



Research Article

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Emergence of Agricultural Platforms and Food Production in Smallholder Firms



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Abstract

This study attempts to carry-out a comprehensive analysis on the contribution of agricultural platforms on food production. Recently Cameroon has witness a proliferation of agricultural platforms/projects emerging from the World Bank programmes and operating throughout the whole country. It therefore becomes imperative to evaluate the intricacies associated with the emergence of such platforms. To go about this, the study has as objectives: to examine the contribution of agricultural platforms on food production and to verify if the agricultural platform effect is a phenomenon of gender and production status of the platform. The data used both quantitative and qualitative paradigms as well as employed one econometric model, the Ordinary Least Square model using primary data. The result shows that, agricultural platform is positively and significantly influencing food production. Results by status and gender revealed that, agricultural platform affects more crop production and male farmers organization as oppose to animal production and female farmer's organization. The study suggests that decision makers should create appropriate policies to favour the operations of agricultural platforms/projects in the agricultural sector. The is an excellent step towards increase food supply.

Keywords: Emergence of agricultural platforms and welfare; Smallholder; Farmers

Abbreviations: MINADER: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; MINEPIA: Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries; NPA: New Agricultural Policy; FO: Farmers Organization; ACEFA: Agro-pastoral Farms Exploitation and Competitiveness; AFOP: Support for Professional Training; CDD: Development Contract and Debt Reduction; ADB: African Development Bank; CIG: Common Initiative Groups; SDSR: Rural Sector Development Strategy; CRPA: Regional Center for Support to Agro-pastoral Professionalization

Introduction

From independence in 1960 to the present day, Cameroon has experimented with various agricultural and rural development policies with varying degrees of success. The evolution of agricultural and rural training coincides with the three major periods of development policies that the Cameroun has experienced [1]. From 1960 to 1985, the state was the main actor of the national economy. Agriculture emerged as one of the main elements on which economic development should be based. Two ministries were created for the agricultural sector: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) and Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries (MINEPIA). Two public agricultural education systems were then set up under the supervision of these two ministries, the first with thirty schools and training centers, the second with about fifteen institutions. The training centers were responsible for modular continuing training for producers (breeding and aquaculture stations) and initial training for young people planning an installation in the agricultural sector [2].

From 1985, following the economic tensions linked to difficult national and international conjunctures, the agricultural education system set up after independence became in crisis: the end of

recruitment in the civil service; insufficient human, material and financial resources allocated to the institutions; obsolete teaching contents. New actors (NGOs, farmers' organizations and private organizations) then emerged by creating their own training schemes geared generally towards producers and their groups [2]. Until 1990 the cooperative is the main associative form promoted by the Cameroonian state in terms of organization of agricultural producers both in West and east Cameroon under British and French colonization respectively [3].

The State encourages the creation of cooperatives, which were usually small groups of farmers which promoted the agricultural development strategy. In addition to the supervision of the producers in its area of intervention, each cooperative and each mission or development company was, in a way, an outgrowth of the State to which it entrusted regional socioeconomic and political development missions. The Cameroon Government's New Agricultural Policy (NPA) adopted in 1999; a cooperative movement that occupied a central position with an option for liberalization. In the early 2000s, projects and programs were put in place. The State of Cameroon's action in support of Farmers Organization (FO) is being pursued through project, which is

taking over different agricultural projects. One of the MINADER priorities project was the installation of a national platform of FOs and platforms at sub-national, region, division and district level. The aim has been to define a framework enabling all producers' organizations to meet, exchange and consult each other in order to find common platforms to shared views and negotiate with other actors, including the State. Platforms are expected to be legitimate entities to represent producers in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and projects.

Multitude of projects and programs of MINADER and MINEPIA each work with a set of FOs, all these FOs work with existing platforms with one at the national level, 10 at the regional and 56 at the divisional level. However, in the mid-2000s, the spectacular development of the private non-profit sector, gave rise to more than 130 agricultural training establishments. With the improvement of the country's economic situation and the alignment of donors with national priorities from 2004 onwards, technical and vocational training has reappeared as a means to improve integration, especially for rural youth and active producers. This has resulted in the implementation of programs such as: Support for Professional Training (AFOP), Amelioration of Family Agro-pastoral Farms Exploitation and Competitiveness (ACEFA) and Cell for the Support of Agriculture (PACA to mention a few with financial support from Development Contract and Debt Reduction (CDD), African Development Bank (ADB), World Bank and other partner donors [1].

