

PROJECT INFORMATION DOCUMENT (PID) CONCEPT STAGE

Report No.: PIDC765

Project Name	GABON - SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF CRITICAL WETLANDS ECOSYSTEMS (P143914)
Region	AFRICA
Country	Gabon
Sector(s)	General agriculture, fishing and forestry sector (100%)
Lending Instrument	Specific Investment Loan
Project ID	P143914
Focal Area	Biodiversity
Borrower(s)	Government of Gabon
Implementing Agency	MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, Directorate of Environment
Environmental Category	B-Partial Assessment
Date PID Prepared/ Updated	31-Jan-2013
Date PID Approved/ Disclosed	06-Feb-2013
Estimated Date of Appraisal Completion	25-Sep-2013
Estimated Date of Board Approval	21-Nov-2013
Concept Review Decision	Track II - The review did authorize the preparation to continue

I. Introduction and Context

Country Context

Gabon is a resource-rich country, well endowed with arable land, forest, and mineral resources. It has extraordinary biodiversity as well as rich deposits of magnesium and iron ore. It is the fifth-largest oil producer in Sub-Saharan Africa and the second-largest exporter of manganese. With a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita estimated at US\$8,643 in 2010, it is one of Africa's few middle-income countries.

Low demographic pressure on natural resources. Gabon is one of Africa's most urbanized countries with more than 85 percent of its population living in urban areas, predominantly in Libreville (the capital), Port-Gentil (the economic capital), and Franceville (the mining region). The Gabonese population is young, with 50 percent under 19 years of age. The rural population is widely dispersed over the hinterland where access is difficult. With a per capita forest area of 15 hectares, the pressure of population on forest resources is significantly lower in Gabon than in most African

countries.

Despite its wealth, Gabon is unlikely to meet a number of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The third national MDG progress report, published in 2010, concluded that MDG targets relating to poverty reduction, infant and maternal mortality, and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS are unlikely to be achieved. With respect to education, Gabon has succeeded in making primary education available to all (net enrollment has increased from 88 percent in 1990 to 91 percent in 2005), but the quality and the need for qualified teachers and classrooms remain a concern. The rates for infant mortality dropped from 155 per 1,000 in 1990 to 52.7 per 1,000 in 2010, but it will be difficult to reach the target of 31.5 per 1,000 by 2015. Although maternal mortality fell from 600 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 420 deaths in 2010, it is also unlikely that the target of 150 deaths per 100,000 births will be achieved by 2015.

In 2009, the new government presented a new economic vision –Emerging Gabon. The strategic roadmap for an Emerging Gabon (Plan Stratégique Gabon Emergent -PSGE) aims at modernizing the country and turning it into an emerging economy by 2025. This strategy is based on accelerating growth and reducing poverty but now looks to capitalize on Gabon's comparative advantages in the regional and global landscapes. The strategy is built on three pillars:

- Gabon Industriel aims to develop Gabon into a metallurgic and industrial pole of reference (optimizing oil and mining and support to industries through construction, building materials, and agro-industrial transformation).
- Gabon Vert has three major goals: instituting sustainable forest management and transforming Gabon into a global leader in certified tropical timber production, developing agriculture and livestock farming to improve food security, and creating sustainable and responsible fisheries.
- Gabon des Services has the objective of making Gabon a center of excellence in business, ecotourism, and value-added services, such as higher education and research, health, media, and information technologies (IT).

Gabon has embarked onto a green growth trajectory. Gabon's unique combination of exceptionally abundant and diverse natural resources with a low population presents a favorable context for implementing a sustainable development strategy which will reconcile economic development with environmental preservation which will benefit the local and global community.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

Gabon is endowed with exceptional biodiversity. Gabon belongs to the Congo Basin rain forest ecosystem, the world's second-largest area of contiguous rain forest and features rich faunal and floral wildlife and a variety of landscapes, including an 800-kilometer coastline. Gabon contains three Terrestrial Ecoregions as defined by WWF as the world's most outstanding examples of each major habitat types: the Congolian Coastal Forest, the Northwestern Congolian Lowland Forests and the Western Congolian Forest-Savanna Mosaic. In addition, there are significant stands of central African mangroves along the coast and patches of Congolian-Zairean swamp forests in the northeast. Furthermore several priority freshwater systems occur within the country as well as the coastline and marine ecosystems.

