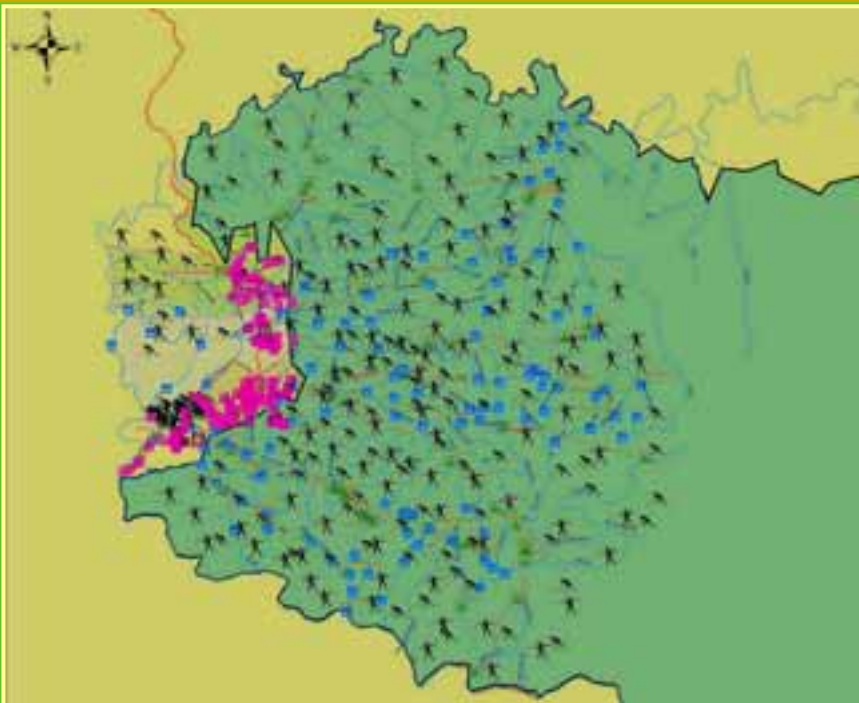




Forest Peoples Programme

Protecting and encouraging customary use of biological resources by the Baka in the west of the Dja Biosphere Reserve

Contribution to the implementation of Article 10(c) of
the Convention on Biological Diversity



Belmond Tchoumba and John Nelson

with the collaboration of

Georges Thierry Handja, Stephen Nounah, Emmanuel Minsolo
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This project was carried out with the generous support of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS) and the Novib-Hivos Biodiversity Fund



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et le Développement

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French version: Protéger et encourager l'usage coutumier des ressources biologiques par les Baka à l'ouest de la Réserve de biosphère du Dja
Contribution à la mise en oeuvre de l'article 10(c) de la Convention sur la diversité biologique

Map on cover: Map of forest resource use by the Baka and Bantu communities of Nkolmbembe, Mimbil, Mekas and Nkougoulou

Photographs: CED and FPP

Maps: CED and FPP

The creation of protected areas for the purpose of conserving nature (such as national parks or nature reserves) may turn out to be more disastrous for an indigenous community than the opening of a logging site, or similar to the construction of a dam. In fact, a community which had hitherto lived freely on a land from which it drew all its livelihood resources, may suddenly be deprived of the latter, robbed of its land or displaced to unknown lands.

Traditional activities are compatible with the maintenance of the forest cover and a diversity of wildlife: we should not forget that the state of current equatorial ecosystems is the result of human activities. There is no virgin forest in the strict sense of the word.

Serge Bahuchet

Acronyms

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CED	Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement
CEFDHAC	Conference on Central African Moist Forest Ecosystems
COP	Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity
DGIS	Department for International Co-operation of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
ECOFAC	Central African Forest Ecosystems
EDF	European Development Fund
FPP	Forest Peoples Programme
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GPS	Global Positioning System
IUCN	World Conservation Union
MINFOF	Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife
MINEF	Ministry of the Environment and Forestry
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society

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We owe a great deal to all the Baka communities of the research site who shared their traditional knowledge regarding the management of biological diversity in the Dja Reserve. In particular, we thank: Abacha Samuel, Alengue Ndengue, Assing Didier Claver, Ati Majinot, Atyi Jean-Marie, Biango Felix, Bissiang Martin, Bitoto Gilbert, Djala Luc, Djampene Pierre, Etong Mustapha, Evina Reymondl, Mama Jean-Bosco, Megata François, Megolo Bonaventure, Mokomo Dieudonné, Movombo Benjamin, Ndo Joseph, Ndolo Samuel, Nsimba Josue, Onanas Thomas, Sala Mefe Sylvestre, and Ze Thierry. We hope that policy-makers and managers of this important protected area shall take into consideration the recommendations of this report when planning or managing this area, which is the very home of these peoples.

We are grateful to CED for making their staff available for the successful implementation and completion of this work. We refer particularly to Belmond Tchoumba, Georges Thierry Handja, Stephen Nounah, G r me Tamo and Emmanuel Minsolo. The technical assistance received from FPP through John Nelson was invaluable, and we are very grateful to him.

Above all, our thanks go to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS) and the Novib-Hivos Biodiversity Fund for their financial support. Were it not for their support, this work would not have been possible.

Executive Summary

This report summarises a case study of community forest use prepared by the Cameroon NGO the Centre for Environment and Development (CED) and the UK-based Forest Peoples Programme (FPP). The case study was prepared in collaboration with Baka and Bantu people living and working in and around Mekas, located on the western side of the Dja Biosphere Reserve, a World Heritage Site.

The case study describes the Baka peoples' customary use of biological diversity and analyses the extent to which conservation policies and practices protect their rights and interests. The report makes recommendations for an improved incorporation of these peoples' traditional practices in biodiversity conservation strategies, in particular those of the Dja Biosphere Reserve.

At the centre of this case study are four Baka communities who have mapped their use of their forests using Geographical Information Systems. The study also outlines the local administrative and socio-political context as well as Baka beliefs and rituals. It then summarises their principal forest activities. The main activities mentioned in the case study, and recorded in the community forest-use maps presented on pages 27-30, include hunting and trapping, fishing, gathering and agriculture. In particular, the report highlights the tension between communities' customary forest use and the objectives of conservation. The latter has, to date, been associated by most local people with an increased control of their forests by outsiders, and loss of access to forest resources. Within areas that have been unilaterally declared 'permanent forest domains', the exercise of their customary rights has meant, for the Baka, violent repression by conservation organisations and services. The result has been the progressive undermining of their livelihoods as well as the exacerbation of poverty.

The community forest-use maps contained in this case study display very clearly the geographic overlap existing between the activities of local and indigenous communities and the conservation activities of the Dja Biosphere Reserve. In this case, most conflicts between communities and conservation stem in large part from a failure to take account of local communities' needs and rights with regard to laws, policies and management plans relating to these protected areas. This is despite Cameroon's ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which, in Article 10(c), states that: *'Each Contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate . . . Protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with conservation or sustainable use requirements'*.

The case study concludes with practical recommendations to improve the situation in the area around the Dja Reserve in line with Article 10(c), along with other more general recommendations to improve implementation of the CBD in Cameroon.

1 Introduction

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is an intergovernmental agreement that has three main objectives: the conservation of biological diversity, its sustainable use and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilisation of genetic resources. All States that have ratified this Convention have the legal obligation under international law to implement all of its provisions. Against this backdrop, States that are party to the CBD meet every two years at a Conference of the Parties to evaluate the Parties' implementation of the Convention's provisions. Thus, in decisions V/24 and VII/12, the Conference of the Parties '*requests the Executive Secretary to invite organizations involved in sustainable-use initiatives, and other relevant organizations, to gather, compile and disseminate through the clearing-house mechanism and other means, case-studies on best practices and lessons learned from the use of biological diversity under the thematic areas of the Convention, drawing on the experience of Parties, Governments, relevant organizations, the private sector and indigenous and local communities*'. Moreover, according to the Addis-Ababa principles and guidelines, '*[t]he needs of indigenous and local communities who live with and are affected by the use and conservation of biological diversity, along with their contributions to its conservation and sustainable use, should be reflected in the equitable distribution of the benefits from the use of those resources*'. This is the context in which this report evaluates the Government of Cameroon's implementation of Article 10(c) of the CBD.

Article 10(c) provides that contracting parties to the Convention shall:

protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with conservation and sustainable use requirements.

The phrase 'customary use' echoes the language of 'practices' referred to in Article 8(j). The latter stipulates that each contracting party shall:

subject to its national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovation and practices.

