

Resilience Construction and Persistence of Coffee Production in Bui Division of the Cameroon Grassland, 1994-2017

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Abstract: *This study investigates the resilience in coffee production in the area roughly representing Bui Division of the North West Region of Cameroon from 1994 to 2017, a period characterised by socio-economic and environmental challenges. Until the mid-1990s, coffee was a vital cash crop in this area, serving as the life wire for the local inhabitants. However, the sector faced numerous adversities including the global economic crisis, liberalisation of the coffee sector, fluctuating global agricultural prices, climate change impacts, and socio-political instability. This paper employs qualitative data analysis to synthesis information obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The findings revealed that coffee farmers in Bui Division demonstrated remarkable resilience through certain key internal strategies comprising diversification of production, formation of cooperatives and sustaining coffee production more or less as a cultural construct. They also benefitted directly or indirectly from external support like government grants and technical intervention, mobilization of interest marketing groups like OLAM Cameroon as well as the scientific research fallouts of some coffee production experts. Ultimately, this research underscored the importance of nurturing adaptive strategies in agriculture as a means of enhancing resilience in the face of uncertainties related to climate change and market fluctuations. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable agricultural practices and offer valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to support coffee farming communities in Cameroon and similar contexts.*

Keywords: *Resilience, Coffee production, Bui Division.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Coffee is one of Cameroons principal cash earning products produced in different localities of the country. Bui Division is one of the major production belts. The Bui coffee production belt is located in Bui Division of the North West Region of Cameroon with Kumbo as its administrative headquarters. It covers a highland area characterized by volcanic soils, rugged hills, valleys, and a cool temperate climate (Neba, 1999, 82). Bui is bordered by Donga-Mantung Division to the north, Ngoketunja to the west, Boyo to the south west, and the Adamawa Plateau to the east (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982, 15). The division is endowed with fertile soils and abundant rainfall, making it highly suitable for subsistence agriculture (maize, beans, potatoes, plantains) and cash crops such as coffee, kola nuts, and vegetables. Its topography also sustains grazing activities, which support cattle rearing and dairy production, especially in areas like Jakiri and Noni (Chilver and Kaberry, 1967, 42).

Bui Division is historically associated with the Grassfields Kingdoms of Cameroon. It is composed of several Fondoms, the most prominent being Nso, Oku, Noni, and Mbiame, each with distinct histories but connected through Tikari migration traditions. The traditional rulers (Fons) remain influential in local governance, culture, and land management. During the colonial period, Bui was first under German rule (1884–1916) and later administered as part of British Southern Cameroons following World War I (Fanso, 1989, 97).

Bui is culturally diverse, though united by common Grassfields traditions. The Nso Fondom is the largest, but the Oku, known for their sacred forest and masquerade traditions, also play a significant role in the cultural identity of the Division. The Noni people have preserved a unique form of communal governance and are known for their farming and cattle rearing, while Mbiame represents another important Fondom with its own palace structures and rituals (Chilver and Kaberry, 51). Festivals, rituals, and palace institutions are central to social life across the Fondoms. Each kingdom has its Fon's palace as the spiritual and cultural nucleus, supported by secret societies (Ngwerong, Ngiri, and their

local variants) (Nkwi and Warnier, 47). Christianity has spread widely, with Catholic, Presbyterian, and Baptist missions founding schools, seminaries, and hospitals. Institutions such as Shisong Hospital in Kumbo and mission schools in Oku and Noni remain central to education and healthcare. Economically and socially, the peoples of Bui place great emphasis on education, craftsmanship (weaving, carving, blacksmithing), and community solidarity (Nyamnjoh, 2001, 56). The division's socio-cultural fabric thus reflects both its diversity and shared heritage within the Grassfields.

From the mid-1930s to the early 1990s coffee production constituted the backbone of the Bui economy. It was an activity that engaged most families and provided them a life wire. By the mid-1990s, the sector experienced some shocks notably; the global economic crisis of the 1980s, economic liberalisation in the early 1990s, withdrawal of state support, pest and diseases, fluctuating global prices, that made the activity to dwindle in intensity and importance. It was believed that with the crisis, coffee farmers were going to move away from coffee production to alternative sources of income but surprisingly a good number of them remained in the business. This tenacity is proof of certain motivations. It is on this basis that this study intends to examine the actions that sustained the activity in spite of the challenges. The Paper is centrally partitioned into two main parts; internal dynamics and external exogenous factors that contributed to resilience. It rounds up with a conclusion bringing together the principal findings. The paper contends that the sustenance of coffee production amid tethering challenges was more or less conditioned by the interplay between certain internal and external support factors

