

Review of: "Stakeholders' Perception of Socioecological Factors Influencing Forest Elephant Crop Depredation in Gabon, Central Africa"

Michael J. Lawes¹

¹ University of KwaZulu-Natal

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This is an interesting study and worthy of publication in revised format. I have commented in the traditional style on the PDF provided – the numbers below refer to numbered comments in the PDF text.

My general comments are as follows:

The manuscript reads like a student thesis chapter and should be edited for wordiness by an experienced researcher.

While generally well written, the use of terminology or jargon in the form of compound nouns (e.g., multiple use forests) to capture several complex issues does make it difficult to follow the arguments presented – more about this below.

Insufficient characterisation of the sample populations and whether they represent their wider population is established in the paper.

While I think the conceptual framework of Emerson et al. (2012) is very useful, its expression in the paper is laboured and confusing and needs refinement. I recommend presenting Figure 5 at the start of the results section and concentrating on the main effects in the narrative. Currently, the authors have chosen to write out all the detailed framework results, framing them in the language of the framework, e.g., subproblems and so on, which provides a wordy and confusing narrative. In this way, the framework takes on an importance of its own and overwhelms the actual results and, in some respects, the discussion. The discussion can be halved in length without any loss of information by removing redundant framework references and speculative content, referring these for further investigation. Also, removing some of the directly quoted comments by respondents will also help to focus the text and make it easier to read and follow. In other words, please try to provide less about the framework and more about the actual results. Simply say what effects lead to your conclusions instead of dressing them up in the framework context.

I have another concern that the sample size of villagers is too small to be trusted to represent the scope and scale of the problem.

Numbered comments

1. A long and grand sounding sentence but can be reduced to "We analyzed the narratives through content analysis, to identify five proximal *problem types* leading directly to CDIs."

2. Why not say what these needs are here?
3. Is this perceived or real?
4. Undo italics.
5. Delete.
6. Move text.
7. Delete.
8. Better characterisation of the affected villager population is required as part of the assessment of the problem.
9. How many interviews? From the abstract, it seems that only 24 interviews were conducted. Given the stated scale of the problem, this is insufficient to properly assess the problem, especially given that the interviewees come from 2 villages. The scale of the question and problem demands a larger stratified sample.
10. I can't quite grasp this analysis. It seems to be highly subjective. Given the apparent unfocussed nature of the "questionnaires" – they seem to be unguided narratives – I am wondering whether the authors have made it very difficult to derive anything meaningful from their interviews.
11. This seems an unnecessarily complicated method of analysis for what is a relatively straightforward question-answer process.
12. This needs to be mentioned in the methods, especially if it has a bearing on how the data were analysed.
13. Given the stratification of the sample, the sample size seems inadequate for reliable results.
14. These results of the interviews of the 24 villagers are a pilot study for a much larger and structured survey based on the identified drivers of CDI.
15. Define these economic activities.
16. How is village depopulation a problem and not a release from pressure from CDIs?
17. Is this proven or perceived? See and cite Bush, E. R., Whytock, R. C., Bahaa-el-din, L., Bourgeois, S., Bunnefeld, N., Cardoso, A. W., Dikangadissi, J. T., Dimbonda, P., Dimoto, E., Edzang Ndong, J., Jeffery, K. J., Lehmann, D., Makaga, L., Momboua, B., Momont, L. R. W., Tutin, C. E. G., White, L. J. T., Whittaker, A., & Abernethy, K. (2020). Long-term collapse in fruit availability threatens Central African forest megafauna. *Science*, 370(6521), 1219-1222. doi:10.1126/science.abc7791
18. What is elephant safety?
19. I find this analytical framework very confusing.
20. This is an example of redundant text that confuses the reader. Simply say what you mean – in this instance, I cannot easily connect how multiple use forests are linked to economic activities or elephant foraging activities. Your real meaning is obscured by your dedication to reporting the framework structure first rather than the results pertaining to your objectives.
21. Not just logged areas - see Bush et al. (2020).
22. Almost entirely redundant text - just confusing jargon that does nothing to assist the reader to understand the issues.
23. Delete "me."
24. Provide a fuller address in the affiliation.

