

## Economic Development and Employment in Eastern Cameroun

*The former territory of Cameroun under French administration attained independence on 1 January 1960 and became a Member of the I.L.O. on 7 June of the same year. Later, after the referendum of 1961, it was joined by the southern part of the former Cameroons under British administration and is now a federal State composed of two states : Eastern Cameroun and Western Cameroun.*

*The problems facing this young nation are in general the same as those of the majority of the other African republics<sup>1</sup> : urban unemployment, rural underemployment, lack of skilled manpower, a limited money economy, and demographic and economic imbalance between the various regions. Many Africans believe that these problems can be solved only by state-controlled central planning of economic and social development. Eastern Cameroun has already started along these lines by adopting a five-year plan in December 1960.<sup>2</sup> In the article that follows are sketched the general outline of the five-year plan, the employment situation in Eastern Cameroun and the economic and social prospects and problems of the country.*

Eastern Cameroun, which forms the principal part of the new Republic of Cameroun, has an Atlantic coastline only 125 miles long, but covers a total area of 166,000 square miles a little to the north of the Equator. It is roughly in the shape of a right-angled triangle, the base of which, running east-west, is about 425 miles long, while the north-south side stretches inland for some 800 miles as far as Lake Chad. It is a rapidly developing country which owes its present relative prosperity to agriculture and forestry, but which is also already beginning to industrialise itself.

It had been considered until recently that the country had 3.2 million inhabitants, incidentally very unevenly distributed.<sup>3</sup> The rate of population growth was usually estimated at 1 per cent. per year. However, a social and demographic survey<sup>4</sup>, based on a 5 per cent. sample, which has already been carried out in northern Cameroun and will progressively be extended to cover the whole of the country, may produce revised and more accurate statistics. An extrapolation of the partial results so far obtained would apparently entail an upward

<sup>1</sup> See "Employment Position and Problems in Chad", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. LXXXV, No. 5, May 1962, pp. 500-507, and S. A. BALIMA : "Notes on the Social and Labour Situation in the Republic of Upper Volta", *ibid.*, Vol. LXXXII, No. 4, Oct. 1960, pp. 358-362.

<sup>2</sup> The development plan having been adopted before the referendum, the present article deals only with Eastern Cameroun.

<sup>3</sup> It is also estimated that nine-tenths of the population are concentrated in only about one-tenth of the country's total area.

<sup>4</sup> This social and demographic survey is being supplemented by three investigations into nutrition, agriculture, and family budgets and living standards.

adjustment of the earlier estimates and show a population of between 3.5 and 3.6 million inhabitants with an annual growth rate of 1.5 per cent.

It is difficult to gauge the living standards of the people of Cameroun. Comprehensive data on the subject are scarce because the few available statistics relating to the national accounts are largely estimates. In 1960 the Cameroun national income was estimated to be about 70,000 million CFA francs.<sup>1</sup> About 33 per cent. of this total appears to be accounted for by subsistence farming. Wages represent only 24 per cent. of the total income, and of these wages, 39 per cent. are paid by the Government.

The population of Cameroun, as has been seen, is also very unevenly distributed, and this is not counterbalanced by differences in soil fertility. As a result, there are considerable variations in personal income as between one area and another, as can be appreciated by comparing the average national income of 21,500 francs per head (which is assumed in the five-year development plan to be valid for 1960) with the some 5,000 francs per head of the active population, which is the most reasonable estimate of the income of the poorest mountain peoples in north Cameroun. As a yardstick, it may be added that the annual wage of a labourer in the capital, Yaoundé, is 66,000 francs a year, assuming he works 250 days at 264 francs a day.

However sketchy these facts may be and however imperfectly they may reflect the true picture, they are enough to explain the acute awareness by the people and the authorities of the need for national economic development. This desire is by no means new, and the drive to build up a modern economy has not begun overnight. Nevertheless, the granting of independence to the Republic of Cameroun has given it a new impulse and clearer direction.

But the launching of development plans is apt to be a meaningless exercise unless an attempt is simultaneously made to change men as well as things. Material achievements will have only a limited impact unless the workers are trained to make the best possible use of them. A study of the human factor is therefore the key to any proper appreciation of the prospects and chances of future development. These considerations to some extent govern the layout of this article.

