



Gender and Firm Performance in Cameroon

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Abstract

This study analyzes the contribution of women to the performance of Cameroonian companies. Based on data from the Cameroon Enterprise Survey, carried out in 2016 by the World Bank Group, the analysis focuses on three levels in organizations: the level of employees, of management and, finally, of business ownership. Existing literature on this subject supports the idea that there is a simultaneous effect between the presence of women at all levels in the company and performance. The results of a linear regression reveal a positive and significant effect of the presence of women in management positions on

business performance measured by the growth in turnover. Indeed, a one percentage point increase in the number of women in corporate leadership contributes an average of 61% to improved corporate performance when measured by growth in turnover. However, whichever performance measure is adopted, the analysis does not reveal any significant influence of the presence of women at the employee level on the performance of Cameroonian companies. Finally, the analysis of the differences in performance between companies owned by women and those owned by men indicates a performance gap, an average of 2.2% in terms of turnover growth, and an average of 0.8% in terms of growth in number of employees, in favour of female-owned businesses.

Introduction and background

At a time of globalization, companies feel concerned about, and are even evaluated on, the interaction they have with their environment. Growing emphasis is placed on the term Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): we talk about companies as a reflection of society. Therefore, the issue of professional equality between men and women is rightly a key concern for businesses. Indeed, several empirical investigations, particularly in developed countries, have set out to highlight the effects of professional equality through the participation of women in the prosperity of businesses. It is more than an ethical issue; professional equality has become an imperative for most companies wanting to thrive in a competitive environment. In this regard, Burke, and Davidson (1994) show that companies that reduce the obstacles for women in business benefit from advantages in terms of enhanced performance and productivity. Beyond being a factor of social dynamism, professional equality between men and women can be justified to be an economic and managerial issue.

However, the overall situation of women in business is still much worse compared to that of men. Indeed, there are still many disparities between men, whether in terms of the functions they perform, the sector of activity, or the remuneration received. According to the 2016 report of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on global trends in women's work, the employment rate of women is still significantly lower than that of men: Almost 72% of men are employed compared to only 46% of women. The latter are strongly represented in self-employment (notably family work) and informal jobs, characterized by low wages. Unlike men, they work mainly in the service sector where, since 1995, their participation rate has changed significantly, from 41.1% to 61.5%; and also in the health and education sector, which employs almost a third of women in the labour market.

These disparities in the labour market are even more pronounced when one looks at African countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, there is a global gap of 17 percentage points between the participation rate in the active population of women

and that of men, that is 53% and 70%, respectively (World Bank, 2015). In Cameroon, the results of the second General Census of Enterprises (RGE-2) conducted in 2016 by the National Institute of Statistics (INS) indicate that, compared to men, women are still less likely to be employed in companies. In fact, only 43% of women are employed in companies, and only 44% of them hold a permanent job. This difference in participation is also noticeable when looking at the size of firms: they are still poorly represented in large firms (there are two male employees for every woman in large firms against almost one male for a woman in very small companies). A look at entrepreneurship enables a little more emphasis on gender disparities in Cameroonian companies (62.8% of companies are created by men compared to only 37.2% by women), as well as an analysis of the management level of companies (57.3% of companies are run by men against 42.7% by a woman).

Gender attitudes and practices in the labour market in Cameroon are rooted in a traditional patriarchal system that is detrimental to the advancement of women's economic activity. Indeed, although the employment trends of women have improved somewhat (RGE-2), the sociological and cultural burdens still relegate Cameroonian women to second place by reducing their activities, mostly to fulfil family commitments and due to maternity constraints (Cloutier, 2010). Prejudices, traditions, and customs still limit the employment of women in companies and their promotion to managerial positions. Beyond these sociocultural barriers are also economic barriers, including lack of equity and lack of access to institutional credit, which still severely limit women's entrepreneurship in Cameroon. These barriers amply testify to the persistence of disparities in participation by gender in the labour market in Cameroon. This is despite the efforts made by the public authorities in favour of gender equality and the advancement of women with a view to achieving not only Millennium Development Goals 1 and 3 (MDGs), but more generally Objectives 5 and 10¹ of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, aimed at ensuring equal opportunities between women and men in all sectors, and in the field of employment.

