



Community forestry in Cameroon: how it can contribute more effectively to FLEGT

Key messages:

1. *Inventories*: the quality of commercial stock inventories needs to be improved in order to be able to report the traceable results needed for the verification of legal harvesting of CF timber.
2. *Annual Exploitation Certificates*: need to be improved and verified through stricter controls by an independent monitor.
3. *Marking Operations*: annual logging unit boundaries and tree stumps should be identified and marked in a more accurate and thorough manner.
4. *Transport*: waybills should be clearly linked to harvesting registers and Annual Exploitation Certificates. The origin of timber transported on a truck should be clearly stated on the waybill, especially in cases where the truck is shared by more than one community.

The basic idea of community forestry (CF) is to grant small-scale logging rights to forest-adjacent communities in order to improve the livelihoods of local people. The main principle is to keep it simple: applying for, implementing and documenting forestry activities should be feasible and practical for communities.

This simplicity, however, has started to compromise community forestry. Due to a lack of operational standards for timber exploitation in CFs, and limited independent control of logging inventories, exploitation certificates and waybills (*Lettres de voiture*), it is increasingly difficult to assure that timber is harvested in accordance with legal requirements. For instance, incorrect logging inventories threaten the integrity of the whole chain of CF timber; this makes CF timber destined for export to the European Union (EU) a serious threat to Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT; Box 1). If audits demonstrate the presence of illegal CF timber in the timber supply chain, Cameroonian timber could be prohibited from entering the EU market (Beauquin et al. 2012). CF regulations and procedures should be reformed in order to develop and increase transparency in the CF timber sector.



In Theory...

The Legal Framework

The introduction of Law No. 94/01 (the *Forestry Law*) in 1994 and the subsequent introduction of community forests in Cameroon changed forest management in the country. Community forestry has three objectives: to enhance the livelihoods of rural populations; to conserve forest resources and biodiversity; and to improve local governance through the transfer and democratic implementation of management authority (Bigombe Logo 2004; Oyono, Ribot and Larson 2006; Lescuyer 2012).

By 2011, 182 villages in the non-permanent forest estate (forested lands that can be allocated to other land uses) had registered as community forest with signed Simple Management Plans (Cuny 2011). They managed annual logging units under an agreement with the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife

Box 1. FLEGT and VPAs

The Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) is the European Union's (EU's) response to concerns about illegal logging. Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) between the EU and timber-exporting countries are developed to implement FLEGT. A VPA is a bilateral agreement that aims to improve forest governance and ensure that the wood imported into the EU complies with the legal requirements of the partner country.

In May 2010, the Government of Cameroon initialled a VPA, pledging that by 2012 all timber harvested in the country — both for export and for domestic use — would be of legal origin. Cameroon committed itself to trace the source of all timber produced in the country within the framework of a Legality Assurance System (LAS).

Source: EU and MINFOF 2010

(MINFOF). Under the law communities are allowed to manage an area of up to 5,000 ha, with a rotation of 25 years, divided in five compartments (MINFOF 2009); a compartment consists of five one-year logging units.

Commercial exploitation in community forests is usually conducted under control (*en régie*: harvesting and marketing is under control of the communities), with an annual exploitation certificate or through sales of standing volume (MINFOF 2009). Only small-scale logging is allowed in community forests: timber exploitation is done using chainsaws for tree felling, followed by the use of a portable sawmill or chainsaws to process the timber (Lescuyer *et al.* 2009). Timber from community forests is exempt from payment of forest taxes and royalties (MINFOF 2009).

Inventories

There are two types of inventories: a resource inventory, which is necessary for the preparation of the Simple Management Plan (on a sample basis of 1 to 2%); and a 100% commercial stock inventory, which is required for the Annual Exploitation Certificate (*Certificat Annuel d'Exploitation*). In both cases, the inventory, boundary delimitation and mapping have to be carried out according to the Ministry's standards and procedures (MINFOF 2009):

- mapping must be carried out using a compass or a GPS;
- external boundaries must be demarcated by beacons or landmarks every 500 metres and regularly surveyed;
- distances and angles have to be documented in an observation book; and
- internal boundaries (e.g., of an annual logging unit) are recommended for larger compartments, but are not obligatory.

