

## Case study 5 - The Use of Small Grants to Build Civil Society Capacity to Support the Conservation of Natural Resources : Lessons Learned from Democratic Republic of Congo

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### Introduction

The Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) is undertaking activities for the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources in nine forest countries of the Congo Basin. To this end, one of the programme's key strategies is building the capacity of civil society actors with the aim of stimulating their active involvement in policy reform through advocacy and the development of income-generating activities at a local level, in a bid to reduce pressure on forest resources. The IUCN Small Grants Program (SGP), funded by CARPE, is intended to support this strategy.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is facing mammoth challenges in terms of natural resource management. In order to overcome these challenges, the involvement of all stakeholders in a participatory and inclusive approach is imperative. Civil society is essential to this process. It can contribute significantly to improving forest governance, facilitating the organization and struc-

turing of communities, developing income-generating activities to improve social welfare, and promoting gender considerations.

The contribution of the Coalition of Environmental NGO Networks (*Coalition des Réseaux des ONGs de l'Environnement* – CRON) to the government's legal review of its forest titles had clearly demonstrated the determining role that civil society could play with regard to advocacy in the interests of communities. Civil society has proven its ability to work to support the government, and also to promote the interests and build the capacities of local communities.

The SGP has been operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2002 and has supported several small civil society (local NGOs, associations, etc ...) projects. Though not exhaustive, this document is a synthesis of lessons learned from the implementation of the SGP in the DRC.

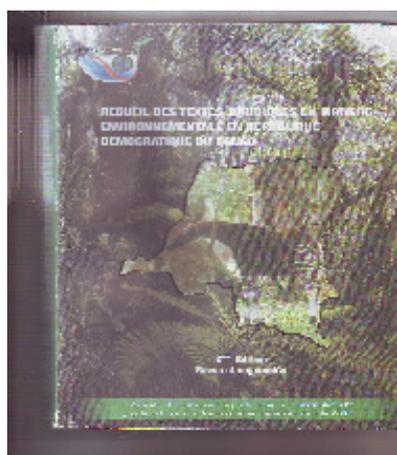
## Objectives of the Small Grants Program

The SGP aims to promote and create a platform within civil society to support conservation and specifically to:

1. Build the capacities of civil society in institutional development and strategic planning, as a prerequisite to the sustainability of CARPE activities and objectives in the region;
2. Promote social welfare through the development of income-generating activities;
3. Effectively mainstream CARPE activities into the institutions of the host country;
4. Identify natural resource management policies that require national advocacy either to reform them or to draw them up;
5. Raise awareness at local, national and regional levels on forest governance issues;
6. Encourage gender equality.

## SGP projects implemented and their impacts

### The compendium of legal instruments on the environment in the DRC



The DRC is a post-conflict country. For some time all the legal instruments governing its natural resources sector were widely dispersed and almost inaccessible to most interested parties except for the legal profes-

sion. Thanks to help from the SGP, a national NGO called *Avocats Verts* (Green lawyers) was able to produce the first version of the compendium of legal instruments on the environment. This document was distributed to all the actors in the environmental sector at national, provincial and local levels. This exercise has been very successful in terms of training and raising public

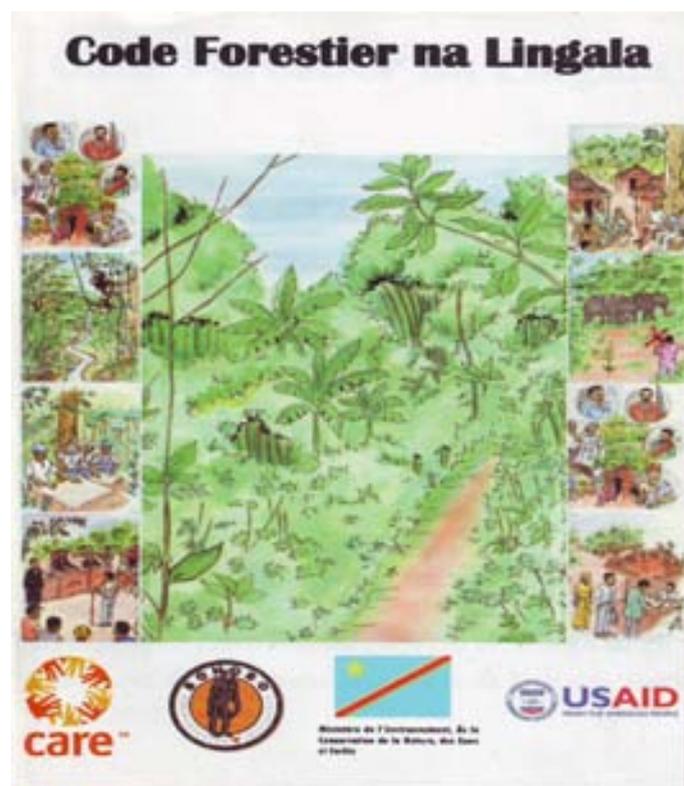
awareness on regulatory instruments governing environment management. The document was even used as a reference throughout the process of developing the DRC's Forestry Code, produced in 2002.

