

THE UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE I

RESEARCH CENTER FOR
DOCTORAL FORMATION IN HUMAN
AND EDUCATIVE SCIENCES

RESEARCH UNIT FOR DOCTORAL
FORMATION IN HUMAN AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY



UNIVERSITÉ DE YAOUNDÉ I

CENTRE DE RECHERCHE ET DE
FORMATION DOCTORALE EN SCIENCES
HUMAINES ET ÉDUCATIVES

UNITÉ DE RECHERCHE ET DE
FORMATION DOCTORALE EN SCIENCES
HUMAINES ET SOCIALES

DÉPARTEMENT D'HISTOIRE

THE STATE OF CAMEROON AND THE ISSUE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS FROM 1975 TO 2020

Dissertation presented and publicly defend for the graduation of the Master's Degree in History

Option: History of international relations

By:

VESSA PEKASSA YLIASSOU SIPI

(B.A. History)

Jury:

President of the jury: Virginie WANYAKA BONGUEN

(Professor)

Supervisor: Edouard BETOBO BOKAGNE

(Associated Professor)

Examiner: Marie MBARGA MESSOMO

(Lecturer)



July 2023

To my parents

SUMMARY

DEDICATION	i
SUMMARY	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
RÉSUMÉ	vi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vii
LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	ix
GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
1- CONTEXT AND REASON FOR THE CHOICE OF THIS TOPIC	1
2- CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	2
3- THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH	8
4- LITERATURE REVIEW	9
5- THE PROBLEM STATEMENT	15
6- METHODOLOGY	16
7- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	19
8- DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED	19
9- PLAN OF THE WORK	20
CHAPTER 1: FROM THE INDEPENDENCE OF CAMEROON TO THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GOVERNANCE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CAMEROON 1960-1975	21
I-THE LAW AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CAMEROON	21
1- The law and the status of women in Cameroon: during the pre-colonial period 21	
II-THE EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS FROM INDEPENDENCE TO THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF GENDER-BASED GOVERNANCE	34

1- Presentation of the elements of a participatory governance of women 1961-1972	
34	
2- The establishment of an institutional approach to women's rights: The birth of MINAS 1961-1975	39
CHAPTER II: FROM THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS TO THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CAMEROON: THE STAKES OF AN INSTITUTIONAL MUTATION 1975-1984	46
I- Political and cultural strategies at the basis of the birth of MINAS in terms of women's rights in Cameroon.....	46
II- From the institutional administrative approach to the appropriation of the gender approach.....	53
CHAPTER III- THE GLOBALISATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ITS IMPACT IN CAMEROON 1984-2004.....	70
I- The change in the world ideological order and its consequences on the evolution of women's rights in Cameroon.....	70
II- The impact of the 1995 Beijing Conference on Cameroonian rights.....	85
CHAPTER IV: EVALUATION OF PUBLIC POLICY ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CAMEROON.....	94
I- ADVANCES IN PUBLIC POLICY ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CAMEROON	94
II- THE MAIN INNOVATIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR WOMEN IN CAMEROON.....	100
GENERAL CONCLUSION.....	119
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES	132
ANNEXES.....	i
TABLE OF CONTENT	148

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An imperishable gratitude is addressed to Professor Edouard Betobo Bokagne, who accepted to supervise us. He guided our first steps into the world of research despite constraints and responsibilities of his position as Head of Department and Lecturer. The richness and depth of his advice and guidance have been decisive in the realization of this work.

Our thanks also go to the teaching staff of the History Department of the University of Yaounde 1, such as Professor Virginie Wanyaka Bonguen, Professor Cyrille Aymard Bekono, Professor George Fuh Kum, Dr. Alassa Fouapon, Pr. Chamberlain Nenkam, who lectured us and taught in *Travaux Dirigés* (TD).

Deep gratitude is also extended to all the staff and members of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family, the Ministry of Justice, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms of Cameroon, who were kind enough to exchange with us.

Our sincere thanks to all those whose names do not appear here but who, from near or far, have given us both moral and material support for the realisation of this work.

ABSTRACT

With the wind of independence in the 1960s, Cameroonian women, driven by a popular dynamic, embarked on a process of democratisation, which led to independence and later to the fight for women's rights. The present research field is based on the contribution of the State to the promotion and respect of women's rights in Cameroon. This historical study was carried out using multiple sources, mainly written documents and oral testimonies collected during grouped and individual interviews. The work of sociology, legal sciences, anthropology and economics has made it possible to move beyond the purely historical field to a transdisciplinary perspective. A threefold methodological approach has been used that is, descriptive, explanatory and analytical has made it possible to retrace the actions of the State by explaining the reasons for its initiative in favour of women and studying in depth the consequences of this commitment to women in Cameroon from the period of independence until 2020, that is, for five decades.

At the end of this study, we can say that the State of Cameroon since independence has strongly worked in favour of equality between men and women, setting up strategies, signing agreements so that, women should be at the same level as men. In one way or the other, the State made it possible to improve their living conditions and thus contributed to their empowerment. In spite of all the actions of the State, it is important to point out that, despite all these actions, there is still a lot to do.

Keywords: rights, women, Cameroon.

RÉSUMÉ

Avec le vent de l'indépendance dans les années 1960, les femmes camerounaises, portées par une dynamique populaire, se sont engagées dans un processus de démocratisation, qui a conduit à l'indépendance et plus tard à la lutte pour les droits des femmes. Le présent travail recherche la contribution de l'Etat à la promotion et au respect des droits des femmes au Cameroun. Cette étude historique a été réalisée à partir de sources multiples, dont les principales sont les documents écrits, les rapports, mémoires, thèses et les témoignages oraux recueillis lors d'entretiens collectifs et individuels. Les travaux de la sociologie, des sciences juridiques, de l'anthropologie et de l'économie ont permis de dépasser le champ purement historique pour s'inscrire dans une perspective transdisciplinaire. Une triple méthode à la fois descriptive, explicative et analytique a permis de retracer l'action de l'Etat en expliquant les raisons de son initiative en faveur des femmes et d'étudier en profondeur les répercussions de cet engagement en faveur des femmes au Cameroun de la période de l'indépendance à 2020, soit pendant cinq décennies.

Au terme de cette étude, nous pouvons dire que l'Etat camerounais depuis l'indépendance a milité en faveur de l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes, en mettant en place des stratégies, en signant des accords pour que les femmes soient au même niveau que les hommes. Cela a permis d'améliorer leurs conditions de vie et de contribuer ainsi à leur autonomisation. Malgré toutes les actions de l'État, il est important de souligner que, tout cela, il reste encore beaucoup à faire.

Mots clés : Droits, femmes, Cameroun

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Tables

Table 1: Representation of women deputy in the Camerounain Assembly from 1957 till 1970s	41
Table 2: An evolution of girls in primary school	57
Table 3: Female participation in the central party committee 1969-1984.....	58
Table 4: Women Deputy Municipal Administrators in 1982.....	59
Table 5: Representation of farms run by women	63
Table 6: A representation of civil Rights in Cameroon in 1981.....	65
Table 7: Women's participation in the Central Committee of the party 1969-1990	73
Table 8 : Representation of women's participation in political discussion groups	96
Table 9: Summary of the distribution of political and administrative positions	116

2. Map

Map 1: Map of Cameroun	6
-------------------------------------	---

3. Pictures

Image 1: Kom and Kedjom women with KNDP President John Ngu.	26
Image 2: Women members of ASSOFECAM : Marthe Ouandié and Julienne Keutcha:.....	29
Image 3 : Jeanne Keutcha, Abanda, Doroty Njeuma, Delphine Tsanga respectively	50
Image 4 : Picture of Minister Isabelle Ebanda	52
Image 5 : Picture of Minister Delphine Tsanga.....	54
Image 6 : Madame the Minister Yaou Aissatou	61
Image 7 : Ministers Yaou Aissatou, Julienne Ngo Som, and Cathérine Bakang Mbock respectively.....	72
Image 8 : A victim of "breast ironing", Julie Ndjessa, holds as an example a piece of wood usually used to burn the breasts of young girls.	82
Image 9 : Picture of Minister Bomback Bandolo Suzanne Marie Cecile.....	92
Image 10 : Madame Françoise Foning and Célestine Keutcha Courtès	95

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACAFEJ	: <i>Association Camerounaise des Femmes Juristes</i>
ALCAMOR	: <i>Assemblée Législative du Cameroun Oriental</i>
ALVF	: <i>Association de Lutte contre les Violences Faites aux Femmes</i>
APEE	: <i>Association de Parents, d'Elèves et d'Enseignants</i>
ARCAM	: <i>Assemblée Représentative du Cameroun</i>
ASSOFECAM	: <i>Association des Femmes Camerounaises</i>
ATCAM	: <i>Assemblée Territoriale du Cameroun</i>
BAD	: <i>Banque Africaine de Développement.</i>
BIT	: <i>Bureau International du Travail</i>
CEDAW	: <i>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</i>
CEDEF	: <i>Convention sur l'Élimination de toutes les formes de Discrimination à l'Égard des Femmes</i>
CNDHL	: <i>Commission Nationale des Droits de l'Homme et des Libertés</i>
CNFC	: <i>Conseil National des Femmes du Cameroun Communication</i>
CPFF	: <i>Centre de Promotion de la Femme et de la Famille.</i>
ACVUC	: <i>Association des Communes et Villes du Cameroun</i>

RDPC	: <i>Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Cameroun</i>
ELECAM	: <i>Elections Cameroon</i>
ENAAS	: <i>Ecole Nationale des Assistance des Affaires Sociales</i>
FALSH	: <i>Faculté des Arts Lettres et des Sciences Humaines</i>
FCEM	: <i>Femmes Chefs d'Entreprises Mondiales</i>
FDIF	: <i>Fédération Démocratique Internationale des Femmes</i>
FEF	: <i>Forum Entrepreneuriat Féminin</i>
FNUAP	: <i>Fonds des Nations Unies pour la population</i>
INS	: <i>Institut National de la Statistique</i>
KNC	: <i>Kamerun Natoinal Congress</i>
KNDP	: <i>Kamerun National Democratic Party</i>
MINADER	: <i>Ministère de l'Agriculture et du Développement Rural</i>
MINAS	: <i>Ministère des Affaires Sociales</i>
MINASCOF	: <i>Ministère des Affaires Sociales et de la Condition Féminine</i>
MINCOF	: <i>Ministère de la Condition Féminine</i>
MINCommerce	: <i>Ministère du Commerce</i>
MINEDUB	: <i>Ministère de l'Education de Base</i>
MINEPDED	: <i>Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la Nature et du Développement Durable.</i>
MINEPIA	: <i>Ministère de l'Elevage des Pêches et Industries</i>
MINFOF	: <i>Ministère des Forêts et de la Faune</i>

- MINFOPRA** : *Ministère de la Fonction Publique et de la Réforme Administrative*
- MINPMEESA** : *Ministère des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises de l'Economie Sociale et de l'Artisanat*
- MINPOSTEL** : *Ministère des Postes et Télécommunications*
- MINPROFF** : *Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Famille*
- MWP** : *More Women in Politics.*
- NGO** : *Non-Gouvernement Organisation*
- OFRDPC** : *Organisation des Femmes du Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais*
- OMD** : *Objectifs du Millénaire pour le Développement*
- ONAREST** : *Office National de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique*
- OSP** : *Orientation Scolaire et Professionnelle*
- PANDEF** : *Plan d'Action pour le Développement de L'Entrepreneuriat Féminin*
- PAPEF** : *Projet d'Appui au Parcours Entrepreneurial des Femmes*
- PNUD** : *Programme des Nations Unies pour le Développement*
- PPTD** : *Programme par Pays pour la Promotion du Travail Décent*

PTF	:	<i>Partenaires Techniques et Financiers</i>
RDPC	:	<i>Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple du Cameroun</i>
SIDA	:	<i>Syndrome d'Immunodéficience Acquis</i>
TIC	:	<i>Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication</i>
UDEFEC	:	<i>Union Démocratique des Femmes du Cameroun</i>
UFC	:	<i>Union des Femmes Camerounaises</i>
UNESCO	:	<i>Organisation des Nation Unies pour l'Education, la Science et la Culture</i>
UNICEF	:	<i>United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund</i>
UNO	:	<i>United Nations Organisation</i>
UPC	:	<i>Union des Populations du Cameroun</i>
VIH	:	<i>Virus de l'Immunodéficience Humaine</i>
ZEP	:	<i>Zones d'Éducation Prioritaires</i>

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Debates on women's rights are frequent in the world in general and in Cameroon in particular. Since its independence, Cameroon has been singled out as a "desert state" of human rights by some non-governmental organizations, such as Human Right Watch¹.

1- CONTEXT AND REASON FOR THE CHOICE OF THIS TOPIC

Any scientific research stems from a number of reasons. There are several modules that justify the choice of our subject.

Our first motivation stems from observation. The willingness of the State in its policy, to guarantee and protect women rights, has evolved over time. In fact, the State of Cameroon appropriated the issue of women's rights with the colonial heritage, with reference to the Jacquinot Treaty of 1951-1955², and hence, the issue of women's rights was put in place in the 1990s, thus strategic plans were to improve the situation of women in Cameroon. Consequently, reports were established between Yaounde and international civil organizations, it is for this reason that, the public authorities took into account, amongst others, the reports of Human Right Watch³, Amnesty International⁴ and the appeal of several so-called feminist organizations on prison conditions. This consideration of the integration of women in society, boosted the visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to Cameroon in 2013⁵, which shows the willingness of the Cameroonian State to become more and more involved. Consequently, led to the signing of agreements and treaties with other countries or organizations that were to provide aid. This motivation is therefore inspired by the fact that, the issue of women's rights remains a controversy.

Our second motivation is based on personal reasons. We grew up in an environment where parental discourse imposed to us, the respect for others in all senses. To the men of the house in particular, they reminded us of the importance of respecting women, but also of the rights and duties of men towards them. Instead in the fact that, we should always take care of

¹ Report of Human Rights Watch, quoted in *Rapport de la Commission des Droits de l'Homme. Minjustice, 2019*.

² M. Houndjahoue, "Le Décret Jacquinot et les questions de fiançailles, des dots et mariages dans le bas-Benin", Université Laval, Québec, 1984, pp. 3-13.

³ United States Departement of State, "Country reports on Human Rights Practices", Bureau of Democracy, 2018.

⁴ « Report of Amnesty International on the situation of Human Rights in Cameroun 2020 », consult on the 21 August, at 13h18min in <http://www.Amnesty International.fr>

⁵ P. Kum, "La Haut-Commissaire aux Droits de l'Homme en visite au Cameroun", Yaoundé, l'Agence Presse Anadolu, 2019, p. 20.

them, protect them, due to the fact that they are vulnerable and constitute a social category below men. It is therefore, necessary today to carry out in-depth investigations to analyse, with controlled subjectivity, the respect of women's rights. This can then be a contribution to the edification of women in general and Cameroonian women in particular.

Our third motivation is based on academic reasons. Firstly, by doing a historical study on women's rights in Cameroon, we want as a student of history, contribute to the knowledge of the genesis, foundations and stakes of the evolution of women in a country that claims to be a country of law. Secondary, it is necessary to mention that, academic works on the dynamics of women's rights are little. Consequently, we wish to bring our modest contribution to the historiography of women's rights. Furthermore, concerning the History Department of the University of Yaounde 1, we note with satisfaction the presence of a fundamental course, which shows the importance of women in our society⁶.

Our fourth motivation draws its essence from realities. The first reality is the obtaining of our Master's degree. The second is the orientation of our academic specialisation. Indeed, History of International Relations is interested in the relations between the actors of the international scene and this, over a determined period of time⁷. Women are essential actors in this field and must be protected by those who govern them, that is, the State, as stipulated in the Constitution⁸.

In conclusion, these motivations, especially on the current scene, have sharpened and motivated us to seek to understand the role of the State in the issue of women's rights in Cameroon. In order to better understand this concept, it is necessary to first understand the different key words.

2- CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the most common conception, the use of terms, expressions and concepts is often at the origin of bad recoveries. This can therefore give a different and consequently change the etymology of the words. To approach this work, it is necessary to clarify the following concepts: State, issue, rights, women, vulnerable person, social policy, Human Rights and women's rights.

⁶ Course taught in Master 1, *l'UE 442 : Femmes et Genre*. Virginie Wanyaka Bonguen

⁷ M. Merle, *Sociologie des Relations Internationales*, Paris, 3^e Edition, Dalloz, 1982, p. 527.

⁸ J. A. Tickner, "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A feminist reformulation", *Millennium* 17.3, 1988, p. 430.

“State” comes from the Latin word “*status*”, derived from the verb “*stare*”, which means in the primary sense, “to stand”, and in the figurative sense, “the position”⁹. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, a state is a form of government, which brings together a body of people in a well-defined territory¹⁰. It appears in European languages, in its modern sense, between the XVth century and XVIth century. For Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel, the state is a product of class society¹¹. For François Châtelet, the State is an administration supported by the army and the police, whose whole function is to reinforce, legalise and make it appear as moral the oppression exercised by those who own the means of production¹². From this point of view, it can be considered as a political society resulting from the establishment on a delimited territory through borders, of a human group, with more or less marked characteristics of homogeneity and governed by an institutionalised power. It is considered as, the primary guarantor of fundamental rights and freedoms, specifically those of women.

According to the etymology of the word “question”, it is derived from the Latin word *quaestio*¹³. According to Philippe De Thaon, a question is a point on which one has imperfect knowledge, which is to be examined or discussed¹⁴. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, a question is a request that one need to find out about something, which is derived from an interrogation, in order to obtain an answer to a problem posed¹⁵. In this case, the question asked is against the state, which is secular and the defender of its people.

According to the etymology of the word ‘rights’, it is derived from the Old French “*dreit*” and from the Latin word “*directus*”, which means “in a straight line” is or are prerogatives that enjoy an individual in a state¹⁶. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*¹⁷, law can be defined as all legal, general and impersonal rules that govern the relationships between human beings, which here is objective law. For Pascal Boniface, it is the set of interpretative provisions or directives which, at a given time and in a given state, regulate the status of persons and property, as well as the relationships that public or private persons

⁹ *Cambridge Etymology Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ F. Engels, *L'origine de la famille, de la propriété privée et de l'Etat : pour faire suite aux travaux de Lewis Morgan*, Paris, Carré, Première Edition, 1893, p. 116.

¹² K. Marx, F. Engels, Châtelet F., *Manifeste du Parti Communiste*, Librairie générale française, Paris, Première Edition, 2004, p. 155.

¹³ F. Raynouard, *Lexique roman ou Dictionnaire de la langue des troubadours, comparée avec les autres langues de l'Europe latine*, Paris, Forgotten Books, 2018, p.45.

¹⁴ P. D. Thon, Auteur du livre de Sibylle, In : *Romania*, Tome 85 n° 340, 1964, pp. 455-477.

¹⁵ « Etat définitions », consulted on the 13 August 2021 at 16H02 in <https://www.Larousse.fr>

¹⁶ N. Bouillet, *Dictionnaire Universel des Sciences, des Lettres et des Arts*, Librairie Hachette, Paris, 1874, p. 545.

¹⁷ *Cambridge Etymology Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

maintain¹⁸. This work shows us the little advantages that a person has, from the simple fact of been a human being, which here is a subjective right so we want to attribute to the woman.

‘Woman’ is a word that comes from the Latin *femina*¹⁹. The original meaning of the word *femina* in Latin is not one of the highest gallantry, since it originally meant female. According to the Bible, the woman is the fourth part of the man, which means his half. According to the *Dictionnaire Robert*²⁰, a woman is a human being of female sex or gender and of adult age. Pierre Richelet²¹ defines woman as a reasonable creature, made by the hand of God to keep man company. Before adulthood, in the infantile stage, we speak of a girl. In this work, the used of woman, is to talk about, the female gender of any age, girl or woman.

The term vulnerable person in the context of this work, it is important to start from their etymology. First of all, according to traditional etymology, “person” comes from the latin word, *persona*, derived from the verb *personare*, which means “to resonate or hold back”, and refers to the theatrical mask, the mask equipped with a special device to serve as a bullhorn. On the other hand, the etymology of the word vulnerable comes from the Latin word *vulnerare*, which means “to injure” and its definition is, one who can be injured; liable to be touched, hurt, from a moral or physical standpoint. Vulnerability can be psychological or social and the two can be intertwined. According to the *Dictionnaire Robert*, vulnerable persons are persons in a situation of physical or psychological weakness, whom the law protects from abuse, particularly in criminal or social matters²².

‘Vulnerable person’, to better understand these words, it is important to start from their etymology each. Firstly, according to traditional etymology, “person” comes from the Latin word *persona*, a term itself derived from the verb *personare*, which means “to hold back”, and refers to the theatrical mask, the mask equipped with a special device to serve as a bullhorn. On the other hand, the etymology of the word ‘vulnerable’ comes from the Latin *vulnerare*, which means “to injure” and its definition is, one who can be injured; liable to be touched, hurt, from a moral or physical standpoint. Vulnerability can be psychological or social and the two can be intertwined. According to the *Dictionnaire Robert*, vulnerable

¹⁸ P. Boniface, *Les Relations Internationales de 1945 à nos jours*, Paris, Eyrolles, 2020, p.112.

¹⁹ TLFi, “Femme”, *le Trésor de la langue française informatisé*, Paris, CNRS EDITIONS, 1971-1994, p.56.

²⁰ *Cambridge Etymology Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

²¹ G. Petrequin, *Le Dictionnaire François de P. Richelet : Etude de métalexigraphie historique*, Paris, Peeters, 2009, p. 112.

²² *Cambridge Etymology Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

persons are peoples in a situation of physical or psychological weakness, whom the law protects from abuse, particularly in criminal or social matter²³. According to the World Health Organisation, vulnerable peoples are those who are relatively or totally unable to protect their own interests²⁴. According to Pierre-Brice Lebrun, a vulnerable person is defined as a minor of 15 years of age or a person who is unable to protect him/herself because of his/her age, illness, infirmity, physical or mental deficiency or pregnancy²⁵.

The term 'social policy' means, it would be better to start from its etymology. The term politics, by its etymology, refers to ancient Greece, where *polis* designates the organised city, while "*politeia*", whose French equivalent "*politie*" is more rarely used than the English policy²⁶. Which means both constitution and body of citizens. As for the term social, it is derived from the Latin word "*socius*", meaning companions or associate, which has to do with society, which concerns the relations between living beings. According to Marie-Thérèse Join Lambert, social policy is a necessary invention to make a society organised around principles of solidarity governable²⁷.

The term 'Human Rights' is inherited from the XVII century, is among the Romance languages used to convey the ambiguity of man "male", and Man "being human", although the Latin word homo, from which it etymologically derived it designates human being. According to Keba M'baye, they are presented as a coherent set of fundamental legal principles that apply everywhere in the world to both men and to all men taken collectively because of the existence of a dignity attached to their person and justified by their condition²⁸. As stipulated in Article II of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10th December 1948 in Paris, women's rights « are inalienable rights, without distinction as to race, sex, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion or any other status »²⁹.

The State and the issue of women's rights is therefore seen here as being the contribution of this institution (the State), in the respect and promotion of the prerogatives enjoyed by the individual (woman), due to the mere fact of her human state and which are inseparable from her despite the wear and tear of time, wherever she may be.

²³ *Cambridge Etymology Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

²⁴ CIOMS et OMS, *Lignes Directrices Internationales d'éthique pour la recherche biomédicale impliquant des sujets humains*, Genève, CIOMS, 2003, p. 19.

²⁵ P. B. Lebrun, *La vulnérabilité*, Paris, Cairn.info, 2015, pp. 112-116.

²⁶ G. Balandier, *Sens et puissance*, Paris, PUF, 1971, p. 114.

²⁷ M.T. Join-Lambert, *Les politiques sociales, 130 années d'histoire, la grande transformation depuis 1973*, Paris, Presse de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques et Dalloz, 1994, p. 1198.

²⁸ K. M'baye, "*Les droits de l'homme en Afrique*", Paris, Edition A.Pedone, 1992, p.312.

²⁹ O.N.U., *La Déclaration Universelle des Droits de l'Homme*, Paris, ONU, 1948, p.2.

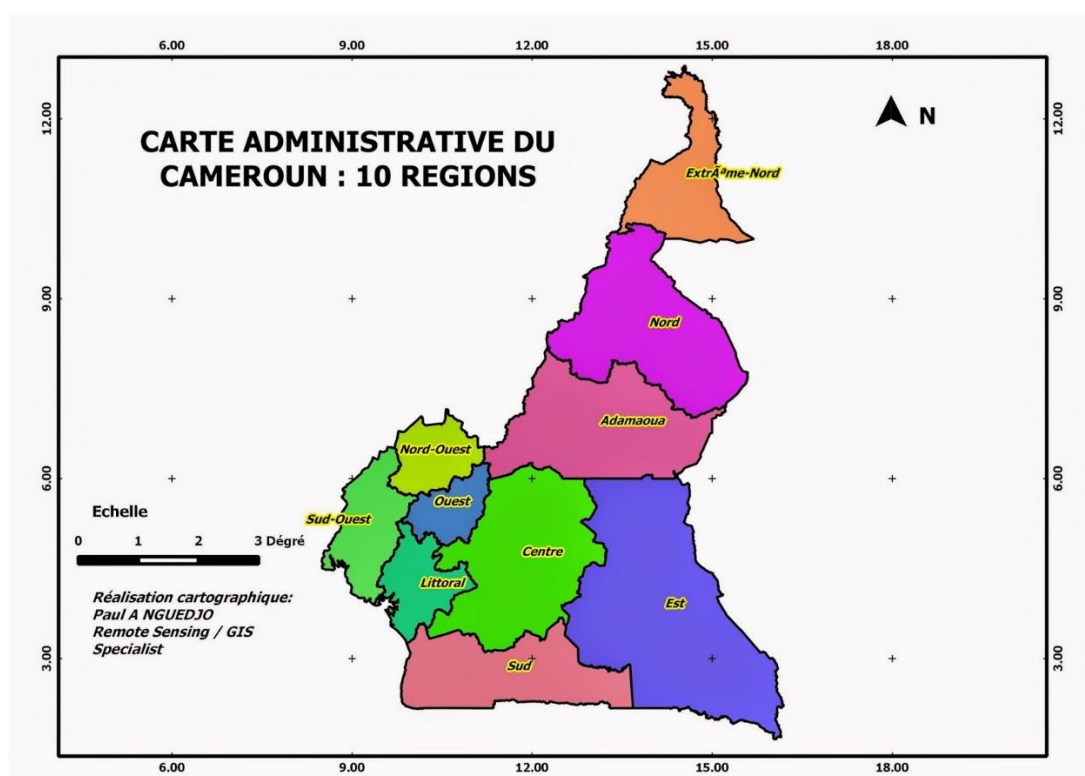
SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

In order to carry out a study, it is necessary, indeed imperative, to define from the outset the spatial and temporal framework within which the study will be carried out.

A- Scope of the work

The present study is based on the territory of Cameroon. Cameroon is a country in Central Africa, situated between Nigeria to the west, Chad to the north-east, the Central African Republic to the east, the Republic of Congo, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea to the south. With a surface area of 475,442 km², a land area of 465,400 km² and a population of about 27,744,989 inhabitants³⁰, according to the results of the 2005 census, Cameroon has more women than men, hence the estimate of about 50.6 %³¹. In Cameroon, 54.54% of economic violence, is suffered by 24% of adolescent girls have undergone breast ironing and 1.4% have been victims of female genital mutilation.

Map 1: the Republic of Cameroon



Source: M. Lemarié, "Map of Cameroon" Yaoundé, 2019, Accessed on 03 Sept. 2021, at 18h13 in <http://www.Cameroun-infotourisme.com>

B- The terms and scope of the topic

³⁰ J. Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire de l'Afrique noire. D'hier à demain Tome 1*, Paris, *Revue française d'outre-mer*, 1972, pp. 158-159.

³¹ INS, « *Etat et structure de la population : indicateurs démographiques* », in <http://www.Institut Nationale de Statistique du Cameroun.fr> consulté en ligne le 23-06-2021 à 13h.

In 1972, Joseph Ki-Zerbo³², to justify the interest of chronological boundaries in a research, stated: « the historian who wants to go back to the past without a chronological marker, looks like, a traveller who travels in a car without a meter ». It is important, indeed necessary, for the historian who wants to do research to take a step back. It is in this way that Antoine Post³³ asserts in 1996 in his book, *Lessons en Historire* that:

« It has often been said that in order to write history, a certain distance is necessary; this is taking the effect for the cause: history does not presuppose a prior distance; it creates it. To believe that it is enough to leave the years to take a step back is to delude oneself: one must make the history of what happened in order to create hindsight". Antoine Post, then recommended the definition of a time frame during a study».

Indeed, time is essential in capturing facts and in understanding ruptures and continuities. To this end, this work will therefore comply with this prescription, which is to define the chronological boundaries. It covers a period of 60 years, from 1960 to 2020. The year 1960 marks the independence of Cameroon (the independence of French Cameroon).

As far as the international scene is concerned, it corresponds to the very first World Conference on the Status of Women, which will take a turn in the minds of women worldwide and that of Cameroon. This was done in parallel with Cameroon's adherence to international instruments. We can cite the International Women's Rights Declaration, notably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women³⁴, which defines the right of women to be free from all forms of discrimination and sets out the essential principles to protect their rights. According to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women, women's rights are « the same as men's rights and this is enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the various agreements signed between States »³⁵. Therefore, any distinction, exclusion, restriction or differential treatment based on sex, which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all spheres of life, is punishable by the guarantor of rights, which is the State.

³² J. Ki-Zerbo : "Honneur et respect", in [https://www.honneur et respect de Joseph Ki-Zerbo.com.](https://www.honneur-et-respect.de-Joseph-Ki-Zerbo.com), consult on the 20th December 2020 in [https://www.honneur et respect de Joseph Ki-Zerbo.com](https://www.honneur-et-respect.de-Joseph-Ki-Zerbo.com).

³³ A. Post, Comment l'histoire fait-elle l'historien ?, *Revue d'Histoire, XX siecle*, 2000, pp. P3-12.

³⁴ UNICEF, *La Convention sur l'Elimination de toutes les formes de Discrimination à l'égard des Femme*, New York, UN Plaza, 2011, p.10.

³⁵ « Protocole à la Charte africaine des droits de l'homme et des peuples relatif aux droits des femmes en Afrique », Addis-Abeba, 1995, consulté le 13 Aout 2021, à 17h37 in <https://www.Union Africaine.fr>

Gérard Pougoue believes that women's rights constitute a set of principles and norms based on the postulate of human dignity and made effective through a series of protection and guarantee mechanisms³⁶.

As for the second date, it marks 25 years after the 1995 Beijing Conference, the holding of the Fourth World Conference. This marked an important turning point in the global agenda for gender equality. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, unanimously adopted by 189 countries, including Cameroon, encourages each country to ensure the respect and promotion of women. The need therefore seek here, to stop by 2020 to evaluate the level of effectiveness of the policies undertaken by the State, to achieve the targets.

3- THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

In the spirit of Madeleine Grawitz, defining the objective of the research is tantamount to tracing one's path in order to know where one is going and what one is looking for, so as not to lose the « breadcrumb trail »³⁷.

The vector of this study is the woman and the object of study is women's rights in Cameroon, more precisely, in the internal politics of an independent country. The objective here is to demonstrate the action of the State in protecting and promoting women's rights in Cameroon. Cameroon has remained a lower middle income country for the past 30 years, despite its large natural resource endowments such as oil, agriculture, forestry, mining, tourism and hydroelectricity. The re-election of the President of the Republic did not take place in a peaceful context: in addition to political tensions, the country has been plagued by insecurity in the North-West and South-West regions and in the Far North where religiously inspired terrorism (Boko Haram) is rife. According to the 2019 Human Development Report, persistent gender inequalities have led to a wide disparity between Cameroonian women and men in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres.

The number of uneducated women is more than 1.7 times that of men in a similar situation. In Cameroon, 52% of women have experienced domestic violence at least once since the age of 15. Between 2018 and 2020, the Country Office Programme required an average of 3.2 million US annually, divided between 4 thematic areas: 45% devoted to Women's Economic Empowerment, 32% to Women's Governance, Leadership and Political Participation, 22% to Humanitarian Action, Peace and Security and only 0.5% to efforts to

³⁶ M. Grawitz, *Méthodes des sciences sociales*, Paris, Dalloz, 11^{ème} édition, 2001, p.4.

³⁷P. G. Pougoue, "La protection des droits de la personnalité par le juge Camerounais", Master in Human Rights and Humanitarian Action, Université Catholique d'Afrique Centrale, 2009, p. 55.

end violence against women. This has not yet been sifted through the historical method that should help to make it a historical fact, which is new ground for Cameroonian historiography. Since history is interested in everything where, this work therefore seems important, thus talking about the State and the issue of women's rights in Cameroon, which has to be retraced. We cannot help but notice that there is a problem and therefore, a never-ending struggle will be waged by the State which is the first guarantor or defender of human rights in general and those of women in particular. The objectives of this research are diverse;

- The contribution of the State in the promotion and respect of women's rights in Cameroon;
- To trace the history of women's rights policy in Cameroon;
- To highlight the strategies adopted and/or activities carried out by the state to promote women's political rights in Cameroon;
- To make a critical assessment of women's political rights in Cameroon.

4- LITERATURE REVIEW

For a better analysis of this research topic, it is important to rely on the work done by our predecessors in the field. All of these works constitute an information framework that provides a state of the art on the question addressed and, above all, opens perspectives for the researcher. Michel Beaud states: 'No student, however intelligent, can do everything that humanity has taken millennia to produce. All social reflection is above all reflection on the thought of others'³⁸. The realisation of such a study required enough sources as diverse as varied as can be, specially written, electronic, archival and iconographic sources that which will be relevant to the subject under study.

Judith Ann Tickner³⁹, in her analysis of *the Principles of Political Realism*, made mention of six points of contention that a feminist perspective on International Relations must establish. Two of these points caught our attention. Firstly, Tickner challenges the objectivity of the immutable laws of human nature, as presented by Morgenthau, insofar as the notion of objectivity itself is a cultural construct inseparable from the notion of masculinity. Secondly, the author makes us understand that, a feminist perspective must reject the idea of the autonomy of the political sphere, which is based not only on Western thought, but also masculine and therefore, monolithic and partial cultural construction of human nature. "International politics, is a man's world, a world of power and conflict, in which, warfare is a

³⁸ M. Beaud, *L'art de la thèse : comment préparer et rédiger une thèse de doctorat, un mémoire de DEA ou de maîtrise ou tout autre travail universitaire*, Paris, la Découverte, 1985, p. 24.

³⁹ J. A. Tickner, "Hans Morgenthau's *Principles of Political Realism*" *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, Winter, 1988, pp. 429-440.

privileged activity"⁴⁰ (International politics is a man's world, a world of power and conflict, in which, warfare is a privileged activity). The conceptual 'blindness' of political realism towards the contributions and even the existence of women is therefore, inherent in the epistemological bias that determines its basic assumptions. This book will be a necessity because, it teaches us that women's problems do not date of today. Women have a daily problem of life in all its spheres. She will have to fight for a prosperity of the feminist gender by rejecting all that rejects the female gender. It will be of great use in the construction of this work. Though they are faced with many problems and difficulties, women, play an important role in the society.

La constitution Camerounaise du 18 janvier 1996: Bilan et perspectives, is a collective contribution in which the participants reflect on the evolution and practice of law in Cameroon. In the sections relating to women's rights, the authors analyses the formal changes recorded on certain rights with the advent of the 1996 constitutional law. For them, this constitution marks the beginning of a State of Law⁴¹. The study of these authors makes us understand the desire and determination of the State of Cameroon to guarantee the rights of women. In spite of the authors' dissatisfaction with its organisation, which for them has certain limitations, due to its dependence on the executive and its lack of freedom of action. The analysis of these authors, both in terms of the evolution of women's rights in Cameroon and the obstacles encountered in the real application of women's rights in Cameroon, will be of great use in this work. The work of the author, plays a major role in the fight for the respect and promotion of women right in Cameroun. The difficulties encountered will enable us to better come up, with good perspectives.

Valentin Ndi Mbarga in *Ruptures et continuités au Cameroun*, analyses the political life of Cameroon since the accession to power of Paul Biya⁴². He starts from the context in which Biya acceded to the supreme magistracy to show that Paul Biya had inherited a people thirsty for freedom and democracy. The author traces the political evolution of Cameroon since 1982, presenting the fundamental principles of the politics inherited from Ahidjo era and the new principles imposed by his successor. He presents the politics of renewal as a real 'paradox' because, although it proclaims the rule of law, it does not respect the law. His historical and comparative analysis, to bring out the good and bad policies used by the state, will be a building block in our work.

