

SUMMARY NOTE

FIRST LOCAL FORUM IN ITURI, ORIENTALE

DATE: 28 - 29 SEPTEMBER 2009

The project “Community forest management as a contribution to poverty alleviation in DRC” held its first Local Forum in Ituri on 28th - 29th September 2009 in the administrative building of the Territorial authority in Mambasa, Ituri District, Orientale Province. This Forum was organised by Forests Monitor and the management committee for the Ituri site composed of ENRA, OCEAN, CVAP and a representative of indigenous peoples.

Objective of the forum

The objective of the Local Forum in Mambasa was to discuss the results of the community dialogues held during July and August 2009 in the “secteurs” of Biakato, Teturi, Mambasa and Lolwa. The Forum also served as an opportunity to evaluate and enrich the results of these dialogues.

Participants

53 participants attended the meeting. These included representatives of the local administration (District Commissioner for Ituri, Territorial administrator, “chefferies” leaders, and officials from the Ministries of Environment, Justice, Agriculture and Rural Development and ANR/Mambasa), civil society (OCEAN, CVAP, PAP/RDC, PACT/Congo, FLEVICA, PADIP, churches and Muslim groups), “groupement” and village chiefs, the private sector (ENRA and artisanal loggers) and Forests Monitor.

The local forum

The District Commissioner for Ituri officially opened the Local Forum, as part of an official visit for the installation of the new Territorial administrator. The Forum focussed on the following two points:

1. The presentation of results from community dialogues and National Forums;
2. Working groups around five different themes.

Summary presentation of community dialogues

The coordinator for the Ituri site, Ir Gustave of ENRA, presented a summary of results from 8 dialogues held in the four “secteurs-chefferies” of Biakato, Teturi, Mambasa and Lolwa. The Forum focussed on the following five themes:

1. Customary land rights;
2. The status of forests;
3. Decision-making processes at community level;
4. Artisanal logging;
5. Protected areas and community forests.

Local and indigenous people showed great interest in the community dialogues and over 350 people attended these in each of the four selected sites. Fewer people attended the dialogue on artisanal logging (approximately 160 people) because it was organised at short notice.

It was noted that during the dialogues local and indigenous populations had highlighted the importance of community forests for their development, based on their traditional knowledge and practices of forest resource management.

Summary presentation of National Forum results

Forests Monitor presented the results from the National Forums held to date. It was noted that their aim was to provide a platform to discuss and analyse the diverse concepts related to community forests in order to develop more appropriate laws. The results from each Forum consist of an executive note that summarises the points on which participants reached a consensus.

To date, four national forums have been held on the following themes: (1) clarification of concepts; (2) community forests and artisanal forest exploitation; (3) community forests and community conservation; and (4) extent and nature of rights to forests and forest resources.

Group work

Participants were split into groups of 8 to 10 people, in which each interest group present at the Forum was represented. The groups worked on a list of questions relating to the five themes of the community dialogues. Each group worked on two different themes and a summary of their responses was presented in a plenary session.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the five working groups, participants in the Forum made the following recommendations for the design of community forestry legislation:

1. Concerning the criteria for the definition of a community and a local community forest, participants stressed that all members of the community should be descendants of the same tribe and more importantly belong to the same clan or family. Sociologically, the clan is the basic unit constituting a community, while at the administrative level, it is the locality or village, the “groupement” (village grouping) or the “chefferie”. The “groupement” or inter-village committee, generally called “Comité de Base” (COBA), would be the appropriate body to use for managing a community forest.

It is important to note that the Mambasa territory, where the community dialogues took place, is administratively made up of “chefferies”. This explains the trend towards the centralisation of

customary powers around the “*groupement*” leader, who is also a clan member. If the clan or the village was chosen as the management entity for a community forest, participants underlined the importance of the inter-village committee, whose customary power should have an important coordination role.

