

# WHAT FUTURE FOR THE BAKA?



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS AND  
LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES IN SOUTH-EAST CAMEROON

Aili Pyhälä

IWGIA report 13

Cameroon

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# CONTENTS

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<b>List of abbreviations</b> .....	8
<b>Maps</b> .....	10
<b>Preface</b> .....	12
<b>1. The Baka: traditional territories and way of life</b> .....	14
<b>2. Human rights violations and threats to the survival of the Baka</b> .....	15
2.1 Forced sedentarisation .....	15
2.2 Recognition as indigenous peoples and their citizenship .....	15
2.3 Participation in decision-making processes .....	17
2.4 Right to self-determined development .....	18
2.5 Extreme exploitation and discrimination .....	20
2.6 Loss of ancestral territories .....	21
2.6.1 Logging .....	23
2.6.2 Mining .....	26
2.6.3 Oil palm plantations .....	26
2.6.4 Protected areas .....	27
2.6.5 The tourism sector .....	27
2.7 Access to justice .....	28
2.8 Access to education and health .....	28
<b>3. Baka livelihoods in the present day</b> .....	32
3.1 NTFP harvesting and Food Forests .....	33
3.2 Small-scale ecological agriculture .....	33
3.3 Hunting, fishing, animal husbandry, pisciculture and apiculture .....	33
3.4 Traditional medicine, midwifery and craftsmanship .....	34
3.5 Commercialisation and access to markets .....	35
3.6 Managing finances and funds .....	36
3.7 Social organisation and gender .....	37
<b>4. Actions taken to improve the situation and protect the rights of the Baka</b> .....	40
4.1 Human rights .....	42
4.2 Land use and land rights .....	42
4.3 Community capacity building .....	42
4.4 Legal recognition .....	42
4.5 Traditional knowledge and culture .....	43
4.6 Non-timber forest products and agriculture .....	44

<b>5. Legislation, policy and institutional frameworks in Cameroon that can help protect the rights of the Baka</b> .....	46
5.1 Draft law on marginal populations .....	46
5.2 Revision of the new Forest Law and the Forest and Environmental Sectoral Programme .....	46
5.3 Community forests .....	47
5.4 Climate change policies and programmes .....	48
5.5 Agricultural extension programme.....	48
5.6 Awareness raising and lobbying with a focus on land tenure reform.....	49
<b>6. International conventions, declarations and bodies supporting Baka rights</b> .....	51
6.1 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples .....	51
6.2 ILO Convention No. 169.....	51
6.3 Convention on Biological Diversity .....	52
6.4 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.....	52
6.5 Working Group of Experts .....	52
6.6 Other international conventions of importance for the Baka.....	53
<b>7. Conclusions</b> .....	54
<b>8. Recommendations</b> .....	57
8.1 Recommendations to the government .....	57
8.2 Recommendations to civil society and NGOs in Cameroon.....	57
8.2.1 Recommendations for supporting Baka political power.....	57
8.2.2 Recommendations on concrete forms of livelihood support.....	59
8.2.3 Recommendations on approaches, strategies and methodologies .....	62
8.3 Recommendations to the international human rights community.....	64
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	66
<b>Communities, institutions, networks and persons interviewed</b> .....	68

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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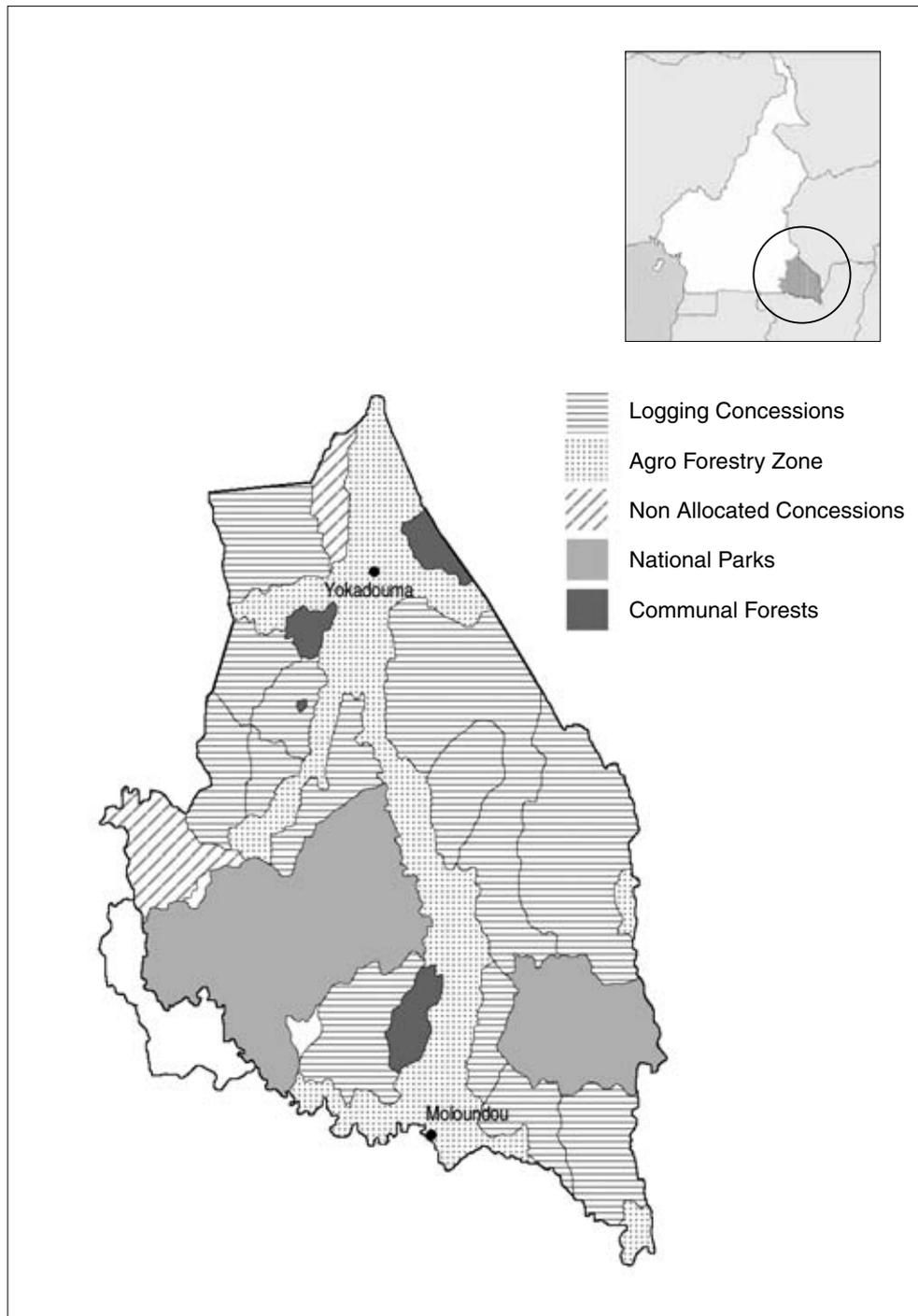
<b>AAFEBEN</b>	Appui à l'auto-promotion des femmes de la Boumba-et-Ngoko
<b>ACHPR</b>	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
<b>African Charter</b>	The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
<b>ASBAK</b>	Association Baka - Cameroon
<b>CADDAP</b>	Centre d'action pour le développement durable des autochtones Pygmées
<b>CARPE</b>	Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment
<b>CBD</b>	Convention on Biological Diversity
<b>CDM</b>	Clean Development Mechanism
<b>CED</b>	Centre pour l'environnement et le développement
<b>CEFAID</b>	Centre pour l'éducation et la formation pour l'appui aux initiatives de développement
<b>CIFOR</b>	Center for International Forestry Research
<b>CIG</b>	Community Association Group
<b>CNPI</b>	Caisse nationale pour la promotion de l'investissement
<b>COMIFAC</b>	Central African Forest Commission
<b>ECOSOC</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Council
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organisation
<b>FIFFA</b>	First Investment for Financial Assistance
<b>FLEGT</b>	Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade
<b>FPIC</b>	Free Prior and Informed Consent
<b>FPP</b>	Forest Peoples Programme
<b>FSC</b>	Forest Stewardship Council
<b>GACF</b>	Global Alliance of Forest Communities
<b>Geovic</b>	Geovic Mining Corp
<b>GDR</b>	Green Development Rights
<b>GFW</b>	Global Forest Watch
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GIC</b>	Groupement d'intérêt communautaire
<b>GEN</b>	Global Ecovillage Network
<b>GTZ</b>	(Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) German Development Aid organisation
<b>HRBA</b>	Human Rights-Based Approach
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>ICESCR</b>	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
<b>ICRAF</b>	The World Agroforestry Centre

<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>INADES-formation</b>	Institut Africain pour le développement économique et social
<b>IUCN</b>	World Conservation Union
<b>IWGIA</b>	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
<b>MAPAPY</b>	Méthode d'approche participative des populations Pygmées
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>MINAS</b>	Ministry of Social Affairs
<b>MINFOF</b>	Ministry of Forests and Fauna
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>NTFP</b>	Non-timber forest product
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>OKANI</b>	Association OKANI ("OKANI" meaning "rise up" in Baka)
<b>ORADER</b>	Organisation d'appui au développement rural
<b>PERAD</b>	Environmental Protection, Research and Support to Sustainable Development, Cameroon
<b>PFNL</b>	Produits forestiers non-ligneux
<b>PSFE</b>	Forest and Environment Sectoral Programme
<b>RACOPY</b>	Réseau action concerté Pygmées
<b>REDD</b>	United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
<b>RRI</b>	Rights and Resources Initiative
<b>SAFACAM</b>	Société agricole forestière du Cameroun
<b>SNV</b>	(Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers) Dutch Development Organisation
<b>SOCAPALM</b>	la Société Camerounaise de palmeraies
<b>STCP</b>	Sustainable Tree Crops Program
<b>UFA</b>	Unité forestière d'aménagement
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDRIP</b>	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UPR</b>	Universal Periodic Review Mechanism under the Human Rights Council
<b>WWF</b>	World Wide Fund for Nature

# CAMEROON



## Land-use allocation in south-east Cameroon



The agro-forestry zone is the only land left that has not been allocated to either logging companies, protected areas/national parks or mining companies (not shown) – apart from a few relatively small areas of community forests, which are mostly in the hands of the Bantu farmers. Source: MINFOF (2003)

## PREFACE

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One of the most pressing and concerning human rights issues being witnessed today is the continued dispossession of traditional lands and territories from indigenous peoples. This is the case in many countries around the world, where dominant development paradigms are coming into conflict with traditional modes of production and livelihood, such as hunting, herding and gathering. Such conflicts are often based on prejudiced views of indigenous peoples as 'primitive', economically unproductive, or not in line with modern aspirations. Whatever the reason, some nation states have even gone as far as to disregard the presence and rights of indigenous peoples altogether, and directly or indirectly weaken or eradicate their traditional modes of living, thereby also threatening the survival of entire cultures and socio-environmental structures that have co-developed over millennia.

With disappearing cultures, we also face the disappearance of languages, wisdom and knowledge systems which, if gone, will be an immense loss not only to the indigenous peoples themselves but to humanity as a whole. This is a fundamental human rights issue. It is also a severe environmental threat. Indigenous peoples worldwide have been the custodians of forests and other ecosystems for hundreds and thousands of generations, living in relative harmony with what nature provides, taking no more than what they need, thereby leaving enough for the ecological systems to regenerate, and for other species to continue to thrive. Today, however, due to unsustainable paths of development,<sup>1</sup> we are faced with ever more pressing environmental problems, manifested through complex and interconnected phenomena, such as the diminishing availability of clean water, rapid decline of fertile soil on which to grow food, a continuous loss of biodiversity, and concerning signs

of climate change, amongst many others. One is only left to wonder what is to become of our planet and humanity, when – despite increasing awareness – the last remaining forests are being taken away from their traditional custodians, only to satisfy the materialistic desires of ever more 'high-consumer' societies who have lost track of what it means to live truly sustainably.

This report sets out to answer a few key questions regarding the livelihoods of the Baka, an indigenous hunter-gatherer society inhabiting the western range of the Central African rainforests. The objective is to help identify potential livelihood strategies for Baka communities, given the socio-economic and environmental conditions they are in, and to analyze these in relation to factors such as external pressures, internal and external change, Baka culture and tradition, feasibility of social and economic development, and long-term sustainability. The report is primarily a result of an evaluation carried out in 2009 (by the author) for the Baka Rights and Dignity Project of Plan Finland and Plan Cameroon, funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, and updated two years later on a scoping trip funded by the Ethnoecology Laboratory of the Autonomous University of Barcelona. The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) has long worked to promote the rights of indigenous peoples and, seeing that very little has to date been published with regard to the rights of the Baka (including Baka children<sup>2</sup>), a mutual interest was found between Plan and IWGIA to co-publish this work as part IWGIA's Human Rights Report series.

While the main emphasis of the report lies on the *rights* of the Baka, the issue is examined in a broader context of: a) history, and how it relates to the current cultural identity of the Baka and to the attitudes of other actors and stakeholders; b) equal opportunities for all in-

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1 For purposes of clarification, it is important to note that any discussion concerning "development" is inevitably a subjective one. The intention with this report is not one of imposing particular modes of livelihood or paths of development upon the Baka, or any other indigenous society, but rather to empower them in making more informed decisions in choosing their own path of development. Hence, this report goes far deeper into the notions of "development" than simply *economic* development (which is seen as implying economic growth based on income or gross domestic product, GDP) and instead explores the basic development *rights* of the Baka, including the right to ancestral territories and the right to self-determined development, amongst others.

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2 Indigenous children are subjects of universal rights as laid down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments. The rights of indigenous children – including rights to survival and development, to the highest standard of health, to education that respects their cultural identity, and to protection from abuse, violence and exploitation – are just as relevant for the Baka as they are for other indigenous populations worldwide. Indigenous children are a very important group to work with, for they are the inheritors of their communities' land and values and will, in turn, pass them on to their own children. They are also the custodians of their culture, language, beliefs and knowledge systems (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2003).

terest groups (men, women, youth, elders); c) financial, marketing and trade aspects in relation to Baka livelihood strategies; and d) possible development routes for the Baka that combine both traditional knowledge as well as “new” methods, opportunities and livelihood strategies. It is hoped that this report will serve as an informative reference for Baka communities, non-governmental organisations, civil society, governments and the international human rights community, and that it will help to promote Baka rights in future decision-making at all levels of society.

# 1. THE BAKA: TRADITIONAL TERRITORIES AND WAY OF LIFE

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The Baka are one of many different hunter-gatherer (or forager) groups (historically referred to as 'pygmies'<sup>3</sup>) that are autochthonous or 'aboriginal' to Central Africa.<sup>4</sup> They are an ethnic group inhabiting the south-eastern rainforests of Cameroon, northern Republic of Congo, northern Gabon and south-western Central African Republic. Although the exact numbers are difficult to determine, the Baka are currently estimated to have a total population of somewhere between 50,000 – 70,000, of which a large portion (approximately 40,000-60,000) are found in Cameroon.<sup>5</sup>

This report addresses the situation of the Baka of south-east Cameroon. The Baka of this region are facing an increasingly uncertain future as their traditional lands have almost entirely been taken away from them, mainly as allocations to international logging and mining companies, as parts of Protected Areas, and the remainder as agricultural or agroforestry plots primarily for Bantu<sup>6</sup> farmers (see land use allocation map on page 11). What once were expansive areas of intact forest, largely inaccessible to the outside world, are today overlain with numerous forestry concessions and mining allocations, with ever more roads and temporary settlements encroaching into the remaining (previously intact) forest.

As a result, many Baka communities have been forced to leave their traditional lands and extremely few, if any, are still living 'purely traditional' nomadic lifestyles, i.e. maintaining migratory forest life throughout the year. Rather, almost the entire Baka population in Cameroon are today semi-sedentarised, meaning that they spend at least part of the year in their roadside settlements but continue to go for short- and long-term (up to several months long) hunting and gathering expeditions deep into the forest. For instance, in the rainy season (September to November) – when *Irvingia* nuts and other forest fruits become available – the Baka often go in small groups to spend some days or weeks in the forest camps to collect nuts and trap animals,

whereas in the dry season (December to March), when wild yams are available, they set out in larger groups to remote parts of the forest on long-term foraging and hunting expeditions called "*molongo*", which often last for a few months. However, due to forest degradation and recently imposed restrictions by National Park Authorities, some of the Baka groups have begun to abandon the practice of "*molongo*".

This sedentarisation process has resulted in the Baka facing a major challenge in shifting from what has been their traditional lifestyle of largely isolated clans practising nomadic hunting and gathering, to a mostly sedentary life of part-time agriculturalists integrated ever more with the outside world. Lacking farming skills and tools, many Baka communities find themselves highly dependent on neighbouring Bantu communities to meet even their most basic needs.

Nonetheless, despite the drastic changes that many Baka communities have been subjected to during the sedentarisation and integration period of the past few decades, the Baka have held on tightly to their own culture and tradition. For the most part, the Baka continue to carry on with their traditional livelihood activities (e.g. hunting and gathering), to speak their own language, to practise their traditional rituals and initiations and are still, for the most part, resisting conversion to any foreign religion.

Yet, the question remains: what will become of the Baka - and of their culture, knowledge and dignity - with current and foreseeable shifts in their entire mode of living? More specifically, what will form the sustenance of Baka livelihoods if they are pushed to leave their largely self-sufficient hunter-gatherer life in the forests to settle along roadsides, bearing in mind the limited skills, know-how and tools they currently have for agricultural and monetary systems? This report takes a closer look at these and other related questions, from a perspective of indigenous peoples' rights and sustainable livelihoods.

3 The terms "forest foragers" or "hunter-gatherers" are preferred when referring to Central African "pygmy" populations, for a few reasons: firstly, the term "pygmy" is considered derogatory by many, including by many of the people in question, and; secondly, not all pygmies are foragers or hunter-gatherers. Furthermore, the use of the term "pygmy" gives the impression of a homogenous pygmy culture, blurring the diversity of Central African forest forager groups. The most correct and acceptable term to use is the specific name of the ethnic group in question (e.g., Baka, Bagyeli, Aka, Mbuti etc).

4 Studies have found that ancestral hunter-gatherers of Central Africa probably split from other humans around 70,000 years ago and have,

since then, split into the diverse array of populations seen today in the region. This development coincided with the expansion of "non-hunter-gatherer" agriculture in the region, driving the hunter-gatherers into isolated groups and prompting their evolution into distinct populations, with huge genetic and cultural diversity between them (Kwok, 2009).

5 The Baka comprise the largest of three very distinct groups of forest-dwelling hunter-gatherers in Cameroon, the other two being the Bagyeli/Bagola and Medzan.

6 Hereafter, the local Bantu-speaking farming populations are referred to as the "Bantu". Bantu is a language group comprising many other distinct languages (e.g. Nzime, Konabemba, Bakpele, etc.), hence the Bantu should also not be seen as a homogenous ethnic group.

## 2. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND THREATS TO THE SURVIVAL OF THE BAKA

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The transition currently facing the Baka presents numerous problems, challenges and unresolved questions. One of the main threats, as mentioned, is the degradation of the forests that have provided sustenance for the Baka over thousands of years. These forests have been home not only to Baka communities but also to many large mammal species (including elephants, gorillas and chimpanzees), as well as countless species of trees and plants of high medicinal and cultural value. In addition, there are aspects of the Baka language that are fast disappearing, as species in the rainforests become extinct (and are thus no longer used or referred to), or as certain words are gradually replaced by their French equivalents, through prolonged communication with the neighbouring Bantu or with development aid agencies. In sum, while the Baka have to date held on to much of their customary heritage,<sup>7</sup> their culture and knowledge systems are becoming increasingly threatened. Below are some of the principal threats and violations to the survival of the Baka as a cultural entity.

### 2.1 Forced sedentarisation

The shift described above had already begun in the 1950s, with the colonial government policy of sedentarisation and adoption of agriculture. Cameroon had become a major export country of cocoa and coffee, and the government (along with missionaries) saw the “pygmies” at “a primitive stage of evolution, and intervention [was] needed to bring them into the modern economy” (Bailey, et al., 1992). It was seen that these nomadic peoples had to be integrated into the mainstream of

national culture and economy, and become productive members of society. This sedentarisation process, which began over half a century ago, is still underway. The main argument currently used by the government is that the Baka should integrate into Cameroonian society just like everyone else, as they aim to get all citizens actively contributing to the national economy. In addition, the government cannot keep track of its citizens if they keep moving around. Unfortunately, what this sedentarisation programme has not realised or recognised is the economic or social value of: a) Bantu-Baka relationships and trade; and b) the contribution that the Baka make to the national economy by sustainably exploiting forest resources.

Although it was initially the Cameroonian government that decided to establish a sedentarisation and integration programme, and while the government remains largely responsible for the process, the implementation of the programme has, in practice, been left in the hands of international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as foreign aid agencies. These NGOs’ work has, over the past decade or so, involved accompanying the Baka in their process of social, economic, cultural and political development. Nevertheless, the Baka have to date received no significant compensation for the costs they are bearing, such as those resulting from the degradation of, and loss of access to, their traditional forest lands. It is no surprise, then, that in most areas, the sedentarisation programme has to some extent failed, as the Baka keep returning to the forest on long seasonal hunting and gathering expeditions.

### 2.2 Recognition as indigenous peoples and their citizenship

Another extremely complex and sensitive subject in Cameroon is that of “indigenous” peoples. In June 2006, when the United Nations Human Rights Council proposed the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Cameroon voted in favour of the Declaration (together with many other African states). The Declaration was adopted by the General Assembly in September 2007 and during subsequent years (2008-2011), this universal human rights instrument has also been officially celebrated in

<sup>7</sup> The term “customary heritage” is used here to refer to customs that are in harmony with the traditions that they have given rise to, as well as those that embrace and reflect contemporary indigenous practices and beliefs, thus acknowledging the rights of the Baka to practise and revitalise their cultural traditions, while at the same time embracing contemporary practices which they consider to be consistent with the overall continuity of their culture. In contrast, “traditional rights” suggests that legal rights will only pertain to those culturally transmitted aspects of indigenous culture that remain faithful to ancient beliefs, practices and knowledge (Simpson, 1997: pp 20-21). In other words, the term “customary heritage” leaves open to the Baka the determination of what is part of their heritage, and how that heritage should be protected.



*Sedentarized Baka community. Photo: Youssoufa Bele Mekou*

Cameroon, with the “International Day of Indigenous Peoples” (9 August), as a symbol of triumph and hope. Also in 2006, the government of Cameroon hosted a regional sensitization seminar on the rights of indigenous populations, organised by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR), where the need to improve the rights and situation of the Baka people, amongst others, was recognised.

