



# Report

## On Cameroon's 2019 Budget

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*The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessary reflect the views of the editorial advisers or The Nkafu Policy Institute.*

***“The press, social partners and all civil society actors in general shall be encouraged to participate in disseminating information, as well as in the public debate on governance and public finance management” Law N02018/011 of 11 July 2018: Cameroon Code of Transparency and Good Governance in Public Finance Management; section 48(2).***

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## 1. KEY FINDINGS

#1 high debt service cost and government wage bill are crowding out priority spending such as public investments, health, agriculture and fisheries.

#2 an inadequate public investment budget which represents only about 6% of the GDP of Cameroon, i.e., 24% of the annual budget, which is below the 30% needed to reach emergence in 2035 according to the World Bank and the Strategy for Growth and Employment document.

#3 an inadequate public health budget representing less than 1% of the GDP or 4.29% of the annual budget.

#4 the national policy priorities of the government are not including both the development of fish farming and improving the productivity and competitiveness of the agricultural sector (with rice and frozen fish imports of about 315 billion FCFA according to the World Bank).

#5 quantitative indicators or outputs loosely related to the government's objectives or outcomes

## 2. CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION OF CAMEROON

Cameroon economic situation is getting worst: the GDP growth rate has been decreasing almost at a constant rate of 1.1% between 2015 and 2017 (GDP figure for 2018 will soon be available). It was 3.5% in 2017, 4.6% in 2016 and 5.7% in 2015 (CIA World Factbook, 2018; National Institute of Statistics, 2018<sup>1</sup>). Thus, the real GDP growth rate is lower than the 8% estimated by the World Bank (2016) for Cameroon to become an upper-middle income country by 2035. According to the National Institute of Statistics (2018<sup>6</sup>), Cameroon trade balance (exports minus its imports) was negative by approximately -1128 billion FCFA. Furthermore, the foreign currency reserve is down significantly due to amongst other things, a drop in the oil price – currently sitting at \$3.1 billion, from \$3.6 billion in 2010 (World Bank, 2017). That is a drop of nearly half a billion FCFA. In other words, Cameroon has less foreign currencies available in its central bank to pay for its imports. Fear the economy will further deteriorate is steadily growing because Cameroon lost the hosting rights of the 2019 African cup of nations (Afcon). Some entrepreneurs who obtain banks' loans to improve their facilities (to make it more attractive to visitors/tourists) in anticipation for the Afcon, may now have problems finding new clients.

Underemployment and the informal sector economy are dominant in Cameroon (United Nations, 2013). It is reported that 88.6% of jobs created in Cameroon are in the informal sector (National Institute of Statistics, 2018<sup>5</sup>). In addition, 79% of individual workers in Cameroon were underemployed in 2014 and 37.5% of Cameroonian adults have an average income of less than 931 FCFA (\$2) per day (National Institute of Statistics, 2018<sup>5</sup>). Arguably, low-paid jobs in the informal sector, and, underemployment in Cameroon in general seem to be unemployment in disguise. Thus, the official unemployment rate in Cameroon of 4.3%, from 30% in 2001 (CIA World Factbook, 2018, United Nations, 2013) is highly likely to be biased. Indeed, this significant drop in the rate of unemployment between 2001 and 2018 is associated with a re-definition of an “unemployed individual” by the National Institute of Statistics, to include unemployed individuals’ looking for an opportunity but having done some part-time works the week before the survey. For example, most unemployed individuals in Cameroon are considered “employed” by the State because they are working part-time in the informal sector (Moto taxis, Bayam-Sellam and Cultivators etc.), while looking for opportunities in the formal sector; sometimes earning less than the minimum salary of approximately FCFA 36 000/month or \$72 (National Institute of Statistics, 2018<sup>5</sup>). The following facts from the National Institute of Statistics can further substantiate our claim that the unemployment rate of 4.3% does not reflect the reality on the economy. Poverty is widespread: 41.3% of households in Cameroon are living in poverty, based on data collected in 2014 (National Institute of Statistics, 2018<sup>3</sup>). Things have not improved significantly in 2018. For example, 35.3% of Cameroonians do not have access to potable water (National Institute of Statistics, 2018<sup>3</sup>).

However, the cost of living is relatively stable: the inflation was 0.6% in 2017, from 0.9% in 2016 (National Institute of Statistics, 2018<sup>2</sup>); albeit not in every part of the country. It has been increasing above the national average in Bertoua and Bafoussam, driven in part by the rising cost of electricity, drinks, goods and services (National Institute of Statistics, 2018<sup>2</sup>).

The main threats in a relatively short-term to the Cameroonian economy include the management of the Afcon infrastructure development, the Anglophone crisis in the North-west and South-west regions of the country and the crisis in the Far North-region of the country. Some companies with a substantial number of corporate and individual customers in those parts of the country, are reportedly struggling financially, as the insecurity continues (Lunn, Jon and Brooke-Holland, Louisa, 2018).

