DV 435 Economic and Political Geography of Cameroon

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THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

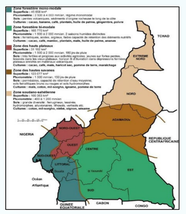
I.1. Location

Cameroon is physically located in Central Africa. The territory accounts for 475,442 km^2 (UNEP 2008). It is one of the costal countries, with proximately 400km of coastline in the west. It is a rich-resources country (Ndulu&O'Connell 2009). Nearly 21% of the land area is estimated to agricultural area (FAO 2016). Cameroon is referred to 'Africa in Miniature' due to its cultural and geological diversity. Its climate varies from tropical on the coast to semi-desert in the north(FEWS NET 2019).

Maps Credit: UNEP. 2008. AFRICA Atlas of Our Changing Environment. Nairobi. Kenya.

I.2. Agro-Ecological Zones

Cameroon has five agro-ecological zones(AEZ). Cameroon's ecologies range from sudano—sahelian in the far north to sub-equatorial rainforest in the far south, via Guinean wooded and grassy savannahs high and low in the center, and mountain, highland and coastal ecologies in the west (FEWS NET 2019). Food crop types are changed from cereals in the north, mainly sorghum and maize, to yams and cassava in the center, but still with substantial maize, to increasing dependence on cassava as well as plantain towards the south and west, again with the ubiquitous maize(*Ibid*). Especially, the Extreme Nord Region has highly marketable crops including Irish potatoes, onion and garlic traded to Douala and Yaoundé and cross-border markets of Nigeria(*Ibid*). Nigeria is one of the center markets, which strongly influences parts of Cameroon's rural economy(*Ibid*).



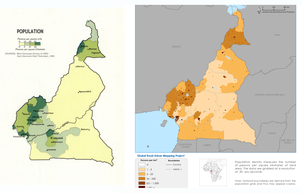
Maps Credit : FEWS NET. 2019. Livelihoods zone map and descriptions for Cameroon.

I.3. Mineral and Natural Endowment

Cameroon is well-endowed with abundant mineral resources including petroleum, as well as timber resources, gold, diamond, iron ore, and bauxite(Kamega 2008). Most of oil reserves are located on the west coastal line and the amount of oil reserves is expected as 0.2 billion barrels. Cameroon holds 4.77 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of natural gas reserves as of 2017, ranking 47th in the world(Worldometer 2019). In addition, Cameroon has 22 million hectares (ha) of tropical forests, which are a vital part of the Congo Basin forest ecosystem.

Maps Credit : Marc Anselme Kamga et al, 2018. Sustainable development and environmental challenges in Cameroon's mining sector: A review. Journal of Mining and Environment.(JME).

I.4. Population

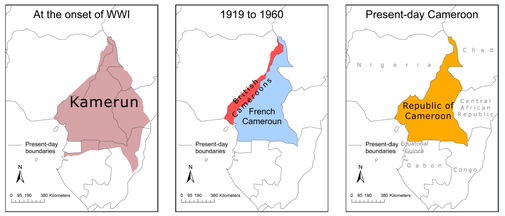


Population density 1970 (left) and 2000 (right)
Maps Credit: Andrew Gloe. 2000. Population density map of Cameroon, 1970.; NASA. 2000. Global Rural-Urban Mapping Project(GRUMP).

The population increased from 5.2 million (m) in 1960 to 25.9 m in 2019. The population growth rate is 2.6% in 2019. The figure of population density increases almost 5 time from 1961 to 2018, showing 53 persons per km^2 of land area(Worldbank 2020), becoming similar figure in the world average(59%, 2018). The populations are spilt fairly evenly between urban and rural areas (UNEP 2008). Population is concentrated in the west and north, with the interior of the country sparsely populated(CIA 2020). The density of population is high in the west region where most of mineral resources located. Extreme Nord Region, far north, is one of the most densely-populated areas of the country because of commercial product and cross-border trade. Compared to 1970, the distribution of population was quite similar in 2000, while the only change of that is more concentrated population nearby neighboring countries' borders.

II.1. Colonial Economy

Cameroon had three colonial encounters with Germany, France and Britain. Germany was the first to colonise the region from 1884 until it lost the territory in 1916. The Germans were the first to unite the inland and the coastal ethnic groups into a single political entity of the Kamerun. Following the First World War, Cameroon fell under a League of Nations mandate which divided the country into two zones among the British and French. France took 80 percent of the land while Britain got 20 percent, which it ruled as part of British Nigeria. British Cameroon was administered separately. France continued public work programmes that the Germans had established and promoted rural capitalism based on small scale-cash crop farming. French Cameroon gained independence while the British Cameroon was still under Nigeria. a referendum was held in British Cameroon on joining Nigeria or remaining in Cameroon. In 1961, the Northern region voted to join Nigeria while the Southern region remained with Cameroon.



