

## The Need for Gender Studies at All Levels of Education in Cameroon



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### **Abstract**

**Aim:** The need for gender studies and practice in Cameroon cannot be over emphasized or remain only on papers and commemorations such as the celebration of the International Day of the Woman and conventions ratified. This paper aims at elucidating how the top-down educational policy of the government where gender studies are introduced later on under Citizenship Education has failed to inculcate desired values in society.

**Methods:** Data was garnered empirically through observations, through study of conjugal conflict files at the Regional Delegations of the Ministry of Women Empowerment and the Family, and through related scholarly articles, books and online sources.

**Results:** The study found that even with imposed quarters from the UN that have been inculcated in the country's constitution, and the efforts made so far by government, there's no parity from the executive right down to legislative, not to go down to communal and family levels in Cameroon. Findings equally show that, many women still ignorantly believe especially in rural areas, that politics is meant only for their male counterparts who are presumably heads of the families. At the level of Higher Education, some male scholars in state universities continue to falsely believe and question the competence of female colleagues. Some cultures still made parents to believe that higher education or schooling in general should be a male domain, thereby retarding the education of the girl child who is lagging behind under the bondage of culture. This is the typical case with the Hausa and Fulani residing in Cameroon and some ethnic groups caught up in discriminatory cultures all over the country.

**Conclusion:** Gender studies should be imposed at all levels of education in Cameroon and African countries to foster gender equality.

**Recommendations:** Government should separate gender studies from citizenship and make it a stand-alone subject known as Gender and Ethnic studies. Parents should undergo gender training courses be it in adult literacy program, and/or future parents are to gain this knowledge in schools before becoming parents to avoid being discriminative. If the gender studies are incorporated in current syllabus, Cameroonians would have no problems with notions like gender equality, equity, mainstreaming.

**Keywords:** *Gender studies, gender practices, gender discrimination, Cameroon.*

## INTRODUCTION

Cameroon, is a Central African country often described as Africa in miniature, due to her diverse nature in terms of peoples, culture and edaphic factors. The existence of many cultures entailed several forms of socialisations, be it ethnic, religious and western systems of education. Since independence, Cameroon has ratified many conventions and protocols aimed at avoiding gender discriminations of all sorts. For example, Cameroon ratified the convention on the rights of a child, the convention on the Elimination of all forms of discriminations against women, the Maputo Protocol and many others. She is a member of UNESCO and her First Lady Madam Chantal Biya won Good Will Ambassador Prize for fighting hard against HIV/AIDS pandemic in the country in year 2008.

The Cameroon constitution is equally not biased against gender issues, because everyone is presumably equal before the law. But irrespective of all these, many women were still in the lower rungs of the socio-economic and political ladder.<sup>1</sup> This can be seen in ministerial positions where only few women are appointed and only a small number compared to men are imposed at the legislative and regional councils. Were it not for imposed quarters almost all seats at these levels of administration would still be held but by men. Since the family is the basic unit of the society, the men continue to pass for family heads even if the man is not responsible for the upkeep of the family, and the fact that there are families headed by women in case of women who are single-parents. This is due to Cameroon's indigenous education which gave women complementary status and relegated women behind where patriarchy prevailed. This was replicated in most African countries by the colonial masters, who rather entrenched the inferior status to women with their own stereotypes educational wise.<sup>2</sup>

With the post-colonial education following western philosophical theories of education, the fight to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women and to carry out gender mainstreaming has been proving difficult.<sup>3</sup> The way forward therefore, can only come from the introduction of gender studies as early as from primary to secondary levels of education in African schools and making the subject compulsory like some subjects. This is to make sure that the various norms to be derived from such studies are inculcated into the pupils and students who are presumably future parents, policy makers and leaders. The bulk of the society has been kept ignorant due to drop outs from school at the primary and secondary levels, whereas if the subject were to be made compulsory, students before taking their specializations or dropping out, as it is often the case<sup>4</sup> they would have grasped the various issues at stakes when it comes to gender discrimination. Hence, the avoidance of wasted resources for advocacy on gender equality, which often falls on deaf ears and expected goals

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<sup>1</sup> Ever since its inception some 29 years ago the International Day of Women is celebrated in Cameroon Year in year out and up to this 29<sup>th</sup> edition, yearly themes are tailored to sensitise stakeholders on the one hand and women on the other, to reach earmarked goals which were not being heeded to,

<sup>2</sup> A. Bame, Nsamenang, "Towards a Philosophy for Africa's Education" in. Bame Nsamenang and Therese M. S. Thombs's: *A Hand Book for African Educational Theories and Practices, A Generative Teacher Education Curriculum*, Human Development Resource Centre (HDRC) 2011, *Presses universitaires d'Afrique*.

<sup>3</sup> All Yearly women's day celebration themes were first tailored towards Millennium Development Goals which were earmarked to end at the year 2000, when goals were not attained, sustainable goals were developed all aimed at the eradication of poverty to achieve equality for all to no avail.

<sup>4</sup> From mere observations, it is no secret that at the primary and secondary levels, drop out of school occur for various reasons in Cameroon, while in some areas like in the northern part of the country children can't afford required statutory documents to sit in for end of school certificate exams, not to talk of the gender parity issue.

not attained. This paper corroborates the UNESCO and UNISEF projects such as the ideas found in Clare D. et al (2020).<sup>5</sup> Like it was mentioned above the greater part of the population does not perceive gender equality as African, where women were perceived to play complementary roles and the men were the natural leaders and gender roles constructed as such.