⁴⁰ Tickner, "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism"..., p.32.

⁴¹ A. Ondoua, *La constitution Camerounaise du 18 janvier 1996 : Bilan et perspectives*, Yaoundé, Afrédit, 2007, pp. 138-139.

⁴² V. Ndi Mbarga, *Ruptures et Continuités au Cameroun*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 1993, p. 19.

Ngadjui Nicolas, addresses the Political Rights of Women in Cameroon. To better carry out his work, he uses a multidisciplinary approach to present the various constitutional provisions and international instruments relating to the political rights of Cameroonian women on the one hand, and on the other hand, the bodies set up in case of violations. The author analyses the political existence of women in Cameroonian political parties. He goes on to demonstrate the difficulties that Cameroonian women face in their integration into society without discrimination, in all sectors, which would only be fair since women already participate in all the organs of the community. Her analysis on the involvement of women in Cameroonian society will be of paramount importance in this work, because it helps to understand the dynamics of women in the city of Douala.

Alvine Ndi Assembe in her theses "*La problematique des droits de l'homme*", she poses the problem of the effectiveness of human rights (women's rights) in Cameroon⁴³. To solve it, she first takes a leap into the past to retrace the history of human rights in Cameroon from the pre-colonial period through colonization to independence. The author points out that, human rights violations that already existed during the colonial period continued until after independence under the reign of President Ahmadou Ahidjo. However, in 1990, thanks to the national and international context, there was a resurgence of human rights (women's rights) in Cameroon. The author concludes by saying that human rights are universal and therefore not contemporary to Western civilization. Moreover, it deconstructs the thesis according to which human rights in Africa are of Western facts, which strengthens this subject research because, it shows the struggle led by the State for the applicability of women's rights in Cameroon.

The African Society of Culture⁴⁴ analyses the particular contribution of women as agents of culture and original civilization. According to the African Society of Culture, feminist movements have sought to grant women the same rights as men. The author goes on to demonstrate the difference between Europe and Africa. For the author, it is in Europe that the best formula has been found to free women from a series of servitudes, born of man's egotism and the continuous development of his civilization. The author goes on to say that the day when women will enjoy the same freedoms and the advantages that these freedoms confer, it seems that in Europe there will no longer be any serious problems for women, but in Black Africa, is this also the case? The author concludes by saying that, in fact, almost nothing has been written about the African woman, except when it is to present her as a minor, enslaved being. Her autonomy in relation to men, the sovereignty of her initiatives, has

⁴³ Assembe, "Les droits de l'homme"... , p. 45.

⁴⁴ SAC, "*La civilisation de la femme dans la tradition africaine*", Paris, Présence Africaine, 1972, pp. 12-13.

almost never been recognised and admired. The author goes on to show the differences that exist between men and women in terms of rights, precisely because women have kept their African identity in relation to men. Her study is essential for this survey because, she is in favour of equal rights for both men and women, and for the promotion of women's values.

UNESCO, in its book *Femmes au pays: Effet de la migration sur les femmes dans les cultures méditerranéennes*⁴⁵, firstly, focuses on the fate of these women who are invisible in society, since they do not belong to any category recognised by society: neither as a wife, a widow, a head of the family, a father and often, more shockingly, not even a mother⁴⁵. Secondly, it gives perspectives in the sense of providing national leaders and women's organisations and associations, which are concerned with the defence of women's rights, with the aim of improving their living conditions. Its analysis of vulnerable women and some of its perspectives will enable us to carry out our work.

Cyrille Apala Moiffo in his book entitled, *l'Emergence d'une culture des droits de l'homme au Cameroun*⁴⁶ makes a « flashback » where Cameroon at its independence in 1960, inherited the institutions set up by the colonizer as well as the legislation instituted by the latter. The need to organise political and social life led the new 'indigenous' authorities to progressively replace the laws of the 'coloniser' by national laws strongly inspired by the metropolis, but taking into account local specificities. Thus, the 1990s were a qualitative leap in the world in terms of human rights. The words of Boutros Boutros-Ghali, at the opening of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in June 1993, illustrate this very well, when he declared that: "The end of our century is witnessing the spread everywhere of a new culture which is the culture of human rights". This is essentially due to a combination of factors, which have not spared the African continent. Given that Cameroon has not escaped this trend, Apala Moiffo, asks the question of what progress has been made mainly in terms of human rights? That is, what has Cameroon done to bring herself in line with international instruments on these rights? He will take a legal approach. His general analysis, although legal, on the respect of human rights, is of capital importance in this study because it analyses Cameroonian legislation on human rights, which is a necessary field in this work.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women, in its book « *La femme Camerounaise de demain : Actes du Symposium* » organised on 7 and 8 March 1989, wonders about the Cameroonian woman of tomorrow and the measures to be taken so that she

⁴⁵ UNESCO, *Femmes au Pays : Effet de la migration sur les femmes dans les cultures méditerranéennes*, Paris, Place de Fontenoy, 1985, pp. 9-11.

⁴⁶ C. Apala Moiffo, *L'émergence d'une culture des droits des femmes au Cameroun* ; *Diplôme d'Université de 3^{ème} cycle en Droit Fondamentaux Nante* ", Paris, 2005.

becomes, alongside men, the indispensable partner of all progress⁴⁷. It starts from its historical background, from pre-colonial history, where the essential roles of women were to make children and provide food for the family. They were sometimes bullied, but never enslaved. With colonization, this social order changed. At first, it was the men who left the family unit to find a job in the city or on the newly created industrial plantations. The woman had to stay alone with the children and provide for their needs. Later, with independence, she would gradually become a wage earner and work outside the home to support her husband. The right to import here, grows with time, with the feminist associations, even if some of them will be reluctant and will slow down this fight for women's rights. This fight by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women, within the framework of this work, this study is essential, even capital, to appropriate these difficulties and broaden the scope of perspectives in the battle for the promotion and protection of women's rights in Cameroon on the part of the State, which is the subject here.

Naty Garcia Guadilla, in her book "*Libération des Femmes: Mouvement de Libération des Femmes*"⁴⁸, looks at the history of the Women's Liberation Movement. Naty Garcia, makes us understand that it is constituted by well-known groups or tendencies: Politics and Psychoanalysis, Revolutionary Feminists, Neighbourhood Groups, Class Struggle tendency. Despite, the absence of some women in this tendency, they nevertheless feel today that they belong, by their life and ideas, to this more blurred entity, the « Women's Movement ». Her study revolves around the « Women's Movement » and the Women's Liberation Movement, but focuses more on the Women's Liberation Movement. In the context of this work, this study conducted by Guadilla will help in this study, to better understand the movements of political parties and associations in this country with regard to the respect of women's rights in Cameroon.

Prima Conseil and Njock Nje Yvonne, in a jointly conducted study, "Women in the informal sector and credit"⁴⁹, are more interested in women in the informal sector, why they are more in this sector than in others and whether their adherence to this sector may have changed over time given that, what the woman often earns in this sector is often not enough, to be able to support their husbands or provide for their children and then and often obliged to take loans. The authors therefore argue that women should be more interested in other sectors to earn more money without having to take out loans. In the context of this work, this study

⁴⁷ MASCOF, *La femme Camerounaise de demain : Actes du symposium*, Yaoundé, MINASCOF, 1989, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁸ N. G. Guadilla, *Libération des femmes*, Paris, Presses Universitaire de France, 1981, p. 1-3.

⁴⁹ P. Conseil et Y. Njock Nje, "*La femme dans le secteur informel et le crédit*", 1993, pp 1-2.

conducted by Prima Conseil and Njock Nje Yvonne, is essential, even capital, to identify the problems faced by women in society.

Norbert Guiswe, makes us understand that today, in democratic states around the world, there are various specific public institutions that contribute to the protection of human rights and freedoms⁵⁰. The emergence of these new institutions, guaranteeing fundamental rights and freedoms, is one of the components of a more global movement aiming to rethink the (legal) relationship between the administration and its citizens on one hand, and the citizens among themselves on the other hand, particularly in the field of human rights. The author goes on to say that democracy is the form of government that best guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms. Indeed, a democratic government, such as Cameroon's, is an institution whose decisions influence and guarantee the people's right to challenge it, either directly (referendum) or indirectly (representatives), while at the same time guaranteeing the same people the protection and free exercise of their rights. This guarantee of rights is two-dimensional, that is jurisdictional and non-jurisdictional.

Christian Tsala Tsala's⁵¹ thesis on "*Les détenus politique au Cameroun*" paints the sad reality of Cameroonian politics, particularly the fate of opponents of the regime in place from 1958 to 1991. According to the author, all the actors of the political struggle in Cameroon, have been for the most part, the object of repression for their opinions in spite of the fact that, the Cameroonian constitution stipulates in its preamble: No citizen can be punished for his or her opinions, be it on the life of the country. He continued, this did not prevent some citizens from being presented by the ruling power to the Cameroonian public and the international community as outlaws. However, they were fighting for the effective and uncompromising application of the law. The author brings out some fundamental points that will help in the construction of this work. The State, which is considered the first guarantor of the rights of a citizen, is the first to violate them. This will allow permit to give adequate perspectives.

Emmanuel Décaux⁵², in his book entitle, "*Les institutions nationales de protection des droits de l'homme, nouveaux acteurs des relations internationales*", drawing on the experience of the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights gave a general presentation of the role of national human rights institutions. In this presentation, he provides information on the genesis of these institutions, on their dual national and international

⁵⁰ A. S. Minkoa, *Droits de l'homme et droit pénal au Cameroun*, Paris, Economica, 1999, pp. 23-30.

⁵¹ C. Tsala Tsala, "*Les détenus politique au Cameroun*", Université Yaoundé I, Thèse de doctorat Ph.D, 2006.

⁵² E. Décaux., "*Les institutions nationales de protection des droits de l'homme, nouveaux acteurs des relations internationales*", Paris, in Collection Les Conférences Publique du Centre d'Excellence Jean Monnet Université Pierre-Mendès France Grenoble, 2012, pp. 4-5.

legitimacy, which according to the author, is their strength. The author believes that, despite the very fragile start of national institutions, they have evolved over time thanks to their dynamic nature. In the framework of the study, Décaux's analysis is fundamental, to make the complexity of the Cameroonian women's rights institution intelligible.

Danièle Lochak⁵³ deals with numerous themes relating to human rights. The author, in situating human rights in Europe, believes that there is a triple issue at stake which is situated at the political, ideological and legal levels. The author places a specific emphasis on the structures for the promotion and protection of human rights, saying that Ombudsmen are effective institutions for the defence of human rights, unlike other types of institutions such as Committees and/or Commissions, which do not have binding power to make their actions more effective. This analysis of the author on the subject of human rights structures, will serve as a support to make intelligible the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the State of Cameroon in the issue of women's rights

Zacharie Ngniman⁵⁴ in *Les chemins de la démocratie*, retraces the path Cameroon has taken to achieve the democratisation of its institutions. For the author, this democratisation became more accentuated in the 1990s, with the setting up of the first democratic and human rights institutions such as the National Committee for Human Rights and Freedoms created on 8 November 1990. The author's reflection on the historicity of democracy and the creation of an institution to ensure the respect and promotion of human rights in Cameroon will be very useful in the analysis of our theme. The report on the state of women's rights in Cameroon in 2016 particularly highlights the major actions of the State with regard to the achievements, advances, constraints and difficulties relating to the promotion and protection of women's rights in Cameroon during that year⁵⁵.

5- THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Eurocentric theses have often mentioned that women's rights, in Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular are contemporary to Western civilisation. Most African countries have ratified several charters and conventions on women's rights after independence, signed and ratified by the State. But unfortunately, violations of the effective application of these rights continue to be observed. It is in this sense that, international institutions such as the European Union have imposed since Lomé 4, the respect of human rights as a condition, to receive aid, we can also cite the Maputo Protocol, the Protocol of African Charter on Human

⁵³ D. Lochak, *Les Droits de l'homme*, Paris, La Découverte, Troisième Edition, 2009.

⁵⁴ Z. Ngniman, *Les chemins de la démocratie*, Yaoundé, Edi 'Action, 2003.

⁵⁵ CNDHL, *Rapports sur l'état des droits au Cameroun en 2015*, Yaoundé, M. E. Printer, 2016.

and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women. Answering the question of why we continue to observe these violations will not be easy, hence the importance of a huge background in the field.

Despite the existence of a legal framework set up by the International, Continental and National Organization, that is, the State, placing a fairly wide range of freedoms, certain issues still remain firm, particularly on matters relating to women's rights. This work therefore aims to analyse the effectiveness and limits of the mechanisms set up by the State to promote and protect women's rights. From this, the central question and the secondary questions emerge. The consecration of human rights in general and women's rights in particular, a few years after Cameroon's independence, the State led a hard-fought conquest in the defence of women's rights, which was highly desired by generations of Cameroonian women, political and opposition activists, women's rights activists or simple litigants, who were caught under the scourge of a brutal and authoritarian political regime and a class-based and selective justice. After nearly 61 years of Independence, what are the mechanisms put in place by the State to guarantee and ensure the rights of women in Cameroon? This central question is supported by other secondary concerns. What are the governmental institutions in the management of women's rights in Cameroon? What are the different activities carried out by the State in the respect of women's rights in Cameroon? And finally, what critical evaluation can be made of the state's struggle in the issue of women's rights in Cameroon?

All these questions will help us to better understand the action of the State with regard to women.

6- METHODOLOGY

A work such as this requires the use of sources and complements. In this particular context, four main categories of sources were used: written, oral, iconographic and digital.

a- Written sources

The written sources used are of two types: primary and secondary sources.

The primary sources consist of archival documents. These consist of national archives and reports from organisations such as United Nations Organisation for Gender Equality and Women's Automation, Human Rights, Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family, Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry. They were consulted at the documentation services of MINPROFF, MINAS, *ONU FEMMES* and the National Archives of Cameroon. They have been essential in understanding the realities that women and the State of Cameroon have gone

through since independence. Furthermore, they have helped to trace the evolution of women's rights in Cameroon.

The secondary sources consist of books, articles, theses and dissertations. Most of this documentation was collected in the libraries on the campus of the University of Yaounde 1, namely the libraries of the *Cercle d'Histoire, Géographie-Archéologie*, the Faculty of Arts, Literature and Human Sciences, the Department of History and the Central Library. These documentation centres not only provided access to the research work already carried out on the issue under study, but also reinforced the methodological elements necessary for the analysis and presentation of this work.

The documentary research also led to other documentation Centers in Yaoundé and Douala. Among others, the exploitation of the works of the French Institute of Cameroon, the Paul Ango Ella library and the library of the Institute of International Relations. In the city of Douala, the library of the Department of History was also of great importance. These different knowledge centres firstly enriched the bibliography of the work and secondly completed the information collected in the field. They also contributed to the understanding of the evolution and role of the Cameroonian state in the promotion of women's rights.

b- Oral sources

This topic covers all the female gender from North to South Cameroon, from East to West. In view of the sample selected, a good part of the information was obtained during interviews conducted in the field. The surveys were conducted with administrative staff and gender officers at *ONU FEMMES* headquarters. These informants were selected according to their sex, age and level of involvement in the fight for gender equality in Cameroon. These interviews were often private and in most cases grouped together.

With regard to administrative staff, several interviews were conducted at *MINPROFF* and at the *MINPROFF* Delegation in the Central Cameroon region. The aim of these meetings was to obtain information on the activities of *MINPROFF's* projects and programmes in Cameroonian public policy. The information collected was used to enrich the information read in various documents.

With the officials of the *ONU FEMMES* headquarters in Yaoundé, it was a question of completing the information read in the documents and relating to the roles played by the latter in the framework of the gender programme. It was also a question of obtaining more information on the difficulties encountered by the Ministry.

The public opinion on the issue is to be taken in consideration. They were also consulted on their views on the issue. The purpose of these different questionnaires was to enrich and strengthen the information collected in the literature.

The oral sources shed light on areas of uncertainty that had not been well understood. In addition, they helped to complete, confirm and sometimes refute the information collected or read.

C-Iconographic and digital sources.

Almost all of the iconographic sources consist of photos of actors who played an essential role in the promotion of women's rights. A significant part of these photographs comes from the archives of MINPROFF, MINAS and *ONU FEMMES*. These different images not only allowed us to confront certain assertions, but also to expose certain realities that the texts did not sufficiently demonstrate.

The digital sources are made up of the capital contribution of the Internet. This tool of Information and Communication Technology allowed us to access the website of MINPROFF, MINAS, *ONU FEMMES* and the various feminist associations, with the aim of exploiting the different information, in this case, the reports of their programmes or projects throughout the territory of Cameroon. This source was also of capital importance in that it allowed us to access a great deal of information that was almost unavailable or inaccessible through the other centres.

The method used in this work is one that all professional historians must use. The complexity of this study requires it, as it is imperative to leave the purely historical field to place oneself in a combinatorial perspective. Several analytical tools, including oral, written and iconographic sources, have been used to carry out this work. Other social sciences have been of importance in the understanding of certain realities. This study includes a triple approach: descriptive, explanatory and analytical.

The descriptive approche consists of describing the observed phenomena by taking into account the interactions between the different components studied: the state and the issue of women's rights in Cameroon. This translates into a description of the realities observed in the field, i.e. the different activities undertaken by the state. In addition, this method aims to describe the validity of the different activities undertaken by the state for women in Cameroon.

The explanatory method makes it possible to trace all the actions undertaken by the State in the process of integrating women into its public policy. These are the actions undertaken from independence until 2020. This approche has also made it possible, within the

framework of gender, to trace the insertion of women year after year in Cameroon's public policy.

The analytical approach consists in highlighting or studying the different activities undertaken by the State in the framework of the promotion of women in Cameroon. These actions are placed in their contexts before any analysis. The problem here is to see to what extent the actions carried out by the State in Cameroon since independence have progressively transformed the life of girls and women.

The combination of this threefold approach has made it possible to present the activities or action of the state as they have really developed.

The historian interested in legal issues has a multitude of sources at his disposal. A subject like the one we propose to study, in which facts related to law and history abound, requires diverse and complementary sources. Therefore, we will use three main sources : written, oral and digital sources.

As far as the various sources of this study are concerned, we have used a historical approach. The historical approach allows us to present the facts and events in a chronological sequence. The choice of this approach in our study is justified by the fact that it is essential for the analysis of facts in social science.

7- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As far as the theoretical framework is concerned, we have opted for liberalism⁵⁶. Liberalism is a school of thought, which advocates the defence of individual rights. Liberalism is based on the idea that every human being has fundamental rights, which no power has the right to violate. Consequently, liberals want to limit the social obligations imposed by the government and, more generally, the social system in favour of the free choice of each individual. The state, which is secular and is the first guarantor of fundamental rights, is not the guarantor of the law of the majority, but rather the protector of the freedom of individuals and minorities against the strongest. The woman here is a prime example.

8- DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

In carrying out this work, we were confronted with numerous difficulties, particularly the slowness and refusal of certain administrative sectors in processing the request for research authorization. This slowness and sometimes the refusal of an authorization has been an obstacle to the proper conduct of the research. For example, we submitted an application to

⁵⁶ Est un courant de pensée des relations internationales. Pour l'école réaliste, les Etats recherchent avant tout à garantir leur sécurité et à étendre leur puissance en raison de la compétition qui existe entre eux.

the Ministry of Social Affairs but we were never called. However, some of the most authoritative sources at the Ministry of Women empowerment and the Family have made us understand that certain valuable documents on women before and after independence are actually held by this ministry.

Still in the context of the realization of this work, we had a difficulty concerning the choice of the subject. We changed it several times. Then came the turn of the plan, where we found ourselves doing three dissertation topics, until the supervisor gave us the final swallow, which was not at all easy.

And finally, the year 2020 was marked by the beginning of an unprecedented global health crisis, associated with the spread of a new coronavirus disease in many countries, including Cameroon. The outbreak of the pandemic forced the government to take emergency measures in the hope of speeding up the exit from this international crisis that has profoundly disrupted all aspects of daily life. The closure of libraries and the unavailability of some key informants due to the confinement did not make the task any easier.

In spite of all these obstacles, in order to better understand this work, it was judicious to organize it in a methodical way based on the available documentation.

9- PLAN OF THE WORK

For a thorough analysis of the problem posed, we have organized our work into four chapters.

The first chapter is entitled ‘‘from the independence of Cameroon to the institutionalization of governance on women’s rights in Cameroon 1960-1975’’.

The second chapter is entitled, ‘‘from the promotion of social affairs to the status of women in Cameroon: The stakes of an institutional mutation 1975-1984’’.

The third chapter is entitled ‘‘the globalization of women’s rights and its impact in Cameroon 1984-2004’’.

And finally, the fourth chapter, Evaluation of public policy on women’s rights in Cameroon 2004-2020’’.

CHAPTER 1: FROM THE INDEPENDENCE OF CAMEROON TO THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GOVERNANCE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CAMEROON 1960-1975

The issue of women appears as an innovative fact during the colonial process. It is obvious that this fact caused a shift in the paradigm of institutional behaviour. Indeed, the logic of the constitution of political bodies was made in a particular context. From then on, it is a question of understanding how the political evolution has modified social interactions. Thus, it will be important first of all, to know how women rights were in the traditional domaine in Cameroon during the precolonial era.

I- THE LAW AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CAMEROON

In Africa, the existence of a traditional ideology during the pre-colonial period stipulates that, 'the male gender is above the female gender'⁵⁷. This assertion seems to find an echo in the Cameroonian social order, despite the cultural diversity that characterises it.

1- The law and the status of women in Cameroon: during the pre-colonial period

Indeed, the Cameroonian social space embraces the contours of male domination by placing women in the domestic sphere. Whether in the Bantu culture, that of the grassfields, or in the Arab-Muslim culture, women are in no way considered as the equals of men. For example, in each of these cultures, men are allowed to have several wives, but the reverse is not conceivable. Women are assigned to housework and household management⁵⁸. In the northern regions and the grassfields, for example, most women are not allowed to look at their husbands in the face without his permission.

The Bantu culture is the one generally found in the deep south of Cameroon. However, authors such as Henri Ngoa believe that during the pre-colonial period, women were endowed with certain powers in the public sphere⁵⁹. In this respect, he prefers to speak of the existence of complementarity between men and women in traditional society, especially in politically centralised societies such as chieftaincies and kingdoms.

⁵⁷ H. Guétat-Bernard, *Développement rural et rapports de genre, mobilité et argent au Cameroun*, Renne, Presses Universitaires de Renne, p. 213.

⁵⁸ J. C. Barbier, *Femmes du Cameroun, Mères pacifiques, femmes rebelles*, Paris, ORSTOM-KARTHALA, 1993, p. 20.

⁵⁹ H. Ngoa, ' 'Non, la femme n'était pas opprimée"', Yaoundé, CLE, 1975, p. 17.

In the western highlands, for example, it was not uncommon for a woman to exercise supreme political power as a leader, for example as a priestess chief of the land, or as a political ruler. A concrete example is the 'Bamouns', where the existence of female traditional chiefs or 'queen mothers' was noted. It was possible for the descendant or wife of a sultan, or more generally of a noble family, to become involved in politics without infringing on customs and traditions⁶⁰. This is the case of Queen Njapdunke, mother of Njoya who ruled the Bamoun kingdom from 1885-1892⁶¹.

In the same vein, a study carried out on the 'Ide' tribe in West Cameroon also highlights the role of women in traditional Cameroonian society.

Similarly, in the northern region among the 'Fali Tinguelin', it has been shown that the role of women is played out in the difference that does not imply inequality or opposition to the role of men. This difference establishes a permanent dialogue between men and women in all areas of social, religious, public and private life⁶².

In his study of the community of *Asêm* in the central region, J.C. Barbier, showed the existence of a permanent dialogue between men and women. Barbier, in his study of the *Asêm* community in the central region, has shown the existence of female political power in the pre-colonial period. In addition to Mimboo, the queen of *Asêm*, he detected female power in several other localities of the said region. We can cite here the case of female chiefs among the Vuté in the Mbam region.

This ambivalent status of women in traditional ideology is not unique to Cameroon. Many authors have also shown that in pre-colonial Africa there were female customary chiefs in certain kingdoms⁶³. In the end, Cameroonian women, although not equal to men, were not totally excluded from public activities. They were able to take part through numerous rites. In the center regions, women, through the *Mevungu* rite for example, are responsible for the education of children, fertility and soil fertility⁶⁴. They provide protection at the same time as they provide reproductive power. In any case, it is the feminine attributes that always seem to justify the place of women in political society. In her capacity as a mother, the Cameroonian

⁶⁰ V. Nga Ndongo, "Femmes, Société et politique", Séminaire de l'OFRDPC, 8 et 9 janvier 2010.

⁶¹ MINRESI, *les Grandes figures du Cameroun*, Yaoundé, 2013, p. 13.

⁶² J.C Barbier, *Femmes du Cameroun. Mères pacifique, femmes rebelles*, ORSTOM, Karthala, Paris, 1985.

⁶³ C. Conquery-Vidrovitch, *Les Africaines : histoire des femmes d'Afrique noire du XIXe siècle*, Paris, Desjonquères, 1994, p. 50.

⁶⁴ M-P. Bochet De The, *Rite et association traditionnelles chez les femmes beti*, Orstom-KARTHALA, Paris, pp. 233-245.

woman is ‘the custodian and guardian of the united opposites. She is in charge of all tasks that consist in protecting what « grows »⁶⁵.

This somewhat enhanced role of Cameroonian women in traditional society during the pre-colonial period was ignored by colonisation, which entrenched the already existing inequalities. To quote A. Okonjo⁶⁶, the colonial administrative and bureaucratic apparatus, which was exclusively male, ousted the pre-colonial systems which, although differentiated according to gender, included political functions and titles of varying importance and influence for women and men.

The notion of law in Social Science is that which can be accepted as the expression of the popular will⁶⁷. Hence, it is the general rule that governs a society and determines its mode of functioning. In the societies and peoples of precolonial Cameroon, law can be assimilated to custom. The latter is the set of principles that coexist in a population group as a whole⁶⁸. These have evolved from period to period, thus passing from a law considered primitive to a constituted and standardized law. In order to understand this, we proceeded to an investigation with Thomas Kuhn’s conception in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* as our theoretical point⁶⁹. His reading allows us to conceive of rights and status as a window through which to measure the stabilization of a society.

2- The ‘customary’ status of women during the colonial period, independence and reunification (1961)

Jacques Fame Ndonga in an article "*la femme dans la tradition pahouine* ",⁷⁰ notes that, on the cosmogonic level, the woman has more extensive powers than the man. According to popular belief, it is the woman who introduced the vital force or universal cosmic energy into the villages by transporting it in her womb from the forest and passing it through her genitals⁷¹. The female Pahouin parent, which is reflected in the fact that ‘several names are part of the female code and several lineage names are attached to women. She represents an undeniable economic aspect. In the *Vuté* society of yesterday and today, studied by Célestin Ngoura, it is established that women hold a place of prominence, and still play a

⁶⁵ P. Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, Paris, Les Editions de minuit, 1980, p. 380.

⁶⁶ A. M. Lebeuf, *The Role of Women in the Political Organisation of African Societies*, Routledge- London, In Paulme Editions, *Women of Tropical Africa*, 1963, pp. 93-119.

⁶⁷ Hayek, *Droit, législations*, Paris, LGDJ, 2011, p. 11.

⁶⁸ A. Mballa-Kyé, *La pastorale dans une ville d’Afrique*, Nordheim, Cerdic –publications, 1995, p.11.

⁶⁹ TH. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 1962, p. 11.

⁷⁰ J. Fame Ndonga, *La femme Camerounaise et la promotion du patrimoine culturel national*, Yaoundé, Edition CLE, 2002, p.5.

⁷¹ J.C Barbier, *Femmes du Cameroun. Mères pacifique, femmes rebelles*, Paris, ORSTOM, Karthala, 1985, p. 12.

predominant social role in all areas of collective life. In addition, she is the link between the world of the living and that of the ancestors and the God of the ancestors.

Moreover, it should be noted that the political history of Cameroon in its complexity has delayed the development of the emancipation of women's rights. In fact, Cameroon is a country that has experienced a triple foreign occupation⁷². A former German colony, divided in 1916 between Great Britain and France, Cameroon was first under a League of Nations mandate in 1919, and then, in 1949, a trust territory. This shows political issues took precedence over the social demands of both minorities and social strata⁷³. The range of texts taken concern, for the most part, institutional and economic facts that should allow the mandating powers known as colonial powers to act according to their interests! This occupation of the territory which lasted from 1884 to 1960 in French Cameroon and 1961 in English Cameroon was marked by the negation of the humanity of these peoples⁷⁴. This destruction of cultures and the denial of the values of African customs led to the evacuation of the value of Humanity to Africans. Far from going back to the racist theses dear to Gobineau and Levy Bruhl, it emerges that the administrative philosophies were essentially discriminatory⁷⁵.

However, these actors are stakeholders in the process of implementing international texts, such as those concerning women. This is the case with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁷⁶ and that of women in particular, which in its preamble condemns all forms of violence against women⁷⁷. Cameroon thus adopted the preamble, which went through a variety of discussions, but in the end, was incorporated into the Cameroonian constitution⁷⁸.

Women have a special place in African societies in general and in Cameroon in particular. It should be noted that the migrations of populations are meant to explain their

⁷² Assembé, "*Les Droits de l'Homme*"... p.134.

⁷³ Ngadjui, *Les Droits politiques*... p.12.

⁷⁴ Roussel, *Leçons de Déontologie coloniale*, Paris, AUCAM, Bruylant, 1944, p. 16.

⁷⁵ C. R. Paligot, *La République raciale 1860-1930*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2006, pp. 151-220.

⁷⁶ UNO, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948*.

⁷⁷ B. Chelini-Pont, *Les Droits de la femme dans la Déclaration Universelle des Droit de l'Homme*, Paris, CNCDDH-PSL-EPHE-Science Politique, 2018, p. 40.

⁷⁸ Law N°96/6 of 18 janvier 1996 on the revision of the Constitution, amended and completed by Law N°2008/001 of 14 avril 2008, Yaounde Nationale printing house, 2008.

socio-political organisation⁷⁹. Achille Mballa-Kyé notes that: « science stabilises itself at certain times by conforming to a « paradigm »⁸⁰.

In 1929, *Igbo* women in present-day Nigeria launched a revolt to defend their socio-economic interests against the British colonial authorities. Later, 29 years later, women in northwest Cameroon found themselves in similar conditions. Coming from the *Kom* and *Kedjom* chiefdoms in the North West Region, where women were responsible for agricultural activities and men owned the animals, they were reacting to rumours that the British authorities were about to hand over their land to the *Igbo* who were also under British rule.

The *Kom* and *Kedjom* women also disagreed with a British government decree that prohibited the local practice of slavery. The latter forbade the local practice of agriculture with the adaptation of the shape of the fields to the terrain. Finally, the *Kom* and *Kedjom* women saw their fields ravaged by cattle whose passage was authorised by the colonial authorities.

From 1958, the *Kom* and *Kedjom* women of North-West Cameroon led revolts to defend their economic interests threatened by the British colonial master. They lasted until the country's independence in 1961⁸¹. To show their dissatisfaction with these lands reforms, the *Kom* and *Kedjom* women organised revolts. They were directed against the colonial authorities and certain chiefs who were accused of not defending their interests sufficiently. They were encouraged by the anti-colonial Kamerun National Democratic Party.

⁷⁹ B. Bilongo, *Les pahouins du sud Cameroun. Inventaires bibliographiques. Connaissance des Fang, Ntoumou, Mvaé, Boulou, Béti (Eton, Manguissa, Mvélé, Béne et Ewondo) et du groupe dit « Sanaga »*, Yaoundé, Sd cité par R.B. Onomo Etaba, "L'évolution de l'activité des missions catholiques : le cas de l'arrondissement d'Okola, 1928-1980", Mémoire de Maitrise en Histoire, UY, 1991, p.10.

⁸⁰ Mballa-Kyé, "Société droit et pastorale dans une ville d'Afrique, Thèse de doctorat en Histoire du droit et des institutions", Université Marc Bloch, Strasbourg, 1995, p.8.

⁸¹ S. Capo Chichi, "*La revolte coloniale des femmes Kom Kedjom du Cameroun de 1958*", Yaounde, Nofi Media, 2018, p. 22.

Image 1: Kom and Kedjom women with KNDP President John Ngu.



Source: www.Archive of minproff.com, consulted on the 12 march 2022 at 11 am.

The image above, shows women of the secret societies and the President of the KNDP in British Southern Cameroon, followed by his party members. These women who strongly participated in the Independence and Reunification of the Two Cameroons in 1961.

These revolts were based on pre-existing models of women's organisation. The *Anlu*⁸² of *Kom* women and the *Fombuen*⁸³ of *Kedjom* women. More specifically, it was their response to aggression or insults to one of them. Whether it was, violence against pregnant women, abusing old women or using language that insulted a female characteristic.

The women of the community would gather in front of the house of the perpetrator. There they would dance, sing, urinate and defecate until the place became a public latrine. *Anlu* and *Fombuen* were also the names given by the *Kom* and *Kedjom* women to the revolts they led in 1958. On these occasions, nearly 7000 women mobilised to defend their interests⁸⁴.

⁸² It is a born practice of Kom women, set up to respond to transgressions of the social order.

⁸³ It was an association of *Kedjom* women. It celebrated their reproductive powers and organised their dances at the funerals of a family member.

⁸⁴ S. Capo Chichi, *La revolte coloniale des femmes Kom Kedjom du Cameroun de 1958*, Nofi Media, 2018, p. 14.

In their action against the colonial government, they travelled 20 kilometres to its headquarters in the town of Bamenda. During their longest protests, they camped for a fortnight in front of the colonial government headquarters where they were responsible for Anlu-inspired nuisances. Songs, dances and dung accompanied their protests. In some of their songs, the Anlu activists paid tribute to deceased Kom chiefs Ndi Kuoh and Ngam Kuoh, who like them had fought to protect their land. In the next song, the bravery of Ngam Kuoh and Ndi Kuoh is contrasted with that of Ndong Nyang and Ghajem, activists from the rival KNC party who were deemed ‘collaborators’ in the abandonment of their land⁸⁵.

« Ngam Nkuoh lies in the ground, No! He did not sell our land
 Ndong Nyang came to sell our land.
 Ngam Nkuoh lies in the ground, N! He did not sell our land
 Ghajem came to sell our land »⁸⁶.

The revolts of the Anlu activists and their relationship to the KNDP contributed to the KNDP’s victory in the 1961 elections following the country’s independence in 1961. Despite their promises to the Anlu activists, the KNDP authorities would abandon them, banning the local farming practices with the adaptation of the shape of the fields to the terrain that they had fought against. Anlu activists demonstrating against this law would be subject to the justice system now held by the KNDP. The political power of the Anlu activists would now be reduced to almost nothing.

« Let us hope that the heirs of the African anti-colonialist struggle will ensure that the memory, if not the lost power, of these extraordinary women lives on. Women, as one of their songs indicates, ready to die for their ancestors, their homeland and their children :
 We will go to war in »⁸⁷.

It is clear that the semi-autonomous state of Cameroon had taken it upon itself to constitute a body of rules that would gradually free itself from the colonial framework between 1957 and 1959. Is it necessary to think that the Cameroonian political authorities, namely André Marie Mbida⁸⁸ and his successor Ahmadou Ahidjo, took measures and initiatives to guarantee the rights and status of women ?

It should first be noted that custom is a fundamental element of culture. As far as women are concerned, they have been governed by aspects that derive either from

⁸⁵ E. Konde, *African Women and Politics: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Male-dominated Cameroon*, University of Michigan, Edwin Mellen Press, 2005, p.16.

⁸⁶ S. Capo Chichi, *La revolte coloniale des femmes Kom Kedjom du Cameroun de 1958*, Nofi Media, 2018, p. 31.

⁸⁷ Capo Chichi, *La revolte coloniale des femmes...*, p. 31.

⁸⁸ D.Abwa, *André Marie Mbida, premier premier ministre Camerounais 1917-1980*, Paris, l’Harmattan, 1993.

- Precepts linked to the collective cultural imagination ;

These are reinforced by the existence of traditional courts (customary courts and courts of first instance organised by Decree)⁸⁹ ;

- Religion;

- Habitus in the sense of Bourdieu of the populations; it emerges from this that : « even when informed, women will not be able to request the application of their rights if psychological blocks exist. These blocks consist of the image that the woman herself and her entourage have of her. This image is not very pleasant »⁹⁰.

