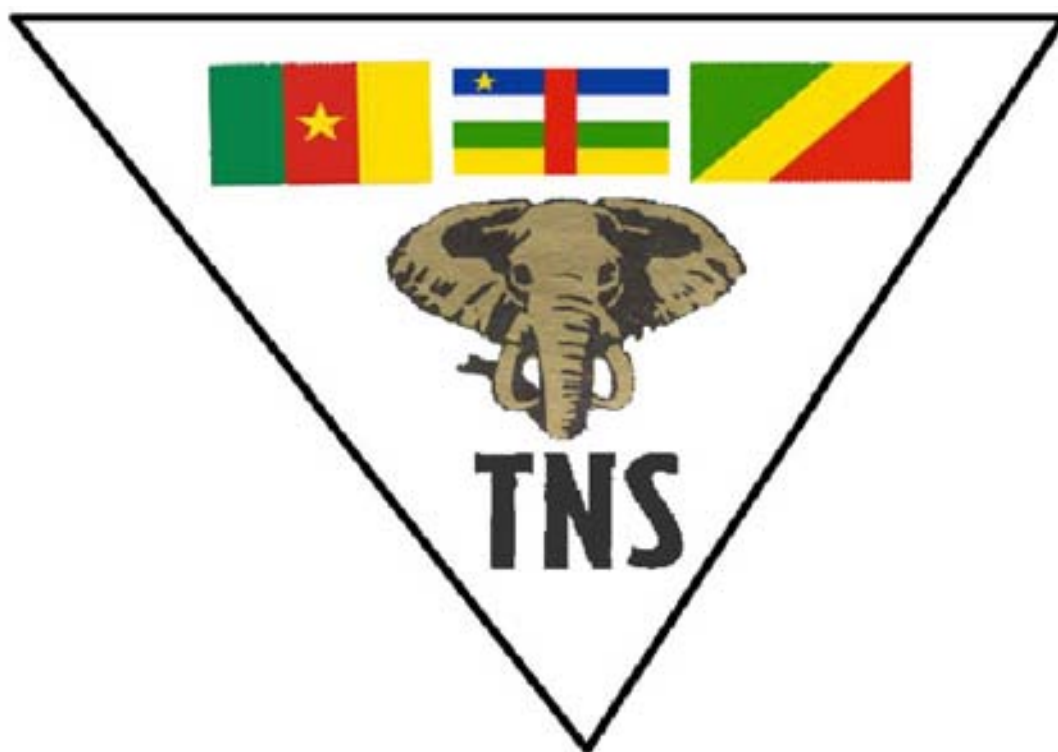


## Case Study 2 - Landscape Land Use Planning : Lessons Learned from the Sangha Tri National Landscape

*Leonard Usongo*



### Introduction

In December 2005, partners of the Sangha Tri-National Landscape (Tri-National de Sangha – TNS), (primarily WWF, WCS, GTZ and national government forest administration staff from Cameroon..., Central African Republic (CAR) and the Republic of Congo) held meetings to discuss thematic issues to be captured in the Land-Use Plan (LUP) document for the TNS Landscape. The purpose of the consultative process funded by USAID/CARPE was to allow key partners to exchange views on the best strategies to address the multitude of conservation challenges in the Landscape. The meetings promoted dialogue and collaboration especially among the national government forest administration staffs of the three countries. The success of the implementation of the land-use plan strongly hinges on the level of collaboration among national government officials such as the conservators working together to address hunting, the bushmeat trade and other cross-border conservation issues.

### Relevance of the land-use plan

The LUP provides broad management guidelines for implementation of activities promoting sustainable management of natural resources with the participation of all local stakeholders. The document describes forest vegetation types and other bio-geographical features, land uses and management strategies as applied by the different actors in the different segments within the TNS Landscape. It enables the TNS partners to communicate with other stakeholders in a comprehensive manner concerning conservation and development issues in this important forest landscape. Looking at the overall forest landscape and its management from a sustainable development perspective provides new insights for what is at stake in the long run.

First of all, this plan is a state of the art document that describes the Sangha Tri-National forest ve-

getation types, the present land uses and the management strategies employed by the various actors in the different segments of the Landscape. It brings together existing knowledge concerning vegetation types, animal populations and movements, road infrastructure and human settlements, land-use zoning maps and overlays, conservation management with the involvement of surrounding local communities, law enforcement and infrastructure development. These key parameters concerning land use define the context of landscape management and help identify the weak spots in current management. The plan aims to foster existing transboundary collaboration by describing local land-use strategies and policy issues contained in forest and wildlife legislation, in particular issues related to land-use (access) rights of local and indigenous peoples. Furthermore, this document will support long-term funding initiatives such as the establishment of the Sangha Tri-National Trust Fund.

