

## **SUMMARY REPORT**

### **SECOND LOCAL FORUM, MAMBASA**

**DATE: 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2010**

#### **Introduction**

The second local forum of Mambasa was held on 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> March 2010. This forum, organised by the Ituri site project coordination team, took place following a series of community dialogues and the day before the second and last provincial forum. The aim of the meeting was to validate and enrich the results of the community dialogues and to make recommendations for presentation at the provincial forum. The meeting included a presentation of the results of these dialogues, including those held with indigenous Pygmy communities, as well as the preliminary results of the mapping of community rights to forest land and resources.

#### **Participants in the local forum**

46 people took part in this second local forum at Mambasa. They included the heads of local administrative departments, representatives of civil society and international organisations, heads of chieftaincies and village “*groupements*”, local community representatives and a strong indigenous delegation from across the territory of Mambasa. The forum was opened by the Deputy Territorial Administrator responsible for economy, finances and development. Irène Wabiwa, representing CODELT, chaired the discussions.

#### **Results from the community dialogues**

Prior to the forum, community dialogues had been organised in the following areas: Teturi, Mambasa, Biakato and Lolwa. More than 500 people had participated in these dialogues, including 126 women and 116 indigenous people. They focused on the following subjects:

- Community forests as a tool for local development;
- Community forest management institutions;
- Managing the profits from community forests;
- The role of customary authorities in community forest management;
- Reconciling individual uses and the collective nature of community forests;
- Handling conflicts related to community forest management.

These community dialogues resulted in a better understanding of local communities’ aspirations, and it was highlighted that these must be taken into consideration when producing the legal and technical instruments for community forest management. Detailed reports of the community dialogues are available from the project’s national coordination team in Kinshasa.

#### **Results of the dialogues held with indigenous communities**

One of the specific features of the Ituri site is the presence of a high number of Mbuti indigenous people, whose lives are intimately linked to the forest. It was decided to hold specific dialogues with these communities as they are often marginalised from decision-making processes relating to forest resource management. These dialogues were facilitated by staff from the DGPA (*Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones*), a network of organisations that specialises in supporting indigenous peoples in the DR Congo. Dialogues were held in two indigenous communities (Nduye and Epulu) and these focused on the following issues:

- The status of forests;
- Customary land rights of indigenous peoples;
- Community forest management institutions;
- Handling conflicts related to community forest management;
- The role of customary authorities in community forest management;
- Community forests as a real tool for development;
- Managing profits;
- Reconciling individual interests and the collective nature of community forests.

Several hundred indigenous people, both men and women, participated in these dialogues in the two above-mentioned communities. These included not only the residents of the host communities but also representatives from other indigenous communities, who came to take part in the dialogues.



It was highlighted that the situation of indigenous peoples is not the same everywhere in Mambasa Territory. The main differences arise in their relations with their neighbouring Bantu communities. Whilst at Epulu relations are more strained and the indigenous people feel they are marginalised and discriminated against by their neighbours, at Nduye relationships between the Mbuti and the Bantu seem more cordial and the former are involved to some degree in forest resource management and profits are shared with them. Given these conditions, the participants envisaged a jointly-managed forest run according to previously established rules of equity. However, it was noted that the Epulu communities cannot ask for concessions to their community's forests because of the presence of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve which covers most of their traditional territory. Both communities considered the current pressures exerted on "their" forests either by artisanal logging, poaching and the Reserve to be a real threat to their survival.

#### **Preliminary results of the participatory mapping**

The participatory mapping of rights to land and resources was conducted by OCEAN (*Organisation Concertée des Ecologistes et Amis de la Nature*). The aim was to map the different types and extent of rights in certain areas and to reflect on how this tool could be used to clarify these rights. An additional goal was to consider the legal role of mapping and its use in the process of obtaining and managing community forests. The rights of the Babofi, Bapusungwe and Baposome clans of Teturi village grouping were mapped, covering a total area of 67,450 ha. It was noted that discussions need to continue with these clans to determine if this area represents one or several "community forests".

This participatory mapping exercise enabled a number of lessons to be drawn and recommendations to be made. In particular it was noted that the boundaries of traditional territories are not always clearly known by the owners, particularly when there are no natural boundaries. This suggests that traditional territories are not always as rigid as is often thought. Further, some confusion was noted between customary rights holders and those to whom they have ceded rights of use. Many of the communities saw participatory mapping as an exercise by which to demarcate villages and village groupings, hence there was a tendency for some people to extend boundaries. The lesson drawn from this was that there is a need for appropriate awareness raising

and information provision among the communities in question, as well as the involvement of neighbouring communities, particularly during the mapping itself, so as not to generate conflicts over boundaries between communities.

It was highlighted by the indigenous representatives that they want to have official documents that secure their rights to their forests, as without such documents they will be unable to be effectively involved in protecting them and far less able to benefit from their exploitation. The participants also raised doubts as to the government's political will to give local communities more responsibility over forest resource management, particularly as "the soil and subsoil" continue to be owned exclusively by the State.

### **Discussions**

Working groups were held during the Forum to facilitate more in-depth discussions, each focusing on one of the 6 issues covered in the community dialogues. The recommendations of each group were then discussed in plenary before being adopted as the recommendations of this Forum.

The participants considered that community forests could form a real tool for local development, provided that income-generating activities were identified and developed and that the income was managed in a transparent and fair manner. The main potential activities were considered to be agriculture, tourism and environmental services. However, some participants felt that the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, which covers most of their traditional territory, formed a constraint to socio-economic development.

In terms of community forest management institutions, the participants suggested establishing institutions that would be likely to provide better governance (community participation, capacity and effectiveness, monitoring and control) for community forests.

With regard to managing the profits that community forests could generate, the participants suggested producing a development plan that would define the community's development priorities. This plan will need to be produced in a participatory, fair and non-discriminatory manner in relation to all sectors of the community, in particular taking indigenous peoples' concerns into account. The indigenous representatives insisted on these principles of fairness and non-discrimination when the forest was to be managed jointly by indigenous and Bantu groups. With regard to whether it would be desirable for the indigenous peoples to have their own forests, there was a great deal of ambiguity in the responses. In private, the indigenous people, particularly those from Epulu, wanted "documents" to provide security over their land. In public, however, they wished to co-manage the forest space with their Bantu neighbours as in the days of their ancestors when apparently there was a relationship of understanding and mutual help between the two groups. This position is supported by the Bantu, who accuse the NGOs of manipulating the Pygmies and setting the two groups against each other.

The role of customary authorities in community forest management was difficult to define accurately and concretely. There is currently a lack of confidence between customary chiefs and other community members, with the latter suspecting the former of keeping the benefits of artisanal logging to themselves. Nevertheless, the forum participants all thought that the skills of the customary authorities should be strengthened so that they could play their role in the development of their local area. Further, they recommended that community forests be managed by a "barza" or joint committee involving all sectors of the community.

The participants also advocated peaceful coexistence between the indigenous and Bantu communities. Previously cordial relations between these two communities have been degraded by modernisation, money and artisanal logging. If conflicts arise in the joint management of community forests then those involved should prioritise the option of negotiation and mediation through elders and customary chiefs. The head of the Teturi village grouping recognised that the community dialogues and participatory mapping had enabled relationships between the Bantu and the Pygmies to be substantially improved because, on these occasions, they had been required to work together.

The local forum participants felt that most of the conflicts that arose in their region were down to three factors: (a) the presence of a protected area limiting their rights to access forest resources; (b) artisanal logging, which does not benefit the local people and destroys the forest; and (c) disagreements over boundaries between communities.