

# Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development in Cameroon

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**Abstract:** Poverty is one of the greatest challenges facing the world today. While countries of the West are working to eradicate it within their circles, others in the rest of the world are still formulating policies that may not be totally geared towards solving the real problem – eliminating extreme poverty – but rather, to meet their debt servicing requirements. In the late 60s and early 70s, Western Europe experienced a 15 fold growing economic trend. Developing countries, over the past four decades, have witnessed a regression, and have become about six times poorer than they were in the 70s. Despite the growth in the ‘North’, the gap between the poor and rich keeps widening. It is estimated that 1.3 billion out of the over 6 billion people in the world live on less than US\$ 1 per day (Human Development Report, 2002). The majority of these people are children, women, youths and refugees.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, this number keeps growing as civil and international wars continue, heavy debt burden, migration, political dissention, loss of employment, natural and man-made disasters and restructuring of societies create newly poor groups. In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of people to be provided for continues to grow, and people tend to rely more and more on the physical environment for their survival accompanied by severe population pressure on the environment and a decline in per capita income and quality of life (Nana-Fabu, 2001).. This increasing dependency only reduces the natural resources base and impedes sustainable development in this sub region. Since 1992, the world has been made to understand the intricacies interwoven in a world ridden by poverty, including such events as the terrorist attacks on the US on September 11 2001 and martyr operations in the Middle East by Palestinian activists. The most often forgotten is the continuous reliance on the physical environment by the poor for survival. This paper looks at attempts to combat poverty at international, national, local and community levels, especially those championed by the United Nations using Cameroon as a case study. Agenda 21<sup>2</sup> offers a series of guidelines and principles for combating poverty for the sustainable development of our planet. At the level of nations and states, individual countries have come out with a national and local Agenda 21 given the complexity and

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<sup>1</sup> See Fokwang, J. 1999 *African Youths, Globalisation, Competing Cultures and the Future of Peace*. In South-South Journal of Cultures and Development, vol 398 No 1, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Agenda 21 is the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It provides us in 40 chapters and many sub sections, a comprehensive list of moral principles and guidelines for achieving sustainable development.

relativity of poverty on the globe. Cameroon has been signing and ratifying many of such conventions and as a latest development, has prepared an interim national poverty reduction strategy paper giving more hope for a better future for the poor. At the Johannesburg Summit, it was explained that for the past ten years the world has been only regressing in terms of sustainable development. Current efforts are geared towards macro economic policies which place more responsibility of income generation on the poor themselves (Mestrum, 2002), with little regard for redistributive policies and actions that facilitate poverty reduction and limit human degradation (HDR, 2002). Generally, there has been no genuine commitment to effectively combating poverty at both the global and local levels, due to the rift between the intellectual desires to address such issues and the political will (Hens, 1996) of governments around the globe to keep to their commitments at Rio. The knowledge, skills, and abilities are there, but the problem is whether the political will to implement what has been discussed so far at global, national and local levels exists. In conclusion, this paper argues that what is needed to combat global poverty is a broad based framework for sustainability in poverty reduction that ensures economic, social and ecological resilience.

### **Introduction and Definition Of Poverty**

Poverty is a fluid concept that has many definitions. Poverty has social, cultural, economic, political and more recently, environmental dimensions. It can be seen as hunger, lack of shelter or being sick and not being able to afford to see a doctor. Poverty is not being able to afford to go to school and not knowing how to read, not having a job; fear for the future; living one day at a time, losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water; powerlessness; lack of representation and freedom (World Bank Group, 2002). Top on the list of poor and disadvantaged persons are: disabled people; those afflicted with HIV and/or AIDS; women and children; asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced people; and ethnic and religious minorities (Mobiddin, 2001). Interestingly, most Cameroonians define poverty mainly as the absence of material or financial resources needed to satisfy basic needs such as food, housing, health care, education, and safe water (IPRSP of Cameroon, 2000). In this same paper, other social dysfunctions such as loss of moral values, lack of social consideration, loss of family solidarity, involvement in sorcery, boarding of material resources in some regions, and prejudice against social groups with different cultural characteristics, are cited as common perceptions of poverty.

While extreme poverty exists where the individual does not get enough to eat, poverty can be defined as material deprivation which manifests itself in food security, access to essential services such as housing, transportation, health, education and drinking water, as well as opportunities or resources to generate income. According to the 1996 First Cameroon Household Survey, the liberalization of the agricultural sector, the lack of training for farmers, the high cost of inputs, low prices paid to farmers,

and the lack of credit or advances for them are major causes of poverty in the country. These give the impression that insufficient attention was paid to laying the groundwork for liberalizing agricultural sector, and that the State is completely withdrawing itself from rural life. Another cause of poverty is the inaccessibility of some regions because inhabitants are unable to transport their output or purchase supplies at reasonable cost. This is true given that many social critics have denounced the current policy of developing the centre to the neglect of the periphery.<sup>3</sup> Cameroonians also decry bad governance, attributing it to corruption, diversion of public funds with impunity, demands for bribes for public utilities, lack of decentralization, and inequitable distribution of the rewards of growth. It is clear from these definitions that poor people are socially excluded from the resource base and that this exclusion has not been overlooked. Local and global concerns about bridging the gap in the access to and distribution of resources as a variant of wealth have led to the adoption and usage of many terminologies including:

- a) **Poverty eradication:** rooting out poverty in the world.
- b) **Poverty alleviation:** making less severe poverty in the world.
- c) **Poverty reduction:** reducing the number of poor people with a certain target to be met.
- d) **Poverty abatement:** abolishing or conquering poverty.

Poverty eradication and abatement seem to be very unrealistic to achieve and have served as a buzzword for blindfolding popular concerns about this pandemic. In Sub-Saharan Africa human development has actually regressed in recent years, and the lives of its very poor people are getting worse. The share of people living on \$1 a day was about the same at the end of the 1990s (47%) as at the start. Thus, because of population growth, the number of poor people in the region has increased. The table below shows that, the declining share of people living in extreme poverty is hopeful, but that the level remains disturbingly high. In addition, the table implies that the failure to reduce poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, the world's poorest region, is of grave concern.

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<sup>3</sup> Nyamnjoh, F & Piet Konings. 1999. "Construction and Deconstruction: Anglophones or Autochthones". Paper presented at the Ninth Annual Conference of the Pan African Anthropological Association on "African Anthropology and the challenges of the third millennium". Yaounde, Cameroon, August 30th - September 02th.1999

TABLE 1.2

**Worldwide, the number of people living on less than \$1 a day barely changed in the 1990s**

Region	Share (percent)		Number (millions)	
	1990	1999	1990	1999
Sub-Saharan Africa	47.7	46.7	242	300
East Asia and the Pacific	27.6	14.2	452	260
Excluding China	18.5	7.9	92	46
South Asia	44.0	36.9	495	490
Latin America and the Caribbean	16.8	15.1	74	77
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	1.6	3.6	7	17
Middle East and North Africa	2.4	2.3	6	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>29.0</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>1,276</b>	<b>1,151</b>
Excluding China	28.1	24.5	916	936

Source: World Bank, 2002c; HDR, 2002:18

However, if we think that “poverty is the sociological description of social pathology, a self-image of the poverty experience”, then “only by listening to the poor instead of placing them above or below an abstract poverty line, can we form a picture of what poverty really is” (Report of the Special Evaluator, 2001). From the above definitions, we see two diametrically opposing camps. One uses an “objective” definition with a benchmark and the other uses a more subjective definition that accounts for the views of the poor, with regard to their own experiences with poverty. Whatever the imagined future for the poor in Cameroon is, this paper strongly holds that “objective” definitions help to push people out of or distort completely the real picture. Even when such definitions come from sources like the World Bank, the real intentions behind them must be questioned, given the profit-making motive of the Bank and the failure for over four decades today in eradicating poverty. To better fight poverty, the world needs a contextual and cultural definition rather than the flawed ‘less than one dollar a day’ that has championed poverty discourse since the late 40s.

