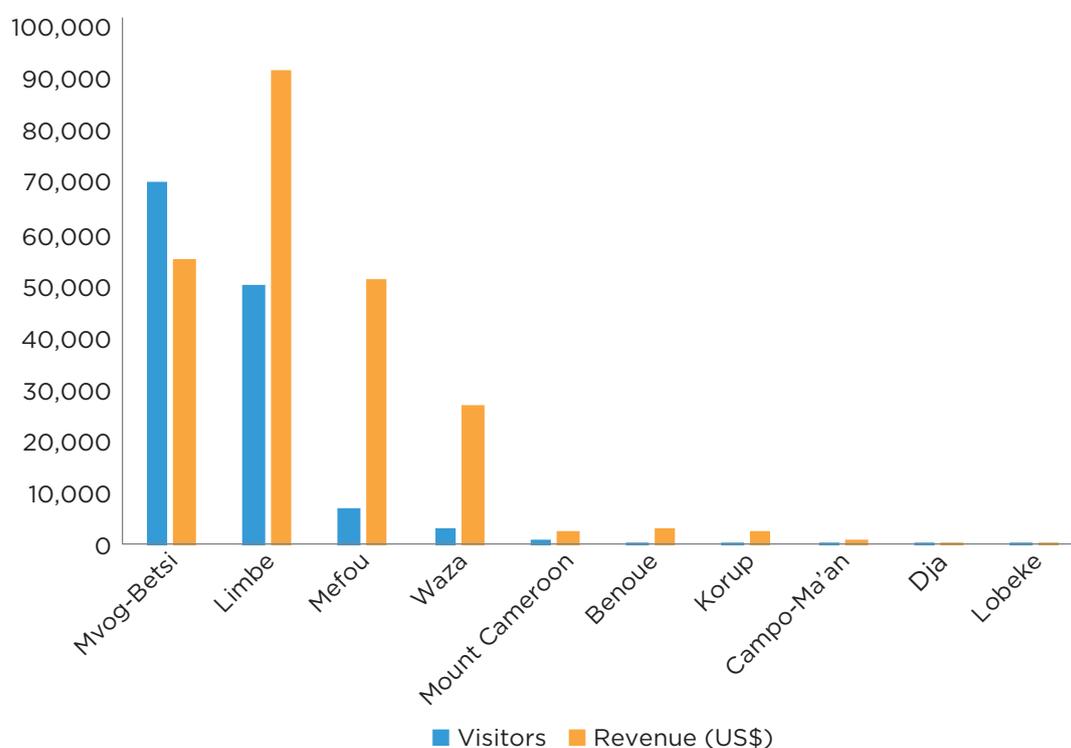
currently, in Cameroon, national nature and wildlife viewing tourism (including resident foreigners but mostly Cameroonians) is far more important in terms of numbers than international tourism, and is almost as important as the latter in terms of revenue.

**Table 7 – Visits to several tourist sites in Cameroon in 2012**

Site	Visitors	Non-resident foreigners (%)
Mvog-Betsi <sup>1</sup>	69,985	1.2
Limbe <sup>1</sup>	50,372	7.8
Mefou <sup>2</sup>	6,800	70
Waza <sup>3</sup>	2,930	42
Mount Cameroon <sup>3</sup>	1,107	92
Benoue <sup>3</sup>	496	98
Korup <sup>3</sup>	218	53
Campo-Ma'an <sup>3</sup>	148	67
Dja <sup>3</sup>	82	70
Lobeke <sup>3</sup>	61	80

<sup>1</sup>: botanical and zoological gardens; <sup>2</sup>: wildlife parks in natural forests; <sup>3</sup>: protected areas in natural environments. Source: Nlom *et al.* (2013)

