

Case Study 2 - Community-Based Natural Resource Management Land Use Planning : Lessons Learned from Community Forests in Cameroon

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Community forests in Cameroon are sanctioned by Law No. 94/01 of 20 January 1994 on forestry and its Implementation Decree No. 95/531/PM of 23 August 1995. One of the main objectives of this law is to promote the participation of the population in the conservation and management of forest resources, so that these resources can contribute to improving their living standards. The terms and conditions as well as regulations relating to the allocation and management of community forests are outlined in the Manual of the Allocation Procedures and Management Regulations for Community Forests. Various bodies and organizations are involved in the implementation of the community forest process in south-east Cameroon, including WWF through its Jengi Project.

WWF Jengi Project

Background

The WWF Jengi Project has been in place in

south-east Cameroon since the mid-1990s. It focused mainly on inventories of large mammals and then on the creation of three new parks – Lobéké, Boumba Bek and Nki. In 1998, it extended its range of activities to include sustainable forest management, co-management and access to resources as well as benefit sharing.

Objectives

The objectives of the Jengi Project are :

- To ensure the sustainable management of wildlife in multiple-use zones;
- To ensure the efficient and collaborative management of protected areas;
- To reinforce the sustainable management of logging activities through solid partnerships between the government, the private sector and village communities;
- To put in place a systematic ecological monitoring programme to study the status of the environment during logging activities;
- To improve transboundary conservation ac-

tivities in collaboration with key partners and various institutions.

There are ten community forests with management agreements in the Cameroon segment of the Sangha Tri-national (Tri-National de la Sangha (TNS)) Landscape and the Dja-Odzala-Minkébé Tri-national (Tri-national Dja-Odzala-Minkébé (TRIDOM)) Landscape. These agreements were granted through a contract with which the forestry administration entrusts to a community a portion of forest in the agro-forestry zone for it to manage, conserve and exploit in the best interests of that community. It is accompanied by a simple management plan that outlines the activities to be carried out. Fourteen forest portions have been granted or are in the process of being granted to local communities. How have these forests been granted and managed? What is the WWF Jengi strategy to guide the communities? What are the lessons learned from the community forestry process in the TNS and TRIDOM landscapes?

The Cameroon segments of the TNS and TRIDOM Landscapes

The Cameroon segments of the STN and the TRIDOM Landscapes are situated in the south-east and have surface areas of about 1,471,000 ha and 112,000 ha of forest respectively (see Figure 1). They are made up of five protected areas (the Lobéké, Boumba-Bek, and Nki National Parks, the Dja Wildlife Reserve and the Mangame Gorilla Sanctuary). Their peripheral zones are made up of production forests, mining zones and agro-forestry zones. Community forests are created in the agro-forestry zones.

The process of allocating community forests

By law, a community forest is a forest in the non-permanent forest estate that is subject to a management agreement between a village

