

Traditional gender dimensions in resource access and use patterns among the Upper Balongs of Cameroon

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Abstract

In the face of concerted actions to implement sustainable management of natural resources as a guarantee for a better future for all, measures most of the time are taken in circles where women are absent with the blurred notion that they do not constitute any threat to the environment. Even when they are considered as actors, they are treated as by-product or a tiny part of a programme. This article exposes the dynamics of resource access and exploitation in a rural milieu where masculinity is theoretically captioned as the main force in land tenure system. This work combined a range of qualitative methods in collecting data on the traditional gender dimensions in resource access and use patterns among the Upper Balongs of Cameroon. Discussion meetings were organised in the concerned villages where all the segments of the population (men, women, old and young) interacted in a participatory manner. Key informants were later singled out among the participants for in-depth interviews. Guided observation tours were carried out in resources specific locations within the community and in buffer zone of the Korup National Park. Data were analysed using the content analysis method where raw data were regrouped or matched into themes and sub themes. The data were subsequently retrieved for analysis and reporting. Due to its proximity to the Korup National Park and the Nguti Council Forest, conservation of natural resources here is regarded as a sensitive issue, considering the community's reliance on these resources for livelihood boosting. This sensitivity renders the notion of "local people" an unavoidable element in conservation rhetoric. This initiative is likely to be jeopardised as gender issues either are ignored or are only given cosmetic treatment. Due to the patriarchal structure of most African societies, community participation is usually taken to mean the involvement of a limited number of local institutions such as Chiefs, councillors, elites and natural resource management committees whose interests often conflict with other users, notably women. Consequently, specific gender roles are relegated to the background, blurring important data on resource access modalities, exploitation, use and commercialisation. This study therefore sought in-sights into who intervenes at the community level in natural resource exploitation and how the intervention is regulated. It was found out that NTFP areas are accessed by women. Though they do not access bush meat hunting grounds, they nevertheless command the commercialisation which is the final force that triggers hunting. Therefore, women should be considered in equal terms with men when it comes to sustainable management of natural resources.

Key words: NTFP, Women, Commercialisation, Household livelihoods, Resource management

Résumé

Face aux actions concertées pour la mise en œuvre de la gestion durable des ressources naturelles comme garantie pour un avenir meilleur pour tous, des mesures dans la plupart du temps sont prises en absence des femmes. Cet état de chose est justifié par les considérations rétrogrades selon lesquelles les femmes ne constituent pas une menace pour l'environnement. Même quand elles sont prises en compte comme des acteurs, elles sont considérées comme figurant. Cet article expose la dynamique de l'accès et de l'exploitation des ressources en milieu rural, où la masculinité est théoriquement considérée comme dépositaire du système foncier. Ce travail a combiné une série de méthodes qualitatives dans la collecte des données sur les dimensions traditionnelles du genre, en ce qui concerne l'accès et l'utilisation des ressources naturels dans la communauté des "Upper Balongs" du Cameroun. Des réunions de discussions ont été organisées dans les villages concernés, incluant tous les segments de la population (hommes, femmes, jeunes et vieux). Durant cet exercice, ces différents groupes sociaux ont échangé de manière participative. Les informateurs clés ont ensuite été distingués parmi les participants pour des interviews plus approfondis. Des visites guidées d'observation ont été réalisées dans les sites des ressources spécifiques et dans la zone tampon du Parc National de Korup. Les informations collectées ont été traitées en utilisant la méthode d'analyse de contenu, qui consiste à regrouper ou assembler les données brutes selon des thèmes et sous-thèmes. Les données ont ensuite été analysées en vue de la rédaction du rapport. En raison de sa proximité avec le Parc National de Korup et la forêt Communale de Nguti, la conservation des ressources naturelles est très sensible, compte tenu de la dépendance de la communauté à ces ressources pour la subsistance. Cette sensibilité rend la notion de «population locale» comme un élément incontournable dans la rhétorique de la conservation. Cette notion est susceptible d'être mise en péril parce que les questions de genre sont soit ignorées, soit négligées. En raison de la structure patriarcale de la plupart des sociétés africaines, la participation communautaire est généralement synonyme d'implication d'un nombre restreint d'acteurs locaux telles que : les chefs, les conseillers, les élites et les comités de gestion des ressources naturelles, dont les intérêts sont souvent en conflit avec d'autres utilisateurs, notamment les femmes. Par conséquent, les rôles spécifiques du genre sont relégués en arrière-plan, rendant opaque les modalités d'accès, d'exploitation, d'utilisation et de commercialisation des ressources. Cette étude a donc cherché à connaître qui intervient au niveau de la communauté dans l'exploitation des ressources naturelles et comment cette intervention est réglementée. Il a été constaté que les zones de récolte des PFNL sont accessibles aux femmes, bien qu'elles n'aient pas accès aux zones de chasse. Elles commandent néanmoins la commercialisation qui s'étend aux produits de la chasse. Par conséquent, les femmes devraient être considérées au même titre que les hommes en matière de gestion durable des ressources naturelles.

