

Final Report

Developing a Strategy for Conservation and Development in the Lokutu Region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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CONSERVATION
INTERNATIONAL



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Introduction

Conservation International and its partners - the South Eastern Consortium for International Development (SECID) and the Bonobo Conservation Initiative (BCI) - have achieved a successful conclusion of this project, aimed at facilitating the development of participatory strategies for conservation and development in Lokutu, a region adjacent to the Maringa Wamba Lopori Landscape in the central Democratic Republic of Congo. This region includes two closely related but distinct areas: The epicenter of the region is Lokutu proper, a palm oil plantation currently owned by Plantations et Huileries du Congo (PHC), a subsidiary of the Unilever Group. This area has several villages, is connected with the rest of the country via the Congo River, and still has a relatively important, if crumbling infrastructure. The southern part of the region, Lonua, is more sparsely populated and forms one of the most important forest blocks remaining in the globally important Maringa-Lopori-Wamba Landscape.

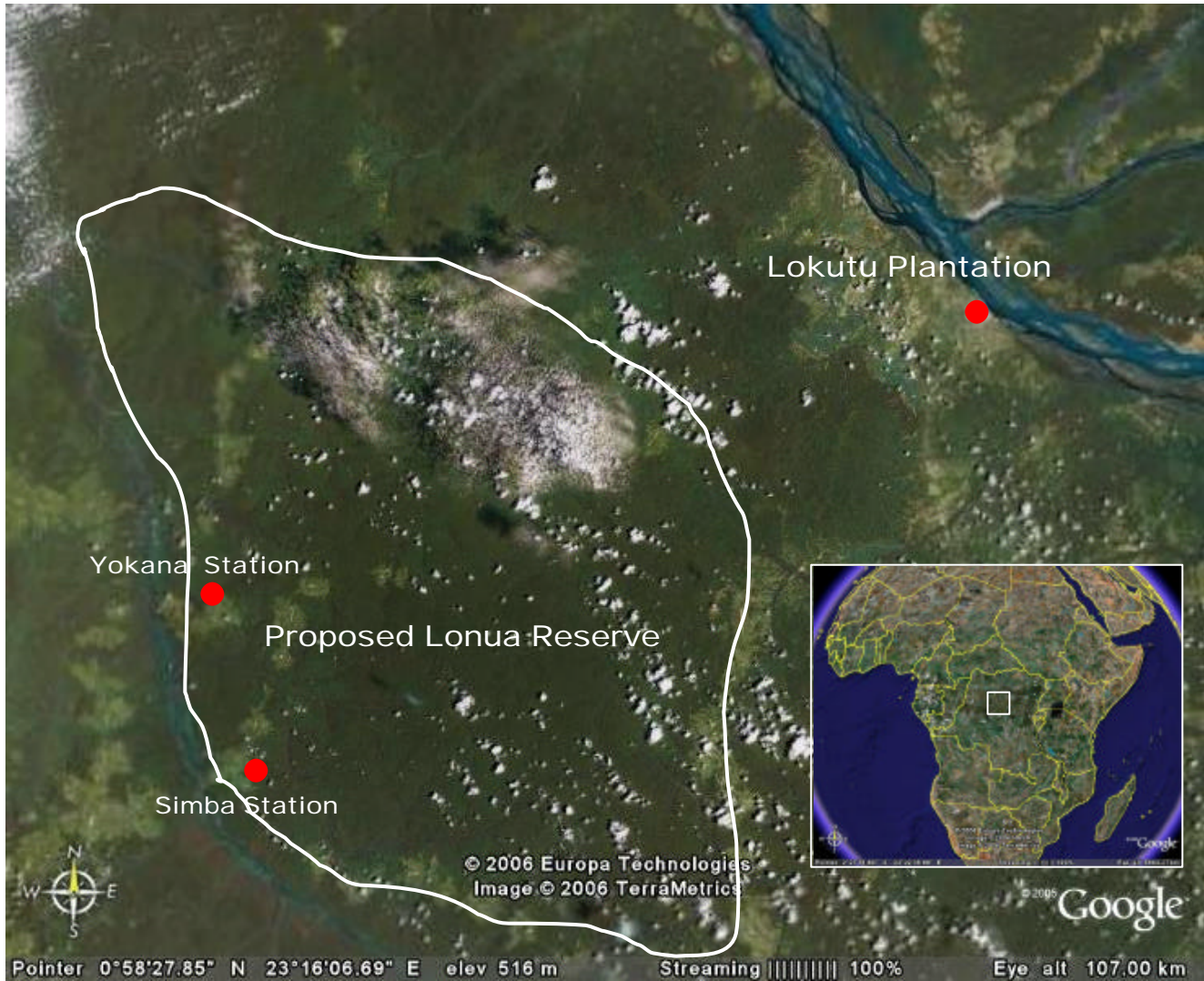
Uncontrolled anthropogenic pressure from Lokutu is the greatest threat to a proposed Lonua community-based natural reserve. The recent decision of Unilever to divest from this property poses a risk of increasing these threats, because the jobs and social services such as health and education provided by the plantation are an important anchor for its growing population. If the agro-industrial complex at Lokutu ceases to operate, it is likely this jobless population will increase its dependence on forest resources, increase hunting and increase forest fragmentation while clearing subsistence agriculture plots. This process has negative outcomes for both biodiversity and human welfare. CI proposed to work with Unilever and other local and international organizations to:

