

# THE IMPACT OF DIASPORA AND THE DEMOGRAPHICS IN CAMEROON

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**Optimism is the muscle that gets strengthened with use.**

## INTRODUCTION

Feedback from four articles posted in December by the Trade and Investment Assistance Center (TIAC), on Cameroon and CEMAC was interesting. The piece on electrification was the most read, followed by that on US-Africa trade relationship. The articles on branding and entrepreneurship and a hub economy were the least read or commented upon. Maybe because of the length of the articles ...just kidding.

The responses on electrification, were tied to innovation and infrastructure development. The piece on US- Africa received comments on poor governance and the increasing role of China in SSA. The kicker was that the articles on Cameroon and the region; albeit the fact that they touched on the human component received the least comments.

*In the continent and Cameroon the buzz at the moment is on the demographic dividend (youth bulge and women) and diaspora. The life wire for the fourth industrial revolution for Cameroon will depend on how we manage our human and natural resources.*

Some countries in Southern and East Africa, have understood this, and have taken adequate steps to that end.

The country is blessed with flora, fauna, extractives, arable land, sea port, shared borders,



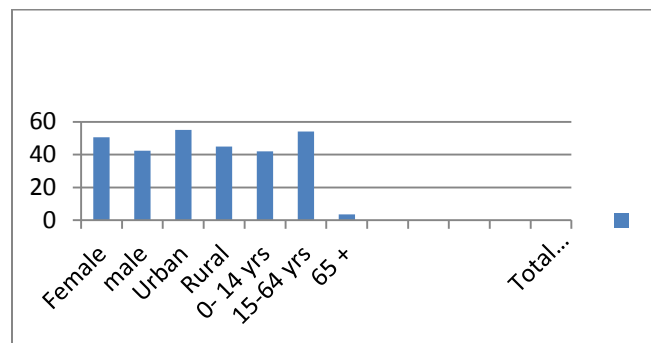
industry, and a host of other factors. If the human component is not fine-tuned, economic transformation will stall, even if equipped with the right infrastructure and technology.

## DEMOGRAPHICS AND DIASPORA

The “Resource Curse” narrative was birthed because; countries in SSA with huge revenues from extractives are mired in wars and stay poor. The AU has received 18 of the 22 required signatures for the ratification of the AfCFTA. African countries in a common market will benefit from tariffs exempts, visa free borderless travel in a market of 1.2 billion people by 2030. Regarding the “New Frontier “Cameroon with potential and opportunities for diversification, tapped and untapped natural resources, climate smart policies should be part of this new wave through comparative and competitive advantages. Innovation and technology should revolutionize the current resources both human and natural for economic transformation.

This, demands we take into consideration the population of Cameroon, and distill the data, to valorize each component.

The population of Cameroon as of 2017, was about approximately 23.5million of which 50.6 % were female and 49.4 where male. The Urban population was at 55 % while the rural population was at 45%. Of this population, 42% ranged in age from 0-14 years old, while 54% was made up of 15-64 year olds .Those above 65+ years made up 3.6% of the population. This was sourced from The African Statistical Year book 2018, jointly produced by the AU, ECA and the AfDB.



The observed peaks in the charts identify female, urban and rural populations as being higher than the others. The urban population is made up of mostly young people. The increasing number of women adds an important vector in understanding the demographic dividend, and further emphasizes the importance of the human component in Cameroon. The lack of population data on diaspora is not insignificant, and is an issue which needs to be addressed.

Rising urbanization rates, increase in women valorization and diaspora integration (education, knowledge, expertise and remittances) is a great opportunity. The youth bulge and its significance need not be over stated. They are the future of Cameroon and part of the bed rock to couch the “New Frontier” narrative. Most of the youth today including graduates are maintaining families while living in poverty. Some do not have any formal training or skill set. Capacity building, training, education and health of the

youth are critical for the exploitation of their potential, to grow wealth and increase productivity. The opportunities for Cameroon will depend on how the youth bulge is addressed.

The proper valorization of women in work/input will have a socio-economic impact. It will improve women's health and reduce infant mortality, improve female education and reduce violence against women caused by dependency. The increased participation of women as economic operators is an important vector in emancipation. They play a fundamental role in Cameroon in respect to peace and stability. "Women make up 75% of traders in food markets, in the urban and rural areas day and night. They are the majority in the fashion industry, as tailors, in education in private day care centers and schools, in restaurants and eateries in the main cities, in private health care centers as nurses and are driving the informal sector" *an integrated and inclusive economic paradigm for the CEMAC region and Cameroon*. Innocent M. Anchang CEO, TIAC.

.With advances in ICT, online payment systems etc. clerical jobs will soon be replaced by technology. This will disproportionately affect women .There are programs for capacity building provided by government and NGO's. More needs to be done in these regard.

Cameroonian diaspora population is highly skilled, with about 400.000 working in the continent as experts; meanwhile 40% of those in Asia, Europe and the US have highly skilled jobs. The socio-cultural ties of some in diaspora to the motherland, coupled with increasing protectionism and xenophobia, in the West are amongst the reasons for "reverse migration" in some countries. Today more Mexicans are returning home as compared to those entering the US. In Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire, there are well formulated programs for diaspora.

Diaspora from Cameroon has similarities with those from other countries, in their desire to return home and participate in economic development.

*There is need for targeted and structured programs complimented with policies and regulations attractive to diaspora to facilitate their integration.*

Diaspora has to exercise patience while working in Cameroon, as the modules and administrative systems in some cases are not comparable.

