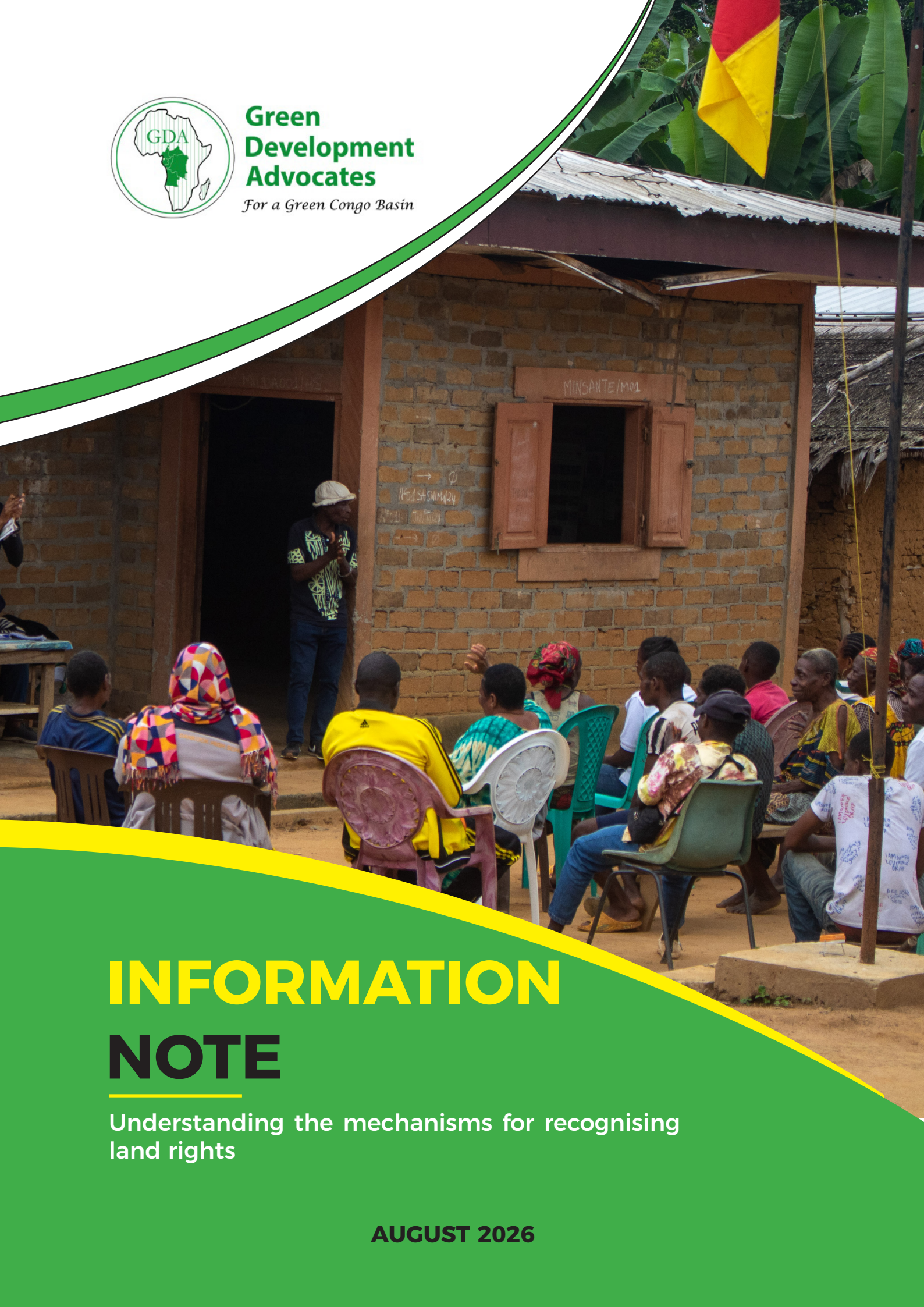




**Green
Development
Advocates**

For a Green Congo Basin



INFORMATION NOTE

Understanding the mechanisms for recognising
land rights

AUGUST 2026

The letter of no objection in land matters



INTRODUCTION

The Cameroonian land system is based on a legal framework primarily defined by the 1974 ordinances and the 1976 decrees. Since then, the registration procedure, governed by Decree No. 76.165 of April 27, 1976, which sets out the conditions for obtaining a land title, has remained rigid, with the land title itself being the sole official proof of property ownership. While this rigidity was initially intended to secure land rights (Article 1 of the 1974 ordinance), it now constitutes a major obstacle for local communities, who face enormous difficulties in having their ancestral lands recognized and secured due to administrative complexity. In response to these limitations, the government has undertaken a land reform aimed at making the system more inclusive and better protecting customary rights.

