

Project Title: Enhancing the rights and livelihoods of the Indigenous People (IP) in the Ngovayang Forest, Cameroon.

Project duration: 5 years (1 April 2008 – 31 March 2013)
Region/Country: Cameroon
Donors: DFID and additional funding from; BirdLife International; CBCS; Government of Cameroon; and Jensen Foundation.
Local partner: Cameroon Biodiversity Conservation Society (CBCS)
Total Project Cost: £524,138 (DFID, GBP 464,940)
Project Status: Ongoing

Project Description:

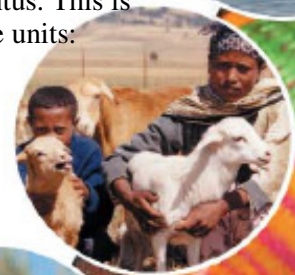
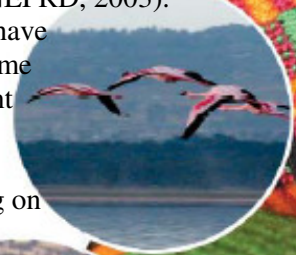
Overall Goal: To reduce the poverty of Indigenous People in Cameroon by empowering them to direct their own sustainable development.

Purpose: To improve the socio-economic conditions and reduce disparities in development and resource rights between the Bagyeli/Bakola (hunters/gatherers) and Bantu communities in and around the Ngovayang Forest, Cameroon

Rationale:

The thirty thousand Indigenous People living in Cameroon (0.2% of the population) are highly marginalised. Very few are in the civil service and none is a member of the 339 councils in Cameroon. They are very poor; few can afford the \$25 required to prepare citizenship documents (birth certificates and national identity cards). IP households earn one quarter of the average income of rural households in Cameroon (Ministry of Economic Affairs, Programming and Regional Development - MINEPRD, 2003). IP who formerly ranged over broad areas of uninterrupted forests as hunters and gatherers have increasingly been restricted to settlements and rely on their Bantu neighbours for cash income and work. The settlement of IP which began during the colonial period through Government efforts to monitor the population has continued to date as forest is lost through logging, agricultural expansion and development. The interdependent relationship with the Bantu agriculturalists, with the IP providing Bantus with labour for agriculture and Bantus relying on the IP for forest products, has become one-way dependence of the IP on the Bantus. This is compounded by the lack of recognition of many IP settlements as administrative units: IP settlements are often considered as part of the nearby Bantu communities (due to the small size of their population). This project will address three interlinked problems:

- the marginalized status of the Indigenous Bagyeli/Bakola people in the Ngovayang Forest in Cameroon, especially vis-à-vis their Bantu neighbours
- their poverty situation; and
- the increased pressure and unsustainable use of the natural resources in the forest, which again affects the livelihoods of these Indigenous People (IP).

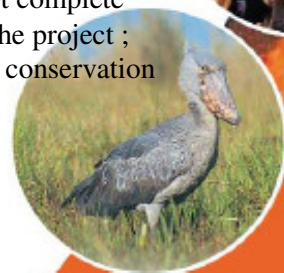
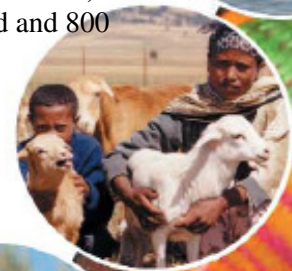


Main Activities:

- Provide support in the processing of civil status documentation for IP (Bagyeli/Bakola).
- Further develop the organisational and institutional capacities of existing IP organisations to enhance their ability to make their voices heard and claim their rights.
- Work in close collaboration with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINTAD); the National Committee on Human Rights and Freedom and other agencies involved in promoting human rights to IP issues in Cameroon.
- Put in place mechanisms for IP-Bantu conflict management, equitable benefit-sharing, collaborative planning and decision-making, and the development of joint projects/activities.
- Establish and manage a small grant programme to support sustainable small-scale enterprises that increase incomes and reduce dependence on forest resources by both IP and Bantu.
- Construct water facilities and improved houses for those IP who are willing to settle, to improve health and land ownership rights through long-term occupation and use as prescribed by customary law.
- Collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINARD) and International Centre for Research in Agro-Forestry /World Agro-Forestry Centre (ICRAF) to promote improved agricultural techniques (e.g. agroforestry) of IP and Bantu.
- Collaborate with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINSAs), to provide support and raise awareness of the IP and Bantus (including children) on HIV/AIDS, malaria and general health and hygiene.
- Investigate and implement a long-term fundraising strategy, including linkages to national and international fair-trade markets, payment for ecosystem services of the forest, etc.
- Identify and fill gaps in knowledge of the forest, its uses and its traditional and current management.
- Study and document the impact of (illegal) logging, hunting and bushmeat trade.
- Establish links to national Forest Law and governance enforcement programmes.
- Assess capacity needs in natural resource use, management and governance and organize
- Organise training courses/workshops and exchange visits to address the identified needs.
- Promote sustainable exploitation and management of economically valuable Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP) for increased income.
- Develop a management plan for the forest to promote the wise use and conservation of the resources on which the IP depend.

Progress:

- A total of eight progress reports have been produced and four distributed widely amongst various stakeholders and other interested parties;
- 472 civil documentations produced and distributed (100 NIC, and 372 birth certificates). These bring the number of people with these documents to 722 (48% of the 1500 IPs)
- Twenty new and permanent houses constructed; 2 water facilities constructed and 800 mosquito nets distributed
- Seven CBOs legalized four of them with mix Bantu/IP membership.
- Significant reduction in conflict from crop stealing.
- Current average annual IP household income is 32000 FCFA, which is more than double the amount at the beginning of the project.
- Data collection and compilation of existing information is almost complete
- Education and advocacy materials produced; 1000 flyers about the project ; 1000 flyers on biodiversity conservation, 1000 poster on species conservation and 2 issue of the CBCS newsletter each of 1000 copies.
- The project has generated enough information to prepare a natural resource map of the forest.



Lessons Learnt:

- **Project management and partnership**, especially monitoring and evaluation needs to be close and well-coordinated to ensure continuous engagement of all stakeholders especially the target beneficiaries (IPs). This is more so because of the distance between the villages involved in the action and hence the beneficiaries and inaccessibility of some sites during certain periods. Monitoring and evaluation both external and internal needs to be budgeted for adequately. This was not the case with the project.
- **Rights awareness** is the key to empowerment and development. By simply making the IPs aware of their rights has given them the voice and strength to fight for it, knowing it was not at the mercy of the Bantus, as initially assumed, but enshrined in the legal and policy framework of the country.
- **Poverty reduction**, can only be achieved if one fully understands what poverty means to the beneficiary and if efforts are made to tackle this from their perspective. It is also a multi facet subject, linked to other development sectors and therefore cannot be addressed as a standalone subject. For instance, the capacity to manage funds generated by the income generating actions aimed at alleviating poverty of the IPs has proven to be one area that can potentially result in conflict, if adequate measures are not put in place to ensure equity and transparency in the use of the funds.

Challenges:

Next Steps:

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