

# **Reforming a National System of Higher Education: THE CASE OF CAMEROON**

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A Report of the ADEA Working Group On Higher Education

This study was commissioned and financed by the Working Group on Higher Education which is sponsored by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). It was also supported by substantial in-kind contributions from staff of the University of Buea. The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and should not be attributed to ADEA, to its members or affiliated organizations, or to any individual acting on behalf of ADEA.

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Published by the ADEA Working Group on Higher Education  
The World Bank  
1818 H Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20433  
U.S.A.

The Working Group on Higher Education (WGHE) was founded in 1989 to strengthen collaboration between African governments, development agencies, and higher education institutions. Its goals are to improve the effectiveness of development assistance and, more broadly, to support the revitalization of African universities. The lead agency of the WGHE is the World Bank, which works closely with the Association of African Universities (AAU) in carrying out the WGHE's activities.

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# Reforming a National System of Higher Education:

## THE CASE OF CAMEROON

### *Introduction*

In January 1993 the government of Cameroon launched a major reform of its higher education system. Six universities were created out of one large university and four small university centres, a semester course-credit system was introduced, bursaries to students were eliminated, and students were required to pay substantial fees. These reforms, especially the creation of six universities, were considered in certain circles, particularly among some international donor agencies, as inconsistent with an environment of severe economic crisis that many countries in Africa, including Cameroon, were experiencing.

At the time of the reform, the country's only university, the University of Yaoundé, was experiencing an exponential increase in student numbers (over 40,000 students on a campus originally intended for 5,000), poor teacher-student ratios (1:132 in the Faculty of Law and Economics, 1:58 in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and 1:58 in the Faculty of Science), and attendant negative effects on educational quality and success rates. The university's budget was spent largely on students' welfare (over 43%) to the detriment of its primary missions of teaching and research, to which less than 1.5% of the recurrent budget was allocated.

In contrast, the four small university centres were under-utilised because of the limited scope and nature of their programmes. For example, the Buea University Centre had facilities for 2,000 students but had only 60 enrolled in its single school (the School of Translators and Interpreters). The Ngaoundere University Centre, also with a capacity for over 2,000 students, had just 306 students enrolled in its modest School of Food Technology. The Dschang University Centre with accommodations for over 4,000 students, had only 555 enrolled. Although the University of Yaoundé was intended to function as a bilingual institution, its programmes were essentially designed after the French university system and were taught predominantly in French. This created problems of access and performance for English-speaking students.

These and other problems prompted an urgent and complete overhaul of the country's higher education system in 1993. Six years after these reforms were instituted, it is appropriate to review them in order to determine their major achievements and shortcomings, and to see what lessons can be drawn not only for Cameroon, but also for the wider African region.

On balance, higher education reforms in Cameroon have succeeded in decongesting the University of Yaoundé, in redistributing students to the University Centres (which have now become full-fledged universities, thereby ensuring more equitable access), in stimulating the participation of stakeholders in funding the universities, in offering more diverse educational opportunities for students, and in re-ordering budgetary priorities. However, the reforms have met stiff resistance on the part of students, particularly in the area of finances. Moreover, they have been hampered by reduced and irregular funding from the State (especially from 1993 to 1997) which has not permitted an increase of quality staff and adequate infrastructure to match the surging enrolments. Given this situation, the new universities find themselves steadily sliding back into the same discouraging conditions and atmosphere that prevailed in the former University of Yaoundé before the reforms were initiated.

The main thrust of this paper is to analyse the goals, process and impact of higher education reforms introduced by the government of Cameroon during the 1990s. To do so, it is important to set the context by summarising the evolution of higher education in Cameroon, taking into consideration earlier reform efforts and their impact.

### ***The Beginnings of Higher Education in Cameroon (1961 – 1977)***

Following independence in 1960, one of the crucial problems faced by Cameroon was the need for trained national cadres, especially for senior positions in the civil service. Before independence, most Cameroonians pursued university education abroad. But the education they received overseas was poorly adapted to the needs of Africa in general, and of Cameroon in particular.

To provide higher education suitable for the specific needs and realities of the newly independent nation, the government created in 1961 a university complex known as the National Institute for University Studies (Institut National d'Etudes Universitaires). Its activities started modestly in October 1961 with the assistance of the French Government. Its mandate was to prepare students for degrees in Education, Law, Economics and the Arts. Professional training programmes were developed at the same time through the School of Administration, School of Agriculture and the Military Academy. In 1962 the National Institute for University Studies evolved into the Federal University of Cameroon, created to take over the role of training senior cadres in Science, Education and Technology. This institution was composed of organisational units such as faculties, schools, centres and institutes, each assigned a specific mission.

By 1967 other establishments had been created and attached to the University of Yaoundé (new name after 1967). The principal ones are worth mentioning. Medical training began in 1969 with the opening of the University Centre for Health Sciences (CUSS). At the same time, programmes in management and commerce were initiated at the Institute of Management – Institut de l'Administration des Entreprises (IAE). In 1970 the International School of Journalism – Ecole Supérieure Internationale de Journalisme de Yaoundé (ESIJY) – came into existence as a regional institution, thus opening the doors of the University of Yaoundé to inter-African co-operation. In 1971, the Institute of International Relations (Institut des Relations Internationales de Yaoundé) and the National Advanced School of Engineering (Ecole Nationale Supérieure Polytechnique – ENSP) became operational. With the creation of these training capacities, the nation was finally poised to tackle the broad strategic problems of development.

In summary, the period from 1962-1967 witnessed the creation of general education structures (faculties), while the period after 1967 was devoted to building professional and technological schools. These efforts were aimed at preparing graduates for immediate integration into the public service or government corporations. By 1974 Cameroon therefore possessed at the structural level its two principal types of higher educational establishments: fundamental education and technical and professional education.

The roots of present higher education problems in Cameroon stem from the method of developing these two types of education. On the one hand, professional and technical education was very selective, admitting small numbers of students through highly competitive entrance examinations. On the other hand, massive non-selective admission of students was permitted into the university faculties to pursue general studies. This produced in the universities a huge number of less qualified graduates who were not readily employable. Overall, the numbers of students in the university faculties increased while those in the more demanding professional schools progressively decreased.

