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The Politics of Social Entrepreneurship in Cameroon

Aaron Danowski

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The Politics of Social Entrepreneurship in Cameroon

Independent Study Project, School for International Training (SIT)

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Abstract

Social entrepreneurship, a practice that combines nonprofit missions and business principles in pursuit of social impact, is a growing phenomenon that has the potential to empower millions of people around the world through a decentralized approach to social problem solving. In this paper, I examine the state of social entrepreneurship in Cameroon, exploring how social entrepreneurship is defined in the Cameroonian context by local actors, and the ways in which Cameroonian social entrepreneurs interact with macro, meso, and micro level politics and partners to create sustainable social impact. From November 7 through December 7, 2015, I conducted in-person interviews with eight social enterprises and four government ministries, as well as six email exchanges with two social enterprises in different parts of Cameroon and four university students who participated in a US Embassy sponsored exchange program for social innovators. Ultimately, I conclude that social entrepreneurship is an underdeveloped concept that is understood differently by different actors in the country, and the practitioners work with the government, businesses, universities, funders, community partners, and mentors to varying extents in pursuit of solving some of Cameroon's most persistent social issues, such as hunger, poverty, and unemployment.

ISP Key words: Social Entrepreneurship, Social Economy, Politics, Partnerships, Cameroon

Résumé

L'entrepreneuriat social est une pratique qui combine la mission d'une organisation non lucrative avec les principes des entreprises commerciales dans la poursuite d'un but social. C'est un phénomène grandissant qui a la possibilité d'améliorer les vies de millions de personnes autour du monde en faisant la promotion d'une approche décentralisée de résolution des problèmes sociaux. Dans ce travail, j'analyse l'état de l'entrepreneuriat social au Cameroun en examinant comment le concept est défini par les acteurs locaux et les manières avec lesquelles les entrepreneurs sociaux camerounais interagissent avec les politiques et partenaires macro, méso et micro pour créer un impact social durable. Du 7 novembre au 7 décembre 2015, j'ai mené des entretiens individuels avec des personnes travaillant pour huit entreprises sociales et quatre ministères. J'ai aussi effectué six échanges d'email avec deux entreprises sociales et quatre étudiants qui ont participé à un programme conduit par l'ambassade Américaine pour les innovateurs sociaux. Je conclus au terme de mon travail que l'entrepreneuriat social est un concept qui est défini différemment par les différents acteurs dans le pays, et que les entrepreneurs sociaux travaillent de différentes manières avec le Gouvernement, les entreprises, les universités, les bailleurs de fonds, les partenaires communautaires et les encadreurs dans leurs processus de résolution des problèmes les plus persistants au Cameroun, comme pour exemple la faim, la pauvreté et le chômage.

ISP Mots Clé: Entrepreneuriat Social, Economie Sociale, Politiques, Partenariats, Cameroun

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Thank you to my ISP advisor, Abdou Aziz Njoya, who refused to accept anything less than the highest quality work and who pushed me to evolve my approach and check my assumptions over the month-long ISP timeframe. I thank you for investing yourself in my project and for teaching me the sociologist approach to qualitative research.

Thanks to my Mom and Dad, who set aside their reservations and allowed me to pursue my studies here in Cameroon this semester... You have given me a gift that will continue to pay dividends for the rest of my life, and I know that this research project is the beginning of a lifelong journey to understand how the world works and how we can best promote social justice for all.

Thank you to Dr. Alex Nicholls at Oxford University, who took the time to stoke my passion for social entrepreneurship and gave me the inspiration to conduct my research on this subject. I hope this paper provides valuable insights for you in your continuing inquiry into “The Politics of Social Entrepreneurship”.

And finally, thank you to all the individuals who took the time out of their busy schedules to meet with me over the course of completing this project. Your interviews, email exchanges, and openness to contributing your thoughts and experiences were invaluable to me, and I hope this project gives back some knowledge that helps you continue on your journey to navigate the politics of social entrepreneurship in Cameroon.

Introduction

“The study of social entrepreneurship sheds light on how change happens and how societies renew themselves. It can help explain why government and international aid efforts have often met with limited success or outright failure, and what needs to be done differently in order to achieve better results. It also adds a dimension to the study of democracy, expanding the role of the citizen beyond choosing government representatives. In the years ahead, we believe many more citizens will consider it natural to take the lead in the creation of solutions to social problems.”¹

In the post-World War II era, the question of how to develop a country and meet the needs of its most vulnerable populations has represented a tricky situation for developed and under-developed countries alike. Although many different development strategies have been tested over the decades, promoted by such entities as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the impact of these efforts on the world’s poorest countries has been minimal at best and harmful on average². So what can be done in the face of these development shortcomings to solve grinding issues of poverty, hunger, and insecurity?

As a result of the recent trend towards globalization and market-capitalism³, a new generation of market-oriented development organizations are emerging which promise to deliver where government and traditional NGO efforts have failed. These organizations, called social enterprises, seek to address social issues in ways that are more financially sustainable and accountable than traditional charity or government methods. While there is considerable debate over what activities qualify as “social entrepreneurship”, thousands of self-described social entrepreneurs are operating in dozens of countries around the world, and very little information exists explaining how they engage with local, national and

¹ Bornstein, David and Davis, Susan. “Social Entrepreneurship: What Everyone Needs to Know”. New York. Oxford University Press. 2010. XXII

² Moyo, Dambisa, “Dead Aid”. New York. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2009. 10-28

³ Fowler, Alan. “NGOs as a Moment in History: Beyond Aid to Social Entrepreneurship or Civic Innovation?”. Third World Quarterly. 2000. 644

international political processes and structures to produce social impact in their home communities.

This paper seeks to understand how various actors in Cameroonian society understand the term “social entrepreneurship”, and also to identify how social entrepreneurs in Cameroon interact with political structure at the macro level (e.g. navigating cultural norms, government structures, and leveraging international institutions), the meso level (partnering with businesses, nonprofits, universities and international funders/ investors), and the micro level (working with local governance structures, community organizations, mentors and individual employees/ beneficiaries). In doing so, this paper aims to shed light on the current state of social entrepreneurship as an alternative model for development in Cameroon, and to identify potential areas of improvement that the government, social entrepreneurs themselves, partner organizations, and local communities can focus on to maximize the impact social entrepreneurs have in Cameroon.

The paper is divided into two parts, which each contain three chapters. The first part is the Theoretical Analysis portion, dedicated to reviewing the existing literature concerning social entrepreneurship and related terms, the methodology used to conduct the research for this paper, and the various definitions and concepts various actors in Cameroon have of social entrepreneurship. The second part is the Field Analysis section, which examines the information gathered over the course of this project relative to the macro, meso, and micro level politics social entrepreneurs in Cameroon must navigate and leverage in order to achieve their desired impact.

I. Theoretical Analysis

The first part of this research paper is dedicated to developing a thorough theoretical foundation for the field research I conducted examining the politics of social entrepreneurship in Cameroon. It outlines the key concepts related to the topic, the methodology and procedures used to conduct the research, and a look into the varying definitions of social entrepreneurship that exist in the Cameroonian context.

Chapter 1: Concepts and Definitions

In order to orient ourselves to the topics this research paper aims to cover, several key concepts must be examined and defined. A brief overview of the field of social entrepreneurship is provided, and the debate over its definition is presented, and a “Social Entrepreneurship Spectrum” which I’ve developed is presented as a way of clarifying what is meant when people invoke the terms “social entrepreneurship”, “social enterprise”, “social business”, and “social innovation”. Additional concepts, such as the social economy and the cooperative enterprise form, are explored as a result of their relevance to the topic of social entrepreneurship in Cameroon.

1.1. Social Entrepreneurship

The most widely cited definition of “social entrepreneurship” was coined by the late Greg Dees, the father of social entrepreneurship education, in 1998 when he said social entrepreneurs create public value, pursue new opportunities, innovate and adapt, act boldly, leverage resources they don’t control, and exhibit a strong sense of accountability⁴. Dees identified two schools of thought surrounding social entrepreneurship, and each emphasizes different aspects of the term: “social” and “entrepreneurship”. One school identifies business development as the core element of social entrepreneurship, and thus in order for an

⁴ Borstein and Davis, Idem

organization to be a social enterprise, it must have organizational strategies, revenue generation, and financial planning powering a social-impact mission⁵. The other school identifies social innovation as the core of social entrepreneurship. In this case, an organization must fight for large-scale transformational change with uncommon creativity, courage, and tenacity in order to be a social enterprise, generally with a certain amount of revenue generation to supplement its activities⁶.

Since Dees' initial definition, academics and development professionals have put forth their own definitions of social entrepreneurship as more research has been conducted on the subject. Dr. Alex Nicholls, professor of Social Entrepreneurship at Oxford University, says social entrepreneurship *"borrows from an eclectic mix of business, charity, and social movement models to reconfigure solutions to community problems and deliver sustainable new social value"*⁷. Its mission is to not only include marginalized people in the economy, but to create actual, large scale social change in innovative ways⁸. Alan Fowler, a professor at Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, defines social entrepreneurship according to the business-development- centric school of thought, and coins a different term, civic innovation, to describe organizations that create socially innovative solutions to problems. He defines social entrepreneurship as *"the creation of viable (socio) economic structures, relations, institutions, organizations and practices that yield and sustain social benefits"*, while civic innovation refers to *"the creation of new or modification of existing conventions, structures, relations, institutions, organizations and practices for civic benefit demonstrated by ongoing, self-willed citizen engagement and support"*⁹.

⁵ Bornstein and Davis, Idem

⁶ Bornstein and Davis, Idem

⁷ Nicholls (2006,2) as cited in Panum and Hansen, "Successful Social Enterprises in Africa: Case Studies of Six Social Enterprises in Kenya". Center for Business and Development Studies. 2014. 3

⁸ Panum and Hansen, Idem

⁹ Fowler, Ibid, 648

Within his definition of social entrepreneurship, Fowler identifies three distinct brands of social entrepreneurship: Integrated social entrepreneurship, re-interpreted social entrepreneurship, and complementary social entrepreneurship. As he explains,

“Integrated social entrepreneurship is characterised when surplus-generating activities simultaneously create social benefit... integrative combinations seek to reduce external financial dependency, increase development impact and spread risk.”¹⁰

Re-interpreted social entrepreneurship

“builds on and creatively applies a [non-governmental development organization (NGDO)]s’ existing activities in ways that reduce costs and/or increase and diversify incomes. One example is a non-profit organisation in the USA supplying meals to the medically infirm on a contract with the municipal government. Recognising that there was a busy middle class with elderly parents, the organisation started to advertise this service for the elderly, but not necessarily infirm.”¹¹

And finally, complementary social entrepreneurship

“seeks to diversify clients and income streams by adding an enterprise dimension that does not necessarily engender a social benefit. The enterprise generates a surplus that can cross-subsidise development activities that are in themselves not economically viable. It can also be used to finance the NGDO itself.”¹²

Beyond the academic debate over the precise definition of social entrepreneurship, there are several international nonprofit organizations and foundations whose express purpose is to promote the field of social entrepreneurship. The father of them all, the nonprofit Ashoka (named after an ancient Indian ruler whom founder Bill Drayton terms “*the earliest example of a social innovator*”¹³) is the largest network of social entrepreneurs in the world: 3000 fellows working in 70 countries developing system changing ideas to address social

¹⁰ Fowler, Ibid, 645-646

¹¹ Fowler, Ibid, 646

¹² Fowler, Ibid, 647

¹³ <https://www.ashoka.org/facts>

inequity at a local and global level¹⁴. Founded in 1980 after Drayton left his job at the EPA, Ashoka helped launch the field of social entrepreneurship with its rigorous fellow nomination process identifying social innovators worldwide. Another nonprofit organization, the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, was founded in 1998 by World Economic Forum founder Klaus Schwab, and it seeks to “*advance social entrepreneurship and to foster social entrepreneurs as an important catalyst for societal innovation and progress*”¹⁵. In addition to annually selecting twenty to twenty five “Social Entrepreneurs of the Year” (who join a community of 260 social entrepreneur fellows and counting), the organization invites a select number of these fellows to participate in the World Economic Forum each year in Geneva and provides educational opportunities for social entrepreneurs at Harvard, Stanford, and INSEAD¹⁶. The third dominant organization in the realm of social entrepreneurship is the Skoll Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, founded by eBay’s first president, Jeffrey Skoll, in 1999¹⁷. According to its website, it seeks to “*drive truly transformative change—equilibrium change—by supporting the social entrepreneurs who recognize the systems in need of change and then advance social progress by developing powerful models for change that disrupt a suboptimal status quo and transform our world for the better*”¹⁸. The organization partnered with Oxford University to launch the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship in 2004 and the Skoll World Forum, the premiere conference on social entrepreneurship in the world. The organization also partners with the Sundance Institute to profile social entrepreneurs, and it sponsors news outlets like the PBS Newshour to highlight the transformational activities of social entrepreneurs around the world¹⁹. Overall since its inception, the Skoll foundation has invested approximately \$400 million worldwide in 91

¹⁴ <https://www.ashoka.org/about>

¹⁵ <http://www.schwabfound.org/content/about-us-0>

¹⁶ Idem

¹⁷ <http://skoll.org/about/about-skoll/>

¹⁸ Idem

¹⁹ Idem

social enterprises on five continents through its “Skoll Award”, presented at the Skoll World Forum each year²⁰.

Each of these three organizations (Ashoka, Schwab and Skoll) carry their own, slightly nuanced, definitions of social entrepreneurship. Ashoka defines social entrepreneurs much more in terms of their socially innovative spirit as opposed to by the businesses they create, as evidenced below:

“Social entrepreneurs are individuals with innovative solutions to society’s most pressing social problems. They are ambitious and persistent, tackling major social issues and offering new ideas for wide-scale change. Rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, social entrepreneurs find what is not working and solve the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution, and persuading entire societies to move in different directions. Social entrepreneurs often seem to be possessed by their ideas, committing their lives to changing the direction of their field. They are visionaries, but also realists, and are ultimately concerned with the practical implementation of their vision above all else. Social entrepreneurs present user-friendly, understandable, and ethical ideas that engage widespread support in order to maximize the number of citizens that will stand up, seize their idea, and implement it. Leading social entrepreneurs are mass recruiters of local changemakers—role models proving that citizens who channel their ideas into action can do almost anything.”²¹

The Schwab Foundation strikes a balance between the two schools of thought, using both the terms “social innovation” and “enterprise development” expressly in their definition:

“Social entrepreneurs drive social innovation and transformation in various fields including education, health, environment and enterprise development. They pursue poverty alleviation goals with entrepreneurial zeal, business methods and the courage to innovate and overcome traditional practices. A social entrepreneur, similar to a business entrepreneur, builds strong and sustainable organizations, which are either set up as not-for-profits or companies...Social entrepreneurship is about applying practical, innovative and sustainable approaches to benefit society in general, with an emphasis on those who are marginalized and poor. [Its] a term that captures a unique approach to economic and social problems, an approach that cuts across sectors and disciplines grounded in certain values and processes that are common to each social entrepreneur, independent of whether his/ her area of focus has been education, health, welfare reform, human rights, workers' rights, environment, economic development, agriculture, etc., or whether the organizations they set up are non-profit or for-profit entities. It is this approach that sets the social entrepreneur

²⁰ Idem

²¹ https://www.ashoka.org/social_entrepreneur

apart from the rest of the crowd of well-meaning people and organizations who dedicate their lives to social improvement.”²²

Meanwhile, the Skoll Foundation’s definition of social entrepreneurship, similar to Ashoka, stresses social innovation as the defining trait of the phenomenon:

“[Social entrepreneurs are] extraordinary leaders and their organizations are creating innovative models to drive equilibrium change—the disruption of social, economic, and political forces that enable inequality, injustice, and other thorny social and environmental problems to persist. By disrupting the status quo, social entrepreneurs open up the space for solutions to take root, scale, and become the foundation of profound social transformation and a more peaceful and prosperous world. Social entrepreneurs both take direct action and seek to transform the existing systems. They seek to go beyond better, to bring about a transformed, stable new system that is fundamentally different than the world that preceded it.”²³

Overall, there is still much contention over the exact definition of “social entrepreneurship”, but that has not stopped the movement from taking off since Ashoka began recruiting fellows in 1980. The term serves as a rallying point for changemakers and innovative thinkers around the world, and even though no two social entrepreneurs are alike, they all find that the term resonates with the work they do.

