

## Case study 3 - The Use of Small Grants to Build Civil Society Capacity to Support Conservation : Lessons Learned from Republic of Congo

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### Objectives of the IUCN Small Grants Program

The history of the Small Grants Program in the Republic of Congo is recent and essentially coincides with the opening of the CARPE Congo National Office in May 2006 (although before this date, three local NGOs did receive grants through one of CARPE's partners, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)).

The objectives of the Small Grants Program in the Republic of Congo are as follows :

1. To promote and create a forum to support conservation within civil society;
2. To build the capacity of civil society in institutional development and strategic planning, prerequisites to the sustainability of CARPE activities and objectives in the region;
3. To promote social wellbeing through the development of income-generating activities;

4. Effectively to mainstream CARPE activities into the institutions of the host country;
5. To identify natural resource management policies that require national advocacy for their reform or formulation;
6. To raise awareness at local, national as well as regional levels on issues of forest good governance;
7. To encourage gender equality.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Republic of Congo are weak and the Small Grants Program is of crucial importance in raising awareness amongst CSOs of their place and role in the management of natural resources. Progress in mobilizing and motivating local NGOs has been significant over the last two years, despite the rather small amounts allocated by this programme. Remarkable actions can be carried out with very little financial resources, if measured by their actual impact on communities. Identifying priorities is fundamental to this approach. In the Republic of Congo, 11 local NGOs have so

far received small grants to develop activities at a national level as well as within and around landscapes. These activities include :

- In 2000, the ANN NGO (Alliance Nationale pour la Nature) produced and disseminated the first ever specialist newspaper on environmental issues in the Republic of Congo, called L'Araignée (The Spider) to inform, raise awareness and carry on advocacy;
- In 2002, the Association of Female Jurists (l'Association des femmes juristes) of Congo produced the first-ever volume of the Environment Code of the Republic of Congo, a document that, to this day, continues to answer some of the deficits concerning availability of national instruments on environmental protection;
- Also in 2002, the association called Club des Amis de la Nature established, within the University of Marien Ngouabi, a Green cybercafé that is an interactive reference centre for access to environmental data and information;
- Between 2006 and 2008, various local NGOs and associations submitted project proposals for various activities in rural areas, and were successful in receiving funding. They included: ACNL (*Association pour la Conservation de la Nature de la Likouala*), ADECOR (*Association pour le Développement des Communautés Rurales*), AEV (*Assainissement Eau et Vie*), APETDS (*Association pour la Protection des Ecosystèmes Tropicaux et Développement de la Sangha*), ARDN (*Association pour la Réflexion au Développement du Nord-Congo*), CFC (*Conservation de la Faune Congolaise*) and ECOTOUR (*Ecologie Conservation Tourisme*). There were 10 project proposals in all :

1) Support for the promotion of peasant beekeeping in the villages of Likouala using grass, around the Community Reserve of Lake Télé, Likouala District (CFC);

2) Awareness-raising campaign for the prevention of haemorrhagic fever from the Ebola Virus, Sangha District (APETDS);

3) Promotion and development of village beekeeping among the local population of Motaba, Likouala District (ACNL);

4) Planting eucalyptus to satisfy fuelwood needs in the periphery of the Inoni Village, Batéké Plateau District (Association des Femmes Veuves de Fatima);

5) Support for alternative livelihood strategies for the Noumbi communities (Conkouati-Douli National Park), Kouilou District (ADECOR);

6) Monitoring, evaluating and determining the physico-chemical and bacteriological quality of water resources in the two water catchments of the Noumbi and Conkouati Rivers in the Kouilou District (AEV);

7) Contribution towards forest conservation by moving towards sedentary rather than shifting cultivation of plantains in the Mokeko District (ARDN);

8) Preparing village communities living around the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park for the promotion and development of ecotourism, Sangha District (ECOTOUR);

9) Helping conserve biodiversity through the development of alternative activities and the popularization of legal instruments on environmental management (ADECOR);

10) Preparing the village communities of Ngombe and Pokola for the management of revenues derived from logging and for carrying out community projects.

