

Women and the Constraints of Accessing Finance for Agricultural Productivity in the North West Region of Cameroon, 1961-2017: A Study on Food Security

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Abstract

Obdurate cultural assumptions and structural arrangements persist and to assert that women face a plethora of problems in accessing finance for agricultural and food production is to give power to a phenomenon that is historically located. The paper focuses on the constraints faced by women in accessing finance and financial services and explores its bearing on agricultural productivity and food security in the North West Region of Cameroon. The region surfaces to be the agricultural bread basket of the country and prides women as custodians of its food sovereignty since the independence period. Sadly, this gender class, applauded as purveyors of the region's agriculture from the mid-20th and early 21st centuries, encounter copious challenges in accessing financial services for crop production. Is this right? Were women and agriculture of less importance in the economics of post-independence policy makers in Cameroon? Based on the theoretical and analytical methods, this paper makes the point that since independence, women in the Northwestern Bamenda area have been at the forefront of agriculture and food production but limited access to agricultural finance, inadequate information, illiteracy, and inadequate collaterals by these feminist cultivators for credit, set production on a downward spiral with a major threat on food security. The paper concludes that increasing women's access to financial services through well-tailored policies would spike productivity thereby removing it on the road to moribund.

Keywords: Women; Constraints; Finance; Productivity; Food Security.

Staging the Corporate Finance Theory and Methodological Application

Informed by local and international scholarship on women and finance the analysis is billed on theorizing application in a meticulously engaging manner to address the prominent overarching questions and issues raised in the subject of women's finance. Clearly the underlying paper explores the Corporate Finance Theory which evolved from financial management in the early 20th century characterized by the traditional approach, focusing on the main events of corporate financial life, rather than routine management problems (Archer and D' Ambrosio, 1969, p. 20). During this phase, development of the financial management function occurred as the result of

the corporate consolidation and U.S. domestic market growth brought about by the setting up of major railway networks in the late 1880s. Additionally, as large industrial conglomerates requiring voluminous financial resources to fund their operations appeared on the scenery, manager's concerns turned to capital structure-related decisions (Weston, 1975). Markedly, Dew concluded that the emphasis was for financial managers to protect the company from bankruptcy and promote its financial restructuring (Dewing, 1914).

The post-world war II period therefore saw a change of focus in finance studies, which began to feature the dominance of internal routines and the essential for organizational structure that characterize the administrative approach, according to (Archer and D'Ambrosio, 1969). It is this new wave by 1950s that saw Modigliani and Miller (1958) introduce a new mainstream on the subject-finance called the modern Corporate Finance Theory which was previously characterized by two polarized beliefs: one maintained that the distribution of dividends maximized the value of the company to its stockholders, while the other understood that distributing dividends prevented the company from investing in profitable projects, thus impeding value maximization. They devised the concept that the value of a company is independent of its capital structure. In light of the innovative character of this proposal, (Chew, 1993) considers Modigliani and Miller to be the founders of modern finance.

Although the assumptions that underlie the original proposal of Modigliani and Miller (1958) – such as the absence of taxes – cannot be wholly ratified in real-world situations, they do allow study of the factors capable of affecting the lease of funds for capital investment in Agriculture without fear of loss. It argues that the need to escape losses by financial institutions in the North West region caused financial institutions to hold firm to capital structures for growth which aligns with the basic tenet of modern finance epistemology. This relevance was envisaged by the fact that women's situation in the Bamenda grassfields fueled the imposition of stringent collateral measures as a pre-condition to access credits, which constrained the poor farmers from obtaining the required funds for agricultural productivity. Based on the onus of the foregoing model, the paper deploys the theoretical method by making a generalization of a few developments, a proof of however or why certain situations happened on the women's agricultural sector in Cameroon's Northwestern region. Anchoring on the dy-chronic approach, it therefore facilitates insights and heightens analysis of historical events on female's finance for global readership.

Introduction

There is an increasing recognition that ownership, access and control over agricultural finance (resources) constitutes critical elements in the determination of the well-being of farm households. A large literature has sought to compare the productivity of men and women in the agricultural activities in developing areas. This proves to be a challenging task, starting at a conceptual level and stretching further to measurement, estimation without a consideration on the challenges faced by women in accessing finance or credit for agricultural production in the North West Region. Literature on this in the North West Region of Cameroon is rare and even where it exists is relatively patchy. Deere and Doss contend that farmer capacity to employ improved technology and investment depends on their access to productive resources. Both men

and women contribute significantly to agricultural production yet, their access to these agricultural resources differ (Deere and Doss 2006; FAO, 1998). In spite of the marked contribution of women to agriculture, it is evident that they do not have much access and control over agricultural inputs such as finance (FAO, 1998). In agriculture, women feature prominently as they are believed to produce more than half of all the food that is grown, specifically, up to 80% in Africa (Mehra & Rojas, 2008). It has been assumed that if incomes of women are increased, they may have more access to resources and invest in their children's education, health care and nutrition or better still food supply. However, they are constrained by poor access to financing opportunities, including new markets, poor networks and mobility restrictions. Gender difference, arising from the socially constructed relationship between men and women in the NWR, affects the distribution of agricultural finance and cause many disparities in food security outcomes. Women face several challenges, most importantly cultural restrictions in accessing land than men. Besides, the land they control is often of poorer quality and their tenure is insecure (FAO, 1998).

