

COMMUNITY FORESTS IN CENTRAL AFRICA: PRESENT HURDLES AND PROSPECTIVE EVOLUTIONS

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Taking Stock of Smallholder and Community Forestry: Where do we go from here?

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Abstract :

The present article presents the principal aspects of community forests (CFs) implementation in Central African countries as well as some prospective ideas for its successful implementation in the future.

The paper is organised in two main parts: the first part tracks the institutionalisation process of community forests in Central Africa since they were recognised by the Cameroonian forest law in 1994. We reveal the contradictions between the law and the de facto social representativeness, as well as the tenure complexity that the present model has short-circuited. We then present other implementation issues such as the sustainability of resource use and the socio-economic factors that have characterised community forests' development.

This allows us to discuss that the concept of community forests has been differently appropriated by the governments of Gabon, DRC and Cameroon, and the shared challenges ahead: the need to acknowledge the dual dimension of land tenure; the need to better integrate community forests in the decentralised matrix of municipalities; and the importance of a comprehensive zoning plan bearing in mind the powerful consequences it can have regarding PES and REDD additionality.

We conclude that community forestry (CFY) in Central Africa is still a tool with a great potential for forest conservation and rural development, and we give the main lines that research institutions, development agencies, governments and forest dwellers have to work on if the model is to bring more success in the coming decade.

AN INSTITUTIONALISATION MORE DIFFICULT THAN EXPECTED

A dual reality

Community Forestry (CFY) embrace two realities: a customary reality where different groups of rural dwellers use and manage in their own way – often not collectively – a piece of forest, and an institutional entity by which a public authority – generally the State – decide to create a juridical

category named “Community Forest” and decide to allocate a piece of land to a “community” identified through a territory (generally a village or a group of villages composed by a number of lineages). In Central Africa, where the institutional system has been inspired by the French system, devolution of management responsibilities cannot be directly transferred to a “customary institution” if it has not been given a legal recognition, called “personnalité juridique” or “morale” that give formal authority and responsibility to the body. In Cameroon, such issue has been resolved through the use of existing categories such as the “Groupement d’Intérêt Collectif” (GIC) or the “Cooperatives”, we refer both as “associations”. The Gabon has followed the same way. In DRC, the issue is still pending; lawyers from the Ministry of Environment are considering granting a *sui generis* moral personality to the “communities”. This solution, which was already proposed by Garrier (1992) for Côte d’Ivoire, is suitable but gives the political authority to customary Chiefs, not elected and sometimes contested for corruption. The Cameroonian system of “associations” lies upon election, a procedure for designation of leaders strongly advocated by Ribot (2009) who opposes “*democratic decentralisation*” to decentralisation as a mere “participatory approach”. Another problem with such self-definition principle is the need to have already an institutional system based on powers devolved to community entities, as the “indirect rule” principle was (Mortimore, 1998). In DRC, decades of Kinshasa’s discretionary ruling (even though the authority of the State was elusive) will certainly create difficulties for such a shift in the institutional system.

The Cameroonian way of creation of “modern” territory-based legal entities (“associations”) generates also its own difficulties. An association/group/cooperative is voluntary-based, and membership needs an action of registration. The risk is the “privatisation” of associations, when a prominent family or clan gets the effective ruling of the association at the expenses of the other members of the village -the so-called community¹. In Cameroon, where the land tenure is exerted by families, several CFs have been split leading to de facto land privatisation. In Central Africa, like in many developing regions, land privatisation in remote rural areas, especially forested ones, cannot be an individualisation of land as it is in many western countries, even though there are “big men”, sometimes the customary chiefs, who prepare such an evolution Community forestry can be seen as a collective de facto privatisation process, and the family entities are shown on the surface of the “communities”, especially when conflicts are breaking the initial arrangements at village levels. In Central Africa, villages have often been colonial creations and populations have been moved and concentrated along roads in order to facilitate political control. A. Takforyan (2001) suggests that several “boundaries” between communities’ forests have been set through the hard labour process, when the colonial authority distributed portions of road to be maintained between the villages².

