

Cameroon

The roaring lion of Central Africa

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Long-standing political stability

Widely considered a role model for the region, Cameroon has enjoyed political and social stability since its independence.

Central Africa's best kept secret is unveiled here



'Today, we are a nation, a great nation, a nation united, proud of its cultural and linguistic diversity, which is its wealth. A nation that looks to the future with confidence'

PAUL BIYA

President of Cameroon

Following the merger in 1961 of former French Cameroon and part of British Cameroon, the Republic of Cameroon has since enjoyed over half a century of political and social stability, despite being located in the conflictive Central African sub-region. Such composure has enabled the republic to focus on its agriculture, roads, infrastructure and the development of a petroleum industry.

In his New Year 2011 message to the nation, President Paul Biya announced: "Today, we are a nation, a great nation, a nation united, proud of its cultural and linguistic diversity, which is its wealth. A nation that looks to the future with confidence."

So what has been the crux to establishing long-standing political stability at the "hinge of Africa"? According to Minister of Finance Essimi Menye, "The secret is that Cameroon is born out of a huge mix of different people. We estimate that there are 268 languages in the country that make the nation a multicultural state. The efforts after independence have been focused on being able to live peacefully together. The spirit in which the Government has worked has been to reinforce national unity. A nation is not built in 10 days or in six years, it takes a long time and it is a process."

Covering an area of 183,568 square miles – almost twice the size of the UK – Cameroon is richly endowed and full of natural resources, packed with potential not only in terms of its young population, untapped tourism and energy production, but also industry, trade and agriculture.

For the first time, the Government has embarked on the formulation of a long-term development plan for Cameroon: Vision 2035. This outline, which projects an image of the country up to 2035, constitutes a reference framework for: reducing poverty to a socially acceptable level; reaching middle-income country status; becoming a newly industrialised country; consolidating the democratic process; and strengthening national unity while respecting the country's diversity.

In 2010, Cameroon celebrated the 50th anniversary of its accession to independence. It also marked the beginning of the first phase of the Government's growth and employment strategy that, according to the President, involves the implementation of major agricultural, mining, industrial, energy and infrastructure projects.

This year will be marked by the upcoming general elections in October, where President Biya, who has been at the political helm since 1982, will seek to maintain the country's status quo by gaining a third term in office for the incumbent Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). He is urging the electorate to participate fully in the elections and for voter turnout to be as high as possible.

"For this election to be indisputable I am counting very much on ElecCam, which will benefit from the necessary support of the administration and political parties during electoral operations," he says.

Based in the capital Yaounde, Elections Cameroon, aka ElecCam, is the neutral body appointed to organise, manage and supervise the elections in the republic. "On the whole, the Cameroonian people are a patient and peace-loving people and they were quick to notice that nothing of a lasting nature can be achieved in instability," says president of ElecCam Samuel Fonkam Azu'u.

An ElecCam office has been set up in each of the 360 regional councils across the country to ensure smooth and transparent elections. "The United Nations has been



Yaounde is Cameroon's capital city, with a population of just under 1.5 million. The city's main industries include dairy products, breweries, clay, tobacco, glass goods and lumber

very supportive of the electoral process in Cameroon," says Mr Azu'u. "No country in the world can be peaceful and progressive if it does not choose its leaders according to the will of people. To have the support of the people, the people need to choose their leaders so that they can have confidence in them and collaborate with their leaders."

The Finance Minister adds, "The secret of stability is the will to be able to live together and living together is living in peace. And this objective is renewed in every generation, so that children learn to live next to one another." ●



‘I think when you make a promise to [developing countries], you should keep it. And I am proud that Britain is doing that’

DAVID CAMERON
Prime Minister of the UK



‘The Government of Cameroon I think has been astonishing. It has been incredible how they have maintained stability in what is a very rough neighbourhood’

BHARAT JOSHI,
British High Commissioner
to Cameroon



‘Cameroonians see themselves as a single united people, in a peaceful nation, in search of one prosperous future, also embracing excellence and happiness’

PHILEMON YANG,
Prime Minister of Cameroon

The Cameroon-UK entente, a vital partnership

The solid relations enjoyed by Cameroon and the UK over the years have seen the UK involved in a range of projects in Cameroon to promote democracy, human rights, youth development, peace building, the fight against corruption, climate change, regional integration and UK-Cameroon trade and investment.

“We are committed to not only making the UK-Cameroon as strong a relationship as possible, but also to helping Cameroon on its journey to being the best country that it can be,” comments Bharat Joshi, the British High Commissioner to Cameroon. “In terms of developing good relationships with Cameroon, we are lucky. We have inherited a very strong bond and relationships that are partly due to colonial heritage and which have also been bolstered by official visits. They have been further strengthened by our shared membership of the Commonwealth since 1995.”

The British High Commission co-ordinates a variety of bilateral projects and also awards scholarships and fellowships under the UK’s prestigious Chevening scheme. Funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is jointly administered in Cameroon by the British High Commission and the British Council, scholarships under the scheme allow outstanding young professionals in Cameroon to study at a British university for up to one year.

The High Commission’s Challenge Fund supports small-scale, high-impact social and

commercial projects at a grassroots level. Also, recent projects from its Strategic Programme Fund include a scheme to help local communities in Cameroon’s rainforests to map trees and record incidents of illegal logging using custom-designed handheld computers and global positioning satellites.

Following a major review of the UK’s aid partners to focus its development resources on the 27 neediest nations, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) announced that Cameroon would be one of 16 countries to have their bilateral programs with the donor country phased out. Nevertheless, the commissioner points out, “Our commitment to Africa remains unquestioned and it will increase even more in the next few years.”

The UK will continue to support Cameroon through the UK’s increasing participation in initiatives by the World Bank, African Development Bank, European Commission and other multilateral involvement. “The overall Government commitment to development assistance to Africa remains and it is clear that we are going to continue to make the OECD target of spending 0.7 per cent of GDP on aid by 2015,” says Mr Joshi. “As part of that, there is going to be an increase in bilateral programs for [African] countries. We will have bilateral programme funds that we will be able to spend in Cameroon, while supporting key British Government priorities.”

Forestry is a vitally important area for Cameroon and the UK Government was

instrumental in setting up the Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF), to which it has pledged £58 million to finance action to protect the forests in the Congo Basin region of Cameroon.

Commercially, the “hinge of Africa” is well located as a base to access various domestic and neighbouring markets. “We have a long-standing economic relation; we have some big British companies who are operating here quite successfully,” says Mr Joshi. “The Government of Cameroon I think has been astonishing. It has been incredible how they have maintained stability in what is a very rough neighbourhood.”

There are many areas where UK companies could add value, such as in the service industry, where competition is quite low, profit margins are high and the industry is underdeveloped. Also, tourism and ecotourism have great potential. “Interestingly, we have only very few high quality hotels in places like Yaounde and Douala, where the markets are quite large. You see many business people around, so there is a niche for that,” adds Mr Joshi.

The commissioner sees the Cameroonian business environment changing, with the creation of free trade zones and one-stop shops designed to spark entrepreneurship. “Steps have been taken to make it easier for people to create businesses,” he says, “and there is evidence that the Government is genuinely committed and there is a commission which is under the Prime Minister’s chairmanship to tackle corruption.”

Political stability, a key enabler for development

Achieving political and social stability gave Cameroon a solid bedrock for growth

Cameroon was under German rule from 1884 until the end of WWI, when its territories came under a UN mandate and were administered by the allied Governments of France and Britain, effectively creating East Cameroon (under French rule) and West Cameroon (under British rule) – a narrow territorial strip along the Nigerian border but with the same population as East Cameroon.

A national trademark since Cameroon's independence in 1960 and reunification in 1961 has been its success in addressing the issues of the moment. The republic's political stability has allowed for the development of its diversified economy and the strengthening of such economic pillars as the oil industry and the agriculture sector, which today is one of the largest in sub-Saharan Africa and has made Cameroon one of the world's largest producers of cash crops such as coffee, cocoa, banana, plantain and pineapple.

