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**Tropical Ecology and Society
Reconciling Conservation and
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O13-05 – S13 Biodiversity conservation in a conflicting context – The case of the Congo basin
 Monday 20 June 20 / 11:00-15:30 – Barthez

The case for a “conservation bank” to secure the future of the TRIDOM forest landscape

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The 178,000 km² Tri-National Dja –Odzala-Minkebe landscape (TRIDOM) is a transboundary rainforest shared by Cameroon, the Republic of Congo and Gabon. It is considered a stronghold for great apes and forest elephants. Protected areas cover 24% of the landscape and are ecologically connected by a large expanse of forest matrix.

Threats to the TRIDOM are considerable. Most of the forest in between the protected areas is allocated to logging companies. Elephant populations are declining rapidly because of ivory poaching. A new highway through the TRIDOM’s heartland is being built. Hydropower projects such as the Chollet dam are being proposed. The area is also an emerging iron ore province, with several world class iron ore deposits. Under a business as usual scenario, the TRIDOM will progressively cease to exist as a large intact forest landscape, with interconnected patches of high quality forest, and be reduced to a fragmented landscape with isolated protected areas, with most of the large fauna disappearing from the matrix. Elephants, in particular, are key dispersers of plant species and the loss of long-distance connectivity could negatively affect the forest’s capacity to respond to change through shifts in the distribution of species. The successful implementation of a net biodiversity gain policy by the proposed mining and hydro projects could leverage significant additional conservation in TRIDOM, through biodiversity offset commitments. Together with careful siting and minimization measures, an aggregated offset project for mining and hydro developments could be designed to provide effective large mammal conservation, and ensure long-distance connectivity is maintained. But, with the mining projects on hold, due to the recent fall in iron ore prices, such a project appears to be a distant prospect. However, with the right institutions in place, investors may be willing to secure land for an aggregated offset, in anticipation of future offset needs. This could ensure the matrix forests are protected before it is too late, with considerable benefits to biodiversity and ecosystem services, and investors could get a return by offering offsets to developers when commodity prices rise again. Such a system is analogous to establishing a “conservation bank” for the TRIDOM, which raises a number of technical and organizational challenges. We discuss these in the light of similar systems elsewhere.

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Place of customary rights mapping initiatives in conservation policies

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In Africa, participatory mapping of land use by local people is a quite old field practice in conservation or development projects. More recently, massive on line mapping of customary rights were born under the impulse of activist NGO. These include The Mapping for Right Initiative which notably proposed to communities to prove by themselves their presence inside the forest. The announced purpose is to help the decision-makers and the private sector to recognize this presence and help international community to recognize rights linked with this presence. Promoted as a decision making-tool, this initiative try in fact to make recognize customary rights at large scale in order to put them against land management and planning (logging concession, protected areas...). The important things is that conservation world take it into consideration not as an constraint but as an opportunity. We propose as line of conduct three possibilities i) for existing protected areas, mapping of rights should promote more participation of local population in decision structure and access to benefits-sharing, but exclude rights of hunting ii) for new protected areas, mapping of rights will help the free prior and informed consent process and should lead to land sharing based on overlapping rights officially acknowledged through contracts (participation in decision structure, sharing benefits), with village hunting areas outside and around this new protected area and iii) about non protected areas where wildlife is still abundant, mapping of rights should promote community-based management and hunting rights on non-protected species.