Territory and tenure

The issue of the tenure is more complex than usually believed in many NGOs “advocacy speeches”. In some cases, lineages have a strong authority on the forest territory they claim, access is well codified and boundaries are precisely known. But is more frequent that villages experience internal conflicts, precluding collective action and resulting to open access or similar situations where some individuals claiming an authority try to squeeze money to land candidates. Most of the time, land and resources tenures are complex combination of individual/family/lineage/clan rights that interfere and vary according to conditions. In Eastern DRC, it was told during a Forest Monitor partners meeting that the customary chiefs are giving forest access to artisanal loggers against direct and personal payments, at the expense of the rest of the community. On-going studies show a similar situation in

¹ In Cameroon, in most cases the non-member of the associations are not part of the benefits from the timber activity but they are nonetheless compensated through a small return (in percentage) on each tree sold.

² As noticed by Weber (1977) and Leplaideur (1985), this is also correlated with the cocoa planting, a practice which drove land tenure appropriation in the years 1930’s.

Bas-Congo and Bateke Plateau. On the other hand, it is very common to see individual customary owners selling one or several trees to small-scale loggers without the authorization of village chief or families elders.

Between these two extremes, one can see a range of situations where the collective action capacities are more or less effective, and highly dependent -among other factors- on the dynamics of the fluid boundaries of the “customary collective land”.

Indeed, those boundaries are not every time identified for all the forest, and/or are not known by all the members. Some land rights are often elusive when the density of population is low, as mentioned by Pourtier (1986) for Gabon: « *Au-delà du terroir, dans l'espace interstitiel entre deux villages, les droits sont plus flous ou complexes. Ils n'ont de réalité qu'en cas de compétition, donc à partir d'une certaine densité (...)* La réalité des différents droits fonciers dépend fondamentalement de la densité de population ; ils ne sont effectifs que dans la proximité des îlots d'habitat, dans la sphère reconnue des espaces périvillageois. Si ceux-ci sont contigus, la démarcation entre territoires est efficiente. Dans le cas contraire, l'espace se dilue dans l'inconnu des non-lieux où les droits n'ont plus de consistance ». Takforyan (2001), Karsenty and Marie (1998) and Vermeulen (2000) made similar statements for Eastern Cameroon. Moreover, forest claim dynamics may go beyond community forest limits. This has been noticed by Pourtier (1986) (« *La non-coïncidence fréquente entre appartenance clanique et localisation (surtout dans les sociétés de filiation matrilineaire) peut compliquer les choses* ») and by Pierre et al (2001) who mentioned that the lineages, who are claiming the land rights, are spread in several villages. But national legislations tend to assimilate communities and villages when community forests are concerned.

During the API Dimako project, the project team did in 1995 a “participatory mapping” of lineages forest use lands (Cirad-Forêt, 1998). This exercise confirmed the discontinuity and the uncertainty of the boundaries of the “*finage*”, but the most striking was the singular use of the map: once given back to the village of Bimba the map was used to ask the neighbouring hunters for an access duty to the common area of forest they always used free!³ This confirms that CF creation is a *collective* privatisation process, in the sense that it formalise legally and on the field the existence of exclusive rights on resources⁴. But assuming that such a privatisation process will lead spontaneously to a “sustainable management of resources” would be naïve.

The sustainability issue

Rural communities in forested areas tend to strive towards the reproduction of the social group and not towards “sustainable use” of the resource. In its PhD thesis, Takforyan (2001) noticed that the “rules” in the two villages she studied in 1995-1996 in eastern Cameroon were not rules designed for the sustainability of hunting, but general rules embedded in social relations such as the redistribution of bushmeat catches according to the status in the lineages. Rules were simply designed for practical reasons not intentionally set for ensuring a “sustainable yield” of the bushmeat. Vermeulen (2000) made complementary statements in its own PhD thesis in other places of eastern Cameroon: he observed that when a given specie tended to disappear after overhunting, the hunting effort simply shifted to another specie -generally a smaller one- without an attempt to design and impose “sustainability rules”. Moving elsewhere in the forest to get new resources has been a historical pattern in the Congo Basin, facilitated by shifting cultivation and the limited in-site investment, as opposed for example to “hydraulic societies” in drier areas.