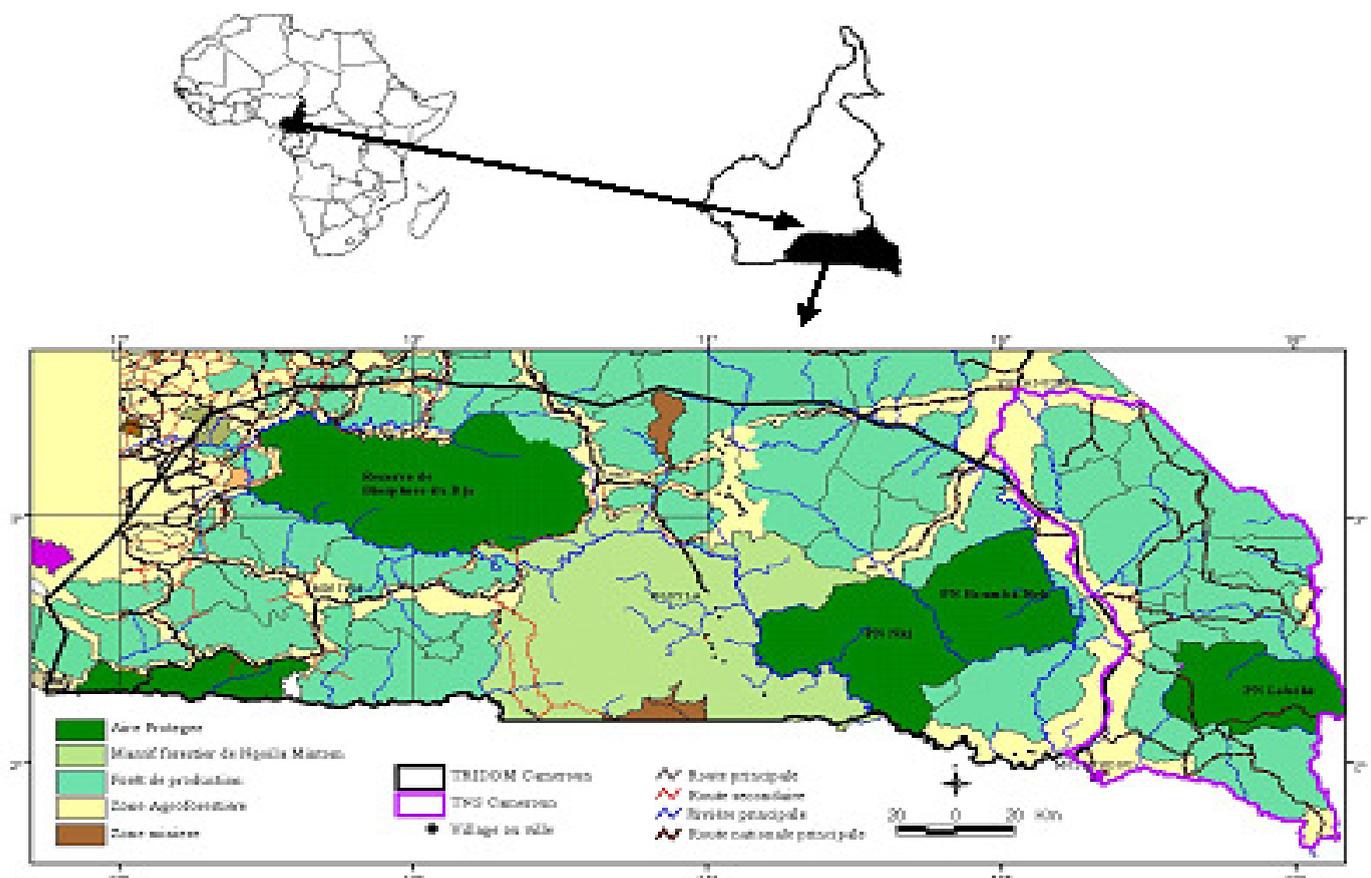


Figure 1. Location of the Cameroon segments of the TNS and TRIDOM Landscapes

community and the administration in charge of forestry. Its surface area cannot be more than 5,000 ha. Between applying for, and finally being allocated, a community forest, the community has to fulfil several conditions of which the most important are: constituting a legal entity, preparing a Reservation File, drawing up a simple management plan (SMP), and signing a management agreement.

Constituting a legal entity

In order to qualify for the granting of a community forest, the village community has to be constituted into some kind of acceptable legal entity such as: an association, a cooperative, a common initiative group, or an economic interest group. This is to be done after awareness-raising meetings on community forestry have been organized in the community concerned. If the community is receptive to the process, a general assembly meeting is organized during which the statutes and rules and regulations are drawn up, and a legal entity that represents all the social components of the community (villages, women, men, Bantus, Bakas) is set up. Its members are elected democratically. All important decisions are taken by the general assembly; those which relate to the community forest or to the management of revenues should also conform to the requirements of the SMP.

Once the major decisions have been taken, small commissions can be set up to monitor the use of the funds and the implementation of the project, under the supervision of the steering committee of the association presided over by a delegate or a president.

According to the SMPs, revenues raised from logging should finance, as a priority: the functioning of the entity as an enterprise, to guarantee the sustainability of jobs and incomes; the exploitation of the timber and non-timber forest products (NTFPs); any other project that might create jobs and incomes (fishponds, community farms, etc.); and community projects (such as a health centre, school, well, community centre, etc.).

