

ICTs and Improvement of Agriculture in the North West Region of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This chapter evaluates the link that exists between ICTs and the promotion of agricultural activities. It presents forms of ICTs within the region, agricultural practices, and how they interact to enhance development. Qualitative and quantitative research designs were adopted with the use of semi-structured interviews and observation and questionnaires. Data derived was coded and analyzed using appropriate statistical procedures to come out with the following findings: diverse forms of ICTs, both traditional and modern, are available for the population of the North West Region; agricultural activities in the North West Region were found to be diverse though subsistence; ICTs present were found to be very significant in promoting agricultural activities in the region. Despite the problems that hinder the integration of ICTs in the agricultural sector of the region, increased capital and training will help boost this sector and enhance the socio-economic development of the region.

KEYWORDS

Agriculture, ICTs, North West Region, Socio-Economic Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture can be defined as the growing of crops and the tending of livestock whether for subsistence of the producers or for sale or exchange. As defined, there are two main sub divisions of agriculture, farming and livestock. First, consider farming which is the cultivation of crops and which is the main activity of the people of the North West. By 2012, the North West Region counted 161032 agricultural families and apart from children 7 persons in average out of 10, that is about 70% of the total population (1620000 people) were working in the agricultural sector (2012 development report for the region).

The term Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is used to refer to hardware, software, networks and media for collection, storage, processing, transmission and presentation of information in the formats of voice, data, text and images (World Bank ICT Glossary Guide). As such, the nature of ICTs is diverse, ranging from telephones, radios and TVs to more complex technologies such as Internet technologies, mobile telephony, computers and databases.

The ‘raison d’être’ of this paper is to find out and evaluate the available ICTs that can be used and the existing agricultural activities of the region. There is equally the need to find out how these technologies have contributed to promoting the activity within the region as well as the challenges faced. This paper therefore seeks to present traditional and modern forms of ICTs within the region, the agricultural practices and how they interact to enhance development.

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2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Agricultural Sector of the North West Region

Comparatively to other regions of the country, the North West has very little cultivated land (about 20% as indicated on Table 1) despite the high potential of the arable land it possesses. It is only in Ndu, Ndawara and the Ndop plains that agro industrial activities are well developed by the Cameroon Tea estate for tea and UNVDA for rice. In the rest of the region, traditional agriculture on small parcels of family land of about 0.7ha and at times less is used with rudimentary tools and very little inputs.

This agriculture is mostly subsistence with low yields. It is a system of farming that involves nearly total self-sufficiency on the part of its members. Production for exchange is minimal and each family or close-knit social group relies on itself for its food and other essential requirements. Market gardening has however come to ameliorate things especially in areas such as Santa, Babanki Tungo where huge quantities of vegetables (huckleberry, onion, carrots, tomatoes, etc) are produced annually.

The main cash crops cultivated in this part of the country include:

- Arabica coffee, in Ngoketunjia, Donga Mantung, Boyo and Mezam divisions;
- Robusta Coffee in Momo(Widikum and Batibo), Menchum (Menchum valley and Furu Awa) and Donga Mantung (Misaje and Nwa);
- Tea at Ndu, Santa and Ndawara;
- Cocoa is cultivated in Widikum;
- Oil palm is cultivated in Mezam (Bafut), Momo (Widikum and Batibo), Donga Mantung (Ako, Mbembe and Nwa), Ngoketunjia (Bamunka) and Menchum (Menchum Valley);
- Rice is cultivated in Ndop plain, Mbaw plains, Tingo valley in Bafut and Menchum Valley;
- Wheat is cultivated in small quantities in Bui and Donga Mantung Divisions mainly for consumption;
- Market gardening equally occupies an important place in the agriculture of this area, particularly in Mezam and Bui Divisions.

Figure 1 represents some major cash crops located within the North West Region.

Food crops are equally important as far as the agricultural production of the region is concerned. Maize constitutes the major cereal in this area, followed by beans groundnuts. Tubers here include cocoyams, cassava, yams and potatoes. Table 1 shows the production of selected foodcrops within the region in the year 2012. The table shows a diversity of crops cultivated in this region.

There is a lot of diversity within the region as far as cash crop cultivation is concerned as indicated on Figure 1, Wheat is cultivated in the cold areas such as Bui and Donga Mantung divisions. Tea is grown in the ndawara and Ndu areas which have a climate adapted to such crops. Oilpalms, rice and market gardening crops equally has a place of importance in cash crop production within the study area.

2.1.1. Honey Production

Apiculture or bee farming is an old economic activity dating back to the origins of the people. In the Kilum Mountain Forest for example, bees are adapted to plants. Conditions such as climate, vegetation, social traditions and economics favor bee keeping in the region. As such, honey is being produced in the region in great quantity. There are many small factories alongside WONTSERDEV CIG and Oku Honey Cooperation, such as Establishment Samy Samy, Ngang and Sons Enterprise, which collect honey from farmers for primary processing. The peak season for honey production is in the month of May. Two varieties of honey are produced in the region: white honey, which is harvested at an altitude of 2,000 - 3,011 meters; and brown honey, harvested at an altitude below 2,000 meters. Honey is harvested from natural bee hives. About 2,000 farmers are involved in bee farming in the region particularly in Boyo and Bui and Mezam Division. As indicated on Table 2, Bui division

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