RURAL DEVELOPMENT FORESTRY NETWORK

DEVELOPMENTS TOWARDS PARTICIPATORY FOREST MANAGEMENT ON MOUNT CAMEROON
(THE LIMBE BOTANIC GARDEN AND RAINFOREST GENETIC CONSERVATION PROJECT 1988-1994)

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INTRODUCTION

Mount Cameroon and its associated lowlands are thought to lie within one of the forest refugia of central Africa and probably represent one of the highest priorities for the conservation of biodiversity within Africa. Use and demand for the land and natural resources of the area are complex, incorporating vast areas of plantations annexed during colonial times, large in-migration of people from other parts of Cameroon and a rapidly evolving political, legislative and economic environment with the changes to multi-party politics and a Structural Adjustment Programme. Within this setting The Limbe Botanic Garden and Rainforest Genetic Conservation Project has been working towards biodiversity conservation on Mount Cameroon. As the Project has developed towards a more participatory approach to forest management it has tried to reconcile the outside ideas of biodiversity conservation with locally held aspirations for the forest. The objectives of this article are to discuss the historic and contemporary institutional aspects of land and natural resource use in the area, describe the approach taken by the Limbe Project and outline its plans for the future.

THE MOUNT CAMEROON AREA: AN OVERVIEW

The physical and biological environment

Mount Cameroon is an active Hawaiian type volcano with relatively fertile soils. It is the tallest peak (4095m) in an isolated chain of volcanic uplands (Thomas and Cheek, 1992). There is a high mean annual rainfall on the coast at the foot of Mount Cameroon (up to about 10,000 mm $year^{-1}$), whereas to the north of the massif rainfall is about 1,700 mm $year^{-1}$. A short dry season occurs between December and February but humidity remains at about 75-80% (Payton, 1993).

Mount Cameroon is unique within West Africa for having a relatively unbroken sequence of vegetation from evergreen forest at sea level to sub-alpine vegetation near its summit and is thought to lie within the Cameroon Refuge (Gartlan, 1989). The high levels of endemism and diversity of the area of Mount Cameroon are internationally recognised with at least 42 plant species and two bird species strictly endemic to the main massif (Thomas and Cheek, 1992; Stuart, 1986). There are also three species of endangered primate (Gadsby and Jenkins, 1992) and a small population of elephant.

History

The history of the area is now reasonably well known to the Limbe Project. However, earlier on the historical context of the land-use and political institutions were not so apparent.

Human settlement of the area is thought to have begun with the Bomboko tribe at the north east

of the Mountain. The Bakweri are believed to have come from the Bomboko tribe and settled the eastern flanks of the Mountain in the eighteenth century (Ardener, 1956). These coastal tribes were some of the first to have contact with European merchants (Kofele-Kale, 1981).

The German government claimed control of the Kamerun Protectorate in 1884. The fertile soils around Mount Cameroon attracted the Germans' attention and over 1,000 km^2 of the most fertile land was alienated. Of this 830 km^2 was from the Bakweri, who received little or no payment and were forced into restricted native reserves or the poorer land higher on the Mountain (Bederman, 1968). This mass alienation of land and the subsequent influx of immigrants had a profound affect on the Bakweri. It has been reported that they suffered disease and a falling birthrate and have experienced a cultural and demographic crisis from which they are only just recovering (Jeanrenaud, 1991).

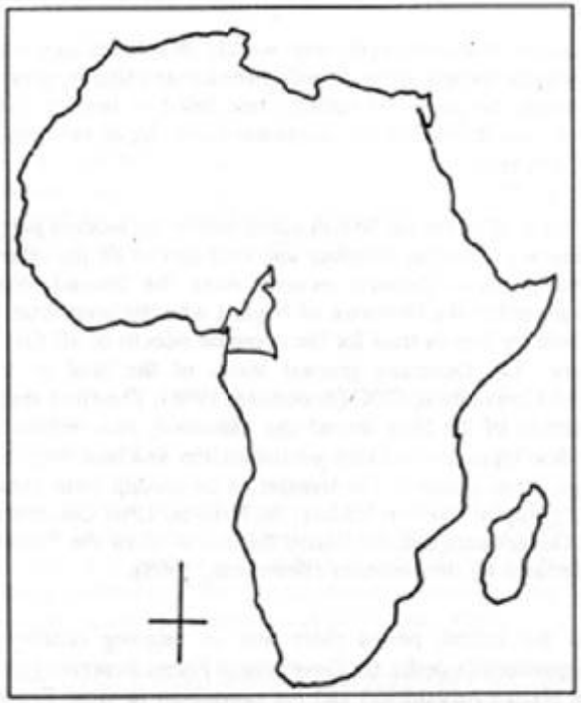
Labour was a continuing problem for the plantations and the working conditions in the unhealthy coastal climate led to a high death rate and rapid turnover of the work-force. The plantation managers, sometimes using forced labour, recruited additional workers from other parts of Cameroon (primarily from the Bamenda Highlands) and these were stationed in estate camps. By 1927 only 732 of the 10,542 plantation workers in Victoria (later Fako) Division were indigenous to the area (Kofele-Kale, 1981).

