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AFRICA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

1. Why the Village Matters

Historical and global pattern: Until the onset of the Industrial Revolution in about 1750, humanity essentially lived in rural settlements. The first city-based spurts of civilization were recorded some five thousand years ago in the Middle East. According to historians, only 2 per cent of the world's population was urban in 1800, barely two hundred plus years ago. For practically all countries and continents, the demographic drift from rural to urban space seems unrelenting historically, with close to 200,000 people added to the urban population each day, according to UN statistics. The rural population in developed industrialized countries has declined on average from 40 per cent in 1960 to 24 per cent in 2016; for Africa it decreased from 85 per cent to 62 per cent during the same period; for South Asia from 83 per cent to 67 per cent; for Latin America and the Caribbean from 50 per cent to 20 percent; and for the world as a whole from 66 per cent to 46 per cent (see data in table below adapted from the UN Population Fund). A point worth stressing is that since the 19th Century urbanization and industrialization rates of countries have tended to correlate. At least, that has been the obvious pattern in much of the industrialized countries of Europe, North America, and Asia. In these latter countries, that fact is clearly evident in the parallel over the years between the pace of their industrial expansion, on the one hand, and their urban growth rates, on the other. But that vital correlation is not always so evident in many developing countries, particularly in Africa where the urbanization growth rate is reported to be about the fastest in the world, currently at 5 per cent per annum, even though its average industrialization rate continues to lag far behind, at minus 1 per cent in 2016 according to World Bank data. Since industrialization is historically the source of wealth creation and modernization, the implication for Africa is that very little real wealth is being created as a result of its current development pattern of "urbanization minus industrialization"; which begs the question: mass consumption of foreign goods or mass domestic production to meet local demand? This dilemma for Africa explains why a country like Gabon, which was 83 per cent rural at independence in 1960, is today more "urbanized" at

87 per cent than France at 80 per cent. According to development literature, cities are considered to be important drivers of development and poverty reduction in both urban and rural areas because they concentrate much of the national economic activity, government, commerce and transportation, and provide crucial links with rural areas, between cities, and across international borders. Moreover, urban living is often associated with higher levels of literacy and education, better health, greater access to social services, and enhanced opportunities for cultural and political participation. However, these "urban advantages" derive from public policies and not from any divine commandment favouring the urban over the rural sector. The rural population in most developed countries enjoy more or less the same advantages, if not more. For example, the average income in most Swiss villages exceeds average urban incomes by at least 10 per cent. The urban-rural divide differs considerably from one country and region to another. But Africa faces some unique challenges in managing that divide in the nation building process.

Africa's unique challenges: Although city-village or urban-rural dichotomies documented in Africa's spatial development literature are worldwide as noted above, rural development challenges in Africa appear to be more daunting than in any other region of the world. That is due to several factors. Firstly, the village is congenitally and comprehensively African because pre-colonial Africa was very much a horizontal constellation of clan-based self-governing villages which formed the fulcrum of chiefdoms, kingdoms and empires dotting Africa's history since time immemorial. The few cities in existence in the 10th and 11th centuries for example, such as Djenne, Gao or Timbuktu in present day Mali or Kano and Zaria in Nigeria, were mostly poles of commerce lacking many of the urban organizational characteristics typical of today's African modern cities inherited from the colonial era. More specifically, the village embodied, and maybe still condenses, Africa's ancestral heritage consisting of the original hallmarks of an autonomous African governance system - a micro nation state in short – characterized by a self-contained, coherent, and enduring societal and political unit, glued internally by the bonds of kinship and organic economic solidarity, a common cultural system of languages and customs, a collective sense of purpose, peace, security and justice. That ancestral heritage ought to have been the genetic code and starting block of a bottom-up development and modernization strategy for African countries, proceeding from village building to nation building. For the most part, that opportunity has been missed since independence in the crafting of rural development strategies which focus on top-down approaches to modernization whereby the urban sector of

European vintage swallows up villages in a linear, command and control governance and integrative approach instead of an empirical approach to modernize the villages organically to become townships and cities. That, for example, is the Swiss benchmark of spatial, rural-urban development worth emulating in Africa. This benchmark is possible thanks to the unique Swiss federal political system whereby the democratic base tends to wield more power than the top of the political pyramid, capped by an annually rotating and self-effacing president. The second major challenge facing rural development in Africa is the huge scale of rural infrastructure deficits. The difficult living conditions in most African villages are mostly due to such deficits, including in particular the harsh limitations of transport and communication and energy systems across the rural and village heartland. This challenging gap not only sharpens the divide between city and village but also more crucially limits capitalization of the vast economic potential represented by the rural and village sector besides encouraging mass consumption of imported products, especially foods. Yet another challenge of rural development is the socio-cultural development of villages, or the democratic and institutional modernization of village traditions to align with modernity and international law regime in the context of the nation building process. Hardly no information is available as to which African countries have deliberately embarked on such an exercise despite the existence, in virtually all countries, of Ministries of Culture, in one form or another. In Cameroon, for example, the national democratic framework seems marred by some inconsistencies whereby, for example, a constitutional democratic system co-exists with village-based monarchies paid by and more accountable to the State than to their village communities. Not surprisingly, most Cameroonian villages lack vibrant democratic institutions and forceful development leadership which could make a huge difference in modernizing our traditional societies.

Why the village matters – case for village-centric development strategy in Africa: The strategy denotes a horizontal and human-focused approach whereby the bulk of public investments and development services are oriented towards meeting the needs of the majority population living in villages. The strategy aims to level the existing disparities between Africa's urban and village sectors. "Rural development", which embraces a wide range of concerns such as infrastructure and agricultural development, protection of the natural environment and wildlife preserves, or promotion of ecotourism in African countries, does not instantly convey the understanding that the process should be primarily geared towards improving the conditions

of village inhabitants above all. Village-centric development on the other hand more accurately captures the notion that village communities should be the main beneficiaries of rural development initiatives in Africa. This approach does not imply neglect of urban centres or of the macro level for that matter. Rather, it means that initial emphasis should be placed on modernizing Africa from its indigenous productive base that will sustain the nation state. In other words the fundamental principles of justice and the democratic right of all citizens to economic development and social inclusion should be applied in such a way that the village communities also receive their proportionate share of public expenditures and services. Regrettably, however, the very opposite has happened in much of Africa since independence, to the extent that it is not even certain whether any data exist on how much public expenditure is devoted to the village sector . Is Africa losing an opportunity to create a civilization anchored in and powered by colourful villages?

WORLD RURAL POPULATION TRENDS

A . CEMAC Subregion			**Some emerging economies**		
Country	**% of Rural Population**		**Country**	**% of Rural Population**	
	1960	**2016**		**1960**	**2016**
CAR	80	60	Brazil	54	14
Cameroon	86	45	China	84	43
Chad	93	77	India	82	67
Congo Rep	68	34	**Average**	**73**	**41**
Equat Guinea	74	60	**Some industrialized countries**		
Gabon	83	13	France	38	20
CEMAC Average	**81**	**48**	Germany	29	24
			Italy	41	31
Other selected African countries			Japan	37	6
Burundi	98	88	Liechtenstein	80	86

Congo (CDR)	78	57	Netherlands	40	9
Côte d'Ivoire	82	45	Norway	50	19
Egypt	62	57	Sweden	28	14
Ethiopia	94	80	Switzerland	49	26
Ghana	77	45	United Kingdom	22	17
Kenya	93	74	United States	30	18
Madagascar	89	64	**Average**	**40**	**25**
			Arab world	**69**	**42**
Malawi	96	84	**Latin America and the Caribbean**	**45**	**20**
Mali	89	59	**South Asia**	**83**	**67**
Mauritius	67	60	**World**	**66**	**46**
Mozambique	95	67			
Niger	94	81			
Nigeria	85	51			
Rwanda	97	70			
South Africa	53	35			
South Sudan	91	81			
Tanzania	95	68			
Uganda	96	84			
Zambia	82	59			
Zimbabwe	87	68			
Africa Average	**85**	**62**			

2. FROM VILLAGE BUILDING TO NATION BUILDING

In part 1 of the present series on rural development challenges in Africa entitled "Why the Village Matters" (published in the 21 March edition of Cameroon Business Today), we argued that the village was congenitally African because for millennia before colonial experience Africans lived in village settlements. However, as used in this series, "the village" is not simply a settled and traditionally demarcated physical space but, more important, it is the very embodiment of Africa's traditional system of values, institutions and practices embracing all aspects – political, social, cultural, and economic – embedded in what conventional development literature generally refers to as the "rural sector" of African countries. However, in pre-colonial Africa only the traditional system of values and institutions was by and large in existence; it was more or less homogeneous culturally and socially and self-sufficient economically. At village-clan level, it was comprehensively a self-governing and self-generating institutional order. That, in general, was the continental norm before the European scramble for Africa in the 19th Century. **The European impact** fractured Africa's traditional map with stunning speed and effectiveness, splitting Africa's erstwhile traditional society into two opposite halves: (a) the modern-city-urban sector and (b) the traditional-village-rural sector. The former (new urban society and value system introduced by Europeans) has ever since been embraced in practically all African countries – as elsewhere in the world for that matter - as the norm of modernity if not the mark of a civilized society; while the latter's existence (traditional-village-rural heritage) is at best simply tolerated and at worst considered outmoded and irrelevant to the building of the post-independence states. This split society which, it must be stressed, was a colonial hand-down, has proved exceedingly difficult to treat and heal since independence. Indeed, it remains so problematic that national economic and social development (or nation-building in short) has actually been proceeding on parallel tracks and on different gears, notwithstanding more than half a Century of "rural development" programmes. Urban expansion is accelerating faster than industrial and economic growth against the backdrop of a relatively stagnant village-rural sector. This dual reality is evident, for example, in the differences between the European languages used in government and cities, on the one hand, and native African languages used in the village-rural sector, on the other; or the contrasts that can be observed between the modern and rural economic sectors; formal and informal economies; divisional officers and traditional chiefs; modern and traditional medicine; modern justice system and traditional/customary law practice;

