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**Ad-hoc Expert Group Meeting on the  
Impact of Economic and Social Changes  
on the African Family**

**(Africa Hall, Addis Ababa, 13-17 December 1993)**

**THE LAMENTATION OF MA FETOE FOR AFRICA**



## **THE LAMENTATION OF MA FETOE FOR AFRICA**

**Paper Presented by the  
Cameroon National Association for  
Family Welfare**

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC  
AND SOCIAL CHANGES ON THE AFRICAN FAMILY.

AFRICA HALL, ADDIS ABABA, 13-17 DECEMBER 1993.

THE LAMENTATION OF MA FETOE FOR AFRICA

MY GOD MY GOD

Have you forsaken me ?

I Perish, I Perish oh Master -- --

Please hasten and take control.

1. My mother-land which you with milk and honey did bestow  
with beautiful natural and human resources AFRICA you did endow  
My blessed motherland is bewitched with sufferings yet untold.
2. Oh ZAIRE, GHANA, SOUTH AFRICA AND SIERRA LEONE  
Where is your 90% of the world's diamonds you produce ?  
Oh ZAMBIA, ZIMBABWE, SOUTH AFRICA AND ANGOLA.  
To what has your third of the world's total copper been reduced ?  
Oh CAMEROON AND NIGERIA For what are your rich wells of oils  
being confused.
3. My AFRICA producer of 70% of the worlds gold  
My AFRICA, producer of tons + tons of wood and other  
agricultural products in quantities yet untold.  
My AFRICA OH MY AFRICA. You who was showered with plenty,  
chosen by the master for his fold. MY AFRICA MY AFRICA who  
Rendered you poor must have been bold. He is not bold but  
wicked. The selfish heartless monster, Who to this endless  
state of slavery and misery AFRICA has sold.
4. Oh AFRICA why is your wealth so consumed by the demon of  
International markets. Prices set not by the seller but by  
the consumer-economics of Africa's nature given parkets.  
By continued falling prices of Africa's commodities to the  
benefit of those international markets. By the effect of  
price movements so catastrophic on African Countries and  
peoples - the unfortunate targets.
5. Oh World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the G.7,  
Have you but rendered the United Nations democratic  
mechanisms for the promotion of human development redundant ?  
Were your Structural Adjustment Programms and foreign currency  
loans ment to render the lives of African families unpleasant ?  
Where spiralled interests which trippled the loans to  
African Countries to you an out come pleasant ?

6. AFRICA, AFRICA wake up from sleep  
Your men and sons are out of jobs  
in their thousands its not a dream.  
Your women and children are hungry,  
dying also by the thousands, down to the deep.  
Men and leaders of Africa, how can you accept severe  
cuts on social spending for a deal so mean.  
How can you afford to mismanage the little that you  
borrowed for your Countries as meat.
7. Wake up Wake up men of Africa  
Its a real rough deal. Wake up wake up you strong  
and hard working women of Africa. Gird tight your  
loins and fight these economic powers and principalities  
of our times that be.
8. Prayerful women of AFRICA cry out  
Like David and ask your maker  
How much longer, Lord will you just look on ?  
My God my God I will keep praying on  
For I know some day you will answer me.

This little Poem is meant to give a Bird's Eye View of the  
economic plight of Africa during the past two decades with  
its consequences on the African family.

THE AFRICAN FAMILY ; ITS STRUCTURES, FUNCTIONS AND  
ROLES IN THE CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
CHANGES.

CAMEROON COUNTRY PAPER

In Africa as in the world over, the family is the basic unit of society with distinct peculiarities and diversities in each environment. It is the social institution within which child-bearing and child up bringing takes place. The wide diversity in family structures stems the variety in societal values and in relation to the functions they accomplish and the support system.

In Africa, families are important agents of sustainable development to which they make crucial contributions at all levels of Society. As the primary agent of socialization, the family plays an important role in the intergenerational transmission of social values. In this light it can also be a potential agent of social change.

