

8 Crises, Complexities and Claims in Protected Areas

Landscapes of (In) Coherent Biodiversity Governance and Social-Environmental Injustice in Southwest Cameroon

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8.1 Introduction

Many indicators converge on the fact that biodiversity is collapsing on a global scale and that the phenomenon is recently accelerating (Bradley et al., 2012; IPBES, 2019). Biodiversity is the guarantor of exceptional goods and services, preserving nature's capacity to provide food, raw materials and medicines, to protect human beings against natural hazards, to store carbon, to recycle waste, and to contribute to the quality of our living environment. The main drivers of biodiversity loss are now well-known, notably anthropogenic activities (Bradley et al., 2012). In relation with anthropogenic extinctions of biodiversity, it is well-established that international markets and financial liberalizations have increased the exposure of forests to global trade and investments, which have aggravated the historical trends of deforestation and biodiversity loss worldwide (Pacheco et al., 2012; Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013; Sist et al., 2014).

Faced with the above challenges that have been underestimated for too long, biodiversity conservation policies, strategies and actions have had disappointing results (Pyhälä et al., 2016; Ray et al., 2021). Indeed, conservation policies have lacked coherence, often focusing more on wildlife and/or plant species and ignoring complex social-ecological relations between ecosystems, local communities and the livelihoods of indigenous people as well as their related claims and rights (Springer et al., 2011; Proce et al., 2021). The countries of the Congo Basin (notably Cameroon) are not exempt from these global trends, because they are faced with both the accelerated disappearance of rich forest biodiversity and the conservation policies of colonial inspiration that are ineffective because they are not adapted to the subregional socioeconomic and ecological contexts (Megevand et al., 2013; Pyhälä et al., 2016).

The objective of this chapter is to examine how biodiversity conservation and related public policies and strategies have affected local social-ecological and -economic contexts. To this end, we apply a social and environmental justice lens and illustrate conservation and biodiversity outcomes with a situation analysis of the implementation of forest conservation policies and related community rights from the Southwest region of Cameroon. The following research questions guide the current analysis:

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What impacts have biodiversity conservation policies had over local communities' rights and livelihoods? Have the biodiversity conservation strategies and related public policies succeeded in meeting their stated conservation objectives?

8.2 Analytical framework

We apply an analytical framework that examines the multiple dimensions of environmental justice (Schreckenberg et al., 2016; Martin, 2017), emphasizing the connections between biodiversity conservation policies and social-environmental injustices as related to changes or displacement of local communities' rights and livelihoods. Studies have shown how the loss of rights and lack of recognition of local rights and claims can lead to widening inequalities, poverty and violent conflicts (Martin et al., 2016; Wegerif and Guereña, 2020). Indeed, Stedman-Edwards (1997) and Pascual et al. (2014) have shown that inequalities and inequities work against biodiversity conservation strategies. The minority wealthy who control the resources and enjoy the profits from their use impose the impacts of degradation and decline on those whose livelihoods and culture/identity depend on them (Minfede Koe, 2017; Stedman-Edwards, 1997; Wegerif and Guereña, 2020).

Finally, the concept of environmental justice, which refers to the issue of environmental equity within and outside social groups is also relevant for this analysis (Been, 1993; Kaswan, 1997; Teelucksingh, 2002). These authors also emphasize that the end of environmental justice is to harmonize contrasting social policies, and especially, to obtain equitable distribution of resources (see Figure 8.1 and Table 8.2).

