

The model forest experience in Cameroon

Two model forests in Cameroon are building broad-based partnerships between diverse stakeholders to make sustainable forest management a reality

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FORESTRY IS A critical element in the Cameroonian social fabric, providing employment, recreation and cultural identity. The humid forest zone of Cameroon (270 162 km²) is considered the most diverse of all Central African forests, with a wide variety of resources of plant, animal and human origin. Gartlan (1992) reports that in some sites, more than 200 woody plant species can be found in one-tenth of a hectare. However, there are serious and dynamic problems of environmental degradation, equity and persistent poverty in the forestry sector, which translate into increased deforestation, unequal social access to resources and benefits, degraded environmental services, low productivity of land and labour, and a weak policy and institutional environment.

For the entire colonial period up to the mid-1990s, the forests of Cameroon were managed through a centrally directed structure and process, which expropriated resources and control over resources from local communities, and excluded such communities from accessing forest resources as well as economic benefits accruing from them (Diaw et al. 1997; Ngwasiri 1998). Since the early 1990s, Cameroon has undergone a general overhaul of its institutional and political structure through a process of macro-policy, sectoral and constitutional reforms affecting all aspects of society, particularly the relationships between the forest, agriculture and people. A variety of interacting factors including donor pressures, international economic interests, local political considerations, sheer weight of local tenurial and use pressures, as well as pressures from civil society movements ushered in a pro-people trend in policy, which culminated in the enactment of the 1994 forest law and its complementary decree of application (Ekoko 1997; Essama-Nssah & Gockowski 2000; Brown & Schreckenber 2001).

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With the introduction of community-based approaches in rural development and in forest management in the



Model workers: Model forest facilitators and workers with harvested log in Bosquet, a Baka Pygmy Community forest site in Dja et Mpomo. Photo: Cyprain Jum/CIFOR

early 1990s throughout the entire region, principles such as participation and the involvement of local communities have been progressively embraced by practitioners. With regards to Cameroon, Nguingui (1999) and Vabi et al. (2000) underline the fact that the promulgation in 1994 of a new forestry legislation that focuses on the devolution of management responsibilities to local communities has reinforced this participatory trend. This has an impact in the whole of rural Cameroon (Oyono and Temple 2003).

Cameroon's Model Forest Project

In 2003, the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and its partners commenced the Model Forest Project in Cameroon. This project is part of the International Model Forest Network (IMFN). The goal of the IMFN is to work towards sustainable management of forests around the world, while taking into account the needs of local communities. In 2005, the government of Cameroon recognized the sites of Campo Ma'an and Dja et Mpomo as model forest sites. With the support of the government, the area is even more likely to adopt successful collaborative management. The initiative has received considerable attention in Cameroon and other African countries have shown interest.

Model forests (MF) are large multi-functional landscapes governed by a voluntary partnership representing all the important uses and values within that landscape. They constitute a novel and functional way to fully and constructively engage civil society, together with government, industry, indigenous groups, research organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on a large landscape. Partners with an interest in the land and its many values come together to identify practical land



Model planners: Dja et Mpomo model forest Board of Trustees (BOT) meeting in Lomie, East Cameroon. Photo: Marjolaine Veilleux/University of Laval, Canada

and forest management problems and to find collaborative answers. Through this process, they develop a shared vision of their future, establish representative, transparent and accountable governance structures, and commit resources to joint initiatives and credible, peer-reviewed research and development. The model forest is, therefore, a platform of innovation where development and conservation interests can work with local stakeholders to make sustainable development a practical reality. There are about 40 model forests around the world. Only two are in Africa, both of which are in Cameroon.

The minimum defining attributes of a model forest according to the International Model Forest Network Secretariat (IMFNS 2000) are as follows:

- Based upon an inclusive, voluntary partnership of stakeholders—from local to national levels;
- Commitment to sustainable forest management (SFM) by all stakeholders in the partnership;
- Large enough in scale to reflect the environmental, social and economic values of the landscape and for it to have potential to affect policy;
- A strategy and program of action that reflects partner needs, values and priorities;

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- A transparent and accountable governance structure that includes concrete efforts to give capacity and voice to non-traditional partners; and
- Commitment to sharing and exchange (networking) so that innovations can be shared and their introduction accelerated at local, national and international levels.

