

Cameroon : The Effect of Developmental AID on Poverty Reduction and Agro-Rural Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract Cameroon, with her numerous resources, still depends on foreign aid while the rate of poverty remains high. Thus, even though historical evidence gives impetus to the impasse over role of developmental aid, from the top down approach through to development as a spring-board raising states from the doldrums of poverty, it is still very difficult to draw a substantial relationship between developmental aid and poverty reduction. Against this backdrop of controversy, I find it apt to put Cameroon on a balance scale. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to critically assess the implications of developmental aid on poverty reduction and agro-rural development in Cameroon, using the RUMPI Area Development Project in the South West region of Cameroon as a case study. The study will situate and contextualize the top-down and bottom-up approaches to development within the basis of a Cameroonian perspective, using the Sachs-Easterly debate. The RUMPI Project was introduced with the objective of improving agriculture and empowering the rural woman; thereby fighting poverty within the South West region of Cameroon. Despite its criticism of the barriers to development created by corruption, political pressure and limited use of local and grass-root partnerships, the study, in assessing these failures also tries to outline vital ways in which the project can be improved upon.

Keywords Developmental Aid, Poverty Reduction, Agro-Rural Development, Rumpi Area Project, Economic Growth, Economic Development, Non Governmental Organizations, Cameroon

1 Introduction

As the fight against global extreme poverty continues even after 50 years, it is still empirically difficult to verify whether things are getting better or not. Thus, the combating of extreme poverty by pumping in billions of US dollars in the form of foreign aid continues to draw massive criticism. While some economists have used models to justify the existence of a financial gap between production levels and foreign exchange earnings, indicating the availability of limited resources for investment which can only be solved by foreign aid, others rather find it difficult to see any possible nexus between the poverty trap and agro-rural development.

It is a truism that 2.3 trillion USD in aid from the West has been contributed in the effort to address extreme poverty and to improve the economies of developing countries over the past 50 years (Easterly, 2005) Despite these massive efforts, so many people in Cameroon and around the world still face miserable lives and early deaths.

Cameroon has always been a highly-rated potential benefactor of developmental aid. What is interesting here is the fact that Cameroon has been witnessing an increasing amount of developmental aid flow. This therefore is creating an atmosphere of mixed feelings, not only among Cameroonian researchers, economists, writers and students, but even among laymen in the streets of Douala and Yaoundé as well as across villages in Cameroon. Statistics show that the Cameroon government has been depending on developmental aid, seeing it as one of the major means of achieving a positive breakthrough for development. Thus, as a show of burning desire responding to the

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Bretton Woods (IMF and World Bank) institutions on the government's vision to use developmental aid productively, the Cameroon government outlined its strategy to combat poverty in the well-documented 2003 Cameroon Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which was meant to increase average economic growth to 6% during the periods 2005-2015 (Cameroon PRSP, 2003).

The fundamental paradox here is that the Cameroon government has continued to receive developmental aid even though most of the objectives outlined in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper have not been realized and the per capita income remains very low. Cameroon is a country blessed with abundant wealth and natural resources, yet her being admitted into the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), was highly rated as a political achievement by the Cameroon government, for the simple reason that the country's external debts would be cancelled and a flow of aid would come to Cameroon.

According to the Official Development Assistance (ODA) and World Bank reports, developmental aid is very important to recipient countries as it serves as a galvanizer and stimulus to economic development, which in return serves as a springboard for poverty reduction and agro-rural development. From this point of view, we can see a link between developmental aid and development. Development is a combination of many aspects which include rising levels of education, political participation and democracy, urbanization, technology, health and welfare as well as higher incomes and industrialization, and to which states directions were seen as essential in their actualization (Paul, Haslam, Schafer, Beaudet, 2009). Here, reference can be made to the effectiveness of the Marshall Plan in transforming Europe (Moyo, 2009). This historical evidence gives impetus to the role of developmental aid as a springboard by which States can lift themselves up from the doldrums of economic impasse. Despite this positive view, the corollary is that it is very difficult to draw a substantial connection between developmental aid and actual development. Against this background of controversy, it is the intention of the researcher to put Cameroon on a scale which will balance developmental aid on the one side against poverty reduction on the other.

Even though Cameroon continuously receives developmental aid, and has witnessed a number of debt cancellations, this has not actually had a significant impact on its economic development or poverty level. If foreign aid and poverty reduction are directly or indirectly tied to each other, then the nature of this relationship will determine future agro-rural development in Cameroon. NGOs therefore can fill the gap. The purpose of this research is to conduct

an enquiry into the relationship between the impact of developmental aid on poverty reduction and agro-rural development in Cameroon, using the Sachs-Easterly debate. This research will examine how an increase in foreign aid would affect agro-rural development. It will also try to determine whether or not the problem of aid ineffectiveness actually rests with the approach used, or if there are other vital factors affecting aid effectiveness in Cameroon.