Ironically, however, when it comes to actually addressing indigenous peoples’ rights in Cameroon, the national government does not, in practice, recognise the concept of “indigenous peoples”. The argument used by the Cameroonian government, as by many African states, is that “all Africans are indigenous”, or can at least legitimately consider themselves as indigenous to the continent. However, there may be some opening up in Cameroon since the Ministry of External Relations recently commissioned a study (Kamanda and Bigombe Logo, 2009) on indigenous peoples in Cameroon with a view to debating criteria for identifying indigenous peoples in Cameroon and analysing their situation. The first phase of this study was discussed during a validation seminar held in Yaoundé in December 2011.<sup>8</sup>

The ACHPR does not consider the question of aboriginality or of “who came first” as a key issue for the identification of indigenous peoples (ACHPR and IWGIA, 2005). For the ACHPR, the principle of *self-identification*, rather than aboriginality, is a key criterion for

identifying indigenous peoples. This principle requires that peoples identify themselves as indigenous and as distinctly different from other groups within the state. The ACHPR has listed the following criteria to help identify (as opposed to “define”) indigenous peoples:

- Their cultures and ways of life differ considerably from those of the dominant society;
- Their cultures are under threat, in some cases on the verge of extinction;
- The survival of their particular way of life depends on access and rights to their traditional land and resources;
- They often live in inaccessible, geographically isolated regions; and
- They suffer from political and social marginalization and are subject to domination and exploitation within national political and economic structures.

The Baka do indeed identify themselves as indigenous peoples, and recognise their marginalization in the political spheres and in the country’s development process. Their culture and lifestyle differ significantly from those of the dominant Cameroonian society, not only in terms of language, customs and traditions, but also in that their livelihoods and identity depend entirely on their rights and access to their traditional lands and the natural resources that the Baka have harvested and sustainably managed over millennia. The Baka also meet all of the other criteria listed by the ACHPR, and the ACHPR does explicitly recognize the Baka people as indigenous people (ACHPR and IWGIA, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> *Atelier de validation du rapport de la première phase de l’étude sur l’identification des populations autochtones du Cameroun.* Ministry of External Relations. 2011.

Yet there is to date no organised social movement on indigenous peoples' rights in Cameroon (unlike in South America, for instance, where the movement has gained strong ground in academic and political circles). In Cameroon, the only sector driving indigenous peoples' rights seems to be that of NGOs and, even there, the movement is lacking coordinated voice and action. Regardless of how terms are used or understood in Cameroon, linking up to a global movement by applying the term "indigenous peoples" is therefore a way for the Baka to try to address their situation, to analyse the specific forms of inequalities and the repression they suffer from, and to overcome the human rights violations by invoking the protection of international law.

Regarding citizenship, the Baka face many difficulties, given that the majority still lack identity cards and hence very few Baka are able to vote in national elections. The problems around citizenship are also reflected in the fact that, to date, the government has still not established an official census of the Baka population in the country.

### 2.3 Participation in decision-making processes

With regard to political voice, Article 18 of the UNDRIP states that:

"Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions".

There are currently no Baka holding office in local, regional or national government, and representation in regional and national institutions is minimal. There are also no forms of consultation, involvement or consent process with the Baka when it comes to making high-level decisions that bear direct or indirect consequences for them. As a result, the Baka are in no way involved in the decision-making processes around matters that concern them or that affect their rights, and have no political or decision-making power, even in regions where they are the majority of the population.<sup>9</sup>

The reason for the above-mentioned lack of representation and participation in decision-making processes is not that the Baka do not have anyone to represent them, for the Baka do have their political representatives (village chiefs), just as they have always had. The problem is that the Baka chiefs are not recognised by the wider society. Even where Baka chiefs or representatives have tried to get into higher levels of decision-making, they have not been accepted. The Baka chiefs have to date been completely dismissed from any legal recognition processes. Some state representatives interviewed were not even aware that the Baka had chiefs; they were under the impression that the Baka were socially unorganised and randomly chose someone to represent them from time to time when they wanted to raise their voice. There is thus a great deal of misunderstanding and ignorance with regard to Baka social and political structures.

According to the government (as expressed by the interviewed state representatives), you need to have a *legally recognized village chief* (referred to as "*chefferie de troisième degré*" in Cameroon) in order to have any political power or representation. Third-degree *chefferies* are the lowest level of administration in Cameroon.<sup>10</sup> The Cameroonian government has lately been holding back from giving "legal recognition of chiefdoms" as the government started receiving too many applications from random chiefs from so called "liberal" communities (or spontaneous settlements) just so that these settlements could gain legal recognition (and thereby also land rights). This in turn led to a trend whereby any newly established village or settlement would quite randomly appoint a chief and try to register, without any real or established political organization. Unfortunately what has happened is that local, regional and perhaps even national government authorities have been under the false impression that the Baka, too, are unorganised "liberal" communities with no real social or political order or organisation, and no real leaders. As a result, all attempts by the Baka to have their true leaders legally recognised – leaders who are arguably much more representative of, and accountable to, their communities than tends to be the case in more modern societies - have failed.

On a more positive note, there have been recent successes in a few Baka communities (e.g. Nomedjoh and Le Bosquet) where legally recognized Baka *chefferies* have been appointed. The fact that at least two Baka communities have already received legal recognition is a very promising sign, for it goes to show that it is possible, and many more can follow. However it is still too early to

<sup>9</sup> In the sub-division of Yokadouma, for instance, the vast majority of the rural population are Baka, but they hold no representation whatsoever at any decision-making level.

<sup>10</sup> There are *chefferies* of the first, second and third degree – ranging from local community chief (third degree) to chief of district (first degree).

know the degree to which this is making any difference in terms of actually giving the Baka a political voice that is also being heard and listened to.

## 2.4 Right to self-determined development

When it comes to “development”, the mere term itself seems to be a somewhat vague concept for the Baka communities visited, just as it is for many people and institutions worldwide. What is often unknown or forgotten in development work is the etymology of the word *development*, which in many languages means to “set free from that which is holding you down” or “to untie something that is tied, enveloped, closed or locked” - that is to say, “to remove all the obstacles that block life or any individual or collective action” (Serrate, 1997). This concept of development implies eliminating hindrances to the creative energy of persons and nations, allowing them to determine their own fate. Serrate (1997) goes on to argue that:

“It implies trust in human strength and people’s ability to know what they need and how to obtain it, people who demand nothing more than a fair chance to work out their own solutions.... To accomplish these ends, a radical change in the style of development is needed.... The biggest investment must be in people’s self-esteem. Communities should not be called on for support; rather, they should be supported and inspired, insofar as this is possible, with the confidence to frame their own changes.”

Similarly, International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169 states in Article 7.1 that: “*The peoples concerned shall have the right to decide their own priorities for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions and spiritual well-being (...)*” and “*to exercise control, to the extent possible, over their own economic, social and cultural development*”. Similarly, Article 3 of the UNDRIP states that: “*Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.*”

The articles presented above should especially be considered in the case of those Baka communities that have chosen to remain nomadic, or semi-nomadic, living almost exclusively off the products of nature, their livelihoods consisting almost entirely of hunting and gathering. According to a study commissioned by Plan Cameroon, these Baka groups have intentionally decided not

to settle down, for they have noticed that those Baka who have chosen a sedentary lifestyle “*get hooked on needs, on attachment, on boredom, and on problems*” and these observations are deterring them from shifting from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle, even when given the option (RASED, 2006). These choices should be fully respected by the national government, NGOs and all other stakeholders. In fact, all organisations and funding bodies, including staff members, working with the Baka should consider the above two articles seriously, and should take them into account at all stages of work – from planning to consultation and implementation. This applies to all aspects of development cooperation work, including education and healthcare.

Some examples illustrating the importance of allowing the Baka to decide their own process of development came from the Baka community of Kwamb, where community members expressed concern over the fact that they have been told to stop building their traditional huts (*mongulu*), to stop lighting fires in their homes (which is what Baka do to stay warm as well as to keep insects and animals away), and to prioritise education for their children (even when there is not enough food to feed the family).

When it comes to traditional versus new homes, many Baka still prefer their traditional homes, saying they “breathe” better, they are more resistant to wind and rain and extreme weather (both heat and cold), and they are more comfortable. Why, then, should they live in large square houses simply because the latter are seen by others as more “civilised”? In the case of lighting fires in the homes, the consequences include a loss of knowledge over one or two generations of what tree species are suitable for lighting fires in the home, and so when some families have wanted to recover this tradition, and have used inappropriate timber species, they have started developing respiratory problems.

In the case of education, the problem is even more complex. A common scenario that has been observed in numerous Baka communities (where the families have been urged to send their children to school) is a fundamental dilemma and trade-off between “education for the children” or “feeding the children”. Given that many Baka communities are still only in the early stages of learning agricultural practices, and others are still working for the Bantu, it is not a “given” that each family has a constant supply of food. In times of low food supply, children are therefore also needed to help harvest food from the forest, or to work on Bantu plantations (to earn food in exchange for labour). In other words, time invested in the children’s education is time and energy lost from harvesting or obtaining food. One community teacher exclaimed that he had witnessed a child reach close to



*Traditional mongulus (Baka huts). Photos: Aili Pyhälä and OHCHR, Cameroon*



starvation point simply because the child's parents had been made to believe that education was a priority, apparently an even greater priority than feeding their child.

What was observed in Kwamb and the other Baka communities was a general trend whereby NGOs and development agencies have "told" the Baka what to do or what not to do, as if they knew what was best for them. Not only is this condescending and disrespectful, but it can also have far more serious consequences than may have been intended simply due to not treating issues in a systematic, holistic way, but as isolated "projects".

A crucial point here with regard to Baka rights to self-determined development is that basic needs should be met first, and only then can more elaborate projects be considered. How, for instance, can one expect community members to send their children to school if their food production is still so limited that children are needed to help the families harvest food from the forest, and given the lack of incentive, with extremely low employment rates among those Baka that have been educated? Similarly, how can community members be expected to pay for medicine if they have no stable and secure income? The Baka have been told by many NGOs that education and healthcare are the most important development issues but somehow some critical "middle" steps have been forgotten along the way, and one is left to question how reasonable and logical the focus of such development work is given the situation that some Baka communities are in, and given the development path they are currently on.

## **2.5 Extreme exploitation and discrimination**

The main issue when it comes to Baka exploitation is no doubt the relationship that the Baka have with their Bantu-speaking neighbours. The Bantu have apparently had difficulties in fully accepting the Baka as equals and, over time and generations, this has led to a low self-esteem among the Baka when it comes to political power. This has resulted in a vicious circle in which opportunities for their manipulation are maintained, and many Baka communities continue to be exploited to this day: for labour (working as menial labourers in Bantu-run plantations); sexually (supposedly most of the premature pregnancies taking place in Baka communities result from sexual exploitation by neighbouring Bantu); and through discrimination (not only by Bantu, but also by the wider society).

The degree to which the various Baka communities in the South-East Region are discriminated against and/or exploited varies. There are some Baka communities that claim to be self-sufficient, at least in terms of food

production and harvesting. Yet social "independence" is a whole other question, and while some Baka communities are more independent, others have remained locked in a vicious cycle of subjugation and servitude to their Bantu neighbours for decades. For instance, one Baka community visited near Salapoumbé explained how they are "locked" into a very exploitative relationship with their Bantu neighbours. Practically the entire community - men, women, children and elders - go to work daily on the Bantu-run cocoa plantations, all day long, for only 250 CFA per day (equivalent to approximately 0.40 euros at the time of writing). According to one local authority interviewed, 60-70% of the cocoa produced in the south-east of Cameroon is derived from Baka "exploitative labour". Meanwhile, another community visited near Lomié claimed to have good relations with their Bantu neighbours.

Not surprisingly, the degree to which Baka communities are still suppressed or exploited seems to be linked to the degree to which they have had outsiders working with them, namely NGOs or other development aid bodies. The general observation is that the Baka communities living closer to Bertoua and Lomié (and thus closer to the central Cameroonian infrastructure) tend to be less subjugated to the Bantu, probably because they have had regular contact over many years with NGOs, aid agencies, government extension workers and others (which can also be seen as simply a transfer of dependency from the Bantu to aid workers). In contrast, the Baka communities that have only more recently started to receive externally-driven projects, particularly those communities located along the Yokadouma-Moloundou road (towards the border with the Central African Republic and the Republic of Congo), seem to be the most exploited by the Bantu.

In the communities, discrimination towards the Baka starts at a very young age. Teachers and field staff interviewed confirmed that Baka children at school regularly experience teasing and marginalisation on the part of fellow Bantu students. That is, if school is even an option, for in some cases - such as in the community of Mbangoe II - the exploitation not only affects the livelihood possibilities of the Baka; it also prevents the children from going to school, as they, too, are put to work daily on the cocoa plantations of the Bantu.

According to several NGO representatives, the most effective ways of breaking these vicious cycles of discrimination and exploitation are: 1) to assist the Baka in obtaining financial independence (including negotiating power for income); and 2) education. For only once these are obtained can the Baka be economically independent of the Bantu and hence also much closer to the same "negotiating playing field". Currently much of the discrimination directed towards the Baka is based

on a false belief (not only by the Bantu, but also by other stakeholders) that, as one interviewee put it: “Because the Baka are uneducated, they must also be stupid.” One Baka community member shared his experience of this, saying that: “As long as you’re not educated, you’re treated as lesser.”

Changing power relationships that have persisted for generations is not an easy task, nor will it happen overnight. Similarly, for the Baka to stop working for the Bantu from one day to the next is not necessarily the most realistic or sensible option either.

Rather, what needs to be worked on is developing Baka knowledge and understanding of their rights, including over human and child labour. In addition, for those Baka communities already settled and integrated into the market economy, a very valuable asset would be for them to learn how to manage their own finances and economies. For the acquisition of rights may require a shift in local economic thinking altogether, to one whereby the Baka give themselves far more value and credit than they have to date. Only once their self-esteem is raised can the Baka be in a better position to negotiate the terms and conditions under which they wish to work for the Bantu, if they so wish to do (e.g. regarding salaries, working hours, seasonal leave, rights of children to go to school, etc.). As these are generational stigmas, it is also all the more important to work with the youth, including Bantu youth, to overcome the prejudices that their parents have passed onto them.

## 2.6 Loss of ancestral territories

Forests provide the very basis of Baka identity, culture and livelihood, and the Baka have a very intimate and intricate relationship with the forest. They consider the



Baka grandmother and child. Photo: OHCHR, Cameroon

forest not only as their source of all food and nurture, healing and shelter, but also as their place of origin, from which their very existence – and everything in their universe – is born. It is home to all their spirits, including *Ed-jengui*, their protector god. To destroy the forest is thus to destroy their god, their home, their identity, their soul.

Traditionally, the forest was the only world that the Baka conceptualised – in their stories, their rituals and ceremonies. They believe that they were the first inhabitants of the forest, and that even though their race has split into different

groups that have moved to different lands and countries, the forest remains the domain of the Baka, which also gives rise to a fear of anything or anyone who is not from the forest (RASED, 2006).

Forests are therefore *the* most important aspect to safeguard if the mission is to protect Baka rights, dignity, culture and livelihood. Without forests, the entire Baka identity would be destroyed. Similarly, land rights are perhaps the most urgent issue that projects working to improve Baka rights and development need to address. Meanwhile, as explained above, the Cameroonian government has allocated the majority of remaining Cameroon forests to logging and mining companies. As a “solution”, the government has embarked upon a sedentarisation programme, with the general attitude being that the Baka should move away from the forests, settle down along roadsides and start planting cash crops (cocoa, coffee, palm), and be a labour force for plantation owners – thereby also contributing to the national economy.

As seen in the land allocation map on page 11, almost all the land in south-eastern Cameroon has been allocated to logging companies, apart from a couple of designated Protected Areas. The remainder of the



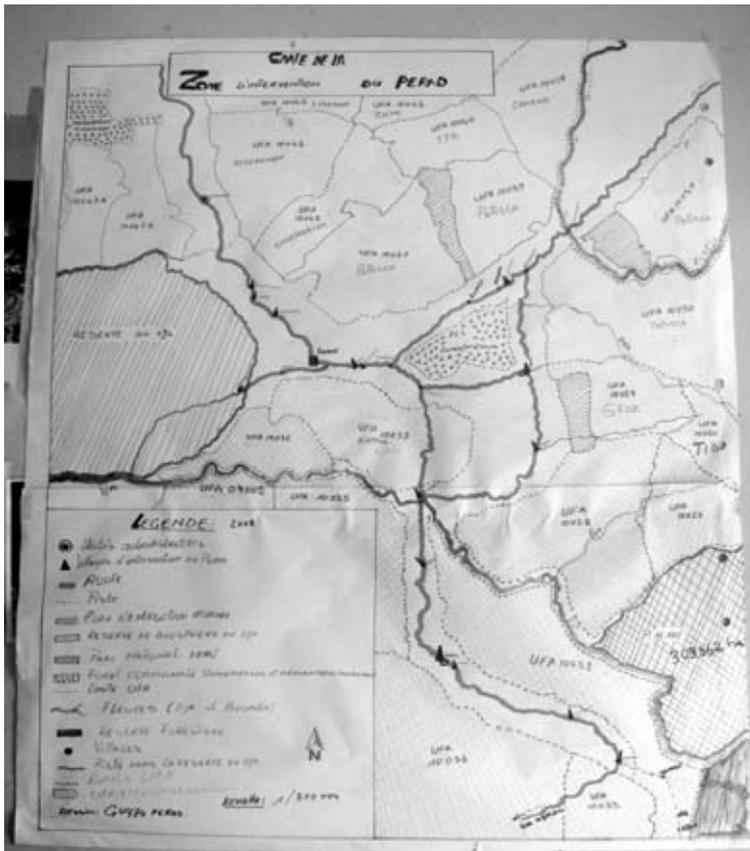
*Baka women going gathering. Photo: Joachim Nguimbouri*

land, categorised as “agroforestry zone” or communal forests, is largely managed by Bantu farmers. In other words, the Baka are literally being squeezed into ever less territory, virtually none at all, in comparison to the massive areas of logging concessions, mining zones (not pictured in the map) and protected areas, where the Baka have very restricted user rights, if any at all. Meanwhile, the Baka are given no compensation, and what little land is left for them to settle on tends to be the most infertile land (“leftovers”, so to speak). This loss of ancestral land is a threat not only to the Baka but also to the countless species of flora and fauna that face extinction if their habitat is destroyed.

According to some of the NGO representatives interviewed, one of the greatest intervention failures of the past has been the moving or displacing of the Baka. Even if the intention may have been good (e.g. to help get them out of trouble with logging companies), all such attempts have had dire consequences. The Baka have not felt at ease in the new places, or in the new, more “modern” square houses built for them. This is already evident from the many examples where the Baka have simply built their traditional Baka *mon-gulu* next to the new houses built for them. Such a sight speaks for itself.

What is desperately needed is to designate land set aside for the Baka to be able to continue with their traditional livelihoods of hunting and gathering and visiting sacred sites. This is where *Participatory Cartography* comes in as perhaps the most useful tool to start with. Participatory cartography, a mechanism whereby communities themselves map out their land-use zones using Geographical Positioning Systems (GPS), is proving to be a highly effective communication and negotiation tool. The territory of the Baka has never before been mapped out, and only recently have some Baka communities started to do so, using participatory cartography (see Chapter 4).

In the process of obtaining land rights for the Baka, there will no doubt be obstacles and conflicts of interest along the way (i.e. that traditional lands of the Baka have been allocated to logging companies and Protected Areas) but this is where negotiation platforms become crucial. If the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has managed to negotiate with Baka communities to allow them to continue to live in Protected Areas (under certain conditions respecting conservation measures) then surely logging companies can also negotiate with the Baka communities living in their UFAs (logging concessions, *Unité Forestière d’Aménagement*) – with the help of



Mapping of land-use zones. Photo: Kinkoh Thomas Ngala

facilitation of course. Considering long-term production and land-use options when designing livelihood strategies with the Baka will also be an advantage. Long-term production systems such as intricate agroforestry plots combining various species (such as cocoa and coffee) in diversified food forest systems could help secure land tenure.

Another aspect to bear in mind is that once the land rights have been given, they are not necessarily respected by others (i.e. the Bantu or logging companies), who have been known to either expel the Baka from their land or invade their territory, telling the Baka that the land does not belong to them. What exacerbates the problem is that often the two (Bantu leaders and logging companies) are working in collaboration, thus reinforcing one another. Obtaining land rights for the Baka must therefore go hand in hand with effective sensitisation and awareness raising with all other stakeholders who may have an interest in the same land.

### 2.6.1 Logging

The area of Cameroon that is covered by rainforests is estimated to be approximately 20 million hectares, and as much as 2 million hectares of the forest area is estimated to

have disappeared in the period from 1980 to 1995 alone, when Cameroon became the world's fourth largest timber exporting country (after New Guinea, Gabon and Malaysia) (Ichikawa, 2006). In the years from 1996 to 1998, when the logging activities peaked, an average of 1.7 million cubic meters of lumber was exported each year, and the logging area (including both actual and planned areas) had expanded to account for as much as 76% of the total forest area by 1999.

The Cameroonian government has allocated the majority of the forested land area in south-eastern Cameroon to logging companies as concessions units, or UFAs (*Unité Forestière d'Amenagement*). The extent can be seen in the land use allocation map on page 11, as well as in maps produced by the Central African Regional Program for the Environment, CARPE (<http://carpe.umd.edu/>) and Global Forest Watch ([www.globalforestwatch.org](http://www.globalforestwatch.org)). Many

of these concession areas have already been taken for use and, in some areas, where foreign logging companies have been for years, large settlements and timber processing sites have been established. The logging companies have opened many new roads in order to access even the most remote areas of rainforest, which were previously inaccessible other than on foot.

These very same allocated zones are also the traditional lands of the Baka, who continue to live within and in the immediate vicinity of the forests being (or about to be) logged. And yet, the Baka have had no power or influence to make their voices heard, nor have they been given any compensation for the impacts that logging companies are having on their livelihood and culture. Research shows that logging has a significant negative impact on non-timber forest product availability. In Cameroon, the majority of plant and animal non-timber forest products (NTFPs) have declined as a result of logging (FAO, 2007). The impact of roads, too, is greater than many would have expected (Laurance *et al.*, 2009), particularly on the large fauna of the forest ecosystem, and species upon which much of Baka culture and livelihood is based and structured.

