

# Case Studies



**Cameroon Youth  
Biodiversity  
Network**



**Kaaijayu-GYBN  
Bolivia**



**Malagasy Youth  
Biodiversity  
Network**

## CASE STUDY 1

### From GYBN Cameroon



Cameroon Youth  
Biodiversity  
Network

# Putting the Social and Political Context at the Heart of the Fight Against the Invasive Water Hyacinth in the Wouri Basin, Cameroon: A Conflict Sensitivity Analysis of Biodiversity Conservation

By Adamou Ndam & Esperance Noubou, 2024

## 1. Introduction

The interaction between human (economic, social and cultural) life and the issue around the quality of water and mangroves requires handling conservation activities in relation to their complex social and institutional context. The conflict sensitivity approach is a set of tools and processes that allow us to analyse the details of each activity and the way in which we want to work to better protect the mangroves and anticipate our interactions (positive and negative) with the actors and dynamics existing in the context. It starts from the hypothesis that we cannot (and should not) separate nature from the human context and rather build our interventions within the complex system in which they both exist.

In this case study, we will: I) Introduce the conservation issues in the Wouri Basin; II) Dig into the dynamics of the context and conflicts existing in the area that influence the basin; III) Share the adaptations of our intervention that were driven by the context analysis; and IV) Open up our reflection on lessons learnt from applying conflict sensitivity analysis to our fields of intervention.

## 2. Mangrove Conservation in Wouri Basin, Cameroon

After field research conducted by Cameroon Youth Biodiversity Network (CYBN), the national chapter of GYBN, we came to notice the rapid and persistent degradation of the mangrove areas in Wouri Basin, Cameroon. Mangroves are the lungs of the earth, the best regulators of weather conditions, uncontested providers

of ecosystem services and home to many important plant and animal species. There is therefore an urgent need to take action in order to build back biodiversity for a harmonious relationship with nature. Given the current state of degradation of the Wouri watershed and in accordance with the targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), this project aims to conserve the biodiversity of the region, to eliminate water hyacinth in the Wouri watershed and to monitor the water quality of the Basin on an ongoing basis. The targets of KMGBF that the project is in direct alignment with include: Target 2 which aims to restore ecosystems; Target 3 to protect 30% of lands and seas; Target 6 which aims to fight against invasive species; and Target 9 which aims to enable populations to benefit from the goods and services offered by biodiversity. The project includes an objective to support the socio-economic development of the populations bordering the Wouri watershed through their contribution to the restoration of this ecosystem.

Waterways provide a variety of goods and services to human societies. However, in most developing countries, the majority of urban waterways are used for the disposal of waste from cities, towns and industries. This therefore results in a deterioration of water quality, a modification in species composition of the region and most often, loss of biodiversity. The Wouri basin which is located between 04°34'12" North Latitude and 10°09'49 East Longitude has its source in the confluence between the Nkam and Makombé rivers and is located in the coastal region mainly in the city of Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon. A considerable part of the economy of the city, the country and even the Central African sub-region

is based on activities linked to this river. We cannot talk about the import-export data of the port of Douala, the river transport and navigation, and ecotourism without also mentioning the populations that border the river and who live from fishing and related activities. But for a number of years, the Wouri River has been slowly dying due to different forms of pollution and the proliferation of water hyacinth, an aquatic plant with a high potential for invasion and environmental, economic and social harm.

This plant, which arrived in Cameroon in 1991 for ornamental reasons, today occupies 33.7% of the surface of the Wouri River, one of the main maritime gateways to Cameroon. Gluttonous in oxygen, it threatens the survival of other aquatic plants. Today, fishing is an important livelihood activity for communities living near Wouri River Basin and with increased degradation, there is a significant loss in resources relating to fisheries and earning a livelihood through fishing is becoming rare. Local populations can no longer easily travel by canoe from one village to another. Diseases such as malaria and bilharzia are now prevalent. The municipalities of Wouri 4 and 5 are particularly threatened by water hyacinth.

### 3. Context of Conflict Analysis

GYBN Cameroon (CYBN), commits to take concrete actions to restore this ecosystem, because protecting this ecosystem is a way to contribute tremendously to regulating the atmospheric weather conditions, provide ecosystem services and conserve an important variety of plant and animal species. However, CYBN acknowledges that the success of this enterprise has to consider the multiple stakeholders that either have an impact on, or are impacted by the region; and the interactions and relationships between them. These stakeholders include:

#### a. NGOs and local associations:

- The Cameroon Wildlife Conservation Society (CWCS), which already works in the region and has connections to a few government agencies.
- Other non-recognised civil society organizations (CSOs) and smaller groups operating in the region with their specific interest (related or not to conservation).
- GYBN Cameroon and other organizations interested in and working for biodiversity conservation in the mangrove area.

#### b. Local populations and communities:

- A huge diversity of socio-cultural groups who live in the region. Some who know the mangrove well through intergenerational knowledge and who depend on the mangrove for their livelihood and for accessing natural resources; others who have no interest or knowledge about the mangrove.

- Some who have lived here for many generations (Sawa people) and some who have come from other regions thanks to the economic attraction of a city.

#### c. Local authorities:

- Like chiefs, the mayor, legal political or technical authorities, with diverse and sometimes contradictory interests about the mangrove and the water resources.

#### d. Industrial and economic actors:

- The port of Douala has different industrial activities that lead to some forms of pollution in the area.
- Other industries within the economic capital that carry out activities that threaten the quality of this watershed and significantly contribute to biodiversity loss.

#### e. Government of Cameroon through the Ministry of Environment, in charge of:

- Education and sensitisation campaigns to reinforce local communities' resilience capacity.
- Ensuring a sustainable exploitation of mangrove resources by elaborating, setting up and monitoring environmental policies.
- Providing support to organizations and local communities in the form of training, resources and access to other opportunities like partnership, etc.

All these different actors interact with each other through sensitive, conflictual or constructive relationships. They also have elements in the context that bring them together (connectors) and elements that pull them apart (dividers).

### 3.1. Identifying Connectors

- a. A strong attachment and respect between the local population and traditional authorities (Chiefs and other opinion leaders except political leaders)
- b. Ancestral knowledge from some historical local populations about the mangrove, acknowledged by people inside and outside the mangrove
- c. Active elected people on mangrove issue (for example the mayor of Mouanko – a town lying on the north bank of Sanaga River) who wish things would change and are ready to engage.

### 3.2. Identifying dividers:

- a. Practice of mangrove exploitation being an activity shared by most of the population: many are contributing to the mangrove degradation on a daily basis.
- b. Competition between conservation agencies in the same field of action.
- c. A high percentage of the economic activities of the local population rely on these mangrove resources,

with an opposite interest from any organization coming to conserve the mangrove in this region.

- d. There are some industrial firms practicing agriculture in the area and this tends to pollute the zone. This can only be a divider between those actors and mangrove restoration as these organizations see little interest in the continuation of conservation activities.
- e. Despite increasing degradation and constant information-sharing, the local population still continues to cut the mangrove for wood, especially the young plants that are still growing.
- f. Many tensions and potential conflict situations between government and other local actors (as seen in the map), therefore lack of trust on my issues
- g. The relationship between unrecognized local NGOs and CWCS is tense, so is the relationship between CWCS and the Government of Cameroon.

