



# Democratic Republic of the Congo

## Introduction

The Pygmies of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are the oldest and most traditional Indigenous Peoples in the east of the country. They are highly regarded by other ethnic groups for their values, their ability to live in harmony with nature and their knowledge of plants, animals and their habitats. The Pygmies engage in a series of sustainable activities without causing harm to the ecosystems. There is a high level of social cohesion in their community and they live a life of peaceful coexistence. In the zone, the Pygmies adapt to the life of their neighbours, the Bantu.

The Bambuti Babuluko Pygmies live in the heavily wooded province of North Kivu in the Walikale territory. They hunt and gather food to survive and some engage in subsistence agriculture. The CCRI assessment was carried out in what is to be their future community forest concession called “Kisimbosa Chamakasa”. The literal translation of the name is the hand with five fingers (hills); “Kisimbosa” means fertile territory. Four Pygmy villages are located within the area: Kissa, Kilali, Lufito and Kambushi.

This territory is home to world-renowned forest ecosystems that are extremely rich in biodiversity and to important endemic animal

and plant species, including flagship species such as the mountain gorillas of the Kahuzi Biega National Park and in the Ikobo-Pinga forests. There are also, however, sizeable mining and water reserves in the region that are attracting the attention and greed of transnational corporations and large conservation organisations. A large residential zone is also being threatened by small-scale mining activities.

There are also protected zones in the region, including the Kahuzi Biega National Park and the Maiko National Park. A large portion of the forest is not under the protection of these zones and, even so, it is still in a good state of conservation. This is mainly due to the significant contribution of

the Bambuti and local communities in the region (who depend on these forests) to their conservation thanks to their non-destructive traditional resource use and management system.

Women provide for their families and communities by generating and using natural resources wisely. As both consumers and producers who take care of their families and educate their children and are concerned with preserving the quality of life for present and future generations, women have an important role to play in the promotion of sustainable development.

To strengthen advocacy for the recognition, defence and promotion



Women from the Bambuti Babuluko Pygmy community. PIDP-KIVU/GFC



of the rights of indigenous peoples and for the protection of their living spaces and means of survival, the *Programme Intégré pour le Développement du Peuple Pygmée* (PIDP, or the Integrated Programme for the Development of the Pygmy People) has launched a series of activities. The objective of these activities is to promote Indigenous Peoples' rights to access natural resources and to manage them. One of the initiatives is a community forestry programme in the Pygmies' territories.

In the DRC, community forestry is regulated by a legal framework comprised of: the Constitution (namely articles 34, 53, 56 and 207); Law n° 011/2002 on the forestry code (especially articles 22, 111, 112 and 113), which recognises and protects the communities' customary land rights in forest areas; Decree n° 14/018 from 2001, which establishes the procedures for awarding forestry concessions to local communities; and Ministerial Order n° 025 / CAB / min / ECNDDCCJ / 00 / RBM / 2016, which contains specific provisions related to the management and exploitation of the forestry concession by local communities.

The implementation of these regulations is the result of a long participatory process in which civil society played an important role in defending local communities and Indigenous Peoples in the DRC. The process is unique, primarily because it is participatory and includes all social groups (youth, women, elders, Bantu and Pygmies). The objective of these initiatives is to guarantee the sustainable management and use of forests and natural resources for the benefit of current and future generations.

Our forests are registered with the *Division des Forêts Communautaires* (Community Forests Department) under the number ENR 006 / NK / 2015 as a collective concession. Our concession is on the list of community forestry concessions that will receive the legal titles awarded by the governor of each province following the publication of Ministerial Order no. 25 by the Ministry of the Environment and

Bana Mukomo and Banaka Mughogho, all from the Bambuti people of the Walikale territory attended the workshop. They stressed the importance of respect for their land rights, ending violence, improving security in the region and making improvements to public services such as schools, roads, hospitals and sociocultural centres. They also affirmed the need to stop investment projects that are



Men from the Bambuti Babuluko Pygmy community. PIDP-KIVU/GFC

Sustainable Development.

In February 2017 a two-day capacity-building workshop geared mainly toward the Pygmy indigenous communities was held in Goma, North Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was organised by PIDP Shirika la Bambuti in collaboration with the CCRI regional resource person. More than 20 representatives of the Kisimbosa Chamakasa forest communities from Banama Longa,



Fisherman. PIDP-KIVU/GFC

destructive and appropriate land, such as the mining projects initiated on Bambuti land and territories without their prior and informed consent.



# Community Conservation Resilience by the Bambuti Babuluko indigenous community

The Babuluko Pygmies gather non-timber forest products and take only what they need. By doing so, they preserve the natural resources. In practice, killing a large mammal while hunting is not allowed, except during cultural ceremonies in which the elders/ancestors may authorise it.