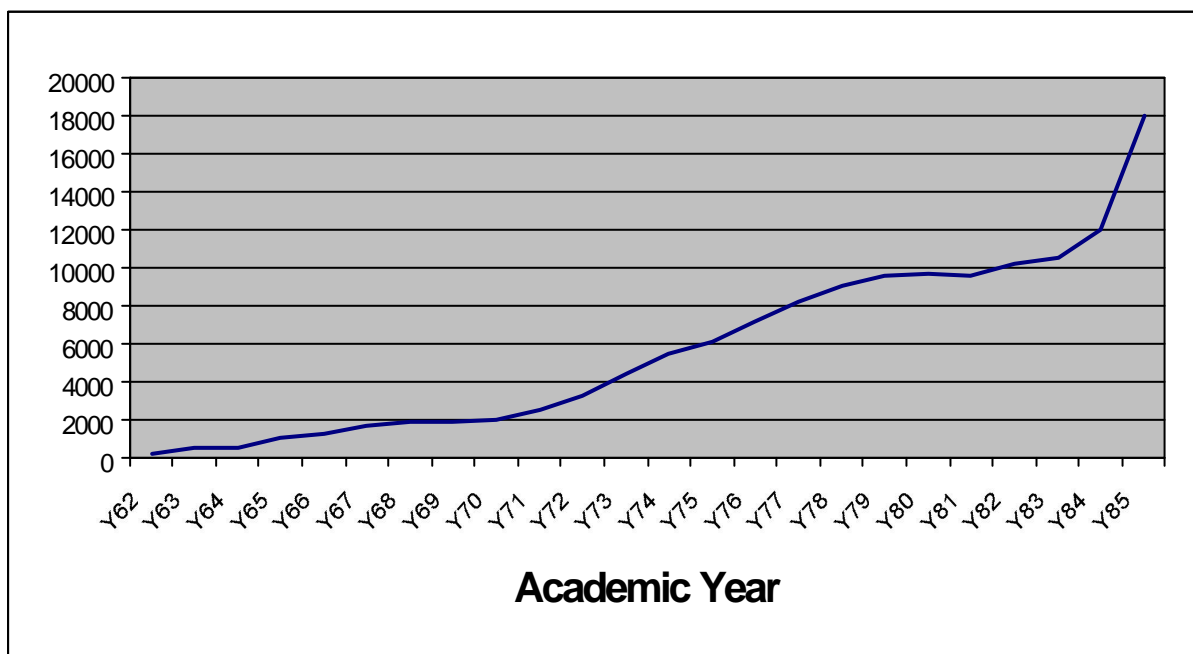
Paradoxically, the great efforts undertaken to develop professional education were not producing enough graduates to fill government positions, let alone supply the private sector. It became clear that in the course of tackling the problem of increased demand for university education, the challenge of how to expand the numbers of students receiving professional and technological training also needed to be addressed.

As a means of inducing more students to enrol in the university and thereby reducing the numbers leaving the country to study abroad, a very generous system of student welfare was put in place. Students paid no tuition fees, received subsidised accommodation and meals, and were in addition provided with well-paid bursaries. Beginning with 539 students and 22 teaching staff in 1962, the University of Yaoundé had grown by 1970 to 2,500 students with 200 teachers. By 1974, enrolment increased to 6,000 as shown in Table 1 below. At the same time virtually no expansion of infrastructure occurred and the growth in teaching staff numbers failed to keep pace with enrolments. The university became severely over-crowded. Learning became difficult as a consequence. Whereas the student body was swelling in response to the financial and material inducements, a parallel expansion of study facilities, staff, and equipment did not occur.

**Table 1.** *University of Yaounde Student Enrolment: 1962 -1984*

1961-62	1962-63	1963-64	1964-65	1965-66	1966-67	1967-68	1968-69
213	539	577	1,129	1,369	1,677	1,913	1,896
1969-70	1970-71	1971-72	1972-73	1973-74	1974-75	1975-76	1976-77
2,011	2,575	3,334	4,484	5,533	6,098	7,169	8,200
1977-78	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
9,057	9,602	9,687	9,562	10,231	10,494	12,031	18,000

**Figure 1.** *Student Enrolments at the University of Yaounde: 1962-1984*



**Table 2. Student Enrolments in Cameroonian Universities: 1986-1995**

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Yaoundé	17535	19893	22298	26744	34868	37215	25169	16455	17553	17524
Yaoundé II							15247	9110	7741	5631
Buea					58	65	790	2048	3286	4093
Ngaoundere					364	306	566	826	1286	1369
Dschang					555	665	1299	1647	2147	3554
Douala					645	900	1199	3654	6238	7149
TOTAL					36490	39151	44270	33740	38251	39320

Not surprisingly, academic staff grew increasingly unhappy with their conditions of employment. Although the decrees No 67/DF/566 of 24 December 1987 and No 69/DF/8 of 8 January 1969 were quite precise in defining the status of University teachers, the diverse qualifications of applicants to teaching positions, together with the tenacious influence of certain inherited traditions, created a serious obstacle to the application of these decrees. The principal problems were the following:

- Cameroonian teachers who had degrees from countries other than France had little difficulty in entering the ranks of Lecturer and Associate Professor but encountered serious difficulty in being promoted to the rank of Professor. Those with degrees from French universities progressed to the rank of Professor more easily. However, they experienced difficulty in obtaining promotion from Lecturer to Associate Professor.
- The recruitment of Cameroonian teachers in the different ranks was subject to foreign conditions (concours d'agrégation, inscription sur les listes d'aptitude françaises) for only one category of teachers (those trained in francophone or French universities).
- Degrees were the only criteria for recruitment of university teachers.
- Teachers in most of the professional schools had great difficulty in fulfilling the general requirements for promotion. This was due mainly to the nature of their profession, which was production-oriented rather than research-oriented and did not require terminal degrees (i.e., Ph.D. or *doctorat*).

The teaching staff became increasingly frustrated with these arbitrary conditions of recruitment, promotion, and service in general. The scene was set for reform of the higher education system.

