

Original Research Article

Impacts of Co-Management of Forest Resources in the Kounabembe Cultural Universe, East Cameroon Region

Flaubert Taloussock^{1*}, Paul Nchoji Nkwi²¹Doctoral student in Anthropology, option: Development Anthropology, University of Yaounde I, CASS-RT Yaounde, Cameroon²Professor, Anthropologist; Professor, University of Yaounde I, CASS-RT Yaounde, Cameroon**Article History**

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Abstract: *Objective:* This article aims to examine the impact of changes linked to the co-management of forest resources on the way of life of the Kounabembe in the East Region, Cameroon. *Method:* In addition to the literature review, standard development anthropology techniques were used to collect data in the field from co-management actors, community members, and co-management beneficiaries. Following this qualitative research, the data was transcribed, then processed and interpreted on the basis of content analysis. The dynamic theory of anthropology was used to interpret the data. *Results:* The co-management of forest resources has generated perceptible changes in the Kounabembe cultural universe. The way of life of the populations has improved relatively. However, due to the implementation of numerous micro-projects, it is also deplored that these changes are not in line with the cultural representations of the Kounabembe. *Conclusion:* The interest in co-management of forest resources to contribute effectively to local development among the Kounabembe is obvious. However, its contribution to development and poverty reduction in relation to the changes in this cultural universe remains insufficient because of its sometimes non-consensual nature and the search for personal profit by certain actors.

Keywords: Co-management forest resources, mutations, Kounabembe.

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INTRODUCTION

The present article, which complements the work of other authors, has two objectives in its method. Firstly, to identify the general context of co-management of forest resources between stakeholders and riverian communities by describing the positive and negative impacts on which their way of life is organised. This co-management is largely regulated in practice by rules that have nothing to do with the legal framework governed by formal laws. Cameroonian decision-makers, co-management implementation partners in general and especially those in the South-East need to understand these forces in order to intervene effectively to improve the lives of the people. Secondly, this paper aims to provide a set of characteristics that will help to identify the elements that regulate this co-management or the impact of this co-management on the way of life of the Kounabembe. These include: spatial location, the profile of actors involved in co-management, sources of funding, functions or roles with these populations, the

contribution of cost-benefits and the costs of marketing forest resources in relation to development.

The state is the strict owner of the forest and its management and exploitation are highly centralized [1]. Although in 1981 it promulgated a forestry code and reorganised the institutions in charge of forests. The forestry sector was not only intensively exploited, but also denounced as a real threat to ecosystems and where salaries fell by 40% overnight), which led to its eligibility for structural adjustments in 1988. The forestry sector remained largely under the influence of foreign actors and institutions, with the establishment of complex and clientelistic networks of relationships. Privatisation, clientelist relationships and corruption led to a situation that was considered unmanageable and, from 1987 onwards, it was the World Bank that took on the responsibility of pressuring the government to

¹ Karsenty1999b; Fomété, 2001

implement the policy reforms begun in 1981 with the Tropical Forest Action Plan (TFAP) [2].

It was in this context that Forestry Law 94/01 of 20 January 1994, considered a major step in the history of Cameroon, was put in place. It covers all the major international issues (rational management of resources, biodiversity conservation, development and poverty reduction, democracy ...).

Largely influenced by the Rio Convention, driven by international financial institutions, most notably the World Bank, and combined with pressure from biodiversity management organisations, the Forestry Law (drafted by the World Bank) forms a kind of all-encompassing law governing both local communities and state actors. The law is so comprehensive that there is not a single study on biodiversity, forestry, democracy or simply the South-democracy or simply Southern Cameroon that is not placed in the context of this law.

Cameroon is a signatory to several international conventions and agreements in the field of forest management. The reform of the forestry sector took place in the 1990s under the guidance of international and national standards with the support and establishment of certain institutions. It had a triple objective: political, economic and social, and ecological. The forestry policy adopted in 1995 aims to sustain and develop the economic, ecological and social functions of Cameroon's forests, within the framework of a sustainable development policy. Cameroon's forests, within the framework of an integrated management system that ensures the conservation, use of forest resources and ecosystems.

It was a question of translating the principles of participation and empowerment of village populations in the management of forest resources to promote local democracy and governance in the management of forest resources. In the view of the designers and beneficiaries of the 1994 reform, decentralised forest management should enshrine social forestry, i.e. forestry that is people-centred, forestry that serves as a level for building local development, poverty alleviation and the promotion of social cohesion the fight against poverty, the improvement of the general living conditions of forest populations.

These populations live mainly from slash-and-burn agriculture, cocoa and coffee cultivation, hunting fishing and gathering. The trade in of hunting products is flourishing in the region due, among other things, to the intense industrial logging activity. Industrial logging was introduced to the region in the 1970s and 1980s and, together with sport hunting, is the main driver of economic activity. It is the main engine of economic

activity, together with sport hunting. The region attracts a large number of migrants from other parts of Cameroon and neighbouring countries, all in search of work and well-being. A significant proportion of this migrant population lives off the hunting, capture and sale of red-tailed parrots.

