

## Interaction between local institutions in a context of centralized governance of the Nazinga Game Ranch (NGR), Centre-South of Burkina Faso

*Original Research Article*

### ABSTRACT

The Nazinga Game Ranch (NGR), located in the south-central region of Burkina Faso, was established to promote sustainable socio-economic development and the harmonious and sustainable management of wildlife resources. This article analyzes inter-institutional interactions in the governance of the Nazinga Game Ranch (NGR) within a context of state-centralized governance. It focuses on examining the conflicting, collaborative, and indifferent relationships between the local institutions involved. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, incorporating a literature review, interviews, and focus groups. Data processing and analysis were carried out using R software. The results highlight that two institutions, namely the Forestry Administration (UGN) and the Village Hunting Committees (CVC), occupy a central position in the conflicts. Projects and programs were found to play a significant role, cooperating with most of the institutions involved, except for the prefecture and among themselves. Relationships of indifference were identified between the UGN's partner projects and programs, local associations, the CVCs, and the Village Development Committees (CVDs), as well as between the Guiaro prefecture and the municipal government, and between the municipal authorities of the two neighboring communes. The analysis in terms of intensity shows that the conflicts, although not reaching maximum intensity, affect the management of the NGR. Furthermore, some collaborations, particularly those involving NGOs, play a decisive

**Keywords:** Interaction, centralized governance, Nazinga Game Ranch, Burkina Faso

### Introduction

Interactions between the various stakeholders play a decisive role in the conservation or destruction of plant and animal species (Kouaro, 2020, p.214). In Africa, protected areas, which are veritable reservoirs of biodiversity, have become major development issues, attracting increasing attention because of their multiple ecological, economic and social benefits (Sène, 2022, p.279). The sustainable management of these areas is now an imperative for the sustainable development of our planet, requiring informed decisions that balance economic