modern banking sector and traditional thrift societies; supermarkets and African marketplaces, etc. While traditional self-governments (where they still exist or are simply tolerated) see themselves as the custodians of Africa's cultural heritage which should inform national development agendas, the ruling and urban elite tend to scorn the same heritage, aspiring instead to be identified with Western cultural canons and lifestyles, and promoting a rural development vision based on the European cultural and administrative frame of reference or the linear, top-down colonial model by which development is expected to radiate and trickle down from cities to townships and then to villages and the rural hinterland. Not surprisingly, public expenditures and services are concentrated on building this "modern state sector" of European coinage and providing for urban expansion requirements, exactly as in colonial times, while precious little is allocated for village livelihoods. Likewise, entire government Ministries exist for urban planning and development, but none for the planning and development of villages hosting Africa's cultural heritage – which ought to form the critical foundation or at least provide the substantive seeds of Africa's development for posterity. In this context, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that on the whole much of Africa's nation-building strategies might be flawed, tainted unconsciously no doubt with a serious mongrel identity crisis, if not inferiority complex, which could explain the inability of the ruling elite to: (a) reconnect with Africa's historical and cultural continuum broken in the 19th century; (b) cure the deep psychological wounds inflicted on Africans during the colonial era; (c) select and tap the very best of European colonial legacies - especially formal education and science and technology - to redeem, modernize and project at world level Africa's ancestral heritage; and (d) reshuffle and harmonize into stable political and societal coherence the indigenous and European value systems, harnessing both to galvanize the African populace to address its basic development needs evenly across urban and rural landscapes.

Rural development as nation building: As inference from the foregoing, "rural development" in Africa should essentially be about comprehensive nation building designed to (a) modernize and reinvigorate villages and traditional knowledge systems in order to secure their vibrant contribution to national development; and (b) bridge urban-rural socio-economic cleavages so that nation-building becomes fully participatory for all irrespective of their urban-rural location. To that end, rural development in Africa should be redefined to encompass two mutually reinforcing development tools in the African context, namely (a) the hardware issues of

economic and infrastructure development; and (b) the software issues (operating systems) of nation building whereby the instruments of research and development (R&D), education, entrepreneurship and industry are applied fully and consistently to rebuild our villages, update our traditional heritage, and tap the full economic potential of our indigenous knowledge systems and forest resources. Until now, rural development in Africa has tended simply to copy rural development programmes elsewhere in the world, which mostly focus on agriculture, infrastructure, and the environment. For African countries, limiting the scope of rural development to such concerns, important though they certainly are, would be a huge mistake considering the very peculiar situation in most African countries as outlined earlier with respect in particular to the very sharp socio-economic dichotomies born of the colonial period and which must be addressed in priority and comprehensively for Africa to fully overcome its past traumatic shocks. **The table on some differences between the urban and rural sectors in Cameroon is by and large typical of the situation in the rest of Africa.**

SOME CORE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL SECTORS IN CAMEROON (2016)

HEADING	URBAN SECTOR	RURAL SECTOR
1.Origin	European (mostly a colonial legacy)	Cameroon's traditional/ancestral heritage since time
2.Percentage of national population in 2017	55 %	45%
3.National surface area	Less than 20%	More than 80%
4.Demographic density	500 persons/ km ²	50 persons /km²
5. Income per capita	550'000 FCFA	270'000 FCFA

(PPP)		
6.Literacy rate	85%	55%
7.Access to potable water	90%	54%
8. Access to improved sanitation facilities	60%	20%
9.Access to electricity	87 %	22%
10.Internet connectivity	25%	No data
11. Main economic functions	Heart of the industrial and service sectors; market for rural production (agricultural/livestock, mining, forest products, and handicrafts)	Heart of the primary sector (agriculture/livestock, mining, and forestry), handicrafts and cottage industries; market for goods and services produced in the urban sector
12. Main languages	European languages (English/French)	Indigenous Cameroonian languages; Pidgin English in Anglophone Regions; very limited penetration of English and French in much of the countryside
13. Economic value system	Structured and informal non-agricultural wage employment, importance of money to meet basic needs, individualist instincts for survival	Traditional and mixed economy: predominance of non-wage family employment, limited circulation of money; kinship values of economic solidarity for survival
14.Normative goods and	Seat of government and concentration of normative	Paucity of these assets, especially infrastructure

services	public and private goods and services (administration, infrastructure, education, healthcare, etc)	endowment
15.Flow of ideas, goods and services	Ideas and manufactured goods and services flow from the urban to the rural sector	Food production, raw materials, and people move from the rural to the urban sector, usually in search of education and employment
16.Economic and trade links to the outside world	Major national gateways to the outside world, especially seaports, airports, and communication networks	Mostly dependent on the urban sector for commercial interactions with the outside world

Data compiled from various sources

3. THE CULTURAL POLICY DIMENSION

What is at stake? The two previous articles in this series exposed the urban-rural divide which has bedeviled Africa's social and economic development since independence. The articles also brought to light the apparent difficulties experienced by most African countries since then in bridging the urban-rural (alias modern-traditional) polarity that characterizes post-independence African societies, resulting in a serious identity crisis which undermines nation-building and modernization strategies in subconsciously ambivalent public policies. One strategic area promising a cure for such ambivalence arising from a cleft development mentality lies in the cultural policy dimension of rural development. This dimension, referred to in our previous article as the software or operating system package of national development, is of critical importance in its implications and holistic in its nation-wide scope. It embraces, for example, the protection, modernization and incorporation of traditional or village-level resources and knowledge systems, languages, community values and customs and social codes of conduct, into nation-building and socio-economic and industrial development processes on a systematic basis. Yet this traditional cultural base is often either ignored in rural or broader national development

strategies or given short shrift as a primitive drag on modernization – as now pursued. More often than not, modernization is mistakenly construed as simply copying, mimicking and expanding the European colonial bequest, such as political models, institutional machinery, values and policies inherited from the colonial period, with little or no indigenous institutional and cultural creativity or adaptations inspired by the traditional foundations of African societies. As such the stakes are high and huge for Africa's future. There is a real risk that because of the near absence of robust cultural development policies focused on the transformation and modernization of rural communities and resources aimed at building coherent and integrated social and economic development systems that mitigate the present urban-rural or city-village divide, much of Africa could forever lose its traditional cultural taproot, which has sustained it for millennia past, without at the same time succeeding to fully assimilate its colonial heritage of cultural values and institutions to the point where these cease to be a cultural liability for the region's development, as at present. This dilemma of blurred identity is in fact at the root of the challenges facing nation-building in many African countries today, including low-intensity social conflicts or violent civil wars.

Rural development as cultural bridge to Africa's past: As a general observation, Africa's development patterns since independence give the perplexing impression that the point of departure of Africa's development agenda is the colonial period which gave Africa its existing artificial state boundaries, European languages (English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish) as official media of communication, established extroverted economic development patterns as well as city-centred administrative systems, just to cite those few institutions which Africa's cultural development policies should tackle and seek to reform. To this end, the functions of research and development (R&D), education, knowledge and skills capacity building, entrepreneurship and industrialization, etc should be applied systematically from the vantage point of Africa's traditional knowledge systems and village environmental resources. In other words, urban development is not the starting point but rather the outcome or end-point of what ought to be an empirical development process that ideally should start from the village-rural level and proceeds to other levels of nation building. To the extent that we have simply been content so far with expanding European colonial legacies in the name of development, with precious little indigenous cultural and institutional innovations or value addition to those legacies, it is difficult to conclude that we have in fact been building anything substantive for

Africa's posterity for more than half a century of development efforts. That rather sad conclusion could be attenuated by the fact that Africa's post-independence development architects had virtually no compass to guide them because of some crippling weaknesses in Africa's pre-colonial past and traditional society, such as the wide prevalence of oral tradition; the absence of an alphabet and recorded history (excepting Ethiopia and North Africa); the lack of formal and systematic pedagogic systems; the cruel paucity of infrastructure in general; or dependence on frail traditional technologies and mostly subsistence economies. Nonetheless, and notwithstanding the rapid depopulation of the countryside, it is still possible to redeem and reactivate Africa's village-rural sector to become a prime contributor to Africa's cultural and socio-economic development in ways that bridge the current urban-rural divide and make Africans proud of their traditional past and of their villages. What is required above all is political leadership awareness of the need for creative audacity to convert our indigenous knowledge and local resources into modern development assets that not only contribute substantially to national economic progress but also guarantee decent livelihoods for the village population.

Examples: Africa's traditional economy, which was ruled by autarky and barter trade in most cases, had little need for money as conventionally known today. As a result, Africans in traditional society had very little familiarity with money and its market-exchange functions. This fact may still be true in many parts of rural Africa where the meaning of wealth refers more to physical assets than to bank notes. As such the clash between the traditional economy and market-capitalist economy has been one of the most disorienting in the ongoing metamorphosis from a traditional society (in which social and economic functions are integrated into the same behavioural code) to a modern economic system (in which those same functions are separate and distinct). Accordingly, socio-economic research (R&D) could seek to develop prototypes of village livelihood systems non-dependent on a monetized economy or on cash exchanging hands. The widespread use of credit cards and other electronic payment systems in the developed countries would suggest that, on this point at least, the developed world is moving in the direction of Africa's cashless traditional society, thus indicating the possibility of novel village alternatives to the use of cash to meet basic needs, including healthcare and social security. Researching, developing and widening such innovations in the village-rural landscape should be the big purpose of rural development agendas. Furthermore, the villagers should be entitled to

thorough training and retraining on the differences between the traditional economy and the modern market economy as well as the role of money in such a system – in short a simplified economic course right from primary school at village level. It is doubtful whether such basic but vital economic training currently exists in much of the region. The fight against corruption in some African countries could well start at village level and in primary schools providing the school curricula prepare the children for challenges likely to be encountered at upper levels of nation building.

