

Insights



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REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON – COUNTRY STRATEGY AND PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Behind every data point there is a human story

As part of the Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation (CSPE) conducted in the Republic of Cameroon, the evaluation team piloted an innovative approach to confirm the linkages between the support provided by projects and changes in living conditions as perceived by beneficiary households. The study targeted two projects financed by IFAD focussed on the cassava, rice and onion value chains. It sought to fill the evidence gap regarding the contribution made by project outputs to the changes measured in IFAD impact domains, such as agricultural productivity, incomes and food security.

The approach was based on a participatory methodology called *SenseMaker* that involved the collection of a large number of brief stories from beneficiaries, recounting one or more notable changes perceived as a result of their participation in producer organizations (PO) supported by an IFAD project. The short stories were then analysed by the respondents themselves through a separate interpretation questionnaire. This lent the analysis greater legitimacy by reducing the bias associated with an external expert's interpretation of the data. In total, 590 stories were collected and self-interpreted from 20 POs, of which 12 were located in the northern regions and 8 in the western regions of Cameroon.

Then, an analysis of the responses using dedicated *SenseMaker* software made it possible to uncover trends embedded in the stories, by positioning the large number of stories on specially designed charts. The software analysis brought up additional questions which were further explored during four participatory workshops with beneficiaries who took part in the survey.

Opening question to elicit the personal stories

Since you have become a member of the producers' organisation, can you tell us about an important positive or negative change related to the production, processing or selling/marketing of your crop (onion, rice or cassava) and how this has affected you and your family? Please describe what happened?

Study results

Members interviewed were generally satisfied with services provided by their PO, which were mainly focused on training, processing and storage of produce. A vast majority of members believed that their organisation had

¹ The projects were the Roots and Tubers Market-Driven Development Programme (PNDRT, which concluded in 2012) and the Commodity Value-Chain Development Support Project (PADFA, which ended in 2017).

an inclusive and representative form of governance; but this finding must be qualified due to the fact that several stories alleged monopolization by certain individuals or expressed the feeling of certain members that their needs were being ignored. Also, sustainability issues emerged from the stories, mainly linked to internal tensions in the POs, inadequacy of processing equipment and storage facilities, and limited availability of seeds and fertilizers after the end of the projects.

“Since joining the Union in 2007, I’ve benefited from improved and resilient seeds provided by the Union, which I can now multiply and use in my field to increase my production. I’ve been able to increase my income to cover my family’s needs, pay my children’s expenses and even look after my elderly parents. Another thing that helped me a lot is the presence of a processing machine that allows me to process cassava into gari more easily and quickly.”

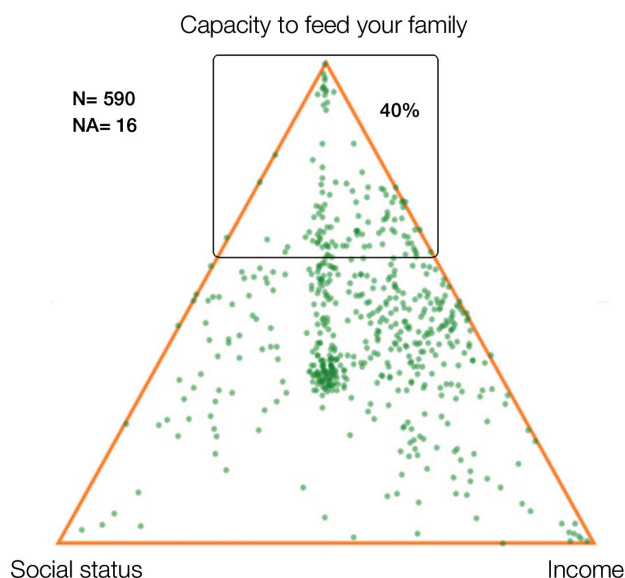
Young woman, Mbufong, Northwest, Cassava, 5 April 2017

“Since I’ve been in the farmers’ group, there have been a lot of difficulties, including leadership problems among the members. In the group, the leaders monopolized power, and ten members and myself withdrew. Nonetheless, we continue to save money and I invested in my farm, which has enabled me to send my children to school and to the hospital. I joined the cooperative and here it’s more structured and there is consensus. I hope the cooperative will benefit me a lot.”

Man, Maroua, Far North, Onion, April 5, 2017

The stories related a significant increase in production due to training in agricultural practices and the provision of quality seeds and new varieties. Increased production resulted in improved food security, as an important part of the cassava and rice produced was consumed by the households. However, the agricultural techniques proposed by the projects are not fully mastered. Women who took part in the survey brought up constraints related to land access and labour costs. In addition, external factors such as droughts in the northern regions and the destruction of fields by birds among the rice producers surveyed in the western regions added uncertainty to production, and slowed down the adoption of new cropping techniques.

The change related in your history had mainly an impact on...



Income growth depended also on the evolution of selling prices. Stories indicate that an improvement in storage conditions of rice and onion, and in processing of cassava and rice, have contributed to improve the quality of produce and to increase selling prices. Nonetheless, concerns over transport and market access are frequently mentioned, in particular amongst cassava growers who lament the lack of services provided by their POs in this area. POs could also have done more in terms of providing price information or organizing grouped purchases or sales.

The stories show how additional income has been used mainly to meet family needs, particularly food, and to invest in preparing the next agricultural season. However, the increase in income is rarely sufficient for investment in the sustainable improvement of the farm through purchase of land and/or tools and equipment to enhance labour productivity.

The study has shown that support to agriculture through POs can be effective and lead to an income increase, but that the needs of certain more vulnerable groups such as women are not always catered for in those organisations. In addition, there is still a lot of room for improving PO services related to group purchases and sales, transport, storage and processing, which are considered very important by their members to reduce production costs and guarantee a profitable selling price.

Further information:

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