As if these were not already causing a large enough "ecological footprint" in the area, and even if they remain uncut, reports reveal that many of the forests have al-

ready been reduced to “empty forests”, deprived of much of their important ecological constituents by the excessive pressures of commercial hunting and other forms of exploitation of forest resources (Ichikawa, 2006). There is a considerable amount of illegal hunting taking place inside the UFAs. In May 2009, for instance, one tonne (1000 kgs) of illegal bushmeat was confiscated from illegal hunters in UFA zones in south-eastern Cameroon (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/who/media/press/2009/WWFPrescongobushmeat.html>). The settlements established by logging companies also rely on huge quantities of bushmeat to feed their employees and the staff and families living in the settlements (*personal observation*).

Forestry companies in Cameroon have tended to consider themselves as having full rights to harvest the forest if they have gone through the procedure of gaining official permission from the state which, according to the national constitution, is the owner of the land. These perceived rights have been taken to the extreme, with reports of logging company employees finding Baka communities inside UFA zones and forcing them to leave. The Environmental NGO PERAD (*Environmental Protection, Research and Support to Sustainable Development, Cameroon*) was recently called in to mediate between the Baka and the logging company Pallisco. Other Baka communities reported logging companies encroaching onto their land, extracting and hunting what they want (without employing any of the Baka or giving them anything in return for the trees they fell and animals they hunt) and then leaving. The Baka are well aware that acts like these abuse Baka rights but they have no political power to do anything about these and other criminal acts.

While all these injustices are taking place, there is a fundamental problem concerning the perception of the roles, benefits and services of the logging companies and their presence in the East Region. The general public opinion at the local and national level is that the foreign logging companies in south-east Cameroon are of benefit to everyone as they provide employment, they open roads, they buy produce from local farmers and hunters (including from the Baka) and they even pay taxes to the Cameroonian government – tax money which to some degree trickles down to regional authorities but, in no case to date, has it reached the hands of the Baka. In recent interviews with conservation organisations such as WWF and PERAD, even those who were previously opposed to logging companies now see them as their allies in comparison to mining companies, as the presence and impacts of the latter are starting to emerge in the region.

It is also highly ironic that, when the financial crisis hit at the end of 2008, and there was a sudden visible decline in the presence of logging companies in Cameroon, the reaction of many, even the NGOs working with the Baka, was one of disappointment. The reasoning for the disappointment was the following: with the disappearance of certain logging companies, some Baka communities were left with no-one to sell their produce to. This concerned especially those remote communities only accessible by logging routes. The rationale behind this scenario is illogical: logging companies first kicking the Baka off their land to then buy their produce and, ultimately, disappear (when all the valuable timber has been felled and their business moves elsewhere), only to leave the Baka behind with forests depleted of bushmeat, trees and NTFPs, and no-one to sell their produce to.

Not only have the Baka received no compensation for the costs they are bearing due to encroachment onto their land by forest companies, they are also not receiving any of the benefits from the revenue generated by the timber extracted from their ancestral lands. As mentioned, the logging companies are paying taxes to the government of Cameroon but very little, if any, of this revenue is reaching the Baka as possible funds to provide them with alternative livelihood strategies to the ones taken away from them. Of the total amount of tax that the Cameroonian state receives, 50% stays with the government while 40% goes to the local council where the company is based, of which 10% goes to the communities in the area where logging is taking place. Of the 40% that goes to the local council, the money is intended for development schemes for the entire district, i.e. to pay for local teachers, school materials, for health care support, roads, shops, etc. These are, naturally, in the interests of the logging companies, so that their employees and the families of their employees can have access to such services.

Similarly, with the 10% designated for communities located in the logging area, the money rarely reaches the communities at all (especially if they are only Baka communities). In many cases, the communities are not even aware of the fact that they should be receiving compensation for the impacts that logging companies are inflicting on their lands, resources and livelihoods. In cases where the 10% of logging company taxes *does* reach the local community, it ends up in the hands of the local management committee, which is set up to see that this money is used for the development of the community in a way that benefits all. However, in mixed Baka-Bantu communities, the Baka rarely have any place or involvement in these committees, and the Bantu com-



*Logging road in the forest. Photo: Kinkoh Thomas Ngala*

munity leaders have supposedly been taking the money for their personal benefit (to build bigger houses, to expand their plantations and so on). The Baka may not even be aware of the fact that they should be receiving compensation, as they are kept away from all such information and discussions.

In terms of mediating with logging companies, what is needed is that all the stakeholders, particularly representatives of logging companies, local council authorities, the Baka and other relevant actors (WWF, other NGOs and facilitators) come together and discuss these problems in open, facilitated dialogue, and work together to find solutions. In such discussions, it is important that the logging companies be shown that they can still make a profit by going about their work in a fair, equitable and sustainable way, and that there are alternative systems to forest exploitation which might require fundamental shifts in their paradigms but not necessarily economic losses or trade-offs. For instance, the logging companies working in Cameroon would do well to follow the example of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification efforts elsewhere in the Congo Basin (see below). The first and most important point is to build a relationship with the other actors involved. There is a need to involve development actors in the elaboration of

a social responsibility plan for these companies, as well as during council development planning. This in turn needs solid advocacy through strong networks such as RACOPY (*Réseau Action Concerté Pygmées*).<sup>11</sup>

The Baka NGO CADDAP has tried to establish a platform for negotiation with the logging companies but its efforts have been unsuccessful. According to CADDAP, the logging companies have not been willing to discuss or collaborate, so CADDAP is now considering new channels through the government and through legislation, such as the new Forest Law that has been proposed by civil society.

There is thus a need to build a strong civil society network concerning indigenous peoples' rights. This can be achieved, for instance, through the creation of a national coalition of Pygmies, similar to the one established for the Mbororos (MBOSCUDA), through capacity building by RACOPY or even by creating a new network involving other organisations (international, national and state). Steps should be taken and discussions held between NGO partners and stakeholders to plan and design

<sup>11</sup> RACOPY is the umbrella organisation of all the different NGOs in Cameroon that work directly with the different "pygmy" groups in the country, namely the Baka, the Bagyeli and the Medzan.

a thorough awareness raising campaign of local communities and forest companies for equitable user rights of NTFPs by local communities in forest company areas.

Against this setting, the concept of *free, prior and informed consent* (FPIC) provides a possible avenue for developing mutual understanding, as already emphasised in the UNDRIP (United Nations General Assembly, 2007). FPIC is a method that has been tested in the Congo Basin (in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo and Gabon) by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), in collaboration with five forestry companies and the local people living in and around the forest concessions and, based on the results, is seen as an appropriate tool for defining and regulating contractual relationships. FPIC can, for instance, guide forest management to ensure an open, ongoing and equitable relationship between the different stakeholders. The experts go on to explain that: *“Negotiating consent means that forest peoples have the right to say ‘no’. This is, of course, a challenge for forestry companies. However, far from being the end to a negotiation process, the right to deny consent can represent the start of discussions and a powerful means to build the confidence of local communities”* (Lewis *et al.*, 2008). It would thus be well worth the NGOs working with the Baka in Cameroon to contact the team that undertook the pilot study “Free, Prior and Informed Consent and Sustainable Forest Management in the Congo Basin” (see Lewis *et al.*, 2008) in order to learn from similar contexts how FPIC has been used as a method to reach mutual agreement between logging companies and local communities, and to see how this could be adapted to Cameroon, with Baka populations and UFAs. The NGOs in Cameroon could also visit some of the logging concessions that have successfully been FSC certified, for example the case of Congolaise Industrielle des Bois (CIB) in Congo Brazzaville. Also on a positive note, Cameroon is engaged with the EU Programme on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) to combat illegal logging. The Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) between the EU and Cameroon was signed in May 2010 and is expected to enter into force in two years.

### 2.6.2 Mining

There are at least ten zones in the East Region of Cameroon that have already been allocated to mining companies, mainly for diamonds and gold, but also cobalt and possibly other minerals. A map entitled “Mining concessions over Forests and National Parks in South-East Cameroon” (see WWF, 2008) shows how many of the mining concessions have been allocated over UFAs, National Parks and

Baka ancestral territories.<sup>12</sup> The mining companies are expected to move in during the next few years; many are already doing preliminary exploration work over extensive areas of forest, and some (cobalt mining companies such as Geovic Mining Corp in Lomié and Cam Iron in Mballam) have already started to excavate.

The long-term social, economic, ecological and cultural impacts of mining companies on the local communities and the environment cannot be over-emphasised, yet no-one seems to be talking about these risks and concerns in the East Region. Most interviewees were not even aware of the situation. There are supposedly state-level environmental impact assessments for the two mining companies mentioned, and these reports and their findings need to be shared and disseminated at the local level. Meanwhile, of utmost importance is the fact that local communities and stakeholders must be made well aware of what zones have been designated for mining, and what the implications of this are likely to be. Further steps can then be defined and decided upon once more information is available.

In the meantime, companies like GeoVic Mining Corp (Geovic) are carrying out some small-scale and so-called “development aid work” with certain Baka communities. Geovic’s sister organisation, GeoAid (based in Lomié), is in charge of this side of Geovic’s work. For instance, in the Baka community Nonsu, they have been planting vegetable gardens for the Baka, thereby building positive relations on the basis of which the companies can then access all the Baka traditional land they want. There does not seem to be any external monitoring or evaluation work around this, and the ethics of these kinds of strategies in particular deserve to be openly discussed.

### 2.6.3 Oil palm plantations

Cameroon is one of many African countries that have been the target of a growing international business, namely palm oil plantations. While oil palm has, for centuries, provided local communities with a large number of benefits, the last few years have seen the rapid expansion of industrial plantations led mainly by foreign corporations, along with a major change in focus: from small-scale and edible palm oil to the mass production of agrofuels.

Cameroon already has more than 76,500 hectares of industrial oil palm plantations. The French Bolloré

<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately this or other maps indicating allocated and occupied mining zones in eastern Cameroon were unavailable for this report.

group is the main actor in the country's oil palm sector, producing 80% of the national production of palm oil and holding some 40,000 hectares of plantations through its companies SOCAPALM, SAFACAM and Ferme Suisse (Carrere, 2010). French Bolloré also has industrial plants and has recently declared its interest in the production of biodiesel (ibid.).

Furthermore, the government of Cameroon is planning to lease huge areas of land to set up more oil palm plantations. The company Sime Darby (a big player in the oil palm sector) is, at the time of writing, negotiating a 300,000 hectare lease of land in Cameroon (Levitt, 2011).

The extent to which this new source of "land grabbing" will affect the Baka is still unclear but there are already signs of palm oil plantations emerging in Baka ancestral lands (*personal observation*), and there is reason to be concerned and aware of the severe social and environmental effects this trend may have on the Baka and their livelihoods.

#### 2.6.4 Protected areas

WWF is the main conservation body in the East Region, with its main regional office in Yokadouma. WWF has long had a contested reputation, particularly with regard to the organisation's working relations with the Baka. The primary focus of WWF's work has been to establish three new forests parks in the East Region of Cameroon (*Lobéké, Boumba-Bek and Nki*). In 1995, in partnership with the Global Environment Facility's *National Biodiversity Programme*, WWF reviewed its intervention strategy and soon realized that while they were concentrating their efforts on the management of those protected areas, the rate of on-going commercial logging in the surrounding zones was going to result in three green "oases" in the heart of an otherwise depleted landscape. One of the many disastrous impacts of such a scenario would be increased conflicts between protected areas and local communities (see work published by the Environment and Development Centre, CED, and the Forest Peoples Programme, FPP, 2005, and Nelson and Venant, 2008).

Consequently, WWF's vision changed and, since 1998, WWF's work has focused on the sustainable use of natural resources through better forest practices, including collaboration with logging companies, collaborative management and benefit sharing. Today, WWF's main project in the region is the *Jengi South East Forests Programme*, which aims not only to focus on protected areas but also to address issues of sustainable management of forest and wildlife outside protected areas and to develop partnerships with local communities and the private sector.

In its interview, WWF admitted that one of its main challenges was to better understand the Baka communities in and around the protected areas, as well as the dynamics between Baka and Bantu populations. Some tensions or misinterpretations were also witnessed between WWF and some of the Baka NGOs. The representative interviewed from WWF was well aware of the fact that WWF does not have a very good reputation, and that it tended to get the blame for anything that went wrong in the field. According to him, it has almost become the norm within local communities and other NGOs to point the finger at WWF without being well informed of what is actually taking place, and who is doing what. The confusion often arises due to misunderstandings of the different yet inter-related roles of WWF and the Ministry of Forests and Fauna. In response to the criticism received, WWF is currently working on a comprehensive new communication strategy that is geared towards helping improve its image and clearing the air of misinterpretations, and it is expected to improve working relations between WWF and other stakeholders.

#### 2.6.5 The tourism sector

The future of tourism in south-east Cameroon is an aspect that is still little talked about, yet there is reason to consider the role that tourism might play in the livelihoods of the Baka in the future. There seems to be an enormous potential for ecotourism in the East Region, and the Cameroonian government is supposedly planning ecotourism as one of the future development paths in the region. This is an important and promising prospect for all NGOs working with the Baka to bear in mind, for the potential revenues from tourism could be used as a very strong and convincing lobbying argument in discussions with the state.

It would be particularly worth exploring the possibilities of "converting" designated but still non-logged and non-mined concession lands and transforming these into "sustainable use" areas where the Baka could continue to live sustainably. These same areas could be hotspots for ecotourism and wildlife corridors for large mammals on the verge of extinction. The long-term economic potential of such sites may well outweigh the net revenues that logging and mining companies bring to the national economy in the short-term. A study and proposal presenting the results of such a cost-benefit analysis of the different use options for the remaining forested areas of south-east Cameroon, together with the synergetic social and ecological benefits and win-win solutions benefiting all, could be one of the most powerful and con-

vincing arguments to get the Cameroonian government to consider alternatives to logging and mining.

There are, however, numerous risks and challenges that go hand-in-hand with tourism (including “ecotourism”), and it is crucial that these are taken clearly into account in all stages of planning. These risks include: a) unequal distribution of benefits, both between and across levels, which may lead to conflict e.g. within and/or between communities; b) disrespect of local cultures and acculturation; and c) ecological footprints (waste, pollution, unsustainable use of local resources, exceeding carrying capacity), to name but a few. For the Baka in particular, tourism has the potential to enhance cultural awareness and a knowledge of ethnic history, as long as the “people in a zoo” phenomenon is avoided. As Bailey et al (1992) put it: “*The success of a tourist industry in any central African country depends on the enthusiastic participation of indigenous peoples who will be crucial for maintaining the region’s cultural and environmental integrity*” (Bailey et al, 1992).

## 2.7 Access to justice

The above section on recognition and participation in decision-making processes has already discussed the legal recognition of the Baka. In addition to this, there is the question of *access to legal support*. Currently, none of the injustices and rights violations (to which the Baka are victim) receive legal attention, nor are they in any way addressed by the police or the justice system. The main challenges that the Baka face in this regard are the lack of identity cards, as well as underlying ethnic discrimination on the part of the wider public (including judicial and police forces) towards the Baka.

Getting legal support would resolve numerous problems for the Baka. Not only would they have a much higher chance of obtaining land rights, and more certainty in managing and deciding upon resource and land use, but they would also be in a much better position to finally start receiving the logging company tax revenues in cases where their traditional lands are being logged – as has been the case with the two communities where ‘chefferies’ have been legally recognized. Meanwhile, appropriately targeted programmes of support should be drawn up to help Baka communities gain the necessary knowledge, experience and organisation to negotiate as equal partners with forestry companies, policy makers and other actors, so that as soon as they get their representatives legally recognised, they can immediately start participating in decision-making and negotiation process that concern and affect Baka rights.

## 2.8 Access to health and education

There is not much documented data on Baka health and education, and the information that does exist tends to be either from a limited number of case studies, or somewhat outdated. Rather than presenting precise statistics on health and education, this section therefore addresses these topics in a more descriptive manner.

As with other Central African hunter-gatherer groups, child mortality rates are high, and life expectancy rates are low. Meanwhile, there is little documentation about Baka fertility rates, and exact figures were not available at the time of writing. Those Baka groups who are still able to lead a largely forest-based life are known to have better health in several respects than nearby farming groups (Ohenjo et al., 2006). For instance, the Baka have a lower prevalence of malaria, rheumatism, respiratory infections, scabies, goitre, syphilis, hepatitis C, high blood pressure and dental caries than their neighbouring Bantu communities. On the other hand, leprosy, conjunctivitis, periodontal disease, tooth loss and splenomegaly are more prevalent amongst the Baka than the Bantu. The Baka also have high intestinal parasite loads (ibid).

Health records also differ across the Baka communities. Where communities have significantly less access to forests, dietary resources and land on which to practise agriculture, nutritional levels are also lower. With increased acculturation, this situation is often coupled with the breakdown of traditional food-sharing systems. With settlement also come higher population density and poor sanitation, and thus also higher rates of malaria and parasites. In addition, traditional rituals and ceremonies that used to restore health and harmony are fading, while alcohol abuse is already a common problem.

Most Baka still rely almost exclusively on traditional health care. However, degraded forests are depriving Baka communities of their renowned traditional herbal pharmacopoeia, which the Baka claim they use to cure diseases including helminthiasis, guinea worm, jaundice, malaria, diarrhoea, toothache and cough, among many others (Ohenjo et al., 2006).

Access to forests is thus a fundamental prerequisite for Baka health, especially as health is more than just a biophysical condition but rather consisting of psychological and social dimensions as well. As Ohenjo et al (2006: 1941) conclude:

“forests are ... where they feel at ease, a vital component of their sense of wellbeing, and mental and spiritual health. By contrast, loss of forest lands and resources, and the consequent sedentarisation, increases [their] risks of inadequate nutrition, infec-



*Baka mother and child. Photo: OHCHR, Cameroon*

*Entrance to a Baka community. Photo: OHCHR, Cameroon*



tious diseases, parasites, ... without necessarily increasing their access to health care.”

There are very few, if any, government policies and programmes providing direct and equitable access to health care for the Baka. The Baka hence depend largely on missionaries, NGOs and development agencies for external health care. Access to health care is often not only a question of distance to medical clinics; rather, the Baka complain that they cannot afford to pay for the consultations and medicines, and most Baka lack the documents and identity cards needed to obtain hospital treatment. In addition, the Baka claim that they are subjected to discriminatory treatment when they do attend medical clinics.

With regard to education, a little over a decade ago, approximately 2-5% of Baka attended school, comprising a significant minority of the school students (e.g. in Moloundou, where the Baka totalled 13% of all students) (Bahuchet, 1991). While this number and proportion may have increased in recent years, it still remains very low. The low literacy rate of the Baka is explained by their mobile lifestyle, as they seldom attend school for more than a few weeks at a time, and are sometimes absent for several months while on extended hunting-gathering trips.

An important factor in this equation is that of food security. Many Baka communities have already reached a stage of self-sufficiency in terms of food supplies, and hence also freedom from exploitation by Bantu neighbours. Such communities are thus able to prioritise, for instance, education for their children. Furthermore, some NGOs, such as the *Association Baka* (ASBAK) have had great success in convincing Baka communities of the importance of education, and in getting families to willingly send their children to school. Interestingly, however, in all Baka communities visited, the preference was to have a local Baka school, with Baka teachers and education in Baka language (but with French as a second language included in the curriculum). Even though the Baka may value and prioritise education as a notion, they may therefore not necessarily agree with how and what is currently being taught. This is an important point, stressed in more detail in Article 14 of the UNDRIP, which states that:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning;  
And:
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order

for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

The question is also not one of Baka children not managing well at school. On the contrary, the few coordinators and teachers spoken to stressed the fact that Baka children tend to be very quick to learn, and are bright and intelligent. In fact, Baka children are known to “excel” at school, and it is only a shame, the teachers said, that not more Baka carry on through primary and secondary school to the end.

The question thus arises: what if Baka schools were designed so that they better respected and reflected Baka needs, culture, traditions and livelihoods? For instance, rather than having “school holidays” when the rest of the nation has a holiday, children could have leave from school when it is harvesting season, when families and entire communities tend to go for weeks or even months to the forest to harvest seasonal products.

In addition, how could the educational system offered to the Baka incorporate useful, real-life and practical elements into basic teaching? For instance, the teaching of reading, writing, counting and all the basic analytical and deductive skills that are generally taught in schools could be covered by applying them to real needs and real life skills as well as to Baka culture and livelihood,

Indeed, one of the main questions (and critiques) with regards to education that came up in several interviews with the Baka (and their representative NGOs) was how the education system (currently seen to be at odds with the Baka reality) could be adapted to the Baka, such that Baka schools incorporate Baka culture and tradition as well as practice and theory on livelihood strategies (i.e. “life skills”) into education. One suggestion is to set up early childhood education centres, in the Baka language, where Baka children can learn to appreciate their own language, customs and culture from a young age, whilst receiving basic education and skills. This could be carried on throughout later education, with Baka students encouraged to collect oral traditions, to learn chants, tales, stories, dances, music, traditional techniques and methods, local ecological knowledge (e.g. on medicinal plants) and much more.

Similarly, one of the Baka NGO OKANI’s visions is to establish a rural educational and training centre where the following are applied:



ACHPR Regional Sensitization Seminar held in 2006. Photo: Marianne Wiben Jensen

- a. Theory is combined with practice;
- b. Observation in the field (or forest) is combined with real projects, such as participatory cartography and mapping of resource use zones;
- c. Educational structures take into account and work with, rather than against, the real life, socio-economic context of the people and area, and;
- d. Local culture, traditions and values are integrated into the training and learning to help build, enhance and respect all aspects of life.

This vision and proposal is, incidentally, very much in line with what the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) has been helping to establish in Senegal, Ghana and, more recently, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and there are good prospects for collaboration.

In sum, the originally nomadic lifestyle of the Baka creates difficulties for the government and agencies in terms of providing consistent education, health and other services to the Baka. Nevertheless, there are ways of accommodating mobile lifestyles and ensuring that the Baka are not denied equal opportunities. The latest initiative is one by Plan Cameroon, namely a pilot project to test the feasibility of Baka schools, taught in the Baka language, and which aim to accommodate mobile lifestyles. The project is to begin in 2012, ini-

tially only in a few Baka communities, and – if successful – will then be implemented more widely.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Cameroonian delegate at the 2006 Regional Sensitization Seminar held in Yaoundé, having described some of the multiple problems facing the Baka, summed up their most urgent needs as “access to basic and quality social services including school education and health care” (ACHPR and IWGIA, 2009). This emphasis may therefore already be triggering extra efforts to address the health and education “needs” of the Baka. Having said that, and to summarise this section, it is critical to take a step back and view the Baka situation from a broader perspective. In so doing, it can strongly be argued that *land rights* are a prerequisite before any intervention in Baka livelihoods.

First, however, it is useful to shed light on what it means to be Baka, in order to be better equipped to address Baka rights. The following section does just that, providing a brief overview of different elements of Baka livelihoods, both current and potential, and from different points of view, ranging from the environmental and economic to the social and cultural.

