

# information brief

## Constraints and opportunities to the participation of women and minorities in land restoration in Cameroon



➤ **Summary:** Insufficient consideration of the needs and capacities of women and minority groups leads to sub-optimal performance, and at times failure, of landscape restoration initiatives. Landscape restoration interventions should therefore enhance participation and seek ‘empowerment’ of women and minority groups. This information brief presents key results from several studies aimed at gaining a better understanding of the opportunities and constraints to the participation of women and minority groups in land restoration activities. First, while national policies and policy instruments are not gender-discriminatory, there is room to make them more gender-sensitive and transformative, especially with regards to access and control over resources, access to information and knowledge and lastly, participation, status, and power. Second, more inclusive approaches are needed to make sure people, including women and minority groups, receive up-to-date information and training on context-specific and gender-sensitive land restoration options. Third, innovative strategies and mechanisms must be put in place to enhance women’s and minorities’ control over land restoration choices, especially in contexts where customary rules and norms restrict their access to the resources needed for land restoration. Lastly, project managers and practitioners need to give more attention to encouraging female leadership and facilitating inclusive decision-making processes in land restoration initiatives to achieve genuine participation of all.

➤ **Context:** Land restoration for post-Covid rural and indigenous women empowerment and poverty reduction in Cameroon is a 36-month project funded under the IDRC GLOW initiative (Gender Equality in a Low Carbon World). The project is executed in Cameroon and falls within the Country's AFR100 Initiative under the Bonn Challenge. In fact, Cameroon has committed to restore 12 million ha of degraded lands and landscapes across its different agroecological zones as part of the AFR100 Initiative under the Bonn Challenge. Rural women and minority groups are key actors to meeting this objective because of the important role they play in agriculture, food security and land management and related land and tree tenure issues. Nevertheless, overall power imbalances and other sociocultural and policy factors often limit rural women's participation in land restoration.

➤ **Research question:** The main assumption underlying our research is that insufficient consideration of the needs and capacities of women and minority groups leads to sub-optimal performance, and at times failure of landscape restoration initiatives. Landscape restoration interventions should therefore enhance participation and seek 'empowerment' of women and minority groups. Literature qualifies 'empowerment' in many ways, but this project focuses on 4 interventions domains that seem relevant in the landscape restoration context (Figure 1):

- Interventions that improve women and minority groups' **access to resources**.
- Interventions that strengthen **leadership** of women and minority groups.
- Interventions that enhance control over **income** and **time** use
- **Opportunity structure**, i.e., gender-related policy and institutional environment

