

Implications of Child Labour for Agricultural Production, Productivity and food security in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

The farming system in Africa is characterized by small peasant family farms whose production and productivity depend on the participation of all members of the family including children. In Cameroon, as elsewhere in African production, the traditional agricultural sector is based on an impressive division of labour along gender and age lines. Farm operations such as clearing and hunting are carried out by men, while others such as planting and weeding are culturally assigned to women and children. A major postulate of these laws is that the rights of children are abused and their physical bodies exploited. This structure and organization of the African family farm have an impact on the family and food security in African countries. Since 1919, a number of milestones have been achieved in the fight against child labour. These include the 1999 Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182), culminating in the establishment of the World Day Against Child Labour in 2002 (ILO, 2003:6). An empirical analysis of the family farm through a case study in Momo Division of the North West Province of Cameroon confirms that the productivity of food crop-based and cash crop-based agricultural enterprises using cocoyam and coffee as sample crops is greatly influenced by competing economic, social and cultural factors such as the crop itself, age and gender. A multistage random sampling technique was adopted in the selection of a sample of 120 farmers. The results show that farm size per family range from < 1.0 ha to 4.0 ha for cocoyam production with an average of 1.24 hectares, and from <1.0 ha to 7.0 hectares for coffee production with an average of 1.54 hectares. The main sources of labour on both enterprises were family, hired and exchange/communal. For the two crops approximately 46% women contributed to the total labour required as against 33% for men and 21 for children. Women (89.7%) were more engaged in hiring labour than men (66.4%). Farm operations that employed more children and women than men included land preparation, weeding, harvesting and marketing. Recommendations are made for further research particularly policy studies on food, agriculture and rural development within the context of food self sufficiency, food security and sustainable development.

Key words: child labour, cocoyam, coffee, person days, gender, agricultural production and productivity, food security, and rural development

RESUME

Implications du travail des enfants pour la production, la productivité agricoles, et la sécurité alimentaire au Cameroun.

Le système agricole en Afrique est caractérisé par des petits champs paysans dont la production et la productivité dépendent de la participation de tous les membres de la famille y compris les enfants. Au Cameroun, comme ailleurs en Afrique, le secteur agricole traditionnel est basé sur une répartition impressionnante de travail suivant le genre et la classe d'âges. Les opérations telles que le défrichage et la chasse sont des activités masculines. Alors que le semis et désherbage sont assignés culturellement aux femmes et aux enfants. Ce que en découle est que les droits des enfants sont abusés et leurs corps physique exploité. Cette structure et organisation de la ferme de la famille africaine ont un impact sur la famille et la sécurité alimentaire des pays africaines. Depuis 1919, des étapes importantes ont été franchies dans la lutte contre le travail des enfants. Celles-ci incluent la convention de 1999 sur Les Pires Formes de Travail des Enfants (No 182) ayant conduit à l'institution de la Journée International Contre le Travail des Enfants en 2002 (OIT, 2003 :6). Une analyse empirique des exploitations familiales principes par une étude de cas dans le département de la Momo dans la province du Nord-Ouest au Cameroun confirme que la productivité des cultures vivrières et celle de rente en prenant le macabo et le café comme exemples, est fortement influencée par des facteurs compétitifs d'ordre économique, social et culturel. Tels que la plante elle-même, l'âge et le genre. La technique d'échantillonnage aléatoire stratifié a été utilisée pour la sélection de 120 agriculteurs. Les résultats montrent que la superficie de l'exploitation par famille varie de moins d'1 ha à 4 ha pour la production de taro avec une moyenne de 1,24 ha, et de moins d'1 ha à 7 ha pour la production du café avec une moyenne de 1,54 ha. Les principales sources de main d'œuvre dans ces deux types d'exploitation sont la famille, la location et l'entraide. Pour les deux cultures, environ 46 % de femmes contribuent au travail requis contre 33 % d'hommes et 21 % d'enfants. Les femmes (89,7%) sont plus employées comme main d'œuvre salariée que les hommes (66,4%). La préparation du sol, le sarclage, la récolte et la commercialisation sont les opérations de l'exploitation qui emploient le plus les enfants et les femmes. Des recommandations sont faites pour des recherches futures particulièrement sur les politiques relatives à l'alimentation, l'agriculture et le développement rural dans un contexte d'autosuffisance alimentaire, de sécurité alimentaire et de développement durable.

