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The Legal Framework of Civil Society and Social Movements

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Introduction

Law functions as a means of directing and imposing restraints on human activities and it must therefore seem something of a paradox that the idea of freedom can be embodied in the law (Lloyd 1964:138). There is the question of the right of various types of groups, whether social, political, or economic, or of any other kind, to organise themselves and to conduct their own affairs.

In Cameroon, as elsewhere, it is thus a common feature of daily life that people tend to constitute themselves into groups which may be permanent or transient. Such groups, when they become instituted are treated in law as persons possessing a separate identity and continuity from its members. The movements differ very markedly in size, character, composition, and purpose, so it by no means follows either as a matter of logic or even common sense that all should be accorded similar recognition on the doubtful analogy of the individual human person (op cit.:303).

Civil society and social movements in Cameroon reflect complexity and diversity. This is amply illustrated in the legal instruments governing their modes of creation, organisation, functioning and other details such as goals, and particularly, their sources of revenue. In the structuring of civil society in Africa therefore, Ekeh argues that care should be taken to include associations and institutions that possess not just a manifest but also a latent capacity to confront the state. On this basis, he identifies four categories of civil society organisations in Africa: civic public associations, for example, trade unions, student unions, mass media; deviant civic associations, for example, secret societies and fundamentalist religious movements; primordial public associations, for example, ethnic associations; and indigenous development associations, for example, farmers and traditional women's unions (Ekeh 1992).

It must be remembered that the end of the East-West conflict and the sudden breakdown of the socialist experiment in Eastern Europe are at the basis of the emergence of civil society organisations as is the adoption of neo-liberal market-led reforms and of political pluralism. Generally, it is believed the civil society movements in Africa constitute a fifth power. This explains why the good governance programme of Cameroon has designed a strategy which consists of strengthening civil society and social movements. Gradually, the state is disengaging from several key sectors of national life in favour of civil society by facilitating its legal framework (Temngah 2000:2).

The attitude adopted by the state in creating the legal space for civil society has been one of both caution and repression. For the purpose of this chapter, a sample of legal instruments regulating civil society and social movements will be presented. Our next task shall consist of analysing the adequacy of such legislation in an attempt to illustrate the state's attitude of caution and repression. Finally, the thesis that there is still the possibility of harnessing these groups into a total national network capable of presenting an alternative framework for managing the crisis-ridden state within the present legal context will be highlighted as a way forward.

Diversity of Legal Instruments

The legal framework of non-state actors is abundant and rich. Civil society organisations consist of groups of non-state actors representing a number of sectors with different, and possibly divergent, interests. Such diversity can constitute a valuable asset but it also constitutes a veritable obstacle to the sustainable and coherent organisation of the civil society (Mbaye 2003:24). Cameroon's legislation on associational life is regulated and controlled through legal instruments having drawback clauses intended to maintain a firm grip on associational life (Law No. 90/053, Law No. 99/Law No. 90/053, Law No. 99/014). The legal instruments confer on the groups a legal personality enabling them to act in their own name(s) within the ambit of the law as artificial persons separate from their founders (Salomon v. Salomon 1897). It is in affirming its attachment to fundamental freedoms contained in the universal declaration of human rights and other regional and international human rights instruments that the Cameroonian Constitution guarantees freedom of association as is the case with other freedoms (Republic of Cameroon 1990).

It is consequent on the liberalisation of public life in Cameroon that a 'baby boom' emerged in associational life in the context where the state had failed in both its governmental functions and developmentalist claims and where donor agency attention was tilting towards civil society organisations.

