

SUCCESS STORY



Jean Nestor Bouengue



From Knowledge to Action for a Protected Planet in Western and Central Africa

BIOPAMA aims to improve the long-term conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, in protected areas and surrounding communities. It is an initiative of the ACP Group of States financed by the European Union's 11th European Development Fund (EDF), jointly implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC).

The multiple results of the management effectiveness assessment of protected areas in Gabon

The success story of Jean Nestor Bouengue, from National Parks Agency of Gabon (ANPN) is an example of how a partnership with the BIOPAMA programme can generate positive changes in the management of national parks.

The reviewing of the park management plans objectives, their updating and the increasingly positive perception of monitoring and evaluation by protected area managers are some of the many results of the management effectiveness assessment of protected areas using the Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool (IMET) in Gabon, identified by Jean Nestor Bouengue, who joined the Council of Ministers in 2012.

Monitoring and Evaluation officer at the National Parks Agency of Gabon (ANPN), Nestor is trained in forest sciences and wildlife and protected areas management. In 2003, he joined the Planning and Monitoring-Evaluation unit of the Multisectoral Forest, Fisheries and Environment Program within the Ministry of Forest Economy.

Back then, Nestor was responsible for conducting a vast reform agenda in order to rapidly promote the water and forest sectors. Among these projects was the creation, in August 2007, of the National Parks Agency.

Another important step in Nestor's work was his mission to set up a Monitoring and Evaluation system within the ANPN. In 2014, with the support of an IT solutions developer, Nestor launched a monitoring and evaluation software package for all the ANPN activities.

Thanks to this previous experience, when the BIOPAMA program arrived in Gabon, the ANPN was ready to engage on the use of IMET to support planning, monitoring and evaluation of protected areas. Nestor participated in several BIOPAMA preparation exercises, from a workshop on the identification of indicators to the BIOPAMA inception meeting in Brazzaville or other meetings in Dakar and Douala. The ANPN monitoring and evaluation experience was shared for the first time during the BIOPAMA workshop in Kinshasa in 2014.

Nestor reports that Gabon was pioneering the use of the Integrated management effectiveness tool (IMET). Due to his status as a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer at the ANPN, Nestor was able to facilitate the organization of test phases on the IMET forms in his country. He became a coach after participating in the workshop in Niger in 2015. The role of the coach is, according to him: *“to provide permanent support to the protected areas managers, but also to some thematic managers of central level units”*. He adds: *“For more than two years, the Planning, monitoring and Evaluation Unit has been highly solicited and the staff opinion about this Unit has dramatically changed, which is a positive point”*.

Nestor emphasizes that *“thanks to the BIOPAMA programme, we have been able to implement our Local Management Advisory Committees (CCGLs). These mechanisms involving communities in the management of protected areas were provided in our management plans but never implemented. Besides that, the participatory filling of the forms for the protected areas diagnosis was a great experience”*.

Learning how to use the IMET tool in Gabon included two test exercises, and several participants came from sub-region countries. In 2016, with the support of BIOPAMA funding, two major activities were carried out: **the training of the protected area managers and the organization of a data collection campaign in 14 protected areas**. *“We were four coaches and worked in pairs. We followed the COMIT toolbox, the Guidelines to accompany the IMET tool.*

Then we administered IMET and returned it on the local, central and sub-regional level”, says Nestor.

According to him, the introduction of the IMET tool has had other outcomes, such as **the designing of the priority actions matrix and the operationalization of the Local Management Advisory Committees offices**. Furthermore, the coach training changed Nestor’s way of working: *“I now spend more time providing support to protected areas managers, project managers, department heads. In other words, I provide technical, professional and institutional support”*.

Speaking about the ANPN, he explains: *“The institution translates into reality the government policy on biodiversity management through strategies, like the strategic plan “Emerging Gabon” and the Economic Recovery Plan. In view of the upcoming change of the ANPN statutes, we want to update the management plans of the national parks and integrate the ecosystem services aspects, the climate changes, and further involve the communities in the governance of protected areas”*.

To improve the management effectiveness of the protected areas network in Gabon, Nestor is considering some priority actions, such as activities on ecosystem services, the reduction of human-wildlife conflicts and the involvement of local communities in the management of natural resources.

Nestor is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the activities implemented within the network of 13 national parks, a presidential reserve, an arboretum and 9 sites, and reminds us that: *“The trees we planted during the biodiversity coaches training in May 2019, ensure the well-being of current and future communities. I would simply like to tell the professionals working in agencies, through a lens of critical thinking, that they are the ambassadors of their country”*.

Contacts

Tanya Merceron

Coordinatrice régionale en Afrique de l’ouest et centrale
Union internationale pour la conservation de la nature
e-mail: tanya.merceron@iucn.org

Jean Nestor Bouengue

Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux du Gabon
<http://anpn.ga>
<https://siap.anpngabon.org>
e-mail: nestorboue@yahoo.fr

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