

TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO ON THE COMMERCIALISATION OF GINGER BY NOWEFOR (A FARMER ORGANISATION IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE) in BAFUT (Cameroon)

Commentary/introduction

We are in the Bafut Market. Bafut is one of the Sub divisions that make up the North West Province of Cameroon. The sales of ginger is a particularly feature of this community. We would have been talking about coffee if it were a few years ago but the crises that rocked the coffee sector led farmers to sought other alternatives like the cultivation of ginger.

Even though the situation looks bright today, the journey has been full of difficulties. What are these difficulties ? How were they overcome? And what is the actual situation ? The producers of NOWEFOR (North West Farmers' Organisation) developed different actions. This documentary comes to recount the main stages.

Song from the Bafut women

Voice off

John Ntonifor is today a ginger farmer but he remembers the events which led him to abandon the cultivation of coffee.

John Ntonifor/ NOWEFOR farmer

In the past it was thanks to coffee that we were able to educate our children and to construct our houses. With the fall in the price of coffee, we resorted to ginger which at the time was cultivated in Bafut but in very small quantities. A bucket of ginger at the time was bought at 2500 Fcfa and this was very encouraging. We understood therefore that ginger could help us replace coffee and enable us take care of our responsibilities.

Voice off

A crop that was traditionally cultivated in small quantities by women, ginger production significantly increased. More farmers got involved, yields improved due to new cultural practices and new varieties that were introduced by research. The results achieved in production were not complete for the farmers. The increase in production led to a fall in prices in the local market.

Maria Nemamfor/ NOWEFOR farmer

The increase in production led to production costs that were higher than sales price. In effect, 500 000 Fcfa and 400 000 Fcfa respectively. The deficit was therefore 100 000 Fcfa. This was because the buyers were organised. They were buying a bucket in Bafut at 400 Fcfa and selling in Yaounde at 3 500 Fcfa. More so, the supply of ginger in the market was very high leading to a fall in prices. The union started reflecting on what to do.

Voice off

For the farmers, the challenge therefore is to put in all effort to ensure better and profitable sales of ginger.

Mbah David/ President of the follow up committee

After many reflection workshops, we arrived at the conclusion that the problem was the excess supply of ginger in the local market. We therefore put in place a committee in charge of regulating the supply and demand of ginger so as to increase the prices in the local market.

Voice off

To achieve this objective, the peasants realised quite early that the key to success was first to get organised at the level of NOWEFOR producers and also mobilise other stakeholders in the community.

Joseph Tangie/President of the marketing committee

It appeared important for our farmers to get united and organise the local market. Once this was done, we designated some leaders to carry out a follow up of the process. The leaders first of all approached the Mayor so that he can provide them a common sales point in the market. This is because this was the only way to control the quantities of ginger that were supplied to the market. After this we realised that the supply was higher than the demand reason behind the fall in prices. It was thus important to split the community into zones. An annual sales calendar was drawn. Sales were therefore going to be done in turns. Despite this, the rules that were in place were not been respected. We then sought the support of the Fon. The Fon approved the idea of zoning, laid down penalties and instructed his messengers to carry out unannounced controls. When the farmers realised that the Fon was with us they started to respect the zoning. The prices increased instantly thereafter.

Voice off

Not surprising to find a good number of actors at the forefront of this initiative – the Mayor of Bafut rural council who states his motivations.

Akoso Henry Neba/ Mayor of Bafut

The council has allocated a place in the market where ginger is sold. So the control is done. Now so, we also ensure that the people respect their schedules, then we send the council van to stroll around, or patrol to find out whether there are people who want to sell ginger out of the market and when that is done, we will cease the ginger and bring it to the market. But the most important role we think we should be playing should be education. We are educating the people and we ask our councillors in the various constituencies to educate the people on the advantages they stand to gain by following the marketing system that is in place.

Voice off

The Bafut Fandom is known for its deep rooted traditions. The implication of the Fon could only be an assurance to the commercialisation process.

His royal highness Abumbi II /Fon of Bafut

The Bafut Fandom is a very important producer of ginger and many women are involved in the activity. The quantity they produce is very high. This high production of ginger in Bafut led to a very serious fall in the prices in the market and the farmers were not reaping the benefits or the right amounts as far as their labour is concerned and this raised a lot of concerns amongst the farmers, amongst the women, and the Fandom. So we had to work as farmers in collaboration with NGOs to control the supply of ginger to the local market. So that, the farmers can get the right prices for their labour from the production of ginger.

Voice off

Some farmers who were reticent at the beginning were now quick to adopt the approach of NOWEFOR which consisted of reducing the supply of ginger in the local market so as to maintain the price at a reasonable level.

Dorothy Lum/Non Member of NOWEFOR

At the beginning i was selling ginger like the other retailers. The strategy was not of any importance to me. Today, i am convinced by the organisational approach of NOWEFOR and i am respecting it because i have realised that it is beneficial to the Bafut woman.

Voice off

After the mobilisation of the community, it was important to put in place a follow up committee to ensure that the strategy put in place by NOWEFOR and the traditional authorities is being respected.

Joseph Tangie/ /President of the marketing committee

We held meetings and nine persons were elected to the committee. The council is represented as well as the traditional council. The representative of the council is responsible for respect of resolutions that are taken and confiscates all goods that are sold in defiance of the rules. The traditional council is in charge of reinforcing this policy and ensures that defaulters pay penalties to recover the ginger which is confiscated from them.

Maria Nemamfor/ NOWEFOR member

The marketing committee faced many problems. Some farmers did not respect the zoning calendar that was in place and were selling out of their turn. There were 4 zones and each zone had to sell just once a month. The violation of the rule was because the farmers were in need of money. It was therefore important to seek for other external markets so as to satisfy everybody. It is in this light that in December 2004, 5 tones of ginger were sold in Yaoundé and 25 tones in 2005.

Voix off

Many difficulties were encountered in the process of putting in place this strategy.

Rose Mfournuh/ NOWEFOR member

The fall in the prices of coffee made me to think that it was the end for my family and myself but now, i have realised that through the sales of ginger, the members of my group and myself are able to educate our children, get them treated and even clothe them. The house you see here is the result of ginger. I am now able to repay my loans and acquire my farm tools.

Voice off

At the end, the impact of ginger market organisation on the lives of the farmers is therefore certain.

Tangie Joseph / President of the marketing committee

Despite all what has been done this far, we still have many challenges to raise up and maintain the prices in the market.

Voice off

The challenges are still enormous as concerns mastery of the supply, sales and the buyers. If the supply is limited voluntarily in the local market, it is important to find new outlets from other buyers. Find outlets in other far away markets for processed ginger products.

Tangie Joseph / President of the marketing committee

Processing of ginger is one of the challenges. Processing is done traditionally today and it will be better to modernise it so that we can sell in external markets and as such farmers will get more profits. At the moment we can supply more than 5 tones weekly because our production permits us to do so.

Conclusion

Thanks to the dynamism and the organisation of farmers in Bafut, the difficulties that resulted from the fall in prices of coffee on the international market have been overcome. The future can therefore be envisaged with optimism as long as the successes are maintained.