

Migrant Remittance and Farm Production Decisions in Cameroon

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Abstract: In the last two decades, there has been a significant surge of Cameroonians migrating to developed countries. The migrants though predominantly recent university graduates, they cut across all age groups, with the reasons for migration being that Cameroon is not economically promising. Money and material remitted to Cameroon could have a role to play in household economic activity. This research examines the role of migrant remittance on farm profits. Cross-sectional primary observations from 240 farming households reveal that pull factors rather than push factors explain the recent wave of emigration. Relying on quantitative analysis through formal econometric techniques, the study establishes that farm profits while depending on prices, level of education, also depend on migrant remittance. There exist a positive relationship between demand for inputs and supply of products to market, with migrant remittance. This study therefore calls for measures to ease the flow of migrant remittance and tap into its significant contributory effects in improving welfare, especially in rural Cameroon.

Key words: migration, remittance, farming household, profits, Cameroon

INTRODUCTION

Acceleration of globalisation over the last fifty years has been accompanied by increased average inflows of foreign population into the developed world. While globalisation has set in motion forces which are creating demand for labour mobility across borders, developing institutions and prevailing conditions in labour sending zones unleash forces to meet this demand for labour^[23]. In the last two decades there has been an influx of African immigrants to countries abroad despite the insurmountable barriers erected by the wealthy European Union, USA, Canada and Japan^[12]. The current surge of Cameroonian migration to developed countries involves mostly the youths that are leaving the country and their reason being that Cameroon is not promising economically, no jobs and little salaries. Thus, they believe developed countries have much to offer them economically, as these countries' living standards are better off than Cameroon's. Today, the decision to emigrate is part of Cameroonian's strategy to solve daily problems and increase the income of other family members through cash remittances from abroad. However, despite such evidence, gaps remain in our understanding of how remittances are or can be used to promote development, especially given that existing policy incentives are not generally considered as having been very effective in channelling remittances towards development^[2].

The rise of migrant remittances, to a level that is on par with global development assistance and foreign direct investment in the migrant-sending countries has stirred renewed policy attention and studies on the development dimension of migrant transfers^[33]. In the mid 1990s world wide migrants' remittances were in the range of US\$ 75 billion per annum. Of these, remittances to developing countries were about US\$ 45 billion per annum, compared with inflows of foreign direct investment at US\$ 100 billion per annum and foreign portfolio investment at US\$ 63 billion per annum^[23]. The Global Development Finance 2003 Annual Report makes a very conservative calculation of remittances based on official IMF balance of payments data. Even so, the report estimates that US\$ 72.3 billion went to developing countries in 2001. Of these, Latin America received US\$ 25 billion (Mexico alone 9.9 billion); South Asia US\$ 16 billion (India alone US\$ 10 billion); and East Asia US\$ 11 billion (the Philippines alone US\$ 7 billion).

Remittances, defined as the money migrants send back to their countries of origin, have become a substantial source of foreign currency income for Cameroon. This increase can be seen through a burgeoning foreign exchange money market and the increase of transfer mechanisms such as Western Union, Moneygram, Moneyline and MoneyExpress. These money houses make it easier for money transfer from abroad. The aim of this research is to review the role of remittances on the socioeconomic development

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of Cameroon by studying the impact of migrant remittances on rural households. Specifically, this research explores the factors in rural household in Cameroon that motivate their emigrant relatives to remit, examine how this money is used, and the impact of these on farm production. In meeting the set objectives, the hypothesis that migrant remittance has a positive impact on household welfare is tested. The broad handling of this topic adds more knowledge on the effect of remittances on welfare Cameroon and development in Africa in general by providing information on the socioeconomic development spurred up by migrant remittances. The current appreciation of remittances as a development tool is recent and several questions on how best to capture their development impact remain.

