



# GOVERNANCE OF PROTECTED AREAS IN CENTRAL AFRICA: AN EVOLVING PROCESS

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Geopolitical borders were carved into the African landscape, forming the basis on which “modern” economic and social systems have gradually developed at the expense of traditional natural resource governance systems. The process related to the creation of protected areas has not taken this reality into account, thus carrying within itself the seeds of separation between humans and nature (Monpetit, 2013). Consequently, rural communities often have been excluded from the decision-making processes and the management of protected areas as well as the resources they relied on to survive. From being the managers of their environment, most local inhabitants have been relegated to the status of observers. Meanwhile, state, private and non-governmental actors exercised their rights over these lands. Over time, protected areas have been created and, with them, new institutions.

Despite the continued growth of protected area networks in Central Africa, as well as efforts to improve the performance of these protected areas, they do not always achieve the objectives set out. Poaching and other anthropogenic pressures continue. To respond effectively to these challenges, it is key to improve the governance of protected areas. While “good governance” – one that is shared, transparent, and effective – is a vital factor in the management effectiveness of protected areas, its absence can yield mixed results, even though significant financial, human and material resources are mobilized.

Good governance cannot be decreed, it is an evolving process involving knowledge, practices and standards that must be adapted to each context. What is the situation in Central African protected areas? Does their governance encourage effective inclusive participation of all stakeholders? By effective inclusive participation, we mean that government institutions, local communities, the private sector and civil society are involved in decision-making processes in a manner that is transparent and accountable to all relevant stakeholders.

This chapter aims to show that the governance of protected areas in Central Africa is undergoing a profound change, while also at a crossroads between consolidation and continuous improvement in some countries, and hesitation and resistance in others. The chapter provides an overview of the governance of protected areas in the subregion and the changes that have occurred over the past 30 years and concludes with recommendations for policy makers and protected area managers.

## 1. Protected area governance: concepts and definitions

Governance “is about who decides what is done and how those decisions are made” (Borrini-Feyerabend, 2014b). It is “the interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are taken and whether citizens or other stakeholders have their say” (Graham & Plumptre, 2003).

Governance:

- is neither a system of rules nor an activity, but rather a process;
- is not based on domination, but rather on trade-off;
- is not formalized, but is based on continuous interplay;
- involves both private and public actors (Smouts, 1998 in Nguinguiri, 2003).

Governance includes formal institutions and regimes with enforceable powers, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions have agreed upon or perceive to be in their interest (Battistella *et al.*, 2012). There is no silver bullet model of protected area governance. Rather, it is a multidimensional concept that depends on a number of site-specific factors, including:

- land tenure security as a prerequisite for the success of land and natural resource governance,
- considering the diverse stakeholders, and their objectives, interests and concerns,
- the specific context of the protected area: environmental, socio-economic, institutional and political (Franks, 2018).

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) characterizes protected areas according to four governance types (Borrini-Feyerabend, 2014a) which are determined based on the actors who hold power in decision-making (Table 1). These governance

types can be applied to different types of management (Dudley, 2008). Governance and management are indeed two different and yet complementary concepts, the latter falling under “what is done to achieve the given objectives” (Borrini-Feyerabend, 2014b).

**Table 1 - Types of protected area governance considered by IUCN**

Public	Shared	Private	Community
Governance by the government, acting at several levels	Shared governance involving the participation of multiple rights holders	Governance by individuals or private organizations	Governance by indigenous peoples and/or local communities

Source: Borrini-Feyerabend *et al.* (2014a)

IUCN also proposes key principles for good governance, including:

- the **inclusion** of all stakeholders in decision-making, which implies a democratic dimension;
- **subsidiarity**, which promotes a “bottom-up” approach, so that collective decision-making is not disconnected from those who must comply with it;
- **transparency** in the sharing of information about decisions with all stakeholders; and
- **accountability** of decision makers to impacted and affected stakeholders (Lausche, 2012).

The analysis of governance therefore calls on official norms, actors, power play, and refers to the political, administrative and legal environment that facilitates or hinders good protected area management. It also outlines the legitimacy of decision-makers, the free and informed participation of key stakeholders in the decision-making process, and the inclusion of the views of rights-holders.

## 2. Policy framework for protected area governance

### 2.1 International conventions

The creation of protected areas is enshrined in Article 8 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), relating to in situ biodiversity conservation. In Central Africa, the Yaounde Declaration (1999) is one of the important milestones for the development of protected areas in the subregion; it is supported by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 54/214, which acknowledged

the Declaration and called on the international community to support Central African countries in their forest development efforts. On 5 February 2005, the Treaty on the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa reiterated these commitments, while integrating cooperation agreements and conventions.

These international texts are the bedrock of cooperation and exchange between the States of the subregion for better conservation of biodiversity and sustainable natural resource use. They serve as an overall framework for national protected area governance strategies, policies and programs, and include consideration of indigenous peoples and local communities. Improving the protection of biodiversity indeed requires the support of the stakeholders who directly depend on it and recognition of their traditional knowledge, while contributing to their well-being.

### 2.2 Intergovernmental agreements

These agreements are legal instruments signed between government representatives to establish and manage protected areas in a collaborative manner. They therefore mainly are aimed at protected areas whose governance type is “governance by government” (see section 4.2.1). The memoranda of understanding specify the management modalities for each of the areas selected for cooperation.

This is the case, for example, with the Cameroon-Congo-Central African Republic (CAR) cooperation agreement and the agreement on the free movement of personnel relating to Sangha Tri-National (TNS;

COMIFAC, 2000 & 2005), the BSB Yamoussa Agreement for the Cameroon-Chad binational complex, and the Tripartite Anti-Poaching Agreement for the Cameroon-CAR-Chad area. The implementation of these agreements is sometimes an uphill battle (see the box below on the BSB Yamoussa Agreement).

In practice, the application of these agreements is sometimes difficult, due in particular to considerations of sovereignty, but also to questions of territorial control (Ngoufo, 2013) and administrative inconsistencies, which limit the effectiveness of joint actions. In addition to these challenges, there is the question of the financial, human and material resources required for their implementation. Lastly, as each country has its own conservation and protected area laws, governance and management arrangements may differ, requiring efforts on the part of all concerned to reach a consensus.

### 2.3 National laws

Many traditional and modern political systems in Africa operate side by side, yet this has not yet led to a profound or sustainable mutual transformation (Kwesi, 2007). Customary law and traditional techniques for the management and protection of ecosystems and/or natural resources are part of the intangible cultural heritage of COMIFAC (Central African Forests Commission) countries. The sidelining of legal heritage on the basis of “non-Western legal cultures” remains a burning issue in the governance of protected areas in the COMIFAC area (Zognou, 2020).

From a legal perspective, the creation and management of protected areas are governed by laws that vary between countries, ranging from ministerial decisions (in the case of certain protected areas in Cameroon), to presidential decrees (in the case of Congo), to laws

#### Challenges in the operationalization of two international agreements concerning BSB Yamoussa

The BSB (Binational Sena-Oura - Bouba-Ndjida) Yamoussa Complex was established by the governments of Cameroon and Chad on 2 August 2011 with the signing of the agreement for the creation and joint management of the complex. It is one of the seven transboundary initiatives carried out under the lead of COMIFAC, as part of the implementation of the convergence plan for the conservation and sustainable management of Central African ecosystems.

Following major massacres of elephants in the BSB complex, the COMIFAC Council of Ministers held in N'djaména (Chad) on June 6, 2012, highlighted the importance of transboundary anti-poaching operations for the sustainable development of biodiversity in the northern part of the subregion. To this end, a roadmap for the operationalization of the BSB Agreement was developed. In addition, Cameroon, CAR and Chad signed a tripartite transboundary anti-poaching cooperation agreement in N'djaména on 8 November due to the need to develop national strategies, intensify anti-poaching efforts in each country, develop and implement a joint strategy associated with a transboundary anti-poaching action plan for the three countries.

However, it took eight years after the signing of the BSB Agreement, and six years after the signing of the transboundary anti-poaching agreement, for the very first inter-ministerial oversight body meeting of these two agreements to take place. The supervisory and arbitration committees of both agreements met in December 2019 to facilitate the operationalization of the said agreements. At the regional and provincial level, the binational and tripartite planning and implementation committees met four times between 2014 and 2017. Nonetheless, their resolutions and recommendations were not fully implemented.



(in the case of CAR and Chad) or ordinances (in the Democratic Republic of the Congo - DRC). In addition, there are differences in the processes for preparing laws and in their degree of precision (distribution of responsibilities, designation of posts to be created, determination of the origin and extent of funding, etc.).

Conflicts of jurisdiction also are critical in determining the effectiveness of legal instruments for the protection of protected areas. This is the case, for example, in Cameroon, where several ministries are involved in environmental protection: the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, the Ministry of Water and Energy and the Ministry of Tourism. This multi-layered institutional structure reinforces the lack of transparency in decision-making. It is combined with what can be termed as the “government by deceit” that makes all decisions potentially overruled or reversed depending on the interests of the stakeholders involved (Ongolo & Badoux, 2017).

Over the years, changes have occurred at the legislative and legal levels. In particular, land use has long suffered from legal uncertainty due to an overlap of various laws. In order to deal with the conflicts

generated, Congo has recognized the customary land rights of local communities under certain conditions, and those of indigenous populations in an inalienable and perpetual manner. In DRC, on the other hand, property rights remain with the State, and land use can be subject to concessions.

