

Evolution of Natural Resource Policy in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Natural resource management has a long history in Cameroon. It began before colonial administration within village communities and continues through today's numerous ministries. The development of protected areas and reserves begun in colonial times created tensions between rural communities and newly formalized administrative structures. Today's forestry policy is linked with the National Environment Management Program (NEMP) and takes into consideration ecosystem perspectives for management activities. In addition, economic development, involvement of women, and support for local NGO involvement are taken into consideration. The policy is the result of numerous international, continental, and sub-regional conventions. The strategies, priorities, and objectives for the forestry policy outlined here incorporate an overall biodiversity conservation, local participatory, and economic development goal. The implementation of the policy is being carried out through a number of agreements: the Global Environment Facility, Dja Biosphere Reserve, Lomié Region, and the National Environment Plan of Cameroon. Universities are strongly encouraged to develop collaborative efforts with Cameroon to assist in addressing information needs in the areas of anthropology, socioeconomics, monitoring, ethnobotany, bioecology, relations between resources and populations, and biology.

Cameroon is a country of 455,000 km² and borders the Republic of Chad, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Congo and the Atlantic Ocean. We have forests, Sudano-Guinean savanna, as well as Sahelian savanna ecosystems. Some say you can find everything of Africa in Cameroon. We are currently developing conservation initiatives and have many protected areas. The trinational zone that is the subject of this volume includes the southeastern forests of Cameroon. We have seven national parks that we have classified, six of which are in the savanna zone. Number seven, in the southwest, is Korup National Park, the only forest-zone protected area to date in Cameroon.

HISTORY OF NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

I have chosen to present the history of natural resource management in Cameroon, in an effort to enhance the ability of universities to assist us in establishing the future of natural resource management. Natural resource policy in Cameroon is as old as Cameroon itself. Before the arrival of the first colonial administrators in 1900, natural resources were managed according to the people's law (i.e. family law); the village chiefs were the main administrators of resource management. For example, when a hunting party returned to a village, all the animals killed were brought to the chief, whose duty it was to distribute the meat to all the villagers. When hunters went outside of a village's zone, they were required to first ask the chief's