Following the enactment of the Forestry Code, several implementation decrees were promulgated and in the process the matter of updating the compendium was raised. Consequently, the same NGO, still supported by the SGP, produced a second edition of the compendium with the support of other partners.

### Translation of the Forestry Code into Lingala and its dissemination

Good governance also entails transparency through the dissemination of laws and regulations governing forestry activities to grass-roots communities. This is a real challenge for those communities living in forested areas in the DRC, who represent about 70 percent of the country's population, and most of whom have received little education.

This challenge was taken up by an NGO, the national branch of a women's NGO called the Network of African Women for Sustainable



Development (Réseau des Femmes Africaines pour le Développement Durable – REFADD). This NGO translated the Forestry Code into a national language (Lingala), thanks to support from the SGP, and undertook an awareness-raising campaign in the Bandundu Province in the Lisala and Bongandanga territories in the Equator Province. This initiative has been really successful in raising the communities' awareness of their rights and duties with regards to forest management, and several international partners, notably SNV (the Netherlands Development Organisation) and Care International, have produced revised and improved versions of the document in Lingala, Swahili and Kikongo in order to extend the dissemination of the Forestry Code all over the country.

### Promotion of wildlife laws

Poaching is still a major concern affecting all biodiversity conservation efforts in the DRC. One of the factors that aggravate poaching is ignorance of the law and, even more so, ignorance of which species are totally or partially protected because they are on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Again with the help of a small grant, REFADD, which had already gained the trust of the communities in the Ituri-Epulu-Aru Landscape, developed posters showing the protected species of the DRC and posted them around protected areas. This resulted in local communities reporting to the police eight cases of poachers who had in their possession whole specimens or parts of integrally protected species (Okapi).

The success achieved by REFADD through their awareness-raising campaign and production of visual aids (posters) has inspired other partners, notably the NGO SOS Nature that has paid for the translation into Swahili of the law governing hunting and its annexes, and disseminated 1,000 copies around the hunter communities in the forests of Mambasa around the Okapi Faunal Reserve. This has raised the level of awareness and knowledge amongst hunters as well as communities, the majority of whom up to now had only been interested in the hunting calendar and the types of species to be hunted.

The same NGO (SOS Nature) enabled the creation of a multi-stakeholder platform for the management of wildlife resources, involving several territories and provincial government authorities. This platform monitors and guides female bushmeat sellers, and reports cases of poaching protected species. This platform has also become the body in charge of wildlife issues in the land-use planning process undertaken by the CARPE-CBFP-WCS Ituri Project.

In addition to these activities promoting laws and regulations, the SGP has also contributed to reducing deforestation, promoting rational management of forest resources and alleviating poverty.

### Poverty alleviation through the promotion of development actions

Local NGOs work directly with grass-roots communities and consequently they know their socio-economic realities and their development imperatives in relation to the conservation and sustainable management of resources. Two NGOs (including an association of six NGO networks – Protection de l'écosystème et des espèces rares du sud-est de l'Equateur (PERSE); Initiative locale de développement intégré (ILDI) ; Faune, flore et santé à Yahuma (FFSY) ; Centre de développement intégré de Lomako (CEDILO); Centre de Développement Agro-Pastoral de Djolu (CEDAP) and Action pour le développement et la Conservation de la Nature (ADCN) – operating in six territories of the flagship Maringa/Lopori-Wamba Landscape (Djolu, Bongandanga, Befale, Lomako, Yahuma, Basankusu)) have through the SGP supported the revival of sustainable agriculture (agroforestry), with more than 300 ha planted with varied foodstuffs, affecting more than 300 women. A second project has supported grazing and fishing activities in the Monkoto Territory in the Salonga-Lukenie-Sankuru Landscape. These two projects have enabled the communities to improve their livelihoods and to engage in conservation activities.



