



INSPIRING PRACTICES
FOREST AND CLIMATE

CULTIVATING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY PROCESSES IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

August 2020



SNAPSHOT

What

A strategic approach to cultivating inclusion of women and Indigenous peoples in local governance and participatory processes in the Maï-Ndombe province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where these groups have been historically marginalized, to strengthen social capital and governance, improve land-use planning, tackle deforestation and degradation, and benefit people and the climate.

Who

- » Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs)
- » Local Development Committees (CLDs), which are comprised of community members and govern community land-use planning and natural resources management
- » National and local non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, including Coalition des Femmes Leaders pour l'Environnement et le Développement Durable (CFLEDD, a women's rights organization); Le Réseau des Populations Autochtones et Locales pour la Gestion Durable des Ecosystèmes Forestiers de la RDC (REPALEF, a network of IPLC organizations for sustainable forest management); Environnement pour Tous (EPT); Tombokolo; Action Massive Rurale (AMAR); DIALO; and the IKALATA and MUKILA technical schools of agriculture
- » World Wildlife Fund (WWF)
- » National and provincial ministries of the environment and sustainable development



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Where

Maï-Ndombe province, the Democratic Republic of the Congo

When

2016-ongoing

Project Team

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In Memoriam, pictured above

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SUMMARY

This Inspiring Practice describes how WWF and its partners worked with communities in the Mai-Ndombe province of the DRC to improve local governance through the participation of women and Indigenous groups in land-use planning, mapping, decision-making, and other activities essential to conserving the region's forests and wildlife, tackling deforestation and degradation while building sustainable livelihoods.

Through a gradual process of trust-building and culturally informed discussion, the Local Development Committees, or CLDs, governing community land-use planning and natural resources management have come to include these historically marginalized groups for the very first time. As a result, 300 CLDs throughout the province now have at least 30% female leadership and include Bantu and Indigenous Twa (also known as Batwa) peoples working together.



CONTEXT

Nestled in what is known as the Green Heart of Africa, the DRC contains more than 167 million hectares of forest cover—which includes approximately 10% of the planet’s tropical forests and about half of all remaining African forests.

It is one of the world’s most important biodiversity hot spots and home to more than 200 ethnic groups. But despite its dazzling natural and cultural riches, the DRC lives with the ravages of ongoing violence, political instability, corruption, food insecurity, and the legacy of colonial oppression. It also ranks as one of the poorest nations on Earth.

Spanning 12.3 million hectares northeast of the DRC’s capital of Kinshasa, the recently created province of Mai-Ndombe holds 9.8 million hectares of vital forest. About 1.8 million residents—a mix of the dominant Bantu population and Indigenous, traditionally forest-dwelling Twa people, who face intense discrimination and marginalization—live in this region, and most practice traditional lifestyles based on hunting, fishing, and collecting forest products. But a myriad of pressures threaten these lifestyles and the lands that support them.

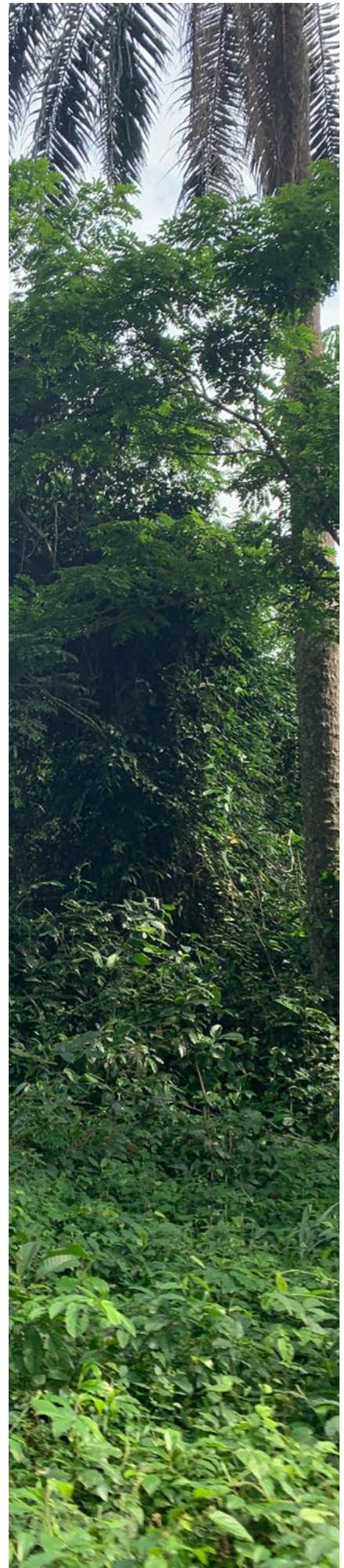
Intensified slash-and-burn agriculture has reduced the soil’s productivity, leaving villages with limited access to food. Together with increased charcoal production for local and regional markets, industrial and artisanal logging, and demand for fuel and timber in Kinshasa, these factors propel forest loss in Mai-Ndombe at rates that outpace those of the rest of the DRC.

