

**A REPORT
ON TREE PLANTING IN THE OKU COMMUNITY FOREST
1st TO 13th JULY 2013**

**CAMEROON GENDER AND ENVIRONMENT WATCH
(CAMGEW)**



**Project title:
“Regeneration of the Oku Community Forest”**

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ABBREVIATIONS

CAMGEW – Cameroon Gender and Environment Watch

CBOs: Community Based Organizations

IUCN: International Union for the Conservation of Nature

MINEPIA – Ministry of Livestock Fisheries and Animal Industries

MINFOF – Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife

OCDA – Oku Cultural and Development Association

OHCS – Oku Honey Cooperative Society

OREP – Oku Reserve Protection

PPI-FFEM – Small-Scale Initiatives Program of Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial (FFEM)

SOPISDEW – the Society for the Promotion of Initiatives in Sustainable Development and Welfare

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Cameroon Gender and Environment Watch (CAMGEW) is a non profit created in October 2007 with authorisation number N° 000998/RDA/JO6/BAPP to work locally and think globally, integrating gender issues in solving environmental and social problems in Cameroon. CAMGEW believes that the future of our mother planet-earth is in our hands (men and women, young and old) and also that the planet can be sustained by putting social and environmental justice at the centre of development using a participatory approach. CAMGEW seeks to achieve her objectives by liaising with other likeminded organisations worldwide. She has resolved to function according to core values of honesty, engagement and dedication in total respect of its constitution. CAMGEW has as **vision** “Changing lives of women, children and communities while protecting the environment and as **mission** to fight poverty; promote sound environmental management, gender balance and economic sustainable development.

To execute this activity on forest regeneration in the Oku Community Forest at compartment III of Emfvu- Mii Forest Management Institution (FMI), CAMGEW got financial and technical support from Ministry of Forest and Wildlife (MINFOF)-Cameroon.

PRESENTATION OF PROJECT AREA

Oku is found in Bui Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. Oku has a population estimated at about 130,000 inhabitants. With a total surface area of about 800km² of which 300km² are covered by the forest. This gives the locality a population density of about 162 persons per km². The population is English speaking. Oku has the largest remaining Bamenda Highland Montane Forest with a large crater lake called Lake Oku. The Oku Community Forest is the first community forest in Cameroon. The forest has a unique ecosystem and is the largest remaining habitat for Bannermans turacco-a red feathered bird that is only found in the Bamenda Forest Highland Region and is classified by IUCN Redlist as endangered. Kilum Mountain with altitude 3011 m is the second highest mountain in Cameroon, Central and West Africa after Mount Cameroon. Honey from Oku Forest is white in colour and is commonly called Oku White Honey. It is cherished nationally. It is certified as a Geographical Indication Product. Oku has a rich culture. Carving is highly practiced in Oku. Oku is a touristic destination. The Kilum Mountain Forest is rich in Non Timber Forest Products such as herbs for medicine, rodents, wood for carving, bamboo which is used locally for construction and the Oku honey with its peculiarity of being white in color.

PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT

CAMGEW received a grant from the Ministry of Forest and Wildlife (MINFOF) to regenerate the Oku Community Forest in July 2013. This project had as one of its objectives to plant 3000 native forest trees of *Prunus africana* at the Oku Community Forest in compartment III of Emfvu-Mii Forest Management Institution (FMI). The choice of *Prunus* was made for forest regeneration because it is a native tree species of the Oku Community Forest, it is watershed friendly, it is bee loving, medicinal and income generating as it is used in pharmaceuticals to produce treatment for prostate cancer. The project's objectives were as follows:

- To promote the regeneration of the Oku Community Forest.
- To sensitize communities about environmental issues in the Oku community Forest

Given that the participation of forest community in forest management is part of forest governance, CAMGEW through this project engaged local people to participate in the regeneration activities. The participation of the community in tree planting was intended to make them avoid the destruction of the forest through bush fires, ownership of domestic animals like goats in the forest and the cutting of fresh trees for firewood. Environmental education was done during the tree planting activities and took place in schools, and on sites of regeneration, in communities and through Oku Community Radio. A participatory approach was used in the execution of this project. This involved MINFOF, MINEPIA, and the administrative and traditional authorities, media, various CBOs and the community.

