

Assessment of Stakeholders in Agro-Based Peasant Farming Development in Babadjou Subdivision, West Region, Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Babadjou sub division, characterized by its fertile volcanic soils, serve as a critical hub for the country's food security, yet its agro-based peasant farming sector faces persistent challenges regarding productivity, market access, and sustainability. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the multi-layered stakeholder ecosystem driving agricultural development in this area. Through the administration of 107 sampled questionnaires, complemented by semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and direct field observations, the results showed that the stakeholders' involved in agro-based peasant farming development in Babadjou include; farmers, municipal council, traditional leaders, traditional herbalist, soothsayers, associations, Common Initiative Groups-CIGs, *njangi* groups, masquerade groups, religious bodies and Non-Governmental Organizations-NGOs. The roles played by these agricultural stakeholders' are helpful in peasant farming development and span through; conflict resolution, land lending and distribution, sensitization, crops protection, research, aids, road maintenance, creation of markets, and the formation of Common Initiative Groups-CIGs. This paper concludes that sustainable development in agro-based peasant farming in Babadjou, West Region of Cameroon depends on strengthening synergistic partnerships that integrate indigenous governance structures with modern extension services. The study recommends that decision and policymakers should foster cohesive, resilient, and market oriented agricultural environment tailored to the unique socio-cultural context of the West Region of Cameroon.

Keywords: Community stakeholders, agro-based peasant farming development, Babadjou

