

Summary of Conclusions reached at the 1st Regional Meeting of the IUCN-SSC Crocodile Specialist Group for West Africa on Conservation and Captive Management of Crocodiles, Tapoa, Niger, 13-15 November 2007

1. Objectives

Following the different presentations given and the discussions which these triggered, three working groups were formed to consider following issues:

- Group 1: Elaboration of conservation and sustainable use strategies for crocodiles in West Africa.
- Group 2: Use and benefits of crocodiles to human populations.
- Group 3: Institutional and human capacity building on crocodilian management (technical and scientific) starting from the bottom.

(The document is the summary of what the 3 working groups discussed at first separately and subsequently and finally in a plenary session in order to reach this consensus document)

2. State of Art (crocodilian management and actors involved)

The state of art does concern institutional, political, legal, technical and follow-up/evaluation aspects

2.1. Institutional aspects

On a government level, among those countries that were present at the meeting (Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger), one can distinguish between two types of actors:

- **Institutional actors**
Institutional actors are the Ministries which are responsible for the wild fauna of the countries concerned.
- **Other actors**
Other actors are the civil society, NGO's and scientific research institutions present in the countries. However in the majority of the countries of the region (of West Africa) no specific persons or personal bodies have been identified. Any rare specialists have not been recorded.

2.2. Political and legal aspects

On the political side it is important to note that in the majority of the countries concerned strategies on poverty reduction as well as national plans on the environment and on sustainable development have been put in place. Therefore, sub-regional organisations such as UEMOA and CEDEAO command politics on agriculture, fishery resources or on environmental matters which all are by themselves important for the conservation and sustainable management of crocodiles.

2.3. Legal status of the species

The States present at the meeting all noted the existence of legislation and regulations that classify crocodiles as totally protected species. But the difficulty is that the legislation is insufficiently implemented because of their limited general distribution and insufficient qualified human resources due to material and financial constraints.

The personal in charge for the conservation of the wild fauna assumes that in certain circumstances the conservation of crocodiles isn't the first priority when it comes in general to species that require a significant amount of capacities against poaching.

In reality the status of the species (distribution, population size, etc.) is in many instances is not known.

2.4. International cooperation

On the search for common and adaptive solutions to relief the threat on the natural resources in general this has brought the governments to engage themselves equally both on the sub-regional national as well as on the international level.

Therefore the governments have signed and ratified CITES. The common will to address the question of crocodiles and the role they play in the ecosystems must allow governments both to conserve and manage these species in a concerted manner for the profit of the respective communities in the states of the region.

2.5. Status of crocodilians

There are three species of crocodilians occurring in the countries of the region:

- *Crocodylus niloticus*
- *Mecistops cataphractus*
- *Osteolaemus tetraspis*

In the absence of ongoing ecological data on crocodilians the governments in the region don't have sufficient scientific information at their disposal this does also affect wildlife department officials to efficiently control poaching activities.

Moreover, crocodilians in the region are threatened by the phenomena of recurrent droughts, siltation of watercourses, different pollutants, the deviation of normal watercourses of the rivers, and the pressure of agricultural activities, in particular cotton farming.

The deficits in scientific knowledge and therefore an insufficient continuing ecological assessment constitute a major obstacle for the rational management of the crocodiles and a real threat for its continuity.

2.6. Habitat

The crocodile habitats in the sub-region are the watersheds, lakes, dams, ponds or other wetland zones. Continuing degradation of the crocodile populations has been noted due to:

- loss and fragmentation of habitat
- extension of surfaces for agriculture practices (water use for irrigation, pollution of water due to agricultural activities)
- mining development and its effects on rivers and humid zones
- introduction of exotic species
- industrial development (heating and pollution of water)

Meanwhile some initiatives are noted such as:

- implementation of the programme against silting of the river Niger (PLCE)
- the framework programme on the improvement of the environment by UEMOA
- the management plan on inland fisheries by UEMOA
- the ECOPAS programme

2.7. Ways of exploitation/valorisation

The ways of exploitation/valorisation which one can find in the region despite CITES are among following:

- pharmacopoeia
- cultural and spiritual rites
- leather production and manufactured products
- domestication for guarding purposes
- meat
- commercialisation of products and sub-products
- captive breeding or ranching(unofficially, unprofessional and frequently informal)
- capture for scientific purposes
- ecotourism

On the contrary, the limitation of traditional forms of exploitation and the risk associated with such use on the indefinite survival of the species, as well as the loss of traditional local knowledge, are becoming more and more worrying.

