

Title: Environmental Governance Arrangements for Sustainable Management of Non-Wood Forest Products in the Humid Forest Zone of Southern Cameroon

SUMMARY REPORT SUBMITTED TO CARPE, July 31, 2003

(a) Project Number: No 9F071105

GA 37 – Funding level: \$ xxxx

Funding source: CARPE

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(c) Introduction:

As the extraction of Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFPs) for commercial purposes increases, there is a need to understand traditional management systems and how they are changing with the increasing pressure, and to look for new governance arrangements that will ensure sustainability of the resources. Characteristics that indicate the level of social capital and capacity for management are examined as indicators of the social learning potential of resource user groups. An assessment of resource extraction methods and perceived extent of resource degradation for two NWFP species was also carried out. The relationship of community level stakeholders to external stakeholders was also examined. Ultimately the research will contribute to knowledge of how traditional governance arrangements can be adapted to address changing circumstances, enhance livelihoods and strengthen indigenous forest resource management and conservation.

(d) Objectives:

The overall goal of the research is to identify potential localized governance arrangements that will improve or enhance the sustainability of the management system for identified commercial NWFP species in southern Cameroon. During the first Phase of the research for which funding was granted, the objectives were to identify research communities on the basis of the levels of extraction and marketing of the target species with communities of high and low volume of harvest and trade being included. Each research community would have a Community Forest governed by a management committee. Stakeholders involved in the harvest, trade and management of identified

NWFP species were to be identified. Data collection was to begin on the level of social capital and capacity of community level stakeholder groups and the formal or informal rules governing the harvest of the targeted NWFP species. Data on harvesting methodologies and qualitative assessment of trends in degradation of the two species was also to be collected.

(e) Summary of Activities Conducted:

The researcher left for Cameroon on May 21 arriving in Yaoundé, Cameroon on May 22, 2003. The departure for field research was three weeks later than originally planned due to the delay in receiving confirmation of funding from CARPE.

Identification of Research Communities: In consultation with the Center for International Forest Research (CIFOR), low and high volume of trade areas for the targeted NWFP species were identified. Information on the location of Community Forests in those areas was obtained from the Ministry of the Environment and Forests (MINEF). Document research as well as consultations with researchers at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Institut de Recherche Agricole pour le Développement (IRAD) and the Botany Department of the University of Yaoundé were carried out to obtain information on the presence of the target species in the prospective research areas.

The area of high volume of trade in *Gnetum sp.* was found to be in Central province, particularly Lekie Division. There is only one designated Community Forest in the present high commercial area for *Gnetum sp.* and while it has been reserved as a Community Forest it is not yet attributed according to the MINEF process as a legalized Community Forest. Due to the long process required to legalize a Community Forest there is a backlog of applications at the government ministry and this limited the choice of research communities. Therefore, it was necessary to choose this forest as a study area although it has not yet reached the point of attribution and hence exploitation.

This Community Forest is administered by a cooperative, Cooperative des Paysans de la Lekie (COPAL) which is comprised of representatives from the 6 villages containing the Community Forest as well as other interested members. Two villages from this Community Forest were identified as high areas of sale of *Gnetum sp.* by wholesalers of the product. Therefore two villages, Womkoa and Nkol-bogo III in the Groupement of Nkol-bogo, Zone of Sa'a, Lekie Division were chosen as research communities. Although not part of the Community Forest, the village of Nkol-bogo I was also chosen as a research community due to its proximity to the chosen villages and contrasting situation of being a high commercial area for the target species but no longer having any primary forest. Primary forest in this area is defined as forest that has been allowed to regrow for at least 30 years. The enthusiasm for the research of the local chief of the Groupement in Nkol-bogo I, also contributed to its inclusion in the study.

The contrasting situation of low trade in NWFPs and the presence of Community Forests is found in Eastern province near the town of Lomié. Two villages which have attributed

and working Community Forests and low volume of trade in NWFPs are Kongo and Ngola which are located on a main road into the primary rainforest at 33 and 45 km respectively from Lomié. Research has not yet begun in the low commercial areas.