As noted earlier, the projects and programs promoted by MINADER and MINEPIA work mainly with FOs which group together several small individual producers. Many of these organizations prefer the status of common initiative groups (CIGs) union of CIGs, federation of union of CIG and less than 20% are cooperatives. The families' farms that make up these FOs are the culmination of innumerable innovations form the social base of most Southern countries and contribute to the supply of local, national and international markets. Paradoxically, they also constitute the bulk of poor and food-insecure rural households. Family farming is thus at the heart of the contemporary contradictions of agriculture [4]. In this view, the government has upgraded the rural sector to make better use of the enormous potential for increasing agricultural production and above all to improving the productivity of farms [5]. This sector has been equipped with efficient tools, including a project for agricultural and rural education and training.

The family yields of major crops remained low and the vast majority of producers live below poverty lines [6]. In the northern region, the agricultural sector faces complex challenges such as climatic hazards that negatively affect food security [7]. The peri-urban and rural area is strongly affected by food insecurity. According to WFP, 63% of the population in this region is food insecure and 3.7% of rural households are severely food insecure. Women are mainly responsible for food crops: groundnuts, maize, onions, millet-sorghum and to some extent rice. According to the National Institute of statistics [8], despite a moderate decline in

the level of poverty in the Adamawa region, poverty is increasing in the Far North and North regions. The primary sector accounted for 21.4% of gross domestic product over the period 2008-2014. With an annual growth rate of 4.2%, it contributed an average of 0.9 points per year to real growth over the period. The share of the agricultural sub-sector in the gross domestic product of the primary sector, however, remains high (around 75%). Its growth rate was 3.7% in 2013, including 3.9% for food crops and 6.9% for export crops.

This level of growth in agriculture remains well below the forecasts of the Rural Sector Development Strategy (SDSR) implemented since 2006 and modified in 2008 [8]. The rural sector therefore remains the key sector of the national economy both for its contribution to GDP and for spillover effects on other sectors. It is in this context that agro-pastoral professional managers in Cameroon with the support of MINADER and MINEPIA through the Institutional Support Project (PARI), set up the Regional Center for Support to Agro-pastoral Professionalization (CRPA). The Regional Center for the Support of Agro-pastoral Professionalization (RCAP), which began on 06 March 2007, is administered and managed by professional leaders appointed by their peers. A technical team assists the board of directors and constitutes the body of proposal and execution of the actions planned by the board of directors. CRPA operates in the three northern regions of Adamawa, the Far North and the North and to date has 212 members including 23 umbrella organizations, 83 intermediary organizations and 106 grassroots organizations. The CRPA's and other Projects mission is to strengthen the skills of its members through the identification and structuring of the needs of FOs. Based on all these, this study has as objectives: to determine the contribution of agricultural platforms on food production and to evaluate agricultural platforms contribution to food production by gender and farmers organization production status.

Literature Review

Issues and challenges related to rural sector development relate to several concerns. The issues are those of ensuring food security and self-sufficiency; to promote the creation of decent jobs; to contribute to economic growth; sustainable management of natural resources; accelerate decentralization and the transfer of powers to the decentralized territorial communities and to promote a "green" economy model that takes into account the effects of climate change. The challenges are to develop cash crops, agribusiness, animal and fish production, logging in compliance with standards (quality, traceability, legality, hygiene etc.). To develop intensive large and medium-scale farms to address the needs of the internal and external market and develop high-performing family farms (agriculture, livestock, fisheries, aquaculture) to create jobs, increase rural incomes and meet domestic demand for food and non-food products [5].

Farming family farms/smallholder firms have a very variable profile, but they have one thing in common: they are the backbone of agriculture all over the world. Their production is not intended

primarily for the world market, but for the local population. They are therefore essential in a world where about 850 million people suffer. The small distances of transport and a production oriented on the local needs are other assets of the family farms. They practice ecologically and economically sustainable agriculture, particularly because parents have an interest in returning a healthy area to their offspring [9]. In the markets of Cameroon's villages and towns, it can be seen that most of the food comes from family farming. As already noted in previous studies and observed with the naked eye, that plantain; cassava, peanuts, millet, sorghum, yams, corn, leafy vegetables etc., comes from family farms. In Cameroon 97% of farmers are engaged in family farming and provide about 95% of the food consumed [10].

