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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Samuel E. Egbe is a Researcher and Lecturer in the Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Yaoundé II – Soa, and a researcher and consultant in environmental law. He can be contacted at: egbee@yahoo.com

Kristin Olsen, DFID APO for Community Resource Management, is seeking to integrate participatory monitoring and evaluation into the framework of community-based management initiatives. **Henry Ekwoge**, Area Manager for the Onge Mokoko area, is working to develop a Participatory Management Plan for a State Forest Reserve and adjacent forests. **Rose Ongie**, Area Manager for West Coast area, is working to develop and implement participatory approaches to sustainable wildlife management. **James Acworth**, DFID Forest Management and Conservation Adviser, provides advice on the process of developing sustainable, community-based resource management models, broader forest management systems, land use strategies to ensure long-term maintenance of biodiversity, and support to local livelihoods. **Ebwekoh M. O'kah**, GEF MCP wildlife unit, is responsible for collection of baseline information (on all forms of wildlife) on which to base management decisions, as well as providing advice on methods of participatory wildlife management and training to build local capacity. **Charles Tako** is the former area manager for the West Coast. The authors work for the Mount Cameroon Project (Limbe). This is a Ministry of Environment and Forests project funded by the UK Department for International Development and implemented under contract by LTS International, Scotland. The authors can be contacted at mcplbg@iccnnet.cm and OLSEN927@aol.com.

Elias Djoh is Director of the Lomé-based non-governmental organisation, CIAD (Centre International d'Appui au Développement), and can be contacted at: CIAD, P.O. Box 24 Lomé, Cameroon. Email: vso@camnet.cm. **Mark van der Wal** is a Consultant for the SNV-SDDL project. He can be contacted at: SNV Cameroon, P.O. Box 1239, Yaoundé, Cameroon. Email: snvcmPose@gcnet.cm

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COMMUNITY HUNTING ZONES: FIRST STEPS IN THE DECENTRALISATION OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT. OBSERVATIONS FROM THE VILLAGE OF DJAPOSTEN, CAMEROON

Mark van der Wal and Elias Djoh

SUMMARY

This short paper recounts the experiences of the village of Djaposten in East Cameroon in trying to establish a Community Hunting Zone that realistically reflects its existing hunting territory and fits in with current legislation. The case raises several fundamental questions about how to cope with an inappropriate legal framework and the difficulties of achieving communal management of a moving resource.

ASPIRATIONS OF A HUNTING VILLAGE

The village of Djaposten is situated on the main road from Abong-Mbang to Lomie in Cameroon's Eastern province, about 25 km east of the Dja Fauna Reserve (listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site). The village population is about 600. Because of local traditions, the relative abundance of game, and a high interest in activities that require little investment and bring a quick rate of return, hunting is the main income-generating activity in the area. It provides an income throughout the year and, in 1999, during the top hunting months of September and October, Djaposten produced around 13 tonnes of meat for export to the regional and national markets. This meant

an average monthly income for the village of 1 million FCFA (approximately \$1,300) for these months.

The arrival of several conservation-oriented projects in the area confronted the people of Djaposten with the fact that, according to the law, their principal income-generating activity was in fact illegal. Like most other rural inhabitants, the Djaposten villagers no longer hunt with 'traditional' means (theoretically permitted by the law), nor does anyone have a hunting permit, a permit to carry fire-arms, or a permit to buy ammunition. People were, therefore, very concerned about what they were supposed to do if they could not continue hunting (or poaching, as it now turned out to be). While some expressed an interest in enhancing their agricultural capacities (in particular the rehabilitation of their cocoa plantations and the creation of oil palm plantations), for most men, hunting remained their prime interest. The discussions about future options, including changing their activities, trying to legalise their current hunting, or perhaps both, led to a desire to find out more about the concept of 'Community Hunting Zones' (known as '*Territoir de chasse communautaire*' in French). Could these hunting zones be part of the solution?

