Welcome to the first issue of Dryad News, where we aim to share updates on our ongoing project titled Financing Sustainable Community Forest Enterprises in Cameroon. In short, the project is dubbed dryad, which is not an acronym but a term derived from Greek mythology referring to a wood/forest nymph.

The supportive legal policy framework in Cameroon has enabled the creation of hundreds of new community forests with the promise to promote participation of communities in significant decisions on how the forest is used or managed. However, their potential to improve livelihoods, contribute to the economy while enhancing proper forest management has not been realized due to lack of financial and technical capacity. Dryad is a public financing system based on performance that will fill this gap by providing capital and investment options to selected Community Forest Enterprises (CFEs).

The purpose and action of this five year project is to provide financial support to develop businesses that generate financial profit by using the natural resources of the forest in an economically and environmentally sustainable way. Once implemented successfully, the model can be scaled out at a regional level to benefit the entire Congo basin.

Dryad further contributes directly and indirectly to a number of Sustainable Development Goals. These include the goals to reduce poverty, sustainable forest management, promote inclusiveness, economic growth, employment for all; and action to combat climate change.

This maiden issue of Dryad News introduces the concept, provides highlights of preliminary work underway, explains and lends voice to some of the actors and stakeholders.

Zacharie Tchoundjeu
Regional Coordinator - World Agroforestry Centre, West and Central Africa

**Dryad: The Concept**

It is common for communities in different cultures to view forests and forest species as sacred. Dryad is a word derived from Greek mythology referring to a divinity presiding over forests, and aptly describes our efforts to conserve forests and improve livelihoods through a public performance based system of financing sustainable Community Forest Enterprises (CFEs) in Cameroon.

Despite 20 years of Community forestry in Cameroon and Cameroonian CFEs having a legal status, they have been unable to access the financial and technical support to develop. Dryad is a five year initiative that aims to fill this gap by providing better access to finance and technical support so forest communities can establish viable and sustainable enterprises around forest products and services for their benefit. The project will provide public finance, training and technical assistance to selected CFEs via a network of locally based Implementing Organizations (IOs) that include Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and research institutions.

The initiative is funded by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), and conceptualized by the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) and TMP systems, creators of the Dryad concept. It is a highly decentralized system in which locally based organizations (IOs) implement the project by identifying, recruiting, assisting and monitoring CFEs performance.

Dryad provides financial support through a payment-for-performance basis where ‘performance’ is defined through a set of indicators showing environmental, social and economic outcomes. Environmental indicators are checked with an emphasis on measuring deforestation. Social and economic indicators ensure that dryad is helping each community achieve their own particular goals. To monitor CFE performance, a Field Monitoring System (FMS) developed by TMP Systems is deployed. This system will enable the CFEs to upload associated data that can be viewed and analyzed real time by the implementing agencies.

The ultimate goal is for Dryad to enhance well-established and sustainable CFEs in Cameroon with viable business cases that use forest resources sustainably, enhance livelihoods and promote social improvements for local communities. The aim is to impact on about 30 community forest enterprises and to cover a maximum of 150,000 ha of forestland in Cameroon over the next five years.
Dryad Project was Successfully Launched in December 2015

The official launch of the project was held on December 10, 2015 in Yaoundé under the auspices of Cameroon’s Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife and the British High Commission in Cameroon. Community representatives, as well as national and international partners attended the event. The aim of the official launch was to formally present the project to the Government of Cameroon and enable a discussions with Government staffs from the centralized and decentralized services on ideas for project implementation. Speaking on behalf of the Minister, the Secretary General in the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, Mr. Koulagna Denis Koutou appraised the Dryad project as being unique in the way it has been conceived and designed as well as the framework put in place for its implementation. “Twenty years ago, it was thanks to the support from DFID that we launched the community forestry programme for which we are leaders today in the region,” he said, acknowledging continued support by DFID. The launching ceremony was followed by an Inception workshop held in Yaoundé on December 11, 2015 for selected implementing organizations (IOs) in order to develop a common understanding about Dryad.

Local Organizations are at the Forefront of Implementation

Through a diligent, rigorous and transparent process, four Implementing Organizations (IOs) who are going to provide the necessary technical support to the Community Forests have been selected at the moment. IOs are local intermediaries who are strategically positioned to reach the CFEs and capture the local complexity in which the Dryad investments are happening. These IOs will deliver field support which includes identification, training and technical assistance to CFEs; management of agreements, verification of data collected through FMS and maintenance of equipment.

The IOs are identified and described below:

**Centre d’Appui aux FEmmes et aux Ruraux (CAFER)**

CAFER is a Cameroonian non-profit organization (NGO) established in 2013 and existing as an association since 1995. Its mission is to fight against poverty by supporting women and marginalized/vulnerable populations in urban and rural areas through the development of entrepreneurship, promotion of participatory development, participatory and sustainable management of natural resources and preservation of the environment. CAFER is also engaged in assisting local officials to develop REDD+ pilot projects in their communal forests. CAFER is the focal point of African Women Network for Sustainable Development (REFADD-Cam).

**CAMEROUN ECOLOGIE (CAM-ECO)**

CAM-ECO is a Cameroonian non-profit organization (NGO) established in September 2000 which aims at supporting local communities in the community forest processes and in the development and implementation of their development plans; promoting sustainable management of natural resources and good forest governance; advocating for secure land tenure and community forest; and enhancing the development of local economic initiatives.

**The Environment and Rural Development Foundation (ERuDeF)**

ERuDef is a Cameroonian non-profit conservation organization founded in 1999. ERuDef seeks to conserve wildlife and protect fragile environments in Africa. Its core programmes include biodiversity conservation, sustainable forestry management, education for sustainable development, agroforestry and agricultural development, women and gender, corporate communication, livelihoods and economic development as well as its ERuDef Institute of Biodiversity and Non-profit Studies.

