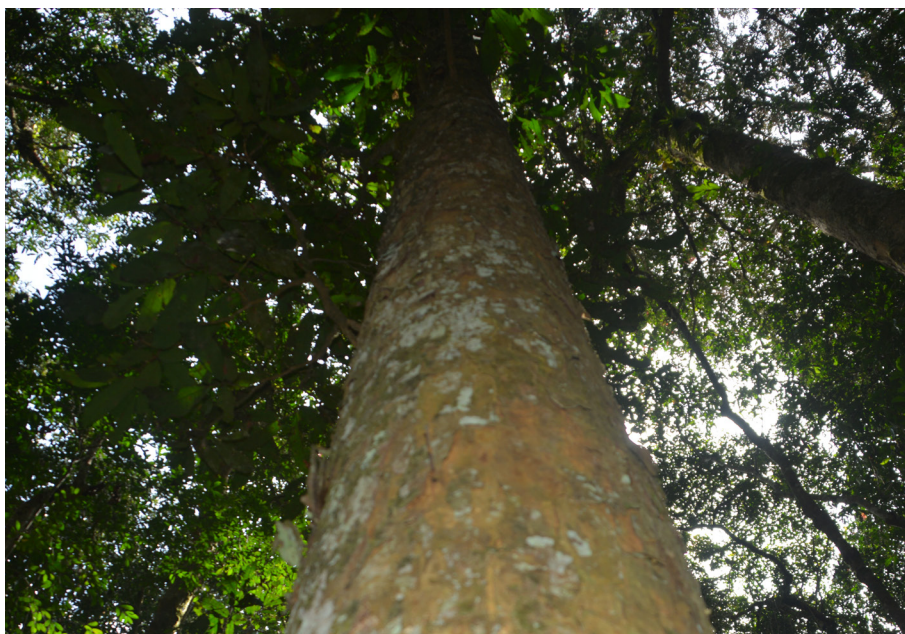




THE STATE OF COMMUNITY FORESTS IN THE TRIDOM LANDSCAPE WHAT LESSONS?





PRODUCED BY

WWF Cameroon Country Program Office (CCPO)
& Central Africa Regional Forest Program
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FOREWORD

The Congo Basin forest provides important ecosystem services essential to human survival. But the scale of the threats to this vast ecosystem could orchestrate a huge loss of forest cover due to deforestation in the coming decades if the “Business as usual” scenario continues.

Over the past two decades, Congo Basin countries, with Cameroon as a pioneer, have adopted community forests as a tool to improve the participation of local communities and indigenous peoples in forest management and to improve the livelihoods of these communities and indigenous peoples.

WWF, in collaboration with governments, partners, indigenous peoples and local communities, has accompanied this change by strengthening its efforts over the past several years to protect the forests of the Congo Basin. The promotion of community forests has emerged as the crucible for the direct participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in the sustainable management of natural resources and thus as an alternative to vertical governance in the strict sense.

In fact, WWF has helped indigenous peoples and local communities acquire and manage more than 80 community forest initiatives in Cameroon and Gabon. Twenty-seven years after the 1994 law establishing community forests in Cameroon, the expected results of community forests throughout the Congo Basin

are mixed. The initial enthusiasm has waned and donors seem to have lost interest. Against this background and experience, WWF has rethought its support by promoting Community Forests in TRIDOM (or Tri-national Dja - Cameroon, Odzala - Congo, Minkebe - Gabon) transboundary conservation landscape to inform potential reforms, share lessons with other countries in the region embarking on Community Forests, and call for more government, donor and other stakeholder support for Community Forests. Questioning this experience and shifting to an integrated approach in a larger transboundary landscape help identify the essential characteristics needed to make Community Forest entities more eligible for greater long-term support.

The results and recommendations of this assessment are already providing insights into the development of future Community Forest management strategies in Cameroon in particular and in the Congo Basin as a whole.

I would like to thank our Central African Regional Forestry Program for carrying out this project and WWF Netherlands for its financial support. I hope that the findings and recommendations of this important report will be widely disseminated.

Jean Bakouma

*WWF Director of Conservation,
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KEY MESSAGES

The objective of this assessment is to help determine what vital characteristics are needed to make community forest entities more eligible for greater long-term support. Some findings include:

- The number of years a community forest has been in operation on a “Definitive Management Convention¹” is an important, but not a determinant, factor of performance.
- Diversification of activities in community forests is an established driver of resilience. However, although engagement in other areas such as Payments for Ecosystem Services is a form of diversification of income sources, it does not appear to be strongly correlated with performance.
- Some community forests have received technical support from NGOs, while others have received both technical support and observed strict compliance with harvesting quotas agreed to with third parties. Technical support and adherence to harvesting quotas is a strong contributor to improved community forest performance. This attribute is also more common with entities under “Definitive Management Convention” of ten years or more.
- A series of characteristics are common to the more successful community forests. These include a strong ownership of the model by community members, a strong tendency towards inclusiveness of different components of the community (gender, indigenous peoples, age group etc.) and the number and diversity of social actions. These characteristics tend to be equally associated, are important to communities and capture the original purpose and essence of community forests as an instrument of local forest policy in Cameroon.
- Monitoring of ecological impacts and sustainability of community forestry appears to be the biggest challenge of the process due to too much focus on socio-economic aspects.

