

Increased Youth Involvement in Modern Agriculture and the Challenges of Farmland Acquisition in Cameroon: A Sociological Appraisal

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Abstract

Recently, several youths are becoming modern farmers. This change in trend prompted this research. This study examines the reasons for the recent increase in Cameroonian youths in modern farming and the challenges of acquiring farmlands. Primary data was collected from 149 survey respondents and 17 interviewees. The analysed data led to the following results. High unemployment and the high cost of living in Cameroon have frustrated many youths and made 91.95% of youth farmers turn to agriculture as an easy opportunity to gain self-employment. The high use of social media by some modern young farmers to showcase their successes and offer online training in farming has motivated many youths to become modern farmers as 68.5% of youth farmers claimed to have received agricultural training through the media. The state of Cameroon in general and the President of the Republic of Cameroon in particular have on several occasions advised youths to engage in farming. Several non-governmental organisations provide grants to modern farmers, encouraging youths to engage in modern farming. The recent increase in the prices of agricultural produce has attracted many youths into modern farming. Young farmers engaged in modern farming face serious problems of farmland acquisition. Many of them cannot buy farmlands and 38.2% of them are forced to practise farming on leased land, leading to exploitation of these modern farmers by their landlords. Youths in modern farming suffer from land disputes through the purchasing of disputed lands. They are generally unable to acquire land certificates for their farmlands. This exposes the youths to future land disputes and makes it difficult for them.

Keywords: Cameroon, Farmlands Acquisition, Modern Agriculture, Modern Farmers, Sociological Appraisal, Youth Involvement.

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INTRODUCTION

Several researchers have proven that the Cameroonian agricultural landscape has been plagued by several problems. Achancho (2013) narrates that about a decade ago, Cameroon faced problems ensuring food security due to rapid population growth on one hand and a declining population of farm workers on the other hand as youths mostly migrated to urban areas, leaving the farms with the old masses. The scare of embracing farming as a means of livelihood in Cameroon is evident even among adolescents who, in choosing their career paths, mostly refuse the choice of farming. The lack of enthusiasm of youths to engage in agriculture is not unique to Cameroon. Global Age Watch (2014) states that the population of young people living in rural areas is reducing, while that of older farmers in rural areas is increasing in low-income and middle-income countries. Nkwain *et al.* (1993) explain that the reducing population of young people and the increasing number of old farmers are caused by the high rate of rural exodus as youths abandon villages for urban areas, leaving the vulnerable old people in villages to work in the farms.

Over almost four decades, Cameroon has had serious issues ensuring food security. Food shortage is common, especially in urban areas. Even in rural areas, food shortage is witnessed, especially during the planting season. Food shortage due to increasing abandonment of rural areas by youths is highly foreseeable. The World Bank in the year 1989 warned that the high rate of urbanisation in Cameroon would increase the need for an ageing population in the rural areas to produce more food (World Bank, 1989). In Cameroon, the increased pressure on the ageing farmers to meet the food need of the country has proven futile. These frail farmers are unable to expand farmlands, are unable to develop new farms and are also unable to rejuvenate old farmlands (IFAD, 2018). These many challenges lead to low food outputs and rising food shortages in the country.

Fifth-form students of secondary schools in Cameroon point out reasons why many young people abandon rural areas by reciting their lessons of geography, spelling out push factors in rural areas such as limited employment opportunities, witchcraft practices, poor roads and poor social amenities in rural areas and, on the other hand, high employment opportunities, educational facilities, good transport facilities and many social amenities in urban areas. From here, one can deduce that the high rural exodus in Cameroon is not solely due to the unwillingness of youths to engage in agriculture but a plethora of factors pushing rural youths from villages to towns and cities in Cameroon. Having much interest in modern agriculture and following the activities of many farmers through their social media platforms, it was discovered in this study that recently, many Cameroonian youths have created platforms showcasing their prowess in modern farming. Modern farming in the context of this study involves farming systems that apply high chemical inputs in the form of fertilisers, pesticides, growth hormones, mechanisation and use of hybrids. This system is different from the traditional farming system common in Cameroon that depends on natural soil quality and on family labour.

The recent change from the neglect of farming some decades ago to the increasing number of youths embracing agriculture in the past decade motivated this research with the following research questions: Why is an increasing number of Cameroonian youths recently engaging in modern agriculture? How easy is it for these youths to acquire farmland? To guide the collection of data, the following hypotheses were used: The recent increase in the cost of living in Cameroon is pushing Cameroonian youths to embrace agriculture as a means of livelihood. The youths engaged in modern agriculture are facing great difficulties in acquiring farmlands.

