

# **CHANGING FORTUNES OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE APPLICATION OF AGRICULTURAL INNOVATIONS IN CAMEROON\***

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## **ABSTRACT**

The battle against poverty and environmental protection in Cameroon will be won or lost in the agricultural sector. This is because agriculture plays a prime role in the economy of the country. Although this role in the economy is critical, the current state of agricultural infrastructure does not match with government's high-sounding policy of promoting agricultural development. From the forgotten story of agricultural shows after 1985, to the closure or near neglect of major agro-pastoral research and technical institutions in the country, the future of agriculture in Cameroon is bleak and raises a lot of questions. Yet, the Ministry of Agriculture is one of the ministries with a lion's share of the national budget.

This paper argues that the fight against poverty and the drive towards food sufficiency by the State remains a fallacy given the collapsing state of agro-pastoral infrastructures in the country. Using case study analysis, from a province whose population is predominantly rural, the paper revisits the state of these infrastructures in the North West Province, and concludes that the change in government policies in the sector can create a negative multiplier effects on the future use of innovations in the country with far reaching consequences on farmer's productivity and farm outputs. The reversal of this trend, the author notes, requires short and long-term measures that go beyond State action alone.

*Keywords: agricultural innovation, food production, government policy, sustainability, Cameroon*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Agriculture is the corner stone of the Cameroonian economy. It generates the highest number of employments (more than 60% of both skilled and unskilled), ensures national food security, contributes enormously to Cameroon's GDP and foreign earnings and, above all, provides raw materials to the industrial sector, which is still in its infant stage. The importance of agriculture to the economy of the country was recognised even before independence. The colonial strategy of

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development at the time revolved on two axes: to discourage industrialisation and encourage an agricultural sector based on mono-cultural plantation economy (Azobi, 1988). After independence, the Cameroon government continued to show a lot of concern to the development of agriculture in its five-year development plans. The first five-year development of 1965–1967, for example, was captured “the farmer’s year” and the second plan (1966–1971) was declared as “the farmer’s plan”. (Fonjong, forth coming) This solid early foundation explains why Cameroon has remained for long the breadbasket of the Central African region.

Government’s commitment to ensure the future of agricultural development until the 1990s has been consistent. The agricultural show schemes and best farm competitions served as additional incentives to farmers. The creation of zones *d’action communautaire et culturelle* and community development in the former East and West Cameroons respectively were all signs of government interests in agricultural development. These realizations were further extended to the development of agro-pastoral infrastructure. One can cite the examples of schools, agricultural research centres (e.g. IRZ and IRAD<sup>1</sup> in Ekona, Bambui, Mankon), agricultural training institutions and credit schemes that serve both regional and national interests. All these investments in agriculture and the rural economy produced far-reaching results in the domain of population and political stability, as well as economic growth.

However, this has not lasted for ever as the situation has changed in recent times. There has been a systematic neglect of the agricultural sector and its infrastructure while, at the same time, a lot of lip-service is paid to its importance. Such abandonment of the nerve centre on which the Cameroonian economy revolves has opened the way for poverty, rural exodus, hunger, crimes, etc, to gradually but steadily infest a country of great economic potentials. Economic development has generally slowed down and the living standards of the population in most localities are deplorable. Although many are quick to attribute this situation to the economic crisis of the mid 80s and the harsh structural adjustment measures that followed in the 90s, the central issue remains that the deteriorating state of agro-pastoral infrastructure in Cameroon is a call for concern.

## 1. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Agriculture in Cameroon accounted for 27% of the GDP in 1991 and employed 59.3% of the labour force (FAO Fact Sheet - Cameroon). Unfortunately, the near neglect of the agricultural sector does not suggest any reason to hope that it will be able to continue to meet up these challenges in the future. Major agricultural funding schemes like FONADER and agricultural institutions like

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<sup>1</sup> IRZ is the Institute of Zoo-technical Research and IRAD the Institute for Agricultural Research and Development.