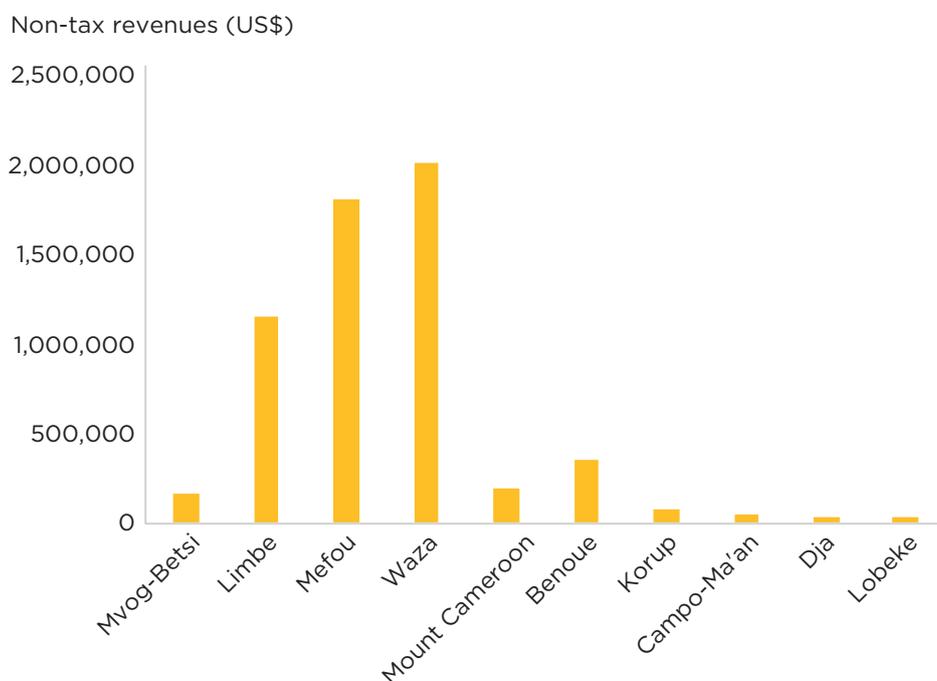
**Figure 5 – Visits and revenue at several sites in Cameroon in 2012**



Note: revenues mainly are from entrance fees. Source: Nlom *et al.* (2013)



Figure 6 - Estimated non-tax revenues from several tourism sites in Cameroon in 2012



Note: estimated non-tax revenues concern all expenses related to tourism activity (accommodation, catering, guiding, transport, purchase of handicrafts...). Source: Nlom *et al.* (2013)

Beyond rising awareness about protecting nature, there also is a real demand for a national nature and vision tourism that has been largely underestimated until now, except in Rwanda. In this country, the administration and its partners have implemented a biodiversity awareness policy as well as an information and pricing policy for Rwandans. For the past 15 years, the country has been organizing a naming ceremony for young gorillas – called *Kwita Izina* – directly inspired by traditional Rwandan ceremonies, during which parents name their children in the pres-

ence of family and friends. This ceremony has over time become a national event for the celebration of nature (Visit Rwanda, 2021d). The country also has put in place a specific pricing policy for visiting the parks for nationals but also for African nationals, in particular those from the EAC (Visit Rwanda, 2021st). This program, called *Tembera U Rwanda*, has been in place since 2015 and is widely advertised (Ntirenganya, 2017; RDB, 2020). In 2018, over 44,000 tourists visited Akagera Park, half of whom were Rwandan nationals (NPC, 2021b).



### 3.3 Contribution of tourism to local development

Despite the many difficulties in involving rural communities in ecotourism, as discussed in section 2.3.3, the establishment of tourism operators can generate benefits for these communities, either at the community or individual level. In the APDS (see box in section 2.3.3), a total of FCFA 1,277 billion (or about US\$2,344,000) was collected in direct revenue for 13,313 tourists from 1993 to 2019 despite the drastic reduction in bookings resulting from the military-political crises in CAR; tourist revenue has increased ninefold since the end of the 1990s (Blom, 2000)

Of this amount, over FCFA 53.32 million (just under US\$98,000) was received directly by local communities and indigenous peoples through formalized community activities. This corresponds to about 4% of total revenues, as in 2018, when over FCFA 4 million (about US\$7,500) was received by communities through cultural tourism activities (Table 8). In 2019, it is estimated that the APDS injected a total of about US\$180,000 into the local economy (including community projects, service provision, salaries...). While these figures may seem relatively modest, even by the standards of some Central African protected areas (see Table 5), they are an invaluable source of income for these poor rural populations, who have no alternative sources of cash income apart from logging or mining.

Table 8 – Services and revenues of APDS in 2018

Service or fee	Revenue (FCFA)	Revenue (US\$)
<b>Park visit revenue</b>	<b>12,907,965</b>	<b>23,686</b>
Elephant visit revenue	15,099,535	27,708
Gorilla tracking revenue	52,084,590	95,575
Mangabeys tracking revenue	1,267,425	2,326
Saline circuit revenue	550,200	1,010
<b>Nature tourism revenues</b>	<b>69,001,750</b>	<b>126,618</b>
Net hunting revenue	2,470,800	4,534
Crossbow hunting revenue	0	0
Plant collection revenue	353,700	649
Ba'aka cooking revenue	13,100	24
Ba'aka dance revenue	345,100	633
Bilo dance revenue	0	0
Sangha ride revenue	471,640	865
Hut building revenue	345,100	633
Tamtam on water revenue	0	0
Raffia palm wine revenue	117,940	216
<b>Community tourism revenue</b>	<b>4,117,380</b>	<b>7,555</b>
<b>Total services</b>	<b>86,027,095</b>	<b>157,860</b>
Administrative fees for filming	786,000	1,442
Administrative fees for researchers	2,832,875	5,198
Research and filming deposit	0	0
Doli lodge revenues	10,720,629	19,672
Sangha lodge revenues	6,720,000	12,331
<b>Total fees</b>	<b>21,059,504</b>	<b>38,644</b>
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>107,086,599</b>	<b>196,504</b>

