

DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOREST RESERVE AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN THE COMMUNITY OF BELABO AT EAST CAMEROON

Jacques Serge KOUADJOVI KALELJE II

Assistant Lecturer, PhD, University of Douala (Cameroon), E-mail: sergekouadjovi@gmail.com

Abstract: *Our research seeks to define whether this new development model, contributing to increasing the investment capacities of the municipality and the transfer of power from a central level to a local level, can constitute a framework for sustainable and participatory management and to evaluate the socio-economic environment of the villages bordering the Deng Deng forest reserve, transferred to the commune of Belabo. The forest plays a crucial role in physical and physiological, and previously biological, purification of air and water. Human health ultimately depends on society's ability to manage the interaction between human activities and the physical environment. The plant absorbs CO₂ for the photosynthesis reaction to take place (which it needs for its survival), releasing oxygen. The gas destroying oxygen is at this level absorbed by the plant, it slows down, reduces the effects of this harmful gas from the atmosphere. Let's remember that in places where there are no plants, CO₂ will quickly pass or release into the atmosphere to initiate the greenhouse effect phenomenon. The living being needs oxygen for its survival, without this substance man cannot live, it therefore helps him for his survival. Man also releases a little CO₂ in the absence of forests; humanity would suffer because it fights effectively against the perverse effects of global warming. The Belabo forest reserve allows for better management of altitudinal stratification. The forestry management of large concessions and that of small community forests, certain municipalities in Cameroon like Belabo have recently embarked on the sustainable management of forests handed over to them by the State. These communal forests represent an intermediate forest development between these two types of concessions. A development plan is drawn up and participatory management must be carried out in order to take into account the uses and interests of local populations.*

Keywords: Development, Forest reserve, Development, Municipality, Belabo

In Cameroon, poverty remains an essentially rural phenomenon. In 2001, 84% of the poor lived in rural areas and the incidence of poverty was higher there than in urban areas. Agriculture, livestock breeding and fishing constitute the main production activities and sources of income in rural areas. They should therefore find themselves at the center of the problem of poverty reduction (Kamgnia et al, 2006: 17). In its ongoing concern to remedy this situation, the public authorities have engaged in a process of progressive establishment of an institutional system, which will allow populations in rural areas to appropriate and sustainably manage the resources present in their localities. . This commitment increased further following the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and under the impetus of donors. It resulted in the adoption in 1994 of a new forest code whose objective is to promote sustainable management of Cameroonian forests, by encouraging the participation of all users in the forest planning and management process. Also, this commitment is translated by Law No. 96/06 of January 18, 1996 revising the constitution of June 2, 1972 which gave new impetus and an increased and determining role to decentralization to improve and boost political development, social and economic of Cameroon; as well as by Law No. 2004/017 of July 22, 2004 on the orientation of decentralization which sets the general rules applicable to territorial decentralization. This law defines decentralization as a transfer by the State to decentralized local authorities of specific skills and appropriate means. Thus, municipalities can invest their financial resources in the sectors covered by their general missions of local development,

improvement of the environment and living conditions of the populations (Kemajou, 2009). In this way, in the implementation phase of the decentralization process and in the forestry sector, forest areas are returned by the State to certain municipalities, which manage and exploit them for the benefit of the entire population: it these are Communal Forests (FC). The latter are subject to intermediate forest management between the two types of concessions, notably Forest Management Units (UFA) and community forests. On the one hand, they share with the large concession model a sophisticated technical development centered on commercial timber resources. However, unlike UFAs, they are obliged to deal with the aspirations, interests and uses of local populations. These forests are thus closer to the model of community forests. The FC thus constitutes a recent framework for real participatory forest management where the sustained exploitation of trees must be combined on a local scale with the improvement of the well-being of citizens (Poissonnet et al, 2005: 15).

However, any activity carried out in a municipal forest must, according to the law, comply with its development plan. This development plan is drawn up at the request of municipal officials, in accordance with the requirements of article 30 of the forest code. The creation of the development plan is based on various preliminary studies, in particular, flora and fauna inventories; as well as a socio-economic study. Thus, the zoning plan for the southern part of Cameroon potentially identified the Belabo forest massif as a communal forest, which could be subject to classification in the permanent domain. It is with the aim of seizing this opportunity which will undoubtedly increase the income of the municipality that this study is carried out.