1.2. Social Enterprise

Due in large part to the lack of a concrete definition of social entrepreneurship, different groups have different concepts of what constitutes a “social enterprise”, the organizations social entrepreneurs create. According to the Schwab Foundation, social enterprises fall into three major categories: leveraged non-profit ventures, hybrid non-profit ventures, and social business ventures. According to their definition, a leveraged non-profit venture is created when:

“The [social] entrepreneur sets up a non-profit organization to drive the adoption of an innovation that addresses a market or government failure. In doing so, the entrepreneur engages a cross section of society, including private and public organizations, to drive forward the innovation through a multiplier

²² <http://www.schwabfound.org/content/what-social-entrepreneur>

²³ <https://skoll.org/about/approach/>

*effect. Leveraged non-profit ventures continuously depend on outside philanthropic funding, but their longer term sustainability is often enhanced given that the partners have a vested interest in the continuation of the venture.*²⁴

A hybrid non-profit venture is created when:

*“The [social] entrepreneur sets up a non-profit organization but the model includes some degree of cost-recovery through the sale of goods and services to a cross section of institutions, public and private, as well as to target population groups. Often, the entrepreneur sets up several legal entities to accommodate the earning of an income and the charitable expenditures in an optimal structure. To be able to sustain the transformation activities in full and address the needs of clients, who are often poor or marginalized from society, the entrepreneur must mobilize other sources of funding from the public and/or philanthropic sectors. Such funds can be in the form of grants or loans, and even quasi-equity.”*²⁵

Finally, a social business venture is created when:

*“The [social] entrepreneur sets up a for-profit entity or business to provide a social or ecological product or service. While profits are ideally generated, the main aim is not to maximize financial returns for shareholders but to grow the social venture and reach more people in need. Wealth accumulation is not a priority and profits are reinvested in the enterprise to fund expansion. The entrepreneur of a social business venture seeks investors who are interested in combining financial and social returns on their investments.”*²⁶

Although these definitions represent the different forms social enterprises can take, national governments have sought to make it easier for social entrepreneurs to operate by explicitly defining the parameters of social enterprises. The French government, for example, officially stipulates that a social enterprise must be a non-profit with democratic, participatory governance²⁷. Although this definition is rather limiting, since it excludes social business ventures as defined by the Schwab Foundation, people have created a workaround by defining an enterprise according to its social objectives. In this scenario, an enterprise can be considered a “social enterprise” in France if it is economically viable, has a social objective, limits its profitability, and is administered with democratic and participatory

²⁴ <http://www.schwabfound.org/content/what-social-entrepreneur>

²⁵ Idem

²⁶ Idem

²⁷ <http://www.convergences.org/assets/uploads/Comparing-social-economy-definitions.pdf>

governance²⁸. Meanwhile, the British government went the opposite route, officially defining “social enterprise” under Schwab’s definition of a social business venture: “[A social enterprise is] a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners”²⁹. Social Enterprise UK, the official national body for social enterprise in the UK, has published six criteria that all social enterprises in the UK must meet³⁰:

1. *Have a clear social and/or environmental mission set out in their governing documents*
2. *Generate the majority of their income through trade*
3. *Reinvest the majority of their profits*
4. *Be autonomous of state*
5. *Be majority controlled in the interests of the social mission*
6. *Be accountable and transparent*

While most of these points are straightforward, the second point, “*generate the majority of income through trade*”, might be confusing to some. This point specifies that at least 50% of a social enterprise’s income streams must be revenues for goods and services provided, not grants or donations. All social enterprises in the UK are set up to specifically make a difference and that reinvest the profits they make in their social mission³¹. It is worth noting that, while most countries are just beginning to grapple with the concept of formalizing the social enterprise sector, the UK has been a front runner ever since it broke new ground by establishing a designated legal structure for the social enterprise sector: the “Community Interest Company” (CICs), in 2004³². According to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, CICs must by law “*have provisions in their articles of association to enshrine their social purpose, specifically an ‘asset lock’, which restricts the*

²⁸ Idem

²⁹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31677/11-1400-guide-legal-forms-for-social-enterprise.pdf

³⁰ <http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/about/about-social-enterprise/FAQs>

³¹ Idem

³² Parnum and Hansen, Ibid, 4

*transfer of assets out of the CIC, ultimately to ensure that they continue to be used for the benefit of the community; and a cap on the maximum dividend and interest payments it can make*³³. There were over 5500 registered CICs in the UK in 2011³⁴, and CICs are hailed internationally as a model for other countries to use to develop their own legal frameworks for formalizing the social enterprise sector.

Meanwhile, across the pond, the US government does not have an official definition of “social enterprise” like France or the UK. However, the Social Enterprise Alliance, a nonprofit membership organization that connects social enterprises in the US, offers the following as a working definition of social enterprise: *“an organization or initiative that marries the social mission of a non-profit or government program with the market-driven approach of a business.”*³⁵ This definition is specifically vague, since the organization sees opportunities for many types of social enterprises to develop, anywhere along the spectrum of the Schwab Foundation’s definitions:

*“For traditional non-profits, social enterprise can be a powerful complement to other activities when it advances the social mission and the financial sustainability of the organization. For new start-ups – non-profits and for-profits – social enterprise gives entrepreneurs the ability to bake social impact and financial sustainability into the organization’s DNA from its outset. [And] For traditional businesses, social enterprise initiatives enable a company to integrate social impact into business operations and prioritize social goals alongside financial returns.”*³⁶

Overall, social entrepreneurs create and operate a variety of types of organizations to create social impact, and while this flexibility and diversity can be lauded as one of the strengths of the social entrepreneurship movement, it also poses an inherent difficulty for governments and organizations seeking to promote the field of social entrepreneurship through lawmaking or building a community of practice.

³³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31677/11-1400-guide-legal-forms-for-social-enterprise.pdf

³⁴ <http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/about/about-social-enterprise/FAQs>

³⁵ <https://socialenterprise.us/about/social-enterprise/>

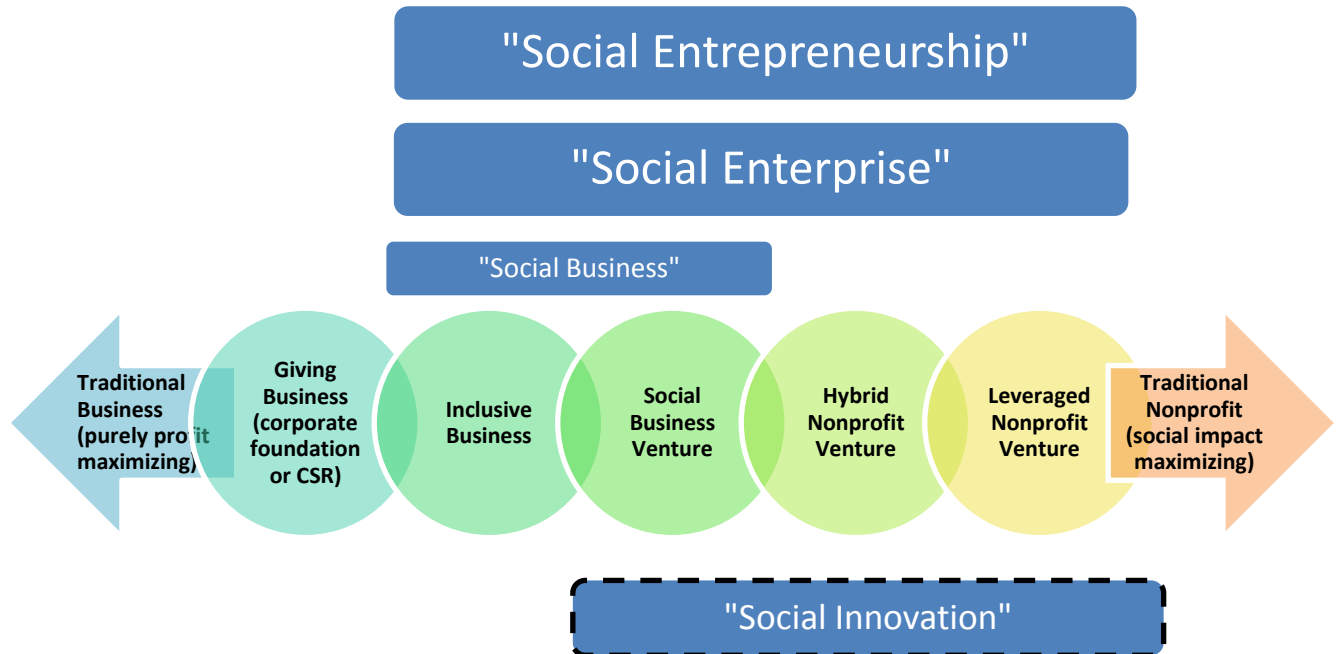
³⁶ <https://socialenterprise.us/about/social-enterprise/>

1.3. The Social Entrepreneurship Spectrum

As we have seen, social entrepreneurship is a term that has many nuanced definitions and which can apply to a wide variety of organizations and individuals. Creating common ground on this topic only becomes more complicated when ambiguous terms such as “social enterprise”, “social business”, “social innovation”, “triple bottom line”, and “corporate social responsibility” enter the picture. In order to illustrate how all of these concepts fit together, I’ve developed the following “Social Entrepreneurship Spectrum” (see next page). This spectrum represents the different types of organizations that fall somewhere in between the traditional concept of business (a profit maximizing enterprise) and the traditional concept of nonprofits (a social benefit maximizing enterprise). There are five types of organizations on the spectrum, and four can be considered to be examples of “social entrepreneurship” or “social enterprises”, and which can exhibit varying degrees of “social innovation” depending on their social solutions: Inclusive businesses, social businesses, hybrid nonprofit ventures, and leveraged nonprofit ventures. The fifth type of organization I’ve called a “Giving Business”, which refers to an organization that creates a corporate foundation or allots a portion of its profits to fund social projects around the world each year. This does not qualify as social entrepreneurship since it does not prioritize social impact over profit maximization; instead, it merely adds a separate social component to its corporate mission which (generally) has little to do with its core business operations. An initiative can be considered “social entrepreneurship” when an organization uses business practices and strategies to bring multiple stakeholders together and develops products, services, and initiatives to address the root causes of social issues in society. The four different types of organizations that fall under the terms “social entrepreneurship” and “social enterprise” are described in further detail below:

The Social Entrepreneurship Spectrum:

Types of organizations the terms “Social Entrepreneurship”, “Social Enterprise”, “Social Business”, and “Social Innovation” can be applied to



Inclusive Business:

“Inclusive businesses”, coined and defined in 2005 by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, are businesses which promote “*sustainable solutions that go beyond philanthropy and expand access to goods, services, and livelihood opportunities for low-income communities in commercially viable ways*”³⁷. Inclusive businesses are generally branches of multinational companies created in poor or low income areas which seek to integrate poverty alleviation objectives into an otherwise conventional business structure. As a result, their social focus is a complement to their business activities, not the purpose for the

³⁷ WBCSD, 2013 as cited in Parnum and Hansen, Ibid, 8

founding of the multinational organization overall³⁸. Inclusive businesses are on the outer edge of social entrepreneurship, but are firmly within the realm of “social business”, since they businesses create social impact in a financially self-sufficient manner through their operations. They go one step further than “Giving Businesses”, which simply contribute money or gifts in kind to social causes as part of their corporate strategy.

Social Business Venture

A “Social Business Venture” is a for-profit entity or businesses which seek to provide a social or ecological product or service.³⁹ The distinction between inclusive businesses and social business ventures is that social business ventures are founded for the expressed purpose of achieving social impact, rather than being created in a low-income area by a pre-existing company in order to add social impact to the corporate mission. Social businesses are typically more committed to addressing the root causes of social issues than “Inclusive Businesses” are. A prominent version of social business is promoted by Mohammad Yunus, the winner of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize and father of microfinance. He has published several books on the subject, and together with Hans Reitz, director of the Grameen Creative Lab, Yunus has formulated seven principle for social businesses to follow⁴⁰:

1. *The objective of a social business is to overcome poverty, or one or more problems from the field of education, health, technology access or environment. A social business aims not to maximise profit.*
2. *A social business enterprise will attain financial and economic sustainability.*
3. *Investors only get back their investment amount without dividends or interest rates.*
4. *When the investment amount is paid back, profit stays within the enterprise. It should be used for expansion and improvement of the business.*
5. *The enterprise will be environmentally conscious.*
6. *The employees get market wage with better-than-standard working conditions.*
7. *(Do it with joy).*

³⁸Parnum and Hansen, Idem

³⁹ <http://www.schwabfound.org/content/what-social-entrepreneur>

⁴⁰Yunus, as cited in Jeanloz, Ibid, 12

Hybrid Nonprofit Venture

A “Hybrid Nonprofit Venture” is a non-profit organization whose business model includes some degree of cost-recovery through the sale of goods and services to a cross section of institutions, public and private, as well as to target population groups⁴¹. This type of organization still relies on grants and donations to cover the costs it doesn’t recover through the sale of goods and services, and it often the entrepreneur sets up multiple legal entities to facilitate the earning of an income and the charitable expenditure of grant and donation money.⁴² A hybrid nonprofit venture can start off as just a traditional nonprofit or as a “Leveraged Nonprofit” (see below) before evolving gradually into a hybrid form.

Leveraged Nonprofit Venture

A “Leveraged Nonprofit Venture” is a non-profit organization which seeks to drive the adoption of an innovation that addresses a market or government failure.⁴³ In doing so, the organization engages a cross section of society, including private and public organizations, to coordinate institutional efforts to drive forward the innovation. Leveraged non-profit ventures continuously depend on outside philanthropic funding, but their longer term sustainability is often enhanced given that the partners have a vested interest in the continuation of the venture.⁴⁴ Leveraged nonprofit ventures are on the outer extreme of social entrepreneurship, and many definitions consider it as “social innovation” as opposed to “social entrepreneurship”, since the organization does not have any revenue generating activities which it uses to fund itself.

Taken together, the “Social Enterprise Spectrum” represents the theoretical framework for the world of social entrepreneurship, providing a roadmap for anyone to begin

⁴¹ <http://www.schwabfound.org/content/what-social-entrepreneur>

⁴² Idem

⁴³ Idem

⁴⁴ Idem

to navigate the intricacies of the concepts of social entrepreneurship, social enterprise, social business, and social innovation. With that established, we can now transition towards understanding the different ways social entrepreneurship contributes to the economies of countries around the world, but with a special focus on Africa and Cameroon.

