

# Still waiting for the Benefits

An analysis of the ECOFAC's "Mesures d'accompagnement" project on the local and indigenous communities of the Dja Biosphere Reserve, Cameroon

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## List of abbreviations

ASBAK-Cam	Association Baka - Cameroon
ACP	Africa, Caribbean and Pacific
CADDAP	Centre d'Action pour le Développement Durable des Autochtones Pygmées
CED	Centre for Environment and Development
EC	European Community
ECOFAC	Programme for the Conservation and rational use of forest ecosystems in Central Africa, commonly called Ecosystèmes Forestiers d'Afrique Centrale
EDF	European Development Fund
EU	European Union
FERN	Forest and the European Union Resource Network
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NTFP	Non timber forest products
PERAD	Organisation pour la Protection de l'Environnement, la Recherche et l'Appui au Développement en Afrique
PLC	Private Limited Corporation
PMdA	Social and Infrastructure Support project (known by its French acronym Projet Mesures d'Accompagnement)
UFA	Forest Management Unit (Unité Forestière d'Aménagement)
UNESCO	United Nations Education Social and Cultural Organisation

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# I. Outline

## 1.1 Summary

The “Social and Infrastructure Support project” (known by its French acronym PMdA, *Projet Mesures d’Accompagnement*) is an integrated conservation and development project funded by the European Union programme for the conservation and rational use of forest ecosystems in Central Africa, commonly called ECOFAC (*Ecosystèmes Forestiers d’Afrique Centrale*).

This report, commissioned by the EC Forest Platform, a joint Cameroonian-European NGO initiative facilitated by the Centre for Environment and Development (CED) and FERN, looks at the impact PMdA has had in the Dja Reserve of Cameroon and aims to complement other evaluation reports of the ECOFAC programme. The final chapter provides recommendations for the forth-coming phase of the ECOFAC programme in Cameroon. The report analyses achievements and lessons learned during the implementation of the project, and focuses particularly on benefits accrued by the local population. It also looks at the involvement of civil society and indigenous and local people in the management of the project.

The methodology included field visits and interviews with Baka and Bantu community members, NGOs, the local administration and the forest service. It also drew from existing reports and case studies on the project area.

The conclusion makes it clear that most of the project’s promised benefits did not materialise, especially in the area of development. Furthermore, the implementation of the PMdA did not convince the local and indigenous populations that this project was different to the previous, repressive phases of ECOFAC. These aimed to preserve natural resources through disallowing access to them inside the reserve. The project promised, but failed, to involve local and indigenous peoples in project planning and implementation. This meant that the project was perceived as being an “outside” rather than a joint community initiative. Baka people, and women especially, were left out of the project cycle. Also, very little, or nothing, was done to promote income generating activities to replace those, such as hunting and trapping, that were seen as conflicting with conservation.

To ensure the long-term viability of conservation efforts in the Dja Reserve, it is recommended that any subsequent ECOFAC phases guarantee that local and indigenous people play a central role in the design and implementation. Also, more emphasis should be placed on creating stable partnerships with local non-governmental organisations and associations that have a long experience of working with communities in the area and who can ensure that there is a continuity of work after the project is finished.

## 1.2 Background - conservation and development in sustainable forest management in Central Africa

Attempts to combine conservation of biological diversity with human well-being have greatly evolved in recent times. History portrays that, during the first half of the twentieth century, the dominant focus in development was on the production aspect -economic growth - leaving environmental issues to be addressed in a second stage of the development process (“develop now, protect later”). Focusing on economic development also ignored gender issues and assumed that there has to be a choice between development and conservation. Nature was perceived as wilderness and people as a threat to its pristineness, so the appropriate response was “fences and fines” policies.

From the beginning of the conservation debate in the 1970s, when UNESCO organised what became known as the "Biosphere conference", and especially since the 1992 Rio-Conventions, endeavours to harmonise conservation with the development (or social) agenda have become stronger and led to a paradigm shift. Today, the objectives of poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation are not considered mutually exclusive, but as two sides of the same coin. This shift in thinking was most obvious at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, where the three components of sustainable development outlined 10 years earlier in the Rio declaration on Environment and Development were reaffirmed and adopted internationally.

