

The Promotion of National Policy and Governance Agendas for Conservation : Lessons Learned from the CARPE Program

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

It is often said that policy and legislative issues are the bedrock of any socio-cultural and political structure – be it a small village community at the heart of the Congo Basin forest or a large state in central USA. This is obvious because they help control and maintain any structure, facilitate cohesion among actors, reduce conflicts and, above all, ensure the effective management of natural resources. While it is also true that most policies and legislations are in the form of written documents – as in modern States, others are not – as in village communities. However, whether they are written or unwritten, one thing is clear – they often manifest themselves in the form of unwritten norms, actions, behaviours, roles and statuses that help determine whether a person is acting conventionally or unconventionally. If not,

cultural or political custodians tap from these policies and laws to come up with some corrective measures (sanctions, etc.) to ensure that deviants are brought back on track.

The diversity and complex nature of socio-political structures make it very challenging to put in place, and implement, appropriate policies and laws that effectively take into account both “modern” and local knowledge in natural resource management (NRM). To guarantee that the effective implementation of these laws and policies will have a significant impact on the ground, indicators need to be put in place that can prove that the rational use of these natural resources is fostering sustainable regional, national and local development. Some say that this is possible only if modern laws and policies are not only consistent with customary laws but also keep on adapting to innovative conservation dynamics.

Although most countries in Central Africa have taken giant strides in reforming most of their NRM codes, especially the forestry codes, there is still plenty of progress to be made. There has been a call for the various stakeholders to work alongside government officials to ensure that some of these laws are either reformed or adapted, or that implementation decrees are passed if this has not been done yet, as is the case with some countries.

This is why the CARPE Phase 2b programme, notably its governance components commonly known in our jargon as IR2 (Intermediate Result 2), has been focusing on good governance issues in natural resource management because it is an invaluable tool to avert forest degradation and the loss of biodiversity in Cameroon, Republic of Congo (RoC), Gabon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, Rwanda, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, the Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea. A major objective of the CARPE Focal Points and Country Team members is to facilitate good governance in the management and use of natural resources by focusing on strategies that will subsequently facilitate policy/legislative change and/or reforms. Another crucial issue for CARPE is to push for a “people-centred approach” to conservation by facilitating the implementation of key reforms so that they can have sustainable impact on the lives of populations in terms of reconciling the conservation of natural resources and sustainable livelihoods.

To share their experiences with others, CARPE Focal Points have come up with four case studies on lessons learned from Gabon, Cameroon, RoC and DRC. The goal of these studies is to show that a good national policy and governance agenda is the bedrock to sustainable resource management and local development. They show how they have used concrete field data to help influence policies, laws and various regulatory frameworks (through advocacy, communication, etc.) or conversely have helped to create enabling policy and legal frameworks to facilitate work at the landscape level. The aim of this paper is to provide a synthesis of these four studies, showing some similarities and differences, followed by some key recommendations.

1.2 The importance of promoting a national policy and governance agenda for conservation

Although Central Africa harbours the richest biological diversity in Africa and is the second largest continuous expanse of tropical forest in the world after Amazonia, most environmental specialists and policy/decision makers are very uncomfortable with the persistent rate of forest degradation and loss of biodiversity in the region. Current NRM policies and legislative frameworks have not been able to effectively balance local and national development needs and the conservation of biodiversity. Some observers strongly believe that increased human population and lack of development opportunities are the major drivers of this unfortunate phenomenon. Other dominant dynamics include: unsustainable agriculture, irrational forest and mineral exploitation, armed conflicts, road construction without adequate environmental impact assessment, unsustainable hunting, poaching, fire, large population movements in times of war (refugees) etc., invasive alien species, climate change, etc. The armed conflict in DRC and RoC, the increasing problem of arid lands in the northern part of Cameroon as well as the vast, complex and enormous territory of DRC, have all made it very difficult to implement most of these policies and laws. Also, the creation of enormous tracts of protected areas in Gabon (13 national parks), without putting in place consistent institutions and policy mechanisms to manage them, has only fuelled additional pressure on these resources, creating discord between local populations, government officials and international organizations.

However, on analysis, some observers are of the opinion that the root cause of forest loss in Central Africa is the difficulty some decision makers have in coming up with, and implementing, effective, consistent, harmonized and feasible conservation and development policies and laws which aim to satisfy current human practical needs without compromising the use of these resources by present and future generations.