Fongang et al. [11] highlighted the role of contractual commitments in improving the performance of FOs in West Cameroon. This indicated the existence of input purchase and corn marketing contracts. The contract allows FOs to obtain better quality inputs at prices that are 4 to 17% lower than non-contract purchase prices. The contracts also allow FOs to access a more lucrative market and to make additional gains with prices per kg of maize, 12% higher than those prevailing outside contracts. Moreover, it should be noted that agricultural training has several advantages a priori, training increases the chance of having higher personal incomes; it gives financial benefits to farmers: training increases the performance of the farm and minimizes the risk of abandonment; training gives farmers better adaptation capacities [12]. Njoya [2], found that the development of the agro-pastoral sector remains strongly constrained by a number of factors, the most important of which are difficulties of access to land, inputs, credit, and the aging of producers, a situation aggravated by rural exodus. Market access constraints are linked to the massive imports of food products (rice, maize, meat) to the inadequacy and poor condition of rural roads and the high cost of transport among others. The positive impact of the support mechanisms for producers (training) as noted by the work cited above leads to the question of Agricultural platform concern about its beneficiaries.

Apart from the training gap that prevents smallholder firms from operating at full capacity and maximizing their welfare through increased productivity and income, there are several other factors that influence the welfare of these FOs. Abdullah et al. [13], explored the factors that affect the food security of rural households in northern Pakistan. The random sampling technique was applied to collect data from 294 rural households and a binary logistic regression technique was used to determine the factors that influence household food insecurity. They indicated that age, gender, education, unemployment, inflation, assets and illness are important factors in determining household food insecurity. In addition, gender plays a dominant role in household food insecurity as households headed by women were in a food situation with households headed by men.

Methodology

The population of this study consists of smallholder firms operating in Cameroon who are the members of FOs

benefiting financially, materially or services from an agricultural platform/projects. The data used for this work are qualitative and quantitative data from primary sources. Primary data is information obtained through interviews, direct field observations and the questionnaire. These data was collected in the study area, relating to the activities of the smallholder firms and agricultural projects. The questionnaire was developed according to our objectives and administered to selected individuals of both smallholder firms and managers of agricultural projects. To have the size of the sample, the multistage sample survey method was used. About 50 different active groups were sampled.

In this study, we applied both descriptive and econometric tools. In the descriptive statistics tools we used table and percentages to present the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. The model used is the semi-linear function (log-level) in which agricultural platforms that smallholder firms belong is regressed against food production together with complementary variables. Thus, the model parameters are estimated using the Ordinary Least Squared method presented as follows:

$$\log FP_i = \lambda_0 + \lambda_1 AP + \delta_i \chi_i + \varepsilon_i \dots \dots (1)$$

With $\log FP$ being the log of food production of smallholder firms, the AP is Agricultural project/platform, the χ_i represent other exogenous factors that are belief to be affecting the revenue of smallholder firms, while the coefficient $\lambda_0, \lambda_1, \delta_i$ are all parameters to be estimated and ε_i is the vector of the error term of the model. The outcome variable used here is the revenue of the smallholder firms. The income here refers to the total amount of money the farms derived from the sale of products producers after the intervention of the agricultural project or platform. In fact, it is the net income after the intervention of the agricultural project. Principally, income is recognized in the literature as one of the key indicators of objective well-being, it helps to acquire the basic needs of each individual and thus plays a significant role in maximizing well-being.

In relation to the estimation and validation technique, to determine the threshold of significance of the variables included in the model use is made of the student t-statistic and the p-value. Fisher's F-statistic is used to determine the overall significance of the estimated model. This study is limited in terms of coverage area because it does not take into account all the smallholder firms in Cameroon. Thus, the conclusion drawn from the study may only be generalized for the total population as it does not reflect the exact situation.

Empirical Results

Socio-economic characteristics of members of platform

From Table 1, we observed that 78.65% of farmer's organizations are involved in crop production with the crops commonly produce being: rice, yams, cassava, millet, maize, onion, sweet and Irish potatoes, etc. In our regression table, this capture as the total quantity of crops produces per season. The descriptive statistics Table also revealed that 21.35% of the farmers are engage

in animal production among which are: poultry, piggery, goats and sheep which they all produce and sell both in the domestically and internationally depending on the market they are open to and the available quantity for sale.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of members of platform.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Distribution According to FOs Produced Good		
Crop Production in Tons/kgs	140	78.65
Animal Production in Tons/kgs	38	21.35
Total	178	100
Distribution of Respondents by Age		
<30 Years	15	8,43
30-40 Years	51	28,65
41-50 Years	59	33,15
>50	53	29,78
Total	178	100,00
Distribution According to Gender		
Male	161	90.45
Female	17	9.45
Total	178	100
Distribution According to Marital Status		
Married	146	82.2
Single	32	11.8
Total	178	100
Distribution According to Education Level		
No Education	27	15,17
Primary	66	37,08
Secondary	78	43,82
Higher	7	3,93
Total	178	100,00
Distribution according to household size		
< 4 Persons	9	5,06
10-Apr	94	52,81
15-Nov	49	27,53
> 15 Persons	26	14,61
Total	178	100,00
Distribution According to Main Agricultural Activity		
Vegetable Production	152	85,39

