



Organisation Ecologique des Lacs et de l'Ogooué

# Strategic Plan

2023-2027



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# Executive Summary

The Bas Ogooué lake region encompasses Gabon's largest Ramsar Site: a wetland of international importance covering 1,370,000 hectares of flooded forests and waterways. The forests and lakes of the Bas Ogooué support some of the largest remaining populations of forest elephants, western gorillas, slender-snouted crocodiles, hippos, chimpanzees, African manatees, giant pangolins, leopards, red-capped mangabeys and other Congo Basin forest wildlife. The Bas Ogooué also includes Lambaréné, Gabon's seventh largest city, a commercial center for hundreds of lakeside and riverside communities. Local communities rely on lake and forest resources for their livelihoods and travel frequently to the city to sell goods at markets, visit clinics and hospitals, and enroll their children in schools.

[OELO](#) was created in 2010 when community members from Lake Oguemoué decided to protect lake resources for future generations. We began with an ecotourism site, [Tsam Tsam](#), that creates jobs and generates income for local lake residents, while also financing OELO's biodiversity conservation initiatives. We put local residents at the center of decision-making, organizing communities to conserve biodiversity and secure ecosystem services.

OELO has developed both lake-based and town-based programs. On Lake Oguemoué, we work in lake villages with fishers, village residents, and local leaders to organize communities into cooperatives as well as a lake association that manages lake and forest resources for future generations. These initiatives are known as "Our Lake, Our Future" and "Our Forest, Our Future." In town, we work in schools, neighborhoods, and markets, with youth, teachers, and community leaders to change consumer preferences away from bushmeat from protected species, and to form the next generation of conservation leaders of the Bas Ogooué.

We are at an exciting crossroads as communities around the Bas Ogooué have reached out to replicate the Oguemoué, "Our Lake, Our Future" model. They have been inspired by the community-led initiative that has created the first sustainable fishing cooperatives in the country, Gabon's first women fishers' coop, and Gabon's first freshwater fisheries management plan.

By organizing and mobilizing local communities, we have created three legally recognized fishing coops, and one community association representing the villages of Lake Oguemoué. In Lambaréné, we have formed dozens of nature clubs with hundreds of members annually that lead stewardship projects throughout the greater Bas Ogooué. Each year, more and more schools, teachers, and neighborhoods reach out to us to collaborate.

Thanks to support from our partners The Nature Conservancy, Maliasili, and Well Grounded, we are creating our first strategic plan for the next five years, as we plan to expand OELO's impact into additional lakes of the Bas Ogooué and expand and strengthen our town-based work in Lambaréné and surrounding communities.

Five major strategic pillars have been identified to structure OELO's work over the next five years.



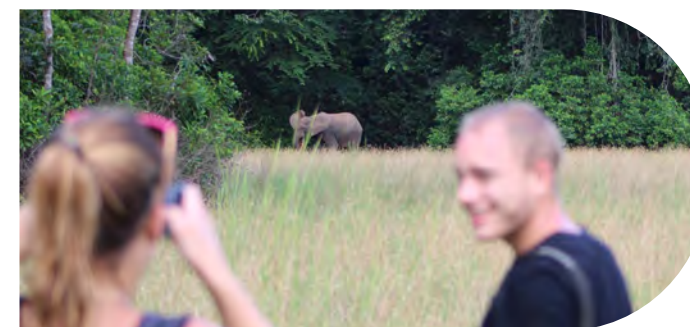
## Forests

We support communities to secure rights over forests, and establish and accompany local institutions for sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation that benefits local communities.



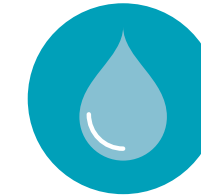
## Youth

We lead outreach and educational activities with schools and youth groups to foster a culture of environmental stewardship and awareness of conservation issues.



## Freshwater

We work with communities to build local institutions for the sustainable management of freshwater fisheries, as a key element of community livelihoods, food security, and the protection of freshwater resources and biodiversity.



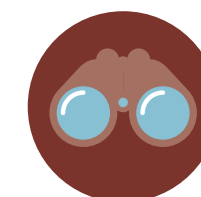
## Wildlife

We work to reduce illegal bushmeat consumption and trade in urban centers, through education and outreach, in order to reduce illegal wildlife trade within the wider landscape.



## Ecotourism

We operate a model ecotourism initiative on Lake Oguemoué to create income for local residents, finance OELO's conservation programs, and provide a base for researchers, students, community members, and visitors.





# Who We Are

We believe environmental conservation should be driven by, and benefit, those living in and around natural areas. We began in 2010, with an ecotourism destination called Tsam Tsam on Lake Oguemoué that creates jobs for lake residents, while generating income for biodiversity conservation programs. After launching the site, we asked village residents to identify their environmental priorities and proposed solutions. The sustainable fishing initiative, “Our Lake, Our Future” was born, resulting in the creation of Gabon’s first freshwater fisheries management plan, which was signed into law in 2018. In 2021, we launched our sister initiative “Our Forest, Our Future,” to reclaim Oguemoué forests from irresponsible commercial logging operators and instead manage ancestral forests and their biodiversity for future generations.



In 2012, we launched an environmental education program in Lambaréné schools and a program to reduce illegal bushmeat commerce: a main driver of biodiversity loss in the Bas Ogooué lake region. In schools, we work with students, teachers, administrators and parents to create a new generation of environmental leaders and community organizers. In Lambaréné, we work with vendors, collaborate with city leaders, and lead outreach with restaurant owners and consumers. Our in-town work has led to the city signing a mayoral decree to enforce protected species laws, and a 98% decrease in protected species for sale openly at the main market of the Bas Ogooué.

We have achieved significant results across all five pillars of our work over the past decade. Some highlights include:

## Freshwater

Lake Oguemoué now benefits from Gabon’s first freshwater fisheries management plan: a collaboration between local communities, NGOs, scientific partners, and the Government of Gabon. In 2022, OELO received the Equator Prize for this initiative, known as “Our Lake, Our Future”; the first Gabonese organization to receive this award. On Lake Oguemoué, the fisheries management plan has eliminated African manatee bycatch in fishing nets, allowed the return of large migratory fish to the lake, and created improvements in catches. We have organized local fishers to monitor fisheries and collect data on catch and methods since 2014.

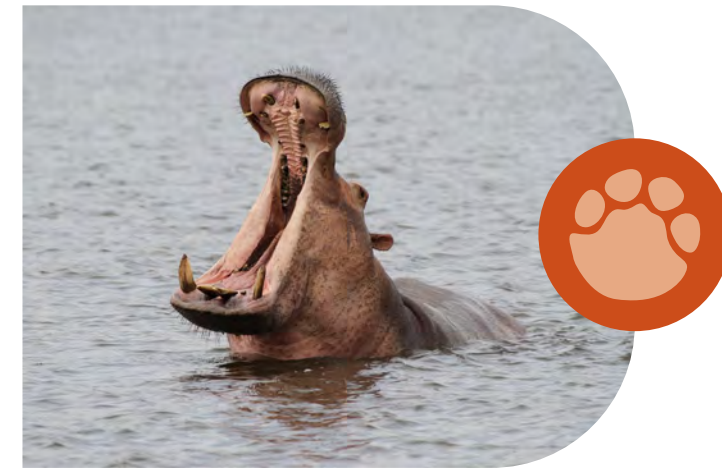
## Forests

On Lake Oguemoué we launched our sister initiative, “Our Forest, Our Future,” organizing seven villages into a lake-wide structure, the Association of Communities of Lake Oguemoué” (ACLO) that successfully advocated for the State to expel destructive foreign logging operators from the lake, and has instead proposed a replicable community forest model that aims to protect ancestral forests for future generations.