³ Even though this did not last, since the same duty would have been enforced by the other villages, resulting in a collective loss and possible conflicts.

⁴ Simply, such collective privatisation cannot be complete since overlapping uses are still maintained, such as hunting, as they would be difficult, practically and socially, to exclude neighbouring hunters.

A parallel can be made with the “désaccumulation” strategies well-known by anthropologists (Copet-Rougier, 1987; Geschiere, 1995) using witchcraft, segmentation and migration, a common feature in Bantus’ societies of the Congo’s Basin. The power is called “non-coercion”, the society is called “egalitarian”, “segmentary” or “acephalous”, even though this is related to some societies of the dense forest area (the situation cannot be compared with Western Cameroon, for instance, or with the uplands’ Téké societies in the two Congo(s)). Such characteristic should be taken into consideration by organisations such as RRI and IIED aiming at developing small-scale enterprises upon CFs: entrepreneurship spirit is not absent from these areas, but its realisation can be severely fought by other community’s members.

The socio-economic dimension

Ezzine de Blas *et al* (2009) showed that the likeliness of self-managed – highly vertically integrated – CFs (i.e. community enterprises) in Cameroon decreases with the distance to markets. The wider was such distance, the more likely was a situation where the communities have delegated or sold out their timber rights to artisanal or industrial loggers. External support by an NGO or a development group such as the Dutch SNV also helped community forests towards community enterprises if such support was of sufficient quantity and quality support.

Such a statistical result can be backed by a number of reasons: timber activity is highly dependent on road conditions and market knowledge, two assets owned by the industry which have developed important logistical division, something difficult to achieve at community level. In addition, remote and land-locked areas are also often less populated, with many of the features above mentioned for land tenure and spatial boundaries in low-density forest areas. In Gabon, the study by J.M. Pierre and the LUTO (*Laboratoire Universitaire de la Tradition Orale*) pointed out the diversity of management system of the forest resources by the “communities” and concluded that this diversity could be considered as a major impediment for the implementation of the concept of “Community Forestry” that was about to be promulgated by the 2001 Gabonese’s Forest code (Pierre *et al*, 2000)⁵. It underlined the demographic issue: due to the rural exodus, “*Le milieu rural se caractérise par une prédominance de personnes âgées et d’enfants (...) Le manque de main d’œuvre s’y fait sentir*”. In Cameroon, it was the return of young adults from the cities, where they have experienced both salary working, general criticism vis-à-vis the government and, for some of them, the urban violence, which created a social group contesting community forest management. Karsenty (1999) recounted how in a Cameroonian village the incapacity of the “Chief” to convince the others to invest in a collective way the share of the proceeds from the logging company contribution (1,000 FCFA per cubic-meter to the riparian villages), with young men shouting him: “*Tu as assez mangé, maintenant c’est notre tour!*”. These internal conflicts illustrate also the lack of accountability and the need to developing mechanisms for improved governance of community forest logging revenues. It also stresses the need for developmental and international organisational to target and work with strong cohesive villages.

In conditions where landlocking and low density are coupled with unbalanced population repartition entailing labour constraint, the possibility of having a self-managed *community* creating its local enterprise to commercialise the timber and/or non-timber products is limited. This explains why, in many cases, villagers are looking for alternative ways of getting money and revenues. When confronted to the adventure of self-development through enterprise creation, they do prefer the

⁵ Nevertheless, the EU-funded DACEFI project successfully implemented CFs in Northern Gabon, with three different ethnic groups. It shows that this sociological feature raised in Pierre *et al*. report does not prevent CFY, even though the social demand for it seems less active in Gabon compare to Cameroon.

