

# Civil Society and Politics in Africa – The Case of Cameroon

## (Analyzing the Role of Civil Society in the Democratization Process in Cameroon)

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**Abstract:-** Contemporary notions of civil society are diverse, and debates around its fundamental role in enhancing the process of democratization in Eastern Europe, Africa and other parts of the developing world are the basis for its existence. Increasing political instability, unaccountable economic and management systems, corruption, asymmetric development, social injustice, authoritarian regime forms amongst others, have been the key areas of anxiety in many countries. This paper begins by tracing the emergence of civil society in Eastern Europe from the 1980s extending to Africa. It subscribes to the fact that civil society existed in Africa before colonialism, and that civil society formations were mostly captured under the voluntary sector which to some extent demonstrated some form of autonomy from the state. Civil society agenda during this period was apolitical. It was only when colonialism sets in and politicized the very existence of civil society formations that a growing political sensation started gaining grounds. However, the repressive measures of colonial administration silenced any form of civil society awakening. From the colonial era to that of independence under president Ahidjo, civil society was configured under same trade associations, agricultural work parties and the voluntary sector in general, with virtually no political activism. As a point of departure and anchored within the broad paradigm of civil society and Africa's political activism, this paper intends to critically analyze some captivating elements surrounding the civil society of Cameroon. It starts by positioning the concept within the framework of Cameroon's political transformation process and the actual role civil society played in attaining this objective. Acknowledging both the conformist and activist roles played by Cameroon civil society, this paper focuses more on the activist dimension of the concept. This paper contends that Cameroon civil society during the early 1990s was more vibrant and willing to exert pressure on the Biya regime for a pluralistic political system. During this period, political activism was crafted in what I have captioned 'civilian group militancy.' Unlike then, current trends of civil society shows a relatively weak

capacity and unwillingness to commit and unite as one force to challenge the incumbent regime. The paper asserts that the state, on its part has used all forms of machinery to render the civil society disjointed and divided in realizing its objective for change. The researcher has employed a qualitative method in analyzing data collected from primary and secondary sources, semi-structured interview session and views from direct and personal observation pertaining to the subject in question.

**Keywords:-** Civil Society, Politics, Democratization, Transformation.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The notion of civil society is not new in academic circles. Nevertheless, its re-emergence can be traced from mounting political insurgencies that began in the late 1980s in Eastern Europe extending to Africa and other parts of the less developed world. Contending opinions have emerged on the usage of the concept. The term civil society has a variety of meanings, with different authors and theorists approaching the concept from diverse angles, but without consistency in their usage.<sup>1</sup>

Classical theorists and philosophers such as George Hegel define the concept as collectives in society in distinction to the state, involving a range of bodies that are

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<sup>1</sup>Anthony Bebbington, & Roger C Riddell, "Heavy Hands, Hidden Hands, Holding Hands? Donors, Intermediary NGOs and Civil Society Organizations," "In" David Hulme & Michael A Edwards (eds), *NGOs, States and Donors: too close for comfort?* (1997), pp. 107-127. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.

represented by different organizations within the state in political, cultural and ideological dimensions.<sup>2</sup>

Revolutionary theorists (e.g. Karl Marx) perceived civil society as an inclusive concept of society minus the state, but with an addition to what we would now term the economy. The developments of a distinct political economy gave a new direction to the concept, in which individuals interacted with each other as independent agents and not as those with assigned social roles.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of civil society can be historically traced within three important phases. The first phase was the pre-18<sup>th</sup> century period which described the concept by political theorists such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke as the advent of highly structured political society. Within this scope, the state of nature, rather than the political order was used to differentiate the concept.<sup>4</sup>

The second phase took off from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and re-defined the concept as midway between private property and the state. In this context, civil society was differentiated from political society and the state.<sup>5</sup>

The third phase began in the late 1980s. This period was followed by infuriating political revolts that took place in Eastern Europe. This political uprising consequently led to the demise of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It has been argued by Fine that the third phase of civil society was exclusive in its nature and that it gave impetus to civil society than all other forms of societal initiatives on the assumption that civil society provides the basic requirements of freedom in the contemporary world. Its agenda was to

counteract any infiltration by either the political power of the state or the economic power of the currency.

The concept of civil society is said to have emanated from Western Political philosophy. In other words, western political philosophers (such as Harbeson, Adam Ferguson, and Friederich Hegel) initiated the concept and, argued that civil society acts as a barricade against the state. That is, with the understanding that only those organizations and collectives that are framed with confrontational motives against the state machinery represent civil society.<sup>6</sup>

This understanding of the civil society concept is limited in several dimensions. One of its shortfalls and implication is that, when agents of civil society vanish as a result of non-confrontational encounters against the state, civil society will also vanish or will no longer be instrumental.<sup>7</sup> It is based on this premise that this paper contends that civil society should be perceived from an inclusive perspective that insinuates both confrontational and collaborative arrangements. In essence, civil society is not a uni-directional collective but is comprised of organizations that have different agendas but are all channeled towards persuading the state to adhere or serve their peculiar motives. It is in this light that John Harbeson<sup>8</sup> points out that civil society is a bridge between society and polity. A core characteristic of civil society is its role in setting up gaps between the society and government and in questing for the solidarity of their relevant designs.

In conforming to the above prescription, Peter Lewis' contention is quite reminiscent: postulating that the inherent value of civil society is to defy state infiltration, while others engage in lobbying with the state to persuade or advance public policies as well as the distribution of resources.<sup>9</sup> This commitment, according to Adam Habib might either be

<sup>2</sup>Jean Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*,(1992), Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Frank K Matanga, "Civil Society and Politics in Africa: The Case of Kenya," paper presented at the *Fourth International Conference of ISTR on the Third Sector: for what and for whom?* Held in Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland (5-8 July 2000), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Tilly, "Social Movements and National Politics," "In" Charles Bright & Susan Hardings (eds), *State-Making and Social Movements: Essays in History and Theory*, (1984), pp. 297-317. Michigan: University of Michigan Press. Also see Robert Fine "Civil Society Theory, Enlightenment and Critique," "in" Robert Fine & Shirin Rai S (eds), *Civil Society: Democratic Perspectives* (1997), pp. 7-28. London: Frank Cass Ltd. Andrew Reeve and Jack Lively have also mentioned this in their discussion on the Emergence of the Idea of Civil Society: the Artificial Political Order and the Natural Social Order, pp. 63-75.

<sup>6</sup>Jean F Bayart, *L'état en Afrique* (1989), Paris: Fayard. For a more recent view see Bayart's article on Africa in the World: A history of Extraversion published by the *Journal of African Affairs*, (2000), Issue 99, pp.217-267. See amongst others Naomi Chazan, John Harbeson & Donald Rothchild, *Civil Society and the State in Africa* (1994)

<sup>7</sup> Nelson M Kasfir, "The Conventional Notion of Civil Society: A Critique," "in" Kasfir, N. (ed). *Civil Society and Democracy in Africa: Critical Perspectives*, (1998), London: Frank Cass Ltd, pp. 1-19.

<sup>8</sup>John W Harbeson, "Civil Society and Political Renaissance in Africa," in John W Harbeson, Naomi Chazan, & Donald Rothchild (eds), *Civil Society and the State in Africa* (1994), pp. 1-29. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc- America.