Over the past half century, the country has had but two presidents: Ahmadou

Ahidjo (1960 -1982) and Paul Biya (1982 - present). It has also been under the governance of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) and it has been perhaps this factor that has most contributed to the political stability Cameroon has enjoyed since independence, despite the turmoil experienced by neighbours such as Chad and the Central African Republic.

Paradoxically, however, it is the growth of political inclusion that will most likely ensure this political stability continues forward.

As the decade of the 1990s opened, Cameroon reintroduced multiparty politics and the Social Democratic Front (SDF) was created. The move in some ways was symbolic as the ruling party won the 1992 elections and civil unrest erupted between 1992 and 1994 among opposition supporters in operation "villes mortes" – a movement met by the Government with a crackdown that resulted in a 1997 Amnesty report on the detention of political protesters and journalists.



'Fostering good governance and increasing transparency are key for Cameroon's judicial system'

AMADOU ALI,
Vice Prime Minister,
Minister of Justice and
Keeper of the Seals



In May 2010 Cameroon celebrated 50 years of independence

True to style, however, Cameroon was already one step ahead. The year before it had abolished media censorship and it had made moves to end state involvement in the economy. Also in 1996, the country had been collaborating with the IMF and the World Bank on a new structural adjustment programme that included the gradual privatisation of state enterprises and improved management practices in Government, which helped to consolidate Cameroon as one of the economic success stories of the CEMAC region.

As a result of a boycott of the October 1997 elections by the three main opposition parties (the SDF, the National

Union for Democracy and Progress and the Cameroonian Democratic Union), whose call for an independent election committee had gone unheeded, the Government began a decade-long reform of its electoral process. The first fruit of the reformation was the establishment in 2000 of the National Elections Observatory (NEO), which oversaw elections in 2002, 2004 and 2007.

Furthermore, in 2006 the President created Elections Cameroon (ElecCam), an independent body responsible for the organisation, management and supervision of all election operations and referendums.

The push for good governance and transparency

"The strengthening of the judicial system and the increase of transparency in Cameroon will contribute to President Biya's objective of ensuring free and fair presidential elections this year," says Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Seals Amadou Ali. The Minister says legislation reforming the electoral process – including the 2000 creation of the National Elections Observatory, the 2006 creation of a national electoral commission, ElecCam, and subsequent modification in 2010 in the laws governing ElecCam that widens political representation within the body – have paved the way for protecting fairness in the presidential elections to be held in October. Mr Ali, who has headed the justice department since 2001, is also leading the country's efforts to eradicate corruption. An anti-corruption campaign, known as

Operation Epervier (Operation Sparrow Hawk), was launched in 2005 targeting embezzlement and mismanagement of public funds among public officials. The campaign was supported by the creation of the National Agency for Financial Investigations (ANIF) that same year, aimed at eradicating money laundering and financial terrorism, and the National Anti-Corruption Commission (CONAC), which has branches in all Government ministries, the following year. Also in 2005, Parliament passed a bill to harmonise the penal codes of the French and English-speaking parts of the country. Article 66 in Cameroon's constitution stipulates that those overseeing public funds



declare their possessions. A law on the subject was passed in 2006 that requires state administrators and managers to disclose their assets upon entering and when leaving office. The Code of Penal Procedures 2005 came into force in January 2007.

In February 2007, a further effort to combat corruption was introduced in the form of the three-year CHOC-Cameroon programme (with CHOC standing for Change Habits, Oppose Corruption). Backed by the support of international donors, the programme is intended to create a national governance programme, enforced by CONAC and ANIF. These developments have led to a string of convictions of high-ranking officials on corruption and embezzlement charges

starting from 2006. The resulting impact on Cameroon's good governance and transparency, and subsequently its business environment, has been positive. It has also boosted efforts under way since 2000 in the National Governance Programme that aim at improving public accountability. Both the Government and Cameroonian companies have lost cases against foreign partners before national courts in recent years. All of these efforts to enhance good governance and transparency will serve the country well as it heads into presidential elections this year. In March, further amendments were made to the country's electoral process, including the passing of two laws expanding ElecCam's board from 12 to 18 members and granting the Constitutional Council the exclusive right to publish election results.

Enduring economic performance

With sights set on diversifying the economy, Cameroon will rely on its vast natural resources

Like the 268 languages spoken within its borders, Cameroon has a GDP ecosystem teeming with natural resources and competitive advantages. Its manufacturing sector, which accounts for 19.2 per cent of GDP, is held as a model for the sub-region. Now, the goal is to maximize domestic assets in order to create jobs and reduce poverty – without relying on oil or mineral revenue.

“Cameroon is a country at the heart of a bigger country. We are flanked by Nigeria to the north and many of the things we do are visible there and in neighbouring countries,” says Finance Minister Essimi Menye.

Since 2010, economic policy has been recalibrated in the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP). The document, an MDG-based policy roadmap, identifies the economic sectors that can grow above population growth and thus drive down the poverty level, estimated at 40 per cent. In Budget 2011, financial resources have been prioritised for public works, energy projects and agriculture.

The country has become a vast work-site for infrastructure companies working on roads, railroads, seaports and energy projects.

“For 2011, the Government has taken further measures to push the economy. We expect to surpass real GDP growth of 3.8 per cent this year. Many projects are currently under way, including the construction of the deep seaport at Kribi and a gas-fired power plant,” says Mr Menye.

Engineers are busy building a new generation of hydroelectric power plants. They include Memve’ele, Nachtigal, Song Mbengue, Warak, Colomines and Ndockayo. Lom Pangar, a regulating dam, is one of the mega-projects seeking to harness more than 6,000MW of the Sanaga River’s hydroelectric potential. By 2020, total installed capacity in Cameroon is expected to reach 3,000MW.

“In the future, we are going to build more hydroelectric stations to produce cheap electricity for those looking to invest in Cameroon. We will also export it to neighbouring countries,” says Mr Menye.

Rehabilitating the road network of 1,243 miles will take precedence. Then

the Government will take steps to make bank lending more fluid for the private sector. The dense network of SMEs around Douala, which exports throughout Central and West Africa, cannot afford the high interest rates and short maturities offered by commercial banks. Therefore, encouraging banks to widen access to financial packages and leasing arrangements is key to strengthening the SME sector and spurring the creation of new businesses, which in turn will further bolster the nation’s economy.



‘We’re focusing on diversifying and promoting non-oil sectors and we believe there is great potential yet to be tapped on’

ESSIMI MENYE,
Minister of Finance

External shocks during the global financial crisis impacted on Cameroon’s economic growth and GDP slowed to 2 per cent in 2009 as oil prices collapsed.

Demand for the country’s other export commodities, from cocoa to rubber and aluminium, also dropped. To help it adjust for weak external demand, Cameroon sought an IMF-sponsored package valued at \$144 million.

As of 2011, the outlook has again turned positive with a global rebound under way and oil production ramps up next year after a successful three-year exploration period.

Despite a production slide in the oil sector to 57,500 barrels per day (bpd), oil revenue will grow in 2011. The

Government expects exports to benefit from an increase in oil prices through the end of the year. Starting in 2012, new oil wells are scheduled to go on stream, giving oil and gas a second wind.

“However, we wish to keep a low profile in terms of oil and mineral production since our focus is on economic diversification and promoting the non-oil and non-mineral sectors,” says Mr Menye.

Agriculture, which accounts for 18.9 per cent of GDP, will be critical in reducing poverty as it employs more than half of the population, mostly subsistence farmers.

In February 2011, President Biya announced the inauguration of a tractor factory in Ebolowa, in the south of the country, to encourage farm mechanisation. The Government will also provide seeds and fertiliser inputs. In addition, a \$100-million agricultural competitiveness project (Projet d’Amelioration de la Competitivite Agricole, PACA) was launched last year to provide incentives for sub-sectors like rice, maize, banana, plantain, poultry and palm oil.

However, agriculture continues to be held back by land issues, lack of farm credit and policies not always conducive to the interests of the 4.2 million smallholder farmers. The main challenge for this segment of the population is how to transition to an industrial type of production while ensuring food security.

“The head of state has called for more investment into the agricultural sector and I think in 2011 we will see an increase in seasonal crops,” says Mr Menye.