Traditionally Bakweri society was without elaborate systems of centralised authority in which political power is centralised in a Chief (Kofele-Kale, 1981). The highest level of political organisation was the village, and it is suggested that community structures were very weakly developed and were becoming weaker during the period of the British protectorate (Sharpe, pers. comm.). The British, through the policy of indirect rule, tried to increase the role of the village chiefs and developed the additional hierarchy of the Paramount Chiefs (Geschiere, 1993).

After the First World War the British administered the western part of Cameroon under a League of Nations Mandate and sold almost all the seized plantations back to the previous German owners. After the Second World War the plantations passed to the Governor of Nigeria who declared them Native Lands and to be held by him in trust for the common benefit of all the inhabitants of the Territory. The Governor granted leases of the land to the Cameroon Development Corporation, CDC (Bederman, 1968). Therefore the plantations, a large proportion of the land around the Mountain, have effectively remained outside all developments in forest administration and land ownership policy to date (Sharpe, pers. comm.). The transfer of ownership went ahead in spite of efforts by a group of Bakweri leaders, the Bakweri Land Committee, to petition the British Government and the United Nations to allow the Bakweri to reclaim the land alienated by the Germans (Bederman, 1968).

Throughout the British period there was an ongoing conflict between the Forestry Department's desire for Government Forest Reserves (and their lack of faith in the Native Authorities) and the opposition to these Reserves from the local people and the administration who supported the Native Lands Ordinance and the idea of Native Forest Reserves. In 1917, 1923 and 1927 the gazetting of the upper slopes of Mount Cameroon was recommended, but the proposals failed mainly due to this conflict. When reserves were later made in the 1930s and 1950s they were vested in the Native Authorities. The Bambuko Native Authority Forest Reserve and the Mokoko River Forest Reserve, on the north eastern flank and foothills of the Mountain were gazetted in 1939 and 1952 respectively (Sharpe, pers. comm.).

The Native Authorities had little effective responsibility other than for their forest reserves. The consultation and establishment process of `Reserve settlement' was criticised by the British administration and the villagers. Often the Forestry Department simply did not have the resources to make reserves effectively. Under the system of Native Authorities there were many struggles over the control of forest resources and their associated revenues. These conflicts were within the Native Authorities and between the Native Authorities, the villages and the individual villagers. The villages were becoming increasingly heterogeneous and fragmented and the institution of the Native Authority – although still supported by the British Administration – became less effective.



