

Community-Based Forest Enterprises in Cameroon

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

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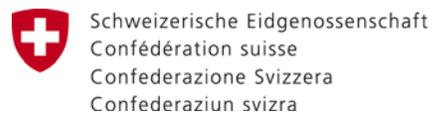


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1. Country background

Situated in the Congo Basin, Cameroon has a surface area of close to 475. 000 Km² (Kameni 1999) including 47.5 million ha of forests (Abena 2004), i.e. 40 % of its total area (Letouzey 1985). Studies have shown that of the 47.5 million ha of forest that Cameroon can boast of, about 22.5 million ha is production forest. It is also estimated that forest exploitation and associated activities contribute to about 10% of the Cameroonian GNP (Abena 2004). The forest harbours one of the richest biodiversity in Africa.

By the close of the 1980s and early 1990s, the appalling world economic recession flanged Cameroon in to a serious economic dullrum that precipitated unrest, fostered unsustainable and overexploitation of the forest and forest-related resources (Tchoungui et al 1995). Civil strife to reverse the Government's monopolistic and 'authoritarian' management of the forest (Oyono 1998; Mbémbe 1995) was met with numerous confrontations. With disturbances often stifled by the Government, local communities shifted their anger to most commercial logging companies, especially European companies who were often supported by the Government (Mimbimi 1996). Most of these communities chided the State and some logging companies for exploiting "their forest" without ceding any socio-economic and/or political benefits to them. Confronted with poverty, unrest and latent conflict, life became very difficult both to the Government and logging Companies. The devaluation of the CFA Franc¹ by 50% on January 11, 1994 had an overarching effect on the whole country, especially local and indigenous populations. With about 50% of the Cameroonian population affected by poverty (Mosser-Cléaud 2003), human populations increasingly accelerated their dependence on the forest for their livelihoods (Kaimowitz 1998; Oyono 1998).

In order to redress the situation, the World Bank and IMF came in to help the Cameroon Government to restructure its economy more especially to avert chaos and socio-economic strife. To this effect, far-reaching and ambitious political, administrative and economic reforms were undertaken under the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). Besides other general reforms such as the law on freedom and association that was promulgated in 1990 and the revision of the Constitution in 1996 to pave the way for political pluralism, the reform of the forestry code in 1994 was considered one of the key reforms because the forestry sector was increasingly becoming key to economic revival, especially with the geometric dwindling of petrol revenue and the alarming increase of the Cameroonian population. According to Karsenty (2002), the forestry reform was very central because it was a giant stride for innovative forest management in Central Africa. Diaw and oyono (1998) posit that the reform put an end to decades of monolithic "order" and state monopoly because it paved the way for the "institutionalisation" of local management on the one hand, and access for village communities to greater income from the commercial logging of their forests on the other. In 1995, ITTO (1995) estimated Cameroon timber production at some 2.3 million Cm³ and in the year 2002 Karsenty (2002) came out with about 4.3 million Cm³. Concerning employment, commercial logging companies employed close to 30.000 people and production was valued at 187.000 million USD in 2003 (Oyono 2004). Main international commercial logging companies are from France, Italy, the Netherlands and Germany. However, after the promulgation of the 1994 forestry law, nationals were encouraged to join the field, albeit the conditions for their entry were soften to catalyse national economy.

Highlights of the 1994 forestry reforms

1.1 Forestry domains

According to the 1994 Forestry Law, the forest was divided in to two main domains: the Non-Permanent forest domain and the Permanent forest domain. The former being a domain with multiple uses and which constitutes forested lands that can also be used for other activities than forestry. They include Agroforestry zones (4 475 491 ha), Agro-industrial zones (142 073 ha) and Industrial zones (575 653 ha).

¹ One Dollar is about 545 FCFA

They have been reserved for Community Forestry and *ventes de coupe*. Community forests (which should not exceed 5000 ha) are reserved for small village communities with the dual aim of conservation and sustainable exploitation to stimulate local economy. This was more or less a positive response to their social strife.

1.1.1 Community Forestry

Community Forestry, as defined by the new Cameroonian Forestry Law N° 94/01 of 20 January 1994 and its Decree of implementation 95/531PM of 23 August 1995, aims to:

“increase the participation of local populations in forest conservation and management in order to contribute to raising their living standards” and “seeks to secure substantial benefits for village communities as well as to motivate them to better protect forest cover”.

(MINEF 1998)

Before exploitation, however, there are certain prerequisites that need to be addressed by local communities such as having a legalised Associations or Common Initiative Groups, carrying out an inventory to determine the resources found in the forest, the elaboration of a comprehensive Simple Management Plan (SMP) that is expected more especially to check unsustainable forest management, etc. As already mentioned, the Procedure to acquire a Community forest is so bureaucratic, tiresome and expensive in Cameroon. For example, to elaborate a good Simple Management Plan might require from 7 to 15 million FCFA. This process is the most expensive of all the processes, covering about 69% of the total cost (Nguenang, 2003). Initially, the Government did not encourage communities to seek for outside financial help because it often led to the exploitation of communities. However, experiences have shown that without outside funding, most communities are unable to respect the requirements, especially the elaboration of all the necessary technical and administrative documents. This is so because the Government lacks the necessary funds and personnel to do this. The end result is that we find community forests that are created with financial support from National or International NGO and others with the support of small logging companies who had as objectives to maximise profit. The second case is often very costly to the community because the economically oriented logging company often dictates the pace and scale of the game. According to Abena (2004), 72 Community Forest have their Simple Management Plans ready while 55 are currently being exploited.

