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Abstract

New approaches must be designed to address the challenge of accommodating development needs with locally appropriate environmental management schemes on the Central African urban landscape. Investigating the forest - city interface by associating geographic analysis (remote sensing and geographic information systems) with socio-economic, socio-cultural and demographic data is an approach which has not been sufficiently developed to date.

Integrating urban geography in Central African tropical forest conservation and development projects is crucial because :

- there are more people living in urban areas than in rural zones, (e.g. Gabon, 73%);
- the number of very large cities is growing rapidly: more than 70 Sub-Saharan cities with one million inhabitants are forecast for 2020 (compared with 18 in 1990);
- use of forest products by city dwellers appears to be unsustainable;
- urban behaviour patterns which result in deforestation (especially peri-urban deforestation) provoke serious ecological and social problems;
- in times of economic hardship, urban populations exert increasing pressure on forest resources: the situation is exacerbated when state systems no longer provide basic services.

In order to understand the human and environmental dynamics of forest-city relations, two geographic levels of scale will be studied. On the local level, the project will use remote sensing techniques to trace the evolution of land use/land cover urban and peri-urban patterns, and to see how different districts interface with peri-urban hinterlands. This local level study will focus on at least two cities of different size by country. This will be backed up by socio-economic and cultural investigation. At a regional scale (whole Central Africa), a statistical analysis will be added by linking remotely sensed data to socio-economic variables in order to categorize some 20 cities for their relations with the forest environment.

This multi-scale and multi-approach project will be carried out through a collaborative work of four teams: APFT/CAC/ULB, IGEAT/ULB, CEDA et le Département de Géographie/UMD. A close collaboration with African partners will be established for data collection, socio-eco-demographic analysis and result validation. Final products will include a detailed report, geographic databases integrated into ARC VIEW . This proposal could be seen as a first one year pilot stage of a larger project.