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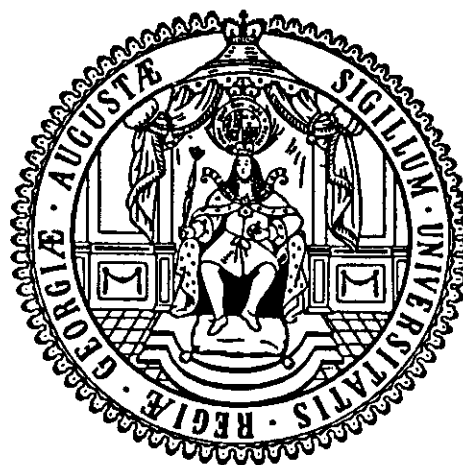
DISCUSSION PAPERS

Rural Development and Agricultural Progress: challenges, strategies and the Cameroonian experience

Ernest L. Molua

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**Institut für Rurale Entwicklung
Universität Göttingen**

Institute of Rural Development
University of Goettingen

D-37073 Göttingen - Waldweg 26

Rural Development and Agricultural Progress: challenges, strategies and the Cameroonian experience*

ERNEST L. MOLUA[®]

Abstract

Agriculture is the most important rural enterprise, contributing an average of 30% of total gross domestic product in Cameroon. Rural food processing and marketing which depend on agricultural growth, is responsible for an additional 10% of gross domestic product and about 25% of total rural incomes. This paper reviews the agricultural production situation in Cameroon, appraises the approaches to rural development in the country and its role in agricultural production. The review indicates that increased agricultural production in Cameroon is impeded by the dearth of rural infrastructure, leading to the non-attainment of improved welfare for rural areas. For a sustainable increase in agricultural production, priority in the allocation of scarce resources should be given to programmes and socioeconomic infrastructure in rural areas that directly benefits the rural population.

Keywords: Cameroon, rural development, agricultural production

JEL Classification: I31, O18, Q18, R38

* This study is part of a broad research on "*Agricultural and Rural Development Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and New Agenda for Action.*" In sub-Saharan Africa, the political and institutional framework has substantially changed in the last two decades, in part as a consequence of the implementation of structural adjustment programmes. Our research reviews some of the implications of these changes on the design and implementation of agricultural and rural policy and provides concrete suggestions regarding the utilization of some new agricultural policy instruments. The assertions in this paper are based on evidence obtained from rapid rural appraisal (RRA) and discussions with experts in Cameroon in November 2000 to April 2001.

[®] Unit of Agricultural Policy (Chair: PROF. S. VON CRAMON-TAUBADEL), Institute for Agricultural Economics, Georg-August University Goettingen, Platz der Goettinger Sieben 5, 37073 Goettingen, Germany. Tel: +49 551 394811; Fax: +49 551 399866; emolua@uni-uaao.gwdg.de and/or ELMOLUA@HOTMAIL.COM

1. Introduction

The issue of rural development¹ has assumed enormous attention in the scheme of socioeconomic-engineering. Many schools of thought have prescribed different panacea for the ills of the rural economy. **The protagonists of 'industrialisation' emphasise industrial possibilities for rural development, whilst advocates of 'agriculture-led-development' see modernised agriculture with efficient utilisation of natural resources e.g. land, fishery, forestry, livestock, minerals as well as allied processing operations as possessing more promise for a faster rate of development of the rural economy.** It is possible that the combination of these two schools of thought in conjunction with progressive socio-political environment and stability can effectively launch the rural landscape into dynamic economic prosperity.

Broadly, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the challenge of development (which in large measure involves lifting people out of poverty) is particularly daunting in rural areas where the bulk of the population earns its livelihood from agriculture, and where poverty has reached alarming proportions. According to the WORLD BANK (2000, 2001), **the factors responsible for underdevelopment and widespread poverty in rural areas in the region include: low agricultural productivity, environmental degradation, rapid population growth, poor rural infrastructure, lack of access to markets and market information, low levels of investment in people, ethnic and tribal conflicts, tropical disease burdens, inappropriate economic policies, and adverse effects of globalisation.** In addition to the above factors, rural development is constrained by neglect of the rural non-farm sector (REARDON, 1997), urban bias in public and private investments and by unfavourable geographical and social institutions (ALI and THORBECKE, 1997).

In regions of mass poverty associated with dependence on agriculture, poverty reduction starts by raising the productivity and amount of resources available to agriculturists. Agricultural production, which rests on the traditional rural populace in Cameroon, as in most of sub-Saharan Africa, is affected directly and indirectly by the level of rural development. **Rural development is a *sine qua non* for agricultural development.** Numerous problems plague Cameroon's rural areas. These include low agricultural productivity, hunger, malnutrition, prevalence of diseases, poverty,

¹ Rural development in this paper is seen as a process through collective effort aimed at improving the well-being and self realisation of people living outside urban areas. In general, rural development could be described as a process in which there is structural and institutional transformation of rural society such that the society acquires the capacity and capability of providing all the goods and services needed by its population in increasing diversity. In other words, it is a process aimed at not only increasing the level of per capita income in the rural areas but also the standard of living which depends on such factors as food and nutrition level, health, education, housing, recreation and security.

illiteracy and general environmental squalor. Rural development would therefore facilitate agricultural production through the provision and efficient workings of basic production infrastructures in the rural areas. On the other hand, improved agricultural productivity would lead to the development of rural areas through improved income generation and living standards of the people. It is therefore very important to consider ways of developing the rural areas (both farm and non-farm sectors) with a view to achieve improved agricultural production and thereby solving persistent low income and food insecurity problems.

Close to 60% of Cameroon's population live in rural areas. Figure 1 shows the temporal distribution of rural/urban population in Cameroon. However, Cameroon's population is rapidly experiencing a demographic change. The current population is estimated at about 15 million, 10 million more than in 1960, and another 20 million is likely to add by 2030 (FAO, 2002). An important demographic trend is the rate of rural-urban exodus. The percent urban population of 40% today compares with 20% in the 1960s, and is even projected to reach 60% by 2030 (FAO, *ibid.*).