Finally, the existence of a land-use plan provides technical, institutional and political backing for the Sangha Tri-National Landscape. Indeed, the development of LUPs for the priority landscapes in the Congo basin is one of the critical elements recommended by COMIFAC (Commission of Forest Ministers of Central Africa) to improve the management of transboundary conservation programmes.

## Vision for the Sangha Tri-National Landscape

The vision for the TNS Landscape includes the following objectives: The TNS will be a forest landscape where wildlife can move freely without fear of being hunted, as illustrated in Figure 1 which shows the cross-border movements of radio-collared Forest elephants over their home ranges. It will also be a place where the rights of indigenous peoples are respected and where local communities and indigenous peoples will be able to continue to practise their traditional life styles with all stakeholders participating in and benefiting from the economic development of the area.

Another important element of the management

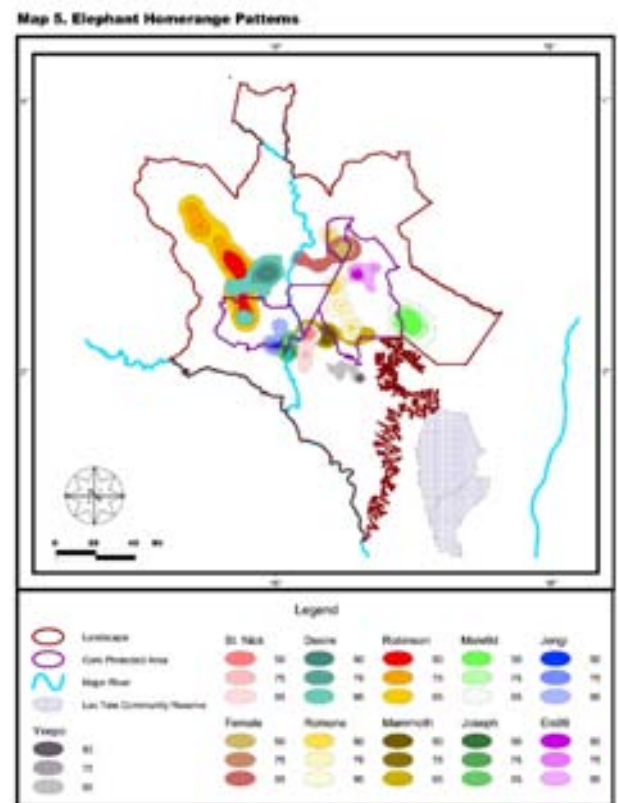


Figure 1. Elephant home range patterns

vision for the TNS is to ensure that forestry and wildlife exploitation as well as agricultural production are in balance with the natural environment and form the foundation for long-term sustainable development in the region. Industrial forestry activity is a key component in this balance as it provides sustainable revenues and employment for the national economies of the three countries. Likewise, wildlife is a critical asset, not only because of its intrinsic value, but also due to its contribution to local development and people's livelihoods.

## The Landscape

The Sangha Tri-National Landscape includes a core protection zone in which human activities are either forbidden or controlled and a peripheral zone in which participatory and sustainable management of wildlife and forest resources is practised. The core protection zone of the Sangha Tri-National comprises the National Parks of Lobéké (Republic of Cameroon), Dzanga-Ndoki (Central African Republic) and Nouabalé-Ndoki (Congo Republic). The peripheral zone includes production forests, sport hunting concessions,

