

“Le Cameroun des Grands Ambitions”: The Place for the Youth in Cameroon’s “Vision 2035” to become an Emerging Economy in 2035

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Abstract

In Africa, youth constitute majority of the population and are at the centre of societal interactions and transformations. Yet they are often placed at the margins of the public sphere and major political, socio-economic, and cultural processes. Many have little or no access to education, employment and livelihoods, healthcare and basic nutrition. Despite the segregation and difficulties they face, youth are often actively participating in constructing their own identities, and in many ways contributing to the transformative process of their societies. African youth have the capacity to fracture public space, and reinvent or even bypass it. This article is a theoretical critical analysis of the place for the youth in the process of transforming Cameroon into an emerging economy by the year 2035. The essence is to determine the extent to which today’s youth in Cameroon, who constitute the hope of the country, are given opportunity to be part of the making of the future of their nation. This is particularly imperative for Cameroon, given that the purported development agenda is pioneered by today’s leadership, largely constituted by the older generation. The underlying question is: who should dream for tomorrow’s Cameroon? The young or the old? If it is the young, how much space do they occupy in the making of the future of Cameroon? To answer these questions, this article makes a critical analysis of President Biya’s “Le Cameroun des Grands Ambitions” policy, embedded in the “vision 2035” framework, to transform Cameroon into an emerging economy by 2035.

Keywords: Grands Ambitions, Youth, Vision 2035, Emerging Economy

Introduction and background

In Africa, young people constitute the majority of the population and are at the centre of societal interactions and transformations, yet they have many pressing health, education, economic and social needs. They are often placed at the margins of the public sphere and major political, socio-economic, and cultural processes. The challenging situation on the continent today makes young people particularly vulnerable. Despite their critical value for future well-being, many African countries, including Cameroon still have minimal investments towards the healthy development of adolescents and young adults (Knowles & Behrman, 2005). Many have little or no access to education, employment and livelihoods, healthcare and basic nutrition (Honwana & Boeck, 2005). Over the past two decades, political conflict, armed violence, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic created a crisis of unprecedented proportions for younger generations of Africans. According to du Plessis (2010), they experience high levels of poverty and unemployment, low levels of literacy, skills and education attainment, HIV/AIDS infections, vulnerability to committing crime due to high levels of poverty, societal alienation and substance abuse, high rates of teenage pregnancy, and lack of information. Within this stressful environment, how do young people organize and make sense of their daily lives? How do they negotiate their private and public roles and envision their futures? The essence is to determine the extent and quality of what African youth today can do in transforming their societies and how these transformations may in turn shape their overall development.

Despite all the difficulties they face, young people in Africa are actively participating in social, economic, and political developments and, in the process, constructing their own identities, and in many ways contributing to the transformative process of their nation states. They are often viewed simultaneously as creative and destructive forces. Indeed, youth have been at the forefront of major social transformations, whether in politics, economics, religion, popular culture, or community building. Young people often shape and express political aspirations in surprising ways. They are at the frontier of the reconfiguration of geographies of exclusion and inclusion and the categories of public and private. They have the capacity to fracture public space, and reinvent or even bypass it.

In economic terms, children and youth are major players in new informal economies and processes of globalization, as well as in the delineation of alternative local forms of modernity. Young people are at the forefront of movements that embody the expectations and promises of millennial capitalist ideals (Durham, 2000; Everatt & Sisulu, 1992). Creative and innovative forms of popular culture-theatre, arts, music and dance-are often the exclusive domain of the young as they create, reinvent, and domesticate global trends into local forms (Boeck & Honwana, 2005; Remes, 1999). Finally, in terms of community building, young people are important actors in redefining and restructuring existing models of kinship and moral matrices of reciprocity and solidarity (Honwana & Boeck, 2005). More than anyone else, they are the ones who undergo, express, and provide answers to the crisis of existing communitarian models, structures of authority, gerontocracy, and gender relations. Children and youth are the focal point of the many changes that characterize the contemporary African scene, afloat between crisis and renewal.