Despite these limitations, they hardly have access to adequate funds to permit them purchase such landed properties. This was the situation despite the fact that land was a key vector to production in the agricultural food value chain. Sustaining food security in households within the NWR as in other African communities under such conditions became incredibly difficult. Globally, women hold title to approximately two percent of land and were frequently denied the right to inherit property (Steinzor, 2003). Availability of adequate finance and financing schemes for women and particularly those of the NWR, could ably grant them the right to purchase and inherit vast tracks of landed property. To this end, bolstering agricultural production and food supply given that landed property was easily disposed for purchase by whoever had the financial prowess to grab it. The liquidation of adequate financial resources in the NWR, inevitably was a monumental milestone to tend the fortunes of women in the NWR. Thence increasing agricultural productivity and food supply. This could go a long way to bolster the global fight against food security. Paradoxically, this was never the case as flawed post-independent economic policy variables in the locale set in the cropping trail to stop the inflows of funds for the women's sector. This perturbed situation was so, despite the fact that women envisaged crop production in the region as their domicile. In Ghana for example, Deere and Doss (2006) pointed out that women held land in only 10 per cent of Ghanaian households. This situation is crucial to the understanding of their subordinate position in societies of the North West Region of Cameroon in order to explain their difficulties to access finance. Due to these draw backs (low degree of land ownership to sell for financial acquisition) on women in the NWR, their ability to practice sustainable environmental management became affected. The fall out was a negative impression on the agricultural sector and maintaining the biodiversity of their farms (Ardayfio Schandorf & Awumbila, 2008). This limited access to finance, hindered their(women) productivity and even reduced their contributions towards agriculture, food security sustenance and to the achievement of broader economic and social development goals.

Women agricultural labour refers to women's own ability to produce outputs; the quantity and quality of supplemental labour they are able to access, which is often unpaid labour allocated within the household (Quisumbing & Pandolfelli, 2010). Women farmers mostly depended on

their husbands for the available labour as most farms were owned by the men. They also had the problem of poor financing which did not allow them to hire labour extensively. To this end, they hence depended on their own labour and that of their households. As a result, spent more hours working on their farms since they could not afford hired labour. The study is carried out in the NWR of Cameroon which is an agricultural based economy located in the Central African Sub region and is hemmed within the Sub-Saharan African sphere.

In view of the foregoing locale description, the paper further articulates that some of the basic barriers faced by women were the transaction cost of credit, well-defined property rights and being poorer than men (World Bank, 2009). Even though men also faced these barriers, those faced by women were more acute in rural agricultural communities like the North West Region of Cameroon. In order to improve women's access to credit, most of the microfinance programs were being directed towards women. Some of these include Microfinance and Small Loans Centre (MASLOC) and the Rural Banks. In cases where women had access to credit, the amount was very small and the repayment conditions were not very suitable, making women not to accept some of these financial arrangements. Poor access to credit facilities prevented women in this locale from purchasing the needed inputs for agricultural purposes. This slackened any hopes of improving agriculture and increasing food production. Perhaps, it has been observed by Mehra and Rojas, (2008) that women were able to access only one percent of credit in agriculture. In cases where tools suitable for women were available, most of them were either unaware of such tools or did not have adequate funds to buy them. In the scheme of things, women continued to use old manual methods in cultivation. The pitfalls being a decrease in the speed of work and productivity (World Bank, 2009). The use of tractor draughts, combined harvesters and ICTs such as radio, Television, Internet and mobile phones were major contributors to extension advisory services especially in remote areas. For these to effectively be at the reach of women, Manfre (2011) evoked the need to account for women's lack of financial resources to pay for ICTs, higher levels of technology, language illiteracy and standards. The absence of these variables which was believed to have discouraged women from using the technology. Input suppliers on a regular basis carried out extension advisory service on a limited scale.

To this was added extension services with the target objective to reach farmers who were wealthier and more likely to adopt modern innovations. Despite this wealth of knowledge on women and their despicable farming woes in the agricultural food value chain, those of the NWR especially at the grassroots were less likely to access finance and financial services. Under such conditions, they were usually overlooked in the production process while the food supply circuit remained endangered in the African mainland. In view of this precedence, the question of agricultural production and food security has continued to be very sensitive. That is why women in the North West Region have refused to allow any attempt at endangering the livelihood of their families by letting the farming sector to be tempered with. Women often staged mammoth demonstrations in public places (Barbier, 1985) when they felt men were unconcerned about threats to their farming activities or were in complicity with nomadic grazers from whom they depended for favors. Despite their determination to feed their families, women encountered multiple financial challenges that inhibited their ambition to contribute fully to the economy, particularly in curbing food insecurity.

There is available literature on women's access to finance in general but there is a lack of consensus on the actual magnitude and effects of this trend on agricultural productivity and food security on sub-regional agricultural units like the North West Region of Cameroon. The objective of this articulation is: to determine the relationship between women's limited access to finance and its pitfalls on agriculture and food security in the North West Region. First the place of finance in the feminist enterprise deserves thorough examination.

