
International Advocacy on Biodiversity Conservation

By Vincent Gudmia Mfonfu
Head of the Media & External
Relations Department - LAGA



Aim of the Presentation

- Share with LAGA staff some experiences in international advocacy in wildlife conservation and sustainable management.
 - Important because LAGA now has an interest in inter-ministerial, intergovernmental and international meetings
-

-
- ▶ E.g. The first intergovernmental meeting on ape conservation that held in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2005
 - ▶ The 13th Conference of Parties (CoP) of CITES
 - ▶ Intergovernmental meeting held in Limbe in 2007 to put pressure on the repatriation of the Cameroon's gorillas from South Africa
-

-
- Provide a rough idea of how the international policy process works
 - Provide some practical suggestions for promoting NGO concerns in international negotiations and meetings
-

Background

- International Cooperation is important and necessary to combat cross-border illegal wildlife trade which today ranks 3rd after the world illicit trade in drugs and arms.
 - International negotiations on this issue must break new ground and find innovative and radical solutions
 - Governments can't solve problems on their own
 - Civil society, NGOs and concerned citizens have a part to play
-

NGO Role

- NGOs have as main role to bring international negotiations closer to local communities
 - This is important because most citizens find it difficult to deal with their own governments and bureaucracies
 - International negotiations in which governments speak to other governments are even further removed from local people
 - Yet these people's lives may be significantly affected by decisions taken at these international meetings.
-

-
- NGOs are uniquely positioned to bring local experience and the voice of local communities to international policy process
 - NGO ideas feed the evolution of international policy and their proposals can help set international agenda
 - Many environmental and conservation NGOs working to protect ecosystems and species participate in international meetings.
-

-
- Different types of NGOs have different reasons for their creation
 - Some are influential because they represent large numbers of people e.g. IUCN, and others because they have unique expertise e.g. LAGA's unique expertise in wildlife law enforcement
 - NGOs have observer status at international meetings, sometimes referred to as consultative status
 - This means NGOs have a right to attend meetings but not closed sessions of a meeting
-

-
- They have a right to distribute written statements (position papers) sometimes outside the meeting room
 - NGOs may be allowed to make statements in the meetings but don't have the right to vote
 - Only government delegates can vote
-

Governments Role

- Take decisions in international negotiations
 - Governments which are Parties to say CBD or CITES form its highest decision making body
 - Conference of Parties (CoP) to conventions meet once a year while a smaller governing body (Council or Executive Board) of a given convention meets more frequently to deal with immediate matters
 - Government Declarations include representatives from different Ministries, and Foreign Ministries
-

-
- They are usually accompanied by technical experts
 - One of the delegates is appointed to head it
 - Sometimes delegates contact their capital for additional information before taking a decision
 - National governments may be grouped into numerous regional and special interest groups e.g. African Union, CEMAC, G8 countries etc.
-

What Happens

- A month or 2 before the meeting secretariats provide governments with meeting documents based on instructions received from the last meeting
 - Many international meetings run from 3 pm to 6 pm with simultaneous interpretations into several languages, Spanish, Chinese, English, French, Greek, Latin etc
 - But the common language used is English
-

-
- Every participant wears a badge indicating their name and organization received at the registration desk
 - Security is usually tight, especially in this era of world terrorism
 - Government representatives sit behind a sign bearing the name of their governments
-

-
- Some NGOs representatives sit among government delegations, behind name signs
 - Some NGOs sit in a separate area of room
 - Most NGOs object to this sitting arrangements because it makes contact with government delegates difficult
 - Meetings usually start on Monday
-

-
- In the morning, the meeting might choose a chairperson and vice chairs, adopt the draft agenda which is circulated by the Secretariat
 - The meeting then begins to go through the agenda items
 - Delegates try to maintain a diplomatic and courteous tone, even when they disagree strongly with each other
-

Working Groups

- Issues that require detailed discussions in a meeting, perhaps because of their technical nature, or because they are difficult to resolve are often referred to working groups
 - Groups made up of smaller number of country representatives. They meet for a few days and report back to the plenary which can approve or reject their conclusions
 - It is easy to resolve difficult questions in smaller groups than in large groups
-

Informal Meetings

- Chairperson might decide to hold informal discussions with a small group of countries that have a particular interest in an issue
 - Many discussions take place among delegates and NGOs in the corridors
-

