



Cameroon in need of a coordinated agroforestry strategy and program



If agroforestry is to fulfil its full potential of livelihoods' improvement and provision of environmental services, then appropriate strategies, institutions and the necessary financial mechanisms need to be provided. More specifically:

- A coordinated project or program needs to be put in place to develop, guide and implement agroforestry strategies;
- Distinction should be made between agroforestry products harvested from trees on-farm and non-timber forest products collected from the wild;
- Simplify procedures for obtaining land certificates;
- Additional incentives should be provided to encourage farmers to plant more trees.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays there is worldwide recognition that agroforestry, the deliberate integration of trees in the farming landscape for social, economic and environmental benefits, can contribute in a significant way in meeting virtually all the millennium development goals. Although agroforestry is an age-old practice in Cameroon, farmers and society at large are not reaping its full potential because of a number of constraints, some clearly related to the policy environment, specifically the absence of a comprehensive agroforestry strategy. So far, tree planting activities have been carried by a number of ministries, for example agriculture, forestry and the environment but none has the responsibility to define and coordinate agroforestry activities. The outcome is that there is actually limited Government commitment and resources to develop the agroforestry sector.

This policy brief describes the importance of agroforestry to farmers' livelihoods in Cameroon and climate change mitigation in general and discusses policy related barriers and options to remove the barriers.

AGROFORESTRY AS A SOURCE OF LIVELIHOODS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

The importance of agroforestry for farmers' livelihoods is no longer a doubt (Garrity, 2004). There are many ways in which agroforestry can be applied to address problems relevant to the Cameroon context.

Rehabilitation of degraded land. Fertilizer trees, such as *Calliandra*, *Leucaena*, *Acacia* and *Gliricidia*, can be used to improve soil fertility and reclaim degraded land.



Diversification and stability of income.

Domestication of local species and the integration of both indigenous and exotic fruit trees in the farming landscape can increase and diversify household income.

Provision of fodder and reduction of over grazing.

Fodder species can be used as feed to improve livestock production and thus reduce overgrazing which often leads to soil degradation.

Provision of fuelwood, food and medicine. Trees provide wood for construction and fuel. Many tree products are of high nutritional importance and used in a variety of local dishes: safou (*Dacryodes edulis*), njansang (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*), bush mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*), moabi (*Baillonella toxisperma*), etc. Some trees also have medicinal values and can be used for both local and industrial purposes (*Annickia choloranta*, *Prunus africana*, *Pausinystalia johimbe*, etc.).

Urban employment. Agroforestry can be a source of urban employment, for example nursery operators and small processing units for tree products.



Means to build farmer organisations. Community-based organisations in Cameroon (local NGOs and CIGs) recognising the importance of agroforestry and faced with the insufficiency of government extension services, felt the need to form a national network of grassroots organisations (ANACRAD) operating rural resource centres to share information, diffuse agroforestry skills and knowledge, and bridge the gap between research and farmers.

POLICY BARRIERS TO AGROFORESTRY DEVELOPMENT IN CAMEROON

Good intention marred by lack of strategy and coordination

A review of policy documents and mission statements in Cameroon indicate that no agroforestry policy or strategy document exists for Cameroon. However, elements of agroforestry technologies can be found in major government policy documents (e.g. 2003 Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper (PRSP), 2008 Growth and Employment Strategic Paper (GESP), Rural Development Strategic Paper (RDSP) and National Forestry Policy) and there is a will to include NTFPs in the natural resources management and poverty reduction policies, thereby indirectly promoting agroforestry.

Several ministries in Cameroon have agroforestry and tree planting activities in their portfolio but none of them has the mandate to coordinate such activities and properly address related constraints. The result is confusion as to which, amongst numerous tree planting activities/programs, fall within the domain of agroforestry, forestation or afforestation; what species need to be planted where, at what planting distances and with which crops, etc. The abundance of afforestation and reforestation programs to address environmental issues may undermine the important role the Ministry of Agriculture should play in promoting interaction between crops, animals and trees on a piece of land, which is actually the essence of agroforestry.

Lack of clarity regarding the status of agroforestry products in the 1994 Forestry Law

Forestry legislation governing trees in Cameroon (1994 Forestry Law) designed with the good intentions of conserving natural resources in Cameroon, potentially limits farmers' economic rights to exploit NTFPs and de facto limits their rights to the trees they plant on their farms. There is confusion as to whether products harvested from farm trees shall be considered as agricultural products or forestry products. This is particularly unclear for tree species which are also found in the wild, such as kola (*Cola spp.*), bush mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*), njansang (*Ricinodendron heudelotii*), etc.

