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Socio-Economic Impacts of Fruit Crop Production in the Mungo Corridor, Littoral Region, Cameroon

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Abstract

Purpose: Agriculture, particularly fruit crop production, serves as a vital driver of economic growth worldwide. In Cameroon, the Mungo Corridor plays a substantial role in the agricultural sector, particularly in fruit crop production. This study aims to assess the socio-economic impacts of fruit crop production within the Mungo Corridor, a region known for cultivating bananas, pineapples, and mangoes. By evaluating the economic contributions and challenges, the study seeks to provide insights for policies that could enhance the sustainability and development of fruit production in the area. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique to select respondents and resource persons.

Materials and Methods: Data collection involved the use of structured and pre-tested questionnaires along with an interview guide. Quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0 and Microsoft Excel, while qualitative data from interviews was subjected to thematic analysis. Six subdivisions from the Mungo Division were purposely chosen to represent the agricultural activities within the region.

Findings: The study confirms that fruit crop production has significant socio-economic benefits in the Mungo Corridor. Over a 10-year period, banana production reached 195,000 tons, while pineapple production rose from 6,543 tons in 2012 to 28,141 tons in 2022. Papaya production increased from 36 tons to 86 tons during the same period. The income from fruit sales enabled stakeholders to develop socio-economic activities, fostering regional development. Fruit crop production contributed to the construction of 12 schools (primary and secondary), 21 health centers, the rehabilitation of 8 fruit markets, 3 bus stations, and growth in the informal sector. However, the study also identified several challenges with Farmers face limited access to markets. Poor infrastructure affects production and distribution. The looming threat of climate change presents long-term risks to fruit farming.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: To address the challenges and ensure sustainable fruit crop production in the Mungo Corridor, the study recommends the implementation of policies that promote local products and support farmers through market access initiatives. Invest in transport, storage, and market infrastructure to improve efficiency. Develop interventions to mitigate the impact of climate change on fruit production and strengthen cooperation among farmers, government, and private actors to maximize the benefits of fruit crop production and foster sustainable development. By highlighting the essential role of fruit farming in the socio-economic development of the Mungo Corridor, the study emphasizes the need for renewed efforts to support the sector and enhance its contributions to regional growth.

Keywords: *Agriculture, Cameroon, Development, Fruit Crop Production, Mungo Corridor.*

INTRODUCTION

Human societies around the globe today rely on agricultural systems to provide most of their food needs, as they have for thousands of years. (David, 2008). So, agriculture, given its importance, constitutes a favorable element for the development of many countries. It is one of the most powerful tools to end extreme poverty; the life sustaining occupation and provider of employment than other sectors of the economy (World Bank, 2020).

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (F.A.O.) has repeatedly praised the role of the agricultural sector in developing countries (FAO and WFP, 2009). But, undoubtedly, the crucial vocation of agriculture is first of all to ensure the subsistence of undernourished people living mostly in rural areas of poor countries.

Agriculture contributes to strengthening the conditions of societies and the sustenance of communities based on specific products from this territory (Yemmafouo et al, 2021). It contributes as an economic activity and as a means of livelihood for development (World Bank, 2007).

On the importance of agriculture in Africa, (Njeubong, 2014) alleges that agriculture is the backbone of African nations and the source of revenue to the State and crucial foreign exchange sources. This means agriculture is a tool for development, poverty eradication and living conditions improvement. African governments put agriculture at the top of their development priorities given the fact that, secondary and tertiary industries are limited and not fully developed. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) statistics show that at the start of the new millennium, agriculture, hunting, fishing and forestry provided a livelihood for 2.57 billion people, including those in the sector and their families unemployed.

Agriculture is the lifeblood of Cameroon's economy, providing livelihoods for around 70% of the population and contributing about 23% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (FAO, 2020). Thanks to its diverse climate and rich topography, Cameroon is able to cultivate a wide variety of crops, making the agricultural sector a key driver of both economic growth and food security. Among the nation's many agricultural regions, the Littoral Region and particularly the Mungo Corridor stands out for its immense agricultural potential. This area is known for its fertile volcanic soils and ideal climate, making it especially well-suited for fruit crop production (Njikeu, 2017).

The Mungo Corridor is a prominent agricultural zone within the Littoral Region, renowned for producing an abundance of fruit crops, including bananas, pineapples, mangoes amongst others. The region's success in fruit farming is largely due to its warm, humid climate and well-drained soils, which are perfect for these crops. The fruits grown here are not just important for local consumption; they also play a significant role in Cameroon's export economy, with bananas being one of the country's leading agricultural exports (Mbassi & Sango, 2019).

The impact of fruit crop production in the Mungo Corridor goes far beyond just providing food; it is a vital source of income and sustenance for the local population. For many families in this region, fruit farming is the primary means of earning a living. The income generated from selling fruit crops allows households to improve their living conditions, invest in their children's education, and access healthcare (Neba, 2021). Beyond individual families, the revenue from fruit sales boosts the local economy by increasing the demand for goods and services, creating a ripple effect of economic benefits throughout the region.