The dynamic actors map below synthesizes the complex relationships between the different actors. It is therefore interesting to understand that any intervention from CYBN will impact those existing relationships and carry risks of reinforcing conflict, which would most probably complicate actions, make the situation in the region even more fragile and drastically reduce opportunities to contribute to peace and social cohesion. Without analyzing the present context, CYBN's intervention will put at risk its ambition and objective to implement its action in this region.

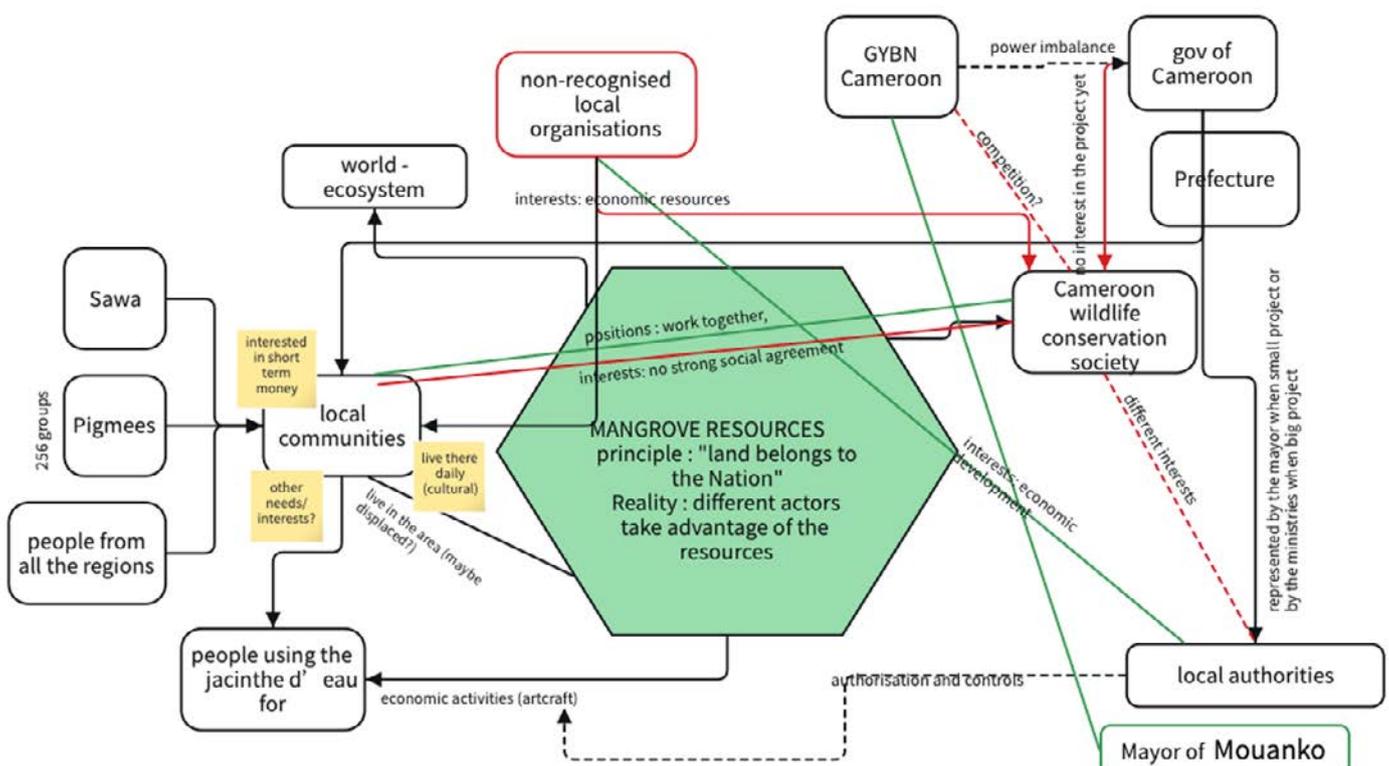
## 4. Interaction Between CYBN's Intervention and the Context

### 4.1. Negative potential interactions between intervention and context/ conflicts

- a. CYBN's interaction and intervention in the region can have potential negative impacts on the local communities reliant on the ecosystem and invasive species.
- b. CYBN should make sure they are not considered nor identified as an actor linked to government agencies, as the local communities do not have a good relationship with certain government agencies.
- c. Since it is public government land, the government can influence decisions taken and what kind of projects can be done on the ground.
- d. Interaction between different local communities based on what resources they rely on can have negative impacts.

### 4.2. Positive potential interactions between intervention and context/ conflicts

- a. NGOs, organizations and youth networks that are working towards a common goal of restoration may generate a collective stimulation and effect. CYBN



can become a bridge between the different actors by organizing inclusive consultations and open dialogues, making sure local community voices are represented and heard.

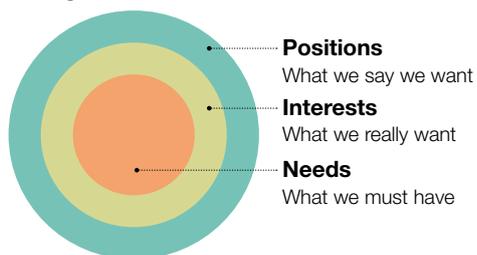
- b. CYBN's interaction with youth (who are much more approachable) could be a strategy to reach out to other actors.
- c. The lack of interest from the government allows CYBN to intervene without initial constraints from the institution. It will however become a risk if the government does not get involved and support/help with regulating unsustainable activities on the ground.

The frequent exchange and consultation between the local communities and CSOs operating in the area is seen to be an opportunity: it contributes to building the capacity and understanding of local actors, who change and adapt progressively and it also opens a door to constant dialogue which will allow CYBN and its allies to handle conflicting situations that may arise in the course of implementing various projects. This is still a gateway to submit and discuss different concerns from all actors involved in the program.

### 4.3. Adaptations recommended for CYBN in this specific context

#### a. Listen better to people

- Public consultations should be organized to understand what the real needs of the actors are (not what they say they want – positions – but their real interests and needs). All activities should be designed in a way that stimulates and facilitates continuous dialogue between all stakeholders.



- Invent alternate livelihood sources for the local communities who rely on the invasive species, based on their needs and after consultation.
- Better understand the dynamics within the local communities and different socio-cultural groups who are utilizing the mangroves.
- Build a good relationship with government agencies, without losing our neutrality
- CYBN is known to CWCS but it would be important that there is collaboration and joint action, so that CYBN's actions are not taken as a "threat" to CSWS's work and avoid duplicating work.

- CYBN needs to better understand the relationship between different communities/social groups in the mangrove region through the process of identifying connectors and dividers. This would enable CYBN to identify appropriate actions and approaches while interacting with local communities and monitor if tensions rise due to our intervention.