1.1.2 State and rural council forests

The Permanent Forest Zones are forest zones belonging to the State (State forests) and to rural councils (rural council forests). Forests belonging to the state are divided into two categories: those protected for wildlife and any other resources such as national parks, game reserves, buffers zones, game ranches and zoological gardens, hunting areas, wildlife sanctuaries, etc.; and forest reserves including production forests, protection forests, botanical gardens and plantations, etc.

Within the production forest, 107 Forest Management Units (FMU) have been identified in the Zonage Plan, 72 have been attributed while 09 have been proposed for conservation. 26 are still to be attributed (Abena 2004). Of the 13 Council Forests, only 02 have been classified, with one currently being exploited.

2. Overview of country case study

2.1 Introduction

Our research was carried out in a confederation of four villages (Ngola, Achip, Ndam and Ngola-Baka), some 450 Km from Yaounde, the Capital city of Cameroon. Although it is a multi-ethnic community (Bantu and Baka Pygmies), the control of village activities lies with three main families: the Balogbo; Pa'ah and Bamouh. Each of the villages has a village Chief that take orders from the “Chef de Canton” (Paramount Chief) at Zoulabot, a few Km from the villages. Tradition holds that the forefathers of these

three villages were forced to migrate to the present site because of filial conflict, war and diseases. Oral tradition posits that because of tribal wars, the heads of the Balogbo and Bamouh left their kin at Nakan in about 1913 to the present site-Ngola which means "fortress" against enemies. Concerning the Pa'a Family, they settled at the present site after one of the Bamouhs got married to their sister at a neighbouring village known as Mesok village.

On the other hand, the Baka pygmies have, and are still regarded as migratory communities. Because they are gatherers, they hardly live in a permanent settlement. However, the Baka pygmies of Ngola defy this convention. After some migration from the forest of Yokadouma and Mbang, one Epélé resided with one village Elite, Alama Diedonné, and later to their present village when he decided to have a family of his own. They presently have a Chief of their own (Alama Thomas).

As already mention above, Community forest falls under the Non-permanent forest domain as opposed to the Permanent forest domain. Community forest includes zones reserve for varied purposes such forested lands that can also be used for other activities such as agroforestry and Agro-industry. They are lands that should not exceed 5.000 hectares of forested land. One of the priorities to have a community forest is that communities should form and legalise an association or a Common Initiative Group that is expected to negotiate and work with other actors like the Government to create and sustainably manage the Community forest. In response to this, the villages created an Association known as *The Association of the families of Balogbo, Pa'a and Bamouh of Ngola-Achip* in 1998. It is a confederation of 4 villages-Ngola, Achip, Ndam and Ngola-Baka. After some negotiations, the Association was finally legalised in 2000. With a population of close to 1050 inhabitants, the 4 villages are forced to work together to sustainably manage their community forest of 4200 hectares, without which, and as per the provision of the Cameroonian law, their community forest might be suspended. Although all the villages have access rights to the 4.200 hectares of Community forest, management rights have been delegated to bureau members as per the terms of the Simple Management Plan and their Constitution. Bureau members are responsible to the Government in case of unsustainable exploitation, mismanagement and any other unconventional acts.

Discussion with inhabitants of Achip village including the village Chief

2.2 History of the enterprise

The history of community forestry in Ngola-Achip all started in 1996 when EnviroProtect, a National NGO organised a workshop in a neighbouring village, Mintoum, on the 1994 Cameroonian forestry law and the possibility for local communities like Ngola-Achip to apply for, and obtain a Community forest. The meeting, which was attended by the present Secretary General of their association, set the foundation for their community forest. Armed with this new knowledge the to-be Secretary General organised an awareness creation meeting in their village on the advantages for their village to possess community forestry. A provisional Association known as the *"Comité des forces active et progressiste de Ngola (COFAPNGO)"* was created to actively follow-up the process, with Mrss NKoul de Lore and Nstie Omer Hervé respectively as President and Vice President. The success of the first meeting brought in the external and internal elites of the village in a second meeting with the result being the dissolution of COFAPNGO in favour of another association known as *Avenir pour le Développement de Ngola (ADENGO)*. With the departure of EnviroProtect and the coming of SNV/SDDL, a Dutch Development/Conservation Organisation, in 1998, the impetus for the acquisition of community forest became more advanced with the capacity building efforts by the later which culminated with the organisation of many capacity building meetings on the issue. The SNV/SDDL advised them that in order to be more effective and to acquire maximum results, it was absolutely necessary for them to create a community forest under the banner of an association of the above mentioned four villages (Ngola, Achip, Ndam and Ngola-Baka), instead of each village struggling to have theirs. This explains the present name the Association of Balogbo, Pa'a and Bamouh Families of Ngola-Achip in 1998. The Association was later legalised by the Cameroonian Government in 2001.