Custom has three dimensions: a set of beliefs that act as an organising principle, a dimension of postulates, and a dimension of laws and methods. This is what makes it the organising and ‘sovereign’ principle of social intermediation and interaction. Custom has a social dimension that calls for the observation of existing structures in formal reality. Custom has a significant value for the peoples of Cameroon. This is particularly true of forest peoples who live with a segmented organisation based on lineages.

In this universe, the woman corresponds to an « ideal » subject to phallocratic rules that take precedence over the hierarchy of Man. She is seen as a ‘second-class’ being, inferior to the man, the one who is obliged to marry. This obligation drastically reduces her claim to rights and a specific status⁹¹. This fact leads to the consideration of the Negro African world as an unfulfilled unity, in spite of well established principles. From a theoretical point of view, we are subject to an organisational model that has developed rules that justify its survival and contribute to the efficiency of the interactions that take place at all levels of society⁹².

The woman as ‘object’ is approached through the prism of the coordinated efforts she has undertaken with institutions to improve her status. In traditional African society, solidarity appears to be a main point for the survival of the numbers in a given community in the face of all kinds of threats to which they are exposed, whether from nature or from other human communities. The results it has, was greater than what Brazzaville in 1944 had foreseen, just as the law of 1946. Yet these changes were supposed to be advances in the status of women, but they were not. The Jacquinet decree of 1955 is a significant act in their evolution. Let us

⁸⁹ Degree No. 64/DF/544 of 19 December 1969.

⁹⁰ MINAS, « la femme camerounaise de demain », actes du symposium organisé les 7 et 8 mars 1989, Yaoundé, édition MINASCOF, 1989, p.68.

⁹¹ J.M Ela, *Restituer l'histoire aux sociétés africaines. Promouvoir les sciences sociales en Afrique noire*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1994, p.14.

⁹² H. Fayol, *Administration industrielle et générale*, Paris, Dunod, 1918, p.15

acknowledge that the political changes that followed forced the local colonial authorities to accept the action of women's organisations.

Association of Cameroon Women through the voice of its creator Laurence Eteki Maladi, at that time a midwife by training who opened the first private clinic in Cameroon in Douala, tried to delay the political data wanted by the colonial power⁹³ and with the main objective of demanding access to the right to vote in general and to women in particular⁹⁴. It is reasonable to think that the women's trade union action prevented the realization of the will to deprive Cameroonian women of their freedom, but a few years later, through the voice of two female teachers, Marie-Irene Ngapeth-Biyong General Secretary, and Marthe Ouandié Treasurer, created the Cameroon Women Union, which continued the struggle initiated by ASSOFE CAM. The strikes of 1945 and 1955 are thus illustrative of the participation of women in the political protest movement, which will lead to a historic act, the candidacy of the very first woman to stand for election in Cameroon, Julienne Niate, later called « Our Joan of Arc » and later, another pioneer by the name of Julienne Keutcha, will take up the torch and become the very first woman democratically elected as a member of the National Assembly on April 4, 1960 of the young sovereign Cameroon State.

Image 3: Women members of ASSOFE CAM: Marthe Ouandié and Julienne Keutcha:



Source : www.Marthe Ouandié and Julienne Keutcha.com, consulted on the 12 June 2022.

⁹³ R. Joseph, *Le Mouvement Nationaliste au Cameroun, les origines sociales de l'UPC*, Paris, Karthala, 1986, p.19.

⁹⁴ R. Ndengue, "Mobilisation féminines au Cameroun français dans les années 1940-1950 : l'ordre du genre et l'ordre colonial fissurés", [www. https://www. Mobilisations féminines au Cameroun francais dans les années 1940-1950.fr](https://www.MobilisationsfémininesauCamerounfrancaisdanslesannées1940-1950.fr) consulted on the 11 April 2022 p.12.

The image on p.3 presents two strong fighters of women rights in Cameroon who were each members of the ASSOFECCAM. They shared the ideas of the UPC party.

What was the real impact of their action? It is difficult to separate it from that of the men who, through their trade unions and political movements, shook up the colonial order. We take into account the principle that the end of the Second World War brought hope to the colonised populations. Cameroon is one of those countries which, through Territorial Assembly of Cameroon Representative Assembly of Cameroon and later the Gaston-Deferre law or Loi-Cadre, tried to implement the progressiveness desired by Brazzaville⁹⁵.

Still at the political level, access to suffrage must be limited to exceptionally evolved African women⁹⁶. For the tiny minority of women concerned, this implies fulfilling two conditions:

- To have had access to education and to have adopted codes and tastes identified as 'Western' :

In 1946, for example, in a letter addressed to the governor of Cameroon, the Minister of Overseas France urged the local colonial administration not to give the "indigenous" the impression that it was encouraging women's work : faced with a shortage of personnel one can neither "entrust certain posts to European" women, because they would receive a more advantageous salary than native civil servants, nor employ the wives or daughters of the latter to improve the situation of the head of the family⁹⁷.

- To hold a job as an auxiliary of the administration, which remains exceptional⁹⁸.

All in all, the 'conservatives', understood here as the supporters of this phallographic domination, were forced to become weary. The result was the emancipation of women at the time of the sovereignty of British Southern Cameroon through the reunification with the Republic of Cameroon on 1 October 1961⁹⁹. Despite visible signs of women's resistance in Cameroon, they have not constituted a fundamental part of the literature on the contribution of women and social cadets to the same extent as in Nigeria and Ghana. This omission is a denial of the work of these women for freedom! As it happens, the adoption of the

⁹⁵ Ndengue, "*Mobilisation féminines au Cameroun français...*", p.15.

⁹⁶ J. B. Mbaye, *Le vote des femmes au Sénégal*, Dakar, Ethiopique, 1976, pp. 26-43

⁹⁷ ANOM, "Affaires politiques, 1405, Lettre du Ministre de la France d'outre-mer au gouverneur du Cameroun", Ministère des colonies, Yaoundé, 1946, p. 4.

⁹⁸ P. Barthélémy, *Africaines et diplômées à l'époque coloniale*, Presses Universitaire de Rennes, Rennes, 2010, p.13.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 16.

constitution of the Independent State of East Cameroon had already recognised the equality of citizens in gender and sex. By specifying that all men are equal in rights and duties¹⁰⁰.

Efforts have been made to mobilise women from all ethnic groups under a recognised and well-coordinated leadership from the bottom to the top¹⁰¹. This was done through the use of local and other symbols to convey messages that were ‘tacitly’ assimilated by local people but not always correctly interpreted by the colonial authorities¹⁰². The results were often ‘embarrassing’ for the administration, and it sometimes submitted to the will of the people¹⁰³. Such measures played a role in the decolonisation of British Cameroon as a whole¹⁰⁴. This aspect influenced the colonial administration and pushed for the development of women’s rights. What is the state of women’s rights in the post-colonial era?

3- Changes in the law and status of women at the advent of independence

Independence is characterised by the adoption of several regulations that end up building a body of legal texts. We mention laws such as;

- Law N°62.2 of 7 July 1966 on marriage ;
- Law N°68-LF-21 of 11 June 1968 on civil status ;
- Ordinance N°81-02 of 29 June 1981 on the organisation of civil status.

Let us analyse the means and strategies used at this level. In fact, the revolt of women in this region was well thought out.

- The involvement in openly hostile acts.

The facts that attest to this are linked to their activities in the chiefdoms, which were carefully synchronised¹⁰⁵. Moreover, this strategy was also the result of an authoritarian and threatening policy of symbols that surprised male institutions such as the *ckuiifuai*¹⁰⁶ or the *kwifoyn*¹⁰⁷, which supported the subjugation of women¹⁰⁸. The women’s ‘revolt’ is first and foremost against tradition, its heaviness, and its impact on the lives of women in the region. Their action can be seen in the sense of the conflictual continuum defended by Simmels¹⁰⁹. It turns out that, this social experience was to have an impact on the women’s lives.

¹⁰⁰ Constitution of Cameroon of 1960.

¹⁰¹ N. Ngadjui, *Les droits politiques...*, pp. 19-23.

¹⁰² H. Kam Kah, "Women resistance"..., p. 71.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p.60.

¹⁰⁴ MINAS, « la femme camerounaise de demain », actes du symposium organisé les 7 et 8 mars 1989, Yaoundé, édition MINASCOF, 1989, p.66.

¹⁰⁵ N. Ngadjui, *Les droits politiques...*, pp. 19-23.

¹⁰⁶ It is a secret society in the North West region of Cameroon.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Kam Kah, "Womens Resistance in Cameroon’s Western Grassfields: The power of symbols, Organisation, and leadership 1957-1961", *Center for African Studies*, University of Florida, 2011, p.67.

¹⁰⁹ S. Vromen, "Georg Simmel et le dilemme culturel des femmes", Paris, *Les cahiers du Griff*, 1989, pp. 7-28.

Indeed, there was an uprising of women in 1929 in Eastern Nigeria¹¹⁰. It is possible to think that because of the proximity, the ideas of protest spread. This is a way of seeing the theory of proximity as a source of conflict in the sense of Barry Buzan, Diehl¹¹¹. For Henry Kam Kah, women's groups, like other voluntary associations in the colonial era, served as vectors of new ideas and testing grounds for political leaders, refuting the official narratives that relegated them¹¹². This is why ASSOFECCAM is challenging the colonial enterprise of hierarchising populations into social norms oriented towards the 'domestic values' they have integrated.

This is specific to the system of assimilation desired by the French. Mongo Béti rightly denounced this administrative system, which imposed the *corvée* and the *portage*, as well as the maintenance of the double college¹¹³. It should be noted that the women's committee of the UPC had, as early as 1949, sent to the United Nation a petition pleading for the recognition of the political role of women. In it, this body denounced the « policy of contempt » which kept them in a subordinate position and affirmed that it was their right, but even more so, their duty, to participate in the construction of their country.

It is clear from all this that ASSOFECCAM challenges colonial prejudices about the role of Cameroonian women. From then on, it was perceived as subversive and was banned by the colonial administration. In 1952, the UFC emerged and continued the fight initiated by ASSOFECCAM¹¹⁴.

Union des Femmes Camerounaises movement, following the political formations, will carry the fight for independence. We can thus think that, Um Nyobe's speech at the United Nations was supported by women. This is a way of saying that the Ka'a Kunde¹¹⁵ cannot be dissociated from women's actions¹¹⁶. Through Um Nyobe, Cameroonian women expressed their dissatisfaction with the law of 23 May 1951 to the United Nations.

In 1952, the UFC sent a petition to the UN mission, in a context where organisations denounced the maintenance of the double school system, which had been abolished in Togo, and the late dissemination of the law¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁰ H. Kam Kah, "Women resistance" ..., p. 69.

¹¹¹ P.F. Diehl, D. Druckman, *Evaluating peace operations*, Institut quebecois des hautes études internationales, 2010, p. 234.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p. 200.

¹¹³ C. Ndami, "La dynamique de la participation des femmes...", p.33.

¹¹⁴ Ngadjui, *Les droits politiques de la femme* ..., p.14.

¹¹⁵ Ndengue, *Mobilisations féminines au Cameroun français dans* ..., pp. 73-81.

¹¹⁶ S. Ndjé, "Femmes et Maquis en pays Bassa'a", *Mémoire de Maitrise en Histoire*, UYI, 2008.

¹¹⁷ Joseph, *Le Mouvement nationaliste* ..., pp. 195-196.

In its petition, the UFC reproduces the concerns underlining that : « the protection of children implies the protection of mothers because healthy children are only born to healthy mothers ». Linking mother-child and schooling is a premise of the Jacquinot decree which will improve the gender situation in Black Africa. What exactly is it about ?

- The demand for more health care facilities¹¹⁸ ;
- The introduction of compulsory schooling for children of both sexes¹¹⁹.

As the text progresses, the demands become bolder. Indeed, the organisation stresses that « there can be no democracy, no full and complete freedom in a country where women do not enjoy equal rights and are kept out of political and cultural life »¹²⁰. It therefore calls for the development of institutions enabling women to reconcile their duties as citizens, wives and mothers, which are the very basis of future society

UFC points out that women ‘practically’ did not vote in the elections for the renewal of representatives to ATCAM in March 1952. This is justified by the fact that the law was enacted late, so that women could register to vote and obtain voter’s cards. At a UDEFEC meeting, Jacques Ngom, delegated by the UPC BCD, took a stand. In his speech, he urged women to join the women’s movement in order to defend their interests and obtain a faster evolution of Cameroon¹²¹.

In response to his initiative, the women decided to actively participate in nationalism. In 1954, they launched a subscription to ensure the defence of two nurses from the hospital in the town of Sackbayeme, trade union leaders who were imprisoned on charges of theft and concealment of medicines¹²². In view of all this in the French part, one wonders how women got involved in the nationalist struggle in the English part.

Moreover, the UFC demands the eligibility of women to the assemblies, as well as their access to all administrative positions and to municipal councils¹²³. All this underlines the commitment of Cameroonian women to join the political and social facts. These recriminations are made by a female elite progressively politicised by the revolutionary nationalism defended by the UPC.

From this, it appears that this organisation criticises the discrimination suffered by the urban female elite in relation to European women. What is the basis for this? This movement fights at this level for:

¹¹⁸ Ndengue, *Mobilisation féminines au Cameroun...*, p. 82.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹²¹ Ndengue, *Mobilisation féminines au Cameroun...*, p. 85.

¹²² Ngapeth Biyong, *Cameroun : Combat pour l’indépendance*, p.35.

¹²³ Ndengue, "Mobilisation féminines au Cameroun français...", p. 79.

- Maternity leave;
- Social insurance.¹²⁴

It demands that the metropolitan social insurance system be applied to Cameroonian women, and calls for measures to ensure employment for all women. However, her demands were not limited to the concerns of this elite. Although the leaders struggled to establish their organisation in the countryside, they did not forget the fate of the peasant women. In order to lighten their workload, it calls for the mechanisation of agriculture and the electrification of the countryside¹²⁵.

The UFC resorts to a strategic 'manipulation' of public identities. This action consists of putting forward the social roles assigned to women to justify their inclusion in political institutions.

Emmanuel Konde likens the UFC to an 'additional' tool for the control of political space by a colonial administration that is prey to the rise of nationalist demands¹²⁶. If certain facts tend to this expresses positions close to those of the administration, Without corroborating this hypothesis, the reality is much more complex¹²⁷.

II- THE EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS FROM INDEPENDENCE TO THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF GENDER-BASED GOVERNANCE.

As early as 1946, Cameroonian women organised and mobilised to challenge the effects of the colonial social order on their status. This action took place in a context marked by the colonial legislator with the decree setting up the semi-autonomous regime in Cameroon¹²⁸.

1- Presentation of the elements of a participatory governance of women 1961-1972

Independence maintained Western law and regulations in Africa. At this level, we can refer to Gonidec¹²⁹ and Edmond Jouve¹³⁰ to speak of an imported law, or if we refer to an

¹²⁴ Ngapeth Biyong, *Cameroun : Combat pour l'indépendance*, p.45.

¹²⁵ O. Filleule, *Travail militant, action collective et rapports de genre*, Paris, Presses de Science Politiques, 2009, p. 36

¹²⁶ E. Konde, *African Women and Politics: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Male-dominated Cameroon*, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2005, p. 89.

¹²⁷ E. Konde, *African Women and Politics: Knowledge, Gende...*, p. 90.

¹²⁸ Ngadjui, *Les Droits Politiques...*, p. 16.

¹²⁹ P. F. Gonidec, *Cours de droit du travail africain et malgache*, cité In : *Revue internationale de droit comparé*, Paris, 1967, pp. 312-314.

¹³⁰ Jouve, *L'Organisation de l'unité...*, p.22.

expression dear to Edouard Glissant, to a law of 'decalomania'¹³¹. The latter facilitates a change of views, or even a decolonisation of the mentalised, with regard to women. Cameroon could not remain on the sidelines of these changes. To better understand the situation of women's rights in Cameroon, it is necessary to understand how it emerged over time. The respective independence of Cameroon, in 1960 and 1961, marked a turning point with regard to women's rights in particular. It was the end of the 'myth' that women had more power as individuals, but less collective power¹³². Cameroonian women acted in such a way, that they imprinted their name in history.

- **Petitions;**

These are the demands, complaints and other things that women use to enforce their freedoms. In West Bamenda, specifically, the *anlu*¹³³ and *kelu*¹³⁴ women's organisations became more political and provided the basis for the uprising based on women's grievances against repression and exploitation¹³⁵.

- **Boycotts;**

This is the main instrument of protest used by women's organisations. History explains how women traders in the south of British Cameroon boycotted the market in Douala to protest against the imposition of price restrictions by French colonisation¹³⁶. As a result, they also fought against the principle that, « women should stay at home », as M. Gardiner declared. This raises the question of what is the preferred development model? It follows that: "major development problems cannot be solved without the active participation of women"¹³⁷. For example, the contribution of the women of the Grassfields¹³⁸ to the liberation from colonial domination took various forms. These include the following :

¹³¹ I. Amaduime, "Sexuality, African Religio-Cultural Traditions and Modernity: Expanding the lens", *CODESCIA bulletin special issue: The African Woman 1 and 2*, 2006, p. 26-28.

¹³² It is a traditional practice in the community of the Kom, in the North West region of Cameroon.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Amaduime, "Sexuality, African Religio-Cultural Traditions and Modernity...", pp. 26-28.

¹³⁵ Ngadjui, *Les droits politiques...*, pp. 19-23.

¹³⁶ Ngadjui, "Les droits politiques...", pp. 19-23.

¹³⁷ MINASCOF, *La femme Camerounaise...*p. 12.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

- **Mass mobilisation;**

It appears that mobilisation was a strategy or means used by women to obtain the effectiveness of their rights. The colonial period reveals that the contribution of women to the emancipation of their people, their region and their country was considerable¹³⁹.

Theoretically, the contribution of women as a group challenges Amadiume's argument that women have greater freedom and choice.

In such a situation, figures such like Laurence Eteki Maladi¹⁴⁰, appear. They are part of the social contract, which is the means of expression of the individual and collective will of the people¹⁴¹. It is the means of expression of the general will in a democratic political system. It is exercised through the ballot box and free elections.

The latter wanted to be an activist for the emancipation of Cameroonian women. Her struggle was about:

- **The questioning of the colonial administrative framework;**
- **Equality of civil and social rights between Cameroonian women and metropolitan women, but also between men and women¹⁴².**

The information gathered on its action is limited, insofar as it is drawn from secondary sources. These sources point to an association that is a 'pioneer' in demanding access to the right to vote, regardless of gender. This association is known as ASSOFECCAM. What are the objectives of this structure?

It appears that the purpose of the said association is to : denounce able suffrage. This is understandable because before the law of May 1951¹⁴³, almost all Cameroonian women were deprived of the right to vote. Cameroonian women were granted this right in 1945¹⁴⁴. This significant advance in women's rights came up against a reality that was not sufficiently taken into account by the French colonisers.

This analysis presents some of the battles waged by the women's association of the UFC, which succeeded it. The latter adopted a two-pronged strategy, consisting of not questioning colonisation head-on, particularly its civilising mission of educating women, while demanding:

¹³⁹ Ngadjui, "Les droits politiques...", p. 20.

¹⁴⁰ She was the first nurse in Cameroon and she was the woman who created the Cameroon women Association.

¹⁴¹ Cf. J. J. Rousseau, *Du contrat social ou, principes du Droit politique*, Amsterdam, Marc-Michel Rey, 1762.

¹⁴² Ngadui, *Les Droits politique des femmes...*, pp. 17-19.

¹⁴³ Ngadui, "*Les Droits politique des femmes...*", p. 17.

¹⁴⁴ Ndengue, "Mobilisations féminines au Cameroun français...", p 81.

- At the international level, the improvement of women's socio-economic and political rights;
- At the political and civic level, the UFC challenges the colonial construction of the category of the mother-electress and distances itself from the dominant gender assignments.

This movement calls for the repeal of the law of May 1951 establishing a privilege reserved for mothers of two children and its replacement by the access of all adult women to the right to vote, as in France¹⁴⁵.

The UDEFEC was created on August 3, 1952¹⁴⁶, with the constant support of the U.P.C. Emma Ngom, upon her return from the conference on childhood held in 1952 in Vienna, under the aegis of the International Women's Democratic Federation (IWDF), was to focus on the contribution of women in the liberation of Cameroon from the colonialists and the representation of women in the political life of Cameroon.

The objective was to bring together women from all tribes without distinction of clan, religion or social class¹⁴⁷. Is this not the meaning of the definition of development?

The development of Africa, whatever the theory, efficiently integrates the contribution of gender¹⁴⁸. Scientific works attest this, even though, works like the one of Axelle Kabou, are considered as fireworks. Marie Claire Mottin in Co-Editing with René Dumont noted it sufficiently¹⁴⁹. Catherine Ngo Komol¹⁵⁰, underlines the paradox that African women live with, a double oppression, colonial and patriarchal; even though there are principles and non-discriminating legislative and regulatory provisions¹⁵¹. In addition, she declared that women have: « the same rights as men, are oppressed like them, sometimes more than them, by colonialism, and like them, they are determined to fight for freedom, without fearing the manoeuvres of the administration¹⁵². Finally, during a meeting, a female activist urged her comrades to work to pay their own dues, without waiting for their husbands' help¹⁵³.

¹⁴⁵ Ndengue, *Mobilisation féminines au Cameroun...*, p. 70.

¹⁴⁶ M. I. Ngapeth Biyong, *Cameroun : Combats pour l'indépendance*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010, p. 82.

¹⁴⁷ M. C. Diop et M. Diop, *Les figures du politique en Afrique : des pouvoirs hérités aux pouvoirs élus*, Kathala Editions, 1999, p. 15.

¹⁴⁸ C. Oloa Ndi, *Femmes, leadership et développement au Cameroun : Images, perceptions et réalités*, mémoire de master, Faculté des Sciences Sociale, Développent International et mondialisation, 2020.

¹⁴⁹ A. Kabou, "Et si l'Afrique refusait le développement ?", Paris, L'Harmattan, 1991.

¹⁵⁰ She was the President of UDEFEC in Douala.

¹⁵¹ Ndengue, *Mobilisation féminines au Cameroun ...*, p. 78.

¹⁵² P. Nken Ndjeng, *L'idée nationale dans le Cameroun sous administration française 1920-1960*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2012, p. 17.

¹⁵³ ANY, 1AC 71 (D), UDEFEC 1955-1956, Réunion de 1955.

Within UDEFEC, women adopt a demanding conception of gender equality. This consists of putting forward a desire to assume the same responsibilities as men. This discourse emphasizes their equal capacity to participate in politics¹⁵⁴.

Was it realistic to think so? It is obvious that this action aimed to relativise the hierarchy of struggles for the emancipation of the country and that of women. Under this prism, women want the best living conditions. Such a discourse is in line with the objectives of the nationalist party, the UPC, which approves of the action that UDEFEC is carrying out for women and is pleased that it is also participating in the country's liberation struggle¹⁵⁵. The facts illustrate this and allow us to understand this collusion.

This situation led to the fact that from 1960 to 1961, there was only one woman out of 100 parliamentarians, that is. 1% of the members of parliament in East Cameroon. This same woman was the only deputy in the Federal Parliament composed of 50 parliamentarians (40 Francophones and 10 Anglophones)¹⁵⁶. This low participation of women in the parliament changed dramatically years later. From 1960 onwards, women's participation in the various Congresses of the parties has evolved in fits and starts¹⁵⁷. The 3rd Congress of the Cameroonian Union held in September 1960 in Maroua and which included 227 delegates and a Permanent Secretariat of 21 members, did not have any woman among its participants, the 4th Congress, that of Ebolowa in July 1962, had a strong female representation because 4 women out of 219 delegates took part in it: Mrs. Assawe, Adele Belembe, Keutchu Julienne, and Mrs. Tapara, who were respectively part of the delegations of Diamare, Mungo Menoua and Mayo-Danai¹⁵⁸.

In spite of their absence from the high partisan political sphere, Cameroonian women, with their multitudes of cultural and economic associations, took highly political actions: they participated massively on January 1, 1960 in the independence celebration, and took the initiative in March 1961 to send a petition to the United Nations to protest against the annexation of North Cameroon to Nigeria. It is also important to note the contribution of Mrs. Martius, who led a delegation to West Cameroon to collect funds for the campaign for the reunification of the two parts of the national territory. Some Cameroonian women have manifested themselves in isolation but in a way that is beneficial to the party, on the political scene. As an example : Mrs. Ebanda Isabelle, who took charge of the party's propaganda in

¹⁵⁴ M. I. Ngapeth Beyong, *Cameroun : Combats pour l'Indépendance*, Paris, l'Hamarttan, 2010, p. 10.

¹⁵⁵ Ndengue, *Mobilisation féminines au Cameroun français...*, p.82.

¹⁵⁶ MINASCOF, *La femme Camerounaise...*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁸ MINASCOF, *La femme Camerounaise...*, p. 12.

the Littoral, Mrs. Gobe, Bouquet, and Abomo, who campaigned for the massive adhesion of women to the U.C. in the East, Mrs. Nsegbe and her comrades contributed in a decisive way to the establishment of the party in Nyong and Kelle¹⁵⁹.

Some political leaders, despite these efforts of women to play a role in the Cameroonian political system, permanently sought to marginalise women politicians. However, aware of the success of their action in the socio-economic and cultural fields, these Cameroonian women, who considered themselves as an essential element of the national political system, grouped their multiple associations to form the National Council of Cameroonian Women on 3 April 1961¹⁶⁰.

2- The establishment of an institutional approach to women's rights: The birth of MINAS 1961-1975

The institutional mutations allow us to observe that the issue of women is at the heart of the debate on governance. For some authors, the institutional question is riveted to the changes in the sense of modifying the institutions.

It is with this in mind that the normative framework has been put in place¹⁶¹. The latter ensures that the Directorate of Social Affairs is set up as a fully-fledged ministerial department. Moreover, the Ministry of Social Affairs was organised by decree n°75/723 of November 1975¹⁶². In Cameroon, the pressure of facts has won a "semi victory" over the authority of the Law through the institution of the civil solidarity pact¹⁶³. This current fact leads to a modification of social structures and the resulting perceptions.

For example, in France, three types of couples cohabit in French law: the legal couple resulting from marriage, the de facto couple constituting concubinage and an intermediate couple. This evolution has also been progressive in Cameroon and this has led to the construction of norms of freedom. Two Cameroonians face each other and specifically in ancient Cameroon, the informed observer is sometimes accustomed to seeing him follow in the footsteps of his former master on legal issues¹⁶⁴. This fact is the result of the impact of

¹⁵⁹ R. Ndengue, "Mobilisation féminines au Cameroun français...", p.82.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁶¹ That is, the Degree n°75/467 du 28 juin 1975.

¹⁶² Archives of the Ministre of Social Affaires.

¹⁶³ A. F. Tjouen, "La condition de la femme en droits Camerounais de la famille, Vol. 64, Paris, *Revue Internationale de droit comparé*", 2012, p. 137-167.

¹⁶⁴ MINASCOF, *La femme Camerounaise de demain*, Yaoundé, MINASCOF, 1989, p. 1.

colonisation. The latter introduced new ways of life into the country. The contact of the populations with the new civilisations led to an evolution of mentalities¹⁶⁵.

The problem that appears here, is that of the schooling of young girls who express themselves on political issues in accordance with political advances. As a result, women suffered from low school enrolment rates. This is due to the relative importance of gender representation in girls' education¹⁶⁶. The education of women is undermined by traditional clichés. This approach ultimately proves to be a source of disappointment and frustration. It seems that the political advances that allowed the birth of a political elite around people like Um Nyobe, André Marie Mbida, Charles Assalé Mbiam, Soppo Priso. They initiated texts that facilitated the setting up of administrative and political mechanisms that were to be linked to the international context. The latter shaped by the Anglo-American suffragettes and women of the French left like the French writer Colette incited Paris to drop ballast! Moreover, after its independence, Cameroon ratified international and regional legal instruments on the protection of human rights. Since his accession to the Supreme Magistracy in 1982, liberalising and democratising the national life of Cameroonians were among the objectives of President Paul Biya.

On 26 August 1994, the government of Cameroon ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

It is no longer time to leave the field to men alone, hence, the commitment of the State in the fight for the protection of rights of women in Cameroon. It should be noted here that women's rights are both codified and guaranteed by domestic law. In Cameroon, the principles of equality and more specifically, that of non-discrimination are guaranteed both by the Constitution and by positive law. First of all, we have;

Problems arose in the example of citizenship, led by the French and English authorities, and French, English and Cameroonian parliamentarians. Thus, over time, the principle of representation of the Black majority in the political edifice was accompanied by the question of rights and women's rights. Consequently, it is logical to look at the history of women's rights. To come back to this, it should be noted that in 1960, we will see the fruits of this fight led by the UDEFEC, when Julienne Keutchu, after having submitted her candidacy to become a parliamentarian, despite the fact that this attracted criticism from certain

¹⁶⁵ E. J. Ntap, "Reportage sur le faible taux de scolarisation des filles au Cameroun", VOA- Afrique, Yaoundé, 2020.

¹⁶⁶ Women in Research and Action, *The Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women*, UNIFEM-CAMX, p.9.

journalists, who publicly invited her in the columns of the press, to deal with problems that concerned her¹⁶⁷.

On 10 April 1960, she became the first and only woman to be elected as a member of parliament, sitting in the Legislative Assembly of East Cameroon between 1960 and 1965. Then, she continued her career in the Federal National Assembly from 1962 to 1972¹⁶⁸. Later, in 1973, the number of women in the assembly increased to 7 women representatives. These include Abdoulaye Fadimatou, Burnley Gwendoline, Isabelle Ebanda, Salomé Eyeffa, Brigitte Maye, Iemlon Bridget Nsawir and Cécile Maffo Mondji¹⁶⁹.

Beyond all these representations, it appears that women have been essential actors in the process of social transmutation. Their actions are of the order of understanding the position of women in decision-making circles. Here is an illustration.

Table 1: Representation of women Parliamentarians in the Camerounain Asembly from 1957 till 1970s

Name and dates of birth	Years of term	Parliament	Profession	Origin	Function and other activities.
Mrs D. E. Idowu: 19 match 1933.	1957-1959	House of Assembly of Southern Cameroon		South West	
Mrs Mua Josepha : around 1924	1959-1961	House of Assembly of Southern Cameroon	Teacher	Bamenda	Presidente of the Menchum Party Section, member for Youth of the Central Commitee.
Mrs Keutchu Julienne	1960-1973	National Assembly,	Nursery nurse		Secretary of the National

¹⁶⁷ Ngapeth, *Cameroun : Combats pour...*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.20.

¹⁶⁹ MINASCOF, *La femme Camerounaise de demain*, Yaoundé, MINASCOF, 1989, p. 1.

around 1924		Legislative Assembly		Dschang	Assembly of Eastern Cameroun, Member several Commisions.
Mme Gladys Difo	1965- 1970	National Assembly, Legislative Assembly	Nursery nurse	Buea	Secretary of the National Assembly of Eastern Cameroun, Member several Commisions.
Mme Burley Gwendoline E. : 29 février 1932	1970- 1973	Legislative Assembly of Western Cameroun	Senior Civil Administrator	Buea	Secretary of the Permanent Office of CACAM, Vice Chairman of the Commitee at the National Assembly, Conflict Delegate of the Fako Party Sub- Section.
Mme Tsanga Delphine : 21 décembre 1935	1965- 1970	Legislative Assembly of East Cameroun	Nurse	Mefou	President of the National Council of Camerounians Women and Secretary of ALCAMOR, President of the

					Women's branch of the Party.
Mme Motaze Rosalie	1970- 1973	Legislative Assembly of East Cameroun	Administration Clerks	Sangmelima	Vice-President of the Legislative Assembly of East Cameroun Répresentative of the National Assembly at the National Commission for Holiday Camps.
Mme Isabelle : 23 février 1936	1970- 1973	Legislative Assembly of East Cameroun	Assistant Teacher	Douala	Departementale Presidente of the Wouri Party, Secretary at the Office of the National Assembly
Mme Nwanack Sarah : 27 octobre 1928	1970- 1973	Legislative Assembly of East Cameroun	Assistant Teacher	Makak	Section President of the Party of Nyong and Kellé
Mme Chilla Prudence Helen vers 1928	1970- 1973	Federal National Assembly	Teacher	Kumbo	Member and Copmmittee Secretary of the Federal National Assembly

Mme Gobe Brigitte	1973...	National Assembly	Teacher	Douala	Councillor and Auditor of the Mfoundi Party branch
Mme Tagny Jeannette : 12 juillet 1927	1973...	National Assembly	Teacher	Dschang	General Treasurer of the National Office of the Party.
Mme Abdoulayé Fadimatou : 1 ^{er} Janvier 1943	1973...	National Assembly	Assistant Social Worker	Far North Mokolo	President of the Margui-wandala Party
Mme Fotso Magne Jeanne : vers 1934	1970- 1973	Legislative Assembly of East Cameroun	House Wife	Bayangam	President of the Bandjoun Sub- Section Party

Source: MINASCOF, *La femme Camerounaise de demain*, MINASCOF, Yaoundé, 1989

Between 1947¹⁷⁰ and 1975, women decided to initiate themselves in the country's public policy. The first one was in 1957, 10 years after men first entered Parliament. It is important to note that during the colonial period, European and assimilated women did not have the right to participate in the Parliament of French Cameroon despite the existence of the double college¹⁷¹. After the independence of Cameroon, the new political leaders, in spite of a small opening towards Cameroonian women, continued along the same lines.

It should be noted that although women made individual choices, with regard to freedom in their lineages or families, they enjoyed and exercised greater freedom and power when they came together in organised groups. This was facilitated by skilful leadership that successfully opposed and weakened the different forces embodied in the British colonial administration system.

¹⁷⁰ That is, 28 years of parliamentary life in Cameroon.

¹⁷¹ R. Ndengue, "Mobilisation féminines au Cameroun français...", p.82.

To understand this, it should be noted that the women of the Grassfields were more militant in their demand for independence as a well coordinated group. This is why village associations raised funds, such as: *Kom, Kedjom Keku, Baisso, Mughom, Teitengem, Mbengkas and Bu*¹⁷².

Cameroonian women face many problems that are not new and go beyond access to marriage. During marriage, at its dissolution or outside of it, she continues to suffer discrimination due, among other things, to the influence of ancestral customs; this calls into question not only the equality of the sexes and of rights advocated by international texts, but also and above all her own dignity. But whatever her status (concubine, fiancée, wife, divorcee, widow, etc.), and despite the still considerable influence of customs, for some years now, women's rights have continued to grow both internationally and nationally, with much hope based on the draft code of persons and the family. While this project is being widely considered, one question that may be asked is whether, in the end, by dint of being interested in the promotion of women's rights (as sometimes seems to be the case), the Cameroonian legislator does not run the risk of tipping over into a certain inequality to the detriment of her companion, the man.

An analysis of African and foreign laws that have followed the lead of the Cameroonian legislator on these issues can help the latter to avoid falling into the trap of excessively favouring women or men. In reality, only legislation adapted to the local context and integrating elements of modernity will ultimately lead to a better consideration of the condition of Cameroonian women¹⁷³.

¹⁷² Kom are population of the grassfield of Cameroon.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER II: FROM THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS TO THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CAMEROON: THE STAKES OF AN INSTITUTIONAL MUTATION 1975-1984

The political commitment of some Cameroonian feminist figures during the independence period, such as Madame Ouandie Marthe, Ngoye Marguerite, Omok Gertrude, Noumie Marthe and others, made the issue of women's promotion a confusing aspect of public policies put in place by the public authorities. Indeed, the cultural universes that will make Cameroon a miniature Africa are not specifically provided for by women's rights in terms of policy, although the recognition of these rights is put into practice through traditional institutions¹⁷⁴. Also in Chapter 1, we mentioned the associations, that is to say, the women's societies that significantly modified the image of women in both the so-called centralised¹⁷⁵ and lineage societies¹⁷⁶. This chapter therefore focuses on the mechanisms for the promotion of women in these cultural universes in correlation with Cameroon's positive law, which has been in place since independence. In other words, how does the State of Cameroon promote women's rights by taking into account customs? In order to do this, it was necessary to proceed with a two-pronged approach. This approach highlighted the institutional procedure put in place by the public authorities to respond to it before the advent of the Second Republic.