In 2014, the DRC became the first African nation to receive approval of its Emissions Reductions Program Idea Note (ER-PIN), a proposal to implement a large-scale REDD+ program that would address

deforestation through a payment for ecosystem services model. The Mai-Ndombe province would serve as the program’s pilot region. Within this context, WWF partnered with local and national NGOs and community members to develop an approach that would enable local communities to plan and benefit from their own forest management and green development.

This model established a thorough process of FPIC (Free, Prior, and Informed Consent), after which each community would be able to set up a local participatory decision-making body, known as a CLD, to organize and advocate for community interests in relation to participatory mapping, natural resources management planning, and other key community forestry and development activities. Due to its successes, this model has been adopted by the government for use in other large REDD+ jurisdictional programs.

Gender equity and inclusion of Indigenous voices have been part of WWF’s work in the region from the beginning and are in line with WWF’s global social policies. In 2016, based on lessons learned from previous experiences; an in-depth analysis conducted in DRC’s priority landscapes; and the strategic plan that came from that analysis, WWF and its partners set out to put a stronger focus on inclusion of historically marginalized groups in Mai-Ndombe’s CLD leadership—specifically to support local CLDs in empowering women and Indigenous peoples to participate and lead.



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Direct stakeholders

Involved in project design, make decisions, and receive benefits

- Indigenous peoples and local communities
- Customary authorities and local community representatives that work within the CLDs
- Local primary and technical schools

Strategic stakeholders

Provide material, human, and other resources

- WWF
- Local and national NGOs, including CFLEDD, REPALF, EPT, Tombokolo, AMAR, and DIALO
- National and provincial administrative authorities
- Ministries of environment and sustainable development, rural development, and education
- REDD+ National Coordination (CN-REDD)
- Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI)
- Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation (Norad)

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EXPECTED CHANGES

- Help build capacities for women and Indigenous peoples in Mai-Ndombe to more fully participate in local governance and benefit from community processes and activities.
- Transfer relevant knowledge on best practices for engagement of marginalized communities from national NGO partners to local NGOs, local communities, and the next generation through work with local primary and technical schools.
- Achieve more representation of women and gender balance in CLD leadership in compliance with WWF-DRC's policy recommending that women comprise at least 30% of all decision-making bodies.
- Help achieve greater collaboration between the Bantu and Twa peoples within communities and in CLDs by highlighting the deep traditional knowledge of the Twa and the potential benefits of that knowledge for all people.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

2006: The DRC Constitution is approved in a referendum by the Congolese people; the constitution includes a call for gender parity in national institutions and all directive boards and governing bodies.

2009: The DRC formally engages in REDD+ with a presidential decree establishing its framework.

2010: The DRC becomes the first African country to receive approval from the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) of its REDD+ Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP), a framework document that sets out a clear plan, budget, and schedule for a country to achieve REDD+ readiness. With the participation and support of WWF, stakeholder consultations and meetings ensue to craft a specific vision for integrated green development in Mai-Ndombe.

2011: Community-level engagement and capacity building begin. National FPIC guidelines are completed and approved by CN-REDD.

2012: CFLEDD begins its work advocating for women's rights in Kinshasa. Within two years, the NGO receives legal recognition with support from women's and mixed-gender organizations in all DRC provinces.

