

CAMEROON

The Green Sahel Reforestation Programme

The Lake Chad basin lies in the Sudano-Sahelian climatic zone of Africa with average annual rainfall ranging from 400 mm in the north and 1100 mm in the south. Severe climatic conditions and changes associated with global warming have contributed to desertification, rendering the ecosystems of this zone increasingly fragile and posing a serious threat to biodiversity and human survival in the area. As Lake Chad has increasingly dried up, the Lake Chad basin area has decreased from 26,000 km² in 1963 to barely 1,500 km² in 2001.

The government of Cameroon has initiated broad support for forest landscape restoration in the Lake Chad region in order to raise water levels, encourage sustainable agro-pastoral activities and conserve dwindling biodiversity. The main activities focus on encouraging local production of tree seedlings, buying seedlings from farmers and employing local communities and organizing labour for afforestation/reforestation programmes by youths and NGOs. By financing ecosystem restoration, the Government is seen to be re-investing in natural capital and “paying” for ecosystem services and the restoration of biodiversity (e.g. fish, fauna, flora) in order to re-create local conditions which are suitable for sustainable agro-pastoral production, to re-establish the area as suitable for human habitation (to prevent further out-migration) and to promote food security.

The Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection and the Specialized Institute (IRAD) of the Ministry of Scientific Research have identified suitable natural drought resistant tree species, tested for their viability and other environmental compartment factors. Field experts from other ministries were co-opted and the programme of activities was established. Participation of local communities has been essential for success and includes the production of seedlings by the local population and NGOs, and providing labour for planting and maintenance of restored areas.

The Ministry of Youth Affairs in collaboration with institutions of secondary and higher education have developed a programme for “national youth voluntary service” which organizes for young people to plant trees seedlings in North Cameroon during the summer holidays. Over 2.5 million youths are to participate every year.

The Biodiversity Development and Conservation Programme of Cameroon (*BDCP-C*), a local NGO, has initiated several biodiversity conservation projects, focusing on restoration of natural sacred forests (shrines) which have been degraded by desertification. Related projects have worked with local women to encourage the adoption of shrub-like vegetable plants husbandry which can help to raise the level of the water table and to promote the progressive restoration of agro-pastoral production.

Replicability

Ecosystem and forest landscape restoration are being introduced in degraded areas globally. Although it is generally more cost-effective to conserve intact ecosystems than to restore degraded ones, in many situation, such as in Lake Chad, there is no alternative to restoration or rehabilitation which can have significant and positive impacts on local livelihoods.

Source: Njinyam, S.N. (2009, 2010).