Fruit farming also plays a crucial role in employment. The entire agricultural value chain in the Mungo Corridor, from growing and harvesting to processing and marketing provides a wide range of job opportunities. For instance, the banana industry alone employs thousands of

people, helping to reduce unemployment in rural areas (Agbor, 2018). These jobs are not just limited to farm labor; they also include roles in transportation, packaging, and sales, offering diverse income sources for local communities.

In addition to these economic benefits, fruit farming is essential for food security in the region. The fruits produced in the Mungo Corridor provide nutritious food options for local people, while the income from fruit sales enables families to purchase other food items, ensuring a more balanced diet (Tekeu & Fomukong, 2016).

While previous studies thoroughly discuss the role of agriculture in economic development, poverty alleviation, employment, and food security at global, regional (Africa), and national (Cameroon) levels, there is notable gap on the socio-economic impacts of fruit crop production in the Mungo Corridor which this study aim to explore.

Problem Statement

Agriculture has long been the backbone of rural communities in Cameroon, shaping the livelihoods of thousands of families. In the Mungo Corridor, fruit crop production, particularly bananas, pineapples, mangoes and papayas, has become a lifeline for many households, providing food, income, and employment opportunities. Blessed with fertile soils and favorable weather, the corridor has become a key agricultural hub. However, while fruit farming offers hope and economic prospects, farmers and other stakeholders often struggle with challenges that threaten the sector's sustainability.

For many smallholder farmers, traders, and laborers in the Mungo Corridor, fruit crop production serves as more than just a livelihood, it's their pathway to financial stability and improved quality of life. The fruits grown in this corridor not only feed local families but also find their way to markets across Cameroon and even beyond, contributing to regional trade and national economic growth. However, these benefits are not without hurdles. Farmers face unpredictable weather patterns, poor infrastructure, limited access to financial services, and fluctuating market prices. Pest infestations and post-harvest losses further reduce profitability. The farmers' ability to scale their businesses is also hampered by inconsistent government support, lack of access to modern inputs, and competition from larger agro-industrial enterprises.

While the sector has generated income, employment, and trade opportunities, there is concern about whether these benefits are reaching all those involved. Smallholder farmers, who make up the majority of fruit producers, often struggle to keep pace with larger agro-industrial players, leading to economic disparities. At the same time, women and youth, who are actively involved in farming and trade, encounter unique challenges that hinder their full participation in the sector. As such, the region's fruit production, though full of promise, has yet to fulfill its potential as a true driver of inclusive and sustainable development.

This study aims to explore the socio-economic impacts of fruit crop production in the Mungo Corridor**,** delving into the contributions of banana, pineapple, and mango production to household income, employment, local trade, and food security. It will also seek to uncover the barriers that prevent small-scale farmers and marginalized groups from benefiting equally. By hearing directly from farmers, traders, laborers, and policymakers, the research hopes to paint a fuller picture of both the achievements and challenges within this sector.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Location of the Study Area

The study was conducted in the Mungo Division, located in the Littoral region of Cameroon (figure 1), one of the four Divisions of the Littoral region of Cameroon covers an area of 3723 km² for a population of 486,243 inhabitants according to the General Census of Population and Housing (RGPH 2005). Qualified corridor, the area is geographically located between 4 ° 04' and 5° 20' of Northern latitude and 9° 24' and 10° 08' Eastern longitude. Limited to the North by the Menoua Division, to the South by the Wouri division, to the East by the Koupe-Manengouba and to the West by Upper-Nkam, with the Divisional Head Quarter, Nkongsamba. Figure 1.1 below is the location of the study area.