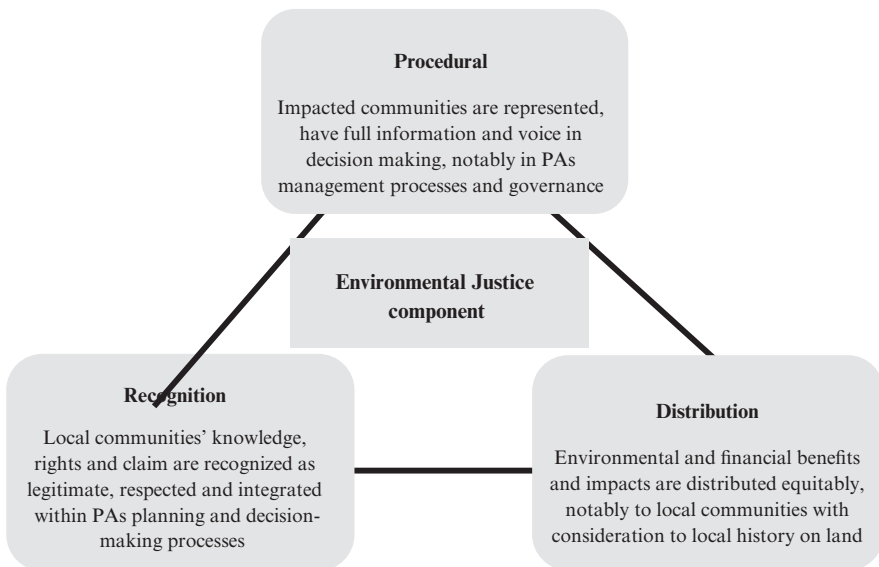


Figure 8.1 Three dimensions of environmental justice, as applied in our study of protected areas (*inspired by* Martin, 2017; Schreckenberg et al., 2016)¹

8.3 Methods used and Southwest landscape of Cameroon

Methods used

The collection of qualitative and quantitative data for this study took place between the end of 2016 and beginning of 2017 using the following approaches: i) review of international and national legal and policy materials on forest conservation and related local communities' rights; ii) literature review on rights-based approach (RBA) in conservation; iii) a field trip was conducted at grassroots levels, notably by organizing focus-group discussions in 12 villages and interviewing local leaders (village chief and elders) around the Mount Cameroon National Park and the Bakossi National Park; and iv) additional interviews were conducted with local conservation administration, biodiversity conservation NGOs and bilateral aid agencies such as WWF and GIZ staff, plus three experts from local associations.

In light of recent developments of conflict in the research site, notably the starting of armed conflict known as “Anglophone problem in Cameroon”, we carried out a review and analysis of recent literature to update our data for better understanding of the situation on the ground (International Crisis Group, 2020; Tabi et al., 2020; IBRD/WB, 2021). Following a situation analysis is incidentally to provide an understanding of how the struggle affects legal, economic and political conditions and their impacts on conservation and human rights.

Biodiversity and the land use plan of Southwest landscape of Cameroon

The region of our study is located in the Southwest coast of Cameroon. This region is covered by four landscapes: Bakossi, Banyang-Mbo, Korup-Oban, and Mount Cameroon, which include the four protected areas of Bakossi National Park, Banyang-Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary, Korup National Park and Mount Cameroon National Park respectively, totaling a surface area of 44, 500 km² (WWF, 2015). This gradation gives room to many microhabitats, explaining the high levels of species diversity, albeit in the context of many anthropogenic threats (WWF, 2015). Table 8.1 provides a summary of the main characteristics and threats to the four protected areas (PAs). In this vein, Asaha and Deakin (2016) underlined that the Southwest region of Cameroon has experienced several changes in land use over the last century and such a trend is continuing. Furthermore, other past studies in this region have shown that local communities' rights and related livelihoods issues were in a tricky situation including tribal displacements and attempted mechanisms to ensure resettlement (Schmidt-Soltau, 2003; Tiani and Diaw, 2006; Mbile, 2009; Burgin and Zama, 2014).

Socio-ecological complexity and livelihood production of Southwest landscape

Alongside the conservation areas are large-scale agro-industrial plantations, which constitute parts of German and British colonial legacies. There are two state owned agro-industrial plantations in this landscape: the Cameroon Development

Table 8.1 Main characteristics and threats of the four protected areas (WWF, 2015)

Protected areas	Date of creation	Areas (ha)	Key species	Threats
Mount Cameroon National Park	12 December 2009	58 154	Elephants (<i>Loxodonta cyclotis</i>), chimpanzees (<i>Pan troglodytes</i>), drills (<i>Mandrillus leucophaeus</i>), 330 birds' species etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poaching and unsustainable bush meat hunting; - Growth of extractive and agro-industries; - Large forest clearance and shifting cultivation; - Unsustainable exploitation of timber and non-timber forest products; - Climate change risk; - Poverty and threatened livelihoods; - Armed conflict
Korup National Park	30 October 1986	125 900	Okoune (<i>Coelocaryon preussii</i>), Black afara or framire (<i>Terminalia ivorensis</i>), Palm tree (<i>Elaeis guineensis</i>), Ilomba (<i>Pycnanthus angolensis</i>), Emien (<i>Alstonia boonei</i>), Mepepe (<i>Albizia zygia</i>), African rubber (<i>Funtumia africana</i>), Dabema (<i>Piptadeniastrum africanum</i>), and Evoula (<i>Vitex grandifolia</i>).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poaching and unsustainable bush meat hunting; - Growth of extractive and agro-industries; - Large forest clearance and shifting cultivation; - Unsustainable exploitation of timber and non-timber forest products; - Climate change risk; - Poverty and threatened livelihoods; - Armed conflict