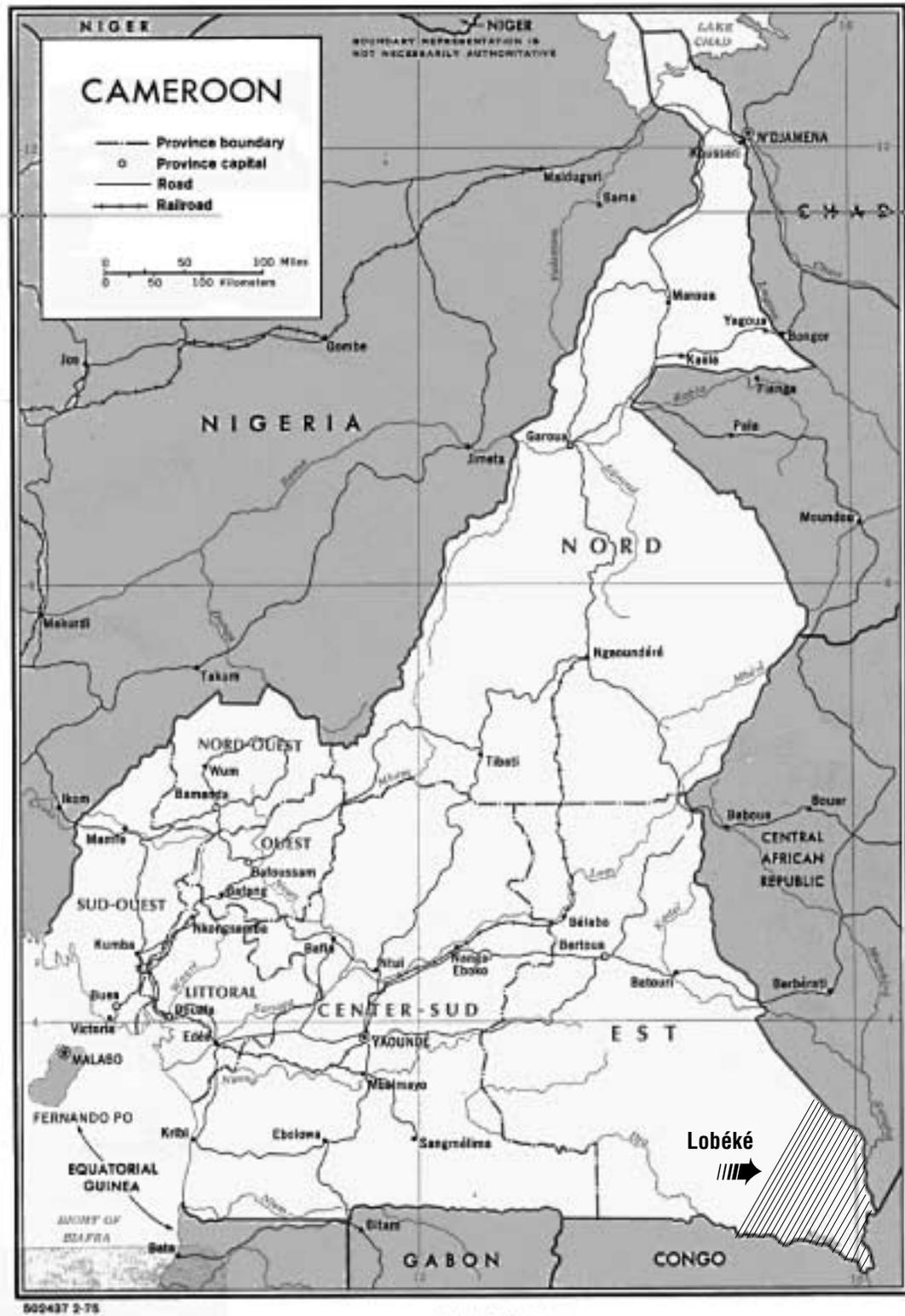


Figure 1 Cameroon's national and administrative borders. Shaded area in lower right represents the approximate location of the Lobéké Protected Area.

permission to enter the forest of the village. If they did not, they could be punished through a number of means: through the totem of the village (an animal which was in the forest to protect it), the hunters would not have an opportunity to shoot an animal, or even if they had an opportunity to see an animal, they wouldn't have been able to reach it to kill it.

After the arrival of the first colonial administrators, natural resources, which had belonged to the people, became the property of the first administration and a formal administrative structure evolved. People were forbidden to kill an animal if they did not have a hunting permit from the colonial administration. Needless to say, such measures created real tensions, and some resistance on the part of local populations. Nevertheless, a new set of systems arose, along with the first creation of protected areas. For example, during the German colonization, the Limbe Botanical Garden was created after World War I. This botanical garden still exists today and is an example of biodiversity conservation in Cameroon. By early 1960, when Cameroon became politically independent, there were already a number of operational hunting reserves in the country, including Waza, Kalamaloe, Dja, Douala, Edea, Santchou, Korup, Benoue, and Boubandjidah. In fact, all reserves, with the exception of one, that exist in Cameroon were created under colonial administrations.

In 1930, French colonization began creating hunting reserves and educated the population about planting exotic plants such as *Tectona grandis* in the savanna zone, Neem trees, and species of eucalyptus. During this time, the population received education about resource tenure; all resources belonged to the state. Anyone requiring use of the resources was required to apply for a permit. As a result of this policy the first game guards were recruited to protect forests and wildlife. But since independence the means available for development of these human resources have been decreasing, relative to those available under colonial regimes. There has also been a shift away from “police” mentalities, toward a desire for participation from local communities in the sustainable management of natural resources.

From 1960 to the present, natural resources have been under the responsibility of different ministries, including the Rural Development Secretariat, the Department of Tourism, the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Husbandry, and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. The Rural Development Secretariat dealt with forest and water resources as well as agriculture. The main policies were based on the fact that all natural resources belonged to the state, and anyone who damaged them was punished by law. In 1968, the first national parks in Cameroon were created. They were

Waza, Bénoué, and Boubandjidah. Responsibility for the parks was transferred to the Department of Tourism to support the activities of that sector. Today our country has seven national parks, seven faunal reserves, seventy forest reserves, one sanctuary, three zoological gardens and one botanical garden.

In 1972, forest (timber and hunting activities) and water resources were managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, while national parks were the responsibility of the Department of Tourism. The term wildlife specifically represents hunting activities and studies about wildlife (species monitoring). In 1982 the responsibility for wildlife resources was transferred to the Department of Tourism, and responsibility for fisheries was allocated to MINEPIA. Forest resources were still managed by the Ministry of Agriculture. This distribution of natural resource responsibility to different ministries continues to the present. Forest resources now belong to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, fisheries are the responsibility of the Department of Livestock, and wildlife is managed by Animal Husbandry.

CAMEROON'S NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICY TODAY

In 1992, the Cameroonian forest and wildlife sectors in the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Tourism formed the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MINEF). Since this time, these two sectors have undergone profound institutional and legislative reforms, such as the establishment of Cameroon forestry policy, the creation of new forestry laws, wildlife and fisheries regulations, and development of all the applications of these forestry laws. All these actions have significantly modified regulation governing the entire sector. Cameroon forestry policy is one component of our national strategy for the enhancement of rural economic activities. It falls within the framework of land use planning (zoning plan) and goes a long way toward boosting the agricultural policy.

