

Cameroon's Democratic Process: Vision 2020

By Mwalimu George Ngwane

*“A new generation in Africa is within the range of a new vision of the best future
Africa is yet to see”*

Jonathan N. Moyo, Minister of Information - Zimbabwe.

Rationale

The underlying assumption of this essay is that multipartyism has failed in Cameroon not necessarily because multipartyism has proven to be an ill-adapted political model in most of Africa but primarily because the political elite in Cameroon have been unable to provide a vision of a future for Cameroonians and a realistic strategy for achieving it. The essay therefore calls on Cameroonians to see beyond Presidential elections 2004 and to ponder over the question: *‘What will Cameroon look like in the year 2020?’*

Introduction

It is 2004; Cameroon is in the heat of another multiparty election fever. Since the elections are Presidential, the stakes are high and the expectations even higher. Leaders of thought and Presidential hopefuls are raising their apocalyptic voices above the din of disillusionment just like it happened in 1992 and in 1997. Since Multipartyism got reintroduced in Cameroon in 1990, Cameroonians have learnt to make do with a presumptuous yet obsquitious incumbent and an ambitious yet fragmented opposition.

Democratic content

For more than a decade, the goals of multiparty democracy still elude the masses and within the present political context of unbridled demagogy, multiparty may remain a façade and charade, promising much but delivering little. Many reasons have been advanced for the dismal performance of neo-liberal democracy in Cameroon but let us dwell on just a few.

(i) Lack of democratic will:

Cameroon's leadership yielded to democratic pressures (both internal and external) in the early 1990s more out of convenience than of conviction. In his political book Communal Liberalism, the incumbent President, Paul Biya had manifested his apprehension for multipartyism as he wrote:

“The present phase of the history of Cameroon does not permit the institution of a multiparty system. Our Party (Cameroon People's Democratic Movement- CPDM) is therefore, responsible for the reduction of the existing ethno-cultural divisions in order to promote national integration...” (Biya 1987: 127)

Hardly had Paul Biya, who took power as President in 1982 from Amadou Ahidjo, settled down to experiment his political thought than the 6th April 1984 aborted military coup jostled his grip on power and the 26 May 1990 launching of another political party (Social Democratic Front - SDF) defied his one party ideology.

From May – November 1990, opponents of multiparty politics marched the streets of Cameroon calling those who had dared to upset the apple's cart “merchants of illusions” and “enemies of national unity”. This did not stem the tide of internal pressure. As for external forces the then French President Francois Mitterand believed to have facilitated Biya's accession to power made a speech at La baule (France) in the direction that African countries should henceforth “expand their democratic spaces”. Arguably because of Cameroon's legendary servitude to France, the Biya leadership reneged on its initial ideology of one party rule. At the same time the international community was waving the “stick and carrot” bait to African countries reluctant to swallow multiparty democracy. Prominent among them was the then British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd who said,

those countries tending towards pluralism, public accountability, respect for human rights, and market principles, should be encouraged. But governments which persist with repressive policies... should not expect us to support their folly with the scarce resources which could be better used elsewhere (Africa confidential: 1991).

With both internal and external pressures on Paul Biya, but without any concrete rules on the exigencies of multiparty politics, without a change of the monolithic constitution, without a defined role of the opposition, without a clear cut line between the party and state and without

any referendum, he (Biya) promulgated into law on 19 December 1990, the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in Cameroon. (Ngwane 1996:175)

ii) lack of democratic transition:

Patrick Qantrin highlighted several features of the democratisation processes in Africa for over a decade as non-transition, transitions without change, authoritarian rehabilitation and fragile transitions (CODESRIA bulletin: 2002) Cameroon was one of the countries that embarked on a non transition democracy. Either oblivious of, or bankrupt, in other political models, Cameroon trigger-happily discarded the “devil” of the one party system to embrace the “god” of multipartyism. But unlike other African countries, like Benin (1990), Mali (1991), Zaire (1991) and South Africa (1994) that planned a transition, the leadership of Cameroon resisted any form of democratic transition. Such a context only encouraged the emergence of a new elite in the political arena, next to the old ones who switched over, for the occasion, to the virtues of political pluralism (Tidjani Alou 2002:28).

