

Gender just climate solutions: Women-led ecological restoration in Cameroon

Cameroon, Africa



In the montane grassland of Mbiame Village, in northwest Cameroon, women are using Analog Forestry to restore degraded ecosystems, while strengthening their health and livelihoods through sustainable food production. Analog Forestry is an approach to ecological restoration that focuses on increasing biodiversity by imitating natural forest systems in order to create economically productive and environmentally mature forests. The approach values ecological sustainability while recognising local rural communities' social and economic needs, which can be met through the production of a diversity of useful and marketable goods and services, such as food, natural medicines, fuel and fodder. Analog Forestry helps to restore degraded soils, which is essential for creating healthy and resilient ecosystems that have a natural resistance to plagues, droughts, floods and other threats. Moreover, diversification of crops decreases farmers' risks and reduces dependence on external inputs.

Mitigating and Adapting to climate change through ecosystem restoration

In northwest Cameroon, most original forests have been degraded or turned into farmland. Climate change has led to irregular onset of rainfall with increased dry spells, floods and storms. Local streams are drying up and the water table is dropping, leading to water scarcity, low crop harvests and food shortages.

Through Analog Forestry, women in Mbiame Village are working to restore the area's ecosystems and recreate the carbon sinks that are vital to mitigating climate change. Some 600 women are implementing Analog Forestry technology on both personal and community land. They have established household-level tree nurseries, producing seedlings for their own use and occasionally selling surplus seedlings to supply the community forest. The number of seedlings per household ranges from 50 to about 500. Taken together, over 20 different tree species, both native and exotic, are



Photo Credit: CENDEP

being grown. The women decide on the type of trees to produce based on their needs and those of the community (e.g. fruits for home consumption, medicinal trees, beeloving plants for bee farming, water loving trees for watershed protection etc). The women meet every month at the village level to plan their activities. Representatives of the village groups meet every quarter with staff of the Centre for Nursery Development and Eru Propagation (CENDEP). CENDEP supports the women with training and agricultural inputs, including seeds and tools.

Advancing gender justice

Small-scale farmers, especially women, are highly vulnerable to land rights abuses in Cameroon. Among other things, they contend with exclusionary, patriarchal and discriminatory social norms, limited access to land, deprivation of land ownership and poverty. Past interventions aimed at expanding and conserving the Mbiame Village community forest sought to prohibit women from accessing the forest, with no regard for the challenges they faced in securing access to land for their livelihoods.

Analog Forestry helped solve this problem by coupling the women's

agricultural practices to their forest restoration efforts. The forest management committee agreed to allow the women to grow their crops in the degraded area of the forest, while they planted and protected trees to restore the area. As the trees matured and the area became less suitable for sun-dependent plants, the women transitioned to forestbased income generating activities, like bee-keeping, with technical and material support from CENDEP. The Analog Forestry initiative in Mbiame Village has brought women together in large numbers to articulate their problems and demands. Sensitization meetings have been held with targeted decision-makers with the aim of securing more land for women.

The meetings have created an avenue and enabling space for women to share experiences and challenges on land issues, and lessons learned. Analog Forestry thus contributes to food sovereignty, and enhances women's autonomy and resilience.

Potential for upscaling

Cameroon, like many countries, has accepted reconstitution of forest cover as one of the National Determined Contributions with respect to

climate change mitigation and adaptation within the forestry sector. In addition to Mbiame, Analog Forestry has been introduced in ten communities in northwest Cameroon. It is also being practiced in Togo and in the pilot phase in Ghana, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Benin, with support from a network of certified trainers from Cameroon. There is huge potential to upscale Analog Forestry initiatives by (peer-to-peer) training of more practitioners and support for women in acquiring access to land. Long-term financial support, such as multi-year grants, is essential for achieving and sustaining Analog Forestry results, and forest restoration and conservation in general.

For more information, visit: gaggaalliance.org, or contact gaggacommunication@fondocentroamericano.org

About the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA)

The Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) is a diverse network of women's funds, environmental justice funds, NGOs, and women-led community-based organisations that have joined forces to strengthen the nexus of women's rights, climate and environmental justice. It works at local, national, regional and international levels in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and Europe. GAGGA's aim is to influence governments, investors, and donors to divest from fossil fuel (related) industries, defend critical ecosystems, and support inclusive, sustainable and gender-just climate solutions. It does so by strengthening and deepening connections and collaborations among women-led community-based organisations (CBOs) and movements working on women's rights, environmental and climate justice, and by pursuing women-centred lobby and advocacy (L&A) agendas.

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