

13. Evaluation of Resilience and Poverty Reduction: Case Study of Employment in the Urban Informal Sector in Cameroon

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Resilience is the ability to “bounce back”, to overcome traumatic situations. It can also be defined as an individual’s capacity to respond to a difficult or stress-inducing situation. The urban populations of Cameroon have been exposed to many such situations in recent decades.

Cameroon is a country of nearly 24 million inhabitants. Economic crises have disrupted the life of the Cameroonian nation over the last 30 years. The economic crisis of the 1980s, which lasted through to 2000, was further to a fall in the prices of oil and Cameroon’s main cash crops, cocoa and coffee. Multiple cash-flow problems forced the Government to liquidate or restructure many State-owned and para-public enterprises. These economic stresses also led to reductions in the number of State employees, salary reductions, a worsened employment market and worsened quality of life for the population. Despite renewed growth in 1994 following the devaluation of the CFA franc and the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, it proved impossible to raise the standard of living of the Cameroonian people. Indeed, according to data from the fourth Cameroonian Household Survey (ECAM 4²⁴⁰), the poverty rate is estimated at 37.5 percent (2014). The findings of the Employment and Informal Sector Survey (EESI 2), carried out in 2010, describe a situation of widespread underemployment (75.8 percent) and informal employment (90.5 per cent).²⁴¹

THE URBAN INFORMAL SECTOR

The phenomenon of street trading began shortly before the 1960s and spread throughout the country up to the present day. This practice mainly involved people who had come from rural areas to find work in Yaoundé and/or who had not been able to obtain a school leaving

240 See <http://www.statistics-cameroon.org/news.php?id=393>.

241 See http://www.stat.cm/downloads/EESI/2010/Phase1/Rapport_Principal_Phase1_EESI2_2010_Fr_14mars12.pdf.

certificate or university diploma needed to apply for the civil service. This phenomenon increased from the 1990s. It fell back a little with the economic recovery of the period after 1995, before worsening during the period starting in 2008.

The situation was further impacted by the reduction in the numbers of State employees, as mentioned above, which further contributed to ambient poverty among urban populations in general and, more particularly, those of the city of Yaoundé. This situation arose due to the fact that the political capital city of Cameroon is mainly composed of civil servants and State officials, who were the main targets of the redundancies. This meant that in order to survive in this context of tension and urban socioeconomic crisis, the population (young people and adults) had to develop new strategies, often engaging in informal economic activities. These multiplied on the streets of Yaoundé, which were not ready to host them, since such activities normally take place in conventional, well-established markets.

Poverty, the rural exodus, weak public-spiritedness, anarchic urbanization and population growth are counted among the factors that have made Yaoundé's street markets grow; these became the hubs for survival for many city dwellers.

The main streets of the Cameroonian capital are the setting for significant commercial activities by night and by day. However, these street markets of Yaoundé are a real problem for political and municipal authorities. On the one hand, the informal sector employs 88.6 percent²⁴² of the economically active population; on the other it causes significant economic losses to the State (loss of tax revenue). Most street traders are people who the civil service and the formal private sector could not hire. To systematically prohibit these activities would probably lead to serious social unrest and upheavals that the State would not wish to confront (such as the social crisis of 2008 in Cameroon, called the "hunger strike"). Thus, some authorities tolerate these activities because they provide employment for people, whether educated or not, for whom a place could not be found in the saturated formal sector. Conversely, in addition to the fiscal losses to the State, these activities pose societal problems such road accidents, pollution, traffic jams and health problems.

A CASE STUDY

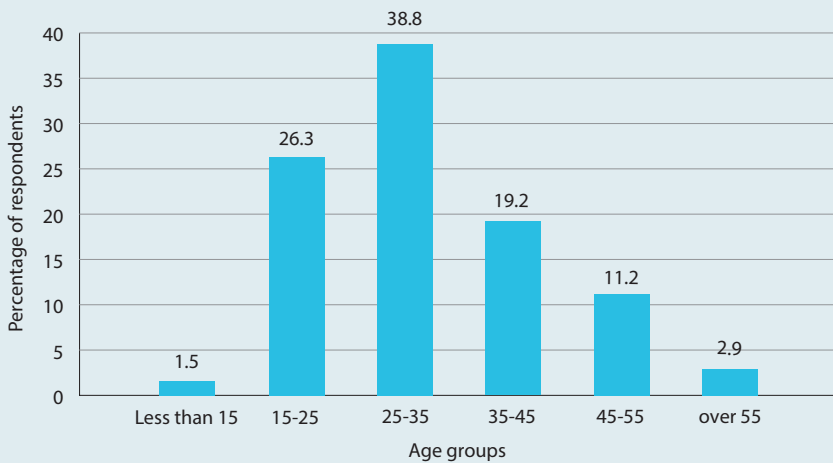
To explore in the greater depth the issues of the urban informal sector, we carried out a desk study and surveys and interviews with 7,509 informal sector workers in urban areas of Cameroon.