1 FCFA = 0.001835 \$US. Source: APDS.

Odzala National Park (Congo) injects about FCFA 15 million (US\$27,000) per month into the local economy in the form of salaries and services, or about US\$330,000 per year. In addition, part of the revenue generated by tourism supports community projects. In 2019, US\$33,116 was allocated to the Odzala community development fund for agricultural diversification (planting cocoa and banana trees), support for small-scale livestock, infrastructure projects (construction of a community center and kindergarten, renovation of several schools, creation of a mobile clinic), and the delivery of medical equipment and supplies for health centers (APN, 2018, 2019 & 2020).

In the densely populated Rift Valley Mountain region, with its more developed tourism activities, the protected area that generates the most tourism revenue in DRC is Virunga National Park. Tourism revenue there was approximately US\$4 million in 2017 (Table 5). This amount includes revenue from visitor permits, of which 50% goes to ICCN, 20% to park operations and 30% into a community fund. The latter supports small development projects, finances public lighting and supports small-scale entrepreneurship. In 2017, the budget of the community fund was US\$458,566.

In Rwanda, it is estimated that nearly 142,000 jobs were created between 2018 and 2019 as a result of the growth of tourism in the country (Leung *et al.*, 2019). By law, 10% of revenues from tourism

activities in protected areas must go to rural communities and are invested in community development projects. Between 2005 and 2017, over 600 projects (education, food security, health, basic infrastructure, access to drinking water, anti-erosion control, etc.; Nielsen & Spenceley, 2011) were funded for a total of US\$4.4 million (RDB, 2018). Rendering tourism in Volcanoes Park valuable to surrounding communities seems to have promoted a recent decline in poaching in the park (Uwayo *et al.*, 2020). On the Akagera side, the community cooperative of independent guides also brought in nearly US\$160,000 in 2018 (APD, 2019).

All of these elements suggest that Rwandan rural communities living on the outskirts of protected areas benefit substantially from tourism activities despite the high population density of the country. However, this momentum needs to be continued, especially for the poorest communities (Spenceley *et al.*, 2010; Sabuhoro *et al.*, 2017; Munanura *et al.*, 2020).

#### 4. SWOT analysis of ecotourism in two Central African protected areas

APN has supported the management and protection of Odzala-Kokoua National Park (Congo) for several years. The site offers a particularly popular tourism experience with lowland gorilla viewing. Although these gorillas are more difficult to see than



**Table 9 - SWOT analysis of tourism development in Odzala-Kokoua National Park**

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unique and iconic wildlife experiences (western lowland gorillas, forest elephants, forest buffalo, bongo, birdlife).</li> <li>• Rare tourist experiences including habituated gorillas.</li> <li>• Diversity of waterways.</li> <li>• Products and activities available year round.</li> <li>• High-end tourist accommodation.</li> <li>• Friendliness of the staff.</li> <li>• Commitment to park conservation at all levels (heritage protection).</li> <li>• Transnational conservation (TRIDOM) and tourism development (countries, CCC) dynamic.</li> <li>• Major investments in infrastructure (roads, lodging, transport, surveillance posts, etc.) and staff training.</li> <li>• Multiple financial partners (EU, WWF, Sabine Plattner Foundation...).</li> <li>• Existence of a community development fund.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower concentrations of species and more difficult to observe than some regional competitors (mountain gorillas).</li> <li>• Limited diversity of experiences currently available.</li> <li>• Lack of infrastructure and access to some areas of the park.</li> <li>• Cost and complexity of logistics (remoteness, poor roads, air transfers).</li> <li>• Costs and access to regular media exposure on international, regional and local markets.</li> <li>• Barriers due to low literacy and language (lack of English proficiency) in the park and in the country.</li> <li>• Challenge of aligning community expectations and needs with market development realities.</li> <li>• Limited availability of tourism skills in Congo.</li> <li>• Difficult to secure guides for more than one or two seasons.</li> <li>• Lack of a comprehensive national tourism development plan.</li> <li>• Administrative red tape.</li> <li>• High taxation.</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• World famous Congo Basin forests: could be seen as the “Amazon of Africa”.</li> <li>• A potentially emblematic destination for adventurous tourists or those aware of the protection of tropical forests and the sustainable development of the people who live there.</li> <li>• Significant opportunities to use the experience of researchers in tourism products.</li> <li>• Combining wildlife, nature and culture to give tourists a unique experience.</li> <li>• Potential to develop new attractions: river tourism, chimpanzee and other primate habituation, bird tourism.</li> <li>• A cultural wealth capable of creating additional opportunities for the development of tourism.</li> <li>• Existing experiences of community involvement to be developed.</li> <li>• Strengthening community resilience and reducing environmental pressure through sustainable tourism.</li> <li>• Tourism identified as a strategic pillar for the development of Congo.</li> <li>• Creation of a one-stop shop for tourism and transformation of the <i>Office de Promotion de l'Industrie Touristique</i> (OPIT) in 2019.</li> <li>• Development of local and foreign resident markets (low-end and mid-range) to diversify reception facilities without diluting the value of the offer for the international market.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional reputation as a risky destination due to security problems and lack of knowledge about Congo (confusion with DRC).</li> <li>• Restrictions on travel that discourage visitors (visa applications, security checkpoints, etc.).</li> <li>• Undeveloped institutional framework (local and regional tourism organizations).</li> <li>• Difficulty in achieving coherence between tourism and protected areas due to the separation of responsibilities between ministries.</li> <li>• Lack of political will despite various announcements.</li> <li>• Very limited understanding of the benefits of tourism by politicians and citizens.</li> <li>• Lack of a tourism culture.</li> </ul>