Despite the existence of a set of legal and regulatory mechanisms, consisting not only of national legislation, but also of international and regional legal instruments aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of women in the labour market, professional equality remains a real challenge for Cameroonian authorities, who nevertheless continue to develop strategies aimed at encouraging much greater participation of women in the labour market. It is from this perspective that an action plan for the development of female entrepreneurship (PAN-DEV) will be published, under the aegis of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family (MINPROFF). This action

1 SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. SDG 10: Reduce inequalities within and across countries.

plan will be based on several axes, in particular: encouraging the creation of businesses by women, facilitating their access to resources, and even guaranteeing them access to training and the market. This government strategy has led not only to the creation of a Ministry of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts which, from its creation, has committed to making female entrepreneurship one of the pillars of the private-sector development strategy whose contribution to economic growth is well established. It has also led to the decision to create two public banks, notably the Cameroon Rural Financial Corporation (agricultural bank) and the Cameroonian Bank of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), whose role is to promote access to finance for SMEs and financial income-generating activities. In addition to these government structures, informal structures such as promoter's family circle the tontines (village, business, or friends), the professional environment (such as colleagues, customers, and suppliers), contribute to supporting female entrepreneurship in Cameroon (Nkakleu et al., 2010).

However, it is clear that if some government measures are slow to be set up, like the Cameroon Rural Financial Corporation that was not established until several years after the decision to do so, others have mixed results: for example, the Cameroonian SME Bank which, although functional since 2015, is still struggling to fulfil its primary role of financing the activity of SMEs, as women are mainly responsible for the development of SMEs in the Cameroonian context. All these shortcomings point to the ineffectiveness of the various strategies undertaken by public authorities. In addition, as in the case of women entrepreneurs presented by Lee-Gosselin et al. (2010), Cameroonian women entrepreneurs tend to perceive government programmes as administratively burdensome, which discourages them from taking an interest in them. In addition, they believe that these programmes do not sufficiently meet their demands and that the time taken to meet their requirements is sometimes too long. Finally, these programmes would not adequately target their needs concerning access to finance, training and information and would be ill-suited to the SMEs that they mostly own or manage.

According to Kamdem (2011), two main factors can characterize the support for female businesses in Cameroon: The first relates to the considerable importance that female promoters attach to local structures and networks (such as friends and acquaintances who are members of tontines); the second highlights the predominance of informal support structures over formal structures.

The current context seems to be gradually moving away from the traditional patriarchal model that favors the exclusion of women from economic activity. According to the last General Census of Population and Housing (RGPH-2005) women make up more than half of the Cameroonian population (49% men and 51% women). Failure to integrate the latter into economic activity can therefore represent a major obstacle to development and social progress in an economic environment

characterized by permanent change. It therefore becomes necessary to consider women's contribution to business performance in a Cameroonian context. This study contributes to an investigation of the issue of professional equality between men and women in companies, and the organizational consequences in terms of performance, by focussing exclusively on Cameroonian companies where the contribution of women is significant in view of the special place they occupy in the development of business. To do so, the following question is posed: Can women's work enhance business performance beyond social considerations? In other words, is the presence of women in companies a driver of performance? Throughout this analysis, the presence of women is assimilated, as in several studies that will be presented here, into the role that women play in the company, in other words to the work carried out by them to improve the performance of companies.

