

Ex-post evaluation

Sustainable natural resource management, DR Congo

Title	'Sustainable natural resource management' (phases I and II), "Biodiversity and sustainable forest management" (phase III)		
Sector and CRS code	Biodiversity/ 4103000		
Project number	Phase I: 2005 66 729; Phase II: 2008 66 723; Phase III: 2010 65 895		
Commissioned by	BMZ		
Recipient/Programme executing agency	Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN)		
Project volume/ Financing instrument	EUR 46.0 million, subsidy		
Project duration	2010-2019		
Year of report	2024	Year of random sample	2023

Objectives and project outline

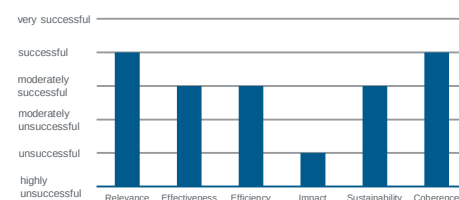
The aim of the project was to improve the management of the protected areas, reduce overexploitation and create the conditions for sustainable operation. This was intended to contribute to the protection of biodiversity, the sustainable management of the forest and the selective improvement of the situation of the local population in selected areas. Measures were implemented to develop administrative and financial capacity, improve the management basis and monitoring of the ICCN and to involve and support the local population.

Key findings

For the following reasons, the project is rated as 'moderately unsuccessful':

- The core problem addressed by the programme was highly relevant and has become even more relevant from today's perspective. The programme was also strongly aligned with national and international priorities in the area of forest and nature conservation.
- The programme only partially achieved its objectives and - measured against its indicators - had limited success. Nonetheless, important progress was made in relation to the main areas of work, which can plausibly be attributed to the programme measures. The programme was also affected by difficult contextual factors, particularly the security situation.
- Although the programme was largely unable to meet its indicators at the overarching developmental level, it has plausibly contributed to slowing the rate of deforestation and to preserving biodiversity. However, the negative results of the human rights violations outweigh the overall impact assessment, even though FC responded appropriately and responsibly to the incidents.
- Due to still insufficient local capacities and a lack of financial resources, the results are not sustainable. However, as is the case in many similar contexts, it was already envisaged in the design of the programme that no sustainability claim would be made. External and long-term financing by donors can also be considered justified due to the international relevance of the protected areas.

Overall rating:
moderately unsuccessful



Conclusions

- As part of the development cooperation involvement in nature conservation projects, sufficient funds should be available for neighbourhood measures, especially if the neighbouring population socio-economic situation of the has an influence on protected areas.
- For projects that are implemented in fragile contexts, it is necessary to discuss human rights standards with the executing agency at an early stage, carry out in-depth due diligence and agree and implement appropriate measures to prevent and deal with human rights violations.
- In projects that use positive discrimination approaches to include particularly disadvantaged population groups, negative, unintended effects, such as feelings of frustration, can be avoided by including other sections of the population.

Ex-post evaluation - assessment according to OECD DAC criteria

General conditions and classification of the project

The rainforest area of the Congo Basin is one of the last contiguous areas of tropical forest in the world. Some parts of the primary rainforest areas, which are mainly located in the lowlands, are difficult to access. These forests form the habitat for the world's last populations of great apes, such as the mountain gorilla, lowland gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos, as well as other unique animal and plant species. In addition, the protection of the Congo Basin is of great global importance due to its climate relevance and its special ecological richness. Since 2000, nine sites in the Congo Basin have therefore been designated as World Heritage Sites by UNSECO (five of which are protected areas in the DR Congo). However, the Congo Basin is also important for the country's economic development due to its wealth of natural resources. In view of the country's generally poor economic situation, this is leading to increasing pressure to utilise the forest areas and their destruction.

The global relevance of climate and biodiversity on the one hand and the destruction caused by economic interests and social as well as traditional needs on the other thus lead to a tense relationship. In particular, the neighbouring population affected by poverty is dependent on the use of forest resources. However, unsustainable forms of forest utilisation, such as timber and charcoal extraction, the creation of agricultural land or poaching, contribute significantly to degradation. The situation is further exacerbated by population growth and rebel groups and militias active in some protected areas (including Kahuzi-Biéga). The exploitation of minerals and raw materials leads to massive deforestation and the production of toxic waste, which places a further burden on local ecosystems. The loss of forests has serious consequences for the environment and climate, as tropical rainforests in particular are a major emitter of carbon dioxide due to their ability to store it during wood conversion (especially when used as fuel). The destruction of forests also has a significant negative impact on neighbouring communities.

The international political will to improve the situation both in the protected areas and for the neighbouring populations exists, but the implementation of conservation rights faces challenges. For example, the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has designated 17% of its land as protected areas. However, the sometimes precarious security situation due to the ongoing armed conflicts, particularly in the east of the country, poses major challenges for the regulated protection of natural areas. At the same time, the local institutions, including the Ministry of Environment (MEDD) and the national nature conservation authority ICCN (*Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature*), are severely weakened and only able to act to a limited extent. The budget funds available for nature conservation areas only cover a very small proportion of the costs, while there is a lack of funds, particularly for communication and infrastructure as well as for training and further education. This also leads to a lack of trained personnel for the management and protection of nature reserves. Corruption and nepotism are widespread in the country and contribute to the difficult framework conditions. In this respect, Congo was ranked 166th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 'Corruption Perceptions Index' in 2022¹. In addition, the restrictions on use associated with the classification of protected areas are met with disapproval by some local neighbouring populations, as the forest areas are considered to be traditionally ancestral. In the 1970s, resettlement was also ordered without compensation. In addition, their sources of income are restricted and their financial and social situation remains precarious, especially for the indigenous population. These conditions also hinder the development of tourism as a source of financing. In view of these challenges, the KfW project aims to support and sustainably strengthen ICCN and its partners, focussing on the participatory involvement of the local population.

Brief description of the project

The FC programme with its three phases, "Sustainable Natural Resource Management" (2010-2014), "Sustainable Natural Resource Management II" (2014-2019) and "Biodiversity and Sustainable Forest Management"

¹ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index*: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/cod>

(2014-2019)² financed measures to create the conditions for sustainable operation of the supported protected areas, to protect biodiversity in selected areas and to partially improve the economic situation of the poor local population in selected areas. Due to the overlaps between Phase III and the follow-up Phase IV, which is being implemented in parallel, it is not always possible to make a clear distinction.

The project was organised by the Congolese nature conservation authority ICCN. The project was implemented in **six protected areas**: in the Kahuzi-Biéga *National Park* (*Parc national de Kahuzi-Biéga*, PNKB), in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve (*Réserve de Faune à Okapis*, RFO) (Phase I, II/III), in the Lomami National Park (*Parc national de la Lomami*, PNL), in the Salonga National Park (*Parc National de la Salonga*, PNS) in the Ngiri Protected Area (*Réserve Naturelle du Triangle de la Ngiri*, RNTN) and in the Kundelungu National Park (*Parc National de Kundelungu*, PNKL/CUK) (Phase II/III). The majority of these protected areas (PNKB, PNKL/CUK, PNL, PNS, RFO) have been categorised as 'Category II - National Park' in the classification system of the *International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources* (IUCN), the "*IUCN Protected Areas Categories System*",³. This category describes protected areas that are mainly managed for the protection of ecosystems and for recreational purposes. Only the Ngiri Protected Area has been classified as "Category IV - Resource Conservation Areas"⁴(an area managed for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems and habitats).

The primary **target group** comprised the neighbouring population living in the areas surrounding the protected areas and the forest concessions, most of whom are affected by poverty and use natural resources for their livelihoods. This neighbouring population was estimated at around 600.000 (phase 1) / 750.000 (phases 2 and 3) people.

Breakdown of total costs

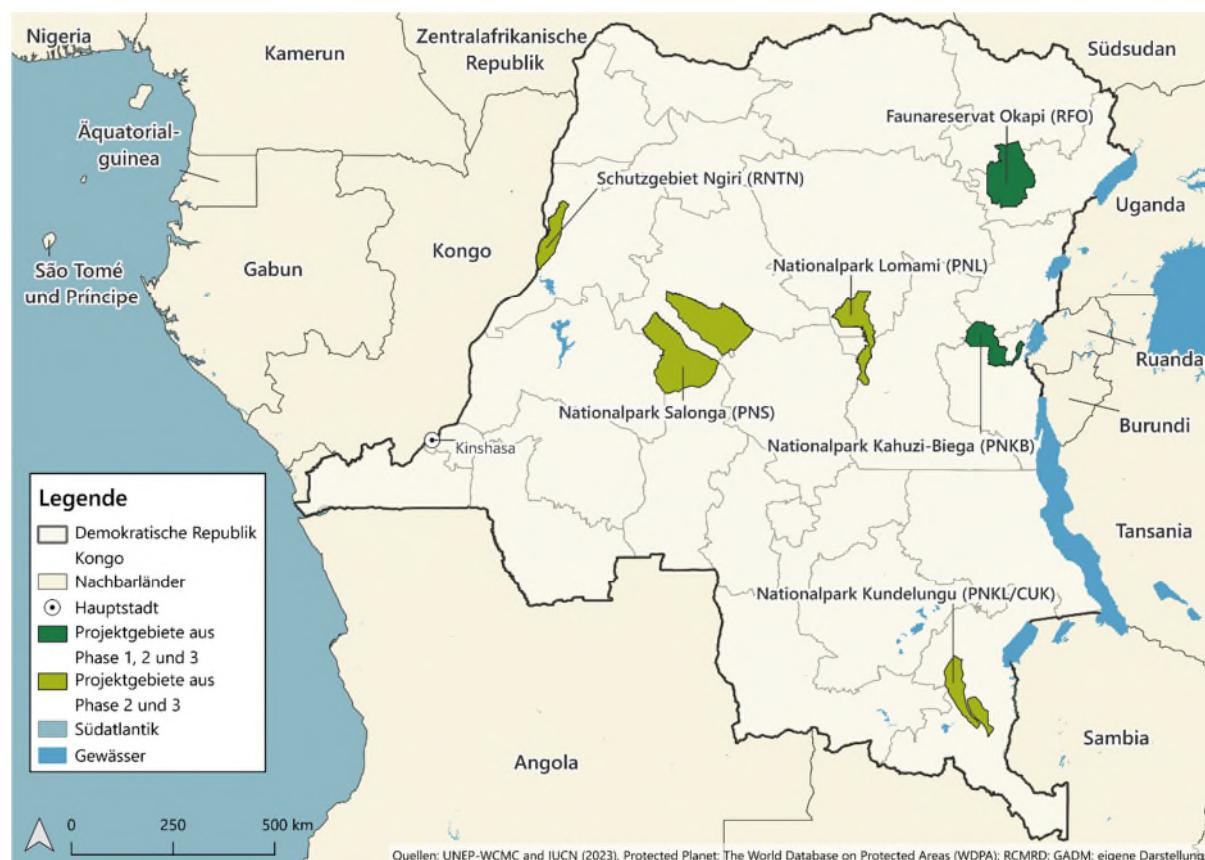
		Phase I (plan)	Phase I (actual)	Phase II (plan)	Phase (actual)	Phase III (plan)	Phase (actual)
Investment costs (total)	million EUR	16.7	16.7	15	15	20	20
Own contribution	million EUR	3.4	3.4	0	0	0	0
External financing	million EUR	11.0	11.0	15	15	20	20
of which budget funds (BMZ)	million EUR	11.0	11.0	15	15	20	20
Co-financing	million EUR	2.3	2.3				

² These three projects are to be regarded as phases I, II and III, which build on each other. For better readability, the projects "Sustainable Natural Resource Management" and "Sustainable Resource Management II" are abbreviated as "PBF I" and "PBF II". The "Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Forest Management" programme is abbreviated as "PBF III". PBF stands for "*Programme de Conservation de la Biodiversité et de la Gestion Durable des Forêts*".

³ The *IUCN Protected Areas Categories System* is a system of the *International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources* (IUCN) in which all protected areas on earth are categorised according to their conservation objective, conservation measures and area management (IUCN category). The system categorises areas according to their conservation objectives and management, i.e. the measures taken and prohibitions imposed in the protected area.

⁴ In English, Category IV is referred to as "*Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources*".

