



**Green
Development
Advocates**

For a Green Congo Basin



2019-2020 BI-ANNUAL REPORT

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Foreword



GDA's work with its targets have been strengthened and intensified in the last two years (2019-2020). There is no doubt that the organisation has grown in reputation and effectiveness.

Overall, our activities have revolved around securing the customary spaces of populations living near agro-industries, the campaign against land conversion in Cameroon, which has gained momentum, while the forestry law, the revision of which was initiated in 2008, is still awaited, as Cameroon has made a number of commitments at the national and international levels to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. We have also worked to ensure that the rights of local communities are better taken into account in the construction of the Nachtigal dam.

At the organisational level, GDA has enriched its operating tools through the development and adoption of a Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct and a Gender Policy in addition to the existing Administrative and Financial Procedures Manual. Also, in order to improve its communication, a website (www.gdacamaroon.org) has been developed and is functional.

We express our deep gratitude to all our technical and financial partners whose contributions/support have made our efforts fruitful. This challenges us to work harder for the protection of the environment and the improvement of the quality of life of the indigenous and local populations. Our gratitude also goes to the populations we work with, for allowing us to share their daily lives, and, finally, to this young, dynamic, committed and devoted team that fights every day for GDA to fulfil the missions it has set for itself.

Aristide Chacgom
Coordinator

About GDA

Who are we?

Green Development Advocates (GDA) is a Cameroonian Civil Society Organisation (CSO) created in 2009 by a multidisciplinary group of former NGO executives working in the same field. It was legalised on 30 June 2011 and works for development in line with social and environmental requirements.

Our mission

To contribute to the sustainable development of African rainforests while respecting the cultures, rights, interests and needs of African people, with a particular focus on the indigenous people of the forest.

Our goal

- 1 To promote good environmental governance;
- 2 To integrate environmental considerations into local development initiatives and into the policies of modern actors (states, aid agencies, private sector, etc.);
- 3 To provide the population, especially the poor and the vulnerable, with alternative justice services, legal assistance, defence and protection of citizens' socio-economic rights;
- 4 To ensure capacity building for civil society actors in the area of environmental protection and the defence of rights;
- 5 To support indigenous people and other threatened populations in self-help in line with their environment and culture;
- 6 To inform, educate and raise awareness on environmental and human rights issues;
- 7 To contribute to the sustainable management of natural resources and the fight against climate change;
- 8 To promote gender and minority mainstreaming in the implementation of development policies and programmes.

Highlights of activities of the Last Two Years

I. Promotion of Community Forestry as an Approach to Securing the Land and Forest Rights of Local and Indigenous Communities

With a view to contribute to securing the rights of local communities around the growing number of agro-industries in Cameroon, GDA has undertaken to promote community forestry as a tool for securing the land and forestry rights of local and indigenous communities. To this end, we have undertaken discussions with the Nseppe Elog-Ngango, Mbana, Okokong and Bikegle communities in Mouanko subdivision, and with the chiefs of Dibombari subdivision.

The populations of Nseppe Elog-Ngango, Mbana, Okokong and Bikegle have portions of forest that are coveted by SAFACAM and SOCAPALM, as both companies wish to expand their plantations. Thanks to the strategic partnership with SYNAPARCAM, we have carried out several field visits to these villages during which we discussed options to secure this community space in Cameroon legal and legislative framework, with a focus on community forestry. The discussions also focused on the recovery of some land occupied by SAFACAM, which was once occupied by their ancestors. These communities, which are very interested in the concept of community forestry, have asked us to assist them in securing their traditional space, and also to support them in advocating for retrocession.

The feasibility studies carried out by GDA for the creation of a community forest in Nseppe Elog-Ngango revealed that 2,500 hectares of forest had been allocated for a period of three years to a logging company - Nzama et Fils - by the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOP) as a standing timber sale in 2018, without the consent and consultation of the community. Discussions and research by the community showed that they have a limited forest on which to create a community forest, which eventually

prompted the community to write a letter to the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife, requesting the handover of their forest to enable the creation of a community forest. We contacted the sub-director of community forestry in the Directorate of Forest for a formal meeting, during which we were able to discuss our intention to assist certain communities of the Mouanko subdivision in the creation of a community forest. This initiative was welcome and encouraged by the Sub-director of Community Forestry, Mr Koung Roger, who said that *«the process of creating a community forest is open»*. He added: *«Do not hesitate to come back to me whenever you need help. It is my duty and obligation to welcome and facilitate such creation»*.