## Wildlife

We have found that children from hunting families who participate in our nature clubs are half as likely to hunt protected species than their classmates, and only one third as likely to eat a protected species. Over the past decade, we have reduced illegal bushmeat commerce by 98% in the biggest bushmeat market of the Bas Ogooué, Marché Isaac of Lambaréné, by working with youth, leaders, and community partners.



## Youth

Each year since 2012, we have reached thousands of children through classroom sessions on protected species, and mobilized hundreds of youth to lead environmental stewardship projects around the Bas Ogooué. We train dozens of teacher mentors, and host 30 student leaders at our annual environmental leadership camp at Tsam Tsam. Eighty percent of children in our environmental education program report that the experience has changed their desire to eat protected species.

## Ecotourism

The number of tourists visiting Tsam Tsam has steadily grown over the past decade, generating more income for lake residents, jobs for former hunters, and more income for our conservation activities. At the same time, tourist trips to Tsam Tsam by boat have recorded a three-fold increase in hippo numbers over the past ten years, and forest elephant sightings have become more and more frequent on Lake Oguemoué.





# Timeline of Milestones and Achievements

**2012**  
**Phase 1 of Tsam Tsam ecotourism site is completed** - Five platforms, made of local materials and locally-sourced termite-resistant hardwoods, are constructed on the lake with participation of dozens of community members from lake villages. A team of local residents is trained to host guests.

**2012**  
**First Community Solutions Report is completed on Lake Oguemoué** - Focus group discussions with lake residents identify local priorities for the next 10 years and their ideas are compiled in our first "Community Solutions Report."

**2012**  
**Sustainable fishing initiative, "Our Lake, Our Future" is launched** - Focus group work highlights a key priority for lake residents: improving fishing practices to manage lake fisheries sustainably.

**2010**  
**OELO is created** - With a small group of current and former residents of Lake Oguemoué, the Ecotourism Organization of Lake Oguemoué (OELO) is formed and a community-based ecotourism project at Tsam Tsam is launched.

**2012**  
**Environmental Education program is launched** - In Lambaréné primary and secondary schools, classroom presentations and extracurricular nature clubs are launched with trained teacher mentors.

**2012**  
**Marché Isaac monitoring is launched** - Monitoring of bushmeat availability and prices at the largest bushmeat and fish market of the Bas Ogooué begins.

**2014**  
**First Tsam Tsam environmental leadership camp** - Top students from our nature clubs are hosted at Tsam Tsam ecotourism site to form the next generation of environmental leaders.

**2014**  
**Community-led fisheries data collection launched** - Oguemoué fishers begin recording data on fishing methods, species, and size of catches to monitor changes over time.

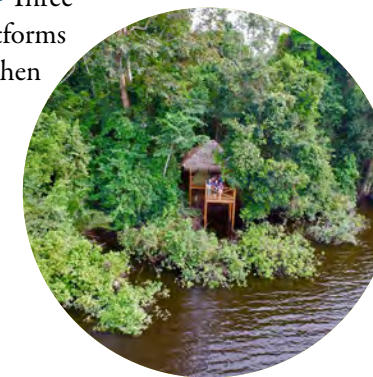
**2013**  
**"Our Lake, Our Future" sustainable fishing agreement is signed** - A majority of fishers on Lake Oguemoué agree on a list of best practices, "Our Lake, Our Future," creating the basis for a sustainable fisheries management plan.



**2015**  
**Protected species law enforcement decree is signed by the mayor of Lambaréné** - OELO leads outreach with city leaders on protected species, and the mayor signs a decree to enforce protected species laws at the region's largest market, Marché Isaac.

**2016**  
**Partnership agreement signed with the city of Lambaréné** - A Partnership Agreement is finalized to work collaboratively on environmental priorities, including reducing illegal bushmeat commerce and organizing summer nature club activities for youth.

**2016**  
**Second Phase of Tsam Tsam ecotourism site is completed** - Three additional platforms and a new kitchen with lodging for staff in the village are added, increasing the site's capacity.



**2017**  
**"La Maison de la Nature" opens** - In partnership with the city of Lambaréné, we renovate a community event space, featuring environmental murals and outreach panels.

**2017**  
**Three no-take zones are created on Lake Oguemoué** - Local fishers identify three zones of the lake that are particularly important for fish reproduction, and create floating barriers to prevent fishing boats from entering, while also beginning outreach and patrols.

**2017**  
**Amven Cooperative is legalized** - Lake Oguemoué's first sustainable fishing coop receives legal recognition.

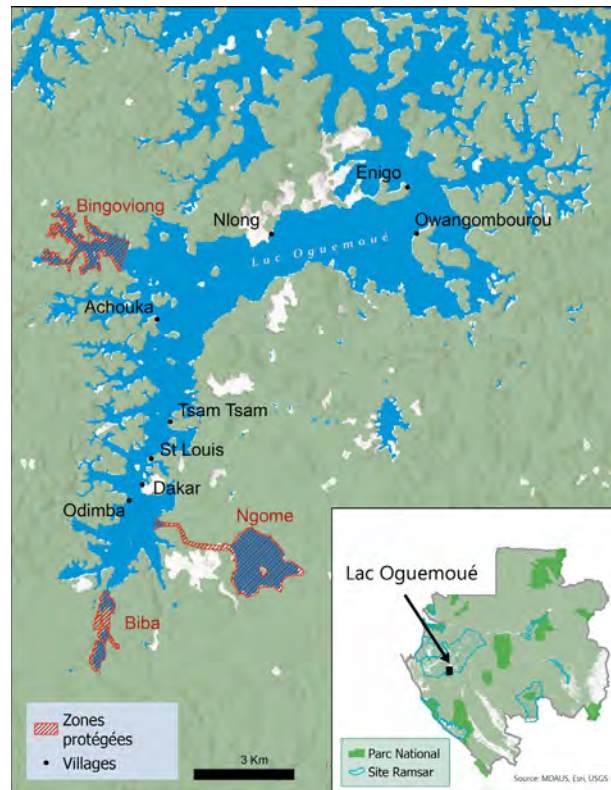


**2018**  
**Oguemoué sustainable fisheries management plan is legalized** - Following community meetings, government workshops, fisheries data collection, feedback from scientists and NGOs, and a validation ceremony, a sustainable fisheries management plan for Lake Oguemoué is signed by the government minister responsible for fisheries management, becoming Gabon's first freshwater fisheries management plan.



# NOTRE LAC, NOTRE AVENIR

## Plan d'Aménagement de la Pêche du lac Oguemoué



### Bienvenue au lac Oguemoué !

Pour le succès de notre plan d'aménagement de pêche qui va assurer la durabilité de nos ressources halieutiques pour les générations futures et en respectant la loi 015/2005, portant Code des Pêches et de l'Aquaculture en République Gabonaise :

- Le tabou, l'éroca, et le tappage sont **INTERDITS**
- Les filets mono-filament (crin) sont **INTERDITS**
- Les trois zones protégées (**BINGOVIONG, BIBA, NGOME**) sont **INTERDITES** à la pêche pour assurer la reproduction des poissons

**Le non-respect de ces mesures est puni par la loi.**  
 Merci pour la bonne compréhension !  
 Les Coopératives du Lac Oguemoué



Entrance Panels placed at the entrance of the lake explain key provisions and no-take zones of the Oguemoué Fisheries Management Plan



**2019**  
 Baseline ecological monitoring of fisheries launched - With partners Aquatic Ecosystem Services (AES) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), an ecological study of lake fisheries is conducted to complement the community-led data collection on catches.

2019

**2020**  
 Efoulatchi and Ewûgha-Angome Cooperatives legalized - Two further sustainable fishing coops receive legal recognition, one of which is led by women.

