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EcoNorCam

Ecosystème du Nord Cameroun : Vers une Approche Intégrée du Paysage
Partenaires de mise en oeuvre



ECOSYSTEM OF NORTH CAMEROON PROJECT: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE APPROACH (EcoNorCam)

TRANSFORMATIVE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Functional literacy to strengthen women entrepreneurship and leadership

SHEET 3



Handing over certificates to recipients of the functional literacy programme



Groups of literate women from Na'ari with the facilitator from that zone who came for the follow-up.

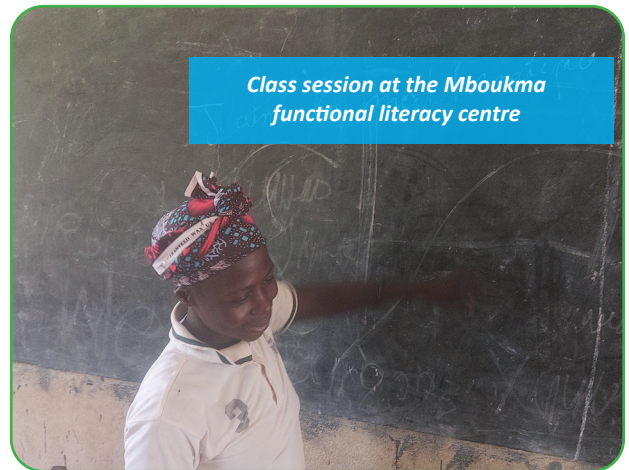
Since 2022, FODER, within the framework of the project Ecosystem of North Cameroon: Towards an Integrated Landscape Approach (EcoNor-Cam), has been supporting the empowerment of women farmers in communities along the Benoue National Park (BNP). This initiative has, however, been hampered by the low or non-existent level of schooling among young girls and women, limiting the sustainability and impact of efforts aimed at promoting women leadership and entrepreneurship in rural areas of the Septentrion. In order to change this situation, FODER implemented a functional literacy programme to provide sustainable support for women empowerment in the North region.

A total of 135 women, most of whom are farmers from four (4) communities along the BNP, benefited from the functional literacy programme. Among them are women who have never been to school and those who have been to school, for some up to class five of the primary school (CMI) or less, but could not further their studies for various reasons. At the end of the first year of the programme, almost all the women were now able to read and write French. They can now better communicate, market their own agricultural produce and keep simplified accounts

of their income-generating activities (IGAs). As per the testimonies of the learners, thanks to their literacy programme, they are more empowered in their personal lives by increasing their self-confidence and their ability to take initiatives. Isabelle WANGLAOUNA, Secretary of the TAIDJAGUE cooperative in Banda, is a beneficiary of this functional literacy programme: *«I have been promoted to level 3. Thanks to the literacy programme, I am now able to write and speak French better. Today, I can better express myself in French, and sell the produce from my field more easily. I am no longer obliged to go to the market with my husband; I can go to the market on my own and easily sell the fruits of my harvest without the risk of being ripped off. I would love to continue with the courses and get my First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) next year.»*



The new skills gained during this programme have enabled some of the learners to find new jobs. In the Na'ari community, for example, 06 women have been recruited as community relays for the Na'ari integrated health centre. In the 04 centres where the functional literacy programme is running, a number of women have expressed an interest in writing the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) exam this academic year (2023–2024). *«I will soon be starting level 3, and how eager I am to get back to school. I am finally going to sit for the FSLC exam and this makes me happy because I will finally be able to tell my children to follow their mother's footsteps, i.e. to go to school and get their certificates. I have recently started helping my children in the evenings with their homework, so it's no longer my husband's responsibility. I'm thinking of extending my business outside the village and selling my produce to locals and foreigners alike, thanks to the fact that I can now speak, read and write French,»* joyfully says Rachel ASTA, a learner at level 3 in the Mboukma public school.



In the long run, the project will assist these women with the process of obtaining birth certificates and encourage the instructors to take a closer look at them, in order to improve their skills and enable them to obtain certificates without administrative difficulties. An emphasis will also be placed on raising awareness among husbands and traditional rulers who are still reluctant to teach their wives to read and write.

Bonne GUISSATA, EcoNorCam Project



« We need to plead with the relevant authorities to issue birth certificates to the beneficiary young girls and women, to make it easier for them to take part in official examinations »

Why was the functional literacy programme implemented as part of the EcoNorCam project?

The functional literacy programme is a human capacity development programme. It helps women acquire the basic knowledge they need for their emancipation. It was devised by FODER as part of the EcoNorCam project, which began in December 2022 and ended in May 2023. We deemed it necessary to carry out this programme because among the members that we mentor, young girls and women, 80 to 90% are illiterate, which is a handicap when it comes to managing their groups and making the most of the tools that this project provides.

What was the response of the women in the communities with regard to this programme?

One important point to note is that these women were the ones who first requested that they be taught to read and write. It's true that it was a small group that expressed this need, but following this request we set up this programme and the others joined in. For them, this literacy programme was an opportunity to learn to read, write and speak French, and to be able to perform the small calculations necessary for the development of their businesses, as most are farmers and shopkeepers.

How has the programme been implemented?

It's an activity that fits in with the existing educational programme. We worked in collaboration with primary schools, which hosted the programme. The beneficiaries follow the same programme as primary school pupils, to which we have added a document drafted by an education professional. This document supplements the programme of primary school pupils and thus gives more weight to the programme for the women beneficiaries. We're dealing with women who, in a way,



have already lived their lives, but that hasn't been a hindrance so far, because they're determined to learn and improve their knowledge. Taking into account the women's situation and schedule (busy in the mornings), the courses take place in the afternoons. This approach has been unanimously adopted by the teachers, learners and traditional rulers.