Gabon ranks first in Africa on the Environmental Sustainability Index (ESI). The 2012 Environmental Performance Index, published by Yale University (USA) on July 2012, has named Gabon as the best environmentally sustainable nation in Africa (Gabon has been ranked at position

40 in the world in the said environmental performance index). This high score was achieved inter alia because the high level and degree of intactness of Gabon's biodiversity, the fact that a large proportion of its national territory has been placed under environmental protection and that as a consequence it has the lowest risk of any African nation experiencing major environmental deterioration in the short and medium term.

Since 2002, Gabon has significantly expanded its areas under protection. In August of 2002 President Bongo and his government created a network of 13 national parks covering 28,371 km², i. e. 10.6 percent of the country's surface area. An inter-ministerial government committee, the Conseil National des Parcs Nationaux (CNPN) was established to oversee the process leading to effective management of the network. The Law 003/2007 on National Parks was then adopted on September 11, 2007.

Management effectiveness of the National Parks has significantly improved. The Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux (ANPN) was created by the Law 003/2007 on National Parks and became responsible for managing all 13 national parks. The US\$10 million GEF grant (PARCS project), implemented by the World Bank, was declared effective a few months later (December 27, 2007). One of the objectives of the GEF project was to build capacities of the newly created agency. After five years of implementation (and despite difficulties at the beginning) the PARCS project helped define roles and operational modalities of the ANPN as well contributed to the set up of key systems in the functioning of the agency (Fiduciary management, HR management, Monitoring and Evaluation system). Many features developed under the project for the three targeted National Parks are now applied to the entire Park Network (comprising 13 National Parks). The partnership with international NGOs has been significantly adjusted over the past few years to account for leadership of the ANPN on all issues related to National Parks in Gabon. New partnerships have been deployed with local NGOs. The project has also contributed to make the Management Unit in the National Parks much more efficient and autonomous, with greater impacts in terms of monitoring and control.

Biodiversity management outside the National Park network remains a challenge. Over the past few years, major progress has been made in preserving biodiversity within National Parks and immediate buffer zone. However, there is an increasing awareness that biodiversity and ecological services need to be also preserved outside the National Parks. One priority that has been clearly set by the Government of Gabon (under the leadership of the ANPN and the General Directorate of Environment) is the preservation of the critical wetlands sites. See Box on Importance of wetlands to sustain long term growth.

Wetlands provide major ecosystem services, yet are often overlooked. The value of these wetlands and their associated ecosystem services has been estimated at US\$14 trillion annually. Yet many of these services, such as the recharge of groundwater, water purification, mitigation and adaption to climate change or aesthetic and cultural values, are not immediately obvious when one looks at a wetland. Planners and decision-makers at many levels are frequently not fully aware of the connections between wetland condition and the provision of wetland services and the resulting benefits for people, benefits which often have substantial economic value (see Box 1).

Box 1. Wetlands are critical ecosystems and sustain long term growth. Wetland ecosystems are a major part of natural wealth. At a worldwide scale they provide us with services worth trillions of US dollars every year – entirely free of charge – making a vital contribution to human health and

well-being. Amongst key ecological services delivered by wetlands, one can list:

Provisioning services: fresh water, fish, prawns, seaweeds, fruit, grain, wild game, timber for fuel and building materials, medicines;

Regulating services: climate regulation, flood control, storm protection, water purification, waste treatment;

Cultural services: beautiful places for recreation and education, and places of religious significance;

Supporting services: nutrient cycling, sediment retention and provision of habitats.