Within this context, and pending the adoption of a new comprehensive land reform, the Ministry of State Property, Surveys and Land Affairs (MINDCAF) has implemented transitional measures aimed at reconciling development needs with the protection of the population's living spaces. This commitment to change and social justice finds concrete expression in the creation of a new administrative tool: the «letter of no objection».

Initially established by Circular Letter No. 003 of 2 April 2025, which set the threshold at twenty (20) hectares, requiring the consent of traditional chiefs of the 1st and 2nd Circular Letter No. 006 of 26 December 2025 lowered this threshold to ten (10) hectares. This latest decision repeals the previous one whilst maintaining the requirement to obtain a “letter of no objection” for any direct registration or provisional concession procedure.

1. What is this about ?

From now on, any land acquisition procedure (direct registration or concession) covering an area greater than 10 hectares must include the written agreement of the first or second-degree Traditional Chief of the locality concerned. This written agreement is contained in a document called: the “**Letter of No Objection**”.

2. Why this measure ?

The involvement of traditional authorities aims to :

Preventing land grabbing : To prevent individuals from appropriating vast tracts of land at the expense of local families.

Protecting the rights of populations : To ensure that projects do not drive inhabitants from their ancestral lands.

Reducing conflicts : Resolve boundary or ownership issues before the land title is issued, to ensure buyer security.

Promote responsible forest governance in accordance with international standards : To enable local communities, customary communities and their members, as well as potential investors to generate income by exploiting the national domain. ¹

Article 1-b of the Letter – Circular establishing “the letter of no objection”

3. Who is concerned ?

The various people involved in the implementation of this measure are :

The applicants: Any person, whether natural (human beings as individuals) or legal (entities, groups, communities or organizations recognized by law as having legal rights and obligations) applying for direct registration or a concession on the national domain of plots of land larger than 10 hectares

The validating authorities: The Heads of Traditional Command Units of the 1st or 2nd degree with territorial jurisdiction.

The administrative authorities: Prefects, Sub-Prefects and Delegates from MINDCAF who are supervising the case.

4. How does the procedure work ?

The procedure is subject to strict deadlines to avoid blockages:

- 1 **The initiative :** The Departmental Delegate for Domains seeks the opinion of the traditional Chief of the 1st and 2nd degree no later than 10 days after the end of the work of the Advisory Commission.
- 2 **Response time :** The traditional Chief has 10 days to respond with a positive opinion (a letter of no objection) or a negative opinion (a letter of objection) specifying the reasons for his refusal.
- 3 **Silence on the part of the traditional authority constitutes consent:** If the chief does not respond within this 10-day period, their silence is deemed to be tacit consent, allowing the case to proceed.
- 4 **In case of refusal:** If the Chief objects, the case is referred to the Minister of State Property for arbitration.²

² Article 3 of the Letter – Circular establishing “the letter of no objection”

5. On what criteria can the Chief of the 1st and 2nd degree object ?

The Chief **cannot refuse without a valid reason**. His criteria for refusal may include :

The real threat of loss of living spaces for populations delimited by public authorities.

The violation of the customary land rights of the current occupants, proven by certificates of peaceful enjoyment, and certificates of recognition of customary land rights signed by the Chief of the 3rd degree

The failure to take into account the improvements already made by the local populations on the ground.

Failure to comply with **Land Use Plans (LUP) or Communal Development Plans (CDP)**.³

Entry into force: The new regulation setting the threshold at 10 hectares applies from April 1, 2026. Files not yet submitted to the hierarchy by that date must comply



³ Article 2 of the Letter – Circular establishing “the letter of no objection”

Conclusion

The letter of no objection is an essential land regulation mechanism, designed to better regulate access to land within the national domain while integrating traditional authorities into the decision-making process. It helps prevent conflicts, limit the risk of land grabbing, and ensure that the rights and interests of local communities are better taken into account.

For local communities, this tool represents an opportunity to make their voices heard in land projects affecting their living spaces. It is therefore essential that they are informed of its existence and how it works, so that they can ensure their rights are respected and, if necessary, alert the relevant authorities in case of irregularities.

Key points to remember

Any application for more than 10 hectares requires a letter of no objection.