Based on the law, local populations are conferred usufruct rights which constitute the right to exploit NTFPs for personal use, but not for commercial purposes. On the other hand, some NTFPs are defined as special products (section 9 (2)), meaning that interested parties are expected to obtain permits to exploit and sell such special products. The effect of permits may not have a direct consequence on farmers' decisions now because

most of them sell at the door step and are seldom controlled for permits. But if farmers were to transport their produce to urban markets themselves they would be subjected to forestry control. Data collected from five regions in Cameroon show that about 40% of a random selection of 394 farmers would stop dealing in the selected species if the regulation of permits were properly enforced.



Insufficient access to improved tree planting material

Improved planting material is in high demand but costly. The price of improved planting material is quite high due to important nursery establishment and production costs. For example, a marcott of safou costs between 2000 - 3000 FCFA. An average farmer may only afford one or two plants, as such limiting the number of quality trees to plant.

Access to and security of land

Following the 1994 Forestry Law, trees planted on land without a title deed belong to the state. Also, all naturally growing trees belong to the state even if they grow on cultivated land. This means that trees growing on private land will only be considered property of the individual if the person has legal ownership of the land. A survey conducted in Cameroon shows that 85% of farmers prefer formal to customary institutions to protect their land, but only 3% actually had land titles because of difficulties involved in obtaining such. Besides security of ownership, agroforestry requires land and competition between trees and other crops may push agroforestry to a second choice position. Therefore, the bottleneck may not really be rights to land - as is often reported - but rather the possibility of obtaining enough land. Customary laws also slow down the emergence of land markets, as families are expected to reserve land for their progenies and are not allowed to sell it.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A comprehensive program needs to be put in place to develop, guide and implement agroforestry strategies

Appropriate policies, policy instruments, strategies and implementation mechanisms are required to reap the full benefits of agroforestry. However this needs a concerted action between all ministries interested in tree planting. Such a strategy would define clear objectives and targets to meet. The Ministry of Agriculture may have a broader role to play in differentiating general tree planting, afforestation and reforestation programs from 'agroforestry', by incorporating elements specific to agriculture and livestock that may be overlooked by other ministries. This requires adequate financial and sectorial affiliation.

Distinction should be made between agroforestry products harvested from trees on-farm and non-timber forest products collected from the wild

Most NTFPs with high economic value currently collected from the wild are likely to be planted on farmers' fields in the near future, partly thanks to recent advances in tree domestication research. Furthermore, development projects in the domain of climate change mitigation and adaptation (REDD and REDD+) most likely will encourage tree planting by farmers. Thus, there is need to develop criteria to distinguish agricultural and agroforestry products from forestry products and NTFPs, while products bounded by specific legislation need to be clearly defined. Since it is impossible to visually differentiate tree products harvested from the wild from those harvested on farmers' fields, certificates of origin may be useful. While transactions costs in obtaining these certificates may be an issue, studies have shown that a majority of farmers in Cameroon would be ready to abide by certificates of origin if introduced.

Facilitate access to land and secure ownership

Obtaining land certificates should be simplified to allow farmers to secure ownership of the land and the trees they plant on that land. On the other hand, strategies are needed to either encourage land markets or redistribute land to enterprising farmers in another manner.

Additional incentives should be provided to encourage farmers to plant more trees

Farmers have developed agroforestry as a traditional land use practice with minimal assistance from either government or NGOs. Nevertheless, policies that provide additional incentives for farmers could accelerate the adoption of agroforestry, amongst which:

- Assistance to production and distribution of quality tree planting material. Because distribution of tree seedlings free of charge has often proven to be counterproductive, supporting small-scale nurseries with nursery tools and technical assistance could enhance farmers' access to quality tree planting material at affordable prices, provided quality assurance is taken care of.
- Add value to tree products, for example through improved processing of tree products. Increased tree planting calls for methods to reduce gluts and wastage. Thus, simple processing technologies that meet basic hygiene needs are to be encouraged at producer level.
- Disseminate appropriate tree propagation and tree management skills to farmers through vast extension programmes

References

Garritty, D. P. (2004) Agroforestry and Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals Agroforestry systems, 61, 5-17.

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