1.4. The Social Economy

In October of 2009, amidst the global economic recession caused by the 2008 financial crisis, the International Labor Organization (ILO)'s Regional Office for Africa held a conference in Johannesburg, South Africa titled “*Social Economy: Africa's Response to the Global Crisis*”⁴⁵. It was attended by representatives of fifteen African countries, members of social economy organizations from around the world, and technical specialists from the ILO. The conference sought to “*adopt an action programme aiming at mobilising the social economy in Africa*”, as well as to “*develop a universally accepted definition of the social economy*”⁴⁶. Out of this meeting, a consensus universal definition of the social economy emerged, which reads as follows:

*“[The social economy is] a concept designating enterprises and organizations, in particular cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises, which have the specific feature of producing goods, services and knowledge while pursuing both economic and social aims and fostering solidarity”*⁴⁷

Under this definition, social enterprises under all four of the venture categories identified in the previous section (“Inclusive Business”, “Social Business Ventures”, “Hybrid Nonprofit Ventures”, and “Leveraged Nonprofit Ventures”) qualify as members of the social economy. The official action plan published in the aftermath of the conference affirmed the attendees’ belief that “*the social economy provides complementary paths to development that coherently*

⁴⁵http://www.ilo.org/empent/Eventsandmeetings/WCMS_113333/lang--en/index.htm

⁴⁶http://www.ilo.org/empent/Eventsandmeetings/WCMS_113333/lang--en/index.htm

⁴⁷ ILO Regional Conference Plan of Action for the Promotion of Social Economy Enterprises and Organizations in Africa, Johannesburg 19-21, 2009

*bring together the concerns of economic sustainability, social justice, ecological balance, political stability, conflict resolution and gender equality*⁴⁸, and called for the ILO and partner organizations/ governments to⁴⁹:

1. *Increase the recognition of social economy enterprises and organizations nationally, regionally and globally.*
2. *Increase the number of North-South, South-South, and Inter-African partnerships with social economy enterprises and organizations.*
3. *Promote and reinforce African social economy networks across the continent,*
4. *Establish enabling national legal, institutional and policy environments for social economy enterprises and organizations, and*
5. *Enhance the efficiency of social economy enterprises and organizations by educating local stakeholders, increasing access to financing and training, and integrating social economy dynamics into social and economic development plans.*

As was the case with the ILO Regional Conference in Johannesburg, the social economy has seen a boost in its profile internationally over the last seven years as a result of spurred by the 2008-2009 global economic crisis, being formalized in countries around the world through the introduction of national legislation to promote cooperatives and social enterprises⁵⁰. Algeria, Argentina, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada (specifically Quebec), Columbia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Greece, Honduras, Luxembourg, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, Portugal, Romania, South Africa, South Korea, and Spain all have either established social economy laws or laws in the course of being implemented⁵¹. In France, the “Social and Solidarity Economy” law, meant to “*recognise the social and solidarity economy as a distinct entrepreneurial model*” and “*modernise the co-operative sector by providing subventions and other forms of finance*” was adopted unanimously by the French Council of Ministers on July 21, 2014⁵². Carole Delga, Secretary of State for Trade, Handicrafts, and Consumption and of Social and Solidarity Economy has previously defended the importance

⁴⁸ Idem

⁴⁹ Idem

⁵⁰ “Tableau des lois sur l’ESS dans le monde” http://base.socioeco.org/docs/tableau_lois_ess_monde-c_lafaye_uniopss-131113.pdf

⁵¹ Idem

⁵² <http://ica.coop/en/media/news/french-national-assembly-passes-new-social-economy-law>

of the social economy by saying it's "*an economy that has a meaning, founded on values that place the people as actors, drivers and most importantly, as an absolute norm, as the standard. It's an economy that shows the path for tomorrow, towards a sustainable and responsible economy, situated across our territory and communities*"⁵³.

1.5. The Social Economy of Cameroon

As Marie Louise Pouka Epse Secke, Secretary General of the Cameroonian Ministry for Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy, and Artisanry (MINPMEESA) points out, "*The social economy, as understood under [the ILO's] definition, has historically always existed in Cameroon, and is not merely a fad or a trend*"⁵⁴. Indeed, the social economy embraces the pan-African values of solidarity, community, and collectivism in its core principles, and it represents a stark shift away from the values of American market capitalism, chiefly individualism, competition and self-interest.

In Cameroon, legislation is in the course of being proposed that would establish the following official government definition of social economy:

*« [L'] Ensemble d'activités économiques mener par des organisations et les entreprises fonder sur les principes de solidarité et de participation. Elle recherche soit l'intérêt collectif de ses membres, soit l'intérêt général économique et social, soit les deux. »*⁵⁵

"The aggregate of economic activities undertaken by organizations and enterprises founded on principles of solidarity and participation. They seek or the collective interest of their members, or the general economic and social good [of their community], or both."

On the 8th of December, 2004, Cameroon's President, Paul Biya, signed a presidential decree ordering the creation of a new ministry to manage the development of the social economy:

⁵³ Idem

⁵⁴ Pouka Secke, Secretary General of MINPEEMEESA, powerpoint presentation at the "2nd National Social Economy Days", October 14-16, 2015 (translated)

⁵⁵ Interview with Interim Director of Social Economy Ahanda Joseph, Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy, and Artisanry (MINPMEESA), 25 November, 2015. Imeuble Rose

the Ministry for Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy, and Artisanry (French acronym MINPMEESA)⁵⁶. The ministry's mission was to develop the social economy through a variety of activities, including coordinating the national government's approach to promoting the social economy, formalizing the organizations that make up the social economy by registering groups working in the informal social economy as cooperatives or mutual associations, creating formal channels for social economy organizations to help shape national policy and ministerial programs in the sector, providing ongoing training for personnel working for cooperatives, and conducting evaluations of projects in the realm of social economy⁵⁷.

MINPMEESA built on the pre-existing social structures that preceded the social economy in Cameroonian society, to which Mrs. Pouka Secke alluded to in her quote. Stretching back over 400 years, communities in the West, Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon have been led by traditional chieftaincies with in-built accountability systems that promoted the social and economic wellbeing of the general population⁵⁸. In addition, a widespread traditional practice called "tontine" serves as a sort of rural banking system, bringing community members together to save, loan, and invest money in community development projects⁵⁹.

More recently, in the midst of IMF mandated structural adjustment in 1987 and a vicious economic crisis caused by the worldwide drop in oil prices in the mid-1980s (Cameroon's primary export)⁶⁰, the Cameroonian government began to withdrawal from its involvement in the agricultural sector and to promote the cooperative model in order to fill

⁵⁶Pouka Secke, Idem

⁵⁷ Mrs. Pouka Secke, Idem

⁵⁸Nyamnjoh, Francis. "Our Traditions are Modern, Our Modernities Traditional: Chieftaincy and Democracy in Contemporary Africa". 2003. 6.

⁵⁹Visit to traditional tontine at the chefferie of Batoufam, 26 October, 2015

⁶⁰Djoum, Serges. Economics Professor University of Yaounde 2. Lecture at SIT Office in Yaounde, 14 September, 2015

the gap⁶¹. The 1990's saw an extension of this effort, including passage of national legislation in 1992 intended to facilitate the creation of cooperatives and an even more simplified organizational structure called "*groups d'interet commun*" (GICs), or "communal interest groups" (CIGs)⁶². By 2012, the government reported a total of 111,988 registered GICs and 3,528 registered cooperatives throughout Cameroon⁶³, however, a depressing reality hides behind the impressive numbers, according to Raymond Dongmo, chief assistant researcher in the Cooperative Registry Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER): "*very few [GICs] are actually operating effectively in the field... even among the 4000 registered cooperatives, very few ever ran effectively... and even if they did work well, they often did not conform to certain parts of the law, specifically submitting an annual report to us each year.*"⁶⁴

In part due to the inefficiency of the old GIC and cooperative legislation, and in part due to the increasingly important role of inter-African trade and exchange, on February 15, 2011 Cameroon joined sixteen other African nations in adopting the Uniform Act Concerning the Rights of Cooperative Societies, referred to as "L'acte Uniforme OHADA", which (among other things) standardized the cooperative form between the nations and eliminated the GIC form in Cameroon⁶⁵. Under the OHADA act, a cooperative society is defined as :

*« un groupement autonome de personnes volontairement réunies pour satisfaire leurs aspirations et besoins économiques, sociaux et culturels communs, au moyen d'une entreprise dont la propriété et la gestion sont collectives et où le pouvoir est exercé démocratiquement et selon les principes coopératifs. »*⁶⁶

⁶¹ Interview with Interim Director of Social Economy Mr. Ahanda Joseph, Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy, and Artisanry (MINPMEESA)

⁶² Interview with Mrs. Jeanne Alie Akamba, Department of Cooperative Registration in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, November 23, 2015.

⁶³ Mrs. Pouka Secke, Idem

⁶⁴ Interview with Mr. Raymond Dongmo, Department of Cooperative Registration in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, November 23, 2015

⁶⁵ Interview with Mrs. Akamba, Idem

⁶⁶ Acte Uniforme Relatif au Droit des Societes Cooperatives OHADA. 2011. 4

“An autonomous grouping of voluntary participants seeking to satisfy their common economic, social, and cultural aspirations and needs through an enterprise in which the property and management collectively managed and where power is democratically exerted according to the cooperative principles.”

The seven universally recognized cooperative principles alluded to in the OHADA act are established by the International Co-operative Alliance and consist of the following⁶⁷:

| Seven Universal Cooperative Principles | |
|---|--|
| English | French |
| 1. Voluntary and open membership | 1. l'adhésion volontaire et ouverte à tous |
| 2. Democratic control (1 member, 1 vote) | 2. le pouvoir démocratique exercé par les coopérateurs |
| 3. Member economic participation | 3. la participation économique des coopérateurs |
| 4. Autonomy and Independence | 4. l'autonomie et l'indépendance |
| 5. Education, training, and information | 5. l'éducation, la formation et l'information |
| 6. Cooperation among cooperatives | 6. la coopération entre organisations à caractère coopératif |
| 7. Concern for community | 7. l'engagement volontaire envers la communauté |
| (source: International Co-operative Alliance) | (source : Mrs. Pouka Secke, Idem) |

According to Jean Medjiengou, the Director of the Cooperative Registry Department in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, its important not to conflate the term cooperative with the concept of poor people coming together to ask for donations or government interventions. In his words:

« La coopérative n'est pas une entreprise des pauvres, mais celle de personnes à moyens limités ; ces personnes doivent faire nombre afin que leurs moyens disponibles puissent ensemble constituer le capital initial et le fonds de roulement

⁶⁷Abell, Hilary. “Worker Cooperatives: Pathways to Scale”. Washington DC. The Democracy Collaborative. 2014. 4

nécessaire au démarrage harmonieux de leurs activités. »⁶⁸

“The cooperative is not an enterprise of the poor, but rather that of people with limited means; these people must unite in greater numbers in order that their available resources can collectively constitute the necessary initial capital and startup funds to successfully launch their activities.”

Currently, the Cameroonian government is in the process of re-writing and approving its internal documents and processes for registering and tracking cooperatives so that they conform with the OHADA law⁶⁹. It is also launching a widespread effort to sensitize potential cooperative populations in Cameroon’s 358 regional districts on the changes the OHADA act brings about (chiefly the elimination of the GIC structure) and the new process for creating cooperatives in the current judicial environment of Cameroon⁷⁰.

Today, the bolstering the social economy of Cameroon remains an important albeit underdeveloped priority for the national government, and it’s for this reason that MINPMEESA is working with social economy actors and the office of the Prime Minister to create a national council on social economy with representation from all the ministries involved in promoting social economy, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Economy and Territorial Administration, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and of course, MINPMEESA itself⁷¹.

Although social enterprises are not expressly referenced in the social economy laws being proposed, the four types of social enterprise organizations (“Integrated Businesses”, “Social Business Ventures”, “Hybrid Nonprofit Ventures”, and “Leveraged Nonprofit Ventures”) fall within the affected organizations, and therefore it is crucially important to understand the government’s commitment to fostering the social economy in order to diagnose the relationship between social enterprises and political institutions in Cameroon.

⁶⁸ Medjiengoue, Jean. Powerpoint presentation given at “National Social Economy Days”, October 14-16, 2015

⁶⁹ Interview with Mrs. Akamba, Idem

⁷⁰ Interview with Mrs. Akamba, Idem

⁷¹ Interview with Mr. Ahanda Joseph, Idem

1.6. Macro, Meso and Micro Level Politics

“Politics” is a broad term which refers to social relations involving authority or power. This definition draws from the Aristotelian definition of politics as “affairs of the city/action of the citizens”, and which invokes processes by which groups of people make or oppose collective decisions.⁷²

Politics can be applied to its traditional counterpart (governmental action and public affairs), but also to other structures, organizations, institutions, fields, and specific interest groups through which citizens express their will⁷³. As such, three broad levels of politics emerge which must be considered when examining the political landscape:

1. Macro Politics (Societal Norms, Government Structures, and International Governing Institutions)
2. Meso Politics (partnerships with businesses, nonprofits/ religious groups, universities, and funders/investors)
3. Micro Politics (Local governance structures, community organizations, mentors and individual employee/beneficiary politics)

⁷²Nicholls, Alex. “The Politics of Social Entrepreneurship: A Research Framework”. PowerPoint Presentation. 2011

⁷³Nicholls, Idem

Chapter 2: Field of Research and Methodology

The research for this paper was conducted from November 7-December 7, 2015, with several preliminary interviews taking place in October, 2015. Overall, thirteen semi-formal interviews were conducted with founders/ employees of social enterprises and government officials, and two email exchanges with social enterprises outside of Yaounde also served to collect primary data. Interviews ranged from thirty minutes to two hours, and they were conducted in the language the interviewee was most comfortable with (French or English). Each interview was transcribed in its entirety and was coded with the themes of this research paper to yield relevant material to include in the final paper. Quotes from interviews conducted in French included in this paper were translated and written in English for the purposes of clarity and consistency for the reader. In addition, four email exchanges with current or recently graduated students at the Catholic University Institute of Buea who participated in the SUSI Exchange Program for Student Leaders in Social Entrepreneurship through the US Embassy provided insight into the perception of social entrepreneurship among engaged youths.

Interviewees were identified through a variety of means. Prior to travelling to Cameroon, searches were conducted online using Ashoka and the Schwab Foundation's social entrepreneur databases, which yielded some initial candidates. Over the course of the SIT Program in Cameroon from August 31-November 7, additional candidates were identified through the program's contacts in Yaounde, Bamenda, and Kribi, and additional web searches yielded contact information for smaller local organizations not recognized by major organizations like Ashoka or Schwab. As each interview took place, interviewees were also asked if they knew of any other social enterprises or partners they thought would be

interested in contributing to this project, and that is how many of the government and several of the social enterprise contacts were attained.

