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“World Food System —
A Contribution from Europe”

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Abstract

Background

Recent market-oriented policy reforms by the government of Cameroon to tackle market inefficiencies in the agricultural sector opened up opportunities for private entrepreneurs. However, modern input use has declined substantially over the years and agricultural productivity of the country's major food and export commodities has either stagnated or decreased after reform leading to food insecurity and urban unrest. While the contribution of agricultural inputs to the country's food security is widely acknowledged, the development of a viable agricultural input market continues to be a major challenge for stakeholders of all corresponding levels, ranging from farmers to national level organisations, institutions, private agencies and policy makers.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to assess the current state of private agricultural input markets in Cameroon with a particular focus on the countries' most important primary markets including fertilisers and hybrid maize seeds. *Design/methodology*

This study was built on Porters Structure, Conduct and Performance theory and the transaction cost theory. Data collection was done in 2009. Snow ball sampling technique was used to select 24 agricultural input dealers in the North West Region of Cameroon. Focus group discussions with farmers' groups and key informant interviews were employed. Data analysis was done using Microsoft Excel aided by Garret score ranking techniques.

Findings

The private sector based input market is highly disorganised, fragmented and uncompetitive. Strong involvement of government agencies in the fertiliser and hybrid maize seed markets have crowd out effects on private entrepreneurs resulting in high prices and reduced access to agricultural inputs by farmers. Producers' organisations and Non Governmental organisations play a primary role to facilitate small holders' access to farm inputs.

Value

Even though private sector entrepreneurs play an important role in agricultural input delivery in Cameroon, no study has applied the SCP and new institutional economic theories to evaluate the market, assess their opinions and experiences and the entrepreneurial environment for the development of their activity. Considerable potential exists for a more effective input market development with remarkable improvements in the livelihoods of rural small holders.

Keywords: Agricultural inputs, Cameroon, food security, markets, private sector

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