Conservation can today be defined as the wise and sustainable use of living resources. Development and poverty reduction efforts now focus on sustainability of resources, encouraging people not to overexploit them and flagging the benefits of involving local population in their conservation. In this way, the false dilemma that biodiversity scientists and development workers faced, dissolved: environmental protection, social development and economic opportunities are now interlinked. Thus biodiversity and natural resource conservation become integral parts of the strategies for economic development, and securing livelihoods/poverty reduction a part of sustainable conservation efforts.

After the Amazon, Central Africa is home to the second largest area of tropical forest on earth. These forests, also called the Congo basin forests, cover more than 2.8 million km<sup>2</sup> and represent 20 per cent of the world's remaining moist tropical forest reserve. These forests are the most biologically diverse in Africa, and are very rich in natural resources. The uses of the forest in Central Africa are multiple, include both timber and non-timber forest products (NTFPs), and vary from low impact harvesting to high intensive logging.

All though the Central African forests are naturally rich, the communities living in the forests and surrounding areas are often poor or very poor and dependent on wild and cultivated resources from the forest, including bark, vegetables, fruits, honey, and medicinal plants for local consumption as well as for trade. Inter cropping or agro-forestry practised within these communities is a vital source of vegetables, fruits, roots and tubers for use by households or for trade.

Since the 1930s, about 10 per cent of the forests in the region have been declared as 'protected areas' and accorded a variety of statuses, including National Parks, Fauna Reserves and Wildlife Sanctuaries. Conservation efforts turned the region into a major focus for international organisations and institutions like the EU who are interested in the conservation of biological diversity. These organisations support the region's governments in establishing and managing protected areas.

With regards to Cameroon specifically, the influence of structural adjustment policy and the Rio Earth Summit heightened the conservation versus development debate there in the early 1990s. The Cameroon government's 1994 forest policy aimed to have 30 per cent of national land as protected zones and in doing so attracted donors such as the European Union to support conservation activities. As an integrated conservation and development project, the PMdA is a good example of this EU funded support programme for the conservation and rational use of forest ecosystems in Central Africa. (See section 2.3. of this report for the objectives of both the PMdA project and of the ECOFAC programme).

## 1.3 Key Objectives of Report

The key objectives of this report include the following:

1. Provide information on issues and key stakeholders in the PMdA-ECOFAC programme site;
2. Analyse the impact of the PMdA project on local and indigenous communities, especially the Baka people; and
3. Provide recommendations on the future socio-economic strategic direction of the ECOFAC programme.

## 1.4 Methodology and limitations

The report was compiled through:

- Reviewing existing literature available on socio-economic data on the ECOFAC project and its site;
- Informal meetings with Baka and Bantu community members in the project area;
- Short informal interviews and discussions with former staff of the project, NGO representatives working in the area, local administration and forest service staff.
- Limitations identified include:
  - Access to senior PMdA project staff to comment on the project, as well as difficulties in obtaining relevant references related to the project such as reports and other key project documents;
  - The time for field visits was very short.

The scope and context of this report is limited to analysis on the local and ground level and does not enter into the institutional and international funding issues of the PMdA project.

## II. Background of the Dja reserve and its periphery and ECOFAC - PMdA project

### 2.1 The Dja Reserve and its periphery

The Dja Biosphere Reserve is the largest protected area in Cameroon, covering 5,260 km<sup>2</sup> (See figure 1). Located about 243 km southeast of Yaoundé, the nation's capital, the reserve has the Dja River as its natural boundary, except to the southwest. The reserve is found within two administrative regions of Cameroon, the South and East Provinces, and it is administered by a government appointed conservator based in Somalomo.

The area was classified as 'Réserve de faune et de chasse' in 1950, as 'Faunal Reserve' in 1973, and as Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1981. It was also inscribed on the World Heritage site by the World Heritage Committee in 1987 and is an IUCN category IV protected area. The Dja Biosphere Reserve has equatorial climate with two rainfall peaks, a mean temperature of 23.3°C and a mean annual rainfall of 1,570mm. It is fairly flat except in the southeast, although a major fault line on the southern edge has led to the formation of deeper valleys.