Key Concepts

- The art or know-how of government, what politicians want to do
- The course of action. Mother Teresa states that “*Action is the law of nature*” and that actions that do not come from God have no meaning
- A system of administration guided more by interests than principle involving ideologies

Source: Chambers English Dictionary

-
- ▶ Strategic framework, meaning policy has objectives and guidelines e.g. Is the wildlife policy of a country going to be for conservation and sustainable use or for commerce? How is it going to be managed? By the private or public sector?
 - ▶ There are usually multiple partners and multiple guidelines
 - ▶ Single partner: government
 - ▶ Multiple partner: Private, Government, NGO
-

-
- ▶ Cameroon policy on wildlife: Equitable distribution of wealth accruing from sustainable wildlife management eg. Special wildlife fund in MINFOF, Local councils, Community hunting zones
 - ▶ Policy should not be firm and not flexible so as to accommodate wide needs of stakeholders
 - A lobby is a group of people who try to persuade a government or organisation to do something or prevent something
-

Legislation

- Legislation refers to laws passed by government
 - Wildlife legislation translates policy and strategies into norms and rules to be followed and enforced by society as a whole
 - E.g. The famous sections 101 and 158 of the 1994 wildlife law which prescribes prison term of up to 3 years and or a fine of up to 10 million francs for anyone caught with part of dead or live protected wildlife species
-

-
- Provides wildlife administration with mechanisms and tools to implement policy
 - Legislation must reflect the intentions of policy
 - Law must be simple, enforceable and flexible
-

Stakeholders

- Various actors having special interests e.g. government, traders, villagers



Wildlife for what?

- Livelihoods
 - Biodiversity components have very big voice in the world, e.g. 1992 Rio Earth Summit, CBD, CITES
 - Revenue e.g. Government treasuries, private companies
 - Recreation e.g. Ecotourism
-

-
- Future values e.g. Prevent climate change – wildlife seen as natural forest gardeners – without them natural forest regeneration stops
 - Education e.g. scientific studies
-

Conflicting interests

- All stakeholders want their voices heard
- They have conflicting and competing interests
- Good policy is one which allows for all these voices to be heard



Division of Stakeholders

- Primary stakeholders – those who depend on wildlife as source of protein and income.
 - Secondary stakeholders – governments, commercialists, international NGOs
 - Good policy gives consideration to all those using wildlife
 - Problem is deciding who should have priority in policy formulation
 - Government has pressure from NGOs and local people. The problem is in balancing these pressures
-

Advocacy

- If you advocate something you say publicly you think it should be done, used or introduced e.g. the recent constitutional change by the CPDM party, media production on the need to implement wildlife laws
 - LAGA is an advocate of effective wildlife law enforcement
 - This art is called advocacy
-

Declaration

- Declaration refers to agreements that are not legally binding but which have great political influence, e.g. AFLEG Declaration, Central African Heads of States Forest Declaration



Global Environment Movement

- Emerged in different places at different times and for different reasons
 - When Africa emerged from colonialism, conservationists from Europe encouraged African governments to associate themselves with conservation and agree in principle to reconcile conservation with national development plans
-

-
- In 1960 IUCN (World Conservation Union) concluded that conservation of forests and wildlife species was a particularly urgent priority in Africa
 - IUCN offered to help governments integrate wildlife management with overall land use development plans
 - Wildlife management meant forest management since the latter is home for the former
-

-
- In 1962, the UN adopted resolution that Biodiversity resources (forest, wildlife) were vital to economic development.
 - That economic development could jeopardize biodiversity if it took place without the attention to their conservation
 - In 1972 at the Stockholm Conference on Human Development and Environment were no longer seen as incompatible
-

-
- ▶ The new environmental slogan was sustainable development which served as guidelines to development projects design
 - ▶ Stockholm placed the environment firmly on the agenda of international relations
 - In 1980 a document was prepared by the US government titled, “The Global 2000 Report”, warned that if present trends of environmental degradation continued, the world in 2000 would be less stable ecologically
-

Conventions

- These multinational perceptions of the environment led to the growth of international treaties, agreements and conventions or Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs)
 - In 1984 UNEP register listed 108 of such MEAs including CBD, CITES
 - In 1992 during the Rio Summit or the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) the world including Cameroon adopted some of these conventions
-

