

NEWS FROM AFRICAN PROTECTED AREAS

# NAPA 200

CONSERVING NATURE IN AFRICA



## THIS MONTH IN THE NAPA

**TOWARDS GOOD  
GOVERNANCE!**

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Good governance provides a compass: it creates the conditions for dialogue, respect, and sustainability...

**MOOC, TUTOS  
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Heading into a green and committed new school year with our educational resources!

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Discover the content of our new MOOC on governance of protected areas... and **join the course now!**



## Nature conservation: good governance is not an option!

By Geoffroy Mauvais  
IUCN-Papaco coordinator

» Africa's protected areas (PAs) are home to exceptional biodiversity, which humans have depleted elsewhere, and protect species that have become symbols of nature conservation. However, these images of Eden hide a painful past and an uncertain future if their governance does not evolve towards a truly fair and inclusive model.

The history of some African PAs is linked to colonization. The first national parks, created in the early 20th century, were established on the principle of preserving nature from all human presence. To give substance to this myth, millions of people were expelled from their ancestral lands: pastoralists, hunters, farmers, all considered incompatible with the "purity" of nature.

These evictions disrupted millennia-old social and economic balances. They generated lasting resentment, passed down from generation to generation. Many parks still bear the scars: conflicts over land use, poaching perceived as an act of resistance, and mistrust of conservation institutions.

This dark side cannot be forgotten, but it must not obscure the recent development of conservation areas in Africa, mainly Category IV and VI PAs where protection and sustainable use go hand in hand. This is a tremendous movement that has led to the creation of thousands of PAs, often community-based, which are operating promisingly and offering the rest of the world a source of inspiration, outside of any preconceived model. Failing to recognize their uniqueness is an affront to African conservationists.

At a time of climate crisis and biodiversity loss, international pressure to expand PAs is immense. The goal of protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030 is mobilizing donors, NGOs, and governments. But there is a risk of replicating, in modernized forms, the logic of appropriation of the past.

This is what some call "green colonialism": a tendency to impose measures in the name of global conservation that ignore the rights, cultures, and priorities of local actors. However, if the people living in or near PAs are not recognized as full partners, conservation once again becomes a tool of injustice, undermining both social peace and the sustainability of ecosystems.

In light of these tensions, good governance of PAs appears to be a prerequisite for their success. It requires the effective participation of various actors - state, private, and community - in decision-making, not as mere extras but as co-managers. It recognizes rights and secures access to land, resources, and traditional knowledge: private partners, indigenous peoples, and local communities must be able to continue to live, practice their subsistence activities, and harvest honey or medicinal plants, according to jointly established rules. It implies transparency and accountability: revenues from tourism, carbon projects, or regulated hunting must be managed in a clear manner, with fair and verifiable redistribution mechanisms. It requires intergenerational equity and reconciles the protection of ecosystems with the immediate or future needs of populations. It adapts to the context and culture, taking into account the history, customary institutions, social hierarchies, etc. of each territory, without attempting to impose an imported model.



Numerous initiatives are leading the way across the continent. Community conservation areas are flourishing in Senegal, Benin, or Kenya, directly involving local residents in the management and benefits of tourism and sustainable resource exploitation. Forest reserves in Central Africa are exploring hybrid models that combine conservation with sustainable agroforestry, giving local communities an active and recognized role. Public-private partnerships are emerging and proving that it is possible to combine conservation and development, provided that peaceful coexistence is established. All these experiences, still fragile, remind us that governance is an ongoing process, involving the negotiation of balances.

But at the same time, dark lines are being drawn, often in countries with weak or authoritarian governments. Private individuals and NGOs are assuming quasi-sovereign power over parks, to the detriment of local inhabitants and their representatives. This recreates conservation as a fortress, disconnected from humans. Areas are sometimes fenced off and access to resources strictly regulated, with eco-guards having quasi-military powers, with all the abuses that one can imagine. Consultation is replaced by authority, justice by arbitrariness, fairness by brutality. This is done with the support of foreign donors and sponsors eager for simplistic, short-term results. And this rightly fuels the growing condemnation of green colonialism and undoubtedly jeopardizes the future of all PAs in Africa.