In other words, traditional knowledge, innovations and practices proceed directly from customary use of biological resources. This means that Article 10(c) of the CBD ought to be read in conjunction with Article 8(j).¹ Notably, however, while States and indigenous peoples themselves have made considerable efforts to develop a guide for the implementation of Article 8(j), this has not been the case for Article 10(c) which has attracted very little attention. Very few resources have thus been allocated to promote the dissemination of Article 10(c) at national level. We hope that this work shall contribute to correcting this imbalance.

The implementation of Article 10(c) of the Convention on Biological Diversity requires that signatory States develop national laws and policies which respect the laws and customs of indigenous peoples, their systems of governance, as well as their land and resources rights.

What are the customary uses of biological resources by indigenous peoples in Cameroon? Are the public authorities and other decision makers aware of them? What measures are being taken by the Government of Cameroon to '*protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with*

requirements for their conservation and sustainable use? How can traditional practices or customary use of biological diversity by indigenous peoples be mainstreamed into national conservation strategies and policies? These questions are at the heart of this report, which has been prepared on the basis of a case study carried out in a number of indigenous communities of so-called 'Pygmy' people located in the western part of the Dja Biosphere Reserve in southern Cameroon.



Section showing the Dja Reserve

Map: 'Carpe Congo Basin Forest Partnership', Global Forest Watch

2 The indigenous peoples of Cameroon

The indigenous peoples of Cameroon are many and diverse. They principally comprise Mbororo nomadic pastoralists who live in the Adamawa plateau and in the highlands of the western part of Cameroon, and the forest peoples pejoratively referred to as 'Pygmies'. The latter are considered to be the first inhabitants of the Cameroon forest, and are divided into three main ethnic groups: the Baka, the Bakola/Bagyeli and the Bedzang. The Baka are the largest group and comprise about 40,000 people² over an area of approximately 75,000 km² in the south-eastern part of the country, extending across the administrative provinces of the South and the East.

The second group, the Bakola and Bagyeli, numbers about 3,700 people and occupies almost 12,000 km² in the southern part of the coastal region, and more specifically in the Akom II, Campo, Bipindi, Kribi and Lolodorf sub-divisions.

The third group is the Bedzang, comprising about a thousand people, who live in the north-western part of the Mbam and Kim Division in the Ngambe-Tikar³ region. Pygmies represent about 0.4% of the total population of Cameroon.

The common feature of the Pygmies is their attachment to the forest. However, in recent years, a certain change in their lifestyles has been observed with the gradual intrusion of subsistence farming. At any rate, the Baka, Bakola/Bagyeli and Bedzang existence is centred on the forest and its resources. These peoples are generally highly dependent on the forest, from which they harvest most of their subsistence needs (honey, fruits, wild yams, caterpillars, snails, etc.), so they regard it as their 'mother earth'. The wellbeing of Pygmies is fundamentally tied to forest life. Not only does it provide their means of subsistence, but it is also a source of peace and security.

As a result of their historical relationship with the forest, Pygmies have developed management systems, practices and methods that make them experts in the conservation and sustainable management of biological diversity in their living environment, as observed by Bahuchet when he stated that:

Traditional activities are compatible with the maintenance of the forest cover and a diversity of wildlife: we should not forget that the state of current equatorial ecosystems is the result of human activities. (Bahuchet 1993)

The case study which follows is the result of discussions and activities which took place during 2004 and 2005 with Baka communities from the western Dja, near Mekas. The project involved a series of community consultations to discuss this project as well as the content and meaning of Article 10(c) of the CBD. Its aim was also to collect community views on the use and management of their forests. Following these consultations, four Baka communities helped create community land-use maps using forest use data collected by communities themselves, with the technical support of CED and FPP.

The participatory mapping approach involved the communities themselves selecting mappers in accordance with their own procedures and criteria. Their main criteria were: knowledge of the forest and its resources, an individual's level of integration into the community, and the desire to participate in the project. The mappers were chosen both from Bantu villages and Baka communities.

Next, the selected local mappers were trained in modern cartography techniques and in using GPS (Global Positioning System). The third stage of the participatory mapping programme consisted in the locally trained mappers collecting and documenting their respective communities' land use systems with the participation of other members of the community. Data thus collected were processed using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software and the maps produced were handed over to the communities during formal meetings. The communities had the opportunity to comment on and correct the maps before the final versions were produced.



Training in the use of GPS © CED

The final maps form the basis for discussions between indigenous communities from three areas of the Dja Reserve – as well as between these communities and the reserve managers – regarding the future uses and management of their forests.

3 The Baka peoples of Canton Dja

3.1 Administrative organisation

An unfortunate fact is that in Cameroon, the Baka can only be identified in relation to their Bantu neighbours. This situation stems from the fact that the authorities do not officially recognise the Baka's traditional system of organisation. Canton Dja is a Bulu second-degree chiefdom made up of four Bulu villages (third-degree chiefdoms) whose nucleus is the village of Koungoulou situated, in administrative terms, in the Bengbis Sub-Division of the Dja and Lobo Division of the South Province.

The Baka of Canton Dja are organised into four main communities, in local parlance pejoratively called camps, terminology which both highlights their mobility and the precariousness of their habitat, but above all serves to remind them that they are foreigners to these lands despite the fact that they have occupied these areas for many years. These four communities, all within eight kilometres of each other, are: Nkoumbadjap, Mimbil, Mekas and Mvoé. As indicated above, the names given to these communities are those of the Bulu villages to which they are attached.

The socio-administrative organisation of this locality is as follows:

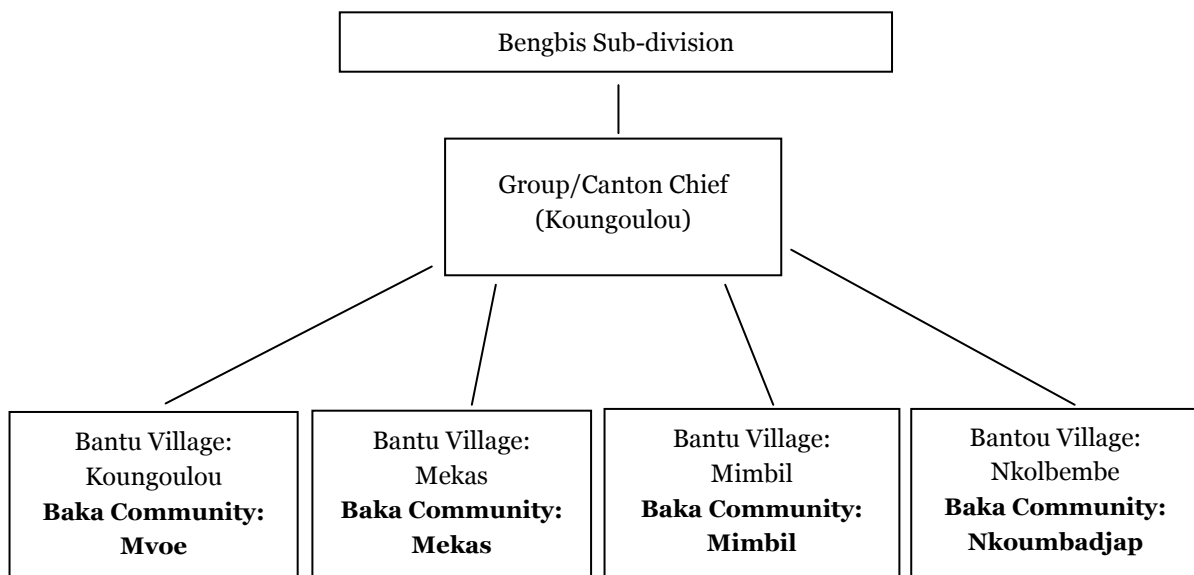


Figure 1: Baka camps in their respective chiefdoms

Figure 1 reveals that Baka communities are not recognised as distinct socio-administrative entities. Rather, they are dependent on the Bantu villages to which they are culturally and socially attached. Therefore, the customary laws that regulate the life of these populations are those of the Bantu which the Baka communities are obliged to obey. The State usually relates to Baka communities via the Bantu villages only, which tend to be located adjacent to the roadways. Elsewhere (and over successive decades) some of the Baka were forced, then subsequently encouraged, by the Government as well as their farming neighbours, to move to the villages and adopt sedentary lifestyles. The reality is very different in the forest, where the Baka have far more autonomy.