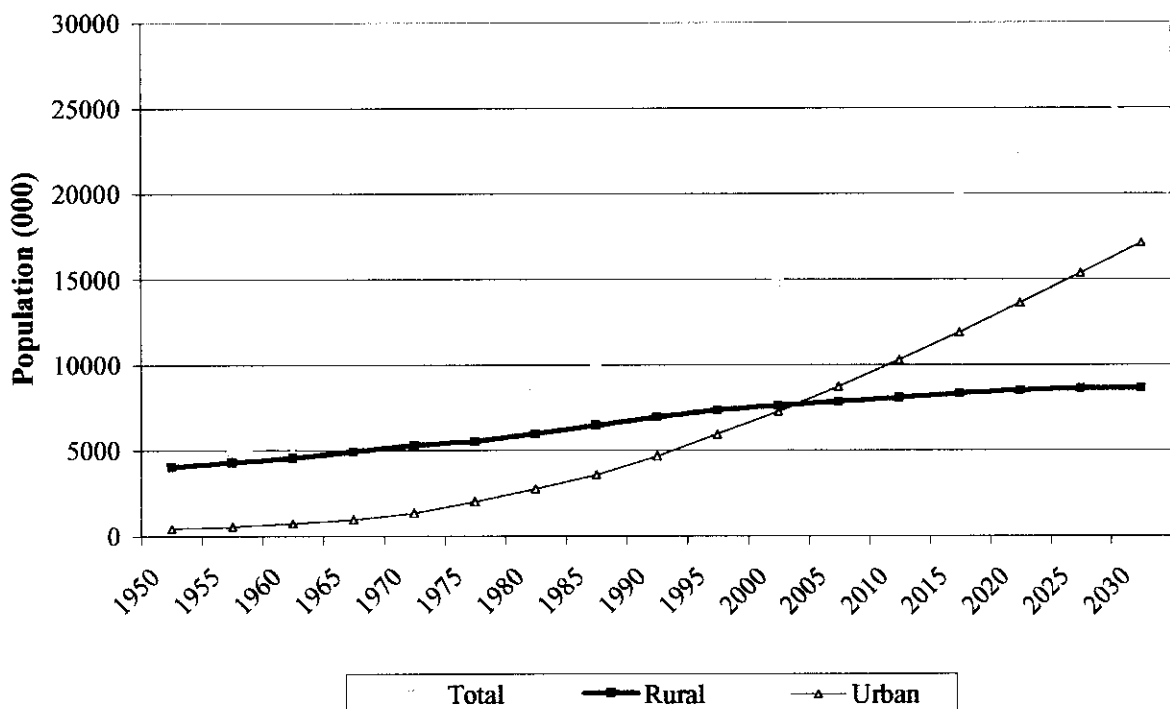


Figure 1. Estimated and Projected Rural and Urban Population in Cameroon (1950-2030) Source: FAO (2002).

As its primary goal, this paper examines the agricultural production situation in Cameroon and the relevant issues affecting it. It appraises the approaches to rural

development in Cameroon and its role in agricultural production. Strategies for ensuring increased agricultural production through rural development efforts are suggested. In meeting these objectives, the rest of the paper is divided into four sections. In section two the importance of the agricultural sector to Cameroon's economy is discussed. Section three presents a conspectus of rural development issues. The strategy for increasing agricultural production through rural development, by both government and non governmental organisations (NGOs) is discussed in section four. Some policy recommendations are then presented. The paper concludes with brief remarks in section five. **It is hoped that this study will meaningfully contribute to on-going debates on the role of rural development in agricultural growth and poverty reduction.**

2. Agriculture in Cameroon

Cameroon's economy is predominantly agrarian and the exploitation of agricultural and other natural resources remains the driving force for the country's economic development. **Agriculture is a major earner of foreign exchange for the country; accounting for about 30% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).** It provides employment for the bulk of the population, bearing the brunt and responsibility for economic growth and development. Most of the agricultural production is by small-scale farmers who make up close to 90% of the farming community. A greater proportion of agricultural production in the country takes place in rural regions. About 5 million rural holdings operate on an area of about 4 million hectares, with an average farm size of about 1.8 hectares.² Figure 2 shows the agricultural output index for Cameroon. Nominal production appears to be increasing steadily over a forty year period. However, as also shown in Table 1, **per capita production appears to have stagnated in most of the years, with marginal decline observed in some years.** This is partly explained by the rapidly increasing population. Between 1965 and 2000, percentage change of per capita total agricultural production dropped by 0.6%. The livestock sub-sector observes a significant + 45% change in 2000 relative to 1965, whilst per capita arable crop production has dropped by 11%. This is further reflected in the most recent world trade figures which depict Cameroon's market share of major agricultural commodities trailing behind that of the 1980s (FAO, 2002).

² Small farms exist because of inherent land tenure constraints. The available small land is the farmer's last hope for food security. This allows them to produce their own food, receive income to afford education and health opportunities for their family. Notwithstanding, the farming sector and the rural sector in general are yearning for change, a change that will fulfil their aspirations of increased income earnings and alleviate poverty.

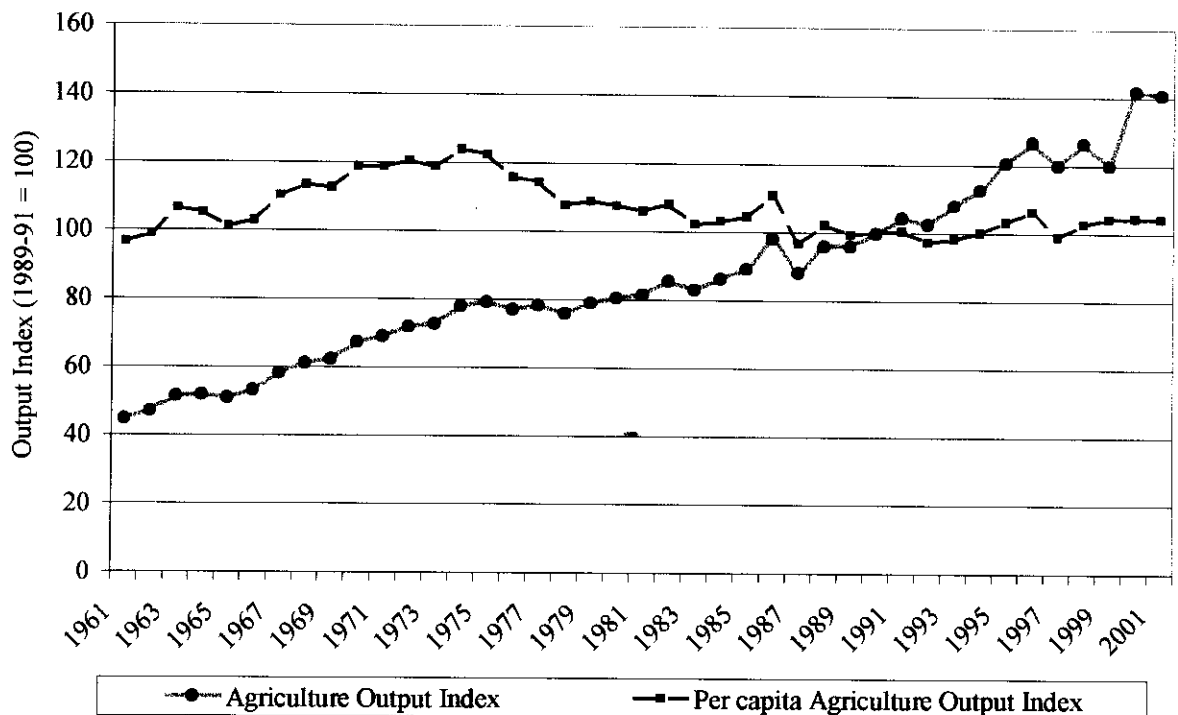


Figure 2. Total Agricultural Output Index and Per capita Agricultural Output Index for Cameroon, 1961-2000 [Source: FAO (2002)].

