

# Socio-Political Use of Large Scale Agriculture

## The Strategic Paradigm and the New Entrepreneur-Farmers in Cameroon

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### Introduction

**I**N POINT of fact, since their introduction during the colonial period, cocoa, coffee and cotton have been the cornerstone of the country's development plans (Ela 1990; Hugon 1993). Thus, multiple types of taxes have been used to extract money from small farmers. If individual taxes were instrumented by colonizers in order to draw profit from the incomes generated by cocoa, coffee and cotton, the postcolonial state uses not only tax mechanisms, but also some trading organizations whose implicit but structural role is to cut down peasants' incomes (Courade 2000, 1994).

Indeed, by contributing about 40% of the gross national product and by employing most of the active population, agriculture and specifically cocoa, coffee, and cotton raise sensible concerns, considering that the state draws such a substantial part of its finances from this sector (Ela 1990). The different agencies coordinating the trade in those products were no strangers to the state strategy of control of each operation and income extraction. During the functioning of agencies such as Stabex, Caistab, ONCPB, to name just a few, small producers were officially obliged to pay a part of the market price per kilogram to the state treasury. Moreover, prices received by small producers were generally less than two-thirds of the real price, which corresponds to the free on board (FOB) price. And most often the prices given to peasants were inferior to half the value of the real price (Giri 1986: 68). Such a conclusion could be highlighted by the specific taxation policy applied in the cocoa and coffee sector.

*During twenty-eight years of market organization (1960–1987), the Cameroonian state effectively gave to the producers 75 % of the real price three times, while it attributed less than 50 % of the real product price to them fifteen times. In 1985–1986, the state taxation reached 25 % of the FOB price, whereas 51 % was gifted to the producer for a real price the value of which was 819 francs cfa. And, if the state only withdrew 0.3 % in 1991–1992 from 374 francs cfa as real price, the different intermediaries of the sector continued to abduct 39 % of this price (Janin, Alary and Courade 1994: 176).*

In the light of these data, cocoa and coffee producers barely receive half of the real value of their work, given the state's taxation policy which leads their sector to support a tax burden of at least 30 % for cocoa, 26 % for Robusta coffee and 43 % for Arabica coffee. Thus, the taxation upon this sector could be said to be three times higher than the general tax burden on the economy, which is estimated at only 11 % of the gross domestic product. These facts, even if partial, are indicative of the phenomenon of *economic violence*.

The concept of economic violence consists of dual realities. First of all, it involves forcing the peasant workforce to carry out economic activities (cocoa, coffee, cotton) not primarily chosen by them or socially significant for their local needs. Secondly, there is a set of strategies used to extort a substantial part of the incomes generated by those activities on behalf of the state treasury. Economic violence as an ongoing structural relation between state and peasants has subsequently generated the progressive demobilization of small farmers from cocoa and coffee production since 1990 (Ela 1982; 1990).

Thus, due to the importance of agriculture for the country's economic growth, within the policy of "emergence 2035"—an ambitious policy which aims at bringing Cameroon among the emerging countries by 2035—the state started promoting large scale agricultural investments. Through the so-called "second generation agriculture," an industrial agriculture intended to overcome not only the disinterestedness of small farmers, but also to increase the contribution of agriculture, the government logically caused the emergence of another kind of farmers. Thus, since 2008 a global trend has been observed in the agricultural sector in Cameroon: the massive entrance of socio-professional groups who previously were not involved in agriculture. This wave of urban categories of new farmers in the agricultural sector is the outcome of the progressive withdrawal of small farmers, whose production was previously sustaining the sector (Bosc and Losch 2002: 4). Such an eruptive activism from urban individuals globally belonging to socio-professional groups that appear as financially prosperous and politically dominant generates some concern.

This work aims at deciphering the reasons and meaning of the entry of the new urban dominant class into the agricultural sector. The question raised by their activism concerns the logic behind their sudden interest in large scale agriculture, whereas previously they were not interested in such activities. Indeed, a main analytical scheme is usually employed to explain the elites' investment in agriculture: the search for additional sources of income in a context of scarcity. However, questioning the theoretical central position of such a model erases the multidimensional property of actor investment. This calls for a heuristic stand in a special context where not only the investigated groups are not primarily in an entrepreneurship dynamic, but are also economically at ease. Consequently, in order to explain the new agricultural activism of the elites, this paper assumes the hypothesis embedded in the strategic paradigm of actor investment. The paper specifically proceeds from empirical data gathered within the new cocoa policy sector. It scrutinizes the reports of the society of cocoa development (SODECAO); it analyzes both elite and peasant discourses and it also proceeds from a documentary analysis for a statistical modeling of some studied factors. The paper, by aggregating related profiles to draw homogenous categories of the new elite farmers, discusses, in a multireferential scheme structured by a strategic paradigm, some reasons which factually explain the emergence of those categories in cocoa farming.