In a relatively long-term, Cameroon should significantly reduce its debt service and the public sector wage bill (Both representing a staggering 2/5 of the annual budget or 44% of it, i.e., about 11% of the GDP) to be able to increase its investment share of the budget. The debt service is a series of payments of interest and principal required on public debt, and it is a shocking 1/5 of the annual budget (1057 billion FCFA). The government wage bill is also a 1/5 of the annual budget (1058 billion FCFA) and almost a 1/3 of the Government own revenue (i.e., its revenue excluding loans). In other words, high debt service cost and government wage bill are crowding out priority spending such as the public investments (similar to Gambia, Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative, 2018<sup>2</sup>). The investment share of the annual budget should increase from 20% in 2016 to 30%, in order to reach emergence by 2035 according to a World Bank (2016) report on the economy of Cameroon and the Strategy for Growth and Employment Document (DSCE). Though the 2019 public investment

budget has increased by 142 billion FCFA compared to last year, it is only 24% of the annual budget (Government of Cameroon, 2019), and it represents about 6% of the GDP of Cameroon (which is \$35 billion according to the CIA World Factbook, 2018). Limited allocation of funds for public investments (similar to Liberia, Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative, 2018<sup>3</sup>) is the main reason why this budget bill cannot in its current form stimulate the economy of Cameroon towards emergence in 2035. Moreover, human capital investments (education and public health) remain relatively low and not targeted at significantly increasing the percentage of STEM graduates nationwide (STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). It is a government responsibility to ensure sufficient supply of STEM skills because these are vital for a country's productivity (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2018). Additionally, the offer of entrepreneurial education in Cameroon that aims at improving trainees' business acumen (creativity/innovation skills) to create jobs, is very limited (Ndedi, A., 2015). For the 2035 vision for an emerging and democratic Cameroon to become a reality, Cameroon should unleash the potential of its private sector and create jobs (World Bank, 2016). Unfortunately, most of these "entrepreneurship training" being offered are in fact small business management training and do not cover skills to innovate and create jobs (Ndedi, A., 2015). The budget allocated to modernization and professionalization of mainstream faculties (whose objective is to provide higher education's students with skills and capacities to find employment and/or create jobs) has not changed at 2.62 billion FCFA, compared to last year. To sum up, there is a mismatch between the entrepreneurship training currently being offered in Cameroon and the labour market need: the budget allocation towards adapting secondary education's training to the socio-economic environment has decreased by 129 million compared to last year to 62.747 billion FCFA.

### 3. THE 2019 BUDGET IN A NUTSHELL

This report is based on the 60 pages (budget) draft bill No 1041/PJL/AN of the Republic of Cameroon that was adopted by the parliament on the 28 November 2018. According to this bill, Cameroon's budget for 2019 stands at 4850.5 billion FCFA. This is an increase of 161 billion or 3.43%, compared to last year budget. The government expects the GDP to grow further by 0.9% in 2019, to 4.4%. This seems a little bit optimistic with the fall in oil price, the situation in the Far North region of the country and the Anglophone crisis in the North-west/South-west regions. It is reported that some Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are closing down in those parts of the country, because of, amongst other things a drop in the number of customers (Lunn Jon and Brooke-Holland Louisa, 2018). In addition, the already high-corporate tax rate has not changed at 30% (plus 10% additional municipal taxes i.e., 33% in total); making it difficult for SMEs to reinvest profits.

Revenue from oil accounts for almost 10% (9.79%) of the annual budget of the State of Cameroon. It is the second most important source of revenue of the State in terms of FCFA value. In other words, a significant drop in the oil price in 2019, can negatively affect the investment programs run by the State that are financed through this budget. The main source of revenue of the Government is the Value Added Tax (VAT), whose rate remains at 19.25%. VAT revenue represents a little bit more than a quarter of the annual budget (or 26.5%). The import related tax revenue is amounts 8% of the annual budget and it is the third source of revenue of the State after VAT and oil.

As regards the Anglophone crisis, the government is planning a devolution of power to the regions in an attempt to give the residents more voice in the local government affairs. The budget of the ministry of decentralization and local development has quadrupled (it is amongst the only two expenditure lines in the budget that has increased by more than two-fold from last year budget, along with the budget allocation for the ministry of communication which has doubled). The budget allocation for the ministry in charge of decentralization intends to cover 3 main programs. One is concerned with reinforcing/deepening the decentralization process, and, it is allocated 83% of the overall budget of this ministry. What deepening the decentralization process means to the government is strengthening the autonomy of the councils (smallest territorial divisions) and making the regions operational. However, it means different things to different Cameroonians. To some, this means electing the governors of each of the 10 regions: the 2018 scientific nationwide public opinion survey on Governance, Economy and the 2018 Presidential Election in Cameroon, by the Nkafu Policy Institute, reveals that more than 80% of Cameroonians want governors of their regions to be elected by the people. The remaining two programs are the promotion of local development (budget allocated 2.94 billion FCFA) and the Governance and institutional support in the decentralization and local development sub-sector (budget allocated 4.87 billion FCFA).

