

## ABSTRACT

### **Access to Schooling and Employment in Cameroon New Inequalities and Opportunities**

by

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Recent crises in Africa have disrupted access to education and employment in ways that present both new risks and opportunities. Debate has focused on the risks of growing inequalities and has neglected possible growth opportunities associated with the increased competition for limited employment and with the longer window of time between graduation and first employment.

This project will use a mix of data to assess recent inequalities in access to schooling and employment but also to investigate new opportunities to create employment and build capacity. We address four questions related to SAGA's objectives in the areas of access and growth:

- a) How has access to schooling for vulnerable groups changed in recent years and how can present inequalities be contained?
- b) How has access to employment after graduation changed in recent years and what factors boost individual chances of finding employment?
- c) Has the increased competition for schooling and employment opportunities created a demand for new education/ training services? If so, can this demand be used to create employment?
- d) What new opportunities/challenges do the major stakeholders in the school system see?

This research will achieve three tangible goals. A short-term goal, by the end of the summer, is to produce empirical findings and a policy report on recent trends in schooling and graduate unemployment, as well as policy recommendations to address schooling and employment inequalities. A medium-term goal is to carry out an in-depth study of the demand for education services and related employment opportunities. A longer-term goal is to consolidate a unique four-way collaboration between Cameroon researchers, Cornell, the Ministry of Education, and PichNet, a Cameroon NGO that seeks to promote statistical and computer literacy. This collaboration will enhance the policy research skills of Cameroon University students by improving access to large-scale data sets, statistical software, statistical workshop training, and supervision by professionals in technical ministries.

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*For full research/trip experience read below:*

*Field*

## **TRIP REPORT**

### **Parfait Eloundou-Enyegue**

#### Background

Economic crises engender both risk and opportunity. Researchers and planners are concerned that Africa's economic downturns may worsen and crystallize inequalities in access to education and employment. Yet, Africa's crises also hold growth opportunities. The increased competition for education or the longer period of post-graduate unemployment can foster a demand for new education services, whether in tutoring, improved training, career counseling, job placement, skills maintenance, or professional development. Meeting this demand can create employment and build a more competitive and self-reliant labor force.

This collaborative project (between myself and Cameroon researchers and professionals) seeks to investigate both the risks and opportunities associated with economic downturns in Cameroon. On the risk side, we assess recent trends in educational and employment inequalities. On the opportunity side, we examine possible growth opportunities in the context of a changing economic and schooling environment.

The project's central thesis is that economic crises in Africa are crystallizing educational and employment inequalities along class lines in ways that curtail socioeconomic mobility. On a brighter side, the increased competition for school and employment represents a growth opportunity. It fosters a demand for new education services and meeting this demand will create jobs and a more productive labor force.

#### Project objectives

The ultimate goal in this research is to draft a policy report to suggest or evaluate concrete initiatives designed to reduce educational inequalities and create employment in connection with the demand for new education services. The report will involve collaboration between myself, CEREG, researchers at the Cameroon National School of Education (ENS) and high level staff at the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC). The report will concentrate on four policy issues:

- Trends in educational inequalities and buffering institutions. After assessing trends in schooling and employment inequalities, we evaluate the role of several institutions in mitigating schooling inequalities. Pr. Mbangwana and Tamukong of the ENS will inventory these institutions. My work focuses on extended family networks and their effectiveness in supporting the education of children from low-income, rural, or large families. Using survey and focus group data, we also study inequalities in employment after graduation.

- Government policies to contain educational inequalities. Drs. R OKENE and M. NGOUBE of the Ministry of Education will review Cameroon's policy orientations in the education sector, and highlight the specific initiatives to reduce schooling and employment inequalities. My work focuses on integrated policies, with emphasis on the potential impact of family planning programs on gender inequalities in schooling.
- Creating jobs through tutoring. The demand for tutoring in Cameroon is growing in response to increased school competition in Cameroon. Yet, the question remains whether or not this demand is strong enough to create steady employment opportunities for tutors. Collaborators at PICHNet will organize focus group discussions with current tutors and parents to evaluate the current demand for tutoring.
- Creating jobs and improving schools through computer literacy. Computer technology is making its way into African schools. However, these advances may initially exacerbate schooling inequalities. What practical, efficient, and affordable approaches can be used to introduce computers in poorer schools? I am working with PICHNet to design and evaluate a pilot experiment to test whether teachers can serve as a relay to introduce computer literacy into poor schools.

The funding from SAGA enabled progress on all of these four objectives. Below, I list the main activities implemented and outcomes achieved during my summer research. Instead of a chronological listing, I list activities under their corresponding research objectives.