African Traditional Family Structures/Formatives as reflected in the Cameroon context can be outlined as follows :-

- The nuclear family                      - Husband wife and children.
- The extended family                    - The above plus uncles, aunties, cousins and inlaws.
- The polygamous family                - Husband several wives and children. The largest of these type of family are found in the royal families where the members of one family can number up to 500 persons.
- The Single Parent Family            - Could be due to death of a spouse seperation, abandonment or the unmarried parent many of whom are girls with unplanned for children.

The structure and functions of families in Cameroon are undergoing changes in keeping with the changing Socio-Economic conditions prevailing today. In addition, family structures and functions may be influenced by place of residence. For example families in the rural areas tend to remain more homogenous with closer family ties. Polygamy is widely practiced and the extended family structure more predominant. On the principle of providing cheap communal labour and community support system.

The single parent especially mother centered family type, as well as the monogamous family are more commonly found in urban areas. It must be pointed out however, that though polygamy is on

at the head, very often the wife in a polygamous family finds herself in the same situation as the single parent, mother centered family, where the wife takes the responsibility of bringing up her children and taking care of her material needs with little or no help from the husband.

While the financial strains of urban living encourage nuclear family type and individualism, the feeling of belonging to the conventional extended family still prevails. The better placed family members in urban areas still extend a helping hand to the less fortunate in the rural and even urban areas.

The role of the family in Cameroon no matter what family structure is to procreate and to provide the born child with the basic necessities including feeding, clothing, education, protection, love and security. Added to these are attached responsibilities to the care of the elderly and the disabled.

In Cameroon there is a traditional gender based division of productive and reproductive functions within the family. With the changing economic situation, this separation of roles is gradually dying out. Men and women seek formal or informal jobs or undertake other income generating activities.

The truth is that without such efforts, the family in Cameroon can no longer meet up to its expected functions.

Instead of the usual two to three meals a day, many families here ~~revert~~ to one square meal a day. The quality of the meal has also reduced, most families live on Carbohydrates i.e. Cocoyams, Cassava and its products and rice which are comparatively cheaper. Many go without proteins. Those who can afford resort to fish which is cheaper than meat. The saving grace is that Cameroon produces plenty of food and is also a green vegetables and fruits consuming country.

The function of Educating children is becoming more a problem. Locally there are many school drop ~~outs~~ <sup>outs</sup>. Children in Schools abroad both private and those on governments awards are straggled.

Health care is another function difficult to meet. Even with the income earner, ill health ~~now~~ <sup>now</sup> places heavy economic and psychological burden on the family. Deaths and mental derangement are common.

### THE CHANGING STATUS ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGES

1. What ever the origin, ~~ethnicity~~ or social standing of the woman, her first recognized function is that of pro-creation. Added to this very important function which is quite demanding in itself, are a string of other functions which are equally important.

In Cameroon statistics have shown that women are predominant in the primary sector notably, in agriculture where they are responsible for almost 90% of food production. Society also places the responsibilities of domestic activities on the woman. Thus she sees to it that her husband and children are well nourished, takes care of their health and in case of illness plays the role of the nurse. The traditional woman in the rural areas also fetches drinking water and wood for fuel. In times of economic crises, she engages in informal duties to make ends meet.

Despite this preponderant role that the woman plays in the community and the family, societies mentality does not perceive her as an important partner in development. Rather, her image of wife and mother is emphasized and regarded with such magnificence only to the detriment of her other capabilities. She is not accepted as a possible owner of the land she cultivates.

2. She does not have access to bank credits. Legally widows and divorced women are not meant the same legislative and customary rights as men. She has no reproductive rights. Traditionally the man is regarded as head of the family and determines the number of children the woman should bear.

This perception of the female sex in the African context gives vent to a number of repercussions.

#### EDUCATION :

In many parts of the country/continent, the male is given preference when it becomes necessary to chose who to educate. Starting school with her male counterpart, the girl remains at par with the boy only up to the end of primary school. After that the female drop out rate is considerably higher. She is sent to help in the kitchen or to early marriage - marriage

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Yet several studies have highlighted the importance of educating the woman. It has been pointed out for instance that infant and maternal mortality reduces as the level of education of the woman goes higher.