### Gender Tenets Before and After Colonisation

Gender, according to World Health Organisation, refers to socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women especially in their previous relations to men<sup>6</sup>. Gender role is generally defined as a set of attitudes, behaviours, and self-presentation methods ascribed to members of a certain biological sex.<sup>7</sup> This includes norms for behaviour, which some researchers started calling it “the rules of masculinity” or “masculine ideology.”<sup>8</sup> On the other hand there is “womanhood”, which had complementary roles to that of masculinity. These included prescriptions for ways to act. It also includes proscriptions or ways not to act. Similar to sex differences, there are many debates about the nature and nurture of gender role. Some believe that these attitudes and behaviours naturally flow from biological sex and personality traits, whereas others see them as complete cultural constructions which suit the case of Africa before.<sup>9</sup> If it were so, then it tied very well with the Cameroonian situation wherein the authorities in concert with the international world have been struggling to reach equity.

Masculinity went with strength, which was manifested by emotional toughness, courage, being self-reliant, and honour manifested equally through duty consciousness, loyalty, being responsible with integrity, selfless, compassionate and being generative. Of course, some of these qualities could also be attributed to women like being self-reliant and being generative, for women fend for their children in the absence of men and were compassionate too. Actions attributed to masculinity were competitiveness, ambition, risk taking and volition. Womanhood was thus perceived to have weaknesses such as emotional fragility, excessive fear, dependency and irrationality. Women were also looked upon as ambivalent, that is being unreliable, irresponsible and being non-committal. While women were presumed to be inactive with lethargic tendencies, which resulted in submissiveness and complacency, men were generally seen as those who secured and provided for the rest of the society. They were equally seen as protectors who would risk their lives to ensure security for their love ones. Males were therefore, presumed to be protective of others and endowed with action-empathy.<sup>10</sup>

Generative fathering entailed engaging and responding, to a child's needs while attending to larger development. For a man to be self-reliant, it means that he had to use resources to

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<sup>5</sup> Clare Doud, et Al, *Gender Responsive Pedagogy*, Pub & ed, Nairobi: Forum for Africa Women Educationalists: FAWE in partnership with UNESCO and UNISEF.2020. 30-36.

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organisation, overview, assessed on 20<sup>th</sup> 06,21.

<sup>7</sup> Hammer & Good (2010). Positive Psychology: “An Empirical Examination of Beneficial Aspects of Endorsement of Masculine Norms”. “Psychology of Men & Masculinity”, 2010, pp.303–318., [www.wiki pedia en](http://www.wiki pedia en), Retrived on the 12/06/ 2021

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.jstor.org/staple/2230225>, Judith Butler, *Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir' second sex*. Assessed 10/10/2021

<sup>10</sup> Hammer & Good (2010). Positive Psychology: “An Empirical Examination of Beneficial Aspects of Endorsement of Masculine Norms”. Assessed 12/06/2021

overcome adversity. As a worker/provider traditionally, men had to have meaningful work that provided for others. In group orientation males tended to collaborate and associated in larger networks such as those which resulted in secret societies in this study area. With courage, males could achieve great things through daring and risk-taking such as during defensive wars or expansionist wars as the case could be. Fraternal organizations have a strong history of humanitarian services for others. Heroic acts therefore were given a long tradition as part of manhood. But at the war front, men depended on foodstuff cultivated by women. Perhaps it was for the same reason that most customs of African countries were formulated, because in their examination, they are a perfect example of this description of gender roles.<sup>11</sup>

According to those arguing for womanhood in traditional Africa, there's a claim that no degree of stereotyping against women existed in traditional Africa. To them women possessed the power to organize the family and the society at large. It is said that there was an enormous task and responsibility conferred on womanhood. The responsibility of both men and women were seen as complementary to one another "there was a co-dependence and a balance that existed."<sup>12</sup> In various traditional African societies such as among the Yoroba in Nigeria and the Azante in Ghana, the African woman possessed the power that bound the society together. In fact, the survival of the family and the future of marriage depended a great deal on the African woman. According to Leith (1967), culturally, African women were the transmitters of the language, the history and the oral culture, the music, the dance, the habits and the artisanal knowledge. They were the teachers and were responsible for instilling traditional values and knowledge in children. Men were also essential in the transmission of knowledge to the youth because they had a different type of knowledge of the earth and environment, and also of ceremonies and traditions that were performed exclusively by men.<sup>13</sup>

From the inexhaustible reviewed sources, it is evident that the leadership roles women played in the development of various African societies cannot be underestimated. The contributions of women towards the social, economic, political and educational developments of African societies cannot also be opposed. In fact, traditional African society attached no importance to gender issues because every individual had a role to play both in the family and in the larger society. Each gender had its traditional role in the development of the society. In other words, the position of women was complimentary to that of men or it could be that the old did not lay much emphasis on dependency issues. There was therefore the non-existent of gender inequality. Each role, regardless of who performed it was considered equally important because it contributed to the fundamental goal of community survival. The claim, therefore, is that gender inequality came with the advent of colonialism.<sup>14</sup> But if it were so, there would not have been much hesitance in relinquishing some of the traditions, which were no longer considered valid in terms of women emancipation.

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<sup>11</sup> This stemmed from a mere belief by women whom without trail and failure or success, that men were to continue to be head of their families and leaders, whom with time have now proven that they can succeed with or without a man given a situation or means of survival.

<sup>12</sup> St. Clair, W, *Imperialism and Traditional African Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1994, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> R. Leith, *African Woman*, New York: Macmillan Publishers Ltd. 1967, p.34.

<sup>14</sup> Clair, *Imperialism and Traditional African Culture*, p.19.