The anthropic pressure on wildlife resources is considerable. While government justify the expansion of industrial logging the imperatives of economic and social development. While the public authorities justify the expansion of industrial logging on the grounds of economic and social development, it is paradoxical to note that the forest regions where industrial logging has been practised for decades (and in some cases since the beginning of the colonial period) remain among the poorest (isolation, lack of basic infrastructure, poor schooling, poor health coverage, etc.).The institutionalisation of cogeneration in the forestry sector is a major challenge.) The institutionalisation of co-management of forest resources does not seem to meet expectations in terms of local development. Forest communities are having difficulty integrating the process despite the opportunities offered by the reform of the forestry sector in Cameroon.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis framework and the sources of the data used are presented. The co- management of forest resources has been the subject of several methods depending on the characteristics of the commercial circuits, which differ according to the products obtained from the forests and the organisational modes and strategies of the actors. In this paper, official, private and field survey data were cross-checked in the sites of Yokadouma and its surroundings over a given period. In other words, the qualitative method used is none other than a standard method in development anthropology. The rationale for this method is that data from documentary research alone does not always allow for representation, perception, or the opinions of stakeholders. Very often theoretical information does not always reflect the realities on the ground. There are no records or updated documents on all financial transactions generated by the co-management of forest resources.

Field data collection took place in several phases between 2013 and 2022. It was carried out with 15 informants consisting of: administrative, sectoral and communal authorities, local NGOs chosen at random in the Kounabembe Canton and the commune of Yokadouma. They allowed us to question political and civil organisations and the ideologies developed around the management of forest resources. The interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth and specific insights into the changes related to forest resource management among the Kounabembe of East Cameroon. The redundancy of information during the interviews with the different categories of informants, direct

² Brunner & Ekokoundated: 4.

observations, and life stories in the field led to the saturation point, which put an end to this collection. A field guide was asked to translate some of the data from local languages into the researcher's usual language, French.

The data was analysed and interpreted according to the methods used in the social sciences. Thus, after transcribing the recorded data in Word, we proceeded to the thematic structuring of the texts. The data noted during the document review and during direct observation and some informal interviews were entered. Different colours were assigned to the different themes and sub-themes. To this end, the context of enunciation provided information on the profile of the informants and revealed their intentions. Following the analysis, the field data were subjected to anthropological interpretation. This exercise served as a guideline for the data analysed beforehand. Appreciating co-management of forest resources and mutations among the Kounabembe in the commune of Yokadouma under the prism of the dynamic theoretical approach is to use the concepts of change and adaptation in order to understand this reality.

RESULTS

This article analyses the impacts of co-management of forest resources on the way of life of human communities in the Kounabembe cultural universe. These are essentially ecological, socio-economic, political, religious and cultural. In international terms, sustainable forest management can be defined as "*the management of permanent forests to achieve clearly defined objectives for the sustained production of desired goods and services without impairing their intrinsic value, without compromising their future productivity and without causing undesirable effects on the physical and social environment*" (ITTO, 1992). Logging is one of the main income-generating activities that impacts both positively and negatively not only on the lifestyles of local people but also partly conditions the regeneration of the forest.

Project identification and prioritisation process

Cameroon's forestry legislation provides for the implementation of community projects to be preceded by co-management of forest resources a process of identification and prioritisation. This process aims to promote projects of common interest to the community.

With regard to identification, the Forest Royalty Management Committees operate with rules of procedure [³]. These include provisions for the

identification of community projects. Article 9 (1) states that before the committee meets to decide on the projects to be financed, each community representative on the committee is required to organise consultation sessions with the populations in his or her area of competence in order to identify priority projects in the area. The consultation sessions make it possible to obtain the populations' assent for the projects to be carried out. Ki-zerbo (1972) [⁴] considers that this approach contributes to endogenous development, i.e. that the community draws the elements of its own development from within itself.

Paragraph 2 of the same article provides that the community may be assisted in identifying its projects in the following terms: "The community representative on the committee may be assisted in this task by a facilitator chosen from among the development support organisations actually working in the sector concerned. The facilitator's intervention is free of charge, but the committee is obliged to reimburse the facilitator's travel expenses and to pay a per diem. This per diem shall in no case exceed 20,000 CFA francs per day for a maximum of 5 days of effective work. Paragraph 3 specifies that 'each community representative on the committee is required to send the list of selected projects (project and village) in his or her area of competence to the committee's chairman and secretary in writing at least one week before the meetings to decide on the projects to be financed'.

The prioritisation of projects is done during the plenary meeting of the committee which has to decide on the projects to be financed. Article 10 of the rules of procedure states that "each representative of the riparian village community is required to present and defend the projects in his or her sector". Article 11 specifies that 'the committee's financial envelope for funding projects is distributed among the projects presented according to the principles of priority, justice and equity between the sectors, villages and sociological components of the geographical area covered by the committee'. It is thus noted that the prioritisation of projects takes into account a set of previously defined factors that contribute to the maintenance of social cohesion within the communities.

Positive impacts of completed projects

On the health front

The co-management of forest resources, especially the exploitation of Community Forests (CF), has helped to alleviate the suffering of several families. In the locality of Mimbo Mimbo, for example, the president of the CF has ordered several times the

the modalities for the use of revenues from forest exploitation destined for local village communities

⁴ I-ZERBO Joseph, 1972, *Histoire de l'Afrique noire. D'hier à demain*; Paris, Hatier.

³ Rules of procedure of the forest revenue management committee (CGRF), supplementing Joint Order No. 000122/MINEFI/MINAT of 29 April 1998 establishing

disbursement of money to help some seriously ill members of the community. Thanks to this intervention, lives have been saved, as the following statement from [5] testifies: *"in addition, there is also help because there are people who sometimes suffer to the point where they say that they cannot lose a family member when there is money in the coffers"*.

The income from the CF has also made it possible to supply medicines to health centres in certain localities, notably Gribé and Mimbo Mimbo. The Yokadouma town hall has also supplied the health centres of Kounabembe Canton with essential medicines worth 500,000CFA francs each year. These medicines have made it possible to treat certain diseases such as typhoid fever on the spot without having to travel to Yokadouma.

