

## **FARMER ORGANISATION IN THE NORTHWEST REGION OF CAMEROON: ACTUAL STATE OF AFFAIRS**

**Patience Mugah Nji<sup>1</sup>, Fon Dorothy Engwali<sup>2\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Rural Sociology and Development, Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences, University of Dschang, P.O Box 222 Dschang, Cameroon.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Agricultural Economics, Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences, University of Dschang, P.O Box 222 Dschang, Cameroon.

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**ABSTRACT:** *Farmer organisations (FOs) are key actors in agricultural development and can play an important role in achieving sustainable rural development. The Cameroon government aware of this important role played by FOs, after independence created cooperatives as alternative organizations for agricultural production and source of foreign currencies. The economic crisis of the 1980s encouraged the creation of many FOs (Common initiative groups and cooperatives) since the government could no longer handle the FOs and this led to the transfer of responsibilities to farmers. The North-West region like other parts of Cameroon since then witnessed the creation of thousands of FOs that have to play both social and economic roles for the benefit of the farmers. This research was carried out to examine the actual state of affairs of FOs in the region and the role they play in the agriculture development of the North West region of Cameroon. The research methods used included field work, field surveys through semi-structured interviews with members of FOs or actors in this sector and documentary research. The results revealed that in 2017 the number of FOs dropped from 16, 425 in 2015 to 11,108 with the number of active groups only 9.6% indicating the presence of FOs which do not provide the expected benefits to farmers.*

**KEYWORDS:** Farmer organizations, agricultural development, North-West region of Cameroon

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In Cameroon, agriculture remains the backbone of its economy employing up to 70 % of its workforce, and contributes about 42 % of its gross domestic product (GDP) and 30 % of its export revenue (World Bank, 2012). Agriculture equally provided 22.7 % of added value in 2014 and it is estimated that 36.6 % of the population is involved in agriculture (World Bank, 2015). Cameroon has a lot of agricultural potential because of its location, which provides an ideal climate for the cultivation of both cash and food crops (World Bank, 2012). Despite these potentials, the country still spends huge sums of money to import foodstuff. In 2011, the Ministry of Finance estimated that the government spent close to 500 billion FCFA (approximately one billion dollars) on the importation of foodstuff such as flour, rice, millet, sorghum, and fish. As such, there is need for the government to resolve the problems faced by the sector for agricultural growth because it contributes immensely to poverty reduction (Gallup *et al.*, 1997; Thirtle *et al.*, 2001; Devkota and Upadhyay, 2013; Dzanku, 2015).

The lack of agricultural production input by farmers in Cameroon as well as most developing countries encouraged farmers to look for various options to guarantee household food security and maximize income from agriculture. Thus, in trying to find schemes for survival and in

seeking growth, farmers gather resources from wherever available, whether through formal or informal systems (Tolno, et al., 2015). One of the options for farmers to boost up their farm production and improve their well-being is by coming together and pooling their resources to work together as members of a farmer organization (FO). Couturier *et al.* (2006; 2013), defines a FO as “a collective entity of farmers in a village or a number of contiguous villages who have come together with common goals for economic or social benefits related to agricultural activities”. In other words, it is a group of rural farmers and producers who come together as FOs to provide services to members and improve rural incomes or employment opportunities in relation to agricultural activities. Strong and dynamic FOs can provide opportunities to farmers to play their role effectively in a market economy and benefit from it (Millie *et al.*, 2006). Other reasons for joining FOs arises from their potential in realizing economic growth and empowering farmers (Fischer and Qaim, 2012, 2013). Olwande and Mathenge, (2012) indicated that the forming of FO among farmers has proved to be one of the means for farmers to overcome market imperfections and provide inputs to members.

The North-West region like other parts of Cameroon has since the 1960 witnessed the creation of thousands of FOs that have to play both social and economic roles for the benefit of the farmers as earlier mentioned. Recently countries that depend mostly on fossil fuels for its GDP have been finding it difficult to support its economy because of fluctuating fuel prices. Countries of Central Africa have been hard hit by these fluctuating fuel prices. One way of maintaining resilience in their economies is to lay more and more emphasis on agricultural development. In this light, it is important to understand how these FOs functions and if they play the important role expected of them because there is scanty knowledge on their functioning, effectiveness and sustainability of these created groups.