#### DEVELOPMENT POLICIES: THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Even before Cameroun became independent, two four-year development plans had been put into effect between 1946 and 1959 under the sponsorship of the Economic and Social Development Investment Fund (F.I.D.E.S.).<sup>2</sup> The first plan was concerned mainly with building the infrastructure, while in the second, loans for the expansion of production bulked much larger—40 per cent. of the total as against 4 per cent.

When Cameroun became independent, it was decided to draw up a national five-year plan based on the natural pattern and actual prospects of the country's economic and social development. In preparing this plan the Government called in two research agencies, the Research and Planning Association (S.O.G.E.P.) and the Research Association for Economic and Social Development (S.E.D.E.S.), the latter being parti-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Société générale d'Etudes et de Planification: *Travaux préparatoires au plan de développement économique et social* (Paris, S.O.G.E.P., 1960), Vol. 3, p. 9. The CFA franc is equal to 0.02 new French francs. All values in this article are expressed in CFA francs.

<sup>2</sup> See also G. LEDUC: "Social Credit Societies: a French Experiment in Africa", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 1, Jan. 1958, pp. 1-18.

cularly concerned with working out the requirements of a policy of industrialisation within the general development plan. On the basis of the reports of these two agencies and after a great deal of work in committee, the final version was approved by the National Assembly on 31 December 1960.

This plan forms part of a long-term development programme designed to keep up the rate of income growth per head which occurred during the last decade (50 per cent. between 1948 and 1958) and to double it over the next 20 years.

In broad outline the programme can be summed up as follows :

In human terms the plan sets out to provide a more balanced diet, to extend or provide education to meet the needs of economic growth and to make more efficient use of the potential labour force available. For these last two purposes it will be necessary to adapt syllabuses and teaching methods to ensure that trained workers are also useful citizens and do not become idlers who merely swell the ranks of the urban unemployed ; and to improve the seriously unbalanced distribution of manpower throughout the country.

In economic terms a threefold effort will have to be made : to develop agricultural resources, to foster a money economy<sup>1</sup> and to promote selective industrialisation.

At the regional level the aim is to secure a better balance between the north and the south, mainly through the economic development of the north, which at present lags behind, and also by tackling the problem of over-population on the western plateaux.

Taking the main branches of the economy in turn, the general aims of the five-year plan can be summarised as follows :

(a) In agriculture it calls for the expansion of export crops (especially cotton, cocoa, groundnuts, meat, palm oil and palm kernels<sup>2</sup>) and the encouragement of forms of production which will improve the domestic food supply and diet (by increasing the output of food crops, placing greater emphasis on fisheries and meeting domestic needs for fats).

(b) In industry there are relatively few new investments under the five-year plan. The schemes which have been approved are for an aluminium rolling mill, two cement works, a spinning and weaving mill, a blanket mill, a plastics factory, a match factory and (in the food industry) a flour mill, a biscuit factory and a meat canning plant.

(c) As regards the infrastructure and transport, a number of road, harbour and airport improvement schemes have been decided on chiefly with the aim of improving north-south communications and enlarging the capacity of the seaports of Douala and Kribi, and the river port at Garoua. Special mention should also be made of the plan to build the first stretch (between Yaoundé and Ngaoundéré) of the Douala-Chad railway, which will also help to open up the north of the country.

<sup>1</sup> This will simultaneously lead to improved nutrition and help to bring production on to the market.

<sup>2</sup> Because of marketing difficulties, the plan does not provide for any expansion in coffee output. The target of 50,000 tons, although appreciably higher than the 1959 output of 30,000 tons, does not imply any increase in the area under cultivation. The expansion will be due to the entry into production of trees that are as yet too young to bear. In the case of bananas the plan does not anticipate any increase in exports, but provides for the replacement of the Gros-Michel variety (which is now cultivated) by the Poyo variety, which is more resistant to disease and more easily transportable.

The Cameroun plan relies heavily for its success on the organised exertions of the people whose wellbeing it is designed to promote. A study of the employment situation and the country's human potential is therefore essential in any assessment of the plan's chances of achieving its aims.

## THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

### *General*

According to the preparatory work carried out for the economic and social development plan<sup>1</sup>, out of the total population of 3,200,000<sup>2</sup> the potential active population (persons of both sexes aged between 16 and 50) comprises 1,836,000 persons, i.e. 828,000 men and 1,008,000 women, or 57 per cent. of the population. Also according to the same source, 600,000 women are employed in the growing and marketing of foodstuffs in the south-central and western areas and between 300,000 and 350,000 in the north. The remainder do not appear to have any activity other than housework. As regards men, table I gives a breakdown of the economic activities in which they are engaged.

TABLE I. BREAKDOWN OF THE POTENTIAL ACTIVE MALE POPULATION BY SECTION OF THE ECONOMY

Section	Independent	Wage earners
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining .	470,000	40,000
Handicrafts, industry . . . . .	30,000	37,000
Commerce, services . . . . .	20,000	25,000
Administration . . . . .	.	27,000
Unemployed . . . . .	180,000	

Source : *Travaux préparatoires au plan de développement économique et social*, op. cit., p. 4.

These figures show that, if women are also included, 91 per cent. of the active population are employed in the primary sector. The part played by wage earners in production is very small, since they account only for 8 per cent. of the active population and about 4 per cent. of the total population, while one-fifth of them are employed in the public sector alone.

The geographical distribution of the active population is just as uneven and is closely related to the variations in population density. As a result there are heavy concentrations of potential manpower in certain areas (especially the Bamiléké country in the west and in the Diamaré and Margui-Wandala country in the north) where resources, particularly in agriculture, are strained almost to the limit and are even being exhausted by overcropping, whereas other areas are practically uninhabited (such as Bamba Ngoko—1.5 inhabitants per square mile; Upper Nyong—5 inhabitants per square mile; Adamaoua—6.7 inhabitants per square mile, etc.), although the soil is good enough for agriculture to be profitable.

<sup>1</sup> By the Research and Planning Association (S.O.G.E.P.).

<sup>2</sup> It will be recalled that these estimates are probably lower than the true figures.

Unfortunately, this uneven distribution of potential manpower shows no sign of improving. The obstacles appear to be of two kinds :

(1) Economic : the lands in the eastern part of the country, for example, are undoubtedly rather inaccessible and to bring them under cultivation (assuming some progress is to be made beyond a closed subsistence economy) would involve the provision of transport facilities, especially since the Upper Nyong river, which has been invaded by weeds, is now no longer navigable ;

(2) Sociological and institutional : ethnic differences and systems of land tenure make it difficult, if not impossible, to resettle on uncultivated land the peoples who are suffering from overcrowding caused by unduly rapid population growth (the population density in some Bamiléké districts, for example, exceeds 780 inhabitants per square mile).

This does not mean, however, that there are no migratory movements in Cameroun or that its peoples are completely rooted to the lands they have traditionally occupied. In fact, there are two kinds of movement.

### *Spontaneous Migration.*

There is a spontaneous movement of emigration from the countryside to the town, with unfortunate consequences. This movement is due to two reasons :

(a) To a large extent it is undoubtedly caused by the dowry system, which often forces a young man to leave his native village to find a job in the town so as to save enough money (usually between 100,000 and 150,000 francs) to pay the traditional dowry required by his future parents-in-law. In such cases he usually goes to the town because only by leaving his family can he secure an income of his own and also because the town is almost the only place where he can earn a cash income.

(b) Another reason may be a local shortage of land caused by overpopulation. For example, it is reckoned that in the Bamiléké country one son out of four in each family will never be able to own any land. His only course, then, is to leave home and, since the system of land tenure usually makes it impossible for him to settle elsewhere, he is forced to try his luck in the towns.

Whatever the reason, this influx into the towns is on a very large scale, as is shown in table II, which gives the estimated populations of the five biggest towns in Eastern Cameroun at various times :

TABLE II. POPULATION OF THE FIVE BIGGEST TOWNS  
IN EASTERN CAMEROUN

Town	1933	1952	1958
Douala . . . . .	26,800	117,000	118,900
Yaoundé . . . . .	6,500	29,800	58,000
Nkongsamba . . . . .	2,100	18,900	25,000
Maroua . . . . .	13,600	16,300	22,700
Ebolowa . . . . .	3,000	10,400	14,300

Most of the other centres of population have expanded to much the same extent.

