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Community-Based Forest Management in Cameroon: Legal and Administrative Requirements, Implementation Challenges and Prospects for Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Community-based forest management plays an important role in promoting sustainable forest management, enhancing local participation in forest governance, conserving biological diversity and improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities. In Cameroon, the introduction of the concept of community forestry under Law No. 94/01 of 20 January 1994 to lay down Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries Regulations was intended to decentralize forest management by granting local communities access to and responsibility for managing forest resources. This initiative made Cameroon one of the first Congo Basin countries to legally recognize community forests. However, community forestry in Cameroon continues to face significant legal, administrative and financial challenges. Adopting an analytical and doctrinal legal research approach, this article examines the legal and administrative framework governing the exploitation of community forests in Cameroon, with particular attention to community forests in the Mount (Mt.) Cameroon region. It identifies the key requirements that must be fulfilled before exploitation may commence and analyses the constraints that hinder compliance, particularly lengthy administrative procedures, high transaction costs, inadequate technical and financial capacity, weak accountability mechanisms and elite capture of community forest resources and benefits. The article concludes by recommending legal, administrative and institutional reforms aimed at enhancing the effective implementation and long-term sustainability of community-based forest management in Cameroon.

Keywords: *Community Forest, Legal and Administrative Requirements, Exploitation, Challenges, Sustainability*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Cameroon has paid attention to environmental protection, with more emphasis on the sustainable management of forest resources. Regarding

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environmental commitments, the government of Cameroon is responsible for adopting and implementing international standards and codes of practice for sustainable forest management. Cameroon's Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 concerning the Management of the Environment, Law No. 94/01 of 20 January 1994 to lay down Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries Regulations,[1] and Decree No. 95/531/PM of 23 August 1995 on Forestry Regulations,[2] among others, have acknowledged the responsibility to protect environmental resources. Concerning forest resources, this can only be effective with the collaboration and participation of local communities, especially those living in or around forested areas.

In 1994, Cameroon became the first Congo Basin country to adopt the concept of community forest into its legal framework, through Law No. 94/01 of 20 January 1994 to lay down Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries Regulations.[3] The 1995 Forestry Decree defines a community forest as "a forest forming part of the non-permanent forest, which is covered by a management agreement between a village community and the forests administration. Management of such forests is the responsibility of the community concerned, with the help or technical assistance of the forest administration". Such a forest may not exceed 5000 ha, and the community undertakes sustainable forest management for a period of 25 years renewable.[4] Community forestry emerged as part of a policy reform process aimed at enabling better participation of local people in forest management, enhancing the contribution of forests to livelihoods and the economy and, above all, enhancing sustainable forest management. Community forests created a new form of forest management, so that local communities can gain immediate legal access to forest resources. For communities to be attributed a community forest, they need to fulfil a number of conditions, including constituting a legal entity and appointing a community forest management officer who shall represent them in negotiations with government in matters of community forestry. The legal entity to be constituted could be an association, a common initiative group, an economic interest group or a cooperative society. The concerned community also needs to delineate and map the intended community forest area, develop and submit a

[1] Law No. 94/01 of 20 January 1994 to Lay Down Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries Regulations (Cameroon), hereinafter the 1994 Forestry Law. The 1994 Forestry Law has been repealed and replaced by Law No. 2024/008 of 24 July 2024 to Lay Down Forestry and Wildlife Regulations (Cameroon). *See* RIGHTS AND RESOURCES INITIATIVE, LEGISLATION CITED AND LITERATURE CONSULTED: CAMEROON 1 (2025); Alain Fabrice Mfoulou et al., *Glimmers and Illusions of the Reform of the Law Governing Forest and Wildlife in Cameroon* 1 (Analysis Note, Nov. 2024).

[2] Decree No. 95/531/PM of 23 August 1995 to Determine the Conditions of Implementation of Forestry Regulations (Cameroon), hereinafter the 1995 Forestry Decree.

[3] Peter G. Veit & Katie Reytar, *Forest Cover Change in Community Forests: An Assessment of Outcomes in Five African Countries* 29 (AFRICAN BIODIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE GROUP 2021), https://abcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Community-Forests-Report_ABCG2021.pdf (last visited Feb. 20, 2024).

[4] 1995 Forestry Decree, *supra* note 2, arts. 3(11), 27(4); 1994 Forestry Law, *supra* note 1, § 37; Veit & Reytar, *supra* note 3, at 29.

simple management plan (SMP) for the first 5 years, and prepare and submit for government approval an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).[5]

Since 1994, the government of Cameroon has issued several legal reforms in an effort to address specific challenges and shortcomings in the 1994 Forestry Law so that community forestry can fulfil its objectives. The following reforms are particularly noteworthy because of their impact on promoting community forestry in Cameroon:[6]

- First, in 1997, the Cameroon government established the Community Forestry Management Unit to support the implementation of community forestry in the country. The State also created a Sub-Department of Community Forestry in the ministry in charge of forests, which helped institutionalize community forestry and anchor it in the broader forestry strategy in Cameroon.
- Secondly, in 1998, the Manual of the Procedures and Norms for the Management of Community Forestry was released by the State.[7] This document provides the rules and detailed procedures for community forestry, ranging from creation to management, including the conditions for timber exploitation.
- Thirdly, in 2001, the Cameroon government banned industrial logging in community forests through a Ministerial Circular of February 2001 and, in 2002, provided modalities and conditions for artisanal logging in community forests in Ministerial Decision No. 1985/D/MINEF/SG/CFC of 26 June 2002.[8]
- Next, the Cameroon government introduced the Environmental Impact Notice in lieu of the more costly Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as a requirement for the exploitation of community forests. The Environmental Impact Notice is now the main tool to ensure that the management activities of community forests do not lead to negative environmental consequences.
- In 2009, the Cameroon government introduced provisional management agreements. These allow communities to exploit their community forests for the first 2 years. They

[5] *See* MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTRY (MINEF), MANUAL OF THE PROCEDURES FOR THE ATTRIBUTION, AND NORMS FOR THE MANAGEMENT, OF COMMUNITY FORESTS (1998); Veit & Reytar, *supra* note 3, at 29.
[6] Veit & Reytar, *supra* note 3, at 29–30.
[7] MINEF, *supra* note 5.
[8] Luc Moutoni, *Community Forestry in Cameroon: An Overview of the Community Perspective* 11 (FOREST PEOPLES PROGRAMME 2019), https://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/default/files/documents/Community%20Forestry%20in%20Cameroon%20%E2%80%93%20WEB.pdf (last visited Apr. 10, 2023).