INTRODUCTION

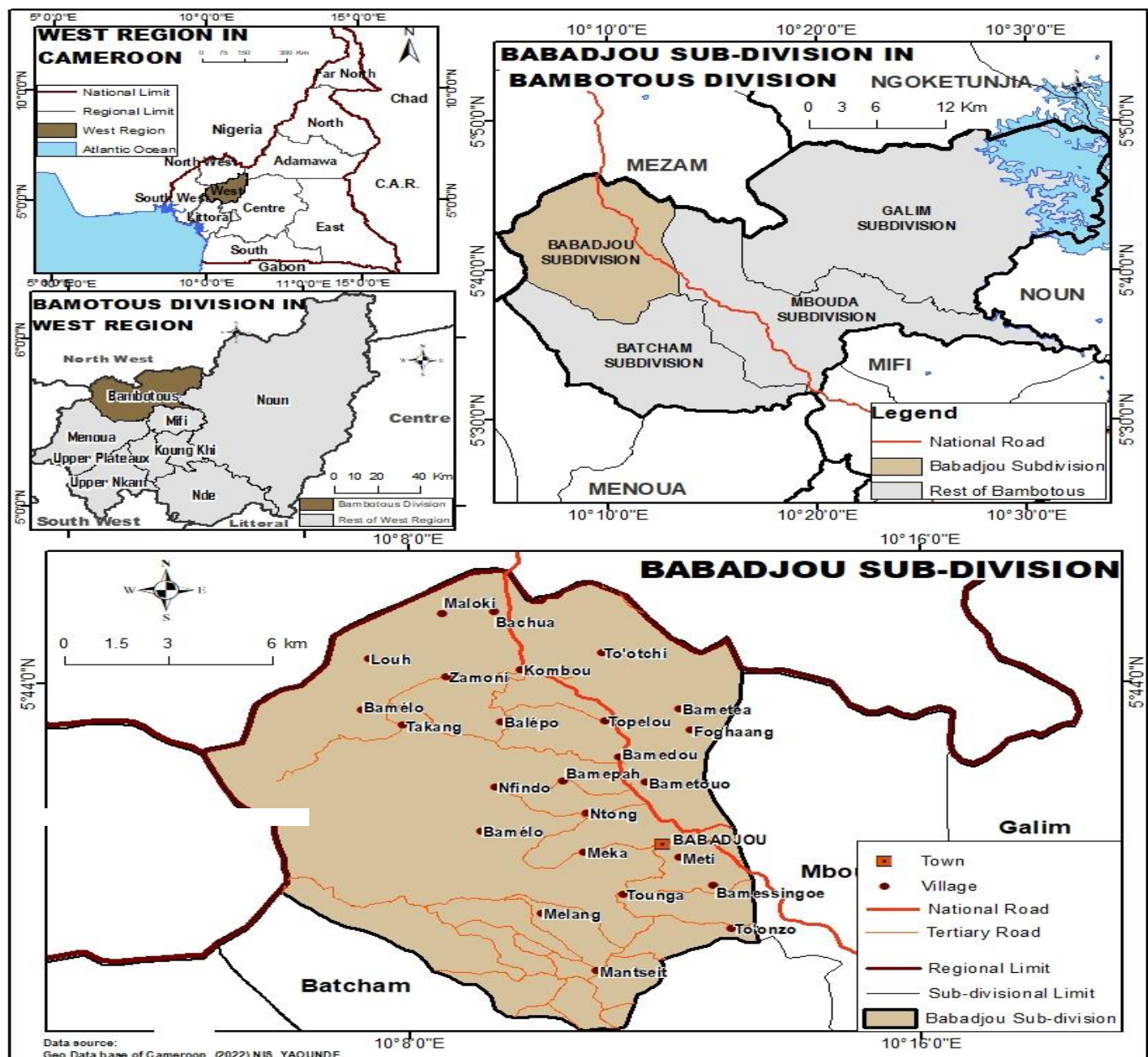
Globally, stakeholders involved in agro-based peasant farming development are varied and diverse with each of them aimed at enhancing crop yields (Sartika et al., 2023). Understanding these stakeholders and their role in agro-based peasant agriculture remains crucial in enhancing efficiency and ensuring increase crop yields across the globe, especially in developing countries which are more agricultural inclined (Velten et al., 2021). In Africa, agro-based peasant farming systems are confronted by socioeconomic, cultural and environmental challenges and requires urgent attention and collaborative efforts from all stakeholders (Odero, 2011; Raheem, 2011; Velten et al., 2021). In Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, the integration of community stakeholders in promoting agro-based peasant farming development is imperative especially with the soaring food insecurity (Doss et al., 2017). For instance, nearly 240 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa lack adequate food for a healthy and active life (Asogwa et al., 2017). In Cameroon, the situation is worst as a vast majority of the population are food insecure. Estimates show that approximately 615,000 people in the North and Far North Regions, 173,000 in the Littoral Region, 86, 000 in the Center Region and 77, 000 in other regional capitals are food insecure (Hervé et al., 2014; Nkwain and Gam, 2019). According to Raheem (2011) this increasing

food insecurity is largely influenced by the lack of collaborative agricultural development with the support of all stakeholders. Chia and Nkwemoh (2023) further argued that agricultural development can only be successful through the identification and integration of all its stakeholders. However, this study seeks to identify the various agricultural stakeholders and the role they play in agro-based peasant farming development in Babadjou Sub Division, West Region of Cameroon.

STUDY AREA AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Area: Babadjou sub division is the gateway to and from the Divisions of Mezam and Mifi. It is an important transit for passengers and goods to and from the North West and West Regions. It is bounded to the West by the South-West Region (Bamock village), to the North by Santa (a subdivision in Mezam division, North-West Region of Cameroon), to the East by the Bamessingue (Mbouda council area), and to the South by Balatchi (Figure 1). The sub division is spotted between latitude 5°37' to 5°46 north of the equator and longitude 10°4' to 10°10' east of the Greenwich Meridian.

Fig.1: Location of Babadjou in Bamboutos Division, West Region of Cameroon



Source: Geo Database of Cameroon (2022) NIS Yaounde

Babadjou covers a total surface area of 161 km², and a total population estimated at 44198 inhabitants with a 2.6% growth rate (CDP-Council Development Plan-Babadjou 2012).

