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**Green and Black Gold in Rural Cameroon:
Natural Resources for Local Governance,
Justice and Sustainability**

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Table of Contents

Acronyms	5
Acknowledgments	6
Executive Summary	7
Key Findings	9
Recommendations	12
Part I Introduction	15
Organization of the paper	16
Part II Preliminary Considerations and Background	18
Conceptual and theoretical issues	18
Policy considerations	21
<i>The pre-reform period and maturing of the “forestry State”</i>	22
<i>The political and social crisis in Cameroon’s forestry sector</i>	22
<i>The post-decentralization period and the significant inclusion of local communities in the forestry “game”</i>	23
Socioeconomic considerations	25
Part III Introduction to the Case Studies	27
Descriptive and analytical framework	27
The study sites	28
Local governance mechanisms	29
<i>Local Governance of Community Forests (LGCF) Mechanism</i>	29
<i>Local Governance of Para-fiscal Community Compensation (LGPCC) Mechanism</i>	30
<i>Local Governance of Annual Forestry Fees (LGAFF) Mechanism</i>	31
<i>Local Governance of Oil Compensation Mechanism (LGOC)</i>	32
Part IV Case Studies	33
The Local Governance of Community Forests (LGCF) Mechanism: Kongo and Mboké	33
<i>Attributes of local governance: a profile of institutional and organizational arrangements</i>	34
<i>Exercising the duties of local governance</i>	37
<i>Socioeconomic effects of local governance of community forests</i>	41
<i>Ecological effects</i>	45
<i>Conclusions</i>	48
The Local Governance of Para-fiscal Community Compensation (LGPCC) Mechanism: Kongo	49
<i>Attributes of local governance</i>	49
<i>Socioeconomic effects</i>	51
<i>Ecological effects</i>	52
<i>Conclusions</i>	52
The Local Governance of Annual Forestry Fees (LGAFF) Mechanism: Kongo, Mboké, and Ndoua	53
<i>Short-circuiting the redistribution and disbursement of annual forestry fees</i>	53
<i>Ecological effects</i>	54
<i>Conclusions</i>	54

The Local Governance of Oil Compensation (LGOC) Mechanism: Ndoua and Nkongmeyos/Obokoué	55
<i>Attributes of local governance and institutional and organizational arrangements</i>	56
<i>Socioeconomic effects</i>	57
<i>Ecological effects</i>	58
<i>Conclusions</i>	59
Part V Mapping of Local Governance Mechanisms	60
Diagrams and comments	60
Conclusions	66
Part VI Political Ecology of Forestry Governance and Local Dynamics	67
The omnipresence of the State, resistance at “the top,” and emasculation of powers transferred to the local sphere	67
The administrative corset of the francophone “Jacobin” model	69
Discursive options and practical attitudes rejecting “natural resource multinationals”	70
Capture of local governance by external elite, municipal authorities, and timber companies	71
Postponement of “green” democracy	72
Struggles for primitive accumulation and survival	74
Exclusion of forest minorities	75
Failed revenge against the State	75
Conclusions	76
Part VII General Conclusion	78
Annex A Research Methods	81
References	82
About the Authors	91

Boxes

Box 1: Good governance – for what?	19
Box 2: Decentralization and democratic local governance	20
Box 3: Timeline of the introduction of policy and administrative mechanisms leading to forest micro-governance in Cameroon	25
Box 4: Indicators for the measurement and assessment of governance	28
Box 5: Kongo’s community forest is launched	35
Box 6: Profile of environmental representation in Mboké community forest	37
Box 7: Intergenerational conflict in the management of Kongo community forest	44
Box 8: Management of community parafiscal compensation in Kongo, 1997-2000	51
Box 9: The administrative dilemma of the creation of community forests	68
Box 10: Claims and violence around the installation of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline	71
Box 11: The extraversion of management committees	72

Maps

Map 1: Southern Cameroon and Research Sites.....	29
Map 2: Historical transect of the Kongo community forest (2000- before logging- to 2004)	47
Map 3: Historical transect of the Mboké community forest (2000- before logging- to 2004)	48

Figures

Figure 1: Frequency of meetings between COBANKO and actors involved in the management of Kongo community forest (January 2001-January 2004).....	39
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Diagrams

Diagram 1: Local governance in the Kongo community forest.....	60
Diagram 2: Local governance of parafiscal community compensation in Kongo	61
Diagram 3: Local governance of annual forestry fees in Kongo	61
Diagram 4: Inter-mechanism comparison in Kongo	62
Diagram 5: Local governance of the Mboké community forest	63
Diagram 6: Local governance of annual forestry fees in Mboké	63
Diagram 7: Inter-mechanism comparison in Mboké.....	64
Diagram 8: Local governance of oil compensation in Ndoua.....	65
Diagram 9: Local governance of oil compensation in Nkongmeyos/Obokoué	65

Acronyms

CFA Franc	<i>Franc de la Coopération Financière en Afrique</i> (Francophone Africa Franc)
COBANKO	Kongo Community Forest Management Committee
COTCO	Cameroon Oil Transportation Company
CVD	<i>Comité villageois de développement</i> (Village development committee)
LGCF	Local governance of community forests
LGPCC	Local governance of parafiscal community compensation
LGAFF	Local governance of annual forestry fees
LGOC	Local governance of oil compensation
MINAT	<i>Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale</i> (Ministry of Territorial Administration)
MINEF	<i>Ministère de l'Environnement et des Forêts</i> (Ministry of Environment and Forests)
MINEFI	<i>Ministère des Finances</i> (Ministry of Finance)
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
SDDL	<i>Soutien au Développement Durable dans la Région du Dja</i> (Support to Sustainable Development in the Dja Region)
SNV	Netherlands Development Agency
UFA	<i>Unité Forestière d'Aménagement</i> (Forest Management Unit)

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Executive Summary

Cameroon has made bold forestry policy reforms over the last decade. Among the many aspects of these reforms, forest management decentralization is the most radical and promising. Cameroon's forest decentralization policy is predicated on the expectation that the transfer of management responsibilities and benefits to local communities will lead to social justice, positive socioeconomic change, and environmental sustainability. These forest sector reforms are part of larger democratization and governance processes. Because the proximity of decision makers to the populations they serve improves accountability and enables local representative decision makers to better match resources to needs and aspirations, policy makers and theorists believe these reforms will result in social and environmental improvements. Because democratic decentralization is supposed to improve both equity and efficiency, it is considered by many theorists and practitioners to be “good” or “improved” governance when compared to central management. The extent and promises of the progressive decentralization reforms in Cameroon are attracting growing interest from activists, practitioners, policy analysts, and researchers.

This report presents the results of research on forest management decentralization and local governance conducted in southern Cameroon in 2003 and 2004. The forest sector provides insights into the decentralization process writ large, since, as a source of national wealth, “green gold,” and of local subsistence, it is of great interest to central and local actors—engaging both in the process of reform. The study also investigated the effects on local governance of oil compensation, or “black gold,” in forested rural areas affected by the Chad-Cameroon pipeline. All of the cases explore two key questions. How is the decentralization of forest or financial management affecting local governance in forest-based communities? What are the outcomes in terms of local democracy, justice, social transformation, poverty reduction, and environmental sustainability?

Central to this analysis are four kinds of mechanisms, created by the government, through which local communities should be able to manage forests and/or related local financial benefits and revenue. Three of these governance mechanisms consist of institutional arrangements provided for under forestry decentralization legislation (to manage community forests, parafiscal community compensation and annual forestry fees), and one was developed for the local investment of oil compensation funds. These mechanisms are key elements in the transfer of benefits to local communities. They are central to the decentralization process. The research focuses on the design, operation and outcomes of these mechanisms in four village-level case studies to evaluate local governance of natural resources in forest-dependent communities.

The study reveals some positive governance outcomes in the management of community forests and parafiscal community compensation. These are less visible in the cases of annual forestry fees and oil compensation. The community forests and parafiscal community compensation mechanisms are more rooted in local decision-making power and in local organizational structures, while annual forestry fees and oil compensation mechanisms are structured more by outside institutions that transfer little or no local decision-making power to local authorities. Nevertheless, the case studies show that none of the current practices produces more-democratic local governance. In most cases, local actors—the local communities in this case—have not received significant decision-making powers, and they remain subjected to the decisions of external administrative bodies, municipal authorities, and timber companies. When communities do have powers and responsibilities, they are poorly exercised.

Five key findings account for this assessment: (i) the weakness of local organizational and institutional arrangements involved in local governance; (ii) the shortcomings of environmental representation as established in rural Cameroon; (iii) the dependence of a poorly structured environmental representation on reciprocal and triangular relations with sub-national administrative corporatisms and regional elites, leading to elite capture and injustice; (iv) the weakness—and sometimes absence—of positive socioeconomic results at the village level; and (v) the presence of indices highlighting the fleeting nature of community forests, which were meant to be tools for fighting poverty and achieving sustainability, and heralding ecological risks in the wake of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline.

The study develops two innovative approaches to micro-level governance research: (i) governance assessment via local governance indicators; and (ii) governance mapping. These new approaches were used in the case studies as complements to semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Governance indicators were identified based on the findings. These include: (i) local community decision-making potential; (ii) strength of internal laws and sanctions; (iii) anti-corruption and embezzlement arrangements; (iv) downward accountability mechanisms; and (v) positive socioeconomic outcomes. These indicators were used in a comparative assessment of the case studies through governance mapping. This mapping consisted of defining and applying a graduated scale for the measurement and evaluation of local governance, by “instrumenting” and using the series of indicators. The comparative assessment demonstrated a substantial unevenness among the governance mechanisms studied.

In addition to confirming the importance of these five indicators, the research reveals several other dynamics that must be taken into account in assessing local governance. First, there is a proliferation of local-level conflicts due to problematic power relationships and conflicting accumulation and survival strategies. Second, decentralization shifts the focus of conflict from community versus government to intra-community. Third, the non-democratic character of local forest governance institutions is not merely the result of existing forest and financial resource control practices of local communities, but also of the detrimental involvement of regional administrative and municipal corporatisms. Fourth, when poorly monitored from “the top” and poorly managed “from within,” the decentralization of natural resources management—just as any other sectoral or administrative variant—results, at best, in a partial failure. These additional factors all must also be evaluated to capture the full range of governance outcomes related to decentralization reforms.

Key Findings

Decentralizing the management of Cameroon's forests has created favorable conditions for more effective local governance of forests and forest benefits. By "order" of central decision makers and experts from Cameroon's Ministry of Environment and Forests, powers and responsibilities have been entrusted to local management committees in charge of representing local communities. Such devolution of powers, however, has only occurred under two of the four types of local governance mechanisms examined in this study: the "community forests mechanism" and the "parafiscal community compensation mechanism." Though both of these demonstrate important weaknesses with regard to local governance, the other two—the "annual forestry fees mechanism" and the "oil compensation mechanism"—have failed to devolve decision-making powers at all. The key research findings by theme include:

Representation

- The leaders of community forest committees and parafiscal community compensation management committees use their powers inappropriately. These committees resulted in little or no democratic process nor social, economic, and ecological investment.
- The local governance process is marked by the emergence of a local "environmental elite"—a group of *nouveaux riches*—alienated from the grassroots community, but linked, through a combination of financial, social, and political interests, to external elite, regional administrative corporatisms, municipal authorities, and timber companies.

Downward accountability and sanction

- The inadequate local exercise of "green" powers and authority—bad local governance—is characterized by:
 - ☞ confiscation, by management committee leaders, of decision-making regarding community forest revenues and parafiscal community compensation;
 - ☞ rampant embezzlement, corruption, and personal wealth-building strategies by management committee leaders;
 - ☞ absence of downward accountability of these leaders to the village communities that appointed them due to a lack of modern or traditional sanctions.

Central-Regional-Local relationships

- Annual forest fees and oil compensation mechanisms have failed to transfer effective and discretionary powers to local actors or establish effective local governance arrangements. The "top-down" arrangements have concentrated powers centrally (Ministerial and Cameroon Oil Transportation Company authorities) and regionally (municipal and administrative authorities).

- Village communities had very little influence over decision making concerning the issue of oil compensation: decisions (i.e. amounts to be paid) were presented to them as a *fait accompli* by various officials.

Equity and distribution

- Local elite, linked to national elite, are involved in raising community forests to the status of a personal “heritage,” in a “patrimonialization” process. In the end, many community forests do not belong to village communities but to village chiefs or external elite.
- Community-level institutional arrangements have jeopardized transparency in the distribution and investment of community oil compensation.
- The new local environmental elite’s marginalization of village communities from access to financial benefits has led to numerous conflicts and internal struggles.

Socio-economic results

- Local governance of forests and forest revenues has so far demonstrated poor socioeconomic achievements, consisting only of a few renovated huts and refurbished classrooms, some community halls, the distribution of minimal amounts of money for assistance to the most destitute, a few community agricultural initiatives, etc. The overall impact is weak.
- The circulation and investment of annual forestry fees for village communities are marked by embezzlement and corruption at the level of mayors and regional administrative authorities, via the preparation of “fictitious” projects, and resulting in the absence or insufficiency of socioeconomic development initiatives.
- The distribution of individual oil compensation has resulted in disputes that have undermined family solidarity, due to the patrimonial management practices of family heads.
- The positive long-term socioeconomic effects of pipeline revenues have been weak: individual compensation, for example, has been mainly used for daily sustenance.

Ecological results

- The chosen modes of community forest exploitation and management are not sustainable and are resulting in ecosystem degradation. This is due to: (i) weakness of institutional arrangements; (ii) corrupt practices by management committee chairmen; and (iii) the maximization of profits by forest entrepreneurs.

Comparison of the mechanisms

- The parafiscal community compensation mechanism, followed by the community forest mechanism, is the one that most conveys powers to local communities; these two mechanisms transferred real powers to the local level. In many cases, local communities have

access to money in cash and have been able to make their own decisions regarding its use.
The mechanism that least reinforces local community powers is that of annual forestry fees.

Lessons learned

Lessons learned from social research on forest management decentralization are an important source of policy information. The exploration and characterization of Cameroon's experiment in decentralized forest governance suggests the following lessons:

- the official acknowledgement of the historical and social rights of local communities to their land and adjacent forests;
- the empowerment of local communities through the transfer of powers for the exploitation and management of certain types of forests and forest benefits by the Central State;
- the effective demonstration of concerns in the policy-making sphere about poverty reduction and environmental justice through forest management reforms;
- the omnipresence of the State (and its corporatisms) all along the experiment, resulting in the emasculation of certain powers transferred to the local sphere, the lack of subsidiarity, and recentralization;
- the great influence of the restrictive Francophone “Jacobin” administrative model, which minimizes the powers of elected sub-national authorities via overbearing supervision by appointed administrative authorities and approval processes;
- the bureaucratization of the decentralized management of forests and forest benefits;
- the omnipresence at the local level of a discourse and set of attitudes concerning the rejection of “natural resource multinationals” (logging companies and COTCO);
- the strong capture of local governance by external elite, municipal authorities, administrative authorities, and logging companies;
- the permanence of struggles for primitive accumulation and survival at the local community level;
- the postponement of local “green democracy”;
- the exclusion of forest-dependent minorities, like Pygmies, from access to financial benefits;
- the failure to produce democratic forms of rural citizenship; and
- the weak capacities of local actors in the context of micro-governance.

Recommendations

The seven principal recommendations drawn from this study are presented below in order of priority:

(i) Establish democratic local representation: two of the governance mechanisms studied establish at least some of the important conditions required for democratic local governance. But these mechanisms are corrupted by the management committee members responsible for ensuring democratic local decision making. In order to promote public participation, local democracy, and social justice, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social researchers, and decision makers should reinforce downward accountability of local governance units, via:

- **responsible representation:** *support the establishment of reliable and responsible local governance organizations through electoral representation processes (rather than through currently practiced forms of co-optation);*
- **fiscal accountability:** *introduce clear financial control mechanisms that include modern and traditional sanctions;*
- **civic education of committee members:** *organize and strengthen local public forums to promote a sense of the common good (rather than personal enrichment), and to promote the advantages of public pluralism in forestry benefits management;*
- **conflict resolution arrangements:** *help to establish conflict-resolution mechanisms within decision-making bodies;*
- **monitoring:** *help define and disseminate downward accountability indicators, and mechanisms to track the effect of sanctions.*

(ii) Redefine administrative oversight: sub-national administrative and municipal authorities often interfere in the circulation of annual forestry fees and in the implementation of village micro-projects. Due to their culture of authoritarianism, administrative and municipal authorities often deny local communities their basic rights in negotiations with timber companies and in other circumstances. NGOs, researchers, and central decision makers could help to sequence, rationalize, and democratize the involvement of administrative corporatisms in local governance, through:

- **civic education of administrative authorities:** *organize meetings to raise the awareness of regional state entrepreneurs (sous-préfets and district heads) of their role and the results expected from decentralized forest management and democratic local governance;*
- **fiscal transparency and accountability:** *help establish mechanisms that can lead to the transfer in cash of part or all of the 10 per cent of annual forestry fees that should be transferred to and used by village communities for socioeconomic purposes;*

- **research of alternatives for annual forestry fee management:** *organize meetings with the Legislature and high-level decision makers to study the issue of transferring annual forestry fee management powers to local communities;*
- **limitation of administrative intervention to appropriate and timely roles:** *help to define and implement a sequenced strategy of involvement rather than the full and permanent involvement of administrative and municipal authorities in the local governance of forestry benefits, especially annual forestry fees;*
- **fight against corruption:** *organize anti-corruption campaigns involving civic education, monitoring, and sanctions in the forestry sector.*

(iii) Clarify the role of NGOs: NGOs with active field experience have, over time, developed effective methods for supporting democratic local governance. Further, they are very familiar with the village environment. Decision makers and donors should design a strategy to enhance the role of NGOs in the decentralized management of financial benefits and their investment in socioeconomic developments, by:

- **giving significant room to NGOs:** *solicit NGOs' expertise in monitoring the democratic, productive, and rational management of community forest revenues;*
- **transferring a “support to local development” mandate to NGOs:** *solicit NGOs' expertise in preparing simple village development plans for the use of forest revenues;*
- **allocating additional financial resources to NGOs:** *transfer small amounts of money from the so-called “highly indebted poor countries fund” to NGOs, so that these will have sufficient resources to prepare coherent strategies for investing part of the forestry fees intended for village communities into socioeconomic micro-projects, in collaboration with the relevant communities and municipal authorities;*
- **giving full recognition to civil society in forest and benefit management issues:** *promote the meaningful inclusion of civil society and community-based organizations in the forestry debate.*

(iv) Clarify the roles of the Central Government: decentralization does not mean marginalization of the Central State. Decentralization models that have produced positive results are those that have managed to strike a balance between centralized and decentralized responsibilities. Accordingly, concerned actors should strengthen the interface between central and local actors, through:

- **improved monitoring of Central Government staff:** *help and/or encourage the Central State to establish mechanisms for monitoring their regional representatives involved in the management of forestry benefits;*
- **less-invasive monitoring of management activities:** *accompany the Central State in establishing flexible, non-directive mechanisms to supervise decentralized forest management generally, and more limited roles for central ministries in the local arena; help central ministries (particularly the new Ministry of Forests, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, and the new Ministry for Programming and Planning) to redefine their respective roles in the local governance of natural resources.*

(v) Establish public review processes: to this end, one could enable local communities to express their opinions with regard to operations such as land expropriation by the State for public utility, as for the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, by:

- **informing local people:** *prior to any project, organize simple and clear campaigns to inform the rural public about its political, social, economic, and ecological stakes.*
- **organizing local communities to respond and negotiate:** *promote, with the support of NGOs, the establishment of community-level structures or organizations for negotiation with this type of project, as well as community decision-making structures.*

(vi) Reinforce local capacities: managing innovations relating to decentralized management requires the right capacities. An assessment of the management of community forests and parafiscal compensation by current committee leaders, for example, reveals severe weaknesses. NGOs can reinforce the technical and administrative capacities of local actors by:

- **assessing capacity needs:** *identify the capacity-building needs of local actors;*
- **well-planned training:** *prepare and implement the appropriate training modules.*

(vii) Establish monitoring protocols: research organizations should prepare monitoring and review standards for local governance of natural resources by:

- **establishing socioeconomic indicators:** *develop and test socioeconomic monitoring and assessment indicators for local governance of benefits accruing from natural resources;*
- **establishing technical indicators:** *develop and test ecological monitoring and assessment indicators for local governance of natural resources.*

Part I

Introduction

Social science expanded its field of observation and analysis considerably over the twentieth century. The relationships between “man,” or human societies, and nature—the physical environment—were one of the founding objects of this effort and one focal point of an attempt to achieve greater understanding (Klausner 1971: 5-35). The precursors of the scientific approach to relationships and interactions between humans and nature¹, such as Montesquieu (1964: 2-22 [1748]) and Ritter (1861: 5-18), laid the theoretical bases for conceptualization and provided the groundwork for attempts to empirically adjust the framework, which lasted throughout the twentieth century. This initial effort, however, focused essentially on the human-nature binomial. Thus, in the early years of the twentieth century, the dominant trends in the literature allowed no place for policies—that is, the laws, institutions, rules, and prescriptions governing the formal regulation of relations between human societies and the environment. This missing link was first taken into consideration toward the middle of the century.

The scientific result of this process, which came to be known as rural sociology and focused on the triangular interactions among social organization, policies and laws, and land issues, emerged in the 1930s (Sorokin and Zimmerman 1930: 25-67; Buie 1944: 269-277). Later, while rural sociology began to strengthen its conceptual and methodological apparatus by paying increasing attention to environmental issues (Field and Burch 1988: 5-23), other paradigmatic frameworks would gradually find their own place in the new scientific approach now nearing maturity. This is the case of ecological economics (Costanza 1989: 2-4; Douguet and O'Connor 2003: 233-239), environmental economics (Faucheux and Noël 1995), environmental law (ELI 1989: 4; Kaswan 1997: 256-263), political ecology (Watts 2000: 21-26), or ecopolitics (Sajor and Resurreccion 1998: 213-235), social ecology (Worlope 2000: 5-19), environmental sociology (Buttel 1996: 56-60), and natural resource sociology (Field and Burch 1988: 10-18; Field *et al.* 2002: 213-218). The present paper may be placed at the intersection of natural resource sociology and political ecology. The former focuses on improved resource management and the promotion of equity and policy innovation (Buttel 2002: 206-208); the latter builds its theoretical tools and pathways on the struggles generated by different forms of access to and control of resources, through tangled relations of power (Peet and Watts 1996; Peluso and Watts 2001: 24-25).

Cameroon's land area comprises 475,000 km², of which 225,000 km² are covered by humid forest; 175,000 km² of that forest is designated for commercial logging. Nearly four million people, including Pygmy groups, live in and for this forest amphitheatre, which provides a living and many basic assets for local communities (Ndoye *et al.* 1998: 2-7; Lescuyer 2003: 13-14; ter Heedge and Cheumani 2004: 11-14; Oyono *et al.* 2004; Diaw and Kusumanto 2004: 86-96), forms part of their culture (Akwah Neba 1998: 10-19; Oyono 2002b: 334-355), and generates income. Cameroon's forest has, since the time of German (1884-1918) and French-British (1918-1960) colonization, represented a source of income and profit both for foreign logging companies (Buttoud 1991: 4-57; Oyono 2004: 113-115) and the State. The timber sector represents nearly eight percent of the industrial product. The total turnover of the various components of the timber sector amounted to approximately \$320 million in 1997.² By 2002, the figure had risen to almost \$345 million (World

¹ A whole range of disciplines would later develop.

² All sums are in US dollars unless otherwise noted.

Bank 2002). In less than a decade, State tax revenue from the forestry sector rose from \$16.4 million in 1991 to \$46.1 million in 1998 (Ndzana Modo 2003: 4). By 2002, this had risen to nearly \$47 million. Since colonial times and increasingly today, local communities have believed that they too—like the State and the logging companies—have the right to a significant portion of the revenue produced by the forest.

In addition to studying local forest governance, this paper also examines the local effects of oil being transported across Cameroon from Chad. An international consortium comprised of Exxon, Chevron, and Petronas established 300 oil rigs (Eriksson and Hagströmer 2005: 40-44), which have been in operation since October 2003, in the Doba region of southern Chad (Wax 2004: A16). Since Chad is landlocked, the oil has to be taken via pipeline from Doba to Cameroon's port of Kribi on the Atlantic Ocean.³ Construction began in 2000 and ended in early 2004 (Gary and Reisch 2005: 23-28). The consortium has forecasted production of 225,000 barrels per day and total revenue for Chad of approximately \$1.7 billion (Eriksson and Hagströmer 2005: 40-44). The pipeline is 1,070 km long, of which 890 km cross Cameroonian territory. It cuts through provinces, divisions, districts, and 238 villages. Floristic sites in and around the villages were destroyed when it was built. Thus, in addition to the general expectations aroused by the project in rural Cameroon, local communities anticipated receiving some sort of financial compensation. The Government of Cameroon and the World Bank expected that the pipeline would act as a lever for economic growth and sustainable development, attracting investment, creating jobs, and improving conditions in the countryside (CED 2002: 3).

This paper begins by looking at the issues raised by local governance of Cameroon's forests. It examines power relations within decentralized management, the arrangements made by actors (and areas) involved in decentralization, and local community management of financial benefits related to logging and oil compensation.⁴ It then sets in perspective the relationship between local governance (of forests and of oil compensation) and environmental and social justice, human well-being, and ecological sustainability. The paper proposes two tools for monitoring forestry reforms and local governance of natural resources and related benefits: (i) local government indicators and (ii) local governance mapping. Finally, in an approach that borrows both from political ecology and natural resource sociology, the paper looks analytically—in light of “bottom-up politics”—at the issues of equity, justice, and ecological sustainability, on the one hand, and popular claims and conflicts, both open and hidden, on the other.