This article seeks to analyse the state of affairs of FO in the North-West region of Cameroon. The method of research was based on documentary research, field work and field surveys in particularly through semi-structured interviews with members of FOs and actors of these organisations. This article is centered on the following points the historical evolution of FOs in Africa, Cameroon and the Northwest region of Cameroon, actual state of affairs of FOs in the North-West region through the characteristics and statistics on the FOs.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Evolution of Farmer organisations in Africa, Cameroon and the North-west region of Cameroon**

Agricultural cooperatives or Farmer organisation evolved through different periods or eras across Africa, which gradually spread to Cameroon and The North-West region with each period having its own peculiarities.

### **The Evolution of Farmer organisations in Africa**

In developing countries and especially Africa agricultural FOs evolved in three distinct generations. The first generation was during the colonial era, where the colonial administrators introduced FOs like cooperatives to organize production, marketing and export of commodities such as bananas, cocoa, rubber, coffee and cotton for European industries and markets.

The second generation witnessed the initiation of FOs by the new governments of newly independent African states in order to promote agricultural and rural development. These agricultural FOs operated under the strict control of the state and were used as a tool to apply planned activities to encourage and promote economic development through agriculture as was the backbone of the economy of most African countries. FOs were also important pathways African governments assisted farmers' with credits-, marketing programs and input supplies. As a result, the FOs were not authentic in terms of their organisation and management. As such, their sustainability was not assured and their poverty reduction methods and development impacts were limited. (Francesconi and Heerink, 2011).

The Third Generation agricultural FOs functioned in the post-reform period; in a competitive business environment, they were autonomous and free from government influence. This is because most African countries during this period liberalised the agricultural sector by introducing new laws and policies that encouraged the creation of farmer organizations. Liberalization and globalization of FOs during this period were vital motivating factors that made it indispensable to promote competitive participation of the rural poor farmers in agricultural production and marketing of agricultural products through third generation FOs. Third generation FOs were organized as autonomous self-help groups in the rural areas. The roles of these FOs were to work for the interest of its members through social and economic development and most especially poverty reduction amongst farmers by empowering its members. The creation of such organizations was to respond to the problem of market failure, which is common in African countries.

The post-liberalization period witnessed a trend of the growing importance of FOs in most African countries. This added to the belief that collective action gains exceed the gains smallholders realize through their own individual actions, also encouraged the increase creation of FOs across the African continent as a whole (Getnet and Anullo, 2012). As such, FOs were identified as one of the strategies necessary to develop smallholder agricultural production and livelihoods, in line with the numerous challenges faced by farmers in Africa (Verhofstadt and Maertens, 2015; Abebaw and Haile, 2013)

### **The Evolution of Farmer organizations in Cameroon**

In Cameroon, the evolution of FOs started as far back as 1920 during the colonial period (Prod-Homme, 1993). During this period, FOs were born to collect and sell goods for exportation and consumption, assists poor farmers by providing loans for the realisation of infrastructures and purchase of farmer tools, these FO were affiliated to savings and loan schemes (Achancho, 2012). Examples of farmer cooperatives for the collection of goods for exportation include *Union Centrale des Coopératives Agricoles de l'Ouest* (UCCAO) created in Dschang in 1932 to export Arabica coffee. In the cotton chain, the *Société de Développement du Coton au Cameroun* (SODECOTON) in the North of Cameroon, and Cameroon Development Cooperation (CDC) in the South West Region (Fongang, 2010).

After independence, in the 1960s, the state created FOs such as cooperatives to encourage agricultural production and as principal source of foreign currencies necessary for economic and social development; these organisations were controlled by the state (Fongang, 2010; MINADER, 2015).

In the 1970's, Cameroon witnessed a reform with the first law on cooperative societies law no.73-15 of 7<sup>th</sup> December 1973. This law gave the state powers to investigate, intervene, and

control cooperatives as well as appoint and release of its administrators especially directors. This law promoted state involvement in the activities of cooperatives and gave way for the creation of a Parastatal named the National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB) in 1975 that worked with the cooperatives. It bought produce from cooperatives and marketed them as well as provided agricultural inputs that strengthened cooperatives during the years (Jiotsa, *et al*, 2015).