The importance of the Dja Biosphere Reserve lies in its richness in biodiversity. Dja harbours 109 mammal species, including threatened species such as the gorilla and elephant. The reserve has 360 bird species, of which 80 are migratory. Bates' weaver is endemic to southern Cameroon and the grey-necked picathartes is believed to be endemic to Dja. Reptiles present in the reserve include two threatened crocodile species and there are 62 species of fish (IUCN-Dja and ECOFAC, 1999).



Figure 1: Map of the Dja reserve and its periphery

### 2.1.1 Logging

While there is no commercial timber exploitation within the Dja Reserve, industrial logging and mining take place close by. The reserve is surrounded by more than ten forest management units (industrial logging concessions or UFAs), most of them being intensively logged. The logging company La société R. Pallisco, found at the northern part of the reserve, holds the biggest share of logging concessions.

The area is the cradle of the community forest initiative prescribed by the 1994 forestry law. The first community forests in Cameroon were created in the northern part of the reserve. Unfortunately, due to the difficult administrative process of acquiring community forests, most forests viable to be used as community forests in the area are now subject to illegal logging, especially for the Moabi (*Baillonella toxisperma*) trees found therein.

With increasing logging in Cameroon and around the Dja reserve, the forests in the Dja Reserve remain an important refuge for many species of plants and animals, including the Moabi which is valued for its timber by foresters and for its fruits by the local population. It also holds a high ritual value for the Baka people. In January 2006, Friends of the Earth published a report detailing increased logging of the Moabi tree and subsequent conflicts between the French logging company La Société R. Pallisco and the local community. The report showed how the company over exploited Moabi trees at the periphery of the villages and tolerated the killing of elephants and gorillas (main dispersers of the seeds of Moabi) around its concessions.

### 2.1.2 Mining

Artisan mining has for long occurred in and around the Dja reserve. For the first time Geovic Cameroon PLC (GeoCam), a subsidiary of the American mining company Geovic Ltd., is expected to mine nickel and cobalt from deposits located at Nkamouna, about 30km East of the Dja biosphere reserve. The environmental impact studies published show that the mining activities are expected to destroy between 30 and 60 hectares of forestland annually. This destruction will have enormous implications on the resources around the reserve and is expected to negatively affect the local population who depend on those resources.

## 2.2 The people living in and around the Dja Reserve

The indigenous and local population found in the southeast forested zone of Cameroon, and therefore in and around the Dja reserve area, are made up of two main groups: the Baka, principally semi nomadic hunter-gatherers and widely known as the first inhabitants of the rainforests of Central Africa, and the Bantus, mainly sedentarised agriculturists. The human population around the Dja reserve is very low (some 2 people/ km<sup>2</sup>), and it has been reported that around 5,000 people, mostly Baka Pygmies, are living within the reserve in small encampments and maintaining an essentially traditional lifestyle (Moucharou, 1999). This figure is not static as the Baka people are very mobile and move constantly between forest and roadside settlements. Some villages of Bantu and Baka are established close to the reserve. In all, around 30,000 people depend directly on the resources of the reserve. These people are located in 6 subdivisions (i.e. Djoum, Mintom, Messamena, Bengbis, Mindourou and Lomie) found in the South and East provinces of Cameroon.

The councils in these localities receive annual revenues from forest fees and royalties (commonly called redevances forestières annuelles) paid by the logging companies found in the area. Mindourou, Lomie and Djoum, for example, receive the greater part of their municipal budgets from forest fees and royalties and are among the richest councils in the forest zones of Cameroon. Serious questions have been raised as to how revenues from forest fees and royalties are being used to trigger development in these areas.

