

Carnet
Faire
commun

number 3

AN AGROFORESTRY PERIMETER IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

From a development project to the creation of a common?



THE CARNETS FAIRE COMMUN were produced by the Commons and shared governance action-research programme, which was initiated by GRET in 2019. The programme is opening up a learning space, where commons-based approaches capable of generating and facilitating shared governance dynamics for fair, sustainable management of resources, services and territories can be tested and documented as part of development projects. How to create the conditions necessary for collective action and collective learning? How to promote systems of shared governance within which citizens-users have real power to control and decide on issues affecting them, alongside public authorities and the private sector? How to reflect on the position of development operator, how to design intervention strategies, which facilitation methods to choose? How to use projects as official development assistance tools to support these social transformation processes over the long term?

In line with the Cahier projet collection, the Carnet Faire commun series, with its short, easy-to access format, shares operational findings drawn from concrete experiences in various geographies. The objective of these handbooks is to enrich the reflections and references of practitioners and political deciders wishing to promote forms of commons-based social organisation and shared governance.

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From a development project to the creation of a common?

Written by: Marion Osmont
Coordinator: Jean-François Kibler
Authors: Judicaël Fetiveau, Romain Duret
Contributors: Marcel Shawanga, Marilou Gilbert
Editors: Marie Camus, Véronique Beldame
Editorial managers: François Enten, Marie Camus
Interior composition: Nancy Cossin
Photographs: © GRET, unless otherwise specified

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AFODEK	Agroforests for the Development of Kipushi
APHK	Suburban Agriculture in Haut-Katanga
CAPAK	Centrale des associations du périmètre agroforestier de Kipushi (Kipushi agroforestry perimeter associations umbrella association)
CPP	Centre de promotion du paysannat (Centre for the promotion of farming)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo

THE COMMONS-BASED APPROACH

Our choices for society are mainly operated by **public authorities** (national and decentralised), which we expect to defend the general interest, and by the **private sector** (companies and foundations), which is considered more efficient from a managerial point of view. Directly or indirectly, both of the latter monopolise arenas of governance, i.e. spaces in which decisions are made. They mobilise a model of society based on competition and survival of the fittest, exclusive private or public property, regulation by the market and by the state, and various forms of control over populations' behaviour.

These models of State-private governance **often struggle to ensure social and environmental justice**. Ecosystems are being degraded, biodiversity is being eroded and the climate is changing, accentuating social inequalities. In the Northern and Southern hemispheres, essential services such as access to drinking water or energy, under public control that in some cases delegates these public services to private operators, remain inaccessible to a large number of poor people who cannot afford them. Similarly, urbanisation and governance patterns in protected areas, which are decided by public or private authorities, are not reconciling conservation of the environment with inclusion of precarious populations who depend on it. The inability of current systems of governance to meet growing social and environmental challenges is generating defiance among citizens vis-à-vis institutions, with which they no longer identify. This situation is leading to socio-political insecurity, which is a threat to peace.

This overview is deliberately exaggerated to underscore **the urgency of exploring ways to move beyond the State-private governance paradigm**. This realisation is expressed in particular in Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG), which targets the implementation of exemplary institutions and systems of inclusive decision-making¹. This is a considerable challenge for official development assistance.

The **commons** movement, which is multidimensional and has been growing since its renaissance in the 1980s with the work of political scientist Elinor Ostrom², is opening up new possibilities. The concept of the commons provides a powerful benchmark for social organisation, which can be described as a set of interdependent stakeholders directly affected by a common challenge, who decide to undertake collective action to co-construct shared governance.

1. "Target 16.6 – Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels" and "Target 16.7 – Ensure responsive, inclusive and representative decision-making at all levels", UN, "16 Peace, justice and strong institutions", Sustainable Development Goals [accessed 3 May 2022], <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/fr/peace-justice/>

2. Her best-known publication is *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

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Within a continuous collective learning process, it defines and implements rules for access and use that are deemed fair, and ensure social, economic and environmental sustainability of the object of the common (see Figure 1 below).

GRET is convinced that forms of shared governance “in commons” are more likely to ensure social and ecological justice for several reasons. For example, they enable citizens to take (back) ownership of the powers to decide and control alongside public authorities and the private sector. They also maintain dynamics of collective action and learning on ways to define and develop the rules to be respected, which is a source of adaptation and resilience. Lastly, they recognise bundles of differentiated, inclusive rights (access, harvesting of resources, management, etc.) and mobilise levers for cooperation and “commoning” to build the society of the future.

Such forms of social organisation, to be invented and built, are likely to provide better responses to the SDGs and to the issues and challenges targeted by official development aid.

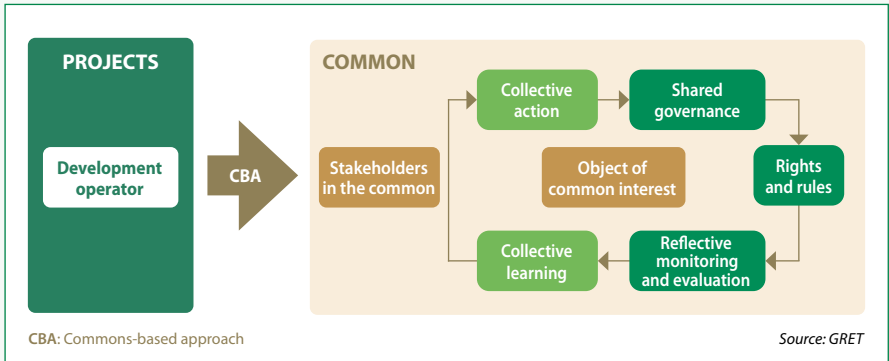
GRET proposes developing a **commons-based approach** that can be adopted and rolled out by development operators wishing to promote such forms of social organisation as part of their interventions (see Figure 1 below). When implemented as part of development projects, a commons-based approach draws from the theory of the commons to promote and support dynamics for social organisation and construction of shared governance “in commons” around resources, services or territories. In this way, the commons-based approach covers everything an operator can implement as part of a project, notably to:

- reveal interdependencies between stakeholders and the common challenges they face;
- motivate collective action of concerned stakeholders to seek solutions together;
- favour fair representation of stakeholders in the shared governance system;
- incite stakeholders to make their action part of a collective learning logic based on a system of internal reflective monitoring.

This initiative by GRET aims to contribute to and draw inspiration from the commons, the social and solidarity economy, and popular education movements. It explicitly targets the strengthening of civil society, citizen emancipation and democracy. Its specificity is that it focuses on interventions conducted as part of official development aid, an environment that is both privileged and constrained. It is in line with reflections undertaken by Agence française de développement (AFD) and the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD), while providing an additional contribution to the operationalisation of a commons-based approach within development projects targeting issues related to natural resources, services and territories.

The commons-based approach discussed here is not a panacea. Apart from the fact that it is currently in vogue – which risks relegating it to the level of a slogan, a catch-all word or

Figure 1: THE COMMONS-BASED APPROACH



a travelling model³ – this approach aims to foster exploration of other ways of making society and of governing, locally and more broadly, for greater social and environmental justice.

The commons-based approach invites us to take a step back, to focus on issues of governance and on the manner in which we conduct development projects. It is neither a recipe nor a method, it is a way of guiding our interventions, of reading situations of action, of conducting our actions and thinking about our position as a committed facilitator. The best way to understand what a commons-based approach looks like in operational terms, is to see how it is rolled out in concrete actions... and, better still, to test it oneself.

As part of its Commons and Shared Governance programme, GRET is developing and testing a commons-based approach in diverse geographies and contexts with an operational and methodological ambition. The aim of the programme is to think about the operationalisation of a commons-based approach in concrete, practical terms. Tests conducted within projects supplied insights originating from various contexts and situations of action around diverse commons-related issues. Capitalisation on these experiences, focusing on governance and the commons-based approach, is aimed at enriching reflection and the various references of practitioners and policymakers wishing to promote forms of social organisation and shared governance inspired by the commons. ●

3. "Any standardised institutional intervention [...], aiming to produce any social change, and that is based on a 'mechanism' and 'devices' [...] assumed to have intrinsic properties inducing this change in various contexts of implementation"; Olivier de Sardan J.-P. (2021), p. 26, (non-official translation).



Charcoal merchant in the miombo wooded savannah

Introduction

This handbook describes the support provided by GRET for the creation of an agroforestry perimeter on the outskirts of the city of Lubumbashi in the province of Haut-Katanga, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This perimeter project was designed in response to growing pressure on the *miombo* ecosystem, a wooded savannah characteristic of the region, which has been seriously degraded by urbanisation, charcoal production and slash-and-burn agriculture, and to the difficulty households face generating decent incomes through dominant agricultural production systems.

Through GRET's support, structured around two projects (AFODEK¹ and APHK²), a 2,000-hectare agroforestry perimeter was established and used by 147 farmers in 2022. During this period, GRET's positioning gradually evolved from a "turnkey" project logic to one of assistance under a commons-based approach.