2020

**2020**  
 OELO name is updated - Our name becomes the Ecological Organization of the Lakes and Ogooué to represent our increasingly regional focus.

**2020**  
 First mating herd of manatees is recorded on Lake Oguemoué - Our Tsam Tsam team films a mating herd directly in front of the ecotourism site: a sign that the management plan is working to eliminate the by-catch of manatee calves.



**2021**  
 ACLO Lake Association is legalized and the "Our Forest, Our Future" initiative is launched - The Association of Communities of Lake Oguemoué (ACLO) receives legal recognition and submits an application to reclaim the ancestral forests of Lake Oguemoué as a community forest, in order to prevent their exploitation by a logging company.

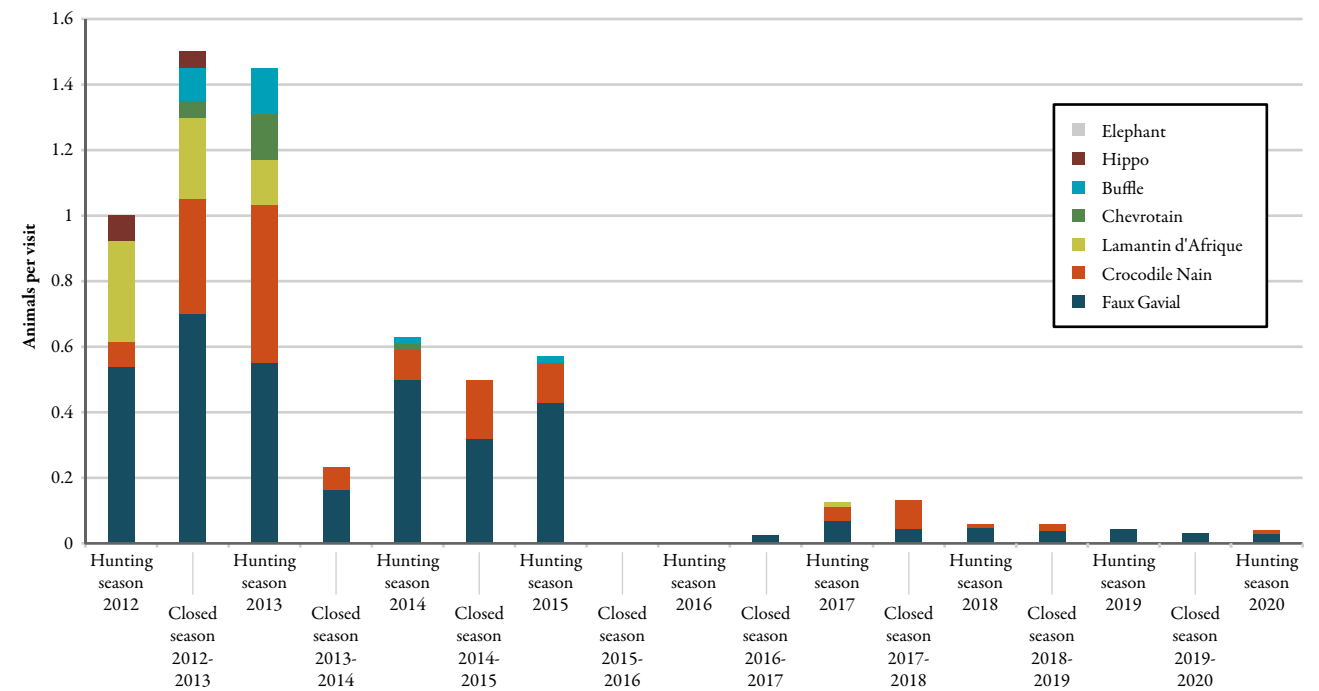
**2021**  
 Oguemoué fisheries management plan is evaluated - OELO's partner AES analyzes and summarizes OELO's fisher-led data collection from 2014 and evaluates the Oguemoué fisheries management plan. The evaluation documents initial successes, including the elimination of African manatee bycatch and the return of large migratory fish to the lake, as well as identifying ways forward.

**2022**  
 Dramatic reduction in illegal bushmeat is recorded at Marché Isaac - After a decade of monitoring and outreach, a 98% reduction in illegal bushmeat is recorded at the largest market of the Bas Ogooué.

**2022**  
 A three-fold increase of the local hippo population is recorded - 30 hippos are recorded in the 2022 dry season, along the Pelican bank of the Ogooué River on the way to Tsam Tsam, compared to only 10 a decade ago.



**2022**  
 Socio-economic study is launched in seven additional lakes in the greater Bas Ogooué - In collaboration with TNC, AES and the Aquatic Ecosystem Direction of the Ministry of Water and Forests (DGEA), OELO helps coordinate socio-economic surveys are coordinated by OELO to guide and inform where our Oguemoué initiative will be replicated.



Fully protected species bushmeat for sale on market tables and wheelbarrows, 2012-2020, Marché Isaac, Lambaréné



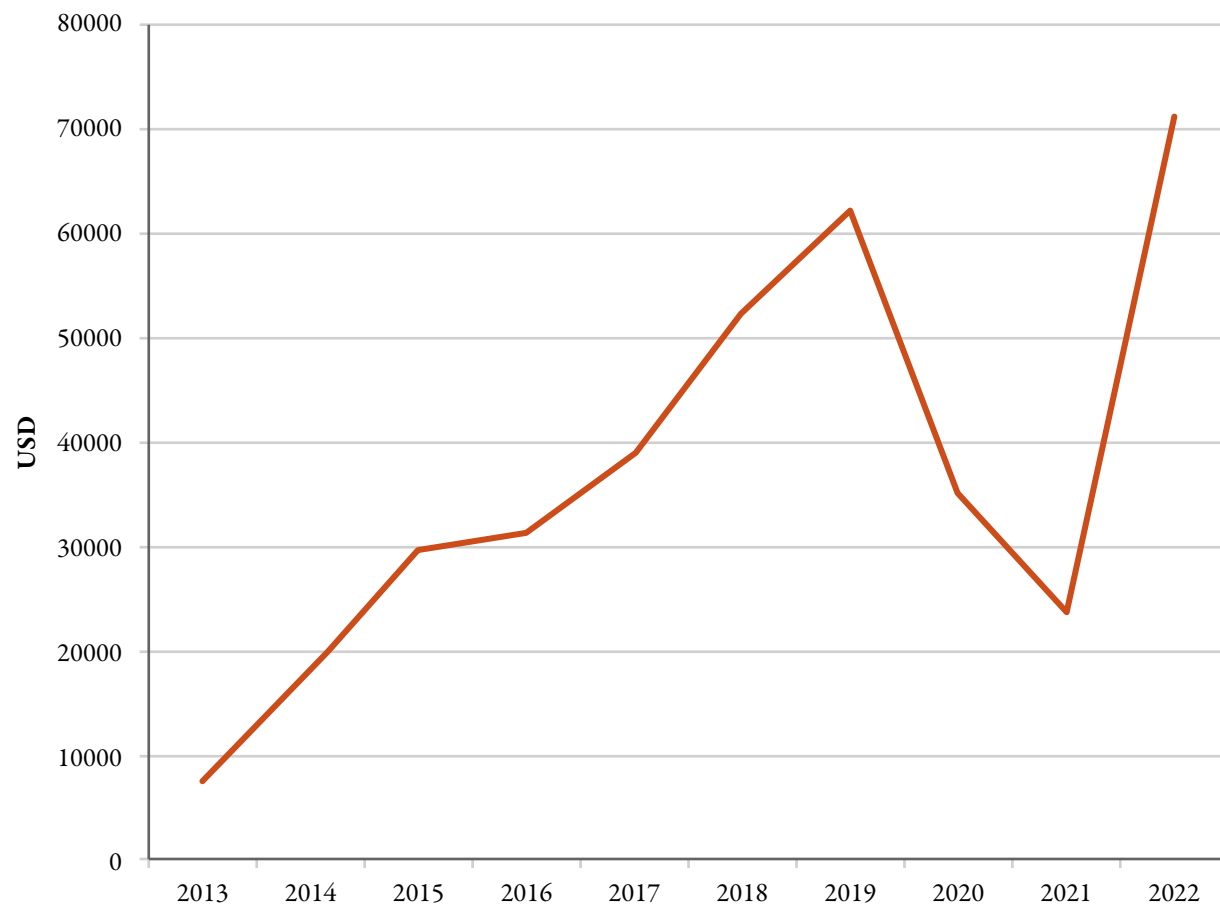
**2022**  
**Ecotourism visitors and income at Tsam Tsam reach an all time high** - With the exception of the COVID pandemic restrictions that closed down camp for most of 2020 and 2021, ecotourism income has steadily risen since our launch in 2012.



