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Exploring the Intent of Agro-pastoral Entrepreneurs Trained in Agricultural Colleges of Northwest Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

The entrepreneurship intentions of agro-pastoral entrepreneurs and those in training in colleges of agriculture in Cameroon are not well understood. This is due to the paucity of data on their motivations for enrolment in the agricultural entrepreneurship course, their propensity to create agricultural enterprises upon completion of the training, and the difficulties they face in creating their enterprises. A case study of the Regional College of Agriculture, Bambili in the Northwest region of Cameroon was conducted during which, open-ended questionnaires were administered to individuals and focus groups. The data collected were analyzed using the thematic framework. Themes emerged on the various categories of information sought. The study revealed that youths are motivated mainly by perceived opportunities to take agricultural entrepreneurship training. Entrepreneurs have positive intentions to create agricultural enterprises post-training, however, they are constrained by difficult access to land, limited finances, unsupportive laws, and complex bureaucratic procedures for enterprise creation. Government land reforms, the pursuit of the strategy on inclusive financing and the easing of procedures for registration of enterprises will incentivise trained entrepreneurs to create formal agricultural enterprises. Further research in agricultural colleges in other agroecological zones will consolidate the understanding of the intentions of youths who take entrepreneurship training and elicit informed decisions from policymakers.

INTRODUCTION

The population of youth in Africa is rising rapidly, whereas, it has plateaued and begun to fall in the rest of the developing world (UNDESA, 2017). This rapidly increasing population poses major challenges to African nations which are largely low-income countries, as they need to invest increasingly in improving the future of these youthful citizens (Stecklov & Menashe-Oren, 2019). These challenges are further compounded by widespread poverty and the high proportion of youths in rural areas, which continue to lag behind in economic development (Filmer and Fox, 2014). Although UNDESA, (2017) reported GDP growth estimated at 4.5% annually and some reduction in

poverty for most Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, these achievements have been attributed primarily to revenues generated from oil, gas, and mineral extraction, and not from labor-intensive sectors such as agriculture or manufacturing. Young people in Africa, who have weaker links to the world of work than the general population, are seriously disadvantaged, yet, they constitute the bulk of the continent's population as some 70% of the population are under the age of 30 (UNDESA, 2022). The continent's youthful population is an opportunity that may only be fully exploited if youth are empowered to realize their potential, and if they are given appropriate work opportunities. Unfortunately, however, youth unemployment in

Africa is extremely high, averaging some 20% across the continent and reaching 30 to 40% in some countries (Filmer and Fox, 2014). Though the definition of employment may influence these measures, Fox & Pimhidzai, (2013) estimate that even if the number of industrial sector wage and salary jobs increase at the projected 55%, this growth will start from a rather small base and will not contribute substantially in absorbing the millions of young Africans who arrive the labor markets annually.

The situation of youth employment in Cameroon is a reflection of that of SSA, characterized by acute and rising difficulty faced by cohorts of youths in finding gainful employment (Avom et al., 2021). According to Capazario et al. (2020), the unemployment rates among young Cameroonians aged 15 to 24 years varied from 12.34% in 1991 to 6.4% in 2020. The National Institute of Statistics (INS, 2015) reported unemployment rates of about 23.8% among Cameroonian youths aged 17 to 35 years, with a rate of 46% in urban towns, as against 37.3% in rural areas where youths reportedly tend to find some work both in on- and off-farm activities. Nonetheless, the difficult social and economic conditions that rural youths face, often push them to urban towns where they fuel the rising youth populations and aggravate the already dramatic unemployment problems. Sosale & Majgaard (2016) reported that whereas the overall unemployment rate for the active workforce aged 15–59 years in Cameroon decreased by about 11% over that period from 2001 to 2010, the rate for youths aged 25–34 years, dropped at a less drastic rate of only 8% indicating that youth unemployment in Cameroon is still very high.

According to Arsalan et al. (2019), increased youth employment, poverty reduction, and rural development in SSA countries must be underpinned by rural transformation which is youth-inclusive, and in which agricultural entrepreneurship plays an important role.

Globally, entrepreneurship is increasingly perceived as a development-promoting tool, and it is recognized that countries that encourage and facilitate the development of entrepreneurship generally experience economic development (Badri and Badri, 2020). Maurer et al. (2021) argue that entrepreneurship does not only contribute to

national economic development but also plays an important role in personal development and social cohesion as anyone irrespective of their social background or location, can take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities that are presented to them. Entrepreneurship is therefore a powerful driver of competitiveness and growth for business ventures and plays a critical role in job creation and employment (Onalan & Magda, 2020).

