



# Is Ending Hunger and Achieving Food Security in Cameroon Possible by 2030?

**Egoh Modi Aziz**

Development Policy Analyst Nkafu Policy Institute, Cameroon

Email: [egohaziz@gmail.com](mailto:egohaziz@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

Cameroon intends to terminate hunger, achieve food security and strive for better nutrition by 2030. The aim of this article is to critically examine the possibility of the government of Cameroon to achieve this vision by 2030. It is informed by three objectives. First, it looks at the current challenges faced by the government of Cameroon in accomplishing her mission. Second, it assesses whether the current atmosphere of insecurity can be a hindrance to the government's plan in effecting this task. Third, it suggests some evidence-informed policies that can better speed up the government's plan towards realizing the task. The study was informed by a severe review of literature. It also gathered data from primary online sources and reports from some relevant organizations. After a thorough review of these sources, we settle down with the conclusion that the government of Cameroon's intention to terminate hunger and achieve food security by 2030 cannot be fully realized without first addressing the current insecurity challenges plaguing the Far North, the East, and the two Anglophone regions, and that part of the remedy is to ensure that peace and justice is reinstated in the country. We also arrived at some recommendations which can be of tremendous help to the government. One such proposition is that the government of Cameroon need to change her economic structure by revolutionizing the agricultural sector from primary to secondary, which if properly followed up can bring about a more advanced industrial sector. An advanced agro-industrial sector will catalyse the transformation process and impact on production levels thus leading to a more positive end towards the realization of ending hunger and attaining food security by 2030.

**Keywords:** Ending, hunger; Food; Security; Cameroon, and government.

## 1. Introduction

Cameroon aspires to end hunger and guarantee food security by 2030. She plans to accomplish this vision by stepping up her forest; agro-pastoral and fishing activities; ensuring an agro-industrial advancement in technology with emphasis on the processing of local food commodities. Cameroon intends to realize this mission by changing its economic structure from primary to secondary – which if properly followed up, will lead to a more developed agro-industrial sector. To ensure this happens, the rural sector must be revolutionized (Cameroon's Vision 2035).

While Cameroon's vision to terminate hunger and achieve food security is applauded, many Cameroonians remain uncertain if this will be a reality in 2030. For hunger to end and food security ascertained, peace and security must reign. If we go by the cliché that “where there is peace, there is development, then one can disputably say that the current political and security climate in Cameroon gives credence to fears among Cameroonians that ending hunger and achieving food security in 2030 is only a myth,” [1]. For instance, the current socio-political impasse [2] that the country is facing due to Anglophone marginalization has led to huge security challenges. Moreover, the Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North region of Cameroon has rendered that part of the country unsecured. Equally is the influx of refugees from the Central African Republic and Nigeria into the border towns of the East and the Far North regions of Cameroon. These three scenarios make it clear that for agricultural transformation to thrive, the reinstatement of peace, justice, and security must first be addressed. This entails the government will have to double its efforts to neutralize these challenges. By doing this, it is assumed that the government is somehow going to re-direct its expenditure on agro-industrial projects to the security sector. The government also has to take major steps to sincerely address issues of decried injustice by Anglophone Cameroonians. These propositions are vital if Cameroon really hopes to end hunger and achieve food security by 2030.

This paper aims to critically analyze Cameroon's mission to end hunger and achieve food security by 2030. It is informed by three key questions: 1) what are the current challenges faced by the government in accomplishing her mission to end hunger and achieve food security by 2030? 2) Can these challenges upset the government's plan to accomplish this task? If yes, what will be the outcome? 3) Which policy options/recommendations can the government put in place to realize this task by 2030? This is followed by a conclusion that contends that amidst the current challenges faced by the government of Cameroon, her plans to end hunger, achieve food security and

improve nutrition by 2030 will be practically impossible without first tackling the current insecurity challenges and ensuring peace and an equitable justice system.

To understand the prospects to end hunger and achieve food security, it is worthy to first identify the current challenges that the country faces alongside this task, and based on all these propose recommendations for what must be done if this mission is real.

## 2. Current Challenges Facing Cameroon

Besides numerous threats of insecurity, Cameroon is plagued with a plethora of challenges that can hinder its mission to attain zero hunger and achieve food security by 2030. A considerable range of these challenges is discussed below.