Table 10 – SWOT analysis of tourism development in Volcanoes National Park

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the most visited parks in Rwanda.</li> <li>• An area reserved for tourism.</li> <li>• Reputation due to the presence of the mountain gorillas and the very good possibility of viewing for tourists.</li> <li>• A country that allows seeing the “Big Five” characteristic of the savannas and the legendary gorilla, characteristic of the dense Congolese forests.</li> <li>• Ecosystem diversity and important faunal and floristic endemism of the Albertine Rift.</li> <li>• A variety of tourism activities are possible, including mountain trekking.</li> <li>• Existence of a park and tourism management plan.</li> <li>• Stable, safe country with good health conditions.</li> <li>• Kigali is becoming better connected to various sending countries, thanks to a reliable airline.</li> <li>• The road network is in good condition and there are good connections between the park and the capital.</li> <li>• Gorilla viewing tourism that brings in significant revenue.</li> <li>• Tourism revenue sharing policy (10% of protected area revenues allocated to socio-economic development of surrounding communities; RDB, 2018).</li> <li>• Voluntary tourism development policy and strategy.</li> <li>• Well established cooperation between government, conservation NGOs and the private sector.</li> <li>• Capacity to invest in the park.</li> <li>• Direct and indirect job creation in conservation and development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited number of permits to visit the gorillas.</li> <li>• Mountainous environment that requires visitors to fit and healthy.</li> <li>• Image of the country still very much linked to the 1994 genocide and poverty.</li> <li>• Higher prices than some neighboring East African countries (overnight stays, packages...); in particular, high cost of visiting the gorillas.</li> <li>• Online offers and bookings are still not well developed or communicated.</li> <li>• The level of training has room for improvement, which hinders a wider professionalization of the sector.</li> <li>• RwandAir faces chronic deficits.</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tangible benefits of the presence of tourism to local community members.</li> <li>• Visitor volume control: preservation of the visitor experience and reduction of wildlife disturbance.</li> <li>• System of incentives favoring local communities and to encourage their own valorization of natural resources (e.g., poachers who become tourist guides).</li> <li>• Study of the environmental economy of the park.</li> <li>• Establishment of health protection and early warning and response systems to contain epidemics (Ebola and others).</li> <li>• Study and promotion of cultural customs and traditions beneficial to gorilla conservation.</li> <li>• Creation of a raffle for the promotion of social tourism (gorilla visits at an affordable price).</li> <li>• Creation of a promotional gorilla season.</li> <li>• Wide range of accommodation and services, from low-end to top-of-the-range.</li> <li>• Opportunities for the development of cultural activities on the outskirts of the park, for the direct benefit of the communities.</li> <li>• Agreements with well-known football clubs to improve the country’s image (Arsenal, Paris St. Germain).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very high human pressure: population densities among the highest in Africa (820 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> in some areas) and extremely poor farmers living around the park.</li> <li>• Poaching still exists in the park.</li> <li>• Possible political instability in the Albertine Rift region.</li> </ul>



their mountain cousins, the park also has many other attractions, including wildlife viewing in swamp and savanna clearings (see Boxes 2.1 and 2.2; Table 9). In addition, a specialized company, CCC, has developed a high-end tourism facility and a variety of tourism products, including regional ones (see Box 2.3.2; Table 9). Significant international investment has enabled CCC to implement a long-term tourism development strategy and to overcome crises such as the global Covid-19 epidemic (see paragraph 5).

