

# Proceedings of the African Diaspora Conference on Sustainable Development

~ TMG – 2006 ~

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# Preface

Sustainable Development is defined in the now-classic Bruntland Commission Report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Africa is in so much need of true sustainable development. However in Africa, what passes for sustainable development is largely still dominated by the Western-driven, donor-led model.

TMG 2006 is unique in three key ways. **Firstly**, it is one of the first of – we hope – a set of conferences organized by Africans, for Africans, in order to truly and pragmatically address African sustainable development. It is an action-oriented conference – and not one that majors on exposes of Africa ills. **Secondly**, it is a conference organized by African Diasporas – a clear hypothesis we hold firmly is that Diasporas will be key to addressing African problems. This is not only because there are enough Africans in Europe alone to fill a mid-sized African country, but also because for most black African countries, there are more Diaspora professionals per key sector than those back in Africa. So for example, two thirds of doctors trained in Ghana are working abroad; similarly, there are 5000 Cameroonian Diaspora doctors and only 3000 in Cameroon. Similar statistics apply to other key professions. **Thirdly**, the philosophical view we take to sustainable development is different to the classic donor-led model. We advocate “grassroots-based”, “micro projects-driven”, “stakeholder community-involving” and “Diaspora-supporting” initiatives, and we argue they bode much better for African sustainability than “Western-driven” and “donor-led” models.

However, we do not pooh-pooh the donor-led model – indeed, we believe they are complementary – one is top-down, big budget in nature and fewer projects – the other bottom-up, small budgets in nature and many projects. Furthermore, we urge the Western donor organizations to facilitate and support the take up of such more sustainable models.

So from a programme perspective, we strove to achieve the following:

- Providing solutions-oriented Papers - not just restating the age old problems;
- Ideally, they should be case-based;
- They must demonstrate a good understanding of our African issues, be relevant, topical, etc. The papers should promote the role of various stakeholders, in particular Diasporas to address issues;
- They should be relatively short: 6-10 pages which makes them "digestible" quickly;

We leave it to the reader to judge how well the papers in this proceedings meet these criteria.

Either way, we urge the participants of this conference to come back to the next conference to report progress on more sustainable projects which they have set-up and got going, inspired by the learnings, networking, case studies, knowledge sharing, etc. of this TMG-2006 conference. If need be, TMG Foundation will advise on projects.

We will measure progress of this TMG conference – not by a publication like what you are reading – but via reported sustainable projects which we can unambiguously attribute to this initiative.

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**Prof. Joseph H. M. Tah**  
University of Salford, UK.

## **TMG 2006 Programme & Organising Committee**

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Dr. Rosemary Burnley, University of Luton, UK

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Mrs. Liz Ngemoh

Mrs. Belle Ngole

Mrs. Louisa Nkohkwo

Mrs. Andin Nwana

Dr. Joe Tabe - **Secretary of TMG**

Mrs. Petronella Tabe

Dr. Caroline Tah

## SATURDAY 22nd JULY 2006

### African Diaspora Conference on Sustainable Development (TMG-2006)

<http://www.tmgcmr.org>

OBE TV Coverage

10 - 10.30am	<b>REGISTRATION</b> (Coffee, tea, etc, provided)
10.30 -10.45am	<b>OPENING CEREMONY</b> Chair: <b>Dean &amp; CEO of TMG</b> Conference Chair: <b>Professor Joe Tah</b> Key VIP: <b>Cameroon High Commissioner (or Representative)</b>
<b>MORNING SESSION</b>	
11 - 11.30am	<b>Keynote: Ms Kirsty Wilson</b> , Diaspora Contributions to Sustainable Development - a UK Perspective, International Deaf Children Society, London
11.30 - 11.45am	<b>Dr. Rosemary Burnley</b> , University of Luton, UK - Helping African 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sector Organisations to be Sustainable - the Cases of CDEO and Fasirud
11.45am - 12pm	<b>Dr. Jerry Domatob</b> , Alcom State University, USA - Bali USA Diaspora and the Quest for Sustainable Development: Challenges & Lessons
12 - 12.30pm	<b>Keynote: Professor Sama Nwana</b> , Arqiva Ltd & Brunel University, UK - Sustainable Funding of Good Causes through Endowment or Trust funds
12.30- 13.00am	<b>Abah Ofon</b> , Standard Chartered Bank - The Challenge of Sustainable Development - The Cameroon Case Study  Morning Session Wrap Up (Chairman)
13.00-14.00 pm	<b>LUNCH/NETWORKING/POSTERS - SPONSORED BY MoneyLine UK</b>
<b>AFTERNOON SESSION</b>	<b>WORKSHOPS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Workshop 1: Developing Sustainable Communities - <b>Facilitator: Dr Priscilla Nkwenti; Rapporteur: Dr Asa'ah Nkohkwo</b></li></ul>

14.00-15.00 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshop 2: Financing Sustainable Development - <b>Facilitator: Mrs. Marion Ndumbe; Rapporteur: Ms Beatrice Njindou</b></li> <li>• Workshop 3: Sustainable Infrastructure - <b>Facilitator - Dr. Divine Ndumu; Key Rapporteur - Mr. Richard Nfor</b></li> </ul>
15.00-15.15pm	<p>Feedback Session from Workshop - Rapporteurs Reporting and Discussion</p> <p><b>Professor Cornellius Lambi</b> (Vice Chancellor, University of Buea)  <b>Professor Fosi Mbantekhu</b> (University of Buea)</p>
<b>PANEL SESSION</b> 15.15-16.15pm	<p>All Speakers: Chair: <b>Dr Titi Banjoko</b> (Executive Director, Africa Recruit).  Panellists: Ms Kirsty Wilson, Dr. Sam Atungsiri, Dr. Rosemary Burnley, Mr. Abah Ofon, Prof. Sama Nwana, Prof. Cornellius Lambi , Prof. Fosi Mbantekhu</p> <p><b>Conference Chair (Prof Joe Tah) - Closes the Conference</b></p>
16.15 - 17.15 pm	<p><b>POST CONFERENCE RECEPTION - SPONSORED BY Fancom Technologies</b></p>
	<p><b>CONFERENCE CLOSE</b></p>

# Sustainable Development & Diaspora: Primers

# Sustainable Development: Africa needs another model – *let a thousand flowers bloom* - and its Experienced Diaspora

**Hyacinth Sama Nwana**

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## **Abstract**

*In this paper, I outline why TMG – as an African Diaspora group in the UK - came to the realization that African Sustainable Development is not only the responsibility of many African stakeholders groups, of course, – but why we have particularly singled out the African Diaspora as key to its resolution! The reasons – we believe – are truly worth re-iterating to African Diaspora. This is a key contribution of this brief paper.*

*The lack of sustainability is such a problem on our continent. However, as a group, we believe time for discussions and forensic analyses of the issues is well past. **It is time to act.** Indeed, this conference is just one of those “actions” which TMG is engaged in, and some of the papers, including this one, detail some of what we and others are **practically doing on the ground** – and not just discussing.*

*We contend the lessons we report from some of our evolving “grassroots-based”, “micro projects-driven”, “stakeholder community-involving” and “diaspora-supporting” initiatives bode much better for **sustainability** than “Western-driven” and “donor-led” models. We hope some of the examples we cover convince you of this other key contribution.*

## **1. Why the African Diaspora must be Key Players in African Sustainable Development**

The Millennium Group (TMG) is a group of Cameroonian (and hence African) professionals (specifically company & NGO directors, university professors, self-made entrepreneurs, managers, IT professionals, top medical personnel and senior scientists) and their families who communion together to foster their professional, economic and social interests, and also pool their efforts to support social and charitable activities concerning Cameroonians both in Cameroon and in the UK.

So why did we collectively and suddenly get interested in African Sustainable Development. Indeed, it did not happen suddenly – it sort of crept up on us all over a long period – and the



reasons and many and varied, and certainly understandable to most, if not all, African Diaspora. They include:

1. **Our Statuses as African Diaspora and the African Brain Drain:** Therein in the first paragraph lies a key problem – we as TMG are all African professionals resident in the UK, and we have long since stopped pretending we will be returning to Cameroon to continue our professional careers. Selfishly or not on our part, we are part of the African Brain Drain problem – and we have seen this continue to grow and grow to crisis proportions – yes, it is a crisis! Consider the following.
  - 604 out of 871 medical officers trained in Ghana between 1993 and 2002 have left the country – indeed, today two-thirds of the doctors trained in Ghana are working abroad. In Zimbabwe, only 360 physicians out of 1200 trained in the 1990s remain in Zimbabwe (Gbary & Sambo, 2006). Musa (2006) recently filed a Reuters news story - “Cameroon seen losing all its doctors by 2009” – as there are only 3000 doctors left for 17 million people, i.e. 1 to 40,000 people. Musa reports that more than 5000 of Cameroon’s doctors are working abroad with 600 in the United States alone. Public Health Minister Urbain Olanguena Awono acknowledges the problem stating “the situation regarding human resources in the health sector is critical”. Most other African countries can recount similar dire statistics.
  - What most African Diaspora do not realize, until it is spelt out to them, is what an unjust subsidy this situation generates to Western nations like the UK – and it will only get worse. Blanchet *et al.* (2006) point out that it costs African countries £270M yearly to train doctors and nurses – but the UK saves 10 times that amount by not training these doctors and nurses themselves! This is an astonishing subsidy to the West by the poorest of poor African nations. Specifically about Ghana as an example, they point out that the brain drain of doctors has cost Ghana £35M and saved the UK £65M in training costs since 1998. Hence, a net loss to Ghana’s “balance of training” with respect to the UK of £100M. And this is just for doctors to the UK! Consider the case for other professions to all other developed countries for Ghana – and multiply this effect for all African countries – then the scale of the subsidy starts looking what it is – obscene.
2. **The Human Resources Crisis back in Africa:** naturally, the brain drain causes this. But it gets worse. Consider the HIV/AIDs crisis. It has been estimated that these accounts for 19% to 53% of all deaths among government staff in typical African country.
  - In Swaziland, 10% of health workers are being lost to HIV/AIDS.
  - A quarter of all Malawi’s remaining health workers are expected to die from AIDS within the next 5 years (all quoted in Blanchet *et al.*, 2006).
3. **African Diaspora have a Moral Responsibility:** Drawing from 1 and 2, we in TMG concluded that African Diaspora all have a moral responsibility to bridge *the talent, skill and knowledge capital gap*. Not only does the brain drain “drain” away talent, skill and capital – but the little that remains is being killed off by AIDS/HIV, and the classic decades of neglect of our professional workforces back in Africa by most governments.

As an example of such abject neglect, consider the case in Cameroon where as one doctor who asked not to be named in Musa (2006) rightly “complained that illiterate soldiers earn more than doctors do” in Cameroon. The scale of the problem from an African perspective is frankly humongous. Consider the following imbalance in health quoted in Blanchet *et al.* (2006). The Americas have 14% of the world’s population; 10% of global burden of disease; 37% of world’s health workers and >50% of global health expenditure. *Now for sub-Saharan Africa...:11% of the world’s population; 24% global burden of disease; 3% of health workers and <1% of global health expenditure.* Surely for example, with almost double the number of Cameroonian doctors outside Cameroon as within Cameroon, the Diaspora doctors have a moral responsibility to their homeland – even if they continue to live abroad.

4. **Tony Blair’s Commission for Africa, Sir Bob Geldof’s Live 8, HIPC & the G8 and Africa – Africa Diaspora must support:** TMG has also been influenced by such initiatives as UK Prime Minister Tony Blair’s Commission for Africa, HIPC as well as the G8 and Africa. African Diaspora may be cynical – but we believe this is mistaken. These initiatives give Africa and Africans a chance for a “new start”. We know they are not all what their Public Relations (PR) will lead us the public to believe – but it is a good re-start.

As a quick reminder, for decades, Sub-Saharan Africa, the poorest region of the World, was spending *\$30M per day* repaying debts to the world’s richest nations, the IMF and the World Bank (Fin, 2005, p. 13). Many countries spent on debt each day than on health care and education combined. Between 1970 and 2002, Africa received *\$540 billions* in loans. Over this period, it paid back *\$550 billions*, i.e. *\$10 billions* more – but today, they still owe *\$293 billions*. In 1999, the world’s richest countries came together to write off billions of dollars of this debt via the IMF’s Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) programme (see Abah Ofon’s paper in this volume). Of the 38 countries currently enrolled in the programme, 32 are African! The problem is – despite fantastic PR – HIPC did not completely cancel countries’ debts. Indeed, it will immediately cancel *\$40 billions* of debt for the 18 countries that have already reached their completion point, and will eventually result in *\$56 billions* of debt cancellation once all 38 HIPC countries reach completion point. Many point out, rightly, that it is too little too late – it is only one-sixth of Africa’s *\$295 billions* debt. However, as pointed out in Fin(2005), p. 14, the *\$40 billions* debt cancellation immediately:

- Enables Zambia to hire 7000 new teachers;
- Tanzania will no longer spend 12% of its annual budgets servicing debt, and could build new hospitals and roads. Whether it does is another matter of course as we know.

We believe, Diaspora have the responsibility to support the “pump priming” opportunities that this affords Africa – despite its limitation. We believe we should use the opportunity it creates as countries complete HIPC to advocate, support and help “implement” good governance, accountability, good leadership. *TMG and this TMG-2006 conference*

*(which we insisted should be free) is a clear antidote to such typical African cynicism of such initiatives.* We implore all Africa Diaspora to join in, in whatever small capacity they can – and make a difference.

So, the core question – surely – is whilst others like Sir Bob Geldof with his Live 8, Tony Blair, with his Commission for Africa and his G8 initiative, etc – what are African Diaspora doing?

5. **The Donor-Led Model Comes with Strings:** as all Africans know to their cost, the donor-led model with key players like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the African Development Bank (ADB), always had some perverse incentives. For example, the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) agreement signed between the IMF and individual countries has often been cited as a key reason for African governments not making human resource investments – indeed, they often incentivised human resource cuts! The Structural Adjustment Programme insisted on by the IMF in the 1990s constrained the Cameroon Government to perversely get rid of hundreds of nurses, health officers and teachers – just the resources the country needed to work its way out of the economic and AIDS/HIV crisis! Such reductions are happening today in 2006 under the guise of HIPC!

The message here is NOT that the donor-led model is wrong – though some may take this view, but rather that other models surely have a place.

6. **We have all started or been involved unsustainable projects:** Most Africa Diaspora would recognize this. They are all typically, individually, involved in cultural organizations, village/tribal communities in the Diaspora, old school clubs, etc. - and many have started companies or key projects back in their African countries of origins. All TMG members have their individual stories of their catalogue of failed, struggling or unsustainable projects back home. With the experiences, we are honing in the UK, we believed there must be a better way.
7. **Stop the Analysis-Paralysis – Diaspora should make a Difference:** How many times do we as Africa Diaspora, analyse and rehearse our old analyses of the continent's age old problems? As Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie points out in the conference programme of the AD3 conference (AD3, 2006), there are enough Africans in Europe alone to fill a mid-sized African country. TMG members fall into this category – and he wonders why we cannot be mobilized “to harness this financial, political, intellectual and social resource base within the Africa Diaspora to kick-start development”? He also proceeds to ask, tantalizingly, if each Africa Diaspora can create one job back in Africa? We as TMG Foundation agree, and like Chikezie's AFFORD, we believe it is time to make a difference, and stop the analysis-paralysis.

We hope the above seven key points make amply the case for why the African Diaspora must be key to African Sustainable Development going forward – and how we meandered our way into the position where we, as TMG, are involved in several sustainable development projects which we report on in this volume. Indeed, this has led to our setting up the TMG Foundation as a registered charity in the UK.

## 2. A User Community-led & Diaspora-involving Model to African Sustainable Development

After digesting all the issues above, we decided that another model – surely - is needed for African Sustainable Development. For decades, the current models have been tried – and look where it got us.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world that has got poorer. As reported in Fin (2005), *The G8 and Africa* (p. 16), its share of world trade halved between 1980 and 2002. It further notes that it makes up 13% of the world's population and 28% of the world poverty. To date 13 million in this region has died of AIDS/HIV, and 26 million are living with the virus. Need I continue?

Suffice to say, I hope the point is clear, that we need other models, and preferably some where Africans and African Diaspora are key stakeholders in them. Not only the Western-driven, donor-led models – which despite being well meaning – involve decisions being made in New York, London, etc – with little understanding of local implications – with an army of Western consultants who charge in a day what an African will earn in a year.

Rather than go through an expose of the principles, I describe briefly an example of a good partnership between the Diaspora, Community Elites back in Cameroon, Elite Women Groups, the local Council and the Government – and how all these stakeholders are working for more sustainable developments back in Bali Nyonga, Bamenda, Cameroon. Then, I point out the key workings of this model – and argue why it is more sustainable.



Figure 1 – Some Scenes from Bali

## 2.1 The Bali-Nyonga (Cameroon) Case Study

This case is described in much more detail in Domatob (2006), also in this volume. As Domatob notes, the Bali-Nyongas is one African Diaspora community, which struggles to help with the development process in the homeland, North West Cameroon. Located in the grass field of Cameroon, the Balis - an amalgamation of achievement-oriented, driven and purposeful people - try hard to foster development, whether they are at home or abroad. To this end, Bali Diaspora associations have been formed in the United States, Britain and Germany.

Below are some key achievements of the Diaspora over the last decade. To further ‘prove’ the Diaspora-African Homeland cooperation, these achievements are drawn directly from a key note speech given by the Lord Mayor of the Bali-Nyonga Council (Nyamsenkwen, 2006) at the recent Bali-USA annual conference in the USA in May 2006. He noted the Bali Diaspora who he called “partners in development” had made “indelible” marks in Bali Nyonga including:

- In the domains of public health and public hygiene, he observed with gratitude that the District Hospital in Bali, and the Bali Health Centres are the best in the North West Province because of BCA-USA efforts (<http://www.bca-usa.org/>).
- Bali Sub Division can boast the best public toilets at its Ntanfoang Ceremonial Square, thanks to BCA-USA philanthropy.
- The most recognised Health Fair in the North West Province was conducted in Bali-Nyonga by BCA-USA covered all over the Cameroon Media.
- In the domains of Water Supply and other Social Welfare programmes, BCA-USA has played in role in saving the near-collapse of the Bali Water Supply Scheme under the control of BANDECA – the cultural association of the Bali Elites back with branches in all the big cities in Cameroon.
- The cripples in Bali now hop about thanks to the hundreds of crutches donated to them by BCA-USA.
- In the domain of education, poor and desperate pupils and students in various schools in the Bali Community have BCA-USA to thank for their continued education. The organisation funds something like 150 scholarships annually in Bali.
- Computer literacy was introduced to the Bali Community by BCA-USA.

There are more, but I have just abridged here for brevity.

Furthermore, more has been achieved – without any Government involvement - in partnership with other organisations back home like Nkumu Fed Fed (the Women Organisation of Bali Women who live outside the village), BANDECA (Bali-Nyonga Development Cultural Association), BANSA (the Bali Nyonga Students Association), Local Churches and Schools, etc.

Let us describe a classic Sustainable Project which the Diaspora engaged and worked in partnership with all these groups in Bali Nyonga recently.

## 2.2 The Sustainable Bali – Nyonga Mortuary

The Bali Community – with an increasing number of its members outside Bali-Nyonga Village, and indeed outside Cameroon, decided that it was important to have a truly modern mortuary to be able to “hold” their loved ones when they died. This allows for other family members from abroad to be able to make it back to the village for the funeral without arriving when the dead would have already been buried as was typically the case before. The Balis increasingly were frustrated with the services provided by the provincial mortuary services at the Bamenda General Hospital which has a host of maintenance issues, electricity black outs, staff morale issues, etc. leading to very poor services all round. Most Cameroonians would recognise these!

Hence, the Bali Community decided to undertake a Mortuary project – with a difference. *They sought sustainability from the outset*, and took significant advice and participation from all the above stakeholders groups, but particularly the Bali Diaspora and the Bali Elites (Fongod, 2006). Some key sustainable aspects that were considered included:

- **Capacity:** The Bali-Nyonga mortuary now boasts the largest capacity in the North and South West Provinces with a capacity for about 50 corpses. It was expected that most in the North West Province would want to use it – and so it has transpired.
- **Diaspora-Local Cooperation:** The building and equipping of the mortuary was a story of true cooperation between the Diaspora, BANDECA, BANSAs, etc. The traditional ruler’s support by His Majesty Dr Doh Ganyonga III, Paramount Fon of Bali, was also very instrumental in such projects for their sustainability.
- **Maintenance:** Unlike most donor-driven projects in Africa, maintenance of the mortuary was a paramount concern from day one. It is equipped fully redundantly with a dual system – one that is “live” and the other “in spare”. This means there are indeed two systems from generators, to freezing units, etc. It undergoes routine maintenance – a novelty in Cameroon – and when a part goes bad, it is replaced immediately from the spare system – and the faulty part is repaired and refitted onto the spare system. This way, there is 99% availability of the Mortuary Services.
- **Governance:** A BANDECA-formed committee runs the mortuary, and provides regular reports to the BANDECA board chaired by its president Dr. Nyamdi.
- **Projects Committee:** A strong projects committee with strong accountability was set up under the guidance of BANDECA members Ba Nkom Gwanyalla and Ba Edwin Fongod.
- **Cash Positive:** Indeed, such is the “success” of the mortuary that it generates cash which is used to fund other BANDECA projects, e.g. the “sick” Water Supply project. This is largely unheard of for most donor and even Diasporan-driven projects: *that they are successful enough in their own right to be able to “fund” other projects.*
- **Good Public Relations (PR);** Considering it was not a Government-funded project, it was important politically to have its support still. Indeed, the Governor of the North West Province inaugurated this mortuary in December 2002 – thereby giving the

Government's "blessing" to this project. The occasion was widely covered over Cameroon Radio & Television (CRTV).

- **Retired Professionals doing the Day to Day Running:** In order to keep running costs as low as possible, the Mortuary funds are run by Retired Health Administrator, Mr Isaac Fokum. However, he is also charged with training "the next generation" and a "cohort of others" to sustainably run the Mortuary in his absence and after his departure.

### 2.3 Further New Projects – Municipal Multi-Purpose Centre & Library

Further new projects are underway. The latest is the planned Multi-Purpose Centre and Library in Bali. Indeed, at the recent convention in the US, about \$50K was raised for this project. The project would have the following benefits for the Bali population (Nyamsenkwen, 2006):

- An expansive hall that will hold up to 800 during development meetings – hence they will not have to be "selecting" delegates in the future.
- The official reception hall and dining rooms will stop the practice of hosting official guests to Bali at people's private lodgings and homes.
- Bali pupils/students will no longer have to travel 15kms to Bamenda for Internet, fax, library and computer services.
- Local research documents including books, manuscripts, photographs, maps, videotapes, CDs, etc – shall now for a central and most accessible place for preservation and references. The would-be Presbyterian University may make use of it too as a resource centre.
- Also key, Bali antiques and historical objects will have a better and accessible home for exhibition and preservation for posterity.
- **Self-Sustaining:** like the Mortuary project, the multi-purpose centre would generate cashflow from conferences, weddings, etc – to be able to support future projects.
- **Diaspora Office:** BCA-USA for the first time shall have an office and a desk officer appointed to help coordinate Diaspora projects.
- **Many Stakeholders "designed in" from the Onset:** as can be surmised so far, there are many clearly identified stakeholders: pupils, students, the Institution of the Fon, the Urban Council, Tourists, the Bali Community, Schools and the Diaspora.
- **Land Already Acquired by Council and Mayor:** the land on which the centre will be built has already been acquired by the Lord Mayor of the Bali Urban Council, and the Council has also pledged that annual maintenance of the centre will be the responsibility of the Council.
- **Support and Patronage from the Paramount Fon of Bali:** Lastly, but by no means, the support and patronage of the Paramount ruler of Bali is not only invaluable, but absolute necessary for the project's success.

All in all, this will clearly be net-positive project for the Bali community – being planned with *sustainability in mind*. Like the Mortuary project, the multi-purpose centre and library project is "grassroots-based", "micro project" in nature, "stakeholder community-involving" and "Diaspora-supporting", and such initiatives bode much better for *sustainability* than "Western-driven" and "donor-led" models.

### 3.0 Conclusions - the *Diaspora-Involving Alternative Model*

We argue the model demonstrated in the previous section (Section 2) meets the classic Bruntland Commission definition of Sustainable Development defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

The role of the Diaspora to provide talent, skill and capital (or intermediating for capital) should not be underestimated. It is estimated by the IMF that African Diaspora sent some \$32 billions back to Africa in 2005 – and this is almost certainly a significant underestimate as it only counts official remittances. Imagine if the Diaspora is encouraged and given tax incentives to partner with Diaspora in achieving African Sustainable Development as reported in this paper.

The Diaspora – we contend should play three key roles:

- **Advocacy:** Diaspora must be key advocates for good governance, accountability and leadership – particularly with the opportunity HIPC provides to many African countries. In projects TMG is involved in back in Africa, this is an absolute requirement.
- **Agents of Change:** we as Diaspora are clearly more credible agents of change than any other stakeholders in the mix. We clearly have more to lose and are inextricably linked to our homelands via family, investments – and frankly, it is “our home land”. We must organize ourselves, and convince Western donors that there are other models.
- **Act** – just act: Stop the analysis paralysis and endless analysis. More importantly, we must individually start “making a difference”!

This paper has made two simple contributions:

- Firstly, the paper has argued – hopefully cogently – why Africa Diaspora should take African Sustainable Development more seriously than we do to date.
- Secondly, that the donor-led model which typically relies on corrupt and inefficient governments should not be the only model to Sustainable Development. Arguably, most of these donor-led projects are not sustainable at all, and frequently result in “White Elephant” projects – and this is assuming the projects ever get commenced at all. How many projects have been “officially completed” back in Africa without a single brick being laid? Recently, in a land mark ruling in Switzerland, the Abacha millions – some \$450M which could be traced – will be repatriated to Nigeria against the wishes of the Abacha family. These monies almost certainly were ear-marked for some “completed” projects!

We hope the reader is convinced that the sorts of “micro-projects” with respect to the typical donor projects we report in this paper, given the right support from stakeholders and Diaspora, are more achievable.



**The vision of our alternative model** is one of where thousands (if not tens of thousands) of such “grassroots-based”, “micro projects-driven”, “stakeholder community-involving” and “Diaspora-supporting” projects evolve. Sure, many will fail! But after the abject failure of current models in Africa for a myriad of reasons, it is time to try the “let a thousand [or ten thousands] flowers bloom” model - preferably with Diaspora support. Some will wilt and die, but with enough African Diaspora in Europe alone to fill a mid-sized African country, the chances are that many sustainable projects will survive.

If there is a last plea we make, it is one of us as African Diaspora organizing ourselves and be ready to partner to make such Sustainable projects happen on our continent – and for Western donor organizations to look for ways to start experimenting with, and supporting such models.

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# THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN SUSTAINABLE HOMEBUILDING

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**ABSTRACT:** *It has been widely acknowledged that the Diaspora is contributing significant financial inflows into Africa, some of which goes towards building homes. This paper seeks to inform the Diaspora of the global resurgence of interest in the use of sustainable methods of building that have long been abandoned in favour of highly industrialized methods of production and the opportunities this presents for Africa. It highlights the shortcomings of existing conventional methods which are putting significant pressures on the exploitation of natural resources and damaging the environment to the detriment of future generations. Emerging and more sustainable solutions are presented. The paper concludes by calling on the Diaspora to establish action networks to facilitate the wider uptake of sustainable practices for the development of affordable homes.*

**Keywords:** African Diaspora, Homebuilding, Sustainable development, Sustainable building technologies, Renewable energy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is now widely recognised that remittances by the Diasporas from high- and middle-income countries is the second largest financial inflow to developing countries behind foreign direct investment, exceeding international aid (DFID, 2005). Anecdotal evidence suggests that a substantial part of this money is spent on building homes, including contributions to the building of community health centres, hospitals, and schools.

The paper aims to raise awareness amongst the African Diaspora on the re-emergence in the use of low technology solutions from the past with significant potential to positively influence the provision of affordable homes. It seeks to inform the Diaspora of the resurgence in global interest in the use of sustainable methods of building that have been long abandoned in favour of highly industrialized methods of production and the opportunities this presents for Africa. This has come about as a result of the realisation of the shortcomings of existing conventional methods which are putting significant pressures on the exploitation of natural resources and damaging the environment to the detriment of future generations. A brief discussion on the relationship between affordable homes and sustainable development, followed by an overview of existing global agenda on shelter are presented to highlight the significance of the subject and the challenges it presents internationally. The shortcomings of existing conventional methods of building are presented and emerging solutions are highlighted. The role that the African Diaspora can play in the development and provision of sustainable homes is presented. The paper concludes by calling on the Diaspora to establish action networks to facilitate the wider uptake of sustainable practices for the development of affordable homes.

## 2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND AFFORDABLE HOMES

Sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Bruntland, 1987). This implies providing a better quality of life for everyone now and for generations to come. The three interdependent and mutually reinforcing dimension of sustainable development often referred to as the “Triple Bottom Line” are economic development, social development, and environmental protection as depicted in Figure 1. The sustainability of a building in terms of its material usage, construction, occupation and end of life is becoming an important consideration. This is being driven by the world’s desire to provide a better quality of life for people and protect the needs of future generations.



*Figure 1. Sustainable Development – The “Triple Bottom Line”*

Adequate shelter is one of the essential components of sustainable development. Homes play a central role in improving the quality of life of people all over the world. A safe and affordable home provides personal, social, economic benefits and contributes significantly to the health and safety of individual inhabitants. The building of homes generates employment, requiring intensive labour and local capital investment.

Investing in building creates jobs, improves productivity and raises incomes. Increased building development activities trigger additional investments in building materials production and marketing. This in turn generates demand in other sectors. Any investment in building or infrastructure has a multiplier effect that extends beyond the construction sector. Thus, the significant inflows of money from the African Diaspora into African countries for building

homes has the potential to make a significant contribution to the development of these countries if done in a sustainable manner.

## **2.1 The Global Agenda**

The right to adequate housing is part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The need for sustainable housing has long been globally recognised and reflected in societal goals for sustainable development embodied in Agenda 21 (1992), the Habitat Agenda (1996), the Millennium Declaration (2000) and the outcomes of the World Summit (2002).

In 1992, the Global Agenda for Sustainable Human Settlements Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It identified a number of programme areas for promoting sustainable human settlement development, including “providing adequate shelter for all” and “promoting sustainable construction industry activities”. In 1996, The Habitat II conference in Istanbul led to the establishment of the Habitat Agenda. This agenda linked locally available, appropriate, affordable, safe, efficient and environmentally sound construction methods and technologies (that emphasize optimal use of local human resources) to the concept of sustainable construction.

The United Nations’ Millennium Declaration (2000) resolved to make every effort “to embark on the required reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases”. Ten years after the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, The United Nations held a World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. The Johannesburg World Summit (2002) brought about a clearer understanding of the important linkages between poverty, the environment and the use of natural resources and builds upon many of the resolutions made in the Millennium Declaration. Thus, the fundamental global action associated with the international agenda for sustainable development is to fight poverty and to protect the environment.

One of the targets set for poverty eradication seeks to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. The proposed actions associated with this target include: improved access to adequate shelter and to basic services for the poor; and the use of low-cost and sustainable materials and appropriate technologies for the construction of adequate and secure housing for the poor, taking into account their culture, climate, specific social conditions and vulnerability to natural disasters.

## **2.3 The Challenges**

Although, societal expectations for sustainable human settlements are well articulated in these global agenda and reflected in the priorities of most African governments, there are significant challenges in meeting current huge deficits in housing due in part to dwindling public finances (Forgwe, 2001). The significant financial inflows from the Diaspora into home building in Africa is therefore of significant importance to the development of the continent. Africans in the Diaspora are therefore in a strong position to influence the diffusion and uptake of more sustainable practices for building homes across the continent.

### **3. SUSTAINABLE HOMEBUILDING**

There are ongoing efforts around the world to relearn many practical aspects of constructing homes by blending the technologies of the present with the traditions of the past to produce more environmentally friendly homes. In this section, efforts to move away from highly centralised industrialised production techniques to the use of more sustainable techniques to produce more sustainable buildings are briefly discussed. These involve the use of locally-based solutions, the use of recycling, and the use of energy from renewable sources.

#### **3. 1 Locally-based building solutions**

Production of building materials has moved from highly decentralized and labour intensive methods and processes to centralized industrialised production resulting in materials with high embodied energy. Embodied energy is the energy used in all of the processes associated with the production of a building, from the acquisition of natural resources to its construction. This includes the mining and manufacturing of materials and equipment, the transport of the materials and the administrative functions. Embodied energy is a significant component of the environmental impact of a building. The centralized mode of production necessitates hauling of raw materials and distribution of finished materials and components over long distances. These activities require expenditure on fossil fuels used in vehicles for transportation. Transportation of raw and finished building materials contributes significantly to the cost of materials, increased energy requirements and environmental pollution. The present mode of production, distribution, and consumption of building materials and existing construction practices are unsustainable. The materials commonly used in construction today include bricks, cement, steel, aluminium, plastic products, paint, polished stone, ceramic products, etc. These materials are energy intensive, are often transported over long distances, and are expensive. Extensive use of these materials can drain significant energy resources and adversely affect the environment.

Due to the realisation that existing conventional methods of construction are unsustainable, more sustainable methods of construction are now being developed. These borrow significantly from techniques that have been abandoned in the past such as the use of traditional materials like mud, straw, bamboo, timber, etc. which are highly energy efficient. Furthermore, these materials are from renewable sources and can thus be exploited by the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to use the same materials. Examples are wood from sustainable forests used in timber framed building, mud used in rammed earth building, and straw used in straw bale building. Other developments include the use of sustainable building materials such as stabilized mud blocks, rammed earth blocks, mud concrete blocks, lime–pozzolana cements, and soil-lime plaster. These materials when used in combination with buildings that have been designed to maximise the benefits of passive heating and cooling, result in highly sustainable buildings.

Traditional materials and low technology like wood reinforced earth and mud blocks have been used in Africa for centuries but are being abandoned due to the advent of steel and reinforced concrete. These techniques are being revived in the developed countries but most new developments in Africa still rely heavily on cement, concrete and steel. There is a need to raise awareness of the merits of using traditional materials and the African Diaspora could play a

significant role given its huge purchasing potential. However, it is difficult to meet the ever growing demand for buildings by adopting only energy efficient traditional materials like (mud, thatch, timber, etc.) and construction methods. Hence, the optimum utilization of available energy resources and raw materials to produce simple, energy efficient, environment friendly and sustainable building alternatives and techniques to satisfy the increasing demand for buildings is essential.

The developed world has a huge investment in buildings and real estate built with conventional methods of construction that are heavily polluting to the environment. Apart from a few major capital cities and commercial cities, Africa does not have such a legacy and there is a huge opportunity for innovation and use of more environmentally friendly modern sustainable construction technologies in Africa. The Tlholego (2006) project in South Africa demonstrates the potential of such sustainable building technologies.

### **3.2 Recycling of Materials**

Reuse and recycling of demolished building wastes is another area/aspect of efficient utilization of materials and resources. Recycling of materials like steel, stone and timber from demolished structures takes place to some extent. But the recycling of bricks, concrete, aggregates, mortar, etc. is still not done in an organized fashion. Such materials can be crushed and processed for utilisation in new constructions.

### **3.3 On-site Renewable Energy**

In most developed countries, energy use in buildings and communities accounts for about 50% of the carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere. Therefore, improving the environmental performance of buildings and communities is vital in the quest for sustainability and to meet Kyoto targets. Consequently, the development of sustainable methods of reducing energy consumption in buildings and greenhouse gas emissions is high on the priority of most governments. The development of cost effective environmentally friendly small-scale renewable energy technologies is emerging as a key solution for reducing dependence on imported oil derived from highly environmentally unfriendly fossil fuels, reducing air and water pollution, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Renewable energy sources capture their energy from on-going natural processes, such as sunshine, wind, flowing water (hydropower), biological processes, and geothermal heat flow.

Small-scale renewable energy technologies or microgenerators are very small power stations which produce heat and power using low-carbon fuels much more efficiently than their larger cousins. Consequently, they have become the centrepiece of most governments' climate change strategy in the developed countries. There are many microgenerating technologies being developed but those that are of immediate direct relevance to developing nations include solar photovoltaics, solar hot water, small hydroelectric systems, and small combined heat and power units.

In solar photovoltaics, photovoltaic (PV) panels convert sunlight into electricity. Electricity is produced throughout the year since sunlight is available throughout the year. Furthermore PV panels have no moving parts and so have good reliability. In solar hot water, the thermal solar

collector consists of tubes containing water. When the temperature of this water exceeds that of the water in the main hot water tank, a pump switches on to circulate the hot water.

In a small wind turbine system, a propeller-type blade is attached to an electrical generator, which is attached to a small mast. When the wind blows, the blade spins the generator, producing electricity. A small hydroelectric system uses fast-flowing water to turn a water turbine, which is connected to an electricity generator. There has to be sufficient head of water to spin the turbine so small hydro schemes are usually sited near a fast-flowing stream or a slow-moving river with a weir.