Furthermore, Africa's traditional economy has also been faulted for being "tribal" in scope and operation. But it can be argued that most companies in the world are family or kinship-based, at least initially. Africa's tradition of strong family bonds could, in areas where this may not yet be the case, be converted into economic assets such as formation of small and medium-sized family enterprises, thrift societies, social security schemes including pension to the extent possible; and such requirements could be stipulated in family and corporate laws. However, this lane requires thorough initial research and testing of proven outcomes to ensure that the schemes thus developed can be replicated widely from villages to towns and to cities. Similarly, Africa's mostly village-based traditional medicine should have deserved more R&D efforts and resources than it has received so far in many countries. The deep knowledge at village level of Africa's medicinal plants and herbs can only be fully tapped and projected into national development and industrial applications in the context of village-based rural development strategies. Considering that Africa's flora, and more particularly its dense forest resources, contain practically all the raw materials needed by the world's pharmaceutical industries to produce the drugs Africa now imports at huge costs, it can be argued that African countries could be largely self-reliant in medicinal drug production provided the ambition, policies , and organizational structures exist for that purpose along the lines suggested in this article. Ideally, Africa should be a net exporter (not importer) of pharmaceuticals in a context where national development policies deliberately seek to optimize the economic factors of traditional village knowledge systems and surrounding environmental resources. In other words, there is little justification for the existing and ever widening parallel development tracks between modern (Western) medicine on the one hand and (African) traditional medicine on the other. The latter should be modernized to replace the former, exactly as China has successfully done. Africa's traditional fabrics such as the Ghanaian Kente or Cameroonian Atogho indicate the way forward in promoting Africa's fashion industry

from the village level upwards to other spheres of economic development and industrial applications, creating a vibrant local industry for that purpose. The same path could be followed by Africa's traditional cuisine. For now Ethiopia is one of the few African countries leading the pack in modernizing and globalizing Africa's traditional cuisine and gastronomy, creating thousands of jobs in Ethiopia and abroad, and moving in the direction of legendary Chinese cuisine. Likewise, our traditional village-based customary laws need not play second fiddle to inherited European Roman and Common Law systems, which also evolved from traditional local contexts in European history. African countries should logically work hard to modernize, integrate and systematize their existing village customary laws at national level in replacement of European legal systems and practices. In this respect, it is instructive to recall how Rwanda's traditional Gacaca courts proved more effective than the European-inspired legal system in delivering justice following the 1994 genocide in that country. With respect to education policies, traditional Africa equally offers something fundamental – the practicality principle. Though mostly informal, education and training was empirical and family-based. The son followed and did like the father, as understudy, in the performance of tasks and the daughter likewise followed and understudied the mother. This is, more broadly, an apprenticeship system which prepares the youth for employment, including self-employment, and for a practical professional role in society. This objective is either missing or not adequately explicit in existing education policies in Africa precisely because they are not informed by Africa's pre-colonial cultural traditions. The foregoing is but an imperfect description of the treasure trove of Africa's traditional heritage still waiting to link up with nation building and economic and industrial development, but which is also increasingly in danger of extinction.

Danger of extinction: Africa's traditional heritage faces three major threats. The first is that it had the serious drawback of being transmitted almost exclusively through oral tradition, from one generation to another. Although oral tradition was by no means unique to Africa's historical experience, the hard fact is that the region's multifaceted traditions are the least recorded by their authors in the world. The second major threat is that the majority of Africans still steeped in those traditions can neither read nor write, and are fast disappearing from the scene. The prospects are diminishing that their knowledge will be smoothly and wholly transmitted to future generations. The third threat is its very limited current role in the development of local and national institutions. Although many facets of that heritage have been

the subject of academic works by anthropologists and ethnologists or doctoral students, their real-life applications or experimentation in African governance and development experience have been very limited indeed. The few exceptions that can be found in West Africa and Southern Africa, are certainly valuable and laudable, but they need to be more forward-looking and engage in a systematic process of further developing, extending, modernizing and deliberately disseminating this cultural heritage. YES to economic development but NO to self-inflicted cultural extinction.

4. CAPITALIZING THE TREASURE TROVE OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Historical and cultural continuum: This article continues and expands our previous instalment entitled "The Cultural Policy Dimension**"** of rural development, published in *Cameroon Business Today* in its edition of 25 April 2018. Whereas the last article argued the case for robust village-focused cultural policies geared to transforming our traditional knowledge systems, customs, practices and resources into modern nation-building and socio-economic assets, the present piece sketches some pathways to that goal, and discusses the challenges to be expected on the way forward. The point stressed in our previous articles in this series and worth recalling here is that rural development policies in Africa, unlike in the developed countries, should not only centre on economic and infrastructure development concerns, vitally important though they are, but should equally aim to rebuild Africa's historical and cultural continuum to pre-colonial ancestry which was violently ruptured during the colonial period. In other words, rural development strategies should aim to merge, as harmoniously as possible, pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa since these two heritages must remain married by force of history. Neither should sink the other. But the African cultural factor must be in control, adapting the colonial heritage and applying modern science and technology to build societal and economic coherence across city and village landscapes. Such a strategy should hopefully mitigate the modern-traditional dualism and inequalities now everywhere prevalent in much of the continent. This should be possible if national development plans and resource allocation strategies focus more on villages and local resources so as to transform, modernize and capitalize the treasure trove of the traditional village weal. This agenda includes, for example, revitalization and upgrading of indigenous knowledge systems such as native languages, customary law, self-governing institutions at village-clan level, food processing technologies, traditional medicine, arts and crafts, ceremonial and

entertainment customs and practices; and many more. Because this traditional heritage should ideally be the subject matter of our development and modernization efforts, of nation building in short, it should be incorporated systematically into local, regional and national development programmes and pursued in the different development sectors (cultural development, science and technology, education, trade and industry, etc). Although this heritage has been denigrated by Europeans and even the African elite since colonial times as "primitive" relics of the past, it ought in fact to constitute the very business of the region's modernization agenda, not least because that is why we fought for political freedom, at least from a nationalist viewpoint. Thus, the goal in researching, recording, weeding, expanding, and adapting this indigenous value system to modern democratic times and technologies would be to ensure that it forms the osmotic fountain for the modern state-building process, from the village base to other reaches and spheres, evenly across all population segments, economic sectors and urban-rural landscapes.

Way forward: If we consider, for example, Africa's traditional pharmacopoeia as practised for centuries in the villages, as well as the vast medicinal plant resources in our nearby forests, it is possible that proactive modernization of these baseline comparative advantages should raise Africa to the economic status of a net exporter (not importer) of pharmaceuticals in a context where national development policies deliberately seek to capitalize the economic factors of traditional knowledge of plants and healing practices. In other words, there is little justification for the existing parallel development tracks between modern (Western) medicine on the one hand and traditional (African) medicine on the other. The latter should be modernized to replace the former, exactly as Western medicine also evolved over time. At present, Africa's raw materials for the production of pharmaceuticals leave our villages and forests for the developed countries where they are manufactured as finished products that then return to Africa as medicines filling our drugstores, very much like other raw materials from extractive to agricultural commodities. Another example is the traditional production of beverages and spirits in the villages since time immemorial, which has suffered the same fate as traditional medicine. In these two cases of deliberate neglect since colonial times, massive imports continue to feed an impulsive dependence of the population on far more costly foreign goods considered as "modern" and symbolic of "civilized" status. The main reason for this state of affairs is the apparent absence of enlightened and bold industrial policies and structures to upgrade and

expand budding indigenous production technologies at village level, and protect their growth from the onslaught of foreign imports, at least initially. Yet another example is village arts and crafts, which seem to be an economic boom elsewhere in the world except in Africa because of regressive cultural and economic conditions in our villages. Nonetheless, in a few cases Africa's traditional fabrics such as Kenyan apparel, Ghanaian Kente or Cameroonian Atogho, among others, indicate the way forward in promoting Africa's fashion industry from village traditions to national industrial and global scales. The same path could be followed by Africa's traditional cuisine. For now Ethiopia is one of the few African countries leading the pack in modernizing and globalizing Africa's traditional cuisine and gastronomy. With respect to the modernization of traditional village institutions, African customary laws need not play second fiddle to inherited European Roman and Common Law systems, which also evolved from traditional local contexts in European history. African countries could modernize, integrate and systematize their existing village customary laws at national level, aligning them with international law regimes and progressively replacing inherited European legal systems. In this respect, it is instructive to recall how Rwanda's traditional Gacaca courts proved more effective than the European-inspired legal system in delivering justice following the 1994 genocide in that country. Regarding education policies, traditional Africa equally offers something fundamental – the practicality principle. Though mostly informal, education and training was empirical and family-based. The son followed and did like the father, as understudy, in the performance of tasks and the daughter likewise followed and understudied the mother. This is, more broadly, an apprenticeship system which prepares the youth for employment, including self-employment, and for a practical professional role in society. This objective is not always adequately explicit in existing education policies in Africa precisely because they are not fully informed by Africa's native traditions. Furthermore, the principle of community labour in the villages illustrates the spirit of community self-reliance and organic solidarity, which cultural policies should strengthen further as community codes or "labour banks" for the delivery of a wide range of services at local level, and which national governments would also be best advised to follow to reduce excessive dependence on foreign development aid – often a bailout for incompetence or mismanagement. But the cultural modernization of village communities also extends to such basic details like providing household training on the safe use of electrical appliances (including avoiding electric shocks); use and proper maintenance of flush-toilets as opposed to latrines, or sanitation systems

in general (now available mostly in the cities); the culture of maintenance of premises and household equipment, and extending the same to townships and cities where a maintenance culture is yet to be fully ingrained. The foregoing examples of the meaning of a "village-centric" development strategy in an African context are an imperfect illustration of the tangible and intangible treasure trove of Africa's traditional heritage still waiting to link up coherently with nation building and to energize economic and industrial development on Africa's cultural terms and across the existing urban-rural chasm. Regrettably, that treasure trove increasingly looks like an endangered species; it is vanishing into oblivion, together with the African village itself.