MIDENO<sup>2</sup>, have been closed down or tactically abandoned. Farmers, especially the small farmers, are gradually drifting away from the countryside to the cities to add to an expanding unemployed urban population. The rural population is aging and its ability to meet the future food and other challenges of an overgrowing population is wanting. This is not to say government is not aware of the strategic importance of the agricultural sector. In fact, there is no official government pronouncement that does not reiterate the need for every Cameroonian to go back to 'the soil' and to behold the agricultural sector. It seems this government concern today is only 'in principle.'

The Ministry of Agriculture is one of the ministries in Cameroon that have the lion's share of budgetary allocation each financial year<sup>3</sup>. Yet, extension workers are virtually non-existent in field, agricultural schools are closing down and there are basically very few incentives tailored to the farmers. The obvious questions thus are: what role does agriculture play in the Cameroonian economy and how was this role conceptualised in the past? What is the state of agro-pastoral infrastructures in the country today and what ramification do they have on the future of agriculture in the country?

Principally, the objective here is to establish a link between the present state of agro-infrastructures and agricultural outputs, and the importance of agriculture in the daily lives of Cameroonian. It is hoped that from this link one can make projections on the future of agriculture in Cameroon and its inherent challenges. In order to attain these objectives two working hypotheses are thus postulated in order to ease data collection and analysis, and the discussions:

- Agriculture plays a primordial role in the development of Cameroon.
- The early commendable efforts by government to promote agricultural development in Cameroon after independence have so far not been sustainable.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

While reviewing the importance of agriculture and the situation of agro-pastoral infrastructure in Cameroon as a whole, the study is focused on particular case studies from the North West Province, which are correlated with some examples from the South West Province. The choice of the North West Province is explained by its predominantly rural population (63.5% according to 1998 estimates), which depends solely on agriculture for survival.

The main instrument used to collect primary data is an interview. It was administered among randomly selected farmers and agricultural officials in

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<sup>2</sup> FONADER is the National Fund for Rural Development and MIDENO is the North West Development Authority.

<sup>3</sup> The budgetary allocation for 2002 fiscal year for the Ministry of Agriculture was 3.7% of the national budget, 0.4% higher than the allocation for the Ministry of Interior.

some chosen villages in Mezam, Boyo, Menchum and Bui Divisions. The villages are areas whose farmers have benefited a lot, in the past, from government interventions through agencies such as MIDENO, WADA, IRZ, and PAFSAT<sup>4</sup>. The content of the interview instrument raise questions patterning to the types of innovations that were introduced in the respective localities, the current state of agricultural infrastructures, and the impact of the state of these infrastructures on their performances. Information collected through these interviews has been complemented with other data collected from field observations, related published works, and annual reports of the Divisional, and Provincial, Delegations of agriculture in the selected locations. The information obtained through these sources were analysed alongside past agricultural trends to establish the current relationship between agriculture infrastructure and agricultural development.

### 3. AGRO-PASTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN CAMEROON

Borlang (1999) has argued that there has been too much minimalist thinking about African agricultural development. According to him, the intensification of food production using modern technologies must be at the heart of any rural development efforts in the years ahead in Sub-Saharan Africa. This means that for agriculture to be able to meet present and future challenges in the sub-region, agricultural modernisation must be given adequate attention and priority within the individual countries. Agricultural modernisation in this context entails introducing better techniques of production, through the creation of agro-institutions of training, introducing high yield and resistant crop seedlings, making available to farmers better inputs and equipment, creating farm-to-market roads, identifying markets outlets and also the provision of better incentives to farmers so as to encourage high productivity.

The notion of agro-pastoral infrastructure is not new in Cameroon. Just after independence, the government took some positive steps to develop the agricultural sector through the introduction of agricultural innovations and incentives and, to an extent, the development of some infrastructures. This was part of government commitment to improve the living conditions in rural areas. Although the situation has gone out of control today, the initial intentions were nevertheless good. This section examines the early efforts at modernising Cameroon agriculture in comparison with the current state of these infrastructures.