### 2.2.1 Brief view of the evolution of the Baka – Bantu relationship

Generally, the Baka or “Pygmies” as a whole are believed to be the original settlers of the Central African rainforests, with the Bantu people migrating from other areas at a later stage. The early relation between the Baka Pygmies, specialised hunter-gatherers, and the Bantus, specialised agriculturists, was characterised by mutual respect. Barter and blood brotherhoods were very common between the two people. This relation started deteriorating with colonial efforts to impose roadside sedentary settlement and institute agriculture-based economic structures through which the Bantus gained the favour of the colonial powers while the Baka did not. Instead, the latter carried on living traditionally within the forests whilst remaining dependent on trade with the Bantu for cultivated products that the forest could not provide (such as machetes and other metal ware). The Bantu came to manipulate these needs, demanding not only forest products but also physical labour in return. This was exacerbated by roads built by loggers which allowed access to other competitors for the forest products that the Baka specialised in. Over time, the relation evolved into one of servitude wherein Baka were born owing their services to particular Bantu families.

Today, the Baka, either predisposed by their culture to avoid conflict or by the lack of choice or opportunities, have largely accepted this as their fate. Nevertheless, despite government’s almost complete neglect of the situation, some NGOs and religious bodies are working towards re-establishing a balance between the two people.

### 2.2.2 The Baka People in and around the Dja Biosphere Reserve

Traditionally, the Baka people are nomadic hunter-gatherers of relatively small population. The small population allows them to use the natural resources in a sustainable manner. The forest has been and continues to be the major source of subsistence for the Baka people, providing wild fruits, honey, game, tubers, caterpillars, and the herbs needed for food and medicine, as well as water and shelter. Through their different beliefs, the Baka people have a strong spiritual relation with the forest. To them the forest is a single unit with no boundaries separating protected areas, forest management units or agro-forestry zones as prescribed by the forestry legislations.

Formally predominately nomadic forest peoples, the Baka have been forced, through logging interests and conservation activities, out of the forest and into near slave like conditions living among their Bantu landlords. As with all ‘Pygmy’ groups, the Baka are disadvantaged by entrenched discrimination and racism, which adds to their preclusion from benefiting from the sparse local services. The Baka communities live in severe circumstances with average daily earnings equivalent to approximately €0.20 for manual work.

The system of land ownership prevailing in the forest areas where Baka people live is based on the simple use of land for agricultural purposes. Once a settlement is recognised as a village, it is attributed a territory that the populations can use freely. Whoever occupies or exploits a piece of land for agriculture or farming owns it, so the fact that the Baka people do not have a territory of their own exposes them to harassment from their Bantu neighbours. The neighbouring Bantu communities with chiefdoms traditionally rule Baka settlements. This subjects the Baka to Bantu traditional and customary laws, even though these laws may be different from those of the Baka.

The 1994 forestry law introduced the concept of a zoning plan that categorises forest areas. Most Pygmy sources of livelihoods are located in the State’s Permanent Forest zones. This contradicts the Baka people’s perception that the forest is theirs and that they have the right to use it as such. By the very nature of their culture, the Baka people have no interest of accumulating goods or planning for the future. This fact characterises them as immediate-return

societies. Although not recognized as owners of the land, which they don't use for agricultural purposes, the Baka people live, hunt and sustain themselves along the Dja river and therefore in and around the Dja Reserve. The women have, like the men, direct and unrestricted access to much of their food and many of the other resources that can be obtained from their forest environment.

The Baka perception of the forest also contradicts with those of many conservation organisations. Nguiffo, 2001, presents these divergent views as "one forest two dreams: one being that of conservation organisations who are concerned about preserving species, and the other being that of the indigenous communities, whose modes of living are intricately linked to the forest."

For centuries or more the Baka have been culturally and economically linked to people of Bantu languages (like the Bulu, Fang, Zaman and Nsime.) The prominent feature of this relation is the Baka people's exchange of wild game for the Bantus' agricultural crops. This fraternal relation of respect and cordiality is called loti in the Baka language. Today, over 90% of Baka people have settled along roads around the Dja reserve, but here they continue to be marginalized by the Bantu people as well as by state institutions and internationally funded programmes.

The sedentarisation process was not accompanied by any measures to integrate the nomadic Baka people into this new lifestyle which had seemed to suit the Bantu farmers. Instead, Baka people were left at the mercy of the Bantu people who used, and continue to use, them as a free labour force in their farms. Confronted by a dual cultural situation, Baka people still rely on the forest though their modern lifestyle is a combination of old traditions and modern ways of living.