The 1980s, witnessed economic crisis, consequently, the state could no longer handle these FOs and there was the transfer of responsibilities to the farmers. Thus, farmers were encouraged to create many farmer groups (Common initiative groups (CIG) and cooperatives) to ease transfer of responsibilities and to enable the farmers to work together to increase agricultural production and ameliorate their revenue. This led to the introduction of new laws to regulate the sector notably the Law No. 90/053 of 19 December 1990 on freedom of association, and Law No. 92/006 of 14 August 1992 on cooperative societies /common initiative groups (CIG) and programs or projects to work with them. (Mercoiret, 1994).

During the 1990s, the sector witnessed the creation of numerous FOs with over 12000-registered FOs with a majority of them inactive and created to benefit from assistance and gifts. (Fongang, 2012). The Ministry of agriculture and rural development according to the 1992 law was in charge of these FOs (Oyono and Temple, 2003). During this period, other new laws introduced to regulate FOs were; Law No. 90/053 of 19 December 1990 on freedom of association, and the law on economic interest groups (IEG). In 1999, the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) put in place the strategic document for poverty reduction obliging countries that were to benefit from loan reduction to define economic, structural and social programs, which its elaboration will result to economic growth, and poverty reduction. This document was to serve as a base for government to get international assistance. (Jiotsa *et al*, 2015; MINADER 2017).

During the years 2000, Cameroon witnessed the elaboration of strategic documents for its development imposed by international financial institutions. Due to the numerous debts of Cameroon, it was classified under the heavily indebted countries initiative and its development policies elaborated in the strategic document for poverty reduction (SDPR) by the government in April 2003, and approved by the IMF and WB in July 2003. Under the said document, the state included the strategic document for rural development (SDRD) outlining agricultural and rural development strategies to encourage sustainable growth at four levels namely; Increase agricultural product, create equitable distribution of income, ensure agricultural products competitiveness and valorise natural resources. (Fongang, 2012).

The elaboration of the SDRD was done through projects emanating from programs under the Ministry of agriculture and rural development (MINADER) related to different food crops like maize, and plantains and later the Ministry of livestock (MINEPIA) with these projects working with FOs. These projects had as approach the creation of their own FOs to serve as their partners; assistance was in the form of financial, material and trainings. Consequently, the country witnessed a certain form of state intervention in FOs, this period also witnessed, regained interest in the creation of FOs due to these existing projects to benefit from financing and each of these projects worked separately with these FOs. For example, the program “*Professionnalisation agricole et renforcement institutionnel*” (PARI) under the coordination of MINADER and MINEPIA, which ended towards the year 2000, due to lack of funds (Fongang, 2012).

By the year 2005 still under these two ministries new projects were introduced and their aims were not to create partner FOs like previous projects but to assist already existing legalised CIGs. These projects include “*Projet d’appui à la compétitivité agricole*” (PACA) which existed from 2010 to 2015 financed by the World Bank and “*Programme d’amélioration de la compétitivité des exploitations familiales agropastorales*” ACEFA created in 2008 till present date financed by the bilateral French debt reduction. These projects that encouraged co-management between the state and FOs carried out its activities in the seven regions of the country; namely North West, the Centre, Far North, North, East, West and Littoral regions. (MINADER, 2017)

In 2010, a new law on Public Interest Group (PIG) was introduced this law brought about liberalization in the sector as it allowed cooperatives and CIGs to carry out their financial as well as administrative activities independently without state intervention (Jiotsa *et al*, 2015). By 2011 there existed about 121 000 FOs in Cameroon with 95% having the status of CIGs and about 1.5% cooperative organisation and others financial cooperatives (Fongang, 2012).

