



EPISODE ONE

The birth of an alliance...

In listening to the great apes, we can only share one conviction: we have a community of origin and a community of destiny with the whole of living things and man can not detach his branch from the tree of life. Protecting our closest cousins, and the forests that shelter them, is an inescapable challenge that mankind must face.

However, the observation is dramatic since 70% of the great ape populations have disappeared in the last 50 years.

It is in Africa, and particularly in the Congo Basin, that the vast majority of the great apes that inhabit our planet are found. On this continent of contrast, where wonder marries the intolerable, we can not ignore that the most basic needs are not accessible to all men and women. But we can not resign ourselves to sacrificing, on the altar of economic development, this unique heritage which constitutes our common past as well as our common future.

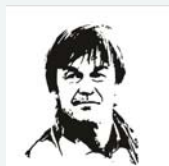
Protecting the forests and great apes that inhabit them is the only way to ensure a desirable future.

How can we not rejoice when we learn that an alliance is born in this sense?

What is more, an alliance between African actors who, for years and closest to the realities on the ground, carry out their actions with dedication and determination.

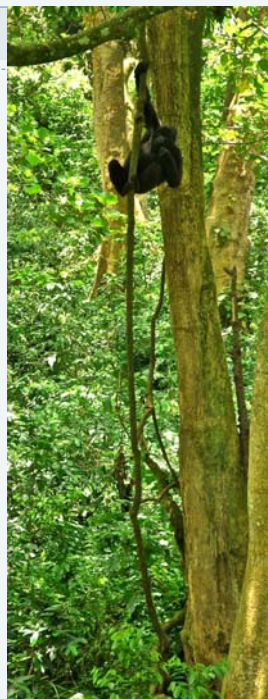
As an echo of the paths traced by Diane Fossey, Jane Goodall and more recently Sabrina Krief, these NGOs pose as guardians of a world heritage whose humanity probably does not measure all the value.

Let us hope that this nascent alliance is the first stone of an unprecedented mobilization whose magnitude is equal to the stake it defends.



Nicolas Hulot

« Fondation Nicolas Hulot pour la Nature et l'Homme »



The edito	1
The creation	2
MBOU MON TOUR	3
GACEBB	4
ERUDEF	5
TF-RD	6
PROGRAM	7
ESI CONGO	8
The interview	9
Contacts	10

KEY WORDS

Civil society, Great Apes, Congo Basin, Conservation, Local Development, Governance, Citizen engagement

On October 20, 2016 in Limbe, Cameroon, a network called the Alliance for the Conservation of Great Apes in Central Africa (A-GSAC) was created to improve the conservation of great apes in the sub-region.

The six African CSOs behind the initiative, ERUDEF and TF-RD for Cameroon, ESI-Congo in Congo Brazzaville, GACEBB and MMT in the DRC and PROGRAM in Gabon, are all partners of the Small Initiatives Program (PPI) funded by the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM) and implemented by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

This collective initiative has been built step by step and does not fall out of nowhere. A first strategic workshop held in Nkala, DRC, at the headquarters of the OSC Mbou Mon Tour (MMT) in April 2016, laid the foundations for the identity, vision and mission of the network as well as strategic objectives and a first 6-month action plan. Exchange visits were then made between representatives of the six actors in order to strengthen cohesion and to learn more about the actions and specificities of the other members of the network. An important first step ...

Only after these preliminary steps took place in October 2016 this first constituent AG, paving the way for the legalization of the Alliance in Cameroonian association, status officially obtained in February 2017.

Each of these six NGOs is active in the field and works in a specific context by addressing the conservation of great apes with its own priorities (research, monitoring and habituation, community support, ecotourism, etc.). Nevertheless, there are commonalities between them, notably on aspects relating to credibility, the feeling of marginalization within the conservation community, organizational difficulties and the raising of funding. All these aspects explain this strong desire to share experiences, to act on these common problems and to explore new methods of promoting their work.

