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### **A Reference to Rural Livelihood in Cameroon: A Case Study from South West Cameroon.**

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#### **1. Introduction**

The improved macroeconomic performance has not been accompanied by a comparable improvement in living conditions. It is true that economic growth has translated into higher incomes per capita (which rose by about 2 percent a year between 1996 and 2001), and a significant drop of 13 percent in the poverty rate, according to a comparison of results of the ECAM I and II household surveys. Yet it is clear that *social conditions* deteriorated considerably during the years of crisis, and that economic recovery has done little so far to improve them. In particular, the provision of basic social services was severely affected by the government's financial difficulties during those years. The country's road infrastructure has deteriorated for want of maintenance. New road building has been halted. Water engineering and electrification programs, particularly in rural areas, have lagged for lack of financing (PRSP 2003).

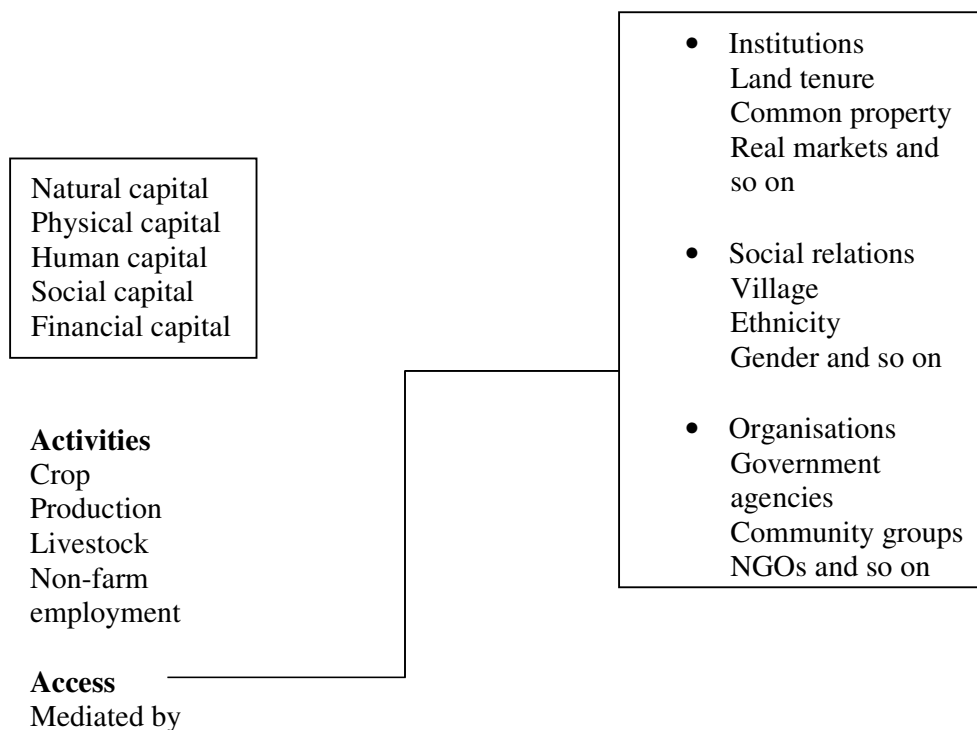
From the Webster's Comprehensive dictionary, a livelihood is defined as a Means to a Living. A well known definition of livelihood is that provided by (CHAMBERS and CONWAY 1992:7) wherein a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living. According to (ELLIS, 2000:7) an important feature of this definition is to direct attention to the links between assets and the options people possess in practice to pursue alternative activities that can generate the income level required for survival. Lack of education means low human capital, one of several assets, and this excludes the individual from the activities that require a particular level of educational or skill attainment for the participation in them.

The *assets* in livelihood definition have five categories which include human capital, physical capital, financial capital, natural capital and social capital. These forms of capital will not be

discussed in detail in my thesis though some will be discuss in the later chapters. To (SEN 1993; 1997), capabilities refer to the ability of individuals to realise their potential as human beings, in the sense both of being and doing. The access of households in livelihood definition refers to the rules and social norms that determine the differential ability of people in rural areas to own, control, otherwise claim or make use of resources such as land and common property (ELLIS, 2000). It refers to the ability to participate in and derive benefits from social, and public services provided by the state such as education, health services, roads, water supplies, electricity, public gardens, social centres, animal parks, and so on.

The reference to rural livelihoods in Cameroon will be based mostly on the activities being carried out to survive. The people are very diversified with respect to culture, natural resources, access to farm to market roads, and basic health services. In this regard it would be wise to define the term *diversification*. Rural livelihood diversification is defined as the process by which rural households construct an increasingly diverse portfolio of activities and assets in order to survive and to improve their standard of living

A diversified rural livelihood comprises:



**Figure 1: Illustration of a livelihood**

Source: Adapted from Frank Ellis 2000, 16

Recognition of livelihood diversity requires an extended concept of the rural household, beyond the resident social unit to include spatially dispersed contributors to household welfare (BRUCE and LLOYD, 1997).

