



Groupe de Démographie Africaine

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**POPULATION SIZE
IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES :
AN EVALUATION**

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CAMEROON

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CAMEROON



C A M E R O O N

I. PRESENTATION OF SOURCES

Attempts to measure the population of Cameroon go back a long way in time. From the time of the German occupation to independence, through French and British colonisation, several more or less successful attempts have been made to enumerate the population, which have produced results of a quality varying from one operation to another, one administration to another and one period to another.

Two major phases can be distinguished in demographical research in Cameroon :

- research from the colonial period to independence
- demographic research since independence

1) Research into the population of Cameroon before independence

The original sources of data are essentially of three kinds:

a) The annual reports of the colonial administration to the League of Nations

The first report sent to the League of Nations dates from 1921. Before that date, the last German official figures date from 1912-1913. However, at the time of their withdrawal, the Germans must have destroyed most of their archives, and among them, those concerning the demographic studies they had carried out. The major drawback of the annual reports of the administrators is that the proposed figures were most of the time based on the number of taxpayers surveyed by the district officers, the administration often being content to simply divide the total amount of tax levied by the value per head of the poll tax under the assumption that the taxpayers represented half of the population. Consequently, the results published in the various reports are sometimes divergent and very contradictory, even when they are based on administrative censuses.

b) Administrative censuses

Whether under the German, French or English colonial administration, or after the independence of the country, attempts to enumerate the population, carried out for tax purposes or recruitment of a native labour force, led to the implementation of administrative censuses, the methods of which evolved over time.

During the early years of colonisation, data came from information provided by native chiefs. From 1933 onwards, French administrators set up in the area under French mandate a system of population registration based on a nominative census. "Censuses are carried out during circuits. These circuits are carried out with a frequency such that sub-divisions are entirely visited every three years on average.

As the census was formerly used for tax purposes and in fact the sub-division officer was sometimes accompanied by a doctor, Africans tried to absent themselves, being helped in this by the suppression of passes. Consequently, the figures thus revealed must be considered as under-estimates.

Towards 1945, very different enumeration procedures were used, varying from simple household enumeration (North Cameroon) to individual enumeration on card (Wouri). Whereas in certain sub-divisions only heads of household possessed a card (his wives, children, etc... being listed on the same card); in some others, every adult had a card, and these were then grouped by households, then households by villages..." [1]

c) Population censuses

After 1950, the efforts made by the French administration to acquire a better knowledge of the population of Cameroon since the time of occupation were oriented towards a different type of investigation: the population censuses carried out by the "Service de la Statistique Générale". Collection of data was made by direct interview of people within their households by the enumerators.

From 1950 to 1958, five censuses were carried out, often covering towns: Douala (1955), the town of Edéa (1956), Yaoundé (1957), the town of Ebolowa (1958), the sub-division of Mbalmayo (1959).

For the rest of the country, the source of demographic data remained essentially the administrative census.

2) Demographic research in Cameroon since independence

Apart from the five censuses mentioned above, collection of demographic data remained at the bottom of the list of priorities. The consequence was that when Cameroon became independent, the exact size of its population was not known, estimated at the time to be 3 200 000 for Eastern Cameroon (French Protectorate) and 850 000 for Western Cameroon (British Cameroon).

This is why as early as 1959, the Government of Cameroon, introduced in its budget an item entitled "world census of population and agriculture" conforming to the recommendations of the United Nations. At the same time, it obtained from FIDES the financing of a sample demographic survey covering the whole country.

The shortage of the credits allocated and the insecurity which prevailed in the southern part of the country did not permit the implementation of such a project. Regional surveys were carried out instead.

This is how, just after independence, the country became the object of regional demographic surveys. From January to June 1960, a survey was carried out in North-Bénoué, in the far north of the country. In 1961, it was the turn of the regions of South-Bénoué and of Adamaoua. From March to November 1962, a survey was carried out in the Eastern and South Central province (south-east), including the census of the town of Yaoundé (1962). Surveys of the coastal area took place from January 1964 to February 1965, including the census of the town of Douala and of Western Cameroon. Finally, in 1965, a survey reached the Bamiléké region and its neighbouring departments (Moung, Nkam, Bamoun, and the district of Ndikiniméki).

These surveys form the first scientific data base for the population of Cameroon. They provide regional results which can be aggregated despite the long duration of operations which lasted six years.