Mots clés: PFNL, les femmes, la commercialisation, les moyens de subsistance des ménages, la gestion des ressources.

INTRODUCTION

The conservation of natural resources in the eastern borders of the Korup National Park in Cameroon is a sensitive issue considering the proximity of the local population and its reliance on access and use of these resources as sources of income and household livelihood boosting. The sensitivity of the topic has a new impetus due to the inclusion of natural resource conservation in the Millennium Development Goals. Goal 7, which deals with environmental sustainability, is focused only on increasing protected areas and forest coverage and could be dangerous for sustainable development; as it targets only the quantity of land areas and ignores issues such as the quality of natural resources contained in such areas, their management, and resource rights of the local people (Dilys, 2004). Even when these concerns are outlined and treated with urgency, there is still paucity of data on how gender issues are handled when land use patterns are targeted as intervention areas in natural resource conservation. Though community involvement in forest resource management is now regarded as an essential component of forest conservation, its progress in community consultation and participatory processes has largely been poor (Malleon, 1999). Socio-economic research in Non Wood Forest Products (NWFP) has in the past been low key, mostly treated as a by-the-way subject to support other aspects. Considering that any research on NWFPs is in the first instance to benefit the local people, starting from what they know and value, would be very rewarding to the development process (Kabuye, 1999). The importance of Kabuye's work is seen as it raises important questions such as who owns and who uses these resources?

Though the present literature points to the failure of the Korup Project's approach to community participation as it focused firstly on limited number of local institutions, namely Chiefs, councillors, elites and project initiated natural

resource management committees whose interests often conflict with other forest users, such as youth and women, the active participation of women has not been fully documented. Little is known on the specific gender roles. Under the present sphere of things, community participation is viewed as complete and effective when community decision-making structures are involved in management, leaving aside the manner under which resources are accessed and used and the parties involved in their exploitation. We stand a better chance in natural resource management if insights are sought on who actually intervenes at the community level and how the intervention is regulated. It would be very difficult for community primary active agents (women) to contribute in resource management, as they are accidentally excluded during the community participation process; accidentally, since they are never part of the patriarchal decision based structures. This work aimed at gaining insights into who actually intervenes in natural resources access, exploitation, processing and commercialisation and how the whole process is regulated.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Data collection and analysis

Primary data were collected in meetings held at the village level with all segments of the population. Several days were spent in all the villages and this permitted us to appraise the people's living conditions. In the village meetings, the following issues were discussed: access to natural resources, resource consumption and commercial flux identification, access and regulation modalities. In-depth interviews were conducted with some key informants to complement data collected during the village meetings. Specific role of men and women were sought. Focus was also laid on conflict resolution mechanism.

Again, interviews and direct observation were the main methods used during this study. Guided visits

were made to natural resource harvesting sites and hunting camps. This is when direct observations were made. I also attended some local courts at the village level and at the Upper Balong Native Authority Court at Manyemen. This is where I had the opportunity to listen to cases relating to natural resources access and use. Study tools were interview guides, semi-structured questionnaires and a photo camera. Data were typed and saved into separate files and analysed using the colour matching technique. Under this method, each colour was matched to a single study theme. At the end, this facilitated manual manipulation of qualitative data.

Location of the study area

The Upper Balong community is located in the Nguti Sub-Division, Kupe-Manenguba Division of the South West region of Cameroon. Most of the villages of this community are situated along the Kumba - Mamfe road but villages that constitute the base of this study are situated a bit further from the main road. This community is bordered to the South West by the Korup National Park, to the West by the Nguti Council Forest, to the South by the Konye Sub-Division, to the East by Bangem Sub-Division, to the North East by Nta Ali reserve and to the North by the Nkwendi Hills which is also a protected area. One of the villages, Baro is situated deep into the Nguti Council Forest. Though the majority of the Upper Balong villages are situated along the Kumba – Mamfe road, they are indirectly related to the study as they constitute selling points for harvested natural resources and stopover base for hunters from other communities.

FINDINGS

ACCESS MODALITIES TO RESOURCES SITES AND EXPLOITATION

Land in these communities is acquired through inheritance and by buying. Natives can colonise

land anywhere within the community territory with or without the chief's consent. Only non-indigenes buy land. Land in this community is therefore easily alienable. Access to watercourses no matter who owns land adjacent to them is free to all women who belong to village women's group. Village fishing grounds are open to all natives. It is only in Sikam where these fishing grounds are strictly distributed according to gender. The Eyang-Bake confluence-fishing pond, for example, is strictly reserved for all village women. Therefore, female fishing grounds are not accessible to men and vice versa. This is to avoid embarrassment, as some women are nude during fishing. Women are also denied access to male fishing grounds because they are deep and dangerous.