Preparing a Reservation File

Once the process has been accepted by the community, a file called a Reservation File has to be prepared and submitted to the Minister in charge of forestry, consisting of: a stamped application specifying the objectives set for the community forest; a map showing the location of the forest (and proof of its surface area); documents showing the name of the community concerned as well as the address of the head of the legal entity; a description of the activities previously carried out within the forest; the curriculum vitae of the person designated by the community to manage the forest; the minutes of the consultation meeting held at the headquarters of the legal entity and presided over by the administrative authority (at which the objectives for, and boundaries of, the community forest are determined); the statutes of the legal entity, and an up-to-date list of its members. The Ministry's technical services for community forestry will verify the surface area (5,000 ha maximum) and the location of the forest to ensure that it does not encroach on a permanent forest estate or any other pre-existing titles. If no irregularities are found, a reservation authorization valid for 18 months is granted to the community to allow it to complete the final procedures for obtaining the land.

Drawing up a simple management plan (SMP)
The reservation authorization gives the community the right to draw up and submit a simple management plan to the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF). The SMP stipulates the activities to be carried out, the rules for managing the timber and non-timber resources sustainably, as well as managing the revenues generated by selling forest products so that they contribute to the wellbeing of the community. The SMP should include a description of the forest and of the community; a micro land-use plan (LUP) based on inventory findings (conservation, agro-forestry and production zones), five-year and annual work plans, results of socio-economic studies and a natural resource inventory, and a community development plan. As soon as the SMP has been drawn up, six copies of it must be deposited with the regional forestry service to be passed on to MINFOF where it is studied and then approved or rejected by a multi-disciplinary validation com-

mission.

Signing a management agreement

A favourable response from the validation commission allows the community to prepare and sign the management agreement. This agreement gives the entire community, through their legal entity, the exclusive right to exploit timber and non-timber resources in the forest for 25 years (with an option to renew) with motor saws and mobile sawmills at their disposal for felling and light processing. The sawn timber is moved from the processing point in the forest to the break-bulk yard by the roadside, where shaping is done manually. The person in charge of managing these activities has to submit an annual work plan as well as an annual progress report to the forestry administration.

WWF strategy for assisting communities

Community forestry has an important role to play in conservation since, if well managed, it creates jobs and strengthens the local economy, thus contributing to improving the living conditions of local people. Therefore, to help overcome the obstacles related to the process of obtaining and managing community forests, the WWF Jengi Project and other partners provide various kinds of support to local communities. The approach is simple and participative: first, meetings are held to raise awareness of the concept of community forestry. After this, specific requests for assistance may be presented to WWF. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the community and WWF Jengi is drawn up and signed, and mechanisms are put in place for monitoring and evaluation of the MoU commitments, and for conflict management.

Awareness-raising meetings

Aware of the fact that local people may have a very limited knowledge of the process of obtaining a community forest, WWF Jengi, in collaboration with some local NGOs that have expertise in this domain, organize awareness-raising mee-

tings for communities. WWF Jengi gives priority to villages bordering the Lobéké, Boumba-Bek and Nki National Parks.

Requests for assistance

After the awareness-raising phase, communities that want to apply for a community forest, but lack the expertise to do so, may ask for assistance from WWF Jengi through a letter addressed to the regional coordinator. In their request, they have to specify the type of assistance expected (technical, financial, material ...). The final commitment is conditional upon the applicant community accepting WWF's MoU.

Signing the Memorandum of Understanding between the community and WWF Jengi

The MoU is signed during a meeting in the community concerned, at which the terms of the MoU are made public. The MoU clearly defines the actions to be carried out, the expected outcomes, and spells out the commitment of the two parties to achieving the defined objectives.

Implementing the Memorandum of Understanding

In addition to assisting the community with the administrative procedures associated with applying for a community forest, WWF, through its MoU with the community, focuses on the following actions: managing the funds generated by the community forests; evaluating the project's achievements; and conflict management.