Danger of extinction: Africa's traditional heritage faces three major threats. The first is that it had the serious drawback of being transmitted almost exclusively through oral tradition, from one generation to another. Although oral tradition was by no means unique to Africa's historical experience, the hard fact is that the region's multifaceted traditions are the least recorded by their authors in the world. The second major threat is that the majority of Africans still steeped in those traditions can neither read nor write, and are fast disappearing from the scene. The prospects are diminishing that their knowledge will be smoothly and wholly transmitted to future generations. The third threat is its very limited current role in the development of local and national institutions. Although many facets of that heritage have been the subject of academic works by anthropologists and ethnologists or doctoral students, their real-life applications or experimentation in African governance and development experience have been very limited indeed.

Conclusion: In the present state of affairs, the villagers have little reason to believe and feel that they have a role in the building of the modern African nation state. From the villagers' vantage point, the modern state is an alien machine. Few, if any, of its component parts have been sourced from Africa's indigenous material. But it's not too late for African countries to reverse the present course of top-down, city-based and neo-colonial state building strategies. Traditional Africa must be part of the struggle and bargain. This article, like the previous ones, sketches the way forward. YES to modernization but NO to self-inflicted cultural extinction.

5. Modernizing and Strengthening Village Self-Governance

Traditional village universe: Traditional self-governing institutions had been vibrant for thousands of years in Africa until they were emasculated by colonial impact in the 19th Century. However, as testimony to their extraordinary resilience in the course of turbulent history, village institutions of self-governance, of law and order, and community empowerment still exist to this day in many parts of the continent notwithstanding the psychological and structural violence they suffered during the colonial era. The present article focuses on how village self-governance can be re-awakened to impulse development initiatives from below, and form the galvanizing base of a national democratic system, thereby equalizing political participation and development opportunities across urban and rural landscapes. This approach should yield at least three benefits. Firstly, the traditional village community is the most ancestral and most natural societal unit we can still be proud of today in Africa; most other socio-political and administrative demarcations were created by fiat, and are therefore as artificial as the boundaries of African states. Accordingly, strengthening the village societal unit comprehensively implies revitalizing Africa's ancestral weal and societal identity as well as the villagers' self-esteem and self confidence which are pre-requisite ingredients for personal and community advancement. Secondly, each village has always had and certainly still has a self-governing institution, whatever it may be called, which could be further strengthened, at very modest cost, to serve as the first line of attack on rural poverty and as a permanent vehicle for the delivery of basic social services in the rural sector. Thirdly, the village focus allows for national development strategies to evolve empirically, from concrete thinking and action to more abstract levels of development management. At present the reverse holds true in many cases as rural and even national development strategies are often engineered from top to bottom, which is why their failure rate remains consistently high. Village communities should not be spoon-fed; they should have a stimulating policy space enabling them to be active and vocal agents of their progress and architects of their welfare within the limits of the possible. Above all, they should be democratically organized to hold local and national governments to account. The non-resident elite of village communities should be instrumental to these ends.

Reform agenda: The first task would be to reform indigenous village institutions as building blocks of a state development strategy, purging them of any obnoxious traditional relics (e.g.

witchcraft and secret societies) at variance with democratic values and human rights standards inscribed in the national constitution. As such, by focusing on micro-institutions villagers have fashioned for themselves since ancestry, this approach should motivate the rural communities to take control of their social and economic progress. That way, it should be possible to start re-building Africa's bridges to its pre-colonial history. That is also what the World Bank is urging Africans to do: "*Before colonialism it is clear that this continent had a remarkable concept of management. There was long before colonialism a sense of values, a sense of sharing, a sense of community, and a sense of participation. It was a system of people coming together for a common purpose. Now we have to find our way back. Governance is not something that is strange to Africa, it is something that has to be rediscovered in Africa"*[1] A wrong-headed strategy since independence has been to concentrate scarce precious resources on building extravagant symbols of statehood, such as an outsize presidency, bloated civil service bureaucracy, armed forces, foreign diplomatic representations, and other complex and costly paraphernalia of the modern state copied from abroad, without first of all accomplishing the necessary and much simpler task of reconstructing the nation-state foundation blocks represented by village communities. Some African states are either failing or showing various dysfunctional symptoms because their vital organs and functions are divorced from their village heartland. Similarly, national democratic processes should draw strength from viable village democratic experiments. However, it remains doubtful whether traditional village chiefs, who operate hereditary monarchies in conflict with democratic principles, can be enthusiastic promoters of a village self-governing democratic project. A thorough development-oriented reform agenda becomes indispensable at village level. Since it would be constitutionally inconsistent to have hereditary monarchies in the villages and democratic systems and processes at all other levels, the state should exercise its sovereign prerogative by modernizing and democratizing village-self-governance institutions, just as European and Asian countries modernized or "democratized" their monarchies in the long march of history. The reform agenda could, for example, include the following elements: (a) traditional chieftaincies become full-dress democratic institutions of village governance; (b) by the same token, salaries government currently pays out to chiefs on their individual basis or on the merit of their simple title should henceforth form part of

[1] James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, in an address to the United Nations African Development Forum, Addis Ababa, quoted by the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) of UN/OCHA, news release dated 18 October 2004.

allocations it would be appropriate for national government to earmark for village self-governments, which should decide democratically on the question of remuneration for their chiefs; (c) village chiefs permanently reside in their respective villages and become fully conversant, not only with indigenous traditions, but also with the law of the land, human rights and democratic principles of governance; (d) each village community formulates and adopts a basic law or "constitution" to guide its democratic experiment and development programmes; (e) in the interest of uniformity and predictability in the functioning of village institutions, the local government could help formulate a model of such a basic law for all village communities within its jurisdiction; (f) consistent with national constitutional requirements, each village community decides to drop the hereditary tradition of its chieftaincy where it exists and to elect village chiefs (as applicable in some countries such the Central African Republic) on the basis of their conversance with traditional lore, integrity, demonstrated leadership qualities, and effective residence in the village community concerned; (g) as an alternative to elected chiefs, each village community could decide democratically to retain a "constitutional chief" (similar to European constitutional monarchies) with largely ceremonial functions separate from an elected village executive responsible for day-to-day management of village affairs; and (h) villages without a formal chieftaincy institution but having an informal leadership structure in place should build their village self-government on such a structure. The objective here would be to re-create and restore to the village environment its erstwhile cultural effervescence, social discipline, and moral code of conduct needed for effective development actions. Some key areas where village self-governments could be most effective include: managing village agricultural cooperatives to facilitate bulk acquisition of farm inputs or group produce marketing schemes; delivery of digital services such as through a village telecentre; village library or documentation centre; health centre and healthcare services; sanitary services such as through a village sanitary inspector; micro energy and water supply systems; adult literacy programmes; formulation and execution of community micro-projects by the villagers themselves; disaster early-warning systems such as alerts on crop and animal epidemics; operating a village bank; and many other initiatives which place development responsibility directly on community shoulders and also serve as ready-made and tested service delivery mechanisms at the grassroots. Village self-governments could also build inter-village syndicates or associations which could extend from local to regional and even

national levels, acting as village advocacy tools at various levels of governmental action. This agenda is a far cry from what typical rural development programmes have to offer.

Conclusion: The foregoing is intended as a recipe for development actions bubbling from ground zero upwards and outwards. The democratic process should be integral to this strategy because by understanding the practical implications of discharging accountability and trust to the village electorate, elected village officers would be conscious of their village-level training for higher responsibilities in local, regional and national governments. In addition to shadowing the local and even national government establishment, village self-governments should also be encouraged to have their community motivation symbols, such as anthems and flags that would further stimulate their sense of participation in nation building. By understanding the meanings behind those symbols at village level, they would also understand their meanings at national level. By enjoying the benefits of genuine democratic participation in the villages, they would become all the wiser in wresting accountability from local and national governments in the performance of their duties.

6. Decentralization Strategy

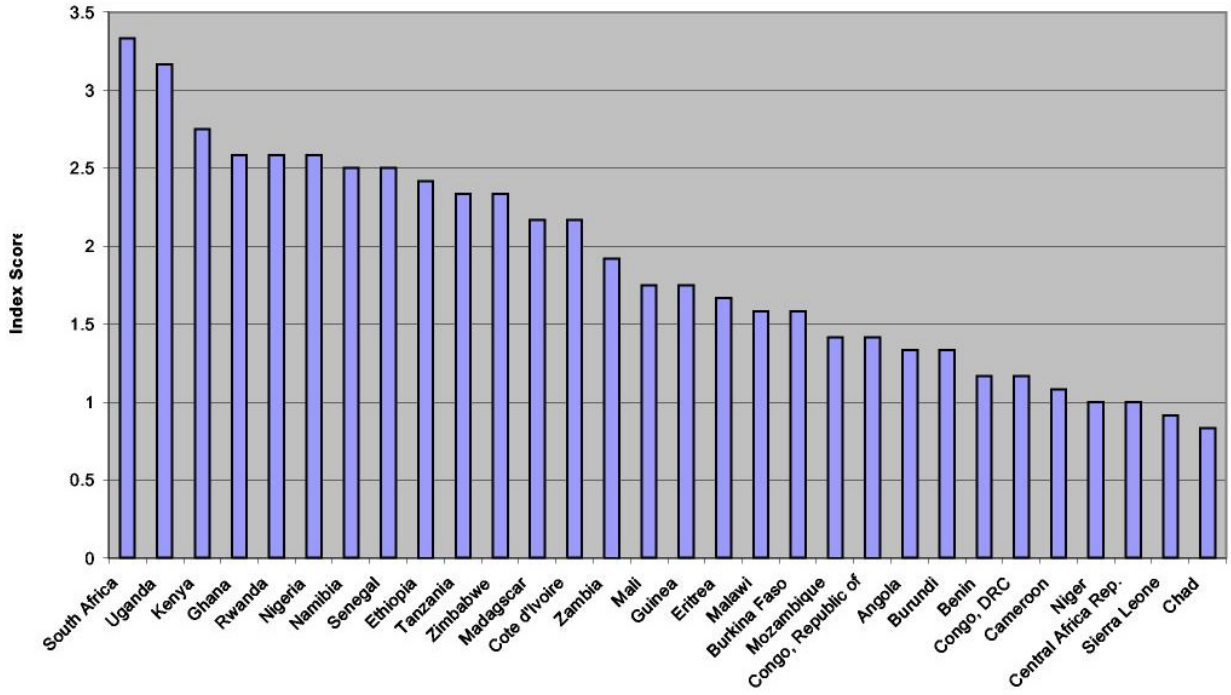
Complex concept: To the extent that it involves transfer of political, administrative and fiscal authority as well as commensurate resources from the centre to the local level of government, decentralization bears directly on the subject of rural development, the rural sector being peripheral to the centre and seat of government. In this sense we had opened the subject of decentralization with our previous article entitled "Modernization and strengthening of village self-governments" published in Cameroon Business Today in its edition of 23 May 2018. However, decentralization of government services extends beyond the ideal of empowering village communities to assume a degree of responsibility for their own welfare through the operation of village self-governing institutions serving as the most proximate mechanisms for the delivery vital social services in the rural sector. The interventions of all other layers of government - at national, sub-national and local levels - are indispensable for village self-governments to be effective and successful in engineering development actions from below, at the rural grassroots. As such, the subject of decentralization inevitably touches on the form and

