COFFEE CRISIS AND RURAL YOUTH ATTITUDE TOWARDS AGRICULTURE: THE CASE OF THE WESTERN PROVINCE OF CAMEROON
Context
Background

- It is generally agreed that a strong involvement of the youth in Agriculture is the solution to improve their livelihoods and boost food security in the continent (Fonjong 2004, WDR 2008, Byerlee, de Janvry, and Sadoulet 2009, Muir-Leresche 2013).

- This consensus is contrasted by an increasing negative perception and disregard of agriculture as source of livelihoods for many young people in Cameroon.
This paper argues that young people negative perception of agriculture in the Western province of Cameroon was exacerbated by the collapse of the coffee sector in the post-liberalisation period.

Data was collected in rural communities in the Western Region of Cameroon located at the proximity of the cities of Dschang, Bafoussam, Santchou and comprised of 36 interviews and 136 surveys questionnaires.
Key Findings

- It was found that the main challenges that coffee farmers have experienced in the past 20 years are the following:
  - Low coffee prices and price volatility combined with the high price of fertilisers and pesticides;
  - The exploitative role of the middlemen called ‘coxeurs’;
  - A lack of support from the cooperatives and government; lack of interest among the youth and women in farming coffee; and the ageing of coffee farmers.
Key Findings 2

- The second major finding is the role and importance of alternative agro-pastoral activities, especially food crops farming as a substitute for coffee farming.
- The importance of tontines associations, which are farmers’ solidarity and saving associations, viewed as farmers’ social insurance.
- An increasing number of new income generating activities (moto taxis, call box, amongs others) and urban migration.
Main changes in coffee farms

Graph showing changes in various aspects of coffee farms, including:
- Food crops production
- Coffee production
- Food crops income
- Coffee income
- Use of fertilizers and pesticide
- Coffee farm size
- Pride as coffee farmer
- Arabica production
- Robusta production

Legend:
- Increased
- Decreased
- Stayed the same
Variation between the number of coffee trees before and after the market liberalisation policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>less than 500 trees</th>
<th>between 500 to 1999 trees</th>
<th>more than 2000 trees</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>coffee trees before</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coffee trees today</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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</tbody>
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Findings 4

- Our analysis of the impacts of the above processes of changed is that it contributed in exacerbating the already negative perception of the youth toward agriculture.
- Some of the youth interviewed mentioned that they have nothing to learn form their parents who have been failed by the coffee-politics.
Conclusion

Although the broader scope of the research was to investigate the coping process and adaption of coffee farmers in the Western Region of Cameroon in the context of a liberalised economy since the introduction of neoliberal policies in 1987, it increasingly became apparent that the processes of agrarian transformation have reinforced young people negative perception of agriculture and farming in particular.
Conclusion and Recommendation

- The paper highlights that although the youth negative perception of agriculture were not created by the coffee crisis they were exacerbated by it.

- These perceptions might be corrected:
  - deconstruction and reconstruction the local discourses on agriculture
  - agriculture as part of school curriculum
  - Intensive role of government in agricultural sector