Participatory research project CARTO in Minvoul

Recherche participatives projet CARTO à Minvoul

Libreville, Gabon, August 2009 LIFESTYLE AND MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES BY THE COMMUNITIES LIVING IN THE PERIPHERY OF THE MINKÉBÉ WEST NATIONAL PARK: CASE OF THE VILLAGES DOUMASSI, BITOUGA, ETO'O AND ELARMINTANG 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"

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5 Introduction i. introduction In August 2002, the late President Omar Bongo ODIMBA created, through a series of presidential decrees, a Network of 13 National Parks, covering 30,138 km^2

(including 1,293 km² of marine territory), which is more than 11% of the national territory. The creation of these National Parks will constitute an unparalleled initiative in Central Africa and will place Gabon at the top of the African hierarchy in terms of protected area management. The establishment of these Protected Areas should also place Gabon at the center of a global concern, which is the reconciliation of community rights with the needs for conservation of natural resources. The problem as posed seems trivial and its response apparently easy. On the contrary, it is a real and recurring problem that managers of Protected Areas must face in contexts marked by human presence. In response to this major concern and in order to comply with the prescriptions contained in international legal instruments such as the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity, the 1972 Stockholm Declaration, the 1992 Rio Declaration, the 1982 World Charter for Nature, etc., Gabonese legislators adopted Law No. 003/2007 of August 27, 2007, relating to national parks. The merit of this law lies in the fact that it provides for several elements of involvement and participation of communities both during the creation and management phases of national parks. Although this law recognizes the exercise of their customary rights to the communities living near national parks, it remains true that its implementation faces difficulties. In such circumstances, what could be the main justifications? Are the modalities provided unsuitable for our context, or is it their application that is simply lacking? Are communities sufficiently informed and aware of their rights? Are there no modalities that could allow for better consideration of the rights of neighboring communities in the management of Protected Areas? Is participatory management or co-management a principle practiced in the management of national parks in our country? In the case of the management of the Minkébé West national park, what management mode would best preserve the interests of the various stakeholders, allowing for a balance between community rights and conservation of natural resources? It is with the aim of providing a beginning of a solution to this questioning that Brainforest, with the financial support of its partner the Rainforest Foundation United Kingdom, is implementing this project aimed at facilitating community participation in the management of national parks, with the ultimate goal of sustainable management of our natural resources. The present participatory research, conducted in mixed villages, predominantly inhabited by Fang and Baka, took place within the framework of this project. As a pilot site, the periphery of the Minkébé West national park was chosen through the villages Elarmintang, Doumassi, Eto'o, and Bitouga. These villages belong to the province of Woleu-Ntem and are located more precisely in the city of Minvoul, which is the capital of the Haut-Ntem Department. Apart from the Baka and Fang as specified above, it should be noted that Minvoul is also populated by Bekekep ethnic groups and populations from Cameroon, who are actually present in large numbers due to the proximity of the borders. It is also important to note that in addition to the Minkébé West national park, which is located on its lands, the city of Minvoul is characterized by the fact that it houses a portion of the TTIB forest concession and TRIDOM. TRIDOM is a transboundary complex of Protected Areas in which participatory processes for sustainable management of natural resources are developed. It consists of Dja, Boumba-Bek, Nki, and Mengamè for the Republic of Cameroon; Odzala-Kokoua and Lossi for the Republic of Congo; and Minkébé, Ivindo, and Wagné for the Gabonese Republic. Similarly,

7 Objectives of the work From discussions held with the WWF management in Libreville, it appears that this organization plans to create a protection corridor all around this national park. Not to forget the objectives pursued through this work, this report will extensively mention the results of the socio-economic study conducted on the communities. It will also address the current mode of management of natural resources by the communities and will provide recommendations to be adopted for the effective implementation of a participatory management process as recommended by our legislation. ii. OBJECTIVES OF THE WORK Our

participatory research aimed at the following objectives: – Collect and Document the lifestyle and management of natural resources by

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8 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Minvoul the communities of Doumassi, Eto'o, Bitouga, and Elarmintang; – Document the interactions between communities and other forest managers; – Engage with stakeholders and forest managers on the current local system of natural resource management; – Based on the recommendations of various local actors, make concrete proposals for the implementation of a concerted system of natural resource management. iii. METHODOLOGY In order to achieve the expected objectives and consequently collect data that truly reflects the reality on the ground, our work was conducted as follows: with the concerned communities The team stayed in these different villages for the duration of the work (about ten days). Data was collected based on exchanges with members of the concerned communities in the form of individual interviews, group discussions, and meetings with all members of the community. Given the mixed nature of some of the communities, namely Elarmintang and Eto'o, composed of Bantou and Baka, separate exchanges were also organized with each of the communities. It is worth noting that the data collected complemented those already gathered during the two previous prospecting missions organized jointly with the Participatory Mapping Project team in the Congo Basin. Thanks to the observation technique that we also employed, we were able to collect sensitive data that was not made available to us during our stay.

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9 Methodology with the authorities of Minvoul (Mr. Secretary General of the prefecture, Mr. President of the Departmental Council, and Mr. Conservator of the Minkebe West National Park) A formal meeting was organized with these various authorities at the Prefecture of Minvoul. The above-mentioned personalities participated in this meeting on the administration side. On the NGO and International Organizations side, our structure Brainforest was represented by the Project Manager and the Rainforest Foundation United Kingdom was represented by the Sub-regional Project Manager for Participatory Mapping in the Congo Basin. Essentially, these exchanges focused on the objectives pursued through our various projects, the current management system of the national park and natural resources in the area, the interactions between communities and other forest users, the interaction between communities and the national park, and the possibility of establishing a concerted system for managing natural resources. It is worth noting that at the end of this meeting, while encouraging and promising to support the various projects, the concerned authorities expressed their desire to receive information on the progress of the projects and on the responsibilities that would be theirs regarding their proper implementation. With a local organization promoting the rights and culture of the Baka Indigenous Peoples This refers to the Indigenous organization Edzengui, created with the technical and financial support of WWF, aimed at promoting Baka rights and culture. The exchanges initiated with the President of this organization provided him with the opportunity to share his experience regarding the involvement of local and indigenous communities in the current local management of natural resources. It is important to specify that following the baseline data collection work, the project team organized a second field visit known as the validation phase. During this second step, it was a matter of agreeing with the various parties on the data collected during the first phase and, on the other hand, completing the missing data, particularly in terms of conflict management and decision-making modalities within the communities.