Simple Management Plan

A Simple Management Plan (SMP) is a document that outlines the potential resources available in a community forest, planned activities to be carried out in the forest, land allocation, the modes of community resource management and the resulting incomes. The plan is developed in a participatory manner by the community with technical assistance from the local Forestry Administration and, where relevant, from support organizations with a view to promote sustainable management and local development (MINFOF 2009).

A resource inventory on a sample basis (1 to 2%) has to be carried out, with an emphasis on the first compartment of the SMP. The SMP also requires a map of the internal and external boundaries of the various forest compartments at a minimum scale of 1:50,000 (MINFOF 2009).

Exploitation

Annually, before starting exploitation, a 100% commercial stock inventory has to be carried out for the designated logging unit. This logging inventory — as well as mapping of the unit — must be performed by a qualified individual or organization and the local staff of MINFOF, together with or on behalf of the community concerned. Logging inventories have to be approved and checked by the regional delegate of the Forestry Administration in accordance with regulations (MINFOF 2009).

Logging under control with an Annual Exploitation Certificate (AEC)

Logging under control means that village communities that have signed a management agreement with the forestry administration can harvest and market the timber and non-timber forest resources themselves, in an artisanal or semi-industrial way, in the forest allocated to them.

Box 2. Administrative steps to obtain an Annual Exploitation Certificate (AEC)

1. verifying the boundary of the annual logging unit
2. verifying the logging inventory carried out in the annual logging unit
3. writing an Annual Activity Report for the previous exploitation year
4. writing an Annual Plan of Operations for the current exploitation year
5. photocopying all waybills from the previous year
6. photocopying the Simple Management Plan
7. writing a request to obtain an AEC

All these steps must be approved and verified by a departmental and regional forestry delegate.

Source: Julve et al. 2007

After MINFOF approves the SMP and signs the management agreement it grants an Annual Exploitation Certificate (AEC) for the extraction of timber products in an annual logging unit for one year (Box 2) (MINFOF 2009).

Transport

For timber transportation, the manual for CF (MINFOF 2009) focuses on three points:

- The Forestry Administration issues the required documents (waybills, certificates of origin, etc.) to the communities in accordance with regulations;
- These timber transportation documents — which are marked, numbered and initialled by the local Forestry Administration official — must state the quantity and specifications of products transported as well as their origin and destination; and
- Forest product exploitation and transportation documents cannot be transferred to another community or another logging company.





In Practice...

Inventories

Lack of Guidelines

Observations in the field showed that the quality of commercial stock inventories is rather low (Box 3). Another problem was the fact that the actual location and surface area of the annual logging unit differed greatly from the Simple Management Plan. This may be a result of a lack of operational standards for timber exploitation for CF in Cameroon. Although a second version of the *Manual of Procedures for the Attribution and Norms for the Management of Community Forests* was published in 2009 (MINFOF 2009), it does not have extensive information about implementation procedures. Research conducted for the present study also showed that the problem is not primarily an absence of regulations, but also compliance with them.

There are several possible causes for the large deviations:

- improper use of the GPS device by the inventory team;
- imprecise cartographic information (1:50,000), leading to poor quality of records;
- GPS coordinates in the SMP are not always verified; and
- limited knowledge of surface area calculation.

Imprecise cartographic information and uncertainty as to the exact location of the exploitation unit can lead to disagreement about property rights over trees that are located in a demarcated unit, but outside the mapped boundary. This can potentially result in illegal logging: trees that do not belong to the exploitation unit are nonetheless recorded and form part of an approved map and the list of trees to be harvested. This study found that the majority

(62%) of tree stumps from harvested trees were located outside the annual logging unit.