The analysis of the influence of the presence of women in Cameroonian companies focusses on three levels of participation, of which the first is at the level of workers employed in companies. The relationship between the proportion of women in companies (rate of feminization of companies) and the performance of these businesses is explored. Such an analysis leads to a different analysis from those comparing mixed enterprises, those that have the same proportion of male and female employees, with non-mixed enterprises or enterprises, in which one of the groups is overrepresented. At the management level there is a question about the relationship between the presence of women in company management and the company's performance. Such questioning leads to an explanation of the effects of the glass ceiling on the performance of Cameroonian companies. Finally, at the level of business creation an investigation is since the emergence of the entrepreneurial potential of Cameroonian women is still slowed down by the existence of a certain number of obstacles, in particular lack of access to resources for female entrepreneurs, and more specifically, their lack of access to formal financial mechanisms (AfDB/ILO, 2009). Even internationally the difficulty in accessing resources among female entrepreneurs seems to be acute (Brush et al., 2010). Such an investigation not only helps to explain the poor performance of companies owned by women, but also to capture the impact of the policies implemented by the authorities to promote female entrepreneurship in Cameroon.

Following from the main research question, the following secondary questions arise:

1. What influence does the proportion of women in the workforce have on business performance?
2. What influence does the presence of women in management positions have on business performance?
3. Are there differences in performance between female-owned and male-owned enterprises?

In addition to the need to act to promote professional equality and encourage greater access of the female workforce to organizations, one of the challenges of the presence of women in companies is political; continued disparities between men and women in the labour market calls into question the very foundations of democracy and undermines its founding principles, namely freedom and equality. This poses a major societal problem as it tarnishes the credibility of institutions. The second, and one of the most important challenges, is economic. It is important to mention that the absence of equality policies in the labour market has far-reaching economic effects, although these are sometimes difficult to measure. It results in substantial economic and social costs overinvestment of people in searching for a job, discouraging, or not adequately investing in women's human capital, and overinvestment of companies in the search for qualified labour.

This study is undertaken from both a theoretical and an empirical perspective. According to gendered theories of organizations, the presence of women significantly impacts the performance of a company and can be both positive and negative. The empirical motivation comes from the growing attention paid to the gender composition of the workforce, managers and even boards of directors of companies. The proportion of women employed by businesses, including those in managerial positions, is still very low in most developing countries. Some countries, like Cameroon, are setting up mechanisms or actions to facilitate the entry of women into businesses and, more generally, female entrepreneurship. Therefore, if it can be shown statistically that more women at all levels of Cameroonian business have positive effects on performance, there can be a strong argument for having more women in business.

Our investigation into women working in businesses is therefore carried out from the angle of their contribution to the performance of Cameroonian businesses. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to empirically analyze the link between the presence of women in Cameroonian companies and their performance. Specifically, the objectives are to analyze the:

1. effects on performance of the presence of women as part of the workforce employed by companies;
2. effects on performance of the presence of women in the management of enterprises; and
3. performance gaps between female-owned and male-owned enterprises.

Data source

The main source of data used in this study is from the Enterprise Survey (ES), which was conducted in 2016 in Cameroonian companies by the World Bank Group as its partners. It consists of a representative sample of 361 non-agricultural, private, formal-economy enterprises located in the central, coastal, and western regions. Based on a questionnaire administered to owners and senior managers of companies, the survey provides information on several aspects of the business environment. This is both helpful and useful for businesses, which play a determining role in the prosperity or otherwise of the private sector of the Cameroonian economy. In general, the questions contained in the survey are intended to address concerns about infrastructure, finance, trade, regulations, taxes and business licenses, corruption, informality, access to finance, innovation, and work and perceptions of barriers to doing business.

More specifically, the sectorial coverage included the manufacturing sector and most companies in the service sector. Businesses in the utilities, health care, financial services and government sectors were not included. The size of the companies is determined by number of employees: Five (5) to 19 employees for small businesses (SE), 20 to 99 for medium-sized businesses (ME), and 100 or more for large businesses (LE). Companies with fewer than five employees were not included in the survey. Not considering these very small enterprises is limiting when one considers that the productive fabric of Cameroon is marked by a predominance of companies employing three people at most (RGE-2, 2016).

