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Forest tenure and rights: a constraint to community forest management in Cameroon and the REDD+ initiative

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ABSTRACT

The link between Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, with the enhancement of forest carbon stock (REDD+) and Community Forest Management (CFM) as a necessary local action on the forest, is continuously being challenged. CFM has been a suitable option in achieving sustainable forest practices in the tropics. The factors that contribute to its success will likely contribute to the success of REDD+ programs in Cameroon. Nevertheless, the opportunity and challenges in integrating the two concepts to achieve the objectives require careful analysis, considering the challenges facing the country's tenure system. This article makes use of an in-depth content analysis of several documents concerning the subject matter and tries to examine the extent to which forest tenure and rights are a constraint to CFM in Cameroon and the REDD+ Initiative and assess how these concepts can work together to achieve sustainable forest management and a reduction in deforestation and forest degradation. The assessment shows several bottlenecks and discrepancies concerning tenure rights in the community forest and carbon rights when it concerns incentive-based benefit-sharing mechanisms under the REDD+ process. It reveals that the state may likely maintain centralization of forest tenure if the issues are not clarified. The article concludes with a proposal of an urgent need for domestic legal reforms to secure forest protection achieve the objectives of international forest policy initiatives like REDD+.

Key Words: *Deforestation and Forest Degradation, Sustainable Forest Management, Forest Tenure and Rights, REDD+, Community Forest Management and Cameroon.*

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I. Introduction

Increasing deforestation and forest degradation experienced over the years have resulted in a considerable loss of biodiversity and drastic decline of ecosystem services. Global deforestation and forest degradation are considered among the global environmental challenges in recent times. Global Forestry Resource Assessment reveals that about 7.6 million hectares of the forest got lost between 2010 and 2015 globally (FAO, 2015). This forest loss, which is associated with deforestation and forest

degradation, has a negative economic, environmental and social impact on society (Pelletier et al., 2016). Research review reveals that the weak governance system, a problem in most developing countries such as Cameroon, influenced forest illegality and contributed to deforestation and forest degradation (Beeko and Arts, 2010). Deforestation is considered one of the leading causes of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC, 2007). Furthermore, in its report published in 2014, the IPCC attributes forestry and other land-uses such as agriculture as the source of 24% of greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC, 2014). The IPCC report detailed how climate change, which is caused by increasing greenhouse gas emissions, will affect the poor people's living conditions in developing countries, including the risk to their income, health, safety and food security (Seymour and Busch, 2016). As one of the vulnerable tropical countries, Cameroon could suffer from climate change impacts because the country depends highly on natural resources and the country possesses the minimal adaptive capacity to change climate (Molua and Lambi, 2007).

The international community proposed the question of including forests in the fight against climate change through the use of mechanisms such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), Sustainable Forest Management (SFM), Afforestation and Reforestation (Kengoum and Tiani, 2013). Furthermore, in the 1990s, there was a shift from the old centralized forest management system to a more collaborative governance approach, with more concern by the international community towards sustainable forest practices (Egute and Albrecht, 2014). The above problems created more attention on intergovernmental institutions such as private market-based initiatives and public-private partnerships, searching for ways to reverse such trends (Levin and Cashore, 2008). Some initiatives like the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), National Forest Programs (NFP) in line with Rio's Agenda 21, Forest Law Enforcement and Governance, and forest certification initiatives did not develop a binding legal convention on forests that could be used globally. The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change provides a comprehensive framework that recognizes forest protection as a valuable climate policy measure. Article 5 of the agreement requires parties to take measures concerning conservation and enhancement of sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases, including forests. To implement this, many parties have incorporated conservation and sustainable management of forests into their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which are climate actions that they plan to achieve. Cameroon ratified the Paris Agreement when its forests were under pressure, experiencing about 752,000 ha of forest loss with an average annual deforestation rate of about 0.16%, the highest in Africa (FIP, 2017). Many factors are responsible for these unsustainable practices, such as undesirable agricultural practices like slash and burn, fuelwood collection, bushfire and unsustainable logging by logging companies, coupled with other underlying factors such as accessibility to markets, defined by the presence of road networks, inadequate awareness of the environmental effects of human activities, poor governance and limited participation of local forest communities in natural or forest resource management (Egute and Albrecht, 2014; FIP, 2017).

