

RAFMs-VCA WORKSHOP REPORT



July 11-12, 2018

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Abbreviations list

- CAMAMF:** Campo Ma'an Model Forest
- UNFCCC:** United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
- FM/MF:** Model Forest
- FOMOD:** Dja Mpomo Model Forest
- RAFAM/AMFN:** African Model Forest Network
- DRC:** Democratic Republic of Congo
- NGO:** Non-Governmental Organization
- NWFP:** Non-Wood Forest Products
- SRAFAM/ AMFNS:** African Model Forest Network Secretariat
- UFA/FMU:** Forest Management Unit
- IUCN:** International Union for the Conservation of Nature
- UNCCD:** United Convention to Combat Desertification
- VCA:** Verified Conservation Areas

1. Background and rationale

Everywhere, life on Earth is threatened. Scientists believe that the continued loss of biodiversity is as serious as climate change. Ecosystems are degrading, natural habitats are disappearing and many wild species of flora and fauna are increasingly at risk. Nature, however, can be preserved. Ecosystems can be restored, natural habitats maintained, wild species preserved and living natural resources valued in a sustainable manner. The VCA conservation approach appears to be more effective for the responsible management of our planet's resources. A VCA is in fact a well-defined geographical area of conservation, managed by an owner who can be a cooperative, an individual, a company ... Any legal person or physical, can develop a VCA and register it as such. The objective of management of a VCA is, therefore, sustainable conservation by zone and this, so as to improve the state of biodiversity or, at the very least, to prevent the loss of biodiversity. Given the similarities between the VCA conservation approach and that of the Model Forests, the discussions initiated with the RAFM led to the idea of implementing the VCA approach within African Model Forests. To this end, an exchange of ideas was initiated by Arthur Eijs, Ministry of the Environment of the Netherlands with Chimère Diaw, Director of the African Model Forests Network (AMFN), during the forum "African Landscape Dialogue" held in March 2017 in Addis Ababa. This discussion culminated in the holding of a regional workshop on 11-12 July 2018 in the offices of the African Model Forests Network Secretariat (AMFNS) located in Yaoundé-Cameroon. This workshop was attended by Earthmind, its Executive Director, Francis Vorhies, and the AMFN that was represented by its secretariat and the participants coming from DRC, Congo and Cameroon's Model Forest sites. This meeting, which took place in two days, aimed to see the possibility of registration of MF into the VCA network. For a more precise rendering of the present report, we propose as a methodology, to clarify the objective of the workshop, then to present the articulations of this meeting in daily sequence and to finish by the resolutions taken.

2. Workshop purpose

The objective of this workshop was to present the added value of the VCA approach to MFs in order to see a possibility of registration of African MFs within the VCA network.

To meet these objectives, several presentations and exchanges guided the discussions during these two days.

First day

This day, dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the VCA approach, began with a brief presentation of the participants, followed by a warm welcome by the

Director of the AMFN to participants from the DRC, Congo and MF Dja and Mpomo and Campo Ma'an in Cameroon. A special word was addressed to Francis Vorhies, Executive Director of Earthmind, the Swiss NGO responsible for the VCA programme.

The work started with the screening of a video of Arthur Eijs, Netherlands Water Management Coordinator, activist, and also representative of the Dutch Government within the VCA since 2009. The latter had given a contextual reminder of his experiences leading up to this workshop while holding through this film, has also apologized for his absence at this meeting for reasons beyond his control. He stressed in his message, to specify the importance of developing the approaches of territorial landscapes as well as the means of exchange of experience of the best practices of conservation. Finally, he said it is imperative to build on each other's capacity building in the hope of having a common success that will one day be celebrated around the VCA conservation approach.

As a result, there were three presentations by Francis Vorhies that reviewed the VCA approach. The first was about the VCA system; the second, the place of the VCA approach in Sustainable Development; the third, the answers to questions about the terms of membership of the VCA.



Photo 1: Francis Vorhies presentation

3. Presentations

3.1 VCA and sustainable development

Verified Conservation Areas (VCAs) are areas where conservation can be measured and where actors voluntarily agree on what they want to conserve. It is therefore a voluntary commitment to conservation where the actors are recognized, encouraged in their conservation area in which they live and work especially outside protected areas. The VCA standard is therefore to take care of our planet, hectare per hectare. This means that sustainable management is an integral part of conservation.

According to IUCN, conservation is the sustainable management of the human use of the biosphere so that it can produce the greatest sustainable benefit for the present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations.

Under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the VCAs directly support Objectives 14 and 15 on the conservation of marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

The conservation objectives of VCA align with the goal of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), on long-term integrated strategies. At the same time, they aim at improving land productivity, rehabilitation and sustainable management of water resources, thus leading to the improvement of people's living conditions, especially at community level, and their commitment to the neutrality of lands degradation.

Indeed, VCA's conservation objective supports that of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for the stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere in sufficient time to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climatic hazards. This objective aims to limit the threats of food production and to this end promotes economic development in a sustainable way.

3.1.1 The different categories of VCAs

There are 4 categories of VCA:

- Proposed
- Confirmed;
- Audited;
- Champion.

It is important to note that one does not have to start at the proposed VCA category in order to reach the confirmed one. It is therefore possible to register directly as

confirmed VCA. To move from the lower category to the next category, it is imperative to go through the audits. To become a mushroom VCA, the verified conservation area must have had 10 years of operation after registration.

Several questions came out during the exchanges and found quite satisfactory answers.

3.1.2. What can be registered as VCA?

To this question, the answer is, any conservation area can be registered as VCA. It could be a field, a flower pot, a forest, an industrial area ...

