

CAMEROON CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

"CCDHR POLICY PAPER"

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CAMEROON

1. Introduction

This paper is written with real modesty about knowledge of the Cameroon's economy, considering the amount of secrecy that surrounds most government's economic operations, and the recognition of the fact that discussions of positive economic figures about Cameroon do not reflect the day-to-day realities of the lives of ordinary Cameroonians. At the same time, this position statement is based on a firm conviction that as human beings, we have a duty to seek better life for all, and those that govern the country and exercise power over the allocation and management of national resources have a responsibility to the people to ensure equality, sound, transparent, and accountable economic policies and programs.

2. Asking the Right Questions

As Cameroonians, we have to start asking ourselves some salient questions about what is going on with our country and our fellow brothers and sisters. We should seek to know about how and whether the economic resources – the funds available to government, business and the society – are being used for the present and future welfare of the country and sound economic growth. Is this money being wasted, stolen, or just not invested well for a better future? How much of it is due to lack of skills, competence and appropriate institutions, and what is the role of unfair politics, corruption, and malfeasance? Is the government actually promoting an effective pro growth policy both in the public and private sectors by supporting sound investments? Who is ultimately responsible and what can be, or should be done about this?

Basically, is life getting better in Cameroon and if so for whom? What are the indicators of a better life in Cameroon? What are the indicators of economic progress in Cameroon? How do we measure economic and social progress in Cameroon – health and life expectancy, education, clean water, communications network, basic roads, and above all viable employment and labor mobility? Have there been improved food production services for small farmers, more and better investment in jobs and production of necessities? Do we have reliable statistics on these facts?

What has happened in Cameroon over the last 40 years and what are the prospects for the future? How can we look into the country's past, learn from its errors and work for a better future for the country and its people? Who should be responsible for doing this? Are people empowered and given the opportunity to succeed in life in Cameroon? Is the legal and business environment conducive for investment and job creation? Are there government policies, tax incentives and other mechanisms in place to encourage the establishment of sound and prospering domestic companies, small and large enterprises, and foreign investment?

3. Some Pertinent Points to Consider

The statistics do show that many of the major economic and social benchmarks have either not improved or improved only marginally in Cameroon in about a decade. Why is Cameroon toward the bottom of similar lower income developing economies according to IMF and World Bank reports? What is Cameroon doing wrong that other similarly developing economies are doing right? Is anyone in the right positions asking these questions? Is anything being done to remedy the situation in Cameroon? How can we better include key economic questions in the political dialogue at all levels in times of election and in an increasingly proactive parliament? CCDHR

therefore encourages a greater democratic investigative role for parliament and opposition leaders? The subsequent points identify specific fields for improvement.

3.1. Education and Training

What is the current emphasis in Cameroon on education to prepare the society for a much higher level of production, professional, and technological capabilities? Does the country even have an education policy? Where can Cameroonians find it? Is the rhetoric on educational programs being put into practice? One of the main basis for the successful economic and social growth in much of Asia's lower income countries has been intense focus on education at all levels from basic literacy to higher technical and academic skills. Is Cameroon learning from these examples?

A complete overhaul of the country's educational system is needed to give Cameroonians the ability to compete in the global labor market of the 21st Century. Such an overhaul should include a harmonization of the currently two educational systems into a single effective system while maintaining the country's bilingual nature of instruction. Cameroon must also start learning from the growth experience of other countries and provide Cameroonians with opportunities for technical and post graduate skills required to modernize the economy including advanced training abroad when necessary for both private and public sectors.

3.2. Healthcare Services

Healthcare refers to the prevention, treatment, and management of illness and the preservation of mental and physical well-being through the services offered by health professions. Improved healthcare and increased life expectancy has been another key factor that has promoted increased economic growth in lower income countries in Asia, yet life expectancy in Cameroon apparently has declined in the last 20 years.

What is the healthcare policy of Cameroon? Is the country meeting significant health benchmarks? What is the government's plan to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, typhoid, cholera, and other illnesses that is rampaging the society? What is the situation of our healthcare infrastructure? Do Cameroonians have access to healthcare services and pharmaceutical products? What is the government doing to combat the selling of fake and expired medications in Cameroon?

3.3. The Environment

What is the situation of environmental protection in Cameroon? Has the concerns for the areas and peoples affected by the construction of the oil pipeline dissipated? What has been the effect and outcome of the World Bank-organized supervisory committee for the pipeline with Cameroonian NGO's and the government? Was their work informed by the best interest of the people affected by the pipeline or a camouflage aimed at securing oil revenues? What has been the outcome of earlier concerns about other great environment issues in Cameroon, including the Lake Nyos incident of 1986? Has the government's response to this crisis ever been evaluated? What will be the government's response should another crisis of this magnitude happen today?

Is Cameroon's agricultural industrial industry viable? What is the future of Cameroon's agricultural and forests industries? Are these industries headed by people informed in academic and professional knowledge in these domains? Does Cameroon have any environmental policy, and forest preservation and restoration policy or programs? How can Cameroonians be informed in what their government is doing in these areas beyond their mention in annual national addresses?