perspective of salary working in the forest industry, which opens to stable revenues, social security and access with their families to health care facilities where they work for large companies. E.g. the logging company CIB in Congo provides incomparable better health care than the government can provide in this area (including HIV tri-therapy). The land claims are often more a way of negotiating and getting rents from the forest concessionaire than a will to displace the concessionary system and its patronage networks in which villagers aspire to become part of. With the development of the certification, companies tend to generalise a system of rent-sharing that started first in Cameroon in the 90's for the sales of standing volume ("*ventes de coupe*"); the principle is to return to the villages a sum (generally set at 1000 FCFA or 1.5 €) for each cubic-meter cut in the concession, the total amount being poured in proportion of the villager's forest area overlapping with the concession. Such system has been experienced in Gabon by the CEB-Thany company, and the villages' area has been designated as "*finages*", a notion already proposed for Cameroon for a similar arrangement in the 90's by Karsenty (1996). It is in a way of being generalised in Central Africa, and will be probably a legal requirement in Gabon in the next future. In Gabon, the appetite for CF has been extremely limited since this possibility has been opened by the 2001 law. The fact that rural inhabitants are entitled to "*coupes familiales*" (in spite of the replacement of this category by the one of "*permis de gré à gré*"), a right to cut and sold a certain amount of commercial trees, which are almost systematically negotiated with an industrial logger, has had certainly to do with this lack of interest.

But the most challenging activity to CFY in Congo Basin comes from informal small-scale logging, which has known a rocketing growth in the last ten years. All cities are mainly provided with informal sawnwood especially for the construction and furniture markets. In Cameroon and in DRC, domestically consumed timber is already above the official timber (export-oriented) production while it is 50% in Libreville (Lescuyer *et al.*, 2009). This activity is highly profitable, from the forest loggers to the urban sellers, and is able to meet domestic demands at very competitive prices. On the field, it is common to see village loggers leaving CF timber cutting to enter informal logging. Without a deep simplification of the CF procedures and a better regulation of the informal timber small-scale sector, there is little chance that CFY becomes an attractive financial activity for most local population.

CFs are nevertheless a way of securing the land tenure and a mean to negotiate with outsiders an access to the resource, two features explaining the high number of applications in Cameroon for being granted a CF.

Challenges with law implementation

In Cameroon, the development of CFs has ambiguous relationships with the law implementation agenda pushed by the "international community", through the FLEGT program. Since 2001 CFs should be run only on an artisanal basis for the timber to be exported. But this condition is rarely met, since it entails the setting of a community enterprise, theoretically more profitable for the villagers but difficult to implement, due to many of the reasons exposed above. The on-shoulder transportation of sawed timber on long distances is not particularly appreciated by villagers – it provokes back and neck injuries, who understandably prefer selling out the stumpage timber and devote their time to other activities. However, as the companies see disadvantages to work with community forestry (high transaction costs and timber prohibited for export), the situation is evolving and more direct exploitation can be seen on the field – without being a guarantee of higher revenues for the villagers.

The FLEGT program, with the perspective of "FLEGT licenses" as a passport to export in the EU, and the companies' endeavour to get FSC certified, had side-effects on the CF in Cameroon. Some companies, such as Pallisco, had reached agreement with a couple of community forests neighbouring its concession: the company was providing the technical means, preparing the

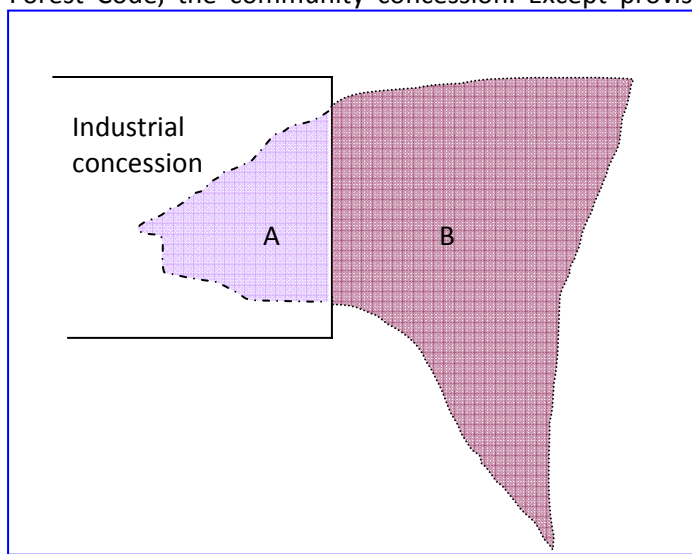
Management Simple Plan (“Plan Simple de Gestion”) and was buying the sawed timber at an agreed price (Vermeulen et al, 2006). But when Pallisco wanted to comply with the legal and FSC requirements, one of the requests was the design of a chain of custody for all the production. The company decided to stop all outsourcing, considering that it was impossible to fully guarantee the legality of the timber coming from the CF. Other difficulties concerning the chain of custody FSC standards regards with the lack of compliance with the simple management logging areas and with the misuse of timber transportation authorisation, sold by community forest members or even by the decentralised authorities to industrial loggers and especially to informal small-scale loggers. The smuggling of transportation authorizations provides multi-level benefits: (1) to administrative centralized authorities who seem to have put this scheme into implementation through the annual renewal of logging permits; (2) to CF leaders who sell these authorizations to large/small-scale loggers and make substantial benefits out of it – sometimes higher than timber harvesting revenues; (3) to the decentralised administrative authorities who are in position to suspect any legal and laundered transportation authorization and can receive cash compensation from a lax control. Such flawed implementation of some legal regulations regarding CFY in Cameroon would require strong corrective measures in terms of governance and economic incentives. So far the “Independent Observers” of the forest sector in several Congo Basin countries have paid most of their attention on industrial logging in large concessions. Their assistance would be helpful to better regulate and improve CFY.