### 2.1. Population Growth and Rapid Urbanization

Cameroon's efforts to end hunger and achieve food security is not aligned with her population growth rate of 2.6% [World Population Review \[3\]](#). According to projections from the World Population Review, Cameroon's 2020 population was projected at 26.55 million up substantively from the 2002 survey of 17.4 million. This makes the country the 52nd most populous nation in the world and the 17th in Africa [\[3\]](#). Moreover, the urbanization rate which currently stands at 3.63% with 52.6% having been urbanized to date (according to the CIA World Fact book) is alarming. This is evident in the rapid movement of youths from rural to urban areas. According to the World fact book, youths constitute 60% of Cameroon's population and consequently its labor force, and a reduction of this potential labor force due to rural exodus can be detrimental in boosting agricultural activities (<https://www.cameroonbusinesstoday.cm/articles/1041/fr/self-employment-young-and-already-entrepreneurs->).

Agricultural activities are mostly practiced in rural areas where there is available land for cash and food crop cultivation, market gardening and pastoral farming. The current pace of agricultural activities and levels of productivity is not going to match the anticipated population growth rate by 2030 – hence there is a possibility of the country's food supply not being proportionate to its growing population by 2030. A study on the rural exodus of young farmers and its impact on the shortage of labor and food crop production in Cameroon indicates an increase in rural-to-city migration rate and a drop in the domestic output of food crops from -1.95 to -21.27% [\[4\]](#). The table below provides a depiction of an increase of rural exodus rate on the variation (in %) of domestic output, domestic sales and exports of food crops.

**Table-1.** Impact of an increase of rural exodus rate on the variation (in %) of domestic output, domestic sales and exports of food crops

Labor category	5% exodus	10% exodus	15% exodus	20% exodus	25% exodus	30% exodus	35% exodus	40% exodus
Domestic output	-1.95	-4.16	-6.58	-9.19	-11.96	-14.91	-18.01	-21.27
Domestic sales	-1.90	-4.05	-6.43	-8.99	-11.73	-14.64	-17.71	-20.95
Exports	-6.02	-11.84	-17.51	-23.07	-28.55	-33.95	-39.29	-44.56

Source: CGE model results

In addition, Cameroon is still a huge importer of rice and fish despite the fact that it produces rice locally – meaning its present supply does not match its population (see Nkafu budget report, 2019), and if her population growth rate of 2.6% persist, it will not be possible for the country to feed its growing population thus making it impossible to terminate hunger and achieve food security by 2030.

### 2.2. Lack of Mechanized System of Farming

Subsistence farming is predominant in Cameroon. This system of farming cannot match the pace of Cameroon's anticipated population by 2030, considering the low levels of productivity involved. This, therefore, implies that there is an absolute need to enhance mechanized agriculture in Cameroon. In a study on the state of agricultural mechanization in Cameroon<sup>1</sup>, it was revealed that 75% of farmers still use manual tools. According to the findings, 12% of farmers utilize joined machines for plowing whereas 5% use mechanical equipment (tractors) and 8% use food processing machines. The study which sampled 1515 users, 312 fabricators of machines, 153 importers and 232 service providers in the domain of agricultural mechanization made an account of the resources and equipment used by different sectors of agriculture in Cameroon. This study revealed that since 2011 only 950 tractors have been distributed to farmers [\[5\]](#). The slow rate of agricultural mechanization can be alluded to a range of factors notably high cost of machines and its maintenance, lack of spare parts and lack of training to operate the machines. If Cameroon intends to end hunger and achieve food security by 2030 as she aspires, then there is a need to entirely move from extensive agriculture (a system of agriculture whereby large farms are being cultivated with lower inputs such as capital and labor) to intensive agriculture (a system of agriculture wherein there is high-level use of capital and labor in comparison to the land area). Contrariwise, to end hunger and achieve food security by 2030 under such prevailing circumstances is a mere wish that cannot be materialized [\[5\]](#).