Table 1: Legal Instruments and their Domains of Applicability

No	Nature Of Group	Legal Instrument(s)	Competent Authority
1	NGOs	Law No 90/053 of 19 December 1990 Law No 99/014 of 22 December 1990 Decree No 2001/150/PM of 13 May 2001	Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation
2	Trade Unions	Law No 90-053 of 19 December 1990 Law No 92-007 of 14 August 1992 Decree No 93/574 of 15 July 1993 Decree No 93/576 of 15 July 1993 Convention No 87(1948) Convention No 98(1949)	Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Welfare
3	Cooperative Movement	Law No 92/006 of 14 August 1992 Decree No 92/455/Pm of 23 November 1992	Ministry of Agriculture Ministry of Finance
4	Common Initiative Groups	Law No 92/006 of 14 August 1992 Decree No 92/455/Pm of 23 November 1992	Ministry of Agriculture Ministry of Finance
5	Mass Media	Law No 90-052 of 19 December 1990 Law on Trade Unions	Ministry of Communication Ministry of Territorial Administration
6	The Church	Law No 90/053 of 19 December 1990	Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation, Presidency of the Republic
7	Professional Associations	Law No 90/053 of 19 December 1990 C.f. Cameroon: Rights and Freedoms 1990	Ministry of Territorial Administration/MINREX (Ministry of External Relations)
8	Students Movements	Law No 90/053 of 19 December 1990	
9	Feminist Movements	Law No 90/053 of 19 December 1990	
10	Development	Law No 90/053 of 19 December 1990	
11	Separatist Movements	Not authorised; no legislation Sectarian Movement,	Ministry of Territorial Administration
12	Religious Fundamentalists	Not authorised; no legislation, deviant group	Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation
13	Ethnic Movements	Socio-cultural, may not need formal authorisation	May not need formal authorisation
14	Secret Societies	Operate clandestinely. Not allowed, considered as deviant structures	Legal instruments are lacking

Source: Constructed from Legislative Instruments of Republic of Cameroon.

The first legislation that inaugurated the new age of civil society in Cameroon is Law No. 90-053 which repealed Law No. 67/LF/19 of 12 June 1967. It is a law of general application (articles 1, 2) which reflects the organisations' diversity and alludes to specific laws (Art 5.4) for the likes of political parties and trade unions. A survey of the legal instruments in this domain reveals a concerted effort to contain it through system checks by curtailing its effect as a major partner or force in the development process. Though legislation gives the movement legitimacy, the attitude towards it is one of caution and repression through the various regulations in force. Table 1 illustrates the various legal instruments in force regulating civil society movements.

The Attitude of the State

In legislating on association life, the state has two complementary attitudes. On the one hand, there is an ambiguous approach guided by caution, which consists of granting rights and freedoms in the most of liberal terms and on the other hand issuing enabling instruments that tend to limit the freedom of association through repression. Law No. 90-053 of 19 December 1990 on the Freedom of Association proclaims that everyone is free to set up an association and has the right to belong to any association. One reading of this law is that it is a liberal piece of legislation which resulted in the emergence of various groups which had even been outlawed through the repressive law of 1967. Religious organisations, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and secret societies like the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star (Olumba Olumba) (Calabar), outlawed some years ago, re-emerged and became free to conduct their activities within this new context. So far so good! However the same law as well as other relevant legislation limits the associational thirst of Cameroonians through drawback clauses in the various laws governing associations.

Caution

A reading of the aforesaid laws reveals that the state is acting with caution. With the exception of public utility associations, no declared association may obtain subventions, gifts and donations (art. 11) and the state has very wide powers as far as the dissolution of associations is concerned (articles 12-14). In effect, articles 12-14 deal with public order and policy. For one reason or the other the authority in charge of the maintenance of public order may dissolve an association which is deemed to be pursuing goals that are contrary to the constitution, laws and good morals, as well as acting in a way that tends to affect national integrity and unity and the security of the state (art. 4). It is the authority that qualifies the said act and once the association is dissolved, the only recourse is to the Administrative Bench of the Supreme Court within ten days, and while the matter is pending, the decision remains valid.

Article 15 which deals with foreign associations gives them the ample freedom to set up and function. Foreign associations here refer to groups having their

headquarters abroad or in Cameroon whose leadership is composed of foreigners or a majority of them. In authorising their existence, the authorising body may issue a temporal legal status or may submit it to regular renewals on the basis of certain conditions and can withdraw their authorisation at anytime without the need to show cause for its decision (art. 17). Under this condition, the association shall proceed forthwith with the immediate cessation of activities and liquidate its assets within a time frame of three months. According to Chapter V (articles 22-31), which defines the parameters for religious associations, in as much as they can be freely set up, they may not receive subventions from the public in the form of gifts and grants.