The setting up of Constitutional Conferences, Sovereign National Conferences and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions as modes of transition was meant to provide new political and economic paradigms suited to the demands of pluralism. As discussion forums, transition modes served as the balm of national reconciliation and catharsis as well as avenues to put in place reforms and structures that would change the quality of lives of the masses. When president Paul Biya therefore declared on 27 June 1991 at the National Assembly that “*Je l’ai dit et je le maintiens, la conférence nationale est sans objet pour le Cameroun*” (I insist that a national conference is baseless in Cameroon). Cameroonians were stunned into both rage and revolt. Biya’s refusal to yield to popular demand for a national conference was partly due to the opposition parties’ misconception of the purpose of such a conference – their perception was not one of overhauling the obsolete monolithic apparatus but one of impeaching and eventually stripping Biya of legitimate power. Cameroonians therefore missed a rare opportunity to reassess the gains of independence and to examine the expectations of a democratic renewal.

Instead, Biya offered Cameroonians a Tripartite Conference consisting of the ruling party, the opposition and the civil society. This conference that held from 30 October – 18 November 1991 proved to be futile as national aspirations became mortgaged on the altar of

parochialism. The main weakness of this conference was the quasi-obsessional temptations of the ruling party, which wanted rules and results for its prime benefit alone.

iii) Lack of democratic vision

When the wind of change blew in Africa in the late 1980s and early 90s most countries made the error of aping neo-liberal democracy as if no other innovative and home-grown democratic choices existed. It was as if 'greater democracy' automatically meant multipartyism and multipartyism was seen to be succeeding only if elections were free or fair. Whatever the reason for the emphasis on multiparty election it is misleading and threatening to the process of democratisation in Africa because it trivialises democracy. (Ake 2000:150). The Cameroonian experience proves that while the ruling party sees multiparty election as a source of prebend, the opposition supports it as a strategy of power. Each one wants to sustain or inherit the system not necessarily to change it.

The over 14 years of Cameroonian democracy is arguably all about voting without choosing. Despite these multiparty years, most Cameroonians have had little reason to believe that they are anything other than pawns in a game of chess played by the power elite. The latter set their agendas for the masses, use them (masses) to serve their ends and abandon them to the misery and ignorance to which they are accustomed. (Nyamnjoh: 2002).

By reducing democracy to an historical practice of election and the peddling of compensatory development advantages to the voter, multipartyism only seeks to hold the ordinary citizen in perpetual captivity. To be sure this capture may be sweetened by allurements and material inducements, which underline the contempt and devalorisation of the voter (Ake 2000: 170). Indeed, with human development now being replaced with the triumph of peace, the success of Cameroon's multiparty experience lies only in counting up the number of permitted parties as in the medieval manner of counting up the number of angels who can stand on point of a pin (Davidson 1991).

Peace is a means to an end; the ultimate end being development. And so Cameroonians sometimes look back with nostalgia at the Amadou Ahidjo authoritarian years of one party rule, when they enjoyed economic prosperity. According to Milton Krieger, Cameroonians sustained steady, even (with petroleum's help) buoyant growth in the economy, and sufficient patterns of opportunity in the patronage distribution of their domestic proceeds. There was

enough for many Cameroonians to aspire to, if not to attain. (Krieger 1994:607). From all indications, the quest for greater democracy in the 1990s in Cameroon was predicated on greater participation in decision-making, greater devolution of power to the regions, greater focus on the Anglophone problem, greater ownership by the population of its natural resources and assets of Independence, greater economic empowerment and greater, fairer and more equal opportunities for any Cameroonian to contest and win any elective position. Unfortunately, Cameroon like most African countries embraced multipartyism not as a vista of social democracy but as a reversal of fortunes from the dominant ruling party (CPDM) to the sharing of sources of prebends and centres of power to party coalitions in proportion to their political or vocal weight.