Finance in Women's Agricultural Economy in the North West Region

Subsistence agriculture production in the North West Region contributes between 40 and 50 percent of income to the women's economy (Dezeh, 2013). One of the basic catalyst necessary for any meaningful agricultural production by smallholder farmers is the access to credit. The agricultural economy is the second largest sector of Cameroon's economy and first in the NWR which accounts for about 40 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014-2015 and is source of livelihood of over 90 per cent of the indigenous people of the region (Dezeh, 2013). Increased agricultural production and high crop yields is essential for food security. At the same time, serving as a safety net for women's farming schemes. Such production increase is necessary for women because they are more vulnerable to on-farm and off the field shocks. These could not be achieved without adequate exposure of these farmers to financing services. To make agriculture more effective in support of economic growth trajectory and reducing poverty in the NWR, a policy framework needs to be adopted with favorable socio-political climate, adequate governance, and sound macroeconomic fund geared at ensuring substantial financial means for women in the increasing productivity and food supply (Dezeh, 2013).

The availability of this financial means is pivotal on improving women's efforts on bettering farm level practices and developing linkages for farmers and the cropping industry. This should be based on new technologies, and ideas as most of the farming population (80%) resides in the rural areas which indirectly and directly can go a long way to improve livelihood. Arguably, an assessment of the place of finance in the women's agricultural economy by the second half of the 20th and early 21st centuries brings us to the conclusion that it was a despicable assert that revolutionized the women's agricultural industry between the 1960s and the second decade of the 21st century. Due to the indispensability of finance in carrying out agriculture and food production, women in the North West Region, sort diverse means to obtain the resource for agrarianism.

Sources of Agricultural Credit for Women in the North West Region

Information on income sources of Africa's women farmers is not readily available. Detailed agricultural financing supply channels or credit source surveys have been undertaken too frequently without a comprehensive study on how finance is accessed on women's sector in sub regional agricultural units like the North West Region of Cameroon. Similarly, income, employment, and farming systems surveys have seldom reached out comprehensively into the promotion of capitalist agriculture/farming where women were less represented in places like the North West Region. Meantime, scholarly literature on the sources of finance in the predominantly women's industry remains derelict. These are points of observation in the North

West Region's widely varying socio-economic and agro-climatic environments. Women's agricultural finance or credit sources in the NWR as early as the 1960s consisted of the informal and formal. These two sources owe their supply from friends, relatives, commercial agents, traders and private money lenders. As such, while agriculture directly provided earnings for rural women farmers in the North West Region and other parts of Cameroon, the source of financing (whether formal or informal for the local industry) during the post-1960 era did not necessarily come from the agricultural fields alone. Instead, there were many other subsistence activities that served as sources of finance for these farmers.

This diversification in sources of women's finance entailed a fair amount of specialization within the household according to gender or age. In Kom and Mbengwi, for instance, most subsistence crops were produced by the females, and most income from craftworks and services was generated by specialized individuals in the extended household system (the compound economy) which was reinvested in the agricultural production trial. This was commonplace in the region especially from the 1960s and 80s and still was the case in the early years of the 21st century. Some women in the Bamenda area cultivated about 30 percent of the cash crop fields (groundnuts) in the South Western Region of Cameroon and wages from such employments were tailored towards the production of food crops. Moreover, subsistence crops in the North Western Bamenda grassfields was also produced mostly by women. On the other hand, non-agricultural wages were generated mostly by males. These non-agricultural wage/salaried employments inter-alia included banking, teaching, and Small and Medium Size Enterprise Employments. Part of the revenues from these services and trading incomes which was mostly generated by men (in places like Nkwen, Nkambe, Nso, and Wum,) became substantially given to women for investment in agricultural production activities. In the scheme of things, food crop cultivation systems benefited most from this financial largesse as women were more concerned with food supply.

Traditionally, friends and relatives, village shop keepers, traders, commercial agents among others, emerged in major communities like Kumbo, Wum, Bambui, Fundong, Bali, Mbengwi and Ndop as potential sources of agricultural credit. These sources of finances, generally lend for short periods with interest. Such loans were given as a coping strategy over bad periods. In this regard, was geared for considerable farm use. It was also available for buying seasonal farm inputs where cash was essentially required. These sources did play an unprecedented role in the purchase of farm inputs for use in agriculture and crop production. Such a model was key in meeting the consumption demands of thousands of small farmers in the region. Moreover, it facilitated the purchase of systemic chemicals like fertilizer likewise enabling women to hire farm labour. The sum of cash income held varied per farmer and one type of borrower (class of farmer) and lender (type of financial institution).

There were also credit sources comprised of financial institutions which were key vectors in agricultural financing for women in the post-independent North Western Bamenda grassfields of Cameroon. They also dispersed loanable funds to small farmers in the locale for use in agricultural production. As a means to curb the difficulties of farmers, the government of Cameroon in the 1980s created the National Fund for Rural Development (NFRD). This

institution was created by ordinance No. 73124 of 29th May 1973, and authorized to operate in the region and elsewhere it deemed necessary. Commonly referred to as the farmer's bank, NFRD granted loans to individual farmers through their organizations from specific funds placed at its disposal to manage by the state. In 1986, the NFRD made a maize loan of 8,07500 FCFA to the Nso Cooperative Produce Marketing Society (MIDENO, 1988). This money was used by the farmers including women's Cooperatives in the transportation of maize produce to Bamenda. It was done this way since they had no other source of income except the small proceeds they retained from farmers' bonuses after sales (Dezeh, 2013). It also guaranteed loans granted to farmers especially women by other financial intermediaries. Cooperative societies were on their own also viable to secure such loans. Loans were of short, medium- and long-term duration. The loans were intended to complement the efforts of rural communities engaged in agricultural development projects in which Nso area women featured prominently (Dezeh, 2013).