The Alliance will function as a platform for exchanges and learning on technical and strategic issues. It will, among other things, enable exchanges visits, make available technical tools to its members, support project writing and porting, especially on a regional scale, build capacity, and promote good governance inside the network. The logic associated with the network is based on the collegiality of decisions and the collective construction of actions and solutions.

The world of conservation is changing step by step, technical and institutional innovations are now available, and good governance and citizen engagement are now recognized as determining factors for the success of conservation and development processes. African civil society has a major role to play in these areas, and if not the case, the conservation objectives set at national, regional and global levels could not be sustainably achieved.

These six NGOs have strong local legitimacy, intervene in territories with major ecological stakes, and progressively accumulate valuable expertise and credibility. National and international mechanisms are increasingly demanding local ownership of conservation processes, which promises real prospects for the A- GSAC and its members ... For the benefit of the conservation of Great Apes living in the ecosystems of the Congo Basin and the local populations living in their direct proximity ...

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AGSAC first strategic meeting - NKALA (RDC) - April 2016



THE BONOBO...

Bonobo (*Pan paniscus*) is an endemic species of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Its genetic heritage is 98% similar to that of man. Considered as pygmies of chimpanzees, bonobos are physically quite similar but slightly smaller than these ones. They are reputed to be more peaceful, social and resolve conflict, especially via sexuality, not violence. The bonobo society is matriarchal.

Why? Females collaborate, form bonds

and work together while males are not as social. This is exactly the opposite of the chimpanzee society where males have a strong fraternity and work together.

To know more

[IUCN Red List: *Pan paniscus*](#)

« LOOKING TO THE TEKE TRADITION, BONOBO IS NOT AN ANIMAL BUT A COUSIN WHO TOOK REFUGE IN THE FOREST TO ESCAPE A DEBT, THUS CREATING A PROTECTIVE TABOU OF THE SPECIES»

JEAN CHRISTOPHE BOKIKA - MMT

MBOU MON TOUR - MMT (RDC)



In 2001, MMT surprised the scientific world by announcing the presence of bonobos in the Bolobo Territory, a region located about 300 km north of Kinshasa, within a forest-savanna mosaic where they were thought to be extinct. Despite the initial lack of attention to the initiative, but with local support from local chiefs and local populations, MMT initiates awareness campaigns to protect bonobos in the area. Lacking resources, MMT initially designed a communication model aimed at the general public through popular songs based on Teké customs and prohibiting the hunting and consumption of bonobo meat, with troops as Bonobo Folk bringing in the villages a message of awareness through dramatic dances and songs.

Sites for monitoring and community surveillance of bonobos by some forty village trackers have gradually been set up and several organizations are now supporting the dynamic, which is an innovation in conservation, being the work of the local populations who have decided to devote a part of the forest spaces to the community conservation of this emblematic species, paving the way for the classification of 6 "Forêts des Communautés Locales" (FCL), for which the files are currently in the desk of the provincial governor of Mai-Ndombe.

The vision of MMT is that of a world where people meet their primary needs through the sustainable management of natural resources. To contribute to this vision, MMT has the mission of supporting local communities in development initiatives compatible with the conservation and rational management of biodiversity in the province of Mai-Ndombe.

The main lines of action for MMT are awareness raising, community conservation and research, ranking of FCL, and support for socio-economic development, through support for sustainable agriculture and ecotourism.

Its headquarters welcoming visitors, Eco tourists and researchers is located two kilometers from the village of Nkala in the chieftaincy of Batéké North.

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GROUPE D'APPUI À LA CONSERVATION DES ECOSYSTÈMES DE BASANKUSU ET BOLOMBA GACEBB (RDC)

GACEBB began its activities in 2009 as a continuation of the program of the green caps of the French NGO AWELY in the DRC. The NGO vision is a world where people cohabit harmoniously with their ecosystems in prosperity. Its mission is to contribute to the conservation of the Basankusu and Bolomba ecosystems by the Informed and Preliminary Free Consent (IPFC) of local communities and through income-generating micro-projects.