Lest we forget, Africa is not in short supply of indigenous democratic visions, hence the no-party system in Uganda, the consensual (*tinkundla*) democracy in Swaziland and the new found consociational democracy now introduced in Rwanda. Cameroon itself is not in short supply of state persons who can provide a democratic vision that has an organic socio historical link with the dynamics of Cameroonian social formations. The problem is that innovative rather than orthodox ideologies are easily met with institutional blockages even from the political parties themselves like Mila Assoute's "White book" in the CPDM party or the Article 8.2 subversion act in the SDF.

The repercussions of the absence of a democratic will, democratic transition and democratic vision on Cameroon's political, social and economic landscapes are as many as they are complex, but let us spell out just a few.

Personalisation of power

Cameroon's present Parliament (2004) is made up of five parties. The CPDM, SDF, Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU), National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP) and the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC).

The Founders of these political parties have remained leaders of their parties since their creation (for the CPDM since 1985 and the rest since 1990). The founders/leaders have presented themselves as candidates for all Presidential elections without first submitting themselves to Primary elections within their respective parties. Apart from the SDF that in 1997 was obliged to stage manage primary elections between the incumbent leader Ni John

Fru Ndi and the little-known and Paris-based Chretien Tabetsing, the other parties have acted as if their leaders, Paul Biya (CPDM), Ndam Njoya (CDU), Bello Bouba (NUDP), and Augustine Kodock (UPC) were “les candidats naturels” and “Presidents à vie de leur parti” (life presidents in their parties). The lesson one can draw from this is that there is no political culture of alternatives and debate in Cameroon since each founder/leader has positioned himself to the point of confiscating party powers. (Biombi 2001:5). This tenacity syndrome characteristic of African heads of state does not augur well with those who wish to steer the state of affairs in a new dispensation.

Probably the worst form of power confiscation is in Cameroon’s state corporations. Some of the barons of these corporations have overstayed their grip on these corporations that they act as if they had no one to render account to. As auditing is a rare feat in Cameroon, the barons parade with state wealth, distribute it in fake philanthropy until the corporations are brought to ruin or to privatisation. It was as if Cameroon was an empire with parastatals looking like personal kingdoms. This phenomenon of patrimonial and personalised management of public affairs now runs through every facet of the Cameroonian bureaucracy. No one sees his/her office as a civil/state property for which service has to be granted without favours; tribalism, nepotism, laxity and egoism are now at loggerheads with nationalism and patriotism. Public and even the private sectors have openly become racketeering spaces; the law officer on the road, the teacher in school, the nurse in the hospital, the magistrate in court and the typist in the secretariat. Everyone is master and the only boss is God. Civil servants are using the cloak of party loyalty to kill the efficiency of the public service.

It must be for this reason that Paul Biya’s address to the nation on 31st December 2003 focused on the word “inertia”. He decried the public service which is plagued by deplorable laissez-faire, laxity and lack of good citizenship. But while the ordinary citizen is an accomplice to this crime, he or she is only drawing inspiration from his/her Almighty bosses.

Embourgeoisement of the state

For the most part, the political atrophy and economic malaise Cameroon is facing can be blamed on its political elite. The political elite have failed to squarely and frankly address and redress the problems in Cameroon preferring instead to safeguard their privileges and sinecures. Since President Biya has adopted the seminarist approach of leadership (dwelling on philosophical and abstract rhetorics) unlike Ahidjo’s pragmatic approach (dwelling on

feasible and concrete projects), since Biya has dwelt on a leadership by proxy with a routine agenda, unlike Ahidjo's leadership by rapprochement with a reform agenda, since Biya's diplomacy is one of distance and discretion, unlike Ahidjo's diplomacy of proximity and presence, the elite in Cameroon have arrogated to themselves the wisdom to interpret every gesture and intention of the President. It is this political elite, which occupy public space; garbed in Biya's effigy, they tell the masses of Biya's messianic achievements and drum support for his eternity in power. They do this knowing that their own survival depends largely on their loyalty to the man and not to the nation or the institutions. It is not about supporting the system wholeheartedly, it is about the benefits that accrue from this hypocrisy. In the end the building of nationhood has been sacrificed on the altar of self-aggrandisement and personality cult. Instead of the political elite being the people's earphone they have become the president's megaphone; instead of the political elite being role models, they alienate citizens and act in their own corporate interest, erecting new ascriptive barriers that limit positive contributions to national life and development. (Nsamenang 1992:117).

