

How unique are Bolivia & Cameroon? A comparison of the development of community forests.

Charlotte Benneker, Peter Cronkleton, Paolo Omar Cerutti, Abdon Awono

1. Introduction

The objective of this article is to compare the development of community forestry initiatives in Bolivia, South America and Cameroon, Central Africa. Cameroon and Bolivia both enacted new forest laws (in 1994 and 1996 respectively) that included the possibility for communities to engage in commercial timber exploitation. The reason to compare these specific countries is that the communities in these two countries have had between 14 and 16 year to developed since the promulgation of the new forest laws and display many interesting similarities and differences in their development processes.

An important similarity is that in both countries community forestry activities have been purposely directed towards commercial timber exploitation. In both cases communities are required to elaborate forest management plans and annual logging plans and in both cases they are free to decide weather they want to engage in logging themselves or outsource logging activities to private forest enterprises, although since 2002 only logging with "artisanal" means is legally allowed in Cameroon. Getting official permission to engage in logging activities, the development of a forest management plan and actual harvesting activities all require substantial capital. Communities do not have this kind of capital and thus have no choice but to rely on external parties to assist them making the necessary investments. NGOs have assisted many communities to get started in both countries, but private timber enterprises have gradually become important investors as well.

On the other hand, an important difference is that in Bolivia many rural communities and indigenous organization have been granted formal property rights over land and exclusive user rights over the forest on that land. Under the agrarian reform law of 1996 indigenous communities and organizations in the lowlands of Bolivia have claimed over 30 million ha of land a considerable part of which is covered with tropical forest. 8 million ha is considered to have the potential to be managed for commercial purposes (Nebel et al. 2003). In Cameroon communities are granted forest user rights for 25 years over a community forest, but no property rights. Community forest management areas in Bolivia have no maximum size as long as they lie within the communal or indigenous territory, in practice the size of community management areas vary between 1 to 97.000 ha. In Cameroon, the community forest areas have a maximum size of 5.000 ha, although in theory several community forests can be joined to cover a larger area managed with a single management plan.

Another main difference is that whereas in Cameroon since 2002 communities must exploit the forest using artisanal logging techniques (i.e. the processing of logs in the

forest using a chainsaw) in Bolivia this practice is prohibited which forces communities to always invest in capital intensive logging equipment.

Both in Bolivia and Cameroon the new forest laws have indeed set up a process of community involvement in forest management. In Bolivia, by the end of 2006, 23 Local Social Associations (ASL) were adjudicated 600,000 ha of forest in municipal forest concessions, 88 indigenous groups engaged in forest management of their communal and indigenous territories covering a total of 1345,000 ha, 48 of these plans had been officially approved, 80 farmers communities were engaged in forest management covering 570,000 ha with 52 plans officially approved. In total an forest area of 2,516,208 ha (Benneker 2008) has been, or is in process of being, handed over to different categories of the rural population. In Cameroon, by the end of 2008, the total area of the 177 granted community forests was about 632,000 ha, with 143 approved management plans covering an area of about 545,000 ha. In 2009, however, only about 70 CFs requested and obtained their annual logging authorisation, covering a total annual logging area of about 10,000 ha.

Studies on community forestry often focus on the question if community forestry initiatives are successful or not. Evaluations are often based on a range of externally defined criteria that cover all three pillars of sustainability (social, economical and ecologic). This implies that the rural poor are expected to, within a few years, change societal patterns of profound social, economic and political inequality, as well as the place of women in society etcetera. This kind of changes are unlikely to be realized within a time-span of a decade, merely due to a legal change in access to forest resources. This argument gains validity considering that in practice possessing legal rights implies little more than being given a tool to be used in the struggle of gaining access over resources that also the economic and political powerful like to have access to.

The objective of this paper is to show that the development of community forestry initiatives takes place in highly dynamic surroundings and depends on a wide variety of factors, processes and institutions guiding society in general.

Four of these processes will be singled out.