Although sound policy and legislative reforms aimed at reversing forest degradation and the

loss of biodiversity are currently in force in most countries in the Congo Basin, especially in Cameroon, Gabon, RoC and the DRC, a quick look at the various national policy and legislative agendas shows that their elaboration, implementation and monitoring differ from one country to another. For example, most observers are of the opinion that although Cameroon is regarded as “far advanced” in putting in place a robust environmental policy and legislative agenda (1994 Forestry Code; 1995 Implementation Decree; 1995 Forestry Policy, etc.), much still has to be done to facilitate their implementation, notably on community involvement in natural resource management and illegal logging. These tools not only failed to put in place appropriate implementation mechanisms, but also showed inconsistency between some articles and laws. Also, there are outright incompatibilities in some environmental policies and legislations when it comes to who is actually in control of certain resources. For example, some stakeholders and government officials in most countries are still confused as to their roles and responsibilities in managing various sectoral issues such as forestry, agricultural, lands and mineral resources, etc. Some of these gaps were not noticed when the laws and policies were drafted. To help remedy this, the Cameroonian Government, for example, has already put in place the necessary structures to reform its forestry law. Although their forestry codes have been updated in recent years, countries like Gabon and the Republic of Congo have still to step up their national strategies to effectively involve community-based structures in government efforts in natural resource management. Also, because of its vast and complex nature (2,345,000 km²), the DRC is currently struggling in its fight against poaching and illegal logging, mainly because of the lack of manpower, resources, funds and adequate modern technology to control their resources in spite of the adoption of their new forestry code in 2002.

However, although there are obvious problems, there is ample evidence that most countries in the region are taking giant strides to strengthen their good governance strategies to ensure effective natural resource management. For example in DRC, the Government, through its Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Document, has iden-

tified the forest as a key sector for development. This explains why the 2002 Forestry Code is the base for all forestry operations in the country. In the Republic of Gabon, the 2001 Forestry Code (Law N° 16/2001 of December 31) as well as the 2007 Law on National Parks (Law N° 003/2007 of September 11) brought in a lot of innovations in terms of forest and wildlife management as well as community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). In Cameroon, seen as the pioneer of forestry reform in Central Africa, the impetus came before and immediately after the 1992 Rio Conference with the creation of the Ministry of the Environment and Forestry (MINEF) for the effective management of flora and fauna. To this effect, the groundwork was set for the elaboration of the first draft document on forest policy in 1993 while one year later, the 1994 Forestry Law (Law N° 94/01 of January 20) was promulgated. This provided adequate material for the publication of the Cameroonian Forestry Policy in 1995. The Republic of Congo has not been lagging behind because the Government has been at the forefront in defining sustainable management policies and laws. The Government was praised when it produced its new 2000 Forestry Code (Law N° 16/2000) and the 2008 Law on the Conservation and Management of Wildlife (Law N° 37-2008 of November 28, 2008). The stage was therefore set for sustainable forestry management in all four countries.

At the regional level, there has been some consensus in Gabon, Cameroon, DRC and the RoC to join their other six neighbours in elaborating a consolidated Central African Forest Commission (French acronym COMIFAC) Convergence Plan – an outcome of the 1999 Yaounde Heads of State Summit and the 2005 Second Heads of State Summit that produced the COMIFAC Treaty. Most stakeholders were aware that laying down a harmonized regional policy framework was the only way to achieve effective natural resource management both at a national and sub-regional level.

1.3 CARPE's approach to promoting a national policy and governance agenda for conservation

CARPE's approach has been very proactive ever since its inception in 1995. In order to facilitate the implementation of its Strategic Objective which is to reduce the rate of forest degradation and loss of biodiversity through increased local, national and regional NRM capacity in nine Central African countries, CARPE and its partners have concentrated their efforts on capitalizing on the results of the first phase which focused on the increase of conservation knowledge, institutional development and capacity building of the various actors. This second phase has highlighted three main objectives – elaboration and implementation of sustainable NRM practices; the improvement of environmental governance; and the strengthening of natural resource monitoring capacity.