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<sup>4</sup> PAFSAT stands for Promotion of Adapted Farming Systems based on Animal Traction while WADA is the Wum Area Development Authority.

### 3.1 THE CREATION OF AGRO-PASTORAL INSTITUTIONS

A good number of these institutions were created and equipped for the service of the farmers. These institutions were to provide technical services and carry out research in crop species, and suitable technology for agricultural development at national level. The technical structures in this case included: the National Centre for studies and Experimentation in Agricultural Mechanisation (CENEEMA), the *Mission de Développement des Cultures Vivrières, Marachaires et Fruitières* (MIDEVIV) and the agricultural extension service of the Ministry of Agriculture. CENEEMA had as objective the study the adaptability of agricultural tools to farmers' local operating environment and fixing prices for these tools. MIDEVIV on its part was to produce high quality seedlings for small farmers involved in food production. The Agriculture extension service provides extension workers who disseminate agricultural information and technologies to rural farmers. Some of these information had to do with how to apply fertilizers, insecticides and fungicides to crops, soil conservation, improved food processing techniques, seed multiplication etc. They were provided motor-bikes which enabled them to meet farmers in poorly accessible localities. Today, the numbers of these extension agents have not only dwindled but the few who are available work under deplorable conditions.

### 3.2 PROMOTION OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

In order to improve on farm inputs and output, the government created agricultural research institutions and dotted them across the country. Some of them are the Nkolbissong Research Centre (Mfoundi Division), IRA and IRZ in Bambui and Mankon (Mezam Division), Barombi Kang (Meme Division) and Ekona (Fako Division). These research institutions carried out specialised research on livestock improvements (through hybridization of improved breeds of rabbits, pigs, cattle, etc) as is the case with the IRZ, and the improvements of seedlings of cassava, Irish potatoes, yams, maize, and other cereals, so as to ensure resistance against diseases, and also early crop maturity and better yields. The impact of these institutions on farmers' output was generally impressive in the early days as farmers constantly benefited in the form of high-yielding varieties of crops, increased food production, improved revenue and better living standards. Furthermore, research on the domestication of *eru* (*gnetum africanum*) and on the mushroom tending being carried out at the Limbe botanical garden, has been able to meet external demand from neighbouring Nigeria, and has also diversified local consumption.

### 3.3 CREATION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

In order to discourage rapid urbanisation through the exodus of the potential agricultural labour force from the villages to the towns, government created certain agencies all over the countries. These agencies provided agricultural services, employment and gave other impetus to the rural population. Some of the common examples include MIDENO, WADA, UNVDA in the North West Province, SOWEDA<sup>5</sup> in the South West Province, *Projet de Developpement Rural de la Province de l'Ouest* in the West Province, *Societè d'Expansion et Modernization de la Rizculture de Yagoua* (SEMRY) in the Far North Province etc. These institutions were fashioned to meet the local needs of each locality with far reaching impacts. For example, in order to promote farming and pastoral activities in the North West Province, the government signed a protocol agreement with the German government to create the Promotion of adapted Farming Systems based on Animal Traction (PAFSAT) in 1980. PAFSAT introduced more productive farming techniques, which laid emphasis on the improvement and maintenance of soil fertility, and (the utilization of animal traction oxen) by peasants and rural farmers who could not afford expensive technology. The activities of PAFSAT eased the labour constraints on farmers and improved their yields. But like WADA, it died off and left the poor farmers abandoned just when they needed its services most, because of economic crisis.

In the typically cattle rearing region of northern Cameroon, modern cattle fattening stations were set up in Yagoua; and another in Mbanjock, a cattle dominated area. This was to ensure the provision of meat all round the year. With the same goal in mind, pilot farms for pig poultry were set up in Douala, Mvog-Betsi and Muyuka, to propagate better species and produce high quality feeds. In the same line, artificial pasturage was created at the Serbewell valley in the North Province, to counter the unpredictability of drought and its hazardous effects on cattle and the rural poor.

