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December 2020 Woleu-Ntem and Ogooué-Ivindo Report written by: Elvis MVE ABESSOLO and Gildas Francis NZENGUE OBEZO. The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the author and cannot in any case be considered as reflecting the official opinion of FAO, the European Commission (EC), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), or the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK FCDO). Project: Strengthening capacities for effective involvement of non-state actors in the preservation of Kévazingo. Activity 2.1: Organize 3 joint independent observation missions with communities and CSOs. INDEPENDENT OBSERVATION REPORT N°I

-- 1 of 10 --

Strengthening capacities for effective involvement of non-state actors in the preservation of Kévazingo. 2 List of abbreviations CCC: Contractual Specifications DGF: General Directorate of Forests DP: Provincial Directorate OI: Independent Observation NGO: Non-Governmental Organization PGD: General Principles of Law Table of contents 1. Context ..... 3 2. Methodology and mission itinerary .....3 2.1. Methodology ..... 3 2.2. Mission itinerary .....3 3. Activity timeline .....4 4. Main observations .....4 5. Mission evaluation .....7 6. Recommendations ..... 7 7. Annexes ..... 8 7.1. Materials used .....8 7.2. Photos from the mission .....8 7.3. Data collection sheet 9

-- 2 of 10 --

Joint independent observation missions with communities and CSOs. 3 1. Context Following reports from communities about illegal logging activities around the villages of Ebessi, Ngone, and Okok, located in the provinces of Ogooué-Ivindo and Woleu-Ntem, the NGO Brainforest conducted an OI mission in these areas from December 14 to 21, 2020. The objective of this mission was to gather information on the ongoing practices in the area. 2. Methodology and mission itinerary 2.1. Methodology To achieve these objectives, the mission consisted of field visits and interviews with the communities of Ebessi, Ngone, and Okok. 2.2. Mission itinerary

-- 3 of 10 --

Strengthening capacities for effective involvement of non-state actors in the preservation of Kévazingo. 4 3. Activity timeline The mission took place over 8 days, including 5 working days and 3 travel days. The table below provides details of the mission timeline. Time Cities Day 1 (December 14, 2020) Departure from Libreville to Makokou Day 2 (December 15, 2020) Makokou Day 3 (December 16, 2020) Makokou Day 4 (December 17, 2020) Departure from Makokou to Oyem Day 5 (December 18, 2020) Minvoul Day 6 (December 19, 2020) Bitam Day 7 (December 20, 2020) Oyem Day 8 (December 21, 2020) Departure from Oyem to Libreville 4. Main observations Summary of interviews Following the reports made by phone calls, the mission visited the villages of Ebessi in Ogooué-Ivindo, Ngone, and Okok in Woleu-Ntem to learn

more about the ongoing practices in these areas. After discussions with the communities, the team noted four main observations: - A log truck from the KHL company transporting unmarked and barkless wood on 14/10/2020 in Ebessi; - Presence of abandoned Kévazingo logs in Okok and Ebessi; - Attempt to recover Kévazingo logs by individuals in Okok; - Non-compliance with contractual specifications by the company Compagnie Dan Gabon in Ngone; Observed facts Presence of abandoned Kévazingo logs in Okok and Ebessi: The mission team organized a forest descent to identify this wood. Once on site, with local observers, five abandoned Kévazingo logs were identified, two in Ebessi and three in Okok. This wood was measured and geo-located using a decameter and a GPS. According to Article 3 of Decree No. 0273/PR/MEF of February 2, 2011, establishing the status of abandoned wood, after the six-month period provided for in Article 134 of the forestry code, abandoned wood becomes the property of the State. The State therefore has the possibility to transfer this wood after identifying it to any person who has submitted a request in accordance with the legal procedure. However, upon the arrival of the mission team on site, this abandoned wood (Kévazingo) had not yet been identified by the local forestry administration, according to local observers. Recommendation The DP of Ogooué-Ivindo or the Bitam Cantonnement should conduct a mission to identify abandoned wood in this area in accordance with the legal provisions in force. Because this wood runs the risk of being fraudulently recovered by unscrupulous operators as has often been the case in the past. The table below provides the characteristics and location of this wood: Species Length Diameter 1 Diameter 2 Villages Latitude Longitude Kévazingo 5 m 1.10 m 96 cm Ebessi 0°34’41.795”N 12°44’25.779”E Kévazingo 20.30 m 1.5 m 80 cm Ebessi 0°34’58.931”N 12°44’55.996”E Kévazingo 8.10 m 22 cm 9 cm Okok 2°5’20.217”N 11°40’31.935”E Kévazingo 9.77 m 1.47 m 1.20 m Okok 2°7’15.399”N 11°42’13.862”E Kévazingo 12.20 m 74 cm 83 cm Okok 2°09’55.22”N 11°67’97.82”E Table 1: Data table of identified Kévazingo wood. Photo 1: abandoned Kévazingo in Ebessi Photo 2: abandoned Kévazingo in Okok Attempt to recover Kévazingo logs by an individual in Okok: According to local observers, these logs were subject to an initial recovery attempt by an individual named ELLA OWONO. He claimed to have authorization to recover this wood but could not present it to the community demanding proof. The presence of tracks from machinery and the position of this wood confirm these allegations. Following the first attempt, another was orchestrated by a certain Dorcely who also claimed to have authorization from the administration to recover this wood. He allegedly also negotiated with the communities, promising them an amount of 20,000/m3 for the purchase of this wood.