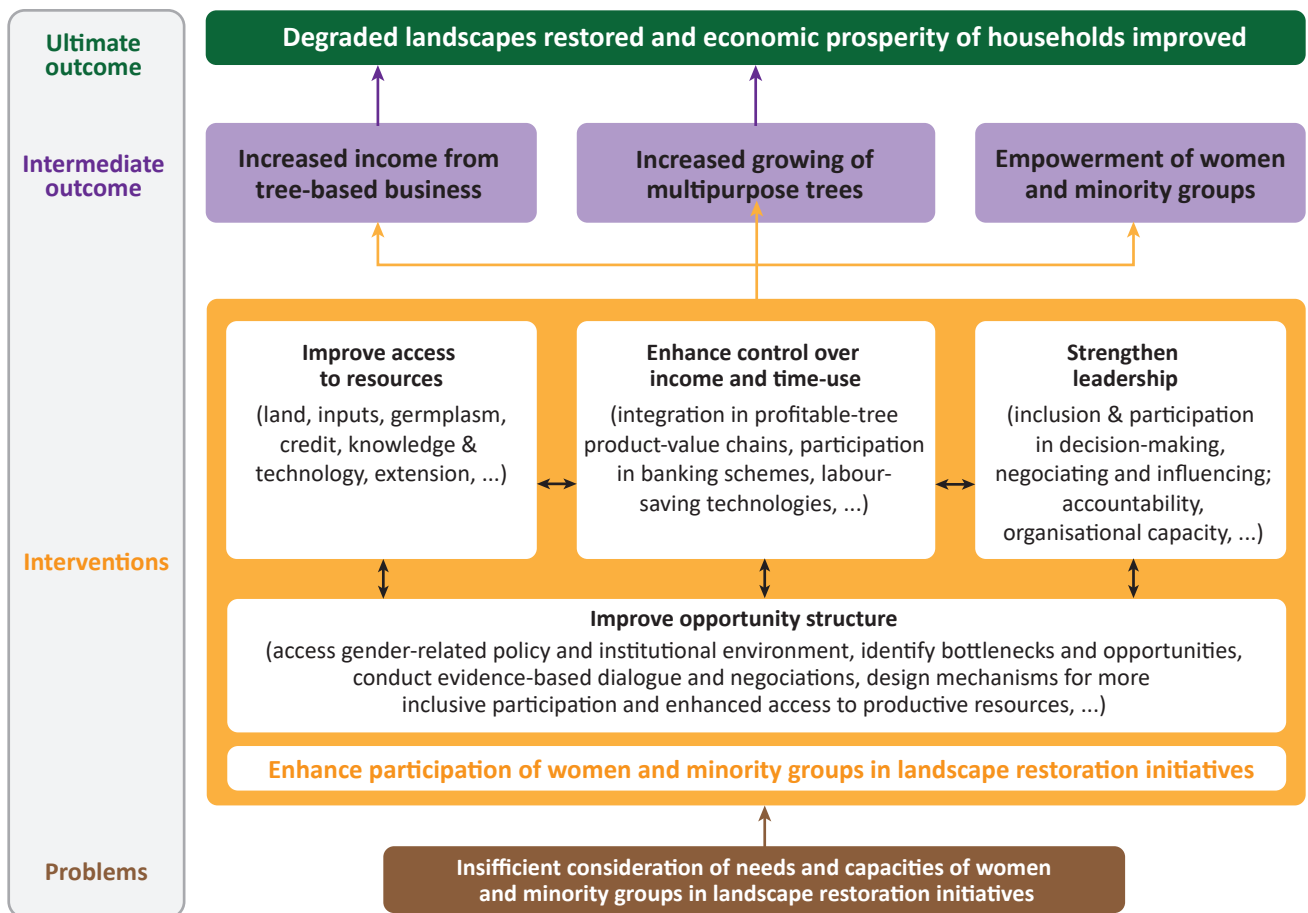


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of LRIWEP project

➤ **Research sites:** Three zones were chosen to cover the diversity of factors likely to affect the success of women's empowerment in landscape restoration: agroecology, land uses, land and tree tenure, role of women and minority groups in society affected by culture and religion, history and ongoing initiatives on land restoration and actors involved. In each of these areas, i.e. Ngambe-Tikar (humid forest), Mount Bamboutos (western highlands) and North region (soudano-sahel), a restoration program implemented by a local actor served as case study (Figure 2).