The AFODEK project was designed with a Congolese association, the Centre de promotion du paysannat (Centre for the Promotion of Farming – CPP), which is recognised in the DRC for its rural development experience, and which plays a key role in establishing contact with traditional authorities, thus facilitating the project's local institutional anchoring. The initial strategy was based on integrating the perimeter's future farmers into an existing cooperative linked to the CPP. However, the CPP proved unable to assume management of the perimeter, forcing the GRET team to change its strategy. So, in 2015, GRET designed and then helped set up a two-tiered governance system, composed of ten agroforestry associations coordinated by an "umbrella" association, as its members call it. In 2017 and 2018, during GRET's absence, the farmers assumed management of the perimeter and gradually took ownership of its governance. Then with the APHK project in 2019, the GRET team began strengthening the agroforestry associations and the umbrella association to support the emerging dynamic of perimeter shared

1. *Agroforests for the development of Kipushi, 2012-2017.*

2. *Suburban agriculture in Haut-Katanga, 2019-2022.*

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governance under a community-based approach. It sought to consolidate the farmers' dynamic and establish a collective learning process to address both agroforestry and governance issues.

This handbook explains how the evolution of GRET's strategy allowed farmers to take ownership of both the perimeter and its governance. It also examines how a development operator can or cannot drive a commons-based dynamic on the initial basis of an exogenous proposal. It seeks to determine the prerequisites for the emergence of collective action, such as commoners' knowledge of one another, shared knowledge of the purpose of the commons, and collective ownership of its governance structure. It also shows how stakeholders external to the commons must be considered and involved. Lastly, it presents prospects for continuing assistance to consolidate the dynamics at work to favour the emergence of a commons. ●

PART 1

An agroforestry perimeter as an alternative to the exploitation of *miombo* forests

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a former Belgian colony that gained independence in 1960. It is the second largest country in Africa with an estimated population of 92.3 million in 2021³. A period of generalised conflicts began in 1996 involving all bordering countries and which led to the fall of President Mobutu (who had been in power since 1965). Since 2003, localised conflicts have persisted, especially in the eastern part of the country, justifying the continuation of the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

The DRC is endowed with considerable mineral wealth, abundant and varied natural resources, and natural conditions favourable to agricultural activity. However, despite this potential, Congolese agriculture is reduced to subsistence farming with productivity among the worst in Africa. This poor development of agriculture has both cyclical (armed conflicts and population displacements) and structural causes (high demographic pressure and lack of socio-economic infrastructure, such as service roads and markets), leading to a situation of food insecurity.

Wood is the primary source of fuel for households. Constantly growing demand for charcoal is leading to accelerating deforestation. Since 2010 and the end of debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, China, which invests in infrastructure projects in exchange for mineral resources, has become the country's main trading partner and creditor. The copper belt area where the province of Haut-Katanga is located has significant copper reserves.

3. World Bank, Data, Congo, Dem. Rep., <https://data.worldbank.org/country/congo-dem-rep?view=chart> [accessed 20 July 2022].

HAUT-KATANGA: FOOD INSECURITY AND PRESSURE ON THE *MIOMBO* ECOSYSTEM

The province of Haut-Katanga is located in the extreme south-east of the country. It is predominantly urban while the rest of the country is highly rural. Thus, providing food for urban centres directs the issue of agricultural development. Of secondary importance in the rest of the country, maize is the primary means of subsistence for the population here, while cassava, which is traditionally dominant, is considered only a supplementary crop. Rural households practise slash-and-burn agriculture on low-fertility ferralitic soils, depending on forest regrowth to restore soil fertility, in a context of low prices (competition from maize imports from Zambia for urban markets drives prices down).

This type of agriculture is threatened by expanding urban, mining and agro-industrial rights of way, and by the deterioration of ecosystems caused by shortening fallow periods, and it no longer allows farmers to meet their needs. To supplement their income, farmers also produce charcoal, which is more profitable than agriculture due to growing demand from cities⁴. These family strategies, combining slashing and burning (with shortened fallow periods) and charcoal production, damage the fragile *miombo*⁵ ecosystem characteristic of the region.

To promote food autonomy in Katanga, the provincial government conducted a proactive agricultural policy between 2007 and 2015 involving the mining sector⁶, private investments and the modernisation of small farms through contract farming systems, delegating agricultural



Charcoal merchant outside the perimeter, returning from Zambia during the AFODEK project

4. Charcoal consumption in Lubumbashi, the provincial capital and the country's second largest city, is currently estimated at 100,000 tonnes per year. The city's population is growing constantly.

5. Wooded savannah characterised by a predominance of *Brachystegia* (*miombo* in Swahili), used for building materials, fuel (charcoal and firewood), medicines and non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

6. The provincial government imposed the crops: each mining operator was required to set aside 500 hectares for maize cultivation.

supervision to the private sector (distribution of tractors and inputs, farming villages). This policy stems from a very centralised vision of farm modernisation (cooperatives, village groupings) with little regard for what rural households want or for social realities in the management of customary lands. It was continued under the provincial regrouping in 2015⁷. The policy is also confronted with the difficulty of securing access to land, urban sprawl and the liberalisation of mining activities, which have fuelled land speculation to the detriment of rural residents. The agricultural development model focussed on mechanisation and the use of improved maize varieties that require chemical inputs, placing rural households in a situation of high dependency and insecurity, as well as on an unsustainable development trajectory.

AN ALTERNATIVE AGROFORESTRY TECHNICAL METHOD BASED ON THE TAUNGYA CULTIVATION SYSTEM

In this context of social and environmental urgency, GRET and its partners, the Belgian NGO Nature+ and the Congolese association the Centre de promotion du paysannat (Centre for the Promotion of Farming – CPP) proposed testing an agroforestry technical method based on the principle of improved bush fallow in 2012.

This agroforestry development model is based on the Taungya technical method⁸ that was adapted to local soil, climatic and socio-economic contexts. The model was initially developed in South-East Asia and has been tested for fifteen years in the DRC, beginning with the Mampu project⁹ that includes slash-and-burn practices in agroforestry methods to regenerate soil fertility through the introduction of leguminous trees in fallow areas (e.g., acacia). At the scale of small plots farmed in rotation, this method provides farmers annual farming income on recently cleared and planted plots and, eventually, annual income from the use of wood to make charcoal when the trees reach maturity.

7. Under the territorial redistribution included in the 2006 Constitution, the Haut-Katanga district of the former province of Katanga became a province in 2015, with Lubumbashi as its capital.

8. "This technical method involves growing forest species (here, *Acacia auriculiformis*) to produce charcoal and food crops such as maize, cassava, etc. It originated in Indonesia in 1851 and has been widely disseminated by the British in their colonies. It was initially a contract between the farmers and forestry services to produce teak (*Tectona grandis*). Given its advantages, it subsequently developed to meet the socio-economic needs of rural areas." (Duret R., 2022) (non-official translation).

9. The Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) has been conducting the Mampu project (named after a village) since 2004 with funding from the European Union. It is what remains of the pilot phase of a 100,000-hectare reforestation project on the Batéké Plateau, located less than 100 kilometres from Kinshasa, to meet the metropolis's demand for charcoal. The project was based on growing *Acacia auriculiformis*, which has been tested in the region since the 1990s.

This model offers several advantages:

- peasant commitment facilitated by maintaining the slash-and-burn principle with the creation of a new farming plot each year, making it possible to pre-finance the crop year by selling charcoal from clearing (in wooded areas);
- settling farming families on a defined area of about ten hectares per farmer, combined with diversified local production systems (home gardens);
- the gradual disappearance of slash-and-burn practices once the acacia plantations have been established, since the plantations regenerate through coppicing¹⁰ after the trees are cut.

This method should reduce pressure on the natural environment while generating a decent income for farmers and providing a sustainable supply of charcoal to the neighbouring city.

GRET and its partners proposed testing this method in a 2,000-hectare agroforestry perimeter created on degraded areas that had already been cultivated and exploited for charcoal. This area is located sixteen kilometres east of Lubumbashi, the provincial capital of Haut-Katanga, in the Kaponda chiefdom on the Kipushi territory. Thanks to funding from the European Union, this experiment was launched under the AFODEK project (Agroforests for the Development of Kipushi) in 2012.

AN AGROFORESTRY PERIMETER CREATED FROM SCRATCH: GOVERNANCE TO BE CONSTRUCTED

The perimeter project involved settling 150 farmers and their families, each of whom would be assigned a twelve-hectare plot. They would apply the agroforestry method, committing to plant one hectare of *Acacia auriculiformis* each year and then harvest and transform it into charcoal after seven to ten years. Food and cash crops were grown with acacias during the first two years after planting to generate food and income for the farmers. The perimeter would be serviced by roads, wells, water points, fire breaks and houses. This perimeter is not just a juxtaposition of individual farms, but a commons-based project with collective dimensions and shared governance involving all the farmers and external stakeholders, such as administrative and customary authorities. So, a social organisation had to be created and governance mechanisms put in place.

10. Coppicing involves cutting the tree at the base of the trunk, after which shoots grow on the stool.

GRET initially planned to apply a governance model pairing the extension of a small existing cooperative in the perimeter with technical support from the CPP. However, deficiencies in the CPP's project implementation quickly became evident, and the cooperative model benefited only a few. This structure was quickly abandoned and replaced by an association model that put decision-making power in the hands of the farmers, who were organised in ten site associations under an "umbrella" association. In this way, the 150 farms created shared governance for the perimeter, dealing with influential external stakeholders, such as the chiefdom in its dual customary and administrative nature, mining companies, agriculture and land administrations, etc. and GRET. ●



Community meeting for all perimeter stakeholders and a few village leaders, 2022

PART 2

From project “coordinator” to commons facilitator: eleven years of support

GRET: COOPERATIVE PROJECT “COORDINATOR” (2012-2015)

Right from the start of the AFODEK project, land was the first challenge. The proposed agroforestry technical method required long-term land security because crops were rotated over a period of about ten years. The entire perimeter had to be secured to guarantee sufficiently large land areas and production volumes, to reach economies of scale (technical support, supply of inputs, sale of agricultural products and charcoal) and to set up shared actions to service farmers’ sites (construction of houses, watering holes, roads and fire breaks).