The study yielded the following findings:

- The informal sector in the city of Yaoundé employs more women than men (55.3 percent women, against 44.7 percent men).
- Young people are the population segment with the highest representation in informal activities (66.7 percent of the young people in the informal sector in urban settings in Cameroon are under age 35; see Figure 1).

- The population over age 35 consists mainly of people made redundant from the civil service or who lost their jobs after the enterprises employing them went out of business.
- Workers in the informal sector are mainly unmarried (49 percent of the total), while 36 percent are married and 10 percent of unmarried people live with a partner (see Figure 3).
- Of these workers, 60.9 percent have a secondary school leaving certificate, 10.1 percent have been to university and only 4.6 per cent have no schooling (see Figure 2).
- Women mainly find themselves working in these activities because they are in many cases forced to drop out of school because their parents are facing financial difficulties (gender discrimination).
- Children under age 15 are either accompanying their parents in their activities during the evening or weekend or are simply minors who are selling to be able to support themselves.
- The group aged 15 to 35 is composed of young people who have not been able to gain employment in the civil service or who are preparing for competitive examinations.²⁴³

FIGURE 1. YOUNG PEOPLE DOMINATE THE INFORMAL SECTOR²⁴³



243 Sources for all figures: Mbeck, Elie Walter, 'Les marchés de nuit dans l'arrondissement de Yaoundé 4^e'. Masters in Geography dissertation, University of Yaoundé 1, 157 pages, 2012.

FIGURE 2. MORE THAN 70 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS HAVE A SCHOOL LEAVING CERTIFICATE

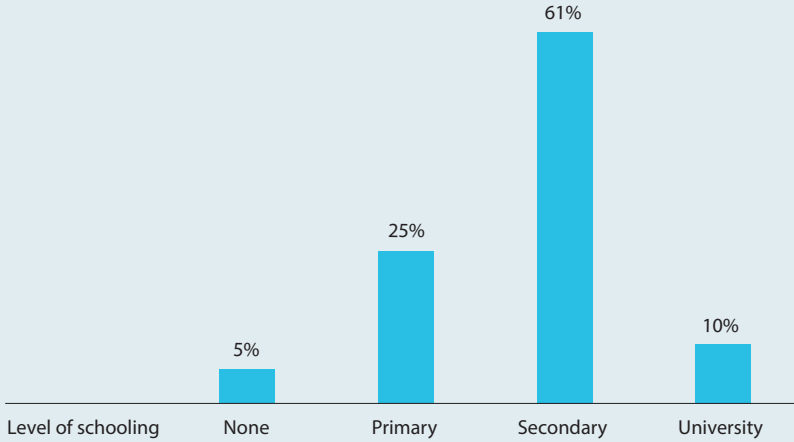
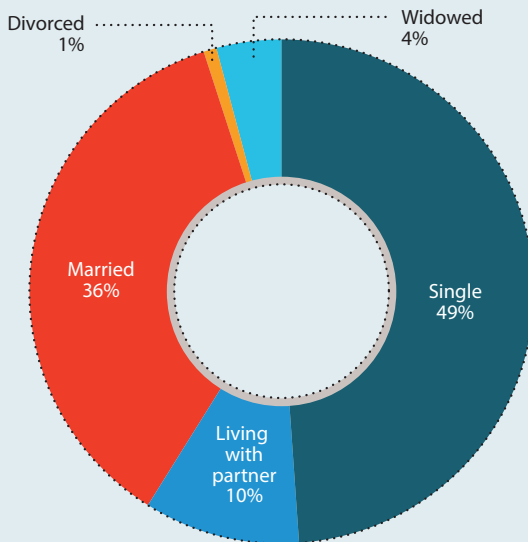


FIGURE 3. ALMOST HALF OF INFORMAL SECTOR WORKERS ARE SINGLE



IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MDGs AND THE SDGs

A lack of decent employment is one of the consequences of economic crisis and is the cause of many social problems that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) sought to address. Employment is again included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in SDG 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full productive employment and decent work for all).