**2022**

**2022**  
**Second Community Solutions report is completed on Lake Oguemoué** - Focus groups in Oguemoué villages evaluate our work on the lake and identify ways forward. Ideas are compiled in our second "Community Solutions" report.

**2022**  
**OELO receives UNDP Equator Prize for initiative "Our Lake, Our Future"** - We become the first organization in Gabon to receive this award.



**Ecotourism income as well as number of guests has steadily risen at Tsam Tsam, with 2023 projected to be the best year yet.**

## What Guides Us



<sup>1</sup> Basic tenet of the philosophy of Albert Schweitzer, inspired while navigating through a group of hippos on a boat trip on the Ogooué River in 1915.



# Our Unique Offer

## → Our understanding and knowledge of the local context

puts us in an ideal position to work in the Bas Ogooué. Many of our team members grew up in the region and originate from villages in the different lakes.

## → We keep local communities at the heart of decisions

and collaborate respectfully with them. We have built a relationship of trust that strengthens our work.

## → We use a mix of complementary strategies, targeting biodiversity conservation and community well-being in parallel.

## → We use our varied expertise and our dynamism

to try innovative approaches. We are pioneers in our field, and our unique approach has created many firsts in Gabon: first sustainable fishing coops, first women's fishers coop, first freshwater fisheries management plan, and the first organization to win an Equator Prize.

# Context

With 88% forest cover, Gabon plays a vital global role in addressing climate change and biodiversity loss. It is one of the most carbon positive countries in the world: its forests sequester more carbon than the country emits. Gabon accounts for 18% of the remaining forests of the Congo Basin, which are now the world's last major carbon sink. Despite its small size, Gabon plays an increasingly important role at the international level for forest conservation.

Gabon also has exceptional biodiversity, with a large number of endemic and emblematic species. Its forests are home to 50% of the remaining forest elephants in Africa, as well as globally important populations of primates, such as gorillas, chimpanzees, mandrills, and red-capped mangabeys. Gabon is the last stronghold of the Critically Endangered central African slender-snouted crocodile, and home to important populations of Endangered giant pangolins, Vulnerable leopards, African manatees, and hippos, among other Congo Basin forest wildlife. The Bas Ogooué hosts important populations of migratory species, including the critically endangered thorny whipray, as well as indigenous freshwater fish. However, unsustainable logging, overfishing, pollution, and wildlife poaching still pose significant threats to the country's biodiversity.

At the national level, promising developments are underway. In 2022, the government pledged to protect 30 percent of terrestrial, marine, and freshwater areas in the country by 2030. However, the ability of civil society to organize and benefit from these initiatives remains low. USAID considers civil society sustainability in Gabon to be "impeded", and the country is in the bottom six countries of the sub-Saharan African [Civil Society Sustainability Index](#) (2021). Top-down approaches have historically made it difficult for local communities to organize and to find support.

At the national level, innovative projects underway, such as the recently approved Global Environmental Fund (GEF 7) initiative, state the aim of transforming the governance of forest landscapes and resources to benefit local communities, and addressing the climate and biodiversity crises while supporting community economic development. Gabon has also pledged to almost double terrestrial and marine protected areas by 2030. While exciting developments at the national level have inspired international investments and partnerships, these must benefit local people. Protecting 30% of Gabon's forests and waters cannot occur without the support and leadership of local communities, who depend on these resources for their livelihoods.





# Where We Work

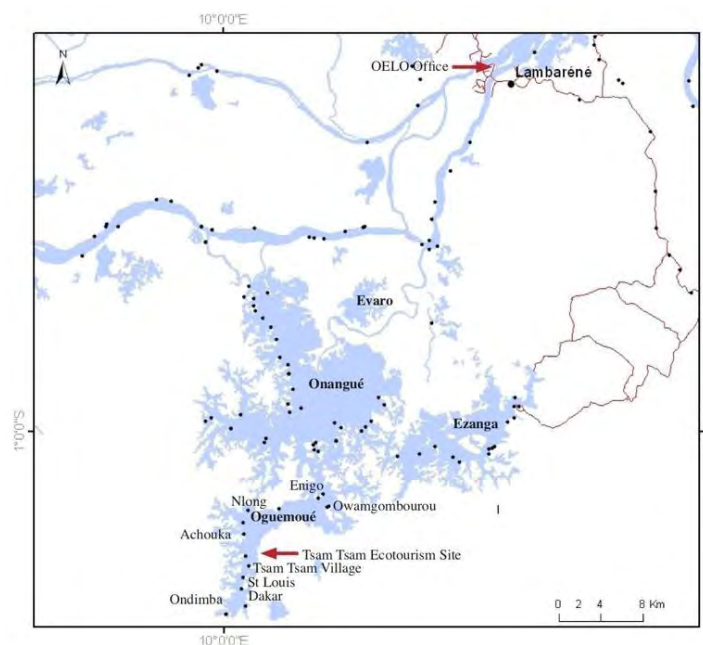
The Bas Ogooué is the largest Ramsar site in Gabon: a wetland of international importance. It encompasses a vast expanse of the Ogooué River, adjacent lakes, and surrounding flooded forest, covering 1,370,000 hectares. Its forests and waterways are home to important populations of Critically endangered species (Central African slender-snouted crocodile, African forest elephant, western gorilla), Endangered species (giant pangolin, red-capped mangabey, chimpanzee), and Vulnerable species (hippo, African manatee, African dwarf crocodile, leopard). Dry season sandbars, riverbanks and forest clearings are breeding sites for birds, including African skimmers, pink-backed pelicans, and African river martins. The waterways support important populations of migratory fish, including the Critically Endangered thorny whipray, Vulnerable tarpon, as well as fully freshwater species. The Bas Ogooué also includes Gabon's 7th largest city, Lambaréné, where the Ogooué River crosses the National Highway 1. It is an important crossroads for people coming by boat or car from surrounding communities, with some of the largest fish and bushmeat markets in the country.

Bas Ogooué residents rely heavily on fishing, hunting, and short-term employment in extractive industries for their livelihoods. Many rural communities no longer have schools or clinics, necessitating women and children to spend parts of the year in Lambaréné, where schools and hospitals are based. Many families have both lake and town family homes, and frequent travel between the two is one of the barriers to communities organizing in the region.

Since its creation in 2010, OELO has been based in Lambaréné, with both town-based programs (Environmental Education, Reducing Illegal Bushmeat Trade) and lake-based programs on Lake Oguemoué (Ecotourism at Tsam Tsam, "Our Lake, Our Future" Sustainable Fishing Initiative, "Our Forest, Our Future" Community Forestry Initiative). With our new strategic plan, OELO has the ambition to extend our lake-based work into other lakes and waterways of the Bas Ogooué, while continuing to strengthen our town-based work.