2014 to 2015: The DRC's ER-PIN is accepted by FCPF and creation of a detailed model for green development in Mai-Ndombe begins. Over several meetings and workshops, stakeholders agree to the key principles of their model. WWF helps facilitate engagement and knowledge building related to the design process, which grows and deepens as more communities take part in FPIC workshops and technical training and as press coverage and other outreach efforts spread the word.

2015: The DRC Parliament passes a law outlining how gender parity will be implemented and enforced in accordance with the constitution.

2016: DRC receives approval of its Emissions Reduction Program Document (ERPD) from FCPF, representing the first example of jurisdictional REDD+ at scale and the

largest forest landscape conservation project ever in Africa.

2018: The DRC Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development formally embraces women's participation and establishes a group to develop a strategy for implementing gender parity in its work.

2018: Two forestry advisory boards—the National Advisory Group and the Provincial Advisory Group in Mai-Ndombe—are reactivated, enabling core decision-making about forest use policies and studies to be determined by a diversity of stakeholders, including NGOs like WWF and CLDs, instead of the national or provincial government alone.

2019: The Mai-Ndombe provincial government establishes an Indigenous Affairs Office, led by an Indigenous representative, intended to help guarantee the involvement of Indigenous peoples in all decisions and the safeguarding of their rights in all the programs, policies, and projects developed by the provincial government.



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ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Women are now participating in CLD leadership in unprecedented numbers**, improving the effectiveness of the CLDs in land-use planning while promoting sustainable livelihoods and conservation. All of the 300 CLDs established across the Maï-Ndombe province now contain at least 30% women, a significant step toward the parity required by national policy. This achievement goes beyond quota-filling. It required a process—led by WWF partner CFLEDD—of capacity building among each community’s men to help them see the potential benefits of women’s participation. It also necessitated the empowerment of its women—who have often internalized their marginality and exclusion—to feel they have worthwhile contributions to make and to become willing to use their voices, often for the first time in their lives. This represents a real shift in how these communities—which number in the hundreds and contain more than 16,000 people—perceive the value of women’s perspectives and leadership.
- **In all communities that include Indigenous peoples, the CLDs are now ethnically mixed, with the dominant Bantus working alongside the Indigenous Twa with respect for the rights of all.** Like other Indigenous groups, the Twa people face intense discrimination and marginalization in DRC’s Bantu-dominated society. In order to challenge this deep division and foster inclusion, WWF first approached the Bantu people in each village and shared how the Twa’s deep knowledge of the forest (as traditional hunter-gatherers) is an asset for the whole community and a potential benefit of working together. Once the Bantu community became open to Twa participation, WWF turned its capacity-building effort to the Twa people and sought to empower them to participate and share their knowledge. The

presence of Twa people in CLDs—fully participating in mapping, decision-making, and land-use planning in ethnically mixed communities—is an important step toward equity that also improves the long-term effectiveness of the CLDs and the outcomes for forests, people, and the climate.



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- **To make these gains in participation and representation, WWF and its partners took an already successful approach for working with communities and expanded it** to foster inclusion and social change as well. In this model, all decision-making and action stem from a

rigorous process of community consultation and FPIC. The community consultation begins with the traditional chief; once he consents, the community must consent as well. Once the community has consented, the people gather to learn about each step involved in establishing a CLD. The community must approve each step on this road map. WWF has now applied this stepwise approach to the inclusion of women and Indigenous peoples by approaching traditional authorities and other powerholders first and then engaging in multilateral capacity building so that all agree to move forward together. This way, no one is forced into change; instead, trust, communication, and openness grow organically from the process. As a result, communities see tangible transformation: The CLD of the village of Bobangi, for example, now counts a Bantu community member as its president, an Indigenous community member as its secretary, and a woman as its treasurer.

- **This work has strengthened two of WWF’s key NGO partners—REPALEF, the national network organization of Indigenous peoples, and CFLEDD, the largest national women’s organization.** It has also sown the seeds of greater change. There is opportunity for the improvement of Indigenous peoples’ livelihoods and rights under the new provincial government, which has established an Indigenous-led Indigenous Affairs Office to guarantee that Indigenous perspectives are represented and their rights improved. And there is opportunity for shared action to improve land tenure as REPALEF and CFLEDD are working together to draft a land tenure law that would guarantee national legal recognition of the land rights of women and Indigenous peoples.