When agricultural entrepreneurship is considered, a key question arises as to whether it is different from entrepreneurship in other sectors. Muzari (2015) sees agricultural entrepreneurship as a profitable marriage between entrepreneurship and agriculture with the specific aim of turning a farm holding or an agriculture-related activity into a business. As most farmers regard agriculture as a philosophy and a lifestyle, agricultural entrepreneurship can thus be said to bind together elements of philosophy, lifestyle, and business, yielding ideals that give the entrepreneur purpose and goals to strive for. According to Pindado and Sánchez (2017), agribusiness and agricultural entrepreneurship depend heavily on the natural, cultural, historical, human, social, economic, and financial resources of the location where the venture will be implanted, or is operating, as these factors will contribute to support its growth and development.

In the face of persistent rising youth unemployment and socio-political dissension, the Cameroon government (like the governments of many other SSA countries), has targeted the agricultural sector as one that should play a leading role in job provision for youths. This is well articulated in the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (Government of Cameroon, 2010), which identifies agribusiness targeting maize, cotton, banana, palm oil, cocoa, and coffee as priority commodities, in addition to forestry (wood and wood processing), mining, and tourism sectors as the key engines of economic growth and employment for Cameroon.

As part of youth-specific support initiatives, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries launched the Support Program for the Renovation and Development of Professional Training in the Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries sector (AFOP) in 2008. This program was charged

with the renovation of agricultural training through the rehabilitation and equipping of training structures, the revamping of training contents in order to professionalize agricultural training, and the improvement of the employability of those youth who go through the system (AFOP, 2012). AFOP program developed eight new training pathways in agricultural schools and colleges in Cameroon, including specialized training in agro-pastoral entrepreneurship, which went operational since 2010 with the specific objective of training agricultural entrepreneurs who would be self-employed, serve as employees in agricultural small and medium enterprises or in large agro-industries.

Following the launching of the agricultural training renovation program, fourteen (14) of the twenty-six (26) agricultural colleges in Cameroon embarked on the training of Agro-pastoral Entrepreneurs (APEs). In the Northwest region of the country, 3 of the 6 agricultural colleges opted for the APE training pathway. The training program is based on occupational standards drawn up after carefully conducted diagnostic studies of the profession, the job description, performance levels, and learner assessment requirements. From the onset, these reference documents were intended to give the training program a hands-on practical approach that would confer the required competencies to the learners to make them truly professional, during, and after their training. Since 2010, the AFOP Program has trained some 7,000 Agro-Pastoral Entrepreneurs (APEs) with about 1,500 of them in colleges in the Northwest Region of the country. However, over the same period, only 8 of the young APEs in the region have approached the AFOP program for grants to set up their farm enterprises, contrary to a relatively higher enthusiasm for financing as expressed by those in other regions. On the other hand, no study had been carried out earlier to assess the motivation of the candidates for the entrepreneurship training and their post-training entrepreneurial intent.

The aim of this study is therefore to seek answers to the questions on the motivation of youth before their enrolment for the agro-pastoral entrepreneurship training, the contribution of the training to their propensity to take up agricultural entrepreneurial activities upon graduation, and the reason why so few of them actually create agricultural microenterprises after their training.

METHODS

Research Design

This study is a case study, focusing on one of the three colleges of agriculture in the northwest region of Cameroon that train Agro-Pastoral Entrepreneurs. It employs an exploratory design and is therefore grounded on qualitative data that is text-based, descriptive, and contextual in nature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The epistemological paradigm of the study is interpretivism which assumes that reality is subjective, multiple, and socially construed and is captured through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments. This implies that there is no unique reality, and what a study participant considers as their reality can best be understood through their experiences and social constructions, which can be quite different from those of other participants (Alharahsheh & Abraham, 2020). From the axiological or ethical perspective, the researchers made an effort to adopt a posture that was as free of bias as possible, to avoid influencing the quality of the data with their personal values.

The initial phase of this study involved a review of existing secondary data to gain insights into the identified issue. This is in line with O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015), who recommend that researchers should efficiently collect, analyze, interpret, and present diverse types of data, encompassing both primary and secondary sources. During this phase, archival data on the enrolment, training, graduation, and post-training activities of APEs from the first to the fifth batch in the college were also carefully analyzed to develop a clear picture of learner performances and their post-training outcomes. Subsequently, in-depth interviews with participants were conducted to address the research questions formulated.