also allow communities to raise funds to develop the more costly and time-consuming Simple Management Plans.[9]

Under the 1994 Forestry Law, a good number of community forests have been established. There were more than 250 community forests in the country by 2015, and by 2019 the number had gone up to more than 430. By 2021, Cameroon could boast of over 600 community forests within its national territory.[10]

In recognizing the importance of involving local communities in sustainable forest management, the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development states in its principle 10 that "environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens".[11] This position is buttressed by principle 22 of the same Declaration, which recognizes that indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices.[12] Thus, States like Cameroon, a participant in the Conference that adopted the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, are expected to recognize and duly support the effective participation of local communities in the sustainable management of forest resources.

For its part, the 2003 African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (also referred to as the 2003 Maputo Convention on Nature and Natural Resources) encourages and promotes the sustainable management and conservation of forests. It requires its Parties to take the necessary measures to ensure the participation of local communities in the process of planning and management of the natural resources (of which forests constitute an essential component) upon which communities depend.[13] This is also in line with principle 22 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which emphasizes the role of local communities in environmental management.

The introduction of community forest management in Cameroon's 1994 Forestry Law is therefore in line with the aspirations of the Rio Declaration and the Maputo Convention. In this regard, section 37(1) of the 1994 Forestry Law states that:

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[9] MINISTRY OF FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE (MINFOF), MANUAL OF PROCEDURES FOR THE ATTRIBUTION AND NORMS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY FORESTS §§ 5.13, 5.13.1 (2009), https://carpe.umd.edu/sites/default/files/documentsarchive/Revised-Community_Forestry_manual_Eng_Cameroon_2009.pdf; Moutoni, *supra* note 8, at 11.

[10] Veit & Reytar, *supra* note 3, at 30.

[11] U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, princ. 10, U.N. Doc. A/CONF.151/5/Rev.1 (June 14, 1992).

[12] *Id.* princ. 22.

[13] African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (Revised) art. XVII, July 11, 2003.

> "The services in charge of forests shall, in order to promote the management of forest resources by village communities which so desire, give them assistance. An agreement shall then be signed between the two parties. The technical assistance thus given to the village communities shall be free of charge."[14]

The above provision implies that local communities within Cameroon interested in partaking in the sustainable management of forests through the concept of community forest can seek technical assistance from the forestry administration to enable them to achieve this objective. This position is further reinforced by the 1995 Forestry Decree, which stipulates that local communities which desire to partake in the conservation and management of forest resources through community forests in order to improve their livelihoods should converge under the umbrella of a legal personality in the form of an entity. This is to permit them to sign community forest management agreements with the government forestry authorities.[15]

Despite the successes in the creation of several community forests in Cameroon, most actors in the field, such as researchers, are of the view that community forests in Cameroon have not produced the desired results of improved livelihoods and improved forest management.[16] While some cases of community social and livelihood benefits have been recorded (for instance, in the Ngoume community, money from timber sales was used to build boreholes and start a kindergarten), evidence of real economic benefits is scarce.[17] This article therefore explores the administrative requirements for the exploitation of community forests in Cameroon, with particular attention to community forests in the Mt Cameroon region, in an attempt to investigate and address the constraints preventing community forest management from effectively realising its goals. Prospects for the sustainability of community forests in Cameroon are also examined.

II. RELEVANCE OF INVOLVING LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN FOREST MANAGEMENT

The introduction of the concept of community forest has often been associated with multiple objectives, but most policymakers and practitioners in the forestry sector are of the view that community forestry aims to deliver the following outcomes:

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[14] 1994 Forestry Law, *supra* note 1, § 37(1).
[15] 1995 Forestry Decree, *supra* note 2, art. 28(3).
[16] CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (CED), FERN, FOREST PEOPLES PROGRAMME, INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (IIED) & ASSOCIATION OKANI, *Community Forestry in Cameroon: A Diagnostic Analysis of Laws, Institutions, Actors and Opportunities* (IIED 2017), https://pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/G04191.pdf (last visited Feb. 18, 2024).
[17] Veit & Reytar, *supra* note 3, at 30.

- to protect the environment and preserve natural resources;
- to involve local people in the conservation and management of forest resources and improve forest conditions towards sustainable management (and, as a result, improved biophysical conditions and ecosystem services); and
- to enhance the living standards of those managing the forests (whether individuals, households, local groups or communities).[18]

Moreover, country- or project-specific community forest objectives may include combating poverty and inequity, empowering communities, supporting decentralization and devolution, advancing democracy, redressing deforestation and enhancing biological diversity conservation.[19] From these objectives, the following importance of community forestry can be deduced.

A. The significance of community forestry in biological diversity conservation

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), in article 2, defines biological diversity as "the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems."[20] The management of biological components is called biodiversity conservation. The involvement of local communities in forest management through the concept of community forestry has recorded success stories in biodiversity conservation in different parts of the world. The United Nations Environment Programme has recognized this role in Nepal.[21] Community forest management contributes to mitigating increasing forest degradation and addressing its negative impacts on rural livelihoods. In Nepal, biomass, forest cover, forest products, wild animals such as leopards, monkeys and birds, and other benefits from forest resources have increased due to community forestry management.[22] The purpose of involving local communities in forest management is not solely to conserve forest biodiversity but also to enable them to have legal access to the use of forest products to improve their livelihoods. In the course of using the forest for livelihood subsistence, local communities exercise traditional conservation practices that indirectly

[18] Don Gilmour, *Forty Years of Community-Based Forestry: A Review of Its Extent and Effectiveness* (FAO Forestry Paper No. 176, 2016), http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5415e.pdf (last visited Apr. 10, 2023); *see also* Veit & Reytar, *supra* note 3, at 1.
[19] Veit & Reytar, *supra* note 3, at 2.
[20] Convention on Biological Diversity art. 2, June 5, 1992, 1760 U.N.T.S. 79, https://www.cbd.int/convention/articles/?a=cbd-02 (last visited Apr. 10, 2023).
[21] Anup K.C., *Community Forestry Management and Its Role in Biodiversity Conservation in Nepal*, *in* GLOBAL EXPOSITION OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT (IntechOpen 2017), https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/52823 (last visited Apr. 10, 2022), https://doi.org/10.5772/65926.
[22] *Id.*