Mots clés: main d'œuvre, macabo, café, homme/jour, genre, production et productivité agricole, sécurité alimentaire, développement rural.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has been referred to as the "backbone", "life wire" or future of African development (Nji, 1981). However, if the back bone or life wire are to give the strength and energies that African economies need to grow then, African agriculture must be developed within the context of its diverse culture, institutions, policies and in cognizance of the changing economic, social and technological forces (Nji, 1989). The economy of Cameroon depends on the agricultural sector. In 1980/81, agriculture contributed 28% of GDP and 33% total export revenue (Fonsah and Chidebelu, 1995; Burfisher, 1984). It is the largest employer of labour engaging 75 -83% of the population (Simarski et al. 1992; Fonsah and Chidebelu, 1995). Population projections suggest that Cameroon will be about 19.9 million by the year 2010 (MINEF, 1996). To meet the challenge for food, economic and political security, rapid technological change and visionary planning based on sound and comprehensive policies will be required (Nji, 2004). Ironically, the introduction of some improved technological packages in African farming systems tends to exacerbate the need for labour on African farms. For example, Chidebelu found that fertilizer application promote rapid weed development, culminating in the need for extra labour for weeding (Chidebelu, 1990). This corroborates with earlier findings by Delgado and Ranade (1987) who found that adoption of innovations such as fertilizer application aggravates seasonal weeding bottlenecks.

Socio-economic characteristics determine the availability and use of farm labour not only in quantitative terms but also in the choice of type and source of labour used (Collinson, 1982). Sex roles and stereotyping of crops and farm role is common in Cameroon and other African agricultural systems countries. This is based mainly on the socio-cultural significance traditionally ascribed to certain crops relative to others (Okorji and Obiechina, 1985). Cash crops are considered men's crop and food crops women's turf. Even if men are to produce food crops, yam is a male crop while cocoyam is a female crop (Okorji, 1983). According to Peter and Ian, the traditional role of men from the beginning of peasant farming and remain is to clear and prepare the land for cultivation, while the tasks of house keeping, planting and weeding the crops behave on women (Peter and Ian, 1991).

However, with changing times, roles are changing as well obliging men and women to swap or adapt roles, particularly in a crisis. For example, at the onset of the economic crisis that rocked Cameroon from 1987 to 1992, civil servants "went back to the land" to make both ends meet, provoking in their wake yet another crisis--a farm land crisis. This was the case in regions with high population densities such as the West Province and in areas with scarce farm land such as the Far North province. Parents confessed that the contributions of children in enabling families to survive during these hard times through their participation in farm work or in the marketing of agricultural produce were significant, inevitable and culturally reassuring as this behaviour reinforces the resilience of the African family (Nji, 1994). A child as used in this paper is referred to as a person between four and 15 years old.

Because agricultural production in Cameroon is predominantly labour-intensive, there are marked seasonal peak demands for labour coinciding with peak agricultural activities, which make labour availability a major bottleneck (Kline et al, 1969; Nji, 2004). Peak periods occur for all crops. However, in a study by Fon (1997) the peak periods for food crops and coffee production are often competitive. As a result, the substitution of labour meant for one activity for another is often a source of family conflicts which can go beyond the farm to include school and the church (Nji, 1996). It was, therefore, of scientific interest, to investigate the coping mechanisms for labour management on family farms and the implications for agricultural productivity and food security.