#### b. Open up alternative livelihood and natural resource use options

- Open up dialogue on alternate sources of livelihood, including tourism/leisure for urban citizens once the mangroves are protected and restored.
- Train populations in the identification of mangrove trees that are at the risk of extinction and in managing the mangrove. Finding funds able to pay for the services brought by the population would be necessary.
- Develop alternative forms of using mangrove trees to smoke fish or cook (improved ovens, manufacture ecological charcoal from their household waste, dead mangrove wood, and invasive exotic plants.

#### c. Build some feedback mechanisms on a need basis between decision-makers and civil society

- Create a vigilance committee made up of young people from the locality who will be responsible for monitoring the tree nurseries and reporting on illegal or unethical felling of mangrove trees, thereby facilitating a continuous dialogue. The vigilance committee must not take the role of the public administration, but rather play its civilian role in parallel of the administration.
- Look for subsidies and develop some internal benefits-based model so that the youth involved get paid for the service (being careful that those models don't favour mangrove degradation in the long run or create conflict between paid youth and others from the community).

#### d. Avoid doing the job of the institutional actors that should be in charge of restoring the mangrove

- The vigilance committee of youths should also include members from different sections of the society in order to be able to make more effective, holistic decisions, be inclusive and it is an opportunity to not exclude youth who are already at risk (socially and economically).
- If CYBN and other groups take a role of control over the use of the mangrove resources, they will substitute themselves to the role of the local police or security forces, who may therefore abandon their mission over mangrove conservation. CYBN should make sure that each actor who is responsible for conserving the mangrove play their role properly and effectively.

## 5. Lessons Learnt by CYBN in this Context and Takeaway Points from the Experience

### 5.1. Lessons learnt for CYBN about its approach to mangrove restoration

- a. **Land use and restoration:** Empower local communities to manage the mangroves and create awareness of the degraded status of the mangrove forest and its implications for the people and communities living there.
- b. **Alternative economic benefits of biodiversity protection:** Ensure that the project generates a long-term vision in which the population and the economic actors fulfill their livelihood needs so that they do not rely on the mangroves anymore. If this is not ensured, they will try to find alternative ways to fulfill their needs.
- c. **Conflict sensitivity at ground and institutional levels:** CYBN has to ensure that conflict sensitivity is integrated into all projects related to biodiversity at national and local level. It should also be a part of the overall scope of all National Biodiversity Strategic and Action Plans (NBSAPs), the key implementing tool for the KMGBF. This integration into the NBSAPs will foster actions at state and international level; will ensure the effective application of conflict sensitivity during the implementation of all projects related to biodiversity conservation; and will then be integrated into the revision of the KMGBF at national level.
- d. **CYBN's position and external image:** A change of focus from "biodiversity" to "biodiversity and human needs". In terms of implementing adaptive measures or alternative solutions, CYBN has a bias towards protecting nature that could easily be seen as detrimental to the interests of the local population. CYBN needs to involve local people fully in the project from design through to implementation and evaluation, so that it becomes an opportunity for both humans and nature to thrive, rather than a fight between them.

### 5.2. Takeaways from the learning and practical experience in conflict sensitivity

- a. **"New skills to apply":** The learning process was an opportunity for GYBN members to develop humanitarian and peacebuilding skills with the fundamental concepts of conflict sensitivity and to gain useful tools for its creative and effective application at the program and institutional levels.

- b. **"We impact others":** At the personal level, we came to understand that it is not only us who could have positive or negative impacts on the context. In fact, the connectors and dividers are existing elements already there between the actors who are touched by the project or programme.
- c. **"Let's share and spread conflict sensitivity":** The new conflict sensitivity skills enable GYBN members to apply their learnings at the programmatic level and handle face-to-face training and sensitisation on conflict sensitivity, while working in a fragile context.
- d. **"Humility in our intervention":** It is important to avoid taking sides during conflict resolution, to be humble enough and accept that at certain points in time, we may be the problem.
- e. **"Needs and interest (ours and theirs) at the heart of 'do no harm'":** Always pay serious attention to everyone's interest and needs through consultation - not only what they say they want, but what is really important to them - so as to minimize the negative impacts that could worsen the situation or harm a party.
- f. **"Conflict sensitivity as a path to inclusion and local resilience":** Prioritize the principles of doing no harm, understanding local contexts, fostering local capacities, and promoting inclusivity. Youths can work towards more stable and resilient communities that thrive and where conflicts are effectively managed.

#### The State and Land use: mirror case from India

Mangrove forests and protected areas in India belong to the Government of India and are monitored by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) through State Forest Departments. Therefore, any restoration work in such areas needs permission from the local, state and national level or requires the land to be purchased. The local communities who have been historically living in and around the mangrove/protected forest would usually be relocated during restoration efforts and not properly compensated. Therefore, it is important in such cases for the different actors such as the Government of India, local governing bodies, NGOs and youth groups to find proper solutions and prepare an actors map and conflict sensitivity assessment that outlines the different interactions and needs.

## CASE STUDY 2

### From GYBN Bolivia



Kaaijaya-  
GYBN  
Bolivia

# Land use in the context of extreme natural events in La Paz, Bolivia: using conflict sensitivity to better design GYBN intervention

By Flavia Gonzales, 2024

### Conflict Sensitive

Efforts, methods and tools for working to reduce the risk of aid unintentionally contributing to the escalation or sustaining of violent conflict; and increasing the potential for aid to contribute to the de-escalation of existing conflict.

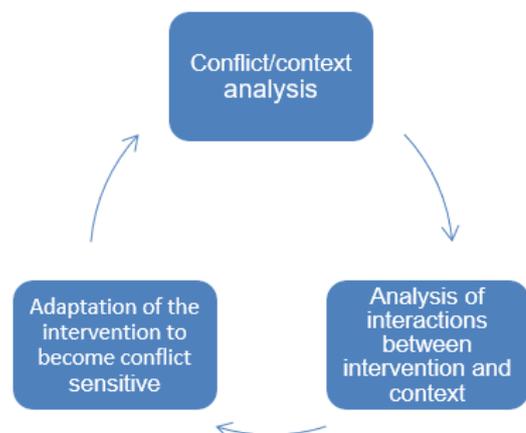
## 1. Introduction

In the city of La Paz, during the rainy season from January to March, precipitation increases considerably compared to other months. The urban area expands along a valley, so there are some zones located on slopes and others in flatter areas. It is well-known that for many years, the rains have caused destruction in the city. The topography and poor planning of urban expansion have caused wet lands to give way, taking houses with them and leaving many people homeless. This year in particular, the river flow has increased, washing away parts of parks, flooding houses, and destroying homes.

In this context, the interest of Kaaijaya (GYBN's Bolivia chapter) begins with the loss of biodiversity due to poor planning and regulation, especially in urban areas. Many protected areas are being urbanized, and with the lack of planning, we not only lose biodiversity, but also homes, because these areas are not safe to live in. Since there are people who sustain themselves by taking these lands, we understand that if we get involved without taking into account the existing context and conflicts, our intervention will most probably affect these existing dynamics. In certain instances it might increase tensions

with the different actors and people involved, preventing any success that would arise from our actions. The case study highlights this relationship between our intervention and the conflict context, by identifying a process to handle it – the conflict sensitivity analysis.

