Crossing Boundaries: Internal, Regional and International Migration in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT
Internal and international migration increasingly continues to be of global importance for development policies and programmes, but the dearth of data on migration for African countries and the limited focus on the structural conditions that motivate migration from specific localities within the region remain glaring. In this study, we examine the patterns and drivers of migration in Cameroon, focusing on the dynamics of rural–urban migration, migrant circulation, regional economic migrants and refugees, international migration, brain drain and returns from emigration. Consequent upon regional conflicts and instability, we highlight the refugee problem in Cameroon and significant challenges in addressing it. Finally, we underscore the policy and research challenges necessary to harness the potentials of internal and international migration for national development.

INTRODUCTION
Increases in internal and international migration associated with economic and political transitions in countries of Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Pacific have made migration a salient feature of life in developing and developed countries (Beauchemin and Bocquier, 2004; Gurmu et al., 2000; Massey et al., 1993; Todaro, 1997). In sub-Saharan Africa, attention has primarily focused on the relationships between migration, spatial redistribution, urbanization and development (Beauchemin and Bocquier, 2004; Bilsborrow, 1998; Black et al., 2003; Eloundou-Enyegue et al., 2002; Mbeume, 1999; Oucho, 1998; Weinstein, 2001). On internal migration, there is particular focus on the selectivity of the young, the educated, the innovative and the energetic into rural–urban migration, which perpetuates rural poverty and dependency, undermines rural social viability and exacerbates unemployment and suboptimal living standards in urban areas (Adepoju, 1983; Dijk et al., 2001; Lockwood, 1990; Makinwa, 1981; UN-HABITAT, 2003). Researchers have increasingly pointed to the vulnerability of migrants to adverse living conditions in their urban destinations in sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, persistent migration to urban areas in the context of the declining economic performance of most African countries has been linked to a new face of poverty, with a significant proportion of the population living below the poverty line in overcrowded slums and sprawling shanty towns around major cities (APHRC, 2002;
Brockerhoff and Brenan, 1998; Lloyd, 2005; NISER, 1997; UN-HABITAT, 2003). On international migration, the focus in the region has been dominated by debates on the benefits for sending and receiving countries in terms of brain drain and gains, remittances and issues around asylum seekers and refugees, together with the recent rising cases of desperate and precarious migration of young people through uncharted routes, illegal immigration and human trafficking (Adepoju, 2002, 2006).

What is generally lacking in the focus on internal migration in the region is commensurate studies on migration as part of the livelihood and survival strategy for rural families, and the perspective that population redistribution and the growth of cities and towns are expected to serve as important catalysts for national development, and to raise the living standards of individual migrants and their households (Andersson, 2001; Gurmu et al., 2000). Related to the above is the failure to emphasize, in both internal and international migration discourses, the socio-economic, political and environmental contexts in which most migration in sub-Saharan Africa takes place. Apart from civil wars, many countries in the region are plagued with recurring droughts, famine, political conflicts and transitions, as well as unfavourable government policies and poor governance that often trigger movements, particularly of the most vulnerable poor. The disruptions associated with these forces complicate the model of migration both as a major component of population change and as a determinant or consequence of economic development (Adepoju, 1977; Carballo, 2005; Mberu, 2006). Yet these contexts, which are typical of several African countries and relevant for a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of Africa’s migration systems, together with the relationships between internal and international migration and human well-being in the region, remain scarcely examined.

In this paper, we focus attention on the case of Cameroon, located at the intersection of Middle and West Africa. Although it remains a relatively poor country in comparison to much of the world, Cameroon is one of the few countries in Africa to have maintained political stability and avoided large-scale conflict since its independence in 1960. Thus it gives us a potential window into how stable social, economic and political structures, beyond conflicts, generate demographic change, particularly internal and international migration streams. Beauchemin and Bocquier (2004) underscored both the gap in the study of migration in Africa other than studies on fertility or mortality and the lesser knowledge about francophone African countries in the anglophone literature due to language barriers. Cameroon provides a unique opportunity for examination of the dynamics of migration in a context in which both the francophone and anglophone milieus are combined, following the government’s experiments aimed at creating an integrated and united bilingual nation (Kofele-Kale, 1980; Njei, 2000).

Our paper builds on the perspective that migration is an intrinsic dimension of economic and social development, reflecting the rational decisions of millions of internal and international migrants to seek new opportunities (Chen et al., 1998; Kessides, 2006; Montgomery et al., 2003), which carries important implications for development, poverty, health, environmental quality and social welfare provision (White et al., 2008). Guided by evidence that migration, as for other social processes, is related to complex multifaceted interactions and interconnections of structure, agency and consciousness (Baker and Aina, 1995), our study adopts a multi-factor theoretical framework. This approach offers a broader theoretical perspective on the determinants and implications of migration in Cameroon; and by highlighting the political roots of migration, it has the potential to broaden the migration discourse in the region beyond the usual economic forces and consequences.