GACEBB operates in part of the territory of Basankusu, and the whole territory of Bolomba, in an area between the Maringa-Lopori-Wamba (MLW) landscape, Salonga National Park, Tumba Nature Reserve -Ledima and the landscape Lake Tele-Lake Tumba.

Its areas of intervention are the support to local communities, environmental education, the fight against climate change, investigation and research.

As part of its support program for local communities, GACEBB collaborates with farmer organizations on goat breeding, fish farming projects and a vegetable garden project. 10 goats, 5 fish ponds and 9 vegetable gardens have already been developed.

Concerning the conservation dimensions, a bonobo monitoring project was initiated in August 2016 to determine the zones with the strongest stakes of conservation of the species and thus to target as much as possible the supports and the zones which can be classified in Forests of Local Communities (FCL). Two forests seem to show important stakes (FONDE 130 km from Basankusu and SOOLA at 60 km).



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ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION - ERUDEF (CAMEROON)

In 1996, a team of professionals created the "Association of Agricultural Sector and Environmental Research" (ASERG). Its activities were mainly in Lebialem Division, South West of Cameroon. After several years of research, the members of ASERG decided to create an enlarged group able to face the challenges identified on the ground.

On August 1999, a Constituent General Assembly was held in Buea with the aim of expanding the activities of ASERG. Thus, ERuDeF was born as a non-profit Cameroonian NGO.

It is dedicated to the conservation of wildlife and the protection of fragile environments through research, training, education and participation of the community.

After seventeen years of activity, ERuDeF has supported the Government of Cameroon in its efforts to conserve biodiversity through its various programmes such as the *Great Apes Research and Conservation*; a program that intervenes in the forests of West Cameroon.

Today, ERuDeF remains one of the main Cameroonian conservation and research NGO on apes. It has supported the creation of some Protected Areas in the Lebialem Highlands in Western Cameroon.

In 2014, ERuDeF coordinated the efforts that led to the establishment of the Tofala Hills Wildlife Sanctuary, the first PA in the Lebialem division in south West Cameroon.

ERuDeF also became the first national NGO in Cameroon to facilitate the signing of a Mutual Agreement (MOU) under the Access and Benefit-Sharing Initiative (ABS) process in the sub-Region of Central Africa. In 2016, another mutually agreed agreement for research on *Mondial whitei* was signed in Cameroon thanks to the ERuDeF facilitation.

In a near future, ERuDeF is eager to publish the Mak-Betchou Wildlife Sanctuary.



ERuDeF

Louis NKEMBI

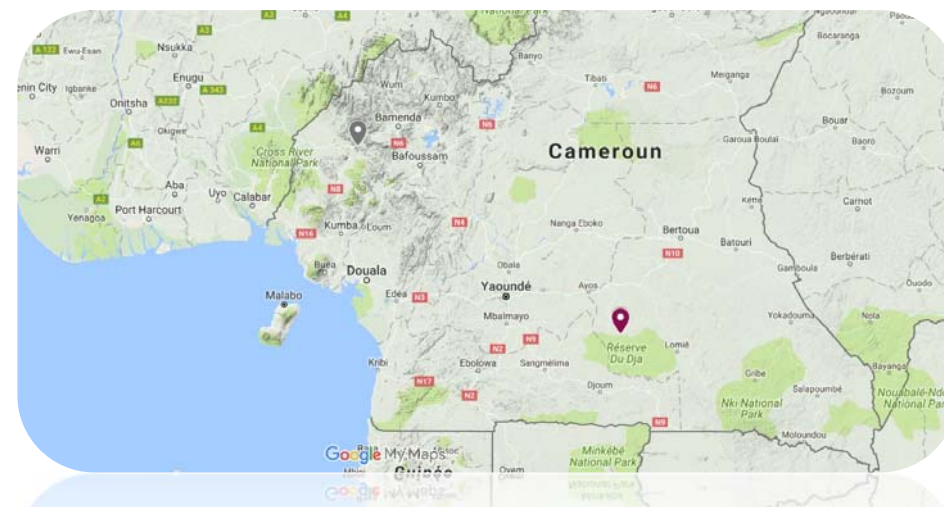
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GORILLA IS OUR NEAR COUSIN. ITS PHYSICAL AND BIOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS TELLS US A LOT ABOUT OUR PROXIMITY. AND ITS SURVIVAL IS PARADOXALLY THREATENED BY THESE SAME COUSINS" LOUIS NKEMBI-ERuDeF