Managing the funds generated from logging

Several capacity-building sessions are held for the steering committees of the legal entities responsible for the management of the community forest, and for the revenues derived from its exploitation, to enable them to:

- Identify priority actions for the community (planning social projects);
- Secure funds (setting up procedures for ta-

- king in, holding and disbursing funds);
- Monitor and evaluate the projects carried out.

Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the MoU

The monitoring and evaluation of the MoU is done through quarterly evaluation meetings with members of the steering committee, WWF Jengi Project staff, local NGOs working on community forestry, and the forestry administration.

Conflict management

Capacity-building sessions on the identification and management of potential conflicts that may arise within the community were organized. These sessions were aimed especially at the members of the legal entity, to help them prevent conflicts by encouraging communication i.e., collating and transmitting information on the management of the community forest to all communities involved.

Outputs

Allocation of community forests

The first community forest with a 5,000 ha surface area was granted in 2001 to the Mbialebot community. The table below gives details of subsequent allocations.

The ten community forests cover a surface area of about 47,560 ha, representing about six percent of the total area of the non-permanent forest estate in south-east Cameroon. The table shows that the number of community forests has increased significantly since 2004, which is largely thanks to the actions of WWF and its partners.

Technical and financial management of community forests

Because the community's technical capacity tends to be inadequate, and there is a lack of financial resources to purchase their own timber-processing equipment, they are often obliged to

Table 1. Allocation of community forests for the period 2001–2007

Years	Number of CFs allocated	Legal entity of the communities concer-
2001	1	Mbialebot
2003	1	Bibimbo
2004	1	Mpemog
2006	3	Djankora, Essayons voir, Mpewang
2007	4	Asmimi, Zenkadjel, Morikoaye, Biemo

sign sub-contracts with business operators. This can lead to problems, including:

- Operators being suspended by the forestry administration for non-compliance with the stipulations of the SMP. The most common causes are not respecting the boundaries of the annual felling plot, and felling trees with trunks of a smaller diameter than the prescribed minimum;
- Conflicts between members. Several conflicts have occurred in communities of which the most recurrent are those related to leadership struggles between steering committee members, and a perceived lack of accountability in the management of funds generated by the sale of products;
- A shortage of logging partners. The often poor state of local roads, combined with the distance of the zones concerned from big cities such as Yaoundé and Douala, discourages business operators from investing in community forests. Those that do invest often pay much less than they would for areas closer to major cities;
- Machinery break-downs. The machines are old and cannot run for long, leading to low production and output.

The following table gives an illustration of planned and actual exploitation figures in some community forests.

From this table, it can be seen that the four forests produced only 580 m³ of the 4035 m³ projected, that is, 14.37 percent. This can be

Table 2. Planned and actual timber exploitation figures in some community forests

Legal entity	Year	Planned quantity (m ³)	Logging carried out			
			Species	Qty (m ³)	Price per m ³ (CFA Francs)	Revenues generated (CFA Francs)
Bibimbo	2004	1010	Sapelli	70	80,000	5,600,000
	2005		Ayous	50	40,000	2,000,000
Mpemog	2005	1000	Sapelli	94	20,000	1,880,000
			Ayous	54	10,000	540,000
Mpewang	2006	1000	Sapelli	20	20,000	400,000
Mbielabot	2003	1025	Sapelli	100	18,000	1,800,000
	2006		Sapelli	100	18,000	1,800,000
	2006		Assamela	92	18,000	1,656,000
TOTAL	-	4035	-	580	-	15,676,000

attributed on the one hand to MINFOF's delay in signing the Annual Logging Certificate and the transportation documents for logged wood (way bills), and on the other hand to the European market (where almost all the timber is sold) which is very demanding with regard to high-value timber. Only three out of a possible 15 tree species have been logged so far: Sapelli with a volume of 384 m³ (66.2 percent), Ayous with a volume of 104 m³ (17.93 percent) and Assamela with a volume of 92 m³ (15.86 percent). The timber logged generated a total revenue of 15,676,000 CFA Francs (FCFA); the average price per m³ of timber of any species stands at FCFA 27,000. This price oscillates between FCFA 10,000 (Ayous in Mpemog) and FCFA 80,000 (Sapelli in Bibimbo) depending on the contracts with subcontractors. It should however be noted that the price of FCFA 80,000 observed in Bibimbo includes handling charges that the community has to bear instead of the subcontractor.