2 Background

According to the World Fact Book, the Republic of Cameroon is situated in Central Africa, with agriculture constituting the backbone of the economy. Even though the country has enjoyed stability, the 2011 GDP - purchasing power parity stands at 47.12 million USD. Real growth rate is barely 3.8 % while the GDP per capita income is 2,300 USD. Also, Cameroon's unemployment rate is relatively high (30%) which explains why the number of people living below the poverty line is up to 48% (CIA World Fact Book).

Firstly, this study openly outlines the impact of and relationship between developmental aid on poverty reduction and agro-rural development in Cameroon, using descriptive statistics for data that spans 1998-2010. General descriptive statistics on yearly GDP values over the period of 1998-2006, using ODA flows within 1998-2006 as variables will be used. Here, the human development index will be used to measure the level of economic development.

Secondly, I will be using the South West region of Cameroon and a bottom-up approach government development agency called the RUMPI PROJECT (2006-2010) as my case study, assessing the implications of developmental aid on poverty reduction and agro-rural development in Cameroon during the years 2006-2010.

3 Sachs-Easterly Debate

Professor Jeffrey Sachs, senior economist and the brain behind the Millennium Development Goals, looks at combating poverty in developing countries from the viewpoint of a planned approach. He believes in eradicating poverty through concrete plans using foreign aid. Thus, he identifies as a core idea of development assistance a plan to improve capital stock, infrastructure, human capital and public administration (UN Millennium Project Report, 2005). Professor Sachs is an advocate of the top-down approach towards development which entails using a univer-

sally free market structure. He holds the view that poor nations have been held hostage by a 'poverty trap' and thus require a 'big push'. He justifies this by identifying three principal mechanisms (Sachs, 2005). These include (1) low savings by the poor, (2) a demographic trap indicating high population and low savings, and (3), very low initial capital per person. Therefore, in order for poor nations to escape this poverty entrapment, developmental aid should strongly increase capital stock in the form of a 'big push'. Our senior economist postulates that developmental aid is required to justify a big push targeting basic investments until 2015 (UN Millennium Report, 2005). He urges rich nations to increase their development assistance in order to realize a poverty-free world and explains why poor nations will remain poor as follows (Sachs, 2005, p56):

... when people are utterly destitute, they need their entire income or more just to survive. There is no margin of income above survival that can be invested for the future. This is the main reason why the poorest of the poor are more prone to becoming trapped ...

On the other hand, William Easterly, a senior economist and prolific writer, holds rather a different viewpoint on development assistance and eradicating poverty. He talks of the searcher's approach to development, indicating that the best plan is to have no plan but use a bottom-up approach (Easterly, 2006). He indicates that in the world of foreign aid, planners announce good intentions but fail to ignite a spirit of motivation among those who need to make things happen, while searchers do not only find workable projects but also get measurable results. This, he explains, is an indication of the fact that planners at the top lack even basic knowledge of what is actually happening at the grassroots level, while searchers focus on the actual normal situation at that grassroots level. While admitting that foreign aid could create massive opportunities for poor nations, he holds strongly that this could only be a reality if it reflects the flourishing attempt of economic sovereignty and is backed up by legwork and rebuttal attempts (Gwartney, Lawson, Easterly, 2006). The objective for searchers therefore, is to look for opportunities to assess and evaluate the possibilities of meeting multiple goals while choosing those which promise the highest expected beneficial result at minimum cost. This he explains as follows (Ibid);

Economic freedom permits the decentralized search

for success that is the hallmark of free markets. It is seldom known in advance what will succeed. Many thousands of searchers mount myriads of different trials as to what will please consumers.

Professor Sachs identifies poverty in its original form as a key trap hindering development in poor countries. This he explains as follows: 'The key problem for the poorest countries is that poverty itself can be a trap. When poverty is very extreme, the poor do not have the ability - by themselves - to get out of the mess' (Sachs, 2005, p38). From this statement, professor Sachs draws a line between poverty and destitution, and since poor countries are living in destitution, their survival depends on their total income, leaving nothing to boast of as savings for the future (Ibid). William Easterly instead uses historical rhetoric to castigate the above submission of Professor Sachs by asking the following question and giving the answer: 'did the poorest countries in 1950 remain stuck in poverty over the next half century? Well no, the poorest fifth of countries in 1950 increased their income over the next five decades by a factor of 2.25' (Easterly, 2005, p38).