The role and importance of women's contribution in agriculture in the past was well established immediately after independence. Their role as key stakeholders in rural development (food production) was further given impetus not just with the emergence of farming cooperatives but much more with the setting up of women's agricultural Cooperatives as sources of financing (beckford & Campbell, 2013). These structures became affiliated under CAMCULL in the function of women's initiative in the agricultural sector by the 1990s. As stated earlier from the 1990s, CAMCULL was mandated by the government among other objectives to grant loans to farmers through community Cooperative Credit Union Limited affiliated to it. This was to enable them improve agricultural production and by so doing ensure food supply. CAMCULL's scheme became polarized in the North West Region immediately after the 1990s and gained impetus in the early 2000s. Subsidies for fertilizers, seeds for cultivation and hired labour also became available for women in the region through this cooperative scheme. This was achieved through loan grants obtained from CAMCULL's agents, the Credit Union Limited. This organ, it should be noted was at the disposal of farmers in the region (GOJ, 2011). Majority of them were women (GOJ, 2011). However, for smooth assistance and for few resources to benefit from the majority of women, such assistance required benefactors (female farmers) to belong to a farm cooperative through which they could obtain formal micro credit. Since most women farmers were not active members of agricultural cooperatives, these demands urged many of them to join such schemes. This was the picture in a wider spectrum of the region. But in the Awing Women's Cooperative as was the case with most cooperative schemes in the North West Region, the lack of consistency in the operation of women Credit Unions therefore placed them in financial peril (GOJ, 2011).

Later on, in the 2000s, there was the proliferation of other Credit Union schemes (AZIRE Cooperative Union), Non-governmental Organizations such as the GTZ (German Technical Cooperation), and Heifer Project International. The raison d'être for the emergence of these funding bodies was of improve the financial prowess of agricultural communities in the locale. This was a target objective to bolster farm productivity, food supply and women's housing incomes for the earmarked population.

Targeting poor women's household income sources on the basis of long-term structural information was a common approach in the North Western Bamenda grassfields of Cameroon and other Sub-Saharan countries. For instance, women farmers were sometimes targeted through technical assistance for "women's crops through organizations like the German Cameroon Technical Cooperation (GTZ), and through extension services by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development." This strategy was pursued on the two cardinal points; that an incremental direct income effect for women, a less privileged agrarian class in their own capacity, will emerge; and that women had a greater preference for financial resource allocation for food security since they were envisaged as the real custodians of the food sovereignty in the region. An example from the Mezam, Bui, Menchum and Boyo divisions suggests that this approach had a potential effect on women's agricultural activities although it also came with some constraints. Perhaps, looking at the prognosis of change for women's sources of finance in the post-1960 North West Region of Cameroon, we are poised to conclude that, myriad sources of finance (both formal and informal) emerged in the women's agricultural economy. These mediums were widely regarded as a coping strategy towards sustaining agriculture and food security in the region. Although these financial sources thrived in the region, they were remarkably minimal in scale. To this effect, could not go a long way to foster the purchase of adequate farm inputs which was a prerequisite for increased agricultural productivity in the mainland. It was hoped that these sources of finance were to help women put to check food scarcity shocks in the region. This was the chequered state of agricultural finance confronting women in the North West Region in their exploits towards agriculture and ensuring food security between the mid-20th and early 21st centuries. Though it did go a long to achieve this measure, the proliferation of such schemes for women in the region, surfaced with plethora of problems in their quest to access them.

Hindrances to Women's Access to Finance and their Pitfalls on Agricultural Productivity and Food Security in the North West Region

Extant literature on the North Western part of Cameroon since the 1960s reveals that women here encountered myriad challenges in accessing finance to carry out both on-farm and off-field in agricultural production. Furthermore, these difficulties hampered the sustainability of the food sovereignty. This was partially due to the fact that traditional and other institutional barriers gave them very limited access to financial resources which was vital for increased agricultural productivity, a step towards curbing food insecurity. Despite the fact that agricultural entrepreneurs thrived within the framework of the informal sector where there was free entry and exit, women in the North West Region on a frequent and often daily basis, much more carried out agri-business on a difficult socio-economic environment. This affected both productivity and hence resulted in periodic food scarcity shocks in the African mainland even before the dawn of the 21st century.

Achieving a meaningful change in agriculture that the Bamenda grassfields and Africa craves; one that can sustain the nation's urgent food demands and the changing agriculture landscape, will require clear understanding of the issues facing female household agriculturist in the sector during the post-1960 era. In this enterprise, limited financial resources surfaced at the helm of

the constrains. If the productivity of agricultural products was low in the North West Region, one area this salient scenario could be hinged on is the limited access to productive resources which made women's ability to scale up field crop production more skewed. During the post-independence era in the North West Region it was common place that women experienced more constraints in accessing agricultural productive resources. According to FAO, such barriers involved several dimensions among which are the ownership of land, management of agricultural resources; use of financial services and other inputs for agriculture, access to education, knowledge and skills related to agriculture which acted in harmony to limit women's access to financial services through which they could ably improve on the production of their crops. Women tend to be disadvantaged in regard to all these dimensions (FAO, 2011) and therefore stalled their ability to effectively produce on the fields while the food security situation remained narrow in the region.

The nexus between women, food production and land (mis)management and ownership is important in understanding the draw back in accessing finance for the productivity of agriculture and food supply. Feminist economic literature reveals all forms of motivation including self-interest in people's choices and behaviours, altruism, caring, and fairness. Although these are associated with women, they were in fact historically and culturally constructed (Beneria, 2003). The world Bank (1990) affirms to the problem of limited access to finance as one of the common constraints of women agricultural entrepreneurs. However, the commonality of the problem of feminist cultivators of food crops in Cameroon's North West Region, they differ in nature from one locality to the other.