The main objective of this study is to give a picture of the status of poverty eradication and sustainable development in Cameroon using the guidelines mentioned at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and in the Plan of Implementation adopted during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. It is guided by the ideas that poverty eradication *stricto sensu* is too radical, hence still a farce and that reducing poverty or alleviating poverty is the first step that the international community must take in order to eventually eliminate poverty. For the past ten years, reducing poverty has seen some positive moves in some countries but Cameroon finds herself behind in this fight. Current steps taken by the country do not address the policies that enable the poor to cope on their own, with respect to essential basic social facilities like education and health, ecological disasters to which the poor are most vulnerable, and the environmental carrying capacity of the poor. Structural reform policies imposed by the World Bank and

the IMF on Cameroon are only aimed at preparing the country to pay back loans while sacrificing the health and education of the poor masses at the chauvinist altar of debts.

### **Efforts at the Global Level to Combat Poverty**

Poverty was central in the discussions at the Rio Summit, thanks to the works of the World Resources Institute and the World Watch Institute<sup>4</sup> based in Washington DC. Chapter three of Agenda 21 addresses the need to eradicate poverty and hunger, by managing natural resources sustainably through environmental policies that take into account the lives of those who depend on these resources for survival. It was clear that at that time; approximately one billion people were absolutely poor, living on less than \$1 US dollar a day. Consequently, together with the not so poor consumed between 15 - 20% of the natural resources. Strikingly, the rich were about the same figure as the poor, consuming between 80 -85% of the worlds resources (Johnson, 1993) Today, the richest 5% of the world's people have incomes 114 times those of the poorest 5% (Human Development Report, 2002). Such a rift in the access to and distribution of resources by the poor remains a major call for concern. Agenda 21 holds that it is the shared responsibility of all countries to help enable the poor to achieve sustainable livelihoods. According to Principle 5 of the Rio Declaration, "all states and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world" (Johnson, 1993). This tells us that poverty has both local and global implications as well as origins. The Principle outlines a series of objectives, activities and means of implementation while Agenda 21 isolates; empowering community related activities; management related activities; data, information and evaluation activities; and international and regional cooperation and coordination as the main activities. Financing and cost evaluation and capacity building were seen as top measures for implementing the chapter on poverty eradication. By March 2002, 73 countries had signed Agenda 21 and 33 countries had ratified it, giving some hope but leaving much to be desired in terms of its implementation.

In March 1997, there was another convergence of actors involved with sustainable development from different backgrounds, at the Rio+5 Forum in Rio de Janeiro. This meeting brought together some 500 committed "stakeholders" for the purpose of moving sustainable development "from agenda to action". The Forum focused on key strategies and management systems for operationalizing sustainable development at the local, national and global levels. The following statement on poverty was made by the Financial Institutions, UN Development Agencies and Private Philanthropy workshops: "Mobilizing and directing finance towards social and environmental integration and

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<sup>4</sup> These are non-governmental organisations specialised in research and policy. They were quick to notice that the activities of extreme poverty stricken people and those of the very rich were responsible for most of the environmental problems in the world. They drew the attention of the world to this reality buttressing their arguments with statistical data.

poverty reduction" is a critical issue towards implementing sustainability (The Earth Council, 1997). The NGO Network and NCSD workshop participants also cited financing for sustainability as a critical issue.

The Doha declarations states that "aid and trade must go hand in hand if the opportunities of globalization are to spread to the neediest; the one billion and more of humankind living in abject poverty." However, Doha marked the first time that the wealthy countries committed to assist the developing world in building capacity to better engage in the global trading system and combating poverty (IMF, 2002). In March 2002, the Monterrey Consensus focused on Financing for Development and only made mention of sustainable development, twice. It had nothing new that was not in the Rio Declarations and Agenda 21, except for the fact that it emphasized, 'mobilising domestic resources' by countries in question and recommended all parties to 'stay engaged'.

Ten years after Rio, heads of governments and states converged in Johannesburg, South Africa and agreed on what was known as "The Plan of Implementation." In the political declarations, point seven reads, "recognizing that humankind is at a crossroad, we have united in a common resolve to make a determined effort to respond positively to the need to produce a practical and visible plan that should bring about poverty eradication and human development." As a matter of commitment, it further states that "We recognize the reality that global society has the means and is endowed with the resources, together we will take extra steps to ensure that these available resources are used to the benefit of humanity." Consequently, we are made to understand that political will, which acts as the pivot, is lacking. This document mentions the creation of a Voluntary Solidarity Fund as the only new dimension to combat poverty, not found in Agenda 21.

The World Bank and IMF have since the late 70s till date unveiled a new way of doing business in poor countries. They started with Structural Adjustment Programmes, evolved to Enhanced Structural Adjustment and Growth Facility Programme, Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility and the HIPC which they imposed on poor countries. Today, national poverty strategies are to be developed by governments, with (little or no) input from civil society, instead of being written in Washington DC, (Oxfam, 2002). This has been the case with Cameroon and African countries in general.

### **The Status of Poverty Eradication in Cameroon**

Cameroon has a variety of ecological and climatic diversity alongside a diverse and complex ethnic makeup, which has been seen to represent both an opportunity and a challenge to development. As Africa in miniature, there are over 220 ethnic groups, each with distinct languages, customs and social structures. In the south and south west, indigenous forest dwellers and near hunting-and-gathering societies exist. The economy of Cameroon is predominantly agricultural. The official

languages are French and English, with about 80% of those who speak the official languages Francophone, and 20% Anglophones. The main religions of the people in Cameroon include: Animism, Christianity and Islam. Such diversity has been seen by the World Bank Group as a major challenge to the country's effective implementation of a poverty reduction plan (The World Bank Group, 2000). Here are brief highlights indicating whether Cameroon has done or is doing something in line with the prescribed policies and activities in the Plan of Implementation as seen below.