Rearing of Animals	26	14,61
Total	178	100,00

In the literature it is revealed that the socio-economic characteristics of farmers are part of the factors that influence production capacity and thus, the level of income. Given the importance of the head of FOs in the conduct of the activities of the farm, a descriptive analysis of the distribution of the FOs surveyed was carried out and it emerges from this analysis that 90.45% of the heads of households are men and 9.55% women. The age of each individual is very important because this has a direct and sometimes indirect effect on productivity and income. We note that only 8.43% has an age between 0 and 30, 28.65 between 31 and 40 years; 33.15 between 41 and 50 years old and 29.78 are above 50 years old. The low rate in the range of 0 to 30 can be explained by the fact that young people are more reluctant to start farming.

Among the respondents, we observed that, only 11.8% of the respondents are single compared to 88.2% married. This situation may be justified by the fact that culture encourages early marriage. It can be seen that 15.17% of those interviewed are uneducated, compared to 37.08 with primary, 43.8% secondary and 3.93% in higher education. The information in Table show that the members of FOs surveyed mainly consist of medium households of 5-10 persons (94 FOs) followed by households with 11-15 persons (49 FOs). Households with between 0-4 persons and those with more than 15 persons are 9 and 26 FOs respectively. The distribution of the sample according to the activity is 85.39% of FOs having as main agricultural activity vegetable production as against 14.61% with breeding as main activity.

Agricultural platforms and agricultural production of smallholder firms

The result in Table 2 shows that the agricultural production of farmer's organization in a given platform is contributing to increasing agricultural production in Cameroon with a coefficient of 28.1 percent and this result is significant at the 1% level. This implies that an actual platform with a well follow-up farmers organization can engineer great agricultural changes and increase food supply among the already malnourish population of Cameroon and Africa in general. This is exactly the concern of the different new agricultural institutions in Cameroon. Other variables that have a significant and positive effect on the level of food production are the age/experience of FOs, the size of the FOs, the size of the area under cultivation, acquisition of agricultural training, status of land ownership, main agricultural activity and the level of education.

Based on the results presented in Table 2, the age coefficient reveals that when the age of the FOs increases by one year, food production increases by 1.18%. The size of the FOs indicates that the arrival of a new member in the platform has a positive effect on food production to about 1.01%. Access to credit is negatively correlating with agricultural production, given that most FOs get their income from and assistant from their platform, any attempt

to take credit may result to a drop in food production due to the conflict that may arise in payment as they are working in a group.

In terms of the size of the cultivated land, the results show that an increase in area by one hectare will increase production by 7.2%. In the same line, FOs with formal agricultural training have a higher probability of increasing production than those who did not have this opportunity by 24.34%. FOs working on their own land has a higher production power than others with 10.07%, we equally observed that FOs raising livestock as a main agricultural activity have higher incomes than those producing crops and heads of FOs with at least primary education have higher production than otherwise by 23.67%. The results presented in Table 2 shows a fairly good overall significance of the model, as the F-statistic (13,154) = 10.51, with a p-value of 0.0000 as well as an R-squared of 77% clarifies this. Most of the estimated parameters are statistically acceptable at 1% significance.

Table 2: Agricultural platforms and agricultural production of smallholder firms.

Outcome Variable: Log of Agricultural Production		
Variable	Coefficient	t-Statistic
Agricultural Platform	0.2805196 ***	2.65
Sex (1= male)	-0.0202623	-0.08
Age group (1= 41-50)	0.0118368*	1.79
Occupation (1= farmer)	-0.0210745	-0.44
Size of FOs (1= large size)	0.0101534***	3.72
Access to credit (1= access)	-0.044613**	2.34
Land size	0.0723294***	7.28
Training (1= training agriculture)	0.2434767*	1.95
Marital Status (1= married)	0.180675	0.88
Land tenure (1= ownership)	0.100768*	1.9
Production status (1= crop)	0.2730118***	4.03
Agricultural input	-0.3456385	-0.86
Level of education (1= primary)	0.2367825*	1.71
Constant	13.01254***	23.61
Number of observations = 178		
F-statistic (13, 154) = 10.51		
Prob> F = 0.0000		
R-squared = 0.7701		

Platform effect on food production by gender and production status of FOs

The analysis of the contribution of agricultural platform according to the gender and the production status of farmer’s organization is presented in Table 3.

