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The Dynamics and Implications of the Coffee Economy in Tubah Sub-Division, 1934-2005

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Abstract
That the coffee economy in Tubah is at a development cul-de-sac and requires an overhaul is unquestionable. The article introduces the sustainable coffee challenge and the circumstances that made the sector unsustainable and suffered a decline in Tubah. It has been argued that coffee economy in Tubah was introduced as a substitute to the legitimate trade and owed its unsustainability and eventual decline to the outbreak of the economic crisis in the 1980s. Such argument is often pegged to the grievances of the poor angry farmers who were victims of the economic crisis and appear to have written off the benefits of the coffee sector on their livelihoods in the past. Contrary to such orthodox, this paper argues that the natural environment of Tubah alongside colonial influence provided the potential for the emergence of the coffee economy. It is further illustrated that coffee cultivation and commercialization mechanisms in Tubah evolved with time and circumstances. The lack of farm subsidies and the fall in the price of the commodity in the world market left the farmers in a state of dilemma. The paper also exposes the view that the coffee economy, in spite its constraints, resulted in beneficial socio-economic mutations in Tubah. A plethora of problems especially the economic crisis and the incessant exploitation of farmers by buying agents contributed in placing the coffee economy on a bad course. Using the case of the world's coffee industry, the paper argues that coffee which was at the centre of Tubah economy had unprecedented implications on the wellbeing of the people prior to its gradual unsustainability and decline in the late 1990s. The reactivation of this sector, the paper suggests, requires short and long term measures that go beyond State action alone.
Keywords: Dynamics, implications, economy, economic crisis, colonialism, Tubah

1. Introduction

Cameroon's coffee economy has evolved over the last decades in a manner which may be qualified as erratic, disorderly and even contradictory. The relative supply scarcity of the mid 1990, caused by the economic crisis and climatic conditions, was followed by a short period of moderately high prices that compensated for the losses incurred by the dismantling in 1989 of the International Coffee Agreement's quota system. However, this situation prompted for a surge in production that altered substantially the sustainable trend of the supply structure in Tubah and globally and was the cause of the worst coffee crisis ever seen in terms of growers' income in the area. (Our focus in understanding the global coffee phenomenon is Tubah Sub-division which is a Sub-Sahara African territory situated in the West African territory of Cameroon. The Sub-division is found in Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. Placed in the Central African sub region within Cameroon, it is situated between several sub divisions; Belo in Boyo division, Bafut, Santa and in Mezam Division, Balikumbat and Ndop Centre in Ngoketunjia Division. Hemmed in between so many subdivisions, means having so many boundaries a likely source of conflict. Being a predominantly agricultural economy this subsistence economy in the first half of the 20th century entered the international monetary chain through the cultivation and commercialization of arabica coffee). Coffee is world's second most tradable commodity after oil. In fact, the lack of sustainable coffee production in most developing countries occasioned partly by a drop in earnings from these commodities, cooperative malpractices and the economic crisis constitutes one of the most important causes for its unsustainable trends and of world poverty. This was clearly stated in November 2003 by the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations in a statement to the General Assembly, when she pointed out that "the decline in prices for commodities such as coffee and their unsustainable supply trends, which now receives roughly a third of the prices that had prevailed in the mid-1990s, contributed to increased poverty and makes it more difficult to reach the millennium development goals" (Iliffe 1979).

Most evidence shows that Cameroon's coffee produce is on a decline and this makes sustainable coffee production the serious topic of all stake holders. Ovalle-Rivera et al (2015) reveal that, since the early 1900s, coffee producing areas such as America, Africa, Asia and Oceania maintained some suitability for growing arabica coffee. They further denote that the overall influence of weather variations on coffee producing countries were predicted to be negative stating that, this could affect sustainable coffee production in the long run (Ovalle-Rivera *et al.* 2015). Kasterine *et al.* (2010) have aptly articulated that this climatic variability has always been the main factor responsible for the reduction of coffee yields in the world and determines the future coffee production status in the coffee producer's countries. Positing further, Jimmy Sherfy (1992) examines gender inequality in Uganda's coffee industry. The article's main question is whether gender equality could improve the sustainability of the coffee industry, and according to the examples provided in it, these factors are pertinent. However, these issues affecting sustainable coffee production have recently started to receive attention, and a number of organizations emerged to address these problems.

As has been seen from above, the world's coffee industry is rather old but raises an important point of its sustainability about how farmer illiteracy, price fluctuations, cooperative behaviours (appropriation of farmer surpluses) and the flaws of the economic crisis in the 1980s affected the possibility for coffee production becoming sustainable in the long run. From the historicist vein, this article argues that despite coffee standing tall as world's second most tradable commodity after oil, due to complexities in the production and supply chain of the industry, most of the farmers were excluded from the profits. Instead, a large portion of the revenue was secured by few cooperatives (corporations). This, plus the increasing competition from other sectors and farmers' vulnerability against global price fluctuations with the global economic crisis of the 1980s contributed in making the sector unsustainable.

1. BACKGROUND

A vivid look at the development literature of capitalist agriculture in Cameroon no doubt depicts that coffee cultivation had become one of the leading cash crops in the nation's agricultural theatres. Like other parts of the globe, Tubah became a pawn of European politics and ultimately of the conflicting designs of the British imperialists with the introduction of coffee culture following the advent of the legitimate trade. Britains's ambivalent conquests—oscillating between attempts to project outward its own ways of understanding the world and efforts to demarcate colonizer from colonized, civilized from primitive, core from periphery-made the space of British empire in Sub Sahara Africa into a terrain where coffee business was widespread in a match of "modernization" and "development". This provided perhaps the clearest example of what is sometimes called the inaugural of a "new technology," an era roughly beginning in 1934. The new era witnessed farm plots all over Sub Sahara Africa rapidly changed their seasonal tastes to reflect an inexorable spread of the coffee crop from Europe but with an increasing African personality.