To orientate this research, the following general and specific objectives were designed. The main objective of this research is to analyse the recent boom in modern farming by youths in Cameroon and explore the predicaments that are related to farmland acquisition. Two specific objectives of this study are the following: to analyse the causes of recent youth attraction in modern agriculture and to examine the land acquisition challenges faced by youths in modern farming in Cameroon.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To guide this research, two theories: the role model theory and the institutional theory were used. The role model theory analyses the influence of role models in the behaviour and actions of mostly youths. Ideas that led to the build-up of the theory of role models were developed by several social researchers. Prominent among these researchers are Robert Merton in the 1950s (Holton, 2004), Albert Bandura in the 1970s (Kearney & Levine, 2020) and the trio Thekla Morgenroth, Michelle Ryan and Kim Peters in the 2010s (Morgenroth et al., 2015).

The concept of 'role model' was established by sociologist Robert K. Merton in the 1950s. Holton (2004) claims that Merton used the concept of 'role model' to assess the interaction of people in the society. According to Merton, people who have succeeded in important endeavours have something to show forth that encourages others to copy their footsteps. Many people fail to develop their own qualities but become motivated by those that have succeeded. Thus, people struggle to be like others who have achieved positive strides in different spheres but fail to make their efforts without the influence of others whom they consider models. Merton's ideas are verified in this study in the sense that many youths who are today embarking on agriculture as their main economic activity originate from peasant parents who practised farming. These youths had rejected farming, considering it mean, degrading and poverty-orientated. Today, because they have seen other youths earning millions of Francs CFA per month from farming, they now see these successful youths as role models and their farming activities as worth emulating.

Bandura (1971), in his Social Learning Theory, shows that through observation and imitation, people learn new skills and behaviours. In other words, the people from whom these skills and behaviours are learnt are the role models, and those learning are the aspirants. Bandura claims that role models are very important in the learning process. Many people tend to do things that others have done successfully. They try to replicate the skills and behaviours used by those who have succeeded in similar activities. In relation to youths engaging in modern farming, the social media space stands out as a platform for observation and learning. Many youths who lacked skills in some types of modern farming activities have gained these skills through social media platforms where they observe and imitate other successful modern farmers. This has helped many youths to gain skills in modern farming types such as poultry farming, pig farming and fish farming.

Role models are admired by many people for their achievements in several fields. Those who admire these role models tend to copy their examples, hoping to replicate their success stories. Morgenroth *et al.* (2015) explain that role models have successes that are admired by their aspirants. Through these successes, the aspirants develop goals and motivations. These goals and motivations push the aspirants to study the models in order to copy their attributes that led to their successes. The study of role models by their aspirants enables the aspirants to develop attributes similar to those of the role models. The attainment of attributes by the aspirants makes their goals attainable. The role models enable their aspirants to break barriers of

stereotypes as they develop the belief that they can succeed, same as their role models. In line with our study, many youths refused to practise agriculture in the past mainly due to the absence of agricultural role models. This seems to have changed in the recent years. Some youths that have recorded significant successes in modern agriculture in Cameroon have made themselves role models to other youths. These youths have created social media platforms through which they encourage other young compatriots to emulate their success stories. Some of these role models show off their successes in poultry farming, fruit farming, fish farming, and cash crop farming, among others. Through their media platforms, many aspirants have copied their examples and have embraced agriculture as their main economic activity.

The institutional theory was developed as from the 1970s. Its proponents include Walter W. Powell, Paul J. DiMaggio, John W. Meyer, Brian Rowan and Richard Scott (Delmestri, 2007). The theory has diverse approaches in defining and understanding institutions (Woodhouse & Johnston, 2023, cited by Woodhouse, 2024). Based on this theory, organisations are influenced by their environments, through their cultures, policies, economic and social lives, and they must comply with the rules of the society (Scott, 1995). Administrative procedures, laws, policies, customs, traditions and government agencies are all classified as institutions that aim to gain legitimacy and acceptance from the population (Deephhouse, 1996).

The role of institutions in the institutional theory is to provide a stable society by controlling behaviours, promoting acceptable norms and making sure the society succeeds (Scott, 1995). These institutions provide rules and regulations that constrain the behaviours of people in the society as they make people adhere voluntarily or coerce them to abide (Bourguignon, 2022). Institutions not only determine human behaviours but also determine how resources in the society are distributed and managed by these institutions (North, 1990).

In relation to our study, the institutions theory explains how land is governed by different institutions such as the Ministry of State property, Surveys and Land Tenure, municipal councils, and traditional councils. These institutions have put in place rules and regulations to be respected by the population in matters of land acquisition, management and utilization. The population has to adhere freely or by coercion to these institutional rules and regulations. In the case where the institutions that govern, manage and distribute land are weak or work ineffectively, they breed chaos and uncertainty in matters of land acquisition, ownership and exploitation. The chaos is evident through double sales of land, challenges in acquiring land certificates, and land disputes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This research makes use of mixed-method research to analyse the reasons for increased youth involvement in modern farming and the challenges of farmland acquisition in Cameroon. The study is based on qualitative and quantitative data used to verify the hypotheses and meet the objectives. Secondary data was sourced from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and institutional databases. Field research carried out in many rural areas of Cameroon constitutes the main source of primary data. This primary data was collected from youths engaged in modern farming, from agricultural extension workers, from members of non-governmental organisations, from some local authorities and from secondary school students. Principally, primary data was collected using a questionnaire and interview guides.