HOW TO DESIGN A MORE ADAPTED MODEL?

Acknowledging the dual dimension of the rural forest use groups

The institutionalisation process would benefit from considering from the beginning the dual reality of community forestry in each country. In DRC, where this institutionalisation process is matter of intense debates amongst the stakeholders of the forest reform, with an opposition between the supporters of the formula “*concessions des communautés locales*” mentioned by the 2002 Forest Code, and those who would advocate a rewording referring to “*forêts des communautés locales*”. What is at stake? First, the word “concession” means the land ownership will remain in the hands of the State, when some stakeholders would like to move toward community ownership. Second, there is the power of customary chiefs; there power will be enhanced in the “*forêts des communautés locales*” were to be chosen, when the introduction of the “concession” concept would call for a more open decision-making process, entailing possible election. Currently, the Ministry in charge of Forests tends to favour, through the draft of implementation texts, the option that gives strong powers to the customary chiefs.

A compromise could be foreseen if instead of opposing the two dimensions, the stakeholders integrate both the customary land tenure (the “forest of the local communities” which is, in Gabon and Cameroon, called the “*finage*”), a category that could overlap with other tenure such as the industrial forest concession and protected areas, and the institutional innovation proposed by the Forest Code, the community concession. Except provisions to avoid private appropriation of the



collective heritage by the customary Chiefs, there is no need to regulate the customary land tenure (A + B, in the below graph is the *finage*), but a political interest to map and recognise it, notably for co-management of shared resources and benefits sharing – as in Gabon and other countries. On the other hand, **the community concession would be an**

exclusive tenure (B will be its maximum size⁶), designed within the *finage*. Its productive nature would call for an elected body, accountable vis-à-vis those who have entrusted them for managing a collective enterprise.

Conceiving all the tenure categories on the same flat plan leads to dead-end discussions and conflicting in-the-field outcomes, in which the possibility of viable community forestry entails a more or less profound dismantling of the industrial concession system; an option which is unlikely to be accepted by governments looking for fiscal receipts, exporting industries and structured employment. Such a difficulty is reflected in the issue of the maximum surface also discussed in DRC.

Currently, the Ministry wishes to cap to 10,000 ha the area of the “*forêts des communautés locales*”, a measure opposed by several NGOs. Here again, the debate would be much easier if the stakeholders were agreeing on the dual dimension rather to think the community forestry on a single plan: as the *finages* are overlapping with other tenure categories, there is no need to cap them; on the other hand, the community concessions would be limited by the boundaries of the other legal tenure entities, such as the industrial concessions. Boundaries of those last could be deemed misplaced and impeding the possibility of a viable community concession; in such a case, negotiations could be organised by the forest administration and the provincial authorities to reshape the industrial concessions boundaries, existing or planned. Such a reshaping process has taken place in Cameroon during with the gazetting process aiming at designing the permanent forest estate (which, in Cameroon, is also the private domain of the State or the local councils), when several concessions areas have been reduced (Topa et al, 2009). DRC, Gabon and other Congo Basin’s countries would take advantage of undertaking a zoning and a gazetting process clarifying the legal status of administrative tenure categories, such as the concessions: it would be matter of clear debate between the stakeholders on the balance that should be given to different categories of tenure.

