

# Village Development Planning

## A Collaborative Management Model for Meaningful Community Conservation Around Protected Areas

Vincent Ndangang, Eric Tah Agwe,

Delphine Agbor and Donatus Asu Manghe



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Keywords: *Community conservation, strategic planning, vision, collaborative management, resource management, conservation area, national ark, protected areas.*

## Abbreviations

BOBEEFAG	Bonakanda Bee Farmers Group
CDC	Cameroon Development Cooperation
CODEV	Conservation Development
ENARESMAC	Ejagham Natural Resources Management Committee
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Technical Cooperation)
KFW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (German Development Bank)
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOCAP	Mount Cameroon Prunus Management
MINEF	Ministry of Environment and Forests
MINFOF	Ministère de la faune et de forets
Mt. CEO	Mount Cameroon Ecotourism Organisation
NGO	Non governmental organisation
PNDP	Programme National de Développement Participatif
RAPDP	Rumpi Area Participatory Development Project
SNRM	Sustainable Natural Resources Management
VDP	Village Development Plan
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

## Executive summary

Being a systemic community-wide planning approach, village development planning analyses the main current and past socio-cultural, economic and ecological parameters of the past and present so as to visualise in a community vision the future of the village. Elaborated from this perspective, the village development plan derives from the community vision, that is, a community held picture of how the village would be in the long term, generally over the next twenty years and more. The VDP also includes a development strategy of how to get to the vision; it identifies conservation and livelihood development projects as well as potential technical and financing stakeholders and mechanisms to support the process. A strength of the process is that it builds the capacity of the community people, moving them progressively from the position of a passive stakeholder to that of a manager whose commitment, pragmatic and visionary skills are inspiring partnerships in their natural resource and development venture.

Without describing the study cases, this paper proposes a stepwise village development planning methodology or guide that was applied in nine study villages selected from around three protected areas Korup National Park (Ndian Town, Mosongiseli Balondo Badiko and Fabe), the Mount Cameroon Area (Woteva, Bova Bomboko and Boviongo Bomboko) and Takamand-Mone Forests of Akwaya (Takamanda, Kajifu II and I and Nyang village) in the southwest province of Cameroon.

The results from the nine villages and from presentations to several conservation and development partners show that the methodology is feasible and cost effective. The VDP guide and plans have been presented to at least four Government Ministries, the German Technical and Financial Cooperations and the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry. They have all expressed their concerns to see the methodology widely used within protected area landscapes.

Village development planning as a tool can be adapted elsewhere for several reasons: first it stems from a shared community vision, therefore, it develops a strong sense of commitment and ownership in the community. It seeks to strike a compromise between conservation and development objectives, stressing on the long term impact without which the collaborative management process is not meaningful. Such impact should address basic needs of communities living around protected areas and conservation requirements of the resources of those protected areas, the very essence of life of the rural poor.

The VDP process is cost effective. It is a hands-on capacity building of village people in managing their resources for their own development without depleting the resource base.

The paper draws a logical conclusion that, village development planning is a mechanism of change; its actors are committed to self-reliance that justifies development partnership rightly. VDP argues that collaborative management of natural resources must by necessity lead to significant changes in basic life sustaining factors such as health, education and economy on the one hand and increased wildlife and forest cover on the other. The VDP model is transferable with slight modifications each time to adapt to the context of the area.

*Keywords: Community conservation, strategic planning, vision, collaborative management, resource management, conservation area, national ark, protected areas.*

## **Introduction**

Village community people living in or around protected areas have in the past been excluded or only partially involved in initiatives of protected area or natural resource management and development where, by their entitlement and legitimacy, these communities depend on protected area resources for livelihood. Unfortunately, the capacity of these village communities to negotiate agreements, to be represented and to finance major conservation and development initiatives is very often limited. This is further weakened by inadequate community organisation and the practice of always trying to meet short term basic needs rather than long term sustainability of the natural resources on which they depend. Although “forests are the riches of the poor” (United Nations Environment Programme), there seems to be a lack of appropriate or tailored strategies to meet local development needs from the management of protected areas and natural resources around these communities.

This paper is titled *A Collaborative Management Model for Meaningful Community Conservation Around Protected Areas*. It focuses on village development planning, in an attempt to provide village communities, government structures, development agencies, civil society and other stakeholders involved in conservation and development initiatives with a management tool that addresses some of the shortcomings involved in integrated natural resource management and local development. The paper is developed from a village development planning process that was conducted by the authors with the support of the German Development Cooperation and the Cameroonian Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) to trial run the model in nine representative villages. These villages were selected from around three protected areas including Korup National Park (Ndian Town, Mosongiseli Balondo Badiko and Fabe), the Mount Cameroon Area (Woteva, Bova Bomboko and Boviongo Bomboko) and Takamanda-Mone Forests of Akwaya (Takamanda, Kajifu II and I and Nyang village) in the southwest province of Cameroon.

The paper unfolds first a contextual analysis of the southwest province of Cameroon where the study is conducted. It then reviews previous milestones in co-management of natural resources before describing the process and methodology of village development planning as a step further into collaborative management of protected areas and partnership for development.

We appreciate the efforts of Kai Schmidt Soltau and CODEV Service for proposing the first draft of the VDP manual. We highly appreciate the inputs of colleagues and the programme for sustainable natural resources management, co-management champions and change leaders for all the inputs they have made for this study to be successful – Okenye Mambo, Gervais Bangaoui, Jean Paul Gwet, Simon Besong, Eberhard Goetz, Johnson Mossima, Mathias Heinze, Martin Ngenge, Chimere Diaw. Many thanks to the Government Ministries and International Organisations with whom we defend the same cause – Klaus Schmidt-Corsitto, Dr. Zac Tchoundjeu, Dr. Martjn Ter Heegde, Dr. Joseph Ntangsi for their inputs to make the guide feasible and implementable.

## **Context of VDP Process**

The VDP model is conceived to work in multi-sector and multi-actor scenarios where actors can negotiate agreements to work together for sustainable natural resources management and poverty reduction using a purely community based resource management approaches. In the rural setting, the village community is considered an entity of heterogeneous composition in which individuals have a right to their opinion, perceptions differ; belonging to the same village structure does not necessarily translate the same level of commitment to

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the principles, norms and values that characterize that village community. By way of life and culture, the village people is a role model in integrating activities of different sectors. This needs to be recognised and integrated in the design of conservation and development initiatives. For instance, a farmer that does hunting, fishing and harvests timber and non-timber forest products actually is at the interface of forestry, agriculture and fishery sectors. Such a peasant farmer will work with policies and procedures of all three sectors – agriculture, forestry and livestock.