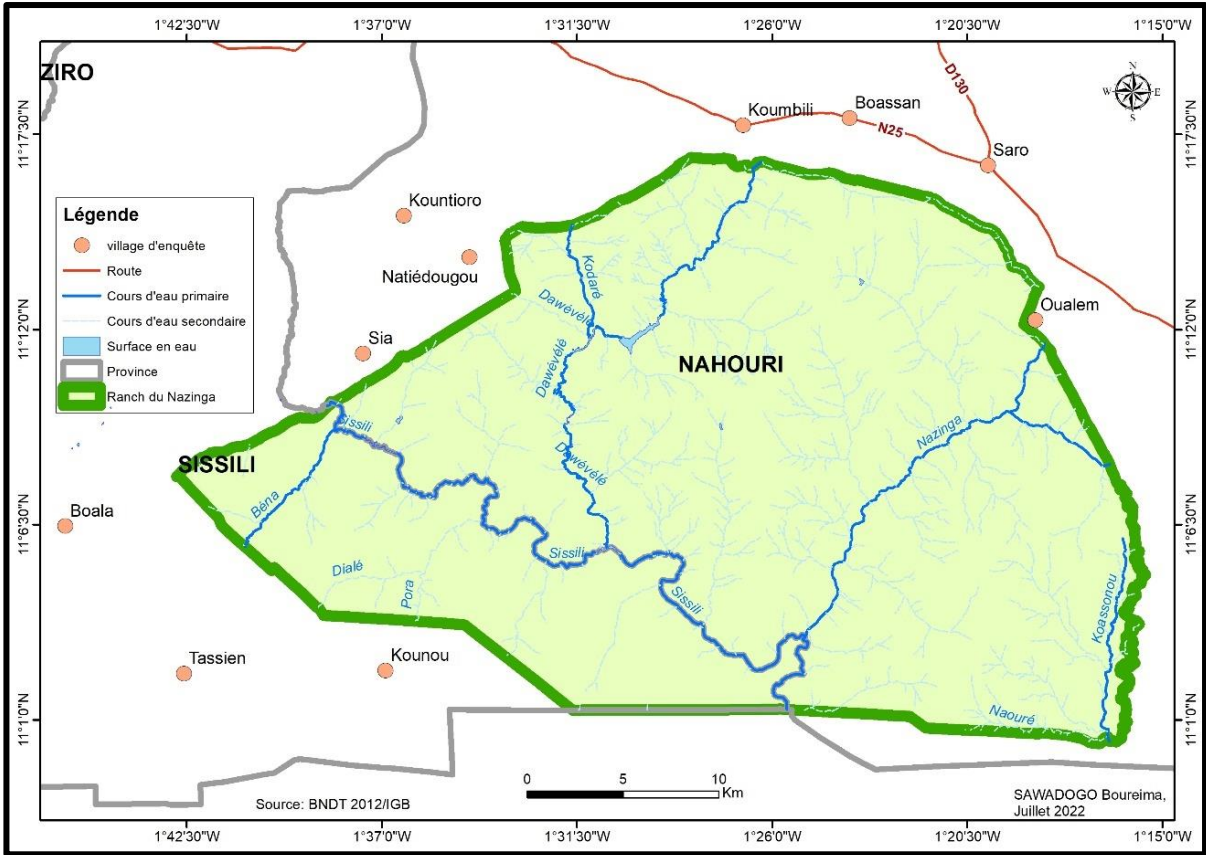
growth and the preservation of natural resources (Van den Hoof et al., 2021, p.4). In this context, inclusive governance of natural resources is an essential approach for tackling the complex challenges facing protected areas, particularly poaching, pastoral and agricultural pressures, and social inequalities. This approach not only protects biodiversity, but also seeks to promote social equity and long-term sustainability, by integrating the needs and aspirations of local communities (Sawadogo et al., 2024, p.119). The sustainability of protected areas depends largely on the inclusion of local populations and the fight against poverty in these areas. However, conservation policies, which are often marked by ambiguity and divergent interpretations, have sometimes led to conflict between the various stakeholders involved in managing these areas. The Nazinga Game Ranch, covering an area of 91,300 hectares, plays an important role in the conservation of wildlife resources in Burkina Faso. Located in the centre-south region, the site is home to remarkable biodiversity of flora and fauna. However, the breakdown of traditional management systems for forest and wildlife resources, combined with the poverty of local communities, is encouraging local people to exploit these resources illegally. As a result, the ranch is facing considerable pressure from poaching, bush fires, excessive logging, unplanned occupation of the land by farmers and herders, and over-exploitation of resources. These activities risk jeopardizing the sustainability of this Village Zone of Hunting Interest (VZHI), which is interconnected with the Ranch. According to Sawadogo, Zabré, et al. (2024), decentralizing decision-making power from the State to local institutions could mitigate the negative environmental and socio-economic impacts of the Nazinga Game Ranch. In this context, it is pertinent to ask the following question: What is the nature and intensity of the interactions between local institutions in the governance of this Ranch?. This study aims to analyse the interactions between the local institutions involved in the governance of the Nazinga Game Ranch (NGR), exploring the dynamics of cooperation and tension that influence the sustainability and effectiveness of this protected area.

## **1. Methodology**

### **1.1. Presentation of the study area**

The Nazinga Game Ranch (NGR), founded in 1979 on the Nazinga classified forest and extended to adjacent riparian territories, is located in the southern region of Burkina Faso, between latitudes 11°00' and 11°18' North and longitudes 01°16' and 01°43' West (Ouédraogo, 2005, Amahowe et al., 2012, p.614). With a surface area of around 97,000 hectares, the NGR was created with the main aim of reconciling biodiversity conservation with local socio-

economic development, by actively involving local communities in the management and protection of natural resources (Sawadogo et al., 2024). The Nazinga Ranch was originally created by Clark and Robert Lungreen, two young Canadian naturalists of Burkinabe origin, who had a passion for raising wild animals. Aware that poaching, recurrent livestock incursions and excessive exploitation of classified wild areas by farmers were seriously threatening the survival of the country's protected areas, they decided to take action. They implemented the concept of game ranching, which is based on the sustainable exploitation of wildlife. The aim is to capture, in a controlled manner, a large but managed number of animals in the wild, for commercial purposes and to promote game-watching tourism. However, the work of Sawadogo et al. (2024, p. 416) reveals that some local institutions are marginalized in the governance of the Nazinga Game Ranch (NGR). Indeed, the UGN remains the main entity involved in this governance process. NGOs and local associations/groups show a moderate level of engagement, while customary, prefectural, and municipal authorities, as well as the Village Development Committees (CVD), are marginalized. Nevertheless, the active involvement of some local institutions, particularly customary authorities, could offer an opportunity for transformation and redistribution of power at the local level by playing a central role in anticipatory strategies (Sawadogo, Zan, et al., 2024, p. 146).



