

Contributions and Competitiveness of Young Female Grain Farmers in Cameroon

A Policy Brief

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Introduction

Two challenges and an opportunity motivate this work. The challenges are rural un- and underemployment and poverty. In 2014, young women were seventy percent (467,700 young women) of the youths aged 15-24 years in Cameroon not in employment, education or training and a third of all households were officially poor rural underemployment and poverty despite the fact that farming accounts for 70% of the workforce but contributing for just 17% of GDP (International Labour Office (ILO), 2014). Half a million young women and a quarter million young men ready and willing to grow food, make goods, and provide services to others. It is a huge resource. How to mobilize them?

Cameroon's agribusiness practice operates in a market economy way. Young entrepreneurs who see opportunities to compete and thrive must save and invest on their own -- or in others' -- farms or businesses with target to sell their output to earn income and pay employees. It is also important to remember that paid employment is both a business cost and the foundation of business revenue. They invest in farm business with expectation to get return or to breakeven. In case of no gain, there is a high tendency to move from farming to rural and urban migration. So it is important to document the actual outcomes and opportunities for women as agribusiness entrepreneurs.

The immediate goal of this Policy Brief is to encourage more young people especially women-- to become agribusiness entrepreneurs. A longer-run goal is to show the policy makers that gender-blind policies are warranted, but gender-positive information may be needed so that public investment in agricultural credit, food marketing, roads, schools can and will be put to very productive and constructive use for young female farmers.

As noted above, agriculture engages almost three-quarters (70%) of all Cameroonians in the labour force. This Policy Brief highlights the contributions, competitiveness, and opportunities of women in agriculture.

Contributions of Young Female Grain Farmers in Cameroon

Findings show that young female maize producer-marketers pay more farm labour. In the situation whereby farm labour is paid a living wage, more non-farm labour can also earn a living wage, as earnings are spent and earned and spent and earned and otherwise cycled through the local economy. Where farm labour goes unpaid, fewer people can afford to purchase goods and services from others, so less money cycles

through the local economy. Thus, those who pay for farm labour contribute more to their local rural economy than those who do not, all else equal.

Our 2018 survey of over 500 maize farmers in three regions found that in fact women are far more likely than their male counterparts to pay for farm labour (Figure 2).