¹This is a contract between the communities that have requested ownership of the forest and the Ministry of Forest and Wildlife, that last for 25 years’ renewable.

ACRONYMS

WWF-CCPO	World Wide Fund for Nature Cameroon Country Program Office
TRIDOM	Tri-Nation Dja Odzala Minkebe
ONG	Organisation Non Gouvernementales
PSE	Paielements pour le Services Ecosystémiques
CD	Convention Définitif
CP	Convention Provisoire
FC	Forêts Communautaires
GIZ	Agence de coopération internationale allemande pour le développement
ICRAF	World Agroforestry Center
CAFT	Coopératives Agroforestière de la Tri National
OCBB	Observatoire des Cultures Baka et Bantous
CIFED	Centre d’Information et de Formation pour l’Environnement et le Développement
CAE	Certificat Annuel D’exploitation
DF10	Carnets de chantiers pour la traçabilité forestière
PFNL	Produits Forestiers Non Ligneux
UFA	Unité Forestière d’Aménagement
XAF	Monnaie de l’Afrique Central
MINFOF	Ministère des Forêts et de la Faune
MINADT	Ministère de l’Administration Territoriale et de la Décentralisation
MINEPDED	Ministère de l’environnement, de la protection de la Nature et Développement Durable
MINADER	Ministère de l’Agriculture et du Développement Rural
MINRESI	Ministère de la Recherche Scientifique et de l’Innovation
INC	Institut National de Cartographie
DDFOF	Délègue Départementale de Forêts et de la Faune
DRFOF	Délègue Régionale de Forêts et de la Faune
PSG	Plan Simple de Gestion
GPS	Global Positioning System

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1 WHY REVISIT COMMUNITY FORESTS ?



Wood from community forest being transformed in a local sawmill

Pegue Manga/WWF

For more than 20 years, the countries of the Congo Basin, through reforms of forestry policies, have recognized the role that local communities and Indigenous peoples can play in ensuring the sustainability of forest resource management and in improving their livelihoods. The community forest policy was conceived in the mid-1990s to encourage greater involvement of local populations and Indigenous peoples in the management of forest resources in Central Africa. It began in Cameroon and has since spread to Gabon and more recently to

the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR) and the Republic of Congo.

More than 20 years after the institutionalization of community forests, many are now controlled by local people who derive income from them for local development needs. However, it must be acknowledged that the results obtained to date have fallen far short of expectations for a variety of political, institutional, social, financial, organizational and other reasons.

Despite the relatively poor performance of community forests compared to the high expectations that accompanied their creation, WWF has been, and remains a major actor in the promotion of community forests in the Congo Basin. This is because WWF continues to believe in a landscape approach to environmental management, in preventing the development of “hard edges of protected areas”, in promoting inclusive conservation by involving Indigenous peoples and local communities in forest conservation and management; and in using the knowledge of Indigenous and local communities while diversifying their livelihoods.

However, the fragility of the social organization of the beneficiary community forests, internal conflicts, cumbersome administrative procedures, scarcity of funding, instability, unpredictability and uncertainty of technical support, partly explain the mixed results of community forests in the field.



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Members of a community forest participating in meeting to assess performance of their forest

Nevertheless, there is still hope in communities that these constraints, challenges and circumstances can be overcome.

There is a broad consensus on the potential of community forests to contribute primarily to raise the standard of living of communities, to improving peoples’ participation in the conservation and management of forest resources, and at the same time to halt deforestation, promote forest restoration and contribute to the sustainable management of remaining forest resources.

It is because of these potentials that WWF in the Congo Basin, and the Cameroon Programme in particular, despite extremely limited financial resources, continue to support local populations wishing to manage their forests sustainably.

2 PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The overall goal of this analysis is to conduct a targeted mapping of community forests in the Cameroon segment of the TRIDOM landscape in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses, to analyse the constraints they face and the opportunities likely to favor the full development of these community forests with a view to sharing experiences and lessons learnt.

More specifically, the aim is to:

- Identify and characterize the community forests supported by WWF-Cameroon within the TRIDOM-Cameroon landscape;
- Identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints of these community forests;
- Characterize the vital issues at stake such as social organization, internal conflicts, administrative procedures and associated costs, availability of social actions, predictability and quality of technical support;
- Deduce desired impacts from this analyses of community forests and develop a sample investment budget;
- Identify community forests with a high potential for socio-economic and ecological impact that could be supported and or integrated into the “Forests Forward¹” platform.

This review will generate lessons that could be of benefit to various community-based entities, organizations and countries that have community forests initiative. In addition, as part of its “Forests Forward” platform of engagement with the private sector, WWF is placing a strong emphasis on small-scale producers, including community forests, whose impact on forest resource conservation can be considerable. Thus the lessons can inspire a fresh look at opportunities offered by community forests.

¹“Forests Forward is WWF’s framework for engaging with the private sector, including small-scale producers, to reduce their forest footprint and support other on-the-ground actions, such as forest restoration, to keep forests thriving for people, nature and climate.

3 SPECIFIC CONTEXT OF TRIDOM, CAMEROON

This assessment was done in the Cameroon section of TRIDOM (or Tri-national Dja - Cameroon, Odzala - Congo, Minkebe - Gabon). This area comprises almost 9 million hectares of tropical rainforest with a very low deforestation rate, from Oveng to Moloundou (Cameroon), 500 km across the landscape from west to east.

