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Local and Decentralized Forest Management in Cameroon: The Case of the Kongo Community Forest

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Introduction

The Cameroon forestry law of 1994 gives rural communities access rights to forest resources in or around their villages. On the basis of a management agreement signed with the State, which includes a simple management plan (SMP), villagers can manage and exploit, in a participatory manner, their forest resources to enhance livelihood development and reduce poverty.

The implementation of this process involves reserving a community forest area, allocating the forest to the local community after the preparation of SMP, and sustainably exploiting the forest resources for the benefit of the community. The last phase is delicate from both technical (selective and sustainable logging of the forests resource) and organizational (proper and equitable management of relatively large sums of money within the institutional framework) aspects.

Kongo village in East Province of Cameroon embarked on this process in January 1998. A local association, the Bankoho Community of Kongo (COBANKO), was formed with a view to set up a community forest comprising 3,000 ha. The association was assisted by the Netherlands Development Organisation's (SNV) Support to Sustainable Development in the Lomié/Dja region (SDDL) project during the first two phases of the community forestry development process. The community subsequently managed the exploitation without project assistance.

Since COBANKO lacked the capacity to exploit its community forest on its own, it signed contracts with different timber companies which extracted 1,096 m^3 of sawn wood from the forest in five years. The total revenue for the village and its inhabitants during this period was roughly US$ 87,000, of which 27% was spent on community development initiatives and 73% comprised direct revenue to community members in the form of wages.

Despite management difficulties and apparent cases of embezzlement, the exploitation of the Kongo Community Forest contributed to significant socio-economic development within the village and generated substantial income for many families, resulting in substantial poverty reduction.

Box 1: Cameroon forestry law definition of community forestry

A community forest is "a forest forming part of the non-permanent forest estate, which is covered by a management agreement between a village community and the Forestry Administration. Management of such forest – which should not exceed 5,000 ha – is the responsibility of the village community concerned, with the help or technical assistance of the Forestry Administration."

Source: Article 3(11) of Decree 95/531/PM of 23 August 1995.

Background

In 1997, tropical rainforests covered an area of 19.6 million ha in southern Cameroon, representing 41% of the national territory. A zoning plan envisages 8.9 million ha of permanent forests and 5.1 million ha of non-permanent forests, part of which may become community forests.

The forestry law of 1994 provides for the involvement of new actors in the management of forest and wildlife resources. This is the case with systems of "population–State" co-management of protected areas, the transfer of forest taxes to councils and communities, creation and management of council forests, etc. The setting up of community forests is one part of this relatively new forest governance dynamic aimed at livelihood development and poverty reduction. It guarantees rural communities access rights to the forest resources of their villages (Box 1). On the basis of a management agreement signed with the State, which includes the necessary SMP, villagers have the opportunity to manage and exploit the products of their community forests and realize opportunities for development (Cuny *et al*. 2005).

The publication in 1998 of the *Manual of the Procedures for the Attribution, and Norms for the Management of Community Forests* (MINEF) helped to turn this concept into reality. From 1999 to 2006, 321 applications were submitted to the Ministry of the Environment and Forestry (MINFOF), with over a million ha requested which comprises about 20% of the non-permanent forest estate. These requests ultimately resulted in 107 community forests being allocated, covering 400,000 ha. The Capacity Building Programme (see Box 2) greatly contributed to this momentum. The Kongo Community Forest is presented in this paper as a success story of this important pro-poor initiative, despite numerous general problems that need to be understood and addressed.

Box 2: Capacity Building Programme

The Capacity Building Programme (CBP, 2002-2005, co-financed by DFID and SNV) aimed to involve civil society organizations in the sustainable management of forests in order to fight poverty in Cameroon.

The objectives of the programme were to: (i) strengthen the technical and professional capacities of civil society organizations through the financing of micro projects; (ii) build their organizational capacities and promote institutional links among them; and (iii) make data relating to the forestry sector accessible to these organizations (through an information center specialized in forestry).

Fifty-six NGOs embarked on the process of promoting the "co-management of forests" and operated micro projects worth a total US$1.6 million. They worked with 221 communities in five provinces of Cameroon. A total of 82 community forests were set up within this framework.

