

Conservation of Biodiversity in the Central African Republic

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ABSTRACT

The political context of biodiversity conservation in Central African Republic (CAR) begins with the Ministry of Environment, Waters, Forests, Hunting, and Fishing, which is charged with the responsibility for natural ecosystem protection. Two action zones are delineated within the country: 1) hunting and natural history zones and 2) buffer zones. The former includes hunting and conservation activities; the latter contains agro-pastoral and industrial activities. Protected areas in CAR are divided into three categories: forbidden access reserves, no hunting national parks, and wildlife reserves which allow customary rights. Sixteen protected areas currently exist in CAR. Dzanga-Sangha Special Dense Forest Reserve was a pioneering effort in multiple-use zoning. A community NGO is integrated into the revenue-sharing and decision-making processes. Project management staff act as partners in biodiversity management. Annual revenues to the community are an estimated US\$200,000 annually.

Central African Republic covers a surface area of 623,000 km² and has about three million inhabitants. Situated astride the east and west African ecological domains, CAR possesses great biological diversity. It is founded essentially on four, great floristic domains, which, from north to south, are the Sudano-sahelian steppes, the Sudan wooded savanna, the Sudano-Guinean woodlands, and finally, dense equatorial forests. A rich and varied fauna reflects the variety of these vegetation types. Among this remarkable variety of ecosystems, the dense forests of the southwest occupy a special place. They still shelter a rich fauna quite specific to the forest ecosystems of the Congo Basin. These natural ecosystems occupy a great place in the life of native populations as well as in the national economy.

PROTECTION OF NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS IN CAR

The protection of natural ecosystems falls to the Ministry of the Environment, Waters, Forests, Hunting, and Fishing. It is governed by ordinance No. 84.045 of 27 July 1984, pertaining to the protection of wildlife, and law No. 90.003 of 9 June 1990, pertaining to the Central African Forestry Code. The national territory comprises two zones of action: zones of hunting and natural history interest, and buffer zones. The former zone is reserved for conservation and for hunting and nature conservation activities by virtue of its low human population density. It includes protected areas and hunting sectors which are conceded to hunting safari operators. It represents 40% of the territory. The buffer zone is reserved for agro-pastoral and industrial activities.



Figure 1 CAR's national and administrative borders. Shaded area in lower left represents the approximate location of the Dzanga Sangha Dense Forest Reserve.

PROTECTED AREAS

To safeguard certain ecosystems and rare or endangered species of fauna and flora from eventual ecological perturbations, the Central African regulations have identified three principal categories of protected areas: integral reserves, wherein access is forbidden to all persons; national parks, where hunting is forbidden; and wildlife reserves, where customary rights may be exercised. Customary hunting is authorized throughout the territory of CAR, with the exception of integral reserves and national parks. All other modes of hunting must conform to the rules of the regulation in effect.

THE NETWORK OF PROTECTED AREAS

The Central African Republic, up until 1989, had a network of 14 protected areas covering a total surface of 72,230 km² or about 11% of the total area of the country. These protected areas consisted of one Integral Reserve, three National Parks, seven Wildlife Reserves, two Biosphere Reserves, and one Presidential Park with special status. The creation of protected areas started only in 1930. The first national park was the Manovo-Gounda-St Floris National Park created in 1933; it was followed in 1936 by the Bamingui-Bangoran National Park.

DZANGA-SANGHA

More recently, CAR has pioneered the creation of a new category of protected area in the annals of the conservation of Central African nature. I refer to the Dzanga-Sangha Special Dense Forest Reserve, created in 1990. Diverse economic activities have been practiced in the course of this multiple-use reserve's history, notably forest exploitation, agriculture, and hunting.

We have facilitated the growth of a local non-governmental organization, the Committee for Development of Bayanga (CDB), to be involved in decision-making about revenue uses within reserve resident communities. That, in brief, has been our principal approach to the issue. Our interior regulations are such that 90% of tourism revenues remain in the Reserve (40% to local communities channeled through the CDB, 50% to reserve administration for upkeep and infrastructure maintenance). Ten percent of revenues — a very modest sum relative to other African precedents for protected areas — leaves the region and goes to the national level.

With the creation of the Dzanga-Sangha Special Dense Forest Reserve and the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park, the Central African Republic now has a network of 16 protected areas, and the total surface area now protected is 76,610 km.² This increase is testimony to the will of the Central African Republic to preserve more natural ecosystems for the needs of present and future generations. In fact,

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by creating the Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve, the Central African Republic has opted for a new conservation strategy, one of integrated conservation and development.

The Dzanga-Sangha Project has as a primary objective the protection of the dense forest of the southwest of the Central African Republic, which incorporates a portion of the trinational conservation area under discussion in this volume. To attain its objective, the project, in its activities, instead of acting as "police agent" has instead adopted the role of "partner" in the management of biodiversity. The adoption of the role of partner does not imply a reduction of responsibility of the project in the matter of conservation, but rather the necessity to take initiatives in collaborating in a constructive manner with the local population in order to introduce better techniques of rational exploitation of natural resources.

CONCLUSION

The collective community of Bayanga receives more than 120 million CFA (about US \$200,000) from this project annually in the form of salaries, social security, medical services, and so on. This is a very important economic factor for the region. At present, efforts at the integration and emancipation of local communities are still made by the project to gain widespread support for the cause of fauna and flora while bringing to the fore their endogenous values. Consequently, integration of the population into the management of natural resources will make it possible to perpetuate the resources because the capital invested will increase in value. The project is open to collaboration with all researchers who share this view.

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