From the above view, it follows that there is a weak correlation between the poverty trap and development and therefore fails to demonstrate how aid can help poor countries out of a stagnant economy. Dr. Dambisa Moyo, in 'Dead Aid' calls for an immediate stop to the flow of government-to-government aid. Instead, she calls for short term interventions. In so doing, she makes reference to the Marshall Plan and Green Revolution that were implemented in Europe and India respectively and which played a vital role in economic reconstruction as they were short, sharp and finite, not open-ended commitments with no insight, which kills government creativity towards better ways of financing their development. This is what is plaguing African countries in general, and Cameroon in particular. William Easterly explains this by making it clear that Cameroon's long-standing dictator, Paul Biya, gets up to 41 percent of his government revenue from foreign aid (Easterly, 2006, p157). Because of this, Easterly urges donors to take foreign aid away from despotic governments.

The Sachs-Easterly debate therefore is a perfect development model for measuring the impact of developmental aid on poverty reduction and agro-rural development in Cameroon. Putting Cameroon on a scale balance using this model goes a long way towards assessing aid on any basis, be it economic or political development. All these measurements greatly affect the poverty level of Cameroonians, either directly through an increase in the standard of living by virtue of economic empowerment or indirectly through

agro-rural development.

4 Developmental Aid and its Impact on Economic Development

Accordingly, development is a combination of so many factors resulting from rising levels of education, political participation and democracy, urbanization, technology and health & welfare as well as higher incomes and industrialization, and these were seen as essential in the actualization of such development. (Haslam et al, 2009). Le and Winter in a very rare attempt to investigate the implications of developmental aid policies on the poverty level of a particular country, postulated that even though growth can be seen as a primary galvanizer for poverty reduction, the possibility of not benefiting from that growth becomes relatively high in countries with very high inequality levels of income allocation (Le, Th, Winter, 2001). From their viewpoint therefore, economic growth, which in turn leads to economic development, can play a very significant role in reducing the poverty levels of poor nations. However, they also argue that this reality becomes questionable in countries where the rate of inequality in income is extremely wide. In those situations, not everybody actually benefits from the growth. Their main findings rest on the fact that economic growth is the primary source of poverty reduction.

The work of Mosley and Hudson is a strong indication of the fact that there is a positive link between foreign aid and poverty alleviation, suggesting that there is strong evidence that foreign aid indirectly affects the poverty level of recipient countries, thereby reducing poverty and increasing the quality of life (Mosley, Hudson, 2001). The impetus here is the fact that their studies were actually carried out using cross-country data, with head index, human development index and infant mortality as their prime measurements for poverty levels and quality of life. Their main findings rather indicate an indirect impact on poverty alleviation and living standards in recipient countries.

Senior economists Hollis Chenery and Alan Strout came out with what was termed a “two gap model”. This model indicates and identifies both the financial gap and the gap between import requirements targeting production levels and foreign exchange earnings (Chenery, Strout, 1996). Their argument here implies that since developing countries have limited resources for investments (financing gap) and also inadequate foreign currency to pay for their imports, developmental aid therefore inevitably becomes the magic wand to promote the economic development of these

countries by bridging these two gaps. This argument implies a positive correlation between developmental aid and poverty reduction. The fundamental question should be whether by simply bridging these gaps, will a developing country see the light at the end of the tunnel? Not at all; it involves more than just pumping in money. If foreign aid was actually the panacea, why are developing countries still inside the tunnel of poverty?

5 Important Facts about Developmental Aid in Cameroon (Top-down)

Gaining independence in 1960, Cameroon experienced massive economic growth. This continuous growth was slowed in 1986 following a tremendous fall in the price of oil and other export products. With the indications of a deficit budget, the country found herself signing a structural adjustment loan in 1989 with the IMF (Amin, 1998). The SAP program targeted issues relating to external shocks and structural problems. It must be noted here that despite gestures towards reducing public expenditure and outlining institutional reforms, the economy was rather at a standstill, thus leading to a severe economic crisis.