Land security is part of a legal pluralism in which written law and customary law coexist. Although land law in the DRC grants no legal recognition to customary authorities in land management and allocation, the customary chief’s support must be obtained prior to any land acquisition. The CPP obtained land security for the project through the identification of the lands of the agroforestry perimeter provided by Grand Chief Kaponda. From the outset, the Chief supported the establishment of this perimeter, in a logic of economic development and sustainable natural resource management, but also to secure part of his territory that was exposed to land pressure and urban expansion of Lubumbashi. However, the Chief’s agreement was not sufficient. Under land law, the State is the sole owner of the land, and natural persons and legal entities can hold only a right of use through land concession titles. So, the project team began the lengthy process of obtaining these land titles from the land registry right from the start.

The project’s initial strategy was to incorporate all the future agroforestry perimeter farmers in an existing small cooperative created by the president of the CPP in the village of Mukoma located within the perimeter. The project also planned for the

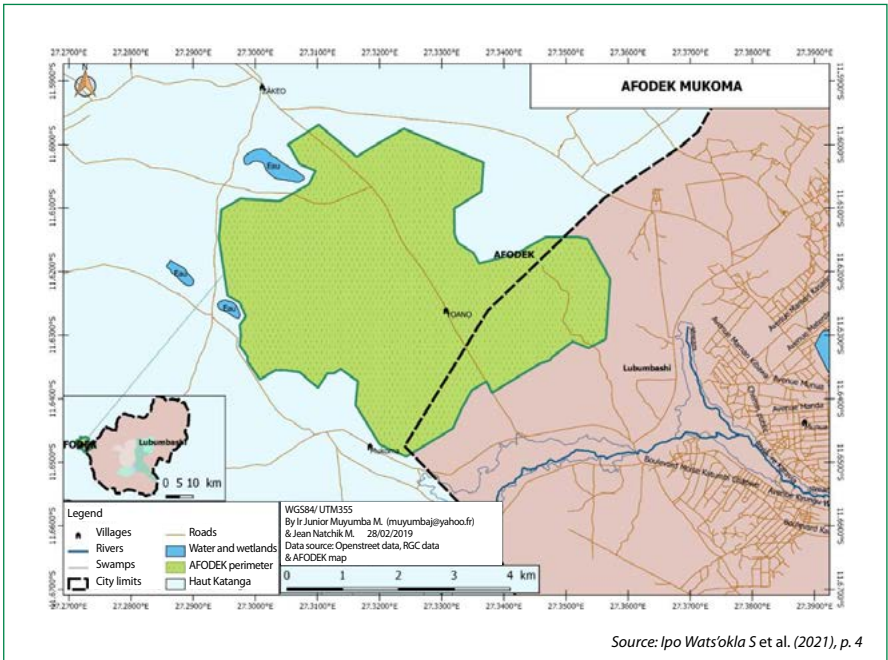
An agroforestry perimeter in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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CPP, based in Mukoma, to manage the perimeter, centralise charcoal sales, manage a working capital for the acquisition of inputs and seeds, and provide services for the perimeter farmers (family farming advice, agroforestry technical advice and training). It was also decided that the CPP would hold the land titles to guarantee land stability and prevent it from being subdivided.

During this first phase, GRET assumed a role of “coordinator”¹¹ attentive to the positioning of stakeholders, notably through the CPP, which was at the centre of the governance system being constructed and was to guarantee good representation of local stakeholders and the perimeter’s sustainability after the project. The CPP was assigned important responsibilities, such as helping GRET select farmers and organising the creation of roads and fire breaks.

Figure 1: LOCATION OF THE AGROFORESTRY PERIMETER



11. Term translated from the French word “ensemblier”, which is used in industrial engineering for large complex projects. The “coordinator” is a prime contractor able to obtain the required resources and skills, and responsible for the entire project, from design to “turnkey” delivery. This term is used in several fields, including geography, urban and regional development, etc.

The GRET team and the CPP supervisor drafted a commitment protocol defining the obligations of the farmers, the project and the CPP on the perimeter. In the event of a conflict, a committee made up of traditional authorities (notables from local villages) would reach a consensual outcome that would protect the perimeter. A selection committee composed of village representatives, the CPP supervisor and the two GRET technical assistants was set up to recruit farmers, whose applications were analysed based on age, location, farming skills and adherence to the project.

In 2013, thirty-two parcels of land were assigned to fifteen families and seventeen members of the Mukoma Shibukeni cooperative, linked to the CPP. Each parcel consisted of twelve one-hectare plots: one for the house, and the other eleven for planting acacias. The parcels reserved for the homes were grouped into small hamlets. The first wells were bored and the first houses built.

To pre-finance the 2013-2014 crop year, the project activated a working capital for inputs. The complete delimitation of the perimeter was completed in August 2014, with 134 plots assigned. At that time, the agroforestry perimeter was structured around nine new hamlets.

Each hamlet was composed of sixteen one-hectare parcels with homes for up to fifteen farmers and one parcel for community infrastructure: well, storage shed, etc. Unoccupied agroforestry plots could be placed in conservation or farmed collectively to generate resources (e.g., community field). The tenth site, which was not modified by the project, was the village of Yoano, which already existed and was located in the centre of the perimeter. The project also created two field schools that were led by an agronomy consultant who also had a farm in the perimeter, to teach farmers new agricultural techniques (ridging¹² instead of mechanical tilling that is too expensive) and raise awareness about crop diversification and companion planting.

In 2015, 1,200 hectares of the perimeter were secured through temporary land occupation titles¹³ obtained by the CPP. Titles for the remaining 800 hectares, corresponding to sites A, B, C and E (see Figure 2 below) were already held by Gécamines, a State-owned



3D project model created in 2013, showing the future perimeter

12. To form into narrow raised bands.

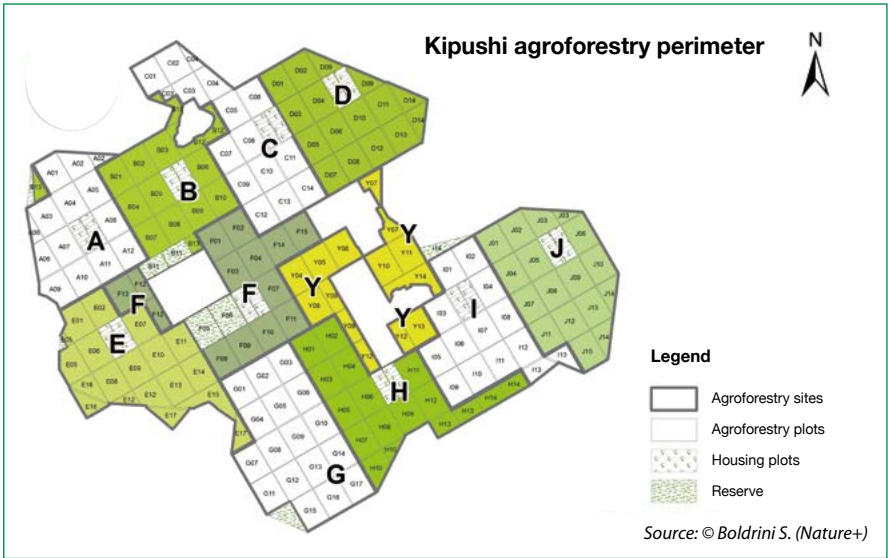
13. The land registry first issues temporary occupation titles for a period of five years. It can then issue perpetual concession titles of twenty-five years.

An agroforestry perimeter in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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private mining company. Gécamines does not plan to exploit these lands and did not oppose the farmers' establishment. In all, 150 plots were assigned to 133 families and seventeen members of the Mukoma Shibukeni cooperative. Most of the farmers were "locals" from neighbouring villages. The others were "new arrivals" from the city of Lubumbashi or elsewhere in the province.

Figure 2: PERIMETER MAP



Site Y technician training in agroforestry by the AFODEK project team, 2014



Visit to a neighbouring field school to identify market garden activities in the area, 2012

GRET: “ORGANISER” OF AN ASSOCIATION STRUCTURE (2015-2017)

Despite playing a significant role in establishing the perimeter and securing land titles, the CPP gradually backed away from technical project management and farmer supervision. In 2014, the annual monitoring report by European Union consultants highlighted its lack of effectiveness in monitoring compliance with the technical method, overseeing the nursery and distributing inputs and seeds. These failures led GRET to abandon the “cooperative/CPP” governance model it had initially planned to apply. So, with its exit from the project looming (AFODEK was to end in 2017), GRET and its partner Nature+ designed and promoted a form of associative governance with a two-tiered community structure: ten agroforestry site associations and an umbrella association.

GRET then took on the role of organiser. It helped the farmers organise themselves into associations at the site level to manage their wells, community storage shed and the Mukoma central nursery, maintain roads and fire breaks, monitor compliance with the protocol and conduct agroforestry campaign reviews. It also organised discussions on the constitution and governance of the umbrella association in anticipation of the transfer of the perimeter’s management to it. In particular, the umbrella association was to hold the land titles in place of the CPP and sign the commitment protocols.