Cotton is produced mainly in the Far North and is the fifth-largest earner of export receipts for Cameroon. But an export ban has led to a 60 per cent drop in production since 2004. Domestic cotton is marketed through the Societe du Developpement du Cotton (Sodecoton), which is 59 per cent-owned by the state and has a regulated price regime. The result has been an increase in the amount of cotton smuggled across the border into Nigeria, where prices for cotton are currently almost three times as high as those offered by Sodecoton.

Exports of tropical hardwoods, meanwhile, are another important component of the non-oil economy. As in other countries in Central Africa, the official policy is to export only processed logs as opposed to raw timber. This will add value to local production and



In 2010, laws were passed to broaden political representation in the various Elecamm commissions governing voter registration, vote counts and disputes.

Consequently, although democratic reform has unfolded slowly over the past two decades, Cameroon has responded with timely legislation throughout, maintaining above all its commitment to political stability and peace – not always an easy task in a country with 268 languages.

“Fostering good governance and increasing transparency are key for Cameroon’s judicial system,” says Amadou Ali, Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Seals.

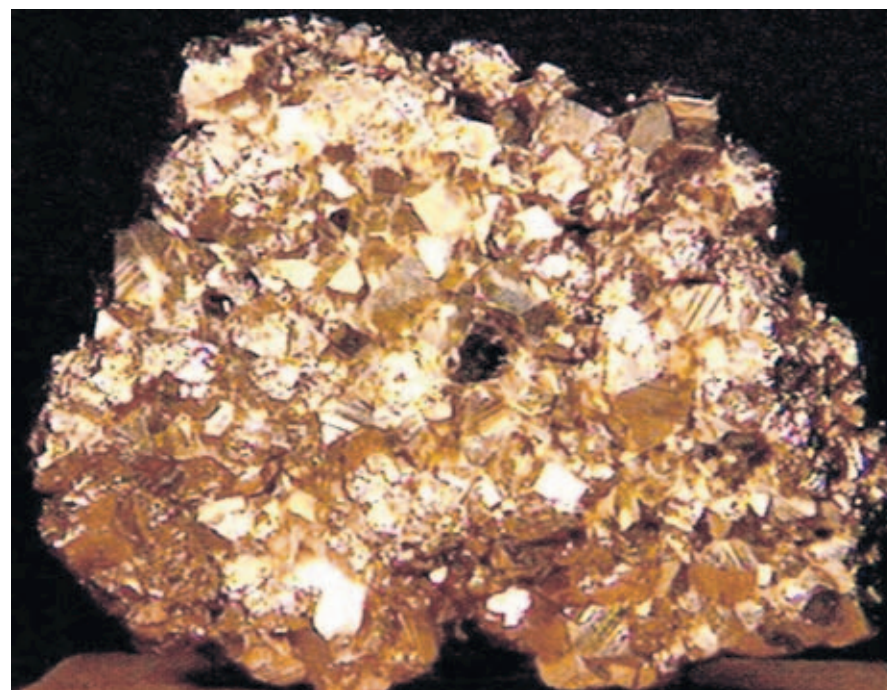
According to Minister of Finance Essimi Menye, the nation’s efforts since independence have been focused on living in harmony.

“The spirit in which the Government has worked has been to reinforce national unity,” he says. “We are giving the events in North Africa a lot of attention. We have built a lot here on our own, and we don’t want to see our achievements destroyed. The secret of stability is living together in peace. Politics is not war; politics is about combating ideas, not violent actions.”

Although Cameroon has wisely navigated the waters of stability throughout the past five decades, treading slowly towards full democracy, however, it has perhaps encountered the moment to complete its transition. And, as the country has done again and again since its independence, it will no doubt address this issue in timely fashion. ●



Southern Cameroon boasts vast timber resources



In the north, the land is rich with gold, iron, bauxite and limestone

contribute to employment at sawmills and river ports.

In the meantime, Cameroon will continue to privatise state-owned companies to generate revenue. The companies that were well managed before being sold off have prospered. Privatisation in those cases was effective because it helped create new jobs and improve customer service. But in the electricity market, the sale of the public utility led to a de facto monopoly.

"Some privatised companies are performing well, but others not so much. Some are managed acceptably after the sell-off, but the state often needs to intervene to guarantee their performance. Ultimately, what we need is for these companies to provide jobs," says Mr Menye.

Although the non-oil economy is expanding, a broader tax base has not emerged as planned. At the Finance Ministry, officials have vowed to simplify taxes for both large enterprises and SMEs. The number of tax forms has been reduced. At free trade zones, companies are only liable to pay taxes once they have developed their resources.

"Cameroon has created a network of free trade zones so that when investors come in they can take advantage of tax holidays when starting up a business. These tax laws include many add-ons to help develop the enterprise," explains Mr Menye.

Beyond 2012, the economy will hinge on its ability to improve business conditions. Cameroon ranked 168th out of 183 world economies in the 2011 Doing Business Report of the World Bank. It placed behind Gabon (156th) and Equatorial Guinea (164th). But it was an improvement over the previous year, when it placed 173rd. The best measures in 2011 included dealing with construction permits, starting a business and protecting investors.

"Our vision is to continue to support the economic development of the country and to make sure the management of resources is under control," says Mr Menye. ●

Meeting the Millennium Development Goals

In 2009, Cameroon's Government prepared a long-term development strategy, called Vision 2035, to raise the country's status to an emerging economy. To set more specific short and mid-term objectives in terms of boosting growth, creating more jobs and reducing poverty, the state drafted the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP) to serve as a framework for 2010-2020. In this document, Cameroon also reaffirmed its commitment towards achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the year 2015.

Despite its efforts, however, Cameroon has made progress in just three out of the eight goals (namely, gender equality, education and environment). The Minister of Economy, Planning and Regional Development, Louis Paul Motaze, recognises that there is still a very long way to go, yet he remains optimistic that Cameroon can still make progress by the deadline. "Nothing is being left to chance to obtain a better score either in the next report or in 2015 during the final evaluation of the MDGs," he states. "For the Government, growth passes through sustainable development and that Government's efforts geared towards ensuring sustainable growth are unwavering."

The Government hopes that economic stability will facilitate its GESP goals and, in turn, move the country closer to meeting more of the MDGs, or at least improving its scores.

1. EXTREME POVERTY & HUNGER

► Between 1996 and 2007, the percentage of people living below the national poverty line fell from 53.3 per cent to 39.9 per cent. Urban areas saw a more noticeable drop: from 41.4 per cent to 12.2 per cent. Sadly, rural areas have not benefited nearly as much. Also, the latest data for the prevalence of moderately to severely underweight children under five point to lost ground in the race: 13.6 per cent in 1991 as opposed to 19.3 per cent in 2006.

2. UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

► Net enrolment ratio in primary education in 2001 stood at just 69.5 per cent. In 2008, it was 88.3 per cent, showing equal gains for both girls and boys. Primary completion rate for both sexes also rose over the same period, from 53.1 per cent to 72.7 per cent. Plus the literacy rate increased, from 83.1 per cent in 2000 to 85.8 per cent in 2008.

3. GENDER EQUALITY

► While the gender parity index in primary and secondary level enrolment remained largely unchanged between 1996 and 2008, significant gains were seen in the tertiary level, where the ratio rose from 0.2 to 0.79. The number of seats held by women in national parliament has dropped since 1990 from 14.4 per cent to 13.9 per cent, nevertheless is favourable compared to the late 1990s, when it stood at just 5.6 per cent.

4. REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY

► Cameroon has backslid since 1990, when 147.8 per 1,000 children under the age of five died. In 2008, the number had risen to 154.7. On the other hand, the infant mortality rate has taken a turn for the better, from 92 to 82 per 1,000 infants. Likewise, the proportion of one-year-old children immunised against measles has improved, from 56 per cent in 1990 to 80 per cent three years ago.

5. IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH

► Although the percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel has remained stable, there has been progress in lowering the maternal mortality rate, which dropped from 680 to 600 per 100,000 live births between 1990 and 2008. Overall figures for contraceptive use among married women between the

ages of 15 and 49 have improved, as has the percentage of women who receive antenatal care coverage.