Table 1. Per Capita Agricultural Production Indices for Cameroon, 1965-2000

	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	% Change (1965-2000)
Cereals	113.7	141.9	189.6	133.8	109.9	92.0	114.3	124.4	9.4
Arable crops	113.7	133.3	138.8	115.5	109.8	100.1	107.7	101.0	-11.2
Livestock	66.0	79.2	78.0	82.5	87.4	101.3	91.0	95.9	45.3
Total Agric. Production	100.9	118.7	122.4	107.6	104.4	100.1	103.4	100.3	-0.6

Source (FAO, 2002)

Agricultural development in Cameroon is intricately linked to the country's macroeconomic history. NDOYE and KAIMOWITZ (1998) identify four major periods of macroeconomic change in Cameroon. (a) The **pre-oil boom period (1967-76)** in which agriculture was the base of the economy, and associated with high taxation on the principal agricultural exports of cocoa and coffee. During this period GDP grew annually at 4.8%. (b) The **oil-boom period (1977-85)** in which per capita GDP increased from US\$ 485 in 1978 to US\$ 915 in 1985, due primarily to oil exploitation.

(c) The economic crisis and **structural adjustment phase (1986-93)**, where Cameroon's terms of trade deteriorated by 65%, average per capita GDP fell 6.3% annually during 1985-93, and oil production also fell. The burden was back on agriculture and forestry to provide most of the country's foreign exchange. This period observed increasing decline in the world wide relative prices for traditional export commodities. (d) The **period (1994-2001)** in which the role of the state is condemned as the source of all problems and the market as the main instrument for reviving growth which, if sustained, will take care of all social problems in the country. The **CFA Franc was devalued by 50% to restore competitiveness of exports**, coupled with increased world prices for cocoa and coffee, led to a mild rebound of these commodities (SUNDERLIN and POKAM, 1998). Since 1994, promising ideas of the 1970s relating to small farmer agriculture, food security, income distribution, education, housing and social welfare have been relegated in priority, and liberalisation and privatisation presented as the panacea for Cameroon's economic ills.

Despite the sectoral reforms Cameroon's agriculture has not peaked, with the expected surplus. Shortfall in domestic production is supplemented with imported supplies. Figure 3 depicts the extent of foreign food supplement from external donors. The highest levels of food aid shipments to Cameroon are observed in 1970, and the early and mid 1980s. These periods together with 1991, 1992 and 1999 were characterised by drought conditions that hit northern Cameroon and unreliable fluctuating rainfalls (associated with torrential downpours, tornadoes and flash floods) in the south of the country, with the resultant shortfall in domestic production. In addition to climatic constraints, **multifaceted problems impede the non-attainment of the ultimate goal of increased agricultural production, principal amongst which is the dearth of rural infrastructure**. The gradual removal of subsidies on inputs such as fertilisers and the dearth of credit facilities in the rural areas are also identified as major factors. In addition, the high cost of farm working capital fuelled by high inflation, has substantially reduced the profitability of most agricultural activities leading to marked reduction in size of farms and in yield³. With the high cost of feed and that of reputable inputs (vaccines, fertilisers, improved seeds etc.) farmers culminate to the use of fake and adulterated drugs, low fertiliser use and poor yielding seed varieties thus leading to low productivity. Further, the land tenure system compels the small farmers to operate an economically small-and-fragmented land. **Technological simplicity has been a major issue in agricultural production**. The bulk of farmers use simple farm tools leading to only marginal improvements in agricultural production. Moreover, inadequate marketing system, transportation, processing and modern storage facilities, have

³ The currency devaluation led to increased costs of inputs at the farm level, increase in supply costs due to deterioration of state maintained rural infrastructure and an attendant reduction in profit margins.

retrogressive effect on the productivity of the rural producers as they cannot sell, store or process agricultural produce for enhanced year-round income inflow.

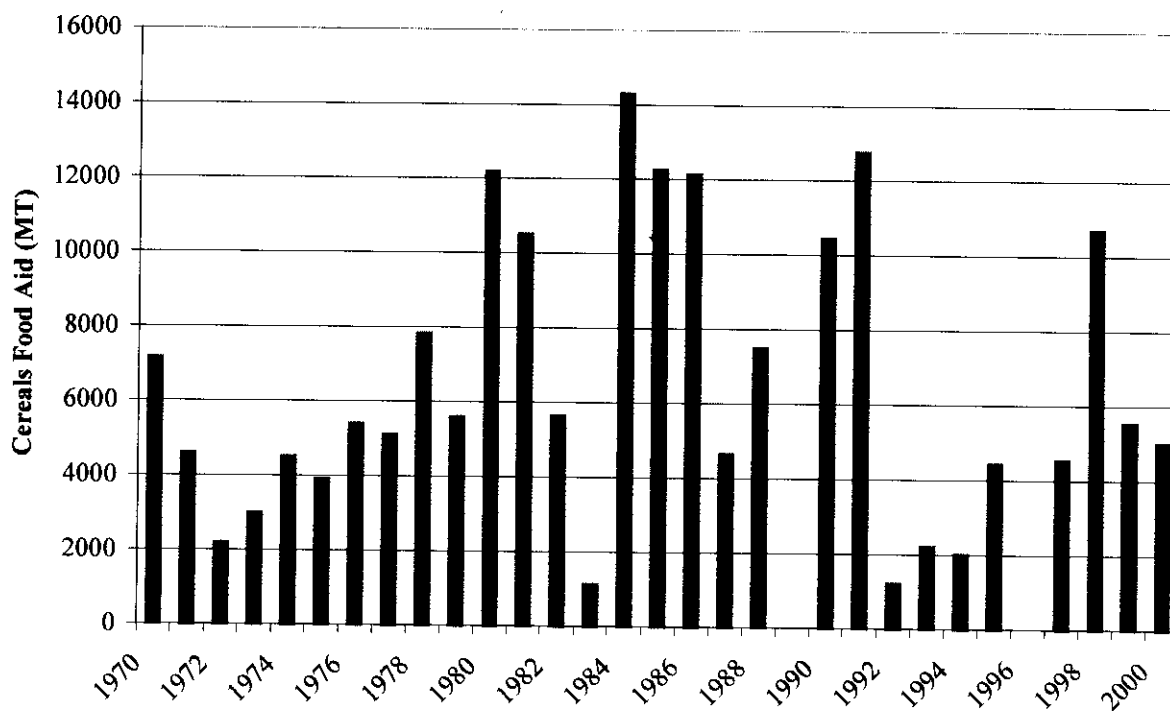


Figure 3. Total Cereals Food Aid Shipment, 1970-2000 [Source: FAO (2002)].

Recent field observations further indicate that the **lack of a well articulated extension programme, input delivery, advisory services and demonstration farms, are militating against the adoption of innovation and enhanced agricultural productivity.** The situation is made worse by the dearth of skilled and properly trained manpower, infrastructures and poor funding of research and development. The resultant effect is poor agriculture performance, low income, poverty and mobility to seek non-agricultural jobs in urban centres.⁴ The relative neglect of the rural areas in government's development efforts has, in addition, led to rapid urbanisation. With the drifting of able-bodied youths to the urban centres for better services; the ageing farm population in the rural areas finds it difficult to respond to the increasing demand of adequate food and agricultural material

⁴ Even in instances where reform policies have helped to improve investment and growth, e.g. growth estimated at 5% per annum for the last few years, they do not appear to be very successful in reducing poverty and rural squalor. This is largely because reduction in subsidies has raised input prices, fiscal restructuring increased unemployment, and the shrinkage of state activity impacts negatively on services like education and health.

supplies for the country. The progress of agriculture in Cameroon is, no doubt, thus tied to the development of rural infrastructure, much needed to enhance productivity increases.

