

# Immense Benefits from Agroforestry in Rural Cameroon

Source: [allafrica.com](http://allafrica.com)

Published: January 18, 2016



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Yaounde — COMMERCIAL agriculture has received a major boost and the impact of climate change minimised in Cameroon thanks to the adoption of agro-forestry techniques by thousands of farmers.

The World Agroforestry Centre (formerly the known as the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry-Icraf), an organisation with a vision of rural transformation in the developing world, introduced agroforestry methods to rural farmers in the central African country some 20 years ago.

Also known as agro-sylviculture, it is a land use management system in which trees or shrubs are grown around or among crops or pastureland. These techniques aim to ensure smallholder households increase their use of trees in agricultural landscapes to improve food security, nutrition, income, health, shelter, social cohesion, energy resources and environmental sustainability.

Two decades later, more than 100 000 farmers that have embraced the scheme across the country are reaping the benefits.

Among the beneficiaries is Emmanuel Kuh, a farmer in Kom village in Cameroon's North West Region.

Some ten years ago, he was eking out a meagre living from gardening but his fortunes changed significantly with the introduction of agro-forestry.

I am now producing plums, mangoes, njangsa and bush mangoes. The adoption of agroforestry has increased my income tenfold,” said Kuh.

“I think that the option of integrating agroforestry into the farming system around the national territory is the only way out for farmers to sustain their livelihoods,” the farmer said.

Before the advent of agroforestry, traditional cash crop production meant that the opportunities offered by the development of value chains were lost.

Dr Zac Tchounjeu, the Coordinator of World Agroforestry Centre for Central Africa, explained the basic difference between cash crop production and agro-forestry practices.

“The cash crop farmer is not part of the value chain. Trees grown through agro-forestry are easily processed and therefore value is added,” said Tchounjeu.

While farmers are earning returns from fruiting trees, they have also been encouraged to plant perennial trees.

“Some of these trees take up to 300 years to mature. There is a need to bequeath to a future generation a world more environmentally stable. That is the way to go if we must win the battle against wanton deforestation,” said Tchounjeu.

Besides, planting trees on farms could give communities a lifeline.

“The farmer who plants bitter-kola or bush mangoes for instance will get income from these products, but the carbon market is being developed gradually, and I am sure that in a short while, experts would come and evaluate the quantity of carbon sequestered by their farm and the farmer would get additional income from the carbon market,” he explained.

Following the success of the scheme in Cameroon, the Kenya-headquartered World Agroforestry Centre is proposing that countries and institutions in the sub region adopt agro-forestry practices.

“I do not see why a farmer should protect the forest just because people are talking about climate change,” said Tchounjeu.

“However, if you tell the farmer that by planting the improved material, they would diversify the source of his income and start harvesting within three years, then they would start listening to why this eco-system should be protected. Any living tree is a reservoir for absorbing carbon. The more you plant trees, the better you reduce the effects of climate change.”

Tchounjeu was speaking in Yaoundé to mark the inception of agroforestry in Cameroon.

He presented a report highlighting farmers could increase their incomes between 10 and 15 times their initial earnings if they engage in such farming.

The potential for climate change attenuation through agroforestry should be good news for participants at the recent 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) summit in Paris, France.

The conference must result in an international climate agreement that should limit global warming to below 2°C.

In Cameroon, unstable rains, dwindling food supplies as well as floods and droughts have been identified as the most palpable examples of climate change.

Cameroon is a weak emitter of greenhouse gases, emitting only 40 000 tonnes carbon dioxide yearly. The emissions level is however expected to more than double to 100 000 tonnes by 2035.

The situation is blamed on the country's planned transformational projects.

Government has pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 11 percent in line with the Intended Nationally Determined Commitments (INDC).

Tchounjeu believes adopting agro-forestry will assist government to obtain such results.

He dismissed arguments that taking firm commitments to cut greenhouse gas emissions would compromise economic growth.

“Agro-forestry will actually improve farmers' yields while at the same stabilizing the climate,” said Tchounjeu.

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