

NGO-state relations in the monitoring of illegal forest logging and wildlife trafficking in Central Africa

Item Type	Journal article
Authors	Mbzibain, Aurelian;Tchoudjen, Teodyl Nkuintchua
Citation	Mbzibain, A. and Tchoudjen, T.N. (2021) NGO-state relations in the monitoring of illegal forest logging and wildlife trafficking in Central Africa. World Development, 148, 105670.
DOI	10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105670
Publisher	Elsevier
Journal	World Development
Download date	2026-04-18 05:01:00
License	https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/2436/624318

Title:

**NGO-state relations in the monitoring of illegal forest logging and wildlife trafficking in
Central Africa**

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Summary

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3 Independent forest monitoring (IFM) by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) emerged
4
5 in the late 1990s as a forest governance mechanism in response to rising forest crime in Asia
6
7 and Central Africa. IFM is the use of an independent third party that, by agreement or not with
8
9 state authorities, provides an assessment of legal compliance, and observation of and guidance
10
11 on official forest law enforcement systems. The success of IFM by NGOs is therefore,
12
13 inextricably linked to the nature of the relationship with state authorities yet this relationship
14
15 has neither been explored nor understood. There is scant empirical research on this mechanism
16
17 globally. This paper addresses these gaps through participatory observation, documentary
18
19 analysis and interviews with leaders of five NGOs at the forefront of forest and wildlife
20
21 monitoring in Central Africa. Using Najam (2000) 4-C framework, we find complex and fluid
22
23 relationships ranging from cooperation, complementarity, confrontation and
24
25 instrumentalization. Complementarity and confrontation emerge as the most important
26
27 relationship types while cooperation is the least prevalent relationship. In response to
28
29 challenges in the relationships, NGOs use a repertoire of strategies and tactics to influence the
30
31 state in pursuit of their goals. Unfortunately, significant dependence on a limited stream of
32
33 intermittent external donor funding and lack of clearly articulated influence and advocacy
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35 strategies, limit the potential contribution of IFM to the fight against forest and wildlife crime
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37 in Central Africa. The implications for IFM organisations, national governments and donor
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39 agencies are discussed.
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51 **Keywords: Independent forest and wildlife monitoring, NGO, State, mixed methods,**
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53 **Central Africa**
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Highlights

- NGO-state relationships are complex characterised by complementarity, confrontation, cooperation and instrumentalisation
- Complementarity and confrontation emerge as the most important NGO-state relationship
- NGOs that successfully lead to law enforcement responses from state adopt a wide range of strategies and influence tactics.
- Lack of secure funding and clearly defined impact strategies represent significant limitations to IFM's impact.
- A basket fund mechanism could further strengthen the capability of NGOs, autonomy and impact of their interventions.

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Introduction

The 1990s were characterized by calls by researchers and policy makers for multi-stakeholder forest governance arrangements to address the failures of state to govern forests (Gibson et al., 2005; Ostrom, 2003) with key proponents predicting “the retreat of the state” or “hollowing out of the state” (Pulhin and Dressler, 2009). In this paper, we focus on NGOs conducting independent forest monitoring (IFM), which has emerged as a governance mechanism in the fight against forest illegality in the last decade (Young, 2007). IFM entails a third-party assessment of the conformity of forest management and forestry activities with the legislative and regulatory standards in force in the forestry sector of the country (Tegtmeyer et al. 2010). The evidence is compiled in a report, which is presented to officials of the forest administration (Young, 2016). Unfortunately, despite years of IFM experience, researchers, donors and practitioners are concerned about its effectiveness (Brown et al., 2004; Hasyim et al., 2020) in the face of sustained forest and wildlife illegality. Recent and emerging evidence from Cameroon suggests that the failure to manage NGO-state relationships may be a key factor (Mbizibain and Ongolo, 2019). This is also reflected in a growing body of literature that emphasizes on the central importance of understanding NGO-state relationships in addressing wicked problems (Fougere and Solitander, 2020, Nathan et al., 2017; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2002).

In line with Dragos and Apostu (2014), we posit that greater understanding of the nature of the interactions between NGOs and state can shed light on what works, pitfalls and challenges, which need to be addressed to enhance their contributions towards improved forest policy outcomes. We argue that traditional IFM, which focuses on the production and submission of

1 IFM results to forest authorities, is obsolete. Though new as a forest governance mode, IFM
2 has been subject to both formal recognition by and conflicts with states in the Congo Basin.
3
4 This shows that the hollowing out of the state has not materialised as proponents of the new
5 forest governance agenda have predicted rather, the role of IFM is intrinsically intertwined with
6 state and hence more in line with Foucauldian concept of governmentality (Arts, 2014). A new
7 generation of successful IFM requires innovative NGOs with clearly defined impact strategies
8 and the ability to navigate complex relationships with not only forestry officials but also other
9 key state agencies such as traditional law enforcement officials, the media and advocacy
10 agencies to push for change.
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24 This paper seeks: (1) to investigate the different ways in which NGOs relate with state officials
25 in charge of forest and wildlife, and (2) to highlight the strategies and tactics implemented by
26 NGOs that seem to generate responses from officials in the form of joint verification missions,
27 sanctions and other punitive measures against alleged forest and wildlife crime. Drawing on
28 Najam (2000) 4C model (Complementarity, Confrontation, Co-optation and Cooperation) of
29 NGO-state relationships, we adopted a mixed qualitative methods approach to address the
30 research questions.
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43 The 4C model provides a robust framework for analysing relationships. Findings reveal
44 complex and fluid relationships between NGOs and the state ranging from cooperation,
45 complementarity, confrontation and instrumentalisation. Complementarity emerges as the most
46 important relationship type followed closely by confrontation and instrumentalisation
47 illustrating a situation where, as NGOs try to perform their oversight functions, they are faced
48 with coercive powers of state, personal interests, corruption and inertia from officials.
49 However, we find that NGOs that appear to generate beneficial responses from state officials,
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1 draw on a wide range of strategies and tactics, target a wider range of stakeholders beyond
2 forestry and wildlife while successfully maintaining their independence and autonomy. Those
3 strategies include certification of IFM quality management systems in order to demonstrate its
4 credibility, and clearly articulated advocacy approaches to influence decisions and policies.
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10 11 **Theoretical framework**

