

Will the proposed forest policy and regulatory reforms boost the NTFP sector in Cameroon?

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SUMMARY

The national policy framework for forest and forest resources management in Cameroon has often been blamed for hindering the development of the non-timber forest products (NTFP) sector. Various actors, both international and national, have gathered to propose major changes to the forestry law in order to support NTFP development. This paper addresses the following questions: (1) What are the provisions of the current forestry policy for NTFPs? (2) What are the major changes proposed for NTFPs and the reality on the ground? (3) How do forest users view the legal forestry framework? (4) Aren't there better ways to improve NTFP management in Cameroon? Informal and formal interviews held with producers, traders, forest administrative agents and civil society actors show that the government tends to address the local communities' participation concerns through decentralisation in the forestry sector but without guaranteeing an efficient implementation. This situation appears to be a structural factor affecting other sectors of activity in the country, and resulting in little hope that the long awaited reforms in the forestry sector will have a determining impact, unless critical actions are taken against corruption and nepotism. The development of a well-structured civil society and the recourse to new technologies appear to be the best way to improve NTFP governance and efficiency in Cameroon.

Keywords: NTFPs, producers, civil society, national economy, policy reforms, governance, efficiency

Les réformes de la politique forestière en cours permettront-elles de développer le secteur des PFNL au Cameroun?

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La loi forestière et ses décrets d'application sont régulièrement considérés comme un frein au développement du secteur des produits forestiers non-ligneux (PFNL) au Cameroun. Divers acteurs, internationaux et nationaux se sont réunis pour proposer des changements majeurs de la loi forestière afin de faciliter le développement des PFNL. Le présent article tente d'apporter des réponses aux questions suivantes: (1) Quelles sont les dispositions actuelles de la loi en matière de PFNL? (2) Quels sont les changements majeurs proposés et quelle est la réalité sur le terrain? (3) Comment les utilisateurs perçoivent-ils la loi forestière actuelle? (4) N'existerait-il pas des moyens plus efficaces pour améliorer la gestion des PFNL au Cameroun? Des interviews avec les producteurs, les commerçants, les agents du Ministère des Forêts et de la Faune et les acteurs de la société civile démontrent que le gouvernement n'envisage la participation des populations locales à la gestion forestière qu'au travers de la décentralisation administrative du secteur forestier, mais sans toutefois en garantir une implémentation efficace. Cette situation est un facteur structurel que l'on retrouve dans les autres secteurs d'activité du pays. Il laisse présager que la réforme proposée de la loi forestière n'aura aucun impact déterminant, à moins que des mesures radicales soient prises pour lutter contre la corruption et le népotisme. Le développement d'une société civile bien structurée et le recours aux nouvelles technologies apparaissent comme le meilleur moyen d'améliorer la gouvernance et l'efficacité du secteur des PFNL au Cameroun.

¿Permitirán incentivar el sector de los PFNM la política forestal y la reforma reguladora en Camerún?

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La ley forestal y sus decretos de aplicación se consideran regularmente como un freno al desarrollo del sector de los productos forestales no madereros (PFNM) en Camerún. Distintos protagonistas, internacionales y nacionales, se reunieron para proponer cambios mayores a la ley forestal con el fin de facilitar el desarrollo de los PFNM en el país. El presente artículo intenta dar respuestas a las siguientes cuestiones: (1) ¿Qué es lo que establece la ley actual en cuanto a los PFNM? (2) ¿Cuáles son los cambios principales propuestos y cuál es la realidad

in situ? (3) ¿Cómo perciben los usuarios la ley forestal actual? (4) ¿Existen procedimientos más eficaces para mejorar la gestión de los PFTM en Camerún? Las entrevistas con productores, comerciantes, agentes del Ministerio de Bosques y Fauna y los actores de la sociedad civil demuestran que el Gobierno sólo prevé la participación de las poblaciones locales a través de la descentralización administrativa del sector forestal, pero sin garantizar una implementación suficiente. Tal situación es un factor estructural que se encuentra en otros sectores de actividad del país. Ya se puede predecir que la reforma propuesta a la ley forestal no tendrá ningún impacto significativo, a menos que se adopten medidas radicales para luchar contra la corrupción y el nepotismo. El desarrollo de una sociedad civil bien estructurada y el fomento de nuevas tecnologías aparecen como la solución más adecuada para mejorar la gobernanza y la eficiencia del sector de los PFTM en Camerún.

INTRODUCTION

The term non-timber forest product (NTFP) is multi semantic and can involve many types of products and varied ways of exploitation (Awono *et al.* 2010, Laird *et al.* 2010). According to FAO (1999), NTFPs are non-wood forest products which include all goods of biological origin, as well as services derived from forests or any land under similar use, and exclude wood in all its forms. NTFPs include plants and derived products used for food, medicine, wrapping, building, etc. Extended definitions consider non-timber wood products, mammals, birds, reptiles, fishes, etc. In Cameroon about a hundred edible forest species (excluding shrubs and herbs) are sold in markets (Eyog *et al.* 2006). NTFPs are playing a pivotal role in the livelihoods of forest dependent people in terms of cultural, economic and environmental needs.

The southern humid forest zone of Cameroon consists of different agro-ecological niches with different cultural backgrounds. The exploitation and trade of forest products has been considered an important alternative to keep the economy running. At the same time, forest products with a high potential originating from other continents like cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*) and Para rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*) were introduced in Cameroon to be farmed. Other products like the local natural rubber (*Funtumia africana*) were tested for domestication but were finally abandoned as the yields were not satisfactory (Chamaulte, 1942). In general forest products were collected by local people for their livelihoods long before the promulgation of statutory land rights by the colonial powers. Based on the customary regulation, community members could access the desired NTFPs without restrictions. The resources were abundant and the population density relatively low. The economy was nearly autarchic, privileging self-consumption and limited exchanges among the community. The first restrictions to local peoples' extraction rights date back to the colonial period. The concept of "*terra nullius*" (land that belongs to no-one) appeared around 1896 with the German administration codifying norms, which actually led to the restrictions of the local community rights over land (Djeukam, 2005). The coloniser only recognised the claims of rural people over "transformed" lands, referring to farmlands and settlements. This was ambiguous because as demonstrated by Bigombé Logo (2004) and Diaw (1997), the extended forest domain where the people in Cameroon lived and hunted, and above all, extracted forest products and implemented cultural practices was far from being a "*terra nullius*".

The post-colonial State also disqualified the land rights of local communities through the ordinance N° 74.1 of 6/1974, replacing the colonial concept of "vacant land" by national land. According to the above mentioned Ordinance, there are two categories of land in Cameroon: private and State land and any other land beyond these two categories is considered to be national land. The parliamentarians of the young independent republic put forward the argument that it was important to build a collective and common heritage above tribal considerations. As the only moral authority that could manage the common heritage, the State was chosen as the legal administrator of the national land (Assembe *et al.* 2014). In fact, the State is acting as the sole owner of both national and State land, especially as the nation is an intangible construction with no capacity to operate. Though it did not impact the tenure rights on land, especially for local communities, the 1994 national forestry law brought in a number of innovations with the zoning system that allows two major categories of forests: (1) the permanent forest estate (*domaine forestier permanent*) made up of State forests and council forests (art 21) and (2) the non-permanent forest estate (*domaine forestier non permanent*) consisting of national forests, community forests and private forests (art 34 1994 law). Another innovation is the distribution of tax revenues that should benefit local communities. The objective was to improve the way forest resources were managed in Cameroon, giving also a chance to other Congo Basin countries to take advantage of this evolution for their own forestry law. Ekoko (2000) noticed that while some provisions of the 1994 forestry law are not positive to local communities, others on the contrary favour them. The final result will depend on the implementation of the law and the motivation to move into the right direction.