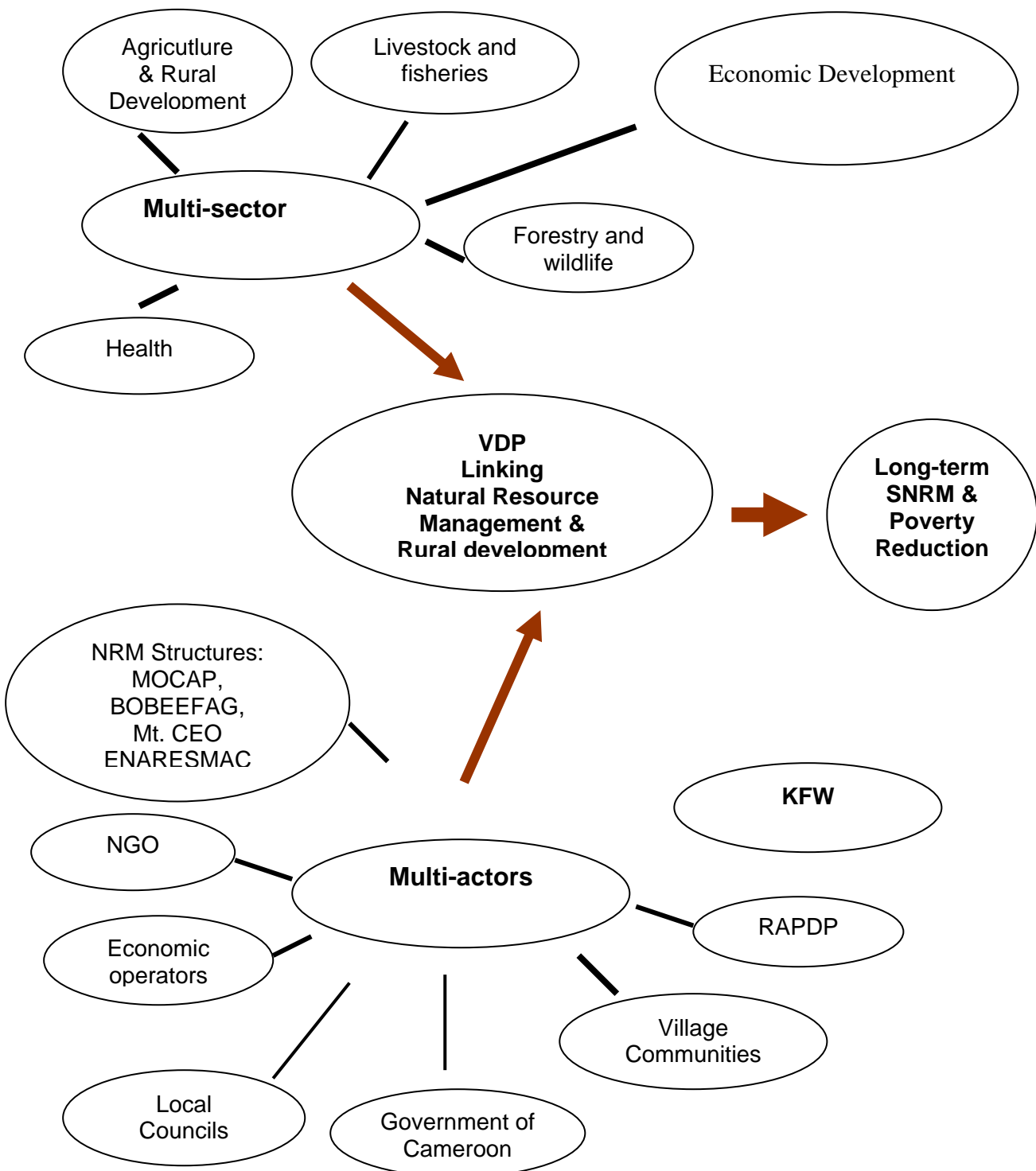
The study was conducted in nine villages selected around three protected areas of the southwest province. There are about 1.4 million inhabitants in the southwest province and the total surface area is about 25 000 km<sup>2</sup>. In terms of land uses, the southwest province is almost equally shared among three main land use options: reserved land (30%), industrial agriculture (30%) and settlement/subsistence crop farms (40%). Reserved land includes the Korup National Park (126 km<sup>2</sup>), the Bayang Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary (42.6km<sup>2</sup>) and more than 13 forest reserves (Table 1). Negotiations are currently ongoing between Government ministries, particularly the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), village communities and international organizations such as the German Technical Cooperation GTZ, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to raise the conservation status of some of the forest reserves to some greater protection status (national park, wildlife sanctuary or game reserve). By this process, Mount Cameroon, Takamanda and Bomboko-Etinde forest reserves would become national parks. The African and the German Development Banks are also getting started; though on separate investment programmes, they both aim at assisting village communities of the province that would lead to poverty reduction and natural resources management in the middle to the long term. Local NGO and associations that are involved in the sustainable use of natural resources are generating revenue that is re-invested in resource development and rural development initiative in stakeholder villages. Figure 1 below is a diagrammatical representation of how different sectors and organisations or institutions are involved in natural resources management in a multi-sector and multi-actor scenario.

**Table 1: List of protected areas of the southwest province**

<b>Name of Protected area</b>	<b>Surface area in (Ha)</b>
Korup National Park	126 000 Ha
Ejagham Production Reserve	74 850 Ha
Takamanda Forest Reserve	67599 Ha
Mane Production Forest Reserve	53 872 Ha
Rump Hills sanctuary	45 843 Ha
Bayang Mbo Wildlife sanctuary	42 606 Ha
Ntaali Forest Reserve	32 982 Ha
Bomboko Production Forest	26 677 Ha
Southern Bakundu Forest Reserve	19 425 Ha
Mokoko River Forest Reserve	9 065 Ha
Mt Manengouba Forest Reserve	5 517 Ha
Mongo River Forest Reserve	4 662 Ha
Barombi Mbo	855 Ha
Limbe Botanical Garden	375 Ha
Buea Fuel Plantation	300 Ha
<b>Total</b>	<b>510,628 Ha</b>

Source: Ministerial Order No 004/L/MINEF/SPE/SW/187

Keywords: *Community conservation, strategic planning, vision, collaborative management, resource management, conservation area, national ark, protected areas.*



**Fig 1: VDP are conceived to operate in a multi sector and multi-actor scenario**

Keywords: *Community conservation, strategic planning, vision, collaborative management, resource management, conservation area, national ark, protected areas.*

## Co-management today in the Southwest Province

A logical conclusion of the contextual analysis of collaborative management in the southwest is first of all with the fact that, the commitment of stakeholders to the process and to the implementation of the agreements is a prerequisite to the success of co-management if the latter must have a positive long term impact on the real livelihood basic needs. Secondly, a community-wide planned co-management process is indispensable to meet with ecological and socio-economic demands. Thirdly, village development planning is an ultimate approach to meet a dual-purpose challenge – linking conservation and development objectives as well as strengthening institutional linkages between the village and development partners at the regional level. The experience of co-management in specific sites of the southwest province have been described and documented (Meboka, 2005); a number of highlights and pitfalls are mentioned here for a better understanding of village development plans and processes.