## ***Map 1: Location of the Study Area***

### **1.2. Theoretical data analysis model**

Moreno's studies have shown that there are only three possible (subjective) human relationships: sympathy, antipathy and indifference. By analysing the results, we can model a system (the group and its members). The representation of this system gives the sociogram (Maman, 1993, p.108). The sociogram thus makes it possible to express the currents of sympathy, antipathy or indifference which exist between the members of a group. The sociogram is a conceptual tool for understanding the order of a political discourse. It is a way of thinking about both the world and the text (Claude Duchet, 1995, p.197, Wesley, 2023, p.13). The concept of the sociogram is essential in the context of organisational conflict. It mainly studies the interacting individuals in the social network, formal and informal groups, as well as each person interacting with different actors. This has made it possible to map relationships and understand the type of relationship they have. In this way, the study used this concept to deepen the analysis of the relationships between the different stakeholders, which made the fieldwork possible.

### **1.3. Data collection and analysis**

A mixed method approach was adopted in this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the local institutions concerned, in particular the Nazinga Management Unit (UGN), members of the Village Hunting Committees (VHC) and the Village Development Council (VDC), as well as the customary, municipal and prefectural authorities, NGOs and associations/groups. A total of 45 interviews were conducted. The institutions were selected on the basis of a literature review, analysing management reports, dissertations and theses dealing with the ranch. This review made it possible to capture the specific contributions of each institution. In addition, the snowball sampling method, combined with collaboration with the forestry administration, made it possible to identify and include all the local institutions involved in the governance of the Nazinga Game Ranch (NGR). At the same time, focus groups were organised in each village, bringing together members of the local community for interactive discussions on their involvement in the governance of the ranch, their concerns and their proposals. Interviews were conducted with local institutions to gather information on their perceptions of relationships and interactions. The intensity of relations between these institutions was assessed using a scale from 0 to 4. Each value corresponds to a different level of intensity: 0 indicates a total absence of intensity, 1 reflects a very low intensity, 2 indicates

a low intensity, and 3 represents a moderate intensity. Value 4 corresponds to high intensity and maximum intensity.

## **2. Results**

### **2.1. Institutions involved in the governance of the NGR**

Many institutions are involved in the management of the Nazinga Game Reserve (NGR). The administration of this reserve is entrusted to the Nazinga Management Unit (NMU), a technical entity reporting administratively to the National Office of Protected Areas (NOPA). This office was established by Decree No. 2008 171/PRES/PM/MEFMCECV/MAHRH of 16 April 2008, with a revision of its statutes approved by Decree No. 2017-0678/PRES/PM/MEEVCC/MINEFID of 21 July 2017. NOPA's fundamental objective is to ensure the application of national forest policy directives, with a view to conserving biodiversity, combating desertification and promoting sustainable economic development in Burkina Faso. At local level, the NMU is headed by a unit manager, who is responsible for coordinating the various operational sections. The NMU's activities are regularly supported by communal foresters. In addition, customary institutions are involved in the governance of the NGR through their right of usufruct. However, it appears that, individually and on a voluntary basis, they are continuing their efforts to raise awareness about the degradation of natural resources. The existence of sacred places on the ranch, such as the altars in each village, forces the traditional chiefs to take an interest in the management of the NGR. In addition, the involvement of local communities in governance helps to establish a solid basis for the participative, integrated and effective management of protected areas. According to Law No. 003-2011/AN on Burkina Faso's forestry code, Article 35 stipulates that the State forest estate, including the ranch, is managed by the State forestry services. Article 38 states that local authorities are responsible for managing their protected areas through partnership-based management structures. According to Decree no. 2014-929/PRES/PM/MATD/MEAHA/MEF/MRAH/MFPTSS on the terms and conditions for the transfer of State powers and resources to municipalities in the field of the environment and natural resource management, local authorities must participate "in the conservation and management of renewable natural resources of regional or national interest" (Chapter II, Article 4, paragraph 10). However, the involvement of municipalities has mainly been limited to village areas of hunting interest (VZHI) due to the lack of a clearly defined role for these institutions.

