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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GOOD GOVERNANCE, CORRUPTION AND POVERTY IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

When Cameroon was admitted into the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPCI), government officials were relieved. However, the expectations of Cameroonians increased when the country met the requirements for the decision and completion points. The researcher, who used the survey research methodology to randomly gather information from respondents in South West Region, examined the role of the political class in shaping the direction of the economy, quality of governance and level of poverty. The paper which took exceptions in the above contending complexities within the context of HIPCI in Cameroon and the fact that no World Bank economic partnership agreement had benefited the Africans, it concluded that except the government and people of Cameroon accept to execute government projects without fraudulent practices, the institutionalization of good governance and the eradication of poverty and corruption in South West Region and Cameroon in general will remain a veritable mirage.

Key Words: Governance, Poverty, Economy,, Corruption, Politics, Torture

Introduction

The quest by Cameroonians for good governance, transparency, accountability, responsibility and a higher and better standard of living started on November 6, 1982 when President Paul Biya then a Prime Minister little known outside Cameroon, was catapulted to the enviable position of President of the Republic of Cameroon after Ahmadou Ahidjo had single-handedly and tyrannically ruled the country for 24 wasted years. The entire people of Cameroon were not interested in whether President Ahidjo was “tricked” to step down or not. Their preoccupation by then was finding a man who was sincere and could change their fortunes for the better. They saw in President Paul Biya, the man who was sincere, clean and considerate (a radical departure from the Ahidjo's reign).

Judging from the dramatic manner Ahidjo left office, most pundits thought the correct position of Cameroon's national debt must not have been ascertained in the handing over notes especially as Ahidjo's regime and that of Mobutu in Zaire were competing for a place in the Guinness Book of Records for corruption. The truth is that president Ahidjo left enough resources which would have kick-started the Cameroonian economy even in the dark days of the Structural Adjustment experiments.

Theoretical Background

To understand the intricate links between good governance, poverty and corruption, we must anchor our treatise on the Political Economy theoretical direction. The notion of “political economy both as a conceptual tool and the context within which politico-economic forces and activities operate, has regained its lost glory” (Aina, 1986:1) since changes in the socio-economic structures and analytical perspectives in the 1950's forced scholars to situate “Political Economy” as the corner stone which the builders had rejected.

Academics who doubt the existence of political economy or some who often stressed the sublime difference between politics and economics, (Ihonvbere, 1989:29) which the use of the modern Political Economy neutrali, must have embarked on their own parochial interests at least for the division of academic labour which we have to stress, temporarily, "put asunder" what was "originally together". To re-enforce the unity of politics and economics, Waldo (1975:75) had this to say:

"Political scientists cannot deny the importance of non-political phenomena for the political, nor do they generally wish to deny the relevance of what other disciplines have to "contribute" to the understanding of politics. Indeed, the idea of a total understanding of the social realm, the concept of a "unified social science" has not only the intellectual respectability but much emotional appeal. How then, can we find the optimum balance, the proper; and fruitful interrelatedness? The "Sundering" of economics and Political Science has always been considered an error, leaving both of the separate disciplines without an adequate base, either for explanatory theory or public guidance, thus resulting in a varied pattern of add hoc co-operation, amateur improvising and "border raids."

It is pertinent to note here that political economy is simultaneously an anachronistic and a new discipline in that it was originally used to describe the subject matter of modern economics and contemporary Political Science. Recently, a number of scholars have developed a sub discipline which is neither Economics nor Political Science but both Political Economy. Hence, the starting point for the analysis of the distribution of power and poverty in any society (including Cameroon) must be the economic relations which are determined largely by the type of government controlling the affairs of the nation, the political will of the bureaucrats in implementing policies and facing new challenges.