In 1966/67 the Ministry of Territorial Administration carried out an administrative census on the whole territory. This was an operation of a new kind. One period was selected and imposed on the administrative authorities and a census form (by household) devised. On the other hand, the Direction de la Statistique had provided the Ministry of Territorial Administration with enumerators who were experienced in collection problems. Unfortunately, numerous difficulties hindered the successful completion of this operation: lack of supervision, on the spot replacement of enumerators, etc. The consequence was that in many units operations were never completed. For this reason, results were never made available.

In 1969 the National Statistical and Accounts Office carried out a demographic sample survey in Yaoundé.

Since 1973 the Institute of Demographic Training and Research of Yaoundé (IFORD) has carried out the census of the towns of Bafia, Manjo, Sangmélina, Ngaoundéré and Mbalmayo as part of its training programme.

In 1976 Cameroon carried out its first general census of population and housing. It made possible an assessment of the size and structure of the population, as well as other population characteristics.

In 1978 a national survey on fertility was started and is still under way.

Apart from these operations of a purely demographic nature, other surveys providing reliable population data have been carried out. Among these are the survey on standard of living in coca-producing areas, the agricultural census, the road traffic survey on the North-Yaoundé route, etc.

It can therefore be stated that the Cameroon authorities accepted that a knowledge of the population was indispensable for economic and social development and that they have therefore spared no effort in the past twenty years in their demographic studies.

These different studies can be used to arrive at estimates of the population of the country.

II. EVOLUTION OF THE POPULATION OF CAMEROON

Based on the quality of sources, this evaluation is examined in two stages :

- the period before independence, characterised by a lack of reliable data,
- the period after independence, during which several statistical were carried out, providing researchers with data of better quality.

1) The Colonial Period

Far more information proved to be available on Eastern Cameroon (French Cameroon) than on Western Cameroon (British Cameroon). For this reason, the two parts of Cameroon are studied separately.

a) Evolution of the population of Eastern Cameroon

During the colonial period, it was customary to distinguish between the indigenous and the non-native population. Their evolution is studied separately.

*Evolution of the indigenous population

Table 5 shows the evolution of the indigenous population of Eastern Cameroon. As mentioned earlier, the quality of sources improved over time. It is convenient to distinguish, therefore, between three distinct periods: 1912-1939, 1939-1950 and 1950-1957.

The 1912-1939 period

The first estimate is that of the period 1912-1913 originating from the last German official figures. The population of Cameroon was then estimated at 2 649 000 inhabitants of which about 2 000 000 were in the part which was to be placed under French mandate.

In 1921 France sent the League of Nations its first report on Cameroon. It gave 3 000 000 as the minimum population. During the same year, three different reports provided the following data :

Table 5

CAMEROON - EVALUATION OF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION OF
EASTERN CAMEROON BASED ON AVAILABLE STATISTICS

YEAR	INDIGENOUS POPULATION in 000's	YEAR	INDIGENOUS POPULATION in 000's
1912	2 000	1939	2 606
1921	2 600	1940	2 632
1923	2 756	1941	2 703
1924	2 770	1942	2 717
1925	2 110	1943	2 767
1926	1 877	1944	2 798
1927	1 880	1945	2 816
1928	1 888	1946	2 816
1929	1 923	1947	2 816
1930	2 186	1948	2 902
1931	2 200	1949	2 902
1932	2 222	1950	3 061
1933	2 224	1951	3 063
1934	2 228	1952	3 065
1935	2 339	1953	3 072
1936	2 340	1954	3 118
1937	2 377	1955	3 144
1938	2 514	1956	3 171
		1957	3 187

Sources: 1912 - Last figures left by the Germans

1921 - Census of French colonies

Other dates - reports to the League of Nations, administrative censuses, statistical yearbooks and reports from health services.

- In his report on the future development of French colonies, presented to the Chamber of Deputies on 12 April 1921, A. Sarraut put forward the figure of 3 000 000 for the indigenous population of Cameroon.
- The Census of French Colonies estimated this same population at 2 600 000.
- Finally, the same population is estimated at 3 500 000 indigenous inhabitants by the Report on the Administration of Cameroon presented to the Chamber of Deputies on 7 September 1921 by the Minister for Colonies.

The above example shows the divergence of data originating from different sources. In this specific case, it is thought that the figure put forward in the census is likely to be the most accurate due to the effort displayed during the enumeration operations. On the whole the figures shown in Table 5 are those which have been selected as the most probable among several sources.

The evolution of the size of the indigenous population from 1912 to 1939 shows very uneven variations from one year to another.