### **Poverty Eradication**

The following are actions at all levels to:

- (a) Halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than \$1 a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and, by the same date, to halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water; some progress is being made but set targets and time are too ambitious.
- (h) Establish on a voluntary basis a world solidarity fund to eradicate poverty and to promote social and human development in the developing countries. Mentioned in PRSP of 2001.
- (e) Develop national, local and community programmes for SD within country-owned poverty reduction strategies. A National Development Plan is scheduled for 2005.
- (d) Promote women's equal access to and full participation in decision-making at all levels. There is still much to be desired in this domain as women occupy only 5.6% in executive.
- (e) Develop policies to improve access by indigenous people and their communities to economic activities, and increase their employment through, training, technical assistance and credit facilities. Very little is being done here at the level of the government but grassroots NGOs are making much progress.
- (f) Deliver basic health services for all and reduce environmental health threats, taking into account the special needs of children and the linkages between poverty, health and environment. There exist some community health care centres that are ill equipped and run by highly untrained personnel. Not encouraging enough.
- (g) Ensure that children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and will have equal access to all levels of education. Primary education is free for all in government primary schools in the entire country beginning September 2001.
- (h) Provide access to agricultural resources for people living in poverty. Grassroots NGOs are the most efficient in this domain though operating in a stressed financial environment.
- (i) Build basic rural infrastructure, diversify the economy, improve transportation and access to markets, market information and credit for the rural poor to support sustainable agriculture and rural development;
- 0) Transfer basic sustainable agricultural techniques and knowledge, including natural resource

management, to small and medium-scale farmers, fishers and the rural poor, especially in developing countries.

(k) Increase food availability and affordability.

(l) Combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought and floods.

(m) Increase access to sanitation. A good example is the National Campaign on Hygiene and Sanitation in 2000.

7. Provision of clean drinking water and adequate sanitation by halving by the year 2015, the proportion of people unable to reach or afford safe drinking water and those with no access to basic sanitation, through actions at all levels to:

(a) Develop and implement efficient household sanitation systems;

(b) Improve sanitation in public institutions, especially schools;

(c) Promote safe hygiene practices;

(d) Promote education and outreach focused on children, as agents of behavioural change; Unfortunately, primary schools do not emphasize these values again as ever before.

(e) Promote affordable and socially and culturally acceptable technologies and practices;

(f) Develop innovative financing and partnership mechanisms;

(g) Integrate sanitation into water resources management strategies.

8. Taking joint actions and improve efforts at all levels to improve access to reliable and affordable energy services for sustainable development including the goal of halving the proportion of people in poverty by 2015, and as a means to generate other important services that mitigate poverty, bearing in mind that access to energy facilitates the eradication of poverty. This includes actions at all levels to:

(a) Improve access to reliable, affordable, economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sound energy services and resources, taking into account national specificities and circumstances, through various means, such as enhanced rural electrification and decentralized energy systems. Still being awaited.

(b) Improve access to modern biomass technologies and fuel wood sources and supplies including use of agricultural residues in rural areas and where such practices are sustainable. Still expected to become a reality.

(c) Promote sustainable use of biomass and other renewable energies by improving current patterns of use, such as management of resources, efficient use of fuel wood and new or improved products and technologies;

(d) Support the transition to the cleaner use of liquid and gaseous fossil fuels, where considered more environmentally sound, socially acceptable and cost-effective. No mention has been made in energy policies.

(e) Develop national energy policies and regulatory frameworks.

(f) Enhance international and regional cooperation to improve access to reliable, affordable, economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sound energy services, as an integral part of poverty reduction programmes.

(g) Assist and facilitate on an accelerated basis access of the poor to reliable, affordable, economically

viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sound energy services, taking into account the instrumental role of developing national policies on energy for sustainable development. Still being developed since there is no energy regulatory framework yet.

9. Strengthen the contribution of industrial development to poverty eradication and sustainable natural resource management. This includes actions at all levels to:

(a) Provide assistance and mobilize resources to enhance industrial productivity and competitiveness as well as industrial development in developing countries, including the transfer of environmentally sound technologies on preferential terms, as mutually agreed;

(b) Provide assistance to increase income-generating employment opportunities, taking into account the International Labour Organization (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work;

(e) Promote the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, through education and skill enhancement, with a special focus on agro-industry as a provider of livelihoods for rural communities;

(d) Provide appropriate financial and technological support to rural communities of developing countries to enable them to benefit from safe and sustainable livelihood opportunities in small-scale mining ventures;

(e) Provide support to developing countries for the development of safe low-cost technologies that provide or conserve fuel for cooking and water heating;

(1) Provide support for natural resources management for creating sustainable livelihoods for the poor.

10. By 2020, achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100million slum dwellers, as proposed in the "Cities without slums" initiative. This includes actions at all levels to:

(a) Improve access to; land and property; adequate shelter; and basic services for the urban and rural poor, with special attention to female heads of household;

(b) Use low-cost and sustainable materials and appropriate technologies for the construction of adequate and secure housing for the poor....

(e) Increase decent employment, credit and income for the urban poor, through appropriate national policies, promoting equal opportunities for women and men;

(d) Remove unnecessary regulatory and other obstacles for micro enterprises and the informal sector;

(e) Support local authorities in elaborating slum upgrading programmes. It is hoped the ministry of Urbanism will soon start work on this aspect especially in the capital cities.

11. Take immediate and effective measures to eliminate the worst forms of child labour as defined in ILO Convention No. 182

12. Promote international cooperation to assist developing countries, upon request, in addressing child labour and its root causes.

The overall picture tells us that, only sectors that promote economic growth have been given keen attention in the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, the National Environmental Management Plan of 1996, and other policy statements. A lot more is expected if the Plan of Implementation is to be followed strictly as seen above.

### **The context of poverty in Cameroon**

1965 to 1985 was a period of an enviable economic growth averaging 7 percent per year in Cameroon, yet, one of a high degree of poverty in rural areas. This prosperity was due to the abundant natural resources: cocoa, coffee, cotton and other tropical crops, forest products, petroleum and minerals. This enabled the country fund extensive public investments in building the industrial base (Douala Industrial Zone) while ensuring the well being of the population through education, health care delivery and social services. This was marked by inequality in the distribution of incomes, and significant regional disparities. The massive drain of rural dwellers in search of a better life in the urban centres due to the "urban illusion" only led to negative consequences. It gave a glaring example of how 'rural poverty becomes urban misery' as urban centres became crowded with people who could barely feed themselves for the time being. Crime and an increasing deterioration of the social fabric became the order of the day. Later, in 1986, the prices of commodities began to fall. Cameroon's exports, as well as unsustainable levels of debt, led to a 38% drop in GDP over the next decade, and a 49% fall in household income for small farmers (Biziama, 2002). The country embarked on and strengthened the Structural Adjustment measures since the late 1980s imposed on her by the IMF and World Bank. In particular, structural reform efforts concentrated on the liberalisation of the coffee and cocoa sectors, the revision of the forestry code, and liberalisation of prices and the labour code. Despite concerted international support, the reform programme encountered difficulties in the early stage. Three IMF stand-by arrangements went off track in 1989 and early 1990 and disbursements under the first Structural Adjustment Loan were suspended. This attempt to stabilise the economy and restore internal and external balances through internal adjustment alone, including a major cut in civil service salaries in 1993, did not produce the expected results, leaving the country with an unmanageable debt, large external and internal arrears, a

demoralised civil service, and a financial sector in crisis. While it led to an eventual turnaround at the macro-economic level, this however imposed a further deterioration in the general quality of life for most Cameroonians and in relations between the government and its partners.

