

Diocèse de Basankusu
Commission Diocésaine Pour le
Ressources Naturelles (CDRN)
BP 68 Basankusu
République Démocratique du Congo
(RDC)



SUMMARY REPORT

BONGANDANGA LOCAL FORUM

DATE: 22 - 23 FEBRUARY 2010

Introduction

The first local forum of Bongandanga, Equateur Province was held on 22nd – 23rd February 2010, in the Saint Dominique Parish Church. This forum was organised jointly by Forests Monitor with the Diocesan Commission on Natural Resources (CDRN) of the Diocese of Basankusu. The CDRN is responsible for the coordination of activities in Equateur Province for the project "Community forest management as a contribution to poverty alleviation in the DRC", being implemented by Forests Monitor on behalf of the Government of DRC.

Background

Bongandanga is the administrative capital of the territory of the same name, which is one of the three territories of Mongala District, Equateur Province. Bongandanga territory comprises 4 sectors, 70 village groups and 364 villages. In addition to agriculture and fishing, the sale of dug-out canoes known as "*komaki*" is one of the main activities in the area, for which the timber is provided by artisanal loggers.

Objective

The objective of the forum was to present the findings of a series of earlier meetings in order to validate and expand on these conclusions with other actors from the environment sector. The previous meetings were: the local forums of Basankusu, 27th – 28th October 2009, and Befale, 13th – 14th January 2010; the provincial forum held in Mbandaka, 21st – 22nd January 2010; and the community dialogue of Bongandanga, 20th – 21st February. A further objective of this forum was to make recommendations to decision makers so that the rights and concerns of local communities will be taken into account in the development and implementation of policies on community forest management.



Participants

50 people attended the forum, with participants from a variety of different institutions. They included representatives of the local public administration (territorial administrator, the town chief of Bongandanga, the sector chiefs of Bongandanga, Boso-Simba, Boso-Zanua and Boso-Melo, the territorial environmental coordinator, the territorial agricultural inspector, the local office heads of the ANR (National Information Agency) and DGM (Directorate General of Migration, the sub-divisional education administrator/Sous-Proved, the chief of police, the senior district doctor, G.F.E), civil society (RRN, CBFC, ACDCN, SPARIS, AFIBO, CDJP, PABO), religious organisations (Catholic and Protestant churches, FEPACO, Assemblée des Saints, Neo-Apostolic) and representatives of local communities (group chiefs from Bongandanga, Bokenda II, Dikila, Lilangi, Baolongo, Mange-ya-liko, Mange-Wamba, Songo-Mboyo, Linkaa and Lolengl).

Summary of the local forum

The local forum was structured around two main elements:

1. The validation of results from the community dialogues, local forums and provincial forum;
2. Discussion of 7 specific themes related to community forestry.

A presentation was first made on the community dialogues held at the two sub-sites of Bobambo, in Gombalo sector, and Bokeka, in Waka-Bokeka sector, in Baringa and Befale in Befale territory and at Bongandanga. A summary was also given of the Basankusu and Befale local forums and the Mbandaka provincial forum. The community dialogues focused on the following seven areas:

1. The status of forests;
2. Customary land rights;
3. Artisanal forest exploitation;
4. Protected areas and community forests;
5. Community forests as a tool for development;
6. Community forest management institutions;
7. The sharing of profits from community forests.



At the forum, members of the local community expressed their views on traditional forest management mechanisms that should be taken into consideration in the community forest regulations being drawn up by the DRC's legislators.

The discussions were very similar to those held previously in the communities of Basankusu and Befale since these communities have almost identical traditions. One particular issue was highlighted, however: the Bongandanga community is not in favour of the local authorities' forest policy and stated clearly that the current way in which the forest was being managed would never promote development. In addition, they highlighted the fact that such practices would only cause conflict given that most communities no longer have what can be called "local community forests" as their forests have been allocated as concessions.