In response, the Council of Higher Education and Scientific Research resolved in 1974 to reorganise studies in the faculties so that they would be geared towards resolving real problems in the nation. Some of these were inherent in the nation's bilingual status. This in turn exacerbated the difficulty of determining equivalence between francophone and anglophone qualifications.

The changes of 1974 was proved significant in several ways. First, conditions for recruitment and promotion were clarified. Tenured university teachers were categorised as Lecturers (*chargé de cours*), Associate Professors (*Maître de Conférence*) and Professors (*Professeur*). Assistant Lecturers became contracted positions of limited duration. During this time they had to obtain terminal degrees and publish in order to be promoted to the rank of tenured Lecturer.

The Council also recommended the creation of a University of Technology for the training of middle and senior level technicians to support the economic progress of the nation. It proposed the establishment of selective post-graduate programmes that would pursue research towards solving national problems.

### ***The Period after the First Reforms (1977-1991)***

At the beginning of the 1977 academic year, the University of Yaoundé comprised ten organisational units – three faculties, four schools, one specialised centre and two institutes. As noted above, the University's basic infrastructure was not expanding. Yet the student population was soaring with numerous negative consequences: overcrowded amphitheatres and saturated laboratories such that students were unable to carry out practicals or tutorials, or to follow lectures in an atmosphere conducive to learning.

In an attempt to bring order to this explosion in student numbers, four University Centres were created in 1977 with specific educational mandates:

- Buea University Centre for languages, translation/interpretation, and the arts;
- Douala University Centre for Business Studies and the training of technical education teachers;
- Dschang University Centre for Agricultural Sciences;
- Ngaoundere University Centre for Food Science and Food Technology.

However, the highly specialised nature of these centres, together with the incomplete implementation of these plans, contributed little to the solution to the University of Yaoundé's congestion problem. The changes did, however, reduce the number of the University's schools and affiliated institutes. While the University of Yaoundé was bursting at the seams, the four centres remained grossly under-utilised. For example, the Buea University Centre, built to accommodate 2,000 students, housed only 60 students in 1991. In contrast, the University of Yaoundé, designed for 5,000 students, enrolled nearly 45,000 in the same year.

### ***The Build-Up to the Second Reforms***

Apart from the risk of student asphyxiation, the University of Yaoundé also confronted very poor teacher/student ratios. These ratios differed widely from one faculty to the other. For example, in the 1990/91 academic year when teachers of all ranks were considered, the ratio was 1/132 in the Faculty of Law and Economic Sciences; 1/58 in the Faculty of Arts and 1/252 in the Faculty of Science. When only Associate Professors and Professors were considered for the same year, the ratios were 1:482; 1/362 and 1:1,252 respectively. These ratios were far from acceptable norms and had serious ramifications for teaching quality as well as graduate programmes and research.

The universities' budgets were provided entirely by the State, without contributions from either the direct beneficiaries or the larger community. With the onset of economic crisis in the late 1980s, the State was forced to reduce its budgetary support (see tables 3 and 4 with particular reference to University of Buea). Most importantly, budget priorities became distorted. For example, the University of Yaoundé in 1991 used 46% of its budget for staff salaries; 43% for student bursaries, feeding and lodging; and just 9% for teaching and research. Student welfare had turned into a higher priority than the fundamental mission of the University: teaching, research and contributions to national development.

The negative consequences of these deficient conditions soon became apparent. Success rates became understandably low (about 30%), resulting in high attrition and drop-out rates. Unemployment of graduates increased, due in part to the mismatch between the university education received by graduates and the capabilities required by the labour market.



**Table 3.** *Reform Implementation Data on the University of Buea*

Parameter	Year											
	86/87	87/88	88/89	89/90	90/91	91/92	92/93	93/94	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98
No. of Degree Programmes	2	2	2	2	2	2	13	17	19	21	37	47
No. of Professional Programmes	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	5	6	6	6	8
No. of Departments	2	2	2	2	2	2	11	11	12	17	25	27
No. of Faculties/Schools	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	4	4	4	4	5
Research Funds (millions)	1,3	1,4	4,4	3,8	0,9	2,6		2,2	9,9	9,7		2,5
Research Output	Minimal											
Administrative Organisation (No. of Directorates)	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	5	5	5	5	5
No. of Administrative Staff	24	84	86	86	84	85	85	154	189	235	308	364
No. of Academic Staff	6	6	6	6	6	6	55	55	82	104	130	159
No. of Lecturers	6	6	6	6	6	6	27	27	35	36	31	43
No. of Professors/Ass. Professors	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	11	13	12	16	17
Total Expenditure (millions F CFA)	460	365	356	352	373	319	281	523	754	742	658	885
Running Costs (millions F CFA)	215	121	106	115	116	71	72	150	297	217	539	737
Lecture Hall Capacity (seats)	1,625	1,625	1,625	1,625	1,625	1,625	1,625	1,625	2,025	2,625	3,306	3,306
Student Enrolment	40	63	63	65	56	52	890	1,925	3,302	4,060	4,114	4,704

**Table 4.** Evolution of Expenditure Per Student, Teaching Staff Numbers and Remuneration at University of Buea, 1986 to 1998 in CFA Francs.

Year	Total Expenditure	Student Enrolment	Expenditure per Student	Teaching Staff	Average Salary of Teaching Staff (per month)
1986/87	927,363,000	40	15,456,000	6	319,000
1987/88	501,003,000	63	7,952,000	6	319,000
1988/89	489,886,000	63	1,776,000	6	319,000
1989/90	485,836,000	65	7,474,000	6	319,000
1990/91	440,266,000	56	7,862,000	6	319,000
1991/92	447,596,000 (319,000,000)	52	4,761,000 (6,135,000)	6	356,000
1992/93	201,431,000 (281,000,000)	890	226,000 ( 316,000)	55	336,000
1993/94	385,125,000	1,925	200,000 (272,000)	55	150,000
1994/95	465,997,000 (754,000,000)	3,302	141,000 (228,000)	82	150,000
1995/96	579,768,000 (742,000,000)	4,060	143,000 (183,000)	104	150,000
1996/97	667,456,000 (921,256,000)	4,114	162,240 (223,930)	130	175,000
1997/98	1,003,499,000 (1,383,499,000)	4,704	222,801 (307,100)	159	175,000

**NB:** Figures in brackets ( ) from 1991/92 include salaries of teaching staff. \$1 = 600 francs cfa.

Under these circumstances, the University community lost motivation and became demoralised. This was due to a number of interrelated factors:

- absence of clearly defined career development profiles for academic and support staff;
- widespread teaching overloads under poor working conditions;
- lack of clear-cut, objective criteria for promotion;
- lack of research facilities;
- inadequate office space for staff;
- student unrest and lack of discipline.

