News from African Protected Areas

Protected areas planning: case studies on preparation and implementation of management plans in a sample of protected areas, in Central and West Africa

This NAPA newsletter proposes a summary of the main results of a study that we conducted last year on the management plans of a sample of protected areas in West and Central Africa, in order to assess their strengths and weaknesses and compare their preparation process, in relationship with the guidelines elaborated by IUCN and WCPA (World Commission on Protected Areas). The whole study (95 pages), conducted by J.P. Dhuart and including the detailed case studies, will be posted on www.papaco.org *in February*

Introduction

In order to protect wildlife, and as an answer to the often uncontrolled uses of nature and the many-sided threats on natural resources, African States have developed a network of protected areas that is expected to conserve the biological diversity. From one country to another, national marine and terrestrial protected areas networks have been extended at different speeds and following very different objectives and shapes. In Central and West Africa, protected areas have very often become the last places for conservation of wildlife.

Very early, IUCN, for its part, has tried to support the development of national networks of protected areas and their management planning by developing a consensus among its members on the adoption of common objectives, and drafting technical frameworks. These have contributed to provide common references to harmoniously extend and manage protected areas networks. Today, this coherent approach facilitates a straight comparison of situations between countries as well as the coordinated implementation of international agreements such as the CBD (convention on biodiversity), the World Heritage Convention or the Ramsar Convention.

In a more technical context, IUCN, further to an analysis of the lessons learned from protected areas management at the international level, has made methodological recommendations to managers through a series ("BPG" or *Best Practice Guidelines*) of technical documents. The topics addressed in this series include a very wide range of management aspects such as marine protected areas, financing, transboundary collaboration, tourism development, local and indigenous communities, sacred sites, trainings and capacity building, etc.

In this « BPG » series, IUCN has published two particularly important documents, one on management planning (Thomas & Middleton 2011), and another one on management effectiveness evaluation (Hockings *and al.* 2008). Both can be downloaded in French and English at www.papaco.org and on the website of the WCPA. These quite theoretical reference frameworks

underline how managers should be rigorous in managing the numerous facets of management planning and how to assess protected areas management.

These references were meant to be pragmatic and successful on the

4. Identify and analyse constraints, opportunities and threats, prioritize the issues to be addressed;

5. Develop a long-term vision for the site and formulate objectives for its management, eventually formulate limits of acceptable changes;

6. Develop, evaluate and make management choices that will allow achieving the objectives, including the protected area zoning issue;

Therefore, the MPs either have an atypical structure specific to the protected area (PEN, URO), or a structure specific to the national institution (DRC, Côte d'Ivoire), or a structure drawn from the methodology used by the drafting team (BAR, MAN). When not imposed by the central administration, the MP structure is the most tangible expression of the influence the experts and the external partners can have on the PA main strategic document.

The document style: according to the people in charge of drafting the document, the style and the language may seem to be very different from one MP to another. This aspect is not important, provided that the content of the document makes it really useful to take decisions and achieve outcomes. This style can however be an obstacle to pragmatism when the document has an extremely scientific purpose (ex: TAI) or when it provides for thousands of details that can hide the most important aspects of management ((ex: BAR).

The link with bordering areas development plans: in spite of the fact that all the MPs refer to regional or local management plans regarding the bordering area, very few include in their action/operational plan some tangible links between the protected area strategic priorities and those of these plans. Some MPs mention the idea of having joint operational committees to coordinate approaches, and others propose that the protected area supports the priority management or development projects of the bordering area.

Development process: while some sites do not provide any information on this process, others give details on the development process of their management plan.

Centralized management vs delegated management: we notice that there are big differences between the management structures and the scope of the objectives and the expected results formulated in some protected areas' MPs managed by the state at centralized level, compared to MPs (GAR, VIR) managed by private organizations. It seems that the management autonomy from which the latter benefits, compared to the central administration, fosters confidence regarding actions feasibility and stimulates initiative and donors' confidence. As some of them are operated within an extremely centralized system that is organized in a hierarchy (TAI), they first consider their protected area function as a contribution to the national network and reserve an important role of supervision and arbitrage to their central administration. Others however, particularly the PAs under delegated management, are more or less managed like enterprises that have to achieve efficient outcomes, and meet empowerment and effectiveness criteria.

Communities' level of involvement in the drafting: according to the MPs, the development process reveals that local populations are involved at very diverse degrees. During this process, MPs refer to « information » (GAR), « cooperation » (MAN) or "consultation" (PEN) of bordering communities. In some cases, it is not always clear that communities' opinions have been taken into account in the MP formulation or if their involvement means that they have tacitly approved. Among the sites that provided the composition of their planning team, it is noticed that only KZB has included "a representative of traditional chiefs". The URO case is very atypical compared to all the other protected areas. This community reserve's MP has been developed for many years by a national NGO, in permanent collaboration with the traditional social structures of the concerned communities.

How detailed is the zoning: while the areas that have a specific assignment are relatively well detailed in most MPs, some sites (BAR, KZB) have published their MP but postponed the drafting of the zoning plan after the collection of the still lacking elements. Surprisingly, these management plans have been validated by the supervising authority despite the absence of a zoning plan.

