



Palm nut lorry in Kilombo- Lokoundje Sub-division

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SUMMARY

Between 2018 and 2021, local and indigenous communities of the Ocean Division received legal support towards a more equitable and inclusive land governance... The lessons learned in the field have improved the recognition of their land rights and a set of recommendations to provided ongoing land reform in Cameroon.

I. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Land is an important element in the development process, and is central in rural poverty reduction. In addition to providing the basis for livelihood activities, rights to land affect status, well-being and empowerment. Land is also a social asset, crucial for cultural identity, political power and participation in local decision-making processes.

In recent years, an unprecedented increase in large-scale land-based investments has increased pressures on rural land rights. This has undermined access to land for local communities, especially women and indigenous groups who are already marginalised in the context of prevailing patriarchal customary systems and power asymmetries.

Land legislation in Cameroon provides some legal protection to the land use rights of rural people, and guarantees equal rights for men and women. However in practice, women are marginalised by discriminatory cultural practices, tend to access land through male relatives, and often have limited say in local land governance. More generally, tenure insecurity is widespread in rural areas, partly due to gaps between local practice and the statute books.

The rise of land-based investments has compounded the challenges, exacerbating land scarcity in specific places, and sometimes leading to conflicts between businesses and local communities. The most vulnerable (rural women and youth, indigenous communities, and more generally rural people) are likely to suffer the most from this growing scarcity, yet these people are also those depending the most on land and resources.

Ultimately, Cameroon's ambition of eradicating poverty, ensuring long-term food security and fostering sustainable development through private sector investment is contingent on an integrated, inclusive, transparent and effective approach to the governance of land and investment. Rising to the challenge require addressing complex, interlinked issues, such as:

- **Community-investor relations:** The increased number of land-based investments has resulted in uncoordinated overlaps between different investments, including agribusiness, forestry, mining concessions. These processes have often marginalised local groups, and led to tensions between businesses and local communities. More vulnerable local groups, including women and indigenous communities, are particularly exposed to the risk of dispossession.
- **A legal system in flux:** Existing laws governing land and natural resources do not adequately recognise, clarify and protect the rights of rural people, particularly vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities, women and the youth; they offer no guidance on investor-community relations; and they do little to promote responsible investment and resource management practices. A reform of the land law is now underway, alongside with other related sectoral reforms. There is a need to ensure that the new law addresses the challenges the country faces today.
- **Capacity challenges** in responding to new and emerging pressures on land and to new international norms and standards in the area of land governance. In different ways and

to different extents, these challenges affect all stakeholder groups (government, CSOs, private sector, local communities including women and indigenous communities). More effective systems are needed to secure local land rights, to empower communities to have greater control over investment approval decisions and get a better deal from approved investments, and to ensure gender-equitable land governance.

The proposed project responds to these challenges. It will develop innovative action-research approaches for supporting community-investor dialogue at the grassroots, and for facilitating inclusive policy dialogue at the national level. The project will also feed learning into the ongoing reform of Cameroon's land legislation, and internationally. As discussed further below, the project is linked to, and involves a co-funding arrangement with, a larger, ongoing programme supported by the EU, "LandCam".

II. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The project had different goals and objectives. The main goal was to identify, develop and upscale effective solutions and strategies for more accountable, just and equitable governance of land and investment that addresses the specific challenges faced by rural women, youths and indigenous communities in the context of large-scale land-related investments.

It had different specific objectives:

1. To test legal empowerment and other action-research strategies for communities, including women, youths and indigenous groups, to secure their land tenure rights and engage in community-investor dialogue on an equitable basis ;
2. To test action-research strategies for facilitating equitable participation of CSOs, particularly those representing marginalised groups, in national-level policy debates, and for feeding insights from pilot activities into law reform ;
3. To share lessons nationally and internationally on how to link grassroots-level legal empowerment to national law reform.

Overall, the project objectives were achieved. Although with the occurrence of the Covid pandemic there was a delay in the implementation of activities. An extension was used to carry out these activities.

The project worked around the development of elite plantations around agro-industrial plantations and the resulting land pressures on neighboring communities.

We also looked at forest conversions. Indeed, the phenomenon of forest conversions is noticeable, and there are problems in the way their rights are taken into account.

The project also focused on monitoring cases of legal violations. The legal assistance was not limited to capacity building for the knowledge of rights but also for a better consideration of these rights. In addition to this legal assistance, we also provided judicial assistance, with the case of the land rights defenders before the court of Kribi.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology was defined early on the project and refined on the grounds of fieldwork.

Overview, outcomes and approach

The project beneficiaries were Cameroon's rural communities, including women, youths and indigenous peoples, who are better able to claim and secure their land tenure rights, both in law and in practice, and to participate more effectively in key decision-making processes, particularly in the context of large-scale land-based investments and the ongoing land law reform.

The ongoing land law reform process in Cameroon provided an opportunity to advance this agenda. Old-school "law and development" approaches to law reform focused on delivering expertise to inform the formulation of national legislation. It is now accepted that law reforms can only work if they proceed from the bottom up – that is, if they respond to local contexts and agendas. Therefore, strengthening land governance via law reform requires good insights from the field – for example, about the real-life challenges rural people and businesses face in the context of land-based investments; about the most effective strategies for communities including women, youths and indigenous groups to claim and secure their land tenure rights in investment processes; and about the conditions for institutionalising and upscaling those strategies. It also requires the effective participation of citizen groups in law-making processes.

This project sought to advance this agenda. It aimed to develop approaches for co-generating evidence on key challenges and possible ways forward, and for supporting citizen groups to engage with law reform processes. More specifically, the project worked towards the following outcomes:

- In selected field sites, greater awareness of community members about their tenure rights and improved ability to secure them;
- In selected field sites, increased and more equitable participation of women, youths and indigenous groups in local governance and decision-making processes;
- At the national level, improved capacity of civil society organisations to feed into the land law reform process;
- At the national level, improved capacity of civil society organisations to raise issues of gender equality in a meaningful way in land policy debates and law reform processes;

- At the international level, improved understanding of tools and approaches for evidence and public participation to inform law reform from the bottom up.

In the longer term, the project aimed to contribute to more equitable and just land laws that improve security of land tenure for women, youths, indigenous groups, and communities more generally, as well as those groups' ability to participate in decision-making processes relevant to large investments in land and resources. Success ultimately hinge on the difference that the project made on the ground, through capacity support and local dialogue, but also on the extent to which the project helped inform effective policy responses.

The project builds on earlier collaborative work on legal empowerment, land governance and agricultural investments, which CED and/or IIED have carried out over the years including with IDRC support – particularly the “foundational” IDRC-IIED scoping study *Accountability in Africa's Land Rush* released in 2013,¹ and the *Pathways to Accountability* project implemented in Cameroon, Ghana and Senegal over the period 2013-2017.² In taking forward this agenda where *Pathways to Accountability* left it, this project explored *what solutions and strategies can be identified and/or developed to promote more accountable, just, and equitable land governance and rights in Cameroon*.

The methodology involved testing approaches to address governance issues through community-investor dialogue in the Ocean Division³ site632+; developing channels to connect local actors and issues to national law making; and sharing lessons nationally and internationally. In practice, the project has looked at other areas where more cross-cutting issues were involved, such as indigenous peoples. Its theory of change involved supporting Cameroon's ongoing land law reform process by improving public understanding of the issues on the ground; by strengthening the agency of rural communities, including women, youths and indigenous peoples; and by supporting informed, equitable dialogue at the national level.

