Community-Based Forest Enterprises in Cameroon: A case study of the Ngola-Achip Community Forest in East Cameroon

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CFE in Tropical Forest Countries, ITTO, Forest Trends and RRI
Country Background

- Situated in the Congo Basin, Cameroon has a surface area of 47.5 m ha of forests
- 40% forest cover
- Forest activities contribute to 10% GNP
- 1995, ITTO estimated timber production at 2.3 m Cm³
- 2002, 4.3 m Cm³
- Commercial logging companies employ 30,000
- 2003, production valued at 187 million USD
During the 1980s and early 1990s, the world economic recession plunged Cameroon into an economic malaise that precipitated unrest and fostered unsustainable forest practices;

January 1994, CFE devalued by 50%, leading to serious impacts on local and indigenous populations

Forestry as an avenue for restructuring the economy

1994: Forestry Reform – institutionalization of local management of forestry activities, village communities have access to greater income from commercial logging
Highlights of the 1994 Forestry Reforms

- Forest divided into Non-Permanent forest domain (multiple-use land) and Permanent forest domain (belong to the state and rural councils)

- Community forestry defined by the new law as “increasing the participation of local populations in forest conservation and management” and “seeking to secure substantial benefits for village communities as well as to motivate them to better protect forest cover”
Overview of Country Case Study

- Four rural villages: Ngola, Achip, Ndam, and Ngola-Baka
- Multi-ethnic community of Bantu and Baka Pygmies; control of village activities lies with three main families – the Balogbos, the Pa’ahs, and the Bamouhs.
- Each village has a village Chief, who reports to the “Chef de Canton” (Paramount Chief) at Zoulabot (a few km away)
- 1998: creation of The Association of the Families of Balogbo, Pa’a and Bamouh of Ngola-Achip
- 2000: Legalization of the Association
- 4 villages, population 1050, 4200 ha of forested area managed as community forest
History of the Enterprise

- 1996: national NGO EnviroProtect organises a workshop in a neighboring village on the 1994 Cameroonian forestry law, applications and new opportunities for local communities like Ngola-Achip
- 1998: new impetus for acquisition and organization of community forest with the arrival of SNF/SDDL, a Dutch development and conservation organization
- 1998: Association of Balagbo, Pa’a and Bamouh Families of Ngola-Achip created to run the enterprise on behalf of the villages
Exploitation of Timber and other NTFPs

- Small-scale loggers have often been contracted to harvest various timber species;
- To date, four major loggers have had the privilege to harvest:
  - L’Homage Investissement Service (Owned by M. Lomié Gérard);
  - Passerelle (Owned by Mme Esther Ela);
  - SICOGE (Owned by M. Paul Mpay); and
  - Bexdan (owned by M. Daniel Djoh).
- Loggers contracted by bureau members and later presented to villagers in a general village meeting.
- Villagers are not satisfied with operations – selective and unsustainable exploitation and low rate of payment per m³ of wood (24,000 FCFA).
Exploitation of timber and other NTFPs (2)

- NTFPs are exploited mainly for subsistence purposes (i.e. food and shelter).
- Predominant NTFPs include Bitter kola (Garcinia kola), Moabi oil (Baillonella toxisperma), Njansang (Ricinodendron heudelotti), Bush mango (irvingia gabonensis), and raffia palm leaves.
Enterprise Organisation, Management and Governance

- Elected bureau members represent the village in all aspects concerning community forestry;

- Bureau must represent all four villages, also gender and youth

- Village elites (bourgeouises living in large cities) often influence the decisions of bureau members, to the detriment of the realities for those actually living in the villages
Economics of the Enterprise

- 34 million FCA profit in the first five years
- Heavy financial investment necessary to exploit timber resources, so communities are unable to conduct harvesting themselves;
- Communities sign contracts with small-scale logging companies for harvest and sale of final product;
- Very little lucrative re-investment in first five years of business. Rather, priorities were rehabilitating health infrastructure and providing education;
- 16-18 people employed by each factory
Environmental & Social Benefits

- New forestry laws and regulations create incentives for local conservation of biodiversity
- Higher local incomes result in local development, improved education infrastructure, health and medical emergency infrastructure
- Construction of two new churches, two television sets, a generator, and a satellite dish for the village
Obstacles & Lessons Learned

- Vast administrative bottlenecks;
- Lack of financial and technical expertise;
- Lack of financial capital or credit resources to fund extraction and processing;
- Decentralization of forest management alone is not sufficient; success also demands technical training, and funding or credit availability;
- Lack of bargaining experience or knowledge, villagers taken advantage of by logging companies;
- Generational and socio-economic conflicts within villages surrounding opportunity, control, and decision-making in the enterprise;
- Community enterprise may be creating a new form of social stratification;
Conclusions, Ways Forward, & Opportunities

- Most communities were not well-prepared to manage their community forests – new programs and models must include extensive training and capacitation for logging, fundraising and marketing.
- Communities must be educated to recognize the differences between logging and community forestry, which also includes agriculture, fishing, ecotourism, and NTFP harvesting.
- Additional investment is necessary to allow CFEs to diversify their products.
- Training and careful institutional structure must work to address internal conflict within communities.
- Equal benefit distribution does NOT occur naturally and must be carefully cultivated within management plans, employment and institutional structure.
- Government should allocate more resources for appropriate technical support and training for communities.