Forest Concession Land Use Planning : Lessons Learned from the CARPE Program

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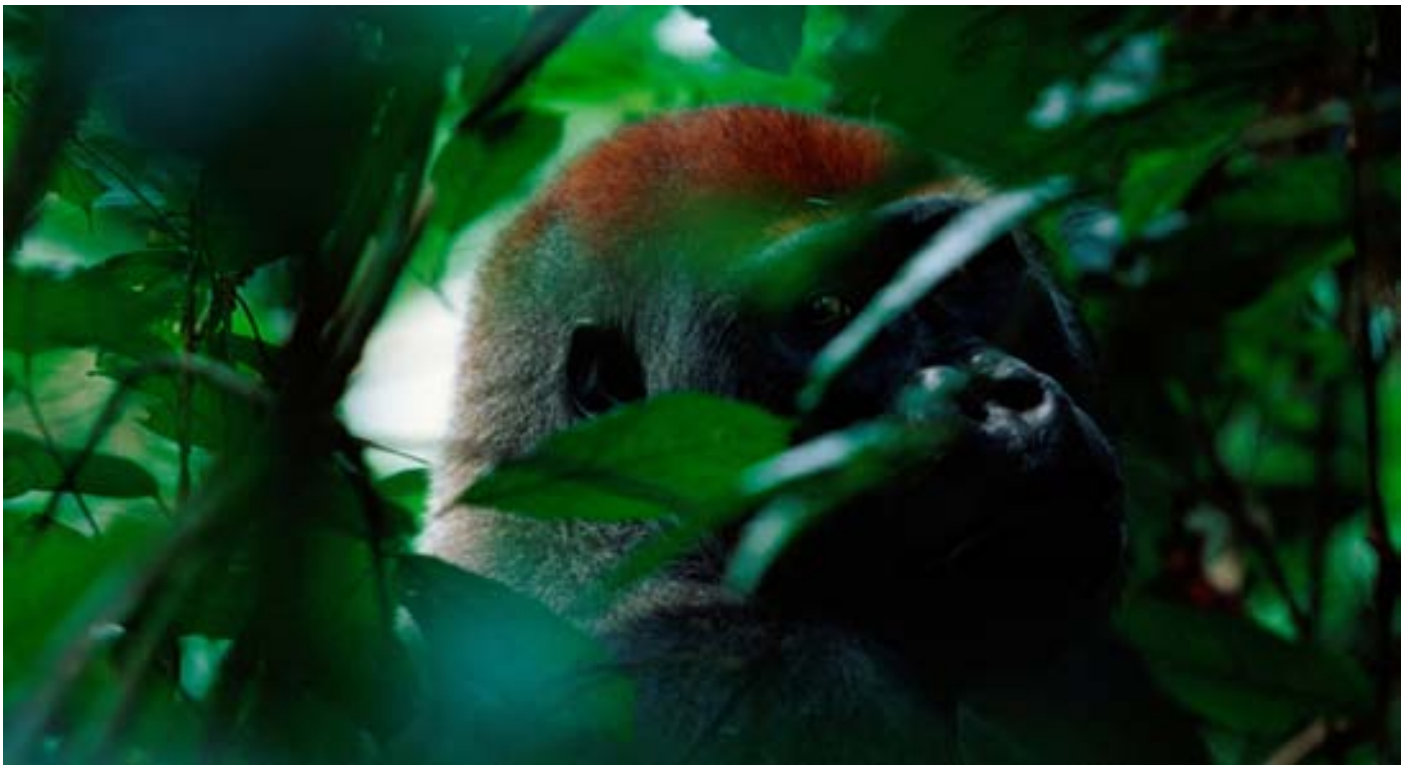

1. Introduction

The area covered by forest concessions in Central African forest countries (Cameroon, DRC, Gabon, Congo, CAR and Equatorial Guinea) is estimated today to total 50 million ha, which is about 25 percent of the evergreen rainforest of the region. All lands belong to the State and concessionaires simply manage the resources for a set period of time. In most of the countries, Cameroon excepted, the zoning process has not yet been finalized. Nonetheless, there has been noticeable progress in the gazettement of forest concessions in these countries.

