

# Protected Area Land Use Planning : Lessons Learned from the CARPE Program

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**P**rotected areas are like young children, the oldest being scarcely more than 100 years old, and with a lot of hope riding on their shoulders. They grow and spread (more than 12 percent of the earth's land surface), and fill any space that is available. They sometimes grow without knowing exactly why, how and for whom ... They try to rescue biodiversity, often fail, start again, change their strategies, philosophy, methods: moving from a conservationist approach where they were protecting nature from humans, to a participatory approach in which they try and integrate humankind into nature. They have gone through many stages, making many U-turns, to the point of blurring the path that they were following.

Protected area managers, whoever they are, are all like parents. They expect the best for and from their children. They set them impossible objectives and nurture unachievable ambitions for them. They look at them with eyes that are anything but impartial, are inclined to be more emo-

tional than rational, motivated by passion rather than reason. Over time, they ask everything of them and more. As they grow, protected areas bring them with joy and often disappointment. And inevitably, they become what they should, or could, have become, and what nobody could have expected.

This is the story of these rather complicated lands, which within a few decades have become powerful tools for the spatial organization of our planet, more and more known and acknowledged by mankind as our environmental awareness grows. They have gone from being a few sanctuary parks, created from a vision of paradise that undoubtedly never existed, to sustainable development landscapes where nature has become a component of progress that is seen as infinite, which will also certainly never exist – an endless to and fro between two extremes that are linked: wild nature that needs to be saved from humans, humanity that naturally respects the future of its ecosystem.

All this to say what we already know: there is no magic formula to save nature any more than there is a perfect recipe for sustainable development. It all depends on the context, places, time and people. In the forests of the Congo Basin, the Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) has developed a pragmatic and adaptive approach to conservation and land-use planning (LUP). Three examples are presented here, from Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

## The CARPE approach to land-use planning of protected areas: an overview of three case studies

### One philosophy, three contexts

The philosophy that these three experiences share is a simple one, and may be described as “common sense”: land-use planning of a protected area and its periphery has to be done through a participatory process, involving all the relevant stakeholders and taking account of the interests of each and everyone (not forgetting, of course, those of the protected area). This holistic and participatory approach has underlain many conservation projects over the last 30 years, as part of the movement known as “sustainable development”.

#### 1. Lobéké National Park (south-east Cameroon)

The task here is to organize a complex landscape made up of: a park of about 200,000 ha (which at the start of the project had not yet been created), village hunting concessions, commercial hunting grounds, and community and commercial forests (altogether more than 1.4 million ha), while taking into consideration the presence and specific needs of sometimes vulnerable ethnic groups, such as the Baka pygmies. In this landscape there are various and sometimes opposing interests, which can cause conflicts between stakeholders. In response to this, the “Jengi Forest” project (World Wide Fund for Nature, WWF) has

set up an advisory committee that includes donors such as GTZ, the State, represented by its Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, local administrations and all the representatives of the aforementioned interests, within the framework of establishing the transboundary Sangha Tri-National (TNS) conservation landscape between Cameroon, the Central African Republic and the Republic of Congo. The project is starting off amidst chaos where the law of the jungle prevails, and people’s only aim seems to be plundering all of the area’s natural resources. Land tenure, access rights, ancestral rights ... none of these are respected. The biggest losers, even though they are also participants in this mess, are the local population and particularly the indigenous people.

The planning process in Lobeke started with detailed studies of the exceptional natural wealth of the site, and the distribution of the main pressures. These studies were carried out mostly by WWF and WCS (Wildlife Conservation Society). The key mission of the advisory committee created by the “Jengi Forest” project was to negotiate with villagers and other users of the lands earmarked for the creation of the Lobeke Park, and then to organize the park’s peripheral areas. During public meetings, the challenges, mapping and management options were discussed. Out of these meetings came proposals for the boundaries of the park, and various allocations of the surrounding lands for hunting, forestry etc. But they were also an opportunity to pinpoint the expectations and/or the demands of the local population and other interest groups, and to find solutions together, for example developing the fight against poaching in forest concessions, or sharing the meat from the animals killed on safari with the local communities. One crucial point was defining the rights of certain sectors of the population within the park itself, in a zone especially set aside for them, something which up till then had not been done in national parks in Cameroon.