2. DYNAMICS OF RESILIENCE

Resilience as a concept is variously defined. Holling (1973, 11) defines resilience as the capacity of a system to absorb disturbances and still retain its basic function and structure. To Helen Herrman et. al. (2011, 258) resilience refers to positive adaptation despite experiencing adversity. From any direction resilience sets out to cushion shocks. Internal and some exogenous factors converged to explain how resilience was constructed by coffee farmers in Bui.

3. INTERNAL DRIVERS OF RESILIENCE CONSTRUCTION

Among the internal aspects that contributed to shaping resilience in coffee production was diversification of production, role of cooperatives and cultural attachment.

4. DIVERSIFICATION OF PRODUCTION

Diversification in agriculture refers to the process by which farm households build a portfolio of different crops, livestock, and off-farm activities to reduce risk and increase income stability (Ellis, 1998, 35). Applied to coffee production, diversification means that coffee farmers introduce complementary crops (such as bananas, cocoa, or food staples) or non-farm activities to reduce dependency on coffee as a single income. Poulton, Dorward, and Kydd (2010, 38) express diversification as “a strategic adjustment in farming systems where households expand the range of their economic activities in order to manage market fluctuations, climate variability, and livelihood vulnerability.” In the context of coffee, diversification may include intercropping, integrating value-added processing, or engaging in alternative income-generating ventures alongside coffee cultivation. The goal is always to have a variety of investments so that underperformance can be made up in other areas. In Bui, diversification was a strategy adopted by coffee farmers to minimise shocks and remain relevant in the production (Tangwa, 2024, interview). Farmers had skills and knowledge on agricultural diversification and in order to continue increasing and sustaining coffee production they got involved in the production of beans, maize, banana, colanut, groundnut and livestock. Money obtained from these sectors was ploughed back in coffee farming through the buying of farming tools, fertilisers and chemicals (Tangwa 2024). Relying on coffee alone especially after the 1990s liberalisation, could not give farmers the desired income but with diversification, they were able to make earnings meet (Mbom, Ngong, Nkambi, 2024, interview). This helped in sustaining the coffee sector and enabled them to stay in production. In this regard, the survival of coffee production in the community was not a chanced situation but a well calculated strategy. In Mbiame for instance, almost all those who engaged actively in the production of coffee were as well engaged in other farming activities so as to empower the coffee sector (Leinyuy, 2024, interview).

Certain circumstances greatly worked in favour of diversification. Coffee farmers became insecure with the seasonal duration to obtain yields given that it took four years before the coffee trees could start

producing. In addition, coffee was sensitive to changing weather conditions and diseases. The value of coffee depended on the global market price fluctuations. Therefore finding additional sources of income to empower coffee farmers was a way to spread risks and sustain coffee production. Diversification focused on food security which helped the smallholder farmers to stop depending on coffee only as source of household income to feed their families. In Bui, farmers who continued in the coffee sector were able to produce and market maize, groundnuts, yams beans as well as livestock to invest in the production of coffee. In Djottin, the farmers cultivated vegetables and bananas for domestic consumption and market oriented imperatives. Evidently the quality of food in the household also improved because the farmers were able to cultivate vegetables in their gardens. Diversification thus reduced over dependency on coffee and increased household income through the sale of other agricultural products (Ndikwa, 2024, interview).

5. INFLUENCE OF LOCAL COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES

Away from diversification, the development of coffee cooperative produce marketing societies encouraged the resilience and sustainability of coffee production in Bui. The Oku Area Cooperative Union (OACU) stands as one of the forces which gave support to the coffee farmers after the hard times caused by the global economic crisis and economic liberalisation. The subsidiary cooperative societies made sure that farmer's products were transported to the union using their vehicles. Coffee in the various sub-unions was carried to the main office for final processing. The OACU equally gave powers to the various subsidiary cooperatives to collect and weigh coffee. The percentage paid to farmers was often based on the number of units and the quality of coffee produced (Ngum, 2024, interview). In the Noni Area Cooperative Union (NACU), there was a section charged with the task of separating the coffee into various grades. This was to ensure that coffee sent out to the market was of good quality (Mbu, 2024, interview). Talking about quality, Ngum Mathias testifies that:

I was incharge of making sure that the coffee was of good grade from 2007-2011. The selection and classification of the product was my responsibility and those who brought in more bags to the union were rewarded with equipment like pulping machines. This was a way of motivation and encouragement. The farmers became determined and their determination led to the sustainability of coffee production in the area (Ngum, 2024).