The CFA devaluation in 1994 had a negative effect on the economy as tremendous public expenditure cuts were made with few or no galvanizers, which would lead the economy back to sustainability, either in the form of actual internal or external balances (Ibid). Amidst all this, what is really significant is the fact that the structural adjustment program of 1988 was not void of aid conditionality. A key example is the privatizations clause in the program. Thus, the privatization of state corporations like Cameroon Air Lines was just a microscopic entity within the entire SAP macrocosm. In December 2003, Cameroon signed a 3-year economic recovery program with the IMF which was supported by a poverty reduction and growth facility (PRGF) (Mission Francaise de Cooperation, 2001)

By April 2006, the government of Cameroon and the IMF signed a reference program with the intention of reaching a conclusion to a new PRGF. This reference program was reached by the end of April 2006. It must also be noted that in April, 2003, Cameroon adopted a final Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

Table 1 Official Development Assistance (ODA), figures and net disbursements to Cameroon from all donors, from 1997 to 2006.

YEAR	AMOUNT IN CURRENT PRICES (MILLIONS OF USD)
1997	499.05
1998	498.98
1999	434.53
2000	379.33
2001	480.08
2002	656.25
2003	895.12
2004	772.55
2005	417.44
2006	1684.34

¹ SOURCE : Extracted from OECD, Statistics, 2008

Table 1 above clearly shows the actual flow of ODA to Cameroon from 1997 to 2006. This table shows that the ODA flow to Cameroon has never been fixed or similar, not even for two consecutive years. Thus, there was a tremendous decrease in funds in 1999 and 2000 over 1997 and 1998. It should be recalled that the year 2000 set the pace for the MDG. Another important issue here is the tremendous increase of ODA flow to Cameroon from 417.44 million USD in 2005 to 1684.34 million USD the next year. From this, it follows that the 2003 Cameroon PSRP, which was endorsed by 2005, started to materialize in 2006. The result is an increase of the ODA flow to Cameroon in 2006. The question of “Why the increase?” could be justified by the Cameroon government’s effort in the 2003 PRSP to involve civil society groups, NGOs and all other stakeholders in the fight against poverty.

The question here is whether the above substantial increase in 2006 actually affected the lives of the intended beneficiaries. The period between 1997 and 2006 can be termed the top-down development model era in Cameroon. It was more of a hierarchical development model, with the donors working specifically with the Cameroon government without actually finding out what was going on at the local and grass root levels. The planning was done by government agencies involved with the opinion that they knew what was good for those at the grassroots level and how those plans should be carried out. For this reason, rural development programs were not framed in a way that

would harbor the ideas and promote the participation of the rural dwellers.

Table 2 Gross Domestic Figures of Cameroon, from 1997 to 2006

YEAR	AMOUNT IN CURRENT PRICES (Billions of USD)
1997	9.8
1998	9.6
1999	10.5
2000	10.1
2001	9.6
2002	10.9
2003	13.6
2004	15.8
2005	16.9
2006	18.3

SOURCE : Extracted from World development indicator website ².

Table 2 shows Cameroon GDP from 1997 to 2006. From every indication, there is an irregular flow of Cameroon’s GDP from top to bottom. This shows that the GDP was unstable and fluctuated from either a decrease from 1997 to 1998, or to an increase from 2002 to 2006. Between 2000 and 2001, the GDP recorded its highest decrease of about 5%, while between 2001 and 2006 it recorded a continuous stable increase of an average of 1.7 billion USD annually.

A close look at Tables 1 and 2 will single out the year 2006 as the one which showed Cameroon’s highest ODA flow between 1997 and 2006, and which was also the year with the highest GDP. The inference to be drawn from such an analysis is the fact that while the tables reveal that Cameroon was not actually dependent on foreign aid in 2001, with just 1% constituting her GDP, the situation in 2006 was just the opposite, as it shows that foreign aid actually constituted a significant amount of the country’s GDP. Thus, it follows that the government of Cameroon has recently been depending on foreign aid. This could be explained by the fact that the country’s admission into the Heavily Indebted Poor countries Initiative was received with much euphoria by the Cameroon government, which could be attributed to the fact that the Cameroon government saw this as a political achievement.

¹ 2005 Development Cooperation Report. www.oecdwash.org/pub/electronic/samples/dcr2006

² www.data.worldbank.org Access date: 23/10/2010

Table 3 Human Development Index (HDI) figures for Cameroon from 1997 to 2006

YEAR	LEB ³	ALR ⁴	CGER ⁵	GDP per capita (PPP USD)	LE ⁶ INDEX	EDUCATION INDEX	GDP INDEX	HUMAN DEV. INDEX
1997	54.7	71.7	43	1.890	0.50	0.62	0.49	0.536
1998	54.5	73.6	46	1.474	0.49	0.64	0.45	0.528
1999	50.0	74.8	43	1.573	0.42	0.64	0.46	0.502
2000	50.0	75.8	43	1.703	0.42	0.65	0.47	0.512
2001	48.0	72.4	48	1.680	0.38	0.64	0.47	0.499
2002	46.0	67.9	56	2.000	0.36	0.64	0.50	0.501
2003	45.8	67.9	55	2.118	0.35	0.64	0.51	0.497
2004	45.7	67.9	62	2.174	0.34	0.66	0.51	0.506
2005	49.8	67.9	62.3	2.563	0.53	0.52	0.54	0.532
2006	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

