Participatory Research Report in Pongara

Rapport recherches participatives à Pongara

Libreville, Gabon, April 2010 LIFESTYLE AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT BY COMMUNITIES LIVING INSIDE AND ON THE PERIPHERY OF PONGARA NATIONAL PARK: CASE OF THE VILLAGES OF MAKOK, OVENG, POINTE-DENIS, EBELLO, MATEK MAVI, BISSO BINAM AND CHINCHOUA final "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" "supporting community involvement in the development of protected area legislation in Gabon"

-- 1 of 44 --

Final report produced by DJINANG Martial (Project Manager, Brainforest) MEYE Olivier (Assistant, Brainforest) AOUBA Raphael (Aventure Sans Frontières) ©July 2010 BRAINFOREST Quartier Ambowé, B.P: 23 749 Libreville – Tel: 07 97 84 25 E-mail: info@brain-forest.org – www.brain-forest.org Registration No: 00265/MISPD/SG/CT - NIF: 89616C The opinions expressed, the information presented in this report do not in any way constitute the expression of the opinion of the donors and are the responsibility of Brainforest ® 2 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Pongara

-- 2 of 44 --

3 TABLE OF CONTENTS I. INTRODUCTION .....
.....5 II. OBJECTIVES OF THE
WORK .....7 III. ADOPTED
METHODOLOGIES .....8 IV.
CHALLENGES
ENCOUNTERED .....11 V. SOME
SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA / KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE CONCERNED COMMUNITIES 12
VI. EVALUATION OF THE CURRENT PARTICIPATION OF COMMUNITIES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF
PONGARA NATIONAL PARK .....32 VII. THE MAIN THREATS TO THE
RESOURCES OF THE NATIONAL PARK .....37 VIII.
RECOMMENDATIONS / HYPOTHESES OF SOLUTIONS 39

-- 3 of 44 --

4 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Pongara

-- 4 of 44 --

5 Introduction i. intRoduction According to Grazia (1997), "participatory management" or "co-management of protected areas" is a form of partnership allowing the various stakeholders involved in nature conservation to share the functions, rights, and responsibilities in managing a territory or a range of resources enjoying a protected status. This concept arose from past failures in wildlife and flora conservation policies in developing countries, based on complete protection, without exploitation. In his report on the anthropological expertise of the ECOFAC program (Central African Forest Ecosystems), Joiris (1996) estimates that this participatory management should vary according to protected areas, cultural and political contexts of the different peoples. For a long time, particularly in Africa, the state has retained a monopoly on the management of forest resources (fauna and flora). Most current protected areas were created without the genuine consent of the populations concerned. In light of the failures of very

traditional biodiversity conservation methods, the situation has evolved positively over the past few years. According to this conception, the management of the ecosystems of the Congo Basin can only be sustainable if it is done within a partnership involving all stakeholders, particularly local populations, so that they contribute to the preservation of an environment that is also their capital (Gami, 2000). The profound ignorance of the realities of forest populations and, by extension, the extremely complex relationships that bind them to their environment, explains, in our view, a good part of the failures and difficulties in finding more fruitful strategies (Bahuchet and Maret, 2000). It is with the aim of contributing to the sustainable management of natural resources in our country that the organization Brainforest has initiated a project since last year whose ultimate goal is to achieve, among the various stakeholders involved, a concerted management system for the natural resources of Gabon's national parks.

-- 5 of 44 --

6 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Pongara This participatory research was conducted as part of this project and specifically with the communities from some of the villages located inside and on the periphery of the national park and with the administrative authorities and managers of Pongara Park. Located in the Estuaire province and more precisely in the Komo Ocean Department, Pongara National Park is part of the network of 13 national parks created by the late President Omar BONGO in August 2002. A marine park like the national parks of Mayumba, Loango, and Moukalaba-Doudou, Pongara covers an area of 92,969 ha and is separated from Libreville, the political capital of Gabon, by an estuary approximately 14 km wide. Pongara is known for the presence of many economic operators specializing in the ecotourism sector. The site is also characterized by the presence of former large-scale logging operations and the current existence of some operations specialized in so-called "family" cuts. The area is also subject to significant extraction of wildlife and fish resources for both marketing needs and consumption by local communities and other actors operating in the area. The Park and its surroundings are populated by communities of diverse origins representing the ethnic groups such as the Fang, Mpongwé, Punu, Vungu, Guizir, and Bahumbu spread across the following villages: Pointe-Dénis, Mateck-Mavi, Chinchoua, Oveng, Ebello, Atonda Simba, Alarmekeh, Makok. Some foreign communities from countries such as Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, and Benin also inhabit this region. As is customary in such circumstances for managers of Protected Areas set in contexts marked by human presence, the Gabon National Parks Agency must face the important question of reconciling the rights of communities with the conservation needs of the park's natural resources. This question is all the more important as it is established that, apart from the communities, other external actors pose real threats to the resources of Pongara and its surroundings.

-- 6 of 44 --

7 Objectives of the work ii. OBJECTIVES OF THE WORK Through this participatory research, we aimed to achieve the following objectives: – Collect relevant data on the concerned communities to understand their main activities conducted in the forest and their mode of management of natural resources; – Conduct a current evaluation of the involvement of communities in the management of Pongara National Park; – Highlight the main threats to the resources of Pongara National Park; – Engage with administrative authorities on the above-mentioned points: Park Conservator, administrative and customary authorities; – Reflect with the various stakeholders on potential solutions to consider for the implementation of a concerted management framework that truly leads to the sustainable management of the resources of Pongara National Park.

-- 7 of 44 --

8 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Pongara iii. ADOPTED METHODOLOGIES As part of our participatory research, we initially relied on the report prepared by our partner Aventure Sans Frontières (ASF), concerning local management of natural resources in Pongara National Park, which allowed us to familiarize ourselves not only with the practices but also with the various issues related to the management of the park's resources. Subsequently, our work focused on elements related to land tenure, the modalities concerning access and management of natural resources, and the current involvement of communities in the management of the park. Ultimately, we addressed the question of the management system that would allow the involvement of all actors while substantially minimizing the adverse effects on biodiversity. The project team implemented the following approaches: with the concerned communities The team stayed in the various villages visited during the duration of the work. Data were collected based on exchanges with members of the concerned communities in the form of structured and semi-structured interviews. With the administrative authorities and local elected officials of the Komo Ocean Department (the Prefect, the President of the Departmental Council, the Deputy, the Conservator of Pongara National Park); customary authorities Given that the administrative institutions are based in Libreville, it was not possible for us during our visit to meet the concerned authorities. However, this work was done subsequently. The Conservator of Pongara National Park, Mr. Eric OGOWET, was met and participated in the training and recycling workshop for facilitators organized as part of the participatory mapping project. For him, the project is a boon and aligns with the actions envisaged by the National Agency

