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BUSINESS IN CAMEROON

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The rise of Cameroon's automotive industry



The «Made in Cameroon» war



EPAs : Cameroon resists Brussels

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Yasmine Bahri-Domon,



Double standards?

In Ethiopia, leaders of the Tigray region challenged the central government. They held unauthorized local elections, demanded greater autonomy, and in one night, fired two federal military bases. Prime Minister and Nobel peace prize winner Abiy Ahmed retaliated by cutting off all communications with the outside world, closing borders, and expelling all journalists and NGOs.

Afterward, in total secrecy, he sent his armed forces to crush the rebels and bomb the capital of the Tigray region. Four weeks into the fight, with no witnesses or observers, hundreds of deaths occurred, with tens of thousands of people fleeing to neighboring Sudan. Meanwhile, the international community did not flinch, besides expressing some 'concerns.' No one called Abiy Ahmed a dictator. No one moved to force him to «open dialogue.» No one accused Addis Ababa of using the military to suppress «mere demands for freedom.» The media and NGOs did not seem bothered by the information

blackout, and Abiy Ahmed remains a very respectable head of state.

On the other hand, in the crisis in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, even after Yaoundé listened to the demands and met the main ones, the movement did not cease to radicalize and veered into demands for secession. It later spread terror by indulging in extremely barbaric actions against the people of these regions. In response, the government did not seal off the region, the national army did not bomb Bamenda, and Buea was not attacked. Journalists and NGOs continued their work. And Paul Biya even instituted the Great National Dialogue, seeking to bring those behind the move back to their senses.

And guess who the media, NGOs, and some chancelleries keep blaming for a lack of dialogue, censorship, excessive centralism, and excessive use of force?



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MONTHLY STATISTICS

6 000 Km

In its Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP), Cameroon promised to asphalt 3,500km of roads between 2010 and 2020. However, to date, only 65% of that target (equivalent to 2,274 km) has been achieved. This was revealed by Célestin Tawamba (president of the employer's grouping GICAM) during a meeting with the Minister of Public Works Emmanuel Nganou Djoumessi on November 27, 2020, in Douala.

During the meeting, Célestin Tawamba expressed his surprise following the government's stated ambition to pave 6,000 km of road (which is thrice the length paved during the previous decade) over the 2020-2030 decade despite the non-fulfillment of the previous target.

CFA40 billion

This year, Cameroon saved CFA40 billion in wage bills, according to Prime Minister Joseph Dion Nguté who revealed this while presenting the government's economic, financial, social, and cultural program for 2021 before the national assembly on November 25, 2020.

According to the official, the amount was saved thanks to a set of measures implemented by the government to sanitize its payroll. These measures include the individualized payment of civil servants' salaries and the dematerialization of pay slips, also called «cash vouchers.»

720

The Cameroonian Ministry of SMEs recently selected 720 companies and craftsmen, eligible for the economic and financial resilience program aimed at supporting businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The eligible recipients were selected based on "fair and rigorous eligibility criteria" contained in a support guide published by the Ministry of SMEs.

The companies and craftsmen will share CFA2 billion, which represents the amount allocated to the Ministry of SMEs out of the CFA180 billion solidarity fund. But, this is not the only financial assistance they will receive from the state, the Ministry of SMEs stresses.

Some of the SMEs are still eligible for funds allocated to some other ministries in the framework of the economic resilience program, we learn. From credible sources, the overall amount of the funds is CFA32.7 billion.

2 438 carats

On November 11, 2020, in Yaoundé, during a session dedicated to the vote of the 2021 budget, the National Permanent Secretary of the Kimberly Process presented an overview of its activities since January 2020.

In that regard, it reveals that by end of October 2020, the Kimberly Process had traced 2,438 carats of diamonds produced in Cameroon, with 700 carats certified. The respective values of these precious stones are officially estimated at over CFA350 million and CFA35.3 million FCFA.

COMPANY OF THE MONTH

SCB CAMEROON MOVES TO DISMANTLE NEO INDUSTRY'S COCOA PROCESSING PLANT IN KEKEM FOLLOWING LOAN-REPAYMENT ISSUES

In November 2020, SCB Cameroon (the local subsidiary of the Moroccan banking group Attijariwafa Bank) published a tender notice on its website for the recruitment of an expert in plant assembly. According to the notice, the expert will dismantle the plant of an agro-industrial unit in Kekem, Western Cameroon.

Reading this rather special service offer (for which bids were expected until November 27, 2020), observers of the Cameroonian economic scene quickly understood that the plant in question belongs to Neo Industry, whose annual cocoa processing capacity is estimated at 32,000 tons (according to the National cocoa and coffee board, the company processed only 4,286 tons of cocoa during the 2019-2020 campaign).

Indeed, in 2018, Neo Industry received a CFA13 billion loan (which was guaranteed at CFA6 billion by the African Guaranty Fund-AGF) from SCB Cameroon to build its Kekem assembly plant. From internal sources within SCB Cameroon, the bank plans to dismantle the plant because Neo Industry is having difficulties honoring its commitments towards the bank.

Despite this, one should wonder why a bank can decide to dismantle a factory for which it granted a 7-year loan after just two years. «In some credit agreements, clauses are inserted to allow the bank to resort to forced recovery before term, as soon as it is discovered that some of the information provided during the loan process was not honest, or



when certain practices of the credit beneficiary are likely to complicate the repayment,» a business analyst explains.

COBAC instruction...

Beyond what could be called «the SCB Cameroon-Neo Industry case,» a source close to the case believes that what prompted that decision is the volume of credits owed by Emmanuel Neossi (promoter of Neo Industry) to the local banking sector. The source indicates that, via various companies, the CEO of Neo Industry borrowed tens of billions of CFA from the local banking sector. Nearly 80% of that debt portfolio is owed to SCB Cameroon, our source reveals.

Due to the difficulties encountered by Emmanuel Neossi in honoring his commitments towards the banks, COBAC (regulator of CEMAC countries' banking sector) instructed the credit institutions concerned to take the required steps to protect the savings of their clients. A first bank affected by the payment defaults of Emmanuel Neossi is said to have set aside about CFA5 billion for that purpose.

SCB Cameroon chose the forced recovery option due to the high volume of funds it will set aside to meet the order of COBAC. By dismantling the processor's factory, it can transfer it to a new operator or outright sale could allow it to recover the various loans it granted to the promoter of Neo Industry.

«Although the promoter of this factory is insolvent as we learn, the real question that must be asked is how a bank could take so much risk on a single client, even if he owns several companies. I think that for large transactions, like the one concerned in this case with Mr. Emmanuel Neossi, banks must first carry out due-diligence missions, i.e. make certain due diligence checks, before deciding whether or not to grant credit. Banks must also monitor the activities of their clients to ensure that everything is working in such a way as to guarantee the repayment of the credit received,» an expert from the financial community suggests..

Brice R. Mbodiam



IS CAMEROON ON ITS WAY TO BECOMING CENTRAL AFRICA'S AUTOMOTIVE HUB?

Between 2015 and 2019, Cameroon has welcomed two assembly units for cars, buses, bikes, and tricycles, created by nationals. Two other plants of the same type are planned by Chinese partners.

Since May 2019, Cameroonian Gaspard Mpondo, former mathematics professor and entrepreneur based in France, launched in his country's economic capital Douala, the company Jengu Sarl, which specializes in the construction of electric vehicles, motorcycles, and tricycles that also run on solar energy. To achieve this, the company -whose name «Jengu» refers to a mermaid or «water spirit» in the Duala language- partnered with the Chinese company S-King, which has worked extensively on the correlation between the production of solar energy and the propulsion of

an electric vehicle.

«Our Chinese partner provides us with all the equipment and has also trained our teams in Cameroon so that we can handle the assembly on-site in Douala,» explains Paul Jike, coordinator of Jengu Sarl.

The company has assembled 12 tricycles and two-wheeled vehicles, which are on display in its showroom in Bonapriso, Douala since it started operation. «We have suspended a little bit the assembly of the machines at the moment while waiting to get the various approvals from the authorities to be able to market

our products,» said Paul Jike, who claims a production capacity of four vehicles per day, excluding the time dedicated to painting. According to Paul Jike, the vehicles currently available at Jengu Sarl are imported samples. Their assembly in Douala depends not only on the approvals expected from the government but also on the enthusiasm of customers, which will condition the fundraising for the acquisition of an assembly line to be installed in the company's workshops in Douala.

Brice R. Mbodiam

Sotrabus, the pioneer...



Equipped with a photovoltaic plate allowing it to capture solar energy to power the battery, which can also be charged through a simple electric

plug, the electric cars, motorcycles, and tricycles of Jengu Sarl have an operating range of 90 to 250 km, depending on the vehicle. With a

battery level at zero, they can be recharged for between 6 and 8 hours and can travel at a speed of between 45 and 150 km, according to the company's managers.

Moreover, although Jengu Sarl is a pioneer in the assembly of electric vehicles in Cameroon, it is the second rolling stock assembly unit to set up in the country. Since 2015, the Bus Transformation Company (Sotrabus) has been assembling 45, 50, and 70 seat buses in Douala. The vehicles assembled by Sotrabus are highly appreciated by some of the country's interurban transport companies.

According to Albert Mbafé Konkou, the Cameroonian polytechnic engineer who owns Sotrabus, the buses produced in the port area of Douala are tropicalized, since they are adapted to African roads. Moreover, Sotrabus aims to conquer the continent in the medium term, starting with Central Africa.

Cameroon Automotive Holding is lagging behind

Two other assembly units for vehicles and other equipment are expected in Cameroon since 2015. Indeed, on June 11, 2015, the government signed with the Sino-Cameroonian joint venture company Cameroon Automotive Holding, an investment agreement for the construction of two assembly units in Douala and Kribi.

From 20 to 26 April 2017, this consortium exhibited, at the Yaoundé Sports Palace, 20 vehicles of different

ranges (sedans, vans, minibusses, 4x4 vehicles, and tractors) from China, as part of the China-Cameroon Auto Show. This exhibition, according to its organizers, was aimed at enabling the Cameroonian people and authorities to discover and even test the models of Chinese vehicles that will soon be assembled locally. Three years later, Cameroon Automotive Holding is still yet to implement the project.

The project benefits from the 2013

law (revised in 2017) on incentives for private investment in Cameroon, which grants tax and customs exemptions to companies for over 5 to 10 years, both during the installation and production phases. About 4,620 direct jobs should be generated during the first 15 years of operation of the two assembly units mentioned above. The overall amount of investment is officially estimated at CFA92 billion.



ISSUES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EPA BETWEEN CAMEROON AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

On August 4, 2020, Cameroon decided to suspend the implementation of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) signed in 2009 with the European Union. For the country, this suspension was due to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on public finances. On November 10, 2020, the country explained that it was ready to resume the implementation of the EPA agreement in January 2021. Following that announcement, Brussels indicated that it would soon review the funding request submitted by Cameroon for the EPA Implementation Strategy and Action Plan.

EPA: Cameroon set on suspending tariff dismantling till the end of 2020 despite the EU's protests



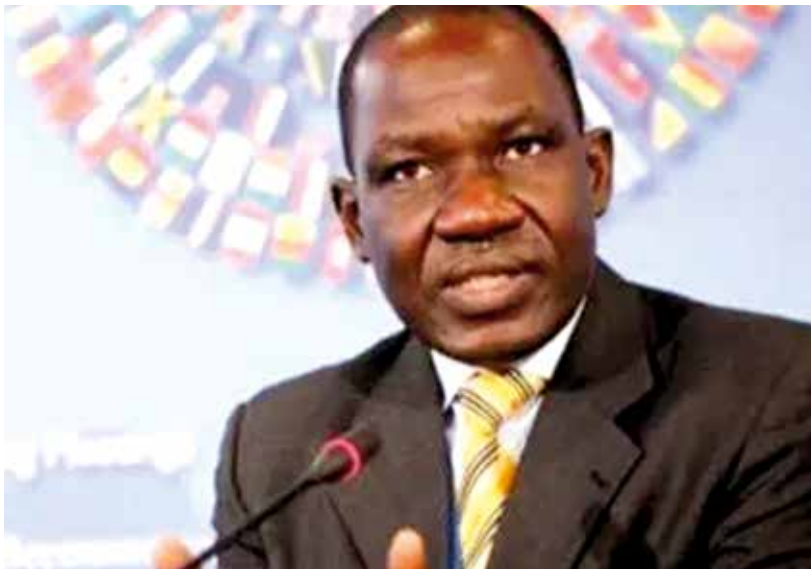
On August 4, 2020, Cameroon decided to suspend the implementation of the interim Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) signed in 2009 with the European Union (EU) because of the ravages of the coronavirus pandemic on public finances. EU's stance against this decision did not help. Despite the European Union's (EU) protests, Cameroon will maintain the suspension of tariff dismantling planned by the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) that binds it to EU countries. This was revealed in a letter sent by the Minister of Economy Alamine Ousmane Mey (photo), on November 10, 2020, to Hans Peter SCHADEK (Head of the EU delegation in Cameroon). The said letter was sent by the minister in reply to another letter (dated August 14, 2020) by the EU.

"Following the dialog initiated by the European Union concerning the temporary suspension by Cameroon of the fifth phase of the tariff dismantling schedule of the bilateral Cameroon-European Union EPA, concerning the dismantling from 45 to 60% of the customs duty on the products of the 2nd category and the beginning of dismantling of the products of the 3rd category, and per the conclusions and recommendations of the Virtual Extraordinary Session of the EPA Committee held on October 28, 2020, I have the honor to reiterate that the Government of Cameroon, despite your challenge to Article 31 of the EPA, has decided in good faith, in light of the provisions of Article 57 of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, concerning the case of force majeure. These provisions allow a

party to the treaty to suspend part or the application of an agreement due to irresistible and unforeseeable circumstances," Alamine Ousmane Mey said in his letter.

The letter sent by the Minister of Economy even informs that the temporary suspension does not only apply to products with high-tax yield (like fuel, cement, tourism, and transport vehicles, etc... that belongs to the third category) but it also applies to products of the 2nd category whose tariff rates would have been dismantled further (from 45 to 60%) on August 4, 2020. Let's note that the tariff dismantling for products in the 2nd category started on August 4, 2017, and was supposed to be complete by 2023 at the rate of 15% tariff dismantled yearly.

Cameroon's decision backed by the 1969 Vienna Convention



Mr. Alamine Ousmane Mey further indicates that even if the EU rejects Cameroon's choice to apply article 31 of the EPA, the country is still allowed by Article 57 of the Vienna convention to suspend the implementation of the EPA. Indeed, the said article allows a party to temporarily or even definitively suspend the implementation of an agreement due to irresistible and unforeseen circumstances.

Indeed, to justify its decision, Cameroon first invoked Article 31, which states that *"after having examined alternative solutions, a Party may apply safeguard measures of limited duration."*

According to the article, the safeguard measures should only be taken *"where a product originating from the territory of one Party is being imported into the territory of the other Party in such increased quantities and under such conditions as to cause or threaten to cause"* specific problems.

The problems include *«serious damage to the domestic industry producing like or directly competi-*

tive products in the territory of the importing Party,» «disruption in a sector of the economy, particularly where this disruption gives rise to major social problems or difficulties which could seriously jeopardize the economic situation of the importing Party» or *«disruption in the markets of like or directly competitive agricultural products or the mechanisms regulating those markets.»*

The Covid-19 pandemic, which is the force majeure behind Cameroon's decision, cannot be considered as one of the specific problems highlighted by Article 31 of the EPA. Thus, the country's final decision to invoke article 57 of the 1969 Vienna Convention. Based on that article, the country is set on suspending the implementation of the EPA till the end of the current financial year.

«While welcoming the European Union's financial support in this context, the government of the Republic of Cameroon marks its commitment to restore, as of January 1, 2021, the tariff dismantling calendar

in the Cameroon-European Union economic partnership agreement. It also urges the European Union's immediate support in the implementation of the development component of the EPA,» the Minister of Economy writes, raising the issue of the development component that has always been a cause for conflicts between the EU and ACP countries.

CFA16 billion of revenues shortfall at end-March 2020...