All these projects have been fully or partially implemented.

We are going to take three of them as references to illustrate the lessons learnt :

- Supporting alternative livelihood strategies for the Noumbi communities (Conkouati-Douli National Park), developed by ADECOR;
- Planting eucalyptus to satisfy fuelwood needs in the periphery of the Inoni village in

the Batéké Plateau, developed by the Association des Femmes Veuves de Fatima.

- Preparing the village communities around the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park for the promotion and development of ecotourism, developed by ECOTOUR.

### Alternative livelihood strategies for the Noumbi communities

The NGO ADECOR has twice received IUCN small grants, in 2006 and 2008. The Noumbi communities project was initiated because of observations by researchers from the WCS Conkouati Project as well as complaints from fishermen about the drop in the quantity of catches and the quality of shrimps found in the Noumbi River and the Conkouati Lagoon. Fishing for shrimps is one of the main income-generating activities in the surrounding communities of the Noumbi River. The shrimps fished in the zone are regularly taken to Pointe-Noire the second largest city in Congo. Various trading activities have developed around this activity, with a stream of vehicles supplying the population with manufactured products from the city and taking back to Pointe-Noire shrimps and other products derived from fishing, hunting and gathering. A significant amount of money circulates in the zone thanks to this trade engendered mostly by the production of shrimps. Unfortunately for these populations, the catch of shrimps has gradually been decreasing year after year. It has become necessary to look for alternatives to shrimp fishing in order for the people to continue to survive and maintain the level of trade without which the communities would be without resources. ADECOR has therefore undertaken to bring together some fishermen and retrain them for other activities such as market gardening, and rearing goats and poultry. To begin with, just one group of former shrimp fishermen successfully took up market gardening and, with support from ADECOR, were able to produce products such as tomatoes, garden eggs, peppers and other vegetables, and supply them to Pointe-Noire markets. Incomes derived from these activities had a trickle-down effect on other former fishermen. There are now three groups of market gardeners, producing many different types of vegetables for the Pointe-Noire market. This ex-

perience highlights the capacity of some local NGOs, such as ADECOR, to produce results that are beyond expectations and even beyond the capacities of some international NGOs, and this, with very limited resources.

### Planting eucalyptus for fuelwood in the Batéké Plateau

Another rich learning experience is that of the Association des Femmes Veuves de Fatima that is tackling the thorny problem of fuel wood in the Batéké Plateau. In fact, the Batéké Plateau District, which is mostly savannah, is facing accelerated degradation of the precious pockets of forest that are found along its waterways because of deforestation caused by the harvesting of firewood and shifting cultivation. The Association des Femmes Veuves de Fatima, having become aware of the situation, wanted to help the people of the plateau not only to meet their needs in terms of firewood but also to slow down the degradation of these pockets of forest. Thus a plantation of about three hectares of eucalyptus was created in the savannah in the neighbouring villages of Inoni. This initiative, though modest, has had a very positive impact in the area to the extent that it serves as inspiration to other associations and individuals, such as the Poumako, Odziba and Mâ communities that have started village eucalyptus plantations with the support of the John Aspinall Foundation (Lesio-Louna Gorilla Protection Project). The John Aspinall Foundation and the Lesio-Louna Gorilla Protection Project have identified the replanting of fast-growing tree species as a priority action to be promoted in the communities living in the Batéké Plateau. This project is in line with one of the strategic objectives of CARPE – reduction of the rate of deforestation. Here the immediate result is not measured in terms of timber production but more in terms of community awareness of the need to reforest and of the threat of deforestation, which may put the availability of water resources at risk. This project, funded under the 2006–2007 Small Grants Program, needs to be continued.



**Creation of a eucalyptus plantation in Inoni (Widows of Fatima)**

### **Preparing communities around Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park for ecotourism**

The NGO ECOTOUR for its part was inspired by the experience of WCS that is experimenting with ecotourism in the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park. This WCS experiment has attracted some European tourism operators who regularly bring in visitors to the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park. Some hundreds of tourists visit the National Park each year, passing through the village of Bomassa. The income generated from this experimental ecotourism is very encouraging, and part of this income is paid to the Park's neighbouring communities. However, although this experiment has been going on for more than three years already, it has not been able to involve the communities, that watch, from a distance, the coming and going of tourists without any real possibilities of taking part in the activity. The promoter of the experimental tourism has not been able to involve the local communities. However, Bomassa

is the gateway into the Park and it is not acceptable that the local people do not have any contact with, and do not benefit from, foreigners visiting their territory.