In Gabon, wetlands ecosystems are critical in the provision of drinking water to major urban centers, energy and also in sustaining fisheries production. As an example, the Mbe watershed, one of the most economically important wetlands in Gabon, provides the sole source of freshwater for the population leaving the capital city, Libreville; in addition, Libreville's principal electricity source is a hydroelectric plant on the Mbe operated by Société d'Energie et d'Eau du Gabon (SEEG). The Mbe forest provides other ecosystem services, as it reduces siltation in two artificial lakes which feed this plant. The forests also regulate year-round flow and prevent flooding. Coastal mangroves are also vital for the fishing industry in Gabon and beyond as they constitute irreplaceable habitat for fish breeding.

Gabon is a party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (WII) since 1987 with the inclusion of the first three sites on the list of Gabonese WII. The country registered nine sites on the list of WII representing a wide variety of aquatic ecosystems (mangroves, savannas coastal waterfalls and rapids, lagoons, rivers, lakes, alluvial) of more than 2.8 million hectares (see below Table). Despite the political engagement through the adhesion to the Convention, only limited actions has been taken so far to operationalize the Convention pillars on the ground. However, the new priorities set by the Government in terms of biodiversity preservation are clearly targeting the WII: accordingly, the Government has decided to use the entire Gabon allocation under the GEF-5 to foster significant progress on WII management.

Ramsar site name	Area	Registration date
Wonga-Wongué	380 000 ha	December 30, 1986
Petit Loango	480 000 ha	December 30, 1986
Setté-Cama	220 000 ha	December 30, 1986
Akanda	54 000 ha	April 2, 2007
Pongara	92 969 ha	April 2, 2007
Birougou	536 800 ha	April 2, 2007
Bas-Ogooué	862 700 ha	April 2, 2009
Falls on the Inwindo River	132 500 ha	April 2, 2009
Falls of Mbougou - Badouma and Doumé	59 500 ha	April 2, 2009

Relationship to CAS

The Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) for the 2012-2016 period aims to set in motion a process of transformative change towards sustainable economic growth. The CPS was approved by the Board of the World Bank Group on February 23, 2012. The CPS builds on two strategic themes: (i) increasing Gabon's competitiveness and employment and, (ii) supporting vulnerability and resilience. As stated in the CPS (para. 77), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) resources will continue to support conservation of biological diversity in Gabon through investments in selected national parks and the strengthening of the management of the parks network, other protected areas

and production forests, and other ecosystems.

The proposed project directly falls under the second pillar on “Vulnerability and Resilience” and will contribute to the fifth outcome on “Sustainable Natural Resources Management”. Wetlands are vital parts of the natural assets needed for addressing climate change. Well-managed wetlands constitute one of our best insurance policies against some of the most damaging effects of global warming.

□ Coastal wetlands such as mangroves, tidal flats and saltmarshes absorb some of the energy from storm and tidal surges, while the roots of wetland plants stabilize shorelines and reduce erosion. These ecosystem services are provided free of charge by nature, but where protective wetlands have been destroyed by human activities, costly artificial flood defenses have to be built in their place.

□ Floodplain wetlands such as lakes and freshwater marshes naturally store and slow down floodwater, helping to protect downstream areas from destructive flooding. This role will become more important in areas where the frequency and intensity of extreme rainfall is predicted to increase.

Degradation and loss of wetlands would increase people's vulnerability to climate change impacts such as floods, droughts and famine. Preserving and/or restoring wetlands and maintaining hydrological cycles are of utmost importance in responses for addressing climate change, flood mitigation, water supply, food provision and biodiversity conservation.