Action-research questions

More specifically, the action research has addressed the following (sets of) questions:

- 1) What are the main challenges confronting community-investor relations in their socially differentiated manifestations, and what strategies can be deployed to address those challenges and enable communities including women, youths and indigenous groups to claim and secure their tenure rights in the face of land-related investments? This first research question can be articulated in the following sub-questions: what are the main challenges affecting community-investor relations in the project field site,

¹ <http://pubs.iied.org/12572IIED/>.

² <https://www.iied.org/legal-social-accountability-tools-agricultural-investments-west-africa>.

³ With the construction of a deep-sea port and related infrastructure, existing agribusiness and forest concessions, and ongoing mining exploration, Ocean Division is experiencing growing pressure on land and resources, and new trends in land-use conflict. This area is also home to the indigenous Bagyeli communities, whose resource rights are often particularly vulnerable in land competition. Ocean Division was one of the sites where *Pathways to Accountability* was active, and it hosted the regional writeshop held in March 2017 to distil lessons from that project.

considering social differentiation (e.g. gender, age, indigenous peoples) both in the identification of the challenges and their implications; what are the strengths and weaknesses of existing legal and institutional arrangements in enabling socially differentiated actors to address those challenges and claim their rights; what solutions are local actors exploring or developing to address the challenges and claim their rights, and how does social differentiation affect patterns and outcomes; how do these solutions interface with existing legal and institutional arrangements; and how could national law better address the challenges, support local solutions and enable communities including women, youths and indigenous peoples to secure their tenure rights?

- 2) What strategies can best facilitate the equitable participation of organisations that represent marginalised groups, including women, youths and indigenous peoples, in national-level policy debates? Sub-questions under this second research question would interrogate the vehicles that can be used not only to channel into policy debates the substantive insights learned by addressing research question 1, but also – and more importantly – to support socially differentiated local actors (considering particularly gender, age and indigenous peoples) in engaging with law making.
- 3) How to address social differentiation and power imbalances in local and national land governance arenas, so as to ensure that local and national-level dialogue takes place on equitable terms? This third – and final – research question involves addressing sub-questions such as: how to identify and address issues stemming from social differentiation, particularly in relation to gender, age and indigenous peoples? How to design and implement local and national processes that are sensitive to gender or age differentiation, and to the special needs of indigenous peoples? How to empower women, youths and indigenous peoples so they can equitably engage with these processes? How to track developments and outcomes in ways that duly recognise social differentiation?

At the field level, the action research was to involve supporting community-investor dialogue in the selected project site, focusing on research questions 1 and 3. The field site has been defined as a geographic area, thereby enabling holistic consideration of the multiple sources of pressure on land – and possibly including multiple investors and investments, as well as multiple communities. The intervention has tested tools / approaches for facilitating multi-actor dialogue that, while centered on relations between investors and communities, also involves other key local stakeholders including government.

The intervention has built on an ongoing stock take of experience with promoting such dialogue, primarily in Cameroon but also including insights from international developments as relevant. It has also draw, in more general terms, on analysis of opportunities and pitfalls of multi-stakeholder approaches, distilling insights on the conditions that facilitate equitable and effective dialogue. While the detailed design of field-level methods be fine-tuned in light of those insights, it is possible to identify the following key parameters.

First, field level activities has taken an iterative approach in order to ensure that participants are in the “driving seat”. Through the dialogue, the project has explored research questions 1 and 3 in a participatory way. Through a set of grassroots meetings, dialogue participants have discussed, for example, the main challenges affecting community-investor relations in the project field site, the strengths and weaknesses of existing legal and institutional arrangements in enabling actors to address those challenges, the solutions local actors exploring or developing to address the challenges, and how best national legislation could support those solutions. Through this process, the dialogue has co-generate evidence to feed into national law debates.

Second, to facilitate informed discussions, supporting the dialogue may require generating evidence on specific issues – for example, on existing land use patterns or tenure holdings within a given area. Based on demand from dialogue participants and their agreed priorities, the project has collected and analysed data and presented findings in ways that can be used at the local level. This strand of data collection has primarily feed into the local dialogue, rather than national policy debates, though it has been crucial for higher-level discussions. Given the iterative and demand-led approach followed, precise research methods can only be defined once local demand and priorities become clearer as the dialogue unfolds.

Third, the approach has been premised on a recognition of social differentiation and power asymmetries affecting relations both within and outside the communities. Therefore, it has combine dialogue facilitation with community empowerment work – the former to create a space for open discussion, the latter to ensure the dialogue occurs on an equitable basis in both community-investor and intra-community relations. It has also tailored activities to address social differentiation within communities, for example through holding separate grassroots meetings for different groups (e.g., depending on the context, women, youths, indigenous peoples) as part of preparations towards the multi-actor dialogue, or even towards community-wide discussions.

Field level activities was to be supported through regular visits by CED and (less frequently) IIED staff, and through the permanent presence of one or more junior lawyers trained and supported through the project. Following the institutional set up deployed through the Pathways to Accountability project, the junior lawyers were to be hosted by one or more local NGOs. The project was to prioritise local NGOs with a strong sensitivity to gender and NGOs led by indigenous people, and it will aim for a good gender balance and, as far as possible, an indigenous/non-indigenous balance in the team of junior lawyers. The project will also engage with relevant private companies and local government in the pilot site, to create conditions conducive to inclusive dialogue.

In 2020, the whole world was shaken by the Covid 19 pandemic. While the response to this pandemic directly affected fundamental rights such as freedom of movement, protest, assembly and association, to name but a few, other rights that ensure the enjoyment of a healthy environment were affected. These include the rights to information, consultation and participation in decision-making affecting the environment of many local and indigenous communities living near investment projects. In the same vein, the right to redress has been profoundly affected. In the framework of the legal empowerment for accountable, just and equitable governance of land and investment in Cameroon project, the impacts of the occurrence of Covid have been noticeable in the implementation of activities. However, strategies were developed to circumvent the problem and ensure the continuation of activities.

The measures that directly impacted our work were those related to the reduction of traffic, the reduction of meetings. During the first phase of Corona, the offices were closed; our interventions in monitoring and implementing activities on the ground were strongly impacted:

- Capacity building of local and indigenous communities was interrupted (Due to poor network coverage, it was not possible to do capacity building through collaborative tools);
- Field information on the violation of communities' rights and the evolution of cases was difficult to collect (due to poor network coverage and the suspension of field interventions).
- As a result, there was an increase in land transactions without the participation of CLPAs (partly due to the limitation on meetings);
- Many international experience-sharing workshops were cancelled due to the closure of borders. The sharing of lessons learned in the field has been delayed.

In order to circumvent these problems various solutions have been implemented:

- Institution of distance work; Collaboration with local facilitators/leaders to obtain information/carry out certain activities (Monitoring the implementation of government measures by agribusinesses; Facilitating the selection of representatives of CLPAs in the National Sustainability Council set up by the Halcyon group);
- Sharing of experience in online meetings;
- Collaboration with local facilitators/leaders to obtain information/carry out certain activities (Monitoring the implementation of government measures by agribusinesses; Facilitating the selection of representatives of CLPAs in the National Sustainability Council set up by the Halcyon group);
- Sharing of experience in online meetings;

Changes in project implementation's approach were maintained, in the sense that the project relied more on facilitators and local partners whose capacities were enhanced to track changes on the field, and to provide support to communities in need. CED staff supported remotely the communities and visits from journalists and CED staff on the field were conducted with the required precautions.