#### 2. The Tayna Nature Reserve (DRC)

This reserve, in the Kivu mountains, was created in a very different way from the Lobéké National Park. In 2000, thanks to the good will of some in-

digenous peoples (including chiefdoms), and based around an old hunting reserve, the “Tayna Gorilla Reserve” was born, a local association devoted to the creation of this nature reserve. What was remarkable was that this took place against a backdrop of a fast-increasing population, the presence of valuable minerals and unpredictable governance. It did not take long for this initiative to attract big conservation NGOs, particularly the Diane Fossey Gorilla Fund (DFGF), followed by Conservation International (CI), and it has received support from CARPE since 2003. It is not possible to describe adequately the difficult path that had to be taken, in the extremely tense context of civil war, to create the reserve that we know today (the core area is 90,000 ha). But at every stage, recognition of the reserve by all interested parties was sought. The initiative has remained under local leadership, sourcing its workforce from the region, implementing pilot development projects on the ground, letting the local authorities have their say and leaving leadership to them.

The land-use planning process is drawn from the same inspiration. In 2002, concerned with what would become of the reserve, the local chiefdoms defined the boundaries and zoning of the reserve, taking into account future potential, the established villages and existing types of uses. They based their designations on the surveys carried out with international NGOs (DFGF and CI) on the natural wealth of the forest and the pressures on it. The plan was submitted to Government for official approval. In subsequent years, the boundaries of the core zone were modified by consensus to take into account more specific management realities on the ground (administrative boundaries, the presence of flagship fauna, etc.) which is testimony to an adaptive and coordinated process. These boundaries were in turn validated by the State. Once created, the Tayna Nature Reserve became an integral part of the network of protected areas in the DRC, with community-based management carried out by a Site Coordination Committee (Comité de Coordination du Site or Cocosi). The boundaries were marked out and the management structures (plan, staff, procedures ...) put in place. The same process has since been followed in other regions in the DRC.

### 3. The Okapi Faunal Reserve (north-east DRC)

This reserve was created by the Government in 1992. The unique feature of this reserve is that it recognizes some usufruct rights to the resident population (grazing livestock, hunting ...) but obviously prohibits those that are commercial in nature (mining, logging, commercial hunting etc.). The reserve is managed by the Institut Congolais de Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), in partnership with two international NGOs, WCS and Gilman International Conservation (GIC) and, from the start, was threatened by the rapidly growing population in the area; a population that depends mostly on natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, for its survival while at the same time the management capacity of the State is still very inadequate.

The planning process promoted by CARPE took another direction here. The aim was to facilitate the effective management of a reserve that had already been created and recognized, while integrating various “micro-zones” of human activities into it. The process was based on raising the awareness of the inhabitants to the conservation challenges and the importance of zoning for the long-term management of the reserve. A collaboration agreement was adopted between the villages and the reserve, the first such formal engagement. After studying existing types of use, the potential of the land, the needs being expressed and existing realities, a proposal for functional zoning was submitted and discussed with the village concerned, both indoors and on the ground. Negotiation then made it possible to specify and redefine this zoning, until a common agreement was reached between the reserve and the inhabitants. The signing of the zoning document and the concrete establishment of boundaries on the ground concluded the participatory process, while the zone thus identified was introduced in the management plan. The designation of hunting grounds within the reserve followed the same process.

#### First tangible outputs

In the case of Lobéké, the main outcome of the

consensual LUP process was simply the gazette-ment of the zone into a functional national park, without making the same mistakes as in many previous gazette-ments, that were carried out in an uncoordinated manner and generated frustrations and conflicts between the various stakeholders in and around the parks. Besides the gazette-ment and clarification of multiple-use zones near the park, the process itself has made it possible to institute a dialogue between all the actors in the area. The “Mambele Convention”, signed by all the parties involved, was the final outcome that established the rules and responsibilities of each and everyone according to their situation and their rights. In addition, logging companies have decided to become more committed to conservation by adopting the certification system. Local social and professional groups, especially village hunting groups, have also organized themselves in the course of this process, and formed a committee to develop wildlife resources (comité de valorisation des ressources fauniques or Covaref). This committee has instigated many community projects (schools, public health, sanitation ...) thanks to the income derived from organized hunting near the park. Another interesting outcome, and the most unexpected, was logging companies joining in the fight against poaching, and some of them also investing in the provision of local social amenities (dispensaries, schools etc.), that would certainly not have been achieved without this preliminary planning work. Finally, in 2007, a park management committee was set up, bringing together village representatives, the administration and NGOs, to implement the management plan. This body is a testimony of the continuation of the participatory process, beyond just the initial planning.