Analysis of the national-level community forestry process

The objectives of community forestry are to: (i) create jobs and generate income in rural areas; (ii) improve the living conditions of the people; and (iii) ensure the sustainable management of the environment while meeting the basic needs of rural communities. The stated aim is to address the basic constraints of: (i) rural communities' limited access to forest resources; (ii) inadequate handling by communities of their own development; and (iii) almost non-existent incomes at the local level. The analysis of community forest exploitation illustrates that achievements have been made by both the communities that organized and increased their capacities, and the other stakeholders who worked in partnership during the community forestry development (State, private companies, and civil society). Given the innovative nature of this process, the stakeholders, especially the rural poor communities, are learning in a context fraught with constraints and deficits.

Phase 1 of community forestry development

During the first phase involving the allocation of an area of forest, communities often use the approach as a means to appropriate land they desire. This can have opposing consequences: either it accelerates the process when the community wants to secure

"its land," [1] or it slows it down when some community members or neighboring communities perceive they are being cheated. If neighboring communities do not feel threatened, it may even stimulate them to begin the process of setting up their own community forests.
The allocation phase is seldom without problems, however. To begin with, the initiative to create a community forest seldom comes from communities themselves. It tends to emanate from external actors who have various interests in the process. The consequences are: (i) difficult social mobilization, which demands much time and patience from supporting actors; (ii) inadequate community social organization, resulting in unforeseen conflicts within the community; and (iii) low representation of women and the youth in the ranks of the management entities. Their membership, when it exists, is often a result of pressure by actors outside of the community.

Instances where management entity members are not truly part of the community pose a serious problem, as this often results from the omnipresence and influence of a private sector timber operator in the community, which allows him to take part in executive committee decision making and direct the management process in his favor. The process therefore is often hijacked by a few elite or private sector actors, making meaningful ownership of the community forestry activity by local communities with limited capacities [2] and resources [3] difficult. The pressure put on communities to perform, applied by some supporting actors to respond to donor requirements, intensifies this constraint. Regardless of community capacity, support actors will often carry on with the process in spite of serious shortcomings identified during the initial phase of development. [4]

It should also be noted that modern management structures, such as Common Initiative Groups, are often ill-adapted to the traditional village context. For example, the articles of association of these management entities are "standard models" which do not take traditional institutions or social structures [5] into proper consideration (see Box 3).

Box 3: What aspects of local communities are considered in the community forestry process?

Traditional village organizations are scarcely considered when setting up the legal management entity. Villagers are not familiar with so-called "modern management structures." For example, villagers often do not understand that the general assembly is the decision-making organ. Often, this organ is not organized or is poorly managed, and decisions are made by the bureau of the management (although it is only an executive organ). In contrast, villagers often have traditional systems of organization like the "gula" (systems of traditional council meetings) that maintain the balance of power in the village and therefore have strong social legitimacy and high representation (although

1 The community forestry process seeks to transfer the management of forest resources from the State to the population, but not the land, which remains the property of the State.

2 Socio-economic surveys earmarked for the second phase during preparation of the SMP can highlight problems relating to the legal entity, the mainstreaming of gender and minorities issues, the quality of relations in the village, etc., and thus, the feasibility of creating a successful community forest that leads to poverty reduction.

3 Communities are highly dependent on economic operators, some of whom do not comply with the rules of the game, or lack technical capacity.

4 Rarely will a support organization (NGO) acknowledge, for example, that a community cannot create a community forest, which in certain cases would however be the appropriate conclusion of objective analysis.

5 For example, (i) the Boumkwa community of wise villagers in East Cameroon; or (ii) the peculiar decision-making systems of the Pygmies (the "yé") involving several groups (including women) who discuss separately then come together in a plenary, etc.

it is difficult to achieve genuine representation in some villages along transport routes, composed of many non-native groups, or in others with Pygmies or migratory herders, who are often excluded). On the basis of these traditional systems of management, the organizational capacities of an association or CIG can be strengthened, noting these organizational forms are designed more for the implementation of agricultural activities than long-term management of a common forest estate.

Lastly, the process is administratively long due to numerous administrative bottlenecks, technically short with little emphasis on awareness raising and education, and costly, which limits the scope for initial consultation meetings due to lack of funds.

Phase 2 of community forestry development

The second phase of the process corresponds with the SMP. Plan preparation and implementation can enable the population to increase its power over the management of community forests. The preparation of these plans has noticeably improved over the last two years. Villagers have acquired necessary skills in forest management, and some SMPs have been well prepared with internal and external boundaries negotiated and clearly defined, known and exploitable natural resources identified, and development objectives clearly stated. This has taken place with the active participation of communities, especially when there has been support project involvement. However, this phase is also sometimes fraught with problems.

