

# ISRG Journal of Education, Humanities and Literature (ISRGJEHL)



## ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Edu Humanit Lit

ISSN: 2584-2544 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjehl/>

Volume – I Issue- V (September-October) 2024

Frequency: Bimonthly



## Forest Exploitation and the Impoverishment of the Population in Cameroon

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| **Received:** 13.10.2024 | **Accepted:** 19.10.2024 | **Published:** 24.10.2024

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### Abstract

Cameroon has a Gini index of around 0.42, indicating a significant level of income inequality. These disparities are exacerbated by factors such as unequal access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities. As a result, life expectancy is around 49 years, with gender and regional differences. Although logging contributes economically to around 6-8% of the country's GDP, it benefits companies more than the general population, with disastrous consequences for social classes. Logging and timber transport generate substantial revenues for the rich and corporations, impoverishing the population. For six months, we conducted a study on the subject of logging and the impoverishment of the population. Our survey of 307 randomly selected heads of household in three regions of the country (East, South and West Cameroon) enabled us to analyze the data using multivariate statistical techniques. We examined household structures along a number of dimensions: nutrition and infant mortality for health, education, access to electricity, asset ownership for standard of living, and road infrastructure. Our results reveal that the impact of massive deforestation on natural resources is reducing non-timber forest products, such as fruit, medicinal plants and building materials. The loss of biodiversity also affects hunting and fishing activities. Economically, the destruction of traditional livelihoods is accompanied by intense competition from large companies such as Rougier, FIPCAM, Interholco and Thanry. These companies reduce local economic opportunities and create inequalities in the distribution of revenues generated by logging. The majority of these revenues benefit large companies and the wealthy, while local communities receive little or no benefit. Lack of reinvestment in road infrastructure and social services further worsens the living conditions of local populations. On the social and cultural front, we have recorded the forced displacement of the Meyos III population to the south, disrupting their way of life and social structures. Social conflicts are recurrent between local communities and forestry companies. Overall, the under-25 population accounts for 50% of the population, with unfavorable socio-economic conditions. The central indicator of deprivation and vulnerability makes it difficult for heads of household to acquire basic goods. The majority of social classes are more vulnerable, with very low purchasing power. Only 26.05% of the population own a television, while 43.97% have electricity in

*their homes, often thanks to generators. In the remote Eastern region, 34% of pupils have not completed primary school. According to the Ministry of Public Health's epidemiological bulletin, out of almost 500,000 live births registered in health facilities, 7,169 stillbirths were reported in 2023. The Ministry attributes these deaths to inadequate care for pregnant women, while medical sources blame poverty. In the regions of Dja-et-Lobo, Meyos III, Lobéké and Lom-et-Djérem, internal conflicts within local communities are increasing due to competition for resources. A balanced and inclusive approach, integrating sustainable practices and community participation, is essential to mitigate the impoverishment of the lower classes and promote the socio-economic development of forest regions.*

**Keywords:** *Impoverishment, Lower Class, Forest, Governance.*

## Introduction

Cameroon, whose population has grown from 2.6 million in 1960 to 30 million in 2023, is richly endowed with natural resources (oil and gas, minerals and precious woods) and agricultural products (coffee, cotton, cocoa, corn and manioc). However, in 2024, the country remains ranked 153rd out of 189 countries and territories worldwide, with a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.563, placing it in the category of poor countries (UNDP, 2024). In 2010, Cameroon had 30 million hectares (Mha) of natural forest, covering 66% of its surface area (Lescuyer, 2000; Rondeux, 1991). Between the 1980s and 2024, Cameroon lost 197 kilo-hectares (kha) of natural forest, equivalent to 128 million tonnes (Mt) of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Official estimates show that 2 million hectares of Cameroonian forests have disappeared since 1980 (Fapa et al., 2020; Liboum et al., 2017).