As earlier mentioned, the major goal of the Community Forest in Ngola-Achip is not only to facilitate their participation in the sustainable management of their forest, but also to use forest resources to raise their living standards. Although the exploitation of timber has been the priority of the community since 2001 other Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) have been primarily harvested for subsistence purposes.

2.3 Exploitation of timber and other NTFPs

Concerning exploitation of timber, most forest exploiters prefer selective exploitation of species. To this effect trees like "Moabi" and Iroko are privileged in the Ngola –Achip community forest. Under the terms of the Cameroonian Forestry law, Large-scale loggers are not authorised to exploit in Community forest for fear of unsustainable logging and depletion of resources within a short period. To this effect, small-scale loggers have often been contacted to exploit their wood. To date, four major loggers have had the privilege to exploit: L'Homage, Investissement, Service (Owned by M. Lomié Gérard; Passerelle (Owned by Mme Esther Ela); Sicogec (Owned by M. Paul Mpay); and Bexdan (owned by M. Daniel Djoh). They are often contacted by bureau members and later presented to villagers during a "Tenue des palabres"- or general village meeting. However, our research shows that villagers are not quite satisfied with their exploitation mainly because of selective and unsustainable exploitation as well as low rate paid for a cubic meter of wood (24.000 FCFA).

Concerning NTFPs, our research shows that although provision for their valorisation has been made in their Simple Management Plan, very little efforts has been made to this effect, especially for commercial purpose. However, most NTFPs are used mainly for subsistence purpose (mainly food and shelter). Predominant NTFPs include Bitter kola (*Garcinia kola*), Moabi oil (*Baillonella toxisperma*), Njansang (*Ricinodendron heudelottii*), Bush mango (*irvingia gabonensis*), raffia palm leaves, etc. Most of our informants told us that they are not valorising it mainly because they lack the necessary funds and the knowledge to transform them into marketable products. Also, although they have some of these resources, they do not know whether they are marketable or not. However, locally distilled wine is highly produced in the village mostly for village consumption.

3. Enterprise organisation, management and governance

3.1 Enterprise organisation and function

As already mentioned, the Association of Balagbo, Pa'a and Bamouh Families of Ngola-Achip was created in 1998 and legalised in 2001. It guided by a Constitution which outline the objectives goals and responsibilities of every stakeholder in the organisation. As earlier mentioned, the goal of the organisation is to involve village inhabitants in the sustainable management of their forest to facilitate poverty alleviation. The Association is composed of the following bureau members:

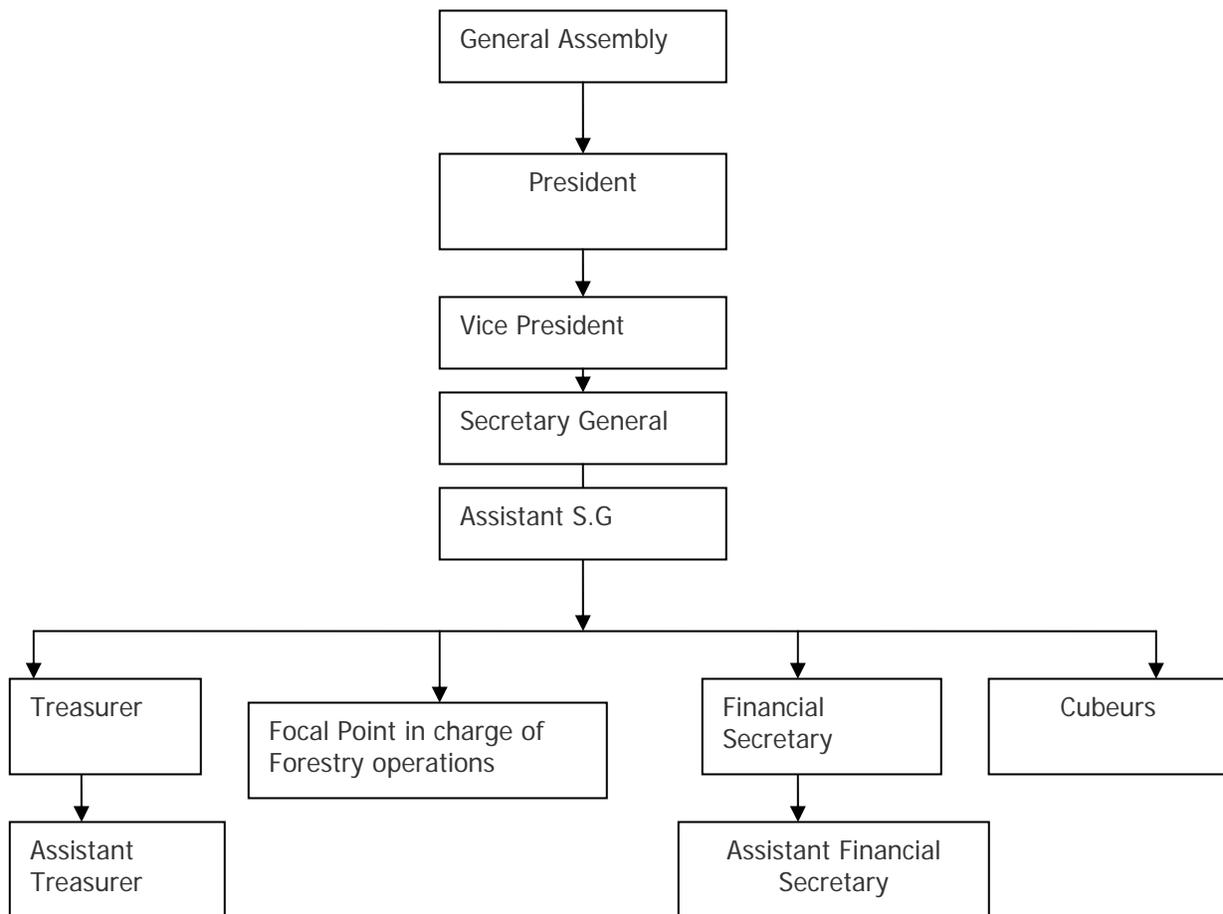
President
Vice President
Secretary General
Assistant Secretary General
Treasurer
Vice Treasurer
Focal Point in charge of Forest Operations
2 Financial Secretaries
2 Cubeurs