Typical male fishing area in Sikam

In Ayong, access to river courses is strictly reserved for village women who belong to the village women's association. All farming and fishing activities along river courses are carried out by these women.

In all the villages, access to the forest is open to everyone with the exception of non-indigenes. Every member of the community can get access to the forest and use resources as he/she deems fit. Non-natives have limited access as they pay some tokens in the form of wine and food. Once this is done, they face no control at all. This is a serious problem since once in the forest any kind of activity can be done. This is usually a leeway for selected resource depletion as nobody controls them.

Non-timber forest products are free to all members of the community including non-indigenes. Permission is only sought when these products are found on fallow land. This is when they are considered as property. Natural boundaries like rivers have in some cases (Sikam) play important roles in limiting access for example into the Korup National Park KNP and Nguti Council Forest NCF. This natural boundary works effectively depending on the length of the rainy season; for the boundary is porous in the dry season. This same natural boundary equally hems the Nguti Council forest within the Ayong neighbourhood and becomes less effective during the dry season. The hanging bridge at Baro facilitates access into the KNP all year round.

ACCESS EXPLOITATION MODALITIES AS PER TYPE OF ACTIVITY

3.2.1 HUNTING

Hunting is an attractive activity in this community as species abound. The act of hunting is a male monopoly. The prominent species of the area are: deer (*Cephalophus ogilbyi*) or (*Cephalophus dorsalis*), frotambo or hare (*Cephalophus monticola*) monkeys of all categories, porcupine (*Atherurus africanus*), hedge hock or cutting grass, company beef (*Crossarchus obscurus*), antelope, drill (*Mandrillus leucophaeus*), alligator (*Osteolemus tetraspis*), bush pig (*Potamochoerus porcus*), bush cat, giant rats (*Cricetomys* spp.), pangolin (*Manis tricuspis*), buffalo (*Syncerus caffernanus*), elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and mongoose.

As important as this activity is to the whole community, it has little or no access constraints. All active males of a given community have equal rights of access into the forest for hunting. Even non-indigenes only signal to some community members their intention to penetrate the forest and hunt. Non-indigenes seek notice before entering the forest for security reasons than permission. There is always the fear of an

eventual wild animal attack or missing track in the forest. Most non-indigenes seek notice for better orientation.

Though hunting in the four villages is done all year round, the peak period stretches from April right up to October. As from November to February, the intensity drops drastically. However, the pressure on wildlife varies. During the rainy season, pressure on wildlife in Baro is less due to its remoteness. Bush meat is evacuated to Manyemen during this part of the year by two motor bikes. Their frequency to this village is twice per week. In the dry season, transporters are numerous since they do not only come from Manyemen but also from other areas. Though the hunting is done entirely by men, the demand for either consumption or commercialisation is in the hands of women. Two reasons account for this; firstly, women take advantage of the less bulk in smoked bush meat, and secondly, most of the men are usually further away in hunting camps while women market the smoked meat. (*monticola*), porcupine (*Atherurus africanus*), antelope, bush pig (*Potamochoerus porcus*), buffalo (*Syncerus cafer*) and hedge hock are hunted with both guns and traps. Alligators (*Osteolemus tetraspis*) are hunted with hooks and cutlasses.

Local people prefer fresh bush meat than smoked meat for consumption. Most of the preservation or smoking of bush meat is done by women. In Sikam, Monkeys, frotambo (*Cephalophus monticola*), and porcupine (*Atherurus africanus*) are smoked only for sale. Apart from these species, everything is either eaten or sold fresh. In Baro, only porcupine (*Atherurus africanus*), hedgehog and drill (*Mandrillus leucophaeus*) are preserved by smoking for local consumption. The rest is consumed fresh. The species that are smoked for sale are: hare, deer, hedgehog and porcupine. In Ayong, everything is eaten fresh except hedgehog. All species preserved by smoking are destined for sale. In Osirayib, everything is eaten fresh except the deer (*Cephalophus ogilbyi*).

Women constitute the majority of bush meat traders. Their integration in this trade starts from the smoking stage and they end up as sellers. Those who even sell at the market points at villages situated along the Kumba – Mamfe road are women. The trade is attractive to women because transportation is easy due to less bulk as compared to other primary products. Commercialisation of bush meat is of greater importance to Baro and Osirayib than to the rest of the communities; considering the remoteness of these localities. As game products are less bulky and weigh less, their transportation to Manyemen is either on foot or by motor bikes.

Hunting methods are common for the four communities but only vary per species. Species like monkeys and elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) are hunted with guns only while others like: frotambo (*Cephalophus*

3.2.2. FISHING

Fishing is the second important activity in this community but employs both men and women. Fishing species in the four communities are common. These species are: mbanga fish (*Denticeps clupeoides*), mud fish (*Denticeps clupeoides*), crocro fish (*Mastacembelus nigromarginatus*, *Ereptoichthys calarabicus*), mbassi (*Istiophorus ansorgii*), tilapia (*Oreochromis mossambicus*), dog fish (*Hepsetus odoe*, *Hydrocynus brevis*), cat fish (*Siluriformes*), and snake fish (*Polypterus ansorgii*, *Mastacembelus decorsei*).

