

## **TRAINING IN PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT**

### **The Case of Agricultural Family Schools in Rural Cameroon**

FRANCIS MENJO BAYE and FONTEH ATHANASIOUS AMUNGWA\*

**Abstract.** How to encourage young people to engage in farming activities and to progressively replace the ageing farmer population is a policy issue in Cameroon. In this context, the paper recognizes the unemployment problem of school leavers and sets out to show that the propagation of Agricultural Family Schools (AFS), which are vocational establishments training youths in agriculture, using the classroom and on farm approach in Cameroon, is an important vector of rural development. To guide the discussion, a framework is presented which advances the view that moving away from pure state paternalism and harshness of market processes, to a system that promotes partnerships between the state, private sector, NGOs, civil society, the donor community and the rural communities, in the training of youths in agriculture is required to improve the asset levels and autonomy of the rural poor. The temptation of regarding the AFS system as a panacea for unemployment and poverty reduction is resisted, however, as the need to strengthen other infrastructures and support services are required. The main recommendation points to the need to evaluate AFS within the general strategy put in place for poverty reduction in the country and to consider its eligibility to resources emanating from the HIPC initiative.

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The importance of education/training in rural development is well articulated in the literature (Haddad, 1990; Hinzen, 2000). Yet, in many societies, both youths and adults generally do not have access to the skills and knowledge

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\*The authors are Assistant Professor at Faculty of Economics and Management, University of Yaoundé II, PO Box 1365, Yaoundé, Cameroon (Email: bayemenjo@yahoo.com) and Coordination Nationale des Ecoles Familiales Agricoles du Cameroun (Email: iccd@camnet.cm), respectively.

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necessary for gainful employment and full participation in the processes of social and economic development. Without meaningfully educating the rural youth, the internationally agreed targets for poverty reduction will remain a slogan, and inequalities between and within countries could be exacerbated.<sup>1</sup> It is the key to sustainable development, peace and stability within and among countries and thus an indispensable means for effective interaction with other societies and economies in this era of rapid globalization. Moreover, education is a fundamental human right.

One of the key concerns of many African countries in this era of globalization is how their educational systems could effectively achieve socio-economic goals. Two main educational questions seem to pre-occupy most African countries and to which workable solutions are still actively being sought. These are problems of unemployment (of the educated) and social decadence. Immediately after independence, educational changes and reforms in most countries involved adaptation of the inherited colonial education system. While this implantation was quite relevant then, it subsequently became necessary to change the strategy. A lack of fit/relevance between what is taught in schools and what is needed in the job market seems to aggravate the problem. To create alternative/parallel structures to formal education with a view to closing the gap which exists between school life and life in the larger society; a radical transformation of the school system and its curricula to replace or complement the inherited structures is among the concerns of many progressive policy makers in developing countries.

Mobilizing youth for active participation in Agricultural Development is one of the ways in which the National Coordination of Agricultural Family Schools in collaboration with local community associations is attempting to meet the challenge of training and employment in Cameroon. As indicated later in this paper, Agricultural Family Schools (AFS) are vocational training establishments created and run by parent associations for promoting the training of young people in agriculture using the *dual education* system. The Agricultural Family School effort is geared at developing a programme relevant to the local needs, and producing young and energetic persons with adequate skills. Such a system is perceived as an alternative-cum-companion to further education and training of primary school leavers to imbue them with a realistic sense of commitment and active involvement in farming and

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<sup>1</sup>Supported by its development partners, Cameroonian authorities programme to reduce poverty by 50% by the year 2015.

the development of rural areas. It is our contention that youth training in Agricultural Family Schools is a field full of promise in Cameroon and perhaps other African countries. Yet, these efforts may only be sustainable if an honest partnership is established between the state, the private sector, the civil society and the rural communities.

The main objective of the paper is to show that the propagation of the Agricultural Family School system in Cameroon is an important vector of rural development. The specific objectives are:

1. To suggest a framework for discussing an alternative-cum-companion to the formal education/training system that is more rural development oriented;
2. To examine the unemployment problem of school leavers in Cameroon;
3. To submit a rationale for the training of youths in agriculture;
4. To review and examine the principles guiding the Agricultural Family School system; and
5. To outline some policy recommendations on the basis of the analysis.

