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A PROPOSAL FOR

CAMEROON'S NEW SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

(SUMMARY VERSION)

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## INTRODUCTION

Academics, researchers, policy makers and government leaders around the world work hard to find an optimal way to invest national resources for better outcomes. They attempt to answer the key question of what is the most effective and efficient governance model to management national resources for optimal socio-economic development.

So far, the government of the Republic of Cameroon, like most countries around the world, has adopted the Gross National Product (GNP) as the main metric for measuring national progress and development.

For the past eight decades, many scientists and politicians have recognized the limitations of Gross Domestic (GDP) and GNP-centered public policy. However, only in the last decade the world has seen a real advancement in providing an alternative to GDP development model and metric as a measure of national progress. Several countries are working on changing their socio-economic development and management models (including the UK, Canada, France, Thailand, UAE and others). Cameroon has now the opportunity to implement a new policy-making framework based on pioneering innovations that can contribute to a more balanced investment and resources allocation with a focus on the dimensions of health and well-being.

In 2003, the government of Cameroon worked out the Poverty Reduction Strategy Document paper (PRSD) that described the country's development policy that would permit to reduce the poverty and achieve the development Millennium Goals. This document was implemented from 2003 to 2008.

This document was revised in 2008, and a new development framework was set up: *"Growth and Job Strategy Document 2010-2020"*. This strategy focuses on wealth and job creation to reduce poverty. The measure of the success of this policy is roughly "Gross Domestic Product (GDP)" and monetary poverty.

Poverty and unemployment are recognized as a main source of unhappiness. Job creation contributes to mental and physical well-being, but it is insufficient to develop it. Though

employment is important, the nature of the workplace experience and other environmental, social and health factors are just as important in determining one's well-being and happiness. Furthermore, the key limitation of the GDP development model is its hyper-focus on production, while ignoring the well-being of the population.

Do material possessions make people healthy and happy? Are we fighting against poverty or should we fight for the well-being of the population?

Clearly, the measureable economic artifacts alone cannot explain personal fulfillment, social cohesion, or the value of the collective experience of life. The United Nations launched the Millennium Development Goals or MDG, (UN, 2000) that made significant policy progress listing many new goals such as gender equality and education in order to overcome the limitation of GDP-based policies.

This shows that development needs to be conceptualized as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. The former dominance of the economic growth paradigm is now challenged by multi-dimensional approaches to development that place people, not economic growth, as the ultimate end goal of development.

We need to understand that the notion of progress goes well beyond lack of income or consumption to include non-monetary aspects such as weak social connections, psychological costs of alienation and isolation, exposure to risks and the experience of vulnerability. We need a clear, coherent, and compelling complement to the dominance of GDP. We need a new and transformational approach to defining and measuring well-being. This is extremely necessary to be efficient in effective allocation of government resources and investments.

## Brief Historical Background

Our historical research found that the first breakthrough innovations in public management came from the following four initiatives:

1. The Human Development Index or HDI (Haq, 1990) that included life expectancy and literacy dimension to complement the GDP. HDI was later updated in 2006 and added more dimensions.
2. The US-based Genuine Progress Index or GPI (Daley & Cobb 1995) that subtracted from the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) accounts the cost of pollution and depletion of natural resources. The GPI was updated in 2006 to include more dimensions.
3. Gross National Development or GND (Yones, 1998) that considered several dimensions based on statistical objective measure of outcomes of education, environment, health, and politics, social and economic indicators.
4. Gross National Well-being or GNW, (Jones, 2005), also referred to as Gross National Happiness, inspired by King of Bhutan and proposed by the US-based International Institute of Management think tank as a policy-making and measurement tool centered on mental and physical health and well-being with an integrated framework that measures subjective and objective well-being covering economic, health & safety, social and education, and government performance.