In the context of a dearth of up-to-date data for a comprehensive migration analysis, we draw on available data, articles, reports, policy documents and miscellaneous literature in order to expatiate on the various dimensions of migration in Cameroon, the structural
conditions that generate internal migration within the country, international migration to and from other nations of the world, and the key implications for the nation’s development.

An overview of the most recent data suggests that current migration flows in Cameroon continue to be mostly internal, from the countryside to the cities, with increasing numbers of skilled and unskilled Cameroonians emigrating to neighbouring countries of Africa, to Europe and to the United States (USA) (Evina, 2010). In terms of determinants, while geographical differences in the supply of and demand for labour are the main drivers of internal and international migration, as argued in most studies, we underscore new roots of mobility, such as civil conflicts and political oppression, especially in the context of increased political instability in the region. In Cameroon, as in most developing countries, current migration patterns are linked to development difficulties since the 1980s due to poverty, economic crisis, soaring population growth, the external debt burden, poorly controlled urbanization of cities, weaknesses of political institutions and adjustment policies that are often not suited to the national situation (Evina, 2010).

In the immediate two sections that follow, we present a demographic and historical overview of Cameroon, and explore the structural conditions that motivate specific migration streams within the country, with a focus on rural–urban migration, urban–rural linkages and circular migration. In the subsequent sections, we examine the dimensions of regional migration, international migration and the brain drain debate, and the returns from emigration. Finally, we conclude by highlighting the future challenges associated with internal, regional and international migration in Cameroon, their relationships to national development, and the need for data to generate research evidence to guide both policies and programmes.

THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON: A HISTORICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

The groups historically inhabiting the present Cameroon include the Baka, who still inhabit the forests of the South and East provinces, the Bantu speakers originating in the Cameroonian highlands, the Mandara kingdom in the Mandara Mountains, founded in around 1500, and the Aro Confederacy of Nigeria, with its presence in western Cameroon due to migration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (DeLancey and DeLancey, 2000). The Fulani, a pastoral Islamic people of the western Sahel, invaded and conquered the indigenous people of most of what is now northern Cameroon during the late 1770s and early 1800s (Fanso, 1989). The Portuguese reached the coast of the country by 1500, but significant European settlement and conquest of the interior became possible only in the late 1870s (US Department of State, 2010).

Beginning on 5 July 1884, all of present-day Cameroon and parts of several of its neighbours became the German colony of Kamerun, with a capital first at Buea and later at Yaoundé. After the First World War, the colony was partitioned between the United Kingdom (UK) and France under a 28 June 1919 League of Nations mandate (US Department of State, 2007). Led by the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC), the territory achieved independence as the Republic of Cameroon in 1960 (DeLancey and DeLancey, 2000). The government is unitary, with a strong executive branch; the president is popularly elected and appoints the prime minister. Following the resignation of the first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, in 1982, after 21 years in power, he was succeeded by his prime minister, Paul Biya, a career official who has remained in power after winning multi-party elections in 1992, 1997, 2004 and 2011 (US Department of State, 2012).
According to 2009 UN estimates, Cameroon’s population is 19,522,000, of which 40.9 per cent are below the age of 15. Despite a high fertility rate of 4.6 children per woman, excess mortality due to AIDS and a high infant mortality rate combine to yield an average life expectancy of 48 years. Cameroon is hardly among the poorest countries in Africa. In 2006, the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was $1,090, compared to $920 for sub-Saharan Africa. However, worldwide, GDP per capita averaged $7,400 in 2006 (World Bank, 2009).

Internal and international migration in the country, which closely parallel established theories of migration, have attracted huge attention following political liberalization and economic downturns in the 1990s. Rural-to-urban migration is partly driven by higher wages and the migrants’ expectations of a better life in urban areas, as posited by neoclassical economists (e.g. Todaro, 1969, 1997). However, wage differentials alone do not explain this phenomenon. Internal migration is also an individual and family risk-diversification strategy, which builds upon pre-existing networks among other motives (see, e.g., Eloundou-Enyegue et al., 2000). While, in recent years, scholars have devoted much attention to the relationship between international migration and economic development in source countries, the link between internal migration and economic development has remained a more important phenomenon in terms of both the potential benefits for development and the challenges that it presents for governments (DeWind and Holdaway, 2005).

**RURAL–URBAN MIGRATION: DEVELOPMENT FRIEND OR FOE?**

The exodus of large numbers of people from rural to urban areas has been blamed for numerous development problems in developing countries, leading most governments to initiate policies aimed at reducing or reversing the flows of rural out-migrants (UN, 1998). In Cameroon, rural–urban migration has been linked to urban overcrowding, slum formation, shortages of infrastructural services (including clean water, energy and health care, among others), as well as declines in agricultural output in rural areas.