### *1. Negotiated agreements implemented*

Negotiated agreements in the form of co-management plans exist and form the basis of protected area management of the Korup National Park, the Takamanda, the Nta-ali and the Bomboko forest reserves. The organization of resource user groups to manage specific resources from the forest has proven in the Mount Cameroon and Korup areas to contribute to the realization of community development projects (Okenye, 2005). Few (Tinto, Akwen, Bimbia Bonadikombo) village communities have obtained approved simple management plans and management agreements with the Forestry Administration, but have hardly been operational for lack of initial investment (Okenye, 2004). Therefore, there is little evidence in this province that community forest can be operational on sustainable basis let alone contribute to improvement of livelihood.

### *2. Co-management, a code of conduct in the southwest province*

Co-mgt has become a code of conduct for land redistribution in the southwest province. In leaseholds of the Cameroon Development Cooperation (CDC), land units that were hitherto used for tea and fuel plantations are handed over to village communities for community farmland following negotiations between the cooperation and village communities.

Similarly, stakeholders have become organised entities to collaborate with Government institutions, technical partners for resource management. In the case of forest exploitation revenues, village communities have organized themselves into legal entities so as to be eligible for forest revenue allocation. This is the case with the Akwen community in the Manyu Division.

A provincial wide consultation process brought local communities; international community and government into agreement around the Phase V zoning plan that covers part of the southwest and littoral provinces. This plan defined community use areas, protected areas and corridors that link them. Although it is yet to be endorsed officially, this negotiated land use zoning plan is already being used today by stakeholders in taking decisions on the design of conservation and development landscapes also called technical operation units (TOU)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> These are regional geographical spaces comprising mosaics under different land use options including parks, forest reserves, sanctuaries, forest concessions, settlements, roads, farms and or plantations. In Cameroon, there can be up to three categories of TOU depending on the size: ≤50,000Ha, ≤100,000 Ha, >100,000 Ha.

### *3. Co-management regulates access over natural resources*

Local communities have in some areas been able to organise the extraction of natural resources so as to increase revenue from them. In areas like Akwen within the Korup technical operation unit, the Natural Resource Management Committee is able to pay salaries to primary school teachers as well as support the construction of the village community hall with revenue collected from trade in non-timber forest products. In areas around Mount Cameroon, local structures of resource management are registered as legalized community based companies or common initiative groups and are generating revenue from natural resources. This is the case of Mount Cameroon Prunus Management association (MOCAP) and the Bonakanda bee farmers group (BOBEEFAG). Unfortunately, there are still conflicts with state control because local communities can hardly afford commercial permits that allow for free and legal trade in non-timber forest products.

### *4. Co-management dynamics and pitfalls*

The co-management process was de-motivating in areas where negotiated agreements were not implemented. Hidden agendas within stakeholders brought suspicion at the inception of the process. The revolution seemed to have been so sudden and quick that suspicion and fear of the unknown created resistance in both village communities and government structures. Hitherto the unmet of collaborative management processes, Government officials used a strongly repressive approaches. They came along with guns during forest patrols and arrest poachers and defaulters who were severely punished after court trials. This continued uninterruptedly until the enactment of the new forest law in 1994 instituting the participation of village people and those living in the vicinity of protected areas. The same law gave the possibility for village communities to obtain and manage community forests for their local development. Four years later, the GTZ-IUCN collaborative management project came up strong; it brought about a reversal of management procedures around protected areas. Then, the same Government officials came with a process oriented approach, sensitizing village people and providing an opportunity to negotiate and come to a mutual agreement. At the same time, the Government offered village people the opportunity to get a more challenging role in forest management – prepare and implement simple management plans for community forest or community hunting areas. This meant that, the village resource users who had no access to resources before, now had hundred percent access and were even expected to control resource exploitation. They would keep a forest unit of at most 5000 Ha (in the case of community forest) for up to 25 years and manage the forest using a simple management plan. Everyone highlighted the important role the government and civil society were expected to play if the process would succeed. So many changes were taking place at the same time. The change in roles and expectations from village people were very ambitious and changing quickly. The result was that village people feared the unknown, suspecting that the intentions of the government were neither clear nor for their interest. At the same time, the government feared to lose authority through a participatory management approach. Like with most administrations, power and authority are concentrated with the Government. The line between the person in authority and the institution was very thin. This created further resistance from the government officials who sometimes seemed to oppose the very policy with which they worked. Ten years later, co-management is still upheld in high esteem even if the practical implementation sometimes deviates from the principles.

### *5. Co-management, any concrete impact?*

The co-management learning-by-doing process that lasted three years from 1998, brought in a lot of momentum and change; roles and responsibilities of stakeholders were clarified, a



toolkit was developed and the capacity of stakeholders and protected area managers was built in starting and leading co-management processes. Co-management was becoming a culture for many national and international organizations. However, these were like the soft process and the hard-core results or impact of co-management were still expected to be seen. Such success indicators were expected to meet the needs and interests of stakeholders. Apart from consultations with the public to agree on Phase V regional land use plan which has not been published till date, no one knows how many additional elephant heads have been saved by the respect and implementation of co-management agreements. No one knows how many hectares of forest have been saved from encroachment or slash and burn through the co-management process. The rural poor, especially those around protected areas seems to be getting more miserable with highest degraded farm-to-market roads and little or no access to primary health care services. Several years of technical and financial input of partner organisations to promote community forest development as a way of alleviating poverty are thwarted by stringent and heavy frame conditions that have obviously killed the process. The perception of these authors is that, co-management processes are yet to address and produce meaningful results in terms of on-the-ground impact that meets local needs of population on the one hand and resource management on the other.