## The new categories of cocoa farmers

CONSIDERING THAT the new agricultural policy promotes a second generation agriculture, officially defined as relying on the development of medium and larger farms using modern elements such as fertilizers, pesticides, ameliorated seeds and plants, as well as agricultural machines (MINADER 2011: 1), we begin to see how small farmers are ignored by the policy. The core of the policy indicates that this agricultural trend is exclusively intended for wealthier farmers; hence the call for politico-administrative strata agents and the like (Ibid.: 3). Such an official invitation to agro-industrial exploitation is effectively against the small farmers, who declare that: *“Their speech stands there in the city, not here. It is good speaking, but giving the means to achieve is better. We don’t have the strength and means to shift to this kind of agriculture individually. Could you figure out how much it would cost in time and money to work at least one hectare? We are not Fotsio Victor,<sup>1</sup> who is exploiting hundreds of hectares”* (Francois Messengue, 10/08/2015).

### Farming without Peasants

THE EXIGENCIES of the new agricultural policy are calling for new socio-professional groups, instead of the peasantry class. Taking our specific empirical case of the cocoa sector, this could be witnessed in the following table displaying data on the categories which endorsed the second generation agriculture.

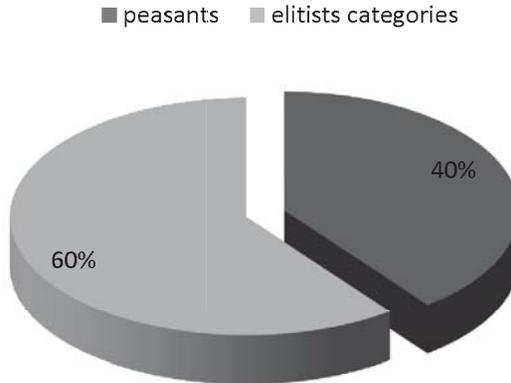
TABLE I. New categories of cocoa farmers

Categories	Number of individuals per category
Peasants	659
Municipal magistrates	18
Civil servants	301
Higher civil servants	33
(ex) Ministers + equivalent	15
Businessmen	39
Army forces and police	48
Clerical corporation	16
Private and para-public managers	39
Liberal professions	13
Deputies	3
GIC + Associations	8
SODECAO managers	25
Small professions	31

SOURCE: compiled data set of SODECAO reports, October 2007 and October 2008

The data displayed could be paradoxical for the argument of small farmer demobilization from the cocoa sector, defended here. Indeed, statistically, the number of 659 peasant subscribers ranks them first when compared to the other categories. But, aggregated data for two categories, peasants versus elites, sheds some light on this issue, as shown below:

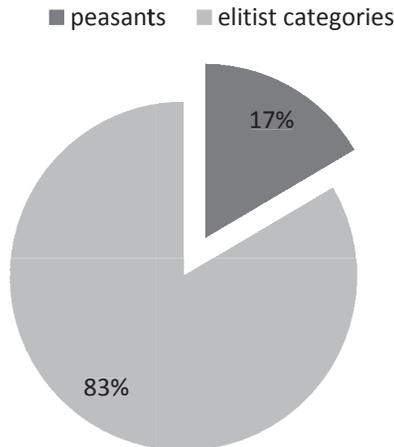
FIGURE I: Aggregated percentages of principal categories



SOURCE: compiled data set of SODECAO reports, October 2007 and October 2008

It appears that elite categories control 60 % of the national cocoa orchard. This percentage is superior to what is owned by the peasants. These percentages statistically refer to 994 subscribers, for the elites, and 659 persons for the peasants (SODECAO 2008). This data set could still cast doubt on the argument concerning a new cocoa sector dominated by non-peasants, if we consider that a difference of 20 % in mobilization between the two categories could not be enough to say that the peasants have withdrawn from this sector. Yet, instead of a hasty conclusion, it is empirically significant to question the number of cocoa trees owned by each category.

FIGURE II: Share of each category in the national cocoa orchard



SOURCE: compiled data set of SODECAO reports, October 2007 and October 2008

This graph establishes the fact that peasants, even if they are 40 % of all subscribers, own only a share of 17 % of the national cocoa orchard. This percentage corresponds to 1,078,661 cocoa plants against 4,370,354 for the elite categories (Ibid.). Given this fact, the presence of the peasantry is no longer significant. It shows their demobilization from cocoa production since 1990. The elites are subsequently those who are enthusiastically embracing the new agricultural trend and, sometimes, they use the peasant status to benefit from some services.

Indeed, a second fact which supports the hypothesis of small farmer demobilization from the cocoa sector is the paradoxical practice noted during the distribution of cocoa plants. Most of the elites received plants twice or thrice. They first subscribed under the peasant category to receive plants in their village. They also subscribed later with their real professional status to get another delivery of cocoa plants, sold and sometimes distributed by the SODECAO. At this point, the statistics for the peasant category are biased due to its infiltration by elites. So, in actual fact, real peasants own less than 17 % of the new national cocoa orchard.

In this perspective, the elite categories are actively involved in the cocoa sector, since the head of state himself emphasized the necessity of shifting from traditional to modern agriculture. But given the professional status of these new farmers, the search for income emerges as a marginal motive in a country where most are not interested in small or medium enterprises or in the industries known as an optimal and secure capital multiplier. Reviewing the administrative or political status of these new farmers is indicated.