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contribute to the sustainability of the forest's ecosystem. In recognizing the role of traditional practices in the conservation of forest biological diversity, the 1992 CBD demands that each Contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate, and 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.[23]

B. Combating poverty and empowering local communities

Aside from the role of community forests in the conservation of biological diversity, community forestry empowers individuals, households, communities and local groups to engage in forest-related economic activities, enabling them to utilize the benefits from the forests to combat poverty and improve their livelihoods and standards of living. As such, involving local people in community forest management can create powerful incentives for communities to manage their forests in sustainable manners in order to empower themselves in the long term. Forest-based economic activities from community forests can be for subsistence or domestic purposes, cultural purposes, and/or commercial purposes. While community forestry initially focused on the extraction and marketing of non-timber forest products, countries like Cameroon and Liberia have introduced community forestry with an emphasis on timber harvesting,[24] which constitutes an important avenue for generating income to improve livelihoods and empower local communities.

Community forests further provide a wide range of medicinal plants, and about 80% of the rural population in Cameroon rely on traditional medicine harvested from local forests, a practice that has been in existence for over a century among West and Central African rural communities.[25] Cuny et al., in assessing local and decentralized forest management in Cameroon, reported a significant improvement in the socio-economic conditions of households with the advent of community forestry in Kongo village in the Lomié area of the East Region of Cameroon. Nurse et al. reported improvement in forest resources in the Kilum-Ijim forests of the North West Region of Cameroon as a result of community forest management.[26]

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[23] Convention on Biological Diversity, *supra* note 20, art. 8(j).
[24] Veit & Reytar, *supra* note 3, at 2; Moutoni, *supra* note 8.
[25] MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND PROTECTION OF NATURE (MINEP), CAMEROON FOURTH NATIONAL REPORT TO THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY 20 (2008), https://www.cbd.int/doc/world/cm/cm-nr-04-en.pdf.
[26] Pascal Cuny, A. Akem Ango & Z. A. Ondoa, *Local and Decentralized Forest Management in Cameroon: The Case of the Kongo Community Forest*, *in* A CUT FOR THE POOR 26 (Robert Oberndorf et al. eds., FAO & RECOFTC, RAP Publication 2007/09, 2007), https://www.fao.org/4/ag131e/ag131e09.htm; M. C. Nurse, C. R. McKay, J. T. Young & C. A. Asanga, *Biodiversity Conservation through Community Forestry in the Montane Forests of Cameroon* (RURAL DEVELOPMENT FORESTRY NETWORK, OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE 1995); *see also* Fru Delvis Ngang, *The Contribution of Community-Based Natural Resources Management to Livelihoods, Conservation and Governance in Cameroon: A Comparative Assessment of Three Community Forests in Fako*

C. The contribution of community forest in redressing deforestation and forest degradation

Studies have been conducted assessing the role of protected and community-managed forests in the long-term maintenance of forest cover in the tropics. Through a meta-analysis of published case studies, the researchers compared land use and cover change data for these two broad types of forest management and assessed their performance in maintaining forest cover. The case studies included 40 protected areas and 33 community-managed forests from the peer-reviewed literature. The results revealed that community-managed forests present lower and less variable annual deforestation rates than protected forests.[27]

In Cameroon, the indigenous Bakweri people of the Woteva village community, situated on the east foot of Mount Cameroon, are a clear example. Found in this village community is the Woteva Community Forest, approved in 2011.[28] Ever since its creation, the indigenous people of this village community have been planting trees, conserving and encouraging the regeneration of plant and animal species in the community forest. In 2014, the Chief and the indigenes of Woteva embarked on a project to plant 3,000 seedlings of endangered tree species in the Woteva Community Forest.[29] This was done to promote afforestation and discourage deforestation and forest degradation. This approach equally works for the conservation of the biodiversity potential of the area. It is interesting to note that the studies reporting success at reducing deforestation are found in Latin America, in indigenous reserves or community forest management implemented in indigenous areas, with studies from Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Panama, Guatemala and Nicaragua.[30]

D. Community forestry as a tool for decentralized governance

The adoption of the concept of community forest has received attention in popular development discourse as an effective policy mechanism for ensuring the increased participation of local

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Division 20 (June 2015) (Postgraduate Diploma thesis, Pan African Institute for Development–West Africa), https://web.archive.org/web/20190110220821/http://www.paidafrica.org/paidwa/images/data/FRU_DELVIS_NGANG_PGDDMG.pdf.

[27] Luciana Porter-Bolland et al., *Community Managed Forests and Forest Protected Areas: An Assessment of Their Conservation Effectiveness Across the Tropics*, 268 FOREST ECOLOGY & MGMT. 6 (2012), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foreco.2011.05.034.

[28] John, *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development in Woteva Village*, TREFF-END (2018), https://web.archive.org/web/20190815082613/http://treff-end.com/ecotourism-woteva-village/.

[29] John, *Six Hundred Additional Cedrela Mexicana Trees Planted in Woteva Village*, TREFF-END (2017), https://web.archive.org/web/20210625062228/http://treff-end.com/six-hundred-additional-cedrela-mexicana-trees-planted-woteva-village-august-2017/.