Cameroon started implementing the EPA on August 4, 2016. The said agreement consecrates the opening of the country's market to EU imports in three (3) stages corresponding to the three groups of products to be liberalized. The tariff dismantling on products in the first category started on August 4, 2016, at the rate of 25% tariffs dismantled yearly. The products included are those that aim to reduce poverty and improve residents' living conditions. On August 4, 2019, the dismantling was completed.

For products belonging to the second category, the tariff dismantling started on August 4, 2017, at the rate of 15% tariff dismantled yearly on products that aim to boost local production. On August 4, 2019, the tariffs were dismantled by 45%. That rate was supposed to reach 60% but, because of the coronavirus pandemic, Cameroon decided to temporarily stop its implementation.

As of March 31, 2020, says the Cameroonian Customs, the impact of the implementation of the EPA was CFA16 billion in budget losses, since the beginning of the dismantling a little over 4 years ago.

Brice R. Mbodiam et Sylvain Andzongo

Development component of the EPA: Cameroon expects a financing of around XAF400 billion from the EU next year



After Cameroon expressed its plan to “restore on January 1, 2021, the timetable for tariff dismantling found in the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU)”, Brussels said it would soon look into Yaoundé’s application for financing, for its national strategy to implement the EPA.

Indeed, on July 24, 2020, Alamine Ousmane Mey, Cameroon’s minister of economy who steers the EPA, submitted to the European side an advocacy document relative to the financing of this strategy. The document lists key needs related to measures for supporting the EPA. Valued at €607.63 million (XAF398.6 billion), the strategy aims at improving the Cameroonian business climate, boost investments, make the private sector more dynamic and competitive, increase exports, foster regional integration, and monitor the EPA.

“Overall, the support measures aim to improve, both quantitatively and qualitatively, goods and services produced and exported by Cameroon,” said

Hans-Peter Schadek, former head of the EU delegation in Cameroon (2017-2020). This should, he added, help the country “fully take advantage of unrestricted access, as guaranteed by the EPA”. As authorities are preparing for the upcoming cooperation program (2021-2027), since the previous one ends this year, Alamine Ousmane Mey said a reaction from the EU on the matter would be “much appreciated”. Divergences

The European Union is yet to provide an answer to the country’s request. “The request reached us at the same time as the government’s letter that was informing us about the temporary suspension of the implementation of the EPA. We therefore had to first clarify the issue related to the resumption of the EPA process,” said Sébastien Bergeon (Chargé d’affaires ad interim of the European Union delegation in Cameroon) on November 16, 2020, to explain this lack of answer to Cameroon’s request.

Let’s note that the said advocacy document was sent two weeks before

the letter notifying about the temporary suspension of the EPA process. “Given the progress already made in the implementation of this project, we will soon review it for the continuation of our constructive partnership,” the diplomat said when interviewed by Business in Cameroon.

Along with the direct compensation of EPA net fiscal losses, the support measures are part of the EPA Development support (articles 10 and 12 of the EPA agreement). Development support has always been the subject of tensions between Cameroon and its European partner. Indeed, the country expects the European Union will make similar commitments as to what it made in West Africa.

In that part of the black continent, the European Union committed to funding the first 5-year operational side (2015-2020) of the EPA development support program to the tune of €6.5 billion (about XAF4,261 billion). However, in Cameroon, the European Union has currently committed no resources other than the ones already available in the framework of the development cooperation agreement signed before the ratification of the EPA.

So, the country believes the EPA development support program is not yet implemented. Therefore, in his correspondence sent on November 10, 2020, to the head of the European delegation in Cameroon, the Minister of Economy requested the Union’s forthwith support in the implementation of that aspect of the EPA agreement.

Aboutdi Ottou



DIVERSIFICATION OR HOW COMPANIES ARE ADAPTING TO CHANGE IN THE CAMEROONIAN MARKET

For some years now, the sales of traditional goods produced by some multinationals and renowned companies operating in Cameroon have been on the decline. This is due to factors including changes in the prices of commodities in international markets that are no longer allowing firms the former profit margins, the arrival of new competitors on the market, and even the economic partnership with countries that are offensive in their market share development strategy, as well as a change in local consumers' habits.

Therefore, to preserve their financial equilibrium affected by the revenue shortfalls, or to conquer new niche markets opened to them, many industrials and agribusinesses embarked on diversification. In some cases, that diversification was called for by the strategic policies implemented by some parent companies. Therefore some groups known on international markets as banana producers have started producing cocoa in their back shops in Cameroon, to preserve profit margins. Also, some renowned chocolate

makers (due to the strategic orientations of their parent companies) are becoming importers of rice or cosmetics that are sold in Cameroonian markets. In the present dossier, we list some of the pioneers of these commercial mutations, which are not always visible or detected by the public but show the dynamism of the Cameroonian economy that usually compels some companies to adapt to keep their status.

B.R.M.

Guinness Cameroon launches first liquor production and packaging unit in Central Africa



On September 7, 2017, in Douala, Guinness Cameroon (the local subsidiary of the Diageo group) officially presented its first locally produced whiskey brand. The said brand is Scottish whiskey “Black & White” for which Guinness Cameroon was granted all the required authorizations for local production after a few years of negotiation with the owners of the brand.

To achieve this, Guinness Cameroon had to purchase a liquor production unit, the management revealed. “The introduction of made in Cameroon

“Black & White” in our market, comes after the commissioning of a whiskey production unit by Guinness Cameroon. Indeed, six months ago, we presented “Cube”, which is the first portable liquor production and packaging unit in Cameroon and the Central African sub-region, to the general public. The goal of this ultra-modern packaging line is to enable Guinness Cameroon to innovate on a larger scale and meet the consumer demand,” Guinness Cameroon explained.

Guinness Cameroon is the 2nd most

performing subsidiary of Diageo group in Africa (after Nigeria) and the 4th worldwide, according to Andy Fennel, President for Africa in the group. The president was speaking during his visit to Cameroon in August 2014. Initially, Guinness Cameroon was a brewery but, it also moved into liquor importation and marketing to diversify its operations in a market largely dominated by Brasseries du Cameroun, which is the subsidiary of Castel group and controls 74% of the market (at the time).

From rice and pasta distribution, Chococam enters the cosmetics distribution market



In January 2014, Chocolateries du Cameroun (Chococam), a local subsidiary of South African chocolate company Tiger Brands, entered the cosmetics distribution market with the brand “Miadi.” It presented the products marketed under the said brand during a ceremony organized in Douala. Chococam thus entered the cosmetics market after a debut in

rice and pasta distribution under the Tastic brand. To officialize that diversification strategy, the company, whose core activity is chocolate and sweets production officially, extended its corporate missions by adding “*production, importation, exportation, and trading of personal and home care products and derivatives*,” according to a legal announcement published on

November 10, 2014. Internal sources at Chococam revealed that this progressive diversification of Chococam’s product offering on the Cameroonian market “is a part of Tiger Brands’ expansion strategy in Africa” thanks to its partnership with Haco Industries, a Kenya-based manufacturer.

Leader of the banana market in Cameroon, PHP, enjoys chocolate and pepper



Plantations du Haut Penja (PHP), the local subsidiary of agribusiness Compagnie fruitière de Marseille, set up cocoa plantations in Cameroon in 2017. The company plans to process the harvest in a bean processing unit set up in the town of Njombé, an agricultural town located in the coastal region of Cameroon. In this factory, PHP produces chocolate under the brand name «ateliers des cinq volcans.» The production is entirely exported to the European market.

This banana producer is thus entering a high-potential market as Cameroon's cocoa is highly prized for its taste qualities conducive to the production of chocolate with a high cocoa content. But above all, PHP's chocolate production allows this food-processing company to better resist the instability of global banana prices, which vary depending on the level of production.

At the same time, PHP, leader of the banana market in Cameroon, with more than 40% of the national production, also produces white pepper. However, the production of Penja pepper, whose labeling a few years ago caused market prices to explode (from CFA2,500 to CFA14,000 per kilogram), is hampered by the invasion of arable lands by bio-aggressors. As a result, in 2018, the Plantations du Haut Penja Company harvested only 12 tons of Penja pepper (achieved because production was relocated to healthier sites), compared to 40 tons just a few years ago.

The old pepper plantations of the PHP, infested with fungi harmful to pepper trees, have been recycled into banana plantations, we officially learn. Because of this reality, the areas used for the production of Penja pepper in this agro-industrial unit have been reduced by half. According to Jules Kamdem, who is

in charge of pepper production at PHP, this area has been reduced from 40 hectares just a few years ago to only 21 hectares currently.

«You must have noticed that since its labeling, farmers now turn to Penja pepper. But the volume of production is not keeping up because of these fungi that destroy the pepper plants. The researchers must settle on the Penja site to be able to find a solution to these bio-aggressors,» said the person in charge of pepper production at PHP.

In 2018, the French Development Agency (AFD) funded a research program to curb the danger that threatens the Penja pepper, we learn. AFD also contributed to the labeling of this internationally renowned spice by the African Intellectual Property Organization (OAPI), as part of a program on geographical indications (GIs).

CDC eyes maize, cassava, and pepper segments, as banana and rubber prices drop

On May 22, 2018, in Yaoundé, the Cameroonian capital, the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) signed an agreement with a European partner for the supply of heavy machinery for CFA39 billion. *«These heavy machines will enable us to increase our production, not only in traditional products such as banana and rubber but also cassava, maize, and chili pepper. We have the land to do so. But for that, we need equipment,»* explained Benjamin Itoe, the chairman of the board of directors of this company, the second-largest employer in the country after the

public administration. Benjamin Itoe confirmed the implementation of a project, on hold since 2016, following financial difficulties resulting from the decline in prices of its traditional products (banana and rubber) on the international market. Indeed, at the end of a Board of Directors meeting held from August 9 to 10, 2016, the CDC directors had agreed to diversify the company's products.

The Board had also been more specific, suggesting to the top management to focus on the production of maize, cassava, and pepper; three

«short-cycle» and «directly profitable» products. However, the CDC's ambition was stopped dead in its tracks by the separatist crisis that began in the country's two Anglophone regions. At the same time, this projected diversification of the CDC's products appears to be a likely trigger for the rebirth of this public company, which has reappeared on the list of Cameroonian banana exporters since June 2020. This, after a non-activity in September 2018, due to violence and damage caused by separatist militants on the equipment and employees of the company.

The wine and spirits supplier BVS bets on fruit processing to double turnover

After its CFA12 billion wine bottling unit which was inaugurated on December 7, 2017, in the economic capital of Cameroon, the beverages, wines, and spirits company BVS launched a range of fruit juices with Portuguese partner Sumol Compal in H1 2018, as well as a wide range of spirits, with the technical support of another partner, Pernod Ricard.

However, this supplier of wines and spirits, which was already claiming CFA8 billion in sales in Cameroon after one year of operation, aims to increase this indicator to CFA20 billion after 3 years thanks in particular to the acquisition of a distillery that will enable the transformation of sugar molasses, as well as corn or wheat into pure alcohol.

«Also, one of the projects that are particularly important to us is to locally harvest fruits such as pineapples, mangoes to transform them into fruit juices and concentrates and / or extracts that we can sell to local producers of soft drinks or for export,» says Guillaume Sara, a former executive at Castel Group and promoter of BVS.

Maurice Simo Djom

“A GOOD ‘MADE IN CAMEROON’ STRATEGY SHOULD BE PART OF A BROAD POLICY FOR NATIONAL GEOECONOMICS”

This Cameroonian expert of geoeconomics, close to the financial world, is the author of «La guerre économique (Economic war),» published in 2019 by Afrédit. Here, he takes a critical look at the government’s conception of «Made in Cameroon.»

Interview with Aboudi Ottou

Business in Cameroon: For some time now, the term “Made in Cameroon” has been at the heart of the official discourse. Do you understand the government’s definition of this concept?

Maurice Simo Djom : In a statement made during the council of ministers on January 31, 2019, the minister of trade defined the Made in Cameroon as a geographical concept. For the minister, any product made by a business or service located in

Cameroon is a Made in Cameroon product. This definition of Made in Cameroon was also used to draw the 2030 national development strategy. The latter, on multiple occasions, refers to Made in Cameroon, in the chapters dedicated to trade and industry.

This geographical definition of Made in Cameroon poses an issue because we don’t have control over our production system. In this context, foreign capitals circulating in the

country can generate local products and this could jeopardize economic sovereignty. There is another definition, a geoeconomic one. It defines Made in Cameroon by taking into consideration Cameroon’s economic sovereignty and the appropriation of production and processing skills by Cameroonians.

BC: In your opinion, as a geoeconomics expert, what factors should be taken into account to



"This geographical definition of Made in Cameroon poses an issue because we don't have control over our production system"

determine whether a product is effectively Cameroonian and should consequently benefit from the State's support policy found in the 2021 finance bill and the national development strategy launched on November 16, 2020?

MSD: Firstly, all products made in Cameroon deserve the State's support since they result from a real activity that generates jobs, and tax revenues, eventually. However, a key

factor that intervenes in defining the type of support is the nationality of capitals and the majority shareholders. It leads to positive discrimination in that when local production comes from local producers, actions should be taken to boost it. It must grow to protect the country against foreign firms' economic imperialism. On the other hand, when the local production is generated by foreign capitals, measures should be taken

to domesticate technology used and to control the movement of revenues generated by the related activities.

BC: Why do you emphasize the origin of capitals?

MSD: For at least four reasons. The first concerns jobs and research. A firm based in Cameroon but owned by the French could lay off staff, privileging the interest of decision-making centers located in Marseilles



"In Ethiopia, the government closed three sectors to foreign investors: banking, insurance, and mass retail"

or Nantes and not Cameroon's social interest. The same goes for research. Research led by foreign companies is aimed at promoting their decision centers.

The second reason is the optimization of capital activity. In Cameroon and other Franc zone countries, foreign investors easily repatriate their profits, taking advantage of the ease of transferability of funds, while local shareholders have no

such choice. Since they are in their own country, they proceed to carry forward and redirect funds in fixed assets, because this is where they develop.

The third reason is related to international competition. With the opening of economic borders, trade is expanding, and countries that fail to be cautious of this end up on the losing side of unequal trades. It is often said that Africa is a vast market, but for

who? Who benefits from it? The US claims to be a champion of free trade but its market is locked with mechanisms like the Buy American Act (where 40% of public procurements are reserved for companies owned by American shareholders) and Buy America provisions (whereby the federal government prefers products manufactured by Americans when purchasing goods).

The fourth and last reason I would



"All smart countries seek power, beyond enhancing local production"

like to refer to is security. Just because a foreign investor does business in Cameroon does not mean the government should close an eye on the potential security risk that this business poses to the country. Take for example the Committee for Foreign Investment in the US (CFIUS) which gives the green light for mer-

gers and acquisitions on American soil. In 2018, this organization, placed under the authority of the US President, canceled the acquisition of MoneyGram by Ant Financial, which is held by the Chinese firm Ali Baba, for security concerns. This shows how important the origin of the capital is.

BC: So, you believe Cameroonian authorities are making a mistake by generally focusing on the "local industry"...

MSD: If we had barriers to entry, there wouldn't be an issue. But now there is an issue; our market is a sieve, anyone can get in. Anyone can settle in, including people who

already benefit from support in their country of origin, and have a long history of industrial manufacturing. So, how can the poor Cameroonian producer thrive when the competition is so unfair? The deck is stacked upstream and downstream. Meanwhile, when an African entrepreneur tries to start a business in a country that claims to be a champion of free-trade, they face countless challenges. The game is rigged so that there is not much room for manoeuvre for foreigners.

BC: Do barriers to entry include joint ventures?

MSD: Indeed, the Chinese economic miracle is attributable to this system which forces foreign investors to partner with natives, not only at an operational level but also at the decisional and strategic levels. Slowly, natives learned the secret to doing business and replicated the same products. This is not what happens in Africa. Anyway, for the same to happen in Africa, we must adopt a global industrialization strategy that is export-oriented. However, as things are now, it seems African countries are set to remain factories for a long time. Meanwhile, a factory can't dream of "flooding the national, sub-regional and regional markets with 'Made in Cameroon' products" as stated under the 2030 national development strategy.

