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SALARIED AGRICULTURAL LABOUR IN NORTH OF FONGO TONGO: ORGANIZATION OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE FIELD

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51193/IJAER.2022.8605>

Received: 10 Nov. 2022 / Accepted: 18 Nov. 2022 / Published: 16 Dec. 2022

ABSTRACT

In the poorly mechanized countries, the development of agriculture is dependent on labour. The degradation of soils in the southern part of the Fongo-Tongo and the coffee crises have favored the mobility of its population to the north where, they serve as employees or employers in agriculture. This work examines the organization of agricultural actors in the north of Fongo-Tongo from the recruitment of labour to the payment of salaries. In the recruitment points and in farms, during the months of april and may 2015, surveys were carried out by interviews (22) and questionnaires (75). As results, in north of Fongo-Tongo, labour was recruited by direct contact or by telephone from 7:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. The activities of the employees were plowing (65.33% of respondents), sowing, phytosanitary treatments, harvesting and related tasks. The main products grown are: potatoes, cabbage, carrots and leeks. Labour was more used from june to september (77.33%) while from april to may, work was scarce. Strategies adopted by employers for better employee performances included positioning them at intervals set by employers, given them a midday meal and transporting them. Employees are paid at the end of the day or on appointment, individually or in groups.

Keywords: North of Fongo-Tongo, agriculture, employers, labour, organization of activities

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of labour in agriculture is practiced since the pre-colonial period. One of the outcomes of the black slave trade was their use as labour in American farms [1]. Today, agricultural labour is more voluntary. Over the years, the working and living conditions of agricultural employees have been improved. Worldwide, the agricultural labour force was estimated at nearly 1.1 billion people, with almost half made up of salaried employees [2]. It was unequally distributed with nearly 80% in Asia, 14.3% in Africa, 3.6% in Latin America and 3.7% in the rest of the world

[3]. Nigeria had the largest number in Africa with 17.7% of the regional total and 2.5% of the world total [3]. Studies on paid agricultural labour are limited and mainly focused on the reasons underlying it [4]-[5]-[6]-[7], incomes and their uses [8] -[9]- [10] and their problems [8]-[11]-[10].

In Cameroon, as in most poorly mechanized developing countries, the development of agriculture depends on the labour. In southern Cameroon, labour is concentrated more in fertile areas. This is also the case in the region of western Cameroon with the Bamboutos mountains having benefited from volcanic ash. The populations coming from the different areas of Fongo-Tongo concentrated themselves every day in the southern part of these mountains waiting to be recruited as paid agricultural labour.

At the end of the 1980s in Fongo Tongo, after the golden period of coffee culture [12], the land having become scarce and poor due to anthropogenic and natural degradation in the south, led to the intensification of agricultural activities in the north. The biggest landowners, mostly from the north, employ the others persons for market gardening. Agricultural employees and employers, made up of men, women and children, fight to improve their living conditions. The former moved daily or weekly from the south of FongoTongo to the north where they were recruited as labour. Employees and employers are organized in a particular way from the recruitment to the payment of wages. Thus, this work focuses on the organization of agricultural employees and employers in the north of Fongo-Tongo.

2. SPATIO-TEMPORAL DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was carried out in Fongo-Tongo, Menoua division, in western Cameroon during the months of April and May 2015. It extends between 5° 29' and 5°38' North latitude and 9° 57' and 10°4 East longitude, at an altitude of 1500m.

3. METHODOLOGY

The approach allowing a better understanding of the organization of the actors in the field imposed the concentration of the work on qualitative data. These data were obtained through direct observations at recruitment areas and on farms and through interviews of employers and employees. At the recruitment areas, groups of employees were observed and the outcome of different arrangements between employers and employees were recorded. In farms, the tasks performed by the labour as well as the mode of transport were noted.

Regarding the interviews, 12 were conducted with employers and 10 with employees. The choice of actors interviewed was based on their seniority in the activity or on the surface of the farm they possessed. Most of the information obtained was oriented towards the recruitment of the

workforce, the working conditions of permanent and non-permanent employees, the work strategies of the actors and payment of the labour.

The questionnaire was administered to 75 employees at the recruitment hub and in the fields (out of a total of 110 employees).