The law is also subjected to enabling statutes (the *textes d'application*), which subvert the veneer of liberality enshrined in the statutes. For example, when it comes to granting the status of accredited association, there is Decree No. 2001/150/PM of 3 May 2003 setting up the functioning and organisation of a technical ministerial committee in charge of accrediting NGOs and the follow-up of their activities. This statute saw the light of day only three years after the law on NGOs entered into force. Secondly, the accreditation procedure is so tight that less than twenty groups received their accreditation three years after the law of application (Law No. 99/01, Law No. 90/053). This requirement is very strict since it leaves no room for transitory measures for existing groups before the enacting of the law.

Repression

In as much as there is freedom of association (Temngah 1995:178-205), this freedom has not gone unchecked. Generally, associations are expected to have rights and obligations. In the present context, the sanctions, which might either be civil or criminal, are more often than not repressive.

Civil Sanctions

Civil sanctions consist of the dissolution of the group by the Minister in charge of Territorial Administration for acts incompatible with public order and policy or activities that undermine the security of the state. Again, the group may be suspended by the competent authority on the recommendation of the follow-up committee for the duration of three months when members pursue objectives contrary to their statutes. The conditions for dissolving an association are arbitrary since the administrative authority alone may determine the degree of incompatibility with public order, policy or the security of the state. In this way the administrators have wide-ranging powers over a domain which is meant to ensure alternative forms of participation and liberties for the common man.

Criminal Sanctions

Criminal sanctions against leaders of groups may be inflicted on the basis of articles 184 and 225 of the Cameroonian Penal Code for embezzlement of public funds

since these funds are considered public funds (Tchokomakoua 2000:18). The 1999 law proceeds to punish a person (founder, delegate, administrators of groups) with a jail sentence of three months to one year and a fine of 100,000 FCFA to 1,000,000 FCFA or one of the sanctions for the continuous activity of a dissolved or suspended group. The sanctions are very severe as they are doubled when the activities of the group(s) are considered inimical to national unity either in an armed or unarmed manner. The sanctions extend to persons who purportedly act as if the group was accredited pending outcome of the accreditation file and to someone who facilitates in any manner meetings of dissolved or suspended groups (Tchokomakoua 2000). Indeed, in these matters the powers of the administration are wide and discretionary.

Taking the example of the law on NGOs, there is a violation of the principle of non-retrospection. Existing groups have the same obligations to produce an application for accreditation in a similar manner to new ones, without considering their previous achievements. The law itself talks of an association, which for three years has contributed to development within its domain of interest. One would have logically expected that older groups should have benefited from transitory measures on the basis of their achievements within this minimum period and given accreditation automatically.

Another major aspect of repression is the fact that the judiciary cannot review a refusal of accreditation of any association. The wide discretionary powers of the competent authority are such that associations, which may not be to the taste of the system, can simply be outlawed. The 'baby boom' of associations can then be halted by the Minister of Territorial Administration for acts incompatible with their statutes and endangering public order and state security (Temngah 2000, Republic of Cameroon 1993, Mbu 1986:263-69). It may be recommended that the right attitude should be for the legislator to review the laws on associations in order to avoid the conflicts, inadequacies and the many pitfalls that impair the largely liberal spirit and may eventually defeat the purpose for which it was intended.

Recourse to the Courts of Law for Judicial Review

The powers of the judiciary to review a dissolution or suspension order are negligible. The judiciary is not an independent structure as it ought to be although the 1996 constitution nominally consecrates it as a power like the executive and the legislative. In practice it has not been possible for it to affirm this role of a power because the Ministry of Justice, which is the supervisory body of the judiciary, is paradoxically part of the executive arm of government (see Decree No. 84/353 of 28 May 1984). By this arrangement judges are placed under administrative structures which exercise wide powers that often undermine the independence of the judiciary (Temngah 1997:362-363). For instance, there are multiple pressures on the judiciary from the executive arm of government. Once a decision has been issued by the authority suspending or dissolving an organisation

or structure, the judiciary is usually reluctant to interfere, especially given that grounds for dissolution or suspension usually consist of matters relating to public order, national security and territorial integrity. Under such circumstances, the courts will normally invoke laws relating to subversion and terrorism as was the case with the one-party days or the aftermath of 9/11.

Response of Potential Civil Society Actors in the Affirmation of Roles

In the face of caution and repression on the part of government, potential civil society actors have resorted to circumventing the laws and setting up spontaneous structures. The very existence of deviant groups and secret societies is a response to the state's refusal to give legal status to such organisations. The phenomenon of rebellious groups and other associations sprouting up with diverse interests and strategies is a response to the tight legislation (for example, the Southern Cameroons National Council). Moreover, some of the structures may not need formal recognition as their impact on the state will be minimal. In any case, recognition is necessary if funding has to be sought in the pursuit of their activities. This is the case of associations changing their denomination to become cooperative societies or common initiative groups and others ridding themselves of the political overtones of their objectives, activities and slogans.

