Dear readers,

We are very proud to share with you the maiden edition of our quarterly TRIDOM newsletter. The Tri-national Dja-Odzala-Minkebe (TRIDOM) landscape spans protected areas in Cameroon, Republic of Congo and Gabon respectively. A vast forest wilderness where wildlife outnumbers people, TRIDOM faces many threats including poaching, deforestation, degradation and habitat loss. In this maiden newsletter, we chronicle the beauty of the TRIDOM landscape. We take you through a journey into the TRIDOM wonderland, to visit the fishermen in Gabon, we reconcile conservation and human wellbeing and reveal the vulnerability of protected areas in this landscape to climate change.

We hope this maiden newsletter moves your heart, fortifies your love for nature and gives you reason to raise your voice for the planet. Thank you for always standing with us.

Together possible

Terrence Ekanje  
Interim Country Director  
WWF-Gabon

Clotilde Ngomba  
Country Director  
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It is a vast forest wilderness that seems endless, where elephants trumpet, gorillas roar and the languid rivers and waterfalls resonate. You seem frightened by its eeriness. The forest is called TRIDOM covering 178,000 km², about half the size of Germany. Ninety-seven percent of TRIDOM is covered by tropical rainforest. It lies at the remote corner of Cameroon, Gabon and Republic of Congo in the vast forest block of the Congo Basin.

TRIDOM is the biggest stronghold of the critically endangered forest elephant and important for gorillas, chimpanzees and many other wildlife. It is also home to some 300,000 people, including indigenous Baka. But poaching and illegal trade in ivory, commercial agricultural expansion, huge infrastructure projects and unsustainable commercial logging are threatening nature and people in the TRIDOM landscape.

Companies from all over the world are eyeing up the forest as their next big investment. An international company is negotiating to convert 55,000 ha of pristine forest into palm oil plantations. Several world class iron ore deposits lie beneath the forest and international mining companies are keen on developing this potential. A huge 600MW hydropower dam is being planned to power the future mines. These big investments dwarf the small footprint of local shifting cultivation and smallholder cocoa, which have little impact on the forest.

Challenges
The indigenous peoples have no formal land tenure rights. Many are illiterate and are not employed in the formal sector. Criminal gangs use the best hunters from the communities to track and poach elephants. It is extremely dangerous and these hunters risk up to 3 years’ imprisonment for poaching a protected species.

How do we secure land tenure and access rights for indigenous peoples? Increase agricultural yields while lowering environmental damage? Improve access to school, healthcare, finance? While WWF is helping to ensure better management of national parks and to stop the illegal ivory trade, we are also working with governments, local communities, civil society organisations and companies in the landscapes to promote access rights of indigenous people and support education of Baka children.

We need to work with companies that take responsibility for a more socially inclusive and environmentally sensitive form of development in TRIDOM. Countries across the globe are committing money to save forests in order to reduce global warming. Together we need to convince our governments to provide funds to protect the TRIDOM forests.

This is what integrated landscape management is about. And you can have a role in it too. We need you. Be part of this crowd/movement to change the future for TRIDOM for people and nature.

Jaap van der Waarde
Deputy TRIDOM Landscape Leader
RECONCILING CONSERVATION AND HUMAN WELLBEING IN TRIDOM

Happy at home
In a landscape where people and wildlife live side by side amidst competing interests and a multiplicity of actors with divergent views, how do you balance biodiversity conservation and the wellbeing of people?

An ambitious WWF 10-year strategy: “TRIDOM Initiative for People and Biodiversity” seeks to ensure a secure future for the Dja-Odzala-Minkebe Tri-national’s (TRIDOM’s) rich forest and wildlife resources — by empowering local communities and contributing to the sustainable economic development aspirations of the communities and countries: Cameroon, Gabon and the Republic of Congo.

