

4.0 BASELINE INFORMATION

4.1 PROJECT AREA AND AFFECTED POPULATIONS

Bakola Pygmy settlements stretch from the southern bank of the Nyong River to the Ntem River which is the border between Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea throughout southwestern Cameroon. To the west settlements can be found from shoreline of the Atlantic Ocean eastward to, but not crossing 11° East.

A census of these settlements was completed in the 1980s (see Loung 1996:177), however results were not published, with the exception of a map illustrating the general location of settlements (Figure 4). Based on this map it appears the majority of settlements are between the Nyong River and the Kribi - Akom II road.

The IPP Project area stretches from Kribi to an area about 10 km west of Lolodorf, about 120 km. This area is near the geographic center of the settlements inventoried by Loung. About 45 percent of the settlements illustrated by Loung are near the road; 25 percent North and 30 percent South.

Bakola Pygmies have been practicing agriculture for several decades, and live in an area widely open to external influences; their way of life is then closer to that of Bantu farmers than other Cameroonian Pygmy groups. However, they suffer from marginalisation and therefore get only a small benefit from this social transformation, and there is no clear indication that this situation will improve in the next future.

Bakola Pygmies in the Project area live in overcrowded housing, and with very poor sanitation conditions, which explains the observed outbreak of tuberculosis among them. They have a limited access to hospitals and dispensaries, mainly for financial reasons, and their life span appears to be shorter than that of other Cameroonians.

At the current time there appears to be little possibility of Bakola Pygmies improving their general standard of living within the Cameroonian society because of the current economic situation. Adaptation has come largely through outside missionary influences.

Some Bakola Pygmies do not welcome change, however, most do. Most Bakola Pygmies contacted by GEPFE would like to improve their life. They are interested in improving sanitary conditions, have a source of income and hence the ability to purchase consumer goods. The majority appear to want to have their children educated to be able to benefit from the local economic situation. However, this is a decision the Bakola Pygmies make themselves.

In addition, about 25 Bantu villages occur along the pipeline route. These Bantu are of several ethnic origins and include (from west to east) the: Batanga, Mabea, Fang, Ngumba, Bassa and

Ewondo. Their population can be roughly estimated to be between 10,000 and 15,000 individuals based on the 1987 census.

4.2 RELATIONS BETWEEN BANTU POPULATIONS AND BAKOLA PYGMIES

In general, Bakola Pygmies live in close association with many ethnic groups throughout Southwest Cameroon. In the Project area, Bakola communities are associated often with Bantu farmers, Fang, Ewondo, Bassa, and especially Kuassio, who speak the closest related language to that spoken by Bakola Pygmies. Near Kribi, Bakola groups are associated to some Batanga and mainly with Mabea villages. Some live in association with Bassa villages north of Bipindi.

"Are the Pygmies obliged to be subservient to the Bantu villagers or do they have to adopt agriculture themselves in order to survive" is a socio-political important question which has been discussed by Bahuchet, *et al.* (1991) and Ngima Mawoung (1993). Until recently, each Bakola family was dependent on a Bantu village family through which reciprocal exchanges occurred. Now, traditional relationship is often abandoned, but Bakola are still dependent on the Bantu farmers for their supply of starchy food, as well as tools, salt, tobacco, and clothing. But partly and to various degrees the Bakola are still dependent on the Bantu villagers for a part of their energy-rich, carbohydrate foods. Central African Pygmies studied by Cavalli-Sforza have been found to devote up to 20 percent of their time for Bantu villagers (Cavalli-Sforza 1986:424).

Examples of some of the interrelationships include:

- Bakola Pygmies share the same clan names as the Bantu Kuassio, and the people who belong to the same clan consider themselves as related, or cousins.
- Bakola Pygmies are often buried near their Bantu family's compound.
- Some Bantu farmers marry Bakola Pygmy women (the reverse, Bakola Pygmy men marrying Bantu women, is very rare but occurs), which is generating closer mutual exchanges.
- Bakola Pygmies frequently develop privileged relationships with several Bantu families, in different villages. This allows them greater flexibility, in case of resource shortages. If shortages occur in one area they can move to another and obtain food from another Bantu family.
- According to Professor Loung's (at the Institute for Human Sciences, Yaoundé, at the time) surveys conducted in the Kribi-Lolodorf area in the 1980's, about half of the Bakola could not rely on their own food production to be self sufficient. They needed to barter game for cassava grown by the Bantu, who are also hunters. The terms were usually fair to both parties.

- Currently, Bakola sell their game to Bantus and buy food with the money when needed.