Organization of the paper

The paper is organized in seven main parts. The first part, above, establishes its general disciplinary orientation. The second part examines various conceptual, theoretical, and contextual, notably policy and socioeconomic, considerations. The village case studies and four local governance mechanisms are introduced in Part III. Part IV uses empirical data from the village case studies to produce a detailed description of each of these mechanisms (powers devolved, transferred, or received,

³ The “Chad-Cameroon pipeline project” is a huge scheme, much criticized by environmentalists and other activists, that raises many controversial issues. Nevertheless, only the local effects of the pipeline in Cameroon—mainly oil compensation—will be examined here.

⁴ Evaluating oil compensation means analyzing: (i) the powers that village communities had over the process; (ii) locally-made arrangements—if any—concerning compensation; and (iii) the socioeconomic and ecological effects.

available internal arrangements, the exercise of devolved powers, and socioeconomic and ecological results). The fifth part provides local governance maps and an evaluation of local governance indicators. Part VI analyzes the findings and explores the politics of local governance. The final part provides a general conclusion and some basic, broad recommendations.

Part II

Preliminary Considerations and Background

Conceptual and theoretical issues

The origins of this paper rest on ideas of decentralization and governance, and of environmental justice. There has always been a logical, functional link between decentralization and governance (Halfani and Nzomo 1995: 33-36; Honlonkou 2004: 3-4; Ribot 2004a: 25-43; Baviskar 2004: 27-31). Underlying this link at the sub-national level, the former, decentralization, nourishes and brings life to the latter, governance, and vice versa (Mehta 1998: 3-18; Salmerón Castro 2002: 32-38; Contreras 2004: 9-14). These two notions must therefore be placed in their respective theoretical frameworks. In its most prosaic expression, decentralization is an act by which the State cedes its powers and resources to sub-national actors and lower-level territorial and political-administrative bodies (Mawhood 1993: 4-6; Prud'homme 1995: 2002-206; Manor 1999: 4-5; Ribot 2002: 4-7; Larson 2002: 18-22). In their scale of preferences (Rondinelli 1998: 3-7)⁵, liberal theoreticians of decentralization, as well as development agency experts, promote what they call democratic or political decentralization (Crook and Manor 1998: 6-17; Sundar 2001: 2008-2013; Ribot 2003a: 5; Anderson 2003: 28-30; Luyuma and Kutugeka 2004: 3-9), presented as the variant that leads to better results for all citizens.⁶ Its comparative advantage is that it entails powers and resources being transferred to elected authorities, who, in exercising their powers, should be downwardly accountable to those who elected them (Manor 1999: 6-22; Larson 2004b: 1-4; Ribot 2004b: 4-9 and 13-18).

Once long outdated, the concept of governance only took on new meaning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when “governance” began to be significantly influenced by the rhetoric of the “fight against corruption” (Kaufmann 2003: 2-7; Kaufmann *et al.* 2003: 3-4). According to its proponents (e.g. the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and United Nations Development Program), corruption and misgovernance go hand in hand (see also Kaufmann *et al.* 2001: 5-12; Owusu 2003: 1656-1660; Rock and Bonnett 2004: 1001-1004; Barr *et al.* 2004: 3-10). Since then, in light of various studies and relevant research, it has expanded its lexical register, as well as its conceptual and theoretical domain (Kaufmann *et al.* 1999: 3-10; Chong and Calderon 2002: 69-76; Kaufmann *et al.* 2003: 4-32). Governance is now defined in general as the way in which power is exercised by the State or any other authority, from the perspective of pluralist and liberal democracy (see Box 1).

Kaufmann *et al.* (2003: 2) and Kaufmann *et al.* (2004: 6-7) consider governance to be the exercise of authority through formal and informal institutions for the common good of the citizenry. This theoretical paradigm generates, includes, and reproduces the following empirical variables (Kaufmann *et al.* 2003: 5-6): “(1) the process (and culture) of selecting, monitoring, and replacing governments; (2) the capacity to formulate and implement sound policies and deliver public services; and (3) the respect of citizens and the State for the institutions that govern economic and social

⁵ This is based on the following variables: good local governance, efficiency, proximity of services, popular participation, responsible representation, downward accountability, top-down reporting, local democracy, equity, justice, and collective well-being.

⁶ In contrast, so-called administrative or formal decentralization—one of the most common variants—is simply an extension of the State (Ribot 2003a: 5; Larson 2004a: 55-58). It is based on the transfer of powers to authorities appointed by the central State, who, therefore, are accountable primarily to central government rather than to local communities. It is considered to be the “weakest” form of decentralization.

interactions among them.” More specifically, governance would appear to consist of all the institutions, both formal (laws) and informal (traditions and rules), through which authority and power are conceived and exercised. According to Mehta (1998: 3-4), governance becomes the series of procedures for action and behaviors which form the basis for the exercise of power and—through public participation, responsibility, and accountability—make it possible to achieve well-being and sustainability. For Oyugi (2000: 5-6), governance is synonymous with “primacy of law,” “justice,” “popular participation in public affairs,” “transparency,” and “liability.”

Box 1: Good governance – for what?

“From the human development perspective, good governance is democratic governance. Democratic governance means that:

- people’s human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected, allowing them to live with dignity;
- people have a say in decisions that affect their lives;
- people can hold decision makers accountable [...];
- inclusive and fair rules, institutions and practices govern social interactions [...];
- the needs of future generations are reflected in current policies [...];
- economic and social policies aim at eradicating poverty and expanding the choices that all people have in their lives.”

Source: UNDP (2002: 51)

The conceptual and theoretical framework previously developed regarding governance was more oriented towards national governance, or governance at the level of a country (Kaufmann *et al.* 1999: 2-14; Beck *et al.* 2000: 13-50; UNDP 2002: 50-78, Karsenty 2002: 2-5; Rock and Bonnett 2004: 999-1005). The small body of literature that looks at local governance—or micro-governance—is both fragmentary and marginal. This paper hopes to help expand our understanding of the local dimension, particularly local conditions for the production of good governance systems, following Gonzales de Asis (2001: 175-182)⁷ and Honlonkou (2004: 2-6). Mawhood (1993: 4-13), Crook and Manor (1994: 6-23), Smoke (2003: 7-10), Resosudarmo (2004: 110-115), and Oyono (2004: 3-7) note that, given the logical and functional juncture between the notions of decentralization and local governance (Barro 1996: 2-13; Mehta 1998: 3-18; Oyugi 2000: 5-7; Salmerón Castro 2002: 32-38; Ribot 2003b: 56-60), the powers transferred to local authorities and representatives during current waves of forest management decentralization in many developing countries have produced conditions for the development of new local governance systems (see Box 2; see also Sandbrook 1993).

To give a minimalist definition, it could be said that local governance is a transposition of macro-dimensions to the micro or local level—that is, all those local practices that can be derived from macro-dimensions and global considerations of governance (Töttemeyer 2000: 96-112; Nkrumah 2000: 55-64; Gonzales de Asis 2001: 175-182; Cousins and Kepe 2004: 41-47). In other words, local

⁷ Gonzales de Asis’s work considers a range of issues related to good governance and controlling corruption, and looks both at whole countries, to identify the macro-dimensions of governance and corruption, and at enterprises and councils, to identify the micro-dimensions. Hellman *et al.* (2000: 4-13) worked along the same lines, measuring governance at national level and at enterprise level.

governance has to take account of all the institutions (Ostrom 1999: 6-8), rules, arrangements, and types of political, economic, and social modes of action that, in the local context, form the basis for exercising local authority over resources and benefits, particularly in the wake of specific power transfers such as those discussed in this paper.

According to the paradigmatic continuum introduced at the beginning of this chapter, when concomitant maximum implementation of democratic decentralization (of forest management) and (forest) micro-governance are achieved, the result is justice, equity, well-being, and environmental sustainability (Ribot 2003a: 5; Ribot and Oyono 2006: 4-5). The idea of justice, here taken to mean equitable access to resources and equitable vertical and horizontal distribution of profits (Ribot 1998: 316-320), is central to theories of decentralization and of local governance (Manor 1999: 12-34; Kaufman *et al.* 2001: 17-20; Ribot 2003a: 5; Meynen and Doornbos 2004: 236-253).⁸ The literature on the forest—or on natural resources and the environment in general—contains a wealth of reflections, descriptive considerations, and analyses of the issues of justice and of equity (Foster 1993: 746-747; Keck and Sikkink 1995; Kaswan 1997: 229-237; Hvalof 2000: 92-110; Schroeder 2000: 53-88; Watts 2000: 21-26; Assembe 2004: 2-3; and others). These represent ways in which the concept of environmental justice has been applied to a Third World context.

Box 2: Decentralization and democratic local governance

“Decentralization is a process of transferring power to popularly elected local governments. Transferring power means providing local governments with greater political authority (e.g. to convene local elections or establish participatory processes), increased financial resources (e.g. through transfers or greater tax authority), and/or more administrative responsibility. Democratic local governance is the process of governing democratically at the local level, viewed broadly to include not only the machinery of government but also the community at large and its interaction with local authorities (use of the term ‘local’ refers to all sub-national levels of government).”

Source: CDG (2000: 6)

According to Keck and Sikkink (1995: 409), Kaswan (1997: 223), and Watts (2000: 24-25), environmental justice—one of the aims of democratic decentralization and local governance—can be described, firstly, as a series of concerns and measures to ensure access for minorities and local communities to the financial and material benefits resulting from the exploitation of the resources that surround them. This form of environmental justice refers to “distributive justice,” since it is linked to sharing and redistribution (see also Dixit *et al.* 1996: 1140-1145).⁹ Secondly, environmental justice includes all the concerns and measures related to local communities’ access to decision making regarding the sharing of environmental benefits (Kaswan 1997: 223; Nguiffo 1998: 102-111; Veit and Benson 2004: 13-15; Diaw and Kusumanto 2004: 85-96). This form of environmental justice refers to “political justice,” since it is linked to decision-making.

⁸ The term “environmental justice” is used in this sense (Foster 1993: 746-747; Kaswan 1997: 229-237).

⁹ The two main concerns of environmental justice were initially structured around minorities and deprived social groups: Blacks and American Indians in the United States (Foster 1993: 746; Kaswan 1997: 221), Indians in South America (see, for example, Zerner 2000: 3-21), and the Pygmies of central Africa (Dyson 1992: 213-219; Bigombé Logo 2001: 4-5; Bigombé Logo 2002: 5-6; Oyono 2004a: 121-127; Diaw and Kusumanto 2004: 85-96). It was then expanded to include all local/rural communities in developing countries. See, for example, Peluso (1992: 6-54) when she talks about “Rich Forests Poor People.”

The paradigmatic continuum discussed in this paper also emphasizes the correlation that should exist between decentralization, local governance, justice, and the sustainability of forest ecosystems. The democratic decentralization of natural resource management is a lever for good governance and for sustainable development. This means that, if the powers transferred by the State through decentralization are used democratically at the local level, distributive (environmental) justice should emerge and, in its turn, should generate a high sense of ecological responsibility at the local and community level. If, on the other hand, local governance is detrimental and hence there is environmental injustice, local communities will contribute to an “eco-apocalypse”¹⁰ (Oyono 2002a: 6-7; Oyono 2005: 184), or the accelerated and irreversible degradation of resources. Where there is good local governance of natural resources in general, and of forests in particular, it should improve the management systems, forms of access to resources and resulting benefits, and local communities’ means of subsistence.

This research was designed to test, for the case of Cameroon, the theoretical construction according to which the decentralization of forest management—if democratic—necessarily reproduces good local governance; and secondly, whether this leads to environmental justice and sustainability. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the analysis of four governance mechanisms and a series of “governance indicators,” we did not find many characteristics of democratic decentralization in any of the cases studied. Hence our findings make it possible to test the contrary proposition—if undemocratic decentralization leads to poor governance, and to the failure of environmental justice and sustainability.

Policy considerations

Cameroon began restructuring its forestry sector at the beginning of the 1990s under the guidance of the World Bank (Brunner and Ekoko 2000: 63-66; Ekoko 2000: 131). The reforms were initiated in a buoyant context of democratic transition, the awakening of civil society, and demands for public freedoms and greater well-being (Karsenty 1999: 7-9; Brunner and Ekoko 2000: 63-66; Erdmann 2003: 4-7; Karsenty 2004: 51-60). Increasingly clear and frequent calls for justice and equity regarding access to the financial benefits of logging were also being made (Mimbimi Essono 2004: 161-164; Oyono 2004c: 175-177). Many years after independence, at the beginning of the 1960s, the legal framework for the management of Cameroon’s forests—the founding texts of national forestry policy—were still based on colonial logics, integrally linked to the French Decree of March 8, 1926, which had set up the forests of the national estate under the direct authority of the French High Commissioner and, particularly, the Decree of May 3, 1946, which transferred all formal powers over forests to the colonial State (Bigombé Logo 1996: 3-6; Diaw and Njomkap 1998: 22-25; Muam Chi 1999: 25-26). It is important to mention here some historical points related to the concerns of this paper.

¹⁰ This outcome is regularly predicted by young people in Cameroon’s forest zone. If the youth themselves are unable to obtain secure access to logging benefits, they would prefer to see the “end of the forest” and a resultant loss for all stakeholders—the logging companies, the State, and local communities (Oyono 2004a: 34-35). This attitude, cultivated and nourished by injustice, has led to extremism and violent movements in some communities, such as the Ogoni in Nigeria (Watts 2000: 23-29) and the bloody social movement led by activist Moujahid Dokubo-Asari, related to the issue of oil exploitation, in south-east Nigeria (Thorin 2004: 68).

The pre-reform period and maturing of the “forestry State”

The pre-reform period began with German colonization (1884-1914), took shape during the joint French and British mandates (1919-1960/1961)¹¹, and extended into the years after independence, until the beginning of the 1990s. It was characterized by the legal and absolute hegemony of the State over the country's forests. Local communities were resolutely excluded by an ownership system and property regime that only recognized western rights of extraction (Diaw and Njomkap 1998: 25; Diaw 2004: 50-62; Oyono 2005b: 114-118; Jum and Oyono 2005: 38-39). While the State thus affirmed its sovereignty over forest resources and their related profits, a process of capitalist accumulation was being consolidated, with the appearance of increasing numbers of European logging companies (Hédin 1930: 12-25; Rice and Counsell 1993: 4-17; Oyono 2004d: 107-115).

Since independence, in contrast to some other States in the central African sub-region¹², Cameroon has introduced successive laws governing forestry and land issues: Forestry Order No 73/18 of May 25, 1973; Land Tenure and State Lands Orders No 74-1 and No 74-2 of July 6, 1974; and Forestry Law No 81/13 of December 27, 1981. However, these legal constructs did nothing to alter the colonial strategy (Baker 2004: 10-20). Rather, as is pointed out by Bigombé Logo (1996: 3-6) and by Karsenty (1999: 8-10), they were in fact a profound reaffirmation of that strategy. The reproduction of exclusive State hegemony over the forests was accompanied (and expanded) by capitalist accumulation in the area of commercial and industrial logging (Buttoud 1991: 4-15; Bomba 1992: 43-69; Baker 2004: 10-20) and the increased marginalization of local communities in decision-making and access to financial benefits (Bomba 2004a: 214-216; Bomba 2004b: 254-261; Diaw and Kusumanto 2004: 85-96).

Several implications of this historical and policy background are highlighted: (i) a strategic alliance between logging multinationals and national decision-making bodies (Buttoud 1991: 4-7; Rice and Counsell 1993: 3-15); (ii) the emergence of a *conflit de langage* (conflict of language) over “rights to the forest” between the State and local communities (Bigombé Logo 1994: 10; Oyono 1995: 3-7; Nguiebouri and Oyono 2003: 9; Oyono 2005b: 114-118) and of a resilient legal dualism¹³ (Bomba 1992: 5-13; Diaw and Njomkap 1998: 14-26; Muam Chi 1999: 25-26; Diaw 2002: 13); (iii) the creation of a *cordon sanitaire* between the local communities on the one side and the State and timber multinationals on the other, the principle aim being to render the forestry issue taboo (Labrousse and Vershave 2002: 4-7; Oyono 2004c: 174); and (iv) an increase in different types of violence related to access to forest ecosystems and their financial benefits.

The political and social crisis in Cameroon's forestry sector

¹¹ When Germany lost the First World War, it also lost its African colonies, including Cameroon, the jewel in its crown. The League of Nations then placed the country under a French-British mandate.

¹² As is the case, for example, of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has only just replaced the 1947 Belgian colonization Forestry Code in 2002 (Oyono and Lelo 2006, forthcoming).

¹³ The idea of “legal dualism” in this case refers to the cohabitation since colonial times of traditional forestry/land tenure systems and the modern western, written, forestry/land tenure system. The colonial system led to the disqualification of the traditional. After an institutional crisis, the latter either withered away or was “domesticated” in certain cases, or dismantled in others. According to Karsenty (1999: 7), the final result of this institutional tension was the relegation of local forest and land tenure to the “less important field of ‘customary rights’”; see also Diaw (2002: 13-15).

At the end of the 1980s, Cameroon, like several other African countries, was plunged into economic recession and slid into an increasingly informal economy. It was also a time of political unrest, provoked by the emergence of new forms of political and social identity (Brunner and Ekoko 2000: 67; Mbembe 2000: 20) and new discourse based on the demand for democracy (Mbuagbo and Nef Fru 2003: 134-140), public freedoms, and general well-being. Among the demands articulated at this time, local communities were calling for equity and security of access to financial benefits from the public management of forests—“their forests” (Bigombé Logo 1994: 10; Bigombé Logo 1996: 3-6; Oyono 2004e: 96-97)—and often against a background of discursive and material violence (Verhagen and Einthoven 1993: 3-10; Mimbimi Essono 2004: 163-166). They wanted to “eat and drink” with the money from these forests (Plouvier *et al.* 2002: 25-26; Oyono 2005b: 130-140). In response to this national crisis—and under pressure from the Bretton Woods institutions (Ekoko 1997: 11-12; Essama Nssah and Gockowski 2000: 5-14; Ekoko 2000: 131; Brown 2002: 2-5; Nguiffo 2004: 191-192)—the Government introduced a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP).

The Government also undertook to reform the entire system, by, *inter alia*, democratizing the public sphere (see the Laws of December 19 and 21, 1990, on freedom of association and on political pluralism) and restructuring the forestry sector (Law No 94/01 of January 20, 1994). These reforms were part of a broad push to promote (good) governance at the national level (Karsenty 1999: 8-10; Brown 2002: 2-3; RdC/PNG 2004: 37-63; Karsenty 2004a). The ambivalent implications of these responses to the crisis “within the system” of the forestry sector included: (i) intensification of logging, a conditionality of the implementation of the SAP (Kuwik 1996: 18; Brunner and Ekoko 2000: 65-69; Essama Nssah and Gockowski 2000: 5-14); (ii) increased donor influence over decision making regarding the restructuring of the country’s forestry sector (Ekoko 1997: 11); and (iii) the inclusion of both the open demands and the “hidden discourse” of local communities on the redistribution of financial benefits generated by forest exploitation (Nguiffo 1998: 105-111; Efoua 2002a: 3-7; Bigombé Logo 2003: 18-22; Oyono 2004e: 97-100; Assembe 2004: 4-8).

The post-decentralization period and the significant inclusion of local communities in the forestry “game”

The decentralization of forest management—inaugurated with the January 1994 Forestry Law—is thus seen as a key factor in the reforms designed and implemented to overcome the crisis throughout the system in Cameroon (Brown 2002: 2-5; Baker 2004: 10-20). Although it was a policy, economic, administrative, and social requirement, decentralization was also a specific response to the forestry sector.¹⁴ Though closely linked to the social and political demands mentioned above, the decentralization of forest management was nevertheless a “supply” put forward by the central State, rather than a “demand” from below. It was therefore initiated and given specific content by the central State. It was “a change within changes.”¹⁵

¹⁴ See Vabi *et al.* (2000: 3-4), Sobze (2003: 88-100), Bigombé Logo (2004: 311-312), and Bomba (2004: 292-294).

¹⁵ The 1994 Forestry Law is rightly seen as one of the spearheads of the forestry reforms introduced in Cameroon over the last ten years. To support these reforms, the Government of Cameroon is working in collaboration with donors, as well as with many bilateral and multilateral entities (see Bomba 2004a: 227-228). At the sub-regional level (Congo Basin), the Government enjoys the support of initiatives such as the Conference on Dense and Humid Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa (CEFDHAC) and Congo Basin Forest Partnership/Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CBFP/CARPE), which work on issues of forest sustainability and governance, as well as several international organizations, such as the World

Forest management decentralization in Cameroon is characterized by the central State's transfer to outlying actors, primarily local communities and rural councils, of managerial powers over, and benefits accruing from, forests. It thus expands the scope of popular participation in forest management and in the management of the financial resources this generates. Moreover, the provisions introduced under the 1994 Forestry Law enlarge the area of powers over—and of local communities' access to—financial benefits generated by commercial logging. This includes a Ministry of Environment and Forests circular requesting logging companies working in forest units known as *ventes de coupe* to pay compensation, to be used to establish socioeconomic amenities in neighboring villages (Circular Letter No. 370/LC/MINEF/CAB of February 22, 1996).

There are also various Finance bills (1996, 1997, 1998) regarding fiscal and financial provisions for the forestry and wildlife sectors, as well as the joint Ministry of Finance (MINEFI)/Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT) *Arrêté* no. 000122 (April 29, 1998)¹⁶ establishing procedures for the use of logging revenue intended for neighboring village communities. All these legal and administrative provisions form the basic framework for local forest governance (see Box 3). These provisions appear to have continued to inspire the Government in its search for greater environmental justice, as demonstrated by the procedures introduced to pay compensation to local communities for the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project.

The basic aim of the post-decentralization period is to achieve the following results: (i) the introduction and reproduction of a new structure of relations between the central and local levels; (ii) the “management” of decentralization and of local governance; (iii) the promotion of village/local democracy through the decentralized management of forests and related financial benefits; (iv) the internalization of governance practices and the production of a local structure to support forest governance; and (v) the emergence of environmental justice and social equity.

Conservation Union (IUCN), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the Netherlands Development Agency (SNV).

¹⁶ MINAT has since become the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD). The Joint *Arrêté* on forestry fees is applied to logging companies exploiting concessions (forest units of up to 200,000 ha). Forest concessions are made up of Forest Management Units (UFA). The *Arrêté* was preceded in 1996 by a MINEF Circular Letter on the payment of CFA 1000 (US\$ 1.50) for each cubic meter of timber logged from the *ventes de coupe* (forest units of less than 2500 ha) to forest-edge communities.

Box 3: Timeline of the introduction of policy and administrative mechanisms leading to forest micro-governance in Cameroon

1988	Review of the 1981 Forestry Law initiated
1988	First round of the Structural Adjustment Program approved
1990	Laws on Freedom of Association and Political Pluralism passed
1992	Law on Common Initiative Groups and Cooperatives (Rural Reform) passed
1994	Devaluation of the CFA Franc
1994	New Forestry Law passed
1995	Implementing Decree of the Forestry Law passed
1996	Circular letter No 370/LC/Ministry of Environment and Forests (MINEF)/CAB on the CFA 1000/m3 tax issued
1998	Joint <i>Arrêté</i> No 000122/MINEFI/MINAT on annual forestry fees signed
2000	<i>Arrêté</i> No 1466 MINEF/DAPE/CEP/FD on hunting zones and community-managed hunting zones in East Cameroon
2001	<i>Arrêté</i> No 0518/MINEF on the right of pre-emption signed
2002	Final version of the community forests Manual published
2004/05	Suspension of many community forests by the MINEF, for “bad management”

Socioeconomic considerations

Although Cameroon is today considered a low-income country, it had the reputation until the mid-1980s of enjoying a fairly stable economy (Burnham and Sharpe 1997: 6-8; Brunner and Ekoko 2000: 59) and “harmonious growth” (Roubaud 1994: 53). However, at the end of the 1980s, the country entered a cycle of deep economic recession (RoC 2003: 11-17). The factors explaining this recession were the fall in agricultural commodity prices, external and domestic imbalances, and non-accumulating internal practices (Brunner and Ekoko 2000: 59-60; Wunder 2003: 177-182; Wunder and Sunderlin 2004: 242). Gross domestic product (GDP) dropped by 6 per cent each year between 1986 and 1993. In 1998-99, under pressure, Cameroon signed its first structural adjustment agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF); the SAP principally contemplated improving the fiscal balance and privatization reforms (Konings 1996: 245-252). One result was the disappearance of the “urban model of well-being” and an unprecedented swing to economic and social informalization (Roubaud 1994: 54-66; Courade 2004: 16-23).¹⁷ In 1994, the local currency (CFA franc) was devalued by 50 percent. The effect of this was even greater insecurity and increasing poverty for most of the population.

The macro-dimensions and micro-dimensions of the economic conditions prevailing at the beginning of the 1990s have significant implications for relations between local communities and forest resources (Courade 1994; Tchoungui *et al.* 1995: 5-14; Oyono 1998b: 558): (i) an urban exodus, with the return to the villages of those excluded by the urban system (those made redundant when enterprises were privatized or closed down, unemployed graduates, early retirees, participants in the informal economy, etc.); (ii) the appearance in rural Cameroon of human and intellectual capital with a more “externalized”—or more “modern”—vision of community issues, with greater

¹⁷ On the extent of the recession and its effects on the social fabric, see Roubaud (1994: 54-66), Tchoungui *et al.* (1995: 2-15), Brunner and Ekoko (2000: 58-61), and Wunder (2003: 177-182).

capacity for other types of action (Oyono 1998a: 11-12; Oyono and Temple 2003: 70-71; Fongang 2004); (iii) the intensification of food crop production and an increase in the number of farming groups and rural organizations; and (iv) the search for alternatives to improve rural means of subsistence.