It must also be pointed out that as a measure of economic recovery, Secondary and University Education which was hitherto free in Public Schools is now being paid for by parents in Cameroon.

#### ACCESS TO INFORMATION :

She has limited access to information, continuous education and training. Consequently she hardly understands the interplay between her activities in the community and the socio-economic development of her times and country.

#### ACCESS TO POSTS OF RESPONSIBILITY :

Even the small percentage of women who have attained higher education, find themselves marginalized and discriminated against when opportunities for nomination into posts of responsibility, conceptualization and decision making for national development arise. Consequently, female participation in social economic, political and indeed in overall development is still much less than that of men. Presently out of 23 Ministers, there are only 3 women, twenty six female members of parliament out of 180. Four hundred and fifty six (456) Counsellors out of 5,425 etc.. Mechanisms put in place to uplift the so called weaker sex have not yet quite brought the woman in focus a principal partner in the desired sustainable development.

- The African chapter under Individual Rights spells out Equal Treatment for ALL irrespective of sex and culture.
- The constitution of the Republic of Cameroon recognizes explicitly that all people "are equal in rights and duties" Yet as evidenced, tradition Gender Segregation still rages across the Country in many aspects. In legal, economic, political and cultural rights barriers still exist to hinder women's advancements.

However, there are several intervening factors natural, social cultural and economic, that are inevitably, bringing to the fore-front the impact of the woman's place in national development and family well being. Naturally, women are not only half the world's population, in Cameroon women are 51% of the total population. A percentage which is prevalent in most parts of Africa. It therefore goes without saying that projects embarked upon by women, or concentrating action towards women, means reaching out already to more than half the population. Evidenced for example by the bulk production of crops for local consumption.

Women are by nature very pliable and quickly adjust to situations. With the current wave of Economic repression, women whose husbands have lost their jobs, have taken upon themselves the responsibility of ensuring family well being. Some combine formal



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and informal duties to be able to survive. Many have as a necessity, dropped their living standards.

The flip side of events is that politically, both at National and International level, women are regrouping to make the impact felt.

The World's Conference on Human Rights and the NGO Forum in Vienna, of which Cameroon is a party are but too aware of the great lobby of the Women's Organisations which since the Global Forum in Rio 1992, are claiming the inclusion of Women's interests and perspectives in the world's political agenda. In the conceptual frame work in preparations for the CAIRO 94 International Conference for Population and Development in Prep Com II New York May 1993, Dr. Nabfi Sadik projects the voices of many NGOs (most of which are women NGOs) in insisting on centralizing development efforts on the individual and especially on women and the girl child. This is essential because of the multiple and changing roles and functions of the woman. In many instances women have proved their ability not only in handling, not only crisis situations, but also posts of responsibility and leadership positions.

Governments and the communities as well as International bodies, need to encourage and strengthen these efforts by women. The little progress made as shown above, since the declaration by the United Nations, of the International Decade for Women, 1976 - 1985 which urged Governments to give special attention to women and their concerns a priority in National Development, remains largely unnoticed because it has not yet been translated into visible improvement in the daily lives of the majority of women in Cameroon. Especially, since even this limited progress seems to have been reverted by the socio-economic changes and the impact of SAP's in the past decade or so.

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DEMOGRAPHY

- 1) Cameroon is a State in Central Africa with Innate Pro-natalist tendencies. Its constantly growing population is presently estimated at 12.3 million.

According to various sources of information, the Demographic Trends in Cameroon can be divided into two main periods.

The 1970 - 1987 period

and

The 1987 - 1992 period.

The 1970 - 1987 period in Cameroon was the era of Pro-Population policies. Government encouraged large families in the aim of increasing the national population. Families received children's allowances which increased with each born child up to the sixth.

However, the obvious growing disparities between the population and available Resources soon prompted a review of such policy. The 1987 census indicated a slight-decline on fertility rates from the Mid 1980's. Compared to the 1978 National Fertility survey which showed fertility rate of an average of 6.5 children per woman, the 1991 CAMEROON DEMOGRAPHIC HEALTH SURVEY (CDHS) placed the fertility rate of Cameroonian woman at an average of 5.8 children during their reproductive years.

