

ILLEGAL WILDLIFE ACTIVITIES IN THE MBAM DJEREM PARK AND ITS SUROUNDINGS - ASSESMENT

1.1 Background

Cameroon's Mbam Djerem National Park (MDNP) is located between the southern slopes of the Adamaoua Plateau and the northern edges of closed canopy humid forests of the Congo basin- a contact zone between forest and savanna. Many streams, among them the Djerem River, flow through the park providing water to humans, livestock, and wildlife. The park's extraordinary habitat diversity makes it the most biologically diverse protected area in Cameroon, with ideal living conditions for more than 50 mammal species such as chimpanzees, leopards, and elephants. Following biodiversity surveys, conducted by WCS researchers in 1999, the Government of Cameroon decided in 2000 to establish Mbam Djerem National Park. Since 2003, WCS has been responsible for assisting the Government in the management of this important conservation site.

74 villages with a population of approximately 28,000 people are adjacent to Mbam Djerem National Park. In the dry season especially, semi-nomadic Fulani cattle-herders drive their cattle deep into the savannas of MDNP, searching for water and grazing grounds. Extensive agricultural methods such as slash and burn agriculture are utilized by the majority of peasant farmers in the periphery of the park and exacerbate habitat loss.

Major threats to the biological integrity of Mbam Djerem National Park include hunting for bushmeat and habitat destruction. The uncontrolled burning of forest by nomadic herders has severely fragmented habitats in the northern part of the park. With technical and logistical support provided by WCS since 2003, MINFOF has put in place law enforcement and surveillance systems to reduced hunting pressure in the park. Additional pressure is emerging from the developing industrial complexes (logging concessions, hydro-electric power plant and bauxite mining) in the northeast and southeast corner of the park. The economic development of this zone will put further human pressure on the natural resources of Mbam Djerem National Park.

The Mbam Djerem National Park Project was initiated in January 2003 as a joint project between MINFOF and WCS, with financial support from FEDEC (Foundation for Environment and Development in Cameroon), with project activities focusing on infrastructure development (construction of a park's headquarters, guard posts, procurement of equipment etc.), capacity building for law enforcement and biodiversity conservation, environmental education, community-outreach, research and monitoring of ecosystems.

2. LAGA and the assessment report

On August 2005 the World Bank decided to support LAGA's work and asked LAGA for an assessment of affectivity of the technical support given to law enforcement measures in three projects that are either financed by the World Bank or connected to World Bank supported schemes. The assessment reports can be used as a base for assisting the Government of Cameroon in increasing or improving the provided technical assistance.

3. Methodology

LAGA has compiled this report based on its routine work technically assisting the Government of Cameroon in investigations and operations against illegal wildlife activities. It is therefore admitted that this assessment is not based on a scientific methodology but is rather a collection of incidental information. Although incidental information collected over time can help in mapping trends and mechanisms, it has its obvious disadvantages and it is therefore important to understand what this assessment is and what it is not.

3.1 Investigations

Between October 2005 to October 2006 4 missions were sent to the field collecting information about illegal wildlife activities connected to the Camrail route and its stations' areas. Although a single observation can give a picture of the situation, multiple investigations over 12 months allowed an assessment to be reliable and conclusive. LAGA was using two different investigators not connected to each other to allow cross-checking and increase reliability of information. Investigators had to produce recordings and other evidence to support their observations, again to increase reliability of information.

3.2 Operations

Investigations are normally used for the aim of planning operations to be executed by MINFOF and the forces of law and order. Information gathered did not result in any operation.

4. Results

4.1 Investigations

In general the investigations were not very conclusive and more work needs to be done for an in-depth analysis of the project.

Still it was evident that in many of the surrounding villages bushmeat trade has been drastically reduced, and deterrence is felt. Many of the locations were suspicious towards the investigators mentioning recent work of the project, raids on villages and control activities. This lack of trust introduced to the bushmeat business is important as it is usually includes newcomers from different provinces to facilitate trade.

In the villages the ecoguards are perceived to be motivated and work with informants to trace poachers and dealers.

The northern part of the Mbam and Djerem National Park is difficult to access, reducing ability of patrols. There is also illegal wildlife activities in the South-eastern part of Mbam and Djerem National Park in the following villages, - Makoury, Guère, Mekaming and Mbitom Gare, as ecoguards are not posted in that area. Mbitom Gare is of particular interest as it is located on the train line. Indeed, while the village was very aware of the project's efforts bushmeat was still present in quantities as well as an outside dealer from Bertua. A new path starting from a small village not far from Mbitom (Sareng) towards the Djerem River is used now by the poachers.