⁷ SOURCE : Established from Human Development Report 1999 to 2007/2008

Table 3 above is a clear manifestation of what constitutes the level of development and its impact on the lives and living standards of Cameroonians. It is actually a better testing ground for the implications of developmental aid on poverty reduction in Cameroon. First, the average life expectancy at birth stands at an average of 49 years, within the period between 1997 and 2005. Second, there is a continuous increase in combined gross enrollment in primary, secondary and tertiary schools, indicating an increase in the literacy rate. Also, the GDP fell from 1.890 to 1.474 in 1998, before witnessing a slow upward improvement towards 2005. Finally, there is a drop in the Human Development Index between 1997 and 2004.

6 Commentary

From the above submissions, the following conclusions can be arrived at in a number of ways :

First, a drop in the Human Development Index between 1997 and 2005 is an indication of the fact that the living standard of Cameroonians was taking a rather negative dip. It shows that despite the inflow of developmental aid to Cameroon, its impact on the life and the living standards of Cameroonians was insignificant. Hence agriculture,

which serves as the backbone of the economy, did not receive enough stimulus from the development aid to improve agro-rural development.

Second, an increase in school enrollment did not result in a spillover effect in the labor market, as the rate of unemployment continued to rise. Another important issue comes from a closer look at the 2001 Human Development index figures. The figures stand at 0.499, one of the lowest between 1997 and 2005. Considering the fact that 2001 was the year in which ODA flow to Cameroon constituted the least part of GDP, then it becomes clear from such an inference that developmental aid actually has had an impact on poverty reduction in Cameroon, but did it affect agro-rural development? This could be explained by the fact that a reduction of aid flow to Cameroon in 2001 could be seen as one of the major causes of a tremendous fall in the 2001 Human Development Index figures.

In summation therefore, statistics from Table 1, showing the total aid flow to Cameroon from 1997 to 2005, and Table 2, indicating GDP values, show some positive link between economic growth and developmental aid. This therefore means that developmental aid affects Cameroon's economic growth positively. But does it actually reduce poverty? This question can be answered when we look at Table 2 in conjunction with Table 3. A close look at these

³ Life Expectancy at Birth

⁴ Adult Literacy Rate

⁵ Combined Primary, Secondary and Tertiary gross enrollment ratio

⁶ Life Expectancy Ratio

⁷ www.undp.org/en/countries/profile/CMR

tables showcases a very weak relationship between ODA and HDI, indicating that even though developmental aid contributes to economic growth in Cameroon, it does not lead to economic development, while agro-rural development initiatives were not fully exploited. This could be explained by the fact that although the country witnessed a significant average growth rate in its GDP of about 1.74 billion USD from 2001 - 2006, the basic social indicators were still very embarrassing, standing as one of the worst world cases. The top-down era (1997-2006), through the planners' model of development, created a positive relationship between developmental aid and economic growth, but without adequately affecting economic development with enough capacity to create a strong impact on poverty reduction through agro-rural development.

Case Study : The RUMPI Project 2005-2010

Background Information and Area of Study : South West Region of Cameroon

This is one of Cameroon's richest regions in terms of natural resources. It is made up of seven divisions and a population of about 1.3 million inhabitants, with Buea as its regional capital. The region is one of the two English-speaking regions in Cameroon and hosts the only State Anglo Saxon University in Cameroon. This region is the home of Cameroon Mountain, Cameroon national oil refinery (SONARA) and many tourist sites, but has one of the worst road infrastructures in the Country. It is made up of mostly rural towns with agriculture as the main source of income. Altogether it consists of seven divisions and more than fifteen subdivisions. The region also shares a boundary with Nigeria and is rich with oil reserves such as the Mundemba and the Bakassi Peninsular. It must be noted here that ownership of this peninsula was a point of conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon until it was handed over to Cameroon by the International Court of Justice.