In 2013 precisely on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2013, the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa (OHADA) introduced a new law on cooperatives that called on CIGs to transform themselves into cooperatives. According to the OHADA, law cooperatives are of two types, simplified cooperative and the cooperative with a board of directors. The simplified cooperative is adapted for village groups and is made up of a least five members making its management easy. Meanwhile the cooperative with a board of directors demands at least 15 members and have a complicated constitution as well as management organs (Jiotsa *et al*, 2015;). After this law, the Ministry of agriculture and rural development encouraged FOs to conform to the new law before they can receive any assistance from the state and exercise would also help to know the real number of active groups in the region. However, even though few FOs conformed themselves by registering according to the OHADA law, very few of them are still functional and respect cooperative norms. (MINADER, 2017)

### **The Evolution of Farmer organizations in the North West region of Cameroon**

In the North-West region of Cameroon unlike French Cameroon, the southern Cameroon (North-West and South-West today), and the British colonial administration ruled using the indirect rule which led to freedom and the birth of many local initiatives from Nigeria. This equally resulted to the creation of Farmer cooperatives in the region which started in the towns where people had obtained western education. They also sought to expand and protect agricultural developments in the region. The first FOs in the region was the Bamenda Farmers’ Cooperative Union created in 1920. The Nigerian Marketing Board encouraged the creation of other FOs in the form of farmer cooperative societies in the big towns of the region such as Bamenda, Kumbo, Mbengwi and Fundong. The North-West Cooperative Association (NWCA) created in 1950 was an example. This association had as objective to educate farmers on the role and importance of the cooperative societies encouraging them to be members. The NWCA received support from the Southern Cameroon Marketing Board (SCMB), created in 1954 to ease the marketing of agricultural produce to obtain foreign exchange. The NWCA later gave rise to 143 primary cooperative societies and seven secondary cooperative unions in the region with about 35000 farmers as members ( Jiotsa *et al*, 2015).

The FOs in the region were found both at divisional and sub divisional level. At sub divisional levels there were primary cooperative societies known as cooperative producer marketing societies (CPMS) who had direct links with the farmers, since CPMS purchased agricultural

produce directly from the farmers and were found at the villages and sub divisional level. At divisional levels were secondary cooperative unions (SCU) who acted as intermediate between the CPMS and the umbrella body NWCA. They processed the produce collected at the primary level and delivered it to NWCA the umbrella body who then transported the produce to the ports for ready foreign markets. Thus, the NWCA was at the head of the organizational chart followed by the Secondary Cooperative Unions (SCU) while Cooperative Produce Marketing Societies (CPMS) were found at the bottom. The marketing of cash crops in British Southern Cameroons was facilitated by SCMB and became the West Cameroon Marketing Board (WCMB) when it achieved independence in 1961 through the plebiscite (Jiotsa *et al*, 2015).

The West Cameroon Marketing Board changed its name to Produce Marketing Organisation (PMO) in 1965; the POM was later dissolved in 1975 after the referendum in 1972 and end of the federal system in Cameroon and an umbrella parastatal known as the National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB) took over for agricultural development in the country. The umbrella parastatal came to assist the cooperative societies by providing education, provision of subsidized agricultural inputs to farmers, trainings, purchase and exportation of produce and the construction of farm to market roads to facilitate the transportation of these agricultural produces. A stabilization fund was created by the NPMB board to avoid price fluctuation of agricultural produce from affecting farmers there by strengthening cooperative societies in the North-West region of Cameroon ( Jiotsa *et al*, 2015).

The economic crisis of 1980s affected the country greatly and the North-West region did not remain indifferent as the incapability of the state to handle FOs like farmer cooperatives encouraged the creation of many FOs to transfer the responsibility of management from the state to the farmers (Mercoiret, 1994). This coupled with the laws introduced in the 1990's on the freedom of association Law No. 90/053 of 19 December 1990 and the law on cooperative societies and common initiative groups (CIG), law No. 92/006 of 14 August the 1993, led to the liberalisation of the sector and creation of many FOs in the region. This like the North-West Farmers' Organization (NOWEFOR) created in 1995 and North-West Pig Dealers Association (NOWEPDA). The number was so large that by 2015 there were a total of 16,425 FOs in the North-West region of Cameroon (MINEDER, 2017).

