

Securing Land Rights for Young People and Their Role in a Win-Win Partnership Model for Agricultural Development: Issues and Perspectives for Northern Cameroon

¹Njouonang Djomo Harold Gael., ²Hamadou Bachirou Maazou

¹PhD in Geography, University of Yaounde

²Sociologist, Independent Researcher

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the issue of land access for young people in northern Cameroon, a region where agriculture plays a central role both economically and socially. However, obtaining land is challenging due to complex land tenure systems influenced by customary practices, colonial legacies, and modern legal frameworks. These systems often create ambiguities in land ownership, with overlapping claims between traditional authorities, families, and the state. Additionally, increasing pressure from foreign investors attracted to fertile lands further exacerbates the difficulties faced by young people seeking land for farming. This context highlights the urgent need to address these systemic barriers to ensure equitable land access. The study aims to analyze the marginalization of youth in this context and to propose an innovative partnership model between young landowners and foreign investors that is mutually beneficial. The methodology employs a mixed approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods: a literature review, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (young farmers, investors, experts), and a quantitative analysis of the impact of partnerships on agricultural production. The findings reveal that young people are often excluded from land access due to patriarchal customs and traditional land tenure systems that favor elders. However, securing their land rights is essential for their economic and social empowerment. The proposed partnership model, based on land leasing or co-management, could provide significant economic benefits to young people, including improved access to technology and expertise, creation of local employment opportunities, and infrastructure development. Nevertheless, this model also presents potential risks and challenges. For instance, power imbalances between foreign investors and local youth could lead to inequitable agreements, while long-term leases might threaten traditional land users. To mitigate these risks, it will be crucial to establish clear legal frameworks that protect local interests, ensure transparent negotiations, and promote capacity-building for young people to effectively engage in such partnerships. Moreover, fostering community oversight and participation can help prevent exploitation and ensure an equitable distribution of benefits. Furthermore, this model has the potential to boost local agricultural production, diversify crops, improve food security, and reduce dependence on imports. The article also emphasizes the importance of transparent governance, community participation, conflict resolution mechanisms, and youth training to ensure the success and sustainability of these partnerships. Managing competition between local crops and those introduced by investors, while respecting the social and cultural dimensions of land access, remains a critical challenge.

INTRODUCTION

Access to land and natural resources is essential for economic development and improving the quality of life, particularly in rural Africa, where land serves as a cornerstone of community life (Adebayo, 2020; Dahou, 2021). In northern Cameroon, nearly 70% of the population relies directly on agriculture for their livelihoods, highlighting the critical role that secure land access plays in sustaining local economies. Studies indicate that secure land tenure can increase agricultural productivity by 30-40%, enabling young landowners to invest in modern farming techniques and improve yields (Chouaib, 2022). This not only fosters economic growth but also enhances food security, reduces poverty, and improves living standards in rural areas.

Despite the region's significant agricultural potential, young people in northern Cameroon face substantial challenges in securing land tenure (Bounoua, 2019). Foreign investments in agriculture often exacerbate these issues, leading to land conflicts, the marginalization of local residents, and limited opportunities for youth (Fouda, 2018; Sissoko & Traoré, 2020). While foreign investment can bring economic benefits, it also carries risks such as land-use disputes and the displacement of young landowners, as emphasized by Guerrero and Mbongo (2020) and Mambou (2020). To address these challenges, a partnership model involving young landowners and foreign investors has been proposed as a potential solution (Tchatchou & Ebolo, 2021). This model aims to align the needs of young people with those of investors, fostering collaboration while preventing conflicts and promoting inclusive, sustainable development. Structured frameworks, such as land leasing or co-management agreements, enable young people to retain ownership or remain actively involved in agricultural activities. These frameworks ensure that young landowners benefit economically while gaining access to resources, technology, and expertise provided by investors. Transparent governance, equitable profit-sharing, and capacity-building initiatives are integral to reducing tensions and empowering youth. By implementing this model, young people's land rights can be protected while maximizing the economic benefits for society as a whole (Baba & Djouka, 2021; Sangha, 2019). The study examines mechanisms to secure youth land rights in northern Cameroon, evaluating their effectiveness and exploring the potential of youth as partners in foreign agricultural investments. It assesses the benefits and drawbacks of such partnerships, their impact on agricultural output, reductions in agricultural imports, and the integration of smallholder farmers into mainstream production and marketing systems.

The final section outlines key strategies to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of these partnerships. Transparent governance structures, such as steering committees and local advisory councils, ensure inclusive decision-making and equitable benefit-sharing. Robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks allow for continuous assessment and adaptation to emerging challenges, ensuring long-term resilience. Accountability is reinforced through clear contractual agreements, grievance mechanisms, and regular stakeholder training to clarify roles and responsibilities. Collectively, these measures foster trust, minimize conflicts, and align the interests of all parties, addressing risks related to land tenure security and resource management while promoting sustainable development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of land access for young people in rural Africa, particularly in northern Cameroon, has garnered increasing attention in academic literature in recent years. African land tenure systems, characterized by the coexistence of precolonial customary practices and modern legal frameworks, often create tensions that marginalize young people, especially in contexts where land is collectively owned by families or clans (Adebayo, 2020). This situation is worsened by high administrative costs and complex procedures associated with formalizing land rights (Bounoua, 2019). The marginalization of youth in accessing land is well-documented, with studies showing that they are frequently excluded from productive land in favor of older generations—a situation further exacerbated by the pressure of foreign investments, which reduces their opportunities even more (Mouafo, 2021; Sissoko & Traoré, 2020). However, securing land rights is essential for the economic and social empowerment of young people, enabling them to invest in modern technologies and access financial services (Chouaib, 2022; Dahou, 2021). Partnerships between young landowners and foreign investors, based on leasing or co-management models, offer significant economic opportunities but require transparent governance mechanisms to prevent conflicts and ensure mutual benefits (Tchatchou & Ebolo, 2021; Guerrero & Mbongo, 2020). Finally, public policies play a central role in promoting clear legal frameworks, conflict resolution mechanisms, and community participation to meet local needs while ensuring sustainable development (Sangha, 2019; Fouda, 2018; Gervais & Nguema, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive study on youth land tenure in Cameroon was conducted using a well-structured methodology that combined qualitative and quantitative techniques. Its primary objective was to examine the accessibility of land for young people, the potential for collaboration with foreign investment partners, and how these factors align with the socio-cultural characteristics of the region. The study began with a literature review, which

provided an in-depth examination of legal and policy documents related to land tenure in Cameroon. National laws were analyzed to understand the legislative foundations of land ownership, while subnational regulatory frameworks, such as municipal decrees governing land access, were also scrutinized. Attention was also given to informal practices, which are often marked by ambiguity and a lack of clear structure. To broaden the analysis, comparative studies from other African countries—Kenya, Mali, and Senegal—were incorporated. These countries were chosen due to their diverse land tenure systems and experiences with foreign agricultural investments, offering valuable lessons on best practices and challenges in addressing similar land access issues. These insights were used to inform strategies for securing youth land rights in northern Cameroon.

