A DESCRIPTIVE OVERVIEW OF TRADITIONAL FARMS AND FARM HOUSEHOLDS IN ZAIRE

David Shapiro

This article provides a descriptive overview of a number of characteristics of farms and farm households in traditional Zairian agriculture. Information is provided regarding household size, farm size, crops cultivated, livestock, participation by men and women in various agricultural activities, overall participation in agriculture and in nonagricultural activities by age and sex, and utilization of nonhousehold labor inputs. In addition, regression analysis reveals that household labor inputs, household size and composition, and geographic location are all important determinants of area under cultivation. At the margin, women’s contribution to area cultivated is nearly twice as great as that of men.

This article gives a descriptive overview of a number of characteristics of farms and farm households in traditional Zairian agriculture. In addition, it also provides results of a multivariate analysis of data on the determinants of area under cultivation. The data being analyzed were gathered during the first round of the Southern Band Survey, a small-scale survey of 240 farm households that was carried out by the Studies and Planning Service of Zaire’s Ministry of Agriculture during December 1985 and January 1986.¹

The Southern Band of Zaire that constituted the sample frame for the survey covers all or parts of five of Zaire’s eight rural regions: all of Bas-Zaire, the central portions of Bandundu and Shaba, and the southern portions of Kasai Occidental and Kasai Oriental. Overall, the Southern Band includes approximately one-fifth of Zaire’s land area and two-fifths of the total population.

The Southern Band Survey (SBS) was motivated in large part by a desire for reliable descriptive data on Zaire’s traditional agricultural sec-
tor. For a variety of reasons, available data on traditional agriculture in Zaire are sparse and often of dubious quality. Ideally, it would be highly desirable to carry out a large-scale survey that would produce statistically reliable estimates of characteristics of the traditional agricultural sector of the country as a whole and for individual regions. Practically, however, such an exercise would be extremely difficult to implement and would require a massive infusion of resources. From this perspective, then, the SBS represents a feasible effort at obtaining reliable data from a significant portion of Zaire. While the small sample size of the SBS means that it is not possible to generate statistically reliable estimates of population parameters of interest, the data do provide good descriptive information on the characteristics of the farms and farm households included in the sample. This aspect, coupled with the fact that the sample area covers a major portion of Zaire, makes the SBS data set a unique source of information on Zaire’s traditional agricultural sector.

The survey focused on measurement of farmers’ fields and identification of the crops grown by farmers. In addition, data were collected concerning age, sex, and agricultural and nonagricultural activities of each individual household member. Livestock were enumerated, and questions were also asked regarding the household’s utilization of nonhousehold labor in its farming activities.

The households in the survey were selected at random as part of a three-stage sampling scheme, and they represent traditional farm households in the rural portions of the Southern Band area. Selection of households for inclusion in the sample was carried out as follows. The starting point was a list of all of the rural collectivities found within the Southern Band area. This list was stratified by region, and two collectivities from each region were chosen at random for inclusion in the sample. During the month of November, 1985 visits were made to the chosen collectivities, and lists of localities (villages) within each collectivity were prepared. Two villages from each collectivity were then chosen at random for inclusion in the sample. The chosen villages were subsequently visited, and lists of agricultural households within each village were established. Twelve agricultural households from each village were then chosen at random for inclusion in the sample. For each of the five regions included in the Southern Band, then, 48 households were sampled, coming from four different villages located in two different collectivities.

The next section provides a descriptive overview of the characteristics of farms and farm households included in the survey. This is followed by a report on the results of multivariate estimation of the determinants of