The desire to maintain quality had a double edged significance as it also helped to sustain the activity. For coffee production to stay on, attention was given to the quality of seedlings. The various cooperatives including the Oku Area Cooperative Union, Noni Area Cooperative Union and the Nso Area Cooperative Union in Bui nursed and sold seedlings to farmers at very reasonable prices. This was one of the greatest sources of finance to the cooperatives. Coffee farmers in Bui believed that seedlings nursed at the union were healthier and did extremely well when transplanted. One of the farmers testified thus, "I bought all my seedlings from OACU before I engaged in coffee farming. These seeds did extremely well considering that they were nursed by technicians." (Njia, 2024, interview). This gesture encouraged farmers in Bui and helped most of them to stay in the production of coffee. Coffee farmers came to understand that cooperatives were a means of bringing them together to overturn their challenges. On this stand point farmers considered the union to be a kind of solidarity group (Bang, 2024, interview).

Cooperatives acted as a forum where farmers met and shared experiences. Meetings were regularly organised for vital farming issues to be discussed. This forum was mostly exploited by the Union leaders who were trained Agronomists. They offered lessons and visited farmers on sites so as to introduce them to new farming techniques. (Nkenen, 2024, interview). Farmers were educated on updated methods in coffee production that could enhance yields. They were taught how to nurse coffee seedlings and how to transplant. The farmers were educated by experts who were sometimes invited by the executive members of the NACU for a joint exchange of techniques. Farmers were advised to follow the normal work schedule that entailed tilling, weeding, pruning and also application of fertilisers.

They were equally guided on the stages of coffee processing (Nkenen, 2024). Union workers also sensitised the coffee farmers on the need to engage massively in the production of coffee as a means of alleviating poverty and increasing their standard of living. This was due to the fact that some of the farmers were not ready to cultivate only coffee on their farms. Food crops, raffia palms and banana were interposed on the coffee farms which affected the quality of coffee produced. The farmers were

alerted on the need to choose a single piece of land for coffee to be cultivated. Also, it was discovered that farmers did not take good care of their farms after coffee was planted. This concern was re-articulated by one of the employees of NACU who disclosed that:

Coffee farmers needed sensitisation due to the fact that they were adamant to change. Women totally despised the cultivation of coffee in favor of the cultivation of food crops. The women were always angry when their husbands used some of their farms to plant coffee. To them it was a waste of resources since the coffee cultivated was not consumed immediately at home. Another reason for their resentment was that coffee was only harvested after a number of years. These women therefore preferred the land to be used for the cultivation of food crops that could be harvested more than once annually for home consumption, (Mbie, 2023, interview).

Given this opposing and disturbing context, NACU as early as the 1990s launched an awareness program to sensitise especially women on the need and importance to sustain coffee production while carrying on domestic local trade in arable crops. This move reversed the scare narrative and eventually increased women's implication in the production of coffee, (Mbie, 2023). With the sensitisation campaigns, women were encouraged to engage massively in coffee activities. This shift in attitude significantly contributed to the resilience experienced in coffee production.

6. CULTURAL FACTOR OF RESILIENCE CONSTRUCTION

Cultural rootedness cannot be overlooked when discussing resilience in coffee farming in Bui Division. Culture and economic activity are deeply interconnected. Cultural values, beliefs, and traditions shape how communities engage in production, trade, and consumption. For example, cultural norms influence farming practices, choice of crops, community-based cooperation in agricultural activities and inheritance. At the same time, economic activity reinforces culture by sustaining social practices such as communal labor, rituals tied to planting and harvest seasons, and the transmission of indigenous knowledge. Thus, culture not only guides the economic behavior of individuals and societies but also evolves through the dynamics of economic change (Polanyi, 1944, 21). In most communities in Bui Division coffee cultivation became an integral part of family life. Coffee was therefore seen as a community way of life and as part and parcel of social and economic wealth construction. A man's wealth was inextricably linked to the number of coffee farms he owned. Coffee farmers were considered wealthy and reliable to uphold future eventualities. A man could not be allowed to get married unless he showed proof of having at least a young coffee farm (Ndong, 2024, interview). The practice therefore became a culture and the people's life oscillated around this philosophy. Nshom corroborates this observation in the following words:

Coffee production in Oku was intractably linked to the people's culture. A man was considered and respected based on the number of coffee farms and as such it was the main indicator of maturity in the land. This activity was the main stay in the land that generated income to a number of farmers even though it took more than five years from planting to harvesting. It was therefore considered as a family activity and this explains why during the harvesting period just everybody was involved. Other economic activities were often halted in favour of coffee harvesting. The attention given to this activity made families to be attached to it not only for its economic value but also for its cultural symbolism. (Nshom, 2024, Interview).

This in essence means that coffee production in the various communities of Bui was more or less a way of life and heritage. Coffee farms were inherited and with this, the production line continued despite all the challenges faced in the process. In the same way, coffee was often the only investment left as property by a deceased for his children. It was therefore seen as a legacy that needed to be preserved by all cost. Given this importance, coffee production was at the heart of the community welfare. This explains why despite the difficulties faced in the production process, coffee farmers did not totally abandon the activity (Ndong, 2024). In Bow one of the production areas, coffee farmers revealed that they continued in the production of coffee not because it was lucrative but because it was the daily activity of the community. The life of the Bow village revolved around coffee farming and each family had at least a coffee farm behind the house or somewhere else. There was hardly a family in the community that was not involved in coffee production. The farming of coffee was the priority of every household and with this, families got engaged in its production whether lucrative or not. This process thus ensured the sustainability of coffee production in Bui (Ndong, 2024). After exploring the factors

within Bui that induced coffee farmers into resilience, attention will be directed to the external considerations that supported coffee production in the area.

7. COMPLEMENTARY EXOGENOUS FACTORS

Although coffee was a locally produced cash crop in Bui, its economic link was more tied to certain external structures and marketing actors. In this regard, the activities of the sector were greatly influenced by support mechanisms out of the Bui production belt. The sector specifically received technical and survival assistance from the government of Cameroon, various reports of facts finding missions and international non-governmental organisations like OLAM Cameroon.

8. GOVERNMENT SUPPORT MECHANISMS

The government of Cameroon in an effort to promote agriculture significantly contributed to the resilience and survival of the coffee economy in Bui Division of Cameroon. In 2015 the government of Cameroon through the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), and Scientific Research and Innovation (MINRESI) developed a new strategy for the coffee sector. It was aimed at motivating farmers to boost up production and to accelerate sustained development needed for poverty reduction (Demeke, 2007, 136). One of its key approaches was improving smallholder productivity and commercialisation of coffee with the help of cooperatives. This was given the general drop in production orchestrated by the drastic decline in coffee prices in the late 1980s and early 1990s due to the structural adjustment programs. The intense involvement of the government in the production of coffee especially before the economic liberalisation boosted the morale of coffee farmers to stay in production (Demeke, 2007). Before 1990, the government of Cameroon was determined in making sure that coffee production in was upheld to standard. Farmers received subsidised inputs like fertilisers and chemicals to ensure the sustainability of their farms. Extension services were provided to producing areas by state employed agricultural extension agents. These agents provided technical support at farm level to ensure good yields and quality. During this period, the marketing of coffee was done entirely by the state through the National Board for the Marketing of Basic Commodity.

This was enough to keep farmers in the production of coffee in the area. Farmers became comfortable in managing their farms since support from the government was consistent (Shende, 2021, 58). By so doing, coffee production survived as farmers remained busy in the production line. One of the farmers, Ezekiel Ndifon affirms this government support in the following words:

We the coffee farmers enjoyed great support from the government of Cameroon. Fertilisers and other inputs were constantly provided through the cooperatives to the farmers. This helped us to maintain our production prowess and to remain in business. Many farmers who could not afford insecticides and pesticides for their farms benefitted from these government gestures through the Ministry of Agriculture. Farming tools like cutlasses, spades, and pruning machines were as well provided to the farmers to enable them maintain their farms for great harvest (Ndifon, 2024, interview).