In some villages, such as Gouonepoum ancien and Mimbo mimbo, the rate of diarrhoeal diseases (celiac disease, Crohn's disease and microscopic colitis) has fallen slightly [6]. This decrease was justified by the construction and development of drinking water points in these localities. Thus, access to safe water has had a significant positive impact on the health of the population.

The "Société Industriel de Mbang" (SIM) is a forestry company operating in the Kounabembe Canton. As part of the implementation of the social actions inherent in its specifications, it administered free primary health care to the local population in search of health in its centre located in Malea. In the framework of the implementation of social actions inherent in its terms of reference, it administered free primary health care to local populations in search of health in its centre located at its base in Malea. As the site manager of this company indicated, the health care also extends to victims of accidents of all kinds.

Drinking water supply in the Kounabembe canton

Having access to clean water and sanitation is a human right and one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The construction and rehabilitation of drinking water points has helped to reduce the need to fetch water in some localities. In the past, people had to travel miles to get drinking water. Not only did the long distances on sometimes rough roads cause exhaustion and loss of time, but the water loads were a constant drain on women and children. Thanks to the co-management of forest resources, water points have been built in the centre of villages not far from the houses. Bringing drinking water closer to the population has reduced the time taken to supply it, allowed children to

⁵ Interview conducted on 01/08/2016 in Yokadouma with the President FC CODECBOM Mr. Konda Samaleu Silvére

⁶ Interview conducted on 04/08/2016 with S.M Pankom Jean Sart, Chief of the village Gouonepoum

have more time to revise their lessons on their return from school and at weekends, reduced the hassle of carrying water and above all allowed women to have more time to devote to managing their households.

As this informant says [7], *"communities have shown their joy in consuming clean water and being spared from certain diseases"*. The construction of drinking water points has also played a fundamental role in reducing diarrhoeal diseases.

Home improvement

Thanks to the co-management of forest resources, some people have been able to build the houses. These houses guarantee the security of family members, as this informant [8] points out: *"In terms of housing, people live better than before. The houses made of planks and sheet metal give them a certain security. 80% of the population now have plank beds thanks to the planks recovered from the FC, which was not the case before"*. The large community halls built in most localities allow medium and large meetings to be held without having to go to a third party's home. They are neutral spaces, very often located in the centre of the village, and are open to everyone. These sheds are appropriate spaces for the reception of administrative authorities on tour in these localities. This informant [9] specifies that *"the hangar allows us to receive the sub-prefect when he arrives here. It is the seat of major decisions. The small sheds that were made of straw did not allow the sub-prefect to be received, for example, in the rainy season"*. It should be pointed out that the hangar has not affected the power of the chieftaincies. The chieftaincies do not have any space built to receive people and it is with the advent of decentralised forest management that the community decided to build large sheds with the consent of the chief.

The "Société de transformation du Bois de la Kadey" (STBK) is another forestry company operating in the Kounabembe Canton. As part of the implementation of the social actions inherent in its specifications, it has contributed to the improvement of the habitat by providing the local population with populations, wood and metal sheets for the repair of houses.

Education

The co-management of forest resources has made it possible to achieve many things in the education sector in Kounabembe Canton. These

⁷ Interview conducted on 01/08/2016 in Yokadouma with the President FC CODECBOM Mr. Konda

⁸ Interview conducted on 04/08/2016 in Song ancien with Mr. YASSAMBARD Jasmin President FC BOGRISSOM

⁹ Interview conducted on 04/08/2016 in Gribé with Mr. ASSONO MESSABA Rodrigue. Delegate of FC Bielabot

achievements included the construction or renovation of classrooms and teachers' housing, the provision of schools and establishments with benches and school supplies, the hiring of temporary teachers, etc.

Achievements in the field of education have had a positive impact on the reduction of distances travelled by pupils in the past, the improvement of the environment and quality of education for pupils, the increase in the number of school-age children, and the increase in the number of teachers and the construction of their residences. With the income from, for example, community forests, many achievements have been made in the field of education. It has contributed to the construction of classrooms in various institutions. These include: the rehabilitation of the first classrooms built by the state in 1982 in a public school in Mimbo Mimbo. The construction of classrooms at the public school in Gribe, and two classrooms in Morazouo. Previously, school-age children travelled several kilometres to attend school in neighbouring villages. Landlocked villages have benefited from the construction of new schools and modern classrooms, such as the kindergarten in Binton.

The STBK (Société de transformation du Bois de la Kadey) has taken on 08 teachers on a permanent basis at the Sengbot public school. This school, located far from the company's base, is attended by the children of employees and local residents. Some of the temporary primary and secondary school teachers are regularly paid thanks to the 40% of the RFA that is retroceded to the commune. CPF (Comités Paysans-Forêts) of Malea nouveau and Masea, has taken charge of 2 parents' teachers at the Zokadiba public school and the Biwala II public school for the 2015-2016 school year. To ensure the safety of people, traffic signs have been put up by the community to regulate traffic during the school year.

Entertainment

In Gouonepoum ancien, the sale of the cuttings has made it possible to create a sports area measuring approximately 80m by 50m for the practice of sports activities. In addition, the forest resource managers have also provided the young people of the Mikel and Tembe communities with sports equipment (jerseys and balls) for football tournaments or championships during the holidays.