Land and forest tenure rights and security are critical components in REDD+ implementation because they empower local communities to participate in REDD+ activities. Unclear forest tenure and resource rights in Cameroon are significant factors causing deforestation and degradation and this has contributed to slowing down social and economic development, hampered sustainable forest management and led to resource conflicts. Government policies in Cameroon concerning natural resource management are based on statutory laws without considering customary laws. Regarding ownership, the Land Tenure Ordinance of 1974 gave the state full ownership of land and resources, creating some uncertainties about land ownership and tenure rights (Egute, 2012). Cameroon's situation gives rise to conflicts between forest users and rights holders (government), coupled with no motivation for the forest communities to practice sustainable forest management in community forests (Siry et al., 2015). The concept of community forestry in Cameroon as stipulated in sec. 37 and 38 of Law No. 94/01 of 20th January 1994 putting in place the Forestry, Wildlife and Fishery Regulations has to do with local communities who have natural resources, and with management agreement with the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife be permitted to manage some specific areas of the forest following a simple management plan designed for that purpose. CFM has been a suitable option in promoting sustainable forest management in the tropics and some factors contribute to the success of CFM, which can also contribute to achieving REDD+ implementation programs in Cameroon. However, unclear forest tenure and rights are some obstacles against sustainable forest

practices in Cameroon. This paper, therefore, examines the extent to which forest tenure and right are a constraint to community forest management and the REDD+ Initiative in Cameroon, and how REDD+ and CFM can work together to achieve better forest management that might result in a reduction of deforestation and forest degradation in the country.

II. Forest tenure in Cameroon

The legal framework in Cameroon concerning land tenure and rights to ownership has its roots in the colonial era. The country inherited many institutions from the colonial time that contributed to shaping the current regime (Njoh, 2013). The issue of state ownership of land in Cameroon could be traced back to 1896 with the "Crown Lands Act" which gave the German colonial state ownership over all land and went further to give the German colonial state the right to reallocate land to increase their holdings, thereby transforming indigenous local farmers into wage labourers on large German-owned plantations. The "Crown Land Act" did not recognize customary ownership of land. Most local communities in Cameroon have lived and continue to live on their traditional land under customary laws, revealing that land or forest ownership by custom remains dominant, especially in rural areas.

The customary ownership and rights to land were further reduced upon the implementation of Ordinance No. 74/1 of July 1974, establishing the land tenure, amended and supplemented by Ordinance No. 77/4 of 10 January 1977, with some usage rights to indigenous people. The 1974 land tenure law creates some reforms concerning land tenure, which are still operational to date. Article 17 of Ordinance No. 74/1 provides that the local communities can occupy land, which can be used for rangelands and agricultural purposes. Article 8 of the 1974 Land Ordinance states clearly that land ownership is only possible by showing proof of a land certificate. Lastly, Article 9 of Decree No. 76/165 of 27 April 1976 provides modalities for acquiring a land title. However, corrupt government officials promote their self-interest and make titling almost impossible (Njoh, 2013). Navigating the process of land registration is very expensive and lengthy. It requires time because of the country's bureaucratic nature and literacy of which many forest communities are found wanting, especially the forest-dwelling Indigenous Peoples like the mbororos and the pygmies (Njoh, 2013).

Since Cameroon became an independent country, only three forestry, wildlife and fisheries laws have been created. Ordinance No. 73/18 of 22 May 1973 with its Decree of implementation, i.e., Decree No. 74/357 of 17 August 1974, was the first to be created. Due to forest resource management's weaknesses, this Ordinance was scraped and replaced by Ordinance No. 81/969 of 12 April 1983. This law produces very little revenue from the country's forest concession sector, which saw forest stakeholders such as logging companies and elites primary beneficiaries instead of the state and the local communities. The 1994 law introduces four significant changes and one of these changes is community forestry which the following section focuses on.

III. Forestry laws in Cameroon and community forest

To legally recognize rural communities' right to use natural or forest resources and participate in forest management, the 1994 law introduces the community forest concept. According to the 1994 Forestry Law, the community forest is considered part of the non-permanent forest estate (not above 5000 hectares), which via an agreement between the government and the community, the community undertakes sustainable forest management for 25 years renewable¹. The agreement serves as a contract and the ministry allocates to a community a portion of the national forest estate to preserve, manage and exploits in its interest². Also, the 1994 Forestry Law provides provisions on how to apply for a community forest. The law states that any community applying for a portion of a national forest estate to be used as a community forest must do so under cover of a corporate body backed by a legal entity provided by Cameroon's laws³.