In its strategy of implementing the policy of conservation and sustainable management of natural resources in the Congo Basin, and more especially in accomplishing its Intermediary Result 2, CARPE is working with partners at all levels – micro-, meso- and macro-zone , but also at national and global level – to make the most of the lessons learned in its various areas of intervention, especially those to do with forest concessions.

The purpose of this paper is to present a summary of the history of the development of forest concession management in Central Africa, from colonial days up to the present; to highlight the main challenges (former and emerging) for better land-use planning (LUP) in forest concessions; to outline the main lessons learned from case studies analyzed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the Cameroon and Congo segments of the Sangha Tri-National Landscape; and to provide some guidelines on current trends.

2. Development of forest management from the colonial period to the present

2.1 From mining management to sustainable management of forest

The history of forest management in Central Africa demonstrates the evolution of sylviculture and land management since the 19th century.

In fact, from the 18th century to the 1950s, policies on the management of forest resources were State-driven and all forest management was geared towards the promotion of logging without any real concern about regulating logging nor preserving wildlife. Most of the logging was for household use. Forests were, in almost all cases, the sole responsibility of the State.

In the 1950s, the situation started to change as forest management and logging were mostly geared towards the reconstruction of Europe after the 2nd World War. For a long time, logging activity was concentrated mostly around the coastline because of problems of transportation.

In the 1960s and 1970s, with the coming of mobile saws and better means of transportation, an increase in demand saw logging activity expand further and further inland although most of the land still remained unexploited.

A few trials were carried out in natural forests and they revealed that sylvicultural treatments before and after logging could significantly improve growth rates and consequently the volumes of marketable species.

Prompted by organizations such as IUCN, the necessity of taking conservation needs into consideration started to be felt. In 1975, the IUCN General Assembly organized in Nsele gave fresh impetus to the recognition of the importance of tropical forests to conservation.

In the 1980s, enormous efforts were made to develop programmes aimed at promoting conservation and regulating forest logging. This gradually evolved into programmes relating the conservation of forest resources to the development of local communities.

In the 1990s, some governments started to adopt laws to enable local communities to be involved in the management of forest resources.

During this period, concessionaires started to play an important role in management including the role hitherto entrusted to governments such as that of being responsible for the management of lands on which concessions had been granted. The obligations of concessionaires continued to grow and included various responsibilities:

- Technical responsibilities such as the preparation of management plans followed by directives and standards, management of felling plots, etc.;
- Social responsibilities through the creation of jobs, the provision of goods and services to administrations and the local populations, contributions to local projects, etc.;
- Economic responsibilities through the contribution of processing units, and the creation and maintenance of roads;
- Social responsibilities through the paying of a number of fees and taxes in addition to those stipulated by law;
- Environmental responsibilities geared towards respect for biological diversity especially wildlife in production zones.

2.2 Progress made on certification

Over the past 10 years, a new era has been born with the advent of forest certification. Concessionaires and States are doing quite a lot for the certification of natural forests. Presently, the surface area under FSC certification has grown from 0 hectare in 2006 to more than 4 million ha in 2010.

3. Major challenges in forest concession management

3.1 Forest concessions and land tenure

In spite of significant progress within the frame-

work of forest management, aspects of forest tenure are not yet harmonized in Central African countries. When it comes to large-scale zoning, apart from Cameroon, the other countries have still to complete their zoning plans.

With regard to domestic policies on granting of concessions, the period granted to concessionaires varies depending on regulations in force: 30 years and above. Do investors feel safe? Community claims on these lands will therefore no be on the increase.

3.2 Challenges of biodiversity conservation in production forests: 10 commandments for managing wildlife

A study carried out in the south of Cameroon in 2003 in a forest concession managed by a logging company called FIPCAM has shown that it is large mammals (gorillas, chimpanzees and elephants) that are facing the most pressure from logging.