Map of the project country incl. project areas



Rating according to OECD DAC criteria

Relevance

Alignment with policies and priorities

This FC project as part of the development cooperation programme "Environmental Policy, Conservation and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources" in the DR Congo consisted of three phases, which were implemented from 2010 to 2019 together with the local executing agency ICCN (*Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature*). The three phases of the programme aimed to improve the management of the supported protected areas, reduce overexploitation and create the conditions for sustainable operation. This was intended to contribute to the protection of biodiversity and the sustainable management of the tropical forest at a higher level and to improve the economic situation of the poor local population in selected areas

The objectives and measures of the programme were and are in line with Congolese forestry, forest protection and development policy at the time of the EPE. They correspond to the priorities and strategies of the DR Congo's main frameworks in this area, namely: the *Code Forestier*⁵ of 2022, the *Agenda Prioritaire* (2007), which sets priorities in relation to forest policy, the National Strategy for the Conservation of Biodiversity in the Protected Areas of the DR Congo (SNCB) 2012 and the REDD+ Framework Strategy of the DR Congo as well

⁵ In the Code Forestier, the DR Congo recognises the relevance of the forest with its ecological, social and economic function. This document provides the legal framework for Congolese forestry policy and aims to promote the rational and sustainable management of forests. The aim of sustainable forest management is to achieve a forestry system that contributes to the economic, social and cultural development of current generations (e.g. increasing income from forestry) and at the same time preserves forest ecosystems and forest biodiversity for the benefit of future generations. The participatory approach anchored in the evaluated FC project also harmonises with the Code Forestier. Article 5 and Article 6 of the Code enshrine the involvement of the local population and relevant private and public stakeholders in forestry policy at all territorial levels.

as the Nature Conservation Law no. 14/003 of 11 February 2014. From today's perspective, the Congolese commitment to COP 22 and the 30x30 goal, the *CAFI letter of intent* and the SNCB revised in 2022 are also relevant. The priorities and strategies of these frameworks are congruently linked

In addition, the FC programme demonstrated and continues to demonstrate close alignment with the policies and priorities of the BMZ. The programme was in line with the BMZ sector concept "Forestry and Sustainable Development" from 2002. In addition, the programme was and is in line with the German development cooperation objectives for the protection of biodiversity at the time of the evaluation, which are expressed, among other things, in the "*Global Biodiversity Framework*" and the BMZ sector concept "Biological Diversity" and its recommendations for action.

The primary target group of German development cooperation in the forest and nature conservation sector was the local population dependent on the forest ecosystem. The participatory approach of the FC project harmonised with the principle of social participation and involvement enshrined in the BMZ sector concept and, in principle, does justice to the necessary participation of relevant groups in sustainable forest development. The BMZ sector strategy also emphasises the need for a differentiated group-specific approach, which the FC project also took into account by explicitly mentioning the improvement of the living conditions of the indigenous population

Alignment with the needs and capacities of the beneficiaries and stakeholders

The promotion of improved management of the protected areas and sustainable operation were appropriate in relation to the needs and objectives of the project executing agency, the Congolese park authority ICCN. . The ICCN has the following tasks: (1) protection of fauna and flora, (2) valorisation of biodiversity through the promotion of research and ecotourism and (3) dissemination of knowledge in the field of nature conservation. However, due to weak financial, human and technical capacities as well as insufficient skills and structures, ICCN needed support to fulfil its mandate. Interviews conducted as part of the EPE confirmed the weaknesses and deficiencies of ICCN as an executing agency (e.g. chronic understaffing and underfunding, high staff turnover) and the need for institutional and structural strengthening. The objectives and measures of the project were in line with these needs. For example, support services provided by an implementation consultant were intended to help establish a functioning internal control system (ICS), strengthen financial management capacities, contribute to the development and implementation of effective management tools and provide overall support for the coordination of the protected areas.

With regard to the needs of the target groups, it should be noted that the project design was partly in line with these needs. The primary target group comprised the population living in the vicinity of the protected areas and the forest concessions, which was estimated at around 600,000 (Phase I) and 750,000 (Phases II and III) people. The neighbouring population is predominantly affected by poverty and dependent on the use of forest resources. Their short-term, immediate needs include access to and utilisation of natural resources as a livelihood. The long-term needs of the target group primarily include improving their living conditions. The protection of flora and fauna and the sustainable use of tropical forest and biodiversity resources is also in their interest, as this population lives in or around the forests. This is also linked to reducing their dependence on forest resources for the long-term protection of the areas. The programme provided for support measures to compensate for losses resulting from restrictions on use and used a participatory approach to take the needs of the local population into account when managing the protected areas. The complexity of the programme was further increased by the so-called "*legacy issue*". This includes the displacement of local residents from the protected areas in the 1970s without compensation and resulted in claims by the displaced residents that were based on events long before the project. To ensure needs-orientated support and adequate representation of interests, the target group was to be closely involved in the preparation and implementation of local development plans. The development of a strategy for *community conservation*, conflict management and sensitisation measures were planned to safeguard interests. The programme also planned to support the nature conservation authority in its involvement of the local population, whose short-term interests sometimes conflict with nature conservation.

However, covering all the needs of the neighbouring population goes beyond the mandate of such a nature conservation project. . The wide range of short, medium and long-term needs of the target group can only be fully addressed by a project with an ecological focus with difficulty. For example, some interviewees mentioned needs relating to the construction of roads, schools or hospitals, health and water supply as well as poverty reduction in general during the evaluation. However, meeting these needs goes beyond the mandate of the ICCN and the programme, as only small-scale infrastructure measures, such as the construction of bridges, can be financed as part of the programme.

Appropriateness of design

The identification of the core problem of the programme - the progressive destruction or unsustainable use of the nationally and internationally very important tropical forest areas in the DR Congo - is understandable from the perspective of the time and even more relevant from today's perspective. The forests of the DR Congo are (still) of enormous importance due to their unique biodiversity, species diversity and ecosystem services. An intact tropical forest in the DR Congo has an important function for the environment and climate with a global reach. From a national perspective, the forests also have an important economic function for the country and provide income for the local population. Over two thirds of the entire Congolese population depend directly or indirectly on forestry activities, with women and indigenous population groups being particularly affected

At the same time, forest areas are under severe - and increasing - threat. Significant overexploitation of natural resources, large-scale destruction of tropical forests and their biodiversity, illegal and unsustainable management of forest resources and massive poaching pose a particular threat to the forest ecosystem and jeopardise biodiversity. In addition, population growth in the neighbouring regions, particularly in eastern DR Congo, has increased the pressure on protected areas, further increasing the need to protect biodiversity and forests. Recent changes in lifestyle pose additional challenges. According to interviewees, not only demographics but also the increasing needs of the population have led to negative impacts on the forests: On the one hand, the local population is increasingly striving, especially near larger cities such as Bukavu, not just for basic services but for better, more urban living conditions for themselves and their children. As part of this population growth pressure, according to interviewees in Kahuzi-Biéga, there was a phenomenon whereby city dwellers had settled near and in the park to engage in agriculture, logging or mining. According to interviews, these population groups increased the demand for bushmeat (including primates and herbivores), for example.⁶ It was also reported that the increase in this demand has led the local population to engage in commercial hunting to meet the needs and food preferences of the cities and to profit from the growth itself. This further exacerbates the impact on local biodiversity. On the other hand, urbanisation and the increasing energy needs of cities also increased the exploitation of forest resources for charcoal, as charcoal is easier to transport and store. The marketing of charcoal in the cities is becoming increasingly profitable for the local population. However, this leads to more deforestation, as cooking with charcoal requires a larger amount of wood as a raw material than if dried wood were used directly. Overall, the interviewees confirmed the correct identification of the core problem (the destruction or unsustainable utilisation of nationally and internationally very important tropical forest areas)

Both the strengthening of the capacities of the ICCN institution and its management, as well as the involvement of the local population as a key objective of the activities, are understandable. On the one hand, important causes of the core problem were and are the inadequate provision of the ICCN with financial, material and human resources, internal organisational problems, a lack of financial control systems and an incoherent distribution of tasks and statutes. As a result, the management of the protected areas was not sufficiently effective and efficient. In addition, the lack of a functioning management and control system in the responsible environment ministry facilitated illegal logging. The programme's approach and the intended measures were designed to address these causes. Strengthening the capacities of ICCN as the institutional structure of the protected areas and promoting more efficient management of the protected areas was a logical step to reduce the overexploitation of the supported protected areas, protect biodiversity and create the conditions for sustainable management of the promoted protected areas. This was to be achieved through the development, implementation, coordination and monitoring of management plans, the planning and construction of park infrastructure, the creation of protection and monitoring strategies, the strengthening of administration and the improvement of financial and personnel management structures, as well as further training of park staff and sensitisation of the population. The suitability of this approach, the strengthening of the executing agency and the improvement of management as prerequisites for a successful project, was confirmed by the interviewees. On the other hand, the involvement of the population, which is of central importance for solving the core problem, was at the centre of the approach. Interview data confirmed that the involvement of the local population was an essential element for effective management and protection of the areas, as well as for the acceptance of the measures. According to interviewees, this participatory approach has evolved over the course of the phases and has become more important and stronger.

⁶ The consumption of bushmeat by households in rural and urban areas of the DRC was also analysed in the following study: van Vliet N, Nebesse C, Nasi R. Bushmeat consumption among rural and urban children from Province Orientale, Democratic Republic of Congo. Oryx. 2015;49(1):165-174. doi:10.1017/S0030605313000549

The measures to improve the conditions for protected area tourism and to support the certification of forest concessions are conceptually comprehensible both from the perspective of the past and today. In the promotion of ecotourism, tourism products, advertising material and business plans were to be developed and the infrastructure and habitat programmes for wild animals were to be improved. With the tourism measures, the programme aimed to contribute to the protection of biodiversity in two ways: On the one hand, these measures were expected to contribute to covering the costs of the protected areas. On the other hand, the potential of tourism was to be used to sensitise the local population to the value of nature conservation through tourism revenue. Among other things, animals should be increasingly perceived by the population as a tourism factor rather than a necessary source of protein. This should lead to further conservation effects, which corresponds in a comprehensible way with the identification of the problem. Finally, the support measures for the certification of forest concessions should also serve to protect the forest. This approach was appropriate in principle for the protected areas in which forestry utilisation is permitted (IUCN Category IV) to reduce overexploitation. In other areas where forestry use is not permitted (IUCN Category II, to which the majority of the supported areas were assigned), strengthening forestry controls, combined with sensitisation of the local population, was an appropriate approach to help protect the forests.

Overall, the project's *Theory of Change*, which was created as part of the EPE (Figure 1), and the underlying impact assumptions are generally comprehensible. However, the analysis of the project design with regard to the target system and indicators revealed some shortcomings. On the one hand, some of the project objectives at outcome level were either defined at the wrong level or incompletely formulated (see appendix). On the other hand, the project indicators showed shortcomings at both outcome and impact level. At the outcome level, for example, the indicators were only partially defined SMART. They are often not specific and not or only partially measurable. At the impact level, no indicators were defined for Phase I in the module proposals. Indicators for "assessing the achievement of the DC programme objective" are named in the project progress reports. However, these are exactly the same as the indicators at outcome level. Responsibility for the achievement of these indicators lay either with TC or with FC. With regard to Phases II/III, no indicators at the impact level were mentioned in the module proposals either, but "indicators for the DC programme objective" were listed. Programme indicators are also mentioned in later progress reports (2016, 2018), but no target and baseline values and no information on the achievement of the indicators were provided in the progress reports and in the final monitoring report.

In addition, the programme was overambitious in terms of improving the living conditions of the local population. At the impact level, the programme aimed to "improve [the] living conditions (access to drinking water, health services, seeds, income through the sustainable use of natural resources, etc.)" of households in the vicinity of the PNKB and RFO. Based on selected socio-economic indicators relating to water, health and income, the situation of the neighbouring population was to be improved by 50 % (impact indicator 1 of phases II/III). However, this objective was overambitious. On the one hand, the programme focused on strengthening the ICCN; supporting the population and the measures to compensate for the losses resulting from restrictions on use represented only a small part of the measures in comparison (see chapter on effectiveness). On the other hand, the budget earmarked for supporting the local population was also too small to achieve a general improvement in the living conditions of the population. This is particularly the case in such a fragile context as eastern Congo. This challenge was also confirmed by the interviewees, who stated that only a "selective" improvement could be expected from the programme. Given the main mandate of the programme, the budget made available for the local population measures and the difficult framework conditions, it would have been more appropriate to focus on a selective improvement in the living conditions of the population or on improving the management of the protected areas "taking into account the needs of the local population". The FC project "Integrated Protected Area Management I+II" was launched to support the neighbouring communities with additional funds and thus complement the evaluated project (see coherence and impact chapter). Finally, gender and human rights aspects should have been given greater consideration by today's standards to bring the executing agency into line with international environmental and social standards at an early stage (e.g. establishment of a complaints mechanism).

