

Policy brief

Participatory planning of gender-responsive restoration options at municipality level



Executive summary

Through the project “Land restoration for post-Covid rural and indigenous women empowerment and poverty reduction in Cameroon” (LRIWEP), we developed and tested a participatory methodology/approach to guide municipalities to identify context-specific and gender-sensitive restoration options for their municipalities. In so doing we strive to serve practitioners and policymakers within a given territory with state-of-the-art guide and tools for them, to integrate land restoration in their development plans thereby contributing to meeting the national agenda on land restoration as specified in AFR100 initiative and the Bonn Challenge. This policy brief demonstrates strong evidence on using participatory and inclusive approaches, to synthesize and interpret results that identify degradation hotspots and provide restoration options for different land users in selected pilot municipalities. The findings in each municipality can be used to complement municipal development plans, inform donors, policy and practice related to environmental issues in general and land and forest restoration options in particular.

Key messages:

- The participatory and inclusive approach to identify restoration options at municipality and village level, developed and tested during the LRIWEP project, allows for identification of context-specific and gender-responsive solutions that are more suitable to local conditions and to different categories of land users. Therefore, the likelihood of adoption is significantly enhanced and the ultimate impact on the environment, as well as on people's livelihoods improved.
- The participation of all relevant stakeholders, including different land user categories such as women and minority groups, in the planning process at both municipal and community level, enhances their buy-in and subsequent participation in the implementation of selected land restoration activities.
- The combination of working at multiple levels (municipal and village level) facilitates the blending of scientific, subject-matter and local knowledge held by researchers, government staff, traditional authorities and local populations and thus enhances knowledge sharing and alignment of national and subnational goals to local needs and priorities.
- The approach and tools for participatory planning of land restoration presented in this brief help municipalities to integrate gender-sensitive restoration initiatives in their communal development plans and budget adequately for them. By so doing, municipalities are capacitated to contribute effectively to meeting national AFR100 and LDN targets. Similarly, the restoration plans can be submitted to different donors and investors for funding.
- While municipalities can easily buy into the approach when adequately engaged in the entire process, higher level Government support is needed to institutionalise and scale out the approach to positively impact livelihoods and the environment; MINDDEVEL can play the required supportive role.

1 Introduction

Land degradation is defined as “any reduction or loss in the biological or economic productive capacity of the land resource base” (UNCCD, 2014). The impacts of land degradation and desertification in Cameroon are felt on the economy, the environment, and the well-being of populations, particularly in rural areas where survival depends on the availability of natural resources provided by the land (MINEPDED 2017).

In Cameroon, about one third of all land (15,160,000 ha) is either highly or moderately degraded, affecting more than 4 million people (Bai et al., 2008). Forest and landscape degradation varies from a low of 10% in the dense humid forest zones to a high of 35% in the wet and dry savannah, contributing to a dramatic decline in productivity of croplands, rangelands, and the ecosystem services of both the savannah and forests (GOC- MINFOF, MINEPDED 2019). Economic losses due to land degradation in Cameroon are estimated to be about 6.15 -13.9 billion EUR (projection based on ELD Initiative, 2015 and Bai et al., 2008).

Factors that contribute to land degradation include inappropriate and unsustainable agricultural practices; overgrazing and bushfires for agricultural, grazing or hunting purposes (resulting in increased soil erosion and biodiversity loss); haphazard logging aggravated by growing population pressure (in the West and Centre Regions); irrational management of agriculture, forest and pastoral lands with no zoning plans. All this is compounded by the chronic poverty level of the population (MINFOF 2019).

To curb the trend of land degradation, Cameroon needs to implement the national forest landscape restoration strategy as part of the AFR 100/BONN challenge initiatives (ROC 2017) and define and integrate the corresponding LDN targets into the Communal Development Plans and Sustainable Use and Management Plans of concerned municipalities.

It is within the context of assisting communes to integrate land restoration in their development plans that we designed a **participatory and gender-responsive planning approach** that is reported in this brief.

