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# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN FOREST MANAGEMENT: A FULL-SCALE EXPERIMENT IN THE SOUTH CAMEROON FOREST

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## SUMMARY

In Cameroon, local community involvement in the process of forest management is obligatory. Within the specific context of the Tropenbos Cameroon Programme, an approach has been developed to achieve this. After a varied phase of awareness-raising, the principal users of a 42,500 ha ecosystem were brought together to discuss the uses to which this forest land would be put, and its boundaries. It is this experience, from the initial negotiating conditions to the final result, which is described in this paper. It shows how a strategic group of local stakeholders was able to force players at the macro-level to comply with its point of view concerning the management of the forest. In order to avoid increased competition for both land and resources, an integrated mode of forest management is proposed, which goes beyond the administrative distinction between permanent and non-permanent forest estate.

## INTRODUCTION

The participation of various stakeholders in the sustainable management of tropical forests is recognised by the international community and, for some years now, has

been required under Cameroonian law. It is also a major concern of the Tropenbos Cameroon Programme (TCP). Indeed, TCP's overall objective is to develop methods for sustainable forest management, and this necessarily includes local community involvement in decision-making. With this aim an experiment is currently being conducted, which attempts to bring together the different stakeholders within one forest area, in order to reach a consensus on the use of resources. At least two aspects of this work are of interest with respect to the involvement of the local population in forest management: (1) a specific 'theoretical' approach to local community involvement in forest management, combining a preliminary phase of information dissemination and interpretation of stakeholders' strategies (in the form of a 'patrimonial audit'), broad freedom of choice regarding the options for forestry management, and the provision (in an appropriate form) of scientific data to give greater information on the choices available; (2) a recent application of this approach, at the end of August 2000, when all those with a stake in a forest area of 42,500 ha got together in Kribi, and succeeded in defining the uses to which the forest was to be put, and its boundaries. The process and the results achieved provide

practical lessons concerning local community participation in the sustainable management of Cameroon's forests. Although the final part of this paper reflects on the nature of forest management, its implications are first and foremost practical.

## BACKGROUND

### Legal context

Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been particular emphasis on environmental protection in Cameroon and, even more, on the sustainable management of forest resources. This step forward is supported by two basic texts: Forestry Law no. 94/01 of 24 January 1994, and Law no. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 concerning the management of the environment. These are supplemented by specific regulatory texts for production forests and community forests. All these documents deal, more or less directly, with the involvement of local populations in decisions concerning forestry management. For example, the Law on the management of the environment (Article 9), recognises the principle of participation, according to which (roughly translated) *“decisions on the environment shall be taken after consultation with the sectors of activity or groups concerned, or after public debate, when they are of a general nature.”* The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MINEF), too, agrees that local populations should *“participate in every phase of consultation and follow-up throughout the process, from the preparatory phase to the implementation of the management plan”* (MINEF, 1998). There is, therefore, a legal obligation to involve local communities in the decision-making process whenever a forest is to be the subject of a management plan.

The process of forest management in Cameroon involves several stages, which may be summarised for purposes of clarity. The Law provides for two types of status for forested areas, with different types of management:

- The Permanent Forest Estate is the private estate of the State (or local council), and is permanently allocated to forest and/or wildlife habitat. These forests must first be classified and then managed under the supervision of MINEF.
- The Non-Permanent Forest Estate consists of forest land which may be allocated to uses other than forestry: these are communal forests, community forests and forests belonging to private individuals. Communal forests, which represent almost all the non-permanent forest estate, are neither classified nor subject to specific management plans.

The stakeholders in forest management in Cameroon have divergent interests with respect to forests of different legal status, particularly when they are opened up for logging. To put it simply, the larger the permanent forest estate, the greater the profit for the councils and the State. For example, for a production forest, the Annual Forestry Fees are at least FCFA 1,500/ha/year, and are distributed as follows: 50% to the State, 40% to the council, and 10% to neighbouring villages. In contrast, the larger the non-permanent forest estate, which allows for the establishment of community forests and the allocation of Sales of Standing Volume, the more the neighbouring populations and local authorities benefit. In community forests, the community has exclusive ownership of the products of the forest and all the income generated from them. In the case of Sales of Standing Volume granted within communal

forests, in addition to the official taxes, loggers are generally bound by their conditions of contract to pay FCFA 1000 per m<sup>3</sup> of wood logged to the neighbouring populations.

The forest management procedure, which establishes the boundaries between these two forest estates, and provides for their management, is thus a crucial stage. It is conducted in two phases. The first is to establish the boundaries between the two estates and to define the uses to which the permanent forest is put (that is, its priority use, which defines the type of management implemented). This is usually based on the Cameroon national zoning plan, which proposes the demarcation and allocation of the permanent forest, and is carried out with the participation of all the stakeholders. An Outline Plan is often drafted at this stage, to answer two essential questions:

1. Who is going to manage the forest (identifying the stakeholders and institutions concerned with resource management)?
2. What is going to be managed (defining the boundaries of the permanent forest and the uses to which it is put)?

This document is a starting point for the classification procedure. The second stage is then to draft a management plan for the classified forest, clearly describing the terms of use of the land concerned.

The Tropenbos Cameroon Programme experience, recounted here, focuses on the first stage of forest management, looking at the possibility of involving local communities in the process of agreeing the boundaries and uses of the forest land.