The country suffered a period of civil unrest in 1991 and 1992 with calls for "Ghost Town Operations" from the opposition parties which aggravated the economic situation. The country's rich resource endowment leads many to believe that public mismanagement is a core development problem, not lack of resources to effectively fight poverty. It was not until 1996 that the country carried out a survey to determine the living conditions of Cameroon households. Using consumption measures, the survey, (Officially known as "Enquête Camerounaise Auprès des Ménages" ECAM) found that 50.5% of the population live below the poverty line (That is about \$0.80 per day). Of this number close to 3 million people can not afford even the food components of the consumption basket- a situation of extreme poverty. From this figure, 52% are women. Further 31.4% were characterized as middle class and 18.1 % as rich. Consequently, women and children represent the majority among the poor. Also poor are export crop farmers and livestock farmers in the forest zone while in the towns, salaried workers and informal-sector operators, as well as the unemployed. Poverty is predominantly rural, with 84 percent of the poor in rural areas. About 2 in 3 rural residents are poor. The percentage of poor among the population is higher in the Northern provinces (For details see map). Urban poverty is exacerbated by increase in unemployment in the modern sector from 7 to 25 percent of the labour force, and the increasing informalization of the economy. Such an uneven access to and the distribution of income as a variant of wealth, has led to high-income poverty in mostly the rural areas. Hence, people's assessment of the distinguishing characteristics of poverty tends to be influenced by hunger, dietary inadequacy, and high food expenditures (Ministry of Economy and Finance, 1996).The table below gives us a vivid overview of the country's profile.

Country Profile:

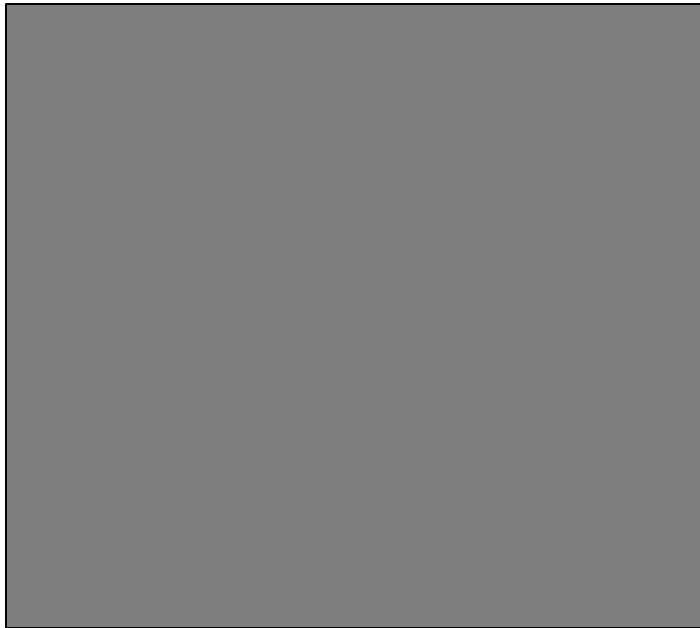
<b>Official name:</b>	Republic of Cameroon	
<b>Capital:</b>	Yaoundé	
<b>Area</b> (Thousands of km2):	475	
<b>Population</b> (millions):	15.2 (2001)	
<b>Population density</b> (per km2):	32 (2001)	
<b>Urban population</b> (%-2001):	49.3	
<b>Gross national income</b> (per capita):	US\$570 (2001)	
<b>Structure of GDP</b> (%-2001):		
· Agriculture	46	
· Industry	21	
· Services	33	
<b>Ecological footprint</b> (area units per person - 2001):	1.11	
<b>Human development index (HDI) ranking:</b>	135th of 173 countries (2002)	
<b>Gender-related development index (GDI) ranking:</b>	115th of 146 countries (2000)	
<b>Life expectancy at birth:</b>	40 (1960), 50 (2000)	
<b>Mortality rate under 5 years old</b> (per 1,000):	255 (1960), 154 (2000) <b>slipping back</b>	
<b>Adult literacy rate</b> (%-2000): Education Development Index value on a score of one: 0.65 (2002)		
· Total	76	
· Men	82	
· Women	69	
<b>Population using improved drinking water sources</b> (%-2000):		
· Total	58	
· Urban	78	
· Rural	39	
<b>Percentage of people living below the poverty line (1996 – 2001) with 3 million unable to afford the basic components of food basket.</b>		
· Total	50.5	
· Urban	16	
· Rural	84	
<b>Extreme poverty reduction from 50.5%to 42% by 2003 This sounds very unrealistic given current structural policy reforms.</b>		
<b>Will potentially reach goal of halving to 25.25% the number of poor people by 2015 though working in a weak supportive environment.</b>		

Adapted from UN, IMF, WB and Canadian Agency for International Development sources

The regional distribution of poverty in 1995 as shown on the map below is not very much different from the situation today. Here we see that the Extreme North hosts the highest number of poor

people. In terms of absolute numbers, the northwest, west and central provinces follow in descending order. Some of the reasons for these disparities can be seen as follows:

- The centre province is the political capital and has been experiencing an influx of people over the years in search for jobs, chasing their files at the ministries or the hundreds of thousands of unemployed graduates and non graduates that do not leave the capital city after school.
- The northwest and western provinces are grassland areas without industries and with high population densities, people rely more on subsistence agriculture that yields little income that can take care of the large families.
- Industries, factories, and plants are located in the south west, littoral (Douala industrial zone is an attractive pool for job seekers), east, south and Adamawa provinces. More so, their populations are not too high.
- There is no proper distribution of the resources to all areas by management despite the five percent growth rate since three years ago.



Poverty Headcount by Province based on housing, illiteracy and malnutrition  
(World Bank Poverty Assessment, 1995)

Combating poverty in Cameroon has been a multi-stakeholder issue from the local to the global levels. The World Bank, IMF, UNO, FAO, Government of Cameroon and a host of local NGOs are

key actors. Cameroon's NGO community consists of a small number of international professional NGOs, very few established Cameroonian secular NGOs, a larger number of established religious NGOs, and a rapidly increasing number of new indigenous secular NGOs. The newer and weaker secular NGOs have predominated since the enactment of the December 19, 1990 Liberty Laws, but their development problems are attracting increasing attention. This affects perceptions of the capacity and credibility of the entire NGO sector. However, some NGOs are more efficient in certain sectors. For instance, religious NGOs have had a significant role in education and health service delivery in Cameroon. The regulatory framework governing NGO activity is unclear; little or no national funding is forthcoming from the government, and the NGOs are increasingly depending on foreign, Western NGOs, for support.