[30] Johanne Pelletier, Nancy Gélinas & Margaret Skutsch, *The Place of Community Forest Management in the REDD+ Landscape*, 7 FORESTS 170 (2016), https://www.mdpi.com/1999-4907/7/8/170/htm#B23-forests-07-00170 (last visited Mar. 20, 2024).

communities in forest decision-making and equity in benefit sharing.[31] Studies conducted in Gujarat, India, revealed an improvement in women's participation in forest management meetings, decision-making and other forest management activities.[32] Also, in the Luangwa Valley in Zambia, it has been reported that community forestry has led to a high level of participation in decision-making by villagers.[33]

However, there have been repeated instances of inequitable distribution of benefits and of embezzlement of local funds in community-based natural resource management, a situation which does not speak well for the sustainability of community forests. This is sometimes attributed to the role played by local elites in local resource governance, as in Botswana.[34] At the local level, benefits can be concentrated among traditional chiefs, the well-educated or the wealthy.[35] It is worth stating that, though women are often primary forest users, they usually participate much less than men in forest management and policy decisions. This is partly because cultural, socio-economic and institutional factors contribute to gender inequality in the forestry sector.[36]

In Cameroon, there are examples of community forest management institutions with records of misuse of funds, thereby undermining the potential of the revenues generated from community forestry as a collective incentive for forest conservation. The situation is especially glaring in the management of the Bimbia-Bonadikombo Community Forest. In a focus group discussion with the members of the Bimbia-Bonadikombo Natural Resource Management Council (BBNRMC), it was revealed that there was a lack of trust among the board members, especially those in the accounting department.[37] It was further pointed out that the general lack of trust was due to a lack of transparency, minimal accountability and limited information sharing among the board members and local communities.[38] This poses serious challenges to the management system of the BBNRMC. During another focus group discussion held with the union members, they admitted to losing trust in their leaders because money contributed to the "common funds"

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[31] M. C. Yufanyi Movuh & C. Schusser, *Power, the Hidden Factor in Development Cooperation: An Example of Community Forestry in Cameroon*, 2 OPEN J. FORESTRY 240 (2012); *see also* Fru, *supra* note 26, at 22.
[32] Fru, *supra* note 26, at 22.
[33] BARRY DALAL-CLAYTON & BRIAN CHILD, LESSONS FROM LUANGWA: THE STORY OF THE LUANGWA INTEGRATED RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, ZAMBIA 3 (IIED 2003).
[34] E. Rihoy & B. Maguranyanga, *Devolution and Democratisation of Natural Resource Management in Southern Africa: A Comparative Analysis of CBNRM Policy Processes in Botswana and Zimbabwe* 2 (Centre for Applied Social Sciences & Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies 2007); *see also* Fru, *supra* note 26, at 22–23.
[35] Fru, *supra* note 26, at 23.
[36] FOOD & AGRIC. ORG. OF THE U.N., *Towards Food Security and Improved Nutrition* 8 (2013).
[37] Regina Edawa Nyambi Anaka, *Forest Conservation and Management Practices in Cameroon: Case Study of Bimbia-Bonadikombo Community Forest and Takamanda National Park* 166 (2018) (Ph.D. thesis, Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg), https://doi.org/10.26127/BTUOpen-5011.
[38] *Id.*

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for the running of the community forest was misused with no accountability.[39] Because of this, the union members suggested that women should be more involved in the board of the BBNRMC, in the belief that women are somewhat more accountable and transparent than men. There is therefore a need to combat the constraints associated with local and decentralized forest governance to boost sustainable forestry at the local level.

III. ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS PRIOR TO THE EXPLOITATION OF COMMUNITY FORESTS IN CAMEROON

The forest of the Mt Cameroon region is dominated by restricted areas such as, but not limited to, community forests and the popular Mt Cameroon National Park, which harbours a good deal of forest. Some of the major community forests identified within this region include the Bimbia-Bonadikombo Community Forest,[40] the Bakingili Community Forest[41] and the Woteva Community Forest.[42] Before these community forests undergo any form of exploitation, the following preliminary activities are required by law to be carried out by the communities concerned. This permits the government to monitor the exploitation process in order to ensure sustainable forest management.

A. Exploitation inventory or forest use inventory

The 1995 Forestry Decree is to the effect that the use of any forest shall be subject to a forest use inventory, the cost of which shall be borne by the holder of the forestry operating licence.[43] Where forest use inventories are carried out by the licence holders, the results shall be checked and approved by the Forests Administration.[44] In the case of the exploitation of a community forest, a forest use inventory is needed as well. In this light, Article 41(1) and (2) of the 1995 Forestry Decree, in describing a forest inventory, provides that:

> "A forest inventory shall consist of an evaluation of forestry resources in order to make plans for their management. Based on the objectives pursued in the forest concerned, there shall be forest management inventories and forest use inventories."

[39] *Id.* at 167.
[40] The Bimbia-Bonadikombo Community Forest (BBCF) is situated in the eastern part of Limbe, a biodiversity hotspot in the South West Region of Cameroon.
[41] Bakingili village and its community forest are situated on the slopes of the southern part of Mt Cameroon and close to the boundary of the proposed Mount Cameroon National Park. The village is located 22 km along the highway from Limbe to Idenau and is described as the gateway into the West Coast District. Bakingili shares a close boundary with the sea, which makes maritime travel in and out of the village very frequent. *See* Suinyuy D. Ngoran, *Unpinning Village Development in Cameroon: The Case of Bakingili Village* (2008) (research paper), https://www.grin.com/document/268072 (last visited Mar. 6, 2023).
[42] Woteva village community is situated on the east foot of Mount Cameroon, at an altitude ranging from 650 to more than 1300 m above sea level. John, *supra* note 28.
[43] 1995 Forestry Decree, *supra* note 2, art. 50(1).
[44] *Id.* art. 50(2).

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From a reading of the above provision, it is clear that forest use or exploitation inventories are supposed to be undertaken in community forests to permit the evaluation of the forest resources and to make plans for their proper management. In this regard, a forest use inventory shall consist of an exhaustive listing of all the commercial species in the community forest or with regard to a specific geographical area.[45] Through the inventory, an estimated total of the number of wildlife species found in the community forest is made known before their exploitation and subsequent commercialization. The community concerned (licence holder) bears the cost of the exploitation or forest use inventory.[46] The inventory may also be carried out by development projects, NGOs or the local staff of the forestry administration, together with or on behalf of the community.[47]

During a forest use inventory, all the species of timber, non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and wildlife found in the community forest are listed. The exploitable NTFPs are listed according to species, and the animals observed, or any signs of their existence, are noted. The names of these products and the number identified or estimated are recorded in the inventory register. All these qualitative and quantitative details are to enable the forestry administration to follow up the rational and sustainable management of the forest resources, as provided for in article 42 of the 1995 Forestry Decree. The results of this survey may cause the forestry administration to mark as reserved any tree within an area to be exploited if it is considered useful for conservation and regeneration purposes.[48] The purpose is to avoid indiscriminate felling, which may be disastrous to the forest ecosystem. When the forest use inventory or exploitation inventory has to be paid for by the exploiter, such a clause is to be stated clearly in the contract between the community and the exploiter. Where forest use inventories are carried out, the accuracy of the results shall be checked and approved by the Forestry Administration.[49] This will enable the forestry authorities to ensure that the exploitation is detrimental neither to the community financially nor to the forest ecologically.

