

# Cameroon needs more than approved forest management plans

**A recent study shows problems in implementation**

**By Greg Clough<sup>1</sup>, Paolo Omar Cerutti<sup>2</sup>, Robert Nasi<sup>3</sup> and Luca Tacconi<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>World Bank (formerly Center for International Forestry Research – CIFOR).

*giclough@gmail.com*

<sup>2</sup>Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Bogor, Indonesia and Crawford School of Economics and Government, The Australian National University

*p.cerutti@cgiar.org*

<sup>3</sup>Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Bogor, Indonesia

*r.nasi@cgiar.org*

<sup>4</sup>Crawford School of Economics and Government, Australian National University

*luca.tacconi@anu.edu.au*



**Sustainable?:** logs from a Cameroonian forest concession being transported *Photo: CIFOR*

In many respects, Cameroon has for some time set the benchmark for central African nations when it comes to sustainably managing the forests of the Congo basin, home to the world's second largest area of tropical forest. A Ministry of Environment and Forests (MINEF) was created in 1992 - now known as the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife (MINFOF) - and policy documents and forest laws soon followed. Of particular note was the 1994 forest law 94-01, aimed at ensuring the sustainable management of forests, wildlife, and fisheries.

A key element of the law was its requirement that logging companies granted concessions to harvest government owned forests must prepare detailed forest management plans (FMPs). These FMPs would describe the company's approach to sustaining the forest's social, economic and ecological values. By 2007, some 50 percent of the 101 forest management units (FMU) granted by MINFOF had approved management plans as required by law 94-01, accounting for 3.5 million hectares of forest (MINFOF 2007).

**Indeed, in recent years several international organizations have remarked favorably about the efforts made by the Cameroonian government toward improved sustainability**

Cameroon's efforts to promote sustainable forest management (SFM) have not gone unnoticed by the broader international community. Indeed, in recent years several international organizations have remarked favorably about the efforts made by the Cameroonian government toward improved sustainability, as reflected in the increased number of approved management plans (e.g. Inter-African Forest Industries Association (IFIA) 2006; International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) 2006; Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (COMIFAC) 2004; Congo Basin Forests Partnership

(CBFP) 2006; German Development Cooperation (GTZ) and MINFOF 2006).

Until recently, however, no one had actually compared what was happening on the ground with what was required in the approved plans – plans that had been prepared and approved to ensure companies paid sufficient attention to the social, economic and ecological issues related to the forests under their control. As always, the devil is in the detail, and such is the case with the law requiring companies to prepare FMPs, as recent CIFOR-ANU research reveals. While companies often meet the legal and technical requirements detailed in their FMPs, the forests in question may not be managed in sustainable ways.

## **Plans vs. implementation**

The CIFOR-ANU study acknowledges that while the innovative measures initiated in 1994 were a major advance on the pre-existing situation (when a company could acquire a title to 5000 hectares of forest and harvest it at will), the government should adopt the same innovative and positive attitude towards reviewing the current system.

According to the study, the combination of a legal loophole and poor oversight meant that almost 70 percent of timber production in 2006 was conducted as if no improved management rules were in place. This finding has a number of far-reaching implications. For example, in 2007 the Government of Cameroon entered into a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the European Union aimed at "contributing to the commitments of timber-producing countries to promote sustainable forest management" (European Commission 2007). The VPA requires the implementation of approved FMPs. But if the FMP system in Cameroon is flawed, as the research strongly suggests, then the VPA's requirements could be fulfilled without real progress being made towards sustainable forest management.

Another implication, should the current system continue, is that many currently approved FMPs are approaching the five year mark, when they can be adjusted to suit actual forest conditions. Sadly, the Ministry of Forestry has not yet begun comparing the estimated annual allowable cuts (AACs) specified in the FMPs with actual production data. Such data is essential for detecting inappropriate harvesting and revising FMPs for the next five years. Without it, there is a risk that FMPs that are in fact unsustainable could be simply rubber-stamped for another five years.

