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RESEARCH ARTICLE

NEW FORMS OF AGRICULTURAL PAID LABOR BY PEASANTS IN THE WESTERN REGION OF CAMEROON: CONDITIONS OF EMERGENCE AND IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this work is to analyze hired labor in agriculture as a social phenomenon by identifying the conditions of its emergence, the reasons why farmers are involved, and the implications in terms of rural development. Fifteen labor markets have been identified in five departments of the Western Region of Cameroon namely: Mifi, Menoua, Noun, Nde, and the Bamboutos divisions. The results of the study conducted in four of these markets with 65 workers and 20 farmers show that 80% of the workers are female; 63% of those workers are aged between 10 and 30 years; 92% have been to school; 46% have completed the primary level and 44% the secondary level. Two reasons justified the engagement of these peoples in the agricultural wage labor: The search of income and their capacity for hard work. Agricultural wage labor is requested by civil servants, employees of private enterprises and agricultural producers. They live mostly in urban areas with farm size ranges between 0.05 and 0.8 hectares. Agricultural wage labor contributes to the development of farmlands, the improvement of living conditions of workers and food security. Moreover, the working conditions are difficult, workers enjoy no social protection, and agricultural wage labor is seen as repugnant. The workers are not taken into account in agricultural policy development.

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INTRODUCTION

In agriculture, work is carried out by family and/or hired labor. For the realization of certain tasks and also to fill the labor gap, some farmers manage by using help from outside hands in several forms: invitation, mutual assistance, and daily employment of agricultural workers [1]. Agricultural work is a socioeconomic phenomenon unfolding in various forms around the world: agricultural wage labor in the case of family farms, or agricultural enterprise employees, temporary workers in the case of punctual paid work. In the Western Region of Cameroon, hired agricultural labor has been observed since the period of coffee production in many forms. However, in recent years, another form of agricultural work has been seen in a remarkable and special way through the groups of women or men along certain roads or junctions in search of paid agricultural work. The analysis of this phenomenon has at least a double interest. As a social phenomenon, it should be analyzed to better understand the dynamism of its emergence, understand the reasons why rural people are more and more engaged, bring out the issues and possible implications on the social plan.

Now that the Cameroon government is promoting Second Generation agriculture, hired labor is becoming scarce and expensive at crucial moments of the year in many areas. There for it is crucial to know if the available farm labor will be able to support the project of the Second Generation Agriculture where mechanization is not immediately available.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Natural environment

The study took place in the Western Region of Cameroon. The climate is tropical and humid with two seasons: a rainy season from mid-March to mid-October and a dry season from mid-October to mid-March. This climate gives the vegetation a unique landscape that of grassland on hilltops, raffia and gallery forests in the lowlands. The average annual precipitation is about 900 mm spread between 110-130 days, sometimes with peaks of about 2500 mm in some localities. The relief made of highlands from 1000 to 1500 m altitude, is spread between peripheral plains. The main rivers of the region are the Noun, Nde, Mbam and Nkam. The soils are usually red lateritic, exposed to erosion, due to the relief of the area and intensity of rainfall. Rainfall variations predispose to some places the practice of specific agricultural activities, like

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the Haut-Nkam Division where we found a comparative advantage for the production of Robusta coffee.

Collection and analysis of data

Hired agricultural labor, our main interest in this study was achieved through the study of crowds of people at specific roadsides offering their services for hired agricultural labor. The essence was to identify the major gathering points (main markets of agricultural work). Fifteen have been identified throughout the Western Region of Cameroon. Surveys were conducted on four of these markets which are: Balessing Junction, Bafounda Bakery, Femock and Protestant mission Bangang. We interviewed a total of 65 workers and 20 farm managers by means of questionnaires. Moreover, interview with resource persons and direct observations allowed us to complete our information. The resource persons were interviewed in areas where the fifteen farm labor markets in the region were identified. Three resource persons were chosen per market based on their knowledge of the market concerned. The data generated were entered and analyzed using Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data collected by the interview guide with resource persons were analyzed through thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The labor markets in the Western Region of Cameroon: emergence and characteristics.