The landscape is traversed by two Longitudes (32 and 33 E); it has five protected areas, 40 forest concessions, 10 communal forests and 100 community forests. It is also home to the “Big 5 of the forest” (elephant, gorilla, chimpanzee, buffalo and bongo). The presence of forest hyena and mandrills has also been reported. The region is characterized by very high rates of species endemism, with many known biodiversity hotspots outside the protected areas.

The landscape is also home to the largest Indigenous population in Central Africa (around 10,000 Indigenous Peoples), with a very low population density (1-3 inhabitants/km²), high dependence of local communities on natural resources and high levels of poverty (\$0.25-0.8/Pers/day).

This section of TRIDOM has a long history of investment in community forests. Notable projects in the region include the RIGC project, CBP /SDDL and, more recently, DFID/DRYAD. The RIGC, a national level project, was set up to help finance machinery and other technological inputs for timber extraction from community forests while the CBP/SDDL operated exclusively within TRIDOM. CBP/SDDL helped to increase the number of community forests and participating civil society organizations (CSOs) by capitalizing on the 1992 Freedom of Association Act, building the organizational and technical capacity of associations, common initiative groups and cooperatives in Lomie, Upper Nyong Division, East Region of Cameroon. The ICRAF-led and DFID-funded DRYAD also supported community forests in the TRIDOM on enterprise development.

4 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

A total of 15 community forests that have previously received financial and technical support from WWF were systematically selected for this assessment. All selected entities have received WWF support and therefore no distinction was given for this attribute.

Subsequent data collection consisted firstly of a review of documents from community forest projects, contacting researchers who have produced documentation on community forests and consulting official central government texts on regulations and records of community forest activities.

Focused discussions and individual interviews were also conducted with individuals and groups of resource persons involved in community forests at the local level. These included NGOs, business people involved in the timber and non-timber forest products trade, and community forest managers. The information gathered in the field was triangulated with the heads of forest posts, with ministerial officials in charge of community forests, and with local council

officers who interact regularly with the head of forest operations in community forests. This overview of the practice of community forests as instruments of forest policy focused on strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats to be watched and managed.

Furthermore, in order to analyze the eligibility of community forests for further structured support - one of the main objectives of this assessment - various organizational and operational issues of community forests were examined.

In terms of a working hypothesis, it was hypothesized that in their current context, the business models under which community forests operate are not clear. As such, although economics is only one expected outcome of community forests, it is not easy to consistently articulate a distinct business model or *modus operandi* that should be supported and sustained to advance the economic and financial objectives of community forests.

Therefore, a number of criteria indicative mainly of maturity, stability, and good governance, among others, were developed for this assessment. This was to facilitate the identification of community forests that may deserve further and more structured support. The five criteria used are;

- i) The number of years the community forest has been under management following the date of acquisition of provisional and final management agreements;
- ii) Community forests engaged in a diversification processes e.g. Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) demonstrated by the volume of payments received;
- iii) Community forests that received technical support from NGOs and have demonstrated compliance with harvesting quotas;
- iv) Taking into consideration the principle of good governance; numbers of community members and their differentiation; men, women, Indigenous peoples;
- v) Scale (number) of social actions taken, with benefits to the whole community.

For the purposes of generating lessons learnt, in-depth qualitative analyses can be sufficient. However, in some cases, and based on specific management needs, simple quantitative procedures can be improvised to diminish subjectivity of the analyses and facilitate comparison of community forest entities. Such comparison was deemed useful in this analysis and so the following data conversions were applied; Provisional Agreement were given a score of 1; those with a Final Agreement of less than 10 years received a score of 2 and those with final agreement more than 10 years received a score of 3. On the other hand, community forest that met either criteria (ii) or (iii) received scores of 1, otherwise a score of 0.

To assess criterion (iv) on governance, a number of characteristics of the associations that manage community forests were taken into account: the number of members, the gender balance and the racial balance of members, i.e. the number of men and women of Baka and Bantu origin. It was assumed that greater uniformity (e.g., with lower statistical Variance) would produce greater representativeness in decision-making. And to render the results manageable (such as reducing the size of the value) to other results, a conversion was performed on Variance. The conversion comprised the reciprocal of the Variance (analyses performed in MS EXCEL) multiplied by 100.

Example; AJAM Community Forests of 13 members; 9 men (8 Bantu, 1 Baka) and 4 women (3 Bantu and 1 Baka). Variance = 8.1875. Conversion; $((1/8.1875) * 100) = 12.21$.

Finally, to assess the social actions of each community forest (criterion (v)), achievements were listed and each was given a score of 01; for example, the purchase of health equipment = 01, the construction of houses = 01, etc. and the sum was computed for each community forest.

The total scores were added up and recorded per community forest and, like the other scores, attributed to the entity as part of its performance evaluation. All total scores for the five criteria per community forest were compiled and used to assess the eligibility of entities for more structured and continuous support.