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10 "Facilitate the involvement of communities in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Minvoul Challenges encountered IV. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED Regarding the challenges encountered, we note: – Problems of understanding in some villages. These were quickly resolved by translations made into local languages by some members of our team. – Access not always easy to sensitive data such as those related to big game hunting. This situation is justified by the fear of information disclosure and consequently of reprisals from the administrative authorities. – The absence during the validation mission in some villages of certain resource persons with whom we worked during the initial data collection phase. – The unavailability of administrative authorities during the validation mission due to the budget session held in Oyem. – The misunderstanding that occurred in Elarmintang during the validation phase was a major obstacle to continuing work in this community. This is why the present report will sometimes present incomplete information about this community. It should be noted that despite our multiple awareness-raising efforts, the community was negatively influenced by the participation of two eco-guards in the data collection activities within the framework of the Participatory Mapping Project. Faced with the presence of the Eco-guards and out of fear of reprisals, the communities carried out a very limited mapping of their different territories. V. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA ON COMMUNITIES / KNOWLEDGE ABOUT COMMUNITIES V.1. History of the villages

13 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities It was between the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 19th century that the Fang peoples arrived in the northern region of Gabon, coming from Cameroon and Congo. This large migratory wave through the equatorial forest was only possible thanks to collaboration with the Pygmy peoples. After several divisions, the group composed of the Fang Mvaî decided to settle in Haut-Ntem. Thus, towards the end of the second half of the 19th century, the northern part of Gabon, particularly the areas of Minvoul and Minkébé, was mainly populated by the Baka and Fang cultural groups. It is in this context of colonial period that a rent agriculture totally oriented towards cocoa and coffee cultivation was established. However, it was only towards the end of the Second World War that this activity would experience a real boom and be considered the main source of income for the populations of Woleu-Ntem. This being very labor-intensive, farmers resorted to the services of Pygmy populations, who represented a servile and cheap labor force. It should be noted beforehand that it was at the instigation of colonial authorities that the populations residing in the Minkébé forest massif, which is their ancestral territory, were forced to abandon their villages in favor of peripheral areas. This order was massively followed by the Fang who settled first on the side of Minvoul, thus appropriating all the spaces where they established their villages and practiced their different subsistence activities. After independence, logging and the exploitation of subsoil resources, particularly oil, have considerably reduced the role of agriculture in the national economy. The oil boom of the 1970s led to a decrease and then a cessation of cocoa and coffee production, resulting in massive rural exodus. In light of all this, the spatial, demographic, and cultural distribution of the villages came out profoundly modified. Thus, the former plantations and their camps

14 "Facilitate the involvement of communities in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Minvoul Table 1: History of the creation of villages Villages Years of creation Reason for creation Founding clans Year of administrative recognition Bitouga Long before independence. Creation of an agricultural operation for the cultivation of cocoa and coffee The members of the Essissong clan (Fang) are the owners of the cultivable area. However, there has been an appropriation by the Baka since

the 1980s. The village had a chief recognized administratively but who died in 2005. The interim is ensured by the son of the deceased Etsimi. Eto’o Long before independence Creation of an agricultural operation for the cultivation of cocoa and coffee It is a camp belonging to several families of the Essoké clan from the Mebeme village. However, the Baka have appropriated it and are the only permanent residents. The village is not administratively recognized. Doumassi Long before independence Desire to create a new village by a member of the Essamessele community The village has been administratively recognized since 1984. Elarmintang After the Second World War. Grouping of the villages of Minkebe for Minvoul to bring the populations closer to the administrative center The Essangok and the Essombam founded the village but it was appropriated by the Essissep. Long before independence, the village was already recognized by the colonial administration. There was a chief of canton until 2004. The date when the village was integrated into the municipality of Minvoul as a neighborhood. They will be abandoned and then completely deserted by their Fang owners. As a result, the Baka, who were only seasonal workers, will settle in these former

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15 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities agricultural camps and turn them into villages. This is particularly the case in Bitouga and Eto’o. Similarly, the Baka will settle on lands located near Fang villages that had been given to them by "their masters" (Elarmintang and Doumassi villages). Thus, due to this sedentarization and the coexistence between these two groups, we will gradually witness the creation or emergence of a new type of village. From then on, the villages around Minvoul will no longer be mono-clan. However, the late arrival on these lands after their occupation by the Fang gives the Baka a status of "foreigner" to this day, thus truly depriving them of any customary rights over these spaces. Indeed, while it is true that Indigenous Peoples can carry out activities on the spaces they occupy, it remains true that they only have a simple usufruct right. As shown in the table above, with the exception of Elarmintang, whose origin of settlement stems from the colonial administration's desire to group peripheral villages towards the center, the origins of the villages are former camps of cocoa and coffee plantations. If the village chiefs are administratively recognized in Doumassi and Elarmintang, it is not the case for those in Eto’o and Bitouga. This situation can be justified for Bitouga by the fact that the Baka community lives on lands belonging to the Fang communities who continue to retain control over them, and for Eto’o by the fact that the village is not recognized as such by the administrative authorities. Although in the villages of Bitouga and Eto’o the Baka populations are in the majority, it should be mentioned here that they do not truly have customary rights over the lands they occupy, these spaces being considered the property of the Bantus. This situation is based on the prior occupation and development of these spaces by the Fang.

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16 "Facilitating the involvement of communities in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Minvoul V.2.Accessibility of villages Regarding the issue of access to villages, it should be noted that only two of the villages are accessible solely by land, namely Elarmintang and Doumassi. As for Eto'o and Bitouga, it should be specified that there is an alternation between the use of land and river routes. by land from Minvoul departure destination time by motorcycle cost of passage: one-way simple with luggage MinVoul Elarmintang 5 minutes 300 FCFA Doumassi 30 minutes 2000 FCFA Source: Report of Prospecting Missions for the Participatory Mapping Project in the Congo Basin From Minvoul, the preferred means of transport is the motorcycle. Thus, to reach Elarmintang, which is now established as a neighborhood of Minvoul, five minutes are sufficient for a sum of 300 FCFA. Meanwhile, to get to Doumassi, the local resident must pay two thousand CFA francs,

which is beyond the means of most of the population. As a result, they opt for walking, which takes about two (2) hours. By river departure destination time by artisanal canoe cost of passage: one-way simple with luggage MinVoul Bitouga 25 minutes 2500 FCFA Eto'o 25 minutes 2500 FCFA Source: Report of Prospecting Missions for the Participatory Mapping Project in the Congo Basin