### **Linking Conservation and Development objectives**

The forests of the southwest province are habitat to large mammals such as the forest elephant *Loxodonta africana*, the Buffalo *Syncerus caffer* and the Bush Pig *Potamochoerus porcus* around Korup and Mount Cameroon. Primates such the Cross River Gorilla *Gorilla gorilla* around Takamanda, the Drill *Mandrillus sp* around Korup and a huge variety of birds including the Mount Cameroon Francolin. The vegetation is mostly tropical rainforest and characterized by high levels of endemism and biological diversity around Korup, Mount Cameroon and Takamanda protection landscapes. The south west province is an attraction for nature conservation- 30% of its surface area is reserved for conservation. By virtue of the volcanic nature of Mount Cameroon, this province also has some of the most fertile soils in Cameroon. Therefore, some of the biggest industrial plantations (such as PAMOL, CDC) of tea, oil palm, rubber and banana are located in this province.

The consequences of this kind of competition are far reaching, ramifying sometimes into serious conflicts over natural resources, acute poverty, encroachment into protected areas, commercial trade in timber and non timber forest products leading to armed conflicts and arrests of village hunters, degraded farm to market roads especially if such roads pass in the peripheries of a protected area. Maintaining these roads would mean easier access to the protected area.

In the case study of the nine villages, it was observed that slash and burn shifting cultivation (plate 1) is the greatest cause of loss of biodiversity and forest fragmentation.



plate 1: Slash and burn, the greatest cause of loss of biodiversity.  
Photo: Ndangang

The forests of the southwest province are rich and diverse, but they are also among the most threatened as they are a source of livelihood for local populations in or around the peripheries of these protected areas. The long border between Cameroon and Nigeria is highly permeable and favourable to trade in wildlife, timber, and non-timber forest products. Slash and burn is very common throughout the forested areas of the south west as it is a cheaper way of clearing the forest for farming. Farmers simply burn big trees which then die off and dry out slowly.

Rural populations are generally very poor; those around protected areas are the poorest. The main occupation of village people is farming, but many farmers are also hunters and fishermen. Therefore, they are almost all the time in fear of being arrested as poachers or are involved in conflicts due to restricted access to natural resources.



Plate 2: How much of a threat is subsistence hunting to the protected area? This kind of hunting can be practiced in the communal forest that buffers the protected area. Village people around Mount Cameroon are setting hunting quotas based on results of community based wildlife monitoring programs.  
Photo: Ndangang

Access to safe drinking water was observed only in two out of nine villages. Roads and bridges are degraded or simply absent. Cases like in slides 3 and 4 are common in remote areas where the biggest farms are also located.

*Keywords: Community conservation, strategic planning, vision, collaborative management, resource management, conservation area, national ark, protected areas.*



Plate 3 left and 4 right: Farm-to-market roads around protected areas are seasonal. On both plates, vehicles transporting goods for the market either get stuck or fall over due to bad roads.

Photo: Loebenstein and Ndangang

In an attempt to address controversies between conservation and development, village development planning argues that forests are the riches of the poor and therefore they need to be harvested in a sustainable way. VDP provides the methodology, but also the mechanisms for actors to come together in a partnership venture to design natural resource management approaches that address resource users' needs while at the same time conserving the resource base which supports the livelihood of the people. VDP reveals that until poverty problems of the rural people are solved or at least brought to a non offensive level, attempts to stop them from living on natural resources can neither be cost effective nor sustainable. Village development planning uses co-management skills and a systemic approach to re-enforce management skills, bringing the the resource user to a resource manager's position.

One of the tools that the village uses is participatory mapping of the village space. Micro-zoning allocates community forest areas next to the protected areas so as to buffer the latter. The landuse option next to the community forest is an agro-forest stand or an old fallow. Next to this are crop farms and then homestead gardens. In this way, there is an increasing protective zone (buffer) between the village and the protected area. The village hunter does not need to go to the park to hunt as he can do so in the community forest or in the old fallow. This is the case with Mosongiseli and Fabe around Korup, Woteva around Mount Cameroon and Takamanda.



Plate 5: Land use planning in Takamanda

Photo: Tah

### **Village Development Planning is a Step-wise Process**

The VDP planning process can be contained in five steps including:

1. Sensitization and pre-planning
2. Public dialogue

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3. Village assessment or data collection
4. Strategic planning
5. Documentation and validation.

A diagrammatic representation of these steps is shown in figure 2 below.

