



# Rural resource centres

Lessons learned from the North  
Region of Cameroon







## Rural resource centres



Faced with a constantly changing world, farmers need a range of innovations and services, coupled with permanent access to knowledge and information. Bringing all these elements together in a single rural environment would greatly facilitate the adoption of innovations and maximise the benefits for farmers. The World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) has been developing rural resource centres (RRCs) since 2006; first in Cameroon, and later in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, and Nigeria, to facilitate the adoption of agricultural innovations.

**A Rural Resource Centre is a centre for demonstrating, training, and disseminating innovations in the agroforestry sector.** An RRC is based in a rural area and managed by a grassroots organisation (either a local NGO or a Producers' Organisation). These platforms encourage farmers to share their experiences and give them

access to technical advice and personalised services to meet their livelihood needs. The emphasis is on knowledge acquisition, interactive learning and linking farmers with each other and with other stakeholders in the sector. They are encouraged to conduct their own experiments, adopt proven technologies, and share them with their peers. Any socio-professional category can be found in an RRC, depending on the context: producers, breeders, women, young people, minorities, because unlike other meeting places in the village (such as the school, the church, the chief's house, the group leader's house), the RRC is a neutral place that belongs to the whole community.

**A 'typical' RRC is comprised of a tree nursery, demonstration plots, a training hall, a small library and office spaces. Accommodation, catering facilities and agricultural processing units may also be part of the RRC depending on available resources, opportunities and needs.**



## Rural resource centres in the ReSI-NoC project



In the North Region of Cameroon, livestock, agriculture, and protected areas use the same 65,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land. There are three national parks and 33 hunting zones that occupy around 45% of the total area of the North Region. Against this situation, the major challenges for the agricultural sector are to secure access to land while preserving a sustainable and balanced use of natural resources. Priority actions to support economic development without compromising biodiversity should consider the often-conflicting interests of the different actors involved.

Several methods and tools for planning development interventions that allow different actors to converge at various levels (community, district, landscape, value chain) have been developed and tested in Cameroon. Although these tools are generally successful in diagnosing land uses, challenges, opportunities, and support



needs, they rarely allow for the participatory identification and implementation of solutions. Thus, the implementation of interventions – whether technical, organizational or social – requires participatory research approaches, allowing the design, testing and adaptation of innovations by a range of stakeholders. One of the approaches advocated is rural resource centres as they bring together different community stakeholders and facilitate the adoption of new techniques. The RRC concept is an organizational innovation, and adapts well to the social, economic and environmental context of the North Region, to the objective to be achieved by the ReSI-NoC project and, above all, facilitates synergy and coaction, integrating existing and future innovations.

The RRCs are alternative extension tools/mechanisms, where farmers themselves are involved in co-developing, testing, evaluating and disseminating innovations.

RRCs are an effective means for resolving problems of poverty, facilitating participative action, co-construction, solidarity, and collective effort, and reaching out to people and providing long-term support.

RRCs are part of an action research approach that promotes “learning by doing”. They also integrate the mobilization and appropriation of innovations by local people. Moreover, the physical space provided by RRCs allows the possibility for several stakeholders to work together.

**An RRC facilitates synergies between research and development actors, the co-creation of a framework for the generation and dissemination of technical, managerial and organizational innovations, with the support of local authorities.**



## Rural resource centres: A northern perspective

As mentioned above, RRCs are generally comprised of a tree nursery, demonstration plots, a training hall, a small library, and office spaces. This model was also adopted in the North Region of Cameroon, but the following elements were added to suit the specificities of the Sahelian zone: **permanent water sources, solid fences to keep livestock out, and spaces for market gardening during the dry season.**

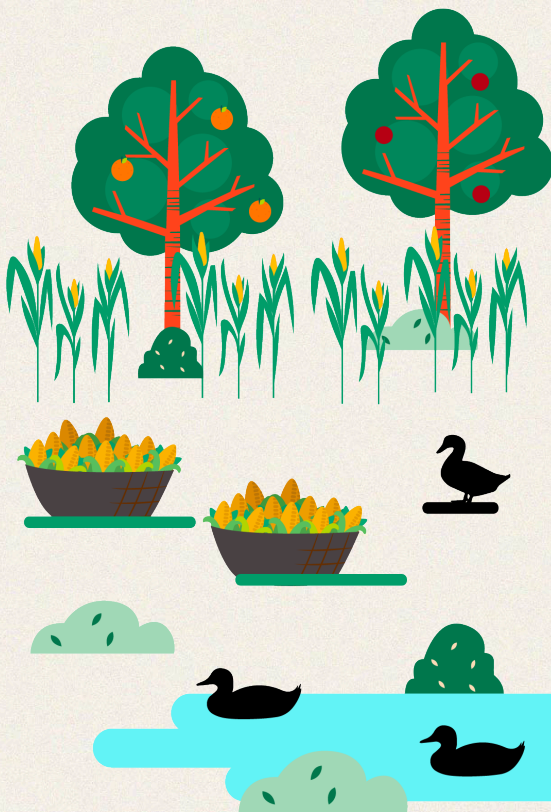




In addition, the RRCs in the North Region have been set up in the peripheries of its three national parks: Faro, Benoue and Bouba Ndjidda, because **they are meant to facilitate negotiations on compromises between the communities and the conservation services**. The communities receive technical and material support in view of sustainably increasing agropastoral productivity and improving livelihoods, provided they limit the extension of agricultural land and cease all non-authorized activity in the protected areas.



