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Title: The impact of land tenure security on youth employment and economic transformation in Africa: the case of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Young people often perceive corruption in land administration as an insurmountable obstacle to the entrepreneurial spirit and access to employment. As a result, they often migrate to rapidly growing cities and likely end up being unemployed or in the informal sector.

In most of Africa, poor land governance limits access to land tenure for youths. From a recent survey Transparency International conducted in nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe), 13% of under 30 years of age having more than 10 years of studies background, state that their land can be taken away from them at any moment. That ultimately generates negative impact on the agricultural sector, whose promise has been acknowledged as key to boosting the continent's transformation.

Their workforce, innovation and potential to increase agricultural productivity are assets for poverty reduction, especially in Africa's rural areas. However, youth remain disadvantaged and encounter several challenges, including discriminatory land laws, practices and policies that limit their capacity to secure land.

Cameroon's demographic profile and land practices are a case in point. The country has a population estimated at 23 million people, 64.2% of whom are youths (men and women) under the age of 25 with an estimated dependency ratio of 78.4 due to high unemployment rates. From the Transparency International survey, in Cameroon, 21% of educated young people and 17% of non-educated young people don't have their land secured. The agricultural sector, which has the potential of providing jobs, especially to young unemployed men and women witnesses a lack of interest from their part, mainly because of complex, expensive and corrupt land tenure procedures and practices, as well as discriminatory society/traditional norms (especially for female rural youths).

Despite efforts by the Government through the Agricultural Competitiveness project aimed at harnessing the competitiveness of eligible producer organizations (including youth organizations) and working on target value chains, failure by youths to secure land—a necessary initial input—limits their engagement in the agricultural sector, which could contribute to transforming the economy of Cameroon.

Drawing from primary evidence and secondary data, this dialogue seeks to showcase how poor land governance policies and practices hinder youths from maximizing their *agricultural potential* to contribute to the country's economic transformation. It further presents (with case studies) the positive impact of land tenure security in developing social (youth) entrepreneurship, boosting the economy, improving food security and fighting against poverty in Africa.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“If agriculture is the engine for Africa food security, employment and economic transformation, youths are the fuel to make them function well”. Unknown

Like several African countries in the continent, Cameroon after its independence in the 1960s relied mainly on the oil industry and agriculture for its development. Before 1978, the agricultural sector accounted for about 30% of the Cameroon’s GDP and by 1990 it fell down to 24% due to the predominant place given to crude oil at the time. However, in the mid-1980s the country’s economy witnessed a recession mainly due to the fall in price of coffee, cocoa and oil at the international market. With lessons learnt from the collapse of the Country’s economy in the mid-1980s, Cameroon returned to agriculture and positioned it as its main source of economic growth like in the 1960s and 1970s.

After having successfully gone through the “Highly Indebted Poor Countries programme” in the 2000s, the Country committed itself to re-orientate its policies to become an “emergent economy” by the year 2030. This new country’s policies summarized in the “Strategy Document for Growth and Employment” gave a predominant role to agriculture to lead Cameroon to the economic transformation expected.

Agriculture nowadays has regained its primordial and important role in the Cameroonian economy. Cameroon is at 80% an Agricultural country¹. The agricultural sector represents 44% of the country’s GDP. Close to 85% of the total population derive their livelihood from the sector which employs close to 70% of the active force found mainly in the rural areas². The potential revealed by agriculture to boost the country’s economy has encouraged the government to attract foreign investment in the agricultural sector which, in return, intensified the high demand for “Land”. This situation was particularly disadvantageous to the rural communities (youth involved) living around the hectares of land being acquired by foreign investors as, their determination to use agriculture for their livelihood has been tremendously diminished by land grabbing and expropriation. This was witnessed in the Herakles Farm case in the south west region and the Bonalea case in the littoral region of Cameroon.

It becomes evident in this context that land is the main capital for agriculture and thus crucial to lead the country to the economic transformation expected. However in a country where youths represent 64.2% (men and women) of the population under the age of 25 with an estimated dependency ratio of 78.4 due to high unemployment rates, the legal framework of land tenure and customary laws are also responsible for the misuse of this workforce and the potential it represents for agricultural productivity and poverty reduction. Because of this unused potential, youths tend to migrate to urban areas or Europe (through the sea); or are manipulated and involved in violence.

In the recent years, one of the government’s responses to high youth unemployment rate has been to design specifically youth-oriented agricultural programmes to attract them into the agricultural sector. However, despite these encouraging measures, the government failed to address a key issue which is facilitating land tenure security for the youths. It is strongly believed and demonstrated that land tenure security can stimulate employment in the agricultural sector and thus contribute effectively to the country’s economic transformation.