Following the recommendations of a mid-term evaluation report in February 2006, IUCN has become a core partner and, since October 2006, has been responsible for the “natural resources governance strengthened” component (IR2). Since then our major approach has focused on strengthening partnerships with existing governance structures, and encouraging host countries and COMIFAC/Congo Basin Forest Partnership partners to participate in the decision-making process of the programme, use the small grants to build the capacities of civil society organizations (CSOs) to advocate for policy and legislative actions, and increase communication between various stakeholders. With this new role, a CARPE-IUCN Regional Program Manager is coordinating the efforts of CARPE Focal Points to convene and coordinate Country Team meetings aimed at implementing and monitoring activities in order to promote short and long-term policy and legislative reforms. Country Team members include designated government officials, parliamentarians, national and international conservation organizations, bilateral and multilateral organizations, research institutes, etc. In addition to the organization of Country Teams, Focal Points organize a policy, regulatory and legislative agenda aimed more especially to build the

capacity of local CSOs in their advocacy and social mobilization roles. Through Country Teams, the CARPE Focal Points also work with CARPE-funded Landscape and cross-cutting partners as well as other conservation actors in the countries. While some members seek to use their field research results to lobby for policy/legislative change in order to facilitate the sustainable management of natural resources, others engage in advocacy activities to facilitate the implementation of field-based conservation programmes. This approach has proved very successful over the years as Country Team members have contributed significantly to the elaboration of new laws and policies and the updating of archaic laws.

2. Review of the policy and governance case studies

2.1 Lessons learned from the Democratic Republic of Congo

With a surface area of close to 2,345,000 km², the forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo cover close to 60 percent of its territory and constitute about 50 percent of the entire Congo Basin forest area. However, although these forests are among the most biodiversity-rich in the world in terms of flora and fauna, its population is still poor with the majority living on less than a dollar a day. The reason for this unfortunate paradox was clarified by the authors of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Document who identified bad governance as one of the major causes of this poverty and suggested some critical issues that needed to be addressed to promote good governance. Most people identified armed conflict as a contributory factor to poor governance in the management of natural resources because it destabilized the capacity of public institutions and the local populations to manage these resources. Since the wars, the Government has been concentrating most of its efforts on seeing how their rich resources could be sustainably used to promote development.

However, most observers believe that the ongoing democratization process should be pursued to promote good governance. The new constitution of the Republic, the new mineral and

investment codes, the 2002 forestry code, the decentralization laws, etc., are all evidence of the ongoing democratization process and the good intentions of the DRC Government. With the help of partners like CARPE, measures have also been taken to ensure the implementation of these NRM reforms. These include the cancellation of close to 25 million hectares of illegal forest concessions; the periodic publication of lists of forest contracts and their fiscal status to ensure transparency and sustainable use of natural resources; the recruitment of international independent observers to oversee the implementation of the forest exploitation reform; etc. Also, the recruitment of an observer to support forestry control and the preparation of the implementation decree of the Forestry Code was an important step taken by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other partners who supported the process. The Government has also initiated reform of Law N° 069 on the protection of nature as well as participatory elaboration of a national forestry and conservation policy.

However, despite all these efforts most national and international conservation and development actors are strongly of the opinion that poor governance is still a very important issue in DRC. The issue of transparency, weak capacity at all levels of government administration to monitor illegal actions, lack of human resources and viable environmental information to foster good decision making, illegal logging in forest concessions, bad tax recovery systems, lack of some implementation decrees, numerous conflicts between forest exploiters and local communities because of inadequate gazetting system, etc. – all still prevail.

Most of these policy and legislative shortfalls were identified by DRC Country Team members who participated in the February 2007 CARPE Inception Workshop that launched Phase 2b and who have since then endeavoured to discuss some of these priorities with decision makers and other actors. Some members like the CARPE Landscape partners and others suggested that some important policy actions could only be properly undertaken if the Country Team was enlarged to include MPs, the private sector and strong indigenous and women's networks. Once this

was done, Country Team members were quite happy with the dynamism and results of the entire team. It has been quite easy to discuss issues and give technical, financial and strategic inputs to facilitate the elaboration or implementation of some draft laws.

To give some examples: representatives of the Country Team worked very hard with other actors as members of a validation committee put in place by a Ministerial Degree to elaborate a draft implementation degree of the 2002 Forestry Code. Their views as expressed in the Committee were simply a reflection of the views of Country Team members. The text was eventually signed and published under the coordination of FAO. Also, Country Team members facilitated the finalization and validation of the manual on the procedures for the attribution and management of Community Forests.