Rural–urban migration is, however, not anathema to development *ipso facto*. Most theories of economic development, based on the historical experience of Western industrialized nations, emphasize the economic transformation from a rural, agrarian-based economy to one with an industrial, urban-orientated focus. This economic transformation is facilitated by the transfer of surplus rural labour to the growing industrial sector. In fact, the tendency towards population concentration in a single city has been seen as a manifestation of economies of scale that contribute to increase economic efficiency and growth (Chen et al., 1998). However, in Cameroon, as in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the magnitude of the rural–urban drift has greatly exceeded the capacity of the urban-based industrial sector to absorb the migrants. Notwithstanding, the inability of national economies to deliver improvements in well-being appear to be deeply rooted not just in population redistribution, but in the socio-economic and political structures of several countries (Kessides, 2006). Various structural problems, including high levels of national debt and consequent structural adjustment policies, placed uneven economic burdens on urban populations (Roberts, 2006). Other contextual features in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) include exposure to broader pressures of global competition, limited outlets for external migration, and loss of the productive workforce and of family security due to HIV/AIDS (Kessides, 2006). Moreover, the discrepancy between the urban promise and concrete reality has inevitably been linked to poor governance and accountability, often characterized by a lack of vision and foresight, and the lack of a partici-
The scale, characteristics and causes of rural–urban migration in Cameroon

Cameroon has a long internal migration history, with one of the highest rates of internal migration in Central Africa (Schrieder and Knerr, 2000). The country’s intranational mobility index was estimated at 32.5 per cent, with about 90 per cent of the migrants being below the age of 35 (Schrieder and Knerr, 2000). Large-scale inter-province migration, particularly to urban centres, was identified as the most significant migration trend in the country. On the one hand, the Extreme North, West and North-West provinces supply about four times more inter-province migrants than they receive, and therefore are the major net labour exporters, contributing 53 per cent of all migrants. On the other hand, the Central and Littoral provinces, with their major urban conglomerates Yaoundé and Douala, are net receivers of intranational migrants; they provide 26 per cent of all inter-province out-migrants (Schrieder and Knerr, 2000).

Inter-province migration is primarily stimulated by a large interprovincial socio-economic gap and the demand for education. Many people move from the northern regions to the south and from the western part of the country to Douala and Yaoundé for reasons related to the economic and agricultural crisis (Fleischer, 2007). An analysis of the country’s poverty indicators shows a 55 per cent incidence of poverty among the population in 2007 and a human development index of 0.523 in 2009 (INS, 2007; UNDP, 2009). These recent figures were consistent with earlier reports from the first survey of households, carried out in 1996, which showed that 51 per cent of the people were poor and 23 per cent of them were extremely poor. A second survey carried out in 2001 showed a decrease in the overall poverty figure, to 40 per cent. The decrease in poverty essentially benefited urban areas, which had a poverty rate of 22.1 per cent, compared to 49.9 per cent in rural areas (IFAD, 2006).

The sustained economic growth of the country between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s, based largely on oil exports, supported a rapid increase in urban employment and high levels of urbanization. By the 1987 census, the population of Yaoundé, the national capital city, was 649,000, and a 1998 projection put the city’s population at 1,293,000. Similarly, Douala, the country’s largest city and principal port, grew from 801,700 to 1,382,900 over the same period (National Institute of Statistics, Cameroon, 2010). However, a drastic decline in world oil and agricultural prices combined with a sharp appreciation of the Cameroonian currency, the CFA franc, against the dollar precipitated a national income collapse and a devastating recession from 1986 onwards. The country’s terms of trade declined by 65 per cent from 1985 to 1987 (Baye et al., 2002; Pongou et al., 2006). This immiseration was aggravated by a 50 per cent cut in the purchase price of cocoa and coffee, the leading agricultural exporter commodities in the country, by the government. The sharp reduction of subsidies for plantation crop inputs drastically reduced the production and export of these commodities, resulting in generalized poverty in agricultural households.