In this paper we shall attempt to respond to the following questions:

- what constrains youths from active engagement in the agricultural sector;

¹ « Agriculture au Cameroun » Wikipedia

² www.theodora.com,

- And will the government efforts to attract these youths in that sector to enhance its agricultural productivity (economy) will be achieved with a legal land tenure framework disadvantageous to youths?

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Cameroon is located between West and Central Africa and is often referred to as “Africa in miniature” due to its diversity of geography, climate and culture, which enhances agricultural production and biodiversity.

Cameroon is endowed with natural resources like gas, oil, timber, minerals as well as agricultural products like maize, cocoa, coffee, cotton, cassava etc. Yet, the number of poor in Cameroon witnessed a 12% increase between 2007 and 2014³. Poverty in Cameroon is essentially a rural phenomenon where agriculture is the key source of livelihood which employs 60% of the workforce with subsistence agriculture being the dominant activity in this sector⁴.

Youth representing 60% of Cameroon’s population presents a great opportunity and a growing labor force which is an asset to the country. Yet, youth dependency ration estimated at 78.4%⁵ is the proof that a high percentage of young people in Cameroon are unemployed or underemployed. However, these youths in need of jobs could also be job creators only if the opportunities available are grabbed especially in the agricultural sector.

The Cameroon government, through its Growth and Employment Strategic Paper (Document Stratégique pour la Croissance et l’Emploi, - DSCE) has proposed substantial investment programs in selected industries and value chains which have the capacity to impact positive growth and employment creation. Amongst these is the agricultural sector. Moreover, the Cameroon government has taken-up certain initiatives to encourage youths in agriculture such as the “**ENABLE Youth Program**” launched by the government of Cameroon and aiming at ensuring that youths have the opportunity to earn a decent living through agriculture. Or the “**Agricultural Competitiveness project**” aimed at harnessing the competitiveness of eligible producer organizations (including youth organizations)

Despite the efforts put in place to encourage youths to take-on agriculture to promote youth employment and thus reduce poverty, land tenure security still remains a neglected component which constrains youths from effectively engaging in agriculture and therefore use their agricultural potential to contribute to the country’s economic transformation.

The BONALEA CASE.

Bonalea is a small community located in the littoral region of Cameroon. Land in the community is very fertile for agriculture which represents almost 90% of the activities practiced therein. In the 1970s, the government conceded large hectares of land to two industrial companies, namely Cameroon Development Corporation and SOCAPALM (involved in palm oil production). In the process of providing land for these companies, many members of the Bonalea’s communities had their land grabbed therefore obliging them to become workers in these companies due to the land’s scarcity.

³ www.worldbank.org/en/country/cameroon/overview

⁴ Cameroon Evaluation of bank group assistance to the agriculture and rural development Sector 1996-2004

⁵ www.theodora.com

A study conducted by the National Engagement Strategy on Land Governance in the Bonalea community and targeting youths revealed that:

- 79% of youths interviewed declared that there is no future for them in that community
- 55,7% of youths do not own a piece of land neither a house
- 44.3% of youths do not even have access to land for agriculture
- 84.5% of youths interviewed revealed that it is not possible for them to secure land in their community.

This situation has had several consequences for youths such as: poverty, delinquency, urban migration, land disputes and food insecurity.

The case of the Bonalea's community clearly indicates that agriculture, especially in rural areas can play an important role in promoting youth's employment, however scarcity in land caused by land concession to big companies and inability of youths to secure land represent constraints to achieving local economic transformation⁶.

SECURING LAND RIGHTS FOR YOUTHS TO BOOST CAMEROON'S ECONOMY THROUGH AGRICULTURE: THE CHALLENGES

➤ Understanding the nexus between land tenure, youth employment and economic transformation

The importance of land in the development of Cameroon appears very clearly, especially when we know that about 60% of the population derive its livelihood and income mainly from agriculture.

"Promoting agriculture should be at the center of national strategies to boost economic developmentYouth employment in sustainable agriculture is one of the country's (Cameroon) main priorities to achieve rural development and enhance agricultural production." Cameroon's Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development Henri Eyebe Ayissi⁷.

From the analysis of the above statement, we can clearly see the linkage between youths, agriculture, economic transformation and development. However, one could ask, why does land, which is the main capital for agriculture it is not clearly and precisely mentioned therein?

According to the FAO, in 2014 alone, about 11 million young Africans entered the labor market. But many saw few opportunities in the agriculture sector and are constrained by lack of skills, low wages, **limited access to land** and financial services⁸.

Land tenure could be understood as the relationship defined by law or custom between individuals or groups in the land. These rules define the allocation of property rights over land,

⁶ Bernard DONGMO; "Rapport d'étude des Impacts de la réduction de l'espace vital des populations riveraines du domaine de la SOCAPALM sur la vie des jeunes dans la commune de BONALEA", Stratégie Nationale d'Engagement sur la Gouvernance Foncière au Cameroun (SNE); Juin 2016.