Traditional leaders play a key role in the validation

The mechanism helps prevent land disputes.

Communities can report any irregularities

Certificate of Recognition of Customary Land Rights (ARDFC)



INTRODUCTION

The Cameroonian land system, inherited from an overlap of colonial and customary rights, now faces a major challenge: securing community rural lands faced with increasing pressure from agro-industrial investments and rampant urbanization, direct registration has so far often been considered inaccessible for rural populations, leaving their ancestral lands in a precarious legal vulnerability within the national domain.

To address this vulnerability, the Ministry of State Property, Surveys and Land Affairs (MINDCAF) established, through Circular Letter No. 0001 of February 20, 2026, the Certificate of Recognition of Customary Land Rights (ARDFC). This document is not merely an administrative formality; it constitutes a true bridge between oral customary law and written positive law. By entrusting the third-degree Traditional Chief with the power to officially recognize ancestral occupation, the State finally acknowledges the legitimacy of communities over their living space.

The purpose of this document is to clarify the procedures for this intermediary tool. By formalizing the existence of rights before any attempt at appropriation by third parties, the ARDFC helps stabilize the territorial boundaries of families and customary communities. It calmly prepares the ground for official registration while preserving the vital space of customary communities. It is an instrument of social peace and transparency, designed to ensure that land remains a secure heritage for those who have occupied it for generations.

1. What is it about ?

The ARDFC is a document issued by the 3rd degree Traditional Chief, which confirms the occupation or exploitation of a plot of the national domain by a customary community or family in accordance with local customs.⁴

2. What is the scope of the ARDFC ?

The Certificate of Recognition of Customary Land Rights aims to :

Securing living space: This involves protecting grazing land, fallow land, or land for gathering from being appropriated.

Formalization of ancestral law : This involves transforming an oral right into a written and georeferenced administrative document.

Conflict prevention : The aim is to clarify the territorial boundaries between local authorities to avoid disputes.

Registration preparation : This is intended to serve as initial evidence for the future acquisition of a land title.⁵

3. Who is concerned ?

The various people involved in implementing the certificate include, among others :

 **The beneficiaries :** Customary communities, family communities or their members acting individually, only the lands of the national domain of the 1st category corresponding to the lands occupied or exploited by the customary communities through dwellings, crops, plantations, pastures and rangelands.

⁴ Article 1-a of Circular Letter No. 0001 of MINDCAF/CAB/LC of February 20, 2026 specifying the procedures for issuing a Certificate of Recognition of Customary Land Rights (ARDFC) and a Certificate of Peaceful Enjoyment of Land (AJPTER)

⁵ Article 3 of the Letter – Circular on the ARDFC and the AJPTER

 **The authorities:** The 3rd degree Traditional Chief (signatory), assisted by notables and representatives of the population (women, youth, vulnerable minorities). He may co-sign with 1st or 2nd degree chiefs according to custom.

4. What documents are required for the application ?

The applicant must provide

- 1 A stamped application addressed to the 3rd degree Traditional Chief;
- 2 A photocopy of the national identity card (or birth certificate for minors);
- 3 • If applicable, a report of the appointment of the representative by the family council. ⁶

5. What is the ARDFC Issuance Procedure ?

The ARDFC issuance procedure includes :

- **Technical verification** : An ad hoc committee (Neighborhood/block leader, GPS operators) goes into the field to identify the boundaries and georeference the plot.
- **Expanded consultation** : The project is being reviewed by a committee including prominent figures and representatives of vulnerable groups to ensure there are no objections. ⁷

⁶ Article 6-a of the Letter – Circular on the ARDFC and the AJPTER

⁷ Article 6-c and d of the Letter – Circular on the ARDFC and the AJPTER

- **Signature** : In the absence of a dispute, the certificate is issued free of charge within 15 days after the fieldwork.⁸
- **Cost** : The issuance of the ARDFC is free of charge. However, the costs associated with its issuance are borne by the applicant.

6. How is the ARDFC archived and preserved ?

The certificate of recognition of customary land rights is subject to a dual classification :

- **At the local level** : Each chiefdom keeps a numbered register initialled by the Sub-Prefect.
- **At the administrative level** : This certificate, along with all supporting documents, is available to the advisory committee. These documents are intended to be used during the registration procedures for properties belonging to the national domain, before they are accepted for classification.⁹

7. What does this really mean for communities?

This document is specifically addressed to members of a customary community or family group to recognize their ancestral rights to a plot of land. It opens up various options for those who request them:

Your Rights (What you are allowed to do):

-  To have your customary land rights on a plot of national land officially recognized by the village chief.