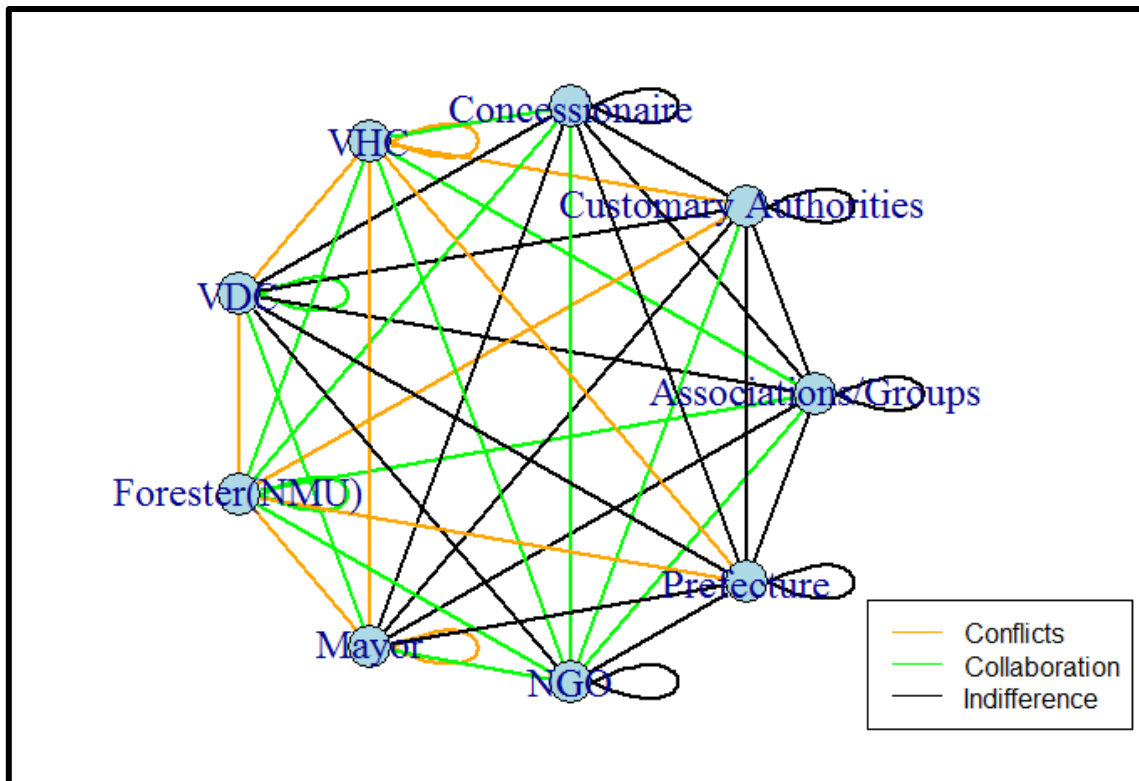
The projects and programmes play an important role as technical and financial partners of the NGR, providing various types of expertise and resources needed for the smooth running of the

activities. NGR partners include the Programme National de Gestion des Terroirs phase 3 (PNGT2-3), the Programme d'Amélioration de la Productivité et de la Sécurité Alimentaire (PAPSA), the West African Science Service Center on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL), Italian cooperation and the Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme. These initiatives have covered several aspects, such as biodiversity conservation, capacity building, the implementation of adapted technologies and local development. Between 2009 and 2019, these partnerships have made it possible to mobilise the sum of FCFA 1,408,500,000 to strengthen the material, technical and organisational capacities of the NGR. The creation of the NGR has brought about structural change in neighbouring villages, encouraging the emergence of new organisations. The groups and associations involved in managing the NGR can be divided into two distinct categories. The first category concerns those involved in wildlife management. In this respect, 11 Village Hunting Committees (VHCs) have been set up in each village, together forming the Village Wildlife Management Committee (VWMC).

The concession holder, recognised by the State, is a natural or legal person under private law with the right to exploit the natural wildlife resources of the ranch for profit, such as hunting or ranching. His intervention is always for a fee, giving rise to the payment of an annual royalty, set according to the potential of the area. In Nazinga, NAZINGA SAFARI has been a key partner of the NMU, working in the field of hunting tourism and biodiversity conservation. This partnership has raised a total of FCFA 308,955,747 between 2016 and 2018, covering activities such as regular and special safaris, supervision of tourists' stays, management of hunting camps, catering services and access to the swimming pool.