Map 2. Administrative Features

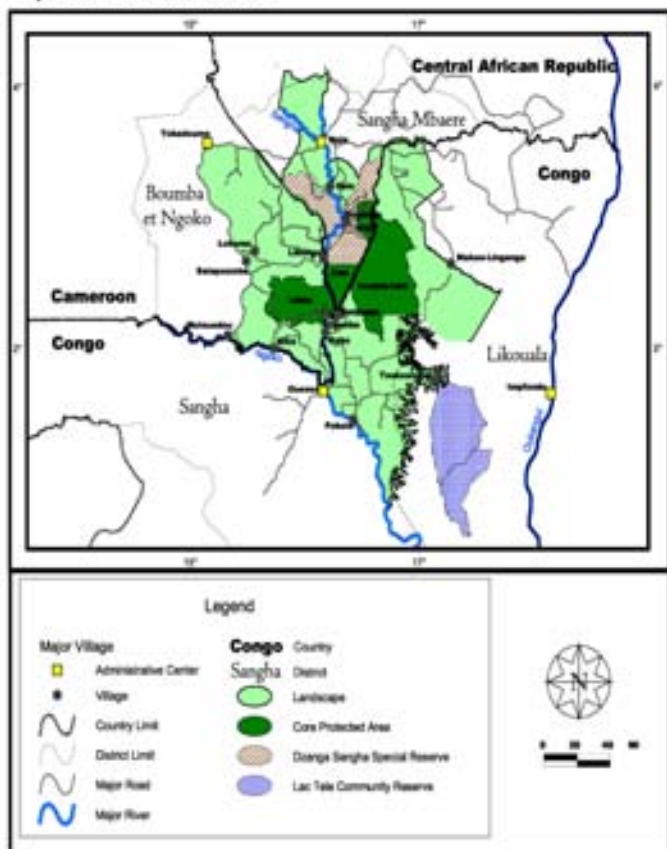


Figure 2. Administrative features

community hunting zones and agro-forestry areas.

The TNS area is about 35,000 km<sup>2</sup> and is made up of Guinean-Congolese lowland forests rich in African Acajou and large mammals. The forest still covers some 95 percent of the landscape including swamp forests and natural forest clearings. The forest harbours important populations of Forest elephants, Western lowland gorillas, chimpanzees and Bongos. Whereas some 30 years ago the human population density in the area was very low, averaging less than 1 person/km<sup>2</sup>, the human population has now risen to about 4–5 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. Local administrative centres have grown and, more importantly, the forest exploitation companies have established relatively important settlements deep inside the forests. The building of an intensive network of logging roads has opened up the region further and has encouraged immigration into this zone rich in natural resources. Thus unprecedented development dynamics have taken root in the TNS Landscape.

## The land-use planning process

A formal collaborative management agreement was signed by the three governments in 2000 and later ratified by the respective parliaments. This agreement provides the official basis for developing a comprehensive vision and LUP for the entire TNS Landscape. However, the process of land-use planning started a long time ago when governments first started to give out forest concessions during the mid-20th century, or even longer ago when the French and Belgian colonial governments gave out large concessions for rubber exploitation. The human occupation of the area dates back many centuries. More realistically, we can say that the process of consciously planning land use started during the 1980s when researchers doing biological surveys in the area confirmed its importance for biodiversity and developed a vision of establishing a cross-border tri-national conservation area. Over the past 20 years, this vision has gradually been translated into concrete actions on the ground with institutional mechanisms put in place for coordination of transboundary activities. The various studies carried out have contributed immensely to a better understanding of the ecological and social dynamics in the region. The signing of a tri-national accord in 2000 by the governments of Cameroon, Congo and CAR provided the much needed institutional platform for the establishment of the Sangha Tri-National Landscape. Looking back 15 years, tremendous progress has been made in the process of building management institutions and mechanisms for managing the TNS Landscape. Listed below are the steps that have been taken in establishing the TNS Landscape and in developing the land-use plan :

**1985–1995 :** Completion of various biological and socio-economic studies with results indicating the conservation importance of the TNS Landscape.

**1999 :** Organization of the first summit of Central African Heads of States in Yaoundé and the signing by member states of the Yaoundé Declaration to promote sub-regional collaboration for sustainable management of natural resources in the Congo basin to support economic develop-

ment of the region. The Yaoundé Summit led to the creation of the Commission of Forest Ministers of Central Africa (COMIFAC) with the mandate to coordinate all sub-regional conservation initiatives under the umbrella of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP). The CBFP brings together COMIFAC national governments, donor agencies, research institutions, the private-sector forest industry and international conservation organizations who collaborate in different domains to foster sustainable natural resource management, economic development and the policy and governance reforms required to promote greater participation of local communities. The CBFP also promotes the establishment of long-term funding mechanisms such as trust funds to support the management of conservation programmes especially for the 12 selected priority landscapes in the Congo Basin.

**1990–2000** : Thorough assessment of the human-driven pressures and other threats to natural resources of the region. Subsequent gazetting and designating of national parks, agro-forestry zones, community forests and hunting areas, professional hunting zones and forest concessions – all with the obligation of elaborating management plans following a clear set of management, use and conservation principles. Land-use planning exercises were carried out in a participatory fashion with the consultation of different stakeholders, notably local communities and indigenous forest peoples living in the area. The land-use planning process was carried out using different approaches as stipulated by the national forestry laws of the three countries.

**2000–2005** : Signing of different institutional agreements by the governments of the three countries namely a transboundary agreement to establish the Sangha Tri-National conservation programme, an accord on joint anti-poaching operations and an agreement on free circulation of staff. The different accords signed by TNS governments are meant to strengthen sub-regional collaboration in the coordination and management of activities within the TNS Landscape.