- **This work has also planted new seeds in the next generation by bringing inclusion into primary and technical schools attended by students of different genders and ethnic groups.** Although WWF's engagement in schools has focused on providing

environmental education and opportunities to engage directly in forest conservation and reforestation, its inclusive, participatory approach and dedication to empowering women and Indigenous peoples has informed this work as well. This could in turn help shape how

youth will view their rights to and capacities for equal participation in the land-use decisions that will sustain their livelihoods and promote sustainable management and conservation of their natural resources.



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CHALLENGES

- Structural challenges, such as physical and political “disconnection” between the central and provincial governments, widespread poverty and food insecurity, and limited access to education, continue to constrain development in the DRC. They are also often seen as competing issues that need to be addressed individually and not part of a single strategy that also tackles deforestation and natural resource degradation. Lack of formal education and literacy, in particular, limit the community's participation in many of the activities essential to developing a new path forward. Free primary education was only established in 2019 and has not yet been implemented everywhere, and most families in rural areas cannot afford education expenses. WWF works to overcome these challenges through the training,

participatory, and capacity-building processes, but as a civil society conservation organization, it cannot resolve these challenges without larger-scale structural change that advances holistic approaches to tackling interconnected issues.

- Although WWF and REPALEF have successfully begun to shift preconceptions and build greater equity in the communities highlighted in this work, there is still a long way to go. The deeply entrenched discrimination against Indigenous or forest peoples in the DRC presents an ongoing challenge. With no recognition of Indigenous rights or land tenure, many have been displaced from their forest homes into camps adjacent to Bantu villages, where they can experience profound poverty and marginalization. To counter this legacy and foster the recognition and inclusion of the

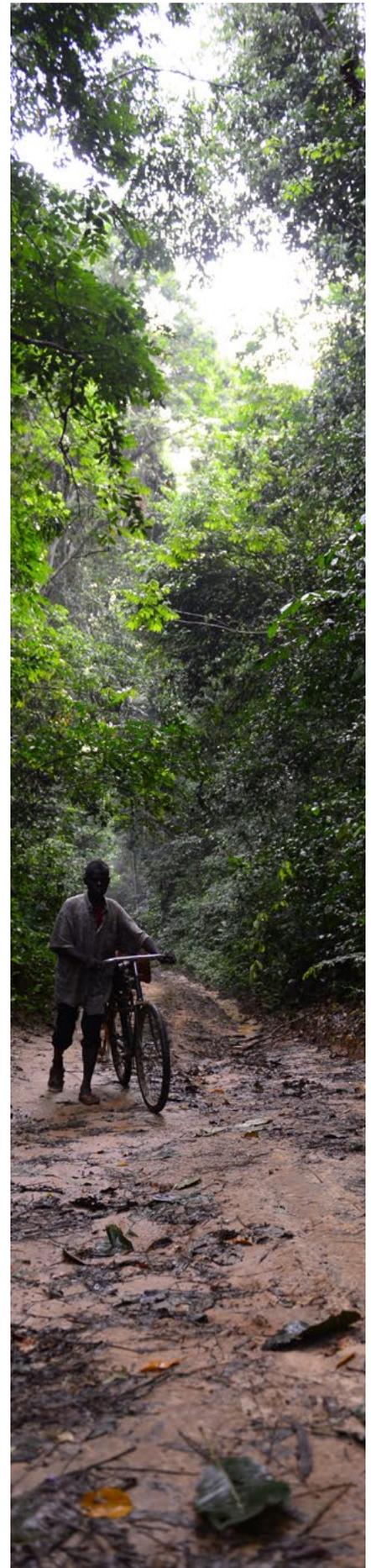
Twa people and other Indigenous groups demands a two-pronged approach: overcoming the discriminatory attitudes and actions of the Bantu and ensuring Indigenous peoples are aware of their right to participate and feel empowered to do so.