These objectives are motivated by the view that moving away from pure state paternalism, as well as the harshness of market processes, to rely more (although not exclusively) on rural self-governing associations and community involvement should be the right path to follow with a view to improving the asset levels and autonomy of the rural poor.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our study is situated within a framework that recognizes government failures and market failures in the past, while proposing an alternative system, which encompasses all partners in agricultural and rural development efforts.<sup>2</sup>

Cameroon has experienced both periods of state intervention and liberalization of economic activities. We recognize that government intervention in the economy can be justified on economic grounds by market failure. For instance, stabilizing the business cycle, deciding on the amount of public goods, responding to externalities, correcting informational

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<sup>2</sup>For a motivation of this framework arguing in favour of public sector-private sector-civil society partnership, see Baye *et al.* (2001).

problems, preventing the abuse of market power, and creating a socially desirable distribution of both income and merit goods, are all economic grounds for a government's role in the economy in general and rural development in particular.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Cameroon government pursued its rural development policies through heavily subsidized projects that were charged with participating in production, supporting and advising other agricultural institutions and farmers in their areas of operation. Most of these government-supported institutions were responsible for marketing of produce, provision of farm inputs, and extension and education services to farmers. After initially performing well, these structures, because of mismanagement, became costly and inefficient providers of services to small farmers. Like other public enterprises, they became sources of jobs for political purposes. With liberalization of trading in inputs and export agriculture in 1990s, the private sector substituted for the government in marketing, and elements of market failure were once more observed. In a bid to moderate outcomes, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) took the center-stage in the conduct of rural development issues.

In particular, following the economic crisis, which began in the mid 1980s, public finances decreased considerably, making it difficult for the government to pursue with vigour its rural development strategy. Even some of the achievements in rural areas in terms of infrastructure deteriorated because of lack of maintenance. Many of the rural development institutions put in place by the state collapsed, thereby aggravating the poverty of the people in the rural areas. The donor community started doubting the efficiency of public administration of rural development projects. Coupled with the absence of good governance and its attendant effects, foreign governments and donor agencies began to adopt a decentralized approach to development cooperation. As Bebbington *et al.* (1993) note, "donors, faced with the confidence crises and inefficiencies of their traditional governmental counterparts, now want to work with NGOs in programmes of poverty alleviation, .... and sustainable development." The proliferation of both international and local NGOs in Cameroon with the mission to ameliorate the living condition of the rural poor appears to be in line with this perception. With the present wave of globalization, liberalization of economic activities and the progressive state withdrawal from active involvement in aspects of

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<sup>3</sup>For a succinct discussion of these aspects of market failure, see Begg *et al.* (1991) and Yaron *et al.* (1998).

rural development, NGOs are perceived as a means of filling the gaps left by governments (Tafah and Asondoh, 2000).

However, development initiatives propelled solely by NGOs are likely to be risky and unsustainable because NGOs operate projects of short duration and at times funding is withdrawn when projects are still under execution. When this happens, the participating groups are deeply frustrated and their willingness to effectively collaborate with other NGOs is weakened. To ensure continuity and sustainability, formulating new institutions and promoting networking and partnerships among them is likely to be more appropriate than NGOs operating in isolation. Moreover, it is now possible for all partners in rural development to be interacting within a local development initiative. By partners in development here we mean, foreign governments, international financial institutions, foreign NGOs, the local government, local NGOs and the local community.

Since poverty prevails more in the rural areas in Cameroon (Fambon *et al.*, 2000), empowering the rural poor by building their assets through accumulation of human capital is critical to an effective poverty reduction programme. Indeed, improving the health and educational status of the rural poor will reduce their risk of falling ill, increase their working time and enhance their revenues. Yet, the health and educational sub-sectors are facing a myriad of problems including limited outreach, financial constraints and poor adaptation (Khan and Nounba, 2001).

Our conceptual framework has implications for the management and organization of rural development institutions. Government failures in policy design and implementation in this context are partly caused by information and transaction costs. A realignment of the management and organizational structure in favour of decentralization or devolution of influence to the local level can create important incentives by placing decision-making in the hands of those who have localized information that the central government lacks. In situations where the central decision making body lacks information on the type of post-primary training compatible with appropriate rural development strategies, while similar informational problems plague the private sector and the role of the local NGOs is thwarted because of risk and the rent-seeking attitude of some of their founders; a local community organization has the potential to provide more efficient coordination than either the state, market or NGO operating in isolation. Such an organization needs stable membership and well-developed mechanisms for transmitting information and establishing norms among the members.