However, while there has been a significant increase in tourist numbers and revenue generated (Table 5), tourism in Odzala-Kokoua is not yet profitable. The activity remains very modest due to various constraints, both internal and external (Table 9). The most notable are the distance from the political (Brazzaville) and economic (Pointe-Noire) capitals, the poor state of road transport infrastructure, and the very high cost of air transport. Moreover, despite some good intentions (Maniongui & Nkounkou, 2019), Congo still sorely lacks a detailed and inclusive tourism action plan that integrates other economic sectors.

It is interesting to compare Odzala-Kokoua Park with Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda (Table 10). Tourism is incomparably more developed there compared to the protected areas of the Congo Basin (Table 5). This is primarily due to mountain gorillas, which are the major tourism attraction (see Box 3.1), but other tourism products also have been developed, such as hiking and cultural tourism (Baeriswyl, 2018). This success is due to the efforts made in the park itself

(infrastructure, protection, tourism management, etc.), the fairly easy access to the park (good roads and relative proximity to Kigali), but also the policy implemented for several years by the Rwandan government to place tourism among the key economic sectors. Tourism is not considered separately from other economic sectors, but rather as a driving force for the development of the country as a whole. Rwanda also has taken a strong position in the business and conference tourism segment, with a very good MICE (Meetings, Incentive, Conferences, Events) ranking, which increases the attractiveness of the destination.

## 5. National and international crises and tourism

### 5.1 Safety and health impacts on tourism and protected areas

Before turning to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been raging since the beginning of 2020 (UNWTO, 2020c), it should be noted that tourism is an economic activity that is particularly sensitive to the destination's image on the one hand, and the local security and health context on the other, as the two are linked. Many examples have shown that the number of visitors to a site drops drastically if there is a deterioration in the security situation. This unfortunately has repeatedly been the case in Virunga Park (DRC), but also in Cameroon's most famous park, Waza

## Waza National Park: the impact of insecurity on tourism and conservation

P. Scholte, GIZ Côte d'Ivoire

Waza Park is located in the Sahelo-Sudanese savannas of Far North Cameroon and includes part of the Logone river floodplain. The park once was famous for its savanna elephants, which, with about 1,000 individuals concentrated around a few waterholes, guaranteed sightings during the dry season. Tens of thousands of kobs (*Kobus kob*) and korrigum antelopes (*Damaliscus lunatus korrigum*) in the floodplain, a large population of lions and Kordofan giraffes (*Giraffa camelopardalis antiquorum*), and rich birdlife made Waza the most visited park in Central Africa in the 1970s to 1990s (Scholte, 2005).

Promoted as an alternative to East African safaris, the number of visitors to the park increased rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s, contributing to a short-lived economic boom in Cameroon (Figure 7). From the late 1980s onwards, the country, under the influence of the structural adjustment program, cut back on government investment, leading to the deterioration of roads and the end of international flights to North Cameroon. This situation, compounded by growing political unrest in neighboring countries (Chad and Nigeria), led to a significant decline in visitors, which fluctuated around 3,000 per year for most of the 1990s and 2000s.

In the late 2000s, pastoralists fled in droves from the unrest caused by Boko Haram in Nigeria, causing an influx of livestock in and around Waza Park, increasing pressure on wildlife (Scholte, 2013). Decades of relative stability in North Cameroon came to a dramatic end with the kidnapping of French visitors in February 2013 (Preel, 2013). Visitor numbers plummeted only to regain slightly in the following tourist season (Figure 8). With the attack on a Chinese roadworkers' camp in the town of Waza in May 2014 (Anon., 2014), tourism ground to a complete halt. Waza was closed, opened only occasionally in 2019 and 2020 with respectively 10 and 11 visitors escorted by the armed forces. With the uncertainty of the Covid-19 crisis, the future of the park looks increasingly bleak.

Tourism always has been crucial to Waza, with revenues from entrance fees equaling operating costs, although procedures put in place by the central government have discouraged more autonomous management. Many communities around Waza were involved in tourism-related activities, such as handicrafts, jobs at hotels, catering, escorting tourists, etc.. In villages such as Andirni, guiding tourists was the main source of income, resulting in a strong spirit of conservation that promotes the protection of the park to this day (Scholte, 2005). However, with the decline in tourism, conservation also has been affected. The lack of road maintenance since 2014 (with spiny *Acacia seyal* rapidly taking over the old tracks), has rendered surveillance and monitoring particularly difficult. The park's annual operating budgets, already low in 2015 (32 million FCFA, or about US\$58,000), had fallen further to 8 million FCFA (US\$15,000) by 2021. Although Waza has a reasonable number of guards (30), they no longer effectively control the park.