Sampling Design

The research design is centred mainly on multistage sampling. Firstly, four administrative regions of Cameroon with high involvement of youths in modern agriculture were selected. From each of these regions, four villages with a high number of youths in modern farming were chosen for the collection of primary data. The proportion of male to female youth farmers in modern agriculture was considered in the distribution of questionnaires. Thus, the stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample population of youths in modern agriculture in order to limit bias in the selection of respondents. This stratified random sampling technique ensured the inclusion of all valuable strata of the population in the sample population. There was a high sex disparity in the selection of youth farmers, with more male respondents compared to female respondents. This stemmed from the limited number of female youth farmers compared to the high number of male youth farmers engaged in modern farming. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 47 secondary school students from two schools in the town of Buea for data collection. Table 1 below illustrates the selection of respondents.

Table 1: Sample villages, numbers of youths in modern farming and questionnaire distribution

Regions selected	Villages selected	No of youths in modern farming		No of questionnaires		Questionnaire response rate	
		Males	Females	To males	To females	Males	Females
South-west	Kongwe	28	11	9	4	8	3
	Mondoni	22	5	7	2	7	2
	Mudeka	27	15	9	5	9	4
	Ikata	19	2	6	1	6	1
Littoral	Miang	29	3	9	1	8	1
	Kappa	34	7	11	2	11	1
	Penda Mboko	25	3	8	1	7	1
	Bomono	23	10	7	3	7	3
West	Bafou	31	7	10	2	9	1
	Balesing	21	2	7	1	6	1
	Fokoue	29	5	9	2	9	2
	Fongo-Tongo	35	3	11	1	9	1
Centre	Mvog Onamenye 1	26	0	8	0	7	0
	Ekot	28	4	9	1	9	1
	Saa Nord	22	4	7	1	7	1
	Saa Sud	18	3	6	1	6	1
Total		417	84	133	27	125	24
General total		501		160		149	
Percentage (%)		100		32		93.1	

Sources: Fieldwork data, 2026.

From Table 1 above, questionnaires were distributed to 32% of youth farmers involved in modern agriculture in the selected villages. A questionnaire response rate of 93.1% was realised. Concerning interviews, a total of 17 persons were interviewed to collect mostly

qualitative data. Persons interviewed were local traditional authorities in selected villages, agricultural extension workers and youth farmers.

The data collected in the field were quantitatively and qualitatively analysed. Cross-tabulation analysis and frequency analysis were used to analyse the quantitative data. Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis and narrative analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Causes Of Recent Youth Attraction In Agriculture

Few youths in Cameroon admire farming as a source of livelihood. Out of the 149 youth farmers sampled, only 6, making 4.1%, declared that they admired becoming farmers in their younger ages. From a sample of 47 secondary school students from two schools in Buea, 45 out of the 47, making 95.7%, declared that they will not want to become farmers. Even though some end up becoming farmers in later years, they had expected to take up other forms of economic activity. Despite their limited admiration for farming as an employment, many of these youths have ended up as farmers, promoting modern farming in Cameroon. The reasons for the recent attraction of these youths to modern agriculture include high unemployment, the high cost of living, the role of the media, the role of the state and rising prices of agricultural products.

High Unemployment And High Cost Of Living

A particularity of Cameroonian youths involved in modern farming is the fact that before they decided to engage in farming, they had struggled to gain employment in other sectors of economic activities. Some of these people had tried to secure employment in other blue-collar and white-collar jobs without success. After several trials to gain employment in other jobs, frustration pushed some of them into farming. As high as 91.95% of the youth farmers had tried to gain employment in other fields besides agriculture without success. This is mainly caused by the high rate of unskilled labour among Cameroonian youths and limited employment opportunities in white- and other blue-collar jobs. After their inability to be employed in other jobs, agriculture appears to them as the last option. This is because farming provides self-employment and the youth with limited capital can begin at a small scale before expanding. Table 2 below shows that most of these youth farmers have on many occasions been rejected for recruitment in other job opportunities.

Table 2: Frequency of unsuccessful application for employment in other types of jobs before engaging in farming

How often have you been unsuccessful in gaining other jobs?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Many times	116	77.9
Few times	15	10.1
A single time	6	4.0
Never	12	8.0
Total	149	100.0

Source: Research findings (2026)

Table 2 shows that the inability of young people to gain employment in other domains significantly pushes them to engage in agriculture. This is evident as 77.9% of young farmers have, on several attempts, failed to gain employment in other job opportunities. Actually, only 12 out of 149 (8%) of these farmers have never sought employment in other activities beside farming.