6. COMBAT ILLNESSES

► HIV/AIDS remains a problem in Cameroon, though awareness and condom use in high-risk sex is on the rise. The proportion of children under five sleeping under insecticide-treated bed nets is similarly improving, up to 13.1 per cent in 2006 from 1.3 per cent in 2000. Treatment for malaria among the under-fives, however, has slipped over the same period, and the prevalence of tuberculosis has grown.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

► Cameroon's territory is losing to deforestation, and CO₂ emissions have more than trebled since 1990. Conversely, the consumption of all ozone-depleting substances (ODS) has plummeted from 125.1 metric tonnes in 1990 to 36.1 metric tonnes in 2008. On another positive note, the proportion of terrestrial and marine areas protected to total territorial area has risen from 6.9 per cent to 9 per cent. Furthermore, the number of people using an improved drinking water source has risen 24 percentage points.

8. GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

► Debt service as a percentage of exports of goods and services has plunged from 13 per cent in 1990 to 0.7 per cent in 2008, reaching an all-time high of 18.6 per cent in 1993. Mobile subscriptions per 100 people have skyrocketed from 0.01 per cent in 1994 to 32.28 per cent in 2008, while the number of fixed telephone lines remains around 1 per cent. Three years ago, there were 3.8 internet users per 100 people.

SMEs form the backbone of a healthy economy

The business environment is being improved and the enterprise creation process speeded up

Minister of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts Laurent Serge Etoundi Ngoa provides an overview as to how the Government is tapping the nation's creativity and helping small businesses get off the ground.

What have been the main drivers of economic growth in the country?

What really enabled Cameroon to grow quickly? First, it was the policy choices of the former leaders; in the early 1960s and the 1970s they decided to develop the agriculture sector. Cameroon was living off agriculture and we are still developing the sector.

At the start of the 1980s, the raw materials and goods produced dropped in price in the international market; this became a problem. We attempted to solve this by diversifying and exploring our options. Once we decided to explore oil in the southwest and build roads, we were faced with the economic crisis.

We have to try and exploit mining resources and develop the power sector. We have iron, cobalt, manganese and the big diamond reserve of Mobilong, among others. Cameroon is sometimes referred to as

"Africa in miniature" due to its diversity. We are very optimistic for the coming years and want to launch a huge investment program.

How is Cameroon encouraging foreign direct investment?

We need to improve the business environment in Cameroon – a point highlighted by investors. Through the creation of businesses we can help solve this. Here in Cameroon we can start up a business in just 72 hours. It has been very much applauded by investors, so now we are extending this process across the country.

We have been reducing the tax rate every year over the past five years. We want to reach a level that satisfies everyone. Whether for foreigners coming to invest in Cameroon or for Cameroonians themselves, we are trying to lower the costs and boost competitiveness. ●

Can you explain how the Ministry is working toward increasing economic growth?

The Ministry considers all the groups that are very active in the business sector that are not official companies and provides them with the opportunity to become formal enterprises. This is what we are working on now.

In organising the handicraft sector, by next December we will have 10 craft villages completely built. We are now building seven and we will launch three at a regional level.

The craft sector was always present but previously had no structure and now we are providing a plan and structure, protecting artisans by law.

Even in 1925 we already had a culture craft unit, which won the first prize in the US but it was confiscated there; the Government recently reclaimed it. Cameroonians are very creative and one can make a lot of money from creativity. We are now developing this sector.

What can you tell us about the Ministry's plans for 2011?

We have different ways of funding SMEs. First, through a project that lends a hand to promoters of SMEs in Cameroon

pursuing a project that cannot go ahead due to certain difficulties. Our program will allow them to conserve and transform what they are producing, so they can build a small factory where they can add value to their goods, especially for goods that are of high-level consumption. For example, yams – we need to preserve them all year round so the population can get it for 12 months not just three. This program has been running for the last three years and with very good results.

Secondly, we have programs with the EU and other international institutions enabling businessmen to acquire loans from banks under certain conditions.

Finally, we have direct help for small businesses in our budget. We can offer grants to small businesses in agriculture or the social economy. ●



'We can start up a business in just 72 hours. It has been very much applauded by investors, so we are extending this process'

LAURENT SERGE ETOUNDI NGOA,
Minister of SMEs, Social Economy and Handicrafts

The real force driving Cameroon's economy is its human resources, the people hard at work every day earning a living doing what they do best. Whether it is a craftsperson, a beautician, a farmer or a business entrepreneur, these are the motors of development. The Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy & Handicrafts is promoting and developing this economic sector through an improved legal framework and extended opportunities.

Crafting a stronger economy

MINPMEESA
Ministry of SME
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An agricultural shot of health for the economy

Agriculture is the third-largest economic sector and provides jobs for 56 per cent of the workforce

Walk into a market in Central Africa and many of the fruits and vegetables on display are likely to come from Cameroon.

At supermarket chains in neighbouring Gabon, slick packets of Robusta coffee from Douala-based SMEs stock the aisles. Cocoa is another home-grown commodity that brings in important export revenues to this agriculturally rich country.

"Cameroon's comparative advantages include high soil fertility, a low-cost workforce, diverse climatic regions, seaport infrastructure and a favourable fiscal regime for those investing in rural areas. Now we just need to add the strong political will to support agribusiness," says Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Jean Nkuete.

Located on the equator, Cameroon has ideal growing conditions for cash crops like coffee and cocoa, as well as bananas, palm oil, rice, sugar and natural rubber, although only 20 per cent of available arable land is farmed. In South Province, a cocoa-growing area, temperatures rarely exceed 24°C and rainfall averages 1,800 millimetres per year. Political stability has allowed agro-processing industries to grow and play on sub-regional wage differentials.

Coffee was first introduced to Cameroon in 1938 by way of the northwestern department of Boyo and today the area is known for its high-quality beans. In recent decades, however, output has fallen from an average of 11,000 tonnes in the 1980s to less than 1,000 tonnes, due in part to coffee berry disease and obsolete machinery. Only small areas are under cultivation, leading to low productivity. Cameroon otherwise exported a total of 44,966 tonnes of Robusta beans and 3,198 tonnes of Arabica beans in 2009-2010.

By 2009, agriculture accounted for 18.9 per cent of Cameroon's GDP, making it the third-largest economic sector after services and manufacturing. It is still the country's largest employer, providing jobs for 56 per cent of the workforce. And yet, Cameroon imported CFA 500 billion (£664.8 million) worth of grains and fish last year, widening its current account deficit.

Like other economies in sub-Saharan Africa, an over-reliance on export receipts from hydrocarbons and mining has neglected sectors that can provide real dollar income for the country's poor. Because of the need to diversify the tax base, investing in smallholder agriculture and agro-processing has suddenly made it back to the top of President Biya's agenda. Furthermore, farm inputs and seed banks are helping to give agribusiness a shot of health.

At the 2010 Ebolowa Agro-pastoral fair in southern Cameroon, President Biya made public a series of measures to bolster food and tree crops. They included the opening of a tractor factory in Ebolowa, as well as investments in animal feed plants and large-scale farming projects. The President also vowed to



Making access to seeds, fertilisers and farm equipment affordable or even free of cost in some cases is part of the second phase of the Government's investment programme in rural markets and warehouses for produce

push for land reform and create a credit institution for young farmers. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance is considering the lifting of import taxes on fertiliser products.

"The landmark changes that need to be instituted have already been announced by President Biya within the framework of the national strategy for growth and employment. Revitalising the agricultural sector is once again one of the top na-

tional priorities. As a result, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development will be able to inject the necessary resources to promote agricultural production," says Mr Nkuete.

On the ground, the €45 million (£39.4 million) investment plan from 2008 to 2011 has led to annual growth of 4 per cent in the agricultural sector, according to the World Bank.

Small farms have been able to catch up with technology and the emphasis on quality is paying off, with growing demand for Cameroon's export commodities in sub-regional and international markets.

In the second phase of the programme, which kicks off in 2011, the Ministry's roadmap includes making access to seeds,

Concoction for growth

Cameroon Agriculture

Quality and diversity boost agricultural exports



With the gradual diversification of revenue sources under way, economic growth in Cameroon will increasingly rely on exports of agribusiness to generate revenue. Oil income fell to 3.6 per cent of GDP in 2010, down from 4.8 per cent in 2009. At the same time, non-oil revenue rose to 12.9 per cent of GDP last year, up slightly from 12.7 per cent in 2009. In the long run, food and tree crops will have to stand in for petroleum products.