A combined heat and power (CHP) plant is an electricity generator situated at the point of use. It consists of an engine that generates electricity with the waste heat used for heating. They range from power station-sized units to washing machine-sized domestic units. These units use biomass. Biomass is any renewable energy resource derived from the carbonaceous waste of various human and natural activities. It is derived from numerous sources, including the by-products from the timber industry, agricultural crops, raw material from the forest, major parts of household waste and wood.

Solar hot water panels can meet a significant proportion of the hot water demand of a dwelling. Roofs can be designed with the right orientation and clad in solar electric panels. Flues suitable for wood-burning could be incorporated to allow significant amounts of thermal needs to be met by clean-burn wood pellet boilers and small CHP units. Significant energy demands can also be met by building integrated micro wind turbines into the roof or between buildings.

The use of these distributed generation technologies, reduces the need to invest in wasteful centralised power stations and long grid lines particularly in remote areas. Unlike the developed regions, most developing regions including Africa do not suffer from the legacy of having invested heavily in conventional technologies. This combined with the need to meet the heavy deficit in housing presents an opportunity for a volume market with the economies of scale needed to reduce the costs of distributed generation technologies rendering them more affordable.

### **3.5 Sustainable Supporting Infrastructure**

Successful homebuilding involves not only home construction but the delivery of critical infrastructural support systems such as clean water, sewage systems and roads, among others. Methods of providing and managing sustainable infrastructure have been suggested in the articles by Tasong (2006), Robinson (2006), and Abanda and Tah (2006) in this conference proceedings.

## **4. THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA**

There is substantial evidence that the African Diaspora is already contributing significantly to the development of the continent. A report (Ndofor-Tah, 2000) commissioned by the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) indicates that UK African Diaspora groups have succeeded in raising funds used to build hospitals, maternity wards, vocational centres, bridges to

link remote villages to services; to provide clean running water and electricity; to supply books and computers to schools; and to support income generating activities. The report concludes that as social and civic entrepreneurs, these UK-based African Diaspora groups have succeeded in pooling resources to create relationships, networks of trust and co-operation and social capital to provide local communities in Africa with access to financial, physical and emotional assets. With the recent DFID (2005) report confirming significant remittances from the Diaspora, most of which will go towards building and construction projects, the Diaspora is well placed to significantly raise awareness and promote sustainable homebuilding practices through its buying power.

#### **4.1 Sustainable Homebuilding Action Networks**

Where people are involved in a project either individually or as a group in Africa every effort should be made to use sustainable building practices and incorporate affordable sustainable building technologies. However, economies of scale are required to reduce the current cost of some of the emerging renewable energy technologies through high volume markets. Thus, wider adoption of such practices and technologies can best be achieved through joined-up working. The emerging diverse forms of Diaspora organisations and networks could pool resources and establish knowledge networks around the development of sustainable communities with specific knowledge networks on sustainable homebuilding practices. These could be action networks that bring together interested individuals in the Diaspora, local communities, NGOs, universities in Africa and beyond, relevant research institutes (e.g. MIPROMALO (2006) in Cameroon), technology transfer organisations, local and central governments, and relevant international agencies. Such action networks could pool resources to set up “Demonstration Projects” throughout the sub-regions and countries of the continent to showcase and promote sustainable homebuilding practices.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

It has been widely acknowledged that the African Diaspora is contributing significant financial inflows into Africa to support various initiatives including the building of homes. The provision of safe and affordable homes is one of the essential components of sustainable development. A safe and affordable home provides personal, social, economic benefits and contributes significantly to the health and safety of individual inhabitants. The building of homes generates employment, improves productivity and raises incomes.

However, the materials commonly used in building today such as bricks, cement, steel, aluminium, plastic products, paint, polished stone, ceramic products, etc. are unsustainable. These materials are produced using highly centralised production methods which are putting significant pressures on the exploitation of natural resources and damaging the environment to the detriment of future generations. These materials consume a lot of energy in their processing, are often transported over long distances resulting in environmental pollution, and are very expensive. It has also been realised in developed countries that energy use in building activity using these methods accounts for about 50% of the carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere.



It is for these reasons that there is currently a lot of interest in the development of low energy and zero-carbon alternative technologies. These borrow heavily from traditional low technology methods that have been abandoned in the past. The emphasis is on maximising the opportunity to use materials from renewable sources such as earth, straw, bamboo, and timber and renewable energy sources like the sun, wind, and water. This presents Africa with an opportunity which is not yet widely recognised and most building projects still really heavily on conventional technologies and methods that are now being questioned in the West. Developing environment friendly, energy efficient, simple and affordable sustainable building technologies maximising the use of local resources and skills should be the way forward for Africa. This paper calls on the African Diaspora to establish action networks, pool resources, and implement “Demonstration Projects” throughout the continent to raise awareness and facilitate the wider uptake of sustainable practices for the development of affordable homes.

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# **Africa Diaspora Conference on Sustainable Development: from proactive solutions to implementation**

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## **Abstract**

*Up to date expert knowledge and skills are required to ensure productive capacity is developed in Africa within an increasing globalised economy. The Diaspora has a critical role to play in bridging the existing skills gaps. This must be done in collaboration and partnership with local stakeholders and not in isolation if it is to be sustained.*

## **Areas of action and engagement**

- Recognition of the problem by African's themselves
- Knowledge and information management
- Policy process, development, implementation and monitoring
- Mobilisation of resources such as skills, remittances
- "Corporate Social Responsibility" by the Diaspora
- Lobby and advocacy inside and outside Africa

## **Quick wins vs. long term aims and objectives**

- Collaboration and partnership
- Competition or diversity
- Credibility
- Proactive implementation

## **Examples of success stories by the Diaspora**

- Individual level
- Group Level
- Organisations level

## Challenges

- Lack of up to date information
- Cultural difference
- Perception
- Process of effective engagement
- Turnaround times
- Resources

“**Africans must believe in themselves**, Africa had to project its positive messages to build a strong brand” Lazarus Zim, Chief Executive of Anglo American Corporation of South Africa.

“Diaspora a potentially massive resource- Several members of a panel of African business leaders identified the African Diaspora as a brand-building opportunity”

Ishmael Yamson, non-executive chairman of Unilever Ghana **World Economic Forum's Africa Economic Summit 2005**

### *About the Author*

Dr. T. A. Banjoko (BDS, FDSRCS, MSc) is a clinician by training, and currently works part-time at the Royal. She founded FindaJobinAfrica.com in 2000. AfricaRecruit was founded in 2002 with the Commonwealth Business Council and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Dr. Banjoko's initiatives have been widely endorsed and embraced by organisations such as United Nations, African Union, Commonwealth Secretariat and The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

She has addressed the issue of Capacity building in Africa and fora, such as the 2005 meeting of African Union Labour Ministers; The UK house of Commons on the subject of remittance/investment and skills to Africa); and many other local and international organizations.

She serves on the executive board of Commonwealth Business Women's Network; was an invited guest in 2004 at No. 10 for reception with Prime Minister Tony Blair to celebrate the role of Africans in the United Kingdom;

She has appeared on many TV and Radio stations including CNN and BBC to address Africa's brain drain; has written extensively on Africa's brain drain, Diaspora, Remittances and Investment in outlets such as Financial Times of London; and has received numerous services awards from local and international organizations.

# Developing Sustainable Communities - Real World Cases

# DIASPORA CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – A UK DEVELOPMENT SECTOR PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper highlights the way in which Diaspora voluntary sector organisations have remained relatively marginalized from the "mainstream" international development sector. Using a 4-point definition of sustainability and some key principles arising from practitioner experience, this paper explores ways in which both Diaspora and "mainstream" voluntary sector organisations can work together to make common progress towards the goal of sustainable development in Africa. In particular the paper highlights the need to adopt a rights-based approach rather than a charitable one and to plan "with the end in mind". The importance of networking and sharing learning is also highlighted as being of critical importance in avoiding the duplication of effort and increasing the impact of lobbying and campaigning efforts. The paper acknowledges that achieving sustainable development requires time and flexibility in planning, engaging communities, and critically analysing our methods and motives for contributing to the process.*

**Keywords:** Africa, Diaspora, International Development, Sustainable Development, Voluntary Sector Organisations,

## 1.0 BACKGROUND

Over the last 50 years, governments, voluntary sector organisations and others have invested trillions of pounds and far more in effort, exhortation and emotion, to relieve human suffering and create the starting conditions for people to escape poverty.

Clearly, this assistance has brought much short-term relief, achieved real breakthroughs against disease and contributed to the long-term development prospects of many countries. However, at the same time, money has also been ineffectively and inefficiently used. In recent years, a lot of focus has been placed on learning from such experiences and improving professionalism in the sector.

At the same time, the African Diaspora has been growing rapidly and is also investing large sums back home. Last year, around \$12-14 million were sent home in remittances. Of course, many of these funds are targeted towards individual family members or for economic investment in small businesses. However there is also a substantial amount raised for and invested in voluntary sector organisations. AFFORD, the African Foundation for development, a UK network of Diaspora

organisations has over 200 members – organisations involving Africans, involved in development in Africa.

However, though both the mainstream development sector and the many Diaspora development organisations are both working to support African development, there is limited sharing of knowledge and experience between the two sectors and there is not always a lot of crossover between these parallel efforts to support African development.

## **2.0 RESEARCH ON DIASPORA CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEVELOPMENT IN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR**

Research produced by AFFORD, showed that traditionally Diaspora organisations are marginalised from the mainstream development sector. They found that there is limited partnership working between traditional “development” NGOs and Diaspora-led organisations. They also noted that the number of UK-based Africans employed as staff in development organisations or pursuing further studies in development was not representative of the sector as a whole. They also noted that Diaspora led organisations were less successful in accessing funding opportunities and that some of the frameworks of the sector were actively inhibiting Diaspora-led organisations from making a difference. The example of the closure of the Somali-owned Al-Barakat bank which facilitated the transfer of funds to Somaliland being indicative of this.

However before examining some of the reasons for this and ways forward, it would first make sense to look at a definition of sustainability in development.

### *2.1 Sustainability: a definition*

To be 'sustainable', development must produce the circumstances necessary for its own continuation. Sustainability comes from the verb to sustain meaning: to hold up; to bear; to support; to provide for; to maintain; to sanction; to keep going; to keep up; to prolong; to support the life of. Sustainability can be considered in relation to a number of key areas:

- Social sustainability. Development must not be reliant on the exploitation or inadvertent disadvantaging of any group of people.
- Environmental sustainability. Development must not deplete resources or irrevocably damage the systems, which produce those resources
- Financial sustainability. Consideration must be given to the financing of development activities beyond their initial investment. The financial resources necessary for the continuation of the activity must be accessible.
- Institutional sustainability. Where development activities rely on organisations for their continued management, must ensure that relevant organisations exist and that those organisations have the necessary skills and expertise to ensure their continuation.

## *2.2 Diaspora development actors: some examples*

Diaspora populations have contributed to development in many different ways – for example in Khalid Koser’s study of the Eritrean Diaspora, strong feelings about political independence, and the granting of voting rights led to a large percentage of expatriate Eritreans to willingly contribute 2% of their income in a tax.

Individual remittances sent in response to family needs also play an important role. Often these respond to immediate priorities and they form part of the informal welfare state across Africa. Indirectly they enable many to access healthcare and education and often provide start-up capital for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). However many remittances are not used productively and, just like development aid, create dependence and inefficiency, the strapline for a recent Diaspora conference organised by AFFORD-UK states *“Do you want to send cash home to burn or start a business?”*

However, often lack of trust in the government or in the individuals’ ability to use money too the best result leads Diaspora populations to engage with voluntary sector organisations. This can either be through making donations, or organising fundraising events, through offering professional or technical support or through establishing new organisations to deal with a specific issue of concern in the home region.

## *2.3 Diaspora action in the voluntary sector: a critical review, carried out by AFFORD-UK.*

A study carried out by AFFORD-UK of a variety of different Diaspora interventions in Ghana highlighted a number of potential issues that they felt were common to many of their members.

In many cases the charitable motivation, urgent desire to act and lack of trust in formal structures, led to duplication of local planning processes. Sometimes there were also issues of local accountability. Due to a lack of “trust” of other channels, friends and family are used as key contacts for development action. According to AFFORD’s research this raises questions of legitimacy and may cause some to question whether the intervention is for the good of the community as a whole.

In addition, the question of “who sets the agenda” is also an important one, with evidence arising that at times Diaspora assistance can reproduce social, ethnic or class inequalities in the home society.



***In addition the limited networking meant that there was limited sharing of knowledge and learning and that duplication of effort could also occur between agencies – both in terms of fundraising in the UK and in work on the ground in Africa.***

#### *2.4 Working together for sustainable development*

In many ways it may not be meaningful to make such a clear distinction between Diaspora-led and mainstream development NGOs. All organisations should be open about working together where it meets their mutual needs. Organisations such as ours should be ready to engage with Diaspora-led organisations to share information, work together and be accountable about the impact that we are having.

It should also be acknowledged, that development – whether micro or macro, community or government-led is a profession, with its own internal standards and body of learning. All organisations involved in development should engage with and learn from this history. In addition, common to this all individuals have a responsibility for the work that they do and a personal ability to engage differently and from a unique perspective on certain issues. Here, all actors have different roles and Diaspora organisations have a unique role to play.

Conferences which bring together UK development sector workers with members of the Diaspora who are interested in development issues, offer a valuable opportunity for discussion around key principles and challenges faced by Diaspora actors. The International Deaf Children’s Society, has a very specific remit and target group but many of the principles, which it applies to its work, are relevant to the wider development sphere and could be applicable to both Diaspora and non-Diaspora development organisations. The purpose in outlining them here is to raise debate about how your own experiences of engaging with the voluntary sector show these to be applicable.

The key elements of our approach can be considered as a commitment to:

- ***Work with local organisations which have clear governance & management structures***  
IDCS exists to support local organisations based in developing countries. However we require all the organisations which we support to comply with some minimum standards of registration and financial record keeping. We also ask for information about governance structures and whether the organisation management is accountable to governors or to the beneficiaries themselves. Governance structures which include beneficiaries in planning and organisational management are preferable and we feel ultimately more sustainable.

- ***Target the most vulnerable: pro-poor development***  
This is particularly applicable to IDCS as an organisation concerned with equalising opportunities for deaf and hearing children. However it is always worth considering the earlier definition of “social sustainability” and whether development activities benefit some people at the expense of others.

- ***Adopt an empowering approach and support work and working processes that are led by the beneficiaries***

The target audience of development interventions should not be seen as passive recipients of aid or of services. This does not take into account the fact that such people have a huge role to play in maximising the impact of a small investment. IDCS looks to support work which considers how to facilitate beneficiary involvement and responsibility from the beginning of every intervention or project. Beneficiary-led projects are more likely to respond to genuine need and more likely to continue after donor involvement has finished.

- ***Take a rights-based, rather than a charitable approach***

Charitable intervention automatically places the recipients in a disempowered position. Rights-based approaches assume that what the development intervention is delivering is a basic human right and that ultimately it is government's responsibility to provide for it.

- ***Start work with the end in mind***

This means IDCS advocates honesty about the extent to which your organisation can offer assistance and planning this with the target group from the beginning. Planning for sustainability is one of the most important ways of guaranteeing this.

- ***Promote networking & interaction with local decision-makers***

Development challenges are great and we can not do it all alone. In addition, adopting the rights based approach means accepting the responsibility of other actors – such as governments – to continue and sustain our work. This means interacting with government and other local development actors is essential.

In addition from a purely practical point of view, being open to networking and partnership working with other voluntary sector organisations helps to reduce duplication of effort.

- ***Be self-aware about our own preconceptions, and how others will perceive us***

This applies to all development workers whether local, foreign or Diaspora. Every one of us comes with labels and baggage attached and thinking carefully about how these might affect the work that we are doing can lead to greater impact.

### **3.0 CONCLUSION**

It is a common experience is that there can be no “conclusion” in development work. It is not easy to sum-up a vast and complex set of issues. In the same light, it is rare to reach a point where you feel that your work has been “sustained”. Development work is an ongoing and messy process of practice, learning, amendments and effort, which is perhaps one of the most important lessons to acknowledge and to avoid rushing forward to achieve “impact” without planning and adapting the plan for sustainability.

Participating in this conference, has given me an important opportunity to learn more about Diaspora contributions to my sector and of the need to consider how best to work together and share information when we are engaged in similar work.

### ***About the Author***

Kirsty Wilson is the Programmes Officer, for the International Deaf Children's Society (IDCS). This is the international development wing of the National Deaf Children's Society, an organisation founded by parents of deaf children in 1944. Kirsty's academic background is in social anthropology and she has spent her working life in the international development sector, both in London and in rural Tanzania for several years working for the agricultural and natural resource INGO, FARM-Africa. Most recently Kirsty's work has taken her on evaluation visits to projects in Namibia, Kenya and Cameroon.

In the past, Kirsty was heavily involved in the international work camp movement participating in meetings and activities with young people from across Europe, promoting voluntary action and cross cultural understanding. Other voluntary activities include supporting the facilitation of school links and mentoring for refugees in London.

IDCS has worked with Diaspora supported organisations – for example the IDCS has worked in partnership with the Cameroon Deaf Empowerment Organisation to support the Ephphatha Institute for the Deaf in Kumba, Cameroon. TMG supported their original communication with IDCS as Dr Asa'ah Nkohkwo is a patron of CDEO.

# The Millennium Group (TMG) Charity Committee: Sustainable Development through Venture Philanthropy

**By Dr. Rosemary Burnley & Dr. Asa'ah Nkohkwo**

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## Abstract

*In this paper, we present some real-world, grassroots community-based, sustainable development work which TMG has been pioneering back in Cameroon as a Diaspora Group in the UK. This paper is based on real feedback from the recipients of two beneficiary organizations – and how they – themselves – discuss why they are now more sustainable organizations through their partnership with TMG. We believe other African Diaspora would learn from these simple real world examples.*

## 1. Introduction

Sustainable development is currently the ‘buzz’ word among governments, businesses, regional, local and global organisations. It was as far back as in 1987 when The Brundtland Commission produced a report entitled “Our Common Future” whereby the first attempt was made to produce a universal definition of Sustainable Development. In this report, the Commission defined Sustainable Development as “*Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”. The period during the 1990s witnessed a phenomenal growth in regional and sectoral sustainability plans and projects whilst giving the sustainability concept their own particular interpretations. These initiatives have indeed increased our understanding of what sustainable development means within many different contexts. Generally speaking, people concerned about sustainable development suggest that meeting the needs of the future depends on how well we balance social, economic, and environmental objectives or needs when making decisions today.

Sustainable development is about improving and sustaining the quality of life of citizens of the world. It is about taking action, changing policy and practice at all levels, from the individual to the international. The dynamism, transparency and applicability of this concept has made it possible for organisations, regardless of their size, all around the world to contribute to economic, social and environmental development. It has indeed given credence to the notion that small can be beautiful and effective.

It is within this framework that TMG Charity Committee operates. TMG’s efforts are aimed at the community level. In 2004, the Charity Committee produced its policy framework entitled

“TMG Charity and Community Action” in which it declared its primary aim to be at the forefront of community action and a net-contributor, Cameroonian immigrant groups in the UK.

### 1.1 The TMG Charity Committee

The TMG Charity Committee constitutes one of the portfolios of the TMG Group (see Figure 1). The TMG group comprises of Cameroonian professionals and their families whose main objectives are to foster their professional, economic and social interests, and also pool their efforts to support social and charitable activities concerning Cameroonians both in Cameroon and in the United Kingdom.

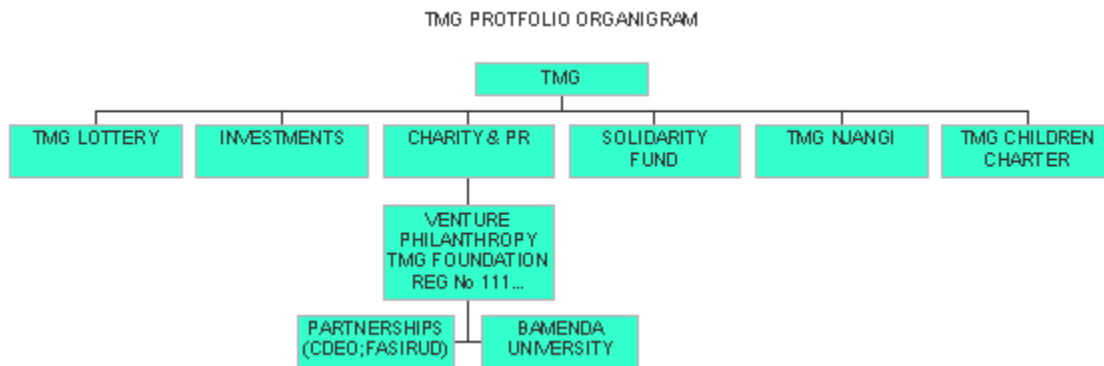


Figure 1 - TMG Portfolio Organigram

The TMG Charity Committee was established in 2004 with a key remit to seed its image of accountability through charitable activities in the Cameroonian community. The salient principle adopted in its “operationalisation strategy” is to have good professional partnerships founded on the universal three pillars of Equity, Transparency and Mutual Benefit.

The vision that drives the TMG Charity Committee is one of thriving communities in Cameroon where every citizen has an access to adequate health care and education and the means to generate a livelihood and the right to respect, dignity and equality. In keeping with this vision, the committee selected two good-cause initiatives that would benefit especially Cameroonians at home. These initiatives fall within the following categories:

- Difficulties of those living at the margins of society;
- Community development;
- Healthcare; and
- Education.

In accordance with the aforementioned initiatives, two Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were selected namely the Fako Sisters in Rural Development (FASIRUD of Limbe, S.W.

Province), and the Cameroon Deaf Empowerment Organisation’s Ephphata Institute for Deaf Children (CDEO-EID), in Kumba, S.W. Province.

The choice of these organisations is essentially based on a two-pronged beneficiary effect – whereby both the organisations and the recipients of their service equally benefit from the partnership with TMG.

Rather than just making cash donations, TMG adopts an approach of venture philanthropy whereby any goodwill (donation/grant/expertise) comes with *pre-conditions*. The object of TMG is to adopt a bottom-up approach to development helping these organisations to build their capacity in areas of identifiable need. The work with these two organisations has essentially concentrated on ensuring the cementing of a culture of public accountability, as a *sine qua non* for TMG’s annual donation to each of the projects.

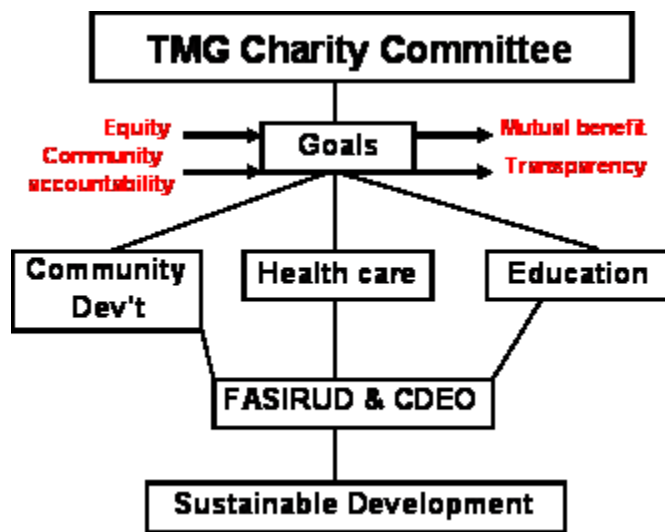


Figure 2 - Strategic Approach of TMG Charity Committee

## 2 The Operationalisation of FASIRUD and CDEO-EID Projects

The two organizations, FASIRUD and CDEO, are briefly described below.

### 2.1 FASIRUD and CDEO-EID Projects

**FASIRUD** was founded in 1997 to “ameliorate the quality of life for women by focusing on community development, especially in the rural areas”. Essentially, they provide education on child welfare, family planning, home craft and self-supporting activities. Since its creation in 1997, about 150 students have graduated from the organisation.

Some of the students have been employed in hotels and restaurants, especially in big towns such as Douala and Yaounde. Some have set up their own businesses. Graduates have been assisted in

most of the job placements and the necessary support is provided for any follow-up that may be needed.

**CDEO** was created in 1995 to achieve the following goals:

- “To promote the human and civil rights of deaf people and their families;
- To unite deaf people in Cameroon and facilitate their empowerment;
- To facilitate health education for the deaf;
- To work for full educational opportunities for deaf Cameroonians, from nursery to higher education;
- To develop and promote Cameroon Sign Language (CSL) as the language of deaf people in Cameroon.”

CDEO owns and manages the Ephphata Institute for Deaf Children (EID) in Kumba, which provides primary school level of education to deaf children.

In 2004, TMG involvement was instrumental in securing a grant of £10,000 to EID from the International Deaf Children Society of London. This enabled the school to progress to post-primary vocational education.

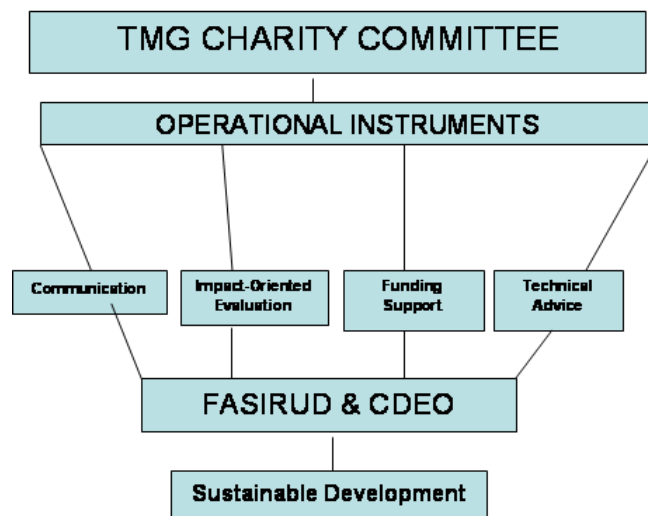


Figure 3 - Operationalisation of TMG Partnerships

## 2.2 TMG Partnership with FASIRUD and CDEO

TMG’s partnership with FASIRUD and CDEO is based on the principle of empowering both organisations toward a common goal of building a culture of community accountability and

transparency. TMG does so by putting into place various mechanisms such as depicted in Figure 3:

- **Frequent communication** with the organisation via personal visits, telephone and emails;
- **Impact-oriented evaluation** through the completion of TMG questionnaire (see Appendix 1);
- **Helping the organisation to secure** funding from various funding bodies in the UK and abroad; and
- **Provision of technical** advice in terms of skills development

The various operational instruments are designed in such a way that they

- maximise effective linkages for lesson learning and wider dissemination of lessons learned;
- develop a ‘lead component’ (i.e. accountability) around which other activities can be developed;
- strengthen and underpin the sense of fulfillment and ownership by the beneficiaries
- have a clear entry, implementation and exit strategies – must be able to facilitate effective phasing out of support and lay foundations for sustainability;
- are dynamic and flexible enough to recognise and accommodate changes in the environment within which they operate.

### **3 Some Details on the ‘Operationalisation’ Process**

#### **3.1 Communication with FASIRUD and CDEO**

TMG’s partnership relationships with both organisations are characterised by frequent communication via the telephone, emails and visits by TMG members. These partnership organisations are encouraged to frequently contact TMG as and when necessary. Typically they would ask for technical advice on issues like design and contents of annual report, setting up of accounting systems, information sharing, reporting back on recent activities, and generally building and fostering the culture of accountability and transparency.

Over the years, several TMG members have visited both organisations and have returned with photographic and videographic records of activities and recent developments.

#### **3.2 Impact-Oriented Evaluation**

TMG’s relationship with both organisations has always been one in which results are crucial. Hence, the aim of all parties involved is to achieve excellence in the provision of sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by the marginalized in Cameroon. The fulfillment of this



objective is harnessed by an impact-oriented evaluation system whereby lessons can be learned and further improvements made to the partnerships. To this effect, a questionnaire is designed every year by TMG and sent for completion by both organisations. To ensure adequate participation by members of both organisations, as well as transparency, a request is made by TMG for someone, other than the main correspondents to complete the questionnaire. Questions are aimed at getting some qualitative feedback on performance and management, which would permit a proactive response from all parties involved.

What is significant, from the responses to the questionnaire, is that there is a consensus on the value-added impact from TMG partnership. Both organisations agree that their operational systems are more transparent and accountable.

In response to one of the questions, CDEO firmly states that they believe in transparency and accountability – *“the constitution for CDEO provides for auditing of its accounts. An Audit Committee exists to that effect. Audited accounts are presented annually to the Board of Directors and annual reports are also presented to the General Assembly”*.

In terms of capacity building, CDEO refers to the *‘strong letters of recommendation from TMG to support the CDEO application for £10,000 grant for the EID Kumba vocational training project’*. Further reference is made to the fact that TMG gave *‘very useful suggestions on how the CDEO should present its application for the highly competitive grant – the sharing of information is important’*.

FASIRUD states that their *“accountability and transparency has improved over the years due to the mutual collaboration and support from TMG.....students are more competitive and responsible in order to win TMG sponsorship”*. In terms of capacity building and sustainability, FASIRUD acknowledges that they *“have to continue with the yearly accounts and balance sheets”* – a process which started with the creation of this relationship with TMG.

The evidence stemming from the aforementioned responses seems to suggest that both organisations recognise a positive impact resulting from embracing the ethos of accountability. Their optimistic perspective in terms of future performance is a sure sign of their increasing confidence.

According to CDEO, *“TMG is an invaluable partner that is interested in seeing that CDEO becomes financially autonomous through income generating projects.....so its survival at the end of relationship with TMG is assured”*. This is very much in keeping with TMG policy of having clear entry, implementation and exit strategies – facilitating effective phasing out of support and laying foundations for sustainability.

### **3.3 Technical Advice**

Through its frequent communication with both organisations, TMG has been providing technical advice in terms of skills development and securing future funding. The building of the ethos of accountability in both organisations has helped to develop skills such as leadership, communication, flexibility, proactiveness in diverse areas like relationship building with their

beneficiaries, financial accounting, curriculum development and management in general. For example, both organisations have representations by service users in their management committees. As a result of this, both organisations seem to be responding adequately to the needs of the communities which they are serving.

FASIRUD, for example, added hairdressing to their curriculum as a result of direct request from the service users. As a result of the confidence gained from the partnership with TMG, both organisations have been able to come up with future projects for which they hope to secure international funding. As mentioned earlier, TMG has been instrumental in the securing of funds to the tune of £10,000 for CDEO. In addition, TMG, through its lobbying activities, secured a small grant for CDEO from the Mwanenguba UK group in 2004/2005. Both organisations also seem to have functional organisational structures and efficient systems which ensure that elections are held every two years by secret ballot. A framework exists whereby new members are screened and interviewed.

#### **4 Sustainable Development and the Future of TMG Partnerships**

The case studies of FASIRUD and CDEO demonstrate the possibility of achieving sustained benefits from adopting a culture of accountability and transparency with effective systems and structures. TMG's operationalisation of these partnerships underpins its primary goal of promoting an achievement oriented learning culture and a philosophy of sustained improved performance. TMG is by no means complacent about the challenges that lay ahead, but nonetheless feel that they are 'sowing the seeds' of sustainable development TMG acknowledges that solutions in terms of sustainable development do differ between places and times and depend on the mix of values and resources. Hence, sustainable development is not a detailed plan of action, and there is no formula that we can all blindly follow. It is worth noting that TMG's involvement in these partnerships is based on mutual learning with the hope of becoming an organisation in which members are collectively and continually increasing their capacity to produce results they care about. A significant development that has recently occurred is the successful registration of TMG Foundation with the UK Charity Commission. This will enable TMG leverage the international grant making reservoir for the benefit of TMG's venture philanthropy. This will, in fact, buttress its philanthropic funding base for further support and development of more partnerships and even achieve more in terms of sustainable development. It is the general anticipation that such capacity building initiatives will enable TMG to move from what may be currently perceived as the 'islands of benefit' approach to ensuring that functional organisations will drive the process of sustainable development.

#### **5. Conclusion**

We hope this paper demystifies how African Diaspora can help create sustainable organizations back in Africa. TMG is available for discussion on further details on techniques, processes, organization and leadership required to make such projects happen for real.

### ***About the Authors***

Dr Rosemary Burnley, Principal Lecturer at the University of Luton, is a member of the TMG Charity and PR committee. She is also a trustee for the TMG Foundation. She has been instrumental in developing the partnership between FASIRUD and TMG. (Email: Rburn70135@aol.com).

Dr Asa'ah Nkohkwo FRSH, CEO [www.SickleCellSociety.org](http://www.SickleCellSociety.org), is Chairman of TMG Charity & PR committee and a Foundation Patron of the Young Cameroonian Professional Network, UK, ([www.YPCN.org](http://www.YPCN.org)). Through his Fine Forest Foundation, he offers community empowerment patronage to several NGOs in Cameroon and Africa, including the Ephphata Institute for the Deaf in Kumba, the Solidarity Farmers Common Initiative Group of Mbalangi, Kumba, and CCASSIC ACCA trainees of Buea University. Known traditionally as Mbi Asaatong Fontem, he is the Chairman of LECA-EU and Europe Ambassador of HM Fontem Njifua of Bangwa. (Email: [Asaatong@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Asaatong@yahoo.co.uk)).

# Bali USA Diaspora and the Quest for Sustainable Development: *Challenges and Lessons*

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## **Abstract**

*Although the quest for sustainable development dominates African political discourse and speeches, it remains an illusive goal. The futile and sterile quest, which has resulted in many “White Elephant Projects” that tarnish African landscapes, has partly spurred the emergence of African Diaspora communities (Senegalese, Gambian, Cameroonian, Nigerian etc) globally. Individuals within these groups endlessly seek avenues for economic survival and success throughout the world, which they perceive as missing in their homelands. Additionally, some collectively strive to assist those in the mother land through development projects. I report here on the case of one such Diasporan community: BCA-USA.*

## **1. Introducing the Bali Cultural Association in the USA (BCA-USA)**

One African Diaspora community, which struggles to help with the development process in the homeland, is the Balis, originally of North West Cameroon. Located in the grass field of Cameroon, the Balis - an amalgamation of achievement-oriented, driven and purposeful people - try hard to foster development, whether they are at home or abroad. To this end, Bali Diaspora associations have been formed in the United States, Britain and Germany.

However, one region, which seems to be in the forefront is the Bali Cultural Association in the USA (BCA-USA). Yes, for almost two decades; Balis under the tutelage of the Bali Cultural Association (BCA-USA) have initiated worthwhile development projects. Under the auspices of competent leaders and committee members, the Bali Diaspora (teachers, students, business people, nurses, engineers, professors, lawyers, accountants, technicians and others) have launched a number of schemes, which provide a *raison d’etre* for sustainable development analysis.

**The Core Question this paper addresses**

Created almost twenty years ago by Bali natives in the United States, the association promotes the cultural, educational and social advancement of people of Bali descent. In accordance with this goal, they have embarked on some undertakings. What are the BCA-USA projects, and which sustainable development lessons can be learned from their success or failure?

## 2 BCA-USA Governance & Projects

Over the last twenty years, the Bali Cultural Association has organized and mobilized first generation émigrés of Bali heritage in the United States for annual conventions and local chapters, where they meet, discuss, network, celebrate and collectively agree on tasks in order to improve the well-being of their relations at home.

- **Constitution:** A constitution and bye laws have been written, enacted, approved and adopted. The association has also been formally registered as a non-profit organization in the United States of America.
- **Local Chapters:** Local chapters have been established at the state level to uphold the objectives of the association. Meetings are held and projects planned and implemented by various chapters.
- **Newsletters & Almanacs:** BCA-USA publishes newsletters and almanacs, which introduce people of Bali origin and publicizes the group's activities. The association invites prominent Bali personalities —professors, principals, mayors, health experts, traditional leaders and other officials—to share their experiences at public forums as keynote speakers especially during conventions and other events.
- **Primary, Secondary & High School Scholarships:** BCA-USA awards scholarships to deserving students at home. They also encourage education through the provision of supplies and equipment to schools and colleges.
- **Health Fairs:** The association further organizes health fairs and provides medication and equipment to hospitals and dispensaries at home.
- **Capacity Mortuary:** It helped to establish one of the best mortuaries in Cameroon in Bali Nyonga.
- **Water Projects:** BCA-USA supports water supply schemes in Bali, through the provision of funds and expertise. They also contributed to the notoriously failed water-by-gravity venture.
- **Culture Promotion:** To crown it all, the association promotes Bali culture through food, dress, exhibits and other strategies.

- **Concrete Plans in Place to Build a Library/Community Centre:** Besides concrete plans to build a library, a development endowment fund has been established with hopes of assuring sustainable development.
- **Invitation of the Paramount Ruler of Bali-Nyonga to the USA:** The association also invited the paramount chief Dr. Doh Ganyonga III for a special visit to the United States where he interacted with his subjects in the Diaspora and unveiled plans for the future.