One of the problems facing resource poor peasants in Africa and other regions is the shortage of labour (Swaminathan, 1987). Despite the reported increase in world population, many rural households suffer from inadequate labour supplies. This is due to a number of reasons: 1) the poor conditions in rural villages which force the youth to flee the countryside into the cities; 2) the search for employment opportunities for livelihoods; 3) the pull of opportunities for education, employment and better communication (Nji, 1981). The dilemma is that as the youth "vote with their feet" by migrating to the city in protest against the neglect of rural areas, the population left behind remain poor and ageing (Nji, 2004; 1981). Considering that peasant agriculture is dominated by rudimentary technology, agricultural productivity cannot rise but fall, putting the sustainability of the agricultural system and African nations into serious jeopardy. These trends affect

agricultural productivity and threaten food security in Cameroon. If the ban on child labour is to be enforced without improvements in the agricultural and rural systems, a hole is bound to be carved in the sails of Cameroon's food self-sufficiency and security syndrome.

Yet, labour remains a critical variable in African agriculture and food security for many households. The competition for labour between food crops and non-food crops and the role of labour policies within the context of a rapidly changing technological world characterized by globalization and changing preferences ought to draw the attention of policy makers and researchers to the dilemma (Nji, 1992). And as Fadahunsi and Igwe (1989) concur in their case study of agricultural development in Nigeria, "given the inadequacy of basic infrastructures such as access roads, transport and communication facilities, as well as the paucity of trained manpower ...required to maintain the machines and equipment, it is not surprising that the increase in agricultural productivity ...has not so far been realised". The development of indigenous technological capacity is critical for the improvement and sustainability of African agriculture (Nji, 1992, 1983: 1981).

To better understand the dynamics of the principal actors involved in agricultural production in Cameroon with a focus on the role of women and children, a study was carried out on family farms in the North West Province of Cameroon from June to August 2006.

The objectives were to:

1. determine the differentials in land allocations for a staple and dominant food crop (cocoyam) in that agro-ecological zone, and a dominant cash crop (coffee), particularly in the light of shifting economic, social and political paradigms;
2. ascertain agricultural roles and their implications for agricultural productivity and food security;
3. determine the allocation of family labour on farms with regard to the key operations on a family farm.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Momo Division of the North West Province of Cameroon. This area falls within zone 1 of the Western Highlands, which is one of Cameroon's seven agro-ecological zones. The zone is characterized by highland savannah with a monsoon-type equatorial climate, a long rainy season (March to

September) and short dry season (October to February). The average temperature is 21°C with a range of 15°C to 30°C (Simarski et al., 1992). The 1986 census put the population of Momo Division at 286,932 inhabitants with a land area of 1790 km², thus giving a population density of 160 inhabitants /km². The results of a population census conducted in 2004 have not been published. It is estimated that approximately 90% of the population of Momo Division practise farming as a main occupation and source of income. They are mainly involved in the production of food crops including cocoyam, yam, banana, plantain, maize, cassava, groundnut and vegetables and cash crops like coffee, oil palms and kola nuts (Fon, 1997).

Momo Division is made up of four administrative subdivisions which formed the basis for a multistage sampling technique. In stage one, there was a random selection of two cocoyam and two coffee producing subdivisions. In stage two, three villages were selected each from the two previously selected subdivisions. In stage three, 20 farm families were randomly selected from each of the three villages. This gave a total sample of 120, although only 116 (96.7%) accepted to participate in the research. A set of structured questionnaires which had been pre-tested, was used to collect the data. The empirical data analyzed in this paper are based on the information provided by the 116 respondents. The data on the tables that follow come from the survey data except otherwise stated.

