

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CENTRAL AFRICA MIKE
SUB-REGIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE
Libreville, 26 – 27 August 2003**

INTRODUCTION

Gabon's capital city of Libreville was the venue from 26 to 27 August 2003, for the Sub-regional Steering Committee of the MIKE Programme for Central Africa. The seven countries involved in the Programme and present at the meeting included Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. The list of participants is in appendix 1.

The objective of the meeting consisted in assessing the state of progress of this Programme in Central Africa and items on the agenda included:

- A welcome address by Gabon's acting Director of Wildlife, Mr NSITOU MABIALA;
- A circumstance address by the MIKE Director for Africa and Asia, Mr NIGEL HUNTER
- A progress report on the MIKE Programme in Central Africa, by the Sub-regional Support Officer (SSO), Mr Sebastien LUHUNU;
- Discussions on the Progress report;
- The forthcoming financing of the MIKE Programme by the European Commission;
- The issue of sustainability of elephant populations surveys and the monitoring of law enforcement; and
- The election of a new chairperson of the Sub-regional Steering Committee for the two years ahead.

OPENING CEREMONY

In his welcome address, Gabon's Director in charge of the promotion of Timber Industries and Trade, sitting in for the Director of Wildlife and Hunting activities, unavoidably absent, recalled some achievements of the MIKE Programme within the Central Africa Region, and enumerated a number of related constraints including:

- The poor knowledge of the resource;
- Institutional inadequacies that stand as an obstacle to a better enforcement of our laws, and
- The lack or insufficiency of financial means to ensure the sustainability of conservation.

Taking the floor, the MIKE Director for Africa and Asia started his speech (see appendix 2) by recalling the major decisions taken during the first Steering Committee Meeting of MIKE for Central Africa, held in July 2001, in this same Port Gentil Hall of Hotel Novotel. Those decisions included:

- A consensus reached on priority sites in each country, in accordance with available funds from the European Commission;
- The possibility to identify supplementary sites if other funds became available;
- A consensus reached on a major objective consisting in the reinforcement of capacities of the Administrations and Departments involved in Central Africa;

- The reach to an understanding of two different dimensions of MIKE, which are the Law Enforcement Monitoring, and elephant populations surveys ; and
- The necessary harmonization of data collection forms in both forests and savannah sites, which was deemed practical.

He then congratulated all Central Africa states involved in the Programme for having appointed their respective MIKE national and sites Officers shortly after the Libreville meeting, stating that this step forward had permitted the MIKE Support Officer to initiate the training of these officers in law enforcement monitoring and later, in database management.

The MIKE Director went further to indicate that in case the funds expected from the European Commission were obtained, the training Programme would naturally be stepped up and diversified, notably in the domains of database use and analysis, and geographical information system. He equally talked about the two major achievements of the Nairobi meeting held in September 2002, namely :

- The adoption of the MIKE progress report presented at the 12th Conference of Parties of CITES ; and
- The adoption of the draft on the MIKE policy in regard to data collection policy, protocols and management.

As concerns the collection of data in the sites, a remark was made that several sites were behind, and amongst the reasons to this situation, was the transfer of staff trained by MIKE.

To this effect, Wildlife Directors of the Central Africa states were called upon to put all their influence on the relevant authorities of their various countries, to help avoid as much as possible, the inopportune transfer of MIKE trained Officers, given that such transfers also bear a negative impact on the quality of data collected, whereas CITES Party states all expect to be provided with reliable information.

He continued by indicating that the objective of the meeting that was about to start, was to examine the problems encountered in the sites during the data collection process, and to reflect on solutions to these problems, so as to be able to satisfactorily take part in the next Conference of Parties meeting scheduled to hold in Thailand.

The MIKE Director for Africa and Asia concluded his speech by restating that both the Nairobi-based MIKE Central Coordinating Unit and the Sub-regional Support Unit in Yaounde are Secretariats set up to assist the states in their effort to implement the Programme. The data being sought he said, is not meant to serve these secretariats. Rather, it is needed by the elephant range states, and for this reason, the role of members of the Sub-regional Steering Committee as regard the implementation of the MIKE Programme by the states concerned, is vital.