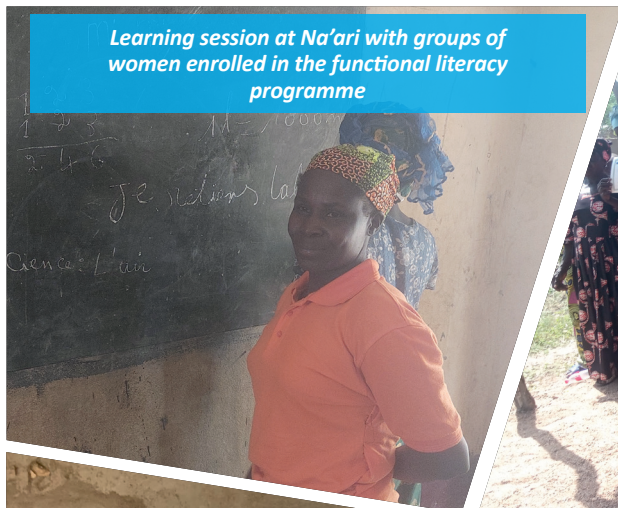
What criteria did you use to recruit the teachers and choose the schools?

As for schools selection, we gave priority to those that were not very far. The recruitment of teachers was based on two (02) criteria. Once we had identified the schools, we held discussions with the hierarchy, i.e. the divisional delegates of the Ministry of Basic Education and the sub-divisional inspectors of Basic Education within the jurisdiction of these schools. Discussions then continued with the headmasters and teachers of the selected schools. After these discussions, it was up to the directors of the various schools to choose the teachers who would give the courses to the women.

What are the long-term goals?

We need to continue implementing the programme and give female learners the chance to sit for the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) exam. We will also need to educate the men and traditional rulers on the need for them to support women empowerment and the education of women and young girls. We will also be pleading with the relevant authorities to issue birth certificates to women and girls. It is true that the problem of the lack of birth certificates affects all regions, nevertheless, the issue is particularly acute in the northern regions. Lack of birth certificates for learners

is therefore one of the major constraints that the literacy programme faces. Learners will find it difficult to sit for the First School Leaving Certificate because they don't have a birth certificate. Cultural barriers, illiteracy, sexism, poverty, corruption, etc., could be at the root of this phenomenon. In order to provoke a sort of competition among the learners, certificates will be awarded to the women with the best results. The awards ceremony will be attended by village chiefs and authorities



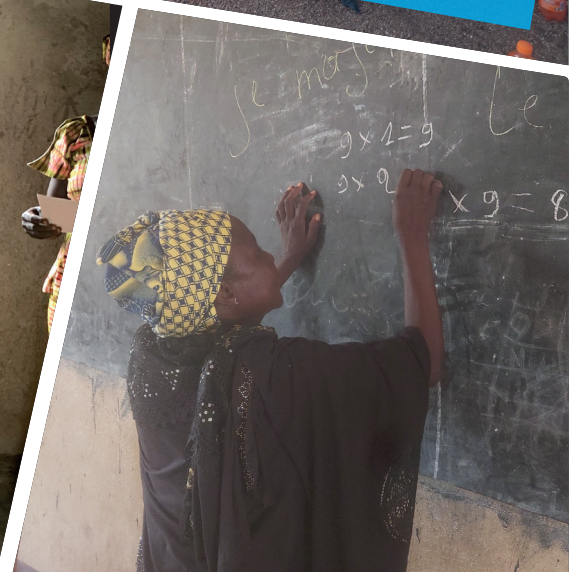
Learning session at Na'ari with groups of women enrolled in the functional literacy programme

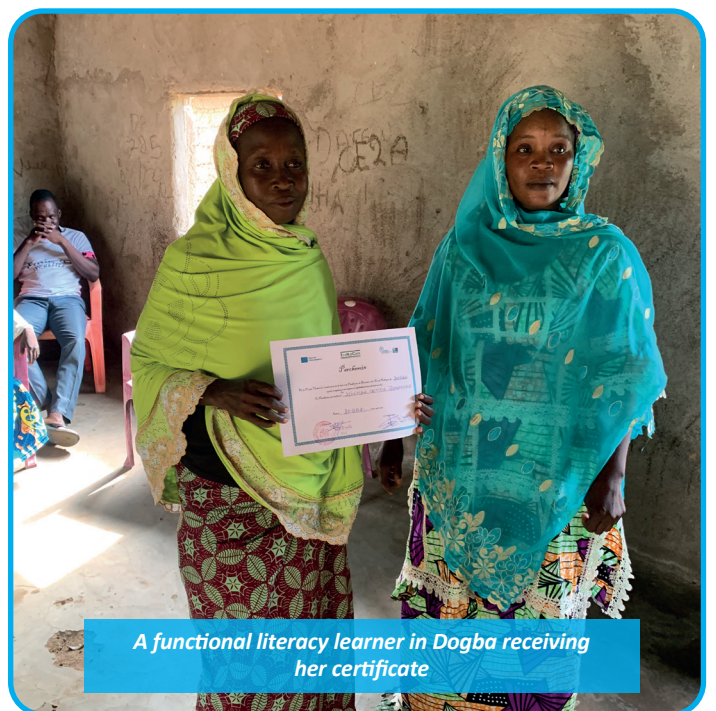


Handing over certificates in the mboukma functional literacy centre



The president of the Dildaga group in Dogba (right) receiving her participation certificate for the functional literacy programme





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