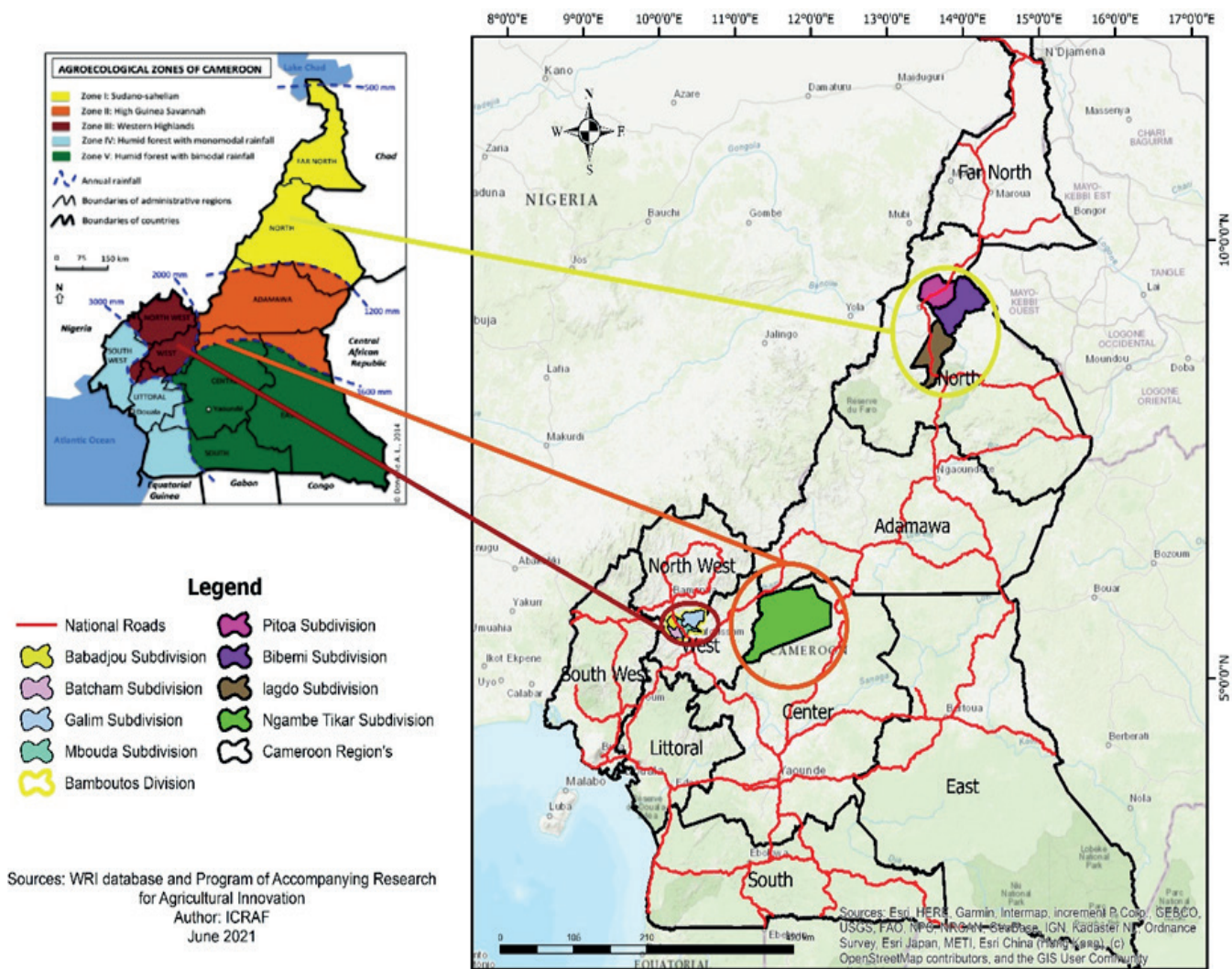


Figure 2: Map of LRIWEP research sites in Cameroon

➤ **Methodology:** The research questions were examined using separate methodologies and in different agroecological zones depending on context (Table 1). They all contributed to gaining a better understanding of the opportunities and constraints to the participation of women and minority groups in land restoration activities. The research activities were led by ICRAF scientists with support from CAFER, ABIOGeT and Rainforest Alliance, one PhD and five MSc students.