This article is a baseline theoretical analysis of the place for the youth in the process of transforming Cameroon into an emerging economy by the year 2035. Code-named “Vision 2035”, with laid down objectives, strategies and envisaged plans for the social and economic transformation of Cameroon in 25 years, beginning in 2010, this vision has become the most popular and ambitious national agenda Cameroon has had in almost three decades-“Le Cameroun des grands ambitions” which has been variously translated as “The Cameroon of greater achievements or of greater ambitions (Biya, 2009; 2010; 2012). The Cameroon of “greater achievements” policy presents a socio-economic and political agenda with the major preoccupation to transform Cameroon into an emerging economy. It contains a patriotic call for Cameroonians of all ages and rank and files to become part of the transformative process. From 2004, the President of the Republic of Cameroon has stressed the leading role of the youth in the achievement of the national agenda-vision 2035 in order to ensure greater achievements for Cameroon (Biya, 2011a, 2011c).

The first steps towards “Vision 2035” in Cameroon, are captured in the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP), which embodies the major steps and plans in the first decade of implementing the ambitious visions in Vision 2035. It not only spells out the expected accomplishments and the plans to achieve them, but also spells out the structures and different stakeholders and their expected contribution to the achievement of “greater achievement policy”. The essence of this paper is therefore to do a conceptual and theoretical analysis of the GESP in order to ascertain whether or not Cameroonian youth have a place in its vision; the extent to which they are predisposed to contribute to the success of the GESP and finally how the youth will negotiate their envisaged futures in vision 2035 (Cameroon, 2009). In so doing we discuss the place of the youth, the stakes, challenges and prospects that stand in their way in the social and economic transformation of Cameroon.

The key questions in this paper are: what/how can the youth contribute to the vision of making Cameroon an emerging economy over the next 25-30 years? Specifically and based on the medium-term objectives of vision 2035, the paper would make an analysis of the place of the youth in: (i) poverty alleviation; (ii) making Cameroon become a middle income country by 2035; (iii) making Cameroon become a newly industrialised economy by 2035; and (iv) consolidating democracy and national unity while respecting the country’s diversity (Cameroon, 2009). By making in-depth theoretical analyses of the role of the youth in the pursuance of these goals, this paper would demonstrate young people in the socio-economic, political and democratic transformative process of Cameroon; the gains of “vision 2035” on Cameroonian youth; youth involvement in democratic processes; and above all identify some examples of youth engagements that permit Cameroonian youth to be functional and productive in the social, economic and political transformation of Cameroon by the year 2035.

The “Grands ambitions” strategy towards the year 2035

In 2003, the government of Cameroon adopted its first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) to define the overall framework for its development policies. Attempts towards implementing this strategy paper were made from then up till 2006, recording some giant strides (Ezekwesili, Nolan & Ghura, 2010). In 2007 however, the government began a wide-range consultative process to fully update the PRSP. At the conclusion of the process, it was largely concluded that the PRSP did not effectively and efficiently reduce poverty in Cameroon. As a result, a new growth and employment strategy paper (GESP) was adopted by the Cabinet in August 2009 and presented to the public in November 2009 (African Development Fund, 2009).

The GESP, covers the period 2010-19, and is based on lessons learned during the implementation of the first PRSP and explicitly recognizes the feedback from the consultative process undertaken in 2007-08. It acknowledges the overall disappointing progress during 2000-2008 against key socioeconomic indicators: although macroeconomic stability was ensured, weaknesses in structural policies, governance, and the business environment remained abound (Ezekwesili, Nolan & Ghura, 2010). It was recognized that access to basic social services had improved under the PRSP. Progress in reducing poverty continued, however, to be hampered by limited infrastructure, as well as access to appropriate education and health services (Ezekwesili, Nolan & Ghura, 2010; Biya, 2011b, 2011c). The new strategy aims to adjust the overall objectives and address the weaknesses of the various sector policies, including some sectors that had not been prioritized in the first round (e.g. energy, telecom, rural development, and governance). It builds on (i) a long-term vision extending to 2035; (ii) a 2008 household survey; and (iii) a medium-term expenditure framework prepared with technical support by the European Union and the World Bank (Cameroon, 2009).