ABOVE: **MAP OF AFRICA SHOWING CAMEROON AND POSITION OF PROJECT AREA**

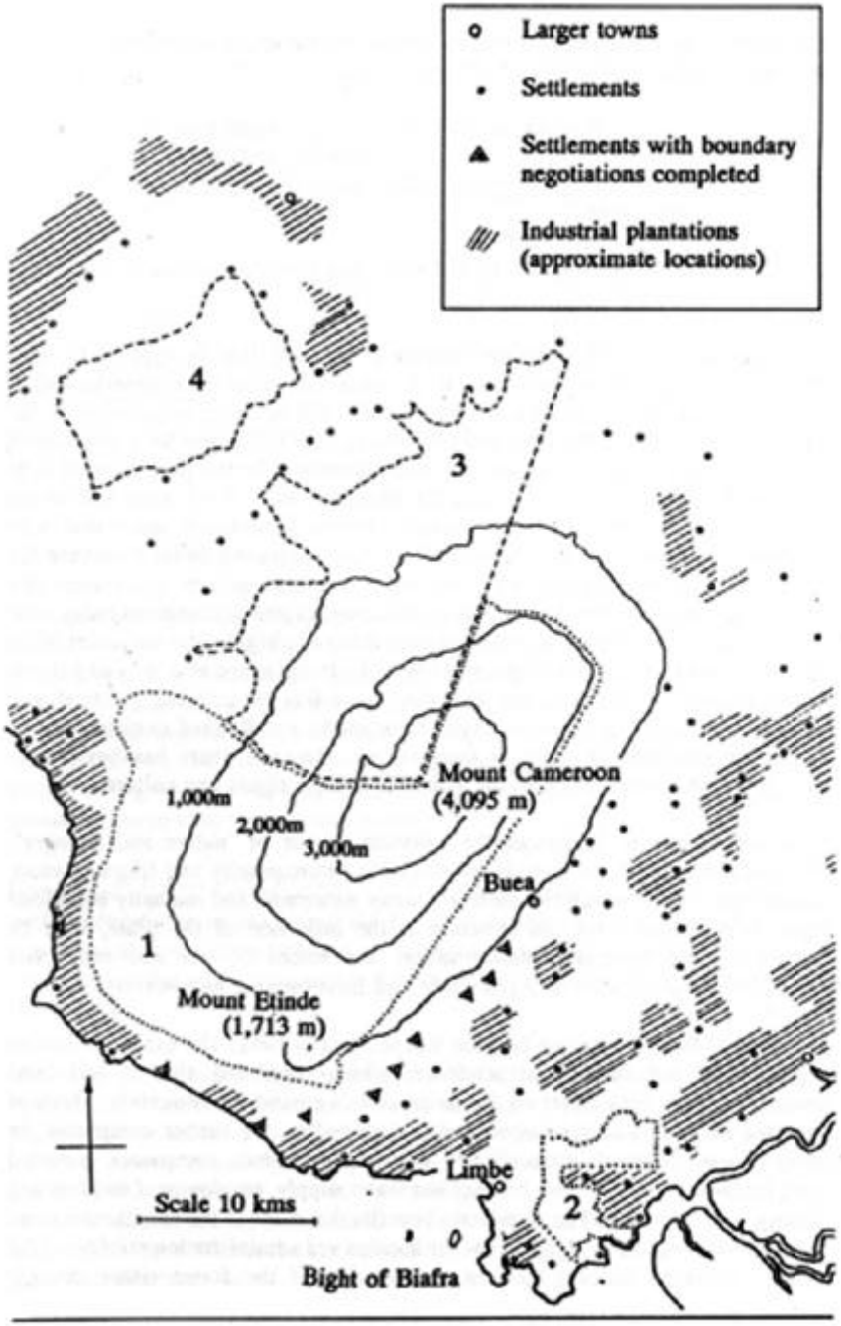
OPPOSITE: **MAP OF THE MOUNT CAMEROON AREA SHOWING THE PROPOSED CONSERVATION AREAS, SETTLEMENTS AND INDUSTRIAL PLANTATIONS**

Proposed Conservation Areas

1 Etinde
2 Mabeta-Moliwe (original boundary)

Existing Forest Reserves

3 Bambuko Forest Reserve
4 Mokoko River Forest Reserve



Although official statistics no longer present demographic information in terms of ethnic origin, Kofele-Kale (1981) noted that:

> "...today there are an estimated 17 immigrants to every native-born person in Fako Division and nearly 4 immigrants to every native Kpe [Bakweri] in the native areas alone"

The proportion of immigrants to Bakweris has probably increased since that estimate.

The attitude of the Bakweri to `strangers' [a term that is applied to non-indigenous people who have lived in the area for up to three generations] is rather ambiguous. In addition to the considerable stranger population in the camps associated with the industrial plantations, many strangers have established themselves in the area for agriculture and commerce. In the past, as well as at present, the people native to around the Mountain have freely sold and rented land to settlers. The population increase within settlements associated with strangers is encouraged as a means of securing increased forest clearance for agricultural expansion, increased Government services and increased community developed infrastructure. The arrival of economic migrants continues today with people from within Cameroon (notably the Bamenda highlands) and other West African states (particularly Nigeria). However, strangers are also seen as a threat to the security of local people and there is a fear of cultural, political and economic domination. Some villages have made a collective decision not to encourage strangers to settle in their village. Recently there has been a re-emergence of interest amongst the Bakweri in their rights and culture.

It is over-simplistic to present the situation as one of `native and stranger'. Within each community there is considerable heterogeneity and fragmentation, and between the communities there are many antagonist and mutually beneficial links. Superimposed on this structure is the influence of the State, with its bureaucracy of territorial administration, the forces of law and order and technical ministries such as Agriculture and Environment and Forests.

The state of West Cameroon became independent in 1961. The extensive timber exploitations just before independence, which continued after it had been declared, had a major effect on the communities around the Mountain. Much of the road network was developed and maintained by the timber companies. In order to gain `owner's consent' and village agreements, companies provided cash, infrastructure including bridges and water supply, employment and feasting (Sharpe, pers. comm.). The significant benefits that came to the communities and to individuals within the Traditional Authorities and administration reinforced the already accepted concept that the exploitation of the forest either through conversion to agriculture or timber extraction was a valid strategy towards development and political power.