### **The Impact of Poverty on Cameroonians**

Poverty in Cameroon is eating through and weakening the social fabric of the Cameroonian society, with children, youths and women suffering the most. According to UN sources, Food insecurity is one of the clearest outcomes of poverty, though the problem is not severe in the entire country. 36% of poor children are seriously underweight, while 250,000 children were malnourished in 1978, there were 466,000 malnourished in 1991, 29% of children under 3 were chronically malnourished in 1998 (UNDP, 2001). The situation today is precarious as severe malnutrition has risen to 7 and 8% in the north-west and Northern provinces (Ministry of Public Health, 2001; Nana-Fabu, 2001 – be consistent in the way you cite). Another indicator of poverty is the percentage of school-aged attendance. Cameroon's school attendance index fell from 101 in 1990 to 81 in 1998. Within this index, there are disparities between rural boys and girls, as well as sharp disparities between the North and South. However, girls and rural children are increasingly going to school. Among adults, illiteracy is failing steadily to a national level of 39% (45% for women), with again a sharper deficit in the North, where up to 68% of the population and 73% of women cannot read. Government spending on education rose from the 1970s through the mid-1980s and declined somewhat by the end of the 1990s. Falling faster was household spending on education, as families coped with reduced incomes. As a result, 18% of young men and 32% of young women have not graduated from school, the proportion is rising to 29% and 46% in rural areas. In a bid to mount and monitor the fight against poverty, the government published the Declaration on a Poverty Alleviation Strategy on 30 December 1998, after consultations with civil society members. This declaration outlined eleven strategies for reducing poverty. In 1999 the process of converting the strategies into concrete actions was initiated. While, the enhanced EUC Initiative gave substantial motivation to this process by offering a more concrete operational vehicle (the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper), it also gave prospects of a reduced debt burden and the possibility of freeing up additional resources for poverty programmes. An interim PRSP was submitted to the IMF and World Bank for review in August 2000. It was criticized on many

grounds. Consequently, the Second Cameroon Household Consumption Survey was undertaken in September 2001 to enable the government to complete a full PRSP by February 2002.

In 2000, the government launched the second triennial economic programme (1st October 2000 - 30 September 2003), which was supported by the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF). This programme established a macroeconomic framework that supports high growth rates and public resource availability needed for environmentally sustainable poverty reduction. It does so by: maintaining the low level of inflation; raising investment and domestic savings; and strengthening external competitiveness through efficiency-enhancing structural reform. The memorandum on the economic policy of this "second generation" of reforms indicates that the implementation of policies envisaged in this document should help to reduce the rate of poverty from 50.5% in 1999 to about 42% in 2003/2004. However, this time frame is too ambiguous and nearly unrealistic.

### **Key Structural Reforms Adopted by Cameroon Government**

During the years between 1990 and 2000, the Cameroonian government adopted some structural reforms that fell in line with the provisions of the plan of implementation as outlined above. The effective implementation of some of these reforms has begun, and this will be explained further in the following section of this paper. These reforms, which take the sectoral approach in policy making, include:

#### a) Incentives and Trade Policy

As a major booster in the slowing agricultural sector, the government decided to completely liberalise the coffee and cocoa sectors between 1991- 95. While this was hailed by the World Bank and IMF as a step forward in Cameroon's economic development, the 1996 household survey shows that the bulk of Cameroonians are still waiting for the benefits of such a privatisation. By February 1994, non-tariff barriers on all imports except petroleum products were eliminated. By July 1, 1999, non-forestry export taxes were reduced to zero, from 15-25% in 1994.

#### b) Price Controls

Before the early 1990s, the government was totally in control of the markets, controlling the prices of all commodities. As a key reform, price controls have been eliminated, except for those of petroleum products, medicines, textbooks, pharmaceuticals, marine transport, and port services.

#### c) Energy

Two annual independent audits of the national oil company's (SNH) accounts were completed. This led to the full integration in the national budget, revenues of the oil sector. By July 1998 the liberalisation of competing imports, led to the elimination of the national oil refinery (SONARA) monopoly over the supply of petroleum products, which often characterized a chaotic market situation. In June 1999, liberalisation occurred in the areas of: distribution margins in the price formula for refined petroleum products; refined petroleum prices and establishment of automatic adjustment mechanism. These reforms promoted the use of cheaper energy sources, especially such that fuel dissipation is one of the major causes of environmental problems in Cameroon. Regulating the price of petroleum products gave increasing access to more people and brought some order to the transport sector, which was becoming more and more accessible to the rich. Taxi fares were raised as fuel prices constantly increased. The result was that the very poor could not go by car to other towns and administrative units to get their documents and files treated. There was a conspicuous lack of an active energy regulatory body. Electricity supply under the patronage of the National Electricity Corporation (SONEL) could only cover about 57% of the national territory. By September 1999 this para-statal was completely privatised by an American Energy Supply group. Unfortunately, they are not obliged to extend electricity supplies to a vast majority of rural areas that still depend on bush lamps for lighting. It is still a challenge for the government to do it to enable the poor masses get access to ICTs considered crucial for poverty reduction and eventual eradication. Another energy problem is the lack of availability of cooking gas in urban areas. In early 2001, the price of a 14kg container of Butane gas was about triple the price in 1999. This caused a reduction in the use of fuel wood, kerosene stoves, and an increase in the use of saw dust as major sources of energy for cooking. This had damaging consequences on forests and human health (children suffer most) especially as occupants of these houses were inhaling the soot emitted from these stoves.

#### d) Financial Sector

- The banking sector was successfully restructured between 1989-92 and 1996-99 through the liquidation of numerous insolvent banks and restructuring of unprofitable but viable banks, including Société Générale des Banques Camerounais (SCBC There is need for a worldwide endeavour to confront the problem of poverty) and Banque Internationale pour le Commerce et d'Epargne du Cameroun (BICEC). This helped secure government debts and improve loan recoveries. Deposits in failed banks were paid out of the proceeds of recoveries.
- On July 1, 1997 the legal requirement that at least one-third of commercial bank capital be held by Cameroonian interests was eliminated. One year later there was enhancement of competition within the banking system with the completion of bank restructuring and the liberalisation of commissions on bank transactions. By January 2000, the only remaining

government-owned bank, BICEC, was completely privatised. To restore some confidence in the financial sector, there was a strengthening of the regulatory and judicial framework for financial transactions. It is too early to evaluate the benefits of these reforms, with respect to poverty reduction.

- The insurance sector was restructured. In 1999 there were preparations for a national strategy to restructure the social security system, the results of which have yet to be presented publicly. In the same year, financial cooperatives representing the interest of the public were required to register with the Ministry of Economy and Finance, and were brought under the control of the regional banking commission (COBAC), which draws up prudential rules adapted to different categories of cooperatives.

#### e) Privatization

In a bid to attract foreign investors and FDIs, the government announced the privatisation of parastatals by 1994. For example, a major rubber company, HEVECAM was privatised in 1996, and the sugar company, CAMSUCO, and the national shipping company, CAMSHW, were privatized in 1998. Also in 1998, a privatisation strategy for the cotton company SODECOTON was adopted. The mobile phone company, CAMTEL Mobile, was sold to the Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) in 2000. This gave way for a second private cellular telephone company, Mobilis, to start operating in January 2000. The government also launched pre-qualification bids for the privatisation of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), and today some parts of the rubber production units have been privatised, amidst widespread protests from civil society in Cameroon. In December 1998, the public water company, SNEC, was privatised. Regulatory agencies for the telecommunications and electricity sectors were established by 1999, but these bodies still have to do more since no one is there to question the American Energy Supply Group on the incessant power failures.