In the second phase, 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants selected based on clearly defined criteria. The sample included 20 young landowners (both male and female) to capture diverse perspectives on land access challenges, 10 representatives of investors to explore their expectations and partnership requirements, and 10 agricultural development experts and local officials to provide insights into policies and governance mechanisms influencing land access. This deliberate selection ensured balanced representation of key stakeholders involved in land tenure and agricultural development. The interviews aimed to gather rich and nuanced testimonies. Among these, 20 interviews focused on young landowners to understand their personal experiences with land access. Additionally, 10 interviews with investor representatives provided insights into their priorities and the groundwork they require before partnering with new farmers. Finally, 10 interviews with agricultural development experts and local officials helped clarify the policies and governance mechanisms shaping land access. To complement the qualitative data, a quantitative analysis was conducted to assess the impact of partnerships on agricultural production and economic outcomes. Data were collected from a sample of 100 farms, with detailed measurements taken on the land area allocated to young people and changes in their agricultural production before and after the establishment of partnerships. Structured surveys were administered to farm owners and operators, focusing on key variables such as land size, crop yields, input costs, and revenue generated. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a subset of participants to gather contextual information on challenges and opportunities encountered during the partnership period.

For the analysis, statistical tools such as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and Excel were used to process and interpret the data. Descriptive statistics were employed to outline trends in land allocation and changes in production, while inferential statistical methods, including paired t-tests, were applied to evaluate the significance of improvements in productivity and profitability following the implementation of partnerships. This robust analytical approach enabled a thorough assessment of the effectiveness of partnership models in enhancing both agricultural productivity and economic returns.

RESULTS

Context and challenges of land rights for youth in Northern Cameroon

Securing land rights is a central issue in rural development strategies in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Cameroon. In the northern region of the country, where agriculture is the backbone of the local economy, land access is crucial for the population. However, the context is marked by the coexistence of multiple land tenure systems and increasing pressure on land due to population growth and rising demand from foreign agricultural investors. In this setting, securing young people's land rights is essential to ensure their inclusion in the region's economic and social development.

The complexity of land tenure systems and the problems related to the securing of land rights

The legal framework in Cameroon reflects a blend of modern and traditional principles. In the municipalities of Lago, Ngong, and Touboro, land management practices are predominantly rooted in pre-colonial customs, where land is often communally owned at the family or clan level. In these rural areas, approximately 70% of land is governed by family lineage customs, making it extremely challenging for young people to access land. Land allocations are typically dominated by household heads and older men, leaving limited opportunities for younger individuals, who already face social disadvantages due to their age. For example, in Ngong, a case study revealed that 75% of land allocations were granted to household heads aged 50 and above, while those under 30 received less than 10%. Similarly, in Touboro, despite a growing population of young farmers, only 5% of arable land

was accessible to them. These traditional practices not only restrict youth access to productive land but also perpetuate cycles of poverty and economic exclusion, as young people are often left with marginal plots unsuitable for sustainable agriculture. Such examples underscore the significant barriers young people encounter in securing land rights within customary systems.

The transition from informal land tenure systems to modern systems of land registration and titling has proven challenging. In the municipalities studied, bureaucratic procedures and associated costs are prohibitively high. Among foreign youth entrepreneurs interviewed, 65% expressed unwillingness to bear the costs of administrative prerequisites. Young people, often misinformed and ill-equipped, are effectively excluded from formal land registration processes.

In northern Cameroon, there is a notable lack of awareness among young people regarding the importance of formalizing land tenure and the steps involved. This knowledge gap, combined with the high costs of land registration, creates significant obstacles for youth seeking to secure their land rights. To address these issues, potential solutions could include community-based educational campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of land tenure formalization, such as enhanced legal protection and access to financial services. Governments and NGOs could also implement subsidized or low-cost land registration programs to make the process more accessible for young landowners. For instance, mobile registration units or digital platforms could be introduced to reduce administrative burdens and costs, while partnerships with local leaders could help disseminate information and encourage participation in formalization efforts. Such measures would empower young people and promote equitable and sustainable land governance in the region.

The marginalization of youth in access to land

The problem of land access by youth remains a fundamental issue in Northern Cameroon, and it is deeply rooted with respect to the socio-economic and cultural landscape of the region. The field data collected from the municipalities of Lago, Ngong, and Touboro illustrate the perpetuation of patriarchal customs that often deny young women the right to land ownership or inheritance. For example, observations reveal that village chiefs and leaders of the community tend to allocate land to the older members of the family in 75% of the cases, citing that the young people do not have sufficient experience to utilize these resources.

The commonly accepted practices surrounding land tenure often emphasize the idea of equal access for all age groups, with land typically accumulated only at a mature age or through inheritance. However, these practices tend to marginalize younger individuals, particularly youth, who face significant barriers in accessing land due to entrenched customs favoring elders. In this context, community leaders could play a pivotal role in facilitating greater youth access to land by advocating for more inclusive practices. For instance, village chiefs and local elders could help introduce mechanisms such as temporary land allocations, mentorship programs, or community land trusts that prioritize youth engagement in agriculture. By leveraging their influence and authority, community leaders can help bridge generational gaps, challenge traditional norms, and promote equitable land distribution that aligns with both cultural values and the socio-economic needs of younger generations.