### **An Elitist Cocoa Farming Trend**

IN FACT, there is a prevalence of persons belonging to the higher political sphere, such as ministers and secretaries of state. If we add the higher civil servants, the new agricultural trend is not merely a matter of agriculture. In this context, we could point out the minister of higher education, the defense minister, the previous minister of finances and economy, the general director of the customs who was later appointed minister of finances, the minister of communications, who was transferred to the ministry of posts and telecommunications, the minister of territorial administration and decentralization, the previous general secretary of the presidency, the minister of mines and technological development, the director of the civil cabinet of the presidency, to name just a few. In the category of higher civil servants and managers, we find the director of the public markets regulatory agency, the director of the electricity regulatory agency, the general manager of CAMTEL,<sup>2</sup> the general manager of the telecommunications regulatory agencies, the deputy director of SODECAO, the inspector of the basic education ministry, etc. All these positions share one central characteristic, being directly and personally monitored by the head of state. However, for a civil servant, political actor or entrepreneur to benefit from a promotion by the head of state, the imperative of faithfulness to the party and a true ability to implement in an exemplary way the central political-ideological lines defended by the head of state himself emerged as the main criterion in the selection and nomination process (Zambo Belinga 2004). Alongside the listed personalities, most parliament members are subscribers to the new cocoa policy (SODECAO, 2007, 2008). All positions attached to the aforementioned professional groups are

understood in the popular social representation to be those opening the access to the state treasury, to other advantages and facilities, given the extreme local use of positions as interchangeable capital, in a sociological perspective. Elite categories perceive the state as an industrial entity in which they can obtain, on a permanent basis, any financial capital needed. Hence, the fruitless character of any attempt to analyze their agricultural investment in light of an economicist hypothesis. The fast and extravagant enrichment of the political and high administrative strata is the empirical translation of such a practice (Pigeaud 2011).

Consequently, despite the decree giving civil servants and politicians the right to conduct business, almost all political and administrative strata are not taking part in the entrepreneurship dynamic through small and medium enterprises or industries, in the search for secure alternative sources of income. Except for those who were primarily businessmen, the elites have not perceived small and medium enterprises as worthy of investment. This is why the entrepreneurial spirit is limited to some well-known social groups such as the one of Bamileké (Meliki 2015; Warnier 2000). So, their agricultural activism mostly seeks political and land capital as the guarantee of their agricultural entrepreneurship.

## **Entrepreneur-farmers and the race for large secured landed estates**

**R**ESTRICTIVE LEGAL dispositions govern landed estate in Cameroon. Indeed, is considered to be a private and a personal property the piece of land which is administratively registered and secured or, with regard to communities' land reserves, those which are valorized. A valorized land is the one displaying signs of human settlements, exploitations or pasturage (Liz Alden 2001: 62). Given this last disposition, land belongs only to those who could claim direct residence on it or valorize it through various exploitations. The second juridical limitation is that no one could legally own more than fifty (50) hectares of lands without an explicit administrative authorization. These legal dispositions brought paradoxical effects: despite being the most abundant resource everywhere in Cameroon, land came to be less available for the communities and individuals unable to valorize or claim it through administrative titles of property. Thus, the land which constitutes the first national production factor is legally scarce, hence the coveting, the struggles and the class confrontations for its legitimate appropriation and control.

Alongside these restrictive legal dispositions, the threat of global warming, climate change and ecological disasters requires the replacement of polluting energies with light and pure ones. The mobilization for clean energy subsequently turned the land into the new source of fuel (Geuder-Jilg 2010). In such a context, controlling the land means to own the new source of fuel, in the sense that the crops used for clean energy require large-scale exploitations. Additionally, the 2008 international crisis, which internally took first the forms of "hunger riots," as the price of corn, cooking oil, flour, meat... inflated, revealed the paradoxical truism that land is the new strategic resource

able to solve most of the pressing contemporary issues. Thus, land is not only a matter of economy, but also a power vector. Power is shifting from the financial and economic side towards land ownership. If land is becoming a scarce and most valuable resource and a lucrative investment for the future as well, it follows that the new categories aim at concentrating in their hands this fundamental resource with the help of which they could broaden their power basis. The sudden revalorization of land is thus at the core of the rush towards indigenous lands, either by international capitals or local elites (Geuder-Jilg 2010; Elong et Tchonang Goudjou 2011).

Focusing on the category of the elites, the notion of entrepreneur-farmers is used as an analytical frame to show that the elites who are investing today in the cocoa sector are not merely after potential incomes generated by their exploitations (Dubresson et Raison 2007; Zambo Belinga et al. 2011). Their motivation is strategic and multidimensional in sociological perspective. It means that agriculture is taken as a capital which could be instrumented to achieve additional objectives or acquire further different capitals; meanwhile the multidimensionality of the investment refers to the fact that a plurality of well-planned objectives is sought through the accomplishment of one single action: investment in agriculture.