Though the documentary record of coffee's (arabica) origins in the area is often maddeningly elusive, the crop has nonetheless been a versatile historical player that both shaped and took the shape of the African societies that cultivated it. A crop that monetized Africa's agriculture with the European currency system of exchange linked the once subsistence economy of Tubah into a cobweb of the international monetary economy via a network of cooperative societies. This was important because the developmental efforts in the coffee industry at the time enabled poor coffee farmers in the area to enjoy relatively high levels of revenues from its cultivation when prices scaled up (Kuit *et al.* 2008). More than 80% of the Tubah indigenes earned their living, either directly or indirectly from coffee. Men formed over 70% of the farming population and engaged mostly in activities like coffee harvesting, picking, drying and the inter-planting of food crops with coffee trees.

The importance of coffee to the economy of Tubah and the African mainlands was recognized even before independence. The colonial strategy of development at the time revolved on two axes: to discourage industrialization and encourage an agricultural sector based on mono-cultural plantation economy (Azobi 1988). After independence, the Cameroon Government continued to show a lot of concern to the development of the coffee sector in its five-year development plans. The first five-year development plan of 1961–1965, for example, was captioned "the farmer's year" and the second plan (1966–1970) was declared "the farmer's plan" (Lotsmart 1922). Government's commitment to ensure the future of coffee development until the 1980s was consistent. The agricultural show schemes and best coffee farm competitions served as additional incentives to the Tubah farmers. All these investments in the rural economy produced far-reaching results in the domain of poverty reduction, employment as well as economic development in the area (Kuit 2008). Paradoxically, the outbreak of the economic crisis by the 1980s and a resultant fall of the price of the commodity in the world market put an end to these incentives by government to the coffee farmers. The outcome was that, sky-rocketing hardship and misery occasioned by the lack of incentives and the appropriation of farmer surpluses and caused many to abandon the sector as production became unsustainable. This paper maintains that the sustainability of the coffee sector in terms of the number of cultivators is under threat. Below a certain available quantity, it becomes loss-making for farmers to operate in the sector. This area's coffee sector is very close to that threshold and increasing available quantities is mandatory. The motivation to embark on coffee economy was premised by a sequence of interlocking factors.

2. BASIS OF COFFEE ECONOMY IN TUBAH

The basis of coffee economy in mainland Tubah is inextricably associated to our understanding of its natural environment and inhabitants. A sub-division that naturally occurred as part of the savanna belt, 2000m above sea level and rich in soils, offered a good environment for vegetation such as bush grass to grow (Ngwa 1986).

Since the vicinity constitutes part of the Cameroon Western highlands evidenced by a series of hills and valleys that were indicative of the experience of volcanic activities in the past, presents the region with a rich and captivating geomorphologic scenery where four main villages that all hailed from the Tikar (to a group of migrants who left northern Nigeria and settled at Ngaoundere) and the Fulani (Mbororos) ethnic origins made their foot prints. It was probably the occurrence of these geomorphologic sceneries and their ethnic ties that led to constant migrations orchestrated by the search for ample and fertile land that brought the occupants of the area in two different migratory groups. These endogenous activities and the current exogenous processes explain the origin of the numerous geomorphologic features that nursed roots for the European imperialists to brutally exploit the untapped natural/environmental potentials of mainland Tubah for commercial agriculture. Since the area naturally occurred as a predominantly subsistence agricultural economy, this served as a catalyst for these indigenous farmers in the first half of the 20th century to enter the international monetary chain through the cultivation and commercialization of arabica coffee.

The propagation of coffee culture in Tubah was an onerous task orchestrated by the British lukewarm attitude towards the crop culture that was met with outright discouragement by the colonial administration for fear that indigenous cultivation without the assistance of the British colonial administration would inhibit the crop quality. This outright discouragement set out to suppress local initiative and lewd absolute reliance on the colonial government. In view of the phenomenon, Dinham and Hines (1983) unanimously maintained that:

> While it seems possible that the people in Bamenda might be able to grow Arabica coffee successfully, it is unlikely that they would be able to prepare it properly for the Agricultural Officer. It is our experience that the native farmer may be able to grow a permanent crop more or less successfully without European help and guidance but that he cannot do without that and guidance when it comes to preparing the crop for export. (NAB 1922)

While the above declarations seem to be very clear that the Europeans doubted the capabilities of these indigenous farmers to cultivate coffee, taking a critique (case) of the Tubah economy noted with agrarian roots from time immemorial, the ugly scenario of doubts posed by the Europeans on the African's capability to successful grow coffee begs us to ask the question as to whether the international coffee trade was a skillful mechanism laid out by the White colonizers to brutally water down (suppress) indigenous African technology towards crop growth in the agricultural economy. What is next, it could be argued that it was this misrepresentation of the indigenous African farmer's know-how to successfully cultivate coffee that nursed disinterest in the European initiators of the crop to train the Africans in the necessary skill of transforming coffee into a finished consumable product that further opened the window for the crop culture in the developing African economies to wind up in the future. However, the crop was successfully introduced in mainland Tubah in 1934. The economic factor as a driving force to the scramble[1] and propagation of coffee in the locale and other African hinterlands was best extrapolated by Jules Ferry, the Prime Minister of France at the time who intimated that:

> Colonial policy is the off spring of industrial policy… European consumption is saturated. It is necessary to raise new masses of consumers in other parts of the globe, else we shall put modern society into bankruptcy; Otto Von Bismarck, the then German chancellor said, 'colonies would mean the winning of new markets for German industry, the expansion of trade and a new field for German activity, civilization and capital (Murdock 1959).