In terms of access to audio-visual facilities, each local RFA management sub-committee has been provided with an antenna, a decoder, a big screen and a generator. As the villages are not electrified, the forest resource co-management instruments provide fuel to run the generator during major events (weddings, mourning, etc.). This equipment has been installed inside the community sheds to allow people to view major ceremonies and access information.

The revenue from the RFA, particularly the 10% destined for the local communities, has been used to donate food to the local population, allowed for the donation of foodstuffs to the population. Each family received a few kilograms of rice, vegetable oil and poison. All the chiefdoms of the villages in Canton Kounambembe received plastic chairs for meetings and other ceremonies.

Agricultural production

To encourage agricultural production, FC CODECBOM helped the population by providing them with phytosanitary products. These products consisted of fertilisers and pesticides for the treatment of cocoa farms. It also helped the population by promoting the group sale of the main agricultural product, cocoa, to enable them to sell at the highest price available.

The RFA (Annual Forestry Levy) has also enabled the purchase and distribution of chainsaws to communities for the creation of agricultural areas. These chainsaws have facilitated the felling of large trees for people wanting to create large plantations. With the help of these machines, beneficiaries have increased their cultivation areas by felling trees over several hectares. The extension of the fields has resulted in increased production of food and cash crops.

Organisation of the sale of non-timber forest products from the CF

The creation and management of CFs has reorganised the sale of NTFPs within communities. This innovation has brought about a major change *"With the creation of the CF, the sale of these products has been well organised by storing them to sell at a good price and this has helped to increase the household basket. To make it work, the CF CODECBOM set up a small fund to help women during the storage period. This means that each person with a certain amount of stored produce can take money from the fund and return it when the produce is sold to a buyer within a set period"* [¹⁰]. She has set up a mechanism to collect the products, store them and sell them to a buyer at the appropriate time.

Bringing together members of different communities

Decentralised forest management has helped to bring members of different communities together. This is the case of the BOGRISOM and Bielabot FCs which, through two community forests include five localities: Gribe, Song ancien, Masea, Zokadiba and Binton. This management method encourages cohabitation because, according to the informants, *"in the event of a problem, the members of all these villages are called together to find a solution. Thus, the arrival of the community forests has meant that they are now in a package. For example, when a truck of wood is*

¹⁰ FGD conducted on 02/08/2016 in MimboMimbo with community leaders.

loaded, they are all represented. The gain, 100,000F for example, is shared equally. With the advent of CF, we realise that the more time passes, the more we get together" [11].

Beyond this cohabitation, the management of the CF and its spin-offs are a catalyst for gestures of solidarity between neighbouring localities. This informant [12] affirms that the management of CF CODECBOM funds includes assistance to neighbouring villages: "When there is an event in a neighbouring village, we try to make a small gift to show our solidarity".

Improving the functioning of the associative model

The advent of co-management of forest resources has boosted the legal functioning of the associative model. In all localities, associations have been legalised to take part in this management. Thanks to the construction of community sheds, associations such as the *Kounebaka* tontine have been set up and meet every Sunday. For the members of this association, it attracts more people because it is held in a public place. It can be seen that the functioning of the association model has also developed thanks to the construction of sheds that are now used as meeting rooms.

Job creation

STBK employs dozens of workers from the Kounabembe canton in FMU 10018. The positions most commonly held by local residents are: site manager, harvester, fork driver, labourer, driver, repair clerk, felling clerk, forestry chainsaw operator, DF10 clerk, disc marker, chainsaw operator and guard. The most common positions held by local residents are: site manager, feller, fork driver, labourer, driver, repair clerk, felling clerk, forestry crosscutter, DF10 clerk, skidder clerk, disc marker, crosscutter; and guard. Like STBK, SIM's site manager states that 70% of the employees are from the Eastern Region between Yokadouma and Messok (the villages near the FMU). He believes that these employees have given them satisfaction in the following positions: prospectors, feller, labourer etc.

Here, nothing but physical strength counts to be recruited by the donors or the operators. "As a direct impact on the population, with the arrival of 02 partners, the exploitation of the CF keeps the villagers away from unemployment. For example: a load of more than 600 pieces mobilise the whole village: children, adults, young people, men and women. And as it is cash

¹¹ FGD conducted on 02/08/2016 in MimboMimbo with community leaders.

¹² Interview conducted on 01/08/2016 in Yokadouma with the President FC CODECBOM Mr. Konda Samaleu Silvere

work, everyone is paid immediately after the work" [13]. Timber loading is one of the main activities that attracts the entire population, regardless of age, sex or religion.

Improving the local economy and increasing incomes

Co-management of forest resources through its actions has contributed to the improvement of the local economy. We are witnessing a kind of internal displacement of people and even people who come beyond Cameroon's borders in search of gains. The phenomenon of the movement of people plays a major role in border financial transactions through the renting of houses, the setting up of income-generating activities, the creation of jobs (catering, petty trade). This informant states that: "when those who come to work are already at our level, there are small movements, those who are in the village sell their drinks a little and it works in the village, others even have rooms to rent to wait for those who come to saw the wood" [14].

Co-management of forest resources has also contributed to increased household incomes. In some localities, women have observed a change in the household basket. "As a woman I notice that CF has made a change in the households because the income of our husbands has increased. As a woman I notice that the CF has made a change in the households because our husbands' incomes have increased. Some of them bought means of transport that helped them to evacuate the sick" [15]. From an economic point of view, as Bigombe points out the management models developed have had both positive and negative impacts. For example, they have allowed the creation of jobs in the villages (sawyers, cubers, fellers, porters, etc.) and the subsequent reduction of the rural exodus the repayment of debts, the securing of space, the training of local experts and technicians, the beginning of the process of improving housing, the construction of new roads, the creation of a new road network. the construction of chapels, health aid and assistance, the elaboration of computerised national identity cards, the repair of schools and the purchase of tables and benches, the construction of dispensaries, etc.). However, the co-management of forest resources has had a negative impact on the communities. The negative impacts of the co-management of forest resources on the local population are noted in the following section.