3. Rural Development, opportunities and shortcomings

Some factors can be identified as major constraints to rural development effort in Cameroon: First, the falling real agricultural prices over the last two decades have led to complacency toward the agricultural sector and neglect of rural areas. Second, rural people have little political power and voice to effectively push for the development of rural areas. In addition, the ruling urban elite pursue policies (excessive taxation through overvalued exchange rates and export taxes) that disadvantage the agricultural sector - the major source of employment for rural people. Third, public parastatals dominated the agricultural sector, for too long, by controlling input and output markets and access to finance. These institutions have often been highly inefficient and unresponsive to changes in market conditions. Fourth, resources such as land, capital and access to knowledge and technology have been concentrated in the hands of urbanites. This has led to high unemployment and low productivity among rural inhabitants. These factors are thought to have impeded sustainable rural development. The implication is that any action or set of actions that directly or indirectly hampers rural development, retrogressively impacts agricultural growth and development.

Government's effort to improve agriculture and the rural sector has been principally through the activities of the agricultural departments and extension services of the Ministry of Agriculture. The objectives of the provincial Departments of Agriculture are aimed at timely procurement and distribution of farm inputs to farmers as well as improvement in agro-processing and marketing of agricultural produce. In general, **approaches adopted to realise the objectives of rural development in Cameroon have been through;** (i) the provision of social amenities such as pipe-borne water, health centres, roads and electricity in order to bridge the gap between rural and urban centres; (ii) attempts to raising rural income by increasing their production capacity and ensuring that agricultural products are adequately exchanged in markets. In this approach, incentives are given to rural farmers including extension services, construction of feeder roads, storage facilities and cheap credit to farmers. Nonetheless, these efforts are not far reaching enough, as highlighted by Figures 2 and 3. Recent macroeconomic reforms and austerity measures have been accompanied by reductions in the allocation of public finances to social schemes that are pro-rural and pro-poor. As a result, the overall development of social services in the rural areas has not been impressive. The education, health, water resources and environment sub-sectors perform unimpressively following the deterioration of basic facilities and industrial relations throughout the country. This less

impressive development of Cameroon is explicitly depicted with the use of some social indicators in Table 2.

Table 2. Selected Social Indicators of Cameroon for 1999

Indicators	Estimates
SUB-SECTORS	
EDUCATION	
Adult literacy rate (%)	
Male	73.0
Female	53.0
HEALTH AND NUTRITION	
Population per physician (No.)	14,000
Population per nursing staff (No.)	6,000
Access to essential drugs (%)	66.0
Life expectancy at birth (years)	50.0
Daily calorie per capita (kilo joules)	2700
Under weight Children under 5 years (%)	22.0
POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHY	
Estimated population	14,693.0
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	95.0
Maternal mortality (per 1,000 live births)	430.0
Annual number of births (per 1,000)	573.0
Population growth rate (%)	2.1
WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION	
Total access to safe water (%)	62.0
Urban access to safe water (%)	82.0
Rural access to safe water (%)	42.0
Total access to sanitation (%)	92.0
Urban access to sanitation (%)	99.0
Rural access to sanitation (%)	85.0
ECONOMIC INDICATORS	
GDP per capita (US\$, PPP)	1573.0
Population below poverty line (%)	40.0
Debt service 1999 (% of GDP)	6.0
Debt service 1999 (% of Export value)	24.3

Source: UNDP, 2001

With about 16.4% of total national government budget (2.8% of GNP) being spent on education and with an average literacy rate of 55% (UNDP, 2001), the educational sub-sector has

been fairing not too well, constrained partly by inadequate funding. Poor education levels have, no doubt, seriously affected agricultural production in the country. **Rural development inevitably must involve increased investment in human capital of the poor, which in addition to expanding their economic opportunities, improves their quality of life directly.** The health sector in 1999 accounted for 1.5% of total national government expenditure. The poor state of health-care delivery as indicated by the major healthcare indicators is due to the combinations of inadequate infrastructure, shortage of drugs and equipment, and high inflation which eroded purchasing power of the populace. **Poor health of the rural dwellers and inadequate provision of healthcare facilities as well as poor supply of portable water in the rural areas, are inimical to food and fibre production. These lead to low labour productivity.**

In addition to infrastructure constraints Cameroon's rural farmers are not involved at the design and planning stages of policies that affect their livelihood. Most agricultural policies have ignored the smaller farmers in agriculture and rural development. This has adversely affected the rate of adoption of certain innovation and practices. Neglecting farmers in agriculture policy formulation will almost always meet with implementation problems because users are not involved at the policy initiation stage. **The Extension service with its laudable objectives, further seems to have been grossly handicapped by inadequate funds, lack of trained and qualified personnel and bureaucratic 'red-tape',** and rural people who are the main target do not seem to be fully aware of the programme package. Some defunct financial aid programmes such as the *Credit Agricole* and FONADER (National Fund for Rural Development) were hampered by inadequate and inefficient supervision, inaccessibility of the fund to the rural farmers due to unattractive interest rates and inadequate collateral by rural entrepreneurs.

On reviewing Table 3 we observe that more effort is needed to improve asset ownership, productivity and reduce rural poverty.⁵ Coupled with evidence in Table 2, in summary, it is clear that rural Cameroon is characterised by a number of drawbacks⁶ to sustainable growth. Development

⁵ Some research has been carried out in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa on growth linkages and guidelines for poverty reduction in rural areas (e.g. HAZELL and HOJJATI, 1995; ALWANG *et al.*, 1996). DEININGER and OLINTO (2000) on examining factors that could explain the relatively lacklustre performance of Zambia's agricultural sector, reach an important conclusion. Not owning productive assets (draft animals and implements) limits improvements in agricultural productivity and household welfare. Owning oxen increases income directly, allows farmers to till their fields efficiently when rain is delayed, increases the area cultivated, and improves access to credit and fertiliser markets. Policies to foster accumulation of the assets needed for agricultural production and to provide complementary public goods (education, credit, and good agricultural extension services) could greatly help reduce poverty and improve productivity.

⁶ In retrospect, such drawbacks include: inadequate access to portable water and sanitation, electricity, health care, educational and recreational facilities; absence of motorable roads; high population growth, high infant and maternal mortality; low life expectancy rates; and a peasant population that lacks modern equipment for the exploitation of natural resources.

appears to be highly skewed in favour of the urban areas where the elite reside.⁷ All these factors have contributed to the estimated rural-urban migration (shown in Figure 1). Solving the problem of low agricultural productivity requires taking into account a constellation of factors, including the roles of technological development and knowledge transfer; land tenure systems; agro-climatic conditions; and informal institutional constraints. **Investments are needed in social infrastructure (e.g., education, health and sanitation facilities), agricultural infrastructure [e.g., irrigation (Cameroon has only about 3% of its cropland irrigated) and extension facilities], exchange infrastructure (e.g., market centres), and non-market institutions (e.g., social networks and safety nets).**⁸

Table 3. Relative Proportion of Asset Ownership in Cameroon, 2000

Item	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
Radio	73.1	43.4
Television	35.8	7.0
Telephone	5.1	0.1
Electricity	79.1	22.0
Refrigerator	23.1	15.2
Bicycles	9.3	15.2
Motorcycles	9.6	5.1
Cars	8.5	2.2
Tractor & Modern Implements	0.03	0.01

Source: MINEFI (2000). *Enquête Démographique et de Santé* (EDS) in Annual Statistics for Cameroon published by DSCN (*Direction de la Statistique et de la Comptabilité Nationale*) of the Ministry of Economic and Finance (MINEFI), Cameroon.