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17 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities From Minvoul, reaching these two villages is done in two stages. Indeed, it is necessary to first reach the landing stage which, for Bitouga, is located more than an hour's walk from the center of Minvoul. Thus, the traveler must first reach Mount Ngam, located about thirty minutes on foot, then take a path for half an hour before arriving at the landing stage. After that, they must take an artisanal canoe that will reach the village of Bitouga in about thirty minutes. Meanwhile, to reach Eto'o, one must first get to the village of Evela, which is about a fifteen-minute walk along the road leading to Doumassi. Then reach the landing stage in ten minutes via a path before finally taking the canoe that will take you to Eto'o in about twenty-five minutes. While the villages located along the road (Elarmintang and Doumassi) are relatively easy to access, this does not seem to be the case for those located on the opposite bank of the Ntem (Eto'o and Bitouga). Because not only are the paths to be traveled poorly maintained, but the artisanal canoes used for the crossing are of very poor quality. Given these observations, we can conclude that these villages are difficult to access. V.3.Ethnic and Demographic Data Several factors are responsible for the spatial and ethnic configuration currently observed in the Minvoul region. Among others, agricultural exploitation, rural exodus, the sedentarization of Baka cultural communities, and immigration. Indeed, unable to meet the labor demands required by the economic activities of the time, we will witness, on the one hand, the emergence and then the sedentarization of the Baka labor force and, on the other hand, the massive arrival of immigrant workers. As a result, we distinguish four types of populations in the villages: the Fang, the Baka, the Bekekep, and foreigners. Part of this latter group will settle and is now considered as local population. This cosmopolitan character currently characterizes not only the population of the frequented villages but also

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18 "Facilitating the involvement of communities in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Minvoul all the communities living in the periphery of the Minkébé national park. However, even though the villages are constantly expanding, the proportion of individuals who reside there permanently is in sharp decline. Indeed, many active individuals regularly go in search of basic social services and employment in neighboring cities. These elements justify the reason why many young people from these villages do not consider themselves as permanent residents of those places. Hence the strong presence of older men in the villages on a permanent basis. Essentially, these villages are characterized by an aging population and a large majority of unschooled young children. Table 2: Ethnic and demographic data Villages current cultural components Monograph of the population Bitouga Baka 46 Eto'o Baka 19 Doumassi Fang, Baka, Bekeka 61 Elarmintang Fang, Baka 145 total 271 Note: these data do not take into account individuals absent during our visit Table 2 refers to the cultural communities and the population that currently compose the peripheral villages of the Minkebe national park. It highlights the distribution of ethnicities and the distribution of populations. Based on the distribution of ethnicities, we distinguish two types of villages: – The mono-ethnic Baka villages: Bitouga and Eto'o – The villages where the Fang are significantly superior to the Baka and Bekekep ethnicities: Doumassi and Elarmintang

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19 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities The distribution of the current population shows that the most populated villages are those that are multi-ethnic: Elarmintang (145 inhabitants) and Doumassi (61 inhabitants). The villages with only Baka components are the least populated, notably Eto'o (19 inhabitants) and Bitouga (46 inhabitants). Finally, the table shows that the distribution of ethnicities is closely linked to the demographics of the population that makes up the villages. And this heterogeneity of settlements combined with the proximity of several urban centers (Minvoul, Oyem, Bitam) makes it difficult to extrapolate the data over time. V.4.Organization of communities and decision-making processes Among the Baka Among the Baka, the clan is a fundamental element of social organization. It represents a group of patrilineal descent. The decision-making process within the village seeks consensus among all the elders of the different clans coexisting in the same village. As one might expect in a patrilineal relationship system, women are rarely integrated into the decision-making process, even for discussions concerning matters considered to be theirs. It should also be noted that this is only true in appearance, as some confess that very often in practice, men adopt positions that have been suggested to them by their wives within the family. Among the Fang Although decisions are also made consensually within Fang communities, it should be noted that, unlike the Baka, women are

20 "Facilitating the involvement of communities in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Minvoul formally consulted. Moreover, they manage to assert their point of view when circumstances require it. The fact that a community like Doumassi has a woman at its head is a true catalyst for the involvement and participation of women in the management of the community. V.5.Conflict management methods within communities Bitouga Whether the conflict is internal, meaning involving only members of the community, or external, meaning opposing a member of the community to an outsider, conciliation is the most preferred method of resolution. This is sometimes done under the good offices of the family head, clan chief, or village chief depending on the nature of the dispute. However, in case of dissatisfaction from the parties, the dispute is brought before the administrative authorities of the department. It is worth lamenting here that in case of conflict with outsiders, particularly the Bantou, it often happens that the Baka allow themselves to be intimidated before the authorities, to the point of making false statements. This deprives them of the reparations they would have been entitled to. Doumassi It is generally resolved through conciliation, and just like elsewhere, the conciliator varies depending on the nature of the dispute. When the conflict involves members of a couple or family within the village, resolution is handled by the family head. When the conflict involves people from different families, resolution falls to the heads of the families. If necessary, the village chief will be involved. If no solution is adopted for amicable resolution of the conflict, the community will then refer to the authorities according to the hierarchy, namely: the grouping chief, the canton chief, and finally the prefect.

21 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities This approach is initiated for resolving conflicts involving both community members such as the Fang and the Baka, as well as conflicts involving individuals outside the community. Eto'o This village is unique in that it is inhabited by a single family from the Baka community, with the few houses belonging to the Fang being occupied occasionally during the agricultural seasons. The eldest member of the community, who is also the family head, is also the village chief. When a conflict arises within the community, it is his responsibility to resolve it. The method of conflict resolution is, as in all other villages, conciliation. It should be noted that here, due to the family structure of the village, problems never reach the administrative authorities. V.6.Interactions with neighboring

ethnic groups Discussing the interactions between the Baka and Fang groups is quite a challenging task, as the question itself is complex. However, we will note that the relationships between these different ethnic groups have always existed and vary depending on circumstances and times. Initially, they were equitable relationships of exchange and barter through which each community was respected for its know-how and contributions. Thus, while the Baka provided forest products from fishing, hunting, or gathering and their traditional medicine, the Fang brought agricultural products and other marketed goods. Subsequently, due to sedentarization and forced regrouping, forest exploitation, and conservation projects, the hunter-gatherer populations originally lost their economic and spiritual power and became increasingly dependent on their Fang neighbors.