To this end, its cultivation against indigenous initiative in Tubah and continental Africa was geared to guarantee European monopoly in the world over its production. In understanding the dynamics of coffee economy in Tubah and globally, Dinham and Hines (1983) have argued that during the 1930s colonial powers intensified African coffee production as European countries sought to undermine Brazil's international coffee monopoly. As a result, African coffee production increased ten-fold during the 1930s as Europeans used tariffs to exclude Latin American producers from European markets. To wade off challenges and ensure the rapid spread of coffee culture in mainland Tubah, Suifon further articulates that this measure was to be impressed upon the Chiefs (Suifon 1990). The use of Tubah chiefs as powerful and influential apparatus endorsed coffee culture by 1934 over its agricultural treaties. Dominick Mundi aptly ascribes its roots in the 1930s in the settlements of Bambui to Alfred Achu Gay. The motivation to cultivate the coffee crop was provoked by an aura of objectives. First, it was introduced when the most important cash crop, the Kolanut, was attacked by blight and people were looking for new sources of money in order to pay for the head tax, buy European goods and finance their children's education (Chem–Langhee 1989).

Of the factors of production, land was the only thing that seemed to be in abundance. It was unimaginable that a prospective farmer would have any difficulty to whatever family land was available in his place of birth. Although there was hardly any technological knowledge with which to redeem waterlogged or otherwise unsuitable land resources for the coffee estates, farmland was plentiful enough not to create a constraint on development in the colonial regime. The availability of arable land in its vastness was accounted for by the fact that there was very little infrastructure due to the remoteness of the environment which made vast arable land available for coffee. Land was not therefore seen as any obstacle for cultivation. Since Tubah (African) Chiefs were kept at the pivot of the enunciation process and wielded a lot of authority on land, we are left with no option than to put to question the state of the fledgling authority of the African rulers whether they still commanded great respect as they had become more of servants to the colonial masters in the coffee business. Moreover, the undeniable involvement of these African rulers in the colonial coffee trading mechanism involving land disposition to the colonizers after receiving gifts from the imperialists poses another great question as to whether it was the "African exploiting the Africans" in the international coffee trade not just the "Europeans exploiting the Africans" as these indigenous African titled men were actively involved in the coffee theatres extorting from their subjects. Either way, whether the African or European involved in the control of affairs over the coffee industry, the end goal was that the indigenous African producer suffered the most. It was squarely in the context of these developments that a tidal wave of coffee dominated farm plots by the 1930s in Tubah. The cultivation of this perennial crop in the locale evolved over time and circumstances.

3. DYNAMICS OF COFFEE CULTIVATION IN TUBAH

The cultivation of coffee in the Tubah area was closely linked to the politics of colonialism, and the changing economic conditions in the different African colonies. Emphasis was placed exclusively on export crops such as coffee. The development of the indigenous food sector received little attention or was actively discouraged because it conflicted with the labour needs of the European-owned large-scale plantations. Numerous measures were taken by the administration to stimulate the creation and expansion of coffee farms in Tubah. During the trusteeship period, the British colonial powers shifted their emphasis to peasant production which provided the basis for the rapid expansion of exports like coffee (Ntangsi 1988).

When these people introduced coffee in Tubah, only a few stems were planted alongside tobacco, an old cash crop of the people of the Bamenda Grassfields. That is to say it was first cultivated locally. Initially, the cultivation of coffee was mainly in the hands of Catholic Christian nuclear families because of the early and widespread involvement of the Catholic clergy in its propagation (Cham-Langhee & Fanso 2011). During these early years, coffee plots in Tubah were located near the compounds where hearth-ashes and sweepings had fertilized the soil and tree crops provided shade for coffee, fallowed lands which required little clearing and were near settlements and feeder roads came under coffee culture, although few people planted the crop on lineage lands, located away from the main settlements and had been in recent cultivation. It was at this time that casual paid labour entered the scene. Thereafter, more and more virgin lands, located away from the main settlements, were brought under coffee culture (Cham-Langhee & Fanso 2011). These were relatively large farms owned by traditional authorities who controlled well-situated lands and had access to free labour, and by large entrepreneurs, political leaders and salaried officials who had the resources to hire seasonal labour and transportation (Chilver 1987). When knowledge on the crop's financial gains was spread across the region, people resorted to the opening of small coffee farm plantations. At this point, food crops especially cassava in Kedjom Keku and Babanki Tungaw gave way to the cultivation of arabica coffee. In the attempt of historicizing the event, Chunkang Tantoh (2005) articulated that:

> Colonial innovations also included the introduction of cash crops such as coffee, which changed the pattern of production from food crops to cash crop production. The immediate impact of this collision on the traditional economic food crop farming and colonial commercial interest on farmers is that the latter eclipsed the former.

Due to the domineering character of coffee over the traditional food crop system when it was introduced, more land was disposed for coffee cultivation as food crop regimes were being altered. More than anything else, the factor that sustained the practice of coffee cultivation in Tubah in the early years (1930s) had been the initiative of the farmers with pernicious qualities in prospects. Although unlettered, the rural farmers of Babanki Tungaw, Bambui, Bambili and Kedjom Keku observed the changing seasons over the years. From their investigations, they could reasonably predict the pouring of the rains and the coming of sunshine. They thus determined the start and the end of the planting seasons and harvested the berries of their labour when it was the time to do so.

