

## Case study 1 - The Use of Small Grants to Build Civil Society Capacity to Support Conservation : Lessons Learned from Cameroon

*Antoine Justin Eyébé*



### Objectives of the IUCN Small Grants Program

The IUCN Small Grants Program, funded by the Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE), has strengthened the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in sustainable forest management. Their role is very important in implementing CARPE's Strategic Objective which is to reduce the rate of deforestation and loss of biodiversity in Central Africa. Moreover, civil society will play a leading role in promoting good governance in natural resource management – a pivotal component of the CARPE Phase II Results Framework.

After the Rio Conference in 1992, the importance of CSOs in Cameroon was recognized because they were considered by members of the Government and other international partners as catalysts for local, national and international development. However, despite this trend, some

forest dwellers were increasingly disappointed because they still felt excluded. For instance, they resented the fact that the benefits they received from the forest were insignificant compared to those received by other forest exploiters, notably logging and mining concessions. Due to this imbalance between stakeholders, it became very important to design appropriate strategies to facilitate their involvement. Hence, CSOs opted to make them aware of the existing legal and policy frameworks, and how these could better serve the interests of local populations. However, they noticed that this could only be effective if they were supported technically, administratively and financially.

CARPE has been very supportive to CSOs because of their potential key role in improving natural resource management in the region. The Small Grants Program has supported, both technically and financially, a wide range of micro-projects submitted by local NGOs in areas where they either had a comparative advantage in im-

plementing them or needed the necessary capacity to improve natural resource management. These micro-projects focused on themes such as understanding the local context of natural resource management, improving transparency in the forestry sector, combating illegal logging and poaching, enhancing knowledge of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) in order to improve livelihoods, assessing the Cameroon logging industry, etc. These projects required precepts which could fill the gaps in the activities of some of CARPE's international partners such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) which receives funds from CARPE to implement the "Sustainable natural resource management practices applied" component in two landscapes in south-east Cameroon. In general the Small Grants Program targets the following groups: community-based organizations (CBOs) and associations, local populations, research institutions and students. The objectives of the Small Grants Program include :

- U Filling gaps in conservation's analytical agenda such as designing a suitable mechanism to provide feedback to local communities on conservation strategies, exchanges of field experiences, and success stories between and within landscapes;
- U Promoting and building a constituency for conservation among civil society;
- U Fostering partnerships between landscape consortia and local civil society in the field;
- U Enabling Central African institutions to participate in CARPE activities in order to ensure host country "buy-in" of conservation initiatives;
- U Reinforcing the capacities of local civil society in institutional development and strategic planning to sustain CARPE activities and objectives in the region in the long term;
- U Effectively integrating CARPE activities in the field with host country institutions;
- U Fostering gender equity through the promotion of female-based community organizations and associations;
- U Raising local, national and regional awareness of CARPE and therefore providing

knowledge and support to the programme objectives.

## Implementation strategy and results achieved

A small grant policy and procedure manual has been prepared<sup>1</sup>. Grants are awarded, after a two-tier selection process, to local NGOs working within the framework of the natural resources governance strengthened components. The first level of selection is organized at the country level by the CARPE Focal Point who coordinates the National Steering Committee. Shortlisted proposals are sent to the Regional Steering Committee for a final decision. In both the National and Regional Committees, CARPE staff members play a strictly neutral role as they guide participants of the group to better understand the programme's vision, objectives and priorities.

Since 1998, about 50 projects have been funded by the Small Grants Program in two key areas: a) research and b) the natural resource policy and legal framework.

Research has mostly focused on non-timber forest products (NTFPs) as a means to improve the livelihoods of millions of forest dwellers. The research topics included :

- the importance of forest resources used by local communities;
- field testing and training in a methodology for the socio-economic valuation of NTFPs;
- state-of-the-knowledge studies of specific NTFPs such as *Tabernanthe iboga* Baillon, *Prunus africana*, *Gnetum africanum* and *G. buchholzianum*, threatened with extinction by unsustainable harvest techniques;
- the establishment of a gene bank of *Gnetum* spp. in Limbe Botanical Garden;
- production and dissemination by the National Herbarium of three volumes of Cameroon flora presenting Orchidaceae and Dichapetalaceae;
- the role of community institutions in the ma-

<sup>1</sup> See CARPE website for copies of the manual in English and in French – <http://carpe.umd.edu/Plone/resources/smallgrants>.

agement of NTFPs to highlight restrictions and rights in their harvest at the local level, and the co-existence of customary rules with legal regulatory frameworks;

- the promotion of gender equity with the creation of the network of women for the sustainable management of the Central African moist forests – one of the dynamic CEFDHAC (Conférence sur les Ecosystèmes de Forêts Denses et Humides d’Afrique Centrale) networks;
- alternatives to slash-and-burn agriculture and unsustainable hunting practices.