**Table 1: Objectives, study sites and methodology used to answer research questions**

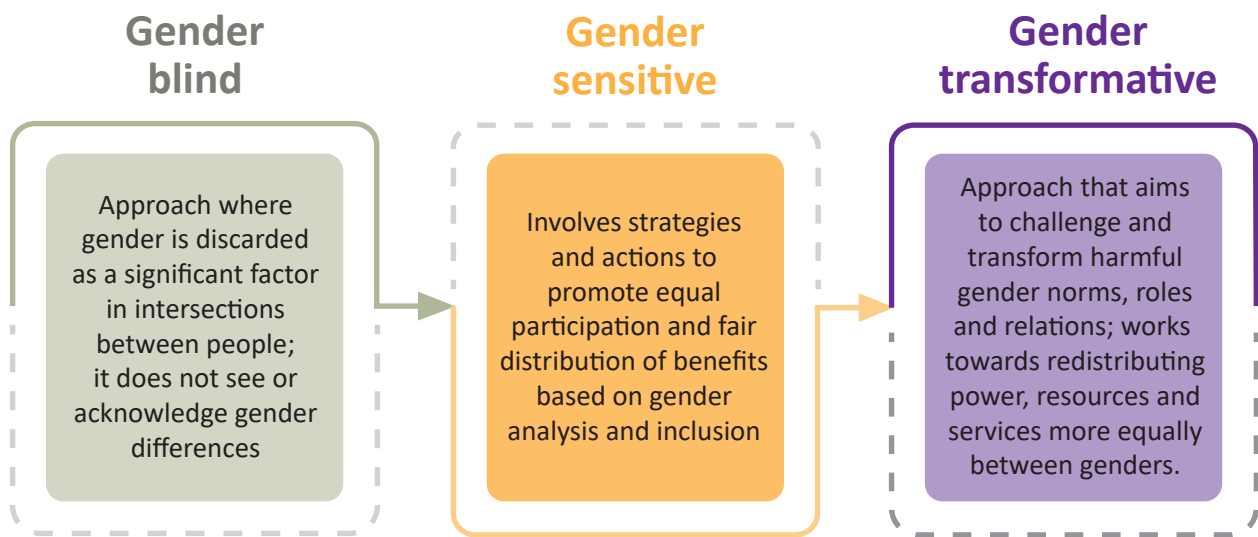
Title	Objectives	Study Sites	Methodology
<b>Gender related policy and institutional opportunities and constraints for land restoration</b>	Assess to what extent gender is considered in policies and institutions related to land restoration in Cameroon	Policies and Institutions at <b>national level</b> ;  Institutional anchoring at the local level, municipality of Ngambé-Tikar as a case study	Literature review and content analysis of policy documents using the Harvard analytical framework;  Key informant interviews at municipality level
<b>Socio-cultural factors affecting access to land and tree resources</b>	Assess knowledge on formal and informal rules governing access to land and trees; Identify customary practices, including prejudices and stereotypes governing access to land, trees and restoration technologies	<b>Centre region</b> , Ngambe-Tikar: Campement Nyanka, Yindie, Ngandie, Campement Nganie	Individual interviews (40 ♀; 20 ♂),  Focus Group Discussions (8),  Key informant interviews (with village heads and decentralised govt services)
<b>Leadership and inclusion of women and minority groups in decision-making for land restoration</b>	Assess participation and influence of women in land restoration initiatives; Identify factors affecting female leadership and inclusive decision-making for land restoration	<b>West region</b> , Monts Bamboutos: Fongo-Tongo, Batcham, Bangang, Balatchi and Babadjou	Individual interviews (60 ♀), Life history telling with 3 women leaders, Focus group discussions (7)  Interviews with representatives of 2 NGOs working on land restoration in the area
<b>Gender-based assessment of the effects of agricultural practices on land degradation and restoration options</b>	Examine intrahousehold differences in men’s and women’s perceptions and perceived values regarding major land degradation causes and trends, and the performance of restoration practices	<b>North region</b> : Pitoa, Bibemi, Tcheboa, Garoua 3, Bacheo; <b>West region</b> , <b>Mt Bamboutos</b> : Babdajou, Balatchi, Bangang and Batcham	Field observation and measurements based on Land Degradation Surveillance Framework (LDSF) protocol on 320 plots; Interviews with 320 plot owners

## Key Results

### 1. Gender considerations in Cameroon policies and policy instruments

In Cameroon, the Constitution, as well as policies and policy instruments are not discriminatory in terms of gender, nor do they prevent women from accessing resources. However, more than half of those instruments are gender-blind (Figure 3) on all three criteria of empowerment, i.e. access and control of resources, access to information and knowledge and participation, status, and power (Table 2). In 4 cases they were gender-sensitive, and only 2 of the 12 policy instruments were gender-transformative.





**Figure 3:** Extent to which gender is considered in policies, strategies and programs

## 2. Socio-cultural factors affecting access to land and tree resources

### *Knowledge on customary and formal land legislation:*

- Customary laws governing land are widely known, but few people are aware of formal laws.
- In Ngambe-Tikar, only 18 % of the respondents were aware of the 1974 land ordinance, the 1976 decree of application and its 2005 modifications. This concerns more men (30%) than women (12.5%) and more Tikar (30%) than the minority Bedzang group (6.5%).
- Information on formal land legislation is obtained from NGOs and close friends, but parents and traditional leaders are the most common sources for informal laws.
- Most male and female respondents are of the opinion that formal laws governing land are contradictory to the customary laws.
- 33% of the respondents in Ngambe-Tikar had heard of land titles as an instrument to protect their land, but many ignore or fear the long and complicated procedures.