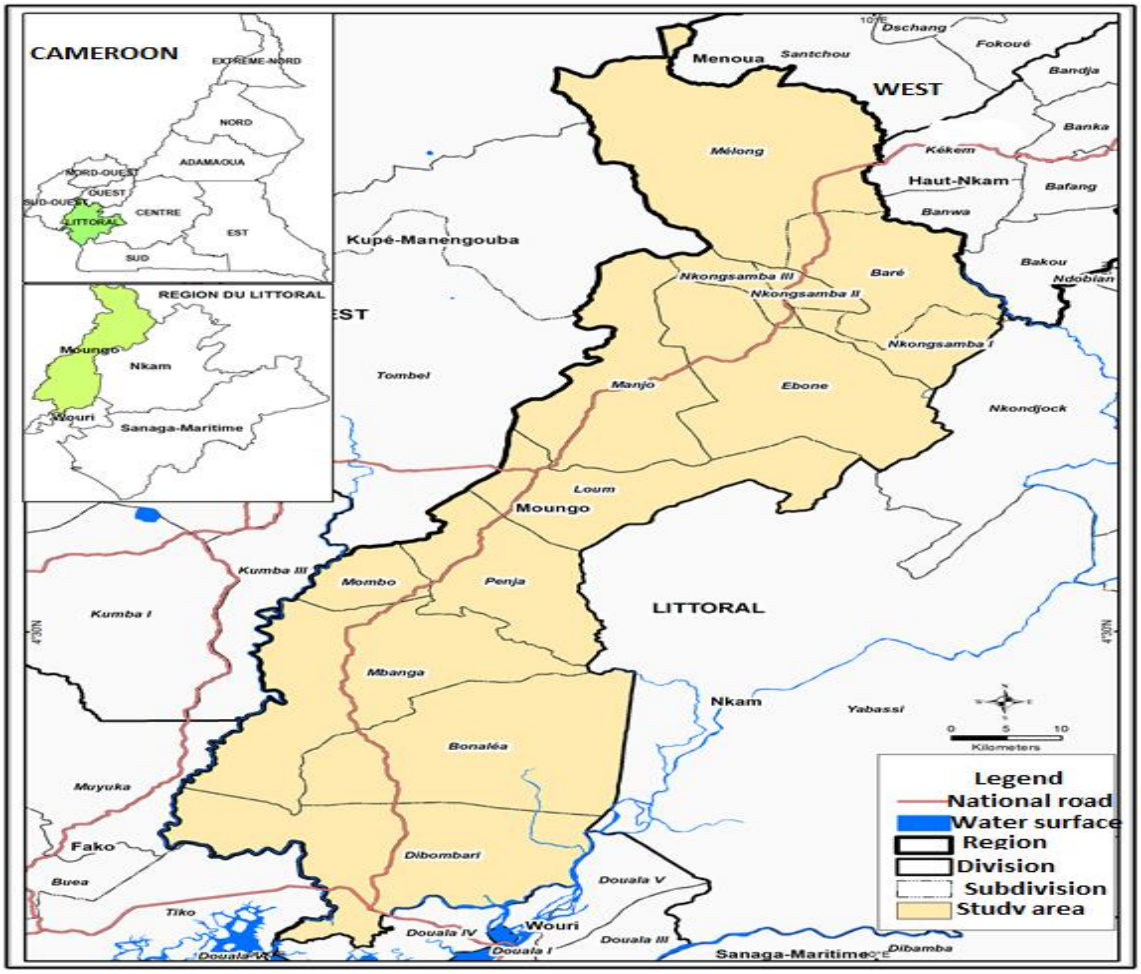

Figure 1: Location of the Mungo Corridor in the Littoral and South West Regions of Cameroon

Source: Geo-Database of Cameroon (NIC,2020)

The Mungo Division has thirteen subdivisions that are Dibombari, Mbanga, Mombo, NJombe-Penja, Loum, Manjo, Nlonako, Nkongsamba 1st, Nkongsamba2nd, Nkongsamba 3rd, Bonalea and Melong, Bare-Bakem). The particularity of the study area is the presence of physical and human factors favorable to fruit crop production.

Method

The study employs a multistage sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique was used to select six (6) production areas (Njombe, Penja,Loum,Manjo, Nkongsamba, Melong) due to their involvement in fruit crop production and their noticeable production quantities.

Random sample was used in the selection of respondents and resource persons. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with producers and resource persons alongside the administration of 300 semi-structured questionnaires were employed in order to obtain the data required. Instrument of data collection was through a structured and pre-tested questionnaires and interview guide. The obtained data from the field were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) aiming to extract descriptive statistics. The results obtained from data treatment were presented into graphs, tables and maps which were subject of comments using Microsoft Word 2017. Maps were realized using ArcGIS 10.2.

FINDINGS

Agricultural Dynamism with the Production of Fruit Crop in the Mungo Corridor

The concentration of agricultural activities in the Mungo corridor can be observed through the evolution of land use and the production quantities of fruits.

Evolution of Land Use in the Mungo Corridor

The concentration of agricultural activities in the Mungo corridor through the cultivation of fruit crop analyses the evolution of land use within the study area and the new modes of access to cultivated lands. The analysis of land use here makes it possible to appreciate the evolution of the landscape as a whole, in order to appreciate the extent of agricultural practices in the study area. Table 1 shows the variation in land use area in 1980.

Table 1: Variation in Land Use Area in 1980

Land Use Unit	Surface Area Ha	%
Dense Forest	291102,5	75,17
Light Forest	9096,54	2,35
Grassy Savannah	76641,12	19,79
Building Space	6891,45	1,78
Farms and Culture	3548,84	0,92
Total	**387280,45**	**100**

Source: Interpretation of Landsat 5 Satellite Images in 1980

According to Table 1, it can be seen that the Mungo landscape in 1980 was much wooded. The dense forest alone occupies an area of 291,102.5ha, that is 75.17% of the space; the grassy savannah occupies 76,641.12ha, that is 19.79% of the space; light forest 2.35% which is equivalent to an area of 9,096.54ha. Furthermore, buildings represented 1.78% of the space, which is equivalent to an area of 6,891.45ha. Plantations and crops covered an area of 3,548.84ha, which is 0.92% of the total space. Table 2 presents the variation in land use areas in 2000.