Economic crises had repercussions in every area of the lives of the urban and rural populations in Cameroon. The Government has tried in vain to counter the negative effects of the situation through a range of strategies such as structural adjustment, development strategies, the devaluation of the CFA franc and more. All these actions had mixed results. Faced with multiple failures to counter poverty, the Government established structures to assess the ongoing situation in order to find lasting, effective solutions. These State structures were challenged by funding problems, which seriously undermined their efforts. The attempts to achieve the MDGs in 2015 resulted in failure, as in many other countries. The Government then turned to the SDGs.

Two years on, its efforts to achieve the SDGs are certainly worthy of praise, but much remains to be done in order to achieve these Goals. In short, the main difficulties encountered for achieving the MDGs and SDGs are the following:

- The economic crisis and its consequences;
- The difficulty of finding solutions appropriate to the particular problems of Cameroon;
- Lack of up-to-date statistical data (data are mostly several years old);
- Little collaboration between academic institutions (researchers) and the State;
- A lack of experienced and trained evaluators to analyse general problems and propose solutions;
- Little exchange of information between policymakers and the universities (researchers, laboratories);
- Conflict of interest between evaluators and State actions.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

To mitigate the difficulties encountered on the road to achieving the MDGs and SDGs, researchers from 10 private, public and religious universities gathered together and created a group composed of 51 full members, all of whom are university researchers and graduates, and 100 periodic members, who are students in the early or later cycles of their university careers.

They formed a collective called Cameroonian SDG Researchers and Evaluators Group (GCEC). This group, which was formed in 2008 and structured in 2017, conducts field work in the 10 regions of Cameroon. It works in the field and produces reports from studies and evaluations that help improve the population's living conditions and well-being.

The GCEC is committed to conducting evaluations all over Cameroon and more particularly in areas where the population is exposed to sustainable development problems. The GCEC does not limit its work to carrying out research and publishing the results. It has an active branch that works on the ground in synergy with associations and non-governmental organizations fighting poverty and/or supporting the State with the SDGs.

Currently, the GCEC is preparing a study to be conducted from December 2017 to December 2018 in the southern part of Cameroon, principally targeted at emergent towns and their environments. The first phase of this work will relate to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 16, and their actions will be linked to achievement of these SDGs in this region.

The GCEC aims to work with and support the State of Cameroon in its efforts to achieve the SDGs by providing it with up-to-date information and statistics on the ground.

GCEC activities will also include trainings for local stakeholders to equip them to conduct evaluations properly. The group is going to create local oversight cells to conduct evaluations in their local areas and forward the results to us. The results will then be consolidated and published to lead the authorities to act more effectively.

In short, the GCEC now wants to create a partnership with the Government, which will no longer have to organize large national surveys every 5 or 10 years; these are very costly and the frequency with which they are conducted nullifies efforts for the country to become emergent by 2035.

To summarize, the outreach activities to be conducted to strengthen evaluation and government action in Cameroon include:

- Organization of workshops, seminars and conferences to disseminate evaluations;
- Engage in real collaboration with the Government of Cameroon;
- Work in synergy with development groups, programmes and organizations;
- Encourage students to take courses in evaluation;
- Conduct evaluations and publish the results.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the main findings and implications of the study are:

- Informal sector employment in Cameroon is broadly dominated by educated young people;
- These form a part of the population that has not had the chance to find employment with the State and formal privately-owned companies;
- There is a higher proportion of women in these activities;
- Those from poor families leave school early and the only activity that they can carry out is that offered by the informal sector;
- This sector requires no specific training;

- The Government of Cameroon has created structures to oversee operators in the informal sector;
- These structures struggle to achieve their goals due to the corruption of civil servants and the misappropriation of public funds;
- Administrative sluggishness and lack of effectiveness weaken government actions;
- The State needs to combat corruption in order to improve the conditions of those working in the informal sector;
- The State should work with researchers, development partners and the private sector to find sustainable solutions to poverty.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

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