## Still more projects supported by the SGP...

(a) A local NGO called Comité des exploitants et négociants de Mambasa (CENEM) has tackled small-scale illegal logging in the Ituri Landscape, a growing problem on this site, by identifying the small-scale exploiters and raising their awareness of the legal instruments governing forest exploitation. In addition, CENEM organized the illegal loggers by assisting them in the process of formalizing their activities with the local administration by obtaining legal permits. The loggers have since formed themselves into an association. Thanks to these efforts made by civil society, the administration can now control this group of small-scale exploiters and raise revenues through imposing taxes.

(b) The NGO called Programme d'action pour le développement intégré des paysans (PADIP) is working towards finding alternatives to deforestation for the sake of satisfying energy needs by producing and popularizing improved stoves destined for women of the Ituri-Epulu-Aru and Virunga Landscapes. More than 500 households

have received improved stoves of which about 1 000 were distributed to women.

(c) The Coalition of Environmental NGO Networks (CRON). Within the framework of the quest for alternative uses of forests in the DRC, CRON has collected scientific data in Bongo in the Inongo Territory, a zone that was being logged before the government's legal review of forest concessions declared it no longer suitable for this purpose. This wildlife and non-timber forest products inventory in the Lake Tamba Landscape has succeeded in demonstrating the unique value of the site in terms of biodiversity. The results of this project will serve as a useful tool when advocating for the gazettelement of the zone as a nature reserve.

## Lessons learned

The outputs obtained from the projects supported by the SGP are tangible and fall in line with CARPE's strategic objectives in the region :

(a) The compendium of legal instruments on the environment in the DRC, first published in 2000,

was the very first document that comprehensively put together all environmental legal instruments (decrees and others) in force in the country. This compendium served as a legal basis in the process of developing the first Forestry Code of the DRC, which replaced the Royal Decree of 1949.

(b) Translating the Forestry Code from French into Lingala and disseminating it has made it possible to pass on, to the communities living in and around the forest massif, the legal instruments on the management of forest resources. Lingala is a very popular vernacular language that is understood by village communities that are more often than not have received little education.

(c) The promotion of the wildlife law using visual aids such as posters in Lingala placed around protected areas has served as a catalyst for strengthening law enforcement and encouraging local communities to report cases of poaching of protected species. As of today, eight cases have been recorded in Ituri around the Okapi Faunal Reserve. This proves that NGOs have the capacity to mobilize local communities to combat poaching, transforming them into game wardens.

(d) The SGP has helped civil society to collaborate effectively with government institutions, thus breaking the myth that has always classified civil society as a source of nuisance to the government. This is seen from the action of the NGO SOS Nature that has not only created a multi-stakeholder platform involving several territories and provincial government authorities for the management of wildlife resources in the Ituri, but also trained it to monitor and evaluate as well as provide guidance to female bushmeat sellers with the aim of reducing the poaching of protected species.

(e) The promotion and development of income-generating activities to improve social welfare goes hand in hand with the strategy to conserve biodiversity. While several international partners either lack the expertise or the willingness to invest therein, the SGP has been an efficient mechanism for bridging this gap by mobilizing village communities through local NGOs and associations. Through the SGP, an association of six networks of NGOs (CEDAP, PERSE, ILDI, FFSY,

CEDILO and ADCN) has revived sustainable agriculture (agroforestry), with more than 300 ha being planted with varied foodstuffs, impacting more than 300 women in six territories (Djolu, Bongandanga, Befale, Lomako, Yahuma and Basankusu) in the Maringa/Lopori-Wamba Landscape

The work of promoting and building the capacities of civil society through the SGP is already bearing fruit with several multiplier effects. For example, the significant role that CRON played in the entire process of converting forest titles into forest concessions in the DRC with the support of the World Bank; and the CEDAP platform, that is active in the Maringa/Lopori-Wamba Landscape in the Djolu Territory, being granted the status of advisory body to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) for local development-related issues.

## Conclusion

The Small Grants Program (with its grants ranging from US\$15,000–40,000) has shown itself to be extremely effective in building the capacities of civil society organizations and mobilizing them to raise awareness and undertake advocacy through **(a)** the dissemination of legal instruments governing the management of forest resources; **(b)** the promotion and/or development of income-generating activities for the wellbeing of local communities; and **(c)** promoting gender considerations and encouraging reporting of damages caused to biodiversity.

These are areas in which several international and even governmental partners generally lack expertise and hence they have often failed to include these concerns in their strategies for the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources.

Therefore, the SGP should not only be strengthened financially to satisfy increasing demand in the sub-region, but its approach should be mainstreamed into the programmes of government and international donor organizations, given that CARPE itself was only conceived to last for 20 years.