During project planning, the environmental and social impact assessment was assigned EIA code C. This no longer corresponds to today's understanding of the potential risks associated with the project. Particularly in view of the fact that park rangers and illegal actors in the park (e.g. poachers, gold prospectors, etc.) were or could still be armed, the possibility of violent clashes could not be ruled out. A categorisation in category A therefore seems appropriate at the present time.

Adaptability- response to change

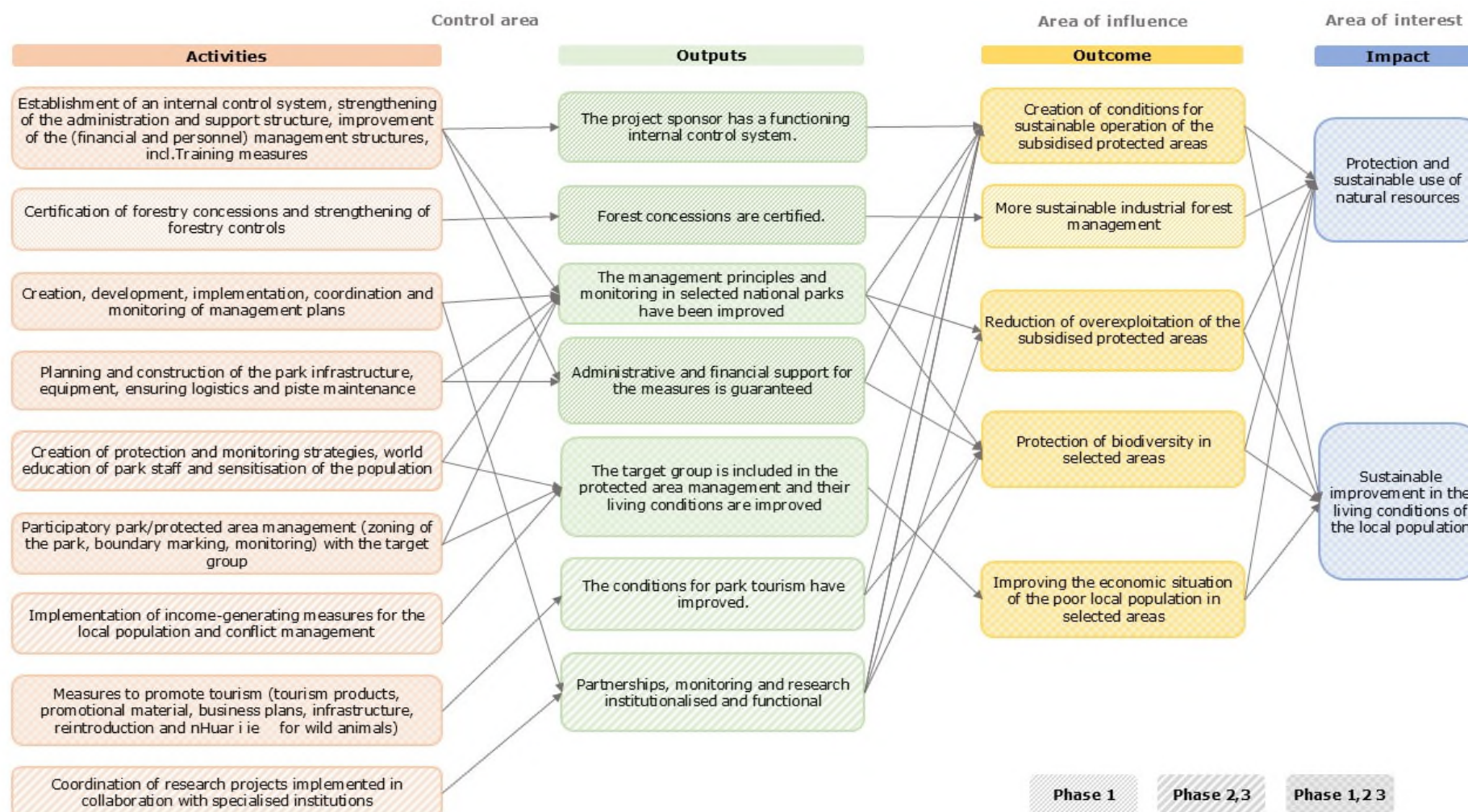
The basic challenges and the **problem situation (particularly in eastern Congo) following the completion of the phases of the programme evaluated in this report have deteriorated continuously since 2017**. For example, the promotion of ecotourism could not be implemented as planned due to the constantly deteriorating security situation and logistical challenges. In addition, the support measures for the certification of forest concessions could not be implemented due to the political situation and the lack of a legal export market. Accordingly, this thematic area was not further financed in phases II/III, which represents an appropriate adjustment to the programme. A significant change in the conditions resulted from the allegations of human rights violations by park rangers in the vicinity of selected protected areas. These necessitated adjustments to the programme (see chapter on overarching developmental impact), the implementation of which was initiated as part of Phase IV, which was ongoing at the time of the EPE.

Rating summary

The programme was highly relevant at the time and the core problem has become even more relevant from today's perspective. It was very successfully aligned with national Congolese priorities and frameworks as well as international priorities in the field of nature conservation. It was largely in line with the needs and capacities of its stakeholders and beneficiaries and the measures selected were appropriate. In addition, the programme's *theory of change* and impact assumptions were comprehensible, despite shortcomings in the design of the target system. Even though the improvement of the socio-economic situation of the neighbouring population was an over-ambitious objective of the project, this only has a limited impact on the relevance rating, as this is a minor dimension of the overall project. Overall, the programme is highly relevant and represents a strength of the programme. The relevance of the programme can therefore be rated as successful.

Relevance: 2 (for all projects)

Figure1 : Theory of change of the project



Coherence

Internal coherence

The programme goes back to a long-term commitment of German development cooperation in the region dating back to the 1980s. The approach and objectives are in line with the priorities of German development cooperation at that time and today. "Protecting our livelihoods - environment and natural resources" is a core theme of German development cooperation that extends to the fields of action of biodiversity and sustainable forest management, as well as water and sanitation, and represents a sectoral priority in cooperation with DR Congo. The BMZ's 2030 Agenda also defines this core theme and the fields of action of biodiversity, forest conservation and water, which also shows that the FC project is conceptually in line with the priorities of German development cooperation.

The project was part of the development cooperation programme "Environmental policy, protection and sustainable use of natural resources" . Under this programme, TC and FC worked together, in part with the same political partner. FC focussed on promoting infrastructure and strengthening capacity within the protected areas, while TC worked primarily in the buffer zones (of two of the six protected areas, PNKB and PNL), where it was entrusted in particular with the implementation of measures for local residents and personnel capacity development for the ICCN. According to the survey data, activities were carried out in a complementary and parallel manner, which meant that synergies could be utilised in some cases and duplication avoided. Parallel and complementary activities included, for example, the complementary preparation of local development plans in the vicinity of the PNKB and the PNL during Phase III.

The key factor for this high level of coherence was not only the complementary design of the programme modules, but also good and close communication and good coordination, which have been strengthened by regular jour fixes between FC and TC since 2017. According to interviewees, any ambiguities in the distribution of tasks could be clarified by proactively addressing uncertainties. At the end of Phase III, the division of labour in the PNKB environment was clearly coordinated. Cooperation between TC and FC at the coordination and project responsibility levels was also strengthened during the course of the programme implementation.

The coherence was also visible with related German development cooperation projects. The FC module "Okapi Nature Conservation Fund" (BMZ No. 2012.65.404), which led to the establishment of a trust fund and the planned financing of the operating costs of the PNKB, which was intended to reduce the PNKB's dependence on financing via the evaluated programme (see sustainability chapter). Synergies were also achieved for the FC modules "Integrated Protected Area Management I + II" (BMZ No. 2012.67.145/2015.67.262), the TC measure "Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Forest Management" (PN: 2015.2229.1) and its follow-up phases, in and around the PNKB and the PNL. While PBF mainly financed measures in the parks, the "Integrated protected area management I + II" modules focussed on supporting the ICCN in implementing its strategy for cooperation with local residents ("*Stratégie de Conservation Communautaire*") by means of significant investments in the peripheral zone development of the selected protected areas, particularly in the rehabilitation of Phase I slopes. Finally, the FC and COMIFAC programme "Promotion of certified forest management" (BMZ No. 2008 66 707) also strengthened internal coherence by focusing on the promotion of certification processes at regional level, which could not be implemented at national level (see outcome indicator 3 of Phase I in the effectiveness chapter).

External coherence

The programme complemented and supported the DR Congo's own efforts (subsidiarity principle) and was coherent with key Congolese strategy documents (see relevance chapter). In addition to the framework values mentioned in the relevance chapter, the partner's strategy documents should be mentioned here, such as the "*Plan Stratégique d'Action 2004-2008*" of the Congolese nature conservation authority ICCN or the "*Stratégie de la Conservation dans les Aires Protégées de la RDC*" 2012 of the ICCN. These show that the project was integrated into the development policy orientation of the Congolese government

In addition, the interview data showed that **donor coordination mechanisms and other instruments existed in the country and in the sector that enabled successful coordination.** The operational plans in the protected areas were a central **coordination instrument**. These emphasised the financial contributions of the respective donors and the activities financed. Steering committees ("*Comités de Pilotage*") in the respective protected areas also contributed to coordination. In addition, the programme participated in the official overarching donor group ("*Groupe Inter-Bailleurs*"), which was initiated at the initiative of KfW, and an informal "protected

area management" subgroup, which includes KfW, GIZ, the EU, USAID, Enabel and AFD. According to the interviewees, this subgroup enabled a more efficient and direct design of the dialogue due to the smaller number of stakeholders. Against the background of the weakness of the executing agency and allegations of human rights violations, additional meetings of the core donors (KfW, GIZ, USAID, EU and AFD as well as in some cases the Okapi Fund) were held from Phase III of the programme onwards, in which the best possible support for the ICCN Directorate General was discussed. The high staff turnover of ICCN directors impaired the ICCN's efforts to improve donor coordination. It should also be noted that donor coordination was predominantly carried out *à posteriori*, meaning that potential synergies from a closer exchange were missed *à priori*.

The programme involved bilateral coordination with individual donors. There was an exchange with USAID, which supported the PNS with its development measures, and with the European Union (EU), which also supported the PNS and the Upemba National Park (PNU), which was part of *the Complexe Upemba-Kundelungu* (CUK) together with the Kundelungu National Park (PNKL) at times, as part of its programme. Coordination between the project and the EU took place, for example, regarding the financing of the salaries of the park rangers in the PNS and the neighbouring measures. According to interviewees, this bilateral communication had varying degrees of success.

Rating summary

The programme was designed in line with the priorities of German DC. Within the DC programme, TC and FC modules were developed in a complementary manner and the communication and coordination of the modules during implementation were successful overall. Internal coherence with other German DC programmes was evident. The programme also supported the partner country's own efforts and endeavoured to use existing donor coordination mechanisms and promote bilateral coordination with individual donors. This strengthened external coherence. The coherence of the programme can therefore be rated as successful overall.