Deliberations of the Steering Committee meeting proper started at 10.00am with the constitution of the meeting's Bureau, which stood as follows:

Chairperson: Mr NSITOU MABIALA, Director in charge of the promotion of Timber Industries and Trade, and Representative of the Director of Wildlife and Hunting activities, unavoidably absent.

Rapporteurs: Messrs. Roger BOUSSOUGOU and Erice NYAMBI, respectively Gabon's MIKE national Officer, and Administrative and Finance Assistant at the Central Africa Sub-regional Support Unit.

PRESENTATION OF THE PROGRESS REPORT

After the meeting's Bureau had been set up, the MIKE Sub-regional Support Officer for Central Africa, Mr Sebastien LUHUNU took the floor to present the Programme's progress report from the start of the pilot phase onto date. Achievements of the current phase that were accounted for included:

- The appointment of MIKE Officers by the various Range States (march-April 2002);
- Training MIKE Officers in law enforcement monitoring during the month of May 2002;
- The beginning in June 2002, of data collection proper;
- Holding of a MIKE regional meeting in September 2002;
- Holding of a preparatory meeting to the 12th CITES Conference of Parties in October 2002;
- Participation at the 12th CITES Conference of Parties in November 2002;
- Basic computer training for MIKE Officers during the period running from January to March 2003.
- Training in techniques to carry out inventories of large mammals living in forests areas (February-March 2003) ;
- Supply of equipment to MIKE sites (May-June 2003);
- Training of MIKE Officers in database management during the period of June-July 2003; and
- Launching in May 2003, of preliminary inventories of elephants in forests sites.

Following this presentation Equatorial Guinea's General Manager for the Environment and MIKE National Officer for this country, Mr SANTIAGO ENGONGA took the floor to inquire about the criteria used for selecting the five (5) forest sites in which inventories were to be conducted.

Reacting to this concern, the MIKE SSO for Central Africa disclosed that a list of priority sites had initially been drawn up by the CITES Standing Committee. He added that consideration was subsequently given to the human resources available in each individual site. Other criteria used included the presence on the sites, of partner NGOs (WCS, WWF, ECOFAC) and the participation to the Somalomo training session, of inventories team leaders. The SSO then went further to reassure all the delegates at this meeting that inventories shall be conducted in all the MIKE sites.

Central African Republic's Director of Wildlife, Mr. STEVY OYELE on his part, asked for some clarifications on the appropriate way to transmit reports from the Site Officer onto the Programme's Central Coordinating Unit.

In response, the SSO provided an explanation stating that, hierarchy always ought be respected, given that reports transmitted by the Site Officer to the National Officer should bear the visa of the Conservator or officer assigned the responsibility of the Park or site. The

same applies to the National Officer's reports being sent to the SSO, because such reports must bear the visa of the Wildlife Director, who is also the country's head of the MIKE component.

After this first questions and answers session, the SSO proceeded with the presentation of reports of findings relating to Mike data collected in each individual site.

The first presentation focused on Cameroon's Boumba-Bek Site. The data presented called for a number of remarks. The Central Africa SSO stated that although the officer of this site had attended the Somalomo training session of May 2002, no single data form had been completed by him. And given this situation he said, he was compelled to contact the World Wide Fund for nature (WWF) which is responsible for the management of the site, and ask that the forms used on the field by this NGO be harmonized with those of the MIKE Programme. After what, the SSO sent some funds to the Boumba-Bek site officer to enable him duplicate these harmonized forms. Yet, despite all these efforts of the SSO, reports from this site were still awaited. The situation as presented, led the entire assembly into some questioning.

Cameroon's National Officer, Mr. Georges MOUNCHAROU who also represented the country's Director of Wildlife and Protected Areas, unavoidably absent, indicated that some data was available at the level of the WWF-South East Cameroon Project component, that was still awaited to be handed over to the Boumba-Bek Site Officer, whose residence is all the same located some 200 km away from his site. Besides, according to the National Officer, collaboration between local WWF staff and the Site Officer is actually not effective on the site.

This situation came to bring up the issue of lack of collaboration between sites officers and representatives of some NGOs working on the field.

Reacting on the issue, the MIKE Director called upon the representatives of national Administrations, to ask their respective Governments to device and promote reliable mechanisms to favour collaboration between sites officers and representatives of NGOs

The SSO for Central Africa on his part, specifically reiterated that the MIKE Programme is no NGO, but a tool used by our states to collect data. He added that it was important for partners on the field to be well aware of this totally distinct fact.