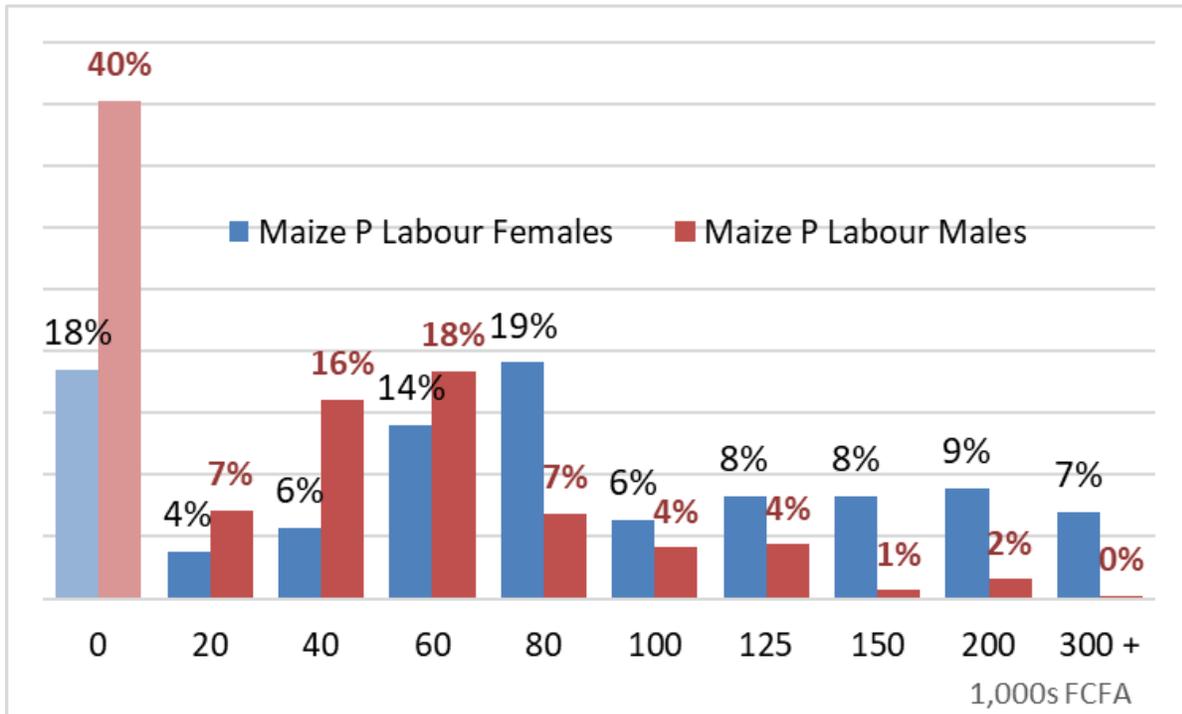


Figure 2. Percents of young male and female maize farmers paying labour by rate paid

Over four-fifths (82%) of the female maize farmers we surveyed paid at least some farm labor (18% paid zero), compared to just 60% of the male maize farmers (40% paid zero); Figure 2. Women maize farmers paid an average of 83,000 FCFA (1FCFA = 0.001715 USD) to farm labour (comparable to the average 76,000 GNI/capita in Cameroon). Male maize farmers paid an average of 32,400 FCFA to farm labour, less than half the rate paid by female maize farmers. Indeed, over 39% of the female maize farmers paid at least 80,000 FCFA to labour, while only 11% of the male maize farmers paid 80,000 or more (Figure 2). Presumably the male farmers enjoyed more unpaid family labour than their female counterparts.

Paying for more hired labour means contributing more to their local rural economies, but it does come at a personal cost. It means that female maize farmers took home a lower return than their male counterparts. Our survey data showed that female maize farmers averaged 1.5 FCFA per FCFA invested compared to 1.94 FCFA per FCFA invested

among male maize farmers. The good news is that returns for both male and female maize farmers are positive and higher than the average rate of return per FCFA saved in a bank account at 5% interest rate.

Among rice producer-marketers, however, males were found to be more likely than females to pay labour (Figure 3). 79% of the male rice producer and marketers paid farm labour (21% paid zero), a larger share than the 71% of the female rice producer-marketers who paid farm labour (29% paid zero). Again, paying farm labour is a contribution to the rural economy, but a business cost. Male rice producer-marketers spent more on labour and enjoyed a lower average return on investment. The average return to males in our sample was 1.98 FCFA per FCFA invested compared to 2.20 FCFA for female rice producer-marketers in our sample.