With respect to customary use rights in the private domain of the State, such as a protected area, DRC and Congo have varying regulations. In DRC, concerning forests classified for conservation purposes, Article 16 of the Forestry Code states that local communities can only exercise their use rights in certain areas. In Congo, on the other hand, the consideration of use rights is specific to each type of protected area: in strict nature reserves, all hunting, fishing, or grazing activities are prohibited, whereas these use rights are arranged in wildlife sanctuaries and declared hunting areas (Van Vliet *et al.*, 2017).

To sum up, within the different countries of Central Africa, each country has its own laws. Governance systems are very diverse and not very transparent. Efforts to include all stakeholders in decision-making also differ, as these populations are often sidelined in protected area governance.

### 3. Actors with conflicting and intertwined interests

#### 3.1 Protected area governance stakeholders

The governance of a protected area should be based on multi-stakeholder engagement that involves all key stakeholders. Since the Rio Conference in 1992, there has been a veritable explosion of new actors in the environmental field, including protected areas (Table 2). The multiplicity and superposition of (sub) regional organizations in Africa ought to play an inte-

grative role, but all too often this creates an overlap and the coordination of actions becomes complex (Kakdeu, 2015).

In Central Africa, the implementation of a regional dynamic instigated by CEEAC (Economic Community of Central African States), COMIFAC and the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) should, however, enable interconnection rather than integration, which would be more efficient in the management of protected areas (Ares *et al.*, 2016). Progress has been made in this direction, although actors often continue to prioritize their own private preserves and interests over open and mutually beneficial cooperation.

Table 2 - Typology of protected area governance actors

Actors	Description
Local communities	Rights holders and interest holders: communities within/around the protected area, represented through existing local leadership arrangements.
Private actors	Non-state actors with a significant interest in the socioeconomic impacts of the protected area and any associated conservation and development activities.
Organizations	Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or private sector organizations, whether for-profit or not, that help to ensure the sharing of costs and benefits to mitigate social conflicts.
Local government services	Stakeholders and actors from decentralized government services or decentralized authorities to whom society attributes legal or customary rights to land, water and natural resources.
Government	National agencies including conservation and environmental authorities acting as protected area managers by government agencies.

Source: adapted from Frank & Small (2016).



The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) urges governments to play a leading role to ensure that the natural resources of their countries are exploited for the benefit of their citizens in a sustainable manner (ECA, 2012). The State is indeed the primary actor in promoting the governance of protected areas. In addition to dedicated ministries and specialized government agencies (such as the *Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature* - ICCN, in DRC), various other ministries (agriculture, animal resources, mining, defense and security, education) may collaborate – or not – on biodiversity conservation.

At a more local level, the regions, departments, urban and rural municipalities, conservation services of protected areas and declared hunting areas can be involved in governance, along with the ministries in charge of the environment, water and forests and any other sectoral administration concerned. Decentralization has been institutionalized, to a greater or lesser extent, in most Central African countries.

Technical and financial partners, including the African Parks Network (APN), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), IUCN, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the European Union and the German cooperation agency are supporting various projects and programs at national and regional levels. This support can take different forms, such as grants to local communities for the development of economic activities, assistance to managers, or the organization of consultation mechanisms with local communities, etc. (IUCN-PACO, 2015a).

The term “Organizations” in Table 2 refers to any grouping, association or movement formed by individuals or legal entities for profit or non-profit purposes (Bettati & Dupuy, 1986; Merle, 1982). These include NGOs and ecological associations that contribute to the protection of natural resources. Among these associations is the Tayna Gorilla Reserve (RGT), an association that manages the nature reserve of the same name in DRC (see box in section 4.1).

In addition to the conservation of natural resources, some NGOs are involved in defending human rights or the rights of indigenous peoples. By being involved in governance and decision-making, these NGOs have the opportunity to make their demands

and needs heard. They also ensure the application of governance principles and the respect of international commitments made by governments. It should also be noted that, they are increasingly involved in the preparation of international documents.

In terms of the private sector’s role, this is manifested by the presence of private operators, such as hunting or fishing concessionaires, managers of tourism infrastructure and other authorized economic activities, etc. Thanks to their ability to mobilize financial resources, they ensure the operation and long-term maintenance of associated economic activities.

The plurality of actors generally means a plurality of “representational configurations” and we can therefore see the emergence of power games and influence peddling within governance. In practical terms, the outcomes of governance systems are closely linked to the skills of the members of the management team, who are responsible for adapting a formal framework to a local context that has its own rules, in order to achieve the management objectives of the protected area.

On the one hand, the strict application of official regulations, often in an authoritarian manner, only leads to the exacerbation of conflicts (and even to violence and more or less arbitrary arrests). Non-inclusive management of protected areas, which can involve systematic repression of local residents, may be effective in the short term. However, it does not help to create an enabling environment for their governance in the long term, let alone better protect biological resources. On the other hand, acquiescing to little deals and monetizing compromises invariably lead to the joint corruption of stakeholders. Negotiating and sharing power appears to be the most effective and rewarding solution for all actors (Nguingui, 2003).

### **3.2 Tools to facilitate governance change in protected areas**

Studies were carried out in two protected areas in Cameroon and one in Chad using the SAPA (Social Assessment for Protected Areas) methodology; this tool is presented in Chapter 4. These studies analyze the negative and positive impacts

of the protected areas on local actors. In Benoue National Park (Cameroon), local communities' perceptions of the impact of the protected area on their well-being were used to develop, together with key stakeholders, solutions to the problems of protected area governance.

The analysis also identified the level of interest and influence of each stakeholder group, including those who have little influence on decision-making related to the protected area (women, youth,

minorities, migrants), but who should have more influence for the sake of equity and effectiveness in conservation. The analysis, extended to the two protected areas of BSB Yamoussa (Bouba Ndjida and Sena Oura National Parks), assessed certain aspects of governance as well as the perceptions of the various stakeholders, such as respect for the rights of communities, transparency of the process and circulation of information, as well as participation in decision-making (Table 3).

**Table 3 - SAPA assessment of governance by local communities in three protected areas**

Protected area	Sena Oura (Chad)	Bouba Ndjida (Cameroon)	Benoue (Cameroon)
Type of governance	By the government and shared	By the government and shared	By the government
Established	By the government at the initiative of the communities	Unilaterally by the government	Unilaterally by the government
Management mode	Operational co-management structure	Non-operational co-management structure	Existence of co-management
<b>Governance indicators</b>			
Respect for the rights of the rights holders	2.25	0.43	0.38
Participation in the decision-making process	1.29	0.51	0.77
Transparency and information	1.55	0.87	0.76
Impact mitigation	0.02	0.38	0.11

Note: Governance indicators were assessed on the basis of a survey of households living on the outskirts of protected areas.

The SAPA methodology has helped to improve the quality of the information collected and the ownership of the process by the communities who also wish to take their destiny into their own hands. Consultation of all the stakeholders, including conservation services and local communities, is particularly useful for sharing costs and benefits, disseminating information, promoting dialogue and shared reflection. The importance of a transparent flow of information (who gets what) also was emphasized.

In addition to SAPA, other assessment tools include IMET (Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool) and the Site-level Assessment of Governance and Equity (SAGE; see Chapter 4). One of the lessons learned from the use of these tools is the importance of

clear identification and participation of all stakeholders. Only then can negotiations lead to the development and joint validation of solutions to the problems encountered in the governance of protected areas.

In general, the more effective the participation of local communities in decision-making processes, the better their input into the development of policies relevant to their own development and accountability. It also appears that programs intended to strengthen the governance of protected areas in order for them to gradually become autonomous (economic, social, ecological and institutional sustainability), should be designed to operate for approximately ten years rather than the three years planned for most projects (UICN-PACO, 2012).



## 4. Modes of governance: four categories and options for adaptation

### 4.1. Status of the governance of protected areas in Central Africa

Since 1990, the governance of protected areas in the subregion has been undergoing profound changes (Table 4 and Figure 1). Although centralized

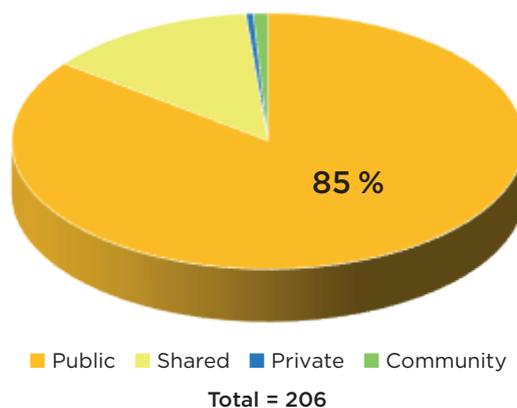
public governance remains the dominant model, it has evolved significantly. In 1990, most countries managed protected areas through a government department. Taking its lead from DRC, a pioneer in this field (1934), several countries have created a state institution with independent management (institute, agency, office): Rwanda (1973), Burundi (1980), Gabon (2002), Equatorial Guinea (2002) and Congo (2012). Currently, the large majority of protected areas are managed by an agency (Figure 2).

Table 4 - Number of protected areas by governance category in Central Africa between 1990 and 2020

Year	Public		Shared		Private	Community
	Ministry	Agency	PPP	Communities		
1990	64	58	0	0	0	0
2020	69	117	26	3	1	2

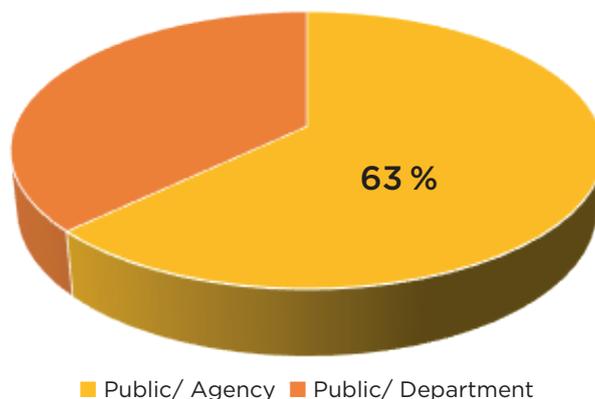
Source: OFAC.