Cameroon's forest policy framework was further enriched by the regional treaty of COMIFAC (*Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale*) signed by the heads of States to improve and harmonise the forest policies of the 10 countries of Central Africa. NTFPs are one of COMIFAC's priorities, and apart from supporting specific projects on NTFPs, sub-regional guidelines have been proposed by experts led by Food and Agricultural Organisation to all the Congo Basin countries for policy harmonisation.

In Cameroon, the 1994 forestry law conditioned the sale of timber and non-timber forest products to the obtaining of an official permit, but gave the rights to local communities to sell both types of products in the context of community forestry. As mentioned by article 37(1) of the forestry law, communities willing to be associated in the management of a

forest adjacent to their geographical position, can be granted a community forest. A Community Forest (CF) is a legal entity of land classified as Non-Permanent Forest Estate (NPFE) given to a community with the management rights through an agreement for 25-years in principle. Another domain where NTFP can be developed by local communities is the council forest that has been proposed in the permanent forest estate with the only condition for the exploitation to be clarified in a management plan (article 37.1). In reality, the legal forestry framework in Cameroon is only an avatar of the colonial forest policy with very minor changes, still sustaining a number of challenging issues with regards to local community rights and equitable benefit sharing. Laird *et al.* (2010) reported that although well-intentioned, the 1994 law was developed without any adequate or meaningful consultation with people living in the forest zone and important stakeholders such as traders and harvesters. As a consequence, the rural communities do not recognise themselves in many aspects of the law. For instance, it is difficult for them to accept that they cannot freely sell the products they collect in what they consider as “their forests”.

There is a large consensus that NTFPs have a significant contribution to improve livelihoods in tropical forests through food, medicine, income generation and other cultural services (Ndoye and Awono, 2009). As such, NTFPs are considered to have a great potential to support local and national development. At the same time, controversies on the scope of this contribution have also emerged (Lescuyer, 2010, Levang *et al.* 2015). As shown by many studies (Ingram *et al.* 2014, Tieguhong *et al.* 2015), the actual role of NTFPs in the national economy is still far from their claimed potential.

In order to increase the management and contribution of NTFPs to the local and national economy, international development partners have been investing in the development of NTFPs in Cameroon. In spite of numerous initiatives, very little concrete results have been obtained so far. To most NGOs in charge of these initiatives, the major constraint to NTFP development comes from the current forestry law as it does not provide a favourable institutional environment, and should therefore be revised. The revision process of the 1994 forestry Law was undertaken in 2009, encouraged by national and international agencies engaged in forest policy change, with special attention given to NTFP use (FAO, 2009). The promulgation of the revision, expected for 2013 has been regularly postponed. It is still expected to come out soon, with hopes that proposed and expected changes will remain in the final text.

The following four questions are addressed in this paper:

- (1) What are the provisions of the current forestry policy for NTFPs?
- (2) What are the major changes proposed for NTFPs and the reality on the ground?
- (3) How do forest users view the legal forestry framework?
- (4) Aren't there better ways to improve NTFP management in Cameroon?

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Two important steps are necessary to query the efficiency of forest policy and regulatory reforms. A clear and neutral evaluation should first be done, prior to determining implementation gaps and policy gaps. By implementation gaps we mean important dispositions that are doable as from the policy in place but that cannot be implemented for one reason or another. By policy gaps we mean clauses that need to be revised because they are not clear in the law or subsequent application decrees and led to confusion in implementation. It should be recalled that in early 2000s the Cameroon forestry policy put in place was considered as pioneer in Central Africa, foreseen to guarantee communities' participation in forest management for more efficiency both on livelihoods and conservation (Larson *et al.* 2010). Such literature reinforces the idea that the implementation of the policy has been harmed by factors that should be clearly identified. The following analysis should not suffer from any presumption, like “the government is the vector of the failure” or “the rights of local communities have been ignored”, because opposite arguments can be found in the law. Building on the experience of some key initiatives on the ground might provide more evidence. As suggested by a number of observers (RRI and ITTO 2011, Sunderlin *et al.* 2014) a great attention must be given to a wide spectrum of governance factors, including -but not limited to- those that affect local tenure conditions. In short, governance refers to understanding how the decisions are made and how far they are considered as legitimate by a given society. The four questions addressed are analysed step by step. To answer the first question, we reviewed the current forestry law and the decree of application of 1995 to better understand to what extent they could be favourable (or not) to decentralisation and local communities' participation in the management of forests and forest resources in Cameroon. For the second question, we built our reflection on the revision process of the 1994 forestry law initiated in 2009 and lasting until 2012, and the submitted document was scrutinised. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) appeared to be the leading partners of the revision process with the commitment of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, and with the involvement of local NGOs, some farmer organisations and other ministries like the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises. For the third question, using informal and formal interviews, we queried the perception of different actors about the present forestry policy, their awareness and level of satisfaction. A semi structured questionnaire was addressed to 100 people, including NTFPs' producers (26), traders (25), civil servants (25), trade union members exporting forest products (4) and scientific research staff (20). As far as the fourth question is concerned, the current literature on governance and NTFPs management in Cameroon was reviewed and we took advantage of our experience on NTFPs' activities and forest policy environment in Cameroon to develop a critical analysis that brought us to elaborate some recommendations that could contribute to the improvement of NTFP development in Cameroon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Question 1: What are the provisions of the current forestry policy for NTFPs?

Two decades after the current forestry law and the subsequent decrees were promulgated; the expected results obtained are far from satisfying, both from a conservation and development perspective. The international community asks for reforms, but in a first attempt one should question the implementation of the law in order to understand why the expected performance was not achieved. While the management rights of forest products are defined by the forestry legal framework (1994 forestry law), the property rights are regulated by the land tenure legal framework (Ordinance N° 74.1). Based on the forest code, the surrounding populations of forests have a usufruct right which does not include the marketing of NTFPs. The population can collect NTFPs for self-consumption but is not allowed to sell them. In order to be allowed to sell, one must be the holder of an official permit. As far as the tenure rights are concerned, it is considered that the land used by local communities is under State property, which means that they are only the users and can be expropriated at any time if need arises. This being said, it doesn't seem to prevent the local communities from using the surrounding forests, especially the non-permanent forest estate, close to the village settlements, based on the customary rules that distribute it among families. The idea that the State is the owner of forests is considered by local communities as a misappropriation. These rules appear to be different from the collective approach imposed by community forestry (Karsenty *et al.* 2010). Customary rights refer to community rules and regulations inherited from ancestors and accepted, interpreted and enforced by the community, which may or may not be recognised by the State. In any case because of various actors with diverse opinions and interventions at different levels, the forestry policy has become a playing field loaded with conflicts and prone to corruption and illegality (Romero *et al.* 2015). A number of efforts have been deployed both by public and private actors to improve governance in the management of forest goods. Each of the tools invented, including Payment for Ecosystem Services, certification, Reduction of Emissions due to Deforestation and forest Degradation, etc. has been presented as a new orientation to improve the economic contribution of forests and forest products to reinforce conservation (Nkem *et al.* 2010).