Until the state of Cameroon recognises that vocal party militancy is not always tantamount to inordinate patriotism; until it recognises that the rent seeking behaviour of the elite has retarded the pace of shared citizenship and national concord, Cameroon's leadership shall never establish a true partnership with a greater number of its human resources- the masses, and democracy is also about numbers. No democracy is as dangerous as one that puts premium on people (elite) with a high consumption capacity over a people (masses) with a high productive potential. Indeed if the democracy of the elite prevails, Africa would have democratised in form but not in content, and in a way that is largely irrelevant to its social realities (Ake 2000:192).

Pauperisation of the masses

Despite the fact that Cameroon has one of the best endowed primary commodity economies in sub-Saharan Africa, its population remains among the least in human development.

In 1993, government slashed civil servants' salaries by 70% and in 1994 the CFA franc was devalued by 50%. This, according to Clovis Atatah, considerably weakened the buying power of Cameroonians thus jeopardising the chances of a consumer-led economic growth (Atatah 2003:11). This economic crisis has been compounded by the draconian structural adjustment

measures of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In spite of all the rhetorics about a 5% economic growth and the glorious projections of the IMF, the average Cameroonian is still to witness an economic miracle on his/her dining table. Because of the social and economic dislocation caused by the IMF, Cameroonians find it difficult to send their kids to school. Hospitals are bereft of drugs or, where available, the prices are prohibitively exorbitant. Despite pious proclamations about alleviating poverty, pauperisation is the order of the day. In short the standards of living are bleak; the future grim (Wache 2003:8).

Companies that had a large labour market like ALUCAM, SOSUCAM, SODECOTON, BATA, CIMENCAM are either folding or laying off their workers. The adjustment process has not only reinforced a sharp polarisation between a rich minority and a largely impoverished majority, it has raised concern about the dangers of recolonisation facing the continent (Olukoshi and Laaki 1996:21).

But was Cameroon not in a position to learn from the experiences of other countries which in the throes of economic crisis, resisted the IMF? For example China, Poland and Malaysia are three countries that ignored IMF advice and yet became successful. During the Far East crisis, Malaysia refused to take any IMF loans. Its leadership mapped a national integrated economy and within two years all was well with its economy. President Sam Nujoma of Namibia is quoted to have boasted that in 13 years as an independent country,

we have not taken a penny from the IMF and world bank simply because they (IMF and World Bank) are the imperialists' well-organised machinery to get African cheap labour and raw materials for their economic development" (New African: Nov. 2003).

Instead Namibia embarks on bottom up development agendas backed by a strong impetus for regional integration. Botswana is a country that has made remarkable social and economic progress since independence in 1966. No country in the World, over a period of more than three decades has had higher growth rates like Namibia. It has 6 billion dollars on its own reserves, free education and health. Botswana's success story is based on first its vision 2016 framework that was launched by the first President Sir Ketumile Masire in 1996, then its sound management of its natural resources, fiscal discipline and a planning process that presents development plans with achievable goals. As for Libya its economy remains buoyant

inspite of decades of international embargo because of the leader's (Muamar Gadaffi's) vision of participative economics and popular socialism. No doubt Libya is the only country in the world with no debt.

Equatorial Guinea is making positive strides in its economy since oil was discovered a couple of years ago. The fallouts of the discovery can be seen in both its human development and especially its transport network. There should be many other countries in Africa linking their endogenous macroeconomic gains with human development but whose bright economic performance does not feature on the Western media simply because they are not Bretton wood-inspired. These countries may not be complete development models but the reality is that only countries which have their heads in the sky of globalisation and their feet firmly rooted to the grounds of localisation will achieve the long awaited Independence goals.