<i>Protected areas</i>	<i>Date of creation</i>	<i>Areas (ha)</i>	<i>Key species</i>	<i>Threats</i>
Bakossi National Park	28 November 2007	29 320	Drill (<i>Mandrillus leucophaeus</i>), Chimpanzee (<i>Pan troglodytes</i>), Preuss's red colobus (<i>Ptilocolobus preussi</i>), Red-eared guenon (<i>Cercopithecus erythrotis</i>), Preuss's guenon (<i>Cercopithecus preussi</i>), Putty-nosed monkey (<i>Cercopithecus nictitans</i>), Mona monkey (<i>Cercopithecus mona</i>) and mammals like Blue duikers (<i>Philantomba monticola</i>), Red river hog (<i>Poranomoerus porcus</i>), Red-fronted duiker (<i>Cephalophus rufiflatus</i>), Black-fronted duikers (<i>Cephalophus nigrifrons</i>), Sitatunga (<i>Tragelaphus spekii</i>), and Long tail pangolin (<i>Manis manis</i>).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poaching and unsustainable bush meat hunting; - Growth of extractive and agro-industries; - Large forest clearance and shifting cultivation; - Unsustainable exploitation of timber and non-timber forest products; - Climate change risk; - Poverty and threatened livelihoods; - Armed conflict
Banyang-Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary	12 March 1996	64 220	Elephants, Chimpanzee (<i>Pan troglodytes vellerosus</i>), Drill (<i>Mandrillus leucophaeus</i>), and Guenons (<i>Cercopithecus</i> spp.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poaching & unsustainable bush meat hunting; • Growth of extractive & agro-industries; • Large forest clearance & shifting cultivation; • Unsustainable exploitation of timber and non-timber forest products; • Climate change risk; • Poverty and threatened livelihoods; - Armed conflict

Corporation (CDC), which produces bananas, palm oil, tea and rubber in a total area of 42 256 ha; and Pamol Plantations, which produces palm oil and rubber in a total area of 11 449 ha. The annexation of Cameroon territory by the Germans induced the development of large-scale plantations by German firms before the First World War (Courade, 1977; Nkongho et al., 2015). After the defeat of the Germans by the British and the French troops in 1916, the industrialization of these plantations began with the creation of Pamol plantations in 1928 and the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) in 1947/48 (Meek, 1957).

There are various local communities living within and around the four protected areas. According to Schmidt-Soltau and Boya Meboka (2004), 15 per cent of the estimated 1.5 million inhabitants of the whole Southwest region are directly affected by the land use planned process and related conservation programmes of the four protected areas: i) Korup National Park (with 32 villages) contains eight major ethnic groups among which are: Oroko, Korup, Ejagham, Balong, Bakossi, Upper Bayang, Mbo and Nigerian (MINFOF, 2008); ii) The Mount Cameroon National Park contains three main ethnic groups: Bakweri, Mboko, Balong as well as many immigrants; iii) Bakossi National Park and Banyang-Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary (29 villages) are mainly composed of Bakossi, Mbo, Bakaka and Balong peoples. All the above local communities or primary stakeholders depend heavily on forest resources and agriculture activities for sustaining their livelihoods. Indeed, the main land use is agriculture, consisting of shifting cultivation ('slash-and-burn') for primary subsistence purposes, vegetables gardening to supplement subsistence crops (cassava, plantains, bananas, cocoyam's) and perennial cash crops such as cocoa, coffee and oil palm (Nana and Ngameni, 2014; Asaha and Deakin, 2016). Many studies have suggested that encroachment of protected areas is due to population increase and growing activities such as illegal hunting and farming (Ebua et al., 2011; Nana and Ngameni, 2014). However, what has been less examined is how the land use plan of protected area boundaries and displacement by both biodiversity conservation and commodity production have affected local communities land rights, availability and access rights, which might be underlying causes of "encroachment" (Schmidt-Soltau, 2003; Tiani and Diaw, 2006). Over 38 per cent of the total surface area in the Southwest region is under cultivation (MINADER, 2013). In addition, the harvesting of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and informal logging have reached unsustainable levels that largely threaten and decimate wildlife populations (Ebua et al., 2011; Bobo et al., 2014). A survey report (Rainforest Foundation, 2016) shows that in the case of Nguti council, 70 per cent of the total populations are farmers; 20 per cent are hunters; five per cent are fishermen and the remaining five per cent conduct other activities. In other words, the livelihood activities of the local communities are also contributing to deforestation and biodiversity decrease.