Institutional arrangements

Power is vested in the people of Cameroon by its Constitution, although in practice the President tends to control the country. Nsoh (2012) noticed that this centralisation of power is deeply rooted in tradition as well as in law, because since the days of independence and reunification, Cameroon has had governments with strong central authority. Anyhow, the rights of property owners are set out in the constitution, the civil code and other derivative documents. The power of the government in managing natural resources is split across

different ministries resulting in huge coordination challenges to reach efficiency.

There is an institutional progress that cannot be ignored, though it does not seem to solve the problem. In 1992, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MINEF) resulted from an institutional reform regrouping the forests and wildlife activities formerly under the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Tourism. This reform was meant to give more light and attention to forests and environment. Later on, environment was further separated from forests and wildlife in 2004. This recurrent shifting indicates the effort of the government to manage the forest sector in accordance with the international evolutions as from the Rio conference (1992) that put emphasis on sustainable management. Based on the decree N° 2005/099 of 6 April 2005, the implementation policy of natural resources including NTFP is devoted to 5 branches within the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, i.e. the Directorate of Forestry (DF), the Directorate of Promotion and Processing (DPP) of Forest Products, the National Brigade (NB) in charge of control, the service in charge of decentralisation (SD) and the National Forestry Development Agency. From the opinion of various stakeholders these different structures are inequitably powerful and the incoherence observed in their coordination leads to overlaps and inefficiency (Table 1).

Created under the DPP of forest products in 2007, the Sub-Directorate of Promotion and Processing (SDPP) of NTFPs has been struggling to develop a vision but with limited human, material and financial resources, and without strong support from the hierarchy. Created at least 15 years ago, the institution in charge of NTFPs in Cameroon is still a sub-direction under the Directorate of Promotion and Transformation of forest products in general. As such, the institution has limited influence in regulating the sector. Cameroon has been a pioneer in forest management in Central Africa with the 1994 forestry law that brought in a number of innovations including community forestry, communal forestry and customary rights for local communities. The sub-directorate has developed a national plan for the development of NTFPs in Cameroon with the support of international agencies in Cameroon. But this plan has never been implemented because of conflicting priorities at the level of the ministry. In short, a National Development Plan (NDP) on NTFPs has been adopted since 2012 as the backbone of NTFPs' activities and actions to be supported by the State's program budget presented as the new financial regime instrument applicable in Cameroon. Four actions were targeted by the NDP on NTFPs, including policy framework improvement, management and production enhancement, processing encouragement and organisation of actors conditioned by a logical framework with a clear planning.

The use of NTFPs has been codified by the 1994 forestry and wildlife law and the application decree of 1995. The exploitation of NTFPs is conditioned by the delivery of a permit from the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (article 56.1) except in the cases of community forests (article 37.3) or usufruct rights recognised, in principle, to local communities (articles 30.2 and 31.1). This permit should be issued after

TABLE 1 *Units dealing with NTFPs (not including wildlife)*

Unit	Missions	Weaknesses according to actors
1. Directorate of forests	Planning and mobilisation of forest resources including NTFPs Conceiving, monitoring and evaluating inventories and management plans Conceiving and monitoring regeneration and reforestation programs	NTFPs are still invisible in the action carried out by the directorate as its main focus is on timber.
2. Directorate of promotion and processing of forest products	Conceiving, monitoring forest trade and industrialisation Conceiving, vulgarising processing norms for timber and NTFPs Promotion of modern processing techniques for timber and NTFPs Monitoring internal and external markets for timber and NTFPs including economic operators for strategic projections	The missions of this directorate are diverse and dilute NTFP initiatives in a sub-directorate lacking the means to implement the national development plan of NTFPs. In addition, the expected inventories to master NTFPs should be implemented by the Directorate of forests instead.
3. National brigade of control	Monitoring operating sites Control application of norms in forest regulation	The total area under forest is too large considering the personnel available (only the chief of brigade and 12 national controllers for about 16.85 million ha of the permanent forest estate) to achieve the expected mission. The decentralisation process and the structuring efforts of the civil society may be more supportive of this process.
4. Service of decentralisation	Facilitating the decentralisation process	A number of administrations are still reluctant to implement the decentralisation instructions from the hierarchy. Some experts think it is another way to preserve personal interests by controlling as much as possible public resources.
5. National forestry development agency	Initiating regeneration and reforestation Ensuring the scientific authority for endangered species in CITES annexes	Not visible at the small producers level. More joint actions should be expected with the civil society including farmer organisations and various associations for more NTFPs planting.

the opinion of a competent commission (article 56.2) or through the *gré à gré* (mutual agreement) practice (article 56.3). However, there is a persistent confusion on the terms NTFPs and “special products” due to a lack of clarity in the national forestry law (Laird *et al.* 2010). In the spirit of its article 9 (2), a ‘special product’ can be either a non-timber forest product or a timber forest product. It would therefore have been helpful to define separately Special Non-Timber Forest Products (SNTFP) and Special Timber Forest Product (STFP). With the rapid evolution of the forestry sector, we should bear in mind that, timber may not exclusively originate from forests but also from agroforests. Timber Agroforestry Product (TAP) would make sense. Along the same line, NTFPs collected in agroforests could be considered as Non-Timber Agroforest Products (NTAP). This distinction is particularly important as a special attention should be given to domestication if we want the national and international markets to be supplied by these products in the long run. Quite logically products under NTAPs, when no longer available in the wild like *Dacryodes edulis* or *Cola acuminata* should be transferred under the authority of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Community participation

There is a common trend by scholars and NGOs to focus on the insufficiencies and ambiguities of the present legal framework, instead of assessing implementation limitations and governance issues. Without denying the shortcomings of the current legal texts, we assert that persistent implementation problems are by far more important to explain the limited development of NTFPs in Cameroon. On the other hand, there are customary rules at the local level that are not well known by a number of actors involved in capacity building of local communities. Some rules may be contrary to sustainable management but in general the tendency for local people is to secure their sources of livelihoods. It has been demonstrated that forest systems are more likely to have sustainable outcomes when local users participate in rulemaking (Persha *et al.* 2011). Rist *et al.* (2015) argue that such participation can be facilitated by enhancing communication and integration of knowledge. Many actors are intervening in the forestry sector with obviously different priorities, different concerns and different perspectives forging their views in forest management (Rist *et al.* 2015) resulting in inequity, conflicts, intimidations and permanent contestations. This reality is

valid at different scales. For instance, because of operational challenges and governance concerns, the added value of council and community forests for poverty alleviation is still to be demonstrated in Cameroon. Drawing lessons from previous initiatives and achievements would give a chance to discuss reforms bearing in mind that institutional arrangements and governance actions should follow for a real implementation of the law. Cameroon's forestry policy needs to find a proper balance between economic development and environmental protection under the influence of diverse stakeholders with divergent interests.