In this country, the impoverishment of the population and biodiversity remains a recurring issue due to legal and illegal logging, which also contributes to the effects of climate change (Chudy et al., 2020; Godbout et al., 2015). Since 1980, Cameroon has remained one of Central Africa's leading timber exporters, supplying a variety of tropical woods such as okoumé, azobé and sipo. This phenomenon of exploitation and impoverishment is particularly evident in the East (Bertoua, Lobéké, Batouri), South (Ebolowa, Dja-et-Lobo, Meyos III), GrassField (Massagam, Maba...), and wooded savannah regions of the North. These regions are among the world's largest carbon sinks (Nandasena, 2023; Rondeux, 1991). Pauperization is particularly pronounced among the country's most disadvantaged social classes, in contrast to forestry companies, which contribute to the creation of affluent classes, leaving local populations in a state of ongoing precariousness (Nanfack, 2020; Nguenang et al., 2010; Klemperer, 1996).

Indeed, these forestry operations have led to the expansion of transnational supply networks, making the system more advantageous for investors. However, Cameroon is experiencing non-inclusive growth, with 40% of the population living in extreme poverty by 2023. The business environment remains difficult due to poor governance (corruption, smuggling, etc.) and rural areas are often isolated. Road infrastructure is of poor quality, accident-prone, poorly managed and badly maintained. With a population growing by 2.6%, Cameroon has a limited road network comprising 121,873.93 km of roads, including 108.60 km of unfinished freeways, 9,387.26 km of national roads, 13,817.86 km of regional roads and 98,560.22 km of local roads. In terms of paved roads, the country has 1,495.27 km in the regional network and 1,874.26 km in the local network. In addition, Cameroon suffers from inadequate healthcare infrastructure, with a low

doctor/population ratio (one doctor per 1,000 inhabitants) and a lack of maintenance of medical equipment (Yah et al., 2023).

Access to healthcare remains difficult due to the limited number of medical facilities. Hospitals are often overcrowded and sometimes ill-equipped to meet the growing needs of the population. Illiteracy affects almost 30% of the population aged 15 and over, with a rate of 45.3% in rural areas versus 13.2% in urban areas. Teachers are the largest group in the Cameroonian civil service, accounting for 46% of the total workforce and 51% of the wage bill. However, their remuneration remains very low. The prevailing poverty is further exacerbated by a minimum wage of 36,270 CFA francs (around €55) per month and an average salary of 296,610 CFA francs (around €450) (INS, 2024). The cost of living for a household is around 70,000 CFA francs per month, and transportation costs can reach up to 100,000 CFA francs per month. Medical expenses vary according to the state of health of family members, with an average monthly cost of 50,000 CFA franc.

When asked why Cameroon is struggling to develop, it's clear that the Far North, North and East regions of the country have high levels of poverty, with poor health standards and gaps in education. Inadequate road infrastructure also hampers development. This situation is exacerbated by poor governance. Although Cameroon is on the margins of major international trade, other factors are also hampering its development. Another critical question and analysis is how the forestry economy contributes to the impoverishment of the population. This study examined the exploitation of timber and its impact on the depletion of biodiversity and the living conditions of populations in the affected regions of Cameroon. It also analyzed the consequences of this exploitation on different social strata.

## Research Methodology

In our research methodology, we conducted observations and collected data on forest resources, and carried out surveys involving multidimensional analysis. We based our study on field survey data collected from 307 randomly selected heads of household in three regions of the country: West, South and East Cameroon. The data collected related to household structures and were categorized according to health, nutrition and infant mortality, years of schooling and number of children in school, access to electricity, water, sanitation facilities, cooking fuels, soil type, asset ownership and road infrastructure.

The study also focused on the exploitation of six types of forest resources: firewood and charcoal, construction and industrial timber, food plants, medicinal plants and fodder. The data collected were analyzed using multivariate statistical techniques, revealing

the population's quality of life as a function of environment, type of health facility, educational institutions, road infrastructure and household purchasing power (table).