1. The commune of Belabo : geography and history

The commune of Belabo is a district capital. It is located in the Lom and Djérem department. About 80 km from Bertoua, capital of the Eastern region, Belabo covers an area of 6,000 km², 2/3 of which is represented by dense rainforest and 1/3, grassy and wooded savannah. It is limited: to the North by the District of Bétaré-Oya, to the East by the Municipality of Mandjou; to the South-East, by the Communes of Diang and Minta; to the South by the Municipality of Nsem and finally to the West by the Municipality of Yoko.

1.1. Location of villages and the communal forest

The commune of Belabo has four cantons subdivided into approximately 46 villages. These are distributed along the different road axes : the Belabo - Deng-Deng road axis ; the Bertoua – Belabo road axis ; the Viali - Deng-Deng road axis. The Belabo municipal forest is part of the permanent forest estate. Bearing the name of the city which shelters it, it is located in the Eastern Region, Department of Lom and Djerem, Arrondissement of Belabo. Its surface area is 59,214 hectares). It is located between the Bertoua-Belabo road axes on the one hand and Bertoua Deng Deng on the other hand. This forest is very rich in plant and animal biological diversity with the presence of endemic species. The presence of the research and teaching blocks of the University of Dschang and IRAD; of the ANAFOR branch as well as the creation of the Ndeng-Ndeng UTO in this forest massif sufficiently demonstrates its richness in biological diversity. The proximity of Deng Deng National Park with contagion effects confirms this richness (Poissonnet et al, 2005: 16).

1.2. Climate, flora and fauna

The climate of the area is of the Guinean equatorial type with a Sudanian tendency towards the north. It is characterized by the alternation of 4 seasons: a long dry season, from December to mid-March; a short rainy season, from mid-March to May; a short dry season, from June to mid-August; a major rainy season from mid-September to November. The town receives between 1500 and 2000 mm of precipitation per year. It rains on average 135 days per year in the forest zone, 130 days in the transition zone and 110 days in the savannah

zone (CIEFE, 2010:12). The maximum temperature is 30°C against a minimum of 18°C during the year. However, the average fluctuates between 23 and 25°C. The wind regime is moderate because of the layout of the relief; vast traffic corridors (winding valleys densely covered by gallery forests). The erosive power of the winds is therefore minimized by the presence of a diversity of plant formations. However, at the beginning and end of the season, storms cause tree falls. Disturbances have been observed in the alternation of seasons in recent years, thus significantly disrupting the agricultural calendar (Poissonnet et al, 2005: 18). Eastern Cameroon is classified among the regions of the country best equipped with fertile soils, and is made up of laterites and areas rich in sand. As for the area covered by the municipality of Belabo, the soils are essentially made up of ferralitic soils with three variants: typical ferralitic soils (red ferralitic soils derived from metamorphic rocks); numerous ironclad ferralitic soils (deep horizons of locally ironclad and exposed red ferralitic soils, ferruginous concretions) towards the south; and complex savannah soils (disturbed soils, concretions and armor debris) to the north (EDC, 2010:10). Within the commune of Belabo, the plant formations encountered are as follows: The semi-deciduous forest with Sterculiaceae and Ulmaceae. The main species are: *Triplochiton scleroxylon*, *Ceiba pentandra*, *Uapaca guineensis*, *Sterculia rhinopetala*, *Ricinodendron heudelotii*, *Alstonia boonei*, *Afzelia africana*, *Entandrophragma cylindricum*, *Hymeno cardialyrata* and *Chatacme aristata*. The semi-deciduous forest with Sterculiaceae and Ulmaceae of the northern type. The species present are approximately the same as in the previous type, sometimes with a different order. However, there are also abundant recruit species such as *Funtumia africana*, *Myrianthus arboreus*, *Markhami alutea*, *Chatacme aristata*, *Olaxsub scorpioides*, various *Albizia*. The main species of these recruits are: *Ceiba pentandra*, *Piptadeniastrum africanum*, *Milicia excelsa*, *Albiziagla berrima*, *Irvingia gabonensis*, *Terminalia superba*, *Olaxsub scorpioides*, *Funtumi aelastica*, *Markhami alutea*, *Chatacme aristata*, *Hymeno cardialyrata*, *Lanne anigritana*, *Xylopiiia ethiopica*. *Harrisonia*. Savanna species such as *Albiziacoriara* and *Dichrosta chyscinerea* persist in the forest (CIEFE, 2010:5).