- 2) One phenomenon of concern is that Cameroon women continue to have children at a very early age.

The 1991 CDHS reports that 35% of women age 15 - 19 had already had at least one child or were pregnant at time of survey. This is partly because marriage is common in Cameroon and 50% of Cameroon women marry by the age of 17.

Following the projections and Retro-projectives from the 1976 NATIONAL FERTILITY SURVEY (NFS), and the 1991 CDHS the population has steadily increased from 6.78 million in 1970, 8,444, in 1980 and 11,433 in 1990.

In 1992, the population was estimated at 12.106 m.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION :

- A very young population of 46% being under 15 years of age.
  - A majority of the female sex with women as 51% of the population.
- This female majority is even stronger in the rural areas due to the rural exodus of men to the urban areas.

The phenomenon of urbanization seems to accelerate over the years.

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In 1976 the urbanization rate was at 28%, in 1987 38% and 42% in 1992.

Recent figures indicate that there are about 65 towns in the country with a population of more than 10,000 inhabitants while 8 towns count more than 100,000 inhabitants.

The active population is estimated at 36,8% of the population. The number of dependents to persons in the active population is on the increase.

In 1976 the ratio was 83 dependents to every 100 active population; steadily rising to 103 dependents to 100 active population in 1991.

Ironically the active population is estimated at 69% in the rural areas whereas the majority of unemployed live in the urban areas.

#### POPULATION DENSITY IN CAMEROON :

CAMEROON'S POPULATION DENSITY DISTRIBUTOR indicates a low population density as in most Sub Saharan African Countries. It rose from 16.5 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> in 1976 to about 22.5 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> in 1987; There are however great disparities from province to province with the Western Province for example housing a density of 100 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and the Eastern Province only 5 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>.

#### MIGRATION, EMIGRATION AND URBANIZATION :

The unequal distribution of the population over the national territory is thus evidently due to historical reasons of human settlements as well as to the residual nature of internal and international migration in Cameroon. Despite the fact that observed migration movements are largely from rural areas, to urban areas, There is some strong evidence of recent migratory counter-currents from urban areas towards the country side.

The 1987-census observed that nearly 164,000 people have changed residence from small towns to the rural areas.

This fact is most likely due to loss of employment in those cities. The recent retrenchments and redundancies since after 1987 have seriously aggravated this urban exodus.

On the whole, the migrant population is young with 70% being under 35 years. Migrant women are very often older than men. Male migrants range between 20 and 24 years or generally under 35 years. Before the age of 30 migrant women are more

Despite these migrant movements, the dynamics of the Cameroon population are largely dependent on Fertility and Mortality rates. While it is presently difficult to affirm that the decline in fertility rates will continue. It is logical to think that such decline is possible due to the following :-

- The rise in the average age at first marriage for young couples to 27.9% (1987 census).
- The intensification of Family Planning services the fight against Sexually Transmitted Diseases/AIDS.

The presently worsening economic situation in the Country, mortality rates, though declining, are still high. Infant mortality is rated at 126/1,000 live births as against 183/1,000, the average for the African Region and 97.7/1,000 world average. Maternal mortality though, is still high at 430/100,000 live births as against 590/100,000 average rate for Africa and 310 world average (UNICEF PROGRESS OF NATIONS REPORT 1993.)

What is evident is that Government which was a pace setter in population growth through the payment of family allowances is no longer capable of paying such allowances. In addition because of the constraints of the present economic situation more and more

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In the 1950's and 1970'S there were signs and hopes that national and international efforts would soon enable all people to meet the human basic need. But over the last decade, and on the eve of the 21st century such hopes have been replaced by disillusionment, a sense of frustration and failure. It has become obvious that the conditions necessary to ensure a minimal living standard for all, are entirely within the powers of the world community. According to the World Bank, unfortunately, between 1.2 and 1.3 billion people (about 1/4) of the world's population live in absolute poverty. For these, unlike those in the industrialized countries, material progress has a different connotation. The 1.3 billion poor still hope for adequate food, clean water, safe sanitation, decent housing, reliable health care and at least a basic education (confirms the UNICEF 1993 Progress of Nations Report).