*Organised Migration.*

There is also an organised movement on a fairly limited scale by the "pagan" peoples—the Kirdis—from the hills down to the plains. These hill people lead a very precarious existence on the borderline of destitution and conditions are tending to become even worse because of the population growth caused by improvements in hygiene and medicine. Various facilities have, therefore, been provided for them in the neighbouring thinly populated plains, where the soil is suitable for farming. Efforts are then made to persuade them to leave their old homes in the hills and settle on this new land. The first experiments along these lines date back to 1953 and it is estimated that about 10,000 of these farmers have now been resettled.

*Unemployment and Underemployment*

This completely lopsided distribution of the population inevitably leaves its mark on the pattern of employment in Cameroun, in both the towns and the countryside.

*Urban Areas.*

Open unemployment is almost entirely an urban phenomenon; because if a worker loses his job even in a rural area he automatically drifts to the towns to look for other work. Owing to the large-scale influx of job seekers into the towns, the number of unemployed workers has risen sharply over the past few years. They were estimated to number 20,000 in Douala in July 1959 or 17 per cent. of the city's population, and there are probably about 10,000 of them in Yaoundé at the present time. Some 90 per cent. of the unemployed are entirely lacking in any skills and because employers have this large pool of unskilled labour to draw on, the workers who can get employment suffer from an insecurity which is socially and vocationally disastrous. Some managements, in order to get round clauses in collective agreements which provide for increases in wages with length of service, unscrupulously dismiss their unskilled workers so as to keep their labour costs down.

The number of unemployed is further swollen by workers of 40 and over who, because of competition from younger men, find it almost impossible to obtain work. Despite this, they remain in the towns instead of going back to their native villages, which they no longer regard as their home.

Underemployment, on the other hand, is difficult to assess in the urban areas. The lavish number of hands doing jobs which in a more advanced economy would require far fewer workers is probably due more to the low productivity characteristic of inadequately trained African workers than to any genuine underemployment. One illustration of this can be seen in the staffing of the big modern Alucam aluminium smelting plant at Edéa, where numbers have already been appreciably reduced and will almost certainly be cut still further during the months ahead from 570 (in July 1961) to about 500, as the workers become more skilled and their productivity improves.

*Rural Areas.*

Open unemployment is not characteristic of rural areas. In any case, as has been seen, there are very few wage earners in the primary sector and any workers who are turned off from the plantations tend to emigrate to the towns.

Underemployment, however, appears to be widespread, although there are not enough statistics to enable its extent to be gauged accurately. One should perhaps hesitate, in referring to this or any other country in the same region, to talk of underemployment because active persons in rural areas devote part of the time left over from farming to essential but somewhat unprofitable activities such as repairing huts, fishing, hunting, collecting wood, etc. But these activities could certainly be concentrated within a shorter space of time than is normally given to them. A good deal of the time that could be used for productive purposes seems to be devoted to resting, admittedly often made necessary by the weather; and, moreover, the general climate is very oppressive.

Unfortunately, there are too few statistics and reports available for it to be possible to estimate with any accuracy the size of the hidden labour reserve represented by this widespread underemployment. As an illustration (which cannot be extrapolated to the other peoples within the country) table III gives a breakdown of the way the Toupouri (a people in northern Cameroun) spend their time. The figures are taken from an excellent article which appeared a few years ago.<sup>1</sup>

TABLE III. OCCUPATIONS OF THE TOUPOURI PEASANT  
(Days per Year)

Occupation	Men			Women		
	Average of 11 men	Maximum	Minimum	Average of 18 women	Maximum	Minimum
Farm work . . . . .	105.5	155.5	66.5	82.1	116.5	42
Miscellaneous (not directly connected with farming) . .	87.5	149	47	106.6	134.5	83
Resting . . . . .	161.5	239	103.5	164.6	192	151
Sickness . . . . .	9.5	30	0	11	40	0

One can certainly agree with the author of the article in question when he says that "working for  $6\frac{1}{2}$  months a year and yet, in a wholly agricultural economy, devoting only  $3\frac{1}{2}$  months to farming is evidence of a marked degree of underemployment". It should be borne in mind, however (as is shown elsewhere in this article on the Toupouri peasant), that farm work is spread very unevenly over the year. It declines sharply and often comes to a complete stop during the dry season, but farmers are exceedingly busy during the rainy season and in June and July the average Toupouri spends over 25 days a month in the fields.