The result estimated in Table 3, shows that if a FOs is a male farmer’s organization or is headed by a male there will be a higher probability of increase food supply as compare to female organization or female headed organization. The male organization is a positive and significant effect on food production with a coefficient of 17.75% at a 1% significance level. The variables that have a positive and significant effect on production include: age, the size of the FOs, access to credit, the size of cultivation area, production status, and the level of education of the FOs.

Table 3: Platform effect on food production by gender of head of FOs.

Outcome Variable: Log of Agricultural Production		
Variable	Coefficient	t-Statistic
Agricultural Platform	0.2805196 ***	2.65
Sex (1= male)	-0.0202623	-0.08
Age group (1= 41-50)	0.0118368*	1.79
Occupation (1= farmer)	-0.0210745	-0.44
Size of FOs (1= large size)	0.0101534***	3.72
Access to credit (1= access)	-0.044613**	2.34
Land size	0.0723294***	7.28
Training (1= training agriculture)	0.2434767*	1.95
Marital Status (1= married)	0.180675	0.88
Land tenure (1= ownership)	0.100768*	1.9
Production status (1= crop)	0.2730118***	4.03
Agricultural input	-0.3456385	-0.86
Level of education (1= primary)	0.2367825*	1.71
Constant	13.01254***	23.61
Number of observations = 178		
F-statistic (13, 154) = 10.51		
Prob> F = 0.0000		
R-squared = 0.7701		

Table 4: Platform effect on food production by production status of heads of FOs.

Outcome Variable: Log of Agricultural Production		
Variable	Coefficient	t-Statistic
Agricultural Platform	0.2805196 ***	2.65
Sex (1= male)	-0.0202623	-0.08
Age group (1= 41-50)	0.0118368*	1.79
Occupation (1= farmer)	-0.0210745	-0.44
Size of FOs (1= large size)	0.0101534***	3.72

Access to credit (1= access)	-0.044613**	2.34
Land size	0.0723294***	7.28
Training (1= training agriculture)	0.2434767*	1.95
Marital Status (1= married)	0.180675	0.88
Land tenure (1= ownership)	0.100768*	1.9
Production status (1= crop)	0.2730118***	4.03
Agricultural input	-0.3456385	-0.86
Level of education (1= primary)	0.2367825*	1.71
Constant	13.01254***	23.61
Number of observations = 178		
F-statistic (13, 154) = 10.51		
Prob> F = 0.0000		
R-squared = 0.7701		

The result presented in Table 4, indicate that, if a FOs is a food crop producing organization there will be a higher probability of increase food supply as compare to animal producing organization. Here, size of the FOs, size of area under cultivation, and agricultural training have a positive and significant effect on food crop production. In relation to animal production, the contribution of FOs has no significant effect on food production, here, only the cultivated area has a positive and significant effect on production while, the size of the FOs and agricultural training have negative and significant effects on agricultural production.

Conclusion

This study entitled the contribution of agricultural platform on food production. In order to achieve these objectives, primary data were collected from 178 FOs. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and econometric statistical tools the OLS.

The result of Table 2 showed that agricultural production of farmer's organization in a given platform is contributing to increasing agricultural production in Cameroon with a coefficient of 28.1 percent and this result is significant at the 1% level. The result estimated in Table 3, shows that if a FOs is a male farmer's organization or is headed by a male there will be a higher probability of increase food supply as compare to female organization or female headed organization. The male organization is a positive and significant effect on food production with a coefficient of 17.75% at a 1% significance level. The variables that have a positive and significant effect on production include: age, the size of the FOs, access to credit, the size of cultivation area, production status, and the level of education of the FOs. The result presented in Table 4, indicate that, if a FOs is a food crop producing organization there will be a higher probability of increase food

supply as compare to animal producing organization. Here, size of the FOs, size of area under cultivation, and agricultural training have a positive and significant effect on food crop production. In relation to animal production, the contribution of FOs has no significant effect on food production, here, only the cultivated area has a positive and significant effect on production while, the size of the FOs and agricultural training have negative and significant effects on agricultural production.

In view of the results obtained at the end of this study, the obvious conclusion is that the platform has a positive impact on food production. The study suggest that decision makers should promote more agricultural platform in terms of creating appropriate policies to favour their operations in the agricultural sector; the is an excellent step towards increase food supply.

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