As noted by Bardham (1996), however, we would like to resist the temptation to romanticize the value of the local community as a social and economic institution, as is common among many environmentalists, NGO activists and other anti-state, anti-market social thinkers. It is important to keep in mind that in situations of severe social and economic inequality at the local level, decentralization or devolution of influence can be very inadequate in helping the poor. The local landlords or politicians may easily capture the local community institutions and subject the poor to their own purposes. Such a situation may be more difficult at the national level as the locally influential groups of the different regions tend to neutralize one another.

The paper investigates an alternative system to conventional schooling, which is supported mainly by the government or private sector. The framework proposed attempts to bring together NGOs, rural communities, the government, the private sector and the donor community in the training of youth in agriculture. It is our contention that the Agricultural Family Schools system, which is gradually taking root in some rural areas in Cameroon, provides a bright future for agricultural development in the country. Indeed, in Cameroon, both farms and farmers are ageing. For instance, the average age of cocoa and coffee farms is about 35 years and that of farmers is about 60 years in the country (Baye and Fambon, 2001). To correct this dismal outlook, the answer may lie with the Agricultural Family School (AFS) system, which offers a three-year vocational training programme in agriculture to young primary school leavers aged 13 and over. At the core of the programme is its emphasis upon classroom instruction, on-site learning and supervised activities on the trainees' home farms.

### **III. THE UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM OF SCHOOL LEAVERS**

The school leaver problems are intractable and it is improbable that they will yield to any single solution or formula for action in Cameroon. In any serious discussion about the unemployment problem in the country, one would find people blaming the schools, in terms of their number and the type of leavers they produce, for the phenomenon of the unemployed youths. A lack of fit or relevance between what is taught in schools and what is needed in the job market seems to aggravate the problem. There is general anxiety concerning the threat to social order that this is thought to imply. The increasing level of poverty in rural communities induces many young people to migrate to cities and large towns into a network of relatives and friends who initially support them against the worst hardships; but eventually they are exposed to under-

employment and unemployment. It is then that some may systematically pose a social problem, as they get involved in crime and anti-social behaviour.

A critical analysis of the school leaver employment problem leads to the observation that the demand for further educational opportunities is on the increase, but employment in the labour market for given levels of education has been steadily decreasing. A rough picture of the school leaver in Cameroon is that of an individual, full of hope about the job prospects, but ending in acute disillusionment. Individuals may indeed adjust their expectations and a great deal of this undoubtedly takes place, but frustration and resentment on the part of the school leavers who cannot find employment remains. Government's education policy tends to positively encourage young people to seek as much formal education as they can; but the pricing system for labour and skill in the economy, with huge differentials between those who have the "big" jobs and those who do not, create and maintain a large pool of unproductive job seekers. Disappointment, anxiety and misery are the lot of many educated unemployed people. This creates a great deal of unnecessary tension and frustration for individuals. It represents a serious social waste bearing in mind the private and public investments made in the schooling of those involved.

It is not self-evident that leaving school in itself creates a problem, for there is nothing unnatural about school leaving. The "problem" arises when school leavers have insufficient opportunities to use their capacities in productive work, or to develop these capacities further. The average young person fresh from primary school lacks practical experience of the world, which comes from assuming responsibility for one's own social relationships and one's own life and from engaging in earning a living. The late teens are the stage at which young people gradually emerge from acting a dependent role to becoming independent. In this transitional period some young people may begin to assume roles in the family left vacant by the death or illness of a parent; they may inherit property or responsibilities in the family farm.

Youths do not acquire the skills and status of adults, or independence in the economic and social sense, overnight. The transition from dependence on parents to independence will often take time and will usually involve embarking upon a course of further education, training or apprenticeship. Because the job market in the country is restricted and movement between jobs extremely limited, a critical examination of more than one occupation may be necessary in determining one's career path and eventual success. The

school leaver problem must not be dissociated from the social context. The young person leaving primary school requires a period of time for further training before being finally established and accepted as a full member of the adult community with a steady occupation, a home and a spouse.