The exploitation inventory is the second inventory carried out in the forest. The first, referred to as the forest inventory (or forest management inventory), is required before the community forest is created.[50] In the course of the forest inventory, all species of timber, wildlife and NTFPs, with their names (both common and scientific), found in the concerned forest are recorded in an inventory register. In fact, all the information required during the exploitation or forest use

[45] 1995 Forestry Decree, *supra* note 2, art. 43(1).
[46] MINFOF, *supra* note 9, § 7.2.10.1; 1995 Forestry Decree, *supra* note 2, art. 29(2).
[47] MINFOF, *supra* note 9, § 7.2.10.
[48] 1994 Forestry Law, *supra* note 1, § 43.
[49] 1995 Forestry Decree, *supra* note 2, art. 50(2).
[50] *Id.* arts. 29(2), 41(2).

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inventory is obtained during the forest inventory or forest management inventory. The inventories are costly and require expertise which local communities can hardly afford. This constitutes a drawback in the exploitation of community forests, and it would be cheaper for the community if the forest inventory could equally be used for the purpose of the exploitation inventory, at least for a reasonable number of years following the creation of the community forest. This would enable the community to raise funds capable of carrying out the subsequent inventories relevant for the exploitation of its community forest.[51]

B. Duty to conduct environmental impact assessment (EIA)

Another requirement by law prior to the exploitation of a community forest has been the need to carry out an EIA. Community forests, just like other forests, constitute natural resources and ecosystem services that comprise essential life-supporting functions for humans through the provision of items such as, but not limited to, clean water, food and shelter. These elements are indispensable for livelihood subsistence. To safeguard these benefits, it is important always to carry out an EIA when the need arises.

EIA is "singularly important in both domestic and international environmental law", as a regulatory mechanism to ensure the sustainability of forest resources. International instruments today "commonly provide that states should not undertake or authorize activities without prior consideration, at an early stage, of their environmental effects".[52] This is because EIA "seeks to ensure that adequate and early information is obtained on likely environmental consequences of development projects, on possible alternatives, and on measures to mitigate harm". EIA procedures generally require the initiator of the project to submit a written document to fully inform the decision-making body and the public of the potential environmental impact, the mitigating measures for reducing the impact and the alternatives for achieving similar goals. As Shelton and Kiss observe, "[a]n adequate and rigorous consideration of alternatives is at the heart of the EIA decision-making process. The study must produce sufficient information to permit a reasonable choice of alternatives as far as environmental consequences are concerned. Where decisions are made purely on economic and technical grounds without regard to environmental costs and benefits, the EIA may be rejected as seriously flawed."[53]

[51] Mbetiji Michel Mbetiji, *Participatory Forest Management: The Case of Community Forest under Cameroonian Law* 189 (2012) (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Dschang).
[52] DINAH SHELTON & ALEXANDRE KISS, JUDICIAL HANDBOOK ON ENVIRONMENTAL LAW 38 (U.N. Env't Programme 2005).
[53] *Id.*

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i. International demand for EIA

There are several international environmental legal instruments which advocate EIA. In this light, the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development fully recognizes EIA when it states that "[e]nvironmental impact assessment, as a national instrument, shall be undertaken for proposed activities that are likely to have a significant adverse impact on the environment and are subject to a decision of a competent national authority".[54] Furthermore, Article 11 of the World Charter for Nature (1982) provides for the deployment of the best available technology, together with the assessment of activities which may disturb nature, to minimize risk and other adverse effects on the environment. This requirement is also restated by the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in the following words:

> "Each Contracting Party, as far as possible and as appropriate, shall: (a) Introduce appropriate procedures requiring environmental impact assessment of its proposed projects that are likely to have significant adverse effects on biological diversity with a view to avoiding or minimizing such effects and, where appropriate, allow for public participation in such procedures".[55]

It can be deduced from the above provision that the importance of EIA should never be undermined in the management of biodiversity or environmental resources, of which forests constitute an essential component. For it has not only been prescribed by most soft-law and hard-law instruments of a global character which Cameroon has pledged to support, but has also been domesticated into the national legislation of Cameroon.

ii. National demand for EIA

The mandatory requirement for EIA has been incorporated in the 1994 Forestry Law. It provides that "[t]he initiation of any development project that is likely to perturb a forest or aquatic environment shall be subject to a prior study of the environmental hazard."[56] Therefore, the initiation of any development project within a community forest in the Mt Cameroon region likely to perturb the forest or its aquatic environment shall be subject to a prior EIA. This requirement is also reasserted by the 1995 Forestry Decree, to the effect that, in the case of a development project which is likely to lead to disturbance in a forest or to its destruction, a preliminary environmental impact assessment shall be carried out by the applicant according to the rules laid down by the Ministry of Environment, in order to determine the special steps to

[54] Rio Declaration, *supra* note 11, princ. 17.
[55] Convention on Biological Diversity, *supra* note 20, art. 14(1)(a).
[56] 1994 Forestry Law, *supra* note 1, § 16(2).

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be taken to ensure the conservation, development or, where appropriate, recovery of natural resources.[57]

Furthermore, Cameroon, in a bid to embrace the wind of environmental change in the early 1990s, incorporated EIA as a mandatory requirement in its 1996 Environmental Law.[58] To this end, article 17(1) of this law specifically provides that:

> "The promoter or owner of any development, labour, equipment or projects which may endanger the environment owing to its dimension, nature or the impact of its activities on the natural environment shall carry out an impact assessment, pursuant to the prescription of the specification. The assessment shall determine the direct or indirect incidence of the said project on the ecological balance of the zone where the plant is located or any other region, the physical environment and quality of life of population and the impact on the environment in general."