- Despite increased government support and early successes, shifting the ingrained power differential between men and women remains difficult. Neither formal nor customary laws recognize women's rights to access the land; women cannot inherit land from their parents or husbands. Traditional leaders remain resistant to the recognition of women's rights and only begin to consider opening participatory spaces to women when shown how working with them can benefit the rest of the family and the community.

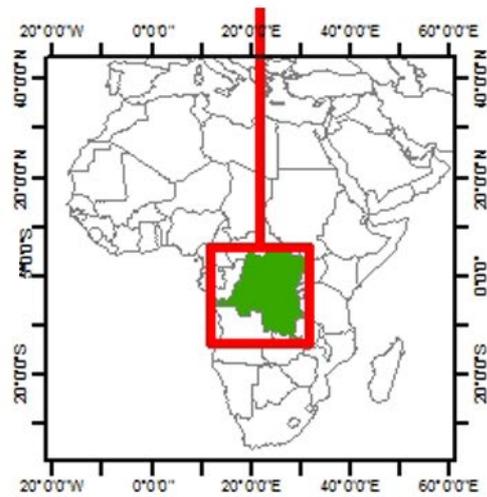
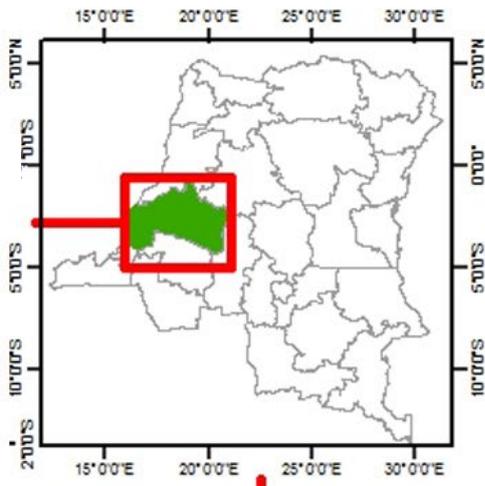
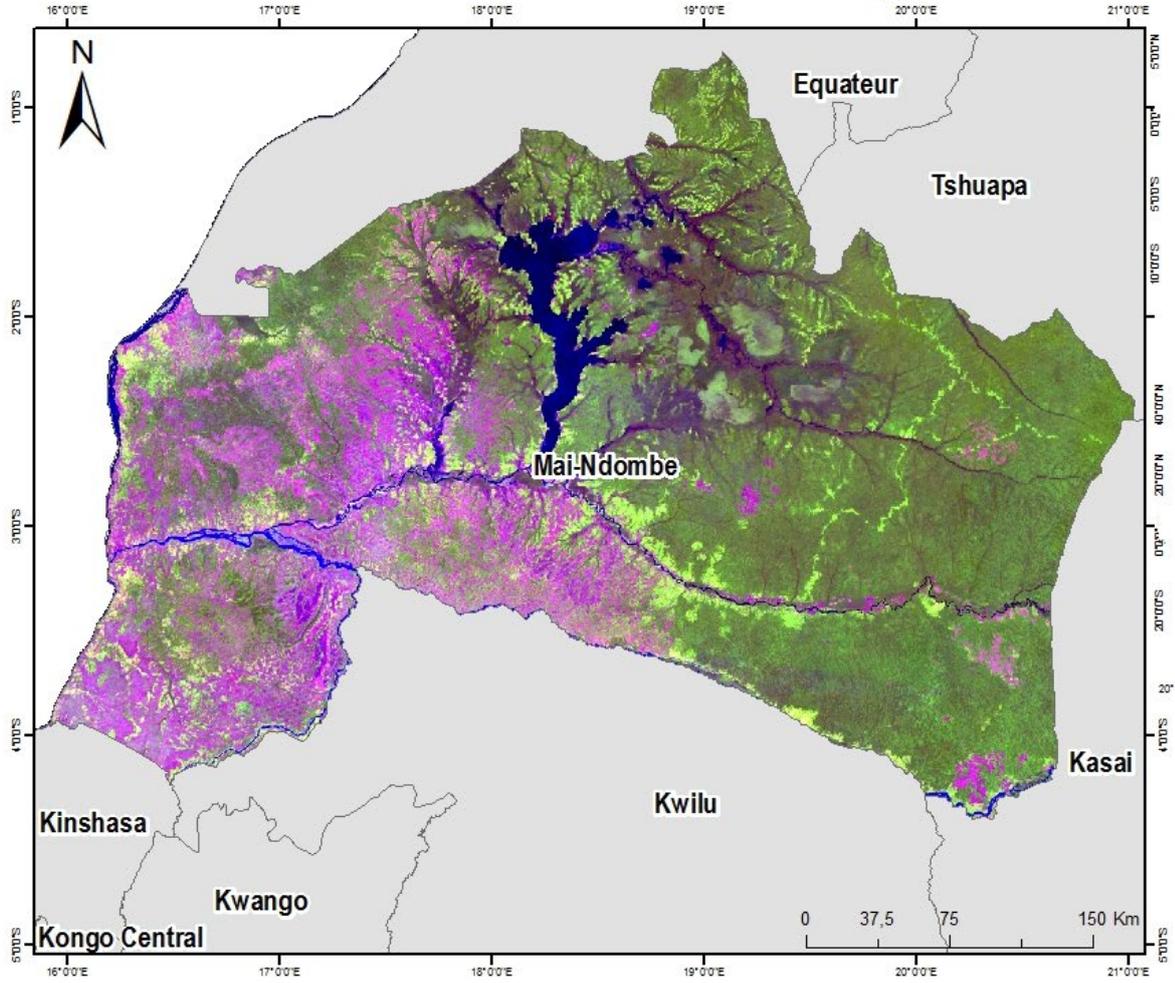
LESSONS LEARNED