3.2 Detailed description of each village

(a) *Nkougoulou*

Nkougoulou is a village of Bulu farmers comprising six hamlets, one of which is host to a Baka community. The hamlets are Ayéné, Azem, Tiaah, Nkolado'o, Oding and Mvoé. The Baka community has settled in the hamlet of Mvoé.

The Baka community of Mvoé comprises four families that settled here thanks to the generosity of a Bantu family that gave them land to settle on. The following main Baka clans ('Yé') are to be found in Mvoé:

- The *Yé Mombito* who are believed to have come from the former Ngatto, located towards the east of the country towards Yokadouma
- The *Yé Kw louqui* who are believed to have come from Lomié, to the east of the Reserve
- The *Yé Ekwabe* who are believed to have come from much further away to the south: from the Minvoul region in the north of Gabon
- The *Yé Njembè* who are believed to have originated in the north of the Reserve, towards Somalomo.



Bantu shack used by Baka who work the Bantu owner's fields © CED



The *moungoulou* is a traditional Baka hut constructed to suit a nomadic lifestyle



(b) Mekas

Mekas Village comprises three large hamlets inhabited by Bulu farmers. The hamlets are: Nkolmekok, the chiefdom of Mekas, and the Mekas Quarter. A large Baka community, divided into two groups, has settled in the Mekas Quarter and the Mekas chiefdom. This is, in fact, one and the same community that split up following a conflict between two families in the group. The community numbers some 50 people: 10 men, 11 women and 28 children. Their homes are built using temporary materials and are therefore rather precarious. They consist of four mud houses (of which one is under construction) and three *moungoulou*.



Mekas camp © CED

(c) Mimbil

The village of Mimbil also comprises three hamlets: Mimbil I, Nyabizou and Mimbil II. A large Baka community has settled here, living mostly from hunting, fishing, gathering and a little farming. The community has been here since the 1800s, and it is likely that this is the original community which most of the others in the region come from. It comprises some 40 individuals: 11 men, 8 women and 24 children. Their homes are as precarious as elsewhere and consist of six mud-brick houses and seven *moungoulou*. The Baka call their camp *kpweke a mboungué* translated literally as 'the power of the white man'. This name evokes memories of the sedentary lifestyle adopted under the influence of the white man, the coloniser. It may also refer to the process by which they were made more sedentary.



Mimbil villagers © CED

(d) Nkolmbembe

This village consists of three hamlets, Nkolmbembe, Nkoumbadjap and Nkolsabe. The Baka have settled in Nkoumbadjap on a piece of land granted to them by a Bantu family on their arrival. The man in the role of chief originates from Djoum Sub-Division, towards the south-east. He is believed to have arrived here in the 1950s, while walking in the forest. He would have settled here because of his marriage, and has never since been back to his original community. He, too, responded to the then Governor's call to adopt a sedentary life. '*As the Government had asked us to stop living in the bush*', the chief says he went and settled near his friend who often provided him with weapons to hunt elephant. It was this friend who gave them the land on which they now live. Increasingly, the *moungoulou* is being abandoned in favour of building mud houses.



House building © CED

The Bantu traditional chiefs are the only true channels to the administrative system here. At best, Baka communities are regarded as sub-sections of the Bantu villages. The chief of the Baka community is appointed by the Bantu village chief, who recognises him as the official representative of the Baka in the locality. In the event of a dispute between a Baka and a Bantu, the competent jurisdiction to settle the dispute is that of the Bantu community. It is clear that in these cases, the Baka are almost always the losers in traditional prosecutions that are generally settled to their disadvantage. However, in cases of disagreements between Baka, they use their own conflict resolution mechanisms.

3.3 Socio-cultural organisation

Baka society is based on small communities, very often composed of members of one family or one clan. In Mékas, the size of communities varies from some 30 to 60 people, including men, women and children. The main clans, or *Yé*, found in the Canton Dja are the *Yé Kwalou*, *Yé Njembe*, *Yé Mombito*, *Yé Ndonga* etc. Most, if not all of these *Yé*, originate from Cameroon's East Province, from the same vast forest large sections of which have been incorporated into protected areas.

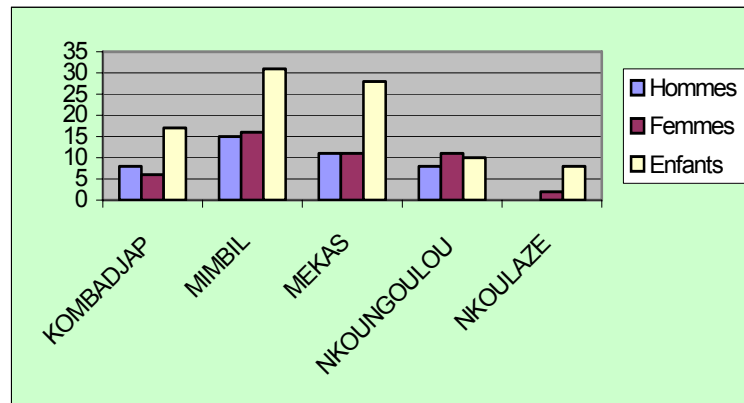


Figure II: Demography of Baka communities in the Canton of Dja

Marriage in Baka societies in general, and especially in the Canton Dja, is exogamic, i.e. marriages occur between people from different *Yé*.

Baka society is egalitarian and non-hierarchical. That is to say, in Baka communities in Dja, as elsewhere, all individuals regardless of gender are considered equal at birth. Egalitarianism in Baka society by no means indicates that their society is acephalous as is often believed by outsiders. The difference between egalitarian societies and highly hierarchical societies lies in the type of leadership. With the Baka, leadership is exercised on the grounds of the experience and abilities of the leaders. Thus, male and female elders (*Kobo* and *Kobowossè*), the *ngàngà* (healer) or the elephant hunter will all play a prominent role in decision-making processes and in regulating life within the community.

The Baka are considered to be the oldest inhabitants of Cameroon's equatorial forest. For a very long time they have lived from hunting and gathering. Traditionally, they lived in small camps in the forest, moving every three to four days. Under the impact of the policy of sedentary settlement instigated by the colonial administration and pursued after independence, they gradually settled along the pathways in Bantu villages, with the result that agriculture has progressively become a way of life for them.

3.4 Beliefs and rites⁴

The Baka believe in God the creator, *Komba*, who moulded all things and all beings from a shapeless but living matter. The divine family is made up of *Komba* the Elder, his older sister *gbékòàwós'ε*, 'the old woman', and his younger sister, *sεε*, the initial Seer.

Komba lives far up in the sky and it is his spirit or the spirit of the forest, *Enjengui*, who introduced knowledge of the world and life in society to humans through the initiation of youths. He protects man but presides over his life, his death and his rebirth as a Forest Spirit.



Enjengui dancing in a community © CED

Communication with the Forest Spirit, *Enjengui*, or with other spirits, is the preserve of a specialist, the seer-healer, or adult males initiated during collective dances, as well through songs, charms and offerings, and sometimes through fire.

Besides *Enjengui*, the Baka also believe in a multitude of 'small' spirits that are often invoked as ghosts.

3.5 Ritual practices

Baka rites have several functions including those of foreseeing the future, blessing the hunt by making sacrifices to the spirits, restoring normality after periods of upheaval, and maintaining the benevolence of the Forest Spirit over the community. There are several types of ritual, most of which are related to hunting, mourning or the passage from adolescence to adulthood.

(a) *Hunting rites*

Hunting large mammals

The aim of this rite is to make the hunter invisible during the hunting of large mammals, in particular during the elephant hunt. The rite entails a divination session where the diviner *ngàngà* reads from the flames of a large log how the hunt should be conducted and the direction to take. The *mònjòyì* dance, performed collectively, enables the hunters to become invisible. Women play an important role in this rite. During the night preceding the departure for the hunt, the hunters' wives sing loudly in *yoddle*, and dance in the dark at the edge of the camp, out of sight of the men, to attract game. A special spirit presides over this dance, which is called

j'ob'ok'o. During these dances, the women chew and spit out leaves (*màkasa*); they handle a baton (*mòjuma*), and then hand it to the chief hunter, who hides it. At the end of the hunt, a portion of the throat of the elephant is presented to the chief hunter's wife, who led the *yéli*, for her to throw into the forest as an offering to the spirits.

The *mòkàtò* ritual

This is a rite performed following a series of unfruitful hunting expeditions, which are believed to be caused by disorder, misunderstandings and disputes in the community. This is the incentive for the community to maintain a degree of social cohesion so as to avoid famine.