This law provides that the impact assessment shall necessarily comprise the following five indications: an analysis of the initial state of the site and its environment; the reasons for the choice of the site; an evaluation of the foreseeable consequences of the project for the site and its natural and human environment; the measures envisaged to eliminate, reduce and, if possible, offset the harmful consequences of the project, with an estimate of their cost; and a presentation of the other possible solutions and of the reasons why, from the standpoint of environmental protection, the project was chosen.[59] The 1996 Environmental Law, however, incorporated EIA requirements as a general obligation without providing all the needed details on its implementing procedures. To fill this lacuna, it was not until 2005 that a Prime Ministerial Decree[60] fixing the modalities for the realization of EIA was signed.[61] Regardless of the importance of EIA, it took about 10 years for an enabling decree fixing the modalities for the realization of EIA to be signed. The decree stipulated that EIA should be carried out with the participation of local communities and is required for the sustainable management of natural resources, such as the exploitation of community forests[62] and other forests, which may have adverse effects on the ecosystem. The Decree also lays down the process and the procedural

[57] 1995 Forestry Decree, *supra* note 2, art. 110(1).
[58] Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 concerning the Management of the Environment (Cameroon), art. 17(1), hereinafter the 1996 Environmental Law.
[59] 1996 Environmental Law, *supra* note 58, art. 19(2).
[60] Decree No. 2005/0577/PM of 23 February 2005 Fixing the Modalities for the Realisation of Environmental Impact Assessments (Cameroon).
[61] This Decree was supplemented by Ministerial Order No. 0070/MINEP of 22 April 2005 defining the different categories of operations whose realisation is subject to an environmental impact assessment, and Order No. 00001/MINEP of 13 February 2007 defining the general content of the terms of reference for environmental impact assessments.
[62] Decree No. 2005/0577/PM, *supra* note 60, art. 11.

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framework governing EIA for any development project that has the potential to inflict harm on the environment, making it applicable to any logging activity within a community forest in the Mt Cameroon region.

The 2005 Decree was replaced by Decree No. 2013/0171/PM to lay down rules for conducting environmental and social impact studies. The 2013 Decree introduced Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as tools for environmental assessment, which must be carried out by any promoter or owner of any development project or establishment under pain of the sanctions envisaged in the law in force.[63]

Outside the Mt Cameroon region, Mbetiji identified the Ndissi-Ekeb Cultural and Development Association (NDECUDE) and the Rural Environmental Poverty and Alleviation Common Initiative Group (REPA CIG) as exploiting community forests without ever having carried out EIA in those forests.[64] The Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development controls the carrying out of EIA, but it is not involved in the creation and management of community forests. It should be understood that if EIA is absent in the exploitation of community forests and other forests, it threatens the ecosystem services of the forest and its livelihood potential, contrary to the very objectives for the creation of community forests.

C. The presentation of an annual plan of operation

Prior to the exploitation of community forests, the local community, with the assistance of the forestry administration, prepares a detailed annual plan of operation.[65] This requirement is in line with article 71(1) of the 1995 Forestry Decree, which states that, in accordance with the management plan and on the basis of a forest exploitation or use inventory, the concession holder shall each year draw up a plan of operations which shall be submitted to the forest administration (the Divisional Delegate). The plan presents all the activities to be carried out in the course of the year so as to facilitate the follow-up of the operations scheduled in the five-year simple management plan (SMP) within the life of the community forest.[66] Generally, the annual plan of operation for the first year is always attached to the SMP of the community forest. This procedure permits the forestry administration not only to be informed of forest

[63] Decree No. 2013/0171/PM of 14 February 2013 to Lay Down Rules for Conducting Environmental and Social Impact Studies (Cameroon).
[64] Mbetiji, *supra* note 51, at 190.
[65] 1995 Forestry Decree, *supra* note 2, art. 96(2).
[66] A community forest has a life span of at least 25 years, but its Simple Management Plan is revised every five years.

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developments within community forests but also to facilitate monitoring and control, approving or disapproving the proposed plan of operation. These checks and balances are to ensure the sustainable management of community forests within the Mt Cameroon region. Thus, the procedure ensures that the local community exploits the forest for sustained production without jeopardizing the potential of the forest for future exploitation.

At the end of the year, at least one month before the expiry of the current plan of operation, the forest management officer (FMO), with the assistance of local MINFOF officials, prepares and submits to the Divisional Delegate the plan of operation for the next year of the five-year action programme, in line with the SMP and the Management Agreement.[67] After receipt of these documents, the Divisional Delegate issues the community a dated receipt and within fifteen days forwards copies of the annual plan of operation to the Regional Delegate. This process permits the Regional Delegate not only to be informed of developments in the community forest but also to participate by checking, approving or disapproving the plan. The Regional Delegate has thirty days to approve the annual plan of operation or give reasons for its rejection.[68] If the plan is approved, the forestry administration will then issue an annual exploitation certificate to the local community to commence exploitation.[69]

It is regrettable that irregularity in the submission of annual plans of operation and delay in the approval of these plans make monitoring and control activities difficult for the forestry administration, since it is on the basis of these plans that the forestry administration controls the activities carried out in community forests within the Mt Cameroon region.

D. Annual certificate of exploitation

The annual certificate of exploitation is a document issued by MINFOF on the proposal of the local forestry administration (Divisional Delegate) authorizing the community to exploit forest resources.[70] This implies that, without this certificate, the local community cannot commence exploitation based on its SMP. The aim of this document is to ensure that the local community respects the SMP. In order to issue this certificate, the Divisional Delegate must be satisfied that the exploitation carried out within the community forest will conform to the SMP, thus guaranteeing sustainable forest management.[71]

[67] MINFOF, *supra* note 9, § 8.2.2.1.
[68] *Id.*
[69] 1995 Forestry Decree, *supra* note 2, art. 71(1).
[70] *Id.*
[71] Mbetiji, *supra* note 51, at 193.

For this document to be issued, the local community, in accordance with the SMP and on the basis of a forest exploitation inventory, shall each year draw up a plan of operation which shall be submitted to the forest administration, and once the plan is approved, the forest administration shall issue an annual operations permit to the local concession holder.[72] The authorization to exploit takes the form of a certificate known as an annual certificate of exploitation. This document permits the forestry administration to know exactly when exploitation by the local community commences, and this in turn enhances monitoring and control by the forestry administration. Again, for the certificate to be issued the following year, the Divisional Delegate must be satisfied that the exploitation carried out in the previous year was in compliance with the SMP, and this guarantees sustainable forest management.