The strategy also puts considerable emphasis on agricultural diversification and productivity, in particular to achieve food security. Five key priority areas have been identified: (i) infrastructure development in energy, telecoms, and transport; (ii) development of the rural and mining sectors; (iii) improvement in human resources through health, education, and training; (iv) greater regional integration and export diversification; and (v) financial sector deepening and strengthening (Cameroon, 2009). There is considerable effort since 2010 towards achieving these goals. There have been major infrastructure development process to boost the energy sector, including the take off of the construction of power dams in Mekin (South of Cameroon) and Lom Pangar (East of Cameroon), and major contracts in solar energy production have also been awarded. The Menchum Falls power plant has been projected for the coming years. Investments in agriculture and mining sectors as well as in education, health, and transport are also highly visible and in process.

To some degree, however small, this development policy agenda maintains that systematic development and mobilization of youth for sustainable national development deserves focus. Main policy related issues include: uncoordinated policy and institutional framework for youth development; few vocational and skills training facilities; fusion of vocational and apprenticeship training with formal education thereby nullifying job training objectives; persistent growth of unemployment for both school finishers, school dropouts and those who never attended school; increasing street children phenomenon and crime; under-mobilisation and utilization of youth talents; continuous growth of youth unemployment and channeling of youth energies into anti-social activities. To do these, there are visible plans to mainstream youth development into a national development policy framework; ensure the implementation of youth policies earmarked in "Vision 2035"; equip the youth with enjoyable skills and introduce new initiatives for youth development; and expand special employment schemes for the youth. In this regard the Cameroon government, still in effort to pilot the country towards modernity and economic advancement, opened up twenty five thousand jobs in the Cameroon public service who were all recruited in 2011-2012. There are many other efforts including the opening up of labour markets, internal and external trade, industrial and agrarian revolution with an agricultural show in Ebolowa in 2011 and opening up of many mining companies, energy supplies and other industrial attempts, all of which are seriously benefiting the youth.

The nature of today's youth in the developing world

The voices, views, and visions of the young still wait to be heard and considered in their own development and that of their nation states in the developing world. This is typical in the developing world, including Africa where very little is yet to be known about them and their developmental strivings, even though they constitute more than 70% of Africa's population (Erny, 1987) and remain the continent's greatest resource, investment and hope for its future. Very little is known about them. In mainstream developmental science, political, economic, social and cultural structures of society, young people have always been seen or understood from the perspective of the adult group or the old. That is why they

have often remained “silent others”, the voiceless *enfants terribles* (Caputo 1995; Gottlieb 2000; Hirschfeld, 1999, 2002) and the incompetent category, blinded, confused and without a focused sense of vision. They are often constructed from the outside and from above as a “problem” or a “lost generation” (Cruise O’Brien 1996), living a life in “crisis” (Everatt and Sisulu, 1992). This is evidenced in the ambitious policy of Cameroon’s vision for the year 2035: Not only that the dream in the policy is dreamt by the adult group, the youth have been almost left silent, voiceless, seemingly incompetent, blinded, confused and with nothing to contribute. However, this paper advocates for a new way of rethinking adolescence and youth so that the way forward is to invest in the young as a way of building sustainable skills in order to prepare them to become more functional, responsible and productive when the take over adult responsibilities.

According to Nsamenang (2007) discourse on Africa’s youth has not transcended the rhetoric of “calamity” that visualises, casts and intervenes the young as problematic cohorts in the tedium of global imperatives offered to humanity by western civilizations. There is doubtful data on the circumstances and imagined futures of Africa’s huge next generations, who today are the young. For example, research on emerging adulthood, especially from the Americas has referred to them as “generation x”, suggesting their vulnerability and inability to pave the way to a functional, productive and dependable adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2004). The impression is also that they constitute a useless cohort of society and naturally do not incarnate anything to contribute to their development and that of their nation states. With these kinds of studies, it is observed that arguments and beliefs that young people nurture have rarely been listened to, and when their voices are not silenced, then their talk is never unconstrained. Their voices reach a broader platform only in rare and sometimes tragic cases, but even then these sorry voices are often immediately recuperated, transformed, and inserted into different narratives and agendas set by other interest groups. In most cases, the young are perceived through opposition to the old and as “people in the process of becoming rather than being” (Honwana & Boeck, 2005). For example, when the youth protested and took to the streets against rising prices in basic commodities in 2008 in Cameroon, they were quickly branded as being manipulated by the opposition in the country.

