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# Saving the Future of Cameroon

*Julian Madrigal*

## ABSTRACT

Cameroon is a beautiful Central African country with lots of Natural resources. Unfortunately due to corruption in the government and lasting effects from colonialism most Cameroonians are living in poverty. The Cameroonians get caught in the same poverty traps over and over again and if no changes are being made at the micro level then these traps will keep occurring over and over again. It is very important that the children in Cameroon receive proper nutrition, healthcare, and stay in school so they can focus on their education to better their lives in the future and not have to get stuck working in harsh conditions their whole life.

*Keywords:* NA

*Classification:* DDC Code: 333.7 LCC Code: HD75.6

*Language:* English

London Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 573333
Print ISSN: 2515-5784
Online ISSN: 2515-5792

London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 22 | Issue 20 | Compilation 1.0

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# Saving the Future of Cameroon

Julian Madrigal

Cameroon is a beautiful Central African country with lots of Natural resources. Unfortunately due to corruption in the government and lasting effects from colonialism most Cameroonians are living in poverty. The Cameroonians get caught in the same poverty traps over and over again and if no changes are being made at the micro level then these traps will keep occurring over and over again. It is very important that the children in Cameroon receive proper nutrition, healthcare, and stay in school so they can focus on their education to better their lives in the future and not have to get stuck working in harsh conditions their whole life. I believe that the Cameroonian leaders need to look towards FBOs (Faith Based Organizations), to help improve their citizens lives and promote sustainability in the country. FBOs that are transparent in what they do and have a strong passion for helping those in poverty can end these poverty traps and give kids in Cameroon all their basic needs which is food, clean water, education, and food everyday. If the children's basic needs are meant then the families will no longer have to force their children into harsh labor because they will know at least their child is being taken care of in school now.

Cameroon is a central African country that is bordered by Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, The Republic of Congo, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea. I believe that this country is very interesting to study because it is still a relatively new country because it gained its independence from France in 1960. So far in this Country's history there have only been two presidents which are Ahmadou Ahhidjo from 1960-1982 and then Paul Biya who has been in office since Ahhidjo resigned and is now 89 years old still leading the country (Britannica).

On the HDI scale Cameroon in 2019 was 0.563 ranked and 153 out of all the countries (UNDP). This level of development would be considered medium level development but, on the IHDI scale the number goes all the way down to 0.375. This shows how inequality in the country is a big problem and really hurts the development because this would be considered low level development when accounting for the inequality in the country. On the MPI scale Cameroon had the value of .232 in 2019.

Compared to the other developing countries that is higher than the average which is 0.105 (UNDP). In 2021 Cameroon's CPI (Corruption Perceptions Index) is 27 which ranks it 144. The closer the number is to 0 the closer it is to complete corruption. For perspective Denmark, New Zealand, and Finland have the highest value which is 88. The lowest score is South Sudan with a score of 11 (Transparency International).

Cameroon was colonized by Germany in 1884. It was taken by force and was used for its natural resources and hurt the Native people badly and many died from harsh work serving the Germans in harsh conditions on the plantations (Britannica). Then in 1916 the Germans were exiled and Cameroon was taken control by the British and the French. Cameroon was split into two parts, the majority of the country by the French and then part of the east by the British. Once Cameroon got its independence from France it took control of the French part and then the next year they got independence from the eastern British side with a part of it being absorbed by the neighboring country Nigeria (Geography Now, 2015). This is why today the two official languages of the country are French and English. 80% of the population speaks French and 20% speaks English in 2 regions on the Eastern side of the country (Le Monde Afrique, 2018). The English speakers of this country have felt marginalized by the Government since they feel they do not have the same access to things like good English speaking teachers or lawyers as the French speaking citizens do with their language. This leads to a lot



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of violence and unsustainability in the country between the Cameroonian army and the Anglophone separatists which has led to lots of death and violent attacks on both sides (Le monde Afrique, 2018).

The anglophone people of this country feel like they are socially excluded because the government and majority of the population is French speaking. They feel as though there is not much they could do to impact their society because they do not have the same access to opportunities as a french speaking citizen would. As we learned this term social exclusion leads to many other problems, like health problems because they are poor because they were never given a proper education which then can lead to crime because they are just trying to survive and have nothing to lose.

Women in this country also face very big problems with inequalities and social exclusion. More girls than boys in Cameroon do not go to school and because of this there is a huge gap in literacy between women and men in the country. A sad fact is in 2018 71% of girls 15 and older are literate with 82% of boys 15 and older being literate (UNESCO). These girls get pregnant at a very young age as well, before they are 18 and don't have any way to care for a baby properly. According to the NGO "Girls Not Brides" 31% of women are married before 18 and only 5% of boys are married before 18. This shows how women are not able to get their education because they are being taken advantage of at such a young age and being forced to get married. This is not ok and these girls need to be protected. There needs to be a shift in the culture and the promotion of education to women so this cycle does not continue.