The wait, however, renders them incapable of partaking in any productive agricultural work, leading to economic disadvantages. Studies conducted in these municipalities showed that, on average, 62% of young people respondents have no access to more productive land, restricting them to marginal plots and subsistence level of agriculture. This phenomenon is further aggravated by the lack of economic opportunities outside the agricultural sector. Data indicate that 48% of young people in these regions migrate to urban areas in search of employment, a trend that contributes to rural depopulation and weakens land tenure claims in rural zones.

Those who remain in rural areas are often forced to rely on subsistence farming, as they lack the necessary resources to improve their productivity or secure their livelihoods in the long term. However, various initiatives and programs have been introduced to address these challenges and provide economic opportunities for young people. For instance, some NGOs and government agencies have launched training programs focused on modern agricultural techniques, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship to equip youth with the skills needed to transition from subsistence to commercial farming. Additionally, programs such as youth agricultural cooperatives and access to microcredit schemes aim to empower young farmers by providing them with the tools, resources, and

networks needed to enhance their productivity and diversify their income sources. These efforts not only help improve their current livelihoods but also create pathways for sustainable economic growth in rural communities.

Young people who have remained in rural areas have expressed their frustration with the lack of institutional support and their limited access to financial services and markets. More than 70% of surveyed youth cited the absence of training in modern agricultural techniques as a major obstacle to their involvement in agriculture. Consequently, they often perceive agriculture as an unprofitable sector with no future, discouraging their investment in the field. This situation creates a cycle of poverty, with 65% of young people feeling trapped without a clear pathway for improving their living conditions.

The importance of land tenure security for youth empowerment

Securing land tenure for young people in Northern Cameroon is of strategic importance for their economic and social empowerment, as demonstrated by field data collected in the municipalities of Lago, Ngong, and Touboro. The surveyed youth emphasized that land tenure security enables them to plan for the long term, invest in agricultural productivity improvements, and access financial services such as agricultural credit, which were previously inaccessible to them.

In fact, 68% of young landowners reported being able to obtain agricultural loans after securing their land rights, enabling them to invest in modern farming technologies and significantly enhance their yields. For instance, in the municipality of Ngong, a young farmer named Jean-Pierre secured his land title and obtained a loan to purchase a solar-powered irrigation system. This investment allowed him to cultivate high-value crops like tomatoes and peppers, increasing his annual income by 45%. Similarly, in Touboro, a group of young women farmers leveraged their newly acquired land rights to access credit for establishing a cooperative focused on cassava processing. Within two years, the cooperative not only improved their household incomes but also created jobs for other youth in the community. These examples highlight how secure land tenure can serve as a catalyst for economic empowerment and agricultural innovation among young landowners.

Several young landowners testified to their increased ability to diversify their economic activities, engaging in commercial crop production or agro-industrial initiatives thanks to the stability of their land rights. For example, in the municipalities of Ngong and Touboro, 52% of young people who secured their land have initiated commercial crops such as cotton and peanuts, contributing to an average income increase of 35%.

Furthermore, secure land access enables young people to position themselves as full-fledged economic actors. Discussions with youth groups in villages revealed that they now feel more confident in negotiating with potential investors, both local and foreign. Data indicate that 61% of young landowners are willing to enter into partnerships with investors, a stark contrast to their previous reluctance due to the insecurity of their land tenure.

This paradigm shift, as observed in field data, demonstrates that land tenure security acts as a catalyst for the inclusion of young people in local development dynamics. They are no longer merely passive participants but active partners capable of significantly contributing to development projects. This active role is further reinforced by the fact that young people who have secured their land are now involved in community projects at a rate of 43%, compared to only 25% previously.

Land tenure security plays a pivotal role in providing legal protection against the risks of forced eviction or land dispossession by more powerful actors, whether local or foreign. In Northern Cameroon, legal and policy frameworks such as the 1974 Land Ordinance and subsequent national land policies aim to safeguard land rights by formalizing ownership and regulating land transactions. These frameworks establish mechanisms for registering land titles and resolving disputes, which are critical for protecting vulnerable groups, including young people, from land-related abuses. However, the implementation of these policies remains inconsistent due to bureaucratic hurdles, high costs, and limited awareness among rural communities.

Young respondents expressed concerns about the persistent risks of land dispossession but also highlighted that securing their land rights through formal registration has empowered them to negotiate fair partnerships with investors. For instance, policies promoting co-management agreements and lease contracts often include clauses

that protect landowners' rights and ensure equitable benefit-sharing. Data show that such partnerships enable young people to fully benefit from the economic returns of agricultural investment projects while ensuring their rights are respected and protected. Indeed, 74% of young people involved in these partnerships reported an improvement in their economic situation and better protection against land-related abuses. Strengthening the enforcement of existing legal frameworks, alongside raising awareness about land rights, could further enhance these protections and ensure sustainable outcomes for young landowners.

Challenges and perspectives of land tenure security for rural development

Securing land rights for young people is far more than an administrative formality; it is a fundamental pillar of sustainable rural development in Northern Cameroon. By securing their land tenure, young people are not only economically and socially empowered but also become key actors in revitalizing local economies. Secure land ownership provides a stable foundation for agricultural activities, enabling young people to generate income, diversify their livelihoods, and reduce economic vulnerability. This process helps curb rural exodus by creating attractive local opportunities, discouraging youth from migrating to urban centers in search of better prospects. Secure land tenure also fosters the creation of local employment opportunities through agriculture and related rural activities. When young people can secure and effectively utilize their land, they can establish viable agricultural enterprises that generate jobs for other community members. For example, integrating youth into agricultural value chains—whether in production, processing, or marketing—promotes equitable benefit distribution and enhances rural resilience. Communities become less reliant on external aid and better equipped to withstand economic shocks, such as commodity price fluctuations or climate change impacts.

However, realizing the full potential of land tenure security for young people requires supportive public policies. These policies should encourage youth investment in agriculture while simplifying access to land tenure processes. For instance, Kenya's Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) has successfully provided financial support and training to young farmers, enabling them to acquire land titles and adopt sustainable practices (Aminou & Dione, 2021). Similarly, Rwanda's Land Tenure Regularization Program (LTRP) streamlined land registration, reducing costs and bureaucratic hurdles for young landowners, significantly improving their access to formal land rights (Kouadio, 2019).