Source: African Economic History Association

II.2. Rail, Infrastructure, Ports and Major roads

The Germans established the boundaries of Cameroon, introduced a monetary system, set up structures for administration and governance, and laid foundations for infrastructure such as telecommunications and the Douala Port. Northern Cameroon was more isolated from colonial activities as a result of its location and climate. Consequently, the economic activities did not reach the North. Major road networks and much of the infrastructure linked to economic development remained in the South.

II.3. Labour Migration

Cameroon is categorised under Africa of the colonial trade economy (Amin, 1972). Cash crops changes Cameroonian households from farming traditional food crops to cash crops. Cash-crop farming mainly focused on the production and export of coffee. Cocoa and tobacco are produced in the Southeastern part of Cameroon while the Southwest produces rubber and palm oil. Coffee is also produced in the Northwest, while the far North produces cotton.

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III.1. Regional Inequality

Cameroon is a middle-low income country, that despite experiencing recent steady economic growth has not translated these gains to improving human capital (AEO, 2020). 32% of the country remain poor, which is underpinned by Cameroon's persistent regional inequalities between urban and rural areas. In the Northern regions – which comprise of mostly rural populations – there is increasing poverty, despite already containing 69.1% of the country's poor (Santander Trade 2020).

III.2. Export Values According to Global Pricing

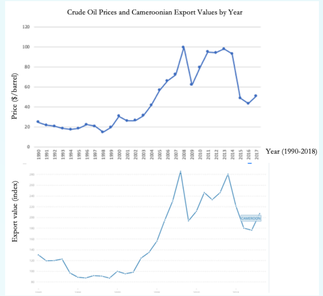
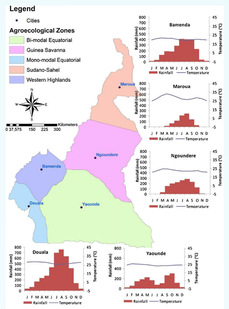


Figure A: Cameroon's export revenue against global crude oil price (1990-2018)

Crude oil has contributed a remarkably consistent 38.3% of the total value of Cameroonian export revenue from 2000-2018 (OEC 2020). Figure A shows the total value (US$ index) of Cameroonian exports from 1990-2018, against the global price of crude oil ($/barrel index) over the same time period. The clear similarities between the two graphs' fluctuations demonstrates the reliance upon crude oil price levels to the total revenues of Cameroonian exportation. This far-reaching symmetry thus underlines the necessity in Cameroon diversifying their exports as oil contributes 8% of total national GDP (World Bank 2019). The importance of oil to Cameroon is emphasized in its ability to propagate regional inequality. Discovery and thus access to oil was secured in the late 1970s on the South-Western coast by where 90% of oil production occurs offshore in the Rio del Ray Basin (Fozao et al. 2018). In this South-Western, oil producing, region the poverty rate is 21% (World Bank 2019) - compared to that of 57% in non-coastal regions (North-Western average).

III.3. Effects of Climate Change

An 800-farm survey conducted by Molua and Lambi (2007) modelled several climate scenarios and the resultant effects on farming income. Molua and Lambi's (2007) study concluded that a 5°C increase in temperature, or a 6.1% decrease in precipitation would reduce national crop revenue by $1.7 billion. The importance of diversifying from agriculture or improving the resistance of crops to climate is stressed due to farming providing employment to 80% of Cameroon's poor (Molua and Lambi 2007). This would inevitably impact on Cameroon's food supply – compounding issues of food scarcity further (where 3.9 million people face 'moderate to severe' food security'). The figure courtesy of Mekou et al. evidences the vulnerability of Northern regions in particular – with the highest average temperatures, and thus the most 'environmentally fragile' (World Bank 2019). The combination of being both the most environmentally fragile region and most reliant on agriculture means that climate change poses significant challenges to Cameroon's regional income distribution.