In spite of the complimentary role women played to men, the dynamism that prevailed was that there existed the patriarchal system where men were still seen as the head of the family and leaders in their societies.<sup>15</sup> This therefore shows that traditional Africa was based on gender inequality but with complements of the other gender because each gender had a role to play in contributions to societal development. The impacts of the women were felt in every aspect of life of the society<sup>16</sup>. Thus, the women played a key role in the education and the teaching of children's social, ethical and moral values, which were part of the cultural standards for evaluating proper societal behaviour. Evaluating the status and position standing of women in traditional Africa, Hafkin and Hanson (1976) reiterate that women were treated with unparalleled respect because they were seen to be closer to the creator than men ever had the potential of being. This is because women themselves had the ability to create due to the fact that they were able to give birth. As creators of life, they were charged with the sacred responsibility of caring for the needs of the next generation, and because of this, they can be regarded as the originations of the idea that is now known as sustainable developments.<sup>17</sup>

Buttressing the above quotation, it is an irrefutable fact that societal sustainable development depended essentially on a solid family structure. In every society, the most important aspect of life and survival was a family. The women were often the backbone of the family in the Cameroon. It is important, however, to mention that one of the many forms of traditional African notions of family structure, which cannot be ignored, was polygamy. This form was *en vogue* because chiefs and kings needed many wives for various reasons. Despite its many woes, polygamy was viewed as a means of achieving family social and economic stability.<sup>18</sup> From a broad perspective, the necessity and importance of polygamy in family structure as well as the many benefits it held for the woman were not to be under estimated. According to Dobson (1954), as a result of the agrarian society of the economy of traditional Africa, polygamy was warned as socially necessary in order to ensure continuation of the society. It was also to provide for the needs of the many women who might otherwise never enjoy the status and benefits which accompany becoming a mother, a bearer of children and are thus a vital link to the ancestors. Wars between groups often resulted in the reduction of the male population, thus females usually outnumbered males. Unmarried women risked social humiliation without a husband and children, thus the system sought to provide for the needs of everyone in the society.<sup>19</sup>

As a solution to societal development, the understanding of traditional African perspective on gender roles was crucial to a sustainable future of Africa. But owing to external influence, their customs were now being condemned as a result of women emancipation, irrespective of their own conceptions about life.

As Olufemi (1992) posits, by giving equal value and importance to the roles played by both male and female, the balance and harmony that once existed can be re-established.<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p.20.

<sup>17</sup> J. Hafkin, and H. Jand Bay, (eds), *Women in Africa: Studies is Social and Economic Change*, Stanford: Heinemann. 1976, pp. 59-60.

<sup>18</sup> B. Dobson, "Polygamy and Women's Place in Africa" in *Corona: Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1 No 12, 1954, pp 454-57.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> S. Olufemi, and C. Ver Eecke, *Mobilizing Women for Rural Development: Some Principles for Success*, London: Cambridge University Press. 1992, p. 226.



misery in the African society today, Cameroon inclusive, has its genesis from the oppression, inequality and discrimination against women. The society must therefore not lose sight of the fact that cooperation between men and women and interdependence on one another is essentially fundamental to achieving a well-ordered society. This is due to the fact that the African situation above was misunderstood by the colonial masters to mean various aspects of subordination and marginalisation of women. With these gender roles, it is necessary to examine the kind of socialisation given to children from birth and its bases.

### **Aspects of Socialisation and Gender**

Education of the children of Cameroon formed part of African indigenous education which culminated to the success of almost everybody in the society and hardly were there idle people.<sup>21</sup> And when it came to marriage those who could not afford to marry were considered to be weaklings. So, parents worked hard and trained their children to be responsible parents. As such, a father would make sure he provided his son with his first wife in order to make him responsible. For women, their responsibility was to train their girl children to be hard-working, since food cultivation was almost entirely their responsibility. As such, a mother had to train her daughters to emulate her in all respects. For, if her children failed in marriage or became lazy, she was to be blamed for not training them very well. Hence women of the region had the task of training all young women to be future good wives wherever they were married. Being a good wife meant being respectful, hardworking and being a good mother to one's children<sup>22</sup>.

All traditional educational practices went on hitch free and values were inculcated into the youths without discriminations because there was no competition of any sought between the various genders.<sup>23</sup> Instead of harmonizing these educational values with that of the western world during colonization, the tendency was that the Africans were inferior to the white and so anything Africa was to be discarded. On the contrary, their system of education with a much more incapacitating tendency was introduced. For one had to know how to read and write before being able to operate or function well in the modern society, a situation which has not only been disproved but has left many unemployed<sup>24</sup>. Unemployment was never envisaged in the African curricula as everyone grew up to be useful in his or her society. Instead, much unemployment was being witnessed in the world today because some jobs were considered to be inferior in spite of their usefulness to man just because the learned assume some arrogance and negligence.<sup>25</sup> This is to say that those who had good intellectual capability had to follow and strengthen themselves intellectual wise and benefits from professions stemming there from. While those incapable of schooling male or female learn other means of provision for them by engaging into the various trades benefitting society as well as individual needs. Again, women were mostly relegated in favor of men who were

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<sup>21</sup> Mathew B. Gwanfogbe, "Africa' Triple Education Heritage: a Historical Comparison" in A. Bame N. and Therese M.S. Tschombe' Hand book of African Theories and Practices. Pp.39-54.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Madam Hilary Clinton in one of her campaign speeches during the 2017 American presidential election did promise, that were she to win, she would make all school drop outs to go to learn various trades in which they were interested in to narrow the unemployment gap which was partly due to lack of technical knowhow which many often neglected with the hope of getting white collar jobs hard to come by because of exorbitant fees and the fact that not everyone can make it. This was not different from the Cameroonian case.