**1998 to the present day** : Development of management plans for the three national parks and for all the forestry concessions under the respon-

sibility and obligation of each concession holder (forestry departments for the national parks and forest companies for the forest concessions). Each stakeholder has the responsibility for developing management plans for each respective forest management unit (FMU). Each country's forestry laws provide certain recommendations for the management plans especially protecting biodiversity hotspots found in logging concessions and the inclusion of local people in management processes.

**1997 to the present day** : Efforts are being made by different technical partners, in particular GTZ, WWF and WCS, to support local communities in managing community forestry and community hunting zones. For example, in Cameroon, WWF and GTZ assisted the government with the creation of six community hunting zones around the Lobéké National Park. About US\$100,000 in revenues has been generated each year by communities from trophy hunting in their hunting zones. Most of the income is used for development projects such as the construction of clean water infrastructure within the communities.

**1999 to the present day** : Increased collaboration among national forestry and wildlife services and conservation and development partners in developing joint activities for the cross-border management of protection, policing and development initiatives. Following the 1999 Yaoundé Heads of State Summit and the subsequent establishment of COMIFAC and the signature of the TNS transboundary agreement in 2000, tremendous progress has been made by local partners, including local government administrations in joint implementation of field activities. There are numerous stakeholder agreements involving local communities, forest administrations and private-sector operators such as logging companies. These agreements promote consultations among stakeholders over resource use, benefit sharing and equity in access rights for local Bantus and indigenous forest peoples to certain areas for particular activities.

**2005 to the present day** : Creation of the TNS Trust Fund governed by a multi-stakeholder board and the elaboration of a comprehensive vi-

sion for the long-term sustainable management and use of the entire Landscape. An estimated 22 million Euros is needed to ensure effective operation of the trust fund. To date, 11.5 million Euros have been raised through contributions from various donors. An executive director has been appointed to manage the operations of the trust fund. An administrative board is in place and consists of representatives of national governments, key conservation NGOs, and representatives of the private sector and civil society.

The establishment of the TNS Trust Fund's governance-finance framework and the development of the TNS land-use plan are parallel processes, though not intrinsically linked as the latter is purely technical in nature. The TNS Trust Fund is a financial mechanism to ensure long-term funding of field activities and management of TNS Landscape. This innovative funding mechanism, when fully operational, will serve as a model for long-term funding of protected areas and complex transboundary conservation programmes in the Congo basin.

## Development of the land-use plan document

The elaboration of the TNS LUP started with a one-day workshop bringing together major players in the field, notably the forest administrations represented by the conservators of the three national parks and technical partners including WWF, WCS and GTZ. The decision to convene a planning meeting was taken jointly during bi-annual meetings of the TNS committee for planning and implementation of tri-national activities, known by its French acronym CTPE (Comité Technique de Planification et Exécution). The objectives of the planning workshop were to: (i) elaborate the planning process for development of the LUP; (ii) create an inventory of available information as well as identifying data gaps; (iii) determine the financial and other resources required for the consultation process; and (iv) agree on a common vision for the LUP. An independent consultant with a deep knowledge of the area was unanimously selected by the tri-national partners to pilot the consultation process including the production of the first LUP draft. All par-

ties agreed during the workshop to work closely with the hired consultant in providing the information required from the respective Landscape segments. At the same time, GIS experts from the different projects operating in the area were expected to produce generic maps of land-use practices, human settlements, flagship wildlife species distributions and other relevant information to illustrate and describe the TNS Landscape. Several drafts of the LUP document were produced by the consultant and submitted for review by the CTPE. The document was finalized after two years of consultations and review by the CTPE. In September 2008, the final draft of the TNS LUP was forwarded to the respective national governments for review and approval. The document, once approved by the three governments, will constitute the official document used by tri-national partners to orientate land-use management actions in the Landscape.

The LUP document proposes innovative solutions to many management problems in the Landscape. Some of the proposed solutions require changes in the perceptions and the administrative approach to national parks and the surrounding zones by the forest administrations of the different countries. For example, protected area authorities must accept that success in managing the national parks will depend on support from surrounding local communities. The rights of indigenous peoples over resources must be secured and officially granted. Since it is the first to cover a Landscape involving three countries, it is expected that the TNS LUP, once approved, will generate debate on a number of policy issues:

- i) Regulation of the access of local communities and indigenous forest peoples to natural resources in the national parks;
- ii) Mechanisms for sharing the benefits of forest revenues amongst local communities;
- iii) Participation of local communities in parks management;
- iv) Capacity building and integration of the national parks authorities in the management of the tri-national park;
- v) Re-investment of revenues generated from ecotourism and other income-generating activities for management of the TNS Landscape;

- vi) Establishment by the TNS Trust Fund Board of an efficient and transparent system for disbursement of funds for the tri-national park's activities;
- vii) Agreement on trophy hunting, quotas and wildlife species;
- viii) Implementation of tri-national accords on free circulation of TNS staff, anti-poaching patrols, and the establishment and functioning of a tri-national brigade.