### **Step 1: Sensitisation and Pre-planning**

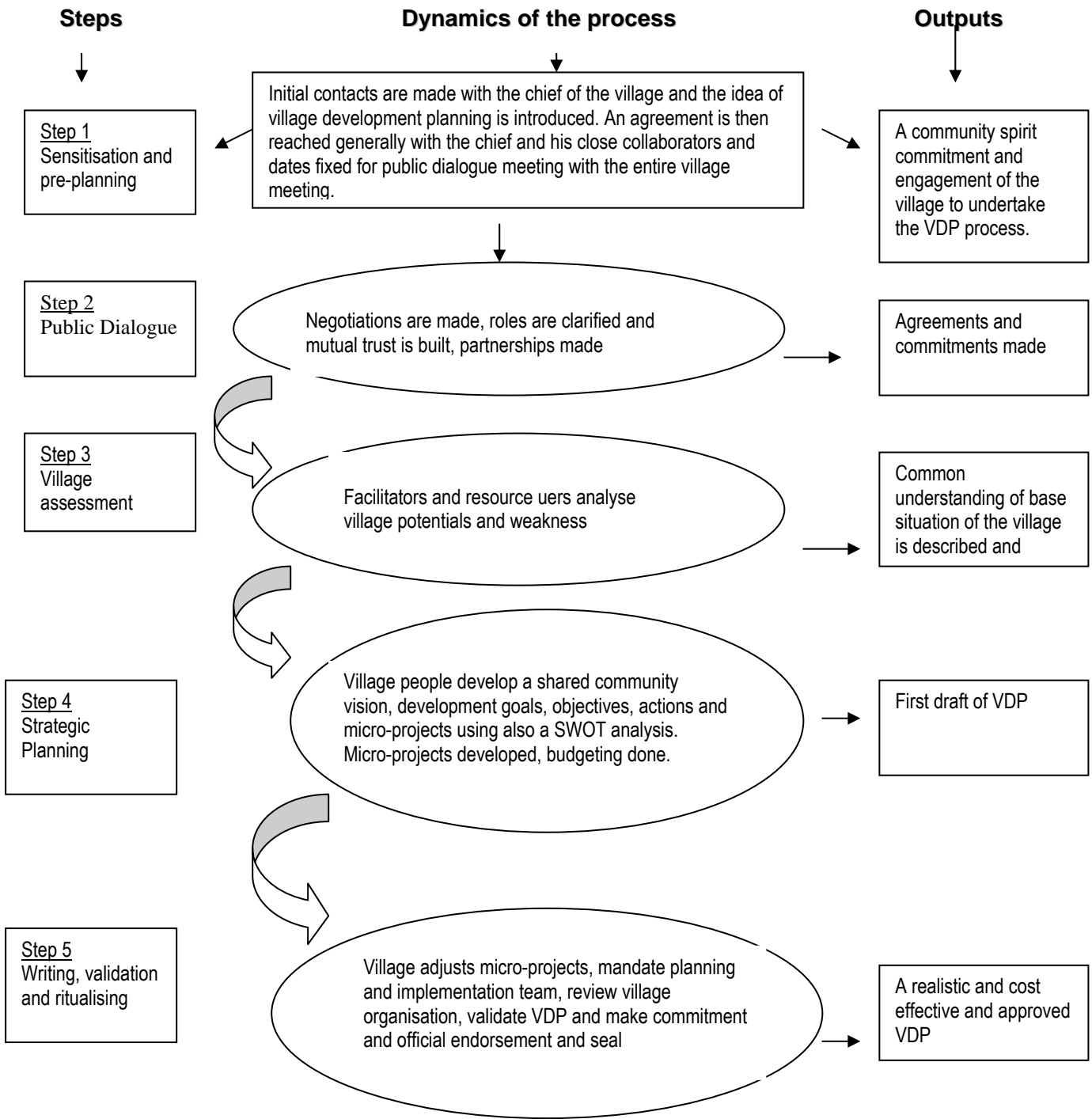
This is a first contact and an information sharing session supposedly between the facilitator and the Traditional Authority, generally the chief of the village and his close collaborators – Traditional Councilors. This meeting is held a week or two prior to the main planning workshop, initially just with the chief and his council, followed by a broader session with opinion leaders (such as teachers, clinic staff, religious leaders, cultural and secret societies, youth leaders, women's groups, etc.) and then leading to the general meeting of the entire village. The working method is generally a group discussion that lasts for up to three hours.

The aim is to establish a common understanding of what the process entails, how it should run and when should events be occurring. It is also to mobilise the leaders of many different sections of the community to identify and invite potential development partners or stakeholders, neighbouring villages and the general public to the public dialogue coming up. The aim is also to get a broadbased ownership of the plan so that the village people realise that this is about their process and that the output needs to be the result of community action. This meeting also marks the onset of data collection which by the way will continue throughout the facilitators stay in the village.

This first contact meeting should indeed serve for sharing information and discussing concerns. It is important to discuss the overall planning process within which the village development plan fits, the concerns and expectations of participants as well as the upcoming public dialog meeting including the expected role the village people. It is wise to avoid using the forum as a public dialogue forum given that all partners may not be present or represented and most of the village people coming at this stage are doing so out of curiosity and not by commitment to the process. When people hear information for the first time, some will react quickly, to support or to resist. Others will receive the information and react to it only in the following days. Therefore, it is important not to rush, rather, allow time enough for the village people to digest the information and react to it realistically and 'truly'.

By the end of this meeting, local leaders understand the planning process and outputs, local leaders are committed to support an inclusive planning process (which prioritizes the needs of marginalized groups) and local leaders are ready to mobilize their constituencies ready for the planning phase.

The result of this meeting fits into chapter two of the VDP. Any agreements made during this meeting are provisional and should be rehearsed during the public dialogue meeting so as to consolidate them or affect any changes arising from changing perceptions of participants.



**Fig 2: Flow chart of VDP process**

Keywords: *Community conservation, strategic planning, vision, collaborative management, resource management, conservation area, national ark, protected areas.*

## Step 2 Public Dialogue

It is important that the planning process should be launched with a meeting, which has broad participation, including representatives of external actors, to establish a prior informed consent on the planning process. This is important in view of establishing a broad ownership of the plan and its process. Public dialogue provides an opportunity to get people to think about the product (the 'plan'), as well as the process, which should be empowering and inclusive. Box 1 is an overview of the entire process of running a public dialogue meeting.

### Box 1: Preparing and Running a Public Dialogue meeting

#### 1 Objective

By the end of this meeting:

- The community understands the planning process and outputs
- A well informed decision whether the village wants to establish a village development plan.
- In case the village want to implement the village development planning process in line with this manual:
- The community is committed to support and participate the planning process
- The planning team is elected
- The main socio-economic groups to take forward the planning process are identified
- A timetable for the planning process has been developed

#### 2 What part of the plan does this fit into? Chapter 2

3 Tool/method General discussion with all stakeholders

4 Timing 3 hours (2 hours and 1 hour)

5 Facilitators Core facilitator

6 Participants Entire village and external participants including technical ministries like forestry, regional planning, rural development as well as the municipal and neighbouring villages.

#### 7 Process

1. Traditional ruler to introduce facilitator, external participants
2. Village Secretary to introduce purpose of meeting and agenda
3. Discuss overall planning process within which the village development plans fit
4. Discuss content of the plan (use flip chart which is left with the planning team)
5. Discuss expectations and concerns of village, facilitators and planning process
6. If the village wants to continue with the process, work in groups to define role of partners and organisation of planning process
7. Discuss the role of planning team and criteria for their selection, allow the village to form the team and present members during the planning workshop
8. Arrange timetable for planning process in general and in detail for the planning workshop.

8 Resources needed Flip chart, markers, and working material planning team members, traditional ruler and council: Copies of the manual, block notes and pencils.

#### 9 Comments/tips

This is a key meeting that will set the pace and content of the planning process. Take the rupture joint serious. If the village is not devoted to the planning process, the exercise will fail earlier or later and will leave everybody unhappy. So it is advisable to pull out of the process at this level. Try to maximise participation, use the opportunity to outline to the community the benefits of community based planning, which are outlined in the introduction section to this manual. Be aware that external participants should join the discussion, but should not dominate the discussion nor take the final decision. It is the responsibility of the facilitator to guarantee that.