Figure 1 - Distribution of Central African protected areas by governance category in 2020



Source: OFAC.

Figure 2 - Distribution of public governance of protected areas between government departments and agencies



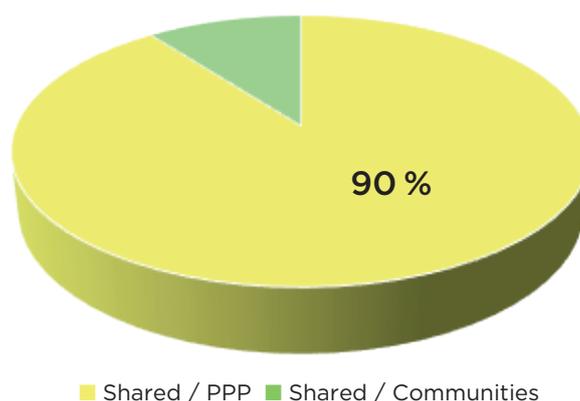
Source: OFAC.

In some cases, private non-profit organizations specialized in protected area management can support public institutions (see Chapter 3). The State, although responsible, receives support (technical and financial) from other actors, or even shares governance and delegates to them all or part of the daily management of certain protected areas.

Overall, for the past several years there has been a gradient of transfer of responsibilities from the public to the private partner, which can take several forms, including shared governance. The governance

of protected areas can be shared between the State and local communities or with private partners (in the form of Public-Private Partnerships - PPP). This form of governance has expanded significantly and is the dominant form in the subregion (Figure 3). DRC has been a PPP pioneer since 2005, with the signing of two agreements for Garamba and Virunga National Parks. At the end of 2020, 14 PPP contracts were in operation and a fifteenth is under negotiation (see Chapter 3), concerning more than 20 protected areas; these PPPs are on a non-profit basis.

Figure 3 - Distribution of shared governance of protected areas between private parties (PPPs) and communities



Source: OFAC.

The sole example of private governance of a protected area seems to be the Lekedi Park in Gabon. The park, which is currently a hunting estate, is managed by a private company, the *Société d'Exploitation du Parc de la Lékédi* (SODEPAL), a

subsidiary of the *Compagnie Minière de l'Ogooué* (COMILOG). It was created to maintain economic activity in the Bakoumba region after the cable car that transported manganese to the Congo stopped operating.

## Tayna Nature Reserve (DRC)

### P. Kakule, Tayna Nature Reserve

Born out of a desire to protect nature, the animals (including gorillas), but also the human inhabitants who depend on natural resources for their survival, Tayna Nature Reserve was created in 1998 on the initiative of the future chief conservation officer of the reserve and two traditional chiefs.

The first phase of the project was conducted in collaboration with the bami, community leaders. Through interviews, surveys and workshops, an inventory of the population's expectations and needs for the reserve was drawn up. Local communities articulated several conditions for the creation of this reserve, including its appropriation by the population and the possibility of acting for the protection of protected species, poverty reduction (thanks to the implementation of development projects, the construction of primary schools, etc.) and the integration of Tayna into the international network of protected areas.

The management of the reserve was entrusted to the Tayna Gorilla Reserve Association (RGT), created by customary chiefs and landowners in 2002. The management model chosen is a community-based management system. The board of directors of the association is made up of local chiefs, bringing together the 21 "landed" chiefs, and reports to the College of Founders, the final decision-maker. In the field, the RGT's actions are carried out by the technical team led by a coordinator. This team consists of about 60 agents spread over different sites, with technical support from ICCN.

Local authorities, such as the political-administrative and customary authorities of the Lubero territory, were involved from the onset and participated in drafting the reserve's management plan with government partners. In the beginning, this authority contributed to easing up some of the tensions that had arisen between some local leaders and project managers.

Tayna Reserve is recognized by the Congolese government as a protected area, on par with a national park. ICCN has a say in the planning of the reserve's activities, and management is entrusted to local communities. The regulations governing the reserve were designed by the stakeholders, namely local communities, traditional chiefs, political-administrative authorities, provincial representatives of government services, ICCN and project managers.

The demarcation of the reserve, done with the communities, was conducted in parallel with the RGT's implementation of support activities for various community structures in the areas of health, assistance to vulnerable people, rehabilitation of agricultural feeder roads, etc. Since the start of the Tayna project, community education and awareness-raising activities have been among the driving forces behind the development of this protected area. The objective is to achieve a better understanding and acceptance of the reserve by local communities. Tayna Community Radio and Television is an example, with two stations broadcasting environmental education programs. Another example is the establishment in 2003 of the *Université de conservation de la nature et développement de Kasugho*, which is responsible for training the daughters and sons of the land in community conservation and integrated conservation development.

Uncertain funding is negatively affecting the reserve's operations, with funding gaps sometimes leads to the abandonment of certain projects, as was the case for the micro-hydro power station. Other threats to the reserve include illegal fishing and hunting, the influence of local leaders on the population for not respecting signed protocols, the looting or destruction of equipment (including radio stations), and the political exploitation of the reserve's activities by local actors. Nevertheless, over the years, RGT has demonstrated the value of its community-based system and has gained the confidence of the government, international conservation organizations (including Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International) and private organizations, which have provided support for the development of the reserve's actions, as well as from local communities.

Currently, the only two protected areas that appear to be under community-based governance are Tayna (see box) and Kisimba Ikobo Nature Reserves, in DRC. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, community-based forest management has been promoted in several Central African countries (Cameroon, Gabon, DRC, etc.), with varying degrees of success (Julve *et al.*, 2007), as well as the involvement of local populations in the management of protected areas (Nguingui, 2004). Twenty years down the line, only a few protected areas can claim community governance or shared governance between the government and rural communities (Table 4 and Figures 1 and 3).

However, the situation is somewhat more nuanced. Without being formally called community governance, alternative models nonetheless are emerging, paving way for greater consideration and involvement of indigenous peoples and local communities in the governance and management of protected areas. It is mainly a matter of shared governance with local communities, and include the Lossi Gorilla Sanctuary in Congo, the Iyondje Bonobo Community Reserve and the Sankuru Nature Reserve in DRC. In other cases, such as the Lake Tele Reserve in Congo, governance is officially in the hands of the public authority, but an entire set of structures and procedures have been put in

place to effectively involve local communities in decision-making (see boxes in section 4.2). All of this is a first step towards officially shared governance, or even governance that could eventually be delegated to rural communities.

The assessment made here corresponds mainly to terrestrial protected areas, which were the first historical models established. Marine protected areas, which are more recent, also have appeared in Central Africa since the end of the 1990s. While the governance of terrestrial protected areas is evolving towards more inclusive models, marine protected areas are all under public governance, thus limiting the possible participation of users of the maritime space.

## 4.2. The most common types of governance in Central Africa

### 4.2.1. Governance by government

Public governance of protected areas has changed significantly over the past few decades. As noted above, a majority of countries have moved from “ministry management” to “agency management”. The creation of independent agencies is supposed to make protected area management more efficient, in particular with regard to finances, but also to give more confidence to donors due to a more transparent use of funds. At present, these institutions have an



improved capacity to mobilize funding, as well as better transparency and accountability. Nevertheless, in the absence of specific studies, it remains difficult to evaluate precisely the pros and cons of the two forms of public governance.

It should be noted here that these two forms of public governance remain centralized forms. Despite the decentralization processes that have been underway for several years in most countries, the governance of protected areas does not seem to be following this trend. To our knowledge, the only case of management by a decentralized state entity is the Obô de Principe Park, which is managed under the supervision of the regional government. Other territories may be moving towards decentralization, such as the Technical Operational Units (referred to by the French acronym, UTOs) set up in Cameroon, with a more or less established form of local governance (see Chapter 1), or rare cases of small protected areas created by local governments (Anonymous, 2019).

Centralized public governance traces back to the colonial era, which featured centralized management and policies that, among other things, excluded indigenous peoples and local communities from natural resource management as they were perceived to be a risk to the resources that the colonists exploited or wished to preserve. Traditional rights of ownership and management of territories that existed prior to the creation of protected areas were not taken into account. This historical form of governance often favors legal and institutional tools of repression and eviction of populations. As a result, conflicts between conservation officers and local communities are recurrent (see Chapter 1). However, this conflictual situation is not inevitable and it is possible to establish more inclusive governance. Some Central African countries have chosen to adopt a government-led governance system that still leaves room for consultation, aiming to better integrate communities and improve management efficiency. This is notably the case in DRC and Congo, although actions towards better shared governance also are being undertaken elsewhere.

In some cases, managers have established mechanisms for conflict resolution and collaboration with local communities, as in Nyungwe National Park in

Rwanda. The administration there promotes environmental information and education, develops joint mechanisms for managing conflicts between communities and the park (illegal activities and animals leaving the park), and allocates 10% of the income generated from tourism in the park to socioeconomic projects chosen jointly by district representatives, park officers and sector officers. Consultation frameworks between the administration and the communities have been set up to provide adequate responses to conflicts arising from illegal activities in the protected area. Park authorities maintain partnerships with local organizations as well as private investors to establish performance contracts related to the implementation of projects that preserve the integrity of the park (Hakizumwami, 2016). Although under the jurisdiction of the State, the welfare of local communities is part of the conservation actions. Since October 2020, Nyungwe Park has switched to a new mode of governance, under a PPP contract with the NGO African Parks, which is committed to continuing these actions.

