

## Case study 7

# Cameroon – Boumba Bek

**Protected areas and indigenous peoples:  
the paradox of conservation and survival of the Baka in  
Moloundou region (south-east Cameroon)**

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# 1 Introduction

*A national park must remain a primordial wilderness to be effective. No men, not even native ones, should live inside its borders.* (Bernard Grzmiek, wildlife campaigner, East Africa)

*The forest that is just behind our camp is not rich; it is difficult to find wild yams there, and even more so, game. We are forced to go into the Boumba Reserve to get what we need to live on.* (Pélembiyé Dieudonné, Baka Pygmy from Banana, April 2001)

In tropical forests, the acts of outsiders, whether their aims are to conserve or to exploit forests, are often founded upon speculative assumptions. In Cameroon this holds true because often people living in these areas are not integrated into the decision-making process. In southern Cameroon, as in the whole of the country's territory, the organisation of the national forest estate is subject to the State's directives, based around the following classification:

- Permanent forest, which includes land allocated to forest or wildlife habitat;
- Non-permanent forest, comprising land available for a variety of other uses.

In practice, for the peoples in forested zones and the Baka in particular, this system of land classification has led to intrusions into their lives by outsiders with many varied ambitions. The co-existence between them and these outside ambitions has on occasions proved difficult. The reality is that in forested zones – where peoples, protected areas and sometimes the logging activities each have their own agendas – there is invariably tension and conflict over the application of the law in general, and the day-to-day management of protected areas in particular. The development of a national policy favouring the principles that emerged from the Rio conference and Agenda 21 has led to the progressive establishment of conservation areas.<sup>1</sup> Implementation of this policy has manifested itself in a boom in the number of protected areas throughout Cameroon. The national network of protected areas covers approximately 9% of this territory – still a long way from the goal of classifying 30% of Cameroon as protected areas. The table overleaf lists some of these protected areas.

Although these protected areas are at different stages of development, the fact that these zones have been classified as protected areas has been the justification for implementing natural resource management policies which have not always been in harmony with indigenous peoples' concerns.

This case study focuses on a particular case which illustrates the paradox between the logic of conservation and the survival of indigenous peoples. More specifically it illustrates how the State has implemented its conservation policy, as manifested through its principles and rules, in a way that runs counter to the local

populations' vision and aims, and how the Baka Pygmies – designated a minority under Cameroon's constitution of 18 January 1996 – live and perceive the impact of forests designated for conservation. The Moloundou region of south-east Cameroon, particularly the Baka camps at Banana and Bangoy, form the area where data was collected. These camps are located on the periphery of the National Parks of Boumba Bek/Nki to the west and Lobéké to the east.

<b>Protected area</b>	<b>Area (hectares)</b>
Bénoué	180,000
Bouba Ndjida	220,000
Faro	330,000
Kalamaloué	4,500
Korup	126,000
Lac Ossa	4,000
Mbam and Djerem	353,200
Mozogo-Gokoro	1,400
Waza	170,000
Bafia	no data
Campo	271,000
Dja	526,000
Douala-Edéa	160,000
Kalfou	4,000
Kimbi-River	5,600
Lac Lobéké	43,000
Boumba Bek/Nki	648,600
Mbi Crater	no data
Ottotomo	no data
Kinké	no data
Mengame Sanctuary	no data
Santchou	no data

*Source: MINEF, Wildlife Directorate, 1999*

## 2 Methods and approach

For this case study we used the following data collection techniques:

- Interviews with residents (Baka and some Bantu) of Banana and Bangoy camps in April 2001;

- Interviews with the administrators and agents of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry working in the Moloundou region;
- A literature review (reports, studies, national and international legal texts and journal articles) which enabled us to obtain useful information and improve our knowledge of both indigenous peoples and the issue of protected areas;
- Direct observation, carried out during our visit to the region, which allowed us to fill the gaps in the information collected in the camps.

This case study is divided into three main parts. The first sets out the context and the situation that the Baka from the villages of Banana and Bangoy were in before the start of the conservation project; the second provides a description of the project, the parties involved, and the range of difficulties experienced by the Baka during the implementation of the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park; and the third aims to provide an outline response to the consequences of the conservation projects on the Baka Pygmies.

### **3 The context of the study**

In Cameroon the creation of protected areas is the prerogative of the State. Quite often, the State itself does not have the means to put them in place. This is the context in which the contribution made by outside organisations is so important in their management. The day-to-day management of these protected areas has had mixed fortunes, and resulting practices have tended not to give adequate consideration for the peoples who live all around these zones. This is the case with the Pygmies, who have come to be known as ‘forest beings’. The greatest aspirations – of management and conservation alike – are vested in the forest. However, there is a different perception of its utility according to whether you are the State, the project, Bantu or Pygmy. This multi-faceted perception has, on occasion, posed a problem concerning the degree to which local peoples have been involved in setting up and managing protected areas. This area of inquiry is the one we explored in and around the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park.

#### **Geography**

The district of Moloundou is approximately 280 km south of Yokadouma, a border town of south-west Cameroon, on the border with Congo-Brazzaville. The climate in this area is ‘subequatorial tending to equatorial’ with four seasons (Ministry of Agriculture, 1985). These seasons include:

- a long rainy season from September to the end of November;
- a long dry season from the end of November to March;

- a short rainy season from the end of March to June; and
- a short dry season from July to August.