Putting this budget in a nutshell should also include a discussion on the debt service, because this expenditure is the #1 in terms of budget allocation or amount of funding (see Table 2). As discussed before, the debt service (domestic and external) is 1057.4 billion FCFA in 2019, which is more than twice the revenue that will be derived from oil or 475 billion FCFA. To break it down, the domestic debt service is 12.3% of the annual budget and the external debt service is 9.5% of the same (i.e., in total, 21.8% of the annual budget will be allocated to the payments of interest and principal required on public debt).

## 4. THE PRIORITIES OF THE 2019 BUDGET

An economic (rational choice) look at Table 1 on the top 10 (& bottom 10) budget allocations, suggests that the national policy priority of the government is not job creation. Each of the top 10 expenditure lines are about 5% of the annual budget or significantly more. It includes expenditure lines related to human capital (primary education, secondary education and public health), debt service (domestic and external debt service), public works, government common expenses, grants and contributions to organizations and public institutions, defense spending and pensions. It is a rational choice to prioritize the investments in human capital and road construction & maintenance (public works) but not necessarily the other expenditures. It is well known that human capital and public works have a significant positive effect on the GDP over a relatively long term. Unfortunately, more than 90% of the 50 000 km of national roads remain both untarred and in bad conditions (Government of Cameroon, 2009<sup>2</sup> in the DSCE i.e., the Strategic Document for Employment and Growth). Likewise, as discussed above, the investment in human capital in Cameroon is not targeted at both promoting entrepreneurial education (programs that teach people how to start businesses and thus creating jobs) as well as

increasing significantly the number of STEM graduates. Entrepreneurial education and STEM skills are needed to catalyze our economic transformation through improved productivity (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2018).

The bottom 10 expenditure lines show that human rights and Economic advisory are not given priority. The commission on Human rights budget allocation is 0.03% of the annual budget (it is 0.04% for the Economic council).

TABLE 1: Top 10 (& bottom 10) budget allocation (million FCFA)				
Top 10				
EXPENDITURE LINE	2018	2019	DIFF	WEIGHT 2019
Domestic Public Debt	683000	596430	-86570	12.30
External Public Debt	373000	461000	88000	9.50
Secondary Education	365212	393079	27867	8.10
Public Works	326269	361344	35075	7.45
Common Expenses	314960	310629	-4331	6.40
Grant and Contributions	245140	273084	27944	5.63
Defense	238910	247447	8537	5.10
Primary Education	210553	226056	15503	4.66
Pensions	209000	215158	6158	4.44
Public Health	175240	207943	32703	4.29
Bottom 10				
Carryover of Credits	10000	8000	-2000	0.16
Women's Empowerment and the Family.	6072	6470	398	0.13
State Auditor General	5382	5493	111	0.11
Arts and Culture	4581	5217	636	0.11
Work and Social Security	4752	5066	314	0.10
Supreme Court	3336	4594	1258	0.09
National Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism	3400	3350	-50	0.07
Constitutional Council	2500	3050	550	0.06
Economic and Social Council	1436	1730	294	0.04
National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms	1155	1215	60	0.03

*Source: Government of Cameroon, 2019: Bill No. 1041/PJL/AN on the Finance Act of the Republic of Cameroon for the 2019 financial year. Yaoundé: National Assembly.*

## 5. OTHER KEY FACTS FROM THE 2019 BUDGET

### 5.1. Taxation of software and application

It is difficult to say whether the taxation of software and application (flat rate of 200 FCFA per app according to this draft bill) that are downloaded online, via a phone or tablet, is good for the economy. This may have an adverse effect on some segments of the economy (e.g., digital economy) due to increased cost related to access to information available online.

### 5.2. Agriculture

Agricultural trucks are exempted from excise duty. This is good for the promotion of agribusiness in Cameroon, although not enough. As discussed before, the trade balance in Cameroon is still negative, due in part, to a large importation of rice and frozen fish. The World Bank estimation was US\$ 298,864,000.13 (175 billion FCFA) for imported rice and US\$ 243,994,000.20 (140 billion FCFA) for imported frozen fish in 2015. Oil, rice and fish are the top 3 imported products from the rest of the world by Cameroon (World Bank, 2015). However, the budget that is allocated to the ministry of agriculture for 2019 has decreased, compared to last year's budget by about 1.6 billion FCFA. It represents only 1.75% of the annual budget and is ranked #15 (out of 58 departments) in terms of budget allocation. The ministry of agriculture's budget is shared within four programs which include that of improving the productivity and competitiveness of the agricultural sector. The latter will receive the greater share (42%) of the overall budget allocated to this ministry in 2019. The remaining programs are modernization of rural and production infrastructure (21.8 billion), sustainable management of agricultural natural resources (1.85 billion) and governance and institutional support in the agricultural and rural development sub-sector (25.29 billion).