In Kivu (DRC), the major outcome here too was the gradual gazette-ment of the Tayna Nature Reserve. Having become part of the country’s network of protected areas, and as such placed under the responsibility of the ICCN, it is managed by the local group of actors who started the process and who have since become an officially recognized NGO. A Cocosi is therefore in place, while the reserve has been demarcated on the ground with and by the villagers themselves, after successive revision of envisaged boundaries to

take into account increased knowledge of the challenges (location of important sites for biodiversity) and pressures (conflict areas, administrative zoning). Throughout the process, raising awareness has been at the centre of the planning efforts. This was done to include all local actors in the decision making. This has made it possible to raise the degree of environmental awareness significantly, and to propagate at all levels the knowledge that the reserve management team accumulated while the surveys were being undertaken. As further proof of its interest in, and commitment to, the local population, the reserve management team draws on local people for its workforce for all its activities. The reserve was gazetted when the main areas of tension had been alleviated.

Finally, through land-use planning, the Okapi Faunal Reserve has redefined its landscape in such a way as to allow all actors with user rights to take part in the management and maintenance of the reserve, while respecting the conservation objectives assigned to it. At the end of the process, 11 zones were allocated for agriculture and six for hunting, within the reserve. The rest of the reserve was dedicated to conservation, and special efforts were made to research and map this conservation landscape, to raise its profile and promote a feeling of ownership amongst the local people. The participatory process also made it possible for problems to be aired and, very often, for common solutions to be found.

## **Key lessons learned in these three experiences undertaken with the CARPE programme**

Each approach has generated its own lessons. Without being fundamentally different, they are distinct depending on the context, the place and the actors. Their main common factor is that they were born on the ground, as the project was being developed. Other lessons would undoubtedly, for some probably, contradict what today we think we have understood. That is the essence of “participation” that allows for the emergence of all opinions, is open to contradiction and, thus, takes the risk of opinions changing

over time.

### Some local lessons learned ...

The case of Lobéké shows the complexity of land-use planning when there are many “strong” parties (logging companies, safaris, local commercial hunters ...) interacting and whose activities spread over the landscape. When “less strong” groups (local populations, indigenous people ...) share the same land, relations can become strained and only dialogue with mutual respect can help relieve tensions. As was well understood by the implementers of the “Jengi Forest” project, the most insignificant actor in the landscape could be the one to cause the whole process to fail. The major role of the conservation NGO is therefore to be a mediator who, more than just a good listener, knows how to let each actor air his/her views so that no-one feels left out.

A park such as the Lobéké National Park depends very much on its periphery. Land-use planning should therefore include all ongoing uses in the periphery, in a bid to optimize the conservation measures taken inside the park. The collaboration of actors does not require commitment to all the challenges or priorities, but an understanding of the essential ones, as for example with logging companies that have invested in the fight against poaching in their own concessions. In order for this collaboration to take root, it needs to be steered locally, by the legitimate administrative authority but one that is also very close to the actors. It is necessary for people to get to know each other, talk to one another in order to finally listen and sometimes even agree with one another. Here too, the NGO partner has to adopt a guiding role to promote dialogue and understanding, even if at any given time the outcomes may seem insignificant. Finally, and this is a prerequisite to the development of the entire process, NGO partners can help with their specialist knowledge of the landscapes and of the challenges of conservation, development, culture. This knowledge, combined with their neutral and independent status, allows an objective picture to be drawn of the land being “allocated”.

The experience in the Tanya Nature Reserve

teaches us many other things, even if their essence is the same and the purpose is to ensure that all stakeholders take part in the planning. It emphasizes the need to gauge properly the consequences of actions to be undertaken, and not to fall into the trap of responding to demands, albeit local, which do not take into account all the parameters of the zone, especially conservation priorities. Preliminary studies to get to know and understand the structure and functioning of the land are essential (and NGO partner NGOs have an important role to play here). The reserve came into being in the particular context of war in the DRC, and it shows that in the absence of any kind of reference to governance, conservation can still be possible, provided it is neither partial nor partisan. It is also necessary to move quickly from words to action and show that conservation effectively has measurable economic benefits. The first action is to give priority to local people as regards the jobs generated by the reserve. Furthermore, Tayna did not hesitate to take former hunters on to its staff, to show that conversion is possible and that there are alternatives to poaching. Since knowledge of land is a dynamic process, the Tayna Reserve also invested in training its staff to collect field data, including constructing an accurate spatial representation of the environment and challenges. Special emphasis was also placed on raising the awareness of the local population through a standardized approach that brought to the fore the long-term benefits of the LUP process. A standardized approach was important to enable the information to be disseminated efficiently, using local NGOs, and to ensure that “individual” approaches were not developed, leading to the risk of confusing the message. Even if the advice and guidance of international NGO partners have been decisive, the LUP process has always been controlled at the local level, in order to ensure its effectiveness on the ground, and its connection with the realities of the situation. The consequence of this “on-the-ground” approach is that the boundaries of the core zone of the reserve (conservation zone) were modified several times, to take into account the real pressures, the conservation and administrative challenges ... This “flexibility” during the establishment of the reserve was encouraged by the State which did not hesitate to modify, accordingly, the gazettelement decree. Promoters of the

