

Linking restoration with sustainable wood fuel initiatives in the Sahelian Far North Region of Cameroon

Cameroon's commitment to the AFR100 initiative to restore 12 million hectares of degraded land puts emphasis on the country's three dry northern regions. One quarter of this commitment is supposed to take place in the Far North Region. The highest degradation of this region has clear impacts on livelihoods; in addition, the dependence of local communities, internally displaced people and refugees on unsustainable wood fuel collection contributes to further degradation.

Supporting Cameroon's restoration program is a component of the CIFOR project "Governing multifunctional landscapes in sub-Saharan Africa: managing trade-offs between social and ecological impacts", funded by the European Union (www2.cifor.org/gml). The initiative is contributing to knowledge, defining and testing options, and identifying networks for more sustainable wood fuel value chains in the region, in order to manage trade-offs between social and ecological impacts. The annual urban consumption of firewood in the region was estimated in 2016 to be 460,551 tonnes, plus 9,677 tonnes of charcoal (International Forestry Review 18:51).

There were difficulties in satisfying the demand for firewood and charcoal by bringing them from the southern humid forest zone of the country, as initially planned by government and its partners. Promotion of sustainable wood fuel initiatives in this Sahelian zone is urgent and high priority. After a scoping study in 2018,

CIFOR established a platform — including public forestry and environment bodies, universities, local government, civil society organisations, local communities, refugee and UNHCR — to find sustainable options.

Together the stakeholders identified three key goals during a problem analysis workshop: (i) better understand the drivers of the demand for wood fuel, the formal and informal institutions involved, and the transboundary trade with Chad and Nigeria; (ii) support research and new technologies for making charcoal from household and agricultural waste to reduce pressures on natural ecosystems; and (iii) attract long-term investments for charcoal production, including plantations. Workshop participants also agreed that food security should be addressed, and that fruit trees should be included in silviculture plans to encourage local communities to participate.

A study on transboundary trade is being carried out, and the results will be valuable in establishing wood fuel regulations at the regional level through the Lake Chad Basin Commission. Since restoration happens in a specific socio-economical context, knowledge of the direct and indirect drivers of degradation that inform initiatives to reduce environmental pressures is very useful in framing a sustainable response. In the Far North Region, the driest part of Cameroon, the promotion of sustainable wood fuel value chains is clearly seen as an important component of restoration.

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Photo: Sacks of charcoal for sale in Kagleri village, Mora sub-division, Far North region. Jean Hugues Nlom

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