Youth in developing economies make up a very large and vulnerable group that is seriously affected by the current international economic crisis (Bennell, 2010). Globally, three-quarters of the poor live in rural areas, and about one-half of the population is young people. The growing food crisis is also expected to have a disproportionately high impact on the youth. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that nearly half a billion youth “do not get the chance to realize their full potential” (FAO, 2009). The 2005 International Labour Organization (ILO) report on Global Employment Trends for Youth states that: “today’s youth represent a group with serious vulnerabilities in the world of work. In recent years, slowing global employment growth and increasing unemployment, underemployment and disillusionment have hit young people hardest. As a result, today’s youth are faced with a growing deficit of decent work opportunities and high levels of economic and social uncertainty” (ILO, 2005: p.1). The lack of decent employment rather than open unemployment is the central issue in the majority of rural locations. In overall terms, four times as many young people earn less than US\$ 2 a day than those who are unemployed. Youth are particularly vulnerable in conflict and post-conflict countries. Very high youth unemployment coupled with rapid urbanization has fuelled civil conflict in many countries, particularly in Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia.

However, the situation is worse for Cameroonian youth as their vision for adulthood is ill-fated by difficult economic, social, political, cultural, health and psychological conditions which have left most of them hopeless about the future of their adulthood (Lo-oh, 2012). In particular, health care services, economic resources, and social services are unevenly distributed across the country. As a result a majority of youth are left languishing in abject poverty, unemployment, under-scholarisation, and a difficult labour market economy. With this, it is increasingly difficult to manage the economics of adulthood including challenges of becoming autonomous, financially independent, personally and socially responsible, emotionally stable and self-reliant (Lo-oh, 2012). As a result, several changes have occurred in the youth life course. For example, education has extended into the late twenties and early thirties, family formation has been postponed, and many young people plan on remaining single and childless well into their thirties, if not indefinitely (Casper & Bianchi 2002). The transition to adult status has been transformed from a relatively clear-cut, linear pathway to a complex, fragmented and individualized process dependent on the ability of each young person to navigate his or her way through a set of landmark events (Lo-oh, 2011).

In the midst of these, core role transitions such as education, entering the work force, exit from the parental home, marrying and becoming a parent (Hogan & Astone, 1986; Shanahan, 2000) have remained outstanding as important criteria for investing in the young, transforming them into thinkers of the future and of course preparing the next generation. This suggests investing in the young as the new road to take in the developing world. Guaranteeing youth education, employment, emotional stability and family formation would mean providing enough spaces for the youth and effectively preparing the future of developing economies. This is particularly crucial now given the changes that have taken place in the last few decades, causing severe fragmentations in the life course, thereby affecting investments in next generations.

For example, in developing economies, including Cameroon and most African states, a higher proportion of students completed high school in the 1990s than in the 1960s, and more students now enroll into university education, pushing forth the age of leaving school (Hayford & Furstenberg, 2008). Also the median age for marriage and first birth has risen steadily since 1970s (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). Again today, children are born before marriage; education and employment alternate; and jobs paying enough to support a family increasingly require more formal education. This is why young people accordingly remain in school longer to acquire the credentials they will need to support a family (Gaudet, 2007). This has extended education further into the late twenties in the northern industrialised economies; and into the thirties in southern emerging economies. The result is that most young people are taking longer to go through the full set of transitions into adult roles, and some are delaying marriage and parenthood indefinitely. This has further led to inadequate preparation for the future of adulthood, participation in development efforts and involvement in next generation policy agendas for the future of Cameroon.