**Table 2: Extent to which Cameroon policies and policy documents consider gender, based on 3 criteria of empowerment**

Empowerment criteria	Access and control of resources			Access to information and knowledge			Participation, status and power		
	Blind	Sensitive	Transformative	Blind	Sensitive	Transformative	Blind	Sensitive	Transformative
	General and Specific Policies								
SND30	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
SDSR/PNIA	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
PNG	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
PDC/NDT	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
PNDPF	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
REDD+	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Total policies</b>	<b>3/6</b>	<b>3/6</b>	<b>2/6</b>	<b>3/6</b>	<b>3/6</b>	<b>1/6</b>	<b>2/6</b>	<b>4/6</b>	<b>1/6</b>
	Policy Instruments								
Constitution de Janvier 1996	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Loi n°96/12 du 05 août 1996	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Loi n°2011/008 du 6 mai 2011	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Loi n°2019/024 du 24 décembre 2019	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Loi n° 94/01 du 20 janvier 1994 et ses décrets	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Ordonnance n°74-1 du 6 juillet 1974 et son décret	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
<b>Total Policy instruments</b>	<b>5/6</b>	<b>1/6</b>	<b>0/6</b>	<b>5/6</b>	<b>1/6</b>	<b>0/6</b>	<b>4/6</b>	<b>1/6</b>	<b>1/6</b>
<b>Total policy and policy instruments</b>	<b>8/12</b>	<b>4/12</b>	<b>2/12</b>	<b>8/12</b>	<b>4/12</b>	<b>1/12</b>	<b>6/12</b>	<b>5/12</b>	<b>2/12</b>

### **Barriers to tree planting and participation in land restoration**

Our study found no obvious cultural and legal barriers that prevent men or women, Tikar or Bedzang, from participating in tree planting. However, where trees are planted matters. For example, women tend to plant more in food crop fields (40%) and home gardens (35%) compared to men (26% and 10.5% respectively). However, several socio-cultural norms prevailing in rural areas affecting access to land, access to finance and participation in meetings and training, may restrict women’s and minorities’ participation in land restoration initiatives. For example, a married woman needs her husband’s permission to make decisions concerning land. Land cannot be rented or sold to a married woman unless she is accompanied by her husband or a male relative, even when she has the money.

### 3. Leadership and inclusion of women and minority groups in decision-making for land restoration

#### Decision-making on land restoration

- Who takes decisions on land restoration at household level depends on the type of decision, but women have their say in most cases (Figure 4).
- About 60% of the women said they had autonomy as far as the use of products from restored farms is concerned, as well as on the income generated from those.
- In 80% of the households, wife and husband take joint decisions on the distribution of land restoration related tasks.
- Men dominate decisions on choice of land to be restored because of the customary land tenure system where women are not allowed to own land, but rather access land through their husband, father, uncle, or brother.