Social Welfare in Contemporary Cameroon and Theoretical Foundations of Migration: Agriculture and extraction of renewable and non-renewable natural resources were the largest sources of revenues for strong economic growth in Cameroon from the 1960's through the mid 1980's. These revenues were used to support expansion of the urban-industrial and public sectors although the rapidly growing population remained largely engaged in agriculture. When Cameroon attained independence in 1960, there was much hope and promise, and anticipated rapid modernisation of the state. Progress was made in the socioeconomic front with income rising at about 6-8% per year. The state engaged in massive public sector investments and young Cameroonians studying abroad returned home on the eve of their graduation from prestigious universities abroad, to gain employment in both the public and private sector. This trend continued to the mid 1980s with Cameroonian families emigrating and young Cameroonian students merely travelling abroad for further studies hoping to return. However, when the 1990s struck accompanied by a debilitating economic decline and recession, the tides turned. There was a sudden surge of families leaving the country and youngsters migrating abroad for studies planning never to return. International migration emerged as a major poverty coping strategy. The emergence of the economy crisis in the early 1990's, fuelled by falling petroleum revenues and worsening terms of trade for agricultural commodities led to cuts in agricultural support services and rural credit, reductions in public services and ultimate cuts in social services. By the mid 1990s the crisis peaked and brought about the devaluation of the CFA franc and massive redundancy in both public and private sector, a 70% cut in salaries, the lay-off of thirty thousand civil servants, redundancy in the private sector, rise in unemployment and a fall in living standards. There was also reduction in health

and education support, which led to poor medical care and increase in prices of drugs and also increase in fees paid in schools. With this economic instability and ensuring hardship many Cameroonians saw hope and a promising future in developed countries abroad.

Who Migrates and Why: According to Hess *et al.*,^[11] migration is the movement of peoples into or out of a given geographic area. While much depends on the historical period and the distance travelled, demographers have observed that migrants are predominantly young unmarried people, who have more education and are more ambitious than others. Migration may occur in response to changing economic, social or political conditions, and before people actually migrate they usually compare the relative opportunities offered by the present and anticipated habitat. If the balance is on the side of the anticipated habitat they typically migrate. For instance, Sørensen^[32,33] indicate that, for young men in North Africa, migration has become the door to independence and maturity that otherwise would be blocked by local poverty. In Morocco, to marry young men need to have money to pay for the dowry and organize the marriage feast. Many men are unable to raise such resources locally. Young men in northern Morocco saw migration to Europe as an escape from traditional (and costly) marriage traditions. Thus the causes of migration depend on the push factors of the present habitat and the pull factors of the anticipated habitat. Push factors, conditions in sending population, are poverty, low wages, few employment, opportunities and absence of health facilities, education and other facilities. Pull factors, magnets that draw people to a new land, are employment opportunities higher wages and health, education and other facilities. Declining economic opportunities or political instability may stimulate emigration while expanding economic opportunities and potential advancement tend to attract migrants.

Remittances and Welfare: The increase in emigration has been associated with a significant soar of remittances. A recent study commissioned by the Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank^[25] estimates the worldwide flows of remittances by region in 2002. The study concludes that Latin America and the Caribbean are the main recipient areas of remittances in the world, receiving about 31 per cent of total flows. South Asia is the second-largest remittance recipient area (20%), followed by the Middle East and North Africa (18%), East Asia and the Pacific (14%), Europe and Central Asia (13%) and Southern Africa (5%). The push factors that cause people to migrate from their country or origins have

being the main reason why money is being remitted, that is, to better the living standard or improve on the welfare of the other members of the family. How remittances are used to improve the welfare (health, happiness, prosperity and general wellbeing) of recipients is the most outstanding issue now.

According to Omer^[24] and Hansen^[9] international remittances to Africa may fall into four categories, namely family remittances whereby Diaspora remit money ranging from US\$ 100 to US\$ 500 per month to contribute towards the livelihoods of their families; small-scale investments in which remittances ranging from US\$ 50,000 - US\$ 100,000 are invested in land, housing and business development.; large-scale international investments where Diaspora capital of over US\$ 500,000 is distributed outside the country mainly in trading activities on international markets; and donations from collective Diaspora organizations.

Russell and Teitelbaum^[29] and De la Garza and Lowell^[8], suggest that remittances are often put to “unproductive uses”, satisfying basic consumption needs, buying medicines, or building a house for the migrant’s retirement, or spending on “conspicuous consumption” in festivals and funerals, although such expenses can have a number of multiplier effects in the local economy. According to Meyers^[20] for the most part, recipients spend the money in daily expenses such as food, clothing, and health care. Building or improving housing, buying land or cattle and buying durable goods such as electronic appliances are other ways the money is spent. Saving or spending in “productive” investment account for only a small percentage of remittances. “Productive activities” means investing in new business which in turn generate employment opportunities.