## Lessons learned

### Land-use planning process

As we have seen, the process of land-use planning in the TNS Landscape has not been a fully consciously planned exercise from the beginning. Indeed, this would not have been possible as national policies and the sub-regional context have evolved greatly over the past decade to finally provide the enabling framework and policy environment that allows for such a far-reaching exercise. The national forestry and wildlife laws of the three countries differ in many areas. For example, there is an official quota for sport hunting of elephants in Cameroon while the law prohibits elephant hunting in CAR and Congo. There are currently no laws or policies to control cross-border trade in timber, wildlife and other non-timber forest products. Such sub-regional laws, when put in place, will help control ongoing illegal trade in various forest resources notably bushmeat and ivory. It is extremely important for the three countries to harmonize certain laws and policies to ensure effective implementation of the land use plan. Without such harmonization, there will be continuous discrepancies on issues dealing with the sanctions of illegal practices, remuneration of forestry staff and benefit-sharing mechanisms for local communities.

Also, for land-use planning and implementation to be meaningful, conservation and development partners need to be well established inside the Landscape working together in a relationship of trust with local government services. All this takes time. Even between the three main conservation and development partners in the TNS (WWF, WCS and GTZ) it has taken a number of years to

develop sufficient understanding and mutual trust to be willing to freely share information, to sometimes agree to disagree and, above all, to share successes and failures. The implementation of the CARPE programme in the context of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership has helped bring partners closer together.

The finalization of the draft TNS LUP and vision ready for submission to governments, COMIFAC and other stakeholders, has proved to be a slow process. The ownership over the process was more fully anchored with the conservation partners than with the national park conservators and the national forest administrations. The government staff must feel fully involved in the process and possess the needed technical capacities to understand the management vision articulated in the plan. Technical partners such as WWF, GTZ and WCS must dedicate time and effort to training national counterparts in participatory management processes. Finding time with technical project staff to work intensively on the document is a naturally difficult and time-consuming process. Therefore project teams must agree on a calendar for joint planning meetings, including consultative meetings with different local stakeholders.

The conservation and development partners who have been involved in the TNS from the beginning had a landscape or eco-regional vision from the start. This larger vision helped push the process forward as all key players had a common understanding of the nature of the key issues, the relevance of the LUP and a long-term vision for management actions.

### Establishing a trust fund

One of the critical elements for the development of a trust fund is the availability of business and management plans for the protected areas. The business plan should include information on conservation investments outside the protected areas, notably in production forests where most of the threats originate. Pulling together technical information required to determine the costs of operations for TNS parks was a long process. None of the sites had detailed business plans addressing various management issues within their

respective Landscape segments. The CTPE, in consultation with national governments and the main conservation organizations working in the TNS Landscape, agreed to hire a team of consultants who helped with the development, and more importantly, the harmonization of the business plans for the TNS parks. This information was consolidated into the overall TNS Landscape business plan which now forms the basis of the calculation of investment costs for the trust fund.

Another critical factor for establishing the trust fund was the engagement of the national governments and their relevant ministries. It became obvious during the initial phase of negotiations between national forest administrations and conservation partners that both sets of actors differed in their vision and objectives for the trust fund. Another problem was the decision to place the funds offshore given the financial insecurity and political instability prevalent within the sub-region. It took more than two years for conservation partners and donor agencies to convince national governments to place the funds offshore. Political endorsement of this decision by governments has been crucial for the success of the process. The three governments discussed and approved the mechanisms for managing the funds in order to facilitate smooth disbursement

and ensure transparency and accountability. The management structure of the trust fund is illustrated in Figure 3. The Board of Administration and Executive Director have been in place since 2006. Disbursements of the funds to the three project sites will be coordinated by a technical committee that approves work plans submitted by the three national parks.

Overall, the establishment of a transboundary trust fund involving several countries is a long and protracted process that requires political commitment and understanding from the beneficiary countries. Wide-ranging expertise is needed to produce a comprehensive business plan that reflects the costs of conservation operations in the area. Another important factor is the support of donor agencies and the international conservation community to mobilize funds. The estimated funds needed to create the TNS Trust Fund are yet to be fully secured even after eight years of launching this initiative. Given these difficulties, national governments and conservation agencies need to explore other funding mechanisms such as carbon payments for environmental services to secure the needed level of funding for the establishment of trust funds for large complex transboundary conservation programmes.