### Practical context

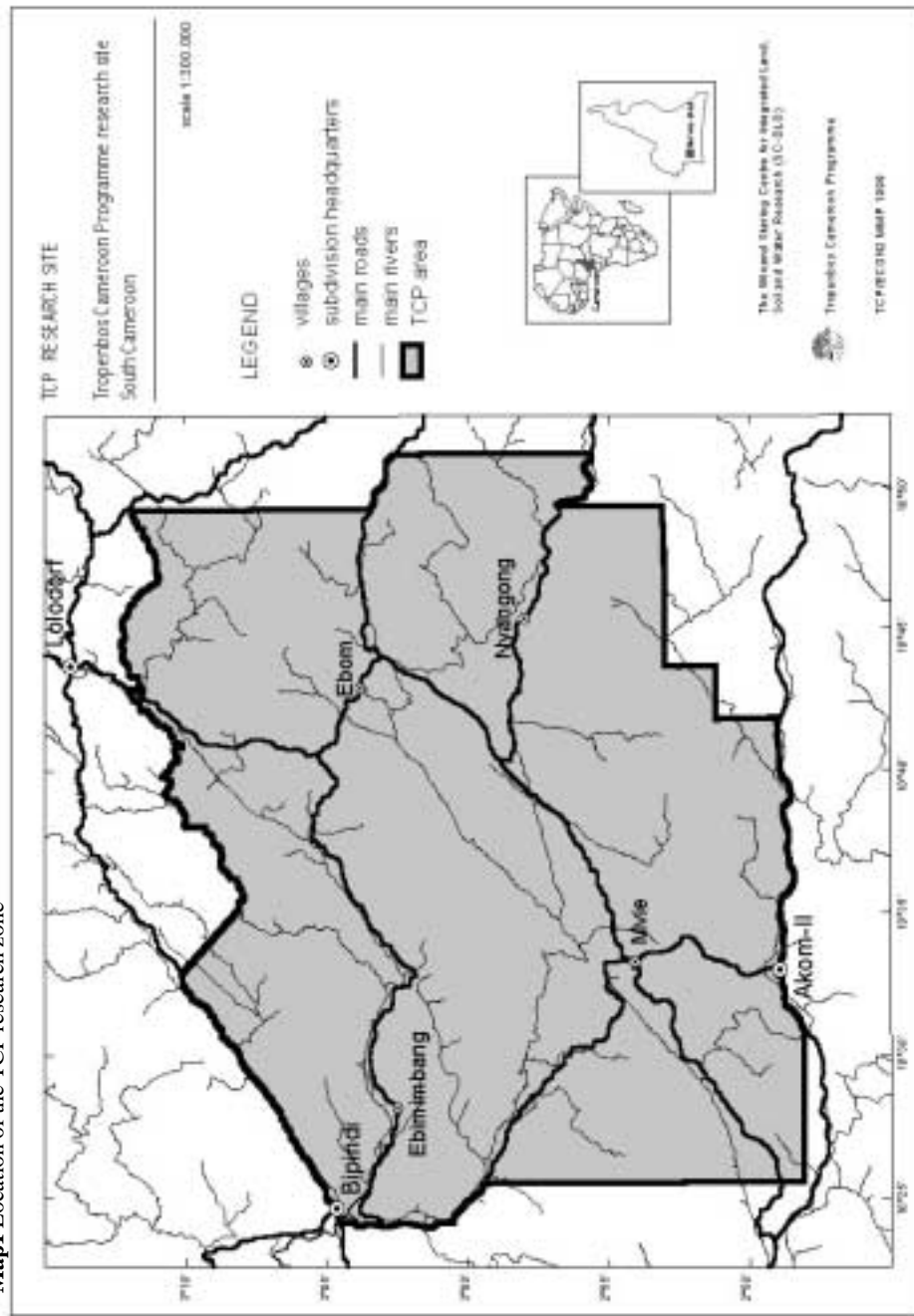
The Tropenbos Cameroon Programme<sup>1</sup> consists of fifteen research projects, the overall aim of which is to contribute to discussions on the sustainable management of the forests of south Cameroon. Several different disciplines are involved (ecology, anthropology, forestry, socio-economics), and the scientists either work in parallel, or interact directly in the same research sites. The TCP research zone (2° 48' – 3° 13' longitude East and 10° 24' – 10° 51' latitude North) is 80 km to the east of Kribi, between the towns of Bipindi, Akom II and Lolodorf (Map 1).

It represents an area of 167,000 ha in Ocean and Mvila divisions, and covers 67 villages. With approximately 15,000 inhabitants, population density is 9 people/km<sup>2</sup>. Five ethnic groups are represented in the zone, with Bantu populations (Bulu, Ngumba, Fang and Bassa), as well as Bagyeli Pygmies in 7 villages. Their use of agricultural and forest resources appears to be the same as that reported for the populations of south Cameroon (Lescuyer *et al.*, 1999).

The natural environment is fairly diverse. The TCP research zone, which is in the guinean-congolese evergreen humid forest, is divided between a low/mid altitude zone and a sub-mountainous zone. Detailed vegetation studies have identified 490 species belonging to 76 families (van Gernerden & Hazeu, 1999).

<sup>1</sup>The Tropenbos Cameroon Programme (TCP) is a partnership between the Tropenbos Foundation/University of Wageningen in the Netherlands, on the one hand, and MINEF and MINREST in Cameroon, on the other. The TCP is currently funded mainly by the European Union.

Map1 Location of the TCP research zone



The interdisciplinary nature of TCP makes it possible to look at the problem of sustainable management of the tropical forest from several points of view. The idea of sustainability can be broken down into three elements: ecological viability, economic profitability and social acceptability. This definition has the advantage of being broad enough to allow inter-disciplinary research and to provide a common perspective for studies with different objectives. However, this accepted view of sustainability is not really operational, and provides no information on the involvement of local populations in the search for sustainable forest management. Whilst this need is stressed in many TCP documents (von Benda *et al.*, 1997; van den Berg *et al.*, 2000), it was, until 1998, only rarely applied in the field. Although the research projects all worked with local populations to varying degrees, none attempted to involve them more widely in decision-making on forest management. The low level of community awareness of the forest law is indicative of this. Moreover, the publication and distribution of 'Tam-Tam', an extension magazine aimed at the populations of the zone, only began in December 1998, that is, five years after TCP was set up.

This concern was, however, addressed from 1998 onwards with the launching of a new TCP research project, Econ2, which was to look at the usefulness of impact assessment in the process of forest management. The advantage of such an approach is that it looks at the interface between scientific research and decision-making. The objective is to find the means to make existing scientific results

available to the stakeholders, in order to help them in their choice of a form of sustainable forest management. This applied research thus clearly raises the question of community involvement in the approach to forest management. Limited resources meant that the Econ2 project was only carried out in part of the TCP site, an area of 42,685 ha at the centre of the zone, covering 26 villages.

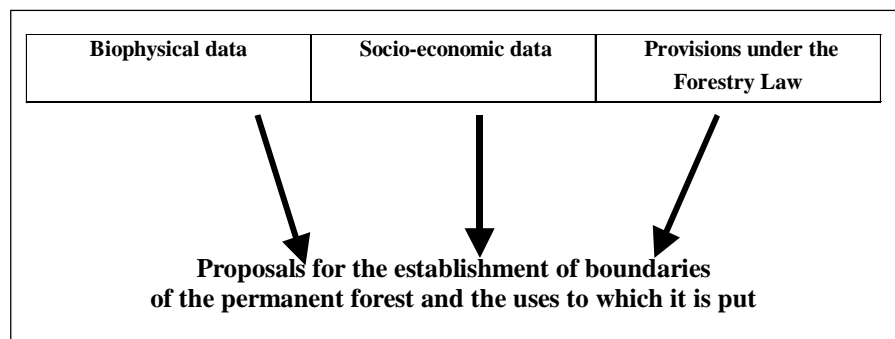
### Scientific context

When any forest development initiative takes place in Cameroon, a certain amount of information is required to guide discussions between the stakeholders. This includes the zoning plan, which indicates to stakeholders the authorities' preferences in this matter. It must be stressed, however, that the provisions of the proposed zoning plan are in no way fixed and may be questioned by forest user groups. Moreover, in the case in question, the zoning plan designates a council forest, which is problematic from three points of view: (i) as far as we know it has not been requested by any of the councils concerned (Ebolowa, Bipindi, Akom II); (ii) it is situated between the areas of three councils and in two divisions; (iii) the status of council forest does not specify the possible use of the resources in the zone.

