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# Women and development: the role of Cameroonian women in poverty alleviation

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Microfinance and their efforts to assist women fight  
poverty in Cameroon.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Cameroonian women have many skills and talents which can enable them to make the economy of Cameroon better, but due to many political, social, economic barriers, they fail to use these skills and talents to the fullest. But thanks to microfinance organization they are able to move from darkness to light.

From findings, the Cameroonian woman is very instrumental and important when it comes to activities that promote the wellbeing of the country. Most of them are the main figure head in the family irrespective of whether a man is present or not. Families can survive thanks to their efforts as they are able to pay the fees of the children, afford food for the entire family and extended families. These women are able to carry on with these activities thank to the help of microcredit they get from microfinance organisations.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Microfinance and their efforts to assist women fight poverty in Cameroon

### 1.1 Introduction and background knowledge to problem

Microfinance institutions are among the main sources of small business capital sustaining most families, homes, communities and villages through loans at small or no interest rates (or microcredit) which enable their beneficiaries to carry out lucrative activities that help in the betterment of their lives and societies. They provide microcredit to the poor, especially women, to help improve their economic status. This initiative of microcredit was instituted by the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh (literally, bank of the villages in Bangali) in the mid 1970s through Muhammed Yunus (Helms, 2006)<sup>1</sup>. This initiative has spread worldwide and has proven to be of ultimate help to many villages or rural populations in the world at large. Micro finances are indispensable to many who have no one to support them due to their social, political or economic situation. Micro finances are believed to help in varied ways in the promotion of economic growth and in alleviating poverty (Emelda, 2010). Due to their help, the less privileged groups in society, which are mainly made up of women, can survive as through loans (micro credits) which permit them to carry out petty trades, cultivate their farms, educate their children thereby empowering them and improving their living standards. Commercial banks consider the poor as the wrong group of people to give out loans for fear of not getting their money back. The banks see them as a risk group to give out loans since they do not fulfil most of the conditions to take loans. This makes life more difficult for them. However, microfinance organisations have taken the initiative to give a chance to the poor to enjoy from the facilities of a bank by providing them with loans. This has proven the commercial banks wrong because the repayment rate is positive compared to some clients of commercial banks (Zeller, M and M.Sharma, 1998).

Statically, the population of Cameroon in 2010 was 19.5 million, amongst which about 40% lives below the poverty line (i.e. on a dollar or less a day). Comparing the number of rural poor between 2007 and 2010 for instance, there is a great improvement from 5.0 million in 2007 to about 4.5 million in 2010. This, thanks to developmental aids from national and international bodies specifically microfinance organisations since they mostly deal with the

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<sup>1</sup> Brigit Helms, 2006. *Access for All: Building Inclusive Financial Systems*. [Washington, D.C.: The World Bank](#). ISBN 0-8213-6360-3.

rural population and underprivileged, especially women who are often viewed as the most vulnerable group (IFAD, 2010). In the developing world, including Cameroon, women form a greater proportion of the rural poor (or the poor in general) due to socio-cultural, political and economic discrimination and corruption at the national or international level. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report in 2005 perpetuates this fact as it concludes that out of the 1.3 million people who live on 1 dollar or less a day, about 70 % of them are women. The Cameroonian woman is not an exception to this (ibid).

Microfinance organisations help boost the economic situation of Cameroonians, and especially of the Cameroonian women. In 2011 the sum of over FCFA 258 billion was collected as deposit from the over 460 microfinance institutes that operate in Cameroon. Since the existence of CAMCULL(Cameroon Cooperative Credit Union League), the first microfinance institution in 1963, Microfinance have provided over FCFA 22billion as capital, 15000 direct jobs and loans worth more than FCFA 138.5 billion to mostly poor especially women (Mbella, 2011)