Village inhabitants make sure that the bureau is highly representative not only of the four villagers, but also on gender and youth issues. For example, the President of the Association, M. Andang Aubin NTYNTY, is barely 25 years old while the Secretary General is 35. The bureau members, especially the

President, represent the village in all aspects concerning community forestry and beyond, when necessary. This include negotiations with loggers, the Government and other stakeholders, attending meetings and conferences, planning, implementing and monitoring village development projects, management of village funds, etc. Bureau members are elected, either by simple ballot or by acclamation for a five year period. Besides the President and his Secretary General, special attention is given to the post of the Treasurer and Financial Secretaries. This is so because there has been a long history of corruption not only in the village, but also in neighbouring villages managing community forestry. Principal requirements to be a bureau member are as follows:

- The candidate should be literate;
- He or she should have the ability to manage village affairs;
- He or she should have a clean management record;
- He or she should be an inhabitant of the village;
- He or she should also have the ability to negotiate with external partners;
- He or she should also have the ability to look for funds to fund village affairs;
- Etc.

Organigramme of the Enterprise



President of the Association (in white shirt); Secretary General in jean trousers and Focal Point in charge of Forestry operations (in red)

3.2 Management

This study shows that although Cameroon has taken a giant stride in the decentralisation of forest management from the Central Government to local actors, there are a lot of mid-way huddles that continue to block the process by some actors. For example, most informants are of the opinion that although bureau members have been elected by all members of the village to represent them in the management of all community forestry endeavours, they can hardly make any real decision without the consent of either village elites who are often bourgeoisies living in large towns. While there have been instances where decisions of bureau members and the General Assembly have been blocked by external elites, mainly because they do not suit their interests and aspirations, there have also been instances where bureau members were forced to succumb to the pressure of these very elites. For example, when there were divergence between them and bureau members on the management of the structure, they pressured the Government to suspend the enterprise until the problems were solved. The suspension was uplifted only after villagers paid 1 million FCFA into Government coffers and promised to work as per the objective of their organisation.

Judging from the above assertion, one can readily see that the decentralisation of the management of Cameroonian forest has had some far-reaching impact in the Ngola village.

Negatively, it has shown that it does not suffice to decentralise forest management, but it suffices to accompany this decision with concrete empirical actions that will guide communities to better manage the resources for the benefit of all. This has not been the case in Ngola-Achip. Even after the creation of their enterprise, very few, if not, no villagers really understood what was going on, especially during the embryonic age of their forestry enterprise. Because of this ignorance, villagers poorly negotiated with logging companies, external elites and some callous de-concentrated Government officials. It was an uphill task looking for small-scale logging companies because of diversified interests among various village stakeholders- economic gains, political influence, village development, nature conservation, etc.

Secondly, it was not an easy task to arbitrate the numerous generational conflicts to manage the enterprise. Often than not, most youths were and are still very bitter about the elders for usurping the management of both community forestry and the poor management of forest royalties given to the village by logging companies with forest concessions adjacent to their villages. It should be noted that this is a burning issue in Ngola-Achip and other community forest like Kongo, a neighbouring village. This made some observers to come out with the opinion that although the community enterprise's objective is to facilitate collective sustainable forest management, it is gradually creating a new form of social stratification within the village. As earlier mentioned, the process to acquire community forest needed the creation of a legalised association- GBOPABA- in the case of Ngola-Achip. Within a short period, the 1994 Cameroon forestry law reformers discovered that because they did not capitalise on existing traditional leadership like the village Chief and village elders, the new structure that they have been created has somewhat facilitated the distortion of village institutions in favour of a new found village elite charge with the management of the very lucrative community forest (Angu Angu 2001). This has somewhat facilitated institutional conflicts, with traditional structures feeling down-graded to an India rubber stamp job with no meaningful function. It is often said that he who controls money is more respected and heard of than somebody hasn't. However, the results of many studies and the capacity building efforts of some de-concentrated government officials and policy-makers are gradually changing the situation. For example, the African Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (AFLEG) Process that culminated with the elaboration of an AFLEG Ministerial Declaration in October 2003 in Yaounde, Cameroon as well as the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) are bedrocks for effective enforcement of governance structures in timber producing countries like Cameroon and their repercussions in consumer countries.

