Rapport D'activités annuel 2010

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1 Summary

The AALF project (Support for the Application of Wildlife Law) was proposed to the Ministry of Water and Forests by the NGO Brainforest (www.brain-forest.org) and Conservation Justice (www.conservation-justice.org) in October 2010.

An agreement was signed between the NGOs Conservation Justice and Brainforest in order to effectuate the replication and adaptation of the project model developed by LAGA (www.laga-enforcement.org), PALF and RALF, established in 2003, 2008, and 2009, respectively. These projects represent an innovative partnership between local authorities and NGOs, enabling particularly promising results with the support of a wide variety of external structures (USFWS, COMIFAC, United Nations, Lusaka Agreement Task Force, WCS, WWF, TAF, World Bank, diplomatic missions from the USA, UK, Netherlands, and European Union) as well as the respective governments and more specifically the ministries assigned to protect wildlife.

This report is the first annual report for the AALF project. The reporting covers the months from October to December, given that AALF effectively began its work in October 2010.

The month of October consisted of making contact with the national authorities: Ministry of Water and Forests as well as the National Agency for National Parks (ANPN); Ministry of Justice; Gendarmerie and Police; a special intervention force called the Contre-Ingérences; various NGOs active in Gabon; and a wide variety of international partners (diplomatic missions, AFD). Two investigators and two legal advisors were also selected and trained and have begun their work.

The month of November was marked by the reinforcement of the activities initiated in October and the execution of a first operation. The operation (November 26, 2010) led to the arrest of 13 wildlife criminals caught red-handed in various locations with ivory.

The month of December consisted principally of legal follow-up of these first concrete results. The first phase of investigations in Libreville and in country’s interior was completed (a relevant report has been issued). The AALF project was able to observe and follow-up on a 190kg ivory seizure with the Direction of Wildlife and Hunting. The seizure was made by the Gendarmerie in the Mitzic-Oyem zone in the Woleu-Ntem Province.

Relations with authorities, particularly with the Ministry of Water and Forests, continue to expand positively.
2 External Relations

Meetings

Numerous meetings have been held with:

1. The authorities of the Ministry of Water and Forests (MINEF), including the Minister of Water and Forests, the General Director, the Director of Wildlife and Hunting, the Director of Studies of the General Direction and several other representatives of the General Direction, the Director of Studies for the Minister, and the Legal Advisor to the Minister;
2. The judicial authorities, including the Prosecutor and his assistant prosecutors, the General Prosecutor for the Gabonese equivalent of the Supreme Court, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Justice, and various examining magistrates;
3. The authorities in charge of the ANPN (National Agency for National Parks), notably its Executive Secretary and Technical Director;
4. The Gendarmerie, notably the Commander and Chief of the National Gendarmerie and his Military Advisor, the Mobile Units Commander, and the Departmental Units Commander;
5. The General Director of the Contre-Ingérences and Military Security, as well as the Director of the Contre-Ingérences (special intervention force);
6. The Commander in Chief of the National Police and the National Director of Interpol;
7. Various NGOs, including: WCS (Wildlife Conservation Society), WWF (World Wildlife Fund), LAGA (Last Great Ape Organization), JGI (Jane Goodall Institute), TAF (The Aspinall Foundation)

The meetings with the authorities demonstrated the national interest and enthusiasm for the idea of such a project.

National Strategy for the Protection of Elephants

AALF participated in a workshop organized by the MINEF and WCS, titled « National Strategy for the Protection of Elephants. » Furthermore in a presentation given by WCS concerning the national strategy for the management of bushmeat trade in Gabon, AALF gave a presentation on illegal ivory traffic in Gabon. Such discussions allowed the aforementioned strategy to be more clearly defined. We hope that it will aid the MINEF who are energetically engaged in the planning of a national strategy in the fight against illegal traffic and poaching.
Two Gabonese investigators and one French investigator have completed investigations regarding ivory traffic in Libreville and the interior of the country. This work has integrated itself into the WCS project, financed by USFWS, whose objective is to specify the WCS conservation strategy for elephants in Gabon. The results have been analyzed and presented in a report.

Whether in Libreville or in the country’s interior, the illegal traffic of ivory is strikingly real. The illegal commerce of sculpted ivory is in decline, having been replaced by highly organized ivory trafficking networks. Many ex-sculptors have confirmed this tendency of conversion by their colleagues and have seen them graduating from ivory sculpture to raw ivory dealers selling at a higher level.

The criminal networks organizing this traffic and largely foreigners, but are generally supported or covered by Gabonese. Asians, often the most difficult to catch, are the principle organizers of ivory traffic.