Table 2 shows the distribution of agricultural labor markets in the Western Region of Cameroon.

Conditions for the emergence of paid work in agriculture in the Western Region

Agricultural wage labor in the Western Region emerged under five main conditions:

- The scarcity of arable land and soil depletion due to demographic pressure constantly reducing cultivated space by households. Increase in population has as corollary land fragmentation and intensive land use which leads to impoverishment.
- The decline in the purchasing power of household heads in rural areas caused by lower prices paid to coffee producers.
- The interest of most civil servants and traders in agricultural activity in order to ensure food security for their families and increase their revenue.
- The layout of road tracks in some production areas and roads linking the chief towns of the divisions.
- The creation of meeting places between people who hire out their services of labor and farmers.

Some characteristics of the labor markets in the Western Region of Cameroon

These new forms of labor markets in the Western Region of Cameroon have the following characteristics:

- The presence of two types of actors, farmers and workers.
- Labor is at the center of negotiations.

- The negotiations are made on the basis of the working day and / or the task to be done.
- Transactions in these markets last 4 hours (6 am to 10 am).
- The cost of the day follows (is based on) the laws of demand and supply.
- Individuals who offer their services of labor in these markets are of three categories: native inhabitants, daily and seasonal migrants.

Socioeconomic characteristics of agricultural workers

The ages of people who perform agricultural wage labor ranged between 10 and 60 years, 63% are between 10 and 30 years of age. Paid work in agriculture is mostly done by married women (28%) and widowed (32%) with an average of 7 children in their charge. Married women live mostly (52%) in polygamous households. In addition, 46% of them have completed the primary level, 44% the secondary level and 2% the high school level. These workers have received no training in agricultural practices. They work from basic knowledge and benefit only from endogenous knowledge accumulated and transmitted from generation to generation. These results confirm those of the study conducted by [2] in France, Vietnam, Senegal, Brazil and Uruguay which shows that: *agricultural workers in most developing countries are people with low levels of education who have received no training.*

Finally, we note that 68% of surveyed workers devote an average of 3 days per week during the agricultural season in this activity and this for more than 4 years. Summarily, these socio-economic characteristics of agricultural workers show that these people are from poor families with low resources and this activity helps them to solve their day to day problems. The workers are mostly small farmers with small land ranging between 0.05 and 0.15 hectares. They produce food crops in mixed cropping systems mainly for consumption. However, 78% of workers say their crops do not allow them family food security throughout the year. These results are similar to those of the study conducted by [3] on safety and health in agriculture which stipulate that: *in developing countries many smallholders supplement their income with wages earned by working in large commercial farms during harvest.*

Socioeconomic characteristics of employers

Civil servant, traders, employees of private companies and some producers are the categories of people who engage agricultural paid work. These people have small land holdings between 0.05 and 0.8 hectares. They practice mixed farming systems for food crops and crop rotation in the cultivation of vegetables. Harvested food crops are mainly for home consumption while market gardening is held for sale.

Motivation and perception of agricultural workers

Motivations

Two main reasons account for the cause of the commitment of people in paid work in agriculture: the quest for income and the need for work.

Table 1. Distribution of the research sample per market studied

Markets	Actors	Average	Sample	Rate (%)
Bafoundabakeryjunction	Agricultural workers	55	20	36.36
	Farm managers	18	6	33.33
Balessingjunction	Argicultural workers	55	20	36.36
	Farm managers	18	6	33.33
Femock	Argicultural workers	35	15	42.85
	Farm managers	12	4	33.33
Protestant mission Bangangjunction	Argicultural workers	21	10	47.61
	Farm managers	7	4	57.14
Total	Argicultural workers	166	65	39.2
	Farm managers	55	20	36.36