The problem of finance for agricultural productivity in the NWR and Cameron in general is serious and inextricably linked to the salient question of accessibility to Land. Land is the central factor of production in agrarian economies (Bell, 1990; Obeng-Odoom, 2012) consequently the manner in which it is accessed, allocated or transferred, controlled, and used was an important consideration in the socio-economic policies and associated legislative environments and institutional forms. Land acquisition in the Mezam, Menchum, Momo, Bui, Boyo, Donga-mantung and Ngo-ketunja divisions by women especially with the enunciation of the Land Ordinance Act of 1974 in Cameroon partially had as target objective to gainfully invest in agricultural production. To appropriate landed property, huge sums of financial capital was required. This was probably explained by the value attached by the people to this commodity. Perhaps, who cared about land and who owned the land in the North West Region of Cameroon? This question points to the problematic of a gendered use and mismanagement of land with major implications on women's agricultural productivity, food security and survival especially in female headed households. Notably, the Land question was thus not purely an agricultural issue. Instead, it was fundamentally a matter for the socio-economic development and was usually at the center of conflict especially within the political economy of North West Region. Since it was a commodity the spurred conflict, this perturbed atmosphere adversely affected women as they found difficulties grappling vast acreages for sale that could ably grant them the necessary cash income to invest in agricultural production while ensuring food security.

Concurrently, unequal rights to land borne out of diverse statute, customary, religious and local norms placed women at a less privileged position, prolonged poverty, and entrenched gender inequality. At the same time, exposing them to the open market for land grabbing even when the financial resources for purchase was limited and often scarce. Even among the indigenous farming population, limited access to land by women, a cost-effective commodity that could be gainfully disposed for cash income towards agricultural production was constrained by the customs and traditions governing land ownership in this dominantly patrilineal society. Women comprised just 15% of agricultural landholders (that is, those who exercise management control over an agricultural holding as owners or tenants, or through customary rights), (Fonjong, 2001). Although about 35 per cent of respondents raised the issue of non-land ownership as major plague hindering them from possessing adequate finance for agriculture and food production, it did not deter their quest for landed property. What usually discouraged these female entrepreneurs in their pursuit for the aforementioned assert in the North West Region was the limited access to finance. Arguably, women were often the disadvantaged agricultural class in accessing finance through this medium-sales of landed property, when matched with their male counterparts in the mainland. This endangered their hopes of bolstering food supply through increased cultivation, purchase of quality seeds and fertilizers. Such a perturbed atmosphere was precarious especially from 1986 with the outbreak of the economic crisis in Cameroon in which women in this mainland were implicated. The question of appropriating adequate finance for land purchase towards crop production in different societies of the North Western Bamenda grassfields like Bambalang became diminished by the fact that women were mostly fishers, buyam-sellems and did not immediately feel the direct effects of the land crisis on the agricultural pursuits (Fonjong, 2001; Nwenfor, 2018).

Given that land was and is still a valid collateral that was often presented by farmers in Banks services as a means to obtain cash for farming often dashed hopes for Bamenda area women in the art of agriculture and food supply. Failure to gain access to the much-needed funds as a result of their limited ownership of land property, placed agriculture and especially food supply on a downward spiral. The devaluation of the Franc CFA in 1994 following the outbreak of the economic crisis made a bad financial situation/environment for women in the area even malignant (worse). In divisions like Boyo, Momo, Menchum, and even Bui and Ngo-ketunjia, women needed money as start up and running capital no matter how small it was for farming. Some of this money could be used to acquire land for agriculture. This could either be land that was rented or purchased. Paradoxically, there were few financial institutions ready to offer women financial assistance in these communities for this purpose (Nwenfor; 2018). Even where such institutions prevailed, women food producers had limited access to them, particularly in circumstances where they were not organized into “working bees”. Breth et al. (1997) have aptly articulated that the inability of women food crop entrepreneurs to access credit is explained by their lack of knowledge about lack of collaterals, credit institutions and illiteracy (Breth, 1997). A Survey by Mutemba & Blackden (2000) evokes that less than two per cent of the low-income entrepreneurs have access to financial services. Women comprise the smallest fraction, having only three per cent of all the credit in Kenya as against 14 per cent for men; and Five per cent in Nigeria as against 14 percent for men in 1996 (Baden, 1996). These low figures beg us to argue that as was the picture in other African countries, women’s low access to financial services in the

North Western Bamenda grassfields of Cameroon affected the quality of food production during the post- 1960 epoch. In addition, this affected the rate at which these women could hire or buy labour. A scathing critique of the financial difficulties of Bamenda area women farmers leaves us with the conclusion that their limited access to credit facilities fueled the declining quality and quantity of food supply especially with the devaluation of the Franc CFA in 1994. This unhealthy situation, the authors contend, continued same for the North Western women even until the second decade of the 21st century (Canute & Nwenfor, 2018). To this effect, efforts geared at intensified farming as a means of ensuring increased crop productivity by these female entrepreneurs became ultimately obscured. This was explained by their limited exposure to financing institutions as they failed to ably sponsor on-farm labour demands. It would appear that the Bamenda area women never had the leverage to control these finance services and consequently did not benefit much from them in the post-independence era. This was the case in spite the fact that they were littered in the region's sub-divisional (Bafut, and Tubah) and divisional (Mezam, and Donga-Mantung) headquarters respectively. Arguably, the foregoing agricultural puzzle facing women in the North West Region, leaves the scathing impression that post-independence agro-policies in Cameroon took keen on agriculture but with no real efforts to boost women's financial situation in the industry as a food security measure (Canute & Nwenfor; 2018).

