

Project Independent Observation in support of
Forest Control and Monitoring of Infractions in
Cameroon

**Approved by the Ministry of
Environment and Forests**

Report of the Independent Observer

No. 099En

Central Control Unit – Independent Observer Joint Mission

Title	Dimako Council Forest
Localisation	Dimako, Upper Nyong Division, East Province
Mission date	18th May 2004
Company	Dimako Rural Council

Independent Observer Team (Global Witness):

*Mr. Serge C. Moukouri, Technical Assistant
Mr. Djeukam Robinson, Consultant Lawyer
Mr. Manjo Joshua Safeh, Driver*

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Accompanied by the Independent Observer (Global Witness), an inspection mission from the Central Control Unit (CCU) visited the Dimako Council Forest (DCF) on 18 May 2004. The aim of the mission was to inspect and evaluate logging activities in this forest by identifying, investigating, and taking prescribed legal action in cases where the forestry law had been circumvented.

DCF is the first forest to have been granted to an administrative council in Cameroon. It was included in the private property of the Dimako Rural Council (DRC), pursuant to Decree No. 2001/388/CAB/PM of 13 June 2001. The management plan of this forest was approved by Letter No. 0042/MINEF/SG/DF/SDIAF/SA of 6 January 2002. The first Annual Standing Volume (ASV) certificate was signed on 17 March 2004. The method of operation chosen by the council is that of local government control. Logging activities were in progress when the mission team arrived.

Prior to visiting the logging site, the mission had discussions with the Secretary General, the Mayor of the Dimako Council, the Head of the Dimako Forestry Post, and the Conservator of the Doume-Dimako Technical Operational Unit (D-D TOU).

Inspection activities at the logging site of ASV No.01 of the DCF focussed on the minimum exploitable diameter (MED) set by the Management Plan, the keeping of logging operation documents, the opening and demarcation of boundaries as well as marking of felled trees.

The Independent Observer noted the following:

- Logging documents were not available on site;
- Minimum exploitable diameters set by the Management Plan as concerns trees of the species *ayous* were not being respected;
- DRC has not drawn up a Five Year Plan; the Annual Operation Plan is still being prepared yet activities have already been initiated ;
- The legal framework for logging in council forests needs to be clarified in order to put a stop to the practice of treating these forests as if they were Forest Management Units.

The CCU issued an Official Statement of Offence on the first three abovementioned offences.

In the light of the facts mentioned above, **the Independent Observer recommends** as follows:

- MINEF send a reminder to the DRC to abide by the provisions of the Council Forest Management Plan notably compliance with regulations on MEDs, the Five Year Plan, and Annual Operations Plan;
- The experience of DCF be taken as “lessons learned” when constituting a legal framework for timber extraction in council forests.

2. RESOURCES USED

- 1 Toyota Land Cruiser
- 2 GPS
- 1 Video Camera
- 1 Digital camera
- 1 Laptop computer

3. MEMBERS OF THE MISSION

The mission team comprised Messrs Moukouri and Djeukam of the Independent Observer team, Messrs Neckmen and Mmes Essono and Djana of the CCU, as well as Mr Bikie from the Data Processing Unit of MINEF.

4 CONSTRAINTS

No obstacles were encountered during the mission.

5. MISSION'S FINDINGS

5.1 Discussions with various officials

The project to set up the Dimako Council Forest (DCF) dates back several years. DCF received support from the *Aménagement Pilote Intégré* [Integrated Pilot Management] project and its successor "*Forêt et Terroir*" [Forest and Soil] when drawing up its Management Plan.

The mission team had discussions with several local officials including the Secretary General of the Dimako Council, the Head of the Dimako Forestry Post, the Conservator of the Doume-Dimako Technical Operational Unit (D-D TOU) and the Mayor of the Dimako Rural Council (DRC). A general impression was derived from these discussions that there are misunderstandings between the DRC and local MINEF officials. The latter are complaining of lack of documentation and the fact that they are not consulted during DCF activities. DRC on its part mentioned the lack of interest by these officials in the monitoring of the project. The team had to visit Dimako twice because the Mayor, who personally keeps the DCF logging operations documents, was absent.

5.2 Findings in the field

In the field, the mission verified the opening and demarcation of the southern boundary through which the team accessed the Annual Standing Volume (ASV) No.01. Logging activities had started, and the Provincial Delegation of Environment and Forest of the East Province (PDEF-E) had not been duly requested to issue notification for commencement of activities.

Given that DCF has an approved management plan; special emphasis was laid on compliance with the provisions of the said plan. Subsequently, an inspection of log ponds revealed that DRC did not comply with stipulations on the minimum exploitable diameter of *Ayous* (100cm) set by the management plan. In one of the log ponds, the mission team found about half a dozen *ayous* logs with a diameter less than the 100cm. Furthermore, the field operations documents (DF 10) were not available

for consultation on site; forestry regulations require that the documents be completed on a daily basis.

5.3 Impreciseness re: applicable norms

Timber extraction in a council forest is not well regulated, given that there are very few provisions in the forest law and the Decree of the Application of Forest Management.

For instance, the special considerations of a council and the need not view councils as private sector economic operators were not taken into account when devising a tax system for the exploitation of council forests under local government control. They were also not taken into account when specifying the litigation procedures to be applied should a council not respect forestry law in its exploitation practices.

Because there are few regulations governing council forests, the forest administration tends to place council forest management in the same category as Forest Management Units, resulting in problematic council forest management.

This is exemplified by the duration of operations in ASV No.01 of the Dimako Council Forest defined by MINEF. The certificate issued to the Council stipulates that the standing volume is valid for one year, and can be renewed only once upon expiry; in addition, no other standing volume may be granted in the DCF before the end of 2008.

However, according to the approved management plan, the forest is divided into five standing volumes, each with a validity period of five years. Given that this model is based on the principle of one standing volume per elective term of office, one can conclude that for a standing volume to be granted in midterm, the first standing volume would cover the remaining term of office of the council authorities which ends in 2007. The next standing volume would, therefore, be granted in January 2008.

The lack of respect by the forestry administration of the five-year duration of each standing volume was the reason given by the mayor in explaining why the council had not thought it worthwhile to prepare a Five Year Plan.

Moreover, the ASV certificate gives no reference to the Minimum Exploitable Diameters (MED) set by the Management Plan.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though DRC is just beginning its forest activities, it has already been found guilty of several offences. While these offences must be sanctioned, measures should be taken to ensure that the council is more compliant with forest laws henceforth.

In the light of the facts mentioned above, **the Independent Observer recommends** as follows:

- MINEF send a reminder to the DRC to abide by the provisions of the Council Forest Management Plan notably compliance with regulations on MEDs, the Five Year Plan, and Annual Operations Plan;
- The experience of DCF be taken as “lessons learned” when constituting a legal framework for timber extraction in council forests.