In the year 2000 with the creation of new programs and projects in Cameroon from the depts., relief programs of the World Bank, the region benefited from projects like PACA and ACEFA, MIDENO assisting farmers through legalised FOs in the region in maize production, poultry, pigs and provision of farming tools and fertilizers under MINADER and MINEPIA (Fongang, 2012).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study area**

The study area is the Northwest region of Cameroon. The region is situated in the western highlands of Cameroon and bordered in the southwest by the Southwest region, north by the Federal Republic of Nigeria, east by the Adamawa region and south by the Western region. The North West region of Cameroon is located at 6.33° longitude North and 10.5° latitude east of the Greenwich Meridian and has a surface area of 17.910km<sup>2</sup>. It has as headquarters Bamenda and is made up of seven divisions which include; Boyo, Bui, Donga–Mantung, Menchum, Mezam, Momo and Ngokentunjia, with 34 subdivisions (Neba, 1999). The North

West region has a population of 2.26 million inhabitants and a population density of 99.12 inhabitants per square kilometer. Economically, the North West region is predominantly agricultural with 80% of the rural population depending solely on subsistence agriculture. The study area was chosen due to the large number of FOs in the region notably 16,425 including CIGs, unions of CIGs, Cooperatives, union of Cooperatives, financial cooperatives and confederations of CIGs or confederations of cooperatives (MINADER,2015)

### **Data collection**

Data collection was done through documentary research, field work and field surveys. In particular semi-structured interviews with members of some FOs and actors of these FOs were used to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data. The actors of these organizations included those who work closely with the FOs such as extension workers in the divisional and sub divisional delegations of MINADER and their delegates as well as NGOs working with FOs such as ACEFA in the different divisions of the North-West region. In all 12 actors were interviewed in all the divisions.

### **Data analysis**

Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected from the field. The parameters grouped from the data include the type of FOs and their locations in the region, the farming activities carried out by these groups and the number of active groups in each division. The data was presented using descriptive statistics on Excel.

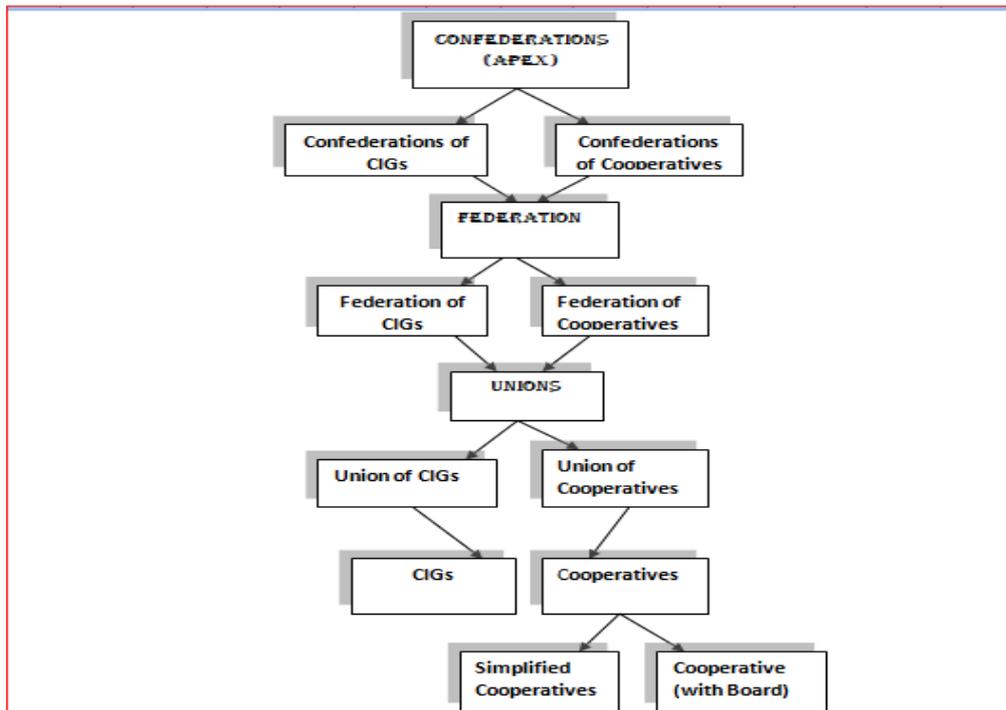
## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Current State of affairs for FOs in the North-West region**

Result of findings focuses on the current state of affairs of FOs in the region with emphasis on real time data on existing and functioning FOs in the North West Region as well as their characteristics.