Elsewhere, administrations and their partners are going even further in sharing governance. Like all Congolese protected areas, the Lake Tele Community Reserve is, by law, under the responsibility of ACFAP (*Agence Congolaise de la Faune et des Aires Protégées*), under the supervision of the Ministry of Forest Economy, Sustainable Development and Environment (French acronym, MEFDDE). The government and WCS signed a memorandum of understanding in 2008 to allow WCS to support the management of the reserve. This management was supposed to involve local communities, notably through management committees (PAPACO, 2011; see box). This approach of co-construction of local consultation and governance bodies should eventually lead to better shared governance, the terms of which have yet to be legally validated. In 2020, the State, in conjunction with the private sector, initiated a new phase in the management of the reserve. The aim is to establish integrated community conservation of the peatland ecosystems and promote ecotourism in the area; the project is financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) via the World Bank and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).

## Lake Tele Community Reserve: local community participation in question

**N. Gami, Consultant anthropologist & P. Oyo, Independent consultant**

Lake Tele Community Reserve (known by its French acronym RCLT), created in 2001 (decree n°2001-220 of 10 May 2001) in Congo, covers an area of 4,389km<sup>2</sup>. It consists mainly of marshy and floodable forests and savannas and dry land. RCLT is included in the national list of sites under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. Currently, it is part of the Lake Tele - Lake Tumba (DRC) landscape, a peatland area sequestering nearly 30 billion tons of carbon (Dargie *et al.*, 2017).

The head of RCLT is a conservation officer appointed by the Minister of Forest Economy (article 9 of the decree creating the reserve). The reserve is formally administered by a management committee and by the same officer (Article 6). WCS provides technical and financial support to the stakeholders in the management of the reserve. Unfortunately, the management committee has never met. To introduce a participatory character to RCLT's governance and management, managers set up three levels of organization:

1. the **Local Management Committee** (LMC), which aims to represent the communities in the management of the reserve, and to inform, educate, communicate and disseminate information on natural resource management. The LMC is composed of people elected by the members of the Natural Resource Management Committees (NRMCS) in each village (Figure 4);

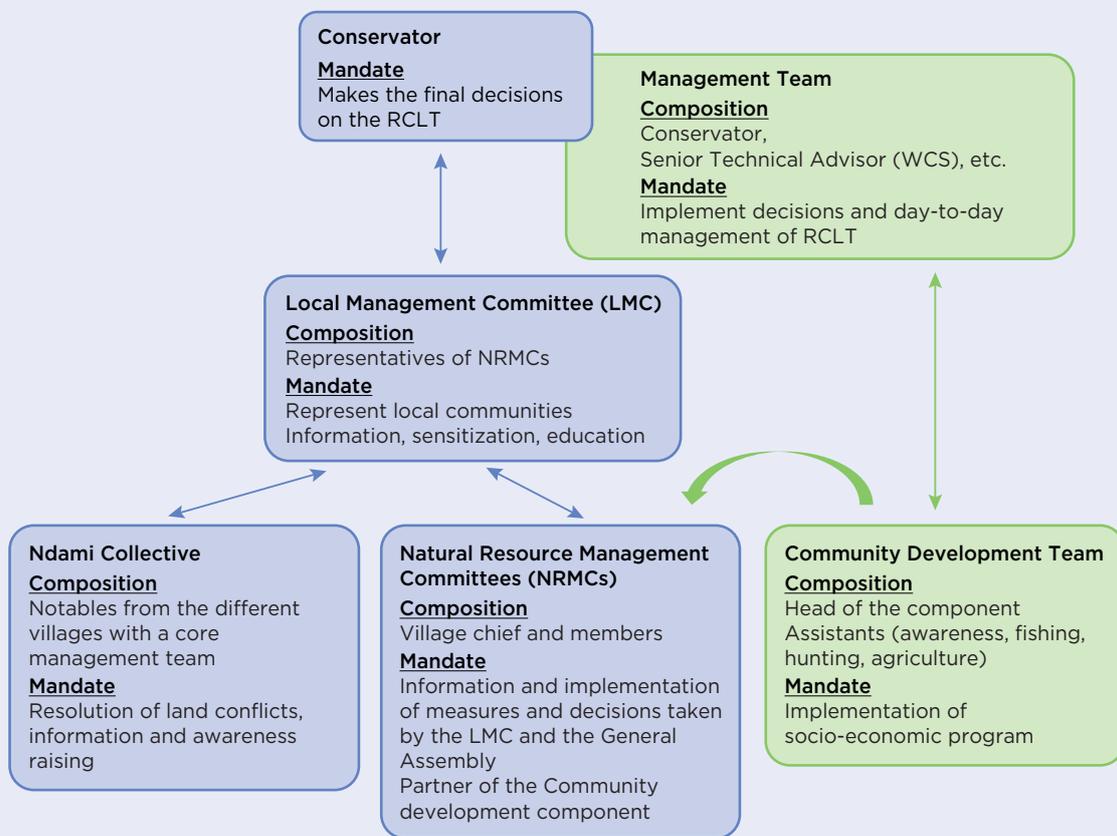
2. the **Ndami Collective** (*ndamis* are notables, or traditional authorities), which works in agreement with the management unit of the reserve to inform communities (such as raising awareness about savanna fires) and, above all, in the resolution of conflicts related to land tenure and good natural resource management. The members of the collective are elected according to the customary rules of the sociocultural groups living in and around the reserve, mainly the Bomitaba. This collective is not formalized administratively, but is highly respected by the inhabitants of the villages concerned;

3-The **RCLT Community Development Team**, composed of several WCS officers, working in harmony with the LMC, the *Ndamis* and the NRMCS. The members of this team helped to organize the NRMCS and the LMC and facilitated understanding of their respective missions. This team facilitates the *Ndami* Collective's missions in the field and helps the NRMCS, the LMC and the *Ndami* to discuss issues related to the proper management of natural resources, particularly fisheries (responsible fishing). The team also supported fishing communities in the development and validation by various political partners (Prefect, sub-Prefect) of a framework for the development and management of wetlands. These governance bodies were set up by reserve managers to fill the gaps in the creation decree, particularly Article 8, which excludes the communities from the management committee. According to this decree, only the conservation officer appointed by the Government has decision-making powers. Local communities only have a consultative role through the LMC, which also is the body that transmits decisions to the NRMCS or conveys their concerns. The management plan for the reserve, once validated by national authorities, will integrate the recommendation on the modification of the said decree, formalizing community governance bodies such as the LMC and the *Ndami* Collective and their roles in decision-making.

**Lake Tele Community Reserve: local community participation in question**

Twenty years after its publication, the decree that established the RCLT is no longer adapted to the current governance context. This text must be modified to adapt to the evolution of management and conservation concerns by including the participation of local communities in decision-making on the reserve, which is real and recognized by all parties. The practice-based approach set up by the managers, outside the traditional institutional framework but validated by the authorities concerned, currently allows local communities to participate in decision-making on the management of the RCLT through the LMC (natural resources). The modification of the creation decree must validate this shared governance, which is already effective in the field.

**Figure 4 - Organization of the current governance of the Lake Télé Community Reserve**



**4.2.2 Shared governance and delegation of authority**

Shared governance in the form of PPPs was promoted in the 1990s by the World Bank. Included in axis 5 of the COMIFAC Convergence Plan (2015-2025), this form of governance involves a larger number of actors (public and private sectors, civil society, technical and financial partners, etc.)

and is a guarantee of its ownership by all stakeholders and a major asset for its success. PPPs could be a solution to some governance problems, which stem from: (i) failure to secure government operating budgets for protected areas; (ii) weak capacity of protected areas to mobilize funding at multiple levels; (iii) worsening threats and pressures on biodiversity; (iv) weak attractiveness and

economic valuation of protected areas; and (v) limitations of external funding related to program cycles (Agnangoye, 2015; Gami, 2016).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, PPP contracts can be broken down into several types, corresponding to different degrees of involvement of the private partner: from governance and management that remain the responsibility of the administration (with technical and financial support from the private partner), to sharing governance and operational management between partners, and to delegating management to the private partner under shared governance. It seems that delegation of governance to the private partner is in no case the norm; it remains, at the minimum, shared.

PPPs currently represent about 12% of protected area governance in Central Africa (Table 4 and Figure 1). A detailed presentation and discussion of PPPs is provided in Chapter 3; only a few specific cases will be noted here. Following the positive results achieved by the partnership established at Odzala-Kokoua National Park (see box), Congo extended this initiative to Nouabale-Ndoki National Park working with

WCS (including the creation of the Nouabale-Ndoki Foundation based on the model of the Odzala-Kokoua Foundation). Another agreement is underway with the NGO *Noé* for Conkouati-Douli National Park.

The Odzala-Kokoua Foundation's governance model allows local communities to make their voices heard and to participate in decision-making (Figure 5). However, this form of governance, concentrated in a few "hands", raises questions of both representativeness and social acceptance. Indeed, in local cultures, decisions are still often made out in the open, in full view of everyone. Furthermore, the fact that only two people, although elected, represent more than 70 associations and several thousand inhabitants implies the establishment of a relationship of trust between the representatives and the inhabitants. This requires good communication, but also the appropriation and development of a certain democratic culture which is not always evident in these societies (Cogels, 2008). Nevertheless, experiences such as that of Odzala-Kokoua contribute to this democratic learning and provide lessons for other partnership governance projects.