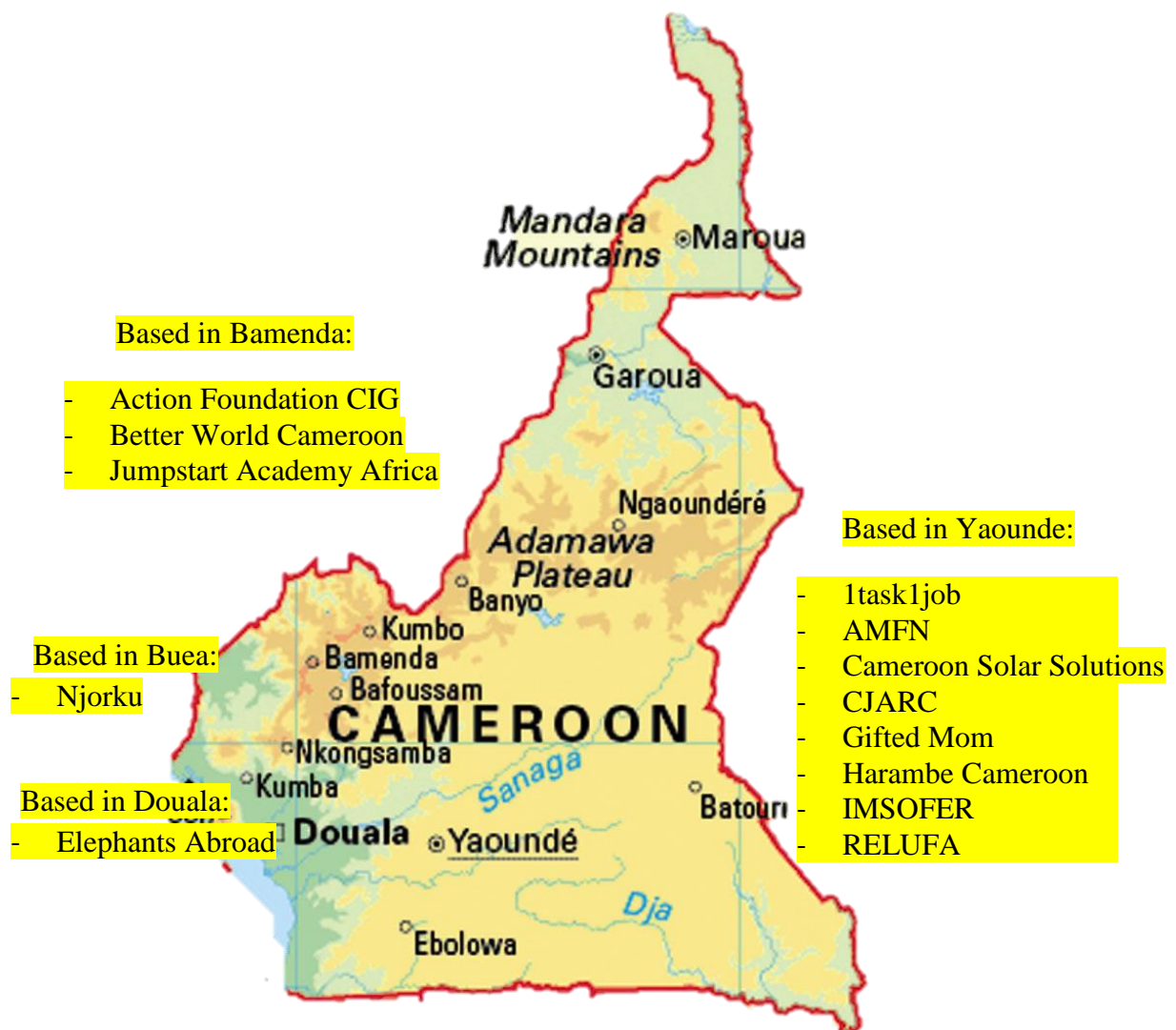
2.1. Profiles of Social Enterprises Studied:

A total of thirteen social enterprise organizations operating in Cameroon were investigated for the purposes of this research. eight were interviewed in person, two were contacted via email, and three were researched using a variety of online secondary sources, including websites, academic research papers, press releases, and third party organizational evaluations. When the organizations were evaluated, it was determined that they fell into the following categories of “social enterprises” according to the “Social Entrepreneurship Spectrum” (sorted in alphabetical order):

| Inclusive Business | Social Business Venture | Hybrid Nonprofit Venture | Leveraged Nonprofit Venture |
|---|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IMSOFER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1Task1Job • Cameroon Solar Solutions • Elephants Abroad • Gifted Mom • Njorku | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better World Cameroon • CJARC • Harambe Cameroon | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Foundation CIG • African Model Forest Network • Jumpstart Academy Africa • RELUFA |

These organizations promote social products, services, and innovation that affect Cameroonians spread throughout the country, but their headquarters are concentrated in regional urban hubs such as Yaounde, Douala, Bamenda, and Buea, as illustrated below:

Geographic Headquarters of Researched Cameroonian Social Enterprises



2.2. Research Questions, Hypotheses, and Study Limitations

This project aims to answer the following four research questions:

1. How do actors at macro, meso, and micro political levels of Cameroonian society understand and define the term “social entrepreneurship”?
2. How do social entrepreneurs in Cameroon engage with macro level politics (cultural norms/paradigms, relations with the government, and international governing organizations) to achieve social impact?

3. How do social entrepreneurs in Cameroon engage with meso level politics (market level relations with for-profit organizations or with nonprofit organizations/funders) to achieve social impact?
4. How do social entrepreneurs in Cameroon engage with micro level politics (community advocacy organizations, grassroots associations and individuals) to achieve social impact?

My hypotheses at the beginning of the research project were as follows:

1. Most actors at the macro, meso, and micro levels do not have a strong concept of the term “social entrepreneurship”, and those who do carry diverse and varied definitions.
2. Social entrepreneurs in Cameroon engage with macro level politics by working closely with the government, especially those located in and around Yaoundé, to create social change.
3. Social entrepreneurs in Cameroon engage with meso level politics by focusing on cultivating 2-3 primary market and/or funder relationships.
4. Social entrepreneurs in Cameroon engage with micro level politics by engaging with their home communities and channeling the desires and hopes of the people into the organization’s mission.

I had four distinct target populations I sought to collect information from for the purposes of this project:

1. Founders and/or employees of social enterprises in Cameroon
2. Macro level political partners (Government officials, international governing organizations)
3. Meso level political partners (for-profit businesses, nonprofit organizations, and funders)
4. Micro level political partners (Community Organizations and beneficiaries)

Unfortunately due to time constraints, I was not able to connect with many meso or micro level partners that the social enterprises I interviewed pointed me to. Four weeks was not adequate time to fully understand the vast, complicated network of political connections social entrepreneurs in Cameroon have developed, but it was enough to give a solid foundation for future researchers to build upon. Overall, this research project contributes to the literature by providing the first in depth research into the operating environment for social entrepreneurs in Cameroon.

Chapter 3: Definitions of Social Entrepreneurship in Cameroon

In order for social entrepreneurs to have a positive, supportive environment for their work, all the agents involved in creating the national political environment must have a firm grasp of the nature of their activities, social entrepreneurs themselves must recognize the diversity of initiatives that fall under the term, and ordinary citizens must be exposed to the concept so that they can join these exceptional role models in ameliorating conditions in their communities. As such, my first research question focused on whether there was awareness of the topic of social entrepreneurship in Cameroon, and if so, whether consensus existed throughout Cameroonian society regarding the definition and the ways to support it. Based on the results outlined below, a more complete understanding of the politics social entrepreneurs must navigate was possible to attain, as described in part two of the paper

3.1. Social Entrepreneurship as Youth Empowerment

Olivia Mukam, a Cameroon native who founded Harambe Cameroon, the country's first social enterprise competition in 2009 after graduating from John Hopkins, says that when she started, social entrepreneurship *"was really a relatively new concept [in Cameroon]. Its true that there have been a lot of social entrepreneurs from Cameroon in the past, but they never labeled themselves in that way, or never saw themselves in that way. So the Harambe program really wanted it to be a program so that youths could actually consciously think "Look, we're building a business while solving social problems", it has to be a conscious effort."*⁷⁴ In large part thanks to Harambe's groundbreaking work promoting the concept of social enterprise to youths across Cameroon, the concept is catching on. *"There's more stories,"* Olivia says, *"there's more success stories of people who transform social problems in to businesses that are actually working, or people getting international*

⁷⁴ Mrs. Olivia Mukam interview, Founder of Harambe Cameroon, Harambe Office, November 5, 2015

recognition for such projects. So it's encouraging many more people to develop those kinds of projects that address social problems and generate revenue."⁷⁵

One such success story is that of Charlie Wandji, a 28 year old chartered accountant who never envisioned becoming a social entrepreneur. *"In the accounting background, you have outsource problems",* he told me, *"Like in risk mitigations, they tell you there are various ways to mitigate risks. So when you see high risks, you better just transfer it to insurance, don't take up the risks ... but when I got this concept of transforming problems into opportunities, it was different... something I had never known before!"*⁷⁶ His inspiration to see social problems as opportunities came when he began volunteering as Harambe Cameroon's financial officer in 2010 and he was exposed to Olivia's passion and vision. Today, he is the founder and director of the online platform www.1task1job.com, a social business that seeks to address Africa's chronic youth unemployment problem by connecting skilled coders and business students to companies in the African diaspora looking to outsource projects to their home country. It works like this, he explains to me:

*"For example, if you are in the US, particularly Africans in the diaspora, because they have a special attachment to Africa, they [need a] website, business plan, market analysis, sometimes it will be more expensive for you to pay local staff in the country where you're from than to outsource that to Africa. When we outsource such services to Cameroon, for example, a website that would have cost you \$1000 can now cost you \$400. But with \$400 here in Cameroon, an unemployed youth who is skillful... that's kind of a government salary."*⁷⁷

Recently, 1task1job was named one of the world's top 50 startups by Startup Open⁷⁸, and in 2014 Charlie was selected as a Mandela Washington Fellow for young African leaders to attend seminars and entrepreneurship courses as a cohort at Yale University. For Charlie, its

⁷⁵ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

⁷⁶ Mr. Charlie Wandji Interview, Founder of 1task1job, Harambe Office, November 18, 2015.

⁷⁷ Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem

⁷⁸ <http://startupopen.com/gew50/profiles-from-2015/>

important to promote 1task1job as a social business, despite many people's confusion over the term:

“we promote [ourselves as a social business] because that's our identity, that's the reason we started doing what we do. But its also true that its difficult. Why? Sometimes people don't get it. Like if you tell someone you're trying to reduce unemployment, they're like “You're not [President] Paul Biya !” (laughs) “Its Paul Biya's responsibility to ensure Cameroonians live in good conditions, that's what he's paid for !”⁷⁹

Another example of a social entrepreneur inspiring many young Cameroonians is Alain Nteff, the 23 year old founder of the social business Gifted Mom. A telecommunications engineer by training, Alain and a team of fellow students at Polytechnique University in Yaounde competed in Harambe Cameroon's 2012 competition and their project (different than Gifted Mom) placed fifth⁸⁰. After the competition, Olivia Mukam, Alain and the rest of the team had weekly coaching meetings to teach them the skills necessary to refine their project. Ultimately, Alain's breakthrough occurred when he visited a clinic in rural Cameroon and learned that 17 premature babies had recently lost their lives due to complications from illnesses like syphilis, chlamydia, and malaria⁸¹. The deaths would have been prevented given proper prenatal treatment, and the grieving mothers would still have their children⁸². As a result, Alain developed a comprehensive suite of mobile phone services designed to improve the health of pregnant women, new mothers, and their children by sending free SMS reminders about the importance of antenatal care and breastfeeding, tracking vaccination schedules, and running mobile campaigns on topics such as family planning and other reproductive health issues⁸³. In 2014 Gifted Mom won the Anzisha Prize as one of Africa's top social enterprises, Ashoka's Future Forward Competition recognizing innovative solutions to youth employment in sub-Saharan Africa, and the New York Africa

⁷⁹ Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem (translated)

⁸⁰ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

⁸¹ <http://allafrica.com/stories/201501271701.html>

⁸² Idem

⁸³ Idem

Competition in Gabon⁸⁴. In addition, Alain's concept has been featured on CNN.com, the Wall Street Journal, and at the World Economic Forum⁸⁵.

The increasing profile of Harambe Cameroon and its success stories, like Charlie Wandji and Alain Nteff, has risen public awareness about social entrepreneurship as social business, but lots of work still remains in order to fully sensitize the population about this relatively new topic. So far, the social business concept has been widely publicized on University campuses, and as such it is primarily reaching a youth population eager to make their mark on Cameroonian society.

3.2. Social Entrepreneurship as a Path to Rural and Urban Development

Social entrepreneurship has also been interpreted to serve as a tool for urban and rural development, leveraging the resources available in both settings to improve standards of living. For Joshua Konkankoh, the founder of Better World Cameroon, a hybrid nonprofit social enterprise promoting a rural development strategy of permaculture, ecovillages, and youth engagement, the term social entrepreneurship hinges upon the idea of civic engagement and promoting grassroots solutions to community issues:

*"[Social entrepreneurship] has to be inclusive, it has to be participatory, it has to be designed from the ground and not from the top. So that's maybe the uniqueness of my own concept, I just don't believe that top down still works. Its time to spread the bottom of the pyramid. There are enough solutions in the world for all the problems of the world. So long as we allow the systems to interact and cross-fertilize and strengthen each other."*⁸⁶

Joshua aims to encourage youths from rural backgrounds studying at Cameroon's major urban universities to take their knowledge and apply it to their home communities to improve agricultural output and improve standards of living:

⁸⁴ <http://www.giftedmom.org/services.html>

⁸⁵ Olivia Mukam Interview, Ibid

⁸⁶ Mr. Joshua Konkankoh Interview, Founder of Better World Cameroon, French Cultural Institute, November 12, 2015

“My concept of entrepreneurship is actually for them to harvest from their communities what they have as indigenous knowledge, and in this enabling environment combine it with the science they have learned in school, and then adapt it to the situation that their communities. This is how I have seen it working and making impact, though at a local level, but it’s also an entrepreneurship where we think locally, and we act globally, because what we are doing has a global impact.”⁸⁷

Meanwhile, social entrepreneurship in the form of integrated business is being field-tested in the back of an industrial processing plant in Yaounde as a path to urban development. In 2005, the Ferrero Group, makers of the world famous Nutella and Kinder Joy chocolate products, founded IMSOFER, a social enterprise production branch located in Yaounde, as part of its international effort to integrate social enterprise into its business model⁸⁸. According to Patrick Ebwelle Elong, quality manager for IMSOFER, *“the goal of these social enterprises was to go into “poor” countries, if I may, and to allow a certain population to have access to long-term employment. To learn a trade.”⁸⁹* IMSOFER currently employs over 230 people to produce its chocolate products, and they pride themselves on providing above average benefits to their workers, such as medical insurance (a rare occurrence here in Cameroon) and higher median pay than their fellow multinationals⁹⁰. When I asked Patrick what his understanding of a social enterprise was, he responded that, for him,

“a social enterprise is an enterprise that respects certain principles. Principles which will help preserve the environment, to promote human wellbeing, in his environment and in his work environment... It means it has to work while respecting people, to respect certain principles, to not steal, moral rules! And then to respect the environment in which we’re working, both the external environment and internal [corporate] environment.”⁹¹

As far as he is aware, however, IMSOFER’s model is unique in Cameroon, and that there are only a few organizations like it in the world :

⁸⁷ Joshua Konkankoh Interview, Idem

⁸⁸ Mr. Patrick Ebwelle Interview, Quality Manager, IMSOFER, IMSOFER Production Site, November 25, 2015

⁸⁹ Patrick Ebwelle Interview, Idem (translated)

⁹⁰ Patrick Ebwelle Interview

⁹¹ Patrick Ebwelle Interview, Idem (translated)

“In Cameroon there are organizations, like the brewery, MTN [telecommunications], these enterprises do social outreach projects, but is that enough to qualify as a social enterprise? I don’t think so... Because for me a social enterprise goes above and beyond what a few social outreach projects can do, it goes above and beyond... I think it’s a solution that people have to integrate. In my opinion, there are not a lot of organizations like us”⁹²

3.3. Social Entrepreneurship as Subsidized Outreach to the Marginalized

One of the few Ashoka Fellows working in Cameroon, Mr. Coco Bertin, has yet a different take on the definition of social entrepreneurship. As the founder of the “Club des Jeunes Aveugles Rehabilite du Cameroun” (“Club of Blind Rehabilitated Youths in Cameroon”) in 1986, he was elected as an Ashoka Fellow in 1993, and he takes his title as a social entrepreneur very seriously:

“I introduce myself as a social entrepreneur, its my profession: I’m a social entrepreneur. So what is a social enterprise? In the world we know lots of enterprises which do business. What is the mission of these organizations? It’s to make money... to win, to sell products! But in a social enterprise, what is the mission? It’s to bring a response to the social, to humanitarian problems, to the problems of human kind. We have people that know suffering, that know difficulties, and it’s a question of bringing responses to the difficulties that these people are facing. That is a social enterprise. And CJARC, I tell people CJARC is a social enterprise. Our mission here is to bring a response to people who are in need, who suffer, who are marginalized, to the people who are excluded in society. For me, that’s the definition of a social enterprise. While others make money, look for money, create, seek financial resources, we seek solutions to human problems, to the problems of human kind. For me, that’s a social enterprise.”⁹³

Coco believes that social enterprises can partially self-finance their activities, but in his experience it is very difficult, if not impossible, to maintain a social commitment to serving the marginalized and make a profit⁹⁴:

⁹² Patrick Ebwelle Interview, Idem (translated)

⁹³ Coco Bertin Interview, Founder and Director of CJARC, Louis Braille Inclusive Primary School, November 18, 2015 (translated)

⁹⁴ Coco Bertin Interview, Idem

“I think it’s possible to partially finance your actions, but not completely, because if you are a social enterprise, it means that your goal is not to create resources. If your goal is to create resources, you can finance yourself 100%. But it’s absolutely essential for a social enterprise to develop income generating activities to support its efforts. Otherwise, when the slightest difficulty arises, it’s over, it’s very dangerous”⁹⁵

CJARC brings in income by operating an inclusive primary school for both seeing and non-seeing students, and by renting out space at the school for companies to hold meetings and to individuals for marriages⁹⁶. However, CJARC continues to seek outside funding from many diverse sources to support its public outreach, events, and training programs for the blind in Cameroon⁹⁷.