Hunting in general

Another pre-hunting ritual is one intended to attract the spirits' attention by showing them the effects of penury. As they leave for the hunt, all the hunters file past a basket filled with leaves, which has been hung up in the centre of the camp, and strike it with their weapons.

(b) *Baka rites of passage*



Initiation rite to *Enjengui* © CED

The life of a Baka male unfolds in three successive phases: puberty, characterised by circumcision; transition to adulthood following an initiation; and finally, death, which entails a number of ceremonies. All of these phases of life are characterised by special ritual ceremonies. This is the case, for example, with rites of initiation to the Forest Spirit that mark the passage from adolescence to adulthood. This is the most important rite in the life of young Baka men: it is during these initiation ceremonies that the youth learn about life in society, the craft of the hunter and the mysteries of religion.

The common feature in these Baka rituals is their link to the forest and life in the forest. Without the forest, therefore, the Baka would not exist culturally. Thus *'the impossibility of continuing to hunt elephants, as a result of a banning order or because the species is disappearing, threatens a crucial aspect of Baka culture – this threat is manifested by increased social conflict'*.

4 Customary use of biological resources

4.1 Baka forest typology

The Baka refer to the forest in the generic name of *bɛɛ*. However, there is a great variety of forest types distinguished one from the other by their structure, function and the wealth of their biodiversity. Each type is used for particular activities. Thus, from the village or the roadside to the depths of the forest, the following distinct forest types are found:

- *Gbye* refers to a field or any agricultural activity;
- *Woundo* is the fallow land left after a crop has been harvested. Baka involved in farming copy the practices of their farmer neighbours. Therefore, like the Bantu, they practise swidden agriculture which entails clearing a portion of the virgin or secondary forest and planting food crops. The following year this portion is left to grow to enable the soil to regain its fertility. Baka farms are generally small in size compared to those of their Bantu neighbours;
- *Woulou* is a relatively resource-poor secondary forest. Here the people mostly lay traps during the long rainy season. It is also a propitious area for the collection of honey;
- *Mandja* is what the Baka consider as virgin or primary forest. This is where moabi fruits (*Baillonella toxisperma*), bush mangoes (*Irvingia gabonensis*), wild yams and all kinds of wild fruits are gathered;
- *Ndoumbo* are areas of gallery forest where hunting camps are established during the dry season because of the presence of water;
- *Njambo* are raffia palm forests in which hunting is mostly carried out with dogs. Here hunting is mostly for small mammals such as does and antelopes;
- *Bai* are open swamps which many animals use as a place of rest. The Baka mainly hunt reptiles here, including snakes, monitor lizards, etc.

Apart from this typology, the Baka also designate specific names for elephant tracks. This confirms the very important role of elephants in the maintenance of Baka culture. The following tracks can thus be distinguished:

- *Eleko* : tracks created by elephants heading to the swampy areas. These areas provide excellent indicators for many other animals as well;
- *Manda* : fresh animal traces that serve as good tracking indicators for hunters.

4.2 Weather and the seasons

The life of the Baka, like that of farmers, is regulated by the weather and the seasons. Different activities are carried out at different seasons. Unlike farmers, who distinguish four seasons in this part of the country, the Baka distinguish only three seasons: *Sokoma*, *Yaka* and *langa*.

Baka seasons and main activities

Month	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N
Conventional seasons in the equatorial area	Long dry season			Short rainy season			Short dry season		Long rainy season			
Baka seasons	Yaka					langa			Sokoma			
Key activities	Honey					Farming mainly in fallow lands	Gathering of fruits, wild yams, mushrooms, etc.					
	Fishing						Fishing	Molingue				
	Molongo					Gathering of wild yams						

4.3 Key activities of the Baka in the Canton of Dja

Baka are essentially hunters and gatherers who harvest their principal resources from the forest. Their society is changing, however, due to the numerous influences being brought to bear on Baka life and its environment. Farming, for example, is a response to the sedentary lifestyle adopted during colonisation. The presence of conservation projects and the introduction of money as a medium of exchange have considerably influenced the lifestyles of the Baka in this part of the Dja Biosphere Reserve. They are thus no longer only hunter-gatherers. Researchers⁵ have established new models of Baka lifestyles. They define these as follows:

- Traditional hunter-gatherers
- Hunter-gatherer-farmers
- Farmer-hunter-gatherers
- Farmer-hunters

These four new Baka categories also appear in our area of study. The main activities carried out by the Baka, therefore, are hunting, fishing, gathering of non-timber forest products, and farming.

(a) Hunting

Hunting is not only a traditional activity for the Baka; it also fulfils a social and cultural function. As described earlier, many rites are performed in relation to hunting. Furthermore, in the social hierarchy of the Baka, elephant hunters have a privileged position.

The Baka today distinguish two main types of hunting expeditions: the great hunt and the small hunt, that can be differentiated by the type of animal hunted, the season and the techniques and tools used. The great hunt, which is for large game (elephant, boar, gorilla, chimpanzee, etc.), is mostly practised during the long rainy season (*Sokoma*). The small hunt, which involves small mammals and other rodents, is carried out mostly in the dry season. However, there is no clear-cut differentiation, and small hunting can also be practised during the rainy season, especially to help mitigate the numerous difficulties the Baka face in carrying out their traditional activities.

Hunting techniques

Hunting with assegai or crossbow (Mbano)

Traditionally, hunting is carried out with assegais. The hunter confronts the animal and, using his own personal technique, endeavours to run it through. This strategy is mainly used in great hunts that traditionally can last from several weeks to several months. This practice is decreasing because of the introduction of modern hunting tools, in particular firearms. In addition to the lance (*mbenga*), the other tools used during the great hunting expeditions include hatchets (*kôbà*), knives (*nlemba*), bellows (*kômbà*), and the *mbomo* contained in the *sawala*, used to make fire. This arsenal, along with food, is used in lengthy expeditions (*Molongo*) within the forest. During these expeditions, large game such as elephant, gorilla, boar, etc. are usually killed.



Kômbà

Sawala

Mbomo

Kôbà and Mbenga

It should be noted with regret that hunting with the assegai, which is compatible with conservation activities and sustainable management of wildlife resources given its high selectivity, is decreasing. In fact, and as acknowledged by a forest guard⁶,

They never kill females and the growing young ones. They (the Baka) know better than anybody else the period when females are generally suckling their young. This corresponds to the end of the hunting season that runs from 1 July to 30 November and hunting activities are supposed to be reduced to the barest minimum throughout this period.

Hunting with the assegai is threatened by the introduction of firearms, but also by conservation projects which, by virtue of preventing any human presence within the protected area, are contributing to the destruction of Baka culture and causing poverty and malnutrition within these communities.

Hunting with nets

Hunting with nets has practically disappeared from this part of the country for the same reasons as those mentioned above. It is merely spoken of by the elders, but the youth know nothing about it.

Hunting by pursuit

This is done traditionally with the help of a dog trained for this purpose. The hunter takes a dog with him; when the dog finds an animal it chases it to the death. Just like hunting with nets, this type of hunting has virtually been abandoned in favour of trapping or hunting with firearms.

Hunting with a rifle

Nowadays, hunting of large mammals is carried out with firearms. This is a very destructive method as it does not permit differentiation between male and female animals – gestating or otherwise – nor between young and adult animals. It constitutes, therefore, a grave threat to the protection and conservation of wild animals. Baka are increasingly using firearms to hunt, given that they reduce risk and are more readily used in self-defence than other traditional weapons. However, the Baka do not own the firearms they use – i.e. these are owned by others.

With the use of firearms, the hunt loses its cultural aspect and becomes a purely economic pursuit. In fact, the Baka now no longer hunt solely to feed their families, but also and above all for the owners of the weapons who, in some cases, are principally interested in trophies (ivory, panther skins, etc.). Yet the pay these new professional hunters receive from their bosses is trifling compared to the profits made by the owners of the weapons. It is clear that no Baka in Canton Dja possesses a firearm; the Baka are therefore only indirectly responsible for the poaching observed and decried.

Hunting weapons forbidden by law⁷

Hunting carried out using the following weapons is forbidden:

- Arms of war or ammunition which are or have been part of the standard arms of the armed forces or the police;
- Firearms capable of firing multiple shots with one pull of the trigger;
- Projectiles containing explosives, use of trenches and dane guns;
- Chemical products.