A number of ivory trafficking routes have been discovered:
1. The route between Woleu-Ntem and Cameroon (and on to Nigeria)
2. A similar movement passing through Equatorial Guinea
3. Direct export from Libreville (and likely through other ports in southern Gabon)
4. Connections between Gabon and West Africa, in particular Cote d’Ivoire

These routes are controlled by the gradient of pricing for ivory in different zones. The prices (in CFA francs) are as follows:
- 15000-20000/kg in villages
- 35000-45000/kg in urban centers in the country’s interior
- 50000-60000/kg in Libreville
- At least 100000/kg in Nigeria
- Around 350000/kg in China
3 Operations

Following information obtained and confirmed, implicating ivory sculptors in the traffic of raw ivory, an operation targeting the crafts market was fixed for November 26, 2010. The arrest collected twelve sculptors and a 13th was arrested during a search conducted at the ivory workshop. In total, 105 kg of sculpted ivory was confiscated.

The collaboration between the Contre-Ingérences and the MINEF for the execution of this operation was ideal. The former demonstrated a high level of professionalism and the latter showed a strong determination to learn more about such sting operations.

It is important to mention that at least four large-scale operations have been effectuated in Gabon by its authorities between November and December:

1. In the Mitzic zone, by the Gendarmerie, where 190kg of ivory were confiscated and 2 suspects accused and transferred to prison;
2. In the Makokou area by the ANPN with the support of the Gendarmerie, with the confiscation of over 20 tusks and the imprisoning of the suspects;
3. At the Cameroon border, following an operation with the ANPN, the Gendarmerie, the Prosecutor of Makokou and WWF;
4. In the Milole area where poachers go to kill elephants in the CEB forestry concessions, poachers were arrested with their sponsor

The first of these four operations allowed the follow-up mission by the MINEF and AALF and paved the way for a number of meetings with regional authorities (Prosecutor and assistant prosecutors, Secretary General of the Governor, Provincial Inspector of the MINEF, Commander of the Section of Investigation of the Gendarmerie of Woleu-Ntem, Chief of the Wildlife Brigade of Oyem, WWF representative of West-Minkebe). It is important to note the strong involvement of judiciary authorities who kept these wildlife criminals incarcerated and covered their cases.
4 Legal Department

The principle activities brought forth by the Legal Department were:

1. The building and upholding of contacts with the Legal Authorities and the presentation of the AALF project
2. The contact building with the relevant Ministry of Water and Forests officials:
   Director of Wildlife and Hunting, Legal Advisor to the Minister, Section Head of Wildlife Management;
3. The follow-up work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a Head Office Agreement
4. The follow-up work resulting from the November 26th arrest
5. Support of MINEF in follow-up work (distribution of Legal Guide, meetings with judicial authorities, meeting with Legal Advisor to the Minister of Water and Forests);
6. Writing up the articles for the establishment of a local organization

The 13 wildlife criminals put in jail on December 1, 2010 remained in prison all of the month of December, despite attempts of corruption and traffic of influence coming from the Senegalese community in Gabon. A lawyer defending the interest of the Gabonese state was requested by the MINEF for the November 26th arrests.

The relevant “Ecomessages” have been transferred to Interpol via the national direction. The ETIS forms has also been filled out.

One of the Gabonese legal advisors recruited on an internship for AALF has also finished training in Cameroon where he was welcomed by LAGA in order to benefit from their well-established experience as an NGO working in this field. He returned to Libreville on December 21, 2010.

5 Média

A wide diversity of media organs saw the importance of the 26 November operation, especially after the MINEF organized a press conference when the wildlife criminals were transferred from the Contre-Ingérences to the Court. On a related note, the Minister of Water and Forests himself made a visit to the crafts market to educate the population, with the participation of various Gabonese media organs. We can only congratulate the ministry on this event especially given the participation of the Minister himself.

Numerous other press organs on the internet diffused the information. RTG-1, RTG-2, l’Union, Gabon Matin, RFI and Africa n°1 broadcasted the events. In total, at least 38 media pieces came out, of which four were in the written press, three on the radio, two on television and some 29 on the internet.
The launch of the AALF project has benefitted from the support of myriad partners and especially the willingness of the Gabonese authorities, especially the Ministry of Water and Forests. It is hoped that the project can be made official and become a priority project.

On a related note, the Court and the Ministry of Justice have shown significant interest with regard to the project. The 13 wildlife criminals transferred to Libreville’s court have been detained since their transfer at the time of publication.

At the moment, two legal advisors and two investigators are working with the project. Each one receives a specially adapted training, thanks to the support granted by the NGO LAGA, in Cameroon, where AALF personnel can be sent.

To attain sufficient efficacy, the project needs to operate as soon as possible in the interior of the country in collaboration with the Provincial Inspections of Water and Forests. The initiation of a national strategy for the fight against poaching and trafficking of wildlife products is a major step in the right direction. AALF hopes to efficiently support the authorities in this fashion and thus participate in this enormous task.

The activities of the AALF project were financed by a number of donors:

The German government via the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) of the United Nations; Prowildlife; WWF; and WCS for a total of 4,808,495 FCFA (7341 Euros) spent as elaborated below:
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