Youth democracy, national consciousness and unity

The role of youth in bringing about and sustaining democracy, national consciousness and unity in Africa, cannot be overemphasized. A genuinely inclusive society needs to ensure that its youth participate in all its affairs; that young people's views are included in development policies and that they develop leadership skills. In many African countries, including Cameroon, youth have either remained marginalized or not played a role in the political process. This is largely due to institutional and policy constraints of the state and society. In most cases across Africa, African youth have been only marginally involved in civic participation, electoral participation and providing a political voice. This is partly due to lack of quota systems in political processes and in political parties of many African countries so that the youth remain on the fringe of political parties, and broad national economic, social and political agendas.

On the contrary, most, if not all democracies in present day Africa are the products of the youth-who in most cases sacrificed their blood and sweat to uphold, plant, and nurture the ideals of that philosophy. This partly explains why most national day celebrations in African nation states, like is the case with Cameroon, is dedicated to the youth. During such celebrations, nation states commemorate the role that the youth played at the dawn of African independence with the spirit of nationalism and unity; and what they have done over the years to foster democratic principles. The fight for democracy by the youth has registered an uphill task for the young since the independence of Cameroon. Major accomplishments would include the struggle for multi-partism in the early 1990s in which case several Cameroonian young people rose to challenge the then autocratic one-party government of Paul Biya at the time. Though this pro-democracy uprising was quelled down with all repressive tools at the disposal of government at the time, it left an indelible footprint in the writing of democracy in Cameroon as it paved the way for multi-party politics from then onwards. Till date, things have never been the same again in Cameroon.

Even though the youth occupy a significant position in the democratization process in Africa, the situation is somewhat different in the Cameroon's development agenda from 2010-2035. Democracy assumes that individuals are equally important so that young people like adults should have a mutual influence on society, irrespective of age, gender, and other background indicators. Democracy loses its strength and legitimacy in a society that consistently excludes groups of people. It means that unless the "vision 2035" agenda effectively build strategies for the youth, considering their perspectives and also enhancing their participation, it might be difficult to realize a developmental plan that is holistically binding for all Cameroonians. This is particularly important for the youth who actually constitutes the future of Cameroon, and who stand out as the legitimate beneficiaries of the development plan envisaged for the country. What if tomorrow the today's youth denounce all the achievements and ideals of that vision?

In politics, democratization implies the institutionalization of democracy whose ingredients include: participation, equality, justice, rule of law and freedom (Nwabueze, 1993; Gauba, 2003; Ake, 1996). Essentially, democratization is a process that requires the removal of all barriers to the effective practice of democracy. At the level of development as the case may be in Cameroon's development agenda, democratization pertains to the making of development efforts and gains accessible to all, irrespective of age group, class, religion, ethnic affiliation or other discriminatory factors (Babarinde, 1995). For integration purposes, the access is at two levels. Here, all members of the ethnic nationalities must have unfettered or unlimited access in order to enhance development and also reap its benefits. This will help to erode feelings of neglect and alienation, arising from the lack of capability to compete for national resources due to the absence of opportunities.

Participatory democracy is a form of democracy in which citizens are actively involved in the decision-making processes of government at different levels on issues that interest or affect them, and on the basis that mechanisms and platforms will be put in place to facilitate this. Youth participation cannot happen if those who have power, influence and are dominant, and who have access to the means to perpetrate development, cannot accept, contend with or argue against views different to those of their own. A culture of tolerance involves debate and dynamic exchanges of opinions and arguments, whereby people can learn from others, get closer to the truth, and benefit from a vital public life. Developing a culture of tolerance is a long term undertaking that removes the roots of intolerance and is necessary for the democratic process. This is particular for Cameroon whose youth are seemingly ever conscious of its duty, dignity and destiny; a youth that has gotten right the essentials of life's philosophical strategy and is therefore able to both discover and fulfill its mission; a youth that has got to know the spiritual value embedded in emancipator praxis and that freedom consists of discipline and selfless service to others and who have embrace the ethic of compassion and that of respect (du Plessis, 2010). The long and short of it all is that Cameroon's youth voices and visions ought to be sought and heard in the democratization process of the country.