Insisting on good governance is not an academic luxury: it is a strategic necessity. A PA that is built against its natural partners, whoever they may be, is a fragile protected area, costly to monitor, and vulnerable to conflict. It is, in essence, only temporary, cloaked in an imaginary narrative that denies the complex reality of human relationships. Conversely, a PA that relies on the support of all the actors in the territory, whether they are voluntary or compulsory conservation partners but *de facto* partners,

becomes more resilient, less dependent on external funding, and capable of lasting beyond political cycles and the fads of international funders.

PAs must no longer be the heirs to a past of injustice, but laboratories for a new alliance between nature and society. This requires a reversal of perspective: considering the actors in these territories not as threats, but as allies. This is complex to achieve but inevitable if we are serious about working for the future of nature in Africa. This is where governance comes in.

Good governance provides a compass: it does not guarantee perfect solutions, but it creates the conditions for dialogue, respect, and sustainability. It builds inclusive, transparent, and equitable PAs. It protects biodiversity, but also social justice, and contributes to the long-term stability of territories. That is why we are launching a new online course, open to all and free of charge: a MOOC on protected area governance. Not to give you a magic formula, because there isn't one. But to get us all thinking together about what is being done and what should be done to change what needs to be changed, at the risk that African PAs will continue to be the scene of a clash between global interests and local rights, and that "green colonialism" will take over from the dramatic past we know.

The future of these territories depends less on the protected area we will record on maps than on the quality of their governance. Our MOOC simply aims to help you define a new contract between nature and society, in the service of a shared future. **Sign up now!**

**OCTOBER 25**

Join our  
MOOC on  
Gouvernance  
on [www.mooc-conservation.org](http://www.mooc-conservation.org)



# OUR ONLINE COURSES: MOOCS, TUTORIALS AND ESSENTIALS

*Our 7 MOOCs, 4 Essentials and 3 Tutorialsa are open and available right now!*



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See you on:

[www.mooc-conservation.org](http://www.mooc-conservation.org)

## THE MOOCS THEME-BASED TRAINING



### MOOC PA management

**Goal:** understand the essence and goals of PAs. Students will be able to grasp the importance of PAs, their role and the different management aspects.



### MOOC Ecological monitoring

**Goal:** understand the different techniques used in protected areas to assess the impact of management by monitoring the ecosystem.



### MOOC Law enforcement

**Goal:** understand the different legal contexts in Africa, their strengths and weaknesses as well as the techniques used to effectively enforce rules in parks.



### MOOC Species conservation

**Goal:** understand the techniques developed to conserve species in PAs, in situ and ex situ. The MOOC covers the main threats, as well as solutions that can help face these threats.



### MOOC Valorisation of resources

**Goal:** knowing how the valorisation of different protected area resources can take place, and understanding protected area valorisation through tourism.



### MOOC New technologies

**Goal:** context of new technologies applied to conservation, existing techniques, prerequisites for their implementation, their opportunities and limitations, their uses in the field...



### MOOC Marine protected areas

**Goal:** understanding as the design and creation of MPA networks, governance, ecological monitoring, but also surrounding economic activities, and how to include all this to MPA management.

## ESSENTIALS PROFILE-BASED TRAINING



### RANGER Essential

For protected area (PA) professionals who apply decisions and ensure the implementation of activities inside or around the PA.



### MANAGER Essential

These two courses are for protected area professionals who need to plan, manage and assess the work carried out by field agents.



**MANAGER LAW** focuses on law enforcement and the valorisation of the PA and its natural resources. **MANAGER RESEARCH** focuses on research activities, monitoring-evaluation and ecological monitoring.



### LEADER Essential

For managers working in central management of parks or large NGOs, they elaborate national and regional policies, they proceed to cross-sectoral coordination and manage complex plans and programmes. This course focuses on more general skills to enable a better understanding of the stakes of bio-diversity conservation, all for better decision-making.

MOOC CONSERVATION IS  
SUPPORTED BY THE  
FONDS FRANÇAIS POUR  
L'ENVIRONNEMENT MONDIAL



## OUR MOOCS THIS MONTH: 150 000 ENROLMENTS AND NEW COURSES



### 150 000 MOOC ENROLMENTS

Since 2016, we have recorded over 150,000 registrations for our MOOCs dedicated to the conservation of protected areas.

As a reminder, these free courses, developed with a particular focus on African issues, help strengthen the skills of thousands of conservation professionals and enthusiasts around the world.

Thank you to our community for this collective commitment to nature.