Scope of the partnership

Since 2005, Campo Ma'an and Dja et Mpomo have been pilot model forest sites for the Congo Basin. Together, these model forests cover some 1.5 million hectares of forested

landscapes (about 800 000 hectares each). In both sites, stakeholders are building large-scale development and management platforms based on voluntary partnerships respecting a range of interests and values.

The two model forests comprise territories of ten municipalities (four in Dja et Mpomo and six in Campo Ma'an). Together, they include operations of five logging companies (Campo: 2; Dja: 3), two industrial agro-plantations (rubber, oil palm) in Campo, a national park (Campo Ma'an) and a Biosphere Reserve (Dja). Two local NGO networks (ROLD and ROCAME), with a dozen NGOs in each site, and several community forests (about 75 established or seeking recognition) are active in the sites. Representatives and traditional chiefs of a wide range of Bantu, Baka and Bagyeli pygmy communities are also actively involved, as well as women's platforms (one in each site), cooperatives (GECEC; Dja et Mpomo), and the GEOVIC mining company in Dja et Mpomo.

In addition to the broad support of government institutions (MINFOF, MINER, IRAD and the Territorial Administration of the South and East Provinces), a number of publicly or privately funded institutions have joined the model forest partnerships, thus demonstrating their national credibility and relevance to the rural development challenge in Cameroon. Such institutions include FEICOM (a rural development fund), MEAO (the Evaluation, Planning and Management Mission for the Ocean Division in Kribi), the Memv'ele Dam Socioeconomic Project in the Campo-Ma'an area, FEDEC (the Environment and Development Fund created by the government of Cameroon and the Chad-Cameroon Pipeline/oil consortium), PNDP (the National Program of Participatory Development) and ECOFAC (the EU-funded regional environment program) in Dja. The Dutch facilitation NGO, SNV, has committed support to the MF process in both sites, while WWF, also present in both sites, has promised a greater involvement in the future.

CIFOR and IMFNS, which initiated the process in 2003 in partnership with the government of Cameroon (MINEF/MINFOF), COMIFAC, CIDA (Cameroon Office), FAO, and IUCN-CEDHAC, have maintained strong support for the Cameroon Model Forests, including cross-site, regional, and international facilitation, as well as research, monitoring, and action-research in the field.

The problem

The need to overcome the many conflicts between forest actors is a prerequisite for establishing frameworks for good governance, innovation, and equitable use of, and benefits from, forest resources and revenues. Reforms in Cameroon have led to the establishment of land-use and management plans for logging concessions, protected areas, agro-plantations and community and council forests. Unfortunately, the functional link between these various forest management units is weak, which has contributed to the fragmentation of local landscapes upon which

sustainable development policies should be based. The establishment of model forests in Cameroon was designed to help to address these problems. They constitute a coherent network at the global scale for experimenting with sustainable management principles on the basis of voluntary partnerships.

Methodology

Selection of sites

In May 2003, CIFOR and the IMFNS organized a workshop in Nkolbisson, Yaoundé, in collaboration with MINEF and FAO. The aim in Nkolbisson was to shed light on the model forest concept and to determine if there was interest in developing a site in the Congo Basin. The response of the workshop was overwhelmingly positive. A key recommendation was for MINEF and regional organizations such as the Central Africa Forests Commission (COMIFAC) to take a lead role in establishing the initiative in the region. CIFOR was to facilitate this work and the establishment of a follow-up committee on the Model Forest Initiative. Follow-up contacts, discussions and initiatives continued for the remainder of the year.

In June 2004, CIFOR and the IMFNS arranged a series of workshops in Cameroon. A range of organizations including IMFNS, COMIFAC, the Cameroon Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), FAO and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) agreed to work together to plan for the development of model forests in the Congo Basin. Meetings were chaired by Cameroon's Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife with CIFOR acting as facilitator. It was agreed that a competition would be developed to choose a model forest in Cameroon that could serve as a pilot site for the Congo Basin. Ten sites were invited to a workshop discussing how the pilot sites should be selected.

A site criteria framework was presented at a workshop in Kribi. Salient points of the criteria framework were: 1) strong commitment of site actors and partners in the process; 2) nature and relevance of site management problems; and 3) ability of the site to generate financial resources. The potential sites and other actors welcomed the model forest concept, the idea of partnership and accepted the site selection criteria guide as a basis for assessment. It was required that potential sites should commit their sites to submitting a dossier for candidature to be evaluated by the technical committee. The three sites which produced the most impressive dossiers were visited in the field, noted and ranked by the technical evaluation committee.