### Summer Activities

#### Objective 1: Inequalities in schooling and employment (trends and social institutions)

- Met Pr FOU DA, coordinator of CEREG, and a few of other CEREG members. CEREG offers a rich research environment, with adequate office space and computing resources. A member of the CEREG group will be involved in drafting the final policy report that is the ultimate goal in this project. This CEREG member will review the macroeconomic transformations in Cameroon in the last two decades, as a means to provide a backdrop against which recent changes in schooling inequalities have occurred.
- Worked with PICHNet to create schooling history files that will be used to examine recent trends in schooling and in post-graduate unemployment. Unfortunately, the disk that contained the very last version of the datafile has crashed. The technicians in Cameroon or in Cornell's Warren Hall lab were not able to recover the data. I am currently working with a private company to recover the data. If this last attempt is unsuccessful, I will need to revert to the backup file and work will be delayed by about three weeks.
- Held 3 meetings with partners at the National School of Education (ENS). Professors Mbangwana and Tamukong are currently drafting a paper in which they list and

evaluate existing formal and informal institutions that help contain schooling inequalities among children. The first draft of their work is due by the end of this month.

- Conducted focus group discussions with unemployed graduates, school teachers, and administrators within the Ministry of Education. Additional focus group discussions will be conducted by Pr Essindi (with parents) and Pr Mbangwana Moses (with researchers in education) as part of their contribution to the group policy report.
- Initiated a case study analysis of labor market outcomes and strategies of students who graduates from the National College of Agriculture in 1999. This group of graduates is interesting in several respects. Until 1997-8, graduates from this College were guaranteed employment in the public service upon graduation. This clause of automatic employment was abruptly rescinded. Students who graduated in 1999 were suddenly thrust into a new world in which they had to seek employment on their own and in which they faced real prospects of prolonged unemployment. How this special group coped with this abrupt transition will provide unique insights about the coping strategies of educated graduates facing unemployment. Mrs. Caroline Mongoe, a graduate from this cohort, has agreed to assist us in gathering summary information about the coping strategies of this group.
- Attended "memoir" presentations at the National School of Education (ENS). Graduating students must present a research project, often on issues related to education. The ENS has a rich collection of reports on a wide range of education issues. Even though students use very small samples (generally 40 subjects) and very basic analyses (generally cross-tabulations), these reports are a useful source of qualitative insights. I am working with Prs. Mbangwana Moses and Tamukong Joseph to improve students' access to education data sets, computer software and hardware. Two computers donated by Cornell are currently available at Pichnet and a few students have begun using portions of our national survey on fertility and schooling. With funding from the SAGA project, we also purchased the most recent version of the World Bank CD rom containing World Development Statistics. This CD rom will provide easy access to national statistics on education for a wide range of African countries including Cameroon.

Objective 2: Policies to contain educational inequalities. Impact of family planning programs on girls' education

- Met Richard OKENE and Maurice NGOUBE of the Ministry of Education. This group will review Cameroon's policy orientation and specific initiatives to contain inequalities in schooling and employment. The first draft of their contribution is due by the end of this week (Sep 15).
- Initiated an empirical analysis of the potential impact of family planning programs on girls' education and on the gender gap in education between boys and girls. The

study begins with a theoretical development, then takes advantages of the detailed information that we have on grade and reason-specific rates of school dropout among boys and girls in Cameroon. Ultimately, the study will use life tables to simulate how a reduction in the current incidence of pregnancy-related dropouts would reduce the gender gap in schooling between boys and girls. With some modification, the analysis can be extended to other African countries. A first draft of this paper was completed in Cameroon and will be presented at Cornell University on November 2. Additional presentations will be scheduled at the Population Association of America (Spring 2003), the Population Reference Bureau (date to be determined) and the Alan Guttmacher Institute (perhaps as early as October 18).

- Met Mr Mbwangue Jonas, the Executive Director of CAMNAFAW, a local affiliate of the International Federation for Planned Parenthood. While I am familiar with the principles and challenges that these institutions face in advocating and implementing family planning programs in school environments, I wished to have a field-level view of their work.

#### Objective 3: Creating jobs through tutoring

- Conducted one focus group that involved tutors. The issues revealed during this first focus group will be explored in greater depth by Mr. Serge Bahoken at PICHNet in two focus group discussions that will exclusively target current tutors.
- Initiated a pilot experiment with 12 primary school teachers from 6 poor schools. The idea is to evaluate 1) how easily these teachers can be trained to use computers in instruction, and the management of class records, 2) how in turn they can introduce students to computers, and 3) the problems involved in acquiring and maintaining a school computer, and 4) the extent to which computers improve teaching, learning, and school administration in poor schools. Mrs Julienne Nna and Serge Bahoken of PICHNET are currently training these 12 teachers and monitoring their progress in learning. The first, training phase, ends in October. In the second phase, the trained teachers will have an opportunity to work within PICHNet to train their students and use computer applications in managing their record. This second phase will be evaluated as well. Insights from the first phase indicate that teachers are excited about learning but their lack of prior experience with computers is a challenge.

#### Other:

- I was not able to visit the USAID Mission in Cameroon because it has closed. Shortly after my return to Ithaca, the Ministry of Education has been reorganized and now includes two separate departments, one of which exclusively deals with Professional Training. Given the objectives of this project, the newly-created department of Professional Training is an interesting partner. I am currently inquiring about their exact mandate and scope of activities.