3.4. Social Entrepreneurship as the Social Economy

Meanwhile, in the administrative offices of the central government in Yaounde, “social entrepreneurship” is a term that is not standardly defined, but which people interpret through the lenses of the government’s policies around social economy. In the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (French acronym MINADER), Jeanne Alie Akamba and Raymond Dongmo, assistants in the Cooperative Registry Department, understand the term in the following ways respectively:

“Well, its not a defined term here in Cameroon, because like I was saying earlier, we speak in terms of cooperatives. Those could maybe, a cooperative could be a social enterprise because speaking from its definition there are social and cultural needs, so it could be considered a social enterprise, like other forms that I indicated: mutual, syndicates, and associations.”⁹⁸

“literally speaking the cooperative is kind of a social enterprise... it doesn’t quite work like a traditional enterprise because a cooperative needs to do certain things other enterprises don’t have to do. So the cooperative is a social

⁹⁵ Coco Bertin Interview, Idem (translated)

⁹⁶ Coco Bertin Interview, Idem

⁹⁷ Coco Bertin Interview, Idem

⁹⁸ Mrs. Akamba Interview, Idem

enterprise. On the other hand, associations aren't enterprises, mutual are also social enterprises, so in this sense I think a cooperative is a social enterprise.”⁹⁹

Meanwhile, across town in MINADER's Department for Local and Community Development, agronomic engineer Enongene Ebong George Ngolle's take on social enterprises was informed by a discussion he heard on TV when a promoter was speaking about the social economy:

“They were talking about social economy so that's where I got involved, to have a bit of a notion of what [social entrepreneurship] is. And when we entered the cooperative movement I started doing some research, and I found some people define it as a social enterprise... because as we say the cooperative is really... how do we say it, its one of the model of social enterprise, because it has economic operations that help to accomplish social targets, and especially most of the people. Especially those that are directly in the enterprise. But with the seventh principle of cooperatives which is internationally recognized, which says the cooperative has concern for the community, it makes it more of a direct obligation the members should not only be concerned with maybe their economic, social and cultural wellbeing, but also with their communities in which the cooperative is put. So it gives it more social responsibility or notion of the social enterprise, yeah.”¹⁰⁰

In the Ministry of Forests and Animals (French acronym MINFOF), designated focal point Mrs. Kibongaye Ebanga indicated she was not as familiar with the term “social enterprises” as she was with several other proxy terms such as “*entreprises villageoise*” (“village enterprises”), “*cooperatives*”, and “*groups d'interet commun*” (GICs)¹⁰¹. She went on to explain that “*entreprises villageoise*” are basically groups in rural areas who have agreements to work together to produce goods on a small, not yet industrial scale¹⁰². She also noted that cooperatives were much more directly handled by MINADER, and that she was more familiar with NGOs and associations¹⁰³.

⁹⁹ Mr. Raymond Dongmo Interview, Idem

¹⁰⁰ Enongene Ebong George Ngolle Interview, MINADER Department of Local and Community Development, MINADER Decentralized Location, November 19, 2015

¹⁰¹ Mrs. Kibongaye Ebanga Interview, MINFOF, Ministerial Building #2, November 24, 2015

¹⁰² Kibongaye Ebanga Interview, Idem

¹⁰³ Kibongaye Ebanga Interview, Idem

Finally, I spoke with Mr. Ahanda Joseph, Interim Director of Social Economy in the Ministry for Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy, and Artisanry (MINPMEESA), and he gave me the definitive definition of social entrepreneurship used in his ministry:

*“So what does social enterprise mean? Social enterprise, first of all, regarding size, it can be a small enterprise, it can be a medium enterprise, which doesn’t necessarily have collective property ownership, which primarily and directly seeks to produce or distribute revenues equitably, and as such the concept of economic activity aligns sustainability and social change.”*¹⁰⁴

Overall, it is safe to say that the terms “social entrepreneurship” and “social enterprise” are still underdeveloped in the Cameroonian context. While the concept of social business is becoming more and more well known among the younger generation of Cameroonians, and while individuals operating in different pockets of society are promoting hybrid nonprofit social enterprises and inclusive business models, ultimately there is still a disconnect between the specific form social entrepreneurship takes on the ground and the government’s approach to supporting these enterprises through their social economy agenda. A general consensus seemed to emerge that the term refers to creating social value while creating at least some amount of revenue through one of the business models Fowler describes (integrated, re-interpreted, or complementary), but without a consensus around the types of organizations that are social enterprises, any efforts to support the field will meet limited success, since there will not be an optimal distribution of resources to support social entrepreneurs working through models such as inclusive businesses, hybrid social enterprises, and social businesses registered under the same legal status as traditional, profit maximizing businesses.

¹⁰⁴ Ahanda Joseph Interview, Idem

Part II. Field Analysis of the Politics of Social Entrepreneurship

With the theoretical framework laid out and an initial inquiry into the understanding of the terms in the field complete, we can now transition into an analysis of the politics social entrepreneurs must navigate in Cameroon, using the information gathered through primary and secondary sources. This part of the paper is divided into three sections in accordance with the three layers of politics defined in Chapter 1: Macro level politics, Meso level politics, and Micro level politics, with each chapter further subdivided into categories of political interactions and partnerships.

Chapter 4: Social Entrepreneurs and Macro Level Politics

Social entrepreneurs operate in an environment characterized by socio-political attitudes and government regulations. In order to operate effectively, social entrepreneurs must identify and develop strategies to leverage the opportunities and overcome the challenges this environment poses. At the macro level, the types of politics social entrepreneurs face are divided into three major categories: cultural politics, which refer to cultural norms or attitudes that can help or hinder a social entrepreneur's work, governmental politics, which involves the regulatory and legal context and which can often provide gateways to scale when leveraged properly, and network politics, national or international groups of individual actors who pool their knowledge and experiences in order to share best practices and support similar actors in different geographic areas. In the following sections, I break down the main cultural, governmental, and network politics that color the work of the social entrepreneurs I met in Cameroon.

4.1. Macro Cultural Politics

One of the biggest cultural attitudes social entrepreneurs face in the Cameroonian context is introducing the assumption that addressing social issues is the government's

responsibility. *“If you tell someone you’re trying to reduce unemployment”, Charlie Wandji told me, “they’re like ‘Its [President] Paul Biya’s responsibility to ensure Cameroonians are living in good conditions, that’s what he’s paid for !... You’re not paid for that.’ Yeah so people they don’t get it.”*¹⁰⁵ The fact that social entrepreneurs are taking responsibility for solving the social issues they encounter in Cameroon represents a paradigm shift that many people find difficult to reconcile with the government’s traditional role in Cameroon since its independence in 1960. For Olivia Mukam, the traditional deference to government is a result of a lack of stories of individuals being problem solvers. *“Stories of youths who actually try and fail, or who try and succeed, are very rare, and a lot of people don’t even know where to start or if its even possible”,* she explains, *“But then I’ve seen in the last six years the trend is really changing, bit by bit, it’s beautiful to see it. Because there are more youths that try, who use technology to crowdfund, to raise funds, to get their names out there, and that is inspiring a lot of youths to do the same.”*¹⁰⁶ To support this growing movement of youth problem solvers and change makers, Olivia positions Harambe Cameroon as a gateway to changing society:

*“Harambe is not just a business plan competition or executive summary, its not just training people to know how to package themselves and stuff, the real core is really to shape youths, especially youths, mindsets so they can think as problem solvers, so that with all the problems we have around here, they can see those problems as real opportunities. I mean I’m not just saying it, I know that’s how you develop a country and that’s how you can combine social and business”*¹⁰⁷

Another cultural attitude that social entrepreneurs in Cameroon are facing is in regards to people’s concept of employment. In a country where unemployment figures range from 30-55%, depending on the source¹⁰⁸, jobs with the government are highly coveted due

¹⁰⁵ Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem

¹⁰⁶ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

¹⁰⁷ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

¹⁰⁸ Djoum Serges, Idem

to their perceived security and high salary. The concept of entrepreneurship and business ownership is underdeveloped or undervalued as a result. Charlie Wandji's team at 1task1job, in promoting freelancing in Cameroonian society, and are trying to tackle this cultural phenomenon head on: *"we want to change the mindset about not just getting jobs. Because we are used to, we've been trained to that. Except that you can take control, you know, you can decide to [be entrepreneurial], and if you find yourself the right network, the right people, yeah you can hit very very high."*¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Terence Munda and the team at Jumpstart Academy Africa, who work with local high schoolers in Northwest and Southwest Cameroon to instill an entrepreneurial mindset in youths, are facing off against this same mindset:

*"in Africa and in Cameroon in particular, we discover that... everyone wants to be employed by the government... Because they believe by working for the government, your job is secure. And now the problem is, the number of jobs that [the government] needs, they are little compared the number of graduates that are leaving university. Jumpstart saw that if we continue to allow youths in this way, to enter concours to enter public service and stuff, there will be a big problem. We need to start addressing this problem not when they have graduated already. We work with this age group... to make them understand that they can be social entrepreneurs, they can look at the environment, they're already enterprising, for positive change and for sustainable development."*¹¹⁰

The third cultural challenge social entrepreneurs face in Cameroon is the emphasis traditional development has placed on democratic governance in Africa as opposed to economic infrastructure and value chain creation. Dr. Mariteuw Chimère, the director of the African Model Forest Network, a leveraged nonprofit seeking to create intentional, sustainable "model forest" communities that develop local transformation organizations, explains that *"When you look at it, people investing a lot into issues of rights and deliberative democracy, formal democracy, all kinds of democratic things, but the economy is too weak,*

¹⁰⁹ Charlie Wandji Interview

¹¹⁰ Terence Munda Interview

so people jump into the sea to cross the ocean, so what is your democracy bringing to them? They're really hard questions..."¹¹¹ More specifically, Dr. Chimere explains that, according to the FAO's "State of the Forests 2014" report,

*"Africa is making in the 2.8% of the forest economy. We have 17% of the forest, extremely valuable, [yet] we can see its 2.8, less than 3%. And Africa is the only region that has an inverted structure. We make 2/3 of our value from primary production, in wood and fuel wood. Everybody else is making up to 80% of their value from transformation, high level processing, you know... Value chains are so underdeveloped they to being inexistent. So situation where we're going through with AMFN reflected a bigger disease of the African economy. It's an economy of concession which roots are colonial."*¹¹²

In his opinion, *"its not conceivable that Africans will just remain poor, they're too wealthy, you know, with their environment, all the natural resources, all the untapped wealth that exists for this to continue forever, but now whether its going to be slow, whether we're going to control it or whether some other entity is going to control most of it, that has to be decided."*¹¹³ For the time being, however, social enterprises like the African Model Forest Network are struggling to develop the physical and social infrastructure necessary to strengthen Cameroon's transformation industries.

Fourth, despite the growing demographic shift towards a more youthful population (overall, 70% of Africa's population is under the age of 30¹¹⁴), many youths in Cameroon are locked out of the economic and political decision making positions in the country. As Terence Munda explains

"There is this concept in this country, youths have very little place. The young people, they really have very little place, that is the truth about it. Their ideas are always... oh what is that child saying, they're just doing... so as we're going we hope that we can keep going with the support of partners, but with the government it's a bit difficult. You imagine the ministry of youths, the ministry of

¹¹¹ Dr. Mariteuw Chimere Diaw Interview, Founder of African Model Forest Network, AMFN Headquarters, November 12, 2015

¹¹² Dr. Chimere Interview, Idem

¹¹³ Dr. Chimere Interview, Idem

¹¹⁴ Ali, Mohamed. "Youth Unemployment: A Global Security Challenge." *Harvard International Review*. 12 Sept. 2014. Web. 18 Sept. 2015.

*youths and empowerment, the person leading that department is a very old person. All old persons, all old people...*¹¹⁵

Joshua Konkankoh elaborates by adding the following:

*“the real challenge [is] the system in the country which does not create a space for young people. So they feel like they don’t have a place, which is why they would rather be somewhere else. Because the young people, that’s why I think most of the programs, not that I think they are bad, that the government has created are not sustainable. Because they are not based on empowering the youth. And with the big directors and elites sitting on and the ruling system all based on old people, what happens when this finally... nature will take its course and they will move on, and what will happen will be a very big gap.”*¹¹⁶

Fifth, according to Joshua Konkankoh, one of the biggest challenges organizations like his face is the lack of a volunteerism culture in Cameroon. In our interview, he said that *“People don’t volunteer in their communities, they don’t volunteer. And this is what I’ve discovered, its through volunteering that you learn. So this is another way to raising awareness and sensitizing, being an NGO with volunteers, but we don’t... because we have a lot to give, we encourage them to give in order to receive all we have to give, and we find that this is working.”*¹¹⁷ This was echoed in the responses I received from the students at the Catholic University Institute of Buea who were selected to participate in the US Embassy’s SUSI exchange program in the US over the past several years. Three out of the four students explicitly referenced learning the value of volunteerism as one of their key takeaways from the program, and expressed an interest in integrating volunteering into their lives back in Cameroon upon their return¹¹⁸.