Positively, the decentralisation of the Cameroon forestry domain has empowered local communities to manage their forest, which was hitherto, the sole affair of the State. While some of the above insufficiencies persist, they are outweighed by their positive results, especially because some of the negative results can be seen within the framework of the democratisation process in Cameroon which has gradually paved the way for communities and their various actors not only to auto-criticise each other but also to criticise recalcitrant local and external elites.

Secondly, most village actors now have the technical and financial capacity to manage village affairs within the framework of globalisation and market economy. Through the creation of association and Common Initiative Groups (CIG), communities like Ngola-Achip have learned to work together within the framework of a purely innovative domain- reconciling forest conservation and their sustainable livelihood within the framework of and extensive market economy.

Thirdly, the Bantu and Baka pygmy ethnic groups can now work together for a common purpose, something that was not the case in the past. The former often regarded the latter with some disdain. The reform has also facilitated the development of the village because villagers could now choose their priority developmental projects. Evidences are everywhere in Ngola-Achip- building of over 70 houses, contributions to the medical wellbeing of fellow villagers, etc.

4. Economics of the enterprise

4.1 Production and harvesting

Because the main product of the forest is timber, at least for now, communities are unable to harvest themselves. This is evident because of the heavy financial investment it takes to exploit timber. They have therefore taken the option of signing contracts with various small-scale logging companies to do the harvest and sale of the final product. Trees are sold at standing volumes and the company is expected to cut and transform the timber into planks before transporting it to the port city of Douala. All cost is borne by the forestry company.

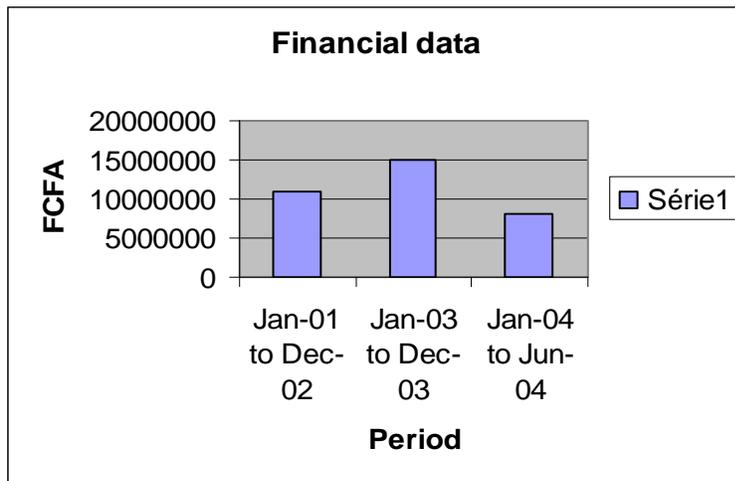
As already mentioned, since the creation of the community enterprise, four major loggers have been permitted to exploit. They are l'Homage, Investissement, Service (Owned by M. Lomié Gérard); Passerelle (owned by Mme Esther Ela); Sicogec (Owned by M. Paul Mpay); and Bexdan (owned by M. Daniel Djoh). Negotiations are often done by bureau members, and if fruitful, they are presented to villagers during a "Tenue des palabres"- or general meeting. Because the Cameroonian law forbids large-scale logging for fear of depletion of resources in a very short timeframe, most communities go in for Cameroonian nationals who often use the Lucas Mill saw to exploit. However, most villagers are not very happy because most of the companies go in for selective logging, especially the Moabi tree which is so dear to them because of the oil they produce. This tree specie is very lucrative in both the domestic and international market.

As stipulated in their Simple Management Plan, logging is just one of the activities done in a Community forest. Other activities such as the valorisation of NTFPs are also encouraged. Cash crop cultivation for communal purpose like Palm trees, cocoa, coffee, etc is also supposed to be part of their enterprise. However, they take very less interest in these activities because they have not yet been trained to harvest and transform these products for industrial purpose. Other reasons include the lack of funds to carry out such a mammoth project, the long timeframe to cultivate and harvest products like cocoa, coffee and oil palm from palm trees. On the other hand, logging does not need any prior investment after the signature of the Convention with the Government. Secondly, buyers are relatively easier to find and they often use their resources to transform, transport and market the finished products. Also, they often take part in some minor village development projects.

The structure of the bureau and the availability of a Constitution provide grounds for efficiency and transparent management. As earlier mentioned, there are two Treasurers and two Financial Secretaries who have the sole function of ensuring sustainable financial management. They are often elected either by simple ballot or by acclamation. Expenses are often authorised by the President after consultation with other members of the bureau or the General Assembly meeting, especially if it concerns very important financial transactions. Money gotten from forest exploitation is often saved in a cooperative or a bank.