structure of the nation state itself. And that is what makes decentralization a complex concept, with deep underpinnings of political philosophy and culture as well as religious history. History books tend to suggest for example that in cases where rationalist, normative philosophies of state organization predominate, centralized states tend to be the norm, whereas in those cases where empiricism and individualism are dominant, state organization tends to be federal or highly decentralized. The evidence here is provided by North European and mostly protestant countries whose state structures are certainly more decentralized than the state systems of South European and mostly Catholic countries. This pattern is more or less replicated in the Americas, where the United States and Canada in North America have state structures which are more decentralized than those in South America. The evidence in both Europe and America points to the conclusion that the more nations are decentralized, the more their governance effectiveness, political stability and economic prosperity. In pre-colonial Africa, and notwithstanding the existence of empires, kingdoms, and chiefdoms of differing scale**s** and fortunes, the state system was indeed vertically authoritarian, but it was the village-clan self-governments which exercised day-to-day authority. These vital village institutions served, in a horizontal configuration, as the outreach local authorities of empires and kingdoms. That they filled in the past and still fill to this day, albeit incompletely, an indispensable need for peace and security, law and order, and economic and social self-provision at the micro level of African societies, is attested by the fact that they have outlived the traditional empires and kingdoms in most cases. For that reason, the design of decentralization strategies in Africa, particularly those targeting rural development as main objective, would benefit from a heavy dose of African pre-colonial history. The objective should be more than simply tweaking the edges of our inherited colonial state models and administrative systems.

Purposes: The need to decentralize Africa's state structures and centralized provision of services arose in the 1980s during the period of severe economic crises and structural adjustment programmes on the continent. As such the decentralization push was in response to the overall dissatisfaction with the results of centralized economic planning and concentration of enterprises and social services in the state sector. The underlying rationale of international development strategies was also shifting in favour of market-based mechanisms for the distribution of the benefits of economic growth more equitably across all segments of society. Decentralization reforms are thus seen as part of the solution to many of the governance problems experienced by

African countries, including the sorry state of the rural, village sector. Bringing decision-making closer to the people provides greater opportunities for participation, more relevant policies, more rational expenditure decisions, and additionally helps improve local governance. The degree of decentralization of government often exemplifies the extent to which a government promotes democratic and human rights values. Indeed, decentralization enables the entire population (meaning all regions and ethnic groups constituting the national fabric) to participate fully in national governance arrangements and to feel a sense of belonging to a nation. Decentralization is the primary tool empowering the grassroots population to exercise their constitutional right to development, and to contribute ideas, energy and relevance to nation-building from the village level upwards. It also provides the medium for listening to local voices and promoting local traditions psychologically important for the self-esteem of village communities. Effective fiscal decentralization spreads out national income equitably across ethnic groups and the urban-rural divide. By its all-inclusive and opportunity-equalizing merits, decentralization is consistent with the thrust of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. What has been the comparative decentralization score of African countries in the past several years?

Decentralization score: This is provided in a World Bank publication entitled *Decentralization in Africa: Emerging Trends and Progress*, which assessed the degree of decentralization in thirty African countries, including Cameroon, in their political, administrative and fiscal arrangements. Each country's political decentralization was assessed on the basis of (a) the number of elected sub-national tiers; (b) the holding of direct elections for local government; and (c) the turnout and fairness of such elections. Administrative decentralization was measured on the basis of (a) the clarity in the legal demarcation of roles between the central government and local government; (b) which level of government (national or local) had responsibility for service delivery at local level; and (c) where responsibility resided for hiring and firing civil servants working at local level. Fiscal decentralization was measured on the basis of (a) clear and predictable formula for fiscal transfers from the central to the local government; and (b) the proportion of public expenditures controlled by local governments.



South Africa's decentralization model: It is not surprising that South Africa tops the decentralization ranking. Its post-Apartheid 1994 Constitution is considered a democratic model in Africa, including its explicit apportionment of service-delivery responsibilities between the central government, provincial governments, and local governments, all of which is spelled out in the Constitution itself, not in a subsidiary statute. More fundamentally, South Africa's Constitution assumes that all levels of government (central, provincial, and local) and all officials at whatever level equally and evenly share patriotic responsibility for the welfare, good governance and economic progress of the country. From this pivotal democratic principle flows the formula of equitable sharing of the country's resources between the three tiers of government.

Thus, Article XXVI of the Constitution states that *each level of government shall have a constitutional right to an equitable share of revenue collected nationally so as to ensure that provinces and local governments are able to provide basic services and execute the functions allocated to them.* Article XXVII stipulates that *a Financial and Fiscal Commission, in which each province shall be represented, shall recommend equitable allocations to the provincial and local governments from revenue collected nationally, after taking into account the national interest, economic disparities between the provinces as well as the population and development*

needs, administrative responsibilities and other legitimate interests of each province. Those who know South Africa pretty well will confirm the extent to which this genuinely democratic system of governance embedded in its Constitution since 1994 has positively impacted on the country's development, particularly at local level, in terms of basic public goods and services such as road infrastructure, utilities, housing, or agriculture-support institutions and services designed to mitigate the wide disparities in income and development opportunities inherited from the Apartheid era.

If the same public goods and services are not yet accessible to many African rural communities, it is mostly because the constitutional arrangements and public administration tend to be skewed disproportionately towards the summit of the State in terms of political power, operational authority, and distribution of national income. In its practical manifestations and effects, such a system of government is geared more towards political and administrative control of citizens than towards promoting their social and economic welfare, and more towards serving the state as a political construct than serving the population's rights to development services. Not surprisingly, rural development projects (like most other projects) have tended to be administered directly from state capitals and implemented on behalf of the village communities. In this process no less than four different levels of administrative and financial intermediation might be involved in a typical project implementation scenario in the rural sector. Although this scenario may vary depending on the type and scope of the project in question, in virtually all cases the village or beneficiary communities directly concerned tend to be locked out of the project's needs assessment, design, implementation and accountability processes. The analogy is not farfetched of piped water intended for the village and managed from an African state capital, with the pipe leaking along the way until no drop of water reaches the village of destination.

7. Rural Infrastructure Assets

Infrastructure and development: The stock of physical infrastructure assets (roads; railways; airports and seaports; telecommunication networks; energy, water-supply and sanitation systems; etc), otherwise known as a country's physical capital, is certainly as vital and indispensable to a country's development as arteries and veins are to a human being. By this analogy, there can be no economic and social development to talk of without these physical assets. Moreover, the pace of economic growth and the nation-wide distribution of its benefits, in all sectors and population segments across urban and rural sectors, inevitably correlate with the scope, density, and efficiency of the national infrastructure available. If we recall that the fundamental *raison d'être* of sovereign states – such as those in the process of construction on the African continent – is to promote and achieve the comprehensive welfare of all citizens, in urban and rural sectors alike, the overriding importance of national infrastructure stock to nation building becomes even more self-evident. Accordingly, the policy and budgetary priorities as well as the urgency African governments assign to establishing, expanding, and maintaining that underlying capital to drive economic growth for the benefit of the urban and rural populations can and should be considered a litmus test of their visionary and leadership capabilities and nationalist credentials. In our specific context of rural development, the infrastructure factor additionally intertwines with the political, administrative and fiscal decentralization of African countries, previously discussed in this paper's edition of 13 June 2018. For example, a decentralization strategy on statute books would have only limited economic and social impact on the livelihoods of village populations without enabling infrastructure endowments such as, above all, a country-wide road network which is useable year-round and extends widely and deeply into the village landscape. Such a coherent national connectivity system can be multi-systemic in its development dividends. By facilitating a wide range of economic and social activities in the primary rural sector (e.g. domestic and foreign investments in agriculture, minerals and forestry industries; extension of transport and communication networks to the villages; efficient movement and marketing of goods between urban and village populations; provision of schools, health centres and hospitals, energy and piped water, telecommunication networks, etc), such a system of infrastructure connectivity significantly reduces the cleavage between urban and rural economic sectors and shifts the rural development debate from its boring monotony of "poverty reduction" to the more lifting promise of "wealth creation".

National road networks and road density: Infrastructure, as earlier defined, being a vast field, this article narrows the focus on national road networks, urban and rural, paved and unpaved, and their impacts on rural livelihoods. Data on exclusively rural or inter-village road networks is extremely scarce and unreliable. However, even inter-urban highways cutting through the rural hinterland also benefit adjacent village communities, besides providing opportunities for feeder rural roads. As such, the longer the national road network, the more it is likely to connect cities to villages and to promote economic and social interactions nation-wide, across urban and rural sectors. Table 1 on the total length of national road networks of African countries illustrates comparative performance, in absolute terms, in road infrastructure building to date on the African continent. CEMAC countries are highlighted.