Before the days of agricultural schools and experimental stations in Tubah, the traditional coffee farmers did learn through trial and error and succeeded in solving farm problems as they arose and thus increased yields from their labour. They had learned to allow worn out parcels of land sometimes when coffee did not do well. Although they did not consciously apply manure to their fields, they got some results in this direction by laying out weeds on the cleared farm plots where they could decompose and give back their minerals to the earth. They saved some of their harvest (berries) as seed for another season and took care to give every coffee tree the special treatment it required like clearing the lower part of the stems and pruning. The last factor which encouraged the expansion and further propagation of coffee cultivation in Tubah and virtually all of the Southern Cameroons came from John Ngu Foncha in 1961. He recommended that:

Each and every man must plant coffee trees just as they do over there in French Cameroon. There, the people make a lot of money with their coffee plantations. If you agree, we shall provide you with seeds and show you how to plant them. Before five years have passed, you will have a very good harvest, which will give you a lot of money. You will then break down the grass-roofs on your houses and have them covered with corrugated Iron Sheets. Whenever your children are ill, you will have money to take them to the hospital and your children will no longer die. You will also be able to send all your children to school to have them educated (RAB, 1957).

Foncha uttered this statement during his tour of Bamenda in 1961 when he encouraged farmers on the benefits they were to reap as a result of their cultivation of arabica coffee. This speech received the blessings of the Tubah coffee farmers and mobilized them for further cultivation in what became the peak period for coffee business in the area.

After the reunification of Cameroon in 1961, people of the winning party did indeed come as promised with coffee seedlings from East Cameroon to share to the farmers (Knopfli 1990). The post-independence period saw substantial continuity in the colonial agricultural policies and institutional structure until 1972. In the coffee sector, it involved the transformation of the Tubah coffee peasants through the progressive diffusion and adoption of innovations and it relied on only limited government intervention (research, extension, and inputs) to obtain changes in peasant behavior in view of their autonomy in decision-making. This approach was implicitly adopted in the first Five-year Development Plans of the country (1961-1965) and to some degree, in the second (1966-1970).

By the Fourth Plan (1976-80), coffee cultivation in Tubah and in most African economies like Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria whose economies were/is predominantly agriculture began dwindling as foreign aid donors were no longer willing to fund for incentives in the coffee sector in the area and agriculture as a whole. But Cameroon's attempt to create a modern coffee sector through this kind of intervention proved to be very costly for the Tubah mainland farmers and had only a marginal impact on total agricultural output. The proliferation of new institutions and structures was particularly counter-productive. Agencies were supervised by different government ministries with little provision for the coordination of activities. The poor performance of the interventionist strategy led to donor retreat and helped to awaken government doubts about the approach. This marked the beginning of gloomy days for coffee business in Tubah and the nation at large. The North West Regional Delegation of Agriculture in its 2003 report noted that coffee was for a long time the major cash earner for farmers in the Bamenda Division. Up to the early 1980s more than seventy percent of the farming population of the region depended largely on income from coffee production for their well-being. Furthermore, the crop contributed significantly to foreign exchange earnings in the economy of the country as a whole (NWRDA 2003).

In spite of its vital role to Cameroon's economic performance, in the 1980s, the indigenous Tubah coffee farmers were left self-reliant and coffee farm bonuses became terminated as their cooperatives were facing managerial problems and their own share of the economic crisis. Faced with a brutal fall in living standards after 1986, the government felt it had to implement Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) supported by international donors. Sector-specific policy reforms of the SAPs in agriculture included both privatization and liberalization. These reforms targeted input, production, transfer of technology and know-how through research and development, marketing, training and information as well as sanitary and phytosanitary control. They aimed to promote and diversify coffee exports and increase income in the rural area. Reforms which attracted the greatest attention involved liberalization of coffee marketing.

The liberalization of the coffee market meant that more drastic changes were to occur after the liquidation of the Cameroon Agricultural Bank (Crédit Agricole) in 1997, only a few parastatals or private agro-industrial enterprises were able to offer farm production loans. Smaller and more remote farmers had no access at all to formal credit. The emergence of financial intermediaries was limited by high risk and limited availability of collaterals. So these rural farmers had to rely on loans from family members and local informal lenders for cultivation. There had been some micro-finance available through donor-funded institutions, but these remained poorly distributed in the country and sometimes lacked credibility and professionalism, with no linkage between them and commercial banks. The dynamics of coffee economy is presented statistically on table 1.

The table shows that coffee produced in the Tubah cooperatives experienced a tidal nature from 1934 to 1939. During this phase, a kilogram of coffee stood at 127frs with 125 tons produced as on row 2. At the price 135frs between 1945 to 1950, it increased rapidly to 315 coffee tonnages. There was a geometric progression from 1950 to 1955 seasons with an increase to 275 tons produced, it nose-dived between 1955 to 1960 with 270 tons and rose again from 1960 to 1980 with 290 tons. The marked increase over these years in Tubah was because government intervened in the sector on functions hitherto carried out by the coffee farmers. It nose-dived and dropped from 1980 to 2005 with less than a tone produce. While the period 1980 to 1985 that marked the advent of the economic crisis and the mal functioning of the Tubah cooperatives, coffee registered production decreases with 160 tons produced and 72 tons between the period 1985 to 1990.Coffee production in Tubah continued to decline.

What marked the apex of the evolution of coffee in Tubah were the cash earnings which limited out migration or made it uncommon with the introduction of coffee farms. Paradoxically, the cash earnings from this crop unequivocally maladjusted the attitude of this indigenous farmers especially men who were real owners of coffee plots were given to wining and drunkenness and often than not exposed to keeping late night movements and some ended in the gutters. The importance of the coffee economy was to alter the pattern of land tenure in Tubah.