Very little or no lucrative reinvestment activities have been done during the first five years. This is mainly because the priority of the enterprise was to shelter at least some 49 households, to rehabilitate some health infrastructure and provide education to some of their pupils and students, etc. Other profitable earmarked activities such as investment in large-scale agriculture, a gorilla conservation centre, and a fish pond could not be done during this first phase (first five years) because of lack of funds and the technical capacity. They are planning to include this in the next phase because they need to incorporate it in the revised Simple Management Plan that is currently being done by a local NGO. In Cameroon, the live span of a Simple management plan is 5 years. This is not only meant to wave out any obsolete activities, but also to give rooms for innovation, growth and conservation.

Although it was very difficult to have any reliable financial data, the President and Secretary General of the organisation gave us some financial trends during their first five year-period. During this period, they have been able to amass some 34.000.000 FCFA as follows: about 11.000.000 FCFA between January 2001 to December 2002; about 15.000.000 FCFA between January 2003 to December 2003; and about 8.000.000 FCFA between January to June 2004.



It is also very important to note that since June 2004, the villagers themselves have taken the decision to overhaul their activities because of the following:

They believe that most of the contracts they signed with what they termed “avaricious business partners” are not lucrative. Although they increased their price from 24.000 FCFA per cubic meter (between January 2001 and December 2003) to 35.000 FCFA per cubic meter in 2004, the situation is still too bad. Secondly, as seen above a good quarter of timber was sold between 2001 and 2003 when the price was very low.

They are also studying the possibility to log and sell timber in their community forest themselves because this will increase turnover and prices per cubic meter. It will also keep them directly in touch with national and external consumers where they can better negotiate not only on the price but also on the possibility to diversify the exploitable species because it will facilitate sustainable use of forest resources.

One year after, they have noticed that this option is very difficult because it needs huge financial investment and capacity building, something they are lacking;

Another reason for this suspension was to sensitise and study the possibility to diversify their market chances through the valorisation and exploitation of Non-Timber Forest Products. Most of their NTFPs are exploited for subsistence purposes. However, our research revealed that nothing has been done to facilitate the implementation of this objective. They are still in need of partners to build their capacity on the valorisation of NTFPs and the money to facilitate the process;

They also expect to build the capacity of bureau members on the management of community forests. This aspect was considered very important because some loopholes were observed during the management process. This includes wrong negotiations with logging companies, low capacity for investment, and insufficient knowledge on the search for additional funding to reinvest in their community forest;

However, it was also observed that not all member of the community agreed on these issues, something that sparked up some conflicts. Some wanted exploitation to go on while others attributed some or all of these insufficiencies to the inexperienced nature of bureau members. They were thus calling for fresh elections. Following this stalemate, most of the village external elites working in influential positions out of the village demanded the suspension of the exploitation of their community forest from the Government.

However, the suspension has been lifted, but not before the community paid some 1.000.000 FCFA as punishment to the Ministry in charge of forestry. Because of this delay, the Minister wrote an official letter to the community according them an exceptional authorisation to exploit some 1.000 cubic meters of wood right up to December 2005, instead of the August 10, 2005 deadline for them to present a revised Simple Management Plan as stipulated in the Cameroonian Forestry Law.

Although most communities talk of exploitation by egocentric logging companies, our analysis show that all is not just bleak for the villagers. These companies had as priority to employ villagers, at least those who are qualified. For example, a Factory Head earns about 70.000 FCFA per month while a guard and other labourers earn close to 35.000 FCFA per month. A single Factory (Small-scale exploitation) employs about 16 to 18 people during particular operations. Although front factory work is often done by men, women are in charge of certain activities. For example, they are given the responsibility to load finished planks in lorries!! They often pay some men to do it and have some benefits. They also sell some food to factory workers.

5. Environmental benefits; conservation values; impact on biodiversity

According to the Cameroonian forestry law, community forestry has the following main objective: involving local communities in the sustainable management of the forest to facilitate local development. This is supposed to create incentives to local communities to conserve biodiversity within their vicinities.

Since the commencement of their community forest, social returns from the enterprise are very visible in the village. Although not as expected the livelihoods of villagers have relatively increased.

Although their Five year plan earmarked the construction of 49 new houses, their records show that 72 houses have already been constructed. However, the Association provides zinc, which is the main cost, because sun-dry blocks are done by each household. To date, some 3.000 zincs amounting to close to.....FCFA have been bought and distributed to villagers. Both villagers and external elites benefit from this venture. However, we noticed that not all the villagers are presently benefiting from the zinc because of insufficient financial means to satisfy all village inhabitants, especially because it has

acted as an incentive for many villagers to build their houses. Prior to this, most houses were build with sticks cloth with mud and roof with sticks and raffia palm leaves.

Picture of household:



Typical household before Community forest



House with zinc donated by the Community forest enterprise



Different type of houses

Since they were unable to satisfy the needs of all the villagers at the same time, and since they wanted to prevent conflicts, they developed certain generally accepted criteria. Each household head was asked to make a list of those he expects to benefit from the zinc. Internal family meetings were organised and a list was settled at. The others will benefit in the next distribution phase. The zinc is given after they are sure that an individual has constructed his house up to the roof. However, one community, the Ngola-Baka (pygmies) questions the distribution because not a single member of their village has benefited from the enterprise.