The government also encouraged the development of farmers' cooperative societies. These cooperatives serve the interest of farmers in the acquisition of farm inputs and in the sale of their produce. Though the government created the National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB), prices for farmers produce like cocoa, coffee, banana etc were stabilise so as to maintain productivity and evict discouragement that could be caused by price fluctuation in the world market. Although these cooperatives were generally organised and run by farmers themselves, government provided them with both material and financial assistance. Through these cooperatives, farmers produce were bought at production points, incentives such as chemicals, fertilizers, cutlasses, and polyethylene bags were provided for them. Proportionate bonuses were given to individual farmers according to the amount of crops sold to the cooperative at the end of each cropping season. The North West Cooperative Association Ltd

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<sup>5</sup> SOWEDA is the South West Development Authority.

based in Bamenda and the South West Farmers Cooperative Society Ltd in Kumba are main umbrella structures of these cooperative in the North West and South West provinces respectively.

### 3.4 CREDIT FACILITIES

Agricultural credit assists farmers to acquire basic tools, new seedlings, and transport and even crop preservation mechanisms. If one considers the fact that small farmers constitute the bulk of the rural poor in Cameroon, then the importance of credit to them and their activities cannot be over emphasised. This seems to be the philosophy behind the early credit schemes that were developed to target farmers in Cameroon.

In fact, right back from the 1960s, through the 1980s, government financed agriculture in Cameroon through the farmers' bank (FONADER) and other subsidies (Websi, 2003). This bank was instrumental in the development of rural areas after its creation in 1973, and boosted agricultural production till 1990. FONADER supported small farmers by providing them with credit for micro-projects like purchasing inputs, and building storage facilities, as earlier mentioned. Even civil servants who had farms also benefited from FONADER scheme. This helped to broaden the scope of production by increasing the population involved. By 1984, FONADER had injected many million CFA francs in the North West Province alone (Azobi, 1988 and Fonjong, forthcoming).

However, the activities of FONADER were soon to ebb away due, to financial mismanagement. However, government's resolve to improve on the liquidity situation of the farmers led to the creation in 1991 of a similar financial institution for farmers known as Credit Agricole. This too collapsed barely six years later. The World Bank supported FIMAC scheme that came up later, and which is currently limping now, is the only source of government credit available to small farmers. FIMAC gives loans to farm groups; it was able to give out over 25 million FCFA to 79 groups between June 2001 and June 2002 in the South West Province, as part of its rural fund (FIMAC, 2002).

#### 3.4.1 Motivation to Farmers

Many activities were carried out by government both at central and external levels to motivate farmers in order to increase production and consequently improve their well-being. In 1972 the government launched the "Green Revolution" in Cameroon. According to Ngwa (1989) and Neba (1999), the Green Revolution has as objective to increase agricultural productivity for both local and external needs by promoting agricultural mechanization through the provision of better inputs and high yield, resistant seedlings, and new livestock breeds to farmers. It also came along with the restitution of regular 'Agricultural

Shows'. The first of such shows was held in 1972 in Buea, the capital of the South West Province.

The launching of Agricultural Shows came along with the institutionalisation of periodic Agricultural festivals, held after every 5 years. The last was held in Bamenda in 1984 for the North West Province, just before the upsurge of the economic crisis. The show provided opportunity for farmers to exhibit their best products, exchange ideas with other farmers and technicians from all parts of the country. This encouraged competition and excellence. It also led to the introduction and diffusion of innovations since it was the unique occasion that brought farmers from all the provinces together.

The strategy of organising regular 'agricultural shows' of rural development in Cameroon disappeared with the advent of the economic crisis in the late 1980s. Another method of motivating farmers was the organization of 'best farm competition' at all levels; that is from the village to the provincial levels. Such competitions and the prizes won by farmers acted as incentives to them and as catalysts for rural development.