Coherence: 2 (for all projects)

Effectiveness

Achievement of (intended) objectives

The objective of the programme, adapted as part of the EPE, was to improve the management of selected protected areas in the DR Congo, while considering the needs of the local population. The achievement of the objective at outcome level can be summarised as follows:

Indicator (adjusted as part of the EPE)	Status at PA	Target value according to PA/EPE	Actual value for PCR	Actual value at EPE
Phase I				
(1) The sustainable management of the Kahuzi-Biéga National Park and the Okapi Game Reserve is ensured	"to be specified" (according to module proposal)	Target level (should): "Improvement"	n.a. Progress report on phases I, II and III from 2015: "not fulfilled".	Not fulfilled
(2) An initial certification process for the large-scale operation of a timber concession has been successfully completed.	0	1 Certificate	n.a. Progress report on phases I, II and III from 2015: "not fulfilled".	Not fulfilled

Phase II/III				
(1a) The management efficiency of the selected protected areas is increased ⁷ .	Increase in management efficiency (in %): PNKB: RFO: RNTN: - PNL: - PNKL: PNS: 41 % (2016)	PNKB: 65 % RFO: 50 % RNTN: 60 % PNL: - PNKL: - PNS: -	PNKB: 57 % (IMET 2018) - Not achieved RFO: 54.8 % (IMET 2019) - Achieved RNTN: 55.5 % (IMET) - Not achieved PNL: 57% / 58% (IMET 2018/PAMET 2018) - "Achieved" according to AK PNKL: 57 % (IMET 2018) - Not to be assessed, but has increased PNS: 56.6 % / 61 % (2019) - Not to be assessed, but has increased	Partially fulfilled
(1b) 80% of the management and operational plans of the selected protected areas have been implemented.	PNKB: 20 % RFO: 20 % RNTN: - PNL: - PNKL: - PNS: 62.3 % (2016)	80 %	PNKB: 42.7 % - Not achieved RFO: 20 % - Not achieved RNTN: 80 % (2019) - Achieved PNL: 100 % (2018) - Achieved PNKL: - Not to be assessed PNS: 74.2 % (2019) - Not achieved	Partially fulfilled
(2) The agreements with the neighbouring population of the selected protected areas to ensure their involvement in protected area management have been 80% implemented.	PNKL: 0 % PNS: 0 %	PNKL: 80 % PNS: 80 %	PNKL: - Not to be measured PNS: - Not to be measured	Not fulfilled
(3) The own revenues of the PNKB and PNKL protected areas have increased.	PNKB: \$100,000 PNKL: \$25,000	PNKB: \$200,000 PNKL: \$40,000	PNKB: 187,600 (2017) - Not achieved PNKL: 12,000 (2016) - Not achieved	Not fulfilled
(4) A long-term partnership with an NGO for co-management in the respective selected protected areas is secured, co-management agreement (KMV) signed	PNKB: no RFO: yes RNTN: yes PNL: no PNKL: no PNS: yes		PNKB: no - Not achieved RFO: yes - achieved RNTN - Achieved PNL: yes - achieved PNKL: yes - achieved PNS: yes - achieved	Largely fulfilled PNKB: yes - achieved RFO: yes - Achieved PNKL: no, after the first KMV was cancelled; talks are taking place at the time of the EPE, but there is no date for a signature yet RNTN: Not applicable

⁷ Management effectiveness was evaluated using the *Protected Area Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool* (PAMETT) method until 2017 and the *Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool* (IMET) method from 2017 onwards. Note from the final review: "It should be noted that the results of the two methods are not directly comparable. [...] To ensure long-term comparability, IMET should continue to be used as a tool in the future." (Source: Final review)

The PAMETT method was originally developed in 2002 by the *World Bank-WWF Alliance for Forest Conservation and Sustainable Use*. It consists of 1) data sheets that collect key information on the protected area, its features, threats and management objectives, as well as information on who carried out the assessment, and 2) an assessment form that provides a composite measurement of 38 parameters covering all six components of the IUCN WCPA PAME framework (*Protected Areas Management Effectiveness framework of the World Commission on Protected Areas*). The form consists of a questionnaire with four possible answers, each of which can be given a score between 0 (poor) and 3 (excellent). For each question there are also data fields for comments on the answers (if possible with reasons), steps to be taken to improve management and information on sources of information. (Source: Protected Planet)

The IMET method was developed as part of the Biodiversity and Protected Area Management Programme (BIOPAMA) in Central and West Africa in 2014. It is a computer application for evaluating the effectiveness of the management of a protected area. Its aim is to improve decision-making in the management, operation and planning of protected areas. IMET has an internal statistical analysis and generates visualization tools that provide a quick overview of the quality of management.

The IMET form is based on the PAME framework proposed by IUCN/WCPA. (Source: BIOPAMA).

				PNL: yes - achieved PNS: yes - achieved
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Indicator (1) of Phase I, (1a) and (1b) of Phases II/III: Ensuring the sustainable management of the protected areas: The target values of the three indicators were not or only partially achieved. Nevertheless, improvements in management effectiveness were achieved in some protected areas and revised management plans were implemented. At the end of Phase III, the ICCN had efficient tools for better management, the procedures were known and the processes were functional. For example, some procedures were standardised and formalised, such as operational plans, tender documents and reporting. The use of these improved or newly created strategies, instruments and infrastructures as well as the strengthened capacities have contributed to an improvement in the management of the protected areas.

Indicator (2) of Phases II/III: Implementation of agreements with the local population to ensure their involvement in protected area management: Activities were only partially implemented. The local development plans, which were intended to ensure the involvement of the local population and consider their needs in the park management, were written but hardly implemented in practice at the end of Phase III. In addition, the involvement of the population in the measures and the **participatory approach** of the programme aimed, in particular, to increase the acceptance of the population vis-à-vis the measure. In view of the very different conditions in the six protected areas, it is difficult to generalise the success of the participatory approach. The collected data showed a mixed picture. On the one hand, **important aspects of the participatory approach were implemented**, which contributed to the involvement of the population in the park management. To this end, a "*Stratégie de Conservation Communautaire*" was developed to organise cooperations with the population. The strategy provides, for example, the creation of jobs for the local population (as park rangers, tourism guides, etc.) or the provision of development grants. On the other hand, the establishment of **local structures** to facilitate consultations with the local population, including the indigenous population, such as the "*Comités de Consultation Communautaires*" (CoCoCo), the "*Comités de Coordination du Site*" (CoCoSi) or the "*Communautés Locales de Développement*" (CLD), as provided for in the strategy, has enabled their involvement in the reflection on park management, the creation of operational plans, and the decision-making, planning and budgeting of local activities. This involvement has had a positive impact. For example, according to progress reports, the PNKL (as part of the CUK at the time) has seen a remarkable increase in contact and cooperation with the neighbouring communities around the complex. In addition, as part of the participatory approach, **awareness-raising measures** on forest and biodiversity protection and protected area management were carried out with the local population by local awareness-raising committees ("*Comités de Sensibilisation à l'Environnement*" (CSE), which showed positive results. According to representatives of KfW and the trainers, the sensitisation activities have not only led to an increased awareness of the need to protect biodiversity but have also contributed to an improvement in the relationship between the local population, including the indigenous population, and the ICCN. If integration and sensitisation measures are combined with measures to compensate for resource losses (see impact indicator 1), such a participatory approach can contribute to increase the acceptance of the population vis-à-vis the conservation measures⁸. However, **the measures to provide socio-economic support to the local population remained limited**. The main mandate of the FC programme in phases I to III was to strengthen the ICCN through major investments in construction measures and the training of park rangers. In comparison, the implementation of the participatory approach and the neighbourhood measures represented a small proportion of the activities. In view of the great needs, in some cases this led to disappointment on the part of the population⁹. In addition, a greater focus on the neighbourhood measures would have been necessary to ensure the effectiveness of awareness-raising measures and the broad acceptance of the population. As already mentioned, however, this was not the main mandate of the programme. In this context, the FC project "Integrated Protected Area Management I+II" focussed on the implementation of local measures with additional funds and served to complement the FC project and address the needs of the local population to a greater extent.

Indicator (2) of Phase I: Completion of a certification process: No certification process was completed as part of the programme. In Phase I, it was determined that this component of the programme was politically infeasible because the DR Congo was not eligible for the legal export market. Accordingly, this thematic area was not

⁸ To further strengthen the involvement of the population, the suggestion was made to integrate an indicator for phases V-VIII, according to which representatives of indigenous population groups must be included in the steering committees of the parks. According to the interviewees, this would be a crucial point for improving participation.

⁹ The funding freeze in phase IV, which led to a pause in activities, also had a strong negative impact on the relationship with the population, according to respondents.

further financed in phases II/III. Instead, it was considered at regional level by COMIFAC. This measure is excluded from further considerations in the effectiveness criteria of this evaluation.

Indicator (3) of Phases II/III: Strengthening the revenue generation of the PNKB and PNKL: In Phases I to III of the programme, a stable strengthening of the income generation of the PNKB and the PNKL through tourism could not be achieved. The tense security situation had a strong negative impact on the achievement of this objective. In the PNKB, tourism infrastructure was built or renovated (e.g. six bungalows, two tents, renovation of the visitor centre, renovation of the hiking trails) and new gorilla families acclimatised. Revenues from gorilla tours stabilised at around USD 190,000 in 2017. However, these fell again in 2019 and, due to the security situation, the opportunities for increased income generation remain very limited, despite the great tourism potential for this area. With regard to the PNKL, revenue has remained at a low level. Due to the relatively stable security situation in this region, there is still considerable tourism potential in this park, but there is a lack of infrastructure and competition with tourism from southern Africa is high. Opportunities for high income generation from tourism is limited. In the other protected areas, there was no significant income from tourism, either because the protected areas are extremely remote (e.g. PNS, PNL, RNTN) or because the security situation is too unstable (RFO).

Indicator (4) of Phases II/III: Conclusion of partnerships with NGOs: Significant progress was made in the endeavour to achieve long-term partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for the co-management of the protected areas, so that the indicator was almost fulfilled. At the end of Phase III, a co-management agreement (CMA) was concluded in the PNKL/CIUK. For the PNS, a three-year CMA was concluded in mid-2015 and a 10-year CMA was signed for the RFO in December 2018. In the PNL, there was a long-term collaboration with an NGO and in the RNTN. There was a long-term collaboration with an NGO - without a formal MoU. A further MoU in PNL was not yet finalised during the third phase (and signed as part of Phase IV). Further progress was recognized at the time of the EPE. There are signed MoUs in all protected areas except the PNKL and the RNTN. Discussions are still underway to conclude a MoU for the PNKL, but no MoU had been signed at the time of the EPE after the existing MoU was cancelled by ICCN. There were no plans to sign an MoU for the RNTN. As part of Phase IV, a transformation into a community-managed system was agreed with ICCN. The implementation of the co-management approach was characterised by **tensions** in selected cases. These became particularly apparent from phase IV onwards. Cooperation in the PNKL between NGOs, the implementation consultant and ICCN proved to be particularly difficult. The NGOs increasingly relied on the existing EU co-financing and, in particular, urgent investments in the PNKL were not carried out. The cooperation between ICCN and the co-management NGO in the PNS was overshadowed by the allegations of human rights violations. The involved parties have worked to resolve these allegations (see unintended effects and impact chapter).

Contribution to the achievement objectives

The progress made in securing the sustainable management of the protected areas is clearly attributable to the programme measures. The measures and outputs of the programme and their expected contribution to the respective outcomes are presented in detail in the *Theory of Change* (Figure 1). According to both the monitoring data and the interview data, important milestones were reached and conditions improved that strengthen the management of the protected areas and are the direct results of the programme. The programme has contributed to the increased commitment of the ICCN, which was necessary for sustainable management. According to selected interviews, this prioritisation of the topic and the ICCN's high level of commitment to protected area management would not have taken place without the project. For the sustainable management of the protected areas, the financing of performance-based bonus payments as a supplement to the salaries of the employees of the protected areas was also a key factor, which led to increased motivation and, accordingly, increased effectiveness of their forest conservation work. The infrastructure and equipment financed by the programme were also decisive in strengthening the project executing agent's monitoring and patrol capacities and improving the management of the protected areas. For example, the programme supported the construction of accommodation for the park rangers, the procurement of vehicles, the strengthening of bio-monitoring and the use of satellites to observe the forests. This improved equipment for managing the protected areas is directly attributable to the programme's investments. In addition, by strengthening the capacities of the project executing agent's staff, the programme contributed to improving the management of the protected areas, for example through basic and advanced training in the areas of finance, financial procedures, audit preparation and patrol activities, including human rights aspects. The evaluation concludes that the programme has contributed significantly to a more professional handling of allegations of human rights violations. Finally, the management tools created and the *"Conservation Communautaire Strategy"*, which are used and contribute to the sustainable management of protected areas, are also attributable to the support provided by the programme.

With regard to the involvement of the neighbouring population, the success of the project is less clear.

