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<strong> Gabon is situated at the very heart of Africa</strong>, on the Atlantic coast with over 800km of coastline. It straddles the equator as does its neighbour The Republic of the Congo and The Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire). In the northwest of the country, along the coastline and embedded within the Gabonese territory, is Equatorial Guinea. The northern border also separates Gabon from Cameroon. The rest of the country runs alongside the Congo, to the east and south. Apart from the Atlantic Ocean, which is to the west, all the other Gabonese borders are artificial and are the result of past agreements:

In 1886, by the decree of governor Savorgnan of Brazza who established the borders between Gabon and The Congo to the south.

In 1900, between France and Spain who established the northwest border.

In 1919, between France and Germany who established the northern border.

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The land mass of Gabon has a compact shape (600 km from east to west) and has a surface area of 267,667 km². It’s the smallest state in central Africa after Ruanda, Burundi and Equatorial Guinea.

<strong>It is a forest country</strong> (with approximately 85% of its land mass covered by forest) where the fauna and flora are still well preserved and protected inside <strong>thirteen national parks</strong> including The National Park of La Lopé, which is which is registered on the UNESCO world heritage.

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Gabon has a typically equatorial climate, that is to say warm and humid, characterised by stable and elevated temperatures all year round (the average temperature is 26°), significant atmospheric humidity due to plenty of r ain, which falls all year round (the average rainfall is 2m).

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Thanks to its small population, significant forest resources and an abundance of petrol, Gabon is one of the most prosperous countries in Africa with one of the highest levels of human development on the continent. Gabon shows evidence of the oldest remains of multicellular life known to date (2017). They go back to 2.1 million years and were discovered in the region of Franceville in 2008.

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With regards to humans, there is evidence of a prehistoric population going as far back as 400,000 years ago and continuing up to the iron age. The six groups, including the Pigmies, which emerged from this population are the first known inhabitants of what is currently known as Gabon. These hunter gatherers settled there approximately five thousand years before the current era, followed by a wave of Bantu, which comprises forty-five different ethnicities. The Bantu left the sahelian zone, which was drying up, five thousand years ago and continued their expansion towards the south and east approximately 1000 or 2000 years before the current era.

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When the Bantu encountered the Pigmies, they discovered that this indigenous population of Africa practises the worship of animal spirits and is made up of “mediators of the sacred”, which change according to the rites.

Throughout the initiation, specific knowledge about the mastery of the forest and the weather elements (rain, lightening…) is acquired, giving rise to a shamanic conception of the workings of the world where the initiated knows how to get in contact with the spirits of nature in order to act upon any given symptoms.

This initiation, when undergone as a rite of passage into adulthood and with a view to encouraging social integration, consists primarily of the consumption of their most sacred plant: Iboga.

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The use of the Iboga root has been known to the Pigmies since time immemorial. The archaeologist Richard Oslisly recently confirmed having found traces of it in charcoal (athracology) that was over two thousand years old, found in a cave in La Lopé, in southern Gabon.

However, it would appear that the Pigmies only shared their knowledge of the “sacred wood” with the closest groups of Bantu during the middle of the 19th century. The first of these would have been the <span class="italic">Apinji</span> (literally <span class="italic">the forest</span>) and more specifically the <span class="italic">Apinji Mokodo</span> clan. Myth has it that the Apinji sought to get in contact with the realm of the dead.

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In order to do so, they would have consumed significant quantities of wood and would have consequently created the first ritualistic practices of the <span class="italic">Bwiti</span> religion, in order to protect themselves from the greater risks involved.

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The etymological root of the word <span class="italic">Bwiti</span>, according to M. Okaba, a linguist from the Chaillu Mountains, is a distortion of the Tsogho word <span class="italic">bo-hete</span>: “emancipation”, “liberation of a fluid” - (<span class="italic">Buetara</span>: “to draw” and <span class="italic">buera</span>: “to reach, to achieve…”).

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Bwiti, therefore, literally means that which enables man to find his freedom.

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Thus, Bwiti is a philosophy of liberation; it allows man to transcend matter, to become a <span class="italic">banzi</span>, which in the Tsogho language literally means “he who has hatched; who has come out of his shell”. And this philosophy is based on <span class="italic">eboghe</span>, “that which heals” (Iboga), <span class="italic">maganga</span> “that which allows a being to renew itself”, and <span class="italic">kangara</span>, “to heat up, regenerate” (the knowledge of plants).

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- Words of M. Hamidou Okaba.

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The arrival of the first Europeans in Gabon during the 15th century (the Portuguese followed by the Dutch) marked the beginning of the abandonment of the indigenous ancestral initiatory traditions due to the forced evangelisation of the Gabonese peoples as well as to the many consequences of the Slave Trade. The practice of Bwiti was then driven underground.

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France began its progressive occupation of Gabon during the middle of the 19th century, after a treaty signed with the “Roi Denis”, in 1839. In 1886, Gabon became a French colony and wouldn’t gain independence until 1960.