### **Characteristics of Farmer organizations in The North-West Region of Cameroon.**

The different types of farmer organizations that exist in the North-West region as indicated in figure one below are (Common initiative groups) CIGs, farmer cooperatives (COOP), farmer financial cooperatives(COOPEC), unions of CIGs or cooperatives, federations of CIGs or cooperatives, and confederations of CIGs or cooperatives, which are the highest rank of farmer organization. These farmer cooperatives are of two types, cooperatives with board of directors and simplified cooperatives with no board of directors (MINADER, 2015) as shown in figure 1.



**Figure 1. Hierarchical representation of the different types of FOs in the North-West region**

The most active of these FOs in the region include the North-West farmer's organisation (NOWEFOR). Founded in October 1995 it works with unions of GIGs. The North-West Cooperative Association (NWCA) works with unions of farmer cooperatives in coffee cultivation, processing and marketing. The North-West vegetable cooperative (NWVC), works with CIGs who carry out vegetable farming. Upper Nun Valley Development Authority (UNDVA) works with cooperatives in the rice sector and The Cameroon Credit Union League (CAMCUL) works with micro finance institutions.

As concerns membership to FOs in the region, findings indicate that cooperatives and CIGs are averagely made up of 10 to 15 members which is in line with Fongang, (2012). Cooperatives membership however according to the OHADA law varies depending on the type of cooperative; cooperatives with board of directors must have a minimum membership of 15 and simplified a minimum of five. These groups are mostly represented by farmers within villages and communities carrying out a common agricultural activity and mostly named based on the type of activity they carry out and name of locality. For example, vegetables cooperatives or CIGs, livestock, mix farming, marketing of farming products, Irish potatoes production among many others. All activities carried out by these farmer organizations are related to farming such as the trainings for its members on improved crop and animal production, purchase of agricultural inputs in bulk and distribution, financial transactions like thrift and loans for members, sharing of experiences, cooperative marketing of members or group products and community farms. However, most of these farms have witnessed less success since most group members carry out farming on individual farms under the group and carry out collective marketing of the produce for the members. These FOs are still entry points of most projects and programs in the rural areas which are still in line with the findings of Fongang (2012) and MINADER (2017).

FOs in the North-West region of Cameroon are also characterised by low state intervention and their existence is short lived as most of them are created not to provide services to their members but are created in order to benefit from financial or material assistance from existing projects or program. This is also due to the fact most of these groups lack a clear mission statement and group objectives. Apart from activities realised during periods of assistance by projects or programs most of the FOs do not carry out any other activities but simply the organisation of *njangi groups* (thrift and loans). However, a few actually carry out activities in their localities and endeavour to render services to its members. This can be seen in table two where about 90% of FOs created in the region has not survived and only 9.6% of the groups are active and carry out group activities. The difficulties faced by most FOs are related to access to finance to expand their activities, transparency, and mismanagement of funds, price fluctuations, and poor farm to market roads especially in the rainy season to sell products among many others. These findings are in line with those of Fongang, (2012).

Field findings also revealed that, the major farming activity in the region is maize farming and each division is also specialised in the farming of a particular crop in addition to maize which gives it its particularity. The major farming activities of FOs per division are indicated in the table three. In Bui division, the major activity undertaken by FOs in addition to maize farming is iris potatoes, cassava, and pig production, rice, rearing of small ruminants, oil palm, and coffee. While in Mezam, Boyo, Menchum, Donga-Mantung, Ngohketunja and Momo divisions the corresponding secondary farming activities are Market gardening, beans, cocoa, coffee, cassava, poultry production, rearing of cattle and small ruminants, maize, irish potatoes, fish production, oil palm and poultry production. The increase production of maize is also due to the PACA program which encouraged the production of maize and animal rearing like pigs and poultry.

### Statistics on FOs in the North-West region of Cameroon

Tables 1 and 2 indicate the different types of FOs that exist in the North-West region per division. Table two also indicates that the number of registered FOs dropped from 16425 in 2015 to 11108 in 2017. This was probably due to law No. 92/006 of 14 August the 1992 of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that all the groups should reregister and conform themselves to the OHADA law on cooperative societies and CIG so as to update their status. This exercise was to help the ministry identify functional and non-functional groups in the country.

