

PROJECTS

Presently, AJESH is running projects in Cameroon with focus on different aspects of rainforest protection, community land rights and community wellbeing. Be it providing technical training or raising awareness or providing material/financial support, all our projects are based on a participatory approach that puts local people at the heart of what we do in harmony with the environment.

1: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATORY MAPPING (MAPPING FOR RIGHTS / COMMON MAPPING PLATFORM):

Overview

In 2016, MappingForRights was recognised by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as part of the UN Momentum for Change awards (an award shared that AJESH shared with RFUK as project implementing partner). It is an interactive community map project for the Congo Basin, which started in November 2011 and is ongoing. By highlighting the presence of otherwise 'invisible' indigenous peoples and forest communities, this project bridges the gap between remote forest communities and central decision-makers, view the aim of eradicating the marginalisation of forest dwellers (RFUK).

The Issue

Customary tenure systems are very well defined and understood locally and are widespread across the Congo Basin but are generally poorly documented and receive only slight recognition in national law.

Despite growing evidence that securing these rights may be one of the best routes to protecting the forest and halting poverty, the political economy of the region has been dominated by a dual model of industrial logging and strict nature conservation, with more recent expansion in the mining and agro-business sectors.

These overlapping claims are leading to land and resource related conflict and the increasing marginalisation of forest dwellers.

What We're Doing

Our mapping activities has gone way over the MappingForRight project as we have supported hundreds of forest and coastal communities across Cameroon to produce maps of their lands and resources covering over 1.5 thousands hectares.

Some of our achievements include:

- 700 community mappers trained in the South West, East and Northern Regions of Cameroon.



- we have mapped over 88 communities representing a total area of about 1.5 thousand hectares of land cover.

- trained over 35 administrative personnel on community-based tenure management

- the first interactive community map of its kind in Africa, if not the world, and largest repository of customary rights and resource use data in the Congo

Basin.

- our mapping data is been used by the National Institute of Cartography to update the national spatial data and the openstreetmap for Cameroon
- our mapping data is now used in policy discourse to integrate into land-use planning processes, REDD+ initiatives processes and to track and mitigate impacts of potential palm oil expansion in the region
- a large and growing membership base among key stakeholders to defend the rights of local communities.
- collaborating with RFUK in pioneering new geo-spatial technologies and mapping methodologies, bridging the gap between remote forest communities and central decision making processes.
- training women and youth on advocacy approaches and use of advocacy tool to negotiate livelihood lands from traditional administration. With funds from Global Greengrant Fund, women in the Yabassi council area are educated on the use of maps to negotiate access rights to land following the advancing agro-industrial expansion and the scaling up of small scale oil palm plantations in the area.
- carry out studies on community involvement in the management of Forest Management Units (FMUs) and Sales by Standing Volumes (SSVs) in the South West Region in all logging concessions in Cameroon.
- mobilized Village Forest Management Committees (VFMCs) to participate effectively in the management and follow up of Forest Royalties in logging concessions as well as play their role in the management of Protected Areas (Pas).
- build the capacities of VFMCs on participatory forest governance.
- organized and re-organized VFMCs in FMU.



- monitor illegal logging activities in and around logging concessions managed in Cameroon.
- monitor the implementation of cooperative social responsibilities of logging companies in the Cameroon.

2. LAND USE PLANNING

Overview

AJESH is supporting rainforest communities in Cameroon to achieve long-term, sustainable development by gaining greater control over their traditional lands and resources through participatory land use planning.



Starting at the village level, we are working with local communities to develop a rigorous, people-centered methodology that can be scaled-up to higher levels.

At the council / municipal level, we are working with the council administrative and technical departments to develop an inclusive and integrated people-centered methodology that will inform the regional and national zoning plans.

The Issue

Access to land and natural resources is essential for the survival of forest communities and indigenous people in the world's tropical forests. *Land use planning* is a systematic, multi-stakeholder process that provides a sustainable means for local people to manage natural resources in a way that meets the needs of both current and future generations.

Given their strong local knowledge, forest communities have a central role to play in land management, but their participation in land governance is often undermined. This trend is noticeable throughout the Congo Basin, where governments have retained state ownership of land, mainly for the benefit of commercial timber concessions and protected areas. Such allocations have commonly been on lands traditionally used by local communities. This has

effectively rendered thousands of people landless, or else pushed to degraded agricultural land deemed unsuitable for commercial logging or biodiversity conservation.

In recent years, there has been a wave of land reform initiatives and land use planning efforts in Cameroon added to the recent decentralisation of power to regional and local levels that has given the potential to improve the situation of local communities.

What We're Doing

From 2015, AJESH and her international and national partners commenced two ambitious land use planning pilot, building on a wealth of participatory maps created by local communities through the MappingForRights initiative. The project has since tested participatory land use planning exercises in Nguti Sub Division, Southwest Region of Cameroon.