Supporting the foregoing submission, Elad holds that after independence, the government of Cameroon was aware of the important role of agriculture in the national economy. As a result, some conscious efforts were constantly made to promote and revitalise agricultural production and enable farmers to keep on with production. With coffee being the main export crop, some extra attention was accorded by the state for its operation (Elad, 2011, 45). The Ministry of Agriculture was generally concerned with agricultural developments in the country. Through its devolved structure, the North West Regional Delegation of Agriculture brought assistance to the coffee farmer. In the RegProvincial/Regional Delegation of Agriculture, there was a phytosanitary unit charged with plant protection (Elad, 46). This service had a team of trained personnel that went round the coffee farms to spray them against diseases and pests. The phytosanitary unit had extensions called brigades at the Divisional levels. Members of this brigade could be quickly contacted by coffee farmers in the event of an outbreak of pests and diseases. Their activities were vital for the resilience in coffee production in Bui as farmers were assured of the constant support of the brigade team in helping them to fight against diseases (Shende, 54). This kept them active in the various production zones. Supporting this view Bang Timothy holds that:

Coffee production could survive in Oku-Bui Division due to constant government support of the farmers. Farmers were supported in all dimensions by the government. In Oku this assistance to

farmers was received and distributed by the Oku Area Cooperative Union to farmers who were determined to uphold coffee production. This assistance continued till the 1990s when the cash crop economy was liberalised. The withdrawal of state subsidies had a toll on the farmers but they struggled on to stay in production, (Bang, 2025, interview).

The total number of hectares of coffee sprayed in the Cameroon Grassland against the coffee berry disease and the bora insect for instance was a negligible fraction of the total number which suffered from the diseases and pest. Many coffee producing areas were inaccessible by cars. Members of the Phytosanitary could not reach such inaccessible areas. During the 1977/78 fiscal year, the government initiated a young farmer's scheme for farmers in the North West Province. This was done under the supervision of the Provincial Delegation of Agriculture. Under the Scheme, young school leavers were trained on farm work by the government. They were then resettled on their own land through a combined grant and loan scheme totaling 360.000 Francs CFA. Of this sum, 160.000 francs was a non-refundable grant while 200.000 Francs CFA constituted a loan to be refunded by the young farmers.

A young farmer was granted six years of grace after which the loan was again renewed for a period of six years. The loan was given partly in cash and partly in agricultural inputs like tools, seeds, fertilisers. In Oku some 500 young farmers benefitted from the scheme and this helped in sustaining the production of coffee in the locality, (Kendeme, 2025, Interview). Cooperative societies on their part were very instrumental in powering and sustaining coffee production in the localities of Bui. Taking the case of Oku, Sangtum testifies that the Oku Area cooperative Union (OACU) was operating under strict visions and objectives. Every member worked so hard to ensure the realisation of these objectives which was to ensure the continuous encouragement of farmers and to make sure that they stayed in production. They visited the various societies and major coffee farmers to ensure that their farms were sustainably managed (Sangtum, 2024, interview). In Noni, the inspection team from the Noni area cooperative constantly visited major production areas like Djottin, and Nkol to make sure that the farmers were effectively and efficiently applying the production principles. This partly explains why they could stay afloat long after the economic downturn.

Another support mechanism employed by the government to ensure the survival and sustainability of coffee production in the Cameroon Grassland in general and Bui Division in particular was the introduction and organisation of yearly agricultural fairs known as "Agric Shows".¹ The idea came from the concept of Green Revolution launched by the Cameroon Federal Government in 1973. Ndambi holds that Agro-pastoral shows were first experienced in West Cameroon, before being adopted nationwide. West Cameroon adopted Agro-pastoral shows as a means to promote food and cash crop sufficiency. This was in pursuance to the National Development Policy (Ndambi, 2022, 32). The slogan "grow more food" was thus launched by Burnley and his agricultural colleagues of West Cameroon. This worked so well that in the early 1970s, President Ahmadou Ahidjo, decided to use the shows to promote the production and commercialisation of cash crops notably coffee and cocoa. One of the main objectives of Agro-pastoral shows was to ensure that coffee farmers remain in the activity. During agricultural shows, cash prizes, wheel barrows, spades, fertilisers, insecticides, pesticides were given to the best farmers in different domains. Such motivations encouraged them to double efforts in the production of coffee and to stay in the activity in spite of the challenges (NAB, File No. DVA/J.2/2).