Achievements of community micro-projects

Community micro-projects are the outcome of surveys and meetings organized within communities. They are included in the development plan, and they are funded from benefits generated by sale of timber harvested from the community forest and other sources previously identified in the community (council and State contributions). Five years after the granting of the first community forest, these micro-projects are still not very visible in the villages. This creates suspicion and even scepticism amongst some members of the community with regards to the capacity of members of the legal entity in particular, and even of community forestry in general, to stimulate socio-economic development in villages.

The micro-projects surveyed support schooling, the creation of casual jobs, and some construction jobs (a shed and a classroom).

Table 3. Community development projects

Legal entity	Achievements
Bibimbo	Contributions to the salaries of part-time teachers Payment of the salaries of workers
Mpemog	Enrolment of 20 students and two undergraduates in their respective institutions (FCFA 500,000) Construction of a classroom Grant to the Catholic Church (FCFA 15,000)
Mpewang	-
Mbielabot	Construction of a shed in Gripe (FCFA 3,000,000) Scholarships to students and pupils (FCFA 500,000)
Essayons Voir	-
Djankora	-

Lessons learned

Management of legal entities

An evaluation of legal entities shows that compliance with the statutes, and rules and regulations is mixed. Membership rights and annual contributions are almost never paid and the average membership per legal entity is 43 members, a relatively low number compared to the number of inhabitants per village. This could be explained by the population's general lack of interest in community concerns on the one hand, and inadequate awareness on the other hand. As regards representation of the various social groups, members are mostly Bantu men (80 percent); Bantu women represent only 12.94 percent and the Bakas are in a small minority (7.06 percent). It is also noted that there is little involvement of members in decision making. For example, drawing up contracts with loggers and other service providers is done by mutual agreement and most often with delegates of the legal entities, without the real involvement of other members of the community. Instituting good governance within the management body of community forests, and real participatory management, remain a priority in the days ahead.

Awareness, information, education and training on community forestry

This phase is executed by WWF Jengi in collaboration with NGOs and the forestry administration. Given the varying management difficulties described above, this type of support and guidance should be maintained throughout the entire community forestry process.

Reservation files

The reservation procedure is long. The files, prepared by the communities and deposited with the local administration in charge of forestry, are then forwarded to the central administration in charge of forestry. The process of examining and approving these files, and issuing a reservation document, takes about one and a half years. The procedure should be revised so that the whole process is carried out at the local forestry administration level, and the manual of procedures should be revised and simplified.

Exploitation of community forests

The exploitation of community forests is entrusted to business operators (subcontractors) who bear all the costs of exploitation. They pay the legal entities a price per m³ comparable to an "owner's tax" that enables them to cover running costs and make a small profit but not enough to

allow them to carry out planned development projects.

Small-scale logging, under the control of the community or through subcontracting, offers significant job opportunities for the local youth. A large proportion of the community can be involved in various tasks related to logging operations. However, for the communities to take charge of logging their forests, they need access to loans to buy their own sawing equipment, and their technical capacities need to be built up to enable them to use the equipment efficiently and comply with the stipulations of the management plan.

Conflicts within communities

An evaluation of the running of the management bodies shows that conflicts related to the management of community forests are of diverse origins. The most common are between families and the members of the legal entity. Families claim “ownership rights” over the forest lands where community forests have been created. But in reality, these are only customary rights, given that the land tenure code and forestry law make the State the sole owner of almost all lands and forest resources of the country. Conflicts between members of the legal entity and the forest manager are usually due to a lack of accountability in the management of funds generated from logging. Conflicts between village chiefs and the manager are usually about the chiefs wanting to have monthly salaries from community forest revenues. Finally, conflicts between legal entities and neighbouring villages can arise from not respecting boundaries. In order to overcome these problems, various interventions will be necessary, including: the development of simple and transparent management mechanisms, especially the putting in place of a simple accounting system; training all members of the steering committee on their respective roles; establishing project preparation and monitoring commissions; and organizing regular meetings between communities.