For the Mbana, Bikegle and Okokong villages, which share the same forest, several activities were carried out, including information and training of the communities on the procedure for creating community forests, and socio-economic analysis using the participatory mapping tool. This process has helped to strengthen the links and collaboration between the three (03) neighbourhoods that make up the community by establishing monthly meetings during which the populations discuss the community forest and other problems affecting the village. According to the Chief of the village, His Highness NKONE Alloys, *«since the process of creating a community forest started in my community, I have seen my people actively participating in issues that concern the forest in particular and the community in general.»*

Thanks to the ground map, we did the socio-economic analysis within the community which enabled us to identify the main economic and social activities carried out within the communi-

ty, but above all to enhance the knowledge of the latter on their resources and customary spaces. *«We had never done participatory mapping in our community before and it was a very exciting and rich experience,»* says Mbongo François, a young man from the village. A lady, named Zoa Thérèse stated: *«Despite the fact that I have been out of the village for some time, I have never participated or heard that the Mbana community has ever conducted such an activity before - this is the first time.»*

An important step in the process of creating a community forest is the creation of a legal entity that will carry out the process on behalf of the community. Thanks to GDA's coaching, the Mbana community was able to design, produce and compile the necessary documents for the

creation of an inclusive legal entity grouping the 03 villages, as well as all the social strata grouped under the Mbana, Bikegle, Okokong Development Association (ADEMBO), whose declaration receipt was signed on 23 November 2020 by the Senior Divisional Officer of the Sanaga Maritime Division.

«I thank GDA and its partners very much because since they started assisting us in securing our land, they have never failed to deliver, the process is promising and we ask GDA not to leave us halfway. » Nkwele Oscar, ADEMBO Secretary General.

This activity must continue in 2021 in Mbana but also extend to other villages bordering the agro industries, such is our pledge to the people.



II. The Advocacy Campaign for the Rights of Local Communities to be Better Taken into Account in the Construction of the Nachtigal Dam



In the context of the construction of the Nachtigal hydroelectric dam (NHPC), the IFI Synergy platform,¹ the secretariat of which is held by GDA, is very concerned about the socio-environmental consequences generated by the construction of the Nachtigal dam, in particular the lack of consultation, the inadequacy of compensation, failure to take into account the aspect of climate in the environmental and social impact study, etc. It was therefore necessary to monitor the construction of this dam and to support the communities around the construction areas by documenting the impacts of the project and building their capacity on safeguards and the use of the complaint mechanisms of the partners donors of the project to seek redress. In this regard, 18 communities affected by the construction of the Nachtigal dam were identified, namely:

- Ndokoa, Ndji located in the power plant area,
- Olembe, Obalon Center, Emana Batchenga, Mbassa, Otibili, Nachtigal, Nalassi, Emana Bedjaca, Elon, Pamnassi and Nkolmekok, Elomzock, Minkama III, Minkama I and Mekas located in the

area crossed by the power transmission line.

The field visits we carried out enabled us to build trust with these communities, which gave us a better understanding of the activities they were carrying out (sand, fishing, market gardening, traditional rites, agriculture) before the construction of the dam as well as the difficulties they have been facing since the construction of the Nachtigal dam began. *«We no longer enter the water to fish, mine sand and have not been reconverted for other jobs as promised by NHPC. As a result, our children do not go to school and women flee from marriage, unemployment is increasing because sand mining and fishing were our main source of income,»* says Ekassi OLOUA, a local sand miner.