Table 2. Agricultural labor markets in the Western Region of Cameroon

Division	Sub-Division	Market
Bamboutos	Mbouda	Plantain market Bafounda
		Bafounda Bakery Junction
		Bandjuinsi (Bamendjo)
		Bakatou (Bamendjo)
Menoua	Batcham	Catholic Mission junction Bangang
		Mission protestante Bangang
	Penka-Michel	Balessing junction
		Pougong
Ndé	Nkong-Ni	Femock
		Bafou pastoral
		RDPC junction
		Bantum1junction
Mifi Noun	Bafoussam 1 ^{er} Foumbot Foumbot	Kouekong junction
		Pananssié junction
		Kwokwo junction

Indeed, 38% of workers are students who practice this activity in order to have pocket money and help their parents by contributing to their school fees and buying their school needs. While 62% carryout this activity firstly, to occupy themselves throughout the year, but especially to have additional income.

Perception

The majority of agricultural workers (71%) perceive agricultural wage labor as a painful, denigrating and non-profitable activity. These workers spend an average of 3 days per week in this activity for an average monthly income of 27000Fcfa. Although this average monthly income is very close to the minimum wage, they feel that the work in other sectors demand little strength and is more decent. These are reasons for the instability of persons engaged in agricultural wage labor. Indeed, 91% of workers say that they use agricultural wage labor as a bridge to go to other activities they consider less painful, noble and better rewarding. Very few respondents (9%) wish to continue in this activity. Yet we see that the demand for agricultural wage labor remains unsatisfied in the Western Region. This is justified by the high cost of labor at certain periods of the year due to its scarcity.

Working conditions

The movement of the workers from the market to the exploitation fields and vice versa is the responsibility of the employers (farmers). However, in most cases, transport is done in difficult conditions for long distances. Workers are transported on overloaded motorcycles, in vehicles "pick up" and in small cars. A working day is 7 hours. However, with the time taken by a worker from his home to the market and vice versa, we realize that it occupies an average of 9 hours a day for this activity. The cost of the work day varies depending on periods and markets.

Issues and implications of hired labor for agricultural and rural development

Agricultural paid work: food security crowbar

The education of children and employment of women in non-agricultural sectors have resulted to a considerably decrease in family labor. Indeed, in the Western Region, small producers (land surface ranged between 0.05-0.8 hectares and very low capital) are at the center of the food production system. The reduction of the exploited space and low capital do not allow them to request farm equipment for the tasks on their plots. To this end, the essential operations in their farm are carried out by paid labor. Moreover, most traders and civil servants with the economic crisis of 1980s and falling wages became interested in farming by creating small plots. However, their multiple occupations do not allow them to constantly be on their farms. They entrust most tasks on their farm (80%) to paid agricultural labor. The products from their farms allow them to meet the food needs of their families and contribute to food security.

Agricultural Paid work and the development of cultivated areas

Paid agricultural work is involved in the development of small farms as part of family subsistence farming and as workers in other operations. Its availability in the Western Region has favored agricultural intensification and expansion of vegetable crops in some production areas. This intensification has been materialized through practices like increasingly recurrent cultivation of two "campaigns" per year. This makes available agricultural products at all seasons of the year. Some crops such as corn and beans during the second campaign overlap on some plots. The majority of growers (75%) in the localities of Bafou North, Balessing, and Baleveng argue that the availability of paid labor allows them to perform various operations on their land on time. Thereby obtaining good

yields and in turn increased revenue. Because the return on capital invested is based on the strength of labor. The increase of revenues contributes to the expansion of the harvested areas and improves living conditions.