Lastly, some social entrepreneurs indicated the challenge they have managing the sensitivity of the work they do in relation to challenging the established governmental and economic power structures in the country. Jaff Bamenjo, the Head Coordinator at RELUFA,

¹¹⁵ Terence Munda Interview, Idem

¹¹⁶ Joshua Konkankoh Interview, Idem

¹¹⁷ Joshua Konkankoh Interview, Idem

¹¹⁸ SUSI US Exchange Cameroonian Student Leaders Email Exchanges, November 22-26, 2015

a leveraged nonprofit fighting to address the root causes of hunger, poverty, and insecurity in Cameroon, summarized this nicely when he told me the following in our interview:

“when you have an idea which is contrary, at times you are perceived as someone who is trying to block things, or you are perceived as the enemy, at times there is intimidation, that we at times receive for the work that we do. I’ll give you an instance. When we had our Fair Fruits project, which was actually touching the interests of a multinational company, we were saying that “In the course of expansion, you displaced people from their land, and therefore, they lost their means of livelihood.” One investor got the news, our fruit, our package, and called the company. And we received calls intimidating us from very... From the company, the government, and even the military, and even from some foreign embassies... foreign embassies where this company... I don’t want to just call names, this is just an example. We might receive a call saying we’re tarnishing the image of the company and this this that... you know? Intimidation. And then we tried to request, why can we not meet, and then have a discussion about it? We never got the opportunity to really sit and meet and talk about it... so this is one challenge we face because we are talking about, we are dealing with global power structures, and sometimes the perception is not always very welcoming, in terms of what you are doing, what you are saying when somebody feels this is hurting my interests.”¹¹⁹

4.2. Macro Governmental Politics

The most common response from social entrepreneurs concerning their interactions with the government was one of surprise at how open the State was to cooperating and supporting their work. Charlie Wandji didn’t mince words when he told me that *“Before we thought the government was this devil, this black guy who never wanted things to happen, that is what we thought before. But with time my perception is gradually changing, gradually changing.”*¹²⁰ After writing to the minister of Economy and Territorial administration concerning a program they were seeking to do promoting rural entrepreneurship, Charlie and his team were surprised to receive an invitation to meet with the ministry, and several days

¹¹⁹ Jaff Bamenjo Interview, Head Coordinator at RELUFA, RELUFA Headquarters, October 16, 2015

¹²⁰ Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem

later they received an official endorsement of the project in the form of a letter from the Minister. As Charlie explained to me:

“And the good thing is this was done with no... this is something you have to know. It was done with no parenage, none of us know this guy, this minister, none of us know nobody in the whole chain who received our letter we wrote to the ministry. But we received this! But its just interesting to know that you can write to a ministry in Cameroon and you get this kind of response. Sometimes we think its not possible. Its possible, we had it!”¹²¹

Olivia Mukam had a similar experience when she returned to Cameroon in 2009 to start Harambe Cameroon:

“when I returned I thought one of the hardest things would be to convince the government or get the government’s approval... because when you’re in the diaspora there’s this like all dark image of the government that doesn’t want to do anything. But in reality, when you’re not asking the government for money, I can say that, its not too difficult to get like, you know their approval for different projects... the government was like “yeah this is great and stuff” and approved.”¹²²

Most social entrepreneurs stressed the importance they saw maintaining quality relations with the government had for their work. Coco Bertin explained that the longevity and success CJARC (nearing its 30th year in existence) has in part been due to their close relationship with the government:

“This means that even when the government couldn’t even give us money, we tried to show them that the work we were doing was a responsibility of the State. We came and worked on the veranda [of the social affairs department], rain or shine. So you see, we had to persevere and not distance ourselves from the government”¹²³

CJARC’s co-founder, Martin Luther, jumped in and elaborated on Coco’s comments with the following:

¹²¹ Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem

¹²² Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

¹²³ Coco Bertin Interview, Idem

“CJARC works primarily with the ministry of social affairs. Secondly with the ministry of basic education, since the school we created, the integrated bilingual school Louis Braille, the authorization was given to us by the ministry of basic education. And for the recognition of our association, it’s the ministry of territorial administration who gives the authorization... so we work, CJARC works with these ministries for the wellbeing of handicapped persons.”¹²⁴

One of the many ways in which this proximity to the government has paid off for CJARC is that on the 30 of December, 2003, the first lady, Chantal Biya, came and inaugurated their newly built Louis Braille Inclusive Primary School, which also houses CJARC’s headquarters¹²⁵. This event brought national attention to CJARC’s work.

Overall, the social entrepreneurs I spoke with expressed the belief that the best way to partner with the government was as an institutional partner as opposed to a financial partner. Olivia Mukam was able to connect with five different state universities across the country in 2011 to promote Harambe’s social business competition thanks to the Ministry of Higher Education¹²⁶. Dr. Chimere has built “*feedback loops*” into the African Model Forest Network’s structure in order to engage high level government officials, such as the Prime Minister, the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife.¹²⁷ And IMSOFER has worked with the ministry of industry to receive permission to operate in Cameroon and to ensure it meets workplace requirements for standards and safety.¹²⁸

Several social entrepreneurs advocating systemic reforms explicitly stated that they seek to avoid confrontation with the government, aiming instead to promote collaboration and engagement in an effort to develop trust and mutual understanding. Jaff Bamenjo and RELUFA have been able to develop relationships in the Ministry of Mines thanks to contacts in the World Bank who facilitated the connection despite a history of ministries being closed

¹²⁴ Coco Bertin Interview, Idem

¹²⁵ Coco Bertin Interview, Idem

¹²⁶ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

¹²⁷ Dr. Chimere Interview, Idem

¹²⁸ Patrick Ebwelle Interview, Idem

off to civil society¹²⁹, and they make every effort to build that relationship while preserving their independence and autonomy. One way in which they strive to do this is by holding restitutions ahead of publishing studies they have conducted:

“We invite people from the ministry to come and listen to the preliminary draft that we have. If they have comments, they can give comments at that time, and we can say the comments if we think the comments are necessary, and we share the fruits of our research with them. That is why I was saying that we have adopted a system of engagement, not confrontation. Its not like just going to the press and insulting them, saying bad things about them. When you do it like that it becomes at times counter productive, they just get more and more closed to you, they don’t allow you to approach them. But, we are very careful not to be submerged by them, because we don’t receive money from governments. We don’t take their money, because if we take money from government or even from companies this is going to compromise our independence of saying certain things, you know, that we feel good to say.”¹³⁰

Joshua Konkankoh also adopts a non-confrontational approach to his work:

“I don’t believe in fighting the systems, the rigid systems. What we’re trying to do with Better World is weave our way in between areas. There has been no confrontation, and I think that is why we are succeeding.”¹³¹

In spite of these diverse partnerships with government entities, overall social entrepreneurs find it difficult to influence policy and decision making in Cameroon. *“The reason my work hasn’t made impact”, Joshua Konkankoh told me, “is because its not been able to influence policy. I wouldn’t say I really know how I can change this... but that is our tall demand for the team I am running in Cameroon: To be able to propose, like you are saying, what needs to change.”¹³²* For Jaff and RELUFA, the way they approach influencing policy is by working through government structures themselves:

“on several occasions we have made presentations in the national parliament, because the parliament is the representatives of the people, you see. So we try to go through parliament because when you give them the issue, give them the ideas, they can ask tough questions to the government... we also go towards the

¹²⁹ JaffBamenjo Interview, Idem

¹³⁰ JaffBamenjo Interview

¹³¹ Joshua Konkankoh Interview, Idem

¹³² Joshua Konkankoh Interview, Idem

administration in charge of the various sectors, in charge of the various domains, to also engage them in terms of discussing the issues and the problem.”¹³³

In his experience, although the government overall is deeply conservative in its approach to engaging with civil society, Jaff Bamenjo has certain contacts whom are open to supporting their work:

“sometimes, we have people in the government who are ready to give us certain information that we want to do the work that we want to do... there are certain people who are very progressive in mind, but they do not do it openly. And they always, they do it just very informally. And then, somebody can give you an info and they say “Ok, you don’t know the source... so protect me”. So there are people like that.”¹³⁴

Overall, the government has begun to open itself up to the social entrepreneurs I spoke with, but lots of work remains before policies and macro government institutions in Cameroon are truly open to public critique and the social reforms social entrepreneurs want to have implemented.

4.3. Macro Network Politics

Several of the social entrepreneurs I met with have sought to align themselves with international networks, gatherings, and movements in order to enhance the success of their initiatives here in Cameroon. For Charlie Wandji, being selected to participate in YALI (Young African Leaders Initiative) at Yale University in 2014 and having 1task1job sponsored by the US government have given him a great deal of credibility as a young African social entrepreneur. As a result, he receives many invitations to serve as a guest speaker at international conferences all over the world: *“They believe that, if we went through YALI, then it should be something credible, it should be a real work, you see?”¹³⁵* He also adds that *“we prefer international conferences that invite us as speakers, because when they*

¹³³ Jaff Bamenjo Interview, Idem

¹³⁴ Jaff Bamenjo Interview, Idem

¹³⁵ Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem

*invite us as speakers for international conference, they take up everything. They pay your flight, your accommodations and everything. Yeah then it's like give you all the tools to help you make your business work!''*¹³⁶

For Joshua Konkankoh, being part of the governing bodies of international permaculture and ecovillage networks has allowed him to spread the concepts he has developed through Better World Cameroon throughout Europe and the world. He got his introduction to these networks when, after pioneering the ecovillage concept in his hometown of Bafut with the help of the local village council, he was invited to Egypt to present at a symposium on African ecovillages. *“Immediately I went there, we created a global ecovillage network for Africa, and today I’m on the board, the ruling council, but not only [that], I’m representing Africa in the global international network!”*¹³⁷ In addition to helping guide these two ecovillage networks, Joshua has joined the International Permaculture Convergence and the African Permaculture Union, and recently he travelled to Durban, South Africa with the mayor of Bafut to present at the African Adaptation for Climate Change conference, where they signed the Durban Adaptation Charter¹³⁸. He explained his strategy of leveraging these international networks by saying the following:

*“Everywhere I have gone, I don’t know if it is through my influence, we have created an African Network!... If we want sustainability, we also have to think about partnerships, because its one of the permaculture principles, where the organisms interact with each other, be it in a plant... every ecosystem is helping each other, and that’s how we create a balanced and harmonious system, and this is the systems thinking that should come into play if we are really thinking about a global village where everybody is a citizen.”*¹³⁹

Finally, for RELUFA’s Jaff Bamenjo, the best way to make use of macro networks is to engage with like-minded organizations doing similar work all over the world. RELUFA is

¹³⁶ Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem

¹³⁷ Joshua Konkankoh interview, Idem

¹³⁸ Joshua Konkankoh Interview, Idem

¹³⁹ Joshua Konkankoh Interview, Idem

a member of the “Publish what you Pay” campaign, a global coalition of civil society organizations promoting transparency in the extractive industries¹⁴⁰. As Jaff explains:

“Within Cameroon we are within the coordination of “Publish What You Pay”, and internationally, we also share with like minded organizations in other countries where there are extractive projects, and they are also campaigning, and we learn from each other. And we try to learn what is happening in other countries to also see how do we make it better in our country. And I’m happy that the method we’ve adopted, and also maybe the visibility that we have, made it in such a way that we are always invited to the policy discussions that are ongoing.”¹⁴¹

All in all, the research on the macro level politics of social entrepreneurship in Cameroon indicate that my hypothesis that social entrepreneurs work closely with the government to create social change was partially correct. Its true that many social enterprises seek to develop strong rapport with the government, however there are not as many tangible results to show for it as I might have expected. Since the government is still relatively closed off to civil society and public interest groups in general, its not surprising that social entrepreneurs have encountered some difficulty changing the macro policies and rules that govern Cameroonian society. It is, however, of the upmost importance for any social entrepreneurs seeking to create social change in Cameroon to develop partnerships with relevant ministries and push for reforms, as pressure from engaged citizens will increase the likelihood of reforms taking place.

¹⁴⁰Jaff Bamenjo Interview, Idem

¹⁴¹JaffBamenjo Interview

Chapter 5: Social Entrepreneurs and Meso Level Politics

On the meso level of political interactions, social entrepreneurs must navigate a labyrinth of organizational partnerships and broker win-win solutions with a variety of collaborators to allow them to operate effectively and sustainably in Cameroon. Based on the ensemble of interviews and data collected, I've broken meso level partnerships into four major categories: Business Partners, University Partners, Nonprofit/ Religious Partners, and International Funders/ Investors. I'll break down the findings for each category below.

5.1. Business Partnerships

Of the social entrepreneurs I talked to, several indicated that they had very little success soliciting funds from businesses, but that when they changed tactics and asked for gifts-in-kind and reduced prices for goods and services, they found organizations to be much more willing. Coco Bertin and Martin Luther, when they were just starting CJARC in 1987, wrote letters to 124 businesses seeking to inform them about their organization and asking for donations:

*"Whenever we were walking in the street and someone would read us the name of a business, we would write it down, and we would send them a letter to talk about our activities... and when we had sent out our 124 letters, we only got a few responses. Of the responses we got, there were two positives ones"*¹⁴²

Over twenty years later, when Olivia Mukam set out to create Harambe, she had planned on reaching out to companies with established corporate social responsibility plans and asking for 1% of their profit¹⁴³:

"it made so much sense in the head... And then you hit the ground running and you just realize how a lot of companies, especially multinational companies, their CSR policy doesn't come from Cameroon, it comes from London or France or wherever... At that time, sponsoring an idea competition, it wasn't

¹⁴² Coco Bertin Interview, Idem (translated)

¹⁴³ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

sexy if I could say. Most companies what they did was they'd do a match, a soccer game of people from neighborhoods, or go to an orphanage, or give things to a hospital... you know, those are things that are tangible, charity wise. You tell them about an idea competition and actually tapping into the mindset of youth, it's a little... you know... you can't, its very abstract."¹⁴⁴

After meeting with the initial brick wall and having to borrow money from family and friends to fund the first competition, Olivia switched tactics and started putting together sponsorship packages for competition winners:

*"For our competitions, for the top three winners, they have a cash reward, we help them with legalizing their company. We have done a partnership with Enter Progress, it's an organization that organizes the big fairs, business fairs in Cameroon. So last year they gave us a booth at their fair "Promote". They gave it to us at 20% of the cost, which is fantastic, I think it was \$2000 per booth, so they gave it to us as their contribution, and we asked the winners of our competition to present their products there, so it really gives them market [visibility] ... So we do these kinds of partnerships, we do partnerships with media so they can speak about these businesses, they can have exposure in media... we also partner with an internet website creator company, so for this year the top 3 had their websites created and hosted for the next 3 years, that's the contract."*¹⁴⁵

CJARC also shifted tactics and met with greater success when they started requesting gifts in kind:

*"Later, we went looking for some land in a nearby village, and it was given to us almost for free, we contributed financially but not at the full price. And when we got this land, we wrote again to multiple enterprises. Among these enterprises, there were three that had positive reactions. SIFOA, CORON, and SAP were all timber businesses who gave us wood, lattices, planks, etc. We built a farm on that land [to train blind people how to farm]"*¹⁴⁶

Charlie Wandji has approached creating institutional partnerships with businesses in Mali and Namibia through contacts he has made at international conferences¹⁴⁷. Impact HUB Bamako is interested in creating a training center in Mali to train youths with web design and business skills which they can promote on 1task1job, and a consulting firm in Namibia is

¹⁴⁴ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

¹⁴⁵ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

¹⁴⁶ Coco Bertin Interview, Idem (translated)

¹⁴⁷ Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem

interested in franchising 1task1job's platform in Namibia to attract freelancers and clients in the Namibian diaspora¹⁴⁸. From his experiences trying to develop partnerships, however, Charlie stresses one key lesson:

“its better when people approach us for partnerships than when we approach them. Because what you realize is, when we approach people, they become demanding... Meanwhile when people come to us like the two cases I just told you, they do it! They do it, not needing any money from you, they do the promotion and advertisement and everything, and get back to share the commission you have. I think that's a better strategy for a startup to have, particularly when you have financial constraints.”¹⁴⁹

5.2. University Partnerships

In addition to partnering with businesses, many of the social entrepreneurs I spoke with had developed partnerships with universities or a presence on campus in order to capitalize on the energy of a young generation who are increasingly expressing interest in social entrepreneurship as a path for their lives. Olivia Mukam and Harambe Cameroon have done this very effectively on multiple levels: they've worked with the Ministry of Higher Education to get a foothold in five state universities across the country (Buea, Ngaoundere, Douala, Yaounde 1, Yaounde 2), and in the past they have also partnered with universities to provide scholarships in project management and business plan writing to competition winners¹⁵⁰. Joshua Konkankoh and Better World Cameroon founded the “Better World Students Nature Club” at several state universities, which serves as the hub for agriculture research and innovation which students then take back to their home communities to promote. And Alain Nteff and his organization “Gifted Mom” are based at Technipole, an entrepreneurship hub located on the campus of Polytechnique University of Yaounde, where

¹⁴⁸ Charlie Wandki Interview, Idem

¹⁴⁹ Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem

¹⁵⁰ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

they are able to engage with engineering students and other student-led ventures sharing the same building to benefit from the creativity and spark students provide¹⁵¹.

