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COUNTRY PROFILE

Sport policy in Cameroon

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Abstract

With a population of over 20 million, the central African nation of Cameroon has over 200 ethnic groups speaking over 230 languages. Its triple colonial heritage makes it a unique nation, fused with many political, economic and social complexities. This country profile provides an overview of how sport is organised and governed and begins with an overview of the democratic and post-colonial past it has witnessed since independence was gained in 1961. Sport is popular in Cameroon, and its development is largely led by central government. The profile begins with a discussion of the key sport policy developments in recent years and in particular the rise in popularity of football over other sporting codes, and how this intersects positively and negatively with politics. Next, the organisation and structure of sport in Cameroon is outlined, specifically school sport, elite sport and disability sport provision. The profile notes a small yet emergent non-state led sector, which uses sport for development purposes which is driven in the main by international organisations and donors. Finally, the key priorities and associated challenges for Cameroon sport are discussed including the desire to grow the nations sporting infrastructure in order to host international sports competitions.

Key words: Cameroon; Africa; sport policy.

Cameroon's recent political past

Cameroon, often referred to as Africa in Miniature (Amin, 2014), is a country with a triple colonial legacy, having been colonised by Germany, and later by the French and the British after World War II. The modern state of Cameroon was created in 1961 and has been dominated by a single party since democratic elections took place after independence was declared. For the past fifty years, Cameroon has had only two Heads of State, beginning with Ahmadou Ahidjo who ruled from 1960 to 1982. In 1966 under the rule of Ahidjo all political parties unified to form a single party – the

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Cameroon National Union (CNU) and power became centralised and concentrated in the hands of one man, the president of the Republic of Cameroon. Angwafo (2014) suggests that Cameroon enjoyed relative economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s from self-reliant efforts and improvements in agricultural development, before a downturn in the economy in the 1980s. The recession was highly attributed to mismanagement and corruption which led to severe salary cuts, high rates of unemployment, poverty and migration (Angwafo, 2014).

Paul Biya succeeded Ahidjo as President in 1982 and is still in power today, leading the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). Early into his presidency, Biya (1987, p.14) articulated his intention;

‘...to create a society whose economy would serve the needs of its people, in which social justice would be the guiding rule in the distribution of the fruits of development; where all citizens would be afforded the opportunity to contribute fully and effectively to national development’.

However people-centered this statement may appear, Mbaku and Takougang (2004) have suggested that after fifty years of independence; economic prosperity, social justice, political freedom and respect for individual freedom continues to elude most Cameroonians and Africans more widely. Such a situation has seen the democratic process in Cameroon stall (Nyamnjoh, 1996). Further criticism has been noted by Nyamnjoh and Rowlands (1998) who contend that Biya and other Cameroonian elites have privatised state structures and turned them into instruments of plunder for their own benefit rather than serving as agents of change for the wider benefits of post-colonial Cameroon.

The colonial and post-colonial administrative boundaries have been a major source of contestation and tension in post-independence Africa, including Cameroon (Nyamnjoh and Awasom, 2008, Egbo et al., 2010). Although almost all African states were colonised by Europeans, Cameroon's situation stands out as it was colonised by more than one European country, Germany, France and Britain, which Nyamnjoh and Awasom (2008) refer to as a triple colonial heritage. Like many former colonies in Africa, Cameroon has faced a difficult political, cultural and social set of circumstances following independence and reunification. Modern day Cameroon has over 200 ethnic groups that retain ethnic identities and affiliations, which are also fused with elements of French (francophone) and English (anglophone) cultures which have survived the colonial period (Angwafo, 2014). The cultural legacies from the original British and French territories bring with them different languages and levels of economic development, which needed to be merged (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003). In recent years the political agenda in Cameroon according to Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997) has been increasingly dominated by the francophone dominated state which poses a major challenge to create a sense of national unity and integration. In more recent times, Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003) continue to suggest that the francophone-dominated government have continually attempted to deconstruct anglophone identity by encouraging divisions within the

anglophone elite and setting up new ethno-regional identities that appear to transcend the anglophone-francophone divide. The ongoing anglophone-francophone division is also apparent within sport. Onwumechili and Akindes (2014) use the example that francophone Cameroon dominates the country's most popular sport - football.

