

Women can now cultivate larger portions of land thanks to the land subsidy scheme by government

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Cameroon banks on 600,000ha scheme to give affordable land to farmers

By Ngalame Elias

High cost of land for agriculture in Cameroon is a major challenge for food production.

Farmers living close to urban areas say the cost of acquiring land for agricultural production is prohibitive.

In 2023, the government launched a land security project to provide farmers around the city of Bertoua in the East region with affordable land for cultivation and stimulate local production of food crops and reduce cereal imports.

As part of the Integrated Agropastoral and Fisheries Import-Substitution Project (Piisah), 400,000 hectares have been secured on the Yoko-Lena-Tibati corridor, extending between the Centre and Adamaoua regions. According to the minister in charge of development, Paul Tasong, an additional 200,000 hectares are in the process of being secured, bringing the total area for the project to 600,000 hectares.

"This initiative aims to provide land at affordable cost to farmers and significantly increase local production of rice, corn and wheat and reduce their importation," Tasong said.

Farmers say they can now get land 50

percent cheaper than they did before the scheme.

"I have since doubled my production of wheat since I acquired additional land after the scheme," says Bouba Winndy, a wheat farmer.

In 2023, Cameroon imported cereals worth 387.7 billion FCFA, including 200.8 billion for rice and 178.3 billion for wheat, according to the National Institute of Statistics.

"Ninety percent of our production comes from family farms. But in the face of growing demand, it is imperative to promote the emergence of medium and large farms with high yields," said Gabriel Mbairrobe, the Minister of Agriculture.

The government is banking on building land reserves to attract private investors to large-scale farming.

These new farms are expected to help meet not only the demand for human food, but also that of the agro-processing, livestock and aquaculture industries.

Dr Augustine Njamnshi of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) said conflicts between agro-industrialists and local populations, often supported by environmental NGOs, are hampering the development of major projects.

In 2021, for example, Prime Minister Joseph Dion Ngute cancelled the creation of land reserves on 66,000 hectares in the South region after local protests.

To avoid such situations, Dr Njamnshi said, the government must engage the communities concerned in dialogue.

He said the success of the 600,000-hectare project will depend on striking a balance between making it attractive to investors and upholding respect for the land rights of local populations.

"The government should not only limit its intervention to the provision of land for farming. Other aspects such as expanding access to credit are important as well. subsidised credit to the poor is among the best approaches to improving food crop production," Dr Njamnshi said.

Plantain Farmers Union President in Buea Enongene Sone said the government should ensure availability of adequate and better agricultural inputs and extension services and ease the movement of produce from the farms to the market.

"One big problem is the high cost of transporting food crops to major markets in cities," Enongene said ■