First, the quality of SMPs varies according to the individuals and organizations that prepare them. Their preparation is often not done in a participatory manner, which directly hinders the execution of forest exploitation due to a perceived lack of ownership. Second, the SMP approval process in MINFOF presents some problems: (i) the criteria for assessing the quality of SMPs vary according to the NGOs that present them; (ii) the approval deadline is very fast for some NGOs and slow for others; (iii) in most cases, communities bypass the external services of MINFOF and submit SMPs directly to the central services of the Ministry; (iv) SMPs are often rejected for minor details; and (v) some administrative authorities obstruct the signing of the management agreement. In addition, the preparation of the SMPs involves high transaction costs[6] that communities cannot afford without assistance.

Phase 3 of community forestry development

The third phase, involving the actual exploitation of the community forest, faces numerous challenges and problems. First, at the level of control: (i) about four forests out of 10 undergo industrial-type exploitation (MINEF-DFID, 2004); (ii) external services of MINFOF scarcely monitor the exploitation process; (iii) community forest management procedures are often wrongly applied and SMPs are not always respected; and (iv) ecological sustainability can be endangered by over-exploitation and an exclusive focus on woody species, though numerous other opportunities can be integrated in this process (NTFPs, tourism, wildlife, reforestation, etc.).

6 *When external support is sizeable, the cost averages between US$ 10,000 and US$ 22,000 (MINEF – DFID, 2004).*

Second, the investment burden on the community is heavy at the beginning of the phase 3 process: (i) inventory of the forest resources requires considerable skills and funding, which are often only available from outside the community; (ii) the bills of lading (transportation of non-timber forest products) are expensive and often too costly for many communities that consequently put them to other uses (sale of the bills of lading to fraudulent timber operators), which leads to conflicts with the forestry administration; and (iii) the Lucas Mill-type mobile sawing machines are costly and too expensive for communities to purchase.[7] Lastly, there are many organizational and technical constraints during this phase: (i) communities often do not manage incomes derived from the exploitation of community forests equitably, with misappropriation of funds being common, and this often leads to conflicts; (ii) there is a large communication gap between those directly responsible for managing the forest and the rest of the community, which, in the short-term, can cause conflict; (iii) the manual transportation of products (derived from dense wood) is tedious for communities; (iv) securing input supplies (fuel, lubricants, spare parts, etc.) and maintaining equipment are major difficulties; (v) control of non-authorized community forest exploitation by the rural population is difficult due to limited power; and (vi) communities encounter serious problems in marketing their forest products due to the absence of a marketing culture, lack of skills, and logistics.

In spite of the difficulties indicated above, Box 4 shows that the sound management of community forests can yield valuable revenue for local people. This is illustrated by the case of the Kongo Community Forest whose management, though not perfect, has led to an improvement in the living conditions of the rural population in that village.

Box 4: What incomes can community forests generate?

A theoretical analysis of the costs and benefits of community forestry using an economic model indicates significant variations in benefits derived by rural communities under three different management regimes (per annum, per adult): (i) predominantly timber, where income is estimated at US$ 32; (ii) mixed timber and NTFP, where income is estimated at US$ 6; and (iii) predominantly NTFPs where income is estimated at US$ 5.60.

Another study by SNV and SDDL shows that a community that exploits its forest alone can obtain US$ 125 per m^3 for sawn timber, or US$ 50 per m^3 for rough timber.

Introduction to the Kongo community

Kongo is a village with 500 inhabitants, situated in the East Province of Cameroon. Villagers carry out subsistence farming (bananas, macabo, cassava, etc.) and cash crop farming (cocoa, oil palm, cola nuts). People also secure animal protein from fishing and hunting. NTFPs are used for traditional medicines and for food, such as Moabi oil (*Baillonella toxisperma*) and wild mango fruits (*Irvingia gabonensis*). Before the allocation of the community forest, when it became a marketable resource, wood was harvested primarily for home consumption.

7 The Lucas Mill-type mobile sawing machine has the following characteristics: difficult to handle; costly (US$ 30,000 to US$ 40,000); relatively high output (2 to 8 m^3 per day); good quality products (for the export market); small-width pieces (23 cm maximum); hardwood can be sawn without any difficulty; reduced losses in raw materials.

Community forest allocation and preparation of the SMP

In January 1998, an association known as COBANKO was established by the villagers of Kongo in order to set up a community forest with the assistance of the SNV-SDDL project. The support of this project was necessary in order to reach a management agreement [8] between the State and this association because, in this part of Cameroon, community spirit is low and the organizational and management capacities of the population are limited. In fact, the local population has no leadership structure and individualism overshadows the collective approach. This makes decision-making on community projects difficult and allows the negative interference of outsiders in the management of natural resources.