RESULTS

Farm sizes per family ranged from <1.0 hectares to approximately 4.0 hectares for cocoyam farms with an average farm size of 1.24 hectares. The size of coffee-based farms ranged from <1.0 hectares to 7.0 hectares with an average farm size of 1.54 hectares (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to the size of cocoyam and coffee farms in Momo Division (Cameroon) in August, 2006

Farm size (Hectare)	Respondents			
	Frequency		Percentage	
	Cocoyam	Coffee	Cocoyam	Coffee
< 1.0	69	50	59.5	43.1
1.0 - 2	31	42	26.7	36.2
2.01 - 3	12	18	10.3	15.5
3.01 - 4	4	2	3.5	1.7
> 4	0	4	0.0	3.5
Total	116	116	100.0	100.0

Table 1 reveals that the average number of farm holdings or plots for cocoyam was 3.4 and 1.6 for coffee. It is also noted that in either the cocoyam or coffee farms, the majority of farmers own smaller farms ranging from <1-2 hectares (86% for cocoyam) and 79% for coffee. The number of family farms or plots per crop category was determined with a view to delineating any structural or organisational differentials. The results are presented on table 2.

From table 2, it can be seen that a significant number of families had several cocoyam plots than coffee plots.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to the number of cocoyam and coffee farms cultivated in Momo Division (Cameroon) in August, 2006

Number of Farms (plots)	Respondents			
	Frequency		Percentage	
	Cocoyam	Coffee	Cocoyam	Coffee
1	9	62	7.8	53.4
2	39	40	33.6	34.5
3	21	11	18.1	9.5
4	18	3	15.5	2.6
> 4	29	0	25.0	0.0
Total	116	116	100.0	100.0

In fact, whereas there were 47 (40.5%) families that reported cultivating 4 or more plots under cocoyam, only 3 (2.6%) owned coffee farms in this range. Seven factors were given by the respondents to be responsible for these differences: 1) the need to feed their families

because as some respondents said, "why spend so much time producing what you cannot eat?"; 2) the need for food stuffs for entertainment, cultural functions and obligations such as death celebrations and marriages; 3) labour constraints and scarcity at peak periods; 4) high cost of investment on coffee farms; 5) high time requirements for work on coffee farms; 6) the need for immediate cash for family needs such as health, education and mobility; 7) minimal technical requirements for work on cocoyam farms, including the ease with which children can tend cocoyam or food crop farms with little skills or no supervision. Older children usually lead the operation while the younger ones follow, enabling the African child "to learn and practise agriculture by doing."

The source of labour on family farms and the extent of gender typing in agriculture were also determined. The results show that there are three sources of labour in the production of cocoyam and coffee in the area, namely: family, hired, and exchange/communal labour (Table 3).

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to the source of labour used in cocoyam and coffee production in Momo Division (Cameroon) in August, 2006.

Source of Labour	Respondents			
	Number*		Percentage	
	Cocoyam	Coffee	Cocoyam	Coffee
Family	116	116	100.0	100.0
Hired	104	77	89.7	66.4
Exchange/communal	106	76	71.4	65.5

*Multiple responses were recorded

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to the type of labour used during each farm operation in cocoyam and coffee production in Momo Division (Cameroon) in August, 2006

Farm operation	Number of Respondents* (n=116)						Percentages*					
	Cocoyam			Coffee			Cocoyam			Coffee		
	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children
Land clearing**	75	87	20	-	-	-	64.7	75.0	17.2	-	-	-
Ridge making/digging of planting holes**	4	116	37	-	-	-	3.5	100.0	31.9	-	-	-
Planting**	3	116	16	-	-	-	2.6	100.0	13.8	-	-	-
Weeding	0	116	56	94	70	61	0.0	100.0	48.3	81.0	60.4	52.6
Pruning ***	-	-	-	116	0	0	-	-	-	100.0	0.0	0.0
Fertiliser application***	-	-	-	5	1	0	-	-	-	4.3	0.9	0.0
Spraying of chemicals***	-	-	-	26	0	0	-	-	-	22.4	0.0	0.0
Harvesting	2	116	38	103	93	90	1.7	100.0	32.8	88.8	80.2	78.0
Drying ***	-	-	-	109	17	46	-	-	-	94.0	14.7	39.7
Transportation	5	116	66	105	42	44	4.3	100.0	56.9	90.5	36.2	37.9
Sale (Marketing)	0	113	3	109	5	4	0.0	97.4	2.6	94.0	4.3	3.5
Percentage							8.1	70.6	21.3	58.5	20.0	21.5