Since the implementation of the 2002 forestry code was an uphill task, Country Team members supported (technically and financially) the elaboration and publication of a commented version of the forestry code by Government experts. When published, this commented version (which will be prefaced by H.E the Minister in charge of forestry) will be widely disseminated to all pertinent forestry stakeholders. It will be translated into two national languages by the Country Team to facilitate its ownership by the local populations. Also, Country Team members carried out a lot of lobbying activities to make sure that civil societies (such as a member of the coalition of NGOs) are represented in pertinent NRM structures like the National Forests and Conservation Programme, the Forest Consultative Council, the Steering Committee in charge of revising the law on nature conservation, etc.

As regards capacity building, Country Team members have been very instrumental in building the capacities of DRC MPs, notably those of the environmental commission. This was done through the organization of training sessions on the Forestry Code (its vision and environmental challenges), illegal logging, the importance of ratifying and implementing international conventions, etc. Along the same lines, CSOs have been in the forefront when it comes to the conception,

elaboration, implementation and monitoring of policy, legislative and development projects. Country Team members help them lobby so that the results of their projects are better appreciated.

Over the years, Country Team members have been working with other institutions such as the US Forestry Service in a bid to make sure that the DRC government starts to consider elaborating a forestry zoning plan for the whole country. It is believed that this is vital in the fight against illegal logging because the information in a zoning plan would facilitate control of these concessions.

A summary of the lessons learned in DRC is as follows. **Firstly**, in order to effectively play their role, Country Team members should work in close collaboration with each other so that they can act as a joint force to lobby for policy and legislative reforms. **Secondly**, it will be very difficult to attain their objectives if the various actors do not develop and implement a robust communication strategy that facilitates the exchange of experiences and lessons learned as well as capacity building to promote policy and law changes and reform. **Thirdly**, in order to make the deliberations of Country Team members as effective and relevant as possible, the Focal Point and other members should organize preparatory meetings. This will help create synergy, save duplication and avert possible conflicts. **Fourthly**, it has been noted that the involvement of CSOs in policy and legislative debates is very important because it ensures that their interests are taken into consideration when elaborating and implementing these laws.

2.3 Lessons learned from the Republic of Cameroon

Some observers are of the opinion that the Cameroon 1994 Forestry Law is the legacy of her three colonial masters – Germany, France and Britain. In fact, it was adopted two years after the Rio Summit and the creation of the then Ministry of the Environment and Forestry in 1992 which was the main government body in charge of the management of environmental issues. The 1994 Forestry Law, or Law N° 94/01 of January 20 as

it is often called, and the 1995 Forestry Policy document promoted some sustainable management practices such as the fight against illegal logging; the gazettement of protected areas; reforestation; the recognition of the rights of indigenous and local populations; the need to reconcile conservation and sustainable development objectives; the recruitment of independent observers to monitor sustainable harvesting in forest concessions; and the setting up of efficient government institutions to ensure the effective implementation of these laws and policies. The Cameroonian Forest and Environment Sector Programme was adopted in 2004 and is considered a consolidated and comprehensive policy document that facilitates cohesion in the drive towards sustainable forest and environmental management.

Also, in 1999 when the Cameroonian President convened his peers in Yaoundé to attend what is now known as the First Central African Heads of State Summit for the Sustainable Management of Central African Moist Forest, most conservation and development stakeholders knew that things would never be the same again in Central Africa because of this commitment at the highest level. This facilitated the creation of COMIFAC, formerly known as the Conference of Ministers in charge of the conservation and sustainable use of the Central African Forest Ecosystems (up to January 2005) and later the Commission for the Forests of Central Africa, immediately after the Second Central African Heads of State Summit in February 2005 that was organized in Brazzaville by the RoC Head of State.

Unfortunately, in spite of this background, some observers are strongly of the opinion that although Cameroon is at the forefront in NRM reforms, there is still a lot to be done in terms of putting in place appropriate governance structures to facilitate their implementation. Numerous studies and observations have shown that corruption in the forestry sector is still rife, especially in forest concessions. Local communities are still complaining over their 10 percent share of forest royalties while women are yet to effectively take on their role in sustainable forest management, etc. The technology, manpower and funds to effectively manage the resources are still not suffi-

cient.