The participatory mapping work in Nguti Council Area, in the South-West region, marked the first time all the communities in a single administrative unit were supported to map their lands. With the support from RFUK, AJESH is now supporting community clans in the region to produce their own land use plans and to set up community structures for land use planning. Results include:



- the training of over 80 community land use planners in the South West of Cameroon
- supported the elaboration of over 18 community participatory land use plans
- setting up of 18 community and 3 clan land use planning committees in the south west region of Cameroon

- our local land use planning activities is been used to orientate the national harmonized council level land use planning and the communal development plans (CDPs)

AJESH in collaboration with LTs. International, Rainbow Environment Consult SARL and the Ministry of Economic and Planning (MINEPAT), with funding from EFI (European Forest Institute) are leading the development and testing of a national council level land use planning methodology for Cameroon.

Organising regional and local workshops on Participatory Land Use Planning reached over 450 people of mixed sex.

Organising multiple multi-stakeholder dialogue sessions workshops on forest and land governance.

3. FORESTS GOVERNANCE

Overview

Our work on forest governance aims at increasing community involvement in decision making in the management of natural resources relevant to the protection of the forest and wildlife in view to alleviate poverty and contribute to the development of equitable, transparent and sustainable forestry and wildlife management that will improve governance and livelihoods for forest communities.

The Issue

The forests of Cameroon make up a significant portion of the **Congo Basin**, the world's second



largest forest ecosystem after the Amazon. The country's forests cover make up around 20 million ha, representing 48% of the national territory. A substantial part of this forest is already allocated to industrial logging concessions, agro-industries and part classified as protected areas, with some overlap between these different uses. Meanwhile, local forest dwellers, including the indigenous people, have in some cases often been denied control of (and access to) their ancestral

territory.

In regulating some obnoxious and malicious management practices in the management of forest and wildlife resources, the government in the decision of N⁰ 1354/D/MINEF/CAB of 26th November 1999 fixing the procedures for the classification of permanent forests in the Republic of Cameroon, highlighted the full and complete involvement of the populations as imperative for the successful implementation enforcement of the forestry and wildlife regulations. This participation aims at making the populations veritable partners of the state in the protection of the environment in general and the forest in particular. Hence, it is expected that the state and the local population must join efforts in protecting and preserving the national heritage.

It is within this framework that AJESH is supporting the communities by engaging them in playing their veritable roles in the management of forest and wildlife resources within their communities through: effective participation in the management of Forest Management Units (FMUs) as stipulated by the forestry code, effectively managing their community forests reserves and tackling illegal exploitation of forest resources wood and wildlife). Our actions seeks to

strengthen community's involvement in forest management using innovative ForestLink technology. Rather than relying on external or third-party observers, working directly with local communities can help reduce monitoring costs and inefficiencies while also improving forest governance.

The increasing agro-industries implantation in the country's forest space has given rise to increasing unsustainable expansion of small-scale holder farms especially in the oil palm sector with the repelling effects being increasing deforestation of the forest, thus intense biodiversity degradation and a total offset of the ecosystem of the said landscape.

What We're Doing



With the support of our donors and partners, we are supporting local communities to understand the forestry law as well as international conventions on forestry, wildlife and climate change rectified by the government of Cameroon for a better understanding of their property rights and benefits over the resources of their customary forests.



In partnership with other organisations involved at national level with independent forest monitoring and with community support, AJESH continuous to carry out Independent monitoring of illegal logging activities in and around logging concessions in the Southwest, Littoral and Eastern Regions of Cameroon. In addition, we monitor the non-respect the implementation of social engagement between companies and communities within the forestry sector.

Supporting communities in the acquisition and sustainable management of community forests reserves as a way to enhance their customary and user rights.

We have supported in the organization, reorganization and built the capacities of forest community's governance structures (Village Forest Management Committees - VFMCs) in and around logging concessions and protected areas in the South West Regions of Cameroon for effective participation in the management of forest and wildlife affairs in their communities.

AJESH is also supporting communities and civil society colleagues to engage in land governance actions, to ensure that indigenous and community rights are respected and in line with international standards, such as Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on "indigenous and tribal peoples" (1989), ratified by CAR in 2010.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE

Overview

Cameroon joined the world at large in the fight against climate by being a signatory to the [conference for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol and regularly participated in the Conferences of the Parties (COP). During the 21st UNFCCC, Cameroon announced its ambitious commitment. These commitments perfectly align with the country's desire to be emergent by 2035 and the urgent need to save the planet from environmental destruction.

Within this framework, AJESH is contributing to government's implementing credible efforts towards the fight against climate change in Cameroon. This has been through different sectoral ministerial (agriculture, forestry, environment and nature, waste management, construction, transport, and industrial development) plans and measures that are both innovative and encouraging in their various sectors of activities geared towards implementing REDD+ initiatives.

