

49. Ingenuity, diversity, vision and adaptability of farmers producing timber and NTFP in western Cameroon

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Most development workers, involved in farm forestry in southern countries, act on the basis of paradigms such as: “poor farmers only consider the short-term production, their traditional agroforestry systems are immutable or being abandoned, we can offer them only well-established techniques, including simple and standardized fast-growing exotic species plantation methods for live-fences, fodder-banks or production of poles”. The study of the practices of farmers in western Cameroon, on the contrary, shows that there is a wide range of behaviour concerning the silviculture. Farmers show ingenuity to adapt traditional systems or integrate external technologies and adapt them to their current needs and their ability, while looking at different uses, sometimes over several generations. Thus, for private Eucalyptus plantations, they integrated the system used by state departments and projects, innovating in the following areas: plant production and direct seeding, spacing, association with crops, coppice selection, and diversity of products. By cons, for Pinus, also encouraged by the state and projects, very few farmers' plantations were carried out, mainly because of lack of markets for products at different ages of stands. Regarding the traditional live-fences, we find that species that have no current use are eliminated in favour of new species. These are selected, on the base of family needs and local market opportunities. For example, near the art centre of Foumban, Polyscias are planted because wood can be sold to the sculptors of masks. The Canarium multipurpose species (fruit and timber), with an average growth, is largely retained and planted. It is surprising to see a small number of farmers planting hedges with local species producing timber after more than 50 years, as Podocarpus or Entandrophragma, while the state itself does not. Rather, the state or municipal plantations burn in a general indifference, despite the best efforts of their managers. The question is whether the aid credits for public reforestation would not be used more effectively as an aid for private reforestation.

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