Besides logging (that has as its corollary the disruption of habitats and the gradual disappearance of animal and plant species), there are many other pressures that are for the most part found outside of forest concessions. They include :

- the economic crisis of which one of the consequences is the decline in jobs in the public and private sectors, and the subsequent return of unemployed city dwellers to rural areas;
- the devaluation of the CFA Franc in 1994 and structural adjustment measures imposed by the World Bank and the IMF;
- new economic difficulties related to the reduction in oil revenues and associated jobs, thereby creating an attractive economic niche for the trade in bushmeat;
- the fall in price of cash crops (cocoa, coffee), coupled with poor sales of these export products, again causing the bushmeat trade to become a more important source of income for rural households in forest zones;
- the proliferation of more efficient hunting weapons aggravated by armed conflicts in the sub-region;
- the opening of new road networks by logging and mining companies thereby facilitating access to forest zones that were hitherto not accessible to hunters;
- the development of more efficient means of transportation;
- the growing demand for bushmeat in cities;
- the opening up of some regions that has led to an increase in outlets for the sale of bushmeat;
- the development of transborder trade and markets for bushmeat in urban areas;
- human immigration into logging and mining sites, and agro-industrial plants;
- huge inadequacies in the implementation of the law.

Some concessionaires have, in collaboration with conservation partners, set up some basic rules to reduce the loss of biodiversity and especially wildlife. These rules, that have been dubbed the “ten commandments”, were outlined at Lopé, Gabon, in 2000. They are :

1) Promote knowledge and respect for the laws in force inside and outside the forest concession through close collaboration between all actors;
2) Create between funding bodies, administrations, logging companies and conservation communities, true partnerships with rights and obligations that are known and accepted by all;
3) Mainstream the problem of “wildlife management” in designing and implementing management plans;
4) Restrict access to the concession;
5) Ban all commercial hunting or hunting using non-selective techniques in the forest concession;
6) Manage immigration to the forest concession with relation to living quarters, permanent camps and industrial sites;
7) Put up strict regulations and instruments for efficient control in the concession;
8) Establish awareness-raising and education programmes on the issue of overexploitation of wildlife;
9) Promote the use of alternative sources of protein to satisfy the dietary needs of the

populations;
10) Never give up!

3.3 How to reconcile the landscape approach with the management of forest concessions?

Landscapes are geographical areas where there is human activity and where there are physical and biological specificities for a given region, institutions and people who influence the latter, as well as cultural and spiritual values. Their scope has to be determined in terms of the targeted management objectives.

Among the main principles of forest landscape restoration, there is: (i) the identification of zones to be restored within landscapes taking into consideration the preservation of biodiversity, species, their habitats and ecosystems, and fostering the resilience of ecological systems; (ii) the promotion of a holistic vision while taking into consideration the management of large mosaics and the entire landscape; and (iii) the promotion of multi-actor platforms (government, civil society, communities and the private sector) for landscape management, to facilitate good moral, social, ethical and professional relations.

In the case of Central African forest concessions, most of them are contiguous to protected areas and are part of these large mosaics. Landscape development and management has to take into consideration the interactions between protected areas and forest concessions. The security of protected areas within a landscape depends on how sustainably they are exploited, the dynamics of the peripheral zones as well as the management of relations between the actors involved.

3.4 Emerging issues

There are emerging issues that have not been looked at in the case studies but that will have short and medium-term impacts on forest concessions.

Forest concessions and energy

The 13th World Forestry Congress in Buenos Aires (October 2009) highlighted the importance of bio-energy and its impact on the use of landscapes. In fact, bio-energy is used by at least 10 percent of the world's population and has pride of place in all developing countries.

As a result of the subsidies provided for research into first-rate bio-fuels, it is possible that land currently occupied by forest concessions will be given over to the production of bio-fuels.