Baka are faced with several problems including:

- National exploitation of forest resources – mostly through commercial logging and poaching. The Baka are often excluded from any benefits resulting from forest exploitation such as social responsibility negotiations and forest fees or royalties;
- Right to citizenship – Most Baka do not possess official identification or other documentation necessary to access government social services like schools, justice and hospitals;
- Traditional institutions – Their settlements, culture and traditional leaders are not recognised by government services;
- Land rights - the forest zone land use plan, instituted after the 1994 forest law, alienates the Baka people from their ancestral lands. Today most Baka communities in the area live as squatters in lands claimed by their Bantu neighbours
- Inequality and discrimination - the Baka people are often abandoned or discriminated against by state support services, agricultural and forestry extension services, community health care and other social services and programmes. When consultation with the local population is necessary, it is mainly the Bantu population that are consulted whilst the Baka people are left out. Their knowledge of the forest is usually undermined when it concerns to decision-making, but considered exploitatively when they have to be used as guides in the reserve. For example, the Baka people did not have the opportunity to participate in the creation of the Dja reserve;
- Health problems - The Baka people have little access to modern health and sanitary facilities and their indigenous healing knowledge is disappearing due to the increasing alienation from the forest and the lack of transfer of indigenous knowledge from elders to the youth;
- The rate of alcoholism and nicotine addiction is high.

Among the Baka people, many of these problems are being addressed and their status and situation is gradually improving. This is thanks to programmes aimed at securing rights and self-development carried by the Baka people and Cameroonian NGOs such as CED, PERAD, CADDAP and ASBAK.

### 2.2.3 The Bantu people

The Bantu form the majority of the people living in the area and are mostly farmers. The main Bantu groups include the Bulu, Fang, Zaman, Badjoue and Nzime, and their elite forms the local and municipal administrators. The mode of life of the Bantus favours them to benefit from some government services.

Though not to the extent of the Baka, the Bantus in these regions are amongst the poorest and least developed in the country. Infrastructure like roads, schools and health centres is lacking in most villages. Money received from municipalities in return for forest exploitation is rarely used for poverty reduction or sustainable development projects. Literacy and rates of school attendance are among the lowest in the country.

## 2.3 Brief history and purpose of EU ECOFAC – PMdA project

The European Union's commitment to the sustainable exploitation of natural resources in ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries, including tropical forests, was heightened in 1984 with the signing of the third Lomé Convention. This led to a European Parliament resolution calling for ACP-EU cooperation in implementing the Tropical Forest Action Plan. Governments in a number of Central African countries proposed that a substantial portion of regional funds from the sixth European Development Fund (EDF), the main instrument providing aid for development cooperation in the ACP states, be allocated to the conservation of forest ecosystems.

ECOFAC, or the programme for the conservation and rational use of forest ecosystems in Central Africa, is the European Commission's largest activity in support of forests and environment in the Central African region. The ECOFAC programme started in 1992 with the aim of supporting the management of protected areas in the Central African region. Although focused on conservation, the programme was conceived to combine two basic and complementary principles: conservation and development. Activities are carried on in seven Central African countries: Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, Chad and São Tomé et Príncipe. Work in a seventh country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, was suspended due to the war, but is now resuming.

The Cameroon component of the programme operates in and around the periphery of the Dja Biosphere Reserve. The first phase of the ECOFAC programme in Cameroon was mostly restricted to the protection of natural resources and to anti-poaching activities. This flawed approach, which neglected the social needs of the communities living in and around the reserve, led to the creation in 2003 of the Social and Infrastructure Support project (PMdA) around the Dja Biosphere Reserve.

### Objectives of ECOFAC PMdA project

Almost all evaluation reports of the previous phases of the ECOFAC programme in Cameroon concluded that the repressive approach to conservation, where people are not allowed to profit from their natural resources, was over-riding the social-participatory approach that

aims to provide communities with alternatives. The PMdA was therefore created within the framework of the ECOFAC programme to meet the social and economic gaps of the previous phases of the programme. Like all other integrated conservation and development projects, the purpose of the social component of the ECOFAC programme was to promote environmentally friendly eco-enterprises or alternatives to prevent the possibility of destructive and unsustainable resource use in and around the Dja Biosphere reserve. The PMdA thus represents a shift away from traditional protected area management practices, involving policing and protection measures, to a greater emphasis on linking forest conservation with sustainable development by focusing on the social and economic needs of people living in and around the Dja reserve.