### PPP: the example of Odzala-Kokoua National Park (Congo)

#### N. Gami, Consultant anthropologist

Odzala-Kokoua National Park (known by its French acronym PNOK), which was established on 13 April 1935, is one of the earliest protected areas in Congo, and has been a biosphere reserve since 1977. To improve the park's governance and the effectiveness of its management, the Congolese government, through the MEFDDE, signed a PPP agreement in 2010 with APN for the management of PNOK over a 25-year period. APN aims to contribute to the government's efforts regarding the social and economic development of local communities and the development of income-generating activities, but also in activities likely to contribute to the conservation and sustainable management of the park's natural resources.

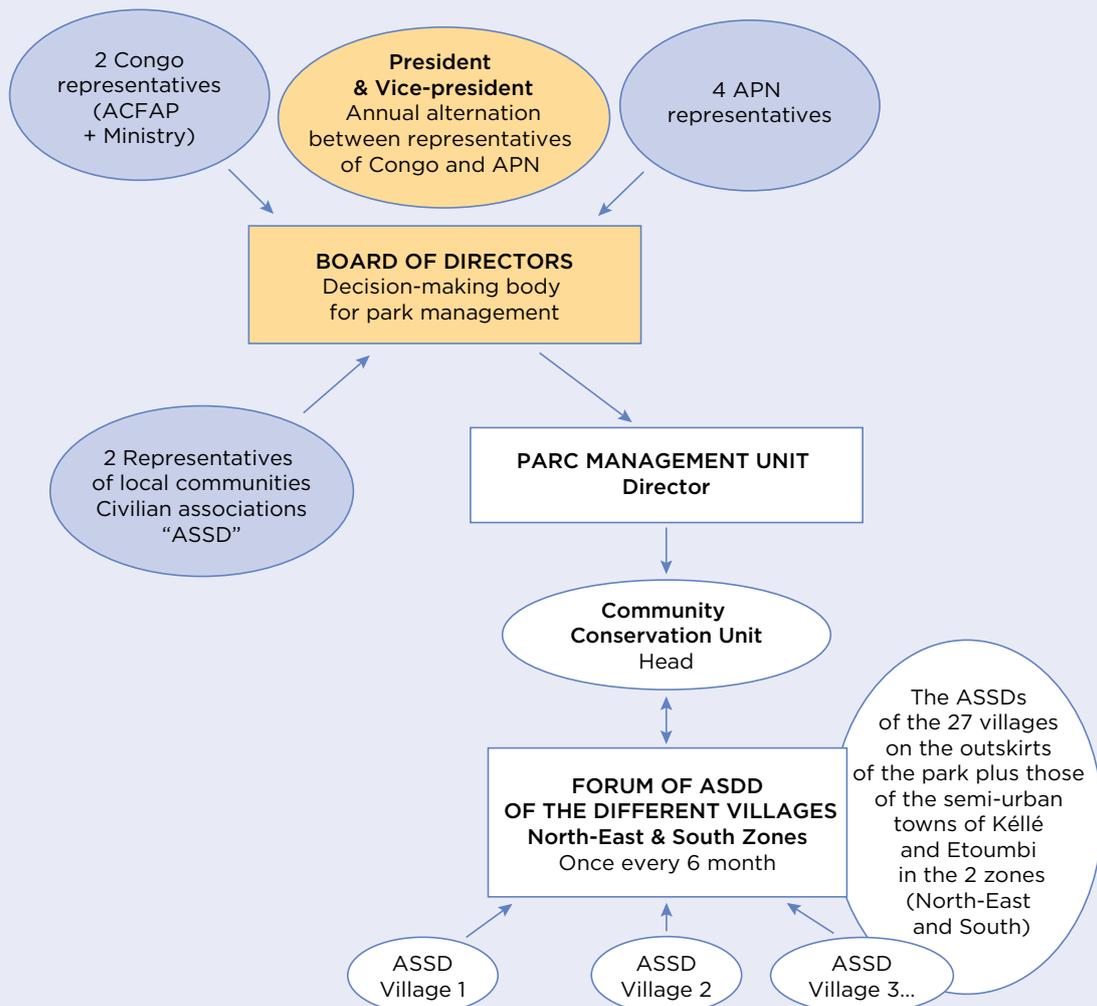
The Odzala-Kokoua Foundation was created to provide funding and management of the park. At the end of 2020, its Board of Directors was made up of representatives of the Ministry, APN and the local communities. The communities living on the outskirts of the park are organized in each village into an Association for Surveillance and Sustainable Development (ASSD), officially recognized by the Congolese authorities (including the sub-prefectures of Mbomo, Etoumbi, Kellé and Makoua). These ASSDs elect two people to represent them on the Foundation's Board of Directors (Figure 5). These representatives are elected democratically at the general assemblies of the village associations after everyone has campaigned. The communities can now have a voice in the management of

**PPP: the example of Odzala-Kokoua National Park (Congo)**

the park and participate in discussions on the selection and funding of micro development projects in the various “villages.”

Two information exchange platforms, called “fora”, bring together the representatives of the 71 ASSDs after each board meeting to exchange information and record complaints and advice. After each forum, the two community representatives convey the complaints of the communities to the Board of Directors and participate in other discussions regarding park management. This partnership approach has made it possible to improve the participation of the various stakeholders, in particular the local communities, in park management and the development of tourism. Indeed, APN works with the Platner Foundation through the Congo Conservation Company (CCC), which has tourism concessions in the park. CCC develops lodges, works with tour operators around the world, and provides training and capacity building for young men and women from local communities in the tourism business. Another benefit for the communities is earning a share of the income generated by tourism and its use in community micro-projects. Nevertheless, communities still require support in the formulation of projects of community interest to make the best use of their share of tourism revenues, with a view to improving their living conditions.

**Figure 5 - Decision-making and management bodies of Odzala-Kokoua Park**



Among the benefits brought by the implementation of shared governance, there is a reduction in the workload between actors, an increase in the skills of the various stakeholders, and a sharing and understanding of each other's perspectives, etc. In terms more directly of conservation, synergy between government representatives and local stakeholders can help create alliances to address unsustainable exploitation of natural resources by entities outside the protected area (Borrini-Fayerabend *et al.*, 2010). However, this assumes that parties involved can get to know each other, work together, and develop a shared vision for the future of the protected area.

Among the protected areas under official shared governance between the State and rural communities, the Lossi Gorilla Sanctuary is a precursor in Central Africa (see box). It is the first protected area created by official decree at the request of local communities - the Mboko Allengui communities. Under Congolese law, as in other countries, the administration in charge of protected areas (ACFAP) holds the governance and management power. The decree provides for a form of partnership (to be defined) with the communities, which could theoretically allow for shared governance. However, the communities are only involved in governance at the pleasure of the administration. This creates an asymmetrical relationship between the two partners from the outset, which can hinder

collaboration; nevertheless, these challenges could be overcome if the official authority is proactive in sharing governance.

Elsewhere, particularly in DRC, local communities also have been behind the emergence of protected areas, such as the Yiondje Bonobo Community Reserve, which came into existence in 2012 after several years of work. As in the case of Lossi, the government conservation agency (ICCN) is the official manager. However, collaborative governance was set up thanks to *La Forêt des Bonobos* Association, created by and for the communities. This association also is supported by two international organizations, the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) and the Wamba Committee for Bonobo Research (WCBR). Another shared governance reserve, Sankuru Nature Reserve, the largest bonobo reserve in DRC, continues to experience heavy deforestation that is endangering the closest relative to humans. These problems appear to be a result of insufficient support and participation on the part of local communities as well as unresolved land conflicts (Volckhausen, 2019).

In the Luki (DRC) and Dimonika (Congo) biosphere reserves, WWF promoted the establishment of shared governance systems. This process has lasted several years and has demonstrated the importance of a protocol to which all stakeholders



## Lossi Gorilla Sanctuary (Congo): current governance

**N. Gami, Consultant anthropologist**

### **An original and innovative story**

In northern Congo spanning 350km<sup>2</sup>, the Lossi Gorilla Sanctuary lies in the south of the Odzala-Kokoua National Park. Between 1992 and 1997, a lowland gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*) habituation experiment took place, supported by Central African Forest Ecosystems program (ECOFAC), funded by the European Union (Gami, 2003).

The site chosen covers clan lands of the Mboko Alengui communities. These have a very strong sense of land ownership, managed by the rights holders. Hence, rules based on customary law set out the terms of inheritance or land appropriation by individuals. The gorilla habituation pilot experiment, in interaction with foreign researchers and with the support of an anthropologist, led to the creation in Congo, for the first time, of a protected area at the request of the local community owning the land (1996).

This local community is explicitly involved in the management of the gorilla sanctuary, including decision making and the sharing of revenues generated by ecotourism. The modalities of participation - a first in Congo - are specified in Decree No. 2001-222 of 10 May 2001, establishing the sanctuary (Articles 3 and 11). Article 11 stipulates in particular: "A memorandum of understanding sets out the forms of involvement of the local community, the partnership model to be put in place and the nature of the benefits derived by the village communities in the management of the sanctuary".

