

GABON

It would seem particularly complicated to conduct a census in Gabon and the figures vary according to the source. The latest figures, from the 2010 census, suggest a total of 1,480,000 inhabitants.

The population comprises around 50 different ethnic groups with distinct cultures and languages, the main ones being the Fang (32%), the Mpongwè (15%), the Mbédé (14%), the Punu (12%), the Baréké or Batéké, the Bakota, the Obamba, etc.

Throughout Gabon, there are also hunter-gatherer-farmer communities (often known as Pygmies) made up of numerous ethnic groups (Baka, Babongo, Bakoya, Baghame, Barimba, Akoula, Akwoa, etc.) with different languages, cultures and areas of origin. The size of their population varies depending on the source but ranging from 7,000 to 20,000 individuals; however, there are no official figures for Gabon's indigenous population since the 2012 national census did not include this group. Pygmy communities are found both in towns and in forest areas. Their means of existence and their cultures are inextricably linked to the forest, which covers 85% of the country.

In 2005, Gabon agreed that its Indigenous Peoples' Development Plan (PDPA) should form part of the World Bank's loan agreement to the Forest and Environment Sector Programme (PSFE).¹ This was the first official recognition from the Gabonese government of the existence of indigenous peoples and its responsibility towards them. In 2007, Gabon voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.²

Community forests

The 2001 Forest Code (under review since 2005) comprises articles relating to the management of "community forests"³ although the implementing regulations for these articles have never been issued. However, the Gabonese govern-



ment still envisages establishing community forests within the context of pilot projects. Regional programmes to demarcate such forests have continued, particularly in the north-east of the country around the Minkébé National Park, where Nature Plus, a European NGO, is pursuing a five-year (2010 -2014) community forestry programme.

Local Management Consultative Committees for national parks

In 2002, during the Earth Summit in Johannesburg, President Omar Bongo announced the creation of 13 national parks. It was anticipated that each of these parks would have a local management consultative committee (CCGL). In 2013, three national parks in the south (Mayumba, Makoulaba, Louango) established

their CCGLs. The remaining 10 CCGLs will need to be created by the first quarter of 2014. This process begins by identifying the villages concerned, as they need to sign land management contracts. These are set out in Law 3/2207 as

Contracts signed between the management of a national park and the rural communities surrounding it, establishing how these communities will be involved in conserving the biological diversity of the park or its surrounding area with a view to encouraging economic benefits for them.

Villages are only affected if they have agricultural activities less than 2 km from the park boundary or hunting activities less than 5 km from the park boundary. Beyond 5 km they are no longer in the rights-of-use zone, unless fishing in the water courses.

Each CCGL includes representatives from the village, civil society, the administration and the private sector. The indigenous NGOs have set an objective of having at least one indigenous participant on every CCGL.

Development of agrifuel plantations

Palm oil and rubber plantations are multiplying in Gabon. In 2012, moreover, the government announced that it intended to make Gabon the number one producer of palm oil in Africa. The President's "Strategic Plan for Emerging Gabon" anticipates increased monocropping of palm oil and rubber in plantations in order to develop the agricultural exports sector. The government also wants to encourage both company plantations and "community plantations" run by the local population.

These plantations will be promoted in three regions: Mouila, Kango and, above all, Bitam / Minvoul. The Olam agricultural company has signed an agreement to develop what it claims will be the largest rubber plantation in the country, covering 28,000 hectares, and to build a processing plant at Bitam and Minvoul. The inhabitants of Bitam and Minvoul have criticised the project, fearing that it will give rise to land conflicts. They are opposed to the production of single species rather than the more traditional crops usually grown in the region. This criticism has resulted in the creation of local project monitoring committees and a commission that federates these committees, known as the "Collective of village populations affected by the Olam project in Woleu-Ntem". This has already given rise to

an open letter, a memorandum and a letter rejecting the results of an environmental impact assessment.

National Forum on the Conference on ecosystems of dense rainforests in Central Africa (CEFDHAC)

A workshop to revive the CEFDHAC-Gabon national forum and provide information on climate change was held in Libreville from 24 to 25 September 2013. The aim of this workshop was, among other things, to support the national forum in producing its basic texts and to inform the participants of the challenges of climate change and REDD+. It was attended by civil society members of the national forum, the administrations involved in the sustainable management of forest ecosystems and the development partners (IUCN, CARPE). During the workshop, a mapping of actors active in the area of climate change and REDD+ was conducted, as well as an assessment of the communication and capacity building needs identified in this area.

A global process of reviving CEFDHAC was commenced within the context of implementing projects in support of “civil society participation in the sustainable management of forest ecosystems through consultation platforms in rural areas, networks of actors, national and sub-regional CEFDHAC fora” and “promoting the inclusive participation and representation of stakeholder groups in the REDD+ discussions in the Congo Basin”. These initiatives are being implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Indigenous representation

Throughout 2013, the two organisations defending Pygmy culture and rights nationally: MINAPYGA, Indigenous Minorities and Pygmies of Gabon, and ADCP-PY, the Association for the Development of Pygmy Peoples’ Culture in Gabon, were active and implementing numerous projects. Both were involved in the work of the National Agency for National Parks (ANPN) to draft the National Parks Act, as well as in the work of revising the Forest Code. ○

Notes and references

- 1 See Dr. Kai Schmidt-Solteu: Programme Sectorial Forêts et Environment (PSFE), Plan de Développement des Peuples Autochtones. Final Report, July 2005.
- 2 For more information see African Union: *Report on the African Commission's Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities' research and information visit to the Republic of Gabon 2007*. ACHPR & IWGIA: 2010; "Gabon" in *The Indigenous World 2008*. IWGIA: 2009; and GITPA: *Mission Report - Information mission to Gabon from 9 to 20 October 2013*. Available at: <http://www.gitpa.org/Qui%20sont%20nous%20GITPA%20100/ACTUlettre%20GABON%20WEB.htm>.
- 3 According to the Gabonese Forest Code, community forest is "a portion of the rural forest domain allocated to a village community with a view to conducting activities or undertaking dynamic processes for a sustainable management of resources on the basis of a simplified management plan" (Article 156, sub-section 5).

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