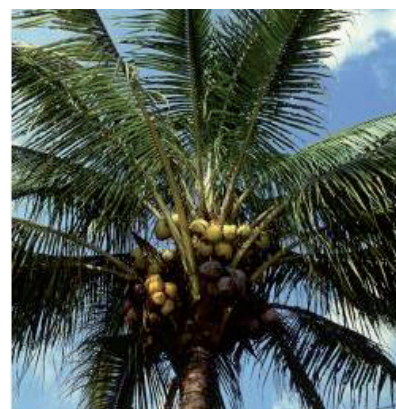
“Cameroon is an extremely rich and diverse country in terms of agricultural products. We have quality fruits and vegetables, both of which can be transformed locally. But we need to add value to these goods and diversify our trade partners in order to conquer new markets,” says Minister of Trade Luc Mbarga Atangana.

Long a commercial diplomat for Cameroon, Mr Atangana is well aware of the quality sought after by international traders. For decades, he travelled worldwide as head of the Office Camerounais de la Banane, an export promotion agency for the banana sector. He was last posted in Paris from 1983 to 2004.

“I travelled all over the world in defence of the humble banana, not only the varieties from Cameroon, but those from other African countries, the Caribbean and the Pacific, even Belize. I was a technical spokesperson for banana producers until I was called back by President Biya to become Minister of Trade,” says Mr Atangana.

In the latest Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP 2009), cash crops like cocoa, coffee, bananas and cotton are top priorities. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development will focus on regenerating plantations and expanding the average size of farms in order to increase output. To ensure food security and expand export capacity, money will be invested in livestock, especially poultry farms.

The PRSP also places export diversification among its five pillars. The policy document addresses structural constraints that have tended to crowd out agro-processing projects in the countryside. They include an ageing rural population, poor road infrastructure, problems with water supply and weak regional trade integration.



‘Cameroon is an extremely rich and diverse country in terms of agricultural products. But we need to add value to these goods and diversify our trade partners in order to conquer new markets’

LUC MBARGA ATANGANA,
Minister of Trade

The goal is to develop industries and services that help improve access to credit. This deepening of the financial sector will eventually lead to lower production costs and the adoption of new standards. The Government has also scaled up spending on infrastructure. In 2010, it grew to 6 per cent of GDP in order to bolster distribution.

By 2015, the targets for agricultural output are ambitious: 4,076,000 tonnes of fruits, 400,000 tonnes of cotton, 350,000 tonnes of palm oil, 280,000 tonnes of cocoa, 93,000 tonnes of Robusta coffee and 15,000 tonnes of Arabica coffee. These goals are part of a programme launched in 2005 that is laying the groundwork for agribusiness. Now the focus has shifted to providing access to land and agricultural inputs.

For Mr Atangana, however, export promotion needs to go beyond sectors like cocoa, coffee, timber and rubber. The country already has a dynamic agro-industrial sector that has been able to incorporate new varieties of pineapple that are virtually unknown in Europe. “Another product which is emblematic, but not well known, is the Cameroonian pepper. You need to taste it because it’s extremely refined. Then there is the flower segment, which is also expanding rapidly,” he says.

Trade relations with Cameroon’s neighbours in the sub-region will be a first test for the new export-driven growth. The challenges include penetrating markets in the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) and the wider Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), with a total of 146 million consumers. Cameroon will also need to tap into the vibrant Nigerian market, with another 150 million consumers.

“We’re pursuing regional economic accords with North African countries like Tunisia and Morocco, as well as Turkey. In each of our economic missions we’re not only talking about the exchange of goods, but also about joint ventures between operators. We would like them to come to Cameroon and invest in sub-sectors, like cocoa, in order to add value locally,” says Mr Atangana.

Traditional exports to European markets consist mainly of raw or semi-processed materials like timber, cocoa, coffee, bananas and natural rubber. In December 2007, Cameroon signed an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the EU establishing a free trade regime.

Bilateral trade with the UK as recently as 2008 amounted to £110.6 million, with Cameroon’s exports at £80.7 million. For British traders, Cameroon can serve as a gateway into the markets of Central Africa.

“The historic ties between Cameroon and Great Britain are very clear in the banana sector. Market access for our bananas in international markets was largely due to commercial relations with the British. It’s therefore normal that this legacy translates into a favourable balance of trade for Cameroon today,” says Mr Atangana.

fertilisers and farm equipment affordable or, in some cases, free of cost. Together with the Ministry of Commerce, the Government will invest in rural markets and warehouses for produce. Finally, linking agricultural production areas with consumer markets in cities is being addressed together with the Ministry of Public Works.

“By 2016, Cameroon’s agricultural sector will have come a long way. The new stress on seed quality and mechanisation is going to guarantee food security, but also improve living standards in the countryside and lay the foundations for industrial expansion. Basically, it will help make our country an emerging market by 2035,” says Mr Nkuete. ●

As the main pillar of the country’s development, Cameroon’s agricultural sector is taking crucial steps to drive development: revamping production capacity, assuring that production covers the population’s needs and integrating Cameroonian products into regional and international markets. Cocoa, bananas, coffee, cotton, rubber, corn, pineapples, palm oil and avocados are the essential fruits of Cameroon’s earth, contributing to 60% of total exports and 30% of GDP. The Ministry of Agriculture is making sure that Cameroon sows the seeds of its great agricultural advantages. So far, liberalisation of the sector has laid the ground for furthering mechanisation and improving infrastructure in rural areas. In addition, increasing investments in the sector are ploughing the way to a well-managed growth.



Central Africa's ambitious new powerhouse

Cameroon has made advances in developing its energy sector, yet demand continues to steadily rise

As in other sub-Saharan countries, Cameroon's productive sectors are thwarted by chronic electricity outages. Although the situation has improved somewhat with the coming online of several diesel and fuel-powered plants, with total installed capacity at 933MW, meeting electricity is no easy task for AES-SONEL, the public utility.

To correct the shortfall, a new generation of power stations has been identified in the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP). But they have not been put online quickly enough to keep up with demand growth of 6 per cent per year.

"According to the GESP, the level of additional infrastructure needed by 2020 is estimated at 3,000MW of new generation stock. That means a total of five million people connected to the power grid. These additional requirements also constitute the core of opportunities for investors," says Michael Ngako Tomdio, Minister of Energy and Water Resources.

To finance the cost-heavy investment, the Government has vowed to continue pushing for structural reforms. It has signalled that the costs of additional infrastructure in energy and water can be partially offset through public-private partnerships (PPPs). The role of private capital is also part of a wider Government strategy to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

As a result of GESP directives, foreign interest in Cameroon's large-scale energy projects has grown. Events such as the 2011 Cameroon International Energy and Water Investment Conference (CIEW) in Yaounde in January showcased business opportunities not only in power generation, but also in industries like aluminium. With the extension of the Edea aluminium factory, electricity demand is expected to grow by another 500MW in 2015.

"After the 2011 CIEW, we were flooded with expressions of interest from the private sector, both national and foreign, as well as by local banks looking to provide financing for these projects," says Mr Ngako Tomdio.

Industrial demand will spike again with the construction of facilities at the deep-water seaport of Kribi, including an industrial zone. The building of a 216MW gas-fired plant there is already under way. According to the Ministry of Energy and Water, the plant will be delivered in 2016.

To help absorb the present energy deficit, natural gas will be put to profit. According to Mr Ngako Tomdio, the country has an estimated 5.5 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of natural gas reserves at the Rio del Rey and Kribi-Sanaga-Campo oil fields. The unexplored reserves could contain another 20 Tcf. Some of the natural gas will be sold to industrial players, but the rest will be transformed into LPG or exported.