In this particular case, therefore, the zoning plan is of secondary interest in guiding forest development. In fact, under the Outline Plan, three types of data were used (Figure 1):

- Biophysical data, which provide information on the characteristics of ecosystems: quantity and quality of resources, location of fragile sites, etc.;
- Socio-economic data, which identify the users of the environment, the links between them, and the use they make of resources;

**Figure 1** Basic data for forest development



- The provisions of the Forestry Law 94/01 and the Law relating to environmental management 96/12, which define three major objectives for forest management: nature conservation (Law 96/12, Art. 62), sustained production of timber (Law 94/01, Art. 23), and the development of village communities (Law 94/01, Arts. 68 & 71).

These basic data open up many choices for forest management. Four specific scenarios for forest development were drawn up by the TCP researchers (Fines *et al.*, 2000):

- The first puts the emphasis on logging for timber (Map 2). It divides the land into a permanent production forest and a non-permanent ‘agro-forestry’ forest<sup>2</sup>;
- A second scenario emphasises biodiversity conservation. Outside of the ‘agro-forestry’ land, the permanent forest is divided into

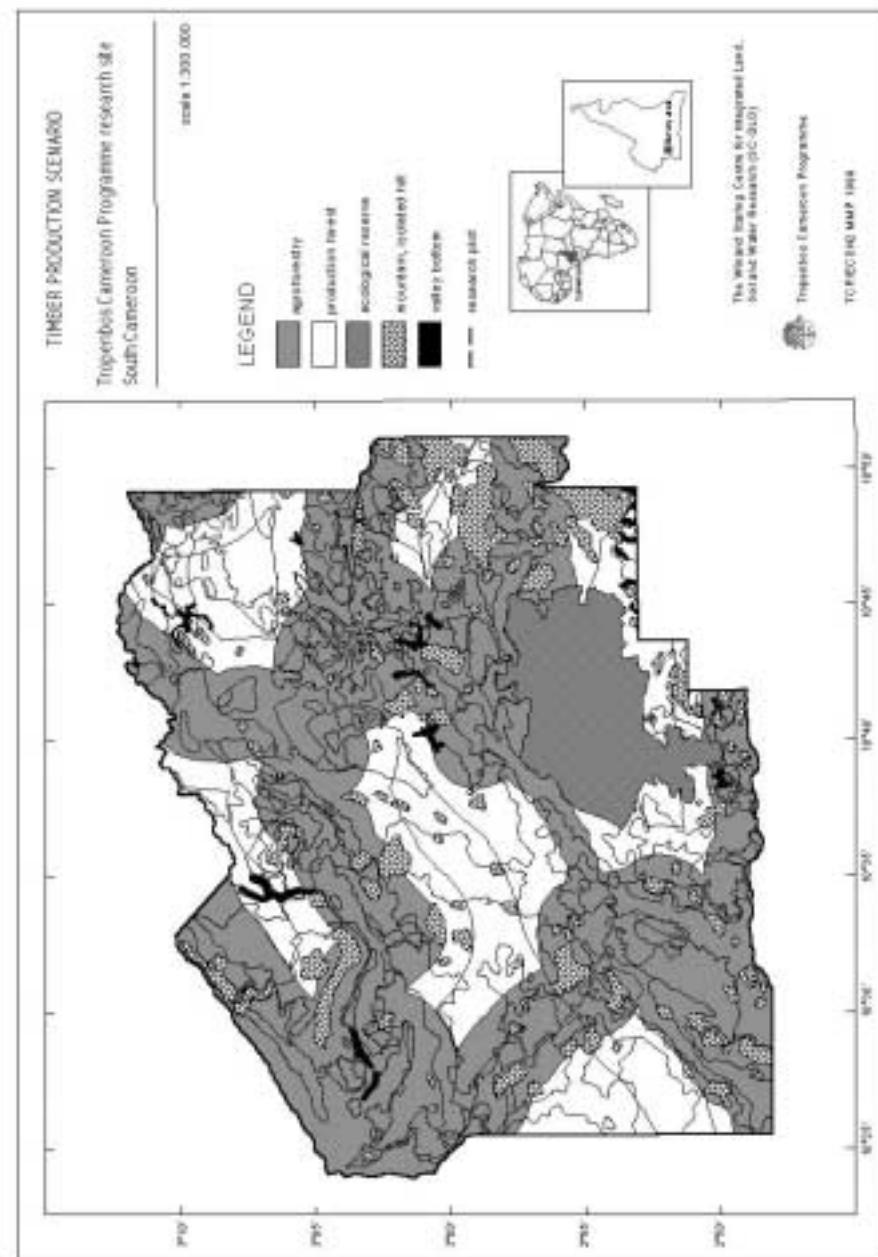
<sup>2</sup> ‘Agro-forestry’ land – as used in this paper – includes farm land (fields and fallows) and forest land appropriated by the local population (degraded forest near to fields and also former secondary forest). It is not subject to any particular development plan, and the users continue to practise their traditional activities.

- protected forest and production forest;
- A third scenario provides for the extension of ‘agro-forestry’ land use to a significant part of the area concerned;
- The fourth scenario provides for no change in current use of the forest.

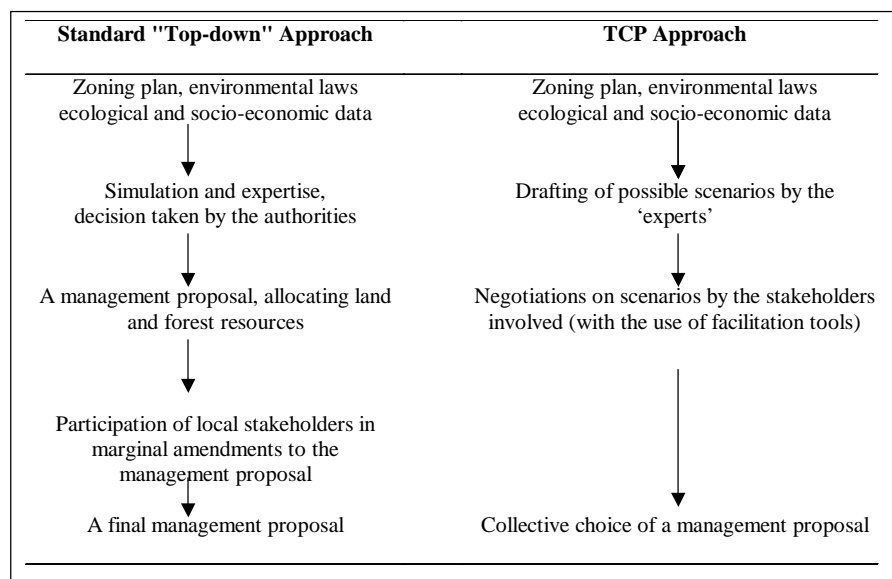
In each of the first three scenarios, all the different aspects of the forest are taken into account, but one is stressed. These four initial proposals for the establishment of boundaries and allocation of the forest form a possible basis for multiparty negotiations between the various stakeholders in the forest. In order to achieve this, a specific approach for the involvement of local populations in the process of forest development was drawn up by the TCP.