**Cooperative Agroforestière de la Trinationale (CAFT)**

CAFT was established in 2001 in Ngoyla District in Cameroon. The organization controls and currently manages 75,000 hectares of community forest with about twenty member associations. About 55 species are exploited economically with a total volume of timber estimated at about 935,130 cubic meters. The priority interventions of CAFT are the introduction of new technologies and techniques in production systems and agroforestry protection through CFEs; creation of supply centers; collection, processing, packaging and marketing of agricultural and forest products (wood and non-wood); research of niche markets; and technical support for the transparent management and traceability of investments and benefit distribution to the members of the cooperative.
Work has begun with Community Forest Enterprises (CFEs)

The project has initiated CFE level implementation activities on the ground. CAMEROUN ECOLOGIE (CAM-ECO) and Centre d’Appui aux Femmes et aux Ruraux (CAFER) have initiated their engagement process with Community Forests in their regions. They have been working for four months identifying and scoping for potential CFEs whereby candidates produce a teaser, which is the initial stage of presenting the business plan for assessment by ICRAF.

These activities were mainly in the Littoral, South and Centre Regions involving 7 Divisions (Departments) and 20 Sub-Divisions. More than 72 community forests were engaged by CAFER and CAM-ECO in this last quarter and 95 letters and project brochures were distributed to various community forests and community forest partners in these parts of country. The CFEs had interesting enterprise ideas that include: timber exploitation, production of pellets for grills from wood residues, non-timber forest product development, and agricultural activities such as plantain production.

Field Monitoring System

Dryad’s payment for performance approach will only be possible if we can receive reliable monthly information on how the CFE is performing. Each CFE will be responsible for collecting and reporting this data – under the supervision of the Implementing Organization – using the Field Monitoring System (FMS).

Each distributed FMS kit combines a smart device to conduct surveys, an independent renewable power source and batteries, and communications equipment to transmit collected data back to Dryad’s database. The FMS collect social, economic and environmental information. These will be operated by staff of the CFE, who will be specially trained both to understand good data collection techniques and to use the FMS technology.

At the back-end, Dryad’s FMS comprises a database and reporting interface, which allows stakeholders – such as Dryad’s Advisory Board, Implementing Organizations and the CFEs themselves – to see frequently updated information on the progress that is being made.

Stakeholders Speak!

Brian Olley,
British High Commissioner to Cameroon

“We have a window of opportunity to work in a more sustainable way, providing community forest resources for development of local communities. The Dryad project is an innovative and exciting new way of working with local communities to achieve more sustainable outcomes for developing economies in forest areas. The British High Commission is pleased to support this ambitious project to help Cameroonians develop their businesses based on sustainable use of forest resources.

A healthy economy is fundamental to a stable and thriving society. It is vital that we find ways of increasing employment opportunities throughout Africa, including in Cameroon, in order to fight extremism, improve health and work towards a fairer, more just society. It is important that young people believe in the opportunities they have to achieve their life goals, and have the skills and education they need to realise their ambitions.

The Dryad project has the potential to help deliver this and we are proud to be supporting the Dryad team in Cameroon with over 4.5 billion CFA of British money. Dryad is unique in targeting three fundamental areas: health of the forests, health of the businesses and health of the society in order to incentivise forest communities to take ownership of how they develop their communities in line with these criteria. We wish the project every success over the coming years.”

Peter Minang (ICRAF) and Jack Denton (TMP Systems) helping local institutions with the manipulation of the Field Monitoring equipment
“Dryad’s primary difference from most rural economic development programmes is the way that mainstream finance and technology tools are applied in small-scale rural enterprise. For example, Dryad requires candidate CFEs to submit a full business plan supported by a detailed investment memorandum and financial model, which we then assess in a way that has similar characteristics to a private equity investment process. We are aiming to implant good business practices in these enterprises that start out very small, so that they can grow sustainably, and eventually integrate into the mainstream economy. For example, reporting monthly operational and financial data through the Field Monitoring System will benefit forest communities by enhancing management capacity and decision-making. Field tests have shown that both IO staff and Community Forest members are able to pick up the techniques required to use surveying equipment more easily than we had expected. The monthly data that CFEs submit will tell us how things are changing on the ground, which will allow us to make necessary adjustments to Dryad’s approach as our investees progress.”

Roger Koung, Sub-director for Community Forestry, Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), Cameroon

“Dryad is the first initiative that has taken the risk to invest directly to build the capacity of rural population engaged in community forests activities and processes. Until now, Community forest-based initiatives were targeting communities but resources were allocated to civil society organizations to support the given communities. In Dryad, we directly support communities to develop viable CFEs that will create wealth among the various village communities. The information we give to the dryad project provide a better understanding of the context where the project is implemented, details and unique attributes of the CFEs and suggest adjustments as needed. Dryad provides capacity through a series of technical trainings to make sure our team is performing well, is well and is equipped technically to work effectively with the various communities involved in the project. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Dryad for making the CFE a reality in our country. We are also very grateful that DFID is a pioneer in Community Forests Enterprises development in Cameroon. We hope to convince those who so far do not believe on Community Forestry Scheme to come on board and join Dryad and DFID.”

Sophia Murday, Partner, TMP Systems

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Cécile Bibiane Ndjebet, National coordinator of CAM-ECO

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“The necessary support and tools to sustainably run community forests are still missing. This new Dryad project will strongly empower forest communities to manage CF on their own and be autonomous. Dryad objectives are well aligned with MINFOF vision and work with forest communities.”

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