After 2005, the research on the subject exploded. Several public, academic and private initiatives were launched by famous economists and organizations such as Stiglitz Commission (2009), OECD Better Life Index (OECD 2011), Gallup Wellbeing Index (Gallup 2012), United Kingdom, (ONS, 2012), and Social Progress Index (SPI, 2014), UAE Happiness Ministry (Dubai Government, 2016). After studying the literature, all initiatives from 2009 until 2016 use similar frameworks with similar dimensions, just rearranged or presented in different ways to suit the perspective of the authors. Some use a subset or superset of metrics or measures, but they all fall into the same dimensions. They also appear to be customized from the one or combination of the first four frameworks (HDI, GPI, GND, and GNW/GNH).

## PROPOSED SOLUTION

All of the above initiatives can inform Cameroon and its policy makers can customize their own socioeconomic development framework to address national needs and priorities. Any resulting framework will be an improvement over the current GDP-based development model.

Based on the research of the above initiative, we propose the use of Gross National Well-being / Happiness (GNW/GNH). There are three reasons for our choice. The first reason is that other framework initiatives lack either a component of mental well-being (subjective) or physical (objective) measurement indicators. We believe an integrated framework that includes direct polling of people's satisfaction on the six key dimensions of life experience and government performance indicators will help policy leaders make decisions that are more informed. The second reason is the simplicity of the framework that will reduce the cost of implementation. The third reason is based on experience and point of view. As medical doctors and health professionals, we can appreciate the importance of health and well-being as the most important factor of socio-economic development needs. For example, Cameroon has one of the highest AIDS and Malaria population infection rates in Central Africa. Although a significant progress has been made in the last decade to contain and reduce these diseases, we need a new, more effective and integrated decision-making tool in our fight against such diseases and mortality rates. For example, our battle for health also requires special attention to water contamination (Environment) and (Education) to prevent rather than treat the diseases. This is naturally integrated in the GNW/GNH framework. The focus on well-being is clear in this model. The international Institute of Management (IIM) paper links a person's well-being to mental happiness. Their research found that happy (mentally healthy) people have better health habits, lower blood pressure, stronger immune system, and higher endurance levels. They cause less stress on the nation's health care system. Citizens with better emotional and mental health are easier to relate to and work with, tend to be better decision-makers, are more creative, and outperform peers in problem-solving, innovation, persistence and productivity.

In Cameroon, the infectious diseases are causing a major burden on national resources and economy both directly and indirectly, and the only way to win the battle is by integrating a multi-dimensional approach. Simply put, people are not interested in socio-economic growth

and development if they are sick or feel unsafe. Therefore, prevention is more cost-effective than treatment.

The Gross National Well-being brings focus to the most important aspects of life experience, and mental and physical health that can be achieved via integrated public policy decisions combined with other dimensions of living such as economic, environment, government, and social relationships.

During the evaluation of the *“Poverty reduction strategy Document (PRSD)”*, a participatory consultation was organized to gather the opinion of the population on the implementation of the PRSD. In general, it came out that the main concerns of the population were: (i) access to basic services (electricity, water, roads, quality healthcare and education); (ii) access to agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and lands; and (iii) centralization of public contracts.

There is, therefore, a great change of paradigm. More than GDP, Gross National Happiness/Well-being helps tune in to those and other dimensions of personal and collective satisfaction to get a reasonable facsimile of what is important to people and for policy makers to improve their lives. In the 2015 World Happiness Report, the U.S. ranks number 15 among 158 countries. Furthermore, the happiness index of the Central African Republic (CAR) is higher than Gabon’s, both countries within Central Africa; however, Gabon’s GDP towers ten times than the GDP of the Central African Republic.

**GNW SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

In GNW/GNH, material well-being is important, but it is also important to focus on other factors affecting health and well-being like governance, education, and harmony with the community and the environment.