The RUMPI Project, which was welcomed with much euphoria due to the fact that it was intended to benefit more than 240,000 rural households (within the South West region of Cameroon) and increase their annual income, instead suffered a disbursement of funds suspension by the African Development Bank in early 2007 for lack of adequate financial management tools. The RUMPI

Project was approved in 2003 by the African Development Bank in Tunis, Algiers as part of an agreement totaling 46.81million USD designed to finance two rural development projects in Cameroon. The RUMPI Area Participatory Development Project consists of a fund which includes 22.29 million USD as a loan and 2.23 million USD as grant. The project, which was highly applauded by the Cameroon government during the introductory phase, raised projections which, according to the government, would benefit more than 240,000 rural households and potentially increase the average annual income for close to 320,000 women from 145,000 CFA to 200,000 CFA⁸. Because of this, the project is placed under the South West Development Authority (SOWEDA) and co-funded by the African Development Bank (75%), Technical Assistance Fund (TAF - 8%), Government of Cameroon (15%) and the beneficiaries (2%)⁹. The project is in the form of a bottom-up approach development model.

Project Description

According to the project structure, the following output will be realized:

- First, the RUMPI area rural communities will be empowered with the capability to sustainably manage community-based projects.
- Second, there is the potential for an increase in productivity within small holdings and an improvement in market access.
- Finally, the project will be implemented under four specific components which comprise capacity building, agricultural production and productivity enhancement, market and local initiatives support, and project management¹⁰.

Project Formulation

The project takes a participatory approach, involving all stakeholders, representatives of GOC, rural communities, civil societies and development partners. It must be noted here that the project is framed within the basis of the National Participatory Development Program, sharing a vision covering a sector-wide approach for community-driven development ¹¹. This is highly characterized by a com-

⁸ www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/.../project/cameroonpdf. Access Date : 20/10/2010

⁹ www.recorderline.blogspot.com/cameroonrumpi-project-approves-2010 Access Date: 25/10/2010

¹⁰ www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/.../project/cameroon.pdf. Access Date: 20/10/2010

¹¹ Ibid.

munity-driven development approach which rests on core principles within the basis of participatory planning and evaluation. Within these structures therefore, we see an effective implementation and monitoring design¹².

As well, it will be in the form of community investment funds, with the capacity to uphold a policy dialogue and decentralized structure, coupled with the ability to upgrade and empower rural communities through the use of sector reforms¹³.

Project Design and Project Benefits

The RUMPI Project was designed as an efficient marketing infrastructure with the capacity to improve agriculture and stimulate supply while reducing post-harvest losses. In this wise, its emphasis is on effective grassroots participation coupled with a holistic approach to rural development and rural economy¹⁴.

The program was projected to benefit and strengthen the capacity of over 2500 villagers, improve planting materials (524,817 cassava cuttings, 10,500 cocoa pods, 20,000 coffee cuttings, 3.17 tons of maize seeds, 12,000 yams sets, 0.3 tons of soybeans, 10,000 oil palm seedlings and 4700 plantain suckers) and ultimately financed 58 income-generating micro-projects, trained 20,308 farmers in agricultural and natural resource management, and also constructed and rehabilitated 20 rural markets, 55 village banks and 24 water schemes¹⁵.

Rumpi and Agro-rural Development

The participatory approach of the RUMPI Project and its grassroots-active participation are clearly the signs and wonders of a bottom-up development approach which can have a serious positive impact on agro-rural development. The RUMPI Project so far has been targeting rural areas, along with the participation of other NGOs and civil society groups. The project has been able to make rural communities part and parcel of communal development. A close look across the water schemes to communities' project is a clear example of grassroots development. The first part of a scheme such as this normally takes the form of

a workshop within a community. A good example here is the three-day workshop organized by RUMPI in Kumba, the headquarters for Meme divisions in the South West region, Cameroon, from January 30th to February 1st, 2008 with over 50 participants. The emphasis of the workshop was on sustainable water resource management, followed the offering of 34 water schemes to communities in the South West region¹⁶.

In the process of helping local farmers to improve their productivity, RUMPI has been able to use community participation and mobilization strategies. During a sensitization workshop on the RUMPI Project, held July 26-27, 2005 at the Alliance Franco-Camerounaise conference hall (in Buea, South West regional capital), the GM of SOWEDA, which serves as the supervisory institution for the project, made it clear that the local population should actually be in the driver's seat of its own destiny, while also emphasizing that the project's purpose is to mobilize all¹⁷.

Thus, recently, on the question as to why RUMPI decided to distribute more planting materials this year, Mr. Enang James, the regional supervisor for RUMPI Activities, Regional Delegation, made it clear that during the months of November and December 2009, they carried out an assessment in all divisions, with the help of the local farmers. He explained that the results of this assessment were the reason for late planting the year before. In this regard therefore, the RUMPI Project envisages distributing 38 tons of maize for the 2010 planting season¹⁸.

