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Cameroon

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**Focus
Equity of access to education and increasing quality of education**

By

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(Special Consultative status with UN ECOSOC)**

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FMSI: The Marist Foundation for International Solidarity is an international NGO in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC and operating in 65 countries. FMSI was established in 2007 and has a special focus on promoting and protecting the rights of children through supporting projects, especially the access to quality education and advocacy.

I. Introduction

Statistics presented by the Ministry of Basic Education revealed that the Government made relevant progress in improving the education system.¹ The 2022 national school map revealed that Cameroon had more than 14,000 public schools and nearly 8,000 private primary schools. This represented an increase of 3,423 in four years. Also, in 2022, there were 93,773 teachers in public secondary schools and 90,845 in the public basic education sector.

Regarding budgetary allocations for 2022, CFA643.9 billion were allocated to the basic and secondary education sectors, out of a total state budget of CFA5,752.4 billion (11.19%). Despite this considerable effort, there are still many challenges related to teacher management, poor quality of education, and equitable access to school, particularly in areas affected by armed conflict.

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) recognizes that while external aid can go a long way toward filling funding gaps, the sustainability of education systems and outcomes depends on national efforts to finance education and ensure sound public financial management systems.² To this end, Cameroonian authorities are called upon to make more efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

II. Right to basic and secondary education

Third Cycle UPR 2018 Recommendations:

During the Third Cycle of the UPR, Cameroon accepted recommendations from Congo, Libya, Serbia, Poland and Bulgaria to guarantee all children an equal footing in access to free primary education and increase the enrolment rate in primary and secondary schools to enhance the quality of education in order to improve school enrolment rates.

II.1 Availability and accessibility to preschool education

Only about 37.5 percent of children of ages 3 - 5 attend preschool, with most children going to private schools, 55 percent, followed by public, 42 percent, and only 2 percent attending community-based preschools. While gender differences are small (30.6 percent for boys, 29.6

¹ <https://www.stopblablacam.com/society/0309-9293-cameroon-s-govt-made-a-lot-of-progress-in-improving-the-education-system-but-challenges-remain>

² <https://www.stopblablacam.com/society/0309-9293-cameroon-s-govt-made-a-lot-of-progress-in-improving-the-education-system-but-challenges-remain>

percent for girls), there are considerable difference along geographic and socio-economic dimensions. In urban areas 68 percent of children attend preschool compared to only 32 percent in rural areas and 43.7 percent of the richest quintile attend preschool compared to 24.9 percent of the poorest quintile.³

Recommendations:

- 1. Make the preschool mandatory and free for all,**
- 2. Take measures to ensure that preschools are evenly distributed in the rural and urban areas of the country,**
- 3. Prioritize the training and recruitment of preschool teachers.**

II.2 Availability and accessibility to primary and secondary Education⁴

Third Cycle UPR 2018 Recommendations

In the Third Cycle of the UPR, Cameroon accepted recommendations from Bulgaria and Libya to pursue the strategy paper for the education sector in Cameroon for 2013–2020 and continue efforts to implement it to increase the enrolment rate in primary and secondary schools and enhance the quality of education.

Even though the Cameroon education sector plan (2013-2020) focused on improving access and relevance at all levels of education by enhancing the quality of learning in primary and secondary school, accessibility to education is still difficult.⁵ The 1996 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon made primary education compulsory and free for all children. However, parents must pay for uniforms, books, canteen, and transport fees.

On the other hand, secondary general, technical, commercial and vocational education is neither compulsory nor free. Even though the government subsidizes public schools, many families still cannot afford to pay for the various levies, books, uniforms and other necessary school requirements.

Parents who send their children to private schools must pay fees and provide all the school requirements. Given this situation, there is a large disparity between those who complete primary education and those who carry on to secondary education. According to UNICEF, only 53% of children of the right age attend secondary school compared to 85% of primary aged children in primary school.⁶ The low enrolment into secondary education is because the Cameroon's education system is not progressive free. Students must pass end of year examination to progress to the next stage of their education.

³ The World Bank: CAMEROON Education Reform Support Project (P160926)

⁴ Cameroon is a state party to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, the Geneva Conventions and its Additional Protocols and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

⁵ Document de Stratégie du Secteur de l'Éducation et de la Formation pour la période 2013-2020

⁶ <https://www.childrenofcameroon.co.uk/post/education-in-cameroon>

Recommendations:

- 1. Ensure that primary and secondary education is completely free and accessible for both boys and girls,**
- 2. Prioritize the training and recruitment of primary and secondary school teachers to reduce the 1:51 qualified teacher/student ratio in primary schools,**
- 3. Encourage schooling by making it progressive free at the elementary and secondary levels,**
- 4. Support the relevant collaboration of the private schools; secular and denominational, in promoting education for all in the country by giving them subventions according to the real needs.**

III. Girls and Women's Right to Education⁷

Third Cycle UPR 2018 Recommendations:

In the Third Cycle of the UPR, Cameroon accepted recommendations from Portugal, Lesotho, Togo, Iceland, Poland, Belgium, Libya, Montenegro, Madagascar, DR Congo and Afghanistan to take steps to effectively ensure the equality of girls and young women at all levels of education, and their retention in schooling; step up efforts to raise the school enrolment rate for girls; take measures to increase the attendance rate of girls in secondary education; ensure that girls and young women have equal access to all levels of education; adopt measures preventing sexual harassment by teachers and child marriage which lead to high dropout rates of girls in secondary schools; fight the practice of early and forced marriage by raising awareness of families and local communities; establish the minimum age for marriage at 18 years for both girls and boys and ratify the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education.⁸

Even though Cameroon's constitution outlines that the State shall guarantee children's right to education, many girls still do not have the privilege of completing a full cycle of primary and/or secondary education. They are oriented from an early age towards domestic life and marriage. Parents prefer to give priority to boy education with the reason that the girl would marry soon and therefore no need to invest on her.

Even though Cameroon's primary school enrollment rate of 88 percent ranks among the highest in West and Central Africa, current figures from UNICEF display a persisting imbalance

⁷ Cameroon is a state party to most Human Right treaties including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, UNICEF Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA), and Plan International. Together with these legal instruments, the Cameroon's Women's Empowerment Ministry fight discrimination against girls and women rights.

⁸ A/HRC/39/15/Add.1

as girls continue lagging boys. According to countrywide statistics furnished by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family, between the ages of 6 and 14, only 80 percent of girls attend school compared to 94 percent of boys.

According to the Nkafu Policy Institute⁹ referring to the Government National Development Strategy 2020-2030, the actions to be implemented by the government to promote an inclusive quality education system include breaking the barriers hindering access to education for girls and women to avoid the consequences of girls' and women's under- or non-enrollment in schools on economic empowerment, children and family health.

Efforts to recruit and keep girls in school are slow because of low perceptions of the benefits of education for girls. UNESCO reports of 2015 state that in Cameroon, the primary school enrollment rate for girls is 80% compared to 94% of boys. 40% of girls abandon school before they reach the fourth and fifth year of primary education, 31% get married before age 15, especially in rural communities. The situation is alarming in the Far North Region of Cameroon where fewer than 18% of girls attend school.¹⁰

Recommendations:

- 1. Cameroon should consider ratifying and be a state party to the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education as well as the Convention on Technical and Vocational Education.**
- 2. The Cameroon government should take measures to**
 - improve the application of the Right to Education Act, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act.**
 - ensure that both primary and secondary schools are girl-child friendly, keeping the works - alongside UNICEF, Bilateral cooperation with friends countries, Plan International and other NGOs,**
 - boost girl-child's school attendance by offering free textbooks, meals and scholarships to girls, and supporting grassroots women's advocacy groups especially in areas with lowest girl enrollment,**
- 3. Carry out girl-child education campaign to raise awareness and sensitize the regions of the country where traditional beliefs continue to hamper schooling for girls and the negative impact of child marriage practices for the development of girls and women as well as for the society.**

⁹ "Enhancing Young Girls and Women's Access to Education in Cameroon" (Jan 28, 2022)

¹⁰ <https://presidentialprecinct.org/educate-a-woman-empower-a-nation-mirabel-ngong/>

IV. Children's right to go to school during armed conflict emergencies¹¹

Third Cycle UPR 2018 Recommendations:

In the Third Cycle of the UPR, Cameroon accepted recommendations from Georgia, Congo, Algeria, Chile and Ghana to speed up the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict; redouble efforts to arrest and bring to justice the perpetrators of the kidnapping of children during conflict emergencies; and take the necessary measures to protect refugee and displaced women against all forms of exploitation; adopt public policies to eradicate the recruitment of children by armed groups, including strategies for the rehabilitation and reintegration of such children into society in accordance with international human rights standards; and provide the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms with adequate resources to enable it to carry out its mandate.

Since 2014, attacks by Boko Haram insurgents have continued to force massive population displacements in the Far North region of Cameroon causing 385,372 internally displaced people in the region by December 2022. Similarly, in the Southwest and Northwest regions of the country, the Anglophone crisis which has been unfolding since 2016, led to the internal displacement of 579,000 people¹² fleeing because their homes have been burnt down, people kidnapped and murdered as the insecurity level rose, schools burnt down, students kidnapped, teachers killed, and students attacked in school premises by armed men and killed.