12 Past research on NGO -state relations has tended to take a comparative advantage approach
13 leading to identification of strategies to avoid any inherent constraints. Taking an economic
14 perspective, Cernea (1988), Clark, (1991) and Charnovitz (1997) contended that the
15 inability/failure of the state to provide all necessary services to citizens led to more
16 accommodation and creation of a more conducive environment for NGOs' interventions.
17 Insisting on the institutional dimension of the NGO-state relations, Bratton (1989) emphasized
18 that engagement between state and NGOs was a two-way process with each actor seeking to
19 influence the other in pursuit of their own objectives. Refining the economic theory on NGO-
20 state relations, Young (1999; 2000) examined three interaction models: Supplementary,
21 Complementary or Adversarial. The supplementary model sees NGOs as fulfilling the demand
22 for public goods left unsatisfied by government; while in the complementary view, both
23 institutions maintain a direct relationship and team up to deliver public goods. In the adversarial
24 model, NGOs and state try to influence each other. The main limitations of this approach are
25 that it says little on how institutional choices may affect each model and, the potential power
26 dynamics between state and NGOs.
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51 Coston's typology precisely insists on those power dynamics. Describing eight possible NGO-
52 state relationships, Coston (1998) argues that power asymmetry and resource imbalances drive
53 the nature of relationships. Such relationships may never reach the stage of proper cooperation
54 because state is generally more powerful and exercise such power. While we find that specific
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1 aspect instrumental, we note however that recent developments in the public governance theory
2 have yielded cases of very horizontal processes between government, NGOs and other
3 stakeholders (Torfing and Sørensen 2014; Klijn, 2008). As Torfing and Sørensen (2014)
4 suggested, multi-stakeholder deliberative processes, that is processes comprising state and
5 other actors such as NGOs, do not eradicate the power imbalance; however, such power
6 asymmetry is contained by the interdependence between actors and, the existence of common
7 norms, values that dictate their collaboration.
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10 Drawing on Coston and Young, Najam's Four-C model builds on both economic and
11 institutional perspectives that integrate the influence of power asymmetry in relationship
12 building and management. Najam's model is grounded on the postulate that NGO-state
13 relations are driven by the strategic interest of each actor (Najam, 2000). We concur with
14 Najam that contextual factors, government initiative, and power asymmetry certainly matter,
15 but overall the relations depend on the choice that each actor willingly makes. Najam's Four-
16 C model is comprised of Cooperation, Confrontation, Complementarity and Collaboration.
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18

19 *Cooperation* happens when NGOs and state seek the same goals with the same strategies.
20 Contrarily to Coston (1998), Najam suggests that cooperation is not fuelled by power
21 symmetry, but it is rather driven by the absence of perceived threat on the part of government
22 or NGOs (See also Klijn and Koppenjan, 2012, on cooperation between actors). While the
23 potential for cooperation is strongly linked to the level of democratic opening within the
24 country (Atack; 1999); cooperative relationships are shaped by the history of interactions, the
25 nature of NGOs in terms of capacity and resources and the extent to which the interactions are
26 formally or informally organized (Mcloughlin, 2011). While supporting the need for
27 cooperative relationships, other authors warn of potential dangers of becoming too close to
28 state such as lose of independence and inability to lead advocacy activities (Visser, 2015; Kim,
29 2009).
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Confrontation or adversarial relations happen when NGOs and state pursue different goals with different means. In the environmental sector, this may happen when governments limit the active participation of NGOs in national and international processes or when the NGOs face political pressure (Siddique, 2016). Ramanath and Ebrahim (2010) argue that in this case, NGOs are able to exercise agency and find ways to influence or shape the outcomes. They suggest however, that few NGOs have clearly articulated strategies and tactics to navigate the complex and fluid nature of relationships with state, which constrains their effectiveness. Researchers also draw attention to the fact that confrontation may actually be positive as NGOs have shown through using confrontational or rejectionist approaches and advocacy strategies to bring improvements to the very institutions they try to oppose (Fougere and Solitander, 2020; Mcloughlin, 2011; Gordenker and Weiss, 1995).

Complementarity happens when goals are similar, but means are dissimilar. In this case, as both actors pursue the same goal, it is very likely that they will complement each other. Complementarities emerge due to the need to share resources and a genuine partnership to tackle mutually agreed problems (Young, 2000; Clark, 1993). Salamon and Toepler (2015) suggest that for all their advantages, NGOs have significant limitations that constrain their ability to respond to public problems. In the area of IFM, Mbzibain and Ongolo (2019) found that NGOs in Cameroon acknowledge that they themselves cannot fully address the problem of forest and wildlife illegality without stronger linkages with the state. Similar observation has been made in Indonesia, where Hasyim et al (2020) argue that NGOs can suggest normative sanctions on illegal actors, but the application of those sanctions, attribution of fines and, prosecution of illegal actors remain within the sovereign role of state.

