

Proposal to CEPF: DRC-62610: Establishment and management of the Itombwe Massif and Misotshi-Kabogo as new protected areas in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Social Assessment of Mbuti Pygmy Groups

Mbuti Pygmies

The project will be working at both sites with Mbuti Pygmy groups. While not as numerous as other ethnic groups at both sites these people have a greater affinity with the forest and may be affected more by the creation of these protected areas. As such they deserve special consideration.

Itombwe Massif: In the Itombwe massif socioeconomic surveys by WWF and AfriCapacity have identified about 1,800 households of about 4 people per household throughout the massif. Their main activities in the massif are the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) – particularly bushmeat, honey and mushrooms for sale to other groups as well as home consumption, small scale agriculture, porters for artisanal mining activities and occasional labour which is usually paid in food rather than in money.

Misotshi-Kabogo Massif: Around the proposed Ngamikka National Park the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has been working with at least 700 households of Mbuti in 26 villages. Average household size is about 3-5 residents. They reside mostly in their own villages for the most part along the Fizi-Kalemie road as well as along the lake shore – although they mix with other ethnic groups in other villages - and use the forest and bushlands in both the proposed Ngamikka Park and the existing Luama Katanga Hunting Reserve for forest and woodland products (NTFPs), particularly honey and mushrooms, as well as bushmeat. They do cultivate around their villages as in Itombwe and so are not totally dependent on the forest/woodland for their livelihoods.

At both sites they will barter forest products for agricultural products grown by the other ethnic groups in order to improve their diet.

Conflicts with other groups

The Mbuti are treated as second class citizens by many of the other ethnic groups in both sites. As such they may be underpaid for work that they do in comparison with someone from another ethnicity and they are more likely to be abused verbally and physically. They have conflict over access to land with other ethnic groups and have difficulties protecting land where they have settled if an outsider wants it. Another source of conflict might be that Mbuti are linked to the customary power as they play a security role for the Mwami (traditional chief) and thus, they are seen by other groups as a privileged group although that privilege doesn't turn into opportunity for them.

Cultural importance of the forest to the Mbuti

The forest is important for the Mbuti as they call themselves forest people and they think that they cannot live in areas where there is no forest. They believe that the forest has most of their power as

their ancestors were buried in forest. In most areas, they have an annual cultural ceremony that is held in forests for young people to transfer their forest knowledge to younger generations. Practices include hunting and honey harvesting trips.

Recognition of Mbuti and other pygmy groups under DRC law

Under DRC law and the constitution of the country every person has equal rights and this applies equally to the Mbuti. The constitution recognizes that the state has the obligation to protect and promote vulnerable and minority groups (art.51). There are no laws specific to minority groups in the country.

Consultations

Consultations have been conducted at several stages of the process to date. The main components included:

1. During the socioeconomic surveys in both Itombwe and Ngamikka we asked households about their use of the forest and how it contributes to their national incomes – measuring the percentage of income derived from the forest in the case of Ngamikka. We questioned people about their interest in creating a protected area and whether they thought it was a good idea or not. Based on these results we were encouraged to follow-up with the consultation meetings at both sites.
2. At meetings in Kalemie and Misisi we presented to the Mwami's of all the villages around the proposed Ngamikka Park information about the biological importance of the place, the results of the socioeconomic study and the interest in creating a protected area, and the various options that are legally available under Congolese law to create a protected area: national park, faunal reserve, natural reserve, hunting reserve and community reserve. They were then given time to discuss amongst themselves in small groups to decide what each group would like to see for their area.
3. In Itombwe a team made up of WCS, WWF, AfriCapacity and RACCOMMI staff have consulted with each of the villages within the region of the proposed reserve. They have similarly presented the biological importance of the region, the socioeconomic needs and interests in the place and then allowed the village committees to discuss what they would like to see in future. Overall there has been agreement on creating the reserve and then suggestions have been made on where boundaries should be established. At two sites in the south west the communities decided to not be part of the reserve and instead to establish a community reserve to be managed by RACCOMMI. Their wishes have been respected and this part of the proposed reserve has been dropped. This is mentioned to highlight that the villages have not been pressured into accepting the protected areas.
4. In the case of Ngamikka we have undertaken participatory mapping using gender-sensitive approaches by separating men and women and using female facilitators with the women groups to encourage their full participation. These mapping exercises were used to identify three zones for the park: a) areas for village cultivation expansion; b) the park boundaries (core protected zone) c) areas of sustainable use of the forest. This type of approach is planned for Itombwe but

has not been undertaken yet as the area is much larger and we wanted to establish the outer boundaries first.

In both cases the communities are asking WCS and its partners to move more quickly in establishing the protected areas, complaining that they have agreed long ago and asking why there is such a delay. We see this as being a clear demonstration of their desire to see the protected areas established.