Source: Adapted from Kai and others, 2004: *Manual for elaborating village development plans P. 17*

### **Step 3. Village Assessment**

Village assessment is all about getting to understand the village community as a system and bringing to the community to be aware of what they are, what they have and what they can do with what they have. Collecting relevant information and analysing it according to set guidelines is important. Different authors have different methods and tools to collect information and the method determines how useful and reliable this information can be. The intention here therefore is not to describe a unique technique of collecting data from the village. However, one needs to maintain the systemic character of planning and to understand livelihoods of different socio-economic groups i.e. where they are at now (assets, vulnerabilities) and where they want to go (desired outcomes & opportunities). The process can be empowering, as it focuses on what people already have and gets them thinking about how they can direct their own development. The analysis avoids people developing a wish list and get people to think about how to link opportunities with assets. The session is also used to update and complete the background information gathered in step 1.

By the end of this meeting we understand the livelihoods of different socio-economic groups, including their:

1. Assets (what people have including financial, social, physical and natural assets);
2. Vulnerabilities (the stresses and shocks that people are subjected to);
3. Preferred outcomes (what people would like to achieve regarding their livelihoods),
4. Opportunities (that are available in the environment, often not recognised by the people themselves);
5. The service providers that operate in the area.
6. Updated and finalised information on the background situation (demography, economy, social stratification and organisation, etc.)

Participants include representatives of socio-economic groups identified by the planning team and resource user groups of the village. It is important to identify the social groups in the community before inviting the people. The main socio-economic groups have been defined in the pre-planning meeting and representatives have been selected to represent people of similar levels of well-being, access to resources, vulnerabilities and livelihood strategies.

The planning team should be encouraged by the facilitator to take over responsibility. The discussion should be carried out in such a manner that the people raise issues about their livelihoods. The role of the facilitator is to prompt the group (using the interview guideline) and ensure that the information given by the group is recorded in an ordered manner. In discussing people's livelihoods, the discussion should begin with what people have, i.e. their strengths and opportunities.

### **Step 4: Strategic Planning**

This is an ambitious and demanding step of the process. It starts with the development of a shared community vision which then becomes the basis on which the village with the assistance of the planning team will set development goals, objectives, main actions and activities. Strategies and organization measures and procedures including leadership principles are also reviewed and or set up. Business plans and micro-project profiles are

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elaborated and documented. Micro-project profiles should also analyse additional household income that will result from the implementation of the micro-project. While it is true that not all micro-projects are oriented towards generating income, it is also true that, such micro-projects do have an indirect impact on social and economic life functions. The construction of a bridge and road will stop further loss of lives as people will use the bridge instead of swimming through the river, facing the risk of being swept away by strong currents. The same road and bridge are used for transporting goods to the market, therefore we can have an idea of additional goods that are moved to the market or how many cars ply the road per day.

#### *4.1 Building a shared community vision, development goals and objectives*

Visioning is a powerful tool to help people look to the future and articulate where they would like to go in terms of the development of their community. It is particularly powerful when it follows on from a review of people's assets and present situation, as it encourages people to develop a realistic, achievable vision, as well as the steps they need to take to reach the vision. Further, by not focusing on constraints and looking to opportunities, it helps the community to build on the strengths of its past and current situation.

By the end of this session, village community people and partners should have reached a negotiated shared vision for the community and the protected areas around them. The participants include the planning team, co-opted community members and external participants. Usually, this group discussion will take 2-3 hours as the process facilitator leads the planning team through the following steps:

1. Using historical mapping, describe how the village and its people had been sometimes ago (about 20-30 years), today and then project into the future to see how they would be in a set time (like 30 years) to come (Borrini-Feyerabend et al, 2000).
2. Analyse the vision and cluster similar elements; for instance, so that health outcomes are on one flip chart, resource management issues, education outcomes on another, income outcomes etc.
3. For each flip chart develop a realistic summary statement, which expresses what people can see happening over the next 30 years – “our (realistic) hopes and dreams for the future for our community?”
4. Develop an overall statement of what people would want addressed e.g. *“By 2024 we will be a town, where people like to live and work, people are well-fed, healthy, well educated”.....)*
5. Take each flip chart in turn (e.g. health, education, income etc.) and for each summary statement which summarised the vision, develop a goal statement for what the participants would concretely like to see happen in 5 years e.g. *“safe drinking water is available throughout the year”*.

Later, groups will work on each of these in turn, to develop objectives and strategic actions.

It is important to be clear on the difference between a vision (broad for instance 30 years etc.), goal (specific 5 years) and objectives (the main sets of things we need to do to get to the goal) and the strategic activities (the concrete individual and specific activities that we have to do to get to the objective and which will be defined the following day). People will generally have different visions of the development of the community or for the forest mosaics round them. Sometimes consensus can be achieved by emphasizing the long term timeframe (30 years) and general nature of the vision. Additionally, it is important to stress that many different

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ideas can go into the vision as there is no prioritisation at this stage (e.g. income opportunities more urgent than infrastructure etc). However, where there are contradictions, explore the underlying causes of the difference in order to negotiate a common vision while integrating contradictions. At the end of the vision building exercise, it is important that participants identify themselves to the vision. They can ritualise it by posing their signatures or thumb prints as a way of demonstrating that *I am proud of this vision and would do everything to achieve it.*

*4.2 Development strategy*

Having developed visions and goals, the next question is *how* (strategic actions) can we or *what* can we do to achieve our vision and goals? Which actions are top priority? The planning team and key resource persons then prioritize the objectives and strategic activities for each goal and identify those strategic actions that can be developed into micro projects to be included in council or regional development plans, or to be handed in to donors. It is advisable to work in teams; participants should be grouped according to their interest and/or expertise in a specific goal area.

The community vision has generated around some key goals areas. Each area can be discussed by one small group. Each small group will:

1. Discuss what are the main things we need to do to achieve the goal?
2. Develop a short list of objectives to achieve the goal.
3. Choose the 3 objectives, which are considered to be most important and achievable.
4. Take each objective in turn and for each one, identify the key strategic actions that will be needed to achieve this objective and discuss what will be needed to make this activity happen and who should/could provide it.

The following matrix is helpful but not indispensable:

**Table 1: Identifying activities and defining roles**

Strategic activities	What can the village do?	Who can assist?
Dig well	Manual labour, feeding of technician	Provide expertise, provide special material

Later on, a project profile may need to be developed for each of strategic actions, and certainly for those being submitted for external funding.

The external technical staff can play as resource persons a more active role at this stage, but make sure they are appraising and adding value to the ideas of the community rather than inserting their own objectives.