Youth and poverty alleviation in Cameroon

The alleviation of poverty is universally accepted as a primary development objective as enshrined in the Millenium Development Goals (World Bank, 2000). This is also one of the major concerns of "vision 2035" agenda for Cameroon's dream of becoming an "emerging" nation. Poverty is a vicious circle which keeps the poor in a state of destitution, in the context of this paper, particularly the youth. Poverty in itself is multidimensional however, as it affects many aspects of the human condition, including physical, moral and even psychological (Ahmed, 2010). These therefore necessitate a call for shaping and reshaping nation states and citizens, especially the youth via poverty alleviation schemes. Irrespective of how poverty is defined and which dimension considered, the poor have been described as those who could not obtain adequate income, find stable jobs, own property or maintain healthy condition (Obadan, 1997). They also lack adequate level of education and cannot satisfy their basic needs; so they are often illiterate, poor in health, and have short life spans (Sancho, 1996). These are visible signs expressed in the daily lives of Cameroonian children and youth in rural and urban centres. It is widely acclaimed that since the outbreak of economic crisis in Cameroon in the mid 1980s, young people have witnessed severe poverty lines, with evidence of majority youth without access to basic necessities of life. Perhaps because of the nature of the life-course events, leaving school, starting work, getting married and having children; Cameroonian youth have been significantly unable to meet both social and economic obligations, lack skills and gainful employment, they have got fewer economic assets and sometimes lack self-esteem. Above all, Cameroonian youth seem to suffer a double-edge poverty experience, where they do not only lack basic needs, but they also lack access to basic services, practical contacts and other forms of support. They are highly marginalized and considered less important in many respects, either as service providers or as service consumers. It makes things worse for Cameroonian children and youth when in many circumstances they are seen as a voiceless "enfant terrible." This is where the problem of this paper also comes in as we question the legality of the ambitious development agendas for Cameroon, one of whose agenda is to alleviate poverty. If we agree that the youth constitute more than 60% of the country's population and that they are the highest hit by poverty, then, where is their voice in the process to eradicate poverty?

In the past years governments of developing economies and the World Bank have focused almost exclusively on agricultural developments as a way for reducing rural poverty and achieving sustainable growth. This has been the case in Cameroon as well, where the fight has not only been against rural poverty but also against youth poverty. A lot of those efforts in Cameroon are enshrined in the development agenda for 2035. A typical example in Cameroon is the National Civic Agency for Participatory Development, which is concerned, prepared and packaged as a grass root economic programme to assist in nurturing among young people, the spirit of nation building, civic responsibility and alleviating

poverty among the youth. Clearly shown on its agenda, we find that the introduction of this youth agency among the many other programmes to accompany the country to 2035 is a huge strategy of alleviating poverty amongst the youth. This is done through training, entrepreneurship education, vocational training, agriculture and provision of micro-credits.

The impact of youth poverty on long term human capital accumulation is well recognized because youth's capacity for learning is greater than for older ages (Kayaly, 2012). Therefore youth poverty characterizes missed opportunities to obtain skills in school or on the job, or good health habits. Youth from poor households suffer from high and relentless capability deprivation especially during childhood that limits human development in many ways that are often irreversible. Unhealthy, poorly educated children can grow into young people with limited capacity for learning and working. From experience in Cameroon, when a young person is forced, because of circumstances against him/her, to leave school or education before achieving a secondary or vocational qualification, such a person is often poorly paid, with insecure work; low and declining assets; minimal access to social protection and basic services. All these subject them to difficulty of breaking off from the vicious circle of poverty. As such to help Cameroonian young people, it is imperative that they are fully engaged in the development plan for Cameroon against 2035. They should not only be seen as beneficiaries, but should also be included in the conception and implementation of policies that will pull or push them out of poverty situations.

A youth voice in poverty alleviation or reduction is particularly relevant given that more than two-third of the population in low-income countries, including Cameroon are under 25 years, thus young people. Across these countries it is also found that most of these youth have significantly limited opportunities to exercise their human rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of association (Sundqvist, 2009), which makes them voiceless in many development initiatives in their respective countries. Also including a youth voice in poverty alleviation plans also makes young people not merely a target group but also initiators, participants, decision-makers and leaders. Eliminating poverty requires that the youth must be recognized as a resource for change in society and given a place to contribute their own share. In doing this, Cameroon needs to recognize and strengthen youth organisations and young leaders giving them more space for participation, influence and power.