Buffeted by the national economic crisis and severe budget cuts, the funding of tertiary education became irregular. One consequence was delays in the payment of bursaries to students and salaries to staff, causing pervasive discontent. Cameroon was losing its grip on the reform gains made up to 1974. Yet expectations for national higher education grew more pronounced. The need for system overhauling and revitalisation was obvious, if tertiary institutions were to fulfil their triple role of teaching, research and outreach.

### ***The Reforms of the 1990s***

By 1991 the problems of higher education had nearly reached the point of explosion. The exponential rise in the student population of the University of Yaoundé from 9,000 in 1977 to 45,000 in 1991, the relative stagnation in infrastructure, and the outrageous teacher-student ratio worsening from 1/25 in 1962 to 1/54 in 1991 were compounded by the deepening economic crisis. This crisis was characterised by a depleted State treasury, late and irregular payment of student bursaries and staff salaries, and a low rate of execution of the university budget.

As could be expected, student agitation and political demands were rife. These were not unrelated to an atmosphere of gradual political liberalisation. It became imperative to decongest and to decentralise the University of Yaoundé. The creation of two universities (an anglophone university in Buea and a francophone university in Ngaoundere) was announced in May 1991 and confirmed by decree No. 92/074 of 13 April 1992. The Universities of Buea and Ngaoundere replaced respectively the Buea University Centre and the Ngaoundere University Centre. Even before the Universities of Buea and Ngaoundere could get underway, it was evident that the two universities would not sufficiently reduce the magnitude of congestion experienced at the University of Yaoundé. A comprehensive package of further university reforms was thus decreed in January 1993.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These reforms were generated by the National Council on Higher Education and Scientific Research, which is chaired by the Head of State. It is an advisory body comprised by a broad range of interests, including government officials, university staff, students, and representatives of the private sector and civil society. The details of the reforms were formulated by a select committee of ministry officials (mainly from Higher Education and Finance), who worked closely with university leaders and the Presidency of the Republic. Although this process did not involve direct consultations with stakeholders, the reforms took into account the concerns of the public, especially students.

### ***The Goals of the Reforms of 1993***

The primary goals of the university reforms of 1993 were the decongestion of the University of Yaoundé and the professionalization of university studies intended to produce graduates who could be useful to the private sector and the country as a whole. Its specific objectives were to:

- i) reduce over-crowding at the University of Yaoundé by the creation of six full-fledged universities, with four of them based at the University Centres created in 1977, each with a specific mission geared towards an overall national development perspective;
- ii) provide all Cameroonians with equal opportunities of obtaining university education. This was to be achieved by the geographical location of each of the universities and also provision for common programmes to be offered in most of the universities.
- iii) make programmes more varied, professional, adapted and responsive to the needs of the job market, by providing more programmes that would enable graduates find employment in the private sector as well as create self employment;
- iv) make universities more accessible to local, regional and international communities;
- v) make more rational and optimal use of existing infrastructure, facilities and services, especially those already existing in the University Centres, by upgrading the otherwise under-utilised centres to full fledged universities with diverse degree programmes;
- vi) broaden and increase the participation of different stakeholders in the financing and management of universities by instituting more substantial registration fees (raised from a modest 3,300F CFA to 50,000F CFA); in addition, the universities were encouraged to generate income by other activities and to involve the community in the attempt to diversify sources of funding;
- vii) grant universities more academic and management autonomy by providing basic infrastructure and finances;
- viii) provide a more conducive environment for teaching and research by creating a better atmosphere for teachers, teaching and research;
- ix) revive and maximise inter-university and international co-operation.
- x) motivate staff and improve living conditions of staff and students through better remuneration, conditions for staff promotion of staff, and upgraded student conditions.

More broadly, the reforms sought to address the challenges of access, quality, capacity-building and funding.

### ***The Challenge of Access***

In order to solve the congestion problem at the University of Yaoundé and address the challenge of access, the 1993 reforms created six full-fledged universities:

- University of Buea in the South West Province,
- University of Dschang in the West Province,
- University of Douala in the Littoral Province,
- University of Ngaoundere in the Adamawa Province,
- University of Yaoundé I in the Centre Province,
- University of Yaoundé II in the Centre Province.

The creation of the six universities addressed the problem of regional distribution of universities (see Table 2). The improved regional distribution of universities made higher education more accessible to Cameroonians in under-served regions and from low income backgrounds. Many students who might not have had access to university education because of the high cost of living in Yaoundé and the long distance of that city from their homes, now found universities physically and financially within reach. Access to the university became more convenient and less expensive. Statistics show that in 1991/92 only 4% of the students of the University of Yaoundé were from the Northern Provinces of Adamawa, Extreme North and North. In 1995/96 they constituted 3% of students at the University of Yaoundé *plus* over 50% of those at the University of Ngaoundere. Furthermore, enrolments in other universities increased while those of Yaoundé have decreased considerably. Total enrolment has also increased, after an initial drop in 1993/94 which is explained by the decision in that year to eliminate student bursaries.

Before the 1993 university reforms, instruction at the University of Yaoundé, which was established as a bilingual institution (English and French), was virtually all given in French. Likewise, the university programmes corresponded in structure and content to those of the French university system. This drastically reduced the success rate for anglophone students, limited their access to the University, and increased their frustration. The creation of the University of Buea, “conceived in the Anglo-Saxon tradition” and therefore an English-speaking university, answered the call of anglophone students and parents for a university system of education consistent with the education system prevailing in anglophone primary and secondary schools. Ironically, the existence of the University of Buea also created the possibility for a teeming number of French-speaking Cameroonians who preferred this type of education to have a second choice at home instead of paying exorbitantly for such education abroad. While the majority of students at that university come from the South-West and North-West provinces, the predominantly French-speaking provinces – Littoral, Centre and West provinces especially – have significant numbers of students enrolled at University of Buea. English-speaking students, who had previously been streaming to universities in Nigeria, Europe and North America, found the university geographically closer and financially more accessible. From the twin perspectives of the nation and the region, access to higher education increased.