9. FACTS FINDING AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF EXPERTS

Besides government intervention, coffee production survived in Bui after the global slump thanks to the facts findings on the coffee economy in the North West by Latum, Jervis and Gablemann. Their reports unearthed the dangers facing the coffee sector. They alerted that if the dangers were not handled

¹ Agro-Pastoral shows in West Cameroon were events designed to stimulate agricultural development by providing a platform for farmers to learn from each other and showcase their products. It was also meant to incite innovation by encouraging farmers to adopt new practices and technologies to improve their yields. In addition, it was meant to inform and educate farmers to share knowledge and best practices by promoting interaction amongst them, policymakers and other stakeholders.

² The Green Revolution launched in Cameroon in 1973 aimed at boosting agricultural development and socio-economic growth but was ultimately affected by the economic crunch in 1986. However, it contributed to Cameroon's planned development program despite its limitations.

then coffee production was going to go extinct. The reports created awareness of the general coffee situation in the North West Region. Jervis in 1958 investigated the stakes of coffee production and prospects to revamp the sector for sustainability. The report unveiled a number of challenges facing the coffee sector and the possible way forward. His Report showed the growing interest that government had in the coffee industry in Bamenda after World War Two. Jervis, an adviser on coffee was commissioned to investigate problems confronting the coffee industry in Bamenda and to make recommendations for sustainability. He had acquired some experience in coffee growing in East Africa and it was hoped that his recommendations could be quite professional (Kengo, 2007, 63) in sustaining the coffee activity. After studying the coffee industry in Bamenda, Jervis made a number of observations. Firstly, he observed that poor cultural practices were a hindrance to the growth of the industry. He noted that low productivity of coffee trees emanated from bent and twisted tap roots due to the fact that coffee was mostly planted in holes much too small to help the plant develop to maturity. Such trees, he added, were also loosely planted. Farmers were to be sensitised on the mechanism to be employed in the sustainable production of coffee for posterity.

The Report also stressed the issue of poor communication network as still constituting a serious menace to many farmers. He further noted that as a result of transportation difficulties, many young men in the area who would have been good coffee farmers preferred to move to the coast for better economic opportunities (NAB, File No.NN,Qc/g/10,T.S Jervis, "A Guide to Coffee Cultivation in the Bamenda Province, 1958").

Based on Jervis' observations, a number of suggestions were made to sustain the coffee sector. The Report recommended that the coffee farmers should be educated on better planting methods, shades and soil conservation. It also suggested that men should be responsible for coffee tending rather than women so that the womenfolk could concentrate on food crop cultivation. It also proposed that Arabica coffee should be planted in areas 4000-6500 feet above sea level and that where it had already been planted in lower unsuitable levels, it should be allowed to die off. On the species grown, the report recommended the encouragement of robusta coffee on the reasoning that it was better suited to peasant production, more resistant to disease, and better suited to the lower areas (altitudes) than Arabica coffee. These recommendations were a way to boost the production capacity of farmers in the North West Province as a whole and to ensure its sustainability (NAB,File No.NN,Qc/g/10,1958).

Another report which provided useful insights to sustain coffee production in Bui was that of Lantum. Lantum was the Assistant Registrar of Cooperative Societies for the Bamenda Area. His memorandum was focused on the improvement of quality through improved cultural practices, so as to attract a better price in the world market. Lantum noted that most farmers were still ignorant of the proper methods to prune their coffee, when to do so, the types of fertilisers to use on their coffee crops, and when and how to apply the fertilisers. According to him, the farmers were also ignorant of the various Arabica coffee diseases/pests and how they could effectively be dealt with. The farmers were not also conscious of the necessity for constant tillage of the soil and the need for suitable types of shade trees for the young coffee plants (Kengo, 65).

After critically examining those problems which he considered as the main cause of the decline of the coffee industry in West Cameroon with special reference to Bamenda, he offered a number of suggestions for the improvement of the industry. Lantum's memorandum shared and reinforced Jervis' observations in two principal ways; firstly, he strongly recommended that the Marketing Board should allocate enough funds for a "Save the Industry Campaign". Secondly, he recommended the recruitment of a dynamic coffee specialist officer for a two-year term and to be attached to the Ministry of Agriculture to undertake the following; (i) Establish coffee demonstration plots at strategic areas. (ii) Take responsibility for control of plant pests and diseases (iii) Recruit and train workers, including those from local authorities, in order to achieve (i) and (ii) above regarding information to the farmers, he suggested that pamphlets, handbills could be provided en masse for public circulation (Kengo, 67). These recommendations, although general, guided farmers in Bui to save the coffee activity that had been seriously affected by the global economic slump.

