

**No.8**

# Forest Participation Series

## **Community Forestry It may be indeed a New Management Tool, but is it Accessible?**

**Two case studies in  
Eastern-Cameroon**

**Alain Pénélon**

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International  
Institute for  
Environment and  
Development

Forestry and Land Use  
Programme

# **Community Forestry: it may indeed be a New Management Tool, but is it Accessible? Two case studies in Eastern-Cameroon**

Alain Pénelon

## **Note on author**

The author has several years experience in rural development in Africa. Over the last years, he has worked within the forest/population component of the API Dimako Project in Cameroon and, more recently, within an ECOFAC project in Central African Republic.

## Preface

### Negotiating roles for forest management: constraints and opportunities

An analysis of the evolution of approaches to forest management in Africa over recent decades shows that we have passed through two main phases and are now entering a third:

#### **The technocratic era: management for the forest and against the people**

Up to the early seventies, priority was given to the trees at the expense of the people who use them. It was thought that enhanced technical capacity in forest management would be sufficient to guarantee their renewal for the good of the nation. Programmes aimed at developing capacity primarily concerned technical matters and were intended for government staff.

However, over the years, significant failures of "top-down" initiatives, driven solely by technical considerations and from the top led to the realisation that bad forest management was not due to lack of technical skills alone.

#### **The participation era: forest management for and by the people**

The flaws of the technocratic approach have led to the pursuit of the concept and practice of *participation*, as a means to ensure that local people's interests and needs are taken into account in the decisions concerning the fate of forests. Participation gradually became a *sine qua non* condition for success of forestry initiatives in rural areas. It has been

politically incorrect to criticise the concept and it invariably constitutes a requirement for securing donor support.

However, in recent years, "participation" has proven difficult to implement when it means going beyond mere consultation and achieving active involvement of forest users in decision making. Reasons for this include:

- active participation implies a process of social transformation. As such, it requires commitment and flexibility over long periods and does not always fit target-oriented agendas; be they by governments alone or with the support of donors;
- participation is often seen as an increase of responsibility given to local people, but without a corresponding increase in their rights and access to benefits. As such, participation actually becomes a burden and is usually refused or passively accepted;
- somewhat paradoxically, the pressure for participation (from donors and NGOs) has led to attempts to applying it mechanically, a little like blueprints. This contradicts one of the original aims of participation, i.e. that it should be adapted to local contexts;
- participation also requires logistical means for advisors (technicians, NGO staff) to be in close contact with rural

dwellers. Such means are often lacking in rural areas.

Even when successful participation is achieved, the sustainability of the new framework for decision-making is often doubtful, for several reasons:

- "success stories" often appear with donor-support but without the need for commitment on the part of government authorities;
- "participation" has tended to focus on the use of resources by people. It has more seldom dealt with institutional participation, i.e. collaboration between all the interest groups.

As a result, participation has been mostly accepted so long as it does not disturb existing power structures. Often this means its restriction to project frameworks; which have a limited lifespan; and where less powerful are called upon to share decision-making.

### **The emergence of political negotiation: forest management with the people and other actors**

It is increasingly apparent that participation is often limited in scope and faces extreme difficulties in scaling up beyond local level.

What has been missing in both the technocratic and the participatory "eras" is the recognition of the *highly political character* of forest management, even at local level. The need for a *social definition* of forest management has been proven by the experience with participation. But this requires negotiations between institutions which represent all existing interest groups,

and especially the weaker ones. Hence, the implementation of participatory forest management needs to be *politically negotiated*. Thus, participation should be accompanied by the development of mechanisms which allow for the negotiation of stakeholders' roles. This implies changes in existing power structures.

To achieve a constructive negotiation process, *capacity needs* are more institutional than technical. They can be divided into two categories:

- capacity for *negotiation* itself, such as empowerment of the weakest stakeholder(s), which may involve literacy, provision of information, and other activities related to the concept of training for transformation;
- at a later stage, capacities for *sustaining roles*, such as accountability and representativeness of local governance, leadership, and economic resilience.

*The highly political nature of these issues explains why they have been poorly dealt with in the development arena, despite the fact that they often constitute the major constraints to sustainable forest management.*

Another difficulty concerns the vagueness associated to the term "roles". One can try to overcome this weakness by defining stakeholders' roles via their respective *rights, responsibilities, returns from forest resources and relationships* (i.e. their "4Rs"). Stakeholders' "4Rs" are often unbalanced, a situation which often impairs adequate negotiation and leads to forest decline.

Papers 6,7,8,9 and 10 in this Forest Participation Series illustrate different constraints created by imbalances in stakeholders' roles; but also how these can evolve towards forms of collaboration which are conducive to more sustainable management of the forest.

**Samuel Egbe** (paper No. 6) provides an overview of the historical evolution of forest tenure and access to forest resources in **Cameroon**.

Natural resource tenure and access policies in Cameroon have, since the colonial period, generally ignored the existence of local populations, done little to strengthen the ability of peasants and their institutions to cope with the blunt nationalisation of the resources upon which their lives are inextricably linked. This unilateral usurpation and top-down approach not only undermined traditional institutions, but demotivated many rural people whose energies could have been mobilised in the management effort.