The annual rainfall is around 1,500 mm, with an average temperature of 24°C.

The population density of the Moloundou region is around five persons per square kilometre. This population is concentrated along the main road, living in villages of mixed populations.<sup>2</sup> The dominant groups in this region are the Bangando and the Baka.

Moloundou is an *arrondissement* (district), and has a mayor and a range of decentralised administrative services. Development of natural resources in accordance with forest zoning plans means that there are areas allocated to logging, to conservation, and to areas where local peoples have usage rights. As a result conservation projects, forestry companies and specialised sport hunting facilities (safari) are all to be seen in the area.

## 4 The population

The population local to the Moloundou region comprises Baka Pygmies and Bantu. There are also people from other areas, including traders or those looking for work. In this case study, we focus purely on the original local population (the Bangando and the Baka).

### The Bangando

This is the name given to the Bantu from the Moloundou region. Written records indicate that that they came from the Nile region of Sudan. They are the descendants of another, larger Bantu group formerly known as the Ngombé. Their migration to the area was as a result of the Islamic conquest of the Nile region. During their migration they first sought refuge in the area now known as the Central African Republic. Later, part of this group crossed the Kadéi and Boumba rivers to the area in which they settled. The name 'Ba Ngando' means 'belonging to the caiman (alligator) family'.<sup>3</sup> This is because they successfully crossed the waterways of Kadéi and Boumba, which are filled with alligators. The fact that they were not attacked by these reptiles led to this name being ascribed to them.

### The Baka

This is the second-largest group in the region. Generally speaking, the Baka are considered to be the largest Pygmy group living in Cameroon. They are located in three regions across south-central and south-eastern Cameroon: Djoum-Messamena, Abong Mbang-Lomié-Ngoïla and Yokadouma-Moloundou. In the latter region, they outnumber the Bantu (Abega, 1998). The Baka live in clan

groups in camps of approximately 50 people connected by friendship, blood or marriage ties. Diaw and Njomkap note that *'apart from the territories used for hunting and gathering, which are relatively close to the camp, you can distinguish areas reserved for settlement. Pygmy communities are structured around camps which constitute the socio-economic unit. This is the place from which they organise their production and consumption activities'*.<sup>4</sup>

In the Moloundou region Pygmy settlements are located along the roads and near to Bantu houses. Their daily life is divided between agricultural work for themselves or for the Bangando,<sup>5</sup> hunting, searching for honey, and gathering other products from the forest. In rare cases, some of them are recruited by companies working in the region. They are hired by timber companies to locate specific tree species for logging because of their good forest knowledge; sometimes they are similarly sought out by safari companies to accompany sport hunters. Others are recruited to work for conservation or development projects (e.g. WWF and GTZ).

The Baka from the Moloundou region are just as attached to the forest as other Baka living in the regions mentioned above. Although they are settled to a certain extent along the main road, they still follow the rhythm of the seasons, and move into the forest for variable lengths of time, depending upon what they are looking for during any one trip.

Work for this case study was undertaken in several Baka villages in the Moloundou region, in particular the villages of Banana and Bangoy.

### **The Baka in the Banana settlement**

The Baka of Banana live in small encampments scattered along the road and others located deeper in the forest. Banana is approximately 10 km from Moloundou on the main Yokadouma-Moloundou road. The village owes its name to a German supply boat that used to berth at Moloundou during the time of German colonisation. Before this, the village was called Ngombe which, in Baka, means a type of liana used in making cord. Several generations of Baka have lived in this village, which is why it is somewhat difficult to say exactly when they settled there. Many maintain that their parents and grandparents were born in this settlement. The fact that the Baka have settled along the roads in the forest zone is linked to the strategy devised by the colonial government and religious institutions who were keen to get the local peoples established along the forest roads in order to make it easier to contact them.

Many of the Baka in Banana carry out their agricultural activities over in Loupé, about 20 km west of the village, near the Boumba River.

## The Bangoy community

Bangoy is five kilometres away from Banana heading towards Yokadouma. Smaller than Banana, it contains about 100 people. The Baka camp is separate from the main Bantu village, located opposite the Bantu dwellings. The Baka in this settlement, like those in Banana, carry out their main activities in the forest located near the Boumba River to the south-east of Boumba Bek National Park, and in the forests located to the south of Lobéke National Park.

## 5 The links between the two Baka communities and the forest

The Baka from Banana and Bangoy villages know the forest next to Boumba Bek/Nki National Park very well. They carry out their various traditional activities in this area because, as they say, *'this is the forest that we know best'*.

For the Baka the forest has always been more than just a place of survival. Several researchers have shown that apart from the fact that the forest enables them to live, it possesses a mystical character. Séverin Cécil Abega (1998) notes to this effect that in Baka mythology, the god Komba is *'the creator of all things'*. All elements of the Baka cosmology are a creation of the god Komba, and the forest and the Baka themselves are part of this cosmology. The attachment that the Baka have for the forest, notes Abega, comes from the fact that:

*The forest is the foster mother: she puts her fauna and flora at the disposal of men. These possessions are transformed before being invested in food, architecture, pharmacopoeia or economic activities. This model permits permanent regeneration, being based upon respect for the rhythms of nature. The Baka respects this rhythm by fitting himself into this environment without changing it, and by associating the relationship to the environment to an entire system of representation.*

The forest is essential to life for the Baka. Those who live in the Banana settlement have land for crops at Loupé. This area, which is a long way from their roadside village is, according to them, fertile and good for agriculture. Loupé also serves as a base camp for the long expeditions into the forest in search of game, honey and many other products that they need for survival. Loupé, therefore, represents only one portion of the area stretching all the way to the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park.