In the same vein, women in Fundong, Ndop, Bali, Mbengwi, Nso and Santa pressed hard to improve agricultural production. In this enterprise, land which was primordial to the success of this initiative was scarce. This scarcity in North Western Region was partly explained by the fact that most of the female agriculturists/ crop producers could not boast of high paying jobs that could ably secure them landed assets for agri-business. While high paying jobs was the plague from securing adequate finance for agri-land purchase, urbanization was on the rise. As observed earlier on, Mezam, Donga-mantung and Bui divisions among others in the North West Region were rapidly growing areas and highly concentrated. These were regions coming under rapid urbanization especially after the 1990s. This served as a major threat for women's cultivable land in the region as this development increased the price for the commodity. Land here thus became scarce and generally very costly to afford. This was typically so for rural women farmers in the mainland. Agriculture and food production thus became placed at the lower edge in the radar of the indigenous people in the rapidly urbanizing areas. This trend owed its explanation to the rapid loss of agri-land to the urban sprawl (Nwenfor, 2018). The rising trend of agri-land loss to urban sprawl in the region made land for agricultural uses very scarce. In a society where farming was considered not to yield high returns in comparison to other uses like commerce and education, women suffered a great blow to their agricultural exploits and food safety before the 2000s was seriously threatened by urban activities (Nwenfor, 2018). As earlier mentioned, the foregoing scenario could be likened to women's dissociation from high paying jobs like education, banking and construction that could guarantee them higher cash returns. Meantime, empowering their ability to purchase agricultural land and purchasing the necessary inputs to increase on-farm food supply. The obnoxious scenario facing the North West women of Cameroon was simultaneously the experience of most post-1960 women in the Sub-Saharan Africa who had given agriculture and food production an embrace but with an obscured vision to access finance and financial services for the enterprise in their surrounding communities.

Moreover, the history of access to finance and financial services in the North West Region of Cameroon and Africa in general reveals that agricultural finance was and now is still among the most difficult type of finance to secure. Women farmers in the North West Region experienced greater constraints in accessing commodity money than their male counterparts. As early as the 1970s and 1980s, Bamenda area women were confronted with the problem of perceived risk and the merit-based account related to requisite collateral. African women farmers like those in the North Western part of Cameroon, operated in an environment particularly perceived as riskier than that found in other non-African developing countries. This obstacle was compounded by the very nature of their business or land size that was often less than one hectare.

Until the 1990s, the North West Regional women farmers generally lacked the necessary management and absorptive capacities required to profitably utilize available financial and productive resources. The region's large population of predominantly rural women with limited education was exposed to little or no access to financial services. This is to affirm that most of them were effectively unbanked farmers. This segment of the population had neither the opportunity for interaction with financial institutions. On the other hand, some had no exposure necessary to develop skills for accessing formal credit. Generally, this also meant that such small holder farmers most of who were rural women had weak capacity to prepare bankable documents. To this is added the knowledge gaps which often led to failure to assess and understand the available financial services to gainfully invest in agriculture as a food safety net. A study conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on Zambia's access to agricultural finance shows a disconcerting disparity in access to financial services between the intermediate category of small, emerging commercial farmers and rural less educated micro-small as well as medium enterprises (MSMEs). The former whose central point stems from satisfactory levels of literacy, land ownership and some experience with formal credit stand at 80 per cent in comparison to their rural counterparts who stand at 20 per cent (Moisé, 2013). Such staggering low figures for rural farmers can be matched to the situation of women in the North West Region of Cameroon who as a result of their educational lapses were unable to effectively access finance from financial institutions. Some of the institutions included the National Financial Credit in Bamenda, African Community Credit (CCA), as well as Cooperative Credit Unions which surfaced to be quite at the reach of women farmers in the locale. However, few women managed to obtain funds through loans from the cooperative societies despite these educational barriers especially in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. But as was the experience with several cooperatives in the region like the Awing Women's cooperative, the lack of consistency in the operation of women farmer cooperatives to their banking system therefore placed them in financial peril (GOJ, 2011).

Accessing banking services as well as the problem of locating farms was another major huddle for the 20th century agriculturist in the North West Region. The next adventitious explanation for prohibitive access to finance by women in the Bamenda area was the physical location of the cultivable fields and distance from credit source. The distance between the female borrower and the lender (financial institutions) ultimately had an impact on the resulting borrower-bank relationship. A disaggregation of data collected on rural and urban agricultural women small holder farmers access to borrowing services in the region paints a dismal picture (Breth et al.,

1997). In all, the data for access to informal finance leaves us with the view that the level of social inclusion was still very low as women were marginally limited in their ability to access viable financial services to increase agricultural productivity in the 2000s. Furthermore, exacerbated by the lack of formal national identification documents, most rural women in the Bamenda area surfaced to be financially excluded. Such a picture did not speak well for the 21st century female agriculturist but only helped in widening the gender income gap in favour of men while posing a serious threat on food security. The difficulties of accessing credit affected other input components of the food crop sector like the storage and transportation systems in the African mainland. Women carried out 80 per cent of all activities related to food storage and transportation in Sub-Saharan Africa, as approximated by the African Women Food Farmer Initiative. The North West women inclusive as part of the Sub-Saharan African region. The near absence of farm to market roads in areas like Nwa, Bambalang, Balikumbat, Alahening, and Awing even in the 2000s and still was in the post-2010 epoch exposed the farmers to the vagaries of nature. Under such conditions, the transportation of inputs and food produce from the farms by these mainland Bamenda area women became difficult with food stocks left in the farm to decay. This posed an even greater agricultural storage puzzle for the women-rendering storage difficulties acute. This was dangerous for the security of the food sovereignty in the region and Cameroon between the 2010 to 2017 farming season.