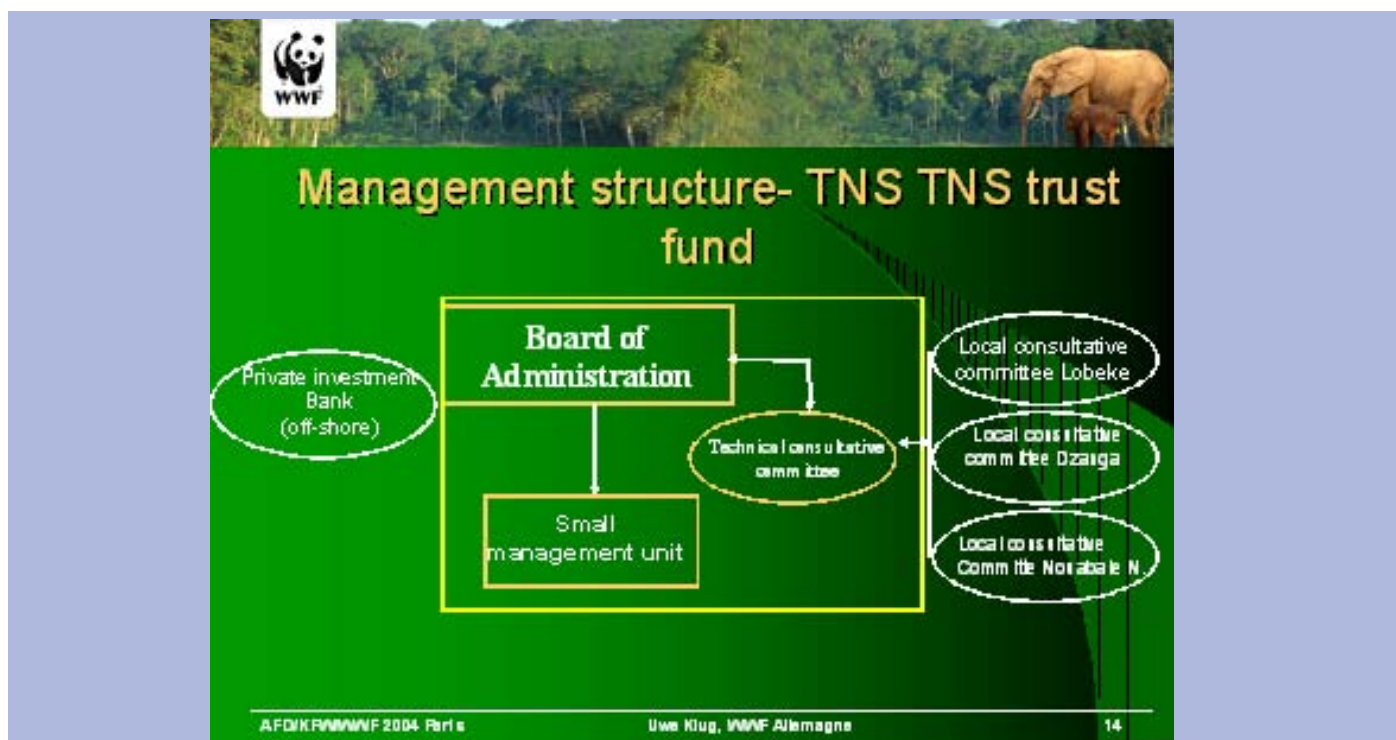


Figure 3. Organigram of the TNS Trust Fund

## Participatory management

From the beginning, the conservation partners have always been very conscious of the spatial use of the Landscape by the indigenous pygmy groups living in the TNS. It is of special interest how, in the large, undeveloped and sparsely populated zone of Nouabalé Ndoki, WCS and its partners were able to map the migrations of the local pygmy groups before proposing use and management regimes. In this aspect, Nouabalé Ndoki is different from Dzanga-Sangha (CAR) and Lobéké (Cameroon) because the attribution of forest and wildlife concessions in the latter two had taken place long before the arrival of the conservation partners.

It is therefore recommended that consultations with local stakeholders, especially local communities and indigenous forest peoples, should be done at the beginning of the planning process. There were problems in the TNS with getting local populations to buy in because they felt cheated and marginalized. Local communities' disagreements with certain already-classified zones seriously impacted management actions on the ground.