The proposed operation contributes to the GEF-5 objectives. As indicated in the Endorsement Letter dated July 03, 2012, the Government of Gabon has decided to use the total envelop available under the GEF-5 allocation to support this project. The project will contribute to the Biodiversity (BD) and Land Degradation (LD) focal areas (please refer to Annex III). Given that Gabon has a flexible STAR allocation, the climate change funds are integrated within the BD/LD focal areas. Additional resources can be accessed through the SFM incentive mechanism. During the Concept Note review meeting, it was also indicated that an additional envelop (of approximately US\$1 million) could be accessed from the Nagoya Protocol Implementation Fund (if this option is confirmed during preparation phase, a dedicated component would cover capacity building activities in line with the NPIF).

II. Proposed Global Environmental Objective(s)

Proposed Global Environmental Objective(s) (From PCN)

The Development Objective of the proposed operation is to improve management of selected critical wetlands ecosystems, through knowledge creation and capacity building of national entities.

Key Results (From PCN)

Key PDO indicators (proposed at concept stage):

Indicator 1: Detailed Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS) are prepared for the Ramsar sites in Gabon and sent to the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention. (Nota: exact number will be decided during preparation, based on the research activities that will be financed by the project).

Indicator 2: Management plans are prepared for the selected Ramsar sites.

Indicator 3: One scheme is defined to pilot the Nagoya Protocol or one “Payment for Ecosystem Services” scheme is designed to sustainably manage wetlands ecosystems.

III. Preliminary Description

Concept Description

The proposed project builds three components, described in detail below. In the third Component on “Strengthening Institutional Framework to support Wetlands Management” resources are provisioned for project management. The structure of the project has been designed to help the Government of Gabon implement the recommendations of the Ramsar Convention and the resolutions of the Conference of the Parties, i.e. (i) improving the level of knowledge on WII Gabon, (ii) the establishment of a system for monitoring ecological characteristics of ecosystems, (iii) the establishment of the conditions necessary for managing an effective network of WII Gabon, and (iv) economic valuation.

The Government of Gabon has already indicated that it would contribute in-kind to the project with provision of staff and offices (the in-kind contribution will be further assessed during preparation of the project). In addition, linkages have already been established with other initiatives:

- the « Arc Emeraude de Libreville » project, implemented by the Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux (ANPN) and financed under the Gabon-France debt relief initiative –C2D- (amount: Euros 11 million). This project will specifically focus on the Ramsar sites of Akanda and Pongara.
- the « Forest Control » project, also financed under the Gabon-France debt relief initiative –C2D- (amount: Euros 12 million) that will pilot forest control in three sites, amongst which two are on the periphery of Ramsar sites (respectively the Birougou forest and the Falls on the Invindo river).

Component 1: Improving Knowledge and Monitoring of Wetlands Ecosystems in Gabon (approximate GEF amount: US\$2.4 million). The global objective of this component is to generate knowledge on wetlands in Gabon and to set up a reliable monitoring system that can produce early warnings on potential alterations of wetlands ecosystems.

Sub-Component 1.1: Knowledge creation on wetlands ecosystems. Gabonese wetlands ecosystems are currently poorly understood; existing scientific literature is fragmented and insufficient, which is highlighted by the very succinct descriptions sent to the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention. So far, research work has been conducted in an ad hoc manner and does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of these ecosystems.

Wetlands ecosystems in Gabon (particularly forested wetlands) however provide –for free- important services, ranging from water purification for drinking water for large urban centers, fish breeding habitats on which the fishing industry directly depends to climate change mitigation through carbon sequestration.

This Component aims at supporting research work on biological wealth and socio-economic dimensions of wetlands ecosystems, in order to better document and quantify the multiple ecological services delivered by wetlands. This ultimate goal of this component is to help decision-makers better understand the importance of wetlands and the potential trade-offs with other competing activities in the wetlands (with a specific focus on forested wetlands). The Component will support targeted research work to enhance knowledge: research activities should be conducted jointly between national and international research entities. In order to do so, the project will support the creation of a “Research Grant Mechanism” (the Manual of Procedures for the Research Fund Grant will be elaborated as part of the preparation phase). Some specific research works have

already been pre-identified (and will be refined and complemented during preparation of the operation):

