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The plight of some vulnerable groups in Cameroon

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to show the deplorable situation of some vulnerable groups (women and girls; youths and children; pygmies; elderly persons and persons living with disabilities) in Cameroon. Despite the fact that Cameroon has ratified a good number of regional and international legal instruments as well as adopted some national legal instruments for the welfare of the said groups, its efforts to implement these legal requirements is still far below expectations in many domains. Consequently, it has to devise better ways and means of addressing issues dealing with the rights of these groups, ways and means which must be sought by all the stakeholders concerned (The vulnerable groups concerned, experts, authorities, etc).

Keywords: Vulnerable, groups, women, girls, youths, children, pygmies, elderly, disabilities, instruments, welfare, rights

Introduction

In Cameroon, just like in any other country in the world, there are vulnerable groups, groups whose rights have to be promoted and protected by legal instruments owing to their precarious situation as well as their marginalization in the society. In Cameroon, these instruments do exist. However, their operational framework leaves much to be desired in so many domains. In this work, this framework, as it obtains in Cameroon, is discussed as concerns the following vulnerable groups: women and girls; youths and children; indigenous people (especially Pygmies); elderly persons and persons living with disabilities.

Some of the tribulations of Cameroonian women are perceptible in the domain of politics. Though, recently, there is a conspicuous increase in the number of women occupying political posts in Cameroon's political parties and government structures, there is still a very big gap between the great number of political posts occupied by men and the few political posts occupied by women^[1]. This situation of great inequality in the distribution of posts in terms of gender also obtains in the administrative sphere.

Cameroonian girls experience a lot of problems. In this connection, their rights are not given the same level of protection as those of boys in a good number of families. In a good number of areas in Cameroon, they suffer from early and forced marriages, genital mutilation, lack of education, early pregnancies, poor personal hygiene conditions, sexual exploitation, paedophilia, incestuous relationships, etc.

The situation of children and youths in Cameroon leaves much to be desired. Some of their problems are as follows:

- An educational system which is not tailored to their post-educational needs (in terms of employment, morality, leadership, creativity, etc).
- They are in a society which has very few paragons in the various domains of life (most persons they admire do not have orthodox behavioural patterns and personalities).
- They are highly exposed to the world of drugs and its related ills or crimes in peer groups, schools, etc;
- They are not well brought up in their family circles.

¹ Central Bureau for Censuses and Population Studies (BUCREP), "Journée Mondiale de la Population (Edition 2019) / CIPD : Bilan Après 25 Ans", Yaounde, BUCREP, 2019, p.8

In this article, it is mentioned that in Cameroon, politics is still dominated by men. Very few women occupy decision-making positions.

- Many families do not seriously take into consideration their psychological, emotional, educational, marital, material, economic and other needs.
- The levity in the handling of these needs has prompted some children and youths to become homeless, reckless, heartless, etc.
- Etc.

Elderly persons are not well catered for in many Cameroonian homes despite the glaring fact that they are an invaluable asset in the society ^[2]. In families, some of them are called all sorts of names. They are sometimes falsely accused of practising witchcraft; displaying a spirit of jealousy; Harboring feelings of resentment; causing confusion and chaos; etc. Furthermore, a good number of elderly persons are often marginalized and persecuted by their children, relatives, etc. They are treated as societal outcasts or social misfits.

Though the Cameroonian Government is constrained to protect and promote the rights of elderly persons, it is not doing much in this light. In this connection, it does not seriously or meticulously supervise or pay attention to the welfare of elderly persons in and out of their family circles. It does not ensure that these persons have enough public homes. Worse still, it poorly supervises the treatment of elderly persons in the few existing homes for elderly persons. It does not substantially assist those managing the said homes in their noble managerial task.

Despite the fact that there is a national and international framework for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in Cameroon, the situation of these persons leaves much to be desired. Some of their problems are clearly presented by Mabelle Nforchu in the following words:

Nevertheless, children with disabilities in our society are still faced with so many challenges in the pursuit of their education ...Some of the problems they experience on a daily basis include the lack of suitable centres which cater for their needs; limited access to Braille; insufficient sign language teachers for the deaf and dumb as well as buildings that are not adapted to human disabilities ^[3].

The situation of persons with disabilities in Cameroon is not paid enough attention by the government. There are very few centres for these people and most of them are poorly equipped. These centres do not adequately cater for the needs (moral, psychological, material, social, etc) of the said people. Furthermore, buildings and building contracts in Cameroon hardly take into consideration the situation of these people. They are not sufficiently catered for both in and out of their homes (centres, streets, gatherings, etc).

Indigenous people (represented in this article by Pygmies) constitute one of the most vulnerable socio-cultural groups in Cameroon. Due to a number of reasons, their rights (educational, cultural, economic, material, social, etc) are

violated in various domains of their life. Some of these violations could be depicted as follows.

- The omnipresence of inequality, marginalization and persecution in their various relationships with other socio-cultural groups, etc.
- The omnipresence of underdevelopment in almost all sectors of their life (poor road infrastructure; very few and poorly built schools; very few and poorly equipped health institutions; etc).
- Little or no involvement of Pygmies in the devising, implementation and assessment of their projects.
- Very little efforts made by the Cameroonian Government to enable Pygmies to feel at ease in their country.
- Etc.

The Cameroonian Government does not seriously take into consideration the general and acceptable belief that groups made vulnerable by social exclusion and inequality are best protected through the effective implementation of social, economic and cultural rights as well as the right to development and civil/political rights ^[4].

On the whole, the plight of the vulnerable groups discussed above is a summary depiction of the hellish situation of the said groups within the confines of life in Cameroon. Furthermore, it is just the tip of the iceberg of the pains or sufferings being borne by other vulnerable groups and even non-vulnerable groups. However, some great strides have been made as concerns the welfare of vulnerable groups in Cameroon.

References

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² Central Bureau for Censuses and Population Studies (BUCREP), "Journée Internationale des Personnes Agées (Vieillessement de la Population : Non à Toutes les Formes de Stigmatisation et de Discrimination Liées à l'Age)", Yaounde, BUCREP, 2016, p.17

This article points out the invaluable place of the elderly in the society. Their contribution to the welfare of the society is undeniable due to their know-how and inter-personal skills. Instead of considering them as outcasts, useless persons, wizards, witches, young people (they shall also become old) should have a different or better way of perceiving them.

³ Mabelle Nforchu, "The Day of the African Child", *Born Free*, No.29, Yaounde, July-August 2012, p.6

⁴ Bience Gawanas, "The African Union: Concepts and Implementation Mechanisms Relating to Human Rights" Available at: www.Kas.de/upload/.../Human_Rights_in_Africa/6_Gawanas.pdf Consulted on: 3/8/12

In this article, the belief concerning the social exclusion and inequality mentioned above is brought to the fore.