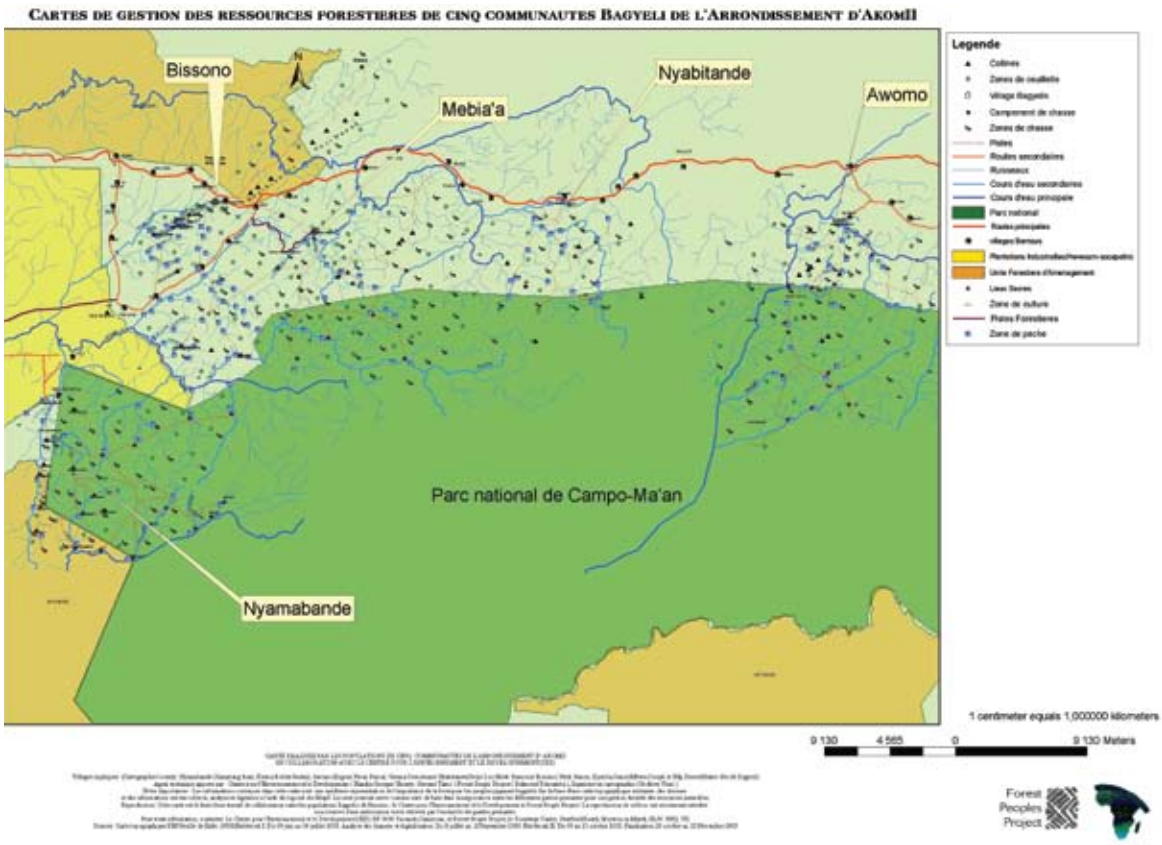

Figure 1: Result of a participatory mapping process showing forest management activities by five communities living near the Campo-Ma'an National Park, Cameroon *Image: Forest Peoples Programme*

Participatory mapping by the Forest Peoples Programme

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Participatory mapping has emerged as a tool for reclaiming rights and resources. It is a process in which local communities document their way of using land and resources. The main objective is to recognize the land rights of the communities. The methodology has evolved a lot over the last ten years: we have moved rapidly from map sketches, to manual maps involving professional cartographers, to, today, geographic information systems and geographic positioning systems (GPSs) to help communities document their methods of forest use and their rights.

Figure 1 shows the results of a specific mapping exercise carried out by communities living in or near national parks on how they use an area for their traditional activities; they go beyond the borders of the national park as defined by decision-makers. Similar exercises have been carried out in timber concessions and industrial plantations; they showed that many of these concessions are in traditional areas that belong to communities.