9 Adopted Methodologies of National Parks, aimed ultimately at harmonizing the interventions of different actors in the management of national parks and surrounding areas. Our organization will recommend conducting quality work at the grassroots level, taking into account the ongoing and future actions of the ANPN. It will also recommend that we work towards continuing our activities beyond the very limited duration of the project, in order to truly achieve the expected objectives of sustainable management of the resources of the Pongara National Park. Ultimately, it will emphasize the constructive nature that our various works must take and the dynamic of information sharing to be established with the ANPN. Still in the chapter of personalities met, we obtained an audience with the guardian of ancestral traditions of Pointe-Denis, in the person of the princess, granddaughter of King Denis Rapotchombo. During this interview, which we found quite fruitful, the princess raised a number of poignant concerns that sufficiently reflect the discomfort of the communities of Pointe-Denis. These concerns can be summarized as follows: – Why are the children of Pointe-Denis not part of the eco-guards established for the national park? – My artisanal wood exploitation has been interrupted, but why not that carried out by Gabon Environment? Are there two Gabons with laws varying from one person to another? – What are we supposed to live on if we are prohibited from practicing our daily activities?

10 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Pongara Beyond the questions raised, the princess insisted on the need for the ANPN and the various NGOs operating in Pongara to initiate a genuine dialogue with the communities as soon as possible so that the current situation can find a favorable outcome. Although she believes that much remains to be done, the Princess encouraged the initiative undertaken in this direction by the ANPN through the holding of an information meeting by the conservator of the Pongara National Park. With

environmental protection organizations and community rights defenders operating in the area (Aventure Sans Frontières and Ariga) Regarding Aventure Sans Frontières, in addition to utilizing the report of their study on "The Local Management of Natural Resources of the Pongara National Park," one of its members, Raphaël AOUBA, participated in the current data collection mission. Moreover, given that he had a better knowledge of the area of activities and the communities concerned, he was given the responsibility of managing the mission team. In this capacity, he facilitated the group's work throughout the duration of the mission. As for the Ariga association, we had exchanges from Libreville with its president Mr. ATISSO, who also addressed the aspect of taking into account the rights of communities in the management of national parks. He elaborated on the shortcomings of the zoning meeting organized in April 2009 by the ANPN and justified this poor performance by the lack of grassroots involvement and prior consultation with the communities. Mr. ATYSSO's concerns mainly relate to the continuation of daily activities by the communities, the absence of compensatory measures in place of the restrictions imposed due to the designation of a portion of village lands as a national park, and the absence of a formal framework for dialogue between the national park managers and local communities.

-- 10 of 44 --

11 Challenges Encountered iV. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED During the conduct of this field activity, we faced two main challenges related, on the one hand, to the availability of community members, and on the other hand, to logistical constraints. Regarding the availability of the communities, it must be said that it is linked to their way of life. Indeed, the particularity of the villages visited stems from the fact that many of their members live between their respective villages and Libreville. This is why, despite the information letters sent, some villages were deserted. The second difficulty was logistical in nature. Indeed, given that the boat made available to us also had to serve for the transport of the various teams involved in the data collection for the participatory mapping project in the Congo basin (a project for which our organization is the focal point in Gabon), it was not always easy to adhere to the previously established schedule. Another difficulty arose from the fact that despite the duration of our stay, it was not possible for us to contact some landowners in Pointe-Denis who hold land titles on lands located within the Pongara National Park. Indeed, this is a rather sensitive issue that the ANPN will necessarily have to address.

-- 11 of 44 --

12 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Pongara V. SOME SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA / KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE CONCERNED COMMUNITIES V.1 History of the Creation of Villages1 It is towards the 16th century that historians locate the arrival of the first peoples in the estuary region of Gabon. At the beginning of the 19th century, after several cycles of migrations, the region was ethnically composed of the Mpongwé, Benga, Séké, and Bakélé. It was only in the second half of this century that the great migratory wave of the Fang was noted. However, it should be noted that these peoples were preceded by the pygmies, whose presence dates back a long time. The Fang, in order to reach the coast where there was a commercial stake, spread throughout the region at the expense of neighboring peoples who were forced either to continue their migration (Mpongwé, Benga, Séké, Bakélé) or to regroup in the region under the influence of King Denis Rapotchombo. It was during these great migratory waves that some clans settled by creating villages along the route. Thus, towards the end of the second half of the 19th century, almost the entire hinterland of the coastal region, particularly the left bank of the Estuary, was predominantly ethnolinguistic Fang. It is in this context that the French colonial government created a national park in the central region of Lopé-Okanda in 1946,

followed ten years later (1956) by the establishment of a vast network of three wildlife reserves in the coastal savanna region of Wonga-Wongué. At the same time, there was a regrouping of the villages on the left bank of the Estuary and a considerable growth in logging activities in the region. After independence (1962), a series of decrees modified and completed this network. Thus, in 1972, the rational wildlife exploitation area (AERF) of Wonga-Wongué became a presidential reserve. 1 Source: ASF in Report on the Local Management of Natural Resources of the Pongara National Park

-- 12 of 44 --

13 Some socio-economic data / knowledge about the concerned communities The creation of the presidential reserve, the regrouping of villages, and especially logging have considerably altered the spatial distribution of villages. Thus, small villages and those far from the roads will be neglected in favor of more populated villages and/or those located near logging sites. An overview of their history allows us to affirm that the creation of almost all villages predates the designation of this area as a National Park. V.2 Ethnic Composition and Population Density2 The combination of elements such as the creation of the presidential reserve, the regrouping of villages, agricultural projects, and especially logging is at the origin of the considerable modification of the spatial distribution of villages on the left bank of the Estuary. Indeed, the great need for labor required by the economic activities of the region has allowed the emergence of a workforce from other regions of the country. This influx of labor, as well as activities related to exploitation (agriculture aimed at supplying logging sites) and the regrouping of villages, will have as main consequences an increase in population, ethnic mixing, and the disappearance of certain villages. However, it is also important to note that the combined effects of the oil boom of the late 1970s and rural exodus motivated by the closure of logging operations are at the origin of the current demographic and ethnic configuration. 2 Source: ASF in Report on the Local Management of Natural Resources in the Pongara National Park