The Cameroonian Country Team knew that they had a big task ahead if they wished to reverse these trends. Through various strategies such as lobbying, capacity building, outreach, etc., Country Team members have done a lot in terms of improving the legal and policy framework (1994 Forestry Law and its implementation Decree of 1995, ratifying the Ramsar Convention, etc.). They lobbied for the update of the Document *Manual of the Procedure for the Attribution and Norms for the Management of Community Forests*. An advanced draft is currently on the table of the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife for signature. The draft decree regulating the management of wildlife, especially the norms and procedures for the attribution and management of Community Hunting Zones, is also available. It was a unique opportunity to discuss the Ministerial Order No. 122 on the setting up of equitable access and benefit-sharing regimes for forest resources. Currently, Country Team members and other partners have been involved in discussions with the Cameroonian authorities to revise the 1994 Forestry Law. At the demand of the Ministry, members have contributed in the elaboration process of the ToR for a Consultant that will take the lead in the process.

As regards Ramsar, the Team provided the necessary technical support to the Cameroonian Government which subsequently led to the ratification of the Ramsar Convention in 2006.

Although information generation and sharing have been handicapped for some time now in Cameroon because of the lack of adequate capacity and information technology, Country Team members have, for example through Global Forest Watch, helped the Ministry in charge of Forestry (French acronym MINFOF) to collect, process and publish data each year on forest cover in forest concessions. Here, data on illegal logging and mining in forest concessions were collected and handed to MINFOF for appropriate decision making. Along the same line, the Cameroon Country Team has set up the Environmental Journalist Network to facilitate the generation, production and dissemination of environmental information.

In the field of participation and capacity building, Country Team members took the necessary steps to facilitate the effective involvement of CSOs in relevant national and sub-regional meetings such as CEFDHAC (*Conférence sur les Ecosystèmes de Forêts Denses et Humides d'Afrique Centrale*). The Cameroon component of the CEFDHAC network (parliamentarians, young people, women, indigenous and local populations, etc.) participated in the entire CEFDHAC reform process and is still very committed to assisting in implementing its recommendations and fostering its links with COMIFAC. Also, the Team facilitated the activities of Access Initiative Network, a CSO that promotes public access to information, participation and justice in decision making that affects environmental management. The Country Team also supported local communities in establishing sustainable wildlife management activities. For example the Committee to Valorise Wildlife Resources (COVAREF) in eastern Cameroon is doing a great job in managing their community hunting zones to obtain the necessary funds to build schools, hospitals and other local development structures.

A summary of lessons learned in Cameroon is as follows. **Firstly**, to successfully push for good governance it is important to start by enhancing the legal, policy and regulatory frameworks. **Secondly**, lobbying for good governance in NRM is a painstaking exercise because it takes a lot of time and energy – one needs to work very hard to change predominantly negative habits which are deep in the fabric of some stakeholders. **Thirdly**, in order to achieve meaningful involvement of CSOs in policy/legal oriented issues, it is very important to simplify these numerous laws and policies and translate them into the national languages. **Fourthly**, it is not easy to work with some stakeholders in the Country Team who are not directly funded by CARPE because they do not feel obliged to implement some of the activities outlined in their Country Matrix. **Fifthly**, enhancing the capacity of CSOs is a prerequisite to ensuring their effective participation and involvement in natural resource management since they will acquire the necessary skills to compete with conflicting interests among other actors. **Sixthly**, although the small grants scheme is an effective way to support CSOs, it can be a source of

conflict if not managed properly. **Seventhly**, although the legislative arm of government is supposed to balance some actions of government, they often compete with some local organizations to manage these resources.

2.3 Lessons learned from the Republic of Congo

With its surface area of 325,000km², the Republic of Congo harbours one of the important segments of tropical forest of the Congo Basin. Because almost 60 percent of its territory is forested, the country is host to some of the richest biodiversity in the world. Over the years, these resources have been subjected to numerous human activities such as forest exploitation, mining, agriculture, etc. Unfortunately, these activities have often been carried out without adequate concerns for their sustainability. Studies have shown that if adequate precaution is not taken, these rich resources will be severely depleted over the years which will be very detrimental not only to the growth of the Congolese population, but also to the Congo Basin and the world at large. With the climate change debate now being taken seriously by most countries in the world, the Congo Basin forest is seen as a public international good that could help avert the negative consequences of climate change in the world.