#### f) Transport Sector

By 1998, the maritime transport system was completely liberalised through the elimination of cargo sharing rules and national preferences. In 1999, a system of autonomous ports was set up to replace the existing Port Authority. The customs section of the Douala port was reorganized with the introduction of a unique counter to check customs fraud. Currently, this measure is paying off, but the process has been very slow and complicated further since only one outlet now exists. Railway activities were conceded to the private sector in 1999, though a lot still has to be done to make this system financially attractive, given the collapse of the bridge along the rail lines to the northern parts of the country, in that the railroads are used to supply onions and ground nuts to the greater parts of the south. Enhancing this system will further increase the availability of such food items in parts that do

not produce them. Given the seasonal nature of roads linking major parts of the country, a road maintenance fund was set up in 1998 to provide sustainable sources of funding for maintenance of priority network. This saw the introduction of tollgates that generate substantial revenues from vehicles on the highway, yet farm to market roads are almost inexistent. The result is that farmers cannot easily transport their farm products to the markets. This is very explicit in rural areas, which are cut off from the rest of the country in the heart of the rainy season, creating price hikes and artificial food scarcity in towns.

#### g) Forestry

The international community is hailing Cameroon today for her new forestry code and application decrees adopted in 1994. These decrees defined the modalities of community forests and forestry, and advocate a participatory and more local management of the forests for community good. Since the installation of the decrees, 10 community forests have been assigned, and are now more or less managed by the communities (Djeumo, 2001). The criteria for the adjudication of concessions and cutting rights were revised in 1999, but they have yielded little dividends since then, given that permitting authorities still do not respect the revised regulations. However, all these were accompanying forestry incentives and tax reforms that begun in 1997. These incentives however are seen to promote indiscriminate logging by big companies who do not need the incentives at all.

#### h) Educational Sector

In the late 1980s, school enrolments stood at 95.6% in 1989-90, but the gross enrolment ratios fell to 81.8% in 1998-99 in primary education, and to less than 50% in secondary education, with wide disparities among the provinces. In addition, the quality of education has deteriorated, as suggested by record repetition rates, estimated at 28% each year, as well as by substandard standardized test scores. However, cultural factors in the northern provinces, poor curricula, poverty, lower salaries paid to teachers, reduced allocations for materials, and neglected infrastructures due to fiscal constraints of the early 1990s, are the major causes and consequences of this deterioration. As a reaction, in 1998, Parliament approved the Education Orientation Law, which sought to develop an educational strategy which brings together all stakeholders to improve the access, quality and equity of educational services. A co-management strategy creating the school "advisory" at the primary level and the institutional "advisory" at the secondary level was introduced. These advisories consist of students' parents, the school administration, teachers and their syndicates, local administration and civil society working in the sector and the geographic area where the school is located. For fiscal year 2000-01, the government took actions to finalise the education sector strategy, effectively enforce the decision granting free access to education within government primary schools, consolidate partnerships in the education sector, open teacher training colleges, government secondary schools and establishments, absorb 1,700 part-time primary school teachers, and implement a national policy on school text books

and teaching aids. However, the outcome of these actions is yet to be seen, given that they have been executed slowly and in an uncommitted fashion. There is a need for development partners to help the government increase allocations of external assistance to basic education, in debt relief and capacity building, which will help reduce gender and regional disparities. These call for the evolution of sound programmes to improve the quality of and full access to primary education by all children in the country.

#### i) Communications Sector

In Cameroon a great deal of the masses relies on rumour as a primary source of information. The national radio and newspaper were state owned and disseminated information only to the extent that it was safe to preserve the government in power. The high rate of illiteracy and poverty limited access to the media for most people. Cognisant of the inherent link between communication and sustainable development, the government undertook the decision to reduce all custom duties on imported information and communications technologies in 2001. The flip side of this was that stakeholders imported old fashioned, ill-adaptive and obsolete technologies. Today, the malfunctioning products are being dumped on roadsides and on open lands, which leads to a large problem in pollution. Although approximately 20 percent of the population can now have access to the Internet, there is still a need for formulating a popularisation policy of information communication technology (ICT).

#### j) Safe Water

Between 1990 and 2000, about 2 million Cameroonians did not have access to safe drinking water. This followed a drop from an average of 44% of households with access to safe drinking water (tapped or quality controlled) in 1998. However, in the main towns, 70% of households had access to safe drinking water, compared with only 20 percent in the rural areas. These figures show a wide disparity between urban and rural areas. Improved water supplies were provided in the early 1990s to the Fulani community in the northern part of the country, but it was later discovered that the people used this water mostly for their cattle rather than for themselves. The government abandoned this project after it was enacted. In addition, it planned to extend rural water supplies schemes through drilling of many bore holes in 2001-02 throughout the country, which did not take place. It has privatised the main supplier of water, SNEC, with expectations that privatisation will facilitate the provision, rehabilitation, and maintenance of infrastructure. Since this may not be the case, higher incomes, community capacity building through training and support will be needed to ensure local sustainable water management and avoidance of possible health risks.

#### k) Health

The 2001 United Nations Country Report on Cameroon states that the health status of Cameroonians has deteriorated over the years, despite government commitments to "ensure health for all by the year 2000." The report shows that infant mortality and reproductive health trends have risen dramatically, representing failure to achieve planned health objectives and nutritional status. It is estimated that there are 13,500 persons per physician and 2,400 persons per nurse (Ministry of Health 2000; Nana-Fabu, 2001) which is far above the 10000 limits. The number of HIV and AIDS cases in Cameroon rose from a rate of 0.9% in 1989 to 11% in 2000. By the mid-1990s, more than 15% of the army and truck drivers, and more than 20% of commercial sex workers in Yaoundé and Douala were HIV-positive. Today there are about 937,000 cases of HIV/AIDS in the country. About 7.8% of young girls and 3.8% of young boys below 24 are infected by HIV/AIDS. Poverty, ignorance in some elements of the population and limited sensitization are the main causes of the higher HIV/AIDS rates in Cameroon. Such a poor status is contested due to the fact that people cannot fully comprehend the sustainable development message, if their health is in poor state. Today, community nursing is being promoted together with the introduction and support of the "essential drugs programme." In September 2000, an NGO, German Technical Co-operation (GTZ), donated the sum of 6 billion francs CFA (US \$ 8.3 million) for training health personnel and the provision and maintenance of health equipment in health centres in Cameroon. This is still not enough, considering the enormous need for health personnel and health equipment in the country.

#### l) Hygiene and Sanitation

Cameroon undertook a national campaign on hygiene and sanitation in 2000 before the adoption of the Plan of Implementation. However, this campaign was intensive and limited to the urban areas to the neglect of rural areas. The campaign was short lived, and gave the impression that it was only used to achieve programmatic objectives. This neglects the view that better management of water resources, access to safe water, basic sanitation and hygiene promotion play a key role in tackling poverty and promoting sustainability (Wroe and Doney, 2003).

#### m) Agriculture and Food Security

The Draft Poverty Reduction Strategy paper outlines many policy reforms in the agricultural sector, which contributes 46% of the GDP. Cameroon can be safely said to be self-sufficient in terms of food production, and can even be described as the food basket of the region. Food supplies go to Gabon, Central African Republic, Chad and Equatorial Guinea. When some areas of the country faced famine in 2001, the government finalised a study on the revamping of the maize and cassava sub-sectors and improved food security in risk zones, notably in the north and the far north. In addition, a Cereals Board was created to put in place a food security stock. 4,000 tonnes of cereal were donated by the Head of State to the famine-stricken populations of the north and far north provinces.

