

EXECUTIVE NOTE
FIRST PROVINCIAL FORUM¹ IN MATADI /BAS CONGO

DATE: 29TH – 30TH SEPTEMBER 2009

Objectives of Provincial Forums

Provincial Forums are one of four levels of national dialogues on community forests, these including National Forums held in Kinshasa, local forums organised in the territories and community dialogues in villages. Provincial Forums target social actors in the Provinces, in particular: provincial parliaments, provincial governments, legal organisations, the private sector, the church and local associations.

Participants

The workshop was attended by about forty people, including ten members of the provincial parliament and representatives of the Bas Congo provincial government, the Bas Congo public prosecutor's department, the provincial services of various ministries, including those ministries with responsibility for forests and agriculture, representatives of education and research institutions and civil society.

Summary of discussions and points of consensus

1. *Presentation of the results of local dialogues held in Tshela and surrounding villages:*

The coordinator for the site of Tshela, CEPECO², presented the results of 8 community dialogues. Over 1,400 people, including more than 540 women, attended these meetings. The following five themes were discussed: the customary status of forests, the type and nature of customary land rights in forested areas in Bas Congo, artisanal exploitation of forests, the customary decision process in Bas Congo and synergies between community forests and protected areas. The following points were highlighted:

- The village or "village grouping" (*groupement*) is the foundation of a local community in the Bas Fleuve district.

¹ Provincial Forums are meetings organised at the provincial level in order to complement and/or amend the content of debates and discussions held during National Forums and dialogues held at community level in the three pilot sites selected to study the concepts and notions of community forests.

² CEPECO : *Centre pour la promotion et l'éducation des communautés de base*

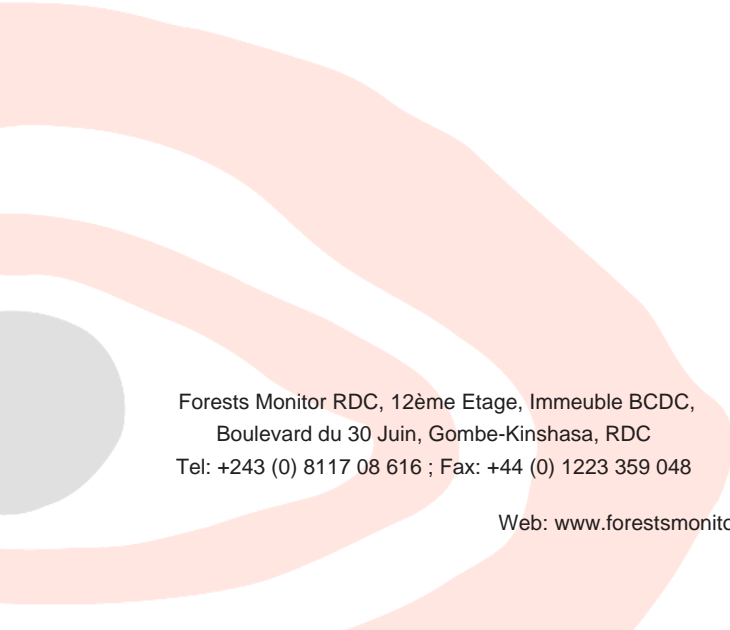
- According to customary law, families/lineages and clans, who are the beneficiaries of traditional land rights, own or possess land and natural resources. Thus, they have the right to manage, administer and even transfer land to third parties.
 - In the Bas Congo, resource management falls under the responsibility of the village leader who acts in consultation with his “notables,” who also represent land right beneficiaries. This village council is thus responsible for the smooth running of community affairs.
 - Within the matrilineal context of Bas Congo, in which power is passed down to men by women, community forest models must take into account the role of women. In some instances, women have the responsibilities of a village chief or even a “village grouping” chief. It is important to maintain established rights and to prevent the marginalisation of women in decision making processes related to land and forest resource management.
 - Artisanal logging and wildlife conservation are activities linked to the notion of community forests in Bas Congo. These activities need to be regulated in a way that is suitable to the context of Bas Congo where the rate of deforestation is high.
 - The boundaries of customary forests are defined through names given to these spaces by ancestors and that are also known to neighbouring communities. In some parts of the Province, customary land is rare since around two thirds of the land is under agro-industrial concessions, some of which have not been used for several decades.
2. **Presentation of the contents and debates of the National Forums:** The NGO CODELT presented the findings of the four National Forums previously held in Kinshasa and the points of consensus reached during these Forums.
3. **Contributions of provincial participants:** Participants to the Provincial Forum of Matadi reviewed the content of the debates at community, local and national level. In addition to the validation process, the following points represent their main contribution in terms of new elements to take into account within the framework of community forests:
- The practice of slash and burn cultivation, which communities should be involved in tackling;
 - Capacity building of legal organisations regarding customary issues, in order to take into account the duality of Congolese law and customary rules regarding community forests;
 - The issue of wood energy as part of the model on community forests in Bas Congo in order to involve communities in the implementation of environmental solutions in the Province.
 - The resolution of land conflicts as an element to take into account given its extent in the Bas Congo Province.

Forests Monitor, CODELT and CEPECO, together with the reporter of the Provincial Parliament and a parliamentary representative contributed to a radio and television programme on community forests.

Conclusion

The first provincial forum of Bas Congo was enriching and raised awareness among various actors in the Province of the concept of community forests. It also made it possible to identify new aspects to develop or to take into account in any community forest model. Other local and provincial forums are being held in the Orientale and Equateur Provinces.

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