⁸ Article 7 of the Letter – Circular on the ARDFC and the AJPTER

⁹ Article 8 of the Letter – Circular on the ARDFC and the AJPTER

- ✔ Protecting your «living spaces» (¹⁰ (areas of cultivation, habitation, ritual or gathering) against any attempt at alienation.
- ✔ Use this certificate as an intermediate document to eventually initiate a direct registration procedure in order to obtain a land title.

Your possible actions:

- ✔ Submit an application for the issuance of an ARDFC to the territorially competent 3rd-degree chieftaincy.
- ✔ Actively participate in field operations, including georeferencing (GPS data collection) and physical marking (traditional boundary surveying) of your boundaries.
- ✔ Sign the agreement with your neighbors to confirm the consensual and peaceful nature of your occupancy.
- ✔ Attending expanded validation meetings with local dignitaries and the rest of the community to validate the transparency of the procedure.

Your Recourse:

- ✔ **Formal objection** : In the event of a threat of land grabbing by a third party (for areas exceeding 10 hectares), you can contact the traditional chief of the 1st or 2nd degree so that he can issue a reasoned “letter of objection” to the Departmental Delegate of MINDCAF, as soon as he is notified by the latter regarding the relevant case.
- ✔ **Suspension of proceedings** : A formal objection obliges the administration to suspend registration and to request arbitration from the Minister.
- ✔ **Action to be taken in case of a dispute** : The agreement signed during the ARDFC procedure serves as proof of your good faith and your rights in the event of a dispute before the advisory committee.¹¹

¹⁰ Definition of the expression «Vital Spaces» as described in the explanatory guide to the ministerial circular letters from 2022 to 2025 relating to strengthening the involvement of traditional authorities in land registration procedures in Cameroon, as well as the corresponding specimens and operationalization tools.

¹¹ Regarding the establishment of the agreement on the boundaries of the plot between the applicant and the adjoining neighbors, see page 26 of the guide

Warning

ARDFC is absolutely not :

- A provisional land title
- A certificate of abandonment of customary rights
- A document that facilitates land or real estate transactions

Conclusion

The Certificate of Recognition of Customary Land Rights (ARDFC) marks a significant step forward in recognizing communities' rights to their land. By providing a written formalization of customary rights, it helps secure vital spaces, prevent conflicts, and prepare for future access to land registration.

This tool thus constitutes a strategic intermediate step between customary practices and formal law. For communities, it is essential to take ownership of its mechanisms in order to better protect their land and strengthen their position in the face of increasing land pressures.

Key points to remember

The ARDFC officially recognizes customary rights.
It protects the vital spaces of communities.
It helps prevent land disputes.
It constitutes a step towards the land title.

Certificate of Uninterrupted Possession of Land (AJPTER)



INTRODUCTION

In Cameroon, the value of land lies not only in its title, but above all in the labor and investments made on it. Yet, many farmers, livestock breeders, and builders are often exposed to the risk of eviction or deprived of fair compensation due to a lack of documentation proving their land development. This insecurity hinders local economic development and particularly weakens the most vulnerable social groups, such as women and young people, who are the main actors in agricultural and livestock production but the last to gain access to land ownership.

The **Certificate of Uninterrupted Possession of Land** (AJPTER), introduced by Circular Letter No. 0001/MINDCAF/CAB/LC of February 20, 2026, addresses this issue. This innovative instrument moves away from the sole focus on ownership to concentrate on the **protection of use**. It outlines a recognition of land use by traditional authorities for those who cultivate the land continuously and peacefully. It transforms visible investment (plantations, buildings, improvements) into an administratively recognized right.

This information note details the mechanisms of the AJPTER, which acts as a guarantee of stability for individual operators of national land. This document serves as proof of investments made. Beyond security, the AJPTER encourages productive investment by assuring operators that their labor will not be dispossessed. It is a tool for economic dignity that helps people remain on their land by offering them medium-term legal certainty.

1. What is it about ?

The AJPTER is an administrative document that confirms the actual development (crops, buildings, livestock) of a plot of land by an individual operator. It provides official recognition of their investment. It is an intermediate document in the process of obtaining a land title.

¹²

2. What is the scope of the AJPTER ?

The Certificate of Uninterrupted Possession of Land aims to :

Effort protection : To guarantee the recognition of the plantings, buildings and developments carried out.