The Study Site

The study was conducted in the Regional College of Agriculture Bambili, which together with the Technical Schools of Agriculture in Bambili, and Nkambe constitute the three colleges that offer specific middle-level training on agro-pastoral entrepreneurship in the Northwest region of Cameroon. Three other colleges in the region offer middle-level, agriculture-related training, focusing on community development, cooperative management and livestock husbandry and

veterinary sciences. Though the trained agro-pastoral entrepreneurs are expected to set up enterprises and be in majority self-employed, youths graduating from other colleges can also initiate private ventures and grow them into thriving agribusinesses. The Regional College of Agriculture (RCA) concerned by the study is situated in Bambili, which is a rapidly growing town as it is also host to the Bamenda University, a number of university colleges, other educational institutions, the agricultural research institute and a host of government services. Bambili is located in Tubah Subdivision, some 20 km from Bamenda, the headquarters of Mezam Division and also the headquarters of the Northwest Region. The main occupation of the majority of inhabitants of the region is agriculture, which gives the Regional College all its importance in this administrative unit of the country.

Sampling Strategy, and Sampling Approach

The purposive approach was used to select the case college based on the criteria of number of years of existence, level of agricultural training, experience in APE training, number of APEs trained, number of APEs of the current batch in training, and ease of access. As concerns, the population of learners of the college, those who had completed their training were classified into two main strata: entrepreneurs who had started an agriculture-related activity in which they were self-employed, and those who had not. The snowball approach was used to conduct sampling in each of the categories, such that participants were identified, and interviewed until saturation was attained. Learners who were still in training were also categorized into strata guided by year of training (Y1 and Y2), and gender (male and female). Respondents in each of the four substrata were randomly sampled and in-depth interviews were conducted with them. Finally, focus group discussions were organized involving two groups of learners drawn randomly from the first and second-year batches with sampling done proportionately to include a balanced sample of male and female learners in both cases. These discussions were intended to provide more information, but also to serve as a means of triangulation of the data collected from individual learners and thereby strengthen the internal validity of the study.

Data Collection

Interview questionnaires were designed including five open-ended lead questions intended to launch discussions on the main issues of the motivation of participants to enroll in the APE training, their perception of the quality of the training, the entrepreneurial intent of learners during training, the post-training outcomes and the determinants of the low levels of enterprise creation by cohorts of graduating agricultural entrepreneurs. Responses to these lead questions would pave the way for more in-depth and prolonged engagement with each respondent. Similarly, discussion guides were designed for the focus group discussions with an emphasis on open-ended questions that would elicit responses that were expressive of the participants' experiences, perceptions, and thoughts. Before data collection, both instruments were piloted to ensure that the participants clearly understood the questions asked. Where there were any misunderstandings, the questions were reviewed to clear the areas of doubt.

In the case of individual interviews, of trained entrepreneurs, an initial interviewee who met the selection criteria was contacted, interviewed, and asked to propose one or two mates, friends, or acquaintances who met the criteria of the participant category. Where the proposed respondent was physically available, interviews were conducted face-to-face, and where this was not feasible, the interviews were run by telephone. The researchers engaged each participant for about forty-five minutes to one hour until saturation was attained when no new data was recorded as new participants were interviewed (Saunders et al., 2017). As suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2015), saturation was attained at the seventh to ninth participants for both sample categories. Focus group discussions ran for about one hour at the end of which all the constructs initially targeted had been covered and no new data were being provided for any of the constructs, by group participants.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, the six-step framework recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used. The focus was more on the inductive, bottom-up approach driven by the data than the top-down approach that hinges on the research question. First of all, the researchers carefully transcribed all recordings into computerized word transcripts. They

then read through all the transcripts and field notes to thoroughly familiarise themselves with the data corpus and get a common understanding of participants' responses as well as the deeper meanings behind certain words and expressions used. Whenever in doubt with a section of a transcript, the researchers returned to the original recordings and listened to them again, to clarify their doubts. Working together on the first set of transcripts, the researchers identified segments of data depicting particular ideas or meanings and coded them while making notes and discussing them to have a common understanding of the coding process. In this way, coder variability was reduced and the trustworthiness of the analysis improved. Using Excel software as explained by Bree and Gallagher (2016), the researchers worked separately to code the rest of the transcripts. The codes were carefully examined and organized into broad themes. The themes that emerged from the clustering of codes were compared with initial data and reviewed to make sure that no important data were omitted. The themes were carefully analyzed and where necessary, they were renamed, split, or merged to make sure that they were distinctive enough, and captured all of the participants' narratives. Finally, the themes were refined by examining each of them and ensuring that they actually represented the data they were supposed to capture (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study presented in the sections that follow are ordered in a way as to provide answers to the research questions. Firstly, we present and discuss the deeper feelings articulated by the young APEs with regard to their motivations to enroll and take the course on agricultural entrepreneurship. Secondly, we examine the respondents' perceptions with respect to the role of entrepreneurship training in preparing them to enter the entrepreneurial world through the creation and management of agricultural enterprises. The third section brings out some explanations on the rather reduced number of trained APEs who effectively create enterprises and then highlights the major difficulties that these youths have in setting up the ventures they are expected to initiate following their completion of the training program.