When will Cameroon and the rest of the African countries realise that "development is endogenous; that it can only come from within society, which defines in total sovereignty its vision and its strategy and counts first and foremost on its internal strengths?"(Lopes 1994:37). As Adebayo Olukoshi rightly observes blind adherence to orthodox structural adjustment with the authoritarian political and repressive socio-economic costs which it carries, will do more harm than good to the cause of democratisation in Africa (Olukoshi 1998:13).

Why has Cameroon surrendered its economic sovereignty to both the IMF and World Bank on the one hand, and to the phenomenon of Aid and Privatisation on the other hand? Schools and hospitals are built today with Aid from the Japanese and the Chinese – inspite of this goodwill by foreign partners, President Museveni of Uganda remarks that Aid has never developed a single African country to the stage of social transformation (New African: Nov. 2003). Whether in our democratic option or economic choice, Cameroon seems to implement policies it does not decide. Dependence on external Aid and the Bretton Wood Institutions can compromise a country's Independence leading to what political scientist call 'stae deligitimisation'. For like Kenneth Kaunda says 'whereas the first round of democratisation was undermined by the strength of the state, the second round is likely to be undermined by its weakness'(West Africa:January 1998).

African countries must depend on themselves through homegrown development models and the pursuit of the objectives of the African economic community. When this Aid comes in trickles it becomes media hyped that one forgets the comparative reality between Aid in Europe and that in Africa. A United Nation Development Program's (UNDP) Report 2003 shows that in the year 2000, the European Union's (EU) annual Aid to Sub-saharan Africa amounted to \$8 per African person while EU annual daily subsidy to EU cows was \$913 per cow. The case of Japan was even more incongruous. In 2000, Japan's annual Aid to sub-saharan Africa was \$1.47 per African but Japan's annual daily subsidy to its cows amounted to an astronomical \$ 2700 per cow. (UNDP 2003:155). So on the face of it, one would rather be a cow in Europe than a human being in Africa.

As for (flawed) privatisation, it still continues to ravage Cameroon's economy. Assets like electricity, telecommunication, transport and water, gained during independence are being thrown back to colonial managers. The country's second largest employer Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) was forced to release into privatisation one of its largest arm of production- the Cameroon Tea Estate (CTE). Only recently the CTE proved that privatisation is about profit not people. On January 15 2004, CTE laid off 585 workers "in a bid to reduce the company's cost of production which had soared to an unbearable level. (The Post Newspaper, January 26, 2004). Cameroon's recognition of its economic dire straits was confirmed when it applied to join the *Heavily Indebted Poor Countries* (HIPC) Initiative.

Experts put the unemployment rate in Cameroon at 25% and more than 50% of the population lives below the poverty line. Cameroon's Minister for Public Investment and Regional Planning, Martin Okouda, defined poverty in Cameroon as people not having the material or financial resources to satisfy their basic needs (food, housing, health etc); the lack of these essential services in some localities makes not only the individual poor, but also households that would otherwise be able to afford them. Minister Okouda attributes poverty in Cameroon to bad governance, which people put down to corruption, to siphoning off public money, to impunity, to milking public services, to the lack of decentralisation and the unequal distribution of the fruits of growth (The Courier: July/Aug 2002).

Yes, it beats all economic logic that a country that is crammed with natural wealth and skilled human resources like Cameroon should be ranked 125 out of 162 by the UNDP's 2001 human development index. The 2003 UNDP report now classifies Cameroon as "low in human

development". Of what use then is political freedom without economic emancipation? Cameroon's democracy is like its football; much ado about victories little to show in infrastructure. Democracy without development is as useless as winning football trophies without football stadia.

Beyond Presidential 2004

What all of these comments show is that since 1990 there has been a considerable alienation between the politicians and the people – a gap temporarily closed only during elections. Apart from grotesque manifestations of condescending sympathy to the people (bags of rice, beer and bank notes) and empty slogans of commitment (build roads, schools, hospitals, power to the people) during election campaigns, will the 2004 Presidential elections live on a promissory note of a permanent social contract between the politician that only thinks of the next election and people that should be thinking of the next generation?