<sup>25</sup> Florence W. Yuven and A. Bame Nsamenang, "Place of Agriculture in Africa's Educational Development" in. A. Bame Nsamenang and ThereseM. S. Tschombe's Handbook of African Educational Theories and Practices: pp.495-515.

over favored and maintained as titular heads of family and administration during the colonial period<sup>26</sup>.

The above was the prevailing situation in Cameroon and in most African societies. It therefore goes that their system of socialization reflected their beliefs and children grew up being trained to inculcate the values stemming from such beliefs.<sup>27</sup> Hence, were these considered by the colonial masters, new knowledge could have simply been added and harmonized to forge the way forward for development?

### **The Need for Gender Studies and Practice at All Levels of Education**

In Cameroon gender studies are introduced only or mainly at the university level and not all universities have departments particularly created for gender studies. Gender or women studies used to feature mostly in departments like history, anthropology, sociology, linguistics and so on<sup>28</sup>. It was only when the University of Buea was created 1993 that she opened a department for women and gender studies. The University of Maroua established in 2008 earmarked a programme on gender studies, but the programme has not yet gone operational. Away from that, it is subsumed under civics and ethics where gender related terms are defined and under the topic Human Rights in primary and secondary schools under Civics and Ethics.<sup>29</sup>

Gender ideology is therefore a term that certainly ignites heated conversations at all levels, including family gatherings and academicians trying to define social phenomena, or even politicians whose agenda is to pronounce themselves for or against conceptions of gender.

The concept of gender as a social platform from which the roles attributed to each sex are derived, began to be studied in the late 1940s. The philosopher Simone de Beauvoir<sup>30</sup> was one of the first academicians to conceptualize the idea of gender and how this influences how women are socially constructed. One of the most important postulates of Beauvoir's discourse is that no one is born a woman. According to him, she becomes a woman, referring not to the biological sex of women, but to the social symbol from which we come to understand the models of behaviour and the social hierarchy of those born with the female biological sex.<sup>31</sup>

In 1968, Robert Stroller,<sup>32</sup> professor and researcher of psychiatry known for his theories on the development of gender identity, extended the understanding of these concepts by pointing out the difference between biological sex, gender, and the roles of each one. These concepts form a social structure composed of symbols, representations, norms, values, and practices that are elaborated not only based on anatomical, sexual and physiological differences but on the attributes, we assign to them.<sup>33</sup> This is entirely social and gives meaning to the relationships among people classified in a gender.

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Kpughe Lang, *Empowered without Power: Women and Leadership in the Basel Mission and Presbyterian Church in Cameroon*, Lnaga Resaerch & Publishing Common Initiative Group. 2020, p. 24-26.

<sup>27</sup> Florence W. Yuven and A. Bame Nsamenang, "Place of Agriculture in Africa's Educational Development" in. A. Bame Nsamenang and ThereseM. S. Tchombe's *Handbook of African Educational Theories*: pp.495-515

<sup>28</sup> See citizenship syllabuses for primary and secondary education online for Cameroon schools.

<sup>29</sup> See the Citizenship syllabus for primary and secondary schools in Cameroon

<sup>30</sup> Beauvoir, Simone "The Woman Destroyed" (1967) (short notes)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> R. Troller, *Sex and Gender: The Development of Masculinity and Femininity*, Routledge, 1994, p20.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.10.

Stemming from the work of Stroller, women's studies, later called Gender Studies, began to make a presence in the curricula of higher education institutions. What is taught at Gender Studies courses is expansive, and those who study it can learn very diverse concepts related to gender and how it is perceived in social, economic, and political levels. In general terms, almost all instances that seek to teach the discipline do so at the level of definition of gender, its differences, and connections to biological sex, as well as the philosophical, anthropological, and social constructions with which we form the idea of masculinity and femininity. These courses also examine the intersections of gender with race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic class, capacity, sexuality, and other dimensions that differentiate in the conceptualization and hierarchy of people on the social ladder.<sup>34</sup>

The goal of an academic degree in Gender Studies is for students to learn to identify, analyse cultural practices and traditional notions that revolve around gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation, as well as understanding how gender is an influential factor in people's lives from a social, political, and economic point of view.<sup>35</sup> This knowledge is valuable if you want to delve into explaining how the differences in gender play an important role in both the microcosm and macrocosm of society. But there is value in the idea that Gender Studies need to stop being an elective subject, but should be injected into the common core of curricula generally. The reason is simple: There is no formula to name or describe neither the social imbalances nor the exercises of invisibility that are exerted over women and other social minority groups.

The necessity for an education with a gender perspective can therefore not be gainsaid as it discusses how the social dynamics that concern gender, ethnicity, or race, negatively affect access to education, job opportunities, as well as the validation and the production of knowledge for women in academia. There still exist within the academic and scientific community, cases of women and people from racial minorities and LGBT who are not entitled to speech and publication of their work and debate without jeopardizing their employment position. In other areas, there are people whose, physical integrity, or the residency in their own countries especially elsewhere in and around the African continent is not guaranteed.<sup>36</sup> The general picture of the African continent and Cameroon in particular depicts women as contributing less to the development of Africa which when examined women would be veritable partners in development of not individual families but the entire continent as a whole. This therefore indicate that there is a necessity for gender studies at all levels of education in all African countries and Cameroon in particular due to the low level of awareness and practice in Cameroon.