**CONDITIONS FOR THE INVOLVEMENT OF FOREST COMMUNITIES**

**A different approach: process and tools**  
Stakeholder participation is discussed widely in the literature on natural resource management (Vabi, 1998; Nguinguiri, 1999). It usually aims to mobilise populations around the



**Map 2** Development scenarios proposed by the TCP: logging

**Figure 2** Two approaches to decision-making for forest development

implementation of a project, the objectives of which have already been set, either politically or economically. The involvement of local stakeholders is therefore only partial, being focused solely on how the project is implemented, rather than on its basic cogency. TCP has put forward a different approach to stakeholder involvement in forest management. The main stages of this are summarised in Figure 2 and compared to those of a standard participatory approach.

The fundamental difference between these two approaches is the role of the stakeholders in the choice of management plan. Usually, the decision is taken based solely on the work of 'experts', approved by the authorities. In contrast, in our approach, the task of the experts is to present the possible options, in order to initiate, and to provide information for,

negotiations between the stakeholders: the experts' role is to provide the different stakeholders with well-founded scientific information on their preferred options (Weber, 1996). In this way, the legitimacy of forest management is not its official approval, but the fact that it has been negotiated and approved by all those involved. What is interesting about this participatory approach is not only that it tries to adapt things as much as possible to local conditions, but also that it encourages the stakeholders to define, and take responsibility for, the measures involved in sustainable management of the forest (Wiersum, 1999).

This type of participatory approach thus has little in common with the 'top-down' approach, in which the options for the use of the forest are discussed prior to any participation by the stakeholders. However, it is not a 'bottom-up' approach either (where the management project

is drawn up by the communities before being submitted to the authorities), since the management options submitted for negotiation are drafted on the basis of the provisions of the environmental laws. This intermediary form of participatory management is thus intended to take account not only of the national forestry strategy, but also of local interests and options for resource management.

This type of approach requires the use of easily understandable tools to aid decision-making, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This computerised processing of geographical data means that maps can be adapted to the requirements of the stakeholders, and then quickly modified as discussions progress. This specific tool, and the participatory approach it is intended to facilitate, are all the more effective because they are suitable for different groups of forest users. There is a need, therefore, firstly, to identify more closely the stakeholders involved and, secondly, to explain to them how the approach adopted for discussing forest management works. This dissemination of information both ways – from the stakeholders to the researchers/experts and vice versa – is a fundamental stage in preparing for the negotiations on management options. The objective is the ownership of both the tool and the approach by the stakeholders, so that they can use them fully throughout the decision-making process.

The two phases of preparation for the negotiations are described below.

#### **Analysis of stakeholders through a 'patrimonial audit'**

We decided to carry out a 'patrimonial audit' in order to understand the logic followed by the

various stakeholders in discussing forest management. This tool, which is relatively little-used in the tropics, has often proved useful in understanding environmental conflicts in the West (Ollagnon, 1990). It allowed us to understand how the whole stakeholder system, which characterised the TCP zone, operated. The audit consists of two stages: a detailed description of the stakeholders involved, followed by a broader analysis of the whole system.

The first phase of the audit helped establish the characteristics of each of the stakeholders (Emerit, 2000). Five main groups (the public administration, local authorities, loggers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and donors, and local populations) were defined, for each of which a conceptual framework for action was identified pertaining to the resources exploited, the rationales followed, temporal and spatial logic, etc.

From this starting point, the second stage was to break down the overall system of stakeholders involved in the forest management of the TCP site into two sub-systems of micro- and macro-level actors.

The system of macro-level actors included three sub-systems: (i) the donors, NGOs and development agencies, which, through funding, partially impose their views on resource management; (ii) the Cameroonian Government and administration, which are the official managers of the national forest; (iii) the users of forest resources (companies, populations, etc.), whose actions are restricted by decisions taken by the two previous sub-systems. The main characteristic of the organisation of these three sub-systems is a

strongly hierarchical decision-making system, which leads to stereotyped and restrictive management of forest resources. This management imposed from above increases the inclination of the stakeholders in the latter two sub-systems to take advantage of income from the forest, rather than to manage it.

The system of micro-level actors is strongly dependent on loggers, who are synonymous with local development for the councils and populations (roads, social infrastructure, etc.). However, in a context which is not at all favourable to the local communities, loggers put particular emphasis on close management of forest resources and on securing their access to those resources.

This examination of the macro- and micro-level stakeholder systems is intended to give a better idea of the logic and interests expressed by those stakeholders at each level of the process. In the present case, it would seem that decentralising decision-making power to the local authorities and forestry departments has strengthened their role at local level: they are the intermediaries between the micro-level and national stakeholder systems. In this context, logging companies will try to reduce the regulatory and fiscal constraints imposed by the macro-level system by negotiating with the local stakeholders. Equally, local populations have minimal involvement in managing the permanent forest estate, and their traditional systems of management are rejected in the non-permanent forest estate. The application of this policy thus strengthens two local management systems:

- In areas specialised in production, the local authorities, forestry companies and the forest administration control the local stakeholder

system to take advantage of a favourable situation.

- Within the non-permanent forest estate, local populations develop a system of close management, where community forests are seen primarily as a way of securing access to the resource, and secondarily as a means of collecting forestry revenue.

As we shall see below, this system leads to competition between stakeholders at the macro and local levels for the acquisition and management of forest resources.

#### **Acquisition of information by local communities: a learning process**

Alongside the 'patrimonial audit' approach, which aims to identify the stakeholders and their logic, significant effort was put into disseminating information to local communities to help them understand what was at stake, and the procedures involved, in forest management in Cameroon. This awareness-raising phase lasted not just for the few weeks before the negotiations, but for more than 18 months, thus allowing the population to go through a gradual process of learning and acquisition of information.