-- 13 of 44 --

14 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Pongara As a result, we will distinguish two types of populations in the villages: – The indigenous people; – The foreigners who are either Gabonese from other regions of the country or expatriates. In many cases, some Gabonese from other regions of the country will settle and are nowadays confused with the local populations. It is this cosmopolitan character that we currently encounter in the villages located on the periphery or inside the Pongara National Park, with villages predominantly inhabited by permanent allogeneic residents. However, even though we observe the emergence of new villages on the left bank of the Estuary, the proportion of permanent resident individuals is in clear decline. Indeed, for these individuals, the village hut is most often a secondary residence and the stay in the village is an opportunity to restore their economic health through the practice of certain income-generating activities. These villages are actually sparsely populated on a permanent basis: many active individuals regularly seek basic infrastructure and job offers on the other bank. It should also be noted that this reality varies from one community to another and often depends on different circumstances. Let us recall that Pointe-Denis was created by the clans of the Mpongwé ethnicity, and their descendants are still represented there. The current population distribution shows that Pointe-Denis is the most populated village on the left bank of the Estuary, due to its nature as a seaside resort. Thus, the workers (guards) of secondary residences, mostly West Africans, constitute more than half of the residents of Pointe-Denis and are, moreover, non-permanent residents. Another part of the population consists of Ghanaians, Beninese, and Togolese. These populations, whose members are perfectly integrated, are

permanent residents. Finally, a tiny part of the resident population consists of indigenous people.

-- 14 of 44 --

15 Some socio-economic data / knowledge about the affected communities Furthermore, it should be noted that, with the exception of Pointe-Denis and Ebelo, more than half of the foreigners in the villages on the left bank are Fang from Equatorial Guinea. On the other hand, although these villages are mostly mono-ethnic, there are perfectly integrated allogeneic individuals. Therefore, there is ethnic heterogeneity in the villages. V.3 Collective facilities and their effectiveness3 While it is easy to observe the existence of a few rare basic social infrastructures in the villages, their proper functioning is not always guaranteed. Health Access to health care is a primary concern for all communities on the Left Bank. Among the villages visited, only Chinchoua has a dispensary. Unfortunately, this dispensary is not functional due to the absence of a nurse and/or a supply of medicine. Furthermore, part of the building is often requisitioned for housing or as a passageway. Given the degradation suffered by the dispensary, which has been left abandoned, it requires rehabilitation work before it can be put back into service. In these villages, self-medication is a popular practice among the populations. They only seek health services in the capital in cases of complications or serious cases. School There are no schools or secondary educational institutions in all the villages on the left bank of the Estuary. This situation also explains the low population density in the villages during the academic year. 3 Collective facilities and their effectiveness

-- 15 of 44 --

16 "Facilitate community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Pongara Water The absence of an official water distribution network in the villages forces the populations to rely on hydraulic pumps, nearby water sources, and wells. We observed hydraulic pumps in Mateck-Mavi, Bissobinam, and Chinchoua. Electricity In all the villages visited, the populations rely on generators for lighting, and in the absence of these, kerosene lamps are used. Social capital: village groups Formal and informal groups at the village level With the exception of Pointe-Denis, where we were able to identify two NGOs, namely ARIGA and the Friends of the Coast, there are none in the other villages. V.4 Village economies in the present and future4 The lives of local populations are regulated by the practice of several activities that are both subsistence and economic. The majority of these activities are mixed because they are carried out by both men and women. However, there is a categorization of activities based on gender. Finally, while some activities are practiced seasonally, others are practiced annually. Furthermore, it should be noted that all income-generating activities for populations living inside and on the periphery of the park have common denominators: the forest and watercourses. Thus, for the Fang and Mpongwé, who are the indigenous people, the appropriation of the forest is lineage-based, while other ethnic groups have appropriated areas free from any occupation. Regardless of the mode of land occupation, both groups perceive the forest as a nurturing mother. 4 Source: ASF in Report on Local Management of Natural Resources in the Pongara National Park

-- 16 of 44 --

17 Some socio-economic data / knowledge about the affected communities Subsistence and commercial agriculture In the villages, agriculture is an activity practiced by both men and women. Here, we observe a division of roles between men and women according to the stages of farming activity. Plantain bananas and cassava tubers are the main crops produced by farmers, to which they add vegetables. With rudimentary tools (Machete, Axe, Hoe...), almost absent labor, and animals devastating the crops, the cultivated areas are relatively average. The practice of farming shows that the main crops planted are plantain bananas and cassava tubers.

To these main crops are associated either eggplant, taro, or corn. In addition to these traditional crops, the farmers of Oveng associate fruit trees, notably mango trees, which populate the aforementioned villages. With the exception of Pointe-Denis and Mackok, agriculture is practiced in all the villages visited. Indeed, while the populations of Pointe-Denis justify this situation by the lack of cultivable land due to the creation of the Park on their land, those of Makok mention the presence of animals that devastate plantations, particularly elephants. In general, the occupation of land intended for agricultural practices occurs within family or clan lands. Most often, the fields form an agricultural belt not exceeding five kilometers around the village. However, the cultivated areas vary in size depending on whether the harvests are intended for self-consumption or for sale. Indeed, the areas where almost all the produce is intended for sale are considerable in size. This is particularly the case in Mateck-Mavi and Ebelo/Ayem.

-- 17 of 44 --

18 "Facilitate community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Pongara The conflict between farmers and crop-destroying animals. The practice of agriculture in the villages is subject to numerous constraints such as various destruction caused by animals. Indeed, being located outside the limits of the villages, in or at the edge of the forests, the fields often suffer attacks from animals that cause enormous damage to the crops. At the forefront of the crop-destroying animals, communities identify the elephant. It is unanimously designated as a plague by farmers from Bissobinam, Ebelo, Makok, and Mateck-Mavi. Following the elephant, the first group of small mammals identified includes the hedgehog and the porcupine (Mateck-Mavi, Bissobinam, Ebelo), then the Sitatunga (Mateck-Mavi, Bissobinam, Chinchoua), and finally the potamochere (Chinchoua). The practice of livestock farming Although this activity is practiced by almost all villages, it still occupies a marginal place. The animals involved are mainly poultry, notably chickens, which are found in all villages. In addition to poultry, there are also sheep and goats, which are found in Pointe-Denis, Ebelo/Ayem, and Makok. All these animals are raised outdoors, without enclosures or special arrangements, exposing them to epidemics, and especially to predators (owls, foxes, snakes...). However, it should be noted that in general, the product of livestock farming is not intended for sale; it is self-consumed, used during ceremonies (treatment by a traditional healer, mourning, births, weddings...) or offered to distinguished guests. Subsistence and commercial fishing In the villages on the left bank, fishing is a mixed activity that takes place all year round. In general, whether practiced by men or women, regardless of the season and the destination of the product, several types of fishing are observed depending on the location of the activity and the tools used.