Supportive measures, such as subsidies for acquiring land titles, technical training in land management and modern agricultural techniques, and tax incentives for young farmers, can make these initiatives more accessible and appealing. In Uganda, the Youth Livelihood Program (YLP) offers grants and capacity-building workshops, helping young people navigate land tenure systems and adopt innovative farming methods (Mouafo, 2021). By learning from these examples, policymakers in Northern Cameroon can design tailored programs addressing local challenges while fostering youth inclusion in agriculture. Technical and financial support is also critical to help young landowners fully capitalize on their land. Guidance is needed to optimize land use through sustainable practices, modern technologies, and diversified economic activities. Access to agricultural credit is essential, enabling young people to invest in improving land productivity and profitability.

Partnerships between governments, NGOs, and the private sector can provide the resources and expertise necessary to support young farmers. For example, Kenya's Youth in Agriculture Initiative (YAI)—a collaboration involving the government, NGOs like One Acre Fund, and private agribusiness companies—has empowered young farmers through training programs, affordable inputs, and market linkages (Aminou & Dione, 2021). Similarly, Rwanda's Private Sector Driven Agricultural Growth (PSDAG) project has facilitated partnerships that provide young farmers with access to modern technologies and financial services, boosting productivity (Kouadio, 2019). These models highlight the potential of multi-stakeholder collaborations to create sustainable support systems for young farmers, offering valuable lessons for replication in Northern Cameroon.

Win-Win partnership model: the interaction between youth and foreign investors

In the communes of Lago, Ngong, and Touboro, located in Northern Cameroon, young people have put forward an ambitious proposal to establish a win-win partnership model with foreign investors. This model aims to boost agricultural development while ensuring sustainable land management and meeting the economic needs of both

parties. Young people see this partnership not only as an opportunity to secure their future but also as a means to revitalize local economies, curb rural exodus, and actively contribute to the development of their communities.

Partnership mechanisms: land leasing and co-management

The proposed model is based on two key mechanisms: leasing land to foreign investors and co-managing agricultural activities.

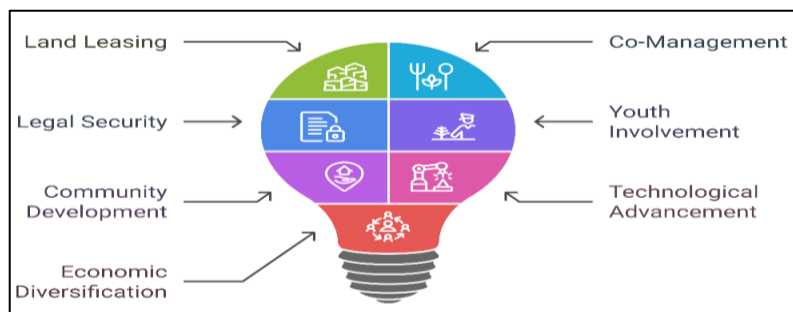


Figure 1. Partnership mechanisms proposed.

These mechanisms provide a structured framework that allows young people to leverage their land resources while remaining actively involved in agricultural activities.

Land leasing

One of the key mechanisms proposed by young landowners is leasing their land to investors. Once they have secured their land rights, they can enter into long-term lease agreements, providing legal security for investors—a critical factor in attracting foreign capital—while retaining ownership of their land.

Young people advocate for lease agreements that ensure their continued involvement in agricultural activities, with fair and equitable profit-sharing as a central element of the co-management model. For instance, these contracts could require young landowners to participate in crop management, either as workers or as partners in decision-making processes. This active involvement allows them to gain valuable experience and skills while ensuring they have a voice in profit distribution. Under the co-management model, profits from agricultural activities would be shared equitably based on clearly defined contractual terms, guaranteeing that young people receive a fair share of the economic benefits. This approach enables them to generate a steady income, which can be reinvested in education, vocational training, or small business development, fostering both personal growth and long-term commitment to the partnership. By incorporating transparent and inclusive profit-sharing mechanisms, the model seeks to empower young landowners economically and socially, laying the groundwork for sustainable mutual growth.

Additionally, the leasing system could be designed to promote balanced rural development. Young people propose that a portion of the revenue generated from land leases be reinvested in community initiatives, such as building local infrastructure, improving healthcare and education services, or supporting collective agricultural projects. In this way, land leasing would not only benefit individuals but also contribute to the sustainable development of the entire community.

Land co-management

Another innovative aspect of the proposed model is land co-management. Instead of merely leasing their land, young people are considering direct collaboration with foreign investors in managing and operating agricultural activities. This approach would allow for the direct transfer of knowledge and technology, enabling young farmers to learn advanced agricultural techniques and modern management practices brought in by investors.

Under this co-management model, the profits generated from agricultural activities would be equitably shared based on contractually defined terms. The youth propose that these agreements include provisions to ensure a fair distribution of income while also guaranteeing equitable and locally respectful working conditions.

According to them, this approach could not only improve their economic situation but also strengthen their role as key players in local development.

Furthermore, co-managing agricultural land could serve as a catalyst for technological development and modernization of farming practices in the region. The youth see this partnership as an opportunity to introduce new commercial crops, improve yields through modern agricultural techniques, and access new markets via investors' networks and expertise. This model would help diversify the local economy, create new job opportunities, and enhance community resilience against market fluctuations and climate challenges.

Benefits for young landowners and the local community

The proposed partnership model between young landowners in the communes of Lago, Ngong, and Touboro and foreign investors is designed to provide substantial benefits not only to the youth but also to the local community as a whole. This innovative model addresses the region's specific challenges while promoting sustainable and inclusive development.

Economic empowerment

Under this model, young landowners have the opportunity to either lease their land or engage in co-exploitation agreements with foreign investors. This partnership has the potential to generate significant additional income for the youth, which could be reinvested into various local economic projects. For instance, in Kenya, the Youth in Agriculture Initiative (YAI) successfully empowered young farmers by enabling them to lease their land to agribusiness companies while retaining involvement in agricultural activities. The income generated allowed them to improve their personal farms, launch small businesses such as poultry farming and retail shops, and fund community projects like building health centers and schools (Aminou & Dione, 2021). Similarly, in Rwanda, young landowners participating in the Private Sector Driven Agricultural Growth (PSDAG) project reported a 40% increase in income, which they reinvested in diversifying crops and establishing local cooperatives (Kouadio, 2019). These examples demonstrate how such models can effectively empower young landowners economically while fostering broader community development.