### **What has become of this pilot experiment in the Congo?**

Unfortunately, following the devastating effects of the Ebola epidemics, the communities now feel abandoned. Indeed, in December 2001, the first Ebola hemorrhagic fever epidemic in the Congo broke out in the Districts of Mbomo and Kellé. Several more outbreaks followed until 2005, resulting in the deaths of more than 80 local people, as well as gorillas and chimpanzees (OMS, 2021). These outbreaks led to the loss of the habituated gorilla group, which was named "Apollo". This group was the sanctuary's main tourism attraction, bringing in significant revenue for the communities.

Following these epidemics, the support needed to sustain this pilot experience disappeared. The primatology researchers left the area and moved to the outskirts of the sanctuary, and the financial support that the project initially received dried up. A government-appointed conservation officer oversees the Sanctuary, but there is a serious lack of financial and logistical resources to revitalize the site. And shared governance is at a standstill.

The Lossi Sanctuary is a good example of the lack of long-term vision and support needed for the establishment of shared, or even community, governance of some protected areas in Central Africa. This sanctuary needs to be revitalized through financial and technical support to restore the confidence of the Mboko Alengui community and enable them to reclaim the future of the site. While a minimum of financial resources is required, support to local communities is particularly important in terms of institutions, governance, management and planning, the resumption of the habituation of gorilla groups and the revival of tourism activities. The community cannot face all of these challenges alone.

adhere. These experiences have led WWF to develop a guide for managers and policy makers to help them develop shared governance systems in protected areas (WWF, 2013).

One of the main expected outcomes of all these shared local governance projects is a change in the behavior of local communities, leading to greater acceptance of conservation actions and protected areas; shared governance of natural resources can be more effective than governance that excludes rural communities (Kairu *et al.*, 2021). However, this objective faces several difficulties, including the expectation of tangible benefits that would enable communities to escape the extreme poverty in which they are trapped. Moreover, in many cases, the populations concerned take a wait and see approach at best. Resistance to proposed changes is frequent, and generally only a few leaders support them.

The forms of shared governance that have been set up in the subregion in recent years can be seen as an opportunity to collaborate and strengthen the skills of those sharing the responsibility, namely local communities. The Lossi experience, as well as other similar experiences that followed, shows that the inclusion of communities requires, in particular, time and support in terms of training and management (preparing even a simple management plan or a business plan cannot be improvised). Special support in terms of the sustainable development of the protected area's biodiversity also is needed, whether this involve ecotourism (see Chapter 8), the development of ecosystem services (carbon, watershed protection) or the use of certain natural resources (when this is tolerated). In too many cases, communities are being led to believe that they can expect benefits from the establishment of protected areas, but they are not being provided with the means or support to realize these expectations.

These obstacles can only be overcome with medium to long-term institutionalized support from the State and development partners (planning, organization, legal recognition, law enforcement, information and training, etc.). Governance and local development projects cannot be considered without a link to national planning for sustainable development and land use, nor without support from national structures. Devolution of responsibilities

cannot mean abandonment; structural reforms cannot “rest on the shoulders of farmers alone” (Joiris & Bigombé Logo, 2008).

#### 4.2.3 Private governance

Private governance is the granting of “control” and/or “ownership” of protected areas to private entities or individuals (see section 3.1). In Central Africa, land is generally collectively owned, and it is the State's responsibility to delegate governance. These private actors may include individuals or conservation NGOs, who purchase and privatize land for natural resource conservation. These actors also may have financial interests in these protected areas. They can effectively develop ecotourism activities but also benefit from taxes and fees related to their land (Fouth *et al.*, 2017).

In the subregion, the only protected area under private governance is Lekedi Park (see section 4.1), but small areas also may be linked to this form of governance, such as arboretums created by private initiatives (in Burundi, for example). Apart from protected areas *stricto sensu*, hunting zones, dedicated to the sustainable exploitation of large fauna through sport hunting, make it possible to examine models of private governance - or those that are close to it - and to draw lessons from them for the benefit of protected areas (Table 5). Indeed, ZICs (the French acronym for *Zones d'Intérêt Cynégétique*, or zones of hunting interest) are a crucial element in the development of the large fauna management network, especially in Cameroon and CAR (see Chapter 1).

These ZICs are usually leased by private parties, often expatriate individuals or companies, or even by rural communities. While the governance of these ZICs is legally a matter of “shared governance” with the government, it is often *de facto* privatized. Indeed, apart from the specifications formulated by the public party, the private party often has a great deal of room of leeway at the decision-making level.

Generally speaking, private governance is seen by some protected area managers as a source of problems, insofar as field experiences have shown, particularly in North Cameroon, that some private operators often do not respect their terms of reference. Moreover, this mixture of control and ownership leaves much open to interpretation (Calaque, 2017).



Table 5 - Governance and management of hunting areas in Central Africa

Country	Type of governance or management	Mode (denomination)	Features	Strengths	Weaknesses	Source
Cameroon, North	Shared governance <sup>1</sup> of hunting	Private (ZIC)	5-year lease, renewable. Specifications are limited to payments and instructions on many of the infrastructures (roads and buildings). “The leaseholder must manage the area as a good environmentalist, with the constant objective of finding the right trophy to satisfy the clients while preserving and maintaining the wildlife capital at an optimal level.”	High level of investment thanks to the long leasing period (>>5 years).  Autonomy of management with the possibility of a good quality of management.	Little control over the quality of management.  Image of “little white king”  Terms of reference that do not include other land uses (ecosystem services such as carbon credit, other forms of tourism, etc.).  Majority of areas (heavily) degraded (see map chapter 1).	Lescuyer <i>et al.</i> , 2016 <sup>2</sup>
	Shared governance	Communal (ZIC-C)	Management contracted out to the private sector.	See above (private mode)	Areas with high human pressure, very marginal in terms of wildlife potential, highly degraded (see map chapter 1)	
	Shared governance	Community (ZIC-GC)	Almost all of them without activity (see map chapter 1).	Diversification of the image.		
Cameroon, South	Delegated hunting management	Private (ZIC)	Hunting activity is superimposed on forestry, the real managers of the area being the forestry companies.	This is a secondary activity, which also explains its viability, as the management of the area is the responsibility of the forestry companies.	Presence of the leaseholder ≤3 months per year.	Lescuyer <i>et al.</i> 2016 <sup>2</sup> , MINFOF 2012
	Delegated hunting management	Community (ZIC-GC)		Good image of the communities.  Areas with some wildlife potential.	Virtually no wildlife management	
Congo	Delegated hunting management	Private (DC)	The forestry industry is the dominant activity in the area.			UNEP-WCMC & IUCN 2021



Country	Type of governance or management	Mode (denomination)	Features	Strengths	Weaknesses	Source
Gabon	Delegated hunting management	Private (DC)	Sport hunting closed			UNEP-WCMC & IUCN 2021
CAR, North/East	Shared governance	Private (ZC)	At present, almost all are inactive. Recent decline in wildlife potential.	Large areas. Potential to open up to other land uses (ecosystem services, vision tourism, etc.)	Little control over the quality of management. Image of "little white king". Need to open up to other land uses (ecosystem services such as carbon credit, other forms of tourism, etc.). Level of degradation.	Roulet <i>et al.</i> 2008 <sup>2</sup>
	Shared governance	Community (ZCV)	Majority not active. Recently reduced wildlife potential. Governed by a tripartite memorandum of understanding (State, community, hunting guide), valid for 10 years.	Areas near national parks. Before the crisis (2013) with some economic potential (>140,000 €/year).	Slowness in opening up to other land uses (ecosystem services such as carbon credit, other forms of tourism, etc.). Despite the potential before the crisis, management costs far exceeded the benefits. Level of degradation.	Roulet <i>et al.</i> 2008 <sup>2</sup> , Bouche <i>et al.</i> 2009
CAR, South/West	Delegated hunting management	Private (ZC)	The forestry industry is the dominant activity in the area. Presence of the leaseholder ≤3 months per year.		Little wildlife management.	Roulet <i>et al.</i> 2008 <sup>2</sup>
	Delegated hunting management	Community (ZCV)	Same for private.		Little wildlife management.	Roulet <i>et al.</i> 2008 <sup>2</sup>
DRC	Delegated hunting management	Private (DC)	Large area, ICCN data (2021) suggest even more sites (27), however inactive. Overlaps with other land uses.		High level of degradation with little wildlife potential	ICCN 2021 UNEP-WCMC & IUCN 2021
Chad	Delegated hunting management	Private (DC)	Large areas with relatively low wildlife density	Wildlife potential, integration with Greater Zakouma	Little control over the quality of management.	UNEP-WCMC & IUCN 2021

DC: hunting estate (from the French *Domaine de Chasse*); ZC: hunting zone (*Zone Cynégétique*); ZCV: village hunting zone (*Zone Cynégétique Villageoise*); ZIC: zone of hunting interest (*Zone d'Intérêt Cynégétique*); ZIC-C: communal ZIC (*Zone d'Intérêt Cynégétique-Communale*); ZIC-GC: community managed ZIC (*Zone d'Intérêt Cynégétique-Gestion Communautaire*). French acronyms have been kept as they are widely used in the countries.

<sup>1</sup>: Shared governance means, in fact, freedom of decision making on the part of the lease holder. This is mainly due to the duration of the lease, which is generally very long (>> 5-10 years) and the absence of the State in the vicinity. This gives the lease holder a large flexibility in decision making that goes beyond the mere responsibility of management itself.

<sup>2</sup>: The hunting areas in Cameroon and CAR, unlike those of Congo, Gabon and DRC, are not included in the World Database of Protected Areas (WDPA; UNEP-WCMC & IUCN, 2021).