The Belabo forest massif experienced heavy exploitation during the period of activity of the Société Forestière et Industrielle de Belabo (SOFIBEL) (PDC de Belabo 2009-2013, 2009: 10). This is what justifies the presence of numerous recruits. Today, in this highly degraded forest, the current activity is cutting firewood and wild sawing. The vegetation of the commune of Belabo thus presented is distributed into three large forest areas in the cantons of Pôl, Képéré-Deng Deng, and Kepere-Woutchaba. The types of activities carried out there make it possible to distinguish the following distribution: two UFA (Forest Management Unit) in the Deng Deng forest massif, operated respectively by the companies PLACAM and SFW (Société Forestière Wandja); a UFA in the locality of Woutchaba, operated by the Pangeotis-Marilis company; a community forest in operation in Koundi, owned by GIC Doh; The change of status of part of the Deng Deng Forest Reserve into an extension of the national park; A forest reserve (Deng Deng) whose management has been transferred to the communes of Belabo (Communal Forest); two blocks of research and experimentation forest belonging to the branch of the University of Dschang and IRAD in Belabo. However, the wealth of the Belabo communal forest is not limited only to the exploitation of wood, alongside woody species; we find an assortment of NTFPs, which are the subject of exploitation by the local populations of the FC. It should be remembered for all practical purposes that the natural and current stands of this municipal forest are of the adult and young secondary forest type, in which several fast-growing species have developed, such as fraké (*Terminalia superba*), *Ricinodendron heudelotii* known as the Ndjansan tree, and the Ayous tree (*Triplochyton scleroxylon*) (Poissonnet et al, 2005: 22). The fauna of the forest area of the commune is very diverse and includes several species, some of which are threatened with extinction. The mammalian fauna is made up of Primates, which regularly come to the growing area close to the forests, notably gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla*), chimpanzees (*Pantroglodit esvelerosus*) and the magistrate (Colobe

guereza). Other mammals represented by the forest elephants (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*) and savannah elephants (*Loxodonta africana africana*), the lion (*Panthera leo*), the panther (*Panthera pardus*), the aardvark (*Orycteropus afer*), the aquatic chevrotain (*Hyemoschus Aquaticus*), the Potto, the bongo (*Tragelaphus euryceros*), waterbucks and duikers (CIEFE, 2010: 5). It should be noted that duikers are of great importance in the region, due to their ease of trapping and the role they play in feeding populations. Among the species mentioned above, those threatened with extinction are elephants, panther, gorilla, chimpanzee, magistrate, potto, aardvark, aquatic chevrotain and lion. It is possible that the systematic, floristic and faunal inventory, which will be carried out subsequently, will complete the list of mammalian species already identified in the municipality. The absence of data on the aquatic fauna of the watercourses in the area (Sanaga, Sesse, Lom and other lagoons) does not make it possible to assess their potential. However, according to surveys carried out among the population, the aquatic fauna of the commune includes: catfish, carp, pike, captains, snake fish, shrimp, crab, caiman (which is not captured) and many other species not identified by the fishermen. Fish caught using rudimentary techniques not only constitute a source of animal protein for populations but also a source of income (Kamgnia et al, 2006: 22).

2. Description of the socio-economic environment

The Municipality of Belabo was created in 1982 after Belabo was established as a district. The populations agree that the Belabo station and SOFIBEL (Forestry and Industrial Company of Belabo) are at the origin of the creation of this administrative unit. Indeed, with the construction in 1969 of the said station and in 1977 of SOFIBEL, the economic activities around the platform attracted populations in search of employment and forced them to settle not far from the rails, forming over time years a large city. The commune of Belabo is made up of 46 villages (Bigombe, 2007: 3).

2.1. Previous uses of the space allocated to the municipal forest massif

Law No. 94 – 01 of January 20, 1994 on the forest regime is the legal framework for the request for classification of the Belabo municipal forest. The option for the commune of Belabo to obtain a communal forest is further reinforced by ministerial decision no. 1354/D/MINEF/CAB of November 26, 1999 establishing the procedures for classifying forests in the permanent forest domain of the Republic of Cameroon. This framework highlights the need for the participation of decentralized authorities and communities bordering forests in the sustainable management of natural resources in order to combat poverty in all its forms. But, upstream, it should be noted that in 1994, the forest law had integrated the existing forest reserves into the Permanent Forest Domain (DFP). Fortunately, the 1995 zoning plan and the proposal for the creation of the Lom Pangar Territorial Operational Unit (UTO) provided for: the creation of two Forest Management Units (UFA) in the eastern block of the Deng Deng forest massif ;the creation in the three western blocks, respectively from North to South: a sanctuary for great apes; the transfer to the municipalities of Belabo of a forest reserve (Deng Deng) of 69,500 ha; teaching and research forests, belonging to the branch of the Institute of Agronomic Research and Development (IRAD) and the Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences (FASA) of the University of Dschang. This enthusiasm for obtaining a municipal forest demonstrates the importance that such a source of wealth can have for the municipal executive and all neighboring communities. Thus, with a view to supporting the efforts of forest municipalities and in particular that of Belabo, in the management of forest heritage, the Technical Center of the Communal Forest (CTFC), provided its technical support in July 2008, to the classification project of the Belabo Communal Forest (Kamgnia et al, 2006: 23).