Cameroon has a population of 15.5 million, of which 45 percent is urban and 55 percent, rural; its current annual GDP growth rate is 3 percent.¹⁸ Nearly 56 percent of the population is living in poverty (Mosser-Cléaud 2003: 67; RoC 2003: 11-18). But it appears that Cameroon's economic crisis is reversible, and a gradual movement towards recovery can be detected from the end of the 1990s (Wunder 2003: 182). After a long period of disturbances, the implementation of a three-year economic and financial program in 1997-2000 produced a noticeable improvement in macro-economic stability and laid the basis for sustained economic growth. In May 2000, Cameroon's eligibility for the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) was declared by the IMF and the World Bank (the Decision Point). In Late April 2006, Cameroon reached the HIPC Completion Point, which cancels part of the external debt of the country and should ideally lead to significant budget savings (FCFA 140 millions per year). Nevertheless, the combination of forest policy changes and the shock waves from the economic recession are leading to a polarization of expectations regarding rural well-being and living standard, which have now crystallized on forestry revenue and on projects such as the Chad-Cameroon pipeline.

¹⁸ By way of comparison, GDP growth for Equatorial Guinea is 76.1 percent and for the Democratic Republic of Congo, -5.7 percent (1994).

Part III

Introduction to the Case Studies

Descriptive and analytical framework

The descriptive framework of this paper is provided by the characterization, through village level case studies, of local forest governance in south Cameroon. The study sites are introduced in this section, as well as the legal basis and principle characteristics of each of the four new governance mechanisms: community forests, parafiscal compensation, annual forestry fees, and oil compensation. Part IV presents the specific institutional and organizational arrangements introduced to establish each mechanism in the study sites, and how these have played out in practice. The central theme concerns the manifestation and manipulation of the fundamental powers of local governance, with particular attention to the distribution of profits and downward accountability mechanisms.¹⁹ This is followed by a discussion of the ecological and socioeconomic effects of each governance mechanism in each village.

The analytical sections, Parts V and VI, examine governance indicators. These indicators emerge from the descriptive framework, particularly through the characterization of power manipulation, on the one hand, and downward accountability mechanisms, on the other (see Box 4). The indicators were produced by simplifying several indicators from Kaufmann *et al.* (1999: 13-26; 2003: 25-46), taking into account certain principles of the “self-governance” of resources as defined by Ostrom (1999: 7), and the author’s own theoretical effort to construct a range of indicators by which to monitor democratic decentralization and local governance.

In these two sections, the characterization, analysis, and mapping of the different local governance mechanisms will first be presented separately by mechanism and village. Through the diagrams of governance indicators (Part V), a cross-cutting dimension will then be introduced to facilitate intra-site comparison, with charts comparing two or more mechanisms in the same village, where these occur. The second section of the analysis (Part VI) offers an overall evaluation of the four mechanisms and forest decentralization in general in Cameroon. It discusses the politics of micro-governance and local management of the revenue from community forests, forestry fees, and oil compensation.

¹⁹ Although derived from the French, the English word “accountability” is more expressive than its French equivalents. Robert Keohane and James Duke (2002: 2-3) state that accountability comes from the old French *comptes à rendre* (rendering of accounts). In the French version of this paper, we use both *reddition des comptes* and *redevabilité* for accountability. In her principles of self-governance of common resources, Ostrom (1990: 90; 1999: 7) sets accountability among the principles of collective arrangements, monitoring, and graduated sanctions.

Box 4: Indicators for the measurement and assessment of governance

Work on governance indicators intensified with the ongoing development of the governance paradigm. Most of this work has focused on either evaluative or descriptive aspects. For example, Daniel Kaufmann *et al.* (2003: 24-49) and Gonzales de Asis (2001: 176-180) evaluated the quality of governance. We took this epistemological basis and these evaluative methodologies to dissect, forge, and adapt a series of indicators to local conditions. The indicators obtained (see Part V below) measure local governance—in terms of performance—and assess its institutional quality. Local governance and its indicators are measured on a twenty-point scale devised on the basis of four questions. Each question is scored on a five-point scale. There are 20 respondents for each site. The questions cover two scales defined according to the type, configuration, and exercise of local governance, and the interaction between the various actors involved. The “fixed scale” concerns the LGCF and LGPCC mechanisms, that is, community forests and community forest compensation. The scale is fixed because the two mechanisms are governed by a greater degree of local ownership (see Part IV below). The “interactive scale” concerns the LGAFF and LGOC mechanisms, the basic determinants of which are primarily regional and national, although there is local implementation. This scale is said to be interactive because it sets the local and the regional levels in perspective—and against each other.

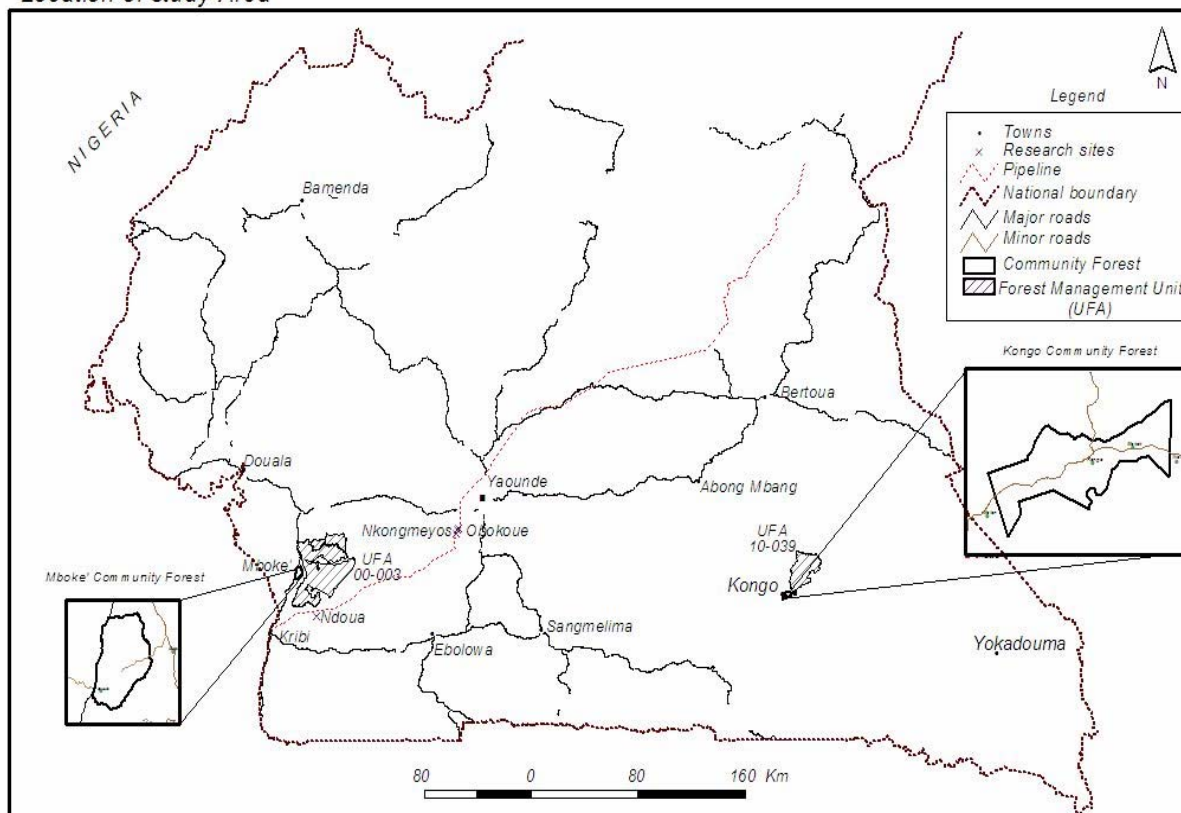
The study sites

Case studies were conducted in four villages: Kongo in the Lomié region, East province; Nkongmeyos/Obokoé in the Ngoumou region, Center province; Ndoua in the Bipindi region, Center province; and Mboké in the Kribi region, South province (see Map 1, see Annex A for a brief discussion of research methods). Each of these research sites, also referred to here as local governance units, contains from one to three governance mechanisms. The village of Kongo, for example, has a “local governance of community forests” (LGCF) mechanism, a “local governance of parafiscal community compensation” (LGPCC) mechanism²⁰, and a “local governance of annual forestry fees” (LGAFF) mechanism. In the village of Mboké, two mechanisms were studied: LGCF and LGAFF; the village of Ndoua has mechanisms of “local governance of oil compensation” (LGOC) and LGAFF; and finally, only one mechanism, the LGOC, was found in Nkongmeyos/Obokoé.

²⁰ This is a version of forestry taxation which is not prescribed by the Forestry Law as such. It is a measure resulting from the MINEF Circular Letter No 370, discussed in the text, regarding *ventes de coupe*. This administrative provision went through periods of extreme distortion, in particular with logging companies, in some regions, directly allocating funds to local communities. In order to exorcise the old demons of environmental injustice and to achieve a collective catharsis (Karsenty 1999: 8-10; Oyono 2004b: 6-7), local communities began, literally, to “eat and drink” with the money paid directly by loggers. For further information on the ways in which this parataxation—described as an aberration by NGOs—has been used, see Mendouga Mebenga (1998a: 10-11), Milol and Pierre (2000: 5-14), and Bomba (2004b: 233-240). For many reasons, including this one, the Minister of Environment and Forests suspended the allocation of *ventes de coupe* at the beginning of 2000. It has only recently been reactivated, but, since some *ventes de coupe* were already being logged when the suspension was announced, the practice persisted in various locations.

Map 1: Southern Cameroon and Research Sites

Location of study Area



Local governance mechanisms

The case studies make it possible to describe, analyze, and assess the different governance mechanisms set out in this paper. The descriptions below shed light on the policy bases of these mechanisms, the powers transferred, when this has occurred, and the institutional and organizational arrangements prescribed and established for the exercise of those powers.

Local Governance of Community Forests (LGCF) Mechanism

Forestry Law No 94/01 (January 20, 1994) established the principle for the establishment of community forests by village communities in Cameroon. Article 3 of its Implementing Decree, promulgated in 1995, provides the following definition of a community forest: “a forest forming part of the non-permanent forest estate²¹, which is covered by a management agreement between a village community and the Forestry Administration. The management of such a forest is the responsibility of the village community concerned, with the help or technical assistance of the

²¹ This is in contrast to the council forests and forest concessions that are part of the permanent forest estate—that is, classified forests, as defined by the January 1994 Forestry Law.

Forestry Administration” (unofficial translation). A community forest may be demarcated only on land over which a village community has customary rights.²² In order to receive official approval and recognition, a community forest must have a Simple Management Plan, a contract through which MINEF cedes a plot of the national estate to a village community, for its management, conservation, and logging.

The law notes that a village community wishing to establish a community forest must be organized as a “legal entity” and thus be represented by a group of individuals acting with the legal status of an “association,” “common initiative group,” or “cooperative.”²³ The legal entity is then known as the “manager” of the community forest—and it is this manager that is given the mandate to exercise the powers transferred to village communities over both the biophysical resource and the resultant financial benefits (Lescuyer 2003: 8-14). A technical tool—the Manual of Norms and Procedures for the Establishment of Community Forests—was developed by MINEF. This and subsequent documents set out an approach and general methodology for community forest establishment. The available data indicate that management agreements have already been developed for nearly 100 community forests throughout Cameroon. Many studies conclude that community forests can potentially make a significant contribution to sustainable forest management and improved living conditions (Vabi *et al.* 2003: 9-38; Erdman 2003: 4-8; Abe’ele *et al.* 2004: 14-47).

Moreover, in Circular Letter No 518/MINEF/CAB (December 21, 2001), the Minister of Environment and Forests established, through the right of pre-emption, the procedure for the priority attribution of any forest likely to be established as a community forest to the neighboring village communities. The objective of this prescription is to give priority to village communities, rather than to logging companies, when a forest may be allocated under *ventes de coupe*. Hence, village community petitions are given priority, and the forest unit in question becomes a community forest. This is an incentive to strengthen the power of village communities over “their forests” and to encourage the creation of community forests.

Local Governance of Para-fiscal Community Compensation (LGPC) Mechanism

The second major instrument of the decentralized forestry taxation system is the para-fiscal tax or “village tax” and the establishment of socioeconomic amenities to benefit neighboring village communities. In Circular Letter No 370/LC/MINEF/CAB, mentioned above, MINEF instituted the practice of including the payment of CFA 1000 (US\$ 1.50) per cubic meter logged (see footnote 16) in the *cahier des charges* (or specifications) of the logging company for *ventes de coupe*. These para-fiscal taxes represent all the taxes logging companies have to pay regularly that were not provided for in the finance bill but rather were established by regulations.

In order to manage this village tax, when it is actually paid, village development committees were reactivated and new associations established. These committees and associations are mandated to

²² These are primarily rights to property, access, and control of access.

²³ Associations were established by Law No 90/53 (December 19, 1990) on Freedom of Association; common initiative groups and cooperatives, by Law No 92/006 (August 14, 1992) on Rural Reform. For further information on the links between these legal instruments and representation in the local management of forests, see Oyono (1998a: 9-13) Diaw *et al.* (1998: 4-8), Djeumo (2001: 7-9), Oyono and Temple (2003: 67-69), Lescuyer (2003: 12-15), Etoungou (2003: 15-19 et 23), Oyono (2004f: 13-20), and Abe’ele *et al.* (2004: 47-52).

represent village communities in all transactions related to determining the amounts to be paid by the logging companies, monitoring the implementation of the *cahier des charges*, and negotiating with the entrepreneurs responsible for the construction of the agreed-upon socioeconomic infrastructures. The local governance mechanism described here is considered to be “parafiscal community compensation” in this paper.

Local Governance of Annual Forestry Fees (LGAFF) Mechanism

As with community forests, annual forestry fees are one of the key provisions of the 1994 Forestry Law (Karsenty 2004: 52-53). It is the State’s response to including local communities in the redistribution of benefits generated by commercial logging. The annual forestry fees are a set of measures forming the decentralized forestry taxation system. The legal framework of reference for the annual forestry fees consists of a series of instruments: (i) Article 68 of Law No 94/01 (January 20, 1994) establishing forestry, wildlife, and fisheries regulations; (ii) Article 122 of Decree No 95/531 (August 23, 1995) establishing the procedure for implementing Cameroon’s forestry regime; (iii) Article 10 of Decree No 08/009/PM (January 23, 1998) establishing the tax base and procedure for recovery of duty, fees, and taxes related to logging activities; and (iv) Joint *Arrêté* No. 000122/MINEFI/MINAT (April 28, 1998) establishing the procedure for the use of logging revenue intended for neighboring village communities. There is also Memorandum No. 2978/MINEF/DFAP/AC (October 14, 1999) concerning management of revenue from wildlife, as well as several successive finance bills from 1995 to 2000.

The current Forestry Law notes, with respect to annual forestry fees: “For the development of village communities neighboring the national forest estate, part of the revenue from the sale of forest products shall be transferred to local communities, according to the mechanisms in the Implementing Decree” (unofficial translation). The forestry fees are paid annually. They are distributed as follows: 50 percent for the State, 40 percent for the rural council within which the forest concession—or the forest management unit (UFA)—is being logged, and 10 percent for the neighboring village communities. Until 1998, when the Joint *Arrêté* mentioned above was signed, the share of the fees intended for the village communities was not related to any local-level governance structure, in contrast to the case of community forests, for example. It was thus a type of ownership without any village basis, unconnected to any local organizational infrastructure.²⁴

Well before the publication of the Joint *Arrêté*, community life in rural Cameroon had been governed by a number of organizational figures, such as village development committees, common initiative groups, and various village associations (Oyono and Temple 2003: 67-69), which the new procedure regulating the circulation and distribution of the annual forestry fees did not, officially,

²⁴ Nevertheless, this had its advantages, as noted by Bigombé Logo (2003:10): “Given the lack of any formal organizational framework for the management of the revenue from this decentralized taxation system, particularly the revenue intended for the neighboring village communities, the local administration, that is, the *préfets* and the *sous-préfets* (divisional and sub-divisional administrative officers), and the logging companies developed their own practices for the distribution and payment of funds. This system was based on direct payment, in cash and kind, to the village communities, or the payment of one part to the local council and contributions in kind to the local population. Under this system, the money intended for the neighboring village communities was handed over at a solemn meeting [...] The money or goods in kind were handed over in front of the whole community, which was informed there and then of the amount concerned, and the quantity and quality of goods received. This system ensured a certain degree of transparency in the process and legitimized the logging companies’ actions, reducing conflicts between the villagers and them.”

take into account. The *Arrêté* required the creation of regional commissions or committees for the management of the annual forestry fees within each rural council. These commissions were to have “organizational counterparts” at village level. This meant that, in each rural council, the villages were represented on the regional commission by village committees. Each regional commission was chaired by the mayor and the sub-divisional officer (or the *chef de district*, district head), while the village representatives attended as members. The commission and the village representatives established the priorities for socioeconomic development in each village. Once this was done, the commission would contract a company for the implementation of the community projects.

Local Governance of Oil Compensation Mechanism (LGOC)

For the installation of the pipeline between Doba, in southern Chad, and Kribi, on Cameroon’s Atlantic coast, dense forests, secondary forests, old fallows, young fallows, food crop fields, cocoa and coffee plantations, sites of great ecological value, tombs, family cemeteries, home gardens, houses, and old village sites were destroyed, completely or partially. In addition to the destruction, there were also the risks related to the reduction in water reserves, threats to food security, risks to maritime ecology, the impoverishment of forest communities, and the spread of HIV/AIDS (because of worker migration). Primarily in response to the damage caused to the inland ecosystems, on which the local communities along the pipeline directly depend, the Cameroon Oil Transportation Company (COTCO), in a joint initiative between the State of Cameroon and the World Bank, set up a Compensation Plan (PGE 1999: 5/1-6/8; COTCO 2001: 1-3). A specific Plan for Vulnerable Indigenous Peoples (PVIP) was devised as well²⁵, as a supporting reference framework on the vulnerability of the Pygmies (Biesbrouck and Dkamela 1998: 14-18; Berg and Biesbrouck 2000: 17-24).

Four types of compensation were defined: (i) individual compensation, applied to individuals or nuclear families; (ii) community compensation for villages, groups of villages, and sub-divisions; (iii) regional compensation, for groups of sub-divisions; and (iv) compensation for vulnerable populations. The compensation paid to local communities is regulated by four basic instruments (Dkamela 2002: 4-6): (i) the Agreement between the Republic of Cameroon and COTCO; (ii) Cameroonian legislation on compensation; (iii) World Bank directives on compensation; and (iv) the Cameroon Compensation Plan, a working instrument developed by COTCO. Together, the forms of compensation described above are not related to any local organizational infrastructure. After a publicity campaign, the project took “what already existed” and “informal groups” as its basis (Ellom, pers. comm., July 12, 2004). As a result, in their transactions with COTCO with respect to community compensation, local communities were, by default, represented by village chiefs, elders, a few women, and a few young people.

²⁵ The fact that the pipeline was to run through the Lolodorf-Bipindi-Kribi corridor, a region inhabited by the Bagyiéli Pygmies, hunter-gatherers of Cameroon’s forest (see Berg and Biesbrouck 2000: 18-26), attracted much attention from environmental NGOs. Biesbrouck and Dkamela (1998: 14-18) note two important facts in this respect. Firstly, this vulnerable group is not taken adequately into account in the compensation strategy. Secondly, the disaster caused by the pipeline to the forest ecosystem, the Pygmies’ source of life, will have lasting consequences on their environment, their overall social and cultural balance, and their balance with nature. The PVIP seeks to establish alternatives to reduce the vulnerability of the Pygmies in their relations with their Bantu—or “Tall Black”—neighbors, through health, education, and agriculture.

Part IV

Case Studies

The Local Governance of Community Forests (LGCF) Mechanism: Kongo and Mboké

The village of Kongo is in the Lomié sub-division, Upper Nyong division, in Cameroon's East province. The region forms part of the Dja forest, in the Cameroon-Congolese evergreen forest. Kongo lies just outside the Dja Biosphere Reserve, the largest protected area in Cameroon. The region has a high level of biodiversity, with more than 1600 tree species (Létouzey 1985). Situated 35 km from the town of Lomié, Kongo's population is about 500, all of whom belong to four lineages of the Bankoho clan (Minlo Enyegue 2003a: 4; Assembe 2004: 5). The forest ecosystem around the village, and throughout the region, has a quantitatively and qualitatively rich floristic potential. In addition to species of high commercial value, such as sappeli (*Endandrophagma cylindrum*), moabi (*Baillonella toxisperma*), ayous (*Triplochiton scleroxylon*), fraké (*Terminalia superba*), bété (*Mansinia altissima*), iroko (*Melicia excelsa*), and bibolo (*Lovoa trichilodes*), both libamli (*Gilbertiodendron dewevrei*) and andok (*Irvingia gabonensis*) are dominant.²⁶

The idea of establishing a community forest in the village was first mooted in 1998. With technical and methodological support from the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV), and its Support to Sustainable Development in the Dja Region (SDDL) project, the community forest was officially inaugurated in August 2000 with the signing of the management agreement between the village community and MINEF (Nchoankwi 2000: 20; Efoua 2001: 6-7). Kongo's community forest covers 3,000 hectares and borders a forest management unit (UFA 10039) with a provisional area of 47,585 hectares. The establishment of the community forest raised many expectations in the village, as the local people saw it as a "way of at last making a living from their forest" (Efoua 2002b: 4-5). Kongo is an illustration of the controversy that exists over the form of logging to be implemented in community forests.²⁷ In 2002, when semi-artisanal logging, as prescribed by MINEF (see footnote 27), was rejected, and after the industrial logging company Nkoa Fouda et Cie had been contracted, the Kongo community forest management convention was suspended for more than a year. Previously, Kongo had been host to a three-year *vente de coupe* at the end of the 1990s. In addition,

²⁶ Libamli is endemic, and andok has a high nutritional value.

²⁷ The first community forest management agreements (in the Lomié region, on the western side of the Dja Biosphere Reserve) were signed in the days of "forestry fever" fuelled by local enthusiasm at finally being able to benefit from forestry income. In the midst of this general euphoria, MINEF, with the support of agencies like SNV, insisted that community forests should in theory be logged on an artisanal or semi-artisanal level. Artisanal logging involves felling the trees with chainsaws and cutting them into planks *in situ*. Semi-artisanal logging involves the use of a Lucas Mill machine or a *grumINETTE*. As described by Auzel *et al.* (2001: 6), "This type of logging is based on a number of basic rules and techniques: (i) careful selection of the trees to be felled, avoiding immature trees, (ii) directional felling, to reduce the impact on the remaining trees; (iii) sawing *in situ* in the forest; and (iv) manual transportation of the planks to the village, to avoid the construction of secondary roads." Local people, however, have often preferred industrial logging, where the timber is extracted and transported directly by truck: it is detrimental in terms of sustainability, but more beneficial financially (Mendouga Mebenga 1998b: 36; Djeumo 2001: 4-7; Oyono 2004f: 36), because of the volume of timber logged, the money paid within a short time by the logging company, and the fact that the villagers do not have to work for it.

the village is located on land with important cobalt and nickel reserves, and Geovic, a US mining company, has gradually been setting up operations in the village to begin mining.²⁸

Mboké village, in the Kribi sub-division, Ocean division, South province, has about 200 inhabitants from five lineages. According to the classification by Létouzey (1985), the area is part of the forestry facies characterized as the “littoral Atlantic district,” and more specifically, the littoral forest with *Lophira alata* and *Sacoglottis gabonensis*. The zone has significant quantities of species of very high commercial value, the most commonly logged being azobé (*Lophira Alata*), fraké (*Terminalia superba*), white doussié (*Azizia pachyloba*), tali (*Erythroleum ivorense*), niové (*Staudtia kamerunensis*), alep (*Desbordesia glaucescens*), and ilomba (*Pycnanthus angolensis*). Mboké’s community forest covers an area of 2,282 hectares and was officially established in 2001, when the management agreement between the village community and MINEF was signed. It has only been logged since 2002, however, because of the repeated failure of negotiations between the village community and the companies contacted for logging (Assembe 2004: 6). The village borders a 48,830 hectare forest concession. In each of the discussion sections below, we consider the case of Kongo and Mboké in turn.

Attributes of local governance: a profile of institutional and organizational arrangements

As stated earlier, the legal provisions and methodological instruments prescribe that each community forest have a legally-recognized management body, which is subsequently known as the “manager.” This means that, although decentralization transfers managerial powers “to local communities,” the establishment of these community-level committees in fact demonstrates that there is a “transfer of powers within a transfer of powers.”

Kongo’s community forest is managed by a body known as the Kongo community forest management committee (COBANKO), which rose from the ashes of a common initiative group, CIG PLAKO (Minlo Enyegue 2003a: 5). COBANKO was set up in 1997, with the methodological guidance of the SNV/SDDL project (Assembe 2003a: 2), and was legally recognized as an association in January 1998. While this was a critical moment in the process of establishing institutional and organizational arrangements for local governance of the community forest, there were other significant stages prior to and after COBANKO’s formation. Prior to COBANKO, for example, the village had already made important progress in becoming a local governance unit. An information and awareness campaign had been organized to assure that villagers understood the meaning of “community forest,” as well as to emphasize the policy reasoning behind it: that is, to give greater responsibility to local communities and redress historical and socioeconomic injustice by improving living conditions (see Box 5).

There were two preconditions to COBANKO becoming a management body: it needed a constitution and an executive bureau. The executive bureau in fact implements and regulates community forest management. COBANKO’s executive bureau consists of the chairman and four other members who are not elected, but rather are appointed by the four lineages that make up the village community. Once COBANKO had been constituted, a consultative meeting was held in the village to establish a consensus among all the internal and external stakeholders regarding forest

²⁸ Geovic’s arrival in Kongo has substantially increased the population. Assembe (2004: 6) and Minlo Enyegue (2003: 5) estimate that more than 150 workers had moved to the village even before mining had begun.

management. After this, the Simple Management Plan, which basically consists of a set of technical and a set of socioeconomic directives, was drawn up. The former set out a management and logging plan for the forest, and the latter indicated micro-projects to be funded with the revenue generated.²⁹ The final step was the signing of the management agreement by the Kongo village community and MINEF on August 10, 2000.