1. Impact of legal rights
2. The difficulty of even get the rights from the state and how the attitude of the state can change towards community forestry initiatives
3. The role of NGOs
4. The role of the market

Internal organizational aspects are important and can even be determining for the success of the community forestry initiatives, but also these organizational issues are highly influenced by external factors and cannot solely be attributed to characteristics of the communities. An important aspect to consider is that in both countries, although the community forestry initiatives might not have developed completely along the lines set out for them by the international community, most of the involved communities are proud to be involved in an activity previously reserved for private enterprises and proud of what

they have achieved. Community forestry issues have without doubt conquered a place on the local political agenda in both Cameroon and Bolivia.

The question guiding this paper is: what are the similarities and differences in organizational and environmental aspects steering the development of community forestry initiatives in Bolivia and Cameroon and what can we learn from the different outcomes to further facilitate the development of community forest enterprises in general.

2. Method

This paper is based on a detailed comparison of two studies on community forestry in Cameroon and Bolivia that followed a similar research approach. First, Ezzine de Blas et al. (2009) studied 20 community forest initiatives in Cameroon that represented 40% of the active community forests in the country by 2006. They used a longitudinal approach as fieldwork was implemented in 2005 and 2006 to be able to observe changes over time. Second, Benneker (Benneker 2008) studied 50 community forest enterprises in Bolivia that represent 50% of the 100 communities with an approved forest management plan by the end of 2006. Benneker also used a longitudinal approach with interviews conducted in 2004 and 2006. Moreover, both studies take on a general perspective by specifically studying the impact of a broad range of environmental factors on the development of community forestry initiatives. The comparison focuses on aspects as: property rights, forest management regulations and the role of the state, NGOs and the market. Additional studies have been used to complement the analysis.

3. Clarification of concepts

The term community forestry may refer to many different systems of forest use and management that, to some extent, include local people. To enable a comparison of community forestry it is important to know that both in Cameroon and Bolivia community forestry refers to the participation of communities in the commercial exploitation of timber. In both countries the communities do have to develop a forest management plan based on guidelines on sustainable forest management that has to be approved by the government.

In Bolivia all landowners have exclusive forest user rights over the forest on the land they own. Ownership can either be individual for farmers, or collective for farmers and indigenous communities and organizations. Collective landownership can be granted to a single community or to an indigenous organization that represent several communities. Community forest organizations can exist of (1), a single farmer managing the forest on his land based on a management plan elaborated in coordination with several farmers or (2), a user group from a certain community managing part of the communal forest with consent of the collective forest owners (a community or an indigenous organization) or (3), all inhabitants of a community managing a communal forest or part of the forest within an indigenous territory or (4), an indigenous organization managing the forest from an indigenous territory in name of all the communal landowners living in several communities.

Beside forest management on private or collectively owned forest land, the new forest law also opened up the possibility for people interested in forest exploitation from certain municipalities to organize themselves in what is called an ASL (Social Local Association). Once legally recognized and formalized, these ASL can request a concessions from the municipality they live in. Municipalities are given the right to grant 20% of the state owned forest land within their jurisdiction to this kind of associations. The associations typically include a heterogeneous group of people previously engaged in the informal timber production chain. The association may include, for example, ex-tree spotters (from different communities), ex-credit providers (the local elite) and people with additional or advanced education. In the literature these ASL are often referred to as community forest enterprises as well but they will not be included in this study because they are unrelated to communities in the geographical meaning as the other communities are.

In Cameroon, the Ministry of Forests and Fauna defines a community forest as “a forest forming part of the Non-Permanent Forest Domain (NPF), of a maximum surface of 5,000 ha, which is covered by a management agreement between a recognised legal entity representing the village community (Village Committee) and the Forestry Administration. Management of such forests is the responsibility of the Committee concerned, after the preparation and approval of a simplified forest management plan (SMP), with the help of free technical assistance of the Forestry Administration”. Community forests are granted a pre-emption right over industrial logging titles (such as sales of standing volume) which may be auctioned by the forest administration in the NPF. After the approval of the SMP and of annual logging plans, each year the CF can request an annual logging certificate in line with the SMP. Community forests are not subject to pay forestry taxes (stumpage and area fees) if they harvest on their own. Once timber is harvested and processed on the spot, the administration delivers way-bills that allow timber to be legally transported and traded within the country.