In addition, miscalculated areas of logging units could lead to overharvesting if the actual annual logging unit is smaller than the size outlined in the SMP. A larger unit could result in a miscalculation of the size of the entire community forest, which is limited to 5,000 ha.

Recommendations

An accurate logging inventory is the basis for legal timber exploitation. A Timber Legality Assurance system requires that inventories be conducted in a standardized, appropriate and reliable way. Traceability and reduction of illegal practices could be improved in the following ways:

- appropriate and easy-to-read logging inventory guidelines should be available to communities and their use should be obligatory;
- each potentially exploitable tree should be located by means of GPS and be numbered and documented on the inventory form;
- logging inventories should be field-checked on a random basis by an independent observer;
- GPS points in the SMP should be verified; and
- boundary demarcation should be carried out using a GPS device.

Annual Exploitation Certificates

Fictitious Inventories

The procedure to obtain an Annual Exploitation Certificate (AEC) has proven to be complex and time-consuming. Getting all the signatures needed for an AEC can take up to a year.

Additionally, this study revealed that the number of trees and timber volume declared on the AEC differed significantly from the actual number of trees and volume harvested in the annual logging unit (Box 3). Further, the number of high value trees was exaggerated or even invented.

Possible reasons for these discrepancies:

- The incorrect information in the AEC could be a consequence of the poor quality of the logging inventories.
- There could be a lack of knowledge on the part of the prospectors who identify the tree species during the inventory, although this would more likely result in a randomly different lower or higher amount of all kind of tree species, rather than an exaggeration of only high value trees.
- Another possibility is that no (or limited) inventory was conducted and the number of valuable trees exaggerated on the annual exploitation certificate to attract potential timber traders.

In the last case, the problem becomes even more serious. If a trader agrees to buy the exaggerated or non-existent amount of timber stated on the AEC, the community is forced to supply it and has to look for this timber outside the logging unit boundaries in order to meet the terms of the agreement.

Box 3. Some observations on inventories

Discrepancies in volumes of commercial timber stock

The entire timber stock in one logging unit was checked after exploitation. There was a difference of almost 500 m³ between the 1,422 m³ stated on the AEC and the actual value of the commercial volume (955 m³). High value tree species represented 36% in relative volume on the AEC, whereas the results of this study showed that they comprised only 16%. A similar discrepancy occurred in the case of relative abundance (33% on the AEC versus 9% actual).

Absence of commercial trees in the logging unit

The AEC for one CF in 2009 stated that ten *Afzelia bipindensis* (*Doussié rouge*) trees were located within the logging unit, but none of the trees extracted were harvested inside the unit boundaries. There are two possible reasons for this: either disregard of the logging unit boundaries and therefore the SMP (although the unit might actually have contained ten exploitable *Afzelia bipindensis*); or the absence of this species in the annual logging unit, which forced the community to search outside the unit to meet the terms of the contract with its exploitation partner. Communities often use Wood Recovery Permits to circumvent the rules, in some cases even using them for allocation of logging rights.

Claiming of non-existent trees

Tree species with no geographical distribution in this part of Cameroon, such as *Zingana* (Zebra wood, *Microberlinia bisulcata* A. Chev. or *Microberlinia brazzavillensis* A. Chev.) are being claimed on AECs. The occurrence of *Zingana* in East Cameroon is highly unlikely, as it grows only in the southwest (PROTA 2012; IUCN 2011). A post-harvest inventory conducted in the forest showed that there was no *Zingana*; it can be assumed that the whole inventory is fictitious.





The NGO Resource Extraction Monitoring (REM) has concluded that the extraction of timber outside the compartment boundaries is often linked to an exaggeration of species and/or volume (REM 2010). Field observations and the analysis of logging inventories of the four CFs studied by the author confirm this conclusion.