IV. ACTIVITIES

MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. It is possible to predict conflicts, by identifying areas with high level of risk, through the observation of a combination of criteria in the area. The needed information are the following:

- a. Total size of land in the study area;
- b. Total size of allocated land in the area (allocated by the Government, and therefore unavailable to communities);
- c. Size of the population in the community;
- d. Size of communities land (claimed by communities as their customary collective property), and size of overlapping land between b. and d. The higher the overlaps, and the higher the population in the area, the higher the land scarcity and the risk of conflicts.
- e. Nature and importance of communities' land allocated by the State to third parties determines the speed of occurrence of the conflict and its magnitude: when the areas are in the "spiritual" sphere (sacred sites for example, or areas with historical value) or in the "highly productive" spheres (very productive lands, swamps, hunting zones or fishing areas), the conflict seems inevitable and can last for long, especially in case of their destruction.

The data is gathered through participatory map with communities, and land/resources allocation by the relevant ministries, and the size of the population in the area. Additional field relevant data is about the production modes in the area, and the size of land needed by an individual for his activities. These information allow for the calculation of the size of land available to community members. The map in appendice of this report was produced in the ocean Division, and formed the ground for the argument for advocating on the need to further identify and protect communities' rights. It was presented during the Land Tenure Week end of January in Yaoundé, in a session devoted to the improvement of coordination among public administrations, and the participants recommended that an assessment of the land/resources allocation system is conducted, to identify weaknesses in terms of communities' rights protection, and efficiency of land/resources rights allocation.

The map shows that the on a total size of 1,1 million hectares, the Division hosts projects on 0,965 million hectares, representing 84,7% of the area, and leaving only 0,173 million hectares of land unallocated (15,3 % of the Division). From this remaining area should be removed a growing size of registered lands: the economic perspective of the Division leads to a rush towards land registration by elites. The total size of land registered by private individuals is estimated at 30% (30,000ha). The area host around 200 000 people (around 80,000 land users), and they have to share a maximum area of 140,000 ha, which leads to an average of 1,75 ha per adult using land. This size of land is not enough to sustain land needs for agriculture conducted according to the traditional practices (shifting cultivation for food crops, requiring 0,5 ha per user per year, with a rotation cycle of 5 years, i.e 2,5 ha per user,

including fallows). To this size should be added, in more than 1 user out of 6, a cocoa farm, with an average size of 1 ha.

This clearly shows that the Ocean Division is a land/resources' conflict hot spot, and the situation is likely to worsen in the coming years. The recommendation stated by communities and NGOs in the area is that new land/resources allocation should be frozen, and an assessment of the current situation and consequences should be conducted and solution found to the land scarcity of communities, before any new land management decision. This proposal is valid for the Ocean Division, but also works for the rest of the country, especially in a context where the different ministries managing land and resources have very poor records in coordinating their decisions in order to ensure coherence.

Land become scarce, land management practices tend to change, with an increase of the commodification of land. Sales are done by men, and benefit the more senior males of the community and/or the family, exposing the weaker segments of the society or the community to increased land scarcity and insecurity of rights (women, youth, indigenous, migrants). Land scarcity pushes communities to request their customary land transferred to third parties (investor, managers of large infrastructure, protected areas), and by disregarding what is considered as the State as acquired rights, communities enter in a conflict with both the administration and the new user/owner of the land. Understanding the roots causes of conflicts, and being able to predict occurrence and magnitude of open conflicts provides useful insights in the selection of locations where efforts are needed in terms of negotiation and sensitization of all the parties to ensure that peaceful solutions are found. It also allows companies to understand the ineluctability of conflict, and to identify the paths for a long lasting solution.

- 2. In an area hosting a high number of investors, characterized by the diversity of their countries of origin, field of activity, source of funding, voluntary rules to which they comply in addition to the national legislation, it is important to understand what determines the most the attitude of companies towards communities (why do the companies care the most ? Is it because of their origin? Their source of funding, the sector in which they operate, the nature of their voluntary commitments, etc. or a combination of all those or some of these factor)? What we are finding out is the ultimate weight of markets' requirements as a key game changer in the behavior of companies involved in production in areas where they co-exist with communities.**

At the beginning of the project, it was observed that some companies were open to dialogue with the local communities. However, this new trend of openness to dialogue, following a long phase of lack of communication between companies and communities, was more due to market pressure. Indeed, international companies, in this case, according to the market requirements and the certifications they had to obtain to satisfy them, were getting closer to the communities. Only during implementation did we find that companies did not always seek effective participation from communities and did not have the real will to effectively take into account the rights of local communities.

- 3. Conflicts among communities over land and resources are growing in number and intensity, especially in areas where projects have overlapped with communities' land.** The project attempts to also address these conflicts through **negotiation, involving local NGOs, traditional rulers and communities' leaders**. Such conflicts are observed around the deep sea port south of Kribi, around SOCAPALM, and in the vicinity of HEVECAM old plantation and extension. The main conflicts observed are the following:
- a. The determination of limits between villages: near the roads, limits are known, and there are no or little dispute, especially because boundaries between villages next to the road are often natural boundaries. It's in the village hinterland that problems arise: rivers do not have a straight flow, and inside the forest it is often difficult to determine, in the absence of farms or house, which village owns a specific portion of land;
 - b. Land acquisition by elites and national investors, interested in land speculation as a consequence of the expected growth of the city of Kribi (hosting the largest sea port of Central Africa, and already witnessing an increase of its population, which could reach more than 1 million inhabitants, i.e 6 times the size at the beginning of the project);
 - c. Under pressure from the communities and NGOs, companies decided to take out of their concessions a size comprise between 2,500 ha to 25,000 ha, with at least half of this size in the Ocean Division. As a consequence of this decision, tensions started within the communities, on how the land will be shared and used: some communities would like to see the land being shared in equal parts among the neighboring communities, while other would like the share to be done in such a way that each village gets back what was in its original customary land. This situation opens a way for a new direction of negotiation that the project is currently handling.
- 4. Companies are more and more under pressure to improve their relationship with communities, due to donors or buyers policies (in the case of Halcyon) or to certification process (SOCAPALM is planning to be RSPO-certified, in order to improve its access to loans from European Banks).** There is however a major risk of superficiality, induced by the poor understanding of the processes by the local administration, who tend to limit the requests of communities, in order to protect the companies. Dialogue is anyway facilitated and opens a platform for the development of a framework for consultation and dialogue. One of the big challenges, however, remains the question of accountability in platforms for dialogue with the company. Representatives of local and indigenous communities who will be able to defend the interests of the communities, but also to share progress in dialogue with the company. *Where companies are ready to start a constructive dialogue with communities, one of the major obstacles is likely to be the ability of the communities, especially when they are diverse, to agree on common positions on issues on the dialogue agenda. Internal disagreements within the communities are likely to delay the main outcomes of the*

dialogue. The focus of development actors has so far been on FPIC as a whole but not enough on the necessary actions prior to the beginning of negotiations. One of the main reasons why communities-companies dialogues are not efficient is probably the lack of preparation on the side of the communities.