So, referring to the restrictive legal dispositions on landed estate appropriation, the implication is that investing in second generation agriculture, which relies on medium and large farms, is nothing less than acquiring and securing portions of land above the legal limits of fifty (50) hectares. At the same time, it should be pointed out that, under the legal dispositions attributing land to those who could valorize it through agriculture, the lands of rural communities and individual owners are being seized by the elites. Because of their means and internal connections in the administrative services, they easily access facilities and authorizations for exploiting not only rural lands, under the pretext that they are not valorized, but also whatever surfaces are deemed to be necessary. So, land grab is consubstantial to the elites' investment in the cocoa sector (Tchonang Goudjou et al. 2001: 99).

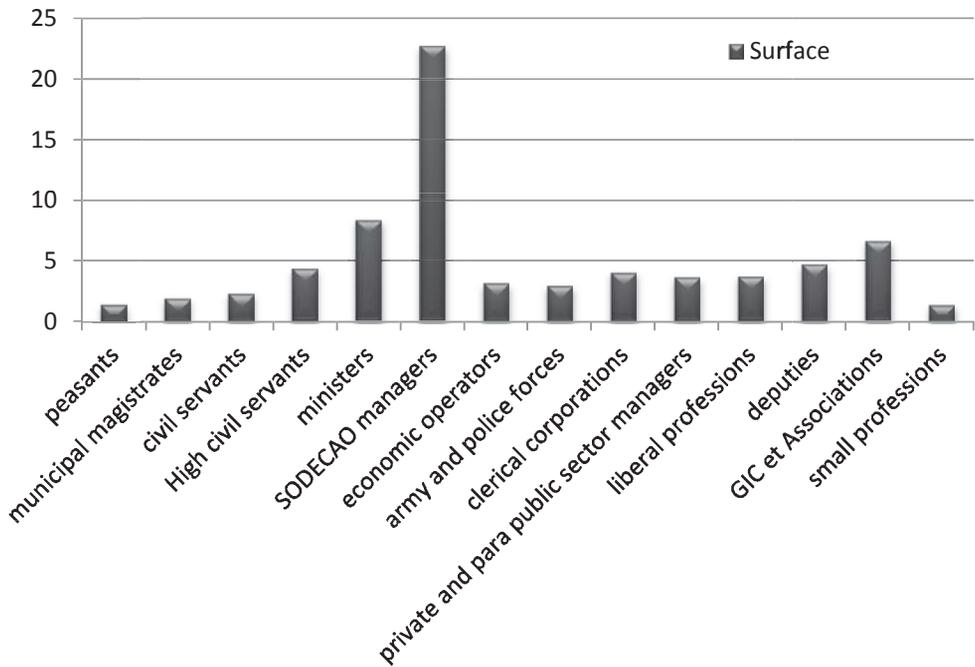
### **The Elite's Bigger Farms and Land Grabs**

IN FACT, on the one hand, traditional rules of land appropriation give the property to individuals who are the first to invest in a piece of land: it is the axe blow duty. Under such a rule, those who are endowed with sufficient means to pay for manpower or farm tractors could have as much land as permitted by their wealth. On the other hand, all unused land legally belongs to the state, considered as the "land master"; it can decide what to do with it and whom to give it to (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1982: 73; Haeringer 1986: 86). Either by the traditional rules or the legal modern rules, communities and peasants are simply vulnerable not only because they can't get into a competition with those elite categories in giving value to the land surface which they envisage, but moreover they can't register the land they still possess due to a complex and expensive administrative procedure (Liz Alden 2001: 11; Gueder-Jilg 2010). Furthermore, by manipulating the concept of public interest the state could decide whether to seize community and personal lands and transfer them for use or as definitive property to some economic operator given some specific objectives (Haeringer 1986: 86; Liz Alden 2001:

12). When considering traditional regulations and state legal dispositions, as well as its practical land management, there is no doubt that a way to a legal land grab to the detriment of indigenous communities has been created (Ela 1990). The great losers are the communities, because their land reserves are usually gradually valorized once there are signs of overexploitation of the prior available lands. It means that community land reserves are conceived traditionally as tactical land savings, to be mobilized each time by members once the critical overexploitation limits of used lands are exceeded and the used lands are no longer able to satisfy the needs of a growing local population. Based on all those elements, the elite categories have become, after the state, the new great owners of land, which they acquire under the pretext of second generation agricultural investment. This is demonstrated by the size of their farms, as displayed below.

FIGURE III: Average surfaces exploited by each category

Source: Compiled data of SODECAO reports, October 2007 and October 2008



Looking at this graph, a conclusion could be that peasants have the smallest surfaces whereas SODECAO managers and ministers own bigger farms. Without going into a critique of statistical compilation weaknesses, it should be stressed that most of the ministers have at least seventy hectares of cocoa farm along with surfaces of palm oil, maize, plantains, bananas, pineapples, etc. that exceed the surface of this land (Elong 2011). This is seen everywhere, like in a small village in East-Cameroon where a principal of a great college of Bertoua city *“has an exploitation which you can’t discover walk-*

*ing on foot. He amassed 75 hectares of cocoa... he also has banana and plantain farms of this size.*" In Bagofit, in the same province, a member of the urban elite, the deputy director of the civil cabinet of the presidency of Cameroon, is transforming a whole village into maize and cocoa farms, while in the Center Province, a previous minister of finance and economy owns multiple large exploitations known as the Rock Farm of Ndonkol. Some villages of the South Province, such as Zoetelé, are being totally transformed into a cocoa belt inspired by the American type of farms. This industrial farm format is present everywhere.