2.8. Actions on education and sensitization

In all countries of the region there have been environmental education programs put into place. However these programs don't always take into account crocodilians. Television and the radio have until now only been little used in order to sensitize the public about environmental issues.

2.9. Human/crocodile conflict

The crocodile habitat has been over the past more and more reduced. There are concerns that in the future human/crocodile conflicts will increase.

3. Strategy

Any regional strategy should integrate national strategies along several axes:

- Elaboration of a common crocodile conservation and management policy
- Harmonisation of national regulations for crocodile management
- Strengthening of human and institutional capacities for better management of crocodilians
- Taking into account of any crocodilians which are already part of different plans established for the management of natural resources
- Development of crocodilian monitoring and research
- Elaboration of programs on information, education and communication for all actors involved with crocodilians in the region
- Strengthening of sub-regional, regional and international cooperation and collaboration on crocodilian conservation issues
- Mobilisation of necessary financial resources to implement the strategy

4. Action plan to implement the strategy

4.1. Elaboration of a common crocodile conservation and management policy

- Elaboration of terms of reference (TOR) for a sub-regional policy
- Distribution of the TOR to the Governments of the sub-region
- Inform and sensitize the Governments
- Elaborate the policy project
- Declare as legally valid the policy on the national and provincial level
- Approve the policy among the ministers in charge for the conservation and management of wild fauna

4.2. Harmonization of national regulations for the management of crocodilians

- Undertake a state of the art assessment of the national regulations (regulation induced barriers could restrict commercialisation of crocodilian products)
- Elaborate a project for common legislative text
- Declare as legally valid the project for common legislative text

4.3. Strengthening human and institutional capacities for better management of crocodilians

- Train Government technicians and scientists in all necessary fields required for proper management of crocodilians (biology, ecology, physiology, ethology, taxonomy, genetics etc.)
- Capitalize and evaluate the local and indigenous traditional knowledge
- Put in place simple methodological and didactical aid tools for the management of crocodilians

4.4. Taking into account of any crocodilians that are already part of different plans established for the management of natural resources

- Sensitize the governments in the sub-region, in particular the respective institutions
- Sensitize all stakeholders in nature conservation (NGOs, etc.)

4.5. Development of crocodilian monitoring and research

- Research the distribution of the crocodilian species present in the sub-region (by giving a priority if possible to *Mecistops cataphractus*)
- Identify the taxonomy of the species on the sub regional level
- Identify priority areas for the conservation of the respective crocodilian species
- Identify the threats (...for crocodiles) and propose solutions (...to alleviate those)
- Continue research which assists in the conservation of crocodilians (ecology, impact of water pollution, agriculture, industry, household waste and water extraction)
- Collect information on human/crocodile conflict and propose solutions (...for alleviation)

4.6. Elaboration of programs on information, education and communication for all actors involved with crocodilians in the region

- Work out an Information, Education and Communication plan targeted at officials and the general public
- Transform legislative and regulatory texts as well as any biodiversity related conventions and CITES in common language
- Work out and distribute a communication plan which builds upon existing local media (television, radio, written journals....)
- Develop and held in common language didactic and educational materials on the ecology and the conservation of crocodiles

4.7. Strengthening of sub-regional, regional and international cooperation and collaboration on crocodilian conservation issues

- Identify focal points and the respective personnel resources in each country and put into place a sub-regional expert pool together with an appropriate communication mechanism

- Make sub-regional crocodile meetings an ongoing institution
- Implement the recommendations of the IUCN-SSC Crocodile Specialist Group
- Put into place focal points which are charged to follow up respective initiatives and evaluations

4.8. Identification and improvement of the structures in captive management

- Compile the different already existing initiatives
- Train new actors in crocodile conservation and management in the sub-region
- Legalize and develop the installation of traditionally existing captive breeding facilities in order for allowing legal access to products and sub-products for traditional pharmaceutical purposes which should assist to reduce ongoing off takes from wild populations

4.9. Mobilisation of necessary financial resources to implement the strategy

- Mobilize financial resources at sub-regional institutions and at the governments level
- Start lobbying at PTF staff level
- Mobilize PTF staff on conservation concerns with crocodiles

5. Follow-up of action plan implementation

- Put into place a sub-regional mailing list (one sub-regional initiator and one focal point for each country)
- Exchange information and reports periodically by appropriate means (if possible through electronic tools)
- Conduct a second regional crocodilian meeting for West Africa in 2009 or 2010