The literature on remittances and their impact on household welfare are extensive, and reveal two opposite views concerning migration and remittances. The first view contends that migration drains the labour and capital resources of migrant-sending areas. This view is characterized as the “migrant syndrome”. It is argued that per-capita income fall as migrants leave, and income remittances partially compensate for the effects of lost labour and lost capital. According to this view, migration is seen as a bad decision that increases poverty in the migrant sending area. The second view, propounded by Stark and Bloom^[35], Stark^[38] and Taylor^[42], is associated with the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM). This view contends that migration decisions are part of an overall family or household strategy to raise income, obtain funds from investment, and insure against risk created by market failure. Remittances compensate production loss both by adding directly to household income and by enabling

household with migrants to invest in productive activities. Cox^[5] and Stark^[38] also introduced the role of altruism as a motive for sending money back home.

In expounding the inherent relationship between migration and welfare, Poirine^[26] suggests remittances to be an implicit family loan arrangement. He asserts remittances to consist of mainly of the repayment of an informal and implicit loan taken out by emigrants during their youth, in order to secure a better education that later makes them more productive. Then better-off emigrants make implicit loans to children or kin, to finance their education back home, until they are ready to emigrate. And finally the next generation emigrants repay the loan to the former emigrant-lenders who may have retired back home. Poirine not only elevates the altruistic hypotheses but also suggests the role of remittance in co-insurance.

On analysing the role of net remittances in village income inequalities, Lucas and Stark^[18] found that the impact of remittances on the income distribution depends on a village migration history and on the degree to which migration opportunities are differed across village household. Lozano-Ascencio^[17] finds that the significant soar in migration has brought about a considerable increase in the amount of money migrants send to their families back home and that the key role of remittances is in insuring the survival of thousands of families. He observes that for the particular case study of Mexico the economic impact of remittances is greater in those regions that produce the larger number of international emigrants both in absolute and relative terms. Ameudo-Dorantes and Pozo^[1] re-echo this finding by establishing that migrants send money back home to purchase family-provided self-insurance. They observe that increase in income risk have a positive impact in both the magnitude and propensity to remit.

In sum, remittances are now recognized as an important source of global development finance. Remittances provide significant foreign exchange to recipient countries, while supplementing the domestic incomes of million of poor families across the world. There are three factors, which explain the growing importance of remittances. First, remittance flows are now the second largest source, behind foreign direct investment of external funding for development countries. Second, remittances are one of the least volatile sources of foreign exchange for developing countries. Finally, remittances are expected to rise significantly in the long term. What could, therefore, be the microeconomic role of remittances on the social and economic development of Cameroon?

Methodology: An important sector in Cameroon’s economy pliable for this kind of study is the

agricultural sector. We estimate a reduced form Cobb-Douglas profit function for migrant receiving farming households in Cameroon. It is estimated in the form:

$$\ln(\pi/p) = \varphi_0 + \sum \varphi_j \ln(p_j/p) + \sum \gamma_k \ln Z_k + \sum \delta_l DUM_l + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

The parameters φ_j , γ_k , δ_l , relate to factors influencing profits and ε is a stochastic error term. The output supply and factor demand equations are derived from eq. (1).

$$-S_j = -\frac{P_j X_j}{\pi} = \frac{\delta \ln \pi'}{\delta \ln P_j} = \alpha + \sum_{k=1}^K \gamma_k \ln P_j + \sum_{l=1}^L \delta_l \ln Z_k \quad (2)$$

Primary data is collected from a field survey with the aid of structured questionnaire. The questionnaire is administered personally by the researcher. The sample size for this study is 240 households chosen from four sub-divisions in Fako Division. Fako Division is located in the Southwest region of Cameroon, one of Cameroon's ten administrative regions. A total of 60 rural households are *simple-randomly* sampled per subdivision, without discrimination of gender, location, education, occupation and marital status.