Table 2: Variation in Land Use Areas in 2000

Land Use Unit	Surface Area Ha	%
Dense Forest	263189,3	67,96
Light Forest	8896,54	2,30
Grassy Savannah	7382,11	19,06
Building Space	17992,12	4,65
Farms and Culture	23379,38	6,04
Total	**387280,45**	**100,00**

Source: Interpretation of Landsat 5 Satellite Images in 2000

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From Table 2, we can note that the Mungo corridor landscape has always remained forested during the period 2000 with a dominance of dense forest extending over an area of 73,823.11ha, or 67.96% of the total space of Mungo. The grassy savannah covers an area of 7,382.11 ha, or 19.06 ha. The open forest occupies an area of 8,896.54 ha, or 2.30% of the total space. Furthermore, buildings and crop plantations have undergone an increase in surface area of 17,992.12ha, or 4.65%, and 23,379.38ha, or 6.04% of the total space. Table 3 shows the variation in land use in 2022.

Table 3: Variation in Land Use Areas 2022

Land Use Unit	Surface Area Ha	%
Dense Forest	199846.5	55.94
Light Forest	9070.1	2.54
Grassy Savannah	86073.3	24.09
Building Space	21750.15	6.09
Farms and Culture	40540.4	11.35
Total	**357280.45**	**100.00**

Source: Interpretation of Landsat 5 Satellite Images in 2002

Comparing tables 1 and 2 to table 3, it can be seen that the Mungo landscape has undergone some modifications. The dense forest saw its surface area decreased by 199,846.5ha, or 55.94%, unlike the light forest and the grass savannah which saw their surface area increase by 2.54% and 24.09% of the total surface area. Furthermore, the built-up area increased by 21,750.15ha, or 6.09% of the total space. Likewise, plantations and crops saw their areas increase by 40,540.4ha, or 11.35%. This decline in dense forests is justified by the fact that they are destroyed in favor of agricultural practices like the cultivation of fruit crops. Figure 2 illustrates more about the evolution of land use in the Mungo corridor from 1980 to 2022.

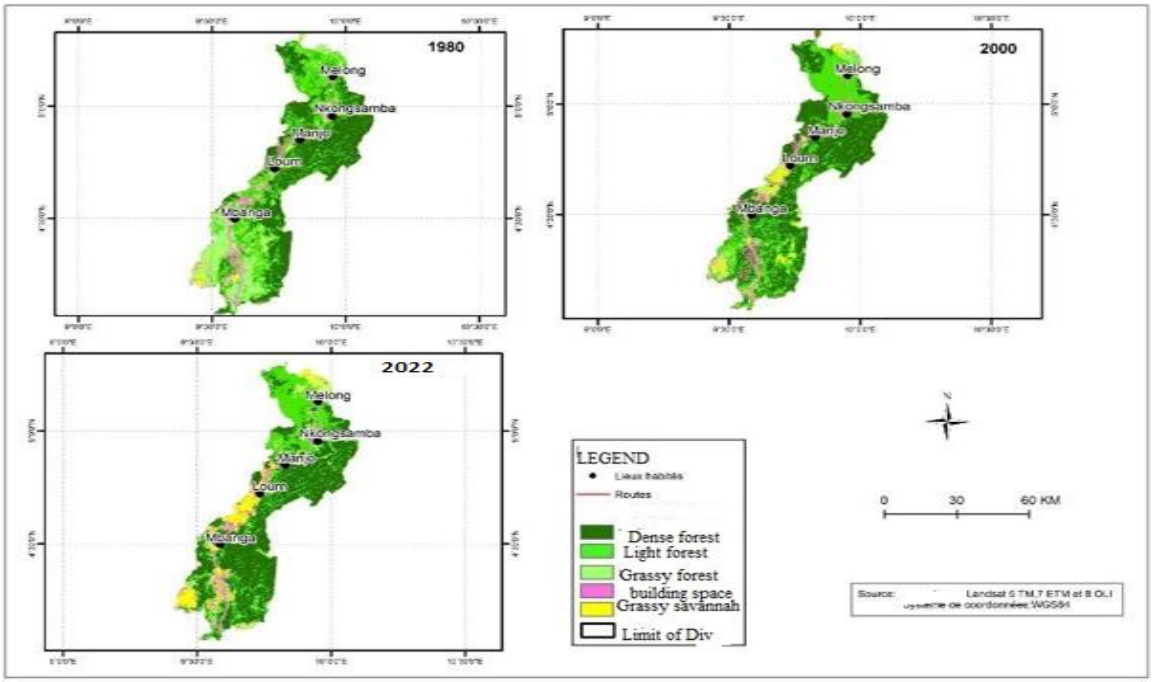

Figure 2: Evolution of Land Use from 1980 to 2022

Source: Landsat 5 Satellite Image

As can be seen in Figure 2, there is a change in land use during these three years. The dense forest reduces to the benefit of buildings and agricultural practices. This evolution can be better appreciated through the variations in land use during this period.

Evolution of Production Quantities of Fruit Crop in the Mungo Corridor

Thanks to the presence of physical and human factors favorable to the production of fruit crop in the Mungo corridor, there is a gradual increase in fruit crop production over time. Banana production increased 196,000 tons in 2012 to 356,000 in 2022 (table 4), i.e. an increase of 196,000 tons in 10 years. Pineapple increased from 6,543 tons to 28,141. Papaya increases from 36 tons to 86 in 2020. Avocado increased from 13 tons to 34, citrus fruit from 12 tons to 29tons. We can also see a fall in production in 2020 due to the presence of Covid 19 which weakened many sectors of activity in Cameroon.