The association raises funds for various tasks through subscriptions, concerts, pledges, dinners and galas.

## 2 BCA-USA: Some Key Lessons Learnt

A major lesson from the enthusiasm and support demonstrated is that members appreciate concrete projects, which foster progress. However, the challenge is how to maintain and develop them on a long term basis. That is where sustainability surges to the surface as a dominant issue.

The critical question therefore is: what lessons can be learned as far as sustainable development is concerned? What challenges should similar Diaspora organizations anticipate and how can they tackle them? In short, what strategies can enhance sustainability so that those development efforts do not end in vain or catastrophe as others, which have passed into the dust bin of history?

### 2.1 It is a Continuous Battle

Sustainable development simply means development that last. Long standing development calls for consistent efforts. Unfortunately, the experiences of post independence African states, vividly illustrate the fact that most development projects have ended in a fiasco.

By contrast, development schemes such as schools, hospitals and maternities established by religious bodies and even individuals have survived. What lesson can BCA-USA learn as they forge ahead in their quest for development?

**Re-invention and re-iteration of sense of common purpose:** The first lesson is that the quest for sustainable development is an incessant and never ending struggle. Realizing this reality, BCA-USA has and must continue battling as they have done for the past twenty years to inform, educate, mobilize and sensitize members by words and deeds. They must continue to reinvent the organization and reiterate the sense of common purpose, through a redefinition of the mission and vision with the changing times. In other words, innovation, adaptation and adjustment must be the overriding ethos.

**Recruitment & Retention:** The recruitment and retention of members must remain as one of the ultimate goals. Above all, efforts must constantly be made to supervise and monitor what has been established so that projects do not collapse or fall into decay and unwanted destruction.

**Monitor & Review:** For example, the association must not only review the scholarship scheme and the criteria for awards but assure that funds are available. The association must continuously evaluate the efficacy of the mortuary as well as the condition of the public toilet built in Bali and make provisions for repairs when the need arises. In other words, a mechanism for continuous monitoring and evaluation must be put in place. Development schemes fail when they lack such basic mechanisms for maintenance which assure continuity amidst inevitable change.

## **2.2 Liaison Officer**

A second major lesson which emerges from the Bali experience is the need for a liaison officer, who serves as the eye and ear of the association. So far, the association despite obstacles, has achieved some of its objectives thanks to the selfless services of some elders back home who took it upon themselves to donate their time and even resources for the realization of the association's goals. However, there have been lapses which require a full-ledged representative in Bali.

In order to achieve set and laudable goals with greater efficiency, the Bali Diaspora will need a liaison officer whose major duty among others, will be to manage, supervise, monitor and ensure that projects are implemented as planned in keeping with the schedule. It will also be his/her responsibility to guarantee that funds allocated for projects are used for that purpose.

This liaison officer preferably should be a person with a broad horizon who understands Bali culture, the village, nation and to some degree, the mechanisms of international transactions. He should be a man/woman of some experience, whose integrity is unimpeachable. The liaison officer will be in charge of all ventures and it is his/her duty to report to BCA-USA and other Diaspora groups that will need his services.

Granted that this is a demanding task, the association will have to envisage some compensation for this person. With time, it will be crucial that he/she acquire office space where members of the public can visit him/her for discussions.

This requirement demands funding. However, for sustainability purposes, it is crucial that the association designate someone who serves as their eyes and ears - their ambassador and representative - in all projects, meetings and transactions. This definitely has positive implications for sustainability.

## **2.3 Leadership**

BCA-USA partly owes its successful existence to effective leadership and this is one of the central lessons for sustainable development. Several development projects in Africa and elsewhere woefully failed over the years due to inept, corrupt and inefficient leadership. Examples abound. The tragic leadership epitomized by leaders such as: Central African Empire's Jean Beddel Bokassa, Uganda's former dictator Idi Amin and Equatorial Guinea's Nguema

Biyogo bear incontrovertible testimony of what poor leadership does. It ruins. This was at the country level where these despots displayed gross ineptitude with multiplier effects across the region.

However, in villages, towns and cities, the same leadership crisis exists and that poses major obstacles for sustainable development.

By contrast, BCA-USA, for a large part, has benefited from the sacrifices of competent leaders. Beginning with the founding mother Mah Maggie Fogam who worked in concert with the first President, Nih Muted Fofung through achievers like Nih Babuya Levai, the late Bah Ben Sama Fondong, Nih Ben Fokum, Dr. Wob Fomunung and now, Ba Tita Moses Mokumi, the association has benefited from eminent leaders.

They have been men (and women) with initiative and the splendid ability to plan and implement projects. They brought passion, integrity, devotion and dedication to their tasks and successive executives have consistently attempted to improve and surpass records set by their predecessors.

Although there are problems, BCA-USA has enjoyed the services of these pilots, who strive by all means possible to galvanize the group, strengthen unity and assist their kith and kin back home.

The results have been stupendous and it is our unabated conviction that the association forges ahead thanks to the marvellous leadership partly emanating from the top. Yes, the Executive members, some of whom are equally outstanding, have also moved the association forward through hard work. Over the years some of these executives have included people like Nih Julius Ndagam, Nih Keh Dema, Nih Vincent Fogam, Nih Bayuga Pefok, Dr. Bobga Fomunung, Bah Nji Fonjoe, Nih Gabriel Todmia and so many others.

At the chapter levels, too, leaders have emerged who organize and mobilize Balis. Their contributions at that state level serve as a major boost to the entire organization, since they have a chance to reflect on what is being done where and how.

Although BCA-USA's development projects are in the nascent-mid stage, there is no shadow of doubt that some might be sustainable if they continue with the same type of committed, strategic and tactful leadership. The challenge and lesson for sustainable development is to continue attracting such eminent leaders.

## **2.4 Membership**

Effective leadership is partly contingent on membership. Leaders without followers are useless. Followers without leaders are rudderless. For development in general and sustainable development in particular, membership is essential. Members are the life wire of the association. The more members, the better for any venture. After all, there is strength in numbers. BCA-USA grows in membership and that enhances the quest for development. This is reflected in the



membership dues paid annually. Members pay their dues and participate in activities. Many go beyond the regular dues and make donations both in cash and in kind.

For sustainable development to occur membership is important because as the saying goes, in unity there is strength. Since most of the services are offered *pro-bono*, the membership pool provides people with various skills and expertise who generously help the association.

Thus for purposes of sustainability, the association can easily pull from its rich resources of: engineers, doctors, lawyers, accountants, nurses, professors to execute projects. That is a major asset having such a reservoir of talent the association can benefit from when it comes to implementing sustainable development projects.

## **2.5 Funding**

Development in general and sustainable development in particular demands finances. Projects initiated be they – water supply, library, health or educational - require funds both in the short term and long run.

Initially, funds can be raised through membership fees, generous donations, gate takings from galas and concerts as well as generous contributions from individuals. That model works at the initial stage. For sustainability purposes it must continue.

However, long term sustainability funding strategies demand diversity. To this end, such a Diaspora organization must embark on grant writing to raise funds. The association may also try to invest in stock markets, bonds or real estate as a strategy to earn revenue. More than anything else, the association may even think of a profitable project such as the development of the water system in Bali where they actually manage it and use the funds to finance other projects. *The Bali Mortuary project is generating enough cash to fund other projects, like the water project – the commencement of sustainability in reality.*

The lesson learned is that finance is a critical component and for purposes of sustainable development. Consequently, all efforts must be made to assure that there is a means for a basic budget which guarantees that projects initiated are maintained.

## **2.6 Communication**

One lesson from the Bali USA Diaspora efforts at development is the importance of effective communication. BCA-USA's birth and development can partly be attributed to effective communication. All communication forms and strategies are useful and crucial as the Bali experience clearly illustrate - interpersonal, group, organizational and mass communication --has assisted in the initial inception of the projects. However, for sustainability, the efforts must be redoubled.

This means that leaders and members must continue discussions and dialogue at every level. Diaspora communities must share information on everything going on in the association ranging

from grand projects to micro issues like the birth of a child or the death of a member. Nothing is small since it builds a sense of community that members recognize and care for each other.

Besides, almanacs, photo albums, speeches, videos, newsletters, all communication channels which promote the mission of the association are significant and should be positively used to enhance the mission of the organization. In this age of the Internet, Fax and Cell phones, they should be resorted to when the need arises. *The e-mail group Mbonbani has been immensely helpful in communication and discussions.*

## **2.7 Research**

Research also plays a major role in assuring sustainability with Diaspora projects. When folks are located elsewhere sometimes they have a wrong perception of the reality on ground.

Other times their perspectives might be diametrically opposite to those on the terrain. In such situations, research – formal and informal- becomes a leading facet of the entire venture. Diaspora's people who are limited as they might be by time, space and distance, must work out strategies for basic research - qualitative and quantitative.

For example, in terms of priorities, where should an organization place emphasis—health, education, road construction, agriculture, entertainment, or what? Which specific project is most likely to succeed and why? Where should a library for example be located? Should it be built in a congested area downtown with little prospects for parking or should it be taken to a totally green area where it serves as a development engine? Is it going to be sustainable? How will it be maintained? These are very basic but meaningful questions. Thus, the basic questions of Who, What, When, Where, Which and Why - germane to research - must be raised and researched at the beginning, when the project is on with scope for future questions. Research becomes a fundamental element of the development project, especially if sustainability is an issue.

## **2.8 Planning**

Inextricably linked to the research process is planning. Owing to politics and other variables that sometimes impact those in power; the quest for rapid results sometimes drowns the need for sustainability factors. Consequently, leaders in a bid to make a political point, rush projects without proper planning.

Sustainable development requires the type of planning that some of the industrialized nations like the United States and Britain sometimes bring into projects. Before the execution of projects, master plans are designed critiqued and modified. All variables are thoroughly examined as plans are embarked upon. Health, environmental, architectural, engineering, business and all kinds of expertise are involved in that planning process.

Perhaps developing nations do not have that time to do elaborate planning since they may be operating at jet-propelled speed in a bid to catch up. However, the disasters that have dominated development projects partly emanate from the poor planning that precedes most assignments.

## **2.9 Failed Project: A Classic Example of Poor Research and Planning**

The Bali Diaspora in the United States joined the bandwagon of a seemingly brilliant suggestion to procure water for the village by gravity. However, owing to the fact that the research was very poor, and project planning was disastrous, the first attempt where vast resources (>\$100,000) were invested ended in a calamity. With meticulous planning and implementation that debacle will have been averted.

## **2.10 Transparency & Accountability**

Asking for accountability and transparency in an environment riddled with poverty and corruption is like trying to pull teeth, a tragically difficult and major Achilles heel of many development states. However, this is the lever for success in any sustainable development project. Many schemes fail in Africa because of the lack of accountability and transparency.

Pure accountability and transparency exist solely in the land of the Gods. Wherever humans live, the limitations of greed, egoism and avarice reign. People will always profit and play games. However, this is exactly where projects are doomed to failure from the very outset.

Although sustainability remains a challenge with the Bali-USA schemes, part of the reason projects have even been initiated is due to the fact that there has been some degree of transparency and accountability. Efforts have been made over the years, especially by the present treasurer Mah Manyi to account for every single dollar. Through a simple spread sheet, the Association attempts to explain what the receipts were and how they were spent. That has built confidence and members are zealous to contribute and pay their dues since they have some faith that their gifts are not being embezzled but are rather put to good use. For sustainable development, such transparency and accountability is not only central but also serves as an encouragement for others to join the bandwagon and be a part of a winning team.

## **2.11 Organization and Mobilization**

Although this may sound trite and perhaps silly, mobilization and organization are vital to sustainable development. The Catholic and Protestant Churches in Africa are huge developmental machines partly due to their organizational and mobilization techniques.

Sustainable development requires organizations with structure and effective management at various levels. BCA-USA has initiated projects because of such basic structures. There is an Executive which manages the association and a leadership committee which discusses projects.

For sustainable development purposes, it is inevitable that the structures define who is responsible for what. Additionally, members must be mobilized through routine activities and special events. New members must be recruited and persuaded on why it is important for them to be a part of the group. All strategies must be used and efforts should be relentless at achieving such objectives.

## **2.12 Partnerships**

Diaspora communities must forge alliances with governments, non-governmental organizations, local councils, churches, schools, universities and other agencies to achieve their mission. They cannot accomplish their goals without assistance. With such partnerships, they can maximize resources and reap benefits from those who already perform some of the tasks they hope to implement. However, they must be careful that they understand their role and contributions

## **3.0 Conclusion**

As Diaspora communities world-wide attempt to assist their kith and kin in homelands sustainable development, challenges abound. They range from political and to social and cultural problems.

However, opportunities also exist. Based on the experience of the Bali Cultural Association founded almost twenty years ago in the United States, a few lessons can be learned.

First, it is necessary to establish an organization. Once the organization comes into being with a constitution and bylaws, the next phase is giving it a legal status in the home country. The third phase is mobilization, which demands the creation of local chapters. Membership demands commitment through presence at functions and financial contribution. Two levels of leadership exist, the national and local.

Additionally, funding, planning, communication, research and above all, transparency and accountability as well as partnerships are key elements in development projects, let alone, sustainable development.

### ***About the Author***

Dr. Jerry Komia Domatob is an Associate Professor of Mass Communications at Alcorn State University, Lorman Mississippi. An author, journalist and poet, Dr. Jerry Komia Domatob has published four books and co-edited two. He has published over thirty articles in international journals and is currently working on two poetry books.

# Financing Sustainable Development

# Sustainable Philanthropy through Endowment or Trust Funds

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## Abstract

*Many of you are weary of answering your phone to a fund raising request for this or that project in Cameroon, Nigeria or anywhere else in Africa?*

*A lot of us do not like making too many one-time donations for different one-time projects either, whether to support your alma-mater, village, or other needy, albeit very worthy, cause.*

*We need an alternate way of generating funds on a SUSTAINABLE basis and beyond our live times too.*

*I submit that using an investment vehicle that invests a principal or capital base to generate income for those causes that drive solicitations, is a key way to address this 'begging' question. That vehicle could be an endowment/trust fund.*

## 1. Introduction: What is an endowment fund?

Endowment funds receive donations from patrons and invest the donations in income-generating and appreciable assets with the *proviso* that the principal **not be** spent.

Some, but not all, of the income generated is drawn down and spent on the causes for which the fund was set up. The rest of the income is reinvested with the capital for the purposes of providing a stable and sustainable future income stream that exceed the pace of inflation and to sure up the real value of the corpus of the endowment fund over time.

## 2. Endowment Fund Basics – How they work

Breaking it down to its basics, if a fund receives £100 say and invests in bonds or stocks/shares (i.e. securities) – and the securities grow in value by 25%, the value of the principal has appreciated to £125. If in addition, the fund receives £15 of dividend income, interest income from these securities or other investments at the end of the period, the fund has £140 (i.e. £125 + £15). If for the sake of argument, inflation is running at 5% at the end of the period, it means, you need £105 to buy goods at the end of the period that were sold for £100 at the beginning of the

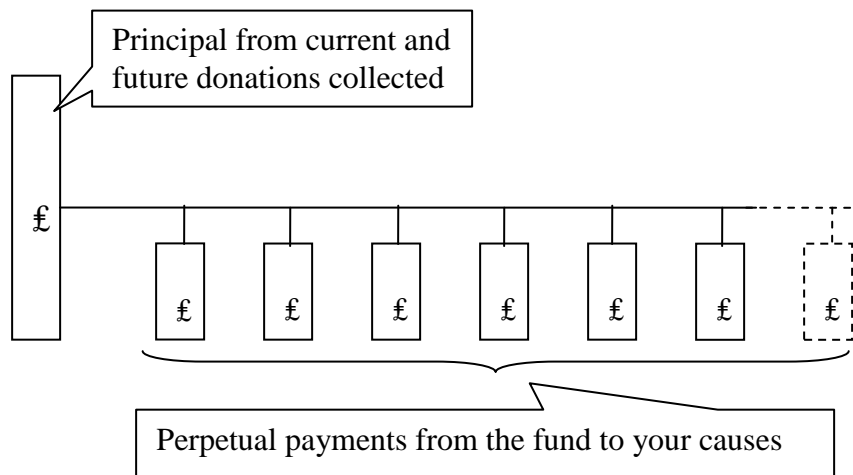
same period. To stay ahead of inflation, the fund should, indeed must seek to, distribute less than £35 (i.e. £140-£105) to the courses for which it was set up. If we distribute £12, say, the new principal is now £128 (i.e. £140-£12) which continues to grow in value and income over time.

You can stretch this example to real life by multiply each of the numbers by say 100, 1,000 or 10,000. If the math above applied to a fund with an initial principal of £100,000, you could distribute £12,000 and be left with £128,000 at the end of the year!

Additions to the principal could come from fund raising activities and new donations to enhance the income generating potential of the fund.

As distributions come from the fund rather than individuals, you will not get the dreaded call begging for money; the trustees of the fund would.! Even if you get a call, you are likely to be asked for help to grow the pie – the assets of the fund; rather than squashing the pie. Growing the pie would entrench the fund and ensure its longevity.

Simply put, as the diagram below shows, an endowment fund is a life time generator of income, especially if you start with a good initial principal. Even if you start with a low principal, you can continue to add funds, from donations and reinvestments to grow the principal and only start drawing down from the fund after the principal reaches a certain level.



**Figure 1 - Endowment Fund as a Life Time Income Generator**

Your principal is almost like an annuity that has been used to buy a life time income stream. Those of you who are students of literature recall that in *Sense and Sensibility*, published in 1811, Jane Austin wrote: "An Annuity is a very a serious business ... it comes over and over each year and there is no getting rid of it". But unlike annuities<sup>1</sup>, your Fund also owns the Principal.

## 2.1 Who runs the fund?

<sup>1</sup> In annuities, you spend your capital/principal to buy a defined income stream – it is generally a pension instrument.

A fund of this nature usually has a Board of Trustees who have a fiduciary duty to ensure all the investments, sources and uses of funds are properly accounted for. So if the Mamfe Cultural Group or the Abakwa Sisters for example has a fund, it **MUST** elect a board of trustees to manage the fund. The fund usually has bye-laws that define the duties of the board and the role of the various trust officers amongst other things.

Organizations wishing to set up a fund via way of a charity should acquaint themselves with the guidelines on trustees provided by the charities commission<sup>2</sup>.

## **2.2 Who owns the fund?**

The organization (e.g., Njangi, Social or Cultural group) that sets up the fund owns the fund. The fund should be legally registered and operate within the boundaries of the laws of the UK or whatever jurisdiction its members reside in.

## **2.3 What is the status of the fund?**

It is preferable that the fund be registered as a charity so that donors can get tax exemptions for donating to the fund. Tax exempt status is obtained by registering the fund with The Charities Commission

If the fund chooses to set up as a charity, it should seriously consider investing through a common investment fund (CIF). According to the UK Charities Commission,<sup>3</sup> “Common Investment Funds (CIFs) are collective investment schemes which are open only to charities in England and Wales (i.e. they are not available to charities in Scotland and Northern Ireland). They are set up by Schemes made by the Charity Commission under Section 22 of the Charities Act 1960 or Section 24 of the Charities Act 1993. They operate as investment vehicles and are deemed by law to be charities themselves. They are therefore eligible for registration as charities in their own right.”

The Charities Commission and in some instances the Financial Services Authority are watchdogs over CIFs.

## **2.4 What kind of assets can be donated to the fund?**

Typically, gifts in cash for a cash consideration and the cash invested in the CIF.

## **2.5 What kind of assets can the fund invest in?**

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/registration/default.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/publications/cc3.asp>



If investment is via a CIF, it would take cash and marketable securities – the latter being company shares, corporate bonds and government bonds. The fund can also operate a business e.g., rental property, shop (such as Oxfam Stores), Carwash business, etc. The challenge here being that monitoring and managing businesses maybe an onerous duty for the board of trustees. It might be best to stick with letting an expert, such as the fund managers in a CIF, manage the money for you.

## **2.6 What is the economic life of the fund?**

The life of the fund is as stipulated in it's by laws, including dissolution arrangements. However in your njangi, social, cultural, or alumni group, it should be set up with the intent of it going on in perpetuity. This way, the fund will be there in and beyond your life time to continue the good work you started.

A few people set up an endowment fund to support Harvard University (USA) many years ago. Today that fund stands at US\$26Billion (this is not a typo; it is twenty six billion US dollars). Harvard can, if it chooses to, admit students and not charge them fees! However, it does; using the fees and more donations from alumni and friends to continue to bolster their endowment and tapping on the income for their expenses. The Harvard Endowment is more that the national budget of Cameroon.

Yale University similarly has an endowment of US\$12.7Billion. Close your eyes and think of your alumni group's, cultural group's, social group's Endowment Fund, many moons from now – with say £1Million and growing in assets and generating an income stream of say £100,000+ a year (i.e. ~ 100,000,000 Frs CFA at today's rates) – imagine what they could do for the courses dear to your hearts. This could be the SHESA UK Fund, the PEMEXAN Fund, The TMG Fund, The Fouban Cultural Association Fund, or The Banyangi Cultural Fund or even the Mankon or Metta Cultural Fund many moons from today.

## **2.7 How do we manage accountability of the fund?**

The trustees should ensure the fund is professionally audited. You could get an audit from under £500. If you are going to have all those assets under managements, you better spend a bit making sure that it is properly accounted for – no ifs, buts, etc. If all your money is invested in a CIF, you would receive audited reports from the CIF(s) you choose to invest in that you share to your organization. The trustees could add color to the report by explaining how the decided on the asset (e.g. cash vs. shares vs. bonds etc) allocation

## **3. Why the Endowment is critical?**

The Endowment will make your fund raising for good causes *sustainable* and put you on a stronger financial foundation medium to long term. Your organization will finally have enough

money to fulfill its mission than ever could before. Over the past several years you might have only had enough money to do little things and once that money was spent you were left with nothing. With the fund's principal and reinvested gains, you will continue to generate revenue for years to come and will continue to grow independent of further fundraising activities. Your group could be able to grant scholarships, build or support schools and hospitals in your locality without being hostage to a capricious government.

Furthermore, you could ask your employers and colleagues to donate to the fund and not just people from your local village, alumni group or social group. People could bequeath parts of their estate in their wills to the fund ... the possibilities are endless.

### **3.1 What next?**

Just go do it. Start small. Build up beginning today. Learn from the Harvards and the Yales. If it is good for them, it must be good for you too. SHESA (Sacred Heart Ex Students Association), my alma alta, will be there long after I am long gone. But an endowment could live on in perpetuity if managed properly like Harvard's.

### **3.2 Case Study – It could be Your Organisation too**

Since moving to the US, we have succeeded in getting one organization (SHESA-USA) to set up a fund, other groups are watching SHESA-USA or working to copy SHESA-USA.

Details on this Case Study can be obtained by contacting the author directly, who will be glad to put the requester(s) in touch with the relevant SHESA-USA authorities.

## **4. Conclusion**

In this brief paper, we have introduced an instrument of sustainable funding of many-a-worthy cause – the endowment fund. They work for a myriad of organizations including Governments, alma altas, cultural organizations, school, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), etc.

The keyword is “sustainable”. A one-time effort to raise the Principal (as explained) – which has the attraction of being able to attract these monies from big organizations – may be all you need for a worry-free funding of your worthy cause.

## **5. References**

<http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/registration/default.asp>:  
<http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/publications/cc3.asp>

### ***About the Author***

Jude Teddy Anye Ngu is currently a management consultant at the New York offices of the Global Strategy Consulting firm, Boston Consulting Group (BCG). Born in Bamenda, Cameroon, he attended the prestigious Sacred Heart College, Mankon, Bamenda before progressing to do his university studies in the United Kingdom. He holds UK BSc, MSc and PhD degrees. Having trained and become a Chartered Accountant (ACA) he joined BT as a senior Finance Analyst/manager. He then later decided to go to business school: he left the UK for the US where he gained an MBA from the prestigious Wharton Business School, University of Pennsylvania before moving on to join BCG in 2005. He is married with a daughter.

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# Challenges & Approaches to African Sustainable Development

# The Challenge of Sustainable Development: the Cameroon Case Study

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## Abstract

*On May 1st, the IMF and World Bank announced that Cameroon had reached completion point under the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) debt relief initiative. Cameroon now becomes the 15th country in Africa to reach this milestone and the 19th country under the scheme.*

*I explore some of the economic benefits that have already benefited Cameroon - thanks to this significant milestone. Indeed, as 'notorious' as some would argue the HIPC countries are, some of these ill-perceived and little-known countries have been brought to the attention of the international financial and investment communities – and this is no bad thing. Over the last couple of years, countries like Zambia and Nigeria and Ghana have benefited from an improvement in investor perception, partly on the back of debt relief*

*I point out this is just the beginning of a long journey to sustainability, and point out many road blocks along the way.*

*I submit that this HIPC debt relief should be exploited as a very good catalyst for resurrecting Cameroon's and other HIPC countries' economic sustainable development, and implore the issues raised in this paper are addressed for Cameroon to have a chance of achieving this goal*

## 1. Cameroon: Sustainable Development through HIPC Completion

On May 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, the IMF and World Bank announced that Cameroon had reached completion point under the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) debt relief initiative. Cameroon now becomes the 15th country in Africa to reach this milestone and the 19th country under the scheme. Having reached completion point, USD 1.3bn of Cameroon's multilateral, bilateral and commercial debt will be written off. Cameroon also immediately becomes eligible for debt relief under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) of about USD 1.1bn.

Implementation of the MDRI begins after July 1, 2006. The combined effect of debt relief under HIPC and the MDRI is likely to reduce Cameroon's external debt in nominal terms from USD 5.7bn in 2005 to USD 525mn in 2006. Cameroon's debt to GDP ratio is consequently expected to improve to 38% from 56% as at end 2005.

### **1.1 Encouragement rather than outright endorsement**

For Cameroon's policymakers, confirmation of HIPC completion could not have come sooner. Under the HIPC initiative, there is no set time limit within which countries must fulfil the criteria qualifying them for debt relief (completion point is said to be 'floating'). In the case of Cameroon, reaching completion point took over 6 years. This is considerably longer than the 3 years generally expected of countries under the scheme.

In 2004, Cameroon's chances of gaining HIPC relief sooner suffered a major setback when donors raised concerns regarding extra budgetary spending. Consequently, they declared Cameroon had gone off track on its reform programme making the government ineligible for debt relief. Since then, the government's efforts at reform have intensified. Financial management has improved and there have been increased efforts to combat corruption, particularly within the civil service. The government has also restarted the privatisation drive of state companies. But although these reforms meant that Cameroon's chances of reaching completion point by end Q2-06 had improved, nagging concerns on weak governance structures meant meeting this objective could not be taken for granted. Indeed as recently as February, IMF and World Bank officials visiting Cameroon were less than bullish about Cameroon's chances of reaching HIPC completion. Again, concerns about governance were raised.

The weight of government reforms, particularly fiscal rigidity, was beginning to tell on the economy. Business leaders argued that the government's tight fiscal stance, which penalised the relatively small formal economy, was dampening GDP growth. In 2005, growth is estimated to have slumped to 2.8% from a trend of 4% between 1999 and 2004. This was a concern that donors must have been aware of. Against this backdrop, it is my view that granting HIPC completion to Cameroon was more *a strong encouragement for policymakers* to carry on the reform process rather than a blanket endorsement of government policies to date.

### **1.2 A hat trick of dividends followed...**

Shortly after reaching completion point, ratings agency Standard & Poor (S&P) upgraded the sovereign rating on Cameroon to B- from CCC. S&P said the upgrade reflected an improvement in the government's debt servicing record, notably with regard to domestic debt. Public finance management was also lauded. Fitch Ratings Agency also upgraded Cameroon's foreign currency Issuer Default rating (IDR) to 'B' from 'B-' (B minus) in June. The outlook is 'Stable'. Fitch announced that the upgrade reflected the significant debt relief that Cameroon will be granted in 2006 and the continuing improvement of the fiscal situation of the country. Cameroon also received kudos from Transparency International (TI) whose President commended the creation of a law on the declaration of assets and property. This quick succession of dividends - debt relief, sovereign rating upgrades and endorsement from TI - should cheer policymakers. It should also

reinforce the message that reform will be rewarded.

## **2 But why is there such a focus on debt relief and what contribution does it make to sustainable development?**

The conduit towards attaining debt relief in itself is usually accompanied by structural reform and poverty reducing strategies. In the case of Cameroon, the criteria for reaching HIPC completion point included:

- a. The preparation of a full poverty reduction strategy paper and its satisfactory implementation for at least one year
- b. Maintenance of a stable macroeconomic environment and satisfactory implementation of a three year poverty reduction and growth facility supported programme
- c. The use of budgeted savings from debt relief in accordance with appropriate controls
- d. Governance and anti-corruption measures, particularly in the areas of judiciary reform, public procurement system and regulatory agencies
- e. Specific targets in the social sectors of education and health and HIV/AIDS

While it is arguable that all these objectives were met to a degree that would be considered satisfactory to a critical audience, it is true that there have been some noticeable changes and improvements within the economy.

These include a sharper focus towards corruption and accountability; an improvement in public finance management and a faster drive towards privatising state run enterprises (as depicted by the imminent privatisation of the much maligned public airline company CAMAIR). These improvements in themselves can create and have created a virtuous cycle where the business environment is improved and more importantly perception changes.

### **2.1 Perception, the business environment and economic growth**

Perception (including anticipation) can play a key role in the development. What (HIPC) debt relief has done is bring a number of either hitherto ill-perceived or little known countries to investor attention. Over the last couple of years, countries like Zambia and Nigeria and Ghana have benefited from an improvement in investor perception, partly on the back of debt relief. Positive perception can be a self-fulfilling prophecy where anticipation of further gains in an economy's growth prospects leads both foreign and domestic investors to fuel that growth. In the case of Cameroon, debt relief under HIPC has led to an improvement in sovereign credit rating scores. This sends a signal to investors that the business environment is improving and is a trigger for increased Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to support development.

### **2.2 Diasporans can help...**

Here, the Diaspora can champion the case for development by being at the forefront of investment flows into the region.

An increase in foreign flows and FDI, thanks to HIPC, has had the effect of driving interest rates down. See Table 1.

<b>Country</b>	<b>HIPC completion date</b>	<b>Sov rating Pre-debt relief*</b>	<b>Sov Rating post debt relief*</b>	<b>Trend in key IR post debt relief</b>
<b>Ghana</b>	Dec-04	B	B+	Down
<b>Zambia</b>	Mar-05	n/a	n/a	Down
<b>Cameroon</b>	May-06	B-	B	down
<b>Nigeria</b>	n/a	n/a	BB-	down

**Table 1 – Trends in key Economic Metrics since HIPC Completion**

And although the level of financial intermediation in Africa is still low, interest rates continue to form an important part of the development jigsaw. As is evident from Table 1, the trend in interest rates has been down following HIPC completion, and this is not by chance! Ultimately, the businesses in these countries will benefit.

Against this backdrop, there are two other macroeconomic variables that require specific mention with regard to attaining completion point under HIPC. Firstly, improved external liquidity, and secondly, reduced currency volatility. External liquidity measures the ability of a country to meet its foreign obligations such as payment of imports, or other current and capital account commitments. For example, import cover for Zambia has increased from 2.4 months in June 2005 to an estimated 4 months now. This should certainly provide relief to the Zambian business community.

Currency stability is also supported as debt servicing costs fall. Although it is arguable that a strong currency can reduce competitiveness in export oriented economies, a stable currency leads to a reduction in imported inflation thereby retaining the value of earnings and disposable income, particularly among the most vulnerable. This again demonstrates the possible benefits of HIPC debt relief as supportive towards liquidity, currency stability and inflation, which are important facets in working towards sustainable development.

Additionally, debt relief under the enhanced HIPC Initiative has made a significant contribution to growth. Although the recovery of non-fuel commodity prices and favorable weather conditions has supported economic output, debt relief has allowed a structural shift in resource allocation. Expenditure on education almost doubled in the last two years in Ghana - a laudable development given that education should form the bedrock of sustainable development in Africa.



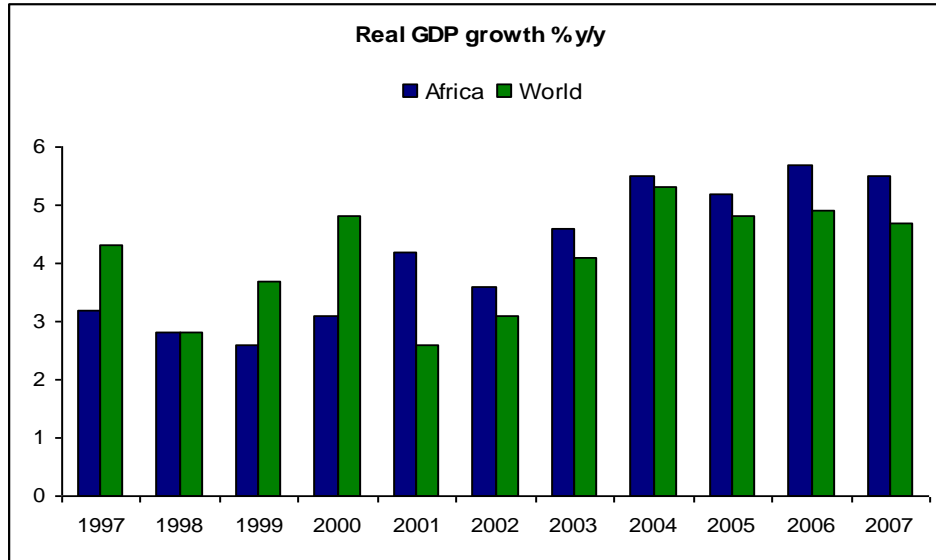


Figure 1 – Africa’s Growth is latterly Outperforming Average World Growth since the HIPC programme began – A Coincidence?

### 3 So is completion point the finishing line then?

Even after reaching completion point, much remains to be done. Let us review the contentious issue of governance. In Cameroon, despite the creation of a national Financial Investigations Agency, a Public Contracts code and a Supreme Court Auditing Unit, a successful track record is needed to validate their efficiency. Donors are also hopeful that the government will organise an independent anti-corruption commission and incorporate training on corruption into the national education curriculum in Cameroon.

Other immediate challenges include efficient and transparent use of funds freed under debt relief. This has been identified as a problem given that in the case of Cameroon, only a low proportion of funds freed up under interim debt relief were used. Policymakers must now channel poverty reduction funds to the sectors that are most needed without unnecessary red tape, in particular, emphasis must be placed on infrastructure and trade.

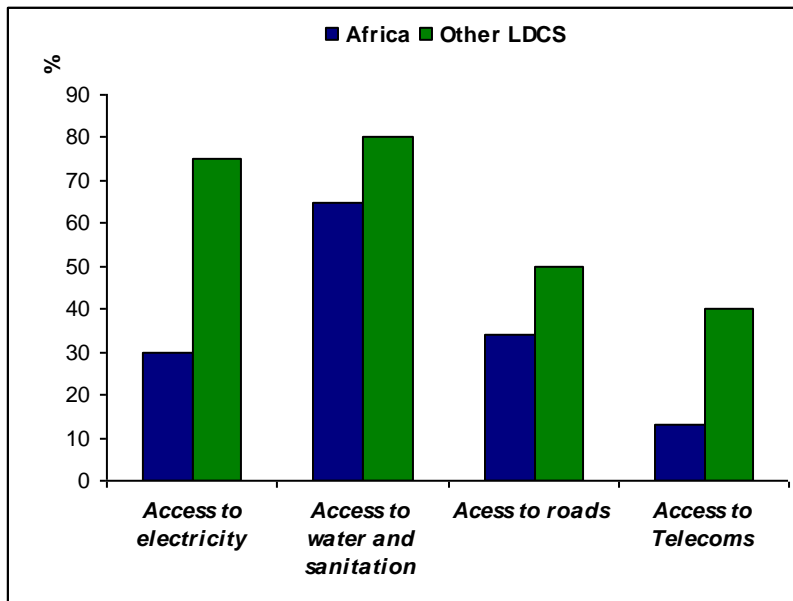
#### 3.1 Infrastructure

The development of social and economic infrastructure is critical for poverty reduction and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa. Increased market size through regional integration and lower prices through the exploits of economies of scale, are examples of the impact of infrastructure development and regional integration in enhancing economic growth, improving living standards and reducing poverty.

The importance of viable national infrastructure development cannot be overemphasized. On the other hand, regional infrastructure networks are at the heart of regional integration as they support the movement of people and goods across borders. Africa’s internal and external trade

flows through its roads, railways, inland waterways, ports and airports. Therefore, an efficient and integrated transport system will facilitate national and international trade and factor mobility. An integrated communications system on the continent will spur growth of trade and finance and reduce production and service costs by enhancing the accessibility and affordability of information. It will also link Africa regionally and with the rest of the world

However, there is a large infrastructure deficit, both in terms of access and quality, to be filled in all the sectors (transport, energy, ICT and water). The Commission for Africa Report estimates the financial requirements for infrastructure in Africa at USD 20bn, which represents about 30% of the total resource requirements for growth.