Youth in the transformative process of Cameroon

The youth are at the centre of a maelstrom of rapid and often destructive social change which distorts young people's position within traditional gerontocratic communities and can cut them off from sources of survival. Youth, particularly those living in poverty or near the poverty line, are at the centre of a whole range of global and local social transformations (Burgess, 2005). Rather than being the stakeholders of the new market-led economies and promoters of democratic governance, youth are caught between becoming postmodern westernized vanguards or violent and disengaged vandals (Abbink & van Kessel, 2005). Therefore, economic restructuring and political reformations as is the case now in Cameroon have shown quite uneven and unexpected impacts on different groups of the youth. There are new groups of young citizens whose specific types of poverty, educational paths and sense of political belonging and becoming reflect the tensions between modernization and traditional community identifications (Burgess, 2005). The dilemma now for many African countries undergoing rapid change is whether young people can successfully connect to and feel that they belong not just to fluid shifting markets but also to the national definitions of citizenship and citizenship responsibilities.

In times of mass social change characterised by opening labour markets, increasing job insecurity, reduced job and training opportunities, and high rates of unemployment, a smooth and successful transition from school to work life becomes an important developmental task for today's youth in Cameroon. These increased changes have led to new work demands with trade-oriented skills at the forefront of employer's requirements. For example, today's employer looks for employees that have an understanding of her/his requirements and expectations, share high work ethics, show a high willingness to work, keenness to learn, punctuality, honesty, and appropriate personal behaviours (Weichold, 2007). Besides these work values, the 21st century labour markets expect basic skills, such as literacy, numeracy, team work, communication skills, problem solving skills and the ability to use equipment and technology. In addition, today's young people are expected to show high initiative, maturity, trainability, cleanliness, good manners, interest in the job, and respect for authority. This network of labour market expectations therefore necessitate effective job-related preparation and training in order to effectively prepare the world's next generation. This call becomes compelling for Cameroonian children and youth who experience high risks, with low levels of competencies and lower prospects for higher education training to empower their skills and ensure successful entry into the labour market. Besides, in Cameroon, schools have

been critiqued for not serving society by insufficiently supporting the development of skills needed in the labour market. Such underprivileged school-to-work experiences especially those of Africa particularly need programs that support school-to-work transitions (Lo-oh, 2012).

Visibly, development objectives, not only in Cameroon but across the many African developing economies cannot be met without the full involvement of young people who must be taken into account in event of any youth or development driven policy. For example a youth perspective in Cameroon's development agenda in the "vision 2035" economic and social ambition would be especially relevant since more than 60% of the nation's active population is made up of the youth. Again most of the youth have significantly limited opportunities to exercise their human rights such as freedom of expression and that of association. In every development effort, it is unfair to treat the young as merely a target group, but they should also be seen and considered as initiators, participants, decision-makers and leaders. Therefore one significant assignment for the greater ambitions policy for 2035 must review and redefine the place of the youth in that agenda so that they are eventually recognized as a resource for change in the country.

As it is already being done in Cameroon, with a whole ministry of youth affairs and a "grand" agency for young people, the National Civic Agency for Participatory Development, there is need to consider and elaborate the voices of the youth in national development. Recognizing their perspective would require that youth associations and leaders are strengthened and given more space for participation, influence and power. This is strongly highlighted in the "vision 2035" dream for Cameroon. A lot of effort is being made towards empowering young people through education, agriculture, entrepreneurship training, trade and other self-enhancing paradigms. Youth associations are encouraged and their existence is supported so that young people emerge with useful and usable plans that if supported could yield fruit. The National Civic Agency for Participatory Development is at the forefront of these efforts and recently trained over six thousand young people in 2012, who from January 2013 are being supported by the state to create businesses.