(b) Trapping

Trapping is the most widespread method of hunting practised here, both by the Bantu and the Baka. In fact, it is estimated that over 75% of young and adult Baka hunt using steel wire traps. There are a great variety of traps; some of the most widely used are described below. The different types of trap are identified by the target animal, the inventor of the trap, or its *modus operandi*, i.e. the manner in which the animal is captured. The common features of all of these traps are that they are made from metal wire and do not discriminate between the age or size of the animal, unlike hunting with an assegai or crossbow which permits the hunter to choose his prey. Moreover, each hunter sets an average of 60 traps which he is unable to monitor on a daily basis. As a result, some animals captured in traps decompose and are uselessly lost because the owner of the traps was unable to visit them. Trapping therefore appears to be a destructive method of hunting because of its non-selective nature, and also because it generates a great deal of waste.

Game is often transported with the help of baskets that are carefully hand-woven using bamboo harvested from the forest, and carried on the back. These exceptionally durable and very capacious baskets are used both for carrying game home or to sites of sale, and for carrying foodstuffs.

Main types of traps

- *Rogers*, named after its inventor
- *Abanda*, as above, bears the name of its inventor
- *Ba'a*, designed for hunting monkeys, squirrels, tiger cats, pangolin and other climbing animals
- *Attention/étrangleur* (beware/strangler) – as its name indicates, this trap can strangle, hence the need for caution
- *Abe'embeng*
- *Awos* – the main targets of this trap are birds, particularly parrots
- *Ndong* mainly targets partridges, but also rats and squirrels
- *Ntam* is a trap for rodents
- *Afo'e*
- *Elongo* – only those who have been initiated use this type of trap.



A pair of trapped duiker (*Cephalophus spp.*) – the products of hunting are transported in specially woven baskets

All the above-mentioned traps are of Bulu origin. When Baka names exist, they are literal translations of the Bulu names. This indicates that trapping is not a traditional Baka practice. Moreover, trapping is incompatible with the traditional lifestyle of the Baka, which is based on mobility. However, almost all Baka practise trapping. They have learnt about trapping through contact with their Bantu neighbours, especially as trapping is compatible with the sedentary lifestyle which is being imposed on the Baka against their will. Trapping is a way for them to escape the notice, and avoid the reprisals, of the forest guards.

It follows that the sedentary lifestyle forced on the Baka and the related destruction of their culture constitutes a serious threat to the conservation and sustainable management of biological diversity.

Traditional hunting grounds

In spite of the restrictions imposed by land tenure and forestry laws in Cameroon and despite the corporal punishment they are often the victims of when they are caught in the forest, the Baka continue to hunt, fish and gather, and carry out all the other cultural and recreational activities that they traditionally practise in the forest. These constitute, in effect, *'our non-negotiable cultural identity'*. The multiple external factors certainly have an influence on their lifestyle. However, a keen observer will note that there is a degree of resistance by the Baka to being converted to the dominant farming culture. Their apparent sedentary lifestyle and gradual involvement in agricultural activities barely veils their desire to continue to affirm that they are a people with a strong attachment to the forest.

In the western part of the Dja Biosphere Reserve, the Baka 'own' many hunting sites. The main ones are as follows: *Nkolgone, Bolongo, Ndokounda, Mboublane, Bifosse, Bikoula, Nkolbaye, Ndjomo'o, Nsimvives*, etc. Some traditional hunting zones have acquired, for unspecified reasons, the names of certain countries, such as Burkina Faso or Gabon.

Hunting methods forbidden by Law⁸

Except where specially authorised by the service in charge of wildlife, the following are forbidden:

- *The pursuit, approach to or shooting of game from a motor vehicle;*
- *Hunting at night, especially with search lamps, head lamps, or in general with any lighting equipment whether designed for hunting purposes or not;*
- *Hunting with drugs, poisoned bait, tranquillizer guns or explosives;*
- *Hunting with traditional or non-traditional devices;*
- *Hunting with fire;*
- *The importation, sale and circulation of hunting lamps;*
- *Hunting with fixed guns and dane guns;*
- *Hunting with a modern net.*

(b) Fishing

Fishing is mostly practised by women during the *Yaka* season. As with trapping, there are several methods and a great range of fishing tools that vary depending on the fishing period and targeted products. In Canton Dja, Baka and Bantu communities share the same fishing places. They include the following rivers and waterways: *Nsabe, Nyadjona, Djona, Mboutou, Mimva, Ngoumbo, Tane, Ntougombem, Mimfoum, Tobo Tobo, Oton Nkan, Oton Yaya, Ebo'o, Meka'a, Mindou'ou, Dieneng, Mimfoumou, Nkamangonges, Ndabile, Bekangue, Boutou, So'o, Pie'e, Bimfossé, Bambossé, Kombélé, Djen, Njomo, Mboublan, Aangbabe, Ndjona, Fiebe, Nlobo, Limi, Nké, She, Befolo, etc.* All of these rivers are probably tributaries of the Dja River.

Fishing techniques and tools

Damming or gouma

The dam method is practised during the low water period. It is team activity that may require the intervention of as many as ten women. The technique is to build a dam of mud across the bed of the running water in which fishing is to take place both downstream and upstream. The water in the contained portion is drained by one group of women while a second group searches the basin for fish, crabs and sometimes shrimps. This work is carried out to the rhythm of the women and children's songs. This technique is highly selective as it allows the harvesting of only those fish of an appropriate age and size for consumption, while the young fish are left to ensure the reproduction of the species. The sustainability of this technique is enhanced by the fact that the catch is intended only for personal consumption and the volume fished remains fairly low as women ensure a sufficient amount of fish are left in order to allow for stock renewal during their river rotation. As mentioned above, it is traditional among the Baka for fishing to serve only the needs of the family so the catches remain small. Nevertheless, the cash economy is increasing the pressure on inland water resources, which have now become a source of revenue for those who practise fishing.

Line fishing

Line fishing (*njenje*) is practised by men, mainly the younger generation, in large waterways during the *Yaka* or *Sokoma* seasons. Strictly speaking, this is not a traditional Baka practice but is borrowed from the Bantu. The same goes for lobster pots and poison fishing which copy the techniques of the Bantu women. The latter technique is quite unsustainable and even harmful to human health as it is based on the use of chemical products, sometimes even pesticides, which are poured onto the surface of the water. Each product is different, but their effects are either to stun or kill the fish and other organisms. The fish are then gathered from the surface of the water.

(c) **Gathering**

Baka still harvest most of their food resources from the products of gathering and picking. They gather a great variety of products in the forest, not only for food but also for healing, and to a diminishing degree for clothing. In any season, a walk in the forest enables a number of products to be gathered.

Wild fruits (bush mango, *Moabi*, *Mvout*, etc.), mushrooms and several varieties of wild yams are mostly available during the rainy season (*Sokoma*).

Honey harvesting is of great importance to the Baka. It is practised during the *Yaka*. The Baka distinguish several types of honey depending on the melliferous insect in question – the most important include:

- *Poki* which is honey produced by the *Mellifica adansonii* bee;
- *Dandu* produced by *Meliponula bocandei*;
- *Molengui* produced by *Axestotrigona erythra*;
- *Nfende* produced by *Apotrigona nebulita*;
- *Mofafale* produced by *Axestotrigona tescorum*;
- *Njenje* produced by *trigona sp*;
- *Moko* produced by *Hypotrigona gribodoi*;
- *Yoya* produced by *Melilebeia africana*.

Baka honey harvesting techniques are highly developed and involve a number of different tools such as hatchets (*kôbà*) and a smokehouse made of a lighted clump of grass. In addition, *mofouab* and *koko*, two herbaceous plant species, help protect the harvester from bee stings when rubbed on the body. The honey collected is preserved in a container made for this purpose from *moko* leaves.

Honey is highly valued by the Baka because of its taste and curative properties. In Baka culture, honey also symbolises the presence of *Komba*, God the Creator. Honey represents one of the great wonders bestowed by *Komba*.⁹

(d) Farming

Farming has a marginal place in the economy of the Baka people in our area of study. However, its importance is increasing because of the constraints imposed by conservation projects and efforts made by various actors, including the State, to make the Baka sedentary. The Baka who practise farming learn their skills from neighbouring farmer populations. In all cases, theirs is subsistence farming carried out in relatively small spaces when compared to those of their neighbours. Their yield barely satisfies their food needs. This activity is also very limited because of the dense vegetation of the region. There is effectively no roadway suitable for motor vehicles, regardless of the season.

The main crops cultivated here are cassava, plantains, coco yams, banana, etc. Cocoa is the main cash crop cultivated in this region, but the Baka have no interest in this.

