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## Small Scale Coffee Production and Institutional Support within Cameroon’s Liberalised Economy — An Explorative Study of Coffee Farmers’ Strategies

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### Abstract

Liberalisation and structural adjustment have deeply affected agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa. Cameroon disposes of advantageous natural conditions to produce export crops, such as coffee, cacao, rubber or palm oil. Coffee as the second most traded commodity world-wide is a typical global good on a highly competitive market.

The study explores how living and working conditions of farm families have changed as a consequence of liberalised policies. The situation of small scale coffee production is analysed using case studies and applying a holistic point of view by looking at external as well as internal factors.

Traditionally, cultivation of coffee in the Highlands is done within small and highly diversified farms bringing modest prosperity to its growers. With the fall of prices it lost importance or has disappeared altogether. Farmers have different strategies to cope with the situation. Some look for off-farm activities or tests new farm patterns. Young farmers particularly diversify and go into vegetable production. “Discouraged” farmers transform coffee areas while “hopeful” farmer keep up with intense coffee production still using fertiliser, chemicals or pig-dung. Typical reaction patterns are presented as case studies.

The arabica coffee sector has experienced the breakdown of the traditional public cooperative system. Free competition exists between licensed buyers, mill owners, and exporters. Farmers are allowed to form producer groups. In order to support them, an interactive research and extension system was installed in 1998. Extension adapted the T and V methodology of the World Bank, while research runs commodity programs. Priority was given to participatory decision making at the village level, use of indigenous knowledge, and the establishment of feed back mechanisms. However, the concept of top-down technology transfer is still very much in use. In the case of coffee, applicable knowledge is neither produced nor disseminated. Thus, farmers are left alone in their search for alternatives.

Only the collaboration between World Bank, bilateral donors and projects, research and extension, as well as government and private actors in rural areas could make coffee policies more coherent.

**Keywords:** Liberalisation, coffee production, research and extension systems, Cameroon