**Table: Distribution of Population and Area in the Studied Regions**

Region	Area km <sup>2</sup>	population	moins de 25 ans %
Est	109 002	855 745	53
Sud	47 110	778 145	51
Ouest	13 892	2500000	50

**Source :** INS, 2023

It appears that the population aged under 25 accounts for 50% of the total, and many of them find themselves in unfavorable socio-economic situations. This vulnerable population, often referred to as "voiceless" or "invisible", speaks little or nothing, is rarely mentioned and often cannot defend itself. These people face negative constraints such as isolation, exclusion, malnutrition, precariousness and the exploitation of their natural resources.

### 1. Historical Evolution of Forestry Exploitation in Cameroon

Logging in Cameroon has undergone significant changes from the colonial period to the present day, marked by transformations in policies, practices and impacts on the environment and local communities. During the colonial period (early 20th century - 1960), large-scale logging began under German administration in the early 20th century. The Germans began extracting forest resources primarily for export to Europe. This exploitation intensified under French and British colonial administrations after the First World War. During this period, infrastructure such as roads and railroads were built to facilitate the transport of timber from forest areas to export ports. Harvesting methods were often rudimentary and environmentally unconcerned, concentrating mainly on the most valuable and accessible timber species.

### 2. Between Independence and the Post-Independence Period (1960-1980)

Cameroon inherited the infrastructure and economic structures established by the colonizers. Post-independence authorities continued to promote logging as a major source of revenue for the country. Both domestic and foreign companies were involved in this activity, which grew over the years. However, this period was also marked by a growing, albeit limited, awareness of the environmental and social impacts of logging. The absence of effective regulation has led to over-exploitation of forest resources and conflicts with local communities, who are often marginalized in decision-making processes.

### Reforms and Regulations (1980-2000)

In response to growing environmental degradation and international pressure, Cameroon began implementing reforms to regulate logging. The 1981 Forestry Law represented one of the first attempts to establish a framework for sustainable forest management. However, it wasn't until 1994, with the enactment of a new forestry law, that more concrete measures were implemented to promote sustainability. These included forest planning mechanisms, better regulation of concessions and the creation of community and protected forests. This period also saw the introduction of forest certification, with companies seeking to

obtain certifications such as those from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) to demonstrate that their practices were both ecologically and socially responsible.

### Modern Period (2000 – Present)

In modern times, the forestry industry in Cameroon has continued to develop, while facing new challenges and opportunities. Globalization and the growing demand for timber on international markets have stimulated the expansion of logging. However, Cameroon has also stepped up its conservation and sustainable management efforts. Recent legislative reforms and conservation initiatives include participatory forest management projects that involve local communities in the management and monitoring of forest resources. In addition, Cameroon is committed to international initiatives such as the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) action plan, which aims to combat illegal logging and promote legal and sustainable forestry practices.

The evolution of forestry in Cameroon is marked by a persistent tension between economic development and environmental conservation. Despite progress in regulation and sustainable management, challenges remain, including deforestation, land-use conflicts and the need to strengthen governance and law enforcement.

### Main Actors in the Forestry Industry in Cameroon

Cameroon's forestry industry is dominated by a mix of national and international companies, operating along the entire value chain, from resource extraction to processing and export. Key national players include Société d'Exploitation Forestière et Commerciale Agricole (SEFCA): One of Cameroon's largest forestry companies, SEFCA specializes in the extraction of tropical hardwoods such as Okoumé and Sapelli. The company holds several forest concessions in the country, although its commitment to sustainable forest management remains limited.

Société Forestière Hazim: This major player focuses on wood extraction and processing, producing logs, sawn timber and various by-products for local and international markets. Pallisco: A well-known national company distinguished by its commitment to sustainable forest management. Pallisco is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and operates in the extraction and processing of a wide range of wood species, adhering to environmental and social standards, albeit to a limited extent.

Société Forestière et Industrielle de la Doumé (SFID): Specializing in sawn timber and veneer production, SFID makes a significant contribution to Cameroon's forest industry.