Co-optation happens when state and NGOs prefer similar strategies (means) but pursue dissimilar goals (ends). According to Najam (2000), power asymmetry will decide whether and which side gives in or gives up its goals. Looking at NGO-state relations in Africa, Hofisi and

1 Hofisi (2013) argue that co-optation is a key feature of the relationship characterized by lack
2 of mutual trust and limited political neutrality. They argue that in this context, actors engage in
3 a constant process of influence, each seeking to bring the other to change their positions on
4 certain key issues. State might do so through support to pro-government NGOs, creation of
5 government NGOs, infiltration of NGOs, coercive control and shrinking of civic space (Bawole
6 et al., 2015; Ulybina, 2014; Ayana et al., 2018).
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14 **Methodology**

15 *Data collection*

16 Drawing on Bawole and Hossain (2015) and Thomas et al (2010), we adopted a mixed
17 qualitative methods approach consisting of participatory observation, documentary analysis
18 and interviews with leaders of five IFM organizations in Cameroon, Central African Republic
19 (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Congo and Gabon. The target countries were
20 selected based on the high levels of forest illegality, illegal wildlife trade and poverty (Karsenty
21 and Ferron, 2017) and their engagement/commitments to address these problems in various
22 international forest governance processes such as FLEGT, REDD+, London Conference on
23 illegal wildlife trade amongst others (Karsenty, 2019; Satyal, 2019; Government of the United
24 Kingdom, 2018). We also selected the countries because of their strong history of IFM
25 compared to other regions engaged in FLEGT and REDD+ (Young, 2007). Over the last
26 decade, the authors have delivered a series of projects (in particular DCI-ENV /2013/323-906
27 – 2014-2016 and ENV/2016/380-500 – 2017-2020) in these with a focus on IFM, wildlife
28 monitoring and advocacy. As Patton (1990) and Ejimabo (2015) propose, participatory
29 observation can lead to a deeper understanding of issues than traditional interviews. Our
30 engagement as experts and participants in these projects provides the authors with excellent
31 knowledge of context and insights into the NGO-state dynamics in target countries. However,
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1 in order to mitigate bias (Andong and Ongolo, 2020); we combined documentary content
2 analysis with semi-structured interviews with leaders and experts of IFM organisations.
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7 We used reports from two workshops organized by the authors in 2017 and 2018 in Cameroon
8 and Republic of Congo respectively. The first workshop brought together seventy-two (72)
9 forestry officials, international development agencies, donors, regional NGOs and community
10 leaders from the five countries of this research (CIDT, 2018a). The second workshop organized
11 in Congo in 2018 brought together over 30 forest monitoring and wildlife experts during which
12 the authors facilitated discussions among experts on the nature of the relationships between
13 their organizations and the state (CIDT, 2019). The use of thematic workshops as a research
14 approach (Rist et al., 2007; Andong and Ongolo, 2020) provides an opportunity to capture the
15 rich experiences of a wide range of stakeholders and to draw on their expert experiences.
16
17 Additionally, to ensure suitability of this data in addressing the objectives and research
18 questions, we followed guidance from Johnston (2014). Finally, from a list of eleven NGOs
19 that make up the Pan-African Network of Independent Forest Monitoring (PA-OI)
20 organisations, we selected the four most experienced IFM NGOs from Cameroon, Congo, CAR
21 and DRC to participate in the study. The PAOI network brings together NGOs from across the
22 Congo Basin, to share knowledge, experience and collaborate on issues related to IFM. In
23 Gabon, we selected a fifth NGO because of its additional focus on monitoring of illegal wildlife
24 trade and law enforcement. We carried out five telephone interviews with leaders of these
25 organizations in order to explore their experiences with state. All the interviews were carried
26 out in French, transcribed and then translated into English.
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Data analysis

The relevant data sources (interviews, workshop reports, project factsheets and success stories, field notes) were then prepared for coding and analysed using the qualitative data analysis software – Nvivo 11. The Nvivo software allows for classification of data into nodes (Galvao et al., 2020). We created four parent nodes in line with Najam’s 4C framework and an additional three were created from the data representing challenges faced by NGOs in their relationships with state, facilitating factors as well as perceived gains and evidence of achievements. These additional themes provided further insights into the nature of the relationships and the different tactics adopted by NGOs. In addition to quotes from interviews and reports, we employed exploratory analysis with visualization tools such word cloud to make sense of the data and to tease out the underlying issues of interest in this study. Table 1 shows the coding references from Nvivo 11.

Table 1: Nvivo aggregate number of coding references

Nodes	Aggregate number of references
Achievements	25
Challenges facing IFM	
Conflict and personal interests	24
Government capability forest law enforcement	7
Impunity of private sector companies	2
Institutional memory	4
Lack of strategy	4
Levels of sanction	4
Resources	10
Unfavourable institutional environment	2
Types of relationships	
Complementarity	16
Confrontation	15
Cooperation	6
Co-optation - Instrumentalisation	13
Facilitation factors and tools of influence	
Acceptance from government	8
Agreements between government and civil society	5
External pressure	19
Favourable institutional framework	15
Monitoring of actions and impacts	1

Organisational capability	17
Trust between actors	21

Limitations

Obviously, like any research endeavour, methodological weaknesses exist and suggest the need for further research. We used project reports, workshop outputs, participant observation and semi structured interviews with a small set of experts and leaders in IFM. While each approach has its strengths and weaknesses (Scandura and Williams, 2000), we believe that the mix of methods adopted helped triangulate the data and hence minimised the potential shortcomings of the individual methods (Jack and Raturi, 2006). We used a small sample of NGO leaders from the PAOI network and hence future research could use a larger sample of IFM organisations including those who are not engaged in IFM networks. The results should therefore, be taken cautiously and understood in the context of the Congo Basin and should not be generalised. Future research endeavours could use our findings as a base to replicate this study in the Amazon or other tropical forest contexts. We did not also seek to establish causality between NGO-state relationship types and forest law enforcement and policy outcomes, and so a future quantitative study could operationalise the 4C model and explore correlations and potential mediation effects between relationship types and outcomes.

