



Socioeconomic Land Data Management in Cameroon

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Executive summary

Human actions are the major causes of environmental changes and land seems to be the common element in all human activities. The main objective of this work is to study the data and stakes related to land issues in Cameroon. Specifically, it entails (1) carrying out an inventory of socio-economic data on issues related to land; (2) identifying the possibility of cross-matching between these databases and with other sources of data; and (3) making suggestions that could enable a better understanding of stakes and an improvement of land data collection and management. The methodology used consists in document analysis and

interviews with public and private institutions involved in these issues. In Cameroon, it can be observed that, in the household surveys (ECAM 1, 2, 3 and 4) conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), the agriculture and rural development component includes land-related issues. The nation-wide scope of these surveys and their comparability make it possible for information from ECAM databases to be cross-matched with that from other data sources. A better understanding of the stakes inherent to land certainly requires a cross disciplinary approach which brings together environmental sciences, economic sciences, legal sciences, and practitioners drawn from the Ministries in charge land tenure, agriculture, and protection of the environment. Given the shortcomings of the current land laws, it is necessary that they be reformed. A unified approach of data collection in which the different ministries concerned with land issues are included in the designing of questionnaires for socio-economic surveys, would contribute in improving the quality of information available on land. Improving the internal system for the management and processing of data from different ministries involved in land management, may equally help in improving the collection of socio-economic land data.

Key words: *Land, human actions, cross disciplinary, socio-economic data.*

Introduction

Land is the common element in all human activities. Agriculture and housing stand out as the major reason for access to land. However, regardless of the reason, the rules and norms that govern access to land (land law) are generally fundamental. These rules guarantee access to landed property, an element that is indispensable for investment; limit or ease the resolution of land conflicts; regulate land pressure and thus limit the negative consequences of human actions on the environment. In other words, good management of land is fundamental to the growth of any economy. It all certainly starts with a mastery of land data and also requires knowledge of related stakes. In Cameroon, about 85% of land is governed by the customary tenure (Alden, 2011); meaning, most residents and users of these lands do not own a title deed, thus placing them in a precarious and disturbing situation given the economic changes taking place in the country. This situation is also such that can fuel land disputes between farmers and pastoralists, natives and non-natives and between the State and rural communities.

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Methodology

The methodology used consists of document analysis and interviews with public and private institutions involved in issues related to the availability and accessibility to socio-economic land data. The document analysis brought to light the cross disciplinary nature of land issues and their socio-economic implications. And as such, the question is of interest, not only to economists, but also to environmental sciences, mainly through the issues related to land use, and to jurists through issues related to land law.

Interviews were conducted with public and private institutions involved in land related issues and took place between 4 and 8 November 2019 in the presence of NEPAD partners. This working visit had as objective to inquire about the state of affairs of land governance, understand existing data and identify possibilities of cross-matching databases likely to enrich analysis on land-related issues. We observed that a good number of public institutions are involved in land issue. This goes to show the importance government gives to this issue. However, it is worth mentioning the coordination problems that exist among the different institutions and the consequence is to weaken the efficiency of the actions taken.

Outstanding results of the study

Two main elements stand out in land related stakes. On the one hand, there is the dichotomy between urban land and rural land. In effect, while the management practices of urban land are based on positive (land law), in the rural area, the use of the natural law (customary tenure) is still very common. This dichotomy has led some legal experts to the conclusion that, the land law as practised today, needs to evolve to include the cultural specificities of the country. On the other hand, the ever increasing interest in issues related to sustainable development and protection of the environment definitely require that related questions be included in future socio-economic surveys.

The National Institute of Statistics in Cameroon is the main body in charge of collecting macroeconomic and microeconomic data at the national level. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) equally has some databases which rather generally concern some specific crops and zones. In other words, it generally refers to data on agricultural productivity and output of certain crops in very specific areas. Cameroon Household Surveys (ECAM 1, 2, 3 and 4) show the advantages of including land-related issues in the section reserved for agriculture and rural development. It goes a long way to ease the possibility for analysing the effects of land on agriculture or on well-being. A quick search of these databases reveals that

they all have information as to the fact that one household possesses at least a plot of land. However, except for ECAM 4, they do not give information as to households effectively owning a land title.

For each of these surveys, a methodology document, a questionnaire and the main reports are available for free download on the NIS site (<http://www.statistics-cameroon.org/>). The database with SAV format (require the SPSS software) are available strictly on demand at the NIS head office or via the Internet site. Due to the national coverage of these surveys, these databases may be exploited at the national, regional divisional and sub divisional levels, primary sample units, households or by individuals. This makes cross-matching or fusion with other sources of data possible, including data in the form of tables or maps.

Three major shortcomings can be observed from these databases. The first being that they all do not contain the same information. Some of the information is not found in ECAM 1 and others are presented only in ECAM 4. Follow-up of the changes in some of this information about land is therefore difficult or even impossible; the second concerns the absence of questions on land conflict; even though it is a very important issue just like issues related to land management in general, or land registration procedures in particular. The third concerns the near absence of the environmental aspect in these surveys. This makes conducting studies on the environmental impact of land use difficult.

Conclusion and implications of the economic policies

They can be placed in two groups. The first group presents general recommendations on the land policy in Cameroon. The second presents specific recommendations on the collection of socio-economic land data.

As concerns general recommendations on the land policy in Cameroon, we have in the course of this work, brought to light the shortcomings of the current land policy. It does not facilitate access to land title; it is not adapted especially in the rural areas where land does not belong to an individual but to the community. The co-existence of the land law and the customary tenure is the source of various conflicts. All stakeholders in land issues are unanimous on the need for a reform of the law regulating land in Cameroon. Moreover, the Government of Cameroon, in 2008, launched the procedure to update the instruments regulating land, forests, mines and the environment. This procedure must certainly be fast tracked and the new land laws would have to take into account the criticisms made by different parties: simplifying procedures, reducing costs, acknowledging the customary tenure subject to its being placed under careful supervision. This supervision must certainly include sales in order to prevent the communities from entering into competition against the State.

The Project for the Modernisation of Land Registration System and the Business Climate (PAMOCCA), in the light of the missions assigned (develop the land capital through (a) modernising land registration and State property, (b) enhancing the land registration system and state property in order to improve the living conditions and business climate) certainly has an important role to play in the improvement of the land policy. It would need to have all the necessary support to succeed in its missions. It would gain a lot by making itself known to the wider public and by communicating more and more on its missions and especially its achievements. Non-governmental organisations such as Centre for Environment and Development (CED) or The Network for the fight against Hunger in Cameroon (RELUF), which are doing great work on the field, should as much as possible, be included in discussions aimed at improving land governance in Cameroon.

With regard to specific recommendations on the collection of socio-economic land data, there is necessity for a unified approach in data collection. To this end, the various ministries and institutions concerned with land issues must be involved in the designing of questionnaires for socio-economic surveys. They could thus make available to National Institute of Statistics (NIS) questions that voice their concerns, so that these can be added to the surveys. There is equally a necessity to improve the internal data processing system of Ministries. In fact, a good number of ministries still store their data on paper. The resulting effect is that internal use of data becomes tedious and it is very difficult to share this information with third parties. Improving and computerising the data management system of Ministries concerned with land-related issues, will considerably ease the analysis and sharing of this data. It could act as a catalyst to research in the area.



Mission

To strengthen local capacity for conducting independent, rigorous inquiry into the problems facing the management of economies in sub-Saharan Africa.

The mission rests on two basic premises: that development is more likely to occur where there is sustained sound management of the economy, and that such management is more likely to happen where there is an active, well-informed group of locally based professional economists to conduct policy-relevant research.

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