Partnerships with universities are increasingly common in Cameroon, as universities have begun searching for ways to promote social entrepreneurship to their students, particularly at the Catholic University Institute of Buea¹⁵². For the past three years, the university has promoted the Study of the U.S. Institute (SUSI) for Student Leaders in Social Entrepreneurship sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State¹⁵³, and four students took part in the program at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, USA from July 4 through August 7th.¹⁵⁴ Lefor Magdalene, one of the participants this year, told me that she decided to apply for the program “*due to the way these students that participated in the programme were excelling in their projects and how passionate they were in any activity and their constant involvement in change making activities*”¹⁵⁵, a sentiment echoed by her fellow participants. All expressed a strong desire to use social entrepreneurship and change making to help Cameroon develop¹⁵⁶.

5.3. Nonprofit/ Religious Partnerships

Several social entrepreneurs I spoke with have developed partnerships with NGOs and religious organizations to complement the core competencies of the organization. Olivia Mukam at Harambe partners with nonprofits focused on leadership and financial literacy training to train the top 10 teams in each year’s annual competition to improve their soft skills

¹⁵¹ Visit to Technipole on November 16, 2015

¹⁵² SUSI US Exchange Cameroonian Student Leaders Email Exchanges, Idem

¹⁵³ http://yaounde.usembassy.gov/lns_060515.html

¹⁵⁴ Idem

¹⁵⁵ Lefor Magdalene Email Exchange, November 22, 2015

¹⁵⁶ SUSI US Exchange Cameroonian Student Leaders Email Exchanges, Idem

and business regimen¹⁵⁷, and Coco Bertin at CJARC has worked extensively with churches and youth groups to find volunteers and to increase the outreach he has¹⁵⁸.

The most extensive partnership between a nonprofit and a social enterprise that I came across, however, was with Dr. Chimere at the African Model Forest Network. Originally, he and several colleagues created an organization called “Adaptive Collaborative Management” (ACM) which sought to promote sustainable forests and landscapes in Cameroon and beyond. In 2002, when they were looking for new partnerships, they came across the Canadian nonprofit International Model Forest Network (IMFN, and after doing a deeper analysis, they realized that *“The words were different but the philosophy was the same”*, and they saw an opportunity to develop a symbiotic relationship between ACM and IMFN¹⁵⁹. As Dr. Chimere describes it, the partnership was a win-win:

“when we got in touch with the model forest, two things happened, three things. The first one is that we were coming out of a series of projects that had no sustainability, so we were learning that the project cycles in the ecosystem of development are not adequate... a three year project and no one cares, if the donor fashion changes and says this is a priority, you leave it there, and in the meantime the people who were being the subject of your project think... are left by themselves. There’s no accountability. The second thing is that, I realized that our very sophisticated method for doing mediation, facilitation, rights, governance, were very good... but it was just software. And for the first time I saw a concept that could be hardware. Because the model forest, you were asking about it, belong to the people themselves, so its not a project, it’s a life project, its meant to continue... And [the third thing was] through the process of developing the model forest in the first years, we realized that an identity, a model forest identity was being built as a result of developing a common practice. And you could develop a community of practice uniquely because you had within a tool that we use called visioning, so we develop a common vision of the landscape between stakeholders that are different.””¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

¹⁵⁸ Coco Bertin Interview, Idem

¹⁵⁹ Dr. Chimere Interview, Idem

¹⁶⁰ Dr. Chimere Interview, Idem

As a result, Adaptive Collaborative Management morphed into the African Model Forest Network, and a marriage between the two organizations allowed both to grow and scale to better achieve their mission.

5.4. International Funder/ Investor Politics

There are many types of funders and investors that the social entrepreneurs I spoke with in Cameroon work with, and this is one of the biggest categories of politics that social entrepreneurs must face in order to ensure the stability, durability, and scalability of their services. The shape of funding depends heavily on the type of social enterprise and the profile of the giving institution. For example, as leveraged nonprofit, RELUFA has sought funding from sources ranging from the US Presbyterian Church, the European Union, and the Natural Resource Governance Institute in New York¹⁶¹. The relationships they carry with each of these funders is highly individualized, and are different in kind and in form from the relationships a social business like 1task1job is developing with impact investors in the US¹⁶². Ultimately, however, the common theme between all the social enterprises I talked to was that they are very selective with their funding sources, and they aren't afraid to pull the plug if a funder is compromising the integrity of the organization.

Two scenarios in particular illustrate the perils of funder politics: a situation Coco Bertin and CJARC faced in 2003, and a situation Dr. Chimere and the African Model Forest Network are currently coping with. In the early 2000s, CJARC was working with a partner organization in Holland to mobilize funds in that country to support its work. However, after a certain time, the partner began to appropriate CJARC and to tell Coco Bertin and Martin Luther about staffing decisions they felt should be made. The partner refused to sign a convention of partnership that defined its role as a partner, and in 2003, when a representative

¹⁶¹Jaff Bamenjo Interview, Idem

¹⁶²Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem

of the organization came to visit CJARC in Cameroon, she assembled Coco and the rest of the leadership team and gave them an ultimatum: either agree to our conditions and rearrange the staff how we like, or we will not fund you anymore. As Coco describes,

“Everyone became furious. We told her that we aren’t – I wasn’t talking, but my colleagues, everyone was really mad! We told her “Who do you think you are? We aren’t in the time of colonialism anymore!... if you want, cut your funding, when we created CJARC we didn’t know you. We used to walk to work on foot, and we aren’t going to accept you giving us orders.” She met a resistance she wasn’t expecting. Everyone was very mad, and after some heated discussions, we finally cut the relationship.”¹⁶³

In the aftermath of the conflict, the partner took to the internet and spread many damaging comments about CJARC’s unwillingness to cooperate, and that caused several other funders to withdraw their support. *“Certain funders think that just because they give you money, they can made decisions on your behalf. And that’s something that you must never accept”*, Coco told me ¹⁶⁴. The partner took several CJARC staff with them and founded a competitor organization, but that organization quickly folded when it encountered difficulties of its own. CJARC continues to persist, and Coco explains that they have recovered from the difficulties this situation presented them, and that they are more galvanized as a result of the conflict¹⁶⁵.

Meanwhile, a similar scenario unfolded at the African Model Forest Network that caused Dr. Chimere and his team to lose a 12 million dollar project with the Congo Basin Fund. The partner, a Canadian organization that brought volunteers to help support AMFN’s work, began to see themselves as better positioned to lead the projects Dr. Chimere’s team was developing, and started pitting themselves as AMFN’s competitors:

¹⁶³ Coco Bertin Interview, Idem (translated)

¹⁶⁴ Coco Bertin Interview, Idem (translated)

¹⁶⁵ Coco Bertin Interview

“they believed we were funded by Canada so they had some legitimacy over these Africans, and then through many touch and go, instead of reducing the problem... they decided to now establish themselves, and they established their own structure, and they became our competitors. And we had an agreement for developing a project two years in the making... and they decided they had to take control now. And we said ok we can make accommodations, we can do shoulder to shoulder control, its going to be hosted here because I was the prime... “nonono we’re going to host it!” ... so it became a big fight for, for excluding us from controlling this project. It didn’t make sense so we said no, we’re not afraid of the unknown, and we’re going to tough it out... but we’re suffering (laughs), its really tough, because we’ve stayed 6 months without salary.”¹⁶⁶

Beyond this falling out, the African Model Forest Network in a period of evolution as it seeks to establish itself as an impact investor for sustainable forest-based micro enterprises in Cameroon and the Congo Basin. However, that process is in a holding pattern until they find the right funders/ investors to help make their vision a reality:

“There’ve been a lot of difficulties... we’ve been starved of funding like now, but, the model persists, so its resilient, its very strong. We’re, among the initiative that exists, I think the only one with this ambition and that has no strong funding base. Only Canada is funding and the others are saying this is a Canadian thing which it is not... you know? And people see what we do, it’s very innovative, its groundbreaking in a lot of ways, but we have very very little support financially... I don’t know if due to us or due to the nascent aspect of this economy or some other factor, but we need to find a connection. And the most difficult thing for us is to find things, to find people who are interested in what we do, to find people who want to invest in what we do, who may want to profit but who don’t want to take all the profit, that’s our problem now. That’s our main problem, you know? That’s this level of partnership that we don’t have yet to be able to make the difference... Because this is not just about having a business, its about transforming the conditions... But so that type of profile exists, but we’ve not been good a finding it and allying with them. So for the time being, our main strategy is what we know best. Its to go and get a project. Manage to put content of investment into the project, and have the money we can inject into the process.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Dr. Chimere Interview

¹⁶⁷ Dr. Chimere Interview, Idem

At the end of the day, my hypothesis that social entrepreneurs focus on developing two or three meso level partnerships was dead wrong. Although the quality of partnerships is definitely important, developing meso level partnerships is an ongoing process that should never stop or be considered “done”. Whether its identifying investors, creating shared value with for profit and nonprofit enterprises in Cameroon, or working to engage youths at universities across the country, there are always more opportunities to partner and increase your impact as a social entrepreneur.

Chapter 6: Social Entrepreneurs and Micro Level Politics

The third and final type of politics that social entrepreneurs must navigate is micro level politics: the politics of localities and individuals. Based on the interviews and field work conducted, micro politics can be divided into four major categories: Local Governance Partners, Local Community Partners, Mentor Partners, and Employee/ Beneficiary Politics, each of which is explored in greater detail below.

6.1. Local Governance Partnerships

A variety of local governance structures exist in Cameroon which can serve as valuable partners for social entrepreneurs. One such example is the local village council, which Joshua Konkankoh was able to work with in his hometown of Bafut when the council was tasked with creating a five year community driven development plan by the national government¹⁶⁸: *“instead of making a 5 year plan, I suggested to my council to partner with the palace, which is a UNESCO [world heritage site] and to come up with a vision for the village, for development... not into a mega city like the West, but into a real ecological [village]”*¹⁶⁹. The counsel and the traditional chieftaincy of Bafut were very open to Joshua’s idea, and as a result Joshua received their support in developing the Ndanifor Ecovillage in Bafut to train youths and international volunteers on permaculture, eco-building, and sustainability techniques for their communities across Cameroon and the world. Joshua strongly believe that *“the real actors are the local government”*¹⁷⁰, and he sees developing relationships with these government structures as crucial to the success of his rural development vision for Cameroon. Joshua’s original suggestion has turned out to be a mutually beneficial proposal, as the current Mayor of Bafut, who has worked closely with Joshua on the Ndanifor Ecovillage, was recently elected as the chair of the Africa Regional

¹⁶⁸ Joshua Konkankoh Interview, Idem

¹⁶⁹ Joshua Konkankoh Interview, Idem

¹⁷⁰ Joshua Konkankoh Interview, Idem

Committee of ICLE (also referred to as “Local Governments for Sustainability”), and has travelled around the world to present the Ndanifor ecovillage concept and its link to Bafut’s local governance to other communities interested in replicating their model¹⁷¹.

Another example of a local governance partnership can be found in Bamenda, where Jumpstart Academy Africa has caught the attention of the divisional officer for the locality. At the moment, the divisional officer is in the process of finalizing authorization for Jumpstart to train teachers to facilitate the leadership curriculum Jumpstart has developed. As Terence Munda explains:

*“it would really help us financially, we might be able to take away a mentor from there and not have to spend money at that school... if we train a teacher at this school [by explaining] in your extra time can you guide the students to do this? Normally the teacher is going to do it, because the teacher works for the government. So that is the partnership we’re putting in place with the government. The problem is, in the country, it takes a lot of time for the government to approve something”*¹⁷²

6.2. Community Partnerships

Certain social enterprises I spoke with had developed partnerships with local community actors that allow them to multiply the scale and depth of their impact. Jaff Bamenjo and RELUFA partners with approximately 12 local civil society organizations across the country to gather accurate, relevant information for the reports they create, and they place heavy emphasis on developing long-term relationships with these partners¹⁷³. In his own words, *“these are people from that area, they are a bit enlightened. They understand the issues, they have some sort of aura, and some degree of acceptance and legitimacy within*

¹⁷¹ Joshua Konkankoh Interview, Idem.

¹⁷² Terence Munda Interview, Idem

¹⁷³ Jaff Bamenjo Interview, Idem

those local communities so we establish long term relations with them and try to work with them.”¹⁷⁴

In a similar vein, Dr. Chimere and the African Model Forest Network (AMFN) have developed an in-house program called the Farmer School, which uses a designated “*model producer*” linked to about 10 “partner producers” that can pick up any innovations AMFN shares with the model producer and thus apply them on a massive scale¹⁷⁵. Thanks to the Farmer School, over the course of a 13 month program called B-Adapt, AMFN was able to reach 2000 farmers and help them include innovative microbe based bio fertilizers AMFN had developed in their fields to boost output¹⁷⁶. As Dr. Chimere puts it, the localized pro-facilitators that ran the Farmer School paired with a system of extension with the government create “*the social infrastructure of model forests*”, which responds quickly to new situations and allows for rapid adoption of innovations¹⁷⁷.

6.3. Individual Mentor Partnerships

One of the most important things for social entrepreneurs that emerged from my research was having strong relationships with mentors and individuals who can offer their experience and networks to help address problems the organizations encounter. In recognition of this fact, Charlie Wandji and 1task1job have recently adopted an advisory board made up of “*influential people in different domains of competence that can help strategize with us so that we can easily grow*”¹⁷⁸. Jumpstart Academy has adopted a similar strategy, gathering influential people from Africa, Europe, and the US and creating a “*Global Advisory Board*”

¹⁷⁴ Jaff Bamenjo Interview, Idem

¹⁷⁵ Dr. Chimere Interview, Idem

¹⁷⁶ Dr. Chimere Interview, Idem

¹⁷⁷ Dr. Chimere Interview, Idem

¹⁷⁸ Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem

to help guide their organization and give them access to otherwise inaccessible professional contacts¹⁷⁹.

Olivia Mukam has often found herself in a mentor role for youths who enter the Harambe Competitions and who want to continue to develop their ideas after the competitions end, and even more recently she has accepted positions as a professional mentor for other social business competitions in Cameroon like the MTN Innovation Challenge¹⁸⁰.