The Issues

The vast majority of poor people live in the rural areas. The main economy resources of the country are: diversified agriculture, oil, hydroelectricity, agro-industry, forestry and mining. This has changed the role of forests in Cameroon over time. In the past, the forests were used only to produce ecosystem goods and services, mainly for the daily lives of the forest populations. Now they are important to several sectors of socio-economic life. The pressure being levied on the forests is causing anxiety to government and non-government actors at both the national and international levels.

The latest figures on deforestation rank Cameroon as second in the Congo Basin (first is Democratic Republic of Congo). The average **deforestation rate** for Cameroon has been on the rise, including the loss of between 40 000 to 80 000 hectares of primary forest annually between 2015 and 2018. (EUREDD Facility).

There is increasing international and national pressure on forests from commercial and subsistence agricultural expansion, mineral extraction, biofuel crops and infrastructure development.

Cameroon is a Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) Country Participant and a UN-REDD Programme Partner Country. It is also involved in the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI).

The following drivers of deforestation and degradation are hereby recorded for Cameroon

Planned deforestation drivers include:

- Government agricultural programmes
- Agro-industry expansion of crops including palm oil and rubber

- Infrastructure developments including railways connecting mining areas to deep sea ports, hydroelectric dams and related electricity networks
- Legal mining and logging operations

Unplanned deforestation drivers include:

- Small-scale subsistence and cash crop agriculture such as cocoa
- Informal logging and mining operation

What We're Doing

- AJESH, other civil society stakeholders and the Cameroon Government with funding from the EU REDD Facility (EFI) are supporting the implementation of the land-use planning law at local (municipal) level. The aim is to increase transparency and information sharing in land-use planning and land allocation processes. Actions realized include:



- land-use planning at local level (the Common Mapping Platform and the Land-use Planner) tools developed, and
- a methodology for municipal land-use and sustainable development plans developed. The methodology has been adopted by the Ministry of Planning, Economy and Regional Development to support municipalities facing land conflicts and increasing pressure on natural resources.

- Researching, sensitizing and training communities and other stakeholders on the **BIOCHAR** technology.
- Supporting the elaboration of ecofriendly communal development plans (CDPSs) for councils (Nguti and Kumba 1) and orientating council development officers on climate change adaptation and resilience approaches in the implementation of council development projects in their respective municipalities.
- Continues capacity building of civil society actors and community members on climate change mitigation, adaption and resilience approaches. Over 15000 community people and local CSOs have been reached with messages on REDD+.
- Carries out mass sensitisation on collaborative management of protected areas with communities around Protected Areas (Korup National Park, Bakossi National Park, Takamanda National Park, Banyang Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary, Nki National Park, Mt. Cameroon National Park, Proposed Mt. Kupe and Muanenguba reserves,.....) in Cameroon.

- Supporting communities and councils with training and follow up tools in the sustainable and ecofriendly management of community and council forest reserves in the forest regions of Cameroon. This is further buttress with organizing community governance structures and building their capacities on their roles and responsibilities in the management protected areas taking into account climate change mitigating approaches.



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- Training of agricultural cooperatives and farmers on ecofriendly agricultural production practices (**CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE**).

- Promoting zero deforestation cocoa production
- Training on zero deforestation food crop cultivation

- Supporting maritime communities along the Bakassi coastline (Isangele, Idabato, Kombo Abedimo, Kombo Itindi and Bamusso) of Cameroon in the practice of ecofriendly fishing.
- Carried out community participatory mapping of the coastal landscape of the Bamusso, council area for use as a tool to strategic planning of fishing activities and for the regeneration of mangroves along the Bamusso_Bekumu coastline.
- Some communities within Nguti Sub division were supported on using their maps to negotiate community rights in Council management plans and the Southwest regional jurisdictional REDD+ pilot Emissions Reduction Program.
- Supporting sustainable NTFP Value Chain Practices. This include the promotion of NTFP domestication.
- Promoting municipal tree planting activities with focus on landscape management to reduce erosion and siltation of water basins in and around mountain (Mt. Kupe, Mt. Muanenguba, Mt. Cameroon) and lowland areas of the Southwestern Cameroon.
- Supported 5 village communities to actively participate in climate change related activities in Bamusso and Isangele Sub divisions.
- Carrying out community sensitization on REDD+ mobilising youth to paste posters.
- Contribute to the setting up and regularly animation of the Mbonge and EkondoTiti council's REDD+ committees.



- Promoted reforestation and afforestation programs with Mbonge and Kumba 1 councils and other villages around the Southern Bakundu Forest Reserve and the Barombi Mbo Lake reserve.
- Facilitated sustainable collection and marketing of NTFPs / NWP (Non Wood Products).