

CASE STUDY 72

Clustering community forests for greater impacts on livelihoods improvements in Cameroon

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Country & Sector: Cameroon, Forestry

Context

In 1994 local communities in Cameroon secured the full right to temporarily own and exploit products from forests as legal entities in the form of community forests (CF). As representative organs of local communities, concerned legal entities are required to re-invest part of the revenue generated from forest exploitation into initiatives of common interests in their respective villages/communities. Since a single CF by itself does not have sufficient capacity, in the broad sense, to position itself as timber supplier on national and international markets, SNV Cameroon engaged in facilitating the clustering of individual CF in 2008 in the Centre, South and East administrative regions of Cameroon. The goal was to enhance prospects for placing timber from individual community forests on national and international markets while developing/consolidating actors' capacities to lobby, mobilize resources and share emerging knowledge and experiences. As the clustering process was membership based, it started in 2008 with a total of thirty-nine CF and ended up with a total of 44 in December 2010.

Clients and partners

As shown in the table 1, six of the CF clusters emerged as direct clients of SNV. These included MIMEKO¹⁷ (which evolved into RECOFOD¹⁸), REGEFOC¹⁹, AFCOM²⁰, UGIFCOS²¹, UFCOMBI²² and UFCD²³. Except MIMEKO which started with 03 individual CF and ended up with 06, and then changed its name to RECOFOD, no numerical changes were observed in other CF clusters. All six CF clusters were spread across two (East and South) of the three administrative regions of Cameroon where SNV has been supporting the CF process since 1998.

Except for MINFOF - Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, which provided technical support to all the clusters, other CF clusters had support from grassroots-oriented organizations. For example, WWF, Nature+ and a network of local NGOs CIAD²⁴ provided supplementary capacity and financial support to both MIMEKO and REGEFOC. Furthermore, a business-oriented service provider SCIC²⁵ - availed herself to MIMEKO. In other clusters, SNV worked in tandem with three client organizations: with CEREP²⁶ for AFCOM, with OPFCR²⁷ for UGIFCOS and UFCD, and PAPEL²⁸ for UFCOMBI.

¹⁷ Mindourou – Medjoh - Kongo

¹⁸ Réseau des forêts communautaires du Dja

¹⁹ Réseau des Gestionnaires des Forêts communautaires de la Boumba et Ngoko

²⁰ Association des Forêts Communautaires de la Mvila

²¹ Union des GIC des Forêts Communautaires de Sangmelima

²² Union des Forêts communautaires Mpô'o-Bibime de Messamena

²³ Union des Forêts Communautaires de Djoum

²⁴ Centre International d'Appui au Développement Durable

²⁵ Société Commerciale pour la Négociation et Investissement Communautaires

²⁶ Centre pour la Protection Durable de l'Environnement

²⁷ Organisation pour la Protection de la Forêt Camerounaise et ses Ressources

²⁸ Programme de Protection de la Biodiversité par la Promotion des Micro Projets Communautaires

| Name of CF Grouping | Administrative Region and field site | Approximate total surface area ²⁹ (hec) | Number of CF Engaged | | Observations |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------|-----------|---|
| | | | 2008 | 2010 | |
| MIMEKO | East (Lomie) | 40,000 | 03 | 08 | Currently part of an EU funded project implemented by Nature + and SNV since 2010 |
| REGEFOC | East (Yokadouma) | 92,472 | 21 | 21 | Part of EU funded FLEGT project |
| AFCOM | South (Ebolowa) | 15,000 | 03 | 03 | Currently part of an EU funded project implemented by Nature + and SNV since 2010 |
| UGIFOS | South (Sangmeliam) | 17,600 | 04 | 04 | Phased out of SNV support |
| UFCOMBI | East (Messamena) | 10,866 | 05 | 05 | Phased out of SNV support |
| UFCD | South (Djoum) | 11,435 | 03 | 03 | Part of EU funded FLEGT project |
| Totals | | 187,373 | 39 | 44 | |

Table 1: Community Forest Clusters Supported by SNV in the South of Cameroon

Intervention logic and methods

Initially, SNV facilitated the organization of CF actor platforms resulting in the establishment of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with each of the clusters. This provided an overall framework for interventions within and between the clusters and the different categories of value chain actors. By bringing these actors together, an enabling environment for securing the necessary support for enhancing the revenue of the individual CF became feasible for placing timber on national and international. SNV then embarked on connecting the CF groupings to different national and international markets. Other examples of SNV's support included: the facilitation of the participation of CF groupings to sector related trade fair, the provision of systematic market information, the organization of thematic training sessions (including timber exploitation site management and contract negotiation) and linkages with groups of secondary wood processors based in the two Cameroon major cities of Yaoundé and Douala.