Such expansion of the elite's investment in agriculture is threatening land security among peasants who revealed that, in the East Province, *"There are people who are crying here. They say that the college's principal farms cross their lands. But they can't do anything because he has a solid network in administration everywhere."* Another peasant of the West Province was also complaining, stating that,

*I was called late in the night one day. They told me that there is an influential police agent of my village who is grabbing my lands. And the greater problem is that he cut off all the crops which were growing there. I got down there to complain in court; I will see what the result will be. These people believe that from now on we don't deserve anything, not even the land!*

Mastering administrative procedures, possessing the means to valorize hundreds or thousands of hectares of land, being able to register the land, investing in the most sensible domain of the moment as promoted by the official discourse, gives to elite categories the strength and the legitimacy for land grabbing in the rural area. So, agricultural investment is a tool for concentrating lands and for elevation to high political positions (Zambo Belinga et al. 2011).

## Farming for political gain

**T**HE PERMANENT search for social hegemony leads to a specific political game where the state controls, prescribes, and provides corrective sanctions and requires total obedience from its citizens and political actors as well. In such a configuration, everything turns out to be political (Schmitt 1992: 60). Incidentally, the political elite are constituted, on the one hand, through cooptation mechanisms tributary to the docility of an individual towards the core ideology of the head of state (Zambo Belinga 2004). On the other hand, the political arena obliges candidates competing for political cooptation to display an effective capacity in controlling a real or supposed political space by securing the loyalty of the population of this fief (Augé 2007; Manirakiza 2010). Elite investment in agriculture is consubstantial to this global profile of the Cameroonian state. The battle for political cooptation or promotion opens the way to numerous strategies (Gaxie 1993: 95), within which the agricultural investment of the elites is structured as a process of constituting a capital of sympathy which could be traded on the political market (Tullock 1978; Fauré et Medard 1995; Terray 2005).

### Cocoa Farming and the Search for Mass Political Loyalty

IT IS a truism that Cameroonian rural areas are extremely poor. While urban expenses per adult were growing by 4.1 % a year between 1996 and 2001, rural expenses were showing a weak increase of 1.7 % (PNUD 2006: 3). This gap among the two geographical zones points at the scarcity of paid jobs in the rural areas. So, each significant investment in the rural areas is said to narrow the gap and remove peasants from their abject poverty. Agricultural investments, such as the observed cocoa trend, are thus perceived as able to sustain a positive dynamic amidst rural groups (Mimché et al. 2006: 109).

In fact, bigger exploitations of cocoa need paid workers for different tasks. The size of the farm itself calls for manpower which is recruited in the vicinity. Working in these farms provides a fixed income to rural families. Then, by investing in bigger cocoa farms, the elites are locally seen as providential persons who ameliorate the living conditions of communities. Such a belief is based on the different casual jobs (Obam et Elong 2011: 212; Obam et Tchonang Goudjou 2011: 206). Another basis of the providential belief benefiting the elites is the emulation caused by their farms. The farms of the elites are setting the example of a model farm. All those who wish to upgrade to a more lucrative agricultural scheme could apply such an example. In that case, the elites provide necessary means and training to willing groups. In the East Province, for instance, the deputy director of the civil cabinet of the presidency wholly distributed the first production of his hybrid cocoa plantation, 100,000 cocoa pods, between the members of the local *Maka* community. He also provided plastic bags and urged the community to remove the beans, sprout and plant them so that they could all have their own hybrid cocoa farm. At the same time, the community was allowed to go to the deputy director's farms to be trained while working and getting paid. Explaining his gifts, the deputy director said that *"it is our tradition which prescribes it: you must give the first harvest to the family and the community, then forthcoming harvests will be abundant!"* (Cameroon Tribune, n<sup>o</sup> 9967/6168: 15). The tradition is mobilized to blur the real motives of these instrumented gifts, which are part of a political calculation.