COMMUNITY FORESTS VERSUS COMMUNITY HUNTING ZONES

The 1994 Forestry Law makes several provisions that should, in theory at least, facilitate community participation in resource management. These include the concept of Community Forests as well as that of Community Hunting Zones. Although still very much in its infancy, the establishment of Community Forests is making slow but steady progress. The theoretical concept is well developed and the first management plans are now entering into their implementation phase (see Klein *et al.*, paper 25f in this issue). The situation as regards Community Hunting Zones is quite the opposite. The theoretical framework is still poorly defined and a manual on the criteria and modalities is still a long way off. Nevertheless, having been informed about legal provision for the creation of a Community Hunting Zone, the population of Djaposten immediately posed the following questions:

- What is the difference between a Community Forest and a Community Hunting Zone?
- What are the advantages (if any) of one over the other?
- How will we be able to benefit from a Community Hunting Zone?
- Where and how can we create such a zone?

FEASIBILITY OF THE CONCEPT

To these pertinent questions from the people of Djaposten about the livelihood implications of a Community Hunting Zone, could be added several more about its potential conservation impact. These questions

aroused the interest of a student from the region who, together with the population of Djaposten and with support from CIAD, a local NGO, decided to try to find some answers (Koulbout, 1999). The main questions that needed to be answered were the following:

- What exactly are the legal conditions for a Community Hunting Zone? In which zone of Cameroon's national forestry zoning plan can it be created? What are the conditions for the exploitation of such a zone?
- Can the current hunting territory of Djaposten be 'transformed' into a Community Hunting Zone?
- Is the level of hunting inside the current hunting territory sustainable?
- What are the ideas (if any) of the people of Djaposten, with regard to the actual management of such a communal zone?

LESSONS LEARNED: THEORY VERSUS REALITY

The study from Djaposten revealed the following:

- Community Forests and Community Hunting Zones are based on the same legislation. Both have a maximum size of 5,000 ha and can only be attributed in the 'agroforestry' zone (part of the so-called 'non-permanent forest estate' and described as a mixed landscape of agriculture and forestry) of the national forestry zoning plan. This poses a spatial problem since the 'agroforestry' zone is a narrow band bordering the principal roads and the villages along these roads. Because of this problem of classification, it appears practically impossible for a

village to have both a community forest *and* a community hunting zone.

- The actual hunting territory of Djaposten covers almost 52,000 ha, compared with the 5000 ha allowed for under the Community Hunting Zone legislation.
- Only around 8% of the current hunting territory is located within the ‘agroforestry’ zone of the national forestry zoning plan; another 47% is in the ‘permanent forest estate’ and about 44% lies within the Dja Fauna Reserve. Around 83% of the game harvested came from within the Reserve. Current legislation, however, does not permit any hunting inside the Reserve nor does it allow for the establishment of a Community Hunting Zone inside the ‘permanent forest estate’.
- During a two-month period, over 13,000 kg of game were harvested and brought to the village (not including the part decomposed in the forest). The current level of harvesting was estimated to be between 1.4 and 3.7 times above the sustainable yield. Around 75% of this harvest was obtained by non-selective means (steel wire snares).
- Around 72% of the total harvest was destined for sale outside the village even though hunting for sale is forbidden by the current law. In theory, however, a Community Hunting Zone should permit hunting for commercial purposes.

So far there are four principal conclusions from the Djaposten case:

- 1) With regard to both the zoning plan and the maximum permitted size, there is a

large discrepancy between the law and reality, and an overlap between the space allocated for Community Forests and Community Hunting Zones.

- 2) The maximum area of 5,000 ha for a Community Hunting Zone and the narrow ‘agroforestry’ band in which they can be created do not take into account the spatial requirements of hunters nor any ecological data of the principal game species. Creating community hunting zones within these spatial limitations is simply not possible. A Community Hunting Zone will clearly have to overlap with the zone now destined for timber production (‘permanent forest estate’).
- 3) The current level of hunting exceeds the level of sustainability. This means that if the hunters of Djaposten want to keep hunting in the future they will have to lessen the pressure on game. This in turn means: a) trying to get some control over current hunting practices in order to make them less destructive and more profitable and, b) to seriously start looking for other incoming-generating activities. It is clear that the economic needs of the village of Djaposten cannot be sustained solely by the harvesting of game.
- 4) Proper management of resources or money is not easy (one only has to look at the mind-blowing levels of fraud linked to the ‘Redevance Forestier’ – the decentralised portion of the tax revenue from logging concessions – and associated micro-projects). Communal

resources, particularly mobile ones like game, make management even more complicated. Although neither the authors nor the population of Djaposten have a clear idea yet of how a Community Hunting Zone might eventually be managed, all parties recognise that current hunting practices will need to change.