The author argues that state control and ownership of natural resources has not ensured rational management nor brought about rapid social and economic development. Lack of social legitimacy of forest regulations and policies is considered to be a main reason for such failures.

The thrust of this paper is therefore to examine past experience, and identify constraints and opportunities, in an attempt to engender a more indigenous resource tenure system in Cameroon.

The paper by **Jonas Ibo** and **Eric Léonard** (No. 7) presents a historical

analysis of developments in policy and social practice relating to forest management and conservation, against the economic and social transformations undergone by the Ivory Coast since the beginning of the century. In particular, it seeks to assess the most recent experiments aimed at involving small farmers in the implementation of rehabilitation programmes, based on two examples. This a rare example in sub-Saharan Africa, where the state officially tackles the issue of encroachment of the forest by farmers, in contrast to the usual "*laissez-faire*" attitude in other African countries. Yet, it does so by means of a strategy aimed at actually excluding farmers from commercial use of the forest resources, however in a "participatory" manner. The last part of the paper discusses possible means to improve this strategy.

In paper No 8, **Alain Pénelon** discusses a study carried out in two forest communities in Eastern-Cameroon. The study had two-fold objectives: to analyse how roles in land and forest resource allocation are defined at village level, and to what extent the provisions on community forestry of the 1994 Forestry Law are applicable at local level.

The author describes nine steps used in the completion of the study. It concerns land differentiation in terms of use and access according to the distance from the village and major problems in the implementation of the New Forestry Law concerning community forestry, i.e. costs, tedious character of the procedure, etc.

The paper finishes with some proposals to improve the existing Law and other

regulations which affect local communities' involvement in forest management.

Liz Wily's paper (No. 9) illustrates how a facilitating role by government has allowed interesting community-based initiatives to take place in the miombo forest of Tanzania. It describes how, in a situation of severe degradation of the forest cover, two communities have met the challenge of achieving sustained, effective control of the use of the forest resource in a very cost-effective way. This was made possible because they were given appropriate rights and access to benefits to effectively assume their responsibilities as forest managers. In her discussion, the author points to some very interesting generic lessons that may be drawn out from these examples.

Finally, Olivier Dubois' paper (No. 10) attempts to provide a synthesis of recent literature - both Anglophone and Francophone - about rights to land and forests in sub-Saharan Africa. These are at the heart of the debate on sustainable land use in this Region, because the dualistic situation where formal and customary rules co-exist creates often confusion and tensions, which result in quasi open access to forest resources.

Policies aimed at improving tenure security have generally failed and reinforced existing power structures, as they only look at the spatial dimension of security, contrasting with the more social aspects of rights built into customary rules. Initiatives such as formal titling of land on the one hand; and codification and formalisation of customary rules on the other hand, have so far not lived up to their expectations. The author discusses more recent experiments and proposals aimed at bridging the gap between customary and formal rules. These concern adaptive legislation, enabling institutional frameworks and ways to convey information to stakeholders. Such actions are just in their infancy and are likely to be difficult to implement, as they threaten to destabilise power structures. Hence the need to allow for experimentation, continuous learning, and building confidence for these attempts to materialise in efficient policies.

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*June 1997, London*

**Other titles in this series are:**

**No. 1**

*The Leaf Gatherers of Kwapanin, Ghana*  
Mary M.O. Agyemang

**No. 2**

*Supporting Local Initiatives in Woodland Regeneration:  
a case study from Ntabazinduna communal land, Zimbabwe*  
J.M. Clarke, S.J. Makuku, R. Mukwenhu and J. Ncube

**No. 3**

*New Forestry Initiatives in Himachal Pradesh*  
Minkesh Paul Sood

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*The View from the Ground: Community Perspectives on  
Joint Forest Management in Gujarat, India*  
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**No. 5**

*Joint Forest Management and Resource Sharing.  
Lessons from India for Zimbabwe*  
Calvin Nhira and Frank Matose

**No. 6**

*Forest Tenure and Access to Forest Resources in Cameroon: an overview*  
Samuel Egbe

**No. 7**

*Farmers, Forests and the State - Participatory Forest Management  
in the Ivory Coast: theory and practice*  
Jonas Ibo and Eric Léonard

**No. 9**

*Villagers as Forest Managers and Governments "Learning to Let Go" -  
The case of Duru-Hattemba & Mgori Forests in Tanzania*  
Liz Willy

**No. 10**

*Rights and Wrongs of Rights to Land and Forest Resources in sub-Saharan Africa:  
bridging the gap between customary and formal rules*  
Olivier Dubois

## Aims and objectives

The activities of the Dimako API<sup>1</sup> project are designed to provide the Cameroonian Ministry of the Environment and Forests with technical, methodological and sociological data. This should help Cameroon to find ways of ensuring sustainable management of its (State-owned) forests and stabilising agriculture around the wooded areas.

This study is one of the outputs of the API project. The basic objective of the study is to determine how village territories function and the rules on land

use and resource appropriation. The secondary objective is to assess the level of awareness and mobilisation of the local people with regard to the general issues of natural resource management.