## An effective training platform



RRCs are conceived as means for the transfer of knowledge on various domains. The training themes cover technical, organizational, and managerial aspects, with coaching and advice on topics such as family economics, gender, and leadership.

These include:

- Seedling production, vegetation propagation techniques, planting techniques, planning, monitoring, and maintenance of tree nurseries.
- Learning and training on the different uses of seedlings (food (fruit trees), soil restoration, timber, fodder, living hedges, medicinal plants, and fuelwood).
- Setting up and managing clonal fields, and Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR);
- The manufacture of biopesticides, biofertilizers and compost.
- Improved technical itineraries, good agricultural practices, the introduction of improved seeds and market garden production.
- Group management techniques, management of RRCs, and sub-committees with various technical and managerial activities.



## Benefits of RRCs in the North Region of Cameroon



There is public satisfaction with rural resource centres so far as they provide people with lasting solutions to the problems they encounter in life. Their expectations in terms of agroforestry production are very much considered in the RRCs' missions. In more detail, the RRCs support improvements in agriculture, livestock farming, forestry, family economy, social solidarity, and entrepreneurship. All these subjects are tackled, and the training courses have an impact on their daily lives.

Rural resource centres make a wide range of contributions to the region. These contributions include:



### A reliable learning environment

Thanks to the RRCs, the people living around them have benefited from various types of training, whether in gender, leadership, or various production techniques (agroforestry, market gardening, fodder crops and production planning).

### A guaranteed way of improving food security in the North Region of Cameroon

Women from the villages where RRCs are based, and others from satellite villages have received training in processing agricultural products and diversifying their diets.

The setting up of home gardens, which are spaces in each house where people replicate the lessons they have received from the members of the RRCs, also contributes not only to food security, but more importantly to people's well-being.

### A key means of restoring landscapes

RRCs enable production of tree seedlings and facilitate access to these seedlings, which makes a major contribution to landscape restoration. These RRCs also make it possible to establish wood lots to produce seedlings for timber and fuelwood.

### An effective collaboration mechanism

RRCs facilitate synergies, a participatory approach and integrated management. The Tchamba RRC is a concrete example of synergy between the ReSI-NoC project and the international organization African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), which together have set up a solar pump drilling system that facilitates local people's activities within this space.

### An effective way of structuring communities

The RRCs have provided a way for people who did not previously speak to each other to come together in one place and work together for a good cause. Women are very involved in the work of the RRCs, probably because they had never had the opportunity to get together in this way to learn and develop actions and receive training and support specific to their needs.

### A clear opportunity to include minority groups

In the North Region, minority groups such as the Mbororos do not generally work with other communities, but this situation has changed since the arrival of the RRCs, particularly the one located in Mbe commune precisely Sassa Mbersi village, a locality around Benoué National Park.

**In a nutshell, the population really appreciates this approach, which is reflected in their mobilization and, above all, in their ownership of the results obtained. They appreciate the support and technical advice, the new varieties introduced, the nursery techniques such as grafting, and the training received. The communities participating in RRCs have learned how to improve crop production, how to participate actively in meetings, and how to run group activities. In several RRCs, such as Tchamba and Bawan, women and men have been introduced to vegetative tree propagation practices such as grafting and layering. The approach of rallying people around common objectives has fostered a spirit of solidarity and a participatory approach geared towards their own results. In short, the RRCs are now fully up and running, and the members (over 95% of whom are women) agree that their lives have improved.**





## RRCs as instruments of effective dissemination



Compared to traditional agricultural outreach systems, RRCs have the following advantages:

- They are more accessible to rural populations, and especially groups that are often 'overlooked' by traditional agricultural extension services, such as women, youths and herders.
- They facilitate more relevant innovations thanks to the process of evaluation and adaptation by beneficiaries.
- They have higher numbers of women and young people among their beneficiaries.
- They provide better quality of service thanks to their proximity and accountability.
- They facilitate better networking with other development actors.

In addition, activities are not necessarily limited to agriculture, but may include different socioeconomic and environmental aspects, such as community development, governance, civic engagement, conflict management, nutrition, and health.