In terms of the limitations of the evaluation, there was no random sampling of community forests given their limited number and the fact that part of the purpose of this evaluation was to assess the impact of WWF's sustainable development objectives. In addition, much

of the data was qualitative, and the process of converting them into quantitative data is never exact and remains subjective. Respondents' answers were based on their memories and not on recorded data. In many cases, not all targeted community forest actors (e.g., bureau members) could be interviewed because some were out of their villages and others, particularly some women and members of the Indigenous population, were simply not reachable.

It was acknowledged that the criteria used to assess the eligibility of community forests for more structured, extensive and continuous support can be improved. For example, not all community forest entities were involved in certain investments and therefore could not logically be compared with each other using the same metrics. Nevertheless, their achievements are tangible and are therefore justifiable reflections of their performance. Furthermore, it is possible to further differentiate criteria (ii) and (iii) in order to deepen the analyses of the selected community forests.

Performance-based payment: for the promotion of agroforestry (sustainable cocoa farming), monitoring patrols, running the legal entity office, and other social benefits; and Payment for Civic Project Funding.



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Pupils in a classroom constructed with proceeds from community forest in eastern Cameroon

5 THE RESULTS

As the basis for social and economic development of communities, and as instruments of sustainable natural resource management, community forests in the TRIDOM have certain factors that work in their favor and can facilitate their further development as livelihood strategies. These are the strengths and opportunities.

However, there are other factors that work against these opportunities, some of which are intrinsic to the practice of community forests, and some of which are beyond the control of communities. These are weaknesses and threats. Weaknesses intrinsic to community forestry practice are dealt with separately. Constraints and weaknesses related to the social, organizational, administrative, commercial and entrepreneurial context of community forests (such as product value chains) are also dealt with separately.

The results are presented in five parts; (1) a snapshot of the strengths and weaknesses of the community forests and as a legal entity; (2) the process and estimated cost of establishing a community forest is presented; (3) a sample simulation of investment costs and returns; (4), how community forests align with value chain assumptions; and (5) eligibility of community forest entities for long-term, structured support.



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Community forest managed exclusively by indigenous Baka people in Assok village South of Cameroon

5.1. Main strengths and weaknesses

Reasonably well functioning legal entities, productive forests and vibrant networks



Bakaman harvesting bark of tree inside forest in eastern Cameroon

Most of the community forests are headed by recognized, legal entities, with skills to enter into beneficial agreements with third parties, such as NGOs (e.g. CIFED for ASDEBYM and ADBAM with the support of WWF, ICRAF, OCBB) to support forest management and other related activities. The entities promote positive values like willingness to work, ambition, solidarity and perseverance. The bureau members of the entities are diversified comprising men, women; Baka and Bantu.

Many of the community forests in the geographic zone surveyed have not been previously logged, are easily accessible by road and are rich in valuable species, including non-timber forest products (NTFPs) with known market potentials. Many are under temporary or final management and possess valid Simple Management Plans (PSG) with many already familiar with paperwork like annual exploitation certificates, transportation authorizations etc. Some of the community forests have diversified into Payments for Ecosystems Services initiatives and have used the financial benefits to enhance forestry operations and develop agriculture. Others, too, have demonstrated maturity in managing revenue from forest activities and areas where their forests overlap with that of neighboring communities have developed the ability to reach mutually beneficial compromises without any conflicts.

Due to the proximity of the forests to the Dja faunal reserve, the Boumba Bek, Nki national parks and Ngoyla Wildlife Reserve, the contiguous community forest blocks offer opportunities for economies of scale, are easily integrated into biodiversity and landscape management opportunities and are regularly considered in livelihood projects by prominent organizations, notable of which are WWF, GIZ, ICRAF, CAFT, OCBB, CIFED, etc. The presence of local councils in a context of decentralization, other technical ministries, and centers for skills development add to the local network.



Pruning cocoa tree for better yield. Agro-forestry is practised in Community Forest

RESOURCE POVERTY, CONFLICTS AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Income poverty contributes towards increasing pressure on community forest resources, both from local and from external sources, and further exposes communities to exploitation pressures from the outside. Material poverty diminishes the community’s ability to effectively use the resource, such as due to lack of appropriate equipment.

Conflicts also represent another form of challenge occurring between people inside the social organization (association), and hampers the efficient functioning of the legal entity. Conflicts also occur between humans and wildlife. So, whereas social conflicts negatively impact benefits-sharing and satisfaction from community forests, human-wildlife conflicts can turn community attitudes against biodiversity conservation and other ecological aspects of community forests.

Poor local governance also significantly constrains progress with community forests especially where it manifests through dishonest dealings with third parties (such as private sector partners). In some cases, unsustainable indebtedness can lead to temporary loss of control by bureau over community forest transactions.

Poor resources governance is another area of concern. This manifests as non-respect of compartmentalization during timber exploitation operations, which can also be prejudicial to the ecological health of community forest.

5.2. Establishment and running of community forests

In practice, the community forest process in Cameroon can be characterized into eight main stages. Each stage is characterized by the actors involved. Table 1 below presents the typology of actors at each stage of the process and a rough cost estimate of each of the steps.



Indigenous Baka people rely on the forest for their livelihood

©David Rouge/WWF

Table 1: Actors involved, their roles and the estimated costs of the different stages in the creation and running of community forests in Cameroon.