Source: African Development Bank

**Figure 2 – Africa vs. Other Less Developed Countries**

The chart above shows the extent of Africa’s deficit in terms of infrastructure. This situation has resulted among others in Africa’s low rates of economic growth, reduced share of world trade and lack of international competitiveness. The high transaction costs arising from poor infrastructure adversely affects development of the African economies, hinders private sector development, and the flow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and seriously affects the social services coverage, particularly for the rural population.

### 3.3 Trade

As with infrastructure, Africa’s future economic performance will in large part be determined by its trade relations with the rest of the world. Africa has fared quite poorly in its international trade performance over the last two decades. Its share in world exports has declined to 2.6 percent in 2004, compared to 4.5 percent in 1983. To reverse this trend, African countries need to pursue a

development strategy that is export-oriented while at the same time seeking to transform their production and exports base. Such a strategy must necessarily start with strengthening Africa's comparative advantage in traditional exports, where it has lost market share in primary commodities such as coffee, cocoa and cotton. In addition, enhanced diversification programs should start by strengthening the linkages between agriculture and the industrial sector, as the comparative advantage of many African countries may initially lie in the processing of agricultural goods.

Further, African countries should exploit the potential that exists in the export of services, including the substantial comparative advantage that they enjoy in tourism. These sectors should be given high priority while African countries seek to build up their comparative advantage in manufacturing. Successful promotion of exports and diversification will require that domestic policies do not discriminate against exporters and that the physical and marketing infrastructure required to help African producers become more competitive in the global market be developed.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The challenge of sustainable development is immense. However, initiatives such as HIPC have begun to address this concern by seeking to redress the imbalances that exist in the development strategies of the poorest countries. There have been obvious benefits. In most cases, macro economic fundamentals have improved and so has the business environment.

Yet more remains to be done. Infrastructure and trade remain key to supporting the efforts made by our development partners. In most countries, there is an urgent need for investments to reduce key constraints such as inefficient transportation and marketing systems. Increased trade will require export diversification and the scaling-up of local capacity with the support of foreign partners. It is my belief that the diaspora can play a role here. Partnerships with foreign capital create access to the needed technologies as well as access to managerial and marketing know-how. In addition, African countries will continue to require technical assistance for their development. It is estimated that China's trade has helped lift 400million people out of absolute poverty in the last two decades. Africa can replicate this phenomenon.

#### ***About the Author***

Abah Ofon is currently an economist at Standard Chartered Bank's London Office. Born in Cameroon, he attended the prestigious Sacred Heart College, Mankon, Bamenda before progressing to do his university studies in the United Kingdom. He holds UK BA and MA degrees from the London School of Economics. He the bank shortly after university and was posted to Douala, Cameroon. He is married with a son.

# The Bangwa in Europe: Challenges for a Sustainable Homeland Development Vehicle

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## **Abstract**

*The Diaspora has a vital role to play in the sustainable development of Cameroon and Africa in general. This can be ensured through many forms, including the concept of homeland association (HLA). This paper addresses some challenges of LECA-Europe, the Lebialem Educational and Cultural Association of Bangwa people in Europe, as a case study of a typical homeland association. Addressing these typical challenges, and with the support of international agencies, HLAs could evolve from the present fragile alliances into veritable "fit for purpose" Homeland Development Vehicles, which can partner with homeland-based organizations.*

## **1. Historical: The Bangwa in Europe**

Bangwa, sociologically describes a loose confederation of 9 ancient kingdoms in rural Western Cameroon, making up the vast majority of the Cameroon government's administrative region known as Lebialem Division. There are an estimated 1000 people of Bangwa origin residing in Europe, stretching from as far East as Russia, Ukraine and neighbourhoods through the continental mainland to the British Isles in the West. Suffice to state that an estimated 50 per cent of the Bangwa population in Europe live in the UK and Germany.

The history of the Bangwa in Europe dates as far back as the mid-1950s. The initial group that formed part of the immediate post-independence rush has been followed by the present generation that is increasingly finding itself having to settle in Europe, as a sign of the times - migration tides - although largely as victims of economic circumstances prevailing in their homeland. These are the "bushfallers"- a contemporary speak for the mix made up of former government scholarship holders in European institutions of higher education and those who have quite simply ventured into Europe to survive for themselves and their families. Today, they ply their trades in such varied fields as medicine, law, engineering, academia and general labour. Some are already active in local politics!

## **1.1 The Genesis of Social Cohesion as Diasporans**

Increasingly, the settler population is already producing what is termed in the Diaspora as a "Generation-X". This is made up of the children of the second generation immigrants. These children are having to grapple with growing up with parents who exhibit a palpable umbilical bias towards a geographical and cultural entity totally alien to the daily realities of what they learn at school, or see out there in the streets. Generation-X children cannot understand how their parents can be so proud of an Africa that is always portrayed in the negative by the media in Europe - the land of famine, diseases, poverty, wars and corruption. Despite these negatives, and in addition to Generation-X, there are those immigrants, who have come to realise the value of their very own rich heritage only outside their country. The grass may not always be greener elsewhere after all!

Given the above background, a vehicle for social cohesion was inevitable to enable not only the establishment of identity, but the preservation of the Homeland. The result, for Bangwa, has been the emergence of a variety of Bangwa homeland associations around Europe. The driving ethos of the pioneers of these associations has therefore been to establish a forum for solidarity among the immigrant Bangwa population. The objectives of such a solidarity forum include: mutual community support, homeland cultural awareness, valuing one's identity or roots and most vitally assisting in the sustainable development of one's homeland.

## **2. Some Social Cohesion Challenges**

We will now examine the challenges that a typical advocate or sympathiser of the homeland association (HLA) model of sustainable development will face, at the level of forming a meaningfully strong group.

### **2.1 Immigration & Isolation**

A good many Cameroonians arrive Europe with temporary immigration papers. Upon arrival, it becomes evident to them that they would have to regularise their stay with longer term visas before they can have any immigration security. The insecurity effects of the 'sans papier' syndrome leaves the immigrant to prioritise other issues out of desperation. Schooling becomes nominal with an intention to secure a temporary arrangement as a student. Working to pay for this and other forms of "leave to remain" papers becomes the priority. Quite often this leads into a vicious cycle. Inexplicably, the affected have tended to isolate themselves from their ethnic community groupings.

### **2.2 Discrimination by the Recipient Population**

Even after eventually securing the stay, discrimination whether intentional or institutional becomes another major hurdle for the immigrant. Thus, often times, very highly qualified Cameroonians like many Africans are found well down the career ladder, even compared to less

qualified indigenes. Outright financial hardship, as a result de-prioritises community solidarity dues down the pecking order, again leading to self isolation.

### **2.3 Fragile Fraternity – The LECA-EU**

The above challenges facing the new arrival to Europe are not helped by the very heterogeneity of the immigrant's background. Cameroon has over 200 ethnic groups - a reality itself that poses a real challenge to the national unity fabric as a result of tribalism and intra-tribalism. Lebialem for example has a history of subtle in-fighting among its three main ethnic groups. The lack of solid cohesion due to the challenges faced by the immigrant to Europe, weakened by the very heterogeneity, etc, of the source Bangwa society is pervasive even as far away as the Diaspora. Lebialem solidarity framework is therefore managed in Europe through a loose coalition of rudimentary meeting groups existing in the various nation-constituencies that make up the quasi-confederal entity that is termed as Lebialem Educational Cultural Association of Europe (LECA-EU).

## **3. Some Goals of Bangwa Diasporans: principles and case examples**

Under the aegis of LECA-EU, these are some of the goals of the Bangwa Diasporans towards their homeland back in Cameroon.

### **3.1 Accountability of Home-Based Structures: Get them to realise they could be so different**

Home-based institutions could encourage the Diaspora to support more home-based projects by exhibiting accountability in the use of resources raised, especially from the goodwill of the Diaspora. A catch-22 caveat here also challenges the Diasporan to help inculcate an ethos of accountability. This can be achieved, for example, through adopting a community-based accountability endeavour to circumvent temptations of nepotism, individual greed and outright dearth of know-how in the execution of homeland-based projects. This is a classic two-way street. Diasporans would help – but this must be reciprocated by the recognition by Home-Based structures that they can do with some help.

### **3.2 Capacity Building Know-How & Charity Registration**

Incorporating the homeland association into a registered charitable company would lend credibility and status to the group. Moreover, the enhanced status as a result of incorporation increases the avenues for networking with UK populations and professional groups. The added advantage to capacity building is the access to the vast reservoir of development grants and charitable public goodwill in Europe. Also, through an ethos of venture philanthropy, grants or donations could come with the willingness on both sides to cooperate to enable the donor also impart certain skills or know-how to the beneficiary, including that of accountability.



Picture 1 - “HM Fonjumetaw on libation, London December 2005

### 3.3 Some Metrology and “Success” Stories

Elements of LECA-Europe have registered successful initiatives in its short history, including:

#### **Supporting the Focolare Missionary Movement ([www.focolare.org](http://www.focolare.org))**

The Focolare Movement is a Catholic Missionary group from Italy with a flagship outpost in Lebialem lasting already 40years. A number of Lebialem people are in Europe today thanks to the development initiatives undertaken by the Movement. Two most notable ones including the top-performing Seat of Wisdom Catholic Secondary High School and the Mary Health of Africa general hospital, both in Menji. Lebialem. The Focolare Movement has also constructed roads, set local standards in house building, initiated vocational training, among others. The role of LECA-Europe, through networking, in maintaining the relationship between the Movement and Bangwaland cannot be underestimated. The Movement now treats Bangwaland as a “laboratory of inter-regional human social relationship” ([www.focolare.org/social-1-Rome2005](http://www.focolare.org/social-1-Rome2005)). Hence, in June 2004, a dance troupe of 15 Bangwa folks was given the pride of place to usher and serenade Lady Chiara Lubich into the Historic League of Nations Methodist Central Hall of Westminster in London. The hall, packed to a 3000 multi-ethnic international capacity, was beamed to a worldwide television audience. Lady Chiara Lubich, the founder of the Focolare movement, was



accompanied into the hall in Bangwa royal tradition by HM Fonjumetaw who had travelled from Lebialem for the occasion.

### **Setting Accountability Standards back in Bangwaland**

Lebang UK, (a subsidiary of LECA-Europe), is presently undertaking a project to erect culture dressing rooms at the Azi Palace of Fontem. Lebang-UK took the approach of a formal public call to tender and open competition by sealed bids. The objective is not only to ease the pressure, from tourists, on the ancient facilities of the historic palace, but more so to promote a concept of development by equality of opportunity and accountable public tender. Thus, it is hoped that Lebang UK would have institutionalised the concept of public accountability, helping educate the locals to be able to hold contractors and other agents to account for community money and goodwill.

## **4. Conclusions**

Despite the quasi-Maslowian challenges discussed above, homeland associations are endowed with vital specialist knowledge of and bonds with their respective homelands. These are two key elements to ascertain the chances of success in undertaking development initiatives in Africa. The case of Bangwaland has been presented here. Yet, and to the extent that the practice of homeland associations (HLAs) is pervasive across the Cameroonian, in particular, and the African Diaspora in general, it becomes imperative that these grass-root groupings are harnessed as potential vehicles for support to sustainable development initiatives back in the homelands. The aggregate multiplier effect cannot be underestimated either, from a point of view of strategic scale-up.

Hence the incessant crusading call that those back in Cameroon should, at the next earliest opportunity ask their relative or friend out here, how active they are in their local LECA or homeland association. Hence, too, the call to such empowering institutions as the Commonwealth Business Council, the European Union, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to look into what role homeland associations can play as the debate on sustainable development of Africa intensifies. The HLAs need capacity building not only in terms of membership, but in terms of over-arching networking, regional integration; and above all meaningful recognition and resourcing to the enable them achieve their full potential as sustainable development partners.

### ***About the Author***

Dr Asa'ah Nkohkwo FRSH, CEO [www.SickleCellSociety.org](http://www.SickleCellSociety.org), is Chairman of TMG Charity & PR committee and a Foundation Patron of the Young Cameroonian Professional Network, UK, ([www.YPCN.org](http://www.YPCN.org)). Through his Fine Forest Foundation, he offers community empowerment patronage to several NGOs in Cameroon and Africa, including the Ephphata Institute for the Deaf in Kumba, the Solidarity Farmers Common Initiative Group of Mbalangi, Kumba, and CCASSIC ACCA trainees of Buea University. Known traditionally as Mbi Asaatong Fontem, he is the Chairman of LECA-EU and Europe Ambassador of HM Fontem Njifua of Bangwa. (Email: [Asaatong@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Asaatong@yahoo.co.uk)).



# Womens' Empowerment and Sustainable Community Development in Cameroon.

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## **Abstract**

*This article looks at the issue of women's empowerment and sustainable community development in Cameroon. It begins with an overview of the women's empowerment and sustainable development literature from a broader perspective. Drawing mainly from recent fieldwork experience in the Northwest province of Cameroon, the article examines a cross section of views in Cameroon on the subject and shows how these concepts are understood within the Cameroon context. It points to the fact that current approaches by government to empower women and promote sustainable development are not putting women described as the backbone of the Cameroon's rural economy at the centre. I argue that unless women become part of the policy formulation, planning, implementation and evaluation of the entire process of sustainable development in Cameroon this will not really work. A conclusion calling on the government to reconsider the place of women in the current programme to empower women and promote sustainable development has been made.*

## **5. Introduction**

The decade 1975-1985 was declared by the UN as the international decade of women throughout the world following from an International Conference on Women held in Mexico. Since then two important world conferences have been held on women in Cairo 1985 and Beijing 1995. The Mexican conference resolved among other issues the 'integration and full participation of women in development'. The conference recognized the 'urgency of improving the status of women and finding more effective strategies which will enable them have the same opportunities as men to participate actively in the development of their countries and contribute to the attainment of peace (UN 1975).

The World Bank has noted the fact that gender inequality across the world is still one of the huge factors slowing economic growth and that if the central mission of reducing world poverty by 2015 has to be met; the third Millennium Development Goal of achieving gender equality and empowering women has to be a priority. It has identified women's empowerment as a major constituent element of poverty reduction and community development especially in developing countries.

*Sustainable development has been defined as ‘development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the chances of the future generation to meet their own needs (Brundtland Commission 1987). There may be enough to meet everyone’s needs globally, but the fact remains that developing communities in general are still struggling without hope to meet the needs of their present generation and in all fairness we cannot start telling them about the needs of future generations. Although we must now do it for reasons which are obvious the approach has to be radically different from that which is taken in Western consumer societies where the problem is insatiable demand.*

This paper will look at the issue of women’s empowerment and how this is understood and taken in the Cameroon context relating it to the concept of sustainable development.

Cameroon’s women have been identified to be the backbone of the rural economy and if the vision of sustainable development SD has to be realized this will depend hugely on the role which women are allowed to play in the whole process. The paper will also critique the current approach to sustainable development in Cameroon which does not seem to empower women or take note of the instrumental role they could play in the process.

## **2. Understanding Gender and Women’s Empowerment**

During an international conference organized by the International Association of Community Development (IACD) which took place in Yaoundé-Cameroon from the 3-8<sup>th</sup> April 2005, I noticed that out of a total of over 300 delegates drawn from five continents and 25 African countries, only six of us were interested in the workshop on Gender Rights and Community Development. The other male, also a student merely joined the workshop to add to the number which he saw to be too small not that he was originally interested in the workshop. Most of the men I talked to and asked why they were not interested in the workshop simply said ‘because it is women’s issue’ and some women said it was no point coming to talk about something ‘we know will never change’.

Many people associate gender only with women but we need to understand gender as equal rights for men and women and eliminating exclusion and imposition by one party to the other. Gender is about shared responsibility, work and projects with a consideration for both men and women and the elimination of inequalities in the use of, access to and control over natural resources (Tuyuc 2002). If gender is understood in this way a new society with equal rights for women and men and equal opportunities could be our new vision for the near future. Empowerment in its broadest sense can be seen as increasing

Power-to especially, marginalized people and groups  
those who are farthest down the ladder in the power over  
hierarchy and who have least access to knowledge, decisions,  
networks and resources’ (Wang & Burris 1994 cited in Humphries 1996)

Empowerment means the ability of women to acquire the power to think and act freely, exercise choice and fulfill their potentials as full and equal members of society. Property rights, poverty

eradication, political and economic rights, reproductive rights etc are all included in what women's empowerment hopes to achieve (DFID 2000).

A similar rationale for supporting women's empowerment has been postulated by the policy statements put forward by the Platform for Action, the Beijing+5 declaration and resolution, the Cairo Programme of Action, the Millennium Declaration and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Sen & Batliwala 2000).

Gaining control over their own bodies is a key issue but obviously not the only thing that women's empowerment is about, but this appears to be the only way that most men see it. Mies (1993) saw the demand for self-determination and autonomy over their bodies and lives as one of the fundamental demands of the women movement and noted that:

For women were not granted this right of determination over the Self, and especially not over our bodies, which have been treated as the property of others, as territory occupied by men, medicine-men statesmen, churchmen and of course men in general. Thus for women, self-determination mean first, the liberation from occupation, the end of the determination by others, by men and by patriarchal social powers' (Mies, 1993 p, 218).

Viewed in this way, it can be understood why women's empowerment still has a long way to go in societies where male domination and control over sexuality is the accepted norm. According to Mohanty, 'male sexual politics' in Africa and around the world share the same political goal: to assure female dependence and subservience by any and all means (Mohanty 1991).

## **2.1 Gender and Women's Empowerment, the Cameroon's Situation**

About three decades ago, gender issues scarcely came to the lime light in Cameroon development discourse. The wave of change from the West beginning with 'Women in Development' and later 'Gender and Development' only saw day light in Cameroon from the late eighties. The Ministry of Women Affairs was created in 1984 (UNIFEM 2005). Official sources in Cameroon recognize women's empowerment as meaning equal opportunity to both men and women to access common property, resources and services without any form of discrimination. This further means giving them the opportunity to participate in decision-making and hold important positions that can influence the development of the nation' (field notes). The empowerment of women is now recognized as crucial to achieving local development in Cameroon and women have aptly been described as the backbone of the rural economy. The creation of a special ministry for women, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family (MINCOFF) is part of government's initiative towards this goal (Official information).

During my recent fieldwork in Cameroon, I sought views on the subject and got an interesting variety of definitions and opinions on what women's empowerment is from various categories of respondents. The word empowerment is commonly used by many women and local NGOs in Cameroon but in a very basic way. To most women in the Northwest of Cameroon, empowerment means the freedom to join groups, associate with these groups and sometimes return late at home, make private savings and investments. Some women consider the fact that since they are now able to assume functions like paying children fees, hospital bills and

contribute to other household duties formerly that of the man it means ‘ipso facto’ that they have become empowered as they were never able to do this in the past.

Among Cameroonian intellectuals, there is clearly a division of opinion regarding the dimension which women’s empowerment should take. The argument is that the Cameroon woman needs to be empowered but perhaps not at the same time or in the same way as her western counterpart. There is also the possibility that men and women who are not educated enough to understand the concept and its usefulness for the development of the nation are simply scared to embrace it. This has already been happening. In fact, some of the men whose wives were in the first batch of the Women Studies degree Programme in the University of Buea, actually ended up divorcing their wives as they firmly believed that these women were studying a subject that will help them turn things around the wrong way in their marital homes(field notes). The general opinion seems to be that The Cameroon woman should be empowered to the extent where traditional values and customs are not compromised. What this means exactly, is a subject for further research.

The above analysis show that the way empowerment is viewed from the Cameroon context is different from the Western view which goes beyond simply gaining economic or socio-political power to include reproductive and human right issues. This perhaps means that women’s empowerment like most other concepts like gender with a Western origin need to be redefined within specific African context before proper implementation can be possible.

## **2.2 Women and sustainable community development in Cameroon**

The 1990s Laws on freedom of association in Cameroon enabled many women to begin forming Common Initiative Groups (CIGs) some of which have become very successful today. Most have as their common objectives the enhancement of the economic status of its members through support, small savings and common economic activities like farming and trading. The economic activities of these groups now constitute over 90% of the informal sector in Cameroon. They are the backbone of Community Development in rural Cameroon. Women manually produce about 90% of the food which has made Cameroon the ‘bread basket’ of Central Africa feeding Chad, Central African Republic, Congo Gabon and parts of Nigeria (CGT 2005).

Their activities include running farming groups, Meetings or ‘Njangis’ for savings, food crops distributors from remote areas to semi-urban and urban markets etc. They are also active in community projects like rural water and electricity, road and bridge constructions, new schools and hospitals or health centres projects, Churches and community centres. In most rural areas, women out-number men in their contribution to these community development activities but their achievements has not gone far because of gender stereotyping and cultural barriers which prevent them from rising to positions of decision-making.

“Women have been responsible for undertaking the day-to-day work which keeps communities together and adds to the quality of daily life. Enhancing the substance of everyday life forms the crux of women’s action in the community (Dominelli 1995).

What all this tells us is about the activities of women in the community and how these are boosting the Cameroon's economy. But the question that must be asked is how far these development activities are sustainable?

*A sustainable community* has been defined as 'a community that uses its resources to meet current needs while ensuring that adequate resources are available for future generations' (Minnesota 1995). The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG 2005) recognizes a sustainable community as a place where people want to live work now and in the future. They believe that a sustainable community must offer among others decent homes at prices people can afford, good public transport, schools hospitals and a clean safe environment. Although meeting current needs is the most crucial thing for any development initiative, in the case of most communities in Cameroon, this is not yet happening. The lack of adequate technology, specialized skills and financial capital all constitute one reason why these communities are underdeveloped and hence not able to meet their needs currently. Achieving sustainable community development requires resources for the planning, implementation and evaluation of development projects at all levels. In the case of the Cameroon, it requires resources to inform and educate the population on the benefit of SD and divert people, for example, from unsustainable agricultural practices to those that are sustainable, and support local council implements their local Agenda 21 which does not seem to exist yet.

The emphasis on meeting basic needs through community economic development activities is encouraging excessive reliance on the physical environment which happens to be the only means of livelihood for a majority of the population. For the developed communities it is their insatiable demand for consumer goods which promotes unsustainability while in developing communities like Cameroon it is the desire to meet basic needs. You cannot for example stop a local farmer from the practice of 'cut and burn' without providing them with an alternative means of doing so because that is the cheapest means available and the only means of livelihood for them. Commercial poaching in many parts of Cameroon has become a trade on which many depend but the attempt over many years to stop it has never got anywhere. Global resource depletion and pollution are forcing recognition that existing patterns of development are not sustainable (Roseland 2000).

All these are unsustainable practices which continue to happen in a world where the call to desist from them has been made loud enough and parts of the world are already suffering from their consequences. We need to make a decisive move toward more sustainable development both because it is the right thing to do - and because it is in our own long-term best interests. It offers the best hope for securing the future (DCLG 2005).

To assist countries draw up a plan of how to achieve sustainable development, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in 1992 came up with a global document called Agenda 21. The full implementation of Agenda 21 and the programme for further implementation were again reaffirmed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg 2002. (UNDESA, 2006).

The UNDP was given the responsibility to implement the concept of SD. It responded by coming up with Capacity 21, a broad plan of action to help developing countries formulate economic, social and environmental goals that will lead to SD (UNDP- SDNP 2006). Cameroon is one of

the countries benefiting from this initiative. The Cameroon Government has initiated an ambitious plan in response to Agenda 21 called the National Environmental Management Plan (NEMP) being elaborated and to be executed by the Ministry of the environment and Forestry (MINEF). Apart from UNDP, support to the government is coming from other international donors including the World Bank, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), Global environment Facility (GEF), etc.

*The British High Commission who have recently made available the sum of £450,000 (CFA 450 million) to be spent on five Sustainable Development projects throughout the country over a period of three years (allafrica.com 2006). But they don't seem to be a clear regional or local Agenda 21 programme. Local councils are not yet aware of NEMP which is the national Agenda 21 programme as is the case in developed countries like Sweden and the Netherlands. This programme appears still to be a thing of the government and the external organizations and not yet part of the people. More particularly, women seem completely absent from the initiative which is still top-bottom. Women have been recognized as the backbone of the Cameroon's local economy (official information). Their instrumental role in the overall development plan of the nation is being acknowledged. Therefore, if the vision of sustainable development (SD) is to be realized in Cameroon women must be key players at every stage of the process. This does not seem to be happening yet. To say the least, SD is yet to become part of the language of those who can see its implementation in Cameroon. The very critical nature of the environmental and social problems that SD is seeking to address and the complexity of the issue does not allow the decision to be made by a selected group of the privilege. Decision-making must be democratic because it is the community as a whole which must make the choices and trade-offs that are essential in the path to sustainable development (Wellford 1997).*

### **2.3 Major Constraints to Women's Empowerment and sustainable Community Development in Cameroon**

Cameroon is typically a male chauvinist society where male domination is a characteristic of the culture through out all tribal groups. The major constraints to women's empowerment and sustainable development are embedded in the complex legislation and customs and tradition. Legislative provisions and most traditional customs in Cameroon do not favour women leadership especially among men. It is not accepted that a woman should give orders to a man. A study of 'Attitudes towards women and gender Mainstreaming in NGOs in Malawi' by Rebecca Tessa (2004) reveals the same attitude as in Cameroon where generally men are not comfortable in seeing women lead them or be in positions of major decision-making. The government gives no recognition or legal security to informal sectors traders despite their contribution to the national economy. The following quote captures the whole idea: "Policy makers have not only failed to provide adequate opportunities for women, they have also created legislation that is aimed at controlling women, controlling their sexuality and fertility and endorsing their subordination (Afshar, 1987, p1).

Another aspect is the lack of skills and access to information and communication technology (ICT). Throughout my work with women's groups in the Northwest province of Cameroon I noticed that none has a group email address let alone a website and very few members were computer literate. The Sustainable Development Networking Programme (SDNP) in Cameroon has noted that there is sufficient need of information on SD and although there is enough

information available in the country, this is not adequately managed because of lack of awareness of its availability (SDNP, 2006).

Building women capacities and improving access to information technology and markets is fundamental to the process of empowerment and sustainable development. The lack of information technology and consequently access to market strategies constitute a serious draw back for any effort by rural women in Cameroon. The development of women entrepreneurs in information technology is fundamental to empower them in the business sector of the economy. This would offset the current in balance whereby men continue to dominate. Yet there is no evidence that Information and Communication Technology has any place in the current programme of government to empower women and promote sustainable development.

### **3. Conclusions**

This article has assessed the issue of women's empowerment and sustainable community development in Cameroon. I have looked at broader definitions and meanings of women's empowerment from the Western perspective and official sources and pointed to the fact that gender and women's empowerment are still widely considered to be something that only concerns women. Drawing mainly from recent fieldwork experience from the Northwest province of Cameroon I have shown a cross section of views on the subject of women's empowerment in Cameroon. The article has further shown the instrumental role which women play in the Cameroon economy especially at the rural level and argued strongly that if sustainable development has to be achieved women who are now seen to be the backbone of the rural economy must be at the centre of the policy formulation, planning, implementation and evaluation of the process of sustainable development.

Some of the major constraints which Cameroonian women face in the process of empowerment and sustainable development include male domination and a traditional custom and legislation that exist simultaneously overlapping and contradicting. Low literacy rate among women especially computer literacy is also seen as a major setback to the process of empowerment and sustainable community development. However, the main message to be taken home is that the Cameroon Government and other development partners have got to reconsider where women have been placed in the current initiative to empower them and promote sustainable community development in Cameroon.

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# A Sustainable Approach to African Development Projects

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## **Abstract**

*In an analysis published in New African, the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, shows how the East Asian “economic miracle” is in fact the outcome of specific political conditions of the Cold War period, and cannot be replicated today. In today’s world, however, new opportunities for sustainable development arise, which are so different in nature that they have been largely ignored by large institutions, both governmental and corporate. These patterns have been pioneered by individuals or small agencies, which developed associated ideas and techniques. There is therefore, enormous potential for large institutions and individuals willing to explore, document and adopt such patterns.*

## **1. The received wisdom**

The traditional way of looking at development is summarised by the word “aid”. The characteristics of this attitude are as follows:

**Philanthropy:** The aid donor is conceived as being a generous agent, who provides the aid out of caring for the welfare of the recipient.

**Top Down:** The relationship is asymmetric, in that the donor chooses who the recipient will be, and what the purpose of the aid is.

**Financial:** Essentially, the aid is thought of as a gift of money, either directly or through the sponsoring of a variety of financial instruments.

## 2. Why it does not work

This approach does not work. Alms-giving seldom does, for well-known reasons:

### 2.1 No Partnership

First, such alms-giving sets the donor and the receiver apart, by its asymmetrical character. It creates dependency instead of partnership.

Most of the problems associated with development are not primarily financial. While they necessarily include an element of wealth-creation (as distinct from money accumulation), they are primarily cultural and structural. Solving them requires the application of skill, know-how and human ingenuity, and they must be tackled by groups of people bound by solidarity.

In other words, the “donors” must donate their own resources of time and skill, in partnership with the “recipients”, in a mutual skill-transfer endeavour.

### 2.1 Clogged filters

Even in those cases where money might be useful to the solution of a problem, aid funding seldom actually reaches the point where it could be used. The reasons are multiple, the main ones being:

**Corruption:** Those at the interface with the aid donor face serious temptations. Much funding which is presented as aid is actually in support of some agenda of the donor, and the receivers of such funding often are encouraged to retain some of it for themselves, in exchange for the promotion of this agenda. One might argue that such funds were never really intended as aid. But they have the further negative effect of building or reinforcing behaviours which then extend to genuine aid funding as well. Petty corruption is of necessity endemic in an environment where employees cannot support their families on the available salaries. Trends to globalization have among other things eroded the traditional support structures, without concurrently raising the economic level sufficiently. The only way a middle employee can meet needs is to extract financial extras from every situation within his/her small realm of power.

**Bureaucracy:** Even when everyone is scrupulously honest, and often in order to enforce such honesty, the processing of “philanthropic” aid is tangled up in bureaucratic obstacles. Only those “in the know” can navigate such tangles, and as a consequence, most of those in real need of aid are excluded.

**Miscommunication:** A solid argument can be made that the above two causes of failure arise from cultural mismatch: certain innocent cultural practices of giving and receiving gifts are misinterpreted and suborned into bribing behaviour. Certain relationships to authority are perverted into support for petty despotism. The bureaucracies of western powers, inherited from the colonial era, cut across traditional patterns of administration and cripple the system.

More generally, development can occur only along the lines that people understand and can navigate: this means that it must be sensitive to, and supported by, local culture. Therefore, it cannot be organized or governed in a uniform way from a distant country by persons who do not participate in the specifics of life in the “target country”.

### **3. New patterns**

“The public, corporate and philanthropic silos we constructed have given structure and predictability to our world, a way to classify different types of human activity. But digitalisation, globalisation and deregulation are dramatically blurring those distinctions. The institutions, values and technologies that previously existed are disappearing and are being replaced with all-embracing uncertainty. This very uncertainty provides an unprecedented opportunity to create organizations that are values-based, inspiring to work for, and financially profitable. The new climate of corporate distrust makes this an imperative for corporate survival and success.

We believe that the time to reshape institutions has never been as propitious as it is currently. There are two further interrelated reasons for this conviction: first, the ever-growing power of people everywhere and their freedom to choose, and second, the knowledge that such values-based businesses not only exist but are beginning to emerge in an ever-growing number of arenas.”

Klaus Schwab and Pamela Hartigan, *Corporate Citizenship Comes of Age: the New Imperative*, World Economic Forum

The thrust of the article from which this quotation is taken is that we live at the beginning of a time of unprecedented change, and that there are enormous opportunities for corporations with the insight to recognizing the emerging patterns, the means to engage them and the political will to do so.

Such patterns have the following characteristics.

#### **3.1 Bottom-up**

The new endeavours do not try to solve the problems of the world from a high level, generalizing over a wide scope. Instead they begin locally, listening to the experience of those who know the pains of development (or lack of such). This is not a case of misplaced pathos or emotionalism. It is a hard-nosed approach to identifying the issues “at the coal-face”, in terms both of the material aspects and the cultural context. This localization combines with the injection of high skills, to ensure that diagnosis is accurate and proposed action is effective.

#### **3.2 Self-directed**

The initiative for action rests with the local community. This “ecological” principle ensures that participants are motivated, and own the project. They are not dictated to by experts: instead, they are expert in their own issues, and choose to enlist the “hired help” of specialists who become part of the project under their governance – even if at first the purely technical issues tend to overwhelm the picture, skill transfer will eventually bring back the balance and the full ownership.

### **3.3 Seeded**

The financial needs of such self-directed projects are peculiar: from the point of view of the local communities, they appear enormous. From the point of view of traditional donor agencies, they are so petty that they fall below the administrative scope of aid agencies (“it would cost more than the funds requested just to administer the project from our end” is the gist of the reasoning). So presumably some new form of funding must be invented (similar to, e.g., Grameen Bank).

### **3.4 Infrastructure**

Not all projects can be run at the “localmost” level. Very often, there arises a problem due to a deficient infrastructure. But the local perspective enables us precisely to identify the aspects of the problem, and to proceed to a relevant generalisation over a group of local communities. Action can then be proposed at the right level, with the right context of culture and market. It is imperative that infrastructure projects should be structured with the flexibility to respond to such local inputs.

### **3.5 Opportunity**

Obviously, given existing bias, development at the local level looks awfully like philanthropy. This is a trap we must be wary of if we wish to understand the new patterns.

“These men and women and their organizations have “unlearned” the tendency to dichotomise a company’s “for profit” and “philanthropic” activities. Rather, they have successfully shown through different business models, that it is possible to prioritise the generation of both financial and social returns in emerging markets.”

(Schwab & Hartigan, op.cit.)

As a matter of fact, local development (with its attendant infrastructure support, when needed) means emerging businesses, institutions, and personal wealth. It means a growing market. Whoever participates in the local development patterns is “on the ground-floor” of an enormous mindshare and market-share opportunity.

“The successful company of the future will be the one that has seized the opportunity opened up by today’s apparent chaos and confusion, created a market niche among previously untapped customers, and generated a unique value proposition that appeals to

the hearts of all its stakeholders... For global companies, this includes taking a fresh look at the emerging markets...”

(Schwab & Hartigan, op.cit.)

## **4. Obstacles to new patterns**

There are reasons why the new patterns have not yet taken over the world. The world’s corporate-institutional complex is a huge animal, which does not respond very swiftly, and whose awareness is quite diffuse. We persevere in our old ways long after they have shown negative, even disastrous, effects.

### **4.1 Inherited structures**

Quite often countries have inherited administrative or political structures from the colonial era, which interfere with the dynamics of decision-making in the local culture. This makes it difficult to identify the specifics which would support “Bottom-up, Self-Directed, Seeded” processes. An example was analysed recently in a radio programme on Ghana: while in the local culture older women collegially select local leaders, as well as identify and prioritise community issues, this pattern of behaviour is not at all reflected in the “democratic” government inherited from British practice.

### **4.2 Western bias**

Sensitivity to cultural diversity, which might help in recognising structural obstacles, is blunted by the self-assured attitude of many Westerners. There is no doubt that western material culture has been widely and hugely successful; there is a tendency to equate this material success with overall social and cultural success, and to believe that it can only be achieved in the context of Western-like institutions. As a result, we miss tremendous opportunities to learn and use other cultural patterns (e.g., other ways to do business, other techniques of value creation, other decision-making processes, and other measures of human achievement).

### **4.3 No channels**

Heretofore, those among us who had the insight and the courage to confront the above two classes of obstacles were then confronted with the third, most categorical type: they had no way of bringing back their discoveries from the frontiers and sharing them with western corporate culture at large. The literature of development is full of accounts by volunteers stating how their experience was ignored and/or ridiculed at home – often attributed to the idealism of the young (the “Peace Corps” syndrome).

There are now ways to change this situation (e.g., the Internet), but the appropriate channels have not yet been created and nurtured to take advantage of them.

### **4.3 Requirements**

Anyone wishing to engage the new patterns must be equipped with certain kinds of resources, primarily to support the required evolutionary change of mindset.

#### **Global reach**

It is important, in light of the current dearth of channels, to be able to supply a worldwide information-sharing network until such time as the new patterns have emerged in the public domain and have been institutionalised.

#### **Recognised relevance**

Initiators of “new pattern” ideas cannot promote them unless they have the ear and the respect of decision-makers in a wide variety of circles. It is all too easy to dismiss a new idea, since it does not slide well into usual channels of thought

#### **Management expertise**

Because of the disruptive nature of the new patterns, standard, routine project management is often inadequate. It takes deep skills to respond flexibly to the novel requirements of such projects.

#### **Skills in analysis and pattern identification**

Beyond usual western methods of doing business, it becomes imperative to spot, recognise and identify new ways of conducting business. The methods of social sciences, as well as business analysis methods must be drawn upon in this effort.

#### **Strength in methods and tooling**

As innovation progresses, it is important to incorporate the lessons learned into reliable instruments and processes, in order to clone successes whenever possible.

#### **Culture of community values**

A fundamental aspect of the new patterns is that they return both the initiative and the decision power to local communities. To be a participant in these new patterns, an institution or corporation must have an internal culture which recognises and leverages community values.