Beginning in 1988, the government implemented a series of measures within the framework of the structural adjustment programme advised by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to restore macroeconomic stability through the reduction of public expenditure (Baye et al., 2002; World Bank, 1995). These measures included reductions in the numbers of public-sector employees, privatization of public enterprises and a salary cut of about 60 per cent for public-sector workers in 1993. In January 1994, the country’s currency was
devaluated by 50 per cent in foreign currency terms. Poverty rates increased from 40 per cent in 1984 to 50.5 per cent in 1996–2000 (MINEFI/DSCN, 1997; MINPAT/DSCN, 1984; UN, 2001). On the basis of data from Amin and Dubois (2001) and Baye (2004), Pongou et al. (2005) calculated that poverty rates rose from 14 per cent to 22 per cent in urban areas and from 43 per cent to 62 per cent in rural areas between 1984 and 1996. However, the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 made the country’s exports more competitive on the international market, and increased world prices of cocoa and coffee led to a modest rebound of the production of these crops. Consistent with the foregoing, Buchenrieder (2005) concluded that rural–urban migrants are mainly motivated by factors pushing them out of their regions of origin – namely economic stagnation in sending regions, decreasing incomes from agriculture, lack of access to natural resources, scarce production inputs and credits, and violent conflicts. The majority are destined for the country’s urban centres of Yaoundé – the national capital – and Douala, where conditions are hardly ideal, but are certainly less dire.

Recent studies confirm that the pace of urban growth in SSA tapered off in the 1980s and 1990s, reflecting both a slowing down of migration to urban areas as well as an intensification of return migration to the countryside in several countries, including Ghana, Nigeria and Zambia (Beauchemin, 2002a; Beauchemin and Bocquier, 2004; Bocquier and Traore, 1998; Tabutin and Schoumaker, 2004). In the case of Cameroon, similar trends were observed. The economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s, and the accompanying implementation of the structural adjustment programmes in the country, were linked to the deteriorating economic fortunes of many urban dwellers and massive return migration from urban to rural areas. As salary levels of public-sector employees were reduced by about 70 per cent after 1992 and many were laid off, a large number of former public-sector employees and people working in the state and parastatal support services could no longer afford urban living costs, particularly in Yaoundé. The significant decline in urban income narrowed the income gap between the urban and rural areas, fuelling massive urban–rural return migration of the unemployed to their villages of origin. As Gubry and Lamenn (1996) concluded, return migration to the countryside in the West and North provinces of the country can be interpreted as individual and household responses to the country’s economic crisis.

Migrants who returned to rural areas engaged massively in clearing forests in order to plant food crops during the recession. Sunderlin and Pokam (2002) demonstrated how the macroeconomic crises in the 1980s and 1990s and the resultant return migration from urban to rural areas, together with other factors such as crop diversification and the gender division of labour, combined to yield an estimated annual loss of 129,000 hectares (0.6% of the total) of forest cover between 1990 and 1995. Consistent with these outcomes are the localized environmental challenges, which include the prevalence of water-borne diseases; deforestation; overgrazing; desertification; poaching; and overfishing. Accordingly, Sunderlin and Pokam (2002) suggested that policies that address deforestation must go beyond addressing the known causes – such as the growth of smaller and plantation agriculture, commercial logging and road construction – and consider macroeconomic events that trigger mass migration.

STATE INTERVENTION TO STEM RURAL-TO-URBAN MIGRATION

Since the 1960s, the Cameroonian government has attempted to stem the flow of young people from rural areas to urban centres by funding economic development projects in the country’s rural regions. One such effort was the establishment, in 1970, of the Upper Nun Valley Development Authority (UNVDA) in the Ndop region of north-western Cameroon (Ngwa, 2005). The government initiative at Ndop (premised on the view that development involves
transformation of the traditional pre-capitalist social formations with the type of technology and social organization that characterize the advanced developed nations) was widely expected to bring the benefits of modern agriculture to the local population, as well as launch the region on the trajectory of sustained economic and social development. Consequently, the stated objectives of the UNVDA included: the introduction of new crops and technology in the region; the provision of basic ancillary infrastructure; and, in general, the raising of the standard of living of the local populations. This initiative, together with the elevation of the area into a full division (the third rung of the five-tier government structure in Cameroon), transformed the area into a migration destination urban centre, with migrants coming from neighbouring rural areas and beyond. The Ndop initiative was judged a success story and by 1995 it was credited to a large extent with reversing the exodus of the youth from the division, increased rural incomes, the higher standard of living of the rural population, and increased rice production to meet the area's consumption needs (Ngwa, 2005).

URBAN–RURAL LINKAGES AND CIRCULAR MIGRATION

In recent years, research has emphasized the continued importance of urban–rural connections as a special aspect of urbanization in Africa. In this context, migrants are viewed in their broad social context, including their social relationships, not only in the city but also in the rural areas they have left. This link with rural origins, which is also associated with a strong commitment to home-town development, challenges the dichotomous model of urban versus rural areas and complicates simplistic renderings of the implications of rural–urban migration for development (Eloundou-Enyegue et al., 2000; Smith, 1999).