International companies operating in Cameroon. International companies active in Cameroon include Rougier: A French group with a long-standing presence in the country, Rougier is involved in the exploitation and marketing of tropical woods. The company operates at various stages of the forestry value chain. Compagnie Industrielle des Bois Africains (CIFM): A subsidiary of the Italian Interholco group, CIFM is a major player in Cameroon's forestry industry, focusing on the extraction and export of tropical woods. FIPCAM (Fomento Industrial y Comercial de Productos Agrícolas y Madereros): Also a subsidiary of an Italian group, FIPCAM is one of Cameroon's largest forestry companies, specializing in the extraction and export of tropical hardwoods. Thanry: A French company that has been present in Cameroon for several decades, Thanry operates multiple forest concessions and is dedicated to the production of sawn timber and by-products.

### 3. Natural Resources, Forestry Economy, and Social Poverty

In the forestry sector, Cameroon boasts over 90 companies, including large international and national companies, some 40 medium-sized national companies and some 30 rural communes owning communal forests. These entities are involved in exploiting the country's forests and exporting forest products. Timber production currently stands at around 3.5 million m<sup>3</sup> of logs per year, spread over some one hundred species, of which five (Ayous, Sapelli, Azobe, Iroko, Frake) account for almost 70%. The sector generates just 45,000 jobs, 22,000 of which are in the informal sector. It accounts for around 20% of the value of exports, and is Cameroon's second most important export after oil. It contributes around 6% to national GDP. However, these natural resources do not benefit the local population; on the contrary, their exploitation impoverishes biodiversity and local social strata.

Logging in Cameroon is detrimental to the climate, the environment, biodiversity and agroforestry communities, with major human consequences such as deforestation, alteration of ecosystems, floods, droughts and even road accidents. This activity does not provide satisfactory financial resources for local and regional populations, apart from negative impacts such as soil erosion, particularly in the Nyong-et-Kéllé, Océan and Sanaga Maritime regions.

### 4. Exploited Forests in Cameroon

The forests exploited in Cameroon are mainly tropical rainforests, classified into two main categories: evergreen forests, which cover 54% of the total forest area, and semi-deciduous forests, which account for 28%. The evergreen forests are divided into two main categories: the Biafran forests, located at low altitude along the Gulf of Guinea, and the Guineo-Congolian forests, found in the southern and southeastern regions of Cameroon. While the Biafran forests have been largely cleared, the remaining forests are dominated by species such as Azobé (*Lophira alata*) and Ozouga (*Sacoglottis gabonensis*).

The floristic composition of Guineo-Congolian forests differs from that of Biafran forests, notably in the absence of gregarious Caesalpinaceae, with the exception of the notable presence of Limbali (*Gilbertiodendron dewevrei*). These forests are also characterized by the marked presence of Moabi (*Baillonella toxisperma*). Other commercially exploited species include Sapelli (*Entandrophragma cylindricum*), Sipo (*Entandrophragma utile*) and Ayous (*Triplochiton scleroxylon*). Medium-altitude dense semi-deciduous forest is characterized by the abundance of Sterculiaceae, which are particularly rich in species adapted to peeling (FAO, 2020).

According to the Ministry of Forests and Fauna (2021), Cameroon has around 22 million hectares of forest, or almost 46% of the country's total area. Of these forests, 26,000 hectares (0.1% of forest area) are classified as plantation forests. A 2021 FAO study estimates Cameroon's forest area at 20.2 million hectares. According to a 2018 FRMI study, 8.5 million hectares of these forests are dedicated to timber production.

### 5. Biodiversity and Economic Impact in Cameroon

Cameroon, with its rich ecological diversity, is home to one of Africa's most varied faunas. Covering just 1.6% of the continent's surface area, the country is home to 6% of the world's vertebrate species, 21% of fish species, 48% of mammal species, 54% of bird species, 50% of amphibian species, between 30% and 75% of

reptile species, and 25% to 50% of African butterfly species. This puts Cameroon in fifth place in terms of continental biodiversity. Although only modestly exploited for consumption, local wildlife is a crucial source of animal protein in certain regions. It also plays an essential role in the development of tourism in Cameroon. However, the growth of the logging industry has had serious repercussions on communities living close to forest areas. Instead of benefiting from employment opportunities, many local people find themselves deprived of their native flora and fauna and, consequently, of their livelihoods. The local population feels that Cameroonian authorities and companies are neglecting their concerns, as current policies do not adequately represent or respond to their needs. Industrial timber exploitation has not significantly improved the living conditions of the most disadvantaged social groups.