#### **Relevant technology**

It is obvious that modern information and communication technology is essential to promote development. But “relevant technology” extends far beyond this. Most of development is primarily a matter of human factors, and the disciplines which show how to take those into account (Process engineering, Administrative structures, Collaborative structures) are the foundation of a new kind of technology. One of the contentions of this paper is that Development is a technology, the foundations of which are only just emerging.

## **5. Conclusion**

In this paper, we discuss why development projects in African fail - sustainability is hardly ever a key requirement. We show how true progress can be achieved by adopting a grassroots approach, ensuring the communities identify and play a leading role in the resolution of their problems.

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Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship - [www.schwabfound.org](http://www.schwabfound.org)

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# Using the Grassroots-Driven Philosophy to Facilitate Sustainable Development

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## Abstract

*We draw from the Open Source Philosophy and argue that sustainable projects must be grass-root led, particularly with the realities in Africa.*

*Communities must own their problems and feel the problems are indeed problems.*

*There are several stakeholders in communities like this: local government, the community; Diasporans across different geographies; NGOs; Government.*

*Understanding the requirements of harmonizing them requires interesting IT tools.*

*This paper presents an initial version of such a community tool, [www.openecosystem.com](http://www.openecosystem.com), and we encourage the different communities to use it and help evolve it.*

## 1. Introduction: The background to this idea.

The ideas presented in this paper are based on my observations and derived from the work of one of the most innovative thinkers of the Software industry.

Eric S. Raymond, in his book "The Cathedral and the Bazaar, Musing on Linux and Open Source by an Accidental Revolution" describes how the success of any industry is almost directly related to the degree of freedom the suppliers and the customers of that industry enjoy. He asserts that legally restricting access to knowledge that society relies on results in less freedom and slower innovation. For this model to be successfully applied to enable sustainable development in Africa, it is not sufficient for the development model to be communicated and understood: an appropriate collaboration platform is required.

This paper describes a first generation of the Open Ecosystem Community Portal, a tool designed to facilitate and systematically harness open development, promoting decentralized peer review to lower costs and improve quality. We encourage all communities to use and help evolve the tool. The tool can be accessed at [www.openecosystem.com](http://www.openecosystem.com).

## **2. Open Source Development – What are the pillars of success?**

Open Source began as free software built by thousands of volunteers who shared the results of their work without charging any fees. Billions of dollars of value has been created based on this simple structure. The adoption of Open Source has become a cultural phenomenon.

The world of Information Technology has recognized the disruptive nature of the Open Source movement, and many have embraced it. Various aspects of this movement are controversial, and it is not clear yet how best to engage with it for maximum benefit (to the movement and to the participant). In this sense, the issues of development are very similar to those of the Open Source Software movement, and experience in one can be used to enhance the other.

### **2.1 Sponsoring**

The first analogy with Open Source software is that development needs sponsorship. Early contributors to Open Source used their free time, but most needed some means to keep body and soul together while creating worthwhile software. In the absence of corporate sponsorship, Open Source software would have remained a daydream of some idealists. Corporate sponsors contributed in several ways beyond the (necessary in the beginning, but ultimately destructive) alms-giving. Presumably they could see corporate advantage in their actions, and apparently have been vindicated. In the same way, development agencies can sponsor the Open Ecosystem Community initiative, supporting it in its objective of facilitating and enabling sustainable development in Africa.

### **2.2 Natural selection**

In the beginning, Open Source projects were largely based on trial and error. Natural selection prevailed, and patterns emerged that could be used to identify what works. The patterns and anti-patterns for successful open source projects can be summarized as follows:

- Project structures define how to get organized.
- Project topics describe activities that lend themselves to open source work
- Legal provisions are stable, workable, enforceable
- There are clear benefits to contributors

Our assertion is that all of the above apply to “open development”, and have been taken into account in the design of the Open Ecosystem Community portal.

## **2.3 Removing obstacles**

Another contribution of corporate sponsors is the removal of structural and economic obstacles. As any “grass-roots” movement, Open Source software starts with the clustering of enthusiasts. But such clusters necessarily remain hidden from the proverbial “general public” unless and until they can claim support from a sponsor whose name and activity are known to the many. This makes people “sit up and take notice”. The sponsor can also make its (business) networks available for the project to become widely known, and to attract more participants, more sponsors, and more customers.

In “disruptive” development that significantly changes current practices; a suitable sponsor can make the difference. For instance, recently a company convinced the government of Ghana to change its rules concerning telecom operators and telecom oversight, to make it possible to set up special-purpose telephone networks. This in turn, opens up for Ghana the opportunity of outsourced call centres, creating a whole new business niche in that part of Western Africa. Such a sponsor can be an NGO, a developmental organization, a government or a community of geographically dispersed Diasporans.

## **2.4 Partnership**

An important, indeed crucial, aspect of Open Source software projects is their real and clearly perceived independence. When IBM wanted to ensure the success of the new software development platform, the Eclipse platform (when it was more important to see it succeed, for long-term objectives, rather than extract short-term profits from it) it donated it to “the open source movement” – that is, it turned a \$40 million investment it into an Open Source project in which IBM was no longer the owner, but one of a number of partners. Assuredly at first IBM was very much the senior partner, but was willing for the partnership to evolve to a point where others would be equally, or more, important. Development projects can succeed only if this attitude is adopted, perceived and understood from the inception.

Although not worth \$40 million, the Open Ecosystem Community portal is a step towards facilitating and encouraging such partnerships. The platform helps get ideas into the public domain quickly, so community members are able to enhance the concept. The Open Source movement has demonstrated that most ideas, when first exposed to the community, are inherently shallow. This is true because different people usually identify, characterize and fix community problems. Sociologists also discovered years ago that the average opinion of a mass of equally expert or equally ignorant observes is quite a bit more than the opinion of a single randomly chosen observer.

### **3. Evolving Markets. Applying lessons learned from the Open Source movement to sustainable development considerations?**

#### **3.1 Supply: Local conditions from local people**

The motivation for an open source project arises from the particular concerns of the initiators. Contributors are self-selected, are interested in supplying some perceived need of the community. This is true to the principle “Necessity is the mother of invention”. If no one is interested in solving a particular problem, the attendant project will wither and die. On the other hand, if the originator has voiced a concern that many share, they will band together to address it. It is no use stating that what the world needs is another gizmo generator, and trying to brute-force the project into existence. This latter stubbornness has characterized many aid-based, interventionist development projects.

#### **3.2 Demand: Evolving the structures**

It may very well be that the concern that unites a small band of brothers is shared by no one else in the world. In this case, no matter what their enthusiasm, and no matter the richness of sponsorship, the product will not be viable and the participants will drift off to pursue other interests. However, in order for demand to emerge effectively, there must be the right channels and structures to advertise the product and its value to the world at large. Typically, Open Source participants are the keenest consumers of Open Source products. That is mainly because they already understand the dynamics of Open Source, and because they are familiar with the governing structures and communication channels of the Open Source culture. The same considerations apply to the structuring of markets which emerge under the new patterns.

#### **3.3 Mindshare: Arising out of Partnership**

If you need support for your Open Source resources, whether in your development projects or in operations, who are you going to call? Obviously those who best understand the products, namely their Open Source creators. Mindshare goes with partnership. The user of an Open Source product is encouraged to contribute back – if only by providing feedback on the software. The creator of the product is committed to provide for free the source, but not the extra understanding that comes from having been in the project for some time, nor any kind of problem-solving and other services. Several successful businesses are founded on this understanding. Before the open source movement started, no one apparently had thought of this entrainment effect: you don’t need to hide the source (i.e., any results of your expertise) to make the use of your expertise profitable. On the contrary, those you share it with will come back to you for more, and be willing to pay for the added value. This business pattern is also valid for development, and indeed has been independently discovered in that context.

## **4. What is needed to make this happen?**

While cheap Internet and suitable collaboration tools was a necessary condition for the Open Source model to evolve, it was not by itself a sufficient condition. Another vital factor was the development of a leadership style and a set of cooperative customs that could allow developers of the software to attract co-developers and get maximum leverage out of the medium. The sustained effort of many converging wills was needed. Those leading collaborative projects needed to learn how to recruit and energize effective communities of interest.

### **4.1 Leadership**

The Open Source movement poses some fundamental questions of human motivation. This raises the question of how the community maintains its interest. In order to build an Open development community, the project leader needs to attract people, interest them in his vision, and keep them happy about the amount of work they are doing. The personality of the project leader is therefore very important. If they treat those who provide them with feedback as if they were their most valued resource, participants respond by becoming their most valued resource. Open Source projects are also only sustainable if leaders recognize that when they loose interest in a program, their last duty is to hand it off to a competent successor.

Therefore, provided the development coordinator has a communication medium at least as good as the Internet, and knows how to lead without coercion, many hands are inevitably better than one. Those who excel, start from individual brilliance, and then amplify it through effective construction of voluntary communities of interest.

In the first instance, the awareness and leadership skills can be provided by geographically dispersed communities of Diasporans who engage locals to define and agree the problem statement, key deliverables etc. This is particularly important because of the lack of infrastructure in Africa. In this model, Diasporans are natural proxies to their communities back home.

### **4.2 Communication Infrastructure**

Communications infrastructure is key to increase the pace and intensity of technological advancement. Funding is required to reduce the cost of Internet connectivity. Brooke's law states that adding more resources to a late project further delays it because complexities of communication increase exponentially while productivity increases linearly. While Brooke's law had previously been regarded as a truism, the Open Source movement has demonstrated that with adequate communications tools, the assumption is falsified. Within the Open Ecosystem Community portal, projects are organized in parallel streams in order to minimize communication and interaction between subject areas. The lack of structure has always characterized the unproductiveness of discussion forums that prevail within the Diasporan communities.

### **4.3 Facilitating the documentation of new patterns**

Throughout the developing world, persons and local groups have discovered ways to make development work. These discoveries all too often remain hidden to the world at large. The first opportunity to leverage these innovations consists of investigating these discoveries, documenting them in a standard, repeatable way, organizing them around interest groups and publishing them adequately. Using the Open Ecosystem Community platform, adequately skilled Diasporans can provide guidelines for the methods of investigation and the economics of organizing the work, and templates for documenting and reporting findings. This will facilitate the capturing of ideas from real visionaries in local communities.

#### **4.4 Providing support methods and tools**

As successful patterns emerge, it becomes possible to develop ways to support their use and adoption in other locales, with adequate provision for cultural differences. This can take the form of handbooks of best practice, reports of experience, and support instruments such as template databases, adapted financial and project management tools, etc. The Open Ecosystem Community portal provides tools to capture and reuse these assets. It frees users, enabling them to think in unusual and creative ways. Quality is not maintained by rigid standards or autocracy, but by naively simple strategies of open collaboration and getting feedback from users in a timely manner.

#### **4.5 Facilitating partnerships**

The intellectual capital developed on the Open Ecosystem Community portal can be offered to development agencies using a variety of modes (from licensing to consulting to participating). Institutions can offer incentives to their members or employees, enabling them to share their skills and expertise on a given project. Several experts can co-operate to create a virtual team consisting of remote experts and local people linked together by a common interest over the Internet. No one need be away from their day job for very long, and the Open Ecosystem Community Web site ensures the virtual community and the local (real) one both thrive and benefit. The Open Development movement thrives on reusing existing assets. Innovation, not re-invention is the driving force. Result-oriented goals drive projects, and when completed, they become read-only references serving as examples for others.

#### **4.6 Diagnose and address obstacles**

Taking into account the social, organisational and technical diversity of Open Ecosystem Community membership, the level of awareness in the community is very high. Someone in the community is likely to understand or identify emerging difficulties, and diagnose issues accurately. Many eyes scrutinising the subject matter are more likely to spot, identify and extract issues; and someone – the same or another – will offer solutions. Some solutions will be truly local; others will be recognised by the Open Ecosystem Community as local manifestations of a wider issue and documented in the Open Ecosystem Community asset repository.

## 4.7 Harvest

The tools provided on the Open Ecosystem Community portal facilitate the harvesting and enrichment of intellectual capital. Community members create useful assets and solicit the collaboration of others so assets can be enriched, refined and diversified over time. Assets are rated and published using an open peer review process. It moves the community from long deliberations, extended months of scrutiny by selected few on discussions forums, (or worst still, in private), to result-oriented collaborative development. New markets, institutional and intellectual structures can emerge from such partnerships.

## 5. The PickAfrica Community Portal ([www.pickafrica.com](http://www.pickafrica.com))

### 5.1 What is PickAfrica?

PickAfrica, the open ecosystem, is a Web site that serves to facilitate collaboration between a network of participants with similar interests. PickAfrica.com lets you create a Web space for your community. Within a community Web space, members can run workshops, share documents, journals and interests with a network of users with a common interest.

**PickAfrica.com** You are not logged in. ([Login](#))

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- Communities who want to keep in touch with geographically dispersed members
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## **5.2 What is unique about the PickAfrica community portal?**

Activities are at the heart of the PickAfrica community portal. The PickAfrica portal was designed with “social constructionist” principles in mind. Constructionism asserts that communities are particularly effective when constructing something that serves a pressing need. This philosophy has proved very successful in the IT industry where billions of dollars worth of software have been created by Open Source communities.

The concept of social constructivism extends the above ideas into a social group (community) constructing things for one another, collaboratively creating a small culture of shared artefacts with shared meanings. When one is immersed within a culture like this, one is learning all the time about how to be a part of that culture, on many levels.

## **5.3 How easy is it to join?**

PickAfrica has an intuitive design so joining an existing community, or creating a new community is a simple process.

1. Click the “Join the community” button, select a Web space category and click on a community or project of interest to enrol.
2. Click the “Create a new Web space”, specify a community category, name, summary. Default properties are sufficient, and can be changed later.
3. New to the site? Login as a guest user and click “Access demo Web space” for a risk free way to learn how to use the advanced site features.

## **5.4 What community tools are available?**

**Assignment:** Used to assign online or offline tasks; members can submit tasks in any file format (e.g. MS Office, PDF, image, video etc.)

**Chat:** Allows real-time synchronous communication by members.

**Choice:** Community leaders create a question and a number of choices for members; results are posted for members to view. This can be used to run a poll or to do quick surveys on subject matter.

**Message:** Allows for one-to-one message exchange between community members.



**Help:** Help screens guide community facilitators through setup when creating new tools.

**Forums:** Discussion boards for community exchange on shared subject matter. Members in forums can be an integral part of the community experience, helping others define and evolve their understanding of subject matter. Member can rate a forum post, based on scales set up by the community leader

**Glossary:** Create a glossary of terms used in a community. Display format options include entry list, encyclopaedia, FAQ, dictionary style and more.

**Journal:** Enables members to reflect, record and revise ideas.

**Label:** Add descriptions with images in any area of the community Web space.

**Lesson:** Allows community leaders to create and manage a set of linked "Pages". Each page can end with a question. The member chooses one answer from a set of answers and either goes forward, backward or stays in the same place in the lesson.

**Glossary:** Glossary terms appear in highlight within all activity resources. PickAfrica includes its own site search engine.

**Resource:** The primary tool for bringing content into a community; may be plain text, uploaded files, links to the web, Wiki or Rich Text (PickAfrica has built-in text editors) or a bibliography type reference.

**Survey:** This module aids a community in running online surveys, including critical incident sampling.

**Workshop:** An activity for peer review of documents that members submit online. Members can assess each other's project. Community facilitators can make final assessment, and can control opening and closing projects.

**Database:** This activity allows communities to store data in any form. The entries can then be sorted, searched etc. Entries can contain text, images, and other kinds of information.

**Wiki:** Enables documents to be authored collaboratively using a web browser. This means that with no programming knowledge, anyone can participate in the creation of a document. The Wiki keeps a good record of the changes people make, so the facilitator can always go back to a previous version.

**Quiz:** Allows community to create all the familiar forms of assessment including true-false, multiple choice, short answer, matching question, random questions, numerical questions, embedded answer questions with descriptive text and graphics.

## **5.5 What member management tools are available?**

Creating content for a community is only part of what a good community portal must do. The system must manage members in a variety of ways. Member management includes:

- Providing information about community members
- Segmenting members into groups
- Ability to schedule events
- And so much more, e.g. applying scales to different community activities, managing grades, tracking user access logs and uploading external files for use within the community etc.

## **5.6 How can anyone join?**

Web site users find it easy to navigate PickAfrica communities in their browser. Intuitive links are always present. Login occurs on a familiar screen. Initial account set is handled by the member.

## **5.7 How do I join a community?**

Community facilitators can require an “enrolment key” to allow members in. Enrolment keys are provided to members separately from the login process. Communities requiring an enrolment key are indicated in “Web Spaces categories” description.

## **5.8 How community members are kept informed?**

Rich text e-mail is sent to each member “subscribed” to different Forums. Facilitators can set private messages to e-mail notification. When members “subscribe” to forums they are notified by e-mail of new postings. Additionally, community leaders can set e-mail notification for private dialogues.

## **5.9 Who is this platform suitable for?**

- Diaspora Social Communities
- Educational Institutions
- Governmental Agencies
- Businesses
- Charities and NGOs

## **Who will help you use PickAfrica?**

Knowledgeable users, willing to share their knowledge and help you become successful are joining PickAfrica.com

## **7. Conclusion**

In this brief paper, we have seen how the Open Source development model challenges conventional wisdom – a priori approach where solutions to community problems are carefully crafted by small core teams, working in isolation. We explain why communities that use their resources in a closed project are going to fall behind those who know how to create an open, evolutionary context in which feedback and improvements comes from hundreds of people.

We present the Open Ecosystem Community Portal, a tool designed to facilitate the creation of useful assets by groups of academics, researchers, businesses and social communities of interest.

The Open Ecosystem Community Portal enables these communities to collaborate on the creation of useful documents, evaluate performance, and access learning resources at any time to achieve their objectives. The Open Ecosystem Community seeks to inspire pedagogical innovation and improve the learning experience in African communities.

Although the Open Ecosystem Community Portal can be used in expected ways, the authors realize that a truly great tool lends itself to uses no one expected. We invite all communities to use and help evolve this tool.

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# REDUCING POVERTY THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGIES

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## **Abstract**

*One of the main obstacles to development in the developing communities around the world is the inability to utilize technological advances in their economic activities and the various ways of life such as farming, house and road building, provision of water and sanitation, just to name a few. Simple tasks are often made too difficult because they are carried out using very basic and some times crude tools. In the end very little is often produced after putting in too much effort. The principal reason for the lack of technology is the high cost of existing technologies. For example, a subsistence farmer in Africa may never be able to afford a tractor during their entire working life. It is believed that the solution to most of the technological-related economic problems in poorer communities lies with the application of 'appropriate' technologies. These are cheaper alternative technologies that take into account the socio-cultural and socio-economic needs of the poor communities. This article proposes their application as the best way towards bridging the technology deficiency gap existing in developing countries and poor communities such as in many parts of Africa.*

**Keywords:** *appropriate technology; sustainable development; reducing poverty; alternative technology*

## **1. Introduction**

The current article looks at poverty reduction and improvement in the quality of life in poorer communities through the application of 'appropriate' technologies. There is little doubt that the high cost of technology is a major hindrance in the way poor communities improve their quality of life through modernization of vital processes and activities such as farming, construction of

houses and roads, provision of water and sanitation. Routine tasks such as farming, house building, obtaining water, picking up the harvest from the farm, traveling from point A to B, just to name a few, are often too difficult to accomplish by poor communities due to lack of use of technological advances. In a good number of cases it is not just a matter of these tasks being difficult and back-breaking, but also it can be a matter of life and death.

For example lack of technology to obtain safe drinking water could result in rapid spread of diseases within the community leading to unnecessary loss of life. The low income levels of most people makes it difficult for there to be improvement in the quality of life in many local communities by incorporating technology in their way of life. Take the housing needs for example, the relatively high cost of cement is a major factor in determining whether a villager lives in a descent house or a poorly made shelter.

It is therefore reasonable to believe that the availability of cheaper alternative technologies can reduce poverty and improve the quality of life in these poor communities. For example, if a villager at a remote part of Cameroon is provided with a much cheaper way to capture, store and purify drinking water this will ensure he has a constant supply of drinking water all year round. This will also mean good health and few trips to the hospital for his entire family. Similarly, if an Ethiopian subsistence farmer is provided with cheaper fertilizers and alternative farming techniques his harvest will increase several folds. He and his family will have sufficient supply of food all year round and may even sell excess for money to send his children to school. Likewise, if the local communities in Lesotho are provided with cheap techniques to stabilize soils for base course construction, they can solve the problems of muddy earth-made roads in their community rendering the road passable all year round; and the list goes on. All these will lead to sustainable development and also improvements in the quality of life of the people.

Examples from the past civilizations suggest application of ‘appropriate’ technologies could provide some solutions to the technological deficiency problems facing poorer communities around the world and leads to improvements in economic development and the quality of life in these communities. For example, the ‘Chinese wall’ and several of the ancient Roman concrete structures, which are today regarded as great wonders were all built using ‘appropriate’ technologies at the existing time.

## **2. Examples of Application of Appropriate Technologies**

The following are just but a few examples where the application of ‘appropriate’ technologies can rapidly accelerate development and also improves the quality of life of poor communities around the world:

## 2.1. Agriculture

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy employing over 90% of the working population in many poor communities around the world. Agricultural products are derived from the rural areas through subsistence farming methods. Often, millions of man-hours are lost or wasted as farming is done with very basic tools such as hoe and cutlass. The process is often too difficult as it involve ploughing the hard ground under the heat of the sun with vary basic tools such as a simple hoe and cutlass. The yield is often very low due to poor farming techniques. Also, some subsistence farmers despite owning large hectares of land at their compound of residence are often forced to travel to far a field in search of fertile land and then having to face the difficulties of transporting the harvest home, usually by 'head load'. It is estimated that about 30% of sub Saharan Africa may suffer from food shortage within the next few years if drastic measures are not taken to increase food production. It is believed that improvements in farming methods are required to increase food production as well as output of other agricultural products. However, the farmers from these poor communities cannot afford the cost of fertilizers and other farming machinery, such as tractors needed to carry out farming on a larger scale. Therefore it is proposed that simple and cheap alternative farming techniques need to be derived if improvement in agricultural output is to be made.

It is believe that the best possible solution for these technological problems lies with the application of 'appropriate' technologies. For example, one of the greatest challenges facing farmers in poorer communities is drought brought about by lack of water due to extended dry seasons. Most often, seeds are dried up before they even begin to grow, leaving several families with very little to hope for during the forth coming harvesting season. It is proposed that water irrigation techniques be employed to eradicate this problem. Where there are no flowing streams near farmland, water wells need to be dug and cheap mechanical pumping systems put in place. Irrigation canals can be built using cheap local materials such as bamboo to take water into the farms. Farmers can either pump the water out manually or by various other means with the help of 'appropriate' technologies, such as win power. Also excess water can be use for drinking and other uses. Appropriate location of wells can be obtained with the technical assistance from the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Water Resources. It is important to note that ground water may be available in most part of Africa, including even the driest regions.

Another problem facing farmers in poorer communities is the lack of mechanization of farming methods. Most often the farmers' tools are very basic, consisting mainly of cutlass and hoe. This usually results in the farmer putting in 'too much effort but doing little overall work of substance' The hardship involve in digging a hard ground using a simple hoe under the hot sun for days after days is a well known fact. These farmers are very poor and do not have the money to buy tractors and other mechanized farming equipments. It is thus proposed that applications of basic, cheap and 'appropriate' techniques can help turn the farmer's endless and unrewarding effort into fruitful products. For instance the use of simple traction equipments, powered by animals such as horses or bulls would without doubt increase the farmers' output by several folds. Also, the design and manufacture of alternative and cheap copies of farming equipments should also be considered. Locally based blacksmiths can be trained to produce cheaper alternative farming tools at a fraction of the cost. This will also have the added advantage of creating employment for the blacksmiths.

One other problem facing farmers is poor soil quality. The heavy rainfall has washed the nutrients out of the soil in most parts of their farming land, leaving it acid and high in available manganese and aluminium. This stops plants roots developing properly and means crops do not grow well. More so, many farmers within these poorer communities use traditional farming practice of slash and burn and, are having to reuse the same land after shorter fallow periods, before natural fertility is restored. As a result the harvest is often very low. Usually the farmers will be expected to use fertilizers to improve the nutrient content of the soils, but fertilizers are often too expensive and unaffordable to many farmers in these poor communities. In addition, the use of fertilizer may increase acidity of the soil in some cases. It is thus proposed that the used of alternative cheap 'appropriate' technologies be considered. For example the addition of agricultural lime to land has been shown to have a very positive impact in increasing crop yield and should be encouraged. The most common form is ground dolomite. This is a rock made up of calcium magnesium carbonate. When ground and added to the soil, it raises the pH of the soil to neutral levels. This will increase crop yield by several folds. It is believed that this rock or something similar such as 'calaba chalk' is available in certain parts of Africa and can be obtained with the technical assistance of the government ministry of Mines, Energy and Water Resources. With this basic technique, the farmers can improve their output by several folds at virtually little additional cost.

## **2.2. Water and Sanitation**

One of the technological problems facing many poor communities is the lack of appropriate cheaper alternative technologies for obtaining, purifying and storing water both for drinking and other uses such as farming. Many of these poorer communities cannot afford the cost of water chlorination and other chemical treatment of water for drinking. Also there is a great need for cheaper alternative technologies for disposing waste including human wastes such as faeces. Uncontrolled waste disposal often results in contamination of water sources by disease causing bacteria. Many within these poorer communities cannot afford the cost of construction for a good toilet. In a good number of cases communities upstream do not follow appropriate sanitary procedures in the way they locate their toilets and control the disposal of waste. Runoffs from toilets after rain quickly find its way into the streams and rivers, which are sources of drinking water for other communities downstream. Diseases are often spread within these communities via this method sometimes leading to unnecessary lost of life. Many within these poor communities cannot afford to pay for hospital treatment when the fall ill. Therefore poor water quality and sanitation can have a very noticeable socio-economic effect and hinder economic development within these communities. It is proposed that the application of 'appropriate' technologies in the various areas of water and sanitation can resolve many of these problems. For example:

The sanitation problems associated with poor human waste disposal can be resolved through the design, and construction of good pit latrines systems. The location of the latrines could be well selected with the help of local 'Sanitary officers' in a manner unlikely to result in contamination of waters sources. The toilets will also be well covered to prevent flies and also well ventilated to increase digestion of the wastes.

The high financial costs associated with purification of drinking water contaminated with disease causing bacteria can be solved by the application of cheaper alternative methods of water

purification. For example, ultra-violet radiation from sunlight has been shown to be very effective in killing harmful bacteria in drinking water. The technique is very simple and mainly involves filling clear plastic bottles with water and then leaving it expose to the sun light for a specified length of time period. The heat from the sun together with the ultra-violet radiation destroys the bacteria in the water, rendering it safe for drinking. The socio-economic and health benefits of this basic approach to water purification on the population of poorer communities are huge.

Also, where appropriate water wells should be dug and cheap pumping mechanisms installed. The pumps can be powered using ‘appropriate’ technologies such as wind power or manually using a simple pulley system. The population should also be encouraged to boil water before drinking or bathing young children.

Furthermore, rainwater harvesting should be encouraged. Tanks for storing water harvested from the rain should be constructed using cheaper locally available materials such as bamboo and other earth-made cements. The water captured from the rain can be use for various purposes such as watering crops in the farm, washing clothes, and drinking, depending on the quality.

### **2.3 Construction of Houses and Roads**

Poor road network infrastructure and lack of decent housing remains one of the biggest challenges facing poorer communities around the world. The majority of people in these poor communities live in poorly made shelters mainly constructed with sundry earth bricks. Most people cannot afford the cost of decent housing built using bricks made of Portland cement due to the relatively high cost of cement. The consequence of building with poor quality materials such as sundry bricks is that these bricks are very unstable in the presence of water and easily crumble during heavy rains. In some cases this problem is accelerated when the win blow off the roof of the houses leaving the sundry brick walls expose to the rain, and then easily collapse. For people already very poor, the loss of their homes by this way can be very devastating. Also, the problem of collapsing buildings does not just end at individual family homes. There have been a number of reported cases of collapsed school buildings consisting of classrooms causing severe disruption to schooling. When this happens, children are often sent home from school for several weeks to allow for new classrooms to be rebuilt.

The problems associated with the lack of use of technological advances are also too apparent in the areas of construction of roads. Majority of roads in these communities are earth-made tracks, which easily go muddy when it rains making the roads virtually impassable during the rainy seasons. The impassable roads cause severe hardship and disruption to the movement of people and goods, putting a lot of strain in an already fragile economy in these communities. During the worst rainy seasons the people of these communities are left with little option but travel long distances on foot. Also transportation of cargo during the rainy season is mainly by head load making it difficult for them to transport their farm products to the market.

The most obvious choice of solution would be to tar the roads, but this is not practicable due to the lack of funds. It is believed that the solution to most of the construction technology related problems lies with the application of ‘appropriate’ technologies in the areas of construction materials for roads and house building. These would be cheap materials derived locally. There



are currently locally available materials whose properties render them more suitable as construction materials than the traditional clay soils. Materials such as lateritic soils, which are available in several regions of the world can offer much better performance when used as road surfacing material compared with untreated clay soils. These materials if well compacted and used in addition to a good drainage system in place can provide much decent roads passable all year round.

Also, in situations where such material like lateritic soils cannot be obtained, other cheaper approaches should be employed. For instance clay soils can be stabilized using Portland cement to produce construction materials with a much increase bearing capacity and durability. Given that a good stabilization effect can be achieved using cement as low as 6 weight percent with the remaining 94 weight percent consisting of clays soil, this technique seems quite cheap to employ. The stabilized material can then be used as road building material especially at known hotspots on the roads. With the application of such cheap alternative techniques, the problems of impassable road during the rainy season in these poorer communities can become a thing of the past.

Furthermore, the soil stabilization techniques could also be employed in the making of cheap and durable bricks for house building. In this case the problem of collapsing building during the rainy season will be greatly reduced. The people of these communities will be able to build much cheaper but decent houses compared with those build using sundry earth bricks. Also, the application of other cheaper approaches such as replacing steel reinforcement bars in concrete structures with locally available materials such as bamboo should also be encouraged.

### **3. The Role of the African Diaspora in the Development and Wider Adoption of Appropriate Technologies**

The role of the African Diaspora in facilitating the implementation and wider adoption of the principles of ‘appropriate’ technologies at the grass-root in Africa cannot be over emphasised. The role of African Diaspora can be seen in two key fronts: Facilitator of skills transfer and provision of funding to undertake training at the grass-root.

#### **3.1 African Diaspora as Facilitator of Transferable Skills**

The African Diaspora is made up of people with a wide range of professions and also people of various works of life. Living and working abroad has exposed most Africans professionals to a wide range of skills in several areas of life and economic development. Several of the African Diaspora professionals have been involve in projects at one point or the other in their career,

which may bear relevance with regards to solving some of the technology related economic problems in Africa.

It is suggested that the African Diaspora professionals should volunteer their services and share their professional experiences and expertise with the local organizations and institutions with the view to widen the adoption of appropriate technologies in solving technology related economic problems in Africa. The various African Diaspora organizations such as the TMG can assist in coordinate all the activities.

### **3.2 African Diaspora as Provider of Funding for Training**

This will go along the generally held notion that: teach a man how to fish or grow his own crops and he will be able to feed his family for life. The African Diaspora can assist in training in the various areas of appropriate technologies in many different ways. For example, the African Diaspora can provide funding for use to organise teaching seminars at local technical colleges in Africa to teach delegates some of the basic ‘appropriate’ technology skills described in this article. Delegates could be selected from all corners of Africa to attend these seminars after, which they can then serve as trainers for their respective villages. It is believed that spending money this way may be much better in the long run than given a few charitable handouts to the people back in Africa year after year.

### **3.3 Other roles**

It is also proposed that the African Diaspora should consider setting up strong lobbying groups based in the various national capitals in Africa. It is a very obvious fact that effective lobbying have influenced political decisions the world over. The key role of the lobbying groups will be to lobby and promote the adoption of appropriate technologies as one of the best approaches in solving many of the economic problems of Africa. Preferably the group will consist of dedicated African elites and decision makers with a power base in many of the national capitals. Their key role will be to lobby the various national governments and promote the wider adoption of appropriate technologies in the government strategies and poverty reduction initiatives in the various African countries.

## **4. The Role of African Universities**

The various local universities in Africa have a great role to play in widening the adoption and application of appropriate technologies in Africa. The African universities have in the past tend to spend too much time and effort training theoretical scientists with very little emphasis given to the practical application of science and engineering in solving many of African economic problems. The curriculum of African universities has to be drawn up in such a way that the courses being taught reflect the socio economic needs of Africa.

The current paper proposes the creation of appropriate technologies research centers and institutes at the various African universities as one of the best approaches in solving many of Africa's technology related economic problems. These centers will carry out research and develop cheaper alternative solutions to many of the technological related economic problems and challenges that Africa current face.

Furthermore, the appropriate technologies research centers can make use of the abundant skills and brains available within the African Diaspora. For example, the African Diaspora professionals can work as visiting lecturers at these research centers and also carry out collaborative research work with these institutions back in Africa. This can take the form of co-supervising PhD research projects or even final year undergraduates degree dissertations. The African Diaspora can also volunteer to fund and supervise these small dissertation projects within their areas of expertise. These approaches will no doubt serve as a good mechanism of skills transfer from the African Diaspora to Africa and would also rapidly accelerate the growth of appropriate technologies in Africa. The resulting effect will be rapid economic growth and improvements in the quality of life in Africa.

## **5. The Role of Governments and NGOs**

African governments need to seriously consider the adoption of appropriate technologies as one of the key approaches to reduce poverty and raise the standard of living in poor communities. Also, NGOs need to invest in appropriate technologies, especially in the areas of food production, by assisting communities to become self-sustaining in the food supplies. This approach would be much better than having to wait until people are dying of starvation before they start rushing in with food aid.

## **6. Conclusion**

It is believed that the solution to most of the technological-related economic problems in poorer communities lies with the application of 'appropriate' technologies. These are cheaper alternative technologies that take into account the socio-cultural and socio-economic needs of the poor communities. This article proposes their application as the best way towards bridging the technology deficiency gap existing in developing countries and poor communities such as in many parts of Africa. The application of appropriate technologies in the various areas of the economy would accelerate economic growth leading to higher living standards within these poor communities.

# Sustainable Infrastructure

# The Provision and Maintenance of Infrastructure as Sustainable Development Tool in Cameroon

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## **Abstract**

*This paper traces the importance of Cameroon infrastructure provision and maintenance and compares it with the “engine” of economic growth and sustainable development. The study emphasises that Cameroon infrastructural policy still lack the sectoral and firm-level targeting which underpins the development of an emerging economy enterprises as leading global players. Cameroon must maintain and improve its infrastructure if it has to build and broaden its agro-industrial base, let alone attract both foreign and home investors.*

**Keywords:** *Capacity building, delivery, globalisation, local economy, public-private partnership, roads, bridges, airports, telecommunications*

## **1. Introduction**

This paper examines the links between infrastructure and development as a means of reducing poverty, facilitating economic growth, and improving environmental conditions in Cameroon. The paper seeks to explore ways in which the government can improve both provision and quality of infrastructure services as a gateway to sustainable development. It charts the actual development of infrastructure services, contributions from Diasporas and the effect they have on social cohesion and economic growth; the political landscape and activity which creates and sustains them; analysing the current problems and future opportunities, including the opportunities arising from globalisation. This historical framework attempts to identify factors, which may be more important for the future of infrastructure provision and maintenance in Cameroon. The experiences and solutions of the last 30 years have demolished the various infrastructure developments as an impact of an unresponsive civil service, and rendered the nation bankrupt within an HIPC league surviving as a nation on hand-outs-loans, grants and aid-from the West due to a centralised system of government.

### **1.1 History**

After independence in 1960, and until the mid-1980s, Cameroon presented a model of economic growth for the rest of Central Africa. In 1986, Cameroon experienced an economic downturn due to the decrease in the price of oil, exchange rate problems and a crumbling infrastructure. This was followed in 1990 by a structural adjustment package. By the mid-1990s, there was hyperinflation of such severity that people put up road blocks to get money, and the standard of living fell sharply as a result of corrupt practices and poor governance. The number of poor people entering a very competitive informal economy increased tremendously. Problems were exacerbated by growing taxation on transport and enterprise due to the deplorable conditions and absolute neglect of the nation's roads infrastructure. Incomes declined and the costs of foodstuff, education and health increased significantly.

The negative effects of problems in Macro-economic Institutions are well known. In addition to the social and psychological trauma that poverty sustains, many basic tenets of society crumbled under the pressure. Communities may be torn apart, government structures corrupted, and basic infrastructures vital to economic life and cross-regional transport rendered useless.

Since the devaluation of 1994, a number of banks have closed or have been restructured (Ministry of Agriculture, 1997). Partly as a response to problems in the mainstream infrastructure sector, and with a considerable interest in microfinance as a poverty alleviation tool in rural and urban areas, lack of proper infrastructure provision renders poverty alleviation strategies ineffective in the rural poor (Mayoux, 1999, 2000).