The main challenge faced during the preparation of the community forest application was the establishment of a legal entity to manage the community forest. [9] Such formal associations are needed to meet the requirements for community forestry allocation, but they are very different from traditional social organizations. As a result, the executive bureau of the association, elected in the general assembly, loses some of its power as soon as the forest begins to yield proceeds, due to the emergence of other powers according to local elites, clan and tribal affiliation. The circulation of information, considered to be power, is also difficult in the village. Because of these problems, the community faces serious difficulties in managing forest revenue (Klein *et al*. 2001). In addition to the problems of establishing the legal entity outlined above, the rather prohibitive cost of preparing the community forest application is estimated at US$ 715, which covers the cost of preliminary information meetings, identification of the forest, creation of the legal entity, consultation meetings, completion of the administrative file, and submission to MINFOF. [10]

Once the forest was "reserved" for the community, the next stage concerned the preparation of the SMP. The preparation of the SMP was carried out mainly by the local people themselves, and involved six stages: (i) the information and planning meeting; (ii) the training of villagers for data collection; (iii) data collection (socio-economic surveys, delineation of the forest, forest inventory, etc.); (iv) data processing; (v) training of villagers on how to draw up the SMP; and (vi) finalizing the SMP. The cost of preparing the SMP of Kongo was US$ 3,025 (excluding technical assistance from the SDDL), which was about US$ 1 per ha. [11] It should be noted that, with assistance from the SDDL, the preparation of the SMP took one year, while the entire process lasted two and a half years (from the setting up of COBANKO to the signing of the management agreement in October 2000), which is a reasonable period of time compared to the average observed in Cameroon. [12]

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8 The management agreement is "a contract by virtue of which the service in charge of forestry allots to a community, a portion of the national forest estate, which the community manages, preserves and exploits in its own interest." Source: Article 3(16) of Decree No. 95/531/PM of 23 August 1995.

9 To apply for a community forest, the community must have the "status of a corporate body, in the form of a legal entity provided for by the laws in force in Cameroon." Source: Article 28(3) of Decree No. 95/531/PM of 23 August 1995.

10 This is the average cost incurred for the creation of five community forests by SDDL (US$ 363 to US$ 1,068) excluding technical assistance provided by the project.

11 As compared to the cost per ha of US$ 2 (with a local consulting firm) and US$ 4.50 (including the technical assistance of the project with external financing), which are the average costs observed in Cameroon.

12 It is worth noting that on average this entire process takes a substantial amount of time in Cameroon, running from 1.5 to 5 years (average of 3.5 years).

Exploitation of the community forest

The community managed the exploitation of its forest without project assistance. Since it lacked the necessary capacities to exploit the forest on its own, it initially signed a contract in 2001 with a timber operator that adopted an "industrial" approach to the exploitation (use of heavy equipment, opening up of tracks, hauling of undressed timber in the forest, etc.). This activity was suspended by the Ministry in charge of forests due to impact concerns. Exploitation was halted until early 2002, when the Ministry asked the community to sign another contract with an operator that would adopt an environmentally friendly, small-scale approach. [13] This approach required the use of mobile sawing machines (Lucas Mill-type) owned by the timber operators, and the manual transportation of sawn wood by villagers, although manual transportation is physically demanding and sometimes causes health problems.

The community forest was exploited by four different timber operators who focused on seven species: *Entandrophragma cylindricum, E. utile, E. candollei, Milicia excelsa, Afzelia bipindensis, Baillonella, toxisperma*, and *Tieghemella africana*. Two species (*Entandrophragma cylindricum* and *Baillonella toxisperma*) accounted for 75% of the total volume harvested. [14]

Primary constraints generally related to forest exploitation

The primary constraints related to forest exploitation as experienced by communities in Cameroon are identified as follows:

- the transportation of sawn timber on the head by villagers is a tedious, dangerous, and costly exercise, especially when products are far from storage areas;
- the high interest of operators in selected species leads to unsustainable selective felling without respecting the SMP;
- conflicting relations between the population and MINFOF;
- internal conflicts in the community disrupt the exploitation of the forest;
- lack of respect for plot rotation as required in the SMP; and
- low price "swindling" by wood purchasers and involvement of a large number of middlemen, due to the community's limited understanding of market dynamics and their overall low negotiation capacity.