This financial empowerment aims to reduce young people's dependence on subsistence farming, which is often low-yielding, and open up opportunities to diversify their income sources. According to estimates provided by the youth, their income could increase by 30% to 40%, offering substantial economic growth potential for individuals and communities alike.

Access to technology and expertise

Young landowners would benefit from the introduction of modern technologies and advanced agricultural techniques brought by foreign investors. This knowledge transfer would include precision farming techniques and sustainable resource management practices tailored to the agroecological conditions of Northern Cameroon.

These innovations have the potential to significantly enhance agricultural yields, with projected increases ranging from 20% to 40%, depending on the specific techniques adopted. However, the adoption of new technologies is not without challenges. Key barriers include the high initial costs of modern equipment, limited access to credit for young farmers, and a lack of technical knowledge required to operate advanced systems. Additionally, resistance to change due to deeply rooted traditional practices and skepticism about the benefits of new technologies can hinder their implementation. To address these challenges, targeted strategies such as subsidies for purchasing equipment, low-interest loans for young landowners, and continuous training programs in modern agricultural techniques could be introduced. Furthermore, awareness campaigns showcasing successful case studies and demonstrations of the long-term economic benefits of adopting these innovations can help overcome resistance and build trust among local communities.

Additionally, young people have proposed continuous training programs on these technologies, which would further strengthen their expertise and ability to manage agricultural operations effectively. This skill development

would not only improve individual productivity but also foster the overall modernization of agricultural practices in the region.

Creation of local jobs

The partnership model is expected to generate numerous local employment opportunities, with projections suggesting the creation of several hundred direct jobs as a result of the increased labor demand from foreign investors' agricultural projects. For instance, young people in the communes of Lago, Ngong, and Touboro could find employment not only as landowners but also within the agricultural enterprises established through these partnerships. This job creation has the potential to significantly impact local communities by reducing unemployment rates, curbing rural-to-urban migration, and stabilizing struggling rural economies. Additionally, the influx of stable income could enhance household purchasing power, enabling families to invest in education, healthcare, and improved living standards, thereby fostering broader socio-economic development in the region.

This initiative would help reduce unemployment and curb rural-to-urban migration, which remains a persistent issue in these communes. The youth estimate that these projects could create several hundred direct jobs, offering economic opportunities and stabilizing struggling rural communities.

Improvement of local infrastructure

Finally, foreign investments could lead to significant improvements in local infrastructure. The construction or rehabilitation of roads, irrigation systems, and agricultural processing facilities would benefit not only investors but also the local community.

These infrastructure developments would facilitate market access, lower transportation costs, and increase the added value of local agricultural products. The youth have suggested that such improvements could transform market accessibility and boost agricultural productivity, ultimately leading to tangible economic benefits and an enhanced quality of life for local residents.

Potential benefits for foreign investors

The proposed partnerships with young landowners from the municipalities of Lago, Ngong, and Touboro offer foreign investors a range of considerable benefits, extending far beyond mere land accessibility.

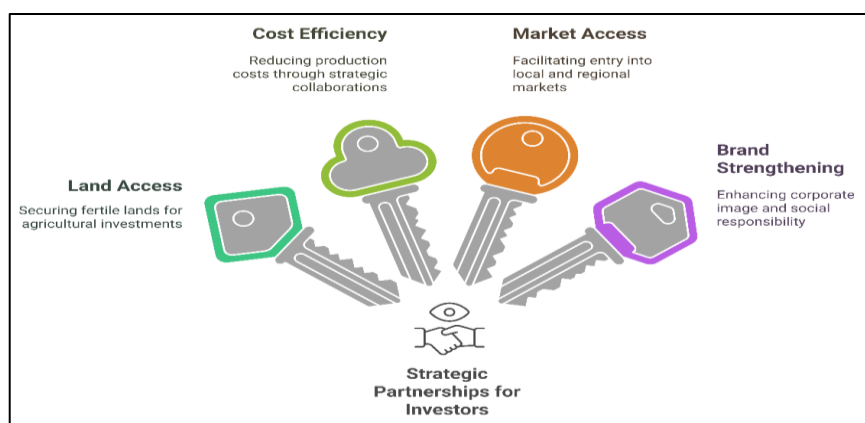


Figure 2. Potential benefits for foreign investors identified

These collaborations are envisioned as innovative and strategic solutions aimed at maximizing the efficiency and sustainability of agricultural investments.

Securing access to fertile agricultural lands

By partnering with local youth, foreign investors can secure access to agricultural lands often located in fertile and underutilized regions. This land tenure security is crucial for investors, as it enables them to plan long-term

projects without the fear of disputes or expropriations, which often represent significant obstacles in the agricultural sector. The youth propose structuring these partnerships with clear, legally robust agreements, thus ensuring the essential stability needed for sustainable investments.

Reduction of production costs

A significant advantage for investors is the potential reduction in production costs. By collaborating with local young landowners, investors can benefit from local labor, typically at a lower wage rate compared to expatriate workers. Furthermore, these young individuals bring an in-depth knowledge of the terrain and local agricultural practices, optimizing production processes. The idea is that this synergy between local expertise and foreign investors' resources will lead to increased productivity and enhanced project profitability.

Facilitated access to local and regional markets

Local youth also propose to facilitate investors' access to local and regional markets. By being integrated into production chains, these young landowners can serve as a bridge between investors and local communities. This integration could not only improve product acceptance in the local market but also open doors to new business opportunities and distribution networks that would otherwise be inaccessible. The proposal includes strategies to enhance the visibility and marketability of products arising from these partnerships, thereby ensuring their commercial success.