The Baka elder, Mboma Jean Paul, from the Bangoy settlement confirms this:

*The Baka from the village carry out their activities in the Boumba forest because it the area they know best, and where they find all that they need for living. Sometimes they stay in the forest for several weeks; on their*



*return they bring back a lot of provisions for themselves and for the other Baka who have remained in the village.*

The Boumba forest is, for the Baka from the Banana and Bangoy settlements, not only the place where they carry out the activities for their survival, but also the place where the Baka tradition survives, characterised by their attachment to the forest and their belief in the forest spirits.

## **6 Forest zoning in the Moloundou region**

The zoning plan for the Moloundou region sets out use of the space as below:

- Protected areas: on the western side (the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park) and the eastern side (Lobéké National Park);
- Forests classified and intended for timber exploitation;
- Multiple-use areas comprising zones where people can live and where they can cultivate.

### **The situation prior to the establishment of the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park**

The situation before the project is divided into two main themes: the first covers the context of social structures in Cameroon in general as well as for the Baka from Banana and Bangoy; and the second concerns the conservation measures taken by the State.

#### **a Social life before the establishment of the project**

In Cameroon, the onset of economic crisis in the 1980s harmed the growth that the country had been experiencing. The consequences, which were not slow to appear, included a rise in unemployment. The need to survive for the young and those who lost their jobs in the public and private sectors put enormous pressure on wildlife, caused by a fresh upsurge in poaching. Throughout the forest zones, from Campo (in south-west Cameroon) to Moloundou (in south-east Cameroon), via Abong Mbang and Djoum, the game-hunting network grew exponentially. Elephants, gorillas and many other species were threatened. The hunt for certain species was the job of the Baka, who were recognised as great hunters.

In the villages of Banana and Bangoy, apart from agriculture (the consequence of the quasi-sedentarization of the Baka), some of the adults who were more skilled at hunting put their talents to use, substantially increasing their income.



Photo: CED, 2001

**Baka from the Banana settlement in the Boumba Forest**

## **b Measures taken for protecting wildlife**

The course followed by the State in protecting the forest and developing its potential took place in the following order. First a regulatory framework for managing forest resources was put in place, followed by the implementation of measures to protect wildlife.

Cameroon's forest conservation policies and legislation were progressively implemented in the early 1990s, following on from the Rio Summit.<sup>6</sup> From these texts one can identify the fundamental options undertaken by the State in order to preserve natural resources. Already at the outset, the application of these texts foreshadowed the contradiction inherent in the process, on the one hand undermining the will to link the local peoples, the residents of the forests, with the process, and on the other hand introducing restrictions that would make harmonious application of the law impossible. One of the inherent problems was the widespread use of the term 'local peoples' which, in the eyes of the legislator, combined both Bantu and Pygmies. Another was with regard to participative management, which was perceived differently by each of the local peoples because no distinction was made between different ethnic groups.

The following are some examples taken from the 1994 Law and from the Decree setting out the procedures for implementing the 1995 wildlife regulations:

### **Usage rights**

- Article 8 of the 1994 Law:  
*usage or customary rights are recognised for resident populations to*

*exploit all forest products, including animals and fish, with the exception of protected species, for personal use.*

*The Ministers responsible for forests, wildlife and fishing can, with state approval and in accord with the populations concerned, temporarily or permanently suspend the exercising of usage rights when necessity so demands.*

- Article 86 of the 1994 Law:

*Subject to the provisions of Article 8 above, traditional hunting is authorised throughout the territory, except in national forests for wildlife conservation, and on private property.*

### **Wildlife Reserve**

- Article 2, point 7 of the 1995 Decree:

*This is an area:*

*Set aside for the conservation, development and prorogation of wild animals, and for the protection and development of their habitat;*

*In which hunting is forbidden, unless authorised by the Minister responsible for wildlife, within the context of the duly approved development activities;*

*Where habitation and other human activities are regulated or forbidden.*

### **National Park**

- Article 2, point 8 of the 1995 Decree:

*This is a zone comprising one unbroken tract of land of which the conservation of the fauna, flora, soil, mineral resources, atmosphere, water, and in general, the natural environment is of special interest warranting its protection against all natural degradation, and to shield it from any activity liable to alter its appearance, composition and evolution.*

The following are forbidden:

*hunting and fishing, except as part of a development plan;  
industrial activities;  
extraction of materials;  
pollution of all kinds;*

*agricultural, pastoral and forest activities;  
grazing domestic animals.*

### **Participative management**

- Article 2, point 14 of the 1995 Decree:  
*. . . any approach to the management of wildlife resources which, at every stage in its planning and implementation, integrates in an optimal manner the local populations and all other relevant parties.*

