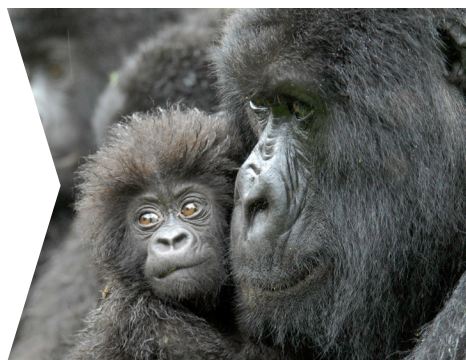
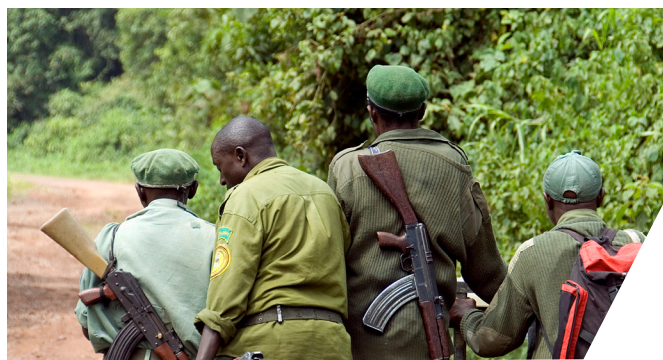


# CONFLICT PREVENTION & PEACEBUILDING IN THE MAIKO-TAYNA-KAHUZI-BIEGA LANDSCAPE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



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## INTRODUCTION

Located in central Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a vast country with over 100 million hectares (ha) of tropical rainforests and more than 70 million inhabitants representing as many as 250 ethnic groups. Despite its richness, the DRC has experienced almost constant conflict since gaining independence from Belgium in 1960. The recurrence of armed conflict, and subsequent insecurity and instability, has led to the deterioration of the quality of life and the further isolation of rural areas as well as intense environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity in the Congolese Rainforest, often referred to as the ‘second lung of the planet’ after the Amazon forest.

Conservation International (CI) began working in the eastern Maiko-Tayna-Kahuzi-Biega landscape in 2001, an area which comprises the Maiko and Kahuzi-Biega National Parks and several community-based reserves. Maiko National Park (MNP), an area the size of Connecticut in the United States, is one of the least known and most biodiverse national parks in the DRC. Unfortunately the park was established without the consent and consideration of local communities such as the Osso/Mandimba people who depend on forest resources for traditional medicines, food and bush meat. At the same time, a rebel group known as the Simba Mai Mai has lived in the park’s forest for decades, claiming possession of the park and its many resources which include minerals, shelter and se-

curity. The local communities accept the rebels’ presence because they provide “protective service” and allow the local community to have access to the park. However, the central government is committed to ending the illegal occupation of MNP, through negotiations or military means in the worst case scenario.

## THE PROCESS

In order to mitigate conflict between forest communities and park authorities, CI is coordinating across a range of local stakeholders such as women and indigenous peoples’ representatives, local and traditional leaders, hunters, miners, religious leaders, international conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and officials from the Ministry of Environment, Education, Security, Interior and Defense to facilitate the preparation of community developed land-use plans. These plans promote activities that strengthen the overall sustainable use and management of natural resources, which in turn promotes social benefits and creates economic opportunities for millions of people living in this region, especially those living in poverty. Considering the ongoing conflict, the land-use planning process has taken a flexible approach—plans are prepared for five to ten year periods, but are regularly reviewed and adjusted.

CI's engagement has gone far beyond planning around conservation challenges to include devising options to manage conflicts, such as those concerning mining and natural resource management. This includes the generation of employment opportunities for local people as well as the integration of former rebels into the management staff and ranger guard force of the park. Additionally, CI began implementing conservation agreements (CAs) with affected communities, a model which commits resource users to conservation actions in exchange for a negotiated benefit package defined through participatory processes to address local development needs and priorities. As a result of these agreements, communities' attitudes towards the conservation of the park have changed in light of improvements to community health care, education, and welfare. An open dialogue has also been created where each concerned party can raise issues and provide suggestions regarding what needs to be done to put an end to the conflict and encourage peace building in the region. Together, providing communities with economic opportunities, tangible incentives and a platform for open dialogue has proven to be successful in improving conservation outcomes and moving MNP towards peace.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- ◇ **Demonstrate continuity.** Maintaining an engaged presence in difficult circumstances demonstrates a commitment and increases the resilience and recovery of the conservation management system to absorb a shock or stress.
- ◇ **Build open, transparent processes for reaching agreement.** Information sharing, capacity building and knowledge transfer through participatory land-use planning builds trust and confidence with local communities while also reducing tension.
- ◇ **Encourage the use of participatory land-use planning as a process to guide communities through managing conflicts over land and resources.** In addition to conservation benefits, participatory land-use planning as a process can help bring all concerned parties together to engage in dialogue, work on solutions and set achievable objectives.
- ◇ **Hold stakeholders accountable.** A good monitoring system is needed for the implementation of recommendations and agreements.



CI/Sheila Brown

## CONCLUSION

CI and its partners have found a workable solution in fostering open dialogue with all stakeholders and providing tangible benefits to improve the livelihoods of the communities and the Simba Mai Mai. MNP, a park originally created without the consensus of the community, now has a land-use plan that was created, fully endorsed and implemented by the surrounding communities. Consensus has also emerged regarding the way forward to resolve ongoing conflict. All stakeholders have agreed to pursue open dialogue with the Simba Mai Mai, with the aim of convincing them to leave the forest and engage in demobilization, disarmament and reintegration into their communities and society in general. At the local level, CI will continue to encourage co-management and community management of the forest, involving local stakeholders in the decision making process as a way of preventing disagreement and ensuring equitable benefit sharing for conservation.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,** please contact Janet Edmond, Senior Director for Peace and Development Partnerships in the Policy Center for Environment and Peace at [jedmond@conservation.org](mailto:jedmond@conservation.org).