Previous thematic expositions by orthodox scholars ignored the fact that the state via the content of her policies, poverty could be alleviated and the monster called corruption could be "caged". This naturally leads us to an intricate web of symbiotic relations between the polity and the economy. In this paper, one of the variants of the modern Political Economy approach dialectical materialism would be used as the theoretical framework. This methodology argues essentially that for us to understand the implementation, challenges and prospects of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPCI) in Cameroon, it must be known that good governance, poverty and corruption in Cameroon are being determined by the primacy of material conditions, the dynamic character of reality and the relatedness of different elements of society. This theoretical foundation is used because it gives us a good insight into the dynamics of the social world, answers salient questions on the development perspective, treats political and economic problems concretely and it takes a comprehensive view of society. The justification for this approach will be clearer as the article progresses.

The fact that the political and economic development of Cameroon rests on the government became more evident when the World Bank admitted the country into the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. The state apparatus swung into action and consummated a "road map" for poverty alleviation by preparing the Cameroon Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) aimed at improving the standard of living of her people and also as a blueprint for managing HIPC resources and good governance. As a background to the problem, President Paul Biya had on the 21 March 1985 in Bamenda launched what he termed, the *Fresh Impetus* which was closely followed by his *Communal Liberalism*. In his treatise, the President prescribed the subsequent benefits for Cameroonians "a more independent mankind, a new political society, towards an economy at the service of man, social justice, developing the human spirit in man and the departure from ethnic cultures to a national culture" (Biya, 1986:5). Here, the President had in the back of his mind, the economic improvement of Cameroonians because he knows that for his people to vigorously implement the HIPCI blueprint, they must have food, clothing and shelter.

Cameroon was blessed to have a "liberator" who as far back as 1986, had laid down the foundation on which the HIPCI was launched. However, the big question in South West Region and indeed the whole of Cameroon now is why, despite the huge investments in the printing and

distribution of President Biya's blueprints for good governance, political development and economic empowerment of Cameroonians, the implementation of the above projects is in comatose and the people are still poor. Some critics claim that the failure of President Paul Biya's Communal Liberalism must have been because the IMF did not contribute the ideas therein. Others are mortified to notice that despite the fact that the IMF contributed in drafting the Decision Point and the Completion Point Documents for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries, it has failed to provide the wealth and good governance that all the documents prescribed for Cameroonians. In the last quarter of 2007, the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy blueprint in Cameroon had lost its bearing, the challenges are rife and the prospects for a rejuvenated economy, had become bleak.

Governance in Cameroon: A Politico-Economic Synthesis

There is no doubt that the seemingly interminable crisis, which has plagued the Cameroonian Political scene, society and economy since independence is attributable to the problem of bad governance. When other African Presidents like Kwame Nkrumah was emphasising the need for an All African Union Government i.e. having one government for the continent and Julius Nyerere was busy supervising the implementation of his "Ujamma" rural development project in Tanzania, their counterpart in Cameroon, late President Ahmadou Ahidjo, was assiduously torturing his countrymen through his infamous "See-Saw" and "Cement Tank" systems. On the nature of torture in Cameroon under late President Ahmadou Ahidjo, Eyinga (1978:215) had this to say:

... I was arrested by men of Lord Pandy and taken to the B.M.M. in Yaounde. ... I saw people night and day, for months and months being tortured, hung from the ceilings by their arms or feet. ... in the room which the boss of B.M.M. Mouyakan Abdoulaye Christened "the chapel" ... being given electric shocks while two or three soldiers from North Cameroon, especially chosen for their cruelty, beat them with unbelievable ferocity.

This testimony given by a Cameroonian in Richard Joseph's book *-Gaulist Africa: Cameroon under Ahmadou Ahidjo* was corroborated by Lanoitte (1978:217) a non-Cameroonian thus: In the "See-Saw" system, the subjects all handcuffed behind their backs were attached to the "See-Saw" by their toes, head downwards, with lengths of wire tightened with pillars, and their legs are spread apart. The See-Saw was then set in motion ... At each end, a policeman or soldier, armed with a hard whip about a meter long, struck first the buttocks, then the stomach, aiming particularly at the sexual organs, then face, the mouth, the eyes ... The blood spurted onto the walls and streamed all over the place. If the man fainted, he was revived with a basin of water thrown full in the face ... about three in the morning; a military lorry carried the cadavers to the cemetery. The foreigner added:

The prisoners chained and naked are made to stoop in the cement tanks filled with cold water up to their nostrils and kept there for days. A system of wires enables an electric current to be passed through the tanks. A few times every night, one of the jailers turns the current on. The screams of the wretched individuals freeze terror into the hearts of the residents in a wide area. The unfortunate in their cement tanks, are driven insane (Lanoitte, 1978:217).