State-led provision of sport

The provision of sport in Cameroon is largely led by central government. In 1996, Biya signed a law fixing the charter of sports and physical activities in Cameroon. The eleven page sports charter regulates the practice of sports and physical education and does so by defining the role of the key stakeholders in the development of elite and grassroots sports provision. The International Monetary Fund (2010, p.76) developed a poverty reduction strategy paper for Cameroon, which summarises the three main aims of the sports charter, which are:

1. *Consolidation of governance in sports.* This will rest on improvement of the sporting milieu, introduction of good management rules, introduction of an effective policy on the maintenance of existing and future infrastructure, and introduction of various incentives to enable the private sector to bring in durable and multifaceted investments in sports
2. *Supervision of sports associations.* By providing qualitative and quantitative training for supervisors (educators and trainers), strengthening sports research and excellence centres, promoting the organisation of all types of competition, improving social safety nets for sportsmen and professionals, facilitating the functioning of federations
3. *Development of sports infrastructure for elite and collective community sport.* In terms of elite sport, quality and multipurpose stadia will be built nationwide, thereby enabling the organisation of international competitions. Concerning sports in schools and promotion of sports practice by the masses, the government, in conjunction with local and regional authorities will encourage the construction of sports facilities for collective sports

Despite the ambitious statements made in the sports charter, seeking better governance and management of sports associations and the development of more effective elite sport structures, it appears that there is still some way to go until these ambitions becomes a reality. Morikang (2006) suggests that like many other laws in Cameroon, the application of some of the articles in the sports charter is still awaited and confusion exists with regards to the interpretation of certain articles within the charter. In the years after the sports charter was introduced, Cameroon has delivered some ad hoc international successes in sporting competitions, however in the main, insufficient performances from a wide range of sports institutions and organisations had become a concern for the public authorities. According to a report by the Ministry of Sports and Physical Education (2010) concern was raised at many political levels, resulting in a national conference being scheduled on sports

and physical education in 2010. The ultimate goal of the conference was to boost the national sports movement and foster social cohesion through physical and sports activities. According to the Ministry's report (2010), the conference was split into six subsections, which provides an indication of the governmental priorities at this time. The sub themes were; 1) Physical Education, 2) Olympic and Paralympic sports disciplines, 3) Non-Olympic sports disciplines, 4) football, 5) financing and partnership and 6) training. The report suggests that the conference was prioritised by the government and by interested individuals, resulting in 7,000 participants drawn from the divisional, regional or national levels. It would be fair to reflect on the conference themes and accept that they are the priority areas of political sporting interest, particularly football.

The dominance of football

The most popular sport by far is football. According to Nkwi and Vidacs (1997), football *is* politics in Cameroon. Football dominates policy and politics at both recreational level and at the national level and is governed by the Cameroon Football Federation (FECAFOOT). The growth and popularity of football in Cameroon is largely attributed to the success of the national team Les Lions who have qualified seven times for the FIFA World Cup, more than any other African team. The popularity of football extends from spectating to participation, with virtually every village having its own football pitch and large numbers of spectators watching games between rival villages. Yet, despite its popularity at every level, Cameroon faces many problems in terms of lack of infrastructural development as the sporting facilities are below the required standard, a similar problem applicable to other African states (Pannenberg, 2010).