In our case, the analysis was made in two steps: one session with the author (who is familiar with the issues on the ground), being trained in the approach and applying new tools and methods to the case; and another session with GYBN chapter colleagues, on the same case, but with different “glasses” to hear different perspective on the situation. The case study is structured following the 3 steps of the conflict sensitivity methodology:

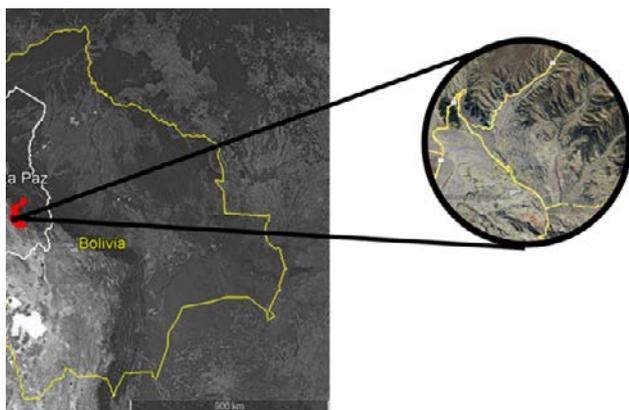


The document also shares lessons learnt from our practice of Conflict Sensitivity, for GYBN and partners to better include people and actors dynamic in their intervention design.

## 2. Context/Conflicts Analysis of the Natural Valley of La Paz

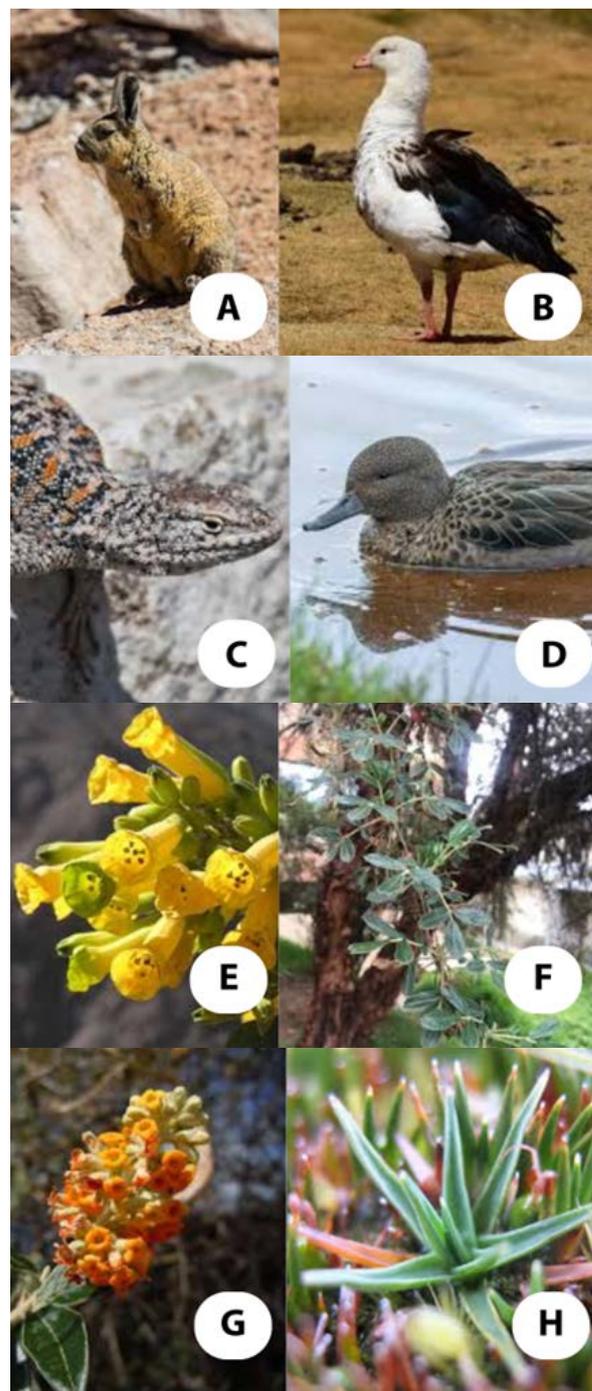
### 2.1. Natural valley of La Paz

The Valley of La Paz occupies a 1500 km<sup>2</sup> of surface in the west center of Bolivia (Figure 1). It is located between 16° 17' a 16° 49' south latitude and 68° 11' a 67° 46' west longitude and 2200 and 5000 m of altitude. These conditions favor the formation of diverse natural environments that determine a varied structure in the configuration of vegetation and the various components of the ecosystems (Moya, 2017).



**Figure 1:** Location *Natural Valley of La Paz*

There are different types of high Andean Ecosystems, wet, and dry. These ecosystems have a high richness of forms of plants. In 2017, there were described 1348 species of plants (938 native species), some of these include basal rosettes such as the genus *Puya*, cushion-shaped plants such as *Azorella diapensioides*, *Pycnophyllum molle* and *Distichia muscoides* and also small trees such as *Polylepis pacensis* and *Buddleja coriacea*, *Nicotiana glauca*, see Figure 2 (Moya, 2017). The most productive ecosystems with the greatest capacity to store water are the bofedales and are dominated by cushion-shaped plants of the *Juncaceae* and *Cyperaceae* families, particularly *Distichia muscoides*, *Oxychloe andina* and *Phylloscirpus deserticola* in Bolivia (Moya, 2017). Although the number of animal and plant species is not comparable to the biodiversity “hot spots” such the Bolivian Amazon, high Andean species have great value for their endemism and their adaptations to the tropical alpine environment. Among the wild species are the vizcacha (*Lagidium viscacia*), the Andean duck (*Anas andium*), the lizard (*Liolaemus* spp.), the huallata (*Oressochen melanopterus*; Figure 2). Furthermore, high Andean biodiversity guarantees the proper functioning of the high andean ecosystems and reduces natural risks such as floods, droughts, and landslides. For example, deep roots stabilize the soil, reducing the probability of landslides.



**Figure 2:** A) *Lagidium viscacia*, B) *Oressochen melanopterus*, C) *Liolaemus* spp. D) *Anas andium*, E) *Nicotiana glauca*, F) *Polylepis pacensis*, G) *Buddleja coriacea*, H) *Phylloscirpus deserticola*

Although the ecosystems of the La Paz Valley provide important natural contributions in both qualitative and quantitative terms, it is a priority to know them and protect them as much as possible so that they function optimally. In the last 50 years, fast demographic expansion is one of the main causes of ecosystem degradation. As a consequence, the soil in unstable and slideland has caused unsafe areas in La Paz and the loss of homes. Crime and unsafe public spaces in various areas in La Paz surroundings, the loss of homes, unclear and/or

unenforced land regulation, and poor urban planning have caused tension between residents of the affected areas and the municipality, as well as between activists and loteadores (people who illegally occupy land to sell it later). These loteadores take unstable lands prone to collapse and, in many cases, have started occupying parts of the city's protected areas.