Motivation to Take the Agricultural Entrepreneurship Course

Analysis of data on the motivations of the respondents to enroll and take the agricultural entrepreneurship course in the first place led to the emergence of two main themes that were labeled as Embracing opportunity and Deep Conviction.

1. Embracing opportunity

The theme of embracing opportunity emerged from the arguments advanced by many of the participants that agriculture offers a singular opportunity for enterprise development by youths in Cameroon, and a real niche for their employment. According to them, this is an opportunity that the youth need to embrace. The respondents however pointed out that there will be little future even for those who consider themselves as agro-pastoral entrepreneurs if they do not develop a true entrepreneurial attitude and approach to their engagement in any agriculture-related activities that may lead to the creation of agricultural enterprises. The perception by the majority of the participants of their involvement in agricultural entrepreneurship as a way of identifying and pursuing opportunities in the field of agriculture stands out clearly as a strong motivation for their choice. Further examination and analysis of the study data led to the splitting of the main theme of embracing opportunity into two sub-themes including "profit-seeking", and "access to funding",

a. Profit-seeking

Study participants generally agree that an agro-pastoral entrepreneur is first of all a businessman or woman, at the helm of an agricultural enterprise. To them, such an enterprise is involved either in the production of crops or livestock and may engage in transformation activities to add value to the products and generate substantial profits. According to the respondents, though the entrepreneur strives for sustenance, the focus should be on income improvement and poverty reduction at the individual and household levels. In so doing, they employ others to facilitate operations in their enterprise and thereby make them profitable.

Furthermore, most of the participants are unanimous that they can only take appropriate advantage of the opportunity that agriculture offers if they are entrepreneurial in the way they run the farm enterprises that they create. For this, they must identify particular openings in relation to various

commodities, and seek to pursue these opportunities by increasingly producing for markets and profits, unlike their parents who are engaged mostly in subsistence production activities. From their perspective, it is only by adopting an entrepreneurial spirit and building the necessary drive, that they can be able to generate substantial profits that permit them to make a difference with other farmers and stay on top of the segments in which they are involved. As entrepreneurs, this category of respondents insist that they must be true professionals in what they do, produce quality products (crops and animals) that will sell themselves, and propel them up the ladder of recognition by other farmers, who will see them as reference persons, models and guides that they have to follow. In support of these arguments, one respondent said: "I have dreamt of being a farmer with a difference where many farmers look up to me as maybe a guide, a reference, and a director I would like to produce quality crops that will sell themselves."

To further substantiate this point, another young agro-pastoral entrepreneur affirmed that: "An APE is somebody who has studied agriculture and can be able to implement it in any context, that is, transform it from paper to action. It should be somebody who is very conscious and focused because, when you are dealing with life (whether animals or plants), you have to be very conscious. You need to know exactly at what stage to do what, you should not be somebody who only wants others to do things for you; you should not only be that kind of master who after creating a farm, puts his hands in his pockets and begins to give orders; you must show the workers how to do it".

Another respondent contends that: "The APE is someone who studies existing opportunities before going into production. That is, he should not just get up and say I want to produce maize and go ahead to produce the maize without knowing what will become of the maize when he finishes production. Most importantly I think it is very necessary that as an APE, should be able to interact with the market and the environment, that is, one who should look for opportunities, to make a profit. They should not let anyone to be between them and the market. They should be able to interact directly with those who are buying".

In addition, still, in connection to profit-seeking, many of the APEs, were of the opinion that to be successful in doing business and in generating enough profits, they must be ambitious, or possess the drive needed to build thriving and profitable enterprises and not ventures that would merely permit them to survive.

b. Access to funding

Some of the respondents indicated that their motivation to enroll and take the course of agricultural entrepreneurship was based on their desire to access the grants provided by the AFOP Program. These grants are intended to give trained youths some capital to start up their farm enterprises. Since access to finance is one of the primary limiting factors of youth involvement and participation in agriculture, these trained APEs as well as those in training considered the grants provided, as a powerful incentive for their entry into the entrepreneurship program, and an opportunity not to be missed. However, upon completion of the training, many of them have not sought funding from this program. In an attempt to explain why, some respondents argued that though the amount of the grant which ranges between FCFA 1,500,000 (US\$ 2460) to FCFA 2,500,000 (US\$ 4100) is substantial enough, and deserving as capital to start an agricultural microenterprise, the procedure to access the funds was somewhat complicated. In their opinion, the hassle involved in mounting an academic project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for qualification as an Agro-Pastoral Entrepreneur, and then another professional project to be submitted in view of accessing the funds provided by the funding program (AFOP) was too much.