5. **In the original customary law, land rights are must often use rights, and the pretended owner can't permanently transferred the land to a non-member of the community or family.** The main objective of customary law is to ensure the integrity of the land, and ensure that it stays in the group (family or community), but every person, including migrants and foreigner are entitled to use the land to sustain his life, but has to leave it at the end of his use. The head of the family is therefore not the owner of the land, but the administrator, who has to ensure that every member of the household in need has a secured access to land for his use. Women, who are in principle supposed to leave the family/village for marriage cannot “administer” the land in her community/family of origin. It's interesting to note that in villages where marriages happen within the family (between cousins), women inherit rights on land, since marriage does not result into her children been “outsiders” to the family/communities. The problem started when land became a commodity, and has intensified in villages experiencing land/resources pressures. This observation is useful for finding solutions to the issue of the recognition of women land rights within the frame of the recognition of communities' collective land rights.
6. **Concerning the impacts of agro-industries on women's land rights, there are a series of hidden impacts due to the increase of working time or of walking time to and from the farm.** As an example, this reduces the volume of products brought from the farm from women, and reduces their income and the family diet. A network of women around agro-industries is progressively been build, and the purpose will be to connect women from plantations outside of the project area.
7. **The protection of the forest and of local and indigenous communities' land rights remains an important element for building their resilience to external shocks.** During the Covid-19 crisis, and as a consequence of the very poor quality of the health system in the country, and more so in rural area, communities had to rely on traditional medicine to address the symptoms of the disease. Due to the high pressure on the forest, some of the species had already disappeared from near the villages, and sometimes the traditional knowledge was also lost. It was interesting to notice that many elites from the city had more trust in the traditional medicine for their personal safety, and were traveling to remote areas to finds traditional doctors to help, even if the public Government message was to rely on hospitals.
8. **Sensitization on Covid 19 in communities in the project area was conducted in 36 communities, including 12 indigenous communities.** The activity involved local NGOs and community leaders as facilitators. The main lessons learned were the **difficulties to implement a coordinated action in sharing information and equipment on Covid 19**: companies and projects did not coordinate their efforts, resulting into some communities receiving several visits and equipment, while other were left with very

little support. The local response to Covid 19 could have been seen as an opportunity for companies to (re)build confidence with neighboring communities, by the nature of their support in these trouble times. While Hevecam invested time and resources (human and financial) to implement a coherent set of anti-covid activities, other companies in the area gave the impression that the Government requirements were a mere formality, an additional constraint to their activities on the field. The company's attitude in this crisis, expected to be one of the deadliest in Africa, reflects their perception of the importance of the value of the life of communities surrounding their operations. One of the lessons learned is that the way companies react to the major needs or threats of communities is a way to pave the way to peaceful coexistence, or to rebuild trust where conflict already exist. In this case, crisis of all kind affecting the communities should be perceived as opportunities for investors to ensure support and improvement of their relationships with communities.

9. **Land and forest conversion are very connected**, forest conversion is one of the ways elites use to claim land ownership and pave the way to land registration. Land is cleared, often by local elite, to provide evidence of land development, necessary step before land registration. Communities have been trying to oppose land grabbing, but it has been hard to deny customary rights to powerful elites. Local civil servants having the authority to validate the land registration process are often accomplices, and receive a portion of the land, exacerbating communities' dispossession. One suggestion to stop land dispossession in the area is to suspend land registration in the Ocean Division, until clarification of rights and processes are made. CED uses satellite images to monitor illegal logging.
10. **The multiplication of infrastructure and biodiversity conservation projects and their overlap in the ocean site is leading to increasing land pressure in the Ocean Division.** Land tenure security of land rights and community use is becoming an increasing concern. The urgency is to materialize this information on a map to inform reform about current problems as well as traditional land governance mechanisms as a potential source of inspiration for the ongoing reform.
11. **Indigenous peoples' participation in co-management agreements** for protected areas is often limited by poor information to communities, poor understanding of the implications of the agreement and poor involvement in monitoring the agreement's clauses.
12. **IPs in Cameroon have the right to be different**, a right that is not recognised in Cameroon because they are not formally recognised under the UN definition of indigenous peoples. This non-recognition of their rights affects the enjoyment of their rights at different levels, including land rights. The participation of indigenous peoples, Bagyeli in the framework of the project could be strengthened by the recognition of traditional 3rd degree indigenous chieftaincies. In addition, improving their representation in decision-making bodies would be a considerable step forward. However, this representation should move away from the modern canons of definition of representativity and be based on IPs' own conception, so that their

participation is effective and the issues of leadership and accountability are no longer a challenge for these communities.

- 13. The freedom enjoyed by the State in the management of permanent forest estate, designed to better protect the forest, is now been used by the State as a way to accelerate forest destruction, through its conversion for agro-industries.** The process seems to be the following: a concession is granted to a logging company, and when the Government receives a demand for a land concession on the said forest, it allow rapid clearance of the forest for the timber, and grants the concession for agro-industry, avoiding the consultation process that would have taken place if it was not a land privately owned by the State: the tool for protection has been turned into a powerful instrument for destruction. This trend was seen in the Camvert and Biopalm concessions in the Ocean and in the Halcyon concession around the Dja.
- 14. During the health crisis, and despite the restrictions impose by the Government, especially in travel and size of meetings, the process for moving forward some of the land deals in the project area continued,** leading to decisions made without appropriate consultation, and with very limited public scrutiny (both from national and international NGOs and media).
- 15. Training of next generation land experts, As part of the LandCam project of which this project is connected as co-funding, CED organized a training session of the next generation land expert, using the Ocean Division as a test case.** The 22 trainees (including 9 women) were Master's and PhD students coming from 6 universities in Cameroon, and covering a diversity of disciplines (law, economics, history, geography, sociology and anthropology). They were trained in research methodology, and on challenges in land management in Africa.
- 16. In a global and transversal way, the communities today more than yesterday need to see the change brought by the support projects in the taking into account of their rights.** They do not always appreciate the impact of the studies carried out and their results, even less the progress made in formulating proposals for land reform. Beyond the necessary return of studies, communities need to see the implementation of concrete activities that would allow them to secure their land and improve their food self-sufficiency. A test was done with the development of the mushroom culture.
- 17. Provide elements for other IP cases !** The studies carried out have made it possible to conclude that the disappearance of indigenous languages is deeply linked to the disappearance of their traditional lands and the different land pressures they encounter. In this perspective, it is fundamental to develop approaches to secure land tenure for indigenous peoples. In addition, their participation must be guaranteed in the current land reform.

V. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

Throughout the implementation of the project, different activities have been carried out in the Ocean Division. Each of these activities has been implemented to contribute to the achievement of the expected outcomes.

A- Activities related to specific objective 1.1. To test legal empowerment strategies for communities in Cameroon, including women, youths and indigenous groups, to secure their land tenure rights and engage in community- investor dialogue on an equitable basis

1. Promotion of community -investor dialogues

Community capacity building emerged as a result of the needs assessments that were carried out at the beginning and during the project. Aware of the knowledge imbalance, the exercise was particularly important. The communities' capacities were thus strengthened on issues of rights in large-scale land allocation processes, on registration processes, on remedies in case of violation of rights...

Preparing traditional rulers to the dialogue with companies and local authorities

The request for the Chiefs in the Ocean Division, especially those from villages neighboring SOCAPALM and HEVECAM, started a process for a joint dialogue with the two companies. Besides all other claims, the main stake of this dialogue is the restitution of a portion of the concession by the companies to communities. There are two issues around this land restitution:

- Communities expect the land to be handed over from the companies to communities;
- The companies insist on the fact that they can't give the land back to communities, but only to the State who gave them the concession ;

CED's concerns, shared by a majority of village Chiefs, is about smooth transfer of the land to communities, and efficient management of the land by communities, for their long term benefit. It's a challenge in an area where the price of land and the high demand is nurturing land speculation and dispossession of communities.