## 2.2. Actors in the region

- a. **National Government:** The highest decision-making body in Bolivia. The Minister of Government has a disaster response mechanism when the situation surpasses the capacity of the Municipality.
- b. **Municipality:** Entity that regulates and controls all aspects of the urban area in the city of La Paz.
- c. **Loteadores:** People who illegally occupy land and sell it for the construction of buildings and houses.
- d. **Environmental Activists:** All individuals who actively participate in the defense of the environment.
- e. **Affected Neighbors:** People who have been affected by climatic events, either by losing their homes or experiencing house flooding.
- f. **Citizens:** All people living in the urban area of La Paz, whether they are affected directly, indirectly, or from a distance by the situation.
- g. **House Builders:** Companies dedicated to constructing buildings and houses for subsequent sale.

## 2.3. Actors' map

The map allows one to look at actors' dynamics quickly, and to understand the relationships at play, as well as the different interests and needs of the different actors. GYBN must be able to identify the needs and interests of the different actors because that's what moves them - despite the law, the constraints and the risks.

**Connectors and dividers** are elements of the context that either gather people/actors together (sometimes despite the existing lines of tension or pull them apart). We want to use those elements later to ensure that GYBN reinforces connectors and does not stimulate dividers through its intervention.

Connectors	Dividers
The law that forbids building in the area.	Political differences between Municipality and Government bodies
Belonging to La Paz	Climate disaster
The security of having a safe house	Habit to criticize the actors instead of take the problem
Empathy with victims	No application of the rule of law
	Lack of transparency of house sellers

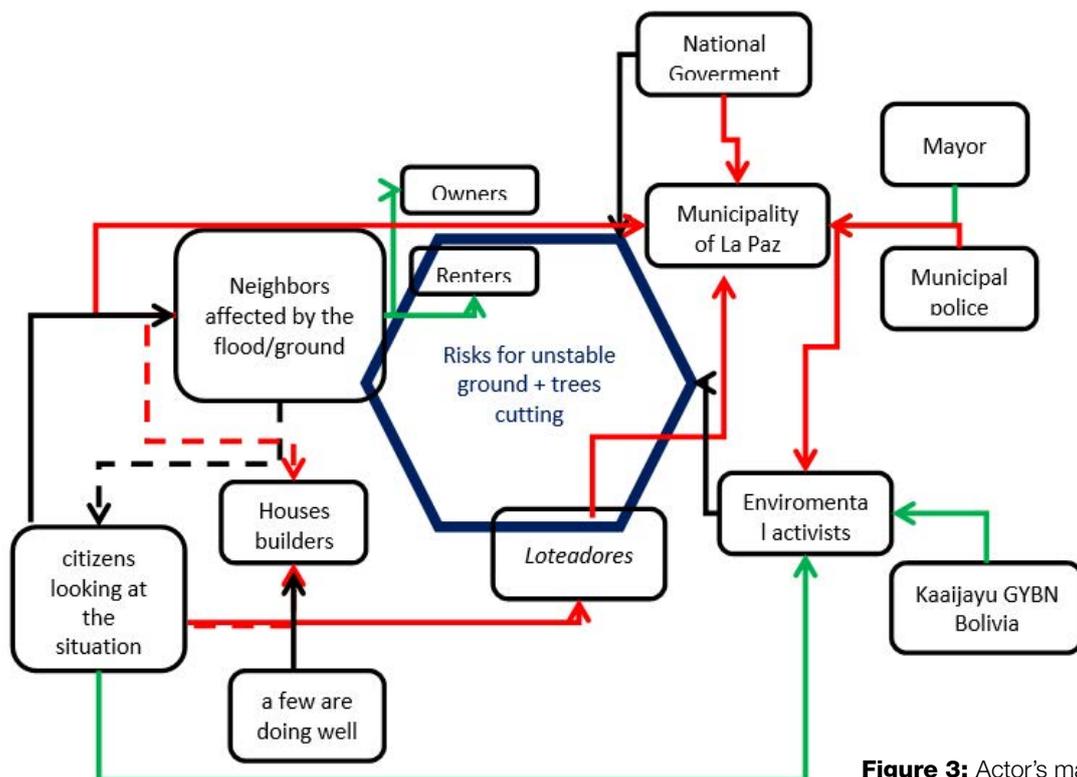


Figure 3: Actor's map

### 3. Analysis of Interactions Between our Intervention and the Context

- a. From the context analysis, we managed to identify the dangers and opportunities that interact negatively or positively with the context and conflicts:
  - Danger to make the already vulnerable context even more fragile and to undermine opportunities to better impact the context and benefit actors.
  - Risks and opportunities to protect your intervention against the context;
  - Adaptations and alternative options identified for our design and monitoring.
- b. Thanks to the Conflict Sensitivity analysis, it has been identified that:
  - There is a weak and tense relationship between citizens, activists and the municipality because the floods and landslides are not a surprise they are well-known. The municipality is blamed for poor planning and management in addressing these disasters, which seemingly increase the tension instead of decrease. One possible solution is to create an alliance between citizens and activists to request and launch a campaign for proper planning.
  - There is significant tension between citizens, activists, and affected neighbors on one hand and the loteadores on the other. This tension has great potential to worsen if any approach is made. This is because many protected areas are being lost, people are losing their homes, and this illegal mechanism is the means by which loteadores people sustain themselves economically, so there is a lot of emotion involved. Different consultations could be made with each of these groups to understand their needs and requests, seek more connectors, and bring groups together through their connectors to provide joint solutions to the municipality.
  - The map helps identify allies and all the elements we have in common; that is, as activists and citizens, we want good urban planning for different reasons. These connecting elements are key to forming alliances and creating a larger community to advocate and meet our needs.
  - The map also helps identify strategies with a high potential to worsen the conflict, such as interacting in some way with the loteadores. If we take them as actors, we may increase their legitimacy and power, but if we ignore them while they actually have power, it may reduce our effect on the area. It is the role of the public authority to interact with them, and we should not substitute ourselves for the public role. The map helps identify the option that allows us not to interact directly with the loteadores and instead intervene with the municipality, requesting better

planning and respecting already established norms without worsening the situation.

- Young people have a key neutral role in our community. We have the opportunity to identify the connectors between the different parties, allowing us to be leaders in strategies to generate the necessary changes in socio-environmental conflicts, promoting peace and reducing conflicts. Generally, society sidelines us when it comes to conflicts; we have no participation or voice, but this is an opportunity to be mediators in conflicts that concern us, such as biodiversity conservation. Therefore, it is important that no party instrumentalizes youth or uses us as a support mechanism.