N°	Stage of Community Forest establishment and functioning as stated in the Procedures Manual	Actors involved	Role played by technical and financial partners	Contribution by WWF (FCFA XAF/ US \$)
01	Information and awareness	Community	Organisation of preliminary information and awareness-raising meetings	655,000 (1,200\$)
		MINFOF	Facilitating the holding of meetings	
		Local NGOs	Accompaniment and facilitation	
		Technical and Financial Partner (WWF)	Financial and technical support	

02	Creation of the legal management entity	Community	Choice of the type of legal entity; Drafting of the statutes and internal regulations; Filing of the legal entity's creation file	580,000 (1,040\$)
			Financial support for the process and information/awareness raising	
			Raising community awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of each type of entity in order to make the best choice	
			Signature of the receipt of declaration by the Senior Divisional Officer of the Division concerned after technical approval of the statutes by the regional manager of MINEPDED in the case of associations	
			Signature of the registration certificate by the regional delegate of MINADER in the case of cooperatives;	

03	Consultation meetings	Communauté	Holding of consultation meeting: designation and validation of the choice of the person responsible for forestry operations	540,000 (965\$)
			Chair of the consultation meeting	
			Reporting, technical assistance to the local administrative authority, advising the community.	
			Technical and financial support for administrative authorities and local government officials	

04	Preparation and submission of a community forest allocation file.	MINRESI/Institut National de Cartographie (INC)	Validation of the external boundaries of the FC through the granting of an Area Measurement Certificate (AMS)	650, 000 (1170\$)
		Community/Legal Entity	Designation of the person responsible for implementing the MTP; Completion and submission of the provisional agreement application form	
		MINFOF (Chief of post, divisional delegate); local NGOs; Technical and Financial Partner (WWF)	Assists the community in preparing and submitting two copies of the interim management agreement application	
		MINFOF (Divisional delegate,)	Receipt of complete files and transmission in duplicate to the Assistant Director of Community Forests	
		MINAT (Senior Prefect, Governor)	Signing of a certificate of posting proving that there has been wide dissemination; Submission	
		Deputy Director of Community Forests	Receipt of complete applications for provisional agreements; Submission of the application and other complete documents to the Minister	
		MINFOF	Validation or rejection of the provisional agreement	
		Technical and Financial Partner and local NGOs	Assists the community in preparing two copies of the application file for the provisional management agreement and in submitting it; Follows up the files with MINFOF	
		Technical and Financial Partner (WWF)	Financial support for the production of AMS and the follow-up of files.	

05	Drafting and submission of the simple management plan and the final management agreement	Community/legal entity	Participation in multi-resource and systematic inventories;	11, 300, 000 (20,180 \$)
		MINFOF (Chief of Post)	Providing technical assistance to the community	
		Technical and Financial Partner (WWF)	Financial and technical support for: carrying out multi-resource and systematic inventories; carrying out socio-economic surveys; drawing up and submitting the simple management plan and the final management agreement in seven copies. Follow-up of files with MINFOF	
		MINFOF (Divisional / Regional Delegate, Minister)	Receipt of 6 copies by the DDFOF, transmission to the DRFOF, transmission to the Minister after reasoned opinion of the DRFOF	
		MINFOF (Minister of Forests & Wildlife)	Approval of the GMPs and GDCs and transmission to the DRFOF and DDFOF	
		MINAT (relevant Senior Divisional Officer)	Signature of the CDG under proposal of the DDFOF.	

06	Implementation of the simple management plan and the final management agreement	Legal Entity	Choice of the commercial exploitation model Signing of contracts with potential partners; Collection of the sale price of forest products ;	1, 600, 000 (2,857\$)
		Forestry operator (CF partner holding the logging permit)	Carrying out exploitation inventories; Facilitation in obtaining secure documents (CAE, DF10, consignment notes); Commercial exploitation of timber and payment of the purchase price of forest products	
		MINFOF (DRFOF)	Approval of operating inventories prior to commercial operation; validation of operating contracts between legal entity and provider	
		Technical and Financial Partner (WWF)	Awareness raising, training; Implementation of conservation projects (PSE); Support for the implementation of timber nurseries; Support for sustainable agriculture (Cocoa); Financing the renewal of secure documents (CAE, Waybill, DF10); Provision of equipment and materials.	

07	Monitoring, control and follow-up	Legal entity/community	Research and denunciation of possible infractions to MINFOF; Report twice a year to the community on the evolution of activities carried out;	
		Legal entity (ROF)	Elaboration of the annual plan of operations; Elaboration of the annual activity report	
		MINFOF, MINEPDED	Control and technical monitoring of forestry and agricultural activities; production of reports on community forestry activities and transmission to the Minister of Forestry	
		Local NGOs	Follow-up/technical support to legal entities in the preparation of reports and annual operating plans	
08	Taxation of community forests	Technical and Financial Partner (WWF)	Follow-up, training of legal entity managers; Financial and technical support for the revision of SMPs; Follow-up of files with MINFOF;	5, 000, 000 (8,930 \$)
		Legal Entity	Exercise of the right of use; payment of the felling tax in case of commercial exploitation of timber	
		Forestry exploitation partner	Payment to the community of the sales price of the products concerned; Payment of the felling tax	
		Technical and Financial Partner (WWF)	Training, awareness raising and monitoring of forest governance	

The stages of the process of establishing a community forest (creation, start-up to functioning) are statutory. The types of actors involved and the roles played by the technical and financial partners, including the amounts spent to achieve the desired results are however, not statutory, but are expected. It means different actors incur different levels of expenses from start to finish and can engage different financial and technical partners. However, the relevant entities of the forestry administration also do not change. There is no way to go around this process. The total cost can only go up or down, depending on how the process is managed.