Research Methods: A sample of 107 questionnaires were randomly administered to the target population made up of landlords, peasant farmers, traditional rulers, Municipal Council staff, Common Initiative Groups-CIGs, and NGOs operating in the study area.

This helped in identifying the different stakeholder groups and their role in promoting agro-based development in the study area. Besides, one (1) focus group discussion with peasant farmers including about thirteen (13) face-to-face personal interviews were conducted with traditional rulers, religious authorities, soothsayers, traditional herbalist, council staff as well as the representatives of associations, Non-Governmental Organizations-NGOs, and masquerade groups to have a deeper understanding about the role played by community stakeholders in promoting agro-based peasant farming development.

Both indirect and indirect field observations and documentary analyses (Council Development Plan and annual reports from Sub Divisional Delegation of Agriculture and Rural Development) were also carried out in order to have a deeper understanding of the role played by stakeholders as well as their activities in agro-based development in Babadjou. The descriptive statistical tool (Excel version 2013) was employed for quantitative data to obtain the statistical table (Table 1) and a bar chart (Figure 2) representing population opinions in respect to different stakeholders and helpfulness in agro-based peasant farming development. Qualitative data obtained from personal interviews, focus group discussion, direct and indirect field observations were sorted out manually and were summarized according to the various sub-headings of the study in order to avoid confusion and to make it more meaningful. Open source GIS (Quantum Geographical Information System-QGIS 2.18) was used to derived the location map of the study area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community-Based Stakeholders in Agro-Based Peasant Farming Development in Babadjou

Using the likert five points scaling method viz: strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD), and undecided (U), about nine (09) stakeholder groups were identified to have been promoting agro-based peasant farming development in the study area (Table 1).

Table 1: Local-based stakeholders in agro-based peasant farming development in Babadjou

Stakeholder groups	Scaling (%)				
	SA	A	D	SD	U
Municipal council	46.4	36.5	7.6	2.0	7.5
Traditional leaders	37.8	43.8	11.5	3.4	3.5
Traditional herbalist	26.4	30.7	15.1	13.8	14.0
Soothsayers	15.3	27.8	23.8	14.8	18.3
Common Initiative Groups	44.7	44.2	1.7	4.4	5.0
Njangi groups	48.6	40.7	3.5	2.2	5.0
Masquerade groups	10.1	13.8	24.0	31.4	20.7
Peasant farmers	71.4	25.7	1.1	0.8	0.0
Others; religious bodies; NGOs, bike riders and drivers	24.1	34.8	14.8	12.5	13.8

Source: Fieldwork, February 2025

These stakeholder groups (Table 1) include; farmers, municipal council, traditional leaders, traditional herbalist, soothsayers, Common Initiative Groups-CIGs, *njangi* groups, masquerade, among others religious bodies religious bodies, NGOs, bike riders and drivers. Table 2 further presents the various stakeholder groups in relation to their domains of intervention, roles played in promoting agro-based peasant farming development as well as their locations in the study area.

Table 2: Stakeholders roles and domain of intervention in agro-based peasant farming development in Babadjou

Stakeholder groups	Domain of intervention	Role played in promoting agro-based peasant farming development	Location	Total
Municipal council	- Assistance	- Project on agriculture - Maintenance of farm to market roads - Construction of markets for sale of farm products - Increase the availability of agricultural facilities	-Toumaka market	01
Traditional leaders	- Sanctions - Dispute resolution - Land distribution - Assistance - Protection	- Settle farmers-farmers land disputes - Settle farmer-grazers conflicts - Rent land to farmers - Distribute land to the local population - Set laws that protect the growth of crops	- Babete palace - Balatchi palace - Bamelo palace - Balepo palace - Babadjou palace	05
Traditional herbalist	- Crop protection	- Protect farms from destruction - Protect crops from thieves	- Kombou - Bawa - Ngagong	07
Soothsayers	- Crop protection	- Predict future threats on crops - Educate farmers on how to tackle predicted treats on crops	- Bamelo - Kombou	06
Common Initiative Groups	- Innovation	- Beg aids from NGOs for the common good of the group - Channel problems faced to the state	- Balepo	01
Njangi /Meetings groups	- Labour - Finance	- Provides labour force - Lent money to farmers involved for interest	- Kombou - Balepo I - Ngagong II	08
		- Sensitize the population about threats on agriculture		