International Advocacy

- The protection of the environment is a political issue and will continue to rely:
 - ▶ Upon politics and policies
 - ▶ Upon attitudes of political leaders
 - ▶ Upon a complex cross-referencing and cooperative system involving international agencies, national environment agencies NGOs and international conventions (MEAs)
-

-
- Biodiversity conservation and management decisions are today reached at international conferences and meetings in which NGOs take part either as observers or part of government delegations
-

NGO Participation at International Meetings Pre-Meeting Check List

- Before setting out for an international meeting ask yourself the following questions
 - ▶ Is attending the meeting part of short or long term strategy for LAGA?
 - ▶ Have you sent a letter of accreditation?
 - ▶ Have you defined what to achieve at the meeting and has LAGA agreed on a common position?
-

-
- ▶ Did you send the position paper to your target audience several weeks or months in advance of the meeting?
 - ▶ Do you know what the position of your government and other key governments at the meeting will be?
 - ▶ Have you discussed the meeting with other NGOs?
 - ▶ Have you got everything you need to take with you?
-

Deciding whether to attend the International Meeting

- Two important factors
 - ▶ Time and money: This involves expensive travel and accommodation costs
 - Its not enough to attend this meeting just to listen or meet other government or NGO delegates
 - You must be able to get hold of the meeting report afterwards
-

-
- You must find out what happened through other NGOs who attended
 - Contact other NGOs before the meeting to discuss the position of your NGO
 - Arrange with other NGOs to represent the views of your organisation
 - Attending a meeting as part of an official Delegation can cause problem because governments which oppose NGO participations may argue it is unnecessary
-

Deciding What to Achieve

- International policy processes are both confusing, uncomplicated and frustrating
 - Powerful governments such as US and UK negotiate with each other and most important discussions take place behind the scenes
 - Larger and well established NGOs even find it difficult to influence proceedings and non of them have a decision-making role
 - This means you will find it difficult to achieve results unless you have clear goals and work in a systematic way
-

-
- One way is presenting your NGO position paper by PowerPoint in a very convincing manner
 - It is hard to influence decisions if government representatives hear different messages from different people in the same NGO, so it's important for your organisation to agree on a common position
-

Thinking Ahead

- International negotiations usually move very slowly
 - It takes many years to agree on a new convention
 - And then it usually takes many more years for governments to bind themselves to the convention, e.g. Until LAGA stepped in in 2003, the 1994 wildlife law reflecting CITES was at zero prosecution
-

-
- Necessary to plan your strategy in the light of this timeframe
 - What do you want the negotiations to achieve in say 5 years time
 - How can you build towards that goal at this particular meeting?
 - You should begin the groundwork for the meeting several months in advance, discussing the issues with your government over a long period of time
-

-
- Aim to build good personal relationships with key government officials especially those who are sympathetic to the views of your organisation
 - Contact NGOs in other countries and find out what key governments think about the position of your organisation



Target the Right People

- Government delegations do not often include people who have decided on the government's policy on an issue
 - Important and politically sensitive issues like effective wildlife law enforcement are decided at the highest level of governments
 - The background work may have been done by junior officials at the Ministry
 - You may be able to have considerable impact by working closely with these low-ranking officials, for instance by providing expertise and information that the Ministry lacks
-

Position Papers

- Position papers are very useful tools
- Keep them short – one page can be enough
- Paper should state what action you propose your government should take at the meeting



-
- Send your position paper to all the government departments that are likely to be involved with a particular issue and to other NGOs
 - International NGOs often circulate position papers to all governments and UN missions
-

Media

- Media can help public sympathy and support for the views of your organisation and encourage governments to accept them

The media sets the agenda for policy decision making



-
- The issuing of press releases and building contacts with journalists should form part of your organisations overall strategy
 - Let the journalist know you will be attending the international meeting
 - Think of what “hooks” you can use to interest them
 - “Most reporters are spread too thin to engage in time-consuming investigative journalism and therefore rely on information from corporate-sourced news releases”

Stamber Jetal (2002)