Table 4: Evolution of Fruit Crop Quantities in the Mungo Corridor from 2012-2022

Fruit Type	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022
Banana	196000	250000	263000	287640	150000	356000
Pineapple	6543	9646	12957	16235	21643	28141
Citrus	12	15.5	21	24	18	29
Papaya	36	42	53	66	75	86
Avocado	13	15	17	22	27	34
Mango	11	17	26	30	37	39
Safou	35	39	51	58	43	61

Source: Field Work 2022

The evolution of production quantities of fruit pushed farmers to extend their cultivable area in other to produce more and increase their income. The great quantities of fruit harvested are distributed not only in the local and national markets, but also internationally. However, each type of fruit is cultivated in the localities according to the agro climatic and soils requirements especially. Figure 3 shows the production zone of different fruit type in the study area.

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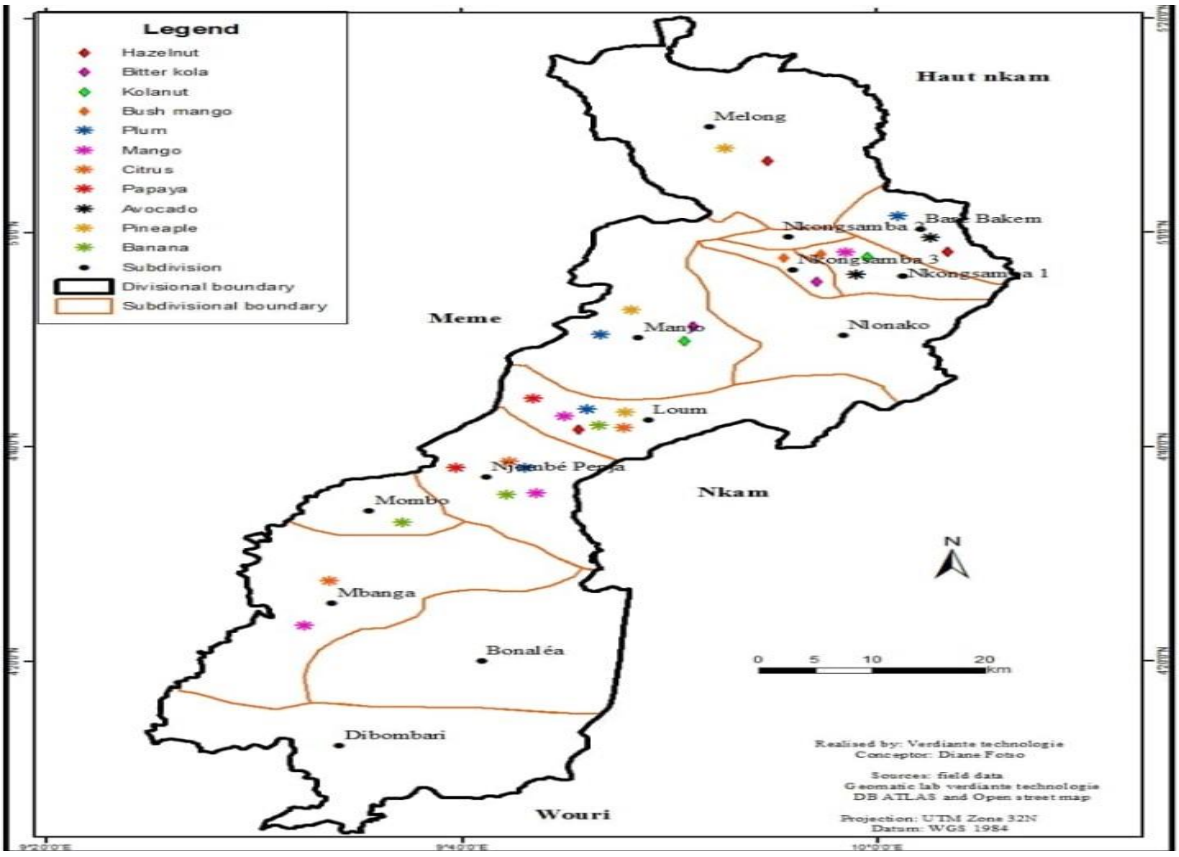

Figure 3: Production Zone of Different Fruit Types in the Mungo Corridor

Source: Field Work 2020

From figure 3, it is clear that fruits are produced in different production basins in the Mungo corridor. Pineapple is produced in Manjo, Loum, Nlohe, Nkongsamba, Bare-Bakem and Melong. As for papaya it can be seen from the figure that it is mostly concentrated in Njombe-Penja subdivision. Mango is generally produced in the entire study area, but mostly concentrated according to the production quantities in Mbanga, Mombo, Loum and Manjo. Plum is produced in Njombe, Penja, Loum, Nkongsamba, Bare-Bakem and Melong. As for avocado, the production basins are Loum, Nkongsamba, Njombe, Bare-Bakem, Nkongsamba and Melong. It is therefore important to note that the belonging of each fruit type to a particular production zone is related to the specific soil characteristics and agroclimatic requirements of the fruit. However, Njombe, Penja, Loum and Manjo appear as high production basins of many fruits crops type.