TREE PLANTING

Introduction

Forest regeneration is an important activity with a global interest. The Oku Community Forest has a vital role to play in climate change mitigation. Considering that forest conservation is important for watershed protection, promotion of biodiversity, sustaining livelihoods, promotion of apiculture and fighting climate change, CAMGEW's action in regenerating the Oku Community forest with 3000 native trees is a step in this line to fight against climate change. CAMGEW involved all forest stakeholders, forest users and the media in the forest regeneration activities. CAMGEW from 2nd to 13th July 2013, carried out forest regeneration through tree planting in the Oku Community Forest. The activities involved planning meeting for tree planting exercise, identification of sites for tree planting, clearing of paths where trees will be planted, carrying of trees to the forest and tree planting. The area for the forest regenerated was at the Emfvu-Mii compartment III of the Oku Community Forest. A total of eleven days was taken to carry out the planting activity and a total of 3416 trees were planted.

TREE PLANTING METHODOLOGY

The planting exercise took place in July 2013. The activity started with a planning meeting attended by various forest stakeholders to plan for the tree planting. A field visit was made in Compartment III-Emfvu-Mii of the Oku Community Forest to identify the area to be regenerated. After the area was identified, community members started slashing the paths where trees were to be planted. Women were given the task of transporting tree seedlings to the forest for planting. The planting was done by men and some women. Seedlings were planted 5m apart. The plastic pots containing the seedlings were removed from the forest. The tree planting activity was accompanied by sensitization on the importance of the forest as work was done in the forest. Work started every day at 8 am and ended at about 3 pm. More than 120 persons took part in the planting exercise involving youths, women and men. CAMGEW received technical support from MINFOF-Oku.

TREE PLANTING ACTIVITIES

Planning meeting and site identification

On the 30th of June 2013, CAMGEW had a planning meeting with the forest stakeholders in Oku to plan for the tree planting exercise. On the 1st of July 2013, 4 staff members of CAMGEW and the Chief of Post of MINFOF-Oku went to the forest to identify the area for regeneration. It was decided that the area to be regenerated will be north of the Compartment III of the Emfvu-Mii Community Forest and South West of the regenerated area funded by the World Bank in August 2012. Planting paths in the forest were marked and intervals of 5metres were adopted as distance between the planted seedlings.



Tree planting planning meeting with community members

Slashing to create paths for planting

On the 2nd of July 2013, 12 experts in forest slashing started work in the forest to create paths where trees will be planted. They were accompanied by three facilitators. Two youths were chosen to place pecks on spots where trees will be planted in the cleared portions and count the number of pecks to determine the number of trees numbers needed to be planted. The following persons were chosen as facilitators: Baimenda Frankline and Shang Hippolite. They were chosen based on their experience in this exercise. The work was organized and work groups were created with each group having a total of four persons. The activity started every day at 8:00 am and ended at 3 pm. In the second day, the number of persons increased to 28. The slashing activity was carried out for a total of seven days. The slashing process ended on the 9th of July 2013 at about 3 pm with a total of 33 persons taking part in the activity. The total number of pecks numbered was 3460.

Transportation of seedlings to the forest and planting

It took two days to transport the seedlings of *prunus africana* to the forest and four days to plant. On the 10th of July 2013, women and youths were called to meet at the nursery to transport the tree seedlings to the forest following a radio announcement at Oku Community Radion. At 7:00 am, about 42 women

were ready with their baskets and buckets to carry the seedling to the forest. They received directives from the facilitators on how to place the trees along the cleared paths for planting. 5 women were chosen to supervise the carrying of the seedlings from the nursery. They were: Kinkoh Veronica, Mercy Meng, Bailack Nicoline, Ndansack Hilda and Secunda Yawah. Seedlings were bought and transported to the CAMGEW nursery site. The chosen women collected the seedlings and arranged in the buckets and baskets of women who did the transportation to the forest for planting. By the end of the day about 1800 trees seedlings were transported to the forest. The men in the forest planted 700 seedlings under the supervision of Kelese Eric and Ngum Raymond. The task ended at 3pm.

On the 12th of July 2013, transportation of the trees continued. At 7:00 am, everybody met at the nursery area and continued with their respective activities. At the end of the day, 1660 trees were transported to the forest. 1200 trees were planted in the forest this day. The activity ended at 3 pm.

At the end of the project, a total of 3416 tree seedlings were planted by CAMGEW in the Emfvu-Mii Compartment III of the Oku Community forest.



