



Jengi

WWF Jengi Southeast Forest Programme Newsletter

Edition N° 12, September 2008

Passage of Jim Leape through Congo Basin Rainforest



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US Ambassador hails WWF's efforts



Edition N° 12, September 2008,

Jim Leape's passage through Congo Basin Rainforest

Director General of WWF International, Jim Leape, recently visited the Congo Basin Rainforest. The visit enabled Leape to see ongoing conservation efforts in Central African Republic and Cameroon, with regards to sustainable forest management and Certification and wildlife protection.

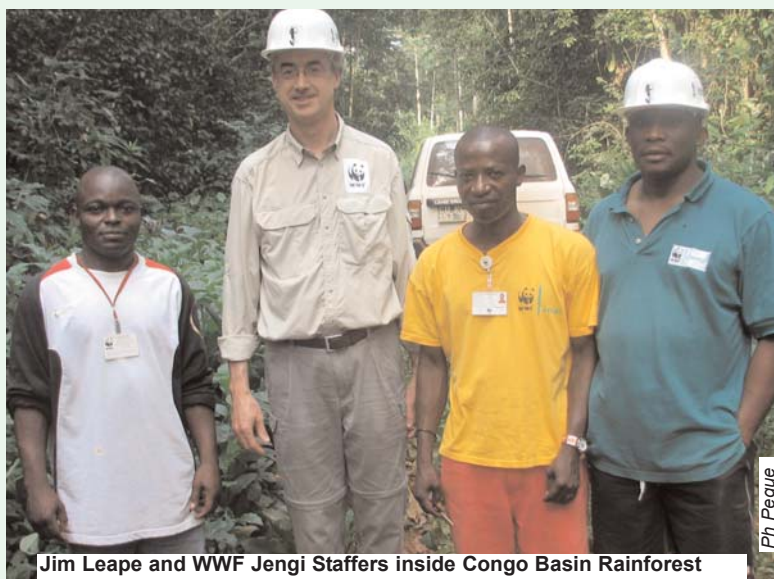
While in the Jengi Project in Southeast Cameroon, Leape noted that the Congo Basin rainforest is for WWF one of the most important places on earth. "It is at the cutting edge of conservation for the organisation."

So far one million hectares of forest has been certified in the region with 314655ha found within the WWF Jengi Southeast forest project.

"I think FSC Certification is one of the most important strategies we have developed over the last 15 years because, absolutely, we have to find ways to conserve the forest and at the same time meet the economic and social needs of surrounding communities," Leape declared.

According to him, the Congo Basin has plenty of resources. "This is a place with stunning resources; the only place where you can see lowland gorillas and forest elephants. But more broadly a real spectacular forest from a biodiversity perspective. It is a place for people who want to be part of finding solutions, who want to be part of conservation and a place of great challenges. This is a hard place to find good solutions.

Leape described work done by WWF in the Congo Basin as challenging and exciting. "We have seen very exciting work from some of our colleagues in Central Africa Republic and here in Cameroon. We have seen some of what they are up against and the challenges they face."

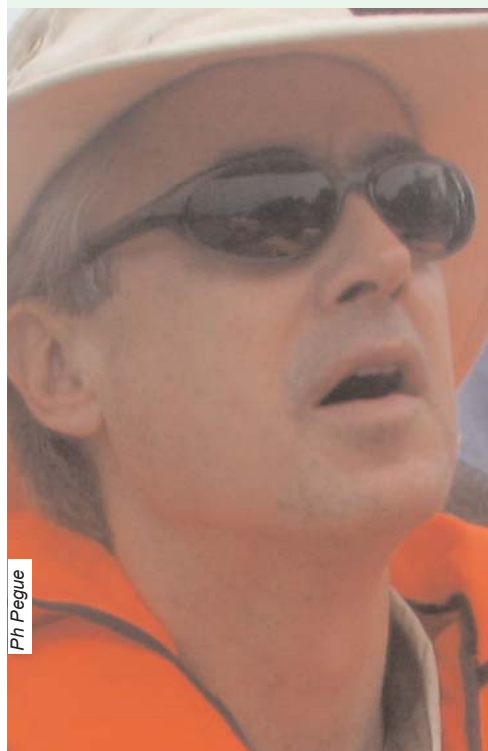


Jim Leape and WWF Jengi Staffers inside Congo Basin Rainforest

He recognised the creativity of the Jengi team. "We see great creativity in this team in finding ways to engage local communities, engage big actors like logging companies and governments to forge solutions and that is what this is all about. For the Jengi and Cameroon team I am very proud to be associated with this group of people and I look forward to great things from them in many years to come," he said.