BC: What do you think of the government's policy to encourage big foreign firms to come in, explaining that they could boost the visibility of local products?

MSD: Before allowing big companies in, the local production industry should have been supported. The cart was put before the horse. Economic Partnership Agreements (with the European Union) were signed and foreign firms started settling in around that time. Now, the issue is to find ways to support local businesses so that they can compete against these firms. In Ethiopia, the government closed three sectors to foreign investors: banking, insurance, and mass retail. Free trade is more about strategy than economics, and as Sun Tzu put it "when not ready, do not go to war." In the meantime, no measure forces big foreign firms to promote local products.

BC: Carrefour claims that it gets more than 70% of its turnover from goods purchased in Cameroon and more than half of these, it adds, comes straight from agriculture, fishing, or the Cameroonian industrial sectors. Shouldn't this calm your concerns?

MSD: Not really. I remain concerned. This figure has to be taken cautiously, especially since local producers have been complaining of many issues preventing them from selling on a large scale. First, they do not meet the labeling and product presentation standards. Secondly, they are unable to supply their products in significant quantities and lastly, do not keep account books. Each of these requirements is enough to push back local producers. While Carrefour is not responsible for these three challenges, we must recognize that they cast doubt on the

authenticity of these figures. Adding to the subsidies that European or US producers benefit from, and potential tax exemptions for entering our markets, one has to admit that Made in Cameroon products are unlikely to enjoy any price competitiveness under current conditions.

BC: In your opinion, what should a good strategy to promote «Made in Cameroon» be based on?

A good "Made in Cameroon" strategy cannot be isolated. It must be part of a broad policy for national geoeconomics, which clearly states the link we establish between wealth and power. What we should do is attract foreign investors while putting in place conditions that foster the boom of local producers.

With the actual policy, it appears wealth is the only goal when it comes to producing locally. But the thing is all smart countries seek power, beyond enhancing local production. They focus not only on limiting imports but also on controlling their fate amid globalization. They care about protecting themselves from heteronomous hegemonies... Cameroon should not be content with only reducing imports. That is not an urgent issue. It must above all define its place in the world: does it want to be a dump for foreign products or a country that masters capitalism and invention and can prevent external powers from taking advantage of its strong economic resources to hamper its ascension? That is the real issue.



PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Yaoundé-Douala highway: Phase 2 (136km) expected to cost XAF812.8 bln

The pre-tax costs of the 2nd phase (136-km) of the Yaoundé-Douala highway are officially estimated at XAF812.8 billion, according to a note recently published by the Ministry of Public Works (Mintp).

Specifically, XAF690.6 billion will be devoted to the motorway section while XAF74.3 billion will be used for slip roads. For the control services, they will cost XAF36.7 billion while compensations will cost XAF11.2 billion.

According to the Mintp, the second phase will be built following a public-private partnership model. Currently, it is at the restricted call for tenders stage following the publication, on October 5, 2020, of a list of three partners selected after a public call for expression of interest. *“The design will last 15 months while construction works will last 48 months,”* the Mintp adds.

Let's note that in a release dated October 5, 2020, the Minister of Public Works Emmanuel Nganou Djoumessi announced that the French Sogeti-Satom-Vinci/Razel-

Fayat was ranked first (with 72.5 points out of 100) after bids were opened for the public call for expression of interest. Issued on March 4, 2020, the public call was aimed at selecting companies or consortiums that will collaborate with the Cameroonian government in the financing, design, construction, exploitation, and maintenance of phase 2 of the Yaoundé-Douala highway (Bibodi-Douala) following a public-private model.

The second highest bidder was the Portuguese group Mota Engil Engenharia Construção Africa, with 60.9 points out of 100. The third highest bidder was the Chinese consortium Sinohydro-PCRB-SDHS, with 60 points out of 100. The selected candidates are invited to, in the coming days, submit detailed offers for the implementation of the project.

The said phase, which extends from Bibodi to Douala (136 km) is segmented into two lots, namely Bidodi-Edéa (70 km) and Edéa-Douala (66 km). It includes three slip roads,

namely a side road to Edéa (12 km), a bypass to Edéa (10.5 km), and a side road to Dibamba Beach (7.6 km). The side road to Dibamba beach includes 6 interchanges, the bridges over the Sanaga (500 m), and the Dibamba (250 m).

The Ministry reminds that the initial pre-tax costs of phase 1 (60 km) of the said project are XAF284 billion. It is implemented by the Chinese group China First Highway Engineering. It has already been 91% completed while the deadline is 93.3% near and 90% of the funds already used. The first 40 kilometers of that phase are fully paved while the last 20 kilometers are 60% constructed and the works are expected to be delivered in 2021.

«The connections to Nationale 3 via Boumnyebel (13 km) and to Yaoundé via Minkoameyos (10 km), as well as functional equipment for the operation in public-private partnership mode of this motorway section, require the mobilization of additional resources,” the Ministry explains.

Only 23.3% of companies are up-to-date with their social security contributions (CNPS)

Only 7,000 (23.33%) of the 30,000 companies operating in Cameroon are up to date with their social security contributions. This was disclosed by the National Social Insurance Fund (CNPS) in a recent briefing note.

«There are about 16,000 socially insured persons we can't cover because their employers own a hefty amount of social contributions to the CNPS. The situation has worsened to the extent

that only one-fourth of the companies operating in the country are up to date,” the CNPS indicates.

The companies either fail to register their employees with the CNPS or they avoid paying the social security contributions even though those contributions have been deducted from the employees' salaries.

The CNPS explains that 81% of companies with 1 to 6 employees owe social contributions to the CNPS,

while 15% of companies with 6 to 20 employees are not up-to-date. As for companies with 21 to 100 employees, the percentage of defaulters is 3.1% while for companies with over 100 employees, that percentage is 0.2%. To recover the contributions it was owed, the fund launched an extensive campaign in 2016. At the time it was estimating the amount of social security contributions it was owed at a little over XAF60 billion.

Cameroon launches SMEs database to assess companies operating in the country



The Minister in charge of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), Achille Bassilekin III (photo), recently initiated the creation of a national database of SMEs operating in Cameroon. In that regard, on December 2, 2020, he signed a press release inviting promoters to

visit the registration desk opened for that purpose in his ministry. The concerned parties are invited to submit copies of the following documents: taxpayer cards, trade register, national ID card of the promoter, and certificate of registration at the CFCE

(if necessary). They will also fill a summary sheet at the registration desk. The Ministry of SMEs explains that the database was created to have a cartography of SMEs operating in the country. Indeed, as 80% of them operate in the informal sector, it is hard to monitor their activities, assess their viability, etc. It even makes it hard for SMEs to access formal financing circuits.

The ministry adds that 14,229 new SMEs were created in the country in 2019. This figure could rise in 2021, as the government has decided to *«reduce the minimum capital threshold from XAF100,000 to XAF5,000 for limited liability companies that are not going to establish their companies via a notary service.»* This measure (the government plans to make effective by end-March 2021) constitutes a 95% reduction in the minimum capital threshold.

XAF10 bln of goods seized this year in the framework of anti-smuggling operation Halcomi

A few years ago, the directorate general of customs intensified its fight for the protection of the Cameroonian market under the operation Halcomi (Halte au commerce illicite). The operation was launched to combat smuggling and counterfeiting, due to which Cameroon loses revenues estimated at about XAF200 billion yearly. According to Prime Minister

Joseph Dion Nguté, in the framework of the operation, the customs administration seized goods worth XAF10 billion this year.

Indeed, hardly a day goes by without traffickers and other fraudsters falling into the net of customs officers deployed in the framework of Halcomi.

The largest seizures are generally

made at the borders with Nigeria (especially in the northern part of the country) or in the southern region bordering Equatorial Guinea. Because of the Wouri river (whose shores are home to all kinds of traffic), Douala and its neighboring towns are also hunting grounds scoured by Halcomi's agents.

Cameroon repaid XAF2,102 bln of debt in Jan-Sep 2020, Prime Minister Joseph Dion Nguté reveals

Cameroon repaid XAF2,102 billion of debt during the first nine months of 2020, according to Prime Minister Joseph Dion Nguté (photo). The latter disclosed the figure on November 25, 2020, while presenting the country's 2021 economic and financial program before the parliament. According to the official, the normal

debt servicing during the period was XAF1,776 billion while XAF326 billion was for payment arrears. During the period, the country continued to borrow money, mainly through its usual fund-raising operations on the sub-regional money market launched in 2011 by the Bank of Central African States (BEAC).

The Prime Minister revealed that over the said period, Cameroon raised XAF614 bln from the above-mentioned market to fund the state's cash needs and development projects. These funds were complemented by the funds from external partners.

Construction works on the 357km Ring Road currently on hold due to insecurity (MINTP)

On November 30, 2020, while defending the 2021 budget of his ministry before the parliament, Minister of public works (MINTP) Emmanuel Nganou Djoumessi gave an update on the construction works of the «Ring Road» connecting Cameroon to Nigeria through the North-West. According to the official, the work divided into four lots is «currently on hold due to insecurity.» Lot 1 of the works is the 96km Kumbo-Ndu-Nkambe-Misaje (including the Nkambe bypass), Lot 2 is the 50km Misaje-Dumbo-Nigeria Border, Lot 3 is the 80km Bamenda-Bafut-Wum road and Lot 4 is the 72km Bambui-Babessi-Ndop that includes the Dawara bypass. For the time being, the technical performances recorded on the sections of the Ring Road currently

undergoing earth road construction are as follows: on Lot 1, the 82km of earth roads (XAF3.28 billion) is 56% completed. On Lot 2, the 45km of earth road (XAF1.55 billion) is 91% completed while on Lot 3, the 43km (XAF0.819 billion) of earth roads are 99% completed and on Lot 4, the 76.72 km (XAF0.292 billion) of earth roads are 10% completed.

The MINTP indicates that the ring road could be relaunched in the framework of Phase III (280 km) of the Transport Sector Support Program, which requires an investment of XAF167.270 billion. The first tranche of a financing agreement was recently signed with the African Development Bank (ADB). This tranche amounts to XAF11.780 billion, he explained.

«The proposals for the second tranche

of 106 billion are being finalized,” the minister added. He proceeded further by disclosing that this year, authorities are planning to complete the financing of the project with the signature of a XAF27.950 billion loan agreement with the Africa Growing Together Fund (AGTF). The «Ring Road» is about 365km long. It can be described as a Bamenda-Bambui-Ndop-Babessi-Kumbo-Nkambe-Misaje-Nyos-Wum-Bafut-Bamenda loop. It crosses five of the seven departments of the English-speaking region of northwest Cameroon and connects to several borders to Nigeria, Misaje notably. According to the initial schedule, it will be completed by December 31, 2024.

Cameroon saved XAF40 bln of wage bill this year, PM Joseph Dion Nguté reveals

This year, Cameroon saved XAF40 billion of wage bills. This was revealed by Prime Minister Joseph Dion Nguté while presenting the government's economic, financial, social, and cultural program for 2021 before the national assembly on November 25, 2020.

According to the official, the amount was saved thanks to a set of measures implemented by the government to sanitize its payroll. These measures include the individualized payment of civil servants' salaries and the dematerialization of payslips, also called «cash vouchers».

Indeed, on August 14, 2020, the Minister of Finance officially launched the payment of salaries via the Central African Teleclearing System (Systac),

administered by the central bank. This system allows the Treasury to directly fund the account of the beneficiary of the pay or pension, as opposed to the old system, called the Automated Large Amounts System (Sygma). Through this system, funds were sent to banks, which then distributed them to the accounts of state employees. The treasury was thus unable to check whether the salaries were effectively paid to the workers or not. Sometimes, the banks keep the amount not paid (either because the recipients are dead or the accounts were fictitious), for several months, instead of returning them to the national treasury. As for the dematerialization of cash vouchers, it started in October 2019.

The operation consisted of replacing the physical vouchers then used to pay salaries under XAF100,000 FCFA, with electronic vouchers. «This is an approach aimed both at simplifying the procedures for paying the salary of public officials and also considerably reducing fraud,» Finance Minister Louis Paul Motazé said at the time. The reforms were preceded by the Physical Count of State Personnel (Coppe) initiated in 2018. Launched in April that year, this operation helped remove more than 10,000 fictitious civil servants from the state payroll. Thanks to that cleanup, the country saved an annual budget of about XAF30 billion, according to official information.

Camwater and the Ministry of employment partner to promote water jobs with the construction of a training center



On November 16, 2020, Issa Tchiroma Bakary (Cameroon's Minister of Employment and Vocational

Training) and Gervais Bolenga (Managing director of Cameroon Water Utilities-Camwater) signed

a partnership agreement for the creation of a water jobs training center, official sources reveal.

Thanks to that agreement, the training center will be built with the support of Camwater in Akomnyada (which hosts one of the main water treatment plants in Cameroon).

“Water production, treatment, and distributions provide jobs but people need training for these jobs. Once the training center is built, tens of thousands of Cameroonians will be trained there,” said Issa Tchiroma in the columns of government daily Cameroon tribune.

Double taxation agreement: Cameroon and Switzerland still in negotiations 2 years after formal negotiations started

On November 19, in Yaoundé, Minister of Economy (Minepat) Alamine Ousmane Mey granted an audience to the Swiss Ambassador to Cameroon Pietro Lazzeri. During the audience, the latter (who was at the end of his stay in Cameroon) and the Minepat discussed the socio-economic collaboration programs between the two countries. The programs included the double taxation agreement process the two countries formally initiated about two years ago. The process was initiated because, without the agreement, companies operating in Cameroon and Switzerland have to pay taxes in both countries.

«I think it is appropriate to mention that to bring the two countries' private sectors together, we will ensure the

double taxation agreement is signed as soon as possible to encourage investors to invest more resources in a country that has so much potential," said Alamine Ousmane.

The double taxation agreement process started on June 4, 2018. That day, Cameroon's Minister of Finance Louis Paul Motaze was granted an audience, in Berne, by Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer for a working visit. According to the Swiss federal department of finance, the two officials discussed financial and fiscal issues.

On July 22, 2019, in Yaoundé, Louis Paul Motaze and Pietro Lazzeri co-presided the 2nd round of the negotiations aimed at preventing double taxation and fraud and tax evasion. The negotiations were sup-

posed to lead to the elaboration of a fiscal framework that would attract investments and encourage companies to operate in both countries. Once the double taxation agreement is reached, fiscal expenses will be reduced for companies operating in the two countries since they would no more have to pay taxes in one of the countries covered by the agreement if they pay taxes in the other. However, experts and civil society organizations question Cameroon's interest in such an agreement. The reason is that fewer Cameroonian companies operate in Switzerland. They are also worried about Switzerland being considered a tax haven.

Cameroon temporarily bans the importation of day-old chicks and hatching eggs to guard national territory against avian influenza



In a correspondence addressed on November 17, 2020, to the Minister of Finance, Cameroon's Minister of Livestock Dr. Taiga announced a temporary ban on Cameroon's imports of day-old chicks and hatching eggs. According to the letter, the measure is aimed at protecting the country against avian influenza that

appeared in recent weeks in some European and Asian countries. The measure falls in line with the recommendation issued by the Cameroonian Poultry Interprofessional Organization (IPAVIC). Indeed, in a recent interview with the government daily Cameroon Tribune, François Djonou

(President of the IPAVIC) suggested poultry farmers should "immediately" stop importing hatching eggs and other day-old chicks from European countries and Nigeria. *«It is better to have empty farms than to have the virus. I wrote a message in the farmers' forum (...) asking for a cessation of poultry products' importation,"* he said.

Let's note that a few days earlier, the government had strengthened sanitary inspections at the borders following the outbreak of avian influenza in Western countries such as Germany, Denmark, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Russia, and Israel.

Cameroon inaugurates a business acceleration center in Douala

On November 18, 2020, in Douala, Achille Bassilekin III (Minister of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts-Minpmeesa) presided over the official inauguration of the business acceleration center JFN-IT E4 IMPACT Accelerator. According to the official, the said center will serve as a crossroads where all entrepreneurs and project holders can collaborate within the Cameroonian innovation ecosystem. It aims to promote the acquisition

of innovation and entrepreneurship skills among students, graduates seeking employment, and employees, as well as involve the business leaders and funders within the business acceleration center.

