



**Declaration from Gbabandi,
Cameroon's national platform of forest indigenous peoples, on the [report](#)
Embedding Human Rights in Nature Conservation: from Intent to Action
commissioned by WWF**

29 December 2020

Cameroon has made commitments at the international level that require respect for the human rights of indigenous peoples, including under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

According to these different legal and political instruments, the rights of indigenous forest peoples must be recognised and respected.

In practice, however, these rights are not always respected in Cameroon.

The publication of the Panel of Expert's report into the allegations of human rights violations in the context of WWF's conservation work brings to the surface the indignation felt by indigenous peoples with respect to the violations suffered in the context of the management of protected areas.

The management of protected areas under the aegis of WWF has been difficult for us. We, indigenous forest communities, find ourselves excluded from our lands. National parks and wildlife reserves have been established on our traditional lands. Relations between WWF and indigenous communities have long been marred by irregularities and violations of our human and customary rights.

On reading the WWF report on the consideration of indigenous peoples' rights in conservation, several points of criticism can be made against WWF:

1. Reparation for violations orchestrated by WWF

Cameroon's Forest Indigenous Peoples' Platform "Gbabandi" condemns, as a matter of urgency, the multifaceted violations suffered by indigenous communities in the context of WWF's conservation management. The memories of communities and individuals who are victim to such violations remain with them, and the abuses continue to this day.

It is noted that following allegations against WWF regarding violations committed against indigenous communities, recommendations for reparation were made. However, in practice, none of the alleged individual or collective indigenous victims have received adequate reparation or compensation for the human rights violations suffered. In addition, the Panel recruited to conduct the investigation into the allegations against WWF concluded that some of the mechanisms put in place by WWF in response to the allegations of abuse were inadequate.

It should be noted that, despite the existence of a complaints mechanism for the Lobéké National Park, it is not yet known to all communities and still has operational weaknesses.

2. Impacts on the cultural life of the Baka and Bagyéli communities resulting from the exclusion of areas classified as protected areas

We, as indigenous peoples, are increasingly suffering significant violations of our human rights as a result of the creation of protected areas on our ancestral lands. The occupation of our customary and ancestral lands is a significant factor in the undermining of our traditional lives in relation to our lands. The physical violence that we suffer from WWF-funded eco-guards presages a future in which the survival of our cultures and peoples remains a cause for concern.

We are already seeing that Baka communities living beside protected areas such as the Lobéké National Park and the Ngoyla Wildlife Reserve are afraid to enter the forest because of past and present ecoguard violence. And the intergenerational transmission of our knowledge is being lost. It is time to rethink this exclusive model of conservation that does not pragmatically benefit either present or future indigenous generations.

3. Our position as indigenous forest peoples on the WWF report

Having taken note of the report published by WWF on the integration of community rights in conservation;

In view of the importance of nature protection for present and future generations;

Noting WWF's "intention-to-act" commitment to integrating indigenous peoples' rights into conservation;

Acknowledging the various commitments made by WWF in its report;

Aware of the challenges related to conservation;

We, Indigenous Forest Peoples, remain open to dialogue for a better consideration of our rights in the management of protected areas.

However, we address these Recommendations to WWF:

- That WWF issue a public letter of apology to indigenous communities in 2021 for the moral damage caused to the indigenous peoples of Cameroon's forests by its failure to address human rights violations connected with its conservation work.
- That an effective and immediate procedure for the restitution of indigenous peoples' customary lands that have been arbitrarily integrated into protected area areas be initiated under the diligence of WWF.
- That there is an improvement in current conservation practices that exclude and undermine the well-being of indigenous peoples.
- That conservation policies put people at the centre of the participatory management of protected areas.
- That a new paradigm of natural resource management in conservation effectively integrates the valorisation of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge and non-timber forest products.
- That WWF recognise the true value of indigenous peoples' identity as guardians of the forest and that indigenous peoples' role in conservation contributes to the perpetuation of their traditional knowledge.
- That a thorough and independent investigation into human rights abuses in *all* protected areas where WWF operates in Cameroon be carried out with a view to repairing the harm done to communities.
- That the position of "Indigenous Peoples Officer" created within WWF be held by an indigenous person.
- That the IPLCs be formally recruited within WWF.
- That there is a functional and accessible (free of charge) framework for conflict resolution between WWF/MINFOF and indigenous peoples for all protected areas where WWF has operated or is currently operating.
- That WWF contribute to the appeal of court decisions condemning indigenous peoples to unfair sentences in the periphery of protected areas.
- That WWF organise a dialogue between MINFOF and the IPLCs living around protected areas.
- That WWF organise a meeting between WWF-Cameroon and indigenous leaders.
- That WWF and MINFOF (conservator of the Lobéké National Park) publish and share with indigenous communities and associations the code of conduct governing relations between conservation agents and communities to be applied around the Lobéké National Park.
- That a mission to consult with and disseminate the translated WWF report be carried out with indigenous communities via the "Gbabandi" platform.
- That there is effectiveness and speed in the implementation of compensatory activities relating to restrictions on access to forest.
- That there is a committee to monitor the commitments made by WWF in its report.
- That the notion of "open access" be effective in and around protected areas.

- That the deadlines for revising management plans around protected areas be respected and that the opinions of the IPLCs be taken into account.
- That WWF explicitly acknowledge and require that Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is an inviolable principle in all conservation projects involving indigenous peoples.

ABONG-MBANG, the 29th December 2020

**MEMBERS OF CAMEROON'S FOREST INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' PLATFORM
« Gbabandi »**

Signed

- ABAGUENI
- ABWONI
- ADEBAKA
- ADEPA
- ARBO
- ASBAK
- ASBABUK
- ASBANGO
- CADDAP
- OKANI