Institutional embeddedness

Cameroon's Government commitment to address the phenomenon of land degradation, affecting all ecosystems in the country is reflected in signing of several internal commitments. For example, since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Cameroon has developed and implemented strategies and actions within the framework of several national and international initiatives. These initiatives are in line with Vision 2035, which aims to make the country an emerging economy by 2035, with a view to improving the living conditions of as many Cameroonians as possible. The Government also plans to intensify actions to combat land degradation and has committed to the Bonn Challenge initiative through its African effort – “African Forest Landscape Restoration (AFR100) “.

The Government has also developed a Harmonised Action Plan (2020-2030) to combat land and forest landscape degradation in Cameroon. The objective of the harmonised action plan is to come up with a consistent document that combines all restoration initiatives of degraded lands and forest landscapes at the national level. The harmonised action plan stems from existing strategies and plans such as the National Adaptation Plan (NAP), Great Green Wall Strategy, National Plantation Development Programme, project document of the Green Sahel operation, Land degradation neutrality (LDN) settings process and the Strategic Framework for Forest Landscape Restoration (SF-FLR). It is expected that the harmonised action plan will contribute to meeting Cameroon's commitment to restore 12,062,768 hectares under the AFR100 initiative by 2030, to reduce greenhouse gases by 35% by 2030 as specified in the updated NDC, and to align with the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

Do municipalities have the mandate to participate in land restoration initiatives?

Through “Article 157 of law n° 2019/024 of December 24, 2019, on the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities”, competencies in terms of environment and sustainable management of natural resources have been devolved to councils with Councils Developments Plans (CDP) as the main planning document for the implementation of local investments at the municipal level. This devolution of power is based on the principles of decentralisation and subsidiarity which ensures citizen participation in development initiatives taking into consideration the aspirations of all socio-professional groups.

Besides, Cameroon has voluntarily defined its Land Degradation Neutrality Targets (LDT) to be achieved by 2030 and for communes it states that the LDT is expected to be achieved in at least 90% of the communes located in priority areas for the fight against land degradation by defining and integrating land use, land productivity and carbon stock targets into Communal Development Plans (CDPs). However, activities to restore degraded land have been poorly identified in the CDPs. One reason to account for this is the lack of means and tools to design and implement restoration efforts in a participatory and inclusive manner (Guizol et al., 2022). Yet, without the involvement of all stakeholders, including local populations and women and minority groups in particular, landscape restoration in the country may not be effective, neither sustainable. Hence the need to provide municipalities with tools and approaches to plan more inclusive and gender-sensitive restoration projects.

The objective of this policy brief is to show evidence, raise awareness and provide the benefits of using a participatory and inclusive approach to land restoration planning. Providing the right tools allowing municipalities to identify gender-sensitive restoration options for integration into their development plans, will help them to deliver on policies related to nature and people defined at the national level.

The participatory approach designed and tested in LRIWEP is inspired by other approaches such as the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM) developed by IUCN. However, we

focus on municipal and village level, by using a combination of territorial and landscape approaches to identify degraded lands and restoration options within municipalities and villages. The territorial approach ensures that the authorities within a given landscape take ownership of the methodology so that they better enforce, monitor, and align land restoration activities within existing or new initiatives in their jurisdiction.

2 Methodology

The methodology was developed and tested in three pilot municipalities representing three agroecological zones in Cameroon, namely (i) Ngambe-Tikar in the centre region, (ii) Nkong-Nhi in the western highlands and (iii) Pitoa in the Sahelian region of Cameroon. These were pilot municipalities of the women centred restoration project in Cameroon (LRIWEP) funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