To address this situation, the Congolese Government was quite aware that with these emerging dynamics, the old forestry law needed to be updated. It was because of this that after some participatory consultation among most relevant actors including local and indigenous populations, Law N° 16/2000 came into force in 2000. Alongside Law N° 48/81 of April 21, 1981 on the Conservation and Management of Wildlife (revised by Law N° 37-2008 of November 28, 2008 on Wildlife and Protected Areas) and Law N° 003 of April 23, 1991 on the Protection of the Environment, most stakeholders were certain that the management of these resources would certainly be ensured. At the regional level, the Congolese Government has often been at the forefront in facilitating the setting up of a regional structure that would ensure regional collaboration in the management of the Congo Basin forest. In 1996, the

Congolese Government hosted the first Conference on Central African Moist Forest Ecosystems (CEFDHAC) which laid the foundations for coordinated management of forests not only among States but among all relevant actors such as parliamentarians, the private sector, research institutions, women, indigenous and local populations, etc. In order to consolidate some of the achievements brought by about CEFDHAC, the Congolese Government also organized the Second Central African Heads of State Summit in Brazzaville that culminated with the signing of the COMIFAC Treaty which is currently responsible for streamlining the management of the Congo Basin Forest.

In an ideal situation, one would expect that all of these regulatory frameworks would stop the unsustainable use of natural resources. Unfortunately, this has not been the case because illegal logging and corruption still prevail, unsustainable hunting and farming are still causes for concern, mining has not complied with existing norms, the manpower and funds to implement these policies and laws are still lacking, the management of protected areas has been very difficult, local communities have still not yet benefited from their rights, and decision makers have not been able to obtain adequate information to take sound decisions.

Given these circumstances, CARPE Country Team members went to work. For example, they took part in the preparation of Law N° 37-2008 of November 28, 2008 on Wildlife and Protected Area Management. The draft law on Fisheries and Continental Aquaculture was adopted by Parliament on December 10, 2008 and now members are lobbying for its promulgation by the President of the Republic. They have also lobbied alongside CSOs for the suspension of Ministerial Order N° 7053/MEF/CAB which authorized the killing of elephants at the periphery of the Odzala-Kokoua (around Miélékouka) and Nouabalé-Ndoki (around Bomassa and Kabo) National Parks.

Lessons learned from the Republic of Congo can be summarized as follows. **Firstly**, the Country Team is an invaluable catalyst for NRM policy and legislative reform or change because of its

diverse and expert membership. **Secondly**, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to lobby for policy and legislative change and implementation if there is no collaboration between all necessary partners such as local administration, parliament, civil society, research centres, etc. **Thirdly**, dialogue and consultation among various actors remain a key factor to reducing conflicts related to the management of natural resources. **Fourthly**, since man is at the centre of all conservation efforts, the success of all our endeavours will depend on how well man is treated in terms of socio-economic-health development. **Fifthly**, awareness raising and sharing of information are vital for the sustainable use of natural resources because they help change attitudes and belief systems. **Sixthly**, it will be very difficult to implement all of these policies and laws if we do not have a sustainable funding mechanism and the necessary manpower.

2.4 Lessons learned from the Republic of Gabon

The current NRM regulatory frameworks in Gabon seek to facilitate the sustainable use of natural resources, and national growth. The elaboration process was fairly participatory since the Government took into account the opinions, views and preoccupations of all relevant actors. For example, the 2001 Gabonese Forestry Code (Law N° 16/2001 of December 31, 2001) and the 2007 Law on National Parks (Law N° 003/2007 of September 11 2007) facilitated the effective involvement of all actors in the management of forest resources and national parks. The laws sought to fill certain gaps found in Law N° 1/82 of July 22, 1982 on the management of water and forest, and brought in some innovations such as combating illegal logging and poaching, community management of natural resources, the link between conservation and local development, sustainable management of forest concessions, transparency and information sharing, etc. The law also laid down some hunting rules. To hunt, one must have one of the following permits: for small or large-scale hunting, for scientific hunting or for capturing wild animals alive. All these permits can be issued to both nationals and non-residents. However, this does not abrogate customary user rights for subsistence purposes.

However, all has not gone well with the 2001 Forestry Code and that is why it was supplemented in 2004 by Decree N° 689/PR/MEFEPEPN of August 24, 2004 which clarified the technical management norms and the sustainable management of productive forests. But this did not seem to satisfy some managers who still find the law silent on important socio-economic issues. Also, the implementation of the code has encountered numerous problems: illegal logging and poaching because of inadequate control by the administration, corruption because of poverty and lack of ethics, inefficient conservation techniques, etc. Most observers are of the opinion that poaching is still on the increase because of the lack of an implementation decree outlining measures for effective law enforcement.