<sup>1</sup> This study was conducted by the Department of Mechanization in the Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with the National Centre of Studies and Improved Agricultural Machinery and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

### 2.3. Poor Health Standards

Cameroon's health sector is faced with daunting challenges such as limited funds available to finance healthcare for the populace. It is often said that the health of every nation guarantees the degree of its wellbeing. Unfortunately for Cameroon, the current health indicators show a bad signal for the country's social capital, and that might be consequential on food production. Figures from the 2019 budget show that the public health budget was only about 1% of GDP in 2019, i.e., 4.29% of the annual budget. The health sector is classified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as having a critical shortage of qualified health personnel. It has also identified Cameroon as having one of the highest 'out of pocket' health expenditures in Africa [6]. The WHO further states that life expectancy at birth for males and females was 57 (male) and 59 (female) in 2016. The probability of dying under 5 per 1000 live births in 2017 was 84. The probability of dying between 15 and 60 years for males and females per 1000 people in 2016 stood at 362 for males and 321 for females. The total expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP stood at 4.1% in 2014. These statistics are substantial evidence to show that the health standard of Cameroon is poor when compared with other developing countries on the aspiring lane to emerge by 2035 (SDG GOAL: 3).<sup>2</sup> The current health situation (coupled with the increasing number of confirmed cases of COVID 19 pandemic)<sup>3</sup> seems unlikely to favor a country that intends to terminate hunger and achieve food security by 2030.

Summarily, two points are worthy of note. 1) A decrease in health expenditure per citizen will enable them to increase their living standard by purchasing more food leading to an increase in demand, which will consequently push up the supply. An increase in food supply is obviously a positive indicator for a country aspiring to end hunger. 2) A decrease in out of pocket health expenditure per citizen is only possible if there is an increase in the health budget. This will enable more investment in building hospitals, and furnishing them with modern equipment and the recruitment of more personnel with the objective to boost service delivery. This has two positive effects. First, it will lead to improved health standards, and second, it will guarantee a potential labor force needed to boost food production – consequently leading to improved living standards.

### 2.4. Lack of Good Farm to Market Roads

Generally, road infrastructure in Cameroon is bad (see [7]). Those leading to rural areas are worst. Agriculture is mostly practiced in rural areas alongside difficulties in transporting products from the farms to the market. In some cases, the farm distances are too long and this requires farmers to pay transport to the farm so as to ease their task. Unfortunately, this is not the case with most farmers as they have to exhaust their energy in trekking very long distances. Moreover, the state of the roads is worsened by prolonged rainfall due to climatic changes hence making transportation of farm produce to the city markets more cumbersome. At times the worsening situation causes vehicles to get stuck on the road for days thus affecting the quality of the products (especially perishable products). This has an adverse effect on the prices of farm produce hence significantly downsizing the income of farmers and constraining them to live under conditions of cyclical poverty. Under such prevailing circumstances, it is certain that food supply to the city markets will be affected thus causing food shortage and making it impossible for the country to end hunger and attain food security by 2030 [8].<sup>4</sup>

### 2.5. Lack of modern Conservation Infrastructure

The prolonged rainfall is detrimental to the existing poor state of roads across the national territory. Environment experts attest to the fact that perishable crops like tomatoes, green beans, and a variety of vegetables do very well during the rainy season. If not well preserved, they, unfortunately, get spoiled very fast. The challenges faced by farmers in transporting their produce during the rainy season supposes that they possess good preservation infrastructure. The traditional preservation methods used by most farmers are open to pest and moisture provoking post-harvest loss. A survey of environmental experts from the Climate Reporters platform states the little or no post-harvest processing and the lack of modern structure for preservation in many parts of Africa coupled with bad weather conditions affect ¼ of crops cultivated on a continent which is already overwhelmed by food insecurity and malnutrition especially in the Sahel regions [8]. How is it possible to end hunger and achieve food security with the lack of modern conservation infrastructures? The World Bank and the Food and Agricultural Organization in a joint report in 2011 estimated that Africa is losing food that can feed 48 million people daily for one year. The report further states that the loss amounts to approximately 25 to 40% of the food produced on the continent [9]. Moreover,

<sup>2</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages constitute one of the 17 United Nations (UN) Global goals adopted by all its Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>. Accessed on 21-02-2020.

<sup>3</sup> The COVID 19 pandemic has caused waves of horror and anxiety across the globe. Its impact on tourism, trade, industrial output, and conventional workplace productivity has been tremendously felt in many countries. In Cameroon, the number of confirmed cases seem to be increasing in an unprecedented rate. According to figures presented by the Nkafu Policy Institute (as of 08 April 2020), the country had a total of 685 infected persons, 9 dead and 60 recovered cases (<https://nkafu.org/>). This is a bad signal for a country that intends to build labor capacity with the objective of revolutionizing its agricultural sector.

