

RURAL RESOURCE CENTRES

BRINGING AGRICULTURAL SERVICES CLOSER TO FARMERS

What are Rural Resource Centres?

Rural Resource Centres (RRCs) are training and demonstration hubs that are managed by grassroots organisations. They create opportunities for farmers to share their experiences peer-to-peer and to receive technical guidance and services that are tailored to their livelihood needs, all under one roof.

Emphasis is put on access to knowledge, interactive learning and networking among farmers and between farmers and other rural actors.

A 'typical' RRC comprises of a tree nursery, demonstration plots, a training hall, a small library and office spaces.



RRC in Belo, North-West of Cameroon

Accommodation, catering facilities, and agricultural processing unit may also be part of the RRC depending on available resources, opportunities and needs.

Why RRCs?

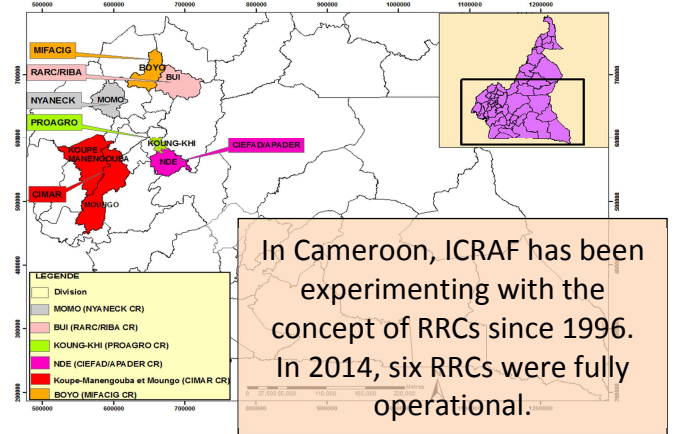
Stagnating production and poor livelihoods

Low adoption of innovations

Inefficient dissemination methods

Particularly for agroforestry, which is complex and knowledge-intensive, but has long-term benefits

Innovative and cost-effective ways of delivering agricultural innovations



In Cameroon, ICRAF has been experimenting with the concept of RRCs since 1996. In 2014, six RRCs were fully operational.

Key services of RRCs

- Skills development in areas such as nursery practice, group dynamics and marketing;
- Information of new technologies and innovations;
- Access to market information;
- Links with market actors particularly from the private sector;
- Forum for exchange of information among farmers, and between farmers and other stakeholders;
- Seeds, seedlings and other agricultural inputs.

Steps to create RRCs:

1. Sensitise farmers and identify "champions" for RRCs, i.e. organisations already involved in some farmer training and agricultural extension activities;
2. Train RRC staff and create tree nursery;
3. Develop training and demonstration facilities at RRC;
4. RRCs identify interested farmer groups, diagnose information and training needs and organise training;
5. Establish links and partnerships with other institutions to increase scope of intervention.

Advantages

Compared to existing (mostly public run) agricultural extension services, RRCs provide:

- Enhanced access to information (closer to farmers);
- Greater capacity for testing and adaptation of innovations, increasing the relevance of agricultural technologies;
- A basket of innovations and services;
- Mutual learning, encouraged by demonstrations and exchange visits;
- More involvement for women and youths;
- Opportunities for grassroots organisations to manage RRCs and become self-sustaining (RRCs can generate US\$7,500-15,000 per year); and,
- Stronger and more diversified partnerships, allowing enhanced interaction with farmers.

BENEFITS TO SMALLHOLDERS

- Improved crop yields
- More trees for fruit, timber, fuel wood, fodder, medicine, windbreak, habitat for bees
- Income from nursery sales
- Improved soil fertility
- Less deforestation and species loss
- Increased capacity to cope with adverse effects of climate change
- Reduced drudgery of women's work
- Revenues reinvested in school fees, agricultural inputs, off-farm activities, and community projects.

Key recommendations

For research:

- Do cost-benefit analysis and study long-term financial viability and sustainability of the approach to show value for money.
- Understand institutional arrangements

and processes required to make RRCs effective in different socio-economic and political contexts.

For development practitioners:

- Strengthen RRCs technically and organisationally to increase their production capacity, skills, visibility and credibility, so that they can sell their products and services better and become autonomous enterprises.

- Promote the approach widely and showcase potential of RRCs in order to reach more farmers in existing sites and reach out to new areas.



For extension managers and policymakers:

- Integrate the concept of RRCs in national extension strategies as a complementary approach to other methods.
- Actively encourage partnerships between RRCs and other development partners, in particular government programmes, development organisations and local authorities.

What makes RRCs effective?

- Visionary and dynamic leadership;
- Skilled and motivated technical team;
- Strategic and diversified partnerships.



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