

Nia Baker
Legacy Christian Academy
Andover, MN
Cameroon, Lack of food/Poverty

Cameroon: The Poverty Unseen

Cameroon has a population of 24,525,676 according to the World-o-meter's website (Worldometers). The country is currently ran by a Republican Government with President Paul Biya as Chief of State and Prime Minister Philemon Yang as Head of Government (Worldometers). In a country where fifty-seven percent of the population in urban (Worldometers), it is important to understand the measure of poverty the citizens are forced to live in.

A lot of the land is not used as farming land; only thirteen percent of land is actually used to grow crops (new-ag); there is also seventy-eight percent forests and woodlands, two percent permanent crops, four percent permanent pastures, and three percent other (new-ag). Cameroon's major crops are plantains, cattle, taro, cocoa beans, and maize. These play a role in their major exports and cuisine. Cocoa, coffee, cotton, bananas, rubber, and palm oil are their major exports (intracen). The climate of Cameroon depends on whether one is in north or south Cameroon. North Cameroon has a light wet season with high temperatures (Our-Africa). Whereas, South Cameroon has two wet seasons and a moderate temperature (Our-Africa).

Needless to say a typical Cameroonian family is distinctive from a typical American family. A typical family in Cameroon has about five to a family, which does not seem very odd (Apsaidal). However, Many Cameroonians have large extended families with both polygamous and monogamous marriages ;therefore It is not uncommon to have more than five family members in one home (World Population Review). Cameroonians live in Musgum dwellings, traditional buildings built from mud (Apsaidal). While no irrigated like the average American homes, Musgum dwellings have impressive architecture (Apsaidal). They are built thicker at the base and thinner towards the top in order to have more strength (Apsaidal). A typical diet would consist of the crops Cameroonians harvested: Cocoyams, Cassava, Beans, Kaloka Chia, Leaves, Grains, and Nuts (food24). In Cameroon, the men clear paths so cash crops can be grown and provide meat, oil, and salt, and the women are taught how to grow food crops from the family, and cook (Everyculture). Food is most likely cooked in forms of soups and stews, with uncooked fruits being eaten as a dessert (Everyculture).

Most of the population, about 70%, work in agriculture (Our-Africa). Most of the crops are for food, but some crops are used to sell as cash crops (Our-Africa). The hours are longer than the average American; most have to work over 50 hours a week with one day off (Our-Africa). The average salary is \$15,102 USD; that is almost one fourth of the average American income (Our-Africa). Health care is not good in Cameroon, and few hospitals are in the country (Our-Africa). In fact, there are only a couple hospitals in the urban areas and even less medical help in the rural area (Our-Africa). Health care is almost non-existent because citizens are forced to pay for their loved ones in cash for help, and some doctors even force the family members to get the supplies needed for their medical attention (Our-Africa).

Education is accessible and affordable up until secondary school; then most are not able to afford the fees for uniforms and tuition (Our-Africa). There are few who manage to attend secondary school, but those who do and graduate can attend one of the seven public universities in that country (Our-Africa).

In urban areas, access to proper sanitation (such as toilets) is very low; in urban areas access is at fifty-eight percent, whereas rural areas have forty-two percent (NCBI). Usable water is even harder to find; about fifteen percent of urban citizens and eighteen percent or rural citizens used improved water sources, and those improved water sources are an average of thirty minutes away (NCBI). An article

from 2015 states that Cameroon does have power, but it is often subject to outages (Voa News).

After researching Cameroon, one can see that typical families have to struggle with lack of food, education, and poverty overall. However, lack of food is a very severe threat to everyone in the country. Since most have to live in poverty, it is difficult to attain food for a family. While lack of food is slightly improving, it needs to improve more.

The lack of education is primarily due to the family's inability to afford school tuition and uniforms once students reach secondary school, but what if children could grow crops as part of their school day? Implementing a form of work-study, similar to the American college program. This would allow impoverished students to attend school and get a much-needed education as well as a consistent meal every day. Furthermore, the school can use part of the profit from the crops as payment for the students, part to keep the school running and part to help sustain the rest of the community. Because more bodies can work the field a larger harvest can be obtained which means more food to feed the students and community, in addition, to more crops being sold to make money.