<sup>9</sup>Peter M Lewis, "Political Transition and the Civil Society in Africa," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1992), p. 26.

collaborative or adversarial in character.<sup>10</sup> However, it takes into cognizance the state's autonomy. This being the case, while some civil society arrangements are progressive in character, others remain rigid in their design. Subscribing to this perspective of state-civil society relations, Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz' conceptualization of civil society as a ground where diverse interest groups and social entities from all levels attempts to converge themselves in a collective unit, so as to promote their interest is more captivating.<sup>11</sup>

In the African continent, civil society's origin can be mapped out from the pre-colonial period. Civil society configurations during the pre-colonial era ranged from same trade groups, farmers' co-operative unions to welfare organizations. Practical examples provided by Anthony Hopkins from West Africa tell us about such formations and how traditional bureaucratic measures were to be adhered to: for instance, in craft production, there was control from being a member, methods of production, standards of craftsmanship and prices.<sup>12</sup> As cited in Frank Matanga, examples of same trade formations mounted control over prices and market routes. During this period, there were several negotiations between civil society and the state as exemplified in policies regarding weights and measures, laws regulating debts and contract agency among others.<sup>13</sup>

Financial societies such as that of the Tikars from the Western Grass fields and the Bantus of the Coastal regions in pre-colonial Cameroon existed to lend money to their members for trading motives, assist them financially in social functions such as sackcloth removal, birth, and death ceremonies among others.<sup>14</sup> Another typical example where such civil society activities were recurrent in the pre-colonial period was among the Widikum (Moghamos) tribe of Cameroon. They had arrangements of agricultural work parties (known in our lingua franca as njangee) that helped in reducing the task a member could have done single-handedly.

<sup>10</sup> Adam Habib, "State-Civil Society Relations in Post-Apartheid South Africa: in Adam Habib, Roger Southall & John D (eds) State of the Nation (2004), pp. 227-241, Pretoria: Human Science Research Council Press.

<sup>11</sup> Alfred C Stepan & Juan J. Linz, Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe (1996), Baltimore, MD/London: John Hopkins University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony G Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa (1973), pp. 50-70. London: Longman.

<sup>13</sup> Frank K Matanga (note 4 above), p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Emmanuel Y Vubo, "Associational Life between Traditional and Modern Society on the Path to Autonomy and Self-reliant Development," *Africa Book Centre, Online Catalogue* <http://www.africabookcentre.com/catalog/index.html?2008>, pp.100-108.

This had a unifying effect among members operating in same trade occupations. The revolving savings and farming clubs was the core of local asset both in economic and cultural perspectives. This gave impetus to a particular kind of transformation, which led to the existence and proliferation of small savings and agricultural clubs, as well as solidarity unions. These clubs were indicative of a will to communal survival and evidence of the vigor of a largely ignored aspect of civil society at its most elementary level.<sup>15</sup>

However, most of these arrangements started operating underground and some even vanished with the emergence and implantation of colonial rule. The repressive tendencies of colonial rule saw in these civil society configurations, a potential threat to their administrative design - hence curtailing their activities, and forcefully instituting new policies and ways in directing such activities. This had a debilitating effect on civil society arrangements in almost all colonies in Africa following the politicization and radicalization of their activities. It thus paved the way for the emergence of hardcore opposition and subsequent demise of the colonial state.<sup>16</sup>

Civil society's activism of recent in Africa particularly regarding its adversarial and antagonistic attributes has been apparently in response to the dwindling economic viability of the colonial African state. The mounting propensity towards political depravity has however been of equal magnitude to the skyrocketing levels of antagonism espoused by civil society formations on the continent. This was followed by the apparent demise of competitive party politics and the institution of clientelist regimes revolving around self-aggrandizement, the banishment of personal freedoms and extortion of state resources – just to mention a few.<sup>17</sup>

In response to the long-standing political and economic challenges facing the continent, international development agencies used civil society organizations as actors to redress the situation. According to Susan Dicklitch,<sup>18</sup> this was actualized within the scope of the New Development Agenda (NDA) and, anchored within a bi-polar structure of neo-liberal economics and liberal democratic concept. Through this new development framework, civil society organizations received the boost to counteract state power by safeguarding human rights and promoting participatory politics. Civil society became an opponent to the totalitarian African state. In the sphere of economics, proponents of neo-liberalism have maintained that state clientelism and patronage politics

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Frank K Matanga (2000: 6-8)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.5. See Naomi Chazan et al in their 1994 publication on Civil Society and the State in Africa.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Dicklitch, The Elusive Promise of NGOs in Africa: Lessons from Uganda (1998) pp.14-16. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

espoused in African states were the origins of economic turbulence.<sup>19</sup> It is contended that the solution is for African states to switch back towards the more efficient and rational market forces which position civil society and Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in particular as major development instruments.<sup>20</sup>

Civil society's role in Africa's political transformation has therefore emerged as the focal point in present academic conversation.<sup>21</sup> It is against this background that this paper intends to demonstrate, the alternating roles and influence of civil society in Cameroon (i.e. the reformist and conservative roles in relation to the state) as imposed by externalities but with more focus on internal political configurations. Acknowledging the twin roles civil society can play in response to the state, this paper contends that civil society formations in present-day Cameroon are relatively weaker, i.e. compared to its strength around the early 1990s, which was the period of political radicalism and awareness across the continent. Regarding the question of political activism, civil society's endeavors to orchestrate change has not been rigorous over a very long period except for the past two years.

The rest of the paper is divided into three sections and discusses these issues in detail. Section two examines civil society-state relations in the immediate post-colonial period under President Ahmadou Ahidjo and proceeds to the era of President Biya from 1982. In the same vein, section three delves into issues of political activism crafted in what I have termed 'civilian group militancy.' This section further analyzes the depths of a series of state-civil society arrangements and the actual furtherance of civil society advocacy for political transformation. Section four examines the socio-economic and political effects of the incumbent regime after all efforts of the opposition parties to effect change have failed. Meanwhile, section five concludes and proposes some recommendations for adjustment of the sector in Cameroon.

## II. CIVIL SOCIETY IN POST-COLONIAL CAMEROON

### A. *The Amadou Ahidjo Era – 1960- 1982*

Civil society, and specifically the NGO sector, experienced some basic forms of transformations in the immediate post-colonial period in Cameroon. In the early post-colonial period, a sizeable chunk of voluntary sector work, particularly in terms of its economic and socio-cultural activism, was motivated by the state. In many ways; the post-colonial regime was not different from its predecessor. However, civil society organizations were very instrumental in meeting societal demands, and have somewhat shaped the ways public policies were formulated and implemented by the post-colonial state. The fragile state seemed to have inherited development needs from the colonial regime, and could not bear the brunt single-handedly without cooperating with the voluntary sector to meet development targets during the greater period of the Ahmadou Ahidjo era, from 1960-82.<sup>22</sup>

The Ahmadou Ahidjo era was characterized by a monolithic political system inherited from the colonial regime directed by the British and French under the League of Nations Mandate and UN Trusteeship. The regime was too totalitarian and restricted all forms of freedoms including that of civil society. Civil activism, especially around the domain of politics during this period was non-existent. Moreover, in the Ahmadou Ahidjo era, the state was seen as a tool of exploitation, hindering popular or personal initiative and contestations as well as nurturing biased politics of tribal conflict and economic disorder. Therefore civil society in Cameroon's first republic remained inactive or confined and weak from 1966 to 1990.<sup>23</sup> Political parties and civic organizations were designated or forced into a single party structure – the Cameroon National Union (CNU) which was transformed later to the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM) by President Paul Biya. Meanwhile, other civic activities without political motives were functional and operated in the form of the same trade organizations.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> David Hulme & Michael A Edwards "NGOs, States and Donors: An Overview," in David Hulme & Michael Edwards (eds) *NGOs, States and Donors: Too Close for Comfort* (1997), pp. 12-14. London: Macmillan Press.