**Table 1: North-West Region general statistics on FOs as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015**

Divisions	CIG	Cooperatives			Unions			Federations			Confederations			Total
		Coop	Coopec	Sub Total	CIG	Coop	Sub Total	CIG	Coop	Sub Total	CIG	Coop	Sub Total	
Boyo	1,494	90	40	<b>130</b>	30	10	<b>40</b>	3	0	<b>3</b>	1	0	<b>1</b>	<b>1,668</b>
Bui	2,035	147	46	<b>193</b>	44	7	<b>51</b>	3	0	<b>3</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>	<b>2,282</b>
Donga/ M	1,261	91	19	<b>110</b>	16	6	<b>22</b>	2	0	<b>2</b>	2	0	<b>2</b>	<b>1,397</b>
Menchum	1,119	36	12	<b>48</b>	20	2	<b>22</b>	2	0	<b>2</b>	3	0	<b>3</b>	<b>1,194</b>
Momo	1,541	57	33	<b>90</b>	40	4	<b>44</b>	13	0	<b>13</b>	7	0	<b>7</b>	<b>1,695</b>
Mezam	6,093	187	222	<b>409</b>	155	13	<b>168</b>	40	4	<b>44</b>	11	0	<b>11</b>	<b>6,725</b>
Ngohketunja	1,289	90	22	<b>112</b>	49	5	<b>54</b>	6	0	<b>6</b>	3	0	<b>3</b>	<b>1,464</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>14,832</b>	<b>698</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>1,092</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>16,425</b>

**Table 2: North-West Region general FOs map as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017**

Divisions	CIG	Cooperatives			Unions			Federations			Confederations			Total
		Coop	Coop c	Sub Total	CIG	Coop	Sub Total	CIG	Coop	Sub Total	CIG	Coop	Sub Total	
<b>Boyo</b>	492	13	10	23	9	2	11	3	1	4	1	1	2	572
<b>Bui</b>	600	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	606
<b>Donga/ M</b>	368	15	0	15	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	402
<b>Menchum</b>	424	41	2	43	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	516
<b>Momo</b>	621	18	12	30	14	3	17	1	0	1	1	0	1	719
<b>Mezam</b>	6,105	192	225	417	155	13	168	40	4	44	11	0	11	7,373
<b>Ngoketunjia</b>	380	201	56	257	3	2	5	2	1	3	5	0	5	920
<b>Totals</b>	<b>8,978</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11,108</b>

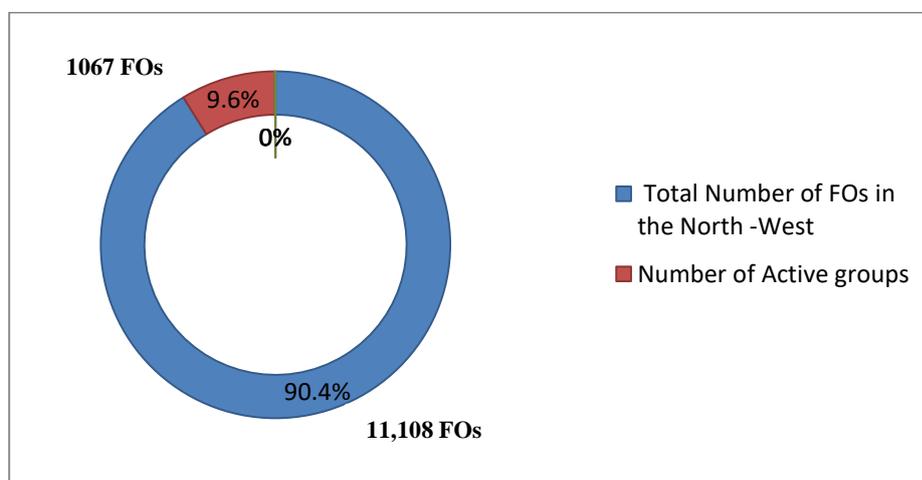
Table 3 presents the percentage of active groups to non-active groups per division. Meanwhile figure 2 shows the total number of active groups to the total number of registered farmer groups or FO in the region. Figure 2 illustrates that the number of active groups is very low compared to the total number of existing groups. This indicates that these groups do not actually carry out activities on the field which is a possible reason why they go out of existence as quickly as they are created (Fongang, 2012).