¹³ Interview conducted on 04/08/2016 in Gribé with Informant.

¹⁴ FGD made on 01/08/2016 in Yokadouma 15 BIGOMBE LOGO, P. 2007, Towards a conservation benefiting the poor in Cameroon? La gestion participative et développement intégré des aires protégées de Lobéké et Boumba- Bek et Nki au Sud-Est Cameroun; IUCN-IUED-RUIG-GIAN

Negative impacts of co-management of forest resources

The projects carried out through the co-management of forest resources in Kounabembe Canton have had many negative impacts.

Increased Conflict

Misunderstandings about the management of the benefits of the exploitation and conservation of forest resources are very often the cause of conflicts within local communities. In the spirit of the law [¹⁶], the fruits of the co-management of forest resources must be used to improve the living conditions of the populations. However, when the funds are available, they do not always agree on how they are to be used, as this informant [¹⁷] points out: *“All this management often leads to conflict in the village because of misinformation. Let's take the example of when there is income at the level of 1000F/m³, when we pay some people want us to eat this money when you tell them that it is for the projects they don't understand. They are not so much informed about what to do with the money”*.

The management of funds from community forests always generates conflicts because of the lack of information on the part of some community members. Not all populations are always informed about the use of these funds, as this informant points out [¹⁸]:

Speaking of conflicts, the management of FC seems difficult when there is income, given that the delegate follows a little training, he knows that the income is intended for development projects, a member who has never followed this training arrives and says that it is the money from the wood, we must share it and when you tell him no, he says that you say it because it is you who eat and he forgets one thing that this sheet of metal that we buy today will be used for how many years.

This other informant [¹⁹] says that from the beginning, people thought that the income from the CF should be shared for consumption. But when we started to explain to them that this money was meant for community projects, it created a bit of conflict and they finally understood when a number of projects were carried out for the group. Funds from forest exploitation and conservation intended for local development are very often misappropriated by their managers. This misappropriation is one of the main sources of conflict

in the communities, as shown by the following comments [²⁰]. *“There is also misappropriation at the level of the managers, which also causes unrest.*

Misappropriation in the context of community forest management is not unique to the Kounabembe of south-east Cameroon. Fomete and Vermaat (2001) describe the same phenomenon in a community in the Dimako area of eastern Cameroon. This community had initially hoped to use the profit from their forest to distribute corrugated iron sheets for the roof of each family. Unfortunately, the profit from the exploitation of this forest never reached the village. In the end, violent conflicts broke out in the village, resulting in the incarceration of two opposing residents. The community did not benefit from the community forest, which was subsequently suspended.

Bigombe (2003) believes that these misappropriations are consubstantial with the financial management of community forests. In his view, the current financial management of community forest revenues is not sustainable. It is not based on any scientific management system. Most of the projects carried out with the financial revenues from community forests do not follow a revenue management plan drawn up before the funds arrive in the communities. They do not always have a community purpose.

The exploitation of community forests under management is very often the source of several conflicts. The community members who are most involved in the work in the forest logically want to be paid when the wood is sold. But the others do not see it that way. This informant [²¹] points out that the management of the CF under the system is more conflictual than that under the partnership system. *“As far as conflicts are concerned, we don't have any yet because we take the money from the partner. There are often more problems when we operate under the management of a company because of the small calculations of each party”*.

The methodology adopted very often for the choice of villages benefiting from the co-management of forest resources is also a source of conflict. Indeed, the FCs, CPFs, COVAREFs and RFA management committees bring together several villages in Kounabembe Township. To choose the villages that will benefit from the projects, lots are drawn. This process is often contested by those who feel that their localities contribute a little more than others to the co-management of forest resources.

¹⁶ Interview conducted on 02/08/2016 in Mimbo Mimbo with METOM Marcellin

¹⁷ Interview conducted on 03/08/2016 in Binton with Mr. Assiso Dieudonné

¹⁸ interview conducted on 04/08/2016 in Song ancien with Yassambard Jasmin

¹⁹ Interview conducted on 04/08/2016 in Song ancien with Yassambard Jasmin

²⁰ Interview conducted on 03/08/2016 in Binton with Mr. Assiso Dieudonné

²¹ Interview conducted on 16/07/2013 in Yokadouma with Mr. SINDEMO Gérard

Uneven distribution of the FRG's achievements

The achievements made in the context of the retrocession of the 10% of the RFA to the riparian communities have not fulfilled all the expectations of the Kounabembe. Some localities have not benefited at all or have benefited very little. On the other hand, others have had a little too much, as this informant points out: *“For the 10%, the local residents do not benefit from anything, there are the unrealized projects. In some villages, they are doing small temporary projects such as donating chairs, satellite dishes and solar panels. There is a discrepancy, in some places they build sheds that are not completed and not in others and we don't understand why. It is true that there are management committees that propose projects, but since 2008 we have observed that not all villages benefit from these projects”* [22].

Unplanned income management by employees

Among the Kounabembe, many young people benefit from the income generated by the co-management of forest resources. They are employed by forestry companies, CF operators and companies responsible for community development. All these companies pay them at the end of each month but very few of them manage to carry out an individual planned project. For the most part, the money they receive is not used to carry out a life project. They use it for immediate needs such as drinking and smoking which are rather harmful to their health.