Strengthening brand image and corporate social responsibility

Another crucial aspect of these partnerships is the perception of investors as responsible actors committed to local development. By entering into equitable partnerships with young people, investors can significantly strengthen their brand image and gain a competitive advantage in international markets, where sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are increasingly prioritized. To enhance their brand image, investors can strategically market these partnerships by highlighting their commitment to empowering local youth, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, and contributing to community development. For instance, investors could develop targeted marketing campaigns that showcase success stories of young landowners benefiting from the partnership, such as increased agricultural productivity or improved livelihoods. Additionally, leveraging social media platforms, sustainability reports, and participation in global CSR forums can further amplify the positive impact of these initiatives. The youth suggest that by adopting and promoting these socially responsible investment practices, investors can attract not only ethically-conscious consumers but also like-minded business partners who are eager to collaborate on sustainable and fair initiatives. This approach not only enhances the investor's reputation but also fosters trust and long-term relationships with stakeholders, creating a win-win scenario for both investors and local communities.

Anticipated impact of the partnership model between young landowners and foreign investors

The envisioned partnership model between young landowners and foreign investors goes beyond the purely economic dimension. It also aims to transform local agricultural systems and improve food security in the Northern region of Cameroon. This model seeks to redefine agricultural production organization by integrating smallholder farmers while increasing the availability of food products in the local market.

Increase in local production and crop diversification

Improvement of agricultural yields

The young landowners suggest that the introduction of modern technologies and better agricultural practices by foreign investors could lead to a significant increase in local agricultural yields. Investors could bring innovations such as the use of high-quality seeds, efficient irrigation techniques, and integrated crop management systems. These practices are designed to maximize land productivity, resulting in a substantial increase in production volumes, which would benefit the entire region.

Diversification of crops

The introduction of new crop varieties, adapted to the local agro-ecological conditions, is also a key aspect of this partnership model. The young landowners propose that this diversification will not only increase the available food supply but also reduce the local communities' dependence on a narrow range of agricultural products. This strategy aims to promote a more varied and nutritious diet for the local populations, while creating new economic opportunities for farmers.

Reduction of post-harvest losses

The young landowners envision that the development of modern infrastructure, funded by investors, would play a crucial role in reducing post-harvest losses. This includes the establishment of modern storage facilities and cold chains that would allow agricultural products to be preserved under optimal conditions. Reducing these losses would ensure that agricultural production is utilized optimally, thereby increasing the quantity of products available on the market and enhancing food security.

Anticipated contribution to regional food security

The proposed partnership model between young landowners and foreign investors aims to strengthen food security in the Northern region of Cameroon. This collaboration has the potential to improve the availability, accessibility, and stability of food products, thereby contributing to greater food security for local populations.

Increased availability of food products

The young landowners suggest that the increase in local agricultural production, combined with the reduction of post-harvest losses, could result in a greater availability of food products throughout the year. This increased supply of products in local markets is essential to strengthening food security, ensuring that populations have consistent access to diverse and nutritious food.

Economic accessibility

The partnership model is also designed to improve the economic accessibility of food. By integrating local smallholder farmers into the value chain, it is expected that production costs could be reduced, enabling the offering of more affordable prices for local consumers. Additionally, by creating employment opportunities for youth and increasing household incomes, this model could enable families to have greater purchasing power, allowing them to acquire a wider variety of foods.

Stability of food supply

The stability of food supply is another key anticipated advantage of this partnership. Even during periods of climate stress or fluctuations in international markets, young landowners, with the support of investors, could maintain stable production. By adopting resilient agricultural practices and improving risk management, this partnership model proposes to ensure that local communities benefit from a regular and reliable food supply, contributing to regional food stability.

Proposed integration of smallholder farmers into local value chains

The integration of smallholder farmers into local value chains is at the heart of the partnership model envisioned by young landowners in the Northern communes of Cameroon. This model aims not only to stimulate regional economic development but also to strengthen food security and the economic autonomy of the region.

Improved market access

One of the primary objectives of this model is to improve smallholder farmers' direct access to broader and better-organized markets. Through collaboration with foreign investors, farmers in regions such as Lago, Ngong, and Touboro could sell their agricultural products (including millet, sorghum, and peanuts, which are vital to the region) at more competitive prices. This approach would not only increase the profit margins of small producers

but also help lift them out of economic marginalization. By accessing better-structured markets, farmers would be able to improve their incomes, strengthen their economic autonomy, and access new business opportunities.

Capacity building and ongoing training

The model also includes a significant focus on training and capacity building. Smallholder farmers would receive ongoing training in best agricultural practices tailored to the climatic conditions of Northern Cameroon, such as managing arid soils and water conservation techniques. This training would also cover farm management and compliance with quality standards specific to local products. By adopting these new practices, farmers would not only improve the quality and quantity of their production but also become more competitive in both local and international markets. Enhanced preparation would allow them to anticipate demand fluctuations and increase their resilience to economic and environmental challenges.

Profit sharing and reinvestment

A key element of this integration is profit sharing. By being integrated into the value chains of investors, smallholder farmers would have the opportunity to share in the profits generated by the sale of their products, such as fonio and cotton, which are crucial to the local economy. This financial participation would have a positive impact on the local economy by encouraging farmers to reinvest in their agricultural operations. Such reinvestment would not only contribute to the sustainability of their activities but also improve their standard of living. By creating investment opportunities in local infrastructure, such as irrigation systems and processing centers, this partnership model would foster a virtuous circle of economic growth and community development, thus strengthening the resilience of communities in Northern Cameroon.

Reduction of dependence on food imports

The partnership model proposed for Northern Cameroon, involving young landowners and foreign investors, is designed to transform the region into a more self-sufficient actor in agricultural production, thereby reducing dependence on food imports.

Increased local production and crop diversification

By increasing local production, particularly of key staple crops, and diversifying crop types, this model aims to decrease the region's reliance on imported food products. This structural change would help reduce the costs associated with imports, alleviating pressure on local economies and strengthening the region's food sovereignty.

Strengthening economic resilience

This enhanced self-sufficiency would play a critical role in strengthening the region's economic resilience. Local production would reduce vulnerability to price fluctuations in international markets, often influenced by external factors such as global economic crises, natural disasters, or geopolitical conflicts. This stability would allow the region to better absorb external shocks and ensure a steady food supply for its population, thus contributing to food security.