Men ready for clearing



Women transport seedlings to forest

1062 PLANTED SEEDLINGS DESTROYED BY GOATS IN THE FOREST

CAMGEW was shocked, after realizing that some of the 3416 seedlings of *Prunus* planted in the forest were being eaten by domestic goats kept by community members in the forest. CAMGEW did an evaluation of the damage together with the Chief of Forestry of MINFOF for Oku and discovered that about 1062 seedlings were totally eaten or destroyed by goats in the forest. CAMGEW together with MINFOF-Oku organized for the catching of these goats from the forest with the participation of

community members. 6 goats were caught and carried to the Oku Council. The owners of the goats went and collected their goats from the council. A radio programme was organized in this line for sensitization of community members to remove their goats from the forest. Some community members had to remove their goats from the area where tree planting was carried. CAMGEW had to replace the 1062 destroyed trees in the forest with the technical assistance of MINFOF-Oku. This was additional work and expenditure that was not previewed. CAMGEW covered this extra cost. All planted trees are doing well now.

OTHER ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT IN THE OKU COMMUNITY FOREST

CAMGEW got a grant from PPI-FFEM of IUCN French Committee in July 2013. This granted permitted CAMGEW to plant 6600 trees of *Prunus africana* in the Oku Community Forest in August 2013 instead of 6000 trees as agreed in project proposal. The funds also helped CAMGEW take care of the 7000 trees planted in August 2012 under the World Bank project. The trees planted under the PPI-FFEM project were not destroyed by goats. About 1112 trees planted under the World Bank project had died during the year. These death trees could have been destroyed by goats in the forest or must have died a naturally.

TREE PLANTING CROWNING CEREMONY

CAMGEW ended the forest generation activities for 2013 with a crowning ceremony on 28th August 2013. This ceremony was attended by the Divisional Officer for Oku Sub Division, MINFOF-Oku, the Local Authorities, Heads of services and CBO's in Oku, Oku Community Forest stakeholders, Traditional Authorities, the Oku Community Radio, and City Community Radio-Kumbo. The occasion started at 9:00 AM. By 9:30 AM speeches were made by the various forest stakeholders and the Divisional Officer.

The purpose of the crowning ceremony was

- to make known the work done by CAMGEW on forest regeneration to the community leaders and
- to sensitize the community members on the importance of conserving the forest for the benefit of the community.
- to make the community members know that the trees planted were threatened by goats living in the forest and that the owners needed to remove them.



Symbolic tree planting by Forest stakeholders in Oku

A welcome speech was made by CAMGEW Director, Wirsiy Emmanuel with much focus on the problems linked to the forest that needed to be solved especially stray goats in the forest that pose a threat to planted trees and forest regeneration. The forest stakeholders were given the opportunity to talk to the community as regards forest regeneration and conservation. Speeches came from the following: The Chief of post for Forestry, the representative of His Royal Highness -the Fon Oku who doubled as the president of OREP, the home branch President of OCDA, the Coordinator SOPISDEW and the Director of CAMGEW.

- The representative of the Fon of Oku, Shufai Ndifon Soom who doubled as the president of OREP called on the community to preserve the forest and reiterated the position of the forest in tradition and the need to conserve it for posterity. He said, there are traditional legal actions that will be implemented on forest defaulters because the tradition of Oku cannot accept the forest to disappear.
- The home based president of OCDA on behalf of the community called on all to understand that the people in Oku depend directly on the Oku Community forest. He also said, the forest has many resources that promote development in Oku. He said, the culture of Oku depended on the

forest. He called on all, to protect the forest. He said that the Oku people should know that though the forest is in Oku its services goes beyond Oku. He asked all persons keeping goats in the forest to remove them.

- The Chief of Forest Post (MINFOF) in Oku called on all the grazers to remove their goats from the forest. He said any goat found in the forest will be caught and the owner will pay for any damage caused by the animal. He also said there were still illegal exploiters of *Prunus africana* in Oku despite the ban passed by ministerial order in 2007. He called on the community members to be very vigilant. He said any person caught trafficking *Prunus* will answer in a court. He reiterated on the penalties for forest defaulters violating forest laws pointing out that imprisonment ranges from 6 months to 5 years and fines goes up to 5000000 FCFA.
- The Coordinator of SOPISDEW called on all the youths to be vigilant and report those destroying the forest. He called on youths to develop the spirit to be lovers of the forest in order to protect it for future generation. He called on every forest user to protect the trees planted.
- To crown the speeches, the Divisional Officer for Oku said that the law will prevail and that Cameroon is a state of law. He went further to say that any person found guilty of any offense was going to answer before a court of justice. He called on each and everyone in the Oku community to jealously preserve the forest. He thanked CAMGEW for her initiatives aimed at preserving and regenerating the Oku Community Forest.