Yoko which was a junction for trade in the past is still a complex place with refrigerators holding bushmeat and moving to Yaounde by public road transport, some dealers showed MINFOF papers covering their activities.

Tibati is a transit point to Nigeria, represent danger of international demand close to the park. It seems to facilitate trade in great apes arriving to Kano in Nigeria and moving further in the international market.

Ecoguards themselves seem to be frustrated by two main issues. The first is lack of means of transport to exploit information on time. This concern seems reasonable, as means of transport is a major constraint. The second concern is focused on the Conservator, where he is generally perceived as a factor limiting control activities and blocking follow-up of control operations, rather than coordinating the activities. This concern, while not confirmed by any direct observation, seems to match recommendations from various dealers to get papers from the conservator to cover illegal activities.

5. Analysis

- More work needs to be done for an in-depth analysis of the project.
- It is evident that in many of the surrounding villages bushmeat trade has been drastically reduced, and deterrence is felt. In the villages the ecoguards are perceived to be motivated and work with informants to trace poachers and dealers.
- The northern part of the Mbam and Djerem National Park is of concern.
- Illegal activities continue in the South-eastern part of the park in the following villages, - Makoury, Guère, Mekaming and Mbitom Gare, as ecoguards are not posted in that area.
- Mbitom Gare is a particular point of concern including the new path from Sareng.

- Yoko which was a junction for trade in the past is still a complex location to be tackled.
- Tibati is a transit point to Nigeria,
- Means of transport for ecoguards is a major constraint.
- The Conservator is generally perceived as a factor limiting control activities and blocking follow-up of control operations, rather than coordinating the activities. This concern, while not confirmed by any direct observation, seems to match recommendations from various dealers to get papers from the conservator to cover illegal activities.

6. Recommendations

- Continue monitoring for an in-depth analysis of the project.
- Increasing activities in northern part of the Mbam and Djerem National Park.
- Covering more regularly the South-eastern part of the park in the following villages, - Makoury, Guère, Mekambing and Mbitom Gare.
- Increasing intelligence gathering efforts and activities in Mbitom Gare, its connection to the railways, and path from Sareng.
- **Increasing intelligence gathering efforts and activities in Yoko and mainly the public road transport from Yoko to Yaounde.**
- Collaborating with LAGA on the connection of Tibati to international trade.
- Considering acquiring more means of transport for ecoguards.
- Further assessing the effectiveness of MINFOF conservator.