Rudimentary techniques are employed for fishing. The techniques are common to the four villages but only vary per species. Mud fish, tilapia, and snake fish are caught with hook only. The rest are caught with hook, damming, fish blinding, and river poisoning with chemicals. Just as with bush meat, fish either caught by men or women is smoked and preserved for the future by women. Local people smoke fish only for commercialisation. Mbanga fish in all the villages is smoked before consumption. The

commercialisation of fish is an important activity in Ayong and Sikam than in Baro and Osirayib. Accessibility here is the key determinant factor. Seasonal variation is also a determinant factor in fishing activity. This activity becomes an important source of revenue in the dry season when the river courses are accessible and less dangerous.

3.2.3. NTFP GATHERING

Apart from bush meat and fish, non-timber forest products constitute the backbone of the local economy. The KNP and the NCF are fertile grounds for NTFP. The common species of the locality are: bush mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*), njansang (*Riccinodendron heudelotii*), eru (*Gnetum africanum*), njabe (*Bailonella toxisperma*), bush onion (*Afrostryax lepidophyllus*), bitter kola (*Garcinia kola*), bush pepper (*Piper guinensis*), alligator pepper (*Afromomum melegueta*), bush kernel (*Poga oleosa*), cashio nuts (*Tetracarpidium conophorum*), mushroom, snails, monkey kola (*Cola lepidota*), fuel wood, termites, various plants and weeds used for handicrafts.

In all the four villages, women maintain a monopoly over NTFP. They monopolise harvesting, processing and commercialisation. These products play a vital role in household income level and livelihood. Those that are commercialised such as bush mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*), njansang (*Riccinodendron heudelotii*), eru (*Gnetum africanum*), njabe (*Bailonella toxisperma*), bush onion (*Afrostryax lepidophyllus*), bitter kola (*Garcinia kola*), bush pepper (*Piper guinensis*) and alligator pepper supplement household income, especially during lean periods. Bush meat, mushroom, snails, termites, caterpillars, and various fruits, plants and weeds boost household consumption patterns.

Gathering period varies according to species. Mushroom for example, is harvested from March to May, bush onion from July to September, bush mango, njabe and monkey kola from July to

October, njansang and bush pepper from August to November, snails from March to September, alligator pepper and bush kernel from August to October, eru throughout the year.

Most of the species are picked with hands. Species like bush mango, njansang, and njabe are picked on the ground when they have fallen from the trees. Snails and mushroom are equally picked with hand on the floor of the forest. Eru and alligator pepper are harvested by cutting with hands or sometimes assisted by a knife or cutlass. Monkey kola is harvested by climbing the trees. Bitter kola is either picked or harvested by climbing the tree. Bush pepper is harvest by cutting the stem of the plant or by wounding it so that it withers and falls to the ground. Young children assist their mothers and elder sisters in harvesting species that require climbing. All the harvesting methods are sustainable, except bush pepper whose stem is cut completely.

None of the species is processed on the spot. They only dry them to postpone consumption or commercialization. Bush mango is pounded to obtain a paste either for consumption or for sale. Most of the women complain that making the paste is time consuming and it does not lead to a corresponding increase in commercial value because of the non-existence of the trading supply chain. Njansang seeds are kept in the rain so that the outer cover gets rotten before it is cooked and cracked. Njabe oil is also processed at home and it is equally time consuming.

Without NTFP, the communities around this forest would not survive, considering the vital role these products play in their diet. All the gathered products are consumed locally. The local people consume a lot of eru as vegetable, bush onion and bush peppers as spices, njansang as soup thickener, alligator pepper for medicine, bitter kola as a stimulant and medicine, mushroom and snails as food. In short, gathered products play a crucial role in the people's diet and health.

A household without a woman in this community is like a household in the urban setting without someone with a regular income.

Apart from their role in household diet, they equally enhance household livelihood. The commercialisation of NTFP permits the local people to acquire other domestic products. The commercialization of these products is part of women's main activities. Some women are specialized in buying these products in the villages and selling them at Manyemen.

Revenue from gathered products is of great importance to Baro and Osirayib. Revenue from these products in the above mentioned communities can only be comparable to bush meat. This is because these products are abundant in these two villages than in Ayong and Sikam. Inaccessibility of Baro and osirayib by road has rendered the commercialisation of cocoa and coffee almost impossible, meanwhile the commercialisation of NTFP is attractive because they do not require maintenance like the former.