The parallel emulation of elite farms by communities and the wages earned by members of those communities, as well as the different gifts occasionally given to them, acquire a fundamental significance in a specific context where since 1990 the state has not been fulfilling its social contract vis-à-vis the population (Duruflé 1988; Mbembe 1990; Gendreau 1996: 116). This is why, in the eyes of the peasants, the actions of the elite transfer the qualities of providential protector from a distant state to the elites themselves. So, the elites are gaining not only respect, but also popular sympathy (Manirakiza 2010; Zambo Belinga et al. 2011). This sympathy is a capital from which a fief is built, because it commands loyalty. Loyalty is moral, but it is imperatively requested from the peasants in regard to the elites, if we consider that the elites, by ameliorating rural living conditions through the wages paid or the aid offered, by fostering group or individual initiative, through gifts of materials or by tutoring certain projects, become creditors whereas the rural people are indebted (Mauss 1973). In this way, indebted members are morally obliged to the elites. Their inability to give back in kind what they received increases their moral gratitude to the elites, who become the new central personalities of local life. In such a perspective, rural people, given that the *"obligation to give back in*

*dignity is imperative*” (Ibid.: 151) and that “*the exigency of reciprocity involves that all those who could not give back are excluded*” from the local solidarity network (Eloundou-Enyegue 1994: 234), clear their debt by usually applying the recommendations of the concerned elites, be these economic, social or political.

Being aware of this, the elites usually start speaking on behalf of the central power, alleging sometimes that what they are giving to rural communities comes from the head of state himself (Socpa 2000: 97). By doing so, not only do they gain popular sympathy for themselves, but they also position themselves as the new mediators between the state and communities. This manipulation process is always combined with the local promotion of elites either at the head or as an influential member of the local chieftaincy, as seen with most ministers, secretaries of state, chief executive officers, etc. Thus, local communities become obedient, affectively attached, subjected by the informational influence of the concerned elites (Burt 1987; Fedi et al. 2009), whereas the latter prove to the leading political party that not only are they the well-known representatives of the concerned rural mass, but moreover they have their sympathy and obedience, which could be used to demand a certain political behavior, as they are listened to. These earned characteristics make such elites able to “*mobilize politically and attach their respective communities to the ongoing political regime*” (Bah et Saibou 1997: 232). Subsequently, they have constituted and are controlling a local fief upon which the central power could rely for electoral support (see Zambo Belinga 2004; Manirakiza 2010). At this stage, they have a capital coveted by the Party. Nevertheless, acquiring mass sympathy and loyalty in a context of scarcity requires also an additional condition to valorize them politically: a visibility strategy.

### **Agriculture, Media Uses and Political Visibility**

COMMUNICATION IS at the center of social activities. Its centrality leads to the idea that a general social theory could be structured around a communicational interaction, given the ongoing interactions between social actors. Yet, “*In social life, nothing could be achieved without communication which should be considered as a fundamental process from which arises any other social fact*” (Gerstle 2010:15). Such a statement makes communication a multifunctional and multidimensional reality.

There is one common and recurrent feature in the elites’ agricultural activism: a systematic use of the media for advertising their agricultural investment. Mass communication around agricultural activities is part of a specific strategy for political visibility. With the use of the media they devise an advertising strategy which aims at expanding their green investments. Knowing how closely the government and the head of state are watching the agricultural indicators, the elites use the media to inform them about their involvement. Thus, each bigger cocoa exploitation is surrounded by media hyperactivity. Entrepreneur-farmers invite both public and private media to present as an exploit the performance which gives a tangible side to the head of state’s personal preoccupations. This generates a search for political visibility which is a “*specific dimension of acting that (...) unfolds practical techniques and communicational proceedings in fact to manifest itself in the public space and cause recognition of practices and political orientations*” (Voirol 2005: 107-109).

In fact, by advertising their cocoa investments, the elites deliver a message about their deep commitment to the government agenda. Incidentally, to ensure maximum political visibility through a successful communication strategy based on the media, the elites always invite ministers and high-ranking chief executive officers. It was then quite logical to see a successful billionaire, Nana Bouba, inviting the then minister of agriculture and rural development to his farms. The minister visited, on 3 June 2016, the modern farm of 5,000 hectares of maize which employs 1,000 people. The minister made a series of trips to multiple farms at the invitation of the elites who wished to spread and advertise their agricultural investment through a media campaign that always goes along with the ministers' field visits. The use of the media aims to present the investment to the political and administrative censors who are integrated in networks from which professional carriers and political ambitions are controlled. By doing so, the elites call for these entities to take note of their commitment level, hence the efforts made to draw their attention—and mostly that of the president of the republic—through advertising.

## Entering the political agenda through large scale farms

**T**HE AGRICULTURAL investment of the elite categories can't be ascribed mainly to the search for alternative sources of income, as indicated by their communication activism which is principally driven by the will to show to the government and to the head of state their commitment to a specific important policy.

### Publish What You Perform According to the Head of State's Core Policy

AS A political visibility strategy, the systematic use of the media paves the way to recognition by the top political echelons. It is a process through which one makes the political sphere identify and distinguish him from other candidates (Zambo Belinga 2004). Thus, this search for visibility, through advertising one's investment in agriculture, is not only about being identified, but also about being identified as a candidate for a political position, a high administrative office or as a politician who remains zealous in applying the ordinances of the head of state. This communication strategy places the members of the elite in the center of the administrative and political agendas, while polishing their image (Schwartzenberg 1977). In fact, communication via the media operates as a device producing hierarchical categories, bringing socio-political recognition to some actors as well as to their activities (Voirol 2005: 114).