### NEW MOOCS IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2025



**Governance of protected areas**  
*Available 1 October*



**Waterbirds of North Africa and the Sahel**  
*Online (French only)*



**Tutorial Managing Human Wildlife-Conflict**  
*Online!*



**Human rights for rangers**  
*Online!*

## ONLINE CERTIFICATE IN PA CONSERVATION

Since June 2025, graduates of the Online Certificate in Conservation of PAs from French-speaking Africa and Haiti can apply for a field internship to put into practice the knowledge acquired in the MOOCs.

**>> How to obtain the Online certificate? Click here. <<**

### 2025 MOOC CONSERVATION CALENDAR

**1 October: launch of MOOC Governance**

**3 December : Online exam for French-speakers**

**4 December: Online exam for English-speakers**



## YOUTH CONSERVATION

## HEADING INTO A GREEN AND COMMITTED NEW SCHOOL YEAR!

At the dawn of a new school year, the role of education appears more crucial than ever. In a context marked by the climate emergency, biodiversity loss, and deep social tensions, young people embody an **inexhaustible source of hope**. Their **curiosity** and **resilience** remind us that education is the key lever to transform this **hope into action**.

The Youth Conservation platform contributes to this dynamic by offering a **rich array of educational resources**: **video modules** to explain complex issues, **practical guides** for classroom and field activities, **illustrated posters** to reinforce key messages, and **audio tracks** to diversify learning approaches.

These tools only reach their full potential when they are used and shared.

Environmental education gains strength when it is lived in **concrete ways**: **observing, planting, protecting, inventing**. This is how meaningful learning experiences emerge, capable of sowing seeds of respect, responsibility, and commitment.

Through these initiatives, a generation is gradually being built—**aware of global challenges, united and resilient, ready to imagine and create a sustainable future**.



## MOOC ON GOVERNANCE OF PROTECTED AREAS A FEW EXTRACTS...

*This NAPA presents a few extracts from our new MOOC on PA governance*

### INTRODUCTION

Governance may seem like a secondary issue, but it's actually one of the most important elements of nature conservation in a park.

Your protected area will always fail if its governance is weak. You may have an excellent management plan, a very effective anti-poaching strategy, you may implement outstanding ecological monitoring, you may have a great financing plan and strong facilities... all this will be useless if the governance of your park is not accurate.



MOOC: governance  
of protected areas



### COURSE SYLLABUS

This course is made up of 5 modules, each designed to build your knowledge and sharpen your skills:

#### 1. Understand the foundations

What does governance mean in the context of protected areas? Why is it crucial for fair and effective conservation?

#### 2. Recognize the different types of governance

Learn how different types of governance (like community-led or state-ruled) work, and how to recognize and support them.

#### 3. Discover the qualities that will make good governance

What makes governance fair, effective, strong or durable? Learn about the different faces of governance and how they contribute to its quality.

#### 4. Apply practical tools to assess governance

Learn practical methods for assessing governance and making it better—tools you can apply in your own context.

#### 5. Learn how to report about and monitor governance

Governance changes, it's important to follow how and to communicate about it.





## MODULE 1: WHAT IS GOVERNANCE?

Governance is about who makes decisions, and how they make them. It's about responsibility. Responsibility is the key word here.

According to IUCN's guidelines, governance is "the interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibility are exercised, how decisions are made, and how the different stakeholders have their say".

First, who makes the decisions? Who holds authority, and who else is meaningfully involved? Directly or through representation? What kind of power and responsibility do they have? How do they exercise it?

Then, governance looks at how decisions are made? Through formal laws or informal customs? By elected representatives, experts, elders, or a combination of these?

Finally, governance aims to ensure that the process is inclusive and equitable. Are the different voices heard? Are they treated fairly? Will those responsible for the results, positive or not, be fairly involved? All this determines what we call the quality of governance.

Governance is not often easily understood. Protected areas involve many stakeholders, with different profiles, different skills and changing roles. It can be difficult to determine who is really in charge! But before we go any further, here's an essential distinction you need to remember: management concerns the actions we implement and the means we use to achieve our goals. Governance is about those who decide on these objectives or actions, and the way they make the decisions.

These are two very distinct notions that should not be confused!





## MODULE 2: THE MULTIPLE FACES OF GOVERNANCE

### **Governance by government.**

In this case, a government body - national, regional or local - takes the decisions on the territory. It may manage the area directly, as is usually the case in a national park, or delegate certain tasks to third parties, such as an NGO or a private company. Ultimately, however, it is the state that holds authority. For example, a nature conservation association, a private contractor or a local community may be involved in some of the activities, but in fact, the government remains the decision-maker and is responsible for what happens in the park: governance is therefore state-run.

