

## Political Conflict and Forest Management in Northern Congo

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### ABSTRACT

The GTZ project in northern Congo includes collaborative work with WCS, and has as its primary goals: (1) to assist in restructuring the local forest administration for more effective management opportunities; (2) to develop tourism in several locations in northern Congo including the buffer zone around the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park; (3) to conduct socioeconomic surveys which elucidate local needs and priorities; and (4) to conduct a pilot survey for inventories in three forestry concessions, ultimately to result in the development of management plans for forestry that include floral, faunal, and socioeconomic considerations. The current political situation in northern Congo, however, has suspended operations, and is a stark illustration of the obstacles encountered by such integrated projects.

The Federal Republic of Germany supports forest conservation-related projects in the northern part of the Republic of Congo, in the southeastern region of Cameroon, and in the southwestern corner of the Central African Republic. All three projects work closely with national administrations and national and international NGOs. The goal is natural resource conservation and forest-related development (see Debonnet, this volume). Our collaboration primarily serves to safeguard and promote responsible utilization of natural resources and forest ecosystems within the partner countries in order to support interests in national and regional development. A key focus of project orientation involving natural resource-related development is the economic and social needs of people in the target areas. In this context, special consideration is to be accorded to populations living in forest regions or those dependent on those regions, particularly indigenous and long-established communities.

The complexity and cross-border effects of the Sangha region development projects demand an interdisciplinary, multi-sectoral and supra-national approach to ensure their success. A further integration of activities, possibly resulting in a trinational protected area, is therefore a major concern of our projects. Some key questions regarding this protected area:

- What should the administrative status of the area be in order to enable us to protect these ecosystems, regardless of borders?
- Which activities should be undertaken in the different countries to make a trinational protected area possible?
- How can the activities of the different projects be better coordinated?
- What critical information and data should be exchanged?

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In our view, co-operation should be established most urgently in the following fields: controlling cross-border poaching; harmonization of approaches regarding income-generating activities for the local people and ways to strengthen their self-help capacities; cross border training of staff and greater involvement of local people in tourism, especially hunting tourism.

The control of wood transport poses further questions for trinational coordination, since even sustainable exploitation of the northern Congo forests can result in diminishing biodiversity in Cameroon, if the transport of logs to Douala creates transport possibilities for bushmeat in southeast Cameroon, resulting in overexploitation of wildlife in this area through poaching.

None of these problems, of course, can be resolved in the midst of civil conflict. We are trying merely to maintain a presence on the ground in the protected areas, and will resume full operation when that is politically possible.

HANS HOFFMANN has worked extensively in conservation throughout Africa, including in Togo, Mali, and Congo, where he recently managed the GTZ effort in the northern part of the country.

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