In the case of the deputy director of the civil cabinet, one could see how the elites get recognition and enter political agendas. Two issues of the *Cameroon Tribune*, the governmental newspaper, reported events linked to *Bagofit Plantations*: the agricultural company of the deputy director. The first issue was commenting on the size of the cocoa farms and on the first harvest, estimated at 100,000 pods of hybrid cocoa. At the same time, his gift of the whole harvest to the *Maka* local communities was commented upon. The deputy director was presented as a great farmer with a heart of gold (*Cameroon Tribune*, n<sup>o</sup> 9967/6168: 15). The following day, the minister of rural development

himself published a related notice. He indicated that the aforementioned pods of hybrid cocoa should not be sprouted and planted, as this could deteriorate the genetic qualities of the hybrid cocoa. The notice was echoing the deputy director's cocoa exploit and generous gift (*Cameroon Tribune*, n<sup>o</sup> 9970/6171: 3).

A number of facts emerge here. First of all, the communication around the performance of farms using newspapers, and specifically the government press, *Cameroon Tribune*, aims to make these agricultural achievements known beyond the area where the farms are located. Spreading the news is accompanied by the desire to tell the political and administrative decision-makers that the head of state's instructions are zealously applied. Secondly, choosing the media and mostly the *Cameroon Tribune* isn't a mere accident. These newspapers are freely distributed each morning to administrative and political officials, from departmental directors to the top echelon. And it should be stated that those newspapers are read before the work starts. So, each action which is written down is immediately known and circulated at the center of the political and administrative apparatus. Doing so, the elites enter the political agenda. This is also seen with the principal of the college reported above. After mobilizing the media around his farms' performance, the same result was produced: the political and administrative strata were aware of his name and agricultural achievements. Peasants attest that: "*the General Director of SODECAO and the minister of agriculture and rural development came here several times to witness by themselves the Principal's farms*" (Aboussack, 10/08/2015).

So, the self-publishing dynamic of the elites aims cumulatively at imposing the recognition of the farms' exemplarity and of their own name within a political sphere that has to act as the final censor of their achievements. This is why the elites always explicitly request the political authorities to come to the village for a field visit. In fact, all field visits of ministers always involve a grand mobilization of the political party members, folkloric dance groups, and numerous representatives of the national media. Such an occasion puts in the limelight, for weeks, the concerned elites.

As intermediary censor of the agricultural achievements of the elites, the presence of the director general of SODECAO is that of a moral instance that acknowledges and rates the achievements of the elite. Meanwhile, the visit of the minister of agriculture and rural development himself means that the farm is seen as corresponding to the agricultural ideal prescribed by the head of state. Thus, the publishing strategy constitutes a whole political communication intended to "*interact given certain modalities as to persuade, convince, seduce, inform, commend, negotiate, invite to*" (Gerstle 2010: 20). As shown by this enunciation, bringing the minister and the director general of SODECAO to the farms and the different speeches made by the elites are an explicit invitation, a persuasion mechanism addressed to the political arena, so that it would retain the concerned elite's name as the sole one in the locality for any potential promotion, as he displays loyalty towards the prescriptions of the head of state. This, in a specific context where the elites know that only "*a certain type of person subjected to the silence and docility law, doing a daily cult to the 'father of the nation' and to his 'local controllers' can easily access high and prestigious political or administrative positions*" (Zambo Belinga 2004: 44). The docility and loyalty are also expressed through speeches delivered during the presentation of farms by the elites.

### Farms Speeches as Political Allegiance

THE ATYPICAL state functioning and the elite's cooptation mechanism institute a political particularity: turning each great achievement into a merit of the head of state *intuiti personae*. In fact, the elites always give speeches from the farms to celebrate the president through their green activism. Those circumstantial orations are structured around the lexical field of politics as principal discursive reference. In the East Province, the speech of the secretary of NODYA (New agricultural dynamic) farm during the visit to their unit by the authorities is illustrative: *"during his speech at the last agro-pastoral show, President Biya declined again the knots of his agricultural policy. So, our daily commitment is to make that second generation agriculture happen"* (Pauline Voufo, 17/09/2010); in the same way, the billionaire Nana Bouba, who is also a member of the Central Committee of the ruling political party, the RDPC, asserts his political allegiance from farms. He states that, *"with my own means, I'm giving materiality to the Head of state's policy. Through my farms investments, I'm accompanying my chief"* (Nana Bouba, 06/11/2016). Such speeches are systematically held by the elites from their farms. The allocutions are politically charged. The green investment is then presented as acting upon the *"Head of state recommendations."* Another entrepreneur-farmer, the owner of the Cana agro-pastoral project, stated during his farm visit by the governor that *"the Cana project which is welcoming you this day was launched in 2012 after Ebolowa agro-pastoral show during which the Head of state, Paul Biya, reckoned that agriculture is our authentic wealth, we work on that perspective. Our project is exploiting 500 hectares"* (Evariste Abessolo, 14/06/2014).