Table 1: TOTAL LENGTH OF NATIONAL ROAD NETWORKS IN KM

In descending order of road network length

S/N	COUNTRY	ROAD NETWORK IN KM
1.	SOUTH AFRICA	747,104
2.	NIGERIA	193,200
3.	KENYA	160,878
4.	CONGO D.R	153,497
5.	EGYPT	137,430
6.	ALGERIA	113,655
7.	ETHIOPIA	110,414
8.	GHANA	109,515
9.	LIBYA	100,024
10.	ZIMBABWE	97,267
11.	TANZANIA	86,472
12	COTE D'IVOIRE	81,996
13.	MOROCCO	58,395
14.	ANGOLA	51,429
15.	CAMEROON	51,350
16.	RWANDA	4,700
17.	SUDAN	12,000
18.	BURUNDI	12,322
19.	GUINEA	44,348
20.	NAMIBIA	44,138
21.	ZAMBIA	40,454
22.	CHAD	40,000
23.	MADAGASCAR	37,476
24.	MOZANBIQUE	30,331
25.	MALI	22,474
26.	SOMALIA	22,100
27.	CAR	20,278
28.	UGENDA	20,000

S/N	COUNTRY	ROAD NETWORK IN KM
29.	TUNISIA	194,418
30.	NIGER	18,942
31.	BOTSWANA	17,916
32.	CONGO REPUBLIC	17,000
33.	BENIN	16,000
34.	MALAWI	15,450
35.	BURKINA FASO	15,272
36.	SENEGAL	15,000
37.	BURUNDI	12,322
38.	SOUTH SUDAN	11,900
39.	TOGO	11,652
40.	SIERRA LEONE	11,300
41.	MAURITANIA	10,628
42,	LIBERIA	10,600
43.	GABON	9,170
44.	LESOTHO	5,940
45.	RWANDA	4700
46.	ERITREA	4,010
47.	THE GAMBIA	3,700
48.	SWAZILAND	3,594
49.	GUINEA BISSAU	3,455
50.	DJIBOUTI	3,065
51.	EQUATORIAL GUINEA	2,880
52.	CAPE VERDE	1,350
53.	MAURITIUS	2,350
54.	COMOROS	800
55.	SEYCHELLES	526

The data, sourced from the World Fact Book, World Bank statistics and the International Road Federation, is based on the latest figures available for the countries concerned. As can be seen in the table, the "ten best performers" in the building of national road networks to underpin economic growth and modernize rural communities include four countries in Southern and East Africa (South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe), three countries in North Africa (Egypt, Algeria, and Libya); two countries in West Africa (Nigeria and Ghana) and one country in Central Africa (Congo Democratic Republic). South Africa particularly stands out in this comparison because its total road network of 747,104 km in 2016 is so impressive by African standards that it is larger for example than that of Germany (645,000 km), which is not shown in the table, and almost twice that of the United Kingdom (394,428 km), discounting the crucial factor of land area. South Africa equally tops the list of best performers when road infrastructure endowment is rated and compared by **road density,** which is the ratio of the length of a country's total road network to its land or surface area, the network including all roads in the country: motorways, highways, main or national roads, secondary or regional roads, other urban and rural roads, paved and unpaved roads. The road density of African countries is shown in table 2 in descending order of the land area of each country. The top performers with a ratio of more than 20 are South Africa, Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Zambia, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. An important caveat here is the very uneven spread of the population in some countries, especially the Sahel and North African countries where the Sahara desert consumes vast chunks of territory hardly fit for human settlement and therefore for road network extension.

Table 2: LAND AREA AND ROAD DENSITY OF SELECTED COUNTRIES

In descending order of land area

S/N	COUNTRY	LAND AREA Km2	ROAD DENSITY	S/N	COUNTRY	LAND AREA Km2	ROAD DENSITY
1.	ALGERIA	2,381,741	4.8	21.	MADAGASCAR	587,041	8.6
				22.			
3.	SUDAN	1,861,484	0.5	23.	KENYA	580,367	27.7
4.	LIBYA	1,759,540	4.7	24.	CAMEROON	475,442	11
5.	CHAD	1,284,000	3.2	25.	MOROCCO	446,55	13
6.	NIGER	1,267,000	1.5	26.	ZIMBABWE	390,757	25.4
7.	ANGOLA	1,246,700	4.1	27.	CONGO REP.	342,000	5
8.	MALI	1,240,192	1	28.	COTE D'IVOIRE	322,460	25
9.	SOUTH AFRICA	1,221,037	30	29.	BURKINA FASO	274	5.6
10.	ETHOPIA	1,104,300	4	30.	GABON	267,668	3.56
11.	MAURITANIA	1,030,000	1.1	31.	GUINEA	245,857	17.6
12.	EGYPT	1,001,449	9.3	32.	GHANA	238,534	26

13.	TANZANIA	945,203	9
14.	NIGERIA	923,768	21
15.	NAMIBIA	825,418	5.5
16.	MOZAMBIQUE	801,59	3.8
17.	ZAMBIA	752,614	25
18.	SOUTH SUDAN	644,329	N/A
19.	SOMALIA	637,657	3.5
20.	CAR	622,984	3.3

33.	UGANDA	236,040	29
34.	SENEGAL	196,723	8
35.	TUNISIA	163,61	11.9
	AFRICA AVERAGE		**6**
	COMPARISONS		
	EUROPEAN AVERAGE		170
	LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN		13.2
	ASIA AND PACIFIC		43.8

The benefits of physical infrastructure to a country's development have been highlighted in several reports of the World Bank. Its 1994 report devoted exclusively to this subject observed that the adequacy of infrastructure helps determine one country's success and another's failure in diversifying production, expanding trade, coping with population growth, reducing poverty, and improving environmental conditions. Good infrastructure raises productivity and lowers production costs, but has to expand fast enough to accommodate growth momentum. Infrastructure capacity grows step by step with economic output; a 1 per cent increase in the stock of infrastructure can generate a 1 per cent increase in gross domestic product (GDP). The report further found that the type of infrastructure available can determine the impact of growth

on poverty, since most of the poor are in rural areas, and the growth in farm productivity and non-farm rural employment are closely linked with infrastructure provision. Citing China's example, the report noted that an important ingredient in the country's success with rural enterprise has been a minimum stock of transport, telecommunications, and power at the village level, resulting in rural enterprises employing more than 100 million people or 18 per cent of the labour force and producing more than a third of national output.

8. Science and Technology Applications

Science and technology for development: Created and directed as part and parcel of enlightened and effective governance, national scientific and technological capacities generally determine the extent to which countries can transform their natural resources into industrial and economic assets and modernize their rural landscapes. Additionally, science and technology (S&T) provides the indispensable tools for harnessing rural sector resources, such as arable land, mineral deposits, or forest ecosystem services, to drive economic growth, build the foundation for wealth creation, and deliver social services nation-wide, especially for the village population. Although some countries (e.g. Algeria, Egypt, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, and South Africa) are making uneven progress in that respect, Africa on the whole is still far from a breakthrough in successfully converting its abundant natural resources (potential wealth) into real and tangible wealth translating into rising GDP growth figures, income per capita, industrialization rate or declining poverty measures. But why is that not happening? The reason for this "paradox of impoverishing natural resource abundance" is that Africa's overall development challenges can easily be equated to capacity deficits in science and technology development and organizational applications. These deficits are reflected in the continent's limited indigenous generation of S&T capabilities or appropriation and adaptation of imported technologies to accelerate the transformation of its natural resources concentrated in the rural sector. Yet the instrumental role of S&T in the development of nations is universally acknowledged and can hardly be over-emphasized since it is S&T capabilities that propelled all the advanced industrialized countries into their present orbit. That S &T capacities determine wealth creation is evident also in the huge income disparities between the developing and advanced economies of the globe. These disparities simply reflect a correspondingly wide divide, in S&T instrumentation, between the two groups of countries. Ranking countries by GDP performance, industrial growth rate, income

per capita or human development index is basically the same as ranking their S&T capabilities to find solutions to development problems, or to produce and trade goods and services efficiently on the global stage. For example, Africa's current world share of S&T output (R&D) of barely 1 per cent correlates with its 1 per cent share of world industrial output and of world merchandise trade, a statistic that has remained worrisomely constant over several decades. Countries cannot sell what they do not produce. Could the problem be lack of awareness of the role of S&T in the building of nations and prosperity? If so, it would be worthwhile to rewind the present discussion to S&T primary basics.

S&T basics: Science is just another name for knowledge (derived from its Latin root "scientia") comprising engineering and social sciences as well as the humanities. Scientific research denotes the ability to find solutions to problems of all kinds – natural, biological, social or cultural – using theoretical and experimental as well as intuitive and analytic processes. Research and Development (R&D) means a scientific advance or innovation achieved in a particular area of work, or simply the development of a new product or process. R&D thus combines the research (basic and applied) process and its result, such as an invention, pre-industrial model, prototype, or new way of doing things. According to UNESCO, R&D is any creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications. Technology is defined as the application of knowledge and more generally as the skills, experience and devices used by people to improve their lives and surroundings. As can be inferred from the foregoing definitions, S&T permeates and influences all development sectors and factors, so much so that social and economic development is basically synonymous with S&T capacity building. Creating and deploying S&T capacities require more than simply establishing a Ministry of Science and Technology. A national S&T system is fundamental.