The paper draws attention to the perennial problems which if tackled; Cameroon can effectively address material poverty, the physical deprivation of goods, services and income to attain them. Cameroon presents a clear example of a country that has endured long-term and devastating scaling down of opportunities for three decades.

Several types of micro institutions are active in Cameroon today, but struggle with the issues of providing services in a run-down economic environment and inaccessible markets yearning for greater outreach.

## **1.2 The Role of Infrastructure**

The role of infrastructure services – including power, transport, and telecommunications are central to economic development representing, if not the “engine”, then, the “wheels” of economic activity. While the special technical and economic characteristics of infrastructure are presumed to give the government an essential role in its provision, evidence bears out the contention that the dominant and pervasive interventions by the Central government have indeed, failed to promote efficiency or responsive delivery of services in Cameroon [World Bank (1995)]. It notes that recent changes in technology now make it possible to increase the scope for the application of commercial principles to the provision of infrastructure and maintenance services. This development may in fact allow Cameroon to improve both the quantity and quality of its infrastructure, even in a situation where the government faces severe financial constraints, by inducing private investors to become suppliers of infrastructure services, and the effective utilisation of “home-groomed” talents.

In the drive for competition and sustainable development, new export markets for agro-industrial products are especially dependent on access to, an adequate supply of, reliable infrastructure, both for the present and for the future. Apart from this obvious benefit, the adequacy of infrastructure through capacity building and skilled labour at home can make a crucial difference to the country's economic development in a variety of ways:

- 1) Diversifying production base, supports economic growth
- 2) Expanding trade
- 3) Improving environmental conditions
- 4) Coping with population growth and reducing poverty

The World Bank [p.17, 1995] provides that *“during the past two decades, increased globalisation of world trade has arisen not only from liberalisation of trade policies... but also from major advances in telecommunications, transportation, and storage technologies.”*

Cameroon stand to benefit if it embarks on such advances in infrastructure provision, thereby allowing producers to achieve major costs savings in inventory and working capital and to respond more rapidly to customer demands, creating closer links between producers and customers and making “just in time” delivery possible. In short, the availability of modern infrastructure services is critical for the modernization and diversification of production and of export development.

### **1.3 Importance of Infrastructure**

Good infrastructure services attract investments thereby creating job opportunities and reducing poverty. Conversely, the poor infrastructure that characterises much of Cameroon reduces the likelihood that private entrepreneurs, domestic and foreign, will increase their investment in response to policy reforms alone. Wheeler and Mody (1992) examined panel data on some developed and developing countries in an effort to explain patterns of foreign direct investment in manufacturing and electronics through variables representing “classical” features of comparative advantage (labour cost, corporate taxation, market size) agglomeration benefits (infrastructure quality, degree of industrialization, and level of past foreign direct investment), as well as socio-political risk and economic openness. The result proved that among developing countries, infrastructure provision and maintenance is the dominant explanatory factor in both manufacturing and electronic investment. Similarly, Kessides (1993) reports that inadequate and unreliable infrastructure cripples the ability of countries to engage in international trade, even of traditional export commodities. She points out that the fight for new, that is, manufactured exports is even more dependent on infrastructure.

### **1.4 Maintenance of Infrastructure**

Deficiencies in infrastructure and basic amenities have reached alarming proportions and the consensus is that infrastructure in Cameroon is poor (Kundu et al, 1999), relative to that in other developing countries. It is less clear however, whether this outcome reflects an under-investment in infrastructure in the past thirty years or whether a failure to maintain existing capacity. Making this distinction is important to identify the means by which this state of affairs can be improved. To the extent that the present situation reflects a failure of sufficient investment in creating

infrastructure, the answer may well be to increase investment, using either public or private funds. However, if the current situation reflects a failure to maintain an adequate level of investment in good repair, then, there is a need to understand the forces that led to this outcome. It may be that regulations governing the infrastructure sector prevent its efficient operation or at least sanction inefficiency on a large scale. If so, and if such regulations are still in place, then there is a need to identify such regulations in some detail and recommend their removal. In case outright privatisation is not considered socially or economically acceptable, a programme to commercialised state-owned providers of infrastructure services should be considered, and an appropriate relationship between the government and the providers of infrastructure services needs to be developed that will increase the accountability of the public sector.

This requires new regulatory and supervisory arrangements for monitoring and enforcing agreements with private or joint-sector companies. Establishing and effectively implementing these instruments is no small challenge, as it is well known that, under the present system of state control, public agencies have to meet a broad range of social objectives, including catering to the needs of poor people through rural roads provision.

### **1.5 Transport and Port Facilities**

#### **Roads**

The need for access to well-maintained roads and a functioning railway system cannot be overemphasised as sustainable development tools in Cameroon. These are essential in linking potential rural producers to their markets, domestic and foreign. Poor road conditions cuts off the supply response by producers to changes in the economic environment. According to a World Bank study [Carapetis, et al. (1991)] “the transport sector – particularly roads – is a key to unleashing the potential for increased production and incomes in Cameroon...If farmers and manufacturers are to take advantage of reforms in agriculture and other productive sectors they must be a dependable road system pliable throughout the year.” The poor road system retards the transformation of the Cameroon economy in numerous ways. For example, Tomich (1994) notes that the poor transport system reduces the potential for linking the production in the agricultural sector to the manufacturing sector. The possibility of efficiently processing agricultural products, and adding value to them before they are exported, is thus retarded. Poor road system raises transport costs and often makes them unreliable or unavailable especially during the rainy season period.

The following pictures scathingly tell the story of Cameroon roads’ infrastructure for themselves:





**The effect of negligence to repair Cameroon roads (2006)**



**Gorges of earth road typical of trunk "A" Roads' journeys in South-West Province of Cameroon (2006)**

Source: (<http://leffortcamerounais.typepad.com/photos/uncategorized/thethingswego.gif>)

In Cameroon, the key issue for roads is to find appropriate institutions that will have the incentive to manage them adequately and have the funds to do so. The key issue for railways and airports is to find ways to give them greater autonomy to operate as commercial activities while ensuring that the stock of assets is tailored to the future needs of a restructured industrial sector. In both areas, there is need to look at the current institutional constraints that impinge on improved road maintenance and that influence railway/airport services in Cameroon and suggest appropriate and acceptable new management modalities.

### **Port and Airport Facilities**

Quite clearly, poor port and airport facilities hamper development of exports. Exporters need rapid access both to necessary imports and to export markets. World Bank (1995) data indicates that because of poor transport facilities, including ports, the cost of shipping plywood/timber from Cameroon is 30% higher than the cost of shipping the same commodity from Asia to Europe. Equally important, ensuring the high quality and reliable transport services needed for international trade also requires that customs procedures and attitudes be reasonably efficient, honest and professional.

On the contrary, this is not always the case, so much so that “unnecessary” customs procedures raise costs and increase shipping times, as there could be so many offices and officials to attend to and each with a “golden hand-shake” to follow. Improvements in customs, police and armed services fall under the rubric of improved “governance”, but in part, it also depends on the quality of in communications and information processing technologies that are available in the country. Customs services should and must rely on electronic data exchange if they have to be efficient and transparent. Most often, the rejection of computer usage under the pretence of computer failure for and the lack of reliable telephone lines reduces Cameroon competitive position in this area as well. The shoddy nature of the Douala international airport as the main point of entry into Cameroon with ineffective air-conditioning facilities, long hall of concrete steps without disable persons provisions, and luggage rooms at the shore of thieves by the roadside do not attract repeat business, and do not speak well of the country abroad.

Before Cameroon re-unification in 1972, there were the Tiko airport, the Bali airport and the Besongabang airport etc. Today, we have nothing to show for these airports due to serious neglect and lack of seriousness of purpose. This has rendered transport services within the country extremely difficult and intrigued to say the least, to so many despite their intention, ability and willingness to travel/tour the country. Poorly maintained roads and inadequate port facilities also raise production costs and erode competitiveness; private producers can less easily substitute for such services than the role of the state. The Limbe seaport is the best in the country, yet it lies idle, deprived of international business. Thus, prospects for the development of the tourism industry are therefore hampered irrespective of the great potential the country presents in this direction for jobs in the service industry if the infrastructure is provided both locally and nationally and maintained.

## **2. Strategies and priorities to address shortcomings**

It is obvious that infrastructure improvements are needed if Cameroon is to improve its general economic performance and in particular its export performance. In order to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and for foreign investors making their decisions where to invest, key determinants they tend to look for are things like good infrastructure, large and/or growing markets, good quality labour force, before they look at the regulatory regime.

It is hardly surprising that exigencies of modern logistic management in developed countries seem to impose similar requirements on Cameroon to provide the transport and telecommunications services essential for modern logistics. This will increasingly determine her ability to compete for export markets and for direct foreign investment. There are many examples of countries losing their competitive edge because of infrastructural shortcomings many times

combined with procedural delays in export related activities, and Cameroon is one of them. A closer analysis of the situation prevailing in Cameroon may well find that the main reason for poor supply response to policy reforms lies in excessive regulation of trade and transport, administrative malpractices, and inefficient management by public sector entities.

Although it is increasingly recognized that the infrastructure in Cameroon needs to be strengthened, extended and improved, this task may not be daunting, as it appears [emphasis added]. Some analysts, as for example Berg [1994], suggests that greater emphasis be given to “indirect” privatization instruments as a supplement to reliance on more “classical” divestiture, which is often opposed. Whether indirect privatization can achieve the efficiencies needed remains to be seen.

Yet two things are clear. First, a substantial upgrading of infrastructure is needed in Cameroon and second, where it may be difficult to raise public resources to fund investments in port facilities, road maintenance, power supply, and so forth, appropriate modalities must be developed which will make possible increased private sector participation. The challenge is to determine those areas in which competitive market conditions can work and those that will continue to require public action.

Second, private sector participation will only occur where a climate exists that allows for a reasonable assessment of costs and future returns. The legal and regulatory framework in Cameroon may not be conducive to private sector participation. To establish this will require a review of existing laws and regulations that will result in specific recommendations for changing those laws and regulations that impede either private sector operation or private sector financing of infrastructure investments.

### **3. The Role of Cameroon Diasporas**

First, Diasporas are defined as populations of Cameroon migrant origin who are scattered among two or more destinations, between which there develop multifarious links involving flows and exchanges of people and resources: between the homeland and destination countries, and among destination countries. Currently much more than the past, Diasporas include complex mixes of people who have arrived at different times, through different means and with different legal statuses. When divisions in the country are also taken into account, such Diasporas can thus be highly fissiparous, which can give rise to problems of coherence when mobilising for development and other purposes.

From the above definition, this paper seeks to raise the consciousness of the Cameroon government to start recognising the potential of its citizens abroad to participate in development and reconstruction in a meaningful sense. This however depends in the extent to which Diasporas feel have stakes in their home nation-state as well as the countries that host them. With such factors in mind, and in partnership with Cameroon government and Diasporas, the UK Department for International Development [DFID] for example, and other development agencies could work together towards:

- Encouraging Diasporas to invest in community development initiatives in Cameroon, and, in particular, to engage with pro – poor drivers of change.

- Taking steps to give Diasporas a more active voice in the development arena, such as involving them in international fora to coordinate resource flows from donors and from Diasporas for development and reconstruction of Cameroon infrastructure as seen above.
- Additionally, in accordance with African Foundation for Development (AFFORD), there is a growing need to draw UK-based Diaspora groups into the formulation of Cameroon development strategy or Assistance Plans, Poverty Reduction Strategy Planning, and other instruments of Cameroon development policy.
- Engagements of this kind should be encouraged by the Cameroon government outreach, such as annual forums to be organised by the Cameroon High Commission in the UK, used to promote interest in Cameroon politics and sequencing of development through public-private partnerships work shops, and not just ‘talking shops’ in ethnic groupings as we have seen in London over the years.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The paper highlights the importance of infrastructure provision and maintenance in Cameroon locally and nationally. Thus seen, the historical provision for the past thirty years has not been impressive due to central government neglect or administrative failure. While effective infrastructure provision and maintenance services require a push for “good governance” agenda, we need to be more careful in identifying which institutions are “necessary” for the country, and have more humility, and be more sensitive to the issue of historical justice given the historical records of Cameroon infrastructure failures.

Unless there is a complete change of perspective among the proponents of Central government in its present form, the push for “global standards” of sustainable development will at best remain highly ineffective in addressing the failure of Cameroon infrastructure provision and maintenance and at worst, prolong the harm already inflicted to the rural poor given the inaccessibility of roads to major cities, which dampen demand for exports, contraction of production and increase unemployment.

Strengthening local institutions is the centrepiece of rural development and the provision of local government roads and community roads and paths must be viewed with an open mind and in the broader vision of rural development and service delivery locally and nationally.

Management of rural transport infrastructure must be local in character, regardless of which government or private overlay is chosen.

However, whether the state (or anyone else) likes it or not and whether it is difficult or easy, the state is bound to play critical roles as the ultimate entrepreneur and the conflict manager in Cameroon infrastructure with complex interdependencies and (radical and incremental) innovations in technologies and institutions. To pretend otherwise will only delay the emergence of a coherent coordination structure and a functioning regime of conflict management and, consequently, address the infrastructure shortcomings without considerable waste on foreign expertise and/or social divisions by absorbing home-groomed talents and making effective use of Diasporas’ contributions and the army to construct Cameroon roads [emphasis added].

Although the constraint imposed by lack of infrastructure maintenance policy may be growing, (see pictures above), it is nowhere near the point where a strategic policy is impossible. The current literature tends to regard the process of globalisation and the rise of multinational corporations (NTSC) as an unstoppable process that no one can control and in which Cameroon in particular is a passive agent that will have to fully embrace this process for its own good. In any event, there is a lot of room to manoeuvre for the government and since such room may even be increasing for Cameroon in some industries, especially with the recent aggressive expansion of some MTNs from China. It would be a big mistake for Cameroon to voluntarily give up all such room for manoeuvre by adopting a universally liberal FDI policy across all sectors. What is needed is a more differentiated and strategic approach to Cameroon infrastructure provision and maintenance, which will allow Cameroon to intelligently “use” MTCs for its long-term developmental purposes.

Ultimately, the paper proposes a framework for improving the management and financing of local government roads, and community roads and paths, based on a public-private partnership in which the governments, communities, farmers and road users share costs as it is practised elsewhere. A centralised system has failed and cannot provide a sustainable livelihood framework for Cameroon infrastructure as seen. It concentrates in the centre and the local economies falter.

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# SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION AS A COST EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS: THE CASE OF CAMEROON

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**ABSTRACT:** *Civil Engineering and Construction are the oldest of all professions. It started with the creation of the world as in the Genesis of the Holy Book. Unfortunately, practices on site by workers have led clients with projects uncompleted, uncomfortable dwellings, high cost, late finish, unsustainable buildings, etc. There is no doubt that Africans in the Diaspora have/are been/still victims of this situation. More than 80% of Cameroon's Construction Industry falls within the informal sector with construction practices and procedures not obeying any standard regulations. From the design to finished state, less attention is paid on the principle of sustainability. This article presents some major bad practices on construction sites that lead to some of these undesirable outcomes of construction projects. It proposes better routes for Africans in the Diaspora to follow in order to achieve the "best practice" in their projects. The best practice could lead to a cost-effective building, eco-friendly and meet up the clients taste and above all takes into consideration both the lifestyle of the African in the Diaspora and the lifestyle back home.*

**Key words:** African Diaspora, Best practice, Construction, Cost, Practices, Sustainability.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Bruntland 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development states that "Sustainable development is the meeting of the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs". Sustainable construction aims to apply this principle to the construction industry by providing ways of buildings that use less virgin material and less energy, cause less pollution and less waste, yet not jeopardising the quality of the construction project. More importantly, is the overall cost-effectiveness of the construction project when well managed.

This article does not examine the detail analysis of a project life cycle, it analyses just some basic practices that render construction projects in Cameroon expensive. These practices could be related to an inappropriate technological choice, material supply chain, financial supply chain and personnel supply chain.

We shall now examine those factors that lead to unsatisfactory results in terms of the sustainability of construction projects. These are largely drawn from the my experience as more than 80% of construction in Cameroon is run by the informal sector (FOKOU , 2003) and little has been documented on the construction industry in Africa and Cameroon in particular.

## 2. NO EARLY COMMITMENT

With present day wages in Cameroon and continuous increase in prices of construction materials, building a house not to talk of a comfortable one is becoming really a difficult task if not impossible. However many individuals sort different ways to finance their projects “easily”. Some go for loans, some travel to Western World for greener pastures which may be of a help to them on their return, some even live by the meager wages and start building what they never live to live in. Indeed the initial process of raising finance for a construction project is itself another project at the early stages.

There is no guarantee of ever acquiring the amount required by any of the aforementioned means, at times nothing is acquired. With even the search just for survival due to massive poor conditions and high dependency ratio, Africans never even think of setting up a comfortable structure—a shelter from excessive rain and excessive sun is enough!. However, when luck comes from any source the immediate action is to rally novices and brief them of his/her intention to build. Spending sometime with a designer to discuss any possible design choices is considered a waste of time and money. Ironically it is just like the very old adage “penny wise but pound foolish”. Building is a major project in one’s life and must be analyzed in detail. It is even worse with Africans abroad as they send money to relatives and contractors without even an idea of: the plot, how much their building will cost; the design of his choice; how long the building will take the people or contractors to construct. We are conscious of the failures of buildings designed in Europe and realized in Cameroon. Also these failures will not be much different for a design carried out in Cameroon for a client in Europe without a fully integrating the client at the design stage. Often at times it turns out being a fiasco, with an individual being totally disappointed for having sent fabulous sum of money, only to go back and see he has actually succeeded buying a plot with a shabby foundation. It is very common to hear people being dissatisfied for having spent millions of franc CFA on construction projects that is never finally realized.

### **3. TECHNICAL STUDIES**

Cameroon is indeed Africa in miniature; in fact the soil properties vary from zone to zone. Instead of these variations to be a favorable factor, the variations have never been fully exploited. Little or no technical studies are ever carried out before most construction work. This has the following consequences:

#### **3.1 Soil bearing capacity**

Experience is good but when it obeys a linear law it can be dangerous. A bricklayer, who has worked in a zone with low soil bearing capacity say Douala, is versed with footings of large sizes. The same brick layer when taken to a zone with a high soil bearing capacity adopts the same footing heights as his practice in Douala. This is fine but uneconomical. He has destroyed the earth more than expected. He has also destroyed part of the earth that someone would have enjoyed of in the future. He has made his client pay more than expected; he would have spent the surplus in acquiring other scarce goods. These are clear violations of the principle of sustainable development. On the other hand one who lives from a zone of a high soil bearing capacity to a zone of low bearing capacity lives a house at risk of collapsing. It is not just violating these sustainable principles but the degree to which it is done is quite costly.

#### **3.2 Construction & the Environment**



This is an important factor to be taken into consideration especially if we want our building to enjoy natural resources. The wind direction has to be studied with respect to the shape and position of the building on plot. It could be costly in the future if this is not considered at the design phase; one can be obliged to buy fans which may be costly. Fans could be noisy and pollute the environment and even be a nuisance at some quiet moments. Fans should be considered as the last resort.

Site design and response of construction to the natural environment remains a common problem in Africa. This can be seen in Pr. A.A Adebayo African Position Paper for the Agenda 21 for Sustainable Construction in developing countries which states “By not allowing a proper investigation of the site, the natural environment ceases to be an integral part of design and construction implementation and is thereby compromised”. There are situations due to poor building orientation, during the rainy season water tends to flow into the building. Again a nightmare!

#### **4. SITE SETTING**

This is the first step of realization of a building or structure. It is a very important stage as it determines the smooth running of subsequent stages of the construction process. When a building is effectively implanted it automatically eliminates litigations from greedy neighbors. It is advisable for more time and proper equipment to be used at this stage. Unfortunately, this has never been the case with most Cameroonian local construction leading to the following gross problems:

##### **4.1 Poor and Inaccurate Room Angles**

Most buildings setting are done without the use of efficient equipment. More so those involved know little geometry. Very few are able to implement Pythagoras triplet to obtain right angles and other angles by pure judgment. The end results are inaccurate angles and distortions of the whole building’s architecture.

##### **4.2 Over Excavation of the Earth/Over Backfill**

Most site foremen implant buildings without taking into consideration serious constraints such as site topology, ground conditions, etc. Often this leads the owner spending on excavating unnecessarily or backfilling unnecessarily. Again this is a costly process to the owner. Also a proper choice of method of excavation could save some money. Manual or mechanical could be expensive or cheap depending on the quantity to be moved.

#### **5. FOUNDATION**

According to The Chambers English Dictionary (2003), a foundation is the base of a building. From “LE GUIDE DU TACHERON” published by CIMENCAM, the role of the foundation is to distribute the load of a structure (building) to the earth. As a result of this crucial role once the foundation is missed it could be dangerous and costly.

##### **5.1 Foundation depths missed**

Often at times foundation trenches and footing depths are dug without any care leading to the depths being realized to be deeper than required. The immediate and dangerous solution often adopted is to backfill the excess. This is a very bad practice as the original soil bearing capacity can never be attained, thus putting the structure in danger. However, one of the most appropriate and economic solution will be to increase the length of columns(of course verifying buckling requirements) rather than the depth of the footings.

### **5.2 Unnecessary costly form work**

Most of the zones in Cameroon have very good soil properties except some regions in Douala. As such it is very possible to dig and concrete some footings without first of all putting formwork in place. The cash saved from doing this is enormous! We avoid digging excess earth for exploitation, cost of planks, cost of labor in building the form work, and save the earth for the future.

## **6. FLOOR**

In the flooring process involving concreting and screeding hardly, are good and precise equipment used such as the leveling machine to ensure exact measurement or thickness. Even when this equipment exists few foreman are able to manipulate it. The outcome of such lack of proper equipment application is analyzed below:

### **6.1 Slab concreting**

Most of the slabs are never done to measurement. This consumes more material than shown from the quantity estimate sheet. Just a 5cm excess could consume tonnes of aggregates and bags of cement.

### **6.2 Screeding**

Poorly compacted earth leads to chairs leaving holes in the floors; poorly leveled finish leads to a slanted floor thus inhibiting its functionality.

## **7. ELEVATION**

Elevation consists of erecting the walls with bricks or cement blocks. There is too much material wastage at this stage ranging from the following.

### **7.1 Plastering**

The disregard of block joints, poor mortar mixture and hence irregular plaster thickness. Too much perforations on the walls for formwork which needs repairs in the end and consumes time and material. The cracking of the walls for the passage of electrical circuits and plumbing conduits. No proper attention is given to this and even most technicians hardly consider passing conduits through the beams and columns.

### **7.2 Painting**

Paint made from natural based material is not widely used despite the availability and abundance of these natural resources. A greater percentage, if not all of the construction sector still depend on chemical based paints. As a normal practice the first layer is normally water based paint or Soda. The poor manner in which some painters display this paint on walls leads to poor results at

the end. Patches of paints of different intensities are often noticed. Moreover, most painters are unable to implement the efficiency of most paint. Some believe in personal secrets in mixing various paints solutions. Of course your building becomes very vulnerable to adverse weather conditions leading to poor quality, health hazards, and regular costly maintenance.

### **7.3 Height of building**

It is very common to know that building plans in the informal construction sector in Cameroon means just the foundation plan. Most clients consider detail architectural and structural plans to be wastage of resources. The exact height of the building is never known to the constructor who is left to make an assumption based on his own judgment. An extra band of 40cm on the perimeter of the building will incur cost on elevation, plastering, painting, reinforcement, concreting, and formwork and may even live the building in danger as the buckling effect of columns will not be verified at this stage.

### **7.4 General Reinforcement**

Technically speaking, concrete works well in compressive zones while re-bars work well in tensile zones. Hence concrete and re-bars are designed to withstand compressive and tensile loads respectively. This simple notion can save a lot of cost in the Cameroon's informal construction sector. The columns, and footings function well under compression unless under special circumstances. So it will be cheaper to use locally fabricated re-bars in reinforcement in columns and footings. Beams on the other hand operate under tensile forces and should be reinforced with imported re-bars as they are of higher quality. Using in both cases the imported re-bars can be costly and can be very dangerous conversely.

## **8. ROOF**

Though at the roof stage wastage in material is not often incurred as the materials exist standard sizes in the market. Appropriate choice should be made so as to avoid insect attacks, rotting of the wood just in the near future. It can be very costly to repair at this stage.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to redress the above deficiencies in construction practices, it is important to use an "integral approach". An approach where the view of the client and/or the African in the Diaspora is considered before his/her project is designed and executed.

All the parties or stakeholders should corporate at the design phase of the project. The project should be well elaborated and broken down so as to enable the clients to have enough knowledge of his project. Competent workers should be employed to execute the projects; quality/cost analysis should be analyzed critically. Optimization of construction processes should be considered before, during and after execution. By using the integral model approach, elaboration of the project and optimization of construction procedure then can we obtain a cost effective and sustainable construction.

Clients should contact competent personal for the execution of projects. A collaborative and participatory approach at the design stage should be encouraged so that the client can participate

fully at the design stage so as to avoid late changes in execution and non-design to conformity. How do you expect someone in Africa to design a house for an African in the Diaspora who has spent over 20 years with a different life style to conform to functionality?

It is also worthwhile nothing that the author of this article has managed projects in Africa and could help in counseling whoever wants to carry out a building project in Cameroon. He has also a well established network of technicians and engineers who could participate in the execution back in the Cameroon. Also in collaboration with BONGOMIN SUPPORT SERVICES projects for Ugandans in the Diaspora are executed back in UGANDA.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

Africa and Cameroon needs to embrace sustainable practices on construction sites. This will lead them to obtaining a cost-effective house and environmentally sustainable building; a building that will meet their taste, less expensive and yet of high quality.

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# The Sustainability Dimensions of Public Works and Infrastructure Projects in Developing Countries: The AGETIP Experience

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**ABSTRACT:** *The significant growth in the urban population in Africa has placed a huge strain on the infrastructure. Construction is central to infrastructure provision and as African countries continue to grow rapidly, the problems of capacity building, employment and poverty alleviation have become major issues. It is now increasingly recognized that the sustainability dimensions of public works and infrastructure projects should be considered and addressed in a holistic way. Findings based on the experience of public works/infrastructure or AGETIP projects implemented in a number of African countries are presented and the implications for capacity building, employment creation and poverty alleviation are discussed within the context of economic, social and environmental sustainability. It is concluded that whilst aspects of the social and economic dimensions are explicitly considered in the design and implementation of public works and infrastructure projects resulting in some improvement in economic and social outcomes, the environmental aspects are largely ignored.*

**Keywords:** capacity building, construction, infrastructure, poverty alleviation, sustainability

## INTRODUCTION

Public works and infrastructure projects are important in addressing social and economic problems relating to the urban environment for number of reasons. Firstly, infrastructure investment is an input into the production process; hence there are productivity benefits generated through the use of infrastructure assets in the long term. Adequate infrastructure is a key factor that influences development investment and the level of competition in international trade. Various studies have shown that lack of infrastructure have contributed to the relative decline of exports, foreign direct investment, economic growth and competitiveness in developing countries (Fay and Yepes, 2003; Kessides, 2004; Amjadi and Yeats, 1995). Secondly, infrastructure investment is often a “public works” activity directly influencing personal income in the short term through employment and wages in the construction sector. The level of social and economic impact and its sustainability depends on the nature and type of infrastructure programmes, as some are more employment intensive than others during construction and post-construction phases (Ball and Wood, 1995; McCutcheon, 2001 and Rosenfeld and Warsawski, 1993). However, the extent of the social and economic gains in the local environment crucially depends on the type of infrastructure and the capacity of local construction sector. Developing local capacity is therefore crucial for implementing and maintaining infrastructure and for creating employment (Robinson, 2004). For example, Abeille and Lantran (1993) identified planning and construction management capacity as the main causes of failure to meet infrastructure programme targets in developing countries, even when sufficient financing is available. Samuelson and Nordhaus (1992; 698) also argued that even if a country has succeeded in raising investments ‘it takes many decades to

accumulate the railroads, electricity generating plants, equipment, factories and other capital goods that underpin a productive economic structure’.

As developing countries continue to grow rapidly, it is crucial to build local capacity not only to meet the increasing demand for infrastructure, but to maximize social and economic benefits to alleviate poverty. The World Bank in an attempt to build local capacity to address some economic and social problems in a number of African countries designed a programme for public works and infrastructure. Projects are implemented through a public works and employment agency called AGETIP - a French acronym for *Agence d’execution des Travaux d’Interet Public contre le sous-emploi*. The Agency was first launched in Senegal in 1989 as a private non-profit NGO for contract management as a result of the inadequate capacity of the public sector in African countries to deliver infrastructure programmes quickly and efficiently (Pean and Watson, 1993). Whilst the AGETIP approach encapsulates and operationalises the social and economic dimensions of sustainability, the environmental aspects are not adequately addressed. Public works and infrastructure projects and facilities create not only economic and social benefits to the community but raises different and at times complex issues concerning the natural environment. Clean water and sanitation, public parks, safe disposal of solid waste, better roads, education, health, and recreational facilities provide various environmental benefits. Public works and infrastructure plays a vital role in the prosperity of society and it is important to understand all aspects of its relationship to sustainability. There is therefore a need for a holistic approach to operationalising sustainability. It is now generally accepted that to do nothing about the environment is not an option. The way forward is to gradually develop a culture to incorporate environmental sustainability in the design and implementation of infrastructure projects in developing countries, whether large or small.

This paper briefly explains the principles and application of sustainability and discusses the need to adopt a holistic approach in the design and implementation of public works and infrastructure projects in developing countries. The findings based on the experience of from recently completed public works and infrastructure projects are discussed within the context of sustainability.

## **PRINCIPLES AND APPLICATION OF SUSTAINABILITY**

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002 world leaders agreed to commit themselves according to the following:

*“Encourage and promote the development of a 10 year framework of programmes in support of regional and national initiatives to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production to promote social and economic development within the capacity of ecosystems by addressing and where appropriate de-linking economic growth and environmental degradation through improving efficiency and sustainability in the use of resources and production processes, and reduce resource degradation, pollution and waste”*

Sustainability is defined as the “capacity for continuance into the long term future” (Forum for the Future, 1999). According to Brundtland (1987) sustainable development is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Sustainable development is underpinned by a number of principles reflected in the complex interaction of three dimensions, namely environmental, economic and social. Whilst the social and economic principles are often underplayed or not well understood, there is generally very little difficulty in understanding the environmental principles that concerns the efficient use of resources, recycling, conservation, energy consumption and climate change. There are different models for sustainable development all reflecting to varying degree the need to integrate economic growth (wealth creation) with social and environmental integrity. Figure 1 is the Triple Link Sustainability Model illustrating the need to consider the interaction between social, economic and environmental aspects in development.

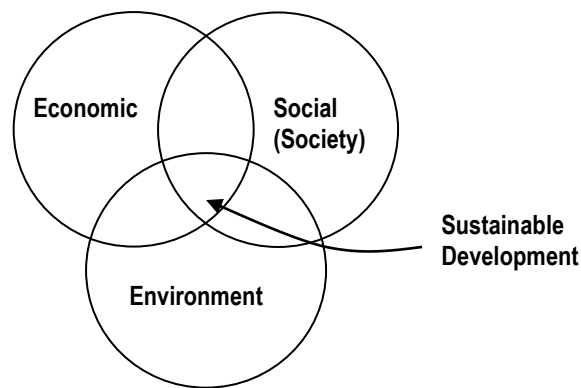


Figure 1 Triple Link Sustainability Model

### **Sustainability in Public Works and Infrastructure Projects**

Within the context of construction ‘sustainability’ has been defined as the creation and responsible management of a healthy built environment based on the prudent use of resources and ecological principles (Kibert 1994). Public works and infrastructure activities are intrinsically linked with the environment and have a significant impact in both developing and developed countries. According to Parkin et al (2003) the UK construction industry:

- Consumes 6 tonnes of material per person;
- Freshly quarries 80% of its aggregates (only 20% being recycled);
- Generates 70 million tonnes of waste per annum;
- Throws away 13 million tonnes of unused material delivered to sites per annum

There are also significant problems with the use of non-replaceable natural resources and replaceable resources in Africa. It is now recognised that a responsible approach should be taken

to safeguard the built environment (Parkin, 2004). As a result the environmental, economic and social impact of large infrastructure projects is now subject to increasing critical scrutiny. For example, the effects of large dams, roads, airports and waste disposal plants have been noted to create various conflicts between economic growth, the quality of life and the environment. Decisions concerning major infrastructure projects should therefore be driven by robust evaluation processes to enable potential conflicts to be identified and solved. Where there is a need to implement particular types of projects, this should be based not on economics alone. Solutions should be developed that will mitigate any adverse environmental and social effects (ICE, 2004). Small scale projects are no exception and should also be subjected to sustainability assessment.

### **The AGETIP Approach**

The World Bank in an attempt to address the capacity deficit, unemployment and urban poverty in a number of African countries developed a programme for public works and infrastructure projects. The specific objectives of AGETIP approach are as follows:

- (a) to create employment by the application of employment-intensive construction technologies and selecting projects that are economically and socially beneficial
- (b) to build local capacity to improve the operational efficiency of the local construction industry; and
- (c) to improve the effectiveness of public institutions (local and central government) in maintaining infrastructure assets.

There are usually several components involved. The first is an investment component for construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of mainly physical and social infrastructure – roads, schools, health facilities, police and fire stations, courts, public parks, playgrounds and markets. This is made up of donor and counterpart funds from central/local governments and communities to create a sense of project ownership. There are two types of operations: (1) public works including routine maintenance of roads, rehabilitation of drainage system; and urban infrastructure; and (2) public services, notably street cleaning, clearing up spoiled urban areas and waste collection and disposal. The second component is supervision and monitoring through technical support (engineering design and construction project management) and capacity building through training for the beneficiaries and small-and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The third component is usually study activities aimed at investigating more specific issues such as improving procurement practices, urban infrastructure maintenance management; private sector participation and the preparation of urban environment projects.

AGETIP was created as a non-governmental, non-profit, result oriented organisation based on the concept of delegated contract management. This means managing every aspect of a project on behalf of central and governments. The approach as Miles (1994) put it depends on bypassing cumbersome and bureaucratic government procedures, paying competitive salaries to a well motivated national staff of high calibre and making extensive use of the private sector. Subprojects - small and medium size labour-based public works and infrastructure projects are designed to take account of inadequate capacity of local governments, the limited output of



contractors, constraints of local consultants and the abundant supply of labour particularly semi-skilled and unskilled labour. The implementation of projects based on a Procedure Manual usually follows a three-stage process. First, AGETIP hires consultants to prepare technical engineering studies, designs and bidding documents for projects and to supervise works. Second, it then issues an invitation for bidding to contractors to implement the projects, evaluates bids, and signs contracts with the most responsive bidder. Third, as construction progresses, the quality of the works is evaluated and payments are made to consultants and contractors until the final handover of works.

To date there are a number of AGETIP agencies created in African cities mainly in the French-speaking countries (see Table 1). These countries have implemented public works and infrastructure projects worth over an estimated US\$ 750 to 500 million. A network called AFRICATIP was also created to co-ordinate and strengthen the activities of member agencies.

Table 1: Network of AGETIP Agencies

<b>Country</b>	<b>Name of Agency</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Name of Agency</b>
Benin	AGETUR	Madagascar	AGETIPA
Burkina Faso	FASO BAARA	Mali	AGETIP
Burundi	ABUTIP	Mauritania	AMEXTIP
Cape Verde	ADECABO	Niger	NIGETIP
Central Africa	AGETIPE CAF	Rwanda	ASSETIP
Djibouti	ADETIP	Senegal	AGETIP
The Gambia	GAMWORKS	Togo	AGETUR
Guinea	AGETIPE		
Guinea Bissau	AGEOPPE		

Source: AFRICATIP Network

## **Discussions**

AGETIP has been considered to be a successful programme or effort certainly from the viewpoint of the World Bank. But there are a number of issues to assess the impact from a sustainability perspective. First, there are the economic dimensions. The need to create short-term

employment for local consultants, contractors and the unemployed urban youth by selecting projects which can be implemented using employment-intensive methods is central to the AGETIP approach. Traditional procedures for designing projects and awarding contracts were considered inappropriate for labour-intensive SMEs as they do not reflect the social and economic context. By 1996, just four years after implementation, it was reported that AGETIP in Senegal had executed more than 1,250 subprojects and created 18,000 person/years of employment. The number of engineering consulting firms and construction contractors also rose significantly (Ref). In The Gambia, the number of contractors registered with the agency increased significantly to over 300 compared to 90 registered with the public sector works department. Similarly, the number of local consultants also increased from a few to about 20 registered with the agency (Robinson, 2000). However, there were significant problems with capacity in The Gambia characterised by lengthy delays and time overruns in projects (see Figure 2). In Senegal, labour costs to the total costs of subprojects varied between 23 to 28% above the threshold of 20% but below the expected 33%. However, in The Gambia, the objective of relatively higher labour (employment) ratios or coefficients may have been undermined by significantly higher cost of materials in relation to the total cost of subprojects due to lack of local capacity in materials production (Robinson, 2000). There are indications that the cost of materials in some projects is higher than 90%.