Identification of Research Species:

In the original application, two plant species, *Gnetum sp.* and *Irvingia sp.*, important sources of commercial products for local communities, were identified for study. Although *Gnetum sp.* was retained as a target research species, the choice was made to switch to *Ricinodendron heudelotii* as the contrasting species. It is comparable to *Irvingia sp.* in also being commercially important, with the nuts being exploited and used as a condiment, and less vulnerable to over-exploitation due to its differing ecology from *Gnetum sp.*. This change was made due to the fact that *Irvingia sp.* is not commonly found in the research villages in the high commercial area. All species are found in the low commercial volume areas.

Data Collection:

Before beginning research in the high commercial area, contact was made with local authorities at the level of the Zone in Sa'a and letters of introduction were obtained for the local authorities at the level of the Groupement and Villages. The researcher visited initially with a representative of CIFOR to introduce the research and make arrangements to return at a later time. During the research, the researcher lived in the communities and was accompanied at all times by a Field Assistant who spoke the local language as well as French.

In all three villages, an initial focus group meeting was held with the village chief and other recognised formal and informal local authorities. At this meeting the research was introduced and information was obtained on the availability, marketing and harvesting of the two target species and formal and informal rules governing the management of the village forest. A social mapping exercise was also done to outline village history, social structure and culture.

Focus groups were arranged separately with the men and with the women of the village. At each of these focus groups a Community mapping exercise was attempted and confirmation of the stakeholders in the harvesting and sale of the target species was obtained. Information on the ecology and harvesting techniques of the two species as well as marketing was obtained. Location of the village forest (primary and secondary forest, cocoa and oil palm plantations and fields and fallows) and also the rules of access concerning land and NWFP use were identified. Location of the Community Forest for Womkoa and Nkol-bogo III was established and information about its proposed exploitation was discussed. Formal and informal groupings of people were outlined – e.g. Common Initiative Groups or credit *tontines*.

Semi-structured interviews were held with the three village chiefs and with the chief of the Groupement in Nkol-bogo I to discuss community social structure, management of

village forest land and resources and level of conflict relating to NWFPs in the community. The researcher also met informally with key informants and other local people in the village to obtain information on the harvesting and marketing of the target species, availability of resources and rules of access as well as formal and informal groupings of people within the community.

A quantitative survey instrument concerning harvesting and degradation of target species and level of social capital in communities was administered to households in all three communities. The survey was initially verified with CIFOR Cameroon researchers and then pilot tested in a neighbouring village in the study area. The survey was administered primarily to women in the three research villages as women and young girls were identified as the primary stakeholders in the harvest and marketing of the target species. The survey was also administered to a sample of men. Those surveyed represented a variety of ages. The survey was administered orally in French by the researcher if the respondent agreed and otherwise it was orally translated from French to the local language by the Field Assistant. Two-thirds of the households in Womkoa and Nkol-bogo III were surveyed and one-quarter of the households in Nkol-bogo I were surveyed.

A focus group was held with the cooperative that will manage the Community Forest in the high commercial area to discuss their ideas concerning management of NWFPs on Community Forest land. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with authorities in the Community Forest Unit as well as the head of the sub department of NWFPs in MINEF. Local MINEF authorities at the level of the Zone in the high commercial area were also interviewed. These interviews served to identify government policies concerning the sustainable management of NWFPs. Non-governmental organisations involved in the management of NWFPs were identified and will be interviewed at a later date.

(f) Conclusion and Recommendations:

As this report represents the beginning of data collection in a much larger study, it is difficult to draw conclusions and make recommendations. However, during this Phase for which funding was granted, approximately one third of the data needed for the research was collected. As expected, women generally represent the main stakeholders in the harvest and trade of the two targeted species in the high commercial areas. Additional data collection and analysis is needed before further conclusions and recommendations can be made. It should be noted that local people and authorities have been very interested and helpful in conducting the research.

As stated in the application for funding, the results of the extended research project will be written as a dissertation to fulfill the requirements for the Ph.D. degree at Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.. The results of the research will also be published in the relevant scientific journals.