- Economic valuation of services delivered by wetlands ecosystems. The economic worth of the ecosystem services provided to society by intact, naturally functioning wetlands has never been quantified in a comprehensive manner in Gabon. The proposed activity will: (i) conduct a comprehensive valuation of economic services provisioned by the wetlands ecosystems in Gabon. This exercise will also help assess the potential trade-offs between wetlands conservation and conversion to 'more valuable' intensive land use and (ii) define options to develop "payment for ecological services" schemes that could support sustainable management of critical wetlands ecosystems.
- Study on the traditional uses of natural resources (including medicinal plants) in wetlands ecosystems and define pilot schemes for the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol.

Sub-Component 1.2: Monitoring system for wetlands ecosystems. Article 3.2 of the Ramsar Convention provisions that "Each Contracting Party shall arrange to be informed at the earliest possible time if the ecological character of any wetland in its territory and included in the List has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference." Such a monitoring system is not in place in Gabon

The proposed project will: (i) define and operationalize the most appropriate Monitoring system for ecological and physic-chemical characteristics of the wetlands in Gabon: the system will be defined in accordance with the technical and human capacities and beacons will then be deployed according to a national network system (targeted capacity building will be an integral part of the activity); and (ii) strengthen the cartography laboratory in place in the DGE, to generate maps with human settlements, industrial activities and hydrological systems for the different Ramsar sites.

Component 2: Supporting Sustainable Management of Selected Critical Wetlands ecosystems (approximate GEF amount: US\$4.0 million). The development and implementation of planning tools are essential to the proper management of WII, but they cannot yield the expected results if not accompanied with appropriate equipment and human resources on the ground: the proposed component will target this two-fold approach in a few targeted sites. The mangrove ecosystems in Gabon are particularly pressured and one priority under this component will be to promote sustainable management of critical mangrove ecosystems.

Sub-Component 2.1: Planning for sustainable management of selected sites. The situation of the Ramsar sites in Gabon are vary widely (legal status, geographical and hydrological features, typology of pressures). As of today, there is no management plan (or any planning tool) that appropriately defines the modalities to support sustainable management of the wetlands ecosystems: these tools need to be developed in a very targeted manner to ensure that the specific challenges and threats are well addressed.

The proposed project will: (i) prepare management plans for selected Ramsar sites: the planning exercise will be based on extensive consultative work in the selected sites (as well as results of the research activities supported under Component 1); (ii) conduct environmental audits for extractive industries operating in and around the wetlands ecosystems and define management plans with private operators.

Sub-Component 2.2: Strengthening surveillance capacities in the selected sites. Unless they are included in a National Park, most of the existing Ramsar sites do not benefit from adequate monitoring activities, mostly because of insufficient staff on the ground and lack of equipment.

The proposed project will: (i) acquire the appropriate equipment and build necessary infrastructure to reinforce capacities of local staff to properly implement monitoring activities in the selected sites and (ii) train local staff on monitoring activities (such training has been delivered to eco-guards in National Parks under the previous GEF-financed project and have proven to be efficient). Systems such as MIST/SMART already used by the ANPN for the monitoring of the National Parks will be adjusted.

Sub-Component 2.3.: Environment-friendly community-driven activities in wetlands. Other economic options exist to support sustainable wetlands management. At COP-11 in July 2012, the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and UNWTO launched a publication that highlights the considerable value of wetlands for tourism and the economic benefits that tourism can bring for the management of wetland sites.

The proposed project will help communities (in partnership with local NGOs) develop revenue-generating activities, including potential viable tourism offer in selected wetlands.

Component 3: Strengthening Institutional Framework to Support Wetlands Management (approximate GEF amount: US\$0.97 million). This Component will aim at establishing an institutional framework favorable to the sustainable management of the WII in Gabon both at the national and site levels. It will also support the daily project management and coordination to ensure that regular monitoring and evaluation is carried out, and the results are fed back into decision making on project implementation.