-- 18 of 44 --

19 Some socio-economic data / knowledge about the affected communities Table 1: Artisanal and commercial fishing Villages Fishing methods Main fish caught Types of fishing Main actors Main destination of fish Fishing area Seasons Logistical access Pointe-De- nis Net: "Ti- ré-Tiré", Rod, Longline Daytime Men Sale Komo, Atlantic Coast An- nuelle Locally made and/or motorized canoe On foot Mateck- MaVi Hooks Rod, Net Longline Daytime Men Self-con- sumption The Gongoué An- nuelle Locally made canoe BissoBinaM Hooks Net, Trap Dam, Rod Daytime Mixed Self-con- sumption Gongoué Branch, Interior Rivers An- nuelle Locally made canoe On foot chinchoua Bottom line Hook Dam, Trap Captain, Red, Ray, Mackerel, Bar, Sole, Bos- su... Shrimp Daytime Mixed Sale La Remboué La Mbila- gone An- nuelle Locally made and/ or motorized canoe On foot eBelo/ ayeMe Net, Trap Hook Dam Mixed oVeng Net, Rod Daytime Men Self-con- sumption An- nuelle Locally made canoe Makok/ MfoulezeM D N C D N C D N C D N C D N C D N C D N C D N C D N C Source: R. Aouba, Aventure Sans Frontières Legend: D N C = Data not communicated It emerges from the table above that fishing is an activity practiced in

almost all the villages on the left bank of the Estuary, with differences regarding the purposes and types of materials used. Thus, fishing with nets and/or traps is the fishing method practiced in almost all villages. One of the most commonly used tools by fishermen is the rod, with the exception of Chinchoua. However, in these villages, fishermen use a sort of variant in that

20 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Pongara Instead of having a rod, they hold the line in their hands and fish with their arms. This is particularly the case in Mateck-Mavi, Bissobinam, and Chinchoua. It also happens, as is the case in Chinchoua, Bissobinam, and Ebelo/Ayem, that fishermen tie the fishing line directly to the branches of mangroves. The trap and the dam are almost always used simultaneously, and their use is made by fishermen from Bissobinam, Chinchoua, and Ebelo/Ayem. In general, almost all villages practice daytime fishing. Fishing is predominantly a male activity in the villages on the left bank; However, depending on the method, the product harvested, and its destination, there is notable participation from women, especially during the dry season. This is particularly true in Bissobinam, Chinchoua, and Ebelo/Ayem. Since, in the majority of villages, the product harvested during fishing is exclusively intended for consumption, it can be confidently stated that communities primarily engage in subsistence fishing; even though the trend is reversed in the villages of Pointe-Denis and Chinchoua, where the product of fishing is mainly sold at the Oloumi market. Subsistence and commercial hunting Although primarily practiced for self-consumption, this activity appears as the main source of income for local populations. It is practiced year-round, with men being the main actors. It occurs both day and night, with a preference for night hunting. Communities generally practice two types of hunting: large and small game. The main hunting tools used are the 12-gauge shotgun and traps. Here, the portion reserved for sale is considerable, even though a significant part is intended for self-consumption in the villages and by families left behind in Libreville: due to its characteristics, it is primarily a commercial hunt.

21 Some socio-economic data / knowledge about the affected communities Moreover, integrating a cycle of activity that includes, among other things, farming work and artisanal fishing; the bushmeat trade (and with it, hunting) is practiced year-round; better during the rainy season due to the abundance of captures or game slaughter. Table 2: Artisanal and commercial hunting Villages Hunting methods Types of hunting Hunting seasons Hunting area Logistical access Main animals hunted Main actors Main destination of the game Pointe-De- nis Non-existent? Non-existent? Non-existent? Non-existent? Non-existent? Non-existent? Non-existent? Non-existent? Mateck- MaVi Shotgun Trap Shotgun preferred at night; Traps during the day Year-round On foot Bushpig, Cephalophus, Sitatunga; Porcupine/ Hedgehog, Buffalo Men Sale BissoBinaM Shotgun Trap Shotgun at night Traps during the day Year-round On foot, Locally made canoe Bushpig, Cephalophus, Sitatunga, Owl, Porcupine, Gongoué River, Inland rivers Men Sale Chinchoua Shotgun Trap Shotgun at night Traps during the day Year-round On foot Locally made canoe Bushpig, Cephalophus, Sitatunga, Porcupine, Monkey Men Sale eBelo/ Ayem Shotgun Trap Shotgun at night Traps during the day Year-round On foot Locally made canoe Men Sale oVeng Trap During the day Year-round On foot Owl, Porcupine, Hedgehog Men Self-consump- tion Makok/ MfoulezeM Not communicated D N C D N C D N C D N C D N C D N C D N C Source: R. Aouba, Legend: D N C = Data not communicated This table shows that mature men, whose age ranges from 35 to 45 years - former employees of forestry companies and younger men, with or without qualifications and especially unemployed, are the main actors in hunting activity. It is

22 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Pongara also the main source of income for the majority of households on the left bank of the Estuary. This is indeed the reason why it is practiced year-round. In general, it should be noted that hunting is practiced by and/or for the communities using shotguns and traps. Moreover, the coastal area is characterized by a multitude of rivers, tributaries, and river arms. As a result, hunting is done on foot and by canoe. The main species in order of hunting are: – Bushpig, Cephalophus, Sitatunga for hunters from Mateck-Mavi, Bissobinam, Chinchoua. – Porcupine/Hedgehog, Cephalophus The most hunted animals are therefore the Cephalophus, the pair Porcupine/Hedgehog, the bushpig, and the Sitatunga. There is an alternation in all these villages between the consumption and sale of game, even though in some cases, sale is predominant. Artisanal and commercial sawing As the primary logging region in the country, the history of the villages on the left bank of the Estuary is intertwined with that of logging. And most often, this activity is the origin of the spatial, ethnic, and demographic distribution of the villages. The populations saw wood for the construction of village huts, during farming work, or for commercial purposes. The activity is exclusively male and is practiced year-round, although there is a preference for the dry season to facilitate the evacuation of planks that are transformed on-site. Transport, for its part, is done in two stages, carried by men (porters) to the evacuation site (temporary landing) and by boat.