### **Governance by private actors.**

Private governance means that an individual, an NGO, a company, an economic operator, etc. owns or manages a protected area, whether for profit or not. Here, the private sector doesn't just manage by delegation, it decides what happens on the territory: it is therefore responsible. Its motivation for conservation may include quality-of-life concerns - protecting its property for example, economic incentives - developing a tourist activity, or cultural and spiritual commitments - preserving a place of worship in nature, and many others. In some cases, a company may also be required to conserve land as a condition of resource use, either on site or elsewhere as part of a compensation scheme.

### **Governance by indigenous peoples or local communities.**

Often referred to as "ICCAs" or territories and areas conserved by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, these protected areas include ancestral domains, community-managed territories, sacred natural sites, local marine areas protected by fishermen... all places whose objective is nature conservation, and which are placed under the responsibility of local inhabitants. In these areas, there is generally a strong link between the community and the land, which may be the habitat of a particular species. It is the community that makes and implements decisions concerning the area and therefore bears the responsibility. Where conservation outcomes are effective, this enables local people to maintain their own well-being, culture and livelihoods. Recognizing this type of governance is essential to give communities their rightful place, respecting their rights, knowledge systems, beliefs and ways of life.

### **Shared governance.**

This is when two or more actors share authority and responsibility. They make decisions together. It might be a partnership between a government and a community, or a government and an NGO. Transboundary conservation areas are also considered shared governance models, because they are a collaboration or shared arrangement between different states.

### MODULE 3: WHAT DOES GOVERNANCE QUALITY MEAN?

Good governance is about ensuring that protected areas are managed in a way that is fair to all stakeholders and effective in achieving conservation objectives.

Equity means fairness. The CBD has recently adopted voluntary guidance that describes three dimensions of equity: recognition, procedure and distribution.

Respecting the rights, cultures and knowledge systems of all groups, including indigenous peoples and local communities, is what we call recognition.

Ensuring transparent decision-making processes where everyone has a say, where accountability is respected and where dispute resolution mechanisms exist: these are the procedures, and they are important.

Sharing the responsibilities and benefits of conservation equitably among all stakeholders: this is distribution, and it matters, of course.

Equity is required ethically and legally, but also recognition, participation and a good distribution enable the sustainable contribution of the various actors involved in conservation, and therefore its effectiveness!

What about effectiveness? Quite simply, it's about achieving conservation objectives. This requires :

- Clear Goals which mean setting specific, achievable conservation targets.

Inclusive Participation and engaging all relevant parties in planning and decision-making.

- Adaptive Management that requires being flexible and responsive to new information and changing conditions.

Equity and effectiveness are interconnected. Fair processes lead to better outcomes, and successful conservation efforts reinforce fairness.





## MODULE 4: HOW TO ASSESS GOVERNANCE?

Improving governance in conservation is essential but it's not that simple. There are many factors that can either help or hinder good governance.

First, it starts with a shared understanding of what governance actually means, and why it matters for both conservation goals and social outcomes.

Then, we need to look at the current situation: What's working well? What challenges exist? We also need clarity. Who actually governs a specific area? What happens when protected areas overlap with community territories? Do people agree on the best governance type in the context they live in? And how do we handle situations where formal ("de jure") and practical ("de facto") governance arrangements differ?

Beyond these site-specific issues, governance is of course shaped by broader factors: legal frameworks, coordination across institutions, available resources, and most importantly, relationships. Trust, political will, humility, and a willingness to share power, all play a role.

Governance isn't static. It evolves. New questions and challenges emerge as things change. That's why improving governance isn't a one-time task. It's an ongoing, adaptive process, one that requires learning and iteration.

One of the most valuable tools for improving governance is assessment. By reflecting on how governance is working now, we can identify clear steps for improvement.

There are many frameworks and methods available to help assess and strengthen governance. If done well, a governance assessment can build a shared understanding and enhance the capacity of those involved. It leads to concrete action for improvement, helps support advocacy for more accountable and equitable governance, guide conservation planning and strategy, and helps track changes in governance over time.

But governance assessments must fit the local context. They must be genuinely participatory and listen to rights-holders, responsibility-holders, knowledge-holders, and so on.