Since colonial times, the current status of protected areas in the Southwest region of Cameroon is ultimately a consequence of extensive habitat loss, incurred primarily through wide-scale clear-cutting activities to replace forests with agro-industrial commodities, including cocoa, oil palm, banana, rubber, tea, and coffee (Morgan et al., 2011). These developments, in turn, have spurred loss of land,

displacements and movements of growing populations and immigrants into forest areas as well as higher population densities around the main cities (Kumba, Buea, Limbe, Mamfe, etc.). Meanwhile, evidence is clear that the current rate of bushmeat hunting, exacerbated by informal and industrial logging operations, agro-industries activities and building of infrastructure that open access into previously difficult to reach areas, are unsustainable for many taxa (Morgan et al., 2011; Bobo et al., 2014). Hunting and illegal transboundary trade (with Nigeria) in species like the African elephants and gorillas has precipitated marked declines in their populations across the Southwest region of Cameroon (Morgan et al., 2011; Forsac-Tata et al., 2015).

In terms of development indicators in the region, the decline in poverty was quite noticeable between 2001 and 2007, with the poverty rate having fallen from 33.8 per cent at 27.5 per cent (NIS, 2010). This trend could be observed in both urban and rural areas. However, since 2017, there has been armed conflict between the national government and separatists from the English-speaking minority that has killed over 4,000 people and displaced 765,000 of whom 60,000 are refugees in Nigeria (International Crisis Group, 2020). Such a violent situation has negatively impacted on the livelihood portfolios of local communities as well as on biodiversity.

8.4 Results

In the results section, we first present an evolution of the history of conservation policies at the levels of Central Africa with emphasis on Cameroon; outline their different policy objectives and priorities, and consequences on the rights of local populations. Next, we present how local communities have perceived their rights and then document how this has impacted local livelihoods. Finally, we present the changing socio-political situation due to the recent conflict in the English-speaking region of the country.

From the subregional to national conservation policies

The origins of regional collaboration on conservation activities and policy dialogue in the Congo Basin can be traced back to the late 1990s. In 1999, spurred by WWF, Central African heads of states held the first regional summit on forest conservation, which resulted in the Yaoundé Declaration that consists of 12 commitments on forest conservation and sustainable forest management. This framework was later operationalized through the 2005 Brazzaville Treaty that established the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) and the adoption and implementation of its first “Convergence Plan”. With support from the European Union, the Network of Protected Areas in Central Africa, known in French as *Réseau des Aires Protégées d’Afrique Centrale* (RAPAC) was created in 2000 and is mostly dedicated to the protected areas (PAs) components of the plan.

However, it should be underlined that conservation policies on biological species and on environmental protection were already known in Africa since the end

of the 19th century. The Convention for the Protection of Fauna and Flora in Africa, held in London at the end of 1933, confirms this interest with more manifestations on the conservation of nature under the Yellowstone- and Yosemite-inspired exclusionary model (Diaw, 2010). In this perspective, many forest reserves were set up in parallel between the 1930s and late 1970s in Cameroon (Gartlan, 1989). All these forest reserves aimed to maintain their capacities for wood production in the face of possible over-exploitation. Therefore, these reserves do not benefit from a very strong conservation status and can be fully subjected to exploitation. As for wildlife reserves, some have kept a very high potential for biodiversity conservation and subsequently changed their missions to become “conservation areas”.