*: Multiple responses were recorded

** : These operations did not take place because there were all old coffee stems (inherited)

***: These operations do not apply for cocoyam

About 89.7% of women used hired labour in cocoyam production compared to 66.4% of men hiring labour for coffee production. On the aggregate, family labour ranks first, exchange/communal labour second, and hired labour third as source of labour for the two crops. Table 4 displays the frequency distribution of respondents type of labour used in cocoyam and coffee farm operations. The table shows that a majority (70.6%) of the women considered themselves involved in all cocoyam production operations. Children are always involved in both cocoyam and coffee operations.

On the source of labour used for various farm operations, it was found that family labour is the dominant source of labour for various operations (Table 5). This further confirms that the family (including children) will remain a necessary and sufficient social and economic unit for agricultural production and productivity in agricultural systems. This puts to test the universal policy banning child labour in all its forms as advocated by Overhoff (2003).

Table 5: Percent distribution of respondents according to source of labour used on cocoyam and coffee farms for the various farm operations in Momo Division (Cameroon) in August, 2006

Farm operation	Percentage*					
	Cocoyam			Coffee		
	Family	Hired	Exchange	Family	Hired	Exchange
Land clearing**	94.0	27.0	28.0	-	-	-
Ridge making/digging of planting holes**	100.0	7.8	50.0	-	-	-
Planting**	100.0	0.0	0.0	-	-	-
Weeding	100.0	6.0	39.7	100.0	28.5	18.1
Pruning ***	-	-	-	72.4	14.7	4.3
Fertiliser application***	-	-	-	4.3	0.0	0.0
Spraying of chemicals***	-	-	-	22.4	0.0	0.0
Harvesting	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	12.9	9.5
Drying ***	-	-	-	100.0	2.6	0.0
Transportation	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.9	0.0
Sale (Marketing)	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
Percentage	81.4	4.8	13.8	86.8	8.6	4.6

*: Multiple responses were recorded

** : These operations did not take place because the coffee stems had already been planted

***: Operations not applicable to cocoyam production.

Highlighting the role of children

Table 6 shows that some farm operations are gender specific and age-biased with the significant contribution of children. In cocoyam production, it was reported that women and children exclusively do the first and second weeding. This is in agreement with Chi (1989) who found that women in Meme and Fako Divisions of the South West Province of Cameroon supplied

Table 6: Distribution of respondents according to the type of labour used for the various farm operations in cocoyam and coffee production in Momo Division (Cameroon) in August, 2006.

Farm operation	Percentage*					
	Cocoyam			Coffee		
	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children
Land clearing**	64.7	75.0	17.2	-	-	-
Ridge making/digging of planting holes**	3.5	100.0	31.9	-	-	-
Planting**	2.6	100.0	13.8	-	-	-
Weeding	0.0	100.0	48.3	81.0	60.4	52.6
Pruning ***	-	-	-	100.0	0.0	0.0
Fertiliser application** *	-	-	-	4.3	0.9	0.0
Spraying of chemicals***	-	-	-	22.4	0.0	0.0
Harvesting	1.7	100.0	32.8	88.8	80.2	78.0
Drying***	-	-	-	94.0	14.7	39.7
Transportation	4.3	100.0	56.9	90.5	36.2	37.9
Sale (Marketing)	0.0	97.4	2.6	94.0	4.3	3.5
Percentage	8.1	70.6	21.3	58.5	20.0	21.5

*: Multiple responses were recorded

** : These operations did not take place because there were all old coffee stems (inherited)

***: These operations do not apply for cocoyam.

most of the labour force in cocoyam production followed by children in weeding. In coffee production men dominated the pruning, transportation, drying and marketing activities, simply because of the technical skills required and also because of who controls the income generated from coffee production. Overall, only 8.1% of men contributed to the total labour needed for cocoyam production in the study area, as against 70.6% of women and 21.3% children. In coffee production, 58.5% of men contributed to the total labour, 20.0% by women and 21.5% by children.