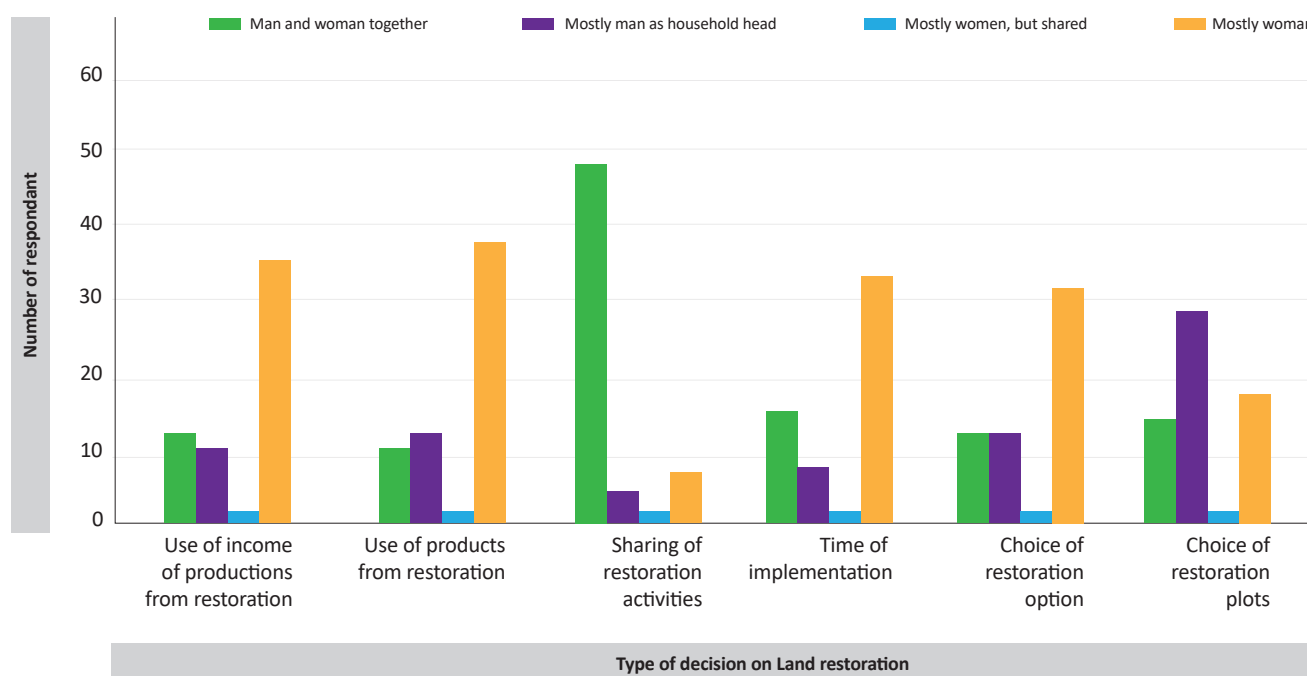


Figure 4: Main decision-maker on land restoration, according to type of decision

#### Women leadership

Two strategies are used to engage communities in land restoration initiatives,

- working with farmer groups consisting of at least 50% female membership and
- bringing on board traditional and administrative authorities (rural councils).

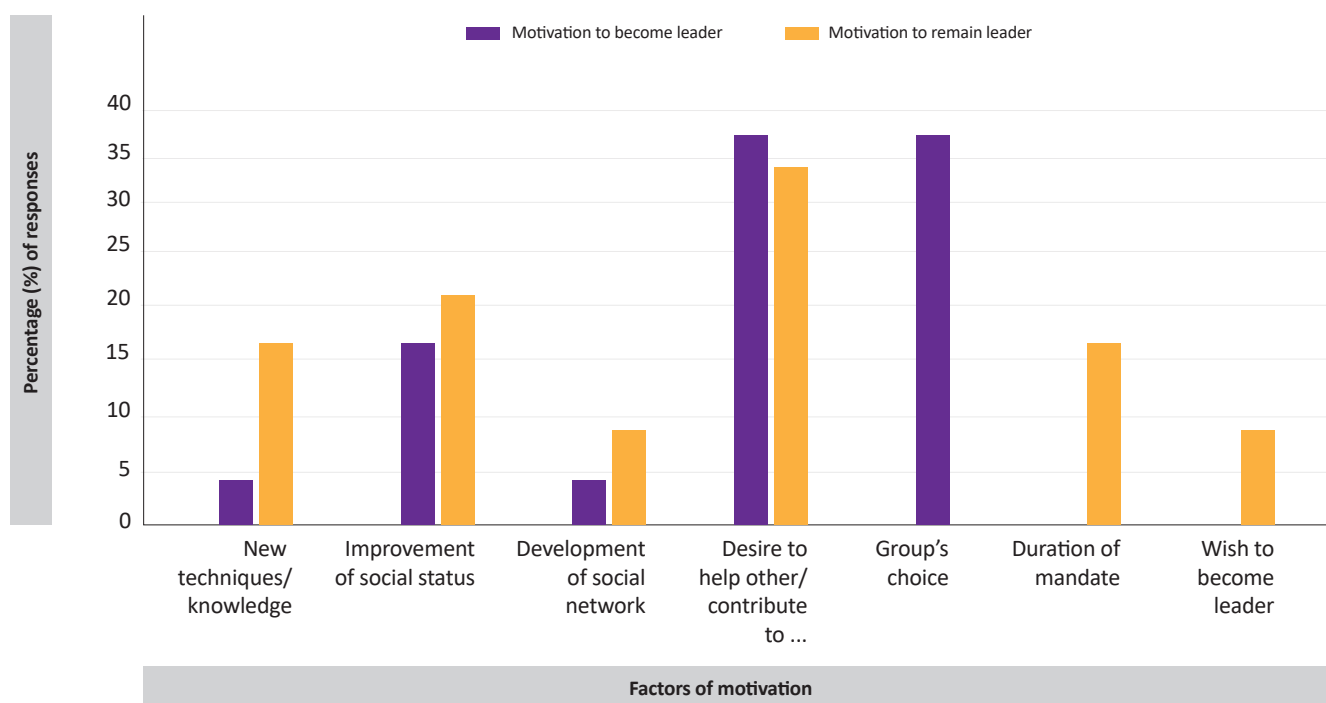


Of the women interviewed,

- 32% had a leadership position in their groups.
- 97% said issues are generally discussed with all group members even though final decisions are the prerogative of the leaders.
- 84% qualified the type of leadership exercised in their groups as ‘participatory’, against 16% who defined it as ‘authoritarian’.
- Factors enabling female leadership: knowledge of the initiative (89%), good education level (79%), opportunities for income generation (68%),
- Factors constraining female leadership: low education level and low financial capacity (each 21%)
- Both positive and negative effects: matrimonial status.
- Little or no effect: group structure, domestic workload, and previous experience.