Home-town linkages provide migrants with a spiritual link to ancestors, access to land and social security upon retirement. By contrast, a migrant who is permanently disconnected from his or her home village is seen as being rootless, or having lost the social nexus that attaches an individual to a given community. In Cameroon, researchers have recognized an intricate relationship between regional politics, identity and urban–rural linkages. Goheen and Fisiy (1998) have shown that among the Nso in Cameroon’s North-West province, home-town connections enable elites to transform their economic and academic achievements into symbolic or social capital relevant for national politics. Accordingly, the elites that live in urban areas – especially in Bamenda, Yaoundé and Douala – see their area of origin or home village as the primary anchor in the construction of their cultural and political identities. Goheen and Fisiy (1998) identified a number of mechanisms for maintaining urban–rural links, including the use of native language and the construction of a house in the village of origin. Such houses provide a positive image for the entire village as well as prestige for the family. Linkages are also maintained through contributions to community welfare, which are rewarded with neo-traditional chieftaincy titles and associated forms of social recognition. Eloundou-Enyegue et al. (2000) also identified the role of child fosterage in maintaining ties between rural and urban households.

In a notable exception to the patterns of migrant linkages to their communities of origin, religious ties and gender identities sometimes do supersede regional affiliations (van Santen, 1998). The model of living in urban areas and maintaining links with rural areas is less prevalent in the Islamic region of northern Cameroon. For example, among the Mafa of the Extreme North province, urbanization coincided with Islamization, triggering a profound reconfiguration of migrant identities. While the maintenance of regional networks and, often, burial in the home town are important motives for circular migration throughout the country, these motives lose much of their significance for Muslims, who prefer to live and die
within Islamic enclaves, conditions that rural places of origin may not represent (van Santen, 1998).

REGIONAL MIGRATION

Foreign farmers, the plantation economy and ethnic violence

Historically, the plantation economy of southern Cameroon attracted many immigrants from south-eastern Nigeria (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2000). Concentrated around the cocoa, banana, palm kernel and coffee plantations first established under German colonial rule, public and private plantations created employment opportunities for labour migrants. In addition to agricultural labourers, the plantation economy created demand for labourers to clear forested areas. In addition to the plantation economy, a common colonial government, a common language and currency, common customs and good transportation infrastructure facilitated mobility between south-western Cameroon and south-eastern Nigeria during the colonial period.

Early migrants to the region were employed as wage labourers. Following independence, however, the government prohibited foreigners from working on government-owned plantations, and many became self-employed farmers. The presence of large numbers of foreigners is often a source of concern to governments faced with high domestic unemployment; however, since most of the foreign-born farmers were employed in the production of cocoa – a major foreign exchange earner for Cameroon – the government was fully aware that without migrant labour, the rapid growth of the country’s economy would not have been possible.

Cameroon is the world’s fifth-largest producer of cocoa, which provides about 40 per cent of the country’s exports.

Nevertheless, the fear of political subversion and economic competition from migrant groups has long characterized the relationship between the Cameroonian authorities, Cameroonian citizens and resident foreigners, and this peaked in the expulsion of 800 Nigerian cocoa farmers in the South West Province of Cameroon in 1967 (Ekpenyong, 1984). Recent tensions in the Bakassi Peninsula between Nigeria and Cameroon may have exacerbated hostilities, with entry regulations having been tightened. More recently, tensions continue to be high in regions of high immigration within Cameroon. For migrant families, migrant labour has provided a source of income and revenue. Forced repatriation, or the restriction of labour mobility, may be politically expedient but economically unsound for both migrant families and the Cameroonian economy, as such measures will limit cocoa production and export. In an assessment of the situation, Konings (2001) reports that foreign settlers were initially welcomed in south-western Cameroon, but a combination of factors – including disputes over land; the rapid success of the foreigners in agriculture, trade and other entrepreneurial activities; an alleged lack of respect for local authorities and customs by migrants; as well as the belief that strangers were only interested in exploiting and dominating the local population – led to simmering conflicts. Those conflicts, which occasionally turned violent, were reportedly directed at settlers from outside anglophone Cameroon – especially the Igbo, from eastern Nigeria, and the Bamileke, from the francophone part of the Grassfields. Konings (2001) reported that the political liberalizations of the early 1990s, the obsession with autochthony–allochthony issues in south-western Cameroon, and the growing divide between political entrepreneurs from the North-West and South-West provinces have their roots in the feelings of demographic, exploitative, political and economic domination of the South-West province by non-indigenes (see also Eyoh, 1998).

Cameroonians have also been involved in similar expulsions from neighbouring countries. In 1981, nearly 10,000 Cameroonians living in Gabon were repatriated following anti-Came-
roonian demonstrations, and an estimated 120,000 Cameroonians were expelled from Nigeria in 1983 (Afolayan, 1988; Gray, 1998; Reed, 1987).