23 Some socio-economic data / knowledge about the affected communities Table 3: Sawing Villages Main species Sawing areas Production tools Main actors Types of exploitation Destination of products Pointe-De- nis Okoumé, Various woods On the other side of the Rogolié river Chainsaw The Princess Ancestral forests (access by canoe) Sale, Construction of huts Mateck- MaVi Okoumé Various woods Around the village Chainsaw (Rental) Village men Family forests (access on foot) Construction of huts BissoBinaM Okoumé Various woods Around the village, Along the paths leading to Odoko and Ndzomoe, Towards the old village. Non-existent Village chief The chief receives compensation from the operator Sale Chinchoua Okoumé Various woods Along the Remboué (on the islets), Along the Ayamé going towards Mvang Ayong, Along the Maga and Bilangone Chainsaw Notable from the village Family forests (access on foot and/or by canoe) Sale, Construction of huts eBelo/ Ayem Okoumé Various woods Around the village Chainsaw The canton chief Family forests (access on foot) Sale, Construction of huts oVeng Non-existent Makok/ MfoulezeM Okoumé Various woods Along the Igombiné river Non-existent Village chief The chief receives compensation Sale Source: R. Aouba The most exploited species by artisanal sawyers is: – Okoumé (Aucoumea klaineana), Indeed, for almost all sawyers on the left bank, Okoumé is the main species they cut in the forest. Moreover, in these villages, all other exploited species are referred to by the term "various woods" which is, in fact, a generic name given to a set of woods that includes: – Padouk (Pterocarpus soyauxii); – Bilinga (Nauclea didderichii);

24 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Pongara – Dibetou (Lovoa klaineana), – Izombe (Testulea gabonensis); – Bahia (Mitragyna ciliata); – Eyoume (Dialum guineense); – Douka (Mimusops africana) In the villages, there are two types of exploitation, one reserved for local consumption and another reserved for commercialization. However, given the costs inherent in practicing this activity, the commercial aspect is mainly the domain of important personalities in the community. The activity does not benefit the entire population. Sawing activity is practiced both in villages located inside and on the periphery of the PNP. Thus, the villages located inside the park that exploit wood are Chinchoua, Bissobinam, Mateck-Mavi,

Ebelo/Ayem, Pointe-Denis, and the exploitation areas are distributed as follows: – Along the Remboué and on the islets: Chinchoua – Along the Ayamé: Chinchoua, – Along the Maga: Chinchoua, – Along the Bilangone: Chinchoua – Along the Rogolié river: Pointe-Denis – Around the village (no more than 5 km): Chinchoua, Atonda Simba, Bissobinam, Mateck-Mavi, Obélo/ Ayem. – On the paths leading to Mateck-Mavi, Bissobinam While the village located outside and on the periphery of the PNP that practices artisanal sawing is: Makok/Mfoulezem. The exploitation areas are distributed as follows: – Along the Igombiné river – Around the village (no more than 5 km)

-- 24 of 44 --

25 Some socio-economic data / knowledge about the affected communities Gathering For local populations, gathering is a seasonal activity consisting of harvesting various non-timber forest products from the forest. Originally reserved for women, men have gradually become involved in this activity. Table 4: Gathering Villages Main species Gathering area Main actors Gathering period Destination of products Pointe-De- nis Andock Hazelnuts Palm nuts On the other side of the Rogolié river Women Fruiting (December-January-February?) Self-consumption eBelo Andock Hazelnuts Wild Atanga Around the village Next to the camps (for gathering and hunting) Men and women Fruiting (December-January-February?) Sale oVeng Non-existent Non-existent Non-existent Non-existent Self-consumption Mateck- MaVi Andock Hazelnuts Palm nuts Around the village (in the plantations) On the hunting paths Women and Men Fruiting (December-January-February?) Self-consumption BissoBinaM Andock Hazelnuts Wild Atanga Palm nuts Around the village (in the plantations) On the hunting paths Men and women Fruiting (December-January-February?) Self-consumption Makok/ MfoulezeM Non-existent Non-existent Non-existent Non-existent Non-existent Chinchoua Andock Hazelnuts Wild Atanga Palm nuts Around the village (in the plantations) On the hunting paths Men and women Fruiting (December-January-February?) Self-consum- tion Source: R. Aouba

-- 25 of 44 --

26 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report on participatory research in Pongara Gathering is practiced in almost all villages, except for Oveng and Makok/Mfoulezem where the activity is practically nonexistent. The most collected products are as follows: – Andock (Irvingia gabonensis), – Hazelnuts (Coula edulis). – Palm nuts. Moreover, since this activity depends on the fruiting period of the trees, on one hand, and on the other hand, the gathering practice by the populations is mainly for the purpose of obtaining a food supplement, it does not truly threaten the species. All these fruit trees are wild and found in the forest; therefore, outside of plantations (farmers never cut down fruit trees that are found in or around the plantations), women (accompanied by men) go to gather or collect fruits in well-defined areas. Thus, for the villages located in the interior of the PNP, we have: – Around the village (in the plantations): Pointe-Denis, Ebelo, Mateck-Mavi, Bissobinam, and Chinchoua. – Along the paths and near hunting camps: Ebelo, Mateck-Mavi, Bissobinam, and Chinchoua. It should also be noted that gathering is a secondary activity in the sense that it overlaps with hunting and agriculture in the same areas. Indeed, during the fruiting period, gathering occurs during hunting and/or agricultural activities. Although, in Ebelo, most of the collected products are intended for sale, it should be noted that gathering is primarily practiced by these communities for food reasons.