### 3. BAKA LIVELIHOODS IN THE PRESENT DAY

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As mentioned, there are to our knowledge no “purely traditional” Baka communities left in Cameroon that continue to maintain a year-round nomadic livelihood of hunting and gathering. The challenges in maintaining such a livelihood have already been discussed (in Sections 1 and 2), the main threats being government forced sedentarisation coupled with pressures on land from logging and mining companies. Opportunities are few, yet worth highlighting.

In this section, the different Baka livelihood activities are presented, with a description of the current state of affairs, along with possible opportunities and benefits. These are discussed for non-timber forest product (NTFP) harvesting, food forests, sustainable small-scale agriculture, hunting, fishing, animal husbandry and apiculture (bee-keeping) – all in relation to subsistence use.<sup>13</sup> The section then examines some commercialisa-

tion and marketing opportunities for the Baka, and the more institutional and intangible aspects of Baka livelihoods, namely the local capacity for managing finances, and prospects for setting up common funds.<sup>14</sup> Baka social organisation is also discussed in relation to the local capacity for collective management and equitable distribution of benefits. Finally, some of the Baka’s tradable skills are touched upon, including healing with medicinal plants, midwifery and craftsmanship – all of which have great potential for income generation.

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<sup>13</sup> Although the livelihood strategies presented here are examined separately, they should not be regarded as isolated strategies but rather as parts of a whole, each playing an important part in an integrated system made up of multiple sub-systems.

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<sup>14</sup> As there was no opportunity to carry out an in-depth analysis of each of these livelihood strategies for this report, the discussion here should be seen merely as an outsider’s observation of what possibilities and prospects exist, and how these could be combined. Similarly, undertaking a detailed market study was beyond the scope of this study, and hence the prospects for commercialisation and marketing are only a general exploration based on available information but in no way a complete study.

*Wild mango tree. Photo: Kinkoh Thomas Ngala*



### 3.1 NTFP harvesting and Food Forests

The sustainable harvesting of NTFPs is one of the principle traditional livelihood activities of the Baka, and one that has enormous potential for continuing to contribute to their livelihoods. Some commonly harvested products include wild mango, *mbalaka* (a seed with big market demand in Nigeria), *moibi* (a tree with medicinal properties whose fruits and oil are also used for culinary and cosmetic purposes), *gimba* (used as a spice), *njansang* (a yellow spice, very popular in Cameroonian cuisine), *kokoo* (a leaf used for culinary purposes, very popular in Nigeria and Cameroon), *tundu*, wild honey, mushrooms, and a local variety of rattan (used particularly for weaving baskets), to name but a few.

The important thing to know about NTFP harvesting is that it is seasonal, and harvests are also variable. For instance, the yield in forest fruits, particularly wild mango (but also others) was exceptionally low in 2009, with fruits not having matured properly. The Baka communities visited reported that weather patterns had been unusual over the past few years, and yields had thus been unpredictable. Whether these are signs of long-term climate change or not, the point is that resilience and capacity need to be built *at the local level*, such that local communities have so-called “safety nets” that enable them to withstand possible future shocks and abnormalities, be it in climate or markets; the key to this is *diversification*. In a diversified system, chances are that something will always produce a yield. For instance, in 2009, while most other forest fruits failed to mature, the *mbalaka* fruits produced normal yields. *Mbalaka* is also one of the NTFPs that some local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as PERAD (Environmental Protection, Research and Support to Sustainable Development Cameroon), have decided to invest most of their efforts in, in terms of establishing markets and market chains for the Baka.

### 3.2 Small-scale ecological agriculture

The Baka, being traditionally nomadic hunter-gatherers, are still relatively new to agriculture, with most communities still lacking sufficient knowledge, skills and materials to grow all their own food. Yet most of the communities who have settled along roadsides have learned to cultivate the most common crops locally grown in the region, including plantain, cassava, maize, peanuts and local varieties of root vegetables (similar to potatoes and sweet potatoes). Nevertheless, regardless of what “stage” of agricultural development they were found to be at, all the Baka communities visited expressed their needs for as-

sistance in: a) skills (technical assistance on how to increase agricultural productivity); b) tools (spades, hoes, machetes, etc) and; c) seeds (for expanding quantity and variety). Some Baka communities do own cocoa plantations but they rent these out to the Bantu, who are better equipped and skilled to annually treat the plantations with pesticides. The use of pesticide is not necessary, however, and the shift to organic cocoa production should be strongly encouraged and supported.

### 3.3 Hunting, fishing, animal husbandry, pisciculture and apiculture

Hunting is still practised by the Baka, albeit less than before as there is much less game in the forest today than there was 50 or more years ago (due to multiple pressures, including population growth and increased access to forests by outsiders, use of modern firearms, illegal trade in species, forest degradation, etc). Nevertheless, even for the settled communities, hunting remains, to this day, an important part of Baka livelihood and tradition, and various rites of passage in Baka culture are hunting-related.<sup>15</sup>

According to WWF and PERAD (two environmental NGOs working with the Baka in south-east Cameroon), the problem of over-hunting is not due to the Baka but rather a result of outside intruders, including neighbouring Bantu populations, who often give shotguns to the Baka and order them to go and hunt for the Bantu. The Baka stressed this point further: in one community, when asked about how sustainable their forest activities were, a Baka representative responded as follows:

“If all the animals were hunted in the forest, to the very last one, then it would be the Bantus’ fault. They cannot come and blame the Baka. For the Baka know very well that one only hunt for one’s own consumption, one does not kill a female animal that is pregnant, one hunts only what one needs, and that is not very much. But the Bantu are the ones sending the Baka into the forest to hunt, and to overhunt, to then sell this meat for good money (of which the Baka get a fraction, if anything at all).”

- Baka representative, anonymous

<sup>15</sup> For instance, young men in the community are accompanied by the most skilled hunters on long expeditions, traditionally for several days, in search of elephant and lion (and these days also other animals) in order to prove their strength and courage.

WWF also stressed that they do not have anything against Baka communities hunting for subsistence purposes, even inside the Protected Areas (which are managed by WWF), *as long as they do not hunt with firearms*. WWF is very clear and strict about this: hunting with shotguns is prohibited in the protected areas. Similarly, the practice of snaring with steel wires, a major Baka hunting method, is not permitted officially by the forest law of 1994, although it continues to be widely practised.

The problem of over-hunting is also largely due to the ever growing presence of logging companies (Ichi-kawa, 2006). Where logging companies have established settlements and processing mills, with up to 100 or more inhabitants (including employees, families and service providers) the main source of protein consumed is bushmeat. This is all illegally hunted, and those suffering the consequences are the local villages, both Baka and neighbouring Bantu farmers, who are left with severely depleted wildlife populations in the forests once logging companies have left. Bushmeat also gets transported illegally on logging company trucks to cities, where it is sold at high prices. There have been some attempts to tighten control but the situation persists. As recently as May 2009, over one tonne (1000 kgs) of bushmeat was confiscated from illegal traders (reported by WWF).

Hence, understandably, some Baka communities have reacted spitefully and with anger when WWF and the German development aid organisation GTZ and other NGOs tell them to stop hunting, for they know well that the amount of bushmeat that the Baka are hunting, purely for their own subsistence, is only a fraction of what is being hunted to feed the employees of logging companies and faraway city dwellers. The resentment is exacerbated by the fact that the Baka are told to stop hunting but are not given anything in return – no support or compensation of any kind, for instance to help them set up alternative strategies, such as animal husbandry, to meet their protein needs – and particularly given that hunting is not only their tradition and culture but their *livelihood* as well

While telling the Baka to stop hunting is unethical and in breach of their rights, there is an urgent need to greatly reduce the pressure of hunting, particularly of large mammals. Each animal in the forest has a critical role to play in maintaining the forest ecosystem in balance (i.e. as seed dispersers and/or predators of other animals down the food chain), and if any species are driven to extinction, the consequences could be devastating in the long run, not only ecologically but also economically, socially and culturally.

The Baka also have a tradition of fishing but some of the communities visited claimed that the waters for fishing are so far away that they only very rarely practise this. When asked about whether they knew about pisciculture, the responses clearly indicated that they were not very aware or knowledgeable of what that would entail. But the response was very positive, and there seemed to be an interest in looking into this as a possible complementary livelihood strategy. Currently there is no record of Baka communities practising pisciculture, but it has great potential in the area, and gathering best practices from tropical rainforest habitats in South America (where it has been tremendously successful) may be a useful starting point.

As for the raising of domesticated animals, all the communities visited are apparently already practising some form of animal husbandry, but there are clear differences in, and between, communities when it comes to preferences regarding what animals they would like to raise (goats, sheep, pigs, chicken, domesticated wild animals, etc). As mentioned above, animal husbandry is also a very efficient part of integrated agricultural and agroforestry systems, where animals provide excellent fertilizer (manure) but also kill off weeds and pests by trampling and foraging. Thus, again, there are synergetic “win-win” solutions to be found.

Finally, beekeeping, or “apiculture”, was rated highly as a livelihood activity in all the communities visited. Honey production has great potential in the region, due to its sacred place in Baka tradition and culture but also its medicinal value and excellent marketing potentials. Supposedly, most of the honey currently being consumed in south-east Cameroon comes from the north - a long distance away with inherent transport costs in its market price - so there seems to be a regional market gap to fill with locally-produced honey.

### **3.4 Traditional medicine, midwifery and craftsmanship**

The Baka, in addition to being expert hunters, fishermen and NTFP harvesters, are also well known for their extraordinary skills in healing with traditional medicine, including midwifery, and in their craftsmanship. These skills are also marketable, and could well provide the livelihood of many members of Baka communities.

Ironically, the main customers of Baka healing and midwifery treatments are currently the Bantu who, despite often discriminating against the Baka, will go to the Baka (albeit discreetly) to be cured of a wide range of different illnesses. The Baka not only possess ency-

clopaedic knowledge on medicinal plants and potions, they have also become known nationally for their powers and efficacy in healing. Stories suggest that some Baka healers have, upon request, gone as far as the capital Yaoundé to heal patients.

Interestingly, the Ministry of Health of Cameroon recently passed a bill stating that medicinal plants and traditional medicine are to be accepted as valid forms of treatment just as “modern” healthcare is. There is a national institute in Yaoundé, the *Synergie Africaine* Foundation,<sup>16</sup> researching traditional medicine, which could be a valuable contact for Baka projects looking for collaboration, and also in terms of finding out what kind of markets might arise both for medicinal plants as well as for healing, and how the Baka could better benefit from these. It is imperative, however, that intellectual property rights are ensured for the Baka, and that sustainability criteria in harvesting medicinal products are met. It is also critical that any possible trade is fair, such that the Baka communities are the main beneficiaries, rather than the state or private companies.

The Baka are also well known for their skills in midwifery. Baka midwives are becoming increasingly well known for their ability and success in curing sterility, inducing fertility, in their ability to both prevent and terminate pregnancies, or even to just postpone or advance childbirth. Baka midwives are often visited by neighbouring Bantu women seeking help in difficult situations. Here, again, the Baka could learn to negotiate a fair wage for the valuable and unique skills and service that they provide.

As for handicrafts, the Baka are excellent and fast weavers, and are known to be able to produce many baskets in just one day. When asked whether they manage to sell these, one Baka community informed us that there was always a demand for baskets (especially when selling by the roadside) but the challenge for them was learning to negotiate fair prices. Currently, the Baka are selling their crafts at a very low price (the equivalent of one euro for one large carrying basket or case). In addition to helping the Baka learn how to negotiate better prices, alternative marketing channels for handicrafts could also be explored. The Baka have the materials, the skills, the time and the interest; the only missing link is a profitable market.

### 3.5 Commercialisation and access to markets

The current level of commercialisation and participation on the part of Baka communities in the market economy is still relatively low, at least in comparison to what it could be. This may be partly explained by the fact that income (as explained by several Baka representatives) has simply not been a major priority for the Baka to date. Several NGOs also explained that, still to this day, many Baka are only interested in commercializing if and when they have met their own needs and if there happens to be something extra left over to sell. When asked if they wanted more income, the Baka communities visited all replied “yes”, and when asked what they would do with the increased income, they all gave the same answer: they would buy basic necessities, such as soap, kerosene, clothes, cooking utensils, medicine, and school uniforms and materials. In addition, those who still have not done so would send their children to school.

The decision regarding whether or what or when to commercialise is, of course, up to the Baka, and regardless of each community’s or household’s decision, the potential for marketing products in the region is excellent. This applies to products from all the livelihood activities and product types mentioned above, including agricultural products, NTFPs, meat from domesticated animals, fish from fish farms, honey, traditional healing, handicrafts and more.

With regard to “providing an enabling policy and institutional environment”, there is hope in that, with the current process of decentralisation in Cameroon, and with the new Forest Law, the marketing of NTFPs could become considerably easier than it has been to date. Currently market chains for the commercialisation of NTFPs are not yet set up institutionally at the national level, and the legal texts are still missing (regarding regulation of prices, for instance). However, the government of Cameroon is in the process of working on this, and the NGO PNFL (*Produits Forestiers Non-Ligneux*), for instance, is advocating changes in the Forest Law, which does not currently support NTFP commercialisation in any way. As Mbile et al. (2009) have found, there are “*strong and confusing regulatory barriers that limit enterprise operations and market access, and requirements for enterprise governance are often culturally inappropriate*” (Mbile, 2009: 1)

With regard to agriculture, the Dutch development aid organisation SNV (and, to some extent, PERAD) have carried out market studies in the South and East regions of Cameroon, and both have found that there is

16 <http://www.synergiesafricaines.org/>

a clear deficit in the supply of almost all agricultural products on local markets. There is therefore no doubt that there is not only a market demand to meet but also an ideal opportunity for the Baka to embark on agriculture as a livelihood strategy, with the freedom to produce a variety of different crops. The only exception is plantain, which occasionally floods the market and, given that it only lasts a week or two before it is too ripe to sell, this can lead to unnecessary waste and disappointment.

Assistance will initially be needed to set up marketing channels and skills (including information on local markets, transportation options, and information on prices) but, again, the projects and NGOs already working in these areas (see Section 4) should be partnered up with, as they may well have all the necessary skills, expertise and infrastructure set up.

For meat, fish and honey, the best options currently may be to sell by the roadside, given that meat and fish are less likely to be sold in bulk, and honey has a very long shelf life, so it does not need to be rushed off to market. Nonetheless, all alternative marketing channels are worth exploring.

### 3.6 Managing finances and funds

The traditional Baka culture is not one based on saving or accumulating material or monetary wealth. As traditional nomadic peoples, having a surplus of belongings or food is more of a burden than a luxury. Rather, the nomadic lifestyle of the Baka is one directly linked to their immediate needs, and therefore their economy, technology and division of labour is modelled around only those needs. The evidence of this is clear: productivity remains weak (as the Baka are not accustomed to agriculture) and there is no means of accumulating products except for very short periods of time. Furthermore, the implications of this for Baka integration into a monetary economy are also evident, and should be acknowledged by all those working with the Baka.

Suffice to say, for a culture that is not based on monetary, material or “wealth” needs or values, the transition into a society where the opposite tends to be the case (status symbolised by accumulated material possessions, by money, by surplus of food) is hugely challenging. This process may take much longer than some NGOs might envisage; it may even be a generational issue (where Baka children learn rapidly how to use and value money, material wealth and surplus of food, whilst elders show hesitance or reluctance).

According to the Baka NGO OKANI, many Baka communities are increasingly insisting that they need

assistance in income generation in order to release them from the long domination and use of exploitative labour by the Bantu. They also realise that they need savings in order to meet their needs in the new sedentary lifestyle along the roadside. While many NGOs have acknowledged the need for the Baka to learn how to manage savings, few have gone further to contemplate how to go about this, and especially how to enable a *progressive* process of integration into the monetary system. Useful practices could be learned from OKANI, who have already had success in working with some Baka communities on very small-scale savings schemes.

One of the principle lines of work that local NGOs seem to be prioritising is the setting up of microfinance projects (i.e. savings and loan schemes) with the Baka communities. For this reason, two microfinance institutions were interviewed (CNPI in Lomié, and FIFFA in Yokadouma) to find out what kinds of options and possibilities exist for such projects. In addition, all NGOs interviewed were also asked about their experience of and opinions regarding microfinance. However, for the moment, it is *not* recommended that microfinance projects be set up before the communities even know what it means to save, borrow and spend money.

Both of the microfinance structures visited and interviewed responded with reluctance when asked about the possibilities of implementing microfinance projects directly with the Baka. Speaking from experience, they claimed that they would have “enormous problems with Baka understanding what it means to manage finances... the Baka do not like saving money.” Both microfinance structures stressed that they would only work with communities that were settled and stable, not semi-nomadic or uncertain of their future direction, and that they would not give loans directly to communities or community members unless they were registered communities.

The response from the Baka communities with regard to microfinance was positive, but also hesitant. There is local interest, but only if the schemes are undertaken at the community level, not the individual or household level, and only if savings are kept elsewhere, not in the community. Several interviewees stressed that microfinance is something that needs to be built up gradually, and the current situation is only in the early stages of this process.

Another idea that came up in discussions with OKANI was to establish a “Baka Fund” which would serve as a common fund for all Baka communities: a charitable trust fund which could be used for savings and loan schemes (hence a kind of “internal microfinance” system). The key challenge would be that of ensuring



*Baka family sitting inside a mongulu. Photo: OHCHR, Cameroon*

equality – the equal distribution of wealth, particularly within communities, but also between communities. The other question is whether such a fund would be national (and managed, for instance, by the umbrella network RACOPY) or regional (such that each Baka NGO manages a separate trust fund for the communities in their geographical area of work), or perhaps a combination of the two (national, with regional management units).

In sum, the NGOs working with the Baka are strongly urged to temporarily pause any plans for full-scale microfinance projects with Baka communities, until both a) communities and b) banks are ready to work with one another, and in the meantime, to build the Baka community's capacity for managing finances, such as savings and loans. The NGOs could also start to investigate how microfinance schemes have come about elsewhere in the world, in similar contexts, with similar communities and projects.

### **3.7 Social organisation and gender**

The Baka traditionally live in autonomous clans (or *kanda*) of about 20 people, each consisting of about five or six households. All the members of the clan consider

one another as relatives, even those to whom they are not closely related. Each clan has a chief who is responsible for the protection of his people and for the decision-making that concerns the entirety of the group. Baka society is neither authoritarian nor repressive. There is no penal code just as there is no private property, for everyone lives in community and the forest does not belong to anyone in particular (to the Baka it was given by their god "Komba").

Setting up projects to support livelihood activities in rural communities is always a risk unless there are clear and solid forms of community governance, organisation and working institutions - including norms, rules and regulations relating to the collective management of common resources, as well as equitable gender roles. For instance, in order for commercialisation of products to be sustainable and equitable, certain indicators may need to be researched, such as those related to social and political processes, and equitable participation of (and benefits to) men and women. These relate to goals, strategies, control, efficacy of rules and sanctions, perceived and actual status of property and user rights, access to resources, and capacities for management, including legitimacy, governance, accountability and organisation.

Key questions include, for instance: a) Do Baka community members involved in a particular project - both men and women - share the same goals and interests? b) What are the traditional gender roles in the collecting, harvesting and processing of particular products? c) Are there rules on allowable harvest volumes? d) Are there rules on the equitable sharing of benefits (between men and women, and throughout the community) from commercialisation? e) Is there monitoring of economic activities? f) Are there recognised sanctions for rule violators? g) Are there clearly defined property and user rights? And h) Is there a defined set of resource users, and is this defined by gender? Obtaining answers to all of these questions is a project in itself, yet important to bear in mind.

The Baka do seem to retain strong community organisation, including self-regulated norms and rules on hunting, harvesting and so on. Baka culture and tradition already incorporate clear and understood agreements on where their boundaries lie and what can and cannot be harvested or hunted in particular areas (i.e. sacred sites), and these are very well respected amongst the Baka, to this day. The problem, supposedly, arises when logging companies and Bantus interfere with these norms, for instance by ordering the Baka to go hunting in areas where they would otherwise not go (in breach of their own or another community's rules or rights).

Women play an invaluable role in Baka society. In addition to their numerous responsibilities in relation to building the *mongulu* (the traditional Baka hut), NTFP collection, fishing and more recently also farming, Baka women are also the ones in charge of keeping the family together, and of guiding and advising their husbands and their children. This has very important implications for Baka livelihoods, and for maintaining the highly respected and empowered role of Baka women, which reiterates the importance of including women in all stages of research and project work undertaken with the Baka.

The Baka also have social norms that give rise to a form of collective intelligence, a "group consciousness". An analysis of the administrative structure of the Baka shows how the traditional community fundamentally works, with a chief who is surrounded by groups of advisors and collaborators. The chief "*nkumou*" plays a key role in Baka society, and to become a chief is a rite and ritual that far exceeds the "tests" and requirements of our modern society (see RASED, 2006 for a detailed description). The '*boklaks*' are the wise sages of the clan who assist the chief in assessing and maintaining tradition and in passing on knowledge, wisdom and tra-

dition from generation to generation. Other vital groups of the Baka community include: the "*belombe*", specialist and expert hunters; the "*bigambi*" or family representatives ("family" being a more extensive concept than in our modern society); the craftsmen and women who produce weapons for hunting, tools for fishing and harvesting, as well as the weavers who weave clothes, nets and baskets; and the "*nganga*", or specialists in traditional medicine.

To think that the Baka have no knowledge of social organisation is thus a severe misconception (as was the case with several of the government authorities interviewed). To what extent the traditional form of social organisation can be translated to fit "Western" models of social organisation is an interesting question, and one that might be worth exploring in more depth. One could encourage Baka communities, for instance, to reflect on their traditional social structures and organisation, and see how these could be used as a base or model to help them form new social structures and groups, i.e. community cooperatives, community groups and associations, and others, that work to manage or assist particular livelihood activities or projects or serve for political representation. It is completely up to the Baka to judge the most suitable and appropriate ways of adapting traditional social structures and roles with external needs and demands for "new" forms of organisation.

On the point of gender equality, whilst the Baka have largely maintained highly equitable social customs and values in relation to gender, they run the risk of being influenced to adopt less equitable practices and beliefs by cultures and societies outside of their own (whether it is by neighbouring Bantu communities, by urban Cameroonian culture, or by other African and international cultures). In other words, while it may not be a problem in traditional Baka culture, gender issues may need special attention when Baka communities start to integrate with neighbouring Bantu villages, or with the outside world. Gender therefore also needs to be addressed with Bantu communities in the project areas, as they potentially have a very strong influence over the Baka, both directly (i.e. Baka girls and women being exploited or sexually abused by the Bantu) and indirectly (the Baka looking up to the Bantu for alternative models of behaviour and cultural norms, including gender roles). In those Baka communities that interact with the neighbouring Bantu, and in mixed communities, it is therefore all the more important to work on awareness-raising and women's empowerment projects with both the Baka and the Bantu.