The World Congress recognized the potential negative impact of the development of bio-fuels on agricultural and forest lands.

Importance of large plantations and their impact on forest concessions

With the development of environmental awareness due partly to climate change and the current economic downturn; there is good reason to ask if current land-use plans will be respected. Nobody can predict the evolution of the annual growth of plantations in the context of climate change. Will the trend be to produce timber in artificial plantations and leave natural forests for the conservation of biodiversity and carbon sequestration?

Similarly, with the much awaited development of bio-fuels in Africa, will large palm plantations that provide the opportunity, in the short term, for greater financial rewards than those provided by forests, not have the tendency to replace natural forests?

Impact of the REDD process on the management of forest concessions

The international community acknowledges the importance of Congo Basin forests in carbon sequestration. Although they represent only a relatively small percentage as compared to other types of forests in the world (especially temperate forests), they stock a relatively large volume of carbon as compared to these other types of forests.

The REDD process that consists of paying compensation to developing countries that have a net reduction of emission of greenhouse gases in

order to mitigate climate change is topical today. The Congo Basin countries that manage forest concessions want to have credits for the preliminary measures of sustainable management already undertaken, to develop suitable policies, incentives and reference scenarios that take into consideration demographical evolution, food security and energy needs.

The issue at stake in the long term is the future of management plans and land-use plans if the REDD mechanism is implemented.

The position of the congo Basin countries on this issue is that “degradation in forest concessions should be taken into account on the same basis of deforestation”.

Also, only the carbon market mechanism can generate the necessary financial resources for REDD and ensure sustainable funding.

4. Synthesis of main lessons learnt from on-going experiences

4.1 Experiences may vary but some common lessons can be learned

Within the framework of capitalizing on experiences and lessons learned by CARPE, three case studies on planning forest management in concessions were carried out:

- Land-use planning by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Enzyme Refiners Association (ENRA) in the Ituri-Epuli Landscape of the Democratic Republic of Congo;
- The gazettement process and management of forest concessions in the Cameroon segment of the Sangha Tri-National (TNS) Landscape, by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF); and
- The multi-organizational model of land-use planning and management of forest resources in forest concessions in the TNS within the framework of the Project for the Management of Ecosystems around the Nouabalé Ndoki National Park (PROGEPP in French).

In spite of the diversity of the landscapes and the complexity of contexts, in the analysis there is some convergence of the main lessons learned in the management of forested lands of which the most important are :

4.2 Act locally and think globally to influence policies at national and regional levels

LUP processes always require the involvement of communities, local authorities, local, national and sub-regional administrations. In the case of ENRA, it is reported that despite the weakness of local authorities, they nonetheless represent the legal authority and ignoring them can compromise the conduct of other planning initiatives. Collaboration with local authorities has facilitated gradual collaboration with the Administrator of the Mambassa Territory through quarterly meetings and other strategic meetings.

In the case of Cameroon, it has been observed that supposedly “weak actors” can constitute a significant threat to biodiversity if they believe that management rules are detrimental to their interests. From this participatory process of gazetting forest concessions, it is clear that conservation is not a technical process but also and mostly a social process.

4.3 Promote the landscape approach and multi-actor partnerships

In the countries covered by the case studies, it has been observed that forest concession management and development must take into consideration the contiguous protected areas (Virunga National Park for the DRC, the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park for Congo and Lobéké National Park for Cameroon). In Cameroon and Congo, it has been proven that the management of protected areas within a landscape depends on how the periphery is managed.

Tripartite partnerships involving the private sector, conservation NGOs and the local administra-

tion are often presented as a model to other sub-regions. It is thanks to multi-actor partnerships (CIB, WCS and the Ministry of Forest Economy for the Congo; ENRA, WCS and the Ministry for the DRC; and WWF, CEFAC and the Ministry in charge of Forestry for Cameroon) that management plans and land-use plans are developed.

In these partnerships, spelling out clear roles and responsibilities is crucial. In fact, conservation agencies must avoid conflicts and possible competition with administrations acting as technical support/advisory agencies to other actors.