In order to help Cameroon's food issue, students in secondary school should have the option to work for the school for part of the day in order to pay for their tuition. While they work for the school, they will grow different crops in order to give part of it back to the community. First, there would have to be an area that can be used for growing crops, preferably near all secondary schools. Then, all students should be presented with an option to work in gardens and grow crops; the students who decide to grow crops will receive a partial or full scholarship. From that point, the students participating in the gardens will take part of their school day to tend to the crops. This way, the children won't have to worry about working after school, and they can focus on their studies more.

My proposal is to split the crops into two areas: Community crops and Trade crops. In order for this plan to operate properly a new position would need to be created for proper distribution of the food; this position should go to a citizen in the community instead of a government official. Since the Cameroonian citizens should be top priority, the majority of the food should go back to the families who need it. Students attending the school will be able to take food back to their families and families without secondary students will still be able to go to the school after hours to get food. This allows students to pick up food before they go home and eliminates the problem of a large number of people on campus during school hours.

The remaining crops that are not used to feed the citizens can be used in the trade market. Since Cameroon has an abundant Agriculture in wood, coffee, cocoa, cotton and palm oil these items are most likely to be exported. If the citizens can work together to build a few large farms pooling all their assets together instead of several small farms the country can become very useful to the trade market. I believe that if Cameroon can produce more resources they will be able to be more successful in the trade market. Once communities can adequately feed and educate its people, citizens can bring even more resources to Cameroon. For example, educated Cameroons will be able to find new and more efficient ways to yield crops or find other resources in other countries that they could not attain by themselves. Therefore, my plan would allow Cameroonians to increase their own resources and help them to obtain other useful resources from other countries.

The benefits to my solution will greatly impact the citizens and the country overall. My solution will mainly bring more food in the community. Currently, the average Cameroonian eats 1,605 calories per day (Open Data for Africa), and the average calorie intake for a healthy adult ranges from 2,000-2,500 calories (NHS Choices). Malnourishment is a huge problem in Cameroon, and can lead to very serious side effects. According to a study done by Kids Health, "The signs and symptoms of malnutrition depend

on which nutritional deficiencies a person has, although they can include: fatigue and low energy, dizziness, poor immune function (which can cause the body to have trouble fighting off infections)” (Kids Health). Malnourishment to both the adults and the children can affect their work and their academic performance (Kids Health). However, when more food is distributed throughout the country, there will be less malnourishment which I believe will enhance performance in both school and work.

Another major benefit for Cameroon is their opportunity to trade natural resources with other countries. Cameroon is currently in the trade market, and it is a vital part to the country’s economy (Heritage). They trade food and Crude Petroleum to countries such as China, Italy, and India (OEC). Cameroon makes an exceptional amount of money in the trade market, but the country imports more than it exports (OEC). In 2016, Cameroon exported 3.55 billion dollars, but imported 5.11 billion dollars resulting in a negative trade balance of 1.56 billion dollars (OEC). An article by Heritage states “Restrictions on trade through nontariff barriers raise costs. Weak rule of law fails to stem the corruption that erodes incentives for long-term economic expansion” (Heritage). Even though the trade market plays an important role in Cameroon, the country still struggles with their imports and exports. If more food was grown, more food would be available to the trade market. I believe that the leftover food from the school can at least bring down the negative trade balance, and if managed well, Cameroon could eventually have a positive trade balance which would better the overall economy.

However, the plan does have minor setbacks such as child labor laws, distribution issues, problems with leadership, and how to start my vision of a school garden. However, each of these problems can be solved with rules, proper leadership, and funds from other countries. Child labor laws would be a huge concern with this project and rightfully so. Therefore, it would be for secondary students only due to child labor concerns and the need for scholarships for secondary school, it would make sense to make this an opportunity for secondary students to work. Also, it is important to have certain jobs for certain age groups. Jobs that require more dangerous tools such as tractors and other agricultural machinery must be used by adults only, while the younger age groups can do simpler tasks like sort the harvested crops and water the fields. It is important that rules like these are in place so that this project is not in jeopardy of becoming a child labor camp.