In these communities, where people have difficulty managing financial income, it would be wise for companies to support them in this new dynamic by training them in monthly income management.

Risk of spread of STIs/HIV/AIDS

The co-management of forest resources involves many people on a permanent and seasonal basis during logging and the implementation of social works. In addition to these people, there are people who wander around the area in search of work. All these people sympathise with the populations of the surrounding areas and enter into all kinds of relationships, including sexual ones. These relationships, when unprotected, can be the source of new STI/HIV/AIDS infections in the locality. This will result in an increase in their prevalence rate. This risk of an increase in the prevalence of STIs/HIV/AIDS is all the more feared as the purchasing power of employees is greater than that of the local population; young girls and even married women are often charmed by money. It is known that with money and alcohol, people lose *self-control* and become more easily debauched. This can also lead to unwanted pregnancies among young girls who may have their education disrupted.

²² Interview conducted on 16/07/2013 in Yokadouma with Mr. SINDEMO Gérard

Costly procedure for obtaining CF

The process of obtaining CFs is very costly in relation to the income of local communities. To obtain a CF, the community must first set itself up as a legal person or entity. It must hold a consultation meeting and prepare an application file for the allocation of the community forest, and present a simple management plan before signing the final management agreement. This made this informant [23] say that:

As community forestry was conceived, it was not of a nature to help local people, it was just so that we don't say we didn't give them anything. You have to give and you have to vice. You can't ask people to do all these multi-resource inventories that cost nearly 5 million and now when you evaluate the annual exploitation only, you are at the turn of one and a half million, 2 million or 2 million two hundred thousand and it must be done every year. The community already has to find a million.

In short, the exercise of the right of pre-emption in forestry matters by village communities is not simple. From the expression of the intention to pre-empt to the signing of the management agreement, village populations must comply with a long and costly administrative and technical procedure, some stages of which, such as the carrying out of an inventory of forest products, generally cost several million CFA francs. This is not always within the reach of all rural populations.

High cost of renewing the simple management plan

The simple management plan is a document that sets out how a village community wishing to obtain a community forest intends to manage it. This document highlights the activities to be carried out by the villagers in the different sectors of management of the natural products of the forest concerned. The approval of the simple management plan by the forestry administration is followed by the signing of the final management agreement. The management agreement is revised at least once every five years. This revision requires multi- resource inventories to be carried out. These inventories are expensive for the community, which has to pay nearly one million CFA francs.

Difficult access in Community Forests

The regulations governing the management of CF do not allow the creation of tracks within them. As a result, access to the resource within the CF is often very difficult. The absence of tracks in the CF leads to non-compliance with the “Certificat Annuel d'Exploitation” (CAE), which is a document delimiting the annual exploitation plot. This informant [24] indicates that: *“in*

²³ Interview conducted on 02/08/2018 in MimboMimbo with METOM Marcellin

²⁴ Interview conducted on 02/08/2016 in MimboMimbo with METOM Marcellin

the context of the Community Forest (CF), non-compliance with the CAE is due to the non-existence of roads in the forest and the prohibition of opening them with heavy machinery. However, it is extremely costly to clear timber over a long distance. For this reason, the logging partners refuse to enter the forest in depth. As a result, they exploit the trees that are close to the main axis much more”.

This difficult access to the interior of the CF also discourages logging partners who have to invest much more money in skidding. In this regard, this informant [25] states that 'when the timber is already a bit far away, the partner can no longer bear the cost of logging and one is obliged not to log this year and as time goes by there are documents whose deadlines are expiring and immediately, as the ACE has a deadline, and the PSG too, and the waybills, if you don't log it's going to be of no use to you. From this point of view, it can be observed that forestry legislation bears the seeds of its own destruction. The prohibition on opening tracks in the CF with heavy machinery means that the annual logging certificate is not respected.

Implementation of non-consensual community projects

Most of the projects carried out thanks to the RFA among the Baka and Kounabembe did not have the consent of the people. This informant [26] affirms that the community seedbed was imposed on the populations by the RFA management committee: 'From 2007 to date, it is only the seedbed that has been built. I attended the meeting of the management committee as a representative of the FC and there we demanded to have the exact amount allocated to this committee and finally there was a mafia. Instead of 8 million for the management committee, which was earmarked for priority projects, a seed field was created for the canton, which has not benefited the population to date.

Indeed, it was a seedbed launched to improve cocoa cultivation. But the people feel that this project was not a priority for them and that it was carried out just to justify the expenses, as this informant indicates: *"At a given moment, we cannot say that the Kounabembe man needs cocoa seeds today. We have a lot of quality cocoa, if someone says he is going to create another field when there is the Cocoa Development Company, that is a problem. This project was imposed on the president of the management committee just to get money out. It's a project that we didn't vote for, we were dictated to by this project”.*

Another project imposed on the Baka and Kounabembe was the distribution of screens, satellite

dishes and generators. Indeed, on the eve of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, the communal executive decided to provide the villages with this equipment to watch the football matches. At the time, people were happy to be able to enjoy themselves, but this equipment did not last after the world competition, as this informant [27] says: *"At the time when the satellite dishes were given out, there was the World Cup. The people were happy. People could watch the World Cup and even the African Cup, but nowadays all that is spoiled. So these are projects that we did not vote for when we identified the projects in each village”.*

Violence by park managers against local populations

Tensions between park managers, particularly eco-guards, and local communities directly related to land and resource use, are rife. There have been evictions of local communities from the park, repression, mistreatment and torture perpetrated by eco-guards, and various failures to inform and involve local people that go against the law. The anti-poaching operations carried out in the area against the local populations are essentially about constant surveillance of the park. *"The eco-guards follow us everywhere, even outside the forest we are no longer free. They have frustrated the people. They have frustrated the people with their violent way of working while giving them the impression that the bushmeat no longer belongs to them and have practically defended the game. This has pushed the people to destroy the wildlife”* [28].