<sup>4</sup> Climate Reporters is Africa's first and largest online newspaper dedicated to new vistas in the coverage and reportage of climate change and the region's environment. According to their report on Cameroon, the rains have been so intense and persistent over the years than usual making food (cassava) production in the South region in particular poor and sales difficult due to impracticable roads. The cassava gets spoiled in the ground because of prolonged rainfall. This prolonged rainfall has an adverse effect on overall food production thus putting a question mark on the possibility to end hunger with such trends of prolonged rainfall.

both organizations estimated that in terms of grain alone, the continent's annual post-harvest loss is about \$4 billion in monetary terms, "roughly equivalent to the value of annual cereal import to the region during the same period." According to World Food Program's 2017 report on Cameroon Country Strategic Plan 2018-2020, other related factors detrimental to food production include the absence of soil conservation strategies, the limited use of external inputs, and uncertainty to access land as 66% of cultivated land are under customary control, and without ample incentives for smallholders to invest in their farming systems. Based on the analysis presented, one cannot hesitate to argue that ending hunger and achieving food security in Cameroon by 2030 is a mere aspiration and cannot be realized. This can partly be attributed to laxity in implementing the government's plan to transform the sector.

## **2.6. Laxity to Implement Policy Objective to Undergo a Transformation**

The government of Cameroon has crafted out plans to beef up its forest, agro-pastoral and fishing industries, as well as making sure to put in place an agro-industrial development technology that lays emphasis on the processing of local food products. The government of Cameroon plans to accomplish this program by revitalizing its economy from primary to secondary industries. Cameroon's Country Strategic Plan 2018-2020 to fight food insecurity by transforming the agricultural sector was backed by a grant of USD 182.9 million by the World Food Program. (<https://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/eb/wfp291585.pdf>). The program is in line with Cameroon's Vision 2035 and the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP) while being incorporated into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. It is among the government's efforts to transform the economy towards industrialization. The bone of contention lies in the fact that the implementation text takes too long in Cameroon and the philosophy of change is problematic. This on its own is an impediment to end hunger and achieve food security in Cameroon by 2030. This is further aggravated by trends of conflicts, insecurity posed by refugee influx (from the Central African Republic, Nigeria and a huge number of Internally Displaced Persons) and the occurrence of violent armed conflict in the Northwest and the Southwest regions of Cameroon. These compounded issues are more than sufficient to deviate the government's attention from her plans to terminate hunger and achieve food security by 2030. Next, we briefly answer the question if the government's plan to terminate hunger and achieve food security by 2030 can be deviated by the challenges of insecurity the country is currently facing.

## **3. Can These Challenges Upset the Government's Plan to Meet up with This Task? If yes what will be the Outcome?**

The afore-mentioned challenges will obviously affect the government's plan to terminate hunger and achieve food security by 2030. These challenges might come along with certain implications such as the following:

A) Resources to boost agricultural activities may be re-directed towards security issues. The current climate of insecurity in the North region (Boko Haram), the influx of refugees from the Central African Republic into the East and Far North regions and the Anglophone crisis are all challenges facing the government. It is the government's responsibility to quickly address these issues and if that has to be done, then it quite certain that resources meant to boost the food sector will rather be channeled to security issues, hence making it infeasible for the government to realize her plan to end hunger and achieve food security by 2030.

B) The budget for other sectors might be affected thus upsetting service delivery. In addressing security issues, it is obvious that the budget in other ministries and state-owned enterprises will also be reduced (see [5]<sup>5</sup>). This might affect service delivery in the ministries involved as a shortage of resources can also upset plans to realize their own objectives.

## **4. Which Policy Options/Recommendations can the Government Adopt to Realize her Plan to Terminate Hunger by 2030?**

The recommendations mention below are not to be perceived as a complete blueprint or a panacea to bring about a total transformation in the domain of agriculture but are rather to be understood as steps that can help to activate the desired change needed for a functional transformation of the sector in question [10]. Putting these steps into action is no doubt going to be a way forward towards terminating hunger and achieving food security by 2030. Next, we propose the following recommendations to help the government of Cameroon accelerate her plans towards terminating hunger and achieving food security within the prescribed time frame.