- Identify biodiversity conservation priorities for the region;
- Estimate the potential socioeconomic impact of Unilever's divestment and related threats to biodiversity; and
- Determine how conservation goals may be achieved and socioeconomic conditions maintained or improved under different scenarios of Unilever divestment.

As proposed, CI and its partners designed a strategic planning process, engaged stakeholders to encourage their participation, coordinated the gathering of relevant biological and socioeconomic data and facilitated a discussion of the findings. This process produced strategic documents to guide development and conservation activities in the Lokutu region, integrated and closely coordinated with USAID-CARPE investments in the Maringa-Lopori-Wamba Landscape. PHC has incorporated this document into its divestment planning.

This project also included a provision to formulate and implement two pilot projects to provide local populations with immediate results from the planning, encourage involvement of local and external actors and spark a process providing lasting benefits beyond its implementation period. This has been extremely successful.

Two pilot projects were formulated and successfully completed to the benefit of local populations. The implementing partners, SECID and BCI have established close working relationships with local stakeholders including PHC, the Lonua Bonobo Reserve Association (LBRA) as well as local authorities, have trained almost 500 locals in improved agriculture and biodiversity surveys, and have established basic infrastructure for development and conservation projects, including over 20 rapid multiplication cassava fields and two equipped conservation/development stations in the hinterland. These pilot projects have now become permanent projects funded by SECID and BCI through their own fundraising.



The Lokutu Region, including Lokutu Plantation and the proposed Lonua Reserve.

Background

In September 2002, at the invitation of USAID-Kinshasa, CI conducted an exploratory mission to assess the environmental and socioeconomic consequences caused by the decision by Unilever, a well-known multinational corporation, to pull out of the country, having revised their business strategy to divest from raw materials production.

Among Unilever’s assets in DRC are four concessions totaling 126,000 ha, 47,000 ha planted with tree crops (cocoa, coffee and oil palm) and 79,000 ha described as “unexploited forest”. These plantations employed 7000 people and maintained a substantial infrastructure, including social services such as health care and schools. The future of the industry, the local economy and the landscape after Unilever’s divestment is uncertain. Failure of the industry-based economy is at risk, threatening both a collapse of local livelihoods and increased pressure on the forested landscape in the form of subsistence agriculture, logging and hunting.