Since the area is situated in one of the most illiterate area in Cameroon, the village association has developed a scholarship strategy. Primary school, Secondary school, High School and University students were granted an annual scholarship ranging from 15.000 FCFA (Primary school), 30.000 (secondary and high school) and 50.000 FCFA for University students. They are expected to pay their school fees and/or buy their books. Close to 94 students have benefited from this exercise. Also, the village Association also rehabilitated some classrooms and were expected to do more had it not been for the suspension of the activities of the enterprise by the Government last June 2004.

Cases have also been reported where the village Association has undertaken some emergency medical evacuation to Sub-Divisional and Divisional Hospitals. This is often done during serious medical cases. Also, some essential drugs were bought to equip the village health Centre (The health centre is not functional anymore). Every person living in the village could benefit from the drugs.

Two village churches (Catholic or Presbyterian) have also been rehabilitated. Although not yet finalised, this is an endeavour that most villagers cherished. Most villagers are either catholic or Presbyterians.

The association also bought two television sets, a generator and a satellite disc for villagers to follow up news, football matches, etc.

As already mentioned, community members are in a very highly illiterate area. However, although some bureau members have not gone beyond the fifth year in Secondary school (the President and his Secretary General, for example, schooled right up to form five), they have had some form of professional training. The President, for example, has been working for the Large-Scale forest logging Company "Société Forestière Hazim" from 1998 to 2002 as *Magasinier* or store accountant. He benefited from a

four-year training in Douala that was sponsored by the company. He resigned in 2002 to take over the control of the village community forest.

The Secretary General has more or less had an on-the-job-training. After his formal education, he created a local NGO known as *Centre d'Etude Forestière du Dja* (CEFDJA) in which he has been the Director since then. He has attended numerous community forestry training Workshops and Conferences.

6. Intersection with government regulations and policies-enabling conditions

A lot has already been said on the intersection between this enterprise and government regulations and policies under the country background which will be irrelevant to repeat here. However, it is very important to note that despite some insufficiencies, the creation and management of community forest in Ngola-Achip falls in line with Government regulations and policies of decentralisation of the management of forest resources to promote sustainable local livelihoods. However, some of these insufficiencies are intentional and unintentional. Unintentional cases are linked to the lack of funds and the manpower to carryout certain activities like communal farms, the creation of a gorilla conservation site, the valorisation of NTFPs that was stipulated (and accepted by the Government) in their Simple Management Plan.

Intentional because the implementation of some of their policies is blocked by very powerful middle class elites if they do not seem to tie with their interests. This was seen when the struggle for power and influence partially fuelled conflicts which led to the suspension of their community forest. Some of them even go as far as using their position in Government to distort any action- positive or negative- just to show to the "other elite" that he or she is more powerful than the other. Community Forest therefore becomes the theatre for political rigmaroling. The looser, of course is the ordinary villager who greatly depends on these forest resources for survival rather than most of these powerful elites who live and work in Yaounde or any other towns. Although the Government of Cameroon is taking stringent actions to avert these situations, they lack the funds and manpower to monitor such incidences.

6.1 Obstacles

As briefly mentioned, although the Government facilitated rural communities to acquire community forest enterprises, a lot of administrative bottlenecks are tainting the smooth running of the enterprise. The Cameroonian Forestry Law of 1994 gives grounds for communities to organise themselves as an association or a common initiative group before demanding the creation of a community forest from the Government. Three years after the creation of the 1994 forestry reforms (i.e 1997) only two Communities successfully passed through the hill top process. They are Bimboé and Bengbis. It took Ngola-Achip six years to have their community forest.

6.1.1 Of the creation of community forests

Without going in to the details on the procedures for the attribution of Community Forestry as stipulated by the *Manual for the Attribution of Community Forestry*, we would want to precise the following major steps that our sample population underwent to have their community forest enterprise:

The first phase includes *sensitisation, information, education and training*. This phase is supposed to be done by the Ministry in charge of forestry, but experience has shown that they had virtually been absent either because of lack of personnel, finance or the will to do so. This explains why, as mentioned above, some local, national and international NGO came in to support some communities, without which, it will have been virtually impossible for some of them to have a community forest. This phase was respected in Ngola-Achip with the support of EnviroProtect (a national NGO) between 1996 and 1997. They were departed in 1997 by SNV/SDDL. During this phase, the community succeeded in organising three meetings, with the participation of both internal and external elites. The result was that they perceived the *raison d'être* of the creation of their community forest in their community.

The second phase requires the creation of a legal entity. The aim of this, among others, is to have a legal base to negotiate with a second or third party, solve problems in case of dispute and be responsible to the Government for any positive or negative acts concerning forest management. Within this framework, the SNV/SDDL Project succeeded in facilitating the creation of their Association regrouping four villages (Ngola, Achip, Ndam and Ngola-Baka), thus the present name the *Association of Balagbo, Pa'a and Bamouh Families of Ngola-Achip* in 1998. The Association was later on legalised by the Cameroonian Government in 2001.

The third phase consists of the delimitation of the community forest. Delimitation might also include a brief study to understand the major resources in the forest. The Ngola Community Forest has a surface area of 4.200 hectares.