3.4. Investment Prospect

Currently, France remains the main foreign investor in Cameroon. It has tight control over the economic prospect of the country and affects significantly the economic lives of Cameroonians. Considering that a nation's economic control is closely tied to political control of a country, France invariably has almost complete control of the country's economic and political life. China is fast becoming a big investor in Cameroon while the world's real democracies have all but certainly been shunted from contributing to the economic and political well being of Cameroonians.

What does this close association and control between Cameroon and France mean for Cameroonians? Who is responsible for the absence of a democracy in Cameroon? How does the lack of a democracy or political certainty in Cameroon affect the prospect of investing in the country, especially by foreign investors? It would be interesting to know what are the main industries and the growth prospect to provide more employment and export earnings, both in minerals and other areas. Any electronic and garment/textile industry; wood product development; and other possible industrial and agricultural products? How open are investment transactions conducted in the country and regulations equally applicable to all without political favors or affiliations?

CCDHR urges the Government of Cameroon to take control over the promotion of appropriate and necessary foreign technical and financial investments to raise production and productivity throughout the economy. It is important to adopt measures that will lead to diversification from "excessive" dependence on France, and get other potential investment partners such as the US and other EU countries involved in promoting economic growth in Cameroon. All business and investment transactions should be guided by better regulations, transparency, discipline, and mutual benefits in how these transactions are carried out in Cameroon.

3.5. Oil Revenues

Are Cameroonians aware that some 35% of the government's revenues come from oil and gas production but that oil production has been slowly declining since a peak in 1985? There is now significant revenue from the Cameroon Oil Transportation Company (COTCO), which transports Chadian oil to the Cameroon coastal port. How are the oil and the pipeline project managed? Is the revenue received from the pipeline accounted for by the Cameroon Government? And is this done honestly and transparently by government entities? If not how can Cameroonians find out more?

The government income from oil exports should have at least doubled in the last two years due to the rise in the world market price of oil. What is the Cameroon Government doing with this substantially increased income? Do recent budget figures take into account this additional income? And how it is being spent? Is it being used to improve the country's healthcare, educational, and road network infrastructures; water, electrical, and energy sector; and communication network and technology?

There is much speculation that Bakassi may have large exploitable petroleum reserves. What this means potentially, in perhaps 6-10 years for Cameroon national income is a very interesting and critical issue. How this would affect political as well as economic and social life in Cameroon is critical. The country could face many challenges in developing fair and rational expenditure of the greatly increased availability of funds for all purposes. Taken from the April 2007 World Bank report, would this be "A Blessing or a Curse for Cameroon?"

3.6. The Use of Statistical and Economic Tools in Development Planning

Does Cameroon have any institutions to assess the interactions of labor, statistics, and population studies in development planning? Some countries have developed institutions charged with the collection and publication of statistics related to the economy, population, and society at both national and local levels in order to boost economic productivity, create jobs, and prevent market failures. Examples of these institutions around the world include Statistics South Africa; The National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE – France); The Bureau of Labor Statistics (USA); The Office for National Statistics (ONS- Algeria); The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), The National Bureau of Statistics (China); The Central Bureau of Statistics (Croatia); The Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT- Italy); The Central Statistics Office (CSO – Ireland); The Israel Central Bureau of Statistics; The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS); and The National Statistics Office (NSO-Philippines) just to name few.

PICAM recognizes the limited availability of reliable data and urges the Government of Cameroon to provide for much more collection and publication of appropriate economic statistics. There should as well be a new and much greater transparency in budgetary and other vital information on government operations and on the economy broadly available on government websites and otherwise.

4. Conclusion

The need to have a functioning democracy and community welfare in Cameroon should indeed be basic human rights which all Cameroonians are entitled to. This is essential to achieving viable and fair use of the country's economic resources for the benefit of all Cameroonians. CCDHR notes that the Government of Cameroon does not have in place a sound economic policy or plan for the country and consequently, does not use Cameroon's human and material resources for the benefit of the country and its people. CCDHR is therefore urging the Government of Cameroon and Cameroonians as a whole to give greater attention to both short and long term economic and social policies and programs that will help restore the economic viability of the country, create jobs, reduce unemployment, and cater for the social needs of Cameroonians.

CCDHR is also urging the Government of Cameroon to set up a labor Economics and Statistical Agency to collect, process, analyze, and disseminate essential statistical and economic data on state agencies; the labor market; financial institutions; private sector; sub-regional entities; the informal sector; the graduation and retention rates of university students by the labor market; and the population at large. Such an institution should produce relevant indices and statistics covering areas as varied as: Consumer Price Index; National Compensation Survey; Employment Cost Index; Employer Costs for Employee Compensation; Producer Price Index; Consumer Expenditure Survey; Unemployment Rate; Productivity; Import and Export Price Indices; Statistics on wages, earnings and benefits by area, occupation, inflation index, and industry; short term and long term occupational employment projections.

Done this day, **May 15, 2008.**

Presented on behalf of CCDHR,

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President/Executive Director.

Cameroon Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CCDHR).