Accessing NTFP under the current forest policy

The access of local communities to NTFPs for subsistence needs (except trade) has been authorised by article 8 of the 1994 forestry law, regardless of the forest estate (permanent or non-permanent), and except for protected species. Not only should the conditions of implementation of these customary rights be defined by a decree from the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife (article 8.3) but also can the local communities be officially prevented from taking advantage of them (Table 2). In that last case they should be entitled to compensations as from article 26 of the same law. Moreover, in practice, as a result of misinterpretation of the law, persistent informal restrictions are reported from one forest domain to another.

The main restrictions in terms of local community access to NTFPs are registered in the permanent forest estate (Table 2) as the customary users are not welcomed by the

forestry commissioners and concessionaires, who suspect local people of poaching and illegal logging. Concessionaires might want to obtain or secure their certification leading to more benefit from the international market. On the other hand it should clearly be underlined that beyond the permanent forest estate, local communities are governed by the customary rules. Thus, they do not experience, as such, any formal restriction in accessing or selling NTFPs. The access to NTFPs as from the customary regulations would depend on the economic importance of the target products. They will be in open access to community members if the market demand is low or null but exclusive to the family controlling the land if they are financially rewarding. Unfortunately the distance between the settlements and the areas where NTFPs are found is getting wider over the time, discouraging women from carrying on NTFP collection (Awono *et al.* 2010, Ingram *et al.* 2014) because they are overloaded with other household activities. Most of the time, the unclassified forest estate close to villages are not diverse enough and lack some needed NTFPs found in protected areas and concessions. That situation may lead to poor implementation with negative consequences on institutional measures aiming at protecting the resources, to increasing informality and illegality, inducing corruption and bribery. In the Southwest Region for instance, a number of initiatives to protect Mount Cameroon that was upgraded to national park did not discourage deforestation and forest degradation by local communities. Out of the total area (58,154 ha) of Mt. Cameroon National Park, an area of 24,000 ha is on the way of being completely converted to

TABLE 2 *Current situation of local communities' access to NTFPs based on forest estate category*

Forest estate	Estimate area (ha)	Forest category	Legal access § = Free access §§ = Access with restrictions §§§ = Forbidden	Legal reference (1994 forestry law)	Level of access in practice £ = weak ££ = medium £££ = high	Factual argument
Permanent	16,85 millions	Protected areas	§	Article 26	££	Access behind the State laxity in controls
		Forest reserve	§	Article 26	££	Community members are suspected to go beyond authorised NTFPs
		Production forests	§	Article 26	£	Conflicts between local communities and concessionaires
		Council forests	§	Article 30 (2) and 31	£££	The access is facilitated by the social proximity
Non-permanent*	4 millions	Community forests	§§	Article 37 (3) and 38	£££	Some restrictions are registered from customary rules
		Private forests	§	Articles 39 (4) and 40	££	The rights are restricted to the owners who can be flexible for some NTFPs
		Forests assignable to other uses	§§	Article 36	£££	Communities feel like owners and the land is most of the time distributed among families

* Overlaps between customary and legal rights as this forest estate is almost entirely divided among families (Karsenty *et al.* 2010)

agroforestry (Awono *et al.* 2014). The same authors reported that even when community members are aware that according to Cameroon's 1994 Forestry Law they are not allowed to open plantations inside protected areas, they feel forced to do so because of the scarcity of farmland combined to an expectation of State laxity. In fact, customary and legal frameworks applicable in forest product management are taking place in a disagreed environment where the two systems coexist but also contradict sometimes. After all, local people believe that their traditional rights over the land are paramount to State supremacy. A growing body of research shows that the exclusion of rural communities from accessing forest management and benefits accruing from forest exploitation often leads to conflicts over resources, resulting in confrontations between the State and loggers on the one hand, and local communities on the other (Michon *et al.*, 2007; Nasi and Frost, 2009).

Question 2: What are the major changes proposed for NTFPs and the reality on the ground?

The debate on the reform of the current forestry law with regards to NTFPs has focused mainly on two types of issues: the confusion between NTFPs and special products, and exploitation permits and taxes. As presented in table 3, the

proposal creates 4 different categories of NTFPs and different types of markets.

With the objective to improve the 1994 forestry law and the subsequent 1995 decree of application on NTFPs in terms of classification and market rights, four categories of forest products and 5 types of markets have been proposed. Category A consists of forest products threatened (with high economic value or not) and highly commercialised in urban, border or export markets (Table 3). In addition, the socio cultural importance can also be enough for a forest product to be in category A. Meanwhile, category B is made up of forest products nearly threatened with average economic and cultural importance sold in markets I, II, III and IV (Table 3). Category C is with forest products like wood energy, cordwood and pools generally sold in market types from 0 to III. The last category consists of forest products not threatened and commercialised in limited quantities production zones. The exploitation permits are proposed in four versions, including the management convention of allocation units for category A, the exploitation permits for NTFP under Category B, the exploitation permits for wood energy, pools and other cordwood while harvesting permits are proposed for forest products under Category D. The commercial rights proposed for local communities are valid only for market

TABLE 3 *The main changes proposed to the 1994 forestry law*

Target dispositions	Problem underlined	Proposed change
Section 9 (1,2) of the 1994 law and Article 22 (3) and 26 (1) of the decree 1995	Confusion between NTFPs and Special products	Four categories of forest products : Category A: Forest products (i) threatened; (ii) and/or with high economic value; (iii) highly commercialised in categories II, III or IV; (iv) and/or with high socio-cultural importance. Category B: Forest products (i) Near-threatened; (ii) and/or moderately commercialised in market types I, II, III or IV; (iii) and/or with average socio-cultural importance. Category C: other forest products, especially wood energy, wood for services and pools, (i) not threatened; (ii) and/or moderately commercialised in market types 0, I, II or III. Category D: Non timber forest products (i) not threatened; (ii) commercialised in market types 0 and I.
Article 8(1,2), 29(1), 30(2), 38(2), 39(4) of the 1994 law and 106 of the decree 1995	Usufruct rights not entitled to NTFP trade	The commercialisation rights are recognised to local communities but valid only for market category 0. This right is conditioned by an exploitation permit delivered by the Regional Delegate of forestry and wildlife. 5 types of markets: Type 0: Trade in villages of the production zones with transactions liking producers to traders or collectors. Type I: Small markets close to the production areas supplying regional and national markets. Type II: Urban markets supplying regional or national transactions with intermediaries involved. Type III: Border markets with high transactions with intermediaries involved. Type IV: Export markets with high transactions with long value chains including intermediaries.
Article 115 of the 1994 law	Centralisation of the attribution of the exploitation permit for NTFP trade	Exploitation Permits for special products and/or wood energy : - Management Convention of Allocation Units for Special Products for products under category A; - Exploitation Permits for non timber forest products under category B; - Exploitation Permits for wood energy or pools for products under category C; - Harvesting Permits for NTFPs under category D.
Section 123 (2) 1994 law	Regeneration tax not decentralised	The tax generated from the Special Product will be distributed to State (50%) council (40%) and adjacent communities 10%.

type 0. There is a risk that the effort to improve the formulation of the current forest policy on NTFPs, leads to more confusion with several levels of interpretation for markets and permit type.

