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Target women farmers' structural disadvantages to improve rural productivity and food security in Cameroon

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Key messages

Targeting women's structural disadvantages can reduce the gender productivity gap among smallholders in Cameroon. Specific actions include:

- Reducing the cost of fertilizer
- Improving access to cultivated land
- Improving the level of education and farming experience

A lack of resources hinders women smallholders' productivity

Despite Cameroon's agricultural sector being dominated by women smallholders—who are responsible for 80% of food production and 60% of cash crop production—women's access to productive resources is limited and thus they are less productive than men (FAO, 2011). Closing the gender gap is also vital for improving food security, with food insecurity being a largely rural concern in Cameroon.

To help address this gender productivity gap and sustainably improve the crop yield, the government introduced a variety of policies to promote gender equality in agriculture, starting in 2010. These include policies to increase women's access to productive resources. However, the gender gap persists across income levels, plot headships, and agroecological zones¹.

Furthermore, female farmers are not a homogeneous group and face a range of different constraints. Women farmers are often disadvantaged in terms of access to land (land size and soil richness), crop choice, tenure security, livestock, education, extension services, legal and social traditions, etc. (Vitalis Pemunta, 2017).

PEP project

From 2019 to 2020, a team of local PEP researchers and government officials undertook a coproduced research project to identify and evaluate policies aiming to reduce the gender productivity gap in Cameroon's agricultural sector.

The project had two parts:

1. A scientific analysis to identify which factors contribute the most to the gender disparities among smallholders. See page 4.
2. A policy paper analysis to compare potential policy options that can address the factors identified in the scientific analysis.



Policy options

Three policy instruments are available to Cameroonian decision-makers to reduce the gender gap in agricultural productivity among small-scale farmers².

1. Subsidize fertilizer.
 - The high price of fertilizer is a barrier for women smallholders¹. So a policy instrument to reduce the cost of fertilizer may increase women's fertilizer use and, consequently, their productivity.
2. Improve the level of education and increase the farming experience of female farmers.
 - Fewer years of education among women smallholders contributes to the gender productivity gap¹.
 - Creating farmer field schools (FFS) and/or developing rural advisory services may help women farmers overcome this hurdle.
3. Improve access to cultivated land and improve the plot management
 - The size of plots and cultivated areas are factors contributing to women farmers' structural disadvantages¹.
 - Expanding the cultivated land area and allocating land to women will help improve land tenure security and address women's disadvantage in this respect.
 - Improving plot management e.g. planting one crop on the plot may help women farmers to sustain fertilizer use.

Key findings²

Policy Instruments	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Fertilizer subsidy	1. Lower cost than the other options 2. Fertilizer is financially accessible to women farmers 3. Equitable	No disadvantages found
2. Education & farming experience provision	1. Improves farmers' knowledge and skills e.g. with respect to fertilizer use 2. Empowers disadvantaged farmers	1. Some farmers remain excluded due to restrictive targeting criteria or procedures; 2. Some women farmers may not participate due to gender, cultural norms or poverty.
3. Expansion of agricultural land & improved plot management	1. Reduces the gender land gap, providing more opportunities for fertilizer use 2. Improves land tenure security	1. Most expensive of the policy instruments considered here.

Source: Authors' analysis

- 1. A subsidy to reduce the price of fertilizer can significantly reduce the gender productivity gap among smallholder farmers in Cameroon.**
 - As all farmers and regions have similar incentives to participate, improving fertilizer use is equitable.
 - A cost-benefit analysis indicates that subsidizing fertilizer is attractive to policymakers because costs associated are the lowest of the options considered here.
- 2. Improving land access and management by expanding the cultivated land area reduces male-female differences in agricultural productivity.**
 - Expanding the cultivated land area and promoting better plot management may help identify critical gender land gaps, increase non-gender-biased land access, increase crop productivity, enhance rural income, and promote food security.
 - This is the second least-expensive option.
- 3. Increasing farmers' education levels and farming experience—through FFS and developing rural advisory services—empowers disadvantaged farmers**
 - A disadvantaged group, i.e. women farmers, may become more empowered and hence the gender productivity gap could be reduced.
 - The costs associated with this option are the highest.
 - Addressing the gender disparities in agricultural productivity through this option may be challenging due to cultural factors among others.

Overall, reducing the price of fertilizer would be the best policy option to reduce the gender bias in agricultural productivity.

Policy road map

Political will and stakeholders involvement are necessary for the implementation of the policy option linked to reductions in the cost of fertilizer. Practical steps specific to its implementation are the following:

1. Definition of criteria to select the beneficiaries:

- Previous agricultural input subsidy programmes in Cameroon focused on small-scale farmers but did not specify which type of women farmers to target.
- To achieve greater gender equality e.g. less women farmers' discrimination, the beneficiaries could be: (i) female-headed, (ii) unmarried female-headed (i.e. women farmers who are the sole heads of their plots because of being single, separated, divorced or widowed), (iii) female-managed, and (iv) female-owned plots.

2. Identification of target groups and communities:

- To obtain effective and equitable outcomes, the Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development in collaboration with other ministries e.g. Ministry of Women & Family and the Ministry of Social Affairs should propose the type(s) of women farmers to be prioritized.

3. Impact assessment on the state budget:

- The government should assess the costs generated by the reduction in the price of fertilizer for the farmers since the price difference will be paid for by the national government.

4. Provision of a legal framework for the implementation:

- The Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development, the Ministry of Women & Family and the Ministry of Social Affairs must work together to propose a law to reduce the price of fertilizer for the farmers.
- The National Assembly as well as the Senate should adopt the law to reduce the price of fertilizer for the farmers.





The Scientific Analysis

A team of local PEP researchers investigated the gender productivity gap among smallholder farmers in Cameroon.

Using survey plot-level data from the Cameroonian Institute of Research for Agricultural Development – IRAD, the decomposition à la Oaxaca-Blinder indicates that:

- The gender gap differs according to the definition of plot headship and agroecological region.
- Women's structural disadvantages are the main factors contributing to this gap.
- The cost of fertilizer, level of education, agricultural tools, maincropping (i.e. growing one crop on the plot), and ethnicity are the main drivers of this disadvantage.

A decomposition along the productivity distribution indicates that increasing access to inputs such as fertilizer and irrigation has a higher pay off among the poorest and wealthiest farmers.

The team produced two Working papers: '*The gender gap in smallholder agricultural productivity: the case of Cameroon*' and '*Exploring the spatial gender gap in smallholder agricultural productivity in Cameroon*'. To find out more about the research methods and findings, read the full research papers, published as part of the [PEP working paper series](#).

References

- 1 - Authors' scientific analysis
 - 2 - Authors' policy paper analysis. For all plot heads, the gender gap is driven by structural factors with women's structural disadvantage exceeding men's structural advantage. Discrimination of women farmers is highest within plot heads (250.4% of the gap) and lowest on unmarried plot heads (-87% of the gap).
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This brief summarises policy analysis outcomes from the project [PMMA-20386](#). To find out more about the scientific research methods and findings, read the full research paper, published as part of the [PEP working paper series](#).

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