As regards African Countries, the dramatic fall in the world's prices of most of its export (products), the Debts burden and the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the I.M.F., have imposed on them a new type of slave trade and slavery.

## THE IMPACT OF THE AFRICAN ECONOMIC SITUATION ON THE FAMILY

The UNDP's Human Development Reports of 1992 (2.40) has clearly confirmed the fact that "Africa is being left behind by the rest of the world".

With a per capital real total (GDP) of US \$171 in comparison with \$964, for the Caribbeans and Latin America and \$351 for South Asia. Cameroon \$940, among the regions of the third world, Sub Saharian Africa presents the poorest of the poor (1.30). Only 40% of the people of Africa have access to safe water and only 48% to health services. Infant mortality rates are still soaring high at 170/1,000 i.e. children who die before the age of five. (Cameroon 121/1000). Maternal mortality rate i.e. the number of women who die from causes related to pregnancy and child birth per 100,000 live births is 590 compared to 490 in South Asia and 210 for South America. (Cameroon 430). In 1990, life expectancy in Sub Sahara Africa was 51 years. This compares grimly with an average life expectancy of 74 for industrialized countries and an average of 62 years for all developing countries (3.37).

Despite the disparities between social groups within individual countries and from country to country, the situation pertaining to Africa in general and sub saharan Africa in particular, represents a very serious challenge.

.../...

Principally it illustrates the gravity of the injustice and malfunctioning of the ~~current~~ world economic order and international monetary system, as well as the failure of traditional development theories and practices.

As it apparent today that every small achievements of African nations in human development since 1960 had been reversed by the 1980's.

The plight of many African families today is a crucial problem which is more than just a statistical reality. African economic crisis could be traced back to the 1970's when oil prices rose causing an excess of \$ in the northern banks. These banks then had to look for burrowers and the third world ofcourse become the victim of loans.

By the 1980's interest rates on these loans sky - rocketed. Paying back became mathematically impossible. The Third World Countries bitterly realized they had to pay back debts many times over in their interest payments. In other words, the South subsidizes the North on a scale of 3 to 1.

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The Big Powers then stepped in giving the third world countries the hope that they intend to help them pay back their debts. Instead the world bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) not only plunged debtor countries (Africa) into fresh loans but also on the condition that debtor countries adopt structural Adjustment Programmes which have not only economic but political connotations.

By the same mid 1980s the prices of agricultural raw materials were 32% lower than before due to prices determined by International markets and regulated by the G7 (leaders of the seven leading industrial countries) annual meeting. This began the decline in the African economic situation and a change in the income level of the African family. The buying power of African families continued to drop. At the same time prices for imported capital goods have been steadily rising. In addition to the above, Governments response to Structural Adjustment Programmes and International debts resulted in a decline in private sector contribution to national economic development. Government receipts continue to drop with consequent cuts on social services.

The I M F and World Bank through STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMES issued conditions for countries to apply severe cuts on social services. For Cameroon this resulted in: cuts in health services, Education and even Nutrition. It meant salary cuts; redundancy, Suppression of free services such as scholarships, increase in taxes, closure of Companies, forced and early retirements. Currency devaluations rendering imported goods much more expensive and exported goods much cheaper. The promotion of Exports to raise foreign exchange and the Liberalization of Trade which allows Foreign goods enter the 'third world' countries including Cameroon without a duty and foreign companies allowed to compete with local companies.

The impact of these measures on the African family and Communities has been extremely devastating, - a situation worsened by the reduction in the flow of Technical Assistance from the Industrialised to the third world countries.

SAPs have inflicted extreme poverty on African families. Unemployment for instance has been exacerbated by the economic crisis which is more pervasive in the urban areas especially among the youths and particularly among the young women. This insecurity causes the youth to become involved in delinquency, prostitution and resurgence to violence and crime.