### Factors motivating women to become and remain leaders.

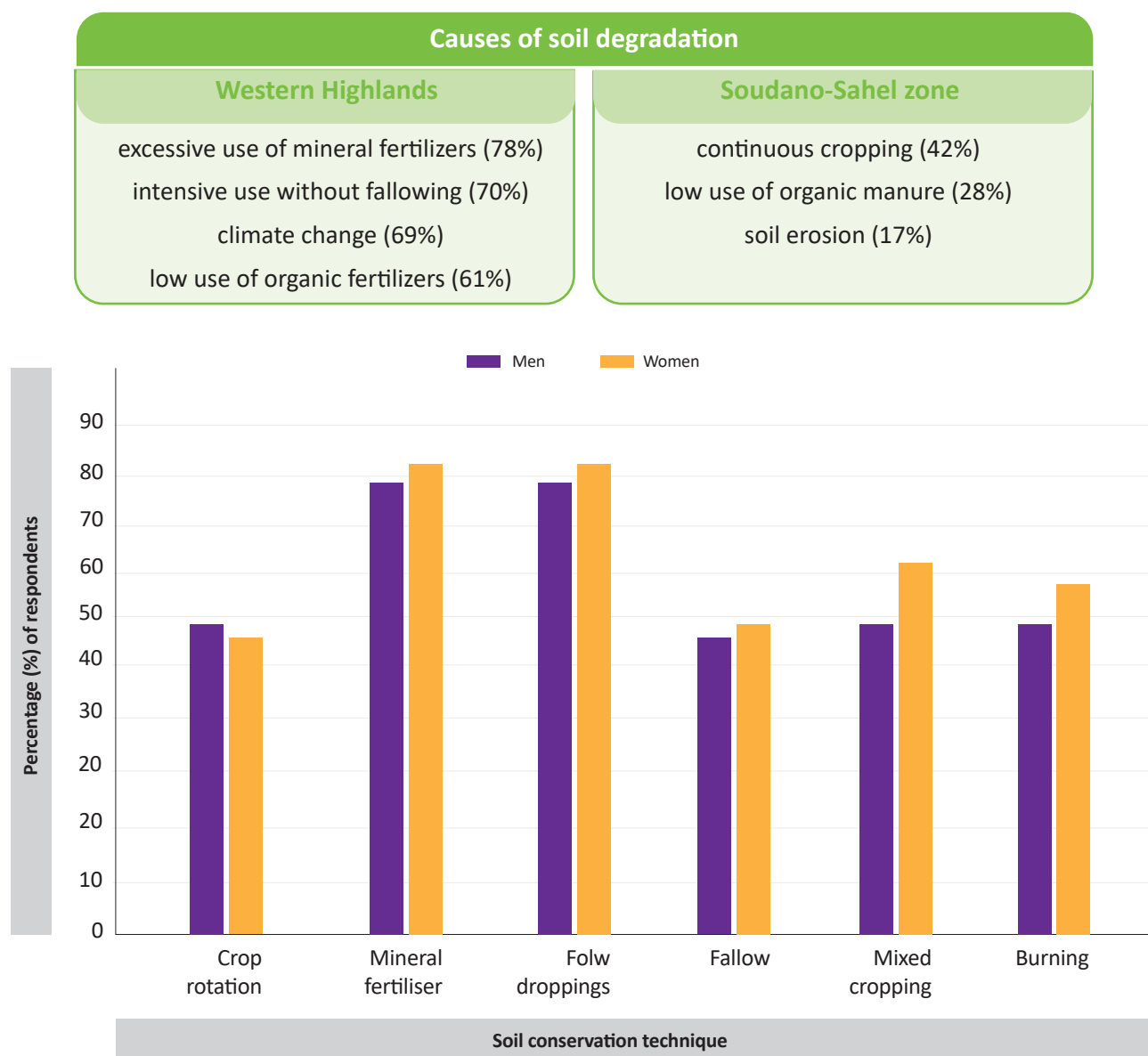
Main motivators include the desire to help others and to contribute to the community’s development and enhance one’s social status and social network (Figure 5). The acquisition of new knowledge and skills, however, becomes more important with time.