Strengthening capacities for effective involvement of non-state actors in the preservation of Kévazingo. 6 Since July 9, 2020, a government measure regarding the valorization of abandoned wood throughout Gabon has been taken by the administration. Circular note No. 0835/ MEFMDPCPAT/SG/DGF/DEPRC states that "in accordance with the provisions of Decree No. 0273/ PR/MEF of 02/02 2011 and Order No. 0026MEFMEPCODDPAT of 25/05/2020, an operation for the identification, recovery, and valorization, by the forestry administration, of abandoned wood throughout the territory is launched as of July 9, 2020." Thus, this operation is organized according to the following modalities: Declaration of abandoned wood by any natural or legal person; Identification of this wood by the forestry administration; Inventory, skidding, grouping in parks, and cubing of identified wood; Sale on site by the administration of the concerned wood to the highest bidder through a call for tenders; Marking; Evacuation of the wood (issuance of appropriation authorizations or transfer decisions and transport slips). However, according to testimonies from the communities and the facts observed by the mission team, the authors of these recovery attempts did not comply with certain modalities of the valorization operation of abandoned wood in accordance with the legal provisions: The absence of local water and forest administration agents during the loading of wood in Okok;

Non-presentation of the authorization from the OMCD company; Uncubed wood. Moreover, Article 5 of Decree No. 0273-PR-MEF of February 2, 2011, establishing the status of abandoned wood, obliges the local water and forest administration, in case of a request for appropriation of abandoned wood, to "go to the site of the discovery for the purpose of drawing up a report." The absence of local water and forest agents during the calculation of the volume of wood and during loading constitutes offenses punishable by law. According to Article 281 of the forestry code, "any offense committed in matters of hunting or forestry may give rise, as the case may be and under the conditions set by regulatory means, to the confiscation of wildlife or forestry products or to the payment by transaction of a penalty equal to their value if they could not be seized." The penalty for this type of offense is imprisonment for forty-five days to three months and a fine of 25,000 to 1,000,000 CFA francs or one of these two penalties only. In case of recidivism or flight, the sanction is doubled (Article 134 of the forestry code). In view of all the above, the mission expresses reservations about the observed facts, the time

Joint missions of independent observation with communities and CSOs. 7 for it to get closer to the administration in order to be in possession of the acts of cession related to the identified woods. Recommendation The Provincial Directorate (DP) of Ogooué-Ivindo and the Waters and Forests District must make public the report of the discovery of abandoned woods and all the cession authorizations. 5. Mission Evaluation The mission went well overall. Among the positive points related to this mission, we can note the availability of the populations for the forest descents. However, the team also faced difficulties, including: The team was met with a refusal from the Waters and Forests District of Bitam; Non-presentation of the cession certificate by the operator; A flat tire on the way there; A flat tire on the way back. 6. Recommendations Following this mission, the OI makes the following recommendations: For the communities Be vigilant and do not hesitate to raise alerts for any suspicious activity. For the provincial directorates of waters and forests of Ogooué-Ivindo and Woleu Ntem The DP of Ogooué-Ivindo and the Bitam District must carry out a mission to identify the abandoned woods in this area. The DP of Ogooué-Ivindo or the Waters and Forests District must conduct a mission to control the legality of the procedure for recovering woods in this area.

Capacity building for effective involvement of non-state actors in the preservation of Kévazingo. 8 7. Annexes 7.1. Equipment used 2 Notebooks; 1 GPS; 1 Smartphone equipped with a GPS camera; 1 Measuring tape 7.2. Photos of the mission

Joint missions of independent observation with communities and CSOs. 9 7.3. Data collection sheet ID Latitude Longitude Observed facts 1 0°34’41.795”N 12°44’25.779”E Abandoned Kévazingo stump overgrown with vegetation about 1km from the main road/village Ebessi. 2 0°34’58.931”N 12°44’55.996”E Abandoned Kévazingo stump overgrown with vegetation less than 1km from the main road/village Ebessi. 3 2°5’20.217”N 11°40’31.935”E Abandoned Kévazingo stump, unmarked and moved from the felling site by machinery, absence of stump. 4 2°7’15.399”N 11°42’13.862”E Abandoned Kévazingo stump, unmarked and moved from the felling site by machinery, absence of stump. 5 2°09’55.22”N 11°67’97.82”E Abandoned Kévazingo stump, unmarked and moved from the felling site by machinery, absence of stump.

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