In 1962, following the boom in the world's coffee industry, the International Coffee Agreement (1962) where Cameroon was a signatory. This coincided with the reform policy for Cameroon's agricultural sector during which there was a mad rush for coffee production and cash proceeds by the farmers of Tubah. Consequently, land which formally was not scrambled for became a market commodity (Ntang 1996). The consequence was that land became scarce. All these accordingly increased the value of land. As the price of these crops scaled up in the 1960s and 70s, the consequence was the sky-rocketing prices for land acre in the area and there was therefore high need for individual possession of land (Kimble 1962). The nature of the coffee crop was that which was bound to alter the land tenure system in locale The fact that this crop was perennial in nature, made the ownership of land to change from communal to individual ownership in the area. The social obligation especially the financial demands of education, house construction and health in most families made it difficult to make both ends meet. As a result, the sale of land to meet up with these social obligations was provoked in part by export agriculture (Ntang 1996).

Land holdings of coffee farmers in Tubah were fairly substantial. Nearly all of the land was used for cropping activities. Land tenure was mostly governed by traditional land-use rights in Kedjom Keku, Bambui, Bambili and Babanki Tungaw. About 55% of Tubah coffee farmers usually cultivated land that had been handed down to them by their parents or other family members. In this way, the land became too fragmented for large scale cultivation of coffee. The traditional village chiefs in the area played an important role in land-ownership issues and had the power to redistribute land that was left lying idle by its owners (Daniel 2013). This however pertained primarily to land used for annual crops. Tenure of coffee land was more secure. Land under coffee in Tubah was for many farmers an attractive asset. Particularly, the poorest farmers used land they had under coffee as collateral when borrowing money. Such land under coffee was typically the last item a farmer in severe financial trouble would sell. Food crops could always be grown on idle land, whereas coffee was a long-term investment to the Tubah farmer. But in 1972, the unification of the country and creation of a new Ministry of Agriculture led to substantial modification in the colonial institutional structure for the coffee sector that brought adverse effects on the indigenous Tubah farmers.

Cameroon's unitary period from 1972 to 1982 was the period of agricultural policy reform in the coffee sector. In Tubah as in most areas around Cameroon, the early 1970s saw a movement towards greater intervention in the coffee sector, with the direct involvement of government in functions hitherto carried out by the private sector such as coffee input distribution (MMA 2009) which benefited the Tubah coffee farmers. Conversely, the 1974 land use laws transferred land ownership from traditional rulers in Tubah to the state (MMA 2009). Against this backdrop, coffee culture in Tubah took a cyclic pattern making the crop culture unsustainable as the loss of land meant a decline in coffee cultivation which impressed on the Tubah coffee farmers the feeling that the absence of land tenure security for small farmers was a guarantee that the sector will soon become unstainable and ebb away (MMA 2009)

Farmers did buy land and those who had bought land from others sometimes had a sales receipt that functioned as proof of ownership. While such land could reportedly be used to mortgage land holdings, government did not recognize it and in cases of land seizure for governmental development projects, farmers were generally not compensated unless they had a real title deed. Obtaining a title deed was costly and a complicated procedure and as such many farmers did not have recognized documents for their land. What was predominant here was the traditional land-use right and sales receipts of land to determine ownership. Land devoted to coffee farming was small family farm plantation and the majority of farmers had different plots across the villages on average one hectare.

In fact, there was increased indirect taxation of peasants Tubah coffee farmers through the Tubah Cooperative Produce Marketing Societies under the directives of the *Office National de Commercialisation de Produits de Base (ONCPB),* which had been created mainly for cocoa and coffee. Coffee was not paid instantly by the aforementioned cooperative boards in Tubah to their farmers. Rather, three quarters was paid to the farmers and twenty-five percent kept and was only paid later to them as bonuses and this was in the rainy season when there was no coffee for sale. This was received with gladness by the Tubah farmers which to them were a kind of incentive. This increase in taxation never fell short of a decline in income which meant every measure of their "hard currency" earned from coffee cultivation benefited the poor farmers little. The excessive use of their coffee incomes on taxes made them to visualize the crop culture as unsustainable for the future which created room for future doubts on the steady evolution of the crop culture. Financial exigencies occasioned the commercialization of coffee in mainland Tubah.

4. EVOLUTION OF COFFEE COMMERCIALIZATION IN TUBAH

In pursuance of the government's four cardinal points of balanced development, self–reliance, social justice and planned liberalism, the government found cooperative societies as a medium through which these goals could be realized and the much emphasized Green Revolution propelled. To maximize the use of cooperatives as a tool for development, employment and poverty reduction, the government undertook certain measures. There was the reorganization of the marketing board. The National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB) which formerly existed as West Cameroon Marketing Board (WCMB) and later as Produce Marketing Organization with many Licensed Buying Agents which had in the past acted as unscrupulous middlemen were effaced. They included Direct Supplies Ltd, Kamerun Mountain Company, Kilo Bross Ltd, West Cameroon Development Agency to name a few. This gave the NPMB a monopolistic hand when it came into being in 1978 following the administrative reorganization by the government that year. Many writers had found the Marketing Board as a source of income (surplus) to be utilized for development especially with its activities in the North West Region between 1978-1987 (RAB 1977). Obayan (1970) pointed out that they were not created primarily for the purpose but to stabilise prices, paying producers less than the world prices during boom and maintaining producer price in the year of low world market prices.