The type of school may affect the way that youths establish their social identity and assume adult roles and status. Agricultural Family Schools are geared towards curbing the mobility and recklessness of young people by turning out trained school leavers ready to earn their living and settle down, preferably in farming. Because the physical, social and economic aspects of the transition between childhood and adulthood are more gradual, it is more realistic to adopt a training system that promotes the gradual emergence of a disciplined and productive work force with entrepreneurial skills and organizational capacities for working on the land.

The content and *modus operandi* of the formal education system contribute to school leaver unemployment. Most of the schools tend to prepare the youths only for white-collar jobs (which are quite scarce) in towns and fail to teach them skills that could render them more useful in the rural economy. The schools overrate theory and devalue practice thereby restricting creative initiatives. The schooling system causes young people to develop an aversion for manual work and contempt for rural life. The solution lies in the establishment of better links between training and employment (Psacharopoulos, 1990). To ensure an adequate link between the supply of and demand for trained manpower, the school curriculum should be related realistically to employment prospects.

Some have argued that the employment problem of school leavers is transitory and that their expectations will become adjusted in line with the realities of the labour market (Callaway, 1976). Education and training can be reformed. This may involve re-examining:

- the quantitative aspects of formal schooling — the expenditure of resources for various types and level of education;
- the qualitative aspects — involving the relevance of the curriculum of the schools in preparing school leavers for meeting the realities of the labour market; and
- the significance of the many kinds of out-of-school education.

It is our contention that a more permanent solution to unemployment and rural poverty lies, at least in part, in carefully developing the Agricultural Family School system.



#### IV. THE AGRICULTURAL FAMILY SCHOOLS SYSTEM IN RURAL CAMEROON

##### DEFINITION OF AGRICULTURAL FAMILY SCHOOLS

In general, the basic aim of education is to facilitate and accelerate the integration of individuals to the national community so as to develop positions and attitudes favourable to change and technological progress. Agricultural Family Schools (AFS) are vocational training centers established by parents' associations for promoting the training of young people in agriculture, using the dual education system. This involves alternating classroom learning and on-the-job training in school, action-research in village communities and supervised activities on trainees' home farms to become skilled farm managers (agriculture entrepreneurs). The schools offer a three-year training programme to youths, aged 13 and above.

Agricultural Family Schools in Cameroon are an adaptation of the "*Maison Familiale Rurale*" system, which started in France in 1937 through the initiatives of a youngster, his father and their parish priest with respect to the need for training the youth to become good farmers without leaving the land. This led to the launching of a dual training system with practical work periods on the farm and training periods at school. This pattern of training has been successful in France, Spain, Latin America and the Philippines. France has about 500 such schools with over 38,000 youths by 1988 (*Centre National Pedagogique des Maisons Familiales Rurales*, 1989).

The initiative for promoting Agricultural Family Schools in Cameroon came from interactions between local stakeholders and the 'Institut European de Cooperation et Developpement' (IECD). A need for vocational training of youth with the correct work attitude to be involved in farming as a business was identified, leading to the opening in 1992, of an Agricultural Family School in *Esse* in the Centre Province. Such schools have been opened in other parts of the country including: *Eyen Meyong*, *Bafia* and *Ngong* in the Centre Province, *Biba I* and *Bikoka* in the South Province, *Yenga* and *Lomié* in the East Province and *Apouh* and *Lelem Mouantong* in the Littoral Province, through the efforts of parent associations in collaboration with the National Coordination of Agricultural Family Schools (CNEFAC, *French acronym*). There are prospects for opening more schools all over the country depending on the degree of dissemination of the innovation and its adaptation in the country. By their nature, such schools contribute towards reducing rural exodus, unemployment and poverty amongst the young post-primary school leavers who show interest in acquiring more knowledge and skills in agriculture.

Agricultural Family Schools are set up and run by Parent Associations and rely on contributions from members, funding from international agencies and donations from private local corporations and persons of goodwill. At present, no direct mechanisms are in place for systematic state subventions.

The National Coordination of Agricultural Family Schools provides pedagogical assistance in the Dual Vocational Training System. The idea is to raise the level of awareness and interest of young people and parents about the need for training and involvement in agriculture as a gainful rural enterprise.

Agricultural Family Schools are active in three fields:

**Family perspective:** It is the active association of families from respective rural communities, present and future parents, as well as local officials that give the schools a legal basis. Pedagogical objectives are based on family values and the active participation of the youths and their families. The schools strive to contribute towards the success of every youth who chooses to be training in the system, avoiding the temptation of extreme selectivity for obtaining better rates of success in examinations even though the quest for efficiency is a normal concern.