Improving the trade balance and resource reallocation

Reducing food imports would also have a positive impact on Cameroon's trade balance. Fewer financial resources would be required for purchasing food from abroad, improving the country's balance of payments. The funds saved could then be reallocated to other critical sectors such as infrastructure, education, or healthcare, thereby stimulating overall economic development for both the region and the country.

Challenges and Perspectives for Broader Adoption

While the partnership model deployed in Northern Cameroon offers numerous benefits, its sustainable adoption and replication in other regions of the country, or even internationally, face several complex and interconnected challenges.

One of the primary challenges is adapting to local contexts. Each region has its own socio-economic, cultural, and environmental specificities. For example, differences in land tenure structures, belief systems, and intergenerational relationships can significantly influence the model's effectiveness. In some communities, patriarchal traditions and customary land management systems may limit young people's and women's access to land resources. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct thorough studies to understand local dynamics and adjust the model accordingly. This customization requires close collaboration with community leaders, local institutions, and potential beneficiaries to co-create solutions that respect local norms and needs. Moreover, it is essential to ensure equity and inclusion in the implementation of this model. The benefits of the partnership must be accessible to all community members, including marginalized groups such as youth, women, and ethnic minorities. This requires the establishment of transparent and inclusive governance mechanisms that allow these groups to actively participate in decision-making processes and share the benefits of investments equitably. Without these safeguards, there is a risk that resources and benefits could be concentrated in the hands of a few privileged individuals, exacerbating existing inequalities. For instance, local land management committees could be formed with balanced representation to ensure that the voices of young people and women are heard and taken into account.

Finally, institutional and political support is a fundamental pillar for the long-term success of the model. Local institutions, whether municipal authorities, rural development agencies, or financial institutions, must be mobilized to create an enabling environment for the partnership. This includes the development and implementation of public policies that facilitate access to land, secure land tenure, and provide financing for youth and small-scale farmers. Furthermore, governments must commit to providing a clear and stable regulatory framework that encourages investment while protecting the rights of local communities. This institutional support can also manifest through training and capacity-building initiatives aimed at preparing young people and other beneficiaries to fully and effectively participate in these partnerships.

Governance and implementation mechanisms for the model

Effective implementation of the partnership model between young landowners and foreign investors requires robust governance and well-defined operational mechanisms. This section explores the necessary governance structures, implementation processes, and strategies to ensure transparency, accountability, and equity in the partnership.

Governance structures and management mechanisms

The governance structures and management mechanisms within the partnership model targeting young landowners in the municipalities of Northern Cameroon, such as Lago, Ngong, and Touboro, are designed to ensure project effectiveness, sustainability, and inclusivity.

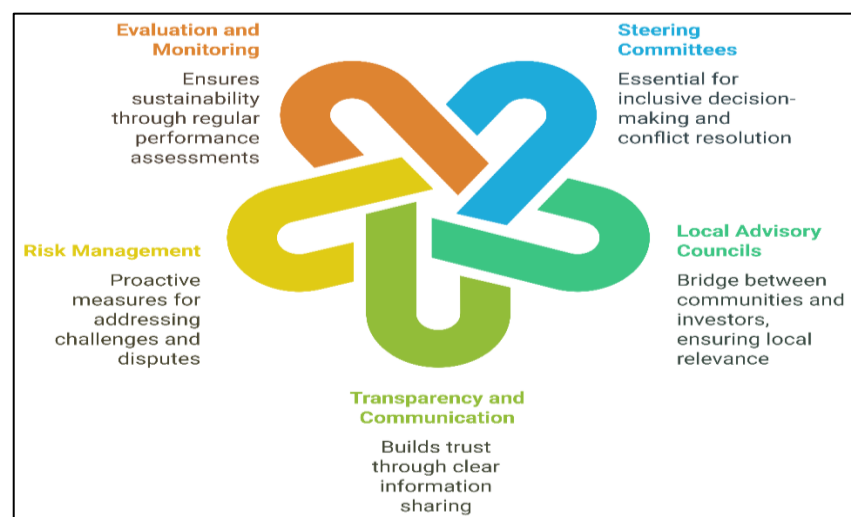


Figure 3. Governance Framework for partnership Model

They include a series of key strategies to achieve these objectives:

Steering and coordination committees

The creation of steering and coordination committees is essential to establish a robust institutional framework. These committees include young landowners, foreign investors, local authorities, and civil society representatives. This diverse composition ensures that all voices are heard, fostering balanced and inclusive decision-making. In addition to overseeing project implementation, these committees are responsible for proactively resolving conflicts, continuously evaluating progress, and adapting strategies to emerging challenges, such as climate variations or fluctuations in local agricultural markets.

Local advisory councils

Local advisory councils play a crucial role in incorporating the specific perspectives of Northern Cameroon's communities and strengthening the community-rootedness of the project. Composed of respected community leaders, agricultural experts familiar with local practices suited to the region's arid conditions, and small-scale producers' representatives, these councils serve as a bridge between local communities and investors. They ensure that the decisions of steering committees are relevant to local contexts and that community needs are fully considered. Additionally, they help prevent conflicts by providing a mediation space and ensuring that local disputes are resolved before escalating.

Transparency and communication

Transparency and communication are essential pillars of the partnership's governance. Ensuring transparency helps establish and maintain trust among all stakeholders. Information related to contracts, land lease terms, party contributions, objectives, and results must be clearly communicated. This transparency can be facilitated through regular community meetings, newsletters, and public reports. These platforms allow for sharing information and collecting feedback from local communities, which is crucial for adjusting project strategies.

Moreover, the transparent management of finances, including the use of funds and generated benefits, is vital to prevent suspicions and ensure the equity of the project.

Risk management

To anticipate and mitigate the impacts of potential challenges, institutionalizing risk management mechanisms is indispensable. This includes establishing protocols for addressing emergency situations, managing land disputes, and preventing discriminatory or abusive practices. Members of the committees and councils must be continuously trained on best practices in governance, conflict management, and intercultural communication. This proactive approach strengthens the project's resilience and increases its chances of long-term success.

Evaluation and monitoring

To ensure the sustainability of the partnership model, a rigorous evaluation and monitoring framework must be established. This framework should include clear performance indicators, regular evaluation processes, and feedback mechanisms that allow for strategy adjustments based on achieved results and changes in the local context. A dynamic and adaptive approach is essential to maintain the model's relevance and effectiveness, even in the face of unforeseen socio-economic changes in Northern Cameroon.