All the above would therefore be geared towards addressing discrimination, which is the denying of opportunities and rights to individuals on the basis of their gender. Gender equity recognizes that women and men have different needs and power in society and that these differences should be identified for gender mainstreaming.<sup>37</sup>

To say the least, the situation for women and girls is just as worrying in Cameroon as well as elsewhere in Africa. As contends Ngassa (Nd), as a child, she was born with an inferior status and the discrimination between her and her male brother stated at infancy. Her education as a child was directed towards making her a cook and a wife. Any formal education had to be

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<sup>34</sup> This is at the level of Higher National Diplomas of post-secondary schools in general

<sup>35</sup> See the 1998 educational law in Cameroon.

<sup>36</sup> <https://itpd.ncert.gov.in/plug>, assessed on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021, 9pm.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



offered but to the male brother, she had to be married as early as the custom permitted, but younger than her brother. She had no choice as to her spouse and her consent was not required. The age difference between her and her husband could be anything over 30 years. For correction she had to be beaten.<sup>38</sup>

With much awareness, the above situation is gradually being abandoned, but sometimes women are given dress codes which bare them from wearing certain dresses in particular places. For examples Muslims would not want their children putting up certain uniforms to schools because of their culture and continue to marry off young under aged girl children at their own detriment. While some institutions cannot be entered into with pairs of trousers, in the rest of the country, we have strict dress codes that disproportionately affect the female student population.

Girls in some places can't inherit their father's property. Women cannot run for certain political post. Women cannot be given certain amount of loans in banks without authorisations from their husbands. Women can't own land and so many could not reach university level or complete primary of secondary levels of education for obvious reasons. Forced marriages are still being practiced among Muslims especially in the north of the country and some cultural enclaves in and around the country still in the name of tradition and customs. When they are qualified alongside men, they would be called names.<sup>39</sup> In this context, there is a clear urgency for an educational drive towards an idea of gender that frees us from the conceptualization of the female gender as an anomaly, secondary to the male and inherently sexual as opined by some philosophers such as Jean Jacque Rousseau who believed that women were too emotional to be educated and rather good for men's sexual gratification.<sup>40</sup> And the place to start is not until universities, but at schools.

The relevance of gender dimensions in teaching and learning processes therefore cannot be overemphasised. We must accept that the social and educational profile of the classroom is multi-class, multi-caste, multi-religious and gendered with disability as a significant dimension of the profile of children in classrooms. Thus, classroom consists of learners who belong to diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds including children with special needs. And Gender cuts across all these categories at varied levels. Inculcating gender in teaching and learning can thus help in addressing gender concerns through text books and pedagogy. This will enable the pupils and students to recognize the factors of gender bias in textual material and curriculum transaction; identify the biases with regard to the content or role allocation to male and female characters and explore linguistic bias, and the participation of women in political, social and economic processes. It will also help to promote respect for the roles that all genders play in their families, communities and the nation at large, while identifying existing gender biased attitudes and behaviour among teachers and students. Again, we can develop gender sensitive pedagogical processes in transaction of various disciplines and use and adopt learning activities that foster gender sensitive classroom environment with the view that stereotypes are created by socialization discussion points.

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<sup>38</sup> V. Ngassa, "Factors that prevent Women from attaining her Rights" in Women, Children and the Law" FIDA Cameroon's Publication. (Nd) p.2-5.

<sup>39</sup> Male chauvinism is not farfetched in Cameroonian universities.

<sup>40</sup> "Age of Enlightenment" Microsoft (R) Student {DVD}. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008, retrieved on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

### Cameroon Governmental Efforts Aimed at Minimizing Discrimination

In both matri and patri clans in Cameroon, the rights that were acquired at the initial stage of the marriage were often exercised by the husband's family during the period of mourning, when a husband died. This fact was brought into focus upon the husband's death. The widow was obliged, in principle, to remain with the late husband's family, provided she had children and if her bride wealth had already been paid. After a period of mourning, the leader or the successor of the patri- or matri-clan or family would assemble all the men of the family and asked the widow to choose a mate among the husband's brothers if there were many, but mostly younger brothers as a father or senior brother could not remarry his son's wife or junior brother's wife. On the other hand, no bride wealth was paid again on her behalf, for from the first bride wealth, she was already condemned as property belonging to the man's patrilineage.<sup>41</sup> All these ideas from time immemorial were handed down from one to the next generation by way of tradition and nobody had to change it<sup>42</sup>.

After independence, Cameroon became a bi-jural country whereby the Common Law system was applied in the English-Speaking Provinces (North West and South West) while the Civil Law system operated in the French-Speaking Provinces of the Federal Republic.<sup>43</sup> The Cameroonian situation was however not different from other African countries in that, while much was being borrowed from the laws of their former colonial masters, there existed customary laws which were as many as the ethnic groups that existed all over Africa. In addition, there was on the other hand an Islamic law in our national territory. The former West Cameroon had experienced the importation of English laws, which were guaranteed by section 11 of the Southern Cameroon High Court law 1955 wherein it was stipulated that "Subject to the provisions of any written law and in particular of this section and of section, 10, 15 and 22 of this law; a) The common law, (b) The doctrine of equality and (c) The statutes of general application which were in force in England on the first day of January 1900, shall in so far as they relate to any matter with respect to which the legislature of the Southern Cameroons is for the time being competent to make laws, be in force within the jurisdiction of the court".<sup>44</sup>

Article 9 of the British Mandate Agreement on the Cameroons did give Britain the liberties *inter alia* to; "(...), constitute the territory into a custom, fiscal and administrative union or federation with the adjacent territories under the sovereignty or control provided always that the measures adapted to that end do not infringe to provisions of this mandate."<sup>45</sup> As such, the British fused together British Cameroons with its Nigeria protectorate for administrative and judicial purposes. At the trusteeship period from 1946 the status quo was still the same, the Nigerian Constitution of 1954 resulted in the creation of the Southern Cameroon High Court. The jurisdiction of this high court was dictated by the Southern Cameroon High Court Law of 1955. According this Law section, 27 (1) stipulated that the high court shall observe, and

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<sup>41</sup> Since women did not get marriage to individuals, but to the whole family as perceived by those who practised bride wealth.