- The government should increase infrastructural spending. This can be done by rehabilitating farm to market roads, and by also investing in building modern preservation infrastructure to avoid post-harvest loss caused by exposure to pest and cold weather – especially with regards to perishable commodities.
- The government should facilitate the acquisition of land deeds. This can serve as collateral to access loans that can be used to purchase or rent farming tools, hire labor and catch up with transportation expenses.
- There should be an increase in financial inclusion. The government should create an enabling environment that encourages financial institutions to grant access to useful and affordable financial products and services to individuals and businesses to enable them to meet their needs in a responsible and sustainable way. It should equally ensure the availability and equality of opportunities to access financial products. In this

<sup>5</sup> Cameroon raises 2019 security budget by XAF 20 billion (Business in Cameroon, June 2019). The government of Cameroon augmented the sum initially predicted to maintain security in the crisis ridden regions. Sources disclosed that the additional amount will make it possible to tactfully follow up the recruitment of defence and security forces in the Far North, Adamawa, and the two English regions of the Country.



regard, government policy, and that of other relevant stakeholders vis-à-vis accessing financial services and products should be non-discriminatory and unbiased to women and youths, who constitute the bulk of the population.

- Address the issue of land grabbing. The government of Cameroon should ensure that the contentious issue of large-scale land acquisition should be strictly monitored. The buying or leasing of large pieces of land by individuals, domestic or multi-national companies should be properly organized by the government agency in charge of urban and rural land development and equipment. This can bring more order and avoid future land disputes between people willing to invest in agriculture.
- The government should increase agricultural spending. For example, ensure the supply of more seeds, fertilizer, and farming tools to farmers to help them boost production levels. The majority of farmers (75%) in the country are still using manual tools. Statistics show that only 950 tractors have been distributed to farmers since 2011. There is a need to invest in more tractors and related machines to help facilitate the farming process towards agro-industrial transformation.
- The government should strengthen agricultural research and establish more partnerships with foreign partners that can help finance agricultural projects. For example, the Institute for Agronomic Research and Development (IRAD) having funds as a result of partnership agreements between the government and the World Food Program. Another example can be accords between the government and the International Fund for Agricultural Development and other national and regional agronomic institutions. This implies that more funding should be made available to these institutions so as to enable them boost scientific and agricultural research. A boost in agricultural research is likely to bring about a boost in production thus guaranteeing food security and achieving hunger by 2030.
- The government of Cameroon should increase the health budget. An increase in the health budget implies an increased investment in infrastructure, equipment, and personnel. The government also needs to open up the health sector for those willing to invest. This enabling environment will promote competition and choice for patients to freely access the health services most affordable to them. Competition among different health service providers enhances innovative ways in handling patients hence leading to an improvement in service delivery which is consequential to increased health standards. An increased health standard is a positive indicator of a potential and vibrant workforce needed to boost agricultural productivity.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have highlighted Cameroon's plan to end hunger and achieve food security by 2030. We have equally noted that she aspires to realize this plan by revitalizing her forest; agro-pastoral and fishing activities; ensuring an agro-industrial development with an emphasis on the processing of local food commodities. Cameroon plans to achieve this task by transforming its economic structure from the primary to secondary sectors – which if effectively pursued, will lead to a more advanced agro-industrial sector. However, the paper moved with the assumption that to terminate hunger and achieve food security by 2030, it must first address the range of insecurity threats posed by the Boko Haram insurgency from the Far North region, the influx of refugees from neighboring Nigeria and Central African Republic into the Northern and East regions of the country, and the current Anglophone socio-political crisis. Other challenges that could impede the government's plan to terminate hunger and achieve food security were identified. Some of them include the lack of a mechanized system of farming, population growth and rapid urbanization, lack of modern conservation infrastructure, etc. The fundamental point of dispute in this paper is that for hunger to end and for food security to be guaranteed, peace, security and socio-economic justice must reign. If we go by the cliché that where there is peace, there is development, then one can inevitably argue that the current socio-political and security environment in Cameroon gives credence to uncertainty in the minds of Cameroonians that ending hunger and achieving food security in 2030 is only an aspiration and can hardly come to fruition – hence making it unrealistic in all its ramifications.

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