The TRIDOM landscape makes up 10% of the Congo Basin Rainforest and hosts Africa’s unique intact forest. It is a refuge for some of the world’s most iconic and endangered wildlife species, such as forest elephants and great apes as well as indigenous peoples (the Baka) whose livelihood depends on the forest.

More than ever before, the exceptional biodiversity richness of the area is threatened by demands for resources and infrastructural development. Among these competing interests include: road and rail development, agricultural production, mining and wood exploitation.

At the same time, the landscape presents unique opportunities for conservation and human wellbeing. They include huge biodiversity potentials, the largest tropical forest under FSC certification in the world and indigenous communities whose role is vital in the sustainable management of the forest.

These challenges are at the centre of WWF’s work in the area. For close to 30 years, WWF and its strategic government and civil society partners have made efforts in ensuring that biodiversity is conserved while helping to meet the needs of the people.

WWF has been supporting local initiatives related to:

- Processing and commercialization of non-timber forest products;
- Sustainable community forest management and certification processes;
- Empowerment of Baka and securing their right to access natural resources;
- Tackling of poverty;
- Elaboration and implementation of a mechanism that enables local communities and indigenous peoples to lodge formal complaints;
- Strengthening of eco-guards’ (rangers’) capacity to effectively protect the landscape’s critically endangered species and their habitat in strict respect of rights of indigenous and local people.

It is against this backdrop that a new TRIDOM initiative was birthed in 2018, seeking to balance the interests of people and conservation. The TRIDOM Strategy is built on five pillars; supporting communities to access natural resources, upholding the rights of indigenous peoples, ensuring sustainable business and production systems, fostering a robust climate action and conserving the landscape’s rich biodiversity. To achieve these goals, the TRIDOM Initiative builds on partnerships and other forms of collaboration, including Governments, Private Sector, NGOs and CSOs and local communities from the three countries with support from international partners.

**Ernest Sumelong**

Communications Officer

WWF Jengi Program
MOST PROTECTED AREAS IN TRIDOM VULNERABLE TO CLIMATE CHANGE
The rich biodiversity of one of the world’s most intact tropical rainforests is vulnerable to climate change risks, a study has revealed. Conducted by Anchor Environmental Consultants, the study forms part of the WWF Africa Adaptation Initiative (AAI), which encourages mainstreaming of climate change adaptation within WWF offices across Africa.

The study assessed vulnerability in terms of potential climate change impacts on biodiversity within the 11 protected areas in Tri-national Dja-Odzala-Minkebe (TRIDOM) landscape. Habitat change, species loss and resource pressure from neighbouring communities is likely to increase as climate change impacts livelihoods. It finds that deforestation leading to habitat loss, loss of resources and loss of carbon are exposing the landscape to climate change risks. The study, which ranks the protected areas from resilient, vulnerable to highly vulnerable, shows that most of them are vulnerable. Of the 11 protected areas surveyed, two are ranked resilient, two highly vulnerable and the rest vulnerable.

With a surface area spanning over 15 million hectares and harbouring 11 protected areas across three countries (Cameroon, Gabon and the Republic of Congo), TRIDOM makes up nearly 10% of the Congo Basin Rainforest. It is one of the priority conservation sites in Africa and one of 12 Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) transboundary conservation programs in the Congo Basin.

According to the study, potential habitat changes within TRIDOM protected areas is relatively low but for two: Boumba Bek in Cameroon and Ivindo in the Republic of Congo. Predicted species loss is high for all protected areas. Poaching for ivory and bush meat, deforestation and forest degradation constitute the main threats to wildlife and forest, thereby jeopardizing conservation efforts in the area.

The TRIDOM landscape has witnessed over 60% decline in forest elephant population during the last decade due to poaching. These factors, coupled with the fact that most protected areas are underfunded, leave the landscape vulnerable.

Small scale agriculture and timber harvesting account for 95% of forest clearing. With over two thirds of TRIDOM landscape under logging concessions, there has been an increasing movement of people in search of jobs. Deforestation reduces the forest’s resilience to climate change.