Under German administration all unoccupied land was declared Crown Land. Later, under the British, the Native Land Ordinance vested such land with the Native Authorities (Sharpe, pers. comm.). However, after 1972 the two states of the Federal Republic of Cameroon became the United Republic and undeveloped land now rested with the State. The economic and political spoils of timber extraction and land acquisition/disposal were siphoned towards the technical and political powers in the national capital of Yaounde and away from the villages and local elite. Nevertheless, the perception that the forest belongs to the indigenous people is still held over 18 years later. Jeanrenaud (1991) noted that Bakweri communities perceived the virgin forest as

communal land and that the chief and elders considered themselves as custodians, holding the forest land in trust for future use.

Current land-use

Agriculture around the Mountain is dominated by the CDC estates of oil palm, rubber, bananas and tea. There are also privately owned plantations of oil palm, coffee and cocoa. Plantains are grown in small holdings and plantations, both for domestic consumption and the relatively lucrative urban markets of Fako Division and Douala. Almy & Besong (1987) estimated that there were about 10,000 families involved in full-time farming in Fako Division and another 10,000 living on the estates or in towns had small plots. The main crops were plantains, cocoyams, cassava and maize.

Jeanrenaud (1991), Carter (1992) and Gadsby & Jenkins (1992) have provided useful information on the use of the forest in the Mount Cameroon area. There is considerable variation between settlements as to their use and attitude to the forest depending on their history and the forest resources that are still accessible from them.

Generally the existing forest around the Mountain is no longer attractive to industrial timber companies as most of the more accessible forest has been logged. However, local entrepreneurs use chainsaws to convert trees to planks for local consumption. Such exploitation supports considerable employment. Carter (1992) estimated that in one village at least 300 people out of an estimated population of about 3,800 were involved in timber exploitation and related activities. Within the settlements there is a general awareness that good quality timber trees are becoming increasingly hard to find.

For most local people the main source of domestic energy is fuelwood, which is usually collected as deadwood and branches from nearby farm-bush. There is an urban fuelwood trade but this is often wood from end-of-rotation rubber trees `acquired' from CDC plantations. Certain tree species are felled solely for the fish drying trade.

Hunting for bushmeat is a major activity around the farms, and in the forest and grassland of Mount Cameroon. Although some bushmeat is for subsistence, it is also an important source of cash. Trappers use wire snares, whilst shooting is often carried out using guns unofficially loaned by government personnel (army, gendarmes) for a share of the proceeds (Gadsby and Jenkins, 1992). According to the law, trapping with wire is illegal, and shooting only permissible after obtaining a license. Although hunting is an entirely male occupation, women are often involved in the marketing and processing of the bushmeat (the network of traders around the Mountain supplies Douala over 80 km away). The number of hunters seems to be increasing, and most hunters note that animal populations are declining (Gadsby and Jenkins, 1992).

Many other products are harvested from the forest and grassland including honey, medicinal plants, vegetables, fruits and spices. The marketing of these products is often along a chain of traders and the resulting cash income, although individually small, may be important – particularly to the women involved. Jeanrenaud (1991) found that half the households interviewed were involved in selling forest products.

The bark of the tree *Prunus africana* is exploited commercially from the Mountain's forest. An extract from the bark is used in the preparation of drugs in Europe to treat prostrate disorders. The effective and equitable management of this potentially lucrative and sustainable non-timber forest product is an interesting case in itself. Cunningham and Mbenkum (1993) provide a useful overview.

The control or management of forest exploitation by the state is limited to timber licenses and sporadic confiscation of illegal timber. There is almost no control of hunting.

Control within villages of hunting and timber exploitation is usually limited to seeking nominal village permission, for which a small payment may be made to the chief and councillors. Some, but not all, villages deny access to strangers. Hunters and villages have recognised, but not exclusive, hunting areas but there is no control of the numbers of hunters or of off-take. Traditional taboos (for example, against the killing of chimpanzees) are breaking down. Any such village control is limited to the more traditional villages. Forest near urban centres or CDC workers camps are virtually free access resources where even professional hunters from other parts of Cameroon are operating.

Clearly Mount Cameroon is important for biodiversity conservation. The Mountain and its natural resources are also a significant source of subsistence and cash income within the regional economy and, at least in the past, political power. It was in this very complex, far-reaching and dynamic political and economic environment that the Limbe Botanic Garden & Rainforest Genetic Conservation Project was established to try to conserve the biodiversity on the Mountain.