### 4. Lessons Learnt by GYBN Bolivia in this Context and Take-aways from the Experience.

- a. Conducting a Conflict Sensitivity analysis with multiple people is important because it allows you to analyze a conflict situation from various perspectives and identify the maximum number of actors involved.
- b. A map will never be perfect; there will always be some bias since it depends on the perspective of the person conducting the analysis. Having a larger number of people reduces bias and can broaden the perspective of the conflict.
- c. Identifying more actors reduces the possibility that the intervention will worsen the conflict circumstances because the map allows you to observe and identify where there is greater tension, and identifying this is key to making an indirect intervention.
- d. As youth, it is important to be strategic when intervening in conflict situations. It is crucial to work on our leadership to mediate conflicts, create strategies that promote peace, and reduce conflicts. We are a group isolated from conflicts that also concern us and in which we want to participate. It is time to promote youth involvement in these processes and have them lead, because we seek the common good, and being always isolated gives us a neutral position, perfect for mediating different processes.
- e. Taking the tools and methods of conflict sensitivity in hand is not a huge challenge. We did this analysis after a few hours of training and practice, and although we cannot anticipate everything, the design of our project has taken benefited from the Conflict Sensitivity analysis

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## CASE STUDY 3

### From GYBN Madagascar



Malagasy Youth  
Biodiversity  
Network

## Locally-based Peri-urban Mangrove Governance in Antsohihy, Madagascar Using Conflict Sensitivity to Better Design GYBN Intervention

By Sanda & Timothy, 2024

### Introduction: Challenges and context of the Antsohihy Mangrove Forest

In North-West Madagascar, the city of Antsohihy is nestled on the banks of the Sofia River and surrounded by an extended peri-urban mangrove forest. In 2014, an inter-ministerial Order was co-issued by the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources that prohibited all forms of mangrove timber exploitation in Madagascar. The Order was intended as an emergency measure to combat the ongoing loss of mangrove ecosystems and the depletion of mangrove wood resources in the country. However, this legislation overlaps with other legal provisions that allow local communities to use mangrove timber - in particular, three-party contracts that transfer the responsibility to manage mangrove forest areas to official local community associations under the supervision of the Municipal authorities and the Forest Services. Also, there is a problem of illegal mangrove timber logging by groups who are not from the area, which often results in violence.

The GYBN Madagascar chapter is interested in the Antsohihy's mangrove as a possible first intervention outside of the capital city as it provides an important opportunity to tackle the intricate connections between halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity in mangroves and the invaluable ecosystem services they provide, and the impacts of these losses on the socioeconomic well-being of the local population. However, given the context and being new actors in this area, we as GYBN Madagascar have to be very cautious in the analysis and design of our interventions. Thus, the conflict sensitivity approach training offered GYBN Madagascar a handy tool to design and think through how we might approach this work.

### 1.2. Methodology

To conduct our analysis of peri-urban mangrove governance and management in Antsohihy, we proceeded as follows:

- a. The case study is based on the research findings of our national coordinator, shared with our team to have a broad idea of the situation and the status quo
- b. We then carried out a deeper mapping and analysis of stakeholder interactions with a conflict-sensitive approach under the guidance of the expert hired by GYBN. During the training, we also had the opportunity to see how that specific approach is implemented in other case studies of fellow national chapters in Africa
- c. A second set of conflict sensitivity analysis was conducted with the facilitation of the national coordinator with the GYBN chapter members, bringing a diversity of perceptions to the issues

## 2. Context Analysis of the Peri-urban Mangrove Governance in Antsohihy, Madagascar

### 2.1. A mix of social, institutional, environmental and economic problems

Despite the efforts made in the management of its natural resources, Madagascar lost 57,359 ha or 21% of its mangroves between 1999 and 2010 (Jones, et al., 2016). According to the same study, the estuary mangrove cover in the Antsohihy - Analalava region was 17,081 ha, then 16,065 ha and 13,838 ha in 1990,

2000 and 2010 respectively. In other words, decreases of 5.94% (1,016 ha) from 1990 to 2000, and 13.86% (2,227 ha) from 2000 to 2010, indicate a trend of mangrove degradation in this region<sup>11</sup>.

Thus, in 2014, inter-ministerial Order N°32100/2014 of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources and the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development put in place, among other things, a national legislative provision concerning the management of the mangrove wood resources. This Order formally prohibits any form of exploitation (cutting, logging, transporting, or selling) of mangrove wood on Malagasy territory.

The mangrove forest is divided into two blocks by the River Sofia, and the 2014 Order meant that these blocks<sup>1</sup> are now being governed under two different and conflicting regimes:

- a. On the Western bank**, the mangrove forest is managed by the local Regional Office of the Ministry of the Environment (herein mentioned as Forest Services) and is governed under the ban according to the 2014 inter-ministerial Order. Thus, and also due to limited budget, the Forest Services only run passive restoration of the degraded mangrove forest.
- b. On the Eastern bank**, the management of a major portion of the mangrove forest is officially and lawfully transferred to a legally established local community organization through contract, by virtue of Law n°96-025 on the local management of renewable natural resources. This Law aims primarily to entrust local grassroots communities with the management of some of the resources within their territory, with a view to enabling the effective participation of rural populations in the sustainable conservation of renewable natural resources. The natural resources concerned are those falling within the domain of the State or the local Government. The transfer of management is carried out under a tripartite contract between the local grassroots community association, which has legal personality and operates as an NGO, the Municipality to which it is attached, and the Forest Services. The Forest Services are responsible for the technical supervision of the resources. Under this regime, local communities have to establish and implement a clear management plan, therefore designating specific zoning for conservation, restoration, and exploitation within the transferred area.

The challenges of mangrove management in Madagascar, and particularly around Antsohihy, are characterized by

competition between the strong dependence of local people on mangroves for non-timber and timber forest products, and the ecological urgency of conserving and restoring this invaluable ecosystem. There is also the problem of illegal mangrove logging for export to major neighboring urban centers in north-west Madagascar such as Mahajanga and Nosy Be. Illegal logging of mangrove wood in the study area leads to conflict and sometimes violence pitting the local communities and the Forest Services against the administrative leaders of a neighboring municipality and the illegal loggers. It is widely speculated, but without irrefutable publicly available proof, that some officials in a city neighboring Antsohihy and other wealthy people have been hiring skilled lumberjacks from the central part of Madagascar, and equipping them with motorized boats and axes to carry out illegal logging in the mangrove forests on both the Western and Eastern bank of the river. Yet, there are other forest types available in the surrounding area of Antsohihy that could provide an alternative to mangrove timber products.

Surveys revealed an annual consumption of 3,600 bags of charcoal and 5,577.12 m<sup>3</sup> of construction and service wood, equivalent to a total of 6,241.97 m<sup>3</sup> of mangrove wood in Antsohihy. Annually, the mangrove wood forest product sectors bring in 22,500,000 Malagasy Ariary (MGA, about 4,900 USD) for charcoal and 82,080,000 MGA (about 17,900 USD) for construction and service wood. This provides a living for more than 150 operators and their households, as well as other players in downstream sectors. It also generates dividends and fees that make up the operating funds for the local community organization and the local Forest Services, all for the use of managing the mangrove. Within this context, banning all forms of mangrove timber exploitation and passive restoration not only deprives local populations of a vital source of timber but also has a socio-economic cost, especially for the many local people living off the mangrove timber exploitation. In parallel, the local community organization's situation is now ambiguous whether their mangrove timber exploitation is legal or not. It is worth noting that the local community is running silvicultural operations and active restoration activities, which means that their designated area is in a much better state of regeneration than the area on the Western bank of the river.