The center's incubation model is destined for young entrepreneurs in the ICT and agribusiness sector. It aims to develop regional and international companies capable of combining economic profitability with social and environmental impact.

For Alphonse Nafack, president of

the said center, JFN-IT E4 IMPACT Accelerator is committed to contributing to the country's socio-economic development through the implementation of numerous initiatives (both in the banking and education sectors) in favor of young people.

«This center will provide local entrepreneurs and project leaders with full support for the growth of their businesses and transform high-potential ideas into real prosperous companies with high social and environmental impact,» said Achille Bassilekin III.

AfDB eyes 200% growth in intra-regional trade by 2025 thanks to the Central Africa regional integration strategy



With the Central Africa Regional Integration Strategy, the AfDB aims to triple intra-regional trade by 2025. This is one of the revelations made by the pan-African institution, on November 16, 2020, during the investors' roundtable being held in Paris, to raise financing for the CEMAC countries' €3.4 billion integrating projects.

«Through its Central Africa Regional Integration Strategy, the AfDB expects intra-regional trade to triple from 2% to 6% by 2025. The investments required for the regional projects are estimated at 3.2 billion UA [ed. note: Unit of Account] (4.4 billion U.S. dollars), with a strong partnership with other donors and the private sector,» the financial institution said.

It added that as the lead technical and financial partner for infrastructure development in Central Africa, it has already provided support for the studies necessary for the maturation of many projects included in the Central Africa Consensual Transport Master Plan (PDCT-AC), because of which the said roundtable is being organized. The bank explained that over the 2015-2019 period, it raised €1.13 billion (XAF768 billion) for transport projects in Central Africa. Close to 30% of those funds were mainly dedicated to the development and renovation of corridor highways between CEMAC countries.

«The Bank will build on its leadership in infrastructure development, dialogue, and capacity building to attract co-financing, accelerate economic diversification, strengthen governance and facilitate structural transformation in Central Africa,» said Solomane Koné (photo), acting AfDB Director General for Central Africa.

Post-Covid-19 economic revival: Private actors call for endogenous solutions



On November 12, 2020, entrepreneurs based in Cameroon met, in Douala, with public sector actors to share the lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic. They also reflected on how African solutions can converge, to provide answers in the case similar situations occur in the future.

«We have a wonderful lever for the development of Africa. This lever is African culture. We must realize that we can use it to develop our leadership on the international scene. We have been thinking for many years about launching this Pro Meet-up & Learn platform but given recent events, with Covid-19, we believe, more than ever, that we should launch it. Indeed, we noticed the tremendous

resilience shown by African entrepreneurs because they dig deeper into their resources to get through the ordeal,» said Carole Mbessa Elongo, co-founder and CEO of Business Facilities Corporation SA, who initiated the meeting. For this first meeting, the entrepreneurs had the opportunity to exchange with Stanislas Zeze, CEO of Bloomfield Investment on the theme: *“the resilience of post-Corona African economies, the challenge of Cameroonian companies.”* The promoter of the first financial rating agency in French-speaking Africa insisted on the urgency of a new social, economic, demographic, health, and military model with a long-term perspective. From the rich exchanges

(focused on African coherence) with the participants, it appears that Africa must make a radical break with its previous societal models.

«I am a great supporter of solutions and exchanges initiated by Africans and I think that solutions for the development of the continent and the emancipation of Africans will have to be found by Africans. This is why I encourage this type of meeting, and I participate in it with great pleasure,» said Stanislas Zeze.

The initiators of the meeting plan to expand the initiative to other African countries. For international analysts (who rely on some set of indicators), the continent is one of the least credible. However, faced with the economic consequences of Covid-19, African countries spent nearly \$44.6 billion of budgetary resources, according to data provided by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Also, in the absence of massive bailing plans, African companies were flexible enough to deal with the economic consequences of the pandemic.

Cameroon signed 11 loan agreements worth XAF416.5 bln in Jan-Sep 2020

Cameroon signed eleven loan agreements with its financial partners this year, including the latest signed on September 25, 2020, for the second phase of the agriculture development program Padfa. The overall amount of the agreements is XAF416.5 billion, we learn.

According to the national sinking fund CAA, 81% of the agreements were for concessional loans while 19% were for non-concessional loans.

This means that out of the XAF350 billion non-concessional loans approved by the 2020 finance law, the country still has a margin of XAF271 billion for the ongoing financial year. As for concessional loans, the amount raised this year is slightly up by XAF37.1 billion compared with the XAF300 billion cap. Under the IMF's definition, a loan is said to be concessional when its grant component (the difference

between the face value of the loan and the sum of the discounted future debt service payments to be made by the borrower expressed as a percentage of the face value of the loan) is greater than or equal to 35%. This type of loan is encouraged by the IMF because it is considered less expensive, but is viewed with suspicion by sovereignists because of the conditions imposed for its obtention.

Insurance companies report only 14% of stamp duties collected into the Public Transport Passengers' pool

Insurance companies operating in Cameroon only report about 14% of the vehicle stamp duties they collect into the Public Transport Passengers' pool (PTP). This was revealed on October 30, 2020, by the department of financial services of the Ministry of Finance, when it was reviewing the January 2017 vehicle stamp duty reform.

According to the reform, those stamp duties were to be collected by insurance companies, instead of tax authorities. However, the companies do not return the counterfoils of insurance certificates provided to them by the Public Transport Passengers' pool (PTP) and they do not even pay the amounts equivalent to those certificates to the pool. The administration explains that every year, they only return 14% of the certificates they have received, *"keep the remaining 86% and order*

new ones without even detailing how they used the ones they previously received," the department indicated. Explaining that there were no possible reasons for not reporting how they use those certificates, the department adds that such behavior paves the way for numerous blunders and malpractices. It, therefore, believes that in the framework of the ongoing actions aimed at improving the sector, insurance companies must be compelled to return all of the certificates whose use they can't justify to the PTP and explain how they used the ones they have not returned.

It also suggests the elaboration of a distribution pattern based on the certificates effectively used by each insurance company as a way to end the suspicions surrounding the important stock of certificates still held by insurance companies.

Let's note that despite the low volume of certificates reported by the companies during the reform period, the amount of vehicle stamp duty collected in the first year of implementing the reform (2017) was up compared with its level in 2016. Indeed, citing the Directorate General of Taxation, the financial services department estimates that amount to be XAF8.5 billion (the 2018 report published by the directorate estimates it to be XAF7.4 billion) while in 2016, it was XAF7 billion. This represents a year-over-year increase of XAF1.5 billion.

The department explains that such performance was due to the reform but in 2018, that amount dropped by XAF7 billion. Yet, to justify the reform, the directorate of taxation points out the costs saved after the suppression of stickers, which were the payment mediums.

CEMAC: Oil revenues mitigated the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on budget revenues in Q2-2020, the BEAC reveals

Despite the coronavirus pandemic that decelerated economic activities in CEMAC countries (from mid-March 2020) and caused confinement in the said countries' main commercial partners, budget revenues were up in Q2-2020. According to the Bank of Central African States (BEAC), the budget revenues of CEMAC countries grew from about XAF2,000 billion to 2,880 billion between Q1 and Q2, 2020. This represents a close to XAF900 billion quarter-to-quarter rise. However,

"on a year-to-year basis, the budget revenues were down by about 10% for the whole CEMAC region," the BEAC adds in a recent note on economic activities in the sub-region. One of the member countries that contributed the most in the mobilization of budget revenues in Q2, 2020 was Cameroon. During the reference period, the country's budget revenue was 116.1% on target. This is mainly due to the increase in domestic revenues, and a 105.2% and 137.9% implementation rate in targeted loans and

grants respectively because donors facilitated disbursements to help the country deal with the health crisis. The central bank of the CEMAC region explains that the resilience of budget revenues, despite the coronavirus pandemic, is due to a rise in the price of an oil barrel from \$26 at end-March to \$41 at end-June 2020. This appreciation of oil prices mitigated the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on budget revenues in the sub-region, the BEAC explains.

SABC group celebrates academic excellence in Kumba, days after the school massacre

Emmanuel de Tailly (Managing director of Société Anonyme des Brasseries du Cameroun-SABC) was in Kumba, on November 13, 2020. In that locality of the South-West region, which is still mourning the massacre of six students killed a few days ago at Mother Francisca College, SABC celebrated academic excellence through a ceremony during which school kits were handed out to the 200 best students from 10 schools in that town.

«It is our duty, as the first corporate citizen, to be with you during this terrible period. Before we proceed, I would ask you to observe one-minute

silence in memory of all the students who lost their lives last month at Mother Francisca College,» he said. He also congratulated the 200 awardees for their good results during the 2019-2020 school year, which took place in a context marked by insecurity and the Covid-19 health crisis. In addition to the 200 school kits offered to deserving students, SABC group also donated 15 computers and three printers to three schools in the town to build the capacity of teachers and familiarize students with ICT.

The school excellence celebrated on November 13, 2020, in Kumba is

part of a comprehensive program launched by SABC group in October 2008. It is dedicated to primary school students from both educational subsystems (Anglophone and Francophone) in Cameroon. According to Emmanuel de Tailly, this program aims not only to be a healthy boost in the school environment, but also to help children from underprivileged areas on their path to success, and share with them values such as performance, excellence, and consciousness which are the only guarantees of success both at school and in life.

Sinking fund CAA estimates SENDs at XAF3,449 bln at end Sep 2020



At the end of September 2020, Cameroon's undisbursed committed balances (SENDs) were XAF3,449.6 billion (budget support excluded), according to the national sinking fund CAA.

The CAA indicates that during the period under review, the said SENDs were solely on external loans since SENDs on domestic loans were completely disbursed in July 2020. As of September 30, 2020, the SENDs

on external loans were constituted at 54% of financial agreements with multilateral partners (including XAF638.6 billion from the AfDB group), 28.5% from bilateral partners (including XAF761.4 billion from China), and 17.5% from commercial loans (including XAF170 billion to be disbursed by Industrial and Commercial Bank of China-ICBC). «These SENDs are programmed to be absorbed in about 5 years [in 2025]. These resources have not yet been disbursed and are not considered as debts, but rather a commitment to be disbursed at a later date,» the CAA explains. The SENDs are namely financial commitments in the form of future loans. They are already available in the credit lines opened by partners but are not yet transferred to the accounts of the concerned programs and projects.

FINANCE

Cameroonian Blaise Abel Ezo'o Engolo becomes secretary-general of CIMA

On December 4, in Lomé, Togo, Blaise Abel Ezo'o Engolo (a Cameroonian working at the national insurance department of the Ministry of Finance) was elected secretary-general of the Inter-African Conference of the Insurance Markets (CIMA). He obtained the vote of 12 (out of 14) of the plenipotentiary member states of the conference that regulates

the insurance market in West and Central Africa. He thus becomes the head of a diplomatic mission with residence in Libreville, Gabon. He replaces his compatriot Issouf Ncharé, who was elected in October 2015 for a 5-year term. As the secretary-general of CIMA, Blaise Abel Ezo'o Engolo will prepare, execute, and monitor the works of the CIMA council and committee.

He will also decide on the modalities for the implementation of the acts drafted by the council, control (upon his initiative or after an order from the committee) insurance and reinsurance companies authorized in member countries and transmit a yearly report on his activities, and that of the CIMA to the council.

Financial intermediaries to soon be compelled by law to disclose their foreign financial transactions to the customs administration

In the framework of the budget session ongoing in the parliament since November 12, 2020, MPs are examining the draft finance law 2021 submitted by the Cameroonian government. The said draft contains an article on the disclosure of financial transactions by licensed financial intermediaries (institutions such as banks microfinance, post offices, and exchange services specialized in foreign exchange and money transfer operations). Paragraph 1 of the said article indicates that by the 10th of every month, financial intermediaries must disclose all the financial transactions they carried out with foreign countries (either for their own or on behalf of a third party) the

previous month, to the directorate general of customs via electronic means. Paragraph 2 states that the said intermediaries are also required to transmit, by the 10th of January, the consolidated annual statements, counting for the previous year, to the same administration. The same text indicates that microfinance institutions are also required to disclose the financial transactions they carried out with foreign countries on behalf of their clients. *«Failure to transmit the information referred to in paragraphs 1 and 2 (...) or their transmission beyond the prescribed time limits are assimilated to the offense of refusing to communicate documents provided for in the CEMAC Customs Code and sanctioned as such,*

without prejudice to the penalties provided for in the said Code," the draft text reads.

According to the CEMAC Customs Code, the failure of an approved intermediary to communicate this information to the customs administration is punishable by a fine ranging from XAF500,000 to 2 million. The license of the culprit could also be withdrawn.

This regulation is a way for the customs administration (which is obliged to regularly publicize the exchange rates of foreign currencies into the local currency) to regulate foreign transactions. It is also a means for authorities to control currency flows through exchange transactions or money transfers.

BDEAC to raise XAF300 bln on CEMAC financial markets via public bond placement over 2020-2022

During the extraordinary session conducted by videoconference on November 30, 2020, the General Assembly of the Development Bank of Central African States (BDEAC) approved a public placement bond issuance program aimed at raising XAF300 billion over the 2020-2022 period.

«This initiative is in line with priority goal N°2 of the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan which encourages the Bank to secure and diversify its sources of financing. The funds mobilized will be used to finance the private sector's projects and they will be well-suited in terms of maturity and interest rate deferral,» the institution explains. It adds that the funds will also

finance the implementation of the priority integrating projects of CEMAC's Regional Economic Program.

Let's note that the bonds will be issued in local currency and they will be tax and duty-free in all CEMAC countries in accordance with the institution's statutes. Investors who buy the securities will benefit from a guarantee of profitability, security, and liquidity, based on the performance of the Institution and its diversified shareholder base.

With this operation, the Bank aims to position itself as a benchmark issuer on the regional financial market. On the CEMAC financial market, the banking institution carried out two

successful private placement bond operations (raising XAF40 billion) in 2005 and 2007, and in 2010, it carried out a public placement bond issuance raising XAF30 billion. All those funds were repaid on time.

«The positive trend in the Bank's results, combined with its ability to timely honor its commitments, give it certain credibility with investors who should accompany it in its efforts to finance CEMAC's economies. The BDEAC offers a new range of products that are both attractive and secure for investors seeking portfolio diversification and security,» the sub-regional banking institution concludes.

CEMAC: Gabon, CAR and Cameroon had the highest interest rates on medium-term loans in H1-2020

Between January and June 2020, Cameroonian banks were very demanding, as far as interest rates are concerned, for medium-term loans (repayable over about 42 months). According to the Beac, the average interest rates on this category of loans (very popular with economic operators) was 11.93% in the country. But, Cameroon was not the most expensive country in terms of medium-term credit in the CEMAC zone. It was outranked by Gabon

(14.23%), which was the most expensive country in this credit category, and the Central African Republic (12.47%).

In addition to being the countries with the highest interest rates for medium-term credits, the two countries were also the most demanding in terms of conditions set to grant short-term loans (loans repayable over 11 months on average). Let's note that short-term loans account for 79% of the new loans

granted by credit institutions operating in the CEMAC zone during the period. Gabonese and Central African bankers charged average interest rates of 12.46 and 11.58% respectively, we learn.

During the period under review, the highest interest rates were charged on long-term loans (repayable over 80 months on average). In this category, Gabonese banks were also the most expensive, with average interest rates of up to 14.5%.

Cameroon to raise XAF452 bln from capital markets to fund its deficit in 2021



During the 2021 finance year, Cameroon will once again turn to the capital market to fund its budget deficit (estimated at XAF1,481.9 billion in the 2021 draft bill being reviewed by parliament).