## Mbou-Mon-Tour: an example of community biodiversity governance in DRC

V. Omasombo and J.-C. Bokika-Ngawolo, MMT, V. Narat, CNRS

The Congolese NGO Mbou-Mon-Tour (MMT) operates mainly in the North Bateke chiefdom, Bolobo Territory, Mai-Ndombe Province (DRC). Following local observations of dwindling animal resources, this NGO was created in 1997, initially as a development NGO, to set up alternative subsistence activities. In 2001, MMT focused on the conservation of an emblematic species: the bonobo (*Pan paniscus*), whose presence was confirmed in 2005 by WWF.

The initiators of the project were villagers who either were from the area originally or were living there. After experiencing a great deal of criticism and mistrust from various “classic” conservation actors, MMT gradually succeeded in becoming a key player by proposing an innovative model for the conservation of bonobos in DRC and, more generally, of great apes in Central Africa.

It quickly became apparent that the local communities were not in favor of creating a reserve or of extending the Tumba-Lediima reserve, as they wished to prevent the area from becoming a classified forest under the Congolese forestry code and being shifted to central governance. In order to be able to create a community conservation area, MMT relied on the Congolese forestry code, and in particular article 22, which stipulates: “A local community may, at its request, obtain as a forest concession all or part of the protected forests among those usually owned by custom”. The objective of creating this “forest concession” was community biodiversity conservation and not artisanal timber exploitation, as is often proposed for the creation of community forests.

The creation process lasted approximately ten years, in parallel with the progress made in the production of regulatory texts relating to the modalities of allocation and management of Local Community Forest Concessions (LCFC). The decree setting out the terms and conditions of allocation was signed in 2014, and the ministerial order specifying the terms and conditions management was signed in 2016. In 2017, the Governor of the Mai-Ndombe Province signed the decrees granting the status of “LCFCs for bonobo conservation” to six villages in the area, collectively named the Mbali River LCFCs, for a total area of 18km<sup>2</sup> instead of the 500km<sup>2</sup> originally requested.

The boundaries, management rules and major orientations of these LCFCs were defined by the villagers themselves at a general assembly. Participatory community governance was established, and in 2020 the inhabitants of the villages concerned elected the members of the three governance bodies from among their population. The Management Committee is the executive and technical body in charge of the daily management of the Mbali River LCFC, in accordance with the resolutions and orientations of the General Assembly to which it reports. The Monitoring Committee is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the management activities of the forest concession. The Committee of Elders is the body for consultation, prevention and settlement of conflicts related to the management, use and operation of the concession and the sharing of the resulting benefits. Prior to the establishment of these committees, MMT brought together traditional chiefs and representatives of the local population to define the rules of management, in accordance with legal requirements and in respect of local customs and practices.

Following this initiative, several neighboring villages have asked MMT to replicate the process. This could lead to a national network of LCFCs promoting the conservation of bonobos and biodiversity in general.



How in effect can it be ensured that the private partner, who has different interests from those of the government, will be able to play its role as a “good” manager of large wildlife and the environment in which they live, while developing a profitable economic activity? This question mirrors one raised previously in forestry, which has given rise to legislation on sustainable forestry and third-party certification (Lescuyer, 2006).

The objectives of ZICs, and especially community-managed ZICs, concern the development of sport hunting and a better distribution of revenues related to this activity (Van Vliet *et al.*, 2017). In Cameroon, the adoption of participatory management as a strong focus of forest policy has led to the establishment of a number of pilot community-management initiatives. Notwithstanding the relatively complex process of creating community-managed ZICs, their establishment has had the advantage, particularly in southern Cameroon, of providing communities with a better structure for wildlife and income management, of encouraging the consideration of minorities and aspects related to female representation in wildlife management, of facilitating their awareness of the challenges of sustainable wildlife management, and of generating tangible financial benefits within the communities, which are used for the implementation of development projects. However, this initiative has weaknesses, such as the low capacity for monitoring and community ownership in the implementation of micro-projects (supply of animal proteins, aquaculture, beekeeping, etc.), the low level of collective action (individualism is still high) and the lack of transparency in the management of the benefits.

#### **4.2.4 Governance by indigenous peoples and local communities**

Introduced in the 1980s, this type of governance advocates a participatory approach to biodiversity conservation and raises the issue of the real power granted to local and indigenous populations. These communities may have different profiles, for example they may be sedentary or mobile, with customary and/or legal rights over the area concerned. The holding of rights, responsibility and authority by communities, through agreed rules, in effect can be quite complex. Multi-level governance, coupled with the political instability found in many Central African countries, also constitutes a major obstacle to the effective involvement of local communities alongside other conservation actors.

However, there are several examples of individuals, social groups and communities working together for the sustainable use of natural resources (Nianogo, 2010). In 2020, two protected areas benefited from community governance: Tayna (see box in section 4.1) and Kisimba Ikobo, both in DRC. However, other conservation initiatives are being developed through community forestry, which allows governance and management of forests to be assigned to rural communities. Using these legal provisions, various forests are being or have been conceded to communities for conservation and enhancement of forest ecosystem services, in Cameroon but especially in DRC. This is the case of the Mbali River forest, developed by the NGO Mbou-Mon-Tour (see box). This type of initiative, driven from the outset by the rural communities themselves, can inspire the creation of community-based protected areas.

## 5. Challenges related to the implementation of protected area governance in Central Africa

To tackle biodiversity loss in Central Africa, reforms are needed to improve the governance of protected areas (Zognou, 2020; COMIFAC-JICA, 2020). As we have seen, this governance is evolving, with an increasing mobilization of technical and financial partners through PPPs and a timid sharing of responsibilities with rural communities.

Biodiversity conservation cannot be managed in a disembodied way, and it involves a multitude of situations that must be managed on a case-by-case basis and the inclusion of local stakeholders (Boissière & Doumenge, 2008; Borrini-Feyerabend *et al.*, 2014a). However, very often, strict conservation is the main management tool and governance remains in the hands of centralized state entities. Highly centralized institutions want to maintain their power over territories and resources; they often are reluctant to decentralize and devolve governance. This reflects an apparent gap between the rhetoric of participatory management and the reality of governance in many protected areas (Petursson & Vedeld, 2017).

Paradoxically, any policy of decentralization and devolution of responsibilities also requires a strong central power. However, this power must be exercised in other ways, by setting a legal and regulatory framework, by specifying the main principles of sustainable development and the framework for land use planning, by supporting local actors and by playing its role of monitoring-evaluation-sanction, etc. On the other hand, the legal status of protected areas and their ecological importance must be considered. Indeed, it could be quite possible that the State retains governance and management responsibility for protected areas of national interest (such as national parks), but favors the devolution of responsibilities for protected areas of more local interest or with a conservation status allowing the exploitation of natural resources by local communities (protected areas in categories IV and VI of the IUCN classification, for example).

The development of PPPs allows weak states to meet their national and international commitments by injecting more technical and financial resources

into protected area management. Private partners have understood that it is necessary to guarantee the application of laws but also to set up mechanisms allowing local communities to benefit from the resources of protected areas (financial and other). However, this support should, on the one hand, enable public services to strengthen their skills and operating capacities and, on the other hand, facilitate the devolution of certain responsibilities to local communities. The ultimate objective is to strengthen the skills, capacities and responsibilities of national actors in the long term (COMIFAC, n.d.; see also Chapter 3).

The training of protected area managers also is an important issue, as it largely determines the effectiveness of management and its ability to adapt to contexts. Significant efforts are still required to overhaul staff training and to make it more consistent with environmental and social conditions and to the responsibilities of the various job positions. In addition, there is a need to improve working conditions to attract and retain staff.

In Central Africa, public service managers are, for the most part, engineers or technical staff of water, forests and hunting departments. Their capacity to use protected area management tools still need to be improved with regard to the development of management plans and business plans, monitoring the implementation of management plans, assessing management effectiveness, fundraising, partnership development, management (staff, equipment, finances), monitoring of bio-ecological indicators, etc. This situation is exacerbated by a lack of teachers specializing in the management of wildlife and protected areas.

Web-based MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), such as those offered by IUCN (IUCN-PAPACO, 2021), are important complements to traditional training, but they do not replace on-the-job training. Similarly, specialized training programs offered by universities and engineering schools do not offer enough internships to students, which would allow them to gain experience in the field and discover their future profession in a more concrete manner (IUCN-PACO, 2015b). Moreover, the training of these state managers does not yet include enough social sciences or the teaching of facilitation and participatory management tools.

The greater involvement of rural and indigenous communities in the governance and management of protected areas also requires appropriate teaching. In particular, these lessons must be more widely co-constructed with the learners and integrate their own knowledge and skills. Even more than for managers in administrations, continuous training and regular support programs are needed, which requires training to be imagined in a totally different way from the basic training that is usually offered.

## **6. Proposals to improve the governance of Central African protected areas**

### **6.1 The need for appropriate and operational legislation**

The legal framework for the governance of protected areas dates back to the colonial period (Bigombe Logo *et al.*, 2020). Various founding texts (London Treaty of 1900, 1947 decree regulating hunting, etc.) established the sovereignty of the colonial State over wildlife management and the consecration of protected areas, in the modern sense of the term (Kamto, 1991), as instruments for the preservation of species and the conservation of biological diversity. After independence, the Central African States adopted legislation which, although new, was still largely inherited from these old texts.