On top of that, the Sofia Region has many endemic species of fauna and flora, and most of the biodiversity conservation and management efforts in this region are most likely focused on endemic and endangered species conservation and protected areas. Otherwise, research led by scientists and NGOs has shown that the Sofia Region has a variety of species that are unique to Madagascar, and that are threatened due to illegal practices in the zone.

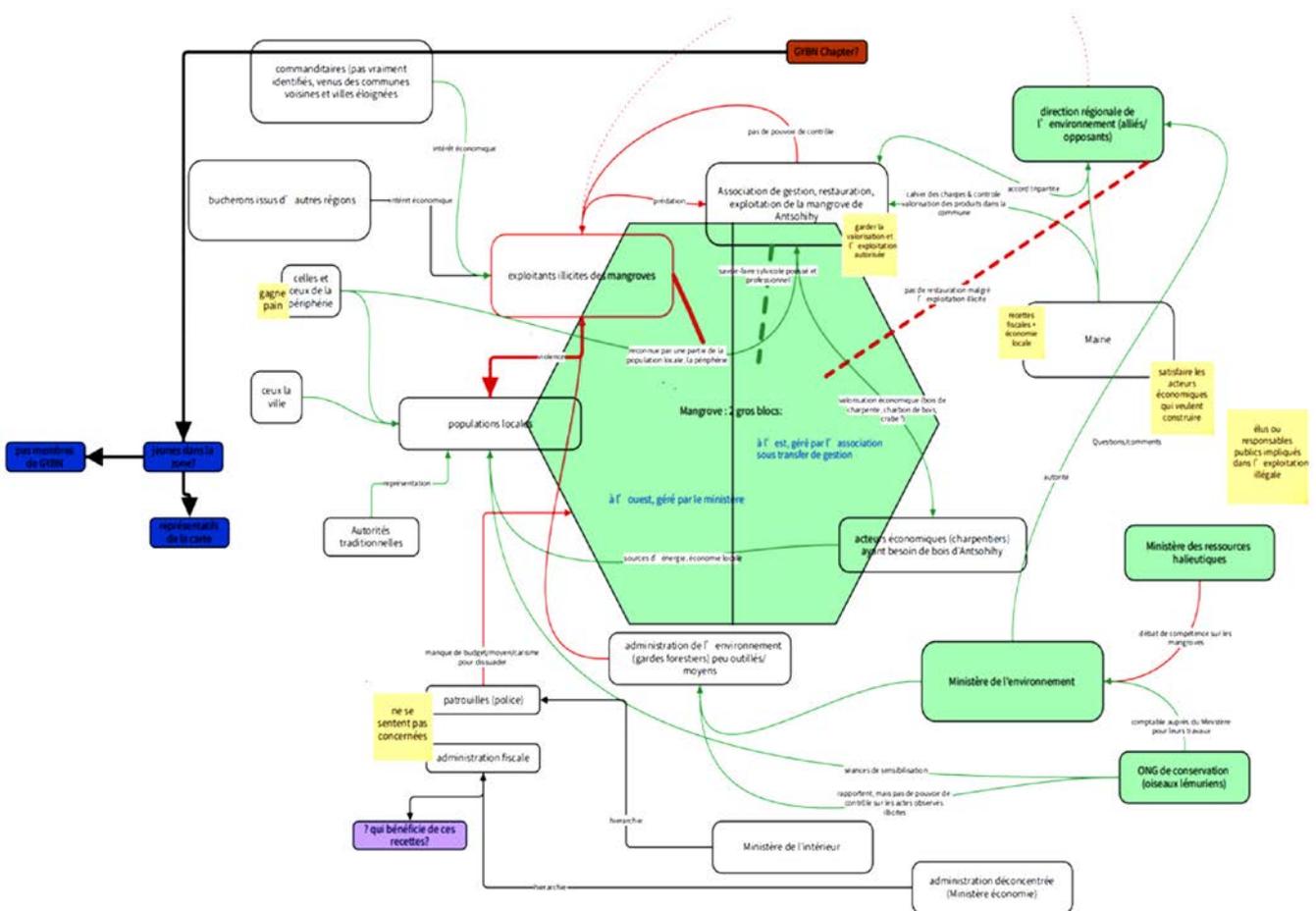
<sup>11</sup> Jones, T. G. et al., 2016. Madagascar's Mangrove: Quantifying Nation-Wide and Ecosystem Specific Dynamics, and Detailed Contemporary Mapping of Distinct Ecosystems. Remote Sensing, 8(106), p. 31

## 2.2. Actors mapping: roles, responsibilities, interests, needs and relationships

### 2.2.1. Actors map

- a. **Regional state forest services:** managing the Western bank of the mangrove under a passive restoration regime, in charge of patrolling
- b. **Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development:** co-issued the Order
- c. **Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources:** co-issued the Order
- d. **Ministry of the Economy and Finance:** receives taxes and fees and allocates budget to other ministries
- e. **Ministry and regional services of home affairs and national police force:** in charge of peace and security in the area, their agents have the power to patrol, seize, arrest and charge offenders. Nevertheless, their actions are not transparent.
- f. **Local government:** party to the agreement transferring mangrove management to the local community organization, collecting fees from the mangrove wood market. This is a benefit for the local administration and population.

- g. **Elected people of the neighboring towns:** elected people in all regions, and not only about mangroves exploitation, are accused of allegedly hiring lumberjacks and commissioning the illegal logging and export to other towns. The problem is that some anti-corruption agents appear to be connected to those cases and acquiring information about this situation is difficult.
- h. **Conservation NGOs in the surroundings of Antsohihy:** ongoing focus on endangered animal species. Most of the time, they are working together depending on the exact activities.
- i. **Local community organization managing the mangrove:** have been entrusted with the management of the mangrove on the Eastern bank, in charge of conservation and active restoration but also have customary rights to use mangrove timber products. They manage the access of people from their own communities and from those outside of their area to the mangrove timber products in their area.
- j. **Citizens of Antsohihy:** consumers of mangrove products (timber and non-timber)
- k. **Illegal mangrove operators:** lumberjacks and boat operators, who often behave violently when encountering local communities in their managed areas, but they also log in the Western bank area



**l. Operators in mangrove wood markets:** wood machinery operators and resellers (poles, boards, etc) and carpenters

**m. Youth (outside of the local community organization):** not really involved in the matter of mangrove conservation and management although they are affected by the social, economic and environmental issues, without being aware of it.

The joint exercise of actor analysis within the team helped us to draw the following map (in French), which allowed us to better understand the existing conflictual or harmonious relationships, as well as the issues at stake.

### 2.2.2. Connectors and dividers

These are key elements of the context that gather groups and people, sometimes beyond the conflictual lines. We want to identify them so that our intervention later reinforces the connectors and avoids exacerbating the dividers.