<sup>20</sup> Peter M Lewis, pp.31-54. See among others the works of Thomas M Callaghy, 1994 pp.231-253; John Toye 1994 pp.24-25.

<sup>21</sup> Naomi Chazan, Robert Mortimer, John Ravenhill & et al. *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa 2<sup>nd</sup>ed* (1992), Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, and London: Macmillan.

<sup>22</sup> Jean F Médard, *L'état Sous-développé au Cameroun* (1977), L'année Africaine, Paris: Pédone.

<sup>23</sup> John W Forje, "Building a Vibrant State-Civil Society in Cameroon: Facing the Challenges of the New Millennium," *Bulletin de L'APAD* (2006), p.4

<sup>24</sup> Emmanuel V Yenshu "Balanced Rural Development in Cameroon Within a Democratic Context," in Paul N Nkwi & Francis Nyamnjuh (eds) *Regional Balance and National Integration in Cameroon: Lessons Learnt and the Uncertain Future* (1997) Leiden: African Studies Centre/Yaoundé: International Centre for Applied Social Science and Training (ICASSRT), ICASSRT Monograph No. 1. For more views on this see Emmanuel Y Vubo 1998a, 1998b, Jean Bayart 1979 and 1989.

During this period, only a few religious denominations such as the Roman Catholic Mission, Baptists, and Presbyterian were present. Pentecostal denominations (such as Apostolic and Full Gospel Missions which later emerged) were not allowed to function in Cameroon legally. Even though they operated in closed doors until they were granted the mandate to fully function.<sup>25</sup>

Besides, the colonial state had no option but to collaborate with foreign missions in meeting the social demands of its citizens. The voluntary sector [represented by foreign evangelical missions amongst others] did invest greatly in the educational and health sectors. This saw the implantation of many primary and secondary schools across the national territory. Health care centers and aid posts were also established to meet the health needs of the populace. The regime in place could not have coped single-handedly in providing the social demands of its citizens coupled with its limited resources and human capacity at the time. These establishments however helped in raising levels of literacy and health in the country at the time.<sup>26</sup>

In the domain of agriculture (which contributes hugely to the country's GDP), the state collaborated with civil society groups represented by agricultural work parties. Through this channel, state subsidies were granted to farmers to help boost their agricultural output thereby meeting the need for food supply in urban centers. Moreover, by this time, cash crop production (cocoa, coffee, palms, and rubber) had gradually gained hold of the Cameroonian agricultural sector, and the state collaborated by providing subsidies to farmers of cash crops to boost their productivity. In a Study of 'Associational Life between Traditional and Modern Society on the Path to Autonomy and Self-reliant Development,' Emmanuel Vubo made mention of the fact that although associational life has generally been built around solidarity, the focal point of departure for most of them has always been centered on economic interest represented in farming groups, credit and thrift societies, small savings societies and solidarity savings union. For example, in the 'Moghamo' area, all associations have a financial side captured in the term 'ashow,' while that of the coastal Bantu peoples was termed 'njangi.'<sup>27</sup>

In the domain of technical skills, civil society organizations were configured into the same trade formations such as craftsmanship, carpentry, and others. Via these associations, the state collaborated with voluntary sector organizations in providing training and capacity building services so as to transfer the skills needed by its citizens to sustain their livelihood. Vocational institutions were established to empower citizens with requisite skills to better their livelihood.<sup>28</sup> An example of such an establishment initiated by the former President Ahmadou Ahidjo is the Bosta Institute in Buea. Even though some form of state direction existed in some of the civil society formations, the majority of them had their autonomous forms of operation from the state, especially in terms of economic and socio-cultural survival. According to Emmanuel Vubo, "most of them worked outside the range of the industrialist method of production with a low level of technology and coupled with the absence of a domineering urban industrialist. He adds that this element of civil society provides a voice for the ultimate conceptualization of choices and thus forms the space for independent actions uncontrolled by the state."<sup>29</sup>

#### *B. The Paul Biya Regime (1982-1990)*

However, with the emergence of the second Republic under President Paul Biya beginning from 1982, the enthusiasm of civil society formations switched from socio-economic motives of nominal collaboration with the state to that of political militancy and advocacy.

Paul Biya's ascension to power took place under a peaceful and tranquil succession from Amadou Ahidjo. The government gazette at the time [1972] made provisions for the prime minister (who at the time was Mr. Paul Biya) to be the next designated official to succeed the president. But when Ahidjo realized that he was being manipulated by the French concerning the state of his health at the time to quit power, he organized a coup d'état [1984] to regain his position and failed. Faced with such insecurity, Paul Biya had to consolidate power by making fresh appointments within the military and key positions of government. He changed the Cameroon National Union Party (with Ahidjo as chairman) into the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement and assumed the position of both chairman and President of the United Republic of Cameroon against the will of his predecessor.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Interview held between the author and Reverend Pastor Paul Ewome of the Full Gospel Mission Church in Cameroon on enquiries about a study of the history of Christian denominations in Cameroon, held on June 1998 in the Full Gospel Mission Church premise at Tsinga- Yaoundé. It should be noted here that the author has simply used the transcribed notes of this past interview to explain the work done by Christian Missionary Denominations in the immediate post-colonial period in Cameroon.

<sup>26</sup> Author and Reverend Paul Ewome (note 25 above).

<sup>27</sup> Emmanuel Y Vubo, (1997: p. 98).

<sup>28</sup>Louis E Aragon, "Building Regional Capacity for Sustainable Development," in the Amazon, UFRJ/EICOS (ed) Social Development: Challenges and Strategies (1995), Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ/EICOS.

<sup>29</sup> Emmanuel Y Vubo (1997: 100).

<sup>30</sup>Transcribed notes from an interview that was held between the author and the late Mr. Narius Namaso Mbile who was the chairman of the KNDP in former West Cameroon, and later board chairman of the Cameroon Development Corporation. His insights on the political landscape of

During this period of consolidation, he silenced all political dissent. Just as his predecessor did, he silenced the operations of all political gathering and made sure there was no opposition to his administration.<sup>31</sup> He monopolized the media and had a stronghold on the press. Moreover, the regime had instituted state-client relations and exceptional priority to influential positions of government had been given to the Beti people. Joseph Takougang reports that as of August 1991, thirty seven of the forty seven senior prefects (head of administrative divisions), three-quarters of the directors and general managers of state enterprises in the country, and twenty-two of the thirty-eight high-ranking bureaucrats who had been appointed in the newly created office of the Prime Minister, were from the President's ethnic group.<sup>32</sup> According to Piet Konings, the Beti elite saw the transfer of power from Ahidjo to Biya simply as an opportunity, in Bayart's words, to 'promote ethnofascism.'<sup>33</sup>

Because of Biya's too much concentration on political power, the economy was affected due to state patrimonialism. This was aggravated by the economic crisis that began in the early 1980s across most countries in the sub-continent. In a bid to redress the dwindling conditions of the economy, the regime in place had to seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Financial aid from such institutions came along with huge conditions which at first were uncompromising to the regime in place, but after a series of resistance, the regime had no option rather than adhering to the dictates of the Structural Adjustment Programs initiated by the IMF and the World Bank.<sup>34</sup>

The Bretton Woods institutions (i.e. IMF & World Bank) held the view that state-led development, excessive bureaucracies, large public service employment, mismanagement of state funds; too much state involvement in the economy, were partly responsible for the economic crisis faced by most African countries at the time.<sup>35</sup>

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Cameroon have undoubtedly contributed enormously to this paper.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Takougang, *The Demise of Biya's New Deal in Cameroon, 1982-1992*. Africa Insight Vol. 23, 2: (1993), pp. 95-96.