### 5.3. Fish farming

As regards fish farming which falls under the ministry of livestock, fisheries and animal industries (MINEPIA) whose budget allocation (i.e., 0.67% of the annual budget of Cameroon) has also decreased, when compared to last year's budget by 2.7 billion FCFA. Its budget allocation covers also 4 main programs including the development of fishery production in order to increase the production of fishery products. However, this program will be allocated only 9% (or 2.9 billion FCFA) of the overall budget allocated to this ministry. It is relatively small when we consider the fact that Cameroon imported frozen fish worth 140 billion FCFA (in 2015) and maybe more in 2018. The remaining programs are development of animal production and industries (15 billion), improvement of livestock health coverage and zoonosis control (5 billion), and governance and institutional support in the livestock, fisheries and animal industries sub-sector (9 billion).

#### 5.4. Water and electricity

Individuals who consume less than 20 m<sup>3</sup> of water and 220 kw of electricity will not be subject to value added tax. This will boost the private consumption of the targeted population provided that the national electricity company (ENEO) does not increase the power tariffs in 2019. It has also the potential to help maintain the inflation rate below a certain target: as discussed before, the rise in electricity cost pushes up the rate of inflation. It is expected that the supply/provision of electricity in Cameroon will improve in the years ahead due to, amongst other things, the heavy investments in this sector (e.g., The Nachtigal hydroelectric project). The building of dams (favored by the government), are the main reasons the budget allocation of the ministry of water and electricity has increased significantly, by more than 57 billion FCFA or 40%, compared to last year's budget. This is the 2nd most important rise in budget allocation (after that of external debt service) in terms of amount of funding in FCFA. Industrialization is associated with both manufacturing and electricity: an excess supply of electricity, will highly likely boost Cameroon economic transformation.

#### 5.5. Excise duty on imported goods and drinks

Excise duty of 0.5% on all imported goods for the finance of refuse disposal is good for public health. The excise duties (on lower range drinks that are imported) per centiliter of wine (3 FCFA), whisky (10 FCFA), champagne (30 FCFA) and other alcoholic drink (3 FCFA) are 1 franc more than that levied on both wine and other alcoholic drinks produced locally, 2 francs more than that levied on local whisky and 5 francs more than that levied on local champagne. This is fair to local businesses because, unlike the European Union (EU), where a large share of imported wines comes from, they do not rely on substantial government subsidies to produce wine. The EU's financial support to its wine industry was estimated at 0.15 Euros (100 FCFA) per liter of wine produced in the EU (Anderson, K. and Jensen, G. G., 2016).

#### 5.6. Human capital: health, education and research

In addition to refuse disposal and much consumption of alcohol, another health risk is the poor investment in hospital infrastructures in Cameroon. The budget allocation for the ministry of public health is less than 5% (4.29) of the annual budget as discussed before. Though it has increased by about 20% compared to last year, it remains only about 1% of the GDP. Human capital (which includes health and STEM-education) contributes to approximately two-thirds of the GDP of nations (Nkafu Policy Institute, 2018). Arguably, the budget allocation for health and education should be amongst the top 5 budget allocation of the country (out of 58, see Table 2). Currently it is ranked #10 for health and #3 for secondary education (it is #8 for primary education and #19 for higher education). As regards research and innovation which is another component of human capital, its 2019 budget allocation is about 12 billion FCFA (i.e., 1 billion/month), or 0.25% of the annual budget. This is less than 0.1% of Cameroon's GDP (around \$35 billion - CIA World Factbook, 2018) and is small when compared to the Research budget (as a percentage of the GDP) of emerging economies like South Africa i.e., 0.8% of the GDP (Government of South Africa, 2017).

### **5.7. National Oil Refinery Company (SONARA)**

SONARA will be going through a restructuring phase that will start in January 1st, 2019 for up to three years. During that phase, it will benefit substantially from a tax allowance of 50% of gross income. A weak management of State Owned Enterprise is highly likely to “increase the risk of contingent liabilities restricting Government fiscal space” (Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative, 2018). As reported earlier, oil is the #1 imported product from the rest of the world by Cameroon according to the World Bank (2015) in terms of \$ value. This investment (tax allowance), hopefully, will allow SONARA to improve its infrastructure and increase its outputs. Indeed, the fact that Cameroon has a projected revenue from oil of 475 billion FCFA (Government of Cameroon, 2019), and at the same time is importing Petroleum oil valued at 655 billion FCFA or more (World Bank, 2015), is due to amongst other things, a lack of modern refinery in Cameroon. Trying to modernize the refinery in Cameroon will eventually decrease importation of fuel thereby reducing the price paid for a liter of fuel in Cameroon and the inflation.