As already described, the implementation of agreements with the local population is hardly visible through the local development plans. Nonetheless, the programme has successfully contributed to the involvement of the local population in the reflection on the management of the protected areas. In particular, the programme has also made an important contribution to involve the particularly disadvantaged indigenous population in the park management. As a socially marginalised group, the indigenous population is highly dependent on forest resources and is heavily discriminated against in Congolese society, which is why the project endeavoured to take their needs into account. This was in line with the *"Leave No One Behind"* principle. The programme also ensured that this vulnerable group benefited from the programme's support with regard to local economic measures. Overall, the programme has contributed to improving the involvement of the indigenous population through the ICCN. The interviews showed that the ICCN has achieved a high level of awareness of the need to involve this vulnerable group and of its potential for impact in terms of biodiversity conservation, which is directly attributable to the project through the awareness-raising measures. According to the interviewees, the indigenous population represents 30% of the ICCN staff of the PNKB. In addition, the indigenous population was supported through the payment of school fees and the provision of school equipment. It is important to underline that the *Bukavu Dialogue Process*, which was organised in response to allegations of human rights violations, has played a major role in increasing the involvement of the indigenous population in the PNKB.¹⁰ Furthermore, respondents stated that the ICCN has seen a positive change in awareness towards the indigenous population.

With regard to the consideration of the needs of disadvantaged population groups, it should be noted that while the project focussed strongly on the needs of the indigenous population, no specific focus was placed on women or children/youth. The vulnerability of women and children/youth in the Congo was not sufficiently considered. From today's perspective, it can be assessed that the consideration of the gender dimension in the design and implementation of the programme does not do justice to a feminist development policy formulated by the German Federal Government in 2023. According to interviewees, no special measures were taken to consider the specific needs of women. Although there were no significant measures of positive discrimination against women, it should be noted that women played an important role in the groupings during the sensitisation measure and found employment in the park management during the course of the project, e.g. as park rangers. According to interviewees, the DR Congo is therefore more progressive than Côte d'Ivoire, for example. However, this was not the result of any particular proactive promotion of women. To summarise, the project can be rated as *"gender-sensitive"* according to the UNFPA guidelines on gender approaches.

External factors were the main reason why the project failed to meet its objectives. The volatile security situation was crucial. The presence of rebels who do not respect the areas as protected areas, who plunder natural resources, operate illegal mines and use violence against local residents and ICCN staff affected the effectiveness of the programme and the monitoring. This was particularly the case for the PNKB and RFO, where militias were very present at the time of the EPE and posed a serious threat to the forests. The attacks by armed militias on the RFO headquarters in 2012 made it impossible to implement the measures there as planned. Regular surveillance patrols and bio-monitoring activities were also not possible at times in large parts of the PNKB, particularly in the lowland zones (*"Basse Altitude"*). In addition, high rates of crime and unrest, high population growth and density, tensions in eastern Congo due to militias and a complex geopolitical situation have exacerbated social tensions in some regions. Other common challenges of development cooperation in a fragile context, such as the high staff turnover at both the ICCN and the consultant, the lack of qualified personnel and capacities on the part of the project executing agent, the dysfunctionality of the state and the weakness of the project executing agency, as well as the self-interest of the various stakeholders, have led to implementation difficulties, slow service delivery and delayed or withheld payments. This was particularly the case for cooperation with the ICCN's head office in Kinshasa. According to the interview data, establishing the ICCN as an institution, managed according to *good governance criteria*, was challenging. In addition, the geographical location of the protected areas presented some major logistical challenges for the project. Due to the size and, in some cases, remoteness of the protected areas, both monitoring and surveillance were, in some regions, challenging. Finally, at the end of Phase III, unrest following the elections at the end of 2018 / beginning of 2019 and the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus pandemic caused further difficulties. Due to the pandemic, the ICCN Directorate General decided in March 2020 that only the absolutely necessary work (*"service minimum"*) may be carried out in the protected areas.

¹⁰ In the "Integrated Protected Area Management I + II" project, a representative of the indigenous population has also become a member of the steering committee (*"Comité de Pilotage"*), which according to the interviewees represents a major role and would have been unthinkable in the past.

In addition, the emergence of allegations of human rights violations from 2017 onwards and the project executing agent's approach to human rights standards towards the end of Phase III posed major challenges for the programme. Following an incident in the vicinity of the Kahuzi-Biéga National Park in eastern DR Congo in August 2017, KfW was informed by the *Rainforest Foundation UK* about incidents in the vicinity of the Salonga National Park in May 2018 (around the end of Phase III of the programme). Subsequently, indications of possible human rights violations also became known in other protected areas, particularly in the PNS¹¹. This revealed shortcomings on the part of the project executing agent with regard to human rights standards, risk management, complaints mechanisms and sanctions. The consequences of the ICCN's inadequate handling of the allegations of human rights violations resulted in the suspension of payments as part of the project, which caused considerable delays in the implementation of project measures. This also led to a necessary shift in the project's priorities, which affected the implementation of activities. The implementation of the activities - as well as the relationship with the partners and target groups - was also negatively affected by the reluctance to pay. The issue of human rights was intensively addressed from Phase IV onwards and KfW, the BMZ and the ICCN took important measures from Phase IV onwards to respond to the situation (see unintended effects and impact chapter).

Quality of implementation

With regard to the quality of the implementation, the successful cooperation between the implementation consultant and the project executing agent should be mentioned despite the unfavourable conditions.

According to representatives of both KfW and the ICCN, the implementation consultant has achieved a great deal in the area of technical and substantive support in close cooperation with the respective park directors and with the ICCN Directorate General in Kinshasa (see progress in improving park management above). Interviewees showed a high level of satisfaction with the support and guidance provided by the consultant. However, in assessing the consultant's performance, the context in the DRC must also be taken into account, as it was difficult to find qualified staff and there were significant delays in reporting and overall service delivery, particularly due to excessive turnover of the consultant's key personnel. Due to the deviations in the schedule, the contract between ICCN and the consultant was extended several times.

On the other hand, there was sometimes a lack of clear understanding of the roles of the consultant, ICCN and NGOs. Furthermore, coordination difficulties between the consultant and the NGOs, as well as between the ICCN and NGOs, affected the quality of implementation. This is an internal project factor that reduced the effectiveness of the programme. The partial lack of clear delineation of responsibilities between the consultant and ICCN, as well as between the consultant and the NGOs, has become even more problematic over time due to the increasing involvement of NGOs - which also made their own contributions - through co-management. For example, according to the interviewees, there was a lack of coordination regarding the payment of performance-related bonuses to the employees of the protected areas. There were also tensions between the consultant and several NGOs during the course of the programme. Among other things, this manifested itself in a lack of reporting by one NGO. This led to frictional losses and delays in implementation. Despite efforts to bring all stakeholders to the table, relations remained strained. Tensions following the allegations of human rights violations between the ICCN and the co-management NGO in the PNS made cooperation, which had been going well beforehand, more difficult.

Unintended effects (positive or negative)

The above-mentioned human rights violations by ICCN protected area staff, which became known at the end of Phase III, were unintended negative impacts of the programme. The human rights violations are analysed and evaluated in more detail in the impact criterion.

A second, unintended negative impact of the project was the frustration and tensions in parts of the neighbouring population, which resulted from the positive discrimination of the indigenous population. The implementation of the participatory approach of the project and the involvement of the indigenous population in the project, in line with the "*Leave No One Behind*" principle, posed a challenge with regard to the "*Do No Harm*" principle. According to interviewees, the project clearly focused on the indigenous population, for example on the renovation of schools and the payment of school fees in the vicinity of the PNKB, the support of administrative processes for land acquisition, property rights and seeds, free access to medical care, as well as the *Bukavu dialogue*. This positive discrimination was intended by the project and justified by the situation of the

¹¹ After the end of Phase III, KfW was informed by the Minority Rights Group about alleged human rights violations in the Kahuzi-Biéga National Park.

indigenous population. However, this led to tensions with the Bantu population, who were also affected by poverty. In response to these frustrations, the programme took measures and strengthened the support of other sections of the population. According to interviewees, for example, at the end of Phase III and the beginning of Phase IV, seeds were distributed in a non-discriminatory manner, agricultural training was offered, agricultural means of production were provided, and banana plantations and farmers were supported.

Rating summary

The programme was strongly affected by internal and external factors in achieving its objectives and some measures could not be implemented at all due to these factors. Even though important progress was made in relation to the main areas of work, which is clearly attributable to the programme measures, the programme was only partially able to achieve its outcome indicators. The quality of implementation was partly unsatisfactory due to the difficult cooperation between the stakeholders involved. In addition, serious negative unintended effects were identified. The effectiveness of the programme can therefore be rated as only partially successful.

Effectiveness: 3 (for all projects)

Efficiency

Production efficiency

The total costs of the programme (phases I and II/III) amounted to around 51.7 million euros. FC financed EUR 46 million of this, while the DR Congo's own contribution and co-financing from other parties totalled EUR 5.7 million. Compared to the original cost estimate, the costs rose due to the increased security risk and the continuing weaknesses of the ICCN, which required greater support and assumption of activities. In phases II and III, 99% and 97% of the funds were spent respectively. The remaining funds were used for consulting services in subsequent phases.

The components of the programme relating to the administrative and financial implementation of the measures and the management of the protected areas were the most cost-intensive. Consulting services and the financing of nature conservation activities accounted for the lion's share of these components. This breakdown of costs is fundamentally understandable due to the weaknesses of the executing agency and the Congolese state. For example, in the PNKL/CUK (presented in the final inspection as an example of cost allocation by results), around 80% of the budget was spent on the administrative and financial implementation of the programme (USD 912,921, for a total budget of USD 1,155,894). According to the project documents, around 70-80% of the budget was spent on running costs and administration in all protected areas, as well as on performance-based bonus payments and providing the park ranger patrols with food rations. According to interviews, these high costs could be explained by the high support requirements of the ICCN, as well as the high cost of living and personnel costs in the DRC. Furthermore, according to interviewees, the high flexibility of the consultant due to the weakness of the executing agency in terms of delays and contract extensions can justify the costs. In view of the weakness of the executing agency, the use of funds is understandable and no better alternatives to these high consulting service costs could be identified. Compared to these high costs, the neighbouring measures received a low proportion of the budget (see allocation efficiency).

The efficiency of the programme was affected by the lack of capacity and weaknesses of the ICCN Directorate General in Kinshasa with regard to financial management. For example, the executing agency initially submitted an improperly prepared audit. After a proper audit was prepared, funds that had not been properly documented were reimbursed by the executing agency. During the period of clarification of the outstanding issues, the processing of call-offs was temporarily suspended. The long delays in processing open audit questions from the ICCN led to uncertainties regarding the release of funds, which affected the implementation of the project.

However, these weaknesses at the level of the Directorate-General do not adequately reflect the situation in the protected areas. At the level of the protected areas, the evaluation of the implementation and monitoring of the financial management of Phases I to III basically revealed a picture of increasing structuring and professionalisation. The reason for this lies in the close monitoring of the award processes and accounting by the consultant (PNKB, PNL, RFO, PNKL/CUK) and the NGOs (PNS, RNTN). Measures such as the introduction of an accounting programme and the direct allocation of payments to the activities in the operational plans, for example, enabled their timely financial monitoring. In addition, despite the irregularities at the level of the

Directorate-General, no evidence of misuse of funds was identified at the level of the protected areas through the physical utilisation checks or in the audit reports. In addition, the recommendations of the audits were implemented and contributed to improving the accounting system and the quality of the supporting documents as well as the control and management capacities. The establishment of a joint IT cloud by the consultant and the organisation of two project workshops in 2017 and 2018 significantly improved the basis for knowledge management in the project. The centralised management of administrative processes and reporting (operational, procurement and business plans, contract templates, etc.) also led to efficiency gains.

In addition to capacity strengthening, the use of the implementation consultant or the NGO enabled the proper management of the respective protected area-specific disposition funds. In this regard, the interviews showed that the management of the disposition fund by the consultant or the NGO was the right approach to ensure successful management of the funds in the context of the executing agency's weak capacities. According to the interviewees, the quality of the financial management and the final audits confirmed the success of this approach.

Overall, the relationship between the funds utilised and the achievement of objectives is comprehensible. Although the programme indicators were largely not met, positive progress and improvements were achieved. This is particularly the case with regard to improving the management of the protected areas, for which the majority of the funds were spent (70-80% of the budget in the respective protected areas). In comparison, significantly less was achieved in terms of involving the local population and improving their living conditions. This is in proportion to the very limited funds spent on the neighbourhood measures.