The forestry policy is also an important component of the National Environment Management Program (NEMP), which has been drawn up with an emphasis on the sustainable management of forest resources. It is also a complementary part of the National Energy Program currently under discussion, with regard to the firewood subsector. Lastly, it covers all the forestry research programs adopted at the beginning of 1995. These orientations, objectives, and strategies take into consideration the environmental problems plaguing Cameroon, notwithstanding the fact that the forestry policy precedes that of the National Environment Management Program. The forestry policy has been a positive contribution to the orientation of the NEMP.

In drawing up this new policy, the forestry administration made it a point to shift emphasis from the tree to the entire forest. The forest will henceforth be seen as a multiple product and multiple-use ecosystem and not simply as a producer of timber. Special care will be taken to bring out the many related aspects of forest resource management. The task of the forest management officers is to harmonize users' needs, which are sometimes contradictory.

There have been no fundamental differences in these adopted viewpoints because consultation and collaboration have been an active component in creating the forestry policy. Nor are there major problems concerning the NEMP link with the National Energy Plan. It is only a question of ensuring the compatibility and feasibility of some of the proposals adopted for the latter.

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Economic development strategies have not quite considered forestry as an important sector, whereas its adequate integration into development can considerably boost the progress of rural populations. One of Cameroon's concerns in forest management has always been the involvement of the population surrounding protected areas, to enable them to have a fair and equitable share of the proceeds from the exploitation of forest resources. Although the population enjoys usufruct rights, they do not have a substantial share of proceeds from the commercial exploitation of forest resources. Consequently, they do not worry about the conservation of these resources. The policy seeks to involve the population concerned so that they can directly profit from this exploitation.

Cameroonian women have a crucial part to play in the exploitation of resources. This policy acknowledges the important role of women and considers them a privileged target group in conservation strategies. Women make up more than 51 percent of Cameroon's total population and 38 percent of the working force. A large percentage of these women (84.5%) live in rural areas and an even higher percentage (92%) live off the land. Rural women are the main consumers of natural resources. They gather hay, firewood, leaves, fruits, bark, and small animals that go into the meals of their families; they are the custodians of traditional pharmacopoeia and harvesters of forest products for craft work.

Cameroon has acknowledged the need to involve women in the development process by creating the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs (MINASCOF), the Office of Social Services, Women's Enhancement in the Ministry of Economics and Finance (MINEFI) and the Department of Community Development to Assist Rural Women. The state has also encouraged the establishment of NGOs that involve women in environmental protection (e.g. Africa 2000 Network, Enviro Protect). MINEF's forestry policy sets out not only

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to integrate women into the development process, as was often the case with previous strategies, but also to recognize them as an important and undeniable factor of sustainable development and endeavors.

The forestry policy aims to develop all components of Cameroonian forests while maintaining our biodiversity reservoir. It sets out to ensure the conservation, further development, and sustainable use of this forest. It respects all the conventions to which Cameroon is party. The many conventions, together with their objectives, strategies, and priorities, are listed below.

International Conventions:

- Convention on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage (Paris, 23 November 1972);
- Convention on International Trade in Wildlife and Endangered Species (Washington, 3 March 1973);
- Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer (Vienna, 22 March 1985);
- Montreal Protocol on the Control of Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) (Montreal, 16 April 1987);
- Convention on Climate Change (14 June 1992);
- Convention on Biological Diversity (14 June 1992);
- Convention on Desertification (Paris, October 1994);
- Cooperation Agreement with International NGOs (IUCN, WWF, ITTO, ATO).

Continental Conventions:

- Convention on the Conservation of Cultural and Natural Resources (Algeria 1968);
- Bamako Convention on Waste Importation in Africa and Transborder Movement and Management of Toxic Wastes.

Sub-Regional Conventions:

- 1964 Accord creating the Lake Chad Basin Commission;
- Accord on joint regulations of fauna and flora within Lake Chad;
- Convention on cooperation relating to the protection and development of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Areas of West and Central Africa (Abidjan, 16 March 1981);

- Accord for cooperation and consultation among central African states relating to wildlife conservation (Libreville, 16 April 1983);
- African Timber Organization (ATO).

The forestry policy intends to use a number of strategies which include:

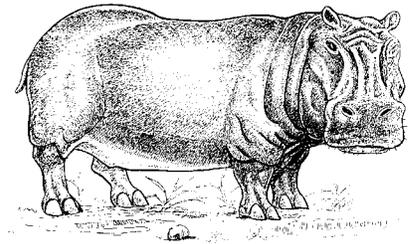
- The sensitization of local populations;
- The involvement of local populations in all activities relating to the environment;
- The creation of alternative activities capable of generating reasonable amounts of revenue, reducing human pressure on the environment, and improving environmental awareness in the local populations;

The major priorities of this policy are classified as follows:

- Establishment of a permanent forest estate;
- Quantitative and qualitative monitoring of resources;
- Management, conservation, and further development of forest biodiversity;
- Development of rural forestry (community forestry, agroforestry);
- Further development of non-timber forest products.