THE LIMBE BOTANIC GARDEN & RAINFOREST GENETIC CONSERVATION PROJECT

The original project and its objectives

The Limbe Botanic Garden and Rainforest Genetic Conservation Project was prepared for the Overseas Development Administration of the British Government (ODA) and the Government of Cameroon (GoC) by a team lead by Nigel Hepper (a taxonomist at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew). The intention was to incorporate the renovation of the Botanic Garden at Limbe (dating back to 1892) with conserving the forest on Mount Cameroon. Conservation was to be achieved through the gazettement and policing of reserves, which would be subsequently studied (Hepper, Mitchell and Bell, 1986; Hepper and Bovey, 1987). There was some recognition that the local people would need to be approached, but otherwise there was little reference to the area's history or the pressures facing the forest.

At the time of project preparation Cameroon was a secure one-party state. It was agreed that the Project would operate through the Forestry Department, whose members formed the Cameroonian Project officers (several expatriate staff were also employed). The Forestry Department merely needed a map and report of the area to be gazetted, and they would be able to secure reservation. Within the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Cameroonian and British governments in 1988 two areas were identified for conservation: Mabeta-Moliwe and Etinde.

Mabeta-Moliwe is an area of old secondary forest, to the east of Limbe town (see Map). The

remaining forest cover is not continuous and in total amounts to less than 40 km². It lies almost entirely on land leased from the GoC by the CDC, which has not developed it into plantations due to the relatively poor soils and terrain. Lacking any need to refer to the traditional owners for permission and payment, the land has attracted strangers for timber extraction and the opening up of new farms. Much of the forest has been cleared by residents from nearby urban settlements. Carter (1992) estimated the population in the immediate vicinity to be about 52,000.

The indigenous people of the area (the Isuwu and Bakweri) saw forest that had originally been alienated by the Germans gradually encroached by timber exploiters and farmers (many of whom were strangers), without the land being returned to the natives to allocate for their own benefit (either to conserve the forest or to raise capital by selling it). At the beginning of the Project local elites requested central Government to protect the forest from further incursion. The coastal area includes the old settlements of Bimbia which had early contact with the Portuguese; the site has been recommended for designation as a World Heritage Site (Sharpe, pers. comm.).

Thus at the start of the Project this `unused' area of forest destined to be conserved had many different, and incompatible, claims upon it. However, this was not apparent to those involved in project preparation.

Etinde (named after the secondary cone of Mount Etinde on Mount Cameroon) covers about 400 km^2 and includes the grassland and relatively undisturbed forest on the southern flanks of the Mountain towards the coast. The population in the immediate vicinity was estimated by Carter (1992) to be about 47,000. This includes the main urban area of Buea and a line of traditional villages at about 1,000m altitude to the east, as well as the CDC plantation camps and mixed villages along the coast.

Initial developments

With minimal reference to local people, the Project cut and surveyed the boundary of the proposed Mabeta-Moliwe Reserve, trying to include as much forest as possible, and exclude the majority of the farms. The area came to about 40 km^2. It was not possible to exclude all the farms, and the Project began to doubt the future of those enclosed. There was little precedence for compensation; eviction was neither practical nor just, and yet ensuring that the farms did not increase was not feasible. New farms continued to be opened within the boundary, which was subsequently re-cut to exclude more farms.

The Project realised the problems presented by the approach adopted in Mabeta-Moliwe. Staff sensed instant distrust by the indigenous people of Etinde of any activity that might further alienate what were considered to be traditional lands. One of the first difficulties to overcome was the lack of confidence in Government projects (for example, there had been a series of water projects that had failed). There was also lack of confidence in the activities of the Forestry Department in particular.

Following a meeting with all the traditional leaders of the area, where tacit support for the proposed Etinde reserve was gained, the Project decided to adopt a methodology that would allow greater participation by the local people. The institution the Project elected to work through was the village Chief and his traditional council, the lowest level of the government hierarchy and

the route used historically for discussion on land matters.

Unfortunately, the Project was operating within a legislative vacuum. The existing forest legislation did not allow effective local benefit from the forest. Although new legislation (anticipated to be more progressive) was being drawn up, at the time it was distant and unknown. With uncertainty over the legislation and fear of letting the people down after raising their expectations, it was decided that the Project would negotiate the boundary of the reserve whilst presenting the `worst possible case scenario' of exclusion (no hunting and no timber extraction). If legislative reform allowed, the management regime could be changed in favour of greater local participation. The Forestry Department thus avoided being put in a future situation of breaking its agreement with local people. It is possible that had the Project had more to offer at the time of negotiations – in terms of forest use or development options – the area agreed for the reserve might have been larger.