Empirical Observations:

Socioeconomic Profile of Remittance Recipients: A large proportion of the population who have children and relatives abroad are from the age group of 45 – 65 years, about 39% of the sampled population falls under this age group, with about 27% of the population educated up to the university level. This indicates a high level of literacy in the study area. But with this level of education, unemployment rate in the region hovers around 30%. While about 60% of the labour force is engaged in agriculture, 40% of the inhabitants in the region are employed in diverse remunerative work, amongst which are teachers, medical officers, and small-scale businesses with incomes ranging from 20.000 FCFA (US\$ 40) – 1.000.000 FCFA (US\$ 2000) per month.

Given the observed income levels, shown in table 1, remittance plays important roles in assisting production and smoothing consumption. In addition to its widening of coping strategies and building precautionary savings, remittance also permit a household to improve its social capital and thus its capabilities, i.e. its ability to conduct a meaningful life and to enhance decision making. Table 2 shows the percentage of income sources in total household income, and differentiates these by income terciles. For the whole sample, remittances account for 15.5 % of the total income. In the lower-income tercile, however, they contribute 10.7% of total income. For this reason, remittances have an equalising effect on income distribution in Cameroon.

Recent increase in education opportunities, accessibility to modern medical facilities and availability of improved technology, has yielded declines in birth and death rate. The number of children born in contemporary Cameroon ranges from 3 – 5. From the research study 40% of the households have children within this range and about 25% have children ranging from 6 – 7 in number and because of the literacy standard of parents, most are striving to educate their offspring. Given the high level of unemployment, with recent university graduates unable to find gainful employment, and mindful of the penetration of modern technology such as the internet, many parents and young graduates have access to first-hand information on the better living conditions in the developed world. Many parents thus prefer their children to go abroad where they think living standards are high and economically promising.

The rate of migration is clearly observed to be increasing. From the survey, about 56% of migrants are reported to be male and 44% are female. The principal destinations for the migrants are United States (44%), Germany (17%) and Britain (8%). Other countries are France, Italy, Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The selection of these destinations is determined by the presence of relatives, the ease of immigration requirements, the cost of education and the possibility of integration in the new society.

Overall, the reason for migration of the young population is to find jobs, get better education and access better living conditions. Hence, most of the migrants abroad are reported to be schooling, working or doing both, though there are anecdotal accounts of a significant few who merely roam the streets. About 44% of peasant parents report that their migrant child schools abroad and works at the same time. But the most impressive issue is the type of jobs migrants do abroad. Some of them are medical personnel serving as nurses in the United States and Britain; others though educated at the university level do menial unskilled jobs which they cannot do in their countries of birth. Other job opportunities are accounting, teaching, engineering and military services in the United States. Overall, however, very few of them do these white-collar jobs. This is because they require valid residential papers and higher academic qualifications before being absorbed by the labour market of the host country. Notwithstanding, there is no doubt that the decision to emigrate to developed countries is strategic in solving the perennial problem of low living standards in Cameroon and increase the income of nuclear and extended family members through remittances from abroad.

Table 1: Characteristics of Households Showing Sample Means and Standard Deviations

Variable and units	Mean	Standard deviation
Age of Head (years)	47.5	11.5
Education of Head (years)	8.5	1.7
Family size (number of live-in members)	5.3	3.6
Land owned (Hectares per household per household)	2.2	1.4
Farm income (FCFA per household per year)	350,000	52,000
Non-farm income (FCFA per household per year)	420,000	78,000
Expenditure on food purchases (FCFA per household per year)	390,000	27,000
Expenditure on non-food purchases (FCFA per year)	250,000	83,000
Farm wage rate (FCFA per day)	1250	350
Non-farm wage rate (FCFA per day)	2550	630
Amount borrowed per year (FCFA per household)	75,000	21,500
Amount received from abroad (FCFA per household)	169,000	32,900
Interest rate (%)	9.3	3.5
Number of households	240	

Source: Computed from Survey Data, 2008

Table 2: Percentage Share of Different Sources of Income by Income Tercile

Income terciles	Crop Farming	Livestock Farming	Non-farm income*	Remittances
Low	44.2	24.8	20.3	10.7
Middle	35.5	15.5	29.6	18.4
High	15.1	30.9	50.5	5.5
All	30.4	20.6	35.7	15.3