Labour allocation to the different farm operations on cocoyam farms showed that weeding, a farm activity almost exclusively assigned to women and children was the most important farm operation. It took up 31.4% of the total person-days required for cocoyam production in Table 7. This confirms the findings by Tambe (1994) that in Manyu Division of the Southwest Province of Cameroon women and children provided the lion's share of labour for weeding in smallholder cocoyam production.

Table 7: Labour allocation (person-days) per hectare for different farm operations in a cocoyam based crop enterprise in Momo Division (Cameroon) in August, 2006.

Farm operation	Person-days	Percentage
Land clearing	14	13.7
Ridge making	22	21.6
Planting	14	13.7
Weeding	32	31.4
Harvesting	20	19.6
Total	102	100.0

Table 8: Labour allocation (person days) per hectare for different farm operations in a coffee based crop enterprise in Momo Division (Cameroon) in August, 2006.

Farm operation	Person days	Percentage
Weeding	20	29.4
Pruning	7	10.3
Planting	1	1.5
Weeding	4	5.9
Harvesting	36	52.9
Total	68	100.00

The situation is slightly different on the coffee-based enterprises. Table 8 shows that harvesting was the most important farm operation in coffee production in terms of labour requirement, utilizing 52.9% of the total person-days.

DISCUSSION

Most farm families have several small-sized cocoyam plots than coffee. This may be attributed to the planting distance of coffee which requires more planting space. Investments in coffee production are higher than in cocoyam production in terms of land requirement, capital, seedlings, maintenance and marketing. This implies that there could be relatively more labour requirements on coffee than on cocoyam farms. The finding partially explains the common assertion that coffee producers in the early 1960s and 70s had more wives in order to have more children who could provide the family labour often most needed on the coffee farms (Logo and Bikie, 2003:46).

One explanation given for more women hiring labour than men was that the travel time between plots takes up most of the working hours in a day and thus does not leave much time for farm work. This often necessitates calling in additional help on the farm or in the home. The women reported that they had to do their household chores as well, which often does not leave them with enough time for farm work, particularly during land preparation, weeding and harvesting. This finding is consistent with that of Rekha (1995) who found that a common characteristic of agricultural production in Sub-Saharan Africa is division of labour along gender lines. Women are primarily responsible for producing food or subsistence crops while men grow cash crops with a share of the labour provided by women and children, particularly where food crops such as cocoyams and plantains are planted under coffee trees. The age-old cultural pattern in African agriculture was also confirmed that food crop cultivation in subsistence economies is women turf whereas the cultivation of cash crops was generally

entrusted to men. Children work with their parents in both situations, with girls concentrating on cocoyam farms and boys on coffee farms except with respect to weeding which employs both genders. In another study of a rural community Nji (1985) found that women are constantly working (cooking, taking care of children and their husband, farming, marketing, and socializing). Women interviewed in the study reported that they worked on the average 14 hours a day whereas the men reported to be working only 8 hours a day. To meet up with the demands on their time, the women reported that their usual wake up time was 4 a.m. and they did not go to bed until 9 p.m, on most days (Nji, 1985). They also cover more kilometres daily than men as they are often constrained to work between several plots.

It must be noted that one reason farm plots are scattered throughout a farming zone is because of differences in soil types and fertility based on an indigenous knowledge system of soil taxonomy developed by the farmers themselves. Thus they know that cocoyams can grow on some soils while on others only cassava would produce good yields. Coffee farms are known to be much less discriminatory because of the possibility of applying fertilizers and the much larger land required for a productive coffee farm. Men, women and children provide labour for the various operations on cocoyam and coffee farms. It is important to note the dominance of the family as source of labour on six of the eleven key operations that take place on cocoyam and coffee farms. Children play key roles in land preparation, planting, weeding, harvesting, transportation and marketing. This pattern has been widely described in various literatures on subsistence agriculture in developing countries, (Chubbier and Fishcer, 1991; Barghouti and Le Moigne, 1990; Lele, 1991; Hoff et al., 1993).