The umbrella association, called Centrale des associations du périmètre agroforestier de Kipushi (Kipushi agroforestry perimeter associations umbrella association – CAPAK), was created in August 2016. One central tree nursery managed by the project was abandoned in favour of ten site nurseries run by the farmers themselves. The project team assisted with set-up, by training association and CAPAK leaders to use tools to lead, monitor and evaluate the technical method for the nurseries and plantations, conduct the technical and economic review of the campaigns and lead the association. The formal establishment of the ten associations made it possible to elect nursery managers in each management committee responsible for ensuring everyone had the necessary information to plant and tend their acacia seedlings.

Despite intensifying land conflicts with neighbouring farms and with the Lubumbashi registration division during this period, the project still succeeded in having the primacy of the perimeter’s rights recognised at every turn.

GRET AS GOVERNANCE “OBSERVER AND ADVISER” (2017-2018)

GRET and Nature+ withdrew from the project in May 2017 after officially transferring the perimeter’s management to CAPAK. CAPAK ran its first agroforestry year alone (seasonal organisation of food crops and acacia plantations by farmers).

Throughout 2018, GRET continued providing informal support through its technical leader who, on his own initiative and at CAPAK's request, served as voluntary adviser for the monitoring and leadership of the association's life and agroforestry dynamics. During this period, with the leader's support in the background, CAPAK showed that it was able to manage the perimeter, monitor its activities and exclude non-compliant farmers. However, given the feeling of social injustice generated by the exclusion¹⁴ of farmers who were unable to plant one hectare of acacias annually, the farmers decided to change the commitment protocol and revise it downwards; the CAPAK general meeting voted that farmers who were unable to respect this rule would be permitted to plant half a hectare of acacias, provided they agreed to the size of their agroforestry lot being cut in half (from twelve to six hectares).

GRET's withdrawal period was a significant step in the life of the perimeter. Through their governance bodies, the farmers not only continued to work the perimeter, but they also modified the rules governing it to evolve the model put in place by GRET towards something they considered to be fairer.

GRET AS A COMMONING "FACILITATOR" (2019-2022)

The work done to establish the perimeter (perimeter creation, support in settling the families, establishing a technical method), as well as the strategy reversal regarding its governance, unexpectedly allowed the bases for shared governance to emerge. In 2019, GRET obtained funding from the European Union to launch the Suburban Agriculture in Haut-Katanga (APHK) project, with the aim of strengthening this governance.

This three-year project (2019-2022) was designed based on an assessment conducted jointly by GRET and CAPAK. It planned to provide light support structured around two aims. The first was to **make the perimeter viable and to secure the farmers**, with priority actions to complete securing the land, renovate wells, construct forty houses to allow the farmers to settle in the perimeter, and stabilise the agroforestry technical method. The second aim was the **institutional and technical consolidation of CAPAK's and the site associations' management** (monitoring and evaluation) **and governance capacities** (renewing executive boards, leading a collective learning process), as these bodies were still young and inexperienced.

The APHK project joined the Commons and Shared Governance programme in May 2019. At that time, it was decided to adopt a **commons-based approach** to help the associations and CAPAK consolidate what was beginning to resemble an agroforestry

14. The commitment protocol includes the obligation to plant one hectare of acacias each year. Any farmer failing to comply with this founding rule may be excluded from the perimeter.

commons. The former agroforestry technician from the AFODEK project took over coordinating the APHK project and assumed the role of facilitator, which consisted of observation, support for coordination and intermediation between stakeholders. He helped the associations' management committees prepare general meetings and held bimonthly meetings with CAPAK to schedule perimeter activities. During these meetings, he observed the dynamics to better understand the stakeholders' positions and identify support needs. He intervened to simplify debates and ensure that all participants were able to express their points of view. GRET also provided support for financial and administrative issues (rendering of accounts, revision of association by-laws and internal regulations, etc.).

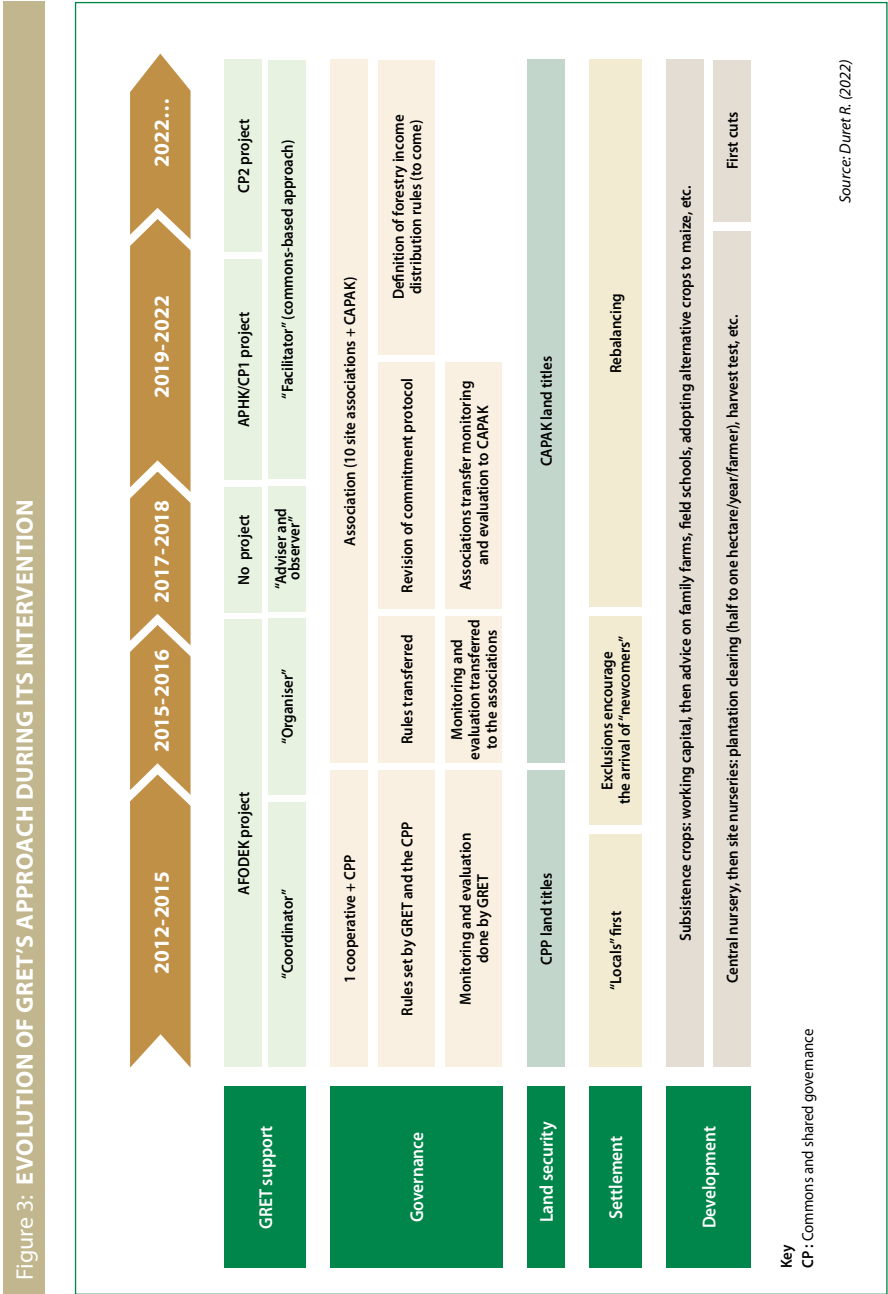
At the end of the APHK project in 2022, the agroforestry perimeter had 147 farmers on ten sites organised in associations. Each site had houses, a well and a storage shed. GRET, CAPAK and the associations conducted a capitalisation exercise at the end of the project to learn from the work done and identify future challenges, including the collective organisation of the first acacia cutting, the sale of charcoal and the distribution of the income generated. ●



One of the first acacia field schools in the perimeter, 2013

An agroforestry perimeter in the Democratic Republic of Congo

From a development project to the creation of a common?



PART 3

The commons-based approach in practice

PROMOTING THE FARMERS' GRADUAL OWNERSHIP OF GOVERNANCE

After abandoning the cooperative/CPP model in 2016, GRET adopted an associative governance system that it helped the perimeter farmers construct in a participatory manner. It was remarkable to observe how they seized the new system and took the initiative in adapting a founding rule.

● DESIGNING A HYBRID AND TWO-TIERED GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

GRET designed a **two-tiered associative governance system** composed of ten site agroforestry associations and CAPAK, an umbrella association. The objective was for these associations to take over the CPP's prerogatives and manage the perimeter's



Acacia nurseries monitored by agricultural and agroforestry technicians, 2013

activities in terms of agroforestry, the monitoring and evaluation of plantations, and fulfilment of farmers' commitments. The proposed system aimed to ensure the representation and participation of all farmers in decision-making and in monitoring the application of decisions at the level of each site and the perimeter itself.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE PERIMETER GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

Each site association consists of two bodies (see Figure 4 opposite): a general meeting, composed of all site farmers (one person per household, i.e., between ten and fifteen people), and a management committee with nine members who are elected by the general meeting. The management committee members share responsibilities at the site level (responsible for the storage sheds and wells, agricultural technician, communication, treasurer, etc.) and designate three delegates to represent the association to CAPAK.