Although there existed some major tarred roads like the Bambui-Fundong, and Bambui-Ndop-Kumbo roads, these linked the farmers mostly to the main rural and urban market centres where very few farms were cultivated. Few of these roads linked women to big markets where cash income could be obtained. Even with the little produce from the fields, Bamenda area women were not opportune with many good roads that could enable them easily channel their farm produce to the marketplace through which after sales they could obtain enough cash income with which they could ably embark on further agricultural production. Meantime, putting food security to check. But this was never the case as poor means of communication became a major plague to their incessant quest for more agricultural cash income.

Meantime, in the interior where most of these farms were cultivated, the roads were earthy and difficult to be accessed by female farmers of the region. Thus, production was carried out but slackened in quantity due to the increased distance. Shamefully enough, Cameroon's North West Regional women farmers could not afford private means of transporting their crops using some of these roads. Wertime (1985) observes that due to the prevalence of such problems associated with high cost transportation, female food crop entrepreneurs in Cameroon most often resorted to human portorage. That is, they transported the crops on their head, backs, hand trucks, which sapped a lot of their energy and time. This increased the amount of post-harvest losses in the region. This explains why almost 80 per cent of the women in the region interviewed lamented on the problem of securing good paying jobs as some modus operandi for the limited access to finance for women. As such pegged this development as the main basis for their incessant use of human portorage in the transportation of agricultural produce from the fields by most women in the mainland. Even in 2010-2017 period, during which modern vehicles could ably accomplish this task with less human energy required, the low earning ability of most North West Regional female farmers in Cameroon still distanced most of them from enjoying these services in

safeguarding their farm produce and food supply. In the scheme of things, post-harvest grain losses were usually increased which further heightened the problem of food insecurity in the region. This was the poor state of affairs facing women's finance during the 21st century in most Third world agricultural communities trapped in a vicious cycle of financial poverty. The reason for this is best explained by the poor access of these women to credit facilities. Since women in the North West Region were plagued by all of the above difficulties in accessing finance, regional and national Banks were further exposed to weak capacities to develop profitable and broadened SME financial products. Arguably, women's difficulties in different societies of the North West Region in accessing commodity money for agri-business certainly increased on-farm crop losses. To this end, the food insecurity query was on a sky-rocketing trend within the region and the national frontiers.

Just as it looked like the involvement of indigenous women in the post-1960 agricultural industry in Cameroon was to petter out to a blossoming agricultural sector, with very limited sources of finance in the offing, these female farmers in the North West Region were forced to live in outlandish need of capital owing to inadequate collateral securities from where such credit was sought (Nwenfor, 2018). From the stringent measures by financial institutions in the region among many the CAMCCUL (Cameroon Cooperative Credit Union Limited) to lease funds, to the erstwhile limitation by crediting institutions to exercise greater financial flexibility for women, gives credence to the Corporal Finance epistemology whose core principles intimate that modern corporate finance structures will with-hold capital stocks for survival, than risk disbursing such funds for investment in other economic circles or entities. Women's agrarianism in mainland Bamenda not secluded (Nwenfor, 2018). The proceedings best explain some of the impending miseries of female farmers *ab initio*, in the Northwestern Bamenda area for a period spanning nearly 50 decades stemming from the 1960s. Interestingly, the very bases for which spiking production to record high levels often proved prohibitive to a majority in this gender group and did gain notoriety in the day-to-day economics of their cropping culture (Nwenfor, 2018).

Due to these financial blockings in the region, women farmers in the North West Region of Cameroon faced challenges in acquiring vital farm inputs. These inputs included fertilizer, seeds, pesticides, farm equipment and machinery. These inputs were all vital to increased agricultural productivity. For example, despite its potential to boost production and increase profits, levels of fertilizer use remain very low in the North West Region and Africa particularly among women. In many Bamenda area societies, women applied even less fertilizer than to than capitalist state run plantations occasioned by the wide income trend facing women. This was especially so with the outbreak of the economic crisis of that stemmed from the failure of the structural adjustment measures. The outcome being the widening state of poverty and untold hardship on women farmers in the North West Region and Cameroon in general. Farmers could no longer foot bills to purchase inputs for their routine agricultural activities. There was an abysmal meltdown in agricultural productivity from this period as inputs could not be purchased. Even where women in the North Western Region managed and purchased these inputs-fertilizers, and quality seeds for cultivation, this was never effected on a regular basis. Hence productivity remained stalled although these strides to purchase inputs especially in the 2000s sapped their energies. A furthers

scathing critique of the financial predicaments of women in the North West Region begs us to argue that the quantity and quality of agricultural and food production in the region was inextricably associated to the financial economy of each female farmers. That is to say, the more financially viable a woman was, the greater the propensity for increased food production.