Refugees and asylum seekers

Another key aspect of immigration into Cameroon relates to the influx of displaced people from neighbouring countries following civil and political conflicts. Recent conflicts in the region – notably in Chad, Rwanda, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Congo and the Central African Republic – have caused huge influxes of refugees into Cameroon, which has been politically stable and peaceful compared to neighbouring countries. In total, the UNHCR counted 52,042 refugees and 6,766 asylum seekers in Cameroon in 2005; the great majority (94%) from either Chad or Nigeria. Following persistent conflicts in the region, the number of refugees and asylum seekers increased to 58,800 in 2006, 71,200 in 2007 and 83,268 in 2009 (Evina, 2010; Ndione and Pabanel, 2007; USCRI, 2008a).

At the end of 1980, there were 110,000 Chadian refugees in Cameroon, but that figure had steadily declined to 39,303 by 2005. During the 1990s, a new group of refugees has begun to arrive from Rwanda (rising from 650 in 1996 to 1,037 in 2005) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (rising from 50 in 1996 to 592 in 2005). Since 2005, Cameroon has been experiencing a silent refugee influx along its remote eastern border with the Central African Republic (CAR) – a country wrecked by generalized insecurity, banditry and recurrent armed conflict (UNHCR, 2010). The number of refugees arriving increased considerably in 2006 and 2007. Most are Mbororo cattle herders fleeing bandits and rebels who have attacked their settlements, stolen their cattle, and kidnapped women and children for huge ransoms. According to the UNHCR (2010), many have experienced and witnessed multiple traumatic events, and lost family members, together with their cattle and their traditional ways of life. The CAR refugees, numbering some 60,000, were spread out in more than 60 settlements over an area of 30,000 square kilometres in the East and Adamaoua provinces, in tough living conditions. Child malnutrition is acute, child mortality rates are reportedly high, and access to primary health care and education is very limited (UNHCR, 2010).

While the Government of Cameroon recognized these refugees as prima facie refugees, the UNHCR (2010) reported several key challenges in administering refugee aid in Cameroon. The first is the absence of credible refugee determination procedures, which makes it difficult to distinguish refugees from economic migrants. Cameroon does not have a well-defined repatriation policy, and the local population is often left with the task of integrating both refugees and economic migrants (see also Evina, 2010). Second, the overwhelming majority of refugees in Cameroon (83% in 2005) were located in urban areas, where it was often difficult to administer targeted assistance. Moreover, the socio-economic situation of the country does not allow urban refugees to become self-reliant and less dependent on humanitarian assistance. Third, the logistical challenge of getting aid to huge numbers of refugees settled at more than 70 sites spread over a territory of more than 30,000 square kilometres remains a major constraint. Poor roads and the difficulty involved in reaching basic services such as health care and water – both for refugees and host populations – make it difficult for the UNHCR to ensure protection and offer assistance to the population of concern. Security for humanitarian actors and the refugees remains a key challenge; and the persistent need for armed escorts to accompany all humanitarian convoys, as well as special security systems and telecommunications, are major drains on humanitarian resources (see also UNHCR, 2007a; 2007b).

In 2005, Cameroon adopted a refugee law (Law No. 2005/006) that applies the definitions of “refugee” found in both the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the
1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (UN, 2008). The law prohibits the repression of refugees and asylum seekers for reasons other than national security and public order. According to the law, asylum seekers must apply for asylum within 15 days of entry, and the application is inadmissible if the applicant has first passed through a country in which protection is available.

Compared with other countries of the Central African subregion experiencing unrest (the Central African Republic, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo), Cameroon does not have many refugees. The International Organization for Migration (2010) reported an estimated 11,833 Cameroonian refugees in 2007. Concerning asylum seekers, after reaching a peak of 6,289 in 2003, their numbers progressively declined during the following years to around 2,933 in 2008, mainly in Europe (Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland) (UNHCR, 2009).

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND THE BRAIN DRAIN

The emigration of Cameroonians abroad remains largely a regional phenomenon. In 2005, there were 231,169 international migrants from Cameroon, approximately 60 per cent (140,000) of whom resided in other African countries (IOM, 2008; for comparable figures, see also Evina, 2010). The top ten destinations for regional migrants include Chad, Gabon, Nigeria, the Central African Republic and the Republic of the Congo – all of which border Cameroon. The level of migration to neighbouring countries and beyond Africa is represented in Figure 1. The top non-African destinations for Cameroonian emigrants include France, the USA, Germany, Italy, the UK, Switzerland, Belgium, Canada, Pakistan and Spain (DRC, 2007).

The highly educated constitute a significant portion of those Cameroonians who venture beyond Africa. In 2005, Cameroonian migrants in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries numbered 57,050 and some 42.3 per cent of these are thought to be highly skilled (Dumont and Lemaître, 2005). The Cameroonian brain drain phenomenon specifically concerns doctors and academics.