Instead of concerning himself with programmes designed to improve the standard of living of his people, and institutionalising the main tenets of good governance in the body politic of Cameroon, Ahidjo was busy planting the seeds of deep hatred among Cameroonians. Governance can be defined as the exercise of political power in the management of human affairs. It is also widely known that the economic foundation of any country, largely determines her political structure because the economy is the substructure on which the social system of the state is built.

The concept of governance entails policy articulation, which influences the allocation of formal powers and resources to public agencies, while on the other hand, influences the private agencies. Seen from another perspective, governance is policy initiation, policy making and policy

execution regulated by a given system of laws and guidelines which are compartmentalised into specific operations geared at achieving specific national goals like institutionalising good governance, eradicating poverty and reducing corruption.

The art of governance is a complex one; because it influences the political and economic aspects of a polity. These aspects were to be considered by the Cameroonian state before accepting (i) foreign aid (ii) any initiative designed by the IMF aimed at improving the standard of living of Cameroonians. In other words, the political ideology, administrative capacity building including administrative accountability and responsibility and the political structure were to greatly influence the direction and tempo of all reform programmes. Whether these prescriptions are accepted or not, effective governance can be achieved through good public policies with clear objectives, focused, people-oriented programmes and the readiness by all and sundry to anticipate and readily review policy options and outcomes as at when due.

Most policy objectives like those streamlined in the HIPCI documents can be achieved only when there is conscious efforts by government to recognise and provide an effective institutional and legal cover which will in turn help us to accomplish the subsequent: (i) Provision of the necessary legal and constitutional framework from which can be easily identified the intended and the unintended consequences of political and economic policies. This must as a matter of principle, be backed by genuine welfare safety valves for the poor in society. (ii) Institutionalisation of humane, clear and consistent political and economic policies, which must eliminate bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency and will also, build confidence in the private sector of the economy. The rules and regulations of any economic and political system will be respected only if the people have trust and confidence in the rule of law. (iii) Provision of a wide range of public goods and quality services especially infrastructures like tarred roads, airports, seaports, aeroplanes, ships, telephones, hospitals and schools to mention but a few. The provision of the above infrastructural facilities will lubricate the economic and political engine of the state and every other facet of human endeavour will run smoothly. (iv) the strengthening of public confidence through keeping to guidelines, responsibility, accountability and probity in the government and private sectors. The crisis of development like those of legitimacy, penetration, and acceptability amongst others will surface if we do not take the above essentials seriously.

Governments all over the world are supposed to initiate, implement and maintain sustainable political and economic policies which, will change for the better, the lives of her citizens. The state is also suppose to harness all the material and human resources at her disposal to provide the necessary conducive environment (level playing ground) for all other actors, including the civil societies to contribute their own quota in the development of the society.

Judging from the above discussion, it goes without saying that it is only the nation state such as Cameroon, which can implement and maintain macroeconomic policies to help the people alleviate poverty through the multiplier and accelerator principles (Samuelson, 1978). The above position brings us to the central issue of Economic Determinism, which in Marxian parlance is the substructure or economic structure. The superstructure carries with it, the laws of the land governing the conduct of man like the definition of corruption and how corrupt officials can be sanctioned, the security officers, the political system, value system, religious beliefs, social aspects, amongst others. This presupposes that the belief and political systems are inextricably intertwined with the economic structure. The economic sub structure serves as a hub on which all other structures political, social, legal and ideological revolve. Government must intervene in the economic activities of all countries; hence the Cameroonian government cannot be an exception.