The last few months have been characterized by calls both by the ruling and opposition parties for the population to register their names in the electoral list. The government has made overtures to the Opposition parties and human right organisation in selecting the names of future members of the National Election Observatory (as opposed to the Constitutional Council) who will be charged with supervising the Presidential Elections. If statistics are anything to go by, the already disillusioned electorate may not hearken to these pleas. According to Reports by International Observers, while about 65% of the electorate took part in the 1992 Presidential Elections, only 25% answered present in 1997 Presidential Elections (Courier: July/August 2002). These reports see systematic boycott by the opposition, low voter registration, bias in the public media, targeted arrests and electoral fraud as traditional opioms of multiparty elections in Cameroon. According to the researcher, Dr. Mamoudou Gazibo, "the democratic process in Cameroon is terribly fragmented and riven with conflicts between the dominant party in power and an opposition divided by leadership disputes". (The Courier: July/Aug 2002). Furthermore, the absence of a wide-ranging debate and clearly presented opposition policies saps interest in electoral contests. The electorate is so dismayed with present politicians on both sides of the divide that voter apathy remains high.

Ntemfac Ofege attributes voter apathy to the stark realisation that Mr. Biya will always rig elections and also to the fact that the so-called opposition is full of political

illiterates, unprincipled dead beats, who pretend to oppose Mr Biya when they are indeed part of the Cameroon problem (The Post: February 23, 2004). Accusations of lack of probity and accountability that have been heaped on the ruling regime seem to have also fallen on some of the local Councillors and Parliamentarians of the Opposition.

So what new mechanisms have been put in place to make Presidential elections 2004 democracy-friendly and voter attractive?

What are the ingredients in the various party manifestoes or politico-economic blueprints that guarantee the electorate that after Presidential 2004, Cameroon will expand its democratic space and redistribute its economic resources?

What are the chances that Presidential 2004 will this time, no matter the victor, reverse the pyramid of power and resources that have long been the preserve of a predatory cartel? The chances are slim and the average Cameroonian voter is tired of being a mere gesture rather than a partner in the democratic process. Since 1990, Cameroon's democratic process has been like a journey without maps. Prayer sessions and ecumenical services have been done, asking the Almighty God to intervene and save Cameroon. But God's response seem to be "I will help those who help themselves".

It is about time Cameroonians took a break and chartered a political, social, economic and cultural map that would go beyond presidential 2004 to the year 2020. Cameroon needs not just a political transformation but also a social transformation of its society and economic upliftment of the poor. Unfortunately those who have the power to transform the society do not have the will and those who have the will do not have the power. But one cannot give up because other countries in other continents that lagged behind Africa in economic development are now tigers in world economy. Germany and Japan that were destroyed in world War II came back because of their people (Molua: 2003:4). Cameroon may be losing its Independence assets but it has not yet mortgaged its national soul. It can still strengthen the union of brotherhood (not bondagehood c.f Bole Butake) between all Cameroonians whatever their origin.

Cameroon does not need repeated elections whose results are often predictable; what Cameroon needs today is what Thandika Mkandawire and Charles Soludo propose for Africa.

They propose for Africa a system of democratic governance in which political actors have the space to freely and openly debate, negotiate and design a (politico) economic reform package that is integral to the construction of a new social contract (Mkandawire&Soludo 1999:133). Beyond Presidential 2004 therefore is the dire need for a Pax Cameroon Congress that will focus on vision 2020.

All Cameroonian Congress

The aim of this Congress would be to provide Cameroon with a genuine democratic, development and citizenship agenda up to the year 2020. 2020 because it would have marked 30 years of Cameroon's institutionalised democratic process began in 1990. This congress could hold in 2005 marking 15 years of stock taking and giving Cameroonians another 15 years of adequate planning. These 15 years of planning, would be interrupted every five years for comparative analysis. The Congress participants would decide and define what democratic strategies and economic choices to make in order to attain both the Independence and Millennium Development goals. It would be about reconnecting the political forces and the social forces; I have also had to wonder aloud why this country should maintain the name "Cameroon"; why should the country continue with a name imposed on it by a group of Portuguese adventurers? Simply because the Portuguese caught and ate a variety of "crayfish" at the Wouri Estuary was no reason to have a country named after "crayfish" prawns (cameroes) in Portuguese or in pidgin "njanga". Except Cameroonians accept that they are "njangas", the new dispensation may also demand that the country be given a new indigenous name that spells dignity, integrity and nationalism.