Table 6

CAMEROON - EVOLUTION OF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION OF
EASTERN CAMEROON FROM 1912 TO 1939

Period	1912	1923	1924	1926	1927	1931	1933	1934	1936	1937	1938
	to	to	to	to	to	to	to	to	to	to	to
	1921	1924	1926	1917	1931	1933	1934	1936	1937	1938	1939
Variation en %	+23	+6	-47	0	+15	+3	-3	+5	+2	+6	+3

Such variations cannot be explained as being the result of natural evolution. The reasons must be found elsewhere.

The first one is the quality of sources. The unexplained discrepancies between the various historical sources have already been noted above. The figures put forward were mostly based on the number of taxpayers counted by district administrative officers, and must very often be regarded cautiously. Besides, figures were often adjusted by administrators according to the use which was going to be made of them. In fact "it is likely that political considerations led the central administration in 1924 to adjust the figures provided by the enumerations of 1923 in order to arrive at a little changed total". [8]

The sharp decrease from 1924 to 1926 can be explained by the adjustment made to the figures, an adjustment which is justified by two important points:

- the official report of 1926 shows that the population must have been of the order of 2 000 000 and that the exaggeration of previous evaluations had been overestimated. [8, p.22]
- besides, M. BREUIL believed that the population of French Cameroon in 1926 could be between 2 200 000 and 2 500 000 [8, p. 22] . Subsequent censuses tend to bear him out.

The difference between the year 1921 and the years 1924 and 1926 also deserves an explanation. It is possible that district officers exaggerated the population size of the regions placed under their authority, maybe in order to make up, in the data provided by native chiefs, for omissions due to the collection method itself. These omissions were certainly overestimated, unless the results of the 1926 census were far below reality.

In any case, the figures put forward before 1931 must be considered as being very approximate.

It is not until 1931 that the French colonial administration started to carry out more thorough enumerations leading to better evaluations until 1939. It must also be noted that at that time, besides a marked development in indigenous vital records with the number of centres going up from 68 in August 1930 to 323 in 1935, special surveys were organised with the purpose of collecting data on births, deaths and population composition.

Despite this effort to carry out more thorough enumerations between 1931 and 1939, variations from one year to another continue to be rather random (see Table 6). It must be emphasised that these variations could not be justified on the grounds of natural movement. Several hypotheses can be put forward, in particular:

- more thorough enumeration
- systematic overestimation of some components of the population

They can explain the substantial increase in population. This is the case for example for the period 1931-33 about which is said in the official report of 1933 "Having been enumerated in the most accurate way possible, the indigenous population shows on the whole a marked increase compared with the figures of the 1931 census".

The sharp decreases are more likely to have been the result of incomplete enumerations and adjustments to previous estimates thought to be excessive rather than of migratory movements which were after all rather limited at the time.

It can be stated therefore that the haphazard variations from one year to another of the population of Cameroon from 1921 to 1939 mainly arise from the undependability of the various censuses or enumerations, though from 1931 onwards, an upward trend is discernible, as the quality of sources improved.

This undependability is connected with the difficulties of investigation which are of two kinds according to whether they relate to the environment studied or the methods of investigation used.

- Difficulties due to environment

Apart from difficulties of access, which are considerable in some regions, there must be noted also :

- . the mobility of the population
- . changes in administrative districts (boundaries and names)
- . changes in name of individuals during their lifetime
- . the frequency of identical first and second names among the inhabitants of a locality
- . the lack of general education among the majority of the population
- . the diversity of languages and dialects

- Difficulties arising from the methods used

The tax assessment purpose of enumeration operations led to :

- . a confusion of "age classes" and of "categories of people liable to tax" and their concomitant variations according to the territory and period
- . the unavoidable lack of interest of the enumerators in the "non-taxables" (children, the elderly, the disabled)
- . lack of statistical preparation and shortage of staff available for censuses
- . lack of regularity in the timing of operations

On the subject of this period between the two wars, M. Kuczinski [7 , pp.94-95] summarises the situation in the conclusion of his demographic study on French Cameroon :

"The enumerations of 1931-38, giving totals between 2 240 000 and 2 514 000 cannot be considered as satisfactory given that they show variances for each district which, until they had been explained in an acceptable fashion, have had to be viewed as the consequence of considerable over or underestimates. It is therefore not possible to say if the population of French Cameroon grew or declined during the twenty years of French occupation."

This opinion, valid as it may be, may nevertheless be qualified. After critical appraisal, these figures still reveal a tendency to increase. But it is impossible to make an exact estimate of the growth rate.

The period from 1939 to 1950

The period was marked by two quite thorough administrative censuses: the censuses of 1945 [1] and 1950 [3] .

Rising from 2 816 000 in 1945 to 3 061 000 in 1950, the indigenous population of Cameroon recorded a mean annual increase of 1.7% for the whole country.