Socio-Economic Impacts Resulting from Fruit Crop Production in the Mungo Corridor

The socio-economic impacts of fruit crop in the Mungo corridor can be viewed through the proliferation of health centers and schools, the creation of job opportunities, the growth of financial structure and trade.

Intensification of Health Centers and Creation of Schools

Health services have increased in the Mungo in recent years. The reasons which pushed the State and other actors to open more health services in these localities are numerous. This concerns firstly, the insufficiency of staff in reference hospitals, the inadequate reference hospitals and secondly, the presence of a predominantly agricultural population that is increasing rapidly and exposed to work accidents. As a result, an increase in staff numbers in these structures was observed in order to provide care to a predominantly agricultural

population. Subsequently, health units were created in certain homes and certain premises in the locality. Moreover, certain fruit companies like PHP have equipped their premises with a medical center to provide first aid to employees. Figure 4 represents the evolution of health huts created in Mungo over the last four years.

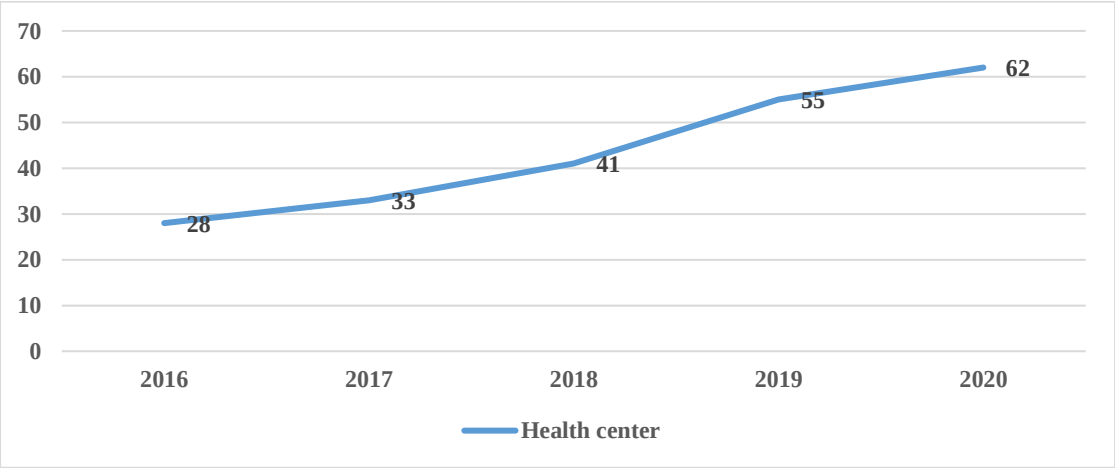

Figure 4: Evolution of Health Units in the Mungo Corridor

Source: Field Work 2020

According to Figure 4, there is an increase in the number of health center in the Mungo corridor. In 2016, there were 28 health centers. From 2016 to 2020, we notice an increase to 34 health centers. This is due to the fact that, with the population growth and important migrations within the study area, there is need to take care of families mostly involved in agriculture and trade activities. Non-Governmental Organizations, fruit companies and the State have generally invested in this sector to provide health care for all. Furthermore, schools have also been constructed by some stakeholders of fruit crop production in the study area in order to promote education. Figure 5 shows some educational structure built in the study area.

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Figure 5: Educational Structures Built and Donated by Actors of Fruit Crop Production

Source: Field Work 2024

In other to promote education in the study area, some educational structures have been donated by stakeholders of fruit crop production. Both primary and secondary school have been constructed. A classroom (A) was donated to the Government Primary School Kompita by the Upper Penja's plantation, the Kompita's Government School Complex (B) was offered by the municipality of Njombe-Penja, the Family Agricultural School (D) is an initiative of PHP to offer training in banana farming in order to have qualified workers. The cherries group complex (E) was created by a fruit producer Rene Metomo in order to improve education in Penja and Bouba. The European Union associated to PHP built the school complex of weavers (F), which is made of a nursery, primary and secondary school for both children of PHP workers in particular and others. Furthermore, trade Fair via PHP offered more than 5,600 benches in public and private school, latrines, administrates buildings, blackboards as well as scholarship to the best students and blackboards.

Creation of Job Opportunities

Fruit crop production creates employment opportunities for local communities in the Mungo corridor. It is an employment-generating activity in the study area. It creates partial employment opportunity for young people. From farming activities to transportation, processing, and marketing of fruits; a wide range of jobs are generated, thereby reducing unemployment rates and improving livelihoods. Fruit crop production requires labor for various tasks, such as land preparation, planting, pruning, irrigation, pest control, and harvesting. Table 5 shows the types of jobs created thanks to fruit crops production in the study area.