The congress would provide a vision born out of tolerance, moderation, intellectual honesty non partisan consideration and sense of realism with regard to the conduct of public affairs in Cameroon; a vision needed to provide a legal framework and foundation suitable for the construction of a new Cameroonian order. While the 1991 Tripartite Conference was too election concerned, the All Cameroonian Congress should have a long term and broad-minded goals. The congress must identify the challenges implied by these goals and propose strategies to meet them.

Documents abound in Cameroon that have attempted to provide a durable social contract between the rulers and the governed. They may be used as references during this congress.

Some of these documents include “*the political philosophy of Ahmadou Ahidjo*”, “*As told by Ahmadou Ahidjo*” “*Communal Liberalism* by Paul Biya, *National Economic and social program* (NESPROG) by the SDF, “*the white book*” by Mila Assoute, “*la crise economique du cameroun*” by Robert Nyom, proposals from the Coalition for National Reconciliation and Reconstruction, and Front for Alternative Forces. This list is not exhaustive.

There are also resource persons that have proposed the way forward for Cameroon either through newspaper articles or other channels. Some of them include Djeukam Tchameni: Hilaire Kanga, Yondo Black, Luc Sindjou Pokam, Maurice Tadadjeu, Anicet Ekane, Jean Emmanuel Pondi, Celestin Monga, Shonda Tonde, Ndiva Kofele Kale, Tatah Mentah, Nantang Jua, Charles Taku, Francis Nyamnjoh, Churchill Monono, Godfrey Tangwa, N.N Susungi, Ernest Molua, Dibussi Tande, Simon Munzu, Christopher Fomunyoh, Charles Ateba Eyene, Eric Chinje, Chris Ebini etc; Once again the list is not exhaustive.

These personalities need to join other members of the political and civil society and party leaders in the All Cameroonian congress. The initiative to convene such a congress lies on the shoulders of all patriotic Cameroonians. The impetus lies on the incumbent leadership. There has indeed been little dialogue and fair play in Cameroon’s multiparty democracy, even in comparison with most African countries (Nyamnjoh: 2002).

Cameroon must be one of the few countries in Africa where opposition leaders and members of the civil society have never publicly met with President Paul Biya. It would also be necessary to include a fresh discussion on a new constitution in the All Cameroonian congress. The 1996 constitution and other party proposals may serve as a point of entry. The outcome of this congress therefore would be a document called “**Vision 2020 – framework for a long term vision for Cameroon**”.

End note: A new Generation

Cameroonians born during or after independence (1960) owe a lot of gratitude to those who fought for the country’s independence and who have been at the helm of state affairs since independence. Most of those who were politically active during and immediately after independence did so when they were in the primes of their lives – almost in their thirties. Without the ultimate sacrifice of these nationalists, Cameroon’s political agenda would have

been completely mortgaged. Thanks to the wisdom and knowledge of those who have so far been in the corridors of power, Cameroon's image of an island of peace in an ocean of conflict is intact. It is an image that must be consolidated with deeper significance. It is therefore a natural design that the old politicians who are mostly above their fifties should start thinking of passing the mantle of leadership to the children of independence who are in their thirties and forties, today.