The Rio Summit in 1992 and the holding of several World Parks Congresses have created favorable conditions for the integration and participation of populations and civil society in the governance of protected areas. These texts reaffirm the sovereignty of States in the management of protected areas, while strictly regulating the rights granted to biodiversity conservation organizations and to local and indigenous populations: conditions of collaboration for protected area management, recognition of customary use rights, participation in the governance protected area institutions, etc.

Currently, these structural schemes are revealing their limitations (Nguiffo & Talla, 2010), as we have seen in the case of the Lake Télé Reserve. On the one hand, they are failing to halt the decline of wildlife, continued poaching and the erosion of biodiversity.

On the other hand, they do not allow protected areas to respond effectively to the legitimate expectations of States and local communities. This situation can be explained by several factors, such as the increase in populations (notably migrations) on the edges or in protected areas, the advisory and non-decisional role attributed to certain organizations from indigenous populations and local communities, and the conflicts that still persist between certain communities and managers.

The effective governance of protected areas in Central Africa therefore requires a thorough overhaul, with revision and adaptation of the related legal framework. This process must promote and fine tune the framework for shared governance of protected areas between States, biodiversity conservation organizations, civil society and local and indigenous populations. Among other things, the reform should translate into the implementation of simplified and coherent statute laws and by-laws that are customized and operational. This new approach must include the recognition of traditional legal heritage, the development of an approach to biodiversity conservation based on the respect for human rights, and the revamping of the regional institutional coordination of protected areas management in the subregion. In the context of the implementation of shared governance or governance by indigenous peoples and local communities, it is important to ensure that all representative bodies of these populations acquire a legal status so that their participation is formally recorded in the statutes of the protected area.

### **6.2 Respect for human rights and an increased role for communities in the governance of protected areas**

This approach is based on the premise that incorporating internationally recognized human rights into biodiversity conservation programs and activities is a solid foundation for effective biodiversity conservation outcomes (Campese *et al.*, 2009). It is an approach that challenges the structural conflict between protected areas and local and indigenous communities (Greiber *et al.*, 2009). It makes local and indigenous communities the key actors and ultimate beneficiaries of biodiversity conservation.

This inclusive conservation is promoted and supported today by the Conservation and Human Rights Initiative, the Secretariat of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the GEF-7, as an alternative to the classic model of conservation versus people.

The human rights referred to here are standards that aim to protect people from serious political,

legal, social and other abuses. It is essential to ensure that these rights (Table 6), whether fundamental, procedural or customary, are systematically taken into account whenever they may be affected, either in relation to conservation objectives or in the event of tensions or conflicts between “rights holders” and “duty bearers” in biodiversity conservation activities.

**Table 6 - Human rights affected by biodiversity conservation**

Fundamental rights	The rights of indigenous peoples
Life	Traditional lands, territories and resources
Health	Self-determination
Adequate standard of living including food	Land and resource management
Water	Development and equitable benefit sharing
Development	Traditional knowledge and indigenous heritage
Practice of own culture	Compensation
Work	Emerging issues
Property	Environmental rights (intergenerational)
Self-determination and use of natural resources	Protection against forced evictions
Procedural rights	Access to land/basic resources
Information	Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)
Participation	
Access to justice and redress	

Source: adapted from Greiber *et al.* (2009).



In order progress further, indigenous people and local communities must become aware of their rights and, in parallel, of the challenges of protected area conservation. These populations need to know their rights better so that they can make their voices heard. This will allow them to become actors of change for the implementation of governance where they would be able to play a full role. In addition, environmental and conservation awareness helps to improve the dialogue between conservationists and rural communities, and ideally to build acceptance of the need for a protected area. In the long run, this may have the effect of limiting conflicts between managers and these populations.

### **6.3 Rebuilding institutional coordination at all territorial levels**

The improvement of the governance of protected areas also requires the reorganization of the regional institutional coordination of the Central African protected area network. Better coordination of the work of the various cooperation actors involved in protected area complexes (often transboundary) is a guarantee of efficiency and success. For example, in the case of the BSB Yamoussa Complex, the two protected areas concerned (Bouba-Ndjida and Sena Oura) have a different type of governance (shared; see section 3.2) from that of the complex itself (state). Faced with such a situation, transboundary cooperation and coordination are needed to achieve the objectives of each protected area at the individual level and the complex at the binational level.

A wide range of actors are involved in the governance and management of protected areas. This abundance of actors, if not well synergized, can reduce the effectiveness of regional cooperation actions due to redundant or contradictory actions. The establishment and/or strengthening of consultation and coordination frameworks at various levels (meetings, sharing of experiences, legal agreements, etc.) is essential to better coordinate actions, harmonize interventions and seek synergy between all stakeholders.

Administrative decentralization, which is a slow but necessary process for integrated natural resource management, is still in its infancy in the subregion and needs active support from regional actors; the

same applies to the devolution of responsibilities to the right territorial level, from local to national. The establishment of decentralized territorial authorities and the empowerment of local actors (communities, etc.) should make it possible to avoid duplication of efforts by encouraging a search for complementarity and by orienting interventions according to the defined objectives. This would allow for a progressive empowerment of local actors in the management of protected areas, the harmonization of interventions and approaches, and the optimization of the mobilization of human, technical and financial resources.

### **6.4 Stakeholder support**

As we have seen previously, technical, material, financial and human support over the medium-long term is key to setting up a governance that is better shared between various stakeholders. Project-based programming spanning three to five years is not adapted to this need and is even counterproductive. Public planning, cooperation agreements, actions to support rural communities, etc., must be programmed over a minimum of ten years. Supporting the establishment of a community-based protected area or the involvement of indigenous populations in the shared management of a protected area cannot be considered in the context of short projects. Governments and supporting financial institutions need to reform their procedures, while maintaining adaptive guidance based on regular assessments.

Another element that we have mentioned concerns training. In order to facilitate the evolution of protected area governance towards more equity and justice, the development of training, whether through workshops, internships, or short courses for example, must be considered. The training courses dedicated to future protected area managers, whether they are university courses or not (for example, short MOOC-style courses or other types), can be improved in a number of ways. It appears that new graduates lack practical experience and knowledge of the field, knowledge of how to manage the budgets they will be responsible for and understanding of relations with other stakeholders. Moreover, the involvement of rural actors, who are often poorly trained or even illiterate (but in possession of incomparable knowledge

and skills), requires an in-depth rethinking of the training system so that it becomes more participatory and applied, with a carefully planned pedagogical progression, adapted to local contexts (see the description of the Tayna reserve initiative in section 4.1). Finally, continuous training targeted to the needs of managers and other personnel must be implemented, along with plans to help skills progress.

## 7. Conclusion

In Central Africa, we have seen that the governance systems of protected areas are complex, based on complex interactions between institutional structures and actors with divergent and overlapping interests and norms. Over the past thirty years, these systems have evolved significantly, although in different ways. Public governance is now leaning more towards governance by an independent agency rather than a ministerial department. Shared governance has developed but mainly in the framework of public-private partnerships with international organizations. The sharing of responsibilities with local communities is being tested in various sites but is still in its infancy. Finally, one protected area with private governance and two with community governance were identified.

Thus, the governance of protected areas in the subregion is undergoing profound change. Central Africa is now at a crossroads in finding the right

governance model reflecting the realities of the variety of human and ecological contexts. Although there is still a long way to go, in some cases it is increasing welfare and social equity for people and significantly reducing threats and pressures on protected areas.

What appears to be a fundamental condition today is the pursuit of reforms within governance systems so that they match local contexts. Given the considerable weight of traditional customs and practices and the esteem in which the institution of traditional chieftaincy is held, as well as the dogma of religion within communities bordering protected areas, it is desirable that reform action be put in place to make traditional norms more compatible with the requirements of modern governance of protected areas (Bigombe Logo, 2012; Kwesi, 2007).

Since the 1990s, international institutions such as the World Bank have been encouraging the establishment of governance systems that include all stakeholders (notably shared governance). In reality, shared governance was developed in the PPP framework with international actors, but has been slow to take shape with rural communities. Despite the commitments made by governments, many protected areas are still under government governance (85%), or have government representatives on their governance body (almost 100%). Cameroon, CAR, Sao Tome and Principe and Chad only have protected areas whose governance is a centralized state model (ministry); the other countries have switched to a governance by agency model.





However, the growth of shared private and community governance systems is involving a greater number of actors and constitutes a step towards the better integration of protected areas in multi-actor territorial management. Shared governance can be observed within ZICs and involves private actors but also communities and decentralized administrations. Private governance as such remains almost non-existent (except, in fact, in some ZICs), which is a major difference with southern Africa, for example (Bauer *et al.* 2020). As for community governance of protected areas, it is slowly emerging, particularly in DRC and Congo, which are pioneers in this regard.

Whether the model in question is one of shared governance or governance by indigenous peoples and local communities, models that include these communities hold the greatest potential for positive impacts on natural resource conservation and on the well-being of people. By taking their needs and rights into account, the risks of conflicts between these communities and protected areas are limited. When

local communities become actors in the governance and management of protected areas, other governance actors can benefit from their know-how and their hands-on knowledge of the natural environment and its specific characteristics.

It is not enough to engage in dialogue with the local communities. It is essential to give legitimacy to their voice by supporting them in the development of the skills they need to participate in the protected area governance, to officially recognize their status as rights holders, and to give them a role in the decision-making process. As we have seen in this chapter, many protected areas are currently moving in this direction, but none has proven yet to propose a sufficiently successful system in terms of effective local communities' involvement. Enabling these communities to participate effectively in the governance and decision making of protected areas that are part of their living environment continues to be a major challenge for the countries of Central Africa.



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