### **Usage rights**

- Article 4, point 1 of the 1995 Decree:  
*. . . the exploitation of forest, animal or fish products by resident populations for personal use. However, with the exception of wildlife reserves, sanctuaries, and buffer zones, for which authorization can be obtained, usage rights apply neither to integral ecological reserves, nor to national parks, zoological gardens or game ranches.*
- Article 5, point 2:  
*. . . the creation or extension of a national park, an integral ecological reserve, a game ranch, or a wildlife reserve cannot take place until compensation has been awarded to the individuals concerned, when their rights are affected by this operation, in keeping with the legislation in force.*

### **Traditional hunting**

- Article 24 of the 1995 Decree:  
*. . . traditional hunting is allowed over the full extent of the territory, except on land owned by third parties, [or] in protected areas where hunting is subject to specific regulations under the terms of the management plan.*

*Game obtained from traditional hunting is exclusively for subsistence purposes, and under no circumstances for commercial gain.*

### **c Conservation project initiatives in the Moloundou region**

In parallel with the State's activities, conservation organisations carried out studies in the forest zones to assess the state of their natural resources.

Organisations like the World Conservation Society (WCS) were the pioneers, having started compiling inventories of the wildlife in the south east in 1988. The results of their activities were to form the basis of protected area planning in the region, culminating in the gradual establishment of two National Parks: Lobéké, and Boumba Bek/Nki. For the purposes of this preliminary case study we restrict our discussion to the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park.

## **7 Boumba Bek/Nki National Park**

Boumba Bek/Nki National Park, which is in the process of formal classification as a park, forms part of the sequence of protected areas in south-east Cameroon (Lobéké, and Boumba Bek/Nki). Its establishment underwent several phases. In 1995 these areas were first named Essential Protection Zones; followed by a categorisation indicative of land use in the southern forest zone, which ratified the initial decision. The Boumba Bek and Nki parks jointly cover an area of 648,600 ha. If the current process culminates in their classification as a national park, these twin parks will become the largest protected area in Cameroon, followed by the Dja Reserve (526,000 ha).

At present, these parks are being managed under the 'Jengi' Project<sup>7</sup> of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Other related organisations are also providing intermittent support, including: GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) through the 'Proforat' Project<sup>8</sup> (Protection of Natural Forests), and the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MINEF), in implementing the south-east region Operational Technical Unit<sup>9</sup> (UTO).

## **8 Implementation of the project and the problems generated**

### **Implementation**

In south-east Cameroon, concurrent activities by the parties involved took place while the programme for the management of natural resources and conservation of biodiversity was being established. These activities resulted in wildlife inventories that culminated in identifying both the importance of the area's ecosystem and the need to fight poaching, which was also a threat to wildlife.

### **The importance of the Boumba Bek/Nki ecosystem**

Garlan (1989) and Stuart *et al* (1990) demonstrated the richness of the forest ecosystem which extends beyond the Boumba River:

*this important forest in the remote south east. . . . Consisting primarily of mixed evergreen and semi deciduous transitional forests, it supports a*

*full complement of forest fauna, including elephant, buffalo, bongo, bushbuck, giant forest hog, bush pig and leopard, as well as gorilla, collared manglebe and chimpanzee.*

## **Poaching**

The Decree setting out the procedures for implementing the wildlife regulations defines poaching as: *'the act of practising the slaughter and capture of whichever species of wild animals for commercial gain'*. Poaching is one of the consequences of the economic crisis that Cameroon experienced at the end of the 1980s. The struggle for survival by people who had become unemployed had the corollary of promoting the development of a market for bushmeat in the large cities. In the Moloundou region, the local peoples – the Baka and the Bangando – went along with this, attracted by the profits. They would sell off the product of their illegal activities through 'intermediaries' for money and sometimes for ammunition. Michael Vabi notes to this effect that in the south-east region:

*Forest edge communities have also resorted to exchanging game meat and skins for the cash needed to purchase consumer good and to pay for health care and school fees. Members of these communities have also used their skills and knowledge to assist non-resident hunters in their poaching, receiving income and other material benefits in return.*

In the fight against poaching, the authorities in charge of wildlife management and the various projects used the strategy of applying repressive measures against those behind the poaching. These acts of repression affected the lives of the Baka in the Moloundou region. One such case was the Baka community of Bethléem (from the village of Mambelé) who were asked by the authorities, in January 1997, to leave their Limbomboko camp and to return to the village.

The anti-poaching measures taken by the authorities also impacted on the Baka of Banana. Makondjo Norbert, a Baka from Banana, maintains that they went through a difficult phase:

*We had a lot of problems during this period. Not only did we have to cross the Boumba by pirogue in order to go hunting, but it was equally difficult to catch a hare and get it back to the village.'* (Banana, April 2001)

These preliminary signs of the way the authorities were going to conduct the fight on the one hand, and the studies being carried out by the projects on the other, would progressively lead to the Boumba Bek/Nki forest's establishment as a national park, and as the Baka said:



Photo: CED, 2001

Certain activities recognised as essential to the Baka have been forbidden through the establishment of national parks in the Moloundou region

*the whites have come to prevent them from hunting all the animals and from cutting leaves and plants. According to them, the whites are asking them to eat beans and not meat.’ (Schmidt, 1998)*

### **The Baka perception of the prevailing situation**

The process of establishing protected areas in the region developed progressively. First was the creation of an ‘Essential Protection Zone,’ whose objective was to limit local populations’ activities in order not to disturb the environment. The Baka wondered why the project was taking all these steps for the conservation of the region’s forests. In this regard Jutta Schmidt notes that for the Baka, there was no distinction between the two organisations who were working in the region. They all considered them part of WWF who, for them ‘*is an organisation of whites who want to protect the animals*’.

