



Information note N° 4 (December 2014)  
**Sustainable Forest Management in Central Africa:  
 Should Protecting Forest Biodiversity in forest  
 concessions and in natural reserves be more important  
 than Human Well-being, Food Security and Nutrition?**



**Enhancing the Contribution of Non-Wood Forest Products  
 to Food Security in Central Africa (GCP/RAF/479/AFB)**

**1. Introduction**

Among the overarching objectives of Governments in Central Africa, poverty reduction remains an important goal. This is confirmed by the fact that countries in Central Africa have defined poverty reduction strategies and have subscribed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) aimed at reducing poverty by half in 2015. Governments of Central Africa have also defined strategies to improve food security and nutrition. In June 2014, an important meeting of the African Union (AU) on food security was held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea and African leaders and their international allies such as The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), The World Bank (WB) made important decisions for the future of the continent. In May 2013, FAO organized an international conference on forests for food security and nutrition which was widely attended. In October 2014, the Conference of Parties on Biological Diversity elaborated decision UNEP/CBD/COP/12/L.13 on the sustainable use of biological diversity which is an important step toward the acceptance of sustainable bush meat consumption. In November 2014, FAO organized another international conference on nutrition, which showed the continuous commitment of the organization to fight poverty and hunger. At the regional level, the Forestry Commission of Central Africa (COMIFAC) has elaborated in 2013 a program on forests for food security and nutrition in Central Africa.

In forest concessions, traditional hunting and the collection of Non Wood Forest Products (NWFP) are authorized to enhance food security and nutrition of rural populations. These efforts made by timber companies are extremely important but they are not enough if COMIFAC sub regional guidelines on NWFP are to be implemented. These guidelines recommend the adoption of commercial use rights for NWFP that are not threatened. It means that in addition to using NWFP for home consumption, the commercial use right allows communities to sell or exchange NWFP that are not threatened.

Protecting forest biodiversity is important and should always be a major goal that needs to be pursued to avoid green-house emissions, and to sequester more carbon and reduce the negative effect of climate change. However, human beings should be put in the fore front within the forest landscape of Central Africa, especially in a region where there is acute poverty and serious development challenges. It is argued in this brief that an approach that reconciles the two major objectives of protecting biodiversity and improving rural livelihoods is necessary. Furthermore, policy makers are

urged to improve their macro-economic and sectorial policies to lift the majority of people out of poverty which could significantly reduce the pressure on forests and thereby contribute to sustainable forest management.

**2. Importance of the forests of Central Africa**



The forests of Central Africa are important reservoirs of biological diversity. Around 70 million persons exploit these resources to satisfy their subsistence needs, income generation and employment. Non Wood Forest Products (NWFP), which are a major component of the biological diversity, are edible and medicinal plants, bush meat, insects, honey, rattan and other fibers for building shelter or tools. In addition, the forests of Central Africa provide ecosystem services including biodiversity protection, and they possess great cultural, religious and aesthetic values for the people of the region. Therefore, the well-being of rural people is linked to all forms of development that impact the forests.



### 3. Necessity to reconcile forest protection and human well-being, food security and nutrition in forest concessions

Recognizing both the importance of forest for biodiversity protection and the necessity of putting human well-being in the fore front, a balanced approach is needed to achieve a sustainable forest management goal with a human face. This will require recognizing the importance of wildlife for human food security and nutrition; having special policies for NWFP which do not conflict with timber in forest concessions; and making special arrangements for trees that provide both timber and NWFP.

#### 3.1. Importance of wildlife in local communities' food security and nutrition

Several scholars have shown the importance of bush meat in household consumption and food security. Several studies have also shown that more than 90 percent of animal protein consumed by local communities is based on bush meat. That is the reason why decision UNEP/CBD/COP/12/L.13 recognizes the importance of bush meat for food security and encourages the Parties to elaborate, revise, or update their legislation in order to make a clear distinction between use of bush meat for consumption and illegal hunting. That would avoid penalizing countries and individuals who use bush meat for subsistence. Therefore local communities must respect this decision without hunting protected species.

#### 3.2. Special policies for NWFP that do not conflict with timber.

For NWFP which do not have a conflict with timber such as rattan, *Gnetum* spp, *Irvingia gabonensis* fruits etc..., their exploitation by local communities should be tolerated in forest concessions. However, in order to enable local communities respect forestry regulations, timber concessionaires should help communities get organized and to obtain licenses or permits from forest administration which will legally authorize them to exploit these specific NWFP for commercial purpose as small and medium forest enterprises.

#### 3.3. Special arrangements with timber concessionaires for trees that provide both timber and NWFP:

For these trees, special arrangements need to be made with timber companies to reduce the conflicts with local communities. Below are some thoughts in that direction:

- a) Forest management plans which timber companies develop should ensure that timber and NWFPs are managed in a complementary manner. These should provide adequate, clear and enforceable social safeguards to protect the customary and legal rights of forest-dependent communities. All these prescriptions need to be respected by timber companies in implementing their management plans. For example, for

moabi (*Baillonella toxisperma*) and sapelli (*Entandrophragma cylindricum*) a win-win solution in the form of legal obligation to protect few trees for providing seeds, could be envisaged.



- b) There is a need to exclude from timber harvesting particular species and sacred groves that are important to local communities. To meet this objective, local communities and timber companies should reach agreements on tree species of local importance. Timber companies then need to be compensated for leaving behind useful trees in their concessions for NWFP values. The governments, as an incentive, can in such situation, reduce the taxes that timber companies pay.
- c) Timber companies could allow local communities to use wood residues (waste) from timber harvesting which will enable them to develop income generating activities thereby reducing their poverty and enhancing their food security.

### 4. Perspectives

The challenge to sustainable forest management remains to be associated to a large extent with poverty. Therefore, policy makers are urged to do their best to improve their macroeconomic and sectorial policies in order to lift the majority of the population of Central Africa out of poverty. Furthermore, the regulatory framework guiding the access and exploitation of NWFP in forest concessions needs to be improved in a participatory manner. Policy makers should also continue to raise awareness on the importance of forests and biodiversity and the need to protect them for future generations. But this will be successful only if communities living in Central Africa find alternative employments, incomes and other ways of improving their well-being and food security and nutrition. In this situation, the forest resources of Central Africa will be more sustainable and will contribute significantly to the green economy.