<sup>42</sup> Lukong Mathilda Yenla, "Evolution and Impact of Traditions and Customs of Marriage in the Bamenda Grasslands ca.1800-2010" A Ph.D. Thesis in History, defended at the University of Yaoundé I. Cameroon, 2017. P.89.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>44</sup> See Southern Cameroons High Court/ S. C .No. 7 of 1955 Law, 1955, Southern Cameroons High Court Law, 1955.

<sup>45</sup> E. N., Angwafor, *Family Law in Anglophone Cameroon*, University of Regina Press, Canada. p.8.

enforce the observant of every Native Law and custom which is not repugnant to the natural justice, equity and good conscience, nor incompatible with any law for the time being in force and nothing in this law shall deprive any person of the benefits of any such native law or custom. (2) Such laws and customs shall be deemed applicable in cases and matters where the parties there to are natives and also in cases and matters between natives and non-natives where it may appear to the court that substantial injustice would be done to both parties by a strict adherence to the rule of English law.<sup>46</sup>

The phrase, “the observance of every native law and custom which was not repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience” gave much room to debate. This is because it was difficult to harmonize customary law with legislative enactments. Whenever the court were satisfied, that a custom was of general usage within a particular ethnic group, it upheld it. Husbands were forbidden to send away their nursing wives from their matrimonial homes or to institute divorce proceedings against any nursing wife. But the observance of certain customary laws, were fraught with much difficulty. Examples, were the cases where husbands claimed paternity of children whom their run-away wives got with other men, simply because they failed to pay back the bride wealth. This was practiced all over the Western Grasslands and the south west provinces.<sup>47</sup> Here, there was therefore conflict between customary and modern law. But cases of this nature, which were brought to court, were decided in favour of the women, while those handled in the customary courts were decided in favour of men.<sup>48</sup>

When Southern Cameroons gained independence in 1961 and decided to join former East Cameroon to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon, laws had to be harmonized. But coming from two different colonial backgrounds, Cameroon remained a bi-jural state. Article 46 of the Federal Constitution of 1961, did acknowledge the continuous application of Pre-independence pieces of legislation. It was therefore stated that: “previous legislation of the Federated states shall remain in force so far as it does not conflict with the provisions of this constitution.”<sup>49</sup> The outcome of all these enactments was that the Southern Cameroon law of 1955, the applicable revised laws of the Federation of Nigeria and all other similar pieces of pre-1961 Legislation continued to be applicable in former West Cameroon.

The first attempt by the Federal Republic of Cameroon to provide a uniform law on family matters was made in 1968, when Law no: 68/LF/2 of June 11<sup>th</sup> 1968 organizing Civil Status Registration was passed.<sup>50</sup> In addition to carrying out births and deaths registrations, it also did so for marriages. This law dealt exclusively with formalities to marry and no reference was made on capacity to marry. In the study area this gap was filled by the application of the Nigerian Marriage Ordinance.<sup>51</sup> The 1968 law was replaced and its provisions consolidated in

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<sup>46</sup> See Southern Cameroons High Court/ S. C .No. 7 of 1955 Law, 1955, Southern Cameroons High Court Law, 1955.

<sup>47</sup> Complain from DLSAM on Paternity of children of a divorcee.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. The Customary Courts continued to uphold that once bride wealth had been paid there is no bargain as the children of such marriages belong to the men who paid for the mother. In this case all marriages could be considered as customary because of bride wealth payment.

<sup>49</sup> Angwafor, *Family Law in Anglophone Cameroon*, p.13.

<sup>50</sup> See Law no: 68/LF/2 of June 11<sup>th</sup> 1968.

<sup>51</sup> See (Chapter 115-Volume 15: Revised Laws of the Federation of Nigeria bearing the Marriage Ordinance.

Ordinance N° 81-2 of June 29<sup>th</sup> 1981 (herein after referred to as the 1981 Ordinance) and bearing the title, Civil Status Registration<sup>52</sup>.

When national constitutions were harmonized in 1972, Section 16 (1) of Judicial Organization Ordinance N° 72/4 of 26<sup>th</sup> August 1972 provided that “the High Court shall have jurisdiction in (a), criminal matters to try actions and related offences. (b) (...), in civil matters, to try actions and proceeding relating to the status of persons, civil status, marriage, divorce, and affiliation, subject to the legal provisions relating to the traditional courts as regards rational, personal jurisdiction”.<sup>53</sup>

Following the modification of Ordinance N° 72/4 of 26<sup>th</sup> June 1972, by Law N° 89/019 of 29<sup>th</sup> December 1989, the provision of Section 16(1) of the 1972 Ordinance were later found in Section 16(1), (c) of the 1989 law. This subsection made reference to Customary Courts which applied customary law. In other words, problems which arose from customary marriage had to be settled in customary courts, while those from monogamous marriages were to be dealt with in the High Court. Section 9 (1)(b) of the Southern Cameroons High Court Law 1955 provided that “Subject to the provisions of the land and Native Rights Ordinance and other written law, the High court shall not exercise original jurisdiction in any suit or matter which is subject to the jurisdiction of a native court relating to marriage, family status, and guardianship of children, inheritance or the disposition of property on death”.<sup>54</sup>