The triumphant emergence of Cameroon in the 1990 World Cup brought Cameroon and Africa into a global limelight which, which provided an opportunity to reunite the country from historic rifts between the francophone and anglophone regions. However, the dominance of football has yielded opportunity for its political exploitation. In 1992, President Paul Biya declared a national holiday as a result of successful performance of the national team which qualified for participation in the 1994 World Cup in the United States. Following Cameroon's emergence as one of the leading African countries in football competitions, sport became a veritable political weapon in the hands of the government and was used to symbolise the country's post-1970s identity (Nkwi, 2010, p.151). Despite football dominating headlines and providing a sense of national unity, there have been regular financial scandals and accusations of corruption within the governing body of the nation's favourite game (Szymanski, 1996); a topic which will be discussed later. On the international arena, the Cameroon government in particular depends on the performance of their teams and clubs in sub-regional, continental and global competitions to gain visibility and prestige among peer states. Through promotion, sponsorship and support, a variety of transnational actors complement the fulfilment of sports policy objectives. Sport in Cameroon has a dual role; at home on the domestic level and on the international stage. Domestically, according to Mokeba (1989), sport serves as a

diversionary element in the country's tightly-controlled political system, whilst internationally, successful sports performance compensates for the country's weak influence in other aspects of continental and global politics.

The organisation of sport in Cameroon

Sport is an important aspect of national policy and is considered a physical and moral imperative within Cameroon. Central government's first formal involvement in sport came with the emergence of the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 1992, which prioritised youth sport for a number of years. As of 2009, Ministry reforms created the Ministry of Sports and Physical Education, which consists of five departments: physical education, school sport, elite sport, participation, growth and monitoring of sports federations and planning. These five departments could be interpreted as the sporting priority areas for government.

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Figure 1. The Organisational Structure of the Ministry of Sports and Physical Education in Cameroon

Source: The Cameroon Ministry of Sports and Physical Education website, 2015.

Elite sport in Cameroon is held in high esteem by central government. The National Olympic Committee (NOC) of Cameroon was formed in 1963 and formally recognised by the IOC in 1994 (National Olympic Committee, 2015). Cameroon became a member of the Commonwealth in 1995 and have competed in every Commonwealth Games since, achieving seven medals in Glasgow, 2014, in judo, weightlifting and wrestling (Commonwealth Games Federation, 2014). Success in these traditional Cameroonian sports has steadily given way to new sports such as football and more recently cycling, a sport in which Cameroon organised the 12th international tour of Cameroon in March 2015. The NOC of Cameroon propagates the need for a commitment to sport which is organised through various Sports Federations, the largest being the Cameroon Football Federation, (FECAFOOT). A score of other federations, including the Cameroon Cricket Federation (FECACRICKET), Cameroon Handball Federation (FECA-HAND) and the Cameroon Boxing Federation (FECABOXE) are a few examples of federations which organise sports competitions and seek to grow sport within their discipline. Funding for sport federations comes into the Ministry of Sports and Physical Education from tax payers, which distributes it to sports federations and the NOC.

School and University Physical Education and Sport

Physical Education is central government funded and a core curriculum subject in Cameroonian schools. Wotany (2012, p.357-358) outlines the six national standards for Physical Education in Cameroonian schools. The standards show a level of determination by government that physical education is seen as a precursor to better living, through active participation. The six national standards are to;

- 1) demonstrate competency in motor skills and movement patterns.
- 2) demonstrate an understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies and tactics as they apply to the learning and performance of physical activities.
- 3) participate regularly in physical activity.
- 4) achieve and maintains a health-enhancing level of fitness.
- 5) exhibit responsible personal and social behaviour that respects self and others.
- 6) value physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression and social interaction.

According to DeLancey et al., (2010) the growth and popularity of Physical Education and Sport can be somewhat attributed to the Office of Schools and University Sports Competition (OSUSC), and more recently the National Federation for College and University Sports (FENASCO), who organise games at local, divisional, provincial and national levels each year. DeLancey et al., (2010) also note that FENESCO organises sports activities for the primary schools at provincial level, for the secondary schools at national level and the University games. Despite the popularity of Physical Education and sport within government the current reality and challenges at grass roots level within Schools and Universities can perhaps be gauged from key recommendations following the 2010 conference on Sports and Physical Education discussed earlier. The conference recommendations span four broad areas of governance, participation, teaching practices and culture (Ministry of Sport and Physical Education, 2010). The 2010 report details that regional institutes of Physical Education must be set up to provide enhanced governance for inter-facility and inter-institute sport in schools and universities.