The WWF Jengi Southeast Forest project covers a surface area of 3 million hectares. Protected areas cover 760,000 hectares and this includes three national parks: Lobeke, Boumba Bek and Nki. The project is also working with some of the 9 logging companies operating in the area towards sustainable forest management and certification.

Four Questions for Jim Leape



Jim Leape: looking at the future with optimism

You are at the heart of the Congo Basin Rainforest. What prompted you to embark on this trip?

Jim Leape: This forest is for WWF one of the most important places on earth. It is at the cutting edge of conservation for the organisation.

Here we are trying to conserve forest on a very large scale, working at the highest levels with heads of states and with foreign governments and at the same time working with local communities to try and find solutions which can sustain conservation in the long term. It is a flagship programme for our organisation. So it is important for me to have time to see what is being done and to share with some of our most important partners.

What is your impression about the Jengi Programme?

This is a place with stunning resources; the only place where you can see lowland gorillas and forest elephants. But more broadly a real spectacular forest from a biodiversity perspective. It is a place for people who want to be part of finding solutions, who want to be part of conservation and a place of great challenges. This is a hard place to find good solutions. We have seen very exciting work from some of our colleagues in Central Africa Republic and here in Cameroon. We have seen some of what they are up against and the challenges they face. It has been for me a very inspiring trip.

You were in a logging company (Group SEFAC) that recently received FSC Certification. Do you think, from what you saw and heard, it was worthwhile for WWF

to accompany this company through the certification process?

I think FSC Certification is one of the most important strategies we have developed over the last 15 years because, absolutely, we have to find ways to conserve the forest and at the same time meet the economic and social needs of surrounding communities. And certified forestry is a proven strategy for doing that. It is very exciting to see that strategy work here in Central Africa. In this specific case we were able to talk with the management and see sustainable forest management in operation. For me it was a great visit.

Some people think that WWF is more interested in protecting nature to the detriment of people whereas it should have been the other way round. What is your take on this assertion?

I can understand that feeling and I think there is a deep understanding within this organisation that conservation can only be successful if it works for people in particular, who live in the areas we are trying to protect, that we are broadly working for society. We have recognised that for a very long time and the strategy that you now see developing in the Congo Basin, for the Amazon, for the Coral Triangle and so on really are focused on finding lasting solutions and lasting solutions means solutions that work for the people. That is actually what we are trying to do.

'WWF Jengi is a ground breaking program'

After spending four days within the Jengi Southeast Forest Program area, US Ambassador to Cameroon, Janet Garvey, described the program as ground breaking and successful in all aspects. Excerpts:

You were in the Southeast of Cameroon for four days, what has struck you most?

Ambassador Garvey: I was struck by the incredible beauty. It is not something that I see everyday. It is a wonderful landscape. I also have been struck by the work that people are doing here. This is a big job with a lot of challenges.

You have been to other protected areas in Cameroon, what difference do you make from what you have seen here?

The difference I see here is in the effort to integrate the local community into the solution and also to enable sustainable economic activities to be carried out. I think that is really the future for a lot of protected areas.

From what you have seen and heard, do you have the conviction that this can work?

I certainly have the great hope that this can work. It is a daily battle. The forces that will misuse these resources are certainly great, be they commercial, poachers or whatever. Because people are here working everyday, trying to raise awareness, maintain the park and working with partners that is the only way

it is going to be safe. I am hopeful. The chances are great. When you have people who are committed to a goal it is hard to stop them.

How far is the US government ready to go to ensure this effort continues?

We are happy to be a partner and you know the USAID, which is the United States government was very instrumental in starting the Central African Regional Program for the Environment, CARPE, which is the project we are looking at. It has been a rare effort on the part of the US government to do something for the long term. CARPE continues for another couple of years. We will have to see what happens after that. I think everyone recognizes that this program has been remarkably successful in all aspects. We recognize the importance of it and I certainly hope that we are able to continue to support it

What is your impression about the Jengi



Ambassador Garvey and Cameroon's Wildlife and Forestry Ministry officials inside Lobeke Park

Program and team?

This is a ground breaking program working in the community and on the environment where the needs of the community are so pre-eminent. Keep it up we are with you and you guys are doing a heroic work. People appreciate what you are doing, how important it is and we need you to keep doing it. You are heroes amongst heroes in Cameroon.