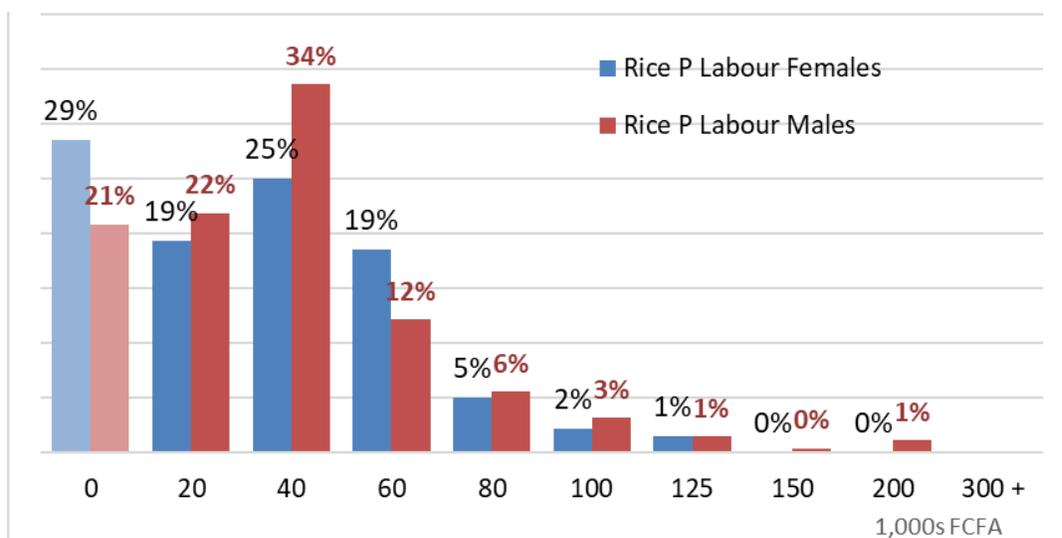


Figure 3. Percents of young male and female rice farmers paying labour by rate paid

The survey also looked for other differences between female and male agribusiness entrepreneurs, but other than paid labour, credit, (see Table 1), and prices received for rice, we found few statistically significant differences.

Farm sizes are similar. Women growing and marketing maize cultivated an average of 1.85 (2 ha) hectares while the men cultivated an average of 2.07 (2 ha) hectares, which is not statistically significantly different. But as Figure 4 shows, women do not operate the larger maize farms. Only 3% of the females cultivated more than 3 hectares of maize, and the largest maize farm operated by a woman in our sample was 4 hectares. In contrast, 12% of the men cultivated more than 3 hectares of maize, and the largest maize area operated by a man in our sample was 40 hectares (Figure 4).