Sub-Component 3.1: Institutional framework. On one hand, the diversity of the WII in Gabon requires that local governance mechanisms be adjusted to the specific circumstances; on the other hand, there is a need to strengthen the overall governance at the national level.

The proposed project will: (i) conduct an analysis of the institutional schemes in place for the different WII site, taking into account the diversity of the statuses and propose recommendations to strengthen them in each site; (ii) establish the National Ramsar Committee in charge of supervising the management of the WII network in Gabon and reporting back to the Convention.

Sub-Component 3.2: Project Management. This sub-Component will support the day-to-day project management, including handling of procurement and financial management. This sub-Component will support both the Ministry of Environment and the Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux, specific institutional arrangements will be defined during the preparation of the project.

Sub-Component 3.2.: Environmental-friendly economic activities in wetlands. Other economic options exist to support sustainable wetlands management. At COP-11 in July 2012, the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and UNWTO launched a publication that highlights the considerable value of wetlands for tourism and the economic benefits that tourism can bring for the management of wetland sites. Biodiversity and endemism are very high in wetlands ecosystems in Gabon: the Government wants to pilot the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilization (Biodiversity Convention).

The proposed project will: (i) help communities (in partnership with local NGOs) develop a viable tourism offer in selected wetlands and (ii) conduct a study on the traditional uses of natural resources (including medicinal plants) in wetlands ecosystems and define pilot schemes for the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol.

During the Concept note review for this operation, the opportunity to access an additional \$1 million envelop under the Nagoya Protocol Implementation Fund (NFIP) was discussed. As a matter of fact, Gabon has clearly led the way in the Africa region, being the first country to ratify the Nagoya Protocol on May 2011 (Gabon was the twenty-second signatory of the Protocol). The political support stands at the highest level; at the operational level, DGE has clearly indicated its interest to get support from the GEF to move forward with the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol.

While this option will be further discussed as part of the preparation of the Project, it was acknowledged that if adopted, a specific component would be dedicated to the implementation of activities related to Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS). Such a component (Component 4) would include the following activities (in compliance with the requirements under the NPIF): (i) Stocktaking and assessment: ABS provisions in existing policies, laws and regulations, stakeholder identification, user rights and intellectual property rights, and institutional capacity including research organizations adding value to genetic resources (i.e. bio-prospecting). (ii) Development and implementation of a strategy and action plan for the implementation of ABS measures (i.e. policy, legal, and regulatory frameworks governing ABS, National Focal Point, Competent National Authority, Institutional agreements, administrative procedures for ABS Agreements with proper Prior Informed Consent [PIC], Mutually Agreed Terms [MAT], and Benefit Sharing, monitoring of use of genetic resources, compliance with legislation and cooperation on trans-boundary issues), (iii) Building capacity among stakeholders (including indigenous peoples, local communities) to negotiate ABS agreements, including domestic protocols, model contractual clauses, and minimum requirements to secure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits. Countries may want to consider using some of the financial resources to build institutional capacity to carry out research and development associated with the valorization of genetic resources (bio-prospecting).

IV. Safeguard Policies that might apply

Safeguard Policies Triggered by the Project	Yes	No	TBD
Environmental Assessment OP/BP 4.01	x		
Natural Habitats OP/BP 4.04	x		
Forests OP/BP 4.36		x	
Pest Management OP 4.09		x	
Physical Cultural Resources OP/BP 4.11		x	
Indigenous Peoples OP/BP 4.10			x
Involuntary Resettlement OP/BP 4.12	x		
Safety of Dams OP/BP 4.37		x	
Projects on International Waterways OP/BP 7.50		x	
Projects in Disputed Areas OP/BP 7.60		x	

V. Tentative financing

Financing Source	Amount
BORROWER/RECIPIENT	0.00
Global Environment Facility (GEF)	7.37

Total

7.37

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