From 2000 to 2010, the strengthening of subregional dynamics was put in place, especially from a functional and/or institutional point of view. For instance, regional cooperation adopted a consultation institution like the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP). In this vein, bilateral and multiparty treaties and agreements were signed in order to improve the effectiveness of conservation policies and, in particular, the management of protected areas. This was the case for cross-border areas such as *Trinational de la Sangha* between Cameroon, Central Africa Republic and Republic of Congo; TRIDOM between Cameroon, Gabon and Republic of Congo, BSB Yamoussa between Cameroon, Chad and Central Africa Republic. Being put in place are protected areas networks embodying the rich biodiversity in each country and the dynamic collaboration between member states. These efforts aimed at strengthening the management efficiency of biodiversity and fighting against poaching that has become more and more transboundary. Despite all these improvements, the networks of protected areas are strongly subjected to ever-increasing pressures, whether it is hunting pressure – including large mammalian poaching for ivory – or more recent and intensifying pressures such as mining projects or oil industry explorations, or even the development of large infrastructure such as dams or major highways (Pyhälä et al., 2016). To reduce the negative impacts, Central African States have put in place some tools of legal and procedural instruments such as environmental impact studies. However, macroeconomic and employment policies based on the exploitation of natural resources are institutionalized in those countries, which are in conflict/competition with land use plans for the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable development policies (Pyhälä et al., 2016). In such a context, protected areas are increasingly faced with strong drivers of deforestation and biodiversity loss.

As pointed out by Mayen Ndiong et al., (2021: 67), within the different Central African countries, each country has its own unique laws governing forest resources and conservation of biodiversity. Governance systems are very fragmented and not transparent because of differing efforts to integrate all stakeholders in decision-making. Local populations are often still remaining in the margin of protected areas governance. In this vein, despite some recent improvements by some governments in Central Africa, the dominant protected areas governance model is still in the hands of state institutions with weak real

involvement of private partners, local communities and indigenous people (Joiris and Bigombé, 2008; Pyhälä et al., 2016; Scholte et al., 2021). Such a trend on poor governance of protected areas is similar to the one observed in the Southwest region of Cameroon. Indeed, Cameroon has signed and ratified most of the major international instruments (except ILO Convention 169) that promoted human rights in the environmental-related sectors. In this connection, one of the most illustrative examples of Cameroon's regional commitments is the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which states that "*all people shall have the right to a general satisfactory environment favorable to their development*".² Other human rights on environmental commitments have been undertaken by Cameroonian authorities in the framework of COMIFAC.³ In 2010, the Council of Ministers of the COMIFAC adopted the Sub-regional Guidelines on the Participation of Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples and NGOs in forest conservation and sustainable management in Central Africa. A review of this subregional soft-law instrument highlights a genuine commitment by states to consolidate the benefits and emerging rights that can really improve the wellbeing and livelihoods of local communities and indigenous peoples in connection to forest resources conservation (Assembe-Mvondo, 2013). From this perspective, it is possible to make the following distinctions among the rights mentioned in the guidelines:

- Consolidated rights, which refer to those rights that are already mentioned in the current forest legislation, Post-Rio Conference, the contents of which the COMIFAC Guidelines appear to only improve upon or re-emphasize;
- Re-established rights, those rights that were removed/banned by many statutory legislations after the independence of Central African countries (like Cameroon) despite their resilience in the form of de facto practices (COMIFAC guidelines have explicitly mentioned and provided them with substance);
- Emerging rights, those rights derived from the newly established mechanisms, which have not yet been implemented (for example, REDD+ rights, FLEGT/VPA, FPIC).

Cameroon 1994 Forest Law recognizes the existence and use of traditional forest rights (through community forests and user rights), which are the rights that people traditionally living near or within forest areas may exercise with a view to satisfying their needs for forest products. These rights are freely accessible, as long as the beneficiaries maintain geographic proximity to forest, harm no protected species, and remove forest products only to meet their personal or collective and strictly non-commercial needs. However, the forest law stipulates that these rights may be restricted or even entirely revoked if they become incompatible with sustainable forest management and conservation. Another step forward by the reform is the participation of the population in the conservation and management of the forest. Such a participatory establishment was translated in protected areas through various measures taken: i) Economic operators in leasing hunting zones are obliged to respect the specifications on social projects to be carried out for the benefit of surrounding communities; ii) In addition to such social projects,

communities benefit 50 percent of lease taxes which are annual and per hectare, and share on a pro-rata basis of 40 percent to the councils and 10 percent to communities. Cameroon also instituted rules that allow for consultation of local communities both at the level of creation, demarcation and management of protected areas.