## **2.2. Types of relationships between local institutions in the governance of the NGR**

Within the framework of the governance of the Nazinga Game Ranch (NGR), the nature of relations between local institutions can be divided into three distinct types: conflictual relations, collaboration, and relations of indifference or sympathy. Figure 1 shows the different types of relationship established between the various local institutions.



**Figure 1 : Types of Relationships Between Local Institutions**

Source: Field survey, 2023

### 2.2.1. Conflictual relationships

The term conflict in this study refers to the expression of tensions, whether latent or manifest, linked to diverging interests. The analysis showed that two institutions, the forestry administration and the VHCs, occupied a central position in the conflicts. This centrality stemmed from their role as managers of protected areas, with the NGR for the foresters and the VZHI for the VHCs. These two entities were in conflict with four other institutions: the municipal, prefectural and customary authorities and the VDCs. In addition, the VDCs were confronted with internal conflicts between villages, as well as tensions with the same institutions as the NMU. Intra-institutional conflicts were also observed, particularly between the Guiaro and Béhia town councils.

### 2.2.2. Sympathetic relations

In the governance of the RGN, certain institutions have developed relationships marked by mutual collaboration, reciprocal support and a shared sense of goodwill. In this relational context, the projects and programmes have played a central role, cooperating with the majority of the institutions involved, with the exception of the prefecture, and with each other. This configuration is due to the effective centralisation of the management of the ranch. The UMN

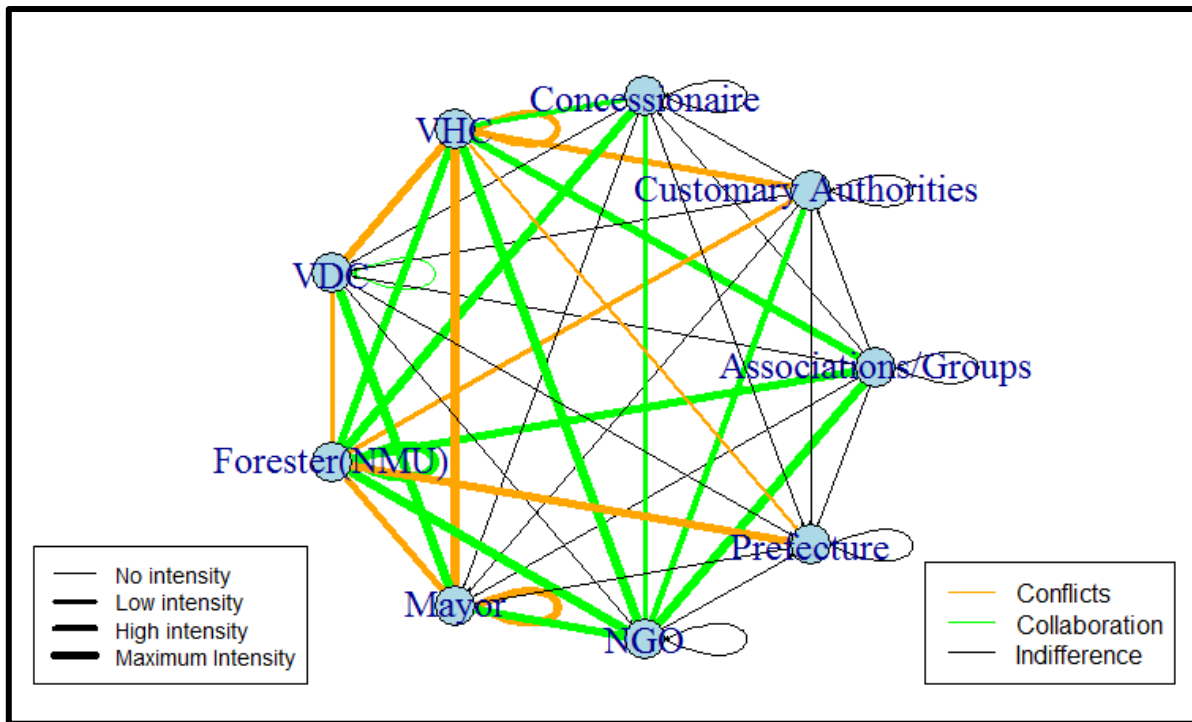
also played an important role, establishing connections with most of the institutions, with the exception of the prefectural authorities, the customary authorities, the VDCs and the Béhia town hall. The VHCs have collaborated with the forestry administration, NGOs, associations and groups, as well as with concession holders. Civil society organisations also worked with NGOs, foresters and CVCs. Finally, the VDCs worked mainly with the municipal authorities. However, some institutions maintained relations of indifference towards others.