Article 37 (3) of the 1994 Forestry Law states that the village community in question wholly owns any forest product acquired by exploiting community forests. Thus, it guarantees community accessibility

¹ Article 27(4) of Decree No. 95-531-PM of 23 August 1995

² Article 3 (16) of Decree No. 95/531/PM of 23 August 1995

³ Article 28(3) of Decree No. 95/531/PM of 23 August 1995

and user rights to forest resources in community forest project sites for 25 years renewable. The law stipulates that the government will provide technical assistance to that community (Art. 37 (1)). The community takes charge only for the management of the forest and not the land itself. The degree of implementation No. 95/531/PM of 23 August 1995 specifies that forests eligible for community forest management agreement are situated adjacent to one or more communities who conduct their activities in the forest in question (Article 27 (2)). Therefore, the community forest allocation depends highly on the community's closeness to the forest (Article 27(3)). Concerning monitoring of the forest, this shall be the responsibility of the community concern or in question. However, the legislators failed to consider the community's financial capacity compared to wealthier logging shareholders. Concerning logging inside the community forest, Article 54 of the forestry law specifies that logging should be conducted by the community concerned, with the help of state supervision, via the sale of standing volume, or by individual authorization with a permit showing prove of a management plan approved by the forestry department. Other regulatory procedures governing community forestry management in Cameroon are contained in a document called the "Manual of Procedures for the Acquisition and Norms for the Management of Community Forests." The manual contains some ministerial orders, for example, Ministerial order No. 0518/MINEF/CAB of December 2001 giving priority to neighboring village communities for attribution of national estates that could be developed into a community forest. This order supplements the 1994 Law by introducing pre-emptive rights giving communities priority to establish community forest over the sale of standing volume in the same area. The Ministerial Order No. 0518/MINEF/CAB of December 2001 provides additional rights to communities to acquire community forests and demonstrate the government's goodwill towards the community forest program. This action was a positive step from the government to acknowledge that forest resource management's western style will not fit Cameroon's customary settings in many communities. There are some national regulations, the Circular No. 0677/LC/MINEF/DF/CFC of 23 February 2001. This regulation restricts any form of industrial logging in community forests, and Ministerial Order No. 1985/D/MINEF/SG/CFC OF 26 June 2002 providing new modalities for controlled, selective felling based on the establishment of Simple Management Plans (SMP) for community forests.

The 1994 Law provides a more participatory approach involving new actors in forest resources management and recognizes community forests' institutional establishment. However, there are some weaknesses concerning the notion of the community forest. There still exists a contradiction between the law and other social safeguards, making the tenure system operational in the country a complex one (Nvenakeng Awung, 2015). For example, the 5000 hectares provided for community forestry, as stated by the law, are not enough for acceptable use and forest management, which discourages forest communities from managing the forest sustainably. Moreover, the acquisition process for a community forest is complicated, just like acquiring a land title. The application for a community forest title requires that the applicant show proof of a legal entity, prepare a forest management plan showing activities to be carried out for the next five years, and produce a map in the area concerned. All the above procedures require money that is beyond the financial capacity of the local communities. Somewhat why, to date, only 430 community forests covering 1.7 million hectares have been assigned to local communities (Minang et al., 2019). The law provides for community's ownership rights to forest resources but restricts these rights to just 25 years that may be renewable. Given that community forest land remains owned by the state and there is uncertainty concerning tenure rights in areas designated as community forests, there is a lack of motivation and incentive to foster sustainable forest management of these areas. Even though community forest creation was just one part of the new forest governance dynamics aimed toward improving livelihood and poverty reduction, community forest management could be carried out in line with international initiatives such as REDD+.

IV. Overview of community forest management and the REDD+ initiative

Community-based forest management is an up-and-coming concept for addressing climate change in Cameroon, especially as it moves towards the REDD+ implementation phase (Bernard and Minang, 2019). Many scholars have identified community forestry as a core strategy or attractive options for promoting the REDD+ initiative (Pelletier et al., 2016). Community forestry can credibly reduce carbon emissions and fight against climate change adverse effects and improve the well-being of the poor and

vulnerable people in society. Some social benefits could be gained with the implementation of CFM since its effects on livelihood and poverty reduction are noticeable in Nepal, Tanzania, and Indonesia. Nepal reported a 37% reduction in deforestation and a 4.3% reduction in poverty because of community forestry (Bhandari et al., 2019). CFM and the REDD+ initiatives in Cameroon have recorded success concerning livelihood improvement and social benefits. For example, a total amount of 48,000 US dollars was generated by three community forests within two years. The money was used for social projects in the communities, like the purchase of solar lamps, provides agricultural inputs to women in the community, and pay salaries of teachers employed by the community (Beauchamp and Ingram, 2011). Rural communities such as the indigenous people play an essential role in preserving this forest ecosystem. Thus their presence cannot be undermined concerning decision-making concerning natural resource management (Monica and Mahbubul, 2017).