⁷ Past national development plans in Cameroon have largely been concentrated on urban areas to the detriment of a vast majority of the population who reside in rural areas. This anomaly has led to dualism between the urban and rural areas highlighted by marked disparities in the level of income, health, education and transport, social services and amenities and general welfare.

⁸ According to MWABU and THORBECKE (2001), solving the problem of low agricultural productivity requires taking into account technological development and knowledge transfer, land tenure systems, agroclimatic conditions and informal institutional constraints, e.g. those imposed by cultural norms.

At the dawn of the 21st century, clarion calls and echoes for food security and poverty alleviation heralds the need for meaningful rural development to assist agricultural production.⁹ **Multiplier effects from development of rural areas will enhance the sustained improvement of agriculture.** For meaningful rural development to take place, the provision of infrastructure¹⁰ facilities is crucial. These facilities serve as the physical capital. The institutions or organisations (both public and private) which provide economic services will have a significant effect (directly or indirectly) upon the economic functioning of the individual farm-firm. **The provision of physical and institutional infrastructure is a prerequisite to rural development and hence agricultural development.** The link between rural infrastructures and agricultural development is so high and almost complementary that rural agricultural development could even be defined as an integrated approach to food production, provision of physical, social and institutional infrastructures with an ultimate goal of bringing about quantitative and qualitative changes which culminate in improved standard of living of the rural population. This follows implicitly that rural development in agrarian economies such as Cameroon is synonymous to increased and improved agricultural production.

4. Some Rural Development Programmes and the Agenda for Future Action

In an increasing effort to accelerate rural development, boost self-sufficiency in agriculture and improve rural livelihood, the government of Cameroon has established regional ‘development authority’ schemes e.g. SOWEDA (Southwest Development Authority) and MIDENO (Northwest Development Authority). The SOWEDA, for instance, has three main components: agricultural development, agricultural credit, and rural infrastructure. Overall, it attempts to improve agricultural production by making available better planting material, the reduction of post-harvest losses and by improved extension. It also finances the regeneration of neglected export crop (cocoa and coffee) smallholder plantations and the creation of new ones. Similarly, MIDENO and its subsidiary--the UNVDA (Upper Noun Valley Development Authority)--operates in like manner in the Northwestern region of Cameroon. Field programmes are funded by the African Development Bank (ADB). While operating on the premise that farmers ought to play a leading role in fighting

⁹ The WORLD BANK (2000) assigns a crucial role to “spurring agricultural and rural development” if African states are ever to claim the 21st century.

¹⁰ Agricultural infrastructures encompass all the established structures, organisation, procedures, and customs, which are largely outside the control of individual farmers but which influence what they can or cannot do. Two key agricultural infrastructures could be identified. These include capital extensive infrastructure (CEI) and capital intensive infrastructure (CI). The former relates to agricultural research, crops and animal protection, soil conservation, credit institutions, health facilities etc. While the latter includes such items as water development facilities, machinery and equipment for processing, storage facilities, electricity, transport services in the form of roads railways and bridges.

poverty, farmers are provided fertiliser and credit to increase farm yields. As part of MIDENO's activities, the Rural Transformation Centre (RTC) in Bui division designs sustainable land use system for agro-pastoral activities and silviculture. MIDENO also directly encourages the improvement of farm technology, such as using animal traction (e.g. the use of cattle in ploughing and several other farm tasks). Women group projects are also pursued. However, financial constraints impedes efforts to promote agricultural diversification and the adoption of more intensive production methods. Hence, TCHOUNGUI *et al.* (1996) observe that cutback in the size of the extension effort has constrained MIDENO's farm support services. In addition, poor management, lack of accountability and transparency are contributory factors why development agencies such as the SOWEDA and MIDENO have not attained their set goals for the rural areas.

Some **international non-governmental organisations** (NGOs) are also engaged in attempts to solve rural development problems in Cameroon, e.g. HELVETAS (Swiss Association for International Co-operation). **With financial assistance from the World Bank and European Union, HELVETAS engages in road construction and rehabilitation, concentrating on the improvement of farm-to-market roads in rural Cameroon.** HELVETAS also provides pipe-borne water and other social services (schools and health centres). It further supports diverse local NGOs as well as state institutions with the goal of solving pressing social and economic problems and enhancing their organisational and technical competence.

The Canadian Development Agency (CIDA) also sponsors projects in Cameroon. One of such projects ensures adequate water supply and sanitation in health districts of the Adamaoua Province in the north of the country. The goal is to contribute to poverty reduction by improving the living conditions of Cameroon's poorest rural populations. **To maximise benefits in terms of better living conditions, the project's major priority is to develop awareness around sustainable management of water supply systems and awareness in sanitation management.** It is expected that the project will lead to (a) sustainable improvement in access to drinking water in Adamaoua Province, as measured by the rise in the number of drinking water supply systems and their ownership by the population; (b) the empowerment of representative village and rural committees to manage and maintain their water supply systems, and to raise awareness of sanitation issues.

CIDA via Dessau-Soprin (as the implementing agency) assists the business community to develop, implement and build management consulting and financing capacities for small businesses. This is specifically aimed to promote the revitalisation of Cameroon's economy by strengthening the private sector via providing small businesses access to funding for their expansion

needs. Without it, some of the potential social and economic benefits of other activities upstream would ultimately be eliminated, since a void would be left in financing and managing small businesses in Cameroon. Commercial banks are not interested in this niche either on a short- or medium-term basis, and have chosen to reposition themselves on profitable import-export markets.

In addition, **CIDA via Tecsuit and *Union des Producteurs Agricoles* (as implementing agents) also attempts to provide basic services required by agribusiness entrepreneurs, e.g. organisation of production (packaging, preservation), development of effective export channels, and product marketing in foreign markets (Europe and the sub-region).** This means helping agribusiness enthusiasts in Cameroon to organise and sell their products in potential foreign markets. Overall, the project promotes increase in export of non-traditional agricultural products in foreign markets by (i) establishing active key export channels; (ii) improving technical management of horticultural producers, access to financing programs, and storage infrastructures; and (iii) providing knowledge of modern production techniques, processing and marketing.

There are also **programmes aimed to improve the socio-economic conditions of women.** For instance, CIDA via OXFAM-Quebec as the executing agency, engages in project aimed at giving women easier access to productive credit and the training they need to start up and develop revenue-generating economic activities. A key objective is to strengthen the Cameroon Co-operative Credit Union League (CAMCCUL) in order to integrate productive microcredit practices for women. The project is expected to lead to operational, effective and sustainable microcredit and consulting/training support services for women in rural communities.

The International Finance Corporation¹¹ in 1999 supported the private sector in Cameroon with three new investments worth US\$1.88 million in small and medium projects, including a laundry soap factory¹², a coffee processor¹³, and a poultry farm¹⁴. **The World Bank also sponsors**

¹¹ The mission of IFC, part of the World Bank Group, is to promote private sector investment in developing countries, which will reduce poverty and improve people's lives. IFC finances private sector investments in the developing world, mobilises capital in the international financial markets, and provides technical assistance and advice to governments and businesses.