#### 4. AGRICULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE

Although the economy of Cameroon also relies heavily on other natural resources like petroleum, bauxite and timber, recent studies by the IMF and the World Bank indicate that Cameroon's crude oil production is falling faster than projected. According to this study, crude oil production fell from 84000 barrels in the year 2000 to 76600 barrels in 2002, and it is estimated to drop further to 50000 barrels by 2005 (Websi, 2003). Websi (2003) observes that if this trend in crude oil production is sustained, then agriculture remains the only fallback solution for Cameroon.

In spite of the enormous importance of agriculture, of which the State is fully aware, agricultural infrastructures are today poorly developed and the small farmers have been left in the wilderness. In fact, the hay-days of agricultural modernisation are gone, and the future of agricultural output and even food security hangs in the balance. The subsequent discussion examines the situation of these infrastructures in the North West Province and its *raison d'être* on food supply. The starting point, of course, is the fact that most of the agricultural population today is ageing. This is as a result of the absence of a policy that creates incentive for the young active population to be involved in the sector. This was not the case in the 1980s when the government managed the Young Farmers' Settlement Scheme. This was a scheme that encouraged young educated persons to take on agriculture as a satisfying and lucrative means of livelihood. It made the agricultural sector as competitive as any other sector of employment. Population instability resulting from rural exodus was thus put in check.



## 5. SLOW DOWN IN AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Field investigations indicate that the first outcome from the closure of WADA and the reduction in the scale of activities of MIDENO, IRZ and IRA in the North West Province is linked to the slow-down of agricultural activities in the various areas. Here, farmers abandoned most of their farms, which these organisations had helped them to open. Table 1 demonstrates the effects of MIDENO and WADA on sampled localities in the North West Province. The table reveals that in all the areas where MIDENO and WADA were present, they carried out a number of activities among the farmers, which ranged from service provision to capacity building. The provision of efficient storage facilities by MIDENO reduces the negative effects of the absence of good roads, as farm produces, which were not readily evacuated to the market, could be preserved. No wonder the premature end of MIDENO's activities in most areas led to the abandonment of most of the high-yielding crops, which had been introduced.

**Table 1.** Decline in the volume of selected crops produced in the North West Province from 1984/85–1997/98.

<b>Crops</b>	<b>1984/85</b>	<b>1985/86</b>	<b>1986/87</b>	<b>1987/88</b>	<b>1988/89</b>	<b>1996/97</b>	<b>1997/98</b>
<b>Arabica Coffee</b>					3,847	2,520	1,146
<b>% Change</b>						-34.5%	-55%
<b>Robusta coffee</b>					1,492	899	141
<b>% change</b>						-39.7	-84%
<b>Cocoa</b>	54					179	0.2
<b>% change</b>						+231%	-99.8%
<b>Oil palm</b>	5,050			9,825			11,500
<b>% change</b>				+94.5%			+7%
<b>Rice</b>			9,332		2,729		
<b>% change</b>					-70%		
<b>Maize</b>		104,735			141,383		183,000
<b>% change</b>					+34.9%		+29.3
<b>Irish Potatoes</b>					16,647	17,737	35,000
<b>% change</b>					+82%	+6.5%	+97%

*Source: Calculated from MINPAT/UNDP (1999)*

A study carried out by MINPAT/UNDP (1999) further affirms this. It indicates that the quantity of cash crops produced witnessed a general drop between the 1984/85 and 1997/98 farming seasons. As indicated in table 1, the drop in production ranged from –6.5% to -99.8%, for some crops, during the period

under consideration. Both Arabica and Robusta coffees, for example, which are the principal cash crop in the Province, saw a drop from 3.417 tons in the 1996/1997 to 1.287 tons in 1997/1998 farming seasons. This represents a 62.3% drop in production within a year. Although part of the reasons for these can be attributed to the negative effects of structural adjustments, the poor state of agricultural infrastructures and services provided to farmers cannot be overlooked. The same reason largely explains the drastic drop observed in the case of cocoa during the same period.