### **2.2.3. Relations of indifference**

Relations between certain local institutions were characterised by mutual recognition without effective collaboration in management interventions. Although they were not in open conflict, they seemed reluctant to work together. This was the case between NMU's partner projects and programmes, local associations, VHCs and VDCs, as well as between the prefecture of Guiaro and the commune's mayor's office, and between the municipal authorities of the two riverside communes. The lack of collaboration between these institutions has hampered the coherence of interventions, resulting in overlapping roles and responsibilities. For example, cooperation between the VHCs and the VDCs could have facilitated decision-making and monitoring of the ranch. Similarly, the Guiaro prefecture and the Guiaro town hall would have benefited from a unified approach. The lack of synergy between projects and programmes also limited sustainable support for the ranch's activities. Although the projects and programmes explained their lack of co-ordination in terms of differing mandates, objectives or competencies, greater co-operation would have helped to resolve some of the ranch's problems in a sustainable way, particularly in terms of roads and the construction of water reservoirs. Local civil society associations, with their in-depth knowledge of local problems, could have contributed to interventions that would have benefited both the ranch and VZHI. The level of collaboration and conflict varied between institutions.

### **2.3. Intensity between institutions in the governance of the NGN**

The intensity of relations between institutions in governance refers to the level or depth of interactions and connections established between them. Analysis of this intensity reveals two types of relationship: collaboration and conflict. Relationships of indifference were not observed, as the surveys did not allow them to be ranked in order of importance. Figure 2 illustrates the degree of relationship between the different institutions.



**Figure 2: Intensity of relationship between the different institutions**

Source: Field survey, 2023

### 2.3.1. Intensity of conflictual relationships

The field surveys show that the intensity of intra- and inter-institutional conflicts varies from one relationship to another. The graphical analysis shows that no conflict of the highest intensity has been observed in the governance of the NGR, demonstrating that this governance has so far not given rise to open conflicts between the various institutions. However, three high-intensity conflicts were recorded: between the VHCs and the mayor's office, in particular the mayor's office in Guiaro; between the forestry administration and the prefectures; and between the VDCs and the VHCs. Low-intensity conflicts were also observed between the two riverside town halls, between the Béhia town hall and the Forester (NMU), between the customary authorities and the NMU, between the customary authorities and the VHCs, and within the VHCs. On the other hand, there was no conflict between the VHCs and the prefectures, or between the VDCs and the NMU.

Tensions between the VHCs and the Guiaro town hall arose from the preference of NMU officials to pay tourism revenues directly to the town hall, to the detriment of the VHCs. The VHCs felt that this practice was inappropriate and recommended that the funds be paid directly to the villages. In addition, the VHCs regretted not knowing how the town hall used these funds. The villages on the banks of the Sissili felt that it was unfair that the taxes were only paid to the

Guiaro town council, and that the Béhia town council should also benefit. It is therefore imperative to re-examine the distribution of the profits from the ranch. However, it is important to note that the VHCs are confusing roles and responsibilities, as according to their terms of reference, they should be raising funds from the management of VZHIs, donations and partnerships.

Tensions have also arisen between the VHCs and local populations following the creation of Village Hunting Interest Areas (VZHI). Critics believe that this encroaches on arable land, leading to disputes within the villages. Conflicts have arisen between the VHCs and the Guiaro town hall, as well as claims by the two neighbouring prefectures that they are not sufficiently taken into account in the management, despite the texts giving the RGN autonomy over the management of the ranch. Among the managers, the eco-guards expressed their dissatisfaction with the working conditions, in particular the pay, which was deemed insufficient. They have also criticised the refusal of their postings to other protected areas, which makes it difficult for them to work in their home village, where they are badly perceived. They are often accused of complicity when poachers are apprehended, which hinders the establishment of positive relations with local populations. In addition, they have reported that some of their colleagues have retired without being declared to the funds.