From the beginning of 1999, a number of contacts were initiated by the Econ2 project with all the communities involved in the use and management of the forest. Initially, several Econ2 teams undertook a census of all the populations in the area, and then conducted detailed socio-economic surveys in 18 representative villages (Lescuyer *et al.*, 1999). This was followed by a feed-back stage.

In May and June 1999, the next stage of this work was begun with the communities –

establishing the boundaries of their village lands. On the basis of 1:50,000 maps, the population of each village was asked to indicate the boundaries of their land with respect to the neighbouring villages. This was an interesting exercise from several points of view. Firstly, it seems that communities are able to establish the boundaries of their land fairly easily, and that the boundaries proposed are mostly accepted by the neighbouring villages: of the 67 villages concerned, only 8 contested the boundaries indicated by their neighbours. Secondly, this map of village lands also showed that all the forest land is appropriated by the rural communities: there is no free access zone, as such. And finally, the area claimed by the village should not be confused with the area actually used by the villagers: traditional rights (farming, fishing, hunting and gathering rights) are not restricted to village lands, but are linked particularly to family ties within and between villages.

Preparations for the negotiations took place between March and August 2000, when the Econ2 project visited the 26 villages involved in the use and management of the forest, to present the materials to be used as a basis for negotiations on the Outline Plan. A (micro-level) 'patrimonial audit' was carried out with 60 key informants, initially as a way of involving them – by encouraging them to express the expectations they had with respect to the management of 'their' forest. In addition to these individual interviews, a meeting was held in each village to present the ins and outs of the negotiations to be conducted on the Outline Plan.

These public meetings were divided into three phases. The first was a description of how the

concept of forest management had developed in Cameroon, with emphasis on the main principles of the forest law. An extension leaflet entitled '*the modalities of forest management in Cameroon*', published by Econ2, was given to each of the villages. The second stage was the presentation of a map showing the three different development scenarios drawn up by Econ2. It was explained that these scenarios were to be used only as a starting point for negotiations, and would be modified according to the comments of the various stakeholders. The villagers did indeed make many comments on the maps. An explanatory sheet indicating the activities permitted and forbidden for each land use (production forest, protected forest, 'agro-forestry') helped them to formulate their observations. A copy of the maps was left in each village to encourage further discussion and to allow each community to choose the option it felt to be most appropriate.

Finally, the communities were asked to appoint two representatives to participate on their behalf in the multiparty negotiations in Kribi. The problem of representativeness is very real in these segmented societies, where there is no strong social hierarchy. We felt that the ideal solution would have been to involve all the different lineages in the negotiations. Lack of both time and money forced us to adopt a less ideal solution, asking each of the villages to identify two people capable of representing them in these negotiations. It is interesting to note that, in many cases, the village leader was not appointed to the delegation.

The drafting of the initial development options by the TCP, the analysis of stakeholder



strategies, and the dissemination of appropriate information to the user groups, were the three pre-conditions for the initiation of multiparty negotiations on the management of the central forest in the TCP research site.

## THE DYNAMICS OF A COMMON CONSENSUS

### Basic conditions for negotiations

The multiparty negotiations on forest development were held from 22 to 25 August 2000 in Kribi, with the aim of discussing the use(s) to which the forest in question should be put, and the boundaries between the permanent and the non-permanent forest. On the basis of the institutional analysis, approximately 90 individuals and/or organisations were invited to the meeting, either in person or by post. These were mainly the stakeholders in forest management at divisional level (MINEF, MINAGRI, administrative authorities, forestry companies, and development projects), as well as some national institutions and NGOs (Institut de recherche agricole pour le développement (IRAD), Office national des forêts (ONADEF), Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), APEC), and all the local communities. With the exception of MINEF (apart from the forest station heads), ONADEF and the forestry companies, which decided in the end not to take part in these negotiations, the level of participation by the stakeholders was excellent, with fewer than six representatives not attending.

Various materials were distributed to all the participants at the beginning of the negotiations including the maps of the four management options drawn up by the TCP, and the accom-

panying explanatory sheet. Twenty copies of an extension leaflet explaining terms related to forest management were also made available. The aim of these materials was to present in simple and clear language the possible management scenarios for the forest, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each. The aim of the first half-day of the meeting was to introduce participants to the proposed process. The Senior Divisional Officer of Ocean Division went through the reasons for the negotiations, with respect to the objectives of the forestry law. More specifically, the particular objectives of the multiparty meeting were identified, and then the working principles for the ensuing discussions were decided on jointly. This preparatory phase established a common basis for discussion for all participants.

### Description of the decision-making process

The objective of the negotiations was to take the four distinct management proposals and produce a single proposal approved by all the participants. The aim of this section is to describe clearly the iterative process of negotiation used and the dynamics of the stakeholders' strategies.

The second day began with a presentation of the four initial forest management proposals drawn up by TCP. It was emphasised that these four scenarios should be taken as a basis for discussion, and not simply as options from which to choose. Because of the large number of participants, the meeting was divided into four sub-groups:

- local Bantu populations (about forty people)
- Bagyeli (twelve people)

- local authorities (twelve people)
- research and administration (twenty people).

Each of these groups was asked to look in detail at one management scenario with its boundaries and land-use allocations. A facilitator worked with each group to aid the discussions.

For the Bantu populations, a consensus on the definition of a management scenario was achieved in two stages. A first scenario was proposed with a significant increase in the 'agro-forestry' zone, to between 10 and 15 km from the villages. This developed into a scenario in which all the land was committed to 'agro-forestry' use. At the end of this first discussion, it became clear that the reason for choosing the 'agro-forestry' option was primarily to secure land for the communities to practise their traditional activities in the long term. Moreover, all the participants felt the need to set the boundaries of their village lands so as to have greater weight in the negotiations with the other stakeholders.

During the course of the day, the choice of scenario moved towards one with a central production forest, whilst still retaining a large area of 'agro-forestry'. Consensus on this scenario was based on the argument that logging companies bring development to the villages, particularly by maintaining transport infrastructure. This new scenario was produced without any real consultation between the representatives, each of them proposing a desired distance between his/her village and the boundary of the production forest.

To conclude, the management scenario (Map 3) proposed by the local populations

maintained an extensive 'agro-forestry' zone surrounding a central production forest (12,000 ha). The boundaries of this production forest varied according to the requirements of each village.

The Bagyeli group called straightaway for the 'agro-forestry' zone to be extended to the whole forest. The predominant argument for them was that their hunting and gathering lands should be maintained intact. The production forest, which is 'ravaged by loggers', and the protected forest, which imposes excessive restrictions on their customary rights, were thus rejected. Their management scenario thus corresponded to a wholly 'agro-forestry' zone, with no forest land being proposed for classification.