CARPE/USAID Prodding Forest Governance in Southeast Cameroon



US Ambassador hands check to network of local NGOs President

Good forest management has been at the epicentre of US policy approach in the Southeast of Cameroon. The United States Agency for International Development, USAID, through CARPE, (Central African Regional Programme for the Environment) supports sustainable forest management initiatives and prods proper use of forest revenues.

In this vein, the US Ambassador to Cameroon, Janet Garvey, recently handed a check to a Network of local NGOs in Southeast Cameroon, (ROSE) to prop a project aimed at instilling probity in the management of forest royalties. During the hand over ceremony in Yokadouma, East Province, the local NGOs told Ambassador Garvey that the 10% of forest

revenues destined for local communities hardly reaches the people.

According to a 1994 forestry law, 50% of taxes accruing from timber exploitation go to the state coffers; 40% percent to the local councils where exploitation takes place and 10% to the local communities within the area. Yokadouma subdivision, for example, receives FCFA 216, 000,000, each year, as 10% forest royalties. Unfortunately, local

NGOs argue, this money is not properly used. The upshot is widespread poverty within the communities as the money gets squirreled at the municipal councils charged with channelling it to local communities for execution of projects.

"After 10 years, the 10% forest royalties have not effectively contributed to rural development," declared ROSE. By sponsoring this project, the CARPE/USAID programme, envisages proper governance of forest royalties which will in turn stimulate development in the rural areas. The NGOs, on their part, plans to put in place "an independent committee in charge of selecting priority projects to be financed with forest royalties and ensure mon-

itoring and execution of the said projects."

Ambassador Garvey declared that the US is determined to fight corruption in the forestry sector. "We are working with other donor countries to ensure that corruption is checked in the forestry sector," she said.

Apart from propping forest governance, the CARPE/USAID programme supports wildlife inventories and the elaboration of land use plans. In collaboration with WWF maps showing trends and distribution of wildlife within and around protected areas have been produced. Significant support has also been given to Cameroon's Wildlife and Forest Ministry, MIN-FOF, to stamp out poaching. In this light, assistance has been given to game rangers for patrols and anti-poaching operations.

CARPE/USAID also encourages community forestry and livelihood programmes. It shores up FSC Certification efforts in the Congo Basin. Certification attests to a logging company's determination to embrace sustainable forest management.

These supports are aimed at ensuring sustainable management of forest, protection of wildlife and poverty alleviation in rural areas. Ambassador Garvey sums it this way: "We are happy to be a partner and you know the USAID, which is the United States government was very instrumental in starting CARPE. It has been a rare effort on the part of the US government to do something for the long term."

FACT SHEET ON COMMUNITY FORESTRY IN SOUTHEAST CAMEROON



Local people receiving training on tree measuring techniques and use of GPS device



In the Southeast of Cameroon, the agro-forestry zone (portion of forest land where agriculture and community forestry are being practised) is of strategic importance to conservation given that it is located between protected areas and logging concessions. Consequently, human activities within this area have corresponding impacts on wildlife and the forest. This explains why WWF is assisting local communities in efforts to establish community forest enterprises in this zone.

These enterprises are a sure way to involve local people in sustainable management of forest resources and poverty alleviation, while at the same time reducing pressure on wildlife and curbing illegal logging. In this perspective the WWF Jengi Southeast Forest Programme gives technical assistance and accompanies local communities from reservation, attribution, exploitation and evaluation of community forests.

➔ Definition

Community Forest is a portion of forest in the non-permanent state forest which is object of a management agreement between a village community and the service in charge of forestry. It is made up of not more than 5000 ha of forest portions managed by village communities, with technical assistance of the services in charge of forestry, for a period of 25 years renewable.

There are 25 community forest enterprises covering a surface area of 115933ha in Southeast Cameroon. In Cameroon, community forest is classified in the non-permanent forest land that also comprises communal forests and forest belonging to private individuals. This forest can be consigned to other uses other than timber extraction.

➔ Support to community forest initiatives

WWF is giving technical support in the form of training, elaboration of management plans, inventories etc, to 25 (115933) community forest enterprises, covering 23 villages with a population of 21178.

Managers of Community forests have been trained on tree and log measuring techniques. Local youths have been drilled on multiple resource inventory techniques.

Awareness raising campaigns have been organised in different villages on the consequences of illegal exploitation of forest.