¹² According the project, NOSA Sarl Receives \$467,000 Investment for Laundry Soap Factory. IFC approved a guarantee of CFA 280 million (\$467,000) to enable Noumsi Samuel Enterprises (NOSA Sarl) to obtain a long-term loan of about \$934,000 from the *Société Commerciale de Banque-Crédit Lyonnais Cameroun*. The loan is aimed at helping NOSA Sarl to set up a 7,200 tons per annum laundry soap factory in Yaounde, Central Province of Cameroon. Cameroon has a high demand for laundry soap, which is lower in cost and easier to handle in tablet form than more expensive substitutes, such as powder or liquid detergents. The project adds value to an abundant natural resource (palm oil, the principal ingredient) create new jobs, and help to establish a modern industry in the central non-industrialised region of the country.

¹³ IFC also provided financial assistance of about \$413,000 to *Société Agro-Industrielle et Commerciale du Cameroun* (SAICAM), a gourmet coffee processor. The project aims to expand processing facilities in order to improve quality and

rural development projects in the country. These include amongst others, (a) a higher education project and (b) an agricultural extension project. The objectives of the higher education technical training project, with the Institute for Technology at the University of Douala acting as the implementing agency, includes: (i) to encourage existing private sector enterprises to become involved in the management, the selection of courses, and the development of curricula in public sector higher education institutions; and (ii) to involve private sector enterprises in the training of higher education students in both public and private sector institutions.¹⁵ For the national agricultural research project, the Directorate for Agricultural Production of the Ministry of Agriculture is the implementing agency. The national agricultural extension and research project seeks to improve farmers' agricultural productivity and incomes by providing support to an integrated farmer-orientated agricultural extension system and a demand-driven research system.¹⁶

In addition to livestock development projects and a wide range of rural development projects, the **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)** sponsors a **national microfinance programme**. The overall objective is to help create and maintain a system of properly supervised microfinance institutions (MFIs) whose services are accessible to all segments of the population, including those living in rural areas.¹⁷

expand coffee production from 120 to 600 tons per annum. The plant is located in Bafoussam, Western Cameroon, the main coffee producing region of the country. This investment enables SAICAM to expand domestic and export sales, increase coffee grower revenue, earn foreign exchange, and create new jobs.

¹⁴ IFC also extended assistance worth \$1,000,000 to *Elevage Promotion Afrique* (EPA), a major poultry producer in Douala, Cameroon. The project attempts to modernise and expand existing poultry breeding and production facilities. The project will increase supply to local consumers of a more affordable source of animal protein, also generate new jobs, and increase revenue to small poultry breeders and corn producers.

¹⁵ Some other clear objectives of the education project are to: (i) insist on following up regularly the employment situation of students in the year following their graduation, and the attitude of employers to the training these students have received; (ii) allow a range of different types of courses depending on market demand; short courses requested by employers, sub-degree, degree, or post graduate, regular full time, part time, or evening; (iii) encourage institutions to raise a substantial proportion of the non salary recurrent resources they will need from non-governmental sources; and (iv) allow institutions full financial autonomy and control in the utilization of all self generated resources. The project components include: (a) the strengthening of existing disciplines through the introduction of new training options requested by local industries; (b) the addition of new disciplines and system coherence; and (c) institutional development, evaluation and follow-up, and sustainability of policy initiatives.

¹⁶ The project consists of five major components. First, the agricultural extension component which includes participatory diagnosis of farmers' production problems, transfer of farming techniques, particularly to resource-poor and women farmers, and monitoring of the progress of extension and research activities. Second, the agricultural research component which strengthens IRAD (Institute for Agricultural Research and Development) research capacity, support operating cost of on-station research work, and train IRAD research staff. The third component supports staff training, assess the market for private agricultural advisory services, and improve human resource management. The fourth component assists the development of contacts between farmer groups and private sector suppliers of agricultural inputs and crop processing equipment, traders, industrial purchasers of agricultural products. Fifth, the village community initiatives pilot project assists village communities to identify and agree upon rural development priority problems and help the various services and development organisations to provide the quality services needed.

¹⁷ Overall, the project focuses on expanding and strengthening MFIs and on broadening the range and coverage of financial services. More specifically, the IFAD project's objectives are to: (i) increase the ability of government

In the natural resource sub-sector, **forest resource conservation projects are pursued in the Mount Cameroon region, Kilum, and Korup.** The Mount Cameroon Project (MCP)¹⁸, for instance, attempts to promote prudent and effective use of forest resources. The main objective of the project is the conservation and sustainable management of the rich biodiversity of Mount Cameroon and its environs, through forging partnerships with local communities and other stakeholders such as the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) and the medicinal plant exporter PLANTECAM (to encourage the protection and sustainable cropping of *Prunus africana* and other medicinal plants within the forests in the region). The MCP further encourages research initiatives to provide baseline information for the formulation of forest management plans and optimum methods of conservation. They also provide technical advice to bee keepers and to individual farmers owning tree nurseries. **The overall aim of the project is to ensure sustainable utilisation of Cameroon's natural resources and improvement of rural wellbeing.**

Some successful rural development schemes could be identified in other developing countries. These could serve as lessons for Cameroon. For example, Nigeria has over the past three decades introduced several programs aimed at the betterment of the rural dwellers through increase in agricultural production. The most interesting rural development scheme is the Directorate of Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). With its headquarters in Lagos and branches in each state capital, **DFRRI¹⁹ had as its main tasks the opening up of the rural areas with the active collaboration of the rural dwellers themselves, the provision of cottage industries, good feeder roads, rural housing and electricity, rural water supply, improved seedlings and plants for**

institutions to implement the national microfinance policy and establish a permanent consultative mechanism that brings together concerned government departments, MFI networks and professional associations; (ii) support the consolidation and professional development of MFI networks and the expansion of their outreach; (iii) replicate, through action research, innovative approaches to rural microfinance; and (iii) capitalise on and disseminate experiences and best practices. In sum, the Government of Cameroon's ability to reduce poverty and ensure sustainable rural livelihoods for its population depends on the availability of viable microfinance services and networks.

¹⁸ The MCP is a multilateral initiative funded by the German Technical Agency (GTZ), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) formerly Overseas Development Administration (ODA), the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) of the World Bank and the Government of Cameroon.

¹⁹ In 1986 the Federal Government of Nigeria established the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) with a mandate for rural development. The goal as clearly stated by the Head of state: "Rural Development Policy will move away from past narrow sectoral preoccupation with the generation of food and fibre surpluses to overall formulation of a National Rural Development Strategy with emphasis on the alleviation of rural life." The objectives of DFRRI included (i) improving the quality of their lives and their standard of living, ii) diversifying and improving the rural infrastructures through the provision of feeder roads and waterways, and water and sanitation, (iii) utilising the enormous resources of the rural areas to lay a solid foundation for the development of the nation by linking the security, growth, and developmental activities of the rural areas with those of the urban centres. All told, DFRRI seems a home-grown formula for rural development whose successes and failures could be useful lessons for Cameroon and other nations in the sub-Saharan region.

agriculture and rural mass literacy program (Eka,1994).²⁰ In Nigeria, efforts are also intensified to improve agriculture and the rural sector through other public programmes such as: (i) 1995 - The River Basins and Rural Development Authority, (ii) 1993 - The National Accelerated Food Production Programme, (iii) 1980 - The Green Revolution, (iv) 1976 - Operation Feed the Nation, (v) 1975 - The Agricultural Development Projects.