Given the level of youth poverty, unemployment and disconnection, Abbink & van Kessel (2005) maintain that to be young in Africa has come to mean being disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginal in the political and economic sense. Rather than holding their future in their own hands, they have become relatively powerless and disconnected from the programs that are shaping their futures. This submission therefore views young people as the sole proprietor of tomorrow's Cameroon. That is why we have looked at them as leaders of tomorrow; persons capable, skillful and competent in becoming part of the machinery in the preparation of next generation economies. In fact, they are seen as the hope of the future. Alternative pathways for the transformation of Cameroon require building skills, capacities and competencies in order to effectively and efficiently prepare young people for adult responsibilities. But the worry now is that these youth have little or no voice in shaping and re-shaping the current strategies for development in Cameroon. When these youth are effective actors in poverty reduction or alleviation, in transforming the economy into a middle income one, in industrializing the economy and consolidating democracy and national unity as is the case in Cameroon's agenda, better results are most likely to be arrived at.

Vision 2035 therefore, hinges on the results of past studies, identification of the population's needs, aspirations and the ambitions of politicians. In particular, the vision synchronises the aspirations and hopes of various actors as follows: a united and indivisible nation enjoying peace and security; a true, strong and fair democracy; a decentralized administration at the service of development; a prosperous economy with good infrastructure; an economy based on sub-regional, regional and global integration; controlled population growth; a nation that promotes gender parity in electoral processes and equality in elective positions; a socially and economically empowered woman; a stable and harmonious family; access to basic and quality social services by all; independence and accessibility of the judiciary; minimal poverty, illiteracy and social exclusion rates; an attractive Cameroonian culture united in diversity, and assertive at the international level; low unemployment and underemployment rates; well-trained youth exalting merit and country's expertise; and a fair distribution of resources between urban and rural areas, and between the various regions of the country (Cameroon, 2009).

According to the working paper for vision 2035, the overall objective of the vision is to make Cameroon an emerging country over the next 25-30 years which is the period required to move from one generation to another. The vision also has medium-term objectives, notably: (i) poverty alleviation; (ii) becoming a middle income country, (iii) becoming a newly industrialised country and (iv) consolidating democracy and national unity while respecting the country's diversity. This paper has therefore portrayed young people as the sole proprietor of tomorrow's Cameroon as an emerging economy.

We look at them as leaders of tomorrow; persons capable, skillful and competent in becoming part of the machinery in the preparation of the next generation economy of Cameroon. In fact, they are seen in this paper as the hope of the future. Based on these, this paper rethinks diverse ways of involving the youth in the transformative process of Cameroon, a major alternative being investment in children and youth. These alternative pathways require building skills, capacities and competencies in order to effectively and efficiently prepare young people for adult responsibilities. Preparing them for adult responsibilities actually means preparing the next generation of Cameroon. Bearing in mind the objectives of vision 2035, the paper will make analyses of the place of the youth in poverty alleviation; transforming Cameroon into a middle income country; transforming Cameroon into a newly industrialised country and consolidating Cameroon's democracy and national unity.

Concluding thoughts

There are more young people in Cameroon and they constitute the next generation of the country and its future hope. This fact makes it even more important to make sure that development policies are reviewed and that the youth are given greater opportunities, stronger capacity and a genuine chance to contribute in shaping and reshaping the way to the future of the country. Ideally, a youth perspective in development policies is a potentially powerful tool for policy-makers (Sundqvist, 2009). Having a youth perspective also identifies age-specific vulnerabilities, gaps and opportunities for investment and leads to greater efficiency by increasing the probability of making efforts that suit different groups of young people. This is effective because young people often have the best means of effectively reaching out to their peers. This means that government needs to increase conscious efforts in supporting young people to organize themselves and also become active partners in the development agenda for 2035 in Cameroon.

From an educational perspective, the new development agenda for Cameroon highlights the value of a form of citizenship education for all youth which should have a set of markers with which to assess progress of schools and other participating agencies towards the achievement of adult civic rights, responsibilities and duties. They would need to encourage active civic engagement where young people should be given practical training to increase their mobility in the informal sector. Schools and other services should also help young people make inroads and gain status in traditional African society. The development of social and human capital of individuals should also be given priority place in the development policy agenda. Therefore, schools and all youth related services, especially the National Civic Agency for Participatory Development should work to provide opportunities for youth to learn how to practice and actualize "active citizenship" and they should help develop the capabilities of youth as part of the process of identity formation and recognition of the importance of youth identity by those who matter.

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