To ameliorate Cameroon’s national happiness/well-being, we can use the six areas that can serve as pillars of governance to measure the well-being of the population. These are:

N°	Dimensions/Domains	Indicators
1	Health & Safety	Mental Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical depression, anxiety etc./capita</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reported health status</li> </ul> Physical Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type and number of serious illnesses/capita</li> <li>• Type and number of chronic illnesses/capita</li> <li>• Number of healthy days</li> <li>• Disability</li> </ul> Physical Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major injuries /capita</li> <li>• Non-natural deaths /capita</li> </ul>
2	Economic	Minimum wage/CPI (consumer price index) Average income/CPI Consumer debt/capita Disposal income/capita Savings or investment account/capita Retirement account/capita Income distribution (outliers excluded) Cost to start a business
3	Social Relationships	Divorce rates/capita Domestic violence/capita Family lawsuits/capita Labor disputes/capita Civil lawsuits/capita Criminal lawsuits/capita
4	Living Environment	Nature

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Air, water, soil, pollution levels</li> <li>• Green sqm/capita</li> </ul> <p>City Planning</p> <p>Infrastructure quality (Water, Electricity, Telecom/Internet, Transportation and Roads)</p> <p>Cleanness</p> <p>Noise, traffic congestions</p> <p>Housing</p>
5	Governance	<p><b>Quality</b></p> <p>Corruptions index</p> <p><b>Fairness:</b></p> <p>Equal opportunities,</p> <p>Labor rights indices</p> <p>Political participation</p> <p>Fundamental rights</p> <p>Internal civil and foreign conflicts</p> <p><b>Efficiency</b></p> <p>Time &amp; cost of (g2c&amp; g2b &amp; g2g???) transactions</p> <p>Percentage of budget deficit vs. surplus</p> <p>Debt/gdp,(GDP??)</p> <p>Tax burden on individuals and businesses</p>
6	Activities	<p><b>Labor</b></p>

		Unemployment rate Self-employed/employment Job satisfaction <b>Learning</b> Percentage of population to education/level Cost of education/min wage <b>Leisure</b> Parks/sports venues sqm/capita Working hours/leisure hours
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Indicators can be added or removed to customize them to policy goals. Collection of data is widely available via government agencies. We can also start small (collecting samples) and improve upon data collection with time. The weight of each indicator can be customized. In general, more weight is placed on Health/Safety, followed by Economic and Social Relationships and less weight on Environment and Government and Life Activities, unless an indicator directly links to a primary dimension. For example, water pollution will effect health and its weight will be higher than the ecological or green footprint or number of parks in the communities.

GNW framework and index is a new concept that provides more integrated and richer life outcomes than the GNP and economic growth. Even though it is an innovation and critics argue against including subjective measures, it can also be regarded as a strength. Every policy maker needs feedback on the quality of his or her decisions and their impact on the well-being of the citizens. For example, spending billions of CFA on a massive football stadium might look good on paper, but it is likely to have less than optimal return on people’s well-being. , especially when the nation’s crime rates, water and health quality are at risk. Measuring GNH is indicative of a new focus on quality of life and not just the increase in economic transactions. Quality of life cannot be measured without the psychological (subjective) component.

**GNW MONITORING TOOL FOR GOVERNMENT LEADERS**

The use of GNW scorecard or dashboard will make it simple for government leaders to monitor and manage policy outcomes.

The gross national well-being and happiness scorecard or dashboard can provide two separate or integrated reports: one report via direct population surveys, and the other via objectives metrics as shown in the following screenshots:

Well-being & Happiness Dimensions		Index Score	Satisfaction &/or Wellbeing	Score	Color
Health (safety, obesity, ...)	(0-10)	Very Unhappy	(0)	Very Happy	[Red]
Economic (retirement savings...)	(0-10)				
Relationships (lawsuits, divorce rates,...)	(0-10)				
Activities (unemployment, education..)	(0-10)	Neutral	(5)	Very Happy	[Yellow]
Government (G2C & G2B satisfaction..)	(0-10)				
Environment (pollution...)	(0-10)	Very Happy	(10)	Very Happy	[Green]
GNW / GNH (Total Weighted Score / 6)	(0-10)				

Appendix:  
National Indicators  
National Happiness Formula  
(After Forum)

Courtesy: International Institute of Management, (IIM Framework 2007)

This governance scorecard can provide a new innovative tool that provides a 360-degree view of the public administration’s key performance indicators. It will reveal any policy blind spots or any unbalanced development goals. It also helps align public agencies by bringing them together to use one unifying framework and common language and overall goals for discussion and measurements. Allocation of budget among agencies then becomes less about political connections or salesmanship and more about measurable outcomes, thus improving the effectiveness and efficiency of government budgets and operations. While the picture shows equal weights across various dimensions for simplicity, the International Institute of Management recommends different weights for each dimension with more weight being placed on health, safety, social relationships and income security than other dimensions.