CED provided a series of preparatory meetings with Chiefs, aiming at building a common position, and advocacy targets and strategies. The advocacy target was extended to the Central Government officers (Ministers of Agriculture and of Land), and the position was to try to keep the land under the common property of the respective villages, with a management plan to ensure production, compliant with the needs and cultures of the communities.

The process involved two meetings of traditional rulers, and visits in villages for further discussions with village members. The traditional rulers requested to prepare a Charter to

govern their approach towards the dialogue with companies and with the (local and central Governments). The Charters aims at acting both as a guide for the actions of the Chiefs in the Dialogue and as a protection against powerful actors (companies and the State) trying to divide the communities (Chiefs could argue that they can't change their positions on the request of more powerful actors because of commitments). The Charter was prepared by the Chiefs, and the discussions continue among the Chiefs. They want to extend the scope of their initiative to the dialogue with all other actors in the Ocean Division. This is a unique initiative in Cameroon, and will set a clear precedent if successful. The map of land allocations in the Ocean Division is an additional argument in the Chiefs' position.

Monitoring companies' commitments

- **Facilitation of the process of appointing representatives of the local and indigenous communities bordering Hevecam to the Sustainability Council**

During the previous semester of 2020, within the framework of companies monitoring, the sustainability council had approached civil society organisations to support them in the process of representation of the local communities bordering the project. In this context, two workshops were organised in order to facilitate the appointment of representatives from local and indigenous communities. From 10 to 11 March 2020, the appointment of the representative of the local communities and the Hevecam company and on 02-04 April 2020, the appointment of the representative of the local indigenous communities to the Hevecam company. Exchanges were initiated with the Halcyon group in 2019, the parent company of Hevecam which exploits rubber in the division of the Ocean on nearly 60,000 ha since decades. These activities were also part of the monitoring of the investor's commitments to the riverside communities. As a reminder, in November 2018, the Halcyon group committed itself to a zero-deforestation policy. These commitments were followed up by CED in collaboration with other CSOs, namely Mighty Earth and APED in the field, which produced a study report. Consultation meetings and workshops were held with local communities and CSOs, including actors in the Ocean zone, to present the results of the study and discuss the fulfilment of these commitments.

Following this, a working session was held with CSOs and two HALCYON officials to both report the results of the study. With Halcyon officials it was more about presenting communities expectations. During this session, the commitments were reaffirmed but above all defined over time.

With the aim of improving dialogue between communities and investors, the dialogue initiated with Halcyon, the parent company of Hevecam in the Ocean Division and Sudcam in Dja was continued with two working sessions. Because of the Corona Virus, the preferred approach here was the facilitation of these different workshops by a local partner NGO (CEDLA). The company finally did not use the council as a consultative organ.

- **Documentation of the evolution of the activities of Camvert (agro-industry) and conducting a study on the forest conversion process in Cameroon**

Within the framework of the project, the monitoring of the implementation of the Camvert agro-industrial project, the project mainly worked on the collection of documentary data. The specifications signed between the company and the municipalities of Campo and Nyete, as well as the specifications signed between the company and the local and indigenous communities living along the river, in this case the Mabi, Yassa and Bagyeli communities, were collected thanks to a local facilitator.

In recent months, there has been an emerging trend in Cameroon of large-scale land allocation through forest conversion. Based on the case of Camvert and Biopalm, a study has been conducted to understand a growing phenomenon in Cameroon to the detriment of the rights of neighboring communities. The phenomenon of forest conversions is the major threat to the forest cover.

- **Exchanges with the central administration on the taking into account of the rights of neighboring communities within the framework of the development of the Société Agricole de l'Océan, which has 627 ha in the Ocean division (Village Makoure 1)**

In the framework of the study on transparency conducted by CCSI in partnership with CED, data collection and local and national workshops were used to reconstitute the results of the study. The aim of the study was to identify the type of information that is important and useful to disclose. Interviews with the administration at the central level drew the attention of the administration to the need to make quality information available in order to enable communities to monitor the progress of the project and ensure that their rights are better taken into account.

- **Legal and judicial assistance to defender of land rights in Makouré 1, (Emmanuel Mbuonzuondi et cie)**

Since the installation in 2011 of the Agricultural Society of the Ocean (SAO) in the village of Makouré 1, without information, consultation and adequate participation of local and indigenous communities, the life of the members of the village has never been the same. Among other things, there are difficulties in accessing traditional land and uses for the local and indigenous communities of Makouré 1. The implementation of the agro-industrial project has generated tensions with these communities. Following numerous complaints to the local administrative authorities which remained in vain, some members of the communities organized a demonstration in 2016 at the entrance to the site of the land concession. The protest led to work stoppage for a few days and the arrest of the leaders of the revolt in Kribi. In 2019, one of the leaders of the revolt, Mr. Emmanuel Mbuonzuondi, as well as other persons implicated were the subject of a legal proceeding in the court of Kribi for the disturbances caused by the 2016 demonstration. In January 2020, the project was contacted by land rights defender Emmanuel Mbuonzuondi for legal and judicial assistance. It should be noted that in previous years the CED provided legal assistance in this case for appeals to local (Divisional office) and central (Ministry of External Relations) administrations. Remedies that so far have not allowed members of communities living near the SAO to exercise their rights.

In order to provide local assistance, the project sought the services of a lawyer, who is based in the city of Kribi. It is planned over the next few months to refine the intervention and defense strategy for these land rights defenders who continue to face daily threats in their quest for justice.

The choice of lawyer was guided by his mastery of the case and the support he gave to the defender since the installation of the company. Telephone meetings were held pending a physical work session. Assistance intensified during February 2020. Till the end of the project, the case was still pending before the court.

During this period the project has continue to support some communities in their interaction with the private sector or conservation agencies. Communities of Bandevouri and Makoure bordering the Société Agricole de l'Océan (Ocean Agricultural Company, SAO) concession in Lokoundje (Ocean), complaining about the legality of the presence of the company in their area was supported. The project team gathered information to better understand differentiated impacts of the presence of the company on communities, and differentiated claims and complaints. The capacity of the communities to defend their land rights was also assessed. The project found that the communities was not well aware of the nature and contain of their rights with regards the presence of a land concession. A preliminary analysis of the legality of the company's concession was conducted, revealing irregularities in the process followed. A discussion initiated with the company revealed its reluctance to dialogue with communities. Communities members exposing the irregularities of the land concession were harassed, and the project is providing them with legal support (design of a legal strategy, provision of legal advices, support in discussions with the administration at the central level and local level). The communities represent a population of 700 persons (250 indigenous and 450 non-indigenous). At the same time, the presence of the agro-industry and the construction of the road Kribi-Grand Zambi had and incidence on the existing land conflict between local community and indigenous people. Data has been collected and legal advices given. Discussions where to be held between both communities.

- ***Participatory mapping***

Participatory mapping is a quality tool in the community-investor dialogue. It allows the rights and uses of communities to be highlighted and improves the way they are taken into account. During the project, participatory mapping was used on several occasions to improve the consideration of local communities' rights in land investment projects.