The high court therefore did not hesitate to strike out cases which came up before it that ought to have been heard in the customary courts, which upheld traditional values which the courts were supposed to intervene following Article 27 (1) of the same 1955 law already cited above. As a result, many cases in the West Cameroon High Court were thrown out at the detriment of the women who sued their husbands for one reason or the other for want of jurisdiction. Examples of such cases were the cases of the Kamgue vs Kamgue, the Ngwa vs Ngwa and the Tufon vs Tufon. In the case of the Ngwa vs Ngwa, Justice Ndoping J. declared that “since the parties had been married according to the Native Laws and Customs of the Bafut people the High Court could not entertain the petitioner’s divorce suit”. He further stated “I find and hold that the petitioner’s marriage to the respondent after September 6, 1980, the date of issue of the marriage certificates no 196/83, continued to be a customary law marriage up to the present. In the upshot I adjudge that I, presiding at the High Court Mezam, have no jurisdiction to entertain the petition. The petitioner is advised to seek her redress in the Bafut Customary Court which is clearly the tribunal court with the jurisdiction in the matter.”<sup>55</sup>

In other cases, it was found out that there were marriage certificates which did not have mention of either monogamy or polygamy. Even where monogamy was mentioned, there was a clause which stated that “according to native laws and customs”<sup>56</sup>, which nullified the monogamous status of the marriage. All these jeopardized women’s enjoyment of their civil status right as stipulated in the Cameroon Constitution and Conventions that Cameroon was signatory to.

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<sup>52</sup> Civil Status Registration.

<sup>53</sup> Angwafor, *Family Law in Anglophone Cameroon*, p.13.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>56</sup> H. Fon., “Formalities, Content and Form of a Marriage Contract” in *A Simple Guide to the Civil Status Registration*, FIDA Publication, Tencam Press Ltd, Douala, nd, pp.24-27.



The multiplicity of ethnic groups in Cameroon was also an indication that conflict had to arise as to which law had to be taken into consideration. If, for example, all couples were to be married in court or civil status registrars, there would not have been problems. But in the study area, each ethnic group had its own customs of marriage and modern laws came to add to it, coupled with Islamic laws on marriage. In a country like Cameroon, where many people were called up to work out of their places of origin, this then called for inter-ethnic or inter-cultural marriages. In customary marriages the legal tender was bride wealth. Did this therefore mean that all people who got married from this region and paid bride wealth were to remain polygamous, even if they never wished for such status? This is because most workers who got married had to register their marriages in the civil status registrars in order to benefit therefrom.<sup>57</sup> But the situation proved worse only when spouses had problems which led to separation. It was only then, that the wife came to understand that her marriage was polygamy even though she contracted monogamy simply because her husband appreciated her parents by paying in some cases some tokens known as bride wealth.<sup>58</sup>

Divorce on the other hand continued to be granted without compromising the input of women in both laws. As with the customary law, divorce was something temporal and it could be permanent in statutory marriages, but in either case no consideration was taken of the wife's input. Only some compensation for the catering of children was to be given in case of divorce in court marriage and the enforcement of such laws was still wanting.<sup>59</sup>

It remained clear that Section 27 (1) of the 1955 law could solve such problems only to a limited extent. This was so because only statutory marriage cases could be held in the high court while customary marriage cases were held only in customary courts. Besides many people believed in their customs and paid less attention to legislative interventions, not to mention the fact that many people were ignorant of these laws. Women or girls of below the age of 21 as stipulated by the 1955 Southern Cameroon Law continued to be given out in marriages and since many never complained, the courts could not take action if there were no cases. This was due to the fact customary marriages had no age limits.<sup>60</sup>

The Cameroon government saw marriage from two perspectives. That is, it allowed polygamy which is known as customary marriage and monogamy known as statutory marriages.<sup>61</sup> Although the colonial government had serious problems in trying to eradicate polygamy, the state saw it as the way of the indigenes and so tolerated polygamy. The state however ensured that, be it monogamy or polygamy, it had to be registered under the civil status ordinance which came into being from 1981.<sup>62</sup> Official government Courts were therefore to handle cases concerning monogamous marriages, while customary courts handled those from customary marriages even though all were to be legalized at the civil status registrars. The state, however, made law concerning marriages which when examined still fell short of expectations, as there are conflicting laws which only lead to implications on couples, children and society at large.

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<sup>57</sup> Angwafor, *Family Law in Anglophone Cameroon*, p.14.

<sup>58</sup> Ngassa, "Factors that Prevent Women" in *Women, Children and the Law*, p.3.

<sup>59</sup> Angwafor, *Family Law in Anglophone Cameroon*, p.14.

<sup>60</sup> It was a taboo for any woman to even sue her husband for whatever reason and so women could not complain about their children being given to marriage at very tender ages.

<sup>61</sup> Cameroon Civil Status Registration Ordinance.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.



The Cameroon government therefore instituted national instruments related to marriage, which were expected to be respected by all the citizens. Cameroon as an actor in international politics therefore had to inculcate into her system some of these international policies with regard to Human Rights and the emancipation of Women in particular. As at now her efforts have not yielded expected fruits and many couples are yet to legalize their marriages.