I- Political and cultural strategies at the basis of the birth of MINAS in terms of women's rights in Cameroon

Figures such as Delphine Tsanga, Mbono Samba Madelienne, Azang Madelienne, Titi Priscille, Keutcha Julienne, made sure that the situation of women in public policies in Cameroon became a concern of the State of Cameroon before, during and after independence. This is one of the concerns that make it possible to talk about the historicity and challenges of women's rights in Cameroon. It so happens that, the issue of respect for women's rights' has been illustrated in the country through conventions, decrees, Constitution, feminist political parties and others. It responds to the concerns of social justice and the valorisation of feminist

¹⁷⁴ Here we are talking of those socio-economic rights in the traditional society.

¹⁷⁵ B. Jacques, "Le statut des femmes au Cameroun Forestier", Bruxelles, Edition de la librairie encyclopédique, 1959, p. 32.

¹⁷⁶ M. G. N. Mendjemi, "Connexité des acteurs dans le cadre de la gestion des ressources ligneuses et implication pour le développement du département de la Kadey", Mémoire présenté en vue de l'obtention du diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies en Géographie physique, septembre, 2009, p. 42.

human resources. Consequently, the State of Cameroon on the high instruction of the Head of State, His Excellency Amadou Ahidjo, put in place strategies to promote the rights of women.

a- Legal strategies and the management of customary and cultural beliefs

When Cameroon became independent in 1960, it inherited a colonial legal and legislative corpus¹⁷⁷. This fact led to the setting up of procedures which no doubt by mimicry recopied the logic of the colonial administration which had put in place either discrimination or exclusion actions; not only of races, but also of gender. It is indeed paradoxical to note that the colonial administration, which was iconoclastic towards the southern part of the country¹⁷⁸, retained a tolerance for the tribal feudalities mainly in the north of the country¹⁷⁹. At the origin of the *Conseil National des Femmes Camerounaises* (CNFC), there was the participation of Mrs. Belinga Rose, as a delegate of the Cameroonian Government, as an observer at the ordinary meeting of the Executive Committee of the International Council of Women, held in December 1960 in Addis Ababa. Her stay in Addis Ababa was very vital because on her return to Cameroon, associations were created in cities such as Yaoundé, from 3 April 1961.

The traditional values and practices of women lead to a division of labour, almost entirely excluding them from politics ; social and especially families activities, after decisions have been made by men, are their speciality. A palpable example is the women of the North, mainly among the Topori, and of the West, among the Bamouns. Economic activity can be recognised and cultural activity is limited to female aspects. Among the Bamouns, trade is a palpable example. This situation of inferiority in professional matters creates psychological blocks.

The Cameroonian woman, especially in rural areas, especially in the north and west (among the Bamouns), is essentially traditional and hardly understands that she can do better. She hardly understands that the management of a municipality is the business of all the inhabitants of the municipality. The majority of Cameroonian women do not accept the efforts required for changes that are favourable to them. Traditional barriers block the way to progress by making them admit that the traditional is sacred.

This principle of administrative continuity in the consideration of communities and peoples has remained in force. This is the reason why women's rights in the northern part of

¹⁷⁷ D. Abwa, *Commissaires et Hauts Commissaires de la France au Cameroun, 1916-1960 : ces hommes qui ont façonné politiquement le Cameroun*, Yaoundé, PUY, 1998, p. 19.

¹⁷⁸ F. Kange Ewane, *Semences et Moissons coloniales : un regard africain sur l'Histoire de la colonisation*, Yaoundé, éditions, Clé, 1985, p. 13.

¹⁷⁹ Daikollé Daissala, *Libre derrière les Barreaux*, Paris, éditions Jaguar, 1993, p. 21.

the country have remained almost unchanged, but also in conformity with those of tribes such as the Bamileke, Baya, Bamouns, Bali, Nso, etc., especially in agricultural and commercial matters¹⁸⁰. In these universes, women are at the centre of what is considered to be the 'agricultural family', which means that:

Wives and dependent sons (who may be married or single) are entitled to a certain amount of land to farm on their own account...the wife in most cases is free to use her produce as she sees fit ; however, she may be obliged with the help of her daughters of working age, to ensure the supply of ingredients... the woman's role is complementary to that of the man, but she generally recognises that the man is 'above' her in terms of opinion, prestige, influence, authority and physical strength¹⁸¹.

This observation shows that it was necessary for the public authorities, which have been bound by a legal corpus since independence, to gradually try to change this situation in order to be more representative on the international scene. We should also note in passing the will of the Cameroonian public authorities who, in their logic, have put in place a certain number of mechanisms. The feminist movements that openly claimed to be like certain female figures such as Georges Sand, Colette, Simone Weil, will ensure that Cameroonian figures such as Tsanga Delphine, Nyaga odette Frieda, Ouandie Marthe, Ngapeth Marie Irène, Moumie Marthe and others, will militate across the country, for a real participation of women in the public policy of the country.

All these events will make it possible to observe, certainly, a mini-break with the customs and to register Cameroon in the field of what Ahmadou Ahidjo declared in his first speech : to build a united and prosperous country. This statement can be seen in the texts and organic government initiatives. What can be said about political strategies for the effective promotion and respect of women's rights?

b- Political strategies

The promotion of women's rights is a characteristic of regal power, and it is a principle that the expression of power is marked by acts and speeches that change the social organization. This principle, which is even specific to African societies, is thus highlighted.

All in all, Ahmadou Ahidjo had the courage to dare to make the promotion of women an aspect of his public policy! How was this done concretely? First of all, it was necessary to strengthen the authority of the State in order to create the State of Cameroon distinct from the traditional powers and this could not be done without the constant support of women like Delphine Tsanga.

¹⁸⁰ W.H.Morris, « production, commercialisation et exportation de l'arachide : Sénégal, Gambie, Mali, Burkina-Faso et Niger », Programme américain d'appui à la recherche collaborative sur l'arachide (PEANUT CRSP), éditeur/Université de Géorgie, David Cummins, 1982, p.25.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.27-28.

Jean François Bayart echoes this¹⁸². In law, a State only has meaning in relation to its capacity to assume its regalian competences, but in the case of the colonial scheme excluding or reducing the role of the woman, in the famous sentence, "the place of the woman, it is in the kitchen". Competences had ended up in this face; in such a context, it was necessary at all costs, a caesura!

The incidence of this movement, meets the commitment of Cameroonian women on the political scene who through the trade unions, are going to play their part through associations, political parties following the example of the Cameroon National Union (CNU) as Tsanga Delphine and of the Democratic Union of Cameroonian Women (UDEFEF) as Mbom Emma. It is in view of all this context without any doubt that the regime in Yaoundé has opted for a progressive strategy of "liberation and defense of women's rights". The who even in the area of origin of the first President, came to challenge his authority because of the thesis on his origins that is proper to a certain historiography¹⁸³.

The institutional approach was therefore the means used by the Head of State to bring back the competence of positive law over traditional law; especially in the northern part, since in the southern part, the Christian churches had mostly destroyed the collective customary consciousness¹⁸⁴.

Philippe Gaillard, in his analysis of Ahmadou Ahidjo's governance, shows how this "struggle" was the pillar with the development of the state structure¹⁸⁵. That is why, by granting to Cameroonian women:

- Equal rights;
- The citizenship;
- Freedom.

The government of Yaounde was already making an act of promotion which was to ratify despite the opposition of the presence of women in the administration by some political figures on their evolution¹⁸⁶. These conservatives will come up against this institutional logic wanted and imposed by the Head of State, His Excellency Amadou Ahidjo, who had appreciated the role of some great figures since his accession to power such as: Jeanne

¹⁸² J.F Bayart, *L'Etat du Cameroun*, Paris, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1979, p.298.

¹⁸³ Daikollé Daissala, *Libre derrière les Barreaux*, Paris, éditions Jaguar, 1993.

¹⁸⁴ E. Jiko, "L'Eglise Catholique face au mouvement nationaliste au Cameroun", Mémoire de Maîtrise en Histoire (non soutenu), UY, 1978.

¹⁸⁵ Ph. Gaillard, *Ahmadou Ahidjo, Patriote et despote, Bâtisseur de l'Etat Cameroun*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1989/1994.

¹⁸⁶ D. Abwa, *Sadou Daoudou Parle*, Yaoundé, PUCAC, 2000.

Keutcha, Isabelle Abanda, Dorothy Njeuma, Delphine Tsanga, to mention only these. Is this not the reason why the establishment of MINAS can be read under a triple reading namely :

- An institutional advance in the face of traditional constraints;
- A reward for the women who supported the Head of State;
- A means of modernizing the political structure.

Image 4: Delphine Tsanga, Jeanne Keutcha, Isabelle Abanda, and Dorothy Njeuma respectively



Source; www.archives-du-MINPROFF.fr, consulted on ligne, on the 23 October 2021.

In view of all these hypotheses, it is obvious that the MINAS was the result of a structural-functional order that was to allow the State to free itself and to relativize the colonial order in an obvious way. Is a ministry a sign of social progress? Or of political perspective ? The works of John Stuart Mills demonstrate that, the representative government is constituted by a set of institutions which obey the will of the people and allow the latter to express its opinion¹⁸⁷. The voice of the Cameroonian woman had been taken into account after so many years of struggle.

The Ministry of Social Affairs set up in 1975, prior to what was the Ministry of Social Affairs, was thus presented as a break between the positive law and the modern law. It is therefore understandable how difficult it was for the customary feudalities to conceive of a power that did not take into account their political and social concerns. This was the case of "Anglophone" and "Francophone" Cameroon which, during the reunification¹⁸⁸ and even more so during the unification¹⁸⁹, will accept any action likely to improve or modify their social status! This was done for the most part by the wives of politicians like that of Dr.

¹⁸⁷ J. Stuart Mills translate by M. Dupont-White, *Le gouvernement représentatif, Guillaumin et Cle, Paris, 3^{ème} Edition, Guillaumin, 1877, p. 45.*

¹⁸⁸ Ngadjui, *Les droits politiques de la femme...*, p. 53.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 37.

Endeley's wife, Gladys Endeley, who apparently decided on the choice of Mademe Idowu as the first woman to sit among the 25 members of the House of Assembly of Southern Cameroon, constituted at the end of the 1950s.

In spite of their absence from the high partisan political sphere, Cameroonian women, with their multitude of cultural and economic associations, took highly political actions. They participated massively on the 1st of January, 1960 in the Independence Day celebration. The organizational structure of UDEFEC was identical to that of the U.P.C., which at the base included the Local Committee, then the Regional Committee and at the national level, the Central Council. The Regional Office of Douala which included the North-West, Littoral, South-West and West Provinces, with President Mrs. Malep Adèle. The Regional Office of Makak included the provinces of Far North, Adamaoua, East, North, Center and South, with Mrs. Nyaga Odette Frieda as President¹⁹⁰. Later, in March 1961, they took the initiative to send a petition to the United Nations to protest against the annexation of Northern Cameroon to Nigeria. At the head of a delegation from Western Cameroon, Mrs. Martius collected funds for the campaign for the reunification of the two parts of the national territory.

From 1960 to 1963, some Cameroonian women such as Mrs. Ebanda Isabelle, who certainly manifested herself in an isolated way, took in hand the propaganda of the party in the Littoral. In addition to her, Mrs. Gobe, Mrs. Bouquet and Mrs. Abomo, campaigned for the massive adhesion of women to the U.N.C in the East. Mrs. Nsegbe and her comrades contributed in a determining way to the establishment of the party in Nyong and Kellé¹⁹¹. Indeed, in most African countries resulting from colonization, the question of the hierarchy of institutions has been permanently raised; this is why the setting up of institutions specifically in charge of women is a means of observing the will of the public authorities to act in accordance with the institutional approach¹⁹². What does history tell us?

It all started with the decree of November 30, 1928, instituting special jurisdictions and the regime of probation; followed by the decree of October 28, 1933, instituting an education center for Métis and Black orphans or abandoned; the decree of October 30, 1935, relating to the protection of the child, or the decree n°3234 of November 22, 1947, creating a Directorate of Social and Cultural Affairs. From 1950 onwards, the expression "Social

¹⁹⁰ Archives of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women, p. 18.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* p. 21.

¹⁹² The origins of Social Service are intertwined with the history of mankind, for although there has never been an institution formally named as such, the social spirit lies at the basis of human relations. In Cameroon, it is from the prism of certain legislation that the prelude to social service can be identified. Indeed, well before the independence period, many texts can be considered as the basis of the evolution toward the Ministry of Social Affairs today.

Service" appeared with the decree n°2763 of August 1, 1950, which created within the High Commission of the French Republic in Cameroon, the Service of Social Affairs and Population, abbreviated as "Social Service". Its attributions were : the study of administrative questions concerning the social development of the territory; the implementation of a regulation and a program of social realization, in liaison with the Directorate of Public Health, the Directorate of Public Instruction and the Regions, the practical realizations being managed either directly by the Social Service or by the Regions and the Subdivisions; the coordination on the social level of the action of the Directorates and Services of the High Commission and of the Regions; the control and coordination of private social works subsidized or not by the State or the Territory and the training of local social personnel. The Social Service was also in charge of Cameroon's relations with official or private, national or international organizations concerned with social works, in liaison, as the case may be, with the Directorate of Political and Administrative Affairs or the Cabinet Office¹⁹³.

Image 5: Picture of Minister Isabelle Ebanda



Source: www.wikipedia.com, consulted on the 11 October 2021, at 3PM.

In Cameroon, it should be specified, this institutional aspect took shape at the same period. It is thus, on the 1st August 1950, that the social service, then attached to the High Commission of the French Republic, was created. This marks a revolution insofar as the colonial authorities are aware of the need to advance the equality of rights. Is this a way to change the administrative paradigm?

In fact, it turns out that the colonial realities linked to the Brazzaville conference obliged to change the data of action. Hence, the data: the deliberation of April 29, 1953; the decree n° 780 of October 29, 1953; the ministerial decree of December 3, 1953; the decree n°

¹⁹³ Ngadjui, *Les droits politiques de la femme...*, p. 50.

4379 of September 3, 1953; the decree n° 662 of February 5, 1953; the decree n° 1758 of April 3, 1953 regulating the allocation of aid in Cameroon.

In 1956, this structure took the name of Wouri social service, covering the cities of Nkongsamba, Yaoundé, Ebolowa, Kribi, Eséka and Dschang¹⁹⁴. However, we admit that the administrative corpus taken for the specific case had led to an improvement in the situation of women's rights, as one informant tells us. To illustrate this, we can mention the date of 23 July 1953 and the decree of 1 July 1954¹⁹⁵. These different texts and acts show the rupture between the state institution and the tribal communitarianism. This is the reason why the parliamentary institutions that were put in place had recourse to innovative legislation that strengthened the powers in terms of social intervention. From then on, in 1956, the first Cameroonian social worker trained in France entered into service, followed by the one in 1957.

Cameroon from the first republic to the second republic has put in place governmental platforms for the promotion of women. This is why we must mention the administrative strategies related to gender management. The question that arises is to know how the administrative approaches have contributed to the implementation of institutional action.

II- From the institutional administrative approach to the appropriation of the gender approach

The State, which is the first guarantor of rights and freedoms through the constitution, has set up a Ministry which in return, works in collaboration with other ministries for a real respect of women's rights in Cameroon. These Ministries have evolved in time and in prerogatives, which shows an evolution insofar as the official powers have freed themselves from traditional logics. This fact can be measured in the extent to which the public authorities have integrated the logic according to which; the central State has the obligation to act in order to promote the social! This is the reason why, President Ahmadou Ahidjo set up in 1975 the MINAS and put at its head, a Minister named Delphine Tsanga, who was the very first woman Minister in Cameroon and the first in Sub-Saharan Africa. This act taken by President Amadou Ahidjo, had shown to the eyes of the Nation, the African Continent and my whole, the value and the essential place that occupies, the woman in our society.

¹⁹⁴ Ngadjui, *"Les droits politiques de la femme au Cameroun..."*, p. 81.

¹⁹⁵ Ndengue, *"Mobilisation féminines au Cameroun français..."*, p.82.

Image 2: Picture of Minister Delphine Tsanga



Source: www.wikipedia.com, consulted on the 11 October 2021, at 3PM.

a- The Ministry of Social Affairs (1975-1984)

The State's policy concerning the promotion of women has evolved according to the imperatives of domestic policy, the objectives of the five-year plans¹⁹⁶, the political will of the President of the Republic, and the recommendations formulated on the regional¹⁹⁷ and international scene¹⁹⁸, especially on issues related to population in general and women in particular.

We take note of the different texts taken by the public authorities in order to make the promotion of women from 1950 to 1975 effective. It is in this sense that we can speak about a policy of social graduation of the public authorities in relation to the society¹⁹⁹. Also, it is logical to summon the functionalism to prove that, the political governance answers to the will of rupture between the old world, what to say, traditional and the new world. We mention here the texts creating and organizing public institutions for the supervision of vulnerable groups, particularly children, which are indicative of a move towards the creation of a ministerial department entirely dedicated to social issues, following the example of decrees:

- No. 72/461 of 2 September 1972 on the organization and functioning of the Reception and Observation Centre for Minors in Bepanda in Douala, which receives delinquent minors in preventive detention, vagrant minors or minors in moral danger, minors presenting emergency cases, minors undergoing short-term re-education;

¹⁹⁶ ONU Femmes, "Rapport de l'État du Cameroun au titre du 25^{eme} anniversaire du Programme et de la Plateforme d'Action de Beijing 2014-2019", ONU Femme- Yaoundé, 2019, p. 12.

¹⁹⁷ W. Henri, "*Le « Renouveau » et les droits de l'Homme : Entre discours, lois et praxis*", Muntunews-Cameroun", Yaoundé, MuntuNezs, 2021.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 14.

- No. 73/115 of 22 March 1973, on the organization and functioning of the Borstal Institute of Buea, which has the same mission as the Reception Centre of Bépanda, except that it receives minors aged between 12 and 18 years;
- No. 73/333 of June 25, 1973, on the organization and functioning of the ICE of Betamba. The ICE is a resocialization center for minor boys aged 12 to 16 whose sociality, morality and education are compromised, as well as delinquent or abandoned minors entrusted to it by the courts. The purpose of these institutions is to restructure the personalities of the minors placed in them and to develop their potential so that they may become autonomous and responsible in emotional, professional, moral and social terms;
- No. 73/774 of December 11, 1973, on the organization of the prison administration, which officially allowed social workers to intervene directly inside prisons. It defines social assistance to prisoners, which consists in the moral recovery of prisoners and their social reintegration after release. With this text, social assistants can work in the Ministry of Territorial Administration²⁰⁰.

In view of these texts and acts, there is reason to believe that a civilization, to reduce, a culture of law has gradually imposed itself within Cameroonian institutions. We are in the context of parturition and any parturition is by essence painful. The regime in Yaoundé would understand this and take the initiative! Georges Gusdorf, has just found that, the worlds and the cultural universes are diametrically opposed, which justifies the principle of caesura²⁰¹.

Let's take into account that the logic of the power had to implement this political governance that was in conflict with the will of the traditional entities. It is obvious that these feudalities, if we stick to certain authors, did not have of cease that to maintain their rights. Julius Victor Ngoh echoes this²⁰².

Therefore, it is necessary to underline that before 1975, Cameroon did not yet have a "formal institutional" framework for the promotion of women. The notion of institutional framework poses that of power, or rather of political system. Here, we are in the state perspective, which in itself is opposed to traditional approaches. In this sense, the promotion of women is first of all a political approximation. This is why, in terms of policy, they are of the order of integrated actions. These have been at the heart of governance policies since the 1950s. It is at this date, from the point of view of the understanding of social phenomena and their impact, that we note the setting up of institutions for the supervision of women.

²⁰⁰ Ndengue, *Mobilisation féminines au Cameroun français ...*, pp. 71-85.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.84.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

In 1961, the State decided that the Ministry of Public Health and Population became the General Commission for Public Health and was directly responsible to the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The 1968 Decree re-established the Directorate of Social Affairs and created the health regions of Cameroon. Following this reorganization, the Directorate of Social Affairs became a Service again in the 1970s. In 1972, the Ministry of Public Health and Public Assistance included a Directorate of Social Affairs. All these departments were put under the direction of Delphine Tsanga one after the other.

In 1975, the Ministry of Social Affairs was created by presidential decree on June 28, 1975, under the direction of Delphine Tsanga. Like any ministerial department, there are Central Services and External Services. There were two Directorates: the Directorate of Private Assistance and the Directorate of Social Development. The External Services were the Provincial Services of Social Affairs, the Social Posts. In 1977, the State set the conditions for the functioning and creation of the PSOs. Later in 1980, for a good functioning of the women's affairs, a school was set up to train the staff of the said ministry, the National School of Assistantes of Sociales Affaires (ENAAS) with its headquarters in Yaoundé²⁰³.

All this will motivate Cameroonians women to militate for a greater representation in the public policy of the State.

b- The approach of representativeness as a means of promoting women's rights in Cameroon

Since independence, the number of women participating in the development of Cameroon has evolved in fits and starts. This was due to the fact that, girls or women were sent less to school and therefore, limited only on what parents told them. Tradition has always taken a greater place in society. But since the Independences, the President of the Republic, with his public policy, to build a country to develop, put mechanisms in place so that the girls should be sent to school.

²⁰³ Le décret Présidentiel N°80/199 du 09 juin 1980.

Table 2: An evolution of girls in primary school

School year	Number of girls	Percentage
1961-1962	151 529	35,5%
1971-1972	329 016	43,63%
1972-1973	422 024	43,61%
1973-1974	445 680	43,94%
1974-1975	474 091	44,10%
1975-1976	500 049	44,53%
1976-1977	513 667	44,80%
1977-1978	540 410	44,90%
1978-1979	567 628	45,26%
1979-1980	591 788	45,40%
1980-1981	626 966	45,45%
1981-1982	657 638	45,55%

Source: Table compiled from data from the Division of the Planification of Education, Ministry of National Education, Yaoundé, 1983.

The progression of the number of girls in the primary cycle has evolved over the academic year from 1961-1962 to 1981-1982, that is, an evolution of more than 10%. Though it is small but it shows that, the mechanisms put in place by the state in one way or the other place a role.

i- The image as a factor in claiming civil and political rights in Cameroon

The 3rd Congress of the UC held in September 1960 in Maroua, included 227 delegates and a Permanent Secretariat of 21 members, unfortunately, no woman was among its participants. Despite this, they did not give up the fight. In July 1962, during the 4th Congress held in Ebolowa, despite its minimal number, there was a very strong representation of 4 women out of 219 delegates who took part. The four women were Mrs. Assawe, Adèle Belembe, Julienne Keutcha and Mrs. Tapara, who were respectively part of the delegation from Diamaré, Mungo, Menoua and Mayo-Danai.

The 1965 Bafoussam congress did not have such a high number. There were just two women. In 1969, 70 women out of 518 delegates participated, i.e. 13.5% of the delegates. This percentage of women dropped to 12.7% at the 1975 Mature Congress. The 1980

Congress of the Masters in Bafoussam saw a relative decrease in female participation compared to the Douala Congress, with 64 women out of 553 delegates, that is, 11.5%²⁰⁴. This decreasing participation of women in the Party Congresses from 1969 to 1980 seems to be due to the minor role given to the female sex in the management of political affairs by the party's leadership at the time. The table below shows the representation of women in the Central Committee Party between 1969 and 1984.

Table 3: Female participation in the central party committee 1969-1984

Name and Surname	Period	Region	Fonctions occupied at the Central committee
Mrs Keutchu Julienne	1969-1984	West	Deputy Secretary for Trade Union, Social and Women's Affairs
Mrs Tsanga Delphine	1975-1984	Center	
Mrs Akwe Marie	1975-1984	North West	Deputy Secretary for Youth
Mrs Ebande Isabelle	1980-1984	Littoral	
Mrs Mua Josépha	1980-1984	South	Deputy Secretary for information and Propaganda

Source : N. Ngadjui, "Les Droits politiques de la femme au Cameroun, Yaoundé, Edition Zaye,1990.

In 1967, government delegations were created in the urban communes of Yaoundé, Douala and N'kongsamba. In 1977, it was Bamenda's turn to benefit from the communal system, but this did not benefit women at all, as they continued to live on the margins of the communes.

At the end of the elections of October 24, 1982, two women were elected in the executive of some urban communes in Cameroon. These were Mrs. Cruzelle Carmen as the 2nd Deputy Mayor of the urban commune of Kribi and Mrs. Meboka Cathérine as Deputy

²⁰⁴ Report of the National Institution of Statistic 2000.

Mayor of the urban commune of Limbe²⁰⁵. Below is a representation of women in municipal administrative positions in 1977 and 1982.

Table 4: Women Deputy Municipal Administrators in 1982

Nom, prénom et profession	Rang	Rural Municipality	Département	Province
Mrs Essiki Sabine (Teacher)	2 nd Deputy	Saa	Lékié	Center
Mrs Nkoumou Abendah Naomie (House Wife)	2 nd Deputy	Mengong	Ntem	South
Mme Mbida Dorothée (House Wife)	2 nd Deputy	Dzeng	Nyong et So	Center
Mme Tsoungui Manette (House Wife)	2 nd Deputy	Ngomedzap	Nyong et So	Center
Mme Momo Mazetem Anne (Teacher)	2 nd Deputy	Dschang	Menoua	West
Mme Ntube Suzanne Ngone ((House Wife))	2 nd Deputy	Bangem	Meme	South West
Mme Hojoko Monono Lydia (Teacher)	2 nd Deputy	Tiko	Fako	South West
Mme Tandjon Mrs Mike Joséphine (Nurse)	3 rd Deputy		Mbamboutos	West

Name and Surname	Rank	Rural Municipality	Departement	Region
Mrs Bindoua Fleurette	2 nd Deputy	Bengbis	Dja-and-Lobo	South
Mrs Essini Sabine	2 nd Deputy	Sa'á	Lékié	Center
Mrs Nkoumou Naomie	2 nd Deputy	Mengong	Ntem	South

²⁰⁵ Ngadjui, "Le Droits politiques de la femme...", p.43.

Mrs Bomba Sophie	2 nd Deputy	Mvengué	Ocean	South
Mrs Nlago Niago Georgette	2 nd Deputy	Moloundou	Boumba and Ngolo	East
Mrs Azeng Thérèse	2 nd Deputy	Bertoua	Lom and Djerem	East
Mrs Ntethen Elisabeth	1st Deputy	Nkongsamba	Littoral	Littoral
Mrs M. Tandjon Joséphine	3rd Deputy	Mbouda	Baboutous	West
Mrs Emomo Mazemtem Anne	3rd Deputy	Dschang	Menoua	West
Mrs Ewusi Dorah Ebenye	2 nd Deputy	Buea	Fako	South West

Source : N. Ngadjui, "Le Droits politiques de la femme au Cameroun, Yaoundé, Edition Zaye,, 1990.

All this organisation and territorial representation will lead to the establishment of another ministerial structure.

ii- MINAS and socio-cultural constraints at the advent of the Second Republic

In 1975, a decree of the President of the Republic created MINAS, comprising the Directorate of Public Assistance and the Directorate of Social Development²⁰⁶.

In 1981, MINAS was reorganised and kept the same attributions until 1984, when MINCOF was created²⁰⁷. The Ministry of Women's Affairs was thus created and Mrs. Yaou Assiatou was the one appointed to head this ministry²⁰⁸. This ministry was conceived at the base as a body of reflection and consultation whose essential role is to make studies and proposals to the Government on the measures to be taken for the promotion of women.

²⁰⁶ Ngadjui, Les droits politiques de la femme ..., p. 37.

²⁰⁷ MINCOF, Recueil de textes juridiques relatif à la promotion..., p. 20.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.21.

Image 6: Madame the Minister Yaou Aissatou



Source: www.wikipedia.com, consulted on the 21 October 2021, at 11h24mins.

From then on, MINAS actions will focus on family promotion, social defence and social reintegration. This evolution is far from insignificant, as it marks an essential break in the management of gender issues in Cameroon. This can be seen in the observance of the new ministerial structure²⁰⁹.

The context in which this new ministerial department was created was characterised by:

- The approaching closure of the Women's Decade, most of whose recommendations invited States to create governmental structures in charge of the promotion of women ;
- The elaboration of the VI Five-Year Development Plan, which was to place particular emphasis on the mobilisation of women's resources with a view to their participation in development ;
- The preparation of the last Congress of the Cameroon National Union, which was to result in:²¹⁰
 - i- The consecration of the policy of renewal advocated by the President of the Republic since 1982, the main theme of which was democratic openness;
 - i- Accountability and social justice ;

²⁰⁹ MINCOF, Recueil de textes juridiques relatif à la promotion..., p. 1.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

ii- The creation of a women's organisation, an annex of the Party, with a political vocation²¹¹.

It is also responsible for liaising with national and international political organisations, including a certain amount of supervision of the OFRDPC. We take into account that despite democracy, the party-State interaction in terms of state of mind remains a constant for a certain elite.

The Decree of 26 March 1984 on the organisation of the Ministry for Women's Affairs focused the strategy of its intervention on three areas, namely:

- Improving the legal status of women ;
- The creation of favourable conditions for the integration of women into the economic circuits;
- Education, training in all areas of life, and particularly information for women to increase their capacity to integrate into the various development sectors of the country²¹².

According to the 1976 population census, the vast majority of women in rural areas, that is 74.6% of the population, are illiterate. This is less the case for rural women in the central, southern and Littoral provinces than for those in the rest of the country, where the democratisation of education is still far from being a reality. A very high proportion of rural women who attend school have not completed primary education. According to the 1976 census, a very high percentage of the female labour force, that is 84.5%, lives in rural area²¹³. In these areas, the contribution of women to economic activity is appreciable: 44% are active. Even among women living in rural areas, a large majority are active.

This performance would be even greater if housewives who do not carry out a secondary economic activity were not considered to be inactive. The contribution of rural women to economic production has increased slightly over the last decade. Unemployment affects a very small proportion of the rural female labour force, that is 3%, but this index is slightly underestimated because it is difficult to measure the phenomenon in the countryside, where the active population gives the impression that they are all busy working on the land²¹⁴. The active female population is distributed among the various sectors of economic activity as follows 92.1% in the primary sector

²¹¹ MINCOF, Recueil de textes juridiques relatif à la promotion..., p. 4.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p.7.

²¹³ MINASCOF, *La femme Camerounaise de demain*, Edition MINASCOF, Yaounde, 1989, p. 88.

²¹⁴ MINASCOF, *La femme Camerounaise...*, p. 80.

In rural areas, the active female population is very heavily employed in agriculture, especially food crops, which occupy 89% of the female peasantry, a situation that is to be expected as this special profession, at least as it is currently practised. Agriculture for industry and export occupies a very small proportion of female farmers, that is, 2.5%. Women farmers in the southwestern and eastern provinces grow slightly more cash crops (bananas, rubber, cocoa and tobacco) than women farmers in the rest of the country. Only a small percentage of women farmers (1.1%) are involved in livestock farming²¹⁵. This is essentially small-scale livestock farming (poultry, sheep, goats, pigs, etc.).

The under-representation of women was very evident in industrial livestock farming. Fishing was characterised by a very high female under-representation of less than one percent. Among women, this activity is exclusively artisanal and concerns mainly women farmers in the coastal provinces, the South West and the northern regions. The management of farms is rarely in the hands of women farmers. According to the 1972 World Census of Agriculture, only 8.7% of farm managers are women. According to the 1984 agricultural census, women are already at the head of 14.6% of farms. This index, which is probably overestimated, is presented in the different provinces in decreasing order of size, as follows

Table 5: Representation of farms run by women

REGIONS	POURCENTAGES OF AGRICULTURAL EXPLOITATION
WEST	24,2%
CENTER	22,2%
LITTORAL	20,9%
SOUTH-WEST	16,1%
SOUTH	15,1%
NORTH WEST	14,6%
ADAMAOUA	9%
EAST	8,4%
FAR NORTH	8,2%
NORTH	6,8%

Source : Ngadjui Nicolas, Les droits politiques de la femme au Cameroun, Yaoundé, Edition ZAYE, 1990.

The women's cooperative movement has already begun. Indeed, the V1 Plan shows that 200 women's groups are involved in the production and marketing of food products in the field and benefit from the support of 34 animation pools.

²¹⁵ Ngadjui, Les droits politiques de la femme..., p. 30.

- 2.6% in the secondary sector

In addition to agricultural, pastoral and fisheries activities, a significant number of rural women are involved in handicrafts, mostly in basketry, pottery, cotton spinning and dyeing. In the area of handicrafts, a more significant participation of women and a greater diversification of activities can be observed in the rural sector of the Sudan-Sahelian provinces and the North-West and West provinces. Genuinely industrial activities by women are, if not non-existent, at least rare and embryonic²¹⁶ (a few units processing agricultural products).

- 5.3% in the tertiary sector

The participation of rural women in the tertiary sector is very low and is practically limited to trade, especially the retail sale of food products in a few bush markets, if not in the fields themselves²¹⁷.

Thus, in implementing this strategy, the Ministry of Women's Affairs is required to undertake activities whose scope has continued to expand, given the pressing demands and new responsibilities that have emerged over time. This is the reason for the institutional change that has subsequently been undertaken.

²¹⁶ MINCOF, L'institution maison de la femme perspective d'une action de redynamisation : Rapport de la Commission Nationale d'Etude et de Relance des Œuvres Privées de Promotion Feminine, MINCOF- Younde, 1986, p. 23.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 34.

Table 6: A representation of civil Rights in Cameroon in 1981

Article 145 of the Civil Code: Age of Marriage;	On Civil Status and Various Provisions Relating to the Status of Natural Persons	Ordinance No. 81-02 of 29 June 1981 This article sets the minimum age for marriage at 15 years for girls and 18 years for men.
Articles 146 and 180 of the Civil Code, articles 52 and 64(1)	Ordinance No. 81-02 of 29 June 1981 on the Civil Status and Various Provisions Relating to the Status of Natural Persons	These texts establish the principle of freedom of marriage and insist on the free consent of the future spouses as an essential condition of marriage. This consent must be given personally by the future spouses
-Article 61 of Ordinance n° 81-02 of 29 June 1981	on the Civil Status and Various Provisions relating to the Status of Natural Persons: the dowry is not a condition for the validity of the marriage	This text provides that no one can validly oppose the celebration of a marriage due to the non-payment of the customary dowry even if this has been previously agreed. Moreover, the partial payment or non-payment of the dowry does not constitute a cause of nullity of the marriage.
Article 63 of Ordinance No. 81-02 of 29 June 1981	on Civil Status and Various Provisions Relating to the Status of Natural Persons According to Article 63 of the aforementioned Ordinance, which is reproduced in Article 359 of the Penal Code, bigamy and polyandry are prohibited.	To the Status of Natural Persons According to Article 63 of the aforementioned Ordinance, which is reproduced in Article 359 of the Penal Code, bigamy and polyandry are prohibited These provisions also stipulate that a marriage concluded by a married woman or by a man in a previous undissolved monogamous marriage is null and void.
Article 212	The Civil Code	This article imposes an obligation of fidelity, assistance and help on spouses
Article 214	The Civil Code	According to this provision of the Civil Code, each spouse must contribute to the household expenses according to his or her ability; if they fail to do so, the victim spouse may apply to the competent court to force his or her spouse to do so.

Articles 227 and 77	The Civil Code	on civil status and various provisions relating to the status of individuals According to Article 227 of the Civil Code and taken up by the 1981 Ordinance in its Article 77: "Marriage is dissolved either by the death of one of the spouses or by divorce pronounced by the courts. See Ordinance No. 81-02 of 29 June 1981 on the Civil Status
Article	The Civil Code	231 A spouse may request and obtain a divorce when the other has been sentenced to an afflictive or infamous penalty.
Article 232	The Civil Code	Divorce may also be pronounced at the request of the spouses for excesses, abuse or insults by one towards the other, when these facts constitute a serious or repeated violation of the duties and obligations resulting from the marriage and render the maintenance of the marital bond intolerable.
Article 74	Ordinance No. 81-02 of 29 June 1981	On civil status and various provisions relating to the status of individuals and Article 223 of the Civil Code This provision establishes the principle of the freedom of a married woman to exercise a profession of her choice without her husband's prior authorisation. It is only in the interest of the children or the family that the husband
Article 75 (1) and (2)	Ordinance No. 81-02 of 29 June 1981 on Civil Status and Various Provisions Relating to the Status of Natural Persons and Articles 222 and 224 of the Civil Code	According to the provisions of these texts, a married woman under any property regime who exercises a profession has the right to open a personal bank account and to freely dispose of the funds she deposits in it without her husband's prior authorisation. Moreover, her husband's creditors may only seize these funds for debts contracted in the interest of the household
Article 76	Ordinance No. 81-02 of 29 June 1981 on civil status and various provisions relating to the status of natural persons.	According to this article, a married woman abandoned by her husband has the right to apply to the competent court to obtain maintenance for herself and for the children left in her

		care. According to this text, the marriage ends if one of the spouses dies. This text insists on the fact that when it is the husband who dies before his wife, the latter recovers her freedom and the heirs of her deceased husband can neither claim anything from her nor demand anything from her.
Article 77	- No. 81 - 02 of 29 June 1981 on civil status and various provisions relating to the status of individuals.	This article of the ordinance specifies in particular that the widow has the right to freely dispose of her share of property and to remarry within 180 days of her husband's death without having to reimburse anyone for the dowry or any other benefit received on the occasion of the marriage or betrothal.
Article 216	the Civil Code	A married woman has the right to perform all acts authorized by law without the assistance of anyone.
Article 745	The Civil Code	Children or their descendants succeed their father and mother, grandparents or other ascendants, without distinction of sex or primogeniture and even if they are from different marriages. When they are all of the first degree, they succeed by equal portions and by head.
Article 767	The Civil Code	When a person dies without leaving any relatives in the degree of succession, the property of his or her estate belongs in full ownership to the surviving spouse who is not divorced or not legally separated. When the non-divorced spouse does not succeed in full ownership because his or her deceased spouse left relatives in the degree of succession, he or she has a right of usufruct over the available assets of the estate of his or her predeceased spouse.

