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Performance of agricultural innovation support services: the case of cocoa agroforestry in savannah in Cameroon

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Abstract

In Cameroon, the afforestation of degraded savannah through cocoa agroforestry is a grassroots innovation that is spreading on semi-arid lands. This study aims to understand the support services which drive the process of this innovation according to farmers and build performance indicators for those services. The data used were collected through individual interviews, focus groups, and workshops with farmers and other stakeholders of the process. Academic and non-academic literature was also used. The analytical process was mostly inductive. The Impact of Research in the South (Impress) ex-post approach serves to build the historical timeline. Then a thematic analysis serves to categorize the performance indicators. Starting in 1930, the afforestation of degraded savannah through the cocoa agroforestry process has three main phases. The first phase, from 1930 to 2003 is characterized by pioneers' experimentations and sensibilization of their siblings and the innovators benefited from generic public support services for the cocoa sector. During the second phase, from 2003 to 2014 the creation of local financing services and the intervention of international researchers leads to the identification of agroforestry associations with higher yields and accelerates the adoption of the innovation. During the third phase, despite the withdrawal of research, public and private support services, the innovation continues to spread through the migration of farmers. The main services identified by cocoa growers are first training to develop skills, then material and financial support to start and expand their activity. Generally, farmers evaluate performance with posture, attitudes, and competencies of service suppliers while the latter's criteria are quantitative. Generally, although farmers consider training as essential to build skills they aim to get autonomous from support services in their activity. These results call for the dedication of specific services to this innovation to reap the benefits of reforestation in semi-arid areas in Cameroon.

Key words: Cameroon, Innovation Support services, Agroforestry, Cocoa, Developing country