<sup>33</sup> Piet Konings, "The Post-Colonial State and Economic and Political Reforms in Cameroon," in Jilberto A. Fernandez & André Mommen (eds) *Liberalization in the Developing World: Institutional and Economic Changes in Latin America, Africa and Asia* (1996), pp.244-265. London: Routledge.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid p. 244.

<sup>35</sup> Ogoku B "Structural Adjustment Policies in African Countries: A Theoretical Perspective," in Onimode B (ed) *The IMF, the World Bank and the African Debt: The Economic Impact* (1991), Vol. 1, London: Zed Books

The SAP imposed stringent measures and conditions in order to restructure the devastating economy of Cameroon. This came along with the devaluation of the currency, salary reduction, reducing the size of public service employees, and liberalization of the economy among others. In fact, all that these measures implied was that state intervention in the economy was to be minimized and the market given an upper hand in the economy. According to Piet Konings, "Structural adjustment was linked to democratization, which in other words implied political conditionality. It was believed that sustainable democracy cannot be achieved without the empowerment of civil society."<sup>36</sup> These measures had a short term effect on the citizens, as many citizens became structurally unemployed. Others could no longer meet their social demands with limited salaries thereof. As a result, enrolment in schools dropped as parents could no longer afford school fees for their children. The brunt was bared most severely by the girl child coupled with deep-rooted traditional African beliefs that they do not really constitute the future of the family. Degrading health standards, general unrest, crime, and mounting levels of social riots across the country was the order of the day.<sup>37</sup>

### III. THE POST-COLONIAL STATE, POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATISATION

#### A. Political Activism

As mentioned above, by 1990 widespread popular dissent within Cameroon urban areas and increasing dissent within the hegemonic alliance became apparent.<sup>38</sup> Various reasons were held accountable for this situation. A greater portion of the populace proclaimed that the corrupt and

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<sup>36</sup> Piet Konings (1997:244).

<sup>37</sup> Ogoku, B (note 35 above). For more insights on the economic effects of the SAP on the girl child see among others Makanza (2011) p.35, Mlangeni (2011), Mc Fadden (2011).

<sup>38</sup> Direct and personal observation by the author. During this period political activism was configured in civilian group militancy, with a reasonable number of unemployed youths and Yaoundé University students on holidays at their various urban and rural locations spearheading the riots. In towns like Ekona and Muyuka in the South West region of Cameroon. Some of the recognised CPDM party members' houses were burnt into arches and increasing tension led to the burning of the Sub-Prefect of the Muyuka Sub-division around October 1992. This incident further sparked tension between civilian group militants and forces of the incumbent regime at the time. The political atmosphere was so intense and some opposing suspects were caught, locked up and terribly tortured by government forces.

authoritarian regime was responsible for the economic crisis – thus leading to a loss of legitimacy.<sup>39</sup>

Under these conditions, political activism became apparent within ‘civilian group militancy’. The objective was to mount pressure against the Biya regime to adhere to the demands of the citizenry. Civilian militant groups went far beyond normal political reforms and insisted that the Biya regime must accept multi-party politics in Cameroon. The opposition parties’ militants capitalized especially on Biya’s declarations at the early stage of his ascendancy to power, where he propounded ‘rigor and moralization’ and stood as an advocate of political freedom and democratic reforms.<sup>40</sup> This ‘civilian militant’ spirit was reinforced following the end of the cold war and the move towards democratization in Eastern Europe.<sup>41</sup>

During this period of excessive anxiety for democratization, some of the elite, especially those who had become disgruntled with the regime’s Beti dominance started giving expression to general dissatisfaction and went as far as organizing the urban mass into political parties. Some individuals of the middle class [such as members of the Cameroon Bar Association, Journalists and intellectuals] sighted with prior dissenters of the totalitarian state. However, their organizational efforts and criticism were first met with fierce confrontation by the state to regulate the process of democratization.<sup>42</sup>

Civilian ‘group militancy’ became much louder in multi-party democracy protests from the 19 February 1990 following the arrest of ten prominent Cameroonians in Douala. Yondo Black (a renowned lawyer), who spearheaded the group was charged with three years imprisonment from a military tribunal. Massive demonstrations became apparent before and after his trial, and the government responded with anti-democratic marches across the nation. The political climate became more intensified when the announcement for the launching of the newly found Social Democratic Front (Opposition Party based in Bamenda) was due on the 26 May 1990, in which six people were shot dead by the police. After a series of denial to adhere to the dictates of civilians for a pluralistic political system, President Biya finally backed down in a CPDM congress held in Yaoundé a few weeks later.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Piet Konings (1997:255)

<sup>40</sup> Paul Biya Communal Liberalism (1987), London: Macmillan Publishers.

<sup>41</sup> Eghosa E Osaghae, Rescuing the Post-Colonial State in Africa: A Reconceptualization of the Role of the Civil Society, *Proceedings of the Interdisciplinary Colloquium on State and Civil Society in Africa*, (July 13-18 1998) Abidjan, Special Issue: QUEST Vol. XII, No. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Piet Konings (1997: 256).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pp. 256-257.

Political activism crafted in ‘civilian group militancy’ gained external support from some influential world bodies and even France at the time. There was pressure from the World Bank and IMF, as well as other development agencies. Financial aid and credits were curtailed, leaving the government without any option but to succumb reluctantly to the opposition. At the 16<sup>th</sup> France Afrique Summit held on 20-21 June 1990 at La Baule in France, one of the resolutions agreed upon by those who attended including Biya, was the need to connect the appropriate population more closely to the process of edifying their socio-political and economic future. In this summit, the French President at the time - Francois Mitterrand made explicit declarations of the French government not being eager to aid regimes associated with autocracy and lack of enthusiasm for a democratic system of governance.<sup>44</sup>

### B. The Democratic Process

The final outcome of ‘civilian group militancy’ was the enactment of a new law by the National Assembly on 5 December 1990. This law officially paved the way for the formation of numerous parties. Meanwhile, society became unperturbed following the ushering of certain forgone freedoms. The press and broadcast media was relaxed, there was freedom of associations and self-expression. Many demonstrations and meetings were held in cities to express their newfound freedom under the banner of different civil society formations. A reasonable number of political parties were formed. Mobilization for militants became evident, as hundreds of thousands rushed to their parties of choice to obtain membership. Meanwhile, in the first months of 1991, registration for new parties was ongoing.<sup>45</sup> There were three major political parties which contested with the CPDM by the mid-1990s. These parties were:

- The Social Democratic Front (SDF), with a political philosophy that bestowed power to the people. This party was originally a regionally based party, but gradually it gained widespread support across the entire nation. Its founding leader is NI John Fru Ndi.
- The Union des Population du Cameroun (UPC). This party took the credit in Cameroons’ struggle for independence in 1960. It was comprised of natives from Douala, Bamiliki and the Bassa regions of former French Cameroon. Its front-liners were comprised of Cameroon’s independence struggle icons that were on exile (Ernest Ouanjie, Felix Moumie) and some breakaway leaders from the CPDM party.
- The ‘Union National Pour La Démocratie et le Progres’ (UNDP). The support base of this party was among the Fulbe of Northern Cameroon region – where Cameroon’s first president (Ahmadou Ahidjo) originated. Its front-

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, pp.257-258

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p.257.

liners were former leaders of the Ahidjo regime who had enjoyed certain privileges.<sup>46</sup>