The NGO ECOTOUR has understood this shortcoming and has proposed to engage the communities around Bomassa and to help develop their skills so that they can benefit from ecotourism by offering the visitors various tourist products that they have made. In order to implement this initiative, ECOTOUR has applied to the Small Grants Program and received financial assistance. The project is underway in Bomassa and has won over the local people who are fully committed to it. The village elites have been prepared, especially craftsmen and cultural leaders who will henceforth present their products and activities to the tourists. A culture and tourism centre has been set up to exhibit works of art and to put cultural activities (such as traditional dance). The project has been so successful amongst the inhabitants of Bomassa that the new

managers of the WCS Nouabalé-Ndoki Project are proposing to enlarge the facilities initiated by ECOTOUR into a tourism village by adding other facilities. In this case, the Small Grants Program has contributed positively in bringing the CARPE conservation partners and village communities closer together and in changing the hitherto negative attitude of the communities to conservation. It is left for the partners to understand that they cannot continue to ignore village communities; they have to be included when it comes to the management of natural resources. The enhancement of protected areas cannot be effective without the commitment of communities; this project is clear proof of that.

### Other projects

The other previously mentioned projects, that were implemented with the help of small grants, also had appreciably successful outcomes. For example, the beekeepers trained in the north of Likouala are producing enough honey for some

of it to be sold on to bigger agglomerations. A litre of pure honey is sold locally for FCFA 1500–2000, about US\$ 4–5.

### Lessons learnt

There are many lessons to be learnt from these experiences. They are the first-ever achievements made by local NGOs on the ground using IUCN small grants in Congo. To mention but a few :

- CARPE small grants have contributed something more to the conservation efforts made by our partners on the ground, by encouraging the involvement of local communities hitherto resistant to conservation ideals.
- The projects that have been successful are those that have inspired the communities themselves. Alternatives to harvesting natural resources will only be accepted if they improve on activities already well practised



Harvesting honey in Makao (village beekeeping project, ACNL 2006–2007)

by the local people. Trying to change behaviour and habits through the imposition of new activities has often ended badly.

- Small projects executed with very modest resources can have an appreciable impact on communities, something that some partners have not been able to achieve over many years in spite of the huge resources put at their disposal. In other words, in conservation matters, it does not necessarily take a significant amount of resources to produce significant outcomes.
- Taking into consideration the interests of local communities and satisfying their vital needs is imperative for successful conservation of natural resources.
- In Congo, there is mixed success of conservation projects in view of the huge amounts of money that have been pumped in for more than a decade. Although anti-poaching efforts are continually increasing year in year out, poaching is still on the increase even in areas that are mostly under surveillance. The cause of these failures is found in the old ill-adapted approaches that are still practised on the ground by some international NGOs and other institutions charged with managing conservation projects. The participatory approach is ignored, poorly implemented or still not understood by these actors.
- The activities of CARPE in the Congo have only been appreciated by the general public as a result of the outcomes of the projects funded by the Small Grants Program, and the opening of the National Office, in spite of more than a decade's presence in Central Africa and in Congo. The activities of CARPE's partners have had very little effect on the public.

from these projects have helped improve the image of conservation projects with the public, which other conservationists in the field have been able to capitalize on. That is why we strongly propose that the size of the Small Grants Program be increased in order to perpetuate and capitalize on its achievements. Actions initiated and carried out by local people have a greater effect on village communities. They are worth encouraging and sustaining.

## Recommendation

Although considered by some to be only a small sub-programme, the Small Grants Program has demonstrated its importance and efficiency. The activities that have resulted from it are a window through which the general public and local communities can appraise the programme. In a short time and with very few resources, the outcomes