There is no doubt significant progress has been made over the years within the three TNS project sites to integrate local communities into natural resource management initiatives. In Lobéké, community hunting zones have been established. Technical assistance is being provided to local communities in various resource management areas such as finance management and the implementation of micro-development projects. Local communities generate significant revenues from trophy hunting by leasing their hunting territories to professional sport hunters. Revenues generated are used for village development projects such as the construction of wells, community health projects and children's education. Land-use plans have also been developed for community hunting areas and local communities are being assisted to secure additional community forests. According to Cameroonian law, communities can acquire 5,000 ha of forests to exploit timber using low-intensity timber extraction methods. In CAR, WWF and GTZ are assisting local communities, notably indigenous forest peoples

(BaAka pygmies), to develop ecotourism and cultural tourism ventures including activities such as traditional net hunting, bird watching and guided tours of habituated gorillas. The project also plans to create community forest areas surrounding the national parks as part of the on-going land-use planning process. In Congo, WCS is assisting local communities to manage community wildlife zones established around the CIB (Congolaise Industrielle des Bois) logging concessions in Kabo. The communities are being trained in management techniques especially for organized subsistence group hunting, basic wildlife monitoring, and the exploitation and commercialization of other non-timber forest products. Other community forests will be established in forests surrounding the Nouabalé Ndoki National Park. The overall co-management vision in the TNS Landscape is to ensure greater integration of the surrounding local population in natural resource management processes, facilitate access to resources, support alternative income-generating activities, build strong local management institutions and facilitate benefit-sharing mechanisms for local communities from revenues generated from the exploitation of wildlife and timber, as well as from ecotourism.

Dzanga-Sangha conservation partners are working out strategies to gazette more community forests in order to obtain property rights over wildlife resources for the Bantu and BaAka populations. Failure of these efforts will likely lead to continued tensions and a lack of support from surrounding communities for conservation. This, in turn, could lead to increased hunting and other illegal activities in the park and surrounding areas.

### What trends can we see?

The systematic disappearance of forests and biodiversity in most parts of the TNS Landscape such as in southeast Cameroon and in southwest CAR has come to a halt, and since 2000 a new and more responsible forest management paradigm is emerging. The level of extraction of timber from the natural forest has stabilized to a somewhat more sustainable level. Due to efforts from both the private sector and projects, localized reductions in the large-scale extraction of



bushmeat from the forest have been achieved. Overall levels are, nevertheless, still far too high. Most logging companies operating in the region actively support anti-poaching operations. In Cameroon, an Italian logging company provides about US\$30,000 per year of direct financing to anti-poaching operations. The company has constructed cold-storage units in Libongo, their main base, to sell beef and fish at subsidized prices to their workers and other local residents. In Congo, CIB has invested in numerous projects to reduce hunting and the bushmeat trade including anti-poaching operations and, in collaboration with WCS, in alternative income-generating projects for local communities.

many people into forested areas in search of job opportunities. Individuals unable to find employment generally turn to hunting in the forest in order to earn a living. The timber business also stimulates local economies with small businesses and thriving local markets to help supply the workers of these companies.

The conservation status of the core protection zone, i.e., the three national parks, has improved greatly over the past ten years, with significant increases in wildlife counts in natural forest clearings (baïs). This positive trend can be attributed in particular to the greater participation of logging companies and, to some extent, local communities in anti-poaching and surveillance operations. These local stakeholders are held accountable by law for management of their forest units.

However in a number of areas there is increasing disturbance of wildlife and wildlife movements due to unregulated artisanal mining and forest exploitation activities and the poaching it engenders (northern section of Dzanga NP, northern border section of Nouabalé Ndoki NP, north-eastern section of Lobéké NP). The growth of industrial urban centres deep inside the forest has been the main driver in population trends in the Landscape, and whilst these centres may not continue to grow exponentially as during the past 10 years, these centres will continue to be a main driving force in illegal resource extraction and local development within the TNS Landscape. Of the estimated 191,000 inhabitants, 33,000 live in logging towns.

There is an emerging trend and willingness of the different actors to collaborate, and relationships between local communities, the private sector, local governments and conservation and development NGOs have significantly improved. Mutual confidence is growing. This can be explained by the multitude of on-going stakeholders' consultation meetings which have allowed everyone to be sufficiently informed about the objectives of the TNS Landscape, including the roles and responsibilities of the technical partners. The various stakeholder platforms between forest administrations, the private sector and local communities have contributed to building trust and collaboration. Different stakeholders have signed several