E. Notification of commencement of activities

The exploitation of a community forest cannot be commenced without written notification to the forestry administration. This notification is important because it permits the forestry officials to know exactly when activities began in the forest. This helps them to monitor the activity, to see how exploitation is carried out and the difficulties encountered in the exploitation.[73] Thus, this serves to enhance control by the forestry administration.

F. Annual report of activities

Where community forests are exploited, the 1995 Forestry Decree requires that reports be made at the end of each year to the forest administration regarding the forest exploitation operations.[74] These reports are drafted by the community forest management officer (FMO), with the assistance and collaboration of the local forestry administrative official, following the format provided by the forestry administration. This report is important because it permits the forestry administrative officials to monitor the activities carried out in the community forest, thus enhancing sustainable forest management. It is on the basis of this report that the forestry administration may renew, or decide to annul, a community forest Management Agreement if the exploitation does not conform to the requirements of the SMP.

Despite its relevance, the absence of credible annual reports from communities renders control by the forest administration difficult. Some community forests have never presented a single annual report since their creation,[75] while others have been irregular with their reports. An example in the Mt Cameroon region is the BBCF, which was created in 2002 and submitted its

[72] 1995 Forestry Decree, *supra* note 2, art. 71(1).
[73] MINFOF, *supra* note 9, § 7.3.3.
[74] 1995 Forestry Decree, *supra* note 2, art. 96(2).
[75] Mbetiji, *supra* note 51, at 195.

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first annual report only in 2007.[76] Outside the Mt Cameroon region, there is the Tinto Clan community forest, which was also created in 2002 but only submitted its first annual report in 2007.[77] Unfortunately, these community forests have not been sanctioned for not submitting annual reports.[78] This laxity of the forestry administration in requesting and evaluating the authenticity of annual reports is a clear indication that the government is not effectively participating in community forest management, as it is not enforcing the laws and regulations on its exploitation.

IV. KEY CONSTRAINTS IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE EXPLOITATION OF COMMUNITY FORESTS

The major challenges identified as hindering compliance with the legal requirements for the utilization of community forests revolve around the lengthy, complicated and costly administrative procedure for the exploitation of community forests.

After successfully getting the approval to run a community forest, one would think that the concerned community would dive into deriving the benefits that come with its creation with little or no encumbrance. However, this is not the case, as the procedure for the exploitation of a community forest is long, complicated and financially expensive, thus constituting a disincentive to local communities interested in managing community forests. The lack of finance, especially of start-up capital, and the lack of management skills have resulted in communities partnering with non-governmental organizations, logging companies and other external entities to help navigate and complete the procedure to formally acquire a community forest.[79] For instance, prior to the exploitation of a community forest, the concerned community is required to carry out an exploitation inventory, which is financially demanding. Also, the local community concerned must respect preliminary requirements for exploitation, such as providing an annual plan of operation, an annual certificate of exploitation, a notification of commencement of activity and annual reports. However, these documents are hardly produced, even though they are needed by the forestry administration to enhance sustainable forest management.[80] This could be due to the administrative bottlenecks involved in the process of obtaining them. For instance, in more than six years of its existence, only two annual reports could be traced for the BBNRMC of the Bimbia-Bonadikombo Community Forest by 2012.[81]

[76] *Id.*
[77] *Id.*
[78] *Id.*
[79] Veit & Reytar, *supra* note 3, at 30.
[80] Mbetiji, *supra* note 51, at 291.
[81] *Id.*

Furthermore, before timber is exploited in a community forest, the exploitation should be subject to titles such as sales of standing volume, forest exploitation permits and individual felling authorizations, which are complicated for the local community to obtain. More so, the signing of a "Way Bill" in order to legally transport forest products further constitutes a serious barrier, as it needs the decisional involvement of several local-level officials of MINFOF. Even though the importance of Way Bills cannot be undermined in regulating forest exploitation, they constitute obstacles in the exploitation of community forests.[82] This is because some communities with community forests have been unable to commence exploitation since they were created, owing to the non-delivery of Way Bills, which requires long and complicated procedures; these procedures, fraught with administrative bottlenecks, hold communities back from exploitation.[83] For instance, the Cooperative des Planteurs de la Lekie (C.O.P.A.L), a cooperative society in the Centre Region created in 2002 to manage a community forest, only had its Way Bills for the first time in 2009. Again, each year it is necessary to renew the certificate of exploitation in order to permit the concerned community to exploit the community forest the following year. High transaction costs have also been identified by Mbile et al.[84] along the marketing chain of the products derived from the exploitation of community forests.

This long procedure for the exploitation of community forests supposedly acts as a disincentive to local communities operating community forests in the Mt Cameroon region, such as the Bimbia-Bonadikombo community, the Woteva community and the Bakingili village community, as well as to those which aspire to operate community forests. This might give avenues for corrupt practices, the likely consequence being the capture of the community forest by elite members of the community who may provide funds for the creation of the community forest and later confiscate all the financial benefits and all the market rights. In doing so, they tend to obtain portions of the forest and exploit the forest as their "private property" without respecting the Simple Management Plan, thus paving the way for forest degradation.[85] A clear example reported by Mbetiji from the Southwest Region of Cameroon is the case of the Rural Environmental Poverty and Alleviation Common Initiative Group (REPA CIG), financed by a sole elite with the sum of about 15 million FCFA on the understanding that the creditor was to exploit the forest until he recovered his money before handing it over to the community.[86] From

[82] *Id.* at 206.
[83] *Id.*
[84] P. Mbile et al., *Alternate Tenure and Enterprise Models in Cameroon: Community Forests in the Context of Community Rights and Forest Landscapes* 1, 5 (World Agroforestry Centre & Rights and Resources Initiative 2009).
[85] P. Auzel & P. Nchoji Nkwi, *La foresterie communautaire dans le sud du Cameroun: état du processus, acteurs impliqués et perspectives* 7 (FUSAGx & Université de Yaoundé I 1999).
[86] Mbetiji, *supra* note 51, at 288.

