



Cooperatives produce food and create community bonds. PHOTO CREDIT: WFP/GLORY NDAKA

Farmers in Cameroon pool savings to unlock credit

By Elias Ngalame

Agriculture in Cameroon plays a vital role in national development, employing a majority of the population and forming the backbone of the rural economy.

Limited access to finance by smallholders, however, remains a major barrier to increasing productivity and shifting from subsistence farming to sustainable agribusiness.

Many smallholder farmers, youth, and agri-entrepreneurs face challenges obtaining capital for seeds, machinery,

irrigation systems, or livestock.

It is against this backdrop that the government has been promoting the formation of cooperatives to enable farmers to access credit.

Experts say farmers' cooperatives play a crucial role in the economic stability and growth of the agricultural sector and the broader economy. By pooling resources, knowledge, and market access, cooperatives enable farmers to achieve economies of scale, reduce transaction costs, and improve their competitiveness in local and global markets. This collective action leads to several positive economic outcomes.

“Rural farmers in Cameroon generally face big challenges accessing urban markets to sell their products due to the deplorable nature of farm-to-market roads. But with assistance from cooperatives a good number are overcoming this challenge,” said Ekungwe Christopher, an agriculture official in Southwest region of Cameroon.

“Cooperatives often have established relationships with buyers and can secure better prices for their members' produce. Additionally, cooperatives may engage in marketing and branding efforts that enhance the visibility





and appeal of their products, further improving market access.”

A cooperative formed in 2023 by cassava farmers in Mbalmayo, a commercial and transportation hub in South of Cameroon, is organising them to pool their resources and access loans.

“We share information through a common WhatsApp platform, learn from each other, improve our knowledge for quality production,” Pedga Charles, a member of the Mbalmayo Cassava Farmers Cooperative (MBACAFACO), said.

Marcus Mbeng, the President of MBACAFACO, said the cooperative provides members with access to better inputs, such as high-quality seeds, fertilisers, and machinery. It also facilitates knowledge sharing and access to training programmes on good farming practices.

“As a result, our members now achieve higher yields and better-quality produce compared to non-members,” Mbeng said.

The cooperative gives out loans to its members at very low interest rate and provides high-yielding seeds and fertilisers for free with subsidies from the Ministry of Agriculture, he added.

The Cotton Farmers Cooperative in Cameroon’s Far North region runs banks that enable farmers to deposit their harvests safely, obtain loans on fair terms and thus gain a degree of financial independence.

These banks protect farmers from the often-unbearable interest rates charged by local money lenders.

“I can get money for my products from our cooperative at any time while waiting for my crop to mature for the market. This is quite helpful to me and my family,” Marion Musa, a cotton farmer in Far North region, said.

Easier access to information from experts through their cooperatives has also help farmers to build resilience to the impacts of climate change.

“We share regular information on planting techniques and periods with the farmers to avoid harvest loss caused by climate change,” Christopher said.

The famers acknowledge the importance of a regular knowledge sharing and financial assistance from their cooperatives.

“We have learnt a lot, how to conduct business in the markets, how to improve the health of the soil to increase our yields in the fields thanks to our cooperatives. We have much more work to do as a team in the years ahead,” said Essadjo Kono Emilienne, the leader of one of the cooperatives.

Through training and capacity-building activities, the cooperatives are helping improve nutrition and empower women and girls economically.

More efficient farming practices also mean that women and girls, who are often responsible for domestic chores and other unpaid care work, have more time to pursue other activities.



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