Only subsistence hunting is allowed. Hunting for sport or for profit is not permitted in Pygmy culture. Customary hunting methods and tools include spears, hunting dogs, axes, nets with coarse or fine mesh ("Makila" and "Kabanda"), bush fires

months: it begins with the planting of a banana tree and the harvesting of the first bunch of bananas indicates that it is time to return. Nowadays, however, the ritual lasts two months (July and August) in order to coincide with the main school vacation period. While this practice continues to be specific to the Babuluko Pygmies, other communities also use it, but under the supervision of Indigenous Peoples who have been identified and recognised in the zone.

The overexploitation of resources by other communities is a major

Recurrent armed conflicts, pillaging, land grabbing, conflicts related to the use of land and the falsification of land titles are also permanent threats.

Local authorities and conservation organisations ignore the Indigenous Peoples' conservation practices and historical efforts and show a blatant disregard for forest peoples' rights despite the relevant international instruments and mechanisms, some of which have been ratified by our country. The creation of protected areas without FPIC has also had

severe negative impacts on forest communities, as it resulted in their eviction from their land and it imposed restrictions on their right to use the resources. This has compromised not only their means of subsistence, but also their very survival. Police surveillance was used to implement these changes, which sometimes led to human rights

violations (as in the case of Itebero in the lowlands of the Kahuzi National Park).

The plan to create an ecological corridor from Itombwe to Mont Hoyo, passing through Walikale and Watalinga territory, represents another example of this kind of threat.



Illegal logging and mining in indigenous areas and territories. PIDP-KIVU/GFC

and traps. Vines are used to trap animals instead of nets because they inflict less pain on the trapped animals. Leopard skin and teeth are jealously guarded for use in traditional ceremonies.

Pygmy circumcision is an initiation ritual for Bambuti Bawta Babuluko boys that marks their passage from adolescence to adulthood. This ritual, most of which is usually carried out in the forest, used to last several

challenge to the Babuluko communities' way of life and resilience, especially practices such as illegal artisanal logging; mining without the free, prior and informed consent of the Pygmies; overhunting; the overexploitation of non-timber forest products and slash-and-burn agriculture. These problems are aggravated by the fact that the legal regimes that apply to natural resources, such as mining and oil and gas, do not recognise customary land.

## Testimony

M. Mukelenga Ksilembo is an elder from the Babuluko Pygmy community. He speaks about the Babuluko Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge and practices and describes how they have contributed to the preservation and protection of forests and large mammals in the Kisimbosa Chamakasa forests. "Our land and territories are our livelihood. Preserving them is our profession and our identity. The fruit and non-timber forest products are our source of energy, our pharmacy and our economy. No one can destroy the source of livelihood. This is why we take care to conserve our natural resources and our biodiversity. Without forgetting the known threats, large mammals such as the great apes (chimpanzees) and leopards can be seen in our forests again despite their disappearance over 30 years ago."



## Conclusions and main recommendations

The communities recommended that all stakeholders take measures to strengthen and apply the Bambuti Babuluko Indigenous Peoples' traditional ways of managing and governing natural resources and biodiversity. This could be facilitated by helping the communities better understand their forest rights enshrined in the DRC's well-defined legal framework and by strengthening these rights. This must include the demarcation of indigenous lands through participatory mapping processes. The community also seeks to strengthen their socioeconomic and cultural initiatives and to improve their economic capacity so they can be more involved in community forestry.

The community also underlines the importance of maintaining the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge and offering an environmental education to their children and those of their neighbouring communities. They hope others will better understand

their way of life and practices thanks to the works of art they create and the cultural events that they organise.

### Recommendations for others

- Reinforce the traditional and community regulations and respect for the hunting and fishing seasons within the Babuluko Pygmy community of Kisimbosa Chamakasa, which are applicable to their neighbours, the Bantu.
- Advocate for the recognition of the Indigenous Peoples' governance of biodiversity through the establishment of a system of community-conserved areas. In general, in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the protection of indigenous land and the respect and recognition of their specific rights guarantee that these international instruments should be mechanisms that are widely known at the national and local level.

- Follow up on the reforms (agrarian and land) underway in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure that customary systems and traditional indigenous management of the territories are integrated into the country's policies. Produce a book on the historical occupation of the Bambuti Babuluko Pygmy communities and their location, including current and previous threats and the concerns about the development of Indigenous Peoples, addressed to the Congolese state.
- Combat slash-and-burn agriculture, mainly by recognising women's role in rural areas and women workers in the agricultural sector. Give women access to training, land, natural resources, production factors, credit, development programmes and cooperation organisations.
- Implement initiatives to combat poverty through the promotion of income generating activities.

**This summary is based on a full CCRI report about the communities' conservation resilience assessment in DRC, which can be found here: <http://globalforestcoalition.org/community-conservation-resilience-initiative-ccri-full-country-report/>**