**Another implication, should the current system continue, is that many currently approved FMPs are approaching the five year mark, when they can be adjusted to suit actual forest conditions**

The research findings have been shared with Cameroon's Ministry of Forests, and with agencies such as GTZ, Dutch Cooperation, World Wildlife Fund, World Conservation Union (IUCN), the European Union, and various local non-governmental organizations. As a result, the Government of Cameroon has announced its willingness to adjust the law to reflect some of the paper's key recommendations. It has already formed a working group and asked logging companies to participate in the legal overhaul.

The overhaul needs to happen quickly, as existing FMP regulations give a company too much flexibility in selecting which species it will be legally required to sustainably manage, and which it can harvest under less stringent requirements. Under the current FMP guidelines, a company must nominate 20 or more species for sustainable management from a list of the 60 most harvested species nationally. The nominated species must account for 75 percent of the trees in the company's forest concession.

The CIFOR-ANU report argues that this is a legal loophole and that companies are taking advantage of it. It allows them to include species in their FMPs that they are not interested in harvesting and exclude commercially valuable species from logging quotas. The consequences of the loophole have come to light only recently. Although the FMP requirement dates back to 1994, it took several years to implement a range of other decrees and regulations needed for law 94-01 to become operational. It also took time to promote awareness of the new requirements, and further time to develop them. As a result, most FMPs were approved as recently as 2004-2005. Thus it has been only in the past two or three years that evidence of how the FMPs have been progressing has begun to emerge.

### **FMP analysis**

Nevertheless, enough data now exists to make a preliminary quantitative assessment of the situation. As of 2007, 49 management plans had been approved, from which the researchers selected 38 for analysis. There were several reasons for not analyzing all 49, including that some concessions with approved plans were not operational in the years considered, some plans were yet to be fully implemented, or were simply not available for analysis.

Some of the reviewed plans were accessed through the GTZ library and some were provided by logging companies. The most important set of data used were management inventory results, which provided the population structures (volume and number of trees per diameter class) for all inventoried species and which are used to calculate the AAC of the FMP. Production data came from official figures provided by the forestry ministry's Computerized Forest Information Management System. These data were available for each FMU and species harvested.

The analysis was carried out following a two-step approach. First, the consequences of legal flaws on annual production were assessed by considering key species that were being harvested but were not part of the group of species selected for management. Second, impacts of the inadequate controls carried out by the ministry on approved management plans were examined by considering how management parameters, for example the minimum cutting diameter, are modified to achieve better recovery and sustainability.

The findings of this analysis clearly showed that despite the implementation of approved FMPs, they were not having the results that had been hoped for in requiring companies to develop sustainability plans. The report cites an example from 2006 of a company fulfilling its legal requirements with an FMP that placed 29 species on its managed species list, which represented 76 percent of the concession's inventoried volume. Of the 29 species nominated for special care, only 11 were actually harvested. These 11 species contributed less than 15 percent of the total volume of timber logged on the concession. In other words, 85 percent of the timber harvested consisted of species not included in the company's plan for managing the forest concession sustainably.

According to the report, 66 percent of logging companies in 2006 did not include at least one of their three most harvested species in their FMPs. Considering the concessions are granted for 15 years with a once-only 15 year renewable provision, there is a high risk that concessions will be quickly harvested of their valuable species, making them commercially unattractive to future investors. Even more worrying is that the current system allows the species that are not managed under the FMP to include a number that are classified as endangered on the IUCN red list (IUCN 2007) - such as assamela (*Pericopsis elata*), also listed in CIYES Appendix II - or vulnerable, usually because of overexploitation for timber - such as azobé (*Lophira alata*), kossipo (*Entandrophragma candollei*), moabi (*Baillonella toxisperma*) and sapelli (*Entandrophragma cylindricum*).