Following its independence in 1961, Cameroon followed an interventionist approach to development (Tambi 1984) Prices as well as the rate of exchange and the interest rates were regulated, quantitative restrictions were imposed on trade and private-sector activity was controlled. Government was directly involved in the provision of services such as marketing and in some cases were also producers. When the government of the United Republic of Cameroon decided to carry out a broad base rural development program for the benefit of the farmers of the North West Region, the Bamenda Cooperative Association (BCA) in an extra ordinary meeting on March 29, 1978, resolved and transformed itself into the North West Co-operative Association. Incidentally, that same year (1978), the same government created the NPMB. It then took over the marketing functions of the Southern Cameroon Marketing Board (SCMB) and subsequently those of the West Cameroon Marketing Board (WCMB) (RAB 1978). Farmers were guaranteed outlets for their crops and given the opportunity to participate in the cash economy, with everyone being paid the same price for the same product irrespective of their location. As buying agent of the National Produce Marketing Board, the North West Cooperative Association delegated powers to the Kedjom Keku, Babanki Tungaw, Bambui and Bambili societies to buy and process coffee. Grading and packaging of coffee from Tubah was carried out by the unions in Bamenda and transported to NPMB in Bamenda ready for export. This left the NWCA Ltd with the major role of coordination over the various Tubah cooperatives. The NPMB secured export quotas through an agent, F S A Cavanagh of Lehavre, France and exported mainly to EEC countries, the US and some other countries. It safeguarded price rises, curbs and wide price fluctuations. If no coffee mill existed, (a situation prevalent in cooperatives with a low marketing tonnage), the farmer had the choice of selling his coffee in cherry form paid directly or continued waiting until his coffee was transported to a section with a coffee mill and hulled there. After hulling and cleaning, the coffee was transported to the stores of the marketing Board. When the NPMB received coffee from cooperatives; it exported it to the world markets. The implication of coffee commercialization in Tubah informed by British policies met with mixed fortunes for the farmers.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF COFFEE ECONOMY IN TUBAH

Mitigating developments took place in Tubah with the coffee economy but was short lived as the level of development was mediocre (Nwenfor 2014). However, the limited economic realization in the area from the crop culture inter-a-lia included the creation of cooperative movements that became market centres. Cooperatives, a worldwide phenomenon manifested by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) gained momentum during the Industrial Revolution with a transition from subsistence to commercialized agriculture.

The fundamental objective of the Tubah cooperatives was acting as authorized agents in a non-profit making capacity on behalf of their members, performing certain economic functions which satisfied the common needs of such coffee farmers. As a result, the economy of the Tubah area evolved from a once traditional *'laiser faire'*economy to a strictly organized market economy with the cultivation of coffee. This helped the Tubah farmers to survive in a microcosmic community, a phenomenon that led Totomiantz to consider the cooperative movement as "the necessary corollary of capitalism" (Totomiantz 1987).

The creation of the cooperatives made Tubah indigenes to think it was a talisman giving the dwarf a chance in the competitive struggle of giants. The marketing of coffee was entrusted in the hands of the National Produce Marketing Board through the Tubah Cooperative Produce Marketing Societies whose importance was illustrated by Olankanpo and Teriba who considered Marketing Boards as government established monopolies entrusted with agricultural export and fixing of producer prices, exercising considerable fiscal and monetary policy (Olankanpo & Teriba 1971). Their operating results were of importance from the point of view of government finance, farm income, money supply, and indeed, the overall growth rate of the economy. This often led to its accumulation of huge surplus. This had been the experiences of the African growers that established them.

The sky-rocketing economic hardship made socio-economic lifestyle difficult for the farmers and increased poverty as coffee farmer benefits were not being paid on time or at all (Azewoh 2011). As a result, farmers became discouraged with the Tubah cooperatives as was the case in the nation at large. According to Helleiner (1989), 32% of potential income of producers had been withheld by the marketing boards. The importance the Cameroon government attached to the role of marketing boards as a source of finance for development need not be overemphasized. Through the various Tubah cooperatives, government found a surplus which was tapped for economic development. Obayan stressed that few will seriously argue against the responsibility of the government to locate and tap such surplus for investment which would benefit not only the farmers but the entire community (Obayan 1978).

Lewis held that from commodities handled exclusively by more public institutions (cooperatives) in the North West Province particularly coffee, much surplus was kept for re-investment by the institutions rather than being passed back to the farmer (Lewis 1979). Agricultural exports were shown earlier to be an important foreign exchange earner for these farmers and the earnings derived from them to farmers was one of the main vehicles for the transformation of the rural sector from a barter economy to a monetized economy. Unfortunately, withholding surpluses for the Tubah coffee farmers met with serious damages for coffee business that led to a coma in the sector.

To posit, a stabilization fund existed through the NPMB that used to pre-finance these cooperatives and maintained a stable purchasing price using the stabilization fund. This enabled coffee production to double between the 1970s and early 80s. As a result of an IMF directed Structural Adjustment Program, a radical change led to the elimination of most state intervention in the Tubah coffee sector. The economic crisis of the early 1990s made the government to take very stringent measures as part of its readjustment plan in the coffee sector. Government drastically reduced subventions to coffee farmers implying the coffee farmers in Tubah had to buy their farm inputs in the open market. Also, the devaluation of the FCFA had doubled import prices; the NPMB was closed implying the pre-financing activity to the Tubah cooperatives was no longer available.

There was the removal of government control through the Department of Cooperatives and Mutuality whose function was to control and audit the activities of the Tubah cooperatives. Although government was taking these decisions as a readjustment strategy, the immediate effects weighed adversely on Tubah coffee farmers and their cooperatives. They could no more buy farm inputs because of the increase in prices due to devaluation of the FCFA (Mbouy 2009). The result was that coffee farms were not properly maintained resulting in low production and productivity, bad management and misdirection of funds causing the Tubah cooperatives to go bankrupt. This caused farmers to abandon their farms and diversify operations to food crop production with no organized and steady market. Lotsmart (1922) attributed the decline to "substantially reduced government support" which brought in progressive changes with accompanying problems on the Tubah coffee farmers such as the inability to buy farm inputs.