22 "Facilitating the involvement of communities in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Minvoul Nowadays, one can certainly claim the existence of interethnic marriages between the different communities to justify the harmonious nature of relations, but it must be said that the reality is much more complex than it appears; it is enough to stay in one of these villages to realize this. V.7.Access to basic social services / Collective facilities Table 3: Basic social infrastructure: State of play state of infrastructure Villages health center school hydraulic pump electricity places of worship Bitouga Non-existent Non-existent Non-existent Non-existent Temple dedicated to traditional Baka worship eto'o Non-existent Non-existent Non-existent Non-existent Temple dedicated to traditional Baka worship douMassi Non-existent Non-existent Non-existent Non-existent Church and Temple dedicated to traditional Baka worship elarMintang Non-existent Public high school Running water Electrification Churches and Temple dedicated to traditional Baka worship This table highlights the near non-existence of basic social infrastructure in these villages. Health Access to health services is the main concern of all communities living on the periphery of the Minkebe West national park. As shown in the table above, there is no primary health center in these villages. Therefore, when populations do not practice self-medication, they consult traditional practitioners (mostly Baka) and only go to hospitals in case of complications or serious illness. School There is no primary school in all the peripheral villages of the PNM. However, there is a public high school in Elarmintang. This presence is justified by the elevation of this village to a district and consequently its belonging to the municipality of Minvoul. Water Except for Elarmintang, the absence of an official water distribution network and hydraulic pump in the villages has led communities to source water from nearby springs (developed or not) located close to their village. Furthermore, despite the fact that Elarmintang benefits from drinking water supply, the taps remain dry for a good part of the day. This situation is justified by the lack of pressure. Given this state of affairs, populations continue to frequent natural water sources. Moreover, drinking water installations are not affordable for everyone, which is why the Baka do not have them. Electricity Being an integral part of the municipality of Minvoul, Elarmintang is the only electrified village. Indeed, in all other villages, the most common lighting method is the storm lamp (which runs on oil). It should also be noted that the Baka part of the village is not electrified. Places of worship

24 "Facilitating the involvement of communities in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Minvoul In almost all villages, there are spaces primarily dedicated to the practice of traditional religion and initiation rites, notably through temples dedicated to Edjengui, the Baka deity to whom traditional worship is devoted. On the other hand, buildings dedicated to Christian religion are only present in Doumassi and Elarmintang. However, their proper functioning is not always guaranteed as

priests and/or pastors are most often itinerant. Aside from the common problems related to access to basic social services faced by both communities, it must be said that the Baka communities in these villages face citizenship issues, as most of the population does not possess either a birth certificate or a national identity card. The integrated development project in pygmy areas initiated by UNICEF addressed this issue a few years ago. Unfortunately, it was abruptly interrupted before the problem was resolved in its entirety. V.8.Social capital: village groups and openness to the outside formal and informal groups at the village level Aside from the Edjengui association which brings together all the Baka communities from the visited villages as well as Minvoul, there are no other formal organizations. However, occasional sociocultural groups can be found in the villages that only come together during electoral deadlines, major celebrations, and various official ceremonies.

25 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities Table 4: Formal and informal groups at the village level types of groups Villages formal informal Bitouga Edzengui Non-existent eto’o Edzengui Non-existent douMassi Edzengui Non-existent elarMintang Edzengui Non-existent The table above presents the formal and informal groups that characterize the villages. From the above, it appears that none of the villages has an informal associative group; the only existing group is formal and federates the Baka from all the villages of Minvoul. This generalized lack of formal and informal groups reveals a real weakness in the social fabric, likely linked to ethnic heterogeneity and/or the non-permanence of residence. Channels of exchange with the outside: trade and information The peripheral villages of the PNM are accessible by two modes of transport, road and river. However, with the facilities it offers, the road is the most used means for transporting passengers and goods. For the two villages located along the road, it facilitates exchanges.

26 "Facilitating the involvement of communities in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Minvoul Table 5: Channels of exchange with the outside Villages places for the sale of goods Means of access to information Bitouga Very little trade with the outside GSM (Zain) Radio (Africa n°1, RFI) Through visitors eto’o Very little trade with the outside GSM (Zain) Radio Through visitors douMassi In the village (internal) and at the market in Minvoul GSM (Zain) Radio (Africa n°1, RFI, radio Oyem) Through visitors elarMintang In the village (internal) and at the market in Minvoul. Sometimes in Bitam GSM (Zain) Radio (national and international) Satellite dish For the monoclonic Baka villages located on the opposite bank, namely Bitouga and Eto’o, residents engage in very little trade with the outside. However, they do not feel the need to leave the village to sell their goods, as trade with the outside is practiced in another form. In terms of hunting, there is an associate who provides weapons and ammunition and takes care of retrieving the game from the village. On the other hand, for the villages Doumassi and Elarmintang, trade is primarily directed outward as daily market vendors go there to stock up. However, the lack of cooperatives and/or groups of sellers/producers makes commercial activity difficult. The prices vary from one village to another; this lack of agreement hinders the development of trade. Moreover, traders believe that the external elite should lend them a hand to develop their activities, which has not been the case so far. The preferred means of communication for exchanging with the outside is the GSM mobile phone, but the quality of the signal from the only operator (Zain) is poor in Eto’o and Doumassi. Access to information through the media is not easy; aside from international radios (RFI, BBC, Africa n°1) whose signals are weakly received, national radio and television channels are almost absent. Populations have no choice but to buy (for wealthier households) satellite dishes as is the case in Elarmintang. Written newspapers (specifically the national daily l’Union)

are not distributed there, and they only arrive in the villages with great delay (Elarmintang). If the official channels for accessing information are almost non-existent, populations have adapted by developing a sort of parallel circuit for accessing information. This is the "telephone arab" implemented by visitors (Bitouga, Eto'o, Doumassi) V.9.Main subsistence and income-generating activities of communities The lives of local populations are regulated by the practice of several activities that serve commercial and subsistence purposes. These activities are mixed, carried out by both men and women; some are seasonal while others are annual. Moreover, it should be noted that all income-generating activities for populations living on the periphery of the PNM have the forest as a common denominator. Thus, for the Fang, the appropriation of the forest is lineage-based, while the Baka have appropriated the abandoned spaces and/or those made available to them by the Fang. For all, the forest is perceived as a nourishing breast. Subsistence and commercial agriculture In the villages, agriculture is an activity practiced by both men

28 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Minvoul by women. Generally, roles are distributed according to the different stages of the activity. After the site is chosen by the women, the men take care of the clearing, cutting down trees, and protecting the plots from pest animals. The women plant and also take care of the maintenance of the plot. Despite the male presence at the beginning of cultivation (clearing), women remain the major actors in agriculture. Plantain bananas and cassava tubers are the main crops produced by farmers, to which they associate vegetables and peanuts. The tools being rudimentary, the cultivated areas are relatively average and vary according to each person's labor force. Most of the cultivated fields hardly exceed one hectare. This situation can be explained by the low interest that the vast majority of young people have in working the land and the proximity of certain urban centers such as Oyem, Bitam, and especially Minvoul. This proximity causes significant rural exodus of young people in search of better living conditions. Only young children and elderly people (50 years and older) remain in the villages. Other difficulties faced by farmers include soil poverty, lack of solidarity among planters, and the isolation of plantations, resulting in difficult access. Livestock This occupies a very marginal place in the villages and concerns only domestic animals, especially poultry. They are raised outdoors, without enclosures or special arrangements, which exposes them to numerous predators. In all the communities encountered, livestock is practiced for consumption purposes, and exceptionally there may be sales in case of need.