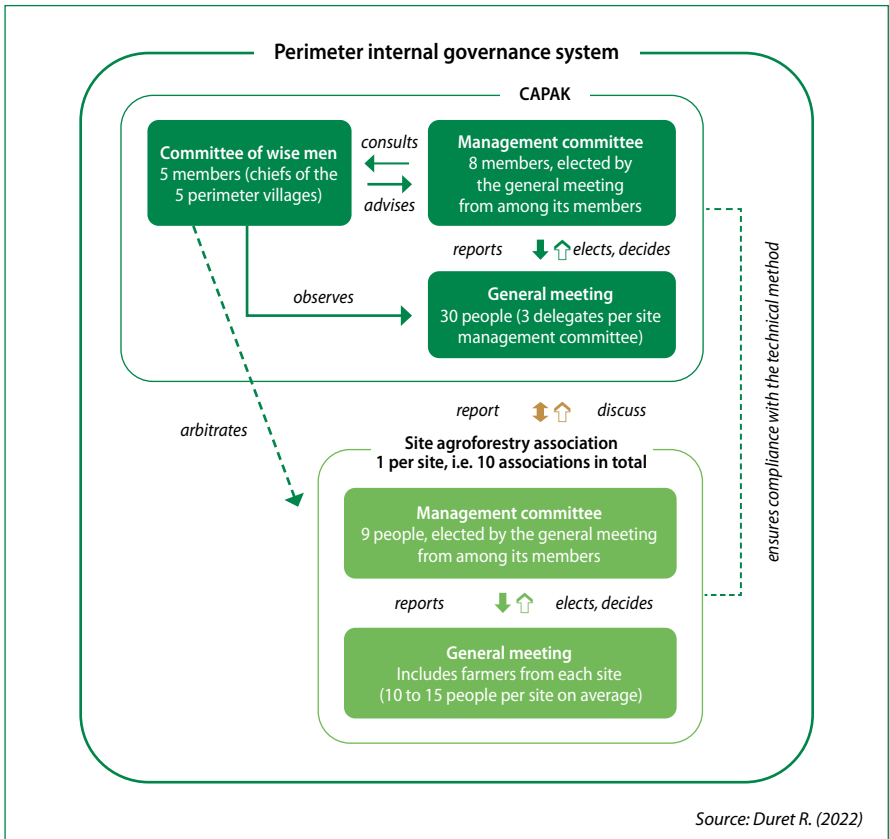
The CAPAK general meeting is composed of the delegates of the ten associations (i.e., thirty people) who represent all the farmers. This is the highest decision-making body in the perimeter. It meets every two months. It elects CAPAK's management committee, which implements its decisions and monitors its orientations. The management committee has nine positions: president, vice-president, secretary, assistant secretary, treasurer, auditor, logistician, training officer and agricultural technician. All are volunteer positions.



The CAPAK president in an acacia plantation on site E, 2017

Perimeter governance is also hybrid in that the associative system is paired with a **committee of wise men**, composed of the chiefs of the five hamlets within the perimeter¹⁵. The committee of wise men enjoys great legitimacy founded on customs. In the event of conflict, the sanction monitoring and enforcement mechanism calls on site associations and, if they are unable to solve the problem, it turns to CAPAK. The committee of wise men is called as a last resort.

Figure 4: **THE AGROFORESTRY PERIMETER'S GOVERNANCE SYSTEM AFTER 2016**



15. The hamlets of Katanga, Kitanfya, Seleye, Timothé and Yoano.

● **PARTICIPATORY CONSTRUCTION OF THE ASSOCIATION GOVERNANCE SYSTEM**

The **associations were created and their by-laws and operating rules were defined** in a participatory manner. Informal site committees were formed as early as 2015 and GRET helped them draft their association by-laws. The by-laws were discussed at several meetings, the final versions were adopted at general meetings and the ten associations acquired legal status in the first half of 2016. During the second half of 2016, the GRET team drafted the umbrella association’s by-laws in collaboration with ten farmers who were elected from among thirty delegates from the agroforestry sites. These delegates decided to set up the umbrella association for their ten associations and refused to include the members of the cooperative linked to the CPP. CAPAK’s by-laws were adopted in August 2016 by the general meeting of the 133 farmers and their ten associations.

During the organisational year, **the associations distributed the perimeter’s governance roles among their members**. They took on the responsibilities related directly to their own respective sites. CAPAK was responsible for the central functions previously assumed by the CPP; it held the land titles and signed the protocols of engagement, and as such took exclusion decisions and chose new members.

Table 1: PREROGATIVES OF THE ASSOCIATIVE STRUCTURES

Roles	Site associations	CAPAK
Main duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage and operate the agroforestry site. • Send delegates to the CAPAK general meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the entire perimeter. • Represent and defend the farmers. • Interface with administration, chiefdom, university, etc. • Seek local development partners.
Protect land security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No direct responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorse existing land titles in its name. • Obtain titles to cover the entire perimeter. • Secure the perimeter against external stakeholders. .../...

Roles	Site associations	CAPAK
Manage infrastructure (storage sheds, wells, equipment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage and repair wells. • Manage the community storage shed. • Manage community equipment (bicycles, carts, tools, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the ten site wells. • Monitor the network of craftsmen/well repairers.
Manage input working capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of input working capital transferred in July 2016 (one per association). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No working capital transferred.
Monitor agroforestry activities and plantations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the implementation of the site's agroforestry activities (prepare annual parcels, plantations, maintenance, etc.). • Monitor the tree nursery. • Monitor road and fire break maintenance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guarantee the sustainability of agroforestry practices and develop the perimeter: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – monitor association activities; – monitor site agroforestry activities; – monitor site tree nurseries; – monitor site road and fire break maintenance.
Other monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmer mutual aid. • Community income-generating activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispute resolution. • Relaunch associations.
Warnings and exclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power to warn and exclude farmers from their site (with recourse to CAPAK). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power to warn and exclude any farmer, with no recourse.
Select farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive applications for their site, approve at general meeting and send to CAPAK. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive and suggest applications to associations. • Issue decision opinions on association candidates.

Source: Fetiveau J. (2018)

Perimeter management rules are included in the association by-laws, in CAPAK's internal regulations and in the commitment protocol. They specify the conditions for farmer settlement, their commitment to develop agroforestry and maintain collective services, as well as their obligations to join the associations and CAPAK.

An agroforestry perimeter in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Table 2: PERIMETER RULES

Perimeter rules	Site association by-laws	CAPAK by-laws	CAPAK internal regulations	Commitment protocol
Join the site association		X		
Commit to the perimeter for the long term	X			X
Produce more than 850 plants per year (nursery)			X	X
Plant one hectare of acacias per year	X		X	X
Plant food crops among the acacia after each plantation	X		X	X
Cut acacia only ten years after planting	X		X	
Participate in road, fire break and community structure maintenance	X		X	X
No uncontrolled slash and burns	X		X	
Attend association or CAPAK information meetings	X			X
Pay association fees				X
Pay property tax and other extraordinary taxes			X	X

Source: Duret R. (2022), p. 54

Thus, quite remarkably, the participatory approach adopted by GRET enabled farmers to create, in just under a year, a governance system combining a democratic associative structure, a division of operational duties, a set of surveillance rules and sanctions that should guarantee the development and enhancement of the agroforestry perimeter.

● ONGOING OWNERSHIP OF THE GOVERNANCE MECHANISM

Only after GRET's temporary withdrawal in 2017 at the end of the AFODEK project, the farmers began to speak of "their" trees and to discuss the need to evolve governance. One notable development concerned a significant rule of the commitment protocol: the requirement to plant one hectare of acacias each year. This rule was decided at the start of the project and was essential to ensure the perimeter would be able to go into production after ten years, with offenders risking exclusion.

At the beginning of the AFODEK project, the farmers and the project signed the commitment protocols, with direct accountability to GRET. When associative governance was set up, responsibility for farmer monitoring and sanctions was transferred to the associations. After GRET's departure, the associations divested themselves of this monitoring function, forcing CAPAK to assume it in their place. New commitment protocols were signed between the farmers and CAPAK, which bore responsibility for excluding non-compliant farmers. However, committed farmers who were often "locals" from neighbouring villages and who had insufficient means for planting were often the targets of exclusion. They were replaced by farmers with greater financial means and access to outside labour, often "newcomers" from the city, leading to a sense of injustice among farmers in neighbouring villages. Anxious to secure his territory for his community, Grand Chief Kaponda pressured CAPAK to find a solution. A decision was taken at the general meeting to change this rule by allowing associations to adjust the surface areas to fit farmers' means. This decision allowed a farmer to plant only half a hectare per year if he agreed to have the size of his plot (initially twelve hectares) cut in half (to six hectares). The associations and CAPAK added this modification to the commitment protocol, the by-laws and the associations' internal regulations. This revision reduced the number of perimeter exclusions significantly, easing tensions and increasing site and association stability. The redistribution of some of the liberated plots increased the number of farmers in the perimeter, thereby increasing the number of associations.