There is a bad cycle in developing countries like Cameroon where kids are forced to work and not go to school in place of sick parents not being able to work, so the child works in harsh conditions as something like a miner which then leads to them getting unhealthy at a young age and then having kids and making their kids work to make money for the family because they are now too unhealthy to work. I do believe that looking at Cameroon through this lens does help people understand the political and economic situations that go on in Cameroon better. I think when you look at these problems at a micro level it makes them feel more relatable and easier to find solutions that can change these problems for the communities because when you hear about problems of a country at a macro level and solutions at a macro level you feel the situations are too big to handle and they do not feel as personal when looking at it through that lens.

To fix these problems at the micro level of children being uneducated, not eating, and growing up poor and unhealthy there are many different ways people think of solutions. Many people think governments should do their best to help to give people the bare minimum to survive like free food, education, and healthcare. I think with the corruption of the government in Cameroon it is not realistic for the Government to come up with solutions to all of these problems. I think that the priority of this country is to have more support for the children because they are the future of the country, so in order for the country to progress the children need to be protected and educated.

Encouraging kids to go to school is a big change that needs to be made. One solution to this I find interesting is conditional cash transfers for kids going to school.

This way the families of these children can get paid for keeping their children in school and they don't have to worry about losing any money from their child not working because this can be their work. This would promote higher education in the country which leads to more people in the country being qualified for higher level jobs to get out of poverty. This will be especially good too because there's definitely a need for English speaking teachers as well in the country and with more education there will be more in the future with the english speakers being able to become teachers in the future.

This solution was done in Mexico and it showed very positive results especially with getting more girls in schools, which is exactly what Cameroon


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needs. With this policy girls enrollment in secondary school increased from 67 percent to about 75 percent (Banerjee & Duflo, 2012, pg 79). Although I think there can be some problems with this solution in Cameroon. I think the conditional cash transfers would increase the number of students in school, but the school systems still won't be very strong in Cameroon, especially in the English region. The students living in poverty will still have other problems that come along with it like hunger and other health issues. People can also take advantage of this and just go to school to get money then drop out. Just because these children are going to school doesn't mean the conditions of these schools are great and they're actually getting a proper education.

This is why I believe that the best solution to promote children's development and sustainability for the future is for the leaders of Cameroon to encourage FBOs in the country. People working with FBOs have a strong passion for making changes and this can lead to a lot of positivity for the people in the country living in poverty because the FBOs can provide their basic needs. A great example of an FBO promoting sustainability at the microlevel is the organization from California that works in Uganda called the "Zozu Project". In 2014 this organization built a school in Aura, Uganda and it has been growing ever since. As of this year the school has 545 students, 39 Ugandan employees, they built 3 clean water wells, and created one full time medical clinic & pharmacy (Zozu Project). I think The Zozu Project is proof that if done right FBOs can, little by little, have a big positive impact on communities that are living in poverty and save people's lives and promote sustainable development. This FBO takes care of a lot of the problems children growing up in poverty have. Now they don't have to worry about getting sick from unsanitary water, now they have a medical clinic to take care of them if they do get sick, and this organization feeds the students too so they will not go hungry. I think Cameroon would really benefit from schools like this that take care of all the kids basic needs to keep them healthy and safe. This would help keep the girls in a safe place as well in a school like this. They would not have to worry about any of the costs to attend school because this is all being paid for by sponsorships.

A lot of people can be skeptical of these organizations because they are very diverse with different beliefs and there's a lot of history of missionaries forcing people to convert or preaching hate towards certain groups of people. This is why I think it is important for these organizations to be as transparent as possible so people know who they are donating to and not be there to force their religion but to help everyone in need. If more organizations like that came to Cameroon the children can have all their basic needs met while promoting positive change for their futures which will help bring the country out of its poverty traps and promote more development.

Cameroon has many big problems in the country that are out of the people's control like corrupt government and conflict between the anglophone and Government. This is why I believe it is important to focus on helping with the microlevel problems in the country. Things that will immediately benefit people's lives. It's the little things that matter the most, like being able to drink clean water everyday or being able to go to school. Children should not have to be working in harsh conditions everyday to take care of their families. That is why I believe FBOs are one of the best solutions to help with all the problems citizens deal with on a day to day basis in Cameroon, especially the children.

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