10. INTERNATIONAL MARKETING AGENCY, OLAMCAM AND THE SHAPING OF RESILIENCE

The role of OLAMCAM cannot be under looked when discussing factors for resilience in coffee production in Bui Division. OLAMCAM was an agric-business multinational established in 1995. It

was one of the top three largest suppliers of green coffee by market share in global trade with Bui Division offering a significant share. It was and is still one of the leading suppliers of coffee, serving all major consumption markets through its marketing, logistics, risk management, and future trading capabilities. OLAMCAM Coffee owned and operated sourcing network and mills across coffee areas. Its emphasis was quality improvement, aiming to improve the livelihood of farmers. This organisation acted as a company in Cameroon with the main objective to revamp the agricultural sector. Its main focus was on production, processing and exportation of various agricultural products notably coffee and cocoa which were the main export crops of Cameroon. After the liberalisation of the 1990s, OLAMCAM became the organisation assisting coffee farmers in Cameroon and Bui Division in particular. This assistance helped coffee farmers who had surrendered because of the negative impact of liberalisation to continue in production. This organisation helped in pumping capital into coffee sector through assistance in the form of tools, chemicals and pre-harvest financing. This measure was vital in ensuring the maintenance of coffee farms (Fonyuy, 2024, interview).

Again, OLAMCAM bought coffee directly from local farmers in Bui, providing them with a reliable market for their products. In this view, Sangtum holds that OLAMCAM alone provided almost all solutions to the problems of coffee farmers through its regular buying, and encouragement to coffee farmers (Sangtum, 2024). This organisation worked effectively in collaboration with the National Cocoa and Coffee Board, an autonomous government institution under the technical supervision of the Ministry of Trade charged with the marketing of Coffee in Cameroon. Even though working together, the most active exporter of coffee in Cameroon remained OLAMCAM. With the readiness to export coffee, the Bui Coffee farmers benefitted and could continue with the production of coffee despite the difficult moments caused by the economic crises and liberalisation.

The organisation in a way to sustain coffee farming in the various production zones distributed spades, wheelbarrows, watering cans, chemicals, fertilisers as well as donated cash. This encouraged the farmers and made them to stay in production (MINADER, 2009). In the North West Region of Cameroon OLAMCAM executed a project on the sustainability of Arabica coffee and prior to that, carried out a baseline study of Arabica coffee situation in the region.

This research project was aimed at deepening the baseline study by focusing on small-scale coffee farmers of the region to investigate the reasons responsible for the low yields and decline in quality of Arabica coffee and how this could be sustainably improved under the liberalised market environment. This study focused in from Santa, Boyo, Mezam and Bui helped farmers to rediscover some of the baseline challenges. This alone enabled the sustainability of coffee farms in the region (Ndikwa, 2024). OLAMCAM did remarkably well to ensure that coffee farmers stayed in the production of coffee. It offered assurance of a ready market for their produce, quality determination and supported rural farmers in maintaining their farms. It is in this context that Baba holds that:

Coffee production survived in Bui Division as from 1990s thanks especially to the influence of OLAMCAM. Being the only reliable buyer of coffee of the Produce Marketing Board, it ensured that the coffee produced by farmers was marketed to the interest of the farmers. This organisation did not only ensure the commercialisation of coffee but offered training opportunities to farmers and provided farming equipment to them, (Baba, 2024, interview).

The foregoing testimony is a pointer to the attention given by external stakeholders to salvaging the crisis experienced by coffee farmers in Bui. It also shows the extent to which coffee in spite of its declining value command relevance in the global commercial circuit.

11. CONCLUSION

The study examines the changing fortunes but stability of the coffee production activity in Bui, one of the principal production belts in the North West Region of Cameroon. It argued that a combination of internal and external factors contributed to the sustenance of coffee production in spite of the tethering challenges. It maintained that internal support mechanisms and circumstances like conscious diversification, implication of local cooperative societies, and cultural construction around the coffee factor contributed to keeping farmers affected by the drop in the value of coffee to stay in production.

The investigation also revealed that certain external factors notably government actions, interest and intervention of international marketing agencies like OLAMCAM as well as the scientific reports of

coffee experts served as vital complementary strategies to sustain coffee production in Bui in the context of crisis. This study exposes the importance of resilience in cushioning structural shocks. It brings to the limelight public-private initiatives in fostering long-term socio-economic resilience in communities facing economic and environmental challenges.

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