Even though REDD+ activities in Cameroon lack domestic legal backings, the international legal instruments that the country is a party to serve as implementing instruments of REDD+. These international legal instruments include the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora adopted in Washington DC in 1973, Convention on Biological Diversity adopted at Nairobi in 1992 and Paris Agreement on climate change adopted in Paris in 2015. Some REDD+ pilot projects, which are operational in the country within the community forests network, include the Takamanda project, Mount Cameroon project, Sangha Tri-National (TRIDOM), and Ngoyla Minton project. The Nkolenyeng community forests and Nomedjoh community forests in the East and South region are governed by the existing national and climate change policies regulated by the 1994 Forestry Law⁴ and the 1996⁵ Law on the Environment.

Challenge to community forest management in Cameroon and the REDD+ initiative

REDD+ is based on the rights to benefit from reducing forest-based GHG emissions, either through fund-based payments, carbon markets, or a combination of these. However, the question about who can claim this right needs clarity. As a precondition to access payments, it is necessary to identify who (government, regional entities, indigenous peoples, landowners or communities managing community forests) receive what type of benefits (monetary or non-monetary) and how payments are to be distributed transparently. This makes sense because clarity on carbon rights and how the benefits will be distributed will stimulate investment in REDD+ projects since investors require a stable enabling environment to ensure that their rights are respected and their actions are duly rewarded. This clarity will also help avoid conflicts between the communities carrying out the actions of avoided deforestation and the central government in charge of reward payments. Any carbon transactions under the REDD+ initiative should be based on the national legal context. Some countries like New Zealand and Guatemala have developed carbon rights based on their national laws. Thus any transaction concerning carbon benefits is based on the principles of law.

Further restrictions through market-based mitigation approaches have led donors and recipients of REDD+ finance to adopt several measures and safeguards that protect vulnerable groups. These safeguards⁶ concern social protections such as; participation, transparency, and the rights to local communities and indigenous peoples, fair sharing of benefits from any action related to reducing emissions, as well as the recognition by governments of carbon rights associated with land and forest (Charlotte Streck, 2020). The Cameroons' Readiness Preparatory Proposal (R-PP) recognized community forestry as a strategic option to implement REDD+ initiative. This was based on the prominent role community forest has on improving forest governance. Thus the concept emerged as a new conservation policy to mitigate climate change and provide incentives to countries with a political will towards forest conservation (Khatri et al., 2018). A grant of 3.6 million dollars was provided by the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) to Cameroon's government to fund its Readiness Preparatory Proposal and reform the legal system to support REDD+ implementation (Awung and Marchant, 2020). Currently, Cameroon is still facing many challenges concerning REDD+ implementation due to lack of clarity on the sharing of benefits, no clear definition about forest tenure

⁴ Law No. 94-01 of 20 January 1994 to lay down Forestry, Wildlife and Fishery Regulations

⁵ Law No. 1996/12 of August 1996 relating to Environmental Management in Cameroon (1996 Framework Law on Environmental Management).

⁶ Decision 1/CP.16. of UNFCCC (Cancun safeguards) provides a number of social and environmental safeguards that should be promoted and supported when undertaking REDD+ activities.

and rights, and issues concerning carbon rights not yet clarified (ibid). Therefore, in this section, we try to assess how community forestry can help REDD+ achieve its objectives or what community forest management can realistically achieve under REDD+, taking into account the national legislation applicable in Cameroon. While the focus is on laws, we shall also acknowledge any progress relating to on-going legal reform processes, coupled with non-binding documents if they exist.