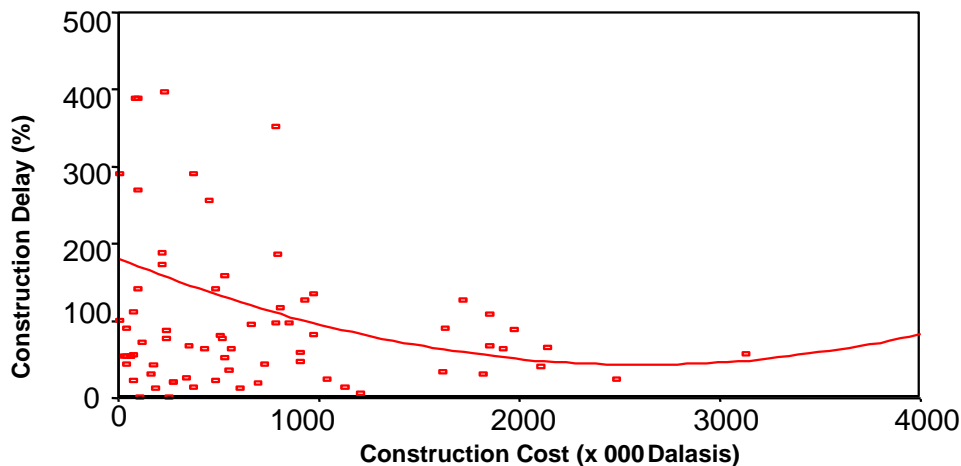


Figure 2: The relationship between construction cost and construction delay  
Source: Robinson (2000)

Figure 2 shows that capacity problems are pronounced at the lower end of the cost spectrum. About 250 out of the 331 contractors registered are in the lowest category. These are generally small contractors with limited technical and managerial capacity and are therefore unable to handle even the smallest projects. There are far less problems at the other end of the spectrum where larger contractors operate.

The World Bank (1998) argued that the AGETIP approach was also required to address widespread corruption and bureaucracy affecting the efficiency and management of public works and infrastructure projects. Unlike the traditional public works procedure noted for lengthy and corrupt procurement processes and excessive delays in payments to contractors, accounts under the AGETIP approach were paid in an average of three days and the bidding process was significantly reduced. External audits are regularly conducted unlike government agencies where donors do not always have the power. There are different types of audit conducted including monthly or bimonthly management audits, financial audits every six months and technical audits every year.

A far more significant factor is the long term economic effect of building institutional and technical capacity and maintaining infrastructure assets across different sectors to prolong the economic life of infrastructure. The World Bank (1998) pointed out that the 'agency was created in the hope of reducing obstacles to the efficient implementation of those large scale public works programme that had the potential to reduce unemployment. AGETIP Gambia (GAMWORKS) following initial funding from the World Bank now manages projects for central and local governments with funding from other donor agencies although larger projects are often carried out by international consultants and contractors. AGETIP's procurement practices also seem to be leading to changes in government procurement procedures. For example, a public procurement agency has recently been established in the Gambia to manage all other government procurement activities, apart from those civil works procurement currently managed by AGETIP Gambia (GAMWORKS). AGETIP's institutional impact is substantial in building local and regional capacity.

The social impact of AGETIP is also significant as SMEs, local communities and the unemployed are major beneficiaries. In fact the AGETIP programme was designed following the social effects of the structural adjustment programmes of the mid eighties in Senegal and other African countries (Miles, 1994). The serious political and social unrest prompted the then president of Senegal, Abdou Diouf, with assistance from the World Bank to develop measures to deal with violent riots precipitated by high and rising unemployment, particularly in the urban areas. The significant levels of employment created for urban settlers and SMEs helped to stabilise the situation caused partly to rapid urbanisation and decreasing employment opportunities. The steady stream of AGETIP projects facilitated the development of entrepreneurial culture among the unemployed and the creation of many SMEs. But the extent to which the programme have reversed some of the social problems caused by deteriorating urban infrastructure, and degradation of the urban environment is not known. Social infrastructure projects implemented through AGETIP projects in a number of African cities and towns have also increased access to education and health services necessary for enhancing human development to support the productive sector. Employment creation through public works and infrastructure projects also have the potential to improve social status and empowerment of urban youths previously unemployed, through earning higher incomes and wages. However, the lack of employment and income opportunities in African cities will continue to create enormous problems such as crime, vandalism, homelessness, drug culture and other anti-social behaviour. Projects under the AGETIP approach have the potential to revitalise urban areas, and will serve to galvanise individuals and local communities if properly designed and implemented.

Whilst there are explicit objectives and some performance indicators (although this is not always rigorously designed and monitored) to assess the social and economic impact of public works and infrastructure projects, the environmental aspects is not often integrated in the design and monitoring of projects. Many of the projects on the AGETIP programme such as street cleaning, clearing of spoiled areas, drainage, waste collection and disposal have major environmental benefits. But there is a need to address specific issues in project development, design and implementation of public works and infrastructure projects (Pitts, 2004). Careful consideration should therefore be given to the following:

- Materials selection and use;
- Construction operations;
- Site planning and management;
- Recycling and disposal; and
- Waste and energy minimisation.

Gradually developing a culture for integrating the environmental aspects and rewarding performance for small and medium enterprises in the supply chain as construction activities will have a significant effect on the built environment. The need to ‘think globally and act locally’ on environmental issues cannot be overemphasised. Figure 3 shows a framework for developing a culture for incorporating the environmental dimension of sustainability in public works and infrastructure projects.

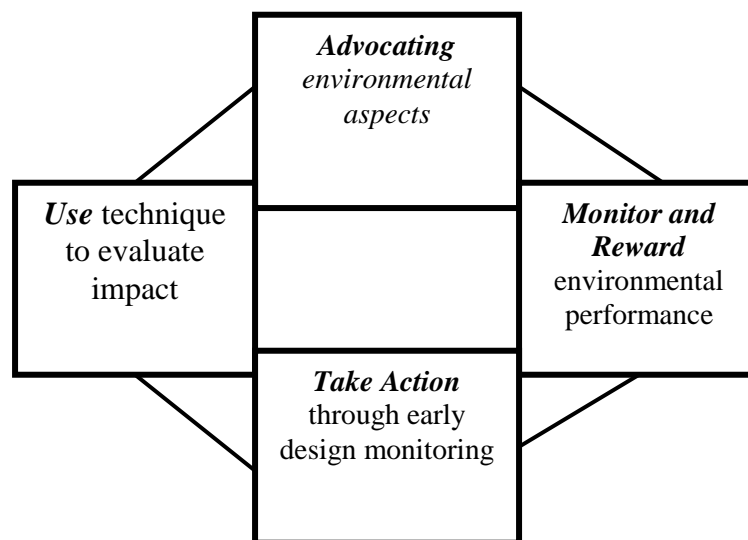


Figure 3: Framework for Environmental Sustainability

Given the massive scale of public works and infrastructure projects being implemented in a number of African countries, integrating the environmental dimension in projects by ‘thinking globally and acting locally’ will have a significant impact. There are opportunities for the network of AGETIP agencies to take a lead in advocating the benefits of integrating environmental aspects in design and there is also an incentive for the SMEs to respond to the challenge of improving the sustainability of public works and infrastructure projects in terms of design, construction and maintenance by monitoring and rewarding performance.

## CONCLUSION

The AGETIP approach in Africa for managing labour-intensive public works with transparent, streamlined and monitoring procedures have significantly improved the management of projects and donor finances. The approach has been successfully replicated in other African countries after the pioneering example in Senegal and there is the development network through AFRICATIP to share best practices. The AGETIP model have resulted in small scale development of contractors and consultants as it creates a demand and market for the services of small contracting and consulting firms by freeing up procurement by means of dividing works into small contracts and providing quick payments.

Some aspects of the social and economic dimensions of sustainability have been addressed in terms of the problems of capacity deficit, employment creation and poverty alleviation but it is vital to extend this further and to collect information on economic and social impact (e.g. permanent employment) beyond the temporary jobs created. However, the environmental dimension is not adequately addressed. This paper has argued that the sustainability of public works and infrastructure projects could be significantly improved by a careful review of the AGETIP concept and by integrating the environmental aspects in the design and monitoring of future projects. The link between the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability should therefore be strengthened.

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### ***About the Author***

Dr. Herbert Robinson is a Senior Lecturer in construction economics and financial management at London South Bank University. Until recently, he was a Senior Research Associate in the Department of Civil and Building Engineering at Loughborough University where he conducted research in knowledge management, performance management, and knowledge transfer in infrastructure projects procured through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). After graduating from Reading University, he worked with international consultants Arup on major projects in the UK. He also worked as a senior cost engineer and a consultant in a World Bank funded study on public sector procurement in a developing country before returning to academia to pursue research. He holds a PhD in infrastructure planning and a PhD in infrastructure investment and resource management.

# THE POTENTIAL FOR THE APPLICATION OF SUSTAINABLE TECHNOLOGIES IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN CAMEROON

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**ABSTRACT:** *Africans in the Diaspora have and are funding personal and community construction projects back home where execution has been done and is being done in an unsustainable fashion. In Cameroon designers and contractors hardly exploit the abundant natural resources that exist in the realisation of construction projects. Effective exploitation of these resources through sustainable technologies, could lead to economic, environmental and social benefits which in turn improve the poverty condition of Cameroonians. The consideration of sustainable technologies at the early design stage of projects makes it possible for projects to be realised in remote areas, contributing to sustainable development. This article explores available natural resources in Cameroon which could be used in developing sustainable technologies in construction projects. It highlights the fact that existing institutions could be used as vectors to expand these technologies to the remote areas without a substantial extra cost. Sustainable technologies can facilitate the use of other technologies such as Information and Communication Technology which is increasingly becoming a necessary tool in the developmental process of any society.*

**Key words:** African Diaspora, Cameroon, Natural resources, Sustainable technologies.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The World Summit on Sustainable Development re-echoed the Millennium Declaration goals with an additional requirement-the provision of shelter. Infrastructure and the built environment is one of the priorities of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) which aims at seeing billions of dollars flowing into Africa. Africans in the Diaspora are also a source of finances for infrastructural development in Africa.

However, critics like Harrison and Huntington (2000) have pointed out that for the past fifty years, investment in infrastructural development of Africa has failed to produce the rapid economic growth, democracy and social justice hoped for. On the contrary it has created widespread economic, environmental and social problems. Incorporation of sustainable technologies could be one of the ways to avoiding the above problems.

Three major domains of sustainable technologies have been examined; two of which are renewable energy technologies from the sun and from biomass and the other being water saving and conservation systems. In some circumstances these sustainable technologies, serve as back-up sources where there exist other alternative sources and as first hand source where there are no other technologies.

A brief summary on institutions that could aid in the expansion of sustainable technologies is also examined. The usefulness of these technologies in the government and private institutions have also been analysed with emphasis on how they can benefit the society in alleviating poverty.

## **2 SUSTAINABLE TECHNOLOGIES**

Most social services in any society depend on the availability of electricity and water. Their limitation therefore inhibits economic and social progress of the society. The lack or limited supply of electricity means schools, hospitals, state's institutions will not operate optimally. In brief, electricity facilitates the spread of Information and Communication Technology which plays a vital role in the economy of any country.

Cameroon's electricity sector is facing a rapid increase in demand while the generating capacities have not been renewed for at least the past 20 years (Tchouate et al, 2003). This has led to power shortages. 62% of the population of Cameroon lives in the rural area where the electrification rate is less than 5 % (Tchouate et al 2003). It is still very fresh in the memory of Cameroonians of electricity rationing at certain hours and at certain places.

The water sector is also facing the same crisis. Of late there have been acute water shortages in cities like Yaounde and Douala. Even when water is available in Douala at certain times of the year the quality is debatable. In some rural areas there virtually exist no water supply lines from the single state water supply corporation. In 2004, only 39% of the rural communities had improved access to drinking water (78% in urban areas), and only 66% in rural communities had access to sanitation (92% in urban areas) (WHO & UNICEF). This situation has contributed to high child mortality rates, high incidence of diarrhoeal diseases, and other detrimental health, etc.

The implications of the consequences of shortage of electricity and water supply leads to a retardation of the economy and an unhealthy population. This in turn has inflicted massive poverty on the population.

The Chambers Dictionary (2003) defines poverty as "the state of being poor; need, want of necessities; a lack or deficiency; meagreness or inadequacy; a band of pipers. This definition is similar to the Cameroonians definition found in (IPRSP of Cameroon 2000) which states "poverty is the absence of material or financial resources needed to satisfy basic needs such as food, housing, health care, education and safe water. Those mostly affected by poverty are: disabled people; those afflicted with HIV and/or AIDS; women and children; asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced people; ethnic and religious minorities (Mohiddin 2001).

The consequences of poverty on the society have been great. Prostitution, moral decadence, juvenile delinquency, insecurity, tribal wars, high mortality rate, institutional decays, poor educational standards, loss of family solidarity, involvement in sorcery are perceptions of poverty. Poverty seems to be the crux of today's societal ill health. It has been demonstrated that poverty is directly related to sexual behaviour (Mburano, 2001). In all its ramifications poverty does not allow the poor to protect themselves from STD and HIV/AIDS (Eyong 2003). No wonder HIV/AIDS prevalence is on the increase daily.



Poverty is amongst the world's greatest preoccupation today; Paragraph Eleven of the Millennium declaration proclaimed the following undertaking: "We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want" (United Nations, 2000). NEPAD on its part sees sustainable energy as a tool to eradicating poverty from the African continent. Sustainable technologies as a whole could booster NEPAD's and the United Nations objective of poverty eradication.

Sustainable technology as part of green building is a term used to describe technologies that comply with the principles of economic, social, and ecological sustainability. It ranges from the microcosm of designing small objects for everyday use, through to the macrocosm of designing buildings, cities, and the earth's physical surface" e.g. photovoltaic technologies. Sustainable or 'green building' design and construction is the opportunity to use our resources more efficiently while creating healthier and more energy-efficient homes. Although there is no magic formula, success comes in the form a leaving a lighter footprint on the environment through conservation of resources, while at the same time balancing energy-efficient, cost-effective, low-maintenance products for our construction needs. In other words, green design involves finding the delicate balance between homebuilding and the sustainable environment.

In case of technologies that depend on electricity, two supply options are available. These are the extension of the existing grid lines and the decentralised network that depends on any available exploitable resources. The latter could be taken as an alternative today as it can supply places in total need of water and electricity or partial need where these technologies can serve as back-up systems. A brief summary of these sustainable technologies is given below:

## **2.1. Electricity**

Cameroon's electricity sector is facing a rapid increase in demand while the generating capacities have not been renewed for at least the past 20 years (P.M Tchouate et 2003). This has lead to power shortages in the country and has so many effects. Whereas the main cities have unreliable supply of electricity, the remote areas virtually have little or no access to electricity. Alternative sources such as available sunlight could be used to supply electricity in the remote areas.

### **2.1.1 Solar energy**

Forty-seven percent of the surface area of the African continent benefits from annual solar energy of at least 2100 KWh/m<sup>2</sup>; 27% between 1,900 and 2,100, and the rest 26% between 1,500 and 1,900(maguysama, 2006). Interestingly the places with high solar energy density are places with high population density except the Sahara and the Kalahari deserts. All geographic parameters favour solar energy systems in Africa and Cameroon in particular (maguysama, 2006). The humid South of Cameroon has an average solar energy density of 4.9KWh/d/m<sup>2</sup> rising towards the North to about 5.8. (maguysama, 2006). The theoretical national mean is estimated at 2 327.5 TWh, about 20 times that of hydroelectric power which is at 1.115TWh (maguysama, 2006).

Solar energy could be used to help meet the electricity supply needs of the population especially in the rural areas where grid lines do not exist at all.

### **2.1.2. Photovoltaic cells**

A PV system consists of one or more PV modules, which convert sunlight directly into electricity, and a range of other system components that may include an AC/DC inverter, back-up source of energy, battery to store the electricity until it is needed, battery charger, control centre, mounting structures and miscellaneous wires and fuses (Roaf et al 2001).

### **2.1.3. Biomass**

Biomass is fuel generated from plants, straw and biomass waste stream (Shell, 2006). Cameroon readily possesses all these sources of biomass. Waste streams from the industrial Douala city, from timber factories in the East Province are sources that can be utilised to produce power. Rice farms in Ndop, a high degree of soil fertility in the South West province are all potential areas that can provide straw and plants to be used in a biomass plant. These are all renewable sources. The various processes of Biomass fuel generation are analysed below.

#### **2.1.3.1. Anaerobic digestion**

This is the break down of organic material within a vessel or controlled environment to generate biogas which is about 60% methane and 40% carbon dioxide. This biogas can now be used in burning to generate heat and electricity. This is known as combined heat and power. Animal waste from cows, pigs and poultry as well as food processing, agricultural and municipal solid wastes are examples of feedstock that can be utilized in anaerobic digester. Banana cultivation, organic part of urban waste, breweries and food industries, slaughter houses and breeding are different categories of waste identified in Cameroon(Tchouate et al, 2003)..

#### **2.1.3.2. Gasification**

This is the thermal decomposition of organic material to produce biogas that is used in burning to generate heat and electricity. Residues from wood processing, forest residues, cotton stalks and palm nut shell are potential organic material sources identified in Cameroon that could be used in the gasification process (Tchouate et al, 2003)..

In cities like Douala these technologies could even be considered as waste treatment technology and the electricity recovered as a by-product.

## **2.2. Water Savings And Water Conservation**

Unsafe water is a source of 80% of illness in the developing world, and at any given time, 50% of the children in the developing world are suffering from one of a number of waterborne diseases (Oldfield, 2006). As of 2001 only 39% of the rural population had improved access to drinking water and 78% in urban areas. Improved access to sanitation stood at 66% in rural areas and 99% in urban areas (WHO/UNICEF). This has greater consequences on high infant and child mortality rates and other waterborne diseases. As such there is necessity to explore all other sustainable technologies to help provide solutions to this water shortages or at least to fulfil one of the Millennium Development Goals-commitment of people in the developing world without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015(World Bank Group).

### **2.2.1. Rain Water**

Rather than allow the abundant and valuable resource of water from the sky to go to waste it could be collected and used in situation where other water systems are not available. Even if other water systems are available rain water could save a family huge amount of bills. Rain water is collected from the roof to a storage tank from where it is pumped into the house. Electricity from PV system could be used to run the pump.

### **2.2.2. Grey water**

Grey water is the slightly sullied water from showers, baths, and faucets; it even appears grey (Daniel D. Chiras 2000). Rather than direct grey water to flow into the environment and mess the top soil structure, flood, and collapse its pore space, and make clays more sticky and unworkable or even to the septic tank; it could be directed to water gardens at the back yard. Grey water could also be reconnected to flush the house bidets and toilets. This helps save much water and high bills. Grey water accounts for 50 to 80% of the total wastewater effluent of a household.

### **2.2.3. Well water**

Well water system in localities can be improved by building a protection wall along its perimeter to protect children from drowning. A pulley system for pulling water can also be hanged over in space to ease getting water out of the well. Also with a simple DC pumps, electricity could be gotten from a PV directly linked to the pump. When the sun is shining electricity is generated and the pump functions and pumps water out of the well to a storage tank for later use. It could be linked directly with the house water system.

### **2.2.4. Composting toilets**

A compost toilet is a dry or waterless toilet, i.e. one that doesn't use water to take the waste somewhere else; it also allows natural processes to produce useful compost, after a resting period depending on the type of toilet. There are usually two chambers – one in use and one resting. A typical toilet would use one chamber for a year, then change to the second chamber and allow the first to decompose for a year before emptying. They do not smell, as long as there is a vent pipe, and a drain to take away excess liquid. A handful of a soak (straw or sawdust etc.) is dropped into the toilet after each use. This is because bacteria like to eat a balanced diet of carbon and nitrogen, and as human waste contains a lot of nitrogen, if they don't get enough carboniferous material (like sawdust, straw, etc) the decomposition process shall be slow.

## **3 USE OF INSTITUTIONS AS A MEDIUM TO FACILITATE SUSTAINABLE TECHNOLOGIES**

The way in which Cameroon government has organised its administrative structure, makes it easier and cheaper to incorporate these technologies through co-ordinating its purchases across all departments and purchasing in bulk with generous discounts. An examination of the potential use of these technologies with respect to these administrative units is presented below:

### **3.1. Education**

The award of contracts for the construction of primary schools and secondary schools in Cameroon is an annual event. A huge number of schools are being constructed each year. PV

systems can be integrated during the design phase to the benefit of the population. The adult literacy level will improve as most of adult classes are operated in the evenings. The use of pedagogic materials could be optimised as more computers, videos, televisions, and projectors supplied will be put into use. This is an imperative ingredient to the educational cycle of students in this era. In fact, the use of ICT contributes to economic, social and environmental development and depends on the availability of electricity. Biomass and Solar electricity are readily potential sources that can be exploited to meet this challenge.

A healthy society is an economic one. One cannot underestimate the degree of poverty inflicted on any society as a result of ill health caused by waterborne diseases. In fact there is no life in the absence of a source of water. To this end rain water, grey water, as water saving and conservation systems in schools can play vital roles. Composting toilets can be of great importance where there is no water at all and is better than traditional pit toilets in schools.

### **3.2. Health**

New health units are being constructed on annual basis, and could be constructed with PV cells incorporated. This could improve on vaccines storage systems. Also night emergencies will be challenged. These consequently will improve the community's health standard and mortality rate.

### **3.3. Security**

The Cameroonian state lays a lot of emphasis on the security on its citizens. There is a good geographical spread of security departments such as the police stations, gendarmeries, customs departments, army camps and barracks and prison yards. These departments could improve their services with the exploitation of the electricity generated from PV cells. Some of these departments are real in the remote areas that the only logical means of electricity supply is solar as grid lines will cover longer distances. In fact customs departments, army camps and barracks are usually located at the frontiers. Also the availability of electricity means the evil activities that go with darkness can be challenged. Also lighting in the evening promotes small night businesses such as bars video clubs that can generate some income to housewives who work during the day in farms and can now spend some few ours in small evening businesses. Of course good water systems can booster these small businesses.

### **3.4. Telecommunication**

With the advent of mobile phones the two dominant companies in Cameroon are Mobile Telephone Network (MTN), the South African Mobile Telephone Company and Orange, French Company. Their recent expansion has been rapid, providing telephone networks to local villages in the remote areas. The use of PV systems as back-up systems could be installed beside local generators. The PV systems could even be used to generate electricity for use by these mobile phone stations. Also the implementation of PV systems in the mobile telephony would mean that it will be possible to provide communication networks to rural areas without electricity. This will lead to all the advantages that go with the availability of mobile telephones and the internet. Even the Africans in the Diaspora can reach their families, monitor projects with the use of WEB-CAMS from the Western world without necessarily being physically present.

### **3.5. Financial Institutions**

It is very common to hear of the popular road arm robbery known by various local names such as “coupeurs de route” in the Northern provinces of Cameroon. People coming from provincial headquarters are attacked with suspicion of possessing money from monthly pay. With the introduction and expansion of financial institution in the local areas that will provide services to the rural masses, the risk of travelling with money will no longer be there. These financial institutions depend on electricity to operate machines which are often not available. PV technology will allow financial institutions to expand into remote areas.

### **3.6. Religious Institutions (Churches and Mosques)**

There are many religious institutions in Cameroon, some still holding spreading the gospel to reach everyone. All these intentions have impacts on moral behaviour on the society. The implementation and integration of PV systems will help spread this gospel thus improving social standards of life among youths who constitute the productive class of the economy. Attendance of evening bible studies will increase as many villagers prefer the evenings due to the fact that they normally go for farming during the day.

### **3.7. Local head quarters (Palaces)**

Most Cameroon’s localities are being ruled by local chiefs with so many wives and many children. In fact this writer’s junior sister refused to be the 81<sup>st</sup> wife of a chief in a locality. 80 wives with an average of 5 children means the palace will be made of 481 persons over a ten years period. These chieftaincies could be electrified using PV systems and an extension to the local subordinates provided. Some local chieftaincies do run primary schools that can exploit the electricity provided by PV systems. The impact of princes and princesses not educated can be very disastrous and even go on for decades. This is because the chieftaincy is hereditary and if the princes and princesses are not educated, the death of a king means the successor will be an uneducated one in this present era. Also the provision of good water systems will go a long way to combat waterborne diseases that could easily become epidemic.

### **3.8. Government administrators**

The government system in place institutes provinces, divisions, districts, and sub districts for easy administration of the people. Accessibility to infrastructure and electricity decreases with decrease in size of the administrative units. Implementing the PV systems to these administrative units will lead to improvement in the use of ICT and thus improvement in services provided by the government authorities in place.

## **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In any projects, personal or community projects, Africans in the Diaspora should recommend a consideration of sustainable technologies in the design phase. The Africans in the Diaspora should also contact a competent advisor for any of the sustainable technologies.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The sustainable technologies presented here are not an attempt to replace the institutions that are in place such as AES-SONEL and SNEC in the case of Cameroon. A lot of people live in remote areas and are thus deprived of basic utilities. As a result of this, the poor remain poorer in their various locations and continuously depend on external help. Implementation of these technologies among others will enhance economic, social and environmental development. This will lead to a reduction in pressure on the Africans in the Diaspora. The society including Africans in the Diaspora can then turn their attention to work on new projects for the growth of the society.

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### **ABBREVIATIONS**

FCFA: Franc des Colonies Français D`afriques

HIV/AIDS: Human Immnodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

AC/DC: Alternating Current/Direct Current

PV: Photovoltaic

IPRSP: Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

WHO

UNICEF

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**CONNECTIONS AND TRANSFORMATION IN THE VIEW OF DIASPORAS:  
WHERE DO DIASPORAS GO WRONG AND WHERE DO THEY GET IT RIGHT IN  
REALIZING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ASPIRATION?**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The contribution made by the Diaspora and forms of such contribution is a subject of extensive dialogue, continuous debate and at variance interpretation. Different people view differently the forms of contribution and the type of contribution made by the Diasporas to their home countries and in particular their communities. This paper is yet another input to explore cross-cutting issues that would open up a new thinking and philosophy that would make Diasporas contribution in line with the sustainable development goal more meaningfully in the contemporary world environment.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The prospective role of a Diasporas contribution in national development or community development efforts has in recent years gained a rising recognition, both in political and academic circles as well as among Diasporas themselves. At present, no doubt many Diasporas in the UK and around the globe are of view of taking a new approach as full partners in development in their home countries and communities. To cite the most obvious examples, members of the Tanzania diasporas living in the UK and elsewhere including USA, have significantly contributed to development of their communities, effectively helping as what the late President Nyerere of Tanzania and now the current president Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete consider as seeing your homeland as a place that made you what you are today.

While this introductory piece sought to ascertain the issue of connections and transformation in the view of Diasporas, aiming to rethink where do Diaspora go wrong and where they get it right within the current global context, the following discussion will mainly focus on what I consider as a challenge for both of us as Diaspora in general and that of our involvement at different levels with our communities. My intent is to use this space to spread head available alternatives that haven't been tried or not received enough attention in order to engage ourselves as Diasporas in constructive support to our countries and communities and hence widen the discussion on these issues.



## **2.0 WHAT ARE THE MODALITIES OF PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT AS DIASPORAS**

Why are we talking of new thinking today? Are the previous approaches that have been used by Diasporas lost meaning? Is there anything wrong like sending money home? To help pay for school fees? Building a house? Setting up a business at home? Contribution to refurbish hospitals or Schools etc?

Away from traditional Diaspora concern, where should we rally our resources as enabler to achieve high multiplier effects? Where in long-term could see business community influenced by the Diaspora emerging to renovate our rural infrastructure, rural economic whose current status is falling day after day?

I am certain it is time to act and move away from traditional philosophy into more reliable and practical involvement that will bring solution to our communities and to our countries. We shouldn't forget many countries around the global are undergoing transformation which among other thing is to empower the private sector.

In our daily involvement and support to our communities how are we taking into equation the role of the private sector? Are we giving our communities we seem to help and support a "fish" or gears to enable them to be fishermen?

How are we connecting the group we tend to support with home-based scientists and market information? or facilitating access to up to date and relevant information on products they could produce and help those developing networks of expertise and access to outside market? In Tanzania there are sign where local groups are now demanding access to sell some of their art products e.g. Tingatinga painting and asking for state-of-the-art machinery to improve their products.

Is there any strategy to create scientific Diaspora Knowledge Networks? Would such network create important channels for Diaspora engagement in supporting communities in countries of origin and linking them to their global counterparts? What are the various ways into to which channel Diaspora resources could be used towards improving national communities.

While we are aware of strategies such as:

- Role of the Diaspora in reversing the brain drain for example in line with NEPAD initiatives
- Modalities for the creation of a Diaspora fund for investment
- Modalities for the development of scientific and technology network
- Establishing of a Diaspora data base to promote and facilitate collaboration etc

As Diaspora we need to go further from just concentrating to know what is the impact of remittances in our countries and communities instead try to respond differently in line with challenges which continue to put our communities in mass poverty.

As Diasporas we need to ask ourselves, do we have the same footing? Are interested in economic development and development for communities? How do we take on body real issue such as poverty, malnutrition and try to stop or intervene on going enslavement, exploitation or resources of people from our countries?

Now is becoming clear that Africa should be allowed to take responsibility of Africa development on its own hand. But the problem we have is to identify sustainable community development needs that will create partnerships. As Diasporas, how do we provide or create opportunities to translate economic development in our countries and communities to benefit our people?

It is important to recognise the value of remittance. Remittance generally focuses on families. (Husbands and wives, mother and father, children, sibling, grand parents and friends). What structural approach can we develop as Diaspora that will provide more sustainable change?

Currently our support in one way or another falls along the following categories:

- helping the church
- helping for the community building including decoration
- infrastructure activities
- economic activities
- Supporting for health
- Creating scholarship funds
- Building libraries
- Sending computer home to school etc
- Helping to spread ideas of accountability
- Support communication programs
- Back up projects etc.

Now if we were to come up with a structural approach that will provide more sustainable change. Were should we put our priorities?

What do need to do as Diasporas to provide a stronger foundation to improve the way in which we provide our support?

An experience from Tanzania is very interesting. Like in other countries in Africa, there are some companies lending money to organisations that are setting up microfinance projects. To access such loans one need to develop proposal which need to be approved by a team of experts. In addition, there are active campaigns to make organisation to work within CBOs. BUT there is a dilemma which I think as Diasporas we could help. Many people in Tanzania who receive such support use the money to extract forest resources such as buying and selling timber and charcoal making and charcoal carry out business. As Diasporas could we help to add value to such business? And make their business grow?

### **3.0 ISSUES FOR REFLECTION**

I believe as Diasporas we have the ability to develop and revolutionize contemporary system of viewing transfer of funds as a last resort to our communities. We need to reconsider and develop systems that will help to create:

- Moral support that would enable people deal with livelihoods coping strategies
- Think to plan projects that are sustainable
- Help to create business link and social networks beyond the communities and countries
- Help to develop a culture of understanding the value of available resources and if possible the value of such resources at world market. Think of “sandalwood” tree that produces oil that plays crucial ingredients in making of perfumes. Whereas a local person get 0.01% of the value, a ton of sandalwood sale minimum US\$15,000. This also affect other tree species which its true value is not public known where is extracted. Those of you from Liberia, Cameroon, DRC, Congo and Tanzania can understand.
- Help our communities understand dynamics in the foreign markets and terms and contracts.
- Use part of support to develop a system that will use media to reach out beyond the ‘family’

I do understand that creating awareness of right to resources, value of available resources, etc might not be easy to auction to regimes where bottom up approach don’t apply or where democracy is owned by few individuals Nevertheless, as Diaspora there is a need to work with our societies as a group if we would like to see sustainable changes in the near future.

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Dr. Hildebrand Shayo is a research Fellow, at London South Bank University. Hildebrand has been in charge of major projects in Tanzania. His work has included local government restructuring and development planning, regional restructuring manpower forecasting, manpower allocation analysis, economic feasibility studies, environmental and economic impact studies. In addition, many involvements have involved in door clients training from public sector, private sector NGOs and at the university.

Recently (June 2006) Hildebrand has been in charge as local counterpart expert of a project financed by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland to prepare proposal, terms of reference and design for the Independent Monitoring of the Forestry sector in Tanzania. Hildebrand is also a resource person to BBC- UK and UNEP and a season lecture to University of Dar es Salaam.

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## **E-learning Infrastructure for Sustainable Development**

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### *Abstract*

*E-learning is an emerging ICT technology being used to increase access to education and community learning as a whole. An infrastructure for “On-Line” Learning commonly referred to as Electronic Learning (or E-learning for short) is introduced and discussed.*

*Training and educational infrastructure is one of the corner stones for sustainable development for building reliable and appropriate human resources in a wide range of skills. This paper addresses cost effective learning and skills development through E-learning infrastructure, as part of a sustainable development strategy.*

*E-Learning system for Communities and Enterprise (ECOMMES), an e-learning environment, is a particularly attractive, progressive and customisable learning installation with no budgetary constraints. It brings hitherto, facilities available only to big corporate institutions to developing Communities, and SME (Small and Medium size Enterprises).*

*ECOMMES brings to play the role of emerging software agent technology, (an application of Artificial Intelligence), indispensable in facilitating learning, education and skills development at the grassroots and anywhere; a cornerstone to the sustainable development of any community. As a contribution to sustainable development, it is cost effective and affordable web-based e-learning system.*

*The infrastructure of the system takes into consideration the shortage and inadequate specialised skills, needed to effectively manage a typical ICT infrastructure. With the deployment of a “Soft Intelligent System” tools, ECOMMES manages e-learning cost effectively, without the need for the physical presence of experts.*

*The novelty of this educational tool is the detailed profiling of Learners according to desired educational needs with a “Rich content delivery” routine; with Advise, counselling and Recommendations for learners as well as Tutors and learning providers.*

**Key words:** *Infrastructure, E-Learning, On-Line, Soft-Intelligence, Experts, ECOMMES*

## **1. Introduction**

E-learning or Electronic learning, is in two forms – web-based, through internet access and through use of removable Computer Disks (CD) learning, (or CD Learning), by play-back of pre-recorded compact disc (CD) media.

CD-ROM or Web-based technology provides potential savings on learning in general with the advantage of self-paced learning. For reasons other than cost, e-learning provided an edge of effectiveness, flexibility and easily adapts to organizational requirement.

E-learning is an emerging ICT technology being used to increase access to higher education and basic community learning as a whole.

## **2. Benefits of E-learning**

With e-learning, access to education is widened and the challenge of expanding access to limited traditional learning environment is addressed. It raises the community level of education and provides more options to learners. It is a distance learning media to young as well as mature age learners/students.

A particular benefit of e-learning to Higher Education institutions is that it makes introductory courses which are common to various degree programs accessible to more students which leads to more successful student completions and increases enrolments at universities without major facility investment.

Broadband internet access is crucial to e-learning. Not all telecoms exchanges can support Broadband internet via LAND-Lines, which influences the cost of e-learning; hence the need for affordable alternative broadband, which is very critical to sustainable e-learning in remote and rural environment.

## **3. E-learning for sustainable development**

Education is very crucial and essential to sustainable development. For any sustainable development, education and learning is fundamental to skill building and economic growth. Hence a cost effective and sustainable educational platform such as e-learning would make a major contribution to sustainable development amongst other infrastructures such as transport and communication systems, which are also indispensable for community growth and sustainable development.

Amongst the key issues of e-learning are its administration, course content and available tools for both learners and course instructors for the deployment of on-line learning especially using internet access. Given e-learning necessarily entail processing of huge data; high information content of text, images and voice data, broadband internet access is very essential to take care of the heavy information flow.

The cost of broadband internet access in rural areas such as rural Yorkshire in UK and developing countries such as Cameroon in West Africa is currently very expensive compared to

that of Urban and City areas. Studies [1] show that the cost of broadband access [2] in Europe and UK in particular, is ten times less compared to the cost in a developing country such as Cameroon [2]. The cost of broadband access using cable access in Urban/city areas of UK cost about ten times less compared to broadband access in the rural Yorkshire area of the UK, through satellite access technology.

The discrepancies is vast, and yet people in the remote rural areas has less economic power or revenue potential to afford comparatively “High cost E-learning”, which is very critical for economic regeneration.

#### **4. The Case for Affordable broadband in rural Areas**

Though often thought of as an expensive system to set-up, especially for developing countries and remote rural areas with limited budget, an e-learning platform is flexible, with the advantage of self-pace learning, and initial high cost is compensated in the long run, given that e-learning reaches out to many learners in isolated and far off locations.

Though the cost of broadband in rural areas and developing countries is currently high, it is dropping following competitive new ISPs (Internet service Providers) and related industry players are coming into the market. Barely over a year ago [3]{4}, VSAT internet access was double the current prices which stand at approximately £200 per month for an equivalent of 51/13 KB/s data rate.