A particularity of the job market in the era of globalisation is job insecurity caused by high geographical and occupational mobility of labour (Raeder *et al.*, 2019). In this study, 44.3% of youth farmers engaged in modern farming have lost previous job opportunities before becoming farmers. Actually, 34.9% of these farmers have lost more than one previous employment, while 9.4% have lost an employment prior to taking up modern farming. This is because higher-quality labour and cheap labour have become so mobile, making people easily lose their jobs. Thus, the ease with which youths lose jobs is surely one of the reasons why they seek self-employment in modern farming. To these youth farmers, engaging in modern farming gives them job security as they are self-employed, suggesting that job insecurity in Cameroon pushes job seekers to activities that guarantee job security, and agriculture is one of these activities in the case where the farmer is self-employed.

Another reason attracting youths into farming in general and modern farming in particular is the rising cost of living in Cameroon. From 2018 to 2024, a litre of petrol and diesel rose from 630 to 840 francs and from 575 to 828 francs CFA, respectively. This shows a 33.3% increase in the price of petrol and a 44% increase in the price of diesel. In the year 2023, increase in fuel prices caused an 11.1% inflation in food prices and a 15% inflation in transport prices (World Food Programme, 2024). Despite the high cost of living that plagued the country over decades, the rise in cost of living over the last decade became alarming. The hikes in the prices of petroleum products increased the cost of production, and this created cost-push inflation in Cameroon whereby basic commodities, housing, transport cost among others witnessed persistent increase in prices. However, the situation of rising cost of living of rural dwellers in Cameroon is better than that of their urban counterparts. In rural areas, house rents are far affordable. Movements are limited, leading to low expenditure on transportation. The cost of foodstuffs is low as subsistence farming, whereby farmers cultivate their foodstuffs has made the rural dwellers to spend little incomes on food.

Many low-income earners in general and the unemployed persons in particular have been unable to cope with the rising cost of living in urban centres of Cameroon. In this study, 78.5% of youths that have recently engaged in modern farming lived in urban centres before relocating to rural areas where they now practice farming. This is because their meagre incomes were insufficient to cover their expenses in the urban centres. Faced with this reality of rising cost of living, some urban dwellers have relocated to rural areas where the cost of living is relatively low. These farmers declared that life is more expensive in towns and cities in Cameroon and this makes it difficult for the low-income urban population to live comfortable lives.

Contributions of the Media

An important factor pushing youths in Cameroon to engage in modern agriculture is the role played by the media. Different types of media in Cameroon and the world at large help to lure youths into modern farming.

The famous French Language newspaper called *La Vioix du Paysan* since 1988 when it was created has published countless articles that encourage farmers. Through these articles, many Cameroonians have gained knowledge on the importance of farming, techniques of farming

and some solutions to farming challenges. This incites youths to be interested in farming. This print newspaper is unpopular among Anglophone youth farmers as only 37.8% know of the existence of this newspaper and only 13.3% of these farmers have read at least an article from this newspaper. On the contrary, this newspaper is popular among francophone youth farmers as 79.8% know of its existence and 51.9% read articles from this newspaper frequently. The popularity of this print newspaper among francophone youth farmers compared to anglophone youth farmers is simply because this is a French language newspaper, a language not understood by many anglophone youth farmers. Thus, this can play a role in converting francophone youths to become farmers. Many television and radio stations in Cameroon have agricultural programs that aim at helping farmers improve on their farming activities. Actually, 68.5% of youth farmers claim to have learnt aspects of farming from these radio and television programs. The role of the print and broadcast media is significant in helping to convince youths to become farmers through their educative slots that help to train youth farmers.

Presently, social media is playing a significant role in this scenario of young people taking up farming. For example, it provides a platform for young people to display their successes. Many youths in modern farming have become social media influencers who use their social media platforms to display their prowess in modern agriculture. Sometimes, the flaunts made on social media make modern farming to appear to be easy and without risks of failures. Ramavhale *et al.*, (2024) highlight similar benefits of social media to farmers. This, for sure, is a motivating factor to many youths facing economic hardship in Cameroon; they see new possibilities of economic success through modern farming. Some modern agricultural social media influencers go as far as telling their followers how easy they have become rich within short periods of engaging in modern farming. Thus, these social media farmer-influencers are role models that influence thousands of youths interested in farming. They have made these youths to believe that they will also become successful if they engage in modern farming. As high as 75.2% of young farmers engaged in modern farming declared that they were influenced by the success stories of other young farmers through social media platforms.

Furthermore, according to the findings of this study, social media and web media have encouraged Cameroonian youths to engage in modern farming through online training. Many youth farmers in modern farming declared that prior to becoming farmers, they had almost no skills in the type of modern farming they now practise but depended on social and web media for online training. Some youths in modern farming through their social media platforms offer free training to those interested in different types of modern farming. Hence, some young Cameroonians have gained training on market gardening, poultry, pig, and fish farming. These training courses are mostly offered free of charge as the trainees only need data to connect to the internet and benefit from the training. Many youths have created WhatsApp groups, telegram groups, among others where members follow up training on specific systems of modern farming and are free to ask questions and receive answers wherever they have misunderstandings. Most of these farmers claimed that modern farming is easy today with the existence of the internet, especially the existence of YouTube that has videos of almost all aspects related to ways of practicing modern farming. Table 3 below illustrates the importance of social and web media in attracting youths of Cameroon to modern farming.