This initiative revealed true ownership of perimeter governance by the farmers. They showed that they were able to use institutional methods of collective choice (decision taken at the CAPAK general meeting) to modify a fundamental collective rule (which concerned and affected all farmers). While GRET undoubtedly contributed to this success by allowing the conditions for ownership of governance to develop through the participatory approach adopted when creating the associations, it is interesting to note that these changes occurred when GRET was no longer officially present, except through its former technical coordinator. He continued to play the role of "observer and adviser" throughout this period, basically in a facilitator role for an agroforestry commons under formation.

ESTABLISHING THE CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION AND LEARNING

It is tempting to see in this experience an emerging “agroforestry commons” led by a community of interdependent farmers around the shared challenge of equitable and sustainable development of the agroforestry perimeter. In fact, the farmers did adopt an associative governance system representing all farmers, which allowed them to define and modify rules (operation, perimeter use and development, etc.) and enforce them (sanctions such as exclusion). But how did this dynamic at the heart of the commons emerge? How did they begin “commoning”? More broadly, we consider here how, through its intervention, GRET helped create the conditions for collective action and collective learning.

● LEVERS FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION DIFFICULT TO REVEAL AT THE PERIMETER SCALE

Collective action is one undertaken by a group (either directly, or on its behalf through an organisation) in pursuit of members’ perceived shared interests¹⁶. Collective action is based on the confluence of individual motivations that are sufficiently strong for people who share a common objective that cannot be achieved individually to decide to devote time and energy to work together and organise collectively for an uncertain outcome. The focus of the commons-based approach is to help create the conditions for collective action.

In the case of the agroforestry perimeter, the challenge was all the greater because the farmers who were settled there did not know each other when they moved in initially, based on a vertical contractual relationship with the project which decided where they would live.

Analysis shows that it was mainly at the site level that several of GRET’s choices and actions successfully contributed to creating conditions conducive to various forms of collective action. The perimeter’s configuration, which brings together fifteen families per site, helped establish relationships of mutual aid among them for brush clearing, the organisation of collective tools such as the tree nursery and well boring, and collective mobilisations around community charcoal. Because the people worked side by side, it is easy to understand that they would perceive shared constraints. The associative framework created at the level of each site required they meet at general meetings and management committee meetings, which promoted mutual knowledge and analysis of shared or collective issues.

16. Scott J., Marshall G. (2009).

Mobilisation is less visible at the perimeter level. While the farmers, through their delegates, modified the commitment protocol, other issues, such as land security and financing, also required perimeter-wide action strategies. These concrete topics concerned all the farmers and were essential for the perimeter's very existence. However, analysis shows that the farmers delegated this responsibility to the CAPAK management committee, hoping it would be able to obtain financing from foreign aid and thereby secure the perimeter. This is far from collective action involving all farmers. GRET's consultations with stakeholders in early 2022 raised several hypotheses that could be considered levers for a commons-based approach. A first obstacle would be a lack of information for farmers about the perimeter as a whole. Indeed, only about thirty delegates attended CAPAK's general meetings, and it was difficult for most families to learn about the entire perimeter and the problems shared by the farmers. Interviews also revealed insufficient accountability of the CAPAK management committee to the farmers, which led to rumours, such as about supposed benefits for its members, despite all of them being volunteers. These rumours distanced CAPAK from the farmers it represents. So, it is important to consider how to create the conditions for shared knowledge of the entire perimeter and collective ownership of the umbrella organisation.

● **A MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM SEEN AS A FORM OF CONTROL TOOL**

A commons-based dynamic depends on a continuous collective learning process through which commons members improve their knowledge and practices about the commons' purpose, governance systems and rules. This process develops through trial and error, with periods of evaluation and collective choice and ones of experimentation and practice, sometimes in a logic of learning loops (see Carnet Faire commun no. 1¹⁷). A reflective monitoring and evaluation tool is useful at this stage to help commoners document and objectivise the results that feed learning.

In the case of the agroforestry perimeter, learning primarily involved perimeter improvement techniques. The project set up **several learning devices** to develop appropriate farming techniques: farm assessments and advice on family farming, experimentation with more profitable alternatives to maize that consume less inputs (peanut, cassava, soybeans, sweet potato, okra), field schools and knowledge shared by agricultural technicians, etc. A similar approach was adopted for charcoal production: assessment of carbonisation practices, carbonisation yield testing based on plantation age, etc. These activities were led by the project team and sometimes involved the University of Lubumbashi, alternating assessments, consultations, experiments and

17. Kibler J.-F. (2022), p. 27.

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sharing of what was learnt. Farmers considered them useful and beneficial, and they gradually adopted alternatives to maize and decided together, for example, not to harvest acacia until the eighth year.

Collective learning also concerned governance and the rules of the entire perimeter. At the start of the AFODEK project, GRET designed a **monitoring and evaluation system to monitor the development and maintenance of facilities** (roads, fire breaks, etc.) but also—and above all—to monitor the progress of cultivation and planting in the perimeter. This system was paired with **monitoring of compliance with the rules** imposed on each farmer under the commitment protocol initially signed with GRET. Thus, the tool met the project's expectations, and was implemented by the project team, for both the collection and processing of monitoring information.

When the associations were created, responsibility for monitoring and evaluation was transferred to them: the site associations were responsible for collecting data, and CAPAK for processing and analysing it. The associations easily adapted and adopted the collection tools (monitoring notebooks). However, CAPAK did not have sufficient human resources to consolidate and analyse data on computer. Still, the associations continued to monitor compliance with planting rules, because it was considered a priority to guarantee that the perimeter entered into production. Violations of these rules were regularly reported to CAPAK, which took exclusion measures when necessary. As a result, farmers quickly came to see monitoring and evaluation as a sanctions system, and expulsions led to conflicts that weakened the associations. The social and political cost of these sanctions became too high, so the associations gradually abandoned monitoring and evaluation, ultimately delegating it to CAPAK. At that point, CAPAK added two forestry technician positions to its management committee to cover its new monitoring duties.



Neighbouring market garden visited by the CPP during the early days of the perimeter, 2013

So, the monitoring and evaluation system that had been inherited from a system designed by and for the project, was partially repeated by the associative structure, which had to adapt it so that it could be used as a learning tool. For example, it is probably necessary to separate the learning aid objective from the monitoring and sanctions objective, and to strengthen CAPAK's skills in analysing and processing monitoring information, which could prove particularly useful when constructing the ways in which production is collectively sold.

CONDITIONS TO ENSURE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE COMMON

Two conditions are essential to ensure the life and existence of the agroforestry common. First, the perimeter's very existence depends on securing the farmers' land rights for the long term. Second, the functioning of its associative governance and the organisation of agroforestry campaigns require sustainable financing mechanisms. Until now, these two conditions have been largely covered by GRET through the AFODEK and APHK projects, which were financed by foreign aid.

● A COMPLEX LAND RIGHTS SECURITY STRATEGY

Even though the land issue had been identified as a challenge since the AFODEK project, GRET did not fully understand the complexity of the process of securing land rights, which had still not been completed in 2022. Securing land rights meets two needs: protecting the rights of each farmer over his own plot and maintaining the integrity of the perimeter by preventing the farmers themselves from selling their plots.

Securing farmers' rights to their plots is essential to encourage them to plant and to apply the imposed agroforestry technical method¹⁸. It is even more crucial in a context of strong land pressure linked to the vicinity of the city. It is based on two registers of law: customary law and positive law of the country, with land titles issued by the land registry.

The process of securing land rights was part of **a complex set of interactions with various institutional stakeholders that had to be dealt with**. Grand Chief Kaponda, who held customary rights on his territory, was anxious to preserve the area's farming vocation, so he authorised the establishment of the agroforestry perimeter on his land as long as farmers from neighbouring villages were permitted to settle there first¹⁹.

18. This method has a minimum ten-year cycle, the time necessary for the acacias to grow before being cut.

19. Elders from neighbouring villages settled their families on perimeter sites located near their home villages. To avoid any temptation on their part to consider these sites as customary management areas of their villages, and to preserve the identity and unity of the newly created perimeter, the project team decided to designate the ten sites by letters (A, B, C, D, etc.).

After a long and expensive operation, the land registry services, which were contacted by GRET in the legal procedure for obtaining land titles, issued only temporary occupation titles of five years, which then had to be transformed into twenty-five-year perpetual concession titles. Finally, part of the perimeter land was covered by a mining concession held by Gécamines, which prevented the acquisition of land titles there. However, Gécamines considered mining unprofitable here, so it permitted agroforestry farmers to settle on its land.

The projects were only able to obtain temporary land rights, which were volatile and some of which could be challenged at any time. For example, Gécamines' surrender of its concession in 2021 weakened the land rights of the farmers working the land it had made available, which the Kipushi land registry could then assign to other claimants. In February 2022, the death of Grand Chief Kaponda raised concerns about whether his successor would renew the customary agreement; GRET immediately engaged dialogue with him to ensure that the farmers' rights would not be challenged. Land pressure is a reality in this suburban area, and GRET was required to involve the Ministry of Land Affairs to prevent the establishment of housing estates on part of the perimeter, which had been wrongly authorised by the land registry services due to a dispute over administrative jurisdiction between two districts.

These examples illustrate the **complexity and fragility of the land security process**, which requires significant funding for land titling operations, and continuous monitoring and agreement negotiations with several institutional stakeholders. These stakeholders are external to the perimeter and its governance system and have a real power of influence on the perimeter's very existence. It is therefore crucial that CAPAK be equipped and prepared to deal with this circle of stakeholders. This is even more important since GRET (in its role as facilitator) and the European Union (as a donor) also belong to this circle; the perimeter is considered locally to be "protected by the whites" who are powerful allies for CAPAK and the farmers, but whose presence acutely raises the question of the commons' future.