Zoning and gazetting should benefit to community forestry

A zoning process, normally, should have essentially the objective of determining which land should be kept as forest land on the long-term, whatever is their legal status – present or anticipated. In Cameroon, the CFs are outside the permanent forest domain, in spite of the initial government project (Karsenty, 2003), but it is not the only solution.

Framework of the forest land status in Cameroon

Land vocation as suggested by the zoning plan	PERMANENT FOREST ESTATE (Gazetted forests or forest awaiting to be gazetted)		NON PERMANENT FORESTS (« agro forestry mosaic strip », part of the National Estate)	
	DOMANIAL FORESTS	LOCAL COUNCIL FOREST	COMMUNITY FOREST	OTHER FORESTS
Administrative naming				
Juridical status	Private property of the state	Private property of the local council	Sub-division of the National Estate	(National Estate, private forests)
Allotment	Production forests, protection forests, etc.	Production forests, protection forests, etc.	Local management under the supervision of the Forest Service	Allotted forests (private properties) or awaiting being allotted

A government can decide including the CFs within the permanent forest estate, or simply a portion of them: the decision to enforce a permanent forest domain should not be a war machine against the

⁶ This maximum size could increase after the gazetting of the forest concession (see box below) which can lead to a move of the forests concession boundaries allowing for a larger area of exclusive tenure on which the community concession can be established

CFs, but may have important consequences with respect to the REDD policies under preparation as we shall see later.

The gazetting process (whatever the local name, such as “classement” in Cameroon, Gabon and Congo, or “enregistrement” in other countries) is essential for the rule of law: it is a way of legalising, but also bounding, the pretensions of the State to establish a private domain. It gives room, at the same time, to community forestry development in an unambiguous legal framework.

Reintegrating the community forestry in the decentralisation process

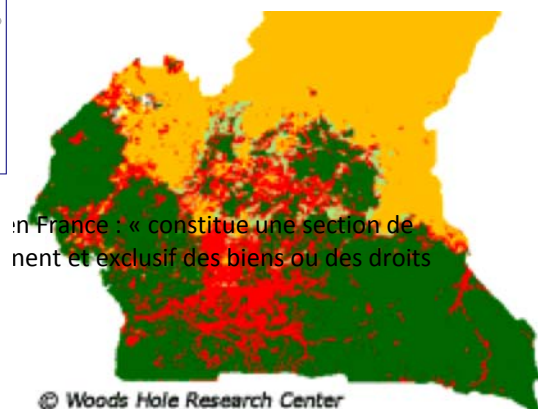
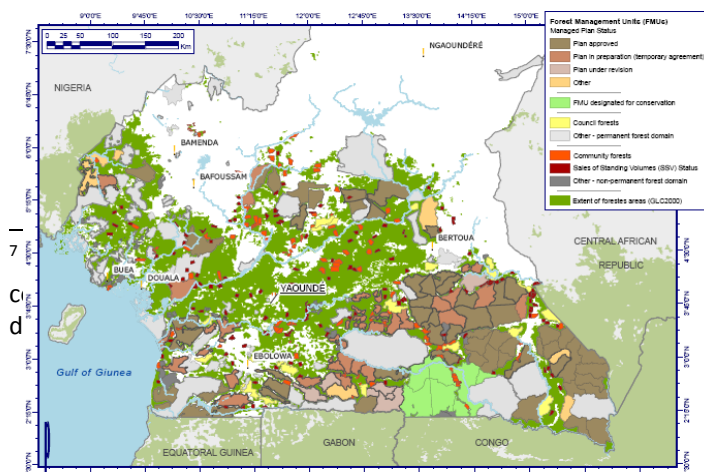
In Cameroon, two different processes are taking place: on one hand, the decentralisation which transfers general management responsibilities on territories to elected bodies, and which cornerstone is the local council (“commune”); on the other hand, the “devolution” process which delegates management responsibilities of some forests to CFs, those forests being on the local council’s circumscriptions. At the local council level, people are expected to act on the mode of citizens, while at community level, people act on behalf their local identity. Tensions arise when the local councils’ mayors, are supposed to refund the communities to the 10% share of the proceeds from the area tax paid by logging companies (40% are for the local council). Refund are often not done or only partially, or is uneven between communities and those last are not in a good position to ask for accountable management of the local council.