It is assumed that, by pursuing these two objectives, it will be possible to assess the level of awareness of rural people, and thereby put forward strategies for informing and training rural communities so that they can participate to a greater extent in the overall processes of managing (timber and non-timber) forest resources.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper analyses some activities carried out within the API - Aménagement Pilote Intégré (pilot integrated development). API is a bilateral project (France/Cameroon) launched in 1992 with the aim of providing the Cameroonian Ministry of the Environment and Forests with the means to manage forests sustainably with the local people. The project has two components: the forestry component is taking part in preparing the methodological tools needed for establishing forest development plans according to the new legislation. The forest/population interaction component is contributing to the debate about stabilising agriculture and involving the population in forest management.



## **Tools and Methods**

### **Tools**

During the first year of operation, the project was presented to the 140 villages in the project area. Subsequently, four villages were selected, including Bandongoué and Bimba.

The work conducted between June 1994 and November 1995 had the following resources at its disposal:

- one team of two agronomists plus the support of a forestry technician specialising in photo-interpretation;
- two four-wheel drive vehicles to get around as well as a geographical position system (GPS) for reconnaissance;
- suitably computerised project infrastructure able to process, digitise and interpret aerial photographs in order to prepare the final maps;
- a budget of FF10,000 to produce the teaching materials, pay casual labour and train representatives of Bimba community.

The seven criteria distinguishing the sites (see Table 1) did not account for any significant differences in results or in the analysis of those results.

### **Method used to identify the extent of village territory**

The method tested to effect this work comprises nine stages:

- (i) Working session in the study village with neighbouring villages, in which the views of all parties will be heard, to make an initial

definition of the territory. The territory is presented by villagers from the study site and representatives from neighbouring villages in order to identify the boundaries and areas of influence per type of activity (hunting, gathering, fishing, agriculture and forestry), as well as noting any areas of conflict;

- (ii) Survey to assess land appropriation patterns and discover which rights are currently operating;
- (iii) Aerial photography of the study area;
- (iv) Photo-interpretation of the area (zoning agricultural land, recent and long standing fallow areas and forest, as well as location of tracks and water courses);
- (v) On-the-spot checking that the interpretation corresponds with field realities;
- (vi) Transferring photo-interpretation to map;
- (vii) Marking out the perimeter of the study territory (as agreed after discussion with all parties) with representatives from pairs of neighbouring villages (delineation, measurement, transferring to map);
- (viii) Drawing up the final map: cartography of the boundaries of areas of influence per activity;

## Methods

### Site selection

Table 1: Site selection criteria

Criterion	BIMBA	BANDONGOUÉ
<b>Similarities</b>		
1. Climate	Same climatic conditions, same distribution of rainfall throughout the year and largely identical altitude throughout the project area.	
2. Commitment to project	Both the village authorities and the population have viewed the project favourably since its presentation.	
3. Size of village <sup>2</sup>	686 inhabitants	873 inhabitants
4. Village status	District capital	District capital
<b>Differences</b>		
1. Position of site in relation to forest	Heart of forest	Forest/Savannah border
2. Dominant plant formations	a) Primary forest 61% b) Secondary forest 14% $\Sigma=76\%$ c) Marshy forest 12%	a) Primary forest 68% b) Savannah 13% c) Marshy forest 13%
3. Scale of exploitation	Very substantial. Range of +/- 100 plant and animal products.	Not substantial: barely 20 products
4. Isolation	Very isolated. By road: • 76km from the sub-prefecture • 63km from the prefecture	Not isolated. • 18km from the sub-prefecture and prefecture
Accessibility	Access difficult. No access in October/November (main rainy season).	Very easy access as it is on the main road between Bertoua and Batouri.
5. Homogeneity of the population	Very homogeneous = 1 ethnic group only: the Boly.  No recent incomers.	Very heterogeneous, but 1 majority indigenous ethnic group: the Kaka.  Numerous incomers: • some province (Maka, Bamvélé, Boblis, Baya) • northern provinces (Foulbé, Mbororo).
6. Social cohesion	Very strong	Average to weak depending on individuals.
7. Facilities	• under-equipped dispensary • 1 water pump which has not worked for a year.	• 1 operational hospital • Electrification

<sup>2</sup> Source: Awongue (1995)

(ix) **Feedback on work in the village.**

This method was subject to various alterations to reduce the cost and to make it accessible to village communities wishing to identify agreed boundaries to their territory. Among other things, careful marking out work (Stage vii) was advocated as a useful replacement for aerial photography, interpretation and transferring to map.

**Method used to set up a community forest**

Discussion on drawing up such an agreement followed three main lines:

- the current status of legislative and regulatory instruments dealing with this question;
- the request made by the forestry administration to test out the new law;
- the application of the local people to take on official responsibility for the forest.