We have also mapped around other protected areas in Cameroon in collaboration with other actors. These maps are produced by the communities, especially the Baka communities in the southeast, who receive training in the use of GPSs and then go to the forest to use them. Such maps show an overlap between the customary rights of communities and the rights conferred to others, especially protected areas, industry users, and timber concessions. These maps increase the ability to monitor industrial activities and provide a tool to show the impact of such activities on the area and on local people's lives.

These maps are very important for showing how communities use areas and how there are conflicts between modern and customary rights. They have helped us to open dialogues with some users in the area, especially timber companies, to clarify forests and demarcate borders. The maps help us to negotiate access by the community to protected areas. We are also assisting mapping exercises in the Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, and Liberia.

Cartography of community spaces in the Congo Basin

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I will draw on mapping experiences in the Central African Republic, Gabon and the Republic of the Congo. In those three countries the few participatory forest mapping exercises that have so far taken place have been promoted by three main actors: conservation NGOs, those promoting certification, and research projects.

Participatory mapping has been used in several initiatives in pursuit of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification. We know that the FSC principles go beyond what is written in

the legal texts in each of the three countries. The benefits of the mapping process to loggers within the framework of certification are very clear, but they are less clear to communities. There are almost no cases in the three countries where the communities have rejected logging during FSC consultative processes. This certainly raises questions about the effectiveness of FSC-style consultations in the above-mentioned countries.

Conservation NGOs tend to work near national parks: for communities the benefits of participating in mapping exercises in this context are not always very clear. They may, for example, be threatened with sanctions if they show that they are carrying out activities within a national park. Mapping carried out by conservation players is often preceded by the sensitization of communities to illegal activities, which can influence their involvement.

What can we note in summary? Very few initiatives in the three countries have sought to influence the law of a country using some form of participatory mapping. We have seen cases where the participation of the communities was limited and passive. There is a lack of legal instruments to allow governments to benefit from mapping processes and many problems with the methodologies and the ways in which results are interpreted and understood. Communities are most often very passive participants and not aware of the purpose of the mapping exercises. In most cases, however, the mapping did reveal conflicts around tenure, highlighting the importance of participatory mapping for land and forest tenure.

How can we make progress? First, we can draw lessons from the participatory mapping that has taken place and use international bodies to promote these. We need to develop political instruments to promote and guide the use of participatory mapping and use mapping to address tenure. We need to provide more training to communities, because the tool will work best when it is mastered by the communities themselves.

Community mapping as a tool for negotiation: case of Ngonga-Kopongo, littoral, Cameroon

by Peter Mbile
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In this business of access to land, nobody is neutral. There are many agendas, lots of symbolism, many interests; we need to bear that in mind.

Before the rule of law becomes respected there must be evidence that people have participated in decision-making and have handed over some of their rights or interests for the common good.

This is the biggest weakness of many efforts. We have land where government has tried to integrate the needs of the local people into the management plan. In the case of Ngonga-Kopongo in southwest Cameroon, there is a crunch between private interests and communities that is very uncomfortable for government. The government promised enclaves but retracted the offer after a submission from a company, so there is a deadlock. It is not a question of right or wrong, it is a question of process.

The story of Koko Chepnuk

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This is the story of Koko Chepnuk from the area around Mount Elgon National Park in Kenya, which shows how participatory mapping can be a tool for empowerment.

Seating arrangements: One of the aims of community mapping is to give local people a seat at the negotiating table *Photo: A. Sarre*

Mount Elgon National Park was alienated from local people a long time ago, although some local rights have been restored. The process is started by talking about it; people in the village start a conversation. Then, in groups, they map the present situation and discuss the maps in front of everyone. Then they map what they would like to do and how they would like the village area to look in the future, and they present that back to the village, too. This helps to visualize problems and identify solutions.

In some societies it is difficult for women to present back to men—so it is an empowerment tool on its own. We have present-situation maps, as well as a vision for what the land will look like in ten years. We can help the villagers translate hand-drawn maps into 'smarter', computer-based maps, but they keep the original.

Koko Chepnuk had never presented in public before to a large group of men and women and was able to do it. The village identified a whole series of simple problems and came up with simple solutions. One of the issues they identified was the lack of trees. They said, 'we have been planting trees for years, so why are there no trees?' They realized that in the dry season livestock wander around freely and end up eating the seedlings. So they lobbied the district government to introduce a bylaw that would allow them to sanction people who allowed their livestock to wander onto other people's farms. This bylaw has since been passed and acted upon, much to Koko Chepnuk's delight.