Although figures are not available for all the universities, statistics from the University of Buea indicate that the creation of more universities also made higher education more accessible to female students: the current female participation rate at Buea is 47%. Parents are usually more reluctant to allow their daughters to study in institutions which are far away from home. With universities closer to their localities, parents have been encouraged to send their daughters to universities.

### ***The Challenge of Quality***

Many of the reform objectives were designed to address the challenge of providing a quality education. The decongestion of the University of Yaoundé, the granting of more academic and management autonomy to universities, the provision of more varied programmes (which are more professional, adapted and responding to the needs of the job market), the provision of a conducive environment for teaching and research, and the provision for selection of students were geared towards ensuring quality in the academic domain. Each of these will be discussed briefly in turn.

#### **REDUCTION OF TEACHER-STUDENT RATIO**

The redeployment of teachers and students to the different universities produced an overall improvement in the teacher-student ratio from 1/54 in 1992/93 to 1/34 in 1995/96. In the various

universities, the 1995/96 ratios were: Buea (1/34), Douala (1/45), Dschang (1/19), Ngaoundere (1/15) and Yaoundé II (1/29). Better student-teacher ratios generally contribute to better quality teaching and improved learning.

The expansion of programmes in the different institutions has resulted in a greater need for academic staff. Though efforts have been made to recruit teachers, the demand (200 new academic staff are needed each year) far exceeds the supply, especially of teachers with terminal qualifications. This has a visible negative impact on the quality of education and an even stronger effect on the potential for research and graduate training.

### **RE-ORGANISATION OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR AND TEACHING PROGRAMMES**

A fundamental aspect of the 1993 reforms was the reorganisation of the academic year into two semesters and the introduction of the modular or course credit system. The modular or course credit system was intended to make programmes more varied, professional, and relevant to the job market, and to reduce failure rates by allowing each student to progress at his/her own pace. The modular or course credit system thereby prompted a substantial revision of course programmes, as well as course content, in the effort to improve relevance.

It is important to note, however, that this is a newly introduced system which most staff and students are confronting for the first time. Consequently, some difficulties are being encountered in its implementation.

### **PROFESSIONALISATION**

The principal purpose for creating of the University of Yaoundé in 1962 was to train qualified national human resources, but this was understood mainly in terms of replacing expatriates as teachers and administrators in public and parastatal establishments. As a result, graduates from the University of Yaoundé did not receive the type of education required by a demanding private sector. When public sector employment became saturated, graduates found themselves ill-equipped for employment in the private sector or for self-employment. Consequently, one of the key goals of the 1993 reforms was professionalisation of the teaching programmes. In order to achieve this objective, universities were required to define, in consultation with other stakeholders, the local market needs, involve professionals in the conception of programmes, define prerequisites for admission into different professional programmes, and draw up the profiles of teaching staff to be recruited.

As noted previously, professional education already existed in the schools and centres of the university system before the reforms: agriculture in Dschang, translation and interpretation in Buea, food technology in Ngaoundere, and commerce and technical education in Douala. In Yaoundé, the School of Engineering, the School of Journalism, the Medical School, the School of International Relations and the School of Education were located. As a consequence of the reforms, a number of professional programmes have been introduced within the universities. At the University of Buea, for example, these include Women and Gender Studies, Accountancy, Banking and Finance, Nursing, Medical Laboratory Science, Chemical Processes Technology, Materials Science, and Journalism and Mass Communication.

## TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

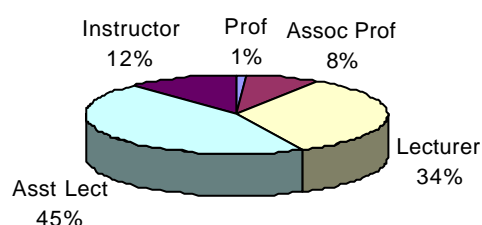
With the creation of more universities, it became imperative to recruit more academic staff and to recycle existing staff in order to provide the new system with adequately qualified teachers who would ensure quality education of the students as well as carry out research. Unfortunately, most of the newly recruited teachers do not have terminal qualifications (i.e. Ph.D. or equivalent) and lack the necessary experience to contribute towards the desired improvement on quality.

Presently, most teaching staff are trained abroad as only a few programmes in some University institutions offer post-graduate degrees. These overseas studies are usually financed through grants from international organisations, friendly nations or inter-institutional linkage arrangements. However, these funding sources are not adequate to train the academic staff that will be needed as the educational system continues to grow.

Table 5 and Figure 2 show the staff situation at the University of Buea in 1997/98.

**Table 5.** *Distribution of Teaching Staff by Rank at the University of Buea (1997/98)*

	ASTI		ARTS		SMS		SCI		HSC		TOTAL		
	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	TOT
Professor			2				1				3	0	3
Assoc Professor	1		7	3	1	2	4	1	1		14	6	20
Lecturer	4	12	8	6	9	14	22	13			43	45	88
Asst Lecturer	1	1	20	12	38		36	4	1	4	96	21	117
Instructor		2	2	25	1			1			3	28	31
Total	6	15	39	46	49	16	63	19	2	4	159	100	259



## RESEARCH OUTPUT AND FUNDING

Another of the reform objectives was to provide a conducive environment for research. The quality of staff recruited is one of the greatest drawbacks in this area. A good stock of experienced teachers is needed in order for research to be properly executed. The low levels of funding by the State, together with the absence of companies which could fund research, make progress in this area slow. These problems are further compounded by the disproportionately small amount of Universities' budgets allocated to research.

Table 6 compares the levels of state subsidies requested by the University of Buea with those actually received over the period 1991/92 to 1997/98. Up to 1997 the rate of receipt was less than

30% of calculated requirements. It should be noted, however, that the overall subvention voted for higher education has also decreased since the reforms were instituted.