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EDUCATION + TRAINING, Despite the significant progress made in Cameroon since independence, the inadequacies between training, education and employment are becoming more and more disturbing.

Such inadequacies between training and employment and the existing economic situation have in addition to massive loss of jobs, caused a stagnation in the labour market's capacity to absorb new job seekers. Aggravating this situation is the current wave of political upheavals in Cameroon as in most African Countries which have given rent to a Political Impasse. Political instability and uncertainty which are hostile to investments both foreign and at national level. This has contributed to capital flight from the already poor countries and has rendered the implementation of Government Programmes difficult

This poverty state gives rise to other ills in communities manifested in general frustration, upheavals, crime, depression, disharmony at family level and abandonment of the family unit.

Women and children the most vulnerable groups become the hardest hit. Violence against women is rampant.

POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES IN SUPPORT AND PROTECTION  
OF FAMILIES TO MITIGATE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES  
OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGES.

In order to mitigate negative consequences of economic and social change which have gravely imperished African families, many African Governments are reviewing their traditional policies and programmes.

In Cameroon several policies are taking new dimensions. The Agricultural Policy has hitherto, encouraged the production of cash crops over food crops. The new Agricultural Policy is concentrating efforts in the growing of a variety of food crops not only sufficient but for export to neighbouring countries for income operation. This innovation has to a certain degree cushioned the falling standards of living since agriculture is the main stay in the Cameroon economy.

POPULATION POLICY:

Cameroon was one of the first francophone countries to create soon after the 1984 Conference a National Structure charged with the responsibility of advising Government on the question of Population. The National Commission on population with its Interministerial Committee as the Technical organs. Following the deliberations of this commission, several activities have finally led up to the adoption of a population policy declared in March 1993.

SOME OF THE MAIN THRUST OF THE POLICY FOCUSS ON THE FOLLOWING SECTORS :

- A) POPULATION DISTRIBUTION AND INTEGRATED REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT.
- B) POPULATION AND EDUCATION.
- C) HEALTH, FAMILY WELFARE AND RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD.
- D) POPULATION INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION.

A) POPULATION DISTRIBUTION AND INTEGRATED REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT :

In this domain, Government deems it expedient to rethink the rural exodus phenomenon and to find appropriate remedies. Government hopes to focus attention on rural development.

One of the measures already embarked on is the cost recovery policy in which cognisance is taken of the role and responsibilities of the grass root communities in drawing up action programmes.

In view of the above, the National Pop Policy will seek to achieve a more balanced spatial redistribution of the population by applying several measures including :-

- - Strengthening of Community Development Programmes in rural areas by recognising existing traditional struc-

tures which must be involved in the management of available governmental and non-governmental (NGO) resources.

- By sensitizing the rural population on the realities of the life in Urban areas and the advantages of life in the rural area.

B) POPULATION AND EDUCATION :

Among other things and despite prevailing difficulties, the Educational System from Primary School to the highest level will remain the constant concern of Government.

Efforts will be made to promote and enhance basic education for all, but especially for females in the way of encouraging enrolment for females and preventing them from dropping out too early.

Lastly by reviewing and adapting school curriculum to the local social, economic and cultural realities particularly the promotion of thics which are in line with our social and cultural values.



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### C) HEALTH FAMILY WELFARE AND RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD :

In this area, the N Pop Pol will give priority to preventive medicine in order to reduce the high infant, child and maternal mortality rates. The strengthening and extension of the existing Primary Health Care System will be highly considered. Special attention will be paid to the problems of teenagers pre-marital and unwanted pregnancies.

Focus will also be on the specific problems faced by impoverished families and populations especially the marginalized. Comprehensive curricular for family welfare and Sex Education Programmes aimed at specific target groups will be conceived and implemented.

Family planning is also taking root in Cameroon. Services are being extended to the rural areas and the hard to reach.

The introduction Family Life/Sex Education in schools in 1992 is one of the measures in disseminating early in life (adolescence) the notion of child spacing and responsible parenthood.

### WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT :

In order to improve the status and wellbeing of women and to ensure their full participation in development, the Policy states that Government and the Community will undertake special actions aimed at :-

- Creating a proper legal Framework for eliminating all existing legal barriers which directly or indirectly interfere with the women's exercising their rights or with full participating in development.
- Extending information, education and communication programmes in order to make women more aware of their roles in the family and society.
- Facilitating the access of women to land ownership and credit facilities, both on individual and on cooperative basis or through any professional group or association.
- Creating appropriate conditions for the women's organizations particularly by encouraging them to enter into partnership with NGO's.

### CHANGES IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Recently Government has had to chose further reduction in salaries rather than further retrenchements. It has also adopted a one shift working system (7.30 - 3.30p.m.) instead of the 7.30 - 12 and 14.30 - 6 p.m. in order to reduce the burden on families.

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The role of the community emerges quite important and significant in the struggle to overcome or at least minimize the effect of the economic crisis.

Community participation is manifested through - individual efforts and group efforts such as informal ethnic groupings and women's association (sundays) and Christian Women's Groups. Formal groups such as : Cooperatives and Non Governmental Organizations.

### INCOME GENERATION :

At Individual Level, women especially engage in small income generating activities e.g.

- Developing small scale farms and gardens where they grow vegetables etc for consumption and selling surpluses for cash.
- Opening small commercial units to sell simple every day edibles like akra balls, plantain chips roasted corn etc.

### AT GROUP LEVEL :

- Creating common initiative groups, Cooperative unions to improve the scale of production storage and marketing.
- Developing this Cooperative Spirit can extend and include : working communally from one persons farm to the other, building houses in same manner etc.
- Raising funds through local banking system popularly known in Cameroon as "Njangi" or Tontines. Here group members subscribe regularly to a common fund from which members take loans for low rate interest. At the breaking of the Njangi bank, as it is termed usually end of the year, members claim their accumulated shares and interests to help solve their financial problems.
- Establishing of skills development centers for basket weaving, bags, dress - making, embroidery etc.. especially for youth including young boys and girls and young mothers.

### EDUCATION AND INFORMATION :

NGO's which are more formalized engage mainly in activities which educate and inform the public.

Some NGO's engage in educating women on particular economic activities and lines of production.

Others involve themselves in teaching women and men elementary household economy through the management of household resources economically e.g. the careful use of water and electricity. They reduce electricity and other forms of lighting by use of fire-wood, stoves and other types of fuel.

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Others still, intensify the action of Ministries such as Health and Women's and Social Affairs in educating and informing the public on the benefits of Family Planning :

- Child spacing,
- Contraceptive methods
- Good nutrition
- Personal hygiene and
- Counselling youth on the prevention of unwanted pregnancy's, Sexually Transmitted Diseases and AIDS.

#### CONCLUSION :

Aware of the economic situation in Africa and the rest of the Third World as we all are, it is obvious that the situation presents a challenge to all concerned.

There is a growing consensus that if the poor of the third world are to be saved, a new framework of International Economic Cooperation will have to be developed. When in 1974 the United Nations in Assembly issued a call for a New Economic Order, they least expected the grave situation endured by the peoples of Africa today.

To pull Africa out of this doldrums requires concerted efforts from all concerned.

Governments of all African Nations need to review the objectives of their programmes and re-evaluate their outcomes if the stated intentions should be credible in the eyes of the world. The OAU, the people's and communities of our nations must all get involved in this struggle. NGOs, Cooperatives and Individual efforts must be intensified to assist Governments attempts to relieve the poverty situation.

We need also to alert the Developed World on the additional social ills caused by the weapons they supply to the third world. Teargas, grenades, bombs and various types of ammunitions are killing our men, women and children. This only increases the number of widows and orphans in our already poverty stricken world.

Finally we call on the World Council of churches to take up the challenge and develop new approaches in dealing with human suffering. There is need to strengthen the faith of Christians for contincus prayers to Christ who will come and crown our efforts with glory.

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