"I'm so glad I participated," she said. "And I look forward to the enactment of the bylaw so that we can move forward to improve our situation."

So these sorts of processes can be very empowering, provided there is real ownership at the village level and that it is not used as an extractive exercise by outsiders.

Comment from the floor: I appreciate the extensive mapping that partners are doing. But maps should not be used as instruments of war between protagonists. With the increase in democracy, people cannot continue without the regulation of forest spaces.

Ter Heegde's response: A lot of the mapping process is about empowerment and to help people in small communities become better negotiators. So I don't see mapping as a conflictive tool. It is a tool for resolving conflicts. The aim of the Rainforest Foundation is to help communities with limited rights to express their rights. It is an opportunity to start a dialogue.

Mbile's response: We started mapping because there were conflicts. Mapping has helped to resolve conflict over the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, for example. The same applies to national parks—there are often serious conflicts because the local people didn't understand why they were being denied access to the land. So we have come in to help them reduce conflict.

Barrow's response: Mapping is a photograph in time; it can be historical or it can represent the present or the future. It is just a tool: it's how the tool is used, and by whom, that becomes an empowerment process. In Somalia we mapped land-use systems in an environment where people were carrying serious guns. We mapped where they accessed resources during the dry season, and this helped to reduce conflict in the area. Fundamentally, participatory mapping should be a tool for empowerment.

Comment from the floor: Is it possible to map mining resources? The problem we have in Cameroon's forests also concerns mining exploitation. When we build a national highway the company that constructs the road takes road-base from the forest and farmlands, leaving the people without anywhere to grow their crops. They are told that Article 6 says the property of mines is distinct from that of the soil; you don't own the subsoil resources.

Comment from the floor: There is a very serious risk concerning the preservation of conservation of our sacred sites. My question is: now that we are moving toward reforms have you thought about measures to make recommendations to protect sacred sites within these areas that would otherwise be destroyed by forest exploitation? In our area, the ancestors of our clans were placed in trees, and these are areas of very strong rights. If there is a problem in the community, people go to these places, spend the night and come back with a solution. That's a tradition that will be destroyed unless these sites are mapped and protected.

Tchoumba's response: With mapping, communities will be better able to protect their rights and to draw the attention of others to the importance of certain sites and the impacts of activities on them. Mapping can help us to visualize rights.

Comment from the floor: Very few countries have implemented their land laws, and those that have, have real constraints. I have the impression that we are recognizing the facts of resource use but there is no legal recognition. Have these maps been officially validated?

Ter Heegde's response: This is an important observation. Maps have a value if they are validated. First of all the community itself has to validate the map; that is an important part of the process. It is a very complex process; various institutions of the state can contribute to it. We encourage the authorities to take these maps and use them. It's a question of method: developing good technique so that these maps will be validated.

Everyone has a part to play: we invite states to join the process. Some states have been very active and open; many countries have shown interest in this method. Mapping is part of the vision that has changed how we see the forest and its users.

Comment from the floor: I have the impression that these maps are static. What was the situation 20 years ago, what are they today, and what will they be tomorrow? How far are you going to go to finish what you started? Why limit people in their vision?

Tchoumba's response: It is important not to look so much at the final product but at the process by which the map is produced. The final product depends on the objective: if it's a planning objective then, yes, it can include future scenarios. Many communities realize that regarding the law their customary rights are not respected—they feel like foreigners in their own territory. The question people are asking is, how can I suddenly be excluded from the space where I have always lived? I don't feel that mapping causes these problems, they are problems that exist, but mapping can help provide solutions.

Comment from the floor: I get the impression that you are focusing on mapping resource use. Was that deliberate? Why didn't you go into the identification of boundaries? That's really the primary issue.

Mbile's response: We have looked at what others have done and why they used the mapping methods they used. The good thing that came out of this is that we were able to compare methodologies and what they got as a result. In terms of territory, other people might have a view as to why Pygmies don't really talk about boundaries, whereas the first thing the Bantu do is mark boundaries.

We are not mapping to prove anything. It is a communication tool that enables the communication of rights. Many people are not doing mapping because of the way it has been done in the past; there is no single way and it depends on the objective of the mapping. The lesson we want to convey is that it is very clear that community forestry works best when high-level officials are in the same boat as the local people, when they are working for a common purpose.