There were nine stages to the method:

- (i) Translation into the local language of the articles of the Decree relating to community forests. For this stage, someone from the village was nominated to go the headquarters of the APl project to study the text and make a written translation. Subsequently, the translation into the Boly language was presented (to us) in French in order to weed out any wrong or incomplete translations due to the complexity of the legal jargon. This check guarantees that the

presentation in the Boly language will conform to the French text;

- (ii) Presentation of the articles of the Decree to the population of Bimba in the Boly language. This is a very important stage which gives all villagers (including old people, women and children) access to legislative information in a precise, comprehensive manner;
- (iii) Deliberation period (two months) to give the community time to discuss and make their choice;
- (iv) Unanimous decision to launch the community forest project. This stage clearly determines all the measures the community must take in order to lodge their request for a community forest with the administration;
- (v) Information and discussion meeting on the modalities of community organisation (legal status of the community, regulations, etc.);
- (vi) Information and discussion meeting on the location of the requested forest;
- (vii) Final discussions before lodging the request for a community forest;
- (viii) Establishment of the GIC<sup>3</sup> Committee by the MINEF<sup>4</sup> departmental delegation;
- (ix) Lodging the request for a community forest with the local MINEF services.

<sup>3</sup> GIC = Groupe d'Initiative Commune (Joint Initiative Group). Legal status chosen by the community of Bimba.

<sup>4</sup> MINEF = Ministry of the Environment

## Results

### Land use rules

Land appropriation does not come under any legal right; the tenure system is basically governed by customary law, whereby land belongs to the first occupant. When the head of a family dies, the land is passed on to the elder son who has it at his disposal to share with his brothers.

*"The village territory may be considered to be the total area of land, whether cultivated or not, over which one or several groups exercise rights" (Bridier, 1991).*

For our purposes, we consider that the village territory is the area which the village considers to be its own, whatever the appropriation patterns in that area.

In Bimba as in Bandungoué, the inhabitants consider the territory to be divided into three parts:

- the village;
- the forest close to the village (extending from behind the houses for several kilometres);
- more distant forest (beyond the close forest up to 8-12 kilometres away).

At each level of the territory (village, close forest, distant forest), there are certain rights (use and appropriation) exclusive to the indigenous population of the village and common to several villages.

### The village

This includes all dwellings. These are established along the road and the coffee or cocoa plantations are behind them.

Within the village, each family or individual appropriates land by "developing" it, i.e. by constructing a dwelling or establishing perennial crops. Once developed, the land is passed on from father to son. Women have no direct access to land tenure.

### The forest close to the village, exclusive land rights

This extends from the plantations located behind the houses up to a distance of 3 kilometres from the village. It includes the cultivated areas (new fields and fallow), forest which has not yet been cleared and all tracks which lead to the fields, streams and rivers.

This forest is considered to belong to the village alone. Only the cultivated and fallow areas are appropriated on the individual basis. In this forest, villagers practise agriculture, hunting (setting traps, hunting with crossbows and rifles), picking up fallen fruit, and so on. Water courses located in the vicinity of the village where villagers habitually fish (the men use hooks, while the women use weirs and hoop nets) belong to the lineages. The presence of outsiders is not tolerated, except after due authorisation and a period of observation of the behaviour of the latter.

### The distant forest, non-specific village control

Beyond a certain distance (3 kilometres from the village), it becomes difficult for farmers to continue to conduct agricultural activity in the forest. On the other hand, this is a prime site for gathering, hunting and fishing activities.

The area then tends to become common to several villages (of the same ethnic group in Bandongoué or different ethnic groups in Bimba). There are joint hunting, gathering and fishing tracks in this distant forest.

However, in each village, the boundaries of the village territory seem to be well known, at least by the older people. The presence of people from another village is allowed, provided that the latter show no intention of trying to extend exclusive rights over the area, for instance by establishing a camp there or setting traps.

In general, these rules are respected and other activities in these distant forests are undertaken by several villages in common without conflict.

Setting traps and fishing using weirs or hoop nets, which are habitually practised by women, only involve their own part of the forest. Generally speaking, women avoid travelling long distances to undertake such tiring activities.

## **Resource appropriation rules**

In this section, the term "resources" refers simultaneously to the yield from cultivated plots, produce gathered from the wild and all animal products (fish, game, caterpillars, etc.).

Rules governing resource appropriation vary depending on the status of the area, which may be subject to one or several forms of land tenure (as an agricultural, hunting and gathering area), and depending on the scarcity or abundance of resources.

### **The agricultural area**

In Bimba and Bandongoué, as throughout the forest area, fields are set up behind the dwellings, just after export crops and along tracks. The agricultural area is therefore situated in the space between:

- the houses and the forest close to the village;
- the main tracks linking the villages and the forest close to the village.

This area is not entirely covered by crops, as it includes islands of crops, new fields, former fallow areas and forest pockets which constitute land reserves for future fields.