## **1.2 Problem statement**

In Cameroon, like in most other African countries, some tribes and rural societies still have the notion that the girl child needs little or no education, rather she needs to take care of her younger ones and assist her parents at home. They view the education of the girl child as a waste of time and resources. Rather, all what she needs is some basic, informal education from her parents. Hence, girls are given out (or get) into marriages early. While in their marital homes, they have to look after their families by cooking for their husbands, taking care of the kids, taking care of their in-laws and their own family. This has resulted in high illiteracy rate among the women and has made them the most vulnerable group to poverty. This is further compounded by the high drop out of girls from school which makes them less competitive in the job market for the high-skill, medium-to-high wage jobs, often reserved for the more educated ones. Illiteracy is a barrier to getting a good paid job and/or aid from existing aid organisations. Only 40% of Cameroonian women are of the working class but still suffer from a lot of discrimination due to some of the above reasons.<sup>2</sup> A great proportion of

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<sup>2</sup> Gender Awareness Workshop and strategy implementation. Available online at: <http://www4.worldbank.org/afr/ssatp/Resources/HTML/Gender-RG/Source%20%20documents/Technical%20Reports/GRTI%20Reports/TEGRT4%20Country%20Report%202%20Cameroon.pdf> accessed 13/2/2012.

the Cameroonian women are housewives, small farmers or petty traders. This makes them more exposed to the poor conditions of the country. Cameroon being a country where about 80% of the population depend on agriculture, women form a larger proportion of this group. In order to support the efforts of these women, there are many national, international organisations and even some local groups formed by the women themselves to assist them in one way or the other. Micro financing through microcredit is a very important and helpful initiative that assists these women by providing them the means to carry out petty trades, farming and other lucrative activities for the up-bringing of their children and also helps them in other aspects to meet their basic necessities. Microfinance organisations thus contribute immensely to the survival and well-being of women in most developing countries like Cameroon. The efforts of these microfinance organisations will be discussed in this thesis based on two microfinance organisations which will be used as case study.

### **1.3 Purpose and significance of this study**

Women by nature are very entrepreneurial and are gifted in organising and coordinating small and medium sized (business) activities that help alleviate their societies from poverty and enhance national development. This study has as its main aim to explore and analyse the role micro finances play in enhancing the efforts of women so as to improve their living standards, with focus on Cameroon. This study will not only broaden our knowledge on how the Cameroonian women fight poverty but will also act as a guiding principle or an eye-opener to other underprivileged women. It will as well create awareness to the state and other national and international bodies which can help to assist in the empowerment of women. Finally the study will investigate if micro financing through women can promote empowerment.

### **1.4 Research questions**

This paper opens with some research questions addressing the main themes investigated in this study. This research was based on the following themes: *Cameroonian women, poverty alleviation, development, and microfinance, with the main focus microfinance*. These themes will be addressed by way of a case study involving two women associations; Women initiative for health Education and Economic Development- Cameroon (WINHEEDCAM) and MBONWEH Women Association. This case study will be used to discuss the role microfinance plays in improving the economic situation of Cameroon through women. The paper intends to find answers to the following questions:

1. What role(s) do the Cameroonian women play in the fight against poverty alleviation? What are some of the problems they encounter?
2. What is the impact of microfinance organizations such as the WINHEEDCAM and MBONWEH women Associations on improving the conditions of the Cameroonian women in the fight against poverty?
3. What will be the likely proves of Amartya Sen's theory on poverty to explain the women under study and other women under such conditions in general?

### **1.5 Definition of Terms**

**Poverty:** Poverty is more of a conceptual term (Piachaud.D, 1978: 147-164 ), the meaning may depend on the context. Various schools of thought view poverty differently. The economist relates it more to the level of income and consumptions, which is the more widely acceptable measure of poverty, but the sociologist relates it to a person's relationship with the society in which he lives, psychologist will view it differently, and so on. Despite the various views different people or fields of study may have about poverty, what is important is that it all centres around the absences or limited access to some basic necessities or the inability to get something due to one reason or the other, including vulnerability, powerlessness, and social exclusion (Nanak Kakwani, 2007). About one third of the population of Cameroon lives under poor conditions, especially women and those in the rural areas.

**Poverty alleviation:** This refers to all the measures that are adopted to overcome poverty and to empower the underprivileged. The main measures that are adopted by Cameroon to curb poverty include the demand of assistance from foreign bodies, the structural adjustment programme that was adopted in the late 80s and 90s and other developmental projects