29 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities Table 6: Agriculture Villages Bitouga eto'o douMassi elarMintang main crops Plantain Tuber Peanut Tuber Banana Fruit trees Peanut Banana Tuber Corn Tuber Banana Peanut Cucumber location of fields In the immediate surroundings of the village In the immediate surroundings of the village In the immediate surroundings of the village In the immediate surroundings of the village predator animals Hedgehog/Porcupine Monkey Elephant Hedgehog/Porcupine Elephant Hedgehog/ Porcupine Mongoose Hedgehog/Porcupine Squirrel Palm rat other obstacles Pests soil poverty proliferation of weeds Pests main destination of the harvest Self-consumption Self-consumption Diseases Self-consumption Table 7: Livestock Villages Bitouga eto'o douMassi elarMintang animals involved Hen Hen Hen Duck Hen, Sheep Goat, Pig type of livestock Outdoor, without enclosure Outdoor, without enclosure Outdoor, without enclosure Outdoor, without enclosure obstacles Snake, Owl Sparrowhawk, Owl Fox Tables 6 and 7 above present the specifics of agricultural and hunting practices in the villages peripheral to the PNM.

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30 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Minvoul Table 6, which only concerns the practice of farming, shows that the main crops planted are cassava tubers and plantain bananas. To these main crops are associated either peanuts (Bitouga and Elarmintang) or corn (Doumassi) or even cucumbers grown in Elarmintang. In Eto'o, in addition to the traditional crops listed above, the planters associate fruit trees. Generally, the land used for agricultural practice is located in the immediate vicinity of the village. The crops thus form a sort of belt surrounding the village. Even if the cultivated spaces do not have the same dimensions, the practice of farming activities does not extend beyond 5km from the village. This is the case in Bitouga, Eto'o, Doumassi, and Elarmintang. The practice of agriculture in the villages highlights the conflict between animals and planters. 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 can cause enormous damage to the plantations. At the top of the list of animals causing the most damage to the plantations are the group of small mammals formed by the hedgehog and the porcupine. They are unanimously designated as a scourge by the planters from Bitouga, Eto'o, Doumassi, and Elarmintang. To these mammals are added the elephant in Doumassi and Eto'o. Thus, the hedgehog, the porcupine, and the elephant are, in order of nuisance, the animals causing the most damage to crops. Alongside these easily identifiable "enemies," planters also identify other obstacles that are more related to the state of the soil and cultivable subsoil. This is the case in Bitouga, Doumassi, and Elarmintang where planters consider pests, soil poverty, and the proliferation of weeds as a major obstacle to the proper practice of their agricultural activities.

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31 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities It should be noted that all these communities practice subsistence agriculture, with the large portion of the harvests being dedicated to self-consumption. In the rare circumstances where the large quantity of harvests allows for partial sales, the isolation of the villages constitutes a major obstacle for this commercialization. The obstacles listed above show that the ills that undermine agricultural practice are directly and indirectly related to the activity. Notably, one can mention the advanced age of the main farmers, the poverty of the cultivated soils due to the reduction of fallow time, and the remoteness of cultivable lands. In addition, there is the massive rural exodus of young people to neighboring urban centers and their lack of interest in agriculture. In Table 7, the focus is primarily on the practice of raising domestic animals. Indeed, it emerges from it that although practiced in almost all villages, the activity occupies a marginal place among the communities. The animals involved are mainly poultry, as is the case in Bitouga, Eto'o, Doumassi, and Elarmintang where hens and ducks (Doumassi) are raised. Then, there are sheep, goats, and pigs found in Elarmintang. All these animals are raised outdoors, without enclosures or special arrangements, thus exposing them to epidemics, predators (sparrowhawks, owls, foxes, etc.), and road accidents. It should be mentioned that in general, the products of livestock are not intended for sale; they are self-consumed, used during ceremonies (treatment by a traditional healer, mourning, births, weddings, etc.), or offered to distinguished guests. Subsistence and commercial hunting In the villages, hunting is the primary source of income. It is practiced by men throughout the year. Depending on the tools and techniques, it is done both day and night, with a preference for night hunting. The hunting tools used are 12-gauge rifles and traps.

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32 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Minvoul The share

reserved for sale is considerable, even if part is self-consumed: by its characteristics, it is primarily a commercial hunt serving to meet the basic needs of the communities. Table 8: Hunting Villages Bitouga eto'o douMassi elarMintang Hunting methods Rifle Trap Rifle Trap Rifle Trap Rifle Trap main animals hunted Porcupine Cephalophus Antelope Bushpig Elephant Porcupine/Hedgehog Cephalophus Antelope Bushpig Elephant Porcupine/Hedgehog Bushpig Monkey Antelope Cephalophus Cephalophus Porcupine/Hedgehog Antelope Bushpig Elephant types of hunting Nocturnal with rifle and traps during the day Nocturnal with rifle and traps during the day Nocturnal with rifle and traps during the day Nocturnal with rifle and traps during the day main actors Men (Baka) Men (Baka) Men (Baka and Fang) Men (Baka and Fang) main destination of the game Self-consumption Self-consumption Sale Sale Hunting area logistical access On foot On foot and by canoe On foot and by canoe On foot distance Maxi-Male of the Village It emerges from this table that men, often young (with or without qualifications) without jobs, are the major actors in hunting, which is the main income-generating activity. It is practiced throughout the year. Night hunting enthusiasts practice it with a weapon (Bitouga, Eto'o, Doumassi, Elarmintang) of 12-gauge type. Generally, it is supplied with ammunition in exchange for a portion of the game killed. Indeed, Baka hunters have associates who provide them with weapons and ammunition. Meanwhile, those who set traps practice daytime hunting. However, it is not easy to distinguish between rifle hunters and trappers, as the actors

33 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities are the same: they check traps during the day and hunt with rifles at night. These hunting trips resemble expeditions and cover distances sometimes exceeding 50 km (Eto'o, Doumassi). Since they can last several days or even weeks, hunting trips require the construction of camps in the forest. Their number varies from one village to another. (cf. baseline data from mapping) It should also be noted that the number of camps reflects the level of use of the hunting area. For example, on the California side, the maximum distance is 50 km for hunters from the villages of Eto'o and Doumassi; despite this distance, several hunting camps can be found there. Furthermore, the California area is characterized by a multitude of rivers, tributaries, and river arms, so hunting is done on foot and by canoe, following the waterways and using hunter trails. Thus, the routes are established as follows: (cf. baseline data from mapping) We observe that hunting areas are common and shared by several villages at once (cf. baseline data from mapping), thereby increasing the pressure on the animals that are hunted without distinction of their status (fully or partially protected). The main species in order of hunting are: – Porcupine/Hedgehog, Gazelle (Cephalophus) for hunters from Bitouga, Eto'o, and Elarmintang – The bushpig and Antelope for those from Bitouga, Eto'o, Doumassi, and Elarmintang. The most hunted animals are therefore the Porcupine/Hedgehog, Gazelle, Antelope, and Wild Boar (Bushpig). Almost all game is intended for sale or barter. From the above, it is clear that the practice of hunting, whether referred to as small or large, is the main source of income for communities in the villages; it is through this that they manage to meet their primary needs and take care of their families. Moreover, it constitutes a significant part of their diet.