The words of one respondent aptly described this situation: "Prior to my enrolment, I learned that the AFOP Program would fund our projects when we completed the agro-pastoral entrepreneurship training course. I was very happy and convinced my parents to let me go for the training and to pay my tuition fees. To my surprise, I learned that the farm enterprise project I had written while in training did not meet the requirements of the funding body. We were asked to redo the project using a format that was quite different from what we did during training. It was too much work so I preferred to start something small using my small savings and support from friends and family members".

When some of the APEs did not get the funding they had expected to obtain from the funding program, they embarked on alternative sources of financing to start up their farm enterprises. Some of them sought temporary employment with organizations that needed their services while others engaged in various activities to generate the finances they needed. Two of the participants who found themselves in this situation respectively declared: "I work as a temporal zonal extension worker; this activity to me is like a source of capital to fund the activities of my farm while waiting for the funding to grow big". "I went into bike riding, buying and selling vegetables. There were times when farmers would engage me to guide them, and this is how I raised income to start my enterprise. Presently, I do welding and car repairs during off-season periods to raise some money to prepare for the next farming season and meet up with my needs".

2. Deep Conviction

The theme labeled deep conviction came out of the data, revealing that the young APEs were deeply convinced about their decision to enroll and take the course on agricultural entrepreneurship for a number of reasons. Two sub-themes presented in the section that follows emerged, based on these motives. They were:

a. Self-employment

Some of the study participants revealed that their strong motivation to take the training on agricultural entrepreneurship was to be self-employed, independent, and masters of their enterprises and their destinies. Whereas the student entrepreneurs talked of their drive to gain new knowledge and build necessary skills, those who were trained maintained that they were sure they could make it on their own, considering that they had sharpened their abilities to be innovative, creative, flexible and capable of adapting to a wide array of conditions, but above all, they were more self-reliant and therefore could employ themselves under the prevailing conditions. They insisted that they did not envy those employed by the public service or some private companies as they earned salaries that were not commensurate with their training and potential. To buttress this position, a self-employed entrepreneur affirmed: "What is expected of an agro-pastoral entrepreneur is to create an agricultural enterprise, be self-employed,

and contribute to promoting rural development. This implies that a trainee with a positive attitude toward the potential of the agricultural sector is capable of setting up an enterprise that employs them and other youth in their localities. I am very comfortable working on my own in my enterprise, which may be small, but which I intend to develop into a thriving business".

b. Passion for agriculture

This sub-theme derives from the narrative of some APEs who stated that their motives to go in for the agricultural entrepreneurship course was rooted on their deep passion for agriculture. This intrinsic factor served as a personal drive to build their entrepreneurial intention with a focus on the agricultural sector. In some cases, this passion was developed under the influence of external or extrinsic factors such as the encouragement of some leading political figures and elites in their communities, basing their arguments on the importance of agriculture to the national economy. In other cases, the push came from their wider families and more particularly their parents who serve as role models or actually talked with them and convinced them to take that final step. One of the respondents summed it all in the words: "I grew up with my mom, we have always been struggling, the only thing I saw my mom doing was farming. I really admired her, since I lost my dad far back in the year 2000. She took care of us from that time till now only from her farm work, so that's where I really discovered that you must not only be in an office to work, you can work your farm and make a profit to take care of yourself and the others. But I wanted to be a professional".

The findings of this study with reference to embracing opportunity, align with those of Nasiri and Hamelin (2018) who point out that some of the prominent motivational factors for beginning entrepreneurs to start up an enterprise are push-pull factors. Some nascent entrepreneurs are pulled by seeing an opportunity for business, while others are pushed by the necessity to make a living, especially when they cannot get a better job or a better offering in life. Giacomini et al. (2011) argue that the pull motivations take different forms such as market opportunity, a quest for a higher social status, profits, self-employment, independence, recognition, financial success, and self-realization among others. Opportunity entrepreneurs as well as

those who will potentially enter this category, exploit business openings and contribute to economic development. The young agro-pastoral entrepreneurs in this study who enrolled in the entrepreneurship training because they wanted to embrace the opportunities offered by the training, fit into this category of persons. Furthermore, Shahzad et al. (2021) hold that individuals with a higher level of education who generally tend to be opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, may have better social networks that are fruitful for their business development as they have stayed longer in an educational system. They also have a deep passion for what they do and this can in part explain their choice of agricultural entrepreneurship for which they have developed such a passion.

Nasiri and Hamelin (2018) point out that the push factors of the push-pull dichotomy stem generally from necessity. According to them, individuals who cannot be hired because of their lack of education and language skills are pushed to become necessity entrepreneurs. In this study, none of the participants declared having been pushed into deciding to take the agricultural entrepreneurship training course.