**Figure 5:** Factors motivating women to become and remain leaders

## 4. Gender-based assessment of the effects of agricultural practices on land degradation levels and restoration options

Our results show that both men and women are conscious about soil degradation, which they qualify as “moderate” or “severe”. According to respondents, the most obvious sign of degradation is a decrease in crop yields (46%), followed by soil erosion (16%), change in vegetation (13%), and appearance of harmful weeds (12%). Farmers are currently practicing several soil conservation techniques to improve the productivity of their land, and these are not significantly different between men and women (Figure 6). Nevertheless, the choice of restoration practice is primarily constrained by the availability of funds (32% of the responses) and of inputs (28%). Lack of training was mentioned by 13% of respondents with more women than men mentioning the latter, suggesting biases in extension strategies that tend to prefer working with men (household heads in most cases) rather than with women.



**Figure 6:** Soil conservation techniques practices by men and women in Western Highlands of Cameroon

# Conclusion and Recommendations

---

## **1. National policies and policy instruments are not gender-discriminatory but need to be more gender sensitive and transformative.**

Our results show that policy and policy instruments related to land restoration in Cameroon are not discriminatory nor do they prevent women formally from accessing resources needed for land restoration. However, most of these policies instruments are gender-blind or at best, gender-sensitive. Therefore, efforts are needed to make existing policies more gender-sensitive and where possible, gender-transformative with regards to access and control over resources, access to information and knowledge and lastly, participation, status, and power.

## **2. Invest more in training farmers on context-specific land restoration options and improve access to improved germplasm and organic fertilisers, using gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches**

Our results show significant awareness on land degradation, its causes and consequences by both men and women. In response to declining crop yields, men and women adopt soil improvement techniques such as mineral fertilisers, manure, fallowing, mixed cropping and crop rotation. However, the choice is often guided by availability of funds and inputs, as well as knowledge of the techniques and may not always be the most appropriate solution. Restoration of most degraded soils requires adding organic matter, for example through agroforestry. But to do so, farmers need more information, training and better access to improved germplasm and organic fertilisers, both in terms of availability and affordability.

## **3. While there are no formal restrictions for women and minority groups to own land and customary laws grant women user rights to land through their male relatives, strategies or mechanisms that enhance women's and minorities' control over land restoration choices must be put in place, if full participation is to be achieved.**

Barriers to participation of women and minority groups in land restoration initiatives are primarily related to socio-cultural rules and norms about access to land, access to credit and other inputs, as well as participation in public meetings and training. There are no restrictions for women to own land in the formal Cameroon land tenure law, but few people in rural areas are informed about how to obtain official land titles in addition to the procedures being complex and costly. Customary land tenure systems in many parts of the country, on the contrary, do not allow women to be land proprietors, though they can access land through male relatives. This has implications for tree planting and other restoration activities, since women may not have full decision-making power over what trees to plant or which soil improvement investments to make on the pieces of land allocated to them. Nevertheless, women do have a say in land restoration activities, as joint decision-making is common in most households, according to our study in the Western Highlands.

## **4. Training on leadership and inclusive decision-making processes are crucial for women's and minority groups' participation in land restoration initiatives – The contribution of NGOs is crucial in achieving this.**

Women's and minorities' participation in decision-making on land restoration at community level requires more attention. The study clearly brought out the important role NGOs play in encouraging female leadership and facilitating inclusive decision-making processes. Ways of improving women's participation and leadership proposed by NGOs and communities include more sensitization on land degradation and restoration, training on sustainable land management, encouragements, targeted action with gender-sensitive land restoration interventions and providing vegetative material and other inputs. Other recommendations are related to the choice of intervention strategies that must match prevailing (traditional) organizational structures. However, involving women in land restoration should not mean that men are neglected, a sound balance is to be found.

Correct citation: Degrande A, Foundjem-Tita D, Eponle S and Bessengue J. 2024. Constraints and opportunities to the participation of women and minorities in land restoration in Cameroon. LRIWEP Information Brief. CIFOR-ICRAF, Yaoundé, Cameroon.









**For more information, please contact:**

Foundjem-Tita Divine ([d.foundjem@cifor-icraf.org](mailto:d.foundjem@cifor-icraf.org)) Yaoundé-Cameroon