From September 23 to October 11, 2019, a participatory mapping activity was carried out in the Ocean Division. The aim of the latter was to document the village lands of local and indigenous communities using participatory mapping. Specifically, it was a question of mapping village terroirs and above all highlighting their limits; spaces belonging / having belonged to the natives or those on which they carry out their main activities; activity and use spaces during the current season (long rainy season); women's activity / use spaces; activity and / or use spaces shared with neighboring villages / camps; land investments made in the village by elites (plantations in particular), companies and the state. The activity was carried out with the technical assistance of three local CSOs (CADER, CEDLA, BACUDA), in nearly

fourteen local and indigenous communities (Nyamabande (Zingui); Nkolekouk (Adjap), Bomlafenda (Bidou 3, Nkolmbonda), Lendi, Betime (Bidou 1); Nkoulizouli (Bissiang); Lolabe (Biyengue)). The activity consisted of workshops with local communities for the proper implementation of mapping, training of local cartographers, collecting GPS coordinates, map processing and reporting.

Because of their differentiated relationship to the land, during the implementation of the activity, an emphasis was placed on the participation of women in the different stages of implementation. Thus, we were able to record the participation of women both during the various training sessions for the implementation of the mapping and in the actual data collection. The women were thus trained in the use of GPS and were asked to be local cartographers. The main objective here is to bring out the specific interests of women on earth. At the same time, during the monograph, an emphasis was placed on the participation of women in the exercise (History of the village, activities practiced according to gender, etc.).

The next steps in the mapping consist of restitution of the results obtained (monograph, maps) and an amendment by community members and a definition of potential advocacy strategies for better consideration of their rights.

Since July 2019, the Société Agricole de Mbanga (SAM) has been established in the villages of Ndogtima-nyong and Yawanda in the Maritime Sanaga division, with a view to create a banana plantation. It would have a provisional concession of 3,000 ha on these lands. In view of its proximity to the Port of Kribi and the strong land pressures in the Ocean division, the area particularly close to this division has been the focus of the project at least for land issues and for taking into account the rights of the communities. In addition, 75% of the swampy area allows the population to carry out its hunting, fishing and collection of non-timber forest products. The agricultural areas are located on the outskirts of the village and a large part of the concession would be on the outskirts of the village. With a view to support the neighboring communities in agro-industry, various activities have been commissioned within the framework of the project. These included taking stock of the situation and carrying out participatory mapping of the area. In Ndogtima-nyong a data collection was carried out between November 2019 and March 2020, and participatory mapping (from 28 June to 06 July 2020, monograph, realization of the ground map, collection of GPS data). The main aim of the exercise was to gain visibility over their entire territory/land heritage, to compare the limits materialised by the SAM and to list all the activity zones and the resources essential to maintain their living conditions. It enabled community members, who shared their views on the usefulness of the agro-industrial project, to have a better visibility of the land area and of the issues involved in implementing agro-industry, in particular the impacts of the latter on access to the areas of use. The next steps will be determined by the restitution of the map in Ndogtima-nyong and the realization of the map in Yawanda. However, as things stand, the communities hope to hold discussions with both the company and the administration.

Support to women around agro-industries (HEVECAM, SOCAPALM and SAO)

Studies were conducted to improve our understanding of women's land rights, and to explore avenues for improvement. A proposal was made to facilitate the dialogue between women and traditional authorities to improve their access to land. A guide was also prepared to support investors in their dialogue with communities. A guide was also prepared to help better understand the complex issue of women land rights.

An assessment of the land management/land rights situation and capacities of women around land concessions was conducted in 8 villages (Ebondi, Kilombo, Bidou 1, Elogbatindi, Mbébé, Makouré 1, Betime and Dehane). The purpose was to: (1) understand progress in the improvement of their situation; (2) identify capacities of women leaders in the selected communities; (3) identify remaining and emerging problems faced by women in communities neighbouring agro-industries;

At the end of the process, the following conclusions were found:

- a. The challenges faced by women
 - i. Restrictions in access to land and resources, due to land scarcity induced by the presence of agro-industries;
 - ii. Gender-specific insecurity, due to the presence of (often single) male workers in the area;
 - iii. Increased sensibility of women labour, due to the grabbing of arable land near the village, obliging the women to seek arable land far from the village;
 - iv. Difficulties in accessing and securing economic opportunities offered by the presence of the company;
- b. The capacities of women leaders in communities
 - i. Women leaders supported by the project are able to support women in villages in documenting their problems, and finding the right avenue to raise them (traditional authorities, local government authorities, local NGOs, etc.). They have a good understanding of the content and weaknesses of the legislation, and of the customary rules. They know where to seek remedies for harm they face, and can communicate to other women within the communities;
- c. Further actions to be carried out
 - i. Finalize and disseminate the tools for communities' assessment of the performance of companies with regards protection of communities' rights ;

- ii. Provide local NGOs and NGOs in other regions of the country hosting agro-industries and other land-based investments with tools on how to identify problems and ways of recourse (how to seek remedy)

Challenge

The General Manager of HEVECAM, who started the gender-specific dialogue with communities, was replaced by the company early 2021. This change in the top management provided the project with the possibility of understanding how far the quality of the dialogue depends on individuals, or is the consequence of a real institutional change. For the rest of the project, it led to freeze the discussion between women and the company.

Support to Indigenous people

In terms of securing the lands, territories, uses and resources of indigenous peoples, the project addressed both land and resource security issues. Indeed, IPs are intrinsically linked to the forest. Their identity is deeply attached to it. The forest being based on land spaces, these two questions are inseparable.

Land pressures in the Ocean Division have as a side effect the increased land scarcity in indigenous communities: they are settled on local communities' land, where they enjoy no customary land rights. Local communities' members tend to either sell land on which indigenous people are settled, or to occupy it when they have sold other parts of the village. In some cases, land taken by investors in local communities push villagers to occupy the space on which indigenous communities are settled.

In the village of Kilombo, where the presence of SOCAPALM restricted the space for Bagyeli indigenous communities, and more and more bantous from neighboring villages interfere in this space. CED supported BACUDA, an indigenous association, in starting the negotiations between the Bantou and the Bagyeli in the area. Mapping was done to identify locations where conflicts are arising, and individuals with conflicting claims, as grounds for starting negotiations.

At the same time, CED accompanied two indigenous communities in the Akom 2 sub-division. The indigenous communities have been settled along the road on areas where they do not enjoy customary land ownership. The dominant-dominated relationship that exists between the two communities contributes to the tensions they encounter. For these indigenous communities, the fact that they do not have a traditional 3rd degree chieftaincy contributes to their low participation in decision-making processes. In order to contribute to their land security, the project has undertaken to support them by facilitating the process of recognition of traditional chieftaincies of the third degree. The application for recognition of a traditional chieftaincy was submitted to local administrative authority of Akom 2 subdivision, who agreed in principle to support the securing of land for indigenous peoples. As the problem is the same for indigenous peoples, a similar initiative has been undertaken in the Mintom district in the Dja and Lobo department, with the agreement in principle of the Prefect of Dja and Lobo. The objective here is to conduct a simultaneous action with the participation of the governor of the Southern Region. With the governor's agreement in principle, it will be easier to duplicate the initiative in all the departments where there are indigenous peoples.