On the other hand, the findings of this study in connection with profit-seeking and economic gains in general, concur with those of Douglas and Fitzsimmons, (2008) who found that individuals who prefer more income, more independence, and more ownership have high entrepreneurial intentions.

Role of Agricultural Entrepreneurship Training in Preparing Youth for Entry Into the Entrepreneurial World

The perceptions of trained APEs and those undergoing training as concerns the role of agricultural entrepreneurship training on preparing learners to enter the entrepreneurial world, led to the emergence of three themes respectively named; Entrepreneurship orientation, Skills development, and Social network building. These themes are presented and discussed in the section that follows.

1. Entrepreneurship orientation

The study participants were unanimous that the agricultural entrepreneurship training program is very important because it prepares the learners and gives them the necessary orientation to enter the entrepreneurial world and confront the realities of their domain. Some of these realities are the risk-

laden nature of agriculture due to its seasonality, exposure to natural hazards such as drought, excessive rains and resultant floods, pests, and disease attacks, post-harvest problems, volatility of the prices of farm produce, and uncertainties that stem from market imperfections. They indicated that through the training they have access to knowledge on general agriculture, and most especially, they are exposed to farming as a business. In addition, they acquire knowledge of agricultural entrepreneurship, farm business, and strategic management among other subject matters. However, though all of the respondents expressed their satisfaction with the training, some of them argued that despite their satisfaction, they found the practical aspect of the training in the college wanting. According to them, emphasis has to be laid on the practical facet of the training of the APE for it to be more complete. A respondent who was satisfied with the training affirmed: "Actually the training just came into my life at a time when I badly needed it given the situation of our country which is characterized by low agricultural production, high demand for farm products, high unemployment, especially of youths. The training helped me to be able to cut through marketing channels, to find a greater market for my products. I can say I got all the skills I need in the field in which I am interested".

Another entrepreneur who had initiated their farm project confirmed the importance of the training he had received in the following words: "The training is a necessity, firstly because when I was producing back then, I had little or no knowledge on many things like improved seeds. I had little knowledge on improved techniques, I had no information on other markets elsewhere, I had little knowledge even on record keeping, on how to even determine if I was making a gain or a loss. So when I heard about the training, firstly I knew I needed to be empowered with the technical know-how so that I should be able to produce better than the other villagers. Yes! the training gave me the necessary skills to start up."

This view was however disputed by a trainee who declared that: "I will say that the Regional College of Agriculture is zero in terms of the practical aspects of running an enterprise".

2. Skills development

The theme of skills development is grounded on the perceptions of respondents who pointed out that the agricultural entrepreneurship training offered at the Regional College, is indispensable because it offers them the opportunity to acquire the skills necessary for the creation, management, and development of their agricultural businesses in general and their farm enterprises in particular. Furthermore, the training provided the competencies that the learners would need to obtain jobs in the public and private sectors.

Closely related to the acquisition of technical skills is the issue of good disease management as some of the respondents indicated that this is what they gained from the training, while others were in the affirmative that the training on agricultural entrepreneurship permitted them to eventually become exemplary farmers in their various communities. This is exemplified by the narrative of a respondent who stated as follows: "I am into Irish potato production; I start by buying my seeds during the off-season, from the Institute of Agronomic Research for Development (IRAD). I multiply the seeds and plant them during the main cropping season, and my yields are exceptional because my seeds are almost disease-free since I do all the operations myself as they are very delicate. My approach is unlike that of other farmers around me, so my seeds, my production my everything is far better than that of the other farmers".

3. Social network building

This theme labeled social network building emanated from the points of view of the respondents who in their majority indicated that the duration of the training is two years, during which they have the opportunity to build very strong networks among themselves on the one hand, and on the other hand, between them and their internship masters with whom they interact on the field, when they are out for their internship. In addition, the training permits them to be exposed to the market and to build relationships with various players in the marketing channels of a number of commodities. Such networks are very useful when they set up their own enterprises. One of the entrepreneurs encapsulated the role of training in network building by explaining his social networks: "After my training, I thought I should gather one or two colleagues from the same course option to start

something. Since we had developed different sets of skills, I thought we should be able to bring our ideas together and constitute some small capital to set up two production units. The first one would be an agroforestry nursery, which is still under development. We produce agroforestry trees, ornamentals, flowers, and fruit trees (pear, plums, citrus, guava); We are into gardening tomatoes and potatoes and we have 2 plantations of plantains with a propagation unit. We also render services and share the profits. I am quite satisfied with the training I took at the Regional College".

The level of satisfaction expressed by most of the APEs is due in great part to the organization of their training which is designed in a way that theoretical training is interspersed with internship phases for hands-on practical training in the field, on farm enterprises owned by practicing and successful entrepreneurs. The technical foundation laid down by the training is undoubtedly the main driving force for them to set up their own businesses.