-- 26 of 44 --

27 Some socio-economic data / knowledge about the communities concerned V.5 Local management of forest and marine spaces / Land tenure V.5.a. Spatial footprint of village activities 5 The socio-economic study conducted in the Komo Océan department revealed the

actual footprint of the populations on the space through several of their activities. However, it should be noted that this pressure on space varies according to the type of activities and the villages. Generally, all these villages appropriate the forest and marine space for almost the same activities, the main ones being: hunting, fishing, agriculture, sawing, gathering, and collecting; some prohibited areas and sacred forests are noted, which are only located at Pointe-Denis. Agricultural zone This zone corresponds to both cultivated spaces and those that could be cultivated by the populations. In the majority of villages, there are still large areas suitable for agricultural activity. For all the villages on the left bank of the Estuary, the situation is almost identical. Regarding the gradient of land appropriation for agriculture, the intervention zone of the populations is adjacent to the villages. This is for several reasons, including: – The administration of the park (cf. the populations of Pointe-Denis); – The proximity to the Capital; – Animals, particularly elephants, devastating crops; – The lack of basic social infrastructure; – Rural exodus; – The advanced age of farmers; – Soil quality; – The isolation of the area. Thus, for all these non-exhaustive reasons, the cultivated spaces in the villages of the left bank are located in the immediate vicinity of the villages (less than 5km) and the fields cover very small areas. There is therefore no appropriation of space by several communities. Each community represents a well-defined area. Except for the populations of Mateck-Mavi and Alarmeke who appropriate the same space. Sawing zone An activity exclusively reserved for men, sawing is practiced in the majority of villages on the left bank. However, unlike hunting, the level of involvement of the populations remains modest as its practice requires a chainsaw, which is not always accessible to everyone. Its practice is also limited in its spatial extent but has a slightly larger area of influence than that of agriculture. This activity is practiced along the tributaries of the Komo, namely the Remboué, the Maga, the Ayamé, and the Bilangone. Sawing is practiced both on the islets and along the banks of these tributaries. However, the extent of the area and the respect for the forests near the villages (Chinchoua) ensures that there is practically no overlap of sawing zones. The situation is identical both along the banks of the Igombiné tributary (Makok/Mfoulezem) and in all the villages on the left bank. Interviews with some individuals have shown that the right to cut down trees near the villages is regulated either by the permission of the village chief (Bissobinam, Makok- Mfoulezem), or directly by the landowner (Chinchoua, Pointe-Denis, Ebelo/Ayeme). In conclusion, it should be noted that the sawing zones listed here are not permanent over time or space. They are indeed subject to change at the discretion of the owners and operators. Hunting zones Of all the activities carried out by communities living inside or on the periphery of the PNP, hunting is the one that experiences both the greatest intensity and a very wide spatial extension.

29 Some socio-economic data / knowledge about the communities concerned The gradient of land appropriation for hunting activity by hunters on the left bank of the Estuary highlights the fact that hunting covers very vast stretches of forest. It is indeed observed that several areas located both inside and on the periphery of the park are frequented by communities for the practice of hunting activities. In fact, while hunting is of low intensity around Pointe-Denis, it is not the case in other villages. On the other hand, hunters from these villages use old forest paths to penetrate deep into the forest. There is indeed a network of old paths that connect several villages to hunting areas. Fishing zone Considering that fishing is generally done in an artisanal manner, the fishing zones are very close to the shores of the villages. However, it should be noted that the expansion of the fishing zone is due to the permanent presence of commercial fishermen from the Capital in the tributaries of the Komo (Remboué, Maga, Igombiné, Gongoué) and trawlers that fish in the park and near the shores of the villages. Gathering and collecting clams and turtle eggs Aside from hunting, fishing, agriculture, and sawing, local populations practice gathering and other activities such as collecting clams (Atonda Simba, Ebelo) and

marine turtle eggs (Pointe-Denis). It should be noted that these activities do not have a real impact on the socio-economic life of the village community as they are practiced by a minority. Moreover, gathering, the collection of clams, and marine turtle eggs are seasonal activities. The populations say they cannot travel long distances solely for gathering (except for Ebelo). It is on the way back from the forest that they can take advantage of this activity. It is a temporary practice, often reserved for consumption only like indigenous chocolate.

-- 29 of 44 --

30 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report on participatory research in Pongara V.5.b. Local rules for access and use of forest resources Except for Pointe-Denis where some activities are subject to the rites and customs that the clan or family chief enforces in their ancestral forest, the practice of human activities is no longer exclusive to the clan or family of origin in the villages, even if the boundaries of ancestral forests are still known. However, it should be noted that regardless of the circumstances, the practice of activities and settlement in the village for individuals without ancestral rights to the land is subject to the prior authorization of the owner of the concerned space or the village chief. Table 5: Local rules for access and use of forest resources Villages Hunting Fishing Agriculture and gathering Sawing Pointe-De- nis Authorization from the clan or family chief to access hunting sites Free fishing for all Authorization from the land owner Authorization from the clan or family chief to access the forest eBelo Authorization from the chief Authorization from a family member and/or the lands are rented (prices vary between 15,000 and 25,000 CFA/month) Authorization from the forest owner oVeng Free hunting Authorization from the boss Nonexistent Mateck- MaVi Free hunting Authorization from a family member and/or the lands are rented Authorization from the clan or family chief to access the forest BissoBinaM Free hunting Free fishing Authorization from the land owner Fruiting (December- January-February?) Makok/ MfoulezeM Free hunting Nonexistent Authorization from the chief who receives a fee chinchoua Authorization from the clan or family chief to access the hunting sites Authorization from a family member Authorization from the land owner Authorization from the clan or family chief

-- 30 of 44 --

31 Some socio-economic data / knowledge about the communities concerned In almost all villages (except Pointe-Denis), once authorization is obtained to settle as a resident with the village chief, clan, family, or landowner, the practice of hunting, fishing, and gathering activities becomes free. For agricultural practice, it is advisable for newcomers to inform the owners in advance. The use of traps benefits somewhat from this constraint. However, regarding the practice of sawing in ancestral forests, an arrangement is required between the village chiefs or the owners and the sawyers. Indeed, artisanal sawyers must request and obtain permission (often after a financial arrangement) from the owners. It often happens that a portion of forest is rented out by the village chief. In this case, the latter receives a fee.

-- 31 of 44 --

32 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report on participatory research in Pongara Vi. Evaluation of the current participation of communities in the management of the national park of Pongara The management of national parks in Gabon is primarily based on Law No. 003/2007 of August 27, 2007, relating to national parks. Aiming to rise to the level of international conventions regarding natural resource management and Protected Areas (African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Convention on Biological Diversity, etc.), our legislator has not been subtle and has therefore included several provisions in the national parks

law that embody the principle of community involvement in the management process of national parks. The number of provisions, as well as the elements referring to this participation, are quite telling. Indeed, through its articles 2, 4, 7, 10, 15, 16,