In relation to Physical Education participation levels an increase from 1 hour to 2 hours of delivery in primary schools was recommended, as was an increase in all university teacher training courses from 2 hours to 4 hours. Recommendations for improved teacher practices included an increased use of ICT, greater consistency on curriculum delivery and greater gender equality and inclusion of pupils with a disability within lessons. Notable cultural differences between francophone and anglophone schools were noted as a recommendation to take more account of Physical Education in anglophone areas. The recommendations offer an insight into the challenges that schools and universities face and the preferred direction of change. It is unclear though, how the implementation of the recommendations will be resourced as no delivery strategy is evident.

Developing countries, including Cameroon are widely under-represented in international sport and especially within disability sport. Lauff (2007) identified a growing gap in developing country participation in disability sport and identified a lack of research designed to identify effective strategies to develop disability sport at the grassroots level in developing countries and overcome the barriers to participation. However, within Cameroon, there has been some appetite to develop disability sport opportunities by central government since the 1990s. Etoug-ebe, a suburb of the capital Yaoundé saw the integration of sporting infrastructures such as a swimming pool, basketball fields, athletics tracks which all became home to disability sports practices in the mid-1990s (Noutcha, 1997). In Cameroon, disability sport is presented not only as a tool of functional rehabilitation, but also as a tool of integration, leisure, social inclusion and reintegration of people with disabilities. Cameroon passed a law in 1996, alongside the sports charter which granted access to sports for all people with disabilities, and was enacted by the creation within the Ministry for Youth and Sports of the adapted sports programme (Gilbert and Schantz, 2008). With regards to international representation, one Cameroonian athlete qualified for the London 2012 Paralympic Games – Conrat Atangana, who competed in power-lifting. Other athletes suffered a setback when they were unable to travel to qualifying events in Tunisia, due to a lack of funds (Handicap Cameroon, 2012).

Non-state led sport in Cameroon

Whilst sport is predominantly led by the Government, a small number of private economic enterprises also contribute towards the promotion of national and international sports. For instance, the Cameroon Brewery Company opened and currently runs a football school in Douala, where talents like Samuel Eto'o were nurtured. Another such institution, the Yong Sports Academy, has a football team that has been promoted to the Premier League (DeLancey et al., 2010). Without doubt, football dominates the headlines, popularity and associated funding, which is to the detriment of the development of other sports. There is a small yet emerging sport-for-development sector in Cameroon, which combines sport with other social messages including health awareness, equality and empowerment. A growing number of international organisations, typically from the Global North deliver sport in Cameroon to satisfy their own agenda, but as a byproduct it offers the potential to contribute to Cameroon's national sporting objectives.

One such organisation is Cameroon Football Development programme (CFDP). Instigated in 2006 by a US University student visiting Kumba in the South West region, consultation with local young people showed a void in recreational activities combining health and social education. This then saw the launch of CFDP in 2010 which combines sport and health awareness education such as HIV/AIDS awareness to young people in the Kumba area (CFDP, 2015). Funded by US donors, CFDP employs a local delivery team who use football as a vehicle to improve the lives of youth in Cameroon in the areas of education, life skills and leadership (CFDP, 2015). Similarly, Cricket

Without Boundaries, a UK cricket development and HIV/AIDS NGO works alongside Cameroon Cricket Federation (FECACRICKET) to deliver HIV/AIDS awareness messages through cricket coaching programmes in primary and secondary schools. Like CFDP, CWB use sport combined with HIV/AIDS awareness in Cameroon, a partnership which has existed since 2012 (CWB, 2015). UK volunteers, often qualified cricket coaches self-fund their two week experience in order to offer knowledge exchange to local beneficiaries who are interested in learning about cricket in combination with health messages. Likewise, Mifalot a sports NGO from the Middle East uses sports as a platform for social change and as an element of their work in a refugee camp in Eastern Cameroon (Street Football World 2014). Coaches use football as an educational tool with the aim to alleviate tension, resolve conflict, encourage and include the refugee population, maintain healthy lifestyles, and strengthen the spirit of the refugees. There is also evidence of non-state led provision by Cameroonians. Fokwang (2009) highlights a sport-for-development programme run by Ntambag Brothers Association, a local organisation developed by locals for locals. According to Fokwang (2009, p.215) this programme showcases a self-managed development process and does so without local government, state or powerful western institution interference. Fokwang's analysis of the value of local initiatives is not meant to signal a rejection of the assistance from external development sponsors but it does highlight the question of whose agenda would prevail were such a partnership to emerge.

