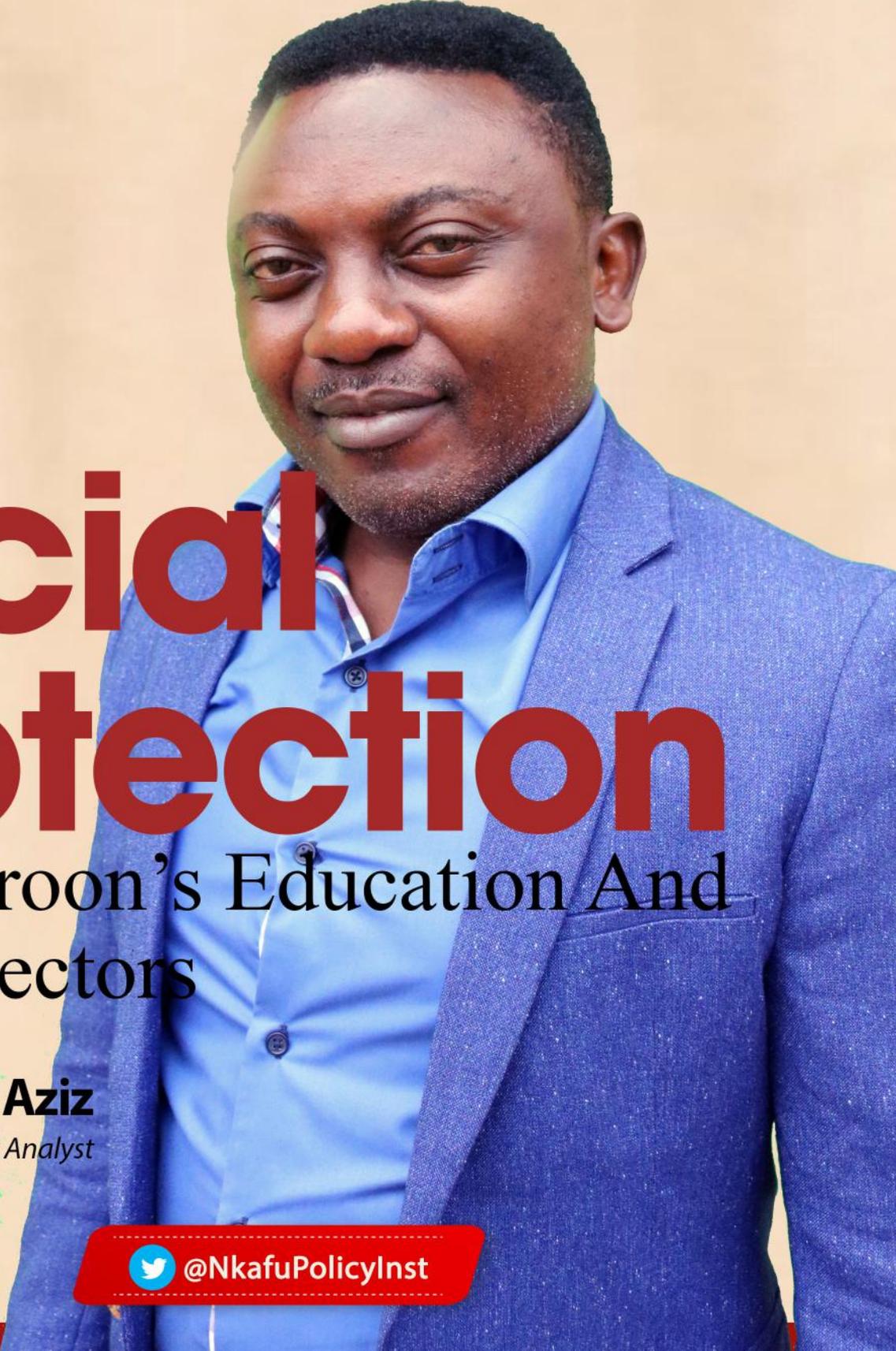


Article

Nkafu Policy Institute

September 2018

A portrait of Eogh Modi Aziz, a man with short dark hair, wearing a blue blazer over a light blue shirt. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression.

Social Protection

In Cameroon's Education And
Health Sectors

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Social protection and welfare systems in most Sub Saharan African countries are below international standards. According to the International Federation of Social Workers,^[1] “social protection is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work and/or protection. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social protection engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.” The above definition may be stressed at national and/or regional levels.

In Cameroon, social assistance in the education sector is limited within the parameters of certain beneficiaries (e.g., civil servants, academically distinguished students, handicapped parents’ children etc.), and/or workers in the formal

economy, and without any particular coverage for the poor, orphans and individuals outside of the formal economic structure. This is largely due to inadequate social governance programs and a laxity to implement the existing ones. Cameroon’s managerial inadequacy resonates from a poorly developed social welfare system, especially referring to its education and health sectors. Over time, there has been limited access to essential healthcare and other goods and services. Because of this limitation, many orphans and helpless children find it difficult or practically impossible to enroll and/or access educational and health services. At the educational level, individuals who manage to gain admission into these institutions are unable to meet the requirements and obligations for continuous school attendance, due to lack of means. The result is that they become victims driven from school by authorities. Ultimately, some completely drop out of school. The Education Policy and Data Center ascertains that up to 17% of primary school children were dropped out in 2014 and, amongst these, the



poorest children constituted the majority.^[2] The role of Cameroon's government to guarantee improvement in the educational sector has been noticeable but, unfortunately, has fallen short of making special provisions to address the material concerns of orphans and the poor and needy.