### 4.3 Strategic actions and costing

The two groups have worked on the goals, but the information generated needs to be validated by the plenary before they can be included in the village development plan and specified in the implementation plan. To do this, each group presents its objectives, the priorities, and the strategic actions they have proposed for the priority objectives. The broader group then discusses these, makes suggestions for changes, and endorses the final product. All goals are presented in this way and checked for any linkages or contradictions. Once this is done, the priority activities for the next 12 months are grouped together in a matrix as below to form an implementation plan for the community.

**Table 2: Implementation Plan for the next 12 Months**

What we need to do in the next 12 months	Who will do it?	When?	What will the village do?	Which partner will assist?

Following, members of the planning team identify projects and develop profiles (especially those, which will be submitted to other agencies) as well as the five year work plan cost estimates as in matrix following (this fits into Annex 1 and 4 of VDP).

**Table 3: Workplan Cost estimate**

What do we need to do?	Who will do it?	When ?	How to know it has been done	Cost estimate FCFA						Potential Partners
				Description	Unit cost	Quantity	Total	Village cost	Partner cost	

As this is the last planning meeting within the planning workshop, it is important that not only is the plan reviewed, but it should be clear to everyone about who should do what by which time.

### 4.4 Describe Micro-project Profiles

For projects which require external support (whether from government, NGOs or the private sector), project profiles may be completed. These define the elements of the project and help in monitoring project progress and holding people accountable for their actions. The structure of the document proposed here follows the guideline of PNDP for micro project application files. This should be updated with questions to analyse economic impact or the additional household revenue that is expected from the implementation of the micro-project.

A standardised well developed project profile will have been completed according to the relevant standards and requirements for each project/activity – especially those which require external financial support.

It might be good to complete project profiles (following the guidelines of the PNDP for micro-project application) for all projects, and not just those that require external support. This increases the accountability of the plan and facilitates the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system and especially the elaboration of indicators on the lower level of the impact chain.

**Table 5: Micro-Project profile template (fits into annex 1)**

Micro Project Parametre	Description		
Objective(s) (impact on clients)			
Location			
Time to complete project or activity			
How was the project identified and by whom?			
Who will benefit?			
How many people will benefit?			
Main environmental Impact			
Main social Impact			
Main economic impact			
Stakeholders			
Completed works will belong to			
Activities will be implemented by what group			
Completed works will be inspected by			
Completed works will be operated by			
Completed works will be maintained by			
Inputs required:	Village cost	Partner cost	Potential partner
Money			
Labour			
Materials			
Transport			
In kind resources			
Total			
Unforseen (10%)			
G.Total			
Operating costs? (and source of funds)			
Maintenance costs? (and source of funds)			

#### 4.5 VDP Implementation, Monitoring and evaluation

During the planning process, the village community identifies and mandates a VDP implementation and monitoring structure. In most cases, this structure is the village development committee which is usually a technical branch of the Traditional Council. Where such a structure does not exist, it is important to form one. This can be a re-enforcement of an existing structure adapting it to the new context and representation or like in most heterogeneous communities, a completely new structure that is also a representation of socio-economic groups, tribes and structures of the village. In all cases, the structure that is mandated as the planning team will always operate under the Traditional Council. In this way the structure is legally recognized at least under customary law.

In both existing and newly created structures, the Chief is an honorary member and the seat of wise counsel. As for village administration, he (it is not a culture of the people to have female chiefs) is responsible for the over all day-to-day coordination of the village affairs.

Keywords: *Community conservation, strategic planning, vision, collaborative management, resource management, conservation area, national ark, protected areas.*

The Planning Team or in some cases the Village Development Committee is responsible for organizing the implementation and monitoring of the village development plan. It shall directly

### **Box 2: Village Development Planning Team**

#### **Criteria for Planning Team Membership**

1. Literacy level (can read and write)
2. Commitment to village affairs.
3. Availability
4. Decision making capacity.
5. Influence in the village and other places.

#### **Three Options for getting a Planning Team**

1. Identify all institutions in the village and their functions. Rate them. Select the one with highest number of points and co-opt members of special skills.
2. Select competent members from different socio economic groups of the village to form the planning team.
3. The traditional council form a development committee which becomes the planning team but re-enforced by qualified individuals from different socio economic groups

#### **Role/Responsibilities of Planning Team**

1. Ensures a strict follow up of the calendar of the village development plan
2. Negotiates with relevant resource persons in and out of the village for VDP implementation
3. Assists the Chief to seek for funds to implement the VDP as well as maintain the high commitment and ownership level of the village.
4. Implements M&E plan: collect, analyse and document information on Monitoring and Evaluation.
5. Reminds village resource persons of the activities planned for them in the VDP
6. Develops annual implementation plans from the VDP and lead the process to review VDP every five years as required.
7. Documents the VDP implementing the plan and make contributions to the resolution of problems, conflicts or constrains that may have been encountered during executing the plan.

Source: *Ndangang and others, 2005*

monitor and evaluate all activities and document all findings. This team is also responsible for identifying development partners that can provide technical or financial assistance for effective and efficient VDP implementation. The team shall regularly make verbal and written reports to the traditional council during ordinary and extra-ordinary sessions or upon request (Box 2).

### **Step 5: Writing, Validating and Ritualising the VDP**

#### **5.1 Writing the Plan**

The documentation of the planning process is always problematic because by adjusting the draft product elaborated in the village to a standardised format reduces the direct visible ownership of the plan. Nevertheless, it is essential to present plans in a standard and comprehensive yet simplified format so that the village people understand and use it, important information can not get lost and can be presented to others. The plan should include information concerning how it was developed, background description of the community, the future plan as well as the annual implementation plan and an outline of the monitoring and evaluation system. Detailed project proposals should be included in the annex. The plan should act as the community record book, enabling decisions to be

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reviewed and information to be updated. It is a tool for monitoring progress in plan implementation and can be updated annually as projects move forward and new priorities emerge (Ndangang and Goetz, 2005).

### **Box 3 Table of Contents a VDP**

List of acronyms

Executive summary

- 1.0 Introduction to Village
- 2.0 The Planning Process
- 3.0 Base situation
- 4.0 Future Plan
- 5.0 Impact Assessment
- 6.0 M&E Plan
- 7.0 Implementation and Monitoring Team
- 8.0 Annexes

On the cover page of the plan, the name and cultural identity of the village, its administrative location, the authority and date of the final approval and the period covered by the plan should be indicated.