The administration/NGO/research institutes group also needed two stages to achieve consensus. The first wish expressed was for an extension of the 'agro-forestry' zone to offer as much advantage as possible to the Bantu and Bagyeli populations. Other considerations were then taken into account. These were, firstly, the advantages of having a production forest, which would bring with it road maintenance, local development and income for the councils. This forest should not, though, affect the local populations, and should be situated far from the villages (at least 5 to 6 km). Secondly, there was also a concern to maintain the ecological quality of the forest, with the creation of a small protected zone around one fragile ecological site. Here too, this protected forest was restricted in size so as not to be prejudicial to communities bordering it.

Within this group, the main criterion was the well-being of the populations, and then local

Map 3 The management scenario proposed by the Bantu populations

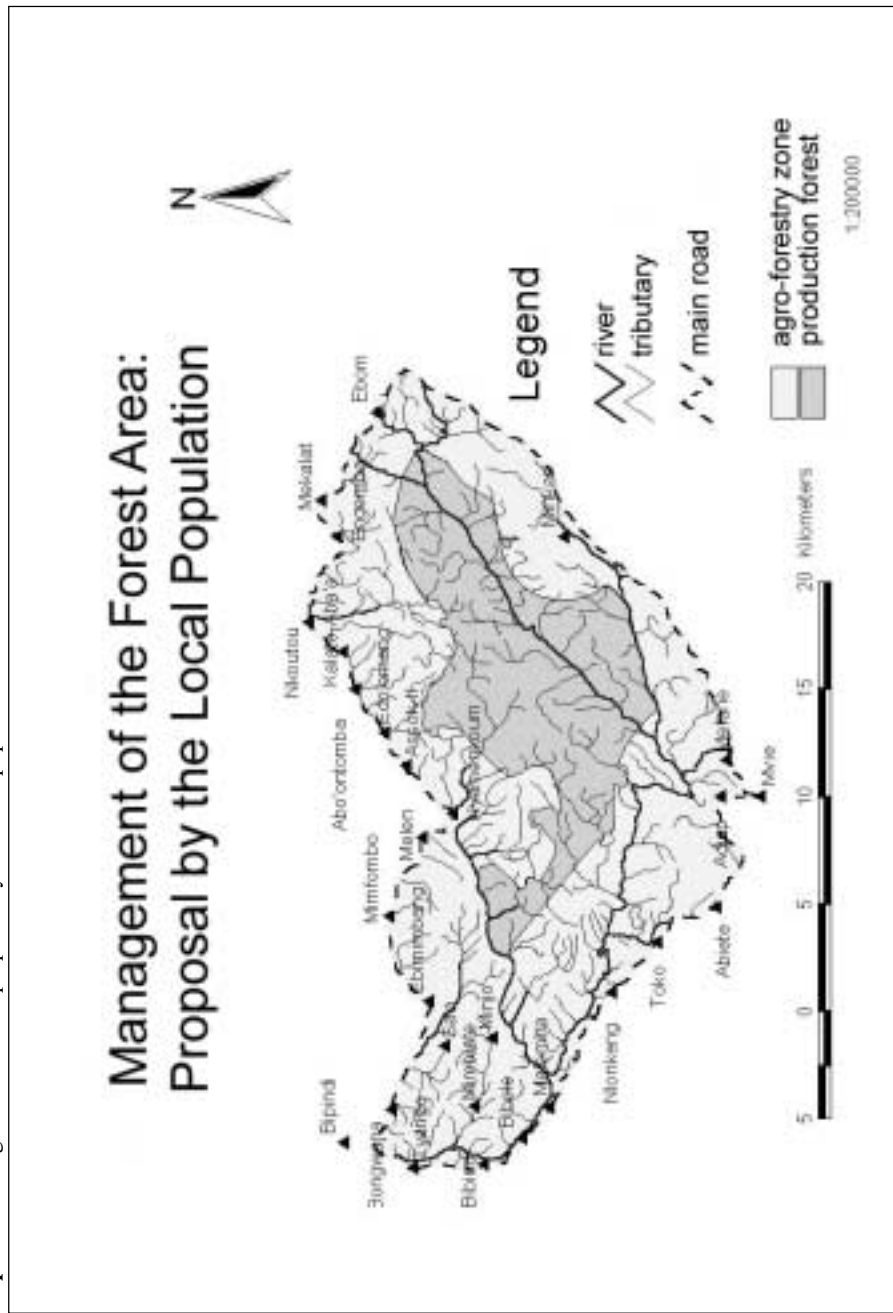


Table 1 Management proposals by the 4 sub-groups

	Bantu Populations	Bagyeli Populations	Administration & research	Local Authorities
'Agro-forestry' Zone	30 500 ha	42 500 ha	35 000 ha	33 000 ha
Production forest	12 000 ha		7 000 ha	
Protected forest			500 ha	9 500 ha

development through logging. The result was a management proposal characterised by an extensive 'agro-forestry' zone around a production forest (7,000 ha) and a small protected forest (500 ha).

Finally, the local authority group (including the divisional officers, mayors and group leaders) began with the same hypothesis of extending the "agro-forestry" zone to improve the living standards of the local communities. They categorically rejected the inclusion of a production forest for several reasons: this type of forest only brings wealth to people from outside the area, it disturbs social relations (particularly for the Bagyeli), and brings only short-term improvements to local development. They did, however, advocate a protected forest, which would conserve the forest's resources for the next generation, would constitute a permanent store of animal and plant resources, and, if it was far enough away from villages, would hardly disturb the activities of the local populations. In their view, the 'agro-forestry' zone offered many advantages to local stakeholders: traditional practices could be continued, large plantations established, there would be the possibility of establishing community forests, and in general the populations would have direct access to the money made from the use of resources. The management scenario finally proposed by the local authorities consisted of an extensive 'agro-forestry' zone, surrounding a protected forest (9,500 ha).

At the end of the day, four distinct management proposals had been drafted. They are summarised in Table 1.

In summary, the four working groups expressed a clear desire to see the 'agro-forestry' zone extended to the benefit of the Bantu and Bagyeli populations. The underlying logic is the security of access to resources for the villagers in the long term. Three secondary arguments came out of this day of discussion:

- Firstly, the local authorities and some villages emphasised the need to establish community forests, which would make it possible to negotiate more easily with logging companies and the forest administration, and the benefits of which would come back to the local populations.
- Secondly, for some stakeholders (villagers, administrations), the production forest is seen as a way of achieving local development, primarily through the provision of roads.
- Thirdly, the choice of protected forest should be understood as a form of rejection of the benefits of logging to local economies, whilst also conserving the forest for the future, and respecting the State's wish to classify forests in the permanent forest estate (as production or protection forests).