Policies however, are instruments of governance, hence a country is properly governed when her policies are initiated, formulated and implemented in a transparent manner. Any nation is as good as its leaders want it to be. Hence, leaders must formulate Fiscal and Monetary policies aimed at the improvement in the livelihood of her people.

Poverty in Cameroon

The incidence of poverty in the world falls squarely on "more than one billion people in the developing world, who continue to live in absolute poverty," (Obadan, 1997:3). At least 12 million

of the above figure are Cameroonians. According to Demery and Squire (1996), of the 12 million poor people in Cameroon, South West Region accounts for over 3 million because apart from a few traders in big towns like Mamfe, Kumba, Limbe, Buea and Mutengene who live on more than 1 US Dollar a day, most people in the villages are living on less than 1 US Dollar a day (World Bank, 1996). Everywhere one goes in the region, poverty stares one directly on the face. The native population try to hide their poverty by "venting their spleen" on matters bordering on football, the famous makossa dance steps and beer (alcohol). To drive home the above assertion, Aboyade (1975), saw poverty as an elephant, which is easily recognised than defined.

Among political economists, poverty has often been defined as a situation of low income or low consumption (World Bank, 1993). This definition has over the years helped scholars in the construction of poverty lines which are merely values of income or consumption essential to purchase the minimum standard of nutrition, housing, health and other essential necessities of life. Those who live below the poverty line are considered poor. The income and non-income dimension of poverty is often intertwined. Poverty can also be defined as the lack of physical necessities, assets and income. It includes, but is more than the income poor (Chambers, 1995:4). In other words, poverty is the general conditions of deprivation whose dimensions include poverty itself, isolation, physical weakness, seasonality, powerlessness, and humiliation (Chambers, 1995). The above attributes are worst in Cameroon because most of the citizens use alcoholism as an escapist solution to their poor situation.

In the South West Region particularly and Cameroon in general, it is very easy to identify the poor. The poor include those who cannot feed themselves, obtain adequate income, find a stable job, own property or stay under healthy conditions. Sancho (1996) added the lack of an adequate level of education and the inability to satisfy their basic health needs to the already crowded list. The 1995 World Bank findings, also added that the poor are often illiterate, in poor health and have a short life span. Their life on earth is "short, nasty and brutish".

The poor in the South West Region, lack the capacity to improve on their standard of living themselves hence, the social unnecessary condition of extreme poverty is persistent and passes from one generation to another "ad infinitum". This reinforces inequality which Seligson and Passé-Smith (1993), pointed out in their edited book *Development & Underdevelopment: The Political Economy of Inequality*.

Poverty exist in many societies but what makes it stand out prominently in South West Region of Cameroon, is the fact that it is not only structured but it is also chronic. It wasn't a surprise that 'Bush Faller', a native of Tiko who went for further studies in America as a young boy in 1970, returned in 2006 to notice that nothing has changed other than a few new buildings including the Presbyterian church situated in front of the Tiko Post Office. This long standing or persistent poverty in the South West is often justified in terms of limited productive resources, lack of skilled manpower, education and achievement motivation. Nobody has bothered to investigate why the government has not provided the enabling instruments for empowerment or a level playing ground for those who are struggling to get out of the straitjacket of poverty in the region.

Bombard the Headquarters: Corruption

It must be admitted that corruption cannot be wiped out completely even in the so called developed world. There is widespread corruption in most developed countries such as the United States of America, Britain, Germany and France. There is also corruption in sacred and secular institutions such as churches, mosques, schools, hospitals, offices, national assemblies, armed forces, in the administration of justice, in the industrial sector, among political office holders, in rural communities and even in families. The main difference here is that, while other countries and institutions are trying very hard to tackle the monster called "corruption" in their countries and establishments, the Cameroonian state is instead voluntarily or involuntarily encouraging public servants, their relations and hangers-on to permanently deprive the state and public establishments of the much needed funds and materials which would have been used for national development and to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have nots. (Frimpong-Ansah, 1991:47) calls this a "predatory state or vampire state." Kautilya (1981:601) writing in Tyagi's book

Public Administration: Principles and Practice, opined that “Just as it is impossible to taste a bit of the honey that happens to be on the tips of one's tongue, similarly it is impossible for government servants not to taste a bit of the money that passes through their hands”.