The Pictures presented on the state of production of reports of several sites reveal that some sites have produced quite poor reports while some others have produced none at all.

Given the magnitude of the problem, the Director of the MIKE Programme suggested that ways and means to alter this situation be sought, in order to help avoid all embarrassment in the forthcoming CITES Conference of Parties scheduled to hold in Thailand. He further made the proposal that the SSO and both the Director in charge of wildlife and the National officer of each country should seat together to identify reliable path solutions to all the problems earlier mentioned.

The second presentation focused on the Waza site in Cameroon.

According to the SSO, the situation here was somewhat identical to the one in Boumba-Bek, with the only difference that some two reports were at least recorded for the year 2002.

In reaction to this, the National Officer for Cameroon revealed the existence of some data accounting for the first semester of the year 2003, which only still had to be transmitted.

The MIKE Programme Director then took the floor to echo an allegation whereby the Waza Site Officer had, for fear of criticism, refrained from reporting some carcasses found on his site.

The National Officer disclosed in response to this, that a report had been written by the site officer and was available at the level of his Administration's hierarchy.

Chad's Director of Wildlife subsequently took the floor to say that a large herd of fleeing elephants had crossed the border to that country, and two amongst these elephants got killed there, and their tusks and trunks were taken away.

Next came the presentation of the Bangassou site in the Central African Republic (CAR). In the opinion of the SSO, the situation of this site was similar to that in the first two sites. The only difference worthy of mention here being that its Site Officer had not attended the first training session held in May 2002.

Taking the floor, the Director of Wildlife of the Central African Republic made a brief presentation of the geographical situation of his site, which he indicated, was experimenting a different conservation approach, since monitoring activities in the field are conducted by members of the rural communities who have constituted themselves into ecodevelopment management units.

He further reassured the entire assembly that after the June 2003 MIKE training session, a number of measures were taken for data collection activities to start in the month of September ahead, when the site officer returns from his annual leave.

The Director of Mike subsequently came up with a comment, saying that Bangassou was an important site enjoying the benefit of a special system of management by the local populations.

Concerning the Dzanga-Sangha site in the CAR, the SSO revealed that the conservator of this site had some data on WWF format. He further indicated that the said Conservator, who also was the Site Officer there, has not demonstrated some willingness to convert this data in MIKE Format. He then indicated that it was for this reason that the local authorities had appointed another Site Officer.

CAR's Director once again took the floor to come back on the issue concerning the lack of incentives for ecoguards.

Reacting to this, the SSO stated as a reminder, that the issue of incentives had been discussed a long time ago. For him, the task today consisted in continuing to sensitize all the parties on the fact that MIKE's mission is to provide assistance in collecting data on elephants, for use by the various States. This, he said, is an activity that is already being carried out in the sites, and Mike's concern is simply to improve on the process.

He went on to indicate that sustainability is Mike's favorite concern, and no long lasting incentive is possible, except the sustainability of financing is secured. In order to illustrate this, mention was made of some sites where all monitoring activities had ceased immediately after the partner NGOs stopped paying the related allowances.

The MIKE Director added that his Programme could, on the basis of reliable reports, intervene at Government level, so that budget allocations provided for conservation be increased by the states concerned.

The chairperson of the meeting came in at this juncture to say it was advisable that the findings of patrols reports served both the Administrations and Partners as aids in decisions to be taken by the states, rather than a personal property of the said partners.

As concerns the ODZALA site in Congo Brazzaville, the National Officer for this country, who also, was representing its Director of Wildlife and Protected Areas, unavoidably absent, indicated that a problem of collaboration existed between the ECOFAC Project and the country's Administration.

In actual fact, the staff assigned to collect data being under the tutelage of the ECOFAC Project, simply contributed towards the confiscation of the entire data by this Project. Another problem mentioned was the existence of the Ebola virus, which came to cause all the staff working in this site, to flee.

Still in Congo Brazzaville, the situation at the NOUBALE-NDOKI site was reported by the SSO, to be a particular one in that, the Site Officer, Mr. DOS SANTOS DOMINGO has personally been actively involved in the data collection process since the start of the Mike Programme.