REM reported that the commercial timber volume recorded on AECs was higher than the actual amount, the result of fictitious inventories. “The corresponding volumetric authorisations and secure documents issued by MINFOF then enable the companies [and Community Forests] to fell significant volumes of timber outside the permit boundaries illegally.” (REM 2010, 18).

Recommendations

Annual Exploitation Certificates need to be improved and better controlled:

- each potentially exploitable tree should be recorded by means of GPS and listed in the AEC;
- AECs should be verified by an independent monitor; and
- the procedure to obtain an AEC is far too time-consuming, which means that there is insufficient time left for harvesting. It should be possible to start the preparations for the AEC in the year before the actual exploitation starts. This would assure sufficient time to carry out a reliable inventory and for the subsequent harvest.

Marking operations

Insufficient Marking

Inconsistent marking of boundaries, inventory lines or tree stumps seems to be a common problem within community forests. This study found that external compartment boundaries were often marked insufficiently or not at all. Tree stumps were rarely demarcated with a traceable number (this is not yet obligatory, although it will be required under FLEGT).

The *Manual of Procedures for the Attribution and Norms for the Management of Community Forests* (MINFOF 2009) contains little information about standards and norms for field operations. It provides only some information concerning the establishment of external community forest boundaries. It does not provide details about the establishment of inventory lines or internal boundaries.

Recommendations

Several steps should be taken to prevent the problems with inventories:

- external boundaries should be clearly marked — preferably with permanent landmarks — and should comply with the SMP for the whole period that the community forest is in use;
- a GPS device should be used to define the borders of annual logging units; and
- the stumps of felled trees should be marked with a traceable code referring to the date, GPS coordinates, tree number and the species name.

Transport: The waybill

Where illegal becomes legal

Transporting timber from community forests is another legality challenge. As soon as CF timber is loaded on the truck it takes another step in its life journey; often, this is when legally sourced timber is mixed with illegal timber and traceability becomes impossible. The following problems have been observed:

- **Waybills do not match with AECs**

The waybill is not connected to the Annual Exploitation Certificate. Therefore, MINFOF enforcement officers at checkpoints — for instance, when timber leaves the CF — cannot trace the timber back to its origin. In some cases, in order to avoid paying taxes, some industrial forestry operators that work in partnership with community forests, declare their sawmilled timber on CF transportation permits. This is known as wood laundering.

- **Incorrect timber volume declared on the waybill**

Several cases were observed where the timber volume was incorrectly calculated and mistakes in simple addition resulted in huge deviations. These miscalculations, which may have been accidental, could be the starting point of a chain of illegality.

- **Timber is transported with CF waybills but originates outside the annual logging unit**

It was observed that in some cases a larger number of trees and species were claimed on waybills than were actually present in the forest. In one case tree stumps of five different species were found in the exploited logging unit, while seven species were reported on officially approved waybills. The additional

trees, which came from other communities/ partners or were logged outside the logging unit (in an agriculture zone or neighbouring logging unit), had a total volume of 114 m³.

Recommendations

To improve legal transportation, the following actions should be taken:

- Waybills should be clearly linked to harvesting registers and AECs so that timber can be easily traced back to the actual trees harvested. This way the origin of timber is accurately indicated on waybills — this is crucial for legal verification, especially when several communities share one truck.
- The people responsible for timber volume calculations should be better trained.



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This policy brief is based on a study (Bauer 2011) carried out on behalf of and financed by Tropenbos International Cameroon. The research was conducted in four community forests in the district of Lomié in East Cameroon (March–August 2010). The policy brief summarizes the situation and the need for an appropriate Timber Legality Assurance system. It investigates several legality aspects, through forest inventories and open interviews, and makes recommendations for a legality verification scheme.

The policy brief targets policy-makers involved in the development of a traceable community forestry timber supply chain in Cameroon, as well as other persons interested in a practical point of view on actual exploitation practices.

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