Kautilya would have received a thunderous ovation had the learned sage presented his paper in any of the towns in the South West Region or cities in Cameroon. The sage expected countries, corporate bodies and individuals to take his prescription as an exception and not as a rule. In Cameroon, corruption has been catapulted to the status of a state religion. Cameroonians give bribe to get birth certificates, admission into nursery schools, even to pay taxes ... they bribe for everything, hence Transparency International was not wrong when that body classified Cameroon as the most corrupt country in the world. The matter of corruption became intractable because the government and some mushroom churches defended the state by pointing out that Transparency International is biased and helping enemies of the state to “tarnish the country's image”. Musa (1999) writing for *Africa Today* in March 1999 exposed the fact that corruption has become part of the system and a way of life. He summed up his arguments thus:

A visitor to Yaounde will see a large crowd of people gathered at the Ministry of Economy and Finance to “chase files”. Officials make it impossible for them to get their salaries, thus inducing bribes. There is no denying that the country has sank to its lowest level of moral depravity since independence, with otherwise outrageous abuses in public offices too ordinary to raise the brows ... Cameroonians have not only come to accept bribery and corruption as a short cut to obtaining undeserved favours but, sadly, yield without qualms to demands for tips even where they see what is due them as a matter of right. (Musa, 1999:23).

When confronted with the facts, government officials accused the enemies of the state. So, when the “Berlin-based Transparency International classified Cameroon as the world's most corrupt country, President Biya's Administration questioned the criteria used and suggested it was “the work of enemies seeking to tarnish the country's image and undermine development” (Musa, 1992:22).

If Tansa Musa decided to “connive” with the critics of the government of President Paul Biya, then what can be said when both the European Union (EU) and the World Bank openly posited that “Cameroon is loosing FCFA 400 Billion through embezzlement yearly” and “40% of Cameroon's investment budget went into private pockets, making it particularly difficult for ongoing economic reforms to yield the expected results” (Ngalame, 2007:2). In another development, through an investigation carried out by the *Federalist Times*, it was revealed that “Bribes, Kick-backs, and other financial misconduct by uniform officers, including Customs, Taxation and Treasury officials in Douala alone, cause the country to loose 9.4 billion francs every month” (*Federalist Times*, 2007:7). The level of corruption now in Cameroon is so high that whole Newspapers and magazines carry nothing other than articles about corruption. For example volume 1, Number 101 of 3rd September 2007 of the *Federalist Times* was devoted exclusively on corruption in Cameroon.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is descriptive. Three settlements were chosen at random from each Division Fako, Meme and Manyu in the South West Region making a total of nine settlements, while a total of 540 questionnaires were administered at random. Out of the 540 questionnaires distributed, 270 of them were administered to educated villagers and the rest 270 were distributed to serving civil servants. Sixty questionnaires were distributed in each of the 9 settlements with thirty being completed by civil servants and thirty by educated villagers. From Fako Division, Buea, Limbe and Mutengene were selected while Kumba, Mbonge and Konye were Selected from Meme Division. Respondents from Manyu Division were selected from Mamfe, Eyumojock and Kembong. There were 180 respondents from each of the three Divisions making the total number of 540 respondents in the South West Province. Out of this 540 respondents, 200 were females while 200 were males and 140 questionnaires were distributed to the youths 70 of the youths were males and 70 females.