In addition to project loans (XAF703.4 billion) and budget support (XAF260 billion) to be sought from international donors, the Cameroonian government intends to raise XAF452 billion on the capital market, according to official sources. Specifically, the country will raise XAF350 billion by issuing public securities and source XAF120 billion via direct bank loans. As far as public securities are concerned, the government will probably turn to the money market of the Bank of Central African States-BEAC (which has become its preferred market in recent years) for the issuance of long and short-term

securities. However, it could also turn to the Douala-based unified stock exchange (BVMAC) for short-term securities, even though in 2019, it started shifting most of its focus to long-term securities.

Lobbying from the BVMAC

According to our sources, Minister of Finance Louis Paul Motazé recently received officials of the Central African Securities Exchange (BVMAC). During the visit, they offered more attractive conditions for Cameroon's fundraising on the BVMAC. Indeed, over the past two years, the country's public treasury kept away from the said market because of the costs deemed prohibitive, the less flexible repayment terms, and the longer execution time. Apart from the issuance of public securities, the government will

solicit credit institutions for direct loans amounting to XAF102 billion. Let's note however that the said institutions will already be solicited indirectly for public security issuance operations. Indeed, some of them are approved as Treasury Securities Specialists (SVTs) on the money market, or as stock exchange intermediaries on the unified financial market. The XAF102 billion of direct loans the government is planning to raise from banks is barely one-tenth of the funds public administration and decentralized local authorities have in the local banking system (Ed.note: the funds were estimated at about XAF976 billion at end-August 2020). «*When the Cameroonian state goes to the banking market, it is in fact to borrow its own money.*» an official from the Ministry of Finance comments ironically.

Investment scams: Société Générale Cameroon warns about Facebook posts impersonating it

Société Générale Cameroon recently posted a message on its Facebook page informing that some scammers have been using its logo and that of YUP Cameroon to entice users into investing amounts for considerable and quick returns.

“Société Générale Cameroon (SGC) wishes to formally deny its alleged involvement in this type of investment. As a reminder, the performance of any initial public offering or financial instrument selling activities is subject to the mandatory approval of Cosumaf [Central African Financial

Market Supervisory Commission],» the bank indicates.

The warning comes just days after a statement issued by the Cosumaf warning Cameroonians against several actors who offer to invest on their behalf without the necessary approvals. In its warning note, it published a list of 14 sites that offer such services without approval. They are namely Académie des investisseurs panafricains, Liyeplimal, GTX Invest, Global Trusted Xchange, Sogaa Sarl, Petronpay Cameroon, Mekit Invest, Unique Finance, Fortune

Investment & Wealth, Crifat, Highlife International Cameroon, Sairiu, Regel Cameroun, Cameroon Invest, and Mougano Investment. Some of the companies listed protested but were suspended by the Cameroonian Ministry of Finance.

As far as SGC is concerned, it is a financial institution authorized by the COSUMAF to operate in the CEMAC region. It is an account keeper along with Afriland First Bank and Standard Chartered Bank.

Cameroon loses over XAF63.2 bln to corporate tax abuses every year, the report estimates

The State of Tax Justice 2020: Tax Justice in the time of COVID-19. ”

This is the title of a report recently published by three NGOs (the Global Alliance For Tax Justice, Public Services International, and Tax Justice Network) thanks to funds from the German foundation Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung and the European Union. The 85-page report (which analyzes the tax system of 133 countries worldwide) reveals that Cameroon loses over \$114.5 million (XAF63.2 billion) in tax revenue every year due to «tax abuses» perpetrated by companies

(particularly multinationals, which are generally guilty of «corporate tax abuses»).

“Corporate tax abuse by multinationals is an element of the global problem of illicit financial flows and comprises criminal tax evasion, unlawful tax avoidance, and some avoidance which, will technically fall within the weaknesses of international tax rules, and nonetheless contributes to the socially objectionable outcome of misalignment between the location of companies’ real economic activity and where their profits are declared for tax purposes,” the report

explains in a footnote.

“By placing holding companies and important value-creating assets in corporate tax havens, large corporations can shift their profits to low tax or no-tax jurisdictions, to artificially drive down their tax obligations elsewhere and pay little to no tax on the profits they shift into tax havens,” it adds.

“Enabling corporate tax abuse deprives governments around the world of public funding, favoring multinationals, wealthy individuals, and tax havens,” the report believes.

Paul Fokam's Afriland First Group provides technical assistance for the creation of National Investment Bank of Guinea



On November 21, Guinean Head of State Alpha Condé officially inaugurated the National Investment Bank of Guinea (Banque Nationale d'investissements de Guinée-BNIG). This banking institution (expected to boost the country's development) was established with the technical support of Afriland First Group, official sources reveal. Afriland First Group (a Swiss holding company controlled by Cameroonian businessman Paul Kammogne Fokam) «*managed all the operations related to the designing, studies, establishment, approval submission, recruitment, training, start-up, and operationali-*

zation of the BNIG,» a source close to the case explains. The head of the administrative board of the new bank is Paul Kammogne Fokam (Head of Afriland First Group that will continue its support to the BNIG). In the same vein, Cameroonian citizen Guy Laurent Fondjo (who is CEO of Afriland First Bank Guinea and economic advisor to President Alpha Condé) has been appointed Secretary of the said board. Also, through Afriland First Bank Guinea, Paul Kammogne Fokam owns 10% of the new bank's capital, while the remaining 90% is owned by the Guinean state.

“In 1958, Guinea started developing a pan-African policy we are all proud of. Those who are unaware of it will wonder how the national investment bank of Guinea can be managed by a Cameroonian (...) this is pan-Africanism at play. Dr.Fokam introduced the MC2-MUFFA model (Ed.note: a network of microfinance institutions) in Guinea and the model was successful. Yet, it can not help small producers while our ambition is to be self-sufficient (...) This is why the national investment bank of Guinea was created. Via appropriate measures, it will collect savings nationwide and set the guidelines for investments in the industrial, agriculture, handicraft, and commercial sectors,” Alpha Condé commented. The Guinea President expects that thanks to BNIG, his country will become a rice exporter «*within two years.*» With a capital of 100 billion Guinean francs, «*BNIG will set up an agropole system that integrates agricultural production, processing, and distribution. This means that you will no longer be afraid to produce since you will have a market where you can sell your products. To achieve the objective set by the government, it will be necessary (in addition to agropoles) to develop industrial poles that will be protected by the State,*» Paul Kammogne Fokam comments.

Vietnamese wood exporters hid over XAF170 bln of export revenues from the state in 2014-2017, report claims



In a report titled «*TAINTED TIMBER, TARNISHED TEMPLES: How the Cameroon-Vietnam Timber Trade Hurts the Cameroonian People and Forests*», two NGOs (Environmental Investigation Agency and Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement-CED) reveal the nefarious consequences of Vietnamese companies' logging operations in Cameroon.

“The Cameroon-Vietnam timber trade has minimally contributed to Cameroon's revenues since financial transactions are often conducted underground, cash-based, and misdeclared. Between 2014 and 2017, exporters from Cameroon reported US\$308 million less than importers in Vietnam,” the report reveals. This means that over the 3-year period, Vietnamese wood exporters

operating in Cameroon exported over XAF170 billion of raw timber (which constitutes the bulk of wood exports from Cameroon to Vietnam, according to the report) leaving no trail. As those hidden transactions are not showing in companies' turnover, they could not be included in the tax collected by Cameroonian authorities.

According to the authors of the above-mentioned report, this practice is not the only malpractice carried out by Vietnamese loggers operating in Cameroon. «*The exploding Cameroon-Vietnam timber trade relies on shocking schemes and illegal activities*», such as “Widespread Violation of Export Law,” “Illegal Harvest and Disregard for National Parks” and “Laundering Operations Covered by Paperwork.”

“To meet the requirements of Vietnamese authorities, trading companies have focused their efforts on obtaining Cameroonian paperwork while disregarding the actual origin of the timber placed on the Vietnamese market,” the report explains. *“In just a few years, Vietnam has become the second-largest market for Cameroonian timber (after China), while Cameroon has become the largest supplier of tropical logs to Vietnam (accounting for 25 percent of the logs imported between 2016 and 2019, in value). In Vietnam, Cameroonian logs have replaced the Southeast Asian species that previously filled the market,”* thanks to those unorthodox practices, it continues.

Cameroon reimbursed XAF1943.6 bln of funds borrowed in financial markets in 2010-2019



Over the decade spanning from 2010 to 2019, Cameroon reimbursed XAF1,943.6 billion on the international, sub-regional, and national financial markets. According to the Directorate General of the Treasury, the amount includes both the interest and principals of the loans that were due or were being amortized during the reference period.

During the said period, Cameroon raised XAF3,112.7 billion via successive issuances on public securities and financial markets to fund its budget and implement large infrastructure projects, the same source informs. On the BEAC money debt market, the country raised XAF1593.6 billion by issuing short-term securities during the period. It also raised XAF795 billion

during five bond issuance operations on the Douala Stock Exchange (which has finally been merged with the BVMAC).

At the same time, it raised XAF273.7 billion by issuing long-term securities (between 2 and 10 years maturation period) on the CEMAC money market, and XAF375 billion (XAF4,50450.3 billion after the cross-currency swap) through the only Eurobond it ever issued (in 2015 at a 9.75% interest rate). For this international bond, the amortization of the principal will begin in 2023, but interest charges are already being regularly paid by Cameroon. For instance, credible sources reveal that the country paid XAF21 billion of interest charges on that Eurobond on May 19, 2020. A similar payment is expected this month of November 2020.

Cameroonian Diko Jacob Mukete joins the board of government agency Rwanda Finance Limited

On November 12, 2020, Cameroonian Diko Jacob Mukete was appointed as a member of the Board of Directors of Rwanda Finance Limited (the government agency in charge of the development and promotion of the Kigali International Financial Centre) that works *“with industry players within the financial services sector, understands their needs, challenges, and then engages with policy formulators to address them.”* Diko Jacob Mukete was appointed

due to his expertise in governance, as well as economic and financial reforms. Indeed, he previously served as the African Development Bank's country representative in Rwanda so he understands the environment in which he will operate. In Cameroon, Jacob Mukete is the spokesman for a family empire (worth \$360 million, according to Forbes Afrique magazine) with investments in many sectors such as telecommunications, communica-

tion, and media.

He is joining the Rwanda Finance Limited Board of Directors at the same time as Franco-Ivorian banker Tidjane Thiam who was appointed head of the board. The other appointees are Lebanon Soleman Abdi (Gabon), Louise Kanyonga (Rwanda), Alice Ntamitondero (Rwanda), Umulinga Karangwa (Rwanda), and Julien Kavaruganda (Rwanda).

CEMAC commission raised XAF2,492 bln for integrating projects during the Paris investors roundtable



Officials of the CEMAC commission raised XAF2,492 billion during the investors' roundtable organized from November 16 to 17, 2020 in Paris, credible sources reveal.

The roundtable was organized to raise funds for the 11 integrating projects ongoing in the CEMAC region. The 11 projects, which require about XAF2,500 billion, fall within the framework of the regional economic program aimed at initiating deeper changes in the sub-regional economies to increase the member countries' added-value, thus reducing unemployment and poverty. Authorized sources indicate that even before the roundtable, XAF400 billion had been raised for the projects. This means that the XAF2,492 billion raised during the roundtable exceeds the amount needed to complete the projects.

Even though the identity of the investors that agreed to invest in

the 11 projects was not revealed, we know that the Development Bank of the Central African States (BDEAC) will invest XAF308 billion in six of the 11 projects. We also know that Afreximbank is part of the investors.

Cameroon: the main beneficiary of the announced projects

Cameroon appears to be the main beneficiary of the 11 projects because it is involved in seven of them. The seven projects include the construction of a bridge over the Ntem river, transport facilitation and road security along the Kribi-Campo-Bata trans-national road (40 km) linking Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, Chollet hydroelectricity dam and power lines (Cameroon-Congo-Gabon-Central African republic), electricity interconnection between Cameroon and Chad, the Central Africa Fibre-Optic Backbone (CSB) Project and the Cameroon-Congo

Interstate university.

The remaining projects include the construction of the remaining 179 kilometers of the Ndendé-Dolisie road on the Libreville-Brazzaville corridor, the construction of the Kogo-Akurenam (230 km) road to link the Southwestern part of Equatorial Guinea to Gabon, the Brazzaville-Ouessou-Bangui-Ndjamen (Congo-Central African Republic-Chad) corridor, and the construction of the Dolisie dry port (Corridor Gabon-Congo).

"These projects are in perfect synergy with the national development plans elaborated by CEMAC countries to effectively address the main sustainable development challenges. Their implementation by 2025 should sustainably accelerate the physical and commercial integration of the sub-region," the BDEAC indicates.

Cameroon disburses XAF61.2 bln for amortization of its “ECMR 5.6% net 2018-2023” bond

On November 16, 2020, the Cameroonian Public Treasury amortized XAF50 billion on the principal of its «ECMR 5.6% net 2018-2023» bond issuance during which it raised XAF200 billion. At the same time, it released XAF11.2 billion as the interest generated by this public offering, open from October 29 to November 9, 2018, on the Douala Stock Exchange, which was finally merged with the BVMAC. This was revealed in a release published by the Bank of Central African States (BEAC). The release informs that the coupon per bond has been set at XAF3,060 (namely XAF2,500 for the amortization and

XAF560 for the interest) adding that investors can start collecting the coupons with brokerage firms today, November 17, 2020.

During the «ECMR 5.6% net 2018-2023» operation, the country was expecting XAF150 billion but the operation was oversubscribed (XAF207 billion). Therefore, the country kept XAF200 billion, after proper approval from the financial market regulator.

The success of the operation was made possible by the nine local banks and financial institutions that disbursed XAF121.5 billion to underwrite the bonds even before they were issued. Those banks

include the three arrangers (namely Société Générale Cameroun, Afriland First Bank, and EDC Investment) and the syndicate of underwriters, constituted of Bicec, Ecobank, UBA, BGFI, SCB Cameroon and Financial Capital.

With the funds raised, Cameroon launched the implementation of about forty infrastructure projects in the 10 regions of the country. Let's note that according to the briefing note published for the fundraising operation, over 70% of the funds would be dedicated to infrastructure projects carried out in the framework of the 2019 African Cup of Nations Cameroon was to host.

Cameroon and the UNDP launch session to update national financial inclusion strategy



Only 10% of the adult population has a bank account in Cameroon, according to the Ministry of Finance. At the same time, more than 50% of the over-15 population has no access to financial services, the same source indicates. To increase the bancarization rate, the Cameroonian government and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) launched a session on November 11, 2020, in Yaoundé to update the country's national financial inclusion strategy.

The session aimed to explore ways and means to significantly increase Cameroonians' access to financial services over the 2021-2025 period. «We must step up our actions to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas, reduce the gap between the rich and the vulnerable, reduce discrimination between young and old and between men and women,» said Finance Minister Louis Paul Motazé.

CEMAC: Many jobs will be lost if the current foreign exchange regulation is applied in the extractive industry, the African Energy Chamber believes



On November 5, 2020, Abbas Mahamat Tolli (governor of the Bank of Central African States-BEAC) signed a decision extending the deadline for extractive companies to comply with the new foreign exchange regulation by an additional 12 months. Specifically, instead of December 31, 2020, this regulation will be enforced onto oil and mining companies operating in the CEMAC region starting from December 31, 2021.

According to the BEAC, this 4th extension of the application deadline (it was already extended to September 1, 2019, moved to December 10, 2019, then to December 31, 2020) is due to

the coronavirus because of which the working sessions scheduled (in the November 12, 2019, circular letter) to be held with the extractive companies were not organized.

The central bank also allows oil and mining companies up to April 30, 2021, to transmit «*the list of onshore and offshore accounts opened to date (including the accounts of their Single Resolution Fund-SRF)*». It explains that the list should detail the domiciliary bank, the number and title of the account, the account currency, the opening date, and the purpose of the account. They should also include the most recent one-month account statement, the bank opening

documents, the lending, borrowing, and investment agreements signed with banks and/or other financial institutions located outside CEMAC, and the oil and mining contracts. According to the governor, the deadline will not be extended for companies that will not transmit the requested information within the stated deadlines. They will also be immediately subjected to the provisions of the law of December 21, 2018, regulating foreign exchange transactions in the CEMAC region.