Source: www.archives.of.the.MinJustice.fr, consulted on the 11 march 2022.

These texts show that the legal provisions applicable to women concern various fields. In this respect, it is emphasised that women are full citizens and as such have a role to play. What about the status of unmarried women? Do they also have rights?

An unmarried woman is one who has not yet been married. She may be a concubine or a fiancée. If one is legally marginalised, the other seems to benefit from a minimum of protection.

Some people are not interested in marriage and others are afraid. For various reasons, couples are reluctant to commit themselves to it, preferring to live in concubinage²¹⁸. But Cameroonian law ignores them in order to preserve the institution of marriage. In view of the increasing number of such unions, one would have expected the State to take up this legal phenomenon, which is not the case. This raises the general problem of adapting the law to the fact²¹⁹. The precise legal question that arises is whether common-law unions should be regulated. Opinions are so divided on this perennial question that the debate sometimes tends to veer into the realm of passion²²⁰. Some of our informants have more to say on the subject. Mrs. Ngamana Else²²¹, Mrs. Balom Zita²²² and Mrs. Meboe Jeanne²²³, think that the unmarried woman should have rights despite the fact that she is not yet officially married. The African condition, are often made, as we say in our country, "the door toqué" and then, live most often with their future husbands.

Betrothal is the prerequisite for marriage in Cameroonian marriage. Unlike concubines, the engaged couple have promised to marry each other. Closer to the institution, the future wife and her fiancé have more consideration than concubines. However, the Cameroonian woman, who already considers herself engaged, is still insufficiently protected by the regulations on engagement and the legal framework of the dowry. The status of fiancée is not specifically regulated by Cameroonian law.

This is the will of the legislator, who refuses to confer the nature of a legal act to the betrothal. However, in Cameroonian society, customary marriage was sufficient to recognise an officially married couple before their arrival, during colonisation and for some years after colonisation. A good example of these societies are the Bamiléké, the Bamouns, the tribes of the North and the Far North. According to the wise men, customary marriage is above civil marriage. But with the arrival of modern law, it has become an obligation in the eyes of the

²¹⁸ R. Chemmengue, "La femme camerounaise et le droit civil", Mémoire de maîtrise en Sociologie, Université de Yaoundé, 1986, p. 31.

²¹⁹ G. Cornu, *Droit civil, la famille*, 9e éd., Montchrestien, 2006, p. 85.

²²⁰ L. Jossierand, « L'avènement du concubinat », D.H., Paris, 1932, p. 35.

²²¹ Ngamana Else, 30 years old, Staff at the Ministry of Youth and Civic Education, Yaounde, Interview of 13 November 2021.

²²² Balom Zita, 41 year old, Principal Registra rat the Ministry of Justice, Yaounde, the 05 November 2021.

²²³ Meboe Jeanne, 35 year old, Head of the Departement for monitoring the inclusion of women in the economic programme and projet of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family, Interview 07 November 2021.

State. The notion of a married woman is logically understood as the one who lives in the marriage, the wife. If we observe that Cameroonian law grants her more and more rights during the marriage, her situation is rather variable at the dissolution of her marriage²²⁴.

The rights of the wife are evolving positively in Cameroon and in Africa thanks to the increasing rationalisation of customary rules and the growing influence of the principle of equality between spouses. However, care must be taken to ensure that excessive protection of the wife's status does not undermine the marriage. Cameroonian customary rules are largely unfavourable to the wife to the extent that she is sometimes reified. This is one of the reasons why, a few decades ago, the doctrine considered that 'customary law is conceived as a law that has not yet managed to rise to the level of modern law. It is an underdeveloped, inferior, primitive law²²⁵.

Fortunately, some customs are not dehumanising and mentalities are changing. For example, the right to retreat has always been recognised for the wife in the event of her husband's failure or abuse of his rights, without this causing any offence. On the contrary, it is a noble and relatively effective means available to her to force her husband to respect her dignity or to act in the interest of the family. Contrary to popular belief, Cameroonian law does not seem to have evolved on certain issues, mainly the right of correction that the husband has over his wife. However, the reasoning of judges, influenced by the legislator and the doctrine but adapting to modernity, should increasingly prevail over the force of dehumanising African custom.

The State, through the Ministry of Women's Affairs, had put a focus on the right to correction, and played a more important role than MINAS in the effective implementation of the respect and promotion of women's rights integrated in the Constitution of 18 January 1996, which stipulates in its preamble that: "Every person has the right to life and to physical and moral integrity. She must be treated with humanity in all circumstances. In no case may they be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. However, this development would not be sufficient, as there are still wishes to improve the status of the wife. The first is to contain polygyny²²⁶, which is the fact that a husband has several wives. Although it grants important privileges to the husband, polygyny is permitted because it is in his economic interest²²⁷.

²²⁴ A. Mignot, "Droit coutumier et anthropologie juridique", Penant, 1977, p. 355.

²²⁵ Mignot, « Droit coutumier et anthropologie... », p. 35.

²²⁶ Is a pattern of mating in which a male animal has more than one female mate.

²²⁷ Mignot, « *Droit coutumier et anthropologie...* », p. 35.

CHAPTER III- THE GLOBALISATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ITS IMPACT IN CAMEROON 1984-2004

The role and place of women have undergone real changes in the society and this evolution does not seem to be complete. Women's rights cover all aspects of life, health, education, political participation, economic well-being, freedom from violence, among many others. Women must be able to enjoy the full and equal exercise of all their human rights and be free from all forms of discrimination. This dimension is fundamental to ensuring human rights, peace and security, and development in a state¹. At the end of the Beijing conference, the various signatory states committed themselves to increasingly addressing the issue of women's rights. Despite the various legal provisions, women's rights are still being violated. Therefore, the State, which is the primary guarantor of human rights, is going to put new strategies in place to fight violations against women. In this chapter, the analysis focuses on how the Government of the Second Republic of Cameroon has dealt with women's rights and its impact in Cameroon.

I- The change in the world ideological order and its consequences on the evolution of women's rights in Cameroon

With the advent of political liberalism in the 1990s, with the advent of new Constitutions, which were either partially modified or substantially reformed, in favour of the advent of the rule of law and democracy, a new approach is observed. The founders of these states are concerned not only with consolidating the legal basis of institutions in order to ensure their durability and stability, but also to guarantee citizens, the exercise and protection of their rights, not only civil and political, but also economic and socio-cultural². The constitutional framework now appears, in the new trend of institutional organisation and the devolution of powers to those in power in the states, as the point of convergence of the values that reinforce the sovereignty and, consequently, the stability of any modern state. In other words, the concern that lies at the centre of our argument is to know whether the "new Cameroonian constitutions³" resulting from the democratic changes that have taken place in Cameroon have really played a major role as mechanisms for protecting women's rights from a political, social and cultural perspective.

¹ Meboe Jeanne, 35 year old, Head of the Departement for monitoring the inclusion of women in the economic programme and projet of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family, Interview 07 november 2021.

² Ngadjui Nicolas, Les droits politiques..., p.11.

³ Here is the differentes years when the constitutions were revised: 1960, 1961, 1972, 1984, et 1996.

1- The end of the Cold War and the emancipation of women from a political point of view

Gender was at the centre of the Cold War in 1947, especially given the place of women's rights and women's emancipation in the ideological construction of socialist regimes, which had established gender as an official norm and marker of their political identity. The fundamental protection of citizens within the borders of states is one of the essential obligations of any modern state in the exercise of its sovereign functions⁴. Both the constitutional texts and the founding charters of international organisations, as well as the conventions that protect the political, economic, social and cultural rights of women, and all the legal provisions relating to women's rights, clearly enshrine the inalienability and inviolability of these rights.

Since the accession of the second President of the Republic of Cameroon, His Excellency Paul Biya, the State of Cameroon has radically changed its public policy with regard to women's rights in Cameroon. In his inaugural speech on November 3, 1992, after the first election of the democratic era, he declared: "the condition of women is one of our constant concerns. Our action in favour of women will consist in strengthening their integration in the political and economic life of the country"⁵. In the same process, in Maroua in 1997, he reiterated: I will ensure that your work is recognised and valued everywhere, I will ensure that you are well represented in all the country's governing bodies. I am committed to making equality between men's and women's rights a reality. The creation of an independent Ministry in 1984 echoes this. Mrs. Yaou Aissatou was the one chosen to head this ministry and consequently became the second woman minister in Cameroon.

Later, in 1988, in the context of the economic crisis that shook Cameroon, one of the major constraints ⁶was the reduction of public expenditure. This was an initiative of the Bretton Woods institutions, in accordance with the Washington consensus. This gave birth to MINASCOF in 1998, with Minister Yaou Aissatou. In 1997, for a good visibility of government action in the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was again created⁷. The missions are the same as those of MINASCOF, except for the attributions devolved to MINAS. Between 1997 and 2004, the Ministry of

⁴ Interview with Sandio Herve, 35 year old, Civiol Servant at the Ministry of Justice and Docteur in Public Law, Yaounde, on the 20 March 2022.

⁵ www.morewomeninpolitics.net, consulted on the 13 december 2021 at 11 am.

⁶ B. Prévost, *Droits et lutte contre la pauvreté : où en sont les institutions de Bretton Woods ?* Mode en développement, 2004.Paris, pp. 115-124,

⁷ Degree N°97/205 of the 7December 1997 on the organisation of the government.

Women's Affairs was headed by three women; Madame Yaou Aissatou, Julienne Ngo Som, and Cathérine Bakang Mbock respectively

Image 7: Ministers Cathérine Bakang Mbock, Yaou Aissatou, and Julienne Ngo Som respectively.

Image A



Image B



Image C

Source: www.MINPROFF.fr, consulted on the 23 November 2021.

Since the 1980s, women have been increasingly involved in the political life of the country, especially through political parties. President Paul Biya declared during a Congress in Bamenda, that he was to give an increased role to women, compared to the past of Cameroonian women, who were confined to minor roles. As Marie Claire Nnana states, "nothing justified that women, within the party, should remain the simple relay of social action"⁸. Thus, Mrs. Yaou Aissatou was part of the Central Committee's Supervision Commission, in charge of studying, as a technical laboratory, the lists of CPDM candidates to

⁸ Ngadjui, "Le Droits politiques de la femme ...", p. 36.

be nominated for the municipal elections of October 1997 and for the legislative elections of April 1988⁹.

Table 7: Women's participation in the Central Committee of the party 1969-1990

Name and Surname	Period	Region	Position held in the National Committee
Keutchu Julienne	1969-1984	West	Deputy Secretary for Trade Union, Social and Women's Affairs
Tsanga Delphine	1975-1984	Center	
Akwe Marie	1975-1984	North West	Deputy Secretary of Youths
Ebande Isabelle	1980-1984	Littoral	
Mua Josépha	1980-1984	South	Deputy Secretary of Press, Information and Propaganda
Ekindi Ruth	1985-1990	Littoral	
Bassong Isabelle	1985-1990	South	Deputy Secretary of Press, Information and Propaganda
Yaou Aissatou	1985	North	Member
Burnley Gwendoline	1985	South west	Member
Pahane Julienne	1985-1990	West	Member
Zang Nguele Rose	1990	Center	Member
Foning Françoise	1990	West	Member
Mbono Madeleine	1990	South	Member
Gladys S. Endeley	1990	South West	Alternate Member

Source: Archives of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family.

⁹ Ngadjui, "Le Droits politiques de la femme ...", p. 38.

The area of influence of Cameroonian women in the Cameroonian political system has clearly increased since 1985¹⁰. This is also due to the opening up to all political sensibilities advocated by President Paul Biya¹¹. The participation of women in the Bamenda Congress reached a score never equalled in the history of Cameroonian party congresses.

From 1986 to 1990, forty-seven (47) of the forty-nine (49) Presidents of the OFCPDM chapters were represented in nine (9) different major professional categories. The majority profession was teaching, in which 16 Section Presidents were present, a percentage of 34.04%. Among them, there were 4 secondary school teachers: Zang Nguele Rose, Fouda Tabi Isabelle, Mbono Samba Madeliene and Iyok Manyi. And 12 teachers: Ndempoup Damaris, Medjo Delphine, Biyong Marie Irene, Fama Maguerite, Andoula Ester, Mussoko Catherine, Mbote Alice, Nsawir Bridget Lemlon, Akwe Mary, Hamidou Mari, Adam Haoua and Mua Jusepha¹².

In addition, about ten of these chairpersons, about 21.27%, were women administrators: two Secretaries General of the Mayor, Doudou Hamadjatou and Massa Joséphine; one Civil Administrator, Mundi Elisabeth Régina; three Clerks of Treasury, Customs and Administration: Zakiatou Djamo, d'Arc and Djoulde Meirama respectively; a development animator, Fanta Malodi; a clerk, Yole Mukwele Helen, an Administrative Assistant, Sarki Haoua and finally, a State Agent, Bouh Marie Louise.

Furthermore, there were 6 women traders, that is a percentage of 12.77%, including Apouma Emilienne, Tontong Madeliene, Azeng Thérèse, Vacalopoulos Jeannette, Tchamba Frida and Foning Françoise. Among the Presidents of the OFCPDM Sections, there were also five women, representing a percentage of about 10.65%: Aissatou Ahidjo Kamgue, Asta Yvonne, Ateba Emilienne, Tandjong Joséphine and Kontchou Emilie, and four future Social Assistants, representing a percentage of about 8.51%: Mrs. Ndjoumbe Agathe, Mrs. Moukoko Marcelline, Mbang Berthe and Abdoulaye Fadimatou. The presence of two Hostesses, that is to say a percentage of about 4.26%: Mairamou Habiba Aminatou and we could also find a Pharmacist and a Bank Employee: Tchuenta Madeliene and Tsobny Marie, each representing about 2.12% of the 47 Presidents of the OFCPDM out of the 49 identified professionally.

In conclusion, the emancipation of women from a political point of view has certainly had its ups and downs, in other words, it has evolved in fits and starts, but with an increasing thrust. This is particularly true of the National Council and the Congress of the single party,

¹⁰ Ngadjui, "Le Droits politiques de la femme ...", pp. 35-36.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.44.

¹² *Ibid*, p.42.

the CPDM, held in 1988 and 1990 respectively. Since the arrival of His Excellency, President Paul Biya, the number of women in charge of the basic organs of the party and as members of the Government has evolved considerably.

In the 1980s, the history of mankind accelerated, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This acceleration led to a worldwide geographical upheaval. Africa in general and Cameroon in particular was not spared. Cameroon moved from monolithism to political pluralism, in other words, to openness. This led the State to create new institutions relating to women's rights in particular.

In August 2002, the State reorganised the Government and redefined the missions of the Ministry of Women's Affairs as "the elaboration and implementation of measures relating to the respect of the rights of Cameroonian women in society, the elimination of all discrimination against women and the increase of guarantees of equality in the political, economic, social and cultural domains". In this context, Decree No. 98/068 of 4 May 1998, which organises MINCOF, provides for bodies with responsibilities in the area of legal recognition of the status and rights of women, as well as in the popularisation and strengthening of existing legal frameworks¹³.

The National Commission on Human Rights and Freedom was created by presidential decree in 1990. Like its predecessor commissions in Benin and Togo, the NCHRF was created at a time when the population was demanding greater democratisation. The NCHRF was one of the first bodies set up as part of a programme to achieve greater democracy, announced by decree by President Biya in December 1990¹⁴.

The powers of the committee are extremely weak. It has only to make recommendations to the relevant authorities, but these are not binding. Article 8 of the founding decree stipulates that the NCHRF cannot make public its annual report on the state of human rights or the results of its activities, and can only submit them to the Head of State. For almost ten years, this provision has been scrupulously respected. No NCHRF report was made public, even though it was sometimes leaked to the press. But in March 1999, the General Assembly of the committee decided to make public all the reports that had been submitted to the president¹⁵.

¹³ MINPROFF avec l'appui de la Coopération Française, *Recueil de textes juridiques relatif à la promotion et à la protection des droits de la femme*, 2004, p.3

¹⁴ Report of Human Right Watch in Cameroun of 1993, p.7.

¹⁵ I. H. Wandja, "Du Comité à la Commission Nationale des Droits de l'Homme et des Libertés du Cameroun de 1990 à 2017", *Mémoire de Master 2 en Histoire Economique et Sociale de l'Université de Yaoundé1*, 2019, p. 91.

Following this, a public ceremony was held on 1 July 1999, attended by diplomats, government officials, parliamentarians and the general public. During this ceremony, the committee presented to the public a five-year review of its activities as well as its two annual reports sent to the president, one outlining the state of human rights in Cameroon and the other describing the activities of the commission. The committee is currently composed of forty members: twenty-three full members and seventeen alternate members including

- The chairperson of the NCHRF, who is an independent member;
- Three representatives of the administration, including one member of the Ministry of Justice;
- Two magistrates from the Supreme Court;
- One representative of each political party represented in the National Assembly;
- Two members of the Bar Association;
- Two law professors;
- Four representatives of religious denominations;
- One representative of the local public authorities;
- Two journalists from the private and public press;
- One representative of the Economic and Social Council (government body);
- Two representatives of women's associations¹⁶.

Originally, the committee had forty-four members, but four have died or left the country. Therefore, the alternates are generally also considered as full-time members.

Appointments to the committee are made by presidential decree, and under Article 4(2), members are expected to serve for five years. In fact, the members of the committee were appointed in 1991, at a time when only the ruling CPDM had seats in the national assembly. They have never been replaced and their appointments have never been officially renewed. Some also refused to serve on the NCHRF¹⁷.

The reputation of the committee was further damaged when two of its members were appointed to presidential cabinet positions without relinquishing their NCHRF duties. Lucy Gwanmesia Doh, the Deputy Executive Secretary of the NCHRF, who was appointed to the committee in her capacity as a Supreme Court judge, was recently appointed to the post of Minister of State Control while the Vice-Chairperson of the committee, Gregoire Owona, became Minister of State for Relations with Parliament. It is not surprising that critics such as

¹⁶ Wandja, "Du Comité à la Commission Nationale des Droits...p. 46.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp.47-48.

Joseph Mbah Ndam see this as further evidence that 'the committee is in the pay of the government'¹⁸.

Initially, the NCHRF was more active in the protection of human rights. In May 1992, for example, it went to the central gendarmerie station in Yaoundé to investigate claims of torture against student protesters who had been arrested following a march in the North-West Province to commemorate Youth Day. The NCHRF delegates were initially denied access to the detainees and were themselves briefly detained by officers who confiscated their working materials. But the NCHRF maintained pressure for the release of the student leaders. They were finally released a few days later. The committee also denounced electoral fraud and strongly criticised the violence between protesters and security forces that led to the detention without trial of some protesters for over a year. When a state of emergency was declared by the authorities in the North West Province in 1992, the NCHRF protested by submitting a report to the government¹⁹.

These actions on behalf of the victims led the government to substantially reduce the NCHRF's funding for two years. He also accused the government of pushing international donors to reduce aid to the country. The reduction in funding and the pressure from the executive seem to have had the desired effect as the NCHRF had to reduce its activities significantly.

The committee mainly dealt with complaints against private individuals rather than cases of human rights violations committed by the state. It rarely speaks publicly about abuses by the authorities, although some of its members have intervened with government officials in specific cases, for example to prevent arrests or to obtain medical assistance for suspects who needed it. In cases not involving the state, the committee often mediates between the conflicting parties. Some complaints concern disputes between employers and employees. In such cases, the committee provides legal assistance and offers mediation or other means of redress. According to the Committee, this type of intervention contributes to the realisation of economic and social rights and the maintenance of peace.

It should be noted that enquiries received by the NCHRF from sources such as Amnesty International members in other countries are also recorded as "individual complaints", which overstates the number of complaints considered by the NCHRF. Thus, while the committee's records show 834 individual complaints received in 1999 (as of 22 November 1999), more than 75 per cent were enquiries from Amnesty International members

¹⁸ Wandja, "Du Comité à la Commission Nationale des Droits...p. 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.62.

or other organisations such as Reporters without borders regarding the arrest of Pius Njawe²⁰. Since many of the complaints relate to labour disputes or disputes between individuals in which the government is not implicated, the actual number of complaints of violations by the state is minimal²¹.

There are several reasons for this. Firstly, few Cameroonians are aware of the existence of the committee, which has been in existence for ten years. In 1999, the committee only had an office in Yaoundé that almost nobody knew about, even locally. The members of the committee, aware of this fact, included in their list of priorities in the 1999-2000 Action Plan of 10 March 1999 "the creation of branches in the provinces"²².

Secondly, the NCHRF does not publish the reports of its investigations or interventions in the field of human rights protection. Several NGO activists interviewed by Human Rights Watch were surprised to read in the NCHRF's Five-Year Review of Activities 1992-1997 that the committee had conducted several field investigations and enquiries between 1992 and 1997, including during political violence, inter-ethnic conflicts and riots. The fact that the committee is restricted to reporting only to the "competent authorities" is an important factor in maintaining public ignorance of the committee's activities, and even of its existence.

Finally, the fact that it does not give local human rights NGOs a consultative or cooperative role has also undermined the credibility and effectiveness of the NCHRF. This has created a kind of vicious circle: the NCHRF does not work with NGOs because they do not submit complaints to it, and NGOs still do not see the point of submitting complaints to the NCHRF because it does not seem to be interested in involving them in its work.

According to Article 3 of the Decree of 8 November 1990, the Committee's resources come from state subsidies, external donations and the sale of its studies. State subsidies mainly cover operating costs (salaries, travel, office supplies, communications, etc.). Between 1992 and 1997, funds allocated by the Cameroonian government represented 65 per cent of the NCHRF's total resources and covered almost all of its current expenses. The remaining funds come from donations from other governments, very often under a bilateral cooperation agreement with the Cameroonian government²³.

According to the Bilan Quinquennal des Activités 1992-1997, public subsidies have been paid regularly and the other main donors have been Western countries, China and the

²⁰ He was a journalist.

²¹ Wandja, "Du Comité à la Commission Nationale des Droits...p. 40.

²² *Ibid*, p.72.

²³ Wandja, "Du Comité à la Commission Nationale des Droits...p. 72.

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Between 1992 and 1997, the NCHRF received (in CFA francs)

- 1991-1992: 90,000,000 (about 150,000 US\$);
- 1992-1993: 49,049,334 (US\$ 82,000);
- 1993-1994: 4,978,995 (8,500 US\$);
- 1994-1995: 87,738,615 (US\$ 146,000);
- 1995-1996: 50,000,000 (US\$ 85,000);
- 1996-1997: 80,000,000 (US\$ 135,000)²⁴.

It is important to note here that, figures for 1998-1999 were not available at the time of the Human Rights Watch visit. Cameroon has a legal and institutional arsenal for the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls.

Since then, the state decided to strengthen this institution in 2004. Created by Law No. 2004/016 of 22 July 2004, the NCHRF is an independent national institution for the promotion and protection of human rights. The NCHRF has a general mandate for the protection and promotion of human rights. It deals with cases of violation of the rights of all social categories or vulnerable groups (women, children, disabled persons, etc.). For greater protection of women's and girls' rights, it has a Sub-Commission specifically responsible for vulnerable groups, whose membership is rich in professionals in the field of women's and girls' protection²⁵.

Having taken note of the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of Declaration No. A/HRC/35/L.26 of 20 June 2017 on the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls and the eradication of early and forced marriages in situations of humanitarian crisis, the NCHRF formulates the following opinion:

i- Early and forced marriages

In Cameroon, according to Article 52 of Ordinance No. 81-02 of June 29, 1981, on the organization of civil status and various provisions relating to the status of natural persons, the minimum age of marriage for girls is 15 years while for boys it is 18 years²⁶.

According to a study conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2015, 31% of Cameroonian girls marry before the age of 15²⁷. Another study conducted in

²⁴ Repport of MINPROFF 2020.

²⁵ Wandja, "Du Comité à la Commission Nationale des Droits...p. 124.

²⁶ F. Tchibindat, Plaidoyer pour les femmes et les enfants du Cameroun 2013-2017, Yaoundé, UNICEF, 2015, p. 4.

²⁷ Tchibindat, "Plaidoyer pour les femmes et les enfants...", p. 9.

2014 by the Association de Lutte contre les Violences faites aux Femmes (ALVF), in partnership with the University of Maroua in Cameroon, among 2,450 households, showed that 62% of the target population is directly affected by early and other forced marriages; the key actors in decision-making regarding early and forced marriages are fathers in 65% of cases. In 90% of the cases, the marriages takes place without the girl's consent and when she is still very young (see "Money Woman" phenomenon described at the bottom of the page).

It should be noted that early marriages prevent girls from enjoying some of their fundamental rights, particularly with regard to the right to health (with high risks of maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity, obstetric fistulas and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, etc.) and the right to education (dropping out).

Parents are not always aware of the risks to their children and are most often only concerned about the financial gains to be made from such practices. Moreover, those who are aware of the harmful effects of early marriage on the child's physical and psycho-emotional development do not always have the latitude to make the decision, due to the weight of customs and traditions (i.e., social pressures). Data from the 2011 Multiple Indicator Demographic and Health Survey (DHS-MICS) revealed that in Cameroon, 17% of women between the ages of 25 and 49 at the time of the survey said they had entered into a union before the age of 15; 45% were already in a union before the age of 18²⁸.

ii- Sexual exploitation of children

The sexual exploitation of children is an increasingly common phenomenon in Cameroon. It generally took the form of forced labor and child trafficking. According to statistics from the Understanding Children's Work program, based on a survey conducted by ECAM III in Cameroon, 27% of children aged 15 to 17 are in the labor force, while 31% aged 0 to 14 are both in school and in the labor force²⁹.

It should be noted that many of these children are forcibly recruited by separatist groups in the North-West and South-West of Cameroon or by the Islamist sect Boko Haram in recent years.

In addition, child abuse within the family is increasingly evident in the country. While the family setting is the primary and most protective environment for children, cases of sexual abuse of minors (pedophilia) are frequently observed by the NCHRF in the family setting.

²⁸ A. F. "Tjouen, La condition de la femme en droit camerounais de la famille" *Revue Internationale de droit comparé*, Yaoundé, 2012, p. 135.

²⁹ Tjouen, "La condition de la femme en droit camerounais...", p.136.

In 2014, two hundred and fifty-four (254) legal proceedings were initiated against the perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse of minors, according to the Ministry of Social Affairs³⁰.

iii- Genital mutilation and breast ironing

This penal code grants in fine a legal value to the dowry and represses the dowry judged excessive. During our interviews with an official from the Ministry of Public Health in Yaoundé, he revealed that female genital mutilation involves all procedures that include the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, generally for cultural reasons³¹. The same informant revealed that genital mutilation is most commonly performed on girls between the ages of 4 and 10³². Although these harmful practices have decreased in Cameroon, they are still practiced in the country's regions. Moreover, the informant reveals that genital mutilation has serious consequences both psychologically and in terms of health, frequently causing hemorrhaging and infections³³. According to the German international cooperation agency GIZ, published in 2006, in 2016, 24% of Cameroonian women had undergone genital mutilation. To speak only of the Far North and South West regions, where in 2019, young women from these regions underwent genital mutilation with proportions reaching 20%³⁴.

On the other hand, breast ironing is a custom that also seems to persist in the country³⁵. This practice consists of massaging the girl's breasts with herbs, barks, kitchen spatulas or stones to delay the early development of the breasts, thus protecting the girl from the sexual "desires" of men. According to ALVF, in 2014 for example, nearly 53% of adolescent girls were directly affected by this phenomenon in the country. During our interview with Mr. Isnoussa Moluh, who believes that these practices seriously affect the physical integrity of the girl and has irreversible repercussions on her morphological development and her psychological balance³⁶.

³⁰ Report of the MINSa 2014.

³¹ Inoussa Moluh, 40 ans, Chef Service Adolescent au Ministère de la Fonction Publique, Yaoundé, entretien du 3 février 2021.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ P. Landais-Barrau, *Le «repassage des seins», une mutilation encore très pratiquée au Cameroun, France Télévisions-Rédaction Afrique*, 2014.

³⁵ Rapport de l'Etat du Cameroun au titre du 25e anniversaire du Programme et de la Plateforme d'Action de Beijing, ONU Femmes, 2019.

³⁶ Inoussa Moluh, 40 ans, Chef Service Adolescent au Ministère de la Fonction Publique, Yaoundé, entretien du 3 février 2021.

Despite the situation described above, the NCHRF notes with satisfaction that the preamble of the Cameroonian Constitution is inspired by the relevant provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified on August 23, 1994, which provides that "the nation shall protect and promote the family, the natural foundation of human society. It protects women (...)"³⁷.

The NCHRF also notes that Law No. 2016/007 of July 12, 2016 on the Cameroonian Penal Code gives pride of place to women's rights by extending the offence of adultery to men, severely punishing female genital mutilation, sexual harassment³⁸, the expulsion of the woman from the family home³⁹, the marriage to the abduction of a minor or rape⁴⁰, the hindrance to the right to schooling of the child and more particularly of the young girl and punishes the one who prevents the surviving spouse or the orphaned children from benefiting from the reversionary pension which is due to them.

Image 8: A victim of "breast ironing", Julie Ndjessa, holds as an example a piece of wood usually used to burn the breasts of young girls.



Source: www.wikipedia.com, consulted on the 12 February 2022, à 16H45mins.

Since 2006, the German Cooperation Agency and the National Network of Aunties' Associations (Renata) in Cameroon have chosen to cooperate in order to fight against sexual abuse and violence suffered by adolescent girls, in particular "breast ironing"⁴¹. They have

³⁷ Report of Human Rights Watch of 2014.

³⁸ Article 361 du Penal Code of Cameroon.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴¹ <https://www.wikipedia.fr>, Le « repassage des seins », une mutilation encore très pratiquée au Cameroun, France Television – Africa Editorial Office, 2014, consulted the 17 March 2022, at 15h37.

launched a national information campaign so that no one can ignore the ravages of this practice.

The Renata Association, organized by and for girl-mothers in Cameroon, ready to share their experience, is composed of more than 60 associations across the country. Together, they denounce the pain and fear that these girls undergo, sometimes preferring to flee to escape this mutilation. A situation that goes against what the family originally wanted, that is to say to postpone the date of a possible marriage or the birth of a child. But by finding themselves on the street, the girls are confronted with harassment and rape, which often result in unwanted pregnancies.

Ségolène Malterre, a journalist from France 24, went to Kigali to investigate, where she met the Cameroonian Minister for the Promotion of Women and the Family, Mrs. Marie-Thérèse Abena Ondo, who, according to her, minimizes the importance of the phenomenon and the pain felt by young Cameroonians, justifying the unsightly shape of "flat" breasts by the fact that women give birth or are morphologically born like that. "The phenomenon of "breast ironing" was increased. It was practiced gently, without any violence"⁴², she explains.

In 2007, the death of a 13 year old girl in Egypt, during her excision, had moved the whole country and questioned the mothers about the barbarity of this act. In 2013, GIZ and the Renata Association planned to measure the results of the awareness campaign conducted in Cameroon in recent years. At their request, IRESCO conducted this follow-up study. In 2013, the percentage had known a real decrease, considering the rate of 2005 which was 24%, it was now 12%. Nevertheless, it is still important to appreciate the efforts made by the State, despite the fact that there is still much to be done⁴³.

In spite of the situation described above, the birth of the Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms of Cameroon has played a crucial role in the improvement of women's and girls' rights. This is one of the reasons why the NCHRF notes with satisfaction that the preamble of the Cameroonian Constitution is inspired by the relevant provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified on August 23, 1994, which provides that "the nation shall protect and promote the family, the natural basis of human society. It protects women (...)"⁴⁴.

The NCHRF also notes that Law No. 2016/007 of July 12, 2016, on the Cameroonian Criminal Code, gives pride of place to women's rights by extending the offence of adultery to

⁴² Repport of *France 24* in 2014.

⁴³ Rapport sur les Droits de l'Homme au Cameroun, Human Rights Watch, pp. 33-38, 2018.

⁴⁴ J. Dikko Tchunkam, *Appui en faveur de l'appropriation sociale et la mise en œuvre effective de la CEDEF*, Institut de Coopération pour le Développement, Bureau d'Appui à la Coopération Canadienne, 2006, p.45.

men, severely punishing female genital mutilation and sexual harassment, the expulsion of the woman from the family home, the marriage to the abduction of a minor or rape, the hindrance to the right to schooling of the child and more particularly of the young girl and punishes the one who prevents the surviving spouse or the orphaned children from benefiting from the reversionary pension which is due to them. This penal code grants a legal value to the dowry and punishes the dowry judged excessive⁴⁵.

2- The Beijing World Conference: an indictment against the marginality of women in Africa and in the world

In Cameroon, as in many other African countries, the conception anchored in the mentalities is that the woman is inferior to the man and consequently, should not enjoy the same prerogatives as the latter, as much in the family relations as in the professional and public life. The weight of tradition, illiteracy and ignorance of their rights by women themselves and the existence in national legislation of provisions that sometimes discriminate against women are the fundamental reasons.

In 1995, a conference was held in China, precisely in Beijing, the Fourth World Conference on Women, with the objective: Fight for gender equality, development and peace⁴⁶. Indeed, the States parties to this convention, of which Cameroon was a part, decided to design and implement a set of measures for the elimination of inequalities based on sex or discrimination against women. For the effectiveness of women's rights, the United Nations Charter on Civil and Political Rights, adopted unanimously by 189 countries, established laws that are more equitable and more favorable to the affirmation of women's rights and dignity.

An analysis of Cameroonian positive law shows that customary law, whether legal or informal, is one of its main sources. The legal recognition of customary law is concretely translated into the attribution of a scope of application completed by the setting up of bodies in charge of applying it. When the principle of the coexistence of written law and traditional or customary law was accepted, it became important to specify the contours of the domain of each system. But this precaution has not prevented the two systems from sometimes coming into conflict. What about economic, social and cultural rights?

As much as the doctrine enshrines civil and political rights as rights of defence, economic, social and cultural rights, simply described as programmatic, do not enjoy the same

⁴⁵ Article 361 of the Penal Code of Cameroon of 2019.

⁴⁶ Interview with Bernadette Françoise Bekono, 50 ans, Vice Director of Women's Social Empowerment, Yaounde, realised on the 12 of April 2022.

justiciability. The 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights thus marks a certain evolution from the point of view of doctrine. One might venture to say that these rights are now increasingly binding, giving the Convention greater doctrinal, normative and jurisdictional importance and force. The assumption that economic, social and cultural rights are second-tier rights can therefore be accepted as an argument in favour of the substantive articles of the Convention. In practice, however, it is acceptable that, for methodological reasons, the invocation of social and cultural rights precedes that of economic rights. Violence, polygamy, and customary practices remain obstacles to the realization of women's rights in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular⁴⁷.

II- The impact of the 1995 Beijing Conference on Cameroonian rights

Women are at the heart of the family, cultural, health and social balance. They play a central role in health, development and education. Their empowerment is an indispensable factor of peace and social, economic and environmental progress⁴⁸. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 was a major turning point. Decisive progress was made. In this section, we will look at the progress of Cameroonian women's rights since the Beijing Conference.