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the annual report of this community forest in 2008, close to 25 million FCFA was generated,[87] meaning that the creditor ought to have recovered the money spent and handed over the excess and the management of the forest to the local community. Unfortunately, this was not the reality.[88] This situation creates a negative impression of the involvement of elites in the creation and exploitation of community forests and renders the decentralization of sustainable forest management fragmented.[89]

Apart from the lengthy, complicated and costly administrative procedure for the exploitation of community forests, another constraint hindering the progress of community forestry in Cameroon is connected to governance challenges: weak accountability mechanisms, elite capture of community forest benefits, and power struggles between community forest managers, traditional authorities and local government officials. Institutional formats for the management of community forests are equally problematic and lack clarity.[90] With respect to the management of community forests in the Mt Cameroon region, the legal entity required by article 28(3) of the 1995 Forestry Decree to sign a community forest management agreement could be an Association, a Common Initiative Group (CIG), an Economic Interest Group (EIG) or a Cooperative Society.[91] Unfortunately, these legal entities are new to the indigenous and local people of Cameroon and are governed by rules and motives not intended for the conservation of community forests. As such, the legal entities are not endowed with the needed indigenous knowledge, nor are their practices suited to represent indigenous and local communities in the management of community forests as recommended by article 8(j) of the 1992 CBD.

V. Conclusion and Defining a Path for the Sustainability of Community Forestry in Cameroon

On the basis of the above findings, the study finds that community forestry is very instrumental in contributing to forest conservation and governance, especially from the grassroots level. Though community forestry has not produced the desired results for the livelihoods of some community members, the benefits that proper management would have on the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities cannot be undermined. The benefits range from combating

[87] *Id.*
[88] *Id.*
[89] P. R. Oyono, *Forest Management, Systemic Crisis and Policy Change: Socio-Organisational Roots of Ecological Uncertainties in the Cameroon's Model* 2 (CIFOR 2002) (paper prepared for the World Resources Institute Workshop on Decentralisation and Environment, Bellagio, Italy).
[90] Veit & Reytar, *supra* note 3, at 30.
[91] MINFOF, *supra* note 9, § 3.1.

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poverty and empowering local communities to the conservation of biological diversity for the benefit of present and future generations, as well as redressing deforestation and forest degradation. Through community forestry, local communities have a chance to secure greater participation in forest governance. Nonetheless, the study notes that the management of community forests is not devoid of several constraints that hinder forest sustainability. Thus, on the basis of the study's findings, the following recommendations are made to improve the sustainable management of community forests in Cameroon:

- The study finds that the procedure involved in the creation and exploitation of community forests is too lengthy and complicated, coupled with high financial demands, which cannot easily be met by the concerned communities without external financial assistance from elites and sometimes NGOs. This situation gives room to some elites who invest huge sums of money in the creation of community forests in the form of loans and end up transforming the forests into "personal businesses". It is therefore submitted that, for the effective participation of local communities in sustainable forest management, the cost of compiling the application file for the creation and exploitation of community forests should be subsidized by the government.
- Also, when loans are granted by elites to local communities facing financial constraints in creating and managing community forests, the modalities of repayment should be clearly laid down in a manner that will not be detrimental to the sustainable management of the forest. When this is done, it will protect communities from elites who would take advantage of the heavy financial cost to provide funds and later enrich themselves to the detriment of the sustainability of the forest.
- It is further submitted that the State should make it obligatory for traditional rulers (local chiefs) to endorse the application files in the creation and exploitation of community forests. Such a mechanism will also limit the corrupt practices of intruders in the creation and management of community forests.
- Though the Cameroon Land Ordinance No. 74-1 of 6 July 1974 maintains that the State is the guardian of all lands, traditional authorities have continued to exercise de facto rights over land. The colonial-like land tenure situation, where the State is the guardian of all land, coupled with the provisions of the 1994 Forestry Law that reserve to communities only access and usage rights to community forests for a duration of 25 years (renewable), leaves local communities lacking the enthusiasm to fully embrace participatory forestry. There is thus a need for a new land tenure policy that augments

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the deficiencies of the existing legal mechanisms in order to improve participatory forestry.[92]

- As in the agricultural sector, where a strong agricultural extension policy framework is usually adopted, a similar mechanism in the forest sector could be designed and implemented in line with the needs of forest-dependent communities. Within the context of community forestry, such an extension policy framework, if well adopted and executed, will enable forest users, community forest management officers and Village Forest Management Committees to be trained in sustainable forest exploitation and management techniques.[93]
- It is submitted that the government should institute a quota policy that will require a certain proportion of representatives of traditionally marginalized populations, such as women and non-indigenes, on the management board or committee responsible for managing community forests. This will serve as a strategy for the needs and expectations of this important social stratum to be incorporated into the community forest management agenda.[94]
- As Fru recommends, "[i]llegal timber and non-timber forest products exploitation is one of the major threats to the sustainability of community forests. Given that communities lack the man-power and or technical capacity to effectively patrol the community forest on a regular bas[is] and MINFOF patrols are one-off and sporadic, there is a need for a community-wide patrol team, to be composed of members of all the households in the community. This community-level control and monitoring brigade will serve as a deterrent to illegal exploiters of forests resources."[95]

In conclusion, the effective and sustainable management of community forests in Cameroon depends not merely on the legal recognition of local communities' rights to participate in forest governance but also on the existence of an accessible, transparent and effectively enforced legal and administrative framework governing forest exploitation. As demonstrated in this study, the lengthy and costly administrative procedures, inadequate financial and technical capacity, weak institutional accountability and elite capture of community forest resources constitute significant obstacles to achieving the objectives of community forestry, particularly within the Mt Cameroon region. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort by the government, local communities, traditional authorities and other relevant stakeholders. In

[92] Fru, *supra* note 26, at 69.
[93] *Id.* at 69–70.
[94] *Id.* at 70.
[95] *Id.* at 70–71.

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particular, simplifying the procedures for the creation and exploitation of community forests, providing financial and technical support to local communities, strengthening accountability mechanisms, recognizing the role of traditional authorities, promoting the participation of women and other marginalized groups and improving community-level monitoring and control of forest activities are essential measures. Ultimately, the sustainability of community forestry in Cameroon will depend on the extent to which the existing legal and institutional framework translates the principle of decentralized forest management into meaningful community participation, equitable benefit-sharing and responsible exploitation of forest resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

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