The project also addressed the issue of cohabitation between protected areas, notably Campo-Ma'an Park, and indigenous peoples. Indeed, conservation generates profound limitations in the access of indigenous peoples to the forest. All of these things generate violations of their rights because the forest remains the habitat, the place of supply and the cultural and religious place of the indigenous peoples. In the perspective of conservation that takes into account the rights of indigenous peoples, the trend is towards co-management of protected areas. In this sense, MOUs had been signed between MINFOF and IPs to allow IPs access to the forest under certain conditions. At the end of the agreement in 2018, the project evaluated the implementation of the MOUs and their awareness of their rights. One of the main conclusions of the study was that indigenous communities are not sufficiently aware of their rights in the context of protected areas. There is a need for greater awareness. The relationship with conservation officers continues to be a challenge.

Monitoring of the alert mechanism for land rights violations and land rights defenders

Established during the COVID 19 crisis, the rapid response mechanism for land rights violations and the protection of land rights defenders aimed at ensuring that cases of violations are quickly identified and properly addressed. The system involves selected communities' leaders (including women and indigenous people), and informants from local NGOs and local administrations. In this phase, 12 local monitors were selected in the project area. It is built on the following principles:

- Confidentiality: none of the local monitors know the identity of the others, and two CED staff have the names and contacts of all the local monitors
- Accuracy of information received: CED has at least 2 monitors per locality, to ensure the possibility to double check the information received
- Flexibility: the purpose is to receive all information concerning possible rights violation, in order to avoid expectation of formality from local monitors, and to ensure that a maximum of information from the field, and decide to be the one selecting those who fit the criteria;
- Use of mobile phones when possible (for video and audio recording, and taking photos of evidence)
- A system for verification of information, and for finding the most appropriate solution to the case (publication in the medias, discussions with the local administration, discussion with the national administration, discussion with the party responsible for the harm, or a combination of some of those options).
- The extension of the system outside of the project area, where 42 local monitors are identified and actives, generating 29 alerts at the beginning of the process

At that moment, 14 cases were recorded, including 4 from women and 3 from IP, and they were all found relevant. Out of the 14 cases, 9 were collective cases, about communities or a portion of the communities.

B- Activities related to specific objective 1.2. *To test action-research strategies, including a national network on gender and land, for facilitating equitable participation of civil society organizations in national-level policy debates, and for feeding insights from pilot activities into law reform*

International Women's Rights Day: women in agro-industries mobilise for better respect of their rights

In 2018 and 2019, the project focused on women's participation in land governance in different instances. The objective of the workshop was to share experiences on the land tenure problems encountered by women around certain agro-industrial plantations, the solutions/good practices developed by women to mitigate the negative impacts of the presence of these agro-industries and finally to reflect on the synergies of action for a better protection of women's land rights around agro-industries. The workshop was attended by representatives of local women in agro-industries, representatives of the administration, representatives of the private sector and representatives of civil society organisations (CED, CEDLA and APEDHO). The first day of the meeting enabled the women from the neighborhood to share their daily lives with each other and to reflect on a common position. The second day for its part consisted of the presentation of the women's position paper and discussions with the representatives of the administrations and agro-industries present. The ensuing exchanges enabled the women to appreciate the measures undertaken by other actors to reduce the negative impacts of agro-industrial activities. Measures that they considered insufficient. However, the exchanges will enable them to come up with solutions to remedy the negative impacts on women's land rights.

At the end of the workshop, the main resolution was the establishment of a network between women from all agro-industries and other land-based investments in Cameroon to share experiences and strategies. For the latter, information sharing has equipped them to better defend their rights. Focal points were thus designated for the platform for exchange and reflection among them. Finally, they hope that 8 March will be an opportunity to advocate for women's land rights in relation to agro-industries and other land-based investments.

Organisation of workshops on land issues

These various workshops enabled the participation of local leaders and field organisations on specific issues related to land governance. These included workshops on indigenous peoples, women, compensation, large-scale land allocations, transparency, etc. All these workshops were enriched by the contributions of field actors and greatly facilitated the development of proposals for land reform.

In addition to these workshops, the project organised various parliamentary-governmental workshops and land tenure weeks that brought together all stakeholders (administration, communities, companies, projects, NGOs) to discuss land tenure issues.

C- Activities related to specific objective 1.3. To share lessons nationally and internationally on how to link grassroots-level legal empowerment to national law reform

Workshops on indigenous people and land

Around the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, the project addressed the issue of indigenous peoples' participation in land governance at various occasions. In addition to bringing the issue into the public arena and sparking debate, these moments were an opportunity to share experiences among indigenous peoples and to enrich land reform with indigenous specificities. Over the years, the issues of indigenous peoples' participation in land tenure, the link between the disappearance of languages, loss of territories and indigenous cultures, the preservation of indigenous territories and resilience in the face of Covid, and finally the representativeness of indigenous peoples in decision-making bodies have been addressed in turn.

The Parliament-Government Dialogue on land governance

Various sessions have brought parliament and government together in a dialogue on land governance. The aim of the last session was to organize the discussion of the consolidated civil society positions for the land law reform. A set of documents were produced, building on lessons learned at the local level, including from the Ocean Division. The document is entitled “Civil Society Land Policy Note”, published in English and French, in a long and short versions, endorsed by around 100 NGOs, the network of traditional rulers of Cameroon (more than a thousand members in the country), and widely disseminated within the country. The Civil Society Land Policy Note was presented and discussed during the two days of the Dialogue, and provided the opportunity communities and NGOs to confront the Government with specific proposals. The dialogue was also the opportunity to start seeing some positive notes, with the Minister acknowledging the need to recognize and protect local and indigenous communities’ collective land rights: it’s the first time a high level Government official publicly expresses support to the protection of collective unregistered land rights. The Land Policy Note provides a vision for land management in Cameroon (there have never been a land policy in Cameroon!!!). It suggest the following eight proposals for the land reform, all built on lessons learned from the field, including the project area:

- Recognize that collective land rights persist throughout the national territory
- Guarantee land tenure security for all stakeholders
- Ensure the full participation of communities in land management
- Improve community access to justice in land matters
- Improve the efficiency of land administration
- Protect community lands for future generations
- Review the large-scale land acquisition process
- Improve the system of expropriation and compensation

The Dialogue was an important milestone in the legitimization process of some of the major proposal from the Land Policy Note, which gained a very strong support of a wide number of members of the Parliament, and Government officials.

The Land Tenure Week

There has been a three Land week during the project. The main one in terms of results is the one organized in Yaounde during the last week of January 2021, focusing on “Local Land Management”. It was jointly organized by the Ministry of Land and CED, and brought together around 200 persons from all over the country (Government representatives, members of the parliament, cooperation agencies, traditional rulers, women leaders, indigenous people leaders, youth leaders, NGOs, researchers and journalists. It was a major event in the country, largely covered by the media. 5 ministers attended the opening ceremony (chaired by the Minister of land, with attendance of the ministers of Agriculture, Livestock, Forests, Territorial Administration), and were all very positive on communities rights in their opening speeches. All the sessions were chaired by a representative of the public administration, and were aiming at ensuring that proposals for the reform are formulated in a consensual way. One of the session brought together representatives of the various public administrations, to address the weak coordination among them. The case study used during the session was the Ocean Division, where local land management is a challenge to peace and local development in the area. One of the recommendations from this session was that land/resources allocation should be frozen until an assessment of the situation and existing land/resources allocation processes is conducted, their consequences analysed, and a new system put in place before any new allocations. Coming from Government officials, such a recommendation is unexpected, and it was finally incorporated in the Land Tenure Week final recommendations, whose implementation will be monitored in the next Land Tenure Week. This outcome was considered by the project as a major success by the project.