These observations equally led the Baka to perceive that they were no longer the only masters of the forest. The Baka’s perception of the organisations that were implementing the conservation projects was altered somewhat. Their image of these projects is not far off mockery. As a joke they nicknamed the organisations ‘*Dobi dobi*’ inspired by the acronyms of the WWF and the WCS. Jutta Schmidt notes:

*the Baka were under the impression that Dobi-dobi was an American organisation (or one of white English speakers) which had bought the forest from the head of the State in order to protect the animals and prevent them from being hunted (Schmidt, 1998).*

The Baka from the Moloundou region have integrated agricultural practices into their daily lives. A good number of them have agricultural plots where they cultivate cash crops (cocoa, coffee) and subsistence crops (plantain, manioc). In order to be motivated about this new life, one must first have fertile land. They are all aware that they have to go a long way from the villages to find suitable land. The conquest of land for agriculture is not that simple. The land is virtually overrun with those whose ambitions are not in tune with the Baka's usual concept of the forest. Industrial exploitation of timber and the proposed Boumba Bek/Nki National Park have slowed their progress. It is with indignation that the Baka explain their current situation. The Baka of Banana, for example, have plots of land at Loupé, their forest camp. Loupé is very close to the Boumba River and is located on the site reserved for timber exploitation under the forest zoning plan. The forests adjoining the National Park had already been exploited, a few years before, by a Belgian timber company SOTREF (*Société tropicale d'exploitation forestière du Cameroun*) and a French timber company SIBAF (*Société industrielle des bois africains*).

### **The question of zoning and the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park**

The process of establishing the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park has not only created difficulties for the Baka, but also raised the issue of the local peoples' rights through its zoning provisions. Recognised by statute, the zoning plan was created by the government under Decree No. 95/678/PM of 18 December 1995 for the prime purpose, it would appear, of representing in map form Cameroon's current policies and forest legislation. The zoning of the forest in the Moloundou area corresponds to the global allocation of land in the forest zone of southern Cameroon. The main constraint confronting the rural populations in the allocation of forest zones is that it '*considerably reduces local communities' room for manoeuvre, and changes suggested boundaries into definite boundaries*'.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the Pygmies from Banana and Bangoy have been penalised by the zoning in that their ability to move around 'their forest' has been restricted through the application of this land-use plan.

This plan confirms the conventional management system's supremacy over the traditional type of management for the area. It is in this sense that Article 7, point 3 of the government Decree relative to forest zoning, states that: '*any activity liable to conflict with the priority use decreed for each forest estate is forbidden*'.

## **9 Establishment of the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park: the impact of the basic principles of the WCPA/IUCN/WWF's conservation model**

Apart from the legal provisions for the establishment of protected areas in Cameroon, principles have been laid down by three internationally recognised



conservation organisations. How do these principles compare with the situation as experienced by the Baka from Moloundou, in terms of participation, co-management and the recognition of their right to traditional and sustainable use of their territory?

### **The Baka's non-participation in the process**

In terms of the procedure for classifying the Boumba forest as a protected area, the project had undertaken to complete a number of activities with the participation of the local peoples. They were to have had an equal involvement in the establishment of the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park. The Baka assert that they were not told about it all until after the boundaries had been put in place. One Baka from Banana commented:

*We didn't know anything about it; but we learned that the government had set boundaries. We didn't agree with this because from the start they had not told us anything and when setting these boundaries they did not inform us, as they should have done.<sup>11</sup>*

If one accepts this declaration, it is entirely possible to say that the process of consulting local peoples was not carried out in an 'optimal manner' as the law requires. The project simply limited itself to public information campaigns about the decisions which had already been taken with respect to the establishment of the protected area. MINEF Notices 1238 and 1239, in establishing this forest as zoned for public use, further reinforced the restrictions on movement for the Baka in the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park.

### **The Baka from Banana and Bangoy and the co-management process of the Boumba Bek/Nki Park**

The co-management process still seems to be embryonic in the region, limited to public information campaigns, in which project workers, the authorities and local administrative bodies give 'directives' in accordance with the decisions taken, either at local level or at the level of their superiors. However, in the region some opportunities for dialogue between the local peoples and the authorities were created in order to discuss joint management of the future park but the Baka were never considered as a separate community with the right to submit their grievances to the Boumba Bek Contact Group.<sup>12</sup> When they did attend discussions, the resolutions put forward only contained grievances of the Bantu, who spoke for the whole community.

Experience in the forest zone shows that there has never been an equal relationship between Bantu and Baka in situations where the two communities have had to join forces to express their points of view. The problem of managing forest permits, as proposed under the forest law – just one of many

examples – has led to numerous conflicts over the management of forest resources.

### **The Baka have limited usage rights**

Still called customary rights, usage rights are a recent creation under forest law. They give the resident populations the right to carry out certain activities recognised as part of their traditional management of natural resources. The relevance of the question about Baka usage rights illustrates the difficulty of applying provisions from norms originating in a local and traditional context where notions of ‘permanence’ of resources, and ‘movement’ in quest of these resources are anchored in custom. The way that the zoning plan operates, as understood under the law, does not correspond to Baka tradition. The fact of recognising unlimited use in non-permanent areas only, i.e. the forests no further from the settlements than ten kilometres or so from the village huts means that these areas have become over-exploited now that the Baka are sedentary and settled next to the dirt roads, and are of no use whatsoever because Baka remain reliant on finding food in the areas that are still fertile, where nature has not been ‘violated’ by the many actions of man.