### **ANALYSIS**

The focus on electrification, technology and manufacturing should be leveraged on the human component. The sampling method and interpretation of the responses to the articles, was controlled since it was not representative. TIAC considered the responses as a limited survey, and used it to make certain interpretations by extrapolation.

*Properly evaluating the demographic dividend and the increasing role of diaspora, is as important if not more important than the emphasis on technology and industry. The human factor has to be developed to better understand and use technological.*

In this analysis the term “entrepreneurs” will be used interchangeably to include youth, women and diaspora. The challenges for entrepreneurs and businesses include access to finance, human capital and governance. This demands Cameroon create a paradigm suited to address these issues. Entrepreneurs should identify low cost solutions modeled to bypass administrative bottlenecks through brick by brick layering of projects in some cases or lateral cooperation channels.

DFI’s and governments finance large projects in most cases in electrification and infrastructure. These are not sufficient to address poverty. With all the electrification and roads, if the exponential human component is not well exploited, poverty will increase, debt levels will continue to rise, and it will be another missed opportunity.

*The underpinnings of the economy of Cameroon, is the buzz generated by the government in suites of policies and regulatory reforms in regards to demographics and diaspora. The private sector has to understand the complexity in application and be informed on how to manage their expectations.*

Entrepreneurs have to be visionary, creative and solution driven Government and DFI’s with deep pockets are complimentary actors. Wealth creation and economic growth, is a task better understood by stakeholders and actors when they are active participants.

There are many projects and assistance programs from government, DFI’s and NGO’s to encourage and assist entrepreneurs. The appointment of Mr. Bassiliken III Achille, as Minister of Small and Medium size enterprises is a step in the right direction. He has demonstrated over the year’s mastery of issues related to trade and commerce. Partnering with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will play a significant role in addressing diaspora integration. The Investment Promotion Agency and CARPA provide accompanying services to interested stake holders. MinPostel is promising cheaper and faster broadband by 2020.

The current theme of opportunities, in Cameroon is leveraged on natural resources and the human component .To better exploit these opportunities there is need for a well-designed and accountable platform. Economic development rides on efficient and effective processes .Most entrepreneurs do not trust the system, and equivocally are not aware of government initiatives and programs.

TIAC defined “**Constructive Engagement**” *In the piece on branding entrepreneurship for investment in the CEMAC region*, as “Local aggregates in an ecosystem of entrepreneurs, technology and

finance. The opportunities in agri-business and renewables given technology are reasons for localized solutions. This will match finance models adapted and suited to specific projects. ICT and technological advancement, youth bulge and a growing consumer base, have opened new avenues for wealth creation”.  
*Innocent M. Anchang CEO TIAC.*

A farmer should have communication channels, with investors in energy (i.e. renewable) for processing or water resources that pay for themselves, while creating jobs. This will attract investment in agro-industry, for transformation and manufacturing as lateral or vertical constructs.

The AfCFTA, coupled with the renewed impetus for inter-regional and intra-regional trade will provide opportunities for Cameroon. The “New Frontier “narrative is rife, and nations that will fail to appropriate themselves to a market of 1.2 billion people, visa free travel, air transport cooperation and reduced tariffs, will have a challenge to grow economically. Standards and norms and balanced trade, have affected the ability of Cameroon to compete in global markets. There is overreliance on imports especially in products that are either grown or sourced from Cameroon like rice and sugar. Cameroon should encourage member countries of CEMAC to join the AfCFTA to improve on inter regional competitiveness.

DFI’s like the AfDB, Islamic Finance, AFD, Bretton Woods and a host of others are accompanying AGOA, Power Africa, Climate funds, Migration funds, Compact Africa, CIF in economic development. The private sector in industry, banking and telecommunication has to partner with DFI’s on local initiatives in providing localized and contextualized financing solutions. Entrepreneurs should look for opportunities in the value chain, where there is friction and provide local solutions. Proper identification of friction, will guide on the applicable technology and not the other way round.

TIAC has observed that access to most of these services, is protocol heavy and burdensome. There is need for increased visibility and accessibility. Channels of communication should be expanded, to improve on messaging in both the private and public sectors, with win-win strategies. To maintain or sustain the momentum, there is need for synergy through resources management pools accessible to entrepreneurs.

The same people talk of solutions in faraway platforms and conferences. The multiple conferences and speeches to entrepreneurs, who cannot afford travel, and internet connectivity, has created echo chambers.

*TIAC has advised over the years on the importance of legal regimes in entity formation, business registration, signing of non-disclosures and intellectual property protection through registration. Lawyering has to be intelligent, with the requisite understanding of trade regulations, and accompanying legal regimes. The increasing role for lawyers in this era of innovation and disruption is as business leaders.*

## **CONCLUSION**

TIAC has interviewed government Ministers, GM's of Public institutions, investors and entrepreneurs, in Cameroon and abroad. The consensus was that most deals could not financially close. The private sector and entrepreneurs have to strategize on how diaspora, women and the youth can work together for economic development. Government has to demonstrate inclusiveness through transparency and good governance .Efforts to fight graft have to be comprehensive and not selective. Government has stayed on course with a positive attitude towards economic development. Civil society is challenged to reverse the narrative of doom

Given the crisis in the NW and SW regions, concurrent with dialogue there is need for instructive conversations on economic empowerment of the human component. A prerequisite for peace and stability, is an economic environment with opportunities for all.

*Optimism is the muscle that gets strengthened with use.*

*Disclaimer, any wrong spellings or misinterpretations are not intentional and TIAC is prepared to correct and adjust to speak to the original intent.*

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