Situation of local communities' rights and claims in the Southwest landscapes

According to Ndi and Batterbury (2017), there is evidence for claims that land acquisition by dominant stakeholders (state, conservation administration, agro-industrial plantations and other stakeholders) are threatening local communities' livelihoods and cultural norms in the Southwest region of Cameroon. During our field visits, a total of seven categories of rights were identified and documented with village communities surrounding the national parks that are being affected by conservation actions in the landscapes of the Southwest of Cameroon. These included:

- Rights linked to tenure security such as rights of ownership of ancestral forest land in PAs;
- Rights linked to participation in decision making such as rights to participate in the Programme for Sustainable Management of Natural Resource (PSMNR) activities;
- Rights linked to law enforcement such as rights to hunt or fish within and around PAs;
- Rights linked to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) such as community consultation and agreement;
- Rights linked to cultural and bio-cultural diversity such as rights to use PA for cultural purposes;
- Rights linked to sustainable development and benefit sharing such as rights for communities to receive an agreed proportion of ecotourism fees;
- Rights linked to displacement and restriction to resources access (harvesting timber and NTFPs for own use/construction or sale).

Overall, rights linked to tenure security in terms of owning ancestral forestland in PAs are not recognized by the Cameroonian Laws while those linked to participation in decision-making are recognized by the 1996 Law on Environmental Management. The latter rights are partially respected in the light of consultation of local communities and their involvement in co-management activities. Rights linked to law enforcement have direct connections with poaching activities of local communities and are recognized by the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Law. Such rights are partially respected outside the PAs and agro-forests, which allow hunters to hunt Class C animals for own consumption, as well as permit men, women and children in local communities to harvest NTFPs and fish in regulated ways in PAs and around cocoa farms. Rights linked to displacement and restriction to resources access are recognized by the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Law but are not respected in the PAs. However, around the villages, rights to harvest timber trees in PAs for

own construction purposes are possible with controls and regulation by the public forest and conservation administrations in place. Rights linked to FPIC are not recognized by the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Law and drafted texts are subjected to future approval by the competent government services. Rights linked to cultural and bio-cultural diversity are recognized by the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Law and are being respected in the cases of Nyalle I & II, Menyom, Muahunzum villages to use PAs for cultural purposes. Rights linked to sustainable development and benefit sharing are recognized by the 1994 Forest Law with fulfillment associated with the respect to communities receiving certain proportions of ecotourism fees and proceeds from the commercialization of *Prunus africana* from the PAs.

For each right/claim, further discussions were made with local communities and representatives on whether it was being recognized, respected and/or fulfilled by conservation actors. Among these rights, two (Rights of ownership to ancestral forest land in PAs and Rights linked to FPIC) are not recognized by the available conservation laws while the remaining five are recognized. In terms of the respect of rights, three are not respected and four are partially respected or subject to some level of regulations by the conservation actors. When it comes to the fulfillment of rights, two are not fulfilled while two are fulfilled but the remaining three are only partially fulfilled (Table 8.2).

Update of our analysis relative to armed conflict in the Southwest of Cameroon

Southwest region is one of the two regions of the English-speaking part of Cameroon that is currently facing a civil conflict. The root of the “Anglophone problem” in Cameroon may be traced back to 1961, when the political elites of two territories with different colonial legacies – one French and the other British – agreed on the formation of a federal state (Ngongo, 1987). Contrary to expectations, this did not provide for the equal partnership of both parties, let alone for the preservation of the colonial legacy and identity of each, but turned out to be merely a transitory phase to integration of the English-speaking region (legacy of British indirect rule system) into a strongly *Jacobinist* (legacy of French colonial administration) unitary state (Kaushal, 2020; IPSS, 2020).

Gradually, this created an Anglophone awareness: the feeling of being marginalized by the Francophone-dominated State. In the wake of political liberalization in the early 1990s, Anglophone interests came to be represented first and foremost by various associations and pressure groups that initially demanded a return to the federal State (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2000). It was only after the persistent refusal of the central government to discuss this scenario that secession became an overt option with mounting popularity. The government’s determination to defend the unitary state by all available means, including repression, could have led to an escalation of Anglophone demands past a point of no return. Such a violent situation has negatively worsened the livelihoods opportunities for local communities in the affected regions characterized by: loss of life and growing humanitarian consequences; physical damage to assets; negative impacts on human development outcomes and related economic activities (IBRD/WB, 2021).