Table 3: Importance of social and web media in training youths on modern farming

Level of dependence on social and web media training in modern agriculture	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Most dependent	58	38.9
Dependent	61	40.9
Less dependent	21	14.1
Non-dependent	9	6.0
Total	149	100.0

Source: Research Findings (2026)

From Table 3, there are 119 (79.8%) youth farmers in modern agriculture who depend on social and web media for online training in agricultural methods. Actually, the level of dependence varies as 58 (38.9%) and 61 (40.9%) of respondents mostly depend, and depend respectively on online training on farming methods using social and web media. The high level of dependence on social and web media is demonstrated by 61.1% of youth farmers who claim that their successes in modern farming depend on the online training gained, while 49.7% of these young farmers claim these online training courses positively influenced them to become modern farmers.

For a long time, middlemen have played a great role in the commercialisation of farm produce. These middlemen bought the farm produce at give-away prices from the farmers in rural areas and resold these farm produce at very high prices, especially in urban markets (Piabuo *et al*, 2020). In food crop farming, middlemen called *bayam-sellam* in Cameroon, visit farmers in remote villages where they buy cheap foodstuffs from the farmers and resell in urban markets. This low agricultural profit made by farmers is one of the factors that for a long time discouraged many youths in Cameroon from becoming farmers. However, the use of social media has recently encouraged many youths to embark in modern farming as they are assured to use social media platforms to publicise their farm outputs and attract large markets. Actually, 54.4% of youths involved in modern farming make use of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp, to advertise their farm outputs. Certainly, through the use of these social media platforms, youth farmers are assured of making their products known to the large population of social media users. As high as 72%, 95.8% and 64% of poultry, fish, and pig farmers respectively depend on social media for the sale of their farm outputs. Specifically, 71.6% of youths engaged in poultry, fish, and pig farming declared that the assurance to make use of social media advertisement attracted them into modern agriculture. It is clear that the use of social media to advertise farm produce by youth farmers not only increases sales but also favours higher prices. High social media publicity by youth farmers has increased farmgate marketing where the farmers sell their farm produce in their farms directly to consumers, thereby eliminating the middlemen and assuring higher profits.

The Role of the State and NGOs

The President of the Republic of Cameroon is a role model to many youths. While many youths believe that their livelihoods can be assured by securing a white-collar or blue-collar job besides farming, the socio-economic hardship faced by Cameroon over several decades makes it difficult for these youths to gain decent employments. For a long time, many youths did not see themselves becoming farmers in Cameroon. However, faced with the problems of food scarcity, skyrocketing prices of foodstuffs and generalised poverty in Cameroon, the President

of the Republic of Cameroon Paul Biya in some of his traditional Youth Day eve speeches encouraged youths to embrace agriculture as a way of solving socio-economic problems in the country (Business in Cameroon, 2016). In his 2012 Youth Day eve speech to the youths, the President declared that agriculture is the main path to the economic emergence of Cameroon. This encouragement was reiterated in the Youth Day eve speeches of 2016 and 2018 (Mbele et al, 2024).

On several occasions the President of Cameroon has encouraged youths to take up farming by posting photographs and sometimes short videos of himself in farms. He published a short video of himself visiting a modern maize farm and photographs of himself harvesting pineapple in a plantation. He last presided the January 2011 Agro-pastoral show in Ebolowa where he encouraged Cameroonians in general to engage in modern farming. The repeated calls of the President of the Republic of Cameroon for youths to engage in farming has encouraged several youths who look up on him as a model to accept becoming farmers, promoting modern farming in Cameroon. Some youths in modern farming who make up 26.2% declared that they are simply implementing the president's advice to youths. This shows that the repeated appeals of President Paul Biya to youths is yielding fruits as some youths are confirming that his requests are part of the reasons they became modern agriculture farmers. Although appeals from the President for youths to take up agriculture could not produce the expected results without financial and material means available to youths, many have developed interest in the appeals of the President by claiming that their involvement in agriculture is a response to the President's call.

The provision of grants to modern farmers by the state and several non-governmental organisations is a reason while some youths have become modern farmers in Cameroon. The findings of this study reveal that 25.5% of the youth farmers engaged in modern farming, started off by creating agricultural Common Initiative Groups (CIGs) and other farming associations with the hope to attract financial and material assistance from NGOs and from the state. 35.6% of youth farmers affirmed to have benefited from financial and or material assistance from NGOs or the state of Cameroon. Some youth farmers declared that after declaring their farming CIGs and associations, they came out with projects and solicited aid from NGOs and from some state departments for financial and material assistance to enable them start their farming activities. The possibility of receiving financial and material support from the state and from NGOs before starting farming activities acts as a boost to potential young farmers, attracting them to engage in agricultural activities. In Cameroon, Law No 92/006 of August 14, 1992 allows for creation and operation of Common Initiative Groups without government intervention (Jiotsa et al, 2015). This law was later backed by Law No 99/014 of 22nd December 1999 relating to freedom of associations in Cameroon. The liberalisation of the creation of NGOs in the 1990 coincided with a period of economic hardship in Cameroon. Tanga and Fonchingong (2009) declare that the economic hardship faced by Cameroon resulted to an increase in the number of humanitarian non-governmental organisations in the country. These laws and the increase in humanitarian non-governmental organisations encourage many youths to become modern farmers by creating agricultural associations and CIGs. These young farmers are eager to benefit from the assistance granted either by the state or the NGOs directly to individual farmers or to CIGs and other farming associations. Thus, by the early 2000s, many youths had engaged in modern farming.

