



Global Music Exchange
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4th February 2003

Your Royal Highness,

I am writing to you since I am extremely concerned about the activities of the WWF in the rainforest region of South East Cameroon. Over the last ten years our organisation has been building contacts with a group of Baka Pygmies from the village of Banana near the town of Moloundou on the border of Cameroon and Congo Brazzaville. We have been raising money through the sale of their music and are currently in the process of building a music house with them. In the last 5 years the WWF have been active in the region with the aim of aiding the conservation of the rainforest and the flora and fauna within it.

I have always supported the WWF since a very early age, I was therefore shocked to hear of the results of their activities when I was last in the region in November 2002. In this region the WWF have a flagship project which I believe is called "Operation Jengi". This is meant to be a shining example of how conservationists can cooperate with local people for the conservation of sensitive areas. They have set up discussions with each village along the road through the region and each village has elected a "guardian of the forest". Now on paper this all sounds very good indeed, however the reality is very different.

In this area of Cameroon the Baka officially are 60% of the population. This is almost certainly an underestimate since there will be groups who have not been officially recognised because they have resisted the pressure to settle along the roadside. Of about 60 elected representatives of local people in Operation Jengi only about 3 are Baka. The WWF claim to have consulted the local population, but I did not meet a single Baka who knew anything about the project. They only knew of the WWF as a European body who was trying to throw them off their traditional hunting grounds. The activities of the Eco guards paid for by WWF affect the lives of the Baka to a far greater extent than the lives of the Bantu population who are almost all farmers settled along the roads. The Baka rely on the forest for their livelihood and in very many cases are being prevented from carrying on their traditional lifestyle. The use of the name "Jengi" for the project is also very insensitive as this is their most important forest spirit, and the project does not take them into account at all.

The relationship between the Bantu and the Baka is a complex one. On a superficial level it is close to serfdom. If asked, Bantu farmers will talk as if they own "their Pygmies". The reality is more complex than this, and as long as the Baka have free access to the forest they are not really enslaved as they can come and go as they please. The worst of it for them is the lack of respect given to them when they are with the Bantu population. However the activities of the WWF is institutionalising this inherent inequality between the Bantu and Baka. By giving the Bantu jurisdiction

over the Baka in the forest, the Baka are being completely disenfranchised. Not only that, their immense knowledge of the ecology of the forest is being thrown away. Having lived and worked with the Baka for these last 10 years I am aware of how complicated it is to really find out what they want and how to integrate them into a program such as Project Jengi, but difficulty in achieving a result is not an excuse for ignoring the problems.

A further thing that shocked me on my last visit was the extreme racism of the WWF representative in Moloundou. I met him whilst I was with two Baka men, one about 35 years old and the other about 45 years old, both well respected in their community. He wanted to talk to me and then said to them (I translate from the French) "You should go away while your betters are speaking". A Bantu boy of about 16 was also with us and he started going as well and your WWF representative said "you can stay". I was shocked. I have never seen such overt racism in my life and to see it coming from a man who's whole position of power was supported by money from the West I found extremely distasteful. This overt racism is being actively reinforced and institutionalised by the activities of the WWF and needs urgent action now before it is too far gone.

The Baka I know in that region have an incredible knowledge of their area of forest and know exactly what is going on there. They can tell you exactly when bush meat is being taken out and by whom. Putting the control of this in the hands of the Bantu villagers who are themselves in fear of higher authorities who are often themselves involved in poaching does nothing to stem the flow of bush meat and ivory from the region. It does however terrorise a generation of Baka and give them more reason to migrate to the roadside to become second-class citizens in an already impoverished region. If the Eco guard jobs were given to Baka they have far less incentive to abuse their position by selling out to the poachers.

If the WWF really want to address the problem of the poaching of bush meat and ivory they would do much better in cooperating with the Cameroon government in the overhaul of the police service. As it stands now there are plenty of police checks on the road from the forest to the capital, but it is quite evident that if you are prepared to give the police money you can do what you want. With it being so easy to transport illegal goods out of the region the temptation to make a bit of extra cash for your impoverished family will always be too great for the majority of local people, especially when they see the European logging companies taking out whatever they want from the area. As it is now, the activities of the WWF are actively destroying a unique culture, one which I am sure that most of the WWF's supporters would like to see protected. It is imperative therefore that something is done about this as a matter of urgency.

I am returning to the area on 21st Feb and am happy to report back to WWF on my return any developments in the situation.

Yours faithfully,

Martin Cradick.