4. Forest management regulations

In both countries the management plan is made up of both a technical part and a socio-organizational part. The technical part is based on a forest management inventory and it is used to establish parameters such as minimum cutting diameters and annual allowable cuts. In Bolivia the technical part of a forest management for all forest users (large, small, private, communal) is exactly the same. In Cameroon, until 2009, the sampling rates of the management inventory of CFs were much higher, i.e. more expensive, than those required to industrial logging concessions (8% vs. 0.5-1.0% respectively). As of 2010, the administration authorised lower sampling rates, thus decreasing the initial costs of the management inventory. In Bolivia, unless one of the community members is a forest engineer, communities are legally unable to developed such a management plan on their own.

In Bolivia the average time a community spends on getting a forest management plan approved is 1.5 year, in Cameroon the average time necessary to complete the procedure

was 4 years in 2006, but it has improved in recent years. Officially, in Bolivia a forest management plan, if elaborated properly, could be approved in three months time. This procedure, in both countries, is often delayed due to remarks made by the Community Forestry Unit of the Forest Service regarding accomplishment with a set of socio-organizational arrangements procedures meant to ensure that all land owners participate in the decision making process on forest management. Although intended to do good, these procedures have given rise to ambiguity and excessive bureaucracy and rather than promoting internal discussions in the communities on how to best implement a management plan, communities are evaluated on their capacity to elaborate, fill in, sign and stamp the right documents. Contrary to the expectations, the technical part of the management plans, evaluated by forest engineers that were sceptical about communities participation in commercial logging, have hardly ever caused delays in the approval of the management plans (Benneker 2008).

The actual application of forest management regulations by communities in Bolivia has proven to be no problem at all. as management regulations are actually quite simple and straight forward; cutting cycle minimally 20 years, respect a minimal cutting diameter per specie and a logging intensity of maximum 80% of mature trees. Forest officers often praise the communities for their compliance with the law and consider them to be more conscious about the management practices than private enterprises that manage large concessions. Communities are often also proud to show the Forest Service that they are capable of managing their forest in a responsible way and invite the officers to come and check their work. Only communities that have outsources all logging activities to private enterprises have little say over the quality of management practices.

In theory, the actual application of forest management regulations, once the SMP is approved and implemented by responsible Committees, is an easy task and does not differ much from the Bolivian experience (rotation 30 years etc.). In practice, though, there exist serious issues concerning the past use of the "community forest" concept, the quality of approved management plans, and the business plan of the CFs. Many CFs have been heavily skimmed prior to, or in the initial years of, their approval, and although they may now have an approved SMP, they are left with very small annual logging surfaces emptied of almost all the valuable trees. In several cases, it is almost impossible for a CF to be economically viable within the legal limits of the SMP, and thus there exist plenty of examples linking community management with illegal logging activities, as people both internal and external to the community use the legally delivered logging authorisations or way-bills to launder illegally harvested timber under the CF cover (e.g. REM 2008). Another difficult issue as far as implementation is concerned could be the lack of ownership rights. With a boosting request for timber on the domestic market and a bad track-record of equity in the redistribution of CF benefits, individual Cameroonians with customary ownership of some trees prefer to sell them to chainsaw loggers for a secure actual profit than work within the legal restrictions established by the SMP, as they are not sure about the future benefits of CF management in such an environment.

5. Legal rights

The main difference between Bolivia and Cameroon, as said before, is that the communities in Bolivia have been granted legal property rights over their land by the 1996 land reform law, and exclusive forest management rights by the 1996 forest law. Community forests in Cameroon are granted a pre-emption right over industrial logging titles (such as sales of standing volume) over a forest area close to their community and that the communities (or part of the community) considers to be traditionally theirs.