2.2. Sociodemographic and economic characteristics

The commune of Belabo is located in the district of Belabo whose current total population is approximately 43,953 inhabitants distributed in 46 villages. The average density is 7.3 inhabitants/km². Statistical data from the District Medical Center (CMA) of Belabo shows a birth rate of 9.8% and a mortality rate of 3.8%. This suggests that the demand for land by populations will undoubtedly increase and consequently, we will see a probable reduction in forest areas. The above reflects the fact that the forests surrounding the large towns of the commune will be absorbed by them which will gradually urbanize like B elabo, Deng Deng, The average household size is eight people in urban areas, around ten people in rural areas. 65% of the population of the commune of B elabo is between 15 and 30 years old. Despite the dynamism of the population and the numerous potentials available to the locality for the creation of income-generating activities, rampant poverty is rife in both rural and urban areas. Generally speaking, housing within the commune of B elabo is grouped and the majority of populations settle along the road and railway. Four categories of houses are present in the area: Clay houses, rectangular in shape and with a two-sloped roof, covered with mats or corrugated iron in some cases and where the floors are not covered. The huts made of clay and mat boards are more numerous in the villages of the three cantons. The majority of residents in this housing category do not have access to electricity. The lighting method frequently used by them is storm lamp lighting (Bigombe, 2007: 3).

The populations of the villages of the commune belong to three (03) main indigenous ethnic groups, namely the Bobilis, the P ols and the Keperes. The table below represents the villages bordering the FCB. Religious beliefs within the villages of the commune are diverse and well represented. Thus, we find: The Catholic church which has the largest number of faithful. It has a Cathedral whose construction work is in progress as well as other large buildings and places of worship; Islam brings together the Muslim populations of the far north and a strong concentration of the Bamoun community. It has a mosque on the slopes of the city hall hill in the Socopao district. We also note the presence of other religious denominations such as the Protestant Church of Cameroon, the Evangelical Church of Cameroon, the Pentecostal Church, the Presbyterian Church and the 7th-day Adventist Church (Kamgnia et al, 2006: 25).

The Belabo district is relatively poor in socio-economic and cultural infrastructure that equitably offers basic services to the entire population of the district. On observation, those that exist in this administrative unit are strongly concentrated in the town of Belabo. The local economy is mainly based on agriculture, livestock, fishing, hunting and the exploitation of various forest products. It employs around 90% of the rural population, jobs in the private sector and small businesses occupy a tiny part of the population (Bigombe, 2007: 13). This small business is often carried out on makeshift counters set up in front of the house and on which a few products such as kerosene, matches, and whiskey in sachets are displayed. Logging is characterized in the villages bordering the FCB by illegal logging activity and the exploitation of NTFPs, within this forest as well as in those surrounding these villages. This illegal cutting is practiced by natives and non-natives, but the involvement of non-natives is favored by the natives. The trees to be sawn are placed in the plantations of the natives, the latter sell them standing at a price ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 CFA francs, the price depending on the species and its volume. The products of this activity (boards, slats of several types of wood, etc.) are intended for the urban market. This exploitation is not limited to the illegal cutting of wood, it also concerns the cutting of firewood. A large volume of wood is taken from the forest for food heating in rural and urban areas (Bigombe, 2007: 13).

The production system is traditional, practiced with rudimentary techniques on small areas varying between 0.5 ha to 5 ha not far from the village depending on the speculation. It's slash-and-burn agriculture. The cropping system is mixed with an average fallow duration of 2 years. Some farmers sometimes travel significant distances of 8 to 10 km to reach their plantation, especially when it comes to crops such as cucumbers. The periods of high agricultural intensity are located in the intervals January-March and June-September (Kamgnia et al, 2006:

26).

