

## **EXECUTIVE NOTE**

### **SIXTH NATIONAL FORUM:<sup>1</sup> PARTICIPATORY MAPPING AND LOCAL COMMUNITY FORESTS**

**DATE: 14 - 15 DECEMBER 2009**

#### **Participants**

This National Forum was attended by representatives of: the Ministries responsible for forests, planning, justice and land affairs, *Observatoire Satellital des Forêts en Afrique Centrale* (OSFAC), Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI/Washington DC), Fauna and Flora International (FFI), WWF, Rainforest Foundation UK, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED/UK), RRN, CEDEN, ODC, APED Kivu, OCEAN and CODELT.

#### **Summary of points of consensus**

##### **What is participatory forest mapping?**

Participatory mapping is a process that results in maps of land occupation and use and/or forest rights, produced with the agreement and effective involvement of local communities. It typically represents a written statement of the uses and/or customary rights of local communities in a forest space. In this regard, participatory mapping makes a link between two sources of Congolese law: written and customary.

##### **Potential roles or functions of participatory mapping**

- In the countries where it is used, participatory mapping provides one of the tools for planning in the context of decentralisation, and is aimed at increasing community support for certain decisions;
- Participatory mapping is a good tool for communication, information and dialogue between local communities, the State and other stakeholders;
- Participatory mapping is also a tool for forest management;
- Mapping is a way of democratically expressing and securing local communities' rights;
- It is also a tool for negotiation, discussion and dialogue between different stakeholders. In this regard, it can be used to prevent and manage vertical and horizontal conflicts over an area and its natural resources. The absence of a map that has been consensually agreed by all lies at the root of a number of conflicts involving local communities.

---

<sup>1</sup> The National Forums are platforms in which experts, technicians, practitioners and researchers can reflect and analyse with the aim of improving certain notions and concepts related to community forestry.

### **Is participatory mapping established in Congolese law?**

Despite its virtues, the notion of participatory mapping is absent from current Congolese legislation. Nevertheless, acknowledging the strong public interest in this notion, the government uses participatory mapping in practice. Several pieces of Congolese legislation sanction mapping as a resource management tool. Congolese case law takes a similar direction with, for example, the decision of the Cataractes District Court, which recognises "to all parties in the case, the right of enjoyment of a forest if it is established by a map of the lands produced by the colonial authority at a time where there were no conflicts between parties, that the disputed forest is made the shared property of the respective ancestors of the two parties to the case".<sup>2</sup> These maps cannot, however, be described as participatory.

The forest sector seems to want to play a pioneering role on this issue and could inspire other sectors, particularly the mining and hydrocarbon sectors.

### **Areas of potential use of participatory mapping**

- Use of other natural resources in local community forests with a view to guaranteeing the preservation and protection of spaces for cultural survival;
- Forest zoning;
- Surveys prior to the classification and allocation of forests;
- Social responsibility contracts (*cahiers des charges*) with concession holders;
- Local community concessions or areas over which local communities have exclusive rights;
- Local community forests or areas over which local communities may or may not have exclusive rights;
- The allocation of customary lands to other kinds of use, particularly mining or oil exploitation.

Given that there is currently no national standard, a "National Guide to Participatory Mapping" would enable harmonisation of practices.

### **Essential elements of participatory mapping**

- The participatory nature of a map must be both internal and external to the community. It is thus a question of ensuring not only the involvement of the community in question but also that of neighbouring communities, even other stakeholders;
- To be participatory, it is important that the map's legend is defined and conceived by the community itself. This practice means for example that a community is able to avoid disclosing certain elements essential to its culture, such as sacred sites;
- The communities must have a certain amount of control over the process. The communities' role in the gathering and validation of information must be a predominant one;
- The communities must clearly understand the aim or reason for the intended mapping.

### **Overview of the process**

Participatory mapping should involve three essential stages, namely: the initial idea, its implementation and its validation and/or legalisation:

- Stage 1: The community makes or produces its map, involving all stakeholders, particularly the State, neighbouring communities and other interested actors. It is important to ensure that the local authorities or State representatives are involved in the

---

<sup>2</sup> Cataractes District Court, RA 528, 12 March 1991, RAJC, 1998, Fasc.1, p.39

- Stage 2: The resulting map is validated by the State after verification, with a view to ensuring public order and respect for third party rights.
- Stage 3: The local authority would publish or stamp the map certifying that it has been produced without contestation from other communities or stakeholders.

### **Conclusion**

This sixth National Forum revealed the essential nature of participatory mapping as a tool in the mechanism for creating local community forests. As a means of conflict prevention, dialogue, negotiation and decentralisation, participatory mapping has advantages both for the State and for local communities.

The next Forum will focus on "**REDD within local community forests**". Similar Forums have previously focused on the concepts of local community forests, artisanal exploitation, community conservation and community exploitation of forests respectively. Future Forums will focus on wood energy, managing land conflicts and decentralisation.

We believe that all these concepts are useful to the work underway to design an innovative model of community forests in the DRC.

December 2009  
Forests Monitor / DRC