3.2.4. HANDICRAFT AND SOURCES OF RAW MATERIAL

The types of products fabricated in the communities are common. They are: baskets, floor mats, thatches, kwarakwara (a kind of floor mat used for the drying of cocoa and coffee) cane chairs, ropes, mortars, mortar pestles, bags, drums, rattles, ladders, axe handles, hoe handles and bamboo houses. Handicraft is a male dominating activity. Exceptions are found in Sikam where women participate in the fabrication of baskets, kwarakwara and fishing nets.

There are only three sources for raw material used in the fabrication of articles in the four communities. These sources are the forest, raphia swamps, and fallow farms. The forest is the source of raw material for baskets, cane chairs, mortars, mortar pestles, axe and hoe handles, and drums. Floor mats and thatches are from fallow farms.

Indian bamboos for the construction of houses and kwarakwara are from swamps. All these material are harvested by men, though some of them are used by women.

Handicrafts play an important role in the local economy. Kwarakwara, for example, is used for drying agricultural products like cocoa and coffee. It is also used for the drying of various gathered products. Baskets, ladders, cane chairs, mortars and mortar pestles and bags are household equipment. Hoe and axe handles are farming tools while rattles and drums are cultural instruments for animation. Floor mats are mostly used for relaxation during the dry season to mitigate high temperatures. These articles are also commercialised with the community.

Though handicraft is not commercialised at a high scale as other products, it is important as an economic activity in these communities as it is indirectly linked to the production of other goods. Where it is commercialised, the demand comes from women who command and control household goods.

3.2.5. HUNTING AND FISHING CAMPS

Hunting and fishing camps are constructed in the KNP and NCF. These camps also shelter women and children who harvest NTFPs. The distances for the location of hunting and fishing camps are determined by the type of activity. In some communities like Sikam for example, some farming camps are jointly used as hunting and fishing camps. However, most of the hunting and fishing camps are located very far away from the villages. In Baro for example, some of their hunting and fishing camps are located in the KNP very far away from the village.

Access to hunting and fishing camps is open. It is evident that some of the generalised reciprocity rules are still applicable in this community. A situation where individual property is almost treated as communal property.



Hunting and Fishing Camp

Access modality to these camps is simple; the first to occupy may have priority provided the owner of the camp is not around. When the owner comes, anybody who is occupying the camp will make provisions for him. These camps are individual property but used by everybody in the society. In the absence of the owner, the first group of hunters/fishermen to occupy the camp takes control over it. If it is already full, the next group of people would have to go ahead in search of an unoccupied camp. It was observed that all the types of camps are temporarily spots for the processing of NTFPs.

4. DISCUSSION

- **Access to the forest**

In all the villages, access to the forest is open to everyone. Every member of the community can get access to forest and use resources as he/she deems fit. Non-timber forest products are free to all members of the community including non-indigenes. Saastamoinen (1999) revealed that in Norway, universal rights include the possibility to pick berries, mushrooms and common herbs. However, there were some restrictions on some species like the cloudberry (*Rubus chamaemorus*). The 1854 forestry law equally prohibited the picking of cloudberry on privately owned land as well as on public land in some counties except for local people. Picking unripe cloudberries has been forbidden in the entire country since 1970. In the light of this example, free access to all forest

resources is detrimental to our forest dwellers and resources.

Within the Upper Balong context, permission is only sought when these products are found on fallow land. Non-natives have relatively limited access as they may be asked to pay some tokens in the form of wine and food. Once this is done, they face no control at all. This is a serious problem since once in the fallow lands and in the forest, any kind of activity can be done. This is a leeway for selective resource depletion since no one controls. In Cameroon, *Garcinia lucida* for example, is governed by an open access regime, which makes the trees become more vulnerable to externalities created by the opportunistic behaviour of a few forest dwellers resulting from higher market demands for the bark. In a situation of economic crisis and an active search for alternative income-generating opportunities, private gains can override the sustainable social benefits that are obtained from *G. lucida* and can lead to depletion of forest resources Ousseynou et al., (2001). This laissez-faire attitude should be singled out and sensitised against by conservationists. This attitude is also conditioned as resources are perceived in the study community as abundant and infinite.

• **Hunting**

Hunting which is the main activity for male members in the society has little or no access constraints. It is a free for all activity. Non-indigenes seek notice before entering the forest for security reasons than permission/control. Dawn (2001), summarised this condition by stating that some communities perceive natural resources as extremely inexhaustible and consequently tend to be very careless about their use and protection. In our context, Upper Balongs perceive game or bush meat as abundant and do not see it necessary to prevent outsiders from getting access to it. This is where education and sensitisation should be focused by project

managers. It is generally said that to reach rational resource use, it is almost inevitable that we must first go through a stage of abuse and depletion that leads us to revise our attitudes and actions so as to avoid larger problems and irreversible situations (Bernardo, 2002). The distance that is now required for hunting of bush meat in this community is already a pointer to the whole community that something wrong is beginning to happen. The depletion point is at hand. If strong measures are not taken at this level, the Korup National Park will face the same problem. This park is now acting as a safety net for the community so far as bush meat harvesting is concerned. Repositioning of eco-guards within this area and especially at Baro and Sikam is the only remedy for the moment.