Box 5: Kongo's community forest is launched

“The ceremony presided by Lazare Mpouel Bala, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, was the culmination of several years’ work and a long process patiently led by the SNV/SDDL project, with the support of the Community Forestry Unit (MINEF), in the villages of Kongo, Eshiembor/Malen, Koungoulou, Ngola, and Moangé-Le-Bosquet. [...] SDDL’s work was fundamental to a number of village communities finally becoming the direct managers of 16,532 hectares of their own forests [...] Although many questions have still not been answered, particularly those concerning the way in which resources are actually exploited and the revenue from them judiciously allocated, it can be said that the five village communities have taken an important step [...] Euphoria reigns in Lomié, as the five villages plan their future, sometimes with hope bordering on utopia. Each has its own priorities: habitat improvement, construction of roads or schools, the production of new food or cash crops [...] However, just knowing that they will no longer be mere passive spectators of the exploitation of the forest’s resources by outsiders, and unscrupulous outsiders at that, is an undeniable psychological plus and represents a considerable achievement.”

Source: Nchoankwi (2000: 20).

COBANKO, with its bureau and its regulations, is at the heart of the institutional arrangements and organizational frame of reference for local governance of the Kongo village community forest. The 1994 Forestry Law and the procedural documents on community forests transfer a “global” power to community forest managers³⁰, that is: “to represent the village communities.” COBANKO’s constitution also more or less spells out the powers devolved to the management body and, with it, the whole village community. According to its constitution, COBANKO is responsible for managing—for socioeconomic and community development—the revenue generated by logging the forest, monitoring the implementation of the Simple Management Plan, and conducting negotiations with external actors. COBANKO has no explicit, structured, internal regulations establishing rules or a collective code of conduct regarding the biophysical management of the community forest or the management of the income from it. For example, there are no sanctions for poor or improper management, nor is there any minimum framework for collective action concerning the management of the forest or expected revenues. Moreover, COBANKO’s general assemblies, which

²⁹ The Simple Management Plan divides the community forest into areas of specialization (use zones). The area set aside for logging is subdivided into plots. The law sets the duration of logging in community forests at twenty-five years, renewable every five years. The socioeconomic priorities identified in the Simple Management Plan are: the establishment of a palm plantation, habitat improvement, and the construction of a village water system and a community hall.

³⁰ This is particularly clear in the *Manual of Norms and Procedures for the Establishment of Community Forests* and several other procedural documents produced by the MINEF Community Forestry Development project between 2001 and 2002.

should be held annually to assess work undertaken, have not taken place. COBANKO's structure is described by Minlo Enyegue (2003a: 6-7) as follows:

COBANKO consists of three bodies. Firstly, there is the general assembly, which is supposed to be held once a year. It should: (i) establish, in general, the way in which the association is run; (ii) evaluate the management plans and the reports of the executive bureau members; (iii) elect the members of the executive bureau; (iv) approve [...] the administrative structure as well as the budget; and (v) draft and modify the association's basic documents. The general assembly consists of the founding members (of the association), the executive bureau, the associate members, and all the able-bodied members of the community. Secondly, there is the executive bureau, which consists of the chairman, the deputy chairman, a general secretary responsible for forest operations, a deputy general secretary, and the auditor. Finally, there is a conflict resolution commission, the structure and operation of which have not been clearly established.

In Mboké, the initiative to set up a community forest came from the now defunct Lokoundjé/Nyong project, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). That project was responsible for managing the Lokoundjé/Nyong forest in the coastal region. Towards the end of the project, it held the first information and awareness meetings in Mboké village on the opportunities opened up by the 1994 Forestry Law, particularly the possibility of creating community forests. Assembe (2003b: 2), quoting local informants, reports that the establishment of the Mboké community forest skipped many procedural stages, including the representative consultation meeting and the participatory development of the Simple Management Plan. Despite these gaps in the institutional process³¹, a management body, the Mboké community forest management committee, was formed and given legal recognition as an association in 1999 (Djeukam 1999: 8). The vacuum left by the departure of the Lokoundjé/Nyong project increased the village chief's control over the process (Assembe 2003b: 2-3). Thus, in 1999, he was appointed as management committee chairman. In addition to the chairman, the management committee has five other members who are appointed, rather than elected. These five people represent the five village lineages, in principle so as to ensure a social balance (see Box 6).

The Mboké community forest management committee's constitution is somewhat simplistic, very briefly setting out a few basic ideas: (i) the community forest involves all those who come from Mboké village; (ii) one of the roles of the management committee is to represent the village community and to manage logging revenue for the well-being of all; and (iii) the committee is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Simple Management Plan. This constitution, which delineates general guidelines for the committee's work, does not, however, establish any explicit—or binding—framework of duties for the committee members. The available documents do not provide the rest of the Mboké village community any recourse mechanisms with regard to monitoring or sanctioning committee members' actions. General assemblies, where those responsible may be assessed (positively or negatively) and sanctioned when appropriate, have not been held as often as required.³² The executive bureau was elected in 1999 for a two-year term, but

³¹ After the Lokoundjé/Nyong project closed, the village no longer had any systematic methodological guidance. It should be mentioned, however, that the Ocean division MINEF delegation became subsequently involved in the provision of advice and monitoring (Assembe 2003a: 3).

³² See Assembe (2004: 12).

as of late 2004 it had still not undergone any kind of evaluation, nor had its officials been subject to re-election.

Box 6: Profile of environmental representation in Mboké community forest

“According to the association’s constitution, three conditions must be fulfilled for an individual to be able to represent Mboké in community forest management. The person must be: from Mboké, a member of the association, and designated by those born in the village. Observation of social practice in Mboké demonstrates that the management committee members do, in fact, fulfill these conditions. Thus, the current chairman’s *curriculum vitae* largely explains why he was chosen for the post: village chief, 75 years old, retired school teacher, former primary school head-teacher and primary school inspector; his eldest son is a colonel in the army, and his second son is the director of general administration at the Ministry of Labor and Employment. All these titles no doubt spoke in his favor.”

Source: Assembe (2003b: 4)

Exercising the duties of local governance

It was noted above that attributes and powers for local governance of community forests are, *de jure*, exercised by management committee members, within a reductionist mechanism produced by social induction and institutional substitution (see Oyono 2004g: 127-130; Oyono and Efoua 2006, forthcoming). This duplication and dual presence—that is, of the village community and the management committee—is described as one of the “critical” factors in the institutional arrangements related to community forests (Efoua 2002a: 4-5; Abe’ele *et al.* 2004: 20). This can be seen, for example, in the provision that requires community members, in all of the communities, to pay membership dues to the management committee before being allowed access rights to consultations concerning community forest management.

This section describes the basic procedures according to which the devolved attributes and powers are exercised in the local governance units created for community forest management, first in Kongo and then in Mboké. The following parameters are taken into account: (i) whether the management committees fulfill their duties; (ii) the objective and subjective alliances between the management committees and outsiders, on the one hand, and the structural relationship between the management committees and rest of their village communities, on the other; (iii) the functional and morphological changes undergone by the management committees; and (iv) the committees’ accountability to the rest of the village. A description of these parameters can provide some indication of the level of democratic local governance (or good governance).

The social agents who hold management powers over Kongo community forest are called upon to act on behalf, and in the interest, of the village community. Thus, COBANKO worked with SNV/SDDL throughout 2000 to lay the groundwork for the establishment of the community forest and the administrative and technical aspects required for it to operate. It was also COBANKO that contacted the various timber operations interested in logging. Contracts were signed successively with three logging companies. After the community forest began to generate revenue in 2001, COBANKO executive bureau members also undertook the financial transactions related to purchasing equipment for community projects.

Despite the statistical vagueness caused, primarily, by the lack of clarity of the accounts, various local sources agree that between December 2001³³ and December 2003, more than 500 cubic meters of timber were logged. This volume of timber would have generated between \$26,500 and \$29,780. This forestry bounty was managed, allocated to community projects, and regulated by the COBANKO executive bureau. Nevertheless, many practices of those in charge do not legally correspond with the executive bureau's role. For example, Efoua (2003: 5) and Assembe (2003a: 7) note that revenue management from Kongo community forest is generally accompanied by misappropriation of funds and practices of self-remuneration. Many informants also mention parallel negotiations between some COBANKO officials and logging companies, behind the backs of the rest of the village community.³⁴ Assembe (2003b: 6) confirms this trend:

The case of Ajeboum and Mbgwamine, known as "the dean," is informative. When we were staying in the town of Lomié, we came across these two COBANKO officials negotiating the sale of sawn timber with unknown persons. Another buyer, who had already been to Kongo, already had an agreement with the entire COBANKO bureau for the purchase of the load of timber in question. Nevertheless, under the pretext that the first buyer had not paid the full sum due to the village community and had not removed the whole stock of timber sold, the two officials had taken it upon themselves to negotiate new commitments, presumably on behalf of the village. In any case, they were not playing a role appropriate for management committee representatives. They seemed to operate more like a private club rather than representing the objectives, of defending the community, laid out in the committee's constitution.

Many external actors have played a role in the process of establishing and managing Kongo's community forest. They include: SNV's SDDL project; the local NGO International Centre for Development Support (CIAD) and the Local NGO Network of the Dja (ROLD); the deconcentrated MINEF services (the Lomié forestry post and the Upper Nyong divisional delegation); and the logging companies COBACO and Assene Nkou/Pallisco. Through simple observation, as well as reading between the lines of the villagers' comments and the documents consulted (Efoua 2002a: 5; Etoungou 2003: 27-30; Assembe 2003b: 5-7; Oyono 2004f: 26-29), it appears that the alliances among the various external actors and the management committee are subjective; that is, they are focused more on each actor's respective interests rather than on those of the Kongo village community. This is apparent because, in spite of the degree to which COBANKO officials disregard village community interests, the inevitable result is their social mobility and their shift towards the aforementioned actors.

When they allude to relations among COBANKO officials and external actors and, consequently, the resulting institutional disconnect, villagers speak of a new alliance between the patrons from town and the village *nouveaux riches*. The infrequency of internal meetings is indicative. For example, in the two years following December 2001, the COBANKO executive bureau held only nine short informational meetings in the village³⁵, with no meeting to report back on their work, nor any

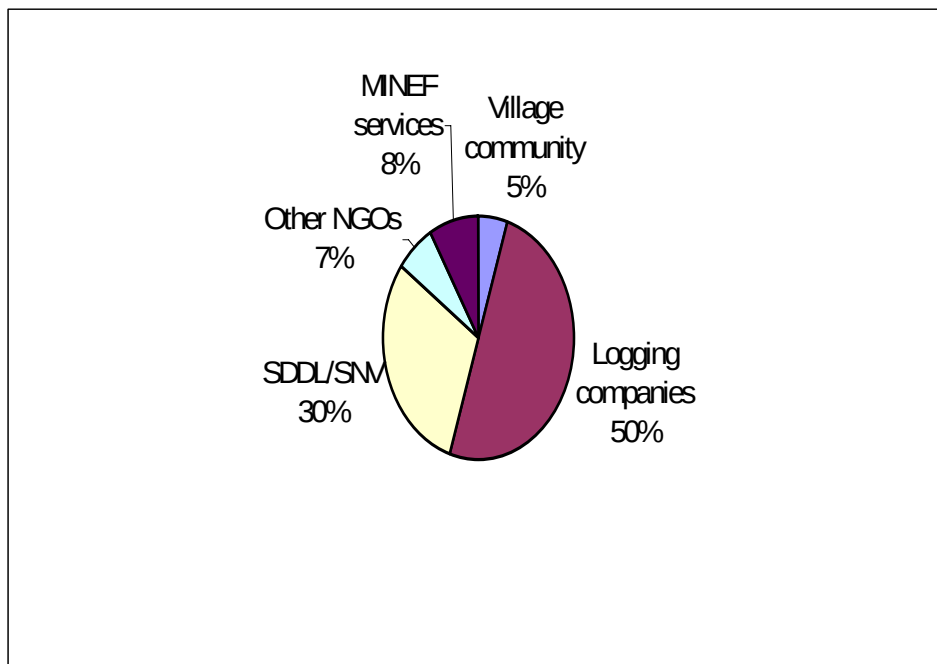
³³ The date that logging first began in Kongo's community forest. As we will see below, a few months later the regional MINEF office suspended this community forest because of the high pace of industrial logging.

³⁴ See also Efoua (2002a: 4), Bouki and Aya'a Aya'a (2002: 7), Etoungou (2003: 22-23), and Oyono (2004f: 25-26).

³⁵ According to our informants, there was no real discussion at these meetings, and sometimes as few as 20 people attended.

general assembly. Figure 1 below shows the distribution of the meetings organized (180 meetings in total between January 2001 and January 2004) between COBANKO and all those involved in the process of managing Kongo community forest, including the local community. Interactions between the executive bureau and the local community form the smallest proportion (5 percent), compared to 50 percent for the logging companies and 30 percent for the SNV/SDDL project. These percentages clearly demonstrate the “outward looking” orientation of the management committee.

Figure 1: Frequency of meetings between COBANKO and actors involved in the management of Kongo community forest (January 2001-January 2004).



The split that occurred within COBANKO shortly after logging began is a strong indication of the exercise of local governance in the Kongo village. In late 2001, when logging began and the first planks were sold, local expectations rose, and the door opened for many opportunistic strategies aimed at capturing revenue from the sale of timber. Finding that COBANKO was increasingly becoming a “free rider” and itself sidelined in the “forestry game,” one sector of the local elite dissented and, in January 2002³⁶, set up the Kongo Community Forest Management Committee (KCFMC).

The dissident group rationalized the formation of a second organization by arguing for the need for transparency in the management of community forest revenue. After a period of tension between the two bodies, they reached a *modus vivendi* for cohabitation. Currently, COBANKO is still the entity in charge of decision-making and deliberation regarding the management of the community forest and its revenue, and the KCFMC is an implementation body. This new arrangement has had some remarkable results: (i) the decision-making and implementation process has become more complex,

³⁶ This was the period in which the community forest began generating its first revenues (Minlo Enyegue 2003: 5).

dictated by power struggles; (ii) strategies for individual accumulation have been duplicated and a local “forestry elite” established; and (iii) the rest of the village community has become even more marginalized than before.

In the management of the community forest, COBANKO and, since the split, KCFMC represent the Kongo village community, at least on paper. According to the logics both of social responsibility in traditional society and of liberal representative democracy, the representatives—those who have mandates—are supposed to be accountable. This should therefore be the case for COBANKO and KCFMC officials. In the COBANKO constitution, the organization’s appointed officials must submit an activities report at each annual general assembly. But since COBANKO and, later, KCFMC were established, no general assembly has been held. Moreover, the meetings organized with the village community are irregular and selectively limited to the one-way transmission of a few items of information.

Local people are not aware of the volume of timber sold or the amount of revenue generated. Management mechanisms are not publicly known, and the COBANKO executive bureau does not have ledgers reporting on revenue. Transactions with external actors—mainly logging companies—are not reported to the rest of the village. This total lack of information, exchange, or real debate between the COBANKO/KCFMC officials and the other members of the community demonstrates that there is no downward accountability in the exercise of local governance in Kongo. It also shows that the form of representation attached to Kongo’s community forest is neither responsible nor democratic.³⁷

The constitution of the Mboké community forest management committee states that the organization’s officials should represent the village and defend the interests of the entire community. The committee is also responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Simple Management Plan. The executive bureau thus established contact with the company Likeng et Cie for logging, which began in August 2002. The revenue from the sale of timber is also managed by the executive bureau. Between August 2002 and April 2004, 307 cubic meters of timber were extracted from the community forest, for an estimated income of \$6,506. The Mboké Simple Management Plan provides for the revenue generated to be allocated to socioeconomic amenities for the community.

As in the case of Kongo, timber revenue has not been properly noted and accounted for. According to key informants and groups of villagers, the management committee chairman controls all transactions related to community forest management³⁸, as well as the revenue. The results of the negotiations between the chairman and Likeng et Cie were contested—in vain—by the rest of the village community. The decision-making process has also been taken over by the chairman, sometimes supported by other officials from the executive bureau. It was the chairman alone who negotiated the logging contract with Likeng et Cie, and he consequently uses the revenue in an “autocratic” manner. Local informants estimate the sums misappropriated by the executive bureau

³⁷ The way in which so-called representatives exercise their powers leads to numerous abuses, the misappropriation of funds, and, particularly, recurrent internal conflicts, as will be seen below.

³⁸ Many local indicators demonstrate that the committee chairman is in fact the sole and final legislator in all issues related to the management of Mboké community forest. He is also the one who initiated the establishment of the forest. It is even said that the chairman—who is also the all-powerful village chief—often states with pride that it is “his forest” (Assemble, pers. comm., June 9, 2004).

to be around \$4,200, in the form of unrepaid loans or money quite simply misappropriated. Assembe (2003c: 3) notes:

On consulting the accounts ledger, we found that part of the forestry revenue had been used by the management committee executive bureau to grant loans to certain people in the village. Some of the loans had been repaid, while others had not yet been recovered. The granting of these loans is one of the points of disagreement between the members of the executive bureau and the protesters who had not enjoyed this type of favor.

The management committee executive bureau is in constant contact with two external actors, Likeng et Cie and the MINEF divisional services. Conversations with Likeng et Cie concern the negotiation of timber sales and the implementation of socioeconomic projects for the community. Contacts with MINEF relate to the monitoring of Likeng et Cie's logging activities, based on the technical directives of the Simple Management Plan. The executive bureau has regular meetings with these two entities: once a month with the logging company and every quarter with MINEF. The Mboké management committee does not, on the other hand, organize regular meetings with the village. Some locals report there have been only ten meetings since logging began. At times information regarding the community forest is given by the chairman (village chief) after church on Sundays, without any discussion of the content.

Almost the entire Mboké population agrees that the executive bureau does not account for its activities, actions, or approaches. Annual general assemblies have not been held; there are no regular informational meetings. Accounting is opaque, as can be seen from the general circulation of the community forest revenue and loans for certain individuals without the knowledge of rest of the community. This lack of top-down accountability is indicative of the committee chairman's hegemonic and "patrimonial" management of the community forest and its revenues.³⁹

Socioeconomic effects of local governance of community forests

According to official rhetoric, the forestry reforms that have taken place in Cameroon since 1994 have had several formal objectives, the primary one being poverty reduction. In addition, there is an assumption that the processes of democratic decentralization and local governance of natural resources will inevitably lead to positive socioeconomic results.⁴⁰ The results found in the study areas are considered—here and for the other governance mechanisms to be examined below—from both social and economic perspectives. Social effects take into account the values, social behaviors, individual and group trends, and various dynamics (stability, ruptures, recombinations, cohesion, creativity, etc.) that are activated, designed, or assumed, to their benefit or detriment, by the institutional and organizational arrangements generated by decentralized local governance. Economic aspects relate to procedures for management and circulation of revenue for each governance mechanism and each village; results are examined in terms of quantified amenities and achievements and the "internal reclassifications" of these societies, as well as through the approaches and primitive accumulation strategies adopted by its individuals or groups. Here we lay

³⁹ Assembe (2003c: 4) summarizes the situation as follows: "The obligation to manage accountably on behalf of the community is not fulfilled in Mboké village. The people interviewed state that there is no transparency in the management of revenue from the community forest. In fact, at the few meetings organized, very little information is provided."

⁴⁰ This hypothesis will be tested in the general discussion of the results.

out the social and economic effects of the establishment and exploitation of the Kongo and Mboké community forests.

Positive social and economic results in Kongo

Kongo is one of the villages in the Lomié region that underwent an acute rural exodus in the 1980s (Oyono 1997: 28; Oyono 1998b: 558). Dozens of young people migrated to the towns of the East province, to Yaoundé and to Douala. Since the 1990s and the economic recession, there has been a massive return of these rural migrants to Kongo. In addition to the lack of economic security in urban areas, this remigration surge was also stimulated by the first signs that Kongo, like many other villages, was becoming involved in the management of forestry bounty—when operations were launched, in 1997, to obtain \$1.50 per cubic meter from the *vente de coupe* within village lands. The establishment of the community forest in 2001 heightened the “village return” phenomenon.

At the first education and awareness meetings in Kongo in 1999-2000, the SNV/SDDL project facilitators emphasized the general socioeconomic advantages of logging the community forest, and particularly the subsequent creation of forest sector jobs. Retired civil servants and unemployed graduates are the social groups most represented among Kongo’s urban migrants. These two groups are now the levers for innovation and socioeconomic creativity in the village (Assembe 2003b: 5; Minlo Enyegue 2003a: 4).⁴¹ The COBANKO executive bureau is composed mainly of retired civil servants and people who have, at some time, held salaried employment in town. Hence the local governance of forests has had the positive effect of consolidating local human and social capital, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The arrangements made for local governance of Kongo’s community forest also opened an avenue of interaction with many external actors. Villagers report that Kongo had for decades lived in isolation—in an already isolated region—and were ignored by State agencies and ministries working in rural areas, as well as all other organizations. The establishment of the community forest has partially helped to fill this vacuum by promoting regular and active exchanges with the outside world—NGOs, economic agents, MINEF services, and research organizations. In social terms, then, the village is much more a part of a “global” space. Local people also feel that they are now benefiting from a “collective consideration” and that their community is viewed as a relevant stakeholder by the “others,” the outsiders. To them, this has contributed to building collective pride.

Kongo’s community forest began generating revenue in January 2002. Part of the more than \$26,000 generated—\$9,580—has been used to provide aluminum roofing for 33 of the village’s 75 households. Nevertheless, to date this is the only clearly beneficial socioeconomic outcome of the community forest management process.

Negative social and economic results in Kongo

In contrast, the establishment of the community forest in general, and of the local institutional arrangements for forest governance in particular, has had numerous detrimental socioeconomic effects. In social terms, COBANKO and KCFMC officials have become an entrenched forestry elite. They consider themselves more literate and to have greater understanding of external actors;

⁴¹ It should be noted, however, that the young graduates tend to be marginalized, which fuels intergenerational conflicts.

they give no account for their actions to the rest of the village community and claim sole knowledge of the ins and outs of the issues regarding the management of the forest and forest revenue. These officials, who see themselves as “authorities” because of the powers they hold, have generated and continue to generate new social stratification and an “environmentalist elitism” cultivated by their social role as representatives.

In addition, as has already been noted by Oyono in the more general context of Cameroon’s humid forest region (1998a: 10; 2002a: 5-7; 2004c: 184; 2004f: 34; 2004j: 8-9), the institutional and organizational arrangements established in Kongo have led to the marginalization of “traditional authorities,”—that is, the pre-existing authorities, primarily elders and heads of lineage. In these societies, it is this social group that, from a “constitutional” point of view, historically have powers over nature.⁴² Hence the COBANKO and KCFMC officials are seen by the pre-existing local authorities as the beneficiaries of an “institutional *coup d’état*” imposed by decentralization, local governance, and the transfer of powers to an elite that had no pre-existing social legitimacy with regard to nature or forest.

Two other social groups are also at the margins of the “forestry game” in Kongo: young people and women. Although they returned to the village *en masse* and are generally better educated, the young people of Kongo do not play any real role in decision making concerning the management of the community forest and its revenue (see Box 7). COBANKO officials are all over the age of 45. When young people do take part in transporting timber from the community forest, they do not receive any financial compensation. The issue of intergenerational access to powers and resources has led to a conflict in which young and old regularly engage in verbal disputes.⁴³ With regard to women, it was apparent from observations and interviews in Kongo that there are no women in positions of responsibility in either COBANKO or KCFMC. It should also be noted, in general, that the lack of transparency in revenue management has generated all kinds of conflicts among individuals and groups—in 2003, property belonging to the KCFMC treasurer was destroyed by a group of malcontents (Minlo Enyegue 2003a: 11).

With regard to economic effects, the remaining \$16,920 to \$20,200, after the aluminum roofing and the acquisition of a sawmill for \$1,610, was apparently misappropriated by COBANKO and KCFMC officials for improper purposes. The economic achievements—the new roofs—do not meet the expectations of such a sum of money. A mosaic of practices has emerged from the circulation of community forest revenue, ranging from the pure and simple concealment of timber income to the granting of loans to accomplices, as well as the inflation of invoices for certain expenses. In addition, channels of individual accumulation through the embezzlement of forestry

⁴² CIFOR’s multi-year analysis of stakeholders in Cameroon’s forest zone has found that, from the village community perspective, elders and heads of lineage have socially recognized, uncontested, and legitimate powers of decision-making concerning common resource management, in contrast to management committee officials (Oyono *et al.* 2003).

⁴³ Assembe (2004: 11) notes: “The conflict is between the youth and their parents and grandparents. Most of the young people interviewed say that their parents and grandparents have taken over the leadership of local organizations. In addition, current organizational leaders do not wish to include young people; nor do they wish to submit to democratic mechanisms for the selection of officials. Participation in work related to the community forest is bifurcated: young people transport the timber, while older people give the orders. The youth are now refusing to obey orders and injunctions, opting instead for verbal confrontation. Basically, they believe that their local government is antidemocratic, gerontocratic, and does not lead to good management.”

revenue by COBANKO officials led to the emergence, within local society, of a segment of privileged and *nouveaux riches* (Angu Angu 2001: 8), as mentioned earlier.

Box 7: Intergenerational conflict in the management of Kongo community forest

“COBANKO and KCFMC are seen as clubs of fifty- and sixty-year-olds, all retired workers who have not lived long in the village. This situation has generated frustration among young people, who also comprise the village majority. They insistently, and sometimes violently, denounce the fact that the village and the forest have been taken over by the old people’s club, and accuse the current leadership of violating the committee statutes that provide for the replacement of officials every two years. They also accuse these officials of misappropriating the revenue from timber sales. Hervé expressed it succinctly: ‘It is impossible these days for a young person to enter the old people’s government.’ The youth also say that, if there has not been any physical confrontation between the two groups yet, it is only because of fear of mystical reprisals linked to sorcery, of which the current leaders are said to be specialists.”