**Occupational perspective:** It is in the world of work that situations are analyzed and adolescents are trained without limiting them to see and do things only the way others do. On the contrary, they are invited to go beyond and do better. This is *self-enhancement* (Snygg and Coombs, 1959). Training implies making progress through experience rather than accumulating new knowledge on an everyday basis that remains static.

It is most important to get the youths to become more conscious about their social situation in order to strive by themselves to change it. In order to do this, it is necessary to promote dialogue with those who simply conform to tradition and routine. In other words, instead of thinking *for* the youths, they should be brought to contribute and have their *own* ideas (Duffaure, 1985; Chattier, 1986).

**Zone of action perspective:** Agricultural Family Schools currently lay emphasis on agriculture (crop and livestock production), but the general concern is for the rural areas as a whole. The schools have to be located in rural areas within easy access to the target population. The schools have respect for the community's values as these constitute a stimulant for development (Nové-Josserand, 1987).

Active community involvement is encouraged for the youths to become development leaders in their respective areas and eventually replace the ageing farmer population.

### **THE RAISON D'ÊTRE FOR TRAINING THE YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE**

The principal goal of Agricultural Family Schools is to help youths to acquire skills that will enable them to start farm businesses of their own or to find jobs in the agricultural sector. They seek to develop modern, work-oriented attitudes, self-reliance and a commitment to rural community development. The schools foster attitudes that will encourage young people to remain in rural areas after their training to create and run a farm.

In Cameroon, systematic agricultural education is not provided for primary school leavers. Surprisingly, it is not offered in public secondary education. The ministries of Agriculture and Livestock, Fishery and Animal Industries provide middle level training to secondary school leavers selected on the basis of entrance examinations. Higher education in agriculture is provided in one of the six state universities in the country. These partly explain the general lack of interest in agriculture manifested by young people. The orientation in secondary schools diverts the interests of students who, in their majority, come from rural backgrounds, to subjects other than plant and animal production.

Most Cameroonians, even if they were raised in a city, come from farming families and know a great deal about rural life and production systems, which support their rural relatives. Some of them know about farming and hunting in their own villages from their upbringing. A few have learnt agriculture in school. This number must be increased especially among the youth. Evidently, there is a knowledge gap between what we have learnt in school and what is known from our background and upbringing. The knowledge gap in agriculture must be filled in order to improve upon the generally low image erroneously attributed to the farming profession in the country.

The diffusion of innovations without genuine consideration of the priority needs of the local people and their realities could likely end up in failure. Social problems such as idleness, alcoholism, immorality, banditry and corruption, which prevail in most rural societies, have continuously received ineffective public attention and condemnation. Education in traditional African societies was largely informal and embedded various aspects of life, emphasized social values and a morality that befitted the

values. There were moral codes that guided behaviour and inter-personal relationships in all aspects of life with the purpose of bringing about harmony between the people and their environment.

Poor agricultural performance in Cameroon results, in part, from low application of modern and appropriate techniques, inefficient traditional land-use systems and inadequate access to improved farm inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and agro-chemicals. The modernization of agricultural activity for greater output presupposes the introduction of technical expertise, which differs from the traditional skills and habits of the farmers. This expertise is lacking, particularly so, because the farming population is ageing. In order to curb malnutrition, improve food security and rural incomes, the youth especially will need training and technical assistance to enable them start a life on land as farm managers. Special attention needs to be given to the problem of preparation of the youth for active participation in agricultural development through specific training. The creation of Agricultural Family Schools at rural community level with special programmes adapted to local needs and the various sections of the population have great potential for success in Cameroon.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROGRAMME**

The AFS programme typically combines some form of academic and technical education in situations that closely resemble the actual working conditions — often in farms that also contribute to the financial support of the schools, the trainees and their families. The programme seeks to integrate skills training and academic education with other elements of the society. In addition, the programme places a high priority on developing positive attitudes towards practical (manual) work and a commitment to self-reliant development. The model fosters individual effort and helps the students to do their work well as a means of personal improvement and of rendering service to society. Emphasis is placed on building the trainees' character, discipline and a sense of responsibility by inculcating in them the right attitude to work, *i.e.* human and moral rectitude. This is a distinguishing feature of the AFS system and it is pursued by tutoring/counselling. This work is done in close collaboration with the parents and the students.