Civilian group militancy was also manifested by a rise in popular revolts in the major urban centers. The atmosphere was tensed with widespread demonstrations by traders, teachers union, taxi drivers, students, and other non-combatant groups. These demonstrations and protests were platforms for civilians to air out their dissatisfaction against the authoritarian regime in place. Persistent pressure against the regime by protesters was met with fierce resistance by the forces of law and order leading to the loss of many lives in April 1991. By this time, party front liners and their supporters staged their grievances on the issue of a national conference. Claiming that such a political playground will surmount to radical proposals that will certainly give birth to a new constitution. Without much doubt, such a ground was never granted by the Biya regime, which was afraid to be exposed to its malpractices and possible impeachment of its perpetrators.<sup>47</sup>

President Biya's denial to accord such political arena led to a long period of hostility between the government and its adversaries. This rivalry led to a contestation requesting a national conference in Bamenda on 11 May 1991, which was to give resonance to mass civil strife on 13 May 1991. A series of demonstrations were subsequently evident with other provinces (Western and Northern Provinces) having joined. The fiercest one was scheduled on 24 June 1991 with the opposition's intention to clamp down all social and economic activities in major cities across the nation. That notwithstanding, the regime in place did not respond positively.<sup>48</sup>

Numerous reasons accounted for the failure of these ghost town campaigns. Some of them included:

- IMF and World Bank's persistent dislike for these campaigns as they claimed that it would have adverse effects on both the SAP program and the economy.
- The Beti people stood their grounds behind Biya and never joined these mass ghost town campaigns. This gave Biya the drive that his people were behind him and he could not disappoint them by surrendering to popular demand.
- The persistent and fierce confrontation between forces of law and order and demonstrators.
- The strength of the opposition subsequently became exhaustive and could no longer resist the combined forces of the police and gendarmes.<sup>49</sup>

The apex of civil society activism crafted in party militancy became apparent when the Social Democratic Front (SDF), which was the main opposition party, refused to sign an agreement that elections for a new National Assembly would soon be held. This accord also entailed the settling of all protest campaigns. Because there was no clarity to arrive at a program for change, the SDF declined from all negotiations and consequently lost support from France and implicitly the Bretton Woods institutions (who confirmed the agreements along with the government and France). In addition, the SDF boycotted the National Assembly elections for reasons of bad election code. They also claimed that it was too early for election arrangements to have been made and that they needed ample time to get themselves ready. The presidential election which followed suit on 11 October 1992 was marred by fraud and irregularities.<sup>50</sup>

These and other misgivings led to violent protests in Bamenda and the entire North West Province. The Biya regime then imposed a state of emergency in Bamenda for three months and John Fru Ndi was kept under house arrest. Meanwhile, some protesters including journalists, political activists, students, and intellectual critics were arrested and manhandled. The SDF manifestations against a rigged election gained support from America, Germany, and the European Common Market. This was followed by threats to withdraw their aid programs in Cameroon. America in particular overtly voiced out its dislike for the Biya's totalitarian regime, and openly supported John Fru Ndi's SDF.<sup>51</sup>

Political activism fostered by civilian group militancy, however, did not attain its desired objectives of reinstating a balanced political system. In spite of the numerous efforts initiated by opposition parties and pressure groups, the process of political pluralism as evident in genuine democratic systems have not yet been attained in Cameroon under the current CPDM government. Undoubtedly, this has affected the entire fabric of society, with the civil society itself being exhaustive of all endeavors to foster change and ensure capacity to project itself as a counteracting force against the state.

#### IV. CONSEQUENCES OF THE BIYA REGIME ON CAMEROON

In a number of ways, the CPDM government headed by the incumbent president has used all possible state mechanisms to forestall the existence of a vibrant civil society. What is now evident in Cameroon is more or less a multitude of disjointed communities and window dressing

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, pp. 257-260.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid pp. 244-265. Also see Konings (2004), pp.295-298.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Ibid p. 259.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid p. 260.

<sup>51</sup> Edwin F Wongibe, *The Social Democratic Front and the Thorny Road to Social Justice* (1991) Yaoundé: Cameroon Republic.



opposition parties with very little or no substantial base to withstand the unscrupulous intrigues of the ‘ultimate end of politics’ represented by the state. Even though the incumbent regime has tried twice to split the SDF (which remains the main opposition party in Cameroon) and failed, it can be stressed here that the SDF, no longer possess the conviction, capacity, and vision to drive its unique objective for a balanced and genuine pluralistic political system. One of the reasons why the SDF in particular and the opposition parties, in general, have not been able to realize their dream to reinstate a genuinely democratic order is the fact that they have not differentiated themselves from the ruling party. They are also immersed in the usage of similar ethno-client networks for the expansion of their power base. As Piet Konings notes, ‘a mixture of personal and ethnic animosities impeded any agreement between opposition parties.’<sup>52</sup>

Given this situation, Philip Burnham, equally states that it is obvious for one to point out that; so far, divisions within opposition frameworks have done no good than resulting to infractions and ideological differences.<sup>53</sup>

This section of the paper recapitulates on these issues and argues that the current state of the Cameroon civil society is relatively weaker compared to its vibrancy during the early 1990s. But it is of equal importance to note that the state is adamant and unwilling to resort to authentic political reforms, and rather prefer to centralize power within a selected political elite. The effects are numerous and evident on Cameroon’s current politics, economy, and its socio-cultural arrangements.

#### A. Politics

As mentioned above, the regime has given excessive power to the president. The issue of separation of powers is not visible at all. The 1972 Constitution and its subsequent amendments in 1996 and 2008 have provided for a strong central government dominated by the executive. The President has the sole prerogative to appoint and dismiss cabinet members, judges, military generals, regional governors, prefects, and sub-prefects, etc. The judiciary is highly answerable to the executive branch of government headed by the Ministry of Justice and directed by the head of state.<sup>54</sup>

Records of human rights abuse are skyrocketing with the evidence of police brutality and torture recurrent in the ways citizens are being manhandled. The supposed media freedom

slogan proclaimed by the incumbent regime seems to be operational from the window instead of operating from the door. Even though the system claims to be democratic, some form of press censorship still exists. There is no clear difference between party politics and state issues. The abuse of political power by politicians and senior state bureaucrats for their private benefits has reached its peak. At the lower levels of the public service, civil servants have personalized their offices for private gains, and delivering genuine public service to citizens seems to the so-called state functionaries as though they are doing special favor to those who are in need of such services. As stated by John Forge, “corruption and mismanagement are on the increase with Cameroon receiving the honor or dishonor of the first position as the most corrupt nation in the world according to the Transparency International findings.”<sup>55</sup>

In Cameroon, the process of political transition as evident in genuine democratization and efficacious pluralistic political system does not seem to be real. With regard to state-civil society relations, there are no complementarities. The development agenda which is supposed to be driven by a sound state-civil society initiative has been forfeited. So far, this has been due to wrong notions of the state seeing civil society organizations as adversaries, instead of viewing them as potential collaborators in driving the developmental objectives of the state.<sup>56</sup>

In reality, there is no coherence in terms of the conduct and nature of the Cameroon civil society. Political activism crafted in ‘civilian group militancy’ was supremely evident in the early 1990s. However, with the persistent confrontations by the incumbent regime’s military police to forestall acts of civil manifestations, the pace of civilian group militancy gradually slowed down. In addition, the regime exploited this serenity and fortified its tactics to engender divisions among various civil society groupings, while fostering a politics of appeasement to regional and tribal linkages. Seemingly, the appointments of political elites from one region or ethnic group against the other at a particular cabinet reshuffle only help to reinforce this division, in a country that is already saturated with massive ethnic diversity. Accordingly, this ethnic diversity has negatively played out on civil society’s strength and focus to hold the state accountable regarding government policies.<sup>57</sup>

In the process of crafting state policies, civic participation must be taken into account particularly about the issue of public accountability. This is relevant because there are certain restrictions levied on the conduct of public officials by groups and constituencies of civil society with the

<sup>52</sup>P. Konings (1997:260).