Cameroon will also tap hydropower along the 553-mile Sanaga River Basin all the way to the Gulf of Guinea. Hydroelectric potential there is estimated at approximately 20GW. The flow of the Sanaga River will power dams at Nachtigal (330MW), Song Mbenge (950MW), Memve'ele (201MW), Kikot (550MW), Njock (270MW), Song Ndong (300MW), Nyanzom (375MW), Bayomen (470MW), Mouila-Mogue (350MW) and Bagangte



'After the 2011 CIEW, we were flooded with interest from the private sector, both national and foreign, as well as by local banks looking to provide financing for energy projects'

DR MICHAEL NGAKO TOMDIO,
Minister of Energy and Water Resources

(90MW). In turn, these plants will be linked to public infrastructure projects that serve the industrial sector.

Nevertheless, the problem with renewable energy sources like hydropower is that low water levels in the dry season affect performance. Some hydroelectric installations work at one-fifth of their potential when rivers are shallow. To hedge against the low-water level of 2011, the Prime Minister's office has embarked on an Emergency Thermal Power Programme (ETPP). It plans to put small thermal plants online at Mbalmayo, Bamenda and Ebolowa, with a total installed capacity of 100MW.

As of 2011, only 48 per cent of Cameroonians had access to electricity in rural areas, compared to 74 per cent in cities. For the population at large to benefit from these capital investments, the Government

has drafted a national energy action plan for poverty reduction, known as PANERP. The goal here is to prioritise upgrades and rehabilitation at schools and hospitals.

The PANERP includes a rural electrification program valued at CFA 664 billion (£891.7 million). In December 2009, the Government also launched the Rural Energy Fund (REF) to finance small-scale energy services in disadvantaged areas. About 128 villages will be hooked up to the grid, along with 20,000 low-income households in metropolitan areas.

"In 2009, about 300 rural communities were electrified thanks to these programs. In 2010, another 26 villages were connected to the grid along the border with Nigeria. These are just some instances in which the Government has been able to improve the lives of the people," says Mr Ngako Tomdio. ●

Putting water to energetic use

Renewable energy in Cameroon includes wind, solar, biogas and tidal power. After signing an agreement with energy group MRS Holdings, Cameroon began studies on electricity production from ocean currents in December 2010.

Though the country is often referred to as "Africa in miniature" because of its geographic diversity, by far the most viable energy option is hydropower. According to the World Bank, Cameroon has 115 terawatt hours per year of hydroelectric potential, of which only 2.8 per cent is developed. This could change with global warming, which affects water flow. But for now, the Government's policy is to maximise river currents while pursuing a more diverse energy mix.

The Sanaga River is the largest in Cameroon with a basin that occupies a quarter of the territory. From east to west, it cuts across six of the country's 10 provinces. Along its 553-mile course, the average river flow is estimated at 2,072 cubic metres per second (m³/s). In the rainy season from August to November, it can easily reach 5,700 m³/s. In March however, average flow drops to 473 m³/s and leads to outages. Estimated losses from erratic electricity provision cost Cameroon 1-2 per cent of GDP growth each year.

The two hydroelectric dams currently operating in the Sanaga River produce 90 per cent of electricity for AES-SONEL, the public utility, which is equivalent to 721MW.

A raft of new dams is expected to double the river's electricity output. The plan is to build reservoirs in the headwaters that can regulate flow during the dry season. In addition, small-scale hydroelectric stations will supply power to rural areas and industries, especially the aluminium sector.

"The main hydroelectric dams currently being built on the Sanaga River include Lom Pangar, Memve'ele and Mekin. At the hydroelectric station of Nachtigal (330MW), the studies seeking to extend the Edea aluminium factory are now complete. The dam will go online in 2015," says Minister of Energy and Water Resources Michael Ngako Tomdio.

The \$430 million (£267 million) Lom Pangar

Hydropower Project (LPHP) is a regulating dam with a 30MW power station attached to it. Its role is to unlock the river's estimated 6,000MW of hydropower potential by storing water during the rainy season and releasing it during dry spells. This will guarantee that the two hydroelectric stations further downstream can work at full capacity.

Together with the downstream development of Nachtigal, LPHP will improve power supply to the Southern Interconnected Network, as well as become a cheap source of energy for the extension of the Alucam smelter.

Economic justification for the project has already been vetted by the World Bank, which could contribute up to \$100 million in technical assistance.

Capacitating future entrepreneurs

Youthful in both history and people, Cameroon puts great emphasis on educating its young population

Cameroon is a young country, both in terms of its constitution and its populace. Last year it celebrated 50 years of independence and this year marks its half century as a reunified nation, where 73 per cent of the population is under 35 years old and just 3 per cent is over 65. Cameroon can also celebrate having one of the best educational systems in Africa: 90 per cent of all children aged between six and 12 years go to school and the adult literacy rate is over 85 per cent. "We are a young nation," comments Essimi Menye, Minister of Finance. "We want to be a modern country that changes for the sake of its population."

The Government places great stock on the republic's youthful populace as being vital to Cameroon's development and it increasingly strives to create an enabling environment for the younger generation to succeed.

In late 2009, to cover the first 10 years of its Vision 2035 long-term development plan, Cameroon drew up a Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP). Serving as a framework for developmental activities between 2010 and 2020, the GESP focuses on boosting growth, creating formal sector jobs and reducing poverty.

Specifically, it sets the following three targets: to raise the average annual growth rate to 5.5 per cent over the 2010-20 period; cut the underemployment rate from 75.8 per cent to below 50 per cent in 2020 by



90 per cent of all children between the ages of six and 12 attend school

creating tens of thousands of formal sector jobs annually over the decade, especially for the youth; and thirdly reduce the monetary poverty rate from 39.9 per cent in 2007 to 28.7 per cent in 2020.

"One of our major preoccupations is investment but more so is the training of Cameroonians in order to incorporate them into the workforce," says Zacharie Perevet, Minister of Employment and Vocational Training. "We now speak of the 'professionalisation of higher education' as it is absolutely necessary that graduates should be able to do something practical. Our main preoccupation is to effectively train people with capacities for self employment; if a carpenter has been trained, for example, he can set up his own business."

Recent years have seen a series of improvements in the education system: the launch of new universities; awarding of scholarships to students; creation of new institutions; construction of classrooms; youth training in public centres for rapid professional progression; and the introduction of

many job seekers into the job market by the National Employment Fund.

"Cameroonians have been formed both internally and internationally and the country's universities have the objective to form students in the perspective of present and future investments in Cameroon," says Issa Tchiroma Bakary, Minister of Commu-

nication. "When you have all these conditions you have a considerable attraction to bring investors."

In his address on February 10, the eve of Cameroon's 45th annual National Youth Day, President Paul Biya pledged to create 25,000 new public sector jobs this year for young graduates. He said: "Regarding the integration of youth into the economy, the state, alongside actions by the National Employment Fund, has continued to support programmes designed to give the greatest possible number of young people opportunities to start a working life. Such is the case of the project to support rural and urban youth and the project for the integration of youth through the manufacture of sports equipment. These two projects have enabled the integration of several thousand youths into economic life, the launching of hundreds of micro-activities and junior enterprises and the creation of dozens of cooperatives."

While launching the National Youth Week on February 4, Minister of Youth Affairs Adoum Garoua called on the nation's younger generation to remember the history of Cameroon and to try hard to preserve its unity, democracy, bilingualism and liberty. During the week, 50 young Cameroonians from diverse backgrounds were trained in entrepreneurial skills under the Ministry's Youth Empowerment Program. ●



ADOU M GAROUA,
Minister of Youth
Affairs



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The Ministry of the Public Service & Administrative Reform is pursuing transparency and modernisation in the public sector and contributing to the country's "Nation of High Ambitions" vision through:

- ▶ Managing the career of State employees.
- ▶ Modernizing Cameroon Public Administration.
- ▶ Introducing Results-based management.
- ▶ Recruiting State employees.



Ministry of the Public Service & Administrative Reform
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New plan targets gender parity

The national drive to increase the enrolment of girls in primary school education gained a major boost on May 4 with the launch of the Cameroon Chapter of the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). The project heralds the beginning of a strengthened partnership between Cameroon's Ministry of Basic Education, UNICEF, the US Government, UN partners, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. According to UNICEF country representative Ora Musa Clemens-Hope, gender disparities still exist and in the far north "there is a 30 per cent gap in enrolment between girls and boys, while 40 per cent of girls who start school don't complete the primary cycle."