The “section de commune” in the forested local councils in France is a reminiscence of the formers wooden lands’ collective properties. The inhabitants of those “sections” have a legal representation and their goods, - common property of the inhabitants of the section - are recognised as distinct from those of the local council⁷. Such a formula could inspire the evolution of the CFs and local council’s framework in Cameroon and in the other countries of the sub-region. Giving their specific status, the sections could be entitled legally to participate to the governing body of the local council. It would be a way of reconnecting the “citizenship” and the “community-kinship” registers, and favours the accountability missing so terribly in the local council’s life.

Could Payment for Environmental Services rescue the community forests?

From a REDD perspective, in Cameroon it is crucial and pertinent to work with community forests because they are located in areas where the bulk of deforestation occurs : along roads, in relatively populated areas of the non-permanent forest domain, often close to major cities, in already degraded forest that is more vulnerable to fires and attractive to shifting cultivators. The potential to create new protected areas is very limited in such areas due to the important human presence. Additionality of REDD payments is extremely high: dealing with community forests is thus not only a social issue, but a REDD priority.

Map 1 shows that most of the non-permanent forest domain remains in dark green colour, meaning that this forest area remains unallocated. On Map 2, which gives us a rough idea on the location of deforestation hot spots (in red), we



observe that the red area is highly correlated to the dark green zone in map 1.

Within an expected REDD agenda, it is crucial to ensure that community forests are a viable model in the long term. In order to resist agricultural expansion, which is a serious alternative in the non permanent forest domain, the standing forest needs to provide a steady flow of revenues to the community. To arrive at this ideal situation, important investments in human capacity, production, distribution, governance (and so forth) need to be made. We therefore can contemplate a PES scheme that would reward community forests for not depleting their natural asset while these investments are being made (with funding from the PES scheme).

There are incipient efforts or investments that already work in this direction at the level of community forests' clusters. It is unlikely that only one of them can tip the balance towards sustainable forest use in the long term at the level of the CF, hence the rationale for comprehensive PES that would bring funding for a "package" of investments at the level of clusters, to be adapted depending on specific deforestation drivers:

- Support to the institutional role of the cluster: insurance, credit, planning, marketing, etc.;
- Investment in human capacity and processing facilities that will make value out of secondary tree species;
- Setting up of village nurseries to secure a future flow of valuable tree specimen;
- Development of NTFP value chains;
- Techniques of ecological agricultural intensification on non forested lands; this PES component should target households rather than the community.
- Investments in units of cogeneration (using wood residues) along with wood dryers;
- Preparation of the cluster for an FSC certification;
- Implementation of woodfire alternatives (at household level).

The professionals working most closely with the community forests are advocating a model based on multi-use of the resource and enhancement of the transformation and distribution of the products. Wood transformation chain has got much more depth than the oil palm one, and therefore can potentially generate more value. According to an entrepreneur working with community forests (*Equifor manager*), wood products from community forests will become more attractive than illegally collected wood ("bois sauvage") when they reach minimum standards of quality (especially with the use of a dryer) that the informal sector is unable to provide. But such a strategy would need at the same time a tighter control of the informal timber sector and removing the administrative hurdles making difficult forest community implementation in the name of "sustainability". For instance, in Cameroon, CFs are, as the industrial concessions, subject since 2005 to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study before its agreement. The cost of this EIA study is around €10,000 to which the community should add around €13,000 as upfront investment before any exploitation (Julve *et al*, 2007). Clearly, such unrealistic requirement paves the way to the informal sector and prevents the possibility of any competitive CFY on the national market.