- **Trust is the foundation for transformational work.** Some communities in the Mai-Ndombe province had never been visited by any organization prior to WWF's work in the region and distrusted WWF's intentions at the outset. In order to overcome that guardedness and build trust, it was essential to communicate openly, honestly, and transparently and to collaborate closely with partner NGOs familiar with local customs and languages. Through a willingness to work with others and through a thorough process of FPIC, WWF has been able to build communication and trust with the communities and their customary chiefs. That trust, nurtured over time, set the stage for this effort, enabling communities to begin to question deeply held preconceptions with more openness to change.
- **Establishing a good relationship with traditional authorities is key.** In each community, the customary chiefs decide whether to engage in the consultation process or not. Once they give permission for FPIC to start (and later, as members of the CLD), customary chiefs then tend to listen to and respect the decisions of the village. This openness results from taking time to build trust with these traditional authorities and acknowledging their role in the community, and it makes it possible to move forward with greater cohesion and ease. Their support helps to validate the process in the eyes of the community, and it empowers community members to explore new ways, even when those conflict with traditional ways. This is especially important in work addressing social justice and equity.

- **Profound change demands a holistic approach to capacity building.** As with its earlier work in Mai-Ndombe province, WWF began this process by engaging those who hold social and economic power—in this case, men and ethnic majorities. To foster greater inclusion of women, WWF and its NGO partners REPALF and CFLEDD approached men first, building their capacity to share leadership with women by emphasizing the benefits of their engagement for the whole community, thereby opening space for women's participation. To foster greater inclusion of the Twa people, WWF approached the Bantus first, again building their capacities and willingness to work with their Indigenous neighbors by emphasizing the potential benefits for all and creating the possibility of greater inclusion. But convincing the powerful to make space for the powerless was not enough by itself. Because discrimination and marginalization can be internalized, it was essential to also empower women and Indigenous peoples to be able to meaningfully participate and manifest their abilities to contribute and lead.
- **Inclusive and effective participation at the local level is necessary for the long-term success of the Mai-Ndombe ERPD.** Without strong governance and implementation capacities at the local level, national or provincial-level ambition and decisions struggle to become more than words on paper. Building and strengthening governance is crucial for changes that benefit people and the climate: increasing social equity, promoting sustainable development and livelihoods, tackling deforestation and degradation, and reducing emissions.



Mai -Ndombe Emission Reduction Program



February 2016, Fabrice NIKUNA



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OUR VISION

WWF’s Forest and Climate team works to ensure that the conservation of tropical forests as carbon stores is secured by green economic development that benefits people, the climate, and biodiversity in transformational ways.

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