Masquerade groups	- Protection	- Predict future threats on crops - Sensitize the population on bad harvest	- Maloki	01
Farmers	- All stages of production	- Main agricultural work-force	- All over	-
Sub Divisional Delegation of Agriculture and Rural Development- Babadjou	- Provision of information - Aids - Relationships - Research	- Sensitize farmers - Facilitate the creation of CIGs - Collect and keep agricultural statistics - Provides information to farmers/research	- Bamelo	01
NGOs (ACEFA)	- Sensitization - Trainings	- Agricultural counseling - Agro pastoral development - Rural Development - Influence the formation of CIGs	- Kombou	01
Religious bodies	- Assistance	- Provides aids - Advice - Prayers - Encouragement of farmers	- All over	11
Bike riders and drivers	-Transport	-Transport farmers, crop yields and materials to and from the farms	- All over	-

Source: Sub-Divisional Delegation of Agriculture and Rural Development-SDARD Babadjou; CDP-Council Development Plan-Babadjou 2012; Fieldwork, February 2025

Table 2 depicts that stakeholders domains of intervention in promoting agro-based peasant farming development are varied, and cut across; assistance, dispute resolution, land distribution, relationships, research, labour supply, sensitization and crops protection. As concerns the traditional leaders, it was acknowledged that they intervene in solving land disputes such as farmers-farmers conflict, farmers-grazers conflict in their various areas of jurisdiction. They also give sanctions and fines to farmers guilty of land related crimes. Other than this, the traditional rulers share or rent land to the farmers. They are considered as the land owners by the local population. They equally sign land agreements especially during the purchase of ancestral lands by private individuals.

As concerns the traditional herbalist, the population attested that they intervene in the domain of crop protection from windstorms, animals' destruction as well as the protection of crops from thieves. For windstorms, above 70% of peasant farmers during field discussions confirmed that windstorms that often destroy crops are not simple. *"...It is witch people that often come to destroy crops and cause hunger..."* to avoid this, traditional herbs are cut and sprinkle along farm boundaries to prevent windstorms from penetrating the farm. At times, only incantations are made along farm boundaries, believing that the "gods" who protect the land will prevent windstorms from destroying crops. Field findings further revealed that the traditional herbalist also prevent thieves from stealing crops in farms. This is through the placing of jinx objects in farms which farmers believed to scare thieves from crops theft. It is believed that when this object is placed in a farm, any person that steal from it will die or carry sickness that can only be treated by the herbalist in question. Before entering the farm, the farm owner have to follow the rules and regulations given to him by the traditional herbalist in order to avoid being affected. Further field testimonies hold that the payment is mostly done in kind through items like goats, fowls, palm oil, food and castor oil.

In addition to traditional herberlist, soothsayers at the community level also offer assistance to farmers in the study area. They predicts the future calamities that may led to poor crop yields as well as giving advice to peasant farmers on how to overcome them. They are more focus on predicting extrem weather conditions (especiall windstorm) that can led to poor crop yields. Focus group findings in Kombou village indicated that farmers are always advised by soothsayers not to go their farmes on “*Country Sundays*” as means to avoid poor crop yields. They believed that “*Country Sundays*” are destine to deities that protect their land and if someone goes to the farm on such a day will hurt the gods. Elia (2014), argrued that soothsayers especially weather seers are of great importance in the agricultural sector and should be considered during decision making. This is because farmers have relied and have continue to rely on soothsayers predictions as a means to avoid poor crop yields.