The ES also collected information on the characteristics of enterprises, including age measured by years of employment, and information on women's participation in employment at different levels in companies. In accordance with the measures adopted in the literature, the participation of women was recorded by the percentage of women employed in enterprises, the percentage of women in management positions and the percentage of female business owners.

The workforce information relates to the number of permanent full-time employees, the number of temporary full-time employees, and the number of employees by gender. The ES provides ample information on positions occupied by women in companies, including the number of permanent full-time female employees, and the number of temporary or seasonal female employees. Similarly, questions relating to the gender of the chief executive and business owner allows calculating the percentage of female managers and business owners.

To assess the performance of companies, the ES provides the opportunity to calculate performance measures for each company based on answers to questions concerning annual sales and the total number of permanent full-time employees in the companies.

It therefore allows us to measure this performance through two relevant indicators: annual growth rate of the number of employees and annual growth rate of actual sales (growth in turnover). Indeed, the questions about the number of permanent full-time jobs and annual turnover achieved not only during the current fiscal year, but also in the fiscal year 2013 (i.e., almost three years before survey), makes it possible to calculate the growth of permanent full-time jobs and turnover. About access to financial resources, the ES provides information on the sources of financing for companies as well as on the characteristics of their financial transactions.

The survey also took into account numerous other factors, in particular, physical infrastructure (such as access to electricity, water and telecommunications); crime (theft, arson or vandalism) and informality (percentage of firms facing competition from unregistered firms and percentage of currently registered firms that began operations by being formally registered); or obstacles to the business environment (such as duration of obtaining a business permit, duration of power outages and corruption).

Conclusion and policy recommendations

In this study we proposed to analyze the link between the presence of women in Cameroonian companies and their performance. We first proposed to analyze the effects on business performance of the presence of women in the workforce. Next was an analysis of the effects on the performance of companies due to the presence of women in management, and finally we analyzed the performance differences between companies owned by women and those owned by men. The results reveal that, regardless of the measure of performance, the variable proportion of women is not significant. In other words, the presence of women in the workforce does not affect the performance of Cameroonian companies. About the effect on performance of a female presence at the company management level, the analysis does not reveal that the variable percentage of women in management exerts a positive and significant influence on the performance of companies when the latter is measured by growth in turnover. In other words, in addition to the relatively low importance of women in management of companies, the analysis shows that the presence of women in management of Cameroonian companies improves by 61%, on average, the level of performance of companies in terms of growth in turnover. However, this relationship is not observed when measuring corporate performance by employee growth. The analysis reveals that the variable percentage of women in business management does not have a significant influence on performance when measured by job growth.

Finally, the analysis of the performance gap between companies owned by women and those owned by men reveals a performance gap both in terms of turnover and employee growth in favour of male-owned businesses. In fact, looking at the difference in performance in terms of turnover, we note that the expected value of the growth

rate in turnover of companies owned by men is 15% against 23% for female-owned businesses. This reveals an 8% gap between the two categories of companies. This reflects the difference in performance in favour of female-owned businesses, mainly due to the difference in endowments between female and male owners. This result suggests that adjusting the level of endowments of male owners to that of women would increase the turnover of businesses owned by men by 2%. This analysis also reveals a performance gap in terms of growth in the number of employees in favour of companies owned by women, although this difference in performance is very small (0.8% difference between the two categories of businesses).

Following the results obtained from our various analyses, some recommendations should be made to not only public authorities but also to employers' associations. This is to encourage women to access Cameroonian businesses, and to own and manage them, by integrating decision-making bodies. To achieve this, it is the responsibility of the government to strengthen education and training for women. Indeed, traditional educational schemes in Cameroon still does not expose women or girls to modern knowledge. Their level of education is found to be low compared to that of men, which further limits their recruitment and rise in companies. A look at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) statistics of 2016 provides sufficient information on the under-education of girls: almost 70% of young girls still suffer from illiteracy in Cameroon. The main reason for this under-schooling is a result of poverty, cultural norms or even the parents' literacy. Strengthening women's capacity through literacy, formal education and training can therefore enable them to be better equipped to contribute actively, as well as men, to activities and strategic debates within companies. As a result, businesses will better understand women's expectations and preferences. This will allow them to develop their leadership capabilities.