TROPICAL FOREST AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT - TF-RD (CAMEROON)



TF-RD is a Cameroonian association working in the northern periphery of the Dja Biosphere Reserve (DBR), specifically in the district of Messamesa within an area of about 3,500 ha, comprising 24 villages with a population estimated at About 3,000 inhabitants. The nearest village to the Protected Area, Mimpalla, is located less than 15 km from the reserve limit.

Established in 2010, the NGO began its activities on an environmental education project on gorillas, aimed at primary schools in villages around the DBR, the "bus ambulante", supported by the Prague Zoo.

Starting in 2013 with the support of IUCN, a project supports farmers on the periphery of the reserve to intensify their cocoa production, develop new integrated cocoa beans in agroforestry systems located in old cocoa beans or in old fallows. The NGO also supports the valorisation of Non-Ligneous Forest Products (NLFs) while working on the development of economic cosmetics, in partnership with the French NGO Man And Nature. Started in 2016, a project to manage apes and cocoa-based agro forests aims specifically to promote better cohabitation between these species and cocoa farmers.

TF-RD's mission is to contribute to create a socio-economic environment that supports the empowerment of local communities and the conservation of biodiversity through four areas of intervention: environmental education, valorisation of NLFs, agroforestry and ecotourism.

In the coming months, the priority will be to extend the agro-forests cocoa approach in new communities of the Dja loop on about 100ha and to support the regeneration of approximately 150 ha of more than 40 years old cocoa plantations. The NGO will continue to valorise in butters and oils the cocoa and the other harvested NLFs (moabi, wild mango, djansang and Allamblakia), to seek out markets for the different products, increase the processing capacity of the Yaoundé processing platform and operationalize the cooperative's management plan for hunting.

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THE GORILLA....

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has classified Gorillas as one of the critically endangered wildlife species in Africa and in the world. There are fewer than 300 Cross River Gorillas remaining in the world and they are found only in Nigeria and Cameroon, with up to 280 of these in Cameroon.

Gorillas in the Central African Region continue to decline due to poaching, habitat loss and disease. National parks and reserves in six range countries protect only 21% of Western Lowland Gorillas according to a recent report by WWF.

Though fragile conservation gains made in recent decades have slowed the rate of decline, these animals are under serious threat from growing human populations, rapid

expansion of extractive industries and industrial agriculture, widespread lack of law enforcement and corruption in the judicial process.

Diseases like Ebola remain a major threat to both Great Apes and millions of people in the world. Western Lowland Gorilla continue to be threatened by wildlife criminals seeking to supply the illegal commercial market and demand for bush meat, particularly in urban areas.

To know more

[IUCN Red List Gorilla Gorilla](#)





THE CHIMPANZEE...

Chimpanzee is a primate, anthropoid living in the wild exclusively in Africa, belonging to the genus Pan (like the Bonobos) and belonging to the species Troglodytes. He is genetically the animal the closest to man and lives mainly in forest, tropical moist or dry, and sometimes ventures into savannah. Its diet is omnivorous, consisting of fruits, leaves, flowers, bark, sap, nuts, insects and occasionally birds and small mammals.