### **The Baka of Banana and Bangoy and the land tenure question**

The land tenure question is a creation of the modern State. The State is the original owner of all land in Cameroon. It is the State that arranges the transfer of any plot of land from the State to the individual. This transaction culminates in the granting of a title that marks the property’s permanent transfer from State to the individual.

With local populations living in a forest zone, acquisition of land only takes effect if an individual undertakes to develop it for housing or for agricultural use. This property, which is transferred from generation to generation is never contested by other members of the community. For the Baka the occupation of space does not signify ownership of that space (Abega, 1998). Evidence of occupation is seen in the traditional housing made from sturdy branches and from leaves, called a *Mongoulou*. By nature the Baka are hunters and collectors of forest products. Agriculture has only developed amongst the Baka of Banana and Bangoy because they have become partly sedentary. However, the Baka from the forest camps do not practise agriculture. Their precarious land tenure situation is equally evident in the fact that their settlements are located next to Bantu villages. This land usually belongs to the Bantu under the traditional land appropriation system, and the Bantu agree to bestow part of their village land in exchange for ‘services’ rendered.



Photo: John Nelson

Boma camp near the Boumba River

## 10 What do the Baka who live around the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park want?

Faced with marginalisation through the decisions taken about managing natural resources, the indigenous populations' universal reaction has been not to respect them. This reaction is equally evident in the Baka and Bantu communities. They seem to be saying to the authorities: *'since you reached these decisions without us, we will go about our business without paying any attention to them, or to you'*.<sup>13</sup> The Baka from the Banana and Bangoy settlements have identified a number of issues of concern stemming from the establishment of the national park. These include changing the current boundaries, and recognising Baka usage rights within the park.

### a Changes to the park boundaries

The final classification process for the Boumba Bek/Nki Park is well advanced. From interviews with the Baka, it is clear that their concerns were not taken into account in the participative processes that were part of the management process. The Baka would like the boundaries delineating the village occupation zones to be moved back, thereby providing assurance that the zones where their agricultural plots are located and where they collect forest products will be secured for them.

## **b Recognition of Baka usage rights within the protected zone**

The inhabitants of the Moloundou region are well aware of the extreme richness of the forest that has now been classified as a protected area. The public information campaigns forbidding entry to the park by law have not been well received because they limit the Baka's movement. The Baka can justify their need for mobility in the forest by the products they need to gather for their survival (wild yams, game, honey and medicinal plants). This activity requires freedom of movement, and repudiates the restrictions imposed under the project. Yesterday's fears are perceived by the Baka as tomorrow's threat to the customs that constitute the basis of their existence. Mobility is one factor in the enjoyment of usage rights. It is fundamental to Baka society, marked as it is by a dependence on the riches of the forest and by the various rites that constitute an important element of respect within the community. The Baka from Banana and Bangoy want their usage rights extended into the Boumba Bek/Nki National Park because the zone is reputed to be rich in game: *'there is a lot a game in the Boumba forest on the other side of the river. There are also other products that we look for so we can heal ourselves. It's impossible for us not to go there because we know that there we can find all that we need'* as the Baka elder, Mboma Jean Paul, says.

## **11 Conclusion**

The populations local to tropical forest zones in general, and the Pygmies in particular, have, for the most part, been marginalised in the management of resources in their natural environment. The conservation projects' grievances against these peoples, which constitute the problem in managing protected areas, relate to the Baka's weak social organisation, their short-term view, and the pre-eminence of personal over communal interests. The forest, which today is dedicated to achieving objectives that do not fit their view, constitutes the only place where they feel in harmony with nature through respect of their traditions. The logic that says that all land should be under the exclusive control of the State constitutes a source of difficulty for 'forest peoples'. The application of this logic could well mean the loss of forest myths and culture, and the loss of the idea that freedom and permanence are elements fundamental to existence, if establishing protected areas becomes synonymous with restricting this freedom. The difficulty in achieving a protected area management plan that will be respected by indigenous populations is rooted in two completely different conceptions of the nature of the forest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Cameroon government policy has set a target to classify 30% of national territory as protected areas.
- <sup>2</sup> WCS (World Conservation Society) 1996.
- <sup>3</sup> Extract from the MARP report (*Méthodes de Recherche Participative*) carried out in the region in 1997 by GTZ.
- <sup>4</sup> Mariteuw Chimère Diaw and Jean Claude Stone Njomkap.
- <sup>5</sup> Agricultural work for the Bangando pays between 200 and 250 FCFA per day.
- <sup>6</sup> These were Law No 94/01 of 20 January 1994 governing regulation of the forests, wildlife and fishing in Cameroon; Decree No 95/466/PM of 10 July 1995 setting out the procedures for regulating wildlife; and Decree No 95/531/PM of 23 August 1995 setting out the procedures for application of forest regulation.
- <sup>7</sup> WWF's 'Jengi' project was created in 1998. It has three component parts: the first and second are responsible for supporting the Lobéke, Boumba Bek/Nki parks, and the third for promoting sustainable management of the peripheral zones. The project is also involved in developing a conservation programme for a transfrontier protected area between Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville and the Central African Republic.
- <sup>8</sup> The 'Proformat' project started in 1996. Its role is to produce socio-economic baseline studies. It works with other partners (MINEF and WWF Jengi) within the southern Operational Technical Unit and to manage the protected areas in the region and in the peripheral zones.
- <sup>9</sup> A Technical Operational Unit (UTO) is the coordinating body for the Ministry of the Environment and Forests in a given region. The UTO for the south-eastern region covers 2,300,000 ha, which corresponds to the priority site of the south-eastern Conservation and Biodiversity Management Programme.
- <sup>10</sup> Samuel Nguiffo and Robinson Djeukam, 2000.
- <sup>11</sup> Pelembiyé Dieudonné, Baka Pygmy, Banana, April 2001.
- <sup>12</sup> The strategy for the dialogue element of creating the Boumba Bek National Park was to create a Contact Group who had responsibility for entering into discussion with the peoples and receiving their complaints.
- <sup>13</sup> Patrice Bigombe Logo, 1996.