Twelve community forests have signed exploitation convention with the local administration

Simple management plans for five forest portions have been elaborated and forwarded to competent administrative authorities for validation.

Eight are still in the process of being attributed with multiple resource inventory and socio-economic studies already carried out in three of them

Business plans have been elaborated for three community forest

➔ Networking and information sharing

WWF has helped established a Network of Community Forest Managers in Southeast Cameroon (REGEFOC) to foster information

exchange amongst managers of community forest enterprises

Accord signed by WWF, SNV, Cameroon's Ministry of Forest and Wildlife (MINFOF) local NGOs and REGEFOC for better management of community forests

➔ Target for 2011

WWF hopes 20 community forest enterprises shall be fully operational on a surface area of 100,000ha by 2011.

➔ Socio-economic benefits

The proceeds generated by community forests enterprises are used to finance micro projects in local communities. Communities so far make about US\$10,000 per year from the two forest units currently operational? The project is investing in form of technical assistance some US\$50,000 annually to promote community forestry.

Following have been achieved with proceeds from community forests under exploitation:

- Construction of classrooms
- Scholarships to pupils and students
- Constructions and maintenance of water points
- Purchase of didactic materials for schools

➔ Difficulties plaguing community forestry

One of the daunting obstacles to community forestry is the huge cost incurred to procure documents for reservation and elaboration of simple management plans (about US\$20000). This frightens off local people, who wallow in poverty, from seeking forest portions.

Community forest enterprises receive little or no support from local councils. This, coupled with the lack of community spirit and solidarity, has weakened community forestry effort.

The enclave nature of some community forests makes it difficult for managers to find markets for their woods. Cameroon's forestry law forbids the opening up of logging tracks in community forests; this means local people have to manually transport sawed wood to main roads for evacuation. The corollary is that economic operators, who are main buyers of timber from community forests, get scared.

➔ Perspective

Despite the drawbacks, WWF and other partners shall continue to support community forest initiatives. Progress is being made to enable community forests operate as full enterprises, equipped with tools that will reduce the hardship related to exploitation.

Profitable markets will be identified for products generated from exploitation of community forest while the technical and organisational skills of community forest managers will be reinforced.

WWF hopes, with the contribution of other partners, to continue monitoring and evaluation of community forests currently exploited.

WIRE TRAP: Big killer of wildlife in Southeast Cameroon

In the middle of a logging road that flanks Lobeke National Park in the Southeast of Cameroon, a male sitatunga sat on its chest and stomach staring at our approaching vehicle. As we drove closer, it stayed on strangely unruffled. We suspected something was amiss and pulled up 5 metres away. As we tiptoed towards it, the mammal staggered to its feet, attempted to lurch into the bush but crashed to the ground 4 metres away. Seething around it, we noticed a wire about its left hind leg, blood oozing from it.

The sitatunga had succeeded in breaking away from a wire snare but due to pains from its wound could not continue running. The animal died while being rushed to the nearest forest control post.

This was one of the many cases of wild animals being caught in wire snares in Southeast Cameroon. Apart from guns, poachers are using wires to trap and kill animals. This is greatly influenced by the availability and affordability of the wires.

A study on the circulation of bush meat in Yokadouma, East Province of Cameroon, revealed that more and more hunters use wire snares because "rolls of wire are sold in almost every shop at affordable prices (FCFA 2500). Wire snares, some poachers have confessed, are easy to use and pose very little



Sitatunga that escaped from a wire trap but not keep running

threat to them (poachers). The snag is that wire traps are easy to use and pose greater threat to all varieties of wildlife species.

Studies have revealed that between 26 and 37% of animals that get caught in wire traps end up decaying because some hunters stay for several weeks before checking the traps.

In the Southeast of Cameroon, an estimated 15368 wire snares were dismantled between June 2006 and June 2008, excluding numerous wire rolls confiscated from poachers during anti-poaching patrol during the same period.

"Wire snares are more dangerous than guns because they kill indiscriminately," noted Expedit Fouda, Park Assistant for Boumba Bek National Park. "They can bring down elephants, gorillas, chimpanzees, etc," Expedit stated. According to him, 99 percent of hunting within and around Boumba-Bek national park is carried out using wire snares. "In 2006, we dismantled 4133 wire snares while in 2007, the number almost doubled to 6625, including 6 rolls of cable." Estimates show that 75% of animals are killed by wire snares in the Southeast of Cameroon.