Still, it is essential to preserve the integrity of the perimeter and its agroforestry vocation to be able to negotiate land security agreements with external stakeholders. Perimeter sprawl would weaken the logic of collective development (hamlets, roads, fire breaks, etc.) as well as the desired economies of scale in the production and sale of crops and charcoal. The community of agroforestry farmers would gradually lose its unity and territorial identity based on their shared history, which is being written. The perimeter would appear less united and more fragile. However, this risk of sprawl would inevitably be increased if land titles were awarded individually, since the temptation of land speculation could eventually prove too strong for the farmers. To avoid any risk of the perimeter being dismantled from the inside, GRET's strategy consisted in obtaining all the land titles in the name of CAPAK, as the umbrella association

representing all the perimeter farmers. **Thus, this collective land ownership appears to be a pillar of the agroforestry common.** However, this requires that farmers remain sufficiently involved and engaged within their associative governance structure to maintain control of the decisions taken by CAPAK.

Thus, land security of the perimeter is based on two pillars. The first is CAPAK, which holds the land titles on behalf of the farmers and is responsible for monitoring and negotiating with influential external stakeholders. The second, which is less visible but equally important, is the actual commitment of the perimeter farmers to decision-making and monitoring land security, within their associative governance system. These two pillars must be strengthened.

● AUTONOMOUS FINANCING TO BE ESTABLISHED

Initially, GRET and its partners designed and tested a long-term financing system for households' economic activities and perimeter governance. It was built on the cooperative governance/CPP model. It was based on working capital initially provided by the project via the European Union and managed by the project. It was expected that it would eventually be replaced by a levy on the sale of the cooperative's agroforestry



Grand Chief Kaponda (deceased in 2022), the former chief of the Inakilyba group and a leader in the AFODEK project at the launch of an agroforestry campaign in November 2013

products and managed by the CPP president. This working capital allowed farmers to buy inputs to grow on their plots for two years. However, a combination of factors (poor quality of some soils, caterpillar infestations, late seeding, inappropriate application of inputs, etc.) resulted in poor harvests and a decrease in the repayment of advances from the working capital. Additionally, the CPP led farmers to believe that advances should be considered gifts. This first experiment proved inconclusive, so this financing mechanism was abandoned. Since then, farmers have pre-financed their food-crop production on their own, some using income from other sources (they work more than one job, providing them a variety of sources of income), and others with income from carbonising wood from brush clearing. Not all farmers have the same pre-financing capacities and crop yields are often low. The farmers' contributions barely cover CAPAK and the associations' operating costs, which are also financed from income from the rental of equipment that was transferred by GRET at the end of the AFODEK project (truck, car) and borne by the projects through disbursements. The associations' action and mobilisation capacities remain low.

Despite being a central condition for the perimeter's long life, **the financing issue has not yet been resolved**. The need to finance households' economic activity (pre-financing of crop years, organisation of sales, etc.), associative governance (operating costs) and the acquisition of land titles to finish securing the perimeter is real and significant. Farmers expect CAPAK to know how to secure funding (including international aid), so it is now considering a new source of income: first sales of charcoal from the plantations, which will gradually enter into production in 2023. **These first sales could offer an opportunity for collective action**, motivated by the prospect of concrete revenues. Indeed, while not wanting to return to the initial, aborted cooperative model, the farmers say they are in favour of the collective and centralised sale of local production (charcoal and food crops) via a single point of sale, in order to benefit from better sales prices than under the current practice of individual sales at the edge of fields on their parcels of land. CAPAK has begun working on a business plan: it could collect production from the community storage sheds, then rent a stall at the nearby market to sell it. It would collect a percentage on sales, which would finance the service and provide lasting income to the association and its members.

The entry into production of plantations thus raises concrete questions likely to push farmers to define, within their association, rules for the organisation of production and sales, and for the sharing and use of profits by farmers, associations and CAPAK. It would be beneficial if management and sharing rules were defined gradually under a collective learning approach. ●

PART 4

Lessons learnt for a commons-based approach

ENDOGENOUS APPROPRIATION OF A GOVERNANCE SYSTEM PROPOSED FROM THE OUTSIDE

The experience of this agroforestry perimeter reveals an endogenous appropriation approach of an exogenous organisation proposal. Indeed, the “social demand” to which the AFODEK project originally responded was not formulated by the perimeter farmers. Its local backers were Grand Chief Kaponda and the president of the CPP, the first wanting to secure the farming vocation of his land that was being threatened by housing development projects, and the second to obtain resources for its association and cooperative. The design of the agroforestry development model and the initial cooperative governance system was also designed and promoted by external stakeholders (European Union, GRET and Nature+). The main stakeholders – the farmers – were not consulted initially. Through a change in the project strategy (withdrawal of the CPP and abandonment of the cooperative project in 2015), the farmers became actively involved in co-constructing an original hybrid governance system based on an exogenous association proposal by GRET. They have since gradually adopted and taken ownership of governance, as illustrated by the change to the perimeter’s founding rule and the internal reorganisation of the monitoring function.

The dynamics of appropriation were fostered by the evolution of GRET’s positioning and intervention strategy, which gradually moved from a “turnkey” project logic to the co-construction of an associative organisation, and then to support for the stakeholders through a commons-based approach. GRET is now positioned as the facilitator of a process of “shaping²⁰” the perimeter’s governance by the farmers, based on the

20. Ostrom E. (2009).

association proposal constructed jointly. It will be interesting to observe how the farmers continue to evolve their organisation, perhaps in a logic of “institutional tinkering”²¹ that remains to be discovered.

Can we see the beginnings of the emergence of a common in this ownership process? It is too early to say, and it is still difficult to perceive the levers for collective action at the level of the entire perimeter. However, if this trend were to materialise, it would indicate that an external development operator can effectively drive a commons dynamic.

PREREQUISITES FOR THE EMERGENCE OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Collective action cannot be decreed, but a commons-based approach can help create conditions conducive to its emergence and expression. This experience illustrates and highlights several prerequisites for the emergence of collective action.

Manifestations of collective action observable at the local level and at the level of the agroforestry sites (mutual aid between farmers, organisation to manage tools of collective interest, community production initiatives) confirm the validity of the project’s decision to group families in hamlets and create an association for each site. These conditions encourage meetings and sociability. The families know each other and spend time together, share a settlement experience and encounter similar difficulties. They also have the power to take initiatives regarding the site.

Collective action is less noticeable at the perimeter level and at that of its 150 farmers divided into ten hamlets. The only visible manifestation seems to be the decision taken by the farmers’ delegates at the CAPAK general meeting to modify the main rule of the commitment protocol in response to social tension shared and perceived by most of the farmers. We note that this initiative was taken under the chiefdom’s influence when GRET was no longer present, suggesting that the appreciation of the power relations of the time probably had a role to play in triggering collective action. At the same time, the absence of collective mobilisation around shared issues, such as land security or the question of financing, could be due to both a lack of shared knowledge of the perimeter as a whole and a lack of collective ownership of the umbrella organisation by the farmers.

The analysis suggests that several prerequisites need to be considered to promote collective action in a commons-based approach. One is to create the conditions for shareholders to know one another and the sense of sharing a common adventure

21. Cleaver F., De Koning J. (2002).

(illustrated here by the collective action observed at the site level). A second prerequisite is to create the conditions for shared knowledge and collective ownership of the common (illustrated here by the lack of knowledge of the entire perimeter and of its ten sites). A third is to create the conditions for collective ownership of the governance structure (illustrated here by the distance that grew between the farmers and the CAPAK management committee). The institutional environment and the comprehension of current power relations are also crucial to allow collective action.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION MECHANISMS USEFUL FOR COLLECTIVE LEARNING

The experience provides lessons on a central element of the commons-based dynamic: the reflective monitoring and evaluation system as a tool to help collective learning.

GRET designed the initial monitoring and evaluation system to keep pace with the development of the perimeter and compliance with annual planting commitments. GRET performed information monitoring and processing, enforced the sanctions and, where necessary, excluded farmers not meeting their commitments. This system very quickly showed its limits when it was transferred to the farmers during the establishment of the associative organisation and adapted by monitoring indicators from the governance bodies.

Beyond CAPAK's technical inability to process the information collected, this transfer revealed that functions of learning aid and compliance monitoring were incompatible within the same tool. Farmers' assimilation of monitoring and evaluation with decisions to exclude offenders led the associations to transfer responsibility for all monitoring to CAPAK. This transfer to the umbrella organisation led to farmers becoming less involved in monitoring their own rules, which would in theory be useful when evolving rules, if necessary. So, should we then consider separating learning and compliance control functions? This incompatibility might stem from the fact that the rule in question had been decided by the project, an external stakeholder, in a vertical relationship with each farmer; indeed, the farmers took the initiative to change this very rule.

In short, a reflective monitoring and evaluation system for the common should ideally be designed by the commoners for the commoners, and not by the project. This is because the commoners are best able to define the indicators and monitoring tools that they find useful for mobilisation and learning. The articulation between reflective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for learning purposes and compliance monitoring mechanisms merits careful consideration at the very least.