Besides, the economic crisis of 1986 adversely affected the area's coffee sector. Tubah area farmers did not see any reason again to continue with the cultivation of coffee (Ngoh 1998). There was a fall in the price of coffee in the world market. This adversely affected the progressive cultivation and buying of some major Cameroonian cash crops like coffee, cocoa and rubber. This price failure for coffee discouraged these indigenous farmers. The economic crisis further dampened hopes of rejuvenation, pushing farmers into drastic decisions some of which have had far reaching repercussions. Many angrily cut down coffee plants in favour of fast-yielding food crops. Some who retained their farms had no other alternative. These were indeed trying moments for the sector in the Tubah area and needed prompt intervention from government which was itself facing its own share of the crisis. To restructure the agricultural sector, state subsidies for principal crops such as coffee was eliminated. The provision of fertilizers and insecticides to farmers and the state regulation of coffee trade, its marketing structure, quality control and pricing were halted. The marketing of coffee was liberalized and the NPMB restructured into a National Cocoa and Coffee Board (NCCB) with reduced mandate to facilitate production and marketing of cocoa and coffee (Tchoungi *et al.* 2009).

For the last 20 years, following the withdrawal of government subsidies in 1990, the liberalization of the coffee trade and the devaluation of the CFA Francs have combined to force Tubah coffee farmers to integrate their coffee farms into traditional family farms, leading to a class intensive and more casual production of coffee (Essomba *et al.* 2009). Together, the decline of the coffee price forced many coffee farmers to abandon or diversify their farms (Benhin & Barbier 1999). Amazingly, the sector was abandoned in the hands of the farmers in the name of liberalisation. As nature would have it, this opened up floodgates of disorder with a steady influx of impostors in the area. The aggressive appetite for money produced very undesirable results including a drop in quantity and quality of coffee. That notwithstanding, from every indication, the situation could have been different if farmers received expert advice (Shepherd & Farolfi 1999).

The idea of destroying coffee farms to plant food crops was caused by ignorance. Michael Ndoping, (Unicef Website 2013). General Manager of the National Cocoa and Coffee Board (NCCB) contends that it is possible to cultivate other crops alongside coffee on the same parcel of land, the best solution being to adopt good agricultural practices. Ignorance of the fact that coffee could be successful cultivated alongside other shrubs and plant pushed the Tubah coffee farmers to cut down their coffee trees who considered the cultivation of the crop to be less profitable or as an occupation for the poor. The abandonment of farms, widespread loss of jobs, reduced fiscal revenue, knock-on effect on other economic sectors, reduced export volumes and earnings (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, El Salvador, Ethiopia and Nicaragua). This scenario was equally reflective of the situation in Cameroon which had become a major exporter of arabica coffee into European markets. The crisis in Cameroon's coffee sector was also felt in Columbia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Papau New Guinea and Vietnam with migration from the countryside to cities, emigration abroad, less money available for health care and education, increase in households living under the poverty line, increased incidence of malnutrition, increased indebtedness harnessed an unsustainable environment for coffee growers and left the farmers with the lone option to neglect the coffee sector. The question remains as to whether instead of governments spending huge funds on white elephant city projects without real fallouts on the rural farmer could the same budget not be invested to remedy the agricultural (coffee) sector with feasible impact on farmer socio-economic wellbeing as well as the GDP while safeguarding the coffee sector thriving in the long run. From the early 1990s to 2005, the local and world price for coffee was on the rise but its cultivation in the Tubah and other developing Sub Sahara African economies rather took a retrogressive dive for the gutters which as expressed graphically in table 2, gives iconic meaning.

Figure 2 illustrates the declining trend in the cultivation of coffee in Tubah with the rising price for the crop in the local market. The blue curve shows the price per kilogram of coffee from 1990 that stood at a near low 300 Frs at the peak of the economic crisis that marked a slump for arabica coffee in Tubah. The decline was maintained until 1994 when the price rose sharply between 400 and 550 Frs per kilogram following the devaluation of the FCFA. This increase was maintained until 2005 in Tubah fluctuating between 600 and 700 Frs per kilogram of arabica coffee. Meanwhile, the red curve indicates the declining trend in the cultivation of coffee in Tubah from 1990-2005. With the economic crisis and it resultant withdrawal of coffee farmer incentives coupled with the onslaught of managerial deficiencies of Tubah produce marketing boards, more farmers left its cultivation from the 90s up to 2005 although the price for the crop between these years had been rising steadily fluctuating between 600 and 700 Frs per kilogram.

Unfortunately, more farmers abandoned coffee cultivation in favour of education, more profitable market gardening which was fast yielding and had greater demand in the market. Thus, the more the price increased, the more people drifted away from its cultivation. It appears the rural farmers lost faith in the sector. There was virtually less than 10% of the Tubah population still involved in coffee cultivation by 2005. To sum up this scenario, Bradley (1991) got it right when he quantified the "economy" to mean "what we collectively produce is what the economy produces". This assertion corresponds perfectly to coffee economy in Tubah as the few bags they could produce represented the dilemma that had become of coffee economy in the locale.

6. CONCLUSION

The article maintains that the Tubah indigenous farmers had the potential to cultivate coffee. The paper further maintains that coffee cultivation and commercialization mechanisms in Tubah had unprecedented socio-economic implications on these indigenous farmers prior to its unsustainability in the 1990s. The initiative to abandon the cultivation of coffee was motivated, among other factors, by the ignorance of the farmers who were owners of the crop, and not only the economic crisis. To posit, the lack of indigenous knowledge capable of producing consumable coffee, the liberalization of the sector that witnessed the withdrawal of government subsidies and the appropriation of farmer surpluses encouraged many to cut down their coffee tress. The paper adheres that the incessant exploitation of farmers by the cooperatives and the collapse of the Cooperative Marketing Boards meant that there was no market and benefits derived from their coffee produce which laid the bedrock for the gradual unsustainability and decline of the sector in the long run. In looking for solutions, it is crucial to understand that sustainability is a term that is heard in more and more contexts in recent years. There is no doubt that the overriding need at present remains to guarantee the future of coffee through addressing the problem of economic sustainability. That is, to ensure that coffee production does not continue to entail a loss to growers. Of course, it may be argued that production should best be concentrated in as few main areas where this will not be the case. The International Coffee Organization under the International Coffee Agreement of 2001 should encourage farmers to develop a sustainable coffee economy while also promoting efforts to create a degree of coordination between several initiatives for these producers for production to be sustainable.