34 "Facilitate the involvement of communities in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Minvoul It would be inappropriate to close this page without mentioning the widespread practice of poaching in this part of the region, notably involving local and indigenous communities by the main sponsors. However, it should be specified that this activity only concerns isolated individuals and not the entire or large majority of the community. Fishing Table 9: Fishing Villages Bitouga eto'o

douMassi elarMintang products Catfish, carp, catfish, common fish Catfish, catfish, common fish, elephant fish Carp, catfish, pike, unnamed, common fish Catfish, fish, common, pike Materials used/ Methods Hook and net Dam, hook, and net (net thrown into the water and net laid down) Hooks of various sizes, net, dam, trap Hook, net season All year round All year round Throughout the year but catches are abundant during the two rainy seasons In all seasons rivers Metine, Minlo'o, Mebe-Ntem, Ndamebem, Mbevoul and in California For the Bantou, fishing is practiced on the Ntem located almost 2 km from the village and in rivers located in the forest The Baka fish on the Ntem and on the Ayia river located about 8 km from the village The rivers used are the Ntem, Kome, and other small rivers. These two large rivers are located approximately twenty kilometers from the village purpose Consumption throughout the year and for commercial purposes during the small (April, May) and large (Sept. to Oct.) rainy season Self-consumption It varies depending on the catch; in the case of a small catch, there is only consumption, and in the case of a large catch, there is consumption and sale Sale and consumption

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35 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities As shown in the table above, fishing is an activity practiced in all these communities and is divided into subsistence fishing and commercial fishing. While subsistence fishing is conducted in small rivers located near the villages, commercial fishing takes place on large rivers and major waterways around the village and in the forest. The techniques generally used are net fishing, line fishing, and dam fishing. The species that abound in the region are generally catfish, carp, catfish, and common fish. The practice of commercial fishing is done in the form of expeditions during which communities spend considerable time in the forest to collect the resource. This is then smoked for preservation needs. Once back, this merchandise is sold either on-site in the village or at the Minvoul market. Although it is established that large portions are intended for self-consumption, communities unanimously recognize that fishing is the second income-generating activity after hunting. It is also the activity for which communities encounter almost no prohibitions from authorities and conservation organizations. Gathering and collecting 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.

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36 "Facilitate the involvement of communities in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Minvoul Table 10: Gathering Villages Bitouga eto'o douMassi elarMintang main species Andock Hazelnut Andock Hazelnut Andock Hazelnut Adzap Figs Bitter wood Andock Hazelnut Gathering area Cf map Cf map Cf map Cf map main actors Men and women Men and women Men and women Men and women gathering period main destination of products Self-consumption Self-consumption Self-consumption Self-consumption Gathering is practiced in all villages, and the most exploited species are: – The Andock (Irvingia gabonensis); – The Hazelnut (Coula edulis). Given its seasonal nature, the activity does not pose a real threat to the species. Fruits are simultaneously gathered or collected in the following villages: Bitouga, Eto'o, Doumassi, Elarmintang. In Doumassi, communities also gather Adzap (Moabi fruits) and figs. The fruits of these species are appreciated and constitute dietary supplements for the populations. It should be noted that some species are also exploited for their medicinal properties or for their contribution to the preparation of palm wine, such as bitter wood (Doumassi).

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37 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities All these fruit trees are

wild and are found scattered throughout the forest. As a result, apart from plantations (Planters never cut down fruit trees found inside or around plantations), women (accompanied by men) go to gather or collect these fruits in well-defined areas, as the resource use maps produced by the communities seem to show. It should be noted, however, that during the fruiting period, gathering also occurs during hunting and agricultural activities, hence the overlap observed between these activity areas. It must be said that after extraction, these fruits are prepared and consumed in the village. The quantities being minimal, they are almost exclusively intended for self-consumption. V.10. Local management of forest spaces 1. Spatial footprint of village activities Participatory research and participatory mapping conducted in the Haut-Ntem department have shown that the populations of this region have a significant footprint on the space through several of their activities. However, it should be noted that this pressure on space varies according to the type of activity and according to the villages. Generally, all these villages appropriate forest space for almost identical activities, the main ones being: hunting, agriculture, gathering, and sacred forests. Agricultural zone The so-called agricultural zone here corresponds to spaces that are actually cultivated and those that could be. The latter spaces are still largely forested, especially as one moves away from the villages.

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38 "Facilitate the involvement of communities in the management of national parks and the development of related laws" Report of participatory research in Minvoul Regarding the gradient of land appropriation for agriculture, the intervention area of the communities does not extend too far into the large forest. This is for several reasons. First, we have the natural limits marked by the dense hydrographic network. (Commentary on the map made in carto!!!). Then, another limiting factor for the appropriation of remote areas by populations for agricultural practice is transport. Indeed, due to difficulties related to transporting crops, communities prefer to rely on plots closest to the village. Ultimately, the gradient of land appropriation for agriculture, as shown in the agricultural purpose map, is established so that plantations are always near the villages. The cultivation areas are not organized continuously between the villages. This is the case for the agricultural occupation of the villages of Bitouga and Eto’o on one hand and Doumassi and Elarmintang on the other. Fishing zone Fishing takes place in rivers located in areas designated for agriculture and hunting, so we can affirm that there is confusion between fishing zones and other activity areas of the communities. However, it should be noted that the two main rivers used here by the communities are the Ayia and the Ntem. Hunting zone Of all the activities carried out by village communities in the periphery of the PNM, hunting is by far the one that experiences not only the greatest intensity but also the greatest spatial extension. The observation of the gradient of land appropriation for hunting is that near the villages, there is less intensity of hunting, while most of this practice is concentrated particularly towards the large forest. Just for this activity, hunters are willing to travel very long distances of over 40 km.