Presently, the programme is oriented mainly towards agriculture but subsequently may involve the teaching of skills such as carpentry, motor mechanics, building construction and masonry. The programme for women lays emphasis on sewing and embroidery, in addition to providing instruction in home-oriented skills such as family care. The training scheme includes

some instruction in the official languages (English and French), Business Arithmetic, applied science, farm economics and general knowledge. The programme is developing ways to link non-vocational subjects such as civics, economics, geography, history and moral instruction with practical skills in agriculture. Such training is often remedial because some of the trainees here received inadequate instruction in primary school.

The activities of Agricultural Family Schools are carried out within the framework of delicate respect for religious belief, since such schools are open to students of all backgrounds without religious, cultural or ethnic discrimination.

### **TARGET AUDIENCE AND ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

The programme is designed for primary school leavers, generally holders of the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC)/"Certificat d'Etudes Primaires et Elementaires (CEPE)". Since the idea is to get young people interested in agriculture as a business, the programme requires that the participants have land on which to work. With agricultural Family Schools, the youth can acquire technical and professional skills in agriculture through systematically studying the art of farming and building on what they learnt from their parents. The training is designed for dynamic and ambitious young people who do not wish to leave the rural setting.

In three years, using a dual vocational training model which does not dislodge the students from their socio-cultural background, young people can learn about the principles of growing field crops and horticultural or market garden crops and livestock breeding with the use of simple farm implements for a start.

### **THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF AGRICULTURAL FAMILY SCHOOLS**

Agricultural Family Schools operate on four basic principles:

- a responsible development-oriented parents' association;
- personal development (all-round training) of the youth;
- a dual training system; and
- training for rural community development.

### **A Responsible Development-Oriented Parents' Association**

The first principle of Agricultural Family Schools is the existence of a responsible Parent Association which is assisted by other local and external elite of the community as well as philanthropic organizations interested in the socio-economic development of the area.

A review of the historical path of Agricultural Family Schools shows that the opening of such schools always starts with a meeting of parents who are worried about their children's education and the future of their country. Such awareness often serves as a motivating factor for the parents to organize themselves into a development-oriented association to promote the setting up of the school.

The General Assembly usually elects a Board of Directors that runs the School. General Assemblies, parents' meetings and Board meetings all create a busy life of association which is necessary for the good functioning of the dual training system. This makes it possible:

- for parents to play a pro-active role in their children's education;
- to encourage fruitful dialogue between adults and young people;
- to raise questions about social change and the future of the rural environment.

### **Personal Development (All-Round Students' Training)**

The training model encourages personal development to take place fully. It also helps the individual to become aware of the real problems arising in the environment, to analyze and understand them and to eventually question the situation in an effort to find solutions and bring about progress in the rural community. The training is personalized and geared to help students to freely and willingly make a right choice. Training activities are aimed at cultivating a sense of responsibility in the students so that they can make their own decisions with integrity.

The educational activity in the school is conceived as being carried out by delegation of the parents and in close cooperation with them; never substituting them in their educational role, however. The parents are the first educators of their children. The school collaborates with the parents in this basic responsibility. The education imparted is based on a set of principles that ensures adequate training to each student both at school and in the family.

### **A Dual Training System**

Agricultural Family Schools follow an educational model that has proven very appropriate in many parents-promoted educational institutions in the world (Duffaure, 1985). Training is by *alternation*. The rationale is that knowledge is not only acquired at school, especially in agricultural training where certain things can only be learnt in the field. *Alternation* is a way of sharing the training between work on the farm, usually the school's experimental farm, the family farm or the student's own farm and study time at school. *Alternation* also offers an advisory system that cares for the development and professional orientation of each student.

Field experiences in Cameroon and Cote-d'Ivoire favour the practice of spending two weeks at school and one week on the farm in *alternation* throughout the training period (Garcia *et al.*, 2001). This implies spending about 12 weeks of study and practice on the family farm and 24 weeks at school during the academic year. The alternation principle is a practical way that allows young people to pursue vocational training while working with their parents without disrupting their cultural roots.