Civil and political rights are a class of rights that protect the individual freedoms of people from infringement by governments, social organisations and individuals, and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in the civil and political life of society and the state without discrimination or repression. This means that conflictual relations with eco-guards are not only related to the restrictions they impose, but to their often brutal behaviour towards local communities. Many testimonies attest to the situation on the ground. Indeed, violations attributed to eco-guards around these parks include cases of torture, cruel treatment, arbitrary detentions and confiscation of property, forced entry into huts, intimidation and even rape. There are also frequent reports of physical violence and destruction of property in connection with evictions caused by the creation of parks.

Interviews with park managers and eco-guards show that they are aware of the tensions between them and local communities *“Relations are difficult with the communities because of the bad perception they have of our action, our repressive missions. They perceive us as enemies because we don't allow them access to the*

²⁵ Interview conducted on 03/08/2016 in Bintom with Councillor Mr. ASSISSO Dieudonné

²⁶ Interview conducted on 02/08/2016 in MimboMimbo with METOM Marcellin

²⁷ Interview conducted on 24/07/2013 in Ngatto nouveau with the respondent

²⁸ Interview conducted on 02/08/2016 in MimboMimbo with Mr. MIKPOK Aloys.

forest" [29]. Local communities feel that park managers are responsible for their poverty. The lack of effective participation of the endogenous dynamics in its design has caused turmoil among the endogenous communities, resulting in fierce resistance through the violation of the law restricting their access to resources.

Deterioration of customs or infringement of ritual practices

Hunting and movement restrictions and movement restrictions within Boumba Beck National Park, the disappearance and retreat of wildlife. The restrictions on hunting and movement within the Boumba Beck National Park, the disappearance and withdrawal of wildlife, the heavy surveillance by eco-guards, and the disruption caused by the incessant interventions of external actors have a significant impact on the ritual practices of the Kounabembe. Indeed, their ritual celebration spaces are located inside the park. They are forbidden to take ritual animals such as elephants and gorillas, which are fully protected by forestry legislation.

When asked whether their lives had changed (for the better or worse) in the last five years, all respondents said that *"life had become more difficult. The most common reason given was the disappearance of wildlife. The most common reason given was the disappearance of wildlife and its retreat from the villages, as hunting hunting is more expensive and women can no longer participate as they used to"*. This suggests the phenomenon of gendered representation of hunting imposed by the co-management of forest resources, in an environment where communities are highly dependent on park resources for their subsistence and cultural activities. The same applies to impacts related to the increase in conflicts, the unequal distribution of the RFA's achievements, the unplanned management of income by employees, the spread of STIs-HIV/AIDS.

Opaque management of revenues from the co-management of forest resources

For the development of village communities bordering national forests of the national domain exploited by sale of timber, a percentage of the felling tax fixed by the finance law is transferred to the benefit of the said communities, which must benefit from the spin-offs. Thus, in the spirit of the aforementioned joint decree 076, a management committee is set up to monitor the management of revenues destined for the communities. This committee includes all the villages along the river. It is set up during an elective assembly under the supervision of the territorially competent Sub-Prefect. This committee constitutes a real leadership pole because its role is to select the priority projects to

be carried out thanks to the retrocession of the 1000Fcfa tax per m3 of wood exploited.

However, the members of this committee are suspected of managing this money as they please, as this informant points out: *"I strongly deplore the fact that the state has made the mistake of making the sale of the cuttings the property of the local residents. They now serve the personal interests of village leaders such as those in Zoulabot, Maléa and Ngounepoum, who are not like those who received at least 20 million. Nothing is noticeable?"* [30]. He believes that the community's share of revenue from timber sales does not contribute to local development as required by law. Development as provided for in the legislation. This situation is attributed to the management committee, which is in the pay of the village chiefs. The local population decries the concentration of co-management in the hands of a single family.

This opacity is also due to the lack of control by the state over the use of the funds collected from the sale of logs, as the informant insists: *"I deplore this situation where the state has abandoned all control. Whatever the number of cuttings in Malea or Ngounepoum, the state cannot go down to the field and see what has happened with the money paid in"* [31]. There is no programme to monitor the financial resources generated by the sale of forest products.

According to the forestry regulations, the RFAs are managed by riparian committees headed by a local councilor. The committee is made up of all the councilors in the area and is headed by an office. According to this councilor [32], the reality on the ground is quite different. The mayor has made the management of the RFA his private preserve. *"I am a deputy mayor, but the mayor is responsible for managing the town hall. I am not involved anywhere. Sometimes I am surprised to see a project in my village and that it is the Commune that is the project owner. The Mayor manages as he pleases and with whom he wishes"* [33].

The management of the FRG is therefore not collegial. The people are not held accountable. They are subject to the diktat of the mayor, who generally carries out projects that do not coincide with the aspirations of the people. The above-mentioned informant affirms that: *"In the past, there was a question of quotas per local committee. We used to say maybe you have 25*

²⁹ Interview conducted on 01/08/2016 in Yokadouma with the President FC CODECBOMM.

³⁰ Interview conducted on 05/08/2016 in Maléa nouveau with informant.