The Baka do not practise farming solely to satisfy their own needs; they are principally used as a quasi-free workforce on the farms belonging to the Bantu. Their salaries are not only derisory, but often paid in kind with tobacco or local or adulterated alcohol. The following testimonies perfectly illustrate the situation that prevails here. According to Bantu employers:

For a bit of adulterated alcohol, a few coins or cigarettes, and a few promises, you have at your disposal for days a tireless pygmy who will clear your cocoa plantation or weed it.

This is confirmed by this young Baka from Nkoumadkjav who testifies:

I have spent four years with a Bulu who made me work on a farm without pay, without medical care and without taking care of me, all because of his promises to take care of me. And when I started asking for money he threatened to kill me, until I could no longer stand it and felt obliged to go back to my brothers in the camp . . .

Despite the efforts and resources invested in promoting farming among the Baka, the results have been very mixed. Cultural resistance certainly contributes substantially to this outcome. However, it should be emphasised that the situation is not conducive to farming, either for the Baka or the Bantu. The main constraints are the density of the vegetation, human-animal conflicts and the lack of extension services.



This whole family works on Bantu-owned land © CED

Inaccessibility

We emphasised above that the region covered by this study is very inaccessible. There are no roadways suitable for motor vehicles. During the rainy season, the region resembles an inaccessible enclave. The only vehicles seen here are those of cocoa buyers who come once a year. Under these circumstances, it is practically impossible to contemplate increasing the production of food crops. Prices become less competitive when the producer faces the challenge of getting his produce to the nearest market. Access to agricultural inputs, including tools, is also very limited.



Water point at Mekas

Man-animal conflicts are recurrent

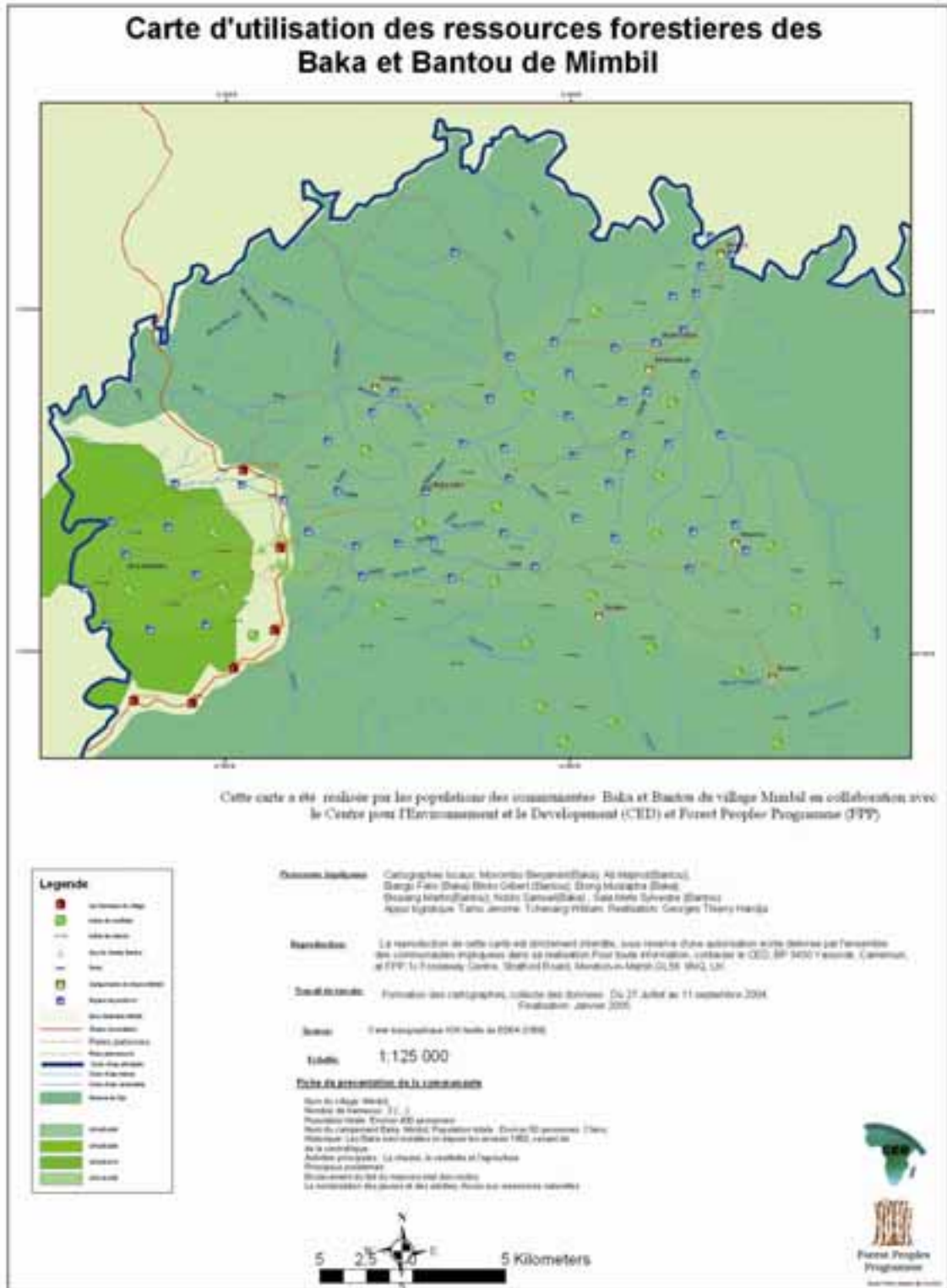
These conflicts arise through damage to farms by wild animals. Farmers regularly complain of herds of elephants and primates that destroy their harvests under the eyes of conservation officials. The level to which elephants are protected, both in Cameroon and internationally, does not permit the victims of this sort of damage to take any action. In some villages, it is reported that there are herds of elephants living fewer than three kilometres away. These conflicts annihilate all will to invest in agricultural activity, especially for the Baka who are traditionally not farmers.



Elephant damage to banana and manioc plants © CED

Lack of technical guidance

Apart from the forestry posts that have the task of keeping watch over the entire reserve, there is no other administrative presence here. The authorities responsible for providing agricultural extension services are absent. This would indicate that any farming remains at a subsistence level, and is designed purely to satisfy family needs.



The role of the forest in Baka life

The interest in or disregard for the conservation and sustainable management of an ecosystem of a given people is closely linked to the various roles that this ecosystem plays in their life. Thus the Baka have developed very deep-rooted ties with the forest because of the multiple benefits they derive from it. For the Baka, the forest fulfils many economic, social, cultural and recreational roles.

(a) The role of productivity

This would appear to be the most important role and the one most visible to external observers of Baka culture. It is, in fact, its function as producer of food that makes the forest a source of life and a reserve of lands for agricultural production and para-agricultural activities. With its fruit trees, wild yams, honey, mushrooms, caterpillars, etc., the forest offers an extensive array of elements essential to the nutritional and biological needs of the populations. It also offers economic opportunities and the possibility of inter-family and inter-community exchanges. The forest is a reservoir of medicines to treat all sorts of health problem. Thus, tree bark, roots, plants, leaves, honey, etc. are used to guard against various lethal diseases. Apart from its function as supplier of food, the forest also provides the Baka with the materials needed for constructing their homes and for making hunting, fishing and farming tools.

(b) Recreational role

For the Baka, the forest not only provides a source of food, but is also a place of peace and security and a refuge from external aggressions. Mobility, one of the characteristics of Baka culture, cannot be explained by the quest for food security alone. The Baka have a keen appreciation of the songs of forest insects and birds. In fact, in the midst of myriad forest 'sounds' they can identify the humming of bees. The practice of *Molongo* illustrates the forest's recreational role for the Baka. *Molongo* is an expedition, or rather a walk, into the depths of the forest, practised in the past by the Baka of Canton Dja. These walks entailed the entire community moving into the forest for many months, or even years, and provided an opportunity for the youth to be initiated into their culture. During these expeditions, they learnt the art and technique of hunting with the assegai, harvesting honey, recognising and picking tubers of wild yams, animal behaviour, mimicking the cries of animals, constructing *moungoulou*, and weaving mats, baskets, etc. During *Molongo*, communities met in the forest, developed friendships and contracted marriages between their sons and daughters.

The religious role of the forest often merges with its recreational function, as ritual and play are bound up together in the lives of the Baka. The *Libandi* is a perfect illustration. This is a ritual organised during initiation to *Enjengui*, or to the forest spirits, or during funerals.

Today the practices of *Molongo* and *Libandi* have been greatly altered. When performed, they last for a much shorter period than in the past. *Molongo* now rarely exceeds a month. Several factors contribute to this, including the process of adopting a sedentary lifestyle with all its accompanying constraints, reduction of available space because of conservation projects, and exposure of the youth to 'modernity', etc.