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The first time Iboga was referenced in the West was by British naturalist explorer Thomas Edward Bowlich, who, in his description of Gabon in 1819, mentions the existence of a plant used by the autochtones so that they could go on long walks and stay awake at night.

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From that point on, the enormous therapeutic potential of Iboga became increasingly apparent to western scientists, starting with French researchers, and its principal constituent Ibogaine was soon commercialised and was made available to the public in 1901 (<a target="\_blank" href="https://www.google.fr/search?client=firefox-b&dcr=0&q=dragées+nyrdahl&spell=1&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjnkaDOi8HXAhXQLFAKHcl1ByQQBQgkKAA"><span class="italic">nyrdahl</span> lozenges</a>).

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In 1962 an American researcher, Howard Lotsof, discovered for himself the <strong> anti-addictive properties of ibogaine, especially with regards to opiates and other narcotics (heroin, cocaine, crack methadone...)</strong> and started carrying out a series of studies which lead him to file multiple patents on its clinical use. He became an avid international proponent of ibogaine which, combined with the advent of the new media, namely the internet, led to a <strong>a growing global enthusiasm for Iboga</strong>. Ibogaine extracted from Iboga, mainly exported from Gabon, made its entry onto the American black market in the late 60s.

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In the light of this increasing international interest and potential issues with the sustainability of the resource as well as with the illegal nature of its exploitation, the late president of the Gabonese republic <strong>El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba declared Iboga a “national cultural heritage” and “strategic reserve” in July of 2000</strong>.

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Then in November 2011, Gabon became the first country in the world to ratify the <strong>Nagoya Protocol</strong> on the access to genetic resources and the <strong>fair and equal share </strong> of the benefits derived from their use according to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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Despite these commitments, there are, at this time, <strong>more than 200 health centres </strong> (official and informal) using iboga(ine) as well as <strong>dozens of websites</strong> reselling this precious resource, primarily of Gabonese origin and sold at premium prices but without any significant economical returns for Gabon or consideration of its sustainability.

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<ul>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Half of the planet’s forests were destroyed during the 20th century.</strong></li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> Due to the (often unpoliced) use of raw materials such as wood, diamond, gold and precious metals and also due to agriculture and livestock farming, <strong>two thirds of the Congo Basin Forest could be lost by 2040 if nothing is done.</strong></li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong> The end of the oil era in Gabon</strong> and the lack of economic diversity place a heavy and unprecedented burden on Gabon’s forest resources. </li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> The <strong>forest operators within the region almost systematically ignore their legal obligations</strong> to pay a pro-rated tax in proportion to the volume of wood taken, payable to the neighbouring village communities in accordance with <strong>Article 251 of Act No. 16/2001 on the Forest Code</strong> in Republic of Gabon (« <strong>terms of contract</strong> » rarely enforced or respected ).</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> The <strong>increasing desertification of community forests, the absence of supervision and the lack of means to promote awareness of</strong> the proper management of these forests, the impoverishment and ageing of the villagers as well as corruption expose the entire Gabonese fauna and flora to illegal exploitation which is both highly unsustainable and more and more irrecoverably destructive.

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<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Poaching and the poor management of the forest eco system </strong> are pushing the animals, in particular the elephants, slaughtered for their ivory and no longer able to get sufficient nourishment from the forest, to go and look for food in the village plantations, creating a <strong>conflict between humans and wildlife

</strong> that is very difficult to resolve.

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<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>The villagers lack the </strong>technical and financial means as well the knowledge and tools that would allow them to make full economical use of their natural and cultural heritage<strong>, to be able to engage in sustainable permaculture agro-forestry projects </strong>capable of providing them with food, medicinal and cosmetic self-sufficiency.</li>