Forest tenure and rights

Forest tenure and rights are significant issues discussed concerning REDD+ implementation because this could exclude local communities from REDD+ activities if clarity to that effect is not made (Yeang, 2012). This inequitable and insecure nature of current land tenure systems in Cameroon has left communities marginalized from their rights to forest resources and contributes to decision-making regarding natural resources. One of Cancun's safeguards obligates indigenous peoples' rights and knowledge and rural communities based on relevant international obligations and national laws. The lack of clarity over land ownership, access to natural resources and rights is one of the most significant challenges faced by forest dwellers in Cameroon. REDD+ stands a better place to provide a platform to strengthen and clarify these rights through a nexus of policies and law reforms. An assessment of the 1994 forestry law reveals some failures concerning recognizing indigenous peoples' rights to the territories and resources they have traditionally owned and used throughout their lifetime. Such a law will be challenging to be accepted by the communities concerned, as their rights are being eroded. Forest tenure and land laws in Cameroon create some uncertainties regarding land ownership and tenure rights. For example, Section 7 of the 1994 Forestry Law gives the state, village communities, local councils, and private individuals the rights to use the forests and aquacultural establishments subject to restriction as laid down in the land tenure regulations. However, no, the distinction is made between who owns the carbon and other land resources. There are also inconsistencies in situations where rights are being granted over the same land by other government ministries for a different purpose. This might result in community forests suffering from a situation of overlapping.

Given that most rural people lack knowledge of the content of Cameroon's forestry and land laws and because the legal procedure to be followed to obtain a community forest, as well as a land title, is lengthy and expensive, the customary ownership of land still exists despite the existence of statutory laws (Egute and Albrecht, 2014). This poses a constraint to ownership concerning community forest management under REDD+, and also the prospect of carbon-selling right of the communities not clear. Thus, clarifying the issues of land ownership and forest tenure is of utmost importance for the proper functioning of the national REDD+, which will affect the benefit-sharing mechanism discussed below.

Benefit-sharing mechanism

Policies that ensure a fair distribution of forest protection incentives and carbon payments are often characterized as benefit-sharing policies. Furthermore, the notion of forest-based carbon rights has emerged and is frequently used by international policymakers, civil society and donors to strengthen local actors' claim to REDD+ related fiscal and non-fiscal benefits (Charlotte Streck, 2015). However, these rights have hardly been described in legal terms. The legal obscurity of the associated rights creates significant problems for national policymakers that seek to comply with donor requirements but are limited because of a vague understanding of carbon rights in the legal context (ibids). As a requirement, the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) requires the issue of benefit-sharing arrangements to be part of the country's national readiness preliminary proposals, and the country should have a plan on how benefit-sharing will be carried out when applying for Carbon Fund. Therefore, the mechanisms governing REDD+ benefit-sharing should be backed by laws and regulations with clear objectives and the beneficiaries concerned (Awung and Marchant, 2020). The design of the benefit-sharing mechanism under the REDD+ initiative could be complicated but not impossible because of the high stakes between the government and other stakeholders competing on whom is going to benefit.

Cameroon has not developed any legal framework for benefit-sharing under the REDD+ projects defining carbon rights. However, the country has decades of experience in sharing benefits from natural resource exploitation in the forestry, wildlife, mining and hydrocarbons sectors. The government plays a significant role in benefit-sharing under the 1994 Forestry Law's provisions and

the 1996 Framework Law on Environmental Management⁷. Concerning the forest sector, the Ministry of Forestry, in collaboration with the Finance department, negotiates benefit sharing. The Finance Law fixes the percentage paid to beneficiaries⁸. The amount of money collected is allocated as follows; 50% is allocated to the state treasury, 20% goes to the local council within which the concession is located, 20% is allocated to FEICOM, which is a body in charge of particular assistance to the local councils and a meager 10% for the population residing around the logging area (Egute and Albrecht, 2014). The allocations were made without consultation of other forest stakeholders. The ratio of distribution stands as 50:20:20:10, with the least allocation to the communities concerned. This is inadequate but could be very disappointing if national REDD+ projects operating under community forestry faced this kind of bias distribution of benefits earned by keeping forest standing.

The benefit-sharing mechanism under the Finance Law can work very well in a forest concession model. Regrettably, there is nothing to learn from the practical experiences in the Cameroonian context. High-level corruption within the government ranks has given rise to unclear payment schemes or underpayment to many communities. Besides, the majority of the forest-dependent communities end up not receiving royalties. In 2018, the government suspended forest royalties to local communities because the funds are mismanaged. Ideally, concerning REDD+ initiative, this concept of benefit-sharing under the REDD+ process should be borne by the community or the actors involved in keeping the forest standing. As a result, implementing REDD+ in the future based on the Cameroonian context would overhaul the benefit-sharing mechanism or avoid the forest concession model. Therefore, REDD+ initiative in Cameroon should put an equitable and effective benefit-sharing system, which can serve from the national to the local level, showing clear rules on how rewards concerning emissions reductions in community forests are to be applied (Bernard and Minang, 2019).