The low technical capacity of farmers constitutes an obstacle to the development of agriculture. Added to this are marketing difficulties (poor organization of producers, difficult accessibility, difficulty in preserving products, etc.). The majority of farmers remain powerless in the face of these constraints which require large investments and significant support resources. The main food crops are cassava, corn, macabo, plantain, sweet banana, peanut, cucumber or pistachio and yam. The majority of production is intended for consumption. Among these crops, the main one, which is cassava, requires more savannah land than forest land (Kamgnia et al, 2006: 26).

This sector is more occupied by women. This situation constitutes a favorable factor for the preservation of forest areas because it prevents the deforestation of the massif allocated to the CF. Among these products, cassava is the most processed and consumed in the form of couscous. Other products, although part of consumption, constitute a source of income for these populations. Sweet bananas and plantains, for example, are bought by traders and sent to the northern part of Cameroon by train. These crops are grown in association or monoculture depending on the production objective. Corn is sometimes grown as a monoculture when the main objective is sale. Peanuts are grown in association with cassava, corn, macabo and other crops sprinkled in the field for consumption (wild tomato in places, chili, vegetables and combo, etc.). Plantain and sweet bananas are sometimes produced in association with cucumber and macabo when the field is newly created. The crops that lead to the clearing of vast areas are plantain and cucumber followed by macabo and corn. Harvests and sales take place gradually throughout the year. The quantities sold per sale are not large. This detail of production is due to rudimentary storage and packaging systems. The houses are narrow to store a large quantity of production and the lack of packaging (Bigombe, 2007: 19).

3. Exploitation of NTFPs: right of access and right of use

In the villages bordering the Belabo Communal Forest, it is the right of use, that of usufructuary, which is the most practiced. The law confers title to the forests on the State, but authorizes local populations to harvest Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) free of charge. However, customary law makes the local populations owners of this forest area. There is therefore a conflict between customary law and Cameroonian forestry regulations. Access to this forest is governed by customary law (Bigombe, 2007: 13). Natives of riverside villages are free to harvest NTFPs while foreigners go there through a native in a village who introduces them. The collection of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) is carried out up to an average distance of 15 km (Bigombe, 2007: 19). In this communal forest, people collect NTFPs of animal and plant origin. These NTFPs are used for food needs, and sometimes marketed or exchanged for other goods. The part of the Bélabo FC massif most exploited for research on Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) is that close to the surroundings of the town of Bélabo where the population is galloping. The forest portion of the Deng Deng commune is under less pressure for NTFP research. However, the collection of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) is an activity more practiced by women and children. It is carried out seasonally depending on the species of Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) to be harvested and being within the municipal forest (Nasi, 1997: 10).

3.1. Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) harvested in the Belabo municipal forest : packaging and marketing

In the villages bordering the Belabo Communal Forest, there is an impressive number of NTFPs that the populations exploit for food needs, traditional medicine, and socio-cultural practices. These Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) ensure the food security of the populations living near the Bélabo Communal Forest as well as that of all Cameroonians through the sale of these products in different markets. Certain Non-Wood Forest Products

(NTFP) are used to make sauces (snails, caterpillars, mushrooms) thus ensuring a supply of animal proteins. Other Non-Wood Forest Products (NTFPs) are used as essential oils (Moabi oil and honey). Djangsang and Adok (wild mango are used to thicken sauces in large families. Forest products collected in the Bélabo Communal Forest are packaged in several ways. Some are crushed or dried for sale. This is the Djangsang, wild mango, pepper, four sides (Bigombe, 2007: 19). Others are consumed directly after the harvest, caterpillars, snails, mushrooms, cockchafers, etc. The treatment, that is to say the drying, packaging of all these products is done in an artisanal and manual manner. These treatment, storage and preservation systems do not allow producers to have consistent yields. They record losses after the harvest. They are forced to sell these products at low prices due to the lack of perfection of the storage systems. Djangsang, wild mangoes and pepper can be stored for a long time in jute bags protected from humidity. The sale of these Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) harvested in the FC of Bélabo is done in the various markets of the locality (Bélabo, Bertoua, etc.). Part of the harvest is sold on site and purchased by travelers who go to Bertoua, Yaoundé and even Ngaoundéré (Kamgnia et al, 2006: 30). Income from the exploitation of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) contributes significantly to improving the conditions of these populations. This income is used on a daily basis to cover expenses linked to schooling, health, clothing and household operations (Bigombe, 2007: 20).