2. As for the surface area and boundaries of a community forest, participants stressed that a surface area of 50,000 ha would be appropriate. This takes into account the fact that because land has been sold or occupied by people that have migrated from North-Kivu, the areas controlled by communities and still under customary law are small, as well as the fact that the Okapi Wildlife reserve is expected to be extended. However, the boundaries of the forest should take into account the limits of neighbours’ forests and the forest should include all types of forests traditionally managed by the community. The authorities with responsibility for local forests should help local communities and indigenous peoples to delimit their forests and to acquire a legal status.
3. At community level, decisions are made by locality or “*groupement*” chiefs, the wise men of each clan (the guardians of customs) as well as wise women. As a source of blessing, women play an important role in reconciliation processes and the resolution of social conflicts (for example in the case of Wasele, Babombi and Bapangomo). They should be involved at all levels of decision-making through being part of the community forest management committee, based on the principle of equality.
4. Regarding issues related to protected areas and community forests, participants in the Local Forum noted that to ensure the conservation of the forest, power should be given to customary authorities, and that local communities and indigenous peoples should be organised in transparent and dynamic management committees. The current management of protected areas is not acceptable to local communities and indigenous peoples who are marginalised and do not receive any financial benefits from these.

Forests are used by local communities and indigenous peoples for agriculture, hunting and fishing and for the extraction of non-timber forest products but they are currently under threat from slash and burn agriculture, uncontrolled artisanal logging, degradation and human migration from the North.

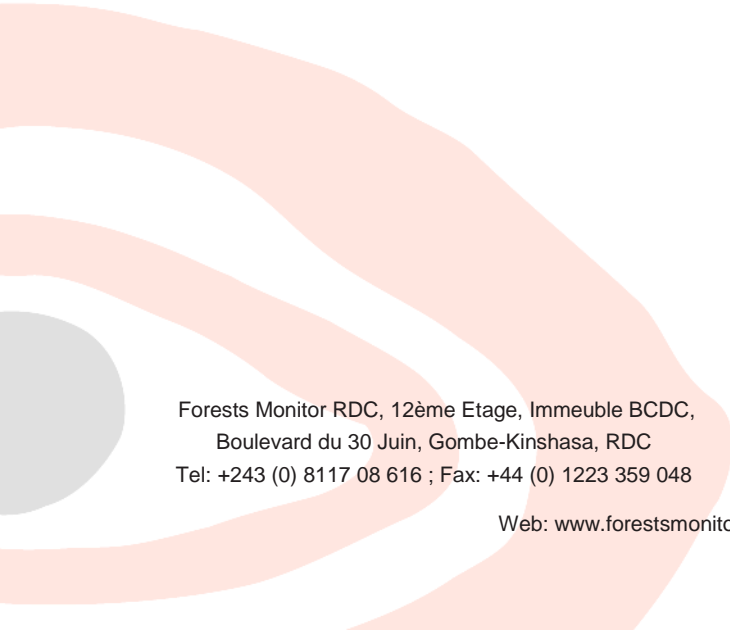
5. Participants stressed the importance of artisanal logging in community forests as a source of employment, income and wood for domestic use, but also as a way to facilitate cohabitation of different communities. However, it is also a potential source of conflict between communities (abuse of the rules by some customary chiefs) and between communities and loggers when social responsibility contracts (*cahiers des charges*) are breached.

As for the responsibilities of different actors, this activity should be regulated as a matter of urgency and local communities and indigenous peoples should be supervised. The customary authority must work for the benefit of the community and not for its own personal interest, and loggers must fulfil their commitments as laid out in the social responsibility contracts. Local populations were invited to unite for the conservation and sustainable use of forest resources, and to use income from customary charges to finance community development projects.

The following recommendations were made by participants:

1. The State must take into account the concerns and wishes of local communities and indigenous peoples when drafting policies and regulations for the forest sector;
2. Local communities and indigenous peoples should be involved in decision-making relating to the allocation of land and the practice of their customary rights;

3. A different approach is needed for the management of protected areas in order to allow local communities and indigenous peoples to have a greater voice;
4. Given the lack of local development initiatives, participants recommend that the State promote community management of forests.



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