The chimpanzee lives in community of several tens of individuals whose members move from group to group, in search of food and social contacts. The society is

patriarchal, the only dominant male reigning over the community with a strict hierarchy established but nevertheless subject to frequent changes according to the "political" alliances between males. Chimpanzees living in the wild are subject to various threats such as destruction of ecosystems, poaching for their meat, contamination of diseases, catching often by killing adults to retrieve small for sale as pets.

To know more

[IUCN Red List: Pan troglodytes](#)

I BELIEVE IN CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT, PEDAGOGY AND PROXIMITY ACTION, TO DEVELOP THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN THE CONSERVATION OF THE BIODIVERSITY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR TERRITORIES IN CENTRAL AFRICA (GUILLAUME TATI - ESI CONGO)

ENDANGERED SPECIES INTERNATIONAL - ESI CONGO (CONGO BRAZZAVILLE)



Established in 2009, ESI CONGO is developing a project to conserve gorillas and chimpanzees in the Mayombe Forest by working with local communities to stop poaching of these primates and reduce hunting pressure on biodiversity in the Kakamoeka district.

The vision of the NGO is a Congolese society conscious of the richness of its environmental heritage, who takes care of it and valorises it to improve its conditions. Its mission is to contribute to the preservation of biodiversity with populations by encouraging their local initiatives, building their capacities so that they can live in harmony with their environment.

The project is developing in south-eastern Congo, 150 km from Pointe-Noire, in an area between the Conkouati National Park, the Dimonika Reserve and the chimpanzee sanctuary of Tchimpounga. It covers an area of 123 km² including the villages of Loaka, Magne, Sexo, Ndinga, Mfilou and Boungolo.

ESI CONGO's main areas of focus are scientific research, conservation education, support for alternative economic activities, the strengthening of the local natural resource use and biodiversity management system.

In terms of results, it is possible to talk about an inventory of gorillas, the monitoring of habitats by camera traps, the creation of a database about the sale of bushmeat, support for the creation of a cooperative and to the development of alternative economic activities. A community fund fed by the benefits of ecotourism and a local consultation committee to improve the participation and involvement of communities in the rational management of natural resources have also been created.

ESI CONGO intends to continue this project to solve the conservation issues concerning great apes of this zone while allowing local communities to benefit better from the conservation of the biodiversity of their territory.

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ASSOCIATION PROTECTRICE DES GRANDS SINGES DE LA MOUKALABA -PROGRAM (GABON)

PROGRAM was created in 2004 by the late General Athanase N'ZAMBA and Professor Pierre André KOMBILA KOUNBA and officially recognized in 2007.

The NGO works in the Moukalaba-Doudou National Park (PNMD), in the South-East of Gabon, within the Gamba Protected Areas (CAPG) complex, specifically on the 3 sites of Doussala, Douguetsi and Mbani.

Its mission is to preserve the biodiversity of the PNMD and its periphery and to integrate the local populations in the process of conservation and valorisation of their heritage through four objectives that are to protect the threatened species of the region, especially the great apes of Doussala, to develop community ecotourism and to diversify economic activities in order to fight poverty, rural exodus and reduce anthropogenic pressure on biodiversity.

To achieve these objectives, the areas of activity are the establishment of an eco-tourism product focused on habituated gorillas of the PNMD, tourism promotion, sensitization of local populations, environmental education and development support to community projects.

PROGRAM has two offices, one in Tchibanga, where the technical department responsible for carrying out project activities is located, and one in Libreville, where the decision-making body responsible for defining the projects and strategy of the NGO is located. It employs 18 staff including an Executive Director acting under the authority of the Board Chair and includes a tourism department and a conservation department.

Since 2014, PROGRAM has initiated a program of habituation of a gorilla group for tourism. Two years later, very positive results were recorded, such as the identification of a second group, the construction of the habituation camp and the increase in numbers of contact days.

PROGRAM launched ecotourism in PNMD in 2010 and saw the number of tourists increase from 43 to more than 150 tourists per year. 4 tour operators work with the NGO and a team of 6 people led by a tourism coordinator manages this activity on the ground.