THE WEIGHT OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE GOVERNANCE OF A COMMON

Experience shows how crucially important it is for a common to be able to deal with institutional stakeholders that are perceived as external, qualified here as influential. Efforts on internal associative governance, focusing on relations between farmers, and between farmers and the perimeter, are necessary but not sufficient to guarantee the sustainability of the agroforestry common, which also belongs to a greater environment.

Analysis has shown the potential and real influence of the chiefdom and the chiefs of neighbouring villages, Gécamines, provincial technical services, and even GRET and the European Union, in consolidating perimeter land. These actors also offer long-term funding opportunities for the perimeter. Thus, the new Chief Kaponda is currently developing a local development plan for the chiefdom financed by tax revenues at his disposal, within which the agroforestry perimeter occupies its rightful place. For their part, mining companies finance local development funds for villages. Provincial agriculture and forestry ministries can promote or inhibit the development of the agroforestry activity in the perimeter through their public policy choices (e.g., through taxation). Therefore, support from these external and influential stakeholders is of great importance for the survival and development of the forestry common. Until now, GRET has played an important facilitation and intermediation role between the perimeter and these external stakeholders and should now be considered a stakeholder of the common. Several types of articulation are possible, from simple monitoring to reacting on an ad-hoc basis to setting up spaces for dialogue that could associate these external stakeholders with shared governance of the perimeter. ●

PART 5

Future prospects

SUPPORTING THE CONSOLIDATION OF PERIMETER GOVERNANCE AROUND ECONOMIC ISSUES

As the acacia parcels reach maturity, farmers can work together to organise charcoal production and sales. This reflection must be conducted at the level of the entire perimeter since it will impact relations between farmers, their associations and the perimeter, and will bring about an evolution in governance and the rules for the production, processing, sale, sharing and use of the income generated. As the plantations go into production, GRET could encourage conducting this exercise as part of a collective learning process. This would offer an opportunity to develop technical and financial planning and management tools and procedures (mapping monitoring tool, business plan, financial management tool, etc.), and implement them as part of a monitoring and evaluation system that promotes collective learning, clearly separating it from any compliance and sanction enforcement mechanism.

Similar approaches could be applied to other economic activities, including market gardening.



Making bricks from termite mounds located on the plots to build community storage sheds, 2015

SUPPORTING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CONDITIONS FOR THE LONG LIFE OF THE PERIMETER

A second priority is to strengthen the conditions for the perimeter's land and financial sustainability, which are currently very fragile and highly dependent on GRET. Obtaining land concession titles remains a major issue in the short term, for which innovative solutions could be explored: collective action with the province, farmers' contributions to financing based on revenues from charcoal sales, etc. Financing to develop agricultural and forestry activities could also be sought from mining companies, the chiefdom or the province. Exploring these potential solutions should be part of a logic to strengthen two-tiered governance. First, internal perimeter governance must be strengthened, creating the conditions for collective action by the 150 farmers at the perimeter level. Second, CAPAK needs to strengthen its ability to deal with influential external stakeholders, such as the chiefdom in its dual customary and administrative nature, mining companies and public authorities, by creating mechanisms for dialogue and collaboration that can expand the perimeter's shared governance. ●

GLOSSARY

COLLECTIVE ACTION. “Action undertaken by a group (either directly, or on its behalf through an organisation) in pursuit of members’ perceived shared interests (Scott and Marshall, 2009). The theories of collective action refer to the sharing of costs and advantages of collective action to manage public or collective goods¹.”

The concept of collective action that we use is part of the theory developed by Elinor Ostrom in opposition to theses whereby individuals only see their own short-term particular interests and are incapable of making decisions in the collective or long-term interest, thereby requiring solutions imposed from the outside, via the State or privatisation. Ostrom demonstrated that individuals, through their collective action, are capable of solving the fundamental problems of collective organisation without solutions imposed by an external stakeholder, by creating a common institution, committing to follow rules and mutual monitoring, i.e. by creating a common². The collective action creating the common is also referred to as “commoning”. Creating the conditions necessary for collective action is a central dimension in the commons-based approach.

COMMON. A social organisation dynamic in which all stakeholders, who are interdependent and directly concerned by a common issue, decide to undertake collective action to build shared governance. As part of a continuous collective learning process, the latter defines and implements rules of access and use that are deemed equitable and ensure the social, economic and environmental sustainability of the object of the common (a resource, service or territory for example).

COMMONING. “‘Commoning’ (Bollier *et al.*, 2014; Coriat, 2020) is the process that leads individuals to become mobilised in order to pool knowledge, experiences, and human, technical or financial resources with a view to achieving an appropriate, common interest. It is the essence of collective action³.”

1. Translated from Antona M., Bousquet F. (2017), p. 125.

2. Ostrom E. (1990).

3. Translated from Aubert S., Botta A. (2022), p. 240.

COMMONS-BASED APPROACH. A way of thinking and conducting a development assistance intervention when this intervention intends to facilitate the construction of shared governance “in commons”. A commons-based approach asserts a political intention of social and environmental justice; mobilises the conceptual frameworks of the commons, of the social and solidarity economy, and of popular education; and uses facilitation methods.

FACILITATION. Facilitation consists of creating the conditions necessary for cooperation between the various stakeholders, creating the conditions necessary for collective action, and creating the conditions necessary for collective learning. The facilitator helps the collective to become aware of its needs and find its own solutions. As part of the commons-based approach, when a political intention of the assistance intervention is specified, the facilitator is not neutral but is, on the contrary, “committed” to greater social and environmental justice, and a higher level of resilience.

GOVERNANCE. The process through which a set of rules, norms and strategies is created, which guides the behaviour of stakeholders in a given area of political interaction⁴. A system of governance includes stakeholders and institutions as much as it includes mobilised formal and informal standards, or practices to define rules, their implementation and their monitoring. These rules can be the subject of consensus or competition between stakeholders. In a prescriptive manner, governance refers to the power to decide on rules and to the various registers of authority on which they are based.

INSTITUTION. Institutions bring together organisations and rules, modes of doing and being, but also structures of thought, concepts and paradigms generated and used to organise modes of interaction within these organisations with the goal of influencing individual and collective decisions.

For Ostrom, “the term ‘institution’ is not [...] synonymous with organization. The term means ‘the set of rules actually used by a set of individuals to organize repetitive activities that produce outcomes affecting those individuals and potentially affecting others’⁵”.

INSTITUTIONAL TINKERING. Concept that allows questioning of the bureaucratic and linear vision of development projects wanting to take action to create solid and sustainable institutions. Institutional tinkering refers to a process by which people consciously and unconsciously shape or reshape institutional arrangements, drawing

4. McGinnis M.D. (2011).

5. Ostrom E. (2009), p. 9.

on all available institutional materials, regardless of their original purpose. In this process, old arrangements are modified, and new ones are invented. Institutional components of different origins are continually reused, reworked or reshaped to fulfil new functions. When applied to the management of natural resources with shared ownership, institutional tinkering refers to the way in which local stakeholders, through unforeseen interactions and “social and cultural arrangements”, shape dynamic and adaptive institutions whose nature is not fixed⁶.

LEARNING LOOP. A useful concept when considering assistance for a continuous process of collective learning that characterises a common dynamic. Conducted under an empirical trial-and-error approach, the learning process can be described as a succession of “learning loops” allowing all stakeholders to make a shared assessment, then formulate, conduct and evaluate experiments, before drawing conclusions and taking decisions on governance issues or technical aspects related to the common. Each loop relating to a specific aspect feeds the next one, thus constituting a learning spiral⁷.

SHARED GOVERNANCE. A model of public action which postulates that each of the stakeholders concerned – in particular citizens, but also the public and private sectors – exercises real power in the taking of decisions and monitoring of their application. We can qualify it as shared governance “in commons” when the governance is constructed and constantly improved in a social dynamic of commoning, in particular collective action and collective learning. The term “in commons” underlines the dynamic and evolutionary nature of this type of governance.

SITUATION OF ACTION. A social space in which stakeholders observe information, select actions, enter into models of interaction and obtain results from their interaction. The black box where political choices are made⁸. ●

6. Cleaver F., De Koning J. (2015).

7. Melki S., Kibler J.-F. (2016).

8. McGinnis M.D. (2011).

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AN AGROFORESTRY PERIMETER IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

From a development project to the creation of a common?

This handbook recounts the support provided by GRET for the creation of an agroforestry perimeter in the province of Haut-Katanga in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the way in which the perimeter's governance has been structured.

In response to growing pressure on the *miombo* ecosystem, which has been degraded by urbanisation, charcoal production and slash-and-burn agriculture, and to the difficulty faced by households to generate decent income through dominant agricultural production systems, in 2012 GRET and its partners, the Belgian NGO Nature+ and the Centre de promotion du paysannat (CPP), launched a project to create a 2,000 hectare agroforestry perimeter. This handbook explains how the evolution of GRET's strategy from a "turnkey" project logic to a commons-based approach enabled farmers to take ownership of the perimeter's governance. It also examines how a development operator can drive a commons-based dynamic from an initially exogenous proposal.

Intended for associations, NGOs and donors promoting initiatives around commons, this document focuses on lessons learned that can be useful for continuing the dynamic undertaken in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and for designing and implementing similar approaches in other contexts.

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Campus du Jardin d'agronomie tropicale de Paris
45 bis avenue de la Belle Gabrielle
94736 Nogent-sur-Marne Cedex, France
Tel. 33 (0)1 70 91 92 00 – www.gret.org

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