On their part, two NGOs have been involved with agricultural development. The first is Mbonweh Women's Development Association, which is based in the southwest province. This NGO is a women's empowerment association that promotes agricultural development through micro credit schemes. Working with over 4000 women, it is recording much success and gaining international support. The second is the Society for Initiative in Rural Development and Environmental Promotion (SIRDEP), which is busy in the northwest province, giving financial credits to women to start income generating activity. This activity is run on the guidelines of the Grameen Bank experiment, which is proven to work so well in rural Bangladesh. There is continuous monitoring and evaluation by these NGOs and results show positive trends towards reducing income poverty. A shortcoming in this development is Cameroon government's lack of commitment to assist these NGOs. The Solidarity Fund created in Johannesburg can be channeled through such NGOs that have good records in the field, if poverty reduction has to be a reality in Cameroon. This is based on the assumption that the trickle-down-effect effectively manifests itself not with government agencies but best with grassroots NGOs and C1Gs.

#### n) Biodiversity Loss (Environment)

The drafting of decrees for a law on the environment was passed in 1996, and was enacted in 2000. There has been some progress with the National Programme for Bio-diversity, which is funded by the Global Environment Fund (GEF). Cameroon has an environmental agenda, which includes water resources management, solid waste management, and the control of water and air pollution. All are still in a fragmented state, and need to be combined, if the country is to achieve sustainable development. There is need to build in government, private sector and civil society, an environmental management capacity. Poverty is one of the factors that can compromise effective implementation of the sustainable development strategy in Cameroon. Reducing poverty will ensure continuous availability of resources to fight poverty, which is seen to be a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation. An Emergency Action Plan for Forests and the Environment makes provisions for: gazetting and reinforcing protected areas, establishing contractual accountability of logging companies against poaching; implementing systematic environmental impact assessments prior to road-works and industrial projects, involving local communities in the management of natural resources, and the co-ordinating priority actions. Additionally, the government is currently: developing botanic gardens and zoological stations, preparing a national strategy for the fight against pollution, preparing a national sensitisation strategy on environmental protection, preparing a national strategy to fight desertification, and validating and implementing a national communication strategy on climate change.

#### O) Support of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

So far this has been indicated in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of Cameroon, giving the added burden for interested persons to come up with comprehensive business plans and get loans from the government to finance them. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently granted a disbursement of about US \$21 million to Cameroon to help support poverty eradication efforts. If all goes well and in a well thought out and coordinated fashion to avoid environmental damage from small businesses, poverty eradication in Cameroon will be possible in the next three decades.

### **Conclusions**

Poverty is multi-dimensionally faceted. Sub-Saharan Africa and Cameroon ended the millennium 5% poorer than they were in 1990. Cameroon has been an independent nation for more forty years, yet poverty is still an ever-present reality amongst the greatest majority of its citizens. Indeed it has spread its tentacles to wider segments of the populations from the second half of the third decade, the fourth decade and at the start of the fifth decade. It is worsened by the fact that the labour code was liberalised between 1990-94, with respect to hiring and firing of employees. Cameroon's economic growth has reached a level of 5% per year, inflation is under 3%, and budget deficits are under control. This growth is still vulnerable to international price and currency fluctuations and depends on political will to tackle corruption and challenges in democratisation. There is need for a worldwide endeavour to confront the problem of human degradation caused by abject poverty in both Cameroon and the world over. Despite the enormous efforts put in place by the government of Cameroon, many aspects in the Plan of Implementation are still being left out in the national strategy to fight against poverty and ensure sustainable livelihoods to people.

Official statistics from the 1996 Household Consumption Survey and the voice of the poor point to Cameroon as a society that has so far, not done enough to confront its poverty. There is a very unequal distribution of income, with high levels of inequality associated with low poverty ratios in Cameroon. It is also observed that within-group inequality is stronger than between-group inequality which poses a policy dilemma for decision makers (Fambon, S. and Baye F., 2002).

Current structural policy reforms undertaken by the government are still geared towards economic growth, so there is need 'to naturalise development thinking' (Mestrum, 2002) at the same that that the country is fighting poverty. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of Cameroon allows for more growth with the conspicuous absence of equitable resources redistribution policies. Only a few aspects and actions of poverty eradication as enshrined in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation are mentioned in this paper. This will only go to increase the already wide gap between the poor and the rich, and will not solve the problem of poverty.

Cameroon does not have a viable social security system that can support and ensure that the fight against poverty continues. There is lack of a viable human capacity at the moment to provide a holistic approach to the problem.

The empowerment of all groups of society especially that of women and children, is at the lowest of motivations in Cameroon. This gives room for social exclusion from the resources base and creates little room for a sustainable future leadership role for the youth of today. Increasing mainstreaming of gender should be given priority in the 2005 national sustainable development agenda of Cameroon.

Despite all the efforts put so far to reduce poverty, Cameroon spends four times more on debt interest payments than on health care. Institutional conflicts, poor coordination and weak capacities of the several structures created under the structural adjustment programmes imposed by the IMF and World Bank, greatly hamper implementation (NESDAEC, 2001). The created Poverty Reduction Fund with no budgetary allocation indicates a heavy dependence on external funding and support in the fight against poverty. Neither ODA nor FDI or international trade will deliver the goods if the domestic resources are still immobilised.

There can be no effective fight against poverty when unemployment is so high, AIDS is taking many of the lives of people between the ages of 13-24, there is heavy reliance on debts, and there is gender disrespect in decision-making.

The above mentioned steps taken by the country do not satisfactorily address policies dealing with essential basic social facilities like education and health, ecological disasters, and the environmental carrying capacity of the poor.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the above-mentioned conclusions, and those of the World Bank (1995), key actions to be taken to ameliorate the situation of poverty in Cameroon include: enhancing institutional performance, greater local initiative and provision of basic infrastructure among many others.

A key responsibility for combating poverty lies in the area of finance. Aid from official and new sources is essential to aid in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and the effective implementation of the plan of action to eradicate poverty adopted at the Johannesburg Summit in September 2002. According to World Bank and IMF sources, developed countries are contributing around \$56 billion a year. Rough estimates show that about \$40-60 billion a year is needed in addition to the current \$56 billion (HDR, 2002) and that even if this were to be the case, current ODA should be

doubled. This will still only amount to about 0.5% of GNP of the developed countries, which is significantly less than the original target set in 1970 and agreed upon in 1972 in Stockholm. With such reluctance in contributing for ODA, the prospects of voluntary contributions for solidarity funds from mostly the private sector of surviving or coming to existence. The experience with GEF created in 1992 at Rio de Janeiro is a good example of a creation of a voluntary fund that has very little promise for the future for the poor, since the majority of them are in poor countries that have little or nothing to contribute if they still have to pay back exorbitant debts.

There is an urgent need to revamp the dying social security system through social protection policies. A careful look into the World Bank's proposals for such policies can guide the country's policy-makers in designing social policies. Respect for human rights, meeting basic human needs and more equitable distribution of wealth, wise utilization of the resources base for development (World Bank, 2003) are clear priorities for the eradication of poverty.