This attitude is illustrative of the view that there is still ample legal space for civil society organisations in Cameroon. Despite severe sanctions and various administrative hurdles, associational life in Cameroon is promising. Of course, one should not lose sight of the fact that this all depends on the economies of the country concerned, given that development assistance is conditioned upon a minimum of stability and peace and the level of democratisation. In addition, there is the lack of experience due to the novelty of the phenomenon and the non-democratic nature of regimes in Africa. Institutional lapses and the high level of corruption do not augur well for the proper implementation of programmes for development that will benefit the masses. The diversity of civil society organisations also accounts for the low level of understanding and the nature of dialogue between the state and non-state actors. The overall picture is not so bleak, but from the Cotonou Agreement (2000) there is hope based on the strategies of setting up platforms at various levels (local, national, regional and international). The strategies employed, such as capacity building, advocacy and training, can only enhance this spirit of solidarity between the various stakeholders.

Legal Framework and Development Role of Civil Society

In order to examine the relationship between the legal framework of civil society and development, one can classify them into either organisations pursuing broad collective interests or those with specialised focus.

Organisations Fostering Broad Collective Interests

It is clear that there is a great diversity of organisations from the legislation regulating civil society in Cameroon. Groups such as ‘Cercle des Amis du Cameroun (CERAC)’, ‘Association Mondiale de Défense des intérêts des Albinos’ (ASMODISA), ‘SOS Dialogue’, and ‘African Synergy against Aids and Suffering’ present themselves as organisations taking up the general interests of their members or the community they seek to protect. These groups embrace almost everything and it can be said of them that they are generally focused as they embrace a variety of activities. This is usually by virtue of their funding capacity. For instance, CERAC (Cercle des Amis du Cameroun) is a prestigious group, headed by the wife of Cameroon’s current President. Its membership is open to spouses of ministers and accredited ambassadors, a fact which enhances the funding capacity and is at the basis of the strength of the organisation. Table 2 presents NGOs as typical organisations with a broad focus.

It is worthy to note that only the seven organisations cited above were able to obtain the status of NGO from the Ministry of Territorial Administration (*Cameroon Tribune* 2003:8), and as of May, 2004, two others, namely ‘Ligue pour l’Education de la Femme et de l’Enfant’ (LEFE) (Yaoundé) and ‘Association Ecole et Développement’ (Yaoundé) equally received accreditation (*Cameroon Tribune* 2004:28).

Table 2: Examples of Non-Governmental Organisations with a Broad Focus

No	Name Of Group	Objectives
1	Centre d’Accueil de l’Espoir (CAES)-Yaoundé	Contribute to the fight against HIV/AIDS, care for children and the girl child
2	Organisme de Développement d’Etude de formation et de Conseil (ODECO)- Yaoundé	Accompany partner organisations in the development process of professional training
3	Organisation des Jeunes pour la Santé, la Sécurité Alimentaire et le Développement	Contribute to the welfare of man particularly the woman and her offspring
4	Service d’Etudes et d’Appui aux Populations à la base (SEAPB)-Yaoundé	Promote development through the participation of individuals
5	Femme, Santé et Développement en Afrique Subsaharienne (FESADE) Yaoundé	Offer training to ameliorate the competencies of women for the resolution of their health problems, their families and their communities.
6	Rural Development Foundation-Buea	Offer training and assistance to projects in underdeveloped rural zones.
7	Mouvement International Contre la Pauvreté en Afrique-Cameroun (MIPACAM)-Yaoundé	Assistance to destitute local peoples.

Source: *Cameroon Tribune*, Friday, 7 November 2003, p. 8, Translation by the author.

The proliferation of associations with a broad focus is the fruit of liberalisation through which the media and civil society can thrive. This category of organisations pursue broad and often vague objectives giving them room for manoeuvre in the development process. Though the law purports to be liberal, the enabling act on NGOs is very severe on granting NGO status to existing associations in Cameroon. From 1952 to 1990, 301 associations of various types were legally operating in Cameroon (Temngah 2000:8) while in the period 1991–1993, 278 associations were declared and from 1990–1993, 16 foreign associations and three organisations operating as public utilities were authorised (Human Rights in Cameroon 1993:79, 81).