Allocation efficiency

The close cooperation with TC within the framework of the development cooperation programme, as well as with other actors outside the programme, made it possible to achieve important synergies that contributed to the allocation efficiency of the project (see coherence chapter).

The project could have spent a larger share of its budget on the neighbourhood measures to contribute more successfully to its objective at impact level (improving the living conditions of the local population), even if only selectively. The neighbourhood measures have received a small part of the budget. According to the operational plan in the consultant's final report for Phase III, 3% was earmarked for involving the local population in park management and improving their livelihoods. This was also the case for the exemplary PNKL/CUK, where only 70% of these measures were also implemented. According to the interview data, the funds available for the neighbourhood measures were not sufficient to cover the needs of the local residents. Supporting the neighbouring population was not the main mandate of a nature conservation project. Complementary projects were launched during the course of the programme to focus on the local residents. Nevertheless, this project has set itself the goal of improving the living conditions of the local population and promoting their involvement in the management of the protected areas. To achieve the goals set with regard to improving the livelihoods of the local population, for example through income-generating measures, greater investment would have been necessary for this component. A higher budget for the neighbourhood measures would also have made sense to ensure the conservation of biodiversity, especially in view of the relevance of involving and supporting the population in the protection of forests (see relevance chapter). To achieve the objectives set with regard to the involvement of the local population in protected area management, for example for the implementation of local development plans, a greater use of funds in this component would have been necessary. Since the needs of the ICCN and its protected areas are also immense, but the possibilities of the project are limited, one solution would be to initiate increased communication and coordination with other projects that have a stronger focus on supporting the local population. This was undertaken at the end of the third phase. There was greater coordination with an EU-funded programme and the FC modules "Integrated Protected Area Management I + II" (see Internal coherence).

Rating summary:

In terms of production efficiency, the allocation of the costs of the programme is generally comprehensible and the relationship between the funds used and the achievement of objectives is plausible. Even though the use of the consultant enabled proper management of the disposition fund and increasing professionalisation of financial management at the park level, irregularities occurred at the level of the ICCN general management. Furthermore, synergies achieved with GIZ contributed to the allocation efficiency of the programme, although the programme could have spent a larger share of its budget on the local population measures to contribute more successfully to

its objective at impact level, i.e. the selective improvement of the living conditions of the local population, despite complementary projects that focus more on supporting the local population. Efficiency can therefore be rated as limited.

Efficiency: 3 (for all projects)

Overarching developmental impact

Overarching (intended) developmental changes

The adapted objective of the EPE was to improve the protection of biodiversity in selected areas of the DR Congo. The achievement of the objective can be summarised as follows:

Indicator	Status PA	Target value according to PA	Actual value at PCR	Actual value at EPE
1) Households in the vicinity of PNKB and RFO (with special consideration of the indigenous population) experience an improvement in their living conditions (access to drinking water, health services, seeds, income through sustainable use of natural resources, etc.).	0	50 % Unit of measurement: % selected socio-economic indicators) In the progress report on phases I, II and III from 2015 (page 7): Measured variables are "water, health, income".	N/A in the AK. In the progress report on phases I, II and III from 2015: "not fulfilled".	Not fulfilled
(2) The population development of selected indicator species in the selected protected areas has improved.	Population development of the indicator species ¹² : PNKB: Gorillas in the highlands: 181 RFO: Elephants: 3,588 Okapis: 3,400 Chimpanzees: 4,600 RNTN: Elephants: 59 (2011) Chimpanzees: 52. Buffalo: 27 PNL: Forest elephants: n.a. Bonobos: 400-1,100 (2012) PNKL: Elephants: 200 Zebras: 80 Buffalo: 80	Population development of indicator species: PNKB: Gorillas in the highlands: 200 RFO: Elephants: 3,500 Okapis: 3,400 Chimpanzees: 4,600 RNTN: Elephants: N/A Chimpanzees: N/A Buffalo: N/A PNL: Forest elephants: N/A Bonobos: N/A PNKL: Elephants: 500 Zebras: N/A Buffalo: N/A	PNKB: Gorillas in the highlands: 325 (2019) - Achieved RFO: Elephants: 566 - Not reached Okapis: N/A - Not assessed Chimpanzees: 5,000 (2019) - Achieved RNTN: Elephants: N/A; considered stable - Not assessed Chimpanzees: N/A; considered stable - Not assessed Buffalo: N/A; assessed as stable - Not assessed PNL: Forest elephants: 504-957 (2016) (threatened) - Not to be assessed	Partially fulfilled

¹² This table only lists indicator species and protected areas for which values are available and which were not listed as "Not to be assessed" (due to missing data/values) in the project documents. "Not to be assessed" indicator species or protected areas are only mentioned if they have added value despite the non-measurability of the indicator data (e.g. with regard to forest elephants and bonobos in the PNL).

	Hippos: 30 PNS: Forest elephants: 600-2,400 (2004) Bonobos: 7,000- 20,000 (2006/2008)	Hippos: N/A PNS: Forest elephants: 1,500-2,000 Bonobos: 4,000	Bonobos: 5,500 - 8,600 (2013) - Not to be assessed PNKL: Elephants: 200 (2016) (threatened) - Not reached PNS: Forest elephants: 979-2,533 (2019) (Stable, estimate) - Achieved Bonobos: 11,211- 20,166 (2019) (Sta- ble, estimate) - Achieved	
(2) The deforestation rate in the selected protected areas has fallen.	Low final deforestation rate (in % p.a.) RFO: 0.02 RNTN: 0.25 (2012) PNS: 0.01-0.21 (2014/2015)	RFO: 0.02 RNTN: 0.20 PNS: N/A	RFO: 0.35 - Not achieved RNTN: 0.43 (2019) - Not achieved PNS: < 0.01 (2021) slightly increasing locally - Achieved	Not fulfilled

Indicator (2): Improvement in the population development of selected indicator species: Due to the security situation, it was not possible to continuously monitor the population development of indicator species. There is therefore a lack of data to assess the achievement of this indicator. Nevertheless, some key species showed positive trends towards the end of Phase III. Surveys confirmed **a trend towards stabilisation of the animal species populations**. For example, the bio-monitoring reports since 2011 indicate stable developments in the populations of gorillas and chimpanzees in the PNKB. According to surveys, the large-scale poaching that took place in the PNS, RFO and PNL in the past has been reduced. A reduction in the poaching rate of forest elephants and bonobos as well as the avoided cover loss was already registered during the project period. However, the biodiversity situation varies depending on the protected area and zone in the respective protected areas, depending on how much control the ICCN has over the areas, how present militias are and how isolated the area is from human activity.

Indicator (3): Reduction of the deforestation rate: Based on the monitoring data, the indicator could not be fulfilled or the deforestation rates could not be reduced. For example, the deforestation rate in the RFO has risen from 0.02 % p.a. to 0.35 % p.a.. However, the situation would have been even more critical without the intervention of the programme. Although negative results dominate according to the indicators, the programme nevertheless had a clearly positive effect on forest conservation. Only a few validated values are available for the annual percentage deforestation rates in the protected areas in the monitoring data. However, the analysis of the data confirms that overall deforestation in the supported protected areas was slowed down in phases II/III and that a difference in the development compared to non-financed protected areas is visible (see Figure 2 below). For the analysis relating to phases II/III¹³, forest areas in the six protected areas were compared with comparable forest areas outside the protected areas¹⁴. Figure 1 shows that prior to funding in 2014 (beginning of Phase II), non-funded forest areas ("control group") were relatively similar to the areas of the funded protected areas ("treatment group"). However, both curves diverge after the funding start, as the areas in funded protected areas have a higher average forest cover than non-funded forest areas. In addition, Figure 2 shows that the forest areas supported by the project had on average 0.75 % more forest cover at the time of the EPE than comparable areas

¹³ Only phases II/III were considered for the creation of the data element, as phase I only covered two of the six forests.

¹⁴ To create this analysis, the DR Congo was divided into small squares and various characteristics were then calculated. For each cell, the forest area in 2000 was calculated as well as the clay content of the soil, the unevenness of the terrain (TRI), the average loss of forest from 2001-2013, the altitude meters of the forest area and the travel time to the nearest town with more than 5000 inhabitants. For each forest area in the protected areas, comparable forest areas outside the protected areas were then identified using a coarsened exact matching procedure. Further information can be found in the appendix "Project measures and results".

without protection status and funding. The statistical analysis thus shows that the protected areas would probably have lost even more forest area without the projects.

The results of the analysis of deforestation rates are consistent with the information provided by the stakeholders surveyed, who also reported a decline in deforestation rates. According to the respondents, the forest destruction has been slowed down. Overall, the threat could generally not be halted, meaning that the forests continued to lose trees and the target values could not be achieved. The situation varies depending on the protected area. The PNS was removed from the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger in 2021 due to the improvements in its conservation status, which can be considered a clear success for the project. Furthermore, no loss of tree cover was observed in the PNL, in the PNS the deforestation rate was stable, but in 2021 the deforestation rate was increasing in the RNTN - as well as in the RFO to a lesser extent (0.35 %). Deforestation also increased in the highland part of the PNKB, including the corridor, due to illegal activities in the park. In addition, population growth in the surrounding area (particularly Bukavu and Lubumbashi) posed an increased threat to the protected areas in the PNKB and PNKL/CUK, which led to increasing pressure on the forests.

Figure 2: Analysis of deforestation rates

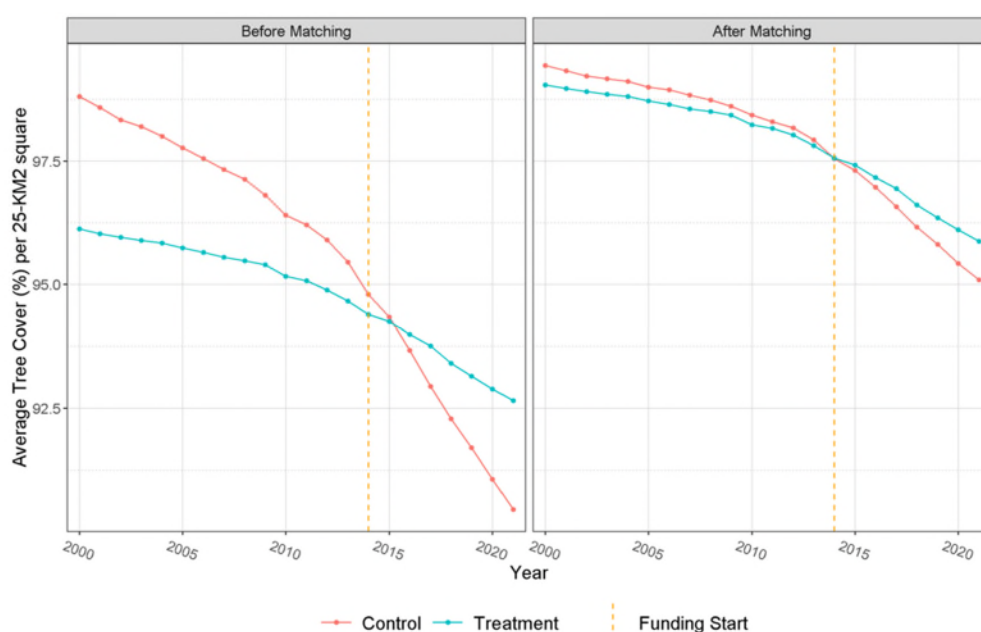


Figure 2 shows the establishment of a statistical twin of comparable forest areas based on data from *Global Forest Watch*. On the left, the figure of deforestation rates per 25 km² cell where the total forest area in the DRC represents the control group. It can be seen that these forest areas vary in level and trend and are not a suitable control group. Right, the average forest area after a *coarsened exact matching*¹⁵ procedure was applied to identify a comparable control group (similar travel time to the nearest smaller town, altitude metres, forest cover, deforestation rates in the past before the time of financing, soil conditions). It can be seen that before the start of implementation, the funded protected areas had a similar forest area and a similar deforestation trend as the areas used for comparison (control group). The difference between these two groups after the start of the project shows that the forest areas in the national parks are also being lost, but to a much lesser extent than in comparable non-protected areas.