⁷ This statement was made on July 6, 2017 in Rome during an official visit of the Minister at the FAO's headquarters. The details about this visit is accessible through this link: <http://www.fao.org/director-general/newsroom/news/detail/en/c/903737/>

⁸ Information collected on the FAO website and available through the link <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/902345/icode/>

the terms of allocation rights of use, control and transfer of land and the corresponding responsibilities and limitations⁹.

Securing land tenure has been recognized by several scholars as a foundation for economic growth and this is particularly true in the agricultural sector.

In rural areas, the nexus between tenure security in the agricultural sector and economic growth can be viewed in four ways. **First**, secure tenure rights increase the likelihood that farmers making investments in the present will be able to enjoy the returns to those investments in the future, and can pass down improved land to heirs. This approach will have bigger impacts where returns to these investments are relatively high. **Second**, they may increase access to credit so landholders can more easily finance on-farm investments as well as increase engagement in market-based entrepreneurial activities. **Third**, secure rights that enable land transfers through the market increase efficiency in rural areas by allowing farmers to allocate both land and labor to their best alternative uses while minimizing time-consuming disputes over land use. **Fourth**, an efficient, stable, and growing agricultural sector is more likely to attract external and domestic investment necessary for broad-based economic growth¹⁰.

Thus, it becomes obvious that land tenure security is pivotal for the agricultural sector to provide new jobs for unemployed, underemployed and disadvantaged youths so as to enable them to take up the economic opportunity agriculture offers. However in the context of Cameroon, land ownership for youths is constrained by the existing legal land and customary tenure systems; and land corruption as well.

- **Cameroon's legal and customary land tenure system and its inability to foster youth's involvement into agriculture in Cameroon**
 - **The legal framework of land tenure and its impact on youth's agricultural potential and employment.**

Cameroon land tenure system has been organized within the 1974 ordinance. The ordinance stipulates that ownership to land is done only through registration and the acquisition of a land title. Registration is the process through which land rights are recognized to an individual of Cameroonian nationality over a specific piece of land. For unemployed and/or underemployed youths looking up at agriculture and relatively poor, the current registration process is very expensive. For instance for a full land registration process in Cameroon, one needs to spend (unofficial fees not included) more than 100.000 FCFA (152 EUR) in a country where more than 12% of the population live below the poverty line¹¹ (less than 2 USD/day) and the minimum wage is 36.270 FCFA (55 EUR).

The Ordinance also stipulates that ownership to land is also recognized if and only if there is proof that it had trace of a construction, crops proving cultivation done before August 5, 1974. For Youths, this measure is also discriminatory when we know that if we take 2017 as a reference, it is only a man of 43 years that can be eligible under this condition. However, statistics in Cameroon indicate that youths under the age of 25 represent 48% of the population and 48% for those under the age of 18. It becomes obvious that even if they become heirs, they will not have the possibility to register the inherited land (if it wasn't).

⁹ "the challenges of Land governance in Cameroon" by Transparency International Cameroon

¹⁰ USAID Issue Brief « Land tenure, Property rights, and economic growth in rural areas »

¹¹ www.worldbank.org/en/country/cameroon/overview

- **The customary laws and its impacts on youths access to land for agriculture (young girl)**

Customary tenure is associated to land tenure insecurity especially for youths and precisely for young girls. In most traditions in rural Cameroon, the head of a family in his old age can choose his heir among his children. The heir could among the wealth, inherit hectares of land. It should be notify here that this is only possible for the young boy. In this case, the heir will be confronted to the legal framework if the land was not registered and if he was not born before August 1974.

In these traditions, women or young girls do not inherit land despite the fact that they account for close to 70% of the food production¹². Even as a married woman, she is not entitled to land in her family-in-law because she is regarded as a stranger. These situations have positioned the young girl only as a “land-user” and never as a “Land-owner”. The inability of women to secure the land could have a huge and negative impact on the country’s economic ambition when we know that women (including young girls) represent 50.1% of the country’s population; and provide 70% of food production while ensuring 80-90% of food supplies in large cities of Cameroon¹³.

It becomes therefore obvious that despite several government’s efforts to attract youths in the agricultural sector, access and ownership to land are key issues when youths consider venturing into agriculture. Thus justifying, land tenure insecurity as one of the push factors of youths out of agriculture. However the inability of youth to strengthen their investment position in the agricultural production could also be a challenge to the country’s vision to become an emergent economy by the year 2035.

