Bakas, women trained on COVAREF management

Eight women and eight Baka pygmies recently received training on how to participate in the running of Community based Wildlife Resource Management Committees, COVAREFs. The training seminar was organized by WWF and its partner GTZ for Bakas and women, recently elected delegates of some COVAREFs. They were taught the tasks and roles they have to play in the Committees. Held in Yokadouma, some 670 km from Yaounde, the delegates learnt how to organize and animate meetings, the roles of members of COVAREFs, advantages of teamwork and how to source for funds.

Some of the women braved the long distances to make it to the seminar venue, bringing along their babies. They were capable of citing, for example, the advantages of working as a team after the seminar. Some of them could even define, succinctly, what group dynamics means.

One of the participants, Bimo Bignoraso, delegates of one COVAREF in Ndja Lobekoe, a village on the outskirt of Boumba-Bek National Park, said after the seminar that she would share the skills gathered with the population back in the village.

Bimo, who had been member of COVAREF for one year, did not have the ears of her people back home. But she was teeming with optimism after the seminar. “I used to invite the people for a briefing after taking part in a COVAREF general assembly meeting but most of them would not come. They accused me of grabbing money and not sharing with them. But now, with the knowledge acquired, I think things will change,” Bimo said.

COVAREF is an initiative of WWF Jengi and partners to enable local people acquire and manage resources accruing from wildlife exploitation in their areas. The recent move by WWF to increase the number of women and Bakas in the management of COVAREFs is intended to make the Committees more representative and also check marginalisation.

Elephants Reappear in PK 27

For the last six months, many more elephants have been seen and heard in PK 27, a junction linking the south to the north of Lobke National Park. PK 27 used to be a wildlife haven until poachers invaded the place, scaring away most of the animals.

But since park authorities erected a control post at this junction, many more elephants have reappeared in the area. A clutch of poachers, who colonised the place have been arrested, some of them are awaiting trial.

Elephant in Lobke: Destination, PK 27 (Ph. Milong)

An ecological monitoring report, presented by Charles Bassama, WWF Jengi Research Assistant for Lobke, revealed that between September and December 2006, averagely seven elephants were seen in PK 27 every month. This was not the case some few months back. The report stated that the large mammals do not get scared of the logging trucks that ply the dusty road flanking the park. Other animals seen or heard in PK 27 include gorillas, chimpanzees and monkeys.
Camp Kombo undergoes Transformation

Camp Kombo, a WWF Jengi base camp, situated near the small village of Mambele in Moloundou sub-division, about 800 Km away from Yaounde, Cameroon, is undergoing remarkable transformation. Constructed way back in 1995, the camp served as a natural camping place for those who visit the abundantly rich Southeast forest region of Cameroon. Students, researchers, scientists and tourists from all over the world in perpetual search for knowledge lodged in the camp, which is planted at the edge of the Lobéke National Park. Now WWF is seeking to transform it into an eco-tourism paradise. The tents are being replaced with somewhat permanent structures.

“We decided to transform the tents because we want to create permanent and more comfortable structures for tourists to live in,” says Dr. Leonard Usongo, WWF Jengi Regional Coordinator. According to Dr. Usongo, precautions have been taken to preserve the originality of the camp. “The design was done to preserve most of the surrounding forest edges around the camp and maintain the natural look once the tents are erected.” Upon completion, Dr. Usongo stated, WWF plans to sign an agreement or lease out the camp to a tourism operator. “We also plan to get this operator work with the local communities so they too can derive direct benefit from revenues from the camp,” explains the WWF Jengi Coordinator.

Even though WWF is opening up the camp for tourism, its research aspect remains intact. “We started up this camp basically for researchers. So the research aspect, with regards to monitoring, still remains,” he says. “My wish is that people should take advantage of this facility and make good use of it for scientific and touristic purposes.” Camp Kombo became internationally famous in 1999 when HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh and President emeritus of WWF stayed the night after attending a summit in Yaounde. The tent the Duke slept in is still jealously preserved. “We do not still have that particular tent right on site but at least the tent site still has some reflex. We always refer to it as the Duke’s Camp regardless of whether the tent is there or not,” states Dr. Usongo.