The dominance of Global North-funded NGOs and charities raises questions over the local benefit in Cameroon. Edwards and Hulme (2013, p.9) have suggested that NGOs have multiple accountabilities; 'downwards' to their partners, beneficiaries, staff and supporters and 'upwards' to their trustees, donors and host governments. What remains clear is that funding for NGOs inherently comes with conditions and guidelines; typically it is ear-marked for projects and issues of interest to the funder, for example improvement of gender inequalities, HIV/AIDS awareness or poverty eradication (Miraftab, 1997). On one hand Cameroon's emerging sport-for-development sector offers the opportunity for Cameroon to develop international sporting partnerships which inevitably comes alongside injections of funding and or equipment, yet the sport-for-development sector is largely western funded (and governed) and subsequently has a tendency to throw up questions surrounding western hegemony and neo-colonialism. The NGOs referred to earlier deliver sport in a myriad of ways and indirectly it could be argued that they do assist the delivery of public policy objectives as they are raising awareness at the grassroots level of the sport. However, questions remain on the long term impact this will have if NGOs attempt to deliver programmes in a silo without forming equal and effective partnerships with Cameroonian sporting organisations.

Current public policy priorities and issues

In Cameroon, sport participation and events are used by politicians to achieve political objectives. Politicians often expound their views to sport administrators which then generate policy and become

political issues in the country (Pannenberg, 2010). It should be noted that football in particular in Cameroon, is a complex sport through which various powerful political individuals achieve their personal aims. As a result, football transcends scoring goals as it intertwines with politics and government policy. Football offers an opportunity to both unify anglophone and francophone societies in Cameroon through a common interest; however, it also offers a potential trigger to cause conflict among the people. As the scope of sport becomes wider, it is accepted that politics cannot be disengaged from sport. Merely consider the role of sport in fostering global peace through international development programmes, which use sporting events in seeking to promote a friendly environment for the divergent societies of the world. In Cameroon, annual end of the year football competitions are organised for both the junior and senior players with the aim of fostering social relations (Pannenberg, 2010).

At an elite level, issues surrounding a handful of Cameroonian athletes have warranted unwanted political attention in recent years. During the London 2012 Olympic Games seven athletes absconded and more recently during the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games two further athletes absconded (BBC, 2014). Such events are likely to have political repercussions domestically within Cameroon sport and also internationally on its relationship and reputation with event organisers such as the International Olympic Committee and the Commonwealth Games Federation. International sport competitions have the potential to offer success to individual athletes and their home nations, however, the repeated issue of athletes absconding from such competitions must be taken seriously internally by government officials in order for the underlying issues be openly and transparently examined, to ensure that this issue does not escalate in the future.

A key priority for Cameroonian sport policy is the focus on international competitions and infrastructure, particularly football. The Cameroon government uses sport to attain domestic and international political objectives (Moakeba, 1989). Supporters of hosting mega-sporting events claim that these events attract large numbers of wealthy visitors and lead to lasting economic benefits for the host regions. Developing countries according to Matheson and Baade (2004) have become increasingly vocal in demanding a share of the economic benefits of these international games, which is the case of Cameroon who are to host the Africa Cup of Nations in 2019. For Cameroon, its desire to host such a major event draws attention to one of the main obstacles to hosting such a competitions; its lack of an adequate sports infrastructure. Matheson and Baade (2004) suggest that the specialised infrastructure and operating expenses required to host such events can be substantial. In particular, the Amadou Ahidjo Stadium in Yaoundé built in 1972 is now dilapidated and floodlights that have long stopped working (Pan African News Agency, 2002). Apart from Amadou Ahidjo Stadium, there is a second large stadium belonging to the army which, at times, hosts Division 2 championship matches staged by the Cameroonian Football Association (FECAFOOT, 2015). Further sport stadia in Goroua, Yaounde and Douala were built during the political administration of Cameroonian first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo. The government strategy to host the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations is heavily reliant on international partnerships. A recent such