### **Training for Rural Development**

Very few organizations have succeeded in developing comprehensive programmes suitable for rural development but many projects simply offer modern sector skills training in a rural setting. Too often the content, equipment and training techniques are imported with little adaptation to the rural context. Yet, if the AFS programme is to meet its goal of providing not only skills training but of preparing young people to meet the challenges of rural development, then planners must carefully assess the extent to which course contents, equipment and training system used influence the attitudes of the youth.

The increasing numbers of educated young people without jobs is creating a situation that appears not to be subject to a self-correcting process. Too great a migration of young people from the rural areas can jeopardize social cohesion. The towns cannot absorb everyone into meaningful employment. So long as rural areas remain economically and socially depressed, there will always be a powerful urge for people to migrate to areas (most often the town) where they expect to find better conditions. A choice has to be made between either encouraging the development of economic activity and supporting services in rural areas or of accepting the *status quo* and its inevitable consequence; a depopulated, ageing and predominantly female rural sector, agricultural production lagging ever

further behind national needs and ever swelling numbers of desperate urban poor.

Since most of the poor in Cameroon live in rural areas, key strategies for poverty alleviation on a sustainable basis, should aim at raising rural incomes. This necessarily involves measures to increase agricultural productivity, which will directly increase rural incomes. But we are faced with an economy, created without a full vision of the consequences, which is unable to offer wage employment in 'modern work' to a majority of the population. The school system, originally designed in order to fill clerical, administrative and social service positions, is still largely run or supervised, not by local communities but, essentially, by government. In this process, the older/traditional system by which parents and communities brought up their children to adult membership has been set aside and almost forgotten.

Mention can be made of the growing difficulty of meeting the cost of this governmental provision of services, which include the wastage of much of what is taught in schools; and rural-urban migration and emigration of those who can afford the means. The long-term response to these effects could involve significant physical and human capital investments in the rural economy, which might produce an enabling environment capable of generating greater output, incomes and demand. If this is achieved, sources of employment could be diversified in both the countryside and the urban centers. Other long-term actions required to effectively transform the rural economy involve getting the prices right, appropriate technology and good governance.

The formal educational system seems to be producing more graduates than is justified either by the cost of producing them or the kind of work which is open to them, much of which could be done as well by young people of honest character but much less expensive training. The AFS system places greater emphasis on parents and the village community, to take greater responsibility for training the youth in agriculture with whatever government can give and encouraging them to participate actively in the development of their villages.

The way ahead is to reorganize the AFS system by moving it away from a single NGO supported initiative to an initiative that can potentially be supported by more partners in rural development. The concept of Agricultural Family Schools should, however, not be regarded as a panacea for unemployment and poverty reduction. It should rather be considered within the framework of the general strategy put in place for poverty reduction in the country. With this in mind, there appears to be a case for it



to be included among projects aimed to benefit from the resources ‘saved’ from the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, we propose the following model that seeks to trace out potential financial, material, information and audit flows linking all the stakeholders in the AFS system.