Difficulties in accessing finance and financial services by women in this agricultural granary can also be associated to their poor representation in major cash leasing institutions. Since this, was rarely the case, the plight of women who came lobbying for finance could not be properly defended by their peers. As there was a poor representation of women in such cash funding institutions (cooperatives and national banks) loans and credits facilities were scarcely obtained. Intensifying the use of inputs like fertilizers therefore became far-fetched among the North West women. Similarly, crop quality and quantity was on a downward spiral. Increasing the use of fertilizer by women, both in terms of quantity and quality, has emerged as a critical priority for increasing agricultural productivity for women particularly in Ethiopia, Malawi, Niger, northern Nigeria, Uganda as in Cameroon's North West Region. Unfortunately, this expectation often fell short of manifestation due to limited funding partly occasioned by their difficulties to get free hold of finance. As if this was enough, several distinct barriers still hindered female farmers from accessing finance including the lack of information concerning the availability of possible financial outlets. Even where information was available few made full use of it. The information blackout on finance outlets for most women caused the purchase of fertilizer and also quality seeds difficult. Given that fertilizers and improved seeds were strategic for women at improving food production but paradoxically was not used on a regular basis due to the inadequate finance, crop yields remained low which was bad for food security in the locale. Improved seeds can boost farmers' yields. But these farmers in the Bamenda area were not able to afford the required cash to purchase them seasonally. Meantime, some of them suffered from the availability of limited knowledge or confidence in their quality. It would appear the mid-20th and 21st centuries North West Regional farmers of Cameroon had zeal for increased agricultural productivity which was never really backed by the necessary financial prowess occasioned by the lack of adequate policy measures to easily expose women to funding schemes. Likewise, make them viable in crop production thereby putting to check the salient problem of food insecurity (Nwenfor, 2018).

In view of these financial limitations, old and out-dated technologies thus flooded most women's fields in the North West Region in the process of agricultural and food crop. This was envisaged as a coping strategy to their woes in accessing finance right through the second decade of the 21st century. While widespread use and application of old and/or traditional indigenous technologies continued to occupy an important place in the agro- economics of the North West Region's female farmers, it was important for these indigenous women not to have remain incarcerated to out-dated or less valuable technologies; and to explore opportunities for change as newer technologies emerged (World Bank, 2009). Whatever the case, their difficulties to adequately access funds for their agricultural exploits could not permit them escape this unhealthy path (Nwenfor, 2018).

In explaining this situation ab initio, the limited financial resources of the indigenous women witnessed majority of them persistently lacking storages/ preservation facilities for their

agricultural commodities (World Bank, 2009). While storage facilities were absent, more and more food produce was lost in the preservative phase. Meantime, the North West Region women's ability to ensure food supply in the region was seriously put to check. Women therefore need to be granted access to finance and financial services. In this way, they will be able to afford the necessary input for agriculture while ensuring food production in a sustainable manner. To this effect, the impact of women in sustaining the food sovereignty would be on an escape from the route to moribund.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the complex issues of women farmers in the North West Region of Cameroon in accessing credit (finance) and their pitfalls on agricultural productivity and food security. Importantly, they were aware of the flaws of women in terms of lack of adequate collateral securities, gender segregation or exclusion in financial matters. Admittedly, these joined forces to limit women's access to adequate finance towards agricultural production and productivity. This served as a major hindrance towards the expansion of agriculture and curbing food insecurity in the region, a situation that could be likened to most Third World agricultural communities where women featured prominently. The paper reveals that the predicaments of women to access finance and financial services stalled their initiative for the expansion of agricultural production. The outcome the authors maintain was a major threat on the security of the food sovereignty in the region between the mid-20th and second decade of the 21st centuries.

In view of the foregoing precedence, the dream of achieving greater agricultural productivity and even food security by women in the North West Region and Cameroon in general becomes illusionary. This implies that well-tailored financial policies especially those that target female agriculturists in the country should be at the core of all political, economic and social discourse. The stark reality as from the 1960s is that the general public did not immediately feel the pinch of all these problems like the female agro-industrialist themselves in the North West of Cameroon. These women were those more vulnerable and must begin the crusade, which will transcend into the entire community. By so doing, trigger the much-needed change in the women's sector. This should take a regional and national broad base approach. In fact, there are obvious worries of persistent hunger in the Sub-Saharan African region where food production persistently lags behind population growth in a majority of area like Mezam and Ngo-ketunjia division. Cognisant of this fact, stakeholders in Cameroon's agricultural industry must ensure measures be implemented to ensure this salient scenario escapes women farmers in the North West Region. The future of agriculture and food security here is bleak if rapid measures are not put in place to ensure that female food crop producers who constitute the bulk of the agricultural industry be increasingly exposed to viable financial services to better agricultural production. In this way, ensure increased food supply and food self-sufficiency in the region and nation in general.

To posit, removing the constraints facing women in accessing finance in the agricultural sector, has the potential to produce significant gains for society by increasing agricultural productivity, reducing poverty and hunger and promoting economic growth. In essence creating schemes with a focus on investments on women farmers and instituting policies that increase the accessibility

and availability of financial resources in the region's agriculture could yield enormous benefits for women. Likewise, their families, communities and country. Empowering women's capacity by allowing them greater ownership to tangible assets that can serve as viable collaterals to obtain bank loans (finance) could be a safety net towards improving agricultural productivity and increasing food security in the North West Region of Cameroon.

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