¹ IFI Synergy Cameroon, established in 2015. Its aim is to influence policies and practices related to natural resource extraction that have negative social and environmental impacts, by targeting sources of funds and investments, including International Financial Institutions (IFIs), export credit agencies and other financial flows

The NHPC consultation process and the company's promises to the communities to address the socio-environmental impacts and the state of implementation of the resettlement plan and the livelihood restoration plan remain weak as most fishermen, sand miners and fishmongers are still waiting for their compensation, despite the fact that the construction of the dam started since 2018.

In view of the multiple claims of the communities, these visits have enabled us to initiate training on the social and environmental safeguards of the various donors, as well as their dispute settlement mechanisms. This has given hope to the communities, which are now aware that their claims can be submitted to the project partner banks and find solutions, which they did not know. For Papa Pierre, Secretary General of the fishermen's association, «this is the first time that an NGO comes to us and explains that our claims can be resolved if we write and file complaints with the project IFI partners.” This motivated them to make available to us requests that they had sent to the NHPC and which had not been answered.

Thus, a letter was sent to the various partner banks of the Nachtigal dam (FMO, WB, ADB, Société Générale, Standard Chartered Bank, etc.) with a copy to the NHPC, which is the company in charge of the construction of the Nachtigal dam, to obtain clarifications regarding the difficulties encountered by the riparian communities. These initiatives led the NHPC to send its financial partners a report on the implementation of social and environmental actions undertaken with the riparians of the dam. The NHPC also invited the IFI Synergy Group team to a meeting in their headquarters with the staff of the Environmental and Social Department. This was their first contact with civil society since the construction of the dam began. During this meeting, we presented the communities' complaints and formulated proposals to resolve the communities'

complaints. As a result of these actions, the NHPC started to pay part of the compensation to the sandmen in the green zone, to a tune of 70% of the total amount for those who had projects there.

This work of denouncing non-respect of communities rights in the construction of the Nachtigal Dam has enabled us to have strategic partnerships with Both End, thanks to its international address book in banks, which has helped us to write and send the claims of the dam riparian communities to these banks. Secondly with the Bank Track, the partnership enabled to design a dubious profile² of the Nachtigal Dam which summarises the impacts of the construction of the Dam, the claims of the communities, the initiatives undertaken by the communities for their claims and their wishes.

We also contributed to the case study on the construction of the Nachtigal dam in relation to the Ecuadorian principles³.

Also, we were able to join the Coalition for Human Rights in Development, whose role is to take the voice of communities to the international arena. The communities during our field visits raised many problems they are facing with the construction of the dam, particularly underestimated compensation, involuntary and forced resettlement, and lack of prior consultation, non-existence of alternative activities for fishermen, sand harvesters and fishmongers. Discussions will continue with them to better document the impacts of this project and to train them in the formulation of complaints and in the procedures for bringing cases before the dispute settlement bodies of the main donors.

² To see the dubious profile, follow this link: https://www.banktrack.org/project/nachtigal_hydropower_plant#_

³ To see the study, follow this link: https://www.banktrack.org/download/trust_us_were_equator_banks_part_ii/201124__part_ii_trust_us_were_equator_banks_1.pdf

The Campaign against Forest Conversion in Cameroon

I. I.Campaign against the Uncontrolled Installation of Agro-industries

On 11 November 2019, Prime Minister Joseph DION NGUTE signed Decree No. 2019/4562 declassifying a 60,000 hectares forest plot around Campo Ma'an National Park from the private domain of the State for agricultural production. The forest parcel in question was formerly part of FMU 09-025, located in the South Region, Ocean Division, Campo and Nyete Sub division with an area of 88,147 hectares. This decree was issued following Public Notice N0. 0082/AP/MINFOF/DF/SDIAF/SC, published on 15 May 2019 and signed by the Minister of Forestry and Fauna (MINFOF), Mr Jules Doret NDONGO, declassifying part of FMU 09-025 for agricultural production. In view of this situation, several actions were carried out:

- The mobilisation of civil society around a declaration signed by more than 40 organisations in which they expressed their deep concern about the downgrading of the planned forest;
- Mobilisation of the media (radio, TV, print and online) for a journalistic mission to the Campo and Nyete area to gather the views of local communities which are concerned about the conversion of 60,000 hectares of forest in their locality;
- Elaboration and publication of a note analysing the illegalities⁴ in the procedure of declassification and concession of 60,000 ha of forest for oil palm monoculture for CAMVERT in Campo and Nyété. This note was disseminated to the media, sectoral administrations (MINFOF, MINEPDED, MINDCAF), financial and technical partners, communities and national and international platforms of which GDA is a member.