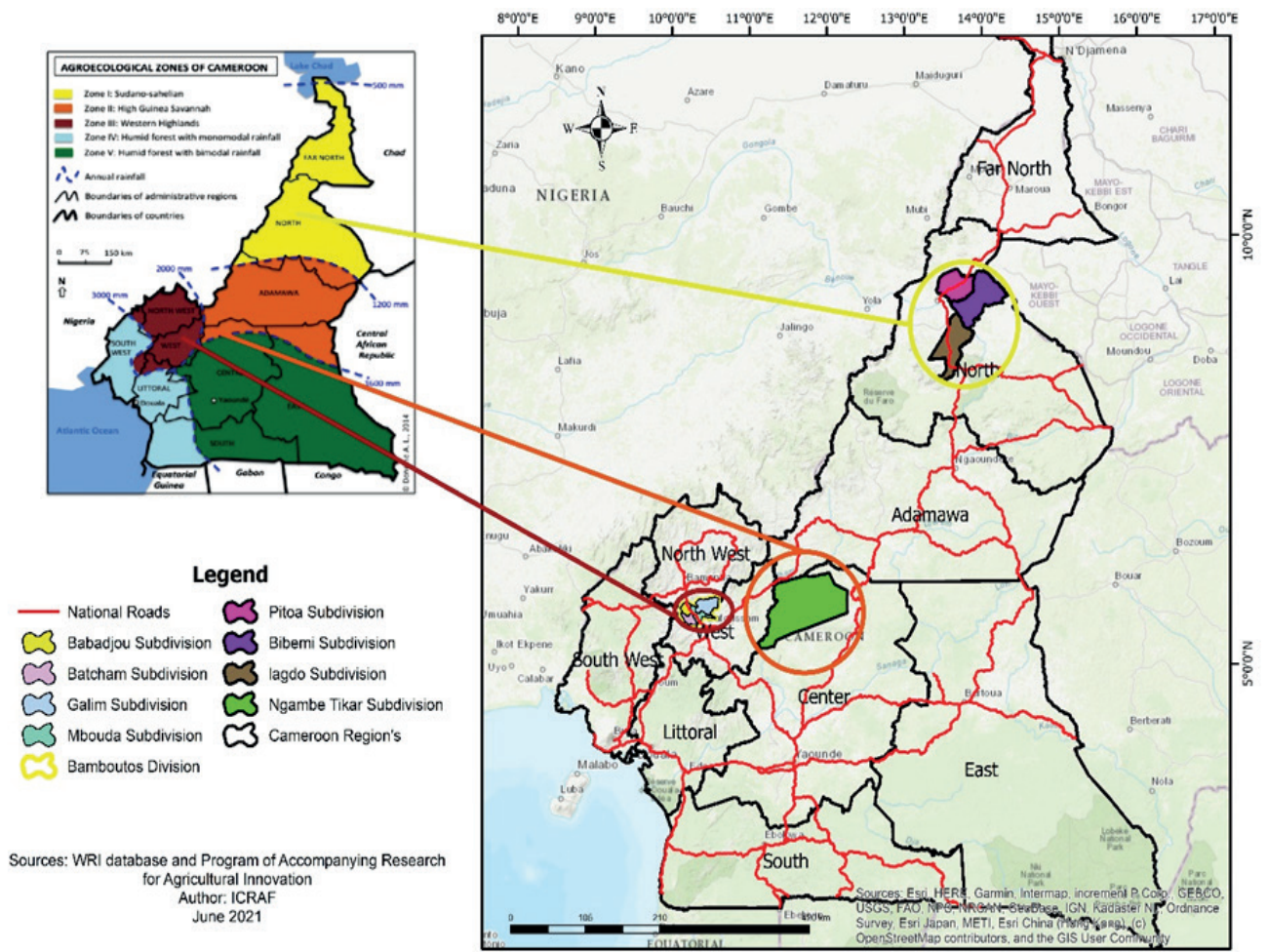


Figure 1: Location of LRIWEP research sites

3 The approach

Phase 1: Preparation

Step 1.2
Identification of stakeholders



Step 1.1
Documentary review and preliminary mapping of the area

Step 1.3
Preparing phase 2 including Communication and awareness raising

Phase 2: Participatory mapping and identification of restoration options at municipal level

Etape 2.6
Contextualise and understand the concepts of degradation and restoration (historical profile)

Etape 2.3
Analyse the generic causes of degradation and identify solutions by land use type