Previous implementation failures

Within the context of landscape transformation, NTFPs are not necessarily extracted from forest lands, which make things more complex in terms of regulating policies for sustainable development. The importance of the forest is viewed by rural people not for timber but through NTFPs that they use in their daily life. While NTFPs were self-consumed by the households in the past, an increasing part is now widely sold locally, regionally and internationally as food, raw material for medicine or horticulture (Laird *et al.* 2010). The same authors reported that the government of Cameroon has been struggling with the regulation of NTFPs, but unlike timber about 99% of them do not have values that can easily be captured by the government. On the other hand, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development put in place in 2009 a supporting program for the promotion and domestication of *Gnetum* spp. in Cameroon but failed to convince the government to withdraw it from the list of special products of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife. Meanwhile distinguishing the plant from the farm and the plant from the wild is quite difficult, making the application of the legal rules quite challenging. This situation tends to encourage informal and illegal activities finally viewed as more rewarding.

Other concerns are associated with the incapacity or lack of willingness to cope with the international engagements. For instance the government of Cameroon was recalled to way down the exports of *Prunus africana* in the absence of a management plan as the plant is classified in annex II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora. There was no proof that the plant was sustainably managed in the absence of a management plan conditioned by an inventory to determine the quotas that could be harvested without jeopardizing the resource. That requirement could not be met by the government as it could only generate about 20 million XAF per year of taxes from *Prunus africana* trade. Luckily, inventories were finally conducted under an EC funded project in the Southwest and Northwest Regions of Cameroon, representing 2/3 of the main *Prunus africana* sites of the country. The amount of money used was far below what was requested by the *Prunus* scientific authority in Cameroon for the same inventories. The results obtained through the inventories led to a management plan that was approved, and the ban on *Prunus africana* was withdrawn for the two regions (Awono *et al.* 2016).

As far as community forestry is concerned the institution of that concept in the forestry law and subsequent application texts was seen as a great achievement by various observers in Cameroon including international agencies. From a community forest the population has the right to go beyond the main restriction applied in the communal or permanent forest estate by selling forest products including timber and NTFPs. A simple management plan was imposed by the legislation for some guidance for sustainable use, which has been a source of critics as community forests are offered in non-permanent forest estate (Karsenty *et al.* 2010, Nguiffo, 2004). However, all community forests have been obtained with assistance of elites or external agencies because of the difficult process of drafting a simple management plan as required by the legislation. Somehow this assistance leads to misunderstandings. An elite or a group of elites investing in the acquisition of a community forest will expect the returns. And the level of investment for timber production is quite high. Julve *et al.* (2007) found that the effective costs for a community forest to start the exploitation in Cameroon are about 23,000 Euros including environmental impact assessment and upfront investment expenses. It can be regretted that the community tends to reproduce the orientation of the government focusing on timber. Very few initiatives have been taken in the field of payments for environmental services (Awono *et al.* 2014). The exploitation of NTFP forest products in community forests is done on an individual basis and people face the same problems with road blocks to reach the markets because there is no community forest “mark” on the products. As a rule, no local community could earn a substantial benefit from the Community Forest policy in Cameroon.

Based on the statistics registered in August 2014, the operating agreement was signed for 267 community forests (918,033 ha) and the simple management plan approved for 313 community forests (1,068,720 ha) covering a total surface of 1,986,753 ha, representing 49.6% of the non permanent forest estate (table 4). This means that apart from the rejected cases, more than 500 community forests (close to 2 million hectares) have been attributed to the local communities for various uses, including timber and NTFP extractions legally open to the market, a token of the willingness of the government to associate rural dwellers in forest management in Cameroon. This has been made possible by the 1994 forestry Law, which confirms the appreciation a number of experts expressed after the law was approved. But given the global context with the rampant corruption that does not exclude local leaders from the game, the expected development of the whole community has not been achieved so far (Karsenty *et al.* 2010).

TABLE 4 *Acquisitions of community and council forests*

Forest category	Number attributed*	Area (ha)	Total forest estate (ha)	%
Community forests	580	1,986,753	4 million of non-permanent forests	49,6
Council forests	20	554,828	16,85 million of permanent forest	3,2

*with the management plan approved (267) or the management convention signed (313)

Source: Data gathered from the ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF, 2015)

Following the process of creating a community forest up to the signature of the operating agreement is a multi-steps journey (Julve *et al.* 2007). The enthusiasm for community forest acquisition in the whole humid forest zone of Cameroon tends to be surprising, knowing that generally communities do not possess the financial means to afford the necessary expenses to conduct the operations on the ground. If it was reported that NGOs have been assisting the local communities in getting community forests, in many other cases the job was done by a network of actors including internal (local leaders) and external elites, decentralised authorities, and various administrative branches (Oyono *et al.* 2006). In such a context the post monitoring operations make no sense because the willingness of some hierarchical authorities or institutions aiming at improving governance is lacking. According to RRI (2014) many administrative measures aiming at transferring forests to communities are restrictive and do not allow the communities to take advantage of their forests. For instance, in Cameroon the total surface of a community forest cannot exceed 5,000 hectares. But at the same time it should be recognised that beyond the textual conception, in practice the management rights that communities benefit from are so extensive that there is finally no big difference between a community forest legally recognised and another managed informally because both will be exploited and will supply the market, especially the domestic market. In many cases people consider that it is more time consuming to use the formal channels than to exploit illegally even though the benefits will not be the same. RRI (2014) also recognised that many reforms have been taken but not translated into practice many years later. This means that reforms do not necessarily lead to social transformation until other conditions are fulfilled, including stronger institutions with a structured and accepted civil society far from the recurrent contestations of the representativeness from inside (Dkamela *et al.* 2014), common in low and middle-income countries.

In addition, article 37 (1) of the forestry law indicates that the communities should be technically assisted by the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, free of charge, in the management of community forests. In reality, this assistance mission became an administrative control that can lead to the withdrawal of the community forest. As stated by article 30 (3) of the decree 1995 of application of the forestry law, the simple management plan and the terms of agreement with the community are valid for five years. Their renewal depends on the government's evaluation of the community's compliance with often-onerous management prescriptions (RRI, 2014). This insecurity in preserving the community rights can be a turning point in trusting the willingness of the State to transfer control and management rights in forestry to the local communities, especially because community forestry is taking place in non-permanent forest estate. Karsenty (2010) noticed that community forests in Central Africa are often close to major cities in degraded forests that are more vulnerable to fires and attractive to shifting cultivators. In general there is a kind of superimposition of CF on customary property rights that lead to tenure ambiguity and contestations between statutory and customary views on tenure rights. Awono *et al.* (2014) reported that, each family knows which

land belongs to whom based on customary rules, but some tend to contest the collective rights imposed by the CF. For instance, many families in Nkolonyeng village in the South Region, claim rights to the CF area based on the fact that old cocoa farms were created there by their forefathers long before the establishment of the CF. Similarly, Baka pygmies from the same Region claim ownership over cultural sites where they celebrate *Njengui*, the figure they consider to be their Godfather, or the spirit of the forest that protects them. Ostrom (2010) reminds us that the rights that are described by the law should be distinguished with those that are implemented in day-to-day practice.