There was however, and understandably too, a very positive increase in production witnessed by Irish potatoes. Irish potatoes, just like maize, serve both as cash and staple crops in the most parts of the Province. Most farmers, particularly in Mezam Division, converted most of their coffee and cocoa farms back to the production of such staple food crops. Besides, these crops require less technical attention. Small farmers here have been in the cultivation of these crops for long and have gained adequate experiences to do without technical assistance. Further, environmental conditions are naturally very favourable for the cultivation of Irish potatoes and maize in most of the Province.

On the whole, however, the performance of farmers in the Province very much depended on the novelties that have been introduced to them by the two main innovation agencies, MIDENO and WADA. Their eventual collapse was a major blow to their productivity and agricultural output in the Province.

**Table 2.** Innovations introduced by MIDENO and WADA in Selected Divisions in the North West Province.

<b>DIVISION</b>	<b>MIDENO</b>	<b>WADA</b>
<b>MEZAM</b>	-Coffee nursery -Provision of extension workers -Distribution of improved seedlings	
<b>BOYO</b>	-Distributed improved seedlings -Created storage facilities -Provided extension workers -Capacity building on farming techniques -Creation of distribution centres for fertilizers	-Provided farming equipments -Provided training skills
<b>BUI</b>	-Introduction of new seedlings, chemical and fertilizer -Animal traction -Cross breeding of cattle	
<b>MENCHUM</b>	-Technical assistance	-Infrastructural Development -Animal traction -Tree crop nursery -Carpentry Project -Auto mobile engineering -Building project -Cattle rearing

*Source: Fieldwork, 2003*

In Fondong (Boyo Division) for example, MIDENO and WADA had distributed improved seedlings, farming tools, created storage facilities and provided specialised skills to farmers through a good number of extension workers being deployed on the field. Farmers had benefited from the opening of seed multiplication farms, and orchards of mangoes, guava, avocado, and other fruits that had a local and international market. Most of these activities and farms have been abandoned by the farmers, or are in a state of near neglect. One of the farmers explained that their activities have been negatively affected by the dislocation of MIDENO centres of distribution, the absence of subsidies and enough extension workers to help them through. Extension services provided by the Ministry of Agriculture are weak both in terms of human and material resources able to ensure an effective coverage of the Province.

A similar situation was recorded in Mambie-Bafut. Here, MIDENO initiated a coffee nursery project and also distributed improved corn and bean seedlings to the farmers. These actions were followed by the deployment of extension agents who provided the necessary follow-up advice to the farmers. But no sooner than the projects have been taken up than they were abandoned. Some of the farmers I interviewed revealed that they had to stop coffee nurseries, and sell off the seedlings, because the spray that was promised them by MIDENO never came. Besides, crops growth was seriously affected negatively. However, some farmers who continued with their farms complained of doing too much work for very low harvest/output. Haematic storage facilities that had been introduced to the farmers, for the storage of corn and other grains, were discontinued because of the lack of follow-up.

Farmers consequently returned to their traditional methods of farming, which in most cases are accompanied by low yielding seedlings, which take quite long to attain maturity. The use of improved seedlings and by extension modern agricultural inputs is an important factor in boosting food production (Hulluka, 2001) in Sub-Saharan Africa. The eventual abandonment of these improved seedlings and agricultural techniques by farmers of the North West Province during this time can only be interpreted as the genesis of low agricultural output in the Province.

**Table 3.** Current state of agricultural innovations in the North West Province after the decline and closure of MIDENO and WADA respectively.

	<b>MIDENO</b>		<b>WADA</b>	
<b>Sampled Areas</b>	Crops introduced	Crops Abandoned	Crops Introduced	Crops Abandoned
<b>BOYO Fondong village</b>	-Hybrid beans (MIDENO Beans) -Hybrid Coffee (Java) -Hybrid Sweet potatoes (MIDENO 0)	None abandoned but productivity is falling drastically because of discontinuity of activities	-Hybrid Maize	Not abandoned but productivity is falling because of discontinuity of support
<b>MEZAM Mambu-Bafut Nforiya-Bafut</b>	-Hybrid Coffee -High yielding corn -Hybrid Beans	-Hybrid Coffee -Hybrid corn -Hybrid beans -Return to local species	None Abandoned	None Abandoned
<b>BUI</b>	-Opako yellow maize -Agricultural potatoes -Soya Beans -Sun flower (egussi)	-Agricultural Potatoes -Sun Flower	None Abandoned	None Abandoned
<b>MENCHUM Befang</b>			-Rice and Maize -Soya Beans -Groundnuts -Oil palms -Tree planting (Acacia spp, Luccania Spp)	-Oil palm -Tree planting -The method of production and the quantity of others has fallen.