4. RESULTS

4.1 RECRUITMENT OF LABOUR

4.1.1 Methods and hours of recruitment of salaried agricultural labor

The recruitment of salaried agricultural labour is carried out by a contact of the employee by the employer or vice versa. In the first case, the employee is chosen among job seekers every morning around eight o'clock at very specific road intersections. The employer also often recruits labor by telephone or through its permanent employees. When it is the job seeker who initiates the contact, he contacts the employer by phone or meet him directly at the farm between 7:30 a.m. and 8 a.m. In the Northern part of Fongo-Tongo, the recruitment of labour is stopped around 10 a.m. every day, both in the fields and at the crossroads.

4.1.2 An agricultural labour changing with the activity to be carried out

The choice of labor by employers in the north of Fongo-Tongo is based on age, the activity to be carried out and gender (Table 1). Children under 15 and women are asked to cultivate and sow, while men are asked to do all the works. This selection is characteristic of employers who need less than 20 employees per day, because beyond this number the employer recruits without any selection.

Table 1: Variation of labor with current agricultural activity

| | Activities | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | Cultivate | Sow | Apply pesticides | Harvest | Fill and seal bags | Transport loads |
| Structure of the labour force | Men, women, children | Men, Women, Children | Men | Men, women | Men | Men |

4.2 LABOUR ACTIVITIES IN THE FARM

The activities carried out in the farm by the agricultural labour in the north of Fongo-Tongo once recruited are presented in figure 1. According to this figure, once recruited, more than half of the employees are charged to plow, sow or apply phytosanitary treatments. Less than 15% of them is able to carry out all the activities in the farm. A similar percentage of employees are recruited for specific activities such as transporting inputs and outputs. Loading and sealing bags occupy the smallest proportion of employees.

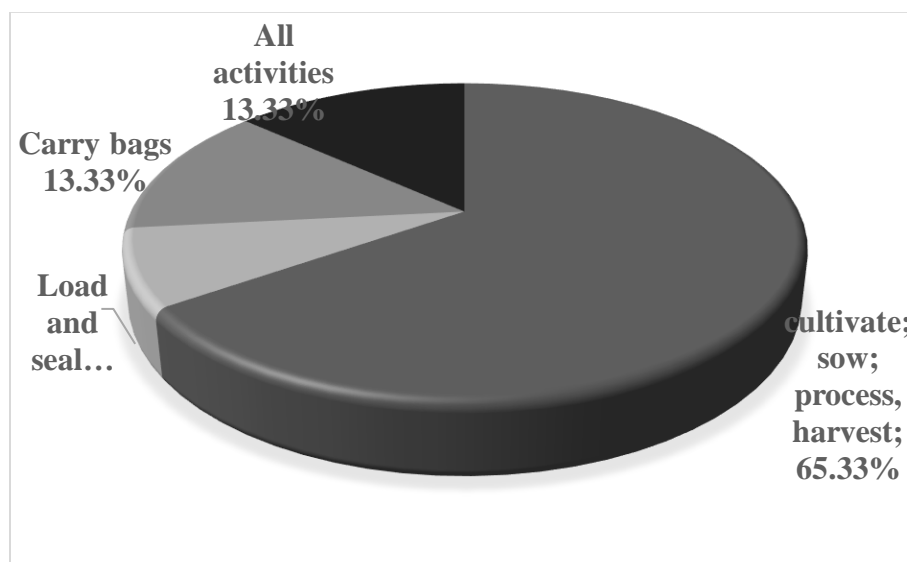


Figure 1: Distribution of the recruited workforce according to the type of activity to be done in the farm

4.2.1 Main activities: ploughing, sowing, processing and harvesting

Plowing, sowing, processing and harvesting are the most practiced activities in the north of Fongo-Tongo. There are two types of plowing: flat plowing (photo 1) and ridge plowing (photo 2). The first type is carried out by employees independently of their age whereas adults are preferred for the latter type.