### **The fishing, hunting and gathering area**

There are two main areas where fishing, hunting and gathering activities are conducted:

The first extends from behind the houses, along the tracks linking the villages, to the forest close to the village. The boundaries of this area theoretically correspond to the boundary between villages. In this area, *only the indigenous population of the village has exclusive fishing, hunting and gathering rights.*

The second extends from the boundary of the forest close to the village into the depths of the forest. *Fishing, hunting and gathering rights are common to several villages, but subject to restrictions on fishing and hunting established in that part of the forest.*

The prevailing logic in this area refers to resource appropriation, land being simply the physical medium through

**Table 2: Natural resource appropriation system in the villages of Bimba and Bandongoué.**

Area	Village		Forest close to village		Distant forest	
Resource	Land		Fields, fallow, fauna, flora	Rest of forest resources	Scarce resources	Abundant
Use	To construct one dwelling and set up one field		Farming, hunting	Crops, hunting, fishing, gathering	Gathering	Gathering, hunting and fishing
Usage rights	Exclusive to indigenous people	Granted to outsiders after negotiation	Exclusive to indigenous people	Granted to outsiders after negotiation	Exclusive to individuals or families	Common to several villages
Method of transmission	Patrilinear	Patrilinear	Patrilinear	Patrilinear	Patrilinear	Community

which this is expressed. The main interest is to establish the resource appropriation system (rules governing access, control, exploitation and transfer).

### The Bimba community forest

The study of the Bimba village territory, with its spatial boundaries established after consultation with neighbouring villages, and areas of influence by type of activity and existing management rules, had first of all mapped out the "finage"<sup>5</sup>.

One of the maps included the following: the boundaries of the Zoning project<sup>6</sup> as set by the administration and the agreed boundaries of the village territory, as well as the boundaries of the

community forest project requested by the community in Bimba. This showed that 56 per cent of the village territory overlapped with the State-owned forest project.

Consultation was therefore undertaken with the MINEF with a view to negotiating resource management rules, rather than classic, geometric land tenure which would alter boundaries in the field to the benefit of some and the detriment of others. Very special attention was given to the expectations of the community so that the community forest might be established in forests which were being gazetted.

Discussion and consultation enabled a procedural manual to be put together to help communities easily to prepare a legally acceptable application to set up a community forest.

<sup>5</sup> An area occupied by and belonging to a group whatever the method of appropriation (Mendras).

<sup>6</sup> Zoning project: a project to define and allocate land in the forest areas of Cameroon with a view to establishing the extent of "gazetted forests" (the bulk of which are State-owned) and remaining wooded areas (non permanent national forest estate). This project was confirmed by Decree 756/95/PM dated 18th December 1995.

## Analysis and Discussion

### Territorial boundaries, meaning and value

#### What is the precise meaning of the boundaries identifying a village territory?

Land appropriation only relates to areas which have already been used for agricultural purposes (cultivated fields as well as forest fallows). Family or individual farms are distributed around the houses, constituting the "village lands" in the strict sense. All rivers and tracks on the latter are collectively appropriated by the village. In this surrounding area, *spatial (territorial) logic prevails*.

Strictly speaking, land appropriation does not relate to forest areas, where the *prevailing logic concerns resource appropriation (in terms of access and control), land being only a physical medium for activities*. In this area, appropriation is organised around rules governing access to, control, exploitation and transfer of resources. Spatial boundaries correspond to the particular modalities of one activity: hunting by trapping, for instance. Convention, as expressed by the villagers, holds that the boundaries correspond to the area where members of the village have the exclusive right to set traps. Such *territorially-based convention* is not the only way of appropriating resources. Since boundaries are more conventional than formal, they enable neighbouring villages to agree amongst themselves,

while allowing for possible exceptions, depending on context. This flexibility reflects the interdependency of groups between whom many exchanges take place.

#### Identifying village territories and value of boundaries

The village elders are well aware of the boundaries of their territory, from the road up to the deep forest. These boundaries are natural and are made up of water courses, naturally occurring or planted trees.

Boundaries between villages are only known by old people and are not passed on to the young. This poses serious problems for the future, especially considering how quickly villages are expanding. This point led us to enquire why young people do not know the boundaries of their villages and why old people do not teach the young where the boundaries are.

We cannot claim that the "generation gap" is the only point at issue. However, the inevitable clash between generations seems to be taking a different turn here. In fact, the old people admit that the young are losing interest in village history as told by the elders under the canopy around the fire in the evening. They prefer to listen to the latest hits on the radio. For young people, such ancient history has no meaning and their concern is with territorial expansion.

We were able to observe the state of extreme tension in two of the villages bordering on Bimba. In both cases, the chiefs have only limited authority over the young people, who lack discernment and reject the wise moderation of their chief. They do not understand how their chief can accept the conventional boundaries which they themselves are even prepared to use force to extend.

This was particularly noticeable in Djemyong village when it came to discussing boundaries with Bimba village. The young people in Djemyong, who were mostly unaware of the boundaries, came to the fore to impose their opinion on the assembly, suggesting false boundaries.

Two observations can be made following the marking-out work. First of all, by seeking to discover the boundaries of village territories, we revealed to the villagers and made them understand that their territory is not infinite. In addition, the work engendered fierce reactions of possessiveness, defence and territorial expansion. Some people even thought that the work would make it possible to establish a definitive boundary between villages, thus abolishing the relationship which had existed between them for a very long time, especially with regard to joint use of the distant forest. On this point, the village of Bakombo, bordering on Bandongoué to the east, even decided to call a complete halt after a few days work on territorial delineation. The Sub-Prefect had to intervene to cool things down and written commitments had to be obtained to guarantee maintenance of the access rights of two families from Bakombo to Bandongoué

territory where they had been cultivating for more than 15 years.