reserve also insisted on the importance of physically marking out the various boundaries of the multiple-use zone of the reserve (conservation zone, buffer zone, development zone) with and by the villagers, to ensure their understanding of the plan, and again to be able to offer direct employment opportunities. Finally, even if the birth of the reserve has followed a very different path from other parks, it is important that in the end it should be integrated into the protected area network of the country, and be considered as a substantial addition to its representative nature. The creation of a management body made up of all the interested parties (the Cocos) is the next step in finishing the work already undertaken to set up this reserve.

The case of the Okapi Faunal Reserve is in itself more traditional given that it starts with a park that has already been created and recognized (World Heritage Site). The challenge here is not to map out a conservation zone, but to optimize its management while taking into consideration its special statute that provides for usufruct rights for the resident population. The LUP process thus aimed, first and foremost, to raise the awareness of stakeholders of the limited nature of the resource, and the need for coordinated holistic management. The particular context of the zone, which has a large immigrant population, required that the indigenous population be given a say, as they were generally less able to stand up for their rights, and liable to take short-term decisions that may be detrimental to themselves in the longer term. Thus, emphasis was put on raising awareness so that the local people understood their rights, and could measure the contribution of conservation in their everyday environment. During the planning process itself, efforts were geared toward achieving an unambiguous understanding of the objectives of the reserve. This did not entail removing the rights of villagers, nor did it mean that the reserve had to compromise its prerogatives; the common objective was to achieve optimum management of the limited space. A lesson learned in the course of the process was the need to continue listening to all and not to be distracted by short-term interests that kept coming up during discussions. As a result, the reserve now has functional zoning that is accepted by all.

## ...And some general lessons

Many common lessons may be learned from these experiences. They are inter alia :

- Effective dialogue is often only achieved, paradoxically, when there are more than two persons involved. Many of the situations described could have been resolved by simple consultation between the protagonists but this does not happen. There is a need for third-party intervention. Mediation by international conservation NGOs can make it possible for the parties to accept sitting around the same negotiation table. These NGOs describe themselves as “mediators” or “facilitators”.
- Knowledge of the environment, of its strengths and weaknesses, the challenges and pressures is indispensable. It is useless trying to undertake joint planning without having prior knowledge of the situation on the ground. Given that each actor will come in with just his or her own knowledge, that may well be limited or subjective, the sum total of everybody’s knowledge will not necessarily give a true picture of the reality. The information-gathering phase can also help in identifying problems, to better circumscribe them, and could be very useful later in the negotiations.
- Planning is a rigorous process that requires a lot of improvisation. While the route has to be marked out, the objectives have to be understood, the choices have to be understood and shared, it is also necessary that, throughout the process, one continues to be aware of what is taking place on the ground, and is prepared to change course as often as is necessary. What is important is no longer to know what has to be done, but to find out what works and will lead to solid results.
- All actors are important, and one should give priority to those who seem, quite rightly, to be relegated to the background, i.e., those who are not heard because they are generally not invited to discussions, or who do not have a full understanding of the challenges, or who are usually reluctant to take part in such meetings ... It is generally amongst these people that you will find the

weakest link that may cause the whole arrangement to fail. It is necessary to identify them and give them the place they deserve. That is another vital role that NGOs can play.