"This is a very big problem," writhed Balla Ottou, Chief of

Sector in Charge of Wildlife for Boumba et Ngoko Division. "Most poachers cannot afford the huge sum needed to buy guns, so they go for wires, judging from the number of poachers we have arrested with rolls of wire cables in recent years," stated Balla.

The use of wire snares is illegal going by Cameroon's forestry law. The law prescribes use of plants to set traps for subsistence hunting in community hunting zones. Such has been the practice for Baka pygmies over the years. But the availability of wire cables has caused a decline in the use of plants, thereby posing even greater threats to wildlife.

Time to take on white-collared poachers

Concerted efforts are underway to pin down white-collared poachers who have been wrecking havoc on wildlife in the Southeast of Cameroon. This category of poachers is composed of influential individuals, local authorities, business people, who supply guns and bullets to agents on the field to poach mostly elephants. Local wildlife authorities are unable to call these individuals to order due to their influence and position in authority. This helplessness in the face of white-collared poachers weakens the surge against poaching in Southeast Cameroon.

According to Jim Leape, Director General of WWF International, it is important to crack this problem. "I do not think the fight against poaching can be focused only on those low standing poachers. I think the big moneys who are behind the big poaching are people we have to get at. We have to crack the big rings and not just get at people at the lower level," Leape said recently in Lobeke.

A similar worry was echoed by US Ambassador to Cameroon, Janet Garvey during a visit to the Southeast. "In our conversation with government officials here, at the provincial and national levels we shall stress how this is important for Cameroon. In the case of poaching, we are in a race against the

clock. It may not be sufficient to say this is going to take a generation to improve because there might not be any elephants if something is not done," Ambassador Garvey said.

The Ambassador promised to take up the problem immediately she gets to Yaoundé. "I certainly will go back to Yaoundé with a stronger sense of what the problem is and the scale of the problem. I will do my best to continue to raise consciousness both in my government and the Cameroon government."

Influential people have been involved in two recent cases of elephant ivory trafficking in Southeast Cameroon. Wildlife authorities have been able to track down agents on the ground but the big hands behind the crime have gone unscathed. "The



Elephant tusks in travelling bags: Arrested poacher works in complicity with a big businessman

difficulty has been our inability to assemble graphic evidence to be able to constitute a case against these individuals given that they act from away," complained Pandong Eitel Delegate of Forest and Wildlife for Boumba et Ngoko Division, East Province of Cameroon.

German Bank pledges more support for TNS

The success of the transboundary conservation initiative, known as Sangha Tri-National, (TNS), can wholly be attributed to the leverage of the German Development Bank, (KFW).

TNS is a transboundary conservation initiative that groups national parks in Cameroon (Lobeke), Central African Republic (Dzanga Ndoki) and Congo Brazzaville (Nouabale Ndoki). The Bank has been instrumental in putting in place a TNS Trust Fund and has provided money for the Fund to kick off.

Through the TNS initiative, the three countries have been working together to secure and protect the rich biodiversity of the region. The TNS zone is one of the few areas in Africa where you can find lowland gorillas, forest elephants and other iconic wildlife species. It is also an area of many challenges posed by poachers and illegal wood exploiters.

"This explains the enthusiasm with which the KFW Development Bank is intervening in this area," stated Bruno Wenns, KFW Development Bank's Senior Vice President Sub-Saharan Africa. Bruno was recently within the TNS region to see the work being done on the ground.

"We are very aware that conservation and the protection of biodiversity can only be done as a cross-border issue," Bruno noted. "That is why the TNS Trust Fund is so important because it gives for the first time a platform for exchange, joint action and it is an instrument to finance recurrent cost," he added.

The KFW has already invested about 300 million Euros in Africa and the Bank says this amount is bound to increase because it is ready to do more for the protection of biodiversity in the Congo Basin. "The Trust Fund has over 50 million Euros as capital. So on an average, you can expect 4 to 5 million Euros a year to finance recurrent cost and also investment," Bruno declared.