These operations damage the environment as a whole, leading to phenomena such as wildlife crime and legal and illegal trafficking in timber and timber products. Some of the consequences of this degradation are irreversible, and can be severe enough to destroy entire ecosystems, threatening the resources of future generations. This exploitation also deprives local communities of vital resources, reducing their access to legitimate income from traditional production activities and perpetuating their vulnerability. The infrastructure made available to these populations is inadequate, making their situation even worse.

Moreover, industrial deforestation is very different from household deforestation, which is limited to the use of wood for cooking. Among other impacts, hunters are forced to travel long distances, and there are risks of diffuse pollution due to malfunctions during felling: a felled tree may cause other unintentional trees to fall, thus contributing to intense deforestation.

### 6. Impact of Logging on Local Populations in Cameroon

Impacts vary according to logging practices, existing regulations and forest resource management. Here is an overview of the main effects of logging on the impoverishment of local populations. Loss of resources and environmental degradation are major consequences. Intensive logging has led to a reduction in the natural resources available to local communities. Forests provide a variety of non-timber products (such as fruits, nuts and medicinal plants) as well as essential ecosystem services, such as regulating the water cycle and protecting soils.

Deforestation and soil degradation are compromising these resources, reducing the livelihoods of the people who depend on them. In this context, 95% of local communities depend on forests for traditional activities such as hunting, collecting non-timber forest products and farming. Although logging creates jobs, these are often precarious and poorly paid, with occasional wages ranging from 50,000 to 150,000 FCFA. What's more, the jobs generated by logging concessions are often temporary and do not always benefit local community members, especially when companies prefer to hire outside workers or subcontractors.

Revenues from logging are not always distributed equitably. Forestry companies, whether national or international, appropriate the majority of profits, leaving little economic benefit to local communities. In addition, tax revenues from forest concessions are not always effectively reinvested in local infrastructure and services.

In the south of the country, particularly in the Dja-et-Lobo and Meyos III regions, cases of expropriation and displacement of local

communities from their traditional lands have been observed due to the expansion of logging activities. These expropriations have often been carried out without adequate compensation or prior consultation, resulting in forced displacement, land loss and social conflict between villages and logging companies. The local population complains about the loss of agricultural land and the changes imposed on the way of life of pygmy communities. Local communities, often the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, are also facing an increase in flooding, particularly in the town of Bertoua.

Throughout the country, the poverty rate remains high, stagnating at around 40%, with deep regional disparities. The poor are mainly concentrated in rural areas, with the Far North and East regions being the hardest hit. Climate change is further aggravating the living conditions of local communities. In 2021, the intensity of poverty in the country's forest regions was 20.2%. Deforestation in these regions leads to massive destruction of natural habitats, threatening 80% of terrestrial biodiversity. This excessive exploitation plunges the most vulnerable social groups into extreme economic insecurity.

### 7. Exploitation of Resources and Complicity of Local Elites

Loggers, in collusion with local elites and under the watchful eye of the political authorities, appropriate the natural wealth of forest regions. This impoverishment of the population is also the result of poor governance and inefficient management of scarce resources since independence. Against this backdrop of precariousness, various forms of corruption, orchestrated by networks of local elites, exacerbate the impoverishment. Corruption, mainly linked to logging, thrives without benefiting local populations. Our study shows that, in the long term, this corruption will continue to have

negative repercussions on households, notably by compromising education levels.

Of the nine types of forestry permits issued by the administration (timber exploitation permit, special products exploitation permit, firewood or pole exploitation permit, individual felling authorization, timber recovery authorization, community forest, forest concession (FMU, forest management unit), felling sale, communal forest), none offers satisfactory traceability or visible financial benefits for local populations. Only the road infrastructure, built to evacuate forest products, has been put in place, without really improving the living conditions of the local population.

