

Speech by Mr. Pierre Kafando – Site Manager at Salonga National Park World Heritage Site in DRC

Webinar: *"Youth, Entrepreneurship and Heritage Sustainability in Africa"* on 5 May 2020

TOPIC: "Building resilience and sustainability at site level"

Thank you for opportunity giving me to speak about the site level contribution' on the topic of the day.

My presentation will focus on 3 points: 1. presentation of the SNP, 2. impacts of COVID-19 and 3. resilience to COVID-19.

As Introductory presentation,

Salonga National Park, the largest tropical forest park of Africa with an area of 33,500 square kilometers, is located in the heart of the central basin of the Congo Basin, the second lung of the earth.

Created in 1970, It is the main habitat for endemic species such as the bonobo (15,000 individuals, more than 40% of the world population), the Congolese peacock, the forest elephant, the pangolin and many other species of mammals, reptiles, birds and flora, some of which are threatened with extinction.

It has been a World Heritage Site since 1999.

The Salonga landscape covers an area of 103,000 square kilometers with a population of more than 1,000,000 inhabitants who share more than 770 villages. Salonga is the main provider of labour in the region and is a focus for the 4 riparian provinces communities and authorities.

It is co-managed by the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) and World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) under an agreement and funding by bilateral organizations (EU, KfW and USAID). The co-management has signed with the aim of ensuring the persistence and viability of large forest blocks representative of the dense humid forests of the central basin of the Congo Basin in order to safeguard its biodiversity, ecosystems, and environmental processes and services for the benefit of local populations, the country and humanity.

What are the impacts of COVID-19 on the management of the SNP

As in other areas, COVID-19 has a significant impact on the management of biodiversity and the Site.

- Reduction of staff mobility in the park with the likely consequences of increased poaching on the emblematic species of the park (bonobos, elephants, pangolin, bongo...);
- Suspension of all community activities support that required a grouping of more than 20 people (e.g. community assemblies in the framework of the implementation of community forestry, mass and school environmental education and awareness raising);
- Threat to food security with the consequent increase in poaching for food but also as a source of income;
- Reduction of funding for the protection of the SNP. The concern is whether the management of protected areas will still be a priority for the different donors after COVID-19 for SNP that was in the process of being removed from the list of endangered sites?

How can resilience and sustainability be strengthened?

The resilience and sustainability of the Park to COVID-19 depends on how well it has been appropriated by the riparian communities, especially the youth. To this end, we have put in place:

- a development program involving youth,
- education for behavioral change,
- support for livelihood activities and
- capacity building for entrepreneurship.

The maintenance of park integrity is one of the results of this program based on sustainable approach. But much remains to be done.

We need to protect our natural environment to safeguard our health and the human race because the health of the environment, the wild and domesticated animals and human health are dependent and interlinked with one another

However, areas like Salonga still offers opportunities for youth to create revolutionaries' enterprises ensuring climate, biodiversity and people well-being sustainability.

I call on young people to seize these investment opportunities to ensure the maintenance of ecosystem services to humanity, but also to generate the resources needed to support the riparian communities and indigenous peoples who have donated their resources to humanity.

This is the key to ensuring the sustainability of the protection of the Park in the resilience to COVID-19. Together, it is possible!!