The ongoing forms of subventions provided by the government are anchored by two ministries: the Ministry of Secondary Education and that of Social Affairs. These include among others, bursaries ranging from ten to twenty-five thousand francs being disbursed to deserving students yearly by the Department of Educational Planning, Cooperation and Assistance.^[3]

Unfortunately, this package goes to the students who already come from a stable family with some level of wealth as it is geared towards the motivation of only academically distinguished students. Further, prize-giving award ceremonies organized by schools and scholarships offered by elites and business leaders are designated only to those who stand out academically. Apart from educational

authorities motivating outstanding students, the education system does not consider the poor and orphans on the basis of how needy they could be. There exists an inter-ministerial policy geared towards the exemption of enrollment fees and Parent Teacher Association charges provided by the Ministries of Secondary Education and Social Affairs.^[4] This policy also favors only the physically handicapped students and children with disabled parents in public schools. Again, it does not take into consideration the orphans and helpless children in and out of public schools. In addition, trained educational advisors are present in some public institutions that cater to the educational and psycho-social needs of students but without attention to orphans and underprivileged children within these same structures. It is in this regard that a policy alternative that is pro-poor and orphan-inclusive, is necessary to ensuring equity in government plans and programs within the country's education and health systems.

The Public Health administration and standards in Cameroon is not encouraging due to a critical



shortage and unequal distribution of health personnel. [5] Given that every country's economy depends on the wellbeing of its people, it is important for the government to put in place action plans and programs that reach out to all – including those who are out of the formal sectors of the economy. The labor market in Cameroon, for example, is largely informal with approximately 8 out of every 10 Cameroonians operating out of the formal sector. Cameroon has one of the highest “out of pocket” health expenditure in Africa (WHO, 2013) thus leading to impoverishment in households.

The country's HIV/AIDS prevalence is also among the highest in the Central African region, with 560,000 people living with HIV in 2016. According to ILO expert Dramane Batchabi, less than 7% of people in Cameroon are covered by adequate social health protection. [6] The current social protection system has two pillars: a scheme for civil servants and, the National Social Insurance Fund (with its French acronym - CNPS) for workers under the labor code. The CNPS covers about 2 out of every 10 people and guarantees most of the benefits provided by the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Social Security 1952 Convention, apart from unemployment and sickness benefits. Workers operating outside of the formal labor market structures are not covered. For example, in 2011,

of the estimated workforce of 8.4 million, only 580,200 (7%) were protected. There is need for the government to ensure effective implementation of the current health policy, especially regarding sick benefits to workers and/or individuals operating out of the formal economy.

CONTEXT AND SCOPE OF CAMEROON'S EDUCATION AND HEALTH SYSTEMS

Going by the definition of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), social protection refers to the “set of policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labor markets, diminishing people's exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against hazards and loss of income.”

As a matter of fact, social protection strategy in Cameroon is ineffective, especially when viewed from the above definition. The government is reviewing the national strategy on social protection initiated in 2004 but has not finalized it. That is more the reason why development partners are needed to support government in formulating social protection policies.

FINANCING SOCIAL PROTECTION

According to the 2006 World Development Report, government expenditure on social protection

is exceedingly low in sub-Saharan Africa; with an expected 0.3% of GDP on social assistance programs, which is relatively low compared to countries in Latin America such as Colombia with 3.0 % in 2015.^[7] Even though figures are not quite accessible, the proportion is possibly even lower in west and central Africa.

Authorities within the prescribed sectors must consider prioritizing the financing of social protection programs. The budget estimates should constitute one of the core factors to ensure an equitable distribution of financial resources to include the poor, orphans and vulnerable populations. Social assistance programs should be reviewed on an ongoing basis rather than maintaining existing action plans that do not seem to benefit the poor in society.

STATE CAPACITY

There is an adverse political environment that emanates from a set of governance indicators showing a downward trend in most west and central African countries. According to the World Bank classification of Worldwide Governance Indicators on state capacity conducted between 2006 and 2016, 14 out of the 24 states in the Sub-Saharan Africa region have approximately 35%. Corruption is persistent in most countries, as evidenced in their scores on the Transparency International Perception Index. ^[8]

Social protection systems do not consider cross-cutting areas such as chronic poverty, risk and vulnerability among others. This system motivates academics but fails to address the bigger picture of the right to education for all – if we want to go - at least by the standards of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The government of Cameroon is making efforts in the area of social protection vis-à-vis helplessness. Due to interruption and a limited scale of interferences by authorities, so far, the efforts have not been noticeable. There is limited access to essential healthcare in the country, as reflected in the per capita government expenditure in health

that stood at 17 USD in 2010 – far below the World Health Organization's (WHO) 44 USD standard. Another example revolves around the continuous lack of care on sickness and unemployment benefits to workers and individuals out of the formal economic system. Finally, in the HIV/AIDS domain, the current government strategy of strip testing and the distribution of anti-retroviral drugs to those affected do not really extend to the hinter lands.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Health

It is relevant for the government to reinforce the current HIV/AIDS action plan to cut across all regions, as well as to ensure enhanced resource capacity to address the disease. Health programs should address workers and individuals out of the mainstream economy.

Education and Political Will

Education authorities should embark on an all-inclusive strategy. The government and relevant interest groups should demonstrate positive political will and concerted efforts, including a considerable reduction on the number of vulnerable children who are out of school.



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