On the natural resource management front, activities were geared towards discussions between field researchers and policy makers on the theme “conserving and managing biodiversity in central Africa: global challenges and local solutions” to ensure that policy decisions are based on empirical data and on international conventions. After this general framework, small projects tackled specific issues such as: a) constraints in implementing the regulatory framework on timber exploitation in Cameroon based on the 1994 Cameroon Forestry Code and its 1995 implementation decrees; b) mapping the hunting practices and circulation of wildlife products along the Moloundou-Bertoua-Yaoundé road to establish a geographical information system database on the exploitation and circulation of wildlife products; c) contribution to the revision of the regulation related to the management of incomes from logging and hunting activities, with a view to improving the livelihoods of communities living around the exploited forest area; and d) constraints related to wildlife law enforcement.

## Lessons learned

### The procedures

- The manual is essential in helping civil society identify and write sound project proposals that meet CARPE’s requirements.
- Although it may sound lengthy, the two-tier selection process (National and Regional Steering Committees) is key for transparency which in turn is key for conflict mitigation.

- Involving other donors in the National Steering Committee for proposal selection is essential because it avoids duplication of funding and creates synergy among donors.

### Implementation

- Flexible in nature, the small grant projects have covered a wide range of activities, all relevant to CARPE’s overall strategic objectives, such as biological research, community mobilization, livelihood improvement, good governance etc.
- Because CSOs are the centrepiece of the Small Grants Program, their success in implementing field activities can only be effective if they receive outside technical and financial support, something which the CARPE Focal Points have been focusing on.
- The Small Grants Program is an effective tool to bridge the gap between activities executed within the landscape and those at the community level. One concrete example is as follows: the Gene Bank that was set up in 2000 is still producing seedlings for the domestication of endangered wild plant species which are unsustainably harvested in the landscapes.

### Positive and negative impacts of the Small Grants Program

- The Cameroon Government is making the effort to incorporate results from the small grant activities into decision making. Part of the decision to review the Cameroon Forestry Code of 1994 was triggered by civil society advocacy initiatives.
- The Small Grants Program is an efficient way to foster gender equity because it has led to the creation of a regional network of women for the conservation and sustainable use of forest ecosystems. This network has been able to translate the Forestry Code into local languages and disseminate it to local communities, especially the section on wildlife management and poaching in the entire forest zone of the Congo basin.

- Funds received by NGOs are mostly targeted towards short-term activities (one year maximum), thereby restricting their opportunities for long-term commitment to action in the field.
  - Dissemination of the results of small grant activities tends to be confined to the geographical area covered by projects hence there is an urgent need for the Focal Point to help package and disseminate the results throughout the entire country (to decision makers, donors, etc.).
  - Though CARPE has been encouraging local NGOs to work in networks to maximize their impacts on the ground, only one (Réseau Femme Africaine pour le Développement Durable (REFADD)) project was submitted by a coalition or network of NGOs, showing that individualism still prevails in civil society in the Congo Basin.
  - Although CBOs that operate in the landscape have a good grasp of the local and field context, they lack the capacity to develop sound proposals to compete for the small grants; hence, there is still a tendency for most of the small grant funding to go to NGOs based in large cities, managed by elites.
- Ngoufo, R. 2000. Contraintes pratiques de mise en œuvre de la réglementation sur l'exploitation forestière au Cameroun.
- Nzoh-Ngandembou, Z. 1998. Field testing and training in a methodology for socio-economic valuation of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) in Cameroon.
- Szlachetko, D.L. and Olszewski, T.S. 2001a. Orchidacées Vol. 2. In: Achoundong, G. and Morat, P. (Eds) Flore du Cameroun. 35. Paris and Yaoundé: MNHN and Herbar National.
- Szlachetko, D.L. and Olszewski, T.S. 2001b. Orchidacées Vol. 3. In: Achoundong, G. and Morat, P. (Eds) Flore du Cameroun. 36. Paris and Yaoundé: MNHN and Herbar National.
- Tchoulack, A. 1999. Conservation de la biodiversité dans la vallée de l'Inoubou.
- van Dijk, H. 1999. The role of community institutions in the management of NTFPs in Cameroon.

## References

Breteler, F.J. 2001. Dichapetalacées. In: Flore du Cameroun. 37. Paris and Yaoundé: MNHN and Herbar National.

Eyébé, A.J. 2007. Revue de la gestion des ressources naturelles au Cameroun. RCGG/IGC.

Nchoji Nkwi, P. 1999. Conserving and managing biodiversity in central Africa: Global challenges and local solutions.

Ndam, N. 1999. State-of-the-knowledge studies of *Tabernanthe iboga* Baillon, *Prunus africana* (Hook.f.) Kalkman, *Gnetum africanum* Welw. and *G. buchholzianum*.

Ngoufo, R. 2006. Suivi cartographique de la chasse et circulation des produits fauniques le long des axes Moloundou-Bertoua-Yaoundé.