The four proposals were turned into maps, specifying land allocation and forest boundaries, and were then digitised to provide new materials for discussions the next day.



20% and 30% of the area; (2) it should be as far away as possible from villages, i.e. at least 5 km. A map of the consensus management proposal was finally drafted and approved by all the representatives (Map 4).

This consensus map was also digitised at the end of the day, to be put to the plenary session the following day for approval.

The fourth day began with the presentation of the consensus map to all the participants, and an explanation of the arguments which had led the group to this choice. Each of the participants was provided with a copy, and was asked to give his/her opinion on the proposal. Several requests were made for clarification, and two slight modifications were proposed, but there was no fundamental criticism of the proposal. All the participants then enthusiastically expressed their explicit agreement, in the ratification of this common solution.

### **AN EX POST ANALYSIS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS: ASSESSMENT AND DEDUCTIONS**

This experience of involving stakeholders in the process of forest management depended on the institutional, economic, ecological and social contexts in which it was conducted. Some lessons can, however, be learned, with respect to: (1) the basis and form of the negotiation approach proposed by the TCP; (2) the compatibility of the stakeholders' strategies with the approach to forest management, as it is currently implemented in Cameroon.

#### **What quality of consensus?**

The emergence of a consensus solution for the

management of the zone led us to question ourselves on the quality of the result achieved: was the final scenario truly a collective result, in that it met the expectations of most of the participants, or was it rather produced by a few and imposed on the many? We needed to know whether the negotiations on the land use and boundaries of the forest was a truly democratic process, or whether it had been exploited by one group to the detriment of the others. The best way of testing the validity of the final result and the approach as a whole seemed to us to be to ask all the participants at the end of the exercise to fill in evaluation sheets. Eight questions were asked concerning: the usefulness of the information provided, the time allowed for discussion and reflection, whether the participant's opinion had been taken into account in the result, etc. A questionnaire was distributed to each of the 74 participants on the last day, and 75% were returned. When asked whether they had enough information to participate in the discussions, 30 participants said yes, 17 no, and 3 gave no answer. Asked whether they felt that their opinion had been taken into account in the process of negotiation and the resultant consensus, 45 participants said yes, 4 no, and one gave no answer.

It seems that the overwhelming majority of respondents approved the process used for the negotiations, and recognised their own contribution to the final scenario. The low level of abstention in the evaluation would confirm this judgement: it is unlikely that anyone who strongly disagreed with the final result would not have taken this opportunity to express his/her opinion and any possible resentment. In conclusion, the proposed classification which emerged from the negotiations would seem to be a socially acceptable solution, in that most

of the participants say that it was 'their choice'. This is a first essential stage in seeking a sustainable mode of management for the forest. This social legitimacy, which is missing in many forestry projects, does not, therefore, seem to be an unrealistic objective, if all the stakeholders, and particularly the local communities, are truly able to be involved in the process of decision-making.

#### **Real participation by the Bagyeli in the negotiations**

Another interesting aspect of this experience is that it has shown that, if appropriate conditions are provided, the Bagyeli populations, and indigenous minorities in general, are quite capable of making their voice heard in the process of forest management. Because of the importance of the forest to the Bagyeli, and because they are often seen as a minority compared to the Bantu communities, it seemed necessary from the very beginning of the idea of negotiations that a distinction be drawn between them and the other local populations. Their participation would thus be on the same level as the Bantu, but not with the Bantu. Several measures were taken to ensure that the beliefs and interests of this 'sensitive' group were expressed and taken into account.

Firstly, a week of field work was conducted in four Bagyeli camps to prepare them for the negotiations. Explanations were given of the reasons for the negotiations, and particularly the role of communities in forest management in Cameroon. To give them a better appreciation of the initial management scenarios proposed by TCP, two Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools were used:

- Mapping, the aim of which was to identify the areas in which the Bagyeli were active in

the forest, and their forms of activity;

- Group discussion, intended to encourage negotiations between the Bagyeli of the four camps, similar to those to take place in Kribi a few weeks later. After these discussions, a consensus choice of management scenario was made, which allowed them to 'speak with one voice' at the multiparty negotiations. Three salient points came of these discussions: (1) the strong opposition to any formalisation of the forest boundaries; (2) the rejection of a production forest because of the very poor relations with loggers in the past; (3) the rejection of a protected forest which imposed too many restrictions on its use.

Various conditions were also established in these negotiations to ensure active Bagyeli participation. Firstly, a bilingual facilitator, whom they already trusted, was made available to them: he was, firstly, to translate their discussions into French, and, secondly, to provide them with the information they required for full understanding. Moreover, to make the Bagyeli feel more secure, the congregation of the Little Sisters of Jesus, who have long years of experience with the Bagyeli in the region, agreed to help during the four days of discussion.

As described above, the Bagyeli wanted to have an 'agro-forestry' zone extended to the whole of the area in question. This was not the final version accepted by all the stakeholders in the negotiations, which aroused both disappointment and satisfaction in the Bagyeli.

It aroused disappointment because, although the Bagyeli did finally agree in principle to the presence of a protected forest in their zone, it

must be recognised that they oppose the formalisation of the boundaries of this permanent forest. This infringes on their semi-nomadic life style and restricts access to game. This bitterness does, however, seem to be compensated by the satisfaction of seeing most of their concerns taken into account in the management scenario adopted. Thus the final choice was only slightly different from the one they themselves chose: a large area set aside for ‘agro-forestry’ and a protected forest, the status of which affects the Bagyeli’s practices only to a very limited extent. Indeed, in contrast to the other forest users, who generally make predatory use of the forest resources (loggers fell trees, the Bantu populations open up fields, etc.) and who are directly affected by the restrictions put on protected forest, the Bagyeli make light use of the resources and move from place to place. They pass through the forest leaving little trace and do not stay in any one place for long. The protected forest, by a happy paradox, becomes an area of privileged access for the Bagyeli of the zone. Its establishment in fact offers them two advantages: the maintenance of larger numbers of wildlife than before, since hunting is banned, and the creation of an area where the Bagyeli will be the primary unofficial users of the resources.

Without being quite this explicit, it would seem to be this logic which finally motivated the Bagyeli to accept the establishment of this protected forest. The proof of this is that their two representatives made several amused comments on the credibility and applicability of the boundaries of the protected forest. One quote might be used to summarise their

thinking: “drawing a line on a map is one thing, but who in the forest is going to stop a Bagyeli crossing it?”