33 Evaluation of the current participation of communities in the management of the national park of Pongara 17, 18, 19, and 21, the national parks law provides for elements such as: – information, education, and environmental communication; – the creation, classification, and declassification, total or partial, of a national park, taking into account the customary rights of local communities and after consulting with them; – the obligation to consult local communities for any modification of the boundaries of a national park or its peripheral zone; – the authorization of a number of activities in the national park, taking into account the imperatives of conserving natural and cultural heritage, as well as customary usage rights; – the establishment and formalization with communities and other actors of co-managed relationships for natural resources in the peripheral areas of the national park; – the freedom in the peripheral areas of national parks to exercise customary usage rights, including fishing, hunting, logging, and capturing wildlife, agricultural and forestry activities, gathering plants, and collecting minerals or fossils, subject to compliance with applicable laws and, where applicable, the stipulations of land management contracts or the management plan. – the creation of local advisory management committees for parks as provided in Article 44 of the law; – the possibility of concluding land management contracts between the administration of a national park and the local communities of the peripheral zone; – the obligation for national park management plans to take into account the customary uses and rights of these communities. In light of the above, it is clear that the aspects of community participation and consideration of their customary usage rights are widely mentioned in the law. What about practice? In reality, the first attempts at genuine community involvement in the management process of the national park of Pongara date back to April 2009, specifically in the context of developing the management plan for the national park of Pongara. At that time, the ANPN invited representatives and resource persons from the affected communities to the zoning meeting of the national park of Pongara. Despite the mixed outcome recognized for this work, we can nonetheless be pleased that the foundations for community participation in the process had been laid. To this attempt, we can add the information and contact meetings organized by the new technical management and the new conservator of the national park of Pongara. We can also mention the many perspectives of the ANPN regarding the adoption of a participatory work approach, notably the imminent establishment of a Local Advisory Management Committee. Despite these rather promising perspectives, communities continue to express numerous grievances regarding the current management system of the national park. In recent years, communities report having received very little information about the management of the national park, while many of them remain dependent on the resources it contains. The few pieces of information received come from the NGO Aventure Sans Frontières, which sometimes is forced to substitute for the administration. The communities have justified their strong position observed during the zoning meeting in April 2009 by stating that some of them had very little information regarding the concept, stakes, and opportunities of a national park. Another grievance directed at the park administration in the villages stems from the fact that it prioritizes restrictions imposed on communities at the expense of raising awareness and developing alternative activities to hunting. In almost all the villages visited, we recurrently heard the following comments and discourses: "It is in the forest that we draw everything; if now we are forbidden to go there, how will we live and feed our children?" "Why are we, the communities, forbidden to cut down trees

while others in the park have this permission? Is there two Gabons with laws that apply to some

and not others?"

-- 34 of 44 --

35 Evaluation of the current participation of communities in the management of the national park of Pongara "I don’t even know where the park begins and where it ends. What should I do to know that in one place I am in the park and in another I am outside the park?" "The park people should know that we do not even refuse to stop hunting and fishing, but what do they give us in return? Already for the recruitment of eco-guards, they did not take anyone from Pongara, and they expect things to work with that?" "This park story, we don’t even see the officials... it is those who have the parks who should come to discuss with the populations. But it is you who are put in front." "Here, this is my home. My grandparents are here, my parents too. Someone is going to come and forbid us from hunting and planting. When the elephant comes, it devastates everything in two days without us being compensated, and we are told we must protect it. This situation almost made me abandon the village." "Those who want to protect will cause rural exodus because we live here off our food. We have our children in Libreville; every Saturday, we go down to bring them food. If we can no longer do that because we must protect the animals that come to destroy the crops, what are we going to do? We would prefer to leave." The communities also see the lack of demarcation of the national park and its peripheral zone as an additional cause of grievance. This demarcation, in their opinion, would have allowed some to appreciate the portions of their traditional territories located within the park or its peripheral zone. The communities have indicated that despite repeated calls to the ANPN regarding the management of the recurring human-wildlife conflict in many villages, it has never come to their aid, thus leaving them in despair. At the end of our participatory research, the following main problems were identified:

-- 35 of 44 --

36 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report on participatory research in Pongara – Lack of knowledge of the concept, stakes, and opportunities of a national park; – Lack of demarcation of the national park boundaries; – Lack of delimitation and demarcation of the peripheral zone and buffer zone; – Existence of human-elephant conflict; – Lack of application of participatory management methods and techniques of park resources with communities; – Lack of recognition and consideration of community rights in the management of the national park; – Lack of valorization of local knowledge and know-how; – Lack of alternative measures, such as micro-development projects, employment, community ecotourism, etc., to the hunting ban;

-- 36 of 44 --

37 The main threats to the resources of the national park VII. THE MAIN THREATS TO THE RESOURCES OF THE NATIONAL PARK A quick analysis of the activities carried out in the national park of Pongara and its periphery allows us to identify activities that have a significant impact on this environment and the resources it contains. Regarding the main threats currently facing the national park of Pongara, we note the following elements: VII.1 Logging. As can be seen, there is intense logging activity in the Pongara area, not only for construction purposes by communities but also for economic needs and with the facilitation of economic operators. It is worth recalling that this situation is justified by the fact that this entire region is part of the country's first logging zone. The old logging roads and previous markings (identifications) of species carried out by various operators who have succeeded each other over the years facilitate the work of artisanal sawyers. If the major obstacle for sawyers is obtaining the chainsaw, which is their main tool of work, they are aided by the difficult access conditions (isolation) that do not allow the Water and Forest agents to carry out regular controls. VII.2 Poaching. Excessive and illegal

harvesting of game is one of the activities of local or foreign poachers in the region. The main cause of pressure on wildlife and its habitats is intensive hunting, often motivated by the development of illicit international trade in trophies, particularly ivory tips and skins, which has become very lucrative, and the sale of game in the Libreville market. The poaching activity operates in a well-organized and structured network as follows: at the top of the hierarchy, we have the hunters. They are in constant contact with the resources, harvest them, and make them available to other actors.

-- 37 of 44 --

38 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Pongara Alongside hunters, we have intermediaries who partly ensure the supply of those who cannot or refuse to travel to the villages. The transporters, also called conveyors, make up the group of actors that facilitates the transport of bush meat and other useful goods from the left bank of the Komo to the right bank as the final destination, specifically to the Oloumi market. Hunters are equipped with a 12-gauge firearm and practice night hunting. When they do not own the weapon, hunters have sponsors who provide them with weapons and ammunition in exchange for a fee or a portion of the game hunted. It also happens that sponsors only provide ammunition to armed hunters in exchange for a portion of the game hunted; VII.3 Increased extraction of fishery resources This is an issue primarily focused on the fishing sector. Indeed, this sector is confronted with the problem of poaching fishery resources, which is a concern for local authorities. It should be noted that this poaching is mainly carried out by fishermen coming mostly from outside and large trawlers venturing into these waters. This situation is, moreover, the source of ongoing conflicts that exist between national artisanal fishermen and foreigners, sometimes leading to social tensions, xenophobic outbursts, and brawls among the various actors in the field.