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39 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities The map shows that the large hunting areas are frequented by hunters coming from diverse backgrounds. No authorization from the communities is required to access the forest; hunters carry out their activities freely, especially when it comes to big game hunting. The big question is what drives hunters to traverse the forest despite accessibility challenges. Various interviews with some hunters from the villages demonstrate that hunting is organized like a sort of journey. Hunters go for several days. To facilitate this, there is a vast network of wild camps in the forest that serve either as habitats during the stay in the hunting area or as temporary shelters before reaching their base camp. Thus, a multitude of wild camps are established for hunting activities. Hunting, therefore, knows no real boundaries. The hunter takes several paths and generally does not

return by the same routes. The multitude of access routes used by hunters means that this activity is responsible for the presence of village communities in the areas of the PNM and the TTIB permit. The intensity gradient represented on the map shows that the most opaque areas correspond to the zones most frequented by several village communities. Gathering and other activities In addition to agricultural, fishing, and hunting activities, local populations engage in gathering and other activities such as artisanal gold extraction at the Ndaboro site, located right in the Minkebe National Park, and sand extraction (as in the village of Elarmintang). It should be noted that these activities have no real impact on the socio-economic life of the village community as they are practiced by a minority. Moreover, gathering is not only a seasonal activity but also a secondary one. The populations say they cannot travel long distances just to practice it. It is on the way back from the forest that they take the opportunity to engage in this activity. It is a temporary practice, often reserved solely for consumption. 2. Local rules for access to the use and control of forest resources Regardless of the village and the origin of the populations, everyone agrees that the activity zones of the populations are located inside or near the ancestral forests of the Fang, considered the first occupants in a general sense. The forest was therefore divided according to the different lineages that make up the villages, and all activities were subject to the rites and customs that the lineage or family chief enforced in their area. Successive migrations, the cessation of cocoa and coffee cultivation, and the development and proximity of urban centers have significantly altered the basic structures of the villages. Thus, even though the boundaries of the ancestral forests are still known, their exploitation is no longer exclusive to the clan or family of origin, except in villages where the Fang are still present (Doumassi and Elarmintang), where one must seek their authorization for practices such as agriculture in these spaces. Except for this situation, for all current local populations, the forest is more or less freely accessible for those practicing hunting, gathering, and collecting. These access rules for the use and control of resources are almost identical from one village to another.

40 Socio-economic data on communities / knowledge about communities Table 11: Local rules for access to the use and control of forest resources Villages Bitouga eto'o douMassi elarMintang hunting No authorization required to access hunting sites Everyone in the village can hunt No authorization is required Hunting is free fishing free free free free main actors Men and women Men and women Men and women Men and women agriculture and gathering In general, only an authorization from the owners is needed to obtain a cultivable plot. However, this authorization does not grant the right to practice logging or any other activity. The land is ceded but not the exploitable species. From this table, it is clear that the practice of hunting and fishing activities in all villages is done almost freely in the forest, including in the ancestral forests. Only areas close to the village that have been previously cleared by families and transformed into fields or fallow land remain reserved. In such circumstances, outsiders must necessarily seek the opinion of the landowner to carry out agricultural activities there. The same applies to hunting with traps in these spaces. Regarding the collection and gathering of non-timber forest products, these are subject to the authorization of the owners of the concerned areas. Although increasingly, there is a reversal of this trend. The significant precision to be made regarding land issues concerns the Baka of these different villages. Indeed, whether they are groups living alone or in the presence of the Fang, it should be noted that these Indigenous Peoples do not truly have rights over the lands they occupy. These have been made available to them by the Fang and must be returned if needed. This situation is justified by the arrival and initial development of the lands by the Fang, particularly with the practice of agriculture and the sedentarization of the different groups. Nowadays, the question of land ownership only arises in case of stakes, particularly when it comes to alienating a plot of land. VI. INTERACTIONS BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND OTHER FOREST MANAGERS VI.1. Interaction

with the national park Talking about interactions between communities and the national park involves addressing the following questions: the confusion between the limits of the park and village territories, the practice of subsistence activities by communities inside and around the national park, the pressures exerted by communities on the resources of the national park, the relationships with the managers of the national park, and the influence of the park on the lifestyle of the communities. If recent research and participatory mapping clearly show that no community currently inhabits the national park, they unanimously establish that the communities, because they have Minkebe as their ancestral site, continue to carry out their traditional activities there. Indeed, aside from livestock farming done in the village and agricultural activities practiced in the immediate vicinity of the villages, almost all other activities such as hunting, fishing, and artisanal gold extraction continue to be carried out inside the Minkebe forest massif. These are conducted for both subsistence and commercial purposes. Only because the national park was created on the traditional lands of the communities, they assert that it will be, if not impossible, at least difficult to stop accessing this part of the forest despite the restrictions imposed on them. The communities also recall that at the creation of the Minkebe national park, they were not consulted regarding the consideration of their village territories or for defining their modalities of participation in the management of this space. In recent years, the affected local and indigenous communities claim to have 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 they have received come from WWF, which sometimes substitutes for the administration. Likewise, the communities believe that the manager should hold more meetings with local populations to allow for a real understanding of the concept of a national park and to address the issue of considering their rights and interests. In the villages, the administration is criticized for prioritizing repression over awareness and genuine involvement of the communities. The latter speak of the existence of patrols tasked with confiscating game. The following grievances have been expressed by the communities: "We were born in the forest, and we all gather, hunt, and fish there. How do they expect us to live without these activities?" "The park rangers accuse us of being poachers, yet many others from neighboring countries also come to hunt in Minkebe." "If we are forbidden from hunting, then tell us what we will do before we all starve here in the village, but I say it is thanks to this hunting that I can send my children to school, and it is thanks to hunting that our father raised us." Similarly, the communities see the lack of materialization of the boundaries of the national park and its peripheral zone as an additional reason for grievance. This materialization, in their opinion, would have allowed them to appreciate the portions of their territories at their true value.