Carbon ownership rights

Like many countries globally, Cameroon has no specific legislation to recognize ownership over forest carbon credits. The issue of carbon rights is just one of the already unresolved property rights (Bernard and Minang, 2019). Carbon rights are considered a fundamental threshold question to determine the right holders eligible for benefits. Cameroon's law makes no difference between the carbon stored in the tree and the carbon itself. Thus, the owner of carbon should be the owner of the natural resources storing carbon.

Furthermore, suppose REDD+ activities are on-going in a communal forest or state forest. In that case the resources which are found in that forest belongs to the state as per the 1994 Forestry Law⁹, and the result is valid for natural resources found within a private forest to be owned by the individual concerned under section 39(1) of the 1994 Forestry Law as presented in the 1974 Land Tenure Ordinance¹⁰ (Costenbader, 2009). Given this discrepancy, reforms geared towards REDD+ policy initiative in Cameroon must address the above discrepancy considering the advantages REDD+ will bring to the country regarding carbon credits. Any uncertainty concerning ownership and the right to benefit from carbon credits will threaten those whose rights have not been clarified. The above reform would reduce the risk of REDD+ project failure in community forests, thus promoting transparency and equitable systems.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, our assessment shows a very positive outcome towards linking REDD+ and CFM in combating climate change via avoided deforestation in the Cameroonian context. CFM and the REDD+ initiatives in Cameroon have recorded success concerning livelihood improvement and social benefits. Government actions at times make us wonder if they are serious in this campaign against fighting

⁷Decree No. 96/642/PM of 17 September 1996, fixing the amount and the modalities of tax recovery and rights to royalties and tax relative to the activities of forestry.

⁸Law No. 96/237/PM of 10 April 1996, fixing the modalities of the functioning of the special fund for Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries.

⁹Article 32(3) of the 1994 Forestry Law states that forest products of all kinds resulting from the exploitation of council forest shall be the sole property of the council concern.

¹⁰Ordinance No. 74-1 of 6 July 1974 to establish rules governing land tenure and Ordinance No. 74-2 of 6 July 1974 to establish rules governing state lands.

deforestation using the REDD+ CFM model. The 1994 forestry law reforms were terrific, but some issues were not addressed because the parliament members eliminated several previously agreed decisions with the World Bank structural adjustment program. The parliament members, most of them involved in forestry businesses, were keen on protecting their privileges against the national economy's interest and the rural population. Even though mentioned as significant stakeholders as per the World Bank policy document, most NGOs did not participate in any discussions or any decision-making process concerning natural resources in rural communities.

The current review of the REDD+ process in Cameroon shows substantial progress concerning planning, coordination and institutional development concerning community forestry in REDD+ pilot projects operating in the country. The government showed a strong political will towards REDD+ implementation by establishing a framework to manage REDD+ implementation and creating the REDD+ Steering Committee. The study also reveals substantial progress in the institutional arrangement for monitoring REDD+ activities in the country. Another substantial progress made by the Cameroon government was the signing of a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) with other stakeholders, which they agreed on collaborative and well-coordinated efforts for the attainment of the national REDD+ aspirations.

Community forestry is essential for sustainable REDD+ implementation in Cameroon. However, more efforts are needed by the government of Cameroon in the area of capacity building of forest communities on adaptation, mitigation of climate change, and sustainable forest practices. To implement fully REDD+ projects in the Cameroonian context, we recommend reforms towards improving forest governance framework based on strong laws or creating new ones and institutions to address specific points that can accommodate REDD+ processes in the country. Thus, to ensure community forests achieve their objectives under the REDD+ initiative, some actions or reforms in the forestry law are needed to make clarity, especially with the tenure system, carbon rights, and the establishment of a benefit-sharing mechanism at different levels, which will clarify the existing discrepancy between tenure and the right to carbon. The government should transfer full ownership to the community to run the community forest affairs and benefit from its rewards 100%. This action will limit pressure in the forests and contributes towards avoided deforestation and unsustainable use of the resources since the community will be confident about their ownership and rights to benefit.

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