This first recommendation can therefore translate into the following actions: First, gender awareness. This mainly concerns parents, community leaders, teachers, and learners (girls and boys) with the aim of raising awareness of the crucial importance of helping or encouraging girls' access to education. Second, the creation of incentives aimed not only at limiting the school dropout rate of girls, but also at reducing the direct costs of education, which still limit the training of girls. It can be measures encouraging positive discrimination against girls, such as awarding prizes to the best female learners or to those who come to school regularly; granting allowances to enrolled girls; scholarship programmes or financial assistance for these girls (for example the Female Secondary School Stipend Programme initiated in Bangladesh, which enabled more than two thirds of girls to get secondary education); or even setting up sponsorships for girl learners as a strategy for keeping them in school and to dissuade them from giving up. Strengthening education and training for women can finally be achieved by modernizing teaching materials. This encapsulates making available non-sexist teaching materials to schools. In other words, programmes and

textbooks that do not only present girls and women in traditional roles, but that encourage them to embark on various careers and to participate actively in the life of society.

It is also a question of the public authorities encouraging and supporting female entrepreneurship in Cameroon by encouraging women to develop their capacity. This means giving women the means to take on responsibilities in the same way as men. Better still, creating a framework of “positive discrimination” in favour of women, to enable the creation of companies. This measure can translate into setting up incentives such as tax advantages, access to social protection, and financial contributions to encourage women to create businesses. It may also involve organizing meetings to inform and sensitize women on the different statutes of the company, the procedures for its creation and registration.

Concerning access to finance: This measure can be implemented not only by improving information for female entrepreneurs on existing sources of finance, setting up specific mechanisms or programmes for funding female entrepreneurs with payment and repayment terms adapted to their needs, but also by setting up funds to finance women's projects, such as a start-up fund granted in the form of an interest-free repayable loan. Finally, about access to business development support services and programmes: This involves specifically encouraging the participation of female entrepreneurs (sole traders and very small businesses run by women) in the various programmes and business development support services, for example by covering their travel costs. It also entails focussing the activities of support services for business development on support that meets the specific needs of female entrepreneurs, on technical training incorporating adapted teaching methods, and professional networking to make women aware of business opportunities and of rights and regulations.

Finally, it is the responsibility of employers' associations or unions to educate business leaders and their network on the empowerment of women. Because the weak representation of these in the breasts of the organs of management, direction and execution can lead to a loss of earnings a shortfall for Cameroonian companies. Indeed, by number (nearly 51% of the total population according to the Central Bureau of Censuses and Population Studies, 2010) women represent a significant potential workforce which could be beneficial for business. It is therefore about revaluing the role of women and considering them to be a potential force to benefit companies.

This study has some limitations that are worth highlighting. The first limit concerns the constitution of the sample (361 companies), which reduces its scope and does not allow generalization and transposition of the results. Mainly concerning the Cameroonian context, it would be wise to widen the sample and include in the analysis all companies that do not appear in the formal, private non-agricultural economy.

This obviously poses the problem of accessibility to data, which is not guaranteed. The second limit relates to the fact that very small businesses (employing less than five people) are not considered in the data collection. Companies which are mostly represented in Cameroon and are mainly owned/run by women. Indeed, the exclusion of this category of business not only helps to reduce the study sample, but also reduces the analysis and the impact of women on business performance.

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Mission

To strengthen local capacity for conducting independent, rigorous inquiry into the problems facing the management of economies in sub-Saharan Africa.

The mission rests on two basic premises: that development is more likely to occur where there is sustained sound management of the economy, and that such management is more likely to happen where there is an active, well-informed group of locally based professional economists to conduct policy-relevant research.

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