To get access to forest land the procedures in Bolivia and Cameroon differ significantly. In Bolivia communities first apply for landownership. The procedure to get legal land titles over land is extremely cumbersome and long lasting. To be able to engage in forest management activities however, the Forest Service initially accepts all legally accepted land claims as a provisional type of landownership as long as there are no competing claims over the land. As the agrarian reform law and the forest law were enacted at the same time, it was unfeasible for the Forest Service to halt all logging activities and wait for all the land to be titled. Communities that decided to develop a management plan on untitled land, had to accept the possible annulment of the plan if the land was not to be titled in their name. The procedure to apply for land rights is thus not part of the procedure to apply forest user rights. In Cameroon, the procedure to apply for a community forest and the development of a management plan are both part of the procedure to get forest user rights, which may be revoked at any moment by the forest administration if non-compliance with any forest regulation is discovered.

The difference in adjudicated rights as well as the way the government actually deals with these rights has a mayor impact on the position of the community forest organizations vis-à-vis other stakeholder in the forest sector. In this section some of these consequences will be shortly discussed.

Forest user rights & land rights

In Bolivia, communities are not obliged to use the land they own for forest management, they are free to opt for all kind of land uses they want. All communities use part of their land for agricultural purposes, some produce for subsistence purposes mainly, others mainly for the market. The conversion of forest for agricultural purposes always requires a permit but is free for areas under five ha. This means that using the forest for agricultural purposes is easier and cheaper than developing a forest management plan for the sustainable use of the forest for timber production, as is the case in Cameroon. In theory, a management plan could locate forested, agricultural, agro-forestry and similar areas, and the sustainable business plan of the CF could integrate all activities. However, as CF have always been interpreted as a mere "logging title", management plans focus almost exclusively on timber production.

Despite the effort communities and indigenous organizations have to go through to develop a forest management plan and have it approved, many of them decide to do so. This tendency is similar in Cameroon. It may take communities four years to get through the adjudication process but additional communities still decide to follow their example. In Bolivia, communities initially decided to engage in forest management mainly to

justify and strengthen their land claims and to protect the land from occupation by others. This strategy was strongly supported by several NGOs. Ezzine de Blas et al (2009, p447) argue that also in Cameroon “communities try to obtain concessions as a way to secure access to resources”. The whole idea of forest management might not be so important initially. From a property rights perspective this is an interesting development as in both countries changed forest laws gave communities the opportunity to secure access to land and forest resources that they considered to be traditionally theirs.

In Bolivia however, forest management issues and the options to improve livelihoods through the management and sale of timber became increasingly important for the communities once logging activities and the commercialization of timber initiated. Involved community members became ever more involved and interested and neighbouring communities that observed their success started to show interest as well. In Cameroon, the economic viability of the CF model is still to be proven, especially as it depends very much on the location of the CF, the availability of valuable timber, etc. To date, there exist more evidences of failures than successes, but in 2009 the Ministry of Forests approved a simplified procedure to get access to and harvest CFs. It remains to be seen whether simplified procedures will improve the viability of CFs.

Protection of property rights

The presence of legal rights over resources is generally considered to be an important prerequisite for successful resource management. However, when communities are granted legal rights without being granted the means to use and defend these rights, resource use may be affected negatively. To what extent communities have been given the means to use and the means to defend their legal rights in Cameroon and Bolivia will be discussed separately.

Using rights

The forest user rights that have been granted to the communities in Bolivia and Cameroon have come with a package of conditions that enable third parties to cream of a significant proportion of the potential benefits.

The process of adjudication of forest land (in Bolivia part of the process of obtaining land rights in general) and the process of developing a management plan and getting it approved requires substantial capital (and perseverance). As rural communities do not have access to capital and financial institutions do not provide credit for the development of management plans, communities depend on external parties to finance the adjudication of forest concessions and the development of management plans. In both Cameroon and Bolivia, a considerable group of communities has received assistance from NGOs. As NGOs do not demand part of the profit from timber sales, these communities have the chance to negotiate their timber freely and profit from their independent position. Communities that received assistance from private enterprises though, are indebted with the enterprise and get locked into unfavourable timber sale contracts and lose their say over the forest. The fact that communities have been given the right to engage in logging activities but are obliged to develop expensive management plans without any provision of credit has indirectly made them subject to the intentions of third parties that are given

the chance to cream of the potential benefits from the forest user rights given to the communities.