Food Scarcity, Rising Prices And Higher Benefits To Farmers

Some decades ago farmers cried of limited market for their cash crops due to the effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme on Cameroon (Amin, 1995). Thus, they sold their farm produce at low prices, leading to limited profits. According to farmers, the problem stemmed from high farm productivity in Cameroon and limited demands for farm produce. This situation has changed over the last decade in Cameroon. For some years now, the foodstuff markets have been plagued by food scarcity. In many of these markets, food demand is higher than food supply. Some consumers questioned in this study declared that they are sometimes forced to consume what is available in the markets other than what they actually want to consume. Some consumers claim to have learnt how to substitute vegetables, fish, meat and other foodstuffs in the market by switching to what is available once they cannot find the items on their shopping lists.

The scarcity of foodstuffs in Cameroon has led to demand-pull inflation over the past decade. Basic foodstuffs in Cameroon have witnessed rapid price increase. The price of rice, bread, beans, maize, plantains, cocoyam and fruits in general have almost doubled in the last decade. In the year 2023, household real incomes of Cameroonians witnessed great fall due to a 13.7% rise in food prices and an inflation rate of 7.5% (National Institute of Statistics, 2023). In the year 2015, a kilogram of cocoa sold between 1500 and 1700 FCFA; a 50kg bag of rice sold for about 15 000 FCFA; (Nchinda, 2017). In December 2024, the price of a 25kg bag of commonly consumed brand of rice in markets in Douala had witnessed price hikes from about 11 000 FCFA in the year 2021 to 17 000 FCFA, indicating a 54.5% price increase. A 200g bread that sold for 125 FCFA in 2021 sold for 150 FCFA as from march 2022, indicating a 25% price increase (Business Cameroon, 2023). Poultry farmers in Mounjo Division of the Littoral Region and in Tiko Subdivision in Fako Division of the Southwest Region declared that a 3kg broiler bird that sold for 3000 FCFA around the year 2018 now sells for about 5 000 FCFA, indicating 66.7% increase in price. Maize farmers in Fako and Mounjo divisions of the Southwest and Littoral regions respectively declared that a 20-litre bucket of maize that sold for 3000 FCFA in the year 2019 sold for about 6 500 FCFA before December 2024. Certainly, the rising inflation also increases cost of production, but farmers still make high profits by pushing the burden of the rising cost on consumers through higher prices of farm produce. These high profits therefore act as an attraction of youths to modern farming.

Farmland Acquisition Challenges Faced By Youths In Modern Agriculture

Farmers in Cameroon generally face several challenges in their farming activities such as problems of pest, poor evacuation routes, limited capital and limited market. However, this section of research is concerned with challenges that youth farmers face in the acquisition of farmlands. These specific challenges include land tenure problems, difficulties in acquiring land certificates and high cost of acquiring farmlands.

Land Tenure Problems

Land tenure problems are faced by a majority of youth farmers engaged in modern agriculture in Cameroon, as 55.7% of these farmers claim to suffer from land tenure problems. Many youth modern farmers carryout their farming activities on leased farmlands. Actually, 38.2% of the youth farmers carried out their farming activities on leased farmlands. They accuse their landlords of extorting money from them using threats to end the lease. Some of these landlords increase cost of the land lease, especially when they presume that the young farmers are making some profits from their farming activities. This increase in the cost of farm lease makes it

difficult for some farmers to make profits. In other cases, some landlords arbitrary end the lease without prior notices and without giving the farmers adequate time to look for new farmlands. Youth farmers who claim to have suffered from arbitrary end of lease make up 10.1% of total youth farmers engaged in modern farming. Some youth farmers practising farming on leased farmlands claim to have the capital to buy their own lands but have for long duration been unable to have suitable lands to buy. Others claim to have been defrauded by middlemen and fake landlords who sell land they do not own to these farmers only for the rightful owners to evict the farmers from the lands. 7.4% of the farmers claim to have been defrauded in their attempts to buy farmlands. The laws governing land tenure in Cameroon are complex and difficult to be understood by local farmers. Thus, problems linked to land acquisition and exploitation are many in Cameroon. These land tenure problems discourage youths from sometimes venturing into farming.