## Advocacy vis-à-vis political decision makers, donors, and development players



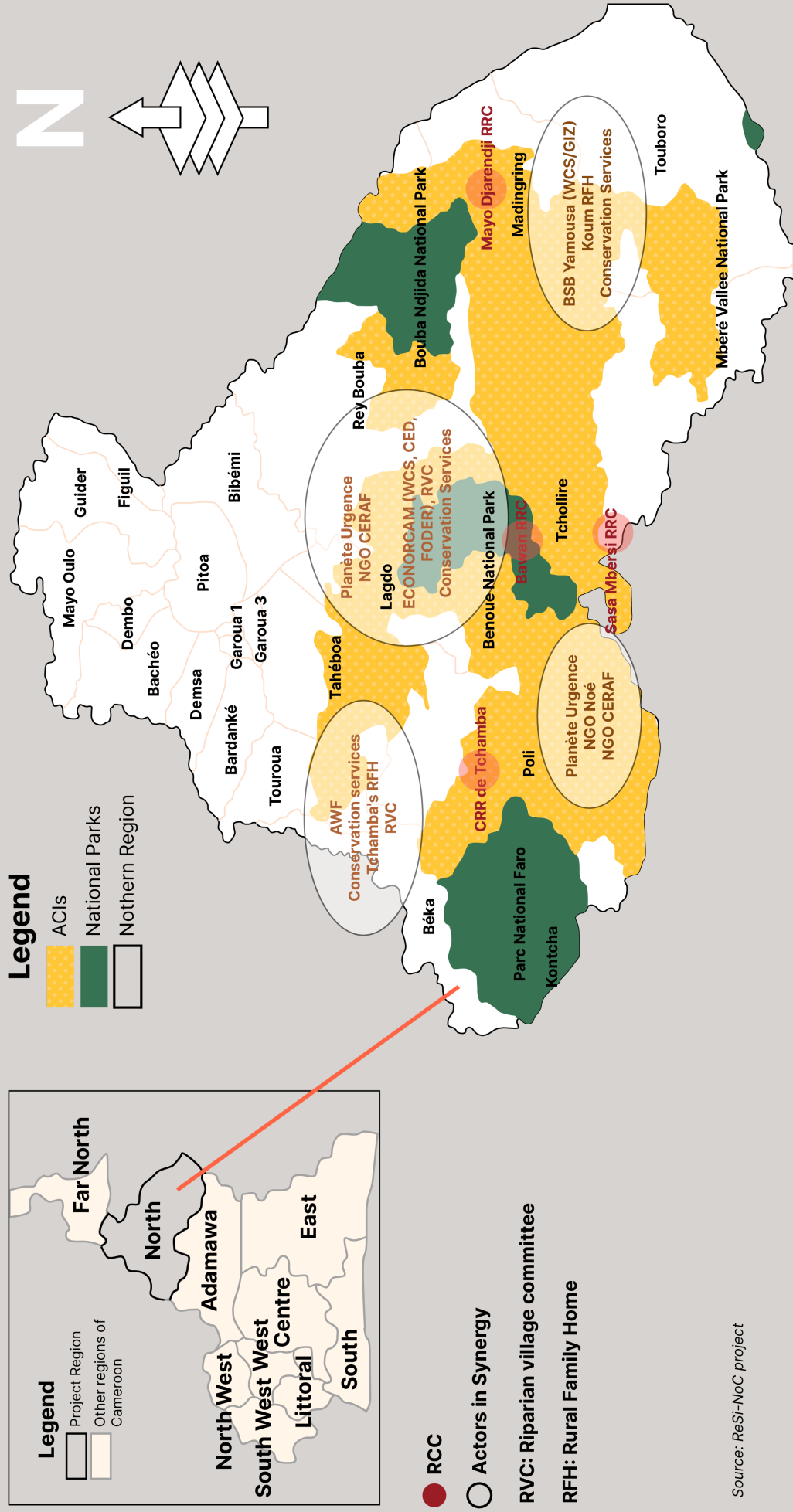
Decision makers, donors and development players should:

- Recognize the RRC approach as an effective outreach mechanism, capable of considering specific local contexts and needs.
- Support the development of RRCs through investment in infrastructure and technical and managerial capacity building to increase their production capacity, competence, visibility, and credibility.
- Actively encourage partnerships between RRCs and other development partners, in particular government programmes, development and humanitarian aid agencies, rural councils, and local authorities.



## Location of RRCs in the North Cameroon region

To date, (04) RRCs have been created around the Benoue (Bawan and Sassa Mbersi), Bouba Ndjida (Mayo Njarendji) and Faro (Tchamba) parks.





The ReSI-NoC project aims to strengthen economically profitable, ecologically sustainable and socially equitable agro-sylvo-pastoral innovation systems in the North Cameroon region. The project is funded by the European Union and implemented by ICRAF-CIFOR-CIRAD-IRAD.

**Contact: ReSI-NoC Project, IRAD-Garoua    Tel: 677 57 32 22    E-mail: [icraf-garoua@cifor-icraf.org](mailto:icraf-garoua@cifor-icraf.org)**