Ramsar Sites in green, National Parks in blue, red box indicates Lambaréné and the Southern Lake Region.



Southern Lake Region showing OELO office, villages of Lake Oguemoué, and Tsam Tsam Ecotourism Site.

# Strategic Pillars

## Freshwater

We work with communities to build local institutions for the sustainable management of freshwater fisheries, as a key element of community livelihoods, food security, and the protection of freshwater resources and biodiversity.



## Forests

We support communities to secure rights over forests, and establish and accompany local institutions for sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation that benefits local communities.

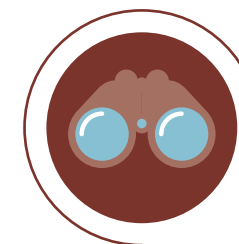
## Wildlife

We work to reduce illegal bushmeat consumption and trade in urban centers, through education and outreach, in order to reduce illegal wildlife trade within the wider landscape.



## Youth

We lead outreach and educational activities with schools and youth groups to foster a culture of environmental stewardship and awareness of conservation issues.



## Ecotourism

We operate a model ecotourism initiative on Lake Oguemoué to create income for local residents, finance OELO's conservation programs, and provide a base for researchers, students, community members, and visitors.



# Theory of Change

OELO's work is based on enabling local communities to better manage and benefit from the incredibly rich natural assets of the Bas Ogooué landscape: the fisheries, forests, wildlife, and unique mix of vast wetlands and surrounding forests of the region. We focus on supporting communities to secure rights over fisheries and forests, strengthening local institutions for the effective management of these resources, and generating income and livelihood benefits through sustainable use. Our ecotourism site, Tsam Tsam, is another mechanism for generating local livelihood opportunities through income and employment.

We believe that if we can build strong community-led management institutions for forests and fisheries, and increase livelihood benefits from sustainable use of those valuable resources, including ecotourism, then we are laying the foundations for sustainable use and management of the Bas Ogooué ecosystem. This is at the core of OELO's work and the foundation for our Theory of Change.

We complement our core on-site work in the lake systems with interventions in Lambaréné town that seek to influence changes in attitudes and human behavior within the wider landscape. Our bushmeat work engages directly with bushmeat markets and consumers to reduce illegal commerce of wildlife, and our work with youth fosters support for conservation. We believe that these interventions in urban areas are crucial for supporting conservation measures at the community level, by discouraging illegal commerce and exploitation of wildlife and fisheries, and supporting productive linkages between urban 'consumers' and the rural 'producers' in our lake system.



**Biodiversity is conserved and ecosystem services are ensured by putting local communities at the heart of decision-making and sustainable management of natural resources, for the well-being of future generations.**

## Freshwater

We work with communities to build local institutions for the sustainable management of freshwater fisheries, as a key element of community livelihoods, food security, and protection of freshwater resources and biodiversity.

## Forests

We support communities to secure rights over forests, and establish and accompany local institutions for sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation that benefits local communities.

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## Ecotourism

We operate a model ecotourism initiative on Lake Oguemoué to create income for local residents, finance OELO's conservation programs, and provide a base for researchers, students, community members, and visitors.

We lead outreach and educational activities with schools and youth groups to foster a culture of environmental stewardship and awareness of conservation issues.

## Youth

Community organizing and capacity building

Environmentally sustainable income generating activities

## Cross-Cutting Strategies

Scientific, technical support, and community-led data collection

Environmental Education

## OELO's Mission

**To conserve biodiversity and ensure ecosystem services in the Bas Ogooué lake region by mobilizing and supporting local communities.**

## OELO's Vision



# Strategic Goals, Intended Results, and Core Strategies



## Freshwater

### 2027 Goals

Community-driven sustainable fisheries management plans exist in four additional lake communities in the Bas Ogooué landscape.



### Our Ambition

OELO's ambition is to support local fishing communities of the Bas Ogooué to manage fisheries resources and aquatic ecosystems. Our goal is to organize communities into sustainable fishing cooperatives and lake associations that take leadership roles in collaborative decision-making processes resulting in legally recognized fisheries management plans.

Local ownership and community development of these initiatives is key to future success and implementation.

### Oguemoué Model: "Our Lake, Our Future"

In recent years, dozens of communities have contacted us to organize and create fisheries management plans, inspired by that of Lake Oguemoué. Based on initial meetings, and a socio-economic study co-organized with TNC, AES, and the DGEA in August 2022, we

have prioritized four lakes where we plan to record local priorities and solutions, organize fishers, hold capacity building workshops, lead exchanges, and form sustainable fishing cooperatives (Onangué, Ezanga, Gomé, Adolet). This will form the basis of fisheries management plans for each lake that will be developed in collaboration with NGO, scientific, and administrative partners.

### Intended Results

Four lake communities organize into cooperatives and lake associations to define the rules for managing their aquatic ecosystems.

Four lake communities develop fisheries management plans for their lakes for the sustainable management and conservation of resources.

Four lake communities acquire responsible fishing tools and techniques.

Four lake communities develop micro-projects to diversify income and reduce year-long fishing pressure.

### With Whom

Community members, governmental partners (Directorate General of Fisheries and Aquaculture - DGPA and Directorate General of Aquatic Ecosystems - DGEA), scientific partners, NGO partners (TNC), micro-project consultants.

### Where

We plan to replicate the "Our Lake, Our Future" initiative on Oguemoué in four additional lakes in the Bas Ogooué lake region by 2027 (Onangué, Ezanga, Gomé, Adolet).

### Strategies

Participatory identification of community problems and solutions (Community Solutions Reports)

Organization of fishers into cooperatives and associations

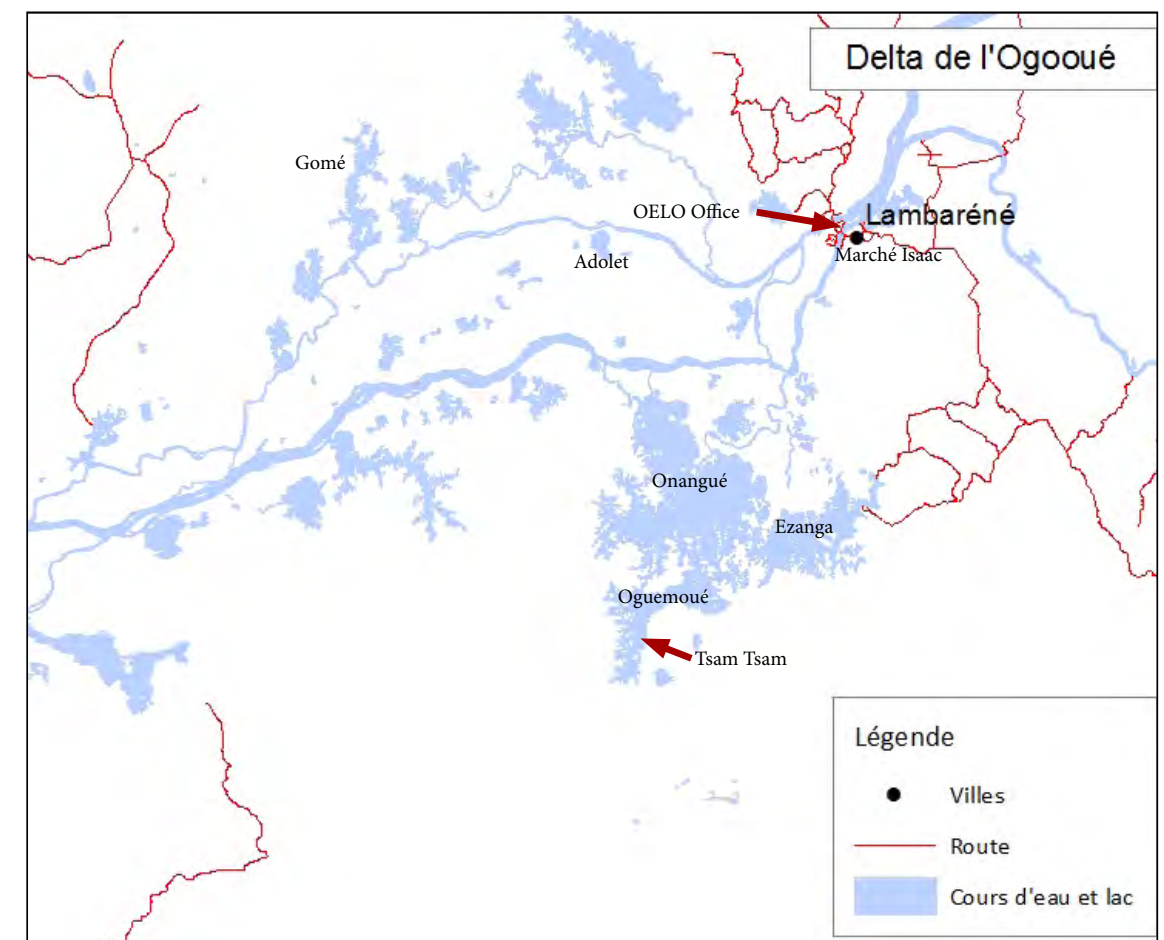
Capacity building of coops focusing on collaboration, organization, transparency, conflict resolution, and sustainable management of resources