Table 7

CAMEROON - EVOLUTION OF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION OF
EASTERN CAMEROON FROM 1945 TO 1950

REGION	POPULATION IN THOUSANDS		GROWTH	
	1945	1950	Absolute	Mean Annual (%)
Adamaoua and North	1 072.5	1 202.8	130.3	2.3
South of Adamaoua	1 743.5	1 857.8	114.3	1.3
Together	2 816.0	3 060.6	244.6	1.7

But as Table 7 above shows, the difference, i.e. 244 000 inhabitants, comes mainly from the Adamaoua and Northern region (+2.3% per annum).

This more rapid growth in the north by comparison with the south does not however appear to be justifiable. It would rather appear to be related to the greater influence of the Administration which allowed more precise enumeration. However, a demographic surge among the animist population can be noted at this time.

The period from 1950 to 1959

This period was marked, as noted earlier, by the carrying out of four statistical censuses covering the towns of Douala (1955), Edea (1956), Yaoundé (1957), Ebolowa (1958) and the Mbalmayo sub-division (1959). For the rest of the country the estimates have been based on the administrative censuses. However, it is likely that as the exercise had by now become more familiar both to the people and the administrators, the data obtained should be increasingly closer to reality.

Table 5 shows the evolution of the figures for the period. An upward trend of around 1% per annum is apparent. On the basis of this trend the indigenous population of Cameroon on the 1st January 1960, Independence Day, would be around 3 200 000.

* Evolution of the non-indigenous population of Eastern Cameroon

Several censuses have been carried out among the non-indigenous population of Eastern Cameroon of which the most recent are those of: 1946 (15 April), 1951 (12 November) and 1957 (15 January). These censuses form part of the general censuses of the non-indigenous population of French overseas territories.

By "non-indigenous" was meant all persons either not themselves originating from Cameroon territory, or at least one of whose parents was not from Cameroon.

The results of the various operations, shown in Table 8, indicate the evolution of the non-indigenous population of Eastern Cameroon.

Knowing the size of the indigenous and the non-indigenous population, the evolution of the total population of Eastern Cameroon can be depicted. This is shown in Table 9.

Taking into account the observed trends, it can therefore be stated that on 1st January 1960, the date of the Independence of Cameroon, the population of Eastern Cameroon was in the order of 3 400 000 inhabitants.

Table 8

CAMEROON - EVOLUTION OF THE NON-INDIGENOUS POPULATION
OF EASTERN CAMEROON

DATES		TOTAL	Of which:	
			Douala	Yaoundé
	1922	741	400	...
	1927	1 909	819	325
1st July	1931	2 163	878	423
1st July	1936	2 383	730	880*
1st January	1941	2 857	791	670*
15th April	1946	3 891	1 406	920
12th November	1951	12 269	4 486	2 311
15th January	1957	16 157	5 410	3 750

* Region of Nyong and Sanaga

Source [13]

Table 9

CAMEROON - EVOLUTION OF THE TOTAL POPULATION
OF EASTERN CAMEROON
(colonial period)

YEAR	INDIGENOUS POPULATION in 000's	NON-INDIGENOUS POPULATION	TOTAL in 000's
1922	2 678	741	2 679
1927	1 880	1 909	1 882
1931	2 200	2 163	2 202
1936	2 340	2 383	2 342
1941	2 703	2 857	2 706
1946	2 816	3 891	2 820
1951	3 063	12 269	3 075
1957	3 187	16 157	3 203

b) Evolution of population figures for Western Cameroon

As has been pointed out above, little data are available for Western Cameroon. The first global data found date back only to 1953.

Before then the last official German figures of 1912-13 gave a population for British Cameroon of 649 000. It must be noted that British Cameroon at the time was larger than Western Cameroon because one of its parts, "Northern Cameroon" was later joined to the Federation of Nigeria.

According to the various reports of the British administration, Western Cameroon experienced the evolution shown in Table 10.

The population of Western Cameroon at 1 January 1960, therefore was in the region of 900 000.

By way of a conclusion to this first section, it can be said that at the time of its independence, the population of the United Republic of Cameroon must have been in the order of 4 300 000 inhabitants.