Forest provides freshwater for humanity

Brent Sturton/WWF

5.3. Simulated example of investments and returns from community forests

This case is applicable to the TRIDOM area. The estimated production costs for wood were derived from data collected during this assessment. The data used to estimate the benefits from NTFPs was taken from a PhD study conducted in the same geographical area (P Mbile, 2016). These are estimates that do not fully consider the changing dynamics of transaction costs in the TRIDOM area, or the needs of any specific marketing mechanisms. They are based on farm-gate prices.

Tableau 2: Simulation of investments and benefits of community forests

Description of the community forests asset	
Location	Ngoyla-Mintom (Djoko, Adenan, Efoulanmeyong)
Surface area	14,214 Ha
Virtues and products	Accessibility, possibility of local transformation of wood and production of NTFPS
Immediate beneficiaries (Household heads)	40 household heads, about 200 family members and a wider local and regional population.
Racial and gender composition of associations	Bantu, Baka, 30 men, 10 women
Financial potential	High potential for local employment and local benefits through social action.
Estimated costs of investment operations - Wood (FCFA)	
Multi-resource inventories, SMP and ESIA review	32,154,000
Market research, business contracts and training	8,400,000
Marketing strategy	9,000,000
Replanting; mapping, forestry, training, logistics.	9,300,000
Total estimated investments	58,854,000

Estimated benefits of the investment per year – NTFPs	
Planned target - 200 m3 of hardwood per year; @ XAF 30 000 per m3 (30000*2.84)	17,056,800
Estimated net value of annual sales of 3 NTFPs - <i>R. heudelottii</i> /year, <i>I. gabonensis</i> /2 years, <i>B. toxisperma</i> /3 years. P Mbile (2012; Table 11, p. 65) estimates these three products at US\$10.5/ha/year; that is, ((14,214 ha*US\$10.5)/5).	
	14,690,738
Estimated total annual revenues	31,747,538

5.4. Community forests and the value chain logic

At the time of their establishment, community forests were seen as small forest ‘enterprises’ that generated products through various value chains. Therefore, the value chain approach has sometimes been used to assess community forests. However, the characteristics (structure, process, conduct) of their establishment and operation has significant irregularities that make it difficult to optimize the performance of their product value chains in local markets. A standard value chain approach produces the following alignment and irregularities;



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Solar panels acquired by community forest to provide electricity to some villages in Mintom, South of Cameroon

Value Chain Components	Challenges highlighted when analyzing Community Forests operations as “small enterprises”.
Consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No applicable issues were raised
Commercialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak marketing and external communication capacity; • Low capacity for public relations; • Unused proximity to logging companies (SEFAC, SBEC...) and possibilities for collaboration;
Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abandonment of wood due to low technology
Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irregular logging frequency due to lack of reliable partner • Non-compliance with good sustainable logging practices; • Lack of technical and material capacity to operate a CF;

Preparation (considered here as The entities' readiness to do business)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cases of bank accounts of the Legal Entities emptied and/or closed; • Cases of failed management of micro-projects related to CFs; • Lack of alternative activities to wood (agriculture, livestock, NTFPs); • Under used possibilities of social actions thanks to payment mechanisms for ecosystem services; • Existence of support structures (Chamber of Agriculture, NGOs such as WWF, ICRAF, CAFT...), little used • Arable/cultivable land available in Community Forests and insufficiently integrated in the business plan; • Unplanned extension of crop fields in untouched forests; • CFs without economic activity planning; • Lack of logistical discipline, especially among the Baka (e.g. cases of stolen equipment, including chainsaws, GPS, etc.)
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Figure 1: Challenges identified in traditional community forestry practice and where/how they might impact on the Value Chain approach as a small business model

Figure 1 above is an attempt to illustrate how the process of establishing a community forest aligns with the Value Chain Conceptual Model (Values link, GIZ 2008). It is clear that the bulk of the activities which characterize community forest are “preparatory activities”. This means that without targeted reforms, most community forests may never get to the point of operating as conventional businesses.

Box 1: Doing business in Sub Saharan Africa – 2020: impact of policy reform

In the 2020 doing business in Africa factsheet, out of 190 countries surveyed, Mauritius (13) and Rwanda (38) are respectively, the two top ranking countries in Sub Saharan Africa. Cameroon is 167. South Sudan is 185, Eritrea - 189 and Somalia is 190. Sub-Saharan Africa remains one of the weakest-performing regions on the ease of doing business ranking, with an average score of 51.8, well below the OECD high-income economy average of 78.4 and the global average of 63.

What’s significant is the effect of policy reforms and how this can affect ease of doing business and the fortunes of small enterprises. For a second year in a row, Togo is among the top 10 economies that most improved ease of doing business through regulatory reforms. Nigeria also joined the top 10 improvers and with Kenya, implemented important reforms in the areas of permitting, start-up certification and governance.