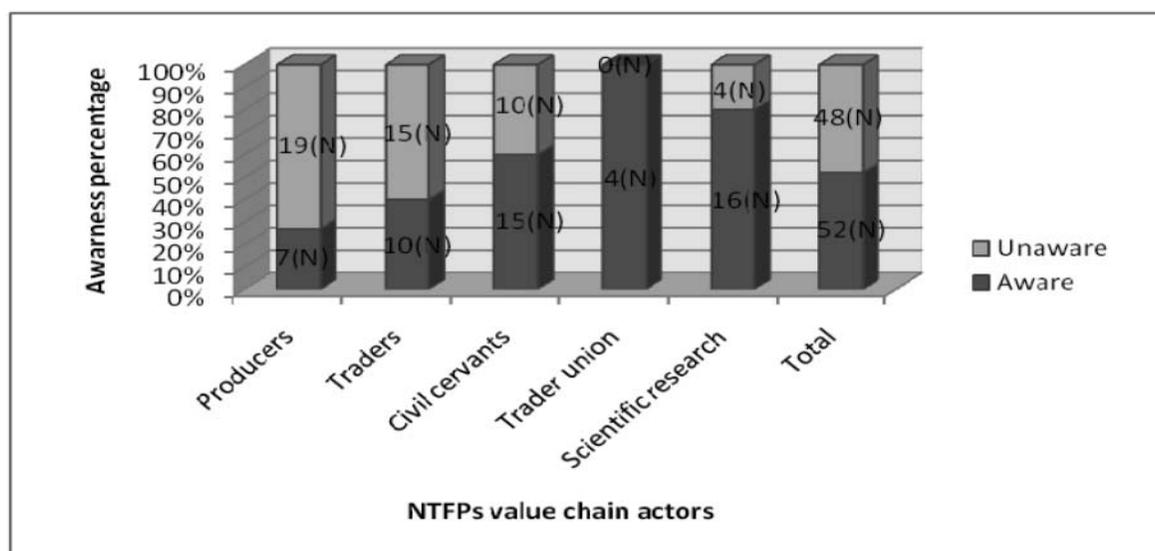
Question 3: How do forest users view the legal forestry framework?

To the question of whether people were aware of the legal provisions relating to the exploitation of NTFPs, 52% of interviewees responded with a yes. Their understanding was associated with their level of education as those aware have been at least to secondary school (Figure 1).

Going further with interviewees informed about the forest policy, the necessity to obtain an exploitation permit was the best known measure (25/52), followed by the taxes and fees due (12/52). We also checked if the political and regulatory framework was better mastered by certain categories of actors than others. Surprisingly, apart from the agents of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, up to 40% (10/25) of the civil servants interacting with forest products were not aware of the forest policy framework (Figure 1). Traders were better informed than producers with 40% (10/25) against 27% (7/25). In both cases the clause that was well known by each group was the obligation to have a permit in order to market NTFPs. Beyond the knowledge of the existence of the clauses, it was important to know to what extent the different stakeholders complied with the norms. As such, 41/52 claimed that they respected the legislation. Most actors aware of the regulations in NTFP management expressed the feeling that the law was disrupting their activity because it was unsuited to the reality in the field. To them, the living conditions of the small producers had not been taken in account by lawmakers. The procedure to obtain an exploitation permit, not to mention the professional accreditation letter issued by the prime minister's office, is out of reach for local producers. As a consequence no local producer ever tried to obtain a permit to sell his products. 87% of the people interviewed did not know how the regulation framework was elaborated, and no one had ever been associated to its elaboration. Though much hope was put in the decentralisation process, the contribution of the technical and administrative services operating on the ground were minimal, as they were not involved in developing forest policies.

Although the majority of local people do not really care about the legal framework in their daily activities (the absence of statutory rights doesn't prevent them from selling NTFPs), the official recognition of customary rights by State authorities would be important to avoid future problems as land and resource availability decrease over time. Some scholars like Arnold and Ruiz-Pérez (1998) have argued that increased

FIGURE 1 Awareness of the forest policy framework by the actors of the NTFPs value chain



market demand may lead to overexploitation and local extinction of some species. It could also be possible that vanishing resources will push farmers to speed up domestication to secure their income source. However the domestication might be hampered by the lack of appropriate planting material. While all NTFPs might probably not be saved, it can be expected that key NTFPs can be domesticated with appropriate incitation.

Ultimately, about 40% of the interviewed actors considered that the current policy on NTFP management is incoherent because it does not take into account the reality on the ground and therefore cannot ensure sustainable and equitable management. A number of constraints in the management of NTFPs were raised. The most often cited was the harassment of traders and producers by police and forestry officers at roadblocks.

A closer look at governance concerns in forest activities reveals that most forestry agents, like other civil servants, locally behave independently, making contradictory decisions out of the context, reinforcing their own profit against the general interest. Writing about the Dimako council forest, Ofoulhast-Othamot (2015) reports that far from their public statements about the pursuit of sustainable forest management and conservation, locally elected authorities had completely ignored the restrictions imposed by the management plan. Indeed local authorities are far from implementing the legal provisions of the management plan, as there is no real control that the norms are respected. In fact the problem comes less from a lack of control than from a lack of sanction, due to suspicious links established with central forestry authorities. As a rule, permits are regularly issued as if the management plan was respected. Along the same line Tieguhong *et al.* (2015) following small and medium enterprises trading *Gnetum* spp. in Cameroon found that from the production forests to the harbour, laws were bureaucratically, arbitrarily and weakly implemented and enforced.

Question 4: Aren't there better ways to improve NTFP management in Cameroon?

Given the complexity of the propositions on the different types of markets and the categories of forest products bearing in mind the persistent confusions in the literature between NTFPs and special products, and the difficulty to reach a consensus on the list established by the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife for special products, the simplification of terminology is instrumental. Therefore we propose to adopt the terminology of “special product” and “ordinary product” both for non-timber and timber products (Figure 2).

By categorising forest products (Figure 2), the term “special” should derive from a deep concern on the management of a given species that can lead to its disappearance if appropriate measures were not taken on time. Meanwhile “ordinary” in this context means any forest products used where the critical threshold has not been reached. As it is established that local communities have been managing their forests for millennium, we pledge to extend the management rights to the market rights to avoid perverse effects. As such, apart from general taxes, the trade of ONTFPs will not be conditioned by any State permit both for the domestic and export markets. However the regulation of SNTFPs should be reinforced (Table 5) and the list revised on a participatory and yearly basis, in such a way that any threatened ONTFP can be listed as SNTFP. The restrictions would probably not guarantee efficiency in the management of NTFPs. This view can be reinforced by Nasi and Frost (2009) who show that many tropical forests with outstandingly high conservation value are under serious threat.