*Source; Fieldwork, 2003*

Thus, the closure of WADA was a deadly blow to the population of the Menchum area. The technical assistance provided to farmers and cattle rearers stopped. The carpentry project that provided cheap but comfortable beds, locally called “WADA beds”, also ceased. All these affected farmers’ productivity negatively; giving inevitably to disillusion.

Forty years after independence, the adage that “where a road passes development follows” is yet to be fully integrated by policy makers in Cameroon. Most elements of the metropolitan economy depends very much on rural production, be they industries (for raw materials) or urban dwellers (for food stuff). Disenclaving rural areas and making them accessible for the evacuation of these products is cardinal for economic development. In other words, a country’s development can be slowed down where there are no good roads linking the production zones.

This is exactly the state of roads in the North West Province of Cameroon. As observed from Table 4 below, the column for farm-to-market road has entries for all the seven administrative divisions and their respective subdivisions. These roads also represent the highest in kilometres of all the types of the roads in the province. Unfortunately for farmers, farm-to-market roads constitute the worst state of roads in both the province and the in the country at large. They are in the real sense of the situation merely enlarged footpaths that can only be plied by 4-Wheel-Drive vehicles, in the dry seasons only.

**Table 4.** Distribution of the different categories of roads in the North West Province.

Divisions	Sub-divisions	Length in Kilometres					Total
		Tarred roads	National roads	Provincial roads	Divisional roads	Farm to market roads	
<b>BOYO</b>	Fondong	40	45	50	20	230	385
<b>BUI</b>	Kumbo	10	21			595	626
	Jakiri	15	27	12		176	230
	Oku				42	294	336
<b>DONGA-MANTUNG</b>	Nkambe		56		45	195	296
	Ako				62	183	245
	Ndu		20	20	52	237	329
<b>MENCHUM</b>	Wum		101	22	15	224	362
	Fungom		68	40		120	228
	Benakuma				16	15	31
<b>MEZAM</b>	Santa	20				112	132
	Bamenda	67	61	65		161	354
<b>MOMO</b>	Mbengui			16	87	93	196
	Batibo		56	06	25	368	455
<b>NGOKETUNJIA</b>	Ndop		48		25	109	182
<b>Province</b>		152	503	231	389	3112	4387

*Source: Provincial Delegation of Public Works, situation in February 1999*

On the whole, good and all-seasons' feeder roads are rare in the North West Province. It is one of the most enclaved regions of Cameroon. Before the construction of the Bamenda-Fundong, and Bamenda-Batibo roads (that were financed mostly by the foreign bodies), the total length of tarred roads in the Province was just 51km. These basically consisted of 31km of the inter-provincial road linking Bamenda and Bafoussam, the airport stretch and the major streets of Bamenda town. All the divisional roads were earth roads, which were also seasonal due to poor maintenance. Under such poor conditions of roads, most of the agricultural products cannot be evacuated to the market. This serves as a form of disincentive to farmers as they have no motivation to produce beyond their subsistence level. The 1999 situation according to statistics from the Provincial Delegation of Public Works shows an increase of 101km out of a total road length of 4387, representing barely 0.12% tarred roads.