However, given his numerous movements under the Sangha tri-national Protected area, he has been unable to compile Mike reports for the period running from January to April 2003. The National Officer further disclosed that the collection of data ended up being an individual task, that no other person is able to accomplish when the Site Officer happens to be absent. Moreover, some data has simply not been handed over to this Site Officer by patrolling staff.

Talking of the Lope site in Gabon, the SSO indicated that in his opinion, this site deserved to be congratulated on the grounds that the data collection process here has been continuous for two years now. The only problem encountered here is identical to that in NOUBALE-NDOKI, where only the site officer carries out this activity.

The SSO also assured the assembly that data in the MINKEBE site in Gabon was available. Gabon's National Officer on his part, indicated that the quality of data collected will have to be improved upon.

His colleague from Congo said he thought it was important for the Site Officer to have a residence within the site given that under contrary conditions, he will be unable to guarantee an immediate monitoring of the quality of reports compiled by patrolling staff.

Regarding the Monte Alen site in Equatorial Guinea, the SSO stated that only three reports were available during his visit to this site in October 2002. Data relating to the period running from November 2002 to July 2003 is still to be produced.

In order to make up for the lapse observed, the Head of the MIKE component for Equatorial Guinea envisages to appoint a new National Officer and Assistant to the Site Officer.

As for the Zakouma site in Chad, the SSO revealed to the entire assembly that data collection has been on since June 2002, although weather conditions sometimes contribute in making this process a difficult one during the raining season especially. Besides the country's National Officer, Mr Dolmia is away in France, where he is to defend his Doctorate Degree dissertation, and he has left none of the data behind, as these are also used for his personal research work..

Due to the late arrival at the meeting venue of Mrs Eulalie Bashige, Head of the DRC MIKE component, the presentations on the sites of Garamba, Ituri, Virunga, Kahuzi-Biega and Salonga could not be discussed.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION EXPECTED FINANCING

The MIKE Programme Director revealed to the entire Assembly that funds for the ongoing phase of the Programme were finished since April 2003. He further disclosed that the European Commission had accepted to extend the current phase of the Programme for one year, but with no additional funding. This measure he indicated, was an exceptional one to help wait for an expected 10 million Euros funding for the five years ahead. The funding expected would be made available upon reception by the Secretariat General of the ACP countries, which in the Central Africa sub-region include Cameroon (as the host country of MIKE's SSU Office), Congo Brazzaville (as the country of CEMAC's acting Chairperson and Gabon (as the native country of the current Secretary General of the ACPs). The process to fulfill this condition has already been initiated, and only its finalization is still pending.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE POPULATION SURVEYS

The Director of the MIKE Programme for Africa and Asia informed all participants at the meeting that inventories currently being conducted in several forest sites are carried out under a short-term Project. Given that it is important to see such inventories conducted for a two or three years duration period, and considering the high nature of the related cost, the MIKE Director suggested that participants take it upon themselves to reflect on the possibility to assign this task to sub-regional teams rather than to national ones. Such reflexion would as well focus on the coordination of these sub-regional teams and their long-term sponsoring. This concept of sustainability of inventories was seconded by Madam the Head of the MIKE/DRC component, who believed this would contribute towards an improved knowledge of the elephant populations within our sub-region.

ELECTION OF THE CHAIRPERSON

In compliance with the resolution taken during the first meeting of the Steering Committee held in July 2001 in Libreville, which had to do with the roving nature of the chairmanship after every two years, Chad was unanimously designated to chair the Committee for the next two years.

CLOSING OF DELIBERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Before closing up the deliberations of the meeting, the chairperson gave the floor to the Director of the MIKE Programme for Africa and Asia, who took this opportunity to thank all the participants and congratulated them for a job well done. *He then expressed the wish that some positive achievements for each site be presented at the next meeting of the Steering Committee.*

He further recommended that Wildlife Directors of the sub-region's states grant part of their authority to their National Officers so as to enable them also have some hold on the Site Officers. Besides, he required that these site Officers always compile their reports even when patrols have not been conducted.

The chairperson of the meeting in turn, expressed his appreciation for the participants regularity throughout the entire duration of the deliberations.

Appendix 1

List of participants

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