

## **Communities in Nguti Council Municipality Present their Participatory Land Tenure, Usage Maps to Administrators and other Stakeholder**

Village communities in Nguti Sub-division in the Southwest Region of Cameroon have presented their traditional land tenure systems and land use maps which they collectively developed.

The communities variously represented by their chiefs, traditional elites as well as youth and women's leaders presented their traditional land tenure systems and land use maps during a four-day workshop at the Nguti Council Hall. It was moreover an opportunity for the communities to present the challenges they face in the use and management of these lands.

A cross-section of government administrators as well as elected officials also attended the workshop.



This was the first time that communities in an entire administrative unit have been supported to map their traditional land tenure usage through participatory mapping as a step toward a participatory land use planning that is ongoing in the municipality.

The presentation of the participatory land use maps came in the wake of the project, Mapping and Forest Governance, funded by the British Department for International Development UK (DfID), and implemented in Cameroon by AJEMALEBU SELF HELP (AJESH) with the support of *Forêts et Développement Rurale* (FODER) and the Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK).

Dr. Tchouto Peguy, a forest expert with the Programme for Sustainable Management of Natural Resources – Southwest Region, reiterated that land use mapping enables communities to gather statistics concerning their land and resources.

“It provides base-line information for sustainable management of resources,” Dr. Peguy added.

The workshop, which is itself an innovation, was also organised to try to find solutions to the problems the villagers face, said Georges Thierry Handja, RFUK Mapping Coordinator.

“This project is to help the villagers present the way they organise traditionally the land between themselves and the way they use this land for their livelihood activities. It will also help them to put together all the information concerning their land and all the other allocations done by the state and how this can be fine-tuned so that the communities can continue to live in harmony. We also hope that the maps will help bring together communities and decision-makers for proper communication on the challenges and the way forward,” Handja added.



The project that will be completed in 2017 is expected to evolve a large scale land use map for land use planning and natural resource management for sustainable development.

“Initially, I personally did not understand what land use mapping and forest governance was all about, but gradually I have been able to understand it and I think it will be to the advantage of my municipality as we now know how to go about land use planning,” said Tong George Enoh, Mayor of Nguti Council.

## **Community Challenges**

Among the challenges that the land use participatory maps helped to uncover is that much of Nguti is occupied by one protected area or the other, leaving a meager portion of the sub-division for the use of the population.

Ewoh Prosper Mayarh, Chief of the Banyu clan, who participated very actively in developing the traditional land tenure and usage maps for his village, said whatever scanty portion of land that is left for the inhabitants is further reduced by harsh topography; rocky and hilly areas, wetlands, poor infrastructural development, an increasing population, indiscriminate sale of land due to poverty, ignorance of the local population of the value of land, ignorance of traditional land tenure laws and national laws, exploitation of natural resources by economic operators and overlapping land uses, among others.

The villagers, after open discussion, recommended, among others, the discontinuation of the creation of protected areas and agro industries; and some of their boundaries reevaluated.

As far as exploitation of natural resources is concerned, the villagers recommended that the local communities should be properly consulted before the creation of a concession or before exploitation begin. In addition, the communities should be informed early enough before consultation meetings and all internal and external elites as well as stakeholders to be involved. They also suggested that monitoring committees to follow up of agreed development projects should include locals.

To curb land disputes, the villagers recommended that proper studies be carried out at all levels (village, clan, sub-divisions...) on land boundaries, and all communities support the importance of handing down traditional knowledge of land boundaries to the younger generation.