Table 1: Respondents (Good Governance, Poverty and Corruption)

Division	Settlements	No. of Civil Servants	No. of Educated Villagers	Total	Percentage (%)
Fako	Buea	30	30	60	11.111
	Mutengene	30	30	60	11.111
	Limbe	30	30	60	11.111
Sub Total	3	90	90	180	33.333
Meme	Kumba	30	30	60	11.111
	Mbonge	30	30	60	11.111
	Konye	30	30	60	11.111
Sub Total	3	90	90	180	33.333
Manyu	Mamfe	30	30	60	11.111
	Eyumojoek	30	30	60	11.111
	Kembong	30	30	60	11.111
Sub Total	3	90	90	180	33.333
Grand Total	9	270	270	540	100%

Data Analysis and Results

Questions were posed on governance, poverty and corruption and the answers were analysed using the statistical method of percentages. The 540 questionnaires distributed at random to 270 serving civil servants and 270 educated villagers in the three divisions and the nine settlements were filled and returned.

On the aspect of good governance, all the 540 respondents (100%) in Fako, Manyu and Meme Divisions claimed that they can identify good governance and that they even tasted a bit of it in the early years of the Federal Republic of Cameroon and West Cameroon Government.

All of them also agreed that good governance started deteriorating immediately Ahmadou Ahidjo started (i) ruling by decrees and Emergency laws (ii) dismantling all the infrastructural facilities the defunct West Cameroon inherited from Nigeria and (iii) the neutralisation of West or Anglophone Cameroonians.

One hundred percent (100%) of the respondents posited that government officials in their respective areas became increasingly indisciplined, ineffective, inefficient, unaccountable and parochial in the mobilisation as well as the utilisation of resources immediately government announced the need for Cameroonians to prepare their minds for the economic crisis which later engulfed the whole country precipitating the HIPC Initiative.

Although multipartism was encouraged by President Paul Biya's regime, eighty five percent (459) of the respondents stated that successive South West Governors, Senior Divisional Officers, Divisional Officers and their superiors in the offices and even the chiefs in their villages did not consult them or allow them to participate in the decision making process of their institutions or communities. They added that most Cameroonians now live in fear and are unemployed. The situation is made worst as the government has not initiated and formulated any meaningful public policy to help her citizens enjoy the fruits of good governance. As a result, they have lost confidence in the government.

Five hundred and forty (100%) respondents stated that as a result of bad governance in the country, the roads are bad, the hospitals have no drugs, equipment and qualified doctors, the primary and secondary schools have no teachers and enough classroom blocks. All the 540 respondents (100%) stated that they consider themselves poor especially as the salaries of all civil servants (including our 270 or 50% of the respondents) were reduced as part of HIPCI prescriptions. Only the 270 civil servants (50%) of the respondents know about the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and the attendant reduction of salaries in Cameroon. Two hundred and seventy (100%) of the villagers and two hundred and fifty (92.6%) of the civil servants know nothing about the existence of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and its use in alleviating poverty in Cameroon. A few people who knew about the existence of the PRSP have however not felt the impact or seen its impact on the country's economy. Since the Cameroonian society is closed, shock waves in the international economy hardly affect her citizens.

Five hundred and forty (100%) of the respondents posited that they had never seen any officials claiming to represent the HIPC Initiative anywhere in the South West Region. The 20 (7.4%) civil servants who knew about the existence of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper got their information by radio in April 2003 when the former Prime Minister, Chief Peter Mafany Musonge launched the Cameroon: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in Yaounde. (IMF Country Report No. 03/249 of August 2003).

In terms of South Westerners having employment from government, the 270 (100%) villagers stated that it is impossible for them to sponsor or bribe government officials in Yaounde for their children and other dependents to be employed, which would have helped them, reduce poverty. Most of them added that civil service jobs in Cameroon before and after the institutionalisation of the HIPCI have been sold to the highest bidders. It is evident from their responses that their poor situation has been aggravated because of the poor conditions of the roads which cannot allow them transport their agricultural products to markets where they would have made some money. The 270 villagers (100%) also exposed the fact that they made no input into the Cameroon Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper since they did not even know about its existence while the civil servants (270 of them) also stated that they were not invited to suggest anything before the paper was presented for implementation before paper was presented for implementation.