It was observed that the main hunting methods are the gun, snare, hooks, spears and cutlasses. Village people claim that gunning is sustainable as it selects the type of species to be caught; and hunting by trapping is usually not sustainable as it does not discriminate the animals that pass on its path. The gun as hunting technique has negative effects on wildlife (Noëlle F *et al.*, 2008). This could equally depend on the type of gun used in this circumstance. Determining the type of gun (short or long range, automatic or manual) is very important in wildlife management. It is certain that the smaller the size of the gun, the less likely it constitutes a menace to great mammal species. Here if effective education on biodiversity is not given to the local people, just one gun can deplete series of species within a given niche. Traps are equally wasteful if they are not frequently visited; when this happens, animals that fall in them decompose and become useless. Again, if the number of traps is higher, then the waste can be considerable. This may have a greater negative impact on wildlife. Hunting with the gun is more selective but not sustainable at all considering the fact that the quantity of bush meat which can be killed in one night may turn out to be huge. The

only advantage is that if hunters are properly sensitised on the type of species to hunt, then this may be a sustainable method as it discriminates in the selection of species.

The role women play in hunting within the Upper Balong community is not negligible. Hunting as an economic activity can only flourish in this community if the commercial chain is maintained. It was observed that women constitute the majority of bush meat traders. This is the market force that triggers hunting; without them, there will be little or no hunting. Each hunter has his group of market women waiting for him either in the villages or at Manyemen market square. The commercial chain is therefore very necessary so far as hunting is concerned. It is therefore necessary to incorporate women in the fight against poaching. Education and sensitisation programmes on environmental protection that focus exclusively on hunters are doomed to fail. Hunters and women should both be considered here as important stakeholders at equal footing. Alternative income sources should equally be sought for these women. Therefore hunting as an economic activity is not an exclusively a male activity as formerly thought.

- **Fishing**

Fishing as the second important activity in this community employs both men and women. However, there are more women in this activity. The rudimentary techniques employed for fishing are: hooking, damming and nets. Despite these common simple methods, both community members and non-indigenes use an unorthodox method within the community. This method employs “gamoline”, a chemical substance to kill all the fish in the river. It is a dangerous method because it does not discriminate between big and small fish; everything is eliminated and secondly, the catch can be very dangerous to human health. Despite the unsustainable nature of this method, it is equally dangerous. Some women employ local

herbs for blinding fish. Local women commonly use poison from vegetation for fishing (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981; Dongmo, 1985 & Wikipédia, 2008). Once the substances are squeezed in the river, all the fish become sightless and vulnerable to attack. No further information is available on the effects of such a practice on human health. Education and sensitisation should target all members of the community in order to eradicate such unsustainable methods.

- **NFTP**

In all the four villages, women maintain a monopoly over NTFP. They monopolise harvesting, processing and commercialisation. The expanding skills of women in the commercialisation of NTFPs is revealed by Ruiz Pérez M et al., (2002) as they assert that given the right conditions, women entrepreneurs can be as successful as men. This group of women who compete with men for the commercialisation of NTFPs come from Cameroonian cities and Nigeria. The most commercialized products are: bush mango, njansang, eru, njabe oil, and bush onion. Therefore NTFP commercialisation can improve women’s socioeconomic status and relief them from frustration.

Processing of NTFP is usually triggered by the demand for it. Without the demand, energy invested in the process will yield little income. According to FAO (2004), this sector suffers from lack of information to realise the full benefits and lack of protected rights to access and benefit from the resources. Women of the community complain that making a paste out of bush mango, for example, is time consuming and it does not lead to a corresponding increase in commercial value because of the non-existence of the trading chain. Producers and traders of NTFP who are most often women are flexible and vulnerable to external shocks such as market fluctuations. There is therefore need for a well-structured organisation to facilitate the negotiation of prices and define trade rules so that

this vulnerable sector of the population should benefit or obtain satisfaction from the existing or future market chains for NTFP.

The benefits from NTFP as food within the community are glaring. The forest and NTFP are safety nets to families during lean periods. The processing of NTFP for food within the community should equally be encouraged. We are focusing on the processing and preservation of harvested and gathered products. Examples are: bush mango paste, njabe oil, dried snails, termites, mushroom and caterpillars. This process will limit access frequency and spare time which women may use for agricultural activities and leisure.

- **Handicraft**

Handicrafts play an important role in the local economy. Sources of material for handicrafts are: the forest, raphia swamps, and fallow farms. Though handicraft is a male dominating activity, most of the articles are commanded and used by women. Women use various articles in drying of gathered products. Baskets, ladders, cane chairs, mortars and mortar pestles and bags are household equipment. However, male members of the community use handicrafts and especially floor mats (*Kwarakwara*) for drying agricultural products like cocoa and coffee. Since most of the raw materials for the fabrication of handicrafts are obtained in fallow plots and swarms, their exploitation and use do not deplete the forest resources.