This dependence of communities on external credit providers is bigger in Bolivia than in Cameroon for two reasons. First, in Bolivia forest management plans are bigger and thus more expensive (a management plan (average surface = 20.000 ha) costs 1 USD/ha). Second, in Bolivia communities are obliged to use capital intensive logging equipment which increases their dependence on external capital even more. This situation reduces the possibility of the Bolivian community forest enterprises to integrate vertically and capture more profit in the production chain.

Most communities that have received assistance from NGOs develop annual logging plans (with assistance from a paid forest professional) and fell the trees themselves. The extraction, transport and transformation of the logs is done by private enterprises, generally under annual timber sale contracts. Most communities that have received assistance from private enterprises, and that are indebted to them, have long term contracts that allow the enterprise to log from the community forest without much participation of the community members (Benneker 2008).

In Cameroon, on the contrary, communities are not allowed to use heavy equipment for timber extraction but they have to process logs in the forest and extract them manually. Mbile and Misouma (2008) argue that this is the reason why communities depend on middlemen to extract timber from the forest areas. However, we have seen that in Bolivia communities also depend on middlemen because they cannot afford paying for the heavy equipment.

The discussion point here is not to identifying either one of the extraction systems as superior to the other for whatever reason. The issue is that communities are not allowed to adapt extraction methods to their financial and physical possibilities. Whereas in Bolivia NGOs often mention the regulations of timber extraction to be a problem for the communities as they need more capital to engage in forest management, communities have never complained about it and are rather alleviated that they are 'freed' from the physically extremely hard and unhealthy (as also mentioned for Cameroon) work of carrying logs out of the forest. Rather, they are allowed to operate as real businesses do. Some communities with smaller management areas and less sizable logs do apply more artisanal extraction methods, which is generally tolerated by the Forest Service if it happens in coordination.

Defending rights

In both Cameroon and Bolivia, communities are unable to actually protect their legal rights from either illegal logging practices or, as in Bolivia, from encroachment by large and subsistence farmers. In Bolivia, most communities have been able to reduce illegal logging practices in their management area and they have often received some assistance from the Forest Service. This assistance may differ from being given the right to apprehend illegal loggers to direct interference from forest officers. In Cameroon this type of assistance is non-existing. In Bolivia, disputes over land are more problematic and

communities are unable to solve land conflicts without outside assistance. Even a community that won two court cases (and spend thousands of dollars from timber sales on them) against a group of small farmers encroaching their forest management area was never able to remove the farmers from the land.

The lack of state protection on property rights often lead to violent conflicts between different stakeholders. In Bolivia, houses have been put on fire and armed conflicts have been reported to protect forest management areas. In Cameroon, back up of legal rights by the government is very fragile as well, which often leads to conflicts among individuals and neighbouring villages, with a direct negative impact on community management. In addition, there are contradictory provisions of the law and decree of application.

Some back-up from the state for legally granted rights seems necessary. Otherwise legal land and forest access rights merely become another factor in the struggle over access to natural resources rather than initiating any real devolutions of voice over resources.

Competition over land use

Both in Bolivia and Cameroon communities encounter mayor problems defending and using the forest user rights granted to them. There is however a mayor difference in the scale in which devolution of forest resources to local communities has taken place. Land claims of farmers and indigenous communities and organizations total over 30 million ha of which 19.52 million ha have been secured for them by 2008 (RRI and ITTO 2009). The area under forest management is only a small part of the land area devolved to local people. In Bolivia, other forest users are therefore likely to be more affected then in Cameroon by the changes in forest legislation.

Large scale forest concessions

In Bolivia, the area available for industrial forest concessions has been reduced from 11 to 5 million ha under the 1996 forest law. Holders of long term logging contracts under the previous forest law were given the opportunity to convert their contracts into 40-year concessions but they would have to start paying a forest fee of 1 US\$/ha. Due to this fee most forest enterprises decided to drastically reduce their concession areas. A considerable part of these abandoned forest areas have been claimed by and/or granted to indigenous communities and organizations and cannot be given out as concessions anymore. In Cameroon there has not been any competition between industrial logging industries that have access to concessions in the permanent forest area and the community forests that can only be granted in the non-permanent forest areas, although the 2002 pre-emption right was granted to CFs because small-scale, short-term, industrial logging titles could be granted over the same areas and cause conflicts with CFs.