Results

Types of relations between State and NGOs conducting IFM in Central Africa

Complementarity

Table 1 shows that complementarity and confrontation were the most recorded relationship forms between NGOs and state agencies in charge of forests and wildlife. NGO monitoring complements the official forest control function of the state with both actors seeking to improve transparency, accountability and stronger law enforcement. In line with Agrawal et al (2018)

1 triangle of governance dimensions, the key role of IFM is to produce credible and quality
2 information to increase forest sector transparency and evidence-based decision-making by
3 national state agencies. As the Gabonese NGO respondent states:
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7 *We only give them facts, and nothing else. We don't want anyone to transform our*
8 *words. We are here first of all to collaborate with the government. Sometimes, they use*
9 *our data, and are even grateful for it.*
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11 The focus on irrefutable and credible information is to ensure that the information is less subject
12 to attack by state agencies or private sector actors who may be involved in the illegality.
13
14 Credible information also enhances the chances of the reports being used to sanction
15 individuals or companies alleged to be involved in illegal activity. With the exception of
16 Gabonese NGO, no other NGO studied will publish IFM reports without first submitting them
17 for examination by forestry officials or multi-stakeholder reading committees that include
18 forestry officials among others. Here we see that NGOs recognise the sovereign and dominant
19 role of state in enforcing forest legislation and seek avenues to support the state in achieving
20 sustainable forest management objectives. In this new governance form, state control and
21 citizen participation are intrinsically intertwined (Arts, 2014).
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39 In four out of the five countries, NGOs have Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with
40 ministries of forest and wildlife, with the exception of Cameroon where the national NGO
41 opted to operate without a mandate fearing the risk of state influence. The agreements between
42 NGOs and state in CAR, Congo, DRC and Gabon propose joint missions as a mechanism for
43 working collaboratively. In the case of joint missions, the ministry provides the necessary
44 administrative support to facilitate NGO access to logging concessions, while the NGO brings
45 in funds from donors and international NGOs and technical expertise. During the mission, both
46 institutions have access to the same level of information. At the end, the government officials
47 write up an official and internal report (“procès-verbal”), while the NGO’s report is submitted
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1 for debate and validation by a multi-stakeholder reading committee. This level of
2 complementarity was observed in CAR at the beginning of the relationship with state but with
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4 the key difference that officials from the ministry did not write reports of the mission. As the
5 respondent from CAR reports:
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9 *so far government is not really acting on our reports. Some people say what is the point
10 of IFM if government is not doing anything. There is some confusion now on roles
11 because when we go to the field, the OPJs (sworn police officials, our definition) don't
12 write the PV (procès-verbal, our definition) and so our reports cannot be admitted in
13 court.*
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16 Despite such inaction by CAR state, the complementary role of NGOs remains crucial. The
17 state bodies grapple with profound capacity gaps that prevent them from performing their basic
18 functions such as conducting forest control missions. According to ENV/2016/380-500 March
19 2020, impact studies report:
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24 *after the civil war, forest monitoring had no leadership, no sanctions and no results.
25 But now government presence on the ground is increasing for the first time in 15 years.
26 ...has supported review of the country's 'summary of forest infractions' after 20 years
27 and operationalized the first multi-stakeholder forest and environmental crime working
28 group in collaboration with the national Interpol focal point office.*
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35 Without a state mandate in Cameroon, the national NGO created a wide network comprised of
36 12 national NGOs to spread risk, increase effectiveness but also allow itself to be independent
37 while keeping the option of being critical of government. It piloted and established a
38 monitoring approach based on ISO 9001:2015 quality management certification to demonstrate
39 quality and credibility of its reports. As stated by Cameroon NGO respondent, there has been
40 an increase in the responsiveness of forestry officials to reports submitted including fines,
41 sanctions and requests for joint verification missions:
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52 *We developed professional IFM based on ISO 9001:2015 quality management systems
53 and this has strengthened our credibility and acceptability of our reports. We are
54 receiving over 70% of positive actions from MINFOF from our reports.*
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57 Additionally, to ensure that there is effective response and impact from IFM reports, the
58 network innovated through development of a communication and advocacy strategy that
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1 includes active engagement with external stakeholders such as national and decentralized state
2 bureaucracies, local and indigenous forest communities, media, VPA implementation units,
3 national and international interest groups. Though the network operates without a formal
4 mandate from state, national NGOs perceive themselves as information providers to state,
5 which holds the sovereign role for forest control and law enforcement. As a respondent from
6 Cameroon NGO mentioned: *the collaboration that we often have with the ministry does not*
7 *affect our independence. We need to have a constructive approach.*
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10 Like in Cameroon, the NGO in Gabon goes beyond submission of reports to the forest and
11 wildlife administration where the NGO was successful in facilitating coordination between
12 various state agencies. Through a network of informants and investigators, the NGO organizes
13 investigations and sting operations in collaboration with officials of the ministry of forests,
14 prosecutor's office and police. Following arrest operations, the organisations undertakes media
15 campaigns to not only publicise achievements, but also to shame and create a dissuasive
16 environment for others. The respondent from Gabon relates that:
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34 *we work a lot with local actors such as provincial ministry staff and Attorneys. It really*
35 *depends on individuals. For example, the new Attorney in Lambaréné is very active, as*
36 *long as we provide him with sufficient elements. In 2019, work by the NGO in Gabon*
37 *led to the 34 people were sentenced with prison sentences.*
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1 characterised by poor acceptance of IFM by state officials, corruption and weak forest
2 governance institutions as suggested by Cerruti et al (2013).
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7 A perfect example of dissimilar ends and means comes from DRC. During eight consecutive
8 months in 2018, the Ministry of forest declined to issue a mission order to the local NGO to
9 carry out field missions. Without a mission order, the organization does not have authorization
10 to access company information or go to the field. As stated by DRC respondent there was:
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16 *divergence of interests between civil society and the administration in general on issues*
17 *of the allocation of new forest titles; the forest code revision process (the non-*
18 *involvement of stakeholders has been reported). The power of the minister is beyond*
19 *the ministry in itself, therefore when he felt that that power was threatened, he*
20 *retaliated against us.*
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25 All attempts to meet the minister to address the issue failed until external intervention by key
26 donor agencies helped to remedy the situation (*author's personal communication with NGO*
27 *and donor staff*). The situation in DRC as in other countries is influenced in some cases by high
28 turnover at the helm of target government agencies and personal agendas of state officials.
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35 Consequently:

36 *everything depends on the minister in place and their personal agenda. The former*
37 *minister was very supportive of IFM and understood the importance of NGOs doing it.*
38 *It seems the current minister has different priorities, says the DRC NGO leader.*
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44 The issue of conflict and personal interests of government officials emerges as a frequent theme
45 throughout the study. In Cameroon, the respondent points to the fact that:
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48 *the relationship with the national control team in the ministry of forest is very*
49 *complicated: field agents are generally unfavourable to our work because they may be*
50 *targeted by it. When their interests are threatened, there are risks of sanctions or*
51 *conflicts against NGOs.*
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55 In Gabon, IFM expert workshop participants identified *government complicity, internal*
56 *quarrels between individuals, personal interests, bribery, influence of the hierarchy and*
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involvement of officials in involvement in poaching and illegal logging activities themselves as reasons for confrontation with NGOs (CIDT, 2019).

Another instance of major confrontation relates to the responsiveness of state officials to reported cases of illegal logging and wildlife trafficking. The problem, is not only the lack of response, it is also the type of response given to a case: sanctions are often underestimated compared to the crime committed, or may be delayed and therefore ineffective (Cerruti et al., 2013). In all countries, ministries of forests try as much as possible not to engage with other traditional law enforcement agencies such as the police and judiciary and prefer to engage in financial transactions directly with private companies or individuals alleged to have been involved in illegality (Cabinet Alternatives, 2020). NGO respondents in Cameroon were particularly displeased with this behaviour by officials who seemed to be using their reports to enrich themselves (author's personal communication with staff). According to Cerruti et al (2013), state officials in Cameroon may be collecting some €6 million annually in informal payments.

Given such failures from the state side, NGOs may then directly publish their investigation reports (in the case of Gabon and Cameroon) or engage with national and international media or other external agencies with the ability to pressure state agencies into action. State officials are strongly opposed to this practice of directly publishing investigation reports - accusing NGOs for being subsidiaries of international activist NGOs or agents of a neo-colonist agenda. They may also disagree on the fact that some NGOs conducting IFM engage in advocacy. For government officials, these two functions are incompatible; an issue identified by Brown et al (2004). This is the case in Cameroon, where the NGO reports that lobbying is done through the national branch of Transparency International. Confrontation also plays out in the area of access to financial, human and material resources where, as they struggle with national debt

1 governments accuse donors of funding NGO projects and of fuelling the activities of non-
2 elected NGO representatives as revealed in Gary (1996) and Karsenty and Ongolo (2012).
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7 Continuous conflicts between forest officials and NGOs over forest monitoring suggest that
8 some of the assumptions underlying new forest governance modes, “the retreat of the state” or
9 “hollowing out of the state” has not happened (Pulhin and Dressler, 2009). The confrontational
10 behaviours of state officials in this study aligns with the view of Arts (2014) that there has
11 rather been a transformation in the strategies and tactics of the state in the new governance era.
12 The state has remained dominant in the areas where it has sovereign obligations such as law
13 and order, taxation, security, etc. (Hirst, 2000).
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26 *Instrumentalization*

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28 Under co-optation scenarios, actors share the same approaches, yet differ on their goals.
29 According to Najam’s Four-C framework, co-optation is the single model where power
30 dynamics play a role as each institution’s aims to influence the other’s strategies using
31 coercion, resources, politics or epistemology. In fact, the idea of co-optation manifests itself in
32 all three relationship forms previously discussed and consequently in our view, not a
33 relationship type in its own right. We suggest that “instrumentalization” represents a stronger
34 framing concept representing the way in which NGOs and state seek to out manoeuvre or
35 manipulate each other towards their respective intermediary ends using either formal or
36 informal channels. Table 1 shows that instrumentalisation was the third most referenced
37 relationship type which emphasises the precarious nature of relationships between NGOs and
38 state highlighted above and the need for NGOs to manage their relationships with state. Figure
39 2 identifies the most stated approaches highlighted in bold used by respondents to influence
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1 relevant government officials. These include the use of meetings, media, international partners,
2 organization of joint missions in other to reach agreement on different subjects.
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24 Figure 2: Instrumentalization tools and approaches.