Land dispute is another land tenure problem faced by youth farmers. The farmers disclosed that land disputes result from the acts of dubious individuals who illegally sell other people's farmlands. Sometimes, fake land certificates are used to sell the farmlands. Unfortunately, in the course of exploiting these farmlands, other people show up and halt the farming activities. This sometimes leads to land disputes as the young farmers who buy the lands upon the brandishing of land certificates argue with confidence that the lands are rightfully theirs. Cases like these become legal disputes that sometimes involve the intervention of the law. The selling of farmlands belonging to other persons caused 5.4% of young farmers engaged in modern farming to suffer from land disputes. Another cause of land dispute is double-selling of farmlands. Some landlords are dubious as they sell the same farmlands to multiple buyers. This problem was suffered by 3.4% of the young farmers. Whenever multiple persons buy the same farmland, the dispute are usually among the buyers as each one tries to push the other buyers away from the farmland. This sometimes leads to destruction of farm produce, sometimes attracting administrative intervention and legal cases in courts. The following is the experience shared by a modern pig farmer in Kongwe village of Tiko Subdivision of the Southwest Region.

I bought 1.2 hectares of farmland from a man. All documents proved that the land was his. I paid some boys to clear the bushes in half of the land in order to start the construction of my pig farm. These boys were stopped by some people who claimed the land was their family land and they had not sold the land to anybody. I confronted these people and discovered that they were brothers of the man who sold the land to me. These people produced another document that showed the person who sold the land to me had no legal right to do so. I was asked to rebuy the land from them or leave. All legal means have proven futile as the person who sold the land to me migrated out of the country just after I paid him for the land.

Difficulties In Acquiring Land Certificates

Young farmers claim that one of the most serious land tenure problems they face is the difficulty in acquiring land certificates for their farmlands. The land tenure system of Cameroon does not permit young farmers to easily apply for land certificates. People can apply for land certificates on land that they effectively occupied before 1974 (Javelle, 2013). Based on ordinance No 74-1 of 6 July 1974 to established rules governing land tenure in Cameroon, land certificates are given to people or communities that occupied the land effectively before 1974. Thus, young farmers who effectively practice modern farming on farmlands they recently bought complained of their inability to apply for land certificates. Others have to

associate with persons born before 6 July 1974 and apply for land certificates. According to the young farmers, their association with older persons to obtain land certificates have a weakness as it can lead to land disputes in future between the young farmers and the older persons they associate with in order to obtain the land certificates. Young farmers declared that their inability to obtain land certificate creates fear and makes their investments in farming insecure.

Another difficulty faced by young modern farmers in acquiring land certificates stems from the bureaucratic bottleneck involved in the procedure for acquiring land certificates in Cameroon. All the farmers affirmed that much delay is involved in the procedure of acquiring land certificates. From the time the administrative procedures to obtain land certificates were launched to the time the certificates were obtained for the few of them who have acquired land certificates, an average duration of two years three months was involved. According to the farmers, the delays registered in the process of acquiring land certificates discourages them from starting the process of land certificate acquisition.

The cost of acquiring land certificate is considered high by all youths in modern farming. These farmers claim that most of the money spent at different stages in the process of acquiring land certificates is not backed by legal documents justifying the expenses. At each level, authorities come up with charges to be paid before the documents of the farmers are validated for signature. This makes the farmers to incur huge expenses in the course of establishing their land certificates. Some of the farmers said that they were tired of giving money in every office their documents passed through. These farmers claim that once an applicant fails to give money to agents in the different offices their application files pass through, the files are not treated and are abandoned. Farmers in Fako Division in particular declared that the cost of acquiring land certificates for their farmlands was exaggerated. They claim that to begin the process of acquiring land certificate, they have to obtain authorisation letters from the Minister of Land Tenure, a procedure that has been made so expensive by middlemen who prevents applicants from having direct access to the office involved in receiving applications for the ministerial authorisations. These middlemen, according to the youth farmers, work in close collaboration with officials in the Ministry of Land Tenure as they collect huge sums of money and within few days hand over the ministerial authorisations to the applicants. Youth farmers in Fako Division who have small farmlands declared that they had to cough out close to a million francs CFA to obtain the ministerial authorisation to commence the process of obtaining land certificates. Farmers with many hectares of farmland claim to have spent over a million France CFA just to obtain the minister's authorisation letter to enable them start the process of obtaining land certificates. This additional cost and the high cost at the level of the Southwest Region have discouraged many young farmers in the Southwest Region from applying for land certificates for their farmlands.