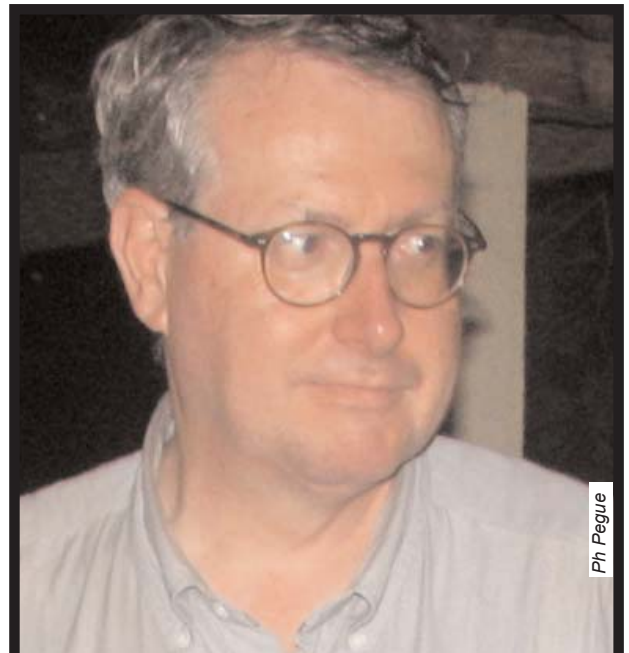
"The protection and conservation of biodiversity is of global public good and we need to preserve the forest because they are a treasure for the local people. In this light, the TNS can become a flagship with experience that can be replicated in other regions," he said.

Deeply impressed with the commitment of the people working to preserve nature, Bruno said the projects within the TNS can do more for the population if more money is available.

The KFW, according to Bruno, has a long relationship with WWF through a memorandum of understanding signed in 2004 with plans to do more jointly. "We are working together

because we compliment each other. We have a large programme in the Congo basin," he said.

Jim Leape, Director General of WWF International, added in a separate interview that: "KFW is one of our most important partners. The resources they are ready to commit offer great potentials for us to forge solutions here in the Congo Basin, in the Amazon and other parts of the world."



Bruno Wenns: KFW Development Bank Senior Vice President Sub-Saharan Africa

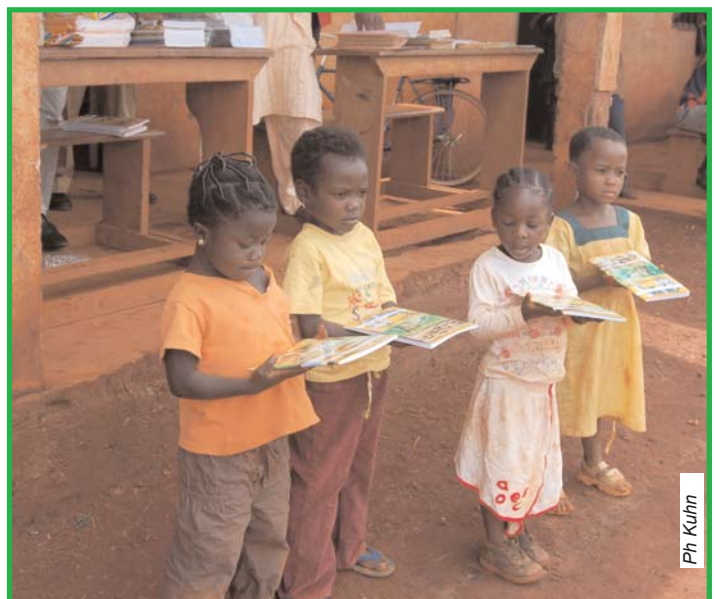
Ph Pegue

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

When Sarah Kuhn, a United States Peace Corp Volunteer, visited a public primary school in Mambele village situated on the outskirts of Lobeke National Park, she was struck by the enthusiasm of the over 140 pupils to learn and the vicarious dedication of their teachers. But Sarah got shocked by the lack of basic requirements such as books and report cards. "A lot of the children come from very poor families. Their parents do not have enough money to buy note books or provide adequate clothing for them. They do not have money even to buy report cards," Sarah said emphatically.

When Sarah presented the plight of the Mambele pupils to an elementary Community School in Aspen Colorado, in the United States, the pupils immediately empathised. The pupils, who were already studying the rainforest and the Bakas, raised US\$298 (FCFA 150,000) to help out their sisters and brothers in Mambele. With this money, Sarah bought FCFA 50000 worth of supplies for the school. "These materials were given to the children in the last day of class to inspire them to keep learning and to come back for the next year. With the remainder we hope to do same next year," said Sarah.

A result of global networking targeting youths, Sarah said the children (aged between 7 and 8) will be the ones to inherit the responsibility of managing Lobeke Park and surrounding areas in future. Sarah hopes to introduce a program of environmental education in



Pupils around Lobeke display gifts offered by fellow mates in Colorado, USA

Ph Kuhn

the school and extend the gesture to other schools in the area. This reflects WWF's effort to take conservation messages into classrooms.