### **5.8. Quantitative indicators (outputs) loosely relate to the government's objectives (outcomes)**

For each ministry/department, there are on average three or four main programs/policies, also expressed in the form of objectives (outcomes) and indicators (outputs). Most of these indicators are quantitative in nature. They are instruments used by the State to evaluate the policy gaps if any between government policies/objectives and their implementations. Their unit of measurements are including level, rate, annual number, percentage, proportion, average time, average quantities, ratio, volume, revenue, yield, and density. The problem is that some of these quantitative indicators loosely relate to the government's objectives (Rosli and Rossi, 2014); for example, that of the ministry of defense namely the “crime rate” (the policy as stated in this bill is to participate in the protection of people and property, the objective is to guarantee security and peace conditions conducive to peace development). The “crime rate” indicator selected to evaluate the successful implementation of this policy may not be satisfactory because many crimes in Cameroon go unreported. In other words, a large percentage or maybe the majority of crimes in Cameroon are not reported to the police.

## 6. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1. A reduction in the government's wage bill and corporate tax

The government remains the country's largest employer (Wage bill of 1058 billion FCFA): in comparison, the formal sector enterprises wage bill is estimated at 996 billion FCFA (National Institute of Statistics, 2018<sup>4</sup>). A reduction in taxes (which is good for business) will likely not happen unless the government wage bill is reduced or frozen. Indeed, a big tax cut has the potential to increase private consumption and private savings/investments. We recommend a reduction in the government's wage bill to below the enterprises wage bill i.e., -60 billion FCFA. This savings can be used to increase the investment budget for road construction (while aligning the infrastructure construction tender to the standard in west, southern and North Africa; as mentioned above, more than 90% of the 50 000 km of national roads remain both untarred and in bad conditions – See Government of Cameroon, 2009<sup>2</sup>: Strategic Document for Growth and Employment), entrepreneurial education, science education and hospitals (i.e., improving significantly the Cameroonian human capital).

The corporate tax rate has not changed at 30% (plus 10% additional municipal taxes). Similar to Rwanda in 2007, the government can cut it in 2019 by at least 5 points to 25% (that is a total rate of 27.5% including the 10% additional municipal taxes)? This will promote private investment and job creation. Rwanda has been experiencing an economic boom during the last decade (8.9% GDP growth rate in 2015 and 6.1% in 2017 according to the CIA World Factbook, 2018<sup>2</sup>) after cutting its corporate tax rate by 5 percentage points, from 35% in 2006 to 30% in 2007 until now. According to the World Bank (2016), to reach emergence by 2035, Cameroon should both increase productivity growth by 2% (from an average of 0% over the last decade) and create a favorable business environment for the private sector to flourish (as reported above).

This subsequent fall in corporate tax revenue equivalent to -5.5% of total rate (33% currently minus 27.5% that we are recommending i.e., approximately 58.5 billion FCFA loss of revenue by the State), can be compensated in a relatively short term, by reducing the government wage bill by about 60 billion FCFA as discussed earlier. However, the savings (by the companies) should be invested in the local economy and only a relatively small percentage should be distributed as dividend to shareholders.

In a relatively long term, the following measures (X4) can also be taken to increase government revenue: first, the implementation of an efficient system of tax collection. The introduction of online payment for the custom duties (border taxes) in this budget bill is good. This should be the default option so that more of the border taxes are paid online for the sake of efficiency. In other words, it has the potential to reduce corruption as well as improving revenue collection. Other provisions in this bill that can help reduce corruption if implemented fully include the information that custom duty managers can no longer import or export goods, and, the introduction of single points of control for the goods entering the country. Though, the custom duty manager is generously given 1 year to

comply, from the date of the promulgation of this bill (which was December 11, 2018 – Cameroon tribune N0 11732/7941 of Wednesday December 12, 2018; pages 9-25), it remains a big step towards fighting corruption at the border.

Second measure to increase the State revenue is the sale of government assets. Assets such as vehicles and shares worth billions of FCFA can be sold to compensate for a fall in corporate tax revenue. Third, a substantial reduction in the government size (i.e., Government spending) from 58 ministerial portfolios or Budget allocation currently (for a total of 66 ministers and associates) to about 33 or below, can also help the State save billions of FCFA. South Africa for example, with a GDP of \$350 billion i.e., 10 X that of Cameroon (CIA World Factbook, 2018<sup>4</sup>), has 33 ministerial portfolios (Government of South Africa, 2017<sup>2</sup>). This reduction may be extended also to the members of parliament and the senators. For example, the United States of America, with a GDP of \$20 trillion i.e., about 570 X that of Cameroon, has only 100 senators (CIA World Factbook, 2018<sup>3</sup>), same as Cameroon. It is fair to say that the number of senators in Cameroon can be brought down to 20 (2 per region, similar to the USA's i.e., two per States). Fourth, greater accountability (for example judges, especially those in charge of corruption cases, should not be fired by any member of the executive branch of the government, though the executive should be able to nominate them – similar to the United States).