1- Cameroon between revisiting its public policy on gender and maintaining its traditional conservative habits

In traditional Africa, law was based solely on custom⁴⁹. Custom thus presented has the advantage of being flexible, malleable and to correspond at all times to the popular will, to the ideas, to the mores of the social or ethnic group that generates it. It is for this reason that it is as respected as it is firmly established. But this attachment of custom to a given group can also, unfortunately, constitute a handicap in certain cases. Indeed, in a country like Cameroon, there are several dozen ethnic groups. And each group has its own particular customs, not always similar to those of other groups. This diversity of customs makes it particularly difficult for the legislator to impose the same rule on everyone. Is this one of the reasons why the colonial authority, when it arrived in Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular, simply wanted to impose its law? One would be tempted to agree.

⁴⁷ *Idem*.

⁴⁸ MINPROFF, Etude sur la participation des femmes à la vie publique au Cameroun, Yaoundé, SOPECAM, 2008, p.10.

⁴⁹ That is to say, a usage that slowly emanates from the popular conscience and is gradually considered obligatory, which later, becomes a rule of law.

Indeed, in its undeniable will to build a modern state where everyone would be subject to the same law and from which would result all prerogatives, the colonial authority relayed by the authorities of independent Cameroon judging difficult, the fact of having to harmonize all existing customs, or deciding simply to go to the essential, imposed its law. But this foreign law met with hostility, when it was not simply indifference of the populations. Also, as one author describes it so well, "faced with the resistance of the African populations against Western laws, the colonial legislator developed a strategy aiming at the end of a more or less long time, to have this legislation adopted. This strategy, he reveals, consisted in allowing the law of the colonized, presented as barbaric, to coexist with the law of the colonizer, judged as policed, and in positing the evolution of the natives in terms of abandoning their legal system and adopting the colonial legal system⁵⁰.

The traditional law of an oral nature was therefore going to coexist with this foreign legislation, essentially written, by entering into a systemic relationship with it characterized by a climate of conflict rather than complementarity. If it is undeniable that certain practices of traditional law deserved to be effectively abandoned without complacency, it must nevertheless be recognized that it is probably because of the euphoria that any new system generally entails that foreign law, considered as the only one capable of leading to development, seemed to supplant traditional law in the first years⁵¹.

This enthusiastic support has now faded considerably. The current trend is to reconsider, in a more realistic sense, the relationship between so-called modern Western law and traditional law. Breaking with the practice of the "first generation", which paid very little attention to the problem of the reception of law, legislators are nowadays constantly invited, under the pressure of an important current of thought, to follow a procedure which ensures the acceptance, by all strata of society, of the rules they enact.

During the presentation of the initial report of Cameroon to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Julienne Ngo Som, stressed that the adoption of the policy and the multisectoral action plan, entitled "women and development" which takes into account seven priority axes from the Beijing Platform for Action⁵². She also mentioned the adoption of a National Plan on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation, which aims to improve the living conditions of women, and the drafting of a bill on violence

⁵⁰ S. Ombiono, "Le mariage coutumier dans le droit positif camerounais", Penant, 1989, p. 32.

⁵¹ M. Keba, *La protection des droits de l'homme dans les rapports entre personnes privées, contribution à une publication de l'Institut international des droits de l'homme*, Paris, Pédone, 1971, 34.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

against women. Among the many obstacles remaining in the application of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Minister identified socio-cultural constraints, the conflicting coexistence of written law and local customs, the legal dualism between the French and Anglo-Saxon systems that Cameroon inherited after colonization, illiteracy and the low level of education of women, the inadequacy of resources allocated to mechanisms for the advancement of women, structural adjustment policies and the timid participation of women in improving their status.

Ahoua Ouedraogo⁵³ and her colleagues welcomed the ratification without reservations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women⁵⁴. They praised the objectivity with which Cameroon's initial report was written.

Ouedraogo emphasized that the use of sex-disaggregated statistics in the report will facilitate CEDAW's work. But, in general, she regretted the lack of a clear strategy in Cameroon to accelerate the change of mentalities and put an end to sociological burdens such as polygamy, forced marriage and genital mutilation.

During the discussion of the legislative provisions adopted by Cameroon, Ahoua Ouedraogo, expert from Burkina Faso, considered that it is necessary to have the means for one's policy and asked for details on the budget of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. She asked how much of the government's own resources were allocated to the Ministry compared to those coming from specialized agencies such as UNFPA or UNICEF for children. She wanted to know whether all the planned policies had been implemented and whether the Ministry also had the necessary human resources⁵⁵. Does the country have a sufficient number of well-trained social workers who can convey the message to women so that they can truly become allies in their emancipation? She also felt that it would have been useful for the Committee to have the details of the National Action Plan adopted by Cameroon and wanted to know if this Action Plan integrated the concept of gender and development identified at the recent regional conferences.

When discussing measures adopted to change socio-cultural patterns of behavior and to act on family education, Ahoua Ouedraogo, expert from Burkina Faso, regretted that, in describing socio-cultural obstacles to the implementation of the Convention, Cameroon had omitted to mention violence against women. Believing that this problem is fairly widespread on the continent, she asked whether there are associations of "battered women" and

⁵³She was Minister of Women's Affairs between 2001 and 2004 in Burkina Faso.

⁵⁴ Report of United Nations on CEDAW: Experts support Cameroon in implementing its Action Plan for Women and Development, Press Release, 2000.

⁵⁵ Report of United Nations on CEDAW: Experts support Cameroon..., p. 15.

recommended that information on this subject be better circulated⁵⁶. Citing the example of the hotlines that make it possible, at least in the cities, to report violence, she stressed the need to create structures that allow the issue of violence to be addressed frankly and without false modesty so that effective action can be taken against this scourge and structures can be set up to provide shelter for women who suffer violence. Acknowledging that African societies are evolving, Ouedraogo nonetheless pointed out the survival of polygamy, which is justified, by some, by the extra workload that weighs on rural women and the sharing that this allows. She asked that the same work be done to fight against polygamy as to fight against genital mutilation. In this regard, Salma Khan, an expert from Bangladesh, asked whether polygamy was legal in Bangladesh.

Charlotte Abaka, considered that the political decentralization set up in Cameroon is a good thing for women because it will give them the opportunity to actively participate at all levels of society⁵⁷. The Committee insisted that the Cameroonian authorities should ensure that the Convention reaches all regions of Cameroon, despite ethnic differences. The Convention can become a unifying force in Cameroon, the expert stressed.

Charlotte Abaka, asked whether the Ministry of Women's Affairs continues to implement programs specifically targeting women's economic needs⁵⁸. Referring to the structural adjustment programs and globalization that have had negative impacts on women, she asked what measures had been adopted to mitigate these negative consequences.

Charlotte Abaka, an expert from Ghana, recommended that Cameroon work with other African countries to help combat customary practices that are detrimental to women, noting that stereotypes also survive in developed countries⁵⁹.

With regard to Article 12 on the right to health, Charlotte Abaka, an expert from Ghana, recommended that Cameroonian authorities adopt a comprehensive approach to the various health issues related to women.

Abaka acknowledged that after structural adjustment programs, financial resources are scarce but health comes first and there is a need to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates through information programs on the risks inherent in very high fertility rates. The perception of high fertility rates is detrimental to women's health and affects the society as a whole,

⁵⁶ Report of United Nations on CEDAW: Experts support Cameroon..., p. 15.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁵⁸ Report of United Nations on CEDAW: Experts support Cameroon..., p. 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.42.

which lacks the necessary structures to educate these children. Ms. Abaka also asked about the measures undertaken by the Cameroonian authorities to fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic⁶⁰.

Hanna Beate Schopp-Schilling, expert from Germany, suggested that the Cameroonian delegation combine the second and third periodic reports in its next presentation to CEDAW⁶¹. Hanna Beate Schopp-Schilling asked whether the Cameroonian authorities have established a timetable for measures to combat obstacles to the advancement of Cameroonian women. Like other experts, Schöpp-Schilling welcomed the fact that discrimination is part of the constitution, but suggested that the authorities adopt a more grassroots law defining equal opportunity. Hanna Beate Schopp-Schilling, asked if the Cameroonian government intends to continue its fight against stereotypes as a strategy to promote women's rights. She also suggested that the Convention be used in literacy campaigns targeting women and recommended that the Minister make efforts to introduce the women's promotion component into economic cooperation programs with countries of the North.

Rosario Manalo, asked about the strategy of the National Commission for the Elimination of Laws that Discriminate Against Women to achieve concrete results for women⁶².

Savitri Goonesekere regretted that Cameroon has retained laws dating from the colonial era, which are a burden and reinforce the cumbersome customary law by enshrining the patriarchal system and the predominance of the husband over his wife. Goonesekere asked whether the norms of the Convention have been incorporated into the Cameroonian legal system. She wanted to know if there is a local complaints procedure in which the Convention can be raised⁶³. To what extent women can have recourse to the courts, she asked. The Expert asked which body is responsible for reforming family laws and whether it conducts comparative studies to carry out this task.

Cui Feng, with regard to the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the National Women's Committee, asked about the relationship between these two bodies and the mode of operation of the Committee.

Salma Khan, expert from Bangladesh, wondered why no sanctions were imposed on ministries or administrations that discriminated against women and what kind of pressure could be brought to bear to change laws that still contained discriminatory provisions. Noting

⁶⁰ Report of United Nations on CEDAW: Experts support Cameroon..., p. 48.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.46

⁶² Report of United Nations on CEDAW : Experts support Cameroon..., p. 22.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.30.

that the fertility rate remains very high in Cameroon, she wanted to know what family planning policy was being pursued to allow women to freely choose the number of children they wish to have and encouraged the Government to make better use of non-governmental organizations in its fight against discrimination against women. She also asked what steps had been taken to change school textbooks⁶⁴.

Speaking on the implementation of the provisions of article 6 of the Convention in Cameroon on the suppression of trafficking in women and exploitation of prostitution, Ms. Ivanka Corti, expert from Italy, referring to the passage in the report that describes the extent of the phenomenon of prostitution, emphasized that she knew of concrete actions adopted by the Ministry of Women's Affairs to combat prostitution and its consequences. If prostitution affects both young and older women, it is necessary to adopt multidisciplinary measures and apply them continuously. Sex education must also be strengthened. Corti stressed whether the measures indicated in Article 143 of the Penal Code are sufficient to combat prostitution. She wanted to know if the clients of prostitutes are also liable to punishment. The expert was under the impression that brothels already exist and asked whether the government plans to close them down, as the women "consigned" to them are reduced to a condition akin to slavery. Ministries, social institutions, and NGOs should help disseminate messages about women's rights and the fact that prostitution is a form of slavery. Even if the results are insufficient, Cameroon can learn from the measures taken in other countries to curb this phenomenon⁶⁵.

Mavivi Myakayaka-Manzini, an expert from South Africa, lamented the decline in the number of women in the legislature. She criticized the marriage law that allows a husband to force his wife to stop her economic activity⁶⁶. Can husbands also prevent their wives' participation in the political life of the country? Myakayaka-Manzini asked how active women's organizations are.

Zelmira Regazzoli, an expert from Argentina, asked about the electoral code, which apparently discourages women's participation in the country's political life. Women's participation in the functioning of municipalities has increased but has decreased in terms of participation at the national level, Regazzoli noted. She asked whether a legislative initiative

⁶⁴ Report of United Nations on CEDAW: Experts support Cameroon..., p. 11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p.29.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p.32.

to incorporate a quota system governing women's participation in politics into the law is planned⁶⁷.

Zelmira Regazzoli, expert from Argentina, regretting that Cameroon is going through an economic crisis and noting that 40% of the population lives in poverty, suggested that the Ministry adopt national legislation prohibiting employment discrimination against women⁶⁸.

Regazzoli suggested that the authorities organize training programs to make women literate and to inform them of their employment rights, including their union rights.

Silvia Rose Cartwright, expert from New Zealand, considered that the initial report of Cameroon was one of the best she had examined and that it contained very relevant observations. With regard to article 10 of the Convention, which deals with education, she shared the concern of the Cameroonian authorities about the problem of illiteracy that gives women access to information about nutrition, training and other aspects of their lives. Cartwright asked whether the measures adopted by the government in this area have already led to an improvement in the school enrollment rate of young girls. With regard to article 11 of the Convention on the right to employment, Yung-Chung Kim, expert from the Republic of Korea, asked whether female heads of households have the cultural background and training to hold a job. As a first step, the expert said, it should be ensured that young girls stay in school to receive the necessary training for a professional life in fields such as science, management or media rather than in traditional fields⁶⁹.

All of these observations, criticisms, and input will give rise to a new government structure.

2- The creation of MINPROFF: a response to Cameroon's international commitments on gender

Given the recommendations and expectations of the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women, the State of Cameroon, in its desire to do its part, expressed its desire by creating a new governmental institution by Presidential Decree, named MINPROFF⁷⁰. Later in 2011, more responsibility is given to it, not only for the elaboration and implementation of governmental measures relating to the promotion and respect of women's rights and the

⁶⁷ Report of United Nations on CEDAW: Experts support Cameroon..., p. 11.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.34

⁶⁹ Report of United Nations on CEDAW : Experts support Cameroon..., p. 34.

⁷⁰ The Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family(MINPROFF) was created by Decree n° 2004/320 du 08 december 2004. This Ministry succeeds the dead Ministry of Wemen's Affairs(MINCOF), which was created in 1997(see: A. MINPROFF, National Strategy to fight genderbased violence, pp.11-13).

protection of the family, as well as those of the child⁷¹. Also, in accordance with the provisions of the January 2003 Decree⁷² on the budgetary organization of the State, it is classified in the social affairs sector. MINPROFF is responsible for the elaboration and implementation of governmental measures to the promotion and respect of women's rights and the protection of the family, with Minister Suzanne Bomback. She is responsible for the elaboration and implementation of governmental measures related to the protection of the family. In this capacity, it is woman:

- To ensure the elimination of all discrimination against women;
- To ensure the increase of guarantees of equality for women in all areas of activity;
- To study and submit to the Government the conditions facilitating the employment of women in all sectors of activity;
- To study and propose strategies and measures to strengthen the promotion and protection of the family;
- To study and propose measures aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of the child.

It is responsible for the supervision of women's training structures, excluding institutions, under the authority of the ministries in charge of educational matters.

Image 9: Picture of Minister Bomback Bandolo Suzanne Marie Cecile.



Source : www.wikipedia.com, consulted on the 10 May 2022.

⁷¹ See. MINCOF, Recueil de textes juridiques relatif à la promotion et à la protection des droits de la femme, MINCOF, Yaoundé, 2004.

⁷² That is Decree n° 2003/011/PM of the 09 January 2003.

In 1999, she began her political career as founding President of the Grassroots Committee in the Women's Wing of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (WCPDM) of the South West Region. Later, from 2004 to 2009, she was appointed Minister of Women Empowerment and the Family⁷³. In 2007, she initiated collective marriages in Cameroon so as to promote cohabitation. Long before these marriages, she had organised seminars that educated future spouses on the legal, sociological and psychological aspects of marriage. Her fight against genital mutilation led her to the Northern regions where she opened several women's empowerment centers⁷⁴.

⁷³ www.jeuneafrique.com: Bombac Bandolo Suzanne Marie Cecile.com, consulted on the 18 February 2022.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER IV: EVALUATION OF PUBLIC POLICY ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CAMEROON

Public policy on women's rights in Cameroon has improved the status of women. However, it should be noted that disparities remain perceptible¹. These are due to age-old sexist prejudices and inappropriate socio-cultural survivals. The political will and the evolution of time will eventually impose this improved status². As an illustration, and exhaustively, the field of education constitutes one of these poles. In Cameroon, educational indicators are in line with international standards. As a result, the evaluation of the former MDGs and the monitoring of the 12 critical areas of the platform for action adopted at the 4th United Nations Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 have shown that education is a key component of the MDGs. In this chapter, we will see how the rights of Cameroonian women and girls have been improved by the State of Cameroon 25 years after the Beijing conference, the difficulties they face and finally, the perspectives for a real respect of women's rights and a real equality between women and men in Cameroon.

I- ADVANCES IN PUBLIC POLICY ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CAMEROON

Since 1995, the Government has placed the promotion of women at the center of its concerns. As early as 1997, the first policy aimed at empowering women was developed and adopted. For the first time in its history, Cameroon has adopted a National Action Plan for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. This resolution deals with: Women, Peace and Security. It also integrates related resolutions, notably 1820, 1888, 1989, 1960, 2106, 3122, 2248 and 2278³. All in all, the improvement of gender equality and the empowerment of women are among the challenges for the achievement of the objectives set out in the 2035 development vision.

These objectives are listed in the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper and the Sustainable Development Goals. In other words, a reading of this public policy instrument underlines that Cameroon has put in place a socio-economic development policy. This policy focuses on gender equality. As a result, a specific ministerial department has been created to address these issues at the national level. In addition, the country has developed and

¹ Interview with Kemagoua Yalande, 41 Years old, Chef Service at the Direction of Women's Rights and the Family, in Yaoundé on the 24 November, 2021.

² Barbier, *femmes du Cameroun, mères pacifiques...* p.58.

³ U.N.O, La Résolution 1325 du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU sur les femmes, la paix et la sécurité, UN Plaza, New York, 2005.

implemented a National Gender Policy since 2010⁴. All this at the institutional level shows that women's rights have made progress. Since 1981, a Cameroonian woman can exercise a profession without her husband's authorization, but the latter has the right to object, for example, if her salary is not higher than the expenses incurred by her absence from home, or if the job she wishes to take up threatens, in his opinion, her health. During the decade of 2000, progress has been made in various areas, although there are still some challenges.

A- In the political field

Women's leadership can be defined as the ability of a woman to lead or lead other women or women's organizations in order to achieve certain goals. In other words, a woman leader is a woman who is able to guide, influence and inspire other women. In Cameroon, figures such as Celestine Keutcha Courtès, Françoise Foning of late memory are to be mentioned.

Image 10: Madame Françoise Foning and Célestine Keutcha Courtès



Source : www.wikipedia.com, consulted on th15 July 2022.

1- Women's political participation

As far as women's political participation is concerned, it is defined as their involvement in decision making in all spheres of public life⁵.

⁴ ONU FEMME, République du Cameroun : Plan d'Action National de la Résolution 1325 et des Résolutions Connexes du Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies sur les Femmes, la Paix et la Sécurité, ONU FEMMES, Yaoundé, 2017, p.11

⁵ MINPROFF, Etude sur la participation des femmes à la vie publique..., p.45.

a- Women's representation in the administrative sphere

The representativeness of Cameroonian women in the political life of Cameroon has improved over time and in space according to the public policy of the State of Cameroon. In Cameroon, the fundamental rules of all citizens are respected. However, the rate of participation of women in political life remains very limited. Here is an illustration:

Table 8 : Representation of women's participation in political discussion groups

DOMAINE RETAIN	TOTAL SHADE	NUMBER OF WOMEN	AMOUNT OF REALISATION
Women Responsible of Associations	120	115	95,8%
Women Head of Service	120	110	91,57%
Young women	120	105	57,5%
Total	360	330	91,57%

Source : Ngo Thiol Thérèse et Hapi : (Dir)/MINFOPRA : " étude sur la participation des femmes à la vie publique au Cameroun ; projet, CAREF,(ACBF)", Yaoundé, SOPECAM, 2008.

In view of this table, women are assigned to subordinate functions. It follows that there is a desire to develop the action of NGOs on issues of public responsibility of the female gender. However, the role of these structures is limited to haranguing the crowds during rallies and meetings⁶. The causes of this "relative" involvement of women stem from the fact that women activists of political parties do not master their political rights⁷. This is the reason why, without shading the pioneers such as Delphine Tsanga, Ketcha, we can agree that their word to say was marginal in its enunciation.

B- Factors of improvement in the administrative representation of women during the decade 2000

Indeed, the low participation of women in political life was a worrying problem for the public authorities. In the 1980s, there were only 5 women out of the 48 members of the government; Delphine Tsanga Minister of Social Affairs from its creation until 1984, Yaou Aissatou Minister of Women's Affairs between 1984 and 1988, Isabelle Bassong Vice-Minister of Public Health between 1984 and 1985, Elisaberth Tankeu Vice-Minister of

⁶ C. Djoko, "Entre marginalisation et invisibilisation : femmes et politique au Cameroun", Yaoundé, 2018.

⁷ E. Otabela, *le totalitarisme des Etats africains*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2016, p. 56.

Planning and Territorial Development between 1984 and 1985, Rose Zang Nguélé Minister of Social Affairs between 1984 and 1985. That is to say a percentage of 10.42%⁸ of women. Later in 2006, the government was composed of 6 women out of 61 members, a percentage of 9.84% . In 2018, the Cameroonian government, had 7 women Ministers, a Minister Delegate and two Secretaries of State out of a total of 64 members. It is important here to mention the fight, led by : UN Women. The goal pursued is that: women have the right to be part of political institutions and to occupy management positions. Indeed, with the proclamation of the results of the legislative elections of October 18, 2013, by the Supreme Court, the National Assembly of Cameroon now has 56 women out of a total of 180 Deputies, or 31.11%⁹.

This percentage which exceeded the threshold required by: the Beijing Platform for Action which practically doubled, was appreciated by the international community and by the State of Cameroon. For Justine Deffo, "the psychological bar of 30% that we had set for ourselves has been reached. We pay a vibrant tribute to UN Women for its support and accompaniment¹⁰.

For Joséphine Odera, it is clear that;

We set up More Women in Politics seven years ago, I would not have believed that one day we would reach such results... I am delighted and reassured that the partnership of UN Women with the Cameroonian authorities, women and civil society has not been in vain. The 30% threshold has been crossed! We can only do better¹¹.

We can only note, these words, as an improvement of the gender policy in Cameroon, even if there is still a lot to do! Women, in spite of their competences, their involvement and the demographic weight they represent "struggle" to occupy positions of responsibility and decision within political parties. However, it is obvious that the position of women must be taken into account.

⁸ MINPROFF, Etude sur la participation des femmes à la vie publique au Cameroun, Projet CAREF, SOPECAM, Yaoundé, 2004, p. 33.

⁹ *Ibid*, p.21.

¹⁰ Interview with Justine Deffo Tchunkam, 60 years old, Lecturer at the University of Yaoundé II Soa, realised on the 23 November 2021.

¹¹ Report of ONU Femmes 2013, p. 39.

1- Women's political rights

Although it must be admitted that it was under the impetus of Ketcha that the strategy of the Cadi Noir was adopted by the political parties¹², particularly the UC. This fact contributed to the disarticulation of the Maquis and underlines the involvement of women in the field of political activity during the struggle against subversion. In view of all this, it is necessary to proceed to the inventory of the question of the political rights.

It is about:

i- **The right to vote, to be a candidate or voter and the right to access, maintain and be promoted in the public service.**

The right of women to vote in our country is recognized by the Cameroonian constitution and by the electoral code. The President of the Republic signed a decision to force political parties to reserve a 30% quota for women candidates¹³. According to the electoral code, women have the right to be voters¹⁴. This provision has allowed us to obtain in the last senatorial elections of March 25, 2018, in our country, the following results:

- 22 women elected out of 70 elected;
- 4 women appointed by the President of the Republic out of 30¹⁵.

Observing the process of appointing mayors and their deputies, their representativeness is improving. At least two cases come from the Western region. Namely: Gisèle Tsangue and Hermine Patricia Tomaino Ndam Njoya. These women-ediles replace men, at the end of the session of full rights. The same process is to be noted in the Littoral with: Lisette Nkoue, Ngo Mboua Dorothée wife Nyodog at the head of the CVUC. It must be said that the entire Littoral region is experiencing this "female breakthrough".

We see it in the municipal council of Ebonè in the Mounjo, where Félicitée Sidiki Manon of the CPDM was elected mayor. In Nyong-et-Kellé, in the Centre region, Véronique Eliane Bikay, wife of Kome, will henceforth preside over the destiny of the commune of Dibang on behalf of the CPDM.

¹² Th. Delthmbe et al, *Kamerun, une guerre cachée aux origines de la France-Afrique*, Paris, La Découverte, 2019, p.112.

¹³ I. Mouich, "Genre et commandement territorial au Cameroun", *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines*, Yaoundé, 2007, pp. 391-408.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Repport of ONU Femmes 2019, p. 12.

Beyond that, we can mention the appointment of Mrs. Akete Dibol as mayor of the town of Minton, in the South region. In the town of Akom II, Elise Mballa Meka keeps her mayor's sash at the end of last week's full session¹⁶.

These examples constitute considerable progress in the fight led by the State of Cameroon to solve the gender policy in Cameroon. In addition to being mayors, other women have been appointed as deputy mayors. This has been confirmed in the communal executives of the Far North regions, where women still have difficulty imposing themselves in the political arena¹⁷.

The right to access, maintain and be promoted in the public service affirms the will to respect the dignity and freedom reserved for all individuals to participate in the elaboration of political choices, in public life and in the functioning of the institutions of the Republic. These rights constitute: the principles of social justice advocated by the President of the Republic. This political will allows all Cameroonian women to exercise their rights as citizens without gender discrimination. It should be noted that significant progress has been made in the promotion of women to positions of responsibility.

However, these figures can be improved and the objective is to reach international standards, namely parity according to the UN Women's 50/50 initiative. Obstacles to the achievement of this objective remain socio-cultural factors, prejudices, men's disapproving looks, traditional burdens, tribalism, banana skins, psychological barriers, lack of means, insufficient training and political information for women, the masochism of some men, and the lack of solidarity among women¹⁸. These obstacles prevent women from developing politically, from taking full advantage of the actions and institutional measures taken by the Government. These obstacles considerably reduce women's capacities and potential to fully play the role of major actors on the national political and public scene.

In order to reverse this trend, the Government has undertaken, in the exercise of its regalian missions, a work of political capacity building for women, whose aim is to raise the political awareness of this social category and to give it the tools it needs to participate, with the same chances of success as men, in the political life and in the decision making. In conclusion, we can say that women must take their destiny into their own hands. They must be innovative, creative, supportive and courageous. They must stop playing the

¹⁶ Azize Mbohou, *Exécutifs communaux : Les femmes ont leur place*, Cameroun Tribune, Yaoundé, 2020, p.19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.21.

¹⁸ MINPROFF, *Etude sur la participation des femmes à la vie publique...*, p. 97.

accompanying, the second roles and propose innovative, revolutionary and constructive projects.

ii- The right to create, to freely join a political party and to be a member of a political party

In Cameroon, women presidents of political parties are few. With the new local elections in the offing, the United Nations through UN Women, MINPROFF, and Election Cameroon (ELECAM) are advocating for gender in the electoral process. In the 2011 presidential elections, only two women were among the 23 candidates running, but in the 2018 elections, no women were among them. The only one who could be part of it was challenged within her own political formation and consequently rejected by the authorities. During the last presidential elections, several women were nominated by their political parties. Women militate in quality and quantity within political parties and this is materialized through the payment of membership fees and cards¹⁹.

The right to nationality is part of the civil rights linked to the individual's professional life with regard to his family and property. This right implies the effective participation of women in all stages of the implementation of major nation building projects.

The Government of Cameroon through the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family promotes the participation of women in public affairs. Indeed, in its concern to enable women to take ownership of political science, MINPROFF, in collaboration with development partners, developed in 2012, a Manual of Political Training for Women.

In addition in 2017, ten café-genre sessions were organized throughout Cameroon. This concept aimed to collect the obstacles to women's political participation and suggest solutions. All these actions have enabled women to contribute, each in her own field of competence, to the construction, development and emergence of the country by 2035. This support from the public authorities has enabled women to be found at strategic decision-making levels in the political, social, cultural and economic fields²⁰.

II- THE MAIN INNOVATIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR WOMEN IN CAMEROON

The status of women's rights in Cameroon has been improved thanks to the constant support of the State of Cameroon. In Cameroon, women constitute a "relatively" important

¹⁹ Djoko, "Entre marginalisation et invisibilisation...", p.12.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.17.

potential and work force; more than half of the population (50.5%). As reported by an informant, Mrs. Meboe Jeanne²¹, women ensure almost all food production to feed people in urban areas. The income-generating activities and projects carried out by women contribute to the increase of the national wealth of the country. While creating jobs that contribute to the development of women and their families. MINPROFF provides some women with financial assistance, advisors, and others. Despite this proven dynamism, the economic situation of women remains rather precarious due to

- Unfavorable legislation regarding property rights and certain discriminatory cultural practices;
- Difficulty in accessing traditional financial mechanisms;
- Limited access to appropriate information and entrepreneurial networks;
- Overburdening of household chores and family responsibilities.

In addition to these structural problems, there are problems related to her status as a woman. Indeed, in a traditionally patriarchal society, the image of a woman leader is still accompanied by prejudices that are obstacles to the blossoming of her business. In order to give women entrepreneurs the same chances of success as men, the State of Cameroon, through MINPROFF, has opted for an action articulated around three axes:

- The definition of an institutional framework for the promotion of female entrepreneurship;
- Education and professional training of women;
- The multiform support to women entrepreneurs.

The Ministry in charge of the Promotion of Women and the Family is responsible for the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of measures relating to the respect of women's rights. In this respect, it ensures:

- The elimination of all discrimination against women;
- The increase of guarantees of equality for women in the political, economic, social and cultural fields.

The promotion of women corresponds to the reduction of poverty among women, the reinforcement of women's capacities, the improvement of their living conditions, the promotion of their rights and duties and the guarantee of equity between men and women by

²¹ Interview with Meboe Jeanne, 41 years old, Head of Departement for Monitoring Gender Mainstreaming in Economic Programmes and Projects, Yaounde, realised on the 12 March 2022.

the popularization of the approach in all areas of life. To this end, many actions are undertaken by the Government to enable women entrepreneurs in all fields, whether it be, to contribute, through the financing of their activities, to the development of Cameroon. We can cite:

A- Breaks and continuities in Cameroonian society regarding the issue of women's rights

The Government of Cameroon signed in October 2014, the DWCP in order to promote decent work for all. It is at the level of Priority 1: "Increase of decent employment opportunities and promotion of IGAs especially for women, youth and vulnerable groups" that the implementation of the PANDEF developed by the ILO and included in the DWCP was planned. The aim is to "promote a new generation of more dynamic and more numerous women entrepreneurs, capable of managing sustainable businesses for decent jobs that promote growth, in order to escape from poverty²².

1- Elaboration of the national policy for women entrepreneurship

The Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with all the actors of the sector has developed a national strategy document for inclusive finance adopted in 2013. The aim is to significantly and sustainably reduce poverty through the provision of low-cost basic financial and banking services to consumers in difficulty and excluded from traditional financial services, especially women and youth. This approach allows them to improve their working conditions through access to financing for their activities. This is why MINPROFF has developed a project to improve women's access to financial services. Indeed, in Cameroon, more than 92% of women work in the informal sector. They therefore need specific support. In the Transport Sector Support Program, Phase I: Development of the Batchenga-Ntui-Yoko - Lena road. This program takes into account the issue of inclusive growth.

A partnership agreement between MINPOSTEL and MINPROFF, with a view to connecting the various CPFs on Cameroonian territory was signed on July 31, 2015. It aims to facilitate for the learners of these structures and their entourage, access to information on government actions and economic opportunities; but also, to exchange on knowledge, skills and know-how of the modern world, to be entertained and thereby improve their living conditions²³.

²² Interview with Obounou Ndongo, environ 44 ans, Cadre au MINPOSTEL, Yaoundé, realised on the 13 march 2022.

²³ *Idem*.

The Digital Houses help reduce unequal access to ICTs and allow a maximum number of women to join the digital economy. This project is framed in Cameroon by an agreement signed between MINPROFF and ORANGE-Cameroon.

The arrival of the Central African Backbone project, aims to provide the CPFF placed along the road projects financed by the ADB with TCP. At the national level, this project is coordinated by MINPOSTEL and financed by the ADB. It will certainly improve the service offer in the CPFFs located along the roads concerned.

This concept is the result of the MINPROFF-UN-Women-Coca-Cola partnership. The initiative aims to support more than 5 million women entrepreneurs by 2020. In its pilot phase, the promoters planned to train 1,000 women from vulnerable and unemployed groups in 2017 and to empower 5,000 women across the country by 2020²⁴.

Women were trained in financial management, with certificates and Coca-Cola product kits to promote self-employment²⁵.

In addition to this ministerial department, whose missions are specific to women, several other ministries and institutions have an entrepreneurial component, where women are not excluded. These are :

- MINPMEESA, which implements the national policy for the development of this sector;
- MINIMIDT, which provides assistance, advice, monitoring and supervision of promoters
- MINADER, which provides technical support for women's agricultural activities;
- MINCOMMERCE, which assists women in organizing trade trips and exports and imports;
- MINEPIA, which supervises animal protein producers and helps boost production;
- MINFOF, which involves women in forestry operations while highlighting their contribution to sustainable forest management;
- MINEP, through the program to popularize improved stoves;
- The Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Handicrafts and the SNI, which support entrepreneurs in their mission;

²⁴ Interview with Obounou Ndongo, environ 44 ans, Cadre au MINPOSTEL, Yaoundé, realised on the 13 march 2022.

²⁵ *Idem*.

- TFPs such as the ILO, which financed a study on the implementation of PAPEF and developed PANDEF. All these actions in favor of women in general and female entrepreneurship in particular are based on the operationalization of the National Gender policy Document. In order to address gender imbalances in education and training, positive discriminatory measures have been implemented, such as²⁶ ;

- The allocation of scholarships and incentives to girls in scientific and technical fields
- The awarding of prizes to the best female students for continuing their studies; the sensitization of communities on the non-discrimination of girls' schooling;

- The multiplication of technical and vocational education establishments;

- The creation of CTAs;

- The creation of Women's Promotion Centers, of which 94 are operational to date ;

- These centers have the following mission ;

- Information and orientation of women :

- Support and advice to women who wish to create their own businesses or who have projects;

- The improvement and training of women facing problems of socio-professional integration ;

- The actions carried out within this framework aim essentially at developing women's knowledge and skills in the creation and management of individual or collective enterprises.

- This is reflected in the organization of training sessions for them in project set-up, management of income-generating activities, processing techniques and conservation of agro-pastoral products.

- Other advances include²⁷ :

- The support of women's associations in their networking;

- The organization of training seminars for women's associations in the setting up and management of community development projects;

- Support for the creation of women's cooperatives

- The development of the capacities of women working in the informal sector through training and information seminars;

- The intensification by the National Employment Fund of actions to promote self-employment and support women's economic activities;

²⁶ Interview with Meboe Jeanne, 41 years old, Head of Department for Monitoring Gender Mainstreaming in Economic Programmes and Projects, Yaounde, realised on the 12 March 2022.

²⁷ *Idem.*

- The organization of business and experience exchange trips.

Several other projects and programs have been set up for the economic promotion of women. This has been done with the support of bi and multilateral cooperation and international women's organizations, such as the FCEM or the FEF Cameroon - Senegal.

Other actions of support, to the efforts of the Cameroonian Government to fight against the feminization of poverty, the creation of a favorable framework, to the emergence of microfinance institutions which constitute the appropriate channels for women. They are appropriate because they respond adequately to their needs. This framework is illustrated by the declaration of the National Microfinance Policy, which was adopted by the Government on April 10, 2001. Women's entrepreneurship has been identified as one of the key means of reducing poverty in the world, and particularly in Africa²⁸. Indeed, for women working in both the formal and informal sectors, in both rural and urban areas, the creation and development of businesses is a way to achieve their autonomy. They are the main actors of their own development, in order to improve their living conditions. They thus contribute to the reduction of gender inequalities and the fight against poverty.

2- In the social and cultural field

Since Cameroon gained independence, the State has given primacy to education as a "sine qua non" condition for any development. But downstream, it also leads a fight to build educational systems capable of offering education for all. Today, education, as access to knowledge, to the improvement of the living conditions of individuals, is also at the center of the process of social reproduction in both rural and urban areas. However, the education of women and girls, in particular, by its impact on the different sectors of the life of the populations is also perceived as one of the keys to development²⁹.

As far as girls are concerned, school completion rates are still low³⁰. In Cameroon, while the schooling rate for girls is increasing in urban areas, it remains low in rural areas. This is still a worrying reality for the ministries in charge of education³¹. In addition, it is important to realize that in rural areas, the importance of girls' school education depends on certain socio-educational parameters³². More precisely, in the northern part of Cameroon,

²⁸ Interview with Meboe Jeanne, 41 years old, Head of Departement for Monitoring Gender Mainstreaming in Economic Programmes and Projects, Yaounde, realised on the 12 March 2022.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Rapport d'UNESCO, 2005, p. 20.

³¹ G. Siakeu..., 2005.

³² Interview with Inoussa Moluh, 41 Years old, Head f the Adolescent Departement at the Ministry of Public Service, Yaounde, 23 Novembre 2021.

where the schooling rate is among the lowest in the country, the education of girls is still neglected³³.