The findings of this study are in consonance with those of Kisaka, (2014) who reported that there is a positive and significant relationship between education and training and entrepreneurial behavior among micro and small enterprises in Kenya. Similarly, Cowling (2009) found a positive effect of school-based entrepreneurial training on the performance of small firms in the UK. He also found a positive relationship between entrepreneurs who received government-backed entrepreneurial training and the output of the small firms that they owned and managed. Saah, (2022) affirms that proprietors and managers of small and medium enterprises who do not receive an adequate level of education and training to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies to run their businesses effectively, are more likely to fail, whereas those who do undergo entrepreneurship education and training and attain a reasonable level are more likely to succeed. In like manner, the findings of this study are in concurrence with evidence from the study conducted by Orabi et al. (2022) who found a high level of entrepreneurial intention among students of agriculture. These findings suggest that agricultural entrepreneurial education at an intermediate and higher level prepares young graduates for the creation of new ventures, and confirms that young graduates are

more willing to form new businesses after gaining the relevant inputs in business and entrepreneurship education.

The study results also resonate with those of Njoroge and Gatungu (2013) who found a positive relationship between training and small and medium enterprise performance. However, in their study, this positive impact of training and education on enterprise performance was observed only during the first year of existence and operation of the enterprise. Therefore, managers and employees need more education on financial management, strategic management, and marketing for their enterprises to grow and survive competition. This seems to suggest that education and training have a negative impact on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises after the first year since many managers of these enterprises lack the requisite skills for continued growth and development.

In her study to measure the effect of participation in an enterprise education and training program on young people's attitudes toward starting a business, and on their enterprise potential, Athayde, (2012) found that participation in the training program does not have a positive impact on young people's enterprise potential, however, this is moderated by other factors such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background and type of school attended. Similarly, Woldehanna et al. (2018) affirm that educational qualification does not appear to be a significant determinant for the survival of a micro and small enterprise, suggesting that to create an enterprise that survives, entrepreneurs do not need to have a high level of formal education.

With regard to social networking, the findings of this study align with those of Orabi et al. (2022) who revealed that networking between school and business colleagues as well as close family members facilitates the creation of a new venture. Networking helps young graduates to access information and other required assets to start their own businesses. The higher the rate of networking among students the greater will be the chance of new venture creation because they acquire whatever is necessary to start the new business.

It follows from the foregoing that extant empirical evidence on the relationship between education and training and the performance of

micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises is mixed.

Creation of Agricultural Enterprises by Trained Entrepreneurs

It came out from the study that the proportion of trained agricultural entrepreneurs who actually created agricultural enterprises was rather low, considering that they are trained primarily to create such enterprises, manage and grow them into thriving businesses that generate employment, and contribute to economic development. Analysis of relevant data leads to the emergence of three themes that attempt to offer some explanations to the problems of enterprise creation expressed by the trained agricultural entrepreneurs and the bottlenecks envisioned by those in training. These themes include limited land, lack of finances, and unsupportive laws and complexity of creation procedures.

1. Limited land

The theme labeled limited land, arises from participant narratives that pointed to difficulties related to the acquisition of land to start their farms or extend them. This is due on the one hand to the availability of land and on the other, to accessibility to land when it is available. In most communities of the western highlands of Cameroon, land acquisition for youth is mainly by inheritance. However, since life expectancy has increased in most communities, land transfer often happens at a later age and young men have to wait many years before inheriting their share of the family land, if at all. When this land is inherited, it has to be parcelled up and shared to the other male siblings, which contributes to substantially decreasing the land holdings passed from one generation to the next (Pamen and Yepndo, 2019).

According to study participants, access to land is crucial for setting up a farm holding or enterprise or extending an existing farm enterprise. It is very important as it contributes to household food security, and provides a means for employment creation, income generation, the improvement of agricultural performance, and economic development. To highlight the importance of land and its constraining role in enterprise creation by trained agricultural entrepreneurs, one of them affirmed as follows: "Apart from lack of finance there is the problem of land. You need to get a good piece of land to work, but then, you need finances to

purchase the land. I have been struggling to pay for land, if there was another empty piece of land behind to use, I would expand my farm, I am still hoping that AFOP has not forgotten us”.

2. Lack of finances

Finances are critical to start an enterprise and to ensure its survival, but as the study participants put it, they do not readily have access to these finances. Availability of finances can allow trained agro-pastoral entrepreneurs to initiate an activity and grow it even from small beginnings. In their narratives, the respondents made mention of difficult access to capital to start their enterprises, and difficulty in raising investment capital, which all culminate to limited capital for initial investments or for investment replacements. Furthermore, when they try to contract a loan, access to it is extremely difficult due mainly to the requirements of the financial institutions in terms of collateral and guarantees, and the very complex procedures put in place. As a respondent reiterated “The biggest problem we have is lack of financial support. With limited finances, we are forced to produce small quantities which do not satisfy all our customers. Right now we have a command for 3000 rootstocks, but we will not be able to supply them because we also need the rootstocks and we lack the means to produce more”.