Affordable, broadband internet access would turn out to be very fundamental for e-learning in developing countries and rural environment, where education and skills building is most need. But the current trend of high cost of broadband access begs for a critical review of existing ICT infrastructure with appropriate government policies and key ISP players, for broadband connectivity, particularly for rural areas and developing countries, where the purchasing power is generally very low, and the need to develop skills sets for sustainable development is very high.

From the forgoing analysis, we have two extremes; Existing High cost of broadband which is unaffordable in rural/developing environments, with poor revenue/income status (low purchasing ability), where the need is high; in contrast with cheap or low cost broadband access for developed urban areas where income generating capacity is much higher than in the rural areas.

Redressing the broadband availability aspect of e-learning such that it is affordable to those in rural/developing economies is one of the major concerns for sustainable development which needs serious attention by governments and international players, to take responsibility to bring this about, with appropriate policies.

National and international policies and strategy for broadband connectivity is a key element to be pursued, to facilitate E-learning environments and hence contribute significantly to community growth and sustainable development. The stakeholders in this venture also include ISPs, Satellite Services providers and Development/Educational institutions need to be involved, with the end result that this would empower and facilitate quality design and implementation of e-learning

platforms, which is customisable and affordable to remote communities as well as and developing countries.

## **5. Cost of E-learning**

From various studies and statistics [4], technology-based training (e-learning in this case) cost almost six times more to educational establishment, compared to traditional learning.

Up-front cost to develop technology-based training is much higher than the development cost for Traditional classroom learning.

The delivery of the training to a large audience over time is where the tables are turned and the overwhelming advantage of e-learning far outweighs the hidden expenses of classroom-based training.

Further gains in e-learning are seen in maintaining and updating of on-line course content. This is where Web-based training has a major benefit even compared to other on-line learning such as CD-based learning. Because all the various content sits on a central server-computer, it is easily and affordably updated. The web-based platform also excels the “CD-Platform” e-learning, given that with web-based course updates, there is no need for new CDs or workbooks to be distributed again to the target audience. This goes to further buttress the critical need for reliable internet broadband access, which is fundamental to sustainable e-learning and therefore sustainable development.

## **6. Case study Workshop of E-learning system -Training Field service Engineer**

In a US based company, the cost of creating and delivering instructor-led customer service training workshops, for example, would be approximately \$1.1 million. And the cost for equivalent training delivered via self-paced CD-ROMs is just over \$500,000. It is now a simple and defensible decision to invest in CD-ROM-based training, since it will save approximately \$600,000 over three years.

The largest cost for technology-based training is in its initial development. This cost is the same regardless of whether there will be 10 students or 1,000 students. The cost for delivery is negligible. Thus it is easy to see that for small audiences, technology-based training might be prohibitively expensive. For large audiences, however, the potential cost savings of CD-ROM and Web-based training is incredible [1].

## **7. Education and the web: Affordable, sustainable E-Learning System**

As a contribution to research and development on E-learning, an “Expert Learning System” *“ECOMMES*, E-Learning system for Communities and Enterprise, is being developed that would facilitate, and contribute to sustainable e-learning and hence sustainable development.

ECOMMES, Provide a framework, which is applicable to SME (Small and Medium Size Enterprises) and Community groups emphasizing different formats of learning with cross-cultural needs taken care of.

Novel Technology such as “Soft Intelligence” or software agents is implemented to take care of user friendly interfaces, including voice activation/language and choice of Graphic User Interface (GUI) menu. Existing systems such as WEBCT, MOODLE partially meet some of the current challenges. The novelty of ECOMMES is that apart of the use of soft intelligence, it specializes in “Rich learning Content” with a “recommender” agent to meet up and provide “Grades of Services” according to customizable user profiles. The “Learning Agents”, or “Assistants”, come closest to providing “face to face” classroom style or instructor-led courses. The pictures in Appendix 1 portray the “Rich Content” proposed by ECOMMES, where a combination of various aspects of a Course (Video, Voice, and Course names, Course Title, Course Description and Course Links) is dynamically loaded.

The case in question and the application of ECOMMES, is to ensure sustainable development, through learning and skills development in any part of the world, be it the case of Africa as a whole or the rural and developing countries in general. ECOMMES address the problem of “Efficiency and Visualization of web data” [4], which are central to e-learning and efficient management of learner profiles with appropriate recommendations for efficient learning.

## **8. Existing E-Learning Systems**

Other attempts on research and developments on e-learning, “Recommender Agents” [5][6], make recommendations to “New Learners” following previous “Successful Learner profiles”. ECOMMES goes further by integrating a “LEARNER PLAN”, learner’s objectives, progress assessments and “personalized” learner details in order to bring about effective learning and build appropriate skills of the learner.

### **8.1 Methodology**

The “Associative role web Mining Technique” has been used in other works, to benefit and improve learners experience, but has so far been “Off-line”, and required experts to use sophisticated tools to work with. ECOMMES is developing a “Parameter free”, on-line web mining tool with software agents, for non-ICT experts such as educators and e-learning site builders.

With current usable e-learning platforms, sometimes serious difficulties arises from its complexity of use and it’s time consuming for educators and web base learning providers, with existing tools, to adequately track e-learners and assess e-learning resource providers. Learning providers do their best to structure e-learning content assuming its efficacy (OMAR – [7][8]). The ECOMMES infrastructure simplifies the learning experience for all parties concern – learners, providers, and educators.

Given the importance of Visual effects in learning, ECOMMES is working very closely with Broadband providers to make video streaming substantially enrich course content, but with



minimal cost on learners and providers. A communications Course content management system, a component of ECOMMES, is being developed for this purpose. This would deliver a split-screen video-text combination to re-enforce learner's objective and experience. It seeks to get learners "Move-on" rather than "Get Stock". A reminder patterned – through voice, text, and video is implemented to help improve learners planned objectives.

ECOMMES simulates a process similar to "Interactive on-line web design" to evaluate and facilitate on-line evaluation of learners, recommending new strategies to proceed with learning based on their Learning Plan and Current achievements, and implements an Algorithm of simple information extraction from on-going learners profile, as feedback to benefit the learner (-OMAR [9])

The system being developed makes use of web mining associative rules in addition to a user "profiling system" which recommend efficient and effectively learning patterns.

## **9. ECOMMES Framework**

ECOMMES is based on MOODLE, an open source E-learning system. ECOMMES goes beyond MOODLE to emphasis sustainability and effective management of e-learning for community groups, with the use of "soft intelligence".

Going through ECOMMES infrastructure, one of its critical components examines and manages effective course or subject assessment / evaluation; implements a reporting structure with user tools and feedback necessary for systems maintenance and update.

The system would generate technical reports that are for administration with self-systems routine reports for updating and self improvements on its management. The "Soft Intelligence of ECOMMES" compensates for the "High specialized skills" needed to operate in similar systems. The reporting structure of ECOMMES on the learner's progress provides flexibility and more learner options, in addition to typical progress reports in a leaning/skills development environment.

The project would provide for facilities and tools within the system that will be responsible for access time control, bandwidth management and Ticketing, takes care of any potential distractions of the a learner on the system, as far as access to learning resources is concern. It also carries out the task of Billing and accounting for resource allocation, and maintenance; Integrating and interfacing input/output sub-systems such as additional learning "plug-in" utilities from other vendors.

Often "Broken-connections" to the internet or a learning resource could be a nuisance to learners on the system. ECOMMES takes care of this by the use of traffic management agent which is responsible for marshalling and controlling huge data volume and low bandwidth (data rates) channel.

## **10. ECOMMES "Apart" with other E-Systems**

Unlike existing MOODLE and other e-learning systems such as Learn-Direct, ECOMMES focuses at the very beginning on the learners / student entry requirements / assessment. A module which verifies qualification / experience / interest and goals, helps generate required entry levels for learners and students into the system. From this base the system would recommend appropriate starting lessons, but would continuously monitor progress of the learner/student and carry out re-assessment with appropriate recommendations.

## **11. ECOMMES, an E-leaning Infrastructure**

The Management of On-Line learning, both Learners and on-line Course, proves to be a critical aspect of e-learning infrastructure. This is where ECOMMES, currently under research and development, makes a contribution to sustainable development.

ECOMMES seeks to provide a platform allowing policies leading to enterprise-wide e-learning strategy with flexible single solution, but enough to allow autonomy to different departments and institutions i.e. providing customisable and adaptable features.

ECOMMES looks at integrating web-based learning with standard learners or student Information System in order to ensure long term success and viability of e-learning.

With increase frequency and volume of e-learning, the integration is critical, as it allows large number of learners / students to be served more quickly and reduced investment for day to day administrative task for learning institutions and departments.

ECOMMES enables effective resource sharing and shared services through distributed support staff – one hardware / one software installation, eliminating redundancy; and this means reduction of maintenance cost.

With the adoption of ECOMMES, as a cost effective infrastructure for sustainable development, no extra infrastructure is needed to provide more access and more options to learners. There is no extra capital overlay for new constructions, or further developments on this infrastructure. Facilities are built and updated virtually rather than physically for any institution using the system.

## **12. The case for ECOMMES Sponsorship**

ECOMMES has a transcontinental (Europe and Africa), and international benefits which can be summarised as follow:

- ECOMMES can be implementing with No Extra cost with the aid of existing and developing broadband / e-learning Platforms / infrastructure in the UK, such as the use of Euro sat, Intelsat transponders to beam broadband at subsidised rates to various locations in Africa (Cameroon and Ghana), and the extension, development and re-deployment of the UK government LEARN-DIRECT e-learning platform in the African sustainable

development context. The ECOMMES research project is based on experience from using and managing LEARN-DIRECT courses and the existing MOODLE e-learning.

- The use of Current Expertise from Cameroon: Expertise from Cameroon and other African countries (TMG Diasporas), who are currently carrying out ICT project in Cameroon (such as VSAT Learning centres), and who are also University lectures; professors in various specialised ICT disciplines in the UK, could be engaged at Minimal cost to develop and implement a sustainable E-learning Platform, deploying affordable broadband through VSAT equipment, currently being used in several towns and cities in Cameroon; But the existing projects struggle with cut-throat (very high) bandwidth cost, rendering unsustainable any serious e-learning programs, which could involve video streaming as described in ECOMMES. Subsidies for Broadband connectivity will go a long way to achieve high standard e-learning, almost at no extra cost to on going e-learning / broadband projects in the UK.
- Benefit from on going project in Cameroon. With experience from on going projects for Learning and information centres in Cameroon (such as COMMES-CAM); Sufficient data exist from this on-going projects on VSAT-based information and learning centres, indicating what is needed in terms of infrastructure and human resources to transform these “Budding projects” into full blown sustainable e-learning centres / institutions. In this case, this would not only support the Cameroon economic growth and eradication of illiteracy, but also provide out-sourcing opportunities to UK companies for professional ICT projects, with professional resources for manpower/skills provided by way of a sustainable e-learning centre. This will also help to improve if not cut-out, the much cried “Brain Drain” syndrome, and benefit both UK (Europe in general) and Cameroon (Africa as a whole).
- Part of other efforts [10] (Tony Blair’s Project for Africa, G8 summit etc): With Existing efforts such as the HIPC program, G8 summit and Tony Blair’s project for Africa, the ECOMMES initiative will fit into the agenda to relieve Africa as a whole from indebtedness and release the potentials of Talents in ICT in particular.
- Bridging the Knowledge and technology Gap: The ECOMMES project will improving human resource building effort in Africa as a whole, and at the same time strengthen the UK economy through out-sourcing and use of existing ICT professional skills in Africa and developing various high end skills at low cost in Africa, thereby bridging the Knowledge and technology Gab between Europe and Africa.
- Supporting the ECOMMES project financially will be part of balancing the subsidy to African nations (Ghana, Cameroon, Zambia) to the UK economy though the extension of a much needed ICT infrastructure for E-Learning. At the same time this will be helping African governments (the Cameroon for example) with the cost of training ICT professional in particular, through E-learning and broadband infrastructure.
- The ECOMMES project would be beneficial to UK economy as very little or no extra cost would be incurred on current or planned e-learning infrastructure, with the extension, development and implementation of this infrastructure, to African communities using

existing VSAT infrastructure – KU & C-Band dedicated links; with subsidised broadband connectivity, rolled out through tested areas like Cameroon and Ghana with developing infrastructure (but currently unsustainable) for Broadband and E-learning.

### 13. Conclusion

This presentation emphasis the dual and inseparable critical needs for sustainable development, namely affordable and alternative broadband internet access for remote rural areas indispensable for web-based e-learning and the need to take care of scarce available specialised ICT skills, with the deployment of a “Soft Intelligent System”, ECOMMES, to manage e-learning cost effectively in remote and rural areas.

We have shown that the cost in the long term for e-learning, will be very low compared to traditional learning methodology, and with a cost effective management system, such as ECOMMES, an e-learning platform would bring a major contribution and benefit to sustainable development.

### 14. Acknowledgement

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G. Vegah has carried out Teaching and Software Development Projects in various UK companies including COMMES Ltd, Terrestrial Solutions Ltd in Manchester, and M-Team Computers, Reading. Also work as Hardware/Software Maintenance Engineer and operates a VSAT Learning Centre.

## THE BETTERWORLD VISION

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**ABSTRACT:** *Cameroon is heavily endowed with enormous human and natural resources and is a peaceful country. Having reached the completion point of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), it is no longer too difficult to protect the vulnerable public from abject poverty and uphold social justice for Sustainable Development to take place. There is a need to strike a balance between the counter productive schemes of the government and Civil Society Organisations (CSO) working to equip today's youth with the capacity to lead the country into a prosperous future. This dilemma has a lot to do with linking development with social justice. We believe networking within the African Diaspora and twining development initiatives across cultures would provide a spring board for bringing in the right kind of changes that will enable building a more sustainable and better world for all. This article addresses the key issues in the over all development of a "Better world Vision" in Cameroon.*

**Keywords:** Civil Society Organisations, Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Betterworld aims to train young people and women to become self employed and gain employment in businesses with a positive impact on environmental sustainability. It seeks to bring about Educational breakthrough in reconnecting women and youth in Cameroon, making the most of Available Land as a primary source of livelihood.

Better world has been designed to empower Women and Youths to become agents of social and economic regeneration in their communities; develop an African model of vocational education (Farming Education, specifically) which will more realistically meet the needs of alienated youth uprooted from the context in which they can rebuild meaning in their lives.

### 2.0 TRANSFORMING VISION INTO SOLIDARITY ACTION

The Better world project in Cameroon is a grassroots initiative based on developing an African model of vocational education which more realistically meets the needs of alienated youth and women uprooted from the context in which they can rebuild meaning in their lives.

The project has been researching and implementing alternative development strategies aimed at reducing poverty through networking with CSOs. The Betterworld network NGO is a group of Cameroonians and some leaders of associations who having realised that Cameroon is endowed with human and natural resources are resolved to expressing the need for these resources to be harnessed to pave the way for sustainable growth in the country.

I initiated “The Betterworld Vision” and I am the project director of Betterworld Cameroon. The main approach of the project is based on the formation of grassroots groups which in turn depend on the regular and continuous interaction of group representatives.

In Cameroon wolves volunteer to herd the sheep but by introducing basic democracy we succeed in putting down the town people and lifting up the villagers, setting aside party politics and training traditional leaders and new community development leaders. We have realised that continuously waiting for solutions to come from out side, the regeneration of Cameroonian villages will never get off the ground. However, the social strife and extreme poverty which characterises our communities make sustainable development initiatives an up hill task.

### **3.0 A CALL FOR ACTION**

Throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, the political turmoil, economic hardships, population increases, rural exodus and natural disasters have put tremendous pressures and demands on livelihoods and environmental management practises. As a result, the effective use of natural resources has never been more crucial, particularly for the rural and urban poor whose survival depends on the local resource base.

Within this context, the participatory approach to project design and implementation which Betterworld Cameroon promotes could help donors/promoters’ bridge involvement and responsibility with capacity to achieve more sustainable local development. The continuous socio-economic decline and environmental degradation in our region is ample evidence to suggest why economic initiatives without donor or external support would easily collapse. Most development ideas have been focused too narrowly on meeting governmental goals and objectives in ways that are neither environmentally sustainable nor socially equitable. The Betterworld initiative is a case study on how to pursue development activities. We believe that grassroots networking linking with international partnerships could constitute the instrument through which community needs for assistance can be better targeted. The cost of resource, degradation and human suffering make this effort essential.

### **4.0 COMMUNICATION ENFORCES CONFIDENCE**

Communication and Information Technology (IT) are the foundations of the new global information based economy and would help grassroots initiatives to enhance their organisational efficiency and competitiveness while providing better goods and services for improved living.

In an interdependent global environment, it is in the interest of both developed and less developed communities to help ensure that the under privileged are not left on the sidelines. The use of electronic technology and e-communication will also stimulate and facilitate social and economic activities.

## **5.0 THE MEDIA CAN AID DEVELOPMENT**

The free press in Africa that addresses the development needs of people should also be taken on board. They are the best placed to communicate economic, social and environmental information and develop an educated public. In this way, an informed consensus can be built around the difficult choices that are inevitable on the road to social and economic sustainability.

The free press in Cameroon is attempting to go beyond reporting on political dogma to educate, entertain and inform the whole nation. It has a critical role to play in educating and providing key information for sustainable development and could constitute an excellent framework for action. It has an important job to do in raising awareness about the goals to and actions for their achievement. Elsewhere, the media could help create a knowledgeable, entrepreneurial and confident society, able to address and achieve development goals and particularly the MGDs.

## **6.0 CULTURAL HERITAGE - OUR LIVING PAST**

The failure to recognise the importance of Cameroon's rich culture and tourism potential has been an important factor in the limited degree of development of our country. Betterworld has realised the importance of indigenous knowledge systems in looking for sustainable solutions for communities. We are trying to fill the gap left behind by state institutions in social policy. We do this by encouraging an audible cultural policy within traditional authority which should take care of women and youth in rural and urban Cameroon. We hope that this cultural revival will constitute a veritable cultural space for genuine development in the country.

If you were to see the faces of young people and women expressing their hopes and aspiration in song and dance, you will see with me that the real challenge for the future is capturing this energy and channelling it positively. While poverty is an undeniable part of our daily lives, we do not want to stay within this limitation.

Beyond the gloom and doom often screened on Western media, we see this renaissance sweeping across the sub-region as an opportunity for a Betterworld. The Betterworld vision is an attempt to kill two birds with one stone: to persuade even rich people to insist on due economy in the consumption of the necessities of life, and to assure poor people that it is possible to make a good deal more of resources within their reach than they do at present.

No one will deny the importance of urging rich and poor alike, in the necessary state of things to try and economise the fuel and food which they have at their disposal. The sooner we make up our minds that what we regretfully speak of as "the good old times", will never come again, the sooner we shall cease to look fondly back on a cheaper past, and embrace ourselves helpfully and bravely to face the increasing cost of life.



My vision is a Better world where traditional African respect for the land helps create sustainable employment among socially disadvantaged groups. "He or she who puts the hand in the soil (earth) will never be deceived"- a quote from my mother translated from Bafut language.

The mission in Betterworld is to shape a uniquely African model for informal learning that reconnects people and land, introducing appropriate technologies where possible.

## **7.0 BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE**

New grassroots institutions are required that can meet the needs of alienated, unemployed women and youth. The traditional socializing role in Africa is under threat from AIDS, malaria and globalisation. In Cameroon, there is a failure within public institutions to address the needs of women and unemployed youth. They are a forgotten generation. Many are immigrants from rural communities and inherit a strong tradition of entrepreneurship with the potential to help themselves in small business ventures. In this context we should be pioneering social enterprises working to develop this inheritance among women and young people and equipping them for a better life. Figures 1, 2 and 3 are examples of the Betterworld initiative to create a better future

## **8.0 CONCLUSION**

There is a crucial need to galvanize the role of CSOs to catalyse change in Africa. The Better world Vision team advocates the building of a critical mass of responsible citizens, who would help maintain checks and balances in society.

Better world vision also advocates nationally-owned solutions and help to make them effective through ensuring a greater voice for poor people, expanding access to productive assets and economic opportunities and linking poverty reduction programmes through international solidarity.

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Figure 1 - Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world.



Figure 2 – Community work and Participation in Action





Figure 3 – Gardening Work

# Reversing the Brain Drain: Stemming Africa's Human Resources Crisis

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*The African continent faces an escalating crisis caused by the continued outflow of skilled professionals seeking better economic and social opportunities in other parts of the world. This haemorrhage of talent, usually educated at the expense of cash strapped nations, impacts heavily on the ability of African governments to develop and implement the policies needed for economic development and attaining the Millennium Development Goals. There is a need for a range of policies and approaches that harness the skills of those Africans who are now resident outside the continent. **Interims for Development** is one of a number of initiatives created by Africans living in the Diaspora to harness the skills and expertise needed within the continent. **Interims for Development** has successfully put in place sustainable skills development and capacity building programmes which have enabled Africans in the Diaspora and others interested in supporting Africa's development to make a lasting difference.*

## 1. Introduction

The African continent is faced with an escalating crisis caused by the continued outflow of skilled professionals seeking better economic and social opportunities in other parts of the world. This haemorrhage of home grown talent, largely educated at the expense of cash strapped nations, impacts heavily on the ability of African governments to develop and implement the policies needed to attain economic development and targets such as the Millennium Development Goals. According to the IOM World Migration Report 2005<sup>1</sup>, South Africa claims to have spent US\$1 billion on educating health workers who have since migrated – the equivalent of one third of all development aid received between 1994 and 2000. Ghana and Zimbabwe have seen one third of their newly qualified doctors leaving the country within a few years of graduation.

International migration is a long standing and global phenomenon affecting rich and poor countries alike. People emigrate for a number of reasons which may include social and economic pressures, war and conflict, religious or political persecution or simply a desire to explore new horizons. Migration has a number of benefits, particularly for skilled professionals who face unemployment or scarce technical resources in their home countries. Migrants with sought after qualifications are more likely to attain the level of career achievement or entrepreneurial success within developed economies, sharing the benefit of their expertise with their new host communities. The improved earning power of successful migrants feeds back into their home countries through sums remitted to help support families and to provide educational and business opportunities for extended family members.

Developed countries can usually adapt to the loss of skills posed by their own migrating populations, as they have greater resources to invest in promoting training and skills development to address specific areas of potential shortage. Additionally, these countries are able to address their skills deficits through concerted campaigns combined with high salaries and incentives to attract skills from poorer countries. This is not the case in Africa where most countries have

limited budgets for education and training, where many countries are battling against the HIV/AIDS pandemic and where large segments of the indigenous population are illiterate and lack the skills in demand for today's technological age.

### **1.1 Impact of the African Brain Drain**

Africa possesses an abundance of natural wealth in the form of gold, diamonds, minerals and oil. But, beyond this abundance of natural resources, what is potentially its strongest competitive advantage, in the long term, is the continent's human resources.

The continent's 53 nations offer a huge array of talent and untapped human potential. Yet, what currently remains less available to the African continent is the growing number of African technocrats and skilled professionals living outside the continent.

According to the IOM World Migration Report 2005, it is estimated that there are over 21,000 Nigerian doctors practicing in the USA and over 200,000 African scientists in the United States, more than on the entire African continent. There are over 40,000 African doctoral graduates outside Africa. The report highlights the aggressive and targeted international recruitment initiatives that can be seen in several African states, for instance in Ghana and South Africa. As a result, a considerable part of the investment in training and education in Africa is never recovered. The rate at which these skills are leaving the continent continues to increase, with the report pointing out that the "number of Africans living outside their country of origin has more than doubled in a generation."

## **2. Harnessing the Skills of the African Diaspora**

Migrants can contribute significantly to the development strategies in their home countries, and not simply through financial remittances. Through skills transfer programmes and investing in local economies, Diaspora associations around the world have established links with their communities at home and overseas. Some countries have adopted proactive policies to attract back Diaspora talent with their acquired skills and education. Countries like Morocco have established special ministries or agencies to support their Diaspora communities and Ghana has appointed a government Minister with a portfolio for Diaspora Relations.

Nevertheless, only a few countries to date have successfully tapped into the full potential offered by their Diaspora, with the impact made to date being felt primarily among only a few sectors. Increasingly, organisations in civil society as well as in the private sector are finding opportunities to create linkages that will support the temporary or permanent return of these much needed skills.

The opportunity to share skills residing in the African Diaspora was a key factor in establishing *Interims for Development*<sup>2</sup> and the more recent launch of the online careers, business and people management publication, **ReConnect Africa**. As Ghanaians living in the UK, we set up *Interims for Development* in 2002 with a view to working with African businesses and international companies operating in Africa to support their Human Resources, business development and capacity building needs.

*Interims for Development* is one of a growing number of African organisations in the Diaspora who are committed to partnering with Africans on the continent to support development. *Interims for Development* harnesses the skills of professionals outside Africa to address the skills challenges within the continent. Bearing in mind the lack of financial resources available to most private sector companies in Africa, the organisation identifies experts who are prepared to sign up as Interim Managers for short-term technical and training projects in Africa and who, as a key requirement, are prepared to take a significant cut on their normal rates, or even volunteer.

We register professionals, both African and non-African in origin, who are genuinely committed to making a difference by sharing their skills. Since 2003 *Interims for Development* has worked with both local African companies and multinational companies operating in Africa. Our projects have succeeded in developing skills and expertise across sectors as diverse as textiles, mining, brewing, international development and the media.

### **3. Facilitating the Return of Skills to Africa**

While many of the causes of migration from the continent will not be solved in the immediate short-term, there are a number of ways, as our projects have demonstrated, that Africans resident outside the continent can use short-term focused projects to deliver skills and training that can be cascaded to others on a long-term and sustainable basis.

#### **3.1 ReConnect Africa.com - Information and Opportunities in Africa**

A significant number of professional émigrés in the West are newly graduated or early career professionals who recognise the growing opportunities available for careers and in business within Africa. Another role that the Diaspora can play is to work with African public and private sectors to highlight the changes taking place in today's Africa and to point the way to the opportunities available within the continent.

In 2006 *Interims for Development* launched ReConnect Africa ([www.reconnectafrica.com](http://www.reconnectafrica.com)) as a platform for sharing information about the positive changes taking place in Africa and as a means to connect Africans within and outside Africa with professional and business opportunities.

Despite the often negative portrayal of Africa in the media, increasing political stability around the continent has led to a successful economic turnaround and business growth in many countries. But while Africa today offers opportunities for both newly qualified and experienced professionals, attracting this talent back into Africa and reaching the African talent around the continent can prove a challenge. For us, the key issue is that Africans need to tell their own stories and to redress the balance of negative stories and negative perceptions widely reported by the Western media in their countries of residence.

The role that African governments can play in this regard is crucial. Since 2000, Africa has been losing 20,000 professionals each year. For African governments, it makes economic sense to facilitate the return of skills from the African Diaspora as, according to World Bank estimates, replacing the skills lost from Africa costs more than \$4 billion a year in salaries for western

expatriate human resources. The cost of expatriate labour represents a significant cost for both the public and private sectors while reports, perceptions and outcomes often indicate a lack of appreciation by foreign experts of the cultural realities and the societal context in which to successfully manage and effect change in Africa.

This ‘brain drain’ of the country’s talent is a major factor hampering progress. The current capacity of Africa’s civil and public services to meet the needs of promoting enterprise development and inward investment is weak and lacks the level of technical efficiency and know-how to deliver against the ambitious targets set by the Millennium Development Goals.

Through our work in careers management with young Africans in the Diaspora, we are aware that growing number of African professionals outside Africa will be in a better position to make informed choices when provided with balanced and relevant information. Notwithstanding the difficulties, there are many professionals, from new graduates to mid-career professionals who want to return to work or to build businesses in their home countries. The main problem is a lack of up-to-date information about how to make that transition. ReConnect Africa was developed to create a platform where we could highlight opportunities across Africa and share the success stories of companies and entrepreneurs who have made a successful transition back home.

The problem is not restricted to the Diaspora. Skilled professionals working within Africa also experience difficulty in identifying better opportunities in their own countries and elsewhere around the continent. ReConnect Africa is about bringing together the people of a continent where fractured communications can hamper the sharing of knowledge and information and the many examples of successful business practices and people management.

ReConnect Africa offers a resource for professionals around the world with their eye on Africa. In addition to the wealth of articles and features on the site, we offer convenient recruitment packages for employers in Africa and a range of careers, tools and services for job seekers.

ReConnect Africa is also considered a valuable source by employers in Africa by providing access to professionals in the Diaspora. Companies such as global drinks giant Diageo, which employs almost a fifth of its workforce within Africa, admit that finding African talent who are keen to return is key to their continued success.

“Many companies like Diageo have realized that there is outstanding talent within and outside Africa that will provide the capacity and the capability to enable Africa to develop to its full potential,” says John Patterson, Human Resources Director for Diageo Africa. “Outside the continent, there are a thousand different organisations that represent various members of the African Diaspora and there really needs to be one place like ReConnect Africa where all Africans can connect. Given the range of services and information it provides, ReConnect Africa is a valuable site that focuses on the African as a consumer wanting to reconnect with all things African.”

Africa’s human resources, whether within or outside Africa, are the ones who hold the key to the continent’s development. Ultimately, it is Africans themselves who will have to drive the changes they want to see. The Diaspora’s ability to bring talent and skills and to provide information and support will enable people to make informed decisions about where they can

build a successful life or business and how, in the process, they will add to the economic and social development of African countries.

## 4. Case Studies

### 4.1 Case Study One: Business Development Project, Kenya <sup>3</sup>

In 2004 and 2005 *Interims for Development* undertook two business development projects for Kenana Knitters Ltd, a Kenyan textile company.

In 1998 Kenana Knitters was established in the farming area of Njoro, Kenya, to help the rural women find some income by using their spinning and knitting skills. Life for these women is hard, with no running water or readily available fuel for cooking and little access to basic medical attention.

To pay for school fees and a better life for their children, the group generates two forms of income; buying the wool from 160 local families, then creating more work by turning the wool into a marketable product. By 2004, the ladies had two key areas of need in order to build their capacity to generate income. Firstly, they needed someone skilled in knitting/textile design to help with new designs for our gifts and accessories. Secondly, they needed to upgrade their very basic website in order to increase their export potential.

*Interims for Development* identified two professionals to address these needs: Rehiat Kabir and Janet Shockness.

To be competitive, the Knitters must produce new lines on a regular basis but have only limited access to trade journals and the internet, making it hard to achieve their full design potential. Rehiat, a textile designer skilled in toy/textile design worked with them for several weeks in Kenya to expand their range of products. Our Interim designer shared her knowledge, skills and ideas in toy/textile design with the group and undertook research on trends in the industry and trained members of the group in new techniques<sup>2</sup>.

To build the Knitters' technological capacity, Janet Shockness, a UK-based web designer of African-Caribbean origin, created a new website as an important marketing tool to capture their target market and gain more business. Janet's work has produced an attractive and professional site which has helped to create greater international appeal by showcasing the group's products and ensuring that the Knitters' unique story and products are widely shared.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Impact of the Projects

Today, the Kenana Knitters have grown to 220 knitters and in June 2006, when US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice gave her opening address at the African Growth and Opportunity Forum in Washington, she highlighted the AGOA success story of the Kenana Knitters from Kenya. Since the *Interims for Development* project, the group has grown to 220 knitters who buy locally produced homespun wool, colour it with natural plant-dye to avoid adversely impacting the



environment, and knit it into toys, bed-covers, jerseys, socks, scarves, hats and other fashion and sports accessories.

The group has continued to grow in and succeed. They are exporting 90% of their products to the US, UK, Scotland, Denmark, Canada, Japan, and France. They now supply outlets like Sundance Catalogue, Green Mountain Coffee, Anthropologie, ABC Carpet and Home, and Ananse Village to name a few.”

The Knitters have also become a source of social support in the region. Funds generated by the group have been used to create a working area and to purchase storage and office facilities. The group’s ethos is to expand their knowledge base and skills and social development activities at the Farm include daily newspapers, a radio, library and sponsored attendance on training courses for HIV/AIDS counselling. The office computer is also used to teach touch typing and computer literacy.

The group also offers a range of free welfare options to the women on a monthly basis, including family planning, homeopathy, VCT, worming and they have introduced a bi-annual eye clinic. They have managed to gather together enough donations to buy several few pairs of glasses for women needing them.

#### **4.2 Case Study 2: Careers Management and Coaching <sup>4</sup>**

Africans living in the Diaspora must themselves be exposed to challenging careers with opportunities for development in order to generate income commensurate to the economic investment they have made in their education and by migrating. To share skills, Africans in the Diaspora must first acquire, utilise and further develop their own potential in the developed economies in which they reside.

ReConnect Africa also services the needs of Africans in the Diaspora to build the skills that will – in the short or long term – flow back to benefit Africa.

MacDuff Phiri is a Malawi national and a mid-career professional with experience of working in consultancy and international development in Malawi and in West Africa. Macduff moved to the UK in order to expand his skills and exposure and soon encountered difficulties in identifying a job role that would address this need. The rest of this case study is in MacDuff’s own words.

“I moved to the UK from Africa in March 2006 having worked in international development for 8 years in Southern, East and West Africa. I attended more than 5 job interviews without success. I was frustrated without really knowing how to target employers in the UK market. A friend recommended that I should undergo a career consultation and coaching session with *Interims for Development*. I had my doubts at the beginning whether it was worth it or not but after been unemployed for 3 months and having my confidence completely shaken, I had no choice but to give it a go.

I had a career consultation and coaching session for several. The session covered skills assessment and short/long-term career strategy, targeting employers in the UK market, detailed review of my CV, detailed review of any previous application forms and online applications, interview skills and following up. As the session progressed it came very clear to me that I was the problem, my strategy was wrong e.g. I had applied for some jobs that did not match my skills and my approach towards interviews was not right. I saw myself as a car that has been on the road for eight years without service, no wonder I was at the point of breakdown.

On 6<sup>th</sup> June 2006, I got invited for an interview with a UK based international organisation working in disability in Africa. The interviews took place on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> June 2006 and I was offered the job on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2006. My job search campaign was finally over.

I would strongly recommend anyone whether at the beginning of their career or not as well as those looking for a job in the UK or considering moving to Africa to get in touch with *Interims for Development* – they are amazing and you will not be disappointed. Any day without a job is an additional day for frustration!”

## 5. Conclusion

Africa stands today at a critical time in its history. In recent years, we have witnessed a rising groundswell of voices against the global economic policies and structures that continue to disadvantage the continent. Increased stability, reduced conflicts and a growing awareness of the investment potential in the continent is slowly changing the perception of the region. 2005 was declared the Year for Africa and 2006 has seen the establishment of international measures to promote investment and trade in Africa.

There is now a growing emphasis against the concept of aid as a panacea to Africa’s problems and the focus has shifted to evaluating how governments can mobilise the creation of a strong and sustained private sector that can create access to jobs, opportunities and wealth for all Africa’s citizens. For this to succeed, Africa needs skills. It needs managers, technocrats, engineers, doctors, and scientists. It needs a strong public sector that can provide the framework for investment and ensure that safeguards are in place and are effective.

Africa also needs its Diaspora. Whether for a few weeks or for a lifetime, Africans currently living in the West and around the world can come together and use their skills and expertise to make a long-term and sustainable difference to the continent’s skill base so that in the long term, Africa has the ability to raise the living standards of its entire people. To date, in our own small way, we have proved that this is possible.

## References

1 p. 6, World Migration 2005: Costs and Benefits of International Migration, International Organization for Migration (IOM)

<sup>2</sup> *Interims for Development* was established in 2002. In 2005 the company was awarded Rising Star of the Year award by the UK Trade and Investment Black Enterprise Awards, described by the UK media as “the Rolls Royce of business awards”. In July 2005, Frances Williams was named ‘Business Innovator of the Year 2005’ by the Ghana Professional Achievers Awards and, in February 2005, Williams received the prestigious Gold Award for Innovative Capacity Building at the British conference organised by the Global Women Inventors and Innovators Network (GWIIN).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.reconnectafrica.com/Business-SMEBusinessDevelopment.jsp#bbd>

<http://www.reconnectafrica.com/Business-SMEBusinessDevelopment.jsp#awt>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.reconnectafrica.com/CareerServices.jsp#onetoone>

### ***About the Author***

Frances Williams is Chief Executive of *Interims for Development*, a UK based Human Resources and Training consultancy which she founded in 2002. *Interims for Development* works with companies and organisations in Africa on short-term assignments or by providing technical assistance or in-house training.

A graduate in French from the University of Reading and the Nouvelle Sorbonne, Paris, and the holder of a post-graduate Linguists’ Diploma, Mrs. Williams has twenty years’ experience in Human Resources management across a diverse range of sectors. Mrs. Williams has successfully set up and managed Human Resources functions and her career has included five years spent working in Ghana; first at the Central Bank and then as Director of Human Resources of a private merchant bank. She has successfully executed Human Resources consultancy assignments for clients in Europe and across Africa, and has delivered training seminars and workshops in HR Management as well as Career Management and Counselling for University and MBA graduates. Mrs. Williams continues to work with senior level clients in the UK, assisting them with Career Management and outplacement strategies. Mrs. Williams is a member of several business networks and Women’s fora and sits on the Finance and Human Resources Committee of AFFORD (African Foundation for Development). She is married with 2 children.

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