By carrying out this work of identifying village territories, the API project acted as a "scout". We think that the villagers have understood quite well the notion of "identification", but they fear it. In fact, they are worried that their rights will be restricted to the area defined as their territory. Their concern is to secure their rights over an area, but not to allow themselves to be confined to geometrical boundaries which have no meaning in relation to the resource management rules which exist in that area.

## Consideration of customary rights by the State

*"A piece of land which the State unilaterally claims (and the law does not allow village communities to refuse this); even if it respects customary land allocation procedures, without the genuine approval of the people and with no benefit to them, is at ecological risk."* (De la Mettrie, 1990).

Traditional systems of land management and control existed in former times. The systems were very often weakened by the arrival of logging companies and development agencies, who came bearing gifts, or projects. These companies whittled away at the power of the traditional chiefs, sometimes reducing it to nothing. This situation was aggravated by the fact that Prefects and Sub-Prefects officially hold rights to land without genuinely exercising control over land.



Sustaining the country's wooded areas means that the local people must participate in their management. Compartmentalised management which would exclude people from the forest areas over which they exert different types of control, both over the land and the various resources, would lead to conflict between the various users. An integrated approach implies that responsibilities for managing wooded areas are divided between the various users and that decisions are taken at the most appropriate level, in order to reconcile efficiency and equity. This level will depend on the type of problem involved, rather than on a predefined, rigid framework<sup>7</sup>.

When villages realise that there is a lot riding on their organisational capacity and the initiatives they are able to put into practice, a favourable climate may be created for negotiated management of resources whose sustainability may become a common objective for all users, both farmers and loggers. The fact that the village of Bimba has shown its ability to organise itself into a GIC to set up a community forest is a sign that contractual management of wooded areas, in which forestry exploitation and various peasant activities (gathering non-timber products, hunting and fishing) can co-exist on an equitable basis, is possible.

## **Is community forestry an appropriate management tool?**

### **Assigning status**

In the national forest estate<sup>8</sup>, forests have no positively defined legal status, but community forests go some way towards plugging the gap. By setting up community forests, the State may hope to give more responsibility to the local people and ensure protection of at least part of the forests in the national estate.

This option has a twofold advantage:

- 1) the State can be sure that at least part of the forests in the national estate will be protected: people look out for anyone gaining access to their forest since they have exclusive rights over the area;
- 2) it provides security to the local people in managing forests in the long term through a management agreement defining the rights and obligations of the community and the forest administration.

### **Tenure is nonetheless precarious**

In the current Cameroonian context, the forest plays an important part in the country's economy. Its development is on the agenda and the subject is very sensitive. Even poorly or badly informed rural people are not unaware

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<sup>7</sup> This principle is known as subsidiarity

<sup>8</sup> In Cameroon, the forest estate is split into two major parts: 1) the permanent forest estate which includes all forest managed by the State or the communes. These State or communal forests are intended to remain as forests. This permanent forest estate is made up of gazetted forests; 2) the non-permanent forest estate which includes the remaining forests, (community forests, private forests belonging to individuals and others). The whole of this non-permanent forest estate makes up the national forest estate.

of the economic importance of timber. Moreover, the reactions which can be heard, even though they are sometimes simplistic, are still indicative of this heightened awareness: "if wood was worthless, how could the loggers (meaning the forestry companies) pay for so many timber trucks at FCFA 100 million and change them so often and pay for all those forest roads?"

The management tool represented by the establishment of a community forest is an opportunity which many communities intend to grasp to secure their rights over their own forest. The people appreciate the forest above all because of the security it confers, not only in terms of land (safeguarding hunting, gathering and mineral extraction areas against neighbouring villages), but also in economic terms (safeguarding income which used to go into the coffers of the logging companies or the State).

However, this situation is still extremely precarious. In fact, in the national forest estate, the law authorises the forestry administration to issue logging concessions (areas of 2,500 hectares) within a short period (one week to several months) in comparison with the time taken to set up a community forest, which is unlikely to be less than one year. Despite the annual establishment of a plan regulating the granting of logging concessions, there is reason to fear that the interests of the local people will carry little weight.

The recent situation in Bandongoué underlines even further the precariousness of this function of

"providing security". In fact, a large logging company has just obtained two logging concessions on the Bandongoué village territory. The population is hesitating between refusing to allow the company to exploit the village forests and negotiating a high price for allowing the developer onto the site. Despite a long period of awareness-raising, the people have little experience of long-term management and are wondering whether the advent of the logging company should be considered more as a real brake on the establishment of their community forest rather than a tremendous opportunity to make money quickly and with certainty.

### **Problems in the initial identification of land tenure**

One stage prior to the request for establishment of a community forest has been forgotten: identification of the village territory in the presence of other interested parties. In fact, in so far as the requested forest must not be the subject of any type of claim by an individual and *a fortiori* by a community, it becomes imperative, indeed essential, that the area declared should be contained within one (or several) *known and identified* village territory(ies). The same goes for the identification and definition of the practices relating to and users of the territory/territories.