**Table 6.** Degree of State Funding of the University of Buea, Cameroon

Year	Budget Request*	Disbursement*	Share Received (%)
1986/87	1,695,419	995,418	59
1987/88	1,110,294	657,741	59
1988/89	602,202	597,202	99
1989/90	550,000	550,000	100
1990/91	587,400	437,401	74
1991/92	440,000+	198,000	45
1992/93	627,000+	166,000	26
1993/94	1,250,000+	240,000	19
1994/95	1,960,000+	258,852	13
1995/96	1,266,000+	285,996	23

\*in thousands of CFA francs (\$1 = 600f cfa)

+Estimates since 1991/92 do not include salaries of teaching staff.

## STUDENT DROP-OUT AND COMPLETION RATES

Judging from the 1995-96 average success rates of students in the universities of Dschang (48%), Yaoundé I (48%), Buea (70%), in comparison with the 1991/92 success rate of about 30% in the University of Yaoundé, it can be concluded that the success rate following the 1993 reforms has improved considerably. Success rates are generally higher in schools where candidates are competitively selected through entrance examinations, but are much lower and varied in faculties where selection is not as stringent. Among the universities, only Buea selects its students systematically for admission.

## ACCESS TO EQUIPMENT, BOOKS AND TEACHING MATERIALS

In order to ensure quality education, students must have access to laboratories, books in the libraries, teaching materials and classroom space. The 1993 reforms prescribed that universities should admit students depending on available infrastructure (laboratories, libraries, teaching materials and classroom space) as well as available human and financial resources. However, the demand for higher education continues to increase even though hardly any investments are being made in infrastructure. Although the universities have the autonomy to set their own in-take levels, they are under enormous social and political pressure to admit students in excess of these capacities. For example, the University of Buea is supposed to serve an English-speaking population of 3.5 million, which currently produces over 7,000 secondary school graduates each year. Yet it has facilities to admit only 1,000 new students annually. The situation is deteriorating at such a rate that the new universities are already finding themselves in the same situation of congestion that prevailed in the former University of Yaoundé before the reforms.



## ***The Challenge of Capacity Building***

### **ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS**

The 1993 reforms also sought to put in place an administrative structure capable of managing the university system efficiently. To this end, some fairly elaborate organigrams were proposed. The main goal was to provide each university with a management team that would ensure the efficient running of the university, especially as the universities were being given greater autonomy. Central administration, as well as the Faculties and Schools, was therefore endowed with new administrative structures.

However, experience over the past six years has revealed a high level of mismanagement in almost all of the Universities except the University of Buea. Various heads of institutions have demonstrated extremely limited management skills. The effects of this have been so profound in some cases that the institutions concerned have been basically derailed from their main missions.

There is great need to ensure that persons appointed to head university institutions possess a clear understanding of the objectives of the reforms and also have a sound background in management. This also holds for Deans of Faculty and Directors of Schools. For the universities to actually enjoy and benefit from the confidence of stakeholders, their management needs to be organised and transparent. The decision to eliminate the office of University Financial Controller (for internal audit) stemming from the 1993 reforms, together with the absence of a corps of trained university administrators, has not helped to ensure proper financial and administrative management of the universities.

### **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

In the area of financial management, the 1993 reforms aimed at broadening the funding base by increasing the participation of the different stakeholders in the financing and management of the universities. Now a substantial degree of autonomy in financial management has been granted to the universities. Before 1993, government had been the sole provider of funding, and universities had no direct control over the income they generated. After the 1993 reforms, universities have been encouraged to generate funds from their own activities. In the spirit of the reforms which solicited the participation of the beneficiaries in funding the institutions, but in order not to render access to the university difficult to students from poor economic background, the university reforms introduced a token registration fee of 50,000 CFA francs per student per annum (approximately \$85). This fee was irrespective of degree programme or kind of degree pursued. Although the fee amount is a substantial increase from the 3,500 CFA francs (about \$6) charged to students previously, it remains far below the fees paid by students in the country's private primary and secondary schools. Registration fees paid by students have quickly become one of the universities' principal sources of income, contributing about 30% of their recurrent budgets. The rest of the funds (over 70%) are provided by government.

The financial management reforms also eliminated student bursaries. Student bursaries had been used, from the inception of the University of Yaoundé in 1962, as an incentive to attract students, especially those from under-served zones and less viable economic backgrounds.

As an example of how the financial circumstances of one university were affected by these reforms, the situation at the University of Buea is depicted in Table 7. It will be observed that the budget (income) of the institution fell by 80% between 1986/87 and 1992/93. At the same time, student enrolment increased by a factor of 22 (from 40 in 1986/87 to 890 in 1992/93). While

student numbers have quadrupled from 1992/93 to 1995/96 (from 90 to 4060), available income has only doubled (from about 350,000,000 to 700,000,000F CFA). In concrete terms, the amount of money expended per student has fallen by 37% between 1992/93 and 1995/96, amounting to only 183,000F CFA (or USD 366) in 1995/96, which is far below the minimum \$1000 per university student per year recommended by the World Bank. This has left very little for research, books, teaching materials and infrastructure. The effect has been a drop in the quality of teaching provided.

**Table 7. Sources of Income of the University of Buea, Cameroon (in thousands of CFA francs)**

Year	Total Income	Sources of Income			
		Self-generated	%	State Subsidy	%
1986/87	1,001,770	6,351	1	995,419	99
1987/88	668,026	10,285	2	657,741	98
1988/89	625,891	26,049	4	599,842	96
1989/90	566,689	16,689	3	550,000	97
1990/91	474,714	37,312	8	437,402	92
1991/92	*319,000	48,536	15	270,464	85
1992/93	*281,000	33,783	12	247,217	88
1993/94	*523,000	145,125	28	377,875	72
1994/95	*754,000	207,145	27	546,855	73
1995/96	*742,000	199,498	27	542,502	73

\*Income shown from 1991/92 includes salaries of teaching staff.

In the case of the University of Buea, practically all of the budget (over 90%) before 1992/93 was provided by the State. After the elimination of bursaries and expenditures on student welfare and following the introduction of registration fees in 1993, government has still continued to provide over 70% of the University's financing. Income generated by the University itself, consisting mostly of student fees, now constitutes about 27% of the budget.