Table 10

CAMEROON - EVOLUTION OF THE POPULATION OF WESTERN CAMEROON
BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

DEPARTMENTS	1953			1954			1959		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Bamenda	126.2	138.6	264.8	127.5	139.9	267.4	143.0	157.0	300.0
Nkambo	41.0	43.6	84.6	41.5	44.0	85.5	46.0	49.0	95.0
Wum	36.7	43.0	79.6	37.0	43.4	80.4	41.4	48.6	90.0
Victoria	55.6	29.9	85.6	56.1	30.2	86.3	61.7	33.3	95.0
Kumba	76.7	61.1	137.8	77.5	61.6	139.1	88.0	72.0	160.0
Mamfe	47.8	52.6	100.4	48.3	53.2	101.5	52.8	58.2	110.0
TOTAL	384.0	368.8	752.8	387.9	372.3	760.2	432.9	418.1	850.0

Source: [4]

2) The period after independence

Four major operations on a national scale have been undertaken in Cameroon since independence. These are :

- the regional surveys of 1960-65
- the administrative census of 1967
- the agricultural census of 1972-73
- the general census of population

The administrative census of 1967 was never completed in the field and for this reason never gave rise to a report. The few figures published by ORSTOM on this operation were in fact estimates.

As for the Agricultural Census, it covered only the agricultural population and for this reason did not give an estimate for the total population of the country.

Only the data given by the surveys of 1960-65 and the General Census of Population and Housing will consequently be used here.

a) The population of Cameroon based on the 1960-65 Surveys

These surveys present two major drawbacks :

* The division into regions :

The division of the territory into survey regions was done with a view to regrouping the population into homogenous groups in order to obtain a better understanding of the demographic phenomena (such as family structure and economic activity).

But if breaking down the area in this way helps in discerning socio-demographic phenomena, it has the inconvenience of not permitting the presentation of results according to administrative units, indispensable to most users.

* The duration of the collection period :

The second major drawback of these surveys resides in the fact that they were not carried out at the same time. As has been pointed out above, the surveys took six years to complete, too long to allow a meaningful comparison between the various regional statistics.

Despite these faults, however, the statistics allow an estimate of the total population of Cameroon. Indeed the dates of the various surveys mentioned above taken together determine a median

date, which is 1 August 1964. A projection of the statistics from the various regions at this date (1), adding complementary data on the areas not covered by the survey, allows an estimate of the population of the United Republic of Cameroon at 1 August 1964 of around 5 400 000 inhabitants.

b) The General Census of Population and Housing of April 1976

The United Republic of Cameroon carried out in April 1976 its first general census of population and housing. This made available a precise figure for the Cameroon population for the first time. It was concerned with the de jure population (residents present and residents absent).

The population enumerated was 7 131 833 inhabitants. However, the evaluation survey carried out at the conclusion of the census indicated an underestimate of approximately 7%. It is for this reason that Decree N° 77/786 of September 30th, 1977, announcing the results of the general census of population and housing in April 1976, fixes the population of the United Republic of Cameroon at 7 663 246 inhabitants, of which 51% females.

This census made possible for the first time a breakdown of the population of the United Republic of Cameroon by administrative region. This is shown in Table 11.

Table 11

CAMEROON - BREAKDOWN OF THE POPULATION OF
THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON BY PROVINCE

(April 1976)

PROVINCES	POPULATION	DENSITY
South Centre	1 491 945	12.9
East	366 235	3.4
North	2 233 257	13.6
North West	980 531	56.7
West	1 035 597	74.5
South West	620 515	24.9
Coast	935 166	46.2
United Republic of Cameroon	7 663 246	16.5

Source : [17]

$$(1) \quad P_t = P_o (1 + R)^t$$

III. CONCLUSIONS

Knowledge of the population of the United Republic of has improved progressively over time. Data were essentially based on estimates by the colonial administrators in the early days, then on administrative censuses. As the administrative infrastructure of the country expanded, these censuses became more and more effective. However, no general census of population was possible during the colonial period. Only a few towns were subject to censuses.

Later, soon after independence, regional demographic censuses were carried out which, despite the long period of time necessary to cover the whole country, when taken together provide the first estimates of the national population based on a scientific source.

These surveys however did not make possible a breakdown of population into administrative units. The general census of population and housing in April 1976 filled this gap and has provided at the same time for the first time an accurate figure for the total population.

The post-censal work carried out, including a National Survey on Fertility and on Nutrition, forms, in conjunction with the statistics from the later census, a substantial body of data which remains to be explained.

As far as population is concerned, the evolution has been as follows :

Table 12

CAMEROON - PROPOSED EVOLUTION OF POPULATION

PERIODS	POPULATION IN THOUSANDS
1912 - 1913	2 649
1953	3 872
1954	3 900
1960	4 300
1964	5 400
1976	7 663

The population on 1 January 1975 is estimated to be 7 423 770 assuming growth rate of 2.5%.

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