## CONCLUSION

Very few countries, particularly in the developing world, have experienced rapid economic growth without agricultural growth either preceding or accompanying it (Anderson and Lorch, 2001). This is because agricultural growth is a catalyst to broad based development. At a micro level for instance, it provides eventual savings for entrepreneurial development in the informal sector. At macro level, it provides raw materials, which is a strong base for industrial development. Cameroon plays a leading role in meeting the food needs of the population of the CEMAC zone and even neighbouring Nigeria. Neglecting the agricultural sector is tantamount to creating a situation of food crisis in the sub-region. This will eventually create poverty and unemployment among small farmers who hitherto depended on revenue from the agricultural sector for survival, as is the case in Cameroon.

Although government has indicated its interest in encouraging the agricultural sector in most of its policy documents and official pronouncements, such lip-service must give way to concrete action, and this must be done before long. The downward trend in the investment in the agricultural infrastructures and institutions has to be redressed and reversed. The State has the duty to make the agricultural sector in Cameroon attractive and competitive, as was the case before the late 1980s. The surest way out is accelerated investments in food technology, and research on how to improve basic road infrastructures and effective market mechanisms, to uplift the purchasing power of the non-agricultural population, and develop a strong agric extension and technical service.

A new class of extension workers needs to emerge, which will allow rural people to take initiatives and think about their problems and appropriate solution. This means that there should be fundamental changes in the way they work. These extension agents need to be willing to learn from the villagers by also becoming listeners and facilitators of the development process. There is greater need for the State to train agricultural technicians at all levels to accomplish this objective. This is because extension plays a major role in farmers' decisions on whether and how to use agricultural inputs or adopt innovations.

The need for these actions to be taken is real and urgent today considering the growing demand for food as the population keeps increasing. The population of Cameroon, which is currently growing at a rate of 2.3% (Economic Commission for Africa, 2001), present a crucial equation for policy-makers in this country. This, of course, requires concerted efforts, which cannot exclude actors like NGOs and private initiatives in the search for a possible way out. NGOs have, in many cases, shown that they can be depended upon for concrete results. This can easily be explained by their grass root approach to issues (Fonjong 2001) and, in some cases, the fact that they command the resources and the will to make things happen. The examples of Heifer Project

International (HPI) in the animal sector, Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) in rehabilitating basic infrastructures, and other NGOs in the North West Province, give one reason to count on the potentials of NGOs in affecting the much-desired changes. The bottom line, however, is that government has the duty to harness all these efforts and co-ordinate them for effective delivery. For the benefits from agriculture go beyond achieving food security at local levels alone. Rural co-operatives societies if streamlined along traditional village organisation lines, like the examples of *Groupement villageois* in Benin and the *Ujamma* system in Tanzania, are possible outlets for far-reaching results.

In fact, as the economy of Cameroon enters a recovery phase (from a long period of economic crisis), a second thought on the state of these infrastructures is non-negotiable if the current government propaganda on poverty alleviation, economic development and environmental protection is to be taken seriously. This is simply because rudimentary agriculture cannot assure food security in the country today. One of the most evident entry points could be supporting existing NGOs on the field and embarking on long-term measures like the restoration of existing infrastructures, and putting in place of new ones. Integrated rural development strategy along the lines of the 'McNamara revolution', that emphasised on the improvement of agricultural inputs through innovation diffusion, if adopted can open a new and wider horizon for agricultural development in Cameroon.

In this case therefore, there is need to advance the living conditions of the rural people so as to enable them stay back in the villages and increase productivity and output. Political speeches alone without concrete actions will certainly not do this. Agriculture innovations should be well thought out before their implementation. Government should be able to count the long-term human and financial cost of such innovations to ensure that once started, the process should be sustained. This is because innovation that is not sustainable particularly among rural population, who in most cases are conservatives, is worst than inaction. It leads to disappointment, disillusion and cost in labour. The risk here is that, once such innovation is abandoned it is difficult to return farmers into it. This, of course, blocks the population from accepting any new innovations in the future, particularly if they had suffered heavy loses in the previous attempt. The way forward for Cameroon thus is that Innovations and reforms in the agricultural sector that will lead to the modernisation of the sector must be backed by good policies and a political will from the State that is capable of sustaining field actions, once introduced, to always gain the blessings of the farmers.

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