-- 38 of 44 --

39 Recommendations / hypotheses for solutions VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS / HYPOTHESES FOR SOLUTIONS At the end of our participatory research and based on the main problems identified, most of which are outlined in this report, we would like to make a few recommendations. Although these do not constitute a panacea for all the problems listed above, we believe they can serve as a basis for reflection for their resolution. VIII.1 Educate, Train, and Raise Awareness among communities about national park law and sustainable management of natural resources One prerequisite for park managers should be a broad dissemination of the law on parks, which extensively covers the contours, stakes, and modalities of the creation and management of national parks. When analyzing the various statements from communities, they seem to have very little information about the national park. Indeed, the further one moves away from Pointe-Denis, the more it is observed that communities are less informed. More than just simple information about the content of the law, we also believe that emphasis should be placed on training related to sustainable management techniques for natural resources. The law on national parks, through its article 2, explicitly supports this when it speaks of information, education, and environmental communication as tools for promoting the policy of protection and sustainable enhancement of national parks. This is also the case with the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Indeed, in its article xx, which deals with capacity building, education, and training, this text clearly states that it is the duty of the States Parties to work towards promoting education, training, and awareness among populations at all levels regarding the environment, so that they become more aware of their close dependence on natural resources and better understand the reasons and rules for the sustainable use of these resources. Thus, this awareness/training can be done through brochures or leaflets written in

simple French and possibly illustrated with drawings to facilitate the understanding of a large majority of the population. VIII.2 Establish a concerted framework for the management of natural resources The political stakes at the international level and the search for alternative solutions to traditional forest management approaches are the origin of the exploration of new approaches to natural resource management (Nguinguiri, 1997). Today, the evolution of management practices is moving from a centralized approach to a participatory approach (participatory or contractual management). This vision has also been endorsed by our legislator through articles 18 and 45, which provide for the creation of local consultative management committees within the framework of national park management, where park officials cooperate with local authorities. These committees thus appear as suitable frameworks for consultation between the managers of the Protected Area and other actors involved in the park, either directly or indirectly. Through these, it will be possible for all parties to address all issues related to the management of the national park in order to establish a management policy that benefits the various actors. This framework will also serve as a perfect opportunity to address the subject of threats to the natural resources of the national park. The difficulty in this activity will certainly lie in the choice of individuals and entities to be included in this dynamic. That is why it is important for park managers to focus on practical aspects by ensuring the establishment of a committee that is light yet representative of the various components involved in Pongara. The committee must necessarily include park managers, administrative authorities, representatives of local communities, representatives of economic operators, representatives of NGOs working in the area, and possibly a representative of logging

operators. VIII.3 Proceed, on the one hand, to the demarcation of the park boundaries and, on the other hand, to the delimitation and demarcation of the buffer and peripheral zones of the national park In order to make it visible not only to the neighboring communities but also to all other users, we believe that a priority task of demarcating the boundaries of the park must be carried out on the ground. This preliminary work should be complemented by the delimitation and demarcation of the buffer and peripheral zones of the national park. And for greater effectiveness, we recommend the use of participatory mapping methods. VIII.4 Recognize village territories, take into account customary rights, and value local knowledge of communities in park management The international convention on biodiversity adopted at the Earth Summit held in Rio in June 1992 recommends that Governments "preserve traditional methods of conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and draw inspiration from them as widely as possible, fully involving the populations concerned in their efforts". According to Posey (1995), each people possesses its TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge), which is a set of traditional ecological knowledge. Furthermore, in Africa, the discourse of political decision-makers in the field of natural resource management has significantly evolved. They increasingly emphasize the real involvement of local populations in decisions regarding the management of the resources of their territories. Indeed, in its article XVII concerning the Traditional Rights of Local Communities and Traditional Knowledge, the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources makes the following recommendations: 1. The Parties take legislative and other measures to ensure that the traditional rights and intellectual property rights of local communities, including the rights of farmers, are respected, in accordance with the provisions of this Convention. 3. The Parties take the necessary measures to enable active participation of local communities in the planning and management processes of the natural resources on which they depend in order to generate local incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of these resources. This logic is also supported by the law on national parks in its article 21 when it recommends that the park administration develop management plans for national parks after consulting all interested parties, including communities from the peripheral area and those living, where applicable, within the park at the time of its creation. For the

legislator, the management plan must necessarily take into account the uses, customary rights, and ancestral territories of the communities. It goes without saying that the implementation of these various legal recommendations can only contribute to better management of the park's resources. Because if communities are involved and their rights are taken into account, they can become true allies for the administration of the national park. In Pongara particularly, the recognition of village territories is, in our opinion, a crucial and almost unavoidable step because whatever solution is adopted, there will always be human presences within the national park. VIII.5 Manage the Human-Animal conflict In this regard, communities claim to suffer more disasters from elephants. For them, the elephant poses a considerable obstacle to agricultural activities. In some villages like Makok, agricultural activity has been definitively abandoned due to the numerous incursions of elephant herds into the fields.

43 Recommendations / hypotheses for solutions In order to contribute to the resolution of this conflict, the organization Aventure Sans Frontière has developed a brochure presenting the various techniques that can be used in such circumstances. Beyond the dissemination of this tool, we believe that the park administration should, in concert with the communities, define appropriate solutions and support their implementation.

VIII.6 Develop alternatives to hunting To limit the pressure exerted on hunting in the national park, we think it wise to participatively develop alternatives to hunting. This concern was indeed widely raised by the communities during our visit. The priority areas identified are as follows: – the development of micro-projects and income-generating activities in the villages; – the strengthening of the agro-sylvo-pastoral capacities of the communities (agriculture, livestock, Non-Timber Forest Products, and market organization); – the development of ecotourism and the valorization of local knowledge.

Another quite important aspect raised by the communities is the issue of job creation. Indeed, they are upset that the body of eco-guards does not include any members from the affected villages.

VIII.7 Recommendations regarding the development and implementation of the management plan It is crucial for the National Agency of National Parks to define a clear, transparent, and participatory process for the development and implementation of national park management plans in Gabon. This process should ensure that not only the communities but also civil society working in the field of sustainable natural resource management are integrated from the ground up. The ultimate goal here is that all parties can find themselves in the developed management plans and thus contribute effectively to their implementation.

44 "Facilitate the involvement of communities in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Pongara Printed by ALSEM (Civil Society Organization Member of the FLEGT platform)