Training of community members in data collection and monitoring of fisheries

Coordination with scientific, NGO, and governmental partners to create fisheries management plans

Support and development of alternative income generating activities (through sustainable use of resources)

Scientific and technical support



Four additional lakes where we will be working in 2023-2027: Onangué, Ezanga, Gomé and Adolet





# Forests

## 2027 Goals

The Oguemoué Community Forest is legalized and a model is developed creating a new kind of community-managed forest in Gabon that benefits lake residents from 8 villages. Lake-wide associations are created on two other lakes, with OELO supporting applications for future community forest initiatives following the Oguemoué model.

## Our Ambition

The “Our Forest, Our Future” would give local communities ownership and long-term generational benefits from their ancestral forests. We aim to create a new community forest model in Gabon: a collaboration between a local community association that would manage the forest, with a Gabonese biodiversity conservation NGO (OELO) that would provide expertise and oversight. The community forest model would benefit local residents living in and around the forest by creating a management plan with a diversity of income streams, including: non-timber forest products, ecotourism, wildlife conservation and anti-poaching patrols, carbon credits, biodiversity credits, and other opportunities.



This will be a model that complements fisheries management plans, and is replicable in the lake region.

## Oguemoué Model: “Our Forest, Our Future”

Ten years ago, we tried to form a lake association on Lake Oguemoué but found that divisions between the north side of the lake and the south prevented communities from collaborating or even attending the same meetings. Instead, we began working with, and organizing smaller entities: sustainable fishing cooperatives. Three sustainable fishing coops were formed and the coops began collaborating and supporting each other from opposite sides of the lake with a common goal of managing lake fisheries. With this lake-wide collaboration, the community was finally able to create a lake-wide association that gained legal recognition in 2021, Association of the Communities of Lake Oguemoué (ACLO), and applied to the government to extend their lake initiative into the forests of Lake Oguemoué with the aim of creating Gabon’s first truly community-managed forest.

## Intended Results

Oguemoué and other lake communities benefit from forest conservation.

The Oguemoué lake community of 8 villages obtains and sustainably manages their ancestral forests for future generations rather than for short-term profits.

Two additional lake communities organize into associations.

Lake associations gain new skills in collective management.

Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are valued and harvested sustainably.

Income generating opportunities and micro-projects like ecotourism, small scale aviculture, and apiculture are supported, diversifying local economies currently focused on year-round fishing.

Defined zones with electric elephant fences reduce human-wildlife conflict while supporting local agriculture.

Carbon credits and biodiversity credits benefit those living in and around the forests being protected.

Increased lake pride and collaboration in and between lake communities.

## With Whom

ACLO, Community members, Governmental partners ( Ministry of Water and Forests), scientific partners, local and international NGO partners, consultants with applicable experience.

## Where

Pilot model on Lake Oguemoué: “Our Forest, Our Future”

Two other lake communities that are interested in similar initiatives in the future.

## Strategies

Participatory identification of community problems and solutions

Organization of lake associations

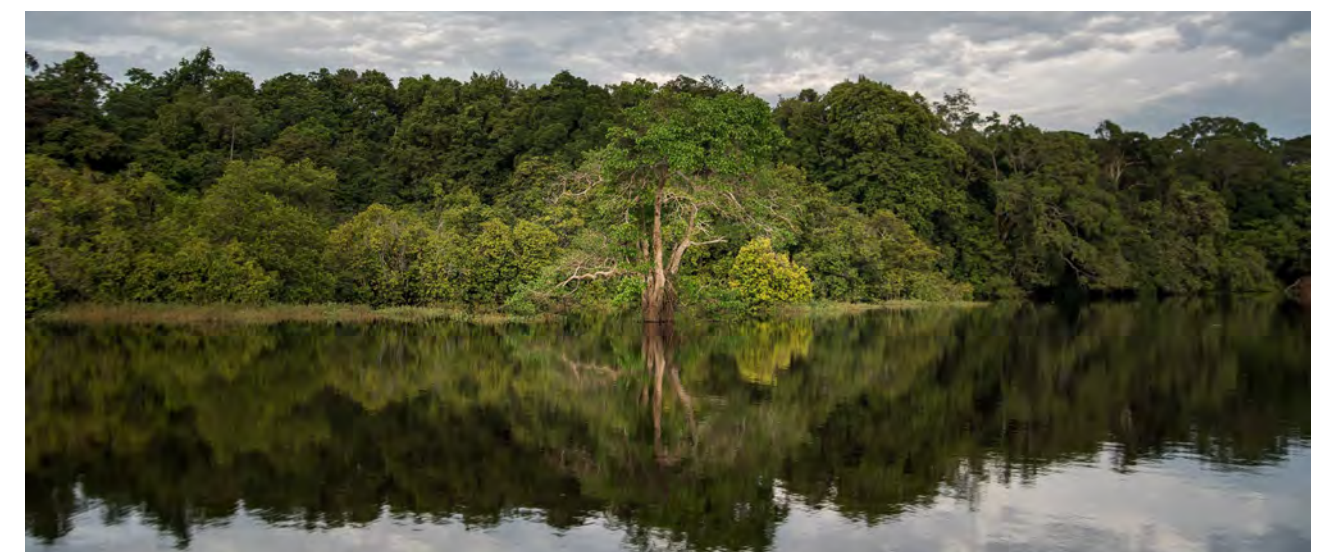
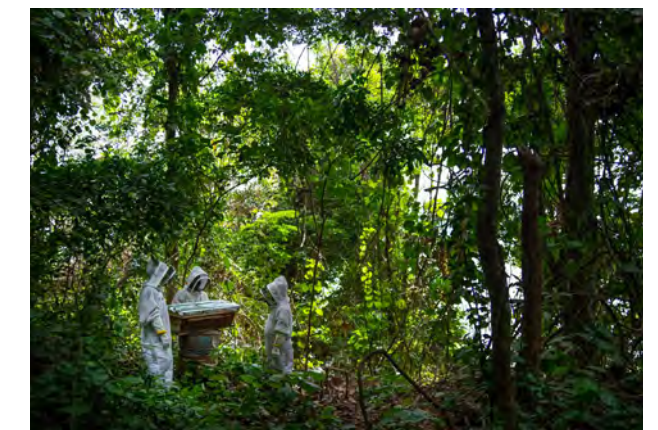
Support for the legalization of community forests