Another respondent made the point about the difficulty of accessing bank loans in the affirmation: “I would also say that getting a loan from the bank is difficult for young people like us. All the banks are always asking for collateral which we don't have”.

3. Unsupportive laws and complexity of creation procedures

Land tenure and ownership, banking laws, trading regulations, and business and tax laws are some of the more common factors that can facilitate or limit the development of successful farm businesses. The ability to buy, sell, and hire land, the legal status of women with respect to access to land and finances, the complexity of business regulations, and the extent of bureaucratic procedures, all affect the environment in which new farm businesses and agricultural enterprises in general operate.

According to the respondents, land laws in Cameroon are not supportive of access to land by young people and women. This has to a certain

extent, excluded women and youth from secured access to productive land. Furthermore, the level of complexity of procedures for enterprise creation can either help them to formalize the new enterprises that they create or force them to keep the enterprises informal and maintain their operations in informality. Study participants went on to point out that current procedures for enterprise creation are highly bureaucratic though related laws and regulations may appear to facilitate the entire enterprise creation procedure. One of them declared: “A fundamental problem that disturbs is the land tenure system in place especially for women. Our tradition does not allow women to own land because it is generally said that they will go off for marriage. It is very difficult to acquire land, and you know that for any agricultural activity, land is primordial”.

Expatriating on the issue of bureaucracy of enterprise creation procedures, another agro-pastoral entrepreneur stated that: “The biggest challenge of creating the enterprise was getting the documents signed. It was not easy because I went up to the Divisional Officer's office so many times that I nearly said I will give up, but then, I persevered and after 2 months the documents were signed”.

The findings of this study on the unavailability of land as a key determinant of enterprise creation, are in agreement with those of the study conducted by MIJARC/IFAD/FAO (2012), which concluded that land is the biggest challenge when anyone starts farming. More than half of the respondents who were not practicing farmers mentioned access to land as one of the main factors that refrained them from starting a farming activity. With respect to the lack of finances, the findings of this study are supported by those of FAO (2014), which pointed at the availability of finances as a key element of success to the creation of enterprises by young agricultural entrepreneurs.

As concerns the problem of unsupportive laws and the complexity of creation procedures, Polo-Otero et al. (2020) confirm the findings of this study as they also concluded that the administrative complexities of creating an enterprise are not related to the levels of entrepreneurship and that the regulations do not originate volumes of enterprises, but only produce changes in their distribution between formal and informal companies. It can

therefore be concluded that reducing the administrative complexities (procedures, time, cost) of starting a business does not increase the levels of entrepreneurship. According to the context of each country, the reduction of administrative complexities could mainly result in a reduction of transaction costs and levels of informality of the enterprises created.

CONCLUSION

One of the challenges faced by most entrepreneurship training programs in Cameroon is the lack of real professional working situations for learning in general and the promotion of entrepreneurial culture in particular. The objective of this study was to understand the motivation of youths before their enrolment for the agro-pastoral entrepreneurship training, the contribution of the training to their propensity to create agricultural enterprises upon graduation, and the reasons why so few of them actually initiate such agricultural microenterprises. The study reveals that most of the youths who enroll and take the course on agricultural entrepreneurship do so because of the opportunities that this will offer them, and not out of necessity. It also points to a lack of access to land, limited finances, and unsupportive laws and bureaucratic procedures as the major constraints to their creating agricultural enterprises upon completion of their training. This suggests that if the youths who enroll in the colleges of agriculture are given sound training and provided land and the necessary financing for start-up capital, they would create enterprises that not only generate income but also curb unemployment and contribute to boosting the Cameroonian economy.

In this regard, it is recommended that the government should engage in reforms of the land laws which, are outdated and no longer match today's context for doing business, and give more attention to secure access by women and youth to land, for productive activities. The National Strategy for Financial Inclusion should be actively pursued with a special focus on youth inclusion through the facilitation of their access to services provided by financial institutions, insurance companies, and other non-financial service providers that will incentivize enterprise creation in general and the creation, growth, and development of agricultural enterprises in particular. Further

research should be carried out in other schools and colleges of agriculture that train agro-pastoral entrepreneurs to validate the results generated by this study, and to consolidate the understanding of the intentions of youths who enroll and take the agricultural entrepreneurship training in the various regions, to better meet their specific needs for agricultural enterprise creation.

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