In June 2005, CIFOR's Assistant Director General visited the Prime Minister of Cameroon who expressed his support for the model forest approach. In August, the government decided to choose the two highest-ranked sites, rather than just one, and the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife officially requested that the IMFNS accept Cameroon as a full member of the network.



Next generation: Marjolaine Veilleux, student intern, with Baka-Pygmy children in the model forest site of Dja et Mpomo, East Cameroon. *Photo: Cyprain Jum/CIFOR*

Initiating site activities

By early 2005, the project had initiated contacts with site actors in Campo Ma'an and Dja et Mpomo by developing a common vision of the situation using techniques such as brainstorming and discussions with a wide range of stakeholders. This was followed by a series of planning workshops to gain a holistic view of the problem and context.

One of the outcomes of these workshops was that site actors committed themselves to develop jointly a Participatory Action Plan (PAP). The key features of a PAP are: 1) each category of stakeholder works separately to identify and rank their problems regarding natural resources management, then later, all stakeholder groups come together to jointly agree on their priority problems; 2) stakeholder groups separately analyze possible solutions and their impacts before meeting in a plenary to share their analysis and form a consensus on win-win solutions and actions; and 3) the participants prepare in more detail an action plan for natural resources management.

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The PAP is designed to encourage participants to express their views, while avoiding a process that is dominated by locally powerful and vocal people, and to develop a shared framework of understanding regarding resource management.

Framework for participation

Both model forests have initiated a unique relational framework that promotes vertical, horizontal and cross-sectoral linkages. The site actors have already identified gaps in knowledge, defined research needs and identified how to manage projects to obtain the required knowledge. The actors are in the process of determining how change in forest management practices might be achieved within their respective organizations.

Technical activities

Among the activities undertaken are expert workshops and enhanced communication and strategic planning exercises to identify broad values and develop management approaches. The model forest partnerships are currently being implemented through stakeholder platforms (women, baka-bagyeli pygmies, logging companies, private media, conservation groups, NGOs and municipalities). Each platform is represented by a board of 17 directors (BOD) elected at the first annual constitutive assembly of the model forest in January 2006. These platforms are in the process of establishing their membership and grassroots governance rules and mechanisms. Actions already taken to date by the model forests include legal recognition and the setting up of governance structures. However, it is not possible to address all challenges at once. Activities that are currently being planned include micro-projects that will generate revenues for the site and the development of local indicators to measure the effects of model forest actions.

Proposed future strategy

The development of a model forest program in Cameroon is the first step in the establishment of a model forest network in the Congo Basin. There are three main phases for the establishment of this model forest network:

- **2000–05:** policy preparation, site selection and development of basic partnerships with local stakeholders.
- **2006–08:** setting up of governance structures, operational projects and sustainable, autonomous initiatives. Strengthening local involvement of stakeholders beyond administrative units.
- **2008–09 (and beyond):** consolidation and extension – expansion of development projects and increased sustainable management of local forest resources.

This process will learn from successes in Cameroon, which can be attributed, at least in part, to the following factors:

- *Cameroon's openness to changes in the forestry sector* has ensured a lively and purposeful debate. Democratization of the forest sector has resulted in a renewed interest in learning from the experiences of field projects and new concepts, thus paving the way for forest actors to take on new challenges.
- *The commitment of civil society organizations to dialogue* makes it possible for stakeholders to participate in formally organized national processes to ensure that their views are heard.
- *Clear government commitment*, especially that of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife through its staff of central and external services, in giving purpose and leadership to the process.
- *Appropriate external financial and technical support* from the Canadian International Development

Research Center (IDRC), IMFNS and CIFOR allows the process to maintain momentum, direction and purpose, without loss of state ownership and commitment.

Conclusion

The program provides the framework for flexibility, innovation and collective learning at the broad landscape level. Partnerships between stakeholders have proven by far the most consuming and challenging to implement, and have affected progress on understanding diverse land resources and on shared learning. Demonstrating progress and results is also a challenge. There is considerable expectation that the program will result in on-the-ground change and influence forest policy.

It is Cameroon's experience that government alone cannot map the route to SFM, which must be built from the ground up, with cross-sectoral, local participation. This is the advantage of the model forest process.

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