



# Independent forests and environment monitoring

A participative certified independent monitoring system for natural resource management deployed in Cameroon and the Congo Basin



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# I.

## DOCUMENT PRODUCED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> EU-NGO HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM



In order to harmonize the independent forest monitoring (IFM) approaches carried out by civil society organizations and communities, the Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER) association in collaboration with other Cameroonian civil society organizations, developed in 2015 a independent monitoring System of natural resource management based on the requirements of the international standard ISO 9001 which deals with quality management. This system, called Standardized System of Civil Society Independent Forest Monitoring (SNOIE<sup>1</sup>), has been certified<sup>2</sup> ISO 9001: 2015 under number 5131. Its operation relies on the participation of the target audience to better deploy itself and make decision-makers

more accountable in terms of forest resource management and law enforcement.

The involvement and participation of key stakeholders, including communities and CSOs, are key factors in the success of SNOIE<sup>3</sup> implementation. Indeed, their intervention begins since the provision of alerts on presumptive forest illegality. Once the alerts are analyzed and their relevance proven, it follows the planning, preparation and completion of verification and documentation missions by these CSOs by involving community leaders and observers from whistleblowing communities. Note that these CSOs, community leaders and observers have been previously trained in SNOIE

1. Standardized System of Civil Society Independent Forest Monitoring (SNOIE) is an independent forest monitoring approach certified ISO 9001: 2015 since April 2018 and implemented by the organizations FODER, PAPEL, CEDLA, ECODEV and TI-C.
2. <https://oiecameroun.org/index.php/8-actualites/96-le-systeme-normalise-d-observation-independante-externe-snoie-premier-systeme-d-observation-independante-certifie-dans-le-monde>
3. [WWW.oiecameroun.org](http://WWW.oiecameroun.org)

procedures.

SNOIE has developed a network of informants made up of community members and local CSOs close to forest titles, to follow the chain of denunciations of cases of suspected illegal logging. For an effective participation of these communities and local CSOs, the system focuses on strengthening the capacity of these actors to identify indices of illegal logging and OI and thereby increases their effectiveness in monitoring the environment and forests in particular.

The trainings carried out within the framework of the SNOIE are carried out either through workshops or through awareness campaigns. To date, there are more than 10,000<sup>4</sup> potential whistleblowers in the logging areas of the South, East, Littoral and Central Cameroon regions. Between 2015 and 2019, 74 community members were responsible for 59 cases of alleged illegal logging reported by alerts, either in writing or by telephone, to the SNOIE coordination provided by FODER. These cases have been verified and documented using SNOIE procedures. The reports of denunciations thus produced were transmitted to the Ministries of Forests and Wildlife (MINFOF) accompanied by letters of denunciation.

To date, four (04) civil society organizations active in forest areas use SNOIE to conduct their independent forest monitoring activi-



ties. These include the Centre pour le Développement Local et Alternatif (CeDLA), the Projet d'Appui à l'élevage et de Préservation de la biodiversité en périphérie des aires protégées au Cameroun (PAPEL), Ecosystèmes et Développement (ECO-DEV) and Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER), one of which is located in Bertoua. The collective action of these CSOs, reinforced with that of other stakeholders including the forest administration, the private forest sector, technical partners and financial and media, allowed the system to maintain a climate of co-production which has been successful to date. To achieve this, multi-stakeholder consultation or reflection frameworks are provided for in the functioning of the SNOIE, which allow stakeholders and key players to discuss the problems encountered and to reflect in a participatory manner on effective alternatives making it possible to strengthen SNOIE performance.

4. Source : Liste de présence des campagnes de sensibilisations faite dans le cadre du projet EU-CFPR sur l'illégalité forestière

5. <https://oiecameroun.org/index.php/8-actualites/22-le-snoie-est-une-approche-qui-s-arrime-aux-exigences-de-la-norme-iso-9001-2015/>

6. <https://www.actu-plus.cm/2017/03/cameroun-letat-simplique-lutte-contre-l-exploitation-illegale-forests/>

To influence the decision-making process following denunciations produced via SNOIE, the development and implementation of this standardized approach for independent monitoring of natural resource management is done with the involvement of the relevant administrations. The consultation of these decision-making actors makes it possible to collect their opinions and expectations which are taken into account in the system. The participation of administrative agents is not only through their involvement in certain field missions carried out by SNOIE CSOs

(Joint mission with heads of forestry posts, regional forest delegations and even the national forest control brigade), but also through their involvement in the technical and ethical evaluation committee (CTE) of IFM reports and also their participation in concertation meetings / multi-stakeholder meetings outlined above. The CTE is made up of senior officials from the administration, the private sector and experts in rights and forestry and is responsible for verifying the reliability of the denunciation reports before any publication. The administration's participation also materializes through their involvement in SNOIE strategic meetings, in particular information and exchange meetings on SNOIE. And during these meetings, the needs and interests of all stakeholders, including the relevant administration, are collected or reviewed with a view



to their integration into the implementation of SNOIE for effective collaboration.

In five years of implementing SNOIE, this participation system has made the administration more accountable, and has enabled the administration to obtain reactions following reports of denunciation from SNOIE.

In fact, between 2015 and 2019, out of 59 Independent forest monitoring reports from SNOIE sent to MINFOF, illegal logging incidents were found in 44 of them following monitoring and verification missions carried out by the MINFOF. The 15 other denunciation reports that were not the subject of a monitoring mission by MINFOF are said to be due to insufficient logistics and financial means because this constraint is often put forward by the administration (during exe-

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7. <https://forest4dev.org/download/2675/>

cutive meetings of consultation mentioned above) which does not hesitate to request possible support from FODER for the search for additional sources of funding.

The reports of denunciations transmitted to MINFOF led to the opening of nine (09) disputes (01 in the Littoral, 03 in the Center, 03 in the South and 02 in the East) against the companies indexed in the denunciations and 01 against an individual. These companies have been recognized by MINFOF, guilty of illegal logging in the national forest estate and in titles awarded in four forest regions. In addition to these disputes, seventeen (17) joint missions (OSC SNOIE / MINFOF) were organized, five (05) of which led to the seizure of illegally harvested wood. Three (03) companies have had their operating license suspended.

At the national and international level, the SNOIE contributed to the implementation of Annex VII of the VPA-FLEGT of Cameroon

relating to information made public by making available information from independent monitoring of the management of natural resources. The SNOIE information exchange approach is done through the popularization of the results obtained at the end of the IFM missions as well as the communication on the specific actions taken by MINFOF following the denunciations transmitted on the presumed illegal logging activities. The popularization of these results allows actors of the European Union Timber Regulation (EUTR) and CITES management bodies to use them to apply and enforce laws relating to the exploitation and sustainable trade of wood.

The SNOIE tool is said to be a tool to assist the participation of non-state actors in environmental management and in decision-making by the competent administrations.





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