In China (1977-85), India (1975-89), Mexico (1970s) and in Indonesia (1980s), food staples and output growth and access to substantial shares of land for farm work for the poor (due to land reforms) have been instrumental in rural poverty reduction. In India rural and urban poverty fell faster when farm output grew (faster industrial growth did not speed up either rural or urban poverty reduction) (See Lipton, 2001). Unlike in Latin America where a tiny proportion of the land is controlled by the poor and large firms own greater proportion of land. In Africa, a major fraction of land is held by the poor in small and fragmented holdings. Hence, employing few people per hectare, agricultural growth will impact positively on poverty reduction than in Latin America. However, this does not imply poverty reduction depends in local food farming forever. As intimated in Lipton (2001) a time comes for poverty transition. In the 1980s and 90s most East and Southeast Asian countries made great strides in parlaying pro-poor farm growth into pro-poor cash crop, rural non-farm and rural development (e.g. China's township and village enterprises). Success came from farm growth which was fast and broad based (e.g. the smallholder systems in China, Taiwan and Korea) after land reform. From this, sprung a broad class of potential entrepreneurs, savers and managers sufficiently food secure to serve first as progressive small farmers, cash crop growers and then as buyers of non-farm products (Lipton, *ibid.*). **In sum, low-income countries that achieved substantial poverty reduction did so initially by getting resources to the rural and farming poor. This led to increased incomes from affordable and productive employment and self employment on small farms.** These are lessons for Cameroon.

In developed nations, the state has played a big positive role in rural poverty reduction by providing public goods, ensuring basic income for all people, building small-farm productivity by supplying the poor with schools and health, and safeguards against land inequality. This has not been the case in most developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. In Cameroon state action is needed to shift resources toward programmes geared at improving the wellbeing of the vulnerable and poor rural masses. Better health and education make employment growth more pro-

²⁰ Information from DFRRRI revealed that the department recorded increased performance in many activities in 1993. With a total budgetary allocation of 350 million Naira, the Directorate constructed a total of 90,857km of rural roads and 22,267 communities benefited from its rural water supply scheme while 708 communities benefited from the rural electrification projects in 1993 alone (CBN, 1993).

poor, but the poor seldom afford them. The rural poor can benefit from the ongoing economic liberalisation, but this will be much easier if they obtain the tools not just to reach markets but to compete in them. This implies education, good advice linked to competitive credit, better rural roads, and means of transport and storage. Many essentials (such as farm research, rural roads, irrigation and finance) needed to achieve early productivity growth, tend to yield social dividends. On examining rural development strategies for poverty reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa, CLEAVER (1997) concludes based on policy reviews of thirty-two countries in the sub-region, that 'bad' and inappropriate policies significantly influence the performance of the agricultural sector. Nation states that have better infrastructure, fertiliser and better extension²¹ policies observe higher economic growth rates. **The lesson drawn from Cleaver (1997) is that policy matters, and it is a crucial ingredient for sustainable rural development and poverty alleviation.**

Some strategies could therefore be recommended to increase agricultural production through rural development efforts in Cameroon. This is summarised in Figure 4. Figure 4 shows a rural development model for Cameroon (CAMRD) and the agenda for future action to revitalise Cameroon's agriculture. The CAMRD model explicitly links rural development in Cameroon with the agricultural sector and agribusiness development. It is based on the synergy and complementarity between a developed agriculture industry and the rural area. The model has four key items.

1. **Agrarian development.** In the model this is associated with access to productive assets and increased income opportunities. The provision of infrastructure, especially access roads in rural areas to enhance agricultural output and minimise cost of produce evacuation should be tackled more vigorously in the years ahead by the relevant government agency. Such investment in infrastructure are pro-poor and do generate off-farm activity for farmers to augment their incomes. Empirical analysis (e.g. HANAN, 1998) shows large benefits from extending roads into remote rural areas, with much of these gains going to poorer households. In addition, the downward trend in farm support services (research and extension) should be reversed in order to generate and make more appropriate and sustainable technologies available to farmers. In addition, technical progress in seeds (and water) remains the most important resource that the poor can acquire. We cannot pretend that rural poverty and squalor can be eliminated by relying on indigenous technical skills alone (even though they are important), or relying on

²¹ See e.g. BIRKENHAEUSER *et al.*, 1991; BINDLISH and EVENSON, 1997; HOLDEN *et al.*, 1999, on the economic importance of extension systems. Cameroon has to strive to develop its rural areas to improve the quality of life of rural dwellers and to mitigate the problems of rural-urban migration, at the same time maximising the vast potential for sustainable development inherent in the countryside. The provision of better seeds, microfinance, rural public works, land

communication (in the absence of farm growth) or relying solely on biotechnology. Only state-led public action, supplementing, drawing on and providing incentives to private agricultural research can address these constraints. The dominant view in the development economics literature is that growth in agriculture and rural non-agriculture complement and reinforce each other in raising incomes of the rural people (see e.g. REARDON, 1997 & 2001; REARDON *et al.*, 2001; BARRETT, *et al.*, 2001a,b). However, the extent of complementarity and synergy between the sectors depend on the nature and density of rural public infrastructure.

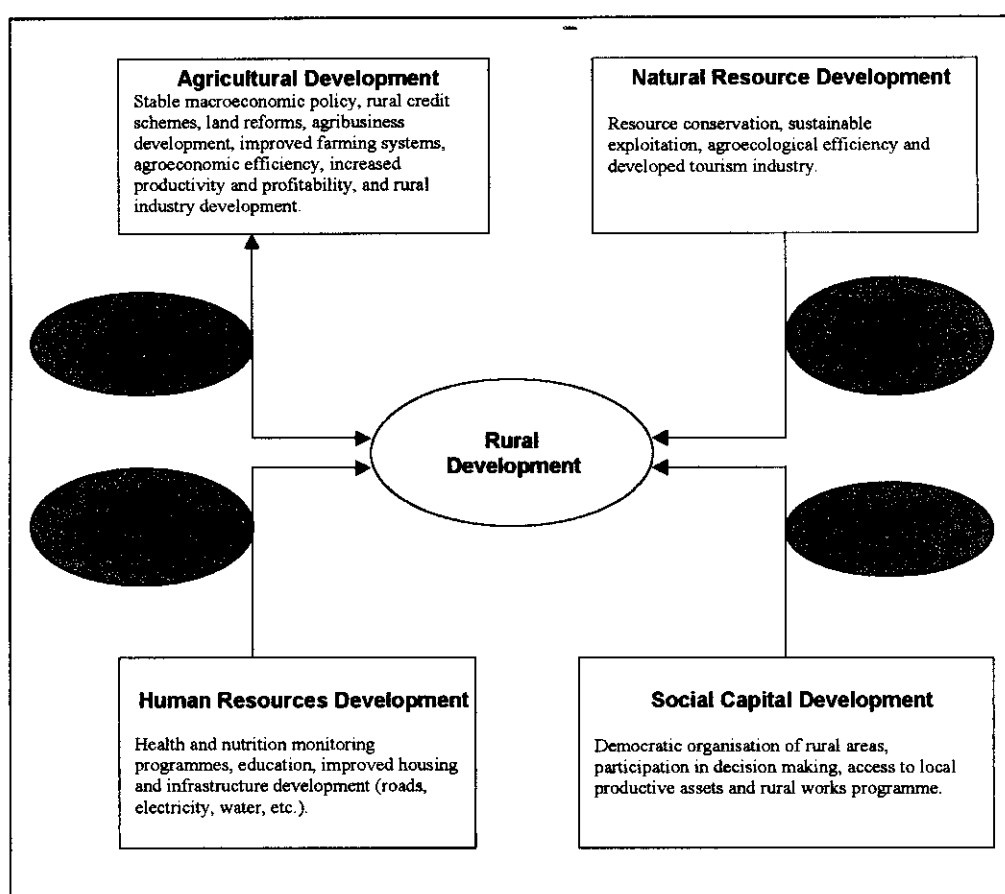


Figure 4. A Rural Development Model (CAMRD) for Cameroon.