National S&T system: There must be a clear political vision and strong political will to build a results-based national S&T system. This should include at a minimum: the executive and legislative branches of government; the civil service; educational and research institutions cross-pollinating with the productive sectors, especially the end-users in the agricultural, industrial and service sectors all inclusive of foreign investments; professional associations; the media and civil society. A national S&T capacity thus encompasses the plural contributions of all the above stakeholders interacting and vibrating towards well defined and dated strategic goals, examples

being: a green revolution or single crop "miracle" such as Côte d'Ivoire's world dominance in cocoa production; a nation-wide and all-season rural road network; doubling per capita income or GDP growth rate; or attaining the key United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This is roughly the S&T capacity development trajectory followed by some emerging countries such as China, South Korea, or India. However, some observations would be in order. Firstly, it is not enough to train numerous high-level scientists and engineers for a country to acquire S&T capacity. A critical mass of intermediate professional skills or skilled workforce of technicians is equally important because it is an attractive asset for foreign direct investments. Secondly, the development of human S&T resources should include solid grounding in entrepreneurship so that S&T graduates can create corporate bodies such as companies and professional associations dedicated to the transformation of Africa's natural resources. Having many engineers is a good starting point but it is better still to have many small and medium-size engineering companies and enterprises operating within interlocking value chains and supply networks at national and international levels. Thirdly, the national S&T system should aim to redress the double jeopardy currently suffered by African countries in the global trading system, namely (a) by exporting predominantly unprocessed and low-priced commodities to other countries, Africa exports to destination countries the skilled jobs it needs at home, and (b) Africa uses its limited foreign reserves to import high-priced finished goods manufactured from its exported commodities. Finally, S&T capacity building should aim at first-grade quality in terms of facilities, equipment, working conditions, and motivating remuneration. It should also start from primary and secondary schools in order to promote scientific/digital literacy or "scientific minds" and demystify the seeming intimidating complexity of the subject, especially in our villages.

S&T applications to rural development: If, as observed above, S&T capacities are at present limited at national level in much of the continent, they are even more so in the rural context where they are most needed to transform and harness primary sector resources in order to feed the industrial and tertiary economic sectors in the cities. The prime areas of interest where the full breadth of S&T can be applied to rural development include researching, testing and applying innovative and cost-effective solutions to: building all-season rural road networks; village housing innovations using local materials; renewable and low-carbon energy systems to replace wood fuel now widely used in the villages; water supply and sanitation systems; community value structures of social and economic inclusion and solidarity; converting village

traditional knowledge systems and practices into modern economic assets (as argued in our previous articles in this series); and lastly, applying S&T innovations to considerably ramp up the productivity of our rural agriculture by breeding and disseminating appropriate seeds certified for high yield, nutritional value, market appeal, and climate resilience. Related applications include local production of environmentally-friendly substitutes for imported synthetic farm inputs, and designing/manufacturing farm tools most appropriate to the needs and possibilities of Africa's village smallholders who neither need nor can afford 100 horse-power tractors or complex irrigation systems.

From hoes to drones? One area of S&T that deserves emphasis in relation to agriculture and rural development in general is Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), often referred to as E-Agriculture and increasingly as Agri-Technologies. Can Africa's village smallholder participate productively in this new digital age by leapfrogging from the use of a hoe to the use of a drone to plant seeds and perform other farm tasks? Indeed, digital applications to agriculture offer the tantalizing promise of coupling two economic sectors of vital importance to Africa's development, namely **agriculture**, which is the oldest economic profession since Neolithic times, and the **digital economy**, which is the newest technological leap in the advancement of nations. The importance of these two sectors to the economic prosperity of Cameroon for example was underlined by President Paul Biya in his message to the Cameroonian youth on Youth Day 2016, as follows: *"The development of our agricultural sector will be accorded a prime place. In this regard, I urge you to truly revolutionize your mindset. The soil has never betrayed anyone. Do not be afraid to take the plunge and become the agricultural entrepreneurs that Cameroon needs. It is a noble and rewarding trade in the so-called real economy. In addition, there is another domain, the so-called "Android" generation which I know you hold most dear, namely the development of the digital economy. To each generation, its historic challenges for the nation's future! I can say that one of the major challenges for our youths is to manage to keep abreast of the astounding phenomenon of the digital economy".*

The mutually reinforcing complementarities between the two sectors in question are obvious since village farmers and farmer organizations need digital services to modernize their profession and communities in many ways: reliable mobile communication with the outside world at affordable costs; digital libraries and Internet/distance learning opportunities; video-conferences

(as less costly alternative to physical meetings) at different levels from village, regional, national to global level; basic electronic commerce solutions; professional and social networking; electronic money transfer services; weather forecasts; produce price information; epidemic alerts; entertainment services especially music, TV and movies; etc all of which can make the village a comfortable home and reduce the itch for city life. For now, however, these basic digital benefits, which are the badge of modernity, are mostly limited to the urban sector. The village farmer also wants to be part of the "Android revolution"

9. Towards Smallholder Commercial Agriculture[2]

The problem: Commercial agriculture simply means a farming system primarily oriented towards the market as opposed to a subsistence-dominated production system practiced in our villages since time immemorial. As a general observation, smallholder commercial agriculture is dominated by seasonal cash crops such as cocoa and coffee which are produced entirely for the domestic or export markets. By contrast, it can be estimated that only about 30 per cent of food crops produced in the villages deliberately targets the market, and that depends largely on the degree of village-market connectivity, especially the all-season quality of village-to-market roads. Whereas not all farmers and villages produce the type of cash crops mentioned above, practically all farmers and villages do produce food crops – essentially for subsistence first and foremost. As such, farmer and village income levels and living standards could rise dramatically if it were possible to reverse the present ratio of smallholder commercial to subsistence food production year-round, whereby at least 70 per cent of village food production is specifically developed each year for the market. But because commercial agriculture can be highly demanding in terms of knowledge, technology and capital, supportive multi-systemic public policies are required to enable the smallholder to veer successfully towards commercial agriculture. In this respect, however, the big problem has been that agricultural development policies in support of the village smallholder have often misfired for much too long, at least until recently. Agricultural and rural development projects have risen and fallen on their market

[2] This article like most of the previous ones is adapted from the author's 2004 publication entitled: ***Agricultural Expansion for Poverty Eradication in Africa – Rethinking Strategy from a Village Perspective: Case study of Cameroon***, available at www.chede.org/resources.

dimension. With few exceptions, more emphasis has been placed on the upstream stages of production and productivity than on the downstream operations of processing and marketing where significant value is usually created within a commodity value chain. For example, our review of some past projects financed in Cameroon by the World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB) between 1990 and 2010 revealed that the marketing function had not been adequately articulated in project design strategies to an extent that raised the importance of produce marketing to the same level as the production function. PNVRA (Projet National de Vulgarisation et de Recherche Agricoles), a major multi-donor agricultural development initiative in Cameroon covering almost two decades, came pretty close to target by including a component on "*support to farmer groups and market linkages development"* as one of the project's nine management units at regional level. However, *market linkages development* disappeared at lower, more concrete layers of producer support. The omission of emphasis on marketing (as on food processing) was also reflected in the fact that the Cameroon Ministry of Trade (known at the time of the project as Ministry of Industrial and Trade Development (MINDIC) was not represented on the project's Steering Committee. The same critique applied to AfDB-financed Integrated Rural Development Project (IRDP/SOWEDA) for the South West Region, implemented in the 1990s, which lacked a clearly visible and budgeted marketing component. Similarly, the successor project (Rumpi Area Participatory Development Project), had a Project Implementation Team (PIT), which included neither a food technologist nor a marketing expert. Yet all the projects shared the objective of raising farmer incomes and livelihoods by increasing rural agricultural output beyond subsistence requirements. Such lack of awareness of the importance of marketing was all the more surprising since successful marketing stimulates higher levels of production and not vice-versa. What would be the point of doubling output in the villages without the prospect of profitably selling the doubled output or without contracts with marketing enterprises and food merchants having the necessary capital, commercial acumen, logistics, market information and handling expertise? To the credit of the two banks, their more recently financed projects such as PIDMA and PD-CVA build explicit linkages with the market and food industry by promoting value-chain development strategies.

Value-chain strategy: By its simplest definition, a commodity value chain is a series of activities which add value to a commodity at every stage of its life cycle, from research to production to processing, marketing, consumption, and disposal. A village smallholder-focused

agricultural value chain *ipso facto* implies that the smallholders in question are capable of undertaking commercial agriculture and that the operating environment motivates them in that direction. To be an effective participant in an agricultural value chain, especially for a farmer who represents the source or mother of the value chain in question, requires some basic attributes, such as an appropriate level of education, technical knowhow and track record of practical on-farm experience. For example, a commercial farmer must first secure one or more commercial partners with signed delivery contracts specifying quantity and quality to be delivered at agreed dates and place, delivery mode, payment modalities, etc. He or she may need to develop a business plan. Based on the sales contract, the farmer must then proceed to plan and budget annual production for the crop to be delivered; he/she probably must then seek to obtain a bank loan using the prospective buyer's Letter of Intent as possible security; recruit labour and acquire other production assets; prepare the land for production; select, purchase and sow seeds; then manage the farm by ensuring timely weeding; protect the crop by applying necessary inputs up to the harvest period; then process and warehouse the production as may be applicable. Each of these activities successively adds value to the crop production process. This, however, is a rough summary of the ideal actions of a village smallholder commercial farmer participating in a well structured agricultural value chain. The current reality of most of Africa's village food farming systems is almost the opposite picture of the ideal model described above, with some major exceptions, such as the cocoa production industry in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, vineyards in South Africa, or horticultural production in Kenya, Egypt, Ethiopia, or Morocco.

Agricultural development locomotive:

The centrality of marketing to production: All our strategy components examined so far (from decentralization to fertilizer imports and distribution) entail costs. While marketing also carries costs, it is the only function or strategy component that produces revenues to cover all the costs associated with the other components, and yield a surplus that justifies and drives more production. However, marketing not only generates profits; it can also incur losses if not professionally organized and staffed and depending more importantly on the quality of the other pillars of our strategy. Such losses would impact negatively on rural production and the nation's export earnings, depriving it of the means to continue strengthening its factor endowment. Thus sustained success on the commercial front fuels ever more output and earnings and sustained national capacity building, while failure depresses production, farmers' incomes and checks

overall development momentum. That underlines the organic linkage between the production and marketing functions. That linkage becomes even more vital to production when marketing is understood as a feedback medium to production, enabling the farmers to continually improve the quality of their product offerings so as to conform to consumer preferences and standards, as may be dictated by local, regional or international markets. Thus by regularly providing the farmers with specifications on product quality and presentation necessary to beat competition and generate good earnings, marketing institutions serve as vectors of technology transfer and innovation to the production level, and thereby help raise production standards. Moreover, only a specialized marketing business, and not the rural farmer, possesses the market intelligence for identifying in which parts of the country or region or foreign market a particular product can generate a windfall profit, or which food manufacturers in the country, region or abroad need which products, in what quantities and frequency.