From the above, the project can adequately be situated within the structure of the Sachs-Easterly debate. The RUMPI Project has been able to make the grassroots community part and parcel of the project, and therefore justifies the essence of Easterly's bottom-up model as a key option with the capacity of linking foreign aid to economic development, resulting in poverty reduction and agro-rural development. Organizing workshops before implementing projects promotes effectiveness and reliability. Also, participatory assessment after every project will lead to positive improvement in the future. We see how RUMPI has been trying to make good use of these principles. Thus, the projects that have been realized so far have actually contributed enormously to the reduction of poverty within the South West region of Cameroon. Finally, the name

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ www.postnewsline.com/2007/05/ogork_ntui_is_n.html. Date of publication : 2008 Access date : 20/10/2010

¹⁷ Ibid Date of publication : 02/08/2005 Access date : 19/10/2010

¹⁸ www.thefarmersvoice.org/.../development-news.php? Date of publication 05/04/2010 Access date : 01/11/2010

RUMPI is gradually becoming common knowledge among farmers, especially in rural areas.

ERD-RUMPI (Electricity for Rural Development in the RUMPI Area)

This 4-year electricity scheme (2008-2011) is designed for socio-economic impact and improvement of rural electrification, spreading across several rural communities in the South West region of Cameroon, namely Kumba, Mbonge, Konye, Ekondo Titi, Bamusso and Muyuka. The ground field-work so far has been very positive, with close to 100 localities and 20,000 villagers expected to benefit from the project¹⁹. Thus, electrifying these communities will go a long way towards having a positive impact on

lives and therefore helps to eradicate poverty at the grass-roots level. It will serve as a boost to the socio-economic situation of these local communities. With the availability of energy, life becomes much better while time wastage can be effectively minimized. This can therefore be seen as a measurable achievement with the capacity to eradicate poverty.

Creation of Poverty Schemes in Rural Areas

The RUMPI Project so far has been able to introduce incentives with the sole purpose of trying to eradicate poverty. This has been in the form of Village Banks, Water Schemes, Rural Markets and rural roads rehabilitation. This can be seen in the table below :

Table 4 Rumpi Poverty Schemes

POVERTY SCHEMES	TOTAL	TOTAL ALREADY EXECUTED	TOTAL YET TO BE EXECUTED	EXECUTION DATELINE
RURAL MARKETS	20	19	1	JUNE 2011
VILLAGE BANKS	55	28	29	N/A ²⁰
WATER SCHEMES	34	34	-	N/A
FEEDER ROADS/REHABILITATION	227 KM	227 KM	-	EXPIRED

SOURCE : ²¹ REACH OUT 2008 Annual Report

Discussion and Presentation of Research Findings

Rumpi Vis a Vis Partnership

- Looking at the project, we realize that it did not make adequate use of local partnerships with other local NGOs fighting poverty. Even though a handful of NGOs were used with good results, it failed to make abundant use of local organizations and civil society groups. We see the coordinators organizing seminars and more often trying to organize rural farmers. This could be well-handled by local farmers unions or groups.

- Local partnerships facilitate projects and minimize costs. A good example of this is the partnership between RUMPI and Reach Out on the HIV/Aids project²². This was a project costing just one million CFA (2000 USD) but with wonderful results. From every indication therefore, an effective local partnership scheme can go a long way towards playing a significant positive role in poverty alleviation, something the RUMPI Project has not been able to adequately utilize.

Corruption

This is also a major problem holding back the project. It must be noted here that the RUMPI Project has not been

¹⁹ www.energyfacilitymonitoring.eu/images/seminar2/etude_de_cas_erd_rumpi.pdf Access Date : 17/03/2011

²⁰ N/A: Not Available

²¹ Formulated by the researcher in consideration of the following news articles, reports and research trip to Cameroon: visiting some Rumpi rural areas, recorder line blogspot.com, Up Station Mountain Club official website www.postnewslines.com/2007/05/ogork_ntui_is_n.html and Reach out 2008 Annual report.

²² Reach out 2008 Annual report

able to meet even 50 percent of the project's target and objectives²³. At one point, the African Development Bank suspended the disbursement of funds for the project due to inadequate financial management structures²⁴. From every indication, this is a sign of mismanagement of funds. This therefore means that some projects are poorly done while resources are grossly over-allocated to others with just a small percentage of the resources used. There is no justification for the unused resources and suspected unaccountability.