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<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> Despite the public declaration of the late president of the Gabonese republic, El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba, made in the Council of Ministers on the 6th July 2000 which classified Iboga as a <span class="italic bold">"national cultural heritage”</span> and <span class="italic bold">”strategic reserve”</span><span class="italic"> (“to be protected from illegal exploitation”)</span>, <strong>no legal texts</strong> have been amended to this effect thus leaving the door wide open to the trafficking and biopiracy taking place.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> Iboga is an <strong>endemic plant of the equatorial forests of Central Africa</strong>, growing <strong> most abundantly in Gabon</strong>, although, to this day, it remains <strong>very difficult to cultivate</strong> outside of this region due to difficulties with the supply of viable seeds and also the lack of knowledge regarding the natural conditions necessary for its growth whilst preserving the botanical and chemical characteristics of each variety.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> Due to <strong>global over-consumption</strong> of Iboga, the <strong>poaching</strong> of animals that naturally plant it, <strong>deforestation</strong>, <strong>climate change</strong> and the <strong>abandonment of the traditional village way of life </strong>, Iboga is becoming increasingly rare in Gabon and <strong>could well disappear from the Gabonese public domain by 2022</strong> if no sustainable conservation/plantation projects are put in place.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> The traditionalist communities, in particular those which live in urban areas (more than 80% of the Gabonese population live in towns), find it more and more difficult to get hold of <strong>good quality and fairly priced Iboga</strong>. This causes <strong>serious public health problems</strong> (an upsurge in the sale of Iboga mixed with all sorts of inedible fillers, an increase in the number of <strong>fatal accidents</strong> due to the consumption of “fake Iboga”) and also problems <strong> preserving the Bwiti tradition</strong> as a whole (growing shortage of Iboga = <strong>increase in the consumption of alcohol</strong> and other psychoactive substances).</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> The natural reserves of Iboga in Gabon are mainly sold for export, all around the world, by <strong>complex informal networks</strong>, sometimes in conjunction with criminal organisations (cross-border poaching), <strong>without a fair sharing of the profits </strong> from this <strong>very lucrative business</strong> or <strong>quality control, or traceability</strong>.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Several international laboratories wish to capitalise on Iboga </strong> (mainly of Gabonese origin) and its chemical constituents and are looking for ways to synthesize the extracted ibogaine, <strong>actively filing for patents</strong> for its clinical use, with complete disregard for the principles upheld by the <strong> Nagoya Protocol</strong> of which Gabon is the first signatory in the world.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i>International scientists and therapists don’t really incorporate the thousands of years of knowledge accumulated by the Gabonese traditional communities about the use of Iboga nor does Gabon contribute to the discoveries made by international research regarding the field of therapeutic prospects and clinical applications.</ul>

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<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Identification of Gabonese associations</strong> who wish to develop agroforestry and permaculture projects focussing on the conservation of Iboga and "useful plants” of Gabon (Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) with significant food, cosmetic and therapeutic potential, as well as dwindling large trees).</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Funding</strong> the planting of NTFPs including Iboga.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Promotion of the ways and means to resolve main/wildlife conflicts </strong> around the village plantations.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Raise international public awareness</strong> of the impact of the growing global interest in Iboga(ine) on the traditional Gabonese communities as well as on Gabon’s flora and fauna.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> Provide <strong>legal expertise</strong>, in partnership with all the Gabonese institutions and international organisations that are involved in the sustainable and equitable management of the Gabonese forest sector and the protection of the biodiversity and cultural heritage, on the ways to <strong>regulate agriculture, the commercialisation and the therapeutic use of Iboga and its chemical constituents. </strong></li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> Organisation of <strong>technical and financial support for Gabonese authorities and associations</strong> responsible for the application of existing and upcoming legislation, with regards to Iboga and the proper management of community forests.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Classification of Iboga on CITES list III</strong> (Convention on international trade of species of wild flora and fauna under threat of extinction) or on the <strong>yellow/orange list of the IUCN</strong> (<a href="https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union\_internationale\_pour\_la\_conservation\_de\_la\_nature" target="\_blank">International Union for the Conservation of Nature</a>).</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Fight against</strong>unfair, illegal and unsustainable exploitation of Iboga and other animal or vegetable forest heritages.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Look for international scientific partners and sources of financing</strong> with a view to creating a <strong>botanical inventory</strong> of Iboga in Gabon and <strong>extensive studies of its ideal ecosystem</strong> (soil and climate conditions, pollination, relationships with neighbouring flora and fauna).</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Mediation</strong> between identified international partners and the Gabonese Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Scientific Research within the context of establishing cooperation agreements.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Publication</strong> of a “<strong>review of Iboga in Gabon and abroad</strong>” v2.0.</li>

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<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> In collaboration with traditional practitioners, <strong>compiling and exchange of information on the best practices</strong> that are an integral part of traditional culture and use of Iboga as well as other medicinal plants within the territory of Gabon.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> <strong>Collection of seeds of each species of Iboga</strong> with a view to creating a <strong>seedbank</strong> for the planting projects in Gabon, then, under strict conditions, abroad.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> Development of a <strong>partnership between "modern medicine" and "traditional medicine"</strong>, between university researchers, national/international scientists, therapists using Iboga and its derivatives throughout the world and the traditional Gabonese communities in order to <strong>consolidate clinical data</strong> on individuals being treated with Iboga(ine).</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> Organisation of a <strong>national conference </strong> and then an international conference on the topic of Iboga.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> Development/Promotion of <strong>multi-sectorial tourist routes</strong> (ecological, cultural and scientific) to a national and international audience wishing to discover the unique characteristics of Gabon, associated with a harmonious life in the equatorial forests of Central Africa.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> Development/Promotion of <strong>traditional Gabonese crafts</strong>.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> Creation of an <strong>agricultural cooperative </strong> covering the nine provinces of Gabon and monitoring the best practices In the field of sustainable Agroforestry followed by the development of an <strong>”organic fairtrade”</strong>label.</li>

<li class="scrollFadeUp"><i class="fa fa-angle-right" aria-hidden="true"></i> National and international promotion of labelled Non-Timber Forest Products from village associations that are partners of Blessings Of The Forest.</li>

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