Recommendations

- 1. Provide access and security to facilitate work of UN humanitarian groups and civil society organizations working on the ground to create a safe atmosphere for children to go to school,**
- 2. Convince the armed groups to ensure safe ways and school spaces for children, without conditions,**
- 3. Call and encourage state and non-state armed groups to not involve school communities and students in the conflict and to ensure quality delivery of education in areas under their control,**

¹¹ Cameroon is a state party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, the Convention on the rights of the child and its Optional Protocol for the protection of children in armed conflicts as well as the Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflict for policies on child protection. Cameroon is also a state party to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its Pan-African legal instrument to combat child soldiering. Moreover, Cameroon is a party to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 1998, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990, the Paris Commitments to Protect Children from Unlawful Recruitment or use by Armed Forces or Armed Groups adopted on 6 February 2007

¹² <https://www.internal-displacement.org/events/internal-displacement-in-cameroon-why-is-the-crisis-neglected>

4. **Ensure that continuity of education in schools is made possible by self-organization and initiatives taken by communities,**
5. **Instruct security forces to take necessary steps to ensure safety of schools, children and teachers,**
6. **Continue the work in collaboration with UNICEF and Education Cannot Wait NGO to encourage schooling in the conflict areas.**

V. Quality of Educational Provision and Learning Conditions

Third Cycle UPR 2018 Recommendations

Third Cycle of the UPR, Cameroon accepted recommendations from Bulgaria, Libya and Lesotho to continue to improve the quality of education to improve school enrolment rates and take steps to raise the school enrolment rate for girls and their retention in schooling.¹³

School facilities¹⁴

Cameroon assumes her responsible in the provision of school infrastructures, teaching staff, equipment, facilities, and amenities whatever the environment. In basic education the number of schools increased from 9,175 in 2014/2015 to 10,678 in 2019/2020 representing an average annual increase of 3.31% during that period. This situation has led to the challenges of infrastructure and quality. In most primary and secondary schools only one seat is offered for every two pupils in the urban areas and in the rural areas one seat for every three pupils. Similarly, the ratio of textbooks to pupils is low throughout the country. On average, there is one reading textbook for every 5 pupils, one mathematics textbook for every 5 pupils, one science textbook for every 17 pupils and one English/French textbook for every 9 pupils in the higher grades. Nationwide, the ratio of reading/language textbooks per pupil for public primary education is one textbook for every seven pupils.

Regarding infrastructure, in the academic year 2019/2020, 85.57% of classrooms were made of permanent materials, 10.02% of temporary materials, and 4.41% of semi-hard materials. Similarly, regarding certain amenities, 49.73% of Preschools and Primary Schools have electricity, 47.15% latrine blocks, 52.07% a fence to provide a safe environment for children, while 33.32% have public water supply points and 75.85% medicine cabinets. Concerning classroom provision, the pupil/classroom ratio is 40 pupils on average. However, the national average hides the disparities between regions: i.e. Far North are more overcrowded (57/1) in relation to the national ratio.

The facilities in the school setting environment like the availability of roads, services and bookshops are important as well to ensure quality learning and school attendance.

Teaching and learning

¹³ A/HRC/39/15/Add.1

¹⁴ Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB), 2020. 2019-2020 Data Analysis Report. Yaoundé, Cameroon. Pp 103-110

To ensure the optimal functioning and quality of the education service, the Cameroon Education Reform Support Programme (CERSP) provides each public primary school with at least 100 pupils with a minimum of three qualified teachers. This measure aims at ensuring that at each level of primary education, there is a qualified teacher. In 2019/2020, 47% of public primary schools enrolled at least 100 pupils with fewer than three teachers. Yet, the supply of qualified teachers available is not always distributed to schools according to need. In the large cities and their outskirts where there are many pupils, double shift system is adopted while in the rural areas with lack of teachers, multigrade class system is adopted i.e., combining students of different ages and abilities in one classroom, under the direction of one teacher.¹⁵ Weak teacher supervision and support often leaves teachers underprepared, especially in remote areas. But even those teachers who are adequately prepared are ~~must use a curriculum~~ “highly theoretical”. The teaching-learning process is not a matter of give and take knowledge. Unfortunately, most teachers in secondary schools in Cameroon put emphasis on teaching rather than learning. They concentrate on dispensing knowledge and exercising undue control at the expense of making students enjoy their learning.

Recommendations

- 1. To set up a monitoring plan to assess the socio-economic status of the school settings in view of improving road network, water and electricity supply, educational resource centres, bookshops, and security in the school’s neighbourhood,**
- 2. Employ more teachers, build more classrooms, equip them with teaching/learning resources to reinforce desirable learning, and reduce class sizes to ensure that students have their fair share of teachers’ attentions during lessons,**
- 3. Introduce child-centred cooperate education to encourage and ensure that students participate fully in their own learning,**
- 4. The government should embark on pedagogic in-service seminars, workshops and refresher courses should be mandatory for all teachers to raise their awareness of the difference between teaching and educating, informing and forming to instill in them the importance of**
 - better management of the teaching-learning difficulties,**
 - creation of exciting and enjoyable learning atmosphere in secondary school classrooms,**
 - encouraging students to participate in classroom activities,**
 - giving attention evenly to all the students, and**
 - introduction of ability grouping classes, small class sizes and group learning system**
- 5. Ensure that teacher educators, head teachers and pedagogic inspectors should instill in classroom teachers the spirit of professionalism,**
- 6. Increase the number of textbooks on essential subjects available in schools, and even through loan books programs.**

¹⁵ Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB), 2020. 2019-2020 Data Analysis Report. Yaoundé, Cameroon. Pp 146-148