The conclusions and recommendations emanated from CI's mission were:

- The area within the concessions has limited conservation importance, as it is composed mainly by monocultures and fragmented forest. Three of the concessions fall outside conservation priority areas and CI decided not to intervene there. However, the Lokutu plantation (63,000 ha; 10,000 ha planted with oil palm) is closely linked to the Maringa-Wamba-Lopori landscape, one of the 11 priority landscapes of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. Its close linkage with a globally important biodiversity area was the reason CI decided to propose this project.
- Unilever's decision to leave DRC may have significant and unpredictable economic, social and ecological impacts in this landscape. It would be socially and ecologically prudent for Unilever to take into consideration these potential effects and ensure mitigation measures are taken before leaving.
- CI is in a position to help identify activities that mitigate these impacts. The purpose of further work in the area was to identify appropriate biodiversity conservation strategies for the landscape, socioeconomic options for the population of Lokutu and business strategies for the plantations to mitigate potentially devastating effects of Unilever's divestment.
- CI's role was to gather the information necessary to understand the potential socioeconomic and environmental implications of the Unilever pullout, and to solicit constructive engagement with Unilever, civil society and government institutions to develop alternative strategies for stabilizing the local economy and ensuring conservation of the forest landscape.

Project objectives and Results

The project document approved in 2003 and extended two times in 2004 and 2005 proposed 1) a process of information gathering, and consultative planning to develop a conservation and development strategy for the area and 2) the development of two pilot projects to identify suitable implementing partners, test the logistical feasibility of work in this remote area, as well as catalyze further partnerships that would carry into the future the implementation of the strategy. These are the Long-Term Goals to which this project contributes:

- **Conservation:** Identify biodiversity conservation targets for the area and define and implement appropriate conservation plans through a participatory process engaging local and international organizations and local communities.
- **Socioeconomic development:** Identify a socioeconomic model that promotes economic development and conservation in the region and ensures continued access to health and education services for local populations.

We have successfully achieved both expected Project Outcomes:

1) Design a local-level strategy for conservation and development coherent with the Maringa Wamba Lopori Landscape plan

- **Biodiversity evaluations:** CI and BCI conducted a systematic biological evaluation of Lokutu and its area of influence, extending from the Congo River 150 km to the south to the northeastern reaches

of the Maringa-Lopori-Wamba Landscape. These included habitat characterization, surveys on birds, primates and other mammals, insects, plants, amphibians, as well as the status of hunting and other anthropogenic threats using line transects, recces, plots and interviews. CI' Rapid Assessment Program (RAP) deployed a team of international experts in the Lokutu area, while BCI and its field implementation partner, local NGO Vie Sauvage, trained five local teams in biological survey methodologies. These studies helped the team reach the conclusion that while the area close to the plantation is of limited biodiversity value, there are still important populations of endangered species in the forest block to the south. The deterioration of economic conditions in Lokutu poses a significant pressure on these globally important forest in its area of influence.

- **Socioeconomic assessments:** CI, with SECID and BCI conducted socioeconomic assessments of Lokutu and its area of influence, finding serious negative impacts on local living conditions from the recent civil wars. The local populations subsist on extremely low incomes (\$135 to \$42 per annum, with the lower incomes reflecting distance to the river), a broken down infrastructure, and virtually no access to adequate health care and education. Local populations rely on subsistence agriculture, supplemented with some fishing, hunting and extraction of forest products. Due to limited access to even basic hand tools and the ravages of the cassava mosaic disease, yields are about a third of what other subsistence farmers get in other parts of the DRC. These are some of the poorest of the poor.
- **Business evaluation:** CI and SECID conducted a thorough analysis of the current situation in the Lokutu Plantation proper. The SECID team included an agro-economist/rural sociologist, an agronomist, and process engineers specializing in palm oil mills and an agribusiness management expert. The analysis included an agronomical evaluation of the crop profile, the state of the infrastructure, the current status of its administrative and management structures, as well as the state of the social service network supported by the company.

The team also prepared a feasibility analysis for the rehabilitation of the plantation and oil mill, as well as the feasibility of alternative strategies such as the use of intermediate technologies, soap, organic oil, biodiesel, producer cooperatives, smallholdings, and others. The results indicate that road infrastructure and mill equipment have deteriorated significantly, that production is very low and faces problems with fruit theft, but operational capacity still exists, the oil produced is of good quality and that the administrative structures and the labor force are still in place. The team conclusion was that the rehabilitation of the Lokutu plantation and mill is economically feasible.