The main objectives to support this policy are:

- To ensure the protection of our forest heritage and participate in safeguarding the environment and the preservation of biodiversity in a sustainable manner;
- To increase the participation of local populations in forest conservation and management in order to contribute to raising their living standards;
- Develop forest resources with a view to increasing the contribution of forest production to the GDP while conserving production potential;
- Ensure resource renewal, through regeneration and reforestation with a view to perpetuating the potentials;



Hippopotamus amphibius
(Illustration: Bernardin Nabana)

- Revitalize the forestry sector by setting up an efficient institutional system and involving all the concerned parties in the management of the sector.

The implementation of our natural resources policy was begun with the signing of agreements between the Cameroon government and various nations and NGOs worldwide. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Project in Cameroon deals with the management and conservation of biodiversity in Cameroon. It is the result of four agreements:

- GEF Grant No. TF 28673 CM of 22 May 1995;
- Grant agreement between Cameroon and France of 22 December 1997;
- Grant agreement between Cameroon and Germany;
- The tripartite convention between Cameroon, Netherlands, and World Bank.

The GEF project has nine components; one is relevant for this paper as it involves the Cameroon portion of the trinational Sangha River region in southeast Cameroon covering 2,300,000 ha.

The main activities that have been developed for this site are intended to ensure protection of the three priority sites:

- The Boumba Beck Fauna Reserve (249,920 ha);
- The NKI Fauna Reserve (181,568 ha);
- The Lac Lobéké Fauna Reserve (206,528 ha).

The development of a participatory approach among the population of this region by promoting research involves several related research initiatives. For this, I stand today as a representative of the Cameroonian government, requesting assistance and collaboration from international universities. Both Yale and San Francisco State University have been exemplary in this sense (the former in the Sangha region, the latter in the Dja Reserve). I think that we are open to such exchange, indeed in great need of it in order to best integrate experimental policy approaches. Specifically, we need assistance and exchange in the following domains: bioecology; ethnobotany; anthropology; and monitoring of species.

The main results anticipated in this project are:

- To reinforce management capacity of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry personnel and also of the local populations;

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- To reinforce research on biodiversity to constitute databases on species of the region and to manage the participatory approach well;
- To reinforce management of protected areas in the sites.

A regional project dealing with sustainable conservation and utilization of central African forestry ecosystems by France (ECOFACT) has one of its components in Cameroon based at the Dja Biosphere Reserve. The main objectives of the Dja project are:

- To protect the forest ecosystem;
- To develop village forestry activities using the diversity of forest products;
- To develop the integration of rural populations in the management of resources;
- To transform the Dja Reserve into a National Park.

Results anticipated from this project are:

- Monitoring of resources and developing effective databases;
- Effective sensitization of local populations;
- Stabilize forest exploitation around the reserve;
- Preparation of a management plan for the reserve.

The second project in the Dja Reserve is the sustainable conservation and utilization of the reserve's biodiversity (Lomié Region). The main domains of this project: ecosystem conservation, research, development, agroforestry, valuation of timber forest products, integration of local populations, education, information on a regional basis reinforcing the sustainable use of forestry resources around the reserve and specifically around the Lomié Region. This project is one year old and execution of research and studies are just beginning. Results are being awaited.

The National Environmental Plan of Cameroon (NEP) is another project supported in Cameroon according to the finance convention CMR/93/G/81 of 29 October 1995 between Cameroon and UNDP. The main objective is to form a national strategy for the environment by attempting to address conservation objectives. It also concerns itself with addressing questions regarding the sustainable utilization of natural resources with the participation of the population concerned. Cameroon has adopted its NEP, which now constitutes the national forestry action program, concerning the way in which natural resources are to be used and managed.

Some other projects exist in Cameroon to help the implementation of Cameroon policy; all of them are seeking the best way to develop sustainable use of resources. For example, the Community Development Project funded by the Overseas Development Administration, currently known as the Department for International Development (DFID), is trying to help Cameroon implement procedures and norms related to its forest community. The Cameroon policy on natural resources makes provision for allocation of community forests to the "Village Community" Forestry Unit (CFU) of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. Considerable ground work is done in order to set out not only the relevant procedure to specify regulations, but also to identify the areas in which the texts are unclear and are in need of development.

In general, the government of Cameroon is now implementing the new policy of integrating populations in the process of managing natural resources. This new and difficult to implement process requires the support of universities, which we hope will orient their research in order to facilitate its implementation, especially in the areas of anthropology, socioeconomics, monitoring of resources, ethnobotany, bioecology, relations between resources, relations between populations and resources, and the biology of resources. Working in cooperation with universities in Africa and abroad, we hope to advance our conservation goals in the future.

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