example is a collaboration between FECAFOOT and Ministry of Youth and Sports and with a number of Chinese firms to construct and renovate at least ten stadiums (Pannenberg, 2010), enabling Cameroon to host the 2019 competition.

Despite Cameroon's ambitious infrastructure plans, a wider issue to contend with is that of corruption. Corruption has been a major concern in the administration and implementation of sport policy in Cameroon as well as in Africa more generally. The lack of good governance that is embedded in the African political landscape is reflected in the administration of sport, especially football. Therefore, football's role in providing a fair and open environment for development of sport in the continent remains questionable. Nwel and Richard (1999, p.106-108) discuss recent scandals in the Cameroonian Sport Council and suggest that the Mobile Telecommunication Company (MTN) released a sum of \$600,000 as part of its social responsibility strategy for the renovation of all the national stadiums. A further \$200,000 was allotted to FECAFOOT totaling \$800,000 for the completion of the projects. However, the then sport minister was accused of diverting a sum of \$146,000 for his personal gain (Chiweshe, 2014, p.27). The country's parliament also apportioned a sum of \$24m for the same project. However, the projects could not be realised due to allegations of corruption that pervaded the Cameroonian political system (Oliver, 2010). Similarly, widespread corruption has been reported in various local leagues in Cameroon. In October 1995, a football match was organised between Tonnerre of Yaounde and Aigle Royal of Nkongsamba; the referee that coordinated the match was alleged to have collected 500,000CFA from the official Aigle Royal of Nkongsamba. After the game, the Aigle Royal officials were not satisfied with the results of the match, therefore, requested for the refund of the payment. The event eventually led to the dismissal of referee (Nwel and Richard, 1999). Allegations of corruption have also been the order of the day in the Cameroonian sport council. Most allegations concern bribes and diversion of funds for private use by the sport management, and this led, in previous years to the refusal of the players to participate in many competitions (Stark, 2014), with the inevitable negative effects on sport and youth development in Cameroon.

Conclusion

In this article, we have provided a review of the nexus between sport and politics within the Cameroonian context. Sport remains largely government led and this article has shown how interlocked the issues of sport and politics remain. Today, Cameroon's sport policies focus on developing sporting infrastructure, elite sport provision and on promoting Physical Education and sport within the education sector. Quality infrastructure including new and refurbished stadia and training facilities will undoubtedly assist the elite squads of sports federations, which in turn may create an environment to nurture international success. Likewise, such infrastructure, funded in part by international donors, notably China, will provide a gateway for Cameroon to host international sports competitions, such as the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations, where economic rewards are expected

to follow. A problematic issue to consider for researchers is how sport (and in particular football) continues to be exploited as a political tool. Despite the notable benefits of sport to society, sport in Cameroon is intertwined in particular with opportunities for corruption. To curb corrupt practices, it is necessary to establish robust financial monitoring to ensure accountability and transparency within the context of sport in Cameroon. Regardless of high level infrastructural decline in Cameroon and opportunities for corruption, Physical Education and school sport are prominent within curricula at primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. The government continues to evidence clear determination to foster active lifestyles amongst young people through active participation. Likewise, the development of youth sport is acknowledged as a priority by central government, which can be realised through effective cross-Ministry collaborations between the Ministry of Youth Affairs and the Ministry of Sport and Physical Education. However, whilst this focus on Physical Education and Youth sport is honorable, there is no notable injection of resources to deliver recent key government recommendations to increase the opportunity for Physical Education.

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