Programe Amélioration de la Compétitivité des Exploitations Familiales Agropastorales-ACEFA is another stakeholder identified to have been playing a crucial role in promoting agro-based development in the study area. The roles play by this organization in agro-based peasant farming are manifold. The organization collaborate with the Sub Divisional Delegation of Agriculture and Rural Development-SDARD in providing trainings to farmers through the existing common initiative groups found in Babadjou. The case in point is MAITRION VERT, a Common Initiative Group in Balepo village. This CIG was revealed by its members to be created under the influenced of ACEFA. As concerns agro-pastoral development, the organization offer counselling services to farmers in order to diversify and enhance agricultural productivity. Furthermore, the stakeholder group also work hand in hand with the Divisional Delegation of Agriculture and Rural Development to implement agricultural projects and programs that benefit rural communities.

Besides, the SDARD does not limit its role on projects implementation, but go further to sensitize peasant farmers on sustainable agricultural practices especially climate smart-agricultural practices. They also educate the population with adaptation strategies that can help them thrive the impacts of climate variability and change on the agricultural sector. In Kombou village, the population attest that the delegation in 2018 facilitated the creation of market gardening CIGs through which members received trainings at no cost. Equally, results also revealed that the institution collects and keep agricultural statistics. These include statistics on the evolution of crop outputs, agricultural land, agricultural population, crops types, and types of farm inputs used by peasant farmers. They make it available to farmers and researchers when needed.

Apart from SDARD, masquerades groups were also revealed to have been involved in one way or the other in the domain of agro-based peasant farming in the study area. In Maloki village, farmers revealed that the masquerade group always inform farmers about poor harvest when they forecast it through their spiritual world. They give instructions to be followed in order to avoid such calamities.

The case in point is the mbé masquerade group in Kombou village which always predict the future of crops harvest just from the onset of the planting seasons. Through FGDs, majority of the farmers strongly agreed that the activities of masquerade groups have been outstanding in predicting and giving orders that help farmers avoid poor crop yields. In Bawa village, some of the farmers revealed that the Kishong masquerade group predicted a storm wind that will destroy crops in 2022, and that happened. To this, farmers were able to cope due to the instructions given to them by the masquerade group. In was further stressed out that, majority those who did not follow the instruction had their crops destroyed by the windstorm.

Equally, Table 2 also depicts that *njangi* groups formed by farmers in the study area play a crucial in enhancing agro-based peasant farming development. The role played by *njangi* groups was found to be mostly financial and labour inclined. The groups are hired either by the members or non-member for a day work in their farms for a wage. To note, the wage is often high for non-members while a bit cheaper for floor members. A clear example is “One Family” *njangi* group in Ngagong village made up of about 11 members. Depicts by one of its member, a day work for a non-members ranges from 15,000 to 20,000FCFA depending on the distance to the farm, meanwhile for floor members, it ranges from 5000 to 10,000FCFA. Apart from labour, it was further stressed out that the money often cultivated in these groups help members in affording their farm inputs. That is, the money is often lent out to members at a cheaper interest rate to help them increase their production levels. According to Gama et al. (2022), these groups are crucial since members themselves does not need collateral to acquire a loan.

Furthermore, field discussions revealed that the religious bodies operating in the study area play a crucial role in promoting agro-based peasant farming development. This is through the offering of prayers against poor harvest and encouraging farmers to work harder. It was observed during the study that, during the planting seasons, religious denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church, Cameroon Baptist Convention, Evangelical church, and the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon as well as other Pentecostal churches found in the study area offer Masses and church services during which planting seeds are blessed.

It is believed by Christians that these blessings of planting seeds with anointing water protect crops from animals, pest and insect attacks. Also, they encourage Christians during church services to work harder as “*God will not come down from heaven to provide them with food if they do not work harder*” recounted a Presbyterian Church Christian in Bawa village. Besides, church groups also offer labour to members during planting and grass weeding at a cheaper rate. The case in point is the Cadets of Mary group in Saint Ferdinand Catholic Mission- Kombou that offer labour to members and non-members at low wages.