Recent observations (March 2021) point to increased human pressure, particularly in the floodplain of the park, and suggest a collapse of the kob and korrigum populations. Strikingly, local communities are calling for better protection of the park to prevent others from appropriating its resources (fish, grazing; Anon., 2021). Overall, species which have given Waza Park global importance, such as lion, korrigum and red-fronted gazelle *Eudorcas rufifrons*, face the risk of imminent loss (Tumenta *et al.* 2010; Scholte, 2013).

Although Boko Haram has seldom poached wildlife in the park (Kelly Pennaz *et al.*, 2018), the insecurity and resulting instability have had a devastating cascading influence, not unlike

**Waza National Park: the impact of insecurity on tourism and conservation**

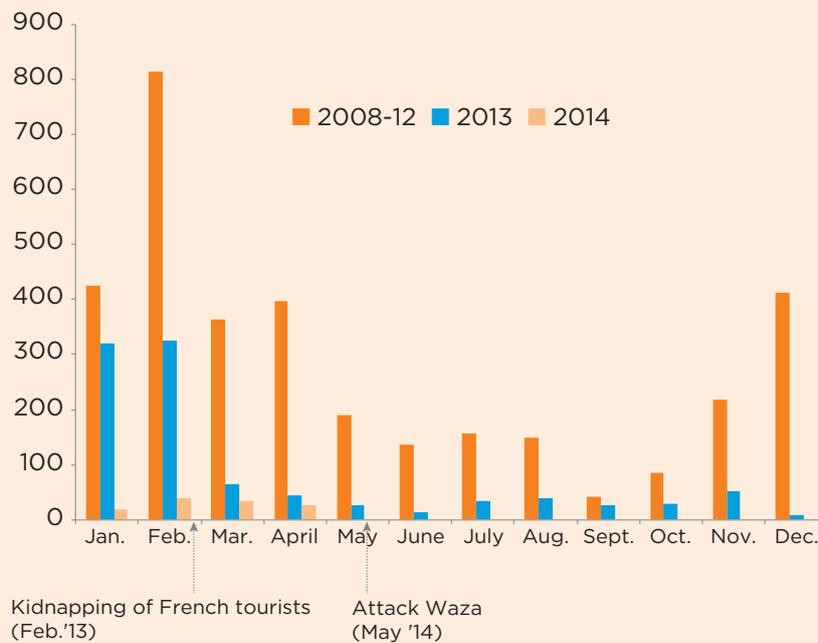
in other Central African parks such as Garamba (DRC). Given the amount of investment and effort required to restore effective management, it is difficult to see a future for Waza under the present management and governance set-up. The future might be brighter if Cameroon chooses to develop a PPP, as neighboring countries have done over the past decade, saving Garamba and several other protected areas (see Chapter 3).

**Figure 7 – Tourist attendance in Waza National Park between 1966 and 2020**



Source: adapted and updated from Scholte (2005).

**Figure 8 – Drop in tourist numbers due to insecurity in Waza Park**



Note: average monthly number of tourists over the period 2008-2012 compared to 2013 (abduction of French tourists in February) and 2014 (Waza camp attack in May).  
 Source: <http://www.deselephantsetdeshommes.org/> and personal investigations.

National Park. This park was the flagship of Cameroonian protected areas in the 1970s and 1980s. It received up to nearly 7,000 tourists in 1986, and continued to receive between 3,000 and 5,000 visitors each year until 2012 (Figure 7 and 8). After that, the number of visits collapsed due to security problems, and today the park no longer receives any visitors (see box).

In addition to security, the emergence of epidemics such as Ebola, and even the prevalence of certain diseases (malaria, etc.), also are handicapping the subregion. The case of the Covid-19 pandemic is emblematic in this respect: it caused a collapse in international arrivals of about 73% globally and 63% in sub-Saharan Africa, with revenues cut in half overall (Gössling *et al.*, 2020; UNWTO, 2020d & e, 2021; WTTC, 2021). Countries with a more dynamic domestic tourism sector were slightly less affected than those solely dependent on international tourism. Worldwide, domestic tourism has fallen by about 45% in value while international tourism has fallen by over 69% (WTTC, 2021).

The measures taken to mitigate the Covid-19 pandemic have had a very significant direct impact on tourism, such as border closures, repeated lockdowns and curfews, the stopping of international air links, the closing of establishments (hotels, restaurants, etc.), etc. (UNWTO, 2020d). Gorilla tourism has had to be suspended due to the potential risks to the primates' health from coronavirus transmission to the gorillas (Fondation Virunga, 2020).