One example of how to apply this decision framework and measurement scorecard can be as follows:

## **OTHER POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Health**

Good health is one of the most important things to people while also bringing many other benefits including greater access to education and the job market, an increase in productivity and wealth, reduced health care costs, good social relations, and of course, longer life expectancy. Health includes conditions of the human body and mind including physical and mental states. A healthy quality of life allows us to get through our daily activities without undue fatigue or physical stress.

Infectious diseases such as malaria, aids, tuberculosis, and chronic, or non-communicable, diseases including diabetes, hypertension are some of the common causes of death and disabilities.

Progress in population health status can be achieved by putting greater emphasis on public health and disease prevention, and by improving the quality and performance of health care systems.

### **2. Education**

Education plays a key role in providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competences needed to participate effectively in society and the economy. In addition, education may improve people's lives in such areas as health, civic participation, political interest, and happiness. Studies show that educated individuals live longer, participate more actively in politics and in the community where they live, commit fewer crimes and rely less on social assistance.

In a fast-changing knowledge economy, education is about learning skills for life. It includes formal and informal education, and assesses each person's wider knowledge, values, and skills. The introduction of well-being and happiness education and measurement in primary school, secondary school, and universities will be a good way to have a new generation of knowledgeable and educated citizens who will be well acquainted with the concept and measurement of socio-economic development.

### **3. Basic Services**

The rapid assessment of PRSP in 2008 showed that people value access to basic services the most such as water, electricity, road (for evacuation of agricultural products), health services, schools.

Investments in these areas can considerably improve individual and population's life satisfaction (mental and physical well-being)

#### **4. Governance**

Trust in the government is essential for social cohesion and well-being. Today, more than ever, citizens demand greater transparency from their governments. Information on the who, why and how of decision-making is essential to hold the government to account, maintain confidence in public institutions and support a fair business environment. Greater transparency is not only key to upholding integrity in the public sector; it also contributes to better governance. Indeed, openness and transparency can ultimately improve public services by minimizing the risk of fraud, corruption, and mismanagement of public funds.

This domain evaluates how people perceive governmental functions and evaluate public service delivery. It explores people's level of participation in elections and government decisions, and their assessment of various rights and freedoms.

#### **5. Work/Job**

Apart from looking at unemployment, rate and self-employment vs employment, this domain also explores job satisfaction. Does one's experience in the workplace contribute to well-being? Does one have the ability to achieve inner satisfaction through work? Measuring those aspects of life at work that contribute to the individual's well-being in order to have a more comprehensive picture of the full human experience is of great importance.

At the regional and local level, measuring GNH can help to assess a population's well-being and provide better information to local leaders. Governments can ask each local political leader to measure the well-being of its population on an annual basis. In this case, the weighting of each indicator can be adjusted or adapted for rural and urban areas.

## **CONCLUSION**

The growing popularity and the influence of the GNW governance and development framework show that many policy makers and millions of people are becoming more and more conscious of what really matters in terms of actionable public policies and how nothing is more important than mental and physical well-being. GNW can be used at the individual level, at the regional level as well as the national level. All investments of public time, effort, money, and projects should be tested against this integrated multi-dimensional model instead of the production-based model (GNP).

This paper also proposes setting up a forum for political representatives, policy makers, practitioners, faith institutions, social leaders, and academicians to discuss this new concept and exchange experiences on strategies for translating well-being frameworks into practice in Cameroon. The final deliverable of the forum is for the government and government agencies to have a clear actionable plan that can enable us to have a more holistic view on the development and well-being of the population.