44 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Minvoul traditional peoples now found on the periphery within the national park. It must be noted here that the hunting prohibitions are much more detrimental to indigenous peoples than to the Fang. Indeed, we all know that indigenous peoples largely depend on hunting and gathering; they were originally referred to as hunter-gatherers. This justifies the rudimentary nature of the agriculture they practice. The Baka hunt both for food and for cultural and ritual reasons. For example, the LIBANDI rite is an occasion during which they kill an elephant once a year primarily for cultural and ritual reasons, as well as for exaltation. It is therefore easy to understand that if nothing is done, this aspect of their culture is likely to disappear. In summary, the communities mentioned the following main difficulties: – The overlap of certain areas of the park on the ancestral lands of the communities; – The absence of demarcation of the national park

boundaries and its peripheral zone; – The lack of information for communities on the concept of a park and its management modalities as provided by law; – The existence of human-elephant conflict; – The absence of application of participatory resource management methods and techniques with the communities; – The practice of repression by park managers to the detriment of awareness-raising; – The absence of recognition and consideration of community rights in the management of the national park; – The absence of recognition of village lands; – The absence of valorization of local knowledge and know-how;

45 Recommendations – The absence of alternative measures, such as micro-development projects, employment, tourism activities, etc., to the hunting ban; – The current lack of a management plan regulating the operation and activities of the Minkébé national park. VI.2. Interaction with logging operators Regarding interaction with logging operators, it is important to mention that the Minvoul area has almost none, the only concessionaire being TTIB here. And although the title is largely based in the Haut-Ntem territory, it is managed by the administrative authorities of Oyem. Nevertheless, the participatory mapping exercise clearly presented activities carried out by the Doumassi community within this concession. The communities claim to hear the distant sounds of saws and say they have no direct relationship with the company in question. VII. RECOMMENDATIONS The establishment at the local level of a framework for dialogue and consultation between all actors involved in forest management The lack of serious and frank dialogue constitutes a major difficulty in the sustainable management of the resources of the national park and its surroundings. Therefore, we believe it is more than necessary to work towards establishing a framework for dialogue and consultation at the local level among all actors involved in the management of the Minkébé forests. This should allow for a concerted approach to the design, decision-making, orientation, and planning of actions at the grassroots level. It will establish a space for dialogue and serve as a bridge between the park, administrative authorities, local communities, NGOs working in the area, and members of the affected communities. The mandate of the members, their selection criteria, and the functioning of the group should be defined by all stakeholders. It is worth noting here that this is not a mere figment of the imagination, but a tested approach that has generally yielded results in terms of sustainable natural resource management. It is certainly in this logic that our legislator, through Article 18 of the National Parks Law, provides for the creation of local management advisory committees within which park officials cooperate with local authorities and communities as part of activities for the protection and sustainable valorization of national parks. Our legislator has shown great foresight in providing such an opportunity, and it is now up to the administration to materialize it. However, the major difficulty will lie in the functionality of such a committee. That is why we believe that to ensure its efficient operation, its composition should be as light as possible. Similarly, the issue of financing this committee must be addressed with great seriousness, as such dynamics often face funding problems. While waiting for the adoption of implementing decrees that will provide further details on these local management advisory committees provided for by the national parks law, we believe it would be appropriate for park managers to anticipate by already initiating multi-stakeholder meetings at the local level or exchange meetings with the various actors concerned by the issue. The recognition of village lands, the valorization of customary rights, and the establishment of a co-management system Based on the present work, it has been established that the communities have Minkebe as their ancestral site, but it has also been shown that the communities continue to carry out traditional subsistence activities there. The recognition of these village lands is a significant step in seeking solutions and involves recognizing the resource use maps that will be produced by the communities.

47 Recommendations On this basis, the communities and park managers can jointly define rules for community access to the resource. The example of the Campo Ma'an national park in Cameroon perfectly illustrates this type of agreement. Indeed, although the Indigenous Bagyeli populations living within the national park were displaced, they were granted the right to access the national park for the practice of their traditional subsistence activities in the management plan. Following this agreement, the authorities, in conjunction with the communities, defined the various rules to be respected by each party for the proper continuation of the agreement. We believe that due to the considerable distances separating village communities from the national park, they cannot truly exert significant pressure on its resources. The intensified poaching observed in Minkébé is primarily justified by its cross-border nature. As a result, the communities and the administration can agree on the activities to be carried out inside the park in the buffer zone and on the activities to be carried out in the peripheral zone. The development of alternatives to hunting with the communities To limit the pressure exerted on hunting in the national park, we believe it is wise to develop participatory alternatives to hunting. This concern was indeed widely raised by the communities during our visit. The priority areas mentioned are as follows: – the development of micro-projects and income-generating activities in the villages; – the strengthening of agro-sylvo-pastoral capacities of the communities (agriculture, livestock, Non-Timber Forest Products, and market organization); – the development of tourism activities and the valorization of local knowledge

48 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report of participatory research in Minvoul Another important aspect raised is the creation of employment by the communities, who are outraged that the ranger corps does not include any members from the affected villages. The communities also wish for tourism activities, in which they would hold significant responsibilities, to be developed. The demarcation of the park boundaries; the delimitation and demarcation of the buffer zone and the peripheral zone of the national park using participatory mapping techniques 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 park boundaries must be carried out on the ground. This work should also be done for the buffer zone and the peripheral zone of the national park. For greater effectiveness, we believe that local and indigenous communities should be involved (Articles 13, 14, and 15 of the National Parks Law). Given the legal constraints that exist in this matter, discussing the relocation of the national park boundaries would be delicate. That is why we believe it would be wise to involve the communities through participatory mapping techniques in the delimitation of the peripheral zone of the national park. This demarcation is all the more important as it will allow communities to know the limits they must not exceed in the practice of their activities. Likewise, as provided by law, communities will be able to agree with the park manager on the activities to be carried out in these different zones. The strengthening of the capacities of neighboring populations in natural resource management The strengthening of the capacities of neighboring populations in natural resource management is a significant activity that park managers cannot do without. Due to a lack of information and training, communities find themselves caught in a logic that is not their own and for which they will certainly not make any effort. While it is true that some community members have heard of the national park, very few actually know its stakes. Likewise, the majority of communities are unaware of the opportunities that may arise for them through such a project. A famous jurist once said, "No one is a good judge of what they do not know." That is why it seems almost imperative to inform communities through awareness campaigns. To

further this goal, the production of an easy-to-read guide in French outlining the rights and duties of communities in the creation and management of parks would be welcome.

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50 "Facilitating community involvement in the management of national parks and the development of related legislation" Report on participatory research in Minvoul Viii. ConCluSion The present participatory research has allowed us to document the practices of some communities living on the outskirts of Minkébé West regarding the management of natural resources. It has also enabled us to make a fairly objective assessment of the interactions that exist between the communities and other users of the forests, with a focus on the national park. The existence of interactions between the park and the communities, the ancestral link that binds them to the Minkébé forest massif, the content of our legal texts, as well as the current practices observed in other contexts have led us to advocate for the adoption of a new approach, based on the concerted management of natural resources and likely to lead to what we will call here community conservation of natural resources. This is a system where communities are involved in all phases of the conservation process. Indeed, it is now established that natural resource management cannot be conceived without popular participation, and that there is no popular participation without dialogue, without sharing of information and experiences, without exchanges of knowledge and techniques. This vi- sion is also endorsed by Law No. 003/2007 on national parks through its Articles 2, 3, 4, 7, 14, 15, 18, 19, 21, and 45.

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51 Conclusion

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