The question of what traditions still exist in Baka culture, and how these are changing, is a sensitive

one. The Baka are still attached to their traditions and belief systems, yet they do not like to go into too much detail about what these particular customs are, and prefer to keep the traditions and rituals at a low profile, without outside observers. Nonetheless, as one staff member from CADDAP (a Baka NGO) explained, what remains very important to the Baka are the *forest* and their *ancestors*. These still have an overriding and

fundamental influence over the Baka and their value system, and the Baka will continue to visit sacred parts of the forest to perform certain ceremonies and rituals. The Baka are still highly attached to these and other traditions and belief systems, but they prefer to keep the traditions and rituals at a very low profile (without outside observers).

*Baka children. Photo: Aili Pyhälä*



## 4. ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION AND PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF THE BAKA

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Just about everything that has been put into practice in terms of programmes aimed at improving the situation and protecting the rights of the Baka has been as a result of the efforts of NGOs. The government has done very little (if anything) on this front, and while the specific reasons for this inaction on behalf of the government are unclear, there are several examples demonstrating a lack of initiative on the part of the government with regard to understanding and acting upon indigenous peoples' – and the Baka's – situation and rights.

To start with, Cameroon's constitution downplays the whole concept of indigenous rights by relegating it to the confines of the preamble. In other words, by including it in the preamble of the national constitution (which is construed as an integral part of the Constitution as per Article 65), it is extremely difficult to enforce the preamble by itself and “constitute[s] a serious if not insurmountable obstacle to one who wants to claim a right” (ACHPR and IWGIA, 2009: 12). The other major obstacle for the Baka is that the state only recognises the rights of those who: a) have identity cards, and b) have productive livelihoods, e.g. by cultivating land.

The position of the Cameroonian government vis-à-vis the Baka is somewhat unclear and changeable, depending on which Ministry or individual is asked, and depending on the issue in question. A commonly heard argument used by government officials is: *“Why should the Baka be given all these special rights, when there are over 200 different ethnic groups in Cameroon? If we give the Baka certain rights, then all ethnic groups should receive the same rights.”* Paradoxically, in 2007 the Cameroonian government officially acknowledged and accepted the UNDRIP, and has since then celebrated ‘The Day of Indigenous Peoples’ annually, with only indigenous peoples being the focus, not all ethnic groups.

Some interviews held with government officials revealed that the authorities, particularly at the regional level, can be quite uninformed about the situation of the Baka, and about the underlying problems from a Baka point of view. There is also a somewhat passive stance towards helping the Baka maintain their customary heritage and rights, let alone their livelihoods. For instance, one government official interviewed was of the opinion that:

“The Baka's lifestyle will change dramatically in any case; that change is inevitable. And particularly when the mining companies start coming in, there will be dramatic changes in the geographic, demographic, socio-economic and environmental landscape of the region, so why try to preserve something that is going to be transformed anyhow?”

Other state representatives interviewed admitted that government outreach on the ground was extremely limited and that there was a lack of field staff. They also admitted that district and department officials were uninformed about the Baka and their situation, and completely unaware of the efforts and initiatives of many Baka community association groups and community leaders.

The NGO sector, on the other hand, is doing an impressive amount of work with the Baka, with many NGOs – both national and international – apparently competent and dedicated. Most of the NGOs working with the Baka are involved in one or more of the following activities:

- a. Helping the Baka obtain land and user rights;
- b. Encouraging and supporting food production self-sufficiency (as opposed to Baka working on Bantu farms for less than minimum wages);
- c. Sustainable management of natural resources;
- d. Re-enforcement of organisational capacities and strategies of community associations;
- e. Environmental education (i.e. awareness raising on threatened species and sustainability in sedentary lifestyles);
- f. Promotion of the rights of Baka children, elders, men and women;
- g. The promotion of Baka culture;
- h. The promotion of health;
- i. Helping the Baka obtain citizenship (national identification cards);
- j. Setting up income-generating activities (including agriculture, animal husbandry, NTFP commercialisation and valorisation, handicrafts)
- k. Support for community forestry activities;
- l. The valorisation of traditional medicine;
- m. Mapping of community areas and use zones;

- n. Conflict resolution between Baka and Bantu communities; and more.

The NGOs working with the Baka are many in number, and have hence been able to distribute the work between them over a vast geographic area, also in terms of focal areas of work. While for some NGOs getting land rights and identification (ID) cards for the Baka is a priority, for others it is education and self-sufficient food production. Yet most of the NGOs interviewed are undertaking very similar work to one another, and have many useful skills, experiences, best practices and lessons learned to share. For this and many other reasons already discussed, the NGOs working with the Baka are highly valuable and recommended partners for one another.

One of the main channels for improving cooperation and communication between and with NGOs working with the Baka is through the RACOPY network - a national network of NGOs working with the Baka. RACOPY's funds are currently limited, however, and their role and effectiveness is nowhere near what it could potentially be. RACOPY is hoping to receive funds from external sources in particular, as this would increase their independence, given that one of their main purposes is to conduct advocacy work at government level in Cameroon.

When asked for their views on collaboration and partnership, all the Baka NGO representatives interviewed stressed their interest in establishing partnerships with other NGOs, in Cameroon and elsewhere, and with institutions promoting human and indigenous rights. They were also very keen on the prospect of projecting the plight of the Baka in the world media but were uncertain as to how they would go about it, as most of them are not well connected with other networks. At the time of writing, some Baka NGOs did not even have Internet connection in their office, meaning they have limited or no access to most of the information, collaboration possibilities and funding sources relevant to their work. The NGO representatives also felt that it was important for them and their work to receive feedback and input from experts and projects elsewhere with experience of working on similar issues and in similar situations.

There are several noteworthy actions and approaches taken by institutions working with the Baka that serve as useful examples for further improving the situation and protecting the rights of the Baka. Below are a few examples of projects seeking to address some of the issues discussed in this report, listed under common thematic areas of work.

*Plan Cameroon working with Baka communities. Photo: Kinkoh Thomas Ngala*



## 4.1 Human rights

At the NGO level, a noteworthy addition is the newly-adopted Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) of Plan's Baka Rights and Dignity project. The HRBA constitutes a framework of action as well as a methodological tool, with the aim being to obtain better and more sustainable outcomes by analysing and addressing the inequalities, discriminatory practices and unjust power relations which are often at the heart of development problems. In so doing, the HRBA places the international human rights entitlements and claims of the people and the corresponding obligations of the state at the centre of the national development debate.

## 4.2 Land use and land rights

The situation regarding land use and land rights in the forested parts of Cameroon is extremely worrying. The basis on which to work is already very limited, given that, of Cameroon's 19,631,000 hectares of forest, only 4% is reserved for communities, the rest being allocated to private commercial timber operations and reserves. To aggravate the situation, timber concessions, protected areas and reserves currently overlap the traditional use zones of at least 2,638 communities (Mbile et al., 2009), and this is not even taking into account mining allocations. As a result, these communities – many of which are Baka – are, according to national law, unable to expand their livelihood options or continue with traditional land-use practices

To address this and other land-use challenges, participatory cartography is a tool that is highly recommended as an undertaking in all the Baka communities interested in participating. Using GPS, community members mark each zone in which they fish, hunt and harvest, as well as their sacred sites, and then produce a map that is helpful not only for the communities themselves but also for other potential users. For instance, the logging company Pallisco has expressed an interest in supporting participatory cartography projects in communities whose use zones overlap with Pallisco's UFAs. It is in Pallisco's interest to have access to the information produced, in order to be able to better respect Baka use zones.

As a result, one of the greatest potential benefits of the participatory cartography projects is that other stakeholders (particularly logging and mining companies) can help solve and avoid many existing and potential land-use conflicts with the Baka. Key partners for learning best practices and methods when starting up the Participatory Cartography project in communities are PERAD,

WWF and OKANI, as they all have experience of the method.

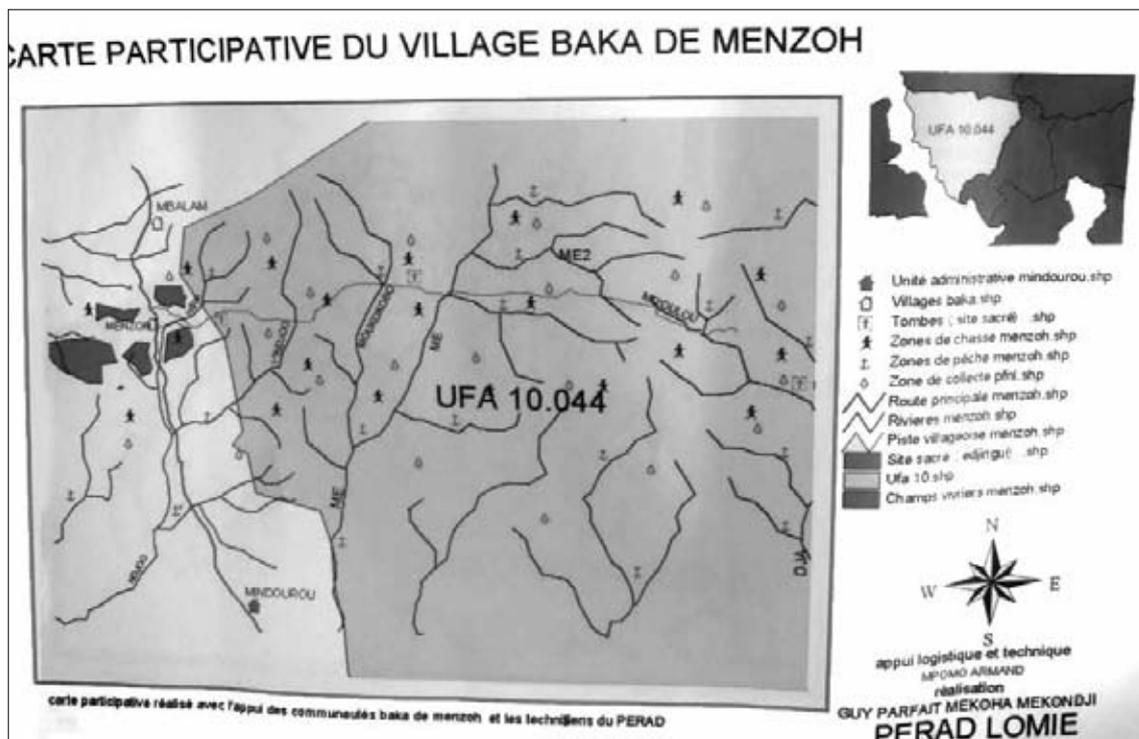
## 4.3 Community capacity building

Another exemplary approach and method that OKANI has been applying in its work with the Baka communities is the use of *Participatory Videos*. This tool has been extremely successful in allowing Baka communities to share knowledge, insights and experiences between communities, and has also worked as a very effective self-appraisal tool. By seeing themselves and other Baka on video, community members have been triggered to reflect upon their situation, their decisions, their behaviour, and have learned to judge for themselves what "looks" like a better or worse option. Furthermore, the video sharing between communities has helped Baka communities realise that they are not always necessarily alone in dealing with a particular problem, challenge or situation. Through the videos, they get a chance to see how other Baka communities are dealing with similar situations or problems, and what solutions seem to be working best elsewhere.

The concept of participatory video was developed by the British-French organisation *Insight* (with whom OKANI has collaborated) as a tool for empowering individuals and communities. Participatory video is known to enhance research and development activities by "handing over control to the target communities from project conception through to implementation, monitoring and evaluation". Opening communication channels for the community members themselves has led to developing successful participant-led projects with sustainable and far-reaching impacts. Furthermore, *Insight's* participatory video methods value local knowledge, build bridges between communities and decision-makers and enable people to gain greater control over their own development and the decisions affecting their lives.

## 4.4 Legal recognition

As for legal recognition, representation and access to justice, the NGO PERAD has recently managed to set up at least two Baka *chefferies*, (legally recognised community representatives), in the communities of Nomedjoh and Le Bosquet. As a result, these two Baka communities are now legally recognized. In addition, as a result of efforts made by NGOs such as CEFAID (*Centre pour l'éducation et la formation pour l'appui aux initiatives de développement*) and ORADER (*Or-*



Map produced via participatory cartography. Photo: Kinkoh Thomas Ngala

ganisation d'appui au développement rural), there have recently been “chefferies de communautés” (as opposed to “chefferies de villages”) established in the Boumba-and-Ngoko division led by Baka and recognised by the administration (Divisional Officer). These cases are a significant achievement, and it is worthwhile all those working with the Baka learning from PERAD, CEFAID and ORADER how they managed to accomplish these *chefferies*, for the same should be carried out in all the Baka communities and villages that wish to be legally recognised.

One major step towards legal recognition of any Baka community is to recognise their land and resource-use zones. The Baka NGO OKANI recently realised what a useful and powerful tool this was when one of their maps (the product of one of their participatory cartography projects) ended up in the hands of parliamentarians who were sat around a meeting table to discuss the situation of forestry in Cameroon. OKANI's participatory cartography map of Baka resource-use zones in a particular area helped open the eyes of the politicians, and served as the very key to aid and inform the discussion and the process of resolving conflicts regarding overlapping resource-use zones. This method should be a high priority for all NGOs working in Baka communities.

#### 4.5 Traditional knowledge and culture

Another important project that OKANI has been implementing is the documentation of several aspects of Baka traditional knowledge before it is lost. Traditional ecological, cultural, social, historical and linguistic knowledge, as well as methods and modes related to livelihood activities, have been written down and OKANI now hope to enrich the records by documenting some elements visually. OKANI's experience shows that by sharing music, dance and rituals on video between communities, the Baka give greater value to these aspects of their life, and are tempted to “do better” (the video sharing has created a playful “competition” and comparison game between the communities, whilst enhancing the value of arts and creativity).

OKANI is also looking to organise annual or biannual festivals, including a Baka music festival, with the aim of helping Baka communities regain self-esteem and value their own culture through arts. The Baka are, after all, world renowned for their exceptional musical skills. The representatives of NGOs that were interviewed all stressed the importance of incorporating Baka culture into their projects, for instance by promoting creativity and the arts in their work, as long as it does not turn into something “exploitative”. The Baka NGO CADDAP, for instance, expressed fear and scepticism and saw the risk of certain cultural projects becoming more like “ex-

exploitative commercialisation of the exotic Baka culture for foreigners”. To ensure that no exploitation is involved, the solution would be to allow such projects only on the condition that they are run and managed by the Baka themselves.

#### 4.6 Non-timber forest products and agriculture

With regard to NTFPs, there are numerous projects and institutions in Cameroon (and worldwide) that have been researching and developing NTFP markets, so the best thing for Baka NGOs would be to establish partnerships with one or more projects or institutions that are specialised in this field (e.g. PFNL or SNV). It is also worth looking into the domestication of wild NTFPs (particularly wild mango, but others too), as these have a very high value on the market and, if new and worthwhile commercialisation channels were found/formed, this could be a promising avenue for the Baka.

PFNL are *the* experts when it comes to NTFP commercialisation in Cameroon. They have carried out several studies analysing markets for NTFPs, developing market chains, community organisation in NTFP management and commercialisation. Work at the community level has involved, for instance, identifying already existing extraction methods and uses of NTFPs, and already existing commercialisation patterns. Together with communities, they have set up business plans (on how to organise the community, where to sell, how to sell, how much, etc). In addition, communities have been helped to establish sustainable management systems for NTFPs (harvesting techniques, domestication, stacking and storing, etc).

The PFNL project “*Forests for poverty reduction: Mobilizing Small and Medium Forest Enterprises in Central Africa*” is an excellent reference. Based in Yaoundé, the PFNL project is coordinated by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in partnership with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) and SNV. The main objective of the project is to improve revenues from NTFPs by: 1) strengthening the capacity of communities and community enterprises (led by SNV); 2) developing information packages on NTFPs and on market chains and links between producers and buyers (led by CIFOR); 3) the sustainable management and domestication of NTFPs (led by ICRAF) and via the legal framework (i.e. national laws on commercialisation of NTFPs) (led by FAO).

SNV has worked extensively on linking up communities with the national Market Information System, which informs communities once a month regarding market

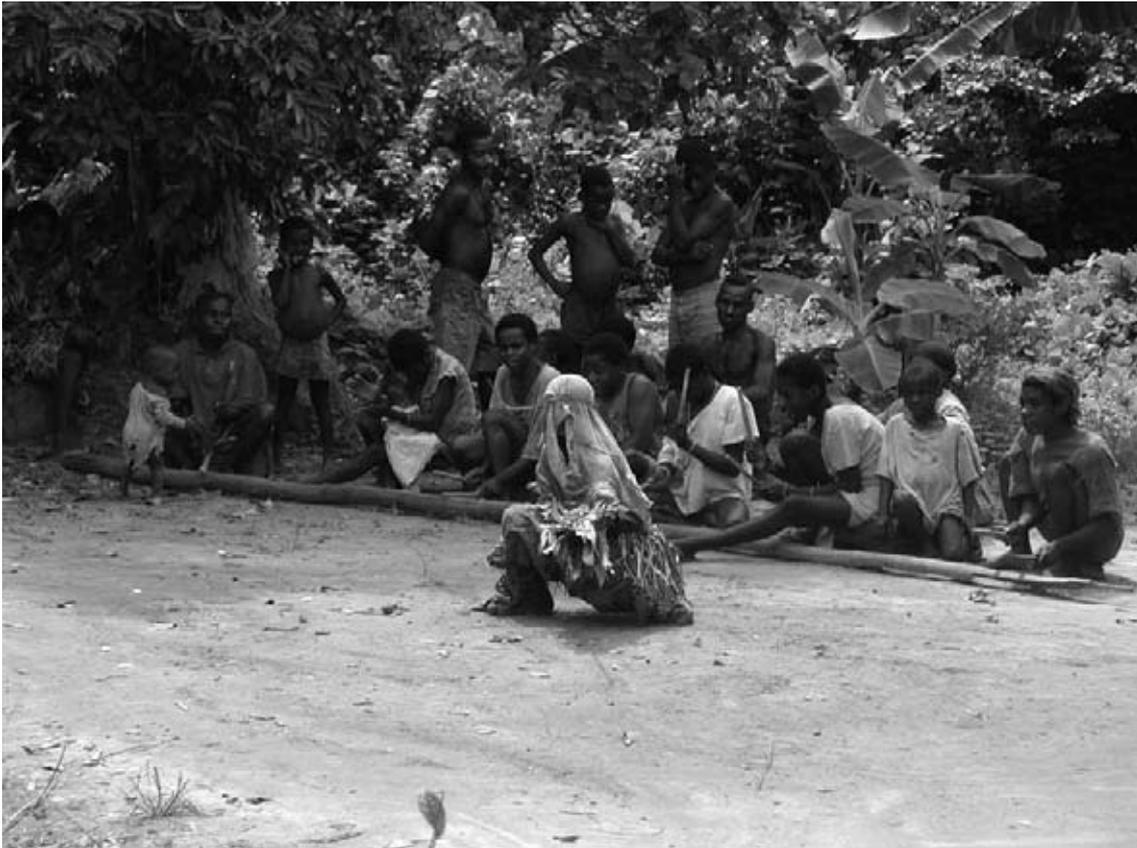
prices for products so that communities can cut out the middlemen (who often cheat them, knowing that the communities have limited access to price information and poor negotiation skills) and negotiate their own prices.

The project “*Mobilisation and capacity building for small and medium scale enterprises involved in the production and commercialisation of non-wood forest products (NWFP) in Central Africa*” (GCP/RAF/408/EC Project) is another valuable source of information. Financed by the European Commission, the project ran for a period of three years (2007-2009) with the aim of increasing the revenues of rural populations by strengthening entrepreneurial capacities and ensuring sustainable resource management within enabling institutional settings.

All of the above mentioned projects and institutions work in one way or another to ensure increased revenue for local producers/groups based on: NTFP production and commercialisation; improved entrepreneurial and marketing skills; ensuring sustainable resource production and harvesting techniques; improved processing for local value added; improved access to market information and credit; and providing an enabling policy and institutional environment.

Furthermore, there are other platforms that can be tapped into for potential collaboration, such as the Sustainable Tree Crops Program (STCP), an institution based in Yaoundé that has also been working with rural communities to develop organic fair trade cocoa farming. STCP is a public-private partnership and innovation platform that seeks to generate growth in rural income among “tree crop farmers” in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. Its work involves introducing innovations to enhance productivity, increase marketing efficiency, diversify farmer income and strengthen the institutional and policy environment. STCP, which is managed by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), provides a framework for collaboration between farmers, the global cocoa industry, the local private sector, national governments, NGOs, research institutes and development investors. It may be worthwhile, for instance, visiting some of their projects to see whether the approach and techniques are something that NGOs working with the Baka would be interested in testing as well.

FAO has also set up a project entitled *Community-Based Forest Enterprises*, which works to promote the creation of community-based tree and forest product enterprises to provide local communities with more opportunities to benefit from forest resources, while also having a greater incentive to sustainably manage and protect those resources (see links in Bibliography). These enterprises are designed with the help of partici-



*Baka traditional performance. Photo: Joachim Nguimbouri*

patory methodologies such as Market Analysis and Development, and operate within the framework of participatory forestry mechanisms, enabling those who have a direct stake in forest resources to be a part of decision-making with regard to all aspects of forest management.

In addition, best practices in terms of how to set up sustainable agriculture projects in Baka communities can be learned from NGOs such as the Baka NGO AS-BAK and SNV, who have managed to bring all of their partner Baka communities to self-sufficiency in terms of food by teaching them sustainable agricultural methods. The positive impacts of this are far-reaching, given that these communities are not only better fed, they are also no longer obliged to go and work for their Bantu neighbours, who previously provided them with basic food supplies in exchange for hard labour. Furthermore, the Baka communities have been so successful with their agriculture projects that they have even reached stages of such abundance in yield that the communities have become temporary important providers of food to local markets (e.g. in Lomié) when other sources and producers have been scarce.

Conversely, “lessons learned” from mistakes made in projects attempting to start up agriculture with the Baka are equally useful to know about. Several NGOs

interviewed admitted that their agricultural projects with the Baka had failed mainly due to lack of follow up. Without frequent visits from NGO staff in the early stages, certain Baka communities simply abandoned their agricultural plots and went back to hunting and gathering, leaving the cultivated crops to die. Yet all the Baka communities visited ranked agriculture as one of the main project activities they would like to obtain assistance for.