The village of Bokwango (a mixed, large village on the edge of the Provincial capital of Buea with many young hunters) was selected in which to begin work. Rumours had begun to circulate of the intention to `sell the Mountain', and it was felt that if progress was not made in Bokwango, future work in other villages would be jeopardised. The Chief, in spite of pressure from some of the village to reject the reserve, selected representatives of the main families to take part in the boundary negotiations. The representatives became the village committee which would be the Project's main contact with the village. The problem presented was where the reserve should be, not if it should exist in the first place. Ideally the question should have been the latter, but the chance of out-right rejection at that stage was too risky.

Over a period of three days the village committee and Project representatives negotiated the boundary and marked it at major paths. The committee made sure that sufficient land was left below the boundary for `village use'. At the end of negotiations the minutes of the discussions, in the form of a letter to the Divisional Officer, were produced and copies were signed by all the committee and project representatives. Everyone received an original document. The idea of a document came from a Committee member. Although such a document had little legal standing, it provided both sides in the negotiation with confidence that what had been agreed could be later referred to. The negotiation increased the village committee's confidence in the reserve – firstly by demonstrating that the reserve was not to include farmland, and secondly by providing some reassurance that the Government was not trying to cheat the villagers.

After the first village had negotiated, more villages felt sufficiently confident to go ahead with the negotiations. After meetings with the village councils, and slide and video-shows with the wider village population, the villages each formed a committee. Discussions were held in the forest between the committee and Project staff, leading to the production of negotiation documents. In the next one and a half years this process was carried out with ten villages along the east and southern boundary of the proposed reserve. From these negotiations a number of observations can be made.

Generally the villages were fairly consistent about where they wanted the boundary to pass: about half an hour's walk on from the furthest farm (in total about one and a half hour's walk from the village). This may have been due to a common feeling of village space, or to communication between settlements. Each village committee was different in their fears and aspirations regarding the negotiations, and the Project could not afford to become complacent by offering a `standard' negotiation routine. It became evident that the opposition or support for the reserve by members

or factions of the village was often linked to intra-village politics rather than objectivity. This should not have come as a surprise, although guided by Bakweri staff, the Project was entering into villages with histories of over 200 years of traditionally factional politics.

Although the Project provided some food and drink for a traditional village `libation' before each negotiation, it was hard to convince some committees that the Government was not buying the forest and there were frequent unfulfilled requests for cash payment. However, the committee members were paid for their time spent negotiating in the forest. Despite frequently emphasising that the forest was not being totally alienated from them, a year later independent researchers found in two villages the opinion that the forest above the boundary was the "Botanic Garden's" or the "Government's" and was now "their" responsibility (Nkwi, pers. comm.). Given the history of land use and disposal within the area, this is perhaps not surprising.

The selection of the committees was left to the village councils, but the Project did request that women and younger people be represented. The Project felt that to try to impose ideas on, for example, the involvement of women in the committee would be too problematic in an already politically charged environment. The committees' sizes varied from five to twelve people. Only four of the committees contained women and their highest number was five in a committee of eleven. The committees that contained women were all along the coast where there had been the longest European contact. The traditional councils were exclusively Bakweri and apart from one instance so were the committees; the strangers within the villages and the plantation camps were not consulted. Although this composition seemed culturally appropriate as land perceived as being `traditionally' owned was being discussed, any future discussion on the management would require a wider constituency to be effective.

THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Since the beginning of the Project in 1988 there has been considerable change within Cameroon, which has effected the context in which the conservation areas are being created.

The economic environment

The economy of Cameroon has progressively declined since Project commencement. Until the recent 50% devaluation of the CFA franc (January 1994) the price of the main cash crops was under half that of previous levels, and manufacturing and commerce had declined correspondingly. Youth unemployment appears to be increasing and more people are relying on their existing or new farms for food. The drastic cut in civil service salaries (up to 70%), on which most families to some extent depend, and recent early retirements has further deepened `la crise'. There is some evidence of a reversal of the rural exodus and the government is exhorting people to return to their villages, putting further pressure on the forest.

It is hard to predict the net effect of the devaluation so soon after it has taken place. Although industrial timber exploitation and exportation has dramatically risen in the forest zone of Cameroon as a whole, local demand for timber in Limbe, at least in the short term, has slumped.

The political environment

For the first three years of the Project the political situation was that of a one-party state. The ruling party was clearly in power, with party officials present at any form of public meeting. The news media was limited and no opposition views were presented. People were reluctant to speak openly about politics. Power was clearly with the State and the attitude of the Forestry Department reflected this when the Project first began work in Mabeta-Moliwe.

