



Fund for Innovation
and Transformation

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UNIVERSITÉ DE SHERBROOKE

Radical Innovation of the Agroforestry Systems Business (conservation context)

Context

In rural Cameroon 90% of people are living below the poverty line. Women are further disadvantaged within the patriarchal structure where economically profitable activities are mostly reserved for men, including cocoa farming and beekeeping. Women are unaware of new opportunities to develop business partnerships for their products made possible by social media and new trends associated with green, fair trade and environmentally friendly products.

The Innovative Solution

Supported by FIT, Université de Sherbrooke with local partner Fondation pour l'Environnement et le Développement au Cameroun tested an innovation bottom-up approach to give power back to rural Cameroonian women and girls. Through the establishment of a professionalization pathway, the innovation targeted the development of careers in the agroforestry field in a rural context and in the longer term, the empowerment of communities. The Gender, Conservation and Climate Change Business Model integrated women into men-only activities, increased the performance of activities (cocoa and honey) in addition to combating the sexual segregation that prevails in communities in the context of conservation and climate change.

Advancing Gender Equality

The Gender Equality Strategy focused on women's empowerment aimed at transforming the challenges and barriers faced by rural women. This included raising awareness of the issues facing women and girls in this region and their empowerment through their inclusion in a professionalization process and the transformation of agroforestry practices that would contribute to the economic prosperity of the region in the long term.



COUNTRY
Cameroon

AMOUNT
\$249,987

TESTING PERIOD
15 months
Ended January 2023



GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE (GE3)

THEME: AGRICULTURE

Testing Framework

Several evaluation strategies and mechanisms were utilized to validate the hypothesis including real-time learning, beneficiary involvement, double learning loops and the required variety approach. The evaluation of the innovation test was based on baseline data. During testing the systemic action research approach was utilized to bring solutions and changes to complex situations in social sciences and management. The objective of this approach was to develop a system of collaboration with the populations to find socially acceptable and culturally feasible solutions including gender equality.

Results and Impact

The innovation reached 241 individuals (119 women/girls, 122 men/boys) across 7 communities including 3 indigenous Baka or Bagyeli communities.

Three local participants' enterprises submitted their applications for ECOCERT Certification that would allow their products to be recognised and commercialised at higher value, thereby generating good revenue for families.

34 women involved in cocoa farming received training in planting techniques. In general, the perception of women and girls about cocoa farming changed. Participating women now see a future in cocoa farming and plan to expand their agroforestry systems.

In Dja, some beneficiaries had a very good groundnut harvest that allowed them to feed themselves with part of the crop, sell another part, and keep a part for future seeding. This was an important sign of women's empowerment. Several women interviewed believed that the activities carried out under the project would improve their autonomy vis-à-vis men and that agroforestry activities would allow them to have income in the future to ensure the education of their children.

Key Lessons

1. By the end of testing, beneficiaries understood the importance of an agroforestry system that combined several types of crops, social aspects including gender and ecological aspects such as climate and biodiversity compared to a plantation that only contains cocoa.
2. The combination of different approaches, including agroforestry systems, beekeeping, soap factories, private enterprise and universities around women and men, is an effective way of meeting the need for support and successful development initiatives for the local population.
3. The planning of agroforestry systems and the use of inventory records not only fostered the spirit of entrepreneurship with beneficiaries, but also demonstrated that they manage several activities in their agroforestry systems like general managers of companies.

"We were trained to make soap, beekeeping and working in teams, we now have earnings and that's how we can send our kids to school. Before that it was only the men who could do that – and now this is a great advantage for women to get involved. I also have a hectare and work with cocoa and peanuts. All this activity gives me confidence that in the long term we'll be businesswomen."

-Frances, participant

PARTNER ORGANIZATION

Fondation pour l'Environnement et le Développement au Cameroun (FEDEC)

TARGET PARTICIPANTS

241 individuals (119 women/girls, 122 men/boys)

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ABOUT FIT

The Fund for Innovation and Transformation supports Canadian small and medium-sized organizations (SMOs) testing innovative solutions that advance gender equality in the Global South.