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## Acronyms

GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
MINEF	Ministry of the Environment and Forests
UTO	Operational Technical Unit
WCPA	World Commission on Protected Areas
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

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## Conference discussions

*Samuel Nguiffo, Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement, presented the first two Cameroon case studies, focusing on the Baka*

### Commentary on case study by community representatives

**Jean Bosco Eyinga**, Baka community representative, detailed the experiences of his people over the past two centuries, highlighting the complexities of their case, because (unlike the previous case studies) they are already established village-dwellers but who wish to retain access to the forest. 'We have many problems in our daily lives. We know we are the first people to inhabit the forest but people don't understand why we stayed in the forests. People want to chase us out of the forests, but our life in the forest is more important for us. However, we also wish to acknowledge that what we do along the roads is also important.

'When we came back from Essea and Dja we came to live in Mabé, in the heart of the forest. This area is very good for us. We were not doing agriculture, only gathering fruits and hunting. This lifestyle lasted a long time without changes. Some time later, villagers came telling us that they did not want us to stay in the forest, they wanted us to stay in the village with them. We discussed with our grandparents, and every time people from the village came they'd bring us salt and we'd give them meat from wild animals. Life continued like this for a long time. They started by attracting us to the villages, up to their cocoa plantations. We lived in the plantations for a long period, up to 140 years. We stayed with those people, they kept us. Then afterwards they told us that we should live in the villages, and we went to live there. They showed us a plot of land where we could live and carry out agriculture. They showed us how to cultivate crops, and we learned how to do it progressively. This lasted for a long time. These elders who brought us, some of them have died. Now only their children and brothers are alive. So they've said now that we cannot live on the plot of land where we are staying.

'When we were in the village we thought we still had land rights in Mabé where we came from. When we went back there to hunt and gather fruit we found the authorities refused us access. They said we cannot hunt, fish, not even gather fruits. We are not allowed to do anything in our former land of Mabé. We were afraid, because we had no powers to claim, to demand from the authorities. So we came back. And if we went back to that land, we went there like thieves, hiding. If those people were to see us they'd kill us or do something very dangerous to us. We do not understand . . . The law took everything from us . . . We therefore request help . . . to move forward and solve our problems, so that we can also have the courage to defend ourselves and our rights.'

Samuel Nguiffo added that the regulations governing protected areas are doubly restricting, forbidding hunting as well as sale of produce, both of which the Baka rely on.

Selling 'is now permitted in community forests, but you cannot do this in permanent forests or where there is a commercial company exploiting the forest. As the Baka live around permanent forest, they cannot benefit from community forests like other communities. The law does not take account of Baka interests.

'I could say the same thing about the protected area in the south east, 600,000 ha. There was a community with forest activities, then suddenly the government declares it a protected area. The community finds itself sandwiched between these areas. The communities request that:

- 1 borders of protected areas be reduced, so that communities can practise traditional activities;
- 2 they have usage rights in protected areas . . . as the number of people is not many. The areas are great but there are only a few Baka;
- 3 there is more flexibility in application of the law. In the south east especially, the people are being denied hunting in protected areas but sport hunting activities bring people who pay a lot of money to kill protected species . . . They are killing for conservation purposes, but the Baka kill for survival;
- 4 the Baka stop being punished for crimes committed by others. There is poaching on a commercial scale, but these people avoid arrest even though everyone knows who it is. These people should be punished, and Baka allowed to practise traditional activities;
- 5 people be involved in management plans: they have a lot of forest skills. If they are involved they can be made to understand. They can be involved in the control and implementation of the plan.'

## Panel discussion

Panellists:	Joseph K Sang	– Coordinator (A&F), Ogiek Welfare Council
	Penninah Zaninka	– Batwa Supporter, UOBDU
	Chantal Shalukoma	– Coordonnatrice des activités de surveillance, PNKB

**Joseph K Sang** asked which channels the Baka had used to demand their rights. Had they confronted the government? 'To get tangible benefits we should push our own governments first as that is where decisions are made. National laws override international laws. In the case of the Ogiek, we exhausted government negotiations before resorting to court. We used district commissioners, met the head of state, used national and international media, lobbying, workshops, parliament. Can the Baka get their rights via the Cameroon parliament?' He discouraged a court challenge because of the extensive time and expense involved, but recommended that they 'find out if their original title has



been extinguished once they moved out, and if so, that is the beginning of their struggle.’