Communities have few resources (financial, material) and lack technical knowledge to manage their own forest resources and effectively access markets. Thus, creating positive win-win relations between a community and a timber company or wood purchaser (otherwise referred to as an economic operator) present what appears to be considerable advantages, including the opportunity for the community to exploit their forest resources in ways which will benefit them. Moreover, the timber company can contribute to social investment in the villages, which will be beneficial to the community in the long run.

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13 The transition from industrial to small-scale, low-impact exploitation was mandated by national regulation (Circular No. 0677/LC/MINEF/DF/CFC of 23 February 2001 to suspend the industrial exploitation of community forests).

14 The selective harvesting of this species leads to the scarcity of its seeds that are used by women to make oil.

Nonetheless, these relations are not free from constraints. Contracts, already oriented towards the economic operator's interests, are often too vague and seldom respected. Firstly, on a technical level, the expected volume per species is often higher than the forest can sustain. This imbalance does not respect the SMP, which can lead to a suspension of the management agreement.

Secondly, the prices paid by purchasers remain low due to the lack of negotiating capacity. For example, relating to *Entndrophragma utile*, communities often receive only US$ 52 per m^3 although its export value is US$ 285 per m^3. [15] Moreover, some economic operators go so far as to not pay for wood delivered. Thirdly, it often occurs that the economic operators will corrupt the forest managers in order to make nominal or non-payment for the timber resources received.

Thus, within this framework where contracts are seldom written, the communities' ignorance of the rights and obligations of the parties involved leads to many abuses which individuals in the community often endure without question. Fortunately, the experience of the Kongo community has not been so dire.

Income management from the Kongo community forest

From 2001 until 2005, there was substantial generation of revenue and income from the Kongo community forestry exploitation activities. Official reports indicate that a total of US$ 87,063 was generated as income for the community, comprised of direct revenue in the form of wages (73% of the total) and revenue that went into socio-economic development projects within the community (27%). There is no doubt that exploitation of the Kongo community forest led to significant socio-economic development within the village and also to substantial income generation for several families. Unfortunately, there were management problems which led to a loss of potential benefits from the activities. Some of these problems can be attributed to the community's lack of familiarity with the overall management mechanisms and micro-business management realities, but experience should help the community solve such problems over time.

The management entities [16] directly involved with the community forest are characterized by (i) poor governance (limited respect of the articles of association and bylaws); (ii) low levels of representation and recognized social legitimacy of the management leaders; (iii) no transparency in management of accounts; and (iv) misappropriation of funds by the local and external elite (Oyono 2004). As an example of this, there was an unjustified gap of about US$ 13,000 (US$ 2,600 per year) between income generated and expenditures. As mentioned above, Kongo village was embarking on the community forest process for the first time, so at the beginning, COBANKO was not familiar with the management of forests and revenues derived from forest exploitation. This partially explains the inaccurate accounting information, weak control of the village community, and the very limited income management capacities.

In addition to the difficulties with internal management, there is also evidence that local governance problems limited the potential benefits from the community forest to the local population. For example, Kongo village is entitled to 10% of the annual forest royalties (AFR) that the Council is supposed to pay to the community to finance investments or social

15 *Experience shows that direct collaboration (without intermediaries) between communities and timber companies yields significantly higher selling prices.*

16 *The community forest management association and village development committee.*

development processes. From 2001 to 2003, this amount should have been US$ 6,500. [17] However, given that the Lomié Council never transferred the US$ 6,500 to the Kongo Village Development Committee, it is assumed that this amount was embezzled. Decentralized taxation, as provided for by the law, has had little positive impact on development at local levels and needs to be addressed, as this limits the pro-poor benefits from community-based commercial forestry activities.

Recommendations

What should be done to eliminate the corruption and loss of revenue related to forest exploitation by economic operators? An obvious answer seems to be a clear consensus from a negotiated and transparent contract process between actors. The contract must specify clearly the object (exploitation or marketing) and it must be directly linked with the SMP in order to avoid unsustainable overexploitation of the forest resources. With regards to extracting the resource, the economic operators must present their actual costs, planned duration of activities, location of activities, employment opportunities for the villagers, etc. On the marketing side, the economic operators must indicate the species to be harvested with accurate information on volumes or quantities, the selling price of the species per m^3, the sale location and date, and the signatory of the contract on behalf of the community. In both cases, the choice of which economic operator will be contracted should be made through a transparent tender process in order to maximize community profits. Prior to the economic operator being selected, all potential contractors must be fully informed, based on the inventory exploitation report (at 100%), which specific species and volumes are available in the annual coup for exploitation. This would establish a "warning" to the potential partners before a contract is established and extraction commences.