#### *5.2 Validate the VDP*

The validation forum is a meeting that takes place after the village chief, his council and the planning team have reviewed the plan in its documented form. In this meeting the plan will be introduced to the village community and adopted by the village people. It is very important that every village person and structure or organization understands the different elements of the village development plan and their role and responsibilities in implementing it. The agenda of the meeting is a short five-steps agenda:

1. The core facilitator and planning team members present a summary of the village development plan and its implementation plan.
2. The village discusses and provides feedbacks. At the end of the discussion the village should come up with a well informed decision on whether they want to adopt the plan or ask for a revision.
3. The core facilitator introduces impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation plan and micro-project proposals.
4. The village discusses and provides feedback. At the end of the discussion, the village comes up with a well informed decision on whether the village people want to adopt the plan and the assessment or ask for a revision.
5. The Chief endorses the final version of the adopted plan. By the end of the session all documents are handed over to the village council.

The facilitator and the planning team member need to be prepared to deal with the feedback on the plan and all its elements. The community may feel frustrated, if some of their key priorities have not been selected for development into micro-projects. Prior to the presentation of the key elements of the impact assessments and the monitoring and evaluation plan it is important to discuss them first with the planning team.

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### 5.3 Ritualizing the VDP

Though optional, a ritual of the final product is important. The ritual rounds up the planning process and launches the implementation of the VDP. Usually conducted at the end of a great achievement, a ritual is a renewed commitment to the results and their implementation. Therefore, during the ritual ceremony, the members of the planning and implementation team remind participants of the highlights of the plan and the planning process. The main goals and actions as well as officials that have the mandate of the people to oversee the implementation of the plan are presented. It is also during the ritual ceremony (also known in some contexts as launching ceremony) that funds are raised to mark the creation of a development fund. Generally, the contributions and freewill donations continue throughout the VDP implementation process. The ritual act itself can take the form of signing (or thumb printing), participation in some form of village recognised cultural ceremony, a dance, a group picture or a combination of several options.

#### **Communicate VDP, its implementation and perceived changes**

Communicating the plan to a broader range of people is important to demonstrate that stakeholder commitment and interest are valued. Communication can take the form of a play, to highlight important elements so that everyone understands why and how the specific activities contribute to the overall vision. If nobody from the planning team is prepared to join the facilitator in this, the key results should at least be transferred on flipchart paper to be displayed in the community hall so that community people can be kept updated about the contents of the plan and the progress of its implementation.

The facilitator should encourage the planning team to take over as much as possible the responsibility and the active part in these meeting, but should also ensure that the planning team does not dominate the discussion and allow enough time for the community to express their concern.

Information that has been gathered from monitoring the strategic actions and the activities of VDP implementation belongs to the entire community who would have access to it and give feedback; they should appreciate changes arising from implementing the plan and make contributions to the resolution of problems, conflicts or constrains that may have been encountered during executing the plan. The village or the group responsible for that activity can collectively address reasons for deviation.

One way of sharing M&E information is to visualise it. The main elements of progress made as against expected targets fixed in the beginning as well as the deviations can be summarised on a chart and presented to the village or hung in the community hall. A village meeting or focused group meetings to propose what should be done to correct the deviations can then follow. The planning team should coordinate this so that it is efficiently done.

Visualisation adds to but does not replace the full documentation process of the M&E results. Therefore monitoring and evaluation reports should be written. At the end of five years implementation period, the over all achievements, changes, deviations from planned targets and lessons learnt should be documented. Documentation can take the form of reports, posters, brochures or leaflets. Additional expertise generally needed for this documentation and publication can be provided by national and international NGOs and financial bodies, especially those that may have been involved in financing the implementation. This documentation shall serve as the basis for next five-year planning period.

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## **Cost implications of VDP Process**

Considering a team of one officer and two or three village people, it takes 8-10 officer days depending whether the village is accessible or remote. Other resources needed include a laptop computer, a printer and workshop material (flip charts, markers, cards etc). The total cost estimate for conducting a VDP process in the village would be in the range of one hundred (100 Euros).

## **Lessons learned**

Village development plans articulate conservation and livelihood improvement (trade-offs of conservation). They can be a powerful tool for managing conflicts over resources. Short term benefits of conservation are an incentive to effective collaboration.

Management agreements are only as good as the process that produces them, however, no matter how good the process may be, the impact of good management agreements is visible only with their implementation.

A good co-management process fully integrates social communication, that is, societal dialogue. Once this is identified as a priority mechanism for co-management, stakeholders begin to build trust one with another. Differences in opinion and perceptions can be a strength when they are well managed. Conducted in the early beginning of the process, context analysis facilitates a better understanding of long term targets and community visions.

The interests, positions and entitlements of stakeholders are jeopardized if they are not identified and integrated into the objectives of the conservation initiative, earlier integration produces better results. Similarly, development initiatives need to consider that natural resources are the riches of the poor and therefore need to be rationally used.

Local communities can be effective managers of conservation and development initiatives though they need to be assisted by co-management partners rather than take over and substitute their role or marginalize resource users.

A recognition of the cultural identity is a huge influential factor in the success of the co-management process. To get a common identity, the community is obliged to agree on something that binds them together. In some areas this has taken up to a week to identify the cultural identity. It also develops a community spirit in the village.

Building a shared community vision has been long neglected, but, it is a prerequisite for a successful planning and development process. The identification of success factors in that case is very important.

Cultural resistance to change is indication of a huge potential for change and development (Meboka and Ndangang); this can be co-managed in a systemic manner for a total reverse of the direction of resistance. In this case, contradictions should be perceived as opportunities for change and not justifications for conflicts.

It is important to analyse the additional income that village people will realise by implementing the microprojects that were identified during the VDP process. However, it

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must be remembered that the benefits of microproject are diverse (for instance, saving lives, rushing a patient to hospital thanks to a new bridge) and not limited to household income.

## **Conclusion**

Village development planning is a mechanism of change, its actors are committed to self-reliance that rightly justifies development as a partnership venture. VDP argues that collaborative management of natural resources must by necessity lead to significant changes in basic factors that sustain life, to be meaningful; such factors include health, education and economy on the one hand and increased wildlife and forest cover on the other. Consequently and conclusively too, the VDP model can be used elsewhere because:

1. It derives from a long term shared community vision.
2. It designs conservation and livelihood projects.
3. It builds capacity to negotiate, raise funds, run own projects and be accountable.
4. It instills commitment, pragmatic and visionary skills within the stakeholder system.
5. Communities becomes managers rather than passive participants.
6. The model is transferable, adaptable and affordable.



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