Contribution to overarching (intended) developmental changes

With regard to the **socio-economic situation of the neighbouring population**, the project was able to contribute to selective improvements **but was unable to achieve any significant changes**. Measures implemented in this area were small-scale support measures to compensate for losses for the population, who were no longer allowed to use the forest resources, and to create alternatives. Measures implemented included, for example, the distribution of seeds for agricultural development and the promotion of small livestock farming. In addition, jobs

¹⁵ Stefano M. Iacus, Gary King, and Giuseppe Porro. 2012. "Causal Inference Without Balance Checking: Coarsened Exact Matching." *Political Analysis*, 20, 1, pp. 1--24.

were created for the local population in protected area management, particularly as park rangers. However, overall support for the population to improve their economic situation was not part of this nature conservation programme. This area is not the core mandate of the ICCN, which also has limited competences and resources for this and could not address this issue on its own. In view of the very poor situation of the population and the size of the regions to be covered, the funds available for the neighbourhood measures were therefore insufficient to realistically contribute to a comprehensive improvement and thus achieve a significant impact. In addition, the success of the neighbourhood measures depended a great deal on the ICCN and the co-management NGOs. However, according to interviewees, both the ICCN and some of the NGOs lacked experience in working with the local population and supporting their livelihoods. On a positive note, however, the programme addressed the lack of experience through its activities to involve the local population and along the participatory approach. At the same time, the ICCN lacked experience in involving and cooperating with local authorities, which could have been supported. There were also logistical factors, such as the lack of access to neighbouring villages, which posed further obstacles. The more remote the protected areas and neighbouring villages, the more limited the support of the population. In contrast, in the PNKB and RFO, measures were implemented more successfully than in other areas, in large part due to the connection to surrounding national roads.

In contrast, with regard to the **preservation of biodiversity and the population development of indicator species and the reduction of deforestation rates, important successes have been achieved that can plausibly be attributed to the programme measures.** The monitoring data from the programme is insufficient to determine a clear improvement in the biodiversity situation. However, all stakeholders surveyed as part of the EPE and the data element (see Figure 2 above) confirmed a trend towards improvement or stabilisation. With regard to the project's contribution to these impacts, the stakeholders clearly stated that this trend is only due to the project's support; without the project's intervention, such an improvement in the situation would not have been possible. With regard to the forest cover, according to the interviewees, the programme has succeeded in keeping the deforestation rate low and slowing down the destruction. According to various interviewees, the PNKB would no longer exist without this project. The fact that the PNS was removed from the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites in Danger is a direct result of the support for this project, as the conservation status of the PNS has improved. In the meantime, several protected areas in the DR Congo have been severely destroyed, but this does not apply to the protected areas supported by the programme.

To achieve such contribution, the German development cooperation has put efforts raise the ICCN's awareness of forest and biodiversity conservation and to increase its focus on new forests to be protected, such as the PNL (founded in 2016), which, according to interviewees, was a key success factor for forest conservation. For forest protection, the funding of performance-related bonuses for ICCN employees was crucial, given the low government salaries. Other actors had not previously been able to provide this service. The programme also increased the effectiveness of the patrols by building accommodation for the park rangers and management staff in the forests and equipping staff. Improved patrols and controls were able to counteract the expansion of poaching and illegal logging. According to the interviewees, the awareness-raising measures have also made a positive contribution to the conservation of biodiversity. According to the interviewees, there is a positive correlation between the presence and monitoring of the ICCN and the reduction in poaching and deforestation.

Contribution to overarching (unintended) developmental changes

At the end of the implementation of Phase III of the programme, incidents of serious human rights violations by ICCN personnel and suspected members of the army against the (indigenous) local population became known. Despite the project's efforts to conduct ICCN training over the years, taking human rights aspects into account, ICCN lacked rules of conduct and procedures to prevent such cases and deal with them appropriately (e.g. through investigations and sanctions). However, after uncovering these deficits, the programme took measures to improve ICCN's human rights compliance together with ICCN and the NGO. A full description of the measures taken was published by KfW as part of an online "*Dossier on biodiversity projects in fragile contexts*".¹⁶

In response to these allegations, KfW and the BMZ launched processes that led to positive development policy changes. In addition to the measures taken in relation to ICCN itself to reduce the risk of human rights violations in the parks, German development cooperation initiated the Bukavu dialogue process, which led to the agreement of a roadmap in September 2019 with the broad participation of the local population. The

¹⁶ KfW "Dossier on biodiversity projects in fragile contexts": <https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/SDG-Portal/SDG-15/Dossier-Biodiversit%C3%A4t/>

implementation of the measures contained therein was subsequently co-financed as part of the development co-operation commitment. These include, for example, the acquisition of land for the indigenous Batwa ethnic group to secure their livelihoods, the provision of seeds and farming equipment and the payment of school fees and school equipment. In addition, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the ICCN and BMZ in March 2020, which led, for example, to the establishment of an independent human rights unit within the ICCN at national level. Following the MoU of March 2020, work began on implementing grievance mechanisms in the respective protected areas. At the time of the EPE, the status of implementation of the mechanisms varied depending on the protected area but was in place in most cases. Finally, KfW developed an Environmental Social Action Plan, which is part of the following phases V-VIII.

Rating summary

The programme has achieved positive partial results. Based on the data analysis and statements from interviewees, it is plausible to assume that the deforestation rates would have been even higher without the programme. However, the negative results dominate the evaluation. The socio-economic situation of the neighbouring population remained largely unchanged and the deforestation rates, with the exception of the PNS, have risen sharply. In terms of biodiversity conservation, the picture is mixed depending on the species. This means that the programme did not achieve its impact indicators, or only partially achieved them. The human rights violations that have occurred and the ICCN's handling of the allegations are decisive for the evaluation. Despite some positive partial results, the negative results clearly dominate.

On a positive note, it should be emphasised that FC's response to the allegations of human rights violations was appropriate and created an important framework for the subsequent phases. However, this EPE only evaluates the results of phases I, II, and III.

Overarching developmental impact: 5 (for all projects)

Sustainability

Capacities of the beneficiaries and stakeholders

The institutional and personnel capacities of the ICCN at the level of the local protected areas were strengthened in the course of the programme. The ICCN also demonstrated its own responsibility for maintaining the positive effects of the measures over time. In terms of institutional capacities, towards the end of Phase III the ICCN had efficient management strategies and instruments at the level of the protected areas, as well as functional procedures that were known and whose processes were well established. Improved infrastructures were also available. These capacities should contribute to enabling the ICCN to better fulfil its mandate, ensure sustainable management of the protected areas and thereby achieve positive impacts in terms of biodiversity conservation. The ICCN has also been strengthened in terms of personnel capacities. Its staff have been trained particularly in the areas of management and finance. In addition, the ICCN gained increased awareness and competences with regard to cooperation with the local population and the involvement of vulnerable groups. According to the interviewees, the capacities and procedures gained were also utilised and applied well, which could contribute to the sustainability of the results. Overall, the interviewees rated these increased capacities as positive steps towards maintaining the results achieved.

Despite the improvements, the ICCN's capacities are still weak and there is still a risk that they are inadequate for the sustainable operation of the protected areas. ICCN continues to be a weak institution. The implementation of its activities was regularly affected by delays. Frequent staff changes at the level of park managers led to additional delays due to the necessary familiarisation periods. Furthermore, at the end of Phase III, the control capacities of the park rangers remained limited, which poses a threat to the conservation of biodiversity. There is also a need for additional equipment, logistics, transport and satellite monitoring devices. As a result, at the end of Phase III, the capacities of the ICCN were deemed insufficient to sustainably secure the results achieved (without further support).

Furthermore, the financial capacities were insufficient at the end of Phase III. Interview data showed that without **further funding** from external donors for subsequent phases, it is not plausible to sustain the impacts. According to the documents analysed, political instability, the volatile security situation, the low political priority of nature conservation and rural development, and the very limited budget resources of the state mean that the protected areas continue to require external support, particularly for the financing of ongoing operating costs. In this

respect, the situation in Eastern Congo is similar to many similar fragile contexts in Africa, where protected area management institutions generally cannot function without external donor funding. Sustainable financing from own resources, e.g. from tourism revenues or the sale of carbon credits, is not to be expected in the foreseeable future (see also Effectiveness). For example, funds for the implementation of development plans have been lacking, which has had a negative impact on the anchoring of these plans (see indicator 4 in the effectiveness chapter).

The evaluation shows that external and long-term support for the protected areas was justified. It was therefore already assumed in the module proposal that the programme and its impacts are not financially sustainable. Both the analysis of relevant reports and surveys showed that this stable and long-term financing was justified and necessary due to the positive climate and biodiversity impacts (public goods) of protecting the forests, which extend far beyond the DR Congo, and in view of the country's very limited financial resources. Given fact that nature and biodiversity conservation requires a long-term approach, a long-term commitment of FC and TC in the country is required. The need to continue the measures after the end of the programme was already anticipated in the module proposal. The creation of the Okapi Nature Conservation Fund by the BMZ (BMZ No. 2012 65 404), a trust fund established for the sustainable financing of biodiversity conservation in the DR Congo and currently financed by German DC, also reflects this need for long-term external financing of operating costs. This fund should also reduce the dependency of the ICCN's financing on this specific BMZ project (e.g. the bonus payments of the PNKB staff depended largely on the availability of FC funds). In addition, the interviews showed that the greatest risk to the sustainability of the results is the lack of continuity, not only for the direct conservation activities, but also for the neighbouring measures. In this context, the discontinuation of activities due to a lack of financial resources and for security reasons could lead to mistrust on the part of the local population and jeopardise the results achieved in terms of awareness-raising and positive, participatory park management and protection.

Contribution to supporting sustainable capacities

The project's capacity development approach was crucial to promote developments at ICCN at the local protected area level that can contribute to the sustainability of results. As described above, the capacity strengthening supported by the project has led to the improvement of tools and processes, infrastructure and equipment, and staff competences that should contribute to a more sustainable management of the protected areas and thus ensure the sustainability of the positive results in terms of forest and biodiversity conservation.

Furthermore, the sustainability of protected areas should be enhanced by an increasing NGO involvement, which are expected to help bridge the capacity gap within the ICCN. This approach not only represents a logical strategy for sustainability but is also essential in light of the human rights violations that have occurred. The aim of the co-management approach, with NGOs that were previously the ICCN's main partners in the respective protected areas, was to compensate for existing capacity deficits and dysfunctionalities at the ICCN and to tap into financial sources at international level. In addition, the relevance of the co-management approach became even greater during Phase III of the programme due to allegations of human rights violations against the ICCN. After these allegations became known, interviewees stated that for KfW and the BMZ as donors, the continuation of cooperation with the ICCN only became conceivable through such an approach and was made a condition for the resumption of regular payments to the ICCN. According to interviewees, this co-management approach makes sense due to the challenges in relation to human rights as well as the limited capacities of the ICCN and the implementation of the complaints mechanisms and the Code of Conduct. This approach can also be positive due to the fact that NGOs do not work in three-year phases or module durations and can therefore anticipate a more long-term planning horizon.

However, the evaluation revealed that the co-management approach, in practice, also has drawbacks that pose risks to sustainability. Interview data primarily indicated that the implementation of co-management in selected protected areas did not always operate satisfactorily (see chapter on effectiveness). The reasons for this vary and partly stem from a lack of clarity regarding the roles and capacities of those involved. In light of allegations of human rights violations, some program activities were also interrupted, jeopardizing the sustainability of the outcomes. Consequently, interviewees reported lost achievements, a suspension of certain community initiatives, and a deterioration in relations with the local population, particularly with indigenous communities. Another valid criticism of the co-management approach is that it results in reduced capacity building within the ICCN, further threatening sustainability.

However, the evaluation concludes that co-management can lead to further capital mobilisation for nature conservation and more staff can be deployed overall. Furthermore, a co-management approach represents an opportunity for mutual learning when jointly managing a nature reserve. Finally, the co-management approach was also useful as a condition for the regular continuation of the project due to the inadequate handling of the allegations of human rights violations and the ongoing dysfunctionality of the ICCN.

Durability of impacts over time

As previously mentioned, the long-term sustainability of the effects can only be ensured with additional funding. This was already outlined in the module proposal for Phase III. Consequently, Phase IV of the program was initiated following the conclusion of Phase III. The financing agreements for Phases V to VIII were signed during the time of the EPE. **It is only through continued financial support for forest protection that the achieved effects can be expected to be permanent.**

However, when assessing the durability of the impacts, it is essential to consider context-related challenges that could jeopardize their sustainability. According to the surveys, the increased pressure in the buffer zones due to population growth and changes in lifestyle is highly significant in this context. As discussed in the chapter on effectiveness and impact, this pressure could have led to the disappearance of certain protected areas, particularly the PNKB, had the program not intervened. In addition to utilizing forest resources for subsistence, the growing population requires land for agriculture and public infrastructure, such as schools and other facilities, which can exacerbate the deforestation issue. Furthermore, current shifts in the population's lifestyle are increasingly negatively impacting the forests. Legitimate aspirations for enhanced economic development and living conditions comparable to those of urban residents are intensifying the pressure on natural resources (see also "Appropriateness of the Concept" in the Relevance chapter).