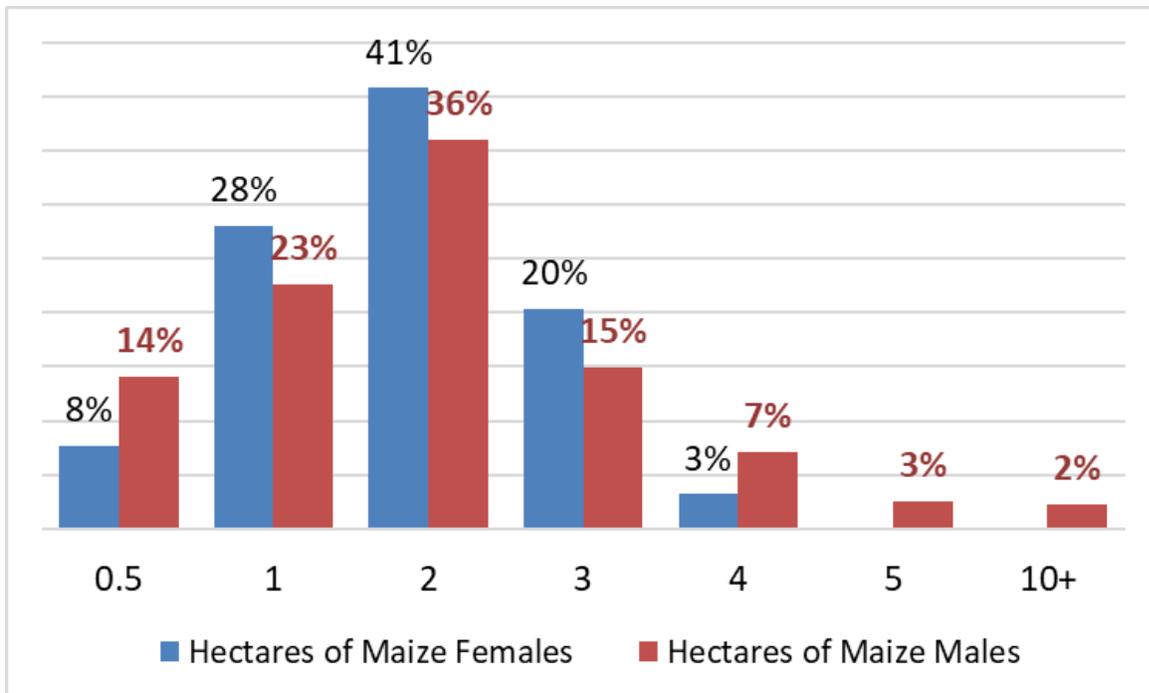


Figure 4. Percentages of young male and female maize producers by farm size

The areas planted to rice are generally smaller than to maize, averaging 0.84 (0.8 ha) hectares for the males and 0.77 hectares (0.8 ha) among the female rice producer-marketers in our sample. Again, the difference in the average rice farm size is not statistically significant, but as Figure 5 shows, only men cultivated larger areas of rice.

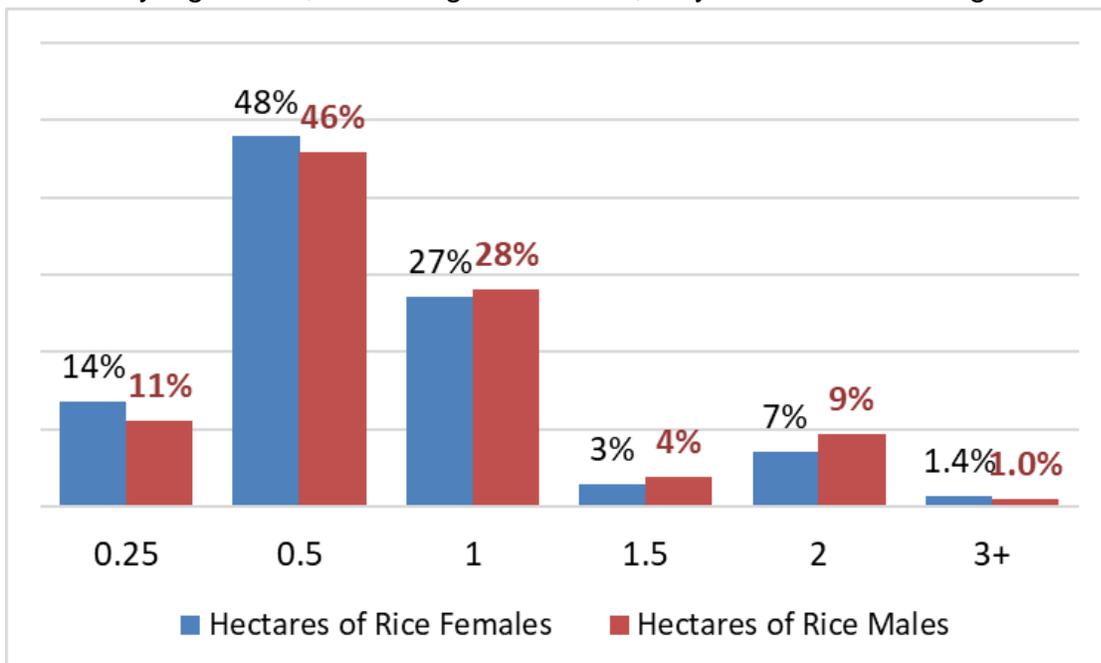


Figure 4. Percentages of young male and female rice producers by farm size

Female producer and marketers sold their maize for about the same prices, on average, as their male counterparts (140-150 FCFA/kg). Figure 5 shows, however, that a larger share of the women (45%) sold maize for under 140 than men (32%). Indeed, 20% of the women sold for not more than 110, compared to 6% of the men. The same very small share of both male and female maize producers in our sample (1%) sold for 220.