Amadou ahidjo born in August 1924 became Premier of Cameroon on 18 February 1958 at the age of 34. Paul Biya born on 13th February 1933 became Prime minister of Cameroon in 1975 at the age of 42 (he had already held the prestigious posts of Director of Cabinet and Secretary General at the Presidency). Ahidjo quit politics at the age of fifty eight, Biya just celebrated his 71st birthday. The charismatic leader of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) Ni John Fru Ndi is already in his late fifties, the meticulous leader of the Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU) Adamou Ndam Njoya is in his sixties, the taciturn leader of the National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP) Bello Bouba Maigari has almost hit fifty seven. One of the longest serving politicians and Secretary General of the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) Pa Augustine Frederick Kodock has attained the ripe age of eighty. Their names have been in the lips of the Independence children for over two decades. These politicians have for so long determined the course of this country and should now be serving as torchlights of succeeding generations.

Of course, democracy is not about excluding people on the basis of age, it is even more about including people on the basis of ideas. But if one has to go by the UNDP 2001 Report that puts life expectancy for Cameroon at fifty then these politicians need to think about an early retirement to provide a smooth transition of leadership to another generation. Julius Kambarage Nyerere did it in Tanzania exposing young Turks like Salim Ahmed Salim to the political limelight. Salim Ahmed Salim was Tanzania's Ambassador to the United Nations at the age of twenty-two. Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela did it in South Africa preferring to step down in favour of young people like Cyril Ramaphosa and Thabo Mbeki. When Sam Shafiishuna Nujoma was asked about prospects of running for a fourth term as President of Namibia he said " You know I am growing old. Age does not wait for anybody. I am not going to run for a fourth term. I must give the chance to the young people who have the strength to run the country". (New African, November 2003).

Examples are few because Africa's democracy still resides in the weird policy of gerontocracy. Yet politics is also about knowing when to quit especially as there are now diplomatic opportunities in the African Union and International Organizations for those who have had rich diplomatic careers in their countries. The generation gap is a major political issue in Africa, an issue which hitherto has gone unnoticed, ignored or unanalyzed by national and international researchers, opinion makers but the truth is that the old-guard nationalists are increasingly finding themselves out of step with the younger population (Moyo 1998:7). What is incumbent on the old leadership is to stand by the energetic youth. This past-present continuity undoubtedly will provide lessons as the new generation attempts to recuperate the disintegrating mantle of leadership. (Chiabi 1997:215).

The youths must equip themselves with what I call "Youth Power". According to Dibussi Tande, as the laboratory of Africa's democracy, youths should be uncompromising critics of their socio-political environment. They should be instilled with a healthy skepticism towards values that might be accepted blindly. They should adopt a way of thinking that is contrary to all forms of monolithism without being carried away by the illusions and fantasies of pluralism. They should clearly say "no" to the utopia of the new demagogues wearing borrowed democratic robes. (Tande, 1992).

What I propose for young people who wish to overhaul their rustic democratic machinery is to come back to the strategy of pioneer pan Africanist which is "think African, implement national". At the national level, youths should create broad-based associations, unions, NGOs and grassroots organizations that only they can control. Addressing grassroots, national and continental problems allows youths to groom themselves towards leadership.

This is the time for a new generation in Cameroon to develop leadership skills based on enduring African values (sharing not accumulating) *ubuntu* philosophy. (I am because we are) and respect for the old. Africa is not only losing its young and virile population to poverty, war and disease but also to Western exodus primarily because the young see the doors of opportunities closed in front of them by politicians whose future is behind them.

When indeed will the Cameroonian youths of today be leaders of tomorrow? Far from being a conflict of generation, the rite of passage of the young into power is a complimentary act meant to let the young realize their own dreams. For what indeed is vision 2020 all about? It

is about equipping Cameroon with a new dream that would revitalize the economy and reorient the democratic order. Vision 2020 needs new energies and fresh ideas from the Cameroonian youth. But these new energy and ideas will not come from perfunctory associations like PRESBY (President Biya's Youth) NEDY (New Deal Youths), JACHABY (Jeunesse Active pour Chantal Biya) and a host of window-dressing youth wing party organizations. Vision 2020 shall be managed by youths who have an independent mind and those who can dare to invent the future.

How the present political dinosaurs begin to involve the young political "indomitable lions" in the pursuit of a new Cameroonian order packaged in vision 2020 will determine the success of Cameroon's democratic process begun more than a decade ago.

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