While this preliminary stage is an immense constraint for the community which has to bear the cost, it is the only clear basis for any future negotiation. Moreover, this loophole suggests that the State needs to think more deeply about land tenure in general. In particular, it highlights the rather

"forestry-based" definition of the current concept of a community forest.

### **Prohibitive cost**

The work of preparing the application for the establishment of a community forest requires the mobilisation of a great deal of resources. While one may optimistically believe that a community will be able to hold its information meetings and identify the boundaries of its territory in consultation with its neighbours, it is difficult to imagine that it could transfer to map the results of its exercise in delineating agreed boundaries and a *fortiori* draw up a detailed map of its territory and community forest, especially as the administration demands that the area of the requested forest should be calculated by a certified agency.

Once the request is accepted, the most important part will still remain to be funded: an inventory of all resources with a view to drawing up a simple management plan, the instrument which will form the basis of the agreement to be made between the community and the forestry administration.

It is, therefore, somewhat utopian to speak of these community forests as a tool within the reach of rural people wishing to manage their own resources. Despite legal provisions which stipulate, in particular, that services will be provided free by the forestry administration to help the communities to prepare their applications, the cost will remain high.

## Prospects and Proposals

### Prospects

In this paragraph, we will confine ourselves to discussing the matter of managing resources through the medium of the community forest.

Prospects for decentralisation must be considered at two different levels:

- one relating to the applicability of the tool proposed by the new law;
- the other relating to the relevance of this tool and its implications.

### Applicability

On the one hand, we have seen that setting up a community forest is a cumbersome procedure and, on the other, that not much public information has been given out to promote the idea. Consequently, few rural communities are currently involved, even though quite a number of foreign agencies are taking an interest (ODA<sup>9</sup>, Tropenbos<sup>10</sup>, ICRAF<sup>11</sup>, CIDA<sup>12</sup>, WWF). Prospects are therefore limited pending the launch of a specific information campaign.

There are two possible scenarios:

- The study in Bimba has shown that the people did not spontaneously express a wish for a community forest. This is why they found it difficult to set one or more aims for

that forest. To begin with, the community even seem to have been dazzled by the prospect of being able to exploit the timber resources of the forest. Other resources were pushed to the background or even ignored by some. In the absence of outside support and supervision, the community is likely to be disappointed when they discover that the simple management plan only provides for the annual felling of a few trees and will not provide all the income initially envisaged.

- On the other hand, the study in Bandongoué, where the request expressed by the people is much more clearly defined (there is a need to secure and conserve an area of forest as the village, being located on the borderline between forest and savannah, is afraid that it will soon have no forest at all). In this second case, prospects for decentralisation no longer depend only on the applicant community, but also on the limitations of the tool as described in the analysis (Section 4)

The situation recently observed in Bandongoué shows how easy it is to wipe out initial awareness-raising work. Without being judgemental about the current hesitation of the local people, this case confirms the yawning gap between the fine words (legal instruments, good intentions to provide

<sup>9</sup> Overseas Development Administration (now Department for International Development), UK

<sup>10</sup> A Dutch foundation dealing with forest-related issues

<sup>11</sup> International Centre for Research in Agroforestry, Nairobi

<sup>12</sup> Canadian International Development Agency

information) and the daily reality of extreme pressure on the forest to be exploited.

On top of this, the notion of the "community forest" itself is beginning to cause some trouble, in particular relating to the submission of requests to establish community forests which are supported, under the table, by logging companies. For this reason, the forestry department has officially told Prefects to freeze all applications. It is currently impossible either to set up a community forest or to know how long the freeze will last!

## **Proposals**

The forestry administration must consider mobilising, in the very near future, all the resources needed to organise a massive information campaign on forest related topics as important as the Zoning Plan, community forests or other current topics. This campaign should be directed at everyone involved: local people, loggers and forestry administration staff.

Having completed this study, it is clear that the villagers have fully understood the notion of "identifying" their territory, but they are afraid of it and possibly rightly so. In fact, this recognition by all parties of agreed boundaries could end up confining their rights only to the area accepted as their territory. As mentioned above, they are keen to secure their rights to an area without being confined within geometrical boundaries which have no meaning in relation to the resource management rules applying to that area.

As far as "management rules" are concerned, the study has shown that these clearly differ depending on the place where the resource is located and on the nature of that resource. This means that two levels must be distinguished:

- close to the village, control over land is "exclusive", meaning that only villagers (one farmer or a family or all the families) have rights over the land and resources. Within that circle around the village, the dominant element is land.
- beyond that circle, there are no more claims to the forest land as such, the focus being on resource appropriation.

This is a vitally important observation. In fact, the notion of the community forest as defined by the new forestry legislation has definitely not taken account of these customary rules, despite its claim to be a management tool available to rural people. The study shows how long it took to set up the procedure for establishing a community forest in Bimba village and how easy it was to wipe out the one in Bandongoué. It would therefore seem timely to put forward three scenarios caricaturing what it is better not to do and what it is desirable to achieve if the Zoning Plan Project is to become viable.