FIGURE 1  
A Model for the Management of Agricultural Family Schools

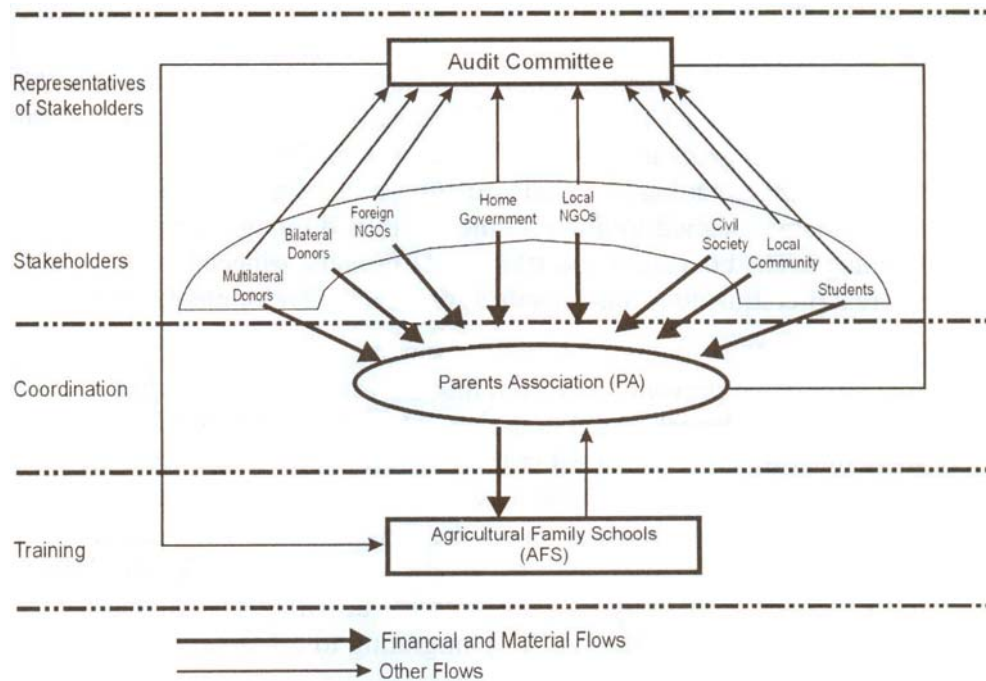


Figure 1 indicates the movement of funds and/or technical assistance directly from each partner to the Parents Association, which is charged with the day-to-day running of the AFS. It also shows the flow of information concerning the form and scale of support supplied by the development partners to the audit committee, which analyzes the information, and has the mandate of cross checking the implementation of projects at the AFS level, as well as auditing and advising the Parents Association. All development partners/stakeholders directly involved with the programme are represented in the audit committee.

<sup>4</sup>With a heavy debt burden and some achievement in macroeconomic stabilization, Cameroon gained admission into the HIPC initiative by reaching the ‘decision point’ in October 2000 and has started benefiting from interim debt cancellation.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Sustainable agriculture requires sustainable systems for promoting the training of young people to participate in farming activities and to progressively replace the ageing farmer population.

In the past, technological change has made increasingly important contributions to agricultural development and growth in many countries. There is no doubt that technological change will become even more important now, and in the future, since productivity and comparative advantages for agricultural production will depend more and more on the level of technology and institutional innovation, rather than on natural resources alone. Progress in the field of agricultural production implies the setting up and strengthening of social structures and infrastructure needed for a training system designed to draw on the youth and village expertise to the best advantage. The education and training of farmers, especially the young, is therefore a prerequisite to sustainable agricultural development.

To reabsorb the youths, especially primary school leavers, into the economic circuit and prevent them from moving to cities in the unlikely hope of finding better-paid work, the foundations of attractive living conditions in rural areas must be laid. The great store of Cameroon's human resources is still largely under-employed. Rural development must go ahead with the active participation and cooperation of the people concerned, acting with them to improve their lives and to create the groundwork for viable, sustainable economic activity. It is, therefore, at village level that better conditions, which rural dwellers seek by migrating to urban areas, should be created.

For this lofty programme of Agricultural Family Schools to be sustainable in the country, the practice has to move away from a single NGO-supported scheme to an integrated rural training scheme, explicitly guaranteed by legislation, which invites all partners in development to participate in the process of opening-up, running and settling the eventual graduates in agriculture as a business. This is in line with the increasing recognition that educational methods and training techniques propagated by the AFS system are but one part of meeting the challenge of poverty alleviation via education and employment. Equally demanding is the task of developing structures and support services that will ensure that potentially employable youths may become employed in work that is purposeful to the community and to their own human development. This could be achieved by

considering the AFS system within the framework of the general strategy for poverty reduction in the country, which is supported by the HIPC resources.

In particular, the government via the appropriate administrative structures may have to undertake and prepare concessions of agricultural land of reasonable sizes, to be acquired by graduates of the AFS for crop and livestock production. For such an initiative to succeed, authorities need to reconstitute a credible rural development bank in the image of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which is widely quoted as a success story in providing financial services to rural people.<sup>5</sup> Expanding the opportunities for rural credit, for example, can encourage the families to invest in the training of youths and assisting graduates of the AFS system to invest in agriculture and enlarge their scale of production as visible evidence of successful agricultural training. Other economic incentives (such as favourable prices), access to markets, transport facilities, agricultural inputs and effective linkages with agricultural extension and research should be made available. When agricultural education operates within the framework of a backward agricultural infrastructure, it can become a factor for accelerated agrarian exodus.<sup>6</sup>

In the absence of these efforts, innovative educational programmes may prepare skilled youth who are committed to development goals but who have no effective means of acting upon that commitment.

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<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Yaron *et al.* (1998) and Von Pischke (1991).

<sup>6</sup>This view is well articulated in Malassis, L. (1975).

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