(c) The cultural and religious role

The Baka regard the forest as a sacred place and the pursuit of certain activities related to the collection of produce and extraction of resources requires solemn behaviour. It is the place of sacrificial rites and worship, for seeking the protection and assistance of the Spirit of the Ancestors spirit in carrying out activities planned for the forest (such as hunting, fishing and use

of medicinal plants). Initiation to *Enjengui*, central to the life of the Baka, provides men and the community as a whole with access to the forest's protection as well as for that of certain older men. This ritual activity of initiation is fundamental to the development of the Baka personality. Being unable to hunt elephant, either because of prohibition or because of the disappearance of the species, threatens a whole portion of Baka culture.

It has also been observed that the Baka, like the Bantu, name their hunting grounds. The names of these areas are rich in history, and provide some insight into the circumstances of their original discovery. Some of these areas are sacred sites given that most, if not all, of Baka rites are carried out in the forest. Many of these secret sites remain voluntarily undisclosed on the maps, and will remain secret for their protection. This is the case for places like *mangbwegbwe* which is a mythical site that the Baka from Mekas and from the south hold secret. This site is unknown to the Bantu and the researchers conducting studies in the Reserve. The Baka refuse to take them to it. *Mangbwegbwe* is certainly rich in game, but it is also a meeting place for Baka from different areas, an initiation site, a refuge and a place of rest.

4.5 Territory, land rights, and right of access to natural resources

As has been mentioned, the Baka who are the subject of this work live in the western part of the Dja Biosphere Reserve. This protected area, with a surface area of about 526,000 hectares, was created on 26 June 1950 by Order No. 319 of the French High Commissioner to Cameroon, with the legal status of a wildlife reserve. In 1981, under the impetus of the Cameroonian section of the Man and Biosphere Program (MAB) it became the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. In 1987, the Dja Reserve was classed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Finally, in 1994 under Decree No. 037/CAB/PM it was gazetted it as a Technical Operational Unit (UTO – *unité technique opérationnelle*).

The Dja Reserve spans two provinces of Cameroon (the South and East Provinces) and covers six sub-divisions: Lomie, Abong-Mbang, Bengbis, Mintom, Meyomessala and Djoum. The Dja River serves as a natural boundary for the Reserve, protecting it to the South, the West and the North.

This is one of the largest and best-protected rainforests in Africa, with 90% of its area left undisturbed. Almost completely surrounded by the Dja river, which forms a natural boundary, the reserve is especially noted for its biodiversity and a wide variety of primates. It contains 107 mammal species, five of which are threatened.¹⁰

The ECOFAC project (Central African Forest Ecosystems), fruit of co-operation between Cameroon and the European Union, has been managing the Reserve since 1992. In March 1992, the programme began with the establishment of a Coordination Unit in Brazzaville and covers seven Central African countries notably Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. After a suspension of its activities for about two years, the ECOFAC Programme will possibly recommence in 2006 following a funding agreement signed recently between the beneficiary countries and the European Union totalling 38 million Euros. As with the previous phases, this fourth phase of the ECOFAC programme aims to ensure the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources in the seven participating countries. With the DRC's participation, this programme will encompass 180,000 km² of tropical evergreen forest and savannah.

Rights of access to forest resources

Protected area management in Cameroon is defined by Law No. 94-01 of 20 January 1994 on forestry, wildlife and fisheries and by Decree No. 95/466/PM of 20 July 1995 which establishes the conditions for the implementation of wildlife regulations. According to this decree, a wildlife reserve is an area set aside for the conservation, management and pure propagation of wild animal life, as well as for the protection and management of its habitat. Hunting is forbidden, except by authorisation of the Minister responsible for Wildlife, as part of duly approved management operations. Human dwelling and other human activities are regulated or forbidden. These provisions greatly restrict the Baka's access rights to the forest resources of the Dja Biosphere Reserve. They are also the cause of many human rights abuses suffered by the Baka in their daily activities.

If in theory '*The pygmies are free to hunt within the reserve using traditional methods*',¹¹ in practice, the Baka of the Canton Dja in Bengbis are subject to daily harassment and persecution by forest guards:

The presence of the Reserve creates many problems for us. Every time we return from the forest, eco-guards seize our game no matter what type it is, whereas we catch the meat, eat part of it and sell another part to buy kerosene, salt, soap or clothes . . .

Is this not the very reason that conservation projects have a predilection for indigenous peoples' ancestral lands, in all their richness in biological diversity? This richness is a source of great attraction to States and numerous external actors (forest concessionaires, professional hunters, agro-industries, etc.), to the detriment of the customary landowners who, very often, are excluded to the benefit of those with purely economic interests.

Unfortunately, rather than seeking to understand the particularities of the methods used by indigenous peoples to manage forest resources, these peoples are expelled from their lands in favour of protected areas, forest concessions and safaris. Their customary land rights are thus ignored, making them illegal occupants of their own lands. The result is conflict and recurrent abuse between peoples attached to their lifestyles and culture, and external actors with diverse and sometimes antagonistic interests.¹²



Baka village near Mekas © CED

5 Conservation policies and practices and indigenous peoples

The policies relating to conservation and the sustainable management of forest resources are set out in the laws and regulations relating to forest management in Cameroon. Moreover, with the help of bilateral and multilateral funding bodies, Cameroon has developed a Forest and Environment Sector Development Programme (FESP), the aim of which is:

The conservation and the sustainable management and use of forest and wildlife resources to meet local, national, regional and global needs for present and future generations.’ Another objective is the ‘sustained improvement of the livelihoods of the local population through the sustainable management of forest ecosystems

Component 3 of the FESP deals with conservation and biodiversity and the development of wildlife resources. It is more than fair in its very real recognition of the usage rights of populations living in protected areas. Cameroon is signatory to international conventions on the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, as is the case with the Convention on Biological Diversity, within which framework a national biodiversity strategy and action plan (NBSAP) has been developed. At the institutional level, the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) is responsible for implementing this policy on the conservation and sustainable management of biological diversity. In order to fulfil this mandate, the government has the support of international cooperation through conservation projects such as ECOFAC and through international conservation organisations such as WWF, WCS, Birdlife, etc.

With regard both to the policy documents as well as the practice of conservation and sustainable management of biological diversity in Cameroon, the only mention of local populations is in the context of their usage rights and benefit sharing arising from biodiversity management.

The Forestry Law defines usage or customary rights as being the utilisation of forestry, wildlife and fishery produce (with the exception of protected species) by the local population for personal use. Similarly, in section 26 (1) the Law stipulates that:

The instrument classifying a State forest shall take into account the social circumstances of the local population, who shall retain their logging rights. However, such rights may be limited if they are contrary to the given objectives of the forest. In such case, the local population shall be entitled to compensation according to conditions laid down by decree.

These provisions of the law appear generous to the local populations whose usage rights have been recognised in State forests. However, the euphoria rapidly fades when one considers the rather restrictive and selective way Cameroonians view the notion of customary and usage rights. The usage right referred to here is not only controlled (by the given objectives of the forest), but also concerns only material aspects of the forest, i.e. ‘forestry, wildlife and fishery produce’. The definition makes no reference to the cultural and religious role of the forest and, less still, to its recreational role.

There is, therefore, a contradiction between usage or customary rights as defined by the Forestry Law of Cameroon and the customary rights promoted by Article 10(c) of the CBD. Moreover, usage right places the benefit at individual level (‘... for personal use’) and makes no mention of customary use by a community or a people. Dismay becomes complete when examining the definition of the different categories of protected area. What is clear is that human activities are forbidden or regulated. In national parks or wildlife reserves for example, local communities’ usage rights are not recognised.¹³

Given the difficulties that local and indigenous populations face in their relationship with the forest, these are further exacerbated by the practices of biodiversity conservation in denying these peoples both their customary use of and access to the forest. The repression¹⁴ that indigenous peoples and local populations living in and around protected areas are subject to appears to be based on this narrow perception of the notion of usage and customary right.

In the Dja Biosphere Reserve, the participation by the local populations – and the Baka in particular – in conservation and sustainable management efforts is extremely limited. It is often limited to developing inappropriate alternatives to commercial hunting.

6 Conclusion

Awkward relationship between the Baka and conservation programmes in the Dja Biosphere Reserve

The conservation of the Dja Biosphere Reserve has benefited from international cooperation through the ECOFAC project. The project was implemented in three phases from 1992 to 2004. A fourth phase is due to start soon with the financial support from another funding agreement with the European Union totalling 38 million Euros for the seven participating countries in the ECOFAC programme.