**Penninah Zaninka** observed that ‘The problems are identical to those of all indigenous peoples. They were displaced from their original forest, Mabé. They have no other land and no rights to go back to their original home.’ Noting that the forest project was funded by the EU, she questioned ‘what the EU did for them when they were displaced’.

**Chantal Shalukoma**’s first comment related to the apparent double standards applied to conservation and the rights of usage: ‘Baka are the biggest losers in terms of use rights, as they are refused permission to hunt in the name of conservation, but sport hunters are permitted. We know all governments have their way of seeing things as far as national resources management is concerned. Now the Baka have to go into the park illegally to get resources, but there are others who commercially exploit those forests. The Baka cannot be happy when they see these two different rules. It is difficult to explain conservation to them under these conditions.’

While recognising the similarities with the other case studies, where peoples ‘were forced to leave the forest by one means or another’ she drew attention to the difference in the case of the Baka, who ‘were moved to the roads. At least a place was found for them, and they could carry out subsistence activities.’

Her recommendation was that ‘the Cameroonian conservationists should involve the Baka in the planning of zones and their implementation, and review their system of double standards. The conservationists may have their reasons, but if these are imposed the Baka will never be happy. They will think they are discriminated against.’

## **Participant discussion**

Participants were particularly interested in the village/forest situation in which the Baka find themselves, but also offered suggestions for the next steps.

### **Further clarification of the Baka situation**

John Nelson, Project Coordinator, Forest Peoples Project, asked Jean Bosco Eyinga whether he felt ‘it would be enough for the Baka to have hunting areas provided for them elsewhere, or will they only be satisfied with Mabé. If not, why not?’ Jean Bosco Eyinga replied, ‘We do not want a particular area, anywhere where we can hunt, we will accept.’

Margareth Kaisoe, Maasai community representative and Co-facilitator, Ngorongoro, asked whether the Baka really wanted to return to hunting, because she understood that the government had offered them a hunting zone. Jean Bosco Eyinga clarified that ‘We don’t want to stay in the forest, we are happy to stay in the villages . . . because we see that living in the villages is good. We do not have a place to hunt. That is what we want. We received land from the villagers, who are the customary owners, that is for farming only.’

Germain Ngandjui, Park Management Advisor, Tropenbos International/Campo Maan Biodiversity Conservation Project, pointed out that the situation had changed in the last month. 'In the Lobéké area some village hunting areas have been given over to community-managed hunting areas (*zones de chasse et de gestion communautaire*).'

Kalimba Zephyrin, Director, CAURWA, was interested in knowing whether it was 'easy for the Baka to adopt the new activity of farming? Has the government given any help? Will farming have any consequence on their lives if they were previously used to hunter gathering, e.g. falling prey to diseases? What are the Baka planning to do if the government refuses rights to the forest?'

Jean Bosco Eyinga explained that the Baka 'cannot refuse to carry out farming; we will farm even though we were once hunters, in order to survive. We are not getting technical assistance, but are managing, more or less, as cultivators.' He added, 'The reality is, we are discussing protected areas and we have come out of the forest. The village is a whole different problem, we already know how to live there and cultivate crops.'

### **Recommendations for issues to raise/next steps**

Taking up Penninah Zaninka's point on the role of the funders, Göran Eklöf, Director, International Department, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) raised the issue of EU funding and whether there had been discussions with EU officials. While acknowledging that the EU forest strategy was not very good, he felt their indigenous peoples policy was quite good. He stated that 'Less than six months ago there was an evaluation of the ECOFAC project, with a request to find out how the indigenous peoples had been impacted. Were the Baka consulted about this part of the evaluation? [If not,] the lack of consultation with the Baka is in contravention of the EU policy.'

Benjamin Mugabuku Meye, Chef de volet sensibilisation, Parc national des volcans, identified a further role for ECOFAC, explaining that 'Cameroon is exceptional, concerning hunting practices. It is surprising to hear that sport hunting is allowed. Many governments do this, but there is also unofficial hunting by powerful people. Commercial trade is a different issue from subsistence hunting, especially if commercial hunters do not pay taxes for the benefit of all citizens. ECOFAC should talk to government wildlife officials that these double standards should be stopped.'

Marcus Colchester, Director, FPP, drew attention to the value of a study by conservation biologists into the sustainability – or non-sustainability – of hunting by Baka.

Jean Bourgeais, Principal Technical Advisor for the Gamba Project/Gabon, WWF Central Africa Regional Program Office (CARPO) identified three aspects to consider in resolving the issue of controlled hunting:

- 1 'If there is a small area of 150 ha, management is not hard. But in protected areas of half a million hectares it is hard to monitor what is happening. Hunting should be

forbidden generally but indigenous peoples should be allowed special rights.

- 2 Large teams are needed for supervision and, as governments can't fund this, the best people to do it are the indigenous peoples: supervision by indigenous peoples who have subsistence hunting rights, using traditional weapons. In the meantime, we need to maximise dialogue and involvement of the people. In our new park in Gabon, we can benefit from experience elsewhere in Africa. It's difficult, but indigenous people should be trained to monitor.
- 3 The main problem is ethnic, if indigenous people become supervisors they will be resented by the other people.'

Close of session.