



3.2 Forest certification in Cameroon

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Between 2002 and 2007 FORM International assisted companies in Cameroon to apply sound forest management and validate this management through FSC certification. Local management had to be improved to meet the stringent demands of the FSC label, partly because these were among the first forest management certificates to be awarded in the Congo Basin. Our guiding philosophy through this process was to find rational and cost-effective solutions to FSC requirements.

Background

At the end of the 1990s non-government organizations (NGOs) drew international attention to Cameroon by exposing problems with legality and sustainability in the export of logs and timber. This notoriety had substantial impacts on timber companies; their customers started to demand proof that the timber sold to them was of legal origin. It became increasingly important for companies that wanted to stay in business to secure third-party certification of legal origin and sustainable forest management. They relied on third parties (auditing companies) to provide independent declarations of legality. *Bureau Veritas* (then Eurocertifor) developed the “Origin and Legality of Timber (OLB)” label in 2003 and awarded the first certificate in 2004. By the end of 2009, this proof of legality had been issued to nine companies controlling two million hectares (ha) in Cameroon.

While seeking certification of legality, many companies started working towards FSC certification. FSC certification is much more complex than certification of legality because it addresses various additional factors, including biodiversity conservation. Mostly as a result of this complexity, the first FSC certification of a logging company in Cameroon was not achieved until the end of 2005. Another, seldom recognized, cause of the delay was that companies were forced to take over responsibilities that were formerly assumed by government bodies



ALTHOUGH CERTIFICATION IS RELATIVELY NEW IN CAMEROON, THERE IS A MARKED DIFFERENCE

IN IMPACTS ON THE FORESTS BETWEEN CERTIFIED AND CONVENTIONALLY MANAGED FORESTS.

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or public organizations. Across production forests in Cameroon, management activities related to wildlife and biodiversity are now carried out by private companies (sometimes with the assistance of environmental NGOs) and not by the government.

Sustainable management in Cameroon

Cameroon's forest legislation requires logging companies to have management plans; these are checked and validated by the government. In principle, these plans provide a sound basis for sustainable management. They have to be based on an inventory of 1% of the area in concessions less than 50,000 ha in size and 0.5% of larger concessions. The inventories include all trees greater than 20 cm in diameter at breast height (DBH) in half-hectare plots positioned along inventory lines cut through the forest. Younger trees (between 10 and 20 cm DBH) are tallied in sub-plots to assess advanced regeneration.

The harvesting system in Cameroon is based on minimum diameters. This means that on the basis of species-specific ecological information (size distribution as well as growth and mortality rates) an optimal minimum diameter is calculated at which the current harvest should be in equilibrium with future harvests. National minimum diameters are based on national inventories, but specific minimum diameters have to be determined in each Forest Management Unit (FMU), from calculations based on the forest inventory. For FSC certification the calculated specific minimum diameters at the FMU level serve as the justification for harvest intensity that is applied.



The forest inventory also provides information about the occurrence of rare and endemic species. The management plan includes special protection programmes for these species. Training forest workers to recognize these species is the first step in protection. It is hoped that selective protection will safeguard populations and may even help species to increase in abundance. Commercial timber species that are found in densities of less than 1 per 100 ha in an FMU are legally protected in Cameroon. Other sorts of information included in official management plans are based on a socio-economic study, fauna inventory and an environmental impact assessment.

The state has usually not completed land-use planning for areas given out as concessions to logging companies and this activity is delegated to the companies. The state checks proposals for land use planning made by the companies and, if acceptable to the local population, they are endorsed. In practice, companies can decide to change the boundaries of their concession in favour of local people by excluding occupied areas and making allowance for future growth of the population. The companies use information from socio-ecological studies as the basis for identifying human occupation of the area. In combination with satellite images, this gives accurate information about which areas are occupied and which are appropriate for harvesting or protection. Invariably this method leads to disagreements, however; some people claim to use areas not identified during the studies and subsequent analyses. A typical result of these negotiations is that the area to be managed for timber is reduced in

order to reserve important pieces of land for the local population. The selection of areas for the local population is usually based on proximity to villages and not on their conservation or production values. Companies thus end up with smaller productive areas than they originally bid for. Despite this fact, the Government of Cameroon uses the original area of the forest concession to calculate area-based taxes.