Consequently, the State still continues to provide the bulk of the costs. However, the degree and constancy of such funding is very precarious as the university competes for scarce funds with other sectors which the State also finances. On the average, the University of Buea received only between 19% and 30% of its requested subvention between 1992/93 and 1996/97. Little or no funding for investment has been available, and this has created enormous problems. Other sources of funding are difficult to harness in a situation where the private sector and industry are also tottering under the burden of structural adjustment.

## FORWARD PLANNING

Each university is supposed to undertake forward planning through a well thought out strategic plan. So far, only the University of Buea is known to have produced a strategic plan in Cameroon. However, the Ministry of Higher Education recently enlisted UNESCO experts to help produce a global strategic plan for the ministry.

## **QUALITY CONTROL**

Quality control is virtually non-existent in the universities. In the effort to rectify this omission, the University of Buea has run seminars, with the collaboration of experts from the University of Manchester, on quality control and quality assurance. But the actual implementation of quality control is yet to be carried out. There is no doubt that this is a very serious handicap. Periodic performance evaluations are the only way in which the reforms can be monitored and kept on track.

Irregularities in the implementation of the semester course-credit system have contributed to this problem. It is doubtful whether the credit system is properly understood by most universities in the country. The institutions are also plagued by malpractice on the part of staff and students.

## **NEGOTIATION WITH STAFF, STUDENTS AND GOVERNMENT**

Constructive dialogue with students is rare. Students' unions created to provide a forum for negotiation with students have become a mechanism for violent confrontation rather than dialogue, as the unions are influenced by politicians to destabilise the universities in the effort to promote particular political agendas. Academic staff unions are not discouraged but are uncommon. In their absence, the University of Buea makes use of its Congregation, which comprises all its academic and senior administrative staff, to cater for their welfare.

## **DONOR CO-ORDINATION**

Over the past few years a number of university institutions in Cameroon have benefited from donor assistance to improve infrastructure, quality of teaching, assure staff development and encourage research. The University of Buea received a grant from the French Co-operation Mission to assist in the building of the central core and east wing of the University Library, as well as research funding from the EEC, the Atomic Energy Agency, the Swedish International Programme in Chemical Sciences and others. Recently funds have been awarded by the *Francophonie* to the Universities of Douala, Ngaoundere, Dschang and Yaoundé I for their development. The Canadian Government is also involved in the distance education programme at the University of Dschang.

To stimulate and co-ordinate external assistance, the University of Buea has created the post of Deputy Vice-Chancellor in charge of research and co-operation. The position provides a channel for co-operation with other institutions and co-ordination of scholarship offers and other material and financial donations.

## ***Information Technology Development***

Among the six existing University institutions in Cameroon, only the University of Yaoundé I possesses a properly equipped and modern computer centre. The other universities barely have rudiments of information systems. Interestingly, only the University of Buea appears to be assembling information that could serve as performance indicators for a viable Management Information System. This probably stems from the fact that only the University of Buea has been able to produce a strategic plan. It is hoped that when the other Universities prepare and produce such plans they would see the necessity to develop management information systems.

## ***Experiments In Distance Learning***

To fulfil Cameroon's needs for well trained and efficient middle level staff in order to move out of its present traditional system of agriculture into a dynamic, market-oriented and sustainable agriculture, the University of Dschang (in collaboration with the University of Guelph in Canada with funds provided by the Canadian International Development Agency) has set up a Distance Education programme in 1996 which offers certificates and diplomas in Tropical Agriculture.

This programme was motivated by:

- Increasing demands on government to offer agricultural training and education to its citizens in a situation where demand far surpasses on-campus resources.
- A critical group of agricultural technicians who were already in the field had need of further opportunities for professional growth.
- The existing system of on-campus training did not provide opportunities for persons who desired further training in Agriculture, but who could not leave their work or families for long periods of time.

The objectives of the programme therefore include:

- upgrading skills in agriculture.
- developing an efficient and qualified pool of persons who can move Cameroon's agriculture forward based on their mastery of Science and Technology.
- providing adult education to persons who otherwise would never get it.
- paving the way for a sustainable programme in distance education in Cameroon to provide alternative means for easing pressure on limited national education resources.

This unique experience of the University of Dschang, which has gone on successfully for three years, indicates a positive potential for spreading the use of distance education into other areas of need. The training of teachers for primary and secondary schools appears to be one of the areas most likely to benefit from such ventures.

## ***Principal Impediments to the Implementation of the Reforms***

### **IMPEDIMENTS TO QUALITY ASSURANCE**

The early years of the reforms witnessed an apparent reduction in the teacher-student ratio and relatively adequate classroom space and other infrastructure. In only a short period, however, student populations in the new universities have increased and now exceed the physical capacities of these universities. In some universities (Buea, Douala, Dschang) the situation has become so acute that facilities outside the universities are now used for lectures and practicals. The principle that students should be admitted according to available space has not been respected by government. The student population has increased uncontrollably, negatively affecting the quality of teaching and learning and, therefore, success rates. Libraries are unable to serve thousands of users. The same over-crowded situation which characterised the University of Yaoundé in 1992/93 is now re-appearing in the new universities. As noted above, this is due to social pressure rather than to government edict.

The modular or course credit systems are yet to be mastered and require the availability of qualified teaching staff and infrastructure. This gives an appearance of a frenzied introduction of new programmes without appropriate infrastructure, qualified teaching staff or financial means. This makes the realisation of reform objectives practically impossible.

In the sphere of academic staffing, little concrete improvement has been made in spite of considerable efforts. At present, two categories of persons can be recruited as Assistant Lecturers:

- Candidates who possess terminal degrees (i.e. Ph.D. or equivalent) but have no teaching experience and have not published any articles. Such persons qualify for promotion to the rank of Lecturer after one year of experience and if they have published at least one article, or
- Candidates who possess a Masters Degree with a thesis or equivalent qualification. Such candidates may be promoted to the rank of lecturer after two years of experience and if they have published two articles.