### **2.3.2. The intensity of sympathetic relations**

The graph reveals several significant trends in terms of collaboration between the different institutions involved in the governance of the NGR. Three pairs felt they had the highest level of collaboration: the NMU and the NGOs, the associations/groups and the NGOs, and the VDC and the town hall. Cooperation between these entities was motivated by common objectives or a shared vision of management. NGOs stood out as the institutions most committed to collaboration, often involved in intense partnerships with other institutions. This highlights their central role in the collaborative network and their ability to work with several entities.

In fact, the NGOs are cooperating with the forester (NMU) in the management of the ranch as financial and technical partners, as the NMU's technical adviser points out. They have financed civil society associations to carry out micro-projects at local level, such as reforestation and capacity building for local people. High-intensity collaboration was observed between the associations/groups and the VHCs, between the associations/groups and the NMU, and between the concessionaires and the NMU and NGOs. These strategic collaborations were aimed at

solving specific problems. The collaboration between the associations and the VHCs concerned the mobilisation of technical and financial partners for the management of the VZHIs, while the collaboration with the foresters (NMU) pursued similar objectives. The concessionaires worked with the NMU to promote wildlife resources through tourism. NGOs acted as financial partners in most of the institutional collaborations.

Weaker levels of collaboration were observed between the customary authorities and the NGOs, between the municipal authorities and the NGOs, and within the VDCs. The weakness of these collaborations can be explained by divergent interests, differences in approach or obstacles to be overcome in order to strengthen inter-institutional cooperation. Collaboration between customary authorities, religious leaders and NGOs has focused on training and the development of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), as well as on training local people to monitor protected areas. It is important to note that there has been little collaboration between concessionaires and VHCs in the management of the NGR. Improving relations between these two parties could lead to better coordination of activities and more effective results in the management of the ranch.

### **3. Discussion**

Many researchers have mentioned the study of the relationships between the various players. Among them, Dumoulin Kervran, (2005), Mbairamadji (2009), Lequin (2009), Robert (2009), Lillo & Nadeau (2020), Perroulaz (2004), Anon & Brou, (2019) have made a significant contribution to understanding this issue. Local governance seeks to integrate the various formal and informal relationships that exist between different local territorial actors (such as local authorities, businesses, associations, etc.) and that impact the performance and efficiency of economic systems at local level (Zbir, 2020, p.336). According to Perroulaz (2004, p.19), research needs to be carried out into measuring the relative effectiveness of the various players. NGOs have often been criticised for the lack of transparency in the activities and decision-making processes of government cooperation agencies; however, these same aspects are not always clearer within some NGOs. Translated with. The newsletters of many NGOs talk mainly about successes, but very few recognise that development aid also involves failures, projects that need to be redirected, and complex relationships between 'donors' and recipient populations. According to the analysis of Fung and Wright (2005) quoted by Robert (2009, p.29), it would be naïve to ignore the existence of power asymmetries in participatory deliberation processes and to believe that the question of power does not weigh on participatory dynamics. Dumoulin Kervran (2005, p.24) has noted that environmental NGOs adopt very

different positions on conservation. The major Western or global NGOs, which influence development and environmental conservation policies, have maintained strong relationships with indigenous communities. Some of these NGOs have favoured partnerships with extractive companies rather than local communities, for example by sitting on their boards of directors. The main complaint of indigenous organisations is that they are excluded from natural resource management processes, despite their requests to participate. Nature conservation has thus served as a pretext for entrusting the management of indigenous territories to non-indigenous people, thereby imposing greater constraints on local populations than on the populations of the North. What's more, indigenous people have often been obliged to repair some of the environmental damage caused by northern populations (Kapp, 2008; Robert, 2009, p.20). Stakeholders: Referring to stakeholders in the same way implicitly leads to them being considered on an equal footing. However, civil society organisations are very unequal in terms of financial and cultural resources, their ability to make their voices heard and therefore their power (Robert, 2009, p.29.). So the inequality of networks is evident in governance

Equality between institutions is often apparent. It does not reflect the reality of the forces at play in negotiations and decision-making. The weight of local NGR institutions remains negligible compared to projects and programmes with financial resources. This has resulted in the inability of associations and groups to defend the common interest, particularly that of the sustainable and inclusive conservation of the NGR. Their participation in meetings is often limited to a mere formal presence. Decisions are often subtly influenced, and the presence of these institutions makes all participants responsible for the outcome. As a result, the claims, oppositions and divergent interests of certain groups quickly tend to become secondary. What takes precedence is the demonstration of the ability to reach a consensus, symbolised by an agreement. As a result, the agreement itself becomes more important than its content. Robert (2009, p.26) thus asserts that the representation of the people is being replaced by a system of participation by notables (now renamed experts) and lobbies.