Table 5: Type of Jobs Created by Fruit Crops Production in the Mungo Corridor

Domains	Jobs	Role	Place	Price
Production	Nursery Men	Nursery Setup and Maintenance	Farm	50 Frs Per Plant
	Labourers	Cleaning, Weeding, Harvest	Farm	Varies from 2000 Frs to 2500 Frs
	Counter Meters	Ensures the Spreading of Fertilizers	Farm	Varies from 2500 Frs to 3000 Frs
Transport	Truck Pushers	Carry Fruits from Farm to Market	Farm and Markets	500 - 1000Frs
	Lorries	Carry Fruits from Farm to Market	Farm and Markets	1000 – 1500 Frs According to the Distance
	Bike or Tricycle Riders	Carry Fruits from Farm to the Markets	Farm and Market	300 Frs - 700 Frs According to the Distance
	Carriers	Transport of Goods to Accessible Areas	Market	100 Frs - 300 Frs Based on the Distance
Commercialization	Loaders	Classify Fruit in the Car	Farm and Market	150 Frs Per Bag
	Off Loaders	Unload the Fruit from the Car	Market	10 Frs Per Fruit or 50 Frs Per Bag
Processing	Cleaners	Wash Fruits	Processing Unit	25000 Frs to 30.000 Frs Monthly
	Crushers	Crush Fruit	Processing Unit	30000 Frs to 35000 Frs Monthly
	Packers	Pack Fruits	Processing Unit	35000 Frs to 40000 Monthly

Source: Field Work 2022

From Table 5, it appears that the producers are the engines of the circuit, from land preparation to postharvest; they must recruit people to work in their farms such as nursery men who take care of the nursery, labourers, counter meters and harvesters. The job price varies from one person to another according to the task, the quality and quantity of fruit and land. After maturity, producers remain the driving force by recruiting other labour for the harvest. The negotiation at this level depends on the quantity harvested. This workforce can also serve as porters to the market. The qualified labourer's pay is made at the end of the harvest.

The implication of buyers and retailers also generates Jobs through the loading and offloading of goods. Farmers then contribute to local job creation and support livelihoods. However, negotiation is influenced by whether conditions. During the dry season or in the rainy season, the condition of the road, the distance from the drop-off location, and according to the nature of the job, plays on the price. At the market level, buyers continue the process. You have to pay the shippers in two levels. Furthermore, other types of jobs are created, like processing of fruits where young people are employed for different tasks. This is the reason why (A. SALL, 2009) says: "horticulture is a dynamic activity, providing jobs and bringing hope." In other words, horticulture is a way out to help people.

The Increase of Financial Structures in the Study Area

The concentration of agricultural activities in the Mungo corridor has pushed several financial structures to be set up there in order to support farmers in their various financial operations such as the granting of agricultural credit, saving and other transactions to promote the agricultural sector. There are Rural investment credit, ACEP, FINEC, Express Union, Baccul, SOFINA, La Regionale, MUPECI, FICOM, CCA Bank SGC and others. The study observed an increase of these financial structures over time as presented in figure 6.

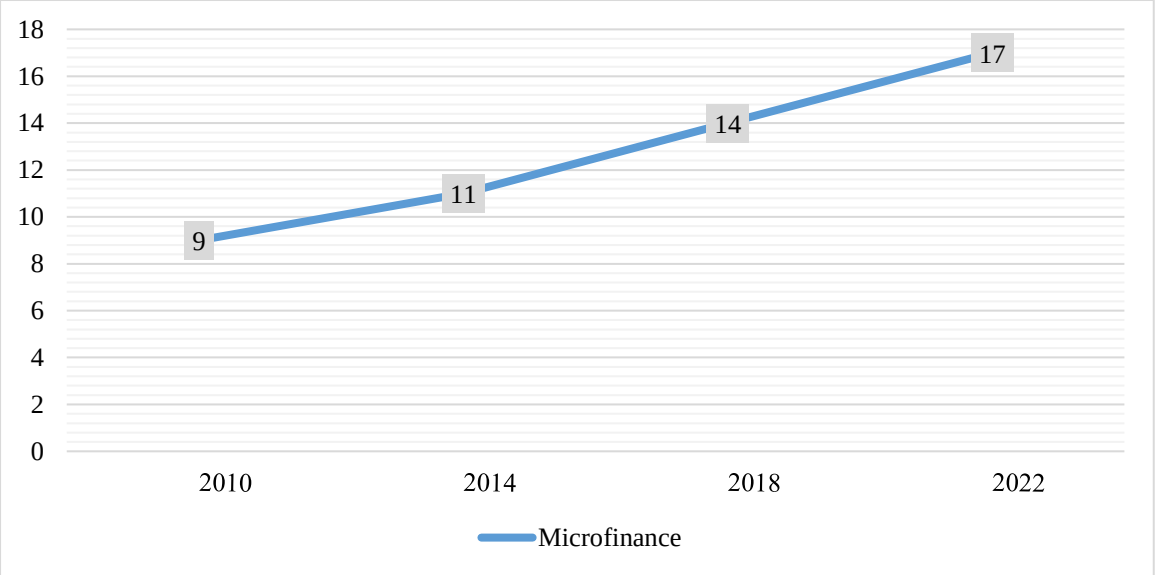

Figure 6: Evolution of Microfinance in the Mungo Corridor from 2010 to 2022.