The impact of agricultural wage labor on the worker's life and education of their children

The impact of agricultural wage labor on the worker's life

Agricultural paid work is a source of income for people who are involved. Indeed, the agricultural wage labor gives an average annual income of 324000 Fcfa to those who spend an average of 3 days per week. Income from agricultural wage labor plays an important role in meeting the needs of practitioners. This money allows them to meet certain needs of their families such as the education of children, family food security, health, acquisition of kitchenware and to save money for future projects. In addition, 50% of this income allows them to meet their children's school needs. Agricultural wage labor is the main source of income devoted to meeting this need.

The impact of agricultural wage labor on children's education

Agricultural workers are mostly women from poor families. In these families, responsibilities are left to the woman. The man mainly ensures procreation. In order to safeguard the dignity of the family, the wife practices agricultural paid work to support the financial needs of the family. In the practice of this activity, she leaves the family home before daybreak and returns only at sunset. Therefore, children are poorly monitored, jeopardizing their education. Smaller children who do not go to school roam around the neighborhood all day. Those who go to school return to the neighborhood and idle around until the mother returns. The mother, exhausted, spends one to two hours to prepare the evening meal. Her concern is whether the children have eaten and if they are healthy. Nobody checks if children have revised their lessons, if they understood the lessons, or if they have done their homework. Moreover, by the age of 10 years, daughters assist their mothers on weekends and holidays, in their "pambé" (local name for agricultural paid work) activity to the detriment of their school lessons. Yet, the International Organization of Labor fixed at eighteen years the age for admission to any type of employment or work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons. As a result, the children of these families for most leave school early; usually after primary school. The boys are getting into small businesses with savings realized by their mother in the practice of "Pambé" and girls follow their mothers in this activity while preparing for their departure into marriage.

Agricultural paid work and second generation agriculture

Second Generation Agriculture that the State of Cameroon wants to implement seems to advocate mechanization, use of improved genetic material and chemical fertilizers. This farming places particular emphasis on the use of tractors on farms in Cameroon. But the use of machines for farm activities will lead to a considerable reduction in the number of workers. However, it is clear from our investigation that agricultural wage labor is a source of income for poor people who have no

qualifications, and living in rural areas. They depend on this activity for the satisfaction of the financial needs of their families. The principles of the Second Generation Agriculture could to some extent contribute to the increase in unemployment and an increase in poverty in rural areas. In fact, people in this activity will be unemployed and may no longer pay school fees for their children and solve other day to day problems. However, producers who use hired agricultural labor exploit surfaces between 0.05 and 0.8 hectares on average and located on two sites. Some agricultural operations such as planting, harvesting of certain products like cabbage cannot be done mechanically and absolutely require manual labor. The fragmentation and the smaller size of farms are an obstacle to compliance with all the principles of the Second Generation Agriculture for this category of producers. Hired agricultural labor is essential in the development of their farms. The principles of the Second Generation farming could be limited to the use of improved variety and chemical fertilizers in some areas. Agricultural wage labor contributes to the development of arable land, food security and to improving the living conditions of workers. However, in the current conditions of its realization, it is seen as repugnant, working conditions are difficult and have no social protection.

Conclusion

Agriculture paid work emerges in a context of economic crisis, falling commodity prices on the world market, the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Plan by the State of Cameroon and demographic pressure which have led to the decline in purchasing power of the heads of families in rural areas, reducing cultivated space by households and the creation of small farms by civil servants following the reduction of wages. Agricultural wage labor is done by rural people who are poor and have no qualification in agriculture. They are mostly (52%) small farmers with farm sizes comprised between 0.05 and 0.15 hectares. Those who seek for hired agricultural labor are mostly (60%) civil servants, traders and private enterprise employees exploiting small size farms comprised between 0.05 and 0.8 hectares. Additional revenue and need for work are the reasons why people are engaged in agricultural wage labor. Paid agricultural work contributes to the development of arable farming, improves the living conditions of workers and ensures food security. However, workers have no social protection and are not taken into account in development policies and this sector is not regulated. So, to make this activity more attractive, it would be judicious that it should be structured and regulated so that workers can benefit from better working conditions, social protection and a peaceful retirement.

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