Following limited civil unrest, and multi-party presidential and parliamentary elections (though of questioned validity) there is much greater freedom of expression. The press is now outspoken and people feel much more free to speak openly about politics. Power at least at a national level still rests with the ruling party and the associated administration. The presence of the State at a village level can be slight. Although the village chief is the government's representative (the highest two out of the three categories of chiefs receive a Government stipend) he has little power to implement without consensus within the villages. The presence of the State in the form of the technical government services is minimal, and the security forces are only able to show sporadic demonstrations of their force. As the economy continues to decline, confidence in the ability of the State to provide law and order diminishes and `justice' is often delivered locally. People seem more confident in challenging the role of the State, including the policing of natural resources. This growing confidence may have implications for any plans to protect the forest in a traditional `forest guard' model, or to use traditional authorities which are progressively loosing respect and are associated closely with the State.

The institutional environment

The GoC staff on the Project were originally all from the Forestry Department, but this has now expanded to include agricultural and wildlife trained personnel. Although there have always been Bakweris on the Project it is hoped in the future to increase the number of Bakweri and women among the staff.

At Project commencement the trees and wild animals of Cameroon were under different ministries: the Forestry Department was within Agriculture and that of Wildlife in Tourism. With the formation of the Ministry of Environment and Forests in 1992 the two departments were brought together.

The Departments of Forestry and of Wildlife and Protected Areas have little or no capital or running budgets and field staff simply do not have the means to perform their duties. Although many of the staff are highly trained and proficient, morale is understandably very low and complaints about alleged corruption are increasing. Although inadequate funding of the forestry service seems to have historical precedence (Sharpe, pers. comm.) the current crisis is acute. The implementation of a new and ambitious law, or innovative management regimes, within such an environment will be difficult. Although Project staff have access to vehicles and limited overtime payments, which improve their output, this does cause problems when working with other government staff.

In other areas near Mount Cameroon, including Bambuko Forest Reserve, there have been past

attempts by the indigenous people to persuade the GoC to clear strangers from the Reserves. The Forest Department's failure to achieve this politically impossible task has further lowered respect for both it and the concept of reserves in the minds of natives and strangers alike.

At the time of going to press it was understood that CDC was to be privatised. This will obviously have major effects on land-use and employment in the area; social and environmental ramifications will be considerable.

The legislative environment

The old forestry law (#81-13 of 27 November 1981) placed the ownership of all non-planted trees with the State. Individuals could apply for trees from the Forestry Department but this would involve lengthy (and potentially corrupt) administrative procedures. With commercial exploitation a company would still give some small compensation to the village (see earlier), although this was often derisory when compared to the value of the timber.

Since the late 1980s, with pressure from the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme, there was discussion on the revision of the law. The new legislation (#84-01) was promulgated on 20 January 1994. Under it there are two categories of forest particularly relevant to the Project. These are Council Forests (considered as Permanent Forest – land permanently assigned to forest and/or fauna) and Community Forests (considered as Non-Permanent Forest). Council Forests are to be declared by decree with a management plan drawn up by the interested parties, but requiring approval by the Minister of Environment and Forests. The forests can be either natural or planted and are to belong to the council and be for its benefit. Community forests are formed from National forests by community officials entering into an agreement with the Ministry of Environment and Forests. Forest products from Community forests will be the exclusive property of that particular community. The agreement between the Ministry and the community can specify the beneficiaries, the boundaries and the management of the forest.

The law on wildlife seems not to have changed much from the previous restrictive legislation. However it is felt that some form of communal management (perhaps using the model of CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe) may be able to be incorporated under the management plans of Council or Community forests (Besong, pers. comm.)

Clearly the new legislation is a welcome change for the Project's activities and there is much greater flexibility as to the choice of management and tenure that may be appropriate for the proposed conservation areas. However, the implications of the new law are still uncertain. There is need for a considerable period of re-training within the Forestry Department, and discussions with the local communities, to accommodate such a radical change in the way in which the forest is viewed.

One major point of contention that has not been defined adequately within the new law is that of **`community**'. Particularly around Mount Cameroon, the constituency that is defined as having responsibility for and the right to benefit from the management of the forest is critical. As presented in the earlier discussion on the history of the area, there is a very complex and contentious web of interested parties (villagers, traditional authorities, local elites, strangers, administrators and technical and security services and of course international conservationists)

all of which have some assumed expectations to benefit from the forest, and different capacities to protect it. Too narrow a definition of the responsibility and beneficiary base for forest management would jeopardise the forest's future. In such a complex environment, a State Forest (similar to the more traditional forest reserve) covering the main area surrounded by additional forests managed on a participatory basis with local people may be most acceptable to the various parties concerned.