The initiative entails a public awareness

campaign to change behaviour towards girls' education in rural areas by involving families and communities in the management of schools and providing sessions to equip parents to better supervise their young children. Two other initiatives, namely Child Friendly Schools and Big Sisters, will focus on empowering girls with knowledge of children's rights and building relationships between girls and older women, who will act as mentors, watching over and helping the younger students with their learning. Although gender parity remains a challenge, great progress has been made since the Government announced free primary education for all 11 years ago and it has been applauded for its support and political will to advance better learning achievements for all.

Celebrating women as agents of change

Women's equality continues to make great strides both socially and in business



On March 8, Cameroon took part in the international celebration of women's achievements

Under the theme of "Equal access to education, training and science and technology: pathway to decent work for women", the 100th anniversary of the UN's International Women's Day was celebrated around the world on March 8 this year. In Cameroon, women from all walks of life gathered in Yaounde as bearers of various affirmations on development, peace, political and gender equality, employment, education access and human rights as they passed along the capital city's 20th May Boulevard. In a statement commemorating the event, the US Ambassador in Cameroon Robert P Jackson applauded the nation's Government "for recognising the importance of women to Cameroon's economic and social development. Not every country has a government ministry dedicated to protecting and promoting women and families."

In his statement, the Ambassador also called on local communities to support women entrepreneurs, commenting: "It is a fact that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) drive economic growth and create jobs. This is true in my country and it is true around the world. And, women-owned enterprises often have a better growth rate and a better loan payback rate...there is no doubt in my mind that Cameroon's greatest resource is its people, especially its women."

International Women's Day, celebrated here since 1986, saw thousands of Cameroonian women participate in the multitudinous parade

Attending the celebrations was Marie-Therese Abena Ondo, Minister of Women's Empowerment and the Family, whose department is tasked with the formulation and implementation of measures relating to the respect of the rights of Cameroonian women in society. It also tackles the eradication of all forms of gender discrimination, the guarantee of equality in social, political and economic domains and the protection of the family and family values.

Furthermore, Cameroon celebrated Commonwealth Day on March 14 in unison with the global Commonwealth community by commemorating "women as agents of change". The lively event at the Yaounde Conference Centre was presided over by Joseph Dion Ngute, Minister Delegate in the Ministry of External Relations, who said the Ministry would work towards ensuring more women are appointed in positions of responsibility and that women's participation in major decision-making forums would also be increased.

One of the highlights of the occasion was the reciting of the Queen's Commonwealth Day message, in which she said: "While some people use this day to acknowledge the love, admiration and respect for women, others use it to remember the great social and political strides made both by and for women in the last hundred years. There is no right or wrong approach." ●

The foundations of an equitable future

Chantal Biya is behind numerous organisations aiding society's disadvantaged



First Ladies Chantal Biya and Michelle Obama in New York last September

In 1994, Cameroon's First Lady Chantal Biya founded a non-political, non-denominational and a non-profit-making humanitarian association to help the nation's underprivileged. The President's wife created the Chantal Biya Foundation following her belief that "there is always a call for more concrete solidarity to build a better world. It is my conviction, it is my passion."

Through a wide variety of projects the foundation strives to assist, educate and protect Cameroon's poor, sick and disadvantaged citizens, as well as champion initiatives to help the nation's young, elderly and marginalised.

For example, according to the Ministry of Public Health, of the 780,000 people who die each year from malaria in the world, 90 per cent are on the African continent. In Cameroon, 38 per cent of consultations and 24 per cent of deaths are caused by malaria, and 26 per cent of people are absent from work due to the illness. So, to strengthen the fight against the disease, the Chantal Biya Foundation has added its voice and support to the Roll Back Malaria Partnership that will raise awareness and advocate for more financial and technical support, as well as boost effectiveness in malaria control interventions in Cameroon and in the sub-region at large.

Mrs Biya is not only renowned for her

activities in support of women, children and other vulnerable groups, but also for the research, treatment and prevention of HIV and AIDS, mainly through her organisation African Synergies Against AIDS and Suffering (Synergies Africaines Contre le Sida et les Souffrances). The non-governmental organisation comprises First Ladies and former First Ladies from Africa and other continents. It fights for the end of child labour and other abuse endured by children and also campaigns for

improvement of living conditions of rural women in Africa.

With numerous feathers in her humanitarian cap, Mrs Biya is also behind the Chantal Biya International Reference Centre for Research on HIV/AIDS prevention and management. Furthermore,

her Circle of Friends of Cameroon (CER-AC) organisation pays visits to the sick, builds schools and makes donations to various health and educational centres.

The First Lady has been designated UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Education and Social Inclusion for her longstanding engagement in the struggle against social exclusion. The position in particular reflects her support for AIDS education and prevention, her leadership and work with Synergies Africaines and her association with the Families First Africa project, in addition to her eponymous foundation in Yaounde. ●

'There is always a call for more concrete solidarity to build a better world. It is my conviction, it is my passion'

A microcosm of African culture that enables creativity to flourish

Intellectual and spiritual stimulation thrive among the nation's mix of more than 200 languages and ethnic groups

Cameroon's Government is committed to helping the country's people at all levels. One of the most important aspects of anyone's life is their economic welfare and much progress has been made in that area, however the Government is looking out for Cameroonians' intellectual and spiritual wellbeing too.

The nation has a rich cultural heritage, and Culture Minister Ama Tutu Muna is in charge of promoting the country's excellence in that area. The Minister is fully aware that encouraging the spread of cultural activities not only enriches people's minds, it can also have positive benefits for their purses and wallets.

"Culture creates jobs at all levels; at the top there are huge industries, but it also involves people like hairdressers, carpenters and other types of workers," she explains. "Culture can in the long run really be a development tool. It stimulates diversity as, for example, tourism does, because it involves a series of small and medium-sized industries."

Cameroon's 20 million people speak 268 different languages, including English, French, Fulfulde and Ewando, and are divided into more than 200 different ethnic groups, among them the Bamileke, Fulani and Bassa. Together, the country's many groups and languages provide a fertile ground for art and literature to flourish.

The country's cultural offerings include a wide range of painting and sculpture, music, food and dance. The Ministry of Culture sponsors performances and exhibitions in the country and abroad. Recently the Cameroon National Ballet went on a 20-city tour of Japan, before going on to perform at the Shanghai Expo.

The Ministry also participates in a large number of traditional festivals in Cameroon, including the Festi Bikutsi, which promotes Bikutsi music and the Aboki Ngoma dance festival. Cameroonian artists attend festivals in other countries as well, such as the Ouagadougou Film Festival, the largest in



More than 200 traditional dances, each one associated with a different event or situation, express the nation's cultural diversity

'Culture can be a development tool; it stimulates diversity as it involves a series of small and medium-sized industries'

AMA TUTU MUNA,
Minister of Culture



Africa, and the Pan African Festival of Music in Brazzaville.

The Ministry does much more than just promote Cameroon's culture: it is also deeply involved in the effort to protect artists' intellectual property, fight against piracy and ensure that the creators of the art gain some of the monetary benefits they generate. The Government has a plan to fight the worst of the abuses. "We are working on a programme. We have identified the real problem; the source of this problem is really being able to manage distribution and production," says Mrs Tutu Muna. "When you really consolidate them properly and you are able to stabilise them, then the artists can make money and they can also fight against piracy." ●

Rhythm and drums

Cameroon has a deep and rich musical heritage, dating back to long before the country's colonial period, but it is also a strong and steady contributor to the world of contemporary popular music. Perhaps the best known style of music known abroad is Makossa, which has inspired artists as famous as Michael Jackson.

Heavy on horns and bass rhythm, Makossa is most popular in Cameroon's cities and has itself been influenced by other kinds of music, such as jazz and Latin. The final verses of Michael Jackson's 'Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'' were borrowed from Manu Dibango's international hit Soul Makossa.

Bikutsi is another popular style of contemporary Cameroonian music. The name comes from words meaning "thump the earth" – a reference to the dance that frequently accompanies the music. It originated with the Beti ethnic group and some of its renowned performers include Lady Ponce and Ama Pierrot.