Implementation process and partnership management

To ensure the effective and successful implementation of the partnership model, it is crucial to establish rigorous processes covering every stage, from the selection of investors to contract management and performance evaluation. Investor selection is conducted through a strict and transparent process. This includes organizing competitive tenders and evaluating candidates based on specific criteria, such as their technical capabilities, financial stability, and, most importantly, their commitment to sustainable practices and respect for the land

rights of young people. These criteria are not merely minimum requirements but standards that investors must not only meet but also maintain throughout the partnership's duration.

Contract and relationship management between young landowners and investors is equally essential. Contracts are developed in detail to ensure they cover all critical aspects, including the rights and obligations of each party, clear terms for profit-sharing, and specific conflict resolution mechanisms. Furthermore, mediators and partnership managers are actively involved to facilitate communication, anticipate potential issues, and ensure swift and equitable resolution of disputes, thus maintaining an atmosphere of trust and mutual cooperation. Monitoring and evaluation are integrated from the start of the partnership, with the establishment of a robust system to track progress and assess outcomes. This system relies on carefully selected key performance indicators that measure essential aspects such as agricultural yields, local production levels, and the economic impact on local communities. Regular and systematic evaluations are conducted not only to verify that partnership objectives are being met but also to identify areas requiring strategic adjustments. By using the collected data, partnership managers can adjust strategies in real time, maximizing the benefits of the partnership for all stakeholders. Ultimately, these rigorous processes and proactive management create a resilient partnership framework that is adaptable and capable of replicating in other contexts while ensuring long-term sustainability.

Strategies to ensure transparency and equity

Ensuring transparency and equity in a partnership model requires a rigorous and structured approach, where each step of the process is supported by clearly defined strategies and proactively implemented. The establishment of grievance and appeal mechanisms is a fundamental first measure. It is imperative to create accessible and reliable channels through which young landowners and other stakeholders can voice their concerns. These mechanisms must be not only accessible to all but also ensure the confidentiality of complainants, providing a quick and fair response to each grievance. By instituting such a system, the partnership ensures effective conflict management and minimizes the risk of unresolved disagreements, which is crucial for maintaining a trusting relationship between partners and the community.

Training and awareness-raising for stakeholders represent the second indispensable pillar to ensure continued transparency and equity. It is essential that all involved parties, whether young landowners, investors, or community members, have a clear understanding of their rights, duties, and the processes in place. By organizing regular training sessions, the partnership strengthens stakeholders' capacities and prepares them to navigate the complexities of the model with confidence. Moreover, awareness campaigns can help prevent misunderstandings and promote a culture of cooperation and mutual respect. These initiatives also enhance local community ownership of the project, which is essential for its acceptance and sustainability.

Continuous revisions and adjustments to the partnership demonstrate the commitment to maintaining equity and transparency in the long term. The economic and social context is constantly evolving, and it is crucial that the partnership model remains flexible enough to adapt to these changes. Governance structures must therefore be designed with built-in adaptability, allowing for periodic revisions based on feedback and contextual analysis. This process of ongoing evaluation and adjustment ensures that the partnership remains relevant, effective, and aligned with the goals of equity and transparency, even in the face of unforeseen challenges. By adopting a dynamic and responsive approach, the partnership model can not only meet the current needs of stakeholders but also anticipate and adapt to future challenges, thus ensuring its longevity and long-term success.

By systematically integrating these strategies, the partnership will not only create an environment of equitable collaboration but will also ensure total transparency at every stage. This approach will strengthen mutual trust between the parties and anchor the partnership in a positive dynamic, conducive to sustainable growth and the achievement of common goals. Transparency and equity will not simply be objectives to be achieved, but guiding principles that, when properly integrated and practiced, can transform a partnership model into a lasting and exemplary success.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of land rights for young people and their role in partnerships with foreign investors in Africa, particularly in Northern Cameroon, highlights opportunities for inclusive and sustainable agricultural development. Young people are no longer passive observers but have emerged as key players, gaining recognition for their land rights and actively participating in the agricultural value chain. Securing these rights is vital for their inclusion in economic partnerships, enabling them to access land resources and establish themselves as credible partners. The proposed model, where young people lease their land while remaining actively involved in its use, promotes equitable benefit-sharing and reduces the risks of marginalization. Key findings from the study support this approach: 74% of young people engaged in such partnerships reported improved economic conditions and better protection against land-related abuses. Additionally, 61% of young landowners expressed willingness to participate in partnerships due to increased land tenure security, reflecting a significant shift in trust and engagement. These outcomes demonstrate the model's potential to economically empower youth while fostering inclusive and sustainable agricultural development. This approach also contributes to food security by boosting local production and stabilizing prices.

However, challenges persist, particularly the need for transparent governance to safeguard the rights of young people and ensure fair agreements. Managing competition between local crops and those introduced by investors is crucial, while respecting the social and cultural dimensions of land access. Interventions must involve communities in decision-making through mechanisms such as local advisory councils, participatory workshops, and regular community forums. These strategies ensure that the voices of young people and marginalized groups are heard and integrated into partnership agreements. Transparent grievance and appeal systems can further empower communities to address concerns and influence decisions, fostering trust and collaboration among stakeholders. To maximize benefits, it is recommended to strengthen the legal framework, promote youth training, and ensure equitable benefit distribution. In the future, this model could be adapted to other regions in Africa, requiring research to tailor approaches to local contexts. The success of such initiatives depends on robust multi-stakeholder collaboration, bringing together governments, NGOs, private investors, and local communities to co-create solutions aligned with sustainable development goals.

Existing partnerships, such as Kenya's Youth in Agriculture Initiative (YAI) and Rwanda's Private Sector Driven Agricultural Growth (PSDAG) project, serve as valuable models for fostering inclusive and equitable collaboration. These examples demonstrate how coordinated efforts among diverse stakeholders can effectively address challenges related to land access, youth empowerment, and agricultural modernization. By leveraging the strengths of each partner and ensuring active community participation, such collaborations can create lasting impacts and scalable solutions for sustainable rural development, offering lessons that can be adapted to contexts like Northern Cameroon.

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