Furthermore, marketing is the nervous point of intersection (the node) of all the other components examined so far in our strategy. That is to say the quality and efficiency of each of the elements in question are felt directly or indirectly on the marketing front. For example, if administrative and other producer-support services are not within farmers' proximity of access because of limited decentralization to the local level, the quality and efficiency of production are affected because of delayed inputs, which in turn would affect product quality, its timely distribution to the market, and its price. Poor infrastructure hampers produce evacuation and marketing efficiency while increasing costs, reducing cost-competitiveness, margins and earnings for producers and marketers. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa has noted that shipping costs from Africa are 30 per cent to 70 per cent higher for some products than from Asia to Europe because of the region's infrastructure challenges. No marketing genius would make a profit in such circumstances. We have also already observed how limited S&T applications to agriculture in Africa negatively impact on quality, yields and costs, making African agricultural commodities less competitive (more difficult to sell) on the global market. Therefore, it is at marketing level that is felt the cumulative impact, positive or negative, of all the other elements.

Using our analogy of an agricultural locomotive, marketing would be its headlights, drive-wheel and gearbox combined. The headlights can spot opportunities and risks at a distance; the drive-wheel guides direction to profitable market segments and product sectors, avoiding risks

and targeting opportunities, and the gearbox serves to signal a faster or slower pace of production as may be dictated by market conditions. Accordingly, the village smallholder will raise his/her incomes and rise out of poverty only on condition that all the elements of our strategy are in place and operating efficiently, with professional commercial institutions interfacing between the farmers on the one hand and local, regional and export markets, on the other. In short, then, agricultural marketing is epicentral to smallholder agricultural development and expansion. One of the many reasons why Cameroon's agricultural development has either stalled or not performed to the amplitude of its potential has been the absence of an integrated approach to agricultural development, as demonstrated herein, and that has been worsened, especially in the South West Region, by the lack of expert marketing institutions supporting rural farmers.

10. Case Study of Cameroon

Our nine preceding articles in this series covering the African continent also indirectly addressed, by association, Cameroon's rural development challenges. This last piece of the series tackles some of those challenges as perceived in Cameroon's development context from the vantage point of Cameroonian village communities. In the context of this article, the "village" refers to the rural population in general and to village agro-pastoral and other livelihood activities.

State-village development linkages: Cameroon's rural development challenges are best understood through the analytic lens of State-village development linkages in virtually all sectors. Since the colonial era and up to the present, those linkages have been weak, amorphous and ambivalent. This is due to several reasons. Firstly, Cameroon has never really had a "village policy", or more precisely a long-term strategy for the modernization of its villages, in contrast to Government's policies and projects promoting urban planning and development. It is as if the State lacked a clue about what to do with its villages. The lack of State policy and administrative identity for the villages extends also to almost everything within the village environment. It is for instance not clear where the State places the village smallholder - in the formal or informal economic sector? Is he recognized as an investor? If so is he granted the same privileges as enjoyed by other local and foreign investors? Further, village customary laws, including land laws, seem to be tolerated but not really recognized by the State beyond the village setting. With respect to language policy, the country is currently witness to a fratricidal conflict over foreign

languages which could have been long replaced, like in Ethiopia, Somalia or Tanzania, by its more melodious native languages fluently spoken in the villages. This example, which should break the heart of any Cameroonian nationalist or PanAfricanist, touches on the cultural policy dimension of rural development discussed in part 3 of this series. It also underscores the point made time and again in this series, namely that rural development in Africa is equivalent to nation building. Secondly, although the Constitution recognizes traditional chiefs, their village territorial jurisdictions - at least for the over 10'000 village-based 3rd degree chiefs - are not administratively defined in the same way as for Governors, Senior Divisional Officers, and Divisional Officers in presidential decrees Nos. 2008/377 and 2008/377, both dated 12/11/2008, relating to the administrative organization of the country. Recognizing traditional chiefs is obviously not equivalent to recognition of village communities. Traditional chiefs in Douala and Yaounde for example had lost their villages long ago to urbanization expansion. In the rural setting a good many village chiefs who have chosen to reside mostly in cities are no longer perceived by their village communities to be credible leaders. Yet the level of success to be expected in human capacity building programmes in Cameroon's rural heartland will depend to a very large extent on village leadership aptitudes, which is why a root and branch reform of village traditional governance is indeed crucial, as noted further below. Thirdly, practically all the functions previously performed by the traditional chiefs seem to have been devolved to Divisional Officers, as borne out in the above-mentioned executive directives, notwithstanding the fact that traditional chiefs are officially considered to be Government's "administrative auxiliaries". But this designation is all but moot and vacuous in light of the Presidential Decrees in question, which muzzle the role of village communities as natural, self-contained self-governing units. By ancestral tradition, the chiefs are supposed to serve only their communities and be accountable to them. Fourthly, there is the more problematic ambiguity, if not contradiction, of having village hereditary monarchies operating as administrative adjuncts within a national constitutional democracy. Furthermore, Cameroon's decentralization framework consists only of regional and local councils and therefore does not extend to the village periphery, which presumably falls within the jurisdictional purview of local councils. In Cameroon's current rural setting, however, the vast majority of the local councils are still so short of technical and managerial capacities that they cannot properly perform the local government functions assigned to them under decentralization laws, and much less mount the

much needed and overdue robust village modernization programmes. However, the increasing village-focused interventions of PNDP (Programme National de Développement Participatif), among other initiatives, appear like scattered bright spots on an otherwise sullen rural development horizon. Lastly, State-village relationships do not seem to have changed significantly since colonial times when the anti-village complex took hold. That would mean we are still trapped by pre-independence urban-oriented and command-and-control administrative legacies, which suited a particular era but are no longer appropriate to wrestle with the challenges of economic transformation, modernization and nation building, as also emphasized by René Dumont in his 1962 prophetic bestseller: "*l'Afrique noire est mal partie".* The foregoing observations are sufficiently indicative of the vigorous institutional reforms required to clarify and elevate the status of Cameroonian villages within the overall decentralization framework; and also re-align village self-governments (traditional or otherwise) with national, regional, and local government democratic institutions and processes, for the benefit of much needed coherence and transparency in State-village development relationships. That could help galvanize rural development throughout the country. As argued in part 5 of this series, village communities being extended families or clans, if and when their kinship honour is pricked, such as in an inter-village development competition, could bring to the rural development process an emotional and motivational charge not likely to be experienced at more artificial, administrative levels of State organization. Development achievements can also spring from psychological art and craft, and not only from brick-and-mortar projects. Rural-based local governments can be a transformative development force if constantly stirred to action and held accountable by village self-governments which function democratically as active change agents or development molecules, both individually and through inter-village syndicates or associations.

The present state of rural development : The Strategy Document for Growth and Employment (DSCE), which is the current perspective blueprint for Cameroon's development up to the year 2035, succinctly outlines the present state of rural development in Cameroon as follows with respect to rural agriculture: « (i) vieillissement de la population rurale; (ii) difficultés d'accès à la terre; (iii) difficultés d'accès aux intrants (engrais, semences améliorées, etc...); (iv) difficultés d'accès aux techniques agricoles modernes et aux autres innovations de la recherche agronomique; (v) difficultés d'accès au crédit (vi) insuffisance des infrastructures d'appui au développement du secteur rural (pistes, routes, magasins de stockages, abattoirs, chaînes de froid

etc.); (vii) difficultés de commercialisation de la production, souvent du fait d'une chaîne de commercialisation trop longue qui accapare l'essentiel de la valeur ajoutée agricole et freine le réinvestissement ». Against this backdrop, the DSCE proposed a raft of remedial policy measures designed to turn around this stark rural development picture and to tap into the extensive potential of the rural sector in order to meet its economic growth and employment targets up to the year 2035. However, more recent evaluations by the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) suggest that, some sporadic successes notwithstanding, Cameroon's rural development and poverty statistics have hardly improved over the past ten years. Close to 80 per cent of the country's poor population resides in the rural areas and overall poverty rates appear to have worsened, particularly in the northern regions. IFAD summarises its evaluation conclusions as follows: « Le portefeuille du FIDA a souffert d'une conception de projets trop ambitieuse et complexe, d'une capacité de gestion limitée des unités de coordination de projets, d'une expertise technique parfois médiocre des prestataires des services, de coûts d'opération excessifs et d'une gestion financière imprudente. Ces facteurs ont réduit l'efficacité des projets, limitant ainsi l'ampleur et la durabilité de l'impact du FIDA au Cameroun. Les populations rurales les plus pauvres et les plus vulnérables, y compris les femmes, ciblées dans la stratégie de pays et les projets, n'ont pas été efficacement atteintes et l'attention du portefeuille semble s'être progressivement éloignée de ce groupe cible ».

Agricultural cooperative societies: While the DSCE devotes full attention to the rural sector, it conspicuously omits the urgent need to strengthen and retool the country's agricultural cooperative movement, which could serve as the primary instrument for DSCE implementation in the rural sector and for achieving the economic growth and employment rates flagged in the document. The State might consider copying the example of the European Union and other developed countries in terms of their subsidies to farmers by providing substantial and systematic support to the development of well structured and managed farmer cooperative societies at the level of each administrative division and federating at the level of each Region of the country as another avenue, in addition to strengthening village self-governments, for pumping new blood and energy into rural development efforts. By so doing, a direct bridge could be established between the State and the national farming community. In the meantime, however, it is the government bureaucracy that serves as the conveyor belt between the State and the farmers. Its performance of that role is all but debatable.