Both in Cameroon and Bolivia, the claim of communities on forest areas does compete with other land uses such as agriculture and small-scale logging. In Cameroon, the forest areas requested by the communities are available for short term logging rights as they are located in the non-permanent forest (Ezzine de Blas et al. 2009). Also in Bolivia, forest areas that were not occupied (legally and/or practically) by logging concessions used to

be logged by small-scale enterprises through short and medium term logging permits or informally. Whereas, in Bolivia, enterprises with long term logging contracts were given the possibility to convert these into forest concessions, small-scale enterprises that used to log based on short and medium term logging permits were not any viable given alternatives under the 1996 forest law¹.

The small-scale timber enterprises in Bolivia thus found themselves severely restricted as the communities had been given very clear legal preference regarding forest use on their land. This also inhibited the Forest Service to grant logging rights over these areas to the small-scale industry. In Cameroon communities have merely been given the first preference (*droits de preemption*) to obtain logging permits over a forest area they consider to be traditionally theirs. If communities are not informed about the government's intentions to give out logging permits over their forest area, or if they are not given preference because they have not complied with the required regulations in time, they lose the forest products on the customary forest to industrial logging companies.

In Bolivia, before the 1996 forest law, all logging permits had to be obtained from the central government, and thus required at least some political connections. Now, all landowners have the theoretical right to log the forest on their land. The Forest Service still has to approve the logging or management plans submitted by these landowners but when complying with all legal and technical requirements this right can hardly be denied. In other words, logging rights became subject to technical requirements rather than political decisions. This seems a large difference with the situation in Cameroon where communities are subject to political decision making especially regarding the allocation of a forest area for management activities (see also: Oyono et al. 2009).

Whatever the differences in legal access to forest resources, both in Bolivia and Cameroon small-scale timber entrepreneurs quickly envisioned the opportunities created by the new forest laws. The central issue is that now, in some cases, enterprises can negotiate timber sale contracts with the communities rather than negotiating logging permits with the government (Benneker 2008; Ezzine de Blas et al. 2009).

6. Role of the state

Typically for both Bolivia and Cameroon is that the government, besides granting certain legal rights, has hardly been involved in implementing their policy on community participation. Financial and technical assistance for localised community forest initiatives have all been provided by NGOs, aid agencies and by private forest companies. The information these groups provide to the communities is almost always adapted to their own interest in community participation in forest management. In Bolivia the government has been informing communities at a limited scale, especially the unit of coordination with indigenous communities and organizations has played a significant role in disseminating relevant information. Farmers communities hardly been attended at all. In Cameroon, as observed by Beauchamp (2009) initially community forestry took off very

¹ They could organize themselves in an Social Local Association (ASL) and request a municipal forest concession but this option was limited to a few and in a few areas not occupied by indigenous organizations only.

slowly as communities were not informed about the possibilities to request a forest concession. As of recently, also thanks to the many past and present dissemination and information efforts made by national and international NGOs working on community forestry, the situation has improved, and as of 2009 about 630,000 ha had been granted to communities.

Whereas most forest officers were initially reluctant to consider the communities to be serious partners in forest management issues, in due time many of them have changed their opinion. In certain regions, community forest enterprises became important timber providers and they turned out to be the ones that most strictly complied with forest management regulations. Moreover, considering the forest area controlled by communities, it was also in the direct interest of the Forest Service to take the communities seriously. In some regions, forest officials started to see the community forest enterprises as their allies and assisted them whenever problems occurred. This process, however, is specific for the regions where community forest enterprises have established themselves as an important stakeholder in the timber industry. In other regions where large scale private enterprises or illegal loggers dominate the sector, community forest enterprises have been less successful in establishing themselves.

7. Role of NGOs

NGOs and donors have been very important both in Bolivia and Cameroon to initiate the development of community forestry as a sector. Moreover they have enabled communities to engage in forest management activities without indebting themselves with private enterprises. In Bolivia it is clear that (most) communities that received NGO assistance are better organized internally and that they have been able to develop themselves over time in robust community forest enterprises.