Source: Assembe (2003b: 6)

Positive social and economic results in Mboké

The establishment and exploitation of the Mboké community forest gave rise to a new vision and a new local development dynamic. Although fragmentary, owing to the absolute grip of the village chief and management committee president, the current community organization, nevertheless, enables the local community to propose objectives for the village. From time to time, people express critical opinions regarding forest exploitation and the management of forest revenue. Though these opinions are not taken into account by the management committee executive or its president⁴⁴, they confirm the existence of social capital and a potential capacity that could be used in the management of the community forest.

By the end of March 2004, the Mboké community forest had already generated \$6,125. This money was used to buy seventy sheets of roofing, nails, and cement for the construction of a classroom in the village primary school. Nevertheless, the classroom was only partially built (Assembe, 2004b: 10). The secondary road leading to the village was maintained and expanded in August 2002 by the timber company, as established in the contract between the village and Likeng et Cie.⁴⁵

Negative social and economic results in Mboké

The chief’s exclusive control over the community forest management committee has strengthened his powers, thereby constituting an obstacle to local democracy. The chief’s decisions and actions are barely discussed, and—as the ultimate manager of the community forest—he is not accountable to anyone. The establishment of the Mboké community forest generated many community conflicts, with the management committee chairman, other members, and their “accomplices” on one side, and the rest of the population, excluded from decision making and revenue management, on the

⁴⁴ For details on the non-democratic ways in which this management body operates, see Assembe (2003b: 4).

⁴⁵ Mboké village is not located on a main road but rather a secondary road. It is thus isolated and less accessible during rainy seasons.

other. The second group accuses the first of mismanagement, embezzlement, and lack of transparency. Each group has entire families behind it. According to Assembe (2004: 8), “These accusations have created a climate of social tension and animosity. This situation is characterized by verbal abuse and serious internal conflicts. The protestors openly call for a general assembly election to bring down the current team.”

As previously mentioned, the executive bureau of the Mboké community forest management committee, at the dictate of its chairman, granted loans to many villagers at the end of 2002⁴⁶, without consulting the other members of the village community. By March 2004, these loans had not yet been repaid, and, since that time, the executive bureau of the management committee has adopted no measures to ensure their recovery. Most of Mboké’s inhabitants strongly contested these arrangements, made “behind their backs.” They believe such practices promote the misuse of funds and result in injustice and inequity of access to the financial benefits of timber sales.

Although the majority of Mboké’s inhabitants affirm that forestry revenues are embezzled by the management committee executive bureau, especially by the chairman, there is no available data regarding the amount. All things considered, popular opinion in Mboké holds that the advent of the community forest, and prospects for personal accumulation through the misappropriation of funds, has created a “drive” toward social stratification among members of the management committee. This “trend toward difference” is translated into practice by the formation of a schematic social structure in which the village chief/chairman stands alone⁴⁷, followed, far behind, by the other management committee members, with the rest of the population relegated to the margins.

Ecological effects

The creation of community forests, with new institutional and organizational arrangements, modalities of access to forestry revenue, and interactions with external actors, inevitably generates ecological effects. When these arrangements are based on the principles and cannons of democratic decentralization, good governance, and responsible/accountable representation, ecological results are expected to be positive, or that is, sustainable. If not, they will be negative, leading to an increase in forest degradation.

The types of forest exploitation permitted are clearly defined by the legislation in force. In forest concessions and *ventes de coupe*, the law prescribes industrial exploitation or large-scale logging. Industrial exploitation refers specifically to “opening paths in the forest, carrying logs on trucks, and transporting them to transformation units or to export.” This is not permitted in community forests. For the sustainable management of the latter, MINEF has prescribed small-scale logging—that is, no roads may be opened, and logs must be sawn into planks *in situ*. This section presents the ecological effects of community forest management in Kongo and Mboké.

The information provided by COBANKO and KCFMC situate the volume of timber logged from the Kongo community forest at 500 cubic meters. Other sources provide figures up to 530 cubic meters, though the actual amount is in fact even higher.⁴⁸ In 2001, the Kongo Community Forest—

⁴⁶ It is said that these people are “in the debt” of the village chief.

⁴⁷ According to local informants, almost everyone in Mboké knows that the chief does not want any other villager to be like him.

⁴⁸ This is the opinion of Assembe (pers. comm., May 23, 2004), based on his research and local sources.

then exploited by Nkoa Fouda et Cie—was suspended in June by the Divisional Delegation of Environment and Forestry for undertaking industrial exploitation rather than small-scale logging. This industrial option left lasting effects on the forest. When the suspension was lifted, another operator, Mpay et Cie, in 2002, felled trees that, rather than being processed, were abandoned on site. Since that time, the Kongo community forest is sometimes exploited *en régie*, that is, by the local community itself, which sells the sawn planks on the regional market, sometimes in partnership with the Compagnie Bexdan, as has been the case since 2004. In 2004, the community forest was again threatened with suspension, this time for failing to respect the Simple Management Plan, particularly with regard to planned rotation.⁴⁹ Furthermore, some species like Sappeli (*Endandrophagma cylindrum*), Bibolo (*Lovoa trichiliodes*), and Iroko (*Melicia excelsa*) are selectively harvested.

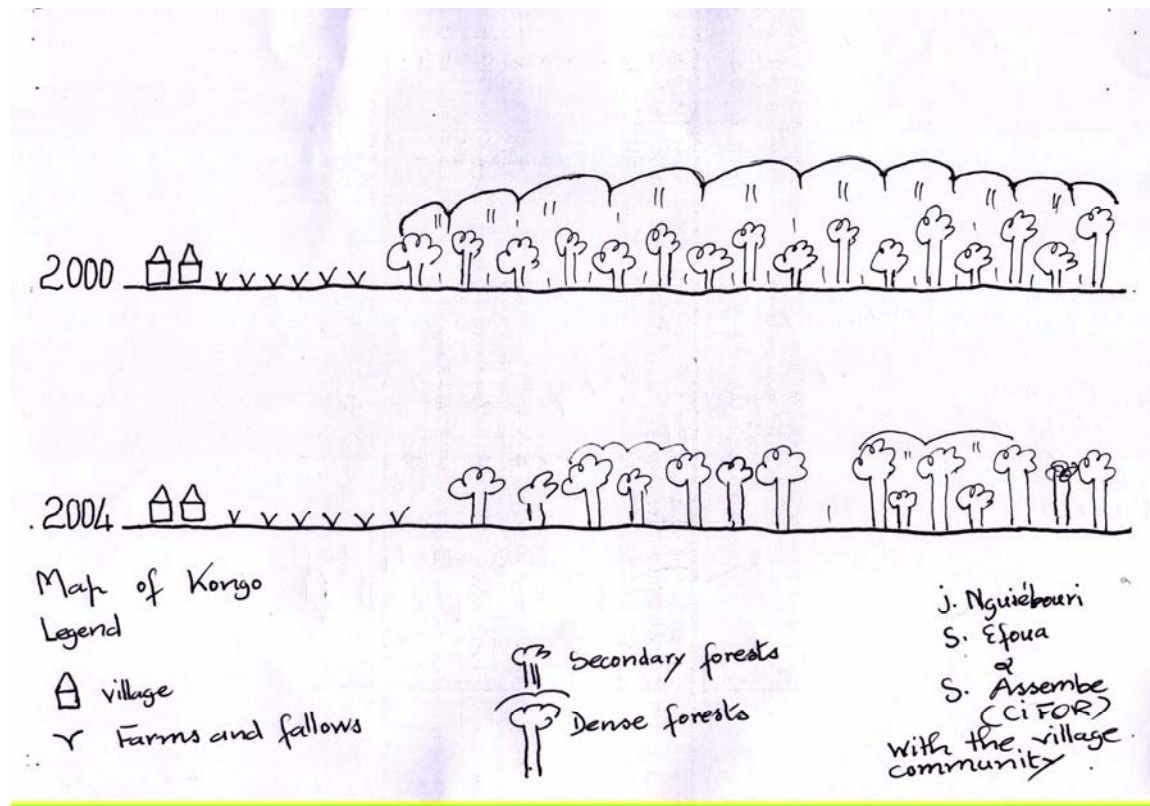
These trends are linked with local governance arrangements established for the management of this community forest. These arrangements—COBANKO, KCFMC, management rules, modes of exploitation, the follow-up of the implementation of the Simple Management Plan, interactions between “insiders” and “outsiders,” etc.—are under the influence of COBANKO and KCFMC authorities. The problems mentioned in the preceding paragraph⁵⁰ are representative of the weaknesses, inconsistency, and diffuse nature of these different arrangements.

Some authors, like Abe’ele *et al* (2004: 35), believe that “the mining exploitation of the forest that characterizes the exploitation *en régie* of community forests constitutes a threat to biodiversity.” Moreover, the sequence of industrial exploitation in Kongo not only opened up roads through the community forest but also destroyed flora that is not targeted by the logging operations. The officially-prescribed duration of community forest exploitation is twenty-five years: transects carried out in Kongo (see below) suggest that this forest is currently over-exploited and, in some scenarios, forecast its “extinction” in the next ten years (see Map 2).

⁴⁹ In other words, instead of harvesting logs from one plot then another, the sawyers of Kongo operated throughout the community forest.

⁵⁰ That is, the juxtaposition of exploitation methods, suspensions, and waste (the abandoning of timber in the forest). The options relating to community forest exploitation methods are, on the whole, subject to many conflicting interpretations. MINEF only tardily (in 2001) prohibited industrial exploitation. Up until now, two major factors have generally contributed to the suspension of community forests: (i) the application of such industrial exploitation; and (ii) the failure to respect the Simple Management Plan. The Decree of Application states that if a forest is poorly managed, it shall be suspended. Some authors, such as Oyono (2004e: 105), believe that the notion of “poor management”—and the predicate “poor”—of community forests acts as a barrier to the full devolution of management responsibilities and powers to local communities. In the article cited, this author argues that local communities should be given the freedom to choose the exploitation method, in order to make them fully responsible. He argues that industrial exploitation and small-scale logging can both produce the same degree of detrimental ecological effects. The fundamental problem is the lack of rigor in controlling the rate of felling, tree selection, and exploitation carried out in a limited time span. Abe’ele *et al* (2004: 25) report that, although illegal, industrial exploitation is carried out in 44 percent of Cameroon’s community forests.

Map 2: Historical transect of the Kongo community forest (2000 -before logging- to 2004)



In contrast to the Kongo community forest, which was exploited by the village community itself in 2003, the Mboké community forest is exploited mainly in partnership. The Mboké village signed a contract with Likeng et Cie in July 2002. From then until April 2004, the Mboké community forest produced 307 cubic meters of timber.⁵¹ All the species harvested, except one, Azobé (*Lophira alata*), should be processed on the spot into planks. Likeng et Cie collects Azobé logs from the Mboké community forest, which are then transported to sawmills or to the Douala Port for shipment to Europe. This logging method—as mentioned above—opens numerous tracks in the forest, thereby destroying much more flora as well as facilitating access to poachers.

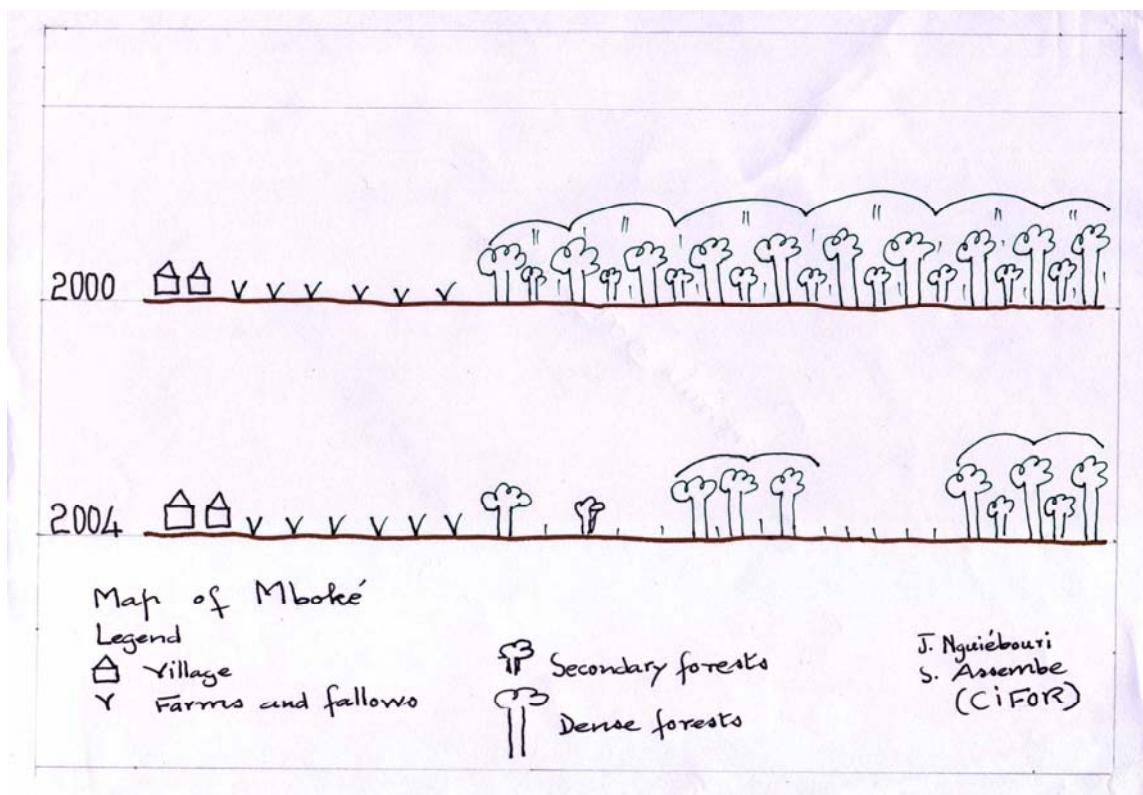
Given that the exploitation of Azobé—a very hard wood that cannot be sawn using traditional methods—requires industrial milling, Likeng et Cie uses this as a pretext to log without strict control, illegally extracting many additional species in the form of logs that could be sawn *in situ*.

⁵¹ The difference in the relationship between harvested volumes and revenues from the Kongo community forest (500 cubic meters and \$26,500-\$29,780 in revenues) and the Mboké community forest (307 cubic meters and only \$6,125) is explained by significant pricing differences. In the first contract signed between the Mboké community forest management committee and Likeng et Cie, the price of a cubic meter of timber was set at \$38, compared to \$45 in Kongo. In response to protests by the Mboké village community, the price was readjusted upwards in 2003, to \$40 for some species.

Assembe (2004: 16) describes it in these terms: “Concretely, timber is not harvested following the Simple Management Plan. Rather, species with high commercial value are harvested from all the plots of this community forest in a reckless manner. In the same vein, the methods of exploitation used are not compatible with sustainable management.” Transects carried out in the Mboké community forest (see Map 3) demonstrate that forest cover has decreased considerably between 2000, before logging began, and 2004.

Villagers express anxiety about the considerable decline of the forest due to Likeng et Cie’s reckless timber harvesting, with the complicity of management committee authorities. From this perspective, though they may be advantageous for the village chief, it is clear that the arrangements in place for the management of the Mboké community forest—that is, the absence of accountability and the low level of control that the village community has over management committee members—have not led to positive ecological outcomes. The Mboké community forest is, in fact, one of the most threatened forests of Southern Cameroon. This is due mainly to the hijacking of decision-making and the drive towards personal accumulation.

Map 3: Historical transect of the Mboké community forest (2000 -before logging- to 2004)



Conclusions

The two case studies allow us to draw the following conclusions regarding the Local Governance of Community Forests Mechanism and its accompanying institutional arrangements: (i) powers and

responsibilities were actually transferred to the Kongo and Mboké village communities to freely exploit their community forests and manage timber revenues, hence creating the opportunity for local governance; (ii) a “transfer within a transfer” took place, since the village communities entrusted the aforementioned powers to management entities, that is, local management committees, in accordance with the regulations in force; (iii) the exercise of these powers and the attributes of local governance by members of the newly-created committees led to the emergence of a dominant, somewhat antidemocratic “forestry elite” in search of social mobility—an elite cut off from the communities they represent, fashioned by codes of conduct and modes of social representation nurtured by individual interests, and protected from any downward accountability or sanctions; (iv) although socioeconomic benefits—one would talk of positive “infra-results” (see Oyono 2004c: 183-188)—were recorded, in the final analysis these results are highly mitigated, as well as controversial, and promote neither local democracy nor poverty reduction; and (v) ecological results—marked by overexploitation by timber companies and management committee members in order to amass wealth—appear entirely detrimental and are governed by a shift toward the rapid disappearance of the two community forests.

The Local Governance of Parafiscal Community Compensation (LGPCC) Mechanism: Kongo

The rich forest ecosystem of the Kongo area, in which the community forest is located, has already been described above. It was in this ecosystem that a *vente de coupe*⁵² was granted to a logging company for exploitation between 1997 and 2000. From the standpoint of decentralization and local governance, the *vente de coupe* is of particular policy interest based on the fact that this type of license enables village communities to have direct access to cash paid by timber companies. This has induced a new material and symbolic economy in the communities studied. These fees, however, do not legally constitute taxes: they are governed by parafiscal procedures that are not established in a finance bill. This parafiscal compensation was instituted in 1996 by a MINEF Circular, as mentioned earlier.⁵³ The following section presents the characteristics of the LGPCC mechanism in Kongo.

Attributes of local governance

The 1996 Circular transferred powers and attributes of local governance to the Kongo village community⁵⁴, as well as to other villages in or around other *ventes de coupe*, in order to manage the income generated and to define socioeconomic infrastructure to be established. As in the case of the management of community forests, the Kongo village community set up the Kongo Parafiscal Compensation Management Committee in 1997. According to Assembe (2003c: 2), this committee was instigated by the village chief. The committee was given the mandate to: (i) represent the Kongo village community in all transactions related to determining amounts of money to be allocated by the

⁵² As pointed out earlier, the *vente de coupe* is a type of forest exploitation license as well as a forest unit.

⁵³ As mentioned in Part II of this paper, the legal and administrative bases of this Circular are vague, and their interpretation made its implementation difficult (Milol and Pierre 2000: 9; Bigombé Logo 2003: 15). Was it just a question of injecting money into the construction of socioeconomic infrastructure? Should this money be handed directly to the village communities for them to use it however they chose? Should it be handed to councils to reinvest in village projects? In some villages, it is clear that the money did fall directly into the hands of communities.

⁵⁴ Kongo is one of the villages to which part of the money was often paid directly by timber companies.

timber company; and (ii) negotiate and monitor the implementation of specifications⁵⁵ with the contractors in charge of constructing infrastructure. This management committee, which was set up hastily and had a seven-member executive bureau, nevertheless had no legal status during its period of operation.

Lacking status and a vision (Minlo Enyegue 2003a: 4), the committee was unable to assume its mandate even for a year and drifted towards a kind of “instrumentality,” through its members’ connections with timber companies and municipal and administrative authorities (Angu Angu 2001: 8). In one year an estimated \$3,000 was embezzled by this local governance organization. Although it contributed significantly to the identification of micro-projects to be implemented locally⁵⁶, the Kongo Parafiscal Compensation Management Committee imploded. It was replaced in 1998 with the Village Development Committee (CVD) (see Assembe 2003c: 2).

The Kongo CVD is an organization that in fact had existed since 1990 but had not previously been involved in the management of forestry revenue. This organization inherited the mandate of the defunct management committee. It is worth noting, however, that many Kongo CVD officials also occupy positions in the COBANKO and KCFMC executive committees (Assembe 2003c: 4). For example, the president of COBANKO is also a CVD advisor; the president of the CVD is an auditor in COBANKO; the vice-president of the CVD is the president of KCFMC.

The CVD reinforced the pre-existing connection with timber companies and municipal and administrative authorities. Hence the rest of the village community continued to refer to “complicity between these three stakeholders in the misappropriation of funds” (S. Efoua, pers. comm., September 9, 2002). Villagers reported that from 1998 to 2000, the CVD executive convened only four meetings that focused on constructive discussions and decisions to be made. The other meetings were organized “to impress the public” (S. Efoua, pers. comm., June 9, 2004). In three years, no general assembly was convened to evaluate the work of CVD officials. In other words, these officials did not account for their actions, transactions, or financial management to the village community. According to a villager, “business was conducted as if timber companies and municipal and administrative authorities are the ones who appointed our CVD officials” (Angu Angu 2001: 10). This drift towards predominantly upward accountability explains why CVD executive bureau members, reinforced by their impunity and sense of security, adopted strategies to embezzle timber company funds that were intended for the whole village community (see Box 8).

⁵⁵ “Specifications” refers to all the socioeconomic projects that a timber company undertakes to accomplish in a village or in a group of villages having customary rights over a forest unit under exploitation. This is a regulatory provision.

⁵⁶ Particularly the drilling of two modern wells and social assistance needs.

Box 8: Management of community parafiscal compensation in Kongo, 1997-2000

The absence of the simplest accounting procedures (such as cash receipts and payment accounts) makes it difficult to accurately assess the situation. The analysis of contradictory speeches, review of council documents, and observation, however, enabled a reconstruction of reality. These sources indicate that the Kongo village received close to \$25,580 from the *vente de coupe* between 1997 and 2000. Part of this money, \$13,530, went to the coffers of the Lomié rural council. The rest, amounting to \$12,250, was handed to the CVD. Of this, the CVD used \$3,840 to drill two wells (work uncompleted as of December 2003), partially financed the filing of the community forest application, and provided financial assistance to a few village schoolchildren, widows, and widowers in 1999. Our informants indicate that the rest of this money (\$8,410) was used by CVD officials for personal ends.

Sources: Assembe (2003c: 8) and Oyono (2004h: 7-8)

Socioeconomic effects

The arrangements for the management of the community parafiscal compensation yielded some positive results. First, the compensation payments induced the establishment of a management committee. Though inefficient in its operation, its establishment demonstrated local will to build community action around the management of forestry revenue. Second, a new imaginary of the issue of access to forestry revenue, illustrated by a “collective” appeasement and a break in symbolic confrontation with the State, emerged from these royalties. Third, the disqualification and dissolution of the committee one year later is evidence that the Kongo village community can demand accountability from its representatives and sanction them when they fail to meet expectations. Fourth, there were a few socioeconomic benefits—indicative, however, of a “preferential option for social realizations” (Oyono 2004b: 9)—to the Kongo village.⁵⁷

On the other hand, these arrangements also produced detrimental intermediate outcomes. To begin with, after entering the “forestry scene” because of the absence of transparency in the exercise of powers by existing management committee officials, the CVD, in turn, failed to set up mechanisms for transparent revenue management, dismantling of local “green delinquency” strategies⁵⁸, and regulation of local governance.⁵⁹ Second, the porosity of established arrangements led to the formation a new “social class”—a corrupt and irresponsible forestry elite (Angu Angu 2001: 8)—more concerned with capturing forestry revenue and seeking avenues for personal enrichment.

⁵⁷ The \$3,840 mentioned in box 8 was spent as follows: \$1,230 was spent to drill two wells; \$1,250, to partly finance the community forest application file; \$390, to the purchase of school supplies for village students; \$350, to grant performance awards to the best students; \$430, to assist widows and widowers; and \$190, to the construction of a community house. It is difficult, however, to verify if the amounts declared were actually spent on these different activities, or if the figures were merely inflated. For example, several local informants argue that the community parafiscal compensation never truly financed the community house.

⁵⁸ An expression borrowed from Ndzana Modo (2003: 5).

⁵⁹ With regard to accountability in the management of the community parafiscal compensation by the Kongo CVD, Minlo Enyegue (2003: 7) states: “The Kongo CVD operated in an archaic manner. The theoretical potential of accountability, when it existed, was simply a formality. General assemblies that were supposed to be convened at the end of each year to assess activities were never held. Members of the executive bureau, who play almost the same roles in various organizations, never accounted to those they represent.”

Some members of the imploded management committee and the CVD have become owners of small village stores thanks to the money that was misappropriated (Assembe 2003c: 6). The disappearance of \$8,410 from the coffers of the management committee/CVD and the retention of \$13,530 by Lomié municipal and administrative authorities—with the approval, though passive, of members of the management committee/CVD—demonstrates the determination of Kongo village community representatives to pursue their “socioeconomic self-relocation” and their attraction to being “top actors.”

Third, after four years, the allocation of the parafiscal compensation has not had a significant or lasting economic impact on the village: the two wells had not been completed and funds were not allocated, for example, for agricultural or livestock production activities. Finally, the resulting institutional and organizational infrastructure produced many internal conflicts in the village: (i) inter-generational conflicts relating to access to financial resources, caused by the increase of young men’s open denunciation and reproving idioms regarding the CVD and the redistribution and management of parafiscal compensation; and (ii) interpersonal and inter-family conflicts, evidenced by the destruction of neighbors’ property (Minlo Enyegue 2003a: 11).

Ecological effects

Kongo’s *vente de coupe* was exploited for close to four years. Neither the CVD nor the rest of the village know the exact volume of timber harvested. Due to lack of expertise, the village community could not closely monitor the logging operations (opening of tracks, species harvested, hauling of logs, etc). The inhabitants of Kongo recognize today that “the section of the forest exploited as *vente de coupe* lost all its large trees, useful to timber companies, as well as trees useful to villagers and many small trees not taken into account by logging companies” (S. Efoua, pers. comm. September 23, 2002). This damage is confirmed by transects carried out at the site. Furthermore, as a result of the timber company’s desire to collect as many logs as possible within a limited time and the local population’s “urge” to obtain money, many trees were felled and abandoned in the forest.

More attention should be focused on local perception’s of the *vente de coupe* than on exploitation technologies. To Kongo’s inhabitants—especially CVD officials—the community parafiscal compensation was a unique opportunity to gain access to cash from the industrial exploitation of “their forest.”⁶⁰ To the local population, it was at last an opportunity to earn a livelihood from this money. CVD officials wanted timber companies to carry on their activities beyond the limits of the *vente de coupe*, provided that they continued to pay them (Oyono 2004b: 8-9). This form of ecological imaginary—according to Mendouga Mebenga (1998b: 36), who writes about the “tragedy of \$1.50 per cubic meter”—led to the messy sale of several forests by networks composed of timber companies, regional officials of MINEF, and management committees.