### **Disincentives to SFM**

One unfortunate consequence of the current arrangement is that it serves as a disincentive to those companies that are trying to operate in a socially and environmentally responsible manner. For example, several companies have already voluntarily sought and obtained Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification. This has forced them to improve their

FMPs, something they would not have needed to do if they remained only with the government-managed system. In a sense, they have been penalized for being SFM proactive. The government could significantly enhance its sustainability goals by more visibly supporting these progressive companies. Being seen to support companies such as those voluntarily working with the FSC would send a very clear message to stakeholders with vested forestry interests in both the private and public sectors.

In addition to the loophole described above, the report also found weaknesses in the government's monitoring of FMPs. Under the original law the government was responsible for developing FMPs, but it lacked the necessary financial and human resources. So it delegated the task to logging companies. As a result, FMPs are often prepared with more emphasis on economic than ecological aspects. The fact the companies are preparing the plans almost unilaterally is of particular concern given the report's conclusion that "although forest management is slowly improving in Cameroon, especially thanks to the efforts made by some motivated logging companies, it is still not perceived as a top priority for most of them, and the increasing number of approved management plans does not equate with sustainable forest management".

The report recommends that the Ministry of Forests becomes the leading actor in the improved management of Cameroonian production forests. This will help ensure FMPs comply more fully with the law and that companies voluntarily applying stricter management remain competitive. On the other hand, the report warns that if the ministry remains largely a silent actor, Cameroon will be unable to implement sustainable forestry management on a wide scale. Fortunately, government has taken notice of the problems raised in the report and is undertaking steps to change the current legal framework.

### Benefits of change

The CIFOR-ANU analysis says making the right changes to current forest management systems in Cameroon could generate the following benefits:

- Thirty-year concessions will remain attractive to future investors by ensuring that they retain sufficient volumes of commercially attractive species;
- Concessions will continue to remain a long-term source of employment and government revenue;
- Species identified by IUCN and/or CITES as endangered or vulnerable will have a greater chance of being managed sustainably; and
- Local and international agreements and certification processes will be stronger if uniform benchmarks are applied.

While a number of changes are needed to attain these benefits, ensuring that companies include their most commonly harvested species in lists of managed species contained in FMPs would be a good start. From there it will be possible to progressively move on to other changes that will eventually benefit Cameroon's economy, environment and people.

## References

Congo Basin Forests Partnership (CBFP). 2006. *Les forêts du Bassin du Congo—État des forêts 2006*. CBFP, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (COMIFAC). 2004. *Plan de convergence pour la conservation et la gestion durable des écosystèmes forestiers d'Afrique Centrale*. COMIFAC, Yaounde, Cameroon.

European Commission. 2007. *Voluntary partnership agreements*. FLEGT Briefing Notes Number 06 - Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade. European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.

German Development Cooperation (GTZ) and Ministère des Forêts et de la Faune (MINFOF). 2006. *Programme sectoriel Forêts et Environnement (PSFE) – Suivi d'impact de la gestion forestière au Cameroun - situation de référence des UTO du Sud-ouest et de l'Est*. GTZ - Natural Resources Sustainable Management Program and MINFOF, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

IUCN. 2007. *2007 IUCN red list of threatened species*. [online] URL: <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

Inter-African Forest Industries Association (IFIA). 2006. *IFIA newsletter: is forest management improving in the tropics?* [online] URL: <http://www.ifiasite.com/>.

International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO). 2006. *Status of tropical forest management 2005*. ITTO, Yokohama, Japan.

Ministry of Forests and Fauna (MINFOF). 2007. *Bref aperçu du secteur forestier* MINFOF, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

*The research paper that this article is based on (Sustainable Forest Management in Cameroon Needs More than Approved Forest Management Plans, by Cerutti, Nasi and Tacconi) is available at <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol13/iss2/art36/>.*



**Community friendly:** Improved forest management will benefit Cameroon's people *Photo: CIFOR*