Added concerns are that some families may not get enough food while others may get too much and what is the optimal volume of food to go into trade. How the food is distributed among the market and the families is vital to the success of the school farm. Distribution of food is the most significant part of the school garden; if the food is not distributed correctly, the school garden overall will not be as effective. However, issues with distribution can be solved with the proper planning. There needs to be a balance where both the community and the country is served efficiently, and I believe it is up to Cameroon to make a proper balance between feeding others and trading resources. While Cameroon decides the amount that goes into trade, it would be important to understand a few things about their country. Cameroon has a negative trade balance and a horrible malnutrition issue. 2.6 million people do not have food security, and forty percent of Cameroon’s population live below the poverty line (Borgen Project). Knowing this, it would be wise for Cameroon to give most of the food to the citizens below the poverty line, and use the remaining portion of food for the trade market.

A general concern with the school garden is who should be in charge of the project. It is easy to worry about who comes into power because it is easy to become a corrupt leader. The school garden will have a great amount of impact of others; therefore, whoever is put in charge of it will carry that same impact. According to The World Food Program, Cameroon is currently politically stable and a peaceful country (World Food Program), but the country has had a long past of corrupt leaders which is part of the reason why so many people live in poverty. Therefore, it is understandable why finding a proper candidate to lead the school garden is a concern. Finding an exceptional leader is possible, but there needs to be a system established in order to do so. The best way to establish effective leadership would

be to let the citizens vote. The citizens know about Cameroon more than anyone else, and I believe that letting them decide who is in charge of their food will encourage an effective leader. Citizens would not elect a corrupt leader of their own food, and with the proper guidance, a good leader will not be hard to find.

The biggest concern with the school garden is how the school garden will be started because it can not start easily. A project this big needs to have money to fund it and support from other countries. It costs 5,000-10,000 dollars in order to start a small business (QuickBooks), and it takes almost 1,000 dollars to start a nonprofit organization (Non Profit Hub). However, I believe that this project will need a lot more money because of how many school gardens that would have to be built across Cameroon and because of the impact this would have on the citizens and the country overall. This could be an issue because Cameroon seems to have the same remaining problems that they have had for the past several years even with the help that Cameroon receives. If Cameroon does not have enough help to support itself now, then how would the country have enough help to fund a brand new project? This is the most significant problem with this project and the solution does not involve just Cameroon, it has to involve other organizations and countries around the world.

It is very easy to say that people need to help fund the school garden for Cameroon, but it is more difficult to give the responsibility to certain people. Certain countries and organizations have a reason to help Cameroon, and those are the people who should really consider funding this project. According to Global Security, France has kept very close ties with Cameroon (Global Security), and France is a global economic power that has more financial security than most European countries (Britannica). France is also a donor, giving many other countries financial aid (World Atlas). France's economic state and their close ties with Cameroon makes them a perfect donor for this project. The United States could also help fund the school gardens of Cameroon because the United States has a peaceful relationship with the country and is also a big donor to other countries. Donations from both the United States and France would not only help tremendously with the school gardens, but it would also foster Cameroon's good relationship between the two countries.

Along with the United States and France, there are other non profit organizations that could help fund the school gardens as well. Through my research, I have found two organizations that would be perfect to fund the gardens in Cameroon: The Hunger Project and Bread for the World. The Hunger Project is a non profit organization that focuses on healthier living for all men, women, and children around the world. The Hunger Project is a well established organization that already resides in twenty-two other countries. The Hunger Project also has nine affiliate countries, Australia; Canada; Sweden; UK; etc., as well as investors from the United States (The Hunger Project). Since they are a well established organization, it would be easy for them to donate to a school garden. Their mission statement will also account for the malnutrition in Cameroon making them a perfect donor. Bread for the World is an organization conducting research on world hunger and how to end it. They also partner with 5,000 other churches in order to discuss current hunger issues. Not only is it a good idea to have them donate to the school gardens, because it is an exceptional solution to hunger issues, but it would also be a good idea to have the partnering churches to donate as well. With the support from these two organizations, the school gardens can turn into a reality.

While this work study program will mainly bring food into the community, it will also give students a chance to get a better education. Most children in Cameroon do not have the opportunity to attend secondary school because they cannot afford the cost of uniforms and the tuition. As a result, most of the kids immediately work as farmers after primary school because that is one of very few career choices they have. With my idea, children will be able to choose whether or not they want to continue their education. Seventy percent of the population are farmers not because they all chose to be, but because that's the only life that they knew and that was the easiest way to bring income into their homes.

Giving children this opportunity to further their education and have a choice of what career they want can change their life.