A majority of teachers recruited do not have terminal qualifications and, as such, cannot give the best of themselves. At the University of Yaoundé I Assistant Lecturers constitute 24% of the teaching staff, in Yaoundé II they constitute 47%, in Buea they constitute 69%, in Ngaoundere 64% and in Dschang 72%. Not surprisingly, the number of experienced senior teaching staff is very low. Furthermore, in recruiting Assistant Lecturers, the university implicitly commits itself to ensure that they continue to obtain terminal degrees and improve their teaching capacities. But the limited number of senior academics is insufficient to supervise and mentor large numbers of Assistant Lecturers and to run post-graduate programmes at the same time.

#### **OBSTACLES TO EQUITABLE ACCESS**

Though the number of institutions has increased, all programmes do not exist in each institution. Consequently, there continues to be the problem of equitable access from a regional point of view. Additionally, very few institutions have addressed the issue of gender balance or social problems like the poor financial means of an otherwise very good candidate.

#### **OBSTACLES TO SUSTAINABLE FINANCING**

Funding remains as one of the greatest obstacles to capacity building. The reduction in government subvention, irregular disbursement of the subventions, the particularly disproportionate contribution by the direct beneficiaries and the under-developed private sector, all combine to make sustained and viable funding of universities extremely difficult. Whereas the universities are required by the reforms to seek other sources of revenue such as the creation of enterprises, these activities need seed money which the institutions either do not have or cannot raise.

The government has also not allowed the universities to introduce tuition fees. In its place government has opted for the payment by students of a fixed registration fee of 50,000F CFA (approximately USD 85). Attempts by the University of Buea to develop its infrastructure by instituting an annual development charge to students of 20,000F CFA (USD 33), were halted by government even though a number of parents had readily accepted to make such a contribution to facilitate the construction of buildings and purchase of equipment.

Another stumbling block is the absence of administrative staff with the appropriate managerial skills to run the universities. Due to the economic crisis, the salaries of academic and support staff have been reduced drastically since 1990. In real terms, salaries have fallen by about 70% following salary reductions in 1993 and currency devaluation in 1994. Misery among university staff is real. This has affected their capacity to apply themselves to their work.

A third serious obstacle is the lack of transparency in financial management which persists in a good number of universities. Lack of transparency in the financial management of the universities compounds the funding problem since donors do not have the confidence to come to the assistance of the universities.

### ***What Lessons?***

The decentralisation of the University of Yaoundé through the establishment of five additional universities located in geographically different locations has resulted in greater peace for university campuses. This is true for both teachers and students. The six universities have produced a more academically oriented system that has taken greater initiative in programme formulation. It has also initiated greater contact with other university institutions abroad as well as with several international assistance organisations. This has provided opportunities for comparison among the institutions within the country.

The creation of six universities in different geographical locations has helped to improve access to tertiary education by reducing the economic and social stress on the students and their parents, since they do not have to travel too far away from home.

The elimination of bursaries has been particularly helpful, especially at a time when government has not been able to finance universities in the same way as it did in the 1960's and 1970's. This has contributed to reduced unrest on university campuses in the country, as students can no longer agitate for unpaid bursaries. At the same time, the higher education system does not use the lion's share of its meagre resources for student welfare as it did before the reforms.

The introduction of higher registration fees (even if relatively very small) has helped to provide vitally needed complementary funding for universities.

The management of the reforms to date has clearly pointed out a number of shortcomings:

- the need for public education on the objectives of the reforms, particularly among those who are to manage them; this should be carried out during the preparatory phase.
- the need to identify and develop performance indicators that will facilitate continuous evaluation of institutional and system performance in meeting the goals of the reform.
- the need for more substantial and sustained funding.
- the need for further liberalisation of revenue generation.
- the need for a professionally trained corps of university administrators.
- the need for greater accountability and transparency in management.

## **Conclusion**

The years 1962, 1974, 1977 and 1993 are important landmarks in the history of higher education in Cameroon. From its inception, the goals of higher education were tied to the vision of a newly independent nation that sought to develop locally trained human resources in order to manage its own affairs. By establishing an array of university institutions, the government succeeded, to a very large degree, in limiting the costs of training Cameroonians abroad as well as stemming associated brain drain. A decade after it started, the attractiveness of the local university was no longer an issue. Today university education is relentlessly sought after by the Cameroonian youth.

The problem of space at the University of Yaoundé, though always on the agenda, has resisted every reform in so far as infrastructure was insufficiently addressed and the population rise unanticipated. Government reluctance to decentralise the system prior to 1993 was a related factor that undermined various attempts at system reform. Until 1977, new institutions of higher education were created mainly in Yaoundé. The University Centres of Buea, Dschang, Douala and Ngaoundere, which were the outcome of efforts in the mid-1970s to look beyond the capital city, suffered from very limited implementation of their vision. The University of Technology, proposed in 1974, has unfortunately not been created.

But the government persisted in the face of various setbacks with plans to boost higher education quality and equity. Political and educational liberalisation in the 1990s, together with the higher education reforms they produced, are yielding fruit in spite of constraints such as a weak financial base and a lack of adequately trained university managers at all levels. Diversity in training opportunities at the six universities today derives from the new and relevant programmes geared towards professionalisation. Other problems arising from rapid execution of the 1993 reform – deficient planning, failure to implement the practical steps towards autonomy, and resistant vestiges of central control – have all hampered the initiatives of the Cameroon higher education reforms.

On balance, the prized gains of the 1993 reforms are seen to be greater institutional autonomy, diversification of funding sources, greater educational choice, increased equity in terms of regional and gender access, and relative improvements in educational quality and relevance. The reforms have succeed in decongesting and decentralising the University of Yaoundé, in redistributing students in larger numbers to other parts of the country, in improving access to higher education, in providing for the participation of stakeholders in financing universities, in offering more diverse educational opportunities, and in re-ordering budgetary priorities.

However, the reforms also suffered setbacks. These include resistance to financial participation by the beneficiaries, reduced and irregular funding by the State, poorer quality of academic staff, inadequate infrastructure and equipment, limited mastery of the new system, and weak management skills. In particular, there is need to establish better working relationships among the government, the students and the institutions.

From the Cameroonian experience it is clear that higher education reforms can only be successful under conditions of political will and societal support, financial sustainability, adequate attention to infrastructure, appropriate information management, and liberalised revenue generation under experienced and devoted university managers.

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