Photo 1: Flat plowing for potato

Cliche: Djeugap, April 2015



Photo 2: Plowing in ridges for carrots

Cliche: Djeugap, April 2015

Plowing precedes sowing and phytosanitary treatments. Treating crops consists of spraying the soil and/or the leaves and stems of plants, or even crop products with pesticides. In North of FongoTongo, pesticides are used on all crops from sowing to harvesting for better production. Thus, the employer provides employees with pesticides that vary with the crop and the enemy being fought, from which solutions are prepared and applied. For this activity, the workforce recruited is mainly made up of mature men.

In north of FongoTongo, when the crop matures, the farmer recruits a number of employees for the harvesting. This number can be high if the harvest needs to be intense. As illustration, several dozen bags of potatoes can be harvested in one day (photo 3), which requires the participation of a large number of employees. In such circumstances, employers hire up to 60 or more employees.



Photo 3: Bagged potatoes in an employer at harvesting

Cliche: Djeugap, April 2015

4.2.2 Analysis of cultivation periods and the use of agricultural labour

The salaried agricultural labour in the North of Fongo-Tongo is used to produce various crops such as potatoes, carrots, leeks and cabbage. Specific agricultural activities carried out by the employees for each of the crops, as well as the month of that activity, are summarized in table 2. It appears from that table that at each month of the year, at least one activity is practiced and for the same month, the type of activity changes according to the culture considered. Potatoes and carrots with similar vegetative cycles are grown twice a year and therefore each of the activities necessary for their cultivation is carried out twice. A similar analysis may appear from the cultivation of carrots, cabbage and leeks.

| Cultures | Months | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------|--------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D |
| Potatoes | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Carrots | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cabbages | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| leeks | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| | |
|---------|--|
| Plow | |
| Sow | |
| Treat | |
| harvest | |

Table 2: Agricultural calendar of the main cultures

Despite the fact that all the months of the year are occupied by labor activities, it appears that the rate of workers having had the job changes with the month of the year (Figure 2). The period when nearly 80% of the workforce has work extends from June to September, while in April-May, less than 3% of the employees surveyed were employed. In February-March 13.33% of the workforce is employed. But, this rate drops almost by half (6.66%) from November to December.

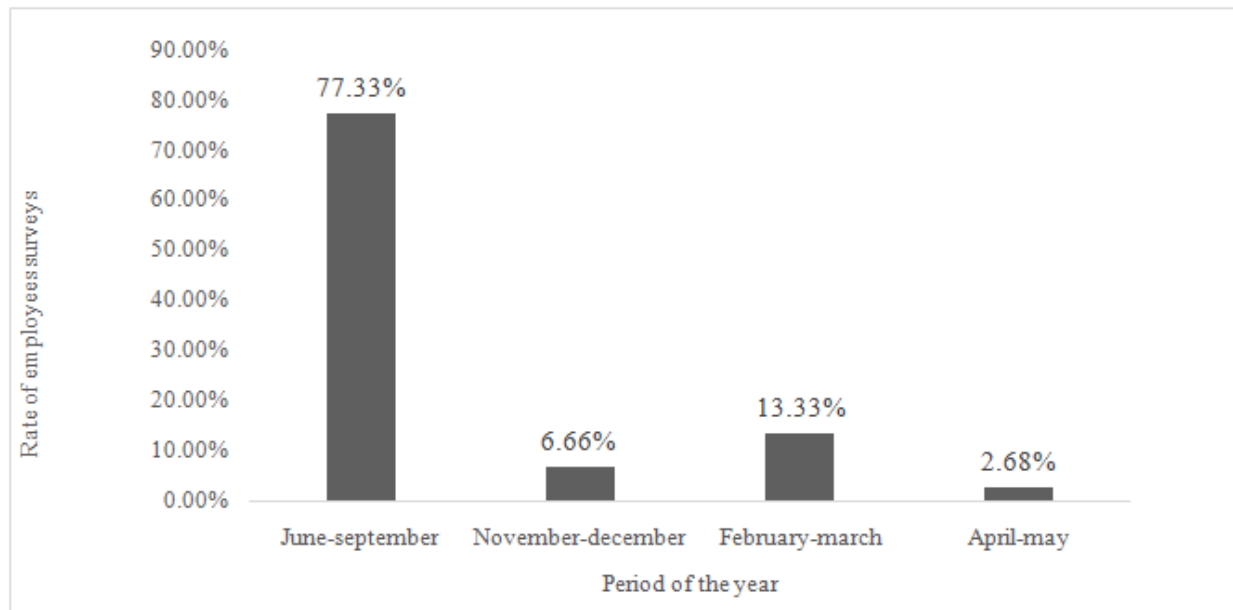


Figure 2: Variation in the rate of employees used by employers with the month of year