As also mentioned by Ezzine de Blas et al (2009), communities do require NGO assistance for a certain time to develop their forest management organization sufficiently. The moment of independency may differ per community but varies between 3 and 5 years. After that incidental, on demand, assistance, additional training and the possibility to participate in exchange meetings are valuable and valued. Some NGOs, however, have made the mistake to withdraw after approval of the forest management plan. In both Bolivia and Cameroon this strategy proved to be unfruitful as the main challenges lie in the process of implementing the management plan. Other NGOs consider it necessary to assist the communities until they comply with a wide range of socioeconomic and ecological indicators set by the NGOs. Benneker (2008) showed that when NGOs interfere too much or too long, communities are likely to dissolve the collaboration unilaterally. In Bolivia, excessive interference regarding the internal distribution of benefits, the position of leaders and the position of women have frequently lead to conflicts between NGOs and communities.

It is striking that both in Bolivia and Cameroon the number of management plans approved per years clearly shows the project cycle of five years employed by NGOs and the international cooperation. After these five years private enterprises take over the task of financing the management plans. Where communities have gained sufficient

experience or have sufficient examples and trained people in their surroundings, this may not cause any problems. Otherwise the communities are likely to be caught up in unfavourable timber sale contracts with these enterprises and unable to develop themselves into independent community forestry organizations.

A last common observation by the Bolivian and Cameroonian cases is that NGOs are unable to upscale their activities to a level that could enable a wider range of communities to benefit from their work, although a recent project by the Dutch development org (SNV) in Cameroon is trying to federate several CFs to reach financial viability.

8. Role of the market

The timber industry in both Bolivia and Cameroon has traditionally been dominated by private enterprises exploiting large scale forest concessions (licences of 5,000 ha in Cameroon prior to 1994) but in both countries small-scale industries have developed simultaneously. In both countries before the enactment of the most recent forest law, the small scale timber industry depended heavily on community and farmers forest areas to access timber. In Bolivia, however, large areas of forest were under long term concessions and not available to the small scale industry. Small scale enterprises have actually benefited from the devolution of forest user rights to local communities as this enabled them to access forest areas through negotiating with the communities rather than with the state. In Bolivia, forest areas that were previously under long term forest concessions and (officially) unavailable to small scale enterprises have now opened up to them. In Cameroon, logging enterprises have always had access to customary forests, but they had to negotiate "charges" with communities.

This process is not necessarily a bad thing. After all to succeed, the community forest enterprises have to have enough timber and have to be able to sell it. Rather, the conditions under which communities sell their timber is important and often these conditions are considered to be unfavourable for the communities. Whereas in Bolivia the situation is not ideal either, especially due to the interference of massive quantities of cheap and illegally logged timber on the market, there has been an interesting change in the relation between the forest industry and the communities forest enterprises over time in some of the timber producing regions.

Whereas NGOs have generally promoted timber sale contracts between the communities and large industrial or certified timber enterprises, in Bolivia the majority of the communities have opted for short term, and thus flexible, timber sale contracts with locally based small scale timber industries. These industries appeared to be more inclined and capable to adapt to the specific conditions that negotiating with rural communities implies. In Bolivia, these small-scale industries have therewith laid the basis for the development of a timber market willing and able to absorb the timber produced by community forest enterprises (Murphy and Schindler 2009).

In Cameroon these small scale industries exist as well but they have not as yet had the same effect on the development of the community forest initiatives. In Cameroon

community forest managers have so far been unable to find the resources to connect and maintain their supply chains within the national market (Mbile and Misouma 2008), especially because the demand of the national market far exceeds the timber supply that CFs can provide, and it is sourced with cheaper informally harvested timber.