Another very important phase is the elaboration of a Simple Management Plan (SMP) which is more or less a pivotal document that outlines the various activities that will be carried out by the community to sustainably management the forest to improve sustainable local livelihoods. This document was elaborated in the year 2000 and is supposed to be revised after five years (2005) to meet up with unforeseeable changes. This phase, which often builds on the results of the inventory, was partially supported by SNV/SDDL. The rest (2.000.000 FCFA) was borrowed from Kongo, a neighbouring village that was already exploiting its Community forest. We do not have the exact data on the financial contribution of SNV/SDDL to this process.

After successfully undergoing all of these stages, the document was submitted to the Ministry in charge of forestry for examination. One of the last stages was the signature of a Convention between the community and the Government which is often represented by the Préfet or Sous-Préfet. The signature of this Convention paved the way for the exploitation of the community forest by the community. It is often done only after the Ministry in charge of forestry has approved the community to go ahead with the exploitation of their community forests (after examining to her satisfaction all the necessary documents).

6.1.2 Funding of activities

Village communities are expected to fund most, if not, all expenditures before and during exploitation. No credit facilities have been allocated to communities to fund the process. This explains why communities turn for solace not only to local, national and international NGOs, but also to logging companies. While most NGOs facilitate sustainable management and local livelihoods in the village, small scale logging companies are business enterprises who would always want to maximise their profits with very little investment. Since villagers do not have enough money to start exploiting timber and other forest resources in their forest (which is their wish), and since it is increasingly becoming very difficult to sign lucrative contracts with partners because of the increasing number of community forests, communities are left with very little options than to negotiate and get the best of what they can get out of logging companies. For example, in 2004, they negotiated a cubic meter of timber at 35.000 FCFA, up from the 2001 24.000 FCFA per cubic meter.

Communities do not pay tax for the exploitation of community forest, mainly because the Government's objective is to facilitate decentralisation, stimulate local development, and catalyse conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. On the contrary, small-scale logging companies pay taxes for the exploitation of timber in the Community forest, mainly because they are economic operators.

7. Ways forward and opportunities

If well managed, community forest is a valuable mechanism to alleviate poverty and foster conservation. However, experiences have shown that most communities were not prepared to manage community forest. This explains why we observe some loopholes in the process. The first five years of the Ngola-Achip Community forest has given them the experience to correct some of their errors of the past. For

example, they were unable to negotiate lucrative contracts with logging companies. This explains why their initial contract was 24.000 FCFA per cubic meters. As our data shows, most of the logging was done at this meagre price, until when they became partially experience to renegotiate a cubic meter at 34.000 FCFA. When given the opportunity, they will do more. Secondly, because they did not negotiate against selective logging, most logging companies concentrated their logging activities on one or two species-Moabi. Presently, this specie, which is culturally and economically important to the community, is gradually close to extinction. The best way to avert these types of insufficiencies is to facilitate local exploitation and marketing of their timber products by building their capacities not only to log and market their product themselves but to look for funds themselves. This will give them the opportunity to balance between logging of wood and their local needs and interests. If they are given the opportunity to log the wood themselves, it will increase their income, stimulate local employment and perhaps reduced conflicts linked to the management of these resources.

Another very burning issue is that most inhabitants of the village equate community forestry to logging. Community forest also includes agriculture, fishing, ecotourism, Non-Timber Forest Products etc. These aspects have totally been neglected by our sample population because logging of trees facilitates quick revenue and less investment. If continued, it will surely deplete trees and stress the community if they are unable to sign a logging contract with any potential partner. The community complained that they were unable to do this because they lacked the initial investment funds and the capacity to successfully carry out the activities because they need some initial training. Research is therefore very important because it will highlight the type of resources (NTFPs), identify appropriate transformation and market mechanisms to valorise them.

Internal conflict is hampering the smooth running of the enterprise. Conflicts between village and external elites have contributed in distorting village affairs for some time. For example, these conflicts contributed in the suspension of the village community forest for more than six months. The result of the conflict is evident in the village: village development projects have been grounded. It will therefore be very important to look for alternative mechanisms to reduce these conflicts which at times also include various components of the village society such as youths and adults, women and men, etc. The underlining causes of these conflicts include corruption, the struggle for political recognition as a village elite, financial management etc. These issues can easily be addressed if there is an appropriate governing mechanism for the village.

Although the community has greatly profited on proceeds from community forest, evidence on the field show that sharing mechanism does not give room for equitable benefit sharing. For example, Ngola-Baka, a pygmy village, benefited less than Ngola, Achip and Ndam who are dominated by Bantu from the zinc distributed project. This has not only created some form of latent conflicts but has also gradually dwindled their interest in collective village development projects. Efforts should therefore be geared towards equal sharing of costs and benefits and the effective involvement of the pygmy population in the community forest enterprise.

Also, because of the lack of human resources and funds, the Ministry of Forestry and Fauna is not giving the appropriate technical support it should have been given to the community. This explains why external elites have captured and are influencing the whole process. Most of the times, their interests do not converge with those of villagers since they live far away from the village- often in towns. This also opens the grounds for avaricious logging companies to deceive villages with unconventional logging. It will be very important if the Government can allocate some resources to better accompany communities in the process. This will reduce illegal logging, corruption, fraud and the fight for leadership.