The continuous reliance on FDIs, ODAs and worst of all, loans, will not do much to solve the problem of poverty in the country. A sustainable means is for the country to mobilize domestic resources is exemplified in the Monterrey Consensus. This will entail building capacity for: poverty monitoring; the formulation of social projects within the PRSP actions plan; and building constituencies between the administration, private sector, donors and civil society. This has the advantage of long term actions, greater chances of the occurrence of the trickle-down-effect. In this regard, internationally recognized grassroots NGOs can directly be contacted by external donors. Simultaneously, the corrupt government structures should be given less attention than the grassroots NGOs since the latter have better results on the ground.

With capacity building, the country can be better equipped with tools and instruments to revisit the priority of investment programme processes to build a national poverty reduction expertise network and accelerate the implementation of the National Governance Programme action plan. However, there should be a need to effectively co-ordinate aid flows to enable a more flexible trickle-down of project funds that mostly come through governmental agencies. A participatory endeavour to define a strategies vision of the country and the planning processes at national and regional levels would only be realized in the fight against poverty if everyone were engaged and committed to the fight.

Monitoring nations to meet targets for poverty eradication cannot be directly possible with current international data. Even other dimensions of poverty that can be monitored have many gaps in the data. Hence it is hoped that the 2001 Second Cameroon Household Consumption Survey (ECAMII) will help bridge this gap. But scientific uncertainty should not be a reason for not acting now. The

precautionary principle should be taken into consideration because the more people stay poor, the more they fall back on the physical environment to scratch a living.

Further, education is seen to play an important role in poverty eradication. In this light therefore, the UNESCO initiated programme in education is hoped will contribute enormously towards poverty eradication. This will build capacity that will drive further action by all for the benefit of all Cameroonians. A proper identification of the poor is to let people see themselves as poor (as demanding as this might be) rather than imposing a less than one dollar a day poverty line.

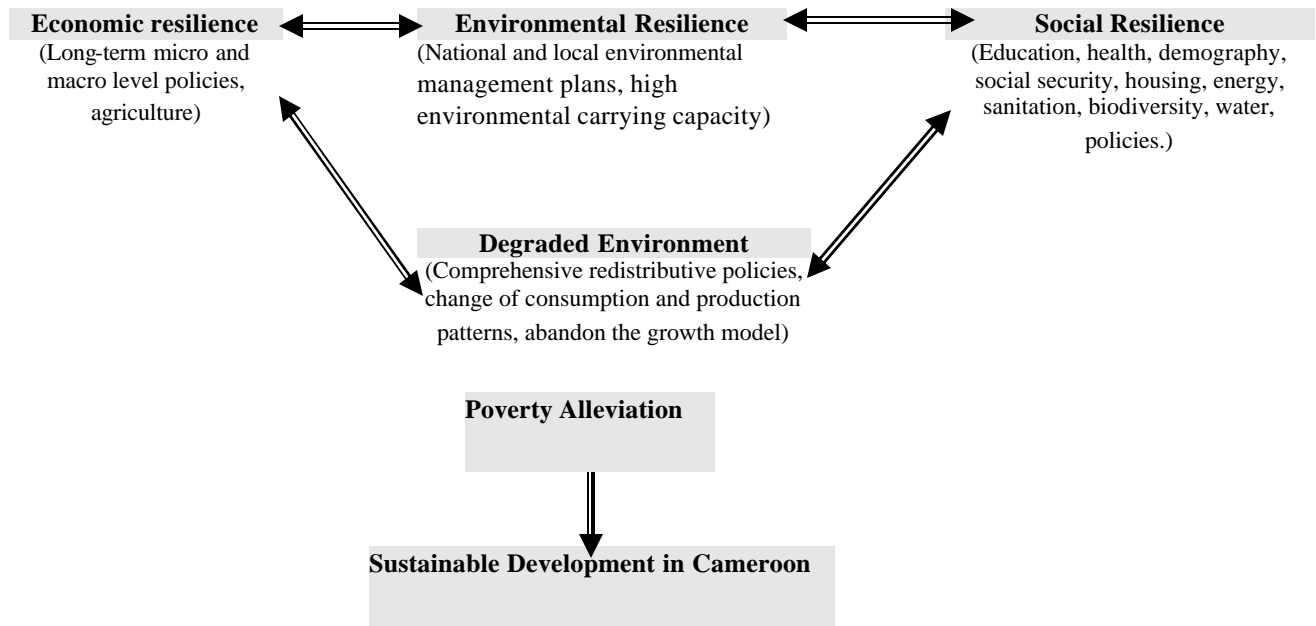
Cameroon should hasten the process of developing comprehensive nationally-owned solutions to poverty alleviation. Setting 2005 as the deadline for developing a national sustainable development programme (Cameroon PRSP, 2001) depicts a situation whereby the authorities want to shift the problem ahead. Action needs to be taken immediately. The UNDP can provide sponsorship if pilot projects are innovative. This is true given that the UNDP has been effective in connecting countries to global best practices and resources, promoting the role of women in development, and bringing government, civil society and outside founders together to coordinate their efforts.

The idea that good governance and sustainable development are indivisible is a sound one in that without the rule of law, predictable administration, legitimate power, and responsive regulation and not amount of funding, no amount of charity will lead to prosperity. Good governance provides every citizen, with a real and lasting stake in the future of his or her society politically, economically, and socially. Ultimate success, however, will only be ensured when there is a willingness and commitment on the part of the non-poor to assist in the elimination of the human degradation which poverty creates (Anan, 1997).

Even if poverty were to be totally eradicated, there is still the dire need to ensure sustainability. This means that care should not only be taken in line with sound and coherent redistributive policies targeting those in extreme poverty, but that people should continuously be aware of the dangers of over- consumption. To fight poverty in Cameroon, there is need to undertake actions and policies that cut across the economic, social and ecological dimensions of sustainable development. This is based on the assumption that most environmental problems are associated with the way we produce and consume goods and services. So far production and consumption patterns of the rich in Cameroon are to satisfy their wants and not their basic needs. Environmental values must make sense to all. If concerted efforts are taken in a coherent and holistic manner, the future of Cameroon's poor will be bright. The effective eradication of poverty in Cameroon can safely be achieved within the framework of the Plan of Implementation, which pays great attention on sustainability issues and concerns. It is

only in such a manner that an equilibrium in reducing poverty while ensuring economic, social, and ecological resilience (as represented below), can be achieved.

Figure: Poverty reduction schemata linking economic, ecological and social resilient needs for coherent policies in Cameroon



Such a scheme depicts a policy scenario that calls for more concerted efforts in the design of measures that can simultaneously reduce poverty and income inequality. Such measures can “best be designed within the ambits of carefully targeted transfers that are group neutral, yet reaching the vulnerable segments of each group” (Fambon, S. and Baye F., 2002). To this end Agenda 21 establishes principles for achieving sustainable development based on the need to manage the economy, the environment and social sectors, in a coherent and coordinated fashion for human development – creating human capital and using its full potential. Its full implementation is reiterated in the Plan of Implementation.

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