Connectors	Dividers
Legislation unclear on the legitimacy of the community association	Markets for illegally harvested timber without controls because it meets an existing demand
Existence of mangroves and importance of this resource	Real estate boom, so need for timber exploitation increases
Presence of the State but fragile connector	Monitoring of the community association's management is no longer serious since the Order.
Mangrove well restored in the community managed area	Violent behavior by outside loggers
Tripartite mangrove management contract between the town council, the State and the community association	Lack of clarification of roles between municipal police and forest police
	Corruption, as illegal loggers have the means to co-opt the authorities/police

## 3. Analysis of the Interactions Between Our Intervention and the Context

GYBN Madagascar has not yet undertaken any activities outside the areas surrounding the capital city Antananarivo. Nevertheless, our activities in other places have enabled us to build networks of stakeholders who can support the study, particularly in the case of mangroves. In any case, careful steps are needed for GYBN Madagascar before making such bold steps: anticipating potential positive and negative interactions between our intervention and the context helps us improve our design, and will also support us during the intervention to follow up on how the context evolves.

From the diverse effects that have been identified, GYBN has identified some adaptations that should be included in its intervention.

#### a. Market effects:

- Clearly we can see that mangrove timber is at the heart of Antsohihy's economy, meaning many actors are involved in the "governance" and exploitation or use of that controversial resource, which lays out potential for conflict if a new actor - GYBN Madagascar - comes in and stirs the waters.

#### b. Substitution effects

- GYBN should not substitute itself for the actors who have responsibility in the area. We already have a partnership with the CBD national focal point of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development which can be strengthened to conduct deeper sharing and a joint study about how impactful and insightful cooperation can positively contribute to dynamic conservation.

We should also deepen the relationship with the central State so as to reinforce its actions towards biodiversity conservation, since it is its duty in the long term.

#### c. Alliance opportunities:

- GYBN may be too small and fragile to face the actors that have more interests in degrading the mangrove. However, we are in contact with other associations that work specifically on human rights regarding environmental protection and it could be a win-win strategy to strengthen our legitimacy through alliances with such organizations.

#### d. Legitimacy effects

- The existence of local communities who manage the mangrove and other key actors such as local authority and other NGOs must be acknowledged and their legitimacy reinforced by our action.

- Interaction strategies to handle illegal trafficking must be considered together, rightfully and clearly because there are risks and threats towards each actor. GYBN must build activities that will bring security forces and the State to support actors who may be harmed or threatened by the illegal activities.

**e. Effect of transparency and accountability:**

- As we see in the actor map analysis, there are different types of actors and interventions. Some might be well-coordinated, but most of the time the problem of solving conservation issues rely on information sharing - that may either not exist or is not completely respected - and on coordination between key actors such as local authorities, local communities and NGOs.

**f. Effect of communication**

- Based on information sharing, taking action against illegal trafficking requires tracking data about logging activities which is not available to NGOs, GYBN Madagascar included. That might create threats both for the communities concerned and for NGOs and associations. This can be taken as misinformation to politically control the situation.
- The security forces and the State must be forced/ stimulated to play their role here. A dialogue to better understand their interests/needs to do so must be carried out before any field activity.

**3.1. Interactions between our intervention and dividers**

- a. An unclear shared authority as well as the contradiction between the inter-ministerial Order and the legal mandate for community-led mangrove management makes decision-making tough and loggers are taking advantage of the situation to c-opt local authorities. This accentuates the vulnerability of the local communities to security threats and development needs. Information about the law and the role/responsibility of each public/private actor must take place before any conservation action is taken so as to prevent exacerbation of this divider.
- b. The principal threat is political instability and uncertainty. Due to political instability, local authorities are having trouble establishing the rule of law, and their presence is contested, mostly because of the influence of the illegal loggers. This will most probably undermine GYBN's intervention if it is not seriously addressed through constant dialogue with political actors and flexibility in the intervention to avoid being targeted or getting stuck in this instability. Although GYBN's objective is political, focusing on technical

issues and challenging them in parallel may be a good strategy to keep several doors open.

**3.2. Interactions between our intervention and connectors**

- a. The existing tripartite management contract can provide another way of exploring investment opportunities that would alleviate both insecurity and illegal exploitation. This would also strengthen the inclusion of other parties in the contract, which could help to decrease misinformation and increase collaboration. GYBN must build on this existing connector.
- b. The impact of youth engagement: Youth are an easy-to-reach target for GYBN, and they are part of the many actors listed on our map. Engaging with youth at the local level (populations) and giving them space in the decision-making process may help them to own the work and to support joint interests. This requires identifying the potential youth allies before any activity.

Conflict sensitivity monitoring issue: Working while there are gaps in our data could lead us to misinterpret the situation that causes and reinforces these problems. Lacking information is dangerous in this situation because each action may respond to an existing problem and be controversial for another, and each stakeholder would undoubtedly act individually according to their own interests. Keeping the pulse of the context all along our activities to identify when we are having a negative impact or facing opposition will be necessary for such a project. This requires us to sustain the present analysis within our steering committee.

**4. Lessons Learnt by GYBN Madagascar in this Context and Takeaways from the Experience**

**a. A tool to navigate within complexity**

- The conflict sensitivity approach makes it easier to navigate through complex problems and especially identifying key leverage points on which to focus our analysis and build our strategy for action.

**b. About biases and prejudice**

- Stay away from assumptions as much as possible when it's not you or about you and always be on top of your information. Conflict sensitivity analysis is rooted in valuing each actor in the system. Each of these actors' value system, intentions, interests, goals, modus operandi, attitude, any single detail about them can tweak the system in a totally different direction. Thus, one really needs to investigate and

get as much information as possible about each actor and detach from our own prejudice or biased perception of each actor. Nothing is totally black or white when coming to conflict sensitivity.

**c. Needs are the key to why things are happening in a certain way**

- For most of the actors, we have discovered that “need” can be about very diverse things, such as the need to feel that one belongs somewhere or with a certain group of people, the need for security, the need to express themselves, etc. It was challenging yet very interesting to investigate the need behind each action. Also, **connectors and dividers were some kind of revelation** for us to find leverage points in order to tackle the highly complex problem and the intricate web of actors and interactions.

**Which actors are benefiting from the conflict**

- It is key to identify which actor is looking for and will benefit from conflict, violence and confusion. Then, we have to get the maximum information about them in order to tailor our approach and steer the system away from conflicts, or at least know how to handle potentially emerging conflicts.

**d. The situation is ever-changing**

- All of the information we used during the training were at least from 5 years ago. Since then, the situation might have gotten better or worse and actors might have changed (in terms of numbers, needs or any other attributes). The best analysis relies on verifiable, proven, and most recent information.

**e. Look into ourselves first**

- Even if we are from a 7-year old youth organization, it was surprising to realize that when asked the question why and where do youth come into play inside the map of interactions, it was hard for us to answer that and to see how youth was somehow “isolated” from the dynamics. This means that there is internal work to do for us youth to find our place in the system and defend it, but also to work strategically and in a conflict-sensitive manner in order to work out the best solution, both for us and the rest of the system.

[1] Jones, T. G. et al., 2016. Madagascar’s Mangrove: Quantifying Nation-Wide and Ecosystem Specific Dynamics, and Detailed Contemporary Mapping of Distinct Ecosystems. Remote Sensing, 8(106), p. 31