Moreover, the collection of the following taxes can be improved: estate and inheritance taxes, occupancy taxes currently at FCFA 2000 per night, cutting-down timber tax currently at 4% (of the FOB/Free on Board value). The Law-makers should make provision in an act of parliament for the minister in charge of budget (finance) to provide details on most tax rates proposed in the annual budget. The rationale behind FCFA 2000 and 4% above-mentioned is not straightforward. This will help improve efficiency in taxing our hotels and forest exploitation companies, to name but a few; by ensuring that a fair tax rate is applied each year. The sector of activities mentioned above are important to the economy of Cameroon: for example, the average contribution of round wood export alone, to the economy over the period 1980-2014 is not insignificant at 1.2% of GDP (Njimanted and Aquilas, 2015). As regards estate and inheritance taxes, this bill makes provision for individuals who will pay their taxes in 2019, not to be charged any penalties by the revenue and customs.

## **6.2. High debt service cost is crowding out priority spending such as public investments, agriculture, fisheries and health**

As regards these budget's priorities, it is our own judgment that, debt service, common expenses, grants & contributions to organizations and public institutions should not be given priority. Instead, in addition to human capital and road construction & maintenance, agriculture and fisheries should be given priority in the current context of heavy dependence on importation of rice and frozen fish. Moreover, this budget's least priority in terms of budget allocation should not be human rights. According to Koob, Jorgensen and Sano (2017), nations that advance freedoms and human rights tend to flourish over a relatively long term (10 years and more). Cameroon should increase the

budget for the commission on human rights and freedoms (whose main role is to ensure that the citizen's rights are respected) and that of the economic and social council, provided that their roles are more orientated towards encouraging/promoting economic freedoms in Cameroon. Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*, states "every man, as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest his own way, and to bring both his industry and capital into competition with those of any other man, or order of men". There is a positive relationship between economic freedoms/liberty and the economic performance of a country (Rodrik, Dani, 2014).

Debt service is a burden to the State (1/5 of the annual budget). We have recommended a progressive reduction in its budget allocation over the years (debt restructuring). The savings that will be made can be used to increase the budget of investment (road construction) and/or that of public health. The debt service budget allocation is more than 4 times that of the public health (which is ranked #10 in terms of budget allocation and representing only 4.29% of the annual budget or 1% of the GDP). It is our own judgment that there is an inadequate funding of health (similar to Nigeria, Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative, 2018<sup>4</sup>) and thus a misallocation of resources. A lack of comprehensive consultation (all members of parliament were reportedly not given enough time to review this draft bill before the voting session) promotes misallocating resources. A longer consultation period on the budget, between the Government and the members of parliament will improve the budgeting process, including the monitoring and evaluation phase. This is in line with section 14 of the Cameroon Code of Transparency and Good Governance in Public Finance Management which reads "An annual budgetary calendar for the preparation of the State budget shall be prepared and made public. This calendar shall envisage notably, within a reasonable timeframe preceding the tabling of the finance law, the publication by the Government of a report on economic assumptions, its major budgetary guidelines and priorities in the medium term as well as its main fiscal choices and budgetary risks for the impending year. (2) This report shall be subject to a debate in Parliament."

This is the case in Egypt which promotes greater civic participation addressing issues of budget. This has contributed to a leap of 25 points in the Open Budget Survey (which ranks countries in terms of transparency and participation when addressing issues of budget) between 2015 and 2017 (International Budget Partnership, 2017). Cameroon dropped 37 places during the same period, and is now ranked #7 (of least open countries when addressing issues of budget) in the world (International Budget Partnership, 2017).

However, the public debts (domestic and external) were 35.2% of the GDP in 2016 according to a document by the IMF on June 16, 2017 entitled "Cameroon: Request for a three-year arrangement under the extended credit facility – Debt sustainability analysis". It has not changed substantially in 2018. This is considered a relatively good performance for a poor country as it is below 70%, but the risk of public debts distress remains relatively high (with a debt service of 21.8% of the annual budget). The reason the debt service is relatively high, although public debts are (only) 36% of the

GDP is that the share of long term loans is very small – it was less than 3.5% of all loans in 2008 (see Cameroon's Strategic Document For Employment and Growth). Several measures in this bill can help in mitigating the risk to public debts if implemented fully as recommended in this IMF document above-mentioned. The measures are intended to reduce the volume of importation and increase the exportation of product items other than oil and gaz. This will help reduce the trade deficit. For instance, the government is planning to discourage via taxation, the importation of some items that can be produced locally such as soft drinks, body lotions, perfumes, second hand clothes and shoes, second hand cars and tires. For instance, the Excise duty (a type of inland indirect tax) on second hand shoes, clothes and tires is set at 12.5%.