The project received €2,134,309 from the EDF (Stabex fund 1992) for a period of 44 months, starting in 2003. Its specific objectives were:

- Rendering remote communities found at the periphery of the Dja Reserve accessible and assuring the free circulation of agricultural products and inputs as well as products from community forestry activities;
- Enhancing partnership with local people living at the periphery of the Dja reserve;
- Improving the living conditions of the population at the periphery of the Reserve, by creating employment/jobs and through environmentally friendly alternative income generating activities; and
- Strengthening the capacity of local communities to be organised, self-reliant and to improve their means of production (through the elaboration of participatory assessment at the initial stage and participatory monitoring and evaluation, through the use of appropriate technologies).

The end goal of all these actions is to reduce pressure on natural resources in the Dja reserve in order to guarantee a "sustainable system for the conservation of the Dja biosphere reserve, by integrating the local population and other actors to be able to participate fully in the sustainable management of their territory, while assuring their improved well-being". The PMdA project ended in early 2006, without any promise by the EU for a second phase. Another conservation phase of the ECOFAC project has started its initial phase of looking into logistics.

## III. Achievements of the PMdA

The PMdA project was supposed to contribute to the sustainable management of the Dja Reserve by involving forest fringe communities in all programme processes. To achieve this, the programme addressed three main areas: (1) infrastructure, construction of roads and bridges; (2) rural development and (3) community forest and wildlife management. At the start of the project, the people around the Dja reserve had high expectations that the PMdA project would substantially improve their living standard through increased agricultural production, the development of alternative income and employment sources, and the improvement road infrastructure. Unfortunately, most of the project's promised development benefits, like improved incomes or roads, have not materialised.

In this report we analyse the level of achievement of the programme within the following domains: infrastructure development (section 3.1); livelihood improvements (section 3.2), capacity building (section 3.3), and community participation (involvement of indigenous Baka "Pygmies"), gender considerations and partnerships between the programme and the communities' livelihood improvements (section 3.2), capacity building (section 3.4).

In 2004 the project carried out studies on the state of community forests and rural development in the project area. Unfortunately, these studies did not feed into project implementation adequately and the PMdA did not take into consideration what previous projects or programmes had done. For example, instead of supporting communities that already had a community forest reservation to improve their management plans, the project started by helping more communities move into the reservation phase. The impact of this was small as the area of the community forest process that needs most work is the elaboration of the management plan, which the project did not address at all.

### 3.1 Infrastructure development

The construction of social infrastructure such as roads is usually considered, in conservation programmes, as a compensatory social benefit for local populations. The lack of roads and poor market access was described by locals as the most significant obstacle to development, and so among the expected results of the project was the construction and rehabilitation of roads and bridges in and around the reserve.

In reality infrastructure development interventions were limited, and those that were initiated by the project were largely directed at people in and around Somalomo, the project headquarters. In total, only about 80km of roads were rehabilitated. The Essiengbot – Malen (about 30km), Somalomo – Ekom (about 40km) and Somalomo – Alouma (about 20km). The rehabilitation work included contracting the clearing and maintenance of roads to local common initiative groups, whereas other more technical works were contracted to private enterprises. The common initiative groups, most of which were created at the same period as the project, benefited from training on the maintenance of rural roads and received materials for the maintenance of the roads. This activity observed serious delays, due to the simple fact that it was difficult to find an expert on rehabilitation of rural roads.

There is controversy over the environmental-development benefits of the creation of roads. While on the one hand the development of road networks diversifies and develops the local economy, on the other it leads to an increase in immigration as well as in commercial hunting and other illegal forest activities around the reserve.

## 3.2 Livelihoods

One of the main findings during the survey was that bush meat (see figure 2) trade continues to be a major source of income for households in and around the Dja reserve. The principal way the project proposed to provide alternative sources of income to activities such as hunting and trapping, which are incompatible with conservation, was through agricultural development. Only a limited number of rural development activities were initiated, including oil palm, cocoa and fruit tree nurseries.