Table 8.2 Summary on rights being recognized, respected and/or fulfilled by protected areas management in the Southwest of Cameroon – and the related social-environmental injustices

<i>List of rights</i>	<i>Legal Recognition</i>	<i>Respected</i>	<i>Fulfilled</i>	<i>Injustice</i>
Rights linked to tenure security in PAs	Not recognized by the Cameroonian Laws to own ancestral forestland in PAs	Not respected in terms of ownership of ancestral forestland in PA	Not fulfilled	Distributional
Rights linked to participation in decision-marking	Recognized by the 1996 Law on Environmental Management	Partially respected with consultation of local communities and their involvement in co-management activities. But, not involved in decision-making process and planning	Partially fulfilled	Procedural
Rights linked to law enforcement	Recognized by the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Law	Partially respected outside the PA and agro-forest areas to hunt Class C animals for own consumption, respected to harvest NTFPs and fish but regulated in PAs	Partially fulfilled around cocoa farms	Procedural Distributional
Rights linked to displacement and restriction to resources access	Recognized by the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Law	Not respected in the PA, but around the village such as rights to harvest timber trees in the PA for own construction purposes	Partially fulfilled	Distributional Recognition
Rights linked to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)	Not recognized by the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Law	Not respected	Not fulfilled	Procedural Recognition
Rights linked to cultural and bio-cultural diversity	Recognized by the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Law	Respected in the cases of Nyalle I & II, Menyom, Maunzum villages to use PAs for cultural purposes	Fulfilled	Recognition
Rights linked to sustainable development and benefit sharing	Recognized by the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Law	Respected for communities to receive an agreed proportion of ecotourism fees and commercialization of <i>Prunus africana</i>	Fulfilled	Distributional

Source: Assembe-Mvondo and Tieguhong (2016).

As far as biodiversity resources are concerned, Tabi et al. (2020) revealed that in the absence of forest law enforcement and related technical administrations *apparatus*, many displaced persons find refuge inside forests and subsequently cut down trees and other forest resources for temporal construction, food and hunt wildlife species, notably great apes, elephants and pangolin.

8.5 Discussion

It is clear in this case that the multilevel biodiversity conservation governance in force in the Congo Basin in general, and especially in Cameroon, are overlapping and in conflict with other sectoral policies in relation to the macro-economic vision of the country (Megevand et al., 2013; IPBES, 2019). Therefore, this conflicting cohabitation between protected areas and the development of agro-industrial plantations generates two main negative impacts in terms of land use conflicts (Oyono et al., 2014). First, the loss of the rich forest biodiversity in the area is now inevitably accelerating despite the conservation strategies put in place by government authorities with the support of international cooperation (Schmidt-Soltau and Boya Meboka, 2004; Pyhälä et al., 2016). This is a main reason for many observers to rightly conclude on the failure of biodiversity governance in the Congo Basin (Pyhälä et al., 2016; Mayen Ndiong et al., 2021). In this sense, both direct and indirect drivers of deforestation interplay in the Southwest landscape. Second, since the colonial periods, the rights of local communities are still restricted by both operational strategies for biodiversity conservation and those connected to the development of agro-industrial plantations (Kofele-Kale, 2007; Njoh, 2013). These facts constitute the first dimension of the crisis of biodiversity policies in Cameroon and Central Africa at large.

In this case, the restrictions on various rights (notably land and forest access) of local communities prevent local actors from enjoying the various socio-economic opportunities in terms of the expansion of agricultural sector as well as the development of NTFPs value chains, thus contributing to the situation of increasing poverty and inequalities between rural and urban populations (NIS, 2010; Nana et al., 2014; Asaha and Deakin, 2016). Indeed, restricting and in some cases dispossessing local communities of their customary lands, have significantly affected livelihoods, because these communities lose part of their main source of income. Such a situation has caused frustration among the villagers, especially due to the low compensatory and mitigation socioeconomic measures. Therefore, the current army conflict between separatists and Cameroonian army is an aggravating and accelerating circumstance of the phenomenon of rural poverty in this fragile region as confirmed by the assessment made by the World Bank (IBRD/WB, 2021: 35):

In rural areas, where populations depend on agricultural production, livelihoods have been severely disrupted as insecurity, lockdowns, and ghost town days prevent households from gaining access to fields, purchasing farm inputs,

or selling crops. Farmers have been forced to flee the conflict, and to either hide in remote bush areas, where they have little or no access to food and basic services, or to relocate to safer urban and semi-urban areas.