Household level livelihood diversity is not necessarily synonymous with sectoral diversity that is agriculture, manufacturing, services and so on within the rural economy, since a high degree of household level diversity may exist even in the context of a relatively undiversified rural economy in sectoral terms (BRYCESON, 1996).

Rural communities are not homogenous social entities in which all families can be supposed to share similar adversities and prospects. Households and individuals are differentiated by their assets (especially land and education), income and social status in their local communities (BERNSTEIN et al., 1992; LEACH et al., 1997).

## **2. Research Objectives**

To characterize rural livelihood in SWP and Cameroon in order to map-out some of the constraints and prospects for rural development and poverty alleviation and to suggest a way forward in my recommendation section for the economic empowerment of rural areas in Cameroon and the SWP in particular

## **3. Materials and Methods**

Materials were taken from; Agricultural Journals, Textbooks, Monographs, Periodicals, Internet database and own questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared base on the Researcher's own experience with reference to similar types of research work. A pre test was done in Berlin with Cameroonian committees and some changes were carried out, before the commencement of work begins. The local data collectors having similar work experience were hired to administer the written questionnaire. A session of training was held among them on how to collect data.

Data were collected in different parts of SWP. The available household head were selected as respondent regardless of sex. The average time taken to answer one questionnaire or to interview on service was about half an hour.

## **4. Case Study**

Cameroon is located in central Africa, with a total area of 475,650km<sup>2</sup> of which 466,464km<sup>2</sup> is Land and 8,546km<sup>2</sup> is water. The country lies between 9° 30`E and 16°00`E and extent from 2° N to 12°30`N. Cameroon has common boarders in the West with Nigeria, in the North East with Chad, in the East with Central African Republic and in the South with Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. It has a coast line of 402km bordering the Gulf of Guinea.

The SWP is found between the coast of the Atlantic Ocean in the South, the North West Province in the North, Littoral and West Provinces in the East and the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the West. The vegetation of this area displays a clear picture of the tropical evergreen forest

## 5. Findings

Agriculture serves as the principal employer of most households in the rural areas through crop, animal and fish cultivation contributing to their welfare. Most farmers carry out subsistence farming producing basic food crops though some substantial numbers used to cultivate cash crops which is not the case today because of falling market prices.

Estimated 1999 production of *food crops* was as follows: sugarcane, 1,350,000 tons; cassava, 1,500,000 tons; plantains, 1,000,000 tons; corn, 600,000 tons; millet, 71,000 tons; yams, 130,000 tons; sweet potatoes, 220,000 tons; potatoes, 49,000 tons; dry beans, 95,000 tons; and rice, 65,000 tons (<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Africa/Cameroon-AGRICULTURE.html>).

Since independence in 1960, Cameroon has scaled through three key phases that enshrined the consolidation of productive structure (1960 – 1975), burgeoning economic growth (1976 – 1986) and debilitating economic crises (1986 – 1994). Recent effort ordained in the HIPC Initiative and the Poverty Reduction Strategy is geared on stabilizing and sustaining the growth process in order to achieve the long term goals of improved standards of living for Cameroon's almost seventeen million people.

Cameroon has witnessed a steady economic growth in the last 10 years but due the severe deterioration of social conditions during the period of economic crisis, it has been difficult to transmit this growth to the rural households. Generally, there has been a 13% drop in poverty according to the two household surveys conducted in 1996 and 2001 as seen in table 1.

**Table 1: Poverty Rate Trend (%)**

	1996	2001	Change as %
<b>Incidence (P0)</b>			
<b>Rural</b>	59.6	49.9	-9.7
<b>Urban</b>	41.4	22.1	-19.3
<b>Total</b>	53.3	40.2	-13.1
<b>Depth (P1)</b>			
<b>Rural</b>	21.5	18.3	-3.2
<b>Urban</b>	14.7	6.3	-8.2
<b>Total</b>	19.1	14.1	-5.0

Source: Adapted from DSCN, ECAM I and II Reports 2003

An analysis by sex of the household head yields encouraging information about the gender gap. The incidence of poverty in households headed by women is slightly lower than that of households headed by men (38.7 percent versus 40.6 percent). It is important to note, however, that 3 out of 4 households are headed by men, and that nearly 8 out of 10 poor people live in households headed by men. An analysis by age of the household head shows

that the poverty rate rises with the age of the household head, regardless of place of residence. This situation was observable both in 1996 and in 2001. Moreover, the poverty rate rises with household size: poor households have an average of 6.6 members, while the average for non poor households is 4.2 (Cameroon PRSP, 2003).

**Table2: Poverty Incidence by sex and age of Household Head (%)**

1996			2001			
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	42.4	60.0	54.2	22.5	49.7	40.6
Female	36.4	55.8	45.8	20.7	50.6	38.7
Total	41.4	59.6	53.3	22.1	49.9	40.2
<b>Age/Years</b>						
<30	32.9	39.6	36.6	15.4	39.9	31.1
30-39	35.6	48.2	42.3	17.2	45.6	34.4
40-49	35.6	56.0	45.7	21.3	48.1	37.7
50>	46.9	65.6	60.1	26.1	53.7	44.7
<b>Total</b>	41.4	59.6	53.3	22.1	49.9	40.2

Source: Adapted from MINEPAT/DSCN: ECAM I and II Reports

In the South West Province diversification in rural households is a means of survival which can be seen in other parts of the country. According to my survey there are varied activities carried by households head for survival and income generation as seen in table 3.