Participatory mapping

Community-led data collection with camera traps

Creation of a management plan

Scientific and technical support



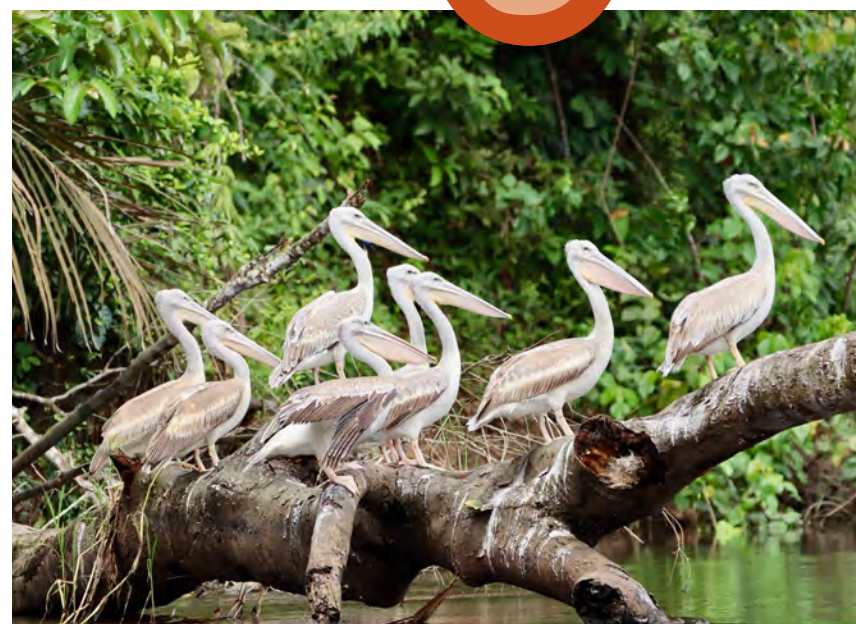




# Wildlife

## 2027 Goals

Low levels of illegal bushmeat in the region's largest market are maintained (fewer than 1% of market visits). Children in clubs are 80% less likely to hunt or consume protected species than their peers. Black markets are better understood and eliminated. The hippo population on the way to Tsam Tsam increases by another 50% (from 30 in 2022 to 45 hippos in 2027).



## Our Ambition

Gabon's protected species are eliminated from bushmeat markets of the Bas Ogooué. The next generation of consumers are no longer willing to eat protected species or contribute to the illegal bushmeat trade. Partners are informed and engaged in enforcing protected species laws. Populations of key emblematic species of the Bas Ogooué are healthy and recover from overexploitation of past bushmeat trade. Wildlife attracts tourists and creates local pride (including hippos, manatees, slender-snouted crocodiles, forest elephants, and giant pangolins).



## Strategies

- Partnering with community leaders
- Outreach with hunters and fishers
- Educating next generation (environmental leaders under Youth Goal) to change consumption preferences for protected species
- Educating vendors about protected species
- Engaging community members in research and data collection
- Market surveys

## Intended Results

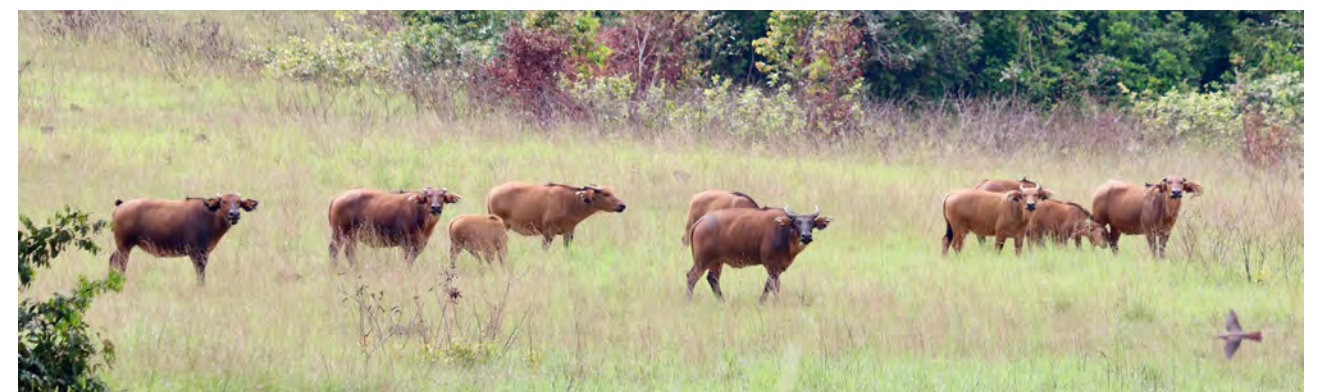
- Illegal bushmeat from protected species disappears from markets and restaurants.
- Consumers are no longer willing to purchase bushmeat from protected species.
- Irresponsible concessionaires stop funding and sponsoring poaching.
- Communities sustainably manage and benefit from healthy wildlife populations.

## With Whom

Hunters, fishers, vendors, forest managers, consumers, community leaders, scientific partners, NGO partners, youth.

## Where

Lambaréné markets and restaurants, community forests, schools of the Bas Ogooué lake region.







# Youth

## 2027 Goals

One hundred fifty local youth environmental leaders are trained over five years (30 per year). Thirty active clubs with 1000 members and trained teacher mentors lead stewardship projects around the Bas Ogooué annually. Four thousand kids are reached annually in classroom sessions from 40 primary and secondary schools.



## Our Ambition

Through our Environmental Education program, the next generation of conservation leaders is formed. Classroom sessions reach thousands of local youths annually and introduce them to an environmental curriculum, including lesson plans on protected species and hunting laws, ecosystem services of wetlands, and emblematic species of the Bas Ogooué. Each year, we organize 30 environmental clubs who mobilize environmental action throughout the Bas Ogooué. Local youths identify environmental problems, propose solutions they can lead, and are given resources and tools to make the changes they propose. Teacher mentors are trained to oversee and lead the efforts. Youth learn leadership skills, community organizing skills, and teamwork. Thirty top student leaders from these clubs win spots at our annual environmental leadership camp at Tsam Tsam.

## Intended Results

Classroom sessions reach 4000 students annually with environmental curriculum.

Extracurricular environmental clubs organize collective action with 1000 students annually.

Young environmental leaders participate in our leadership camp, networking and experience-sharing opportunities.

Youth club leaders gain knowledge, skills, and capacity in biodiversity conservation.



## With Whom

Youth, primary and secondary schools, school administrators, teacher mentors, nature clubs, neighborhood chiefs and city leaders.

## Where

Lambaréné schools and surrounding communities of the Bas Ogooué

Lambaréné neighborhoods

Summer youth clubs in 5 lakes (Oguemoué, Onangué, Ezanga, Gomé, Adolet)

## Strategies

Classroom presentations on key protected species, Gabonese biodiversity, ecosystem services and other topics

Creation and accompaniment of extracurricular environmental clubs in schools

Training of teacher mentor supervisors for clubs

Summer clubs in neighborhoods of Lambaréné in coordination with neighborhood chiefs and city of Lambaréné

Summer clubs on partner lakes

Identification of environmental problems and solutions by club members

Environmental events and exchanges (World Wetlands Day, World Environment Day, World Fish Migration Day, World Elephant Day, and others)

Annual Tsam Tsam environmental leadership camp for top club members

Hosting of summer interns to further develop leadership skills

Environmental scholarships for top students





# Ecotourism

## 2027 Goals

New lodgings for staff are completed in the village. Two new sleeping platforms and flood resistant eating areas are constructed on the island, increasing capacity, and resulting in doubling site income and conservation funding. Currently Tsam Tsam income, \$70,000, covers 24% of our operating budget. In 2027, we aim for \$140 000 of income to cover %16 of our annual budget.