3.1.3. How to register as a VCA?

To register as a VCA it is necessary to present a proof of preservation of nature. This may be his place of residence or place of work. As such, a VCA can be registered by any entity: community, company, organization, government authority or individual capable of implementing a conservation management plan for a defined geographical area. A VCA is thus open to any marine or terrestrial area that has a conservation programme as established by its standard. The following questions are usually asked:

- **Do you have an area that you manage?**
- **Do you carry out conservation activities in this area?**

If the answers to these questions are positive, then the area can be registered as VCA and then continue the following steps to become an integral part of it:

- **Provide a support letter.**

The latter can be obtained from a recognized and credible personality in conservation (Francis). This letter should be supported by an expert on conservation issues (VCA document).

- **Produce a conservation management plan** (description of the area, conservation status, conservation management).

3.1.4 Is there a standard support letter?

At this question, the answer was: there is no standard letter template.

3.1.5. How does the area can stay as the VCA ?

To maintain an area as VCA it is necessary to produce annual reports of its conservation performance.

3.2. Audits

The objective here is to independently verify if the conservation management plan of the area is in accordance with the VCA standard. Audits can be of many types. They may include the conservation plan, annual reports and associated audits. To be registered as an audited VCA, an independent management plan audit must be submitted. The VCA audit process is consistent with expectations that "globally, regionally or nationally recognized credible standards for the sustainable management of living natural resources" are adopted and "provide for independent verification or certification". The audit includes a review of key documents, a visit of the area, interviews with key personnel and stakeholders.

The auditor must be independent and autonomous. It can be national or international. The audit report must be prepared by an auditor accredited by VCA and the relevant conservation area (VCA document).

Second day

Four points were discussed during this day. They were the presentation of the AMFN, the general discussion, the group work and the restitution of the whole work.

3.3 Presentation of the AMFN

It was a question of making a brief presentation of the Model Forests and the business model of the AMFN. The discussions were focused on AFMN-VCA reports based on AMFN lessons and directions, starting with a Model Forest features as location, partnership and process:

- the location could be a landscape or a large territory that may extend to an entire ecosystem;
- Voluntary and inclusive partnership, ranging from policy makers and private companies, to universities and businesses, farmers and local communities; indigenous peoples, to women and youth;

- the process is being a journey and a path of dialogue, experimentation and innovation, structured to understand what sustainability means in the territory and to build on the partnerships in order to work towards achieving it.

Thus, MFs in Africa have two main pillars: Governance and Sustainable Development. One of the major lessons learned by the AMFN in its first development phase is that to go far, MFs need to put the economy at the heart of governance and promote the model on that basis. If the MFs are part of the VCAs, it will be in a framework programme articulated by the different actors and integrating their dimensions of governance and social economy.

During the plenary discussions, there was some exchanges to clarify or confirm MFs that wish to be registered as a pilot conservation programme within the AMFN. In this regard, all the MFs participants present at the workshop have requested their membership. The unanimity of non-competition between the VCA approach and the MFs was noted. ACVs do not replace MFs, rather it is a conservation approach that the AMFN adopts to highlight the conservation aspects of MFs. The AMFN coordinates the adherence of MFs to the VCA conservation approach.

Several cases of figures were evoked and discussed:

- record the MF as a VCA;
- register the MF as VCA, with a framework programme for the creation of smaller VCAs coming from the dismantling of the Model Forest (protected areas, FMUs, community forests, ecovillages, etc.);
- one or more parts of an FM are registered as VCA.

At the end of this exchange phase, three working groups representing the four FMs present at the workshop were formed in order to know how the Mfs will register as VCA.



Photo 2: Plenary discussions

The participants coming from the FOMOD, took the opportunity to present the achievements that they already had made through several projects in the field of agroforestry, the production of pens, ecotourism, and unconventional breeding. This is in direct line of the VCA approach. The FOMOD therefore wishes to be an incubator in which the VCAs must be developed in accordance with the development axis of VCA Programme.

Participants coming from CAMAMF would like to join the VCAs in the form of a framework programme, based on a platform and the AMFN business model with the following thematic axes:

- Transformation and valorization of the NWFP;
- Sustainable agriculture;
- Peach;
- Wood processing (scrap wood ...);
- Development of sacred sites through carbon sequestration; and
- Tourism.

For DRC and Congo, VCAs should be in the form of a landscape at a lower scale as a programme included in the AMFN. It will be imperative to make an initial planning integrating field activity with stakeholders.

IV. Conclusion and learned lessons

As resolutions taken during this meeting, it is necessary that:

- MFs membership documents must be prepared for submission to the VCA network;
- Field trips should be organized with all stakeholders of Model Forests to ensure better ownership of the VCA approach, its implementation, and then, to measure the impacts of VCA approach at the grassroots level;
- The gradual establishment within the Model Forests of a voluntary conservation approach, according to the priorities of each MF and its strategic plan. Each MF will come with a strategic component well developed and adapted to the AMFN model. Because of the specificities encountered within each MF, they MFs will be obliged to adopt a common strategic plan;
- The registration of four Model Forests (Dimonika in Congo, Mayombe in DRC, Dja and Mpomo and Campo Ma'an in Cameroon) as pilot sites for the implementation of the CVA approach;
- Broadening the approach to other African Model Forests;
- The AMFN must support the FM's accreditation process at the VCA level and consolidate the common approaches to all MFs;
- The establishment of a common AMFN-VCA monitoring system to periodically evaluate the progress of the approach and its contribution to the objectives of the Model Forests; and
- The establishment of practical modalities of technical and financial support to the FM and the facilitation of activities and partnerships likely to strengthen their vision and their objectives.

The lesson of the workshop is that all Model Forests agree to join the VCA process as a programme included in the Model Forests.

The workshop ended with speeches of the representatives of the various MFs and the AMFNS members, who all expressed their satisfaction for the success of the event and wished an excellent return to Francis Vorhies.