## MODULE 5: MONITORING AND REPORTING

In the context of protected areas, monitoring and reporting are the processes used to observe, evaluate, and communicate how governance is working.

Monitoring involves gathering data and insights. This can include tracking social outcomes, like how conservation affects local people and stakeholders and assessing governance at both the site and system levels. It helps us understand how diverse and how strong governance really is. Monitoring governance helps support reflection, learning, and improvement. When done collaboratively, through participatory monitoring, it ensures that diverse voices and experiences are included.

Reporting, on the other hand, is about organizing and sharing the results of monitoring. It communicates findings to others, such as policymakers and the broader public. This includes data on both the type of governance in place and its quality.

There are many reasons why reporting matters, for both those managing protected areas and the global community:

- Reporting helps us understand and communicate governance diversity and quality.
- It increases transparency and accountability.
- It identifies gaps and opportunities for improving conservation.
- It raises the visibility of conservation actors, especially non-state actors like local communities, women, and girls, supporting their empowerment and leadership.
- It highlights where local communities are leading conservation efforts, which can strengthen their tenure rights and secure access to natural resources.
- And it helps inform national and global policies, and track progress toward environmental goals.

Global data shows that the number of protected areas has grown significantly in recent decades, yet we still see gaps: governance diversity is limited, many non-state actors remain under-recognized, and data on equity is scarce.





## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"The key to a sustainable future for protected areas lies in the development of partnerships. Only through alliances and collaborations can protected areas become truly relevant to society's needs... The sustainable future of humanity depends, as much as anything else, on a respectful partnership with nature."

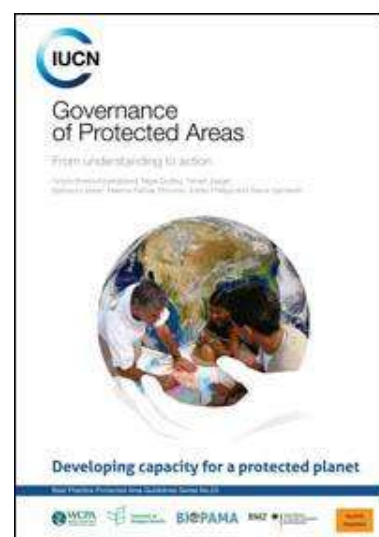
– Nelson Mandela (Opening speech of the 5th World Parks Congress, Durban, 2003)

## READING OF THE MONTH

**GOVERNANCE OF PROTECTED AREAS: FROM UNDERSTANDING TO ACTION**

BORRINI-FEYERABEND, G., DUDLEY, N., JAEGER, T., LASSEN, B., PATHAK BROOME, N., PHILLIPS, A. & SANDWITH, T. (EDS.) (2013). GLAND, SWITZERLAND: IUCN.

This publication asserts that **governance which is both context-appropriate and good is essential for effective and equitable conservation**. This applies to all types of protected and conserved areas, whether terrestrial, coastal, marine, or freshwater. It is a reference work that presents the four main types of governance for protected areas, offering practical guidance for assessing and improving governance, applicable across all types of protected areas.



## IN THE NEWS

**WIDESPREAD PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE '30×30' GOAL**

A global survey reveals strong public support for the goal of protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030, in line with the Global Biodiversity Framework adopted in 2022. The study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, surveyed **12,000 people across eight countries on five continents**. **Average support reached 82.4%**, peaking at 90% in Brazil and 87.9% in Argentina, while Sweden (66.3%) and the United States (71.2%) were slightly lower. The authors argue that public opinion is not an obstacle to implementing the 30×30 target. The survey shows that citizens favor responsibilities being fairly shared among countries and oppose outsourcing conservation through external financial mechanisms. There is strong consensus that wealthy nations should bear the greater share of global costs for protecting nature.

Despite this public backing, protected areas remain insufficient: only 17.6% of land and 8.6% of oceans are under effective protection. The political climate is unfavorable to a rapid expansion of protected areas, with potential conflicts over resource access and land use. Susan Lieberman of the Wildlife Conservation Society sees the findings as a clear mandate for ambitious government action on biodiversity.

In sum, the article highlights the existence of a broad popular consensus that could help drive and legitimize bold policies to achieve the 30×30 target worldwide.

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To contribute to a NAPA (article or publication on protected areas, cover photo, job offer, etc.), contact us at [moocs@papaco.org](mailto:moocs@papaco.org).

THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS LETTER DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THOSE OF IUCN