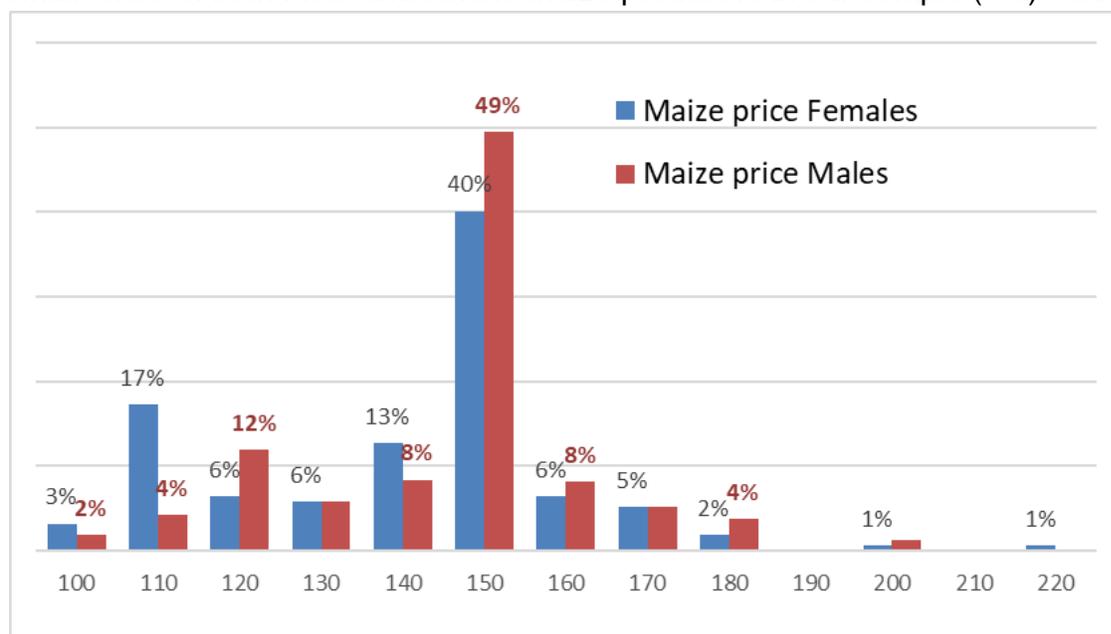


Figure 5. Percentages of young male and female maize farmers by sales price received

Perhaps the clearest explanation for the higher return on investment enjoyed by female rice producer-marketers is the fact that a larger share of the females (33%) got a high price (200-220) for their rice than males (18%), Figure 6. As Figure 6 illustrates, the prices paid for rice in 2018 were bi-modal, with a third at 100-110 and a third at 200-220. *The bi-modal nature of selling price is firstly due to large quantity supplied of rice by female during the harvest period which attracts a low selling price. Secondly, the limited access to capital make female rice farmers to store specific quantities to be sold later in preparation of the subsequent cropping season whereby there is a high demand of rice associated with an increase in selling price.*