The study states that, “in the TRIDOM landscape, climate change will exacerbate and extend the already-severe threats to biodiversity and the protected area system which forms the core of conservation efforts.” It proposes the strengthening of conservation measures to secure biodiversity and natural capital, including strengthening biodiversity protection, holding logging companies accountable, strengthening indigenous peoples’ rights over land and resources and develop and implement a strategy to influence urban household choices and reduce unsustainable demands for bush meat. This, according to the study, should form the basis of a holistic strategy to increase the resilience and effectiveness of TRIDOM’s protected areas in the light of all existing and future impacts.”

Fidelis Pegue Manga
Communications Coordinator
WWF - Cameroon
GOING TO MEET FISHERMEN IN TRIDOM GABON
Our boat slowly slides through the raffia forest. The branches sweep over our heads as we push and pull our way through this green jungle. We are sailing on the Djoua river, on the borders between Gabon and the Republic of Congo. The river soon peters out into a flooded forest and we rely on the knowledge of our local guide to trace it again.

The Djoua river is remote. It takes our WWF-Gabon team three days to get to Mazingo on the river, where we are greeted by the local chief. The village chief takes us to a school where we stayed the night. The Djoua river is a suspected highway for ivory smuggling from Gabon to Cameroon and the TRIDOM Gabon team wants to establish a program here. The aim of our mission is to see what the main activities of the population are and how we can collaborate with them.

As we emerge from the green tangle, a beautiful river stretches out in front of us. Big hornbills fly overhead, grey parrots are chattering over the forest and monkeys clamber in the trees along the river. After 2 hours, we reach the first fishing camp and the fishermen are happy to provide us space to pitch our tents. The camp was built by a family that fishes in the dry season to smoke fish which they sell to traders on the river.

Fishing here is not yet too crowded. But according to the chief of Mazingo there are problems. Some fishermen use unauthorized methods. They also do not respect the agreed boundaries between communities. More people are coming in to fish. The government is wholly absent here so this river may become overfished very soon. The fishing camps we visit express their wish that an NGO like WWF establishes itself here to assist in organizing community fishing arrangements.

We see many children in the camps, lots of babies but also school age kids, so community development, including education will be an important part of any program here. Poaching however does not seem to be too much of an issue. We count not a single cartridge during our hike in the forest and the monkeys frolic just around our camp. When we ask if they are not hunted, we are told ‘the cartridges are too expensive’.

With fishing still more lucrative than hunting, this is a good moment to interact. With a community based fishing program, we can work with the communities to prevent the river being overfished and abused for illegal trafficking of ivory. On our way back we meet the local authorities, the ministry, the national parks agency, all are in favor of WWF installing itself in the region. We agree to start with recruiting a community liaison officer to engage with the communities on the river to further develop the program. So the Djoua will remain the pristine river it is today, with plentiful fish for the local communities and free from ivory trafficking.

Jaap van der Waarde
Deputy TRIDOM Landscape Leader
&
Stephane Le Duc Yeno
TRIDOM Gabon Coordinator
TRIDOM Financial Flows Analysis

We want to know which big economic developments are being prepared for the TRIDOM area. Therefore, we commissioned an analysis of the existing and planned financial investments in TRIDOM, called Financial Flows Analysis. The Dutch consultancy Profundo implemented the study, which was supervised by the TRIDOM Finance Technical Group, composed of representatives of TRIDOM, the Finance Practice, Climate & Energy Practice and Landscape Finance Lab.

The study looked at a wide range of investors including African banks with a specific focus on Agro-commodities, infrastructure, logging and mining. In total US$10 billion is invested in the bonds and shares of companies active in TRIDOM (at least in the three countries). It was not possible to isolate TRIDOM in the analysis. In terms of loans and underwriting services, the agricultural sector is the biggest (US$75 billion), followed by logging (US$41 billion), infrastructure (US$12 billion) and finally mining (US$0.1 billion). Of all the investors, only some banks had a reasonable level of environmental policies.