Conclusions

The general absence of transparency in the management of community parafiscal compensation, of downward accountability, and of internal sanction mechanisms, combined with profitable connections between the members of the management committee/CVD and external actors,

⁶⁰ This “forestry fever” was justified by the fact that Kongo’s community parafiscal compensation occurred prior to the exploitation of the community forest. This was therefore the first time that the inhabitants of this village received money in cash for forest exploitation.

produced mitigated results in Kongo village. In the socioeconomic sphere, the experience induced social changes characterized by imbalances, divisions, and distortions. The arrangements put in place by the village to “welcome” local management of funds did not allow the local community, for example, to initiate income generating activities or to set up a savings and credit system that each peasant could turn toward individual economic activities. Some CVD officials nonetheless succeeded in setting up small stores. In the ecological sphere, these arrangements served only as an incentive for exaggerated logging in the *vente de coupe*.

The Local Governance of Annual Forestry Fees (LGAFF) Mechanism: Kongo, Mboké, and Ndoua

Within the scope of the four case studies, the LGAFF mechanism covers the villages of Kongo, Mboké, and Ndoua. The first two villages have already been presented extensively above. The Ndoua village is located in the South province, Ocean division (coastal region of Cameroon), Lolodorf Sub-division, Bipindi district. Spread over close to seven kilometers, Ndoua has approximately 800 inhabitants distributed among three ethnic groups (Ngoumba, Fang, and Bagyiéli Pygmies), and eight lineages (Assembe 2003a: 5). According to the classification of René Létouzey (1985), the local forest ecosystem belongs to the Atlantic forestry sector, and more specifically to the *Biafrean Cesalpiniaceae* forest type. The most common commercial species are: Fraké (*Terminalia superba*), Tali (*Erythroleum ivorense*), Azobé (*Lophira alata*), Padouk (*Pterocarpus soyauxii*), white Doussié (*Azizia pachyloba*), and Ebony (*Diospyros crassiflora*). The village of Ndoua is found to the east of UFA 00-003 (Lokoundjé/Nyong), which it shares with many other villages, including Mboké. Batendé (2004: 2) states that the Ndoua landscape is composed of agricultural lands, fallows, secondary forests, and dense forests. Agricultural lands are marked by the presence of home gardens, domestic fruit trees, and vast family cacao plantations.

The LGAFF mechanism applies to these villages because their inhabitants have customary rights over UFA 10039 (in the case of Kongo) and 00-003 (in the case of Mboké and Ndoua). The complex legal framework for LGAFF was already explained in Part III. Here the local governance of annual forestry fees in the three villages is assessed.

Short-circuiting the redistribution and disbursement of annual forestry fees

Investigations conducted in Kongo since 2000—the date when the disbursement of community parafiscal compensation was suspended—found that CVD forestry governance activities are currently at a standstill. Despite the retention of funds by the Lomié rural council and embezzlement by the CVD management committee, community parafiscal compensation did, in fact, reach the Kongo village community. This is not the case for annual forestry fees, however, which have not been redistributed to date by the Lomié rural council. According to Assembe (2003a: 8), based on official calculation procedures, the village of Kongo should have received \$6,200 from 2001 to 2003 in forestry fees—that is, approximately \$2,066 per year—in view of its proximity to UFA 10039.

The legal texts stipulate that the 10 per cent of annual forestry fees intended for village communities be channeled through rural councils. These funds should be used to finance village projects based on priorities determined through mutual agreement among municipal authorities, administrative authorities, and representatives of the villages concerned. In the case of Kongo, the \$6,200 was never invested in socioeconomic projects. This money is part of the \$49,230 in forestry fees

intended for all the villages of the Lomié region that were embezzled from the Lomié Treasury in 2001 (Assembe 2003a: 7; Minlo Enyegue 2003a: 8).

In the case of Mboké and Ndoua, the situation is almost identical. These two villages, which fall under the Kribi and Bipindi rural councils, respectively, are near to UFA 00-003, which has been logged since 2001 by the company MMG. These and other villages “dependant” on this UFA should have received from their rural councils approximately \$26,950 (within the Kribi rural council) and \$9,430 (within the Bipindi rural council) in annual forestry fees from 2002 to the first half of 2004.⁶¹ The villagers of Mboké and Ndoua report that their respective rural councils have never even informed them that this money is available. This suggests that part of these funds, which should have been used for micro-projects in these two villages, were simply embezzled by municipal and administrative authorities.

Ecological effects

In Kongo, institutional and organizational arrangements built around annual forestry fees are not functional, because the money that was to be paid to this village disappeared. In Mboké and Ndoua, no governance infrastructure for annual forestry fees was put in place, since these two villages were never taken into account by municipal authorities in the management of these funds. The failure to access these forestry fees has generated two types of negative attitudes with ecological consequences in the villages: (i) a lack of environmental concern—a direct consequence of their exclusion from the redistribution of fees—has resulted in a *laissez faire* attitude toward logging company excesses; and (ii) traditional or artisanal sawing and illegal tree felling have intensified, contributing to forest degradation, “in order not to lose everything.”

Conclusions

In 2003, despite the retention of funds intended for micro-projects in Kongo, the Pallisco/Assene Nkou Group, which logs UFA 10039, decided to finance projects within the scope of the specifications. Thus an agreement was reached with the village community to build a community shelter for the sale of agricultural products, for \$1,850, and to purchase a brick-press. The short-circuiting of the portion of annual forestry fees intended for Kongo led to an open conflict between the CVD, after they received information about this money’s availability, and the Lomié rural council, particularly the mayor. At the root of this conflict is the choice of micro-projects and the contractor (Assembe 2003a: 6). The mayor of the Lomié rural council wants to choose both, without the involvement of village community representatives. The CVD rejects this process, because the members of the executive bureau (Assembe 2003a: 6) fear it will lead to complicity between the mayor and the contractor and to the embezzlement of funds, to the detriment of the effective execution of the projects.⁶²

⁶¹ These figures were taken from the reconstruction of statements of payment of 50 percent of annual forestry fees (see *Nouvelle Expression* No. 1127 and *Cameroon Tribune* of 22 December 2003). More complete and reliable data should be obtained from the PSRF.

⁶² Many authors, writing about “fictitious projects,” have already addressed or evoked this manner of concealing money earmarked for annual forestry fees and village micro-projects. See Efoua (2000: 4), Pierre (2000: 10-12), Kouna (2001: 7-9), Bigombé Logo (2003: 23-26), Nzoyem *et al.* (2003: 23, 35), and Oyono (2004e: 104-105).

Whether annual forest royalties are redistributed and converted into village micro-projects or not, the LGAFF mechanism attracts attention because of the profound dependence of village communities on rural councils, municipal authorities (mayors and municipal tax collectors), administrative authorities (sub-divisional officers and district heads)⁶³, and regional finance officers. The LGCF mechanism (community forests) and the LGPCC mechanism (community parafiscal compensation) pave the way for direct village access to cash. In contrast, in the LGAFF mechanism, the portion of annual fees earmarked for village communities are deposited with rural councils before being converted into micro-projects. This procedure—about which villagers complain and whose negative effects can be seen in Kongo, as well as other villages—constitutes a serious obstacle to substantive decentralization and democratic local governance.

The Local Governance of Oil Compensation (LGOC) Mechanism: Ndoua and Nkongmeyos/Obokoué

The LGOC mechanism is not directly linked, logically or with regard to policy, with the decentralized management of forests in Cameroon. Its inclusion in this paper is justified by its connection to the issue of governance and to environmental justice. In this respect, the following section addresses local governance of oil compensation with two main questions: (i) have village communities had or received decision-making powers regarding the redistribution of oil compensation, as in the case of some forest governance mechanisms?; (ii) what effects are generated—in terms of socioeconomic change, environmental justice, and ecological change—by the pipeline passing through the village of Ndoua and the area of Nkongmeyos/Obokoué?

The village of Ndoua has already been presented in the LGAFF mechanism. For its part, the area of Nkongmeyos/Obokoué is located in the Center province, Mefou and Akono division, Ngoumou sub-division. It comprises a series of villages called Nkongmeyos I, Nkongmeyos II, and Obokoué. To unite this research site, the area is referred to as Nkongmeyos/Obokoué in the case studies. Nkongmeyos/Obokoué has a population estimated at 1,000 inhabitants, distributed in many large families. Vegetation is characterized by semi-deciduous dense forest. The most common tree species include: Ayous (*Triplochiton scleroxylon*), Bété (*Mansonia altissima*), Sapelli (*Entandrophragma cylindrum*), Fraké (*Terminalia superba*), Andok (*Irvingia gabonensis*), Amouk (*Detarium macrocarpum*), etc. (MINEF 1999: 5). The village territory presents diversified facies, with home gardens and agroforests comprised of cacao farms and bands of food crops; domestic fruit trees, the encroachment of which is at the root of protests and of the compensation process; and young fallows, old fallows, secondary forests, and dense forests.

The village of Ndoua and the Nkongmeyos/Obokoué area were selected as research sites for the LGOC mechanism because the Chad-Cameroon pipeline passes through their farms and/or forest land, for which residents received compensation. As mentioned earlier, the Cameroon Oil Transportation Company and the Government of Cameroon defined four types of compensation. This study addresses two of those: individual compensation and community compensation. Individual compensation—to individuals or nuclear families—was paid in Ndoua and Nkongmeyos/Obokoué. It is defined by the Compensation Plan as an amount of money paid for a

⁶³ In Cameroonian administrative terminology, sub-divisional officers and district heads are regional representatives of the central administration in sub-divisions and districts, which are, in descending order, the smallest administrative units in the geography of deconcentration, or administrative decentralization.

good or an investment (houses, farms, protected trees, etc.). The village of Ndoua and the area of Nkongmeyos/Obokoué also received community compensation. According to the Compensation Plan, community compensation is based on a definition of the community which covers, *inter alia*, the village.⁶⁴ This type of compensation is justified by the temporary or permanent suspension of the rights of the (village) community over areas and structures needed by the project to establish its facilities and infrastructure (Dkamela 2002: 7-8; CED 2002: 12).

Attributes of local governance and institutional and organizational arrangements

Existing legal and regulatory provisions, administrative acts, and available technical documents⁶⁵ have not transferred any powers or responsibilities over financial resources to village communities. It is only because individuals or village communities lost material and natural goods—and/or rights over these goods—that they were compensated. Access to one or the other form of compensation thus results more from the recognition of a right over a good and subscription to a principle of environmental justice than from the transfer of powers or responsibilities. For this reason, the “compensation game” is somewhat in contradiction with the values of decentralization and democratic governance.

The two types of compensation examined here are paid by COTCO, assisted by local administrative authorities and chiefs of the relevant villages. As a general rule, access to individual compensation proceeds from “personal” negotiation with COTCO. Thus, strictly speaking, access to compensation does not require organizational arrangements. But access to community compensation necessitates, *a priori*, at least a minimum degree of internal organization and community action. To this end, the Ndoua village set up a community compensation management committee. This committee’s status is vague and has not been legalized (Assembe 2004: 6). Its statutes only state the composition of the executive bureau and vaguely define the attributions of the designated members. In Nkongmeyos/Obokoué, a village general assembly, headed by the three village chiefs of the area, was set up to address the community compensation issue (Minlo Enyegue 2003b: 3-4). The very implicit and unclear mandate⁶⁶ of the Ndoua management committee and the Nkongmeyos/Obokoué general assembly⁶⁷ is to identify micro-projects to be carried out within the scope of community compensation, stimulate public participation, and oversee the implementation of selected projects.

⁶⁴ This definition also covers the district and sub-division.

⁶⁵ This includes, in particular: Ordinance No. 74-1 of July 6, 1974, to establish rules governing land tenure; Ordinance No 74-3 of July 6, 1974, and Law No 85/09 of July 4, 1985, concerning the procedure governing expropriation for a public purpose and the terms and conditions of compensation; Decree No 58 of August 13, 1981, modifying compensation tariffs to be paid to the owner for destruction of planted trees and food crops; Law No 94/01 of January 20, 1994, establishing forestry, wildlife, and fisheries regulations; Law No 97-16 of August 7, 1997, approving the Convention of Establishment between the Republic of Cameroon and COTCO; World Bank directives concerning compensation; the Environmental Management Plan and Compensation Plan drawn up by COTCO; etc.

⁶⁶ This mandate is not, however, the outcome of a legal or administrative regulation, unlike the other three mechanisms.

⁶⁷ Many debates took place among the populations of the three villages of Nkongmeyos/Obokoué regarding the possible transformation of this general meeting into a management committee.

In spite of having established their respective organizations, the village communities do not appear to have implemented a common and clear strategy to exert pressure on COTCO agents (Batendé 2003: 5). Neither the Ndoua management committee nor the Nkongmeyos/Obokoué general assembly received powers “from above.” In practice, these two bodies seem only to be “consultative committees,” without any decision-making power regarding the compensation process, and with very weak influence. After conducting an information campaign, COTCO and administrative authorities opted to work with this “informal” organizational landscape (D. Ellom, pers. comm., July 12, 2004). But on the whole, the process of internalizing compensation is not based on a solid local organizational infrastructure at either site.

Socioeconomic effects

The case of Nkongmeyos/Obokoué

Since it accommodates one of COTCO’s stations, Nkongmeyos/Obokoué was seriously affected by the construction of facilities related to the pipeline. Many families—twenty in all—were therefore compensated. The largest amount received was \$61,570 and the smallest, \$95. The total amount of individual compensation in the zone was \$214,000. Individual cash compensation was accompanied by compensation in kind, comprising, depending on each case, items such as roofing sheets, atomizers for cacao farms, wheelbarrows, pots, etc. Community compensation amounted to \$52,500.

Individual compensation enabled some recipients to improve their living environment and conditions. About six family houses were rebuilt in the area, and as of January 31, 2004, three new houses were being built by the recipients of individual compensation. Two village stores were also opened. In addition to these uses of compensation, recipients also invested their money by acquiring land in the city of Yaoundé, opening up new farms, organizing marriage celebrations, funding funerals, paying school fees for dependent children, or offering gifts in cash. Community compensation was used for the construction of a community hall and three wells⁶⁸, the purchase of community agricultural equipment, and the repair of the village primary school’s classrooms. Furthermore, the laying of the pipeline provided temporary employment for many area youth (about 30 people), on the one hand, and contributed to the improvement of incomes through small businesses and the renting of rooms to workers, on the other.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, the compensation process and the absence of solid local arrangements produced a host of negative socioeconomic effects. According to many villagers, the distribution of individual compensation seriously affected community spirit within families, because of the attraction of money and adoption of individualistic values. For example, several family heads made an exaggerated “patrimonial” use of this compensation, by marginalizing their dependents in redistribution (Minlo Enyegue 2003b: 13; Assembe 2004: 10) and using all the money for themselves. The capture of compensation by family heads generated verbal tensions, quarrels, physical violence, and cases of recourse to customary and modern law. At the inter-family level, Batendé (2003: 7-8) inventoried the many cases of quarrels and brawls over land boundaries generated by compensation payments between 2000 and 2002 in these villages. Activities linked to

⁶⁸ Only two wells are functional.

⁶⁹ Two women that we interviewed, who had sold food to COTCO workers, reported that they had saved \$3,000 and \$2,500, respectively.

the installation of the pipeline also led to an increase in prostitution, alcoholism, school drop out, and insecurity. The project also produced a “conflict of symbols” between “the haves” (those who benefited from individual compensation) and “the have-nots.”

The case of Ndoua

A score of people obtained individual cash compensation in Ndoua. The largest amount allocated was \$24,000 and the smallest, \$1,200. In addition, some individuals received compensation in kind as well, composed generally of agricultural tools. The village also received community compensation amounting to \$2,650. Individual compensation induced very little change in village infrastructure. Six houses were either built or entirely renovated (Batendé 2004: 6). Two small village stores were opened. The individual compensation was used to pay children’s school fees, organize marriage and funeral ceremonies, and offer cash grants within the framework of solidarity networks. The community compensation enabled the village of Ndoua to acquire two brick-presses, build a classroom in the village primary school, and plan the construction of four drinking wells.⁷⁰ Lastly, the Ndoua residents who received individual compensation contributed \$770 for the supply of emergency medication to the area health center.⁷¹

Nevertheless, the oil compensation process—combined with the absence of internal regulatory mechanisms—generated significant social upheaval. As in the previous case, the distribution of individual compensation resulted in the proliferation of intra-familial conflicts (Ngoun N’zié 1998: 8). During and after the payment of this financial compensation, the village recorded at least one violent family quarrel per week (D. Ellom, pers. comm., November 23, 2003). The breakdown of family equilibrium led to practices of witchcraft as recourse. Land disputes between families which hitherto lived in harmony were also noted (Batendé 2004: 7).

Many recipients of individual compensation—either as family head or dependent—demonstrated lavish behavior by spending their money on worthless items. In the absence of an efficient internal organization, the village chief eventually became Ndoua’s sole representative in transactions with COTCO and local administrative authorities. This situation, which made the population feel marginalized, led to a kind of rejection of the village chief, who was accused of complicity with COTCO officials in fixing an inadequate amount for community compensation. In addition, though the first briefings on the installation of the pipeline promised equitable treatment to Ndoua village’s Pygmy population, in the end they were not taken into account in the distribution of individual compensation.⁷²

Ecological effects

The installation of the pipeline through Nkongmeyos/Obokoué and Ndoua has had numerous ecological consequences. Observations on the ground and discussions with villagers and COTCO

⁷⁰ As of March 2004, none of the wells had been completed (Batendé 2004: 6).

⁷¹ Three other villages in the area joined this initiative with a total contribution \$1,300.

⁷² In several villages of the Cameroonian forest zone, the social landscape is characterized by a secular cohabitation between ethnic groups of “Tall Blacks” (Bantou) and Pygmies. The latter, marginalized socially, economically, and politically, are also dependent on the forest and are never taken into account in public issues concerning local communities. To rectify this situation COTCO drew up a special plan for the support of Pygmies.

workers, as well as transects conducted in the area, demonstrated that several components of the agroforest and forest landscape were partly damaged. A large section of fallow land was ravaged. Seventeen food crop farms, forty-six hectares of mixed crops, seven cacao farms, many isolated crops, and thousands of fruit trees and oil palm trees were completely destroyed. In Ndoua, the ecological assessment is qualitatively similar, with, however, a higher degree of destruction of valuable woody species. Additionally, pipeline installation caused the breakdown of the existing geological and ecological balance due to the dynamiting of rocks, the creation of artificial lakes, the disintegration of rivers, water pollution, the blockage of dips, and the disruption of marshy ecosystems and habitats for fauna.

Conclusions

Almost 4,000 Cameroonian peasants have benefited from individual compensation in the context of the construction of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, for a total of approximately \$6,000,000 (FOCARFE 2002: 4-5). Overall, the beneficiaries in the two sites studied perceive the compensation as a windfall in a difficult context, despite the damages they have suffered. This euphoria has generated two asymmetrical attitudes—the minority being a “hoarding” attitude involving productive and/or long-term investments and the majority, a “cathartic” attitude marked by focusing on victuals and summary expenses. In the light of the amounts disbursed at the two sites, community compensation, aimed at setting up community infrastructure and projects, seems to have fallen short of expectations.

In summary, three central observations stand out in the characterization of the LGPCC mechanism: (i) although the oil compensation distribution process, entirely designed and implemented from outside the decision-making space of village communities, meets environmental justice concerns, it is still presented as a “business” fully managed from outside by COTCO and the Cameroonian government⁷³; (ii) the flow of different types of compensation has been characterized by numerous glitches, negotiated access, and influence peddling (Tatchi 2000b: 2; Tatchi 2001: 13), becoming, in the end, an arena where external actors (COTCO and State representatives⁷⁴) exercised their powers over village communities, including through State violence; and (iii) there has been no real socioeconomic change in the villages, despite material destruction and ecological risks caused by the pipeline.

⁷³ For example, in comparison to the LGCF and LGPCC mechanisms, the LGOC mechanism presents a very low potential for local governance.

⁷⁴ Nguiffo (2002: 4) reveals that “injustices were committed against a number of individuals: in some cases, the beneficiaries were unable to receive the sums to which they were entitled, due to mistakes by the consortium and the administration. In other cases, beneficiaries were forced by a local administrative authority to accept amounts that were considerably lower than the value of the damages they had suffered. There are many cases of such unjust practices.” Tatchi (2000a: 14) mentions that “COTCO agents acquired an ‘elite’ complex, making the ‘capacity to negotiate in French’ the decisive barometer in determining individual compensation amounts.”

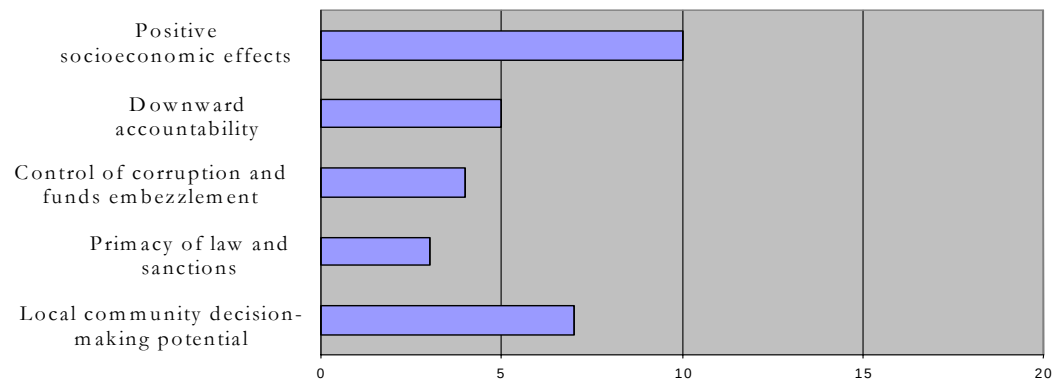
Part V

Mapping of Local Governance Mechanisms

The diagrams below were obtained through the following methodological process: (1) developing five local governance indicators; (2) preparing a questionnaire on the evaluation of those indicators; (3) selecting 20 respondents at each site; (4) applying the questionnaire, each respondent giving a mark (from 0 to 20) for each indicator; (5) adding up all the scores for each indicator and then dividing by 20, hence obtaining a final score for each indicator and for each governance mechanism at each site. Local governance mapping is based both on the presence of local community decision-making—that is, whether there is a potential for local governance at all with regard to the mechanism in question (local community decision-making potential)—and indicators of good governance (downward accountability, control of corruption and funds embezzlement, primacy of law and sanctions, and positive socioeconomic effects). Hence, in some cases, the level of good governance is low because of the absence of the former and, in other cases, because of the weakness of the latter.

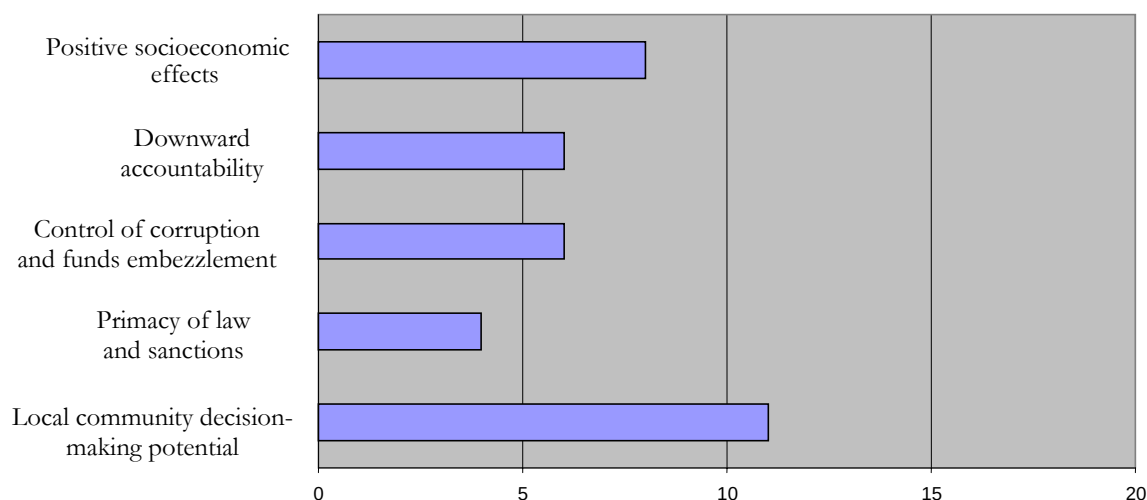
Diagrams and comments

Diagram 1: Local governance in the Kongo community forest



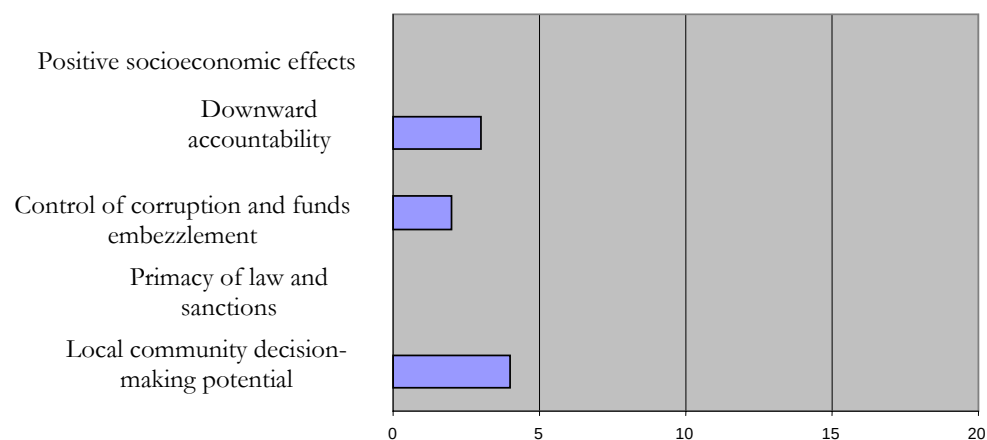
Comment: This diagram demonstrates that, for the 20 people interviewed locally, the socioeconomic outcomes of the management of the Kongo community forest are average. The level of local decision-making potential, although below the average, shows nevertheless that some decisions are made locally. There is little or no control over cases of embezzlement, and sanctions are almost never applied.