Not everything that was reported by the NGOs involved success stories. The NGO representatives were equally open about the projects that had *not* been successful (e.g. several palm oil plantations and community shop projects) as about those that had. Interestingly, when asked what the reasons were for project failure, the answers always came down to the same issue: *a lack of follow up and monitoring on the part of the project's partner NGOs*. In any case, the NGOs have learned many useful lessons, particularly about social organisation in Baka communities. Moreover, these “failures” and lessons learned are just as valuable and useful for other NGOs and others working with the Baka as the success stories.

## 5. LEGISLATION, POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS IN CAMEROON THAT CAN HELP PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF THE BAKA

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There is currently very little in terms of legal structures in Cameroon that support the Baka (or other indigenous peoples for that matter), although there are some worth mentioning. This section looks at the most relevant frameworks, policies and programmes that can help protect the rights of the Baka.

### 5.1 Draft law on marginal populations

In Cameroon, instead of there being a law specifically for indigenous peoples, there is a draft law on “marginal populations”. In theory, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) is the official body in charge of dealing with all “marginalised people” in Cameroon. This category of “marginalised people” refers to all those groups and individuals in Cameroon that have difficulty integrating into Cameroonian society, including people with mental disorders, the physically disabled and others, including the Baka. This clumping of “indigenous” people into the same category as all other “marginalised people” makes it difficult to address the particular and exceptional situation of the Baka. The resistance on the part of MINAS to legally recognize and acknowledge that there is such a group as “indigenous peoples” in Cameroon is, according to many interviewees, the main cause of “blockage” at the government level. However, the draft Study on Indigenous Peoples in Cameroon commissioned by the Ministry of External Relations, which looks into criteria for identifying indigenous peoples in Cameroon, and which was discussed in December 2011, may offer a new window of opportunity.

### 5.2 Revision of the new Forest Law and the Forest and Environmental Sectoral Programme

The 1994 Forest Law of Cameroon is under a (year-long) process of revision, and some organisations, such as PNFL, are optimistic that the Baka will be able to gain back access to their traditional use zones with the help of the revised Forest Law. The current process of revision of the existing Forest Law is a key opportunity, with the revised law expected to bring about several

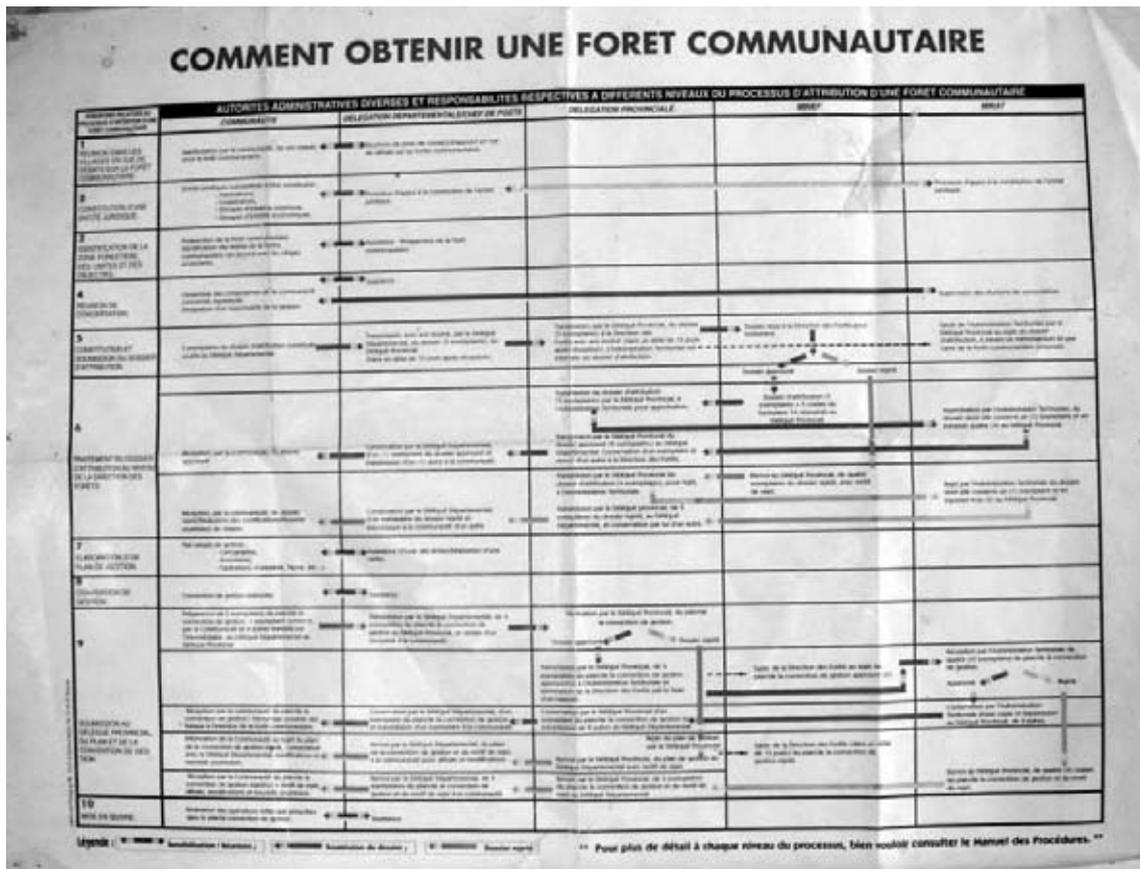
improvements in the form of new legislation and institutional mechanisms that support sustainable NTFP use and commercialisation from community forests, local user rights, and possibly even local land rights. In addition, one of the main recommendations of the international conference on “Forest Tenure, Governance and Enterprise” held in Yaoundé in May 2009<sup>17</sup> was that land and forest tenure reforms should take into account the human rights and customary land rights of forest communities and indigenous peoples. Whether this recommendation will be taken into account and followed up on is another question. In mid-May 2012 the government of Cameroon had still not released the new Forest Law, and it is not yet known what recommendations have been accepted. The revision of the Forest Law is still ongoing and much remains to be seen once the new law is signed.

Several NGOs working with the Baka claimed that other ministries, such as the Ministry of Forests and Fauna (MINFOF) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had been much more cooperative than MINAS. MINFOF has recently taken on board comments from RACOPY, SNV, and ILO, amongst others, in its revision of the new Forest Law as well as the Forest and Environment Sectoral Programme (PSFE). RACOPY and the ILO’s Pro 169 project have also had much more success in working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs than with MINAS. It is therefore not correct to present a picture of the government of Cameroon as if it had a uniform stance with regard to Baka rights.

Interestingly, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in May 2009 between MINFOF and MINAS for the implementation of the development plan for “pygmies” within the framework of the PSFE (Forest and Environment Sectoral Programme). According to the MoU, the management of the social aspect of the PSFE was, at the time of writing, to be taken care of by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Within the framework of the agreement, MINFOF was to disburse 900 million Cameroonian francs to MINAS, which, with these

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<sup>17</sup> The conference was organised by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife of Cameroon (MINFOF), the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Global Alliance of Forest Communities (GACF), the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and partners.



Guidelines relating to community forests. Photo: Kinkoh Thomas Ngala

resources, was expected to: i) build the capacities of indigenous people (including the Baka); ii) reinforce the judicial framework protecting indigenous or marginalised people; and iii) improve the living conditions of the indigenous groups in question. MINAS is also expected to engage the indigenous populations in the sustainable management of forests, with the aim of protecting biodiversity and curbing the adverse effects of climate change and desertification. When MINAS was asked about the above-mentioned development plan and MoU, the reply was that they were still in the process of selecting the team to carry out this work over the next three years. This is something that all interested NGOs and projects should stay up to date with, as it can be used as a leverage point for advocacy and government support aimed at meeting the same goals as those listed in the MoU.

### 5.3 Community forests

Another approach that has been gaining a great deal of ground recently in Cameroon is the notion of “Community Forests”. Community forestry refers to a component of participatory forestry that focuses on local communi-

ties as key stakeholders in managing common property resources. More specifically, a community forest is:

“a forest in the non-permanent forest domain, which is part of an agreement between a village community and the forestry administration, who oversee the management, within the framework of a simple management plan prepared by the community beneficiary. The community beneficiary has ownership of the products of the community forest and has the right to farm the land for commercial purposes, even if the land is part of the national domain.” (Nguiffo, et al., 2009)

Community forests have become very popular in Cameroon, with more than one and half million hectares of community forest currently under this system.

The policy framework for community forestry was established with the 1994 Forestry Law. The original idea behind community forests was to make available more land to a community (as opposed to individual plots), as well as more produce, and hence better marketing opportunities for better prices. There is also the added benefit of improved social organisation in the community. Yet

community forests are still more of a legal framework than a collective action model in Cameroon: administered by MINFOF, the framework used to put community forests in place (e.g. through the mapping process) is often designed to meet administrative needs and interests rather than local perspectives, preferences and realities.

The community forest policy has been criticised in many respects. Firstly, it is said to focus too heavily on timber, and not adequately address the potential of NTFPs and related enterprises. In addition, the current laws pertaining to community forestry limit the area that can be managed by communities to a very arbitrary 5,000 hectares. Furthermore, the community forestry policy does not recognise underlying customary land rights, nor does it ensure that social benefits exceed costs (Mbile et al., 2009).

SNV has perhaps the most experience of these projects in Cameroon, with over 40 community forests currently being managed as part of their work with local communities. Alongside this, SNV is undertaking constant research into NTFPs and NTFP markets, and is also working on the domestication of some NTFP species, such as wild mango. The community forests managed by SNV are focused mainly on NTFP extraction but also on the sustainable extraction of certain timber products. In general, the revenue from the NTFPs extracted can go to individuals and households but, for all timber products sold, the benefits must go to the community (for establishing and implementing a community development plan).

Meanwhile, MINFOF sets the legislation, rules and regulations regarding harvesting, and the conditions include that these projects are implemented in the communities with concomitant awareness-raising, sensitization and environmental education. The environmental education component has mostly been a question of letting communities know which laws apply to the community forests and nature reserves, which species are endangered, what can be harvested and what not, in what quantities, etc. This is important not only for the communities to know but also so that they can use these legal arguments when defending their territory and resources against possible outside intruders, extractors and hunters.

#### **5.4 Climate change policies and programmes**

There are several other important and emerging opportunities to be tapped into at the global level. Firstly, while climate change and food insecurity is in most parts of

the world considered a challenge, the Baka could actually use these crises as an opportunity. With climate change hitting many of the food producing parts of the world hard, and with food insecurity increasingly becoming a reality in many parts of the world, there is all the more demand and need for sustainable and resilient food and agroforestry systems. In the future, the Baka may well be important food producers for populations in Cameroon who have lost their previously productive agricultural land to droughts or due to unsustainable practices and dependency on external resources. Globally, the demand for fair trade and organic products is also rapidly increasing, which is another opportunity that could be considered when exploring potential markets for the Baka.

Additionally, with global politicians and businesses desperately trying to reach an agreement on how to solve the climate crisis and other environmental problems equitably, there may well be an increased opportunity for forest-conserving populations like the Baka to receive funds for the ecosystem services (i.e. carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, etc.) they are providing to the global community, through channels like the United Nations Collaborative Initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), the Green Development Rights (GDR) movement or the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Currently, one of the most talked about climate change mitigation policy programmes in south-east Cameroon is REDD. As an active member of the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) and the Working Group on Climate Change, Cameroon has been engaged in international negotiations on REDD since 2005, with several pilot projects underway. A report published by the Forest Peoples' Programme (FPP) concludes, however, that these planning activities in Cameroon "lack effective actions to ensure the participation of indigenous peoples and local communities, miss solid data on the drivers of deforestation and gloss over critical land tenure, carbon rights and benefit sharing issues" (Freudenthal et al, 2011:3). Furthermore, the report finds that the nine sub-national REDD projects currently underway in Cameroon "lack transparency, meaningful participation or free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and disregard issues of land tenure, customary rights and benefit sharing" (Freudenthal et al, 2011:3)

#### **5.5 Agricultural extension programme**

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development currently has only one Baka community in its agricultural

extension work programme; that is, only one community out of a total of 140 rural communities in the programme is a Baka community. This one particular Baka group is supposedly an exceptional case and, according to the Ministry representative interviewed, it is the only Baka community that has a legally recognised community association group (CIG). Records show, however, that there are several Baka communities with registered CIGs, and there seems to be a gap somewhere in the information transfer process, such that many organised Baka communities are missing out on opportunities for government support simply because they are not registered in official documents (*pers. comm.*, Plan Cameroon).

Even with the best intentions, it is unlikely that Baka communities and NGOs working with the Baka will obtain support in the field from the Ministry of Agriculture, given that the Ministry is already severely understaffed. For instance, of the 47 extension worker posts in the Abong-Mbang district, only 10 are currently filled (37 are vacant). In addition, they are also logistically under-resourced (for instance, they lack bicycles for extension workers to get from one community to another). A Ministry representative interviewed concluded the meeting by expressing that:

“...the pygmies are marginalized because they themselves want to be marginalized – they marginalize themselves. They are people ‘apart’. One cannot have meetings with them; it doesn’t work. They walk out of the room and disappear somewhere in the middle of a meeting. One cannot talk to them. To us it is mystic. We get the feeling that ultimately they always want to return to their own culture.”

The representative went on to explain that the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development used to work in a top-down manner but that they no longer wished to work in that way; rather, they wanted more bottom-up initiatives. Following on from this, the representative claimed that:

“[the Baka] do not take initiative and then we are blamed for abandoning them when we do not follow up. We are not going to chase after the Baka. It is they who run away from us and we are still in the process of trying to understand them and their lifestyle.”

Based on these findings, it is clear that there is still an enormous gap between the Baka and the official govern-

ment authorities, across which there is plenty of room for misunderstandings, misinformation and miscommunication.

## **5.6 Awareness raising and lobbying with a focus on land tenure reform**

Clearly, there is an enormous gap in communication and understanding between the Ministry of Agriculture and Baka communities, and both could probably benefit from the help of facilitators, as well as some more awareness raising and sensitization with regard to one another. When asked whether the Ministry might consider employing someone with experience of working with the Baka (i.e. someone who knows their culture and how to communicate with them and what kind of approaches and methods might work), the representative replied very positively that: “yes, this is precisely what is missing.”

Another institutional constraint that was revealed in the interviews with both government and NGO representatives is the ongoing tension between the government and the NGOs working in Cameroon, at least in the East Region. Some government representatives claimed that it was the NGOs who always flee from them, thinking that the government is going to violate their interests, and thinking that the state is against them somehow. According to these government representatives, there have even been cases where NGOs have mobilised communities into anti-state campaigns, which has only resulted in more antagonism on both sides, state and NGOs. This in turn has led not only to missed opportunities for collaboration but also to a duplication of efforts and lack of coordination and, ultimately, it is the Baka communities who bear the costs.

As Hewlett (2000) has also observed, “*The government often becomes the villain because it has tremendous power and authority over indigenous peoples*”. He goes on to say that:

“Government officials are playing an increasingly important role in the decisions about hunters and gatherers, yet anthropologists and international NGOs involved with development programs for indigenous peoples generally dismiss the abilities and qualifications of government officials. This neglect of the government role ironically often leads to more conflicts and fewer services for Baka.”

Once again, there is clearly a need for awareness raising and sensitization on behalf of both government and NGO employees with regard to each other's roles. In addition, there may be value in rethinking the way arguments and justifications are posed in discussions about indigenous peoples' rights with Cameroonian political decision-makers. Rather than using antagonistic and accusatory tones, it may be worth stakeholders (including the Baka themselves) voicing their proposals in a more positive way that also emphasises the contributions of the Baka people. For instance, it is worth stressing that, if allowed to flourish and develop on their own terms, the Baka have far more valuable and important contributions to make to the overall economic, political, social and cultural development of Cameroon than if forcefully homogenised or marginalised. In other words, the Baka should be seen (and see themselves) as a valuable asset in *all* senses and aspects, not just as a cheap labour force that can be manipulated to meet others' interests.

Achieving land rights for the Baka may seem to many to be too daunting or idealistic an objective, particularly for those who have heard the national government's response to such demands (as it is currently difficult to see how this could come about without major legislative and land reform). There is thus all the more reason to continue lobbying for land rights under the new legislative structures that are currently being revised – such as the Forest Law – and to use the proceedings of conferences where decisions and agreements have been made as key references. Meanwhile, it is worth staying up to date with what land has been, or is being, designated for different purposes, such as community forests. Global For-

est Watch is a good source of information, and maps on the state of Cameroon forests (and forest allocations) can be obtained using various criteria.

Alongside advocacy a strong economic argument is also needed to convince the government to make these fundamental and necessary changes: not an argument based on human rights or land titles but one highlighting economic advantages and disadvantages in the short and long term. Such an argument could, for instance, present the government with the long-term benefits of ecosystem services, of biodiversity, ecotourism revenues, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and other carbon trading schemes, and multiple other economic benefits resulting from sustainably managed forests. It would even be worth getting an environmental economist to carry out basic cost-benefit evaluations of the different scenarios and, assuming that the results are highly in favour of the Baka remaining on traditional territories, to present the study to the government.

In sum, forest tenure reforms should be placed at the centre of all campaigns promoting Baka rights. This situation calls for international action and pressure on the government of Cameroon, as well as on logging and mining companies, to reverse the current process and convince the Cameroonian government to undertake land reform, by taking back at least the newly commissioned (but not yet logged) areas and handing these over to the Baka. Tools, such as participatory mapping, should be made easily available for empowering Baka communities to claim their rights, and to facilitate dialogue and negotiation with government officials (see Mbile, 2009, and Mbile *et al.*, 2009 for studies on how participatory cartography can be used to claim land rights).

## 6. INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS, DECLARATIONS AND BODIES SUPPORTING BAKA RIGHTS

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There are several international conventions, declarations and bodies that serve to protect and promote the rights of the Baka, either through their legal documents, their networking and outreach, or through their on-the-ground work. Below are some of the most promising and well-known of these.

### 6.1 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

In terms of land rights and the loss of ancestral territories, the current situation which the Baka find themselves in is in complete breach of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the UNDRIP. Article 26 of the Declaration states that:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.
2. Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired.
3. States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned.

Furthermore, Article 28 of the Declaration states that:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to redress, by means that can include restitution or, when this is not possible, just, fair and equitable compensation, for the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, and which have been confiscated, taken, occupied, used or damaged without their free, prior and informed consent.
2. Unless otherwise freely agreed upon by the peoples concerned, compensation shall take the form of lands, territories and resources equal in

quality, size and legal status or of monetary compensation or other appropriate redress.

In terms of participation in decision-making, Article 18 of the UNDRIP states that:

“Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions”.

The UNDRIP could therefore be used in a number of ways in Cameroon, by playing a major role in: a) awareness raising on indigenous peoples’ rights, and how these are being addressed and discussed in international arenas; and b) the formulation of new legal structures to support the Baka (and other indigenous peoples’ in Cameroon) regain full access to their traditional lands, and compensation for the losses incurred due to lost and/or damaged lands and resources. Furthermore, the UNDRIP can serve as a powerful tool to help the Baka claim their rightful political power and participation in decision-making in matters that directly concern them.

### 6.2 ILO Convention No. 169

The International Labour Organisation’s Convention No. 169 is one of the international conventions and frameworks that many of the interviewed NGOs see as having great potential in terms of putting pressure on the Cameroonian government and institutions to start addressing indigenous peoples’ rights in Cameroon.

Convention No. 169 was established in 1989 and, since then, 20 countries have ratified it worldwide (none in Africa except for the Central African Republic) and many more are in the process of *considering* ratification (see ILO, 2009 for a guide to Convention No. 169). The person in charge of promoting Convention No.169 in Cameroon, when interviewed at the ILO office in Yaoundé, stated that the government was fearful of ratifying it because that would mean having to deal with issues related to land rights, access to resources,

possibly even establishing indigenous reserves, and this was something that the government was trying to avoid at all costs. There are, however, some signs of hope, as the government of the Central African Republic, Cameroon's neighbouring country to the east, only recently ratified the Convention (in April 2010) and this could put pressure on Cameroon and other Central African nations to do the same.

In any case, regardless of whether it is ratified or not, Convention No. 169 is a useful and important tool for communicating and building awareness on certain rights. It can be used as a tool for discussion at all levels, from government and parliamentarians to ministries of health, education and employment, to authorities and legal entities at the regional level, and local communities and community leaders. The ILO and the Pro 169 project are already planning an awareness raising campaign on Convention 169 but the campaign is currently not advancing due to lack of funds. The purpose is to create awareness as to what some human rights experts and national governments around the world are using as a legal framework. It is thus important that all NGOs and other entities working with the Baka and other indigenous peoples in Cameroon are familiar with the Convention, and start thinking about how they, too, can translate the Convention's articles into practice.

### **6.3 Convention on Biological Diversity**

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was ratified by Cameroon in 1994, and is thus a legally binding instrument that can be used in advocacy and discussions with the government. Particularly important for the Baka, and NGOs working with the Baka, to be aware of is Article 8(j) on "Traditional Knowledge, Innovations and Practices" and Article 10(c) on "Sustainable Use of Components of Biological Diversity". Article 8(j) states that:

"Each contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate: Subject to national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge innovations and practices."

Article 10(c), on the other hand, states that:

"Each contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate, protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with conservation or sustainable use requirements".

These are both extremely important articles when it comes to considering the livelihood options for the Baka, in particular, and what benefits and legal and financial support they could receive simply for living sustainably and practising conservation and a sustainable use of biodiversity – which, in effect, they already do. Again, NGOs working with the Baka would be much better equipped for advocacy, international support and fundraising if their staff familiarised themselves with Convention No. 169 and Articles 8(j) and 10(c) of the CBD, and started translating it into practice in their own work, including sharing information on these with Baka communities.

### **6.4 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights**

The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (African Charter) is another highly applicable instrument for the promotion and protection of the human rights of indigenous peoples. The Charter provides for both individual and collective rights, including the rights to equality and human dignity (Articles 2, 3 and 5). These rights are available to all individuals, including individual members of indigenous communities, as well as to sections of populations within nation states, including indigenous peoples and communities. The most relevant articles include articles 2, 3, 5, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 60.

Article 60 of the African Charter has also provided the African Commission with a mandate to invoke international legal principles of human and peoples' rights. The African Charter therefore provides recourse to international law, and can be seen to protect the rights of indigenous peoples all over Africa.

### **6.5 Working Group of Experts**

Another channel that could assist the Baka is the African Commission's Working Group of Experts on the Rights of Indigenous Populations/ Communities

in Africa. The Working Group carries out country visits, sensitization seminars, information activities and research and, as part of its country missions, its task is to gather information and carry out fact-finding on indigenous issues. The country visits seek to engage all relevant stakeholders (states, national human rights institutions, civil society, international agencies and indigenous communities) in a debate on indigenous peoples' rights and how these rights can be strengthened. The country visits are also one of the key activities for establishing dialogue between the African Commission, African governments and other stakeholders, and the Working Group therefore seeks to establish a fruitful and constructive dialogue with all relevant stakeholders. A fact-finding mission by the Working Group to the Baka and other pygmy groups in Cameroon could potentially provide tremendous leverage for the Baka in terms of gaining both national and international support in voicing and obtaining their rights.