This has resulted in the loss of about 62 million direct and indirect jobs worldwide, including about 2 million in Africa (D'abzac, 2020; WTTC, 2021). In the TNS, parks have been forced to suspend many of their activities. Tourism has fallen sharply, with a loss of revenue of nearly FCFA 130 million (about US\$233,000), with negative consequences on local communities (FTNS, 2020).

For protected areas, the impact of the pandemic goes far beyond the question of employment, leading to reduced funding, a reduction in the scope of management actions (restrictions on travel, difficulties in obtaining supplies, a reduction in surveillance, etc.) and an increase in human impacts (increased risk of poaching...; Kamga Kamdem *et al.*, 2020; Lindsey *et al.*, 2020; Waithaka, 2020; Spenceley *et al.*, 2021). One of the most important impacts is the likely decrease in revenue for protected area management and local communities, especially if cascading effects are likely to lead to a decrease in national and international funding for protected areas, or its redirection to the health sector or to address the financial crisis.

In Rwanda, an organized and proactive country, parks were open for part of the year, which helped to limit losses. A rigorous process was put in place and all visitors were required to present a negative Covid test, both immediately prior to and upon arrival at the parks. Gorilla tourism has been reopened, with revenues falling by less than in other countries, despite the drop in visits and lower rates for domestic visitors (Roberts, 2020).





## 5.2 Prospects for recovery

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on protected areas and tourism will be felt for several years to come. There are various calls for the tourism stakeholders to thoroughly reform the sector in order to foster resilience (Gössling *et al.*, 2020; UNWTO, 2020d). In particular, tourism ministers discussed the importance of initiating discussions on the coordination of health protocols on a global scale in order to facilitate the resumption of international travel while guaranteeing the safety of travelers and populations. They agreed on the need to strengthen exchanges with the private sector, support innovation and take ownership of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In the case of Central Africa, the subregion is facing a dual challenge: one linked to the Covid-19 epidemic, and one linked to the limited attractiveness and lack of organization of the subregion in the field of ecotourism (Rwanda being the exception). A number of structural measures should be taken to keep the sector afloat and enable it to grow. In the short term, fiscal and financial measures are needed, such as renegotiating bank and credit terms for existing tourism structures, if required with the support of the States in the form of bank guarantees (Kamga Kamdem *et al.*, 2020). While large international structures have the financial capacity to overcome the crisis, this is not the case for all of the small operators and service providers, which are often in the informal sector. However, it will not be possible to develop the tourism sector and, in particular, boost national tourism, without increased development of these small structures. The

establishment of micro-credit capacities and the creation of professional support funds would make it possible to compensate – at least in part – for the absence of insurance or unemployment benefits. Other avenues for public funding of protected areas and ecotourism can be considered, such as the allocation of part of the revenues from tourist and airport taxes (Kamga Kamdem *et al.*, 2020).

More generally, it is the responsibility of States to develop integrated, sustainable and equitable tourism development policies, which must be based on three pillars: 1) strengthen the protection of heritage (natural and cultural), 2) provide a secure legal and economic environment for investors, and 3) allow for a better sharing of costs and benefits among stakeholders (Bhammar *et al.*, 2021; Spenceley *et al.*, 2021). The growth of ecotourism requires significant investments in infrastructure, facilitating the movement of tourists (visas on entry to countries or e-visas, free movement agreements for cross-border tourism, etc.) and training of staff at all levels. RAPAC published a handbook on ecotourism and community tourism a few years ago which remains relevant today (RAPAC, 2009).

Thanks to the increase of PPPs, some high-end tourism structures have been set up in protected areas of the subregion, which make it possible to launch the ecotourism dynamic. The States must accompany the process by ensuring that skills are strengthened and national operators developed, and by promoting consultation and synergy between all stakeholders in the sector (Viard, 2008; Kamga Kamdem *et al.*, 2020; Maisonneuve & Poliwa, 2020).

### 5.3 CEEAC and its partners on the front line

In 2015, the Heads of State of the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC) met in Ndjamena (Chad) and adopted several decisions aimed at developing and promoting the Green Economy System in Central Africa (SEVAC). Decision No. 35/CEEAC/CCEG/XVI/15 adopts sectoral programs for the development and promotion of the green economy, including the Programme for the Development of Ecotourism in Central Africa (PDEAC). The latter is associated with three other sectoral programs: the protected areas economic development program, the zoological parks economic program and the botanical gardens program. In the implementation of each sectoral program, an important place and role is reserved for technical and financial partners.