The TNS experience in the Cameroon segment brings to the flore the fact that the landscape conservation approach is a "science of compromises" and that no actor has enough power to impose rules that others cannot understand or share in.

If well carried out, these partnerships result in the signing of collaboration agreements such as the "Mambele Agreement" (between local communities, safari hunting companies and the forestry administration that spells out the roles and responsibilities of each party with regards to sustainable management of wild fauna, and access to the various allocation units) and the anti-poaching agreement called the "LAB Agreement" (between logging and safari hunting companies, local communities, forestry administration and conservation NGOs). In the DRC, these partnerships have made it possible to sign collaboration agreements with ENRA and WCS. This also makes it possible to put in place and strengthen consultation fora between the forestry administration, conservation NGOs and forest concessions to evaluate and direct efforts towards the sustainable management of forest concessions (e.g., WWF and the SAFEC Company).

4.4 Acknowledge traditional land-use systems and the immediate interests of local communities

Regardless of the context, case studies have shown the need to master and take into consideration traditional land management systems and to preserve the immediate interests of communities.

In Cameroon for example, it is important to note that the difference between land tenure applied to local communities vary from those of migrants who want to secure as much land as possible in protected landscapes (protected areas and forest concessions), and this creates conflicts between the various ethnic groups.

The experience has shown that it is only thanks to sincere and open collaboration between actors that a zoning plan may be developed on which the boundaries of non-conflicting usage can be superimposed. The process of landscape zoning is much more likely to succeed if all actors concerned can discuss and agree on how the boundaries of non-conflicting allocations can be superimposed (and overlap) rather than focusing all their attention on exclusive allocation.

In North Congo, PROGEPP is working to strengthen formal recognition of the rights of communities in hunting zones and to formally recognize the rights of pygmy communities in forest concessions.

4.5 Increasing role of South-South dialogue and sharing between landscapes

Thanks to the harmonization of sub-regional policies under the coordination of COMIFAC, there has been an important promotion of discussion and transboundary management to enable new experience sharing in concession and zoning management; those countries that are more advanced in land-use planning should aim to inspire others.

4.6 Role of science and new tools and methods to monitor landscapes

The complexity of landscapes requires the intervention of scientists who work in close collaboration with professionals and the administration to define new tools to monitor landscapes that allow for the various achievements (natural, social, financial, human, cultural, infrastructural) to be measured. The example of the Groupe Sangha that follows up the annual evolution of the TNS

landscape is quite illustrative, for it makes it possible to capitalize on development and conservation using indicators or benchmarks.

Thanks to this group, there are several new tools to monitor landscapes such as modelling that allows for simulation of various scenarios; monitoring development indicators that allow for the monitoring of the evolution of landscape; visualization that allows communities to express their current and future views of the landscape through sessions; and the cyber tracker that makes it possible to improve on how to plan and carry out logging operations. The success observed may contribute to improving regulation.

5. Conclusions

- Thanks to the harmonization of policies and the commitment of partners such as CARPE and others, the Congo Basin has made considerable efforts to manage forest concessions in a sustainable manner through the drawing up and implementation of participatory management plans;
- Multi-actor partnerships allowing for the involvement of the private sector and NGOs will be strengthened in order to facilitate the implementation of management plans;
- In spite of efforts made in countries through the COMIFAC, the issue of forest tenure and access of communities to land is not yet clear, given that some countries are more advanced than others;
- As a result of market pressures and climate change, the role of forest concessions in providing fuelwood will become more important;
- Forest plantations and agro-industries, especially of palm trees and other plants used to provide bio-fuels, are playing an increasingly important role in countries;
- Opportunities and uncertainties generated by the REDD process will have consequences for the development of forest concessions. In fact, the future of the forest concessions is not limited solely to carbon sequestration or environmental services that are essential for the future of the plantations; in addition, the human and economic dimensions of this area are inescapable.

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