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26 In case of meetings, formally, NGOs and state seize various occasions to influence each other:
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28 bilateral meetings, multi-stakeholder events such as workshops. Generally requested by NGOs,
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30 formal bilateral meetings are occasions to introduce cases of illegality or non-respect of
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32 national legislation, report their monitoring activities to newly appointed officials while
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34 seeking to achieve buy-in from officials. In CAR for instance, the NGO leader states that NGOs
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36 systematically organize courtesy visits to new ministers, in order congratulate them and
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38 introduce IFM.
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44 *when a new minister comes in, we ask for a cordial meeting to congratulate him, and*
45 *talk about the work done. We also provide funding and administrative support for their*
46 *participation in international events, co-organization of joint event such as the*
47 *workshop for the validation of the forest policy.*
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51 In DRC, by the time we were collecting data, the local NGO has just resolved to organize such
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53 visits, as a way of preparing the ground for future collaboration following the country's
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55 elections and formation of a new government in 2019. In Gabon, according to NGO project
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57 reports in 2017, staff from the national NGO held over 1084 meetings with a broad range of
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1 state officials: ministry of forest, justice department, law enforcement, *inter alia*, at local and
2 national levels (CIDT 2018b). *We document each single meeting. We don't meet them just to*
3 *greet them, but rather to provide new pieces of information (Gabon NGO leader).* Whether
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5 initiated by government officials or NGOs, these meetings are used to pressure or blame the
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7 other for weaknesses or failure to act.
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13 All five NGOs have established informal links with forest and wildlife officials but also other
14 relevant bodies with the power to influence government decision making. NGOs use
15 communication, media and joint missions to influence government actions. In terms of
16 communication, produce technical and advocacy briefs and engage with national and
17 international media to draw attention to issues on which the government is unwilling to
18 respond. While not approved by state officials, respondents in Cameroon and Gabon reported
19 that this approach seemed to increase government actions in terms of fines and sanctions.
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21 Additionally, NGOs use available funding, training opportunities, joint field missions and
22 events on illegal logging and wildlife trafficking as avenues for effective influencing.
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39 In all countries, respondents reveal that their dependence on mostly short-term project-based
40 funding is a challenge for their activities. This was particularly the case in CAR, Congo and
41 DRC where national NGOs were very dependent on funding from a single donor. The NGOs
42 in Cameroon and Gabon seemed more capable of navigating confrontational relationships with
43 state because of a much diverse funding base for their activities as well as demonstrating a high
44 level of autonomy and independence.
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56 A running theme throughout the cases is that most of the strategies and tactics adopted by
57 NGOs are mainly ad hoc in nature. It is only in Cameroon and Gabon that NGOs have
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1 documented a strategy for influence and advocacy, which enables the organizations to monitor
2 and track the uptake of their recommendations by not only state officials but also other
3 stakeholders with the ability to influence forest and wildlife law enforcement. Compared to
4 CAR, Congo and DRC where a very limited number of sanctions and prosecutions are observed
5 because of IFM missions, the use of a communications and advocacy strategy appears to be a
6 key factor that seem to enable the NGOs in Cameroon and Gabon to achieve higher levels of
7 responses from government officials and targeted stakeholder agencies.
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10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 ***Cooperation***

20 Cooperation happens when state and NGOs work towards the same goals using the same
21 strategies. As shown in table 1, this was the least referenced relationship form identified mainly
22 by respondents in CAR and Congo. When asked about the nature of the relationship between
23 them and the state, the CAR NGO described their relation as *perfect collaboration and*
24 *partnership* while in Congo, the NGO leader considered theirs as *excellent*. It mainly means
25 that each institution feels no threat from the other. In Congo, respondents revealed that:
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we have excellent relationships with the ministry – the case of the recent Forest Governance Forum that we organized with the ministry is a case in in point; We have a permanent mission order which guarantees the possibility to conduct missions as wished, without specific orders and our relations with the ministry are cordial and respectful. The reading Committee is very interesting.

66 Similarly, in CAR, *we have a perfect relationship and partnerships with the ministry and there*
67 *is no risk in collaborating so well with the government (NGO leader). Interestingly the NGO*
68 *leader said we are not accused by other NGOs of being too close with the government. Plus,*
69 *donors now insist on the need to collaborate with relevant administration and other*
70 *stakeholders. Being ‘too’ close with the government is understandably a considerable*
71 *reputation risk for NGOs that label themselves as ‘independent’. Nevertheless, such risk is*
72 *unavoidable in countries where the agreements on IFM specifically limit the ability of the*

1 NGOs to engage with any advocacy activities (Congo). As stated above, the strong dependence
2 of some NGOs on a single funding base in itself creates conditions for fragility. In CAR and
3
4 Congo, the said funding is for mandated IFM activities. This gives the impression that the
5
6 NGOs might not want to be too vocal and hence risk access to funding and create conflict with
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8 government on whom they depend for their mandate and to a great extent their legitimacy in
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10 the eyes of donors. Interestingly, the perceived lack of achievements has led to different
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12 strategies and pathways in both countries.
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19 In Congo, the perceived low levels of visible impact from IFM reports has led to the emergence
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21 of new self-mandated network of NGOs in the country seeking to change the status quo
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23 including through stronger links between monitoring and advocacy to push for change. The
24
25 objective is to replicate their successful IFM approach applied by NGOs in Cameroon, which
26
27 employs quality management systems, ISO 9001 standards and international advocacy to push
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29 for action and improvements from government (EC, 2020). In CAR, the NGO opted to build
30
31 trust relationships with allies and counterparts within the government forestry agency and the
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33 national Interpol focal point as a “champion against illegality” to facilitate the creation of a
34
35 multi-stakeholder forest and environmental crime-working group. Under the leadership of the
36
37 Interpol focal point, the Minister of Forests approved the working group giving it a strong
38
39 mandate to fight forest and environmental crime (Government of CAR, 2019). With the weak
40
41 financial situation of the country, the NGO provides backstopping, financial support and
42
43 capacity building assistance to members of the working group and this has led to the first joint
44
45 control mission between the NGO and trained members of the working group. The strategy
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47 adopted by the NGO seems to be yielding fruit as seen in the feedback from the head of the
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49 working group following a recent joint NGO-state mission.
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58 *the three official reports and the three notifications have been sent to the companies.*
59 *Noname company which has more than 50 years of existence, specialist in illicit timber*
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1 *trafficking and fraud, has tried to contest the infractions and penalties but I have*
2 *brought it back to order in its contestation to confirm the infractions and fines. We are*
3 *waiting for the settlement of the fines (883,000USD) by these three companies (the*
4 *name of the company has been anonymized)*
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7 **Discussion**