**Table 3: Sources of Rural Household Head Income**

Activity	Male	Female
Farming	45	9
Trading	9	0
Fishing	3	2
Carpentry	6	0
Others	5	1
Total	68	12

Source: Field Survey, 2006

Although it is difficult to give an accurate assessment of women's contributions to agriculture, due to the lack of statistics, it is estimated that rural women supply about 90% of the food needed for the subsistence of the population. Women also participate in the cash crop sector. During the high growing season, women devote 6 to 8 hours a day to agriculture in addition to their household work. According to national statistics more than 20% of rural households

were headed by women in 1989/90 while with reference to the thesis questionnaire in 2006, **15%** of these households are headed by women and **85%** by men, table 4.

**Table 4: Age group, migrant and land ownership of household**

<b>Age Group (year)</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Migrant</b>	<b>Owned Land</b>
18-25	3	2	4	3
26-30	12	2	10	6
31-40	24	2	13	8
41-55	13	6	11	7
56>	15	0	12	11

Source: Field Survey, 2006

Of the 80 households who filled the questionnaire, 62.5% of these household heads are migrants from different parts of Cameroon especially from NWP who are all in search of greener pastures as they mentioned. There are better opportunities in the SWP for small scale agriculture especially around the slopes of Mount Cameroon because of the volcanic soil and also the CDC and PAMOIL plantations found in the province. These are major sources of off-farm employment in the rural areas of the province. It was also noticed that 92% of the migrant of the migrant household head also send money to their families in the village.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The national poverty line is about 640 FCFA per day per adult. With reference to the field survey, households headed by females have an income of 541 FCFA per day per adult; while households headed by males have an income of 469 FCFA per day per adult. Both groups have a daily income per household size of approximately 469 FCFA [1 EUR = 655 FCFA and 1 USD = 490 FCFA]. Looking at the above figures, one might be forced to say that the people are generally poor which, is not the case, however, there is no denying fact that poverty exist in high rates in the rural areas of the SWP and Cameroon in general. Development projects should target women and children. Women should be involved at the community decision-making process, have access to land and other opportunities. Poverty alleviation strategies within the province could be realised through the targeting of remote areas where most of the rural poor are located; provision of assets with good farm policies in order to increase rural income; widening of choices and options by providing information to the poor. Knowledge of the location is needed to draft policies and to implement rural development projects which are adapted to the area.

Diversification of livelihood might contribute to a more secure survival especially during adverse situations through alternative utilisation of labour to generate income during low farm periods. Better risk reduction, resource management and environmental sustainability can be realised with a diversified household. Through diversification rural households can have alternatives to increase their income in order to educate themselves, their children, invest in their farms, other income generating activities, pay their medical bills and other expenses without burrowing, which can lead to a more realisable livelihood.

The government of Cameroon has to implement policies like decentralisation, transparency, privatisation of the electricity, telecommunication and water sectors, efficiency and effectiveness in managing resources (human and natural) and good governance which could attract foreign investors with other elements like security and intellectual property rights. The necessary institutions must be in place in order to implement the above policies from the national level right down to the households.

With regards to agriculture, farmers need to get their farm inputs (subsidies and or reduction of prices), financial capital (credits with low interest rates) and infrastructures like markets, roads, hospitals and other social facilities.

Micro credit programmes involving group formation (CIGs and NGOs) can provide additional income to rural families in order to invest in income generating activities since agriculture alone cannot bring the needed livelihood improvement.

The fight against HIV/AIDS with the highest prevalence rate and other tropical diseases like Malaria, Tuberculosis, Typhoid and Cholera are of significant importance to rural livelihoods survival in the SWP. This disease could reduce the progress being made in economic development as the government needs to increase its spending on health as seen earlier.

Therefore, in the SW Agricultural research and development combined with off-farm activities will contribute to the development of rural households' livelihood, fight poverty and promote economic growth. From the survey, 54 out of 80 of these household heads are farmers. Most of them are above 30 years of age, reason why I prefer them continuing with a more sustainable form of agriculture. Farmers too need to form small groups in order to make their common problems heard, draw projects, raise capitals and so on. The question which follows is: Can agricultural development alone create the needed rural employment and improve rural livelihood?

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## 9. Abbreviations

**AIDS:** Acquire Immune Deficiency Syndrome

**CDC:** Cameroon Development Cooperation

**CIG:** Common Initiative Group

**DSCN:** National Account and Statistics Directorate

**ECAM I & II:** Cameroon's Household Survey 1996 and 2001

**FCFA:** Franc Communauté Financière Africaine [Cameroon's currency]

**HIPC:** Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

**MINEPAT:** Ministry of Economic Planning and Regional Development

**NGO:** Non-governmental Organisations

**NWP:** North West Province, Cameroon

**PRSP:** Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper

**SWP:** South West Province, Cameroon