

THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC DILEMMA: THE CASE OF CAMEROON. By Ekema J. Manga. University Press of America, 1998. Pp. xxiv + 241.

This is an ambitious book that is the outgrowth of a dissertation leading to a Ph.d. in economics. The author claims in his preface that his analysis, which is characterized as a new approach to the problems of socio-economic development in Cameroon, could serve as a blue print to other LDC's in the African continent and elsewhere. Moreover, the volume is explicitly designed for use in courses that focus on the economics of development and it is argued that the book is structured and written for researchers, economic planners, policy makers in less developed countries, and students with training in economics as well as students with no formal economics background. It is also said in the foreword by William Kwame Dadson that this contribution can serve as an excellent text for upper level economic courses. The present reviewer does not understand any of these claims. The volume is poorly structured (not to say messy) and full of material which makes little - if any- sense. It is a most confusing text to read, and I can't help make reference to Kenneth E. Boulding's poem where he states: "If you do some acrobatics, with a little mathematics, it will take you far along. If your idea's not defensible, don't make it comprehensible, or folks will find you out, and your work will draw attention, if you only fail to mention, what the whole thing is about".

What does one do about affirmations such as "long-range planning is not forecasting and, therefore, any attempt at forecasting would be foolish; human being can neither predict nor control the future" that appears up front as paragraph 2 in Chapter 1? And then the author goes on in the conclusion of Chapter 2 to say "The purpose of this study, focusing on long-range planning strategies to revive the economic dilemmas in Cameroon is applicable to other LDC's, and will be viewed as a continuous, deliberate coordinated process ...". Daily life is full of contradictions such as these; but academic work should not imitate them but try instead to create order and strive at formulating hypotheses, testing them by quantitative or qualitative analytical methods, and draw out the wider implications. Moreover, most of the material in the book is really concerned with short-run macroeconomic management, which can hardly be characterized as long-run planning. Another illustrative example of the kind of analysis present in this book is a statement (also from Chapter 1): "With excessive rates of growth of national income, the output of particular industries tends to lag behind ..., while demand for imports increases, with deteriorating terms of trade ...".

It should be clear from the above that I find the introduction in Chapter 1 confusing. The same goes for Chapter 2 in which the author tries to provide a brief overview of the literature on economic planning. The present reviewer has worked in centrally planned economies in Africa for a major part of my working life, and I am generally sympathetic to the need for developing long-term strategic visions for the future. The literature review will not, however, help anyone interested in these issues. It is a collection of scattered statements and definitions, with no clear purpose or direction, and a comparison with standard textbooks in economic development reveals that much literature is missed.

In Chapter 3, the author goes on to present - as he says - the methods used to complete this research of the present African dilemma. In particular he "introduces foundational ideas for the use of qualitative methodology". I appreciate the need for qualitative methods, but I find this Chapter strikingly naive, in particular since the author relies himself so much on quantitative economic methods in subsequent parts of the book. The quantitative methods are not even touched upon in the methodological overview, and how the author has actually used his qualitative information remains unclear after having read the remainder of the book. Finally, I don't find that the author's justification of the criteria used to select politicians, academicians, civil servants etc. for interview convincing.

According to the author, Chapter 4 discusses Cameroon's economic history and the problem of inflation, and the introductory remark is that "Africa with its great economic potential is in a social and economic quagmire of immense proportions". The lack of progress is lamented with a reference to literature from 1980. The reader is left speculating about what the many references to literature that old is meant to achieve, and the review of the inflation issue is bewildering. While statements such as "One good fixed rule is to offset completely each aggregate demand disturbance" may be seen as harmless, most of the remainder of the text (including the math) is at best confusing. The reader is certainly left speculating whether the author is in favor of wage and price controls or more orthodox inflation policy.

Chapter 5 is according to the author's overview in Chapter 1 entitled "Governance and Economic Management in Cameroon". In fact, it is section 5.1 which has this title. I had hoped to learn something here, but must admit I fail to follow the author when he uses a comparison with Canada to establish the so-called derailing of the economic, political and even administrative capabilities of Cameroon. It may well be true that the derailing took place, but to use Canada to make the point because of Canada's "bilingualism" and similarity in structure of government is not convincing.

Chapter 6 that provides the formal economic modeling in this volume is a bit of an anomaly. On the one hand, the proclaimed focus of the book is very much on self-sustained growth in a context of long-range planning. This focus is also present in the introductory sections of Chapter 6. On the other hand, the CGE analysis is static. No account is taken of supply side effects of spending of increased foreign currency revenue. What the author attempts to investigate is whether changes in import tariffs can ameliorate negative "Dutch disease" effects on the composition of output. While this topic may be of interest in its own right with a view to short-run macro-economic management it is poorly integrated with the remainder of the book, and the text in Chapter 6 is in any case not well organized. Moreover, the reader gets the impression on p.88 that the text was actually written in 1985 and not 1998, and most of the graphs are either superfluous, difficult to follow, or straight out of undergraduate textbooks. Among the more curious points in Chapter 6 is the reference to North Korea (on p.122) as a case of coherent export promotion. The (unnumbered) equations in section 6.14 are simply a mess. See for example pages 139, 140, 141, 142, 146, and 148. By the way, Walras' Law is referred to as respectively "Malras Law" (p.142) and "Walra's Law" (p.154). Finally, it is certainly debatable - as done in the model - to assume that agricultural labor is perfectly substitutable with non-ag. labor. Some degree of inflexibility would be required to reflect reality. And how the author can specify world market demand (not supply) for exports from Cameroon (p.147) as a function of the domestic price is unclear to the present reviewer. The author evidently needs this assumption to be able to fix both the exchange rate and foreign capital inflows as done in the analysis, but this assumption is not sensible and as such puts the whole analysis in doubt.

Finally, Chapter 7 and 8 are meant to present appropriate strategies to revive the Cameroon economy and present conclusions and recommendations. A so-called strategic management model is put forward. I fail to see this as nothing more than a shopping list of useful things to remember when doing a planning exercise. And the final outward oriented policy conclusion in Chapter 8 is certainly not underpinned by the CGE model to which the author has paid much attention.

In sum, this volume suffers from fundamental analytical flaws. Background, premises, and policy conclusions are mixed up, and the same goes for the use of references specific to Cameroon and to Africa at large. The volume is also poorly edited and it is difficult to make head and tail of what the author wants to achieve. I must therefore conclude that I cannot

recommend this book for its stated purposes.

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