- In the end, land-use planning does not change the realities of the world. It is therefore necessary to ensure that decision makers (and especially the State and its various bodies) take part in negotiations, and then in the decision making. Without the support and political will of the government, a sustainable outcome is impossible. The participatory approach therefore requires that all stakeholders from all walks of life be brought together.
- At the same time, local interest groups have to be helped: to be better structured, to be more capable of expressing their expectations, to be more representative of the local population, and thus to become more reliable partners with which to embark on a joint venture (the three experiences are built on a “contract of trust”). Although these groups may generally be legitimate, it would be a mistake to think that this means they are representative, let alone efficient. Working with weak local groups is building a weak partnership and a fragile future.
- “Moral, ethical and philosophical principles are essential” – this is what the Tayna Reserve teaches us. In addition to that, coordinated land-use planning requires respect. It is not only necessary to analyze or understand the aspirations of the other stakeholders, it is necessary to accept them in their context for they are not, generally, determined by anything other than legitimate needs, or at the least are felt to be such. Obviously, these principles sometimes weaken in the face of foreign partners, or are sometimes galvanized by a logic in which the land itself is secondary ... NGOs can play the important role of watch dog in these circumstances.
- Raising awareness is therefore a vital phase. Everyone has to understand the subject matter, and no longer view the land just through his or her prism. All planning work – especially zoning of activities, or

rights, or challenges – should lead to a common understanding of the problems or opportunities, to facilitate a meaningful dialogue in the future.

These lessons, and many others illustrated by these three examples, will inspire those who are committed to the adventure of participatory land-use planning for their own protected areas. This also applies to those who are responsible for developing new ones.

## Conclusion

The three experiences developed here, with the support of CARPE, certainly do not cover all the possible aspects of the participatory approach as conceived and elaborated over some decades now. They do however illustrate very well that there is potential for action to be taken in the Central African forest context, where there are mixtures of scales, challenges and actors. Multinational companies work alongside small local producers; industrial development is threatening endemic species; exploitation of natural resources is increasing while the resources themselves are decreasing; powerful migrants are coming up against fiercely sedentary peoples who are not well equipped to stand up for their rights. Men and women are taking up the challenge of conserving “their” nature while international NGOs would like to preserve “the” nature ... All the ingredients are there for misunderstandings and conflicts. Meanwhile, each in their own way, these three experiences show how to overcome these differences. Each of them describes a different way to arrive at the same end result: conserving an ecosystem, if not in its original state, then at least in a sustainable state. Each of them shows that, one by one, it is possible to overcome every hurdle. We must congratulate those who carried out this work, the local people that committed themselves, their representatives who were able to bring everyone on board, the administrative authorities who for once, encouraged decentralization, the State that allowed or sometimes even promoted this approach, environmental NGOs that turned away from theory to face the realities on the ground. These experiences are promising and are already being emulated. This is all to the good. They are howe-

ver still fragile, given the challenges ahead, and their balance sheet will need to be examined in 10 or 20 years to come, to know if today's success is truly the foundation for the success of tomorrow.

As for lessons learned, they are already out there. Each one of us stands to benefit if we can adapt them to our own working environment. If these experiences are to be summarized, three major factors come to the fore :

- Trust: none of the three LUP endeavours would have gone this far without real and absolute trust between actors. It is easy to say that dialogue is "instituted", easy to pretend that we "listen" to others, easy finally to say that we work in a "participatory" manner. But it is much more difficult to actually do it, and to continue to do it in spite of the difficulties that arise. In these three stories, there was no hypocrisy, no lies ... there were complicated situations, difficult discussions, outcomes that may have been less successful than those planned ... but there was always consultation and sharing of decisions.
- Time: undoubtedly the key factor in achieving trust. If there is no time to meet, to listen to one another, to understand one another, to convince one another, to change ideas, to change everything ... it is not possible to have trust. The best ideas need time to flourish. Furthermore, they need time to evolve and to face the hard realities of the field, a process which will sometimes cause them to be relegated to the level of a mere "concept". Each of the experiences presented here did it their own way, sometimes rushing phases, while still respecting the "timetable" of others. However, much more time is still needed to move from ongoing experimentation to the day-to-day and sustainable management of parks.
- Work: discovering these three projects has been an inspiration, and just a few pages have described what was done, why and how. But this disguises a major reality. For nothing was produced by chance. Nothing could have happened by itself, simply with trust and time. This may sound banal, but these results have been achieved because

men and women have worked, not just with extreme dedication, but sometimes above and beyond the call of duty too. There are hundreds of projects like this but only a handful that get this far. It is not a matter of luck; what counts is the energy expended by those who determine the future of the project: local actors, paid staff of international NGOs, representatives of local administrations that care, and those others, often isolated individuals whose contribution can be crucial, maybe someone from a forest concession, a development project, a school, the media ...

Trust, time, work ... indispensable ingredients for enabling human societies to live together. Just remember, protected areas are a human invention and like all its inventions, they only work if the inventor wants them to work. Really.