By using the information in Table 1 and Figure 1, we observe that the most cost (over 11 million FCFA) are incurred in the preparatory phases of community forests, at the expense of core business activities like production, transformation and commercialization.

This means targeted policy reform eliminating these start-up costs can significantly improve performance of community forests as small businesses.

5.5. Analyses of the eligibility of community forests for continued support

Table 3: Weighted characteristics of community forests assessed to facilitate comparison

Community Forests entities	Number of active members	Differentiation/ degree of evenness in the association ((1/ VAR)*100)	Les scores					Social Actions	(Sum) Total
			Technical support from NGOs and compliance with exploitation quotas	Duration of the community forest agreement	Involvement in the PES				
(1) MINABADJELAKA*	12	28.57	0	3	0	0	0	43.57	
(2) BOGRISOM	9	19.28	0	2	0	0	7	37.27	
(3) NKNK*	13	16.16	0	2	0	0	6	37.16	
(4) CODEL	9	23.53	0	3	1	1	0	36.52	
(5) COBABA	12	5.88	1	3	1	1	13	35.88	
(6) CODEVI	14	6.78	0	3	1	1	8	32.77	
(7) EFOU-LANMEYONG*	17	3.75	1	1	0	0	9	31.74	
(8) MBIELABOT	15	5.35	1	3	0	0	7	31.35	
(9) ADENAM*	10	13.79	1	2	0	0	4	30.79	
(10) BOULAKABEDEL*	12	11.76	0	3	0	0	0	26.76	
(11) CRADJAMAL	15	6.58	1	2	0	0	2	26.58	
(12) AJAM*	13	12.21	0	1	0	0	0	26.21	
(13) CODEM	13	5.99	1	3	1	1	2	25.99	
(14) COVEM II	13	4.83	0	2	0	0	5	24.83	
(15) DJOKO*	13	8.56	0	1	0	0	1	23.55	

Entities marked with an asterisk (*) have varying levels of irregularities and, therefore, comparing some of their characteristics with other entities may not yield useful information as the entities are not managed under similar production conditions. For example, exploitation in entities (1) and (10) are in fact not controlled by the local communities, but by private timber exploiters. The Simple Management Plans - SMPs of (3) and (9) are not valid. The SMP of (9) is under revision, while (3) is outdated since 2018. Records available at the Ministry show that (7), (12) and (15) are in fact not yet allocated, and therefore not legally eligible for development and support. Despite these irregularities, it is still worthwhile to continue the analysis as

these issues will eventually be resolved. Community forests are social entities and represent local achievements of which communities are proud and which they are not ready to abandon. The aim was to select entities whose vital characteristics make them more eligible for greater long-term support from WWF. However, the differences in scores despite the total for each entity suggest that different entities have different strengths and weaknesses. The results serve as an indication of where greater effort or targeted action may be needed. In addition, the results contribute to the development of hypotheses to guide discriminatory engagements with different entities, as community forest policy as a whole is more likely to succeed when scaled up.



Drinking from the fountain of a liana inside a community forest

6

RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Policy relevant message to practitioners embarking on community forests

- The main strengths of the community forest policy instrument – which include promoting the creation of legal, community-based entities to oversee the management and sustainable use of proximal forest resources, the opportunity of deriving diverse products from them, the wisdom of favoring consensual decision making and sharing their benefits with a diverse range of local stakeholders – have been largely established. The weaknesses linked to the local context of poverty, poor overall infrastructure, social conflicts and governance problems; challenges regarding the regulatory policy environment which frames harvesting, transportation, marketing and associated constraints of doing small forest businesses, have also been known for many decades.
- Therefore, a consistent challenge that must be surmounted for community forest enterprises to have a real chance of succeeding pertain to significantly reducing or completely eliminating unnecessary costs associated with “ease of doing community forest business”. While each country may opt for adaptable instruments, the purpose should essentially be eliminating all administrative bottlenecks that translate to financial costs associated with start-up and operations of community forests, up to the point where products enter into the market.

LESSONS

6.2. Creation of community forests and their estimated costs

- Facilitation towards the creation of community forests by a technical and financial partner can involve up to eight steps, the total cost of which is estimated at US\$ 36,342 (21,152,712 FCFA). The costliest steps are the development and submission of the Simple Management Plan (SMP) the final management agreement (US\$20,180); and the establishment of a monitoring, control and follow-up system (US\$8,930).
- The start of exploitation - which is the actual start of the ‘enterprise activities’ by the management unit - involves additional administrative

formalities such as a transport authorization (consignment note), a site pass (all issued by the central forestry administration in Yaoundé), a notification of exploitation (from the regional forestry delegation), an endorsement (from the divisional delegation of forestry) and an exit permit. A certificate of origin is required for non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

- However, when a private sector entity is involved, the post-SMP administrative formalities are managed by the third party (private sector) and the costs are deducted from the final payments due to the management entity and the community that holds the 'title' to the community forests (in agreement with the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife). This option is one of desperation and is often not favorable to the community. Marketing of community forest wood products is almost always done by private sector partners rather than by the communities themselves. Communities continue to show very little capacity for public relations and marketing despite their proximity to established timber processing companies and links to national and international partners.
- In terms of benefits from community forests accruing to communities, almost 75% are reinvested in health and education, which makes community forests popular at the local level.