Figure. 2 Bush meat hunted through the southern part of the Dja reserve

The marketing and trading of bush meat trade in the area is very organised, which is in stark contrast to agricultural production which suffers from low levels of labour and poor market access. Improved market access would widen the range of feasible economic opportunities for both men and women living in and around the reserve.

## 3.3 Capacity building

The capacity building workshops that the project attempted were only carried out at a late stage and did not move beyond training and demonstration. Several workshops were organised for local groups and associations working on plant nurseries. Nurseries for cocoa and oil palm seedlings were established in villages such as Malen II, Nkenzuh, Ndjibot, MalenV, Doumo Pierre and Ntibonkeuh. The fact that these nurseries were created towards the end of the project impacted in their sustainability and most nurseries were abandoned as the project phased out. Even if sustainability had not been an issue, the nurseries were so small that they could hardly meet the needs of a single farmer, let alone the whole community. Finally, there was no appropriate exit strategy put in place and local and indigenous communities were not empowered to take on income generating activities at the end of the project.

In the area of community forests, the project did nothing to add value to previous initiatives. A total of 12 communities received support from the project with the aim of beginning the process of acquiring community forests, with four local NGOs facilitating the process. Some communities involved in the process said that it was done so quickly that they did not fully understand it. They could not, for example, even explain at what level they were in the process because the NGO acting as service provider kept all the documentation. On their side, NGOs providing the service complained that to get paid they had to go to Yaoundé irrespective of the size of payments.

## 3.4 Community participation and partnership

Little was done to create a climate of trust between the project staff and the local and indigenous peoples. There was a lack of adequate involvement which could be blamed on the fact that staff did not use appropriate tools or techniques. This problem can be solved by ensuring that staff running social support projects have wide experience not only in natural resource management, but also on the use of participatory methods that integrate biophysical and socio-economic aspects.

Most project activities were implemented through local NGOs and their work was not assessed according to criteria including the level of involvement and ownership of the processes by local population, but on the administrative papers presented. The importance of developing appropriate partnerships with local NGOs that can ensure work continues after the end of the project should be built into future ECOFAC phases.

### 3.4.1 Gender issues

There was little gender balance in either the composition of staff or the implement of the project. Of the 13 staff members of the PMdA, only one was a woman, and she was at the lowest level of project hierarchy and beneficiaries considered the project an entirely male affair. Moreover, there was no social scientist in the management who could leverage gender concerns. A social scientist was recruited at the early stage of the project but he unfortunately died and was replaced by a forester.

### 3.4.2 Baka concerns

Evaluation reports of previous ECOFAC phases highlight that the Baka people were marginalised by the project administration. Despite several international conventions and EU commitments stressing the need to involve indigenous forest communities in the planning and management of integrated conservation and development programmes, the PMdA completely left out the over 1,000 Baka people dwelling within and around the Dja reserve. The project, with the pretext of avoiding social and economic problems such as accelerated sedentarisation and acculturation, did not recruit, as previous ECOFAC phases, any Baka. Baka people were also left out in the implementation of the project and did not receive any significant benefits from the project. The Baka people say they were never consulted about the project and that they saw no difference between this phase of ECOFAC and the previous more repressive ones whose activities were mostly centred on forest patrols. The only visible sign of the project in the Baka area is an abandoned fish pond which was created in Bifolone without the participation of the people and never used.

## 3.5 General project management

Although it is not within the scope of this report to discuss project management, we considered it important to include some references to this issue as most of the project failures are related to management. One of the main constraints to the effective implementation of project activities was that although the project headquarters were based in Somalomo, within the project site, key decisions were taken at Yaoundé and all management staff spent most of their time in the nation's capital. Implementation of the project was therefore isolated from other local government services in the area, and the legitimacy of the project among local people, government staff and elites who had, in the past supported the project, was greatly eroded.

The project could not cover all the sites where it was to be implemented. Activities around the southern part of the reserve (Djoum – Mintom) were only launched when the project was within a few months of completion.