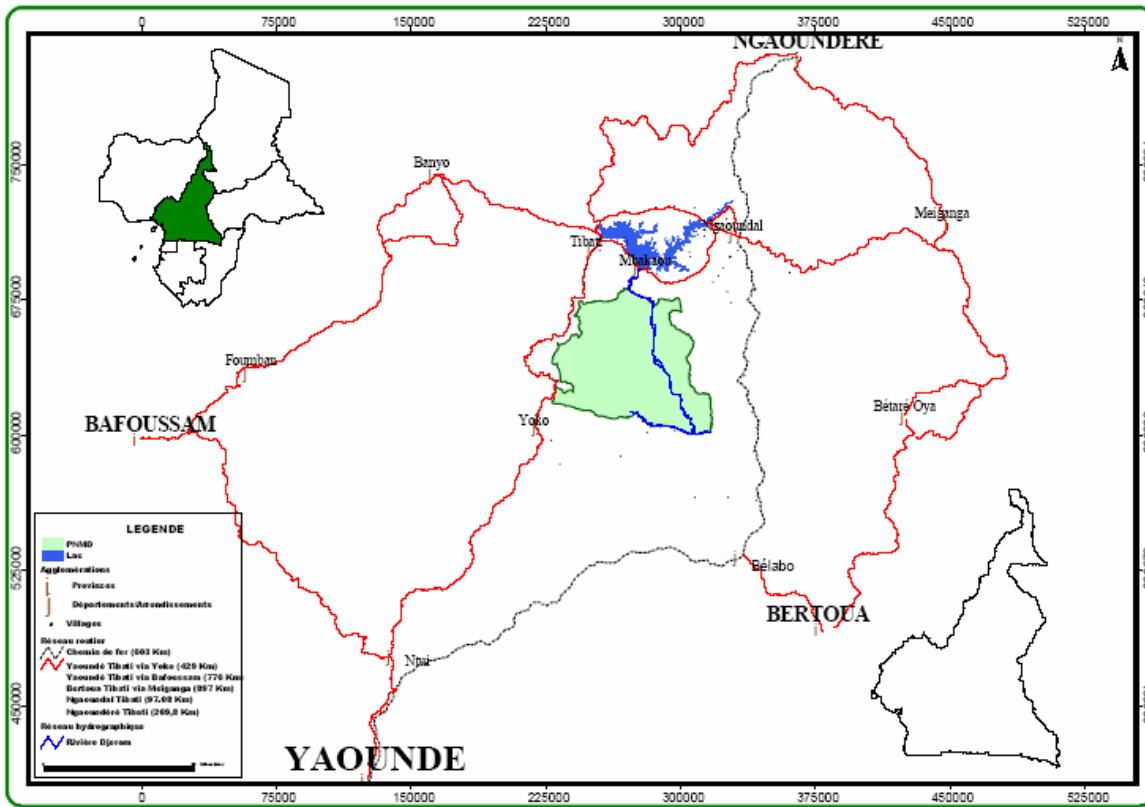


Figure 1 : Localisation du Parc National du Mbam et Djerem

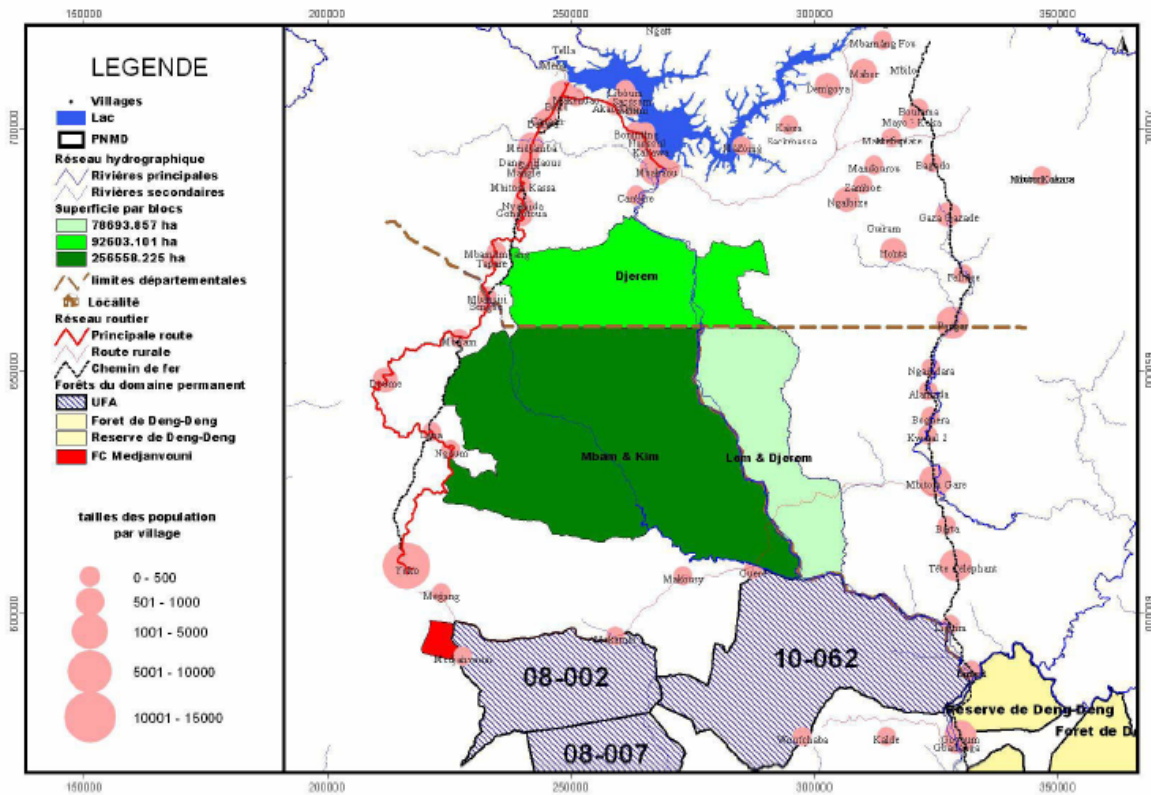


Figure 3 : Découpage administratif et démographie du PNMD et sa périphérie