<sup>53</sup> Philip Burnham, *The Politics of Cultural Difference in Northern Cameroon* (1996) pp. 91- 95 Edinburg: University Press.

<sup>54</sup> Bureau of African Affairs, “Archives on the Republic of Cameroon,” US Embassy Yaoundé: Cameroon, <http://yaounde.usembassy.gov>, accessed in March 2018.

<sup>55</sup>John W Forje (2006:1).

<sup>56</sup> Adam Habib (2004)

<sup>57</sup>Jean F Bayart, *The State in Africa: the Politics of the Belly* (1993), London: Longman Group United Kingdom.

power to apply sanctions on them. In Cameroon, public officials make decisions that benefit their private interest at the expense of the broad public. Lack of dynamism and the inconsistent character of the Cameroon civil society to hold public officials accountable for their malpractices has undoubtedly led to hiking levels of corruption. The World Bank has also insinuated that accountability resides more on the efficacy of the penalty and the capacity of accountability institutions to supervise the actions, decisions, and private interests of public officials.<sup>58</sup> In Cameroon, there is no evidence of accountability institutions and the actions and decisions of politicians, as well as state bureaucrats, are not adequately addressed.

The current regime's political conspiracy and survival owe a meticulous debt to France over the years. Just as it did happen in other Francophone African countries with the most recent case being that of Cote D'Ivoire, France has made numerous efforts to protect its economic interest in Cameroon by constantly supporting the Biya administration in triumphing over any internal and external action from adversaries. In 1992, France did not even dither to furnish the Biya government with arms to forestall public disorder. In addition, and specifically within the frames of political and economic liberalization, the influence of western donors and international financial institutions has also weighed negatively on the citizenry. This was manifested by the imposition of the World Bank on the Biya regime to lay off 20,000 civil servants in 1994 coupled with the privatization pronouncement of the first fifteen state corporations, particularly in the transport and agro-industrial sectors.<sup>59</sup> This verdict led to a state of pandemonium across the entire nation and its consequences were noticeable in a sudden rise of unemployment, as many workers in the public service and state enterprises lost their jobs. This had far-reaching effects on the country's economy.

### B. Economy

It has equally been argued by John Forje<sup>60</sup>, that reducing the role of the state by transferring authority and resources to capitalist institutions has been due to the poor records of government performance. Also of importance is the fact that the privatization machinery and other macro-policies promoted by external development agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions (as evident in the SAP) have proven insufficient to put the country on a right development

trajectory. The result being that persisting on such privatization rules renders resources cheaply for the looting agencies while consequently intensifying the dwindling situation of the country's economy. The debt burden and dependency of Cameroon become more cumbersome as it relies on foreign aid and loans to shoulder its developmental agendas. The downgrading of the country's currency value in 1994 has negatively affected its natural resources as they sell for less than the amount previously attained some years ago.

The economy is not proving its worth. In fact, the scheming between the Bretton Woods Institutions and the governing political elite, with other power brokers and interest groups has profoundly deepened the country's weak and dependent political economy. Cameroon's economy is highly dependent on commodity exports and swings in global prices strongly affect its growth.<sup>61</sup>

Cameroon's economic development has been impeded by mismanagement, pervasive corruption, and a challenging business environment. According to a World Bank report, Cameroon remains one of the lowest-ranked countries on the World Bank's Annual Doing Business Survey. Over the last three years, the GDP growth has averaged around 2-3 percent, which is on an equal wave with population growth but not sufficient to significantly reduce high poverty levels.<sup>62</sup> The outcome of the country's economic decline has been apparent with a general drop in the conditions of living. The Centre for Economic Investment and Trade reports that poverty is still widespread; the country's standards of education and health are in a decline. Increasing levels of poverty have been exacerbated by massive capital flight as well as declining levels of human capacity due to persistent traveling of youths (who represent a potential workforce) out of the country. The current situation is disheartening, as the already fragmented civil society is becoming more elusive and has given up all hopes to foster change.

In a World Bank's commissioned study conducted by Soto Abdelali<sup>63</sup>, on examining Cameroon's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), it was reported that the 'incidence of income poverty in Cameroon remains high, affecting 40.2 percent of the population in 2001. It also specified that poverty in Cameroon varies substantially according to regions, amplifying between rural (50 percent) and urban areas (22 percent). Measurable evaluation of the

<sup>58</sup>Rick Stapenhurst & Mitchel O'Brien, *Anti-corruption in Transition* (2004), pp. 1-4. Retrieved from: <http://sitesources.worldbank.org/PUBLICSECTORANDGOVERNANCE/Resources/Accountability>, accessed in March 2016.

<sup>59</sup>Piet Konings (note 34 above).

<sup>60</sup>John W Forje (note 24 above). Also see Joseph Takougang and Milton Krieger concerning their work on President Biya and Incremental Reform in Cameroon (1998).

<sup>61</sup>Bureau of African Affairs (note 54 above).

<sup>62</sup>Ibid

<sup>63</sup>Soto V Abdelali, *Analysing Cameroon's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, This paper was intended to examine Cameroon's PRSP prepared by the World Bank in 1993*(2006)p.6. Retrieved from: [http://lnweb90.worldbank.org/exteu/SharePapers.nsf/\(\\$all/681A26DC4B96A9C185257230000459AB/\\$File/ANALYZING+CAMEROON+PRSP.PDF](http://lnweb90.worldbank.org/exteu/SharePapers.nsf/($all/681A26DC4B96A9C185257230000459AB/$File/ANALYZING+CAMEROON+PRSP.PDF), accessed in April 2012.

determinants of poverty affirmed the significance of such elements as the agro-economic region, sector of economic activity, education level, and the availability of infrastructure services.<sup>64</sup>

### C. Socio-Cultural Implications

Neither politics nor economics or a blend of both can determine what course of action is unquestionably best for the country without a cohesive, well structured, and responsive civil society. At this juncture, the Cameroon civil society is plagued with an array of political intrigues by the state to persistently render the sector fragmented. This has indubitably distorted the ways in which society can be configured. Besides, its effects on democracy and good governance practices are forever evident.

Electoral victories, development, and employment priorities have had a profound impact on the political landscape in Cameroon. This is amplified by regional influence and ethnic associations. Regional and ethnic associations have influenced the growth (negatively or positively) of both monolithic and pluralistic political systems in Cameroon. Peter Igwacho<sup>65</sup> asserts that ‘during the era of president Ahidjo the attachment of electoral votes and rights of citizens to belong to ethnic regional groups precipitated a growing distinction between “US” and THEM and the creation of who you know. He further states that this state of affair has gradually jeopardized power from political parties to egoistic individuals who have become the prime movers of both regional and national politics.’

Given this situation of political influence on tribal and ethnic settings, with personal and group interest superseding that of the broad public, it would be difficult for civil society to operate from a unified and cohesive standpoint. This is

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<sup>64</sup>Further proceedings on this commissioned study were supported by a participatory consultative meeting with the population organised by the authorities. In the different qualitative consultation sessions, an emphasis on the evaluation of the state of poverty was made, and a significant portion of the population specified that poverty can be defined as the difficulty for meeting their essential needs, as well as access to basic public services. Others mentioned that poverty can be perceived as the result of a weakening social value system. Rolling back to our main concern, the issue of asymmetric development and unequal distribution of resources and public services comes to the fore. It is the civil society’s responsibility to hold the state accountable in reinstating the social value of the country’s citizens. The more elusive civil society becomes, the more the social value system weakens.