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Table 1: Fluctuating Coffee Tonnages in Tubah Cooperatives, 1934-2005

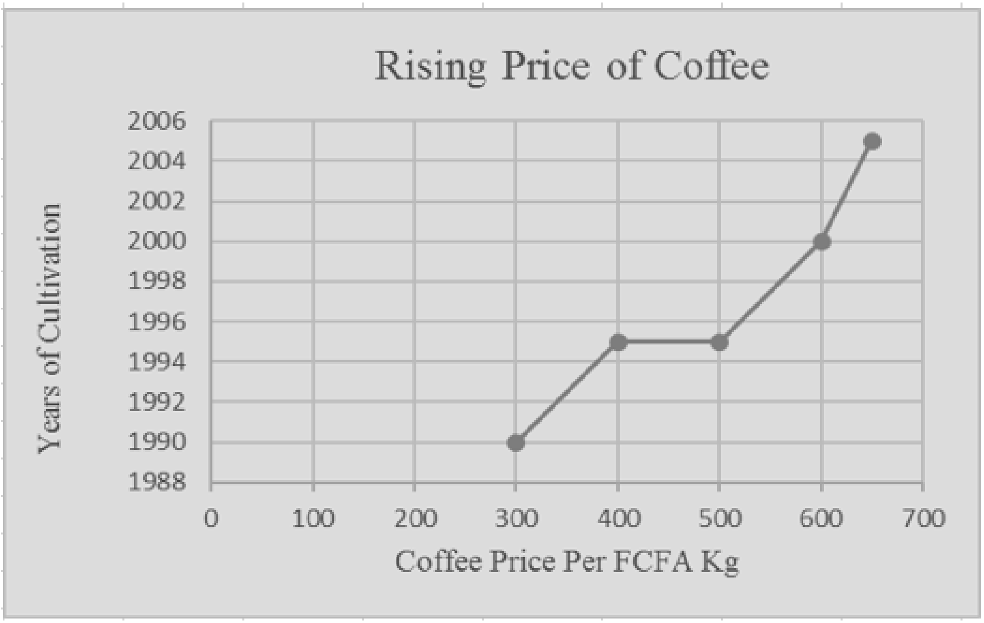
Year	Tonnage	Price/Bonus Per Kg (FCFA)
1934/1939	0	127frs
1939/1945	125	127
1945/1950	165	135
1950/1955	275	135
1955/1960	270	145
1960/1965	245	170
1965/1970	290	145
1970/1975	155	280
1975/1980	325	290
1980/1985	160	300
1985/1990	72	400
1990/1995	25	500
1995/2000	5	550
2000/2005	0.25	600

Sources: Compiled from reports relating Coffee Production in, Tubah, 2014.

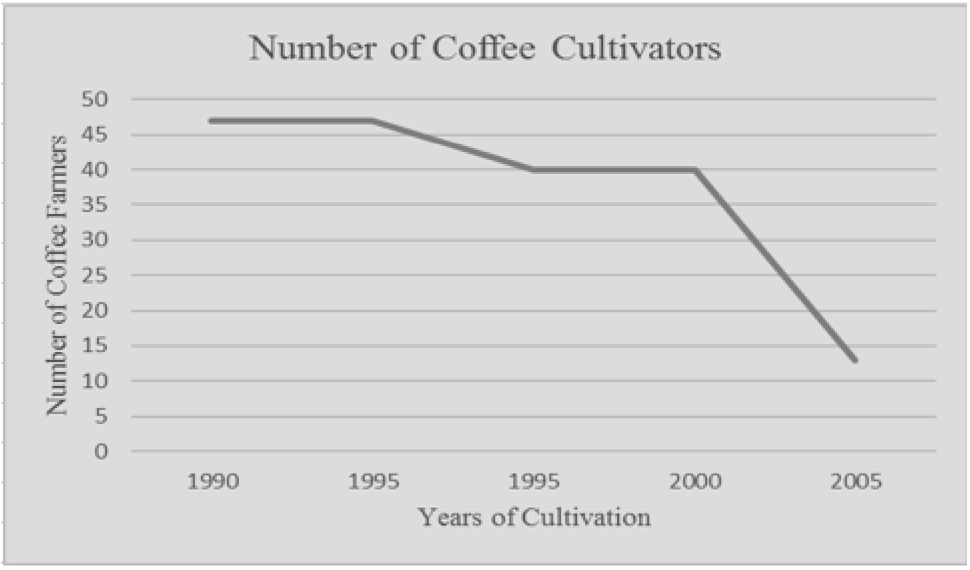
Table 2**:** Declining Trend of Coffee Cultivation in Tubah with Increase in Prices,1990-2005

Coffee Price/Kg (FCFA)	Years of Cultivation	Number of Coffee Farmers
300 to 400	1990-1995	47
500 to 600	1995-2000	40
600 to 650	2000-2005	13
TOTAL		100

Source: Compiled from reports relating to Coffee Economy in Tubah.



Graph 1: Sky-rocketing Price of Coffee, 1990-2005



Graph 2: Abysmal Decline in the Number of Coffee Cultivators in Tubah, 1990-2005