Political Pressure

Politics and government involvement makes it very difficult for things to work smoothly in many Sub-Saharan African countries. Even though the government of Cameroon tries to play a lesser role in the management of poverty schemes as per the 2003 PRSP, the fact that major program coordinators are appointed by the government and not by the board of directors makes it very difficult for these coordinators to work without State pressure. The implications of this are enormous; we see them getting actively involved in partisan-politics with the ruling party. They try to carry out rush-hour projects during election years simply because they want to win votes and do not target projects for the purpose of escalating economic development. This is a problem not only with RUMPI but also with all other poverty schemes within the country which involve the government.

Summary Findings

In this research therefore, the researcher has been able to come up with the following considerations and findings:

First, even though the top-down approach to the use of developmental aid affects Cameroon positively, it does not actually reduce poverty. We see rather a weak relationship between Cameroon's ODA flow and her Human Development Index, indicating that developmental aid contributes to Cameroon's economic growth but does not positively affect the country's economic development. This is why, even though Cameroon witnessed a significant average growth rate in its GDP of about 1.74 billion USD from 2001-2006; the basic social indicators were still very embarrassing, standing as one of the world's more desperate cases. Thus, even though Cameroon has continuously received developmental aid, and has witnessed a number of debt cancellations, this has not actually had a great impact on its economic development or poverty level. If for-

eign aid and poverty alleviation are directly tied to each other, then the nature of this relationship will determine future development in Cameroon. NGOs can then fill this gap.

Second, the bottom-up approach to development as demonstrated through the RUMPI project gives a participatory and grassroots approach to development, as it makes adequate use of community participation and mobilization strategies. Thus, getting the community involved will definitely lead to a change in some lives and affect the economic development of the country. This in turn can help to reduce poverty and ignite agro rural development.

Finally, the impact of developmental aid on poverty reduction and agro-rural development in Cameroon is not simply rooted in a top-down or bottom-up approach to development. There are other strong influences such as corruption, political pressure and inadequate local partnerships. Thus, if the fight against corruption is not intensified and local partnership and participation is not highly encouraged and exploited, the fight against poverty in Cameroon will have little impact on the alleviation of poverty and making it a thing of the past.

Recommendations

If things are to change in the future, the following recommendations are imperative :

First, NGOs, especially at the local level, should be given a much more dominant role in the fight against poverty. They should be allowed to step in and fill the gap between achieving economic growth and realizing economic development. Even if the country continues to achieve significant economic growth, without corresponding economic development, the fight against poverty will be never-ending.

Second, corruption should be strongly discouraged and penalized. Embezzlers should be given severe punishment so as to dissuade others from indulging in similar practices. As long as the fight against corruption is minimal, the result will be that people lose the incentive to manage resources and their desire to work as a team.

Finally, local partnerships should be encouraged while donors play a lesser role as to the utilization of projects. Those at the grassroots level should be focused and given the opportunity to play leading roles in the fight against poverty within their local community.

²³ www.thefarmersvoice.org/.../developmentnews.php published date : 26/01/2009. Access date : 8/02/2011

²⁴ www.entrpreneursonline.com/.../rumpi-rural-development-project-asks-for-extension-html published date : 27/11/2007. Access date:8/02/2011

Conclusion

From the above summary findings, it becomes clear that even though top-down developmental aid affects Cameroon's economic growth, it has not been able to reduce the country's considerable poverty or maintained a consistent agro-rural development. In contrast to this, bottom-up developmental aid, even with its short comings, has been able to reduce poverty in those cases that were adequately applied. However, with greater use of local partnerships with NGOs and implementation of effective measures to fight corruption, the bottom-up developmental aid model can actually make a positive change in the living standards of Cameroonians, especially at the grassroots level, so they can become productive and, in the long run, reduce or end their reliance on developmental aid. In this regard, while the top-down approach focuses more on increasing foreign aid, the bottom-up approach is more committed to how that aid should be used, which makes it the more effective scheme.

The study above identifies a near-vacuum in the connection between developmental aid and agro-rural development. This research tries to fill that gap through the use of NGOs who implement partnerships at the rural level.

The study could also serve as a valuable policy paper for practitioners and policy-makers. The rationale here is based on the premise that since agriculture constitutes up to 80% of the Cameroon economy, poverty reduction can only be achieved through effective agro-rural development initiatives.

Finally, this is the first developmental aid paper on poverty reduction and agro-rural development in Cameroon, situated within the Sachs-Easterly debate. From the above analysis, it becomes obvious that the minimal impact of developmental aid on poverty reduction and agro-rural development is not simply rooted in only the top-down or bottom-up approach. Thus, future research should look at other considerations, be it governance or politics.

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