### **Defiance against the official approach to forest management**

The management proposal finally agreed by the stakeholders at these negotiations will necessarily cast some doubts on the basis of the formal approach to forest management in Cameroon. Whilst the State’s wish is to classify 30% of the country as permanent forest, and to have all those involved manage these areas sustainably, the local stakeholders adopt a divergent strategy regarding ownership of forest land. This, we believe, comes of the defiance felt locally against the macro-level system of stakeholders in forest management, the functioning of which is far from transparent (Bikié *et al.*, 2000).

This defiance against administered and opaque forest management promotes the emergence of strategic groups of stakeholders trying to impose other interests. At the negotiations, for example, the final consensus showed fairly clearly how the local stakeholders managed to impose their point of view, by reducing the permanent forest estate to the minimum required. In this process, the local authorities argued convincingly, managing gradually to bring round their interlocutors to their way of thinking. Their arguments were based on a local analysis of forest use: during the discussions, it was presented intelligently as an alternative to the management from Yaoundé, the symbol of which was the production forest. To quote the ‘patrimonial audit’, it sets the micro-level system of stakeholders against the macro-level system, as is also found by Karsenty (1999, p.154), who states that: (roughly translated)

*“the political loss of legitimacy of the Government and its forest administration, both of which are seen as generally corrupt, encourages this change in the balance of forces in favour of the villagers, actively supported by local notables against the State Forestry Department.”*

This competition for space reaches its climax during the stage of demarcation between the permanent and non-permanent forest estate. On the one hand, the administration respects the zoning plan, on the other the local users remember the existence of traditional lands and ancestral practices in these forests. As is noted by van den Berg *et al.* (2000) for the TCP zone, this context favours the trend towards the exclusive appropriation of resources by the villages, which leads, amongst other things, to the fixed delimitation of land. This new form of land grabbing, in a context of the decentralisation of power, hence puts local stakeholders in an advantageous position against the intrusions of logging companies and the prerogatives of the forestry administration (Karsenty, 1999). In this context, the micro-level stakeholders’ groups are able to force significant changes in the boundaries of the permanent forest estate, making most of the forest land communal forest, where modes of use are their own responsibility.

The indirect result of these developments is a partial reduction in the scope of law 94/01 in its attempts to achieve the sustainable management of the Cameroonian forest. By focussing on the development of specialised forests within the permanent estate, this text leads inevitably to the exclusion of local stakeholders, and encourages them to develop their own competing land use strategies.

### **A new way of involving forest communities in management**

The question of involving local communities must be raised in the broader context of negotiations between all the groups of forest users. The participation of local populations in the approach to forest management cannot go against the interests of other stakeholders. However, the current institutional context and existing forces have given rise to a two-pronged system of stakeholders in forest management in Cameroon: on the one hand, the macro-level stakeholders are involved in the management of specialised forests in the permanent forest estate; on the other, the micro-level stakeholders concentrate their efforts on extending the non-permanent forest estate, within which they continue their traditional forms of use.

The experience of the TCP multiparty negotiations would seem to show that most of the forest stakeholders are prepared to meet, discuss and even agree on a way of managing the forest. The framework within which these stakeholders participated, laid down in legal and regulatory texts does, thus, exist, even if it requires some modifications. The difficulty, as we see it, is the subject of these discussions. They should not be limited to the management of a given specialised forest, nor to the ways of using the resources in the non-permanent estate, but rather cover both areas. The objective is to define a system of joint management of the permanent estate and the surrounding non-permanent estate. This management of the public property which is the forest, as an ecological and social unit, does not mean the disappearance of the status of classified (production or protection) forest, but rather includes its management together with that

of the non-permanent (communal) forests (and vice versa). For example, a production forest will always be used according to a precise forest management plan, but will have the advantage of having been designed with reference to the land use plans of neighbouring villages. This type of management will make it possible to avoid the macro- and micro-level stakeholders each retreating to their own management space, and will rather encourage them to develop a sense of the common ownership of resources. This redefinition of forest management encourages the various stakeholders to adopt arguments which go beyond their own specific interests: the objective is then to seek and organise interactions between the different forest spaces, that is, interactions between the different users. This perspective provides a new context for the involvement of local communities in truly viable management of forest resources.

## CONCLUSION

The experience of multiparty negotiations conducted by TCP gives a practical example of one possible way of involving rural communities in the process of forest management. The approach adopted on this occasion met with some success since, after four days of discussions, the stakeholders managed to agree on a consensus scenario for the establishment of boundaries and allocation of the land area to specific purposes. Other discussions are to follow, particularly concerning the terms for the use of resources by the different partners, but this agreement is a first necessary stage towards the establishment of long-term sustainable management of the forest.

In view of the eventual application of this approach to other situations, several points are worthy of note. Firstly, rural communities participate better when their capacity to influence decisions is greater: since they are the most concerned by the use of the resources, they must have the right of veto over a situation which would not suit them, or at least be able to propose real changes. This is rarely the case in Cameroon, where forest management is more often discussed on the basis of the zoning plan, without allowing it to be questioned. Secondly, the involvement of local communities requires lengthy preliminary work to gather and disseminate information. For the scientists/experts and for the stakeholders, there is a need for 'contextualisation': for the former to improve their understanding of the strategies used by the stakeholders, and for the latter to prepare them for unusual discussions with the other stakeholders in management.

Thirdly, these negotiations between stakeholders are greatly facilitated by the use of appropriate tools, in our case, GIS. These tools offer two advantages: firstly, they are understood relatively easily by the stakeholders, and, secondly, they allow the researchers/experts to provide the stakeholders with 'scientific' information. By using these tools, the results and scientific data are made available to all the stakeholders, whether or not they use them in the decision-making process. In any comparable situation, it is much more important to encourage the stakeholders to build a socially acceptable compromise than to achieve a supposedly 'optimum' situation (which, in any case, is often illusory).

Finally, we believe that the participation of rural populations is likely to be most fruitful if,

rather than dealing with either the permanent forest estate or the non-permanent (communal) forest, it dealt with both at the same time. This demarcation imposed on local stakeholders from above leads them to develop strategies for the increased appropriation of land, which are in no way compatible with the viable and integrated management of the forest. One way forward would thus be to rethink the aim of forest management in Cameroon, to make the forest a truly 'common good' for all its users.

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## ACRONYMS

FCFA	Currency in French-speaking West and Central Africa. Exchange rate: 100 FCFA = 1 FRF 750 FCFA = 1 USD
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
IRAD	Institut de recherche agricole pour le développement
MINAGRI	Ministère de l'agriculture
MINEF	Ministry of Environment and Forests
MINREST	Ministère de la recherche scientifique et technique
NGO	non-governmental organisation
ONADEF	Office national des forêts
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
TCP	Tropenbos Cameroon Programme
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature

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