*Includes wage, household enterprise, and property incomes. Source: Computed from Survey Data, 2008

Table 3: Geographic Origin of Migrant Remittances to Southwestern Cameroon

Destination Country	Proportion (%) of Total Remittances
USA	25.1
United Kingdom	19.2
Germany	15.4
The Netherlands	12.2
France	9.3
Belgium	6.1
Denmark	4.5
Italy	4.2
Canada	3.4
Japan	0.5

Source: Computed from Survey Data, 2008

Table 4: Elasticities of Profit and Output Supply

Exogenous variable	Crop Farming Profit elasticity	Livestock Farming Profit Elasticity	Overall Profit Elasticity
Land	- 0.06	- 0.05	- 0.03
Hired labour	- 0.05	- 0.03	- 0.07
Pesticide	-0.002	- 0.003	-0.001
Education	0.001	0.002	0.002
Crop price	0.03	-0.01	0.19
Livestock price	- 0.09	0.21	0.13
Remittance	0.19	0.11	0.15

Source: Computed from Survey Data, 2008

We observe that 93% of households with migrant relatives do receive cash transfers from abroad. We find that 30% of recipients use the remittance for food, 28% for school fees, 23% report using the money to pay hospital bills and the remaining 19% of remittances is used for business improvement and agriculture. As shown in table 3 about 25% of cash remittance originates from the United States. The United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands present strong showing in competing with the USA not only as major destination for Cameroon’s migrants, but also as significant origins of remittance into Cameroon. In addition, the survey reveals that about 51% of migrants remit but not regularly, with about 20% of migrants do remit per month and 16% per year. This indicates that they remit when they have and the most efficient means for money transfer used is the *Western Union* money transfer. Another frequently used means of money transfer is through friends and relatives. This highlights failures of Cameroon’s commercial banks to provide international banking services for their clients.

Using eq. (2) we estimate the factor shares and profit elasticity with respect to the price of inputs and amount of remittance received. The profit elasticities in Table 4 are all theoretically consistent; negative for input prices and positive for the output prices. Despite the relatively small effect of crop price increase, a 1% increase in crop price results in an almost 2% increase in farm profits overall. The effects of education and pesticides are negligible for farm profitability. Profits are relatively elastic with respect to cash remittance received. This factor provides a broad lesson that as far as farm policy in Cameroon is concerned, cash injection, be it subsidy, credit or grant strongly influences farm outcomes rather than any input price.

Field observations suggest that remittances have played an important part not only in agriculture, but also in supporting local economies and infrastructure development within the study area. In fact, construction

and the creation of small and medium-sized businesses financed by remittance have transformed marginalized neighborhoods. Interestingly, the local development impact in some rural areas has been limited by emigrants’ preferences for investments and consumption in the major urban centres of Buea and the coastal sea resort town of Limbe, where there is a veritable boom in the construction sector. About 60% of migrant households in Buea and Limbe have managed to buy land, build a house or carry out considerable repair work on their old homes. In this vain, several professions and occupations attached to construction have benefited from migration and repatriated wages: plasterers, iron-workers, furniture-makers, foam rubber cushion shops, plumbing appliance shops, lighting fixture outlets, and the market in used refrigerators, stoves, hot water heaters, washing machines and second-hand car dealers. Other investments have been made in vans, taxis, beverage shops, restaurants and hotels. Thus, rremittance not only contributes to household welfare, but has a significant impact.

Conclusion: Migration, a survival and risk coping strategy in view of high level of unemployment and low standard of living in Cameroon, is strongly significant in farm decision making of remittance recipients in Southwestern Cameroon. The important revelation from the analysis that migrant remittance is significant and positively contributes to farm profits, highlights the need to encourage migrant remittance by relaxing some regulations that impede international money transfer, so as to encourage cash flow that helps in solving the immediate problems of households in Cameroon. Therefore, while the government pursues its millennium development goals of creating jobs and improved living conditions, and curbing the brain-drain associated with emigration, it can put in place mechanisms to tap the emerging benefits of existing migrant remittance.

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