From table 3 it can be observed that Mezam division has the highest number (7148) of registered FOs but only 1.2 % of the groups are active. A similar observation is made for Momo where only 10.6% is active. On the contrary, 78.1 % of the registered groups in Boyo division were found to be active. This high rate of active groups may be due to the presence of agricultural projects such as PACA, ACEFA, Participatory National Development, National organization of professional Agrosylvi Pastoral Organisation, National Agricultural Extension and Research Programs among others that fund these FOs. Similar findings were reported by Fongang (2012) who indicated that funded agricultural projects are the entry point for farmer groups in most communities.

Table 3 also revealed that the major farming activity carried by FOs in the region is maize farming even though each division is specialised in the farming of a particular crop that gives it its particularity. The generalised production of maize could be due to the fact that maize is a staple food in the region. It may also be as a result of the PACA project that encouraged the production of maize, pigs and poultry.

**Table 3. Main Farming activities carried out by FOs in North-West Region**

Division	Main farming activities carried out by FOs	Total number of FOs	Number of active FOs	Percentages (active FOs)
<b>Menchum</b>	Maize farming, mix farming, Rice, Cocoa, Groundnuts	<b>516</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>22.7</b>
<b>Ngoketunjia</b>	Maize farming, market gardening, Rice, Cassava	<b>920</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>16.6</b>
<b>Donga / M</b>	Maize, Beans, Cocoa, coffee, Rice, Cassava, cattle rearing, Irish potatoes, Oil Palm	<b>402</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>22.4</b>
<b>Boyo</b>	Maize farming, Irish potatoes, Poultry production, Mix farming	<b>572</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>78.2</b>
<b>Bui</b>	Maize, Irish potatoes, Cassava ,Pig Production, Rice, Rearing of Small ruminants, oil palm, Coffee,	<b>606</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>16.3</b>
<b>Mezam</b>	Pig Production, Coffee, Cassava, Poultry production, Rearing of Small ruminants, Maize, Irish Potatoes, fish Production	<b>7,373</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>Momo</b>	Market gardening, Cocoa, Cassava, Poultry production, Rearing of Small ruminants, Maize, Irish Potatoes, fish Production, oil palm	<b>719</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>10.6</b>
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>11,108</b>	<b>1,067</b>	<b>9.6</b>

**Figure 2: Representation of Active groups****IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**

This study will lay a framework for understanding the types of FOs that exist in the region, their activities, actual statistics of FOs and politics behind the creation of these large numbers of FOs and how the government through MINADER can improve the sector. The study will

help MINADER and other stakeholders in the sector to use this knowledge to help foster the competitiveness of the food supply chain, to promote and facilitate the restructuring and consolidation of the agricultural sector by encouraging the creation of voluntary agricultural producer organizations and strengthening the already existing ones.

Data obtained from this study will be helpful for researchers to produce a sample size and questionnaire which could be used for further research.

## CONCLUSION

The study was carried out to get a clear inside on the actual state of FOs in the region for further study. From the above analysis it holds that FOs can play a key tool to improve the living conditions of resource-poor farmers in Cameroon and FOs are supposed to be created to offer services and inputs to their members (Vilas-boas, and Goldey, 2005). Belonging to these FOs can increase the level of agricultural production and yield, economic benefit to farmers as well as promote the general welfare of the community in which they belong. In the North-West region of Cameroon, a majority of the FOs do not carry out the expected role they are supposed to play as most of them do not have a clear mission or activities which they carry out. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) should control the sector through regular extension visits by extension officers to follow-up their activities so as to be able to encourage these groups to remain active.

To be able to foster the competitiveness of the food supply chain in the North-west region the breadbasket for most regions of the country, financial assistance should only be given to groups who actually carry out activities on the field and provide regularly reports of their activities to the Ministry of Agriculture and rural development at divisional and sub-divisional levels. Findings show that about 90% of groups do not carry out activities on the field thus encourages existing groups and the creation of new ones.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research will be concentrated on the assessment of farmer organizations on poverty alleviation for smallholder farmers in the North West region of Cameroon with data obtained from this study.

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