Access to hunting and fishing camps is open. It is evident that some of the generalised reciprocity rules are still applicable in this community. A situation where individual property is almost treated as communal property. Access modality to these camps is simple; the first to occupy may have priority provided the owner of the camp is not around. When the owner comes, anybody who is occupying the camp will make provisions for him. These camps are individual property but used by everybody in the society. In the absence of

the owner, the first group of hunters/fishermen to occupy the camp takes control over it. If it is already full, the next group of people would have to go ahead in search of an unoccupied camp. It was observed that all the types of camps are temporarily spots for the processing of NTFPs.

4. DISCUSSION

- **Access to the forest**

In all the villages, access to the forest is open to everyone. Every member of the community can get access to forest and use resources as he/she deems fit. Non-timber forest products are free to all members of the community including non-indigenes. Saastamoinen (1999) revealed that in Norway, universal rights include the possibility to pick berries, mushrooms and common herbs. However, there were some restrictions on some species like the cloudberry (*Rubus chamaemorus*). The 1854 forestry law equally prohibited the picking of cloudberry on privately owned land as well as on public land in some counties except for local people. Picking unripe cloudberries has been forbidden in the entire country since 1970. In the light of this example, free access to all forest resources is detrimental to our forest dwellers and resources.

Within the Upper Balong context, permission is only sought when these products are found on fallow land. Non-natives have relatively limited access as they may be asked to pay some tokens in the form of wine and food. Once this is done, they face no control at all. This is a serious problem since once in the fallow lands and in the forest, any kind of activity can be done. This is a leeway for selective resource depletion since no one controls. In Cameroon, *Garcinia lucida* for example, is governed by an open access regime, which makes the trees become more vulnerable to externalities created by the opportunistic behaviour of a few forest dwellers resulting from higher market demands for the bark. In a situation of economic crisis and an active search for

alternative income-generating opportunities, private gains can override the sustainable social benefits that are obtained from *G. lucida* and can lead to depletion of forest resources Ouseynou et al., (2001). This laissez-faire attitude should be singled out and sensitised against by conservationists. This attitude is also conditioned as resources are perceived in the study community as abundant and infinite.

- **Hunting**

Hunting which is the main activity for male members in the society has little or no access constraints. It is a free for all activity. Non-indigenes seek notice before entering the forest for security reasons than permission/control. Dawn (2001), summarised this condition by stating that some communities perceive natural resources as extremely inexhaustible and consequently tend to be very careless about their use and protection. In our context, Upper Balongs perceive game or bush meat as abundant and do not see it necessary to prevent outsiders from getting access to it. This is where education and sensitisation should be focused by project managers. It is generally said that to reach rational resource use, it is almost inevitable that we must first go through a stage of abuse and depletion that leads us to revise our attitudes and actions so as to avoid larger problems and irreversible situations (Bernardo, 2002). The distance that is now required for hunting of bush meat in this community is already a pointer to the whole community that something wrong is beginning to happen. The depletion point is at hand. If strong measures are not taken at this level, the Korup National Park will face the same problem. This park is now acting as a safety net for the community so far as bush meat harvesting is concerned. Repositioning of eco-guards within this area and especially at Baro and Sikam is the only remedy for the moment.

It was observed that the main hunting methods are the gun, snare, hooks, spears and cutlasses.

Village people claim that gunning is sustainable as it selects the type of species to be caught; and hunting by trapping is usually not sustainable as it does not discriminate the animals that pass on its path. The gun as hunting technique has negative effects on wildlife (Noëlle F *et al.*, 2008). This could equally depend on the type of gun used in this circumstance. Determining the type of gun (short or long range, automatic or manual) is very important in wildlife management. It is certain that the smaller the size of the gun, the less likely it constitutes a menace to great mammal species. Here if effective education on biodiversity is not given to the local people, just one gun can deplete series of species within a given niche. Traps are equally wasteful if they are not frequently visited; when this happens, animals that fall in them decompose and become useless. Again, if the number of traps is higher, then the waste can be considerable. This may have a greater negative impact on wildlife. Hunting with the gun is more selective but not sustainable at all considering the fact that the quantity of bush meat which can be killed in one night may turn out to be huge. The only advantage is that if hunters are properly sensitised on the type of species to hunt, then this may be a sustainable method as it discriminates in the selection of species.

The role women play in hunting within the Upper Balong community is not negligible. Hunting as an economic activity can only flourish in this community if the commercial chain is maintained. It was observed that women constitute the majority of bush meat traders. This is the market force that triggers hunting; without them, there will be little or no hunting. Each hunter has his group of market women waiting for him either in the villages or at Manyemen market square. The commercial chain is therefore very necessary so far as hunting is concerned. It is therefore necessary to incorporate women in the fight against poaching. Education and sensitisation programmes on environmental protection that

focus exclusively on hunters are doomed to fail. Hunters and women should both be considered here as important stakeholders at equal footing. Alternative income sources should equally be sought for these women. Therefore hunting as an economic activity is not an exclusively a male activity as formerly thought.