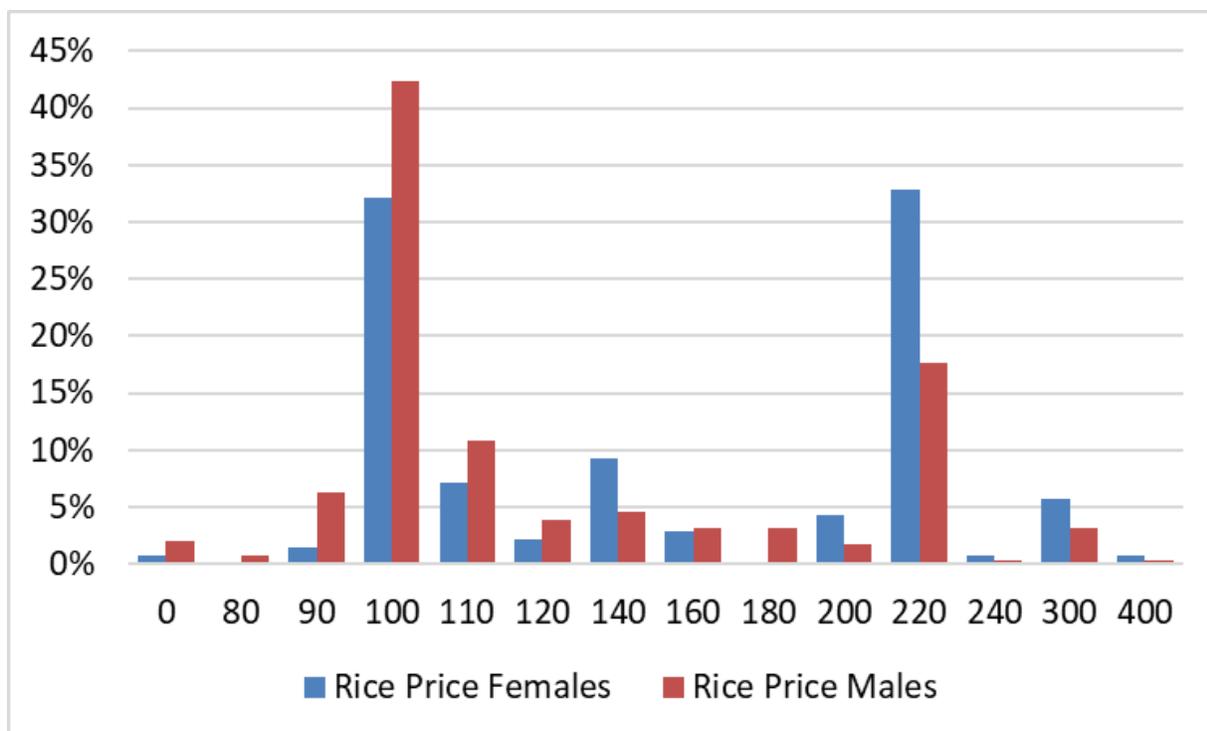


Figure 6. Percentages of young male and female rice farmers by sales price received

Although few farmers in our sample obtained credit at all, a larger share of males got credit than females (Table 1), and rice farmers were more likely than maize farmers to obtain credit. Further study is warranted to determine if the relatively low rates reflect low credit demand or if they reflect low credit supply, credit rationing or gender-bias.

	Maize	Rice
Young Males	3%	14%
Young Females	1%	6%

In sum, our study showed that women agribusiness entrepreneurs are competitive, and that the opportunities for young women in agriculture are good. Women cultivate similar plot sizes and sell for the same – or higher -- prices as their male counterparts. Female maize farmers pay more for labour than their male counterparts, which is better for the local economy but tougher on their bottom line. Female rice farmers, however, pay less than their male counterparts for labour, and a larger share of the women market their rice for higher prices than their male counterparts.

The Survey

The survey was conducted in 2018 in three of Cameroon's ten regions, the Far North Region, North Region and the West Region. These three regions are among the highest producing areas of maize and rice. There were 1019 respondents, including 428 rice producer-marketers (288 male and 140 female) and 591 maize producer-marketers (434 male and 157 female).

Conclusion

The challenge of rural un- and underemployment, especially among young women, can be solved in part if more young Cameroonians choose agribusiness entrepreneurship. Our research shows that young women can be as productive and successful as young men, especially at producing and marketing rice. Also, women who pay more for hired labour in maize farming deserve the appreciation and respect of their local community and the country because they provide income opportunities to others even though it lowers their personal returns.

By these measures, maize and rice production and marketing in Northern and Western Cameroon appear to be good ways to earn a living, raise local food security and/or promote development in rural communities, where nearly half the population lives.

Policy Implications

- i. Given that hired labour constitute a high proportion in maize and rice production and marketing for young women, It is suggested that young females rice and maize producer-marketers should be encouraged to set a labour sharing arrangement for mutual help in farm labour which could in turn considerably reduce cost of labour and increase their profitability.
- ii. Price control policy should be set up throughout the year to enable young women to earn as the counterpart young men which will therefore enable them to remain into production and marketing activities
- iii. Land tenure system policy should give more consideration to young women to acquire more land given that they are as productive as the counterpart young men
- iv. Incentives such single digit interest rate and no collateral security should be directed to young women to receive more credit for purchase fertilizer, pesticides and improved seed varieties for maize and rice production and marketing.