Exploitation permits

An exploitation permit is supposed to contribute to avoid adverse impacts of harvesting to the target forest products or to public interests. Delivering a permit or quotas without any

FIGURE 2 Categories of forest products built from article 9 of the 1994 forestry law

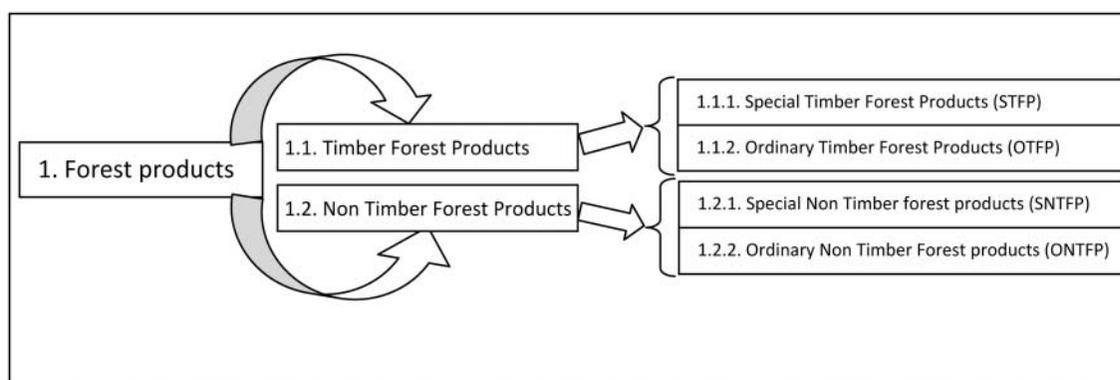


TABLE 5 Simplifying the classification and reducing the workload for Ordinary NTFPs (ONTFPs) and Special NTFPs (SNTFP)

NTFP type	Access to export market	Access to domestic market	Decision body for permit	Empowerment for sustainable management of NTFPs
Ordinary NTFPs	Free	Free	NA**	Council nursery programs on highly traded NTFPs with a target number of seedlings every year
Special NTFPs	EP-SNTFPs* conditioned by inventories	EP-SNTFPs conditioned by inventories	Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife	Increased domestication for endangered species considered as special NTFPs, through a joint partnership including ANAFOR, adjacent councils and community based organisations with a specific number of seedlings planned for every year

* EP-SNTFPs: Exploitation permits for special non timber forest products

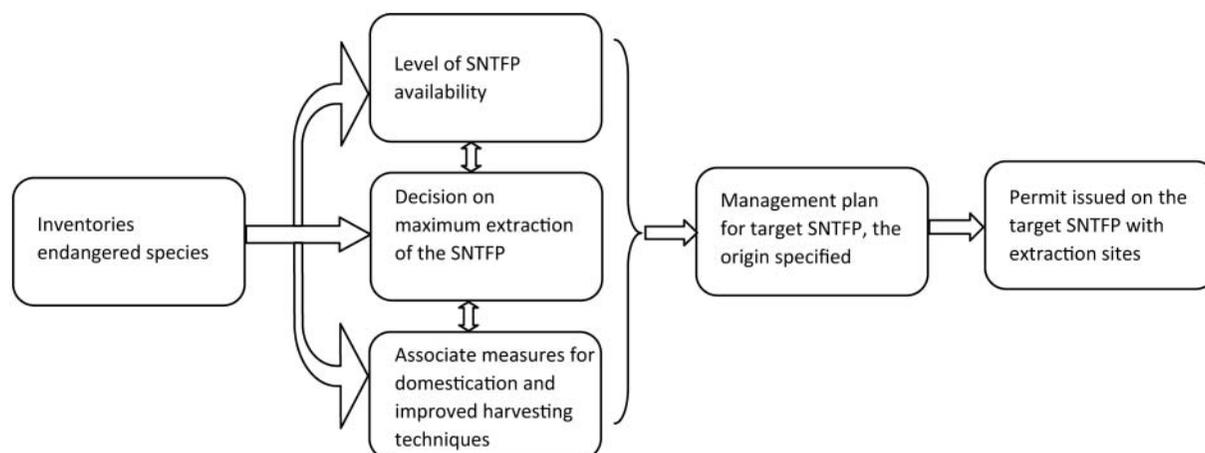
** NA: Not applicable

knowledge of the state of the resource and its spatial origin doesn't make any sense. A precise inventory is the only way to determine the level of availability of the product and to determine whether specific actions are needed for adequate protection. Such actions can only be expressed through a resource management plan. Therefore, written management plans for endangered species should be made available prior to the attribution of permits (Fig. 2). So far, permits have been issued in the absence of any inventory, with quotas arbitrarily fixed (Ndoye and Awono, 2009). As a matter of fact, the spirit and the objective behind the attribution of exploitation permits have been diverted. It would thus be advantageous to focus on endangered species (Special NTFPs) to make sure that the necessary inventories are carried out and management plans are established for their sustainability. Conversely, there is no reason whatsoever to condition (or restrict) Ordinary NTFPs exploitation by any permit procedure.

Decentralisation

In the context of decentralisation the government accepted to transfer 50% of the forest royalties generated by forest concessions to adjacent councils managing directly 40% and supervising the management of the 10% destined to local communities. Unfortunately, these allocations have not created the expected community development. Oyono *et al.* (2009) found that in some cases forest adjacent communities were not even aware of the existence of the annual forest fees

they were entitled to and could not engage in the decision making process. A first step would have been a public information campaign for awareness of such initiatives with the improved livelihood capacity. The authors recognised a relative transparency at the national level, but numerous discrepancies and a general lack of information about the distribution and use of the funds at the council and village levels. Sunderlin *et al.* (2014) underlined that it was necessary to analyse both national and local practices to capture the real governance concerns because village chiefs or other leaders generally act without the consultation and participation of the different population groups in the village. Thus providing the opportunity for some people to take advantage of their position to abuse their constituency and enrich themselves. However, the decentralisation process in the forestry sector in Cameroon has been effective with council and community forests within the conceptual framework. If critics have been rude on the position of community forests taking place only in non-permanent forest estate, the council forests are located in the permanent forest estate instead. More importantly, with the possibility for a council forest to be planted (article 30.1), there is room for developing the domestication of NTFPs. Unfortunately, until now little attention has been paid to plantations at the council level in spite of the enabling environment provided by the law. We argue that more responsibilities should be devoted to councils in terms of permit attribution for export of the NTFPs originating from the council territory

FIGURE 3 *Exploitation permits procedure*

in general. To make this possible, the councils should be able to recruit staff specialised in forest management and work hand in hand with ANAFOR. The regeneration tax paid at the council level if the attribution of permits is recognised to the councils would be an additional incentive to implement such a program with specialised staff.

Structuring the civil society for improved policy implementation and NTFP development

It should be recalled that the civil society should be structured with non-political actors (different from political parties) who base their action on the collective interests that support the grassroots' sectors of the society. Governance would be reduced to the form of government under the permanent control of non-political actors for efficiency and equity. Such a context can only be possible if everyone is an active player for a strong civil society capable of avoiding abuse from those who are running public affairs. From this perspective, governance would be an additional force to the concept of democracy that ensures the legitimacy and the alternation of power. It is unfortunate that the emergence of such supporting institutions is yet to happen in the forestry sector because of conflicts among actors that do not promote participation and representativeness. Consequently, those who defend openly the civil society, even with good intentions cannot impose their views as they don't necessarily constitute a powerful lobby. The resulting lack of control from the civil society on the way public services manage forest products leads to corruption and embezzlements. The present internal controls do not succeed in minimizing the phenomenon up to now. The civil society and the private sector must define appropriate strategies to deserve attention and respect from the government. Control of public action as such is no longer the privileged domain of the government but can be done and reported by various stakeholders, including a well-structured civil society. A well-structured civil society means that different active organisations (associations, syndicates and others) should agree on their agenda and their representatives. As a pressure group, a strong civil society will give a chance to the