As she puts it:

“ I’ve seen and lived and experienced how mentorship has impacted a few youths” she told me, “sometimes you’re coming from the US and you’re like “I’m just giving you common sense advice” ... You know you come back with that American energy of “Yes we can!” and all that, and you don’t realize how much it actually encourages these youth to dare or to try. So I’ve really grasped the importance of mentorship.”¹⁸¹

Beyond the initial mentorship stage, however, Charlie Wandji believes that there is a gap when it comes to supporting social entrepreneurs long term to help them succeed, and he sees potential for a new type of organization to step in and fill that gap:

“Its important to have a 2 years follow up... to help solve some problems, access networks, and open some doors to help the startup grow... its good to have a program that can facilitate, really help startups grow by solving problems in their lifecycle, not just coming, giving them one million, I don’t know, ten thousand dollars, just to do a show that hey we supported a startup, even though the probability to die is high. There are challenges! And you need people to solve challenges.”¹⁸²

6.4. Employee/ Beneficiary Politics

Most of the social enterprises I spoke with stressed the importance of having a solid, dedicated team of employees/ volunteers, and also creating accountability with the people you’re trying to impact. When Olivia Mukam started Harambe, she had issues making sure

¹⁷⁹ <http://jsafrica.org/>

¹⁸⁰ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

¹⁸¹ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

¹⁸² Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem

she had trustworthy personnel on the team, as she explained that *“some people in the group in the team, not some people, one person, mismanaged the money... well, he embezzled it, to be blunt. And it really put us in a series of debt”*¹⁸³. After that person was dismissed, however, Harambe benefited from the commitment and dedication Olivia and the rest of her team showed to get the idea off the ground. The same cannot be said for the social enterprise Cameroon Solar Solutions, a solar installation company based in Yaounde which saw its former director and his entourage embezzle money to the point where it had to shut down at the end of 2012¹⁸⁴. Despite several attempts to restart the organization, it has faced substantial challenges recovering from the financial difficulties it encountered at its inception, since it is required to maintain the installations that were sold under the previous director¹⁸⁵.

For Charlie Wandji, he has faced difficulties with beneficiaries, specifically when freelancers that were signing up for 1task1job were overstating their qualifications and risking the reputation of the organization: *“Freelancers will be like hey I can do whatever kind of website in this world, but on the otherhand, its when you test him that you discover hey this guy can’t even do a website! And you can discover it already when he has a contract, and that becomes an issue for our reputation, because once clients think they won’t find quality workers they’ll just get out, they’ll get out.”*¹⁸⁶ With time however, Charlie and his team devised a series of online evaluation tests freelancers can take that assign them with a quality controlled rating, which employers can reference when sorting through bids to complete their project. In this way, Charlie and his team manage to combat the natural human tendency to overestimate one’s abilities and ensure the satisfaction of the employer¹⁸⁷.

¹⁸³ Olivia Mukam Interview, Idem

¹⁸⁴ Jeanloz, Ibid, 31

¹⁸⁵ Jeanloz, Idem

¹⁸⁶ Charlie Wandji Interview, Idem

¹⁸⁷ Charli Wandji Interview, Idem

Overall, my hypothesis that social enterprises in Cameroon engage with micro level politics by engaging with their home communities and channeling the desires of the people into the organization's mission was correct, albeit simplistic and underdeveloped. Micro politics are quite varied depending on the organization, and its important to strike a balance between regulating the internal environment to assure proper functioning of the enterprise as well as external politics with community stakeholders and governance institutions.

Conclusion

Over the course of this research project, I sought to examine how social entrepreneurs in Cameroon navigate the different layers of politics present in their environment in order to create and leverage social impact. To do so, I identified four research questions I wanted to explore: How actors at macro, meso, and micro political levels of Cameroonian society understand and define the term “social entrepreneurship”, how social entrepreneurs in Cameroon engage with macro level politics (cultural norms/paradigms, relations with the government, and international governing organizations) to achieve social impact, how social entrepreneurs in Cameroon engage with meso level politics (market level relations with for-profit organizations or with nonprofit organizations/funders) to achieve social impact, and how social entrepreneurs in Cameroon engage with micro level politics (community advocacy organizations, grassroots associations and individuals) to achieve social impact.

After conducting thirteen semi-formal interviews with a variety of social enterprises and government officials, as well as carrying on email exchanges with university students and researching secondary sources, I was able to ascertain four key findings in relation to my research questions.

First, the term “social entrepreneurship” has no clear standard definition in the Cameroonian context, but all actors generally agree that it involves a combination of social and economic value creation. The international debate over how strongly the term relies on social innovation versus business creation varies from individual to individual, but ultimately there is no meaningful discussion over the term’s nuances in Cameroon since it is so vaguely understood by most macro level actors. Many macro level actors understand the term through more familiar terms such as “social economy enterprises” or “cooperatives”, which have been formally defined and adopted by the Cameroonian government.

Second, it can be said that social entrepreneurs in Cameroon navigate three major categories of macro level politics: macro cultural politics, macro governmental politics, and macro network politics. Social entrepreneurs are busy trying to deconstruct cultural assumptions that social problems are government's responsibility to solve, that the youths' voice is not properly valued in Cameroonian political and social circles, and that being entrepreneurial is any less of a worthy profession as being employed by the government. Macro political reform represent an obstacle for many social entrepreneurs, since the government has historically been closed off to civil society and outside voices impacting policy and decision making. However, in recent years there have been marginal successes thanks to the efforts of organizations like RELUFA, who work to engage policymakers in a non-confrontational yet persistent manner. In addition, the government has shown a willingness to serve as an institutional partner with social entrepreneurs seeking to connect with regional state officials, even if receiving government funding or authorization to operate in certain realms is a difficult and/or time consuming process. Lastly, social entrepreneurs seek to leverage international networks, conferences, and initiatives to increase their exposure and the impact they have in their local communities here in Cameroon.

Third, social entrepreneurs in Cameroon engage in meso level politics by establishing partnerships with four distinct categories of organizations: businesses, universities, nonprofits/ religious entities, and international funders/ investors. These partnerships vary dramatically based on the type of social enterprise involved in the partnership and the agreed upon terms and conditions of the partnership, but they are crucial partnerships to develop. Businesses prefer to support social enterprises with gifts-in-kind and subsidized products/services as opposed to through donations or financing. Universities contain thousands of youths interested in developing solutions to social problems, and social enterprises can benefit from developing relationships with these institutions in order to

harness the change making potential of these young innovators. Funder and investor relationships can be the most tricky and precarious partnerships of all, since a funder can slowly begin to appropriate social enterprise activities and decision making processes as it invests more and more money into it. In these cases, it is important for social entrepreneurs to define these partnerships with conventions of partnership to ensure things do not devolve into misunderstandings and power struggles.

Fourth and finally, social entrepreneurs in Cameroon engage with three kinds of micro level politics: local governance partners, community partners, mentors, and employees/beneficiaries. Local governance partners can facilitate exposure and connections in a given locality, and can serve as tremendous partners for social enterprises seeking to develop solutions to local community problems. Community partners allow for dissemination of responsibility for problem solving throughout a community rather than placing it solely on the social enterprise itself, and are thus essential partnerships to develop in order to ensure the sustainability of the proposed solutions to social issues. Mentor relationships are also key for social entrepreneurs, providing a wealth of experience and connections which minimize the risk of encountering avoidable challenges and problems over the course of the organization's evolution. Lastly, social enterprises must ensure that they have trustworthy, reliable staff who do not pose a threat to the mission of the organization, and they must also ensure there are sufficient feedback loops in their process to ensure accountability to the beneficiary for the quality of the product or service rendered.

Given the broadness of my topic, future studies could serve to add detail to any of the research questions explored in this paper. Delving into such topics as how the Cameroonian government can alter its policy framework to support social entrepreneurs, the dynamics and intricacies of investor politics, what makes for a successful local governance partnership, how

social enterprises ensure feedback loops keep them accountable to their beneficiaries, or even further studies on the evolution of the concept of social entrepreneurship in Cameroon all would allow for the findings presented in this paper to be fleshed out and further examined.

Social entrepreneurship is a departure from the aid development model that has defined the 20th century and which has plunged so many developing countries further and further into systemic poverty and insecurity. By harnessing the innovative spirit of millions of ordinary citizens, social entrepreneurship can serve as the foundation for building solutions to the systemic problems of our day and age. It is a dynamic concept, which allows space for social innovators, young and old, rich and poor, urban and rural, to create better ways forward and a path to a brighter tomorrow. In the words of one such innovator, Tina Nain Yong, an Accounting major at the Catholic University Institute of Buea who participated in the Study of the U.S. Institute (SUSI) for Student Leaders in Social Entrepreneurship this summer:

“From my own point of view, social entrepreneurship is a new concept in Cameroon, yet to be understood by many. However, a few have embraced the idea or the concept social entrepreneurship. Lately, the upcoming entrepreneurs that I know of are into social entrepreneurship. With this in mind, social entrepreneurship has played a great role in Cameroon because some of these entrepreneurs are already impacting lives. Hence, social entrepreneurship will play a greater role in Cameroon for it to become an emerging economy before 2035... and why not earlier?”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Tina Nain Yong Email Exchange, November 26, 2015

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Appendix 1: List of Interviews/ Email Exchanges (Chronological Order):

| Date of Interview | Name | Position | Organization | Type of Organization | Length of Interview | Location of Interview |
|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|---|
| 10/16/15 | Mr. Jaff Bamenjo | Chief Coordinator | RELUFA | Leveraged Nonprofit Venture | 1:02:29 | RELUFA Headquarters, Yaounde |
| 10/16/15 | Mrs. Sandrine Kuba | Programs Director | - | - | - | - |
| 10/19/15 | Mr. Terence Munda | External Relations Director | Jumpstart Academy Africa | Leveraged Nonprofit Venture | 56:21 | Jumpstart Academy's Program Base, Bamenda |
| 10/19/15 | Mr. Franklin Mayo | Intern, Former Student | - | - | - | - |
| 11/5/15 | Mrs. Olivia Mukam | Founder and Advisor | Harambe Cameroon | Hybrid Nonprofit Venture | 1:01:22 | Harambe/1task1job shared workspace, Nouvelle Route Bastos, Yaounde |
| 11/11/15 | Mr. Tadzong Djou Jeannot | Finance Officer | Action Foundation CIG (AFCIG) | Leveraged Nonprofit Venture | Email exchange | Email Exchange (Bamenda) |
| 11/12/15 | Mr. Joshua Konkankoh | Founder and Director | Better World Cameroon | Hybrid Nonprofit Venture | 1:01:04 | French Cultural Institute, Yaounde |
| 11/12/15 | Dr. Mariteuw Chimere Diaw | Director General | African Model Forests Network | Leveraged Nonprofit Venture | 1:04:03 | AMFN Headquarters, Rue Draggage, Yaounde |
| 11/18/15 | Mr. Coco Bertin | Co-founder and Director | CJARC | Hybrid Nonprofit Venture | 1:32:00 | CJARC's Louis Braille Inclusive Primary School, Ekie Chambre Froid, |

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| | | | | | | Yaounde |
| - | Mr. Ahabata Mahibita Martin Luther | Co-founder | - | - | - | - |
| 11/18/15 | Mr. Charlie Wandji | Founder | 1task1job.com | Social Business Venture | 1:17:09 | Harambe/1task1job shared workspace, Nouvelle Route Bastos, Yaounde |
| 11/19/15 | Mr. George Ngolle Enongene Ebong | Agronomic Engineer | Department for Local and Community Development . MINADER | Government Ministry | 46:17 | MINADER Decentralized Unit, Coron, Yaounde |
| 11/22/14 | Ms. Lefor Magdalene | Catholic University of Buea (Insurance and Risk Mgmt) | SUSI Program 2015 | US Embassy Exchange Program | Email exchange | Email exchange (Buea) |
| 11/23/15 | Mrs. Jeanne Alie Akamba | Assistant #2 | MINADER Cooperative Registry Division | Government Ministry | 1:00:34 | MINADER Cooperative Registry, behind Immeuble Rose, Yaounde |
| - | Mr. Raymond Dongmo | Assistant #1 | - | - | - | - |
| 11/23/15 | Helen Hammond | Founder | Elephants Abroad | Social Business | Email exchange | Email exchange (UK) |
| 11/24/15 | Mrs. Kibongaye Ebanga | Designated Focal Point | MINFOF | Government Ministry | 30:37 | Ministerial Building #2, Yaounde |
| 11/24/15 | Mr. Kabungu Joo Sung Innocent | Catholic University of Buea (Accounting | SUSI Program 2015 | US Embassy Exchange Program | Email Exchange | Email Exchange (Buea) |

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| 11/25/15 | Mr. Ahanda Joseph | Interim Director of Social Economy | MINPMEES A | Government Ministry | 41:16 | Immeuble Rose, Yaounde |
| 11/25/15 | Mr. Patrick Ebwelle Elong | Quality Manager | IMSOFER | Inclusive Business | 46:54 | IMSOFER Production site, Coron, Yaounde |
| 11/25/15 | Mr. George Mbella Teke | Graduate of the Catholic University of Buea (Chemical Engineering) | SUSI Program 2014 | US Embassy Exchange Program | Email Exchange | Email exchange (Buea) |
| 11/26/15 | Dr. Mariteuw Chimere Diaw | Director General | African Model Forest Network | Leveraged Nonprofit Venture | 14:35 | AMFN Headquarters, Rue Draggage, Yaounde |
| 11/26/15 | Ms. Yong Nain Tina | Catholic University of Buea (Accounting) | SUSI 2015 | US Embassy Exchange Program | Email Exchange | Email exchange (Buea) |

| Appendix 2: List of Interview Questions | | |
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| Numero | Axes | Questions |
| I | Characteristics of Interviewee | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your name? 2. What is your age? 3. What is your religion? 4. What is your educational attainment? 5. What is your profession? 6. What is your background? 7. How did you come to begin working with this organization? 8. What is your definition of social entrepreneurship? |
| II | Characteristics of the Organization | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the name of the organization? 2. What is the legal status of the organization? 3. How many employees does the organization have? 4. How was the organization founded? 5. What is the organization's mission? 6. What is the problem the organization seeks to address? 7. How many localities does the organization work in? 8. What are the organization's goals for the future? |
| III | Macro Level Political Interactions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the organization work with in macro level politics to advance its work? 2. Who does the organization work with in macro level politics to advance its work? 3. What are the main challenges the organization faces working with macro level actors, and what strategies does the organization adopt to address these challenges? 4. What changes have occurred in the way macro level actors work with you over the years, based on the strategies you have adopted to address challenges? 5. What reforms in the way macro level politics works would help aid the organization's work? |
| IV | Meso Level Political Interactions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the organization work with in meso level politics to advance its work? 2. Who does the organization work with in meso level politics to advance its work? 3. What are the main challenges the organization faces working with meso level actors, and what strategies does the organization adopt to address these challenges? 4. What changes have occurred in the way meso level actors work with you over the years, based on the strategies you have adopted to address challenges? 5. What reforms in the way meso level organizations operate would help aid the organization's work? |
| V | Micro Level Political Interactions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the organization work with in micro level politics to advance its work? 2. Who does the organization work with in micro level politics to advance its work? 3. What are the main challenges the organization faces working with micro level actors, and what strategies does the organization adopt to address these challenges? 4. What changes have occurred in the way micro level actors work with you over the years, based on the strategies you have adopted to address challenges? 5. What reforms in the way micro level actors operate |

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| | | would help aid the organization's work? |
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