<sup>65</sup> Peter N Igwacho, “The Role of Government in Advancing Democracy in Cameroon,” *The Post Newspaper*, Sunday, 15 August 2010, Cameroon, <http://www.postnewsline.com/2010>, accessed on 26-03-2012.

because civil society in its self is a collection of people from different ethnic groups with virtually different cultural backgrounds and interest. What one ethnic group cherishes or regard as important might be undermined by the other. Conflicts might also arise between ethnic groups depending on certain measures of politically motivated favors and promises to one ethnic group against the other perpetuated by the state. Genuine democracy is supposedly driven by equal distribution of power to various stakeholders of society.<sup>66</sup>

Unfortunately, that of Cameroon is contrary to the tenets that underpin the concept. It is rather about those ethnic groups that are either attached to senior state bureaucrats or affiliated with the party in power. As mentioned elsewhere, development priorities also depend on the extent of motions of support ascribed to the state. Both Republics have espoused some degree of lopsidedness in terms of resource allocation and the actual process of governance. Political opportunism has taken the place of outright rationalism. This divergent interests embraced by the state and different ethnic configurations have irrefutably punctured the entire structure of civil society.<sup>67</sup>

The rich diversity of Cameroon civil society would have rather been an added advantage to amass ideas and mobilize resources to strengthen democracy and development. Disjointed communities and ethnic rivalry can do nothing good to enhance democracy. It can only render the civil society bare and void of its capacity to advance the interest of the citizenry.

### D. Current Trends in Civil Society – State Relations

As mentioned elsewhere, the state has used all possible mechanisms to stamp a failure in ‘civilian group militancy,’ crafted in political activism. The country’s political economy and civil society now seem to be in a state of transition. Political liberalization on the one hand, has not been fully attained as proclaimed by the incumbent regime. Rather, the current regime has crafted its own form of democracy that favors the political elite and some ethnic minorities attached to the ‘ultimate end of politics’ represented by the state and its related sycophants. Civil society, on the other hand, is still making efforts to revive itself from the whims and caprices of the state.<sup>68</sup>

Even though political pluralism reigned in Cameroon following the second wave of political awareness and the subsequent creation of the SDF in the early 1990s, much is still to be done. Institutions of political and economic governance need to be formally legalized to symbolize the state of political pluralism in the country. An introspective

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<sup>66</sup> Emmanuel Y Vubo (note 15 above)

<sup>67</sup>Jean G Gros, *Cameroon: Politics and Society in Critical Perspective* (2003), Africa Book Centre: Online Catalogue.

<sup>68</sup> John W Forje (note 24 above), p. 3. See among others, Bayart 1993, Clark & Gardinier 1997, Diamond, 1994.

view of the current political system in Cameroon indicates that it is a disguised one-party state. In the words of Forje, “it is still governed by the dictates and structures of the authoritarian regime from – the captivity of the legislature, judiciary, and bureaucracy by a powerful presidency which treats the other branches of government as an offspring of political party machinery – CNU/CPDM property.” It is obvious that under such circumstances, there is virtually little or no space for civil society actors to project their views and stand by their demands.<sup>69</sup>

Putting development questions into perspective, the incumbent regime does not seem to implement its developmental objectives from a bottom-up perspective. In other words, development wisdom is still carried out within government bureaucracies instead of bringing it down to the people. In such scenarios, civic participation is necessary from the initial point of project identification to that of project implementation and evaluation. This is to ensure that ordinary citizens have a role in their development trajectory and, are represented in policy-making circles.<sup>70</sup>

The current state of the Cameroon civil society is under captivity. It has lost its vibrancy and can no longer exert pressure on the state regarding issues of developmental priorities. The state is now left alone to decide the development future of its citizens, which most often is done with political bias. The outcome of such prejudice would obviously lead to asymmetric development. That is exactly what is currently happening in Cameroon. Development promises are delivered on the altar of alliance with the regime in place. To further elaborate on this, Njoh Ambe, “affirms that state urban development policy favors only the elitist class that is made up of societal groups – such as the political, bureaucratic and entrepreneurial. Paradoxically, the policy is systematically biased against societal groups such as women, poor, ethnic and other minorities; who pose hardly any threat (political or economic) to the state and possess no connection to the levers of command.”<sup>71</sup>

Just as development comes along with political support, so equally does employment and other economic opportunities. Civil society does no longer have a unifying base as individuals are now considering their personal interest before that of the public. A reasonable chunk of people and civil society groups are now identifying themselves with the

ruling party just to make sure they are on a safe side regarding their livelihood. While others are still very passive concerning issues of political and economic governance, some are maintaining a conservative character of opposing the state. Even though to a larger extent this is visible mostly within die heart SDF militants and some activists within emerging trade unions.<sup>72</sup>

The process of political liberalization in Cameroon as evident in other African countries in the early 1990s, created more space for trade union activism to be apparent. Trade union activism became much noticeable within university teachers union. Compounded with a deepening crisis and poor working conditions in the tertiary education sector, University Teachers organized themselves in the so-called ‘Syndicat des Enseignant Supérieure’ (SYNES), to air out their frustrations for state consideration.<sup>73</sup> After a series of suppression by the state police to impede activism within this union proved to be futile, the state had to come to terms with SEYNES following a series of arrangements. A decree was signed (Decree no. 2002/041 of 4 February 2002) addressing some of the teachers pressing problems with the most urgent ones being that of salary increase and research allowances. That notwithstanding, they fought for the implementation of this decree as experience has shown that decrees can be passed without them being implemented.<sup>74</sup>

Right up till now, political apathy, lack of organization and a sense of direction and leadership has ravaged the civil society of Cameroon. For it to be salvaged there must be some form of civil society re-configuration, and this entails some sort of commitment in public affairs as insinuated by Goran Hyden.<sup>75</sup> The nation-state has failed in all parameters to project its self as the sole liberator of the masses more especially from the 1990s. This has impelled Cameroon citizens to espouse a contemptuous and skeptical attitude towards politics and the state. However, experience from the University Teachers Trade Union shows that some form of civil society organization, re-configuration and resistance can deliver ultimate results, and that is what is exactly needed within the ranks of the Cameroon civil society.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Samuel Hickey & Giles Mohan, “Towards Participation as Transformation: Critical Themes and Challenges”, in Samuel Hickey & Giles Mohan (eds) *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development* (2004), pp.1-20. London/New York: Zed Books Publishers.

<sup>71</sup>Njoh J Ambe, *The State, Urban Development Policy and Society in Cameroon* (1999), Elsevier Science Limited.

<sup>72</sup>Michael Bratton & Nicholas Van de Val, “Popular Protest and Political Reforms in Africa”, *Journal of Comparative Politics* No. 24.

<sup>73</sup> Piet Konings, “Trade-Union Activism among University Teachers during Cameroon’s Political Liberalisation”, *Nordic Journal of Africa Studies* Vol. 13 No. 3 (2004), pp. 289-301

<sup>74</sup>Ibid, pp. 291-298.

<sup>75</sup>Goran Hyden, “Building Civil Society at the turn of the Millennium”, in John I Burbridge (ed) *Beyond Prince and Merchant: Citizen Participation and the Rise of Civil Society* (1998), p. 18. New York: Pact Publications.