High Cost Of Acquiring Farmlands

According to farmers, land acquisition is a serious handicap that prevents many people from practicing agriculture. The local authority and the state ease the transfer of vast pieces of farmland to foreign investors, depriving local youths of the ability to acquire vast farmlands. Youth farmers lack adequate means to acquire farmlands, making it easy for these farmlands to be easily taken over by the capitalist corporations. The difficulty involved in purchasing farmlands in many areas of Cameroon has caused 38.2% of youth modern farmers in this study to carry out farming activities on leased farmlands. Out of the youth modern farmers who own farmlands, 51.1% claim that their farmlands are small for their farming activities and they are

seeking financial means to acquire more farmlands. Unfortunately, most of these farmers complained of facing many challenges in their attempts to secure loans. Concerning bank loans, 81.9% of the young modern farmers claim to have been unable to acquire substantial loans from banks and microfinance institutions. Their inability to provide collateral is the reason farmers are unable to secure bank loans. Real estate property with land certificates is valued collateral requested by banks for huge amounts of loans. Unfortunately, 91.3% of youth modern farmers in Cameroon do not have real estate property that have land certificates. To easily have loans in order to purchase farmlands, 95.3% of youth modern farmers rely on Rotating Saving and Credit Associations (ROSCAs). Besin-Mengla (2020) narrates the importance of ROSCAs in providing small scale loans to farmers in the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon. Unfortunately, these ROSCAs are not able to allocate substantial loans to the farmers. The limited savings made by their members are not substantial enough to permit the youth farmers to acquire huge loans. As a consequence, some of them continue to practice farming on leased lands.

Youth modern farmers in Cameroon acknowledged assistance to farmers by the state and non-governmental organisations. Those who have benefited from financial and material assistance from NGOs or the state of Cameroon made up 35.6%. However, these farmers mentioned that they could not depend on state and NGO assistance to acquire farmlands for two main reasons: uncertainty of obtaining this assistance and the low frequency in obtaining the assistance. The youth farmers claim to always solicit financial and material assistance from the state and from NGOs. Unfortunately, these farmers are never certain of obtaining the solicited assistance. Sometimes when the farmers are granted the assistance from the state and from NGOs, the quality and quantity of this assistance are usually low and unreliable. Some of these youth farmers claim that the assistance they have received from the state and from NGOs helped them in acquiring farmlands, but they cannot depend on these grants, as there is no certainty that a farmer will receive the grants at a particular period. Secondly, the youth farmers acknowledged that grants given to farmers by the state and by NGOs are not frequent. A farmer can carry out farming activities for a decade without benefiting from any state or NGO assistance.

CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges faced by youths in rural areas in general and in agriculture in particular, there is a recent change in the agricultural landscape of Cameroon as more youths are getting involved in modern farming. This was not the case some decades ago when most youths envisaged themselves engaging in activities not related to farming, especially in the urban centres of Cameroon. In the past, farms were mostly abandoned to aged persons who were tired and less productive. The limited agricultural productivity in an agriculture-dependent Cameroon could not guarantee an adequate provision of the vital needs of the urban masses. Faced with the rising cost of foodstuffs and other basic necessities and growing unemployment, youths in urban centres in Cameroon could not assure adequate living conditions. Unable to continue supporting the high cost of living in urban centres in particular, many youths have recently returned to rural areas where the rising prices of agricultural produce have attracted them to embrace modern farming. Unfortunately, youths in modern farming face many problems related to farmland acquisition and exploitation. They suffer from land disputes stemming from the buying of disputed farmlands; they are unable to easily acquire land certificates for their farmlands; and they lack adequate means that can enable them to acquire vast farmlands. The main limitation of this study is geographical, as primary data in this study

was collected in four out of the ten political regions of Cameroon. This, however, does not weaken the quality of results, as the four regions were selected based on the social, economic and cultural characteristics that can be found in all the other political regions.

From this study, it is clear modern farming is an easy way out of unemployment and economic hardship for the millions of unemployed youths in Cameroon. Other urban youths suffering from the brunt of economic hardship should emulate the example of their former urban peers who have relocated to rural areas and taken up modern farming as a livelihood. However, this will not be easy without assistance from the government and other agricultural stakeholders. Thus, the government of Cameroon should allocate resources to create favourable conditions for the relocation of unemployed youths and their conversion to modern farmers. The theoretical implication of this study is its application of the role model theory that explains how youths have been attracted into modern agriculture from the success stories of their agricultural role models. The practical implication of this research shows that more youths in Cameroon will embrace modern farming if the government facilitates access to farmlands and farm inputs.

IMPLICATION OF RESEARCH

The practical implication of this study suggests that the government of Cameroon can be inspired by the rising number of youths engaging in modern farming to revamp the agricultural sector in Cameroon by creating an enabling environment for the farmers. This can be done by creating agricultural cooperatives, providing low-interest rate loans to farmers and creating a general agricultural subsidisation scheme. The government can also use this research to resolve the many land acquisition difficulties faced by farmers: she can ease the process of acquiring farmlands and obtaining land certificates for farmlands in Cameroon.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FUTURE RESEARCHERS

This research is a motivation to researchers of other disciplines for them to carry out interdisciplinary research on themes such as cultural dynamics, land tenure systems and youth involvement in modern farming, and national agricultural policies and implications on youth involvement in modern farming.

INFORMED CONSENT

All respondents who provided information used in this study agreed voluntarily to do so after the researcher had explained the stakes involved in this study. A document proving consent was signed by each respondent. Since students who are mostly minors were involved in the data collection process, the consent of the school administration was first sought, followed by signed consents of the parents and guardians of the students. Thus, no data were collected from a respondent without an approved and signed consent.

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

The author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, Copilot, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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