Other stakeholder groups identified during the study (Table 1) that promote agro-based peasant farming include bike riders and drivers. They intervene in the domain of transport. That is, they transport peasant farmers to and from their farms on daily basis. They also participate in transporting crop yields especially during the harvesting seasons to the nearby markets.

Population Opinions on the Helpfulness of Stakeholders activities in Agro-Based Peasant Farming Development in Babadjou

Regarding the perceptions of the population about the stakeholders activities in agro-based peasant farming development, possible results were obtained on a likert scale five (5) to 1 and the main scores are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Assessment of stakeholders’ roles in agro-based peasant farming development

Stakeholder groups	Scaling (%)				
	EH	VH	LH	NH	DK
Municipal council	30.2	20.8	24.4	11.3	3.3
Traditional leaders	34.2	39.9	13.6	7.5	4.8
Traditional herbalist	32.7	26.6	22.9	8.8	9.1
Soothsayers	22.2	26.6	28.6	10.3	12.3
Common Initiative Groups	19.3	17.7	27.1	14.8	21.1
Njangi groups	36.1	30.2	23.1	10.6	00
Peasant farmers	54.2	25.6	11.6	8.2	0.4
Masquerade groups	27.9	21.5	18.5	12.5	19.6
Religious bodies	23.7	26.7	30.2	10.3	9.1
NGOs	14.4	15.6	32.5	8.5	29.0
Bike riders and drivers	52.9	39.4	3.6	4.1	00

EH: Extremely helpful, VH: Very helpful, LH: Less helpful; NH: Not helpful, Dk: Don’t know

Source: Fieldwork, February 2025

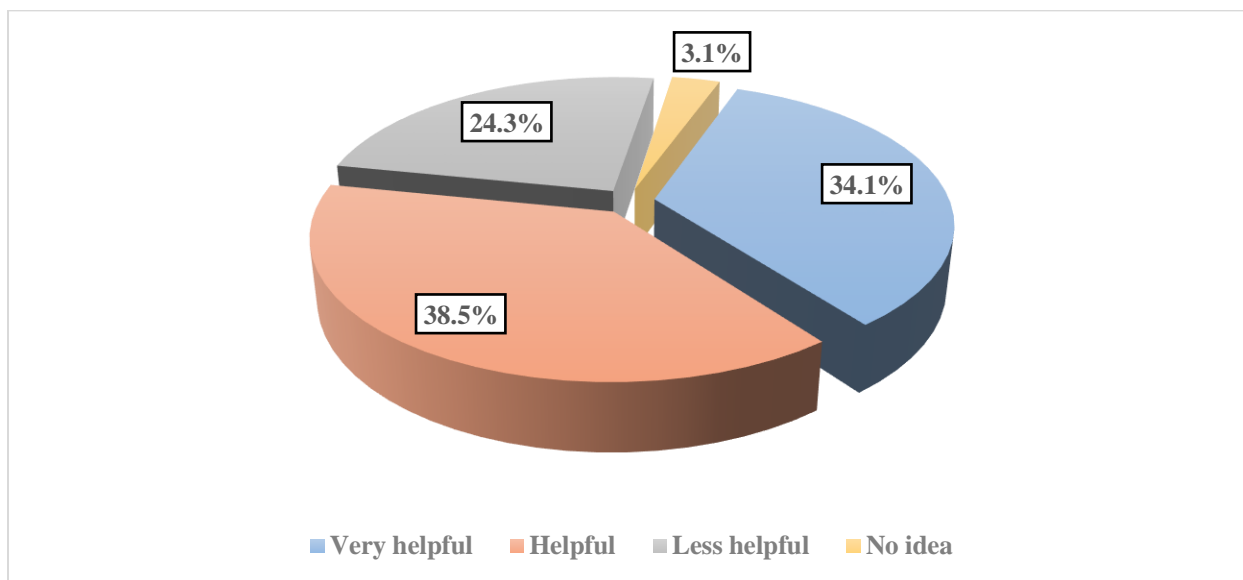
An overall 54.2 % of the population identifies peasant farmers to be extremely helpful in promoting agro-based-peasant farming development in Babadjou. The outstanding helpfulness of peasant farmers in promoting