Organisations with a Specialised Focus

At the end of the Cold War, there were a number of UN Conferences on issues such as the environment (Rio Earth Summit 1992), health and population (Cairo Summit 1994), socio-economic Matters (Vienna 1993), and Women (Beijing 1995). It is in response to these international concerns that some Community-Based Organisation (CBOs) emerged as organisations with special focus around the new issues heralded by globalisation in domains such as social justice, meaningful employment, welfare, environmental rights and awareness, local empowerment, human rights, community development, natural resource management, poverty alleviation, the monitoring of environmental standards, and practice in the local oil industry and the impact on the local oil-producing communities (Obi 1999:24).

This focus is a direct result of donor impact on these groups. For instance, since Rio, environmental associations have fared well in issues such as land rights, peoples' rights to a clean environment, poverty alleviation with people living in dangerous zones (pollution, etc.). The preservation of the environment can be properly handled by specialised and focused groups of a given community. A shining example in Africa is the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in the Delta Region of Nigeria (Obi 2000). In Cameroon, several groups are concerned with the environmental needs of the Cameroon Oil and Transportation Company (COTCO) of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project. If the 1970s and 1980s were decades when the world was preoccupied with issues surrounding supply of security, the 1990s look set to be the decade of the environment. The present environmental discussions have their roots in the Brundtland Report of 1987. That report took a broad view of the problems facing mankind, including the Third World problem of poverty. Although the causes of pollution are the result of the industrialisation process in the developed world over the past two-and-a-half centuries, Third World countries too, are also experiencing the environmental challenge. From the many issues involving the decline in rural economies in developing countries, it is understandable that organisations with a narrow focus may be effective in tackling common questions of their livelihoods in their various communities.

Another key sector which has attracted groups is gender and empowerment, from which the women's movement has benefited greatly. The feminine or women's movement has benefited from the UN's emphasis on the gender question during the Cairo Summit and also during the Copenhagen Conference and then Beijing where these issues came up prominently. The Cameroonian public has taken advantage of this advocacy to set up groups responsive to specific rights. The 'Ligue pour l'Education de la Femme et de l'Enfant' (LEFE) is just one of such organisations pursuing specific questions dealing with gender and the empowerment of women. During the Beijing Conference of 1995, the leader of this group, Pauline Biyong, was part of the Cameroonian delegation for this major advocacy in favour of women's rights. Her movement is gaining ground in this fight for the empowerment of the Cameroonian woman. Many groups and NGOs were involved in this forum for the adoption of the Cameroonian platform and policies have been influenced in favour of women in Cameroon. Women are thus involved in the creation of micro-finance groups and other local community groups for the implementation of the Beijing platform for women. To this effect, laws have been changed in favour of women as pressure mounted from within and abroad. The Cameroon government, through the Ministry of Women Affairs, prepared the official documents that were adopted in April 1997 as the platform of action and policy for the empowerment of women in Cameroon. Many groups, thanks to the opening, are blossoming in this sector.

Another issue that has become the focus of specific groups is children's rights. These groups draw their force from instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1979) and the ILO's Programme of Action for the elimination of the Exploitation of Child Labour of the Human Rights Commission. In Cameroon, some children live in absolute penury, malnutrition, disease, prostitution, and delinquency. No doubt, in this field, one can find groups militating against the sexual abuse of children and other related issues in partnership with UNICEF.

Our next concern is with the attitude of the state to this blossoming associational life.

Prospects for Building Civil Society Networks as an Alternative Framework for Development in Cameroon

Despite statutory and legislative drawbacks dealing with the administrative, institutional and legal framework in Cameroon, there is still enough legal, administrative and institutional space for a blossoming of associational life in Cameroon. If the central approach to development has failed, there is an acknowledgement that non-state actors can play a vital role in the development process. Despite legal hitches, the nature of the group is fundamental to this approach. Self-help and corporate associations and farmers' groups may not need any formal recognition. Sometimes, local government may be part of this process. The decentralisation process engaged through the 1996 constitutional reforms that

imply certain forms of political disengagement on the part of the central government and liberalisation of public life constitute a major concern by central authority to allow local peoples the latitude to manage their own affairs.