- **Strategic planning:** With the information gathered, CI, SECID and BCI, in consultation with PHC and the local communities have prepared strategy documents for the Lokutu plantation and mill, as well as the proposed Lonua Bonobo Reserve which encompasses the southern section of the area. These strategies are complementary and synergistic and will produce improved human welfare in the region, as well as improved biodiversity conservation.

The Lokutu Plantation strategic document identifies several priority investments: purchase of road making equipment (graders, loader, and dump trucks) to perform much needed maintenance work for the plantation's road infrastructure, rehabilitation of the oil mill, and introduction of improved agronomic techniques. An investment of about \$1.8 million would be required. PHC is now in process of evaluating the strategy, and is expected to revise its divestment process. PHC and SECID have established a close collaborative partnership based on this strategic plan.

The Lonua Bonobo Reserve strategic document outlines activities to build local capacity, improve local livelihoods, zoning and gazetting the proposed reserve and establish mechanisms for long-term sustainability. CI, SECID and BCI as well as local partners - LBRA and Vie Sauvage - have established a strong collaborative partnership and have incorporated this strategy to project planning for CARPE and other funding sources.

2) Pilot Strategy implementation

As planned in the project proposal, CI facilitated the design and implementation of two pilot projects to provide local populations with immediate results from the planning process. Besides their direct benefit to local communities, the pilot projects have allowed implementing partners to establish the feasibility of working in the area and build successful collaboration with local groups. They have also encouraged our partners to commit to conduct follow-up activities and to allocate future funding from other sources to build upon the early success catalyzed by the pilot projects.

One of these projects, led by SECID, helped alleviate the extreme poverty of the local population through the transfer of technology and improved disease-resistant varieties of cassava, provide PHC with business options to complement the rehabilitation of the plantation and factory, and develop a business plan for the sustainable development of the Lonua community reserve. This project introduced improved disease-resistant cassava varieties, mobilized local communities to improve production, trained over 300 local farmers in rapid multiplication techniques for cassava and established 14 rapid multiplication plots as a nucleus for dissemination of the new varieties. This project also identified sound land and crop management techniques compatible with sustainable natural resource management, potential for other food products such as rice, maize, groundnuts, bananas and beans, as well as strategies to improve marketing channels for the region's agricultural products. SECID will continue this work using additional funding, including a grant from USAID's Food for Progress.

The other project, led by BCI and Vie Sauvage, provided support to the Lonua Bonobo Reserve Association (LBRA), a community-based organization working towards the establishment and formal official recognition of a community-managed reserve, including prime habitat for the endangered Bonobo. Activities completed include awareness raising and community consultation, support to the development of local organization, advice on legal and management issues, training of 40 local biodiversity trackers in field survey techniques. These teams are now equipped with motorbikes, pirogues and outboard motors. LBRA has now a basic management structure and has established two centers for community conservation at Yokana and Simba, the latter now equipped with a generator and solar panel array. BCI has also secured an important donation of computers and medical equipment that will be placed at the Simba Station to improve data management and a community health clinic benefiting local populations. The material is already in DRC and will be transferred to the site in the near future.

A local student is currently finishing his degree in Protected Area Management at the University for Conservation and Development at Kasugho (UCNDK-TCCB), a community college created and supported by CI with USAID-CARPE funding in eastern DRC. He will graduate in fall 2006 and will return to Lonua to play a leadership role at LBRA. BCI has also built on SECID's pilot program to extend the benefits of agricultural extension to more remote communities, involving 8 community-based organizations and training over 170 local farmers. These activities have been successfully integrated into the USAID/CARPE landscape work plan.