6.3. Value chain issues for community forest products

- Although they have been in operation for many years, the basic characteristics of the legal entities that manage community forests place them at the preparatory stage of businesses set up to manage value chains of products and services. For example, most of them do not have operational bank accounts and are not engaged in other activities of a commercial nature. Despite the presence of payments for ecosystem services and agroforestry diversification options, the entities have yet to develop the commercial tools needed to integrate them into their business models. Instead, they face primary resource degradation, logistical difficulties and basic governance issues such as small-scale theft of start-up equipment.
- Depending on whether production is carried out by the community itself or by a private sector partner, the distribution of benefits between the two parties can be very different. In each case, the benefits accrue to the community because of the scale of the economic activities created by the Community Forest on the one hand, and the nature of any profit-sharing arrangement on the other.

Whatever the model, production here is characterized by unplanned and irregular extraction, non-compliance with operating guidelines, inadequate technical skills and extraction technology.

- There is virtually no local processing. On the other hand, there are many cases of wood abandonment with very little optimization of the use of primary wood material.

6.4. Eligibility for continued support

The number of years a community forest has been operating on a final covenant is an important, but not determining, factor in performance. The five best performing entities in the analyses have all been on a final management agreement for more than ten years or more.

Diversification of activities in community forests is an established driver of resilience. However, although engagement in PES activities is a form of diversification of income sources, it does not appear to be strongly correlated with performance. For example, three of the first five community forests assessed were not PES beneficiaries.

Some community forests received technical support from NGOs, while others received both technical support and stricter compliance with harvesting quotas agreed with third parties. Technical support and compliance with harvesting quotas count towards the overall eligibility of community forests for long-term support. This also appears to be common to entities with final logging agreements of ten years or more.

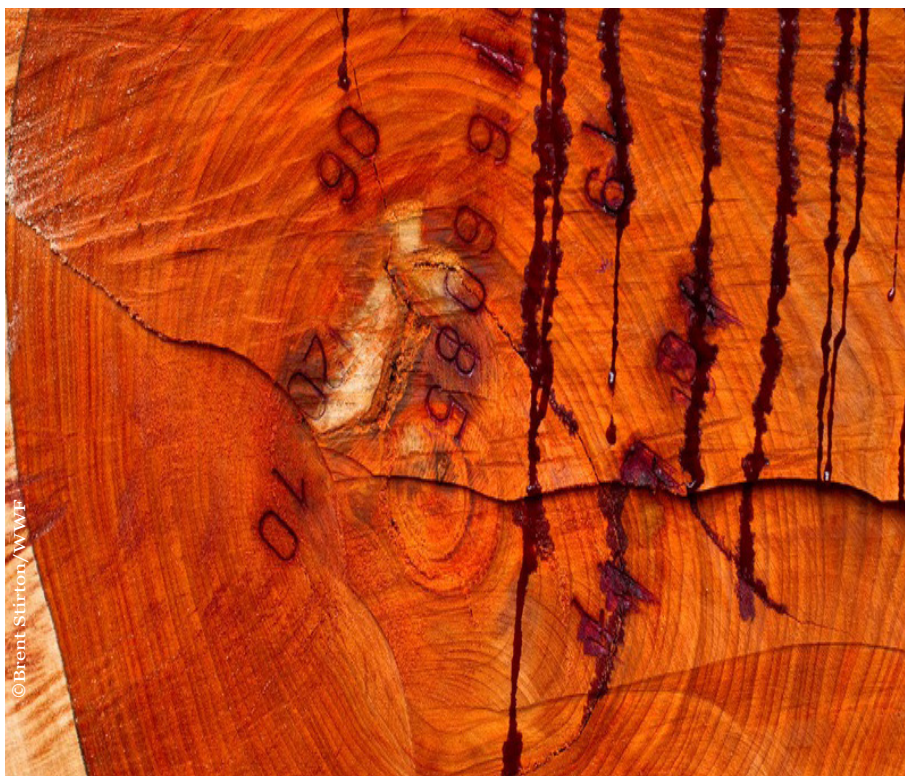
Of the top six community forests in the ranking, only one (COBABA) reported technical support and compliance with harvesting quotas by a third party. Nevertheless, the other five entities share other important characteristics: large membership size, high scores on differentiation (gender, racial representativeness) of membership and on diversity of social actions. These characteristics are easily associated, are important to the communities and capture the original essence of community forests.

The community forests tend to have different strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints. Selecting them for structured, continued support depends on goals and business model. In each case a diagnosis would have to be quickly performed guided by some of the criteria assessed under this effort and the results obtained.

CONCLUSION

This study found that community forests have significant potential for conservation and local development. Cameroon has been a pioneer in reforms establishing community forests in the Congo Basin, and has been followed by many other countries in the region that intend to learn from the Cameroonian experience. This report has attempted to identify some lessons from Cameroon's and WWF's long experience in promoting community forestry.

Yes, community forests can contribute to local development and biodiversity conservation. It needs the support of all actors, including donors, development partners, civil society organizations, and private sector actors, to realize its full potential. The report proposes criteria for identifying community forests eligible for more structured and sustainable support.



Bleeding felled Paddouk wood

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COMMUNITY FORESTS HAVE SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL FOR CONSERVATION AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

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