WWF lectures students on conservation

A WWF Jengi team recently lectured students drawn from two high schools in Yokadouma, the main urban town situated on the edge of Boumba-Bek National Park, East Province of Cameroon, on conservation and other environmental issues. The event was the World Wetlands Day, which is celebrated every February 2. Students listened to Expedit Fouda, Park Assistant for Boumba-Bek talk on WWF mission in the Southeast, the virtues of conserving and the need to protect biodiversity. He also urged them to fight against AIDS. A quiz was organized during which students answered questions on the meaning of WWF and other environmental issues. Both winners and losers were rewarded. The occasion also marked the re-launch of environmental clubs in both schools. The revamped clubs, it is hoped will serve as launch pad for environmental education in Yokadouma and beyond.

WWF Jengi Newsletter, February 2007 edition
WWF builds new office for Nki Park

A two-apartment building, intended to provide office space and a guesthouse has been constructed in Ngoyla, on the outskirts of Nki National Park. Constructed by WWF Jengi, five of the nine rooms in the building will accommodate the offices while four other rooms will serve as lodging facilities.

According to Ndinga Hilaire, WWF Park Assistant for Nki, tourists who are increasingly taking interest in the very rich park, can stay the night in the guesthouse on their way to and from the park. The building, Ndinga said, will also house the office of the park’s conservator, recently appointed by the government of Cameroon. “The VHF radio and the Park Assistant’s office will also be given space,” Ndinga explained.

This imposing structure has transformed the small Sub-division of Ngoyla. It reinforces WWF’s presence on the peripheries of the park. A veritable conservation fortress, it is hoped the structure will win more hearts and boost conservation efforts in Nki.

According to the local administrator for Ngoyla, Engolo Apollinaire, the building belongs to Ngoyla and would never be taken away. He told a WWF team that Ngoyla is an obscure place, where the people refuse everything. The new edifice, he said, might be a source of attraction for the people.

The Nki National Park is the largest (309,362 hectares) of the three national parks within WWF Jengi. Located some 480km from Yaounde, Cameroon’s capital city, Nki is the most hilly and inaccessible park in Southeast Cameroon. The growing wildlife population and the pristine condition of the park have made the area a conservation hotspot.

Daring poachers in Socambo

For several months now game guards in Lobeke National Park have been doing battles with suspect poachers in Socambo, a village situated southeast of the park on the borders with Congo Brazzaville.

The battle is so far unabated as the poachers have been putting up stiff resistance. Recently, some game guards sustained injuries following clashes with the illegal hunters who come mostly from Congo.

“The poachers also blocked a vehicle transporting some arrested colleagues and threatened to set it ablaze if they were not released forthwith,” stated Jonathan Talla, a WWF Mechanic/driver for Lobeke.

“The vehicle was released following the intervention of the Mayor of Moloundou, a small urban town southwest of Lobeke, but only after the suspect poachers had been set free,” Talla explained.

These incidents have prompted park authorities to embark on a sensitization campaign in Socambo, with a veiled warning that the state will not hesitate to clampdown on the poachers if they do not stop their activities.

Djogo Toumouksala, Conservator for Lobeke, says Socambo needs massive sensitization campaigns. “We have held meetings with the authorities during which I explained the implications of poaching and the punishment that awaits any poacher found guilty before the court of law. If these activities do not stop, we shall not hesitate to embark on repressive measures,” Djogo warned.

Socambo, he noted, used to be a logging town, but since the logging company left, the people resorted to poaching for a living. However, the Conservator said he is working with colleagues in Congo, under the auspices of the Tri National de la Sangha, TNS, trans-boundary conservation initiative, to track down poachers on both frontiers. “We would make sure that anyone caught, be they Congolese or Cameroonian, are arrested and detained,” Djogo stated.

During a meeting in Socambo, some of the hunters demanded alternative sources of livelihood as precondition to giving up poaching. “I realised many of the poachers did not understand the law. Also, I learnt there was complicity between some of the game guards and the poachers,” Djogo revealed.
Some 12 traditional rulers of the Kounabembe tribe, whose villages are located around the Boumba-Bek National Park, have offered to collaborate with WWF to stem poaching. The Chiefs made the pledge during a meeting with Boumba-Bek Park Assistant, Expedit Fouda and the Park’s conservator, Mboh Dandjouma. The Chiefs were also briefed on the pending management plan for Boumba-Bek and the need for them to contribute in its elaboration.

The meeting provided a forum for the reinforcement of communication with local communities, especially as the Chiefs used the occasion to voice their worries. According to Olivier Tegomo, Senior Field Assistant for Boumba-Bek, “the meeting established a strong link between conservation and development.”

The meeting usually serves as a forum for the Chiefs to discuss development problems in their chiefdoms. “The speeches made by the park authorities reflected the aspirations of the community leaders who act as spokespersons for the local people,” stated Tegomo.