⁴ Follow this link to read the note <http://gdacameroon.org/download/312/>

- The information and training of communities through simplified guides on the procedure for declassifying and classifying forests, allocating land concessions and the socio-environmental impacts of oil palm plantations, as well as exchange meetings with local CSOs in Kribi and Campo traditional chiefs, have made it possible to change their perception of the Camvert project, which they initially saw as a development factor. Today, the communities have understood that the installation of Camvert in their localities will cause the loss of their traditional land rights, the pollution of their watercourses, etc. According to His Majesty of Ebodjé, «*the installation of an oil palm plantation does not bring development because it is the government that is in charge of putting in place development infrastructures in a locality, if CAMVERT project is accepted in Campo and Nyete, they will suffer the same ills as the communities around SOCAPALM*».
- The way agro-industrial plantations are being set up, especially the CAMVERT project which does not respect legality, increases bio-

diversity loss and deprives communities of their traditional land rights. This led us to initiate a far-reaching advocacy concerning the need for Cameroon to validate and implement a national palm oil strategy.

GDA also shared its experience with agro-industries in fora at African and global level. This is on the one hand its participation on 26th and 27th October 2019 in Liberia in the regional dialogue on the achievements, challenges, perceptions and the way forward for actors in the oil palm sector in West Africa organised by the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) in Liberia and on the other hand a workshop in Kota Kinabalu in Malaysia on palm oil whose objective was to bring public, university and government actors working on rural development to share their experiences and expertise on the impacts endured by the communities living around the oil palm. These activities aim to influence palm oil production policies at international level, focusing them on respect for the environment and the rights of communities.



II. Reflections on Emerging Pandemics and Forest Conversion in Cameroon: What are the Stakes?



On 22nd May 2020, on the occasion of the international day of biodiversity on the theme “Our solutions are in nature”, GDA, in compliance with the barrier measures mobilized civil society organizations, academics, staff of the forestry administration and the media around a debate on the link between forest conversion and the emergence of zoonotic diseases, amidst the wide spread of COVID-19 in Cameroon. We concluded that deforestation reduces the habitat of animals, which makes them vulnerable and facilitates human-wildlife contact which will inevitably

lead to the proliferation of zoonotic diseases in the near future. There is therefore an urgent need to take sustainable measures to stop the conversion of forests to non-forest uses. Thanks to the communication mobilized about this action, it contributed to produce solid arguments on the dangers of forest conversion having undoubtedly led the Head of State to develop a new vision of land use in Cameroon, by asking the Prime Minister to withdraw the decree of classification of the Ebo forest and to suspend any ongoing activity in that line.

Support to the Protection and Promotion of the Culture of Indigenous People

I. Access of Local and Indigenous Communities to Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs)

Although the NTFP sector remains one of the most important sectors in rural areas in which more than fifty percent (50%) of the riparian populations invest to ensure their economic survival and development, and despite the numerous initiatives undertaken, there are persistent constraints which delay the optimal development of this sector, particularly with regard to local and indigenous populations. This compromises the development of these rural communities and keeps them in abject poverty. One of the major constraints today is linked to legal and institutional barriers. Recently, two important decisions were taken in this direction, decision N0. 0209/D/MINFOF/CAB and decision N0. 0210/D/MINFOF/CAB of 26th April 2019, one categorizing NTFPs and the other fixing the methods of collecting and transporting type C NTFPs. In

analysis, although these texts bring significant progress in the NTFP sector, they do not benefit local and indigenous communities.