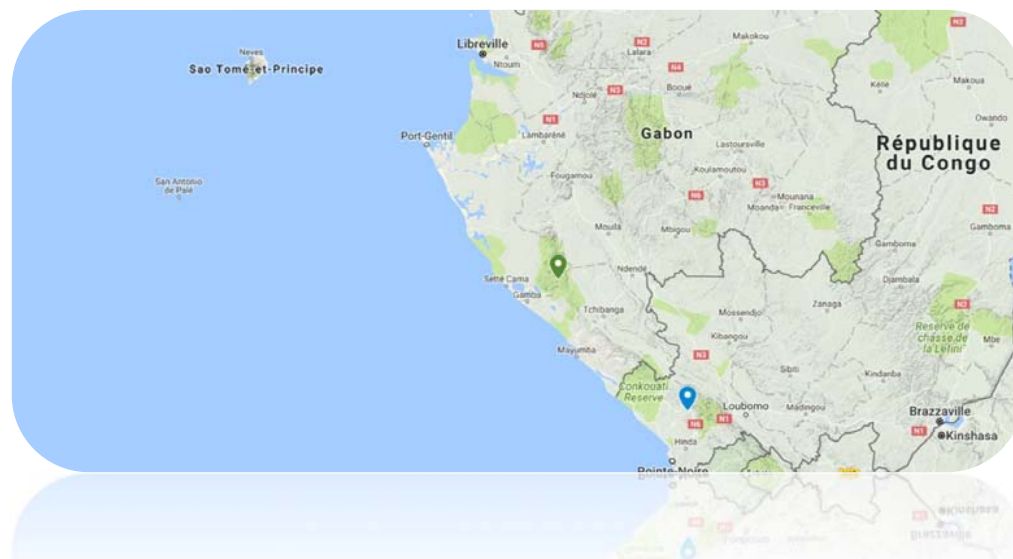
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... JEAN CHRISTOPHE BOKIKA - MBOU MON TOUR EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT OF MMT...



Jean-Christophe, the area of Bolobo, where Mbou Mon Tour (MMT) intervenes for several years now, shelters a species of great ape emblematic of Central Africa and particularly threatened. Can you tell us a bit more about that? What are the characteristics of the Bolobo region ?

The Bolobo region is located north of the mouth of the Kasai River, 300 km north of Kinshasa and is home to bonobos, a species endemic to the DRC and endangered on the IUCN Red List. By the way, the bonobo derives its name from the deformation of "Bolobo", the locality from which the first specimen was sent abroad. In terms of conservation, our bonobos are "exceptional" because they live in an area where they were long believed to be extinct. Moreover, from a scientific point of view, they live in a habitat considered atypical, our zone being a mosaic of forest-savannah where the bonobos frequent the two ecosystems.

Tell us a word about MMT, the association of which you are president, the activities carried out in the field to protect the bonobos of Bolobo...

MMT was born during a meeting held in April 1997 in Nkala, my native village, following an observation of scarcity of natural resources made by university cadres and villagers. From the beginning, the association has set itself the objectives of protecting the environment, promoting environmental education and developing alternative economic activities.

Thanks to the contributions of our members, we have set up an agro pastoral farm that also hosts our headquarters. Since 2001, we have been active in the protection of bonobos, raising awareness on the basis of customary but also national and international laws. We have thus revalorized the traditional taboo Téké which considers the bonobo as a human whose hunting is strictly forbidden. As a result, six villages in our region decided to devote a portion of their forest to the protection of bonobos and monkeys, and we now have two monkey monitoring sites, six sites for bonobos, three of which are intended for bonobos to the habituation in order to develop ecotourism.

Working with local communities living in the bonobo habitat area is particularly important in the approach developed by MMT. What is your vision of conservation? How do you work with local communities to protect Bolobo's bonobos?