Only the agro-industry had a reasonable level of environmental policies. The African banks, in general, did not have a very good level of environmental policies, neither did Chinese. Still, several partners of WWF are investing in TRIDOM and they may be good starting points for discussion. The African banks may be susceptible to WWF message and collaboration. The agriculture and logging sectors seem most promising to start influencing.

Climate Funding

In July 2019 two Landscape Finance managers started working for TRIDOM. Katrui Veldhuizen works from the WWF-Gabon office and Jonas Kemajou works from the Cameroon office, together they also cover the Republic of Congo. The main purpose of their positions is to contribute to Strategy 4 of the Conservation Plan, Climate Action. Under this strategy, Katrui is engaging with the Gabonese government on climate funding. For example, the recent CAFI program. Jonas has been very active in engaging with the REDD+ program development in Cameroon. He has been working hard together with civil society and government to secure a US$5 million grant to prepare a REDD+ program in Cameroon. Our aim is to prepare Cameroon for the full 100m USD REDD+ program.

In the Republic of Congo, the TRIDOM team was invited by the Ministry of Agriculture to present our alternative ideas for a 55,000 ha palm oil concession in the middle of TRIDOM. We are currently developing a REDD+ alternative for this area. Additionally, the minister has invited WWF to support the government in developing a responsible agriculture policy and we will join the government on a business promotion mission to The Netherlands. The Climate funding work is guided through the Finance Technical group (LFL, FinP, CEP) while the work on agroindustry will hopefully bring network support through the Food Practice.
MoMo4C

The Mobilising More 4 Climate (MoMo4C) is a five-year program (2019-2024) funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It aims at bringing together entrepreneurs, firms, policymakers, investors and civil society organisations to make green business propositions that tackle the impacts and causes of climate change at a landscape level in developing countries, and to attract investments to implement these initiatives. The program is led by IUCN Netherlands, and implemented together with WWF Netherlands, Tropenbos International and local partners to address the challenges that governments, NGOs, entrepreneurs, companies and investors in developing countries face when working on programs that tackle the causes and impact of climate change in rural areas.

The MoMo4C program was launched in November 2020 in The Netherlands and TRIDOM is one of six landscapes that participated. The TRIDOM program will focus on Community Forestry and Cacao as the two main responsible business forms that we want to promote. Initially the project will be limited to Cameroon but we will share lessons learned across TRIDOM. This work contributes to Strategy 3 of the Conservation Plan, Responsible Production and we aim to get technical support from the Food and Forest Practice Technical groups.
The Bouvier red colobus monkey is a rare species of primate believed to be found only in the Republic of Congo. Said to have been discovered by an Italian explorer between 1883-1886 and described in 1887 by French botanist and zoologist Alphonse Trémeau de Rochebrune, this very rare primate was feared extinct. The last unverified sightings of the monkey occurred in the 1970s.

Fortunately, in February 15, independent primatologists Lieven Devreeze and Gaël Elie Gnondo Gobolo stumbled upon a group of Bouvier’s red colobus in the swamp forests along the Bokiba River in the Ntokou-Pikounda National Park in the TRIDOM landscape.

Today this primate still thrives in the wild as attested by the picture taken by professional photographer Daniel Nelson in 2019.
I see you from here in
Ntokou-Pikounda National Park
Quick Facts About TRIDOM

Spread across three countries - Cameroon, the Republic of Congo and Gabon
- Comprises 10% of the Congo Basin rainforest
- 11 protected areas spread over 42,319 km²
- Wildlife potential: 40,000 elephants, great apes estimated at up to 140,000
- Low population density: one inhabitant/km²
- 97% of TRIDOM is forested
- Home to some 10,000 indigenous Baka
- 65% of landscape covered by logging concessions
- WWF has been working in TRIDOM since 1993

Working to sustain the natural world for people and wildlife