However, this contract procedure requires a significant reinforcement of the capacities of forest communities, particularly for the managers, on the technical aspects of marketing, negotiation, establishment and management of partnerships and contracts, reporting, and accountability. In addition, this contract procedure could also be supported by grouping community forests to create economies of scale and increase species diversity. Lastly, it requires legal reform to impose standard contract guarantees for the interests of all parties. To help ensure legality and contract compliance in accordance with the SMP, a representative from the MINFOF could also be present during the signing of contracts.

It is necessary to ensure ongoing and meaningful participation of community members, not only at the beginning, but throughout the process. This will enable the whole population to understand the community forest management process so they may be empowered to exercise control over technical activities and the management of revenue. NGOs that support communities involved in capacity building will need substantial resources because the awareness raising needs extend to officials responsible for technical services and administrative authorities who currently may not respect or appreciate the rules of the game.

The SDDL project has shown that a pilot phase is necessary, which requires substantial resources and time. If this is carried out by an international organization, it will help combat problem actors (unscrupulous timber operators, selfish local elites, corrupt officials, etc.). Also, a pilot phase will introduce a methodology that can be used by support actors. Furthermore, in communities lacking stable leadership structures, social development aimed at ensuring the proper application of the concept of community forestry will take time to

17 The logging operator (UFA 10 039) pays AFR into the Public Treasury, which then shares them as follows: 50% to the State, 40 % to councils, and 10 % to villages.

bring people with varied interests together for a common cause, including the elite, clans, etc., and encourage them to adopt a true community spirit. Creating ownership of the community forestry concept by relevant actors, especially community members, will take time. This is especially true for women and minorities, who are often excluded.

Careful attention must be paid to the forest allocation phase because it makes it possible to: (i) define the challenges of the process ("development" versus "biodiversity conservation") at the local level; (ii) assess its impacts on development; (iii) make a diagnosis so as to appraise the existing skills and formulate a capacity building plan; (iv) capitalize on the existing social patterns to lead the group towards adopting a "community spirit" by consensus; and (v) select an appropriate management entity, as often the CIG is "imposed" on the community which does not identify with it. This phase is important because it lays the "groundwork" for the community approach. At the end of this phase, it is necessary to reach consensus on the principles and methods of utilizing revenue derived from the exploitation of the community forest.

The SMP of the Kongo Community Forest has not been used as a sustainable management tool, as communities currently have limited capacities for implementing it (the concept is new) and MINFOF cannot ensure effective follow-up, due to a lack of interest and resources. But community forestry has developed in the Kongo community, where a concern for conservation and sustainable forest management has been translated into reality through community member oversight and a reduction of illegal small-scale sawing.

It is therefore more and more necessary to encourage a separation between management (community approach) and exploitation-marketing (private or cooperative approach). This involves strengthening the community's capacities as a contracting and decision-making authority, so that the contract can potentially be executed by a third party through an agreement signed with the community during the exploitation of forest products.

Although some community forests like that of Kongo generate meaningful revenue streams, the process can be a source of conflict and a factor in social disorder, with effects on communities that are difficult to control. It is during the distribution, management, and use of forest revenue that the most serious problems emerge. Therefore, at the very start of the process, the community must prepare to manage large proceeds from their forests and seek assistance from other actors, including civil society, private sector, and forest administration. Associations must develop an "entrepreneurial spirit" and unite: ten associations can each offer more than 5,000 m^3 per year (including a large volume of high-quality species) to timber exploiters within a contractual framework that protects the interests of each community.

Conclusion

The case study of the Kongo community forest shows that communities need to strengthen their technical and management capacities. This is one of the conditions that will help lead to poverty reduction in rural areas. Success depends on proper implementation of the community forestry process. This entails the improvement of relations between the stakeholders involved, specifically between communities, the forest administration, and timber operators. Civil society, strengthened by SNV and other international organizations operating in Cameroon, can play a vital role in this area. It is in this vein that SNV and DFID have, since May 2006, been supporting a new program known as the Forest Governance Facility (FGF) in Cameroon. The aim of this program is to develop a "discussion forum" and to facilitate the commitment and participation of non-State stakeholders in the development and implementation of Cameroon's environmental and forestry policy. The objective of this

program is to improve the overall context so as to achieve sustainable practices in the forest and environment sectors in Cameroon, within a framework of good governance and equity.

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