agro-based peasant farming development in the study area is linked to their dominance in practicing agriculture throughout all seasons. This was closely followed by bike riders and drivers revealed by 52.9 % of the population during the study. Whereas, NGOs and religious bodies represent the least important stakeholders with 32.5% and 30.2% respectively.

The consideration of these stakeholders’ activities to be less helpful in agro-based peasant farming development can be inferred to their activeness and strategies in the study area. For instance, field discussions opined that the religious bodies always intervene during the onset of the rainy season to bless farmers planting seeds or pray for a successful agricultural season thus making their activities less visible. To the NGOs (ACEFA), it was further stressed out that their extension services are only limited to CIGs which only one was identified (Table 2) in the study area.

Figure 2 further quantifies the opinions of the population on how helpful are the roles played by stakeholder groups in agro-based peasant farming development in the study area.

Fig. 2: Overall assessment of stakeholders in agro-based peasant farming development



Source: Fieldwork, February 2025

An overall 38.5% of the population admitted that stakeholders activities are very helpful in agro-based peasant farming development, meanwhile only a handful of them (24.3%) have the opinions that the activities of stakeholders are less helpful (Figure 2). This proportion of the population with opinions that the activities of these stakeholder groups are not helpful in the study area can be those peasant farmers who are not involved in *njangi* groups, CIGs as well as Christians who do not believe on the roles played by masquerade groups, tradition herbalist and soothsayers. It can also be inferred to the uneven distribution (Table 2) of stakeholder groups in the study area.

It should be noted that albeit the roles played by stakeholder groups are varied and vary in function of importance, they all played a crucial role in agro-based peasant farming development in the study area. According Raheem (2011), despite the participation of varied stakeholders in the domain of agriculture, agricultural development can only be fully achieved when these stakeholders work in collaboration and also participate during decisions and policy development.

This aligns with Freeman’s Stakeholder Theory (1984) which holds that the interest, needs, and expectations of all the stakeholder groups should always be considered during decisions and policy development (Barton and Sundaram, 1989). Chia and Nkwemoh (2023) further argued that the involvement of these local stakeholders during decision and policy development should not be overemphasized in the domain of agriculture, but should also be considered in the domain of forest resource management.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper sought to identify the various agricultural stakeholders and the role they play in agro-based peasant farming development in Babadjou Sub Division, West Region of Cameroon. Results show that the stakeholder groups involved in agro-based peasant farming development are varied and include peasant farmers, municipal council, traditional leaders, traditional herbalist, soothsayers, Common Initiative Groups-CIGs, *njangi* groups, masquerade groups, among others Non-Governmental Organizations-NGOs, religious bodies, bike riders and drivers.

The roles played by these stakeholders are helpful in peasant farming development and span through; conflict resolution, land lending and distribution, sensitization, crops protection, research, aids, road maintenance, creation of markets, and the formation of Common Initiative Groups-CIGs. Based on this, the following recommendations are proposed:

- The Sub Divisional Delegation of Agriculture and Rural Development in Babadjou should identify and recognize all the various groups in the domain of agricultural development.
- The agricultural stakeholders should be fully integrated in the domain of agricultural development.
- The interest, needs, and expectations of all the agricultural stakeholders should be considered during decision and policy development.
- A participatory approach should be used in handling or addressing the concerns of all the agricultural stakeholders.
- The Sub Divisional Delegation of Agriculture and Rural Development should build a positive relationships among all the agricultural stakeholders.

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