However, these relationships are in the process of change as the impact of the local cash economy shifts this relationship, often to the economic detriment of the Bakola. For example, some Bantu now employ Bakola Pygmies as workers on their plantations, paying wages which are not considered by some as a fair price for their labor.

4.3 ECONOMICS

Bakola Pygmy economics are varied and based on a combination of:

- hunting and gathering,
- exchange and selling of forest products,
- agriculture,
- labor for the Bantus, and
- traditional medicine.

Exchanges are both barter, and monetary: Bakola Pygmies can exchange or sell forest products (meat, honey, nuts), and obtain or buy cassava, salt, tobacco, alcohol, *etc.*

Beside their own farming activities, they sell also their labor for activities such as slashing and maintaining the fields for the Bantu villagers, harvesting the cocoa as cheap workers, or helping with manual labor. For this work they may be given some money or cassava. In either case, the rate is very low, and generally unfavorable to the Bakola Pygmies.

By contrast, healers and traditional doctors can be very famous and they treat patients from various origins, coming from very far away. Treatments may be expensive and these individual Bakola Pygmies used to be relatively wealthy.

Another notable source of income was the gathering of seeds of *Strophantus*, which are used by the pharmaceutical industry for medical purposes, but this trade is not active any more.

4.4 HEALTH

Bakola Pygmies suffer from many transmissible diseases, primarily:

- bacteria like salmonellas and treponemas, and tuberculosis (TB)
- viruses like measles, hepatitis A, B, C, D and others, and
- many parasites: malaria, intestinal worms, *etc.*

Waters are polluted, and cause a lot of diarrhea, the first cause of mortality among young children. Diet is fairly good but such a burden of diseases impairs its effect. The health care opportunities available to the Bakola Pygmies are less than for the Bantu populations, at least partly because of the remote locations of the Bakola Pygmy villages.

Health workers have observed that Bakola Pygmy mortality seems to be much higher, and life expectancy shorter, when compared to the other local populations. However, additional work is necessary to confirm this observation due to the small size of the population and long-term follow-up needed.

4.5 HOUSING

Generally speaking, some houses are still made of palm leaves and bark panels, fixed on wooden poles. However, mud houses, similar to those found in the Bantu villages along the road, are the majority. Roofs are made of palm leaves. Sometimes, houses are covered with corrugated iron sheets.

4.6 EDUCATION

Formal education of Bakola Pygmies in the area started some 40 years ago. Today, a significant proportion of the Bakola Pygmies receive some formal education (pre-school, primary school, some secondary and technical schools) with the help of the Catholic Mission and more recently, of the international NGO SAILD. During the 1997 GEPFE survey, it was estimated 30 percent of five to 15 year-old children attended school. During the 1998 surveys it was observed that school attendance had reduced significantly due to lack of funding. As an example, only 14 pupils were present at the mission boarding school of Bipindi compared to up to 60 pupils some years ago.

4.7 SACRED SITES

The most important sacred sites for Bakola Pygmies are the tombs of their ancestors. Bakola Pygmies sometimes bury their dead near their settlement; sometimes in the Bantu village near the family with whom they are related. Dead Bakola are buried either near their house, or beside the hamlet. As a result, all the graves are located in or close to the settlement.

In the past, Bakola Pygmies used to immediately abandon their settlement when someone died. Today, Bakola will move their settlement if too many unexplained deaths occur, but they usually remain close to the original settlement site.

Sacred trees exist, but their location is usually kept secret.

4.8 POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Bakola Pygmies have a non-hierarchical egalitarian society. There is one chief in each Bakola settlement, though this function is not a traditional one. Chiefs are not always representative of the population, and important decisions are taken together by all adult men of the settlement, with a preponderance for the elder men. Bakola Pygmies have very limited personal property, but on the contrary an important collective asset base.

4.9 LAND OWNERSHIP

Bakola Pygmies sometimes live on their own land, sometimes in areas closer to the Bantu fields where they are allowed to use land by the Bantus. When, in the 1960s the government asked the Bakola Pygmies to move closer to the roads, they were allotted unoccupied land between Bantu villages that is now theirs. In case of land disputes between Bantus and Bakola Pygmies, the latter usually move to another site, if the land occupied is not their own.

4.10 LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Under the Cameroon Constitution, Bakola Pygmies have the same rights and obligations as other Cameroonian citizens. The new Constitution also identifies the need to protect "minorities and natives," both of which describe the Bakola Pygmies. Several laws and regulations, which could be to their advantage, are applicable to the Bakola Pygmies.

A summary of these laws is presented in Appendix A.