On the issue of corruption, only the 270 (50%) villagers accepted that corruption exists in Cameroon and that it can cripple a government policy like the HIPCI. They added that since Cameroon is a "civil service state" (most wage earners are employed by government) every worker tries to fraudulently get as much money and materials from government offices as possible. The above group also asserted that the Cameroon National Union and the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement have been using the same civil servants (serving and retired) to be rigging elections in favour of the government. One cannot be surprised here because most of the retired and serving civil servants were and are part of the same criminal enterprise that connived with politicians to loot the government treasuries. The Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement Party stalwarts who embezzle public funds are immuned from prosecution.

The villagers stated that the Cameroon Political and Economic system has been structured to perpetuate inequality and cover up injustice by launching fake civil-service examinations, which go by the name "Concours". All of them posited that they bribe to (i) get drugs from hospitals, (ii) get places for their children in schools, (iii) get birth, death and marriage certificates.

Finally, the five hundred and forty (100%) respondents do not think the Cameroonian government blueprint for good governance and poverty reduction will help to eradicate poverty and corruption in the South West Region.

Judging from the above evidence, one can state with certainty that the success or failure of past, the present and future National Development plans and the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPCI) in Cameroon depends solely on the manner the government and people will handle the hydra-headed monster corruption. If corruption is treated with kid-gloves, the edifice of the state will sink even further into the murky waters of disaster because before the acceptance of the HIPCI in Cameroon, the economy has been limping on three tiny and shaky legs ; Beer consumption, "Makossa" record sales and gate-takings from football.

Challenges

The Cameroonian state officials who are charged with the responsibility of implementing the HIPCI, which includes the Poverty Alleviation project, should accept that "many challenges" (Friedrich Ebert, 2000: 129) exist beyond the launching of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper by the then Prime Minister. These challenges include: (i) the institutionalisation of good governance, (ii) protection of life and property, (iii) infrastructural development, (iv) distorted pupil-teacher ratio, (v) provision of drugs, equipment and qualified personnel in hospitals, (vi) silencing the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) opposition, (vii) confidence and capacity building, (viii) economic empowerment via the provision of gainful employment, increase in salary and regional balance, (ix) inequality and (x) corruption.

The government and people of Cameroon should show some modicum of seriousness in handling state matters. This unserious attitude came to the fore when for two days government agents could not trace the lost Kenyan Airways plane, which crashed a few kilometres from the Douala International Airport.

Prognoses for Action or Recommendations

Cameroonians should stop the bad attitude of looking at their "chop i chop" and sycophantic attitude as the best way of winning political support. All the ministers, Cameroon National Union (CNU) henchmen and other government agents in Ahmadou Ahidjo's regime were in a joint criminal enterprise with the President because all who embezzled, were instead promoted or appointed into lucrative positions where they could steal more state funds to help rig future elections in favour of the President. Those who disagreed with Ahidjo, were tortured to death in Ahidjo's numerous concentration camps all over the national territory.

Instead of imprisoning all those who differ in opinions with the President as Ahidjo did, the present President (Paul Biya) should make sure that there is (i) fiscal and monetary discipline and accountability, (ii) no unbridled corruption and inconsistency in policy design and implementation (iii) population participation in decision-making (iv) transparency and predictability in the conduct of public business not only in South West Region but throughout the National Territory, (v) no arbitrary rule and human rights abuses, (vi) good governance and all the elements of a good democratic system of accountability to the public, independent electoral commission and judiciary, (vii) freedom of the press, (viii) a good and efficient educational system where the schools are well equipped and the teachers are well paid because any government that ignores the education of her citizens especially at the primary school level is not building a strong foundation for the development of the country. After all, all development depends on education. (ix) the ability of public servants to accept full responsibility for their decisions when things go wrong instead of "passing the buck". (x) collective decision making which involves all and sundry, and (xi) enough information about HIPCI at the village and divisional levels so that the government can carry everybody along for the realisation of the HIPCI goals.