Cameroon ratified the recommended international conventions aimed at eliminating various forms of discrimination and violence against women and girl children. Notable examples were the ratification of: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948; the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence and Discrimination against Women adopted by the UN in 1989; the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the UN in 191989; the African Charter on the Rights of the Child which went into force in November 29, 1999 and the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights of June 1993. Cameroon also ratified the fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995 and the African on Human and Peoples' Rights with emphasis on Women adopted in Maputo in 2003.<sup>63</sup>

At the National level the following measures, coupled with the 1981 Ordinance, had been taken. Before 1981, it was the Ministry of Social Affairs that was responsible for conjugal matters affecting couples. With more and more problems facing the families and societies at large, the Government of Cameroon created the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 1998, which was later changed to the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Promotion of the Family (MINPROFF) in 2004. The Mission of this Ministry, included the promotion of the status of Cameroonian women through education, improved access to credit facilities, decision making, gainful employment, prevention of all forms of discrimination and violent acts against women and girl children, the right of women to inheritance, to name a few.<sup>64</sup>

International organization such as United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) United Nations Children and Educational Funds, (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), and United Nations Development Program (UNDP),<sup>65</sup> as well as local nongovernmental organizations such as the Association for the Fight against Violence on the Women, the Cameroon Association of Female Jurists (FIDA) operating in Cameroon have been actively engaged in both the advancement of women and the fight against violence meted on them, many which resulted from forceful marriages, widowhood rites, rampant in the study areas over the years.

Legal dispositions were also included in the Cameroon penal code to protect the women against violence in which she was often a victim. These dispositions included: Article 296 of the penal code which prescribe a punishment of 5 to 10 years for any man who used physical or moral constraint to have sexual relations with a woman no matter her age (rape); article 279of the penal code which also prescribe punishment of 5 to 10 years imprisonment and fine if necessary on anybody who uses physical or any other means to cause injury on the person or persons; article 365 of the same code prescribes an imprisonment of 5 to 10years and fine on anyone who forces the other into marriage and article 357 of the same code also prescribes an imprisonment term of 3months to 5years. Concerning the girl child, the Cameroonian penal code in articles 291, 295, 344, 345, 347, 350 and 356 were to protect her

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<sup>63</sup> Extracted from a document of the Central Bureau for the Census and Population Studies. P. O. Box 12932 Yaoundé Cameroon by tekej2002@justice, com. Assessed on 10-07-2021.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

against prostitution, sexual abuse, (rape, incest etc), participation in pornographic material production, force marriage physical violence and other.<sup>66</sup>

Against this backdrop, the government has a draft family code, which was however still to be voted as law, to handle conjugal issues. An extract from the pending family code from a report sent by State Parties under Article 40 of the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights could help readers to have a fore taste. One wonders what could be withholding such efforts apart from lack of political will and the nonchalant attitude on the part of the government still. The extract from government's report to the Covenant states that Government's orientations on gender equality and the independence of the woman are on the right path. The draft code of the person and the family, which contains favourable provisions on the rights and aspirations of women, provides a major opportunity for gender equality and equity.

The following provisions of this draft bill express this wish: Section 215 stipulates that dowry and gifts cannot be returned, while section 234(3) equally stipulates that spouses owe each other mutual love, respect, fidelity, help and assistance. In case of polygamy, each wife has the right to equal treatment in relation to the other wives. Section 240 grants each of these spouses the freedom to work without the consent of the other. Section 242(1) equally stipulates that in a polygamous marriage, the husband forms with each of his wives a distinct family and that each wife is not obliged to provide for the needs of the other wives or those of their children. Section 449, stipulates that the head of the family manages in agreement with his wife the common property of the family; while section 459(2) states that in case of liquidation of the community, the wife shall receive her share before the husband. And last but not the least, section 547(2) on succession holds that in case of polygamy, all the widows have the right to inheritance shared between them in proportion to the number of years in marriage with the deceased.<sup>67</sup> This is how far the Cameroon government has gone against gender discrimination at various levels.

## CONCLUSION

In trying to meet up with external demands, as far as discriminatory issues resulting from resilient customs were concerned, the government brought about the Civil Status Ordinance of 1981 which had been modified following the 1996 constitutional amendment. When the Cameroon government discovered that many problems were still being faced by women and children particularly when a man died, it tried to solve the problem by ensuring that all marriages be legalized at the civil status. This has also made with stiff resistance from some men who suspect it as a way of giving in to their wives. Hence, had gender studies been introduced and made compulsory at the primary and secondary school levels, the situation would have been different as men and women would understand that interdependence between the various genders is rather a key to development. This would also lead to the avoidance of all sorts of discriminations that exist since the colonial period because by so doing gender education will equally pave the way for acceptance of the various differences that may arise from any issue leading to socio-economic and political development of all genders in Africa.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Schools are therefore the best place to discuss the idea of gender and its social implications in a friendly way that helps children and young people form a more egalitarian conception of how we construct the way we understand male and female genders. They don't have to be complex ideas or readings involving topics that might be considered sensitive, such as those handled by Beauvoir or Stroller. Small actions can be taken, such as questioning the amount of literature available in which girls have agency and weight in the narrative; textbooks that mention the historical and scientific achievements of women on a parity with that of men, as a conscious intention of freeing teaching discourses from stereotypes that are derogatory for female students.

These are the types of measures that prepare children and young people, not only to have a more balanced vision of the world in terms of gender but also to help them build cognitive structures so that, at more advanced educational levels, they can understand the concepts and themes that Gender Studies cover, as well as the problems that this discipline aims to analyse, examine, make visible, communicate and eventually resolve. To come of the problem facing stakeholders, Government should therefore separate gender studies from citizenship and make it a subject of its own known as Gender and Ethnic studies, while parents are to undergo training in such courses, be it in adult literacy program, and/or future parents are to gain this knowledge in schools before becoming parents in order to avoid being discriminative themselves. If the reverse is done before dropping out of school to do other trades in life, Cameroonians would have no problems with notions like gender equality, mainstreaming and you can name the rests.

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