**1st scenario:** Applying the Zoning Plan Project according to its original spirit, i.e. with the aim of *"delineating the rural area (agroforestry zone) and the permanent forest estate (State-owned and communal forests) in which concrete action will be taken with a view to intensive forest*

*development*"<sup>13</sup>. In this case, forestry based logic advocates separating areas and instituting specialisation. For instance, State-owned and communal forests would be strictly destined for forestry (production, conservation, various types of reserve), while the remaining part of the zone could be devoted to agriculture. In the area thus delineated, forests forming part of the national estate would be the subject of logging concessions or serve to back up the establishment of community forests. There would be no negotiation. If the State took precedence throughout, this might jeopardise the security of areas where the national and permanent estates merge.

**2nd scenario:** Assuming that rural areas are well organised and structured. They oppose the application of the initial Zoning Plan Project. During negotiation, the State recognises villagers' rights and agrees to mark the area out again. This time, the farmers' case prevails, but the problem remains unsolved. In fact, what the State loses is won by the village. This is a "zero sum game", but till when? Until the next re negotiation? In this situation, one could even imagine a series of restrictions, particularly relating to where customary rights apply in the forest. In the end, this scenario is not that different from the first, apart from the negotiation aspect: areas are still being separated and specialisation instituted.

**3rd scenario:** Making sure that there is something in it for everyone. Negotiation is certainly necessary, but

must take place between *all* users (people living next to gazetted forests, forestry administration, loggers). The State redefines its production objectives to conform with those of the local people. This option presents the twofold advantage:

- of providing security to local people for the long term management of forest areas where the permanent estate and the village territory overlap, by means of a contract defining the rights and obligations of each party to the contract;
- of assuring the State that control will be exercised. The people would keep an eye on anyone gaining access to their territory, thus limiting illicit activity in the forest areas (illegal logging, entry of agricultural migrants, etc.).

Such contractual management could involve several elements, such as those indicated in the following (non-exhaustive) list:

- help from the forestry services to guarantee exclusive hunting rights (combating poaching from urban areas);
- conclusion of agreements to limit or suspend the exploitation of certain species or certain trees which are important for the peasant economy;
- giving priority to villagers to use logs left behind by loggers on or near the felling areas, within village territories;
- direct payment of part of the logging tax to villagers in the territories concerned, or payment by the logging

<sup>13</sup> "Plan de Zonage. Cas du CAMEROUN, zone méridionale. Objectifs, méthodologie, plan de zonage préliminaire" MINEE, 53p.

company of a fixed annual amount calculated pro rata on the area of overlap between the logging concession and the village territory. Such a measure - if envisaged, which we think is desirable - would probably require an adaptation of the institutional framework to make it legal. It does, nevertheless, seem to be a key element in promoting a system of mutual rights and obligations designed to preserve the integrity of

forest areas, by giving the local population a direct stake in forestry exploitation and development.

Negotiating management like this can enhance the complementarity between those involved rather than them cancelling each other out. Finally, even though ways of setting it up remain to be worked out, this scenario shows that it is possible to move from a zero sum game to a game with a positive result.

## Conclusion

This study describes an experience of resource management by local people within the framework of applying the new law. This experiment is taking place within a project context and is the first of its type in Cameroon. Consequently, it raises questions about the real applicability of the new forestry law. Nevertheless, for the first time, this law "holds out a hand" to local people. The AP1 project, in its role as a laboratory for the Ministry of the Environment and Forests, has tested this new local resource management tool and will, together with other agencies, help to suggest the improvements needed to

establish a suitable procedural manual which can be used by forest communities. Finally, the whole team is already thinking about alternatives which would take even further into account the concerns and interests of all stakeholders and forest users.

However, one may wonder whether the tools suggested to communities by the law, within the current context of decentralisation, are the only relevant ones to consider and the only ones able effectively to meet the needs of all users of the forest and its resources in terms of responsibility for management processes.



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## **Villagers as Forest Managers and Governments 'Learning to Let Go': The case of Duru-Haltemba & Mgori Forests In Tanzania**

The case study relates to two miombo woodlands in Tanzania. Up to 1994, these woodlands were under government control and management. Their condition had been steadily degrading, due to farming encroachment, grazing, hunting and charcoal-making by local dwellers, and timber extraction mainly by outsiders. The paper depicts processes of local people's empowerment authorised on an experimental basis by the government: local communities were made responsible for the management of the forest resources and concomitantly gained more ownership rights as well as more access to benefits from forest resources, subject to proving that they could sustainably manage them. This has been the case, in a very cost effective way for the government.

On the other hand, local foresters have been liberated from their coercive role and the failure of not achieving forest protection, hence allowing them to better provide technical assistance. Factors of success include the fact that initiatives began at village level, the authorisation from the government for the experiment to occur, the further legalisation of the process, and the fact that peoples' empowerment went beyond participation to include more say by villagers in forest management via increased rights and access to benefits. One major pitfall to avoid is to try to impose this type of process elsewhere, forgetting that one major factor of its current success lies in the fact that it has been locally initiated, without outside pressures, nor the use of blueprint schemes. The main role of the government has been to "let it go". Some generic lessons are drawn out in the last part of the paper.

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