Our project is original because it was initiated by the local populations themselves where a large part of the conservation initiatives carried out in the DRC are first and foremost the work of the State or international organizations, populations having for long been kept away from the Protected Areas, some having even suffered humiliations by being displaced from their land without any compensation. Local communities thus felt that the State was sacrificing them to the benefit of animals. Our approach is to find a fair and delicate balance between human and animal interests, a sort of peaceful coexistence pact between the two species. To do this, local populations have, through participatory mapping, defined areas reserved for the conservation of bonobos and those reserved for human activities. In the past, such work was carried out in an air-conditioned office of Kinshasa and it was imposed on the villagers, this is all the difference.

What are your perspectives on the ground? What actions will be taken and what are your priorities for the months to come?

Concerning the allocation of our forest concessions, the files of 6 customary communities are already completed and submitted to the Governor of Mai-Ndombe; but several other neighbouring village communities have expressed their willingness to join the process of establishing community forests.

Our bonobos and monkeys study and monitoring sites regularly host researchers and students from all over the world and it is now possible to observe bonobos in the wild for a significant period of time. The proximity of our region with Kinshasa and Brazzaville is an important asset in scientific research and development of tourism and a project is under discussion with a French tour operator to promote ecotourism. It should also be noted that at the beginning of 2016, we organized a first pilot ecotourism expedition and a French television station came to shoot a documentary.

In addition, we are continuing our projects to rehabilitate basic and livestock infrastructures. Since last September, we have also welcomed an international volunteer who helps us to define a global program on sustainable agriculture for the region. On the other hand, MMT is working on its strategic document, with the support of WELL GROUNDED and IUCN and continues to carry out its traditional activities of habituation, monitoring and sensitization of communities.

As an organization of Congolese civil society, what major difficulties do you face at the present time in order to complete your mandate? What do you think is lacking in order that actors such as MMT can fully play their role and achieve greater impacts?

Like most Congolese civil society organizations, the main difficulties of MMT are mainly related to a lack of resources and a lack of qualified personnel. In addition, there is a lack of communication because our conservation actions are not sufficiently known from the general public and therefore do not have the support they need. Participation in major international conferences requires, for example, important means which we often lack. We hope that the A-GSAC will also make a difference. On the other hand, collaboration with some of our partners sometimes causes problems on the ground, either because of incompetence or sometimes because of dishonesty. We were confronted with such a situation during our work on the creation of community forests, one of which once again carried out the activities already successfully carried out by MMT in order to control the process at all costs. Finally, we need clearer and stronger support from the Congolese government. We appeal to the Governor of the Province of Mai-Ndombe in order that the decrees we are impatiently awaiting for be finally signed so that we can definitively operationalize the process of community forestry that we have initiated several years now.



From left to right, up to down : Wells MTO WA SOKYE (MMT), Aimé Manfred EPANDA (TF-RD), Guillaume TATI (ESI CONGO), Louis NKEMBI (ERUDEP), Thomas BACHA (IUCN), John BOLOLA (GACEBB), Lionel NWAHI (TF-RD)

The A-GSAC is an initiative of six CSOs from four Central African countries, supported by the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM) Small Scale Initiatives Program (PPI), a program implemented by IUCN.-PACO and IUCN-French Committee.

It was created in April 2016 in Nkala (DRC), at the headquarters of the Congolese NGO Mbou Mon Tour and then formalized in Limbe (Cameroon) in October 2016, at the first General Assembly constituting the network which made it a legal Cameroonian association .

Its mission is to strengthen the contribution of Central African NGOs to the conservation of great apes and their habitats by i) building the capacity of the network members, ii) enhancing the work and results of these activities, iii) mobilizing funds for them and (iv) promoting good governance within the network.

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Illustrations: O.BRIKAS, Axone International

Photos: T.BACHA (page 1 et 2), J. BOLOLA (page 2), A.HUGUET (Page 9)