## Our Ambition

Local jobs are created for Oguemoué residents that promote conservation and diversify lake incomes. Ecotourism income covers 16% of OELO's annual budget with unrestricted funding to cover operational costs (difficult for small NGOs to fundraise). Tsam Tsam creates a venue for meetings, workshops, and conversations with partners.

Activities offered to visitors at Tsam Tsam are community-led and include: guided forest walks, pirogue trips, village tours, and traditional music evenings. On Lake Oguemoué, we have partnership agreements with the three sustainable fishing coops to provide: local sustainable fish, boat transfers from town, guiding services, food preparation, village tours, traditional music, cassava, honey, and other services and products as available. We have environmental policies at camp to minimize our impact, to eliminate single use plastics, and to buy locally produced sustainable products wherever possible.



## Oguemoué Research Center Phase I

As we expand our lake model into additional lakes, we also plan more in-depth work on Lake Oguemoué. Since launching Tsam Tsam, we have hosted and facilitated research with partners on great apes, African manatees, reptiles and amphibians, giant pangolins, and fisheries. By training local fishers, we have collected monthly data and compiled a database of fishing activities on the lake since 2014, which makes Lake Oguemoué one of the best monitored lakes in Africa. Local residents collect camera trap images of wildlife around the lake that will inform our community forest initiative, and increase pride for lake biodiversity. We want to facilitate collaborations between academic, government, NGO, and community partners to use this information to better understand biodiversity in Gabon's lake region, to support local students, and to secure ecosystem services. In the next five years, we plan to launch the first phase of development of a research center on the lake, which would include hiring a coordinator and expanding the capacity of the Tsam Tsam ecotourism site.

## Intended Results

- Funding generated for OELO's conservation programs
- Jobs created for Lake Oguemoué residents that values biodiversity
- Market created for goods and services from Oguemoué coops
- Incentives created to not poach wildlife
- Pride generated for lake biodiversity
- OELO's mission and achievements communicated to a network of visitors, community members, researchers and partners

## With Whom

Community members, lake coops (Amven, Efoulatchi, Ewûghe-Angome), visitors, researchers, NGO partners, youth.

## Where

Tsam Tsam, Lake Oguemoué.

## Strategies

- Hiring of local community members
- Partnership Agreements with lake coops to furnish supplies and services
- Model environmental policies, with materials sourced locally, maximizing benefits to local economy and local residents
- Hosting of local students
- Communication of OELO's conservation activities and mission to visitors
- Hosting of conservation partners and researchers



# Building Organizational Capacity



In order to achieve our mission and vision, and successfully implement the strategic plan, OELO will need to significantly increase our overall organizational capacity and resources. This will require major new investments in the capacity of our team, developing strong internal systems, expanding our team and office space, building successful partnerships that provide strategic alignment and can enable our organizational growth, and communicating more effectively about our work. Developing a stronger organization is a priority for OELO over the next five years, and this means focusing on the following priorities:

## Growing Our Team

The most critical challenge for OELO in being able to implement this strategic plan is to significantly grow the internal capacity of our team across a range of key functions. In order to expand our work as envisioned, we will need highly capable programmatic staff who can facilitate the community processes that are core to our work and vision. In order to manage an organization operating over a significantly larger area, we will need to make major new investments in our management capacity, including in the recruitment, management, and development of a larger team, as well as fundraising and communications. We will need to grow our team, while maintaining our strong local roots and community-oriented culture, and within the constraints that exist in Gabon, where recruiting high level staff to work in remote rural areas, or for NGOs in general, can be particularly challenging. Strengthening our approaches to recruiting, developing, and growing our team will be the single greatest challenge OELO will face in implementing this strategic plan and in our overall future as an organization.

### Ultimate Goal

**Recruit, develop, and retain a team capable of enabling and sustaining OELO's growth, implementing all areas of the strategy - including managing work across a much larger geographic area, and stewarding the overall growth of the organization.**

### Specific Objective 1

Double the size of the OELO core team by 2027 (16 full time positions)

### Specific Objective 2

Develop systems and processes to improve effective collaboration and management among team members

### Specific Objective 3

Identify and invest in training opportunities for the OELO team

## Funding and Partnerships

In order to grow OELO's scope, impact, and capacity in the ways envisioned, we will need to significantly increase our funding. Gabon's increasing prominence within Africa, and globally as a leader in conservation, creates new opportunities for funding, but we will need to better position our work and impact within these national and global discourses, while fostering the kinds of long-term partnerships that will support our growth. We will need to invest in more consistent communications about our impact and organizational vision, and develop a more diverse portfolio of funding sources to generate both core organizational funding and more project-based or programmatic funding.

### Ultimate Goal

**Enable the growth of the organization and strengthen its sustainability.**

### Specific Objective 1

Triple OELO's annual budget by 2027 (900,000 USD)

### Specific Objective 2

Diversify the donor portfolio

### Specific Objective 3

Increase tourism income by 100% (140,000 USD)

### Key New Positions Include

Hiring a deputy director to support the ED and program coordinators, with an emphasis on improved communications.

Hiring a research coordinator to improve collaborations between governmental partners, international and national university students, local secondary students, and conservation partners.

Creating a Community Forest team that will collaborate closely with the existing Sustainable Fishing team.

Expanding Environmental Education and Sustainable Fishing teams to work with additional communities, schools, clubs, and partners.

Adding full-time support staff both at the office in Lambaréné and for the camp at Tsam Tsam.

Hiring a second Ecotourism team leader to double our capacity at Tsam Tsam.





# Partnership Principles

In order to strengthen our sustainability and impact, OELO will seek to collaborate with new partners according to the following principles:

## Shared Vision and Values

Partnerships between OELO and other organizations are based on a shared vision of biodiversity conservation that puts local communities at the heart of decision-making and sustainable natural resource management.

## Complementary Roles

As a local NGO our strength is in our deep understanding of local context and our ability to affect long lasting change on the ground. We will look for partners that can elevate our work at the national and international level with complementary skills and strengths.

## Mutual Respect

Our partnerships strive to mutually respect the integrity and expertise of the actors involved. We recognize that in some relationships, there are power imbalances. OELO will seek partners that are aware of these power dynamics and that strive to establish accountability processes, including acknowledging roles and sharing credit.

## Transparency and Communication

In our partnerships, stakeholders will strive to build trust and share information openly with each other. Stakeholders commit to regular communication and to informing each other of progress.

## Long-term Vision

We will seek partners willing to commit to long-term collaboration and support the strengthening of our organizational systems to help us maximize our role and contribution to biodiversity conservation.



# Internal Systems

OELO has developed an ambitious strategy for the next 5 years. The implementation of this strategy will be accompanied by significant organizational growth. To support our sustainability and efficiency, we will need to establish systems and procedures in response to this growth. Doubling the size of our team and expanding our work across four additional lakes will require efficient information-sharing and knowledge management systems to enable collaboration and coordination across staff members and teams. Monitoring work across this expanded area will also require the development of an organizational monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) system to identify results, measure impact, and ensure accountability to both participating communities and financial supporters. Identifying and communicating impact will be key in OELO's success in securing new and sustainable sources of funding. Finally, doubling our annual income and diversifying our donor portfolio will require an organizational financial system that enables accurate and efficient financial management and reporting across an expanded number of donors and programmes.

## Ultimate Goal

**OELO has strong internal systems**

### Specific Objective 1

Develop information-sharing and knowledge management systems to improve operational efficiency

### Specific Objective 2

Strengthen monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) systems to identify results and measure organizational impact

### Specific Objective 3

Strengthen organizational financial management system



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