The Working Group has twice carried out regional sensitization seminars in Central Africa (in Cameroon and Republic of Congo) in which the government of Cameroon has been an active participant, expressing its will to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples. Furthermore, governments regularly present reports to the ACHPR for examination of their human rights performance, including on indigenous peoples' rights, providing an avenue for indigenous peoples to raise questions at the ACHPR sessions via the preparation of shadow reports.

## **6.6 Other international conventions of importance for the Baka**

There are a few other international conventions that are important for supporting the Baka in enforcing their rights. These include, for instance, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (see footnote 2), a legally binding international instrument incorporating the full range of human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social - as well as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, both United Nations conventions and both signed and ratified by the state of Cameroon.

Also worth mentioning is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Mechanism under the Human Rights Council. Under the UPR, all governments are regularly requested to prepare a report on their human rights performance which is then examined by all interested governments, and indigenous peoples' organisations are increasingly making use of this mechanism to present shadow/stakeholder reports that describe the situation and human rights violations of indigenous peoples and to lobby for questions to be raised on these matters during the UPR review in the UN Human Rights Council.

Last but not least are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), both of which are also part of international law. All African states are obliged to honour the rights granted to indigenous peoples under common article 1 of the ICCPR and ICESCR, as well as article 27 of the ICCPR.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

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With the degradation of Cameroon's forests, the sustenance upon which an entire culture is based is also disappearing, namely that of the Baka - a culture that has over millennia been shaped by the very animals, plants and cycles that enabled the Baka to continue living a harmonious life in and with the forest. Forests are *the key* to Baka cultural survival and dignity, and therefore any development work which also aims to protect Baka rights is futile if steps are not first taken to ensure their *continued access to their traditional lands and forests*. Such steps should include full recognition of traditional Baka land-use areas, and delineation of such areas for sole use and access by the Baka for their sustenance.

When it comes to Baka livelihoods, no single model exists, nor should any be imposed, even if one particular model were found to be more promising than others. Similarly, there is no "one particular livelihood strategy" that can be recommended, just as there is no one cultural aspect that can be prioritised. The key to sustainable, productive and resilient livelihoods is *diversification*. By allowing bottom-up approaches to emerge, and by allowing new ideas and local preferences to shape the outcome, the result is likely to be far more stable and rooted than if imposing externally defined models or strategies from above.

Top-down strategies such as forced sedentarisation - coupled with discrimination and a lack of political representation - have left most Baka communities extremely marginalised, not only in terms of political power and decision-making but also in terms of access to resources and land. Yet despite frequent contact with the Bantu and the outside world for decades, the Baka have been somewhat resistant to change. This may partly be explained by the fact that, throughout the integration and sedentarisation process of the past few decades, the Baka have been subject to, and had to deal with, multiple social, cultural and political problems, including marginalisation, discrimination and exploitation, particularly by the Bantu. In fact, to this day, there remains a highly inequitable power structure between these two ethnic groups. This is just one of many challenges faced in supporting the Baka to obtain their rights, their dignity and to achieve sustainable and abundant livelihoods, whilst respecting their customary heritage.

At the local level, one of the main challenges<sup>18</sup> lies in helping the Baka to obtain *political power and representation*, given the currently low levels of education, poor negotiation skills and engrained discrimination by society at large - all of which render the Baka vulnerable to abuse and to being cheated. Another major challenge at the local level is how to *eliminate prolonged suppression and subordination* such that the Baka can shift from a position of withdrawal to one of active and enthusiastic engagement and confident initiative. A related challenge is the problem of how to *build up initiative and momentum in Baka villages* for implementing and managing certain types of projects, considering their limited monetary knowledge and power, as well as limited experience in marketing and administrative skills (i.e. to document decision-making processes, accounting systems, etc). An important challenge will also be the equitable distribution of benefits in the community, once those benefits are accrued. As in any transition from a non-monetary to a monetary economy, the effects on equality and internal relations can be tremendous. It is therefore crucial that these issues be thought through carefully with the Baka well in advance before embarking on projects that are oriented at maximising new forms of local benefits.

There is thus a lot of work to be done in terms of local-level empowerment and sensitization, both with Bantu and Baka populations, particularly in terms of local power relations. It is not easy to break the cycle of subordination but it must be done if Baka rights are to be achieved. And the Baka have to take responsibility for making the change themselves if they want to collaborate on joint projects for enriched livelihoods.

On a regional level, one of the main challenges is the current situation of *tenure and land use*, with overlapping zones of use between multiple and conflicting interest groups (Baka, Bantu, logging companies, mining companies, illegal hunters, protected areas, etc). Once mining companies start entering the region in greater numbers (as is expected in the very near future, given that zones have already been allocated for the exploration of gold, diamonds and cobalt), the impacts may be devastating and large scale - on ecosystems, on the

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<sup>18</sup> Note that some challenges are *also* opportunities, and as the saying goes: "The problem is the solution".

availability of clean water and on health. The pressure on land may be exacerbated even further in the future if the government decides to increase cash crop plantations by means of large-scale intensive monocultures (e.g. palm oil). With an increasing population in Cameroon, land may also be put under more pressure to meet national food demands.

At the national level, the main challenge is undoubtedly *changing the government policy on indigenous peoples*. In order for this to happen, various steps need to be taken, including raising awareness and providing information on the situation and rights of the Baka and other indigenous peoples in Cameroon. An overarching challenge will also be that of changing national institutions and systems, which continue to be fixed on conventional modes of development, including conventional agriculture.

Globally, *climate change* may perhaps pose the greatest challenges, i.e. how to adapt and build capacity and resilience at the local level, particularly given that entire ecosystems, species and agricultural modes of production are likely to be affected. Similarly, *Peak Oil* is another major challenge looming in the near future, and one likely to affect local economies even in south-east Cameroon. With rising oil prices, all oil-based transport and oil-derived products (fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides), oil-dependent machinery and energy supplies will become more expensive and, for periods, perhaps even unavailable. Possible future financial crises on the global level will similarly have numerous direct and indirect effects on local and regional markets and economies, thus also affecting the Baka and their livelihood strategies. In situations of crisis, NGOs working with the Baka may be temporarily cut off, due to lack of funding and resources. For these reasons, it is all the more important that the Baka process of development is aimed at self-sufficiency, not dependence, and the more localised their economy, the more resilient it will be to all these possible future shocks and cycles.

Despite the numerous and daunting challenges facing the Baka in the present and future, the key to success in projects supporting their rights and livelihoods is not to lose sight of the *strengths and opportunities* available, and to use these as best one can. At the local level, the strengths of the Baka are numerous, particularly given their exceptional and extensive knowledge and wisdom, not only of forest ecosystems, species, multiple uses (including medicinal) and of sustainable use and management of forests and forest products, but also of social sustainability and gender equality. The Baka still hold on to age-old wisdom as to how social and cultural values can be maintained, so that the communities can most

effectively, efficiently and equitably function as one unit, over generations. Men and women have different and clearly defined roles in society but are also considered equal in value – both genders fully respecting and supporting one another. The Baka also possess numerous skills that are of great value, including their hunting, fishing, harvesting, healing, midwifery and handicraft skills.

There are also several biophysical conditions that may well work in favour of the Baka, such as the excellent climatic and soil conditions that enable high productivity, and thus the tremendous potential for extremely productive food forests and small-scale organic food gardens. The tropical zone allows for increased diversity in harvesting and production, and therefore also in marketing – all of which builds resilience (to withstand extreme weather events and anomalies in yield, as well as uncertain markets). In addition, an excellent opportunity to tap into is the apparent gap and demand in regional NTFP and agricultural produce markets.

Another advantage providing numerous opportunities for the Baka is the large number of competent and capable NGOs that are keen and willing to expand their project areas (both in substance and in geographic coverage). The Baka NGOs in particular are an extremely valuable resource. To build strong partnerships between these and other NGOs and networks, and in return also provide them with capacity building (i.e. in project proposal formulation, as well as support in basic logistical means such as Internet access), would enable the Baka NGOs to not only be more effective and influential but it would also increase their chances of receiving more funding, and from alternative sources, thus minimizing dependency on single sources. The result would be stronger Baka NGOs, greater representation and political voice, and greater opportunity to share projects, activities and responsibilities across Baka communities in the region.

To collaborate more effectively, and to truly demonstrate equal value and respect, all NGOs and partners involved must improve their knowledge and understanding of Baka culture, values and preferences. This is currently very limited, running the risk of imposing outsider views, ideals and definitions of reality (e.g. on education, health care, and social organisation) onto the Baka rather than letting them adapt their own customs and perspectives on joint project work.

For “we” cannot come from outside and tell the Baka what they need and want, just as we cannot come and tell them what is the best way to “develop”. Only *they* can decide and define that. All we can do is *empower* them by sharing our knowledge, skills and tools so that the Baka themselves are better equipped to design their

own livelihoods, to meet their own needs, and to solve their own problems in the situations they are in, be they cultural, environmental, political, social or economic. This requires working slowly and surely by taking many small steps, the means towards an end, whereby the Baka themselves define their own paths of development and integrate into the outer society if, and only if, they themselves want to, and on their own terms and means, and at their own pace.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

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The following are some key recommendations based on the findings of this report. The recommendations are presented to the national government of Cameroon, to civil society and NGOs working with the Baka, and finally, to the international human rights community. All of these recommendations ought to be seriously considered at various levels of policy making and development work in order to support Baka rights.

### 8.1 Recommendations to the government

- a. The government of Cameroon should recognise the existence of indigenous peoples in Cameroon and develop and implement legislative and policy frameworks which promote and protect their rights, in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- b. The government should appoint a minister and a working group for indigenous affairs. This would be one of the most important steps to take and one that could have remarkable effects on the future of the Baka and other indigenous peoples in Cameroon.
- c. The government of Cameroon should be urged to strongly consider ratifying ILO Convention No. 169.
- d. The government should designate land rights to the Baka, in sufficient amount for the Baka to continue carrying out their traditional livelihood activities as before.
- e. The government should put in place policies and programmes to eliminate the marginalisation, discrimination and extreme exploitation of the Baka people. This could be done through widespread awareness raising, through new materials and approaches integrated into the educational system nationwide, and through a revised judicial system that works to support the rights of the Baka.
- f. The government should start appointing Baka people to positions of power.
- g. At the ACHPR Regional Sensitization Seminar in Yaoundé in 2009 (ACHPR and IWGIA, 2009), several recommendations were made to African Union Member States, some of which are worth restating here, with the intention of reiterating these to the government of Cameroon:
  - Member States are requested to pay attention to the findings and recommendations contained in the “Report of the African Commission’s Working Group of Experts on Indigenous Populations/ Communities,” adopted at the 34th Ordinary Session of the African Commission in November 2003.
  - Member States are requested to find ways and means for the legal recognition and enforcement of the rights and special needs of these marginalized and vulnerable indigenous populations/ communities.
  - Member States are urged to include, in their periodic reports to the African Commission, the programmes and strategies put in place to enhance the human rights of indigenous populations/ communities.

### 8.2 Recommendations to civil society and NGOs in Cameroon

The recommendations to civil society and NGOs in Cameroon are numerous, and therefore presented under three different sub-sections: firstly, those recommendations that concern supporting the Baka in their political power; secondly, those recommendations relating to concrete assistance to the Baka and their livelihoods; and thirdly, those recommendations that concern the approaches, strategies and methodologies used by NGOs and other development agencies in their work with the Baka.

#### 8.2.1 Recommendations for supporting Baka political power

In order for the Baka to be able to negotiate their rights, one of the primary issues to address is the extent to which the Baka, and the NGOs working with the Baka,

are aware of all the current and potential violations of Baka rights. This process involves raising awareness of external pressures such as those outlined above, as well as ensuring familiarisation with enabling channels and legal mechanisms for supporting the Baka in their plight to obtain their rights.

#### **a. Awarenessraising**

NGOs working with the Baka could make more of an effort to incorporate awareness raising on indigenous peoples' rights into all levels of project work – from the community level (facilitation between Baka and Bantu), and regional level (with local authorities) to national level (with different ministries). Debates on terminology should not prevent such action. Meanwhile, in the capital, what NGOs working with the Baka are lacking in order to more effectively and efficiently deal with the issue of indigenous peoples' rights and representation in Cameroon is a "Contact Person for Indigenous Peoples" - someone who speaks on behalf of indigenous peoples in Yaoundé.

#### **b. Contact persons**

The lack of NGO staff knowledgeable on indigenous peoples' rights is a major obstacle for projects working with the Baka in terms of: a) advocacy; b) being active in discussions at the national level; and c) joining forces with other NGOs and movements to support the government in shifting legislation and policies towards recognising the rights of indigenous peoples. Contact persons in the NGOs could share information from local to national level (from projects on the ground to government decision-makers) and vice versa, as well as be the contact persons for international bodies supporting indigenous peoples' and children's rights, and work together with them on global support and pressure. They could also provide information for research, media, campaigning and other bodies at the regional, national and international level for all issues related to indigenous peoples' rights.

#### **c. Advocacy**

Another key recommendation on the policy front is for NGOs to support the Baka in lobbying and advocacy work on legal and policy reforms, for instance in obtaining recognition, securing access and rights to land, securing free, prior and informed consent and participation relating to forest management and other issues.

This requires the NGOs working with the Baka taking a much more active role at the national level, and mediating between national government and grassroots levels. NGOs could play a far greater role in collaborating with scientists and researchers to together produce evidence-based material on the situation of the Baka, and with this, to inform: a) decision-makers at the national level about realities on the ground; b) researchers and scientists about the most relevant and important research questions; and c) the Baka about their rights to free, prior and informed consent in all projects and processes affecting them.

#### **d. Stakeholder meetings**

This could be combined with another key recommendation, namely for stakeholder meetings to take place in the East Region of Cameroon. In such meetings, various interest groups, including Baka representatives, community forest associations, logging companies, environmental groups, development aid agencies and other NGOs can come together to discuss and debate the current situation. The dilemma and questions concerning the overlapping forestry concessions (UFAs), mining zones and traditional use zones particularly need to be discussed, as do the limitations of the current national Forest Law.

Such stakeholder meetings could simultaneously work as awareness-raising and sensitization events in order to help all stakeholders in the region gain a knowledge and understanding of each others' interests, roles and motivations. Discussions and meetings would need to be facilitated by an objective outsider expert in order to enable constructive discussion between different actors when there is tension or antagonism, and to try and resolve any misunderstandings or underlying prejudices. Once up and running, these events could set the platform for multi-actor working groups drafting proposals for future use and management of the region's forests.

#### **e. Networking**

Meanwhile, all the NGOs are urged to enhance their networking capacities at the local, regional and international level with a view to achieving better recognition and visibility of the Baka and other indigenous populations in Cameroon. Indigenous organisations are encouraged to apply for observer status with the ACHPR and to participate in the ACHPR sessions. NGOs with observer status with the ACHPR are urged to include, in their activity reports and statements to the Commission, information on the human rights situation of the Baka.

#### f. Community meetings

As to supporting the Baka in addressing discrimination, subordination and human rights violations, the NGOs are encouraged to arrange community meetings and focus groups to discuss these issues with the Baka, and also to raise these questions in the above-mentioned stakeholder meetings and dialogues. Another possible awareness-raising tool could be to create pamphlets with simple drawings and messages on these topics, which could be used in schools but also disseminated widely in the region.

#### g. Health

To protect and improve Baka health, governments, development agencies and NGOs must all work to secure Baka rights to their customary lands and resources, and develop policies and programmes that ensure equitable access to health care, on the basis of consultations with Baka communities about their concept of wellbeing and good health.

#### h. Culture

NGOs are encouraged to assist the Baka in documenting and valuing their culture and tradition, particularly those aspects that have been, or are on the verge of being, lost. Even though they may not have immediate use for the documented material, descendants may in the future wish to use them to recuperate or revitalise certain cultural traditions.

### 8.2.2 Recommendations on concrete forms of livelihood support

#### a. Diversified livelihoods

The key to sustainable and rich livelihoods for the Baka is *diversification*. There is no “one” or “two” or more particular livelihood strategies that should be *the* livelihood activities for a Baka household or community; rather, what is strongly recommended is to assist the Baka in establishing *diversified livelihood strategies*. The Baka are best off using their existing knowledge and skills the best they can, whilst learning new skills and techniques and strengthening their capacities in order to truly maximise productivity, minimise costs and add value to what they already have to share and offer.

There are numerous reasons and advantages for this approach rather than focusing on just one or a few specific strategies. Diversified livelihoods, when

based on *permaculture principles*,<sup>19</sup> are ecologically, economically, socially and culturally amongst the most sustainable systems known. Not only do they increase biodiversity, they are also very “low-impact” (i.e. have relatively small ecological footprints). Meanwhile, numerous ecosystem services are enhanced and maintained, including microclimates, water cycles and carbon sequestration.

Most importantly, however, diversified livelihoods build *resilience*. Resilience is increasingly becoming a key priority worldwide as we face ever more uncertain futures. With diversified strategies, communities are better equipped to withstand sudden shocks in climate (extreme climate events), in ecological phenomena (outbreaks of pests), in markets (financial crises), in energy and product supplies (expected impacts of Peak Oil), in food insecurity (resulting from previously mentioned shocks), and they are more likely to be positive players in expected global water and soil crises.

Diversified livelihoods are also highly nutritious (varied diet), and are actually less labour-intensive than intensive monoculture systems. When well designed, the elements of the system work to support each other and, ultimately, much of the system becomes self-regulating. Diversified livelihoods can also easily combine a multitude of activities in the same geographic area, from NTFP harvesting to abundant agroforestry systems. They can be established both for subsistence use (e.g. “food forests”) as well as for producing commercial crops (e.g. understory organic cocoa and coffee). These, in turn, can be integrated with foraging animals (animal husbandry), apiculture and ecotourism, and all the while communities can carry on with traditional small-scale hunting and fishing.

Sustainable NTFP harvesting as a livelihood activity is particularly recommended as a strong component of Baka livelihoods. NTFP harvesting:

- a. Is already a Baka tradition, thus highly suitable to their culture;

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<sup>19</sup> Permaculture, derived from “permanent agriculture”, is a design system for creating sustainable human environments, with the aim of creating stable productive systems that provide for human needs, harmoniously integrating the land with the people. Permaculture systems have proved to be amongst the most sustainable and successful in a number of ways: work is minimised, “waste” becomes resources, productivity and yields are increased, health risks are avoided, water tables are kept clean, soil structure and fertility is maintained (if not increased), and biodiversity is enhanced. All chemical, oil-derived pesticides and fertilizers are avoided altogether, not only due to their negative health and ecological impacts but also as these unnecessarily create dependency (on external resources) as well as extra costs.

- b. Is already an area of expertise of the Baka, therefore no technical assistance is needed;
- c. Consists of harvesting a large variety of products with very good market potential, and high prices, and is thus economically attractive;
- d. Is one of the most sustainable practices of forest use, if managed properly;
- e. Provides resilience, through the diversity of products, (e.g. to unpredictable ecological and economic cycles);
- f. Allows for multiple use and integrated livelihood systems, including agroforestry, apiculture, medicinal qualities, exotic species, domestication, edible fruits and seeds, fibres for handicrafts and building/ construction tools, instruments, leaves and young branches for constructing the Mongulu (traditional Baka house), for cosmetics (oils for the hair and body), spices, etc.
- g. Can be integrated with sustainable food forest systems, thus ensuring nutritional self-sufficiency;
- h. Is a carbon-sequestering activity that could receive funds from carbon trading or other climate change mitigation mechanisms;
- i. Can be managed communally, e.g. as “community forests”;
- j. Brings ten times more revenue to the community than wood/timber products (according to research carried out by SNV, *personal communication*), and;
- k. Has lower costs of labour and transportation.

Food forests, in turn, are agro-forestry systems but designed according to permaculture principles, meaning that the ecological processes of plants, animals and water, as well as weather and nutrient cycles, are carefully integrated with the human needs and technologies for food, energy, shelter and infrastructure (for more information on food forests, see Geoff Lawton’s videos on “*How to establish a food forest*”, and for more information on permaculture, see Molison, 1988; 1991). The benefit of food forests is that they are extremely productive, as well as probably the most sustainable food production system known to exist (there are cases of over 2,000 year-old food forests still producing enormous quantities and varieties of food in North Africa). Food forests can also be designed for both subsistence and commercialisation purposes, with long-term use and production crops such as cocoa and coffee in the understory. Such long-term crops would not only be of direct economic benefit to the Baka but would also increase their tenure security as the state is less likely to take over

cultivated land when there are long-term crops being cultivated (*personal communication*).

Experiences from Ghana (through a project assisted by the International Permaculture Services) reveal that approaches to integrating food forest systems with organic cocoa production have been extremely successful. They have had great results in growing cocoa without any chemicals or fertilizer, simply providing sufficient shade and the right “companion plants”, all as part of an intense food forest system integrated with pig and chicken forage systems (or other animals, e.g. goats or sheep).

Like food forests, NTFP harvesting can also significantly contribute to food subsistence needs. This was recently confirmed by the FAO, as found in their three-year long project on Enhancing Food Security through Non-wood Forest Products in Central Africa (see links to project website in the Bibliography). The project, which was funded by the German government, contributed to facilitating actions by governments, non-governmental organisations and the private sector in six Central African countries, including Cameroon, with the aim of enhancing food security in the sub-region through the sustainable use of NTFP harvesting from moist dense forests and other tree-based systems. NGOs working in Cameroon could benefit from the results obtained in the project. Interestingly, through the above-mentioned project, the FAO is now the lead technical partner in terms of integrating NTFPs into the new Forest Law being revised in Cameroon at the time of writing.

When it comes to agricultural development work carried out with Baka communities, an important requisite is that the agricultural methods are *sustainable*. This means that the agricultural techniques used are organic, maintaining or even enhancing the water table, and working to maintain, rather than deplete, the soil of its nutrients, minerals and water retention. Again, this is where permaculture comes in, offering perhaps the most valuable skills and knowledge for sustainable agriculture.

What NGOs could do for those Baka communities that are already settled, or settling, into sedentary lifestyles, is thus to provide technical assistance in sustainable agriculture based on permaculture principles, and to donate basic agricultural tools (spades, hoes, machetes, etc) to communities, on the condition that they share these tools communally. The Baka communities could also be assisted in establishing seed banks, for sharing and trading seed varieties between them indefinitely.