Bibliography

Ako, A A, et al. "Access to Potable Water and Sanitation in Cameroon within the Context of Millennium Development Goals (MDGS)." *Water Science and Technology : a Journal of the International Association on Water Pollution Research.*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20220254.

Ako, A A, et al. "Access to Potable Water and Sanitation in Cameroon within the Context of Millennium Development Goals (MDGS)." *Water Science and Technology : a Journal of the International Association on Water Pollution Research.*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20220254.

Bachrach, Bernard S., and John E. Flower. "France." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1 Aug. 2018, www.britannica.com/place/France/Economy.

"Cameroon." *Countries and Their Cultures*, www.everyculture.com/Bo-Co/Cameroon.html. "Cameroon Population (LIVE)." *Cameroon Population (2018) - Worldometers*,

www.worldometers.info/world-population/cameroon-population/.
“Cameroon Population 2018.” China Population 2018 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs),
worldpopulationreview.com/countries/cameroon-population/.
“Climate & Agriculture.” Our Africa, www.our-africa.org/cameroon/climate-agriculture. “Cost of Living
in Cameroon.” . Prices in Cameroon. Updated Feb 2018,
www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/country_result.jsp?country=Cameroon.
“Engage Your Church.” Bread for the World, 9 May 2017, www.bread.org/engage-your-church.
“Export Impact For Good.” ITC,
www.intracen.org/exporters/organic-products/country-focus/Country-Profile-Cameroon/.
“Household Size and Composition Around the World 2017.” UN,
http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/household_size_and_composition_around_the_world_2017_data_booklet.pdf.
Gusev, Misha. “Global Food Security - Cameroon Data Portal.” Knoema,
cameroon.opendataforafrica.org/infographics/pcuibxb/global-food-security.
“Hunger and Malnutrition.” Edited by Mary L. Gavin, KidsHealth, The Nemours Foundation, Sept. 2015,
kidshealth.org/en/teens/hunger.html.
Kindzeka, Moki Edwin. “Cameroon Economy Suffers Through Power Failures.” VOA, VOA, 19 June
2015, www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-economy-suffers-through-power-failures/2829060.html.
McCamy, Laura. “How Much Money Do You Need to Start a Business?” QuickBooks, 14 Dec. 2016,
quickbooks.intuit.com/r/business-planning/much-money-need-start-business/.
“Musgum Dwellings - Cameroon.” Apsaidal, 21 Jan. 2017, www.apsaidal.com/musgum-dwellings/.
Pike, John. “Military.” Vietnam War - American Return to Dog Fighting,
www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/africa/cm-forrel.htm.
“The World Factbook: CAMEROON.” Central Intelligence Agency, Central Intelligence Agency, 3 Apr.
2018, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cm.html.
“Typical Food of Cameroon.” Food24, 28 May 2010,
www.food24.com/News-and-Guides/Guides/Typical-food-of-Cameroon-20100528-2.
“What Should My Daily Intake of Calories Be?” NHS Choices, NHS,
www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/food-and-diet/what-should-my-daily-intake-of-calories-be/.
“Cameroon.” OEC - Sweden (SWE) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners,
atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/cmr/.
“Cameroon.” The Heritage Foundation, www.heritage.org/index/country/cameroon.
“Agricultural Machinery Hazards II.” National Ag Safety Database - National Ag Safety Database,
nasonline.org/35/d001604/agricultural-machinery-hazards-ii.html.
“Hunger in Cameroon – Still a Huge Problem to Solve.” The Borgen Project, 19 Mar. 2018,
borgenproject.org/hunger-in-cameroon-2/.
“How Much Money Do You Need to Start a Nonprofit?” Nonprofit Hub, 1 Sept. 2016,
nonprofitHub.org/featured/how-much-money-do-you-need-to-start-a-nonprofit/.
Pike, John. “Military.” Vietnam War - American Return to Dog Fighting,
www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/africa/cm-forrel.htm.
Wee, Rolando Y. “Which Countries Receive The Most Foreign Aid (ODA) From France?” WorldAtlas,
WorldAtlas, 14 June 2016, www.worldatlas.com/articles/which-countries-receive-the-most-foreign-aid-oda-from-france.html.

“Who We Are.” The Hunger Project, www.thp.org/who-we-are/.