government to be aware of the dysfunction in the system and to set a strategy for improvement. One may not see the direct link of the description offered here with the NTFP sector but it is obvious that the hesitations and deviated practices registered in the NTFP market value chains can widely be justified by the global governance context of the country. Agrawal *et al.* (2008) writing about governance in the world's forests underlined several factors conditioning the effective forest governance in tropical forest countries, including but not limited to a clear definition of user rights and responsibilities in forests, greater participation by those who use and depend on forests, stronger enforcement of property rights and governance arrangements, and better monitoring of forest outcomes. In Cameroon many studies have focused on governance parameters including transparency, responsibility and accountability in the implementation of forestry policy for the last decades (Nguiffo 2004). Consistent efforts have been made to jugulate corruption in Cameroon for the last years. A number of institutions (National program of governance, Anti-corruption program, etc.) have been created, but corruption seems on the rise instead. In order to be more efficient, the implementation strategy should be reviewed to make sure that different actors are involved in the process. It is expected that the civil society will play a greater role in achieving this objective. Cerutti and Tacconi (2006) suggested that an increase in transparency and accountability could be crucial in the forestry sector. At the same time we are assisting at the transformation of the exporting environment of forestry products including NTFPs, conditioned by a number of actions. The government of Cameroon has engaged in the EU Voluntary Partnership Agreements and Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (VPA-FLEGT) established since 2003 with the objective to reduce illegal logging through the implementation of sustainable management standards that impose enormous efforts for control and traceability. Beyond the creation of the Control Brigade by the government of Cameroon, the involvement of independent observers in monitoring the implementation has raised much hope. Unfortunately despite some denunciations, change is still to

come and the contribution of the forestry sector to the national economy is still weak. Meanwhile, despite the mixed results on the contribution to the national economy, the forest policy of Cameroon as designed is almost in line with international guidelines focusing on participatory management (for instance the institution of council and community forests) in reference to the International Convention on Biological Diversity of 1992 and the 2005 Treaty of COMIFAC on forest policy in Central Africa.

In a global competitive environment, Cameroon should be improving the regulation of its economy to attract more private investments (Awono *et al.* 2013), which requires analysing official procedures or common practices for an enterprise to start up and operate its business formally. The minimum capital requirement should be reviewed through the time spent and the cost to complete the procedures. According to the World Bank (2016), starting a business in Cameroon requires about 15 days and a cost representing 32.7% of income per capita. In comparison with other national economies, Cameroon ranks 172 out of 189. Thus, the private sector tends to hesitate in investing in producing goods including processing in the forestry sector, losing the opportunity to take advantage of the huge potential of jobs in the NTFPs domain.

New technologies for improved implementation

Human resources currently used appear to be insignificant because of the inadequate and outdated administrative systems operating with poor and obsolete tools. Substantial efforts should be made to computerize these systems to save time and reduce the challenges caused by remoteness. This will result in more efficiency in controls from the hierarchy that should demonstrate its willingness to implement change. This change is unavoidable for the financial management system exposed to corruption and embezzlements. The present lack of interest for the computerization in the public administration is a clear indicator of its desire to block the emergence of transparency and control networks. It has been proved that corruption thrives on permanent and direct contact with users for any kind of service. In a context marked by too much corruption in public administration, the quality of a regulation framework may not impact the implementation as expected. After being classified second on the list of the most corrupt African countries in 2015 (Transparency International Cameroon, 2015), the end of year speech of the head of State of Cameroon confirmed the existence of regressive practices within the public administration system, lowering the chance to accelerate the development efforts for improved livelihoods. Thus, there are good reasons for investing in information and communication technologies as these can impact systematically the way things are being carried out in public services and sometimes in the private sector. According to UNCTAD (2012), Cameroon is among the developing countries with less than 5% of computer software and services share, which cannot help to set a strategic control system. To reverse this figure, there is a great need for investing in specialized training institutions as these technologies require a certain level of knowledge. Transformation of the forestry

policy domain for improved governance should be built on a pragmatic modernisation of the management tools in order to see NTFPs taking off. On the other hand, the governance organs created like the National Program for Governance, the Ministry of State High Control, the National Anti-Corruption Program (NACP) known as CONAC, are certainly trying to fight by monitoring and reporting corruption practices but the phenomenon is so complex in general and in the forest sector in particular that so far the results are limited. One of the weak points of these institutions is the fact that Inspectors Generals of the ministries head these units, being both judge and judged. We assert that there is an urgent need for putting in place a system consisting of diverse members from all national sectors including local communities, who will act in schools, universities and public administration (including forests and NTFPs) and justice to monitor corruption practices. The civil society should be able to inspire equity and efficiency and to restore the trust of the grassroots level.

To summarise the discussion on governance in the forestry sector, it is clear that in many situations the implementation of the legal framework continues to be jeopardized, reducing its chance to be effective, efficient and result oriented. This does not necessarily oppose the proposed reforms but underlines the fact that these reforms will stay indicative until a wide change is brought in, with computerized information services in an environment widely influenced by a structured civil society. Based on the numerous failures to date, we cannot count on the only willingness of the government to bring in the expected transformation. The need for conservation and the aspirations of local communities should be effectively balanced to guarantee equity and legitimacy for the long term sustainability of forest management. Restricting unilaterally the needs of rural dwellers would undoubtedly lead to inconsistency and therefore to a rush on forest resources.

CONCLUSION

Carrying out reforms in the forestry sector is important in some domains like recognising official rights on forested lands and forest resources to local communities to cope with international engagements. However given the national context infested with corruption and embezzlements, the reforms will not be enough to guarantee efficiency in managing NTFPs like other forest products in Cameroon. Additional actions are indispensable. Empowering the civil society will be crucial to the transformation of the global spirit for several reasons. Without managing directly public resources, the civil society can help to control the public service action as diverse and spread-out all over the country. In that context, the pressure from the civil society will force civil servants to improve the management of public resources as they will permanently feel on the glance and therefore feel more accountable. The use of information and communication technologies in that perspective will bring additional inputs and help accessing relevant information and, by doing so, reduce time for efficiency in coordinating. Putting more emphasis on these pathways will automatically speed the

delivery of the government as planned. Softening the regulation of NTFPs by giving more trading opportunities to citizens for ordinary NTFPs would be an incentive for the economic improvement of the sector. On the other hand, the rapid growth of the use of new devices including mobile phones or tablets in Cameroon can be an incentive to focus on ICTs in the process of improving governance in managing forest products in particular and all national resources in general. Building on the UNCTAD (2012), the government should be playing a central role in facilitating the acquisition of adapted infrastructures as it will be the first user through e-government and public procurement activities. Low investment in transforming the working environment through computer software and IT service would be seen as an indicator of a lack of motivation from the government to reverse the current poor governance in forest resources and other sectors as well, that actually benefits only a small portion of the society. In the light of the above analysis it can be inferred that the combination of ICTs use and the emergence of a well-structured civil society can be instrumental for improved governance in NTFPs in particular and other national resources in general. Cameroon should be recommended to design a national strategy not only to develop adequate ICT infrastructures but also to be able to fill possible skill gaps in managing new information technologies in the short run. Finally, even with perfect legal texts the efficiency is relative and can only be ensured by the good will for effective implementation from various segments of the society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable inputs.

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