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9 For the past decades, international development actors have been trying to improve the way
10 forest policies are designed, implemented and evaluated in Africa through the ‘good
11 governance’ agenda in view of serious failures (Ongolo and Karsenty, 2015). Independent
12 forest monitoring emerged as a critical tool within the EU led FLEGT VPAs to improve
13 transparency, fight illegal deforestation and related trade (Young, 2016; Mbzibain and Ongolo,
14 2019). In view of persistent forest illegality and IWT, we responded to calls for research to
15 improve understanding of these new governance models (Agrawal et al., 2008; Suominen et
16 al., 2019).
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31 *Underlying nature of NGO-state relationships, strategies and tactics of influence*

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33 The paper finds that NGO-state relations in Central Africa are not linear; often manifest
34 themselves simultaneously and sometimes even erratic and opportunistic. This is very much in
35 support of extant literature on NGO-state relations in other African regions and globally
36 (Najam, 2000; Hofisi and Hofisi, 2013; Ayana et al., 2018; Ulybina, 2014; Ramanath and
37 Ebrahim, 2010).
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48 In the CAR and Congo where the closest cooperation relationship was reported, the lack of
49 response from government to the IFM recommendations was intriguing, leading many external
50 actors to question the *raison-d’être* of such closeness. This finding supports Coston’s argument
51 that cooperation is “*not easy to attain*” (Coston, 1998) and that *the absence of perceived threat*
52 is not enough to create cooperation as argued by Najam (2000). In the CAR context
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1 specifically, characterized by a history of war and conflict¹, it might be that the NGOs prioritize
2 legitimacy and gradual process of trust building with government as a long-term strategy for
3 influence and effectiveness (Bejoy et al., 2010). The fact that cooperation was the least reported
4 type of relationship also suggests that NGOs may not want to be seen as being too close to state
5 agencies (Hulme and Edwards, 1997). Salamon and Toepler (2015) caution that cooperation is
6 necessary but being too close could lead to two critical problems; (a) the potential loss of
7 autonomy or independence and (b) the stunting of advocacy activity. The results clearly
8 supported these views as we found scant advocacy or lobbying activities particularly in the
9 DRC and Republic of Congo leading to limited action from government on IFM reports and
10 recommendations. Fear of losing donor funding seems to be a key factor influencing the way
11 in which NGOs in both countries manage their relationships with state.
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29 Complementarity with state was the most identified form of relationship, which is very much
30 in support of extant literature on NGO-state relationships (Nathan et al., 2017). Through
31 working together, there are far more chances to lead to win-win situations and positive forest
32 policy outcomes as demonstrated in Cameroon and Gabon (Gupta and Koontz, 2019). In all
33 five countries, a number of key strategies and tactics were observed. NGOs used a combination
34 of approaches such as strengthening professionalism, adoption of a quality management
35 certification, building strategic alliances traditional law enforcement agencies, media and
36 leveraging outside pressure to achieve change in the face of inaction from government. The
37 evidence also demonstrated that where there was inertia, NGOs were able to publish their
38 reports and to draw internal pressure on government to act. Keck and Sikkink (2018) argue that
39 this boomerang strategy can be successful but also leads to charges of foreign interference by
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58 ¹ The most recent war in CAR started in 2013 and officially ended in 2014. However, at the moment we are
59 writing this paper, more than 70% of CAR's territory is still controlled by various military groups. NGOs
60 therefore operate in a sort of 'survival context'.
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1 the government. Their ability to maintain their independence while seeking constructive
2 relationships with officials of the ministry of forest and wildlife can be considered success
3 factors (Mbzibain and Ongolo, 2019). This aligns with Bass et al (2014)'s view that committing
4 to both service delivery and advocacy are keys to high performance by non-profits. Further,
5 findings support the argument from Ramanath and Ebrahim (2010) that many NGOs do not
6 always document their pathways to impact. A theory of change they argue is a necessary tool,
7 which demonstrates how the NGO seeks to achieve impact through its intervention.
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19 Where national governments are exposed to international criticism and scrutiny, conflicts and
20 fault lines can emerge in previously complementary/cooperative relationships leading to
21 confrontation and instrumentalization. Compared to 16 references for complementary
22 relationships, confrontation emerged as a close second relationship type with 15 references.
23 This is interesting because it reveals a contrasting context whereby NGOs try to bring about
24 change through working with state officials but at the same time have to battle with problems
25 of divergent institutional and personal interests and weak institutions. We observed
26 confrontation in four countries with varying types of reaction from the national NGOs, from
27 inertia to slow law enforcement, and to direct attacks against NGOs for their alleged unpatriotic
28 behaviour. Such tactics from government have been experienced in other contexts where they
29 either evidenced weak state bureaucracy commitment to effectively combat illegal forest and
30 wildlife crime (Ongolo and Karsenty, 2015), or more broadly, efforts from state to enhance
31 their political control and legitimacy vis-à-vis target constituencies (Bryant, 2001; Mayhew,
32 2005; Heurlin, 2010).
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53 This paper claims that NGOs that are more capable to strategically anticipate and act upon the
54 constantly shifting relationships with their states are likely to better navigate through various
55 types of relationships. While the study did not delve into analysing the effectiveness of each
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1 NGO, it assembled evidence that the lack of confrontation can often equate to a status quo
2 situation as experienced in CAR. The more an NGO takes risks to achieve its objective, the
3
4 more it is exposed to government tactics of influence. Therefore, NGOs taking risks could
5
6 better anticipate government responses to their actions. Such tactics may vary, from the quality
7
8 management certificate and strategic communication of the Cameroonian NGO, to through
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10 networking with key stakeholders as in the Gabonese case study. One may question whether
11
12 NGO tactics are sufficient to shift the power balance, especially in semi-autocratic contexts as
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14 in the five target countries. The immediate response to this relevant question is that the five
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16 countries are not unique semi-authoritarian states in which environment NGOs influence major
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18 decision or policies. Ayana et al (2018) provide a strong case of policy influence by Ethiopian
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20 ENGOs. Going further and echoing the views of Slavíková et al (2017), we acknowledge that
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22 an open *political environment* can constitute success factor for environmental NGOs.
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29 In the past 15 years, all five-country contexts have significantly evolved concerning forest
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31 governance. Through the VPA-FLEGT agreements signed with the European Union between
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33 2009 and 2010, Cameroon, Congo and CAR states *de facto* offer a stronger role to civil society
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35 in general, and more specifically to independent forest monitoring. More recently, Congo has
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37 enacted its new forest law with provision highlighting Independent forest monitoring as a
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39 recognised modality to prompt government action (GoC, 2020). Further, in all countries with
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41 the exception of Gabon, the FLEGT process has proven to be a stimulator of much stronger
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43 participation of civil society in major decision and policymaking (Satyal, 2019). In all those
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45 countries, civil society platforms emerged along the lines of FLEGT, REDD+ and other
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47 governance processes. This has also been the case in Gabon even if the country suspended its
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49 involvement in both FLEGT and REDD+. Additionally, the role of external stakeholders,
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51 including donors has constituted a key success factor. In the Republic of Congo for instance,
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53 the EU has recently issued a round of funding to strengthen IFM capability, develop a national
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1 strategy for IFM including stronger collaboration with self-mandated NGOs and advocacy
2 agencies to push for forest governance improvements (EC, 2020). Ultimately, we argue that
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4 the key is for NGOs to acknowledge all the forms of NGO-state relationships, and design
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6 tactics that take advantage of their unique context.
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10 11 **Conclusion**