2. **Natural resource development (protecting natural and cultural assets).** The rural population should be encouraged to diversify its activities to ensure increasing productivity, more employment opportunities and rising incomes. There should be gradual diversification of the rural economy into fisheries and forestry. These activities and related services such as

reform and overall attempts to get productive resources to the rural poor may be an effective way to attack urban poverty, by reducing the flow of migrants to the cities where they push wages down.

distribution and transport will generate more employment and also create additional incomes for the rural population.²²

3. **Human capital development (education and quality of life).** There must be an expansion and increased investment in people centred development (i.e. education, health and rural infrastructure). A key resource to enable rural society to move from reducing their poverty by better food farming towards doing so by non-farm employment is education. Literacy and numeracy do help poor people to select and adopt (or adapt) new farm methods, and non farm activities better and faster (See ADESINA and ZINNAH, 1992). This is critical for the development of human resources,²³ to increase labour input and hence agricultural output.

4. **Social capital development (increased participation of rural communities in decision making process and access to markets).** Rural inhabitants should be encouraged to form co-operative societies, especially producer and marketing co-operatives. Organising farmers into co-operative activities would lead to sustained technological improvements and a steady increase in the use of modern inputs, better seeds, machinery, and an overall reduction of farm-gate costs. This will further enhance opportunities for increased levels of working capital,²⁴ better infrastructure and post-harvest facilities. Despite recent macroeconomic measures to ensure that agriculture is competitive, e.g. currency devaluation, the benefits have not accrued to the small and rural farmers. This is not only because of inadequate investment in public goods (education, research, health and infrastructure) but also due to marketing constraints and the inherent inadequacies of an unregulated market system, which is well understood in developed countries. In the developed OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) nations, laws and institutions have been created against monopolies to protect consumers and the small business, and elaborated system of taxation and social security to protect the weak and assist the poor, especially the rural poor (AZIZ, 2001). However, it behoves development experts

²² Rural development creates a large taxable base from which the government can generate the revenue needed to finance growth-enhancing social infrastructure in urban and rural areas. At the moment Cameroon derive tax revenues from a small tax base. As a consequence, agriculture is tax-burdened, thus acting as a disincentive to increased output. To the extent that rural development can stimulate output and broaden the tax base of the economy, it can lead to lower tax rates, and hence to greater work effort and to higher rates of growth.

²³ In general, rural people (with relatively low levels of education) are obstinate to change, fear the unknown and unwilling to adopt new farming techniques due to economic and sociocultural reasons, and as such they need intensive education programme aimed at improving upon and imbibing in them new farming practices, attitude, values and skill as to increase productivity and better their standard of living.

²⁴ The availability of credit through co-operative scheme will support productivity growth for agricultural smallholders and small producers of the rural sector. In addition, policy makers can seize the opportunity to usher in reforms in the rural credit for small farmers, in line with pioneer schemes in Bangladesh (e.g. Grameen Bank) and India (e.g. *Kisan-Farmer* credit cards).

why at the global level multilateral companies, financial institutions (e.g. IMF) and rich OECD countries fail to recognise the impact of social policies that take the governments away from the people and the poor and conditionalities/constraints imposed on social security policies. Increased liberalisation and anti-rural/anti-poor fiscal restructuring characterise loan conditionalities imposed on developing country borrowing by the IMF/World Bank or OECD countries. Further, trends towards globalisation as a result of Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture for the World Trade Organisation (which in principle is likely to give small-farmers access to lucrative world markets) may spell death for many small and rural farmers in Cameroon who will lose much of the urban markets to their major cities to subsidised imports from developed nations. According to MCCALLA (2001) policies of the rich OECD countries which protect and subsidise domestic agriculture, are major culprits holding back agricultural-led growth and development in many poor countries.²⁵ Unless concerted steps are taken, the small farmer in countries like Cameroon is doomed to a life of poverty and isolation in remote rural areas away from urban centre and the potential lure for migration into urban centres to provide cheap non-farm labour.

In sum, therefore, rural development in Cameroon will require adequate access to production inputs, education, training and marketing as well as the creation of an institutional framework to benefit rural communities. This can only be achieved on a sustainable basis through the active involvement of local people. To achieve sustainable growth in Cameroon, rural development is imperative because most of the nation's natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, are located in rural areas. Rural development is likely to have a salutary effect on the whole economy. **Hervetas, CIDA, World Bank and other international and local NGOs in Cameroon should continue pursuing better ways of assisting the poor rural region as they draw lessons from on-going projects and programmes.** In an effort to improve the productive capacity of agriculture and raise the standards of living of rural communities, they should support programmes that are aimed at

²⁵ The anomaly of domestic agriculture policy is that developed countries tend to subsidise heavily a declining agricultural sector which contributes less than 5% of GDP, while poor countries where agriculture is the dominant sector tend to either directly or indirectly tax agriculture. In a world linked by trade this becomes a major issue for poverty reduction and raising the standard of living in rural societies. Developed countries' policy objectives are to support farmers' incomes and they have historically done so by supporting farm prices, making supplemental direct payments to hold internal prices above world price (and using export subsidies and border controls) leading to an increase in exports which are then dumped in the world market, depressing world prices and increasing price instability. This negatively impacts developing countries such as Cameroon and reduces foreign exchange earnings making it more difficult to get out of the debt, thus depriving governments from ploughing accrued profit into social programmes. Reductions in subsidies to developed countries' farmers plus opening up of their markets would be a boon for developing countries such as Cameroon. It will definitely lead to high and more stable world prices and improved rural incomes.

increasing access to productive resources by smallholder farmers, and enhance rural welfare through sustainable development.

5. Concluding Remarks

The promotion of rural development and pro-poor growth is the back-bone of a successful approach to achieving better living standards for the rural sector. A determined attack on poverty and underdevelopment will require the formulation of a new development paradigm which recognises the role of the state in meeting the needs of rural people. This will serve as a catalyst for more traditional prescriptions of agricultural development that include high priority for small farmer agriculture, favourable macroeconomic policies to improve the terms of trade for agriculture, building participatory institutions for credit marketing and research, and promoting opportunities for non-farm employment activities on a large scale. Some of the actions called for in this paper are not new. However, what is important is that these issues must be given higher priority and be cast in the new and changing global environment, taking into account new opportunities, risks and constraints.

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