Source: Field Work 2022

As illustrated by Figure 6, microfinances have increased considerately in the Mungo corridor. They went from 9 microfinances and banks in 2010 to seventeen in 2022 with an increase of 8 financial structure in 13 years. In addition to saving and loans in the structure the microfinances also subsidize producers by offering them inputs to increase their production and income.

Intensification of Trade Around Toll Gates, Check Points and Bus Stop

The Mungo corridor has two main toll gates, one in Mbanga and the second in Lala (Nlohe), many checkpoints and bus stops which are places where the sales of fruit is intensified. Given the diversity and the presence of seasonal varieties of fruit in the study area, the municipalities have also created some fruits markets in Njombe, Penja, Manjo, Loum, Melong, Mbanga, and Nkongsamba in order to facilitate the flow of products to consumers. Figure 7 illustrates some sales point of fruit in the Mungo corridor.

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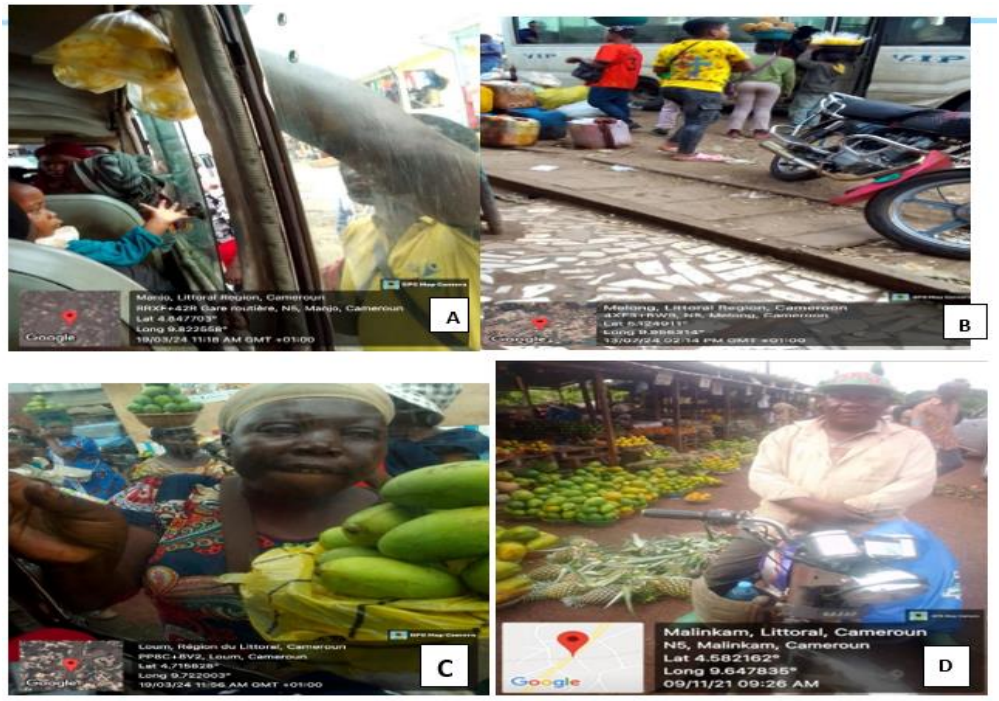

Figure 6: Fruit Local Market and Street Trade in the Mungo Corridor

Source: Field Work.

According to figure 6, fruits are mostly sold at the road side thanks to the strategic location of the corridor and the road traffic on the National Road number 5. This mobilization of sellers at the different point of sale supply fruits regularly to travelers from the West, North-West and South West regions of Cameroon while earning money that will help them to fight against poverty and improve their living conditions.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated a positive correlation between fruit crop production and socio-economic development in the Mungo corridor. Following the strong demand on the markets, farmers intensify fruit crop production while increasing their incomes. This allows them to achieve both social and economic growth in the study area with the perceptible increase in social infrastructures such as schools and health centers, the creation of jobs opportunities and the increase of economic activities. To ensure the sustainability and economic viability of fruit farming in the corridor, there is an urgent need for targeted interventions that improve market access, strengthen infrastructure, and promote climate-resilient agricultural practices. By addressing these challenges, fruit crop production in the Mungo Corridor can continue to contribute meaningfully to both the local and national economy, helping to improve the lives of those who depend on it. To further promote development in the fruit sector, the study strongly recommends sustainable solutions to agricultural problems in Cameroon and the Mungo corridor in particular through policies to ensure a great development in the horticultural sector for a better future. This can only be achieved by multiplying financial incentives and other facilities for producers and enforcing existing laws and regulations strictly related to agriculture. The study provides a more comprehensive picture of the agricultural sector's contribution to Cameroon’s economy and the specific role of the Mungo Corridor in fruit production. It also offers practical insights into how sustainable agricultural practices, technology, and inclusive policies can further enhance the sector’s impact.

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