The implementation was based on subcontracting project activities to businesses and associations. This was done through an open bidding system that did not favour local groups, which meant that organisations based far from the implementing areas got contracts that they would not be able to monitor once the contract was finished. As local organisations were not empowered to carry out project activities in sustainability way, the system failed to create the possibility of appropriate ownership of the project's processes and activities. For example, in some communities the process of acquiring community forests was so rushed that very few people could explain the process of setting up a community forest or even why the community was involved in the process. Even in cases where contracts were given to community groups, it was seen as business for the implementing few, and not as community service.

In general, the relationship between the project and the inhabitants of the project site has markedly deteriorated. Baka people view the project with hostility and suspicion.

It is also worth noting that the short-term nature of the PMdA project would have contributed to the failures recorded.

## IV. Conclusions and recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusions

The local communities around the Dja Biosphere Reserve were of the perception that the PMdA project would bring about large development projects into the area, but this was not the case. Most of the PMdA's interventions were only realised toward the end of the project, leaving a very poor exit strategy with little ownership by the beneficiaries. Moreover, the project did not cover all the sites and most interventions were limited to being around Somalomo.

The failure to involve local and indigenous peoples in project planning and implementation has led many to perceive the project as an outside rather than a joint community initiative. Although its activities differed greatly from previous phases, the PMdA failed to convince the population of this and it was perceived as being similar to the previous and mostly repressive ECOFAC phases.

The project's slowness in delivering results antagonised community members. In some cases, it encouraged the belief that members should try to profit from wildlife immediately before the repressive approach returned and took away the opportunity for them to use this resource. ECOFAC programmes need a clear understanding of the positive implications of improved market access for local livelihoods and natural resource conservation so as to be able to assist communities to identify opportunities that could link development and conservation.

The failure of the PMdA project does not mean that integrated conservation and development should be replaced by repressive policing. Whilst policing activities may have a greater short-term impact on biodiversity conservation, integrated conservation and development will be more effective in the long-term impact.

## 4.2 Recommendations

Establishing good relations between wildlife resources in the reserve and the local and indigenous communities living in and around the reserve is the most important element to be considered in subsequent phases of the ECOFAC programme. To ensure this, the following recommendations, which are not exhaustive, must be part of the development and implementation of future phases:

- Local people from all communities must play a central role in the design and implementation of subsequent projects. Background research on the existing livelihood strategies of the different groups, their culture and way of life, must be carried out and incorporated into management designs. In this way minority and vulnerable communities and segments, like women and Baka people, will be less likely to be left out in the project.
- Assistance must be provided to help local communities develop alternative sources of proteins to bush meat so that people will no longer have to rely on forest resources from within the reserve for their livelihoods. Breeding programmes of small mammals such as cane rat, crocodile farming for meat and skin, and snail farming should all be encouraged.
- Promote participatory approaches that include gender components and all social groups, including the Baka people.
- Empower and mainstream Baka initiatives to ensure greater involvement in the management of the reserve, which is part of their ancestral lands.
- Encourage and facilitate intercommunity dialogue and consultations on issues around the sustainable management of the reserve. This must involve all stakeholders, Baka, Bantus, administration, civil society and the private sector (logging and mining companies).
- Develop appropriate community forest and hunting zones or wildlife management initiatives that focus on strengthening local people's access rights to forest resources while setting sustainable wildlife off-take levels.
- Recruit people with experience of working with Baka people who understand their way of life.
- Ensure partners are local organisations who already work around the reserve and have the skills and experience needed to facilitate local processes. An example of this is the NGO PERAD (action centre for sustainable development for indigenous Pygmies), who work at the periphery of the reserve. They have experience in facilitating Baka people in the process of registering community forests in Payo and Nomedjo. These communities are now at the stage of developing a management plan. Other experienced organisations include the Baka association, CADDAP (organisation for environmental protection, research and support for development in Africa), who have facilitated Baka people to benefit from social activities paid for by logging royalty fees.

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The EC Forest Platform is a FERN initiative that aims to ensure that EC aid contributes effectively to the protection and sustainable use of forests and respect for forest peoples' rights. The Platform promotes active information sharing between the EU institutions and NGOs and the full participation of civil society in decision-making.