Some elements within the new legislation may prove impractical. For example, 5,000 hectares is the minimum area specified for Community forests. This may be too inflexible, especially if local management for specific non-timber forest products is envisaged. It was suggested that given these uncertainties about the new legislation, there is a need for the Project to have some kind of `pilot status' to allow experimentation with management/participation options. These may then provide guidance for further legislative development. This would be of greater value if it could be linked to a network of similar pilot areas.

Further developments

With the political and legislative changes of recent years, the rationale behind gazetting Mabeta-Moliwe as originally planned has been questioned. Clearly the restrictions to agricultural expansion as presented by the original boundary would have proved socially and politically untenable. However there may be a continued case for protecting the relatively undisturbed coastal area (of about 16 km^2). This would have considerable local and international support for reasons of conservation, cultural heritage and tourism.

With the changing political environment, and villagers' greater confidence in questioning the activities of the State, the process of negotiations came to a standstill. The villages that remained to negotiate with the Project were no longer willing to enter into discussions without prior debate over the management of the reserve and direct benefits to the villages (seen in terms of development projects). A related point is that until now the Project has been working through the hierarchy of the Paramount Chief. This angered some villages and their chiefs, illustrating the traditionally fragmentary nature of indigenous politics and the possible weaknesses in a hierarchy largely of colonial origin (Geschiere, 1993). It has been suggested that the recent interest in forest conservation has been seen by some traditional rulers as a vehicle for regaining (or gaining for the first time) power over land and villagers (both indigenous and strangers).

The Limbe Project decided to wait for the information and inputs that will become available under the new Mount Cameroon Project before making further approaches to the villages where the negotiations stalled.

THE MOUNT CAMEROON PROJECT – LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Since inception there had been awareness within the Limbe Project that its remit was too narrow both institutionally and geographically. The next phase of the Project will try to address these issues.

The original project ignored the social implications of forest conservation in terms of people's access and management of forest resources, and the need to stabilize land use around the forest. Also, during Project implementation, various forest and botanical inventories (Limbe Botanic Garden, 1993; Cheek, 1992; Thomas and Cheek, 1992 and Thomas, 1994) implied that much of the botanical interest may lie in the forested lowlands including those to the west of the mountain, which is still contiguous with the forest on the mountain. In addition, the management of only a section (Etinde) of the whole mountain did not correspond with the biological processes, the natural resource exploitation or local culture. All seemed to operate at a mountain-wide level.

This need for a wider remit is to be addressed within the Mount Cameroon Project. This will entail the GoC working with three donors; ODA, GTZ (the German Government Technical Cooperation Agency) and GEF (the Global Environment Facility).[1] The overall objectives of the Project are to:

- develop Limbe Botanic Garden as an institution for conservation, education and research.
- prepare a land-use strategy for the whole Mountain
- establish protected areas on and around the Mountain
- develop approaches to environmental education
- identify alternative income generating activities, and
- develop participatory approaches to sustainable natural resource management.

Some activities will be the exclusive responsibility of the GoC working with a single donor; other responsibilities will be shared. Recognising the considerable uncertainties associated with the objectives, the new Project will adopt a `process' approach.

The participation of a number of donors should permit a greater continuity and a higher level of funding for the Mount Cameroon area than from any one donor. Each donor will be able to provide its own institutional strengths but each may bring different organisational cultures which may bring additional complications to project management.

The next phase of the work on Mount Cameroon has the potential to build on past work and to approach the social issues more effectively. Amongst the various facets of the changing overall environment, the legislation has been considerably improved. However, the background of economic and institutional decline will be hard for the Project to address, even locally.

The negotiation of a boundary with one element in a complex society is incomparably easier than the task of developing the future management of the forest within that boundary with all the stakeholders. Such management must incorporate the needs of not just the indigenous people but the other elements of the very complex and contentious web of interested parties. All have some expectations to benefit from the forest and different capacities to protect (or potentially to damage) it.

[1] A global funding body administered by the World Bank.

There is a need for pragmatism in such a complex environment. For example, calls by conservationists (Gadsby and Jenkins, 1992) for a complete hunting ban on the mountain are politically and logistically impossible. However, trying to implement some popular form of control on elephant and chimpanzee hunting may be a useful starting point to build up the confidence of the population, GoC, and donors. Early success in selected communities can act as a catalyst for others. The need to build a sense of confidence and security within all the institutions involved in the conservation/management cannot be over-emphasised. If ultimately successful, the Mount Cameroon Project will provide a valuable model for other forest areas in Africa facing the erosion of traditional control and escalating demands from fragmented and increasingly heterogeneous populations.

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ACRONYMS

CDC	Cameroon Development Corporation
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GoC	Government of Cameroon
GTZ	(Deutsche) Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Technical Cooperation Agency)
ODA	Overseas Development Administration

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