Media coverage of land management issues in the Ocean Division

The media played a major role throughout the project. They were involved in most of the events in order to attract public attention and stimulate debate on land issues. They also covered different themes in the field so that the public could better understand certain land issues and reflect on them.

With the support of the project (providing information and contacts, or supporting field trips of journalists), the media covered issues of interest by the project. The reports involved a piece for the Voice of America, and a short video for the Voice of America Africa TV news, and several papers in national newspapers. All the media reports aimed at exposing to the public in the capital cities facts and analysis on the situation of land management/conflicts and rights violations in remote rural areas. The media reports also serve the purpose of introducing these topics in the public debate, putting an additional pressure on the decision-makers.

Journalists were selected on the grounds of their interest to continuously report on the issues visited in the Ocean Division.

Participation to international events and training

The University of Columbia on land contracts and on large-scale land grabbing 'From Analysis to Action' organized a one-week session in November 2020, and aimed at providing NGOs, journalists and government officials with skills for understanding and analyzing contracts in land-based investments.

Participation to an online online training in partnership with ILC In May 2020, participation in the training organised by AGTER in partnership with ILC on large-scale land grabbing 'from analysis to action' allowed to share some experiences from Cameroon, including those recorded in the Ocean Division (SOCAPALM, SAO, HEVECAM) and to learn from the experiences of other countries, both from other learners and trainers. The project has also participated in regional workshops in Abidjan from 23 to 30 November 2019 (*Mid-term evaluation of CRDI, International Regional Land Coalition Assembly, CLPA*).

The project attended also to the first African Peoples' Tribunal in Lagos in November 2020. At the end of that first session on agro-industries.

VI. EXTRANTS

A large part of the project was devoted to research... The objective here was to gain a better understanding of various phenomena related to the recognition of the land rights of local and indigenous communities, with a particular focus on women, indigenous peoples and youth. The results obtained were intended to define the most relevant and useful intervention approaches for improving the consideration of community rights.

The following studies were carried out:

- ✓ « **Réformer le foncier au Cameroun : des pistes pour l'action - Note de politique foncière de la société civile** »
- ✓ « **RAPPORT PHARE: Faire une omelette sans casser tous les œufs ? Pourquoi et comment améliorer le système d'expropriation et d'indemnisation au Cameroun** »
- ✓ Woman participation in land and forest governance
- ✓ How to assess the impact of agribusinesses on women? A practical guide
- ✓ How to analyse women's land rights in rural areas - A practical guide
- ✓ Transparency in land investments (with CCSI)
- ✓ Forest conversion process in Cameroon

A briefing note on securing land for indigenous peoples and a video on IPs and compensation were produced.

VII. EFFECTS

Various changes have been recorded in policies and practices. The project has succeeded to:

- a. Identify remaining and emerging problems faced by women in communities around agro-industries ;
- b. Understand the terms in which the issue of women and land tenure arises in Cameroon. Until now, the gender and land tenure debates have revolved around an assumption of discrimination in the recognition of women's land rights in legislation and other sources of law. However, on analysis, it appears that the law makes no distinction between men and women with regard to land. Moreover, custom, although discriminatory in some places, seems to be more conciliatory towards women. It is a faulty application of custom that is at the root of most of the violations of women's land rights;
- c. Keep communities mobilised in the face of land issues, we continue to receive complaints and denunciations despite threats and withdrawals from some victims because the communities know they are supported but also the investors on the other side know that there is someone stronger than the community who is looking into the case ;
- d. Provide a vision for land management in Cameroon with the Land Policy Note (there have never been a land policy in Cameroon);
- e. See officials taken among others recommendations from the Ministry the fact that land/resources allocation should be frozen until an assessment of the situation and existing land/resources allocation processes is conducted, their consequences analysed, and a new system put in place before any new allocations;
- f. At the level of legislation, various analyses were carried out, namely an analysis of the forestry legislation, an analysis of the land conversion process and the concession allocation system. A briefing note was produced on this topic with IIED;
- g. The project has contributed to a discussion on the need to reflect on large-scale land allocations;
- h. Lessons learned at the local level were fed back to the national level in the dialogue;
- i. In terms of women's participation, the Ministry in charge of land organised two consecutive open days in the Lekie Division on the topic of women and land tenure, during which legal assistance was offered to women on the problems they face;
- j. An internal workshop was organised in 2021 on the issue of women's access to land;
- k. Impact of working with young people who have taken an interest in land issues in their research.

VIII. OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The project has been so helpful. It has contributed to stimulate debate on various issues related to land tenure, in a context of land insecurity for communities. This is particularly true for vulnerable groups (women, youth and indigenous peoples). Capacity building on the rights of CLPAs has contributed to the informed participation of communities on issues that impact or are likely to impact their daily lives. Many communities have been supported in dialogue with companies, with variable degrees of collaboration and openness from these investors. All in all, the degree of involvement of companies is deeply linked to market incentives. However, the willingness to take communities into account is questionable, given the lack of provisions for real community participation. In addition, the project has provided legal and judicial support to land rights defenders facing violations of their rights.

Initiatives to recognise the customary land rights of local and particularly indigenous communities have been developed. Processes for the recognition of indigenous traditional chieftaincies are well advanced in some communities.

At the end of the project, some trends emerged:

- Conflicts can be prevented by identifying the places where they are likely to occur through the use of participatory mapping. With the increase in investment in the Ocean area, which is experiencing unprecedented land pressure, there is a need to identify the areas where conflicts are likely to occur. Amongst these investments, one cannot fail to mention the start of a new mining operation covering at least 5 of the 9 districts in the Ocean division.
- Numerous violations of the law continue to be perpetrated on the ground, with gaps in the transmission of information on these violations and limited possibilities for support. An alert mechanism has been set up in the field and should be developed throughout the country to enhance the monitoring of communities.

There have also been changes in the mechanisms and forms of land allocation and acquisition. This has occurred through forest conversions and the phenomenon of elite plantations. In addition, there is a strong need to organise the representation of local communities in investment projects, particularly indigenous peoples. This improved representation will undoubtedly help to move the lines more quickly for the consideration of their rights and interests in the processes and other land investments.

Women face specific problems, both in defining their land-related problems and in the nature of the problems they face as residents of investment projects. To set these realities aside is to limit the quality of the support that can be provided to them and the solutions that would result.

Action research projects such as this one are particularly important and can bring about great change for local and indigenous communities. It is encouraging that the Ministry in charge of land and even the ones on natural resources have put community rights in their outlook.

Lessons learned from the field have profoundly informed land reform the suggestion for the reform would have never been done without those precious insights. The interest of young people in land issues, particularly for vulnerable groups, women, youth and indigenous peoples land rights, suggests that the debate will remain open on these issues and it will lead to solutions that will improve communities daily life. The role of Medias throughout the project has been salutary. The media has put the spotlight on issues that are often unknown to the general public.

Civil society organisations working with communities at local level have seen their capacities strengthened on land issues and communities rights. In the meantime, they have been able to contribute to national and international debates through the experience sharing of field lessons. This result was further achieved through their involvement in the conduct of specific actions in the field (territorial compromises, facilitation of the recognition of 3rd degree traditional chieftaincies, participatory mapping of the uses and interests of riparian communities in investment projects, facilitation of dialogue platforms of traditional chiefs etc.).

To enhance the quality of the action research, it would be interesting to implement small development projects for the communities it build communities confidence toward the project and help them to contribute to the research which can be felt boring. During the project period, initiatives to promote alternative income-generating activities were tested. These included the development of mushroom and plantain cultivation.