Another key project recommended is for schools to set up organic food gardens. This is an excellent example of synergetic solutions to solving different prob-

lems with multiple 'win-win' results. As mentioned in this report, one of the main obstacles preventing Baka children from attending school is that they lack "school lunches". A project carried out in several rural communities in Zimbabwe has addressed this same problem by establishing food gardens in schools, where children themselves learn how to grow food and take care of crops, as well as reap the benefits (see Gailey and Russell, 1991).

Finally, there are two primary solutions for reducing hunting pressure in rural areas: animal husbandry and fish farming (also known as pisciculture or aquaculture). Both of these are highly recommended as livelihood projects for providing protein-rich foods to settled Baka communities, and the two can work well to complement each other.

#### **b. Centres for Innovation and Dissemination**

In order to provide the necessary assistance, skills and capacity for the Baka to realise and successfully design resilient and diversified livelihoods, the recommendation is to establish training and research centres, here referred to as "Centres for Innovation and Dissemination" where Baka and others can learn both theory and practice. These centres would be educational as well as project sites in themselves. In other words, the Baka would come to these centres for a few days or a few weeks to learn how to design and establish sustainable systems of food production, water, energy, shelter and socio-economic community. Eventually, these centres would become demonstration sites in themselves of all the theory put into practice.

The activities of teaching, learning and doing would be well-balanced, as would the different elements of sustainability (social, economic, ecological and cultural). The centres would also be where youth would come to learn "life skills", where school classes could come for field trips to provide students with the opportunity to expand their learning in certain subjects, where universities (national and international) could send students to carry out studies for their theses, and where business, government institutions, NGOs, aid agencies and research institutes could eventually come to find practical solutions to many of their problems. The revenues received by these centres would eventually enable them to become financially independent, with enough revenue flowing in to enable them to continue training and extending best practices to ever more communities.

The centres would eventually be able to provide a "toolkit" of design methods, or a "package" of dif-

ferent livelihood strategies and Baka communities could come and get a taste of the different options and pick what they want to learn about and receive training in. Furthermore, to help incorporate increasing numbers of communities into the process, those Baka communities interested could also offer real life spaces and situations in which some of the activities learned and tested in the centre could be extended (e.g. when students come to learn specific skills or livelihood strategies).

This idea could be tested by first establishing a pilot centre somewhere relatively easily accessible to all Baka communities. There is already interest in collaborating being shown by OKANI, as well as GEN-Africa.<sup>20</sup> This could be an excellent opportunity to combine North-South partnerships (to channel funding) with South-South learning (sharing skills and experiences).

Part of the training that could take place in the above-mentioned Centres for Innovation and Dissemination relates to courses on *Sustainable Community Design* and *Permaculture*. In the African context, permaculture can easily be applied to protect nature and improve traditional farming methods, to address severe problems such as water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, lack of co-operation and disruption of social structures, and to introduce appropriate technologies and environmental education. Permaculture training could be introduced, for example, with the help of International Permaculture Services, who have several years of experience in permaculture training in rural communities in Ghana.

As for sustainable community design, courses such as the Ecovillage Design Education course (EDE)<sup>21</sup> can serve to provide participants with an overview of the full spectrum of design considerations for implementing sustainable communities. It is essential that whatever courses are given: a) are local in application; b) combine both investigative theory and practical application; c) empower communities with the knowledge to become more self-reliant; d) honour unity through diversity, whilst promoting racial, cultural and gender equality; e) promote social justice and environmental awareness; and

<sup>20</sup> GEN, the Global Ecovillage Network, is an NGO with ECOSOC status, meaning it has special consultative status with the United Nations and is a member of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

<sup>21</sup> The four-week comprehensive Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) course, supported by the Gaia Trust and endorsed by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), is assisting in setting a standard for the United Nations' "Decade of Education for Sustainable Development – 2005-2014".

f) strive for peace and local self-determination (Gaia Education, 2005).

### 8.2.3 Recommendations on approaches, strategies and methodologies

#### a. Increasing collaboration

Several organisations and projects are currently carrying out ambitious work in south-east Cameroon to establish fundamental structures and relations with the aim of supporting the Baka through this challenging period of transition and change, and to better enable continued work in partnership with Baka communities in the future. It is strongly recommended that all these NGOs increase partnerships and dialogue with each other and with all stakeholders, including the government. The approach of “collaborating, not competing” is highly recommended for these different projects and institutions, and they are encouraged to maintain and develop the strong working relations that they have with each other and with other stakeholders.

In general, the Baka NGOs would greatly benefit from knowing what the other NGOs also working with the Baka are actually working on, particularly those working in the same communities. There might be a need to meet more regularly than takes place in RA-COPY meetings in order to stay better up to date and exchange work plans, progress reports, ideas, news and results with each other. This would greatly help reduce and avoid duplication and possible contradictions, as well as the risk of “over-exhausting” the Baka with the same questions and meetings that could otherwise be run jointly.

For improved coordination and collaboration between NGOs, one recommendation would be to establish a database of all NGOs working with the Baka, with detailed information on who is doing what and where (what NGOs, in which communities, what projects and activities, with what timeframes, etc). This would assist each NGO in choosing suitable partners, or building relations with other NGOs and projects.

#### b. From empowerment to partnerships and ownership

Empowerment and ownership should be the starting point of any support to the Baka. There are several reasons why this is so important in the approach and methodology of any given project with the Baka. Some of these reasons are:

1. To make it easier for the project to embrace the culture and identity and values of the Baka, and allow these to flourish fully, rather than to be suppressed or in any way judged or dismissed;
2. To avoid the project in any way trying to change or “develop” the Baka based on external priorities and judgements, for it is the Baka’s right to self-determination which allows them to develop how, and at what pace, they themselves wish;
3. To ensure that the project empowers the Baka, and helps build their skills, capacities as well as self-esteem, so as not create dependency on outsiders;
4. To enable all partners involved to work on an equal footing, as equal collaborators, rather than in unequal power structures.

As mentioned in Section 2.4, the Baka have a right to a self-determined development, in line with the principles of the UNDRIP (United Nations General Assembly, 2007). The Baka need to feel *motivated* by projects directed at or involving them, not feel that they are being imposed on them. Based on observations in the field, it currently seems as if very little is being done to motivate the Baka and, if anything, then perhaps there is too much emphasis being placed on income generation. Projects will only be successful if the motives of the Baka themselves are taken into consideration, rather than assuming that they have the same values and motives as project partners. For the Baka to be truly keen and enthusiastic about projects aimed at assisting their livelihoods, these projects need to be based on *their* values. What these values are will probably differ between individuals and communities, and they are also likely to change over time. Nevertheless, a more in-depth understanding of Baka values and preferences is highly recommended as a priority for all institutions working with the Baka.

To better understand Baka values and preferences, collaborative in-depth studies could be carried out as part of qualitative and quantitative research projects (Masters and PhD). The research would be carried out together with the Baka but also facilitated, in order to *together* identify visions, goals and preferences using different methods, such as scenario tools. The participatory, or collaborative, element of such studies is a crucial point. Experience from indigenous forest-based communities in Bolivia shows that participatory research not only strengthens community engagement and interest but also improves their organisational and decision-making capacity because people feel empowered, and

feel that they are in possession of their own information (Townsend, 1998).

Other beneficial results from participatory action research are that it: led to increased administrative capacity, as communities learned how to manage their own budgets and write reports; improved management capacity; helped develop useful skills such as mapping and zoning (using GPS tools); increased local control over natural resource management; helped find a balance between traditional knowledge (which was documented) and Western knowledge (which the locals wanted to learn about); and, perhaps most importantly, it was found that the curiosity of the communities themselves could drive the system forward, whereas previously it had taken a great deal of effort to get local communities to drive the process (Townsend, 1998).

Tools such as participatory cartography and participatory video are highly recommended for empowering communities. Another key tool to bear in mind is the "MAPAPY" (*Méthode d'Approche Participative des Populations Pygmées*) guidebook, which aims to share best practices, particularly regarding participatory methods, with NGOs working with the Baka. Produced by SNV and INADES-Formation, the guidebook is the result of ten years of experience of capacity building and working with Baka communities at the grassroots level.

Nevertheless, in areas where there are many different organisations or researchers working with local communities, there is constantly the risk of "over-participation". This is a real threat for the Baka if NGOs working with them do not begin to communicate and coordinate more closely with one another, especially those working with the same communities. Participation and partnership applies to other actors as well: whether they are Bantu neighbours or employees of a logging company, the projects should strive to *include*, rather than *exclude*, all stakeholders involved or implicated in any way in the project and its outcomes.

In sum, a fundamental pillar for the long-term success of any projects working to support the rights of the Baka is how such projects can help to maximise local responsibility, capacity and, ultimately, the sustainability of projects, with shifts from simple "participation" to more equitable "partnerships" and ultimately, local "ownership". While the NGOs currently working with the Baka all seem to be fairly "participatory" in their approach, participation is only a *process*, with the goal being that ultimately the Baka gain ownership of the projects, such that the envisioning, planning and decision-making of their livelihoods is in their own hands.

### c. Understanding Baka culture

Another requisite for successful NGO-Baka collaborations is for NGO staff to familiarize themselves with the Baka themselves – with Baka history, culture, tradition, customs and rights - before assuming that they can work with the Baka in successful projects. This calls for a greater involvement of anthropologists in the work taking place with the Baka, for projects need baseline research and information about the people they are trying to serve. It is very common for external projects (be they of human rights organisations, missionaries or conservationists) to bring their own cultural models of development, with little time or effort given to the cultural models of local people, which can all too easily lead to a lack of understanding.

The point was strongly emphasised by one of the interviewees (who has worked on numerous projects with the Baka and different NGOs) as he expressed disbelief at how often NGOs and their staff working with the Baka were truly ignorant and insensitive about the Baka and their culture, and the Baka "way of doing things". According to the interviewee, the result is often the use of inappropriate and disrespectful tones and approaches in communication and collaboration which, in turn, leads to a breakdown in trust and working relationships and, ultimately, project failure. A good starting point would be to read Plan's "*Documentation sur la Tradition et la Culture Baka*", (published by RASED), or Severin Cécile Abega's "*Pygmées Baka: Le Droit à la Différence*" (Cécile Abega, 1998) – both of which provide a thorough and in-depth insight into Baka culture and tradition.

Although the Baka share the same language, ancestry, territorial lands and, to a large extent, also culture, the Baka of today represent many different stages of integration and sedentarisation, and therefore also have very different needs and preferences. In other words, while there are Baka communities who have already lived a predominantly sedentary life for over two generations, there are also Baka who continue to live a nomadic life far from the roads and towns. Hence, projects and initiatives that aim to work with the Baka need to take these differences into account, and adjust strategies accordingly.

Similarly, it is not easy to work in mixed Baka-Bantu communities, or with Baka communities that have strong economic, social or geographic ties to Bantu communities. In such communities, it is important to work with everyone, not only the Baka. The more outside partners and intervening actors differentiate between the Baka and the Bantu, the more these people will continue to do so too. So for instance, while there is reason to encourage and promote Baka culture and tradition, such an ap-

proach should not be seen to be showing preference. The aim is that, by stressing the value of Baka tradition and culture, the Baka can gradually, with heightened self esteem, start doing so more themselves and, over time, even Bantu populations may start to accept, respect and even perhaps appreciate what the Baka and their culture and knowledge systems have to offer.

It is also very useful to learn from those NGOs that have already been working closely with Baka communities and who have already had success in empowering the Baka and thereby also building their self-esteem. PERAD, and to some extent ASBAK, are two such NGOs that have played an important role in easing tensions and even heated conflicts between Bantu and Baka communities. They have even succeeded in softening the resistance that Bantu communities previously had towards the work the NGOs were doing with Baka communities in their vicinity. A worthwhile project would be to learn what methods and approaches these and other NGOs have used when mediating between the Bantu and the Baka, and to try to identify concrete strategies for building solidarity between these two ethnic groups.

#### **d. Project management**

On an administrative note, the project stage that comes after the “planning” and the “doing” is one of the most important for project success. It is highly recommended that the projects working with the Baka ensure that there is thorough follow-up in terms of gathering feedback, monitoring, progress reports, acquiring new skills, enhancing results and discerning project outcomes (both lessons learned and best practices). As experience shows, these are *key* to project success.

A crucial point to emphasise here is thus *frequent follow-up*. This applies to any project work being undertaken with the Baka: monitoring and follow-up should be carried out more frequently than seems to be the current case, and there should be frequent contact (i.e. through the local coordinators) to document how project activities are unfolding. It is extremely important for projects to continuously monitor their work in all the Baka communities where they are present, in order to be able to swiftly and appropriately modify any activities that are not working. In such cases, rather than feeling forced to stay with the original plan, and struggling when things do not work as expected (e.g. children not attending school), the main problems should be dealt with at their source, not at the level of symptoms. Such situations are important reminders of the fact that everything is interconnected, and projects or activities cannot be treated in isolation or the problem will just be shifted

elsewhere. What is needed is a systemic and holistic approach, with a focus on synergetic “win-win” solutions rather than a list of individual projects or activities in isolation from each other.

Another important reminder is that working with the Baka in their path to development is a long-term process. The overall vision should be one of long-term sustainability and, with this in mind, embarking on paths that are resilient to possible changes and shocks in the near and long-term future rather than creating dependencies that might collapse from one day to the next. Questions such as “how do we help the Baka adapt to and prepare for climate change and Peak Oil?” should be central to project planning.

Similarly, capacity building and empowerment is a long-term process, not something that can be done and “ticked off” the project plan. Funding agencies are far too often pressed for time and, as a result, many development projects have failed because the timeframes have been too rushed to carry out proper consultation and participatory planning sessions with communities. With limited timeframes, the priority of such projects has thus often focused on simply obtaining clear, concrete and immediate results rather than addressing fundamental structural issues.

### **8.3 Recommendations to the international human rights community**

In order to assist the Baka gain their rights, and thereby also sustainable livelihoods, some pressure and advocacy may have to come from outside Cameroon; that is, from the international and global arenas. The final overarching recommendation is therefore to inform and involve those international groups that are set up to support indigenous rights movements. Three leading institutions that it is particularly recommended that Baka NGOs should get in touch with are the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Survival International and the CBD’s Traditional Knowledge Information Portal.

IWGIA is an international human rights organisation that works to support indigenous peoples around the world. It has produced numerous publications in different languages presenting case studies and thematic analyses from all around the world on issues related to indigenous peoples’ rights. IWGIA also provides support to lobbying for the promotion and protection of the human rights of indigenous peoples in Africa at an African-wide regional level. This lobbying is concretely carried out

with the ACHPR. IWGIA furthermore provides support to enable indigenous peoples' participation in key UN processes of concern to indigenous peoples' rights and to carry out lobbying. IWGIA also supports indigenous organisations at the local and national level with projects focusing on human rights and land and natural resource rights.

Survival International, in turn, works for indigenous peoples' rights in three complementary ways: education, advocacy and campaigns. It offers indigenous people themselves a platform to address the world, and they too work closely with local indigenous organisations. Survival's educational work takes various forms, both inside and outside schools, for children and for adults. They provide free educational materials for teachers and students. In terms of advocacy, they also provide a platform for indigenous representatives to talk directly to the companies that may be invading their land. Survival also plays a major role in ensuring that humanitarian, self-help, educational and medical projects with indigenous peoples receive proper funding. Their tactics range from putting cases to the United Nations to advising on the drafting of international law and informing indigenous populations of their legal rights.

In addition, the CBD has a programme of work that focuses on the participation of indigenous and local communities in the work of the Convention. According to the CBD Secretariat, participation has notably improved over time and could improve further through such mechanisms as the Clearing House Mechanism (the Traditional Knowledge Information Portal) and the establishment of the Voluntary Funding Mechanism.

The hope is that the arguments, information and recommendations presented in this report will assist the many existing and future projects and networks to support the Baka through this challenging period of transition, integration and sedentarisation by maximising the use of, and respect for, their preferences, values and customary heritage. Simultaneously addressing the rights and livelihoods of the Baka has the potential to lead to multiple new and enhanced skills and prospects - skills that can be acquired by all members of the community, including children, elders, men and women equally, and prospects that can benefit the entire community and many generations to come.

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# COMMUNITIES, INSTITUTIONS, NETWORKS AND PERSONS INTERVIEWED

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## **Baka communities visited in October 2009**

### **Kwamb**

Situated approximately 10 kilometres from roadside, near Abong-Mbang

### **Nomedjoh**

Situated by the roadside between Abong-Mbang and Lomié

### **Abakoum**

Situated by the roadside between Yokadouma and Moloundou

### **Mbangoe II**

Situated by the roadside between Yokadouma and Moloundou, near Salapoumbé

## **Baka communities visited in October 2011**

### **Dimako**

Situated in the Ngoela subdivision, about 10 kms north of Ngoela town centre

### **Le Bosquet**

Situated in the Messok subdivision, 30 kms from Lomié town centre

### **Mabam**

Situated in the Ngoela subdivision, about 2 kms south of Ngoela town centre

### **Matison**

Situated in the Lomié subdivision, a few kms from Lomié town centre; bordering the Djá reserve

### **Mballam**

Situated in the Mindourou subdivision, along the road to Lomié

### **Mbang**

Situated in the Messok subdivision, north-east of Messok town centre

### **Messea**

Situated in the Messok subdivision, 12 kms from Messok town centre (south-east)

### **Mindouma**

Situated in the Messok subdivision, about 5 kms from Messok town centre

### **Mokongo aya** (in Baka) (“**Nonsou**” in Zime)

Situated in the Lomié subdivision, a few kms from Lomié town centre; bordering the Djá reserve

### **Ngatto Ancien**

Situated in the Yokadouma subdivision, 125 kms from Yokadouma town centre

### **Ngola II**

Situated in the Lomié subdivision, in between Lomié and Messok town centres

### **Njibot**

Situated in the Abong-Mbang subdivision, about 15 kms from Abong-Mbang town centre

### **Payo**

Situated in the Lomié subdivision, about 13 kms east of Lomié town centre

### **Yekili**

Situated in the Messok subdivision, a few kms north of Messok town centre

### **Zoulabot**

Situated in the Lomié subdivision, east of Lomié town centre

## **NGOs working with the Baka in the East Province**

### **Plan Cameroon**, Bertoua Program Unit

- Denis Tchoukeu, former BRD project coordinator (2009)
- Thomas Ngala, current BRD project coordinator (2011)

- Vital Edoubou, Coordinator/*Animateur* for Abong-Mbang region (2011)
- Chick Felix Tah, Program Unit Manager (2009)
- Samuel Londo, Capacity Building Coordinator (2009)

**Plan Cameroon**, Country Office

- Amadou Bocoum, Country Director
- Casimir Youmbi, Programme Support Manager
- Esther Ekoue Ekoue, Grants Coordinator
- Tchataat Powel, Livelihoods Coordinator
- Bernadette Fonge, South Sector Manager
- Tambe John, Sector Accountant
- Awalou Amadou, Finance Assistant
- Dr Forbeseh Philip, Evaluation and Research Manager
- Abessolo Miriam, Sector Administrator
- Therrense, National Accountant
- Marcus, Office Assistant
- Ebenezer, Administrative Assistant
- Josephine Medjom - Indigenous People's Rights Advisor

**AFDECDH** (Association féminine pour le développement, la conservation de la biodiversité, et la défense des droits humains)

- Sylvie Asso, Coordinator

**ASBAK** (Association Baka), Baka NGO based in Lomié

- Valere Ndjema Akpakoua, Director

**CADDAP** (Centre d'action pour le développement durable des autochtones Pygmées), Baka NGO based in Abong Mbang

- Hélène Mbouano Mondo and her team

**CED** (Centre pour l'environnement et le développement)

- Samuel Nguiffo, General Secretary
- Samuel Nnah Ndobe, Project Coordinator

**CEFAID** (Centre pour l'éducation et la formation pour l'appui aux initiatives de développement), Baka NGO based in Yokadouma

- Evaline Amougou, Vice-director

**CIFOR** (Center for International Forestry Research), Central Africa Regional Office, Yaoundé

- Richard Eba'á Atyi, Regional Coordinator
- Guillaume Lescuyer, Socio-economist

**OKANI**, Association OKANI, Baka NGO based in Bertoua

- Messe Venant, Director
- Yani Antoine, Assistant
- Noel Olinga, Assistant

**ORADER** (Organisation d'appui au développement rural), Baka NGO based in Yokadouma

- Yaya Ngouh, Director

**PERAD** (Environmental Protection, Research and Support to Sustainable Development, Cameroon), Environmental NGO based in Lomié – [www.perad.org](http://www.perad.org)

- Vital Edoubou, Programme Coordinator (2009)
- Angele Ankoh, Director (2011)
- Annie Florence Ankoumontsa, Assistant

**WWF** (World Wide Fund for Nature), Yokadouma office

- Olivier Njounan Tegomo, Senior Field Research Assistant

**WWF** (World Wide Fund for Nature), Ngoela office

- Hanson L. Njiforti, Project Manager

**SNV** (Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers), Dutch Development Organisation, Yaoundé

- Roger Kouokam, Coordinator of the Working Group Center-South-East

**INADES** (African Institute for Economic and Social Development), based in Yaoundé

- Elisabeth Bernadette Mbezele Fouda, National Director

**PFNL** (Produits forestiers non-ligneux), NGO for community-based non-timber forest products enterprise, Yaounde,

- Armand Asseng Zé, Assistant Coordinator

**CARPE** (Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment), based in Yaoundé

- Antoine Justin Eyebe, Focal Point Manager, Cameroon Program Office

## National networks and contacts

**RACOPY** (Réseau action concerté Pygmées), National Network for Pygmy Organisations, Yaoundé office

- Elisabeth Bernadette Mbezele Fouda, Coordinator in 2009
- Rosette Benda, Coordinator in 2011

**ILO** (International Labour Organisation), Yaoundé

- Serge Bouaopda, Coordinator of National Programme Pro169

### **National government representatives (Cameroon)**

**Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development,**

- Abong Mbang, Director of the Divisional Department

**Divisional Officer,** Moloundou

- Mayor of Moloundou

**Ministry of Forests and Fauna,** Yokadouma

- Pandon Eitel, Director of the Divisional Department

**MINAS, Ministry of Social Affairs,** Yaoundé

- Mrs. Mbong, Sub-director of Project Against Social Exclusion

### **Private sector**

**GIC Welfare** (Community Association Group), Bertoua Office

- Joseph Abane, Consultant
- Albert Tsague, Consultant

**CNPI,** Microfinance bank, Lomié

- Charles Raphael Tonye, Director

**FIFFA** (First Investment for Financial Assistance), Yokadouma

- Mathurin Ndzomo Tiga, Coordinator for Zone 6