Thus, celebrating individual or collective achievement is turned into a ceremonial protocol whereby the great president is hailed as the inspiration and driving force behind one's enterprise. This is why it is common to hear during those delivered and broadcast speeches that the elite's farms exist just because of the *"new policy promoted by his Excellency, the Head of state"* or, simply, *"thank to the president very personal vision of agriculture, I could own this farm"* (the college principal). Entrepreneur-farmers justify their agricultural achievements as an attempt to make tangible the *"Renouveau vision"* expressed by this *"new agricultural policy"* which is the pillar of the *"President's preoccupation."*

These few phrases may seem insignificant at first sight. But given their recurrence in the speech of the elites, they make it possible to identify and reconstitute the central hidden political discourse which structures them. By pronouncing such politically structured allocutions from their farms, the elites try to draw administrative and political attention to their achievements. Moreover, they call upon the president of the republic to witness of their investments, which come to materialize his principal ordinances. Hailing for these privileged witnesses clearly indicates that these elites are in a struggle for political visibility and recognition. Consequently, the circumstantial communications orchestrated around the agricultural achievements aim at making the administrative and political circles know and recognize the elite's practices, faithfully taken from the road map of the president of the republic. Thus, they turn this into a credible indicator of partisanship and militancy, highlighting their level of devotion and docility towards the head of state's personal ambitions. Through such a communication, the elites enter in direct communication with the governmental sphere and, more importantly, with polit-

ical decision-makers, and assert their name by joining to it a precise image: the one of elites trying to materialize the party and governmental ambitions of the president.

The choice of the mass media by the elites for projecting in the public arena their green investments implicitly leads to a hierarchical classification of potential candidates of their locality, where they are placed at the top as the ideal one. It also calls for a direct or delayed recognition from the political decision-makers. By structuring their speeches around political references, they identify with the agenda of these decision-makers. If we admit that a political agenda is a “*set of problems perceived as calling a public debate or an intervention of political legitimate authorities*” (Gerstle 2010: 204-205), it follows that the communication through the media and the global discursive structure of speeches serve the aim of introducing the name of those entrepreneur-farmers in the core of the political discussions, as they need a material expression of their ideology or political program, which could serve as a guarantee for the population.

The analysis above confirms the hypothesis that entwines politics to second generation agriculture in Cameroon. Thus, there is a political cocoa behind the applied cocoa policy. In other words, cocoa is a political crop, in the sense that investing in its production is integrated in a strategic plan calling for the recognition of the concerned elites by the influential local and national political actors.

## Conclusion

OUR ANALYSIS of the entrepreneur model of farmers relies on the general theory of strategic behavior. It emphasizes the combination of hidden objectives structuring the elites’ rush towards second generation agriculture, mostly in the hybrid cocoa sector. The creation of additional sources of income in a period of scarcity, as usually highlighted by the classic economist view, is partially irrelevant when studying the categories of new cocoa farmers and the different events which occur around the farms. Therefore, additional motives were seen as driving those categories’ eager involvement in cocoa farming. The enthusiastic commitment and open involvement of the elites in the cocoa farms derive from a desire to extend their control over a sensible contemporary resource: land. The legal pursuit of landed property is one component of the agricultural activities associated with the large cocoa plantations. Meanwhile, political aims appear as another significant explanation of their involvement in agriculture. Their agricultural investment is rooted in the will to create, amass and expand political capital, by gaining the sympathy and obedience of communities through gifts that create a moral obligation towards them. Sympathy and obedience are then turned into political resources which can be exchanged on the political market, as the elites assert their control over a political fief. At the same time, this manifest agricultural activism of the elites demonstrates their adhesion and devotion to the head of state’s political agenda. By doing so, they could be easily co-opted and promoted to higher administrative or political positions, which grant control over the various channels that provide the scarce resources necessary to live in a society which experiences a dire socioeconomic situation.



## Notes

1. Fotso Victor is the name of a Cameroonian billionaire who owns several industries and flourishing banks.
2. Cameroon Telecommunications. A public enterprise which develops and sells communications services and technical support.

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### **Abstract**

#### **Socio-Political Use of Large Scale Agriculture: The Strategic Paradigm and the New Entrepreneur-Farmers in Cameroon**

One analytical scheme is usually employed to explain the elites' investment in agriculture: the search for additional sources of income in a context of scarcity. Questioning the theoretical centrality of such a model erases the multidimensional property of actor investment. This paper presents some concepts and related hypotheses embedded in the strategic paradigm of actor investment. Based on empirical evidence from the cocoa sector, by questioning reports of the society of cocoa development and analyzing peasants' discourses, the paper, by aggregating related profiles to draw homogenous categories of new farmers, discusses some reasons which explain the emergence of these categories in cocoa farming. Two main conclusions appear: a) the agricultural activism of the elites is a factual strategy whose objective is grabbing and securing large lands in a juridico-political context of strict limitation of private land ownership; b) second generation agriculture, as the main preoccupation of the president of the republic, is instrumented by those who seek political positions or visibility. Thus, large scale agriculture appears to be a strategic asset used to achieve both social and political aims.

### **Keywords**

economic violence, agriculture, entrepreneur-farmers, elites, land grab, politics, communication