The major limitations perceived in these texts are, among others, the centralization of the signing of documents (collection authorization and consignment note), the difficult access to procedural documents, the validity of documents set at one budget year, etc. It is therefore urgent to review the aforementioned texts to relax the legal framework governing the collection and the marketing of NTFPs for the benefit of local and indigenous communities so that they can have easy access to the resources and hence to the benefits. The analysis note enabled us to mobilize civil society and the media to advocate to MINFOF in this regard.

II. Development and Implementation of a Specific Animal Breeding Action Plan for Indigenous Baka People in the Upper-Nyong Division, Eastern Region

The objective of GDA involvement in the PRODEL (Livestock Development Project) is justified by the declining wildlife stock in the forest, the need to reduce and then find alternatives to the consumption of bush meat by the indigenous Baka people around the Dja reserve in the Upper-Nyong Division, we availed the opportunity offered by PRODEL in 2018, to draw up a livestock development plan to the benefit of the Baka people in the Upper-Nyong Division. In a participatory manner, we developed the PPA together with micro-projects in 19 Baka communities in the Upper-Nyong. 540 beneficiary households

were identified on the main criterion which is the will to practice the activity established by the construction of enclosures or shelters for animals. As a key step in the purchasing and distribution process, small trainings are planned from the beginning and throughout the growth of the animals on their nutrition and care. Unfortunately, the process of distributing the factors of production only concerned the village of Djibot in Abong-Mbang sub-division. Since then, the activities stopped due to the principal which resulted in decrease in the interest of the beneficiaries for the business.

Contribution to the Review of FLEGT VPA Legality Grids

The VPA-FLEGT (Voluntary Partnership Agreement on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade) legality review process was agreed by Cameroon and the European Union for a better applicability, while remaining in compliance with the regulations in force in Cameroon. To do this, it was necessary to integrate all the stakeholders. Three projects were funded by the FAO EU FLEGT programme and led by three groups of actors, namely the administration through the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), the private sector (GFBC) and the civil society. The project dubbed "Support to the participation of civil society and forest communities in VPA-FLEGT legality grids review" was implemented by Green Development Advocates (GDA) in partnership with the Service d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Développement (SAILD), the objective of which was to strengthen the participation of civil society in the process of reviewing legality grids.

The implementation of the project made it possible to develop a consensual proposal for new legality grids. During the various works, strong recommendations were made to densify the regulatory framework of the forestry sector. Thus, negotiations are underway to draft the following texts:

1. Joint order for transport of forest products by train, in accordance with Article 127(3) of Decree No 95/531;
2. Order relating to the establishment of a model for drafting specifications considering social aspects
3. Decision on the issuance of the certificate of compliance with NIMF (Forest Intervention Standards);
4. Decision organizing the issuance of the count certificate;
5. Decision relating to the issuance of the Certificate of realization of social works;
6. Decision relating the issuance of the Certificate of compliance with the location and autho-

rized volumes in the operation of ARBs and AEBs;

7. Decision on the issuance of Certificate of return of secure documents;

8. Decision organizing the issuance of the certificate of compliance with clauses of the specifications;

9. And the circular on the transport of wood from the second, third and fourth wood processing to supply the local market.

Projet d'Appui à la participation de la société civile et des communautés forestières à la révision des grilles de légalité de l'APV-FLEGT



Garantir les intérêts des communautés forestières à travers des grilles de légalité consensuelles.

GDA's internal dynamics

In order to improve its efficiency, to have a better professionalization of its operation, its communication and better working conditions for its staff, GDA has carried out few actions, namely:

- The development and adoption of a Code of ethics and professional conduct;
- The development and adoption of a Gender Policy, which all add to the already existing Manual of Procedure;
- The creation of a website www.gdacameroon.org in order to make public all information concerning the organization;

All the above-mentioned accomplishments have been made through the contribution of dedicated staff.

NAMES	POSITION WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION
CHACGOM Aristide	Coordinator
FONGE Christaincia	Financial and Administrative Manager
KAMENI Nelly Arielle	Project Assistant
EKANE NKWELLE	Project Manager
MBA MBIA Danielle	Project Assistant
NGUENA MAWAMBA Carrele	Project Manager
TSOGO Jean Henri	Project Manager
NYAKO Zacharia	Driver



Partnership





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