Other authorities have tried to calculate the number of hours required per acre per year for different crops. The following figures have been put forward:

Crop	Hours per acre per year
Cocoa . . . . .	140
Cotton . . . . .	506
Banana . . . . .	400
Coffee . . . . .	400

<sup>1</sup> J. GUILLARD: "Essai de mesure de l'activité d'un paysan africain: le Toupouri", in *Agronomie tropicale* (Paris), Vol. XIII, No. 4, July-Aug. 1958, pp. 415-428.

In order to interpret these figures properly, it would be necessary to know the area cultivated by each active person. Failing any accurate information on this point (which it must be hoped will be provided by the agricultural survey being carried out to supplement the social and demographic survey), it can tentatively be assumed that a cocoa planter often cultivates about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres, representing roughly 70 days' work a year, and that a cotton planter usually cultivates  $1\frac{1}{4}$  acres, equivalent to 140 days' work a year; in the case of the banana and coffee planters, it is difficult to say what would be a standard area.

In any case, there can be no doubt that an appreciable amount of underemployment exists. This is coupled with very low living standards. Here again, it is difficult to give chapter and verse. Average income per head, as has been seen, is estimated to be about 21,500 francs annually, but this is only an average for the country as a whole and some regions are much better off than others. In point of fact, the income of the pagan mountain peoples, including the value of subsistence farming, is probably no more than a quarter of the average.

#### *Supplementary Occupations : Handicrafts and Seasonal Migrations.*

Apart from any purely agricultural improvements, which would naturally be welcome, it would also be desirable to raise these peoples' living standards and to harness their employment potential by encouraging supplementary occupations.

Handicrafts are already widespread in northern Cameroun and are nowhere unknown, although they could be developed still further. In the northern areas they consist mainly of cotton goods, tanning, leather goods, embroidery and basket work. In the west and south, cane and raffia are woven into furniture and panels. Embroiderers, wood carvers and coppersmiths are also to be found in the west, while household pottery is made almost everywhere. In the past few years ivory carving for the tourist market has also become far more common in the south.

Since most of the underemployment among peasants occurs during one particular time of the year it would be possible for them to migrate seasonally to seek jobs elsewhere. But this has not so far happened, either within the country or to other countries. Nor is it certain that it would be practicable to organise labour movements of this kind at the present time.

#### PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

How then can the general employment and manpower situation in Cameroun be summed up? Unemployment, as we have seen, is a purely urban phenomenon which affects only a limited number of potential workers, although in their case the problem is acute enough. Underemployment on the other hand is a very widespread rural phenomenon which affects a large segment of the population. However, it is not directly felt as such by the inhabitants of the countryside, the great majority of whom do not find it unduly difficult to satisfy their basic needs. Nutritional surveys of Cameroun<sup>1</sup> and articles by individual writers tend to agree on this point, despite a certain lack of balance in the diet and some deficiencies which efforts will be made to remedy in the future.

Understandably, the authorities, in drawing up their development plan, did not give top priority to creating employment or even to counter-

<sup>1</sup> Especially the first results of the standard of living inquiry forming part of the social and demographic survey already mentioned.



acting underemployment as such. They are guided mainly by the productivity of the schemes they select, the aim being to double the national income within 20 years.

Accordingly there is no employment target in the strict sense of the term. A few estimates have merely been made of the amount of labour that will be required to carry out some of the industrial schemes covered by the plan. These estimates are quoted in table IV and, as can be seen, the numbers involved are extremely small.

Taking all the schemes incorporated in the plan (and not simply industry alone) it is estimated by the planning authorities that over the next five years the proposed projects will give direct employment to some 15,000 persons.