On 19 April 2017, CEEAC signed several memoranda with some partners, including the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The implementation of this agreement is included in the Medium-Term Indicative Strategic Plan (PSIMT) 2021-2025 and in the Priority Action Plan (PAP) 2021, adopted by the Heads of State (XVIII CEEAC Conference, November 2020, Libreville, Gabon).

The Environment, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Rural Development Department of CEEAC has thus made PDEAC's implementation a priority. The objective of this sectoral program is to develop the ecotourism economy in the subregion and to

contribute to the diversification of the economies of the States, business development, job creation, regional integration and the well-being of communities living in the vicinity of the protected areas in rural areas. It is organized into five components:

- Component 1: development of policy, legal, fiscal and institutional frameworks to support ecotourism development,
- Component 2: development of the market and the products and services offered by the sector,
- Component 3: training and capacity building of stakeholders and ecotourism structures,
- Component 4: development of quality standards in the sector,
- Component 5: development and implementation of a subregional marketing and communication plan.

PDEAC aims to address some of the challenges facing the tourism sector, such as an appropriate legal, fiscal and investment framework, better targeted marketing, strengthening subregional skills and greater involvement of the private sector as well as of communities surrounding protected areas (Viard, 2008; Maisonneuve & Poliwa, 2019). It will build on the success of some protected areas that have benefited from private sector investment and expertise. This program will be financed by CEEAC (Fund for the Green Economy in Central Africa, Cooperation and Development Fund) and by various partners. It will be implemented with the support of UNWTO, within the framework of the above-mentioned memorandum.



## 6. Conclusion

Central Africa has all of the potential of an exceptional ecotourism destination, one that is unique in many ways. From the Atlantic Ocean to the Congo Basin and the Albertine Rift, the subregion is full of natural and cultural wonders. However, it is only recently that initiatives, often private, have made it possible to develop protected areas for tourism. While some countries have already forged a tourism image, such as Cameroon “Africa in miniature”, Rwanda “the land of a thousand hills” and Sao Tome and Principe “the chocolate island”, other countries have yet to create their own identity.

While each protected area also must identify its own product and brand image, Central Africa must develop a regional tourism identity, which will ensure synergy and increased attractiveness. When one speaks about the subregion, the great primates immediately leap to mind: Central Africa is “the land of the great apes”.

Part of the subregion may be suitable for mass tourism, or at least for receiving large numbers of tourists (coastal or savanna regions), but this is not the case for the vast forest areas. Only tourism in small accompanied groups is possible. This, combined with the subregion’s environmental and cultural wealth, is a further argument in favor of the development of ecotourism and community-based tourism. Central Africa must prioritize this type of tourism.

Following the example of Rwanda, the States are beginning to equip themselves with a certain number of legislative, human and operational means to supervise and boost their tourism sector. The legal and institutional framework still needs to be adapted to bring subregional and national ecotourism up to international standards. CEEAC could play a special role in providing leadership, regional synergy and support to countries.

High-end ecotourism already has established itself as a driver of tourism in Rwanda and in some protected areas in the subregion (Virunga in DRC, Odzala-Kokoua in Congo, Zakouma in Chad). These initiatives could stimulate the development of ecotourism in the subregion and enhance its reputation

as an outstanding destination. The development of PPPs has proven effective in this area and could be extended to other sites. This requires investors who are willing to commit to the venture for 10 to 20 years until the activity becomes economically viable, especially in the Congo Basin. These investors will only commit themselves if the countries establish a secure and attractive business climate.

While it would be unrealistic to think that tourism alone will be able to support the investment and management costs of all of the protected areas, tourism already contributes to the partial or total financing of parks such as Akagera and Volcanoes, and indeed provides significant financial resources for other protected areas. Tourism also provides employment opportunities and helps finance community projects in very poor rural areas, thereby helping to anchor protected areas and tourism activity in rural territories.

However, promoting local development means encouraging and supporting the emergence of small local initiatives and reception facilities, agricultural and craft production for visitors, etc. This alone will make it possible to extend the range of tourists received and to promote national tourism, a means of better integrating protected areas into the human societies of the subregion. Small private and community operators have started to operate in the tourism sector, but they lack both professional skills and funding. It is up to the States and the major private operators to support and accompany them for a sufficient period of time, until they can become independent. The countries should thus encourage the creation of tourism development centers anchored in the territories, including the entire range of operators.

Tourism is both a promising and a fragile economic sector, vulnerable to political events and health crises such as Covid-19. In the absence of sectoral insurance and employment policies worthy of the name, States and private partners must set up tourism support funds and mutual insurance companies that enable the most fragile structures and communities to cope with these crises. This is essential for strengthening the resilience of the tourism sector and of protected areas in Central Africa.

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