The response of the African Energy Chamber's representation in the CEMAC region

The November 5, 2020, decision points at the BEAC's resolve to get the foreign exchange regulation applied by companies in the extractive industry but new developments in the corporation suggests those companies will oppose the implementation of that law (despite the negotiations initiated, since 2019, by the IMF which strongly supports the implementation of that law by extractive companies).

Indeed, in a release published on November 9, 2020, Leoncio Amada Nze (Managing Director of Apex Industries Equatorial Guinea and Executive President of the African Energy Chamber within CEMAC) indicated that many jobs would be lost if the current foreign exchange regulation was to be applied.

Currency repatriation: the apple of discord

«The African Energy Chamber understands governments' desire to protect their declining foreign exchange reserves as a result of reduced revenues from oil and gas revenues since the 2014 drop in oil prices and the recent drop triggered by covid-19. However, we believe that the new foreign exchange regulation is a poor and inappropriate response to these new market dynamics. It is a trigger for more bureaucracy, corruption and is the ultimate killer of jobs (Ed.note: only 0.68% of jobs in Cameroon are in

the extractive industry, according to the 2017 EITI report),» said Leoncio Amada Nze, who was speaking on behalf the companies against the implementation of the new regulation. He believes that unlike what is specified in the new foreign exchange regulation (which came into force on March 1, 2019), the contracts signed with the states do not allow them to repatriate the foreign exchange proceeds from the sale of oil, gas, and mining resources produced in the CEMAC region.

Indeed, the regulation requires extractive companies to repatriate the proceeds of exports exceeding XAF5 million within 150 days following the date the products were exported (Ed.note: it set heavy penalties for companies that would not do so). It also subjects the opening of accounts denominated in foreign currencies to prior authorizations from the BEAC and introduces a 0.5% tax applicable to wire transfers exceeding XAF1 million.

Covid-19: Société Générale Cameroon and the EIB set XAF10 bln credit line to support local SMEs

On November 17, 2020, Société Générale Cameroon (SGC) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) signed a strategic agreement aimed at supporting SMEs amid the covid-19 pandemic. The two financial institutions set about XAF10 billion credit line, which will be managed by SGC. Thanks to the credit line, the bank will provide financial support to SMEs with flexible conditions. *“The about XAF10 billion envelope (which includes working capital support) will boost the supports provided for investment projects. The supports will be provided at flexible conditions that take into account the difficult and sudden challenges African companies are confronted with,”* an official release indicates. The partnership was signed in the presence of Achille Bassilekin III (Minister of Small and Medium-

Sized enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts) who praised the initiative. *“Cameroon welcomes the strong support provided by Société Générale Cameroon and the European Investment Bank for Cameroon, and the private sector's development efforts. That support will help Cameroonian SMEs improve their defense against the global economic recession, which is developing in the wake of the economic crisis,”* the official said. According to Mareme Mbaye Ndiaye (Managing director of SGC), the initiative fits in the “Grow with Africa” strategy implemented by Société Générale (Head office of SGC) to boost its commitment to sustainable development in four axes (SMEs, infrastructures, agriculture and renewable energies) in Africa. *“Africa and Europe have decided to*

join forces to deal with the impacts of this pandemic, by notably offering strong support to the private sector, which is one of the most affected by the health crisis. The agreement signed today, between Société Générale Cameroon and the European Investment Bank, thus falls within that framework. The Team Europe (the EU and its member states) expects that the about XAF10 billion (€15 million) dedicated to the project will help Cameroonian companies relaunch their activities,” said Sébastien Bergeon (Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the European Union delegation in Cameroon). On September 1, 2020, BGF Bank Cameroon signed an agreement with the Cameroonian Ministry of Finance to set a XAF10 billion credit line to support local SMEs affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

AGRIBUSINESS

CEMAC: The price index of agricultural products was spurred by three products in Q3-2020, the BEAC reveals



In Q3-2020, the price index of agricultural products exported by CEMAC countries grew by 2.2%. Compared with the 1.9% growth in Q2-2020, this

reveals a 0.3 percentage growth quarter-over-quarter. According to the central bank BEAC, the growth was mainly spurred by three products.

Indeed, in a recent report, the central bank indicates that the highest rise was recorded in the prices of caoutchouc (23.6%), palm oil (22.8%), and sugar (14.6%). *"The rise in the price of caoutchouc can be explained by the drop in the offer and the upturn in automobile production in China,"* the BEAC adds.

"Small variations were observed in the prices of coffee (8.0%), cotton (6.2%), banana (1.7%), cocoa (1.3%). There was no change in the price of acacia gum but there was a negative change in the prices of beef (-4.7%), rice (-4.0%), and tobacco (-1.8%)," the document continues.

The EU provides XAF12 bln to support the agroecological transition program ABC-PADER in the Northern regions

On November 4, 2020, in Garoua (Northern Cameroon), the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Gabriel Mbairrobe launched the ABC-PADER Program co-financed to the tune of XAF12.7 billion by the European Union and the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development. The said program is aimed at improving the economic performance of

private actors in the agriculture and livestock sector by promoting production systems adapted to climate change. It also aims to strengthen the capacities of key players in this sector (particularly in aspects related to land and natural resource management) to preserve the environment in the cotton-producing areas of the Northern regions. Implemented in the three nor-

thern regions of Cameroon (Far North, North, and Adamaoua), the main beneficiaries of this program are small producers, breeders, processors, and agro-pastoral entrepreneurs in the cotton basin of Cameroon. The program, which gives priority to women and the youth, will end in December 2024.

ENERGY

Net oil sales slumped by 33% YoY to XAF262.678 bln, at end-Oct 2020

The national hydrocarbons corporation (SNH) generated XAF262.678 billion of net revenue from oil sales on behalf of the Cameroonian government from January to October 2020. According to the corporation, the revenues are down by 33.10% compared with the end-October 2019 performance. It explains the downward performance by the slump in the prices of petroleum products in

international markets (slumps by 36.06% YoY for the Brent, whose price is the reference for Cameroon). SNH adds that during the period under review, it also paid XAF11.271 billion to the state as the tax on oil companies, XAF10 billion as dividends, and XAF3.695 billion as miscellaneous taxes. During the period SNH sold 13.517 million oil barrels, down by 2.03% in

volume. It produced 32.8 million barrels of equivalent (BOE), including 22.354 million barrels of crude (up by 5.05% year-on-year) and 1,774.777 million m3 of natural gas (- 3.58 % YoY).

The corporation expects that by the end of the year, the overall production would be 26.548 million barrels of crude and 2119.015 million m3 of natural gas.

Hilli Episeyo produced 20,323 tons of domestic gas in Jan-Oct 2020 (SNH)



Between January and October 2020, floating LNG unit Hilli Episeyo produced 20,323 tons of domestic gas, according to the National Hydrocarbons Corporation (SNH). By December 31, 2020, that pro-

duction should logically exceed the 20,545.05 tons Hilli Episeyo supplied the domestic market in 2019. According to the SNH (which represents the government in oil and gas exploration and production), the

bulk of the domestic gas produced during the reference period was mainly supplied to households in Yaoundé and its neighboring towns.

Cameroon to import 120K tons of domestic gas to cover domestic demand in 2021



Okie Johnson Ndoh (President of the ad hoc Commission in charge of petroleum product imports-CIPP) recently published a release informing oil companies with authorization to import the products that on November 23, 2020, a call for tenders was issued for the importation of 120,000 metric tons (MT) of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), commonly known as domestic gas. This quantity of LPG is up by 5,000

metric tons (MT) compared to the quantity imported in 2019 (that year, Cameroon also issued a call for tenders to import 115,000 MT of LPG). According to Okie Johnson Ndoh, the 120,000 MT to be imported will cover the country's needs in the 2021 fiscal year. The said volume will be imported in three batches: 60,000 MT, 35,000 MT, and 25,000 MT. These imports will fill the gap in the domestic gas market because the

National Hydrocarbons Corporation (SNH) also produces LPG for the local market. In 2019, the corporation produced 20,545.05 tons (equivalent to 1,643,604 cylinders of 12.5 kg, up by 943,604 cylinders since in 2018, the country supplied 700,000 cylinders of 12.5 kg in the market) of Liquefied Petroleum Gas for the domestic market.

Cameroon exported 6,182 mln m3 of LNG in Jan-Sep 2020

During the first nine months of 2020, Cameroon exported 6,182 million m3 of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Hilli Episseyo - the floating unit commissioned in 2018 off the coast of Kribi. The information was revealed on November 25, 2020, by Prime Minister Joseph Dion Nguté when he was presenting the government's 2021 Economic and Financial Program to the National Assembly. As a reminder, thanks to Hilli Episseyo (which is the second infras-

tructure of this type in the world after that of Malaysia) Cameroon officially became an LNG exporter 2 years ago. The LNG produced off the coasts of Kribi is mainly marketed in Asia by the Russian firm Gazprom, with which Cameroon has signed an exclusive offtake agreement. Hilli Episseyo also produces domestic gas for households. According to the Prime Minister, about 2,000 metric tons of the said gas are produced every month. However, this

production has become insufficient since the fire outbreak that stopped the operations of Sonara, the country's only refinery. To make up for the deficit, Cameroon is preparing to import 120,000 metric tons of domestic gas to meet the needs of Cameroonian households during the 2021 fiscal year. A call for tenders was launched to this effect on November 23, 2020.

Memve'ele dam generated XAF27.641 bln revenues in April 2019-Oct 2020, MINEE estimates



90MW of energy is injected daily into the southern interconnected network thanks to the Memve'ele dam powered up on April 14, 2019, and the 225KV line temporarily connected to the 90/30 kV Mbalmayo substation in July 2020.

This was revealed by the Minister of Water and Energy (MINEE) Gaston Eloundou Essomba while presenting the activities of his ministry before the parliament on December 1, 2020. According to the official, from April 14, 2019, to September 2020, XAF27.641

billion was generated thanks to the infrastructure. The said amount represents the fuel costs saved thanks to the cessation of the operations at Ahala, Oyom Abang, Mbalmayo, and Ébolowa thermal power plants and the fees paid to the state (via EDC) as water rights.

The 211 MW Memve'ele dam built over the Ntem river has been completed. However, as of October 2020, the associated Nyabizán-Yaoundé transmission line was 92% completed. The said transmission line will be commissioned in March 2021, while the commercial commissioning of the power plant is scheduled for September 2021.



SONATREL to build 460 km of electricity transport lines in the coming ten years



In its 2020-2030 investment plan, the National Society of Transport Electricity (SONATREL) informs that it intends to build 460km of 400-kV transport lines and four transmission substations while rehabilitating three transmission substations and about two dozens of source stations. In that regard, Sonatrel will build the Ngaoundéré-Tibati (225 Kv)

and Tibati-Ngaoundal (30 Kv), Bertoua-Garoua-Boulai-Meiganga-Ngaoundéré (225 Kv), Menchum-Bamenda (225 Kv), Memve'ele-Kribi (225 Kv), Yaoundé-Abong-Mbang and Nkongsamba-Bafoussam (225 Kv) lines. Over the period, 'the government will pay a particular attention to the modernization of the energy distribution network,' the

company adds.

It provided no detail about the financing strategy for the projects but a presidential decree of April 23, 2020, had already allowed it to amend its statutes to be able to create subsidiaries and even open its capital (which is currently XAF10 billion) to private and public institutions. That decree provides it with more flexibility in its resource mobilization strategies, including public-private partnerships.

Established in 2015, Sonatrel funds its operations using revenues it generates from energy transportation and electricity network management activities. According to the price grid published on December 11, 2018, by the Electricity Sector Regulatory Agency (ARSEL), Sonatrel generates XAF10,626 per kWh of energy transported.

SONARA's reconstruction depends on the effective restructuring of its over XAF700 bln debt, according to the MINEE

Sonara's reconstruction will cost about XAF250 billion. According to Minister of Water and Energy Gaston Eloundou, who disclosed the figure during his address before the parliament on December 1, 2020, these are the initial estimates from consulting firms.

«Negotiations are already underway with technical and financial partners who have expressed interest in the reconstruction of this refinery. However, the finalization of these negotiations depends on the restructuring of Sonara's large debt. The government is

working hard to complete this restructuring and allow the gradual amortization of this debt,» the Minister said. According to the national sinking fund CAA, as of September 30, 2020, the debt of the refinery (whose Limbé plant was destroyed by a fire outbreak on May 31, 2019) was XAF704 billion. For the IMF, such huge debt poses a significant risk to the Cameroonian banking system. *"A full provisioning of exposures to SONARA per COBAC's regulation would wipe out more than half of the banking system's capital within*

two years (150 billion provisioning requirements within two years, out of a total regulatory capital of 280 billion for the entire banking system),» the IMF wrote in its Country Report No. 20/48 focused on Cameroon. To avoid such a worrying situation, Cameroonian authorities intend to facilitate an agreement on the reprofiling of SONARA's banks and suppliers' debts. This reprofiling, which will schedule repayment over five fiscal years (as suggested by SONARA), will help mitigate impacts on banks' equity and profitability.

ENVIRONNEMENT

Report accuses Vietnamese wood operators of conducting “shocking schemes and illegal activities”

In just a few years, Vietnam has become the second-largest market for Cameroonian timber (after China), while Cameroon has become the largest supplier of tropical logs to Vietnam (accounting for 25 percent of the logs imported between 2016 and 2019, in value). In Vietnam, Cameroonian logs have replaced the Southeast Asian species that previously filled the market.”

This statement is the introductory note of a 3-year investigation carried out by two NGOs. Titled **TAINTED TIMBER, TARNISHED TEMPLES: How the Cameroon-Vietnam Timber Trade Hurts the Cameroonian People and Forests**, the report was produced

by Centre pour l’Environnement et le Développement (CED) and the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA).

It reveals that “the exploding Cameroon-Vietnam timber trade relies on shocking schemes and illegal activities.”

Those violations and schemes include “Widespread Violation of Export Law,” “Illegal Harvest and Disregard for National Parks” and “Laundering Operations Covered by Paperwork.” Indeed, “to meet the requirements of Vietnamese authorities, trading companies have focused their efforts on obtaining Cameroonian paperwork while

disregarding the actual origin of the timber placed on the Vietnamese market,” the authors commented. For instance, they illustrate, “a senior-level employee from Dai Loi Trading Co. Ltd. (Công ty TNHH Thương Mại Đại Lợi, “Dai Loi”), the largest Vietnamese company operating in Cameroon and one of the three largest timber importers in Vietnam, claimed that he does not care about the origin of the timber even if the timber he is placing on the Vietnamese market were to come from terrorist groups, as long as the proper paperwork is provided.”

Nestlé Cameroon recycled 100 tons of plastic waste this year through a partnership with Name Recycling

This year, Nestlé Cameroon recycled 100 tons of plastic waste in Cameroon, meeting its target for the year in the framework of its commitment to preserve the environment and fight plastic waste, official sources informed. The firm met its target thanks to a partnership with Name Recycling, a local company specialized in waste collection and recycling.

“Nestlé always keeps to its commit-

ments. I am happy with Nestlé meeting the challenge of collecting and recycling 100 tons of plastic waste in 2020. This is a good starting point but the task at hand is huge. Nestlé will continue on this path to ensure that by 2025, all its packaging are recyclable or reusable,” commented Robert Helou, Managing Director of Nestlé Cameroon.

In the framework of its Shared Value Creation program, Nestlé made a

global commitment to make its packaging recyclable or reusable by 2025, with a special emphasis on the fight against plastic pollution. In Cameroon, this commitment includes the implementation of a circular economy that addresses environmental and socio-economic challenges by creating jobs and wealth.