### 8. Logging and Household Precarity

According to the Forest Atlas, between 2013 and 2022, the Ministry of Forests issued at least 548 logging permits, commonly known as "ventes de coupe". These permits are granted to forestry companies for operations on areas not exceeding 2,500 hectares for a period of one year, renewable up to two times. No management plan is required for ventes de coupe. Over the past two decades, Cameroon's log production has remained stable at just over 2 million m<sup>3</sup> (excluding the year marked by the coronavirus crisis). This stability is largely due to the country's relative socio-political stability, good logging logistics despite limited transport infrastructure, and the diversity of species harvested, which provides greater resilience to market fluctuations than forests dependent on one or a few species.

Despite this sustained production, local households live in increasingly precarious conditions. Houses are often built of earth and tree branches, unemployment is widespread and education levels are low. Poor health and the advanced age of the head of household are also aggravating factors in these regions (see table 2).

**Table 2: Poverty Dynamics, Low Electrical and Electronic Equipment in the Studied Households (%)**

Region	Village	Population	Electricity	Televisions	Radio Sets	Telephones
East	Bertoua	14.65	08.14	04.88	06.51	10.74
	Lobéké	09.44	01.62	02.28	03.90	04.88
	Batouri	18.24	04.88	02.93	08.79	13.35
South	Ebolowa	10.74	08.79	06.18	06.84	09.44
	Dja-et-Lobo	08.14	03.25	01.62	03.90	04.56
	Meyos III	08.79	01.62	00.33	00.65	00.97
West	Massagam	16.61	06.51	03.58	05.53	12.70
	Maba	13.35	09.12	04.23	06.84	09.12
<b>Total</b>		100	43.97	26.05	42.99	65.79

Source: Field survey of 307 household heads, 2024

### 9. Deterioration of Living Conditions in Forested Areas

In forest regions, the living conditions of a large proportion of the population are deteriorating, leading to a decline in economic, social and environmental well-being. This impoverishment manifests itself in increased poverty, growing inequality and social exclusion, particularly affecting the most vulnerable populations.

Table 2 shows that monetary poverty is a central indicator of deprivation and vulnerability, making it difficult for heads of household to acquire essential goods. Only 26.05% of the population own a television, while 43.97% have access to electricity, often supplied by generators used intermittently.

However, only a few rare escapes from income poverty translate into improved living conditions, as deprivations linked to quality of life evolve more slowly than incomes. Poverty in the East region is therefore more closely linked to economic inequalities, both between operators and between different social strata.

### **10. Low Transparency and Traceability in Timber Exploitation**

Cameroon's forests are gradually disappearing due to increasing pressure on forest resources and conversion of land to other uses. Over the past two decades, forest basins have lost more than 10.6% of their forest cover. This degradation is exacerbated by overexploitation, due to endemic corruption, weak accountability and legal and illegal logging. In 2013, forest operators established a façade, claiming to be committed to the sustainable and legal development of the timber industry in the regions. However, these commitments to improve timber tracking, transparency and forest governance have remained largely superficial. Traceability systems are not rigorously applied. Interviews with institutional agents and NGOs reveal that corruption compromises traceability throughout the supply chain, from forest to export, whether industrial, artisanal, and communal or community logging. Public control is also marred by corruption, both in terms of revenue collection and resource monitoring.

In the eastern part of the country, nine out of ten villages show signs of impoverishment of the population and its natural resources. Natural resources in these areas are being depleted, making it difficult for the local population to earn a living. Overall, 70% of inhabitants report a decline in resources for at least one forest product, and this trend is worsening over time.

### **11. Poverty and Economic Inequality in Cameroon's Forested Regions**

Forests and tree systems are essential to the reduction and eradication of poverty in Cameroon. However, the population is becoming increasingly impoverished. The poverty rate remains high, with a significant proportion of the population living below the poverty line. National and international statistics indicate that between 30% and 40% of the population is affected by poverty, with notable disparities between urban and rural areas. Rural regions, particularly the North, Far North and East, have even higher poverty rates, reaching up to 60%, and are characterized by strong income inequalities.