Consequently, the girl has no "reference points", her schooling becomes "precarious" and the corollary is the irregularity of her presence in school. An informant tells us that: "For these irregular pupils, any education becomes impossible, they are ranked among the last, often punished, and they soon become discouraged and leave school for good..."³⁴. It is in this perspective that the Canadian Ministry of Education, in 2000, defined dropping out of school as the way of abandoning the expected minimum school course. However, it is indisputable that a girl's dropping out of school is a function of the influence of several factors on her education.

In Cameroon, the "school dropout" rate for girls is unfortunately not the same throughout the country. There are still local, departmental, and regional disparities in educational outcomes, in the allocation of resources, and in the distribution of educational opportunities. The district of Goulfey in the northern part of Cameroon is no exception. The young girl is a victim of inadequate supervision, which encourages her to drop out of school. This is easily understood through the Master Plan for the Development of Logone and Chari.

In order to stimulate a collective reflection, the President of the Republic of Cameroon, His Excellency Paul Biya, took the necessary decisions and prescribed the holding of the general education statut in 1995. The objective was to identify, through a diagnosis, the ills that undermine the education system and propose solutions to overcome them³⁵. Similarly, the Ministries of Basic Education and Secondary Education as well as partner Ministries are involved in both upstream and downstream reflection actions with a view to finding more appropriate solutions to the difficulties faced by women and girls in school education up to today in the regions.

In addition, there is the commitment of some local and national NGOs, the support of UNESCO and international institutions such as the World Bank, UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF and private partners to clean up the education system through education for all. However, it is obvious that today, with globalization, the supervision and education of young girls following their own trajectories, those of their parents, but also those of teachers and many other actors in the educational community are not obvious.

³³ Rapport du MINEDUC, 2010, p.7.

³⁴ Interview with Nfi Joachim Lume, 50 ans, Regional Inspector of Primary Education, realised at Ebolowa on the 12 Octobre 2021.

³⁵ A. Mbog, "Vers la tenue des Etats généraux de l'éducation au Cameroun", APA, Douala, 2019, p. 24.

For Pourtois and Desmet, the educational act, which is the first of the human activities, constitutes in fact, for the parents, the educators and the society something, which is not certain³⁶. Although entities such as: school, individuals and family have undoubtedly evolved in their structures and functions over the centuries³⁷.

In addition, notwithstanding the interest that some and others give to school in general, the stereotypical perceptions of parents, economic and financial difficulties, poverty are not the only ones to enter the school curriculum or the schooling of young girls. Faced with this problem, the State of Cameroon has not remained, arms crossed in front of the discriminatory extent, of the questions of education of women and young girls.

It is in this sense that the Cameroonian government has undertaken some actions in favor of the educational sector.

- We note the holding of the general education statut ;
- The vote of the Framework Law on Education, the creation of state universities in six geographical regions of Cameroon;
- The strong involvement of education partners;
- The creation and construction of elementary school, technical and general colleges and high schools in the villages;
- The recruitment and training of teachers at both the secondary and primary levels;
- The creation of *APEEs* and their involvement in the management of schools;
- The campaign launched in 2000 called "Child Friendly, Girl Friendly School";
- The establishment of student mothers' associations; the active mobilization of religious and traditional leaders for girls' schooling (MINEDUC-UNICEF, 2000);
- The reopening of Teacher Training Colleges that had been closed due to the economic crisis and the provision of multimedia centers for secondary schools and, more recently, the provision of free primary education in public schools.

In addition, there is the support of some local and national NGOs involved in the education and supervision of children, the support of UNESCO and international institutions such as the World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF. In spite of all these actions of various kinds and efforts made by the Government of Cameroon and technical and financial partners in the search for solutions to the problems that hinder the development of education in general and that of the girl child in particular, the results do not always follow!

³⁶ J. P. Pourtois et H. Desmet, *Parents, agents de développement*, Bruxelles, *De Boeck-Université*, 1995, pp. 19-39.

³⁷S. J. Larivée, J. C. Kalubi et B. Terrisse, "La collaboration école-famille en contexte d'inclusion : entre obstacle, risques et facteurs de réussite", Paris, *Revue des sciences de l'éducation*, Volume 32, 2006, p. 15.

The educational partnership between the girl herself in her schooling, the family and the school is however far from being a reality. Indeed, it is obvious that the intervention of the actors of the educational sector does not take into account the ecological approach in their strategies to fight effectively against the factors influencing the studies of young girls. In other words, the issues related to girls' education are not limited exclusively to those of parents in the family environment. It is also about their natural, human and economic environment³⁸. Consequently, girls have responsibilities in relation to their success or failure, as do school administrators and teachers. The family-school concept developed by Ivan Illitch is justified³⁹!

Thus, we note that the individual dimensions of the girls themselves and those linked to the school are not taken into account in the approaches inherent to the questions of education of the populations in general and of the girls in particular. They must also extend to other environments such as the public or private school environment and the school environment, for example. This led us to question ourselves on this issue:

From poverty, war, crises, conflicts, to early marriages through the lack of didactic equipment, and often disqualified in the long term.

There are many "roadblocks" in Cameroon, in the race to reach the objectives of girls' schooling. We can mention:

- The reality of the field in the education of the young girl;
- The question of the constant support of the State of Cameroon.

Although the trend remains very positive in some areas of the country, several other localities in Cameroon still face enormous difficulties in access to education for girls. These are the PTAs: the regions of Adamaoua, East, Far North and North⁴⁰. This status is the result of the low enrollment rate in these regions for several years. Nevertheless, the school map of Cameroon shows a change in enrollment over the past five years. In 2020, 7,394 public elementary schools were open in these regions, with an estimated total enrollment of 2,162,663 students, including 968,003 girls⁴¹. The reality of schooling for girls is therefore particular. According to INS figures, about 13 percent of Cameroonian girls are married before age 15. And nearly 38% of young Cameroonians are married before the age of 18⁴².

³⁸ MINPROFF, Etude sur la participation des femmes...p.32.

³⁹ See. I .Illitch, *une Société sans école*, Paris, le seuil, 1963, p. 54.

⁴⁰ M. G bongo, "L'influence des activités extra scolaires sur l'abandon scolaire de la jeune Gbaya de Garoua-Boulai", mémoire en vue de l'obtention du certificat d'aptitudes pédagogiques d'instituteur de l'enseignement Maternel et Primaire, 2009, p. 15.

⁴¹ *Rapport de l'Institut National des Statistiques*, 2020, p. 32.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 25-34.

The schooling rate for girls is 13 points lower than for boys. Only 68% of girls manage to complete primary school compared to 76% of boys⁴³. As our informant points out. Initiatives have been taken by the government to try to curb this situation and increase the schooling rate of this social group⁴⁴.

It emerges that: "the culture of the North does not allow Muslim girls to go to school properly, their place is at home. The woman should not have the floor in front of the man...etc⁴⁵", explains a parent from Northern Cameroon.

According to MINEDUB, the enrollment rate of girls is estimated at 66.7% in the PTAs between 2015 and 2016, less than the other regions of the country which record 81.8%⁴⁶. Even in these cases, boys lead the way compared to girls. At the Ecole Publique d'Application de Bertoua, Group 3B, the teaching staff is organizing to recover the little girls, as reported by WALL AFRICA, 2021⁴⁷: "The main problem of girls in the East is that some do not live with their parents. The guardians do not always follow up. Moreover, these children start school late, "says Dauline Fetue Kambou⁴⁸.

The evolution of the trend since then is remarkable. Indeed, for the period 2019-2020, the total number of students enrolled in primary school in Cameroon is estimated at nearly five million, with 43% of these enrollments for the ZEP⁴⁹. Regarding the distribution of enrollment by gender, there is a slight advantage for boys with more than one million enrolled in 2020, against only 900,000 girls. This trend can be seen and the slowness is understandable with the crisis that has been raging in the Anglophone zones for more than 5 years now. The young girl is at the top of the list to suffer the negative effects. To do this: "the rate of schooling of young girls in secondary education is already approaching that of young boys, because today, a girl no longer travels 7 kilometers to go to school both in rural and urban areas, schools have been multiplied" reassures Bernadette Mbia⁵⁰.

⁴³ Interview with Aissatou Maidou, 43 Years old, Regional Inspector of Pedagogy at the Ministry of Primary Education, Garoua, 10 Juin 2021.

⁴⁴ Report of ONU Femmes 2019.

⁴⁵ Interview with Tombaya Aissatou, Buisness wowan, at Adamawa on the 10 April 2022.

⁴⁶ Rapport du MINEDUB 2017.

⁴⁷ Rapport WALL AFRICA, 2020.

⁴⁸ Interview with Dauline Fetue Kambou, 43 years old, Teacher in class V, she teaches 53 students, that is 33 girls, Bafoussam, realised on the 11 January 2022.

⁴⁹ Rapport du MINEDUB 2017, p. 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 5.

Only the northwest and southwest regions, where there has been armed conflict for the past four years, have seen a considerable drop in the school enrollment rate for girls⁵¹. If they leave the normal school system early, they can nevertheless follow practical training in dedicated centers such as the 4th arrondissement center in Yaoundé⁵². As the Director of the center, Adjebou Asseme Ngonon⁵³, confided to us, "we provide training to facilitate the empowerment of women and girls:

- The center offers training in: - hotel and restaurant industry
- In industry clothing,
- In aesthetic care,
- In hairdressing,
- In ICT,
- Decoration and leather goods⁵⁴.

To raise the school enrollment rate for girls, the government now distributes inclusive materials in public schools to girls with disabilities and dry food rations to vulnerable girls in the four priority education zones: Adamaoua, East, Far North and North⁵⁵.

On the cultural side, progress has been made with the creation of the CEDAW, which increasingly places men and women on the same level. The notion of married woman is logically understood as the one who lives in the marriage: the wife. If we observe that Cameroonian law grants her more and more rights during the marriage, her situation is rather variable at the dissolution of her marriage.

a. The evolution of the wife's rights during marriage;

The rights of the wife have evolved positively in Cameroon and in Africa thanks to the increasing rationalization of customary rules and the growing influence of the principle of equality between spouses. It should be remembered that colonization was an iconoclasm.

Beyond that, African customs and rules were considered sacrilegious by the missionary Church in accordance with the precepts of Vatican I; thus customary marriage centered on phallogocratic dominance and the relativization of the rights of the spouse. Faced with a colonial European social law, which distinguishes the woman from the wife, the

⁵¹ Interview with Bernadette Mbia, 50 year old, Director of Orientation of life and of the School Assistances at the ministry of Secondary Education, Douala, the 23 July 2021.

⁵² *Cameroon Tribune* 2020, p. 5.

⁵³ Interview with Adjebou Asseme Ngonon, 46 years old, Director of the 4th Center District of Yaounde, at Yaounde, the 12 November 2021.

⁵⁴ *Idem*.

⁵⁵ *Cameroon Tribune* 2020, p. 6.

African customary law disposes of a non distinction between the two meanings. In other words, the conception of "right" as what is rightfully the property of the individual, is hardly conceivable in the societies and peoples of Cameroon!

Is it to say that the woman is an object and her existence and role are purely limited? The subject is debated between the disciplines of the human sciences of Cameroon! Severin Cecil Abega notes that the Cameroonian woman had an essential function in society, as does the sociologist Henri Ngoa⁵⁶. All in all, colonization will impose its vision of the place of women in Cameroonian societies.

The decrees subsequent to the mandate system, integrated the social dimension as a counterpart of the civilizing work. It is in this sense that the work carried out by the administrators had for objectives, to register the need to make the woman, an asset of European civilization! This is the meaning of the Jacquinet decree of 1955 which opens the way to the schooling of young girls and the limitation of age to early marriage. Can one think that the normative framework was going to prevent the maintenance of traditional rules on the status of the spouse understood as a wife in the colonial social philosophy?

In fact, Cameroonian customary rules are largely unfavourable to the wife, to the extent that she is sometimes reified. The common principle of polygamy and the importance of the cult of the "boy" in all influential societies at this level⁵⁷. However, the reason of judges, influenced by the legislator and the doctrine but adapting above all to modernity, should more and more prevail over the force of dehumanizing African custom!

Indeed, what can a wife do in a society where Man is written in lower case! Can African customary law not be considered as the law of the "male"! One can agree with this in view of the work of anthropologists of African law such as Gonidec. This is one of the reasons why, a few decades ago, the doctrine considered that "customary law is conceived as a law that has not yet managed to rise to the level of modern law. It is an underdeveloped, inferior, primitive law". Far from any negation, this acception must be relativized insofar as some customs are not dehumanizing and mentalities are evolving.⁵⁸

The independence of Cameroon opens the way to the civil service and the problem of the employability of women is quickly posed. The traditional mores that give predominance push some people to:

- either to refuse that their wives work;

⁵⁶ H .Ngoa, *Non la femme n'était pas opprimée*, UY, Annales de la FLS H, 1990.

⁵⁷ Interview with Pempeme Adamou, 35 years old, Doctorate in Political Science at the University of Douala, realised on the 12 Octobre 2021.

⁵⁸ *Idem*.

- or that the latter cannot enjoy the wages of her labor.

In both cases, the Cameroonian State ratified this fact through the Napoleonic code then in force in France as regards the civil code. It appears that: not only certain functions, in spite of the theoretical principle of equality, are "closed" to women, but that for many men, equal pay for gender is an attack on their masculinity⁵⁹. As a result, one informant noted that her husband had control over her bank accounts, even though she was a state employee.

This situation also concerns the right to retirement. The latter is recognized to the wife in case of failure or abuse of her husband's right without this hurting sensitivities. History shows that this principle of positive law has been disregarded in Cameroonian societies, in the sense that wives in the 70s and 80s found themselves robbed by their families-in-law who

- Either contested the inheritance procedure ;
- Or decided to manage not only the property, but also the assets and death and retirement pensions of either the spouse or the wife.

However, the right to retirement is a noble means available to the woman to force her husband to respect her dignity or to act in the interest of the family. From there, a problem arises, that of the conception of the notion of family; for the man, it is a social platform which is limited to his family essentially.

For the woman, the family is a whole and she cannot break with her family universe, although she has founded a new social sphere. In accordance with this fact, Cameroonian law does not seem to have evolved on certain questions. This is the case of the "right of correction" that the husband has over his wife. The man is in the position of the Alpha male as Claude Levis Strauss recognized in his description of pre-colonial societies.

However, the jurisprudence on the right of correction should, unless it has already been, undergo a long-awaited reversal in order to respect human rights, the principles of which have been integrated into the Constitution of 18 January 1996.

It is foreseen in its preamble that: "Every person has the right to life and to physical and moral integrity. They must be treated with humanity in all circumstances. In no case may they be subjected to torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. This calls into question the principles of traditional widowhood and the subsequent rites that are not very rewarding for women.

⁵⁹ Interview with Pempeme Adamou, 35 years old, Doctorate in Political Science at the University of Douala, realised on the 12 Octobre 2021.

This is why the Cameroonian State ensures that the constitutional principles are fully respected. However, this evolution is not enough, because there are still wishes to improve the condition of the wife. The first is to contain polygamy, which is the fact that a husband has several wives. Although it grants privileges to the husband, this system exists because it has an economic interest. This theory can be challenged by the principles related to both:

- Sharia law and hadiths in the northern part of Cameroon;
- The African mentality which would like a man to be distinguished by his goods and his number of children.

However, on the basis of equality between spouses, it is questionable and contested despite the jurisprudential effort to adapt custom to the rules of written law. Doctrinal writers agree that the ingenuity of the case law in this area does not seem to be sufficient because it is far from being a panacea.

Whatever the legislative and jurisprudential will, the solutions brought to polygamy will only be a way to improve the condition of women. But the most realistic way to solve this problem would be to avoid extremist solutions such as the admission of "integral polygamy" or the pure and simple suppression of polygamy. Since it cannot provide "bliss" in a context marked by customs, Cameroonian law finds ways to alleviate the suffering of the wife. The lesser evil would then be to marginalize polygamy. The formula would therefore not be, as is the case in the draft, to go back on the current rule by making polygamy an exception.

It would be preferable to opt for a reasonable polygamy limited by the legislator to a determined number of wives: the married man should no longer indefinitely enlarge his "harem" in the name of polygamy⁶⁰.

This solution would at least have the double advantage of reducing conflicts and allowing wives to share more often the confidences of their husbands. African tradition shows that the first wife has a role of adviser to her husband. This is the reason why the husband needs her anointing to start a conjugal relationship.

The more he multiplies his households, the more there is a risk of tension and the less his wives are satisfied with him. The degree of satisfaction in certain societies has often pushed women to revolt or to complain, as in the Mevungu rite among the Beti.

⁶⁰ Interview with Pempeme Adamou, 35 years old, Doctorate in Political Science at the University of Douala, realised on the 12 Octobre 2021.

However, although they have opted willingly for polygamy, they do not ask for much more than to be happy! That is to say, at least to be close and in harmony with their husbands. The second wish is to evolve towards a better recognition of the wife's rights over her children. The question at this level is who is responsible for the education of the child? The work of Dalilou Hamadou among the Foulbé shows that there is a segmentation in terms of age in the management of children⁶¹.

On the other hand, the mother could only exercise her power in case of crisis. It can be assumed, given the nature of the political regime, that this aspect strengthened the control of society, which never ceased to express its opposition to the dictatorial regime. Hence, Ahmadou Ahidjo, father of the nation, was to consider it paradoxical that the notion of "paternal power" could even be debatable with the woman! One can speculate on the question, but the origins and the practices of governance of the political character as Gaillard notes are relevant elements of analysis. This is why the expression of "paternal power" seems to find all its sense because, in the hypothesis of a "normal life", the power of the mother on her children would be inexistent! In reality, it exists, but, she did not often exercise it "beating drums". The archives and the sources consulted show that, the expression "paternal power" in the legitimate family seems excessive, because the father is not so "powerful" as one can believe! Certainly, he remains, the principal person in charge of the family, but not only, the consultation of his wife is imposed to him; in addition, he must also take into account the interest of the child. One can therefore think and find that since the first Cameroonian constitution of 1960 and the subsequent legal texts, the status of women in this respect has been permanently reviewed and corrected by the public authorities⁶².

Consequently, the question arises as to whether instead of "paternal power", the expression "parental authority" should be used.

B- Assessment of the status of women's rights in Cameroon

The improvement of gender equality and the empowerment of women are among the major challenges of Cameroon for the achievement of the objectives set out in its Vision 2035, as instructed in its Growth and Employment Strategy Paper and the realization of the MDGs. Thus, Cameroon has put in place a Socio-Economic Development Policy focused on gender equality. A specific ministerial department has been created to address these issues at

⁶¹ Interview with Awah Ramatou Abdel, 78 years old, Retired teacher, Maroua, realise on the 22 october 2021.

⁶² M. Nkouendjin-Yotnda, " Du droit de « boxer » sa femme ", *Penant*, n° 755, 1977, pp. 5-9.

the national level. Furthermore, the country has developed and implemented a National Gender Policy since 2010.

As part of the fight against poverty and efforts to promote sustainable development, Cameroon developed in 2009 the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper, which constitutes the reference framework for government interventions for the period 2010-2020 and is based on the SDGs⁶³. Through this instrument, the Government affirms its desire to focus its actions on wealth creation, to ensure a proper distribution of the fruits of growth. It also affirms its desire to pursue the achievement of the SDGs as a whole, in order to become an emerging country by 2035.

Among the priorities defined in the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper, the theme of gender equality and women's empowerment occupies an important place, as it is a factor of underdevelopment and a major problem to be solved in order to achieve emergence.

In order to respond to the challenges it faces in terms of gender, and in particular the achievement of the related MDGs, the Government of Cameroon has adopted a National Gender Policy to serve as a framework for guiding interventions in the area of promoting gender equality and equity. The general objective of the National Gender Policy is to contribute to the systematic elimination of inequalities between women and men at all levels of social life.

Although many efforts have been made by the government and other development partners, the situation of women in Cameroon is still a major issue:

In the education sector, girls are less likely to complete their studies than boys. The gross enrollment rate for girls in primary school is 110% compared to 125% for boys. At the secondary level, this rate drops to 53% for girls compared to 65% for their male counterparts, which justifies a fairly high dropout rate for girls.

In the health sector, HIV prevalence is still very high among women, at 5% among women aged 15-64, compared with 2.3% among men in the same age group. 34% of women have difficulty accessing health care, especially in rural areas, where this proportion sometimes reaches more than 50% in the East and Far North regions. Maternal mortality increased from 634 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2004 to 738 in 2011.

⁶³ www.G. Chin, Women fighting poverty in Cameroon : A legal perspective, consulted on the 22nd of Juin 2022 at 2PM.

With regard to violence against women and girls, statistics show that 54.6% of women have been victims of some form of violence since the age of 15, compared with 9.8% of men. Domestic violence affects 52.6% of women; 1.4% of women have undergone genital mutilation, with proportions reaching 20% in the Far North and South West regions. Finally, early marriage affects 11.4% of young girls.

On the socio-economic level, women in Cameroon make up 51.5% of those living below the poverty line out of a national average of 39%. However, these women spend an average of 8.2 hours more per week on unpaid domestic work and 79.2% are underemployed. The female unemployment rate is 4.5% compared to 3.1% for men. Moreover, 50.6% of women contribute to the financing of household expenses and 63.2% to their personal expenses. However, only 3% of women own a house without a land title and 1.6% own a land title in their name. In fact, the statistics of the Ministry in charge of land affairs show that only 13.6% of the land titles issued in Cameroon since 1972 belong to women. It is therefore easy to understand that only 16.8% of women benefit from a credit for any use⁶⁴.

In the area of digital economy and despite the efforts made, we observe that 32.8% of girls aged 15-24 years have access to a computer against 47.5% of boys and 18.9% of girls aged 15-24 years use the internet against 39% of boys⁶⁵.

In terms of political leadership and participation, 99% of women do not hold political or leadership positions: the current data show the following situation

Table 9: Summary of the distribution of political and administrative positions

Domaine of responsibilities	WOMEN	MEN
Municipal Executifs	8,3% (31)	91,7% (343)
Leader of political parties	13	278
Parliamentarians	31% (56 Parliamentarians) 26% (26 Senators)	61% (124 Parliamentarians) 74% (74 Senators)
Constitutionnal Council (Juges)	1	10
Ministers and assimilated	11	59

Source: Report of UN Women compilation 2019.

⁶⁴ MINPROFF, *Etude sur la participation des femmes...*p.23.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

At the institutional level, Cameroon, like most African countries, has ratified the majority of international conventions and resolutions promoting women's rights. Thus, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was signed on June 6, 1983. Similarly, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Maputo Protocol, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the MDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Addis Ababa Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa have all been ratified by the Government of Cameroon. Moreover, an autonomous ministry in charge of gender issues was created. Although the normative framework that contributes to the promotion and protection of women's rights contains many relevant international, regional and national legal instruments, it does not guarantee the exercise and enjoyment by women of all the rights thus recognized. The bills initiated several years ago, including one on violence against women and the other on the Personal and Family Code, have not yet been adopted.

Among the factors that limit the impact of these laws, we can mention, among others, the insufficient popularization of these laws, the insufficient harmonization of domestic legislation with international legal instruments specific to the protection of women's rights, the mixed application of the legal and regulatory provisions in force, the coexistence of written law and custom, and the reluctance of certain judicial actors to apply the laws⁶⁶.

The improvement of gender equality and the empowerment of women are among the major challenges of Cameroon for the achievement of the objectives set in its Vision 2035, its Growth and Employment Strategy Paper and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals⁶⁷.

Aware of these stakes on the development of the country, the Government of Cameroon, with the support of development partners and the civil society, has led these last five years, a set of strong actions aiming at improving the status and condition of women and girls in several domains.

In terms of progress made over the last 5 years, we should note

- The strengthening of the internal legal framework on gender equality and women's empowerment and its progressive linkage to the CEDAW;

⁶⁶ Interview with Pempeme Adamou, 35 years old, Doctorate in Political Science at the University of Douala, realised on the 12 Octobre 2021.

⁶⁷ Tjouen, *La condition de la femme en droit camerounais de la famille...*, p. 18.

- Improving women's access to political decision-making (Senate, Government) and in non-elective positions (State companies, public administration, diplomacy, territorial command, justice, etc.)

- Improving maternal and child health, including reproductive health and HIV
- Improving the schooling of young girls throughout the country
- Strengthening the fight against gender-based violence against women and girls
- Strengthening women's economic power, particularly in rural areas, and access to basic infrastructure, land and finance

- The promotion of women's entrepreneurship;
- Access for women and girls to key technologies, including computers and communications.

- Beyond the progress made, many challenges remain and among the most salient are insufficient popularization of existing laws, insufficient harmonization of domestic legislation with international legal instruments specific to the protection of women's rights, mixed application of legal and regulatory provisions in force, coexistence of written law and custom, reluctance of some judicial actors to apply the texts ;

- The absence of a support fund to accompany women entrepreneurs ;
- The successive humanitarian crises in the North-West, South-West, Far-North and East regions, which have undermined the many efforts made over the past several years ;
- The weak integration of gender in the policies/projects and programs of the sectors ;
- The very low budget allocated to gender issues (MINPROFF 2%);
- Weak coordination of gender interventions;
- Cultural resistance, particularly in rural areas, justifying the persistence of certain harmful cultural practices such as the marriage of young girls⁶⁸.

⁶⁸ Y. Mbassi, "2020 est un jalon essentiel dans la quête de l'égalité" *Cameroon Tribune*, 2020, p. 6.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The researched carried out on "The State of Cameroon and the issue of women's rights from 1960 to 2020", shows the action of the State of Cameroon in the promotion and respect of women's rights which is the consequence of questions based on the evolution of societies. Cameroon is not an exception to this rule. It is a reflection that it aims to enable people to better take consideration the capacities of people and gender. This consists in distinguishing the existential adaptation functionalities in an organisation that needs to fulfill its daily functions by valuing phallocracy⁶⁹. This work raises the question of the representativity of women in public policy and the problem raised by culture toward the political and constructed realities of positive law. Through the promotion of female gender and their rights in particular, we discovered the operational capacities that push women to become economic entrepreneurs and actors of their own destiny.

The said reflections make understand how to learn and adapt to the changing circumstances (adaptive capacities) which make social "faith" an obstructive principle to the development of women, hence the interest of our research. The interest of this work is to bring the State to take into account in its public policy of national and regional development the case of women, while multiplying the programs of socio-economic insertion. This will favour the development process of Cameroon. The promotion of women also favours the improvement of their living conditions and above all their empowerment, in a national context marked by poverty, of which the female layer is the most affected. This work is an appeal to the women of Cameroon and even of the world, who must become aware of their situation. They must approach international organisations, and know their rights better in order to benefit from the various projects and agreements signed by the State to improve their daily lives.

The absence of an evaluation unit for the evolution of women's promotion is therefore one of the epistemic causes of this reflection which is part of the field of social, institutional and political history. It is a chance that we were born and we grow up among women. During our primary and secondary school curriculum, we have been in contact with several women in each town we went in Cameroon. This proximity to women has permitted us to observe a series of realities that this social category has and had to face. The result of this investigation

⁶⁹ I.Jr.Ibrahima, www.FlorenceBigault.com: "*La société africaine reste profondément phallocrate*".com, *La Tribune Afrique*, consulted on the 12 Juin 2022 at 11 am.

shows that between the pre-colonial period and the post-colonial period, women were first of all seen as people who had no use in the society, referring to the common phrase, 'the place of women is at the kitchen'. Later, during the struggle for independence, women began to take an interest in the public life of the country, and campaigned in great numbers for immediate independence and later reunification with British Cameroons through political parties, trade unions and others, which will be a way for women to request for strategic positions in order to find for solution to ameliorate women conditions and rights. Furthermore, a more in-depth investigation into the life of this social component has shown that most of them are not scolarised, which is undoubtedly one of the reasons why they had and continue to have difficulty integrating into the political, economic and in the social world. Not to mention the barriers of culture. It is this reality that has led to the focus of this research topic on this vulnerable category of the population.

Each of the basic types of analysis has been used with the clear intention of updating the praxis of a state which, in the face of international conventions and laws, which has been acting in order to emphasise on the need for the empowerment of women's organisational capacities since the Beijing conference and the creation of institutional structures. One of the goals is that of the strategic leadership. The latter includes operational and adaptive elements that justify the consideration of gender concerns. Here one of the concerns highlighted by the methodology is interdisciplinarity. This was possible thanks to the oral, written and iconographic sources gathered and collected during the field surveys, not to forget about the methods of quantitative analysis of the facts observed during the research which made it possible to understand how the public policy initiated by the State of Cameroon since independence, had a major impact, especially on the political, economic and social domaine.

In my humble opinion, the situation of Cameroonian women has improved considerably since independence, even thou, disparities remain a reality, due to age-old sexist prejudices and certain inappropriate socio-cultural survivals. Political will and the irreversible evolution of time, I am convinced, will eventually get the better of them. By way of illustration, and without the slightest pretension to exhaustiveness, I shall mention the field of education, where the indicators are ostensibly in line with international standards, as shown both by the completed evaluation of the former Millennium Development Goals and by the follow-up to the 12 critical areas of concern of the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. For example, the rate of attendance at pre-school programs

is 27% for boys and 23% for girls. In terms of female representation in public life, Cameroon is ranked 42nd out of 180 countries on the gender inequality index⁷⁰.

⁷⁰W.I.L.P.F., Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Cameroon : Parallel report to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 65th Session, Channel Fondation, Yaounde, 2019, p. 7.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

A- PUBLISHED SOURCES

1. General books

Abwa, D., *André Marie Mbida, premier premier ministre Camerounais 1917-1980*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 1993.

Balandier, G., *Sens et puissance*, Paris, PUF, 1971.

Boniface P., " *Les Relations Internationales de 1945 à nos jours : comment sommes nous arrivés là ?*", Paris, Eyrolles, 2020.

Bourdieu P., *Le sens pratique*, Paris, les Éditions de minuit, 1980.

Cornu, G., *Droit civil, la famille*, 9e éd., Paris, Montchrestien, 2006.

Décaux E., "*Les institutions nationales de protection des droits de l'homme, nouveaux acteurs des relations internationales*", in Collection Les Conférences Publique du Centre d'Excellence Jean Monnet Université Pierre-Mendès-France-Grenoble, 2012.

Deltombe Thomas, Jacob Tatsitsa, Manuel Domergue, *Kamerun ! une guerre cachée aux origines de la France-Afrique*, Paris, La Découverte, 2019.

Engels, F., *L'origine de la famille, de la propriété privée et de l'Etat : pour faire suite aux travaux de Lewis Morgan*, Paris, Carré 1er Edition, 1893.

Eteki Otabela M. L. , *Le totalitarisme des Etats africains : le cas du Cameroun*, Paris, L'Harmattan 2016.

Gaillard Philippe., *Ahmadou Ahidjo, Patriote et despote, Bâtitteur de l'Etat Cameroun*, Paris, JA/ L Harmattan, 1989/1994.

Hayek, *Droit, législations*, Paris, LGDJ, 2011.

Illitch I., *Une Société sans école*, Paris, le seuil, 1963.

Bayart J.F, *L'Etat du Cameroun*, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris, 1979.

Jouve E., *L'Organisation de l'Unité Africaine*, Paris, PUF, 1984.

Kange Ewane F., *Semence et Moisson coloniales : un regard d'Africain sur l'histoire de la colonisation*, Yaoundé, éditions, Clé, 1985

Marx K., Engels F., Châtelet F., *Manifeste du Parti Communiste*, Paris, Editin Champ Libre, 1848.

Merle M., *Sociologie des relations internationales*, Paris, 3^e Edition, Dalloz, 1982.

Ngniman Z., *Les chemins de la démocratie*, Yaoundé, Edi 'Action, 2003.

Nken Ndjeng P., *L'idée nationale dans le Cameroun sous administration française 1920-1960*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2012.

Prévoist B., *Droits et lutte contre la pauvreté : où en sont les institutions de Bretton Woods ?* Mode en développement, Centre d'étude des marchés et des inégalités, Universités Montpellier, 2004.

Rousseau J. J., *Du contrat social ou principes du Droit politique*, Amsterdam, Marc-Michel Rey, 1762.

Roussel J., *Leçons de Déontologie coloniale*, Bruxelles, Secrétariat Catholique pour Coloniaux, 1944.

Ki-Zerbo J., *Histoire de l'Afrique noire. D'hier à demain Tome 61*, Paris, Revue d'histoire, 1974.

UNESCO, *Femmes au Pays : Effet de la migration sur les femmes dans les cultures méditerranéennes*, Paris, Place de Fontenoy, 1985

2. Specific books

Barbier J. C., *Femmes du Cameroun, Mères pacifiques, femmes rebelles*, Paris, ORSTOM-Karthala, 1993.

Barthélémy P., *Africaines et diplômées à l'époque coloniale*, Rennes, Presses Universitaire de 2010.

Bochet De The M. P., *Rite et association traditionnelles chez les femmes beti du sud Cameroun*, Paris, Orstom-Karthala, 2003.

Chelini-Pont, B. *Les Droits de la femme dans la Déclaration Universelle des Droit de l'Homme*, Pari, CNCNDH-PSL-EPHE-Science Politique, 2018.

CIOMS et OMS, *Lignes Directrices Internationales d'éthique pour la recherche biomédicale impliquant des sujets humains*, Genève, CIOMS, 2003.

Conquery-Vidrovitch C., *Les Africaines : histoire des femmes d'Afrique noire du XIXe siècle*, Desjonquères, Paris, 1994.

Daikollé Daissala, *Libre derrière les Barreaux*, Paris, éditions Jaguar, 1993.

Ela, J.M., *Restituer l'histoire aux sociétés africaines. Promouvoir les sciences sociales en Afrique noire*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1994.

Fame Ndong, J., *La femme camerounaise et la promotion du patrimoine culturel national*, Yaoundé, Edition CLE, 2002.

Guadilla N. G. *Libération des femmes*, Paris, Presses Universitaire de France, 1981. .

Guétat-Bernard, *Développement rural et rapports de genre, mobilité et argent au Cameroun*, Renne, Presses Universitaires de Renne, 2013.

Henri, W., *Le « Renouveau » et les droits de l'Homme : Entre discours, lois et praxis*, Yaoundé, Muntunews-Cameroun, 2021

Houndjahoué M. " *Le Décret Jacquinot et les questions de fiançailles, des dots et mariages dans le bas-Benin*", Québec, Université Laval, 1984.

Join-Lambert M.T., *Les politiques sociales, 130 années d'histoire, la grande transformation depuis 1973*, Paris, Presse de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques-Daloz, 1998.

Joseph. R., *Le Mouvement Nationaliste au Cameroun, les origines sociales de l'UPC*, Paris, Karthala, 1986.

Kabou A., *Et si l'Afrique refusait le développement ?*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1991.

Konde E., *African Women and Politics: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Male-dominated Cameroon*, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2005.

Lochak. D, *Les Droits de l'homme*, Paris, La Découverte, 2009.

M'baye, K. " *Les droits de l'homme en Afrique*", Paris, Ed. A. Pedone, 1992.

Mballa-Kyé, A. *La pastorale dans une ville d'Afrique*, Nordheim, Cerdic – publications, 1995,

Minkoa She A., *Droits de l'homme et droit pénal au Cameroun*, Paris, Economica, 1999.

Ndi Mbarga V., *Ruptures et Continuités au Cameroun*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 1993.

Ngadjui N., *Les droits politiques de la femme au Cameroun*, Yaoundé, Zaye, 1990

Ngapeth Biyong M. I., *Cameroun : Combats pour l'indépendance*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2010.

Ngoa, H., *Non, la femme africaine n'était pas opprimée*, Yaoundé, CLE, 1975.

O.N.U, *La Déclaration Universelle des Droits de l'Homme*, Paris, O.N.U, 1948.

Ondoua, A., *La constitution Camerounaise du 18 janvier 1996 : Bilan et perspectives*, Yaoundé, Afrédit, 2007.

Paligot. C. R., *La République raciale 1860-1930*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2006.

TLFI, *Femme, le Trésor de la langue française informatisé*, Paris, L'Université de Lorraine, 1994.

MINPROFF, *Etude sur la participation des femmes à la vie publique au Cameroun*, Yaoundé, SOPECAM, 2008.

B- NEWS PAPERS AND ARTICLES

Larivée S. J., Kalubi J. C. et Terrisse B., *"La collaboration école-famille en contexte d'inclusion : entre obstacle, risques et facteurs de réussite"*, Paris, *Revue des sciences de l'éducation*, Volume 32, 2006.