The occasion ended with the symbolic planting of 4 *Prunus africana* tree seedlings by various stakeholders as follows:

- Divisional Officer for Oku accompanied by other stakeholders of the
- The Oku women;
- The youths of Oku;
- OCDA and The traditional authorities.

This was aimed at encouraging every community member to participate in forest regeneration and conservation. This symbolic planting exercise was facilitated technically by the Chief of Post for Forestry (MINFOF) -Oku and the Conservator of the Plant Life Sanctuary-Oku present in the forest to mark the end of the regenerating activities.

Journalists from Kumbo City Radio and Oku Community Radio covered the event. The occasion ended at 2:30 PM. This crowning ceremony marked the end of CAMGEW's 2013 tree planting season.

CHALLENGES

- The greatest challenge in the regeneration of the Oku Community forest is the presence of goats in the forest. These goats kept by community members in the forest have been destroying planted trees and other seedlings that are regenerating naturally. CAMGEW had to replant about 1062 seedlings that were eaten by these goats. About six goats were caught in the forest destroying planted trees. The goats were handed to the Oku Council and the owners of the goats came and collected them. This was additional cost incurred by CAMGEW.
- There is the cutting of fresh wood for firewood or for fencing of farms and gardens by forest users. This has disturbed the regeneration process and is a threat to the fate of trees planted by CAMGEW in 2012 and 2013 and the natural regeneration process of the forest.
- Bushfires still occur in the forest and this result from poor harvesting of honey and sometimes from smokers in the forest. This has been destroying the forest and affecting forest regeneration. Much sensitization is needed to solve this problem. Teaching bee farmers modern methods of bee farming like honey harvesting can solve this problem.
- There is over hunting in the Oku Community Forest. There are many traps in the forest that do not permit the survival of animals. Hunters are complaining of difficulties trapping animals. They say animals are rare to find and that with 100 traps you are not sure of 10 rats to be trapped. Rats play a big role in forest regeneration ranging from seed germination, seed dispersal, their acidic stomach process some seeds for germination, etc. the absence of rodents in the forest may have a disastrous effect in forest regeneration in Oku Community Forest.

SUCCESS

- The project was aimed at regenerating the forest with 3000 *Prunus africana* seedlings. CAMGEW ended up having 3460 trees planted in the forest.
- CAMGEW used a participatory approach in tree planting and CAMGEW has seen increase community solidarity. Community members after participating in tree planting have understood the importance of Oku Community forest and the need to protect it.
- After sensitization through the Oku community Radio concerning the presence of domestic animals in the forest and action taken to catch the goats in the forest, owners of goats in the Emfvu-Mii Compartment III of the forest have started removing their goats from.

CONCLUSION

The regeneration of the Oku Community Forest has been a reality in July 2013 with the planting of 3416 trees with MINFOF funding. The community participation was encouraging and many community members had the chance to enter the forest for the first time. This activity gave CAMGEW the opportunity to carryout field-based environmental education in the forest with community members involve in forest regeneration on sustainable forest management and use. Forest users took part in the tree planting and were sensitized on how to sustainably use the forest. The Oku community Radio and City Community Radio-Kumbo were used to reach out to the population on the need to protect the forest. The objective of forest regeneration was realized. The forest stakeholders were brought close together and they are realizing a need for a forest stakeholder platform. CAMGEW hopes to make the tree planting event an annual activity. CAMGEW plead that that MINFOF should give her more funds next year to continue with this forest regeneration process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- CAMGEW recommends that all goats found in the forest should be removed to permit the growth of planted trees and the natural regeneration of the forest. Goats eat up planted and natural seedlings of Prunus and other tree species and prevent the natural regeneration process of the forest. The absence of goats from the forest will allow young seedlings to grow and their survival rate will increase.
- CAMGEW recommends sanction to the owners of goats living in the forest. General patrols should be carried out regularly and goats found in the forest caught. The tradition is encouraged to get involved in the catching of goats and should be ready sanctions the owners of these goats. There is a zone of pasture at the top of the forest where they could keep their animals conveniently.
- CAMGEW see the need for a demarcation between the forest and the savannah (pasture) land at the top of the forest. This will prevent the movement of animals from the savannah land to the forest. The absence of animals from the forest will promote the regeneration process of the forest.
- CAMGEW recommend that tree planting in the Oku Community Forest should be made a yearly event. CAMGEW plead that MINFOF should continue supporting her in Oku Community Forest regeneration. This could be done with a 5 year convention signed between CAMGEW and MINFOF-Oku.