- **Fishing**

Fishing as the second important activity in this community employs both men and women. However, there are more women in this activity. The rudimentary techniques employed for fishing are: hooking, damming and nets. Despite these common simple methods, both community members and non-indigenes use an unorthodox method within the community. This method employs “gamoline”, a chemical substance to kill all the fish in the river. It is a dangerous method because it does not discriminate between big and small fish; everything is eliminated and secondly, the catch can be very dangerous to human health. Despite the unsustainable nature of this method, it is equally dangerous. Some women employ local herbs for blinding fish. Local women commonly use poison from vegetation for fishing (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981; Dongmo, 1985 & Wikipédia, 2008). Once the substances are squeezed in the river, all the fish become sightless and vulnerable to attack. No further information is available on the effects of such a practice on human health. Education and sensitisation should target all members of the community in order to eradicate such unsustainable methods.

- **NTFP**

In all the four villages, women maintain a monopoly over NTFP. They monopolise harvesting, processing and commercialisation. The expanding skills of women in the commercialisation of NTFPs is revealed by Ruiz Pérez M et al., (2002) as they assert that given the right conditions, women entrepreneurs can be as successful as men. This group of women who compete with men for the commercialisation of NTFPs come from Cameroonian cities and

Nigeria. The most commercialized products are: bush mango, njansang, eru, njabe oil, and bush onion. Therefore NTFP commercialisation can improve women's socioeconomic status and relief them from frustration.

Processing of NTFP is usually triggered by the demand for it. Without the demand, energy invested in the process will yield little income. According to FAO (2004), this sector suffers from lack of information to realise the full benefits and lack of protected rights to access and benefit from the resources. Women of the community complain that making a paste out of bush mango, for example, is time consuming and it does not lead to a corresponding increase in commercial value because of the non-existence of the trading chain. Producers and traders of NTFP who are most often women are flexible and vulnerable to external shocks such as market fluctuations. There is therefore need for a well-structured organisation to facilitate the negotiation of prices and define trade rules so that this vulnerable sector of the population should benefit or obtain satisfaction from the existing or future market chains for NTFP.

The benefits from NTFP as food within the community are glaring. The forest and NTFP are safety nets to families during lean periods. The processing of NTFP for food within the community should equally be encouraged. We are focusing on the processing and preservation of harvested and gathered products. Examples are: bush mango paste, njabe oil, dried snails, termites, mushroom and caterpillars. This process will limit access frequency and spare time which women may use for agricultural activities and leisure.

- **Handicraft**

Handicrafts play an important role in the local economy. Sources of material for handicrafts are: the forest, raphia swamps, and fallow farms. Though handicraft is a male dominating activity, most of the articles are commanded and used by

women. Women use various articles in drying of gathered products. Baskets, ladders, cane chairs, mortars and mortar pestles and bags are household equipment. However, male members of the community use handicrafts and especially floor mats (*Kwarakwara*) for drying agricultural products like cocoa and coffee. Since most of the raw materials for the fabrication of handicrafts are obtained in fallow plots and swarms, their exploitation and use do not deplete the forest resources.

5. CONCLUSION

Men and women are actively engaged in the access and exploitation of natural resources in this community. Even hunting which is perceived as men's exclusive activity employs a number of women indirectly. Without the commercial chain maintained by women, hunting will not be flourishing as a profession. NTFP harvesting, processing and commercialisation is in the hands of women. NTFP constitute an alternative source for household consumption. NTFP are therefore safety nets to families during lean periods. NTFP as an economic activity is dominated by women. This domain is stunting due to poor market outlets. The development of a commercial chain for NTFP within the community could relief the pressure on bush meat. There is therefore need for a well-structured organisation to negotiate prices and define trade rules that could benefit women who depend on this sector.

As women play latent important roles in enhancing household income and consumption, conservation approach to community participation should not only focus on leading community leaders such as Chiefs, councillors and elites, but on the effective involving of women in such an approach. Inviting just a woman to represent women in forest management committee whose majority are men are gender cosmetic devices that do not argue well for conservation.

The management of water courses in Sikam and Ayong expose clear examples of gender roles in resource access modalities. These are examples to be seriously considered by conservation partners. The loose access to the forest is not something to ride home with. This laissez-faire attitude manifested by all members of the community opens lee ways for resource depletion by non-indigenes as little or no control is exercised.

Market women who maintain the commercial chain condition the hunting of bush meat. Without these women, hunting will not flourish as an economic activity. They should be considered as stakeholders in hunting on equal footing with men. All said, the absence of eco-guards within the community has given undue impetus to hunters to penetrate the KNP at will.

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