Final Project Status

Phase One	Progress as of end of project April 2006	Status
Discussions with Unilever held and completed	Discussions were held early in the project with Unilever to understand and establish expectations for the project. These were very fruitful and have resulted in a good working relationship with Unilever and its subsidiary Plantations et Huileries du Congo (PHC). The strategy document was prepared with participation of PHC executives and has been adopted internally.	COMPLETED
Local partners identified	CI, BCI and SECID have established close collaboration with local partners, including local NGO Vie Sauvage, the Lonua Bonobo Reserve Association and several other village-level associations	COMPLETED
Stakeholder Consultation	Engagement with community members, local NGO's and government institutions, along with continued engagement with PHC/Unilever	COMPLETED
Biological and Socio-economic evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report for strategy development: Bruce Crabb, SECID, November 2004. • Feasibility study for Lokutu plantation and oil mill: socioeconomic issues. Kankonde Mukadi, November 2004. • Feasibility study for Lokutu plantation and oil mill: agronomical issues. Celestin Katoto Gakinu, SECID, November 2004. • Feasibility study for Lokutu plantation and oil mill: Production. Valentin S. Lupala, SECID, November 2004. • Feasibility study for Lokutu plantation and oil mill: administrative and management issues. Jean Kasende Okendembi, SECID, November 2004. • Socioeconomic surveys in Lokutu and Lonua. Albert Lokasola, September 2005 • Rapid Biodiversity Assessment of the Lokutu region. Rapid Assessment Program, CI, June 2005. • Report on bonobo/biological surveys in Lonua. Albert Lokasola, Vie Sauvage/BCI, September 2005. 	COMPLETED
Strategy documents completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested development plan for Lokutu oil palm plantation. Bruce Crabb and Phillippe Dube. SECID, April 2006. • Strategic document for a Management Plan, Lonua Bonobo Reserve. BCI, april 2006. 	COMPLETED
Phase Two	Progress as of end of project April 2006	Status
Identify pilot projects	Two projects formulated, funded and implemented:	COMPLETED
Pilot Project implementation began	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-driven pilot activities for rural development in Lokutu and Lonua community reserve. SECID <p>Lonua biodiversity and community development project. BCI with Vie Sauvage/Lonua Bonobo Reserve Association.</p>	COMPLETED

Summary Timeline

Activities	2003	2004	2005	2006
Discussions with stakeholders				
Business evaluation				
Socioeconomic data collection				
Biodiversity data collection				
Pilot project implementation				
Strategy documents preparation				
Project wrap up and final reports				

Administrative and financial closing

As of April 30 2006, CI has spent \$492,007.19 from an obligated budget of \$512,055 leaving an interim balance of \$20,047.81. No residual non-expendable property over \$5,000.00 was acquired or needs to be disposed of.

At time of this report, July 31, 2006, we have received final financial reports and claims from our two sub-grantees SECID and BCI, and have made final payments. We have requested release of claim letters from both.

No final patent or copyright reports apply in this grant. No personnel phase out applies either. A release of claim letter for USAID will be issued by CI once our final voucher is submitted.

Appendices

Original Project

1. Preliminary visit report
2. Original project proposal
3. Original budget
4. Award

Reports to USAID

5. 1st report
6. Request for extension 2004: technical notes
7. Request for extension 2004: revised budget
8. Request for extension 2004: revised schedule and work plan
9. Request for Extension 2005: technical notes
10. Request for Extension 2005: Budget
11. Extension award

Field Assessment Reports

Business and Socioeconomic

12. Report for strategy development
 - Feasibility study for Lokutu plantation and oil mill: agronomical issues.
 - Feasibility study for Lokutu plantation and oil mill: Production.
 - Feasibility study for Lokutu plantation and oil mill: administrative and management issues.
 - Feasibility study for Lokutu plantation and oil mill: socioeconomic issues.
 - Socioeconomic surveys in Lokutu and Lonua. Albert Lokasola, September 2005

Biodiversity

13. Selected chapters of RAP report (publishing pending)

Strategy Documents

14. Suggested development plan for Lokutu oil palm plantation.
15. Strategic document for a Management Plan, Lonua Bonobo Reserve.

Pilot Projects

16. Project Proposal: Community-driven pilot activities for rural development in Lokutu and Lonua community reserve. SECID.
17. SECID project final report

18. Project Proposal: Lonua biodiversity and community development project. BCI with Vie Sauvage/Lonua Bonobo Reserve Association.
19. BCI progress report
20. BCI report on extension