Diagram 2: Local governance of para-fiscal community compensation in Kongo



Comment: For para-fiscal community compensation, local community decision-making potential is higher than average, because, as in the community forest mechanism, this mechanism depends little on outsiders. The socioeconomic effects have been insufficient. It must be noted that the level of control of embezzlement and the primacy of sanctions, though still low, is justified by the destitution of the management committee members and their replacement by the village development committee.

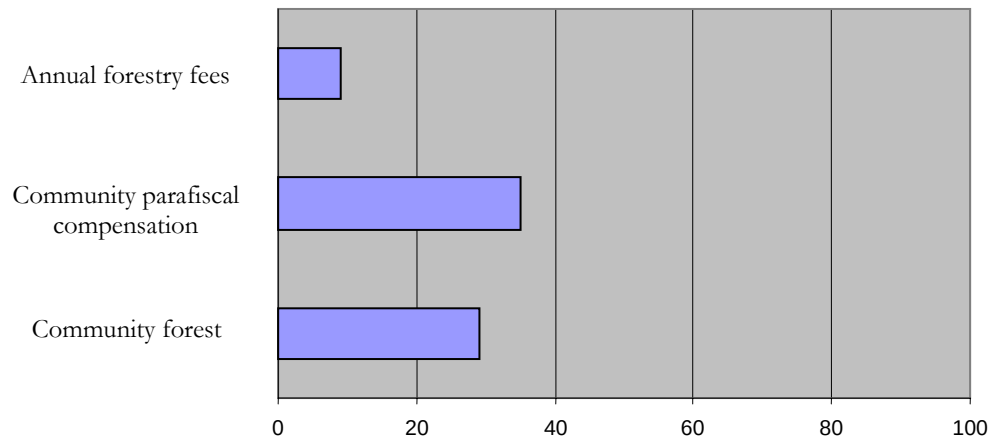
Diagram 3: Local governance of annual forestry fees in Kongo



Comment: This case illustrates the retention of annual forestry fee management powers by intermediary actors, that is, municipal and administrative authorities, and the little-to-no decision-making power that local communities hold over this “innovation.” The village has never had access to the 10 percent, which was apparently embezzled at the town level in Lomié, the regional capital,

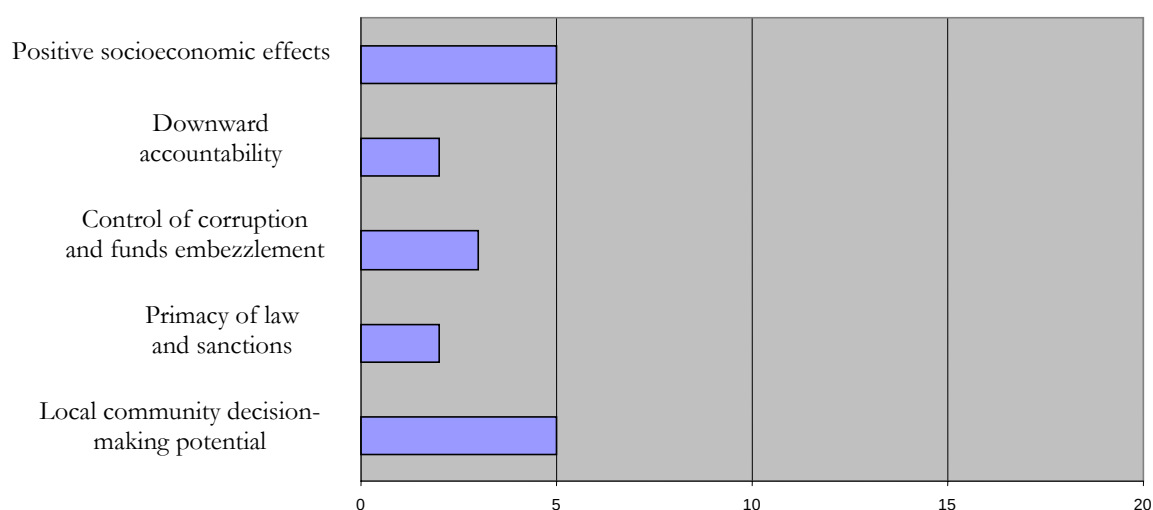
hence the absence of socioeconomic results. The level of accountability illustrated here can be explained by the fact that the village management committee did render accounts to the village community regarding the misunderstanding caused by the Lomié rural council on forestry fees management.

Diagram 4: Inter-mechanism comparison in Kongo



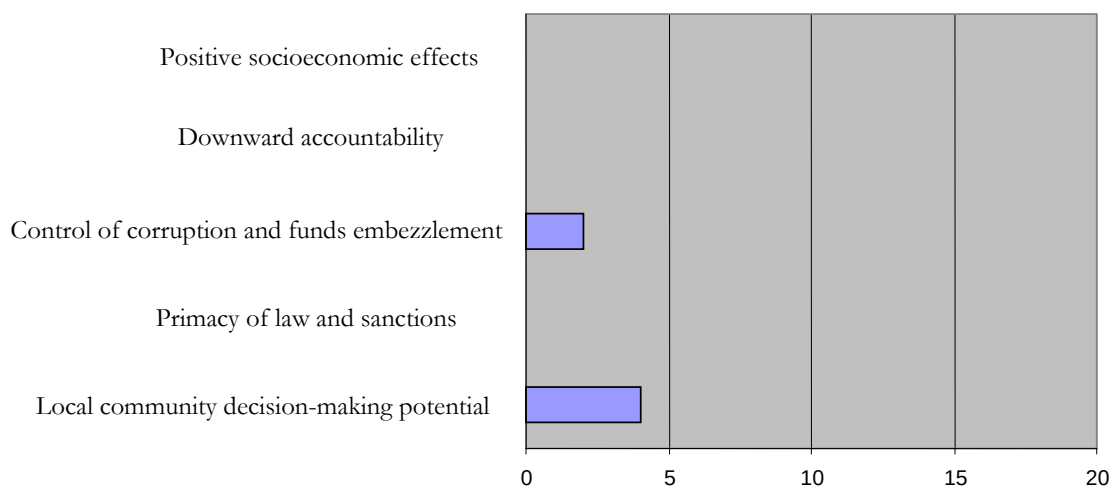
Comment: Among the three mechanisms studied in Kongo, the para-fiscal compensation mechanism is the one with the highest level of good local governance, whereas the annual forestry fees mechanism has the lowest score. These discrepancies illustrate the degree of satisfaction that local communities have drawn from compensation when it is paid directly to them.

Diagram 5: Local governance of the Mboké community forest



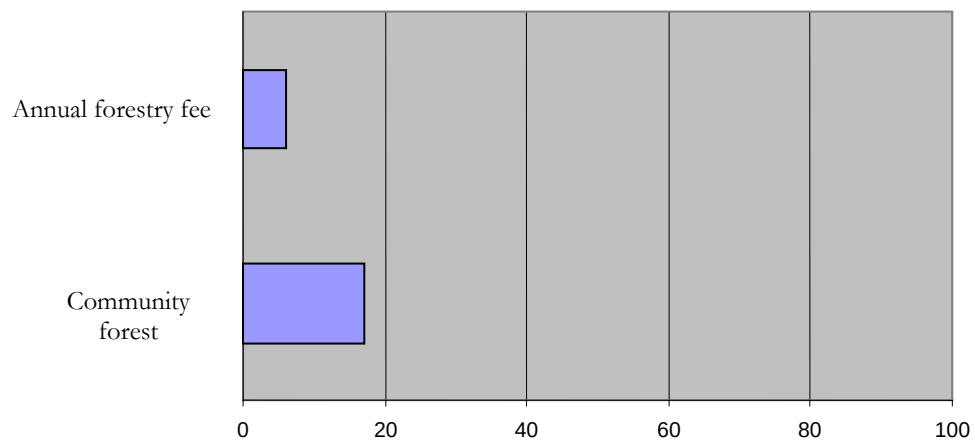
Comment: The socioeconomic effects are virtually non-existent here. And there is practically no local decision-making potential, the level on the diagram being simply the result of the village community's involvement in deciding that Likeng & Cie should restore the road (which is still in process). The low level of the three other indicators reveals the influence of the village chief/committee chairman on the management of revenues generated by the community forest and widespread impunity.

Diagram 6: Local governance of annual forestry fees in Mboké



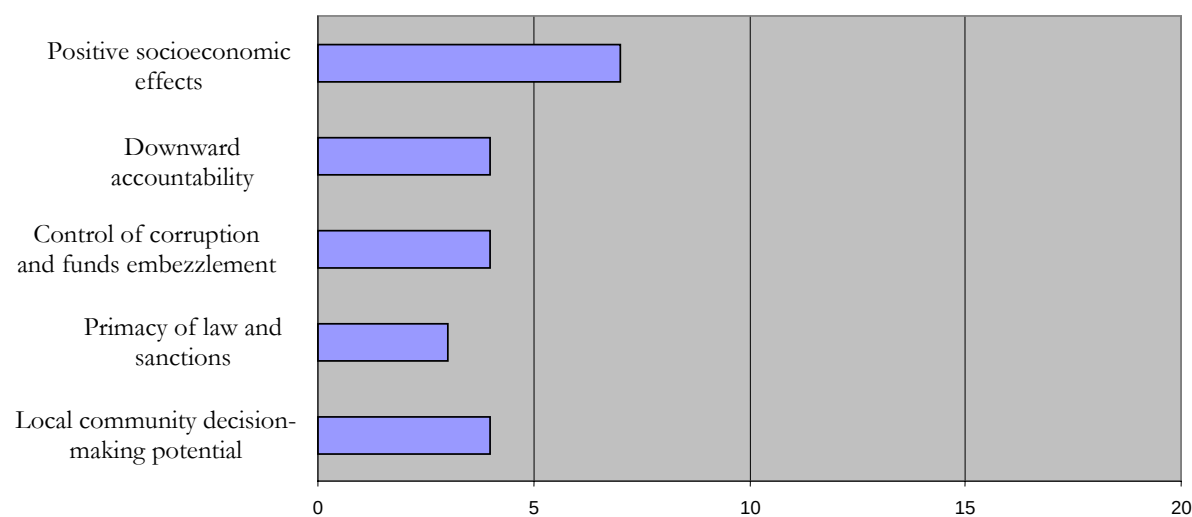
Comment: As in Kongo, the Mboké village has never received the annual forestry fee. The local community reacted, however, by making the collective decision to demand an explanation from municipal authorities, which it accuses of multiple embezzlements.

Diagram 7: Inter-mechanism comparison in Mboké



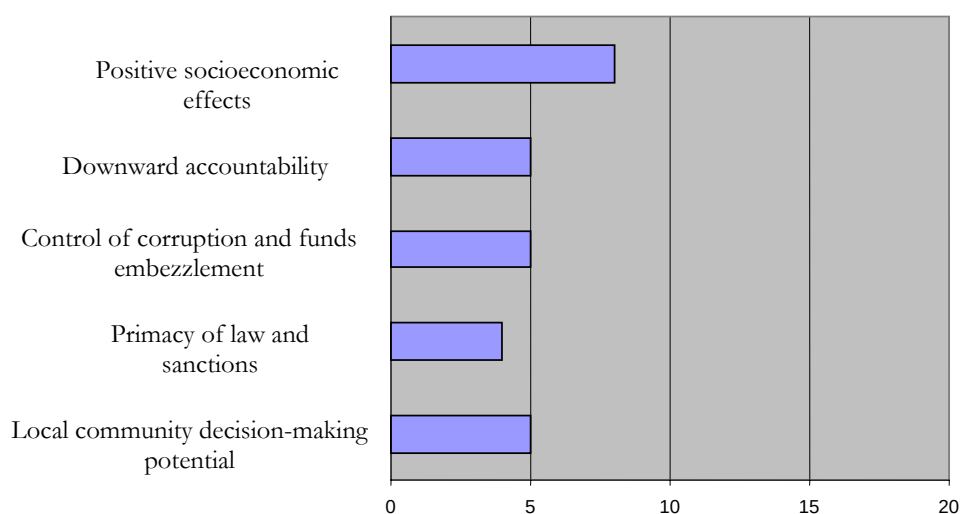
Comment: The results of the evaluation of community forest and annual forestry fees mechanisms in Mboké simply demonstrate poor governance, due to the revenue management method established by the community forest management committee, on the one hand, and the retention of the annual forestry fees by municipal authorities, on the other.

Diagram 8: Local governance of oil compensation in Ndoua



Comment: Apart from the socioeconomic outcomes, which have a level of more than 5 out of 20, the level of the indicators is extremely low. Good local governance of individual oil compensation is very low in the village of Ndoua.

Diagram 9: Local governance of oil compensation in Nkongmeyos/Obokoué



Comment: As in Ndoua, the level of good local governance of oil compensation is low in Nkongmeyos/Obokoué.

Conclusions

The diagrams above are material illustrations of the observations previously discussed in this paper. The highest levels for local governance indicators were observed in Kongo for the parafiscal community compensation mechanism—represented in these case studies in Kongo alone. In this mechanism, the management committee received frequent cash payments, and all decisions were made locally. This is not the case with community forests, even if as with the former mechanism, the decision-making capacity of local actors is also significant, and in Kongo, socioeconomic benefits were even higher.

The annual forestry fees and the mechanisms surrounding the circulation and conversion of the 10 percent into socioeconomic projects serve as counter examples to the devolution and decentralization of forest management. Effective powers are not recognized for local communities, which therefore have no decision-making powers, and the process is controlled by municipal and administrative authorities, who are not downwardly accountable.

The oil compensation mechanism is atypical, to the extent that, as emphasized earlier, it is not characterized by the devolution of formal powers to local communities, and hence cannot be included in the innovations that have taken shape as a result of forest management decentralization. The level of some of this mechanism's accountability indicators is, however, explained not by this particularity but by the “democratic” dynamics that have influenced the management of individual compensation, such as the demand for accountability from heads of families and the use of lawsuits. This mechanism also demonstrates that some positive socioeconomic benefits can be obtained from direct compensation without local governance.

Part VI

Political Ecology of Forestry Governance and Local Dynamics

The findings presented above demonstrate that the quality of local governance and of institutional indicators are determined by conscious, as well as unconscious, factors regarding the direction of decision making, policy choices, and the “culture” of the agents charged with implementing policy innovations. Drawing from political ecology, ecological anthropology, and political economy, important work on institutional analysis of multi-stakeholder interactions in natural resource policy implementation and local ownership in the third world emphasizes a dual-front geography: (i) central; and (ii) local. But from the analytical perspective of this paper, it becomes obvious here that, in the final analysis, we are facing a “three-front geography”: (i) the level at which forestry policies and reforms are conceived (central); (ii) the level of actors and agents in charge of implementation and monitoring (the middle, or regional); and (iii) the sphere of application and implementation of policy innovations and decision-making options (local).

Though resorting to the approach centered on two fronts for certain themes, this chapter will attempt to show how decentralized forest management processes have reconfigured the “traditional” gap and the “conflict of rationalities” between the central and local, and relocated them to the space between the regional and the local, and to the local level itself. Accordingly, the following pages address a sequence of themes through which multi-polar shocks and confrontations are emerging around powers, environmental justice, equity, access to benefits, use of community resources, and access to well-being (Ribot and Oyono 2005: 209-210). The analysis is based on the case studies discussed earlier as well as other decentralization experiences and the broader context for forestry decentralization in Cameroon.

The omnipresence of the State, resistance at “the top,” and emasculation of powers transferred to the local sphere

Forestry reforms undertaken in Cameroon since 1994, in general, and the implementation of the decentralized management of forests, in particular, have generated positive opinions and great optimism in decision-making spheres. Indeed, for the first time, local communities have been given a significant position in the configuration of the field of direct access to the financial benefits derived from Cameroonian timber. The possibilities arising from the new dynamics, such as the establishment of community forests, local management of community forest revenues, and access to funds from *ventes de coupe* and annual forestry fees, have been rapidly integrated into the field of “major instruments for poverty reduction and social justice.” Regional MINEF officials have sometimes spoken of the “liberation of local communities thanks to forestry reforms, and not to agriculture as proclaimed for the past several decades.”

From the viewpoint of local communities⁷⁵, the process of creating and implementing community forests and local/autonomous management of revenues from the sale of boards is, in fact, based on effective powers. This innovation is perceived by forest zone communities as one of the most prominent results of their powerful socio-political demand for recognition of their historical rights

⁷⁵ We believe that the opinion of local communities is the most important in assessing the powers transferred in the context of triumphant decentralization.

over forests and their “legal” inclusion among those entitled to receive benefits from logging. Local views and new collective attitudes⁷⁶ indicate that in the environmental imagery of these local communities, the signing of community forest management agreements is synonymous with distributive justice and taking their rights into account.

Nevertheless, after the euphoria, local communities are now revisiting the rights, powers, and responsibilities transferred to them by the State. Regarding community forests, even if there has been a move towards the “legal” recognition of their rights over forest ecosystems, these communities believe that the implementation of this innovation, from the perspective of reinforcing powers, presents numerous limitations, suggesting the central State’s will to maintain control over the process (see Box 9, see also Pénelon 1997: 4-6). First, at the local level, villagers question if the “right to have a community forest” should be granted by the “top,” the State. This stance is based on the fact that local communities believe that they do not need “authorization for something that has belonged to them since pre-colonial times.” Second, villagers deem insufficient the area established for community forests (5,000 hectares).⁷⁷ Third, legal documents in force state that when a community forest is “poorly managed” its management agreement will be suspended. The communities believe that this clause illustrates the desire of MINEF—and, therefore, the State—to dilute, and control, the transferred powers⁷⁸, thus transforming community forests into “a mere loan.”

Box 9: The administrative dilemma of the creation of community forests

“Community forests are hailed by some as a springboard which would finally allow local populations to directly enjoy revenues from their forests, and perceived by others as a cumbersome instrument. Forest administration is the place of obscure transactions and rather unorthodox procedures. Because of the facilities gained by Ministry of Forests’ agents from industrial logging companies, any other forestry activity that does not follow this logic is considered awkward and unworthy of interest. This means that any community that lacks the financial means to (officially and unofficially) submit a request for a community forest will never succeed—unless it is assisted by an elite, a project, or an NGO, which not only handles the technical, but also the significant financial and logistical aspects. The latter are indeed needed to maintain the waves of civil servants from the cities, pay their *per diem* allowances and ‘motivations,’ and minimize obstacles to obtaining precious signatures [...] that are not given without conflict, knowing the limited resources of village communities and some NGOs. Thus completing a community forest application file through the meanders of bureaucratic red tap is not unlike an obstacle course, where each stage is marked by conflicts between the communities and the administration (forestry and territorial).”

Source: Nzoyem *et al.* (2003: 53)

⁷⁶ By “new collective attitudes” we refer to the attitudes generated by the empowering of local communities in forest management with the signing of management agreements.

⁷⁷ Some villages have native lands that cover larger areas, consequently their inhabitants would have liked to have larger community forests.

⁷⁸ The villagers talk about “the left hand taking away what the right hand had given” (see also Ribot and Oyono 2005: 210).

The process of converting annual forestry fees into projects is also typical of the retention of powers at the regional and central levels. If the distribution of these fees becomes, for whatever reason, the object of a “public ceremony” in which the Ministry of Finance remits the checks to mayors, there is subsequently an extreme lack of transparency and, rather, pronounced opacity at the regional level. There is a regional management committee in each rural council that is involved in the circulation and investment of the annual forestry fees. These committees are headed by municipal and administrative authorities, and have administrative officials and village representatives as members as well.

In addition to three cases analyzed here, other studies regarding the allocation of annual forestry fees also reveal that very few socioeconomic projects have been effectively established (Kouna 2001: 8-13; Bigombé Logo 2003 : 23-34; Nzoyem *et al.* 2003: 46-67). Though several projects have been defined, the funds have been diverted by municipal authorities with the complicity of regional administrative authorities. Local communities believe that the LGAFF mechanism has stripped them of powers and responsibilities.⁷⁹ In other words, they think that “their 10 per cent” should be given directly to them in cash rather than to the mayors and the *sous-préfets*. Local protest movements are structured according to the mode—or absence—of internalization of these fees, and numerous village actors say that “they no longer want this policy” (Efoua 2002b: 5)—that is, for the 10 per cent intended for village communities to end up in the coffers of the regional public treasury.

The administrative corset of the francophone “Jacobin” model

The administrative model of French-speaking Africa is characterized by the supervision of elected authorities, such as mayors, by regional administrative authorities, which are simply appointed by the central State. This leads to what Mawhood (1993: 12-15) qualifies as “irresponsibilization” and “infantilization” of elected bodies. This supervision is part of regional sub-systems in which mayors account for their actions more to regional administrative authorities and less to the local populations that elected them, making it very difficult for villagers to hold them accountable for transgressions.⁸⁰ These sub-systems are reproduced with regard to the local governance of Cameroon’s forests (Oyono 2004e: 94-96). For example, regional administrators have been charged with signing community forest management agreements. Furthermore, these same authorities hastily—and often carelessly—establish the village management committees in the LGPCC and LGAFF mechanisms (Bigombé Logo 2003: 26-27). Such practices are copied from the French governance model, as Chapman (1952: 54) notes:

The French tend to take for granted the essential irresponsibility of local elected bodies, and accordingly to insist on administrative safeguards against it. This tendency can still be seen in Cameroon’s laws. Notwithstanding all his powers, a mayor/municipal administrator is subject to close supervision by the prefect. The latter is involved in all local budgeting and can control decisions made about expenditures, contracts, and the work programme. Legal acts of the mayor/administrator have to be submitted for his specific approval before they become enforceable. The supervisory authority may be for different purposes the prefect, the governor of province, or the Minister of Territorial Administration.

⁷⁹ The governance mapping, in Part V above, provides indications of what farmers refer to as disempowerment and irresponsibilization.

⁸⁰ Even elections fail to be an effective accountability mechanism due to the way in which candidates are presented on party lists.

Together with the mayors, these authorities control, in the end, the circulation and allocation of the annual forestry fees, as in the cases of Kongo, Mboké, and Ndoua. A similar role was reproduced in the distribution of various oil compensations. Occasionally, structured pockets of protest form against the omnipresence of administrative authorities in local forest management, and local actors proclaim that they “do not want supervision in their internal affairs concerning forests” (see Bigombé Logo 2003: 28) and condemn the ongoing authoritarian and non-participatory reflexes of the central administration’s regional representatives.

Discursive options and practical attitudes rejecting “natural resource multinationals”

In the districts of Lomié, Mbang, and Ebolowa, logging companies involved in *ventes de coupe* toward the late 90s often had conflictive and violent relations with local populations, which complain of injustice. These conflicts are nurtured by reproachful speeches about the kind of capitalist accumulation undertaken by logging multinationals, which too often engage in resource mining. For numerous leaders in local opinion, the accumulation levels and material signs of wealth displayed by logging companies do not fit in any way whatsoever with the “socioeconomic distress” in which local communities live (Bigombé Logo 1994: 9; Oyono 1995: 4-5; Nguiffo 1998: 110; Diaw and Kusumanto 2004: 94-96; Oyono *et al.* 2004a: 364-366). The same thing has occurred with the Chad-Cameroon Pipeline Project (see Box 10), whereby the compensation process has encountered obstacles, conflicts, and rejection of the different partners of the “oil multinationals” (Nguiffo 2002: 14; Tatchi 2000a: 14; Ndong 2002: 4).

Verbal condemnation is often compounded by symbol-shattering material attitudes from both the extractive logging companies and oil multinational partners. Efoua (2001: 6) reports on scenes of confrontation between young people from Kongo and loggers in 2000, fighting over the wrong calculation of the \$1.50 per cubic meter *vente de coupe* payment. A group of young people blocked the route for a day to prevent the passage of logging trucks and attacked the loggers’ camps.⁸¹ Such uprisings occur regularly in the Cameroon forest zone (Mimbimi Essono 2004: 175-180; Oyono *et al.* 2004b: 91-92). Similarly, the installation of the pipeline was met with villagers’ strikes and threats of destruction, who now explain that their actions were driven by the desire to claim their basic rights of access to temporary jobs and to compensation (see Abilogo 2002: 8; Minlo Enyegue 2003b: 8; Batendé 2003: 5; Assembe 2003a: 10). All these demonstrations against extractive exploitation and environmental injustice come up against regional administrative authorities and the police, who quite often repress local communities’ claims, thereby demonstrating their blatant support for the logging companies and other multinationals. For leaders of village opinion, the regional representatives of the State are the accomplices of “those with money.”

⁸¹ Regional administrative authorities called in the police to end the demonstration. According to villagers, the ensuing discussions and threats clearly showed that the state had sided with the logging companies.

Box 10: Claims and violence around the installation of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline

“For some time now, Wilbros’ machines arrive regularly at Nanga-Eboko with a large load of equipment [...] The villagers hurriedly go to see the Wilbros representatives to find out about job opportunities for local people, whereupon they are told that it is not time yet [...] Then, curiously, the town is soon invaded by new people from Batschenga, Ngoumou, and other places through which the pipeline passes [...] Tired of waiting for jobs that never come, tired of being humiliated by the sprightly newcomers, and furious at being taunted by Wilbros, the young people of Nanga-Eboko decide, on October 14, 2002, to leave their mark on the project. For three days they organize protest marches against Wilbros. The main reason: the company does not abide by its commitments concerning recruiting local labor. In the beginning, nobody at Wilbros seems shaken by the movement, and the works continue under the protection of peace-keeping forces [...] But as the days go by, the revolt intensifies. Roads are barricaded, effectively bringing Wilbros to a grinding halt for one full day [...] The Nanga-Eboko and Nkoteng police immediately resort to repressive measures. The crowd panics and tries to scatter rapidly. In the general pandemonium that ensues, blanks are fired into the air [...] COTCO agents take advantage of the situation and take personal vengeance on local people. They beat up the demonstrators and commit all sorts of violent acts.”