Bikutsi influences have found their way into music by Paul Simon and other Western performers. Both Makossa and Bikutsi are decades-old genres and both have found success abroad. Newer local styles of music, less well known in other countries, include New Rumba, Makossa-Soukous, Njanja and Bantowbol.

Cameroon's hundreds of languages and ethnic groups provide the country's musicians with endless inspiration for new songs and new styles of music. Cameroonian emigrants have helped spread knowledge of the music to other parts of the world and few other

African countries can boast a music scene that has had the success and influence of Cameroon's. "We have some great artists and Cameroonian musicians are well known internationally," says Ama Tutu Muna, the country's Culture Minister. "If you want to discover the richness of music, come to Cameroon."





From virgin beaches to wildlife safaris and cultural experiences, Cameroon is open to travellers who seek unique experiences and memories to cherish



The true experience of diversity and discovery

Last year half a million visitors went to enjoy Cameroon's beauty and hospitality

Last year was an excellent year for tourism in Cameroon, with more than 500,000 visitors to the central African country. Numbers were undoubtedly boosted by the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa putting the whole continent on the radars of holiday-makers worldwide.

Cameroon has much to offer travellers, with the natural beauty found in its stretches of beach-lined coast matched by magnificent wildlife reservations that teem with cheetahs, giraffes, elephants and many other animals. Its cities feature fascinating museums and pulse with thriving nightlife, while beyond city limits scenic landscapes lie for tourists to discover.

The Government is determined to attract many more tourists in the future and has taken several important steps to help promote the country as a place to come visit. The Minister of Tourism, Baba Hamadou, understands the country's potential and wants to use it to spur job creation and economic growth.

"Thanks to tourism we can create jobs and increase revenue that will reach the workers," he says. "Cameroon is once again starting to promote tourism with new policies and by working hard to make our country a true tourism destination."

Mr Hamadou and the Ministry are working in several directions to promote the country. This year the Ministry is sending representatives to European capitals such as Madrid, Berlin and London to tell tourists and tour operators about all the delightful things the country has to offer those who choose to come visit.

For those who want to relax at the seaside, the country has two resort towns with beautiful beaches. Limbe, located in an English-speaking region, has black volcanic sand, nearby wildlife parks and a lush mountain range in the background.

Kribi is farther south along the coast, in a French-speaking region. Its white-sand beaches attract thousands of visitors every year and are close enough to the Lobe waterfalls for a day trip. Both cities offer many tourist amenities such as top-notch hotels, restaurants and nightlife.

Also on the coast, not far from Limbe, is Mount Cameroon. The active volcano is a popular destination for activity-oriented travellers, who can enjoy climbing the highest mountain in the region. Hikers can set out from the city of Buea, where guides can also be hired and equipment rented.

For travellers more interested in experiencing Cameroon's varied wildlife reserves, the most common destination is the

north. There, the Waza National Park is home to hippopotamuses, rhinoceroses and other large animals. The 656-square-mile park offers developed tourist infrastructure and is also a UNESCO biosphere reserve.

Other regions, in the east and south, have great potential for tourism, with their rainforests and abundant wildlife including chimpanzees, elephants and gorillas. The regions, and indeed the whole country, are ripe for investment to promote eco-tourism.

"Cameroon has ten regions and studies have shown that every region has eco-tourism potential," says Mr Hamadou. "Now we have a big project to implement eco-tourism in every region. We have chosen the west and northwest to focus on. The regions are close to one another so we can organise trips for tourists to both of these."

Cameroon's cities are also interesting destinations. Douala, located on the Wouri River near the coast, is the country's biggest city and boasts a hopping nightlife neighbourhood called Akwa. Tourists can also visit the city's many wonderful patisseries and restaurants, some with views of the Gulf of Guinea and nearby mangrove swamps.

Cameroon is sometimes called "Africa in miniature" and for a good reason. For travellers who are not content with just one type of vacation activity, Cameroon is a perfect destination as they can spend a few days at the beach, climb mountains, visit wildlife parks and see wild animals, all while enjoying the country's excellent food and music. ●



‘Cameroon is at the crossroads where the entire land of Africa seems to meet’



Baba Hamadou, Cameroon’s Minister of Tourism, outlines the Government’s plan to showcase to the world a nation whose truly rich diversity encapsulates the entire African continent and an untapped tourism sector that is wide open to international involvement.

How has Cameroon been able to achieve its long-standing stability?

Cameroon is a peaceful and dynamic country. His Excellency has stated on many occasions that Cameroon is a land of peace and is becoming a very democratic country. We live in peace and the process of democratisation is going well. When we observe what is going on right now with the demonstrations in North Africa, we are happy to be Cameroonian. There are 250 different cultural groups living peacefully here and each individual has his own way of life and customs. Everyone is proud of his country and wants to keep peace. We will continue to live in peace thanks to our political institutions.

In 2010 more than 500,000 tourists visited Cameroon, making it an official world travel destination. What is the country’s tourism potential and what competitive advantages does it have over its neighbours?

As the chairman of the Commission for Africa for the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and as Minister of Tourism, I would like to say that Africa has much to offer. Many people have described Africa as the land of the hungry and of bad governance, but I think that Africa has much to offer to tourists. Cameroon is an emerging tourist destination. It is not yet Morocco, South Africa, Tunisia or Kenya, but we are very happy that we welcomed so many tourists last year. This is a result of action we have taken over the last six years here at the Ministry.

Our slogan describes Cameroon as all of Africa in one country. Cameroon is able to offer everything that people want to see in Africa, thanks to the diversity of our landscape and flora and fauna. It is also thanks to that diversity we can offer all types of tourism: safari, seaside, cultural, eco and hunting. Some Cameroonians are going to London to promote tourist activities. The Government is working towards this big event

to take place in September. It will give England and Cameroon an opportunity to consolidate their relationship in the areas of tourism and trade between the two countries.

What are the main aims of the Ministry of Tourism and how is it contributing to the socio-economic growth of the country?

Tourism is a very important activity and Cameroon has very good potential. In a few years it will become a big and beautiful tourist destination in Africa.

At the Ministry we have two aims: first



‘Cameroon is able to offer everything that people want to see in Africa, thanks to the diversity of our landscape and flora and fauna’

BABA HAMADOU,
Minister of Tourism

to welcome many tourists and second to invite investors. We need visitors but also investors, because our tourism industry is expanding. We need better infrastructure, such as more hotels, and we need further investment in our country. The contribution of tourism to the economy is currently very low: 3 or 4 per cent. However, we are working towards a new vision for Cameroon by 2035. We hope the contribution from tourism will be higher; we are aiming at 13 per cent by then.

In 2010 your efforts were focused on training, streamlining the hotel sector, promoting tourism, developing tourist sites and implementing good governance. What are the major plans for 2011 and how do you intend to implement them?

This year we have to work towards consolidating all the good work from last year by continuing to improve the quality of our tourist sites. We will also organise seminars for our partners in order to implement professionalism.

We must continue to consolidate our place in the European tourism market whilst also moving on to other countries, such as China and America. We have the power from the head of the state to sign a memorandum of understanding with China. Through this memorandum we shall host more Chinese tourists groups. We also have to get new markets in the USA and we currently have a partner working for us in Canada.

Upon signing a new partnership with the World Bank, they will help us financially to promote eco-tourism and in the south we have to promote cultural tourism. In the west and northwestern regions we are continuing to look for further financial support, for example from the European Union.

What are your aims this year in order to attract tourists?

We have to go to the countries from where we want to attract tourists. The participation in the tourism fair market is the best way to tell people what we are about. We have chosen many countries where we are planning to go this year to promote Cameroon. We will also organise many trips for journalists to come and visit and write about us and perhaps broadcast it on television. Last year, we had tourists from Belgium and Germany. Two years ago we had 20 tourists and the manager of China’s television. This was before the Olympic games and some trips for journalists before the Shanghai Expo.

What would you like to tell readers about your country?

Cameroon is at the crossroads where the entire land of Africa seems to meet. Cameroon is “Africa in miniature” – all of Africa in one country. If you have not travelled to Africa then come and visit Cameroon.



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