The above-mentioned excise duties on imported products like second hand clothes/shoes are welcomed. However, Cicam (the main local manufacturer of cotton fabrics) should not unfairly increase prices for local designers and tailors. Alternatively, incentives in the form of tax allowance can be given to private entrepreneurs who invest locally to manufacture cotton fabrics. This will create competition and choice; it is expected that the tailors and designers will get the best possible price. As regards lower range alcoholic drinks that are imported, the excise duty can be doubled to reduce a public health risk due to much consumption of alcohol, while no longer being levied on local production if they improve in quality. A paternalistic government (which influences directly the adult consumer lifestyle) may not be beneficial to society and its individuals (Brock, 2014).

The IMF also recommended that Cameroon should have a preference for concessional/soft loans (associated with below market interest rates and / or grace periods). However, its level of concessional loans will remain the same in 2019 according to this bill. On the contrary, the State is planning an increase in its non-concessional loans in 2019 by 64 billion FCFA (when compared to last year amount of 436 billion FCFA). This non-compliance to the recommendation of the IMF may be due to the fact that Cameroon needed finances for the infrastructure development to host the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations.

### **6.3. Lagging healthcare: public health should be given a priority**

Public health is not given a priority (budget allocation < 5% of annual budget). The focus should be on improving both the economic proposals of local doctors (in a bit to attract and recruit the best) and the public health infrastructures. In other words, the budget allocation of public health should be increased significantly (maybe doubled or set at >10% of the annual budget?) to boost the GDP rate significantly, over a relatively long term.

#### **6.4. Cameroon should produce rice and raise fish commercially, promote the exploitation of minerals and organize the Afcon 2021**

Cameroon should produce rice and raise fish commercially in order to significantly improve its trade balance. We have recommended that the focus for the next 5 years should be on improving the productivity of rice and its competitiveness in the local market. Agricultural outputs can be improved substantially by turning unused fertile lands of the southern part of the country, where it rains abundantly during the year, into the breadbasket of Central Africa. A task team including local farmers from each region concerned, can be instituted and charged to come up with S.M.A.R.T (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely) propositions in this regards. Seeds, compost and expert advices can be given freely to local farmers by the State over a period of 5 years? This will cost on average 14 billion FCFA a year, for 100 000 farmers, according to an estimation by the Nkafu Policy Institute in 2018. The Government of Cameroon should also promote the exploitation of minerals like gold, by both local and foreign investors. This has the potential to significantly improve our economy. Another opportunity for the country is that Cameroon should re-apply to organize the Afcon as early as possible (i.e., in 2021); jobs will be created in the hospitality and tourism industries.

#### **6.5. Research and Innovation (related to STEM) should also be given a priority**

We have recommended that the budget for Research & Innovation (related to STEM) be significantly increased, over the next 5 years, in order to be similar to that of emerging economy like South Africa. The research focus should include digital economy, small and medium size enterprises, agriculture and health to name but a few.

#### **6.6. The Cameroon Code of Transparency and Good Governance in Public Finance Management (Law N02018/011 of 11 July 2018) should be fully implemented**

To sum up, the main Government policies are identified, formulated, and the budget allocated. The two phases of a project cycle that remain will follow i.e., the implementation phase and a monitoring and evaluation mechanisms with the participation of the civil society. The latter has been made easy with the publication in the official journal (Cameroon tribune N0 11756 / 7955 of January 07 2019) of the operations book (project details) per region, division, head, program and action for the financial year 2019, in line with the Cameroon Code of Transparency and Good Governance in Public Finance Management. This has the potential to significantly reduce the deviations between planned and actual expenditure. However, this is concerning the Public Investment Budget only or 1167 billion FCFA (State Budget includes Public Investment Budget and Operating Budget). We recommend that the details concerning the operating part of the budget (i.e., 1666 Billion FCFA) be also published, monitored and evaluated using an independent mechanism. This is in line with sections 40 and 47 of the Cameroon Code of Transparency and Good Governance in Public Finance Management (Government of Cameroon, 2018) cited below.

Section 40 “All operations relating to revenue, expenditure and financing of budgets of public administrations shall be subject to a democratic, jurisdictional and administrative control.” Section 47 “the administration shall take all necessary measures to publish information on public finance, within the timeframes set by regulation. (2) Information in (1) above shall be exhaustive and concern the past, present and future as well as cover all the budget and below-the-line budget activities. (3) A specific instrument at the start of the financial year, shall publish the calendar for the dissemination of information mentioned above.”