In 2000, the emigration rate of the tertiary educated was 17 per cent (Docquier and Marfouk, 2005). During the period from 1995 to 2005, 46 per cent of Cameroonian doctors and 19 per cent of nurses emigrated (Clemens and Pettersson, 2006). According to the Cameroon Medical Association, 4,200 Cameroonian doctors, mostly specialists, are working abroad. Only 800 – that is, one for every 10,000–20,000 inhabitants – are left in the country’s cities (Evina, 2010).

In 2003 alone, 5,300 Cameroonian students were enrolled in German universities, which suggests that the emigration rates of the highly skilled hide a much larger human capital loss – the outflow of dynamic, intellectually engaged young people who go abroad to study and often remain there upon completing their coursework, as a consequence of the depressing economic and political situations in their country of origin (Fleischer, 2007).

The Cameroonian education sector in particular has suffered from long-term decay. Drawing on data on educators’ salaries, Edokat (2000) found that locally trained professionals are attracted abroad by higher earnings. As the salaries of university professors have deteriorated, education has become an increasingly unattractive sector, which then influences the quality of teaching and of the degrees granted in Cameroon’s universities. The harmonization of university salaries with those of the public service sector in the 1960s offered little incentive for educated Cameroonians to teach compared to working in public-sector posts (Edokat, 2000). Having faced the flight of professional educators between 1970 and 1975 –
either abroad or to the public sector – in 1976 the government instituted a technical and higher educational salary subsidy for the various grades of university teachers. This incentive gave university lecturers an edge over civil servants and it became more profitable to teach. As a result, many Cameroonians abroad returned home to teach in the university system.

The current value of the technical and higher education salary subsidies instituted in the 1970s remained fixed until 1993, but in reality was reduced due to the macroeconomic conditions. University salaries, however, were subsequently cut down drastically along with those of the civil service. By contrast, the security services and the military sectors were not affected in this salary cut, once again creating a greater incentive for teachers to emigrate (Evina, 2010). Indeed, many teachers have left the university system since this period, particularly in the science faculties and economics departments (Edokat, 2000).

It is important to point out that the situation with regard to Cameroonian skilled emigration is not exceptional. Similar trends have been observed for most countries in Africa. In 2005, estimates from OECD countries indicated that 55.1 per cent, 51.2 per cent and 47 per cent of emigrants in OECD countries from Nigeria, Egypt and South Africa, respectively, were highly skilled. Other countries with similarly skilled emigrants as those from Cameroon in OECD countries include the following: Benin, 43.5 per cent, Chad, 41 per cent and Sudan, 40.5 per cent. These figures are consistent with estimates from other sources. While African immigrants have been reported to be the most educated immigrant group in the USA, Nigerians stood out in the mix. According to the US Census Bureau, 17 per cent of all Nigerians in the USA in 2006 held master’s degrees, 4 per cent had a doctorate and 37 per cent had bachelor’s degrees, making Nigerians the most educated group in the country, surpassing Whites and Asians (Casmir, 2008).
RETURNS TO EMIGRATION: OFFSETTING HUMAN CAPITAL LOSS?

Following the inevitability of migration as an eternal human phenomenon, discourses on emigration and brain drain have shifted in recent years to how to harness the gains of emigration for development in countries of origin (see, e.g., Easterly and Nyarko, 2008). The areas of increased focus include knowledge of the magnitude, direction and uses of diaspora remittances; the distinctiveness of diaspora investment (both direct and portfolio); and the non-financial influences of diasporas (Newland and Patrick, 2004). In 2005, the World Bank reported that remittances to developing countries had reached $126 billion, making it the developing countries’ second most important source of foreign exchange after foreign direct investment of $165 billion, and far ahead of the official development assistance that totalled $79 billion. Mutume (2005) pointed out that some of the remitted funds find their way deep into the rural areas of Africa, and may send a child to school, build a house or buy food to sustain those remaining at home. The amount of remittances from Cameroonian migrants was estimated to have risen from US$103 million in 2005 (that is, 2.5% of official development aid) to US$167 million in 2008, which amounts to 0.8 per cent of Cameroon’s GDP in 2008 (Evina, 2010). However, the true size of remittances, including unrecorded flows through formal and informal channels, is believed to be larger. Building on this premise, Fondo and Tchouassi (2006) identified remittances as one of the most visible and beneficial aspects of how international migration is reshaping the countries of origin, concluding that diaspora remittances are plugging the gap in the provision of social services that the official sources are unable to fill. According to Asek (2006), remittances tend to have a better downstream effect on the population than foreign aid, and close to 70 per cent of remittances in Cameroon are used by the local population for infrastructure development. A good number of clinics, university students’ hostels, pipe-borne water projects and farm-to-market roads have been constructed using resources from the diaspora. There is also evidence that the increasing flow of remittances has increased the demand for financial services, created new jobs in the financial sector and significantly reduced the foreign exchange losses caused by deficits in the balance of payments (Evina, 2010). Also, on the basis of a cost–benefit analysis of the brain drain, Easterly and Nyarko (2008) have demonstrated the positive effect of this phenomenon on African countries.

INTERNAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN CAMEROON: FUTURE CHALLENGES

Future concerns for Cameroon centre on the need to preserve the internal political, social and economic stability of the country. Consequent upon instability in neighbouring countries, Cameroon remains host to significant number of refugees and asylum seekers, from the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Nigeria, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo-Kinshasa), Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and other countries (USCRI, 2009). Despite government cooperation with the UNHCR and humanitarian agencies in assisting refugees, the present lack of institutions and infrastructure to provide shelter and food for the large numbers of immigrants remains a significant problem. Cameroon’s major cities, Yaoundé and Douala, face similar challenges. The cities have grown rapidly, without a parallel growth in urban infrastructure or urban economic opportunities. The country remains dependent on mineral extraction (notably, petroleum) and commodity exports (such as cocoa and coffee) – none of these activities being concentrated in urban areas.
On the brain drain issue, the Cameroon data supports the debate, over the past four decades, that Africa has continued to lose its best and brightest to the developed countries of Western Europe and North America, with debilitating implications for human resource needs, institutional capacity and health/social services in the region. The attractive fix for Cameroon relates to the massive return of academics and highly skilled professionals in diaspora, or of students when they have completed their studies in the developed countries. However, the possibility of achieving this expectation is yet to be seen, and the stranglehold on political power by an ethnic oligarchy over the past two and half decades, together with an unwieldy bureaucracy, does not seem to promise rapid socio-economic and political reforms that will spur such a return of the diaspora.

The new global debate and the increasing recognition of the importance of diaspora skills and remittances in the development agenda of countries of origin promises a new regime with a more balanced and integrated approach that places emphasis on development rather than on control of migrants by origin and host governments (Skeldon, 2009). Following evidence that the current case of Cameroon is only a part of an ongoing human resources haemorrhage plaguing most of the countries of the subregion, a concerted continental approach in terms of sharing ideas and multilateral cooperation may hold some promise for each country. Efforts to stem Africa’s brain drain by focusing on repatriation strategies were discouraging, and studies have shown that repatriation will not work as long as African governments fail to address the pull and push factors that influence emigration (Tebeje, 2005). Moreover, the adversarial relationship between African governments and the African diaspora has remained a major barrier to finding solutions. However, recent developments in government–diaspora relations show positive signs of change following the growing will of African leaders, through regional initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and the African Union (AU), to promote reconciliation with the African diaspora. Both institutions have formally recognized the African diaspora as a key player in the development agenda of the continent, particularly in the current dialogue and efforts to address the issues of brain drain and capacity-building in Africa (Tebeje, 2005). In this regard, the AU amended its Charter in 2003 to “... encourage the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of the continent”. In the context of almost non-existent information technology, and where development needs are complex and require a sustained commitment, effective and sustained diaspora engagement has been identified as very challenging and will require policy and resource commitments by key stakeholders, including international organizations, African governments and host countries (Tebeje, 2005). While these efforts are still at embryonic stages, the emerging diaspora movements, the growing political will of African governments and the possibilities created by information technology, ceteris paribus, hold out the promise that the African diaspora may, after all, not be a loss to the continent.

The Republic of Cameroon has embraced the emerging diaspora engagement regime. The government developed a policy framework to address the country’s migration management challenges through the 1997 Act No. 97/012. The Act sets out the conditions for the entry, stay and return of foreigners in Cameroon (Sindjoun, 2004; quoted in Evina, 2010). A review of the migration management policy framework has been under way since 2008, with respect to security policy, the transfer of migrant funds, issues concerning the diaspora (transfer of skills), return policies, the brain drain and the irregular migration phenomenon (Evina, 2010). Both the new national migration policy and the programmes being drafted prioritize support for co-development. Despite systemic policy implementation failures of government institutions and the lack of financial resources (see Mbongning, 2004; quoted in Evina, 2010), the policy focus on creating incentives is consistent with the new resolve to both reach out and harness the country’s diaspora and its human and financial investment capacity for the development of the nation.
Finally, the dearth of data on migration underscores the need for substantial investment in data collection and management to enable more nuanced analyses of the complex migration flows in the countries of the region. Such a focus has great potential and holds out the promise for a more comprehensive evidence-based response, at the level of policy and programmes, in addressing – in particular – the challenges of desperate and distressed migration that seem to have dominated Africa’s migration systems in recent years. In these regards, our paper is a necessary step forward in opening up the many dimensions of the migration discourse in Cameroon and the Africa region that need further research investment.

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