TABLE IV. MANPOWER REQUIRED TO CARRY OUT  
THE INDUSTRIALISATION PLAN

Factory or plant	Highly skilled workers	Salaried employees and manual workers, including labourers
Southern cement works . . . . .	15	160
Northern cement works . . . . .	13	110
Spinning and weaving . . . . .	23	307 <sup>1</sup>
Blanket factory . . . . .	2	62 <sup>2</sup>
Flour milling . . . . .	7	94 <sup>3</sup>
Biscuit making . . . . .	3	14
Meat canning . . . . .	2	25
Plastics . . . . .	11	60
Matches . . . . .	13	55
Total . . . . .	89	887

<sup>1</sup> Including 202 skilled workers. <sup>2</sup> Including 38 manual workers other than labourers and salaried employees. <sup>3</sup> Including 44 semi-skilled workers and 12 salaried employees.

But the fairly limited amount of employment directly created in this way does not mean that the authorities underestimate the important part that manpower must play in their country's economic development. The Government has taken a variety of measures, some of which can be called classical while others are more unorthodox, but all of them are designed to provide better training and to foster employment by adapting the labour force to the growing needs of an economy which is expanding, diversifying and becoming more complex.

Little comment is called for here on the classical training measures (in the broadest sense of the term). In the main they involve expanding the traditional primary, secondary and technical education facilities. In passing, it may be noted that measures of this type come up against two awkward problems. The first of these is finance: and the plan only incorporates measures which are essential to expand secondary and technical education. The other is the recruitment of teaching staff, since existing training facilities are far too slender to enable the educational system to be enlarged at all rapidly.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The establishment of four new teachers' training colleges (at present there is only one, at Nkongsamba, in the public sector), which has been approved under the plan, will not have any effect on these shortages for a few years.

Less orthodox but already widespread in many countries are schemes to provide further vocational training for adult workers in rural areas : *paysannats*<sup>1</sup> and rural or community development schemes are already widely used for the modernisation of agriculture. The plan, which provides for the establishment of development agencies to give all-round training to farmers, proposes that the number of adult rural training centres should be increased from three to five. These centres hold training courses which are designed to give farmers an insight into elementary techniques they can use in their particular environment to increase their productivity. But these are fairly long-term measures and, with a large and growing number of unemployed in the towns, the authorities have had to consider more drastic action to improve their lot while at the same time making them contribute towards the country's economic development. Traditional adult training methods, although not to be despised<sup>2</sup>, appear to be inadequate. Mass methods are necessary and the Bill providing for the establishment of a national labour service together with a number of agencies needed for its operation and supervision must be set against this background. The project is as follows :

Initially a national civic, military and vocational training centre would be established under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. This centre would train key staff in all branches of industry and agriculture. Recruitment would be by competition and the training would last for 18 months ; it is planned to train 500 individuals to supervise the workers in the National Civic Service.

The compulsory National Civic Service would normally include all unemployed workers over 18 and under 26 years of age. It would give them sufficient training to enable them to settle down in rural areas and at the same time would use their labour on various projects. The length of service would be one year.

They would carry out work of national importance, e.g. building or improving main roads, developing mineral resources, improving or irrigating farmland, etc. The schemes would be planned by the appropriate technical departments.

This project to rehabilitate and harness the country's unemployed labour potential is, however, if not exactly abandoned, at least in abeyance. The main argument against it is that it would cost far too much and that its results might be distinctly limited. According to the estimates made by S.O.G.E.P., the anticipated cost would be :

	Millions of CFA francs
National centre (for 500 trainees over five years)	
Initial outlay . . . . .	411
Running cost . . . . .	159
Civic service (five years)	
Initial outlay . . . . .	470
Running cost . . . . .	880
Total . . . . .	1,920

<sup>1</sup> *Paysannats* provide rural training to assist farmers in every branch of their work so that finally they shall be able to cultivate their land by advanced methods. The *paysannats* rely largely on the extension of the co-operative movement.

<sup>2</sup> In the public sector an intensive vocational training centre is in existence at Douala. In the private sector a number of firms train their own skilled workers and the Cameroun Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Banking Association hold evening classes at Douala and Yaoundé.

Accordingly, reliance will have to be placed for the time being exclusively on traditional systems to provide the leaders and train the skilled men needed for the country's development. But at least the wide variety of measures employed or contemplated to make more efficient use of the labour force shows that the authorities are aware of the vital importance of manpower to national economic growth. It affords good ground for believing that the difficulties in the way of building the Cameroun economy will be overcome wherever possible.

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