Finally, although REDD is highly *de facto* and *de jure* additional in Cameroonian community forests, it may not be the case in other Central African countries like Gabon and DRC. If community forests are located in forest lands protected by the zoning status, PES will present a dilemma because it implies payments for complying with the law, something that, in its barest form, would mean the end of the rule of law. In such contexts, a possibility would be to identify those areas or territories where *administrative regulation* (command and control) will be used and those where *incentives* (i.e. economic instruments such as PES) might be favoured. A zoning plan previously discussed with stakeholders can be the way to distinguish between these two categories. In all cases, making community forests work could be a powerful way of curbing illegal logging, degradation and deforestation, while offering a social and economical alternative to forest rural villages.

Conclusion

Community forestry is facing several hurdles in Central Africa, some coming from inadequate public policies – such as the unrealistic and unnecessary administrative requirements in the name of “sustainability” – but other deriving from the social, demographic and geographic context related to this sub-region. “Communities” are not as homogenous as commonly believed or are not corresponding with the territorial-based unit which is the “village”; accountability and confidence within the communities are sometimes limited, at the image of the countries they live in ; the economic viability of self-managed community enterprises is questionable when the forest is landlocked and the transport cost of timber to the market is high; in some places, such as in Gabon, such difficulties are compounded by the demographic structure shaped by the rural exodus.

It is sometimes suggested that industrial forest concessions are one of the main obstacle to the development of CFY (Sunderlin *et al*, 2008). Such an assertion does not apply very well in low-populated forested areas of central Africa, where autonomous development is impeded, first, by other factors. Currently, the CFY suffers more from the competition of informal (illegal) loggers who operate in all forests, whatever the legal status, than from land exclusion due to the preference given by governments to large-scale concessions. At the image of many domains of the African economy, the “informalisation” of business activities has rocketed in the last 10-15 years, and this dynamic is probably more detrimental to the development of legal and sustainable small-scale enterprises than to large companies, who specialise on demanding foreign market and are capable of getting certified – a criteria that CFs can rarely meet, are they are embedded in various practices bypassing the law.

Curbing such a pathway will be particularly challenging. But CFY is not only about small-scale autonomous timber enterprises. CFY, as a *de facto* collective privatisation process, is one way of modifying the legal relationship between rural populations and their lands, and prepare land tenure evolutions that would see the emergence of family-based tenures behind the so-called “community forests”. Such an evolution would benefit from a richer view of the collective forest tenure: there is always a dual reality, a “finage” with often unfixed bounders that overlap with other status and on which land rights depends strongly of the population density, production practices and historical circumstances. Acknowledging this dual reality, means distinguishing overlapping uses (which can be organised on negotiated basis, as it starts to be in some concessions) and exclusive tenure rights (where timber community enterprises can develop), instead of having a narrow and one-dimensional view of the FC.

Community Forests have no reason *a priori* to be managed in a sustainable way. Difficulties of collective action, preference for fast earnings, greater profitability of alternative land-use, such as the oil palm (which is not reserved to large-scale industrial plantations), are factors that need to be addressed beyond the land-tenure issue. Making CF profitable would need a wide, multidimensional strategy, encompassing a reversal of the informalisation trend in the timber sector, something that have to do with the public policies. The “predatory” behaviour of the various administrative authorities vis-à-vis the small-scale enterprises, resulting in various more or less legitimate “taxes” collection, tend to dissuade the small entrepreneurs, who prefer going informal, when large companies have the political and financial capacity to cope with these practices.

PES, as part of a REDD scheme, can be helpful for orienting CFs toward sustainable forestry. Such PES should be “assets-building” PES, designed toward investment (as opposed to “land-use restriction” PES) while being conditioned to deforestation halting or reduction. It would entail enhancing the value chain of timber, intensifying the crop productions and modifying agricultural practices, diversifying the local economy. Will such PES exist one day? It will depend strongly on the architecture that will be decided for REDD, and of an adequate funding. Ultimately, there is the dimension of public policies and governance. The “community” collective action patterns often

reflect the practices of the rest of the society, and particularly those of the political “elites”, raising the need to pay more attention to the issue of “embeddedness” (“the degree to which individuals are enmeshed in a social network” as popularised by Granovetter, 1985) in the analysis of community forestry.

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