12 In Central Africa, multi-stakeholder processes have been promoted by international
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14 development agencies as a means to improving forest governance. The objective of this paper
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16 was to explore the nature of relationships between NGO involved in forest and wildlife
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18 monitoring and the state and to unpack the strategies and tactics used by NGOs to manage the
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20 relationships as they pursue forest governance goals.
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29 The paper reveals complex and fluid relationships between NGO-state ranging from
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31 cooperation, complementarity, confrontation and instrumentalisation. Complementarity and
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33 confrontation emerge as the most important relationship types while cooperation was the least
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35 reported relationship. While confrontational relationships emerge as the second most important
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37 relationship type, this paper finds that NGOs which successfully generate beneficial responses
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39 from targeted state agencies draw on a wide range of strategies and tactics, target a wider range
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41 of stakeholders beyond forestry and wildlife while successfully maintaining their independence
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43 and autonomy. Independent monitoring NGOs recognize that only governments have the
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45 sovereign power to fine and sanction illegal actors and therefore strive to influence their actions
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47 including through their own actions or leverage the power of other stronger national or
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49 international stakeholders. This suggests that even in the new forest governance arena, the
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51 hollowing away of the state has not materialised and the state maintains a dominant role in
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53 forest law enforcement (Arts, 2014; Pulhin and Dressler, 2009). We found that the strategies
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1 and tactics of NGOs to increase uptake of IFM evidence are mostly ad hoc and reactive in
2 nature in the absence of clearly articulated advocacy strategies. In addition to lack of secure
3 and diversified funding for IFM, the lack of strategy represents a significant limitation to IFM's
4 contribution to better forest governance outcomes.
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12 Future support to IFM by donors could include putting in place a basket fund mechanism for
13 IFM organizations to play their roles effectively. As Bass et al (2014) demonstrate stronger
14 commitment to both delivery of services and advocacy are keys to high performance by non-
15 profits. Our rigorous conceptualization of NGO-state relations helped to shed more light on
16 their role as contributors to forest governance, which is critical as forests are expected to play
17 a key role in post COVID-19 green recovery in Sub Saharan Africa. As Gibson et al (2005)
18 and Wunder et al (2014) reaffirm, local law enforcement is critical to better forests and
19 improved livelihoods for forest dependent communities.
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Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the European Union [ENV/2016/380-500] and the Department for International Development (DFID) now Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office FCDO (FGMC2018-04-CIDT); and the University of Wolverhampton's Research Investment Fund 3. We also thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments which significantly improved the paper.

Conflict of interest statement

There is no conflict of interest.

Author credit statement

Aurelian Mbzibain: conceptualisation, methodology, data analysis, writing, reviewing and editing

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