Etape 2.5
Site reconnaissance and observation visits: ground truthing

Etape 2.7
Return and validate maps and restoration options



Etape 2.2
Draw up the participatory land-use map and identify the main types of land use

Etape 2.4
Prioritise restoration options: causes by land use type and assess the degree of stakeholder involvement in the degradation

Etape 2.6
Consolidate information (reformulate options, correct maps)

Etape 2.8
Identify degradation hotspots and priority restoration areas at municipal level

Phase 3: Participatory mapping and identification of restoration options at the scale of the restoration zone/village

Etape 3.1
Provide feedback to target community of results obtained at the municipal level

Etape 3.3
Participatory prioritisation of restoration options at the village level (by gender and socio-professional groups)



Etape 3.2
Participatory mapping at the village level

Etape 3.4
Participatory planning of the implementation of restoration options (Calendar of activities, Responsibilities, Budget, sources of funding)

Participation and Inclusiveness

To promote ownership and community engagement, we integrated the perceptions of stakeholders, their knowledge of ecosystem degradation and its consequences to ecosystems and livelihoods. The activities also consisted in organizing stakeholder workshops that gather experts from multiple sectors, municipality staff and representatives from local communities (farmers, pastoralists, indigenous people, women, and youths). We jointly identified villages in each hotspot to represent the mosaic of land uses, degradation levels and other socio-cultural factors; and co-designed context-specific solutions, guided by a set of gender-sensitive criteria, e.g., provides food/income to women, does not increase workload, does not require high financial investment, etc.

The tools

Remote sensing, participatory mapping, visioning, scenario building, interviews with stakeholders, focus group discussions, individual questionnaires, and expert knowledge.

4 Results

The gender-sensitive restoration approach led to the production of decision-making outputs at two levels.

At the municipality level:

- A problem tree describing direct and indirect causes of land degradation and desertification in each pilot municipality.
- Participatory land use maps and priority land use classes in the municipality indicating restoration hotspots.
- A classification of land use types according to the level of involvement of groups of degradation stakeholders (men, women, minority groups)
- Options to mitigate degradation by type of land use in each municipality.

At the village level:

- Land use maps for villages identified as restoration hotspots.
- Landscape restoration options ranked in order of importance according to the types of stakeholders (men, women, minority groups).
- Gender-sensitive landscape restoration options prioritised.
- Selected restoration hotspots.

4 Conclusion

The approach and tools developed and tested in LRIWEP have helped stakeholders in the pilot municipalities to understand and contextualise the concept of land degradation and restoration. The logical and stepwise process has facilitated the diagnosis of causes of land degradation with the participation of all stakeholders and the identification of gender-sensitive options to restore degraded lands. Therefore, the stepwise approach at municipality and community level should be implemented more widely across degradation hotspots to reach expected impact as per targets set in the AFR100 initiative.

5 Implications and Recommendations

- **In designing land restoration options, municipalities need to consider land use diversity within their jurisdiction.**

Our action-research showed that it is important to use a territorial based approach and in our case the municipalities as the entry points for land restoration planning. This is because we found that each municipality chose unique restoration options based on its context. For example, we could not have imagined that fire in Ngambe-Tikar was an important land degradation problem for both men, women, and the Mbororo cattle farmers. This means that policies designed at the national level need to take account of the diversity within broader geographic spaces, such as agro-ecological zones, and develop solutions for limited geographic places which may have different causes of land degradation and consequently call for different land restoration options.

- **Landscape restoration options, if developed in a gender-sensitive manner at municipality levels will contribute to enhance the economic empowerment of local actors, including women and indigenous peoples.**

The approach and tools we used show that, if properly applied, municipalities and local actors will develop skills to make gender-sensitive and evidenced-based decisions. By doing so, they will be able to operationalise national land restoration strategies at local level for the economic empowerment of all, including women and minority groups. In this regard we recommend that Municipalities with the support of MINDDEVEL integrate gender-sensitive restoration plans in their broader municipal development plans in order to also meet AFR100 and LDN targets.