Social inclusion : To provide secure access to land for women, youth and indigenous populations.

Establishing evidence for compensation purposes: To establish proof of the identity of the authors of the rights attached to the developments, in the event of expropriation for public utility.

Prévision des litiges fonciers : Improvement of the protection of rights arising from the exploitation of a plot of the national domain. ¹³

¹² Article 1-a of the Letter – Circular on the ARDFC and the AJPTER

¹³ Article 3 of the Letter – Circular on the ARDFC and the AJPTER

3. Who is affected ?

The various people involved in implementing the certificate include, among others :

 **The beneficiaries :** Any natural person of Cameroonian nationality residing in the community, who can demonstrate continuous and proven occupation of development for at least **five (05) years on the spaces of the national domain concerned.**

 **The authorities :** The Third-Degree Traditional Chief, assisted by a local verification committee.¹⁴

4. What documents are required for the application ?

The applicant must provide :

- 1** A written request specifying the year of commencement of operations;
- 2** A photocopy of the applicant's national identity card
- 3** A photocopy of the national identity card of the holder of customary rights (if different);
- 4** A **descriptive sheet of the development work** carried out by the applicant¹⁵

¹⁴ Article 5 of the Letter – Circular on the ARDFC and the AJPTER

¹⁵ Article 6-b of the Letter – Circular on the ARDFC and the AJPTER

5. What is the AJPTER Issuance Procedure ?

The ARDFC issuance procedure includes :

- **The assessment of development** : A restricted (Ad Hoc) committee assesses the importance and the age (minimum 5 years) of the investments in the field.
- **Georeferencing** : GPS verification to ensure that the operation does not encroach on the neighborhood or protected areas.
- **The validation** : The Chief decides after consulting with the immediate neighbors to confirm the «peaceful» nature of the enjoyment.
- **The validity** : The certificate is valid for five (05) years, renewable.

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6. How is the AJPTER archived and preserved ?

- **Local file** : A directory is kept at the chief's office, serving as a database in case of expropriation for public use.
- **Purpose** : It secures the operator but must imperatively lead, in the long term, to a land registration procedure.¹⁷

¹⁶ Articles 6-d and 7 of the Letter – Circular on the ARDFC and the AJPTER

¹⁷ Article 8 of the Letter – Circular on the ARDFC and the AJPTER

7. What does this really mean for communities ?

This document is intended for anyone, whether or not they belong to the local community, who uses land permanently and peacefully. Making the request will allow them to provide a range of options.

Your Rights (What you are allowed to do) :

AJPTER allows you to :

- ✔ Obtain administrative recognition of your land development (crops, buildings, pastures) from the customary authority.
- ✔ Benefit from protection against arbitrary evictions by proving that your occupation is known and accepted by the village.
- ✔ Use the AJPTER as proof of your investments, potentially in the event of compensation proceedings or expropriation for public purposes.

Your possible actions :

To obtain it, you must :

- ✔ Submit an AJPTER application to the village chief of the location of the land.
- ✔ Engage your neighbours (indigenous or not) to draw up a written agreement on the boundaries of your farm.
- ✔ Provide the necessary data for the plot sketch (GPS coordinates) to ensure traceability of your land use.

Your Recourse :

As part of an appeal, you can :

- ✔ **Request for arbitration** : If your land use is challenged by a third party during a large-area registration application (over 10 hectares), you can invoke your AJPTER (Agreement to Protected Land Use) with the first or second-degree chief to justify a legitimate complaint regarding the failure to take your land improvements into account.
- ✔ **Personal opinion letter** : You can suggest that the first or second-degree chief send a personal opinion letter to the Prefect or the Minister if you believe your customary rights are threatened by ongoing proceedings.

Warning

AJPTER is absolutely not:

- A provisional land title
- A certificate of abandonment of customary rights
- A document that facilitates land or real estate transactions

Conclusion

The Certificate of Peaceful Land Use (AJPTER) provides a concrete response to the need to recognize and protect the efforts of local communities to cultivate and develop their land. By securing land use, it strengthens the stability of farmers and promotes productive investment, while also offering guarantees in the event of disputes or expropriation.

It does not replace the land title, but constitutes an important complementary tool in the land tenure security process. Beneficiaries should therefore use it as leverage to consolidate their rights and, ultimately, undertake the registration process.

Key points to remember

AJPTER protects land development

It provides security for operators (farmers, livestock breeders, etc.)

It can serve as evidence in the event of compensation.

It does not replace the land title



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