➤ **Land corruption as an obstacle for land tenure security.**

Young people often perceive corruption in land administration as an insurmountable obstacle to the entrepreneurial spirit and access to employment. As a result, they often migrate to rapidly growing cities and likely end up being unemployed or in the informal sector. There are several ways in which corruption in the land sector could affect youths:

- **Complex and long registration procedure provides opportunities for corrupt practices:** the procedure for acquiring land titles involves multiple intermediaries and some of these lack integrity and civic responsibility or ethics in relation to public service. The consequence of this on youths (having the necessary means) includes the fact that some of them become discouraged to acquire land titles.
- **Corruption increases the already high cost of registration:** This is due to the fact that registration cost does not only include official fees but also “underground fees” (unofficial fees) requested by some intermediaries and corrupt officials. A study carried out by TI-C in October 2015 showcased that almost all the sectors involved in land administration require bribes and almost every household (including youths) interviewed revealed to have paid a bribe during the land registration procedure for different reasons.

¹² “Women and access to land in Cameroon”, 2015, Transparency International Cameroon.

¹³ « Women and access to land in Cameroon », 2015, Transparency International Cameroon.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the analysis done throughout this paper, we can propose the following recommendations:

- **Review and/or strengthen existing land tenure policies to attract youths into agriculture:** so far government's options in attracting youths into agriculture has been limited to providing seeds and financial support. The issue of land needed to plant the seed or invest the money received is poorly addressed. Therefore it is crucial for the ministry of State Property, Survey and Land tenure to work very closely with the ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to reflect on and implement the policies and strategies needed to facilitate land ownership for youths in Cameroon.
- **Assess the current customary tenure systems and propose intermediate forms of tenure security:** It is important to analyze very closely existing customary tenure system because it is not advantageous to youths and especially young girls. This analysis will enable to clearly identify the best way to engage with this system. The end product of the analysis could be to consider intermediate forms of tenure reform through the setting up of instruments such as Local land boards or Community Land Trust which, provide both individual (including youths) and community level rights simultaneously.
- **Promoting and ensuring participatory land registration:** the land registration process should be as participatory and transparent as possible, both to increase legitimacy and reduce the cost (aggravated by corruption in the land sector).
- **Develop and implement a system of Land Bank for youths:** In Cameroon, Land belong to the State. In a context where we have unemployed and underemployed youths willing to embrace agriculture but constrained by land tenure insecurity, the government through its ministries of land tenure and agriculture, can identify hectares of land in agricultural rural communities. Youths will receive land as a "loan", they will receive government support for seeds and after harvesting, the Ministry of agriculture will facilitate the sale of their products in the neighboring markets. From the benefits made, these youth will use some of the income for their livelihood and the rest will be paid into the account of the government. Once the young man or woman will reimburse the amount that was estimated for the land received, the Ministry of State Property, Survey and Land tenure will ensure that their land is registered and they receive their land title and carry on with their activities. This approach will not only solved the issue of unemployment, but will bring out the agricultural potential of youths and will contribute in boosting the economy of the country.
- **Reduce corruption in the land sector:** Corruption and its manifestations in the land sector is specifically increasing the cost of the land registration process. For youths financially stable enough to acquire a plot of land, the process becomes lengthy because of bribes he/she needs to pay at every steps of the registration process. It is therefore important for Government through its anti-corruption institutions and Civil society organizations (specialized in the fight against corruption) to clearly demonstrate how corruption manifest in that sector and propose mitigation strategies to the decision makers.

Conclusion:

This paper provide clear evidence on the linkage between land tenure security, employment through agriculture and economic transformation. From the various literature reviews, the paper was able to show the potential agriculture has in responding to the youth's unemployment and underemployment. Taking Cameroon as a case study, we were able to see that there are several obstacles for youths to use their agricultural workforce and potential to enhance the economy. Among these obstacles we have the legal land tenure framework and the customary systems which, are not advantageous to youths. But we could also mention land corruption as one of the main obstacles to youth's willingness to secure land. However what must be clearly highlighted here is that land tenure insecurity among other issues must be addressed if Cameroon really need to use the potential in youths to become an emergent economy through agriculture. The case of the community of "Bonalea" in the Littoral region of Cameroon is a clear example of the impact of land tenure insecurity on youth's involvement in the agricultural sector. However there will still be hope if the Government takes appropriate and effective measures to respond to the problem. Among those measures we could cite: (i) reviewing and/or strengthening existing land tenure policies to attract youths into agriculture; (ii) Assessing the current customary tenure systems and propose intermediate forms of tenure security; (iii) Promoting and ensuring participatory land registration; (iv) Developing and implementing a system of Land Bank for youths; (v) and curbing corruption in the land sector.

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Ordinance No 74/2 of July 6, 1974 to establish rules governing state land

Decree No 76/165 of April 27, 1976 to establish the conditions for obtaining land certificates, and determining the procedure for registering land

Decree No 2005/481 of December 16, 2005 amends the regulations for obtaining land certificates and the procedure for registering land