4.2.3 Related activities: loading, sealing and transporting bags

Loading backs with harvested products, sealing and transporting them constituted the related activities of agricultural employees in the north of Fongo-Tongo. These three activities are generally done by men, in the fields or along the road. The same employee takes care of loading and sealing the bags (photo 4).



Photo 4: Loading and sealed potato bags

Cliche: Djeugap, April 2015

The transport of products from the farm to the road is carried out with the motorbike (photo 5), on the head or on the back (photo 6). The transport on the back is carried out by strong and physically resistant men. These products are transported from the farm to the main road, a collection point by traders.



Photo 5: Transport of leek by motorbike



Photo 6: Carrot carried on the back

Cliche: Djeugap, April 2015

4.3 STAKEHOLDER WORKING STRATEGIES

4.3.1 Employers' strategies

The strategies used by employers for a better use of labour vary according to the employers and the type of activity to be carried out. Some employers assign daily tasks by groups of employees in several different plots. Others feed their employees in the afternoon to compensate for lost energy and boost the employee for the rest of the day.

One of the strategies consists in positioning the employees following a certain spacing. For example, for flat plowing, a spacing of 4 meters on average is respected between 2 employees.

To encourage permanent employees, plots of up to 6000 m² are allocated to them for private use.

At the harvesting, the employer sets the quantity of products expected daily from each employee and at the end of the day the harvest of each is measured.

Particularly when harvesting potatoes, the employer ensures that tubers are not left in the ground. Thus, in each plot, he randomly chooses points at which the earth is turned over by himself. If it results from this check that the harvest was badly done, the employee is required to start the work again.

The transport of employees by motorcycle or car to and from the farm by some employers is a strategy allowing them to save time, because it reduces the travel time between the road and the farm. The passage huts are built within the farms by the employers to stay there with permanent

employees during periods of intense activity. This method is less and less used because of the resurgence of border conflicts north of Fongo-Tongo, especially in farms close to the conflict zones.

4.3.2 Employee strategies

Employee strategies are mainly techniques they used to work as little as possible in relation to the terms of the contract with the employer. The actions undertaken are numerous and vary with the type of contract agreed with the employer. They include extending the resting time after meals, taking a break whenever the employer is distracted, distant or absent.

When the contract is based on the quantity of work to be done, some employees work without considering the quality. Thus, the plowing is superficial, the weeding is done by uprooting certain plants by precipitation, and the hoeing with maintenance of the weeds on the ridges.

At the harvesting, when the quantities of products to be harvested are fixed in advance, the less working employees steal the harvested products of the other employees to increase theirs, the less productive portions of land are skipped at the slightest distraction from the employer, and when it comes to tubers, plants whose stems are no longer visible receive no attention from the employee.

4.4 REMUNERATION OF EMPLOYEE

4.4.1 Employee payment methods

In the north of Fongo-Tongo, employees are paid at the end of the day or at the completion of the task if the work is assigned by task. Depending on the employers, the payment can be individual or by group of employees, at the farm, at the employer's home, or by appointment in a specific place with the agreement of the employer. In case of payment by groups, it is made up by village of residence or by age of the employees.

4.4.2 Nature of employee payment

The payment of recruited labour is made in cash and/or in kind. In kind, the sum to be collected is converted into material such as harvested products, seeds or fertilizers. There are cases where employees work to pay for materials acquired in advance from the employer.

5. DISCUSSION

The study highlighted the organization of the agricultural employees and employers in the north of Fongo-Tongo, from their recruitment to the payment.

At the recruitment, there are generally crossroads where job seekers come to wait to the employers. Generally there is no appointment with an employer. More rarely the job seeker meet directly the employer at the farm. Recruiting labour directly at the farm occur when both actors contact themselves in advance and this recruitment pattern saves the employer time. The employer also contacts employee by telephone or through their permanent employees more often to perform a specific task. This type of recruitment has been identified in Montreal [13].

