

Protected Areas and Oil Development in Equatorial Guinea

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Between March and June 2012 I was based in Bata, Equatorial Guinea, to support the country's national park agency (Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Forestal y Manejo del Sistema de Áreas Protegidas or INDEFOR-AP) in reviewing the draft management plan for the Río Campo Natural Reserve (33,000 ha), and in preparing draft management plans for three more protected areas in continental Equatorial Guinea: the Punta Ilende (5,455 ha) and Montes Temelón (23,000 ha) Natural Reserves and the Playa Nendyi Scientific Reserve (500 ha). These areas, together with the other ten in the national system, were formally created in 2000, but lack management plans and field staff. INDEFOR-AP was created in 2002, but without an operating budget for many years. Lodged within the Ministry of Agriculture, the agency has been allocated a rising budget in the past two years, and is promoting alliances with international conservation organizations including WCS, Conservation International, and World Resources Institute.

The oil boom since 1995 has flooded government coffers, with spending most visible in new infrastructure expansion: roads, bridges, airports, ports, public and private offices, hydroelectric dams and power grids. All oil is offshore, extracted from platforms in the Gulf of Guinea, with no pipelines but with gas flares lighting up the shoreline. Infrastructure development is taking place within protected areas, while new roads greatly facilitate the extraction and transport of bushmeat and timber. Forestry concessions that border all protected areas are being renewed, in some cases for the third cycle of extraction of the plywood species Okume (*Aucomea klaineana*). Unregistered chainsaw operators are active in all protected areas, while road construction companies also take timber. Mining also takes place within protected areas, though for now it is limited to earth, sand and rock extraction for roads, ports, and buildings. Rural to urban migration may reduce pressure on some natural resources, but also debilitates social structures capable of managing the same resources for local long-term economic benefits. Three en-



dangered ethnic groups reside within these protected areas: the Bagyeli and Balengue in Río Campo, and the Basek in Punta Ilende.

In addition to the rising budget and INDEFOR-AP staff based in Bata, the agency has prepared several management plans for ministerial review and approval, has stepped up its field visits, and is training local representatives in communities within protected areas. Park infrastructure including offices and vehicles is essential to facilitate a permanent INDEFOR-AP presence on the ground. The greatest opportunities lie in establishing co-management agreements with government authorities (military, police, municipal) and private companies (oil, logging, construction) whose activities overlap or border the protected areas.

This case study addresses several difficult themes that cut across

disciplines: conservation governance, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, conservation and human livelihoods, and cultural survival. The project was directed by Michael Painter (Director-Conservation and the Quality of Human Life Program-WCS; UF alumnus - anthropology), and implemented also by Kantuta Lara (socio-economic expert, WCS-Bolivia) and Dennis Hellebrandt (fisheries expert, University of East Anglia).

Andrew Noss is courtesy assistant professor in the Department of Geography. This project was funded by the Wildlife Conservation Society and Noble Energy.