Challenges to conservation

Some certification requirements are more difficult for forest managers to fulfil than others. The problems that companies seeking certification encounter are mainly related to the availability of information and know-how in forest management. Questions such as how to manage populations of rare plants and mammals, how to control poaching, and how to manage high conservation value forests (HCVFs) are difficult for concessionaires to answer. Attempts at answering these difficult questions are illustrated below.

Wildlife management is a complicated matter, and for certification purposes, information about fauna is vital. A few organizations in Cameroon can provide assistance by conducting faunal inventories and analyzing data, but unfortunately, no clear guidelines exist for the management of animal populations. Their management is mostly based on the selection of no-intervention zones, and on agreements with the local people to respect such zones. Cameroon has also experimented with the creation of communally managed hunting zones. After extensive consultations with the villages, zones were identified where people counted the existing larger mammals. The people then decided on how many could be hunted each year.

This approach has worked relatively well in certain zones: everybody was present during the discussions; a collective decision was reached; and the villagers police each other. One of the problems encountered was poaching. Professional poachers do not respect such village decisions and may even harm the villagers who are trying to chase them away. The timber companies can do little more about this than inform the authorities, as it is impossible for them to assume the policing activities linked to wildlife protection.

Box 1. Reducing the demand for bush meat

When companies provide affordable protein to workers and the local population it helps reduce the demand for bush meat. The Wildlife Conservation Society experimented with this approach at a timber company in Cameroon, stocking a large fridge with meat and fish bought in large cities. A shop was open at certain times of the day, and the meat was sold at cost. Although this type of arrangement mainly benefits people with access to cash, they are usually the ones who are responsible for a large share of bush meat consumption. The companies can run such schemes at almost no cost, because they can buy the meat relatively cheaply.

One solution, tested in West Cameroon, was for the company and the forest service to work together to curb poaching by staffing roadblocks and financing patrols. The funds

are provided by the company whereas the rights to investigate and arrest remain with the forest service. The weakness of this approach is that funding will always be necessary. In lean financial times companies may stop funding these activities and as a consequence lose their certification.

Managing HCVMs is another difficult issue for forest managers in Cameroon. Initially it was problematic because people didn't really understand what the FSC standard required the companies to do. Later it became clear that they first had to identify which types of high conservation values were present, based on existing information and then had to decide how the presence of a conservation value would affect management. The companies were relieved to find out, for example, that the presence of elephants in an FMU does not preclude timber harvesting. There are several examples of how high conservation values can affect forest management:

- having a botanist participate in timber inventories to delineate populations of rare and endemic species;
- increasing the frequency of fauna inventories to see how logging affects chimpanzee and gorilla populations; and
- monitoring silt levels in certain watercourses to assess if logging increases erosion.

Although certification is relatively new in Cameroon, there is a marked difference in impacts on the forests between certified and conventionally managed forests. In conventionally managed forests the logging company carries out an inventory, writes a management plan, establishes minimum logging diameters, and sets up annual cutting areas. All of this is good, but it is also more or less where engagement in sound forest management ends. In contrast, certified companies carry out additional activities such as reduced-impact logging, monitoring of flora and fauna, creation of conservation zones in the concession and patrolling for illegal activities to ensure that they minimize their impacts on the environment; they also actively monitor these impacts so that management can adapt when necessary.

A lot of effort is put into conservation of biodiversity through regulation of harvests, regulation of hunting, and protection of rare species. Whether or not these efforts are successful is not yet known, since the first certificates are only about five years old. It is clear, however, that through certification the companies are carrying out intensive monitoring, and that the transparency that comes with certification has created new opportunities for cooperation between companies and researchers. This openness will ensure that a continued effort is made to conserve biodiversity. If monitoring shows that certain practices are harmful, management can change them to improve the situation. This is a very positive situation that will be further improved when consumers buy certified wood.