Source: Abilogo (2002: 8)

Capture of local governance by external elite, municipal authorities, and timber companies

The creation of a community forest requires significant financial resources, but the rural environment is generally marked by poverty and utter destitution. Often, then, a portion of funds derived from community parafiscal compensation is used to finance the preparation of a community forest application file, as in the case of Kongo. But in numerous other cases, logging companies and/or external elite offer to finance the application (Bisséné 2002: 16). In either case, but particularly where communities depend on external funds, the result is a seizure of local governance. Community forests are placed under patronage conditions and, with weak participation of relevant village communities, become captives of the “donors” or sponsors.

The capture process occurs in three main steps: (i) the establishment and subsequent “domestication” of governance organizations—in this case community forest management committees—by the patrons; (ii) the confiscation of decision making by the patron regarding the choice of company to exploit the forest⁸²; and (iii) the patron’s seizure of the revenue generated. These operational discontinuities in community forest implementation—characterized by a confusion of roles between the local communities and the patrons—are typical of the distorted strategies found in the local management of Cameroonian forests.⁸³ It is because of these conditions that community forests—which are supposed to be collective poverty reduction instruments—are being transformed into “forests for the elite” (see Ambara 2003) or “forests for economic agents” (see Box 11).

⁸² In this kind of situation, villagers can no longer manage their community forest themselves since, ultimately, they are forced to “entrust” it to the sponsor.

⁸³ Admittedly, many members of Cameroon’s political-administrative elite were already in the process of creating logging companies, but with the emergence of community forests, the number of elites interested in forestry has dramatically increased, and they now call themselves local governance entrepreneurs for forests and rural “ecopower.”

Box 11: The extraversion of management committees

“In several cases, the membership of a committee is suggested by the people who created it. Six actors have been identified in management committee establishment in the forest zone: i) leaders of opinion (generally an educated person living in the village or in town); ii) support NGOs; iii) the village chief; iv) the administrative and municipal authorities; v) the forest administration officers; and vi) logging companies. Abe’ele *et al.* (2004: 34) claim that when it is a leader of opinion or an NGO that is a key player, the village chief, feeling no doubt slighted, rebels against the committee’s executive body. The same authors note that when the village chief is the instigator of the management committee, decision-making powers are confiscated, and the other members no longer feel part of decentralized management. Oyono (2004b: 28-29) pointed out that when the last three types of actors are at the origin of a committee’s creation, the committee becomes a “captured” and “extraverted” tool which accounts to its “spawner.” These successive mechanisms do not promote responsible and substantive representation.”

Source: Oyono and Efoua (2006, forthcoming)

Numerous social groups are involved in the *élitization* process of community forests, including businessmen, politicians, senior civil servants, and senior army officials (Abilogo 2000: 5-6), among others. The strategy, as described by peasants, is generally triggered by relatively restricted meetings organized in the village by the elite that want to create a community forest. As soon as they manage to constitute a nucleus of partisans, another series of meetings—for information, not consultation—are organized to present the villagers with the *fait accompli*.⁸⁴ Today, there is a very strong tendency for community forests to be created in this way—later becoming a kind of private forest. Efoua (2002a: 8) highlights tensions generated between representatives of the external elite in the East province and sectors of their respective villages, particularly youth, regarding the creation of this type of initiative, which is ultimately dominated and controlled by an individual or group of individuals.

Though the community forests of Kongo and Mboké did not begin in this way, thanks to the support of NGOs and cooperation agencies, they were quickly captured in both cases. This was facilitated by the failure of the management committees to establish any kind of internal regulations regarding transparency and accountability, as well as the untimely withdrawal of the international agency in Mboké.

Postponement of “green” democracy

In a study carried out in the French-speaking part of Cameroon (East and South province), concerning, *inter alia*, the composition of eleven management committees, principally for community forests and parafiscal compensation⁸⁵, Oyono (2004f: 16-17) and Efoua (2002b: 12-13) demonstrate that the appointment, or choice, of members is based on criteria such as having a modern education—hence the ability to read and write French and to interact with external actors (Klein *et*

⁸⁴ In this regard, Abe’ele *et al.* (2004: 54) state: “At these meetings, people are served food and wine to encourage their support and approval of the idea. This strategy is similar to the one adopted by *ventes de coupe* operators. It merely touts the idea of the community forest without any real information.”

⁸⁵ These authors refer to management committees as “environmental representation.”

al. 2001: 7). These criteria automatically eliminate sectors of the “traditional elite” (lineage chiefs, patriarchs, and the elderly) described as illiterate.⁸⁶ To these groups, who consider that the decentralized management of forests “has given community representation powers to those who have no legitimacy in this kind of business,” their “elimination” is seen as a *coup d’état*.

The community space regulated by the decentralized management of forests and forest benefits is today characterized by a deep fissure, nurtured by conflicts and struggles over legitimacy and authority. On the one hand, the new local authorities who are management committee heads—a segment of the forestry elite—believe that “the challenges of decentralized forest management are beyond the grasp of customary circles in which the old authorities exercise their social pre-eminence.” On the other, for pre-existing authorities, most of the management committee leaders “are opportunists who are espousing village initiatives with the sole aim of using the community’s name to amass personal wealth.” By transforming management committees into critical actors, the policy arrangements for decentralized forest management have indeed resulted in social reductionism and institutional simplification. In other words, in the exercise of local forest governance, the village communities—in spite of all the other forms of local authority—have been reduced to management committees alone. Numerous actors involved in the divisions mentioned above are signs of this social reductionism and “commodification.”

Surveys carried out in 2002/03 (Oyono 2004f: 33-35), in the context of the aforementioned study of 11 village management committees, found that 43 percent of members had been self-appointed. At the other end of the spectrum, only 10 percent of members were elected through competitive voting procedures. Appointment by consensus accounted for 20 percent; “statutory co-optation/appointment” accounted for 27 percent. These statistical findings demonstrate that the creation and composition of management committees is not regulated by electoral competition. Similarly, in none of the cases studied here were the management committees, of community forests or parafiscal compensation, created by fair local election. The “appointment” of management committee members and the “reduction” of village communities to these committees⁸⁷ have had significant effects in the local arena.

The postponement of democracy stands out as a major effect of these institutional practices. The transfer of responsibilities to management committees has caused the emergence of blocs that confiscate decision-making and ongoing initiatives. This local “unilateralism” is characterized in numerous village communities by the marginalization of entire components of the society from the management of community forest revenues. As seen in Kongo and Mboké, most management committees do not renew or rotate their members⁸⁸ and do not hold meetings. Furthermore, these members do not account to the community. Accordingly, any critical discussion is absolutely avoided.⁸⁹ The development of civil society at the village level is often insufficient to effectively demand more responsible practices; more common are limited protests and occasional outbreaks of violence in response to specific events or frustrations.

⁸⁶ The situation that we found in Mboké, where the village chief is also the management committee chairman, is the exception.

⁸⁷ It must be stressed that most of these committees were set up by outside actors.

⁸⁸ As prescribed in their statutes, where these exist.

⁸⁹ In the district of Lomié, a management committee chairman asked by his fellow villagers to clarify the management of revenues generated by the community forest replied that he had “nothing to say to them, and they could go and complain wherever they wanted” (Efoua 2002b: 5).

In his outline of a theory on the capture of decentralized forest management, Oyono (2004f: 37-39, 2004g: 130-131) demonstrated that in situations of weak capture of management committees, there is strong downward accountability—a key factor in representative democracy; and in situations of strong capture of management committees, there is little or no downward accountability, and local democracy is consequently low. The deficit of “green democracy” in rural Cameroon must be linked to two factors: (i) the involvement of external actors in the establishment of management committees, which has rendered the latter “captive”; and (ii) the institutionalization of upward accountability—that is, from committee leaders to municipal authorities, administrative authorities, and logging companies. For the members of management committees created in this way, these external actors are the guarantors of their behavior. Those are the very actors who should be involved in monitoring and evaluating their actions. This extraversion is *in theory* not conducive to productive forms of local democracy. We also noted that management committee members’ hopes for symbolic and socioeconomic mobility resulted in a breach in the local arena. The situation resulted in the shift of the committees “upward,” toward external actors, and in the primacy of anti-democratic values such as clientelism, patronage, and neo-patrimonialism.

Struggles for primitive accumulation and survival

If the tensions between the “top” and the “bottom” and between the “bottom” and regional level forces are catalytic elements of the phenomena and trends described in Part VI, it would also be worthwhile to highlight the more local dimensions of interacting dynamics in the local governance of forests and forest benefits (as in the previous paragraph). The management of financial revenues from the logging of community forests and from community parafiscal compensation illustrates how confrontation has shifted to the local level. In several villages, such as Kongo and Mboké, the manipulation of these two categories of revenues by small strategic units structured around management committees has resulted in (Angu Angu 2002: 7-8; Oyono 2005a: 13-17; Oyono 2006: 177-179): (i) embezzlement of funds; (ii) the appearance of *nouveaux riches* around resources considered to be community assets; and (iii) the maturing of a sense of social and environmental injustice among the other sectors of local communities. The embezzled funds are used to satisfy personal needs, for small rural investments, such as village shops, and for other ostentatious signs of socioeconomic mobility. The resulting social “dichotomy”—with, on the one hand, “those living well on forest money” and, on the other, “those who have no access to that money”—creates symbolic and material struggles.

The fact that management committee members devote nearly all their initiatives and actions toward capturing the forestry windfall and primitive accumulation has spawned the emergence of a local counter current comprised of all those “living on the fringes” (marginalized traditional authorities and young people excluded from forest and revenue management). According to Kongo village youth, for example, this counter current has the social objective of “overthrowing the established order regarding the handling and management of financial revenues from the forest” (Efoua 2002b: 6). In addition to this “social agenda,” outbreaks of violence have been reported in several places, such as the destruction of property of the KCFMC treasurer by a group of villagers mentioned previously in Kongo. There have also been reports of villagers kidnapping committee members, as well as of death threats and mystical retaliations. This is the backdrop against which *coups d'état* are plotted to oust the executive bodies of certain committees, resulting in local schisms, as also occurred in Kongo,

Exclusion of forest minorities

South Cameroon is home to the Baka and Bagyéli Pygmies. This semi-nomadic community depends heavily on the forest and its resources. Moreover, compared to “Tall Blacks,” Pygmies are a minority in their co-habitation areas, hence their description as a forest minority. Numerous such “bi-community” villages have created community forests or benefited from community parafiscal compensation in East Cameroon. Similarly, several bi-community villages in the coastal region crossed by the Chad-Cameroon pipeline have benefited from oil compensation. Concerning forestry revenues, the surveys made by Efoua (2002a: 4) and Assembe (2003a: 6) in the Lomié region reveal that the Baka Pygmies are totally disregarded in the decision-making process and are profoundly marginalized from access to any benefit whatsoever.⁹⁰ This marginalization has been reproduced in the distribution of individual oil compensation in the coastal region, as noted by Tachi (2001: 13): “For these people, the Chad-Cameroon pipeline has, if anything, strengthened the acts of discrimination committed against them daily by the Bantu and local authorities, regardless of what they say. The proof: the Bantu received compensation and the Pygmies nothing [...] Despite their dependence on forest products, current compensation plans do not take them into account as individuals.”

Nevertheless, reactions to this exclusion from some Pygmy leaders are increasing. Their voices are getting stronger, demanding equitable access to community resources and to benefits. In addition to challenging the lines of socioeconomic fracture with the Bantu, the imagery of Pygmies is increasingly questioning the way in which public issues concerning them are conducted. Idioms have been crafted to convey their claims to basic rights and reject the marginalization co-produced by public policies and by the Bantu.⁹¹ A Pygmy leader in the region conveyed this community appeal in an interview to a popular Cameroonian newspaper (*Bubinga* 41: 2001):

Really, I was truly surprised when they came to tell us that the compensation does not concern us, and I really wanted to know the reason but I received no answer. I met people from COTCO, those who handled the compensation here. They didn't say anything promising [...] But aren't we men like the Bantu? Listen to me! I'm speaking in French and maybe in better French than some Bantu, so why is COTCO leaving us on the fringe? They have destroyed our crops, our medicinal plants, our trees, and much more [...] COTCO organized a meeting here with us. We were promised compensation for our crops [...] Each time that the COTCO people pass, they just make promises and nothing happens.

Failed revenge against the State

For decades, Cameroonian communities have felt frustrated by a public management system that marginalized them from access to forest resources and their benefits, in favor of the State and

⁹⁰ In bi-community villages (Bantu/Pygmies) such as Koungoulou or Kongo, Pygmies do not participate in any meetings concerning local issues. Bantus have always argued that since they are semi-nomadic, Pygmies have no access to land ownership. For further reading on the marginalization of Pygmies through forestry policies in Cameroon, see Winterbottom (1992: 115-116), Bigombé Logo (2001: 6-7), Dkamela and Oyono (2003: 341-342), Oyono (2004a: 119-124), and many more.

⁹¹ A Plan for Vulnerable Indigenous People was devised, but its main structure and results are still under discussion. A sector of expert opinion was in favor of distributing individual compensation to Pygmies.

foreign logging companies.⁹² Popular claims have stoked a rebellious geography that has taken shape in the East and South provinces. The extensive coverage of the innovations introduced by forest management decentralization policy has assuaged these frustrations for a while—with the devolution of forest management responsibilities to local communities, the opening of access to certain types of compensation, and the investment of a portion of forestry taxes in socioeconomic development projects for villages. These different provisions enabled local communities to have “what the State has been refusing them until now.” Seen from this perspective, the decentralized management of forests is presented as these communities’ revenge against the State.

Let us, however, take another look at this revenge. First of all, the powers transferred to local communities in the context of forest management decentralization are generally weakened by the damaging involvement of regional level actors—the administrative corporatisms. Secondly, the powers are held by representatives with little sense of responsibility, the members of management committees, who turn them into tools to achieve personal ends to the detriment of other sectors of village communities, representing the majority of the population.

Thirdly, it has been demonstrated that the path leading to community forest establishment and the signing of the management agreement is long and tortuous. Furthermore, the financial and human costs, with numerous operational discontinuities, can be seen in this itinerary, which runs from local communities to the heads of the central departments of MINEF, returning to regional administrative authorities, then back to the village. This path—painful, according to villagers—recreates a host of decision-making centers and is indicative of the retention of powers by central and regional actors⁹³—proof that the central State is “resisting” (Larson and Ribot 2005: 5-8, 19-20; Ribot and Oyono 2005: 106-109). Moreover, community forests appear as “loans” which, if “poorly managed,”⁹⁴ are withdrawn from the hands of local communities.

Fourth, the process, and terms, of circulation, distribution, and investment of annual forestry fees is completely out of the control of local communities and their representatives. Accordingly, the portion of the annual forestry fees intended for local communities is “impounded” at the regional level, by municipal and administrative authorities (Bräutigam 2002: 16-17; Bigombé Logo 2003: 27-28; Nzoyem *et al.* 2003: 52). Overall, the indices recurrently identified regarding the experience of decentralized forest management and the dynamics among the central, regional, and local levels demonstrate that the expected revenge has, at least for now, been a failure.

Conclusions

⁹² This asymmetrical situation is perfectly illustrated by the forestry laws at that time, the emphasis on centralization, and the monopoly of benefits by timber multinationals and the state.

⁹³ In this regard, Abe’le *et al.* (2004: 46) state the following: “Some administrative authorities are not a problem at all, others demand money that may be as much as CFA 300,000 [US \$600, author’s note], [...] so the deadline can be shorter or longer depending on the availability and attitude of the other actors [...] Some administrative authorities occasionally block the signature of the management agreement for unknown reasons and for their personal convenience.”

⁹⁴ Only MINEF can define “poor management.” Admittedly, in several cases, community forests have logically been suspended because they are logged according to a rather extractive mode. But information confided by the villagers speak of “administrative blackmail” by MINEF regional officials concerning the possible suspension of a particular community forest.

This section has explored the categories of dissonance at work in the arena of forestry governance in rural Cameroon. These dissonances, which “traditionally” oppose local communities to decision-makers, sometimes take the form of a “hidden” discourse of protest—what Scott (1990: 10-19) calls “infrapolitics”—and sometimes of a more open confrontation. Clearly, against the State, which holds all the powers, local communities draft and unveil claims and demands for the recognition of their basic rights over natural resources and to the financial revenues derived from their commercial exploitation. This section also shows that the decentralized management of forests and local governance has paved the way for other forms of struggle. Hence, for example, internal conflicts (within local communities) and “intrapolar” conflicts, regarding access to powers and financial and symbolical benefits, are gaining ground over the “traditional” central State/communities divide.

States often implement reforms in reaction to crisis. This is what the Cameroonian State did in the forestry sector by decentralizing—in other words by transferring management responsibilities to “those who have insisted on having them.” Resistance at “the top” is now developing (Ribot and Oyono 2005: 206-209; Ribot and Oyono 2006: 7-12), notably at the level of regional administrative services and regional State representatives. Analysts have often forcefully insisted on the nefarious role of State representatives, the residual and phony character of field initiatives, and the mixed nature of socioeconomic results (Milol and Pierre 2000: 4-10; Bigombé Logo 2003: 23-30; Assembe 2003a: 6-8). But the local dynamics described above demonstrate the complexity of the management of resources—powers and money—by grassroots actors, the local communities. In this sense, these dynamics are just as capable of altering decentralization as the dynamics established by “the top.”

The Cameroonian experience confirms what is already happening elsewhere, namely that decentralizations—including the decentralization of forest management—also present risks, just as does centralization (see Prud’homme 1995: 215-218; Sundar 2001: 2008-2013; Nzoyem *et al.* 2003: 13-18; Ribot 2004b: 5-12; Ribot and Oyono 2005: 206-209). These dangers include the delocalization of conflicts (with their relocalization to the local level (see also Suzuki 2005: 2-5), the rise of local governance “entrepreneurs,”⁹⁵ the intrusion of the elite (Mansuri and Rao 2004: 4-16; Platteau 2004: 225-229), the misuse of power by “those who have the power at the village and regional level” (Wade 1985: 287-294; Sarin *et al.* 2002), embezzlement and corruption linked to new forms of autocracy (Szeftel 1998: 221-227; Coolidge and Ackerman 1999: 10-15; Fisman 2002: 4-15), a new culture born out of liberal individualism (Cassen 2001: 27; Gibson and Lehoucq 2003: 33-39), patronage (Ribot 1999: 24-28; Ribot 2002: 46-48), social injustice, and so on.

⁹⁵ Management committees and their members.

Part VII

General Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that decentralization policies in Cameroon have transferred powers and responsibilities to, or strengthened the powers and responsibilities of, outlying actors⁹⁶ in clearly determined sectors. The exercise of these powers, the implementation of related attributes, institutional arrangements, power relations, resource management mechanisms, etc., have generated new forms of governance at the local level. The case studies on the LGCF, LGAFF, LGPCC, and LGOC mechanisms have enabled the collection of descriptive and analytical material that sheds light both on the local governance of Cameroonian forests and their financial benefits and on the findings and their temporal relevance. These case studies have also helped to map local forest governance based on a series of indicators. As this first effort to document this research comes to a close, one must attempt to answer the following questions in order to understand the meaning of local governance in Cameroon's forests: (i) is there a genuine local governance of forests and forest benefits and, if so, (ii) what is the nature of that governance?

The characterization of the local governance mechanisms demonstrates that some powers and responsibilities have been devolved to local communities through forest management decentralization. This is true for community forests—the possibility of establishing and exploiting them and making local decisions regarding the use of revenues—and for parafiscal community compensation, which has long been paid directly to the local communities entitled to it. Furthermore, current laws prescribe that 10 percent of annual forestry fees must be used to develop socioeconomic micro-projects at the village level, with the participation of local communities and their representatives. Lastly, forms of compensation were allocated to villages and families living along the Chad-Cameroon pipeline. Since the starting point for any form of governance is the possession of powers, then we can speak of the local governance of forests and forest benefits.

Nevertheless, our incursion into the course of this devolution of powers and management responsibilities, from the central State to rural councils and local communities (see Part IV), leads to the conclusion that, although in the case of community forests and parafiscal compensation the attributes of local governance do effectively exist, this is not true for annual forestry fees and oil compensation. The last two “innovations” do not involve any local creativity whatsoever, and their implementation only slightly depends on local decision-making processes. The governance of natural resources⁹⁷ is based on normative criteria. These are defined by the way in which powers are exercised by those who hold them⁹⁸—in other words by the nature, democratic or not, of power relations, the institutional mechanisms of resource access, public participation in decision making, the primacy of law, the application of sanctions, etc. One then speaks accordingly of “good governance” or “bad governance.”

The analysis of the exercise of “decentralized powers,” of mechanisms structuring access to resources, and of community participation and downward accountability demonstrates the uneven nature of the local governance of forests and forest benefits in rural Cameroon. There are two possibilities. In the first scenario, effective powers are not devolved to local communities but rather

⁹⁶ Local communities and rural councils.

⁹⁷ And the related local governance of forests.

⁹⁸ With decentralization, those to whom powers have been “given.”

are retained by intermediary forces (municipal authorities, administrative authorities, and project agents such as those of COTCO); this configuration generates profound weaknesses at the decision-making level and institutional imbalances locally, as in the cases of annual forestry fees and oil compensation. In the second scenario, powers are held locally and exercised by community representatives, but the exercise of democratic local governance is weakened by the shortage of representation mechanisms, individual attempts at primitive accumulation, and other intermediary forces, such as, in this case, the external elite. This second scenario is illustrated by the community forests and parafiscal compensation mechanisms.

Obtaining positive socioeconomic outcomes—social justice, equity, security in intergenerational access to resources, improvement of village infrastructures and well-being, etc.—and ecological outcomes—strict monitoring of simple management plans, sustainability of community forests, rejection of extractive exploitation by local communities, and so on—is necessarily linked, according to theory, to good governance and democratic governance conditions. Yet the mapping of the local governance mechanisms for forests and their financial benefits show that, overall, the conditions for good forestry micro-governance, and consequently for democratic local governance, have not yet been met in rural Cameroon.⁹⁹ In the four case studies, at least some of the negative or weak socioeconomic outcomes are clearly linked to poor governance. Though some positive socioeconomic outcomes are associated with mechanisms that provide for almost no local governance, as with the oil compensation mechanism, these outcomes are limited, fraught with negative consequences, and could clearly be better managed for distributional equity as well as long-term investment. The findings also suggest why governance mechanisms such as community forests and parafiscal community compensation do not yet emerge as real tools for environmental justice and ecological sustainability.

In short, the case studies presented in this paper confirm that decentralization that is not democratic—that is, with responsible representation, downward accountability, and effective popular participation—leads to poor conditions for governance in practice, and, in turn, to poor overall outcomes for people and for forests. The shortcomings observed and presented in this paper will—if they are amplified—destroy or stunt the growth of decentralized forest management and local governance.

But these shortcomings can be reversed. The relevance of decentralized forest management initiatives depends on the definition of a clear democratic governance approach at the local level. Such an approach requires, in turn, the identification of new forms of mobilization and community participation, as well as the redefinition of the role of the State in decentralized management and in the emergence of democratic local governance. Although decentralization means a decline of certain State functions, it does not necessarily mean an absence of the State. The involvement—albeit minimal—of the central State becomes necessary when deviations are observed at the local level, as in some of the cases seen in Cameroon. One option for balancing decentralized and centralized responsibilities would involve the retention of monitoring and supervision functions by central ministries, as well as policy functions. In addition to a balance such as this plus “local solutions,” the future of the “Cameroonian project” of local forest governance will be closely linked to improving the capacities of local actors, the (ideological) reform of administrative corporatism involved in

⁹⁹ Demonstrated by the characterization of local governance mechanisms (Part IV) and the graduation of (good) local governance (Part V).

decentralized forest management, and the degree to which sub-national State forces can be stripped of their “sacred aura,” in order to liberate a genuine citizenship at the local level.

Annex A

Research Methods

The following methods were used to collect the data and information for the research work:

- ❖ review and analysis of national policy on forest management and on poverty reduction;
- ❖ review of available work on access to, and community management of, financial benefits produced by the decentralized management of Cameroon's forests and of oil compensation, as well as the theoretical and empirical dimensions of governance as a universal paradigm;
- ❖ systematic interviews with individuals at the central level: MINEF, COTCO, other projects;
- ❖ participatory observation at the local level;
- ❖ semi-structured interviews at the local level;
- ❖ interviews with key informants (MINEF staff, village leaders, administrative authorities, municipal authorities, Pipeline project staff, COTCO, etc.);
- ❖ focus groups;
- ❖ definition and/or adaptation of a series of indicators for the measurement and evaluation of local governance;
- ❖ selection of questions for the evaluation of local governance;
- ❖ definition of a method and a graduated scale for indicators obtained;
- ❖ analysis of historical trends in the evolution of forest cover;
- ❖ use of geographic information on community forests and forest concessions;
- ❖ participatory mapping.

Limitations of case studies

There are some limitations in conducting case studies on four local governance mechanisms. They include the following:

- *It was not possible to find all four governance mechanisms in the four research sites chosen.*

The original intention in terms of research methodology was to work in sites with all four governance mechanisms. In fact, we managed to find the combination of three governance mechanisms only at one site, Kongo; two mechanisms at two sites, Mboké and Ndoua; and only one mechanism at the final site, Nkongmeyos/Obokoé.

- *The problems in obtaining satellite images of community forests*

One of the objectives of the research was to map ecological change in community forests, taking 2000—before logging—and 2004 as chronological milestones. Nevertheless, because of the very small size of community forests (less than 5000 ha), changes cannot be observed on satellite images. In order to overcome this constraint, the Global Forest Watch (GFW) experts responsible for mapping estimated changes from transects undertaken with the local communities.

- *The limitations in the design and use of indicators*

The design or adaptation and use of governance indicators may be influenced by issues of perception and ideological bias (see Kaufmann *et al.* 2003: 19, 22).

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