The Cameroon government should accept responsibility by putting into place all what it takes for the poor in Cameroon to throw away the shackles of poverty, such bold steps should include: (i) the introduction of unemployment benefit in Cameroon just like what is already in place in USA and Britain where at least "one person in two at any one time is in receipt of a cash benefit of some kind. Yet this vast outlay does not seem sufficient. Even the protection against want seems inadequate with large numbers still living in poverty, in some sense of that admittedly ambiguous term" (Wilson and Thomas, 1981).

The development of infrastructures like good roads to link the villages to big cities like Mamfe, Kumba, Buea and Limbe will go a long way to encourage small agricultural farmers to easily carry their crops for sale. This will in turn help them to reduce the burden of poverty.

Personnel responsible for the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative should encourage the native population in villages to contribute their own quota in the design and implementation of the initiative. Big multinational corporations should stop plundering the forest resources of the local people because this is the only thing they have to sustain their families and themselves.

The commission to check corruption should be made up of only matured and experienced school teachers who have not been “infected with the virus of corruption” and given the power via legislation not only to recover stolen funds from Cameroonians who are corrupt but also to imprison those found guilty of embezzlement. This will not only discourage future fraudsters but will send clear signals to corrupt government officials still in the state employment that the government this time around, means business.

Finally, the 270(50%) serving officials who refused to respond to the questions concerning corruption because they helped to bring the country to the position of Highly Indebted Poor Countries status, should swallow their pride and accept that Cameroon is corrupt. In this case, the Developed World will help Cameroon implement to its logical conclusion, the lofty ideas in the HIPC Initiative blueprint.

Conclusion

The challenges are overwhelming and the prospects of surmounting them are bleak. Cameroonians should accept the fact that they are poor and cannot guarantee good governance today because of corruption. It is hoped that they will also accept to execute all government projects without fraudulent practices. If the above recommendations are not taken seriously, the institutionalisation of good governance and the eradication of chronic poverty and corruption from the body-politic of South West Region in particular and Cameroon in general will take a very long time to achieve.

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Appendix A¹

Questions on: Governance

* Can you identify good governance? * Did you experience any form of good governance under the President Ahidjo's regime? If yes/no explain. * Are the authorities in your area disciplined, effective and efficient in handling public and even personal affairs? * Are primary and secondary schools having enough teachers, equipment and classrooms? * Do government officials accept responsibility, if things go wrong because of the instructions they give? * Are they accountable in the mobilisation as well as utilisation of resources? * Do they offer selfless and impartial services to the workers and others who come in contact with them? * Do you have good roads in your area? * Do you have good hospitals with drugs, equipment and doctors? * Do you know about any policy by government aimed at making you rich or at least live happily?

Questions on: Poverty

* Do you consider yourself rich or poor? * What in your opinion is responsible? * Do you know anything about the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPCI) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) that the government launched to help you? * How did you get the information? By radio, meeting, rally, television, newspaper, books etc. * Do you think the PRSP is designed to empower you economically? * What is your assessment of the Cameroon: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper? * Are HIPCI staffs seen in your towns and villages trying to help people grow economically. * Are you having equal chances of being employed as your colleagues from other provinces? * Do you have tarred roads or fairly good earth roads in your area to enable you transport your agricultural products to the market? * Did the people who drew up the Cameroon Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper actually allow you to make your own input before the final copy was signed by the Prime Minister?

Questions on: Corruption

* Do you think corruption can cripple a government policy like the HIPCI and affect individuals negatively? * Which group of Cameroonians (government officials, those working in the private sector, the unemployed, self employed etc.) is more corrupt? Give your reasons. * Has the CNU or CPDM ever rigged elections in Cameroon? * Is there corruption in the Business sector in Cameroon? * Are you satisfied when magistrates pass judgement against innocent people? * "Is justice for sale" in Cameroon? * Is there inequality in Cameroon? * Do you bribe for most of the things you get from the public services like documents, health, and education? * Do you have equal opportunities for employment via "Concours?" * Do you think the government's HIPCI blueprint for good governance and poverty reduction will help stop corruption, hence alleviate poverty?