However, in the context of participatory governance, relational changes are required between the multiple levels involved: thus, rather than having to go through the central state, local bodies from different territories interact directly (Iclei, 2020 quoted by Lillo & Nadeau, 2020, p.145). The institutional reforms introduced by National Office of Protected Areas (NOPA) via the NMU have disrupted the existing forest management system and given rise to a new local system dominated by a few influential actors, characterised by relationships of dependence or interdependence between these actors. This new configuration has led to the marginalisation of

local people in the decision-making process concerning the governance of the NGR. Most of the associations and groups involved in the governance of the NGR see themselves as competitors and are largely dependent on the NMU to mobilise partners and carry out activities. However, public participation should bring about a change in the dynamics of relations between the various institutions involved in governance. Local authorities should interact directly with each other, without necessarily involving the central state.

According to Pizongo (2017), four of the ten VZHIs are occupied by agricultural activities: Koumbili, Boassan, Saro and Walême-Tiakané. Three others are under heavy pressure (Kounou, Kountiouro and Natiédougou), while the remaining two, Sya and Boala, are in good condition and allow small-scale hunting. Some traditional chiefs criticised the authorities, accusing them of favouring wildlife over human life, and expressing regret at the loss of arable land and the managers' failure to honour contractual commitments. Local residents also expressed disappointment at the lack of development of basic social infrastructure, initially promised by the NGR authorities. As Mastebroek (1989), quoted by Cadoret & Beuret (2022, p.14), points out, participatory processes can transform conflicts into constructive negotiations, thereby reducing tensions and promoting sustainable resource management. However, this requires recognition of local rights and greater involvement of communities in decisions that directly affect their environment and livelihoods. An in-depth understanding of the dynamics of conflicts and crises in natural resource management is essential if effective and sustainable strategies are to be developed. This implies not only adaptive resource management, but also the transformation of institutional frameworks to incorporate the diverse perspectives and needs of local and national stakeholders. Despite these tensions, some of the institutions involved in NGR governance maintain good relations, demonstrating the potential for constructive collaboration towards more inclusive and sustainable natural resource management.

## **5. Recommendations for Sustainable and Inclusive Governance of the Nazinga Game Ranch (NGR)**

It is essential to clearly and unambiguously inform and explain to local populations the benefits of project and program interventions for the sustainable management of the Nazinga Game Ranch. Managers, as well as projects and programs, must incorporate major considerations such as climate change, insecurity, social organization, and cultural beliefs into their interventions. It is crucial to promote a genuine appropriation of the Ranch's management by local institutions, particularly recognized and credible customary authorities among local residents. Local committees should be integrated into traditional and local resource governance systems

and be inclusive to represent all resource users. Moreover, conservation efforts should be coupled with initiatives aimed at reducing the poverty of local populations. Establishing projects and programs that engage youth and women in the villages, especially during the dry season, is necessary. Conservation projects should focus on diversifying activities to improve the livelihoods of local communities, with advocacy for vulnerable social groups such as youth and women. Finally, it is imperative to enforce current legislation, such as the forestry code and decentralization law, and to revise decision-making processes to be more inclusive and adapted to local realities, avoiding confusion between information frameworks and decision-making frameworks.

## **6. Conclusion**

Analysis of inter-institutional interactions in the governance of the Nazinga Game Ranch (NGR) reveals a complexity marked by dynamics of conflict, collaboration and indifference. Although some cooperative efforts have been made, notably with the active involvement of NGOs and certain associations, latent conflicts and tensions between institutional players threaten the sustainability and effectiveness of NGR management. To strengthen this governance, it is imperative to promote better coordination and synergy between the stakeholders. This approach would not only mitigate conflicts, but also maximise the socio-economic and ecological benefits of the ranch, ensuring the sustainability of natural resources and the equitable participation of local communities.

## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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