For each farm activity, the choice of salaried labour is made by the employer. Children are used for flat plowing because it does not require much experience and because of their low salary. For the formation of ridges, the employer prefers older people because that task is more constraining. For weeding and hoeing, employers have avoided children because they often leave weeds on the ridges or do not sufficiently cover the roots of the plants by the soil. During the harvesting, men and women are preferred because they work with more care. As for loading, sealing and transporting the bags, men are chosen because these jobs require a lot of strength. This is an expression of the qualification of salaried agricultural labour contrary to what was in the 19th and 20th centuries where every employees was used to any task in the world [14]. In FongoTongo, the organization of the workforce is marked by specific work, whereas in France, employers resorted to wage labour and agricultural enterprises because of the aging of the family workforce [15].

In the northern Fongo-Tongo, employees are made up of permanent and non-permanent workers. Not all the employers work with permanent employees. They prefer recruit labour only when there is a need. This result is similar to developing countries where, he was distinguished permanent workers from temporary and/or seasonal workers [2]. On the other hand, it was found seasonal employees and permanent employees on farms in France [16].

Those qualified as big employers usually use a great number of worker any time. They have a great diversity of activities. It is the reasons why they are less selective to work seekers. This category of employers has a permanent salaried work force that also monitors other employees.

The added value of this study was observed at the level of the strategies used by employers for a faster and efficient work of the employees. Positioning employees by respecting a certain spacing in the farm is a technic to limit contact between them, and then limit chatting interruption of work.

In the north of Fongo-Tongo, the fact that the majority of agricultural employees work on plowing could be justified by the greater difficulty of this activity. Indeed, agriculture in north of Fongo-Tongo is not mechanized. Therefore, turning the land over with the hoe would take a lot of time if few workers are assigned to it. This non-mechanized work of hired agricultural labour

has been recorded in Almeria in the Mediterranean for the cultivation of fruits and vegetables [17].

The treatment of plants, which has become a very decisive phase in market gardening, could be justified by the use of new plant varieties that are not very resistant to attacks by pests.

Harvesting requires a large workforce because it must be done within a short time in order to meet requirements of traders. The potato is the main crop because of its economic profitability and its more commercial character. Other crops produced using the labour are carrots, cabbage and leeks.

On the other hand, in France, labour takes care of the cultivation of vines and other fruits [18]. In Senegal, employees in the agricultural sector do gardening, transhumance, maintenance of fences and fodder areas [19]. In Brazil, hired agricultural labor has been used in large cocoa plantations for picking pods, fermenting and drying the beans [20].

From June to September, the workforce is more employed because it is the harvesting period for potatoes and carrots. In addition, the months of August and September are those during which new agricultural plots are prepared and sown. At the same time, other activities are underway for crops already established. Indeed different cultures overlap in time with all the activities they require and there is no absolute period for a specific culture. This multi-activity requires a large workforce. Also, this period corresponds to the summer holidays when the students, the real workforce, are present. On the other hand, the April-May period when employees are less used is that of low activity. It is marked by cultivation processing, an activity that requires fewer people.

Transporting loads by motorbike to get out of the farm is preferred by employers because it is faster and more suitable for tracks that lead to the road, and less damages the products. Transport on the back or on the head would be justified by the poor state of the road, which would not allow motorcycles and cars to circulate. This type of transport recalls the results in Latin America [2].

CONCLUSION

Labor recruitments are made at well-known crossroads where job seekers wait every morning. However, the specific relationships, knowledge and regularity of certain employees led them to often be recruited directly from the farm.

Employers with a great need for labour recruit them without being selective. The choice of labour, if any, depends on its estimated or recognized capacity to carry out an activity.

Plowing, sowing, processing and harvesting are the main agricultural activities in northern Fongo-Tongo.

Particular strategies for more gain were put into play by employees or employers.

The loading and sealing of bags are done in the farm or along the main axis.

The payment of employees is made individually or in groups, in cash or in kind, in the farm or far from there.

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