The choice of avocado as a tree crop to restore degraded farmlands and increase economic empowerment of both men and women and the choice to use improved cooking stove by women to reduce pressure on trees for firewood are good examples of restoration options selected by men and women in the commune of Nkong-Nhi.

- **Participation of different land user categories in the planning process facilitates subsequent engagement in implementation at both municipal and community levels.**

The proposed approach contributes to an increased understanding of land restoration options for a mosaic of land uses and of their effects on ecosystem rehabilitation and livelihoods improvement. This permits participants to gain knowledge on drivers of land degradation and which land restoration options are best fit for different land uses (agricultural cropping systems, tree crop systems, pastureland, forests) and for different categories of users (male and female farmers, pastoralists, minority groups).



One elite of Ndoh said: “Our potatoes farm are already too degraded forcing us to use a lot of chemical fertilizers. We are happy for the quality avocado seedlings that you have distributed to us. When in full production each tree will generate between 60000 to 80000 FCFA. This is a lot of money to us and we will use less inputs and efforts to manage the tree crops, besides if you take aerial picture now and in 5 years you will see the contribution of the avocado plants to land cover. In addition, when we prune the trees the branches will serve as firewood that we will use on the improved stoves that you have given to us “

- **Higher level Government Commitment is needed through MINDDEVEL and MINEPDED to achieve impact for people and nature**

Under the LRIWEP project, the approach has been tested in three municipalities and a single village per municipality only, but has the potential to positively impact nature, people and climate as demonstrated in the pilot cases. However, this would need support at a higher level especially the management board of the municipalities and higher-level Government support through MINDDEVEL, to raise the necessary funding to conduct the planning process and later to implement the identified options. Support may also come in through donor projects interested in supporting municipal-driven and gender-sensitive restoration projects that impact livelihoods and the environment.

Benefits of wide-scale adoption of inclusive land restoration planning for people and nature.

The implementation of land restoration options identified with the support of municipalities, communities and other practitioners if properly scaled out can contribute to produce impact for livelihoods and biodiversity. In the North region for example the expected impact for nature is enhanced provision of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the forest ecosystem through Farmer-managed natural regeneration, planting of indigenous tree species, bee keeping and prevention of bush fires, all of which provide multiple benefits to people and the environment. In the agricultural landscape, the community in Forty opted for the promotion of soil fertility through organic manure and training on agroecological practices. Besides, they also added an activity aimed at sensitising traditional rulers to facilitate access to land for women. The options are expected to improve food security and income for participating households, increase resilience to climate change as well as reduce conflicts over resource use. This inclusive approach will strengthen the position of marginalized groups in pilot sites with positive effects on other locally led development processes including sensitization of local population to respect pasture zones and transhumance corridors and rehabilitation of pastoral infrastructure.

Bibliography

- ELD Initiative & UNEP (2015). The Economics of Land Degradation in Africa: Benefits of Action Outweigh the Costs. Available from www.eld-initiative.org.
- Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), Republic of Cameroon (2019). National plantation forests development programme (NPFDP) Cameroon 2020 – 2045: Programme Paper.
- Guizol, P., Diakhite, M., Seka, J., Bring, C., Mbonayem, L., Awono, A., Oyono, P.R., Mokpidie, D., Ndikumagenge, C., Sonwa, D.J., Ndabirorere, S., Waitkuwait, W.E., Ngobieng, M.A., Tabi, P., Essamba, L. (2022). Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) in Central Africa. In: The Forests of the Congo Basin: State of the Forests 2021, 317-338. Bogor, Indonesia. CIFOR.
- République du Cameroun (ROC) (2017). Programme de définition des cibles volontaires nationales de neutralité en matière de dégradation des terres (PDC/NDT).

Correct citation: Foundjem-Tita D, Takoutsing B, Bessengue J, Djami Kwidja Y, Degrande A. 2024. Participatory planning of gender-responsive restoration options at municipality level. LRIWEP Policy Brief 2. CIFOR-ICRAF, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

For more information, please contact:

Foundjem-Tita Divine (d.foundjem@CIFOR-ICRAF.org) Yaoundé-Cameroon