Formulating objectives, outcomes and indicators: it is noted big differences of accuracy among MPs in the way specific objectives, expected outcomes and indicators are formulated. This aspect is very important since they are key elements for the quality of the monitoring and the evaluations. While some PAs have opted for a very clear formulation

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o It is to be noted the influence of international NGOs that often operate thanks to the funding of a wide range of national or multilateral agencies, and channel technical support from very diverse sources. This combination could be more beneficial if it was "channelled" by a unifying element, either a MP drafting framework imposed by the country or complying with a reference international methodology;

o According to the nature and affinities of the partner, the PA manager has access to different methodologies and references for drafting its MP;

Professional aspects

The study showed that all the reviewed MPs have been drafted thanks to the support of foreign experts. This is most probably due to the lack of technical capacities at the internal level. This is unquestionably a field that IUCN has identified as a high priority, which resulted in the setting up of diploma training courses (like the DU or the PA management master developed by PAPACO and the Senghor University). Many similar initiatives (some of which are currently being developed) should be created in Central and West Africa in order to enhance the existing training opportunities and quickly fill this professional gap.

Institutional aspects

Central administrations have different roles in MP drafting. A positive aspect is that in most countries, the obligation to produce a MP and make it validated is governed by the national policy and thus cannot be ignored. This relatively new development is the result of the combined influence of international conventions or agreements ratified by countries (CBD, Ramsar, World Heritage…) and of international partners' pressures…

This influence of central administrations may however be a constraint when the central administration is responsible for the PA coordination, supervision and evaluation without having the technical capacities for holding this position. Indeed, in some countries, it is not rare to note that, thanks to the successive technical support of projects in the field, the staff level of professional training is higher than at the central level. In this case, this may result in a situation of frustration, or even conflicts if the realities are not known by central staff, and the issues not understood.

4. Conclusions drawn from the study

The study has revealed that despite the diversity of the reviewed PAs, their MPs' content fortunately have big similarities. However, the comparison of these MPs with the practices recommended by IUCN in its MP drafting guidelines reveals more or less significant differences. Their analysis allows drawing conclusions on two fields applied to protected areas management: the issues related to MP drafting and those related to their implementation.

### *4.1 Issues related to management plans drafting*

Pre-planning phase

As part of the preparation of a management plan, it is crucial to designate a planning team, to determine the extent of the activities and the process to implement. These teams do not often include representatives of the PA central administration, regional or local authorities and/or bordering communities. The presence of representatives of partner NGOs in the team, but not of other local external stakeholders, may result in the rejection of the MP as an exogenous document which appropriation remains low except by the writers themselves.

Considering the tasks to be achieved and the need to have a multidisciplinary team, it is not surprising that the field teams judge that there is a lack of required technical capacities and call for their partner NGOs or external experts. The "weight" of this external support could be restricted by paying more attention to the technical expertise and professional norms that the central administration can provide.

Developing a vision, formulating objectives and making management choices

Most of the key elements of a PA management have been included in the reviewed MPs, but a couple of them did not include some of these elements. Also, it turned out that some planning teams had opted not to propose management choices or include actions without being sure they can achieve them. For example, some MPs do not provide for an optimal organizational chart for the protected area or do not include action plans. On the contrary, the guidelines foster the design of a MP according to the situation desired for the protected area and not to the funding available or other constraints.

Besides, some MPs have not included major elements such as the PA zoning because it was necessary to conduct more studies or to postpone the resolution of a problem of illegal settlement in the PA. These motivations are understandable, but the supervising authorities have to be encouraged to officially validate a MP only when it includes the most important management choices.
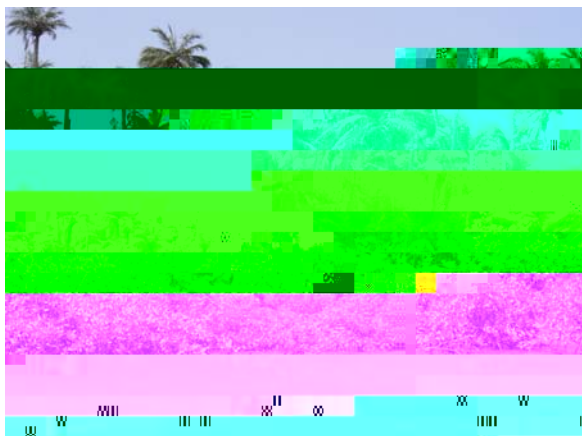
Integrating planning elements in a draft

Roles in the implementation

The stakeholders' roles and responsibilities are not generally well defined. When this is the case, only the PA staff's precise roles are given. Other stakeholders' roles are defined without making sure that they are able to fulfil them, and this is a risk that has to be taken into consideration. Even if it is recognized that it is vital to involve populations in the participatory drafting of MPs, their precise role in the implementation is rarely defined.

Evaluating the implementation:

The information available regarding the implementation of the reviewed MPs is still very disparate due to the recent production of the MPs and the scarcity of formal external evaluations. Most of the existing evaluations are internal. They are dealing with relatively short periods and have been done by the managers themselves (and sometimes by only one member of the management team) and tend to be self-satisfactory. From then on, it seems important that the METT or EoH evaluations be generalized and done systematically by groups of stakeholders (managers and partners) in order to have frequent and reliable results.

Where evaluations are available, this study also highlighted the fact that the lessons learned further to

a site evaluation are not known or shared enough. This is in favour of a concerted effort for sharing and mutual support regarding the results of the evaluations.

Measuring the MP impact:

When the PA is supported by a project, which is almost the case everywhere, it is often impossible to distinguish the MP implementation impacts from the project impact because the project is often the only real instrument of the plan implementation. Besides,