In fact, according to Stedman-Edwards (1997), the worst situations of wellbeing can induce biodiversity loss and degradation. Furthermore, the over-exploitation of wildlife and vegetation in conflict zones exacerbates existing constraints to accessibility and availability, threatening both the resource base and the livelihoods of local communities dependent on them (Dudley, 2002). There is evidence that with armed conflict, the increase in the human population and activity in and around the protected areas, corruption, and weak implementation of existing regulations all present challenges and point to the need for broader and more effective conservation measures (Tabi et al., 2020). Therefore, the conservation landscapes of the Southwest of Cameroon cannot logically escape many dimensions of biodiversity conservation strategies in crisis.

As already mentioned, the concept of environmental justice includes both distributive and procedural components (Been, 1993; Kaswan, 1997). In the case of the protected areas in the Southwest of Cameroon, many underlined restrictions on the enjoyment of rights devolved to local communities rather stem from a situation of perpetuation of environmental injustice (Assembe-Mvondo, 2006). Such injustice began during the German colonial period (1884–1914) with agro-industrial plantations, passing through British trustee 1918–1961 (Meek, 1957; Ngongo, 1987; Kofele-Kale, 2007), and the advent of an independent Cameroon sovereign state did not put an end to this unfair land use planning (Ndi and Batterbury, 2017). The local populations as victims (notably Bakweri ethnic group) of violent eviction on their ancestral lands recognized as fertile, have never been compensated by both colonial and postcolonial administrations (Assembe-Mvondo et al., 2022). Hence the situation of socio-environmental injustice that persists there, thus crystalizing the frustrations and resentments from generation to generation against state authorities and related conservation symbols. On the contrary, socio-political and environmental injustices remain alive; compounded by the ongoing armed rebellion of the local political elite and populations against the *Jacobinist* inspired central state (Kaushal, 2020), thus, culminating in an induced biodiversity conservation crisis.

One of the main lessons of this case study is that Cameroon's triple colonial heritage (German, French and British) continues to permeate the postcolonial policies in force in this country (Njoh and Akiwumi, 2012; Momo Lekane and Asuelime, 2017). Of course, the French political and administrative philosophy and principles tends to be dominant. Indeed, the state, its main institutions and sectoral policies (especially conservation and land policies) largely reproduce the colonial legacies of the former colonial masters. Therefore, Cameroonian politico-institutional landscape seems to resist a wind of transformation: *institution stickiness* (Brockhaus and Angelsen, 2012). This fact demonstrates once again a weakness of political delay and policy design on the part of the Cameroonian authorities and elites.

8.6 Conclusion

At the end of this chapter, it becomes clear that the policies and strategies for the conservation of biodiversity in Cameroon and the Congo Basin at large are in the midst of a crisis. This is because of the dichotomy between making it possible to secure biodiversity as well as ensuring that local communities gain their rights and claims to resources that are important for their livelihoods. Indeed, the situation in the Southwest landscape of Cameroon is found wanting and is compounded by the civil war that has raged in the region since 2016, leading to aggravating circumstances of socio-environmental injustices and impoverishment of rural communities.

Therefore, contrary to this conservation model that induces socio-environmental injustices, Martin et al. (2016) advocate an alternative and fair model of conservation that requires the integration of local people's knowledge and cultures. Such an alternative biodiversity conservation model built on the foundations of environmental justice is likely to have positive effects both for the security and sustainability of biodiversity resources and the improvement of the enjoyment of rights and claims by local communities.

Notes

- 1 This figure was inspired from definitions (texts) by the two following works:
 Martin, A. 2017. *Just Conservation: Biodiversity, Wellbeing and Sustainability*. Routledge: London.
 Schreckenberg, K., Franks, P., Martin, A., & Lang, B. 2016. Unpacking equity for protected area conservation. *Parks*, 22 (2), 11–26. <https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2016.PARKS-22-2KS.en>
- 2 See the provisions of Article 24.
- 3 Central Africa Forests Commission (COMIFAC, French Acronym) Member States: Burundi, Cameroon Central Africa Republic (CAR), Chad, Congo (Republic), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe.

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