-
- What can you do and say at the meeting to attract their attention. What's new and challenging in your statements at the conference?
 - Read the meeting documents through the internet, especially those that concern your issue before the meeting takes place
 - You will be well prepared for the meeting and you will know where your concerns fit into the agenda
-

Making Plans of Action

- Spend the first day meeting delegates and other NGOs before the official proceedings begin
- Make arrangements to stay in touch with your home office during the meeting



Being Careful to make Mistakes at the Meeting

- Avoid making general or sweeping statements
 - Aim at providing the meeting with concrete proposals for action
 - Even if you have sent a position paper to your government in advance, take additional copies for other delegates at the meeting
 - Governments propose and circulate different texts for a decision on the issue concerning your organisation – the difference might be just one crucial word
-

-
- In this case circulate your own paper referring to the decision in question and provide your alternative text
 - If you don't know what to say, don't make a statement
 - Behind-the-scenes work can be just as effective
-

-
- It is customary to say “Thank you Mr. (or Madame) chairman (or chairperson) at the beginning and end of your statement to indicate when you are starting and ending your intervention
 - Good idea to have written copies of your presentation available as delegates might ask for them, and they may help journalists and interpreters
-

Working Groups

- NGOs at times have opportunities to take part in working groups
- Ask if you can participate in the working group of your interest
- Ask the chairperson of the meeting, otherwise ask a government to propose that NGOs be allowed to attend the working group meetings



-
- NGO attendance can be at the discretion of the chairperson unless a government objects



Working with Government Delegates

- Some delegates are highly qualified, top-level experts in their fields from the highest level of government in the countries
 - Others may be attending an international meeting for the first time
 - Some government delegates are used to working closely with NGOs while others do not accept the idea of cooperating with NGOs
 - Be brief and to the point when you approach the delegates because they are sometimes very busy
-

-
- Sometimes social events take place during a meeting with NGOs in attendance
 - Such fora provide a good opportunity to take to government delegates and get to know them better
 - You can also invite a delegate to lunch
-

-
- Aim to build good relations with active delegates who are sympathetic to your views
 - Bear in mind that government delegates are there to promote their own agenda and that some of them are very skilled at influencing NGOs
-

Working with Other NGOs

- During international meetings, NGOs help each other monitor country positions, coordinate lobbying efforts and agree on common strategies
 - If you are going to criticize a government, it is good to speak to the NGOs from that country before doing so
-

-
- If a particular government is blocking a proposal you are supporting, contact fellow NGOs in that country, so that they can approach the government in the capital which could help change the position of the Delegation
 - Aim to attend NGO meetings – an opportunity to cooperate with other NGOs and find out what they are doing
-

NGO Newsletter

- NGOs can be an excellent source of information and opinions
- Provide another outlet for your organisation views



Joint Statements

- NGOs often present joint statements or joint position papers in solidarity
 - This initiative have a strong influence on negotiations
 - But only sign a joint statement only if your organisation fully supports the views expressed in it
-

- Never assume that you speak on behalf of other NGOs
- Never assume that you speak on behalf of other NGOs
- Respect the integrity and individuality of every NGOs contribution



Be Mindful of Hidden Agenda

- Find out as much as you can about the agenda of the meeting in advance, mindful of hidden agendas
 - Speak to people, government and other NGOs
 - Find out what the influences behind the issues are and what the key players might really be aiming for
-

-
- Gordon Shepherd and Joy Hyvarinen of the Campaigns Unit of WWF state “*International negotiations have more than share half truths, hidden messages and behind-the-scenes maneuverings. They are often many versions of the real story behind an issue and you should try to consider all sides of an issue before making decisions on it*”
-

Concluding International Meetings

- Adoption of the report containing the decisions of the meeting which lasts at least one week
 - Secretariat works all night to prepare draft report with translators working day and night to produce draft decisions and the meeting report in several languages
-

-
- Under the chairman directives, the meeting goes through the text of the report – a quick formality as the content of the expert have been discussed during the meeting
 - But it is worth being alert at this point as governments might unexpectedly propose changes in the text
 - You may be able to draw the attention of a government which supports your view during break
-

Finally

- Influencing international negotiations usually requires patience, hard work and sleepless nights
 - A small change in the decision caused by an NGO can have a huge impact when governments take action to comply with it
 - So your efforts at one single meeting could result in change all over the world
-

Thanks for Your Attention