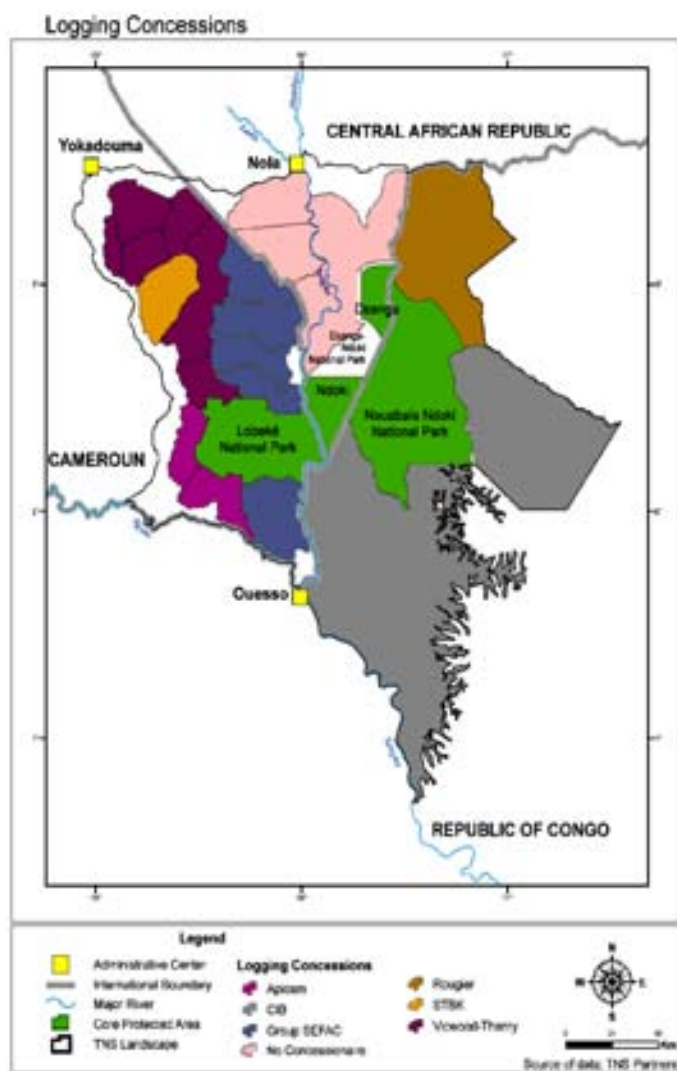


Figure 4. Logging concessions

In northern Congo, a major on-going challenge is that of previously unlogged forests being brought into production with corresponding dramatic socio-demographic changes augmenting the extraction of bushmeat. Logging operations attract

Memoranda of Understanding to implement joint activities or to address problems affecting their relations. Some of these agreements involve safeguarding the interests and providing benefits to local communities and indigenous forest peoples.

International pressures from donors, international governments and markets for more sustainably produced products have led to greater interactions between forest administrations and the private sector. Most logging companies have approved management plans that address biodiversity issues in their concessions. The forest administration and local councils in particular have now been forced to decentralize decision-making systems for the distribution of timber and wildlife revenues to local communities. In Cameroon, several local NGOs play an important advocacy role in support of transparency in the distribution and management of community forest revenues. This process is extremely important as local communities will not support conservation programmes if their interests are not taken into consideration.

The logging industry's lack of contribution to local economic and social development in the villages and district centres remains one of the most significant failures for sustainable development in the region. The forestry sector constitutes at least one-third of the national economies of the TNS countries and the figure is even higher for the Republic of Congo. According to national forestry laws, 10 percent of total forest revenues must be shared with local communities. In southeast Cameroon, this should amount to roughly US\$500,000 of timber revenue. Unfortunately, due to poor benefit-sharing mechanisms and other illegal practices, the communities receive less than US\$100,000 of this amount. This should ring alarm bells as, in the long term, maintaining the integrity of the entire Landscape will depend on social cohesion and inclusive and equitable economic development. The lack of revenue sharing is an emerging and urgent issue. Conservation partners have over the past years invested heavily in working with local community groups and the private sector to enhance community-based wildlife management. There is an urgent need for strengthening the conservation and development dialogue, involving political leaders, government institutions, the private sector,

community representatives and civil society organizations operating within the Sangha Tri-National Landscape.

## Acknowledgements

This article was written thanks to contributions from GTZ, WWF, WCS and other technical partners working in the TNS Landscape. The contributions of the national forest administrations of the three countries, especially the conservators, were highly appreciated. Equally gratifying was the technical and financial support to the TNS Landscape planning and development process from CARPE/USAID, German Development Bank (BMZ), German Investment Agency (KfW), Agence Française de Développement (AFD), World Bank, EU, UNESCO/CAWHFI programmes, Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial (FFEM) and other donor agencies.