## V. CONCLUSION - THE WAY FORWARD FOR CIVIL SOCIETY-STATE RELATIONS IN CAMEROON

This paper has given resonance to the fact that the concept of civil society is not new in the corridors of academia. It has affirmed that increasing political uprisings that began in the 1980s in Eastern Europe was as a result of the re-emergence of civil society. The civil society concept is underpinned by its interaction with the state. Several authors' view about the concept of civil society have been scanned and their stand is nothing short of the fact that civil society is a collective in distinction to the state, involving a set of organizations that represent various group interest, (i.e. political, economic and social).

Given this brief insight, therefore, it requires that Cameroon civil society actors start crafting various mechanisms and possibilities to engage the state on different issues of concern. The political transformation has always constituted one of the key issues that civil society actors in Eastern Europe, the African continent and elsewhere have been focusing on. The case of Cameroon needs not to be exempted. The features of the foremost one-party politics and centralized system of government seem not to end any time soon. Counteracting it necessitates rigorous schooling and capacitating the victims of the system. As proposed by Paolo Freire,<sup>76</sup> it also requires some form of 'conscientization' of the system's proponents, and obviously, encouraging dialogue between the various political and economic interest groups. In various dimensions, civil society actors have a major role to play in the process of political transformation; reducing political violence, curbing the politics of tribal dominance and flushing out all the vices inherent in the current regime.

One way of doing this is by mobilizing all available human and material resources within communities and ensuring that they are equally distributed amongst various stakeholders. Another approach can be through the re-enforcement of community participation and awareness, as well as re-inventing, projecting and proposing a policy of reconciliation, compromise, and dialogue amongst the different rival political forces.

Another way of breaking the legacy of the dominant one-party politics and centralized bureaucratic construct in Cameroon is by uprooting the passive nature of Cameroon civil society while encouraging a culture of inclusiveness and participatory development beyond the normal economic benefits that can be accrued.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

<sup>77</sup>In his analysis on *Peoples first: A Guide to Self-reliant Participatory Rural Development*, Samuel Burkey highlighted that participation in development means more than participation in economic benefits; it is a process which

The broad public has gained much information disseminated by the mass media in the past five years. Breaking the dominance of the incumbent regime requires not thwarting away from the role played by the mass media in raising awareness amongst various groups of people in society. All civil society organizations should mobilize forces to promote the re-emergence of effective democratic politics and encourage good governance practices. This means re-configuring government holistically to ensure that its entire governmental fabric is designed to be more efficient.<sup>78</sup>

A vivid look across the African continent and particularly Cameroon insinuates that there is a need for ordinary citizens to achieve self-determination. The self-determination which I imply here is that from the indigenous leadership. This leadership has plundered the socio-economic, political and cultural fabric of the Cameroon society. It has demonstrated numerous tendencies of brutal repression and has made common survival to be more cumbersome. For this indigenous leadership to be wiped off, it requires the awakening of civil society – which needs to dislodge the monopoly of power from an unsuccessful leadership to the people who need it the most. Civil society mounted pressure in the early 1990s and to some extent, the state responded to some of its demands. For any visible change to occur, that effort needs not to have wavered. The base that civilian group militancy has given to opposition parties must be substantially utilized in forging a breakthrough. The issue at stake is, for how long will the politics of appeasement and divide and rule last?

The regime has showcased uncountable instances of nepotism and divisive politics – a case in point was in 1992 when it orchestrated a division within the National Union for Democratic Progress (NUDP) into two blocks. It has also tried twice to split the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and failed. It has been doing its utmost best in applying the tactics of appeasement policy by appointing ministers in various ethnic groups against the other in subsequent cabinet reshuffles. This kind of political juggling employed by the state should not be taken lightly. It is state-oriented machinery to perpetually render the Cameroon civil society weak and disbanded.

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can range from information, consultation to local people assuming ownership of and responsibility for their development initiative. For instance, if the objective of a project is to encourage ownership and responsibility, then it will be important to monitor how people's participation in the project evolves over time from an initial more passive involvement to eventual active participation and responsibility.

<sup>78</sup>James P Troxel, *Government Works: Profiles of People Making a Difference* (1995) Alexandria: Miles Rive Press. In their discussion on re-inventing government, Osborne D and Gaebler T (1992) have elaborated more on this.

A kind of political consciousness needs to cut across the entire fabric of the Cameroon civil society. This form of awareness needs to be further defined by the willingness of ordinary citizens to gain power and material improvement that will spill over to economic advancement by 2020. Current trends in the process of democratization in Cameroon are buttressed by the desire for material improvement. If this trend continues, the spillover effects will obviously be encouraging. What is therefore required and doable by civil society is a combination of this process and the desire for better economic prospects. Succinctly put, the significance of the economic factor in attaining genuine democratic politics in Cameroon will imply a change of focus from normal legal and political rights to social and economic rights. It will also mean a change of direction from the leniency of economic disparity and laissez-faire to the recognition of substantive economic interference in the market place in the interest of growth and re-allocation of economic wealth.<sup>79</sup>

Another possible mechanism for Cameroon civil society to break the dominant militancy in CPDM party is by thoroughly employing advocacy instruments. Constant engagement between civil society organizations and the state in public policy issues and resource re-distribution can help to improve the countenance of the incumbent regime. As mentioned elsewhere, the deepening of political awareness programs is required by major civil society actors to impart political lessons to the masses so as to enable them to understand the difference between party politics and state issues. This will enable them to stand a better chance to hold the government accountable in economic and political mismanagement. In fact, a genuine democratic system gives way for accountability to be exercised from top-down and bottom-up. This means that where the government discharges certain developmental responsibilities to civil society organizations, they are required to be accountable both to the government and the civil society constituency they represent, and the government also have to comply with this same measure of accountability. For this to be achieved there must be some form of a state – civil society collaboration.

Another feasible approach to overcome the dominant one-party state is through concrete engagement with the international community. The hard fact about the process of democratic and economic freedom in Cameroon is that it must be fashioned to suit the ordinary citizens whose democratic participation is at stake. Examples of such people include the small traders, the marginalized poor, illiterates, rural dwellers and vulnerable group (i.e. women & children). The Cameroon civil society needs to galvanize the attention of the international community to support the process of democratization in Cameroon – not to encourage existing frames of power that concentrates on attaining the democracy of division - in the words of Forje, ‘power not to the people

but to the existing powerful and exploitative classes.’ What is therefore required as a way forward is for civil society and the state to reconcile, endure and mitigate issues more rigorously while closing the existing gaps across different racial, ethnic, political and economic divide.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- A vibrant civil society facilitates better awareness and a more informed citizenry.
- A healthy civil society-state relation will enhance social cohesiveness and disband pockets of disjointed communities which are clearly evident in Cameroon.
- The state should see civil society as an agent of change and a collaborator in actualizing its developmental agendas.
- Civil society on its part should engage the state in a relatively friendly and constructive way so as to achieve their desire to advance the interest of the constituency they represent.
- The issue of accountability should be applicable to both sides. On one hand, the state should be accountable to civil society particularly regarding government expenditure and service delivery; civil society should, on the other hand, be accountable to both the government and the constituency it represents on issues of development priorities.
- It is the responsibility of the state to make sure its development programs are not informed by political motives, and that development should not be perceived as a favor in one region against the other.
- The state should also bear in mind that democratic advancement cannot attain its full-blown nature without the voice of ordinary citizens being considered.
- Politics and economics are intrinsically connected and advancement in one necessitates the maintenance or advancement in the other.
- Civil society is about ‘doing good’ and ‘closing gaps’ including service delivery gaps, gaps of inequality,
- Closing gaps in the quality of life people experience and many more.
- The state is the principal driver of poverty alleviation and development initiatives. Civil society’s role is, therefore, to make sure that national policies are formulated and implemented from a people-centered perspective.

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<sup>79</sup>John W Forje (note 24 above).

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