The Country Team in the Republic of Gabon has been very active – they played a key role in the elaboration and promulgation of Law N° 03/2007 of August 11, 2007 on National Parks. It is very important to note that this law has been long awaited, especially after the Presidential Decree of August 30, 2002 creating 13 National Parks. Conservation partners have always been calling for the creation of a National Park Agency to better manage these parks.

A summary of the lessons learned in policy and governance in Gabon can be summarized as follows. **Firstly**, management decisions that do not take into consideration the interests of the local population are destined to fail. **Secondly**, decisions that do not incorporate economic realities will be very difficult to implement. **Thirdly**, information campaigns should always go hand in hand with the adoption of any NRM law. **Fourthly**, because funds given to national NGOs are not sustained, conservation and development efforts are quite vulnerable after these funds are stopped. **Fifthly**, ministerial instability and frequent transfers of senior civil servants have a negative impact on natural resource management. **Sixthly**, partners should be patient because the adoption and promulgation of laws takes a lot of time. **Seventhly**, because conservation requirements do not often tie in with political and economic objectives, there are bound to be conflicts between NGOs and politicians.

3 Conclusion and recommendations

From the above we can see that although each country has its own specificities and philosophy in terms of the identification, elaboration and implementation of appropriate policy and regulatory frameworks, there is some common ground. Below are some lessons learned which are common to all four countries:

- 1- Lobbying for the adoption and promulgation of new laws and policies by Country Team members is not the only answer to sustainable natural resource management. It is very important to ensure that these new or reformed laws and policies are implemented on the ground and their impact felt by local populations and other actors in terms of socio-economic and conservation benefits. Past experience shows that often when some conservation NGOs, governments and community-based organizations have succeeded in having a new NRM law adopted or promulgated, most of them feel that they have “delivered the goods” – which is not necessarily the case, because a law or policy that is not fully implemented is just as bad as no law or policy at all. A strong recommendation would therefore be that in collaboration with governments, Country Team members should always formulate an appropriate strategy to make sure that these new policies and laws have an impact on the ground.
- 2- To successfully achieve good governance in sustainable NRM, Country Team members should build on each other’s comparative technical and advocacy experiences and advantages. If some members undermine the actions of other stakeholders (like competing NGOs) because they are competing for funding from donors or for favour from Governments, most of their resources are diverted towards irrelevant competition and latent conflicts among themselves. Country Team members have learnt from past experience and are now working very hard to create synergy in their activities. It is therefore very important to continue along this line if we want to be both time and cost-effective.
- 3- Although they lack the necessary capacity and funds to be effectively involved in natural resource management, CSOs are still very important actors because they facilitate buy-in from local populations and act as a counter weapon to some government actions which try to undermine their involvement. The IUCN-CARPE Small Grants Program has shown that with just a little seed money, CSOs can be helped to undertake very productive activities, with local, national and regional impacts.
- 4- In order to facilitate synergy and reduce conflicts, timely communication and information sharing among the various actors is very important to ensure efficient programme delivery. It is therefore very important for members to formulate a simple but appropriate communication strategy to be implemented amongst themselves.
- 5- The process of elaborating, adopting and promulgating NRM policies and laws can be very time-consuming. At times there are conflicting interests and viewpoints, and a lack of the necessary funds and other resources to effectively engage and involve all the relevant actors. It is vital that partners exercise patience because any hasty measures will surely be detrimental to the objectives of such an important process.
- 6- Capacity building of CSOs is a prerequisite to ensuring policy change or reforms; however, most CSOs do not often have the means or capacity to play their role fully. The Small Grants Program is gradually filling this gap.
- 7- Although the small grants scheme is an effective way to support CSOs in lobbying for policy and legislative change, it can also be a source of conflict if not well managed. This is because some CSOs are often competing for cash and will not hesitate to denigrate any competing organizations. It is therefore very important for donors to help create a friendly environment amongst CSOs.
- 8- Some stakeholders, including local communities, have been less supportive to the legal governance framework because it is

difficult to have a good and comprehensive understanding of laws and policies which are written in English or in French. It is therefore very important to translate some of these documents into national languages and promote peer capacity building.