Finally, the political framework and the security context can also influence the sustainability of the results. On one hand, the sustainability of the results partly depends on the will and commitment of the Congolese state. This is particularly relevant given that, according to interviewees, the ICCN is a political institution closely linked to the state at the highest level. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that differing interests and political priorities, along with the dysfunctions of this fragile state, have often resulted in delays in the disbursement of Congolese budget funds to the ICCN, which could jeopardize the sustainability of the outcomes. Overall, the political framework, instability, volatility of the context, and lack of security in a challenging country like the DR Congo present significant risks to sustainability.

Rating summary

The program has made significant contributions to building essential institutional and personnel capacities. However, these capacities remain insufficient to ensure long-term sustainability. In addition, there was no financial sustainability at the end of Phase III and external and long-term financing from donors was or is still necessary, as in many similar contexts, which is justified due to the international relevance of the protected areas. The project's module proposal already indicated that financial sustainability could not be expected. Long-term external financing is justified by the international relevance of the protected areas and is partially planned by the international donor community. The co-management approach, which was intended to support the sustainability of the results, led to challenges in practice, but these have been partially overcome since the end of Phase III. In addition, external factors also influence the durability of the impacts achieved, such as the increased pressure in the buffer zones due to population growth, changes in lifestyle as well as political framework conditions and the fragility and security contexts. Overall, the sustainability of the programme can be rated as limited.

Sustainability: 3 (for all projects)

Overall rating: 4

From the perspective of its time, the FC project was highly relevant with regards to the core problem, and this **relevance** has only increased in today's context. Additionally, the program was closely aligned with national Congolese priorities and frameworks, as well as with German and international priorities. While it addressed the needs and capacities of its project executing agent, it was only partially aligned with the priorities of the local population. However, it is important to note that a comprehensive consideration of the population's needs extends beyond the mandate of this nature conservation project.

The programme was only partially successful at the outcome level (**effectiveness**). Even though important progress has been achieved with regards to the main areas of work, which is clearly attributable to the programme measures, the programme was only partially able to achieve its outcome indicators. In realizing its objectives, the programme was strongly affected by external factors, including the security situation, and some measures could not be implemented due to these factors. The quality of implementation was also unsatisfactory in some cases due to the difficult cooperation between the stakeholders involved and negative unintended effects were also identified.

At the level of **overarching developmental impact**, the programme also failed to achieve its objectives, or only partially achieved them. The programme has made a plausible positive contribution to the protection of forests and the preservation of biodiversity and has contributed to slowing down the rate of deforestation. Despite this, the data show that deforestation rates have increased over time. In contrast, the programme was unable to contribute to any significant changes in the socio-economic situation of the local population. However, this was only intended to a limited extent, as the nature conservation programme did not aim to provide overall support to the population to improve their economic situation. However, the human rights violations and the inadequate handling of the allegations by the project executing agent in 2017 are decisive for the evaluation. Despite recognisable positive results of the project and an appropriate response to the human rights violations by FC, the negative results of the human rights violations dominate the evaluation of the overarching developmental impact of the project.

The programme also had limited success in ensuring the **sustainability** of the results. Even though the programme contributed to building important institutional and personnel capacities through its capacity development approach, these remained insufficient towards the end of Phase III to ensure the sustainability of the impacts. Furthermore, as in many similar contexts, there was no financial sustainability and external and long-term financing from donors was or is still necessary. However, it should be noted that due to the international relevance of the protected areas and their importance for the public goods of climate and biodiversity, this can be considered justified and is partly planned by the international donor community. The fact that the financial sustainability of the project could not be ensured was already foreseen in the project's module proposal. Finally, external factors also influence the sustainability of the impacts achieved, such as the increased pressure in the buffer zones due to population growth, changes in the population's way of life, political framework conditions and the security context.

Contributions to the 2030 Agenda

Universal scope: The programme has led to a number of contributions to the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. In particular, SDG 15, which aims to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests and halt biodiversity loss, should be mentioned here. The programme was also relevant for SDG 13 (measures to combat climate change and its impacts). In particular, the impacts achieved in terms of preserving biodiversity and stabilising both the populations of selected animal species and forests have contributed to achieving these goals. In addition, the programme was in line with SDG 1 "No poverty", although impacts in this area were only achieved to a very limited extent. The programme was only able to contribute to selective improvements in the socio-economic situation of the local population.

Inclusivity/leaving no one behind: The project was in line with the "Leave No One Behind" principle due to its focus on the inclusion of the indigenous population.

Project-specific strengths/weaknesses and general conclusions/lessons

The strengths and weaknesses of the project include the following aspects in particular:

- One of the programme's strengths is its **high relevance, both then and now**, and its strong **alignment with national, German and international priorities**. The protection and sustainable use of the nationally and internationally very important tropical forest areas in the DR Congo is in line with national, German and international priorities in terms of forest conservation and the conservation of biodiversity.
- Another strength of the project is the **close cooperation with German TC** as part of the development cooperation programme and with other German development cooperation projects. The complementary design of the programme and the successful communication and coordination contributed significantly to the internal coherence of the project. The use of existing donor coordination mechanisms and bilateral coordination with other donors also contributed to the (external) coherence of the programme.
- A key aspect of the project was the handling of **allegations of human rights violations**. As part of the project, measures aimed at improving protection against human rights violations were agreed with the various stakeholders.
- One weakness of the programme was the **difficult cooperation between the stakeholders involved**, particularly insufficient clarification of roles and, in some cases, a lack of capacity, which affected the quality of implementation and thus the effectiveness of the programme.
- Another weakness of the project was the **inadequate promotion of measures integrating the local population, which could have further reduced the pressure of use on the protected areas**. It should be noted that poverty reduction was not the main mandate of this nature conservation programme. However, a greater (including financial) focus on neighbourhood measures would have made sense to achieve the objectives with regard to improving the living conditions of the local population. As the needs of the ICCN and its protected areas are great, but the possibilities of the programme were limited, increased communication and coordination with other projects that place a stronger focus on supporting the local population would have been useful. However, in the course of the third phase, a complementary project began to concentrate on supporting the local population with additional funds.
- One weakness of the programme lies in its target system, which was partially deficient, particularly in the definition of targets and indicators at the various levels and their formulation. Some of the objectives and indicators were not measurable, were not recorded, or were too ambitious.

Conclusions and lessons learnt

The following conclusions can be drawn from the results of the evaluation.

- (1) The financing of projects aimed at protecting biodiversity and forests is justified by their global significance and their classification as a public good. Long-term interventions, as opposed to isolated, short-term modules, are essential for achieving meaningful impacts.
- (2) As part of the development cooperation commitment in nature conservation projects, **sufficient funds** should be made available **for measures for the local population**. In addition, the executing organisation must have sufficient available capacities to convert available budgets into tangible measures for local communities.
- (3) In the case of projects that involve different actors (donors, consultants, co-management partners, etc.) for their implementation, **the clarification of roles between the stakeholders** and the sensitive management of different priorities, interests and working methods are crucial for the implementation quality.
- (4) For projects in the field of nature conservation, it is essential to **define human rights standards at an early stage**, to carry out in-depth due diligence and to agree and implement appropriate measures to prevent and deal with human rights violations.
- (5) Positive discrimination in favour of disadvantaged population groups can conflict with the do-no-harm principle, as it may lead to frustrations and tensions between different population groups.

Evaluation approach and methods

Methodology of the ex-post evaluation

The ex-post evaluation follows the methodology of a rapid appraisal, i.e. a data-supported, qualitative contribution analysis and represents an expert judgement. This involves attributing impacts to the project through plausibility considerations based on the careful analysis of documents, data, facts and impressions. Where possible, this also includes the use of digital data sources and modern techniques (e.g. satellite data, online surveys, geocoding). Causes of any contradictory information are investigated, attempts are made to eliminate them and the assessment is based on statements that are - if possible - confirmed by several sources of information (triangulation).

Documents:

- Documents that were analysed as part of the EPE include various internal KfW project documents (in particular the module proposals of the three phases and progress reports (2012, 2015, 2016, 2016-2018, 2019, 2021) and the reports of the implementation consultant, the final monitoring report, the strategy paper of German development cooperation, national frameworks and development strategy documents of Congo as well as literature on the forest protection sector, e.g. from UNESCO.

Data sources and analysis tools:

- Data sources for the EPE include qualitative interviews with stakeholders, monitoring data from KfW and the implementation consultant, and the data element created by KfW.

Interviewee:

- Interviews (15 in total) were conducted with representatives of KfW (e.g. former portfolio managers of the respective phases, technical experts, office manager), GIZ (contract manager of the TC module of the development cooperation programme), the executing agency at the level of the Directorate General in Kinshasa and at the park level (e.g. former director, persons responsible for the "Conservation Communautaire"), the consultants, the partner NGOs and with facilitators who implemented measures with the local population. The discussions were held with the executing agency at the level of the general directorate in Kinshasa and at the park level (e.g. former director, person responsible for the "Conservation Communautaire"), the consultants, the partner NGOs and with facilitators who carried out measures with the local population and representatives of the local CSE awareness-raising committee.

The analysis of impacts is based on assumed interdependencies, documented in the impact matrix developed during the project appraisal and, if necessary, updated during the ex-post evaluation. The evaluation report presents arguments as to why which influencing factors were identified for the identified results and why the analyzed project presumably made which contribution (contribution analysis). The context of the development project is considered with regard to its influence on the results. The conclusions are set in relation to the availability and quality of the data basis. An evaluation design is the reference framework for the evaluation.

For project evaluations, the method offers a - on average - balanced cost-benefit ratio, in which the knowledge gained, and the evaluation effort are in equilibrium, and allows a systematic assessment of the effectiveness of FC projects across all project evaluations. The individual ex-post evaluation can therefore not fulfil the requirements of a scientific assessment in the sense of a clear causal analysis.

The following aspects limited the evaluation:

- Due to the security situation, logistical challenges (e.g. geographical breadth of the protected areas, difficult access to the villages and village leaders) and internet conditions, it was **not** possible to conduct **direct interviews or focus groups (either on site or remotely) with the local population**. This was already announced as part of the concept report. As an alternative, the agreed interview contacts were made with other contact persons who worked very closely with the local population and were able to speak on important topics relating to the population.
- **Only a few interviews** could be conducted **with the NGO partners** due to the unavailability or lack of responses from the interviewees. Despite several requests for interviews, no response was received from important partners. This represents a limitation for the evaluation, as coordination with NGO partners in the EPE was identified as a weakness of the programme and tensions arose for which it would have been useful to conduct further interviews with the representatives.
- The monitoring data for the programme and the figures available in the progress reports with regard to the achievement of the **indicators were incomplete**. In some cases, no data could be found in the final monitoring report either. This impaired the assessment of the achievement of the indicators (see effectiveness chapter).

Methodology of the performance evaluation

A six-point scale is used to assess the programme according to the OECD DAC criteria. The scale values are assigned as follows:

- Level 1** Very successful: result significantly above expectations
- Level 2** Successful: result fully in line with expectations, without significant deficiencies
- Level 3** Moderately successful: below expectations, but positive results dominate
- Level 4** Moderately unsuccessful: is significantly below expectations and negative results dominate despite recognisable positive results
- Level 5** Unsuccessful: despite some positive partial results, the negative results clearly dominate
- Level 6** Highly unsuccessful: the project is useless or the situation has worsened

The overall rating on the six-point scale is based on a project-specific weighting of the six individual criteria. Levels 1-3 of the overall rating indicate a "successful" project, while levels 4-6 indicate an "unsuccessful" project. It should be noted that a project can generally only be considered developmentally "successful" if the achievement of the project objective ("effectiveness") and the impact on the overall objective ("overarching developmental impact") as well as the sustainability are rated as at least "Moderately successful" (rating 3).

The annex to this report is available upon request (German only).

Imprint

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