On the 7 issues under discussion, the following opinions were expressed:

1. Local community and community forest identification

Bongandanga community considers that the local community is the group, i.e. the villages in that group. The identifying criteria are:

- Distinctive customs,
- Speaking the same language,
- Under the authority of the same chief,
- Settled on the same land,
- Sharing the same cemetery.

2. Managing a community forest

- According to the notables and elders, the appropriate unit for managing a community forest should be the village group ("*groupement*").
- The institution best able to represent the community in the process of obtaining and managing a community forest would be a representative association, recognised by the "*groupement*" and based within it.
- A community forest should be identified and demarcated according to customary, natural and administrative boundaries.
- Mediation mechanisms should be envisaged to deal with the potential conflicts that could arise related to community forest management.
- The legitimacy of community forest management must come from the population, as the State only has responsibility for issues relating to security and integration. The

Bakajika land law needs revising.

3. The area and delimitation of community forests

- The desirable area for a community forest depends on its natural boundaries, including:
 - tree markers,
 - mountains,
 - water sources,
 - clans,
 - landmarks,
 - cemeteries.
- The factors to be taken into consideration in the delimitation of a community forest are:
 - natural boundaries,
 - cemeteries,
 - being under the authority of the same chief,
 - speaking the same dialect,
 - having the same forest.
- The roles to be played by other partners are:
 - the state as supporting partner and arbiter of conflicts,
 - neighbouring communities must respect the boundaries and property of others and work in synergy (a “good neighbours policy”).

4. Community conservation

- The population of Bongandanga is in favour of community conservation, provided the State simply plays a role of providing support.
- Illicit and unplanned logging undertaken with the knowledge of the local authorities as well as evictions of the local population must be prohibited, particularly if no measures are put in place beforehand with regard to compensation and living conditions.
- In order to build on existing strengths and minimise the threats, the Bongandanga population recommends:
 - gaining a knowledge of the living spaces and current regulations,
 - managing species sustainably,
 - having a good forest exploitation policy, including reforestation,
 - undertaking awareness raising with communities.

5. Artisanal logging

- Artisanal logging is important in Bongandanga territory as it is one of the main sources of income for many people.
- The advantages it brings include:
 - food for families,
 - education for children,
 - poverty reduction,
 - improved housing,
 - means of transport,
 - local development.
- The disadvantages include:
 - the destruction of nature and forest degradation,
 - the lack of reforestation,
 - global warming and climate change,
 - failure to comply with the minimum exploitable diameters for species,
 - physical strain on the body and accidents.

6. The relationship between community forests and local development

Participants in the Bongandanga local forum stated that it was clear that, given the wealth of their biodiversity, forests could contribute to local development but only if the following conditions were fulfilled:

- If, the State facilitates access to community forests in all legislation;
- If the State undertakes prior consultation of the local communities before granting concessions to forest operators or agro-industrialists and also before proceeding to classify any part of the forest;
- There needs to be a management structure set up by the local communities themselves;
- In addition to community forests, the forests granted to agro-industrialists and forest operators and the forests classified for conservation must also contribute to local development;
- The Bongandanga community is having problems with the concessions granted to forest operators, particularly SIFORCO. Bongandanga community would like a forest map to be produced so that the areas occupied by the different concession holders can be determined as well as the areas that remain for communities.

7. The role of women in community forest management

- Women undertake many different kinds of work in the forest (fishing, gathering and harvesting, net weaving, straw mat making, etc.) and they are able to inherit the forest from their parents or husband. Women must therefore be involved in the decision-making process with regard to forests;
- Women must play the same role as men in community forest management, without discrimination and in line with the internationally-recognised principle of equality.
- There are concrete examples in Bongandanga sector where forests are being managed by women and where they are the people taking the final decisions, over and above men. The cases of the female chiefs of Linkaa village group and Mpukuaonga village group were mentioned.

17th March 2010

Abbé Dieudonné Eluo, CDRN

Basankusu