Due to the use of rudimentary tools when harvesting Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) and the lack of knowledge on the protection of biodiversity, local populations are exposed to the following problems :

- The destruction of the stems of Non-Wood Forest Products (NTFP) during the removal of the economic parts. This is observed for the harvest of species such as the pepper plant, the bark of bitter cola, etc. These tears and wounds let in parasites and fungi which gradually eat away the species which eventually dies. This contributes considerably to the reduction of the resource;
- Ignorance of the law on the exploitation of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) because of the existing conflict between customary law and this forest law. They are subject to arrests by the Water and Forestry services when traveling to sell their harvest;
- The arduousness of extracting seeds and bark from certain Non-Wood Forest Products (NTFPs). Case of Ndjansang, wild mango tree, white pepper.

3.2. Village perceptions of communal forestry

In the development plan, a regulation of the right of use, accompanied by a NTFP management plan, will enlighten everyone and limit the frustrations of local populations; destruction of sacred sites, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) trees, and agricultural plantations; the disappearance of certain forest species and certain Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP); lack of space to cultivate in the future. The economic activities of the villagers take place extensively within the massif to be classified. On the side opposite the central road, activities are not so intense because the land is not as fertile and is very swampy. Will the remaining land after classification of the municipal forest be able to meet the needs for arable land today and especially for future generations? Deforestation and flight of animals caused by noise from logging (Nasi, 1997: 12) the villagers fear that the mayor will appropriate the communal forest and ignore the priorities of the populations; the non-involvement of rural populations in forest management; the misappropriation of funds from forest exploitation. Indeed, the management of this income was a recurring subject in discussions during this study. For the populations of the villages concerned the problem of governance remains acute. The fear of corruption among the representatives of the populations and the municipal council was clearly perceptible during the interviews. Thus, strengthening the financial and managerial management capacities of those involved in the implementation of the forest management plan will contribute to improving local forest governance. The fears of rural populations towards others. The populations also raised a certain number of grievances reflecting their expectations of the Belabo municipal forest

development project. Generally speaking, these are the following grievances: Rehabilitation and construction of classrooms in the different schools in each village. Equip them with teaching materials, without forgetting to assign new teachers; Construction of drinking water points by the town hall; Improvement of roads to allow easy evacuation of agricultural products to Bélabo; Transparent management of revenues from the exploitation of the communal forest with effective involvement of the populations in the management of revenues from the exploitation of the communal forest; Electrification of villages; Construction of health centers; Ensure the recruitment of local labor in the communal forest exploitation project. The development of the municipal forest reveals potential positive and negative impacts. They boil down to: the creation of jobs and the development of riverside villages through the implementation of the development plan; the conservation of faunal and floral species favorable to the perpetuity of traditional rites and pharmacopoeia; forest regeneration favorable to climate regulation; reducing deforestation; increasing the revenue of the municipality. These concerns: the restriction of the use rights of local populations; the weakening of social cohesion due to the mixing of populations linked to the needs of labor for logging (Nasi, 1997: 15).

The present analysis aimed to understand the socio-cultural, economic and natural environment in the villages bordering the Bélabo forest reserve, a forest massif to be classified as communal forest in Belabo. The aim was to evaluate the use that these communities make of the massif in question, in order to better assess the degree of dependence of these local populations on this forest. The purpose of this study is to take into account social factors that may have an effect during the development and implementation of the development plan. The analysis of the socio-economic environment in the villages showed that they are not yet equipped with the minimum in terms of basic infrastructure (educational, health, hydraulic) and other facilities (roads and electricity). Thus, there is a lot to do in all these riverside villages to talk about sustained development; this in terms of strengthening the supply and services of the hydraulic, educational, health, electrical sectors, etc. In terms of productive activities, local populations essentially live from traditional agriculture, livestock breeding, artisanal fishing, picking and collecting NTFPs, and to a lesser extent from hunting and 'craftsmanship. In the context of their activities, they still encounter many difficulties linked, for the most part, to technical, material and financial constraints. Local populations depend significantly on the forest massif to be classified. In fact, they develop agricultural, hunting, fishing and gathering activities there (presence of several camps and a few fields). The main fears and expectations expressed by the populations are closely linked to these activities, in the sense of being reassured of the continuity of their right to exercise in the area of the massif to be classified; but also the availability of arable land for future generations. A very important fear is also that relating to the good governance of income from the exploitation of the municipal forest.

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