Outcome

Though evidence of impacts on production volumes, levels of incomes and utilization and widespread employment are yet to be consolidated, a number of outcomes stand out from the clustering exercise: a) improved access to timber markets b) enhanced sharing of knowledge and experiences and c) improved governance, d) dissemination of the idea of grouping CF and e) improved opportunities for local development.

a) Improved access to timber markets: An interesting result was achieved with REGEFOC, six of the CFs organised a group sale of timber in 2010 and managed to increase the net benefit per m³ of timber from 25.000 to 30.000 FCFA for timber sold on national markets and even to 60.000 FCFA for timber

²⁹ Related Cameroon Law authorizes a maximum surface area of 5,000 hectares per CF

placed on international markets. A key to this success was the fact that contracts were established with the support of SNV and SCNIC, a service provider. Using this experience, the individual CFs improved their market negotiation skills, are better informed of market prices and quality standards on international markets. This gives them a much better visibility on the timber markets at both national and international levels.

b) Enhanced sharing of knowledge and experiences: The CF clustering led four of the seven clusters to independently organize two "synergy and exchange meetings" between them. SNV and other actors of the CF timber value chain were invited as observers to this knowledge exchange meeting. The focus of discussions was the imperative to adhere to the provisions of the provisions of appropriate Cameroon laws and potential benefits of clustering.

c) Improved forest governance:

i) Illegal logging: In order to become a member of the clusters one of the conditions was to actively take a position with regard to illegal forest exploitation. This condition was helpful in the management of illegal exploitation within and around the CF of REGEFOC. In order to become a member of REGEFOC, for example, one of the conditions was to address the challenges of illegal exploitation. This decision actually helped to a significant decrease in illegal exploitation within and around the individual CF of this cluster.

ii) raising and discussing unacceptable management practices: CF clustering enabled the clusters and particularly UGICOS to better perceive governance issues such as financial embezzlement, extortion by local MINFOF staff and the imperative of accountability by CF legal entities.

iii) development of a facilitating rather repressive attitudes: across the seven CF clusters, an improved behavior of MINFOF field level staff was more visible. These staff began to show less repressive attitudes and readily facilitated to access to administrative documents for exploitation often delivered by MINFOF. For example, this attitude resulted in a decrease in securing the cost of exploitation documents by MIMEKO from 2 million FCFA in 2008 to 1.5 million FCFA in 2009 for the same documents.

d) Dissemination of the idea of clusters: Overall, the idea of clustering CF has been gaining grounds in other administrative regions of Cameroon where the initiatives are active. Members of the CF clusters are regularly invited to technical meetings out of the administrative regions initially targeted for the clustering, to share their knowledge, experiences and challenges

e) Improved opportunities for local development: prospects for increased market access due to the CF clustering is an opportunities for investment in local development. Though no data was collected throughout the process, at least 20% of the revenue from timber sales is included into village development plans targeting the rehabilitation of living houses, construction of enclosures for rearing pigs and maintenance of primary schools buildings.

Lessons Learnt/sustainability

Four main lessons have emerged from the clustering of CF in Cameroon and include:

a) Individual CF encounters similar challenges at the exploitation stage in Cameroon. Though the different steps of engaging in the Cameroon CF are explicit, the last stage which is exploitation is still characterized by a number of common challenges: *difficult access to national and international markets,*

revenue management, absence of appropriate exploitation equipment, etc. Developing skills in the management and use of revenue from timber exploitation from CF process remains a key challenge.

b) Clustering is as an alternative for addressing governance challenges: members of local populations, more than ever before, have become aware that they need to keep a more open eye on timber from their CF as a business opportunity. Although they have not completely appropriated the process, these first steps have show that they need to hold the management committees of individual CF more accountable over revenue management. Further, it is evident that clustering CF has the potentials of addressing quality standards from this forest type on national and international markets.

Concerted action by support organizations such as SNV, Nature+, WWF and SCNIC are more impactful on the entire CF value chain. a main factor that enabled members of MIMEKO to sell at a better price was concerted technical support from SNV, Nature+ and WWF. This gave European buyers the confidence that quality timber could be secured from Cameroon CF if the legal entities have a minimum technical and institutional support. Building on this trust and establishing appropriate mechanisms are crucial for ensuring sustainability of the Cameroon CF process.

c) Clustering of CF remains an alternative for collective action: A successful group sale by one of the clusters in 2008 boosted commitment in the idea of clustering. Collective action is required to understand and deal with MINFOF field based staff, adhering to the provisions of appropriate laws, addressing quality standards, articulating support needs from value chain actors.

d) Functional linkages need to be established between individual community forests and clusters in order to ensure reporting on rural livelihoods: Demonstrating impacts on rural livelihoods requires an functional articulation between the MESO level where support is increasingly focused and individual community forests where data is required to demonstrate impacts are found. Further, evidence on the effective use of skills, attitudes and aptitudes can only be perceived at the level of both individual community forests and the clusters; this again requires an functional articulation between the micro and meso levels.

Quotes:

'When we sold timber we contributed to building community halls in the two villages, bought a chainsaw and constructed a water point.' Mr. Abia Jean Theophane, Delegate of GIC ADJEK-Amical of Djoulempoum Ekoh

'Our network is best placed to respond to individual members' problems. The network should function properly so that it can easily approach MINFOF; individual CF cannot act effectively.' Mme Mekaas Née Medjo Marie Florence, Delegate/Management Officer of CIG ZENKADJEL, Member of REGOFOC.