In this regard, Cameroon may gain from the recommendations of Article 4 of the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000 (The Cotonou Agreement), which acknowledges and recognises the complementary role and potential for contributions by non-state actors in the development process. Article 6(1)(b)(2) of the same agreement defines non-state actors as the private sector, economic and social partners, including trade unions and the civil society in all its forms. One of the central objectives of the Cotonou Agreement is poverty reduction, democracy and the recognition of better structured and organised non-state actors in the entire process. Participation of non-state actors in all the sectors of society in the definition and formulation of policies and strategies according to the realities and needs of each country remains a major concern. This emphasis contributes to enhancing ownership of all development strategies by the beneficiaries, thereby consolidating their role as facilitators of public-private partnerships.

The Cotonou spirit lays further emphasis on dialogue in national development strategies, sectoral policies and programming. Pre-Cotonou agreements between the ACP and the EU have been the monopoly of governments, but today the partnership has been extended to non-state actors. To achieve the overall goals of the Agreement, national platforms of civil society organisations representing all its components have now become a necessity. For instance, it may cover a wide range of organisations such as NGOs, trade unions, women and youth organisations as well as other movements that fall under the rubric of non-state actors within the meaning of article 6(1) (b) and (2) of the Cotonou Agreement.

National platforms are necessary for shaping policies and programmes within a given member country of the ACP-EU for the sake of sustainable development. These networks may not be sufficient. Participation requires partnership across regions, given that once organised, these groups are given consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). During the negotiations leading to trade issues of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at Seattle, non-state actors were very involved in contributing to the outcome of the Agreement. During the 1990s, several civil society organisations from all regions of the world, constituting themselves as national platforms and regional coalitions representing the civil society viewpoint were active at the various UN summit conferences (Rio 1992 on the Environment, Vienna 1993 on Socio-economic matters, Cairo 1994 on Population and Health, Beijing 1995 on women). Their force cannot therefore be underestimated. The successful setting up of the International Criminal Court (ICC), whose mandate is to prosecute and punish perpetrators of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, was the brainchild of the NGO Coalition

for an International Criminal Court and its contribution in the process of signing the ratification of the instruments of the court is immeasurable.

From this recognition and through their advocacy skills, non-state actors have played an important role in shaping, defining and formulating policies and development programmes according to the needs of their beneficiaries. Although they usually pursue diverse and even divergent interests, there is a need for platforms at national, regional, and international levels. This approach is feasible given that CSOs exist at local, national, regional and international levels. An examination of the modalities of building civil society networks at all levels in the quest for participation and action towards development is therefore necessary. At the close of the exercise, there should be sufficient evidence that such arrangements are capable of considerably influencing policy. For instance, in the case of Cameroon with supposedly liberal laws having drawback clauses, a lot of lobbying can be done at this level to ensure that legislation on civil society movements conforms to the spirit of civility and this can be done if we borrow wisely and integrate elements of international practice correctly. After all, human problems are universal with the only difference being that the world is divided into poor and rich segments. Since our exercise concerns the developing world, there is need to cooperate with others in order to share experiences. This can take the form of building national platforms, federating civil society organisations, working sector by sector or federating at regional level.

Conclusions

Cameroon's liberal and multifarious approach, as evidenced from the legal framework of associational life, must be reviewed as a matter of urgency. There is hope that this can happen in view of the prevailing international context of globalisation. In the search for alternatives, there is nothing that restrains a group from carrying out its development vision. The partnership existing between the various stakeholders in the definition and implementation of development objectives gives room for hope. As the fever for 'change' of the vibrant and turbulent period of the 1990s passes on, people are settling down to conceiving clear and achievable development goals. I will recommend that the various legal instruments be combined into one with two broad parts, namely, the general part that will cover all general provisions concerning the orientation and cardinal principles, and a special part dealing specifically with different groups. This will avoid repeating the same provisions from group to group. The competent authorities will also be limited to take into account only advisory opinions of the specific sector from which the group has to emerge. The Cotonou partnership and the existence of NEPAD have acknowledged the role of non-state actors in the development process and so it is hoped that any shortcomings in the legal framework of social groups in Cameroon can be made good and so there is still some legal space that civil society and social movements can capture and make much good of a bad situation.

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