In Cameroon, these inequalities are particularly pronounced, with wealth concentrated in the hands of a wealthy minority who exploit forest resources. These disparities exacerbate economic and social inequalities, limiting the access of disadvantaged groups to economic opportunities and basic services.

### **12. Limited Access to Basic Services for the Population**

Although the school enrolment rate has improved, with an increase in the expected number of years of schooling to 4.1 years, significant disparities persist in the East, North and Far North regions. Access to education remains uneven, and the quality of teaching varies considerably. Enrolment and retention rates are lower in rural areas, reaching barely 30%, particularly among disadvantaged populations. This limits employment opportunities and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. In the East region, only 34% of pupils complete elementary school, preventing them from acquiring the skills essential for sustainable literacy.

Social marginalization, the isolation of certain areas, poverty and the adverse effects of the economic crisis linked to logging further

exacerbate this situation. The Adamaoua, Nord and Extrême-Nord regions have the lowest pre-school enrolment rates, with 2.81%, 3.28% and 4.21% of children respectively.

### **13. Access to Basic Services: A Persistent Challenge**

In the 2021/2022 academic year, the gross enrolment rate (GER) in pre-school education reached 39.7%, an increase of around one percentage point on the previous year. However, this rate remains particularly low in the Far North region (7.9%), where potential demand is among the highest in the country. In primary education, the GER for 2021/2022 is 119.2%. Although this figure is higher than 100%, it is inflated by early or late enrolment and repetition, and does not necessarily reflect the fact that all children of elementary school age are actually enrolled. In addition, the pass rate for the general baccalaureate has fallen dramatically, from almost 76% in 2023 to 37% in 2024. The Far North and North regions rank 9th and 10th respectively, with pass rates of 20.91% and 19.99%.

The state of sanitation and access to basic infrastructure remains a major concern, revealing a significant delay in achieving the targets set. Sectoral analysis shows that poverty is particularly high among households headed by people working in the primary sector, reaching 60.7%. Access to health services is also marked by profound inequalities, with infrastructures often inadequate, particularly in remote areas.

The cost of healthcare, combined with limited access to services, prevents many families from benefiting from adequate care, exacerbating public health problems. Access to drinking water and adequate water supply facilities is another major challenge. Many Cameroonians, particularly in rural areas, do not have access to these essential services, leading to health problems such as water-borne diseases. According to the Ministry of Public Health's epidemiological bulletin, out of almost 500,000 live births in hospitals, 7,169 stillbirths were recorded in 2023. The Ministry attributes these deaths to weaknesses in maternal care systems, while some medical sources point to poverty as the main cause.

## **Conclusion**

The impoverishment of people living in forest areas is a multidimensional phenomenon that goes far beyond a simple lack of income. It encompasses structural, social and environmental aspects, contributing to a general deterioration in the living conditions of individuals and forest communities. The main players in the timber industry exploit natural resources without taking visible action or committing themselves to sustainability. In the eastern part of the country, 60 years after independence, the minimum level of income required to meet basic needs such as housing, food and clothing remains very low. Despite this, timber and timber products are among Cameroon's main exports, after oil and cocoa. Revenues from the export of these forest products are a crucial source of foreign currency.

However, forest production areas remain very isolated, lacking adequate road infrastructure, and life expectancy does not exceed 50 years. According to recent data from the National Institute of Statistics, around 37% of Cameroon's population lives below the national poverty line. This rate varies considerably between urban and rural areas, with regions such as the Far North and Bertoua posting even higher poverty rates.

To combat this impoverishment, it is imperative to implement integrated and inclusive policies that address these different

dimensions while tackling the root causes of poverty and inequality. Cameroonian decision-makers and non-governmental organizations need to keep a close eye on the activities of the timber industries to ensure that they comply with current environmental, social and economic laws and regulations. Rigorous forest certification is essential to promote transparency, industry sustainability and respect for the rights of local communities.

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