MINING

Government to collaborate with a «consortium of five Chinese state-owned companies» for the development of the Mbalam mining project



During the current parliamentary session, which is reviewing the 2021 finance act, Mines Minister Gabriel Dodo Ndocke presented part of the government's plan to develop the Mbalam mining project. During his address, the official announced that in 2021, the government will finalize the procedures for the selection of technical and financial partners for the operation of the mine, the construction of the railway, and the construction of the mineral terminal. They will also complete processes for the selection of partners who will buy the iron ore from the Mbalam mine in Cameroon and Nabeba in Congo. Without providing further details

about the partners concerned, Gabriel Dodo Ndocke clearly revealed that the government will collaborate with a «consortium of five Chinese state-owned companies.» For about ten years now, the Mbalam project has been stalling. Australian mining company Sundance Resources Limited, which is in charge of its operation, has been unable to find a financial partner for its launch. Since 2018, the mining company has been trying to reach an agreement with Chinese firm AustSino. After several postponements, the prior agreement between the two parties was terminated in early November 2020. The termination further dashed hopes

of the effective launch of operations at the Mbalam-Nabeba iron ore deposit mining project, which is stalling because of a lack of funds for its infrastructures (the mine and over 500 km railway network between Mbalam and Kribi). The Mbalam (Cameroon)-Nabeba (Congo) iron ore deposit mining project is a two-stage project. In the first stage, Sundance Resources Ltd expects annual production of 40 million tons of direct shipping ore for over 12 years. The second stage will extend the life of the operation by more than 15 years by producing a high-grade concentrate product from Itabirite.

Quarry exploitation: Cameroon partners with a private firm to improve its revenues



The Cameroonian administration, through the Support Framework for Artisanal Mining (Capam), will collaborate with the Business Facilities Corporation (BFC) for better accountability of the resources produced in quarries and improve government revenues in the said sector. An agreement was signed in that regard a few days ago, we learn from stakeholders in the process.

«We are happy to be once again at the heart of an activity that has promising potential and can generate additional income for Cameroon, as well as stable direct employment for Cameroonians. Through these contracts signed and the concrete actions undertaken already, we are further concretizing our mission to be a key player in the economic transformation of Cameroon's

development potential,» said Lucien Ndzomo Mviena, Managing Director of BFC, in reply to Business in Cameroon's questions.

In the framework of the partnership, BFC is expected to set up weighbridges at the quarries' exits to properly estimate the volumes of resources taken out by the various operators. BFC is already implementing a similar project with the Port Authority of Douala (PAD) at the port of the economic capital. According to officials in charge of collecting public revenues dedicated to this sector, the difference between the sums collected and the potential is «significant». One of the difficulties mentioned has always been that of having an exact overview of what is produced and exploited in the quarries. According

to Capam, the solutions proposed so far have mostly faced challenges. The construction of about sixty weighbridges at the quarry exit should therefore be the first line of response to these challenges.

The other aspect of cooperation is the organization of cooperatives that are active around the quarries in Cameroon, like *société simplifiée coopérative des tenanciers et artisans miniers de carrières artisanales de sables de la région du Centre* namely. «We are already working to transform this sector capable of stabilizing and making viable over 100,000 direct jobs and creating more than 2,000 new direct jobs. There will also be indirect jobs and new benefits for the country. The project will also prompt new local investments,» said Lucien Ndzomo Mviena.

Cameroon and Addax Petroleum Cameroon Ltd in negotiation for a production-sharing agreement on the Ngosso block in Bakassi

Cameroon is currently negotiating a production sharing agreement with Addax Petroleum Cameroon Limited for the exploitation of the Ngosso block in the Rio Del Rey basin. This was revealed at the end of the second session of the administrative board of

National Hydrocarbons Corporation (SNH), which was held through house calls from November 19 to 26, 2020. Addax Petroleum Cameroon Limited is a subsidiary of the Chinese company Sinopec. On March 19, 2004, it obtained an exploration permit on

the Ngosso block. The permit, which expired on January 25, 2016, covers a 474 km² area located in a hydrocarbon-bearing basin.

Capam helped collect 37.66 kg of gold by Oct 15, 2020, in the framework of production sharing contract with artisanal miners



In the framework of the production sharing contract between Cameroon and gold miners (both artisanal miners and companies), 276.26 grams of gold was recovered from artisans this year as arrears for the 2019 fiscal year. Also, by October 15, 2020, 37,215.40 grams were recovered from Small-scale mining companies as synthetic tax for this year and 171 grams for arrears of 2019. This makes a total of 37,662.66 grams (37.66 kg) of gold traced as of October 15, 2020. For the Ministry of Mines, this is a small step forward, because accor-

ding to the Support Framework for Artisanal Mining (Capam), the Cameroonian public treasury loses about XAF1 billion every month due to mining companies not disclosing the exact quantity of gold they produce. The Cameroonian government then set up Capam to not only monitor and evaluate the actual production of artisans and mining companies but also to supervise artisanal miners in the marketing of their products. The program also collects the government's share directly under the pro-

duction sharing contracts in effect in the sector.

Despite the quantity of gold produced in the country every year, Cameroon is not yet officially recognized as a gold producer or exporter, according to the Bank of Central African States (Beac). Indeed, in its report on the evolution of the prices of the main commodities exported by CEMAC countries in Q3-2020, the Beac estimated that in the CEMAC region, only the Central African Republic and Gabon produce and export gold.

Yet Cameroon has licensed many mining companies that mine gold in the eastern region, alongside thousands of artisanal gold miners. This lack of recognition is probably because most of the gold produced in the country is sold through informal circuits. According to Cameroonian authorities, barely 5% of the national production is sold through formal channels.

1,028 carats of diamond seized at Douala airport in Jan-Oct 2020



Diamonds (1,028 carats) were seized at the International Airport of Douala this year. This was revealed during the November 11, 2020, budgetary session organized by the National Permanent Secretary of the Kimberly Process, in Yaoundé, to report its activities over the January-October 2020 period. These precious stones, which were to be sold through informal channels, were immediately sealed and will soon be sold according to the usual regulatory procedures, we learn. Let's note that the stock seized complements the 2,438 carats produced in the country from January to October 2020. The Kimberly Process is an international control and tracing mechanism initiated to prevent these precious stones from being used as a means of financing the activities of warlords worldwide.

MINMIDT extends GDC's exploration license on Matanda block by an additional 1-year

The Ministry of Mines, Industry and Technological Development recently extended Gaz Du Cameroon's (GDC) exploration license on the Matanda block by an additional one-year. This new extension will take effect on December 17, 2020. In accordance with Cameroonian substantive law, this authorization will be confirmed in the coming weeks by a presidential decree.

It should be recalled that the Matanda block is adjacent to the Logbaba production area. It thus offers an easy monetization path for its gas potential which, in July 2020, rose to 1,196 billion cubic feet of

risk-free gross prospective resources, compared to the initial estimate of 903 billion cubic feet.

This increase is the result of a detailed internal outlook assessment, which identified 19 gas prospects in shallower Tertiary reservoirs in addition to seven prospects in deeper Cretaceous reservoirs.

It should also be noted that during the first phase of exploration that began in 2018, GDC conducted an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA), which is expected to be completed in Q1-2020. This will ensure that all aspects of environmental and social risks have been

assessed and the necessary precautions taken. A work program will be kicked off next year and includes the drilling of an exploration well but the company will soon finalize the ranking of the main onshore prospects. With a surface area of 1,235 km², the Matanda Block is 75% operated by GDC (a subsidiary of Victoria Oil and Gas) and 25% by Afex Global Limited. According to the production sharing agreement, the Cameroonian public hydrocarbon corporation (SNH) has a 25% right of return once an exploitation license is granted.

TRANSPORTATION

Camair Co has transported 12 tons of freight since activity resumption on Oct 18, 2020

State-owned carrier Camair Co has transported over 12 tons of freight on domestic routes since its flight resumption on October 18, 2020 (after eight months of activity cessation). This was revealed by Louis Georges Njipendi Kouotou, general director of the carrier.

According to the company's estimates, the yearly air cargo market in Cameroon is about 25,505 tons. International freight largely dominates this market, but Cameroonian authorities intend to truly position Camair Co on the market as part of the strategy aimed at restructuring the company.

For the time being, three foreign companies share 77% of the air cargo



market in Cameroon, we learn from good sources. With 29% of the market share, Ethiopian Airlines is the leader. Then comes Brussels Airlines (28%) and Air France (which in 2013 was controlling 55% of the market but is now controlling only 20%, according to the Aviation authority).

Cargolux, one of the world leaders

in cargo freight, comes 4th in the Cameroonian market with 14% of the market share. The Luxembourg cargo carrier landed for the first time at Douala airport in October 2017, after opening its 34th and 35th lines in Africa. The lines connect to Lubumbashi (DR Congo) and Douala.

Camair Co resumes domestic flights to Ngaoundéré, the regional capital of Adamaoua

Camair Co recently published a new flight schedule, which includes the city of Ngaoundéré, in the northern part of Cameroon. Indeed, when it resumed its operations on October 18, 2020 (after 8 months of cessation), the city was not on its flight schedule. According to the new schedule, the carrier will perform two weekly

flights that will depart from Yaoundé, Maroua, and Garoua to Ngaoundéré while from Douala, it will fly to the regional capital of the Adamaoua thrice a week. At the same time, 10 weekly flights will leave Ngaoundéré for the above-mentioned four cities. With this schedule modification, the carrier is not only boosting the number

of flights connecting the northern and southern regions of Cameroon but it is also consolidating its position in the Northern, Adamaoua, and Far Northern markets that are its most performing domestic markets, according to official statistics.

Israeli Ceragon Networks Ltd wins XAF1.3 bln contract to improve rail transport in Cameroon



Camrail recently selected the Israeli firm Ceragon Networks Ltd for the supply and installation of transmission equipment by radio-relay, energy, and VHF radio on the Douala-Ngaoundéré artery. The Israeli firm was selected at the end of an international call for tenders organized within the framework of Camrail's multimodal transport project (rail and road) in Cameroon. According to Camrail, the value of the contract awarded to the Israeli company (which is based in Tel Aviv and listed on Nasdaq) is worth XAF1.397 billion. The multinational company will provide network equip-

ment (for point-to-point wireless connectivity specifically) mainly used by mobile operators and wireless service providers as well as private companies for wireless connection. The multimodal project (implemented with the financial support of the World Bank) is mainly aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of transport along the Yaoundé-Kousséri corridor. To achieve these objectives, a volume of financing worth XAF35 billion was mobilized by the Cameroonian government and the project partners. According to the Ministry of Public Works (a partner in the project), the

project has three essential components. First is a road component (with the rehabilitation of the 62 km long Maroua-Mora road) that captures 74% of the financing. Next comes the rail component aimed at improving the fluidity of rail transport between Yaoundé and Ngaoundéré. This component represents 13% of the financing. Finally, there is a component relating to institutional support for the enhancement of the transport sector and the management of the project. The said institutional support component represents 13% of the financing.

Douala container terminal: ICC acknowledges the validity of DIT's claims but PAD is set on appealing against the ruling

In a communiqué published on November 13, 2020, Douala International Terminal-DIT (whose concession for the management of the Port of Douala's container terminal ended in 2019) praised the International Chamber of Commerce's (ICC) ruling in its favor in a case against the Port Authority of Douala (PAD).

«On November 13, 2020, the arbitration court acknowledged the validity of the two claims issued by DIT. It consequently ordered the PAD to pay damages to DIT and relaunch a tender procedure and include DIT [among the participants],» wrote the company owned by the Bolloré-APMT consortium.

In the release, DIT reminds that it referred to the ICC on two matters namely, the sharing of parking revenues between the PAD and DIT as well as the exclusion of DIT from a tender procedure launched in January 2018 (at the end of that procedure, Swiss Terminal Investment Limited-TIL was declared the winning bidder). It also explains that concerning the disputed tender procedure (for the concession of the Port of Douala's container terminal) and the unlawfulness of the delegated management authority established by the PAD to exploit the container terminal, Cameroonian authorities ruled in the favor of its reference shareholders many times.

«DIT and its reference shareholders will, of course, continue to defend their rights, vis-à-vis all parties involved,

before national and international judicial bodies. It will do so in particular concerning the requisitions of its personnel and assets, illegally ordered by the PAD in late December 2019,» it adds.

The PAD's response

As a response, the PAD published a release on November 14, 2020, informing that it received a mail from the ICC International Court of Arbitration notifying it about the ruling rendered on November 10, 2020.

«The ruling has not been served yet and is therefore not enforceable. As it stands, Douala International Terminal (DIT) should stop its triumphalism and haste in publishing inappropriate information on social media,» the public company wrote.

It added that it was serene and, in due time, would exploit all the legal means allowing it to lodge an appeal for annulment before the Court of Appeal of Paris.

Even though the PAD is not revealing details about the appeal it will lodge, legal sources indicate that it should be about article 25 of the contractual clauses that have been *«misinterpreted»*. *«This article is about the continuation of the public port service during the concession, not at the end of the concession. As for the fee, there could be no arbitration. It is a criminal case because money paid by clients has been misappropriated. Therefore, an arbitrator cannot rule on it,»* a legal source within the PAD explains.

Involvement of the Presidency of the Republic

In the case between DIT and the PAD, DIT claims that the tender procedure at the end of which TIL was chosen as its successor on the container terminal of the Port of Douala is unlawful. At the end of the first phase of the procedure launched on January 12, 2018, APMT Terminals BV/Bolloré SA (reference shareholders in DIT) was ranked 7th out of 9 participants. However, the consortium contesting that ranking referred the matter to national and international courts.

The designated winner was about to sign its contract when, on October 23, 2019, invoking an order from the President of the republic, Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh (secretary-general at the presidency of the republic) asked the PAD's managing director to suspend the finalization of the process. According to the official, the process should not continue till the administrative court of the Littoral has rendered its definitive ruling on the case between APM Terminals BV-Bolloré SA and the Port Authority of Douala. Meanwhile, the PAD estimates that it made the best choice by excluding APMT Terminals BV/Bolloré SA. According to the port authority, TIL offers XAF357 billion as a concession fee for the 15-year contract while DIT is only offering XAF62 billion.

Minim-Martap bauxite: Camrail could triple freight activities through a partnership with Canyon Resources



Camrail's freight business will triple, should the memorandum of understanding it recently signed with Canyon Resources (the Australian junior mining company that is developing the Minim-Martap bauxite project in the Adamaoua region) lead to a commercial agreement. Indeed, the memorandum establishes a framework that will enable both parties to collaborate for the development of a solution thanks to which the 5 million tons of bauxite extracted at Minim-Martap annually can be transported to the port of Douala for export. This means that as of 2022 (projected date for the start of operations at Minim-Martap bauxite deposit), Camrail could start

transporting 5 million tons of bauxite yearly for the Australian junior mining alone.

Thus, its yearly freight operations, which are so far estimated to be below two million tons, could rise to over six million tons (up by about 200% compared to the currently estimated volume).

According to credible sources, for the exploitation of the Minim-Martap bauxite, Canyon Resources plans to build a 20-km road that will connect the various mining sites to Makor. From this town (located in Adamoua where there is a railway station), the ore will be transported by Camrail to the port of Douala or Kribi for export. During researches that started in

September 2018, a refined analysis of 16 of the 79 bauxite plateaus identified on the Minim-Martap and Ngaoundal deposits brought the mineral resources potential to 892 million tons, up by 342 million tons compared with initial estimates. Of this total volume, 250 million tons are «very high grade,» making them ideal for aluminum production, Canyon Resources points out. An analysis of the 63 remaining plateaus could make Minim-Martap and Ngaoundal «the largest deposit in the world, in terms of quantity and quality,» says James Durrant, the project leader.