³¹ Interview conducted on 06/08/2016 in Biwala II with the president of the CPFM.

³² FGD carried out on 01/08/2016 with the forestry administrative authorities in Yokadouma.

³³ FGD carried out on 01/08/2016 with the forestry administrative authorities in Yokadouma.

million and for that amount, get out your priorities. But more and more, the priorities are oriented because they will bring out fake generators, fake satellite dishes that are not what you asked for and that does not give anything to the people. On this subject, this informant maintains that: nowadays we know that the 10% has been suspended and it is becoming even more unclear this management because it is not explained to the people [³⁴].

This opaque management of the RFA has also led to the uneven distribution of community projects in different localities. For example, “*sheds are not built in all localities, and even those that do benefit from them are not completed. Although there are management committees that propose the projects, but since 2008 we have observed that not all villages benefit from these projects. They favour some places and leave others*”. The new Maléa village has lacked a public shed since 2008. This village has not benefited from any of the 10% of the RFA apart from the plastic chairs. The same is true for Biwala II, which has only received plastic chairs, although it was planned to build a hangar and a building with two classrooms. On the other hand, the village of Zoulabot is privileged, as they received a shed, plastic chairs and solar panels.

DISCUSSIONS

This article raises the issue of the insufficient involvement of the Kounabembe in the co-management of forest resources. Yet they should have been consulted according to the standards of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) because this protected area affects their living space. The Forest People Programme, founded in 1990 in response to the forestry crisis, to support the struggles of indigenous peoples forest peoples to defend their lands and livelihoods. In this context, the Forest Peoples Programme states that “*a community has the right to give or withhold consent to proposed projects that may affect the land it traditionally owns, occupies or uses*”. It is clear that there has been no educational communication on the rationale for co- management of forest resources. To remedy this, international and national organisations (WWF, FPP and CED) working in the forestry sector held a series of meetings to involve community leaders, mainly the Kounabembe, in the in-depth mapping process in 2006 and 2007, which was to lead to the development of a management plan for the areas around Boumba Bek National Park. Workshops were organised to enable communities to present the results of the mapping to park officials and recommendations for the recognition of customary use rights in the management plans. Unfortunately, this process had not yet resulted in tangible improvements for local communities on the ground at the time of data collection.

³⁴ FGD carried out on 01/08/2016 with the forestry administrative authorities in Yokadouma.

The opacity surrounding the management of RFA was accentuated with the suspension of the 10% due to the communities. These sums were transferred to the Commune, which now manages them in addition to the usual 20%. Local people have particularly suffered from the violation of their basic civil and political rights in the context of anti-poaching operations. Several people have testified to mistreatment and human rights abuses, particularly by eco- guards, in some cases resulting in serious violations. These violations are usually associated with aggressive anti-poaching surveillance, where local communities are disproportionately targeted for their hunting practices. These violations are usually associated with aggressive anti-poaching surveillance, where local communities are disproportionately targeted for their hunting practices, serving as easier targets than the more powerful criminal networks that organise large-scale commercial hunting.

It is clear that the FRG, whose institution was intended to contribute to the development of the populations It is clear that the RFA, which was set up to contribute to the development of the people living near logging areas, does not really take into account the deep-seated needs of these people. However, as Jean Gray reminds us, “*development will either be the work of the beneficiaries or it will not be*” [³⁵]. This means that local people must be the driving force behind their own development if we really want to improve their living conditions.

There have been more negative than positive impacts: increase in conflicts, unequal distribution of the RFA's achievements, unplanned management of revenues by employees, risk of propagation of STI/HIV/AIDS, risk of destabilisation of households, costly procedure for obtaining FCs, high cost of renewing the MTP, difficult access to FCs, implementation of non-consensual community projects, opaque management of revenues from logging sales, opaque management of the RFA's activities, costly procedure for obtaining FCs, high cost of renewing the MTP, difficult access to FCs, implementation of non-consensual community projects, opaque management of revenue from timber sales, opaque management of the RFA, attraction of poachers, illegal exploitation of forest resources. In view of the above, this calls into question one of the main objectives of the co-management of forest resources, which is to contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of the local populations living in the vicinity of the forest through the realisation of social works, and finally to guarantee a rational and sustainable management of forest resources. However, the modest budgets of the local authorities in this region mean that the direct effects of this co-management policy remain limited.

³⁵ Gray, J. 1981, *Le développement au ras du sol chez les paysans du tiers monde*; Paris, Entente.

Thus, co-management is opposed to the local management that underpins the culture of these communities. The dynamics of the functioning of the communal forest, community forests, the annual forest fee, wildlife resource development committees, peasant forest committees and riparian committees for the management of timber sales are at the heart of the upheavals in the research area. These co-management instruments are essentially the result of the different actors involved, the constitution of management offices and the implementation of their activities.

CONCLUSION

The co-management of forest resources in the Kounabembe community, East Cameroon Region, remains a major concern. The resolution of this problem remains unlikely in the near future and there are many reasons to doubt. Insofar as, at first sight, when one analyses the positive effects of the changes in the co-management of forest resources in the Kounabembe cultural universe, one would be tempted to believe that the local populations are at a level of development worthy of interest. A clear improvement in education, health, village water supply, agriculture, improved housing, the rapprochement of localities, the functioning of the associative model, the reduction of the rural exodus the creation of jobs and the improvement of living conditions the strengthening of the fight against poaching, and the improvement of the local economy. However, when the same indicators are analysed in depth, it becomes clear that through these changes, the instruments of co-management of forest resources do not make available to the local populations one third of the income generated by the implementation of these instruments.

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