### 6.7. Survey of service users should be associated with quantitative indicators to evaluate policy implementation/attainment of government’s objectives

For example, a wide-ranging survey on crime using a representative sample of the Cameroonian’s population can be conducted each year and reported along with the crime rate indicator to assess the implementation of the policy of participation in the protection of people and property by the ministry of defense. This way, the attainment of the objective associated with this policy i.e., to guarantee security and peace conditions conducive to development will be better monitored/evaluated and any policy gap (policy aspiration versus policy implementation) exposed.

EXPENDITURE LINE	2018	2019	DIFF	2019/ 2018	WEIGHT 2019	RANK 2019	RANK DIFF
Domestic Public Debt	683000	596430	-86570	0.87	12.30	1	56
External Public Debt	373000	461000	88000	1.24	9.50	2	1
Secondary Education	365212	393079	27867	1.08	8.10	3	9
Public Works	326269	361344	35075	1.11	7.45	4	5
Common Expenses	314960	310629	-4331	0.99	6.40	5	54
Grant and Contributions	245140	273084	27944	1.11	5.63	6	8
Defense	238910	247447	8537	1.04	5.10	7	11
Primary Education	210553	226056	15503	1.07	4.66	8	10
Pensions	209000	215158	6158	1.03	4.44	9	12

Public Health	175240	207943	32703	1.19	4.29	10	7
Water and Electricity	145487	202672	57185	1.39	4.18	11	2
Urban Development and Housing	92070	143156	51086	1.55	2.95	12	3
National Security	83947	120055	36108	1.43	2.48	13	4
Investment Intervention	228719	119877		0.52	2.47	14	58
Agriculture and Rural Development	86613	84980	-1633	0.98	1.75	15	49
Justice	63454	66316	2862	1.05	1.37	16	19
Finances	57676	62899	5223	1.09	1.30	17	14
Sport and Physical Education	146017	57718	-88299	0.40	1.19	18	57
Higher Education	61401	55952	-5449	0.91	1.15	19	55
Economy, Planning and Regional Development	47979	52791	4812	1.10	1.09	20	15
Presidency of the Republic	46721	51489	4768	1.10	1.06	21	16
Posts and Telecommunications	46845	48351	1506	1.03	1.00	22	25
Decentralization and Social Development	11477	45756	34279	3.99	0.94	23	6
Foreign Affairs	35024	37681	2657	1.08	0.78	24	20
Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries	35100	32343	-2757	0.92	0.67	25	51
Participations	27000	30000	3000	1.11	0.62	26	18
Territorial Administration	30572	27327	-3245	0.89	0.56	27	52
National Assembly	20224	20724	500	1.02	0.43	28	32
Employment and Vocational Training	20723	20587	-136	0.99	0.42	29	45
Forests and Wildlife	18591	19179	588	1.03	0.40	30	30

Lands, Domains and Cadaster	18551	17755	-796	0.96	0.37	31	48
Prime Minister	15287	17497	2210	1.14	0.36	32	21
Public Contracts	17189	17277	88	1.01	0.36	33	38
Youth Affairs and Civic Education	15605	15358	-247	0.98	0.32	34	46
Senate	14991	15191	200	1.01	0.31	35	36
Transports	7840	13519	5679	1.72	0.28	36	13
Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts	11011	12620	1609	1.15	0.26	37	24
Scientific Research and Innovation	10300	11916	1616	1.16	0.25	38	23
Mines, Industry and Technological development	10409	11255	846	1.08	0.23	39	27
Rehabilitation and Restructuring	10000	10000	0	1.00	0.21	40	42
Public Service and Administrative Reforms	13277	9664	-3613	0.73	0.20	41	53
Elections Cameroon	9476	9556	80	1.01	0.20	42	39
Social Affairs	7759	9474	1715	1.22	0.20	43	22
Tourism and Leisure	9546	9094	-452	0.95	0.19	44	47
Communication	4390	8968	4578	2.04	0.18	45	17
Trade	8766	8781	15	1.00	0.18	46	41
Attached Services to the Presidency of the Republic	7525	8357	832	1.11	0.17	47	28
Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development	8042	8009	-33	1.00	0.17	48	43

Carryover of Credits	10000	8000	-2000	0.80	0.16	49	50
Women's Empowerment and the Family.	6072	6470	398	1.07	0.13	50	33
State Auditor General	5382	5493	111	1.02	0.11	51	37
Arts and Culture	4581	5217	636	1.14	0.11	52	29
Work and Social Security	4752	5066	314	1.07	0.10	53	34
Supreme Court	3336	4594	1258	1.38	0.09	54	26
National Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism	3400	3350	-50	0.99	0.07	55	44
Constitutional Council	2500	3050	550	1.22	0.06	56	31
Economic and Social Council	1436	1730	294	1.20	0.04	57	35
National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms	1155	1215	60	1.05	0.03	58	40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4689500</b>	<b>4850500</b>					

*Source: Government of Cameroon, 2019: Bill No. 1041/PJL/AN on the Finance Act of the Republic of Cameroon for the 2019 financial year. Yaoundé: National Assembly.*

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