500 sensitised on Lobeke Community Zone

Cameroon's Wildlife and Forestry Ministry and WWF have sensitized some 500 people living around Lobeke National Park on access modalities into a 32,000 hectare community zone carved out of the park.

The zone is a special area within the park where local people are given access to harvest non-timber forest products. It demonstrates WWF's commitment to secure access rights of local people to resources inside the park in a participatory way. The community zone is rich in fish, mangoes, yams, honey and other forest products.

In a bid to better manage the zone, a joint team held meetings in eight villages around Lobeke during which local people expressed their expectations and worries.

"We have established a timetable for



Locals listen to explanation on access into Community Zone

Ph Ngono

access into the zone. The population will have access between October and February each year," stated Albert Mouna, government conservator for Lobeke. "We shall let in groups of eight people only and ensure that they do not resort to hunting once in the park," he said. Locals will have to spend at most between 7 and 12 days in the zone.

However, this period would be extended if need be.

Locals can harvest honey but are not allowed to cut down trees to do so. In this light a surveillance committee has been created to monitor entry in and out of the zone. Game rangers will carry out unannounced control to ensure that the rules are not violated.

"We have also put in place mechanisms to check discrimination and abuse within the zone," stated Louis Ngono, WWF Jengi Collaborative Management Officer. Village chiefs have been charged with registering potential groups of people wishing to use the zone.

"The community zone is part of WWF's vision to put the interest of local people at the centre of all conservation actions," declared Dr. Leonard Usongo, WWF Jengi's regional Coordinator.

Taking health messages to logging camps



Health awareness raising campaign in village near Lobeke

Ph Ngono



Traditional midwives after training

Ph Ndinga

WWF Jengi in collaboration with some Health Districts in Southeast Cameroon recently organised health campaigns and supported training of traditional midwives and healers. A recent awareness raising meeting was held in strategic logging camps around Lobeke National Park. The campaigns that were punctuated with lectures on conservation, focused on family planning, HIV/AIDS, malaria and hygiene and sanitation.

Locals were taught how to use condoms, mosquito nets and how to keep their environment clean. These messages were passed on using posters, condom use demonstrations and impregnation of mosquito nets to over 200 people. Some 360 condoms were distributed.

Health districts with support from WWF

have been working with traditional midwives and healers. 20 traditional midwives received refresher training organised by the Ngoyla District, on the outskirts of Nki National Park recently. The traditional midwives, amongst them three Baka pygmies, are in charge of traditional delivery in eight villages around Nki National Park. Over 2000 people live in these villages which do not have a single health centre. The traditional midwives were handed basic working kits like gloves, scissors, alcohol and bandages to assist them in their tasks.

In the south of Nki, the local Health District organised a meeting with 24 traditional healers. Health District doctors presented on vaccination, sanitation habits, and networking possibilities, while the traditional healers discussed their needs, gave feedback, and further organised

themselves.

There are also efforts to provide potable water. But for a few logging towns around Lobeke that have potable water most of the villagers drink from filthy streams and untreated wells. Consequently the Lobeke Community Health and Conservation Assistant, Sarah Kuhn has collected data from over 60 drinking water sources in villages around the park. The results will be used to prioritize the sources for water improvement projects, Sarah said.

By insisting in improving the health of the people living around protected areas, WWF hopes to give conservation a human face, tying with WWF Jengi's vision of sustainable management of natural resources and improvement of living conditions of local people.

Baka pygmies sticking to dome-shaped houses

Dotting the vast expanse of rainforest in the Southeast of Cameroon are dome-shaped houses built with young tree branches and leaves. Those who dared to make it to this part of Cameroon in the early 19th century would attest to having seen these structures. These are houses (derogatorily called huts) belonging to Baka pygmies, a diminutive and timid people who live in the Congo Basin rainforest.