If the prevailing structure and organisation of family farms persist, as it is likely to be for decades to come, the productivity of African agriculture is likely to lag behind population growth, thus jeopardizing food security and the development of the continent (Nji, 2004). Moreover, food security cannot be promoted to the exclusion of the overall welfare of the populations. As Fadahunsi and Igwe (1989) note, an integrated and multi-disciplinary rural development approach must take into account major factors affecting the welfare of the rural populations. Such an approach should include the provision of feeder roads, water supply and storage facilities alongside promoting agricultural production. This strategy was honed as

the integrated rural development model of the 1970s and 80s (Nji 1981, Lele, 1991; Evans 1966).

Although labour requirement is highest during weeding, the demand for labour is high in all cocoyam-based farm operations. Farmers reported that children are particularly needed and actively participate in making the ridges on which the crops are planted. Children also manage planting and weeding operations and are the key actors in harvesting and transportation of cocoyams. The special roles played by farm children do not end there. They are also required or claim their importance when it comes to peeling or pounding cocoyams for the popular African cocoyam- taro meals. Wellman (1961) believes that the best skills in coffee production are developed during harvesting. It can be argued from this field research that, the high demands at weeding and harvesting on coffee-based farms arise from a number of factors: 1) the size of the farms; 2) the need for timely completion of the tasks to achieve good quality results; 3) the need to respect the coffee marketing calendar which is often hedged on demands and timelines of the world market.

Coffee planting is done once in about seven years, and so does not require much family labour throughout the year. Pruning is done periodically and can be spaced out with other farming operations as time and circumstances allow. On the contrary, weeding and harvesting are time specific and must be done at the appropriate period if the farmer is to enjoy the fruits of a good harvest. This depends on the price of the produce which in turn depends on the quantity and quality of the crop.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research show that agriculture in Momo Division, Cameroon, as in other African communities is predominantly a family enterprise characterized by high labour requirements, rudimentary technology, low inputs, traditional farming systems and a clear division of labour based on gender, age, technology and the crop. It is argued that agricultural production and the productivity of peasant agriculture depends on a thorough understanding of the dynamics of these variables, the creation of an enabling policy environment and the judicious integration of these factors into the agriculture development mix. The results show that the labour distribution pattern on cocoyam and coffee farms is gender sensitive with women being the major source of the labour required. This may explain why women tend to hire more labour

than men, especially as family labour is mostly in short supply during peak agricultural periods. In addition, women have to work on coffee farms. Without the help of their children, subsistence agriculture in peasant economies is almost unsustainable. Weeding is shown as the most important operation in cocoyam production while harvesting is the most important in coffee production. These are the activities where women and children are the key players in the agricultural enterprise. It becomes clear that coffee production tends to put more pressure and increases the burden on women and children. If peasant agriculture is to be transformed into commercial agriculture, there is need for sharper policy analysis and political commitment, coupled with a more aggressive and purposeful agrarian reforms that pave the way for modern agriculture to make the sector more attractive and profitable for young men and women. A blanket application of international policies such as the ban on all forms of child labour is inappropriate. In the case of Africa, it can be demonstrated that child labour cannot be banned in agriculture without hurting the agricultural system in their present structure, organisation and purpose.

Rather, policy strategies should be targeted to ensure leverage on the traditional burden imposed by peasant farming systems on women and children, taking into consideration the implications of international policies for peasant economies. Without bold and comprehensive strategies to improve peasant agriculture such as for example, by introducing appropriate technologies for various farming operations, food processing, preservation, marketing and consumption, poor people will remain poor (Nji, 2004) as the rest of the world struggles to cope with the fast pace of technological change affecting human societies today. In taking a position contradictory to the fight against child labour, there is no disagreement with Sandra Overhoff (2006:260) that "education is the best protection" of the child. The problems of the African child must be examined in a more holistic and systematic analysis that promotes sustainable development with a human face.

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