Since its inception, aside from conservation activities, the ECOFAC project has developed a number of activities aimed at the socio-economic development of villages surrounding the Reserve. An evaluation of the project conducted in 2003¹⁵ gauged that 90% of its conservation objectives had been achieved. On the other hand, the effectiveness of its development objectives was deemed nil or insufficient to measure. The main development activities focused on the restoration of coffee and cocoa plantations, and the distribution of oil palm seedlings. From the testimonies of the assessors, not one of these activities has succeeded in providing a viable alternative to commercial hunting, *'because hunter-gatherers are not affected by these actions be it for craft work or for farming.'*

This evaluation report provides a precise illustration of the nature of the relationships between conservation programmes and the local populations and indigenous peoples. In particular, a total absence of consultation and participation of local communities and indigenous peoples in conservation initiatives. On the contrary, these populations pay a heavy price for the supposed success of the conservation sector. The excerpts from testimonies that follow are very eloquent in this regard. Indeed, according to the head of one Baka community in the Bengbis Sub-Division of Canton Dja:

We have the feeling that they [eco-guards] have been sent here to kill us.

This is because:

When they met us with any type of game, they would threaten us with firearms and machetes. They would seize our game, our lances and our pots and destroy our hunting camps and sometimes they would organise impromptu visits to our camps, make us come outside and beat us up in front of the whole village, merely upon suspicion of our having killed game.

Baka may even have been killed during the forest guards' raids.

The example of the Dja Biosphere Reserve shows the disparity between the government's international commitments and its practices. By ratifying the CBD, the Government of Cameroon committed itself to *'protect and encourage the customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with conservation and sustainable use requirements'*. Yet the legal and regulatory instruments on use and customary rights do not allow these commitments to be honoured. This case study shows, however, that owing to their long-term experience of forest life, the Baka have developed traditional knowledge and practices which are compatible with the conservation and sustainable management of biological resources. Nonetheless, there is a great risk of seeing these practices disappear because of the enforced sedentary lifestyle and/or efforts to convert the Baka hunter-gatherers to farmers.

It is important that measures be taken to increase knowledge of forest peoples' customary use and traditional cultural practices, and promote these uses and practices in initiatives targeting the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources. Bahuchet (1999) recognised that:

When indigenous peoples are given the means of practising their lifestyles without any major constraints, they do not destroy the environment. If sufficient space is allotted to them, these people not only will not destroy the environment, but will become, ipso facto, its protectors.

7 Recommendations

Over the last two years, the local and indigenous communities living in the area around the forests of the Dja Reserve in Cameroon have been documenting their customary use of the forest through a project to evaluate the implementation of Article 10(c) of the CBD in the Congo Basin. This process has enabled these communities to document and map their use of the forest, and to begin recording their opinions of the forest management its impact on their livelihoods and rights. Evidence collected by the Baka hunter-gatherer communities demonstrates that Baka forest use in the Mekas region of the western part of Dja is:

- linked to the ancient forest culture, beliefs and rites of these communities;
- extensive, and overlaps with areas also sought after for forestry concessions as well as conservation organisations and agencies;
- directed towards satisfying their subsistence needs and this use is sustainable and non-intensive;
- adaptable, on the basis of a varying combination of uses: hunting, gathering and fishing on the one hand, and farming on the other.

These results mirror findings of numerous other studies carried out on the use of the forest by the Baka of Cameroon and the Central African sub-region.

This study, which was conducted specifically in the Mekas area, could find no evidence supporting the thesis that the Baka's traditional forest use is unsustainable. However, numerous inter-connected factors have brought about unsustainable practices both by users of the forest in general, and by certain Baka who seek to adapt to outside influences. These influences include: the monetarisation of exchange, forest zoning, increased sedentarisation, and conservation projects/initiatives, etc.

The direct impact of these pressures is the continued contempt for the Dja Reserve communities' traditional and sustainable forest use, as well as their customary rights, and an erosion of understanding and trust between the communities and the forest management. The consequent reduction in biodiversity protection is against the interests of all the stakeholders, including local and national agencies and NGOs, as well as the local communities whose livelihoods depend on their environment. These negative results run counter to the broader objectives of the CBD and in particular Article 10(c). Measures must therefore be taken to protect communities' rights, engender trust, and improve the protection of biodiversity as well as the communities' traditional and sustainable use rights. With a view to achieving all of these objectives, we make the following recommendations:

Generally:

1. Consult the local and indigenous communities – in an appropriate manner – about all development and conservation initiatives liable to affect them;
2. Stop the persecution of indigenous communities which forces them to leave their ancestral lands in order to settle in Bantu villages along the roadways. This leads to a culture of dependence, intensifies conflicts between the two communities and increases poverty.
3. Improve the implementation of existing laws in accordance with Article 10(c), including the provisions on promoting participation by the communities in development planning and in decision-making regarding changes to the forestry management plan.
4. Amend the laws that run counter to Article 10(c), including those regarding biological diversity.

Specifically:

1. Take into consideration the findings of this report in the development of management plans of the Dja Biosphere Reserve;
2. Support the communities to carry out studies of their forest use. These will serve to reduce conflicts and disagreement with the Dja Reserve's forestry management plans and those of other adjacent forests used by these communities;
3. Formally recognise and protect the traditional and sustainable use rights to the forest by the local and indigenous communities in the management plans of the Dja Reserve;
4. Review the legislation and regulations on wildlife protection and other enforcement laws with a view to protecting the Dja communities in accordance with Article 10(c);
5. Take measures to ensure there is dialogue with the communities during the development of management plans, and during the elaboration and implementation of development projects, particularly when these target the needs of the Baka people.

8 Bibliography

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9 Notes

¹ <http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/traditional/linkages.asp>. On the interconnection between Articles 8(j) and 10(c), see also <http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/traditional/what.asp>.

² Very approximate figures based on a census by Father Delhemmes in the 1970s. This population data needs to be updated urgently. Unfortunately the most recent general population census in Cameroon will not provide any more detail on the exact number of indigenous peoples in Cameroon because ethnic criteria were not taken into account during the counting.

³ The Bedzang, who live in a Savannah area, are said to be of Baka origin, which is why they keep drifting southwards.

⁴ On this subject, see *Les Chasseurs cueilleurs de RCA et du Cameroun* by Serges Bahuchet in collaboration with Daou Joiris
<http://www.uib.ac.be/soco/apft/GENERAL/PUBLICIT/RAPPORTS/RBAHUCH/BAHUCH4.HTM>

⁵ Research by Loung between 1983 and 1991, cited by Bigombe Logo in 'Les Pygmées et les programmes de développement au Cameroun, repenser les approches et responsabiliser les Pygmées' in *Mutations*, 17 August 2004

⁶ Field notes, interview with foret guard

⁷ Section 106 of the Law

⁸ Law No. 94-01 of 20 January 1994 Section 80

⁹ See Binam Bikoi (1998). *Le miel chez les Pygmées Baka de Djoum*.

¹⁰ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/407/>

¹¹ http://www.wcmc.org.uk/protected_areas/data/wh/dja.html

¹² See Nelson J (2004) *Conservation and communities in Central Africa. The need to secure indigenous rights and biodiversity*, Moreton-in-Marsh, Forest Peoples Project; and Tchoumba B (2005) *Peuples indigènes et tribaux et stratégies de réduction de la pauvreté au Cameroun*, BIT/CED 2005. Also see Nelson, J and L Hossack (eds) (2003)

¹³ See Articles 6,7 and 8 of Decree No. 95/466/PM of 20 July 1995 to lay down the conditions for the implementation of Wildlife Regulations

¹⁴ Indigenous Peoples and Protected Areas in Africa: From principles to practice. Community testimony from Cameroon. Video on CD, FPP, 2003

¹⁵ *Évaluation prospective du programme ECOFAC*. Marché de services n° 03/2002/RPR, Provisional report, February 2003

This report contextualises the situation in Cameroon and that of the four Baka communities who mapped their forest use for this case study. The study outlines the local administrative and socio-political situation, Baka beliefs and rituals, and their principal forest activities which are recorded in community maps of forest use. In particular, the study highlights the tension between communities' customary forest use and the objectives of conservation, which to date is associated by most local people with increasing control of their forests by outsiders, the loss of forest access through intimidation and even violence, increased poverty and declining security of livelihoods for the poorest of the poor.

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