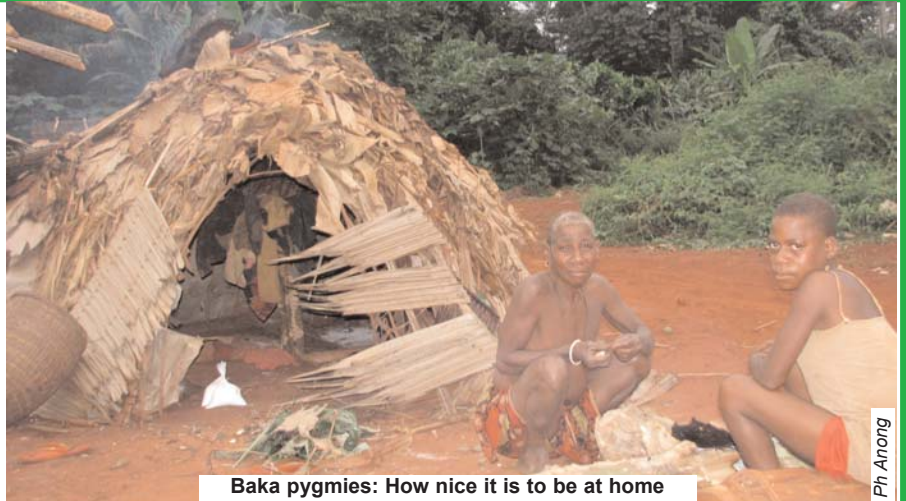
Bakas call them Mongulu. Mongulus have not been battered by the abrasive impact of time so they have remained for centuries, symbols of Baka pygmies' identity. They are mostly built by women especially during penetration into the forest during hunting expeditions.

"There are big and small mongulus," says Awouma Petit Jean, a Baka pygmy residing in Mambele village, about 800km away from Yaounde, in the East Province of Cameroon. The big mongulu is more of a permanent structure that can contain up to 20 people. The small mongulu is a semi-permanent structure that is mostly built to shelter visiting Bakas in times of festivities like the Jengi dance, during farming and gathering of non-timber forest products. Giant leaves, which serve as beds, are placed on the floor inside the mongulu. "We sometime light a fire inside big mongulu to keep it warm," explained Awouma.

Abode for rituals

There are plenty of reasons why Bakas stick to mongulus, despite the emergence of bigger and better housing. The first is cultural. "Our parents built these houses long time ago," says Thomas Lengue, a Baka pygmy in Bomassa, a village overlooking the Sangha River in Congo Brazzaville. Lengue revealed that some mongulus are constructed solely to prepare hunters for the task ahead.

"Before a hunter sets out to hunt big games like elephants, he stays the night alone in the mongulu. In the morning, a cream made from the bark of a tree called Banga Mokoulougo (*Austranella congolensis*) is applied on his body and the mongulu is set on fire. Should the cream take effect, the hunter will mysteriously disappear to return with a big game, if it does-



Baka pygmies: How nice it is to be at home

Ph Anong

not he is consumed by the fire," revealed Lengue.

Mongulus also help distinguish couples from bachelors. Mongulus for bachelors are small with oval shape porch, while those for married people are bigger with small doors that are always closed when the family is out.

Secure and Comfortable

A remarkable character trait in Baka pygmies is the instinct to bolster their security. They hardly get trampled by a charging elephant or spanked by an incensed gorilla. Any sign of danger and the Baka pygmy is behind or on a tree top beyond reach. Mongulus are said to be more secure and comfortable, many Baka pygmies argue. Are they? I asked Dominique Ngalla, a 50-year-old Baka pygmy farmer/hunter near Lobeke National Park, East Cameroon. "My son," he started, "I can easily scamper out of this house and take off because the door is always open. In the night I can light a fire inside here and sleep comfortably. Moreover, I have never been attacked while sleeping in a mongulu," Ngalla said. "I can never sleep in plastic tent while inside the forest," added Awouma Petit Jean. "Mongulu provides comfort and better security. It is warm and easy to build. If all houses were built like

mongulus, there will be no talk of deforestation," Awouma stated.

Tempted?

The construction of modern houses with corrugated sheet roofs, tiled floors, electricity and furniture might be the dream of many in today's modern world. Not with the Baka pygmies. Their indifference to the trappings of modernism verges on contempt. With enthusiasm, Dr. Leonard Usongo, WWF Jengi Southeast Forest Programme Coordinator, once bought a mattress and generously offered to a Baka pygmy friend. To his surprise, his friend never slept on the mattress in his mongulu, rather, he displayed it in front of his house, like an item on the shelf of a shop.

There are signs of change though. Baka pygmies have begun building rectangular houses using wood and leaves. A few of them have corrugated roofs. However, they make sure a mongulu is built near every rectangular shaped house.

Asked what kind of house he now preferred, Lengue hesitated then murmured: "I will choose a modern house because I have been made to understand it is better than our mongulu."



Jengi

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