What is most important, however, is that a start – however small – has been made with thinking about how to manage a communal resource that moves!

STRUGGLING WITH REALITY: NEW CONCEPTS FROM THE SOUTH-EAST

In the sparsely populated area around the recently gazetted protected area of Lac Lobeke (in the extreme south-east of Cameroon), the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MINEF) and several international NGOs have also been trying to establish Community Hunting Zones. In the face of the same spatial limitation problems already described above, they have developed a new concept called ‘Zone d’Intérêt Cynégétique à Gestion Communautaire’ (ZICGC) or ‘community-managed hunting concession’. These legal entities can be far larger than the 5,000 ha of a Community Hunting Zone and are effectively in the zone classified as ‘permanent forest estate’ (i.e. production forest).

Could this new concept possibly be adapted for other regions? For Djaposten? If so, then it would resolve the spatial limitation problem. It would still leave,

however, the most difficult problem, namely how to manage these hunting zones¹ and their associated game species effectively. And if, for argument’s sake, we assume that we are able to hunt this zone sustainably, then we would still have to make sure that it produces enough profit to keep people sufficiently interested. How could this be achieved? Theoretically villages with a functioning ZICGC should get a better price for their meat than people making no effort at all to manage their game. Unfortunately, with the possible exception of a few luxury hotels under western management², consumers are generally interested in the lowest price per kilo. And even if there were a price premium, how would the market distinguish between legal and illegal bushmeat? Is it possible to cut out the middlemen – the ‘buyem-sellem’ – to keep prices compatible, and to control the origin of the meat? Or would it be better to create a hunters’ GIC³, which should assure control of the whole chain from the snare to the market place (see also Olsen *et al.*, paper 25e in this issue)? Or perhaps exploitation of ZICGCs should not be about bushmeat at all, but rather about trophy hunting for wealthy ex-patriates? Would

¹ ‘Hunting’ in the legal context also includes the filming, photographing and tracking of wildlife.

² Currently, all bushmeat on the menus of even the top hotels and restaurants in Cameroon stems from illegal sources.

³ Groupe d’Initiative Commune = a legal entity for a small group of people with a communal interest

such ZICGCs still be a workable concept (from a socio-economic and from a conservation perspective) in areas where the prime species for trophy hunting have become absent or rare? How can we draw on experiences from the establishment of Community Forests with regard to the development of Community Hunting Zones in the form of ZICGCs?

THE FUTURE

Given the fact that a large part of the rural population in south and east Cameroon depend for an important part of their livelihood on hunting and bushmeat, and that over-exploitation of game is becoming a problem, it is time that we started working on the development and management of pilot Community Hunting Zones. Only in the field will we be able to test the feasibility of the concept. As is the case for Community Forests, it will be slow going but may well prove to be worthwhile.

Currently the population of Djaposten together with their NGO partners are engaged in a discussion with the Ministry of Environment and Forests for permission to start a period of research/action for the Djaposten hunting zone, in order to find some answers to these questions and to come up with a set of realistic management tools.

We realise that this short piece poses many more questions than it provides answers. Its intention is to stimulate a discussion that will help further to develop the practical aspects of Community Hunting Zones, specifically in the humid forest belt.

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ACRONYMS

CIAD	Centre international d'appui au développement durable
FCFA	Currency in French-speaking West and Central Africa. Exchange rate: 100 CFCA = 1 FRF 750 CFCA = 1 USD
MINEF	Ministry of Environment and Forests
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SDDL	Projet "Soutien au développement durable de la région Lomié/Dja"
ZICGC	Zone d'Intérêt Cynégétique à Gestion Communautaire (community managed wildlife zone)

Please send comments on this paper to:

Rural Development Forestry Network
Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE1 7JD
United Kingdom
Email: forestry@odi.org.uk

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Rural Development Forestry Network
Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE1 7JD
UK

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7922 0300
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7922 0399
Email: forestry@odi.org.uk
Website: www.odifpeg.org.uk

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