Post A. *"Comment l'histoire fait-elle l'historien ?"* Paris, *Revue d'Histoire*, 2000.

Mbengué Nguimé M., *"L'armée de libération nationale Kamerunaise et sa stratégie"*, Outre-Mers, *Revue d'histoire*, Paris, 2010

Amaduime, "Sexuality, African Religio-Cultural Traditions and Modernity: Expanding the lens", *CODESCIA bulletin special issue: The African Woman 1 and 2*, 2006.

Diehl P.F. Druckman, D., "Evaluating peace operations", *Institut Québécois des Hautes Etudes Internationales*, 2010.

Diop M. C et Diof, M., *Les figures du politique en Afrique : des pouvoirs hérités aux pouvoirs élus*, Kathala Editions, 1999.

Gonidec, P. F., "Cours de droit du travail africain et malgache, cité In : Revue internationale de droit comparé", Paris, Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1967.

Lebeuf, A. "The Role of Women in the Political Organisation of African Societies", In Paulme D. Editions, *Women of Tropical Africa*, 1963.

Mbaye. J. B., "Le vote des femmes au Sénégal", Dakar, Ethiopique : Revue socialiste de culture négro-africaine, 1976.

Mignot A., "Droit coutumier et anthropologie juridique", *Revue de la LGDJ*, Penant, 1977.

Morris W.H. "*Production, commercialisation et exportation de l'arachide : Sénégal, Gambie, Mali, Burkina-Faso et Niger*", Programme américain d'appui à la recherche collaborative sur l'arachide (PEANUT CRSP), Université de Géorgie, 1982.

Ndengue R, "Mobilisations féminines au Cameroun français dans les années 1940-1950 : L'ordre du genre et l'ordre colonial fissurés", Paris, Revue d'histoire, 2016.

Nkouendjin-Yotnda, M. " Du droit de « boxer » sa femme ", *Penant*, n° 755, 1977

Ombiono S., "Le mariage coutumier dans le droit positif camerounais", Paris, Penant : Revue de droit des pays d'Afrique, 1989.

SAC, "La civilisation de la femme dans la tradition africaine", Présence Africaine, Paris, 1972.

Tchibindat F., "Plaidoyer pour les femmes et les enfants du Cameroun 2013-2017", Yaoundé, Mediaterrée-UNICEF, 2015.

Tickner J. A., " Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism", *Millenium : Journal of International Studies*, winter, 1988. Tjouen, A. F. "*La condition de la femme en droits Camerounais de la famille, Vol. 64*", Paris, Revue Internationale de droit comparé", 2012.

Vromen S., " Georg Simmel et le dilemme culturel des femmes", Paris, *Les cahiers du Grif*, 1989.

ZIEMINE NGOUMOU E., *Droits des femmes : Les avancées saluées*, Cameroon Tribune, Yaounde, 2020.

Azize Mbohou, *Exécutifs communaux : Les femmes ont leur place*, Cameroun Tribune, Yaoundé, 2020.

C- PROCEEDINGS OF CONFERENCES, MEETINGS AND SYMPOSIA

Conseil P. et Njock Nje Y., "La femme dans le secteur informel et le crédit", 1993.

Diffo Tchunkam J., "Appui en faveur de l'appropriation sociale et la mise en œuvre effective de la CEDEF, Institut de Coopération pour le Développement", Bureau d'Appui à la Coopération Canadienne, 2006.

Binet J. "Le statut des femmes au Cameroun Forestier", In : la femme Recueils de la société Jean Bodin, Bruxelles, Recueils de la société Jean Bodin, 1959.

Kam Kah, "Womens Resistance in Cameroon's Western Grassfields: The power of symbols, Organisation, and leadership 1957-1961", *Center for African Studies*, University of Florida, 2011.

MASCOF : *La femme Camerounaise de demain : Actes du symposium*, Yaoundé, MINASCOF, 1989.

MINAS, "La femme camerounaise de demain", actes du symposium du 7 et 8 mars 1989, Yaoundé, édition MINASCOF, 1989.

MINCOF, Recueil de textes juridiques relatif à la promotion et à la protection des droits de la femme, MINCOF, Yaoundé, 2004.

Ministère de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation, "les Grandes figures du Cameroun", Yaoundé, 2013.

MINPROFF et Coopération Française, *Recueil de textes juridiques relatif à la promotion et à la protection des droits de la femme*, 2004.

Nga Ndong, V., "Femmes, Société et politique", Séminaire de l'OFRDPC, 8 et 9 janvier 2010.

D- DICTIONARIES AND METHODOLOGICAL BOOKS

1. Dictionaries

Bouillet, N. *Dictionnaire Universel des Sciences, des Lettres et des Arts*, Paris, Hachette, 1874.

Dictionnaire Le Robert, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2005.

Larousse Dictionnaire étymologique, Paris, France, 1971.

Petrequin G., *Le Dictionnaire François" de P. Richelet : Etude de métalexigraphie historique*, Paris, Peeters, 2009.

Raynouard, F., *Lexique roman ou Dictionnaire de la langue des troubadours, comparée avec les autres langues de l'Europe latine*, Paris, Chez Silvestre, 1844.

2. Methodological books

Beaud, M., *L'art de la thèse : comment préparer et rédiger une thèse de doctorat, un mémoire de DEA ou de maîtrise ou tout autre travail universitaire*, Paris, La découverte, 1985.

Grawitz, M., *Méthodes des sciences sociales*, Paris, Dalloz, 11^{ème} édition, 2001.

Kuhn. TH. S., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1962.

E- THESES AND MASTERS DISSERTATIONS

1. PHD DISSERTATION

Apala Moiffo, C., "L'émergence d'une culture des droits des femmes aux Cameroun" ; Diplôme d'Université de 3^{ème} cycle en Droit Fondamentaux Nante", Paris, 2005.

Mbalat-Kyé, "Société droit et pastorale dans une ville d'Afrique, Thèse de doctorat en Histoire du droit et des institutions : Yaoundé", Université Marc Bloch, Strasbourg, 1995.

Tsala Tsala C., " Les détenus politique au Cameroun", Département d'Histoire de l'Université de Yaoundé I, Thèse de doctorat Ph.D, 2006.

2. MASTERS DISSERTATION

Bilongo B., *Les pahouins du sud Cameroun : Inventaires bibliographiques ; Connaissance des Fang, Ntoumou, Mvaé, Boulou, Béti (Eton, Manguissa, Mvélé, Béne et Ewondo) et du groupe dit « Sanaga »*, Université Federale de Yaoundé, 1974.

Chemmengue R., "La femme camerounaise et le droit civil", Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université de Yaoundé Département des Sciences Politiques, 1986.

Jiko, E, "L'Eglise Catholique face au mouvement nationaliste au Cameroun", Mémoire de Maitrise en Histoire (non soutenu), UY, 1978.

Mendjemi, M. G. N. "Connexité des acteurs dans le cadre de la gestion des ressources ligneuses et implication pour le développement du département de la Kadey", Mémoire présenté en vue de l'obtention du diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies en Géographie physique, septembre, 2009.

Ndjé, S., "Femmes et Maquis en pays Bassa'a", Mémoire de Maitrise en Histoire, UYI, 2008.

Wandja, I. H., "Du Comité à la Commission Nationale des Droits de l'Homme et des Libertés du Cameroun de 1990 à 2017", Mémoire de Master 2 en Histoire Economique et Sociale, Université de Yaoundé 1, 2019

Bongo, M. G., "L'influence des activités extra scolaires sur l'abandon scolaire de la jeune Gbaya de Garoua-Boulai", Mémoire en vue de l'obtention du certificat d'aptitudes pédagogiques d'instituteur de l'enseignement Maternel et Primaire, 2009.

Oloa Ndi, C. "Femmes, leadership et développement au Cameroun : Images, perceptions et réalités", Mémoire de Master, Faculté des Sciences Sociale, Développement International et mondialisation, 2020.

Pougoue, P. G. "La protection des droits de la personnalité par le juge Camerounais", Master en droits de l'homme et action humanitaire, Université Catholique d'Afrique Centrale, 2009,

F- INTERNET SOURCES

« Protocole à la Charte africaine des droits de l'homme et des peuples relatif aux droits des femmes en Afrique », Addis-Abeba, 1995, <https://www.Union Africaine.fr.>, consulted on the 13 August 2021, at 5PM 37.

Le « repassage des seins », une mutilation encore très pratiquée au Cameroun, France Television – Africa Editorial Office, 2014, <https://www.wikipedia.fr> consulted on ligne 17 March 2022, at 3PM 37min.

INS, « *Etat et structure de la population : indicateurs démographiques* », [http://www.Institut National de Statistique du Cameroun.fr.](http://www.InstitutNationaldeStatistiqueduCameroun.fr), consulted on ligne le 23-06-2021 at 1PM.

Ki-Zerbo J., "Honneur et respect", [https://www.honneur et respect de Joseph Ki-Zerbo.com.](https://www.honneur-et-respect-de-joseph-ki-zerbo.com), consulted on the 20th December 2020 at 11 am.

Landais-Barrau, P., *Le «repassage des seins», une mutilation encore très pratiquée au Cameroun, France Télévisions-Rédaction Afrique 2014*», <http://www.france24afrique.fr>, Consoltd on the 11 April 2022, at 10 am.

Lebrun, P. B., "La vulnérabilité", *Cairn.info*, 2015, <http://www.vulnérabilité.fr>, Consoltd on the 11 April 2022, at 10 PM.

Mouich, I. "Genre et commandement territorial au Cameroun", *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines*, Yaoundé, 2007, <http://www.GenreetcommandementterritorialauCameroun.fr>, Consoltd on the 13 April 2022, at 10 am.

Ngono Assogo, E. « *Violence à l'égard des femmes : Cas du Cameroun* », consulted on ligne on the 16 August 2021 at 23PM 36Min in <https://www.ASK.com>.

Ntap. E. J., "Reportage sur le faible taux de scolarisation des filles au Cameroun", VOA- Afrique, Yaoundé, 2020, <http://www.GenreetcommandementterritorialauCameroun.fr>, Consoltd on the 11 June 2022, at 2 PM.

Thon, P. D, *Le livre de Sibylle*, In : *Romania*, Tome 85 n° 340, 1964, pp. 455-477. « Etat définitions », <https://www.Larousse.fr> consulted on the 13 August 2021 at 16PM

I.Jr.Ibrahima, www.FlorenceDeBigault.com: "*La société africaine reste profondement phallocrate*".com, *La Tribune Afrique*, consulted on the 12 Juin 2022 at 11 am.

G- ARCHIVAL SOURCES

1. DECREE, LAWS AND CONVENTIONS

- Decrees

Decree No. 64/DF/544 of 19 December 1969.

Décret Présidentiel n°75/467 du 28 Juin 1975, du *Journal Cameroon Tribune*, p.3.

Decree N°97/205 of the 7 December 1997 on the organisation of the government.

Le décret n°80/199 du 09 juin 1980.

Decree n° 2003/011/PM of the 09 January 2003.

- **Laws!**

Constitution of the 4th of March 1960 of the Republic of Cameroon.

Constitution of the 1st of October 1966 of the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

Constitution of the 2nd of Juin 1972 of the United Republic of Cameroon.

Constitution of the 18th January 1996 of the Republic of Cameroon.

Law N°96/6 of 18 janvier 1996 on the revision of the Constitution, amended and completed by Law N°2008/001 of 14 avril 2008, Yaounde Nationale printing house, 2008.

Loi N°2004/016 du 22 Juillet 2004, portant creation, organisation et fonctionnement de la Commission Nationale des Droits de l'Homme et des Libertés du Cameroun

Loi N° 2010/004 du 13 Avril 2010, modifiant et completant certaines dispositions de la loi N° 2004/016 du 22 Juillet 2004, portant creation, organization et fonctionnement de la Commission ationale des Droits de l'Homme et des Libertés du Cameroun

- **Conventions**

UNO, *the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948*.

U.N.O, La Résolution 1325 du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU sur les femmes, la paix et la sécurité, UN Plaza, New York, 2005.

UNICEF, *La Convention sur l'Elimination de toutes les formes de Discrimination à l'égard des Femme*, UN Plaza, New York, 2011.

Women in Research and Action, *The Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women*, UNIFEM-CAMX, p.9.

- **Reports**

CNDHL, *Rapports sur l'état des droits au Cameroun en 2015*, Yaoundé, M. E. Printer, 2016.

Kum P., *La Haut-Commissaire aux Droits de l'Homme en visite au Cameroun*", l'Agence Presse Anadolu, Yaoundé, 2019".

Rapport, MINCOF, L'institution maison de la femme perspective d'une action de redynamisation : Rapport de la Commission Nationale d'Etude et de Relance des Œuvres Privées de Promotion Feminine, MINCOF- Yaounde, 1986.

Rapport, MINASCOF, La femme Camerounaise de demain, MINASCOF, Yaoundé, 1989,

Rapport of Human Right Watch in Cameroun of 1993, p.7.

Report of United Nations on CEDAW: Experts support Cameroon in implementing its Action Plan for Women and Development, Press Release, 2000.

Report of the MINSA 2014.

Report of Human Rights Watch of 2014.

Rapport sur les Droits de l'Homme au Cameroun, Human Rights Watch, 2018.

Report of the National Institution of Statistic 2000.

MINPROFF, Etude sur la participation des femmes à la vie publique au Cameroun, Projet CAREF, SOPECAM, Yaoundé, 2004.

Rapport ONU FEMME, République du Cameroun : Plan d'Action National de la Résolution 1325 et des Résolutions Connexes du Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies sur les Femmes, la Paix et la Sécurité, ONU FEMMES, Yaoundé, 2017,

Rapport du MINEDUB 2017.

Rapport, ONU Femmes, "Rapport de l'Etat du Cameroun au titre du 25^{eme} anniversaire du Programme et de la Plateforme d'Action de Beijing 2014-2019", ONU Femme- Yaoundé, 2019.

Report of Human Rights Watch", quoted in rapport de la Commission des Droits de l'Homme. Minjustice, 2019.

Report of MINPROFF 2020.

« Report of Amnesty International on the situation of Human Rights in Cameroun 2020 », consult on the 21 August, at 13h18min in <http://www.Amnesty International.fr>

United States Department of State, "Country reports on Human Rights Practices", Bureau of

Democracy, 2018.

Report of ONU Femmes 2019.

Rapport WALL AFRICA, 2020.

- **Archival Sources**

ANOM, " Affaires politiques, 1405, Lettre du Ministre de la France d'outre-mer au gouverneur du Cameroun", Ministère des colonies, Yaoundé, 1946,p. 4.

ANY, 1AC 71 (D), UDEFEC 1955-1956, Réunion de 1955.

Mbog, A. "Vers la tenue des Etats généraux de l'éducation au Cameroun", APA, Douala, 2019.

A- Oral Sources

Number	Names and Surnames	Age	Profession	Town	Date of the interview
1	Angah Afah Mosung Njoya	48 Years old	Principal Registra at the Ministry of Justice	Yaounde	20 March 2022.
2	Assako Pauline Valerie	45 Years old	House Wife	Yaounde	12 Match 2022
3	Awah Ramatou Abdel	78 Years old	Retired Teacher	Maroua	22 october 2021 at 12 noon.
4	Balom Zita	41 Years old	Principal Registra at the Ministry of Justice	Yaounde	05 November 2021
5	Bekono Bernadette Francoise	50 Year old	Vice Director of Women's Social Empowerment	Yaounde	20 March 2022.
6	Buweh Vitalis	51 Years old	Principal Registra at the Ministry of Justice	Yaounde	12 of April 2022
7	Deffo Tchunkam Justine	60 Years old	Lecture at the University of Yaounde II	Yaounde	23 November 2021.
8	Fetue Kambou Dauline	43 Years old	Teacher	Bafoussam	11 January 2022
9	Hamadou Asta	40 Years Old	Buisness woman	Yagoua	22 August 2022
10	Kemagoua Yolande	41 Years old	Head of Département	Yaounde	24 November,

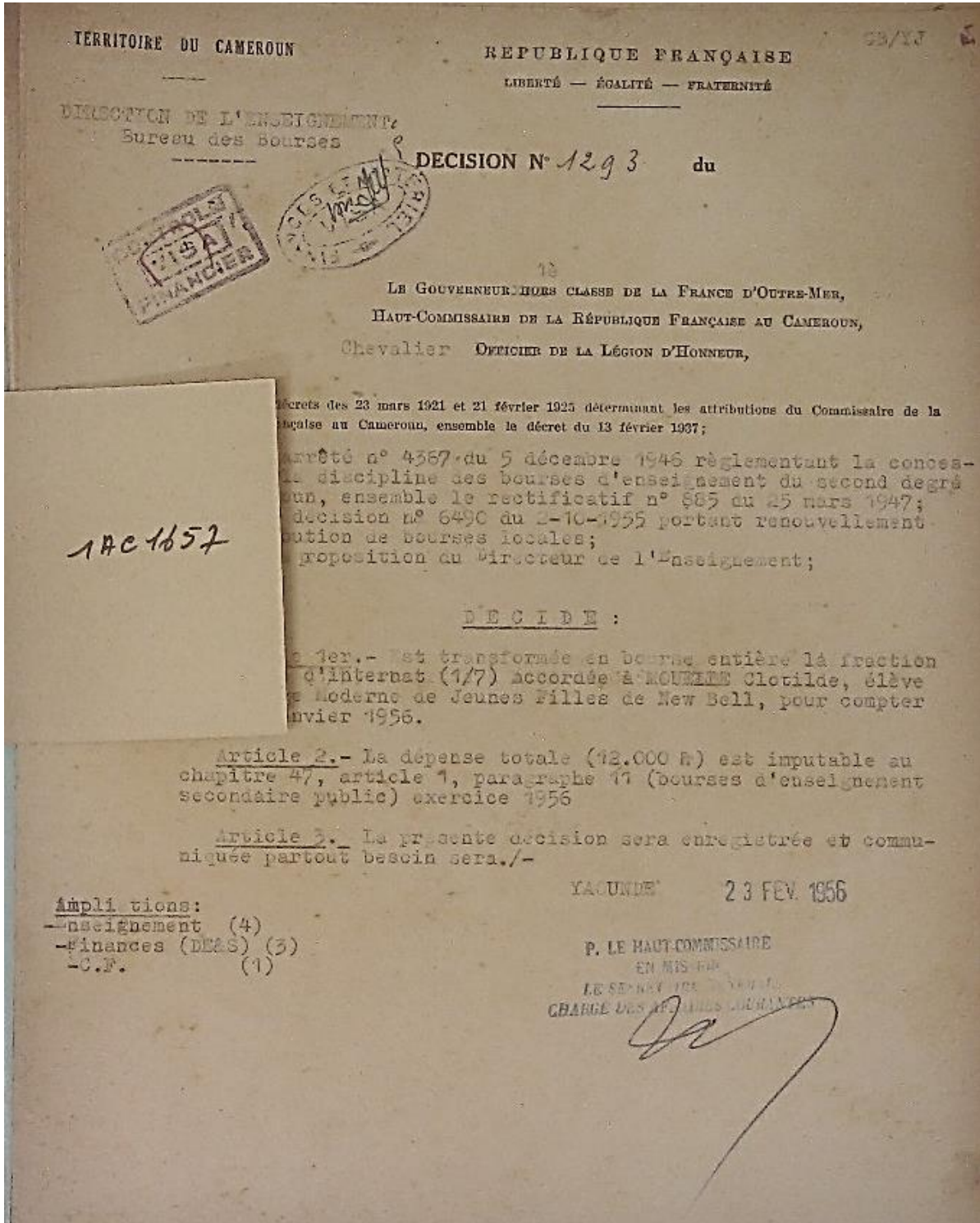
			at the Direction of Women's Right and the Family		2021
11	Mbatyoo Bella Liane Sorelle	39 Years old	Buisness Woman	Yaounde	12 Match 2022
12	Maidou Aissatou	43 Years old	Regional Inspector of Pedagogy at the Ministry of Primary Education	Garoua	10 Juin 2021
13	Mbia Bernadette	50 Years old	Director of Orientation of life and of the School Assistances at the Ministry of Secondary Education	Douala	23 July 2022
14	Meboe Jeanne	36 Year old	Head of the Departement for monitoring the inclusion of women in the economic program and projet of the Promotion of women and the Family	Yaounde	12 March 2022
15	Moluh Inoussa	41 Years old	Head f the	Yaounde	23

			Adolescent Departement at the Ministry of Public Service		November 2021
16	Mume Nfi Joachim	50 Years old	Regional Inspector of Pedagogy at the Ministry of Primary Education	Ebolowa	12 October 2021 at 11 am 23mins
17	Muna Lumiere	37 Years old	Principal Registra at the Ministry of Justice	Yaounde	20 March 2022
18	Myntiene Jacqueline Rita Epse Ngaba	40 Years old	Secretary	Yaounde	12 March 2022
19	Ndongo Obounou	44 Years old	Senior Staff at MINPOSTEL	Yaounde	13 march 2022.
20	Ngamana Else	30 Year old	Staff at the Ministry of Youth and Civil	Yaounde	13 November 2021.
21	Ngono Asseme Adjebou	46 Years old	Director of the Center District of Yaounde	Yaounde	Ngougoure Abiba
22	Ngougoure Abiba	42 Years old	House wife	Douala	07 January 2021
23	Nzie Fifen Agathe Pierrette	43 Years old	Teacher	Foumbot	22 march 2022
24	Pempeme Adamou	35 Years old	Doctorate in Political	Douala	12 October 2021

			Science at the University of Douala		
25	Sandio Hervé	40 Years old	Civil Servant at the Ministry of Justice and Docteur in Public Law	Yaounde	20 March 2022.
26	Toumbaya Aissatou	39 Years old	Buisness woman	Adamawa	10 April 2022

ANNEXES

Annexe 1: Decision N°1293



Annexe 2: DECISION N°1182

TERRITOIRE DU CAMEROUN

REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
LIBERTÉ — ÉGALITÉ — FRATERNITÉ

CB/YJ

DIRECTION DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT
Bureau des Bourses

DECISION N° 1182 du

LE GOUVERNEUR HENRI CLASSE DE LA FRANCE D'OUTRE-MER,
LE HAUT COMMISSAIRE DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE AU CAMEROUN,
Chevalier OFFICIER DE LA LÉGION D'HONNEUR,

Vu les décrets des 28 mars 1921 et 21 février 1925 déterminant les attributions du Commissaire de la République française au Cameroun, ensemble le décret du 18 février 1937;

VU l'arrêté n°4367 du 5 décembre 1946 réglementant la concession et la discipline des bourses d'enseignement du second degré au Cameroun, ensemble le rectificatif n° 885 du 29 mars 1947;

VU la décision n°6490 du 2-10-1955 portant renouvellement et attributions de bourses locales

VU le procès verbal du Conseil de Classe du Collège de Joss en date du 5 janvier 1956

Sur la proposition du Directeur de l'Enseignement;

D E C I D E :

Article 1er. - Est supprimée la bourse d'externat de la jeune NEEBE NOBA Colette, élève du Collège de Joss, à compter du 1-1-56
Motif : travail insuffisant.

Article 2. - Une somme de 2.000 F est annulée au chapitre #7, article 7, paragraphe 11 (bourses d'enseignement secondaire public) exercice 1956.

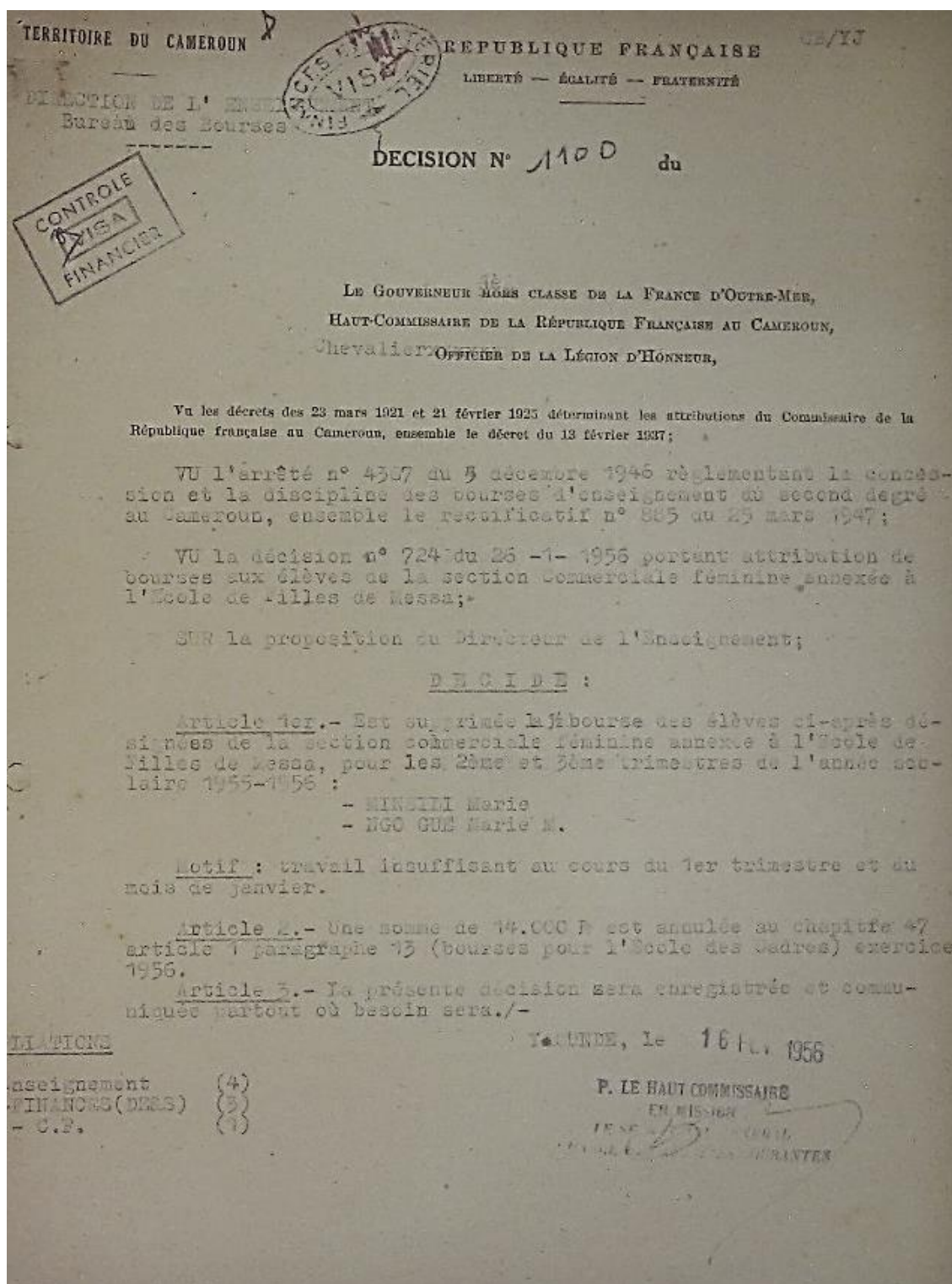
Article 3. - La présente décision sera enregistrée et communiquée partout où besoin sera./-

YACOUNDE, le 18 FEV 1956
P. LE HAUT COMMISSAIRE
EN MISSION
CHARGE DES AFF. IND. ET COMM. EXTÉRIEURES

AMPLIATIONS.
Enseignement (4)
- Finances (DESS) (3)
C.C.F. (1)

Source: ANY/IAC. 1657

Annexe 3: DECISION N°1100



Annexe 4: DECISION N°1182

TERRITOIRE DU CAMEROUN

REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
LIBERTÉ — ÉGALITÉ — FRATERNITÉ

05/13

DIRECTION DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT
Bureau des Bourses

DECISION N° 1182 du

LE GOUVERNEUR HORS CLASSE DE LA FRANCE D'OUTRE-MER,
HAUT-COMMISSAIRE DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE AU CAMEROUN,
Chevalier OFFICIER DE LA LÉGION D'HONNEUR,

Vu les décrets des 23 mars 1921 et 21 février 1925 déterminant les attributions du Commissaire de la République française au Cameroun, ensemble le décret du 13 février 1937;

VU l'arrêté n°4367 du 5 décembre 1945 réglementant la concession et la discipline des bourses d'enseignement du second degré au Cameroun, ensemble le rectificatif n° 885 du 25 mars 1947;

VU la décision n°6490 du 2-10-1955 portant renouvellement et attributions de bourses locales

VU le procès verbal du Conseil de Classe du Collège de Joss en date du 3 janvier 1956

SUR la proposition du Directeur de l'Enseignement;

D E C I S I O N :

Article 1er. - Est supprimée la bourse d'externat de la jeune MIEPHE NOBA Colette, élève du Collège de Joss, à compter du 1-1-56
Motif : travail insuffisant.

Article 2. - Une somme de 2.000 F est annulée au chapitre A7, article 7, paragraphe 11 (bourses d'enseignement secondaire public) exercice 1956.

Article 3. - La présente décision sera enregistrée et communiquée partout où besoin sera./-

COPIATIONS.
Enseignement (4)
Finances (DE&S) (3)
C.F. (1)

YAOUMÉ, le 18 FEV 1956
P. LE HAUT COMMISSAIRE
EN MIS-ION
CHARGE DES AFFAIRES COLONIALES

Annexe 5 : DECISION N°589

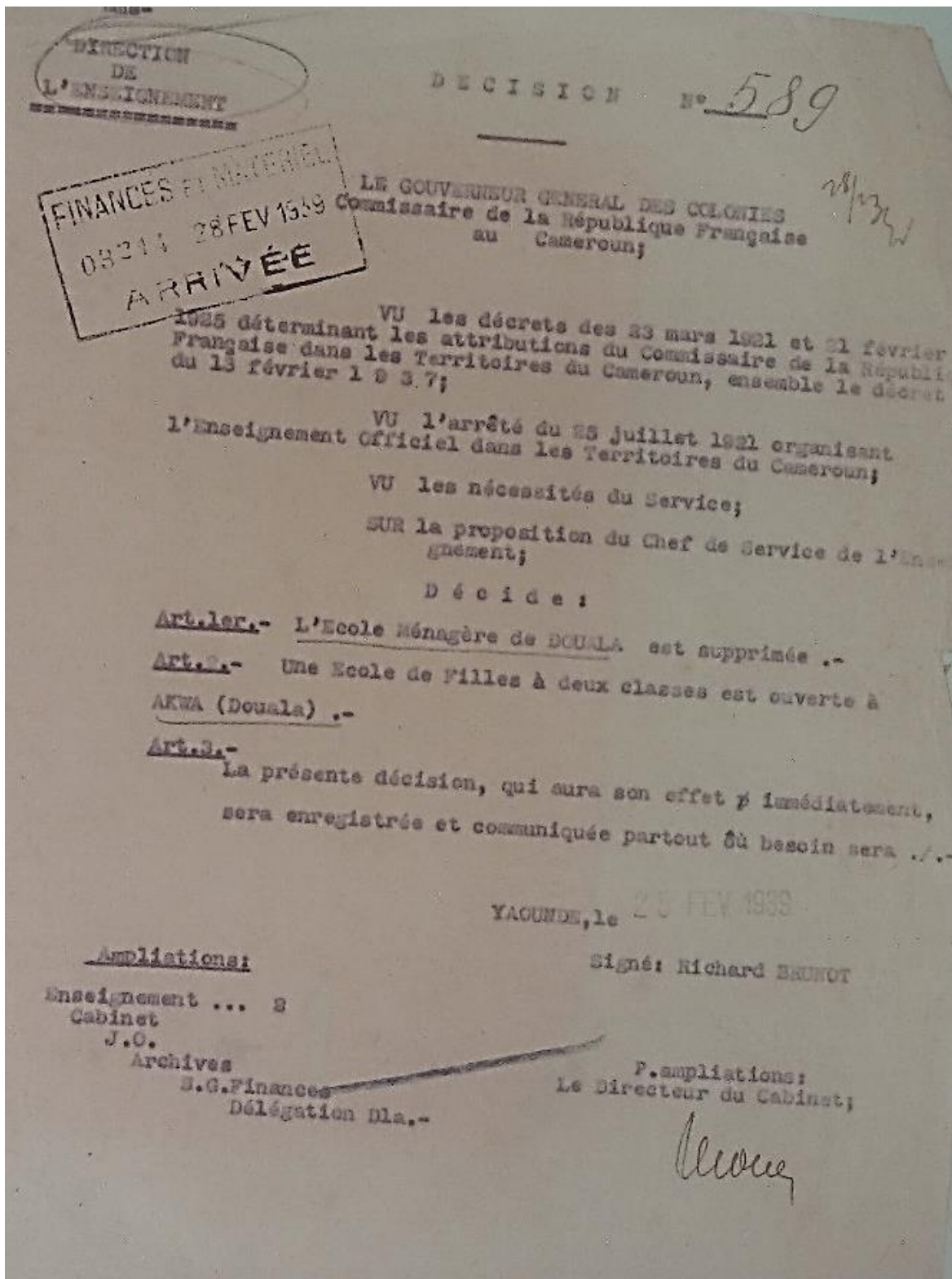


TABLE OF CONTENT

DEDICATION	i
SOMMARY	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
ABSTRACT	v
RÉSUMÉ	vi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vii
LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	ix
GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
1- CONTEXT AND REASON FOR THE CHOICE OF THIS TOPIC	1
2- CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	2
3- SCOPE AND DELIMITATION	6
A- Scope of the work	6
B- The terms and scope of the topic	6
4- THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH	8
5- LITERATURE REVIEW	9
6- THE PROBLEM STATEMENT	15
7- METHODOLOGY	16
8- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	19
9- DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED	19
10- PLAN OF THE WORK	20
CHAPTER 1: FROM THE INDEPENDENCE OF CAMEROON TO THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GOVERNANCE ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN CAMEROON 1960-1975	21
I-THE LAW AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CAMEROON: DURING THE PRE- COLONIAL PERIOD	21

1-	The law and the status of women in Cameroon: during the pre-colonial period	
		21
II-THE EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS FROM INDEPENDENCE TO THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF GENDER-BASED GOVERNANCE.....		34
1-	Presentation of the elements of a participatory governance of women 1961-1972	
		34
2-	The establishment of an institutional approach to women's rights: The birth of MINAS 1961-1975	39
CHAPTER II: FROM THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS TO THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CAMEROON: THE STAKES OF AN INSTITUTIONAL MUTATION 1975-1984		46
I-	Political and cultural strategies at the basis of the birth of MINAS in terms of women's rights in Cameroon.....	46
a-	Legal strategies and the management of customary and cultural beliefs.....	47
b-	Political strategies	48
II-	From the institutional administrative approach to the appropriation of the gender approach.....	53
a-	The Ministry of Social Affairs (1975-1984)	54
b-	The approach of representativeness as a means of promoting women's rights in Cameroon.....	56
i-	The image as a factor in claiming civil and political rights in Cameroon	57
ii-	MINAS and socio-cultural constraints at the advent of the Second Republic	60
CHAPTER III- THE GLOBALISATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ITS IMPACT IN CAMEROON 1984-2004		70
I-	The change in the world ideological order and its consequences on the evolution of women's rights in Cameroon.....	70
1-	The end of the Cold War and the emancipation of women from a political point of view	71
i-	Early and forced marriages	79
ii-	Sexual exploitation of children	80

2-	The Beijing World Conference: an indictment against the marginality of women in Africa and in the world	84
II-	The impact of the 1995 Beijing Conference on Cameroonian rights.....	85
1-	Cameroon between revisiting its public policy on gender and maintaining its traditional conservative habits.....	85
2-	The creation of MINPROFF: a response to Cameroon's international commitments on gender.....	91
CHAPTER IV: EVALUATION OF PUBLIC POLICY ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CAMEROON.....		94
I-	ADVANCES IN PUBLIC POLICY ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CAMEROON	94
A-	In the political field	95
1-	Women's political participation.....	95
a-	Women's representation in the administrative sphere.....	96
B-	Factors of improvement in the administrative representation of women during the decade 2000	96
i-	The right to vote, to be a candidate or voter and the right to access, maintain and be promoted in the public service.....	98
ii-	The right to create, to freely join a political party and to be a member of a political party.....	100
II-	THE MAIN INNOVATIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR WOMEN IN CAMEROON.....	100
A-	Breaks and continuities in Cameroonian society regarding the issue of women's rights	102
1-	Elaboration of the national policy for women entrepreneurship	102
2-	In the social and cultural field	105
a.	The evolution of the wife's rights during marriage;	110
B-	Assessment of the status of women's rights in Cameroon.....	114
GENERAL CONCLUSION		119
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES		132

ANNEXES..... i

TABLE OF CONTENT 148