Cameroonian regions by climate (Mekon et al. 2013)

IV.1. Political Cleavages

Regional Allocation of Investment in the 1966—71 Plan
(in bn of Francs CFA)

Economic Sector	East Cameroon						West Cameroon	Undistributed	Total investments
	North	East	South-Centre	Littoral	West	Total			
General Studies	0.9	—	0.06	2.05	0.08	1.1	0.113	1.11	2.3
p.c.	39.1		2.8	2.2	2.5	47.9	4.9	48.5	
Rural Production (Agriculture)	3.8	1.0	4.8	8.1	4.0	19.7	7.3	5.4	32.4
p.c.	11.8	3.1	15	18.8	12.3	62	22.5	16.5	
Industry	3.2	1.2	3.8	14.5	1.9	24.6	3.9	11.1	39.4
p.c.	8	3	10	37	5	63	9	28	
Trade and Tourism	0.5	—	1.5	0.7	0.06	2.8	0.1	0.8	3.7
p.c.	29.9		41	16	3.1	46.8	4.9	48.3	
Infrastructure	6.5	1.2	3.2	2.7	2.3	15.9	4.4	21.5	41.9
p.c.	11.1	2	4.8	4.9	3.9	27.7	7.6	64.7	
Road Transport	—	—	0.2	0.1	—	0.3	—	15.9	16.2
Education	1.4	0.6	1.7	1.0	1.2	5.9	2.1	2.4	10.4
p.c.	13.5	5.5	17.2	9.1	11.6	56.9	20.2	22.9	
Public Health	0.9	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.8	2.6	0.9	0.6	4.1
p.c.	21.6	4.7	11.2	14.7	18.8	60.8	22.6	16.6	
Town Planning and Housing	0.8	0.2	4.5	3.8	1.0	10.4	1.0	0.3	11.7
p.c.	6.6	2.2	38.8	33.3	8.3	89.2	8.1	2.7	
Administration	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3.5	3.5
Total	18.8	4.4	20.2	29.0	11.2	83.8	19.4	62.0	165.2
p.c.	10.9	2.7	12.2	17.6	6.8	50.2	11.8	38.0	100

Source: Ministry of Planning and Territorial Development: Second Five Year Plan of Economic and Social Development, 1966-71, Yaounde, 1966, p. 477.

The regional distribution of poverty is not solely explained by the location of endowment alone. Rather, the salience of endowment is tied to the political significance of boarders and economic policy. We must understand and appreciate the creation of boarders as this influenced economic policy.

As explained in Column II, Cameroon was partitioned into the Francophone and Anglophone region. Boarders, local identities and administrative units were, therefore, largely formalised during the colonial period, particularly with the amalgamation of native authorities into larger units in the Anglophone region **(Lee and Schultz,2011, p.9).** However, before colonialism, in West Cameroon for instance, many ethnic groups did not have centralised political institutions **(Lee and Shultz, 2011, p.9).** Nevertheless, this gave a rise to clearer administrative and territorial lines, as well as what was the Francophone and Anglophone Cameroon.

The creation of these two states meant that each colonial power had could manage the affairs of these two states in their respective ways. In aggregate, French Cameroun was more prosperous than British Cameroon **(Mawhood, 1993).** British Cameroon was said to be "neglected", and an "outlying part of Nigeria **(Lee and Shultz, 2011, p.36).** There were minimal roads, no standard gage railways and no irrigation projects **(Lee and Shultz).** From 1955 to 1960, the Colonial Development Corporation invested £2.2 million into British Cameroon, only 6.2% of what the French invested **(Ndongko, 1986).**

IV.2. Regional Inequalities

Following from the above, this affected the salience of endowment because the grassfields which is in the Western (francophone) and North-western (*anglophone)* **(Mbapndah, 1994, 44)** has volcanic soils that make the region fertile for growing a wide variety of export and food crops, notably coffee, cocoa which were central to the colonial cash-crop economy **(Mbapndah, 1994, 44).** However, this did not result in the Anglophone region being equally prosperous to the Francophone region because it was largely neglected. This, therefore, explains the political and economic significance of boundaries and how it affects endowment and regional inequality.

After independence, there is a continuation in disparity of regional investment**.** Capital from the five-year national development plan from 1960-65 did not extend to British Cameroon. Consequently, the total planned 53 million Francs CFA was spent on projects in Francophone Cameroon **(Ndongko, 1986, p.12).** The 1966-71 plan also showed signs of skewed investment in favour of the former francophone region; 18% of planned investment went to the littoral region **(Ndongko, 1986, p.12),** which is where the port in Doula is located.

This furthered much of French capital invested before independence in developing the port in Douala that would facilitate the export of coffee, bananas, cocoa and wood from the area while at the same time guarantee the movement of French manufactured goods into Cameroon **(Takougang, 1993, p.281 and p.282).**