The big difference in outcome might be due to scale, in Bolivia the timber production chain has gradually adapted themselves to the fact that huge forest areas are now owned and managed by communities and a timber production and marketing system made up of brokers has developed especially to produce and commercialize timber from community forest areas. Moreover, the fact that the current socialist government of Evo Morales (since 2004) has suggested that all forest concessions should disappear has pushed also the traditional vertically integrated forest industry to establish better contacts with the communities. These enterprises now that the forest they have now is all that they will have and that they might lose even that under the current government. To safeguard their investments these enterprises are more interested in developing mutually profitable relations with actors they previously though impossible to deal with, as the communities.

9. Conclusion

Whereas initially the situation of community forestry in Bolivia and Cameroon seemed to be similar, differences in outcome are huge. In both countries the success of community forestry is often discussed based on the difficulties communities have to settle internal arrangements. This paper has considered the process of devolving forest user rights in a broader perspective and has compared some of the processes involved in the countries considered.

The main conclusion is that in Bolivia community forestry has been institutionalized. This process has likely been caused by the large scale devolution of forest lands to a variety of local stakeholders (ASL, farmers and indigenous communities and organizations). Due to the importance of timber for the regional economies, the property rights devolved to local stakeholders and the scale of this devolution has enabled them to negotiate better deals with all kinds of market actors (forest professionals, timber enterprises). This process has not ended yet as traditional trade relations have not changed in all regions in Bolivia yet. It has also not been an easy process and the assistance of multiple NGOs and international organizations supporting the communities have played an important facilitating role.

The result however is that forest professionals now offer specialized professional services to communities, the timber market has adapted to the peculiarities of buying their timber, and the State Forest Service has accepted the communities as important players in commercial forest management. By the end of 2006, the area managed by communities was only half the size of the area managed by the large scale timber industry. This difference is likely to fade away in the future as the timber industry will not be granted additional concessions whereas the potential for additional communities to engage in forest management is large.

A mayor drawback in the Bolivian system is the fact that the government does not have the capacity to service and control the increased number of actors now involved in forest management and timber extraction. Before enactment of the forest law in 1996, the Forest Service had to deal with only 70 timber enterprises with long term logging contracts. Now, the Forest Service has to deal with thousands land owners with the right to engage in commercial logging whereas no significant changes have been made in the structure of the Forest Service. Not even under the actual government who aims at including even more communities in forest management activities.

References

- Beauchamp, E. (2009). *Impacts of community forest in exploitation on communities' livelihoods in Cameroon: Lessons learned from two case studies*. London, Imperial collage London.
- Benneker, C. (2008). *Dealing with the state, the market and NGOs. The impact of institutions on the constitution and performance of Community Forest Enterprises (CFE) in the lowlands of Bolivia*. Wageningen, Wageningen University.
- Ezzine de Blas, D., M. Ruiz Pérez, J. A. Sayer, G. Lescuyer, R. Nasi and A. Karsenty (2009). External influences on and conditions for community logging management in Cameroon. *World Development* 37 (2): 445-456.
- Mbile, P. and A. Misouma (2008). *An Overview of the history and evolution of forest policy, property rights, industry and trade in Cameroon*. Washington DC, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI). from: <http://www.worldagroforestry.org/downloads/publications/PDFs/WP15922.PDF>.
- Murphy, J. T. and S. Schindler (2009). Globalizing development in Bolivia? Alternative networks and value-capture challenges in the wood products industry. *Journal of Economic Geography*: 1-25.
- Nebel, G., J. Bredahl Jacobsen, R. Quevedo and F. Helles (2003). *A strategic view of commercially based community forestry in indigenous territories in the lowlands of Bolivia*. In: International conference on rural livelihoods, forests and biodiversity, Bonn, CIFOR.
- Oyono, P. R., M. Biyong, I. Flore Bayang and C. Sahmo (2009). *The state, local communities and the change in the status of forests. Exclusive legal dualism on the Cameroonian coast: a strategy note*. Washington, DC, Cameroon Ecology and Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI). from: http://www.rightsandresources.org/documents/files/doc_1256.pdf.
- RRI and ITTO (2009). *Tropical forest tenure assessment. Trends, challenges and opportunities*. Washingtonm DR and Yokohama, Japan, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and International Tropical Timber Organization. from: <http://www.illegal-logging.info/uploads/RRIITTOdoc1075.pdf>.