Camship-CLGG launches its 1st Kribi-Douala maritime cabotage line



On November 3, 2020, the first container ship of the Cameroonian company Camship-CLGG berthed off the coasts of Mboro, home to the deep seaport of Kribi, in southern Cameroon. According to official sources, the 600 TEU ship was thus performing the inaugural trip of the weekly Kribi-Douala cabotage line recently launched by the local company. *«Cabotage is the transport of goods or passengers between two ports in the same region in a given country. Camship-CLGG chose to launch a cabotage service for containerized goods between the ports of Kribi and Douala, at the constant request of our importing and exporting clients, and even major shipping lines. Road transport was no longer sufficient first because of volume issues (we could not transport many containers per trip) and secondly because of the security (roads have become less secure due to the rising number of vehicles and trucks). There is also the issue of costs, which are not always affordable when it comes to road transportation,»* explains Angélique Béatrice Touenguene, Assistant

General Manager of Camship-CLGG. According to the operations schedule, every Tuesday, a ship will depart from the container terminal of the deep seaport of Kribi. Another ship will depart every Saturday from the Port of Douala, which is currently the main gateway for goods entering the country. Camship-CLGG is a merger between Camship (Cameroon Shipping Lines - the state-owned shipping company that was privatized in 1997) and Consignation et logistique du Golfe de Guinée (CLGG). *«Cameroon Shipping Lines chose the trade name CLGG for port trades during the economic crisis that lasted until 2007. Camship-CLGG is now the trade name chosen to mark the return of the state-owned shipping line in the port industry. By reviving the company, we are returning to our core business within the maritime transport industry. We are also launching a service that was inexistent: cabotage of containerized goods between the ports of Kribi-Mboro and Douala-Bonabéri,»* says Georges Njoya, the Director-General of Camship-CLGG.

In addition to helping avoid the transportation of goods via the road network, cabotage (which has been highly expected since the start of operations at the deep seaport of Kribi in early 2018) allows large vessels that are unable to access the port of Douala (because of the low draught of the inland waterway) to unload goods in Kribi. These goods will then be transported to Douala through the cabotage service.

Port authorities intend to extend the service to the Port of Limbé, in the Southwest. To this end, Patrice Melom, Managing Director of the Port Authority of Kribi (PAK), and his counterpart Cyrus Ngo'o of the Port Authority of Douala (PAD) reached a joint decision on 24 August 2020. This decision was aimed at reorganizing the project team *"whose objective is to coordinate and optimize the actions carried out for the implementation of a maritime cabotage service between the ports of Kribi, Douala, and Limbé,"* the official announcement indicated.

INDUSTRY

Bolloré group signs sponsorship agreement to develop the textile industry in Central Africa

On November 17, 2020, Bolloré Transport & Logistics Cameroon signed a sponsorship agreement with Kaba (an association of apprentices in the textile industry) to encourage the development of the textile industry and support training and entrepreneurship of young people and women in textile trades in the Central African sub-region. Thanks to this €10,000 (about XAF6.5 million) fund, «Kaba» plans to

acquire training materials aimed at providing free training to young people in Cameroon, CAR, Congo, and DRC. The aim is to transform the apprentices into professional craftsmen and help them create their businesses.

«I joined Kaba as a trainee fashion designer and received an enriching training, which today allows me to feed my family. I now have a better knowledge of textile materials and I

am happy to pass on my knowledge to others. In the medium term, I plan to open my workshop,» said Michèle Ngwissi, workshop manager for «Kaba».

Founded in Douala in 2014, «Kaba» was selected via the Earthtalent platform (a solidarity program elaborated by Bolloré group), which is primarily tailored for organizations that empower the younger generation in countries where the group operates.

Dangote Cameroon sold 1 mln tons of cement by end Sep 2020, up 18% YoY



Dangote Cement informs that during the first nine months of 2020, its Douala-based 1.5Mta clinker grinding facility sold about one million tons of cement, up by 18% compared to the volume sold during the first nine months of 2019.

“We estimate our market share to have been 39% during the period,” wrote Dangote Cement, which estimated the Cameroonian cement market at over 2.6 million tons during the period under review.

The main factors that boosted demand during the period were increased investments in construction projects. *“The market is primarily driven by individual construction projects and government housing estate,”* it added.

Those performances fall in line with the projections made by Dangote Cameroon in early 2020. Indeed, in February 2020, the local subsidiary forecasted that given the ongoing stadium, road, hotel, and other construction projects, 2020 would be a good year.

Cameroon seeks investors for the construction of a 405-ha agro-industrial technology park in Ouassa Babouté



On November 9, 2020, the Minister in charge of Mines, Industry and Technological Development (Minmidt), Gabriel Dodo Ndocke (photo), issued an international public call for expressions of interest (APMI) to select a promoter (independent companies or groups of companies) for the construction of the agro-industrial reference technology park (Technopole) of Ouassa Babouté, in the Central region.

«The project consists of the creation of a high-tech industrial processing zone with a high-level research and development center capable of hosting world-class researchers. It will include an infrastructure to support raw material producers as well as commercial and business service zones,» the Minmidt explains.

«The project will also contribute to the establishment of an inclusive development system integrating production areas located in rural zones and based on innovation accelerators. The park will transform several issues identified in the technical studies. It will have to be built to also be a smart tourism city,» he continues.

The promoter will fund the implementation of the project following a public-private partnership (PPP) model, elaborate the detailed engineering and architectural plans, provide the basic infrastructure to accommodate high-tech companies as well a manual of procedures for its operation and management. The call for expressions of interest aims to shortlist up to five candidates that will be invited

into the next stage, the restricted bidding process namely. Let's note that the provisional winner (be it Cameroonian or foreign) should establish a subsidiary dedicated to the project, under Cameroonian law, before the conclusion of the contract. According to the call for proposals, preference will be given to groups of companies while applications must be submitted 60 days after the publication of the call for proposals. Cameroon completed the master plan of the 405 ha agro-industrial technopole in 2017, with the technical support of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

Cameroon plans to increase the secondary sector's contribution to GDP to 36.8% by 2030

Cameroon plans to increase the contribution of the secondary sector to GDP from 28.2% in 2018 to 36.8% in 2030, according to the 2020-2030 National Development Strategy.

In that regard, the country decided to focus on nine driving industrial sub-sectors. They are namely «energy, agro-industry and digital, forest-wood, textile-leather manufacturing, mines-metallurgy-planting, hydro-carbons-petrochemicals-refining, chemicals-pharmaceuticals, and construction-services-professional-

scientific-technical sub-sectors,» the development strategy informs.

It adds that besides developing services in those sub-sectors, the country will boost non-financial services. The goals are to increase manufacturing value-added from 12.9% in 2016 to 25% in 2030 and raise manufacturing exports from 26.25% in 2015 to 54.5% in 2030. This model of economic growth driven by the manufacturing industry requires increasing the average contribution (5-16%) of all the components to 30-40% of the GDP

in the medium and long term, the document indicates.

The 2020-2030 development strategy integrates the Cameroon Industrialization Master Plan (PDI) which was adopted in December 2016. Thus, the aim is to make Cameroon the switch (supplier of electrical energy), the feeder (supplier of agro-industrial products), and the equipment manufacturer (supplier of capital goods including furniture) for ECCAS countries and Nigeria by 2030.

Maroua mini dairy plant resumes operations thanks to the EU's support



The mini dairy plant in Maroua (capital of the Far North, which is one of the main cattle rearing regions in Cameroon) is operational again, since November 5, 2020. Commissioned in 2019, this agro-industrial unit was shut down three months later due to various difficulties, including a lack of raw materials. The plant resumed operations thanks to the financial assistance of XAF100 million provided by the European Union, we learn. «Cameroon imports 60,000 tons of dairy products worth XAF240 billion. Yet, its northern region has all it takes to produce milk and dairy products in quality and quantity to meet the needs of local consumers,» the European Union's representative at the plant's launching ceremony explained to regional tri-weekly L'oeil du Sahel.

With a daily processing capacity of 2000 liters of milk, the mini dairy plant is the result of an extensive government program. Thanks to the said program, similar plants were provided in Garoua (in the North), Ngaoundéré, and Meiganga (in the Adamaoua region).



SERVICES

Petroleum products: 5,800 people currently employed in the distribution sub-category, MINEE informs



Petroleum products' distribution currently provides jobs to about 5,800 Cameroonians, according to information recently published by the Ministry of Water and Energy (Minee). The same source informs that the distribution generates an average of

XAF140 billion of tax earning annually for the country. It also reveals that during the first ten months of the 2020 fiscal year, eight new licenses were granted, bringing to fifty-nine the number of companies approved for the distribution of petroleum products.

According to the MINEE, Cameroon continued its petroleum products' distribution projects through the construction and operation of six new filling stations over the reference period, bringing the total number of filling stations in the country to 841 as of October 16, 2020; 35% of them are located in rural areas. The ministry also indicates that to improve access to petroleum products and domestic gas in areas with fragile ecology, a project is being elaborated in collaboration with the Hydrocarbons Prices Stabilization Fund (CSPH) to build pilot filling stations in those areas. However, the outcome of the project is not yet available.

Cameroon: MINPMEESA organizes workshop to improve the marketability of artisan products

On November 19, 2020, in Yaoundé, the Minister of SMEs, Social Economy, and Handicrafts (Minpmeesa), Achille Bassilékin III, chaired a workshop aimed at building the packaging capacity of artisans.

«Having noted that every year, many handicraft products (95%) fail to convince, attract attention or are poorly marketed because of inade-

quate packaging, the Minpmeesa (in the implementation of its roadmap) decided to bring artisans and packaging manufacturing structures together so that they can collaborate to find innovative solutions. The solutions will be implemented to ensure the goods produced by our artisans are valued in and outside the country," the Minpmeesa said.

During the workshop, the partici-

pants demonstrated the importance of quality and authenticity of packaging in the marketing of artisan products. Achille Bassilékin III expects that with the solutions suggested, the sector will become more competitive since packaging, he believes, is a key component in the attractiveness of products and their marketability.

ITC & TELECOM

Unlawful use of FM broadcast bands threatens air navigation, the MINPOSTEL indicates

On November 23, 2020, in Yaoundé, (at the opening of the 23rd, 24th, and 25th ordinary sessions of the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Assignment of Frequency Bands-CIABAF), the Minister of Telecommunications, Minette Libom Li Likeng (photo) presented an overview of the sector on the sidelines of the CAF African Nations Championship (CHAN) Cameroon will organize in early 2021. According to the official (who is also president of CIABAF), the task force in charge of the use of FM broadcast band in Cameroon has highlighted various irregularities in the use of the frequencies that are close to the

aeronautical band. She added that the irregularities were mainly noticed in Yaoundé and Douala and often performed by broadcasting operators who very often just have temporary authorizations issued by the Ministry of Communication.

She explained that such use of FM broadcast bands seriously threatens the safety of air navigation and are against the laws that confer on the Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (ART) the mission of assigning and controlling the use of the frequency spectrum of different radio communication services, including broadcasting services. The said laws are namely those governing electro-

nic communications and audiovisual activities.

Minette Libom Li Likeng then indicated that the successful organization of a sporting event such as CHAN is highly dependent not only on the availability of frequency resources for the proper functioning of electronic communications networks but also on the use of these resources in accordance with technical standards and regulations.

She then prescribed an assessment of CIABAF's activities to possibly elaborate new guidelines for better and lawful use of frequencies in the country.

Internet broadband: Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea to be connected to Gabon with a 528-km optical fiber line

On November 18, 2020, Gabon's National Agency for Digital Infrastructure and Frequencies (ANINF) announced the completion of extension works to connect Boué (North Gabon) with physical interconnections in Cameroon and equatorial Guinea, through Bitam & Oyan-Bifoun-Lambarene along a 528-km optical fiber line. The extension project falls within the framework of

the Central Africa Backbone (CAB4) project, which is one of the 11 integrating projects for which funds were raised during the Paris investors roundtable of November 16-17, 2020. ANINF explains that the next step would be the operational commissioning of the 528-km line allowing residents of the regions covered to have access to broadband internet. The CAB4 will interconnect CEMAC

countries' with broadband internet, as suggested by the Heads of State in 2016. The project was elaborated to boost the capacity and quality as well as reduce the cost of telecommunication services in the region. The main backers are the World Bank and the Africa Development Bank (AfDB).



FACT CHECKING

FREE AIRTIME CREDIT

No, i6mn.com/cameroon does not share free airtime credit



For days now, some WhatsApp users have been sharing a message claiming they received 20GB of data and XAF6,000 of airtime credit by registering on the following website: i6mn.com/cameroon.

Many users, be them clients of Orange, MTN, Camtel, or Nexxtel, are convinced that the story is true. Yet, it is a phishing scheme.

In a LinkedIn post, Orange Cameroon warns its users as follows: *«Dear customers, the site i6mn.com/cameroon is no way related to Orange. We call on greater vigilance from our valued customers not to trust sites that promise you free airtime and internet bundle.»*

To learn more, we visited the said website but, on clicking the link, we noticed the website was not secure. There was also no information about

the website or its purpose, only a popup asking us to choose our operator. When we chose the operator, we were taken to another webpage asking us the bundle we would like to receive (numerous bundles ranging from XAF6,000 to XAF8,000 for airtime credit and 15GB to 20GB of data are presented).

Curiously enough, the counter supposed to indicate the number of remaining bundles never reached zero. It regularly fluctuated between 1300 and 963. Once we chose our operator and the type of bundle we would like to receive, we were shown a congratulatory message telling us that we had received XAF6,000 of airtime credit and 20Gb of internet credit. It also asked us to share the link via Whatsapp. The only problem here is that we never received the

internet and airtime credit we were told we have received.

The same site shows a message claiming that the Cameroonian government has “ordered” the payment of XAF500,000 to every citizen over 18 to support the population affected by the coronavirus pandemic. “To receive your share, just fill in the form below,” the message reads. This announcement is false because the Cameroonian government ordered no such thing since the confirmation of the first coronavirus case in Cameroon in Mid-March.

When a user fills the required form on the website, a message appears claiming that the latter is eligible for the funding but to get access to the fund, the user will have to share the link in Whatsapp groups. Once you try to share the link, computer antivirus software will flag it as a malicious site.

Computer specialists at Orange Cameroon explain that by clicking on these links, the Internet user may allow the installation of spyware that can control one's phone or computer. So, by prompting users to share the links, the hackers that created the website can commit fraudulent acts, going as far as hacking into the confidential information of both the user who shared the message and the recipient who clicked the link.

FAKE COVID-19 TEST RESULTS

No, Figaro did not mention Cameroonians among the people arrested for selling fake Covid-19 test results in France



On November 8, 2020, news website Actucameroun.com published an article claiming that according to information published by French news agency Le Figaro, eight Cameroonians and Beninese were arrested at Roissy Airport (in France) for selling fake negative covid-19 test results.

Some other online Cameroonian news agencies also published similar articles claiming that Figaro announced the arrest of Cameroonians in connection with a case involving

the sale of negative covid-19 test results.

Reading the original article published by Le Figaro on November 5 (and updated on November 6), StopBlaBlaCam found no indication of the nationality of the arrested individuals. What the French news agency said was in fact that six men and women, aged between 29 and 52, were arrested because they constituted a network that illegally sells negative covid-19 test results to travelers at Roissy Airport.

According to the agency, their trial is scheduled for March 2021 and they risk up to five years imprisonment and a fine of €375,000.

We also found out that the article was written by the Agence France-Presse (AFP). When we contacted the AFP to know more, a journalist told us, on condition of anonymity, that no serious media would disclose the nationality of people involved in such cases because doing so exposes the culprits' compatriots to stigmatization.



LEADER OF THE MONTH

L'OREAL-UNESCO WOMEN IN SCIENCE AWARDS: AGNÈS NTOUMBA SELECTED AS A LAUREATE FOR THE 2020 SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA YOUNG TALENTS, THANKS TO HER BIO-INSECTICIDE RESEARCH



Agnès Antoinette Ntoumba (a doctoral student in biological sciences at the University of Douala) is

among the 20 laureates in sub-Saharan Africa in the «young talent» category of «L'Oreal-Unesco 2020

for Women in Science International Prize.»

The science student is rewarded for her research on an organic insecticide that combats female *Anopheles* mosquitoes, which cause malaria with a mortality rate that usually exceeds HIV/AIDS in African countries.

«Because of the many cases of resistance observed after the use of chemical insecticides, she is convinced that it is urgent to explore new research avenues, via green synthesis, to harness the African flora potential, while producing cheaper and more environment-friendly insecticides,» the press kit presenting the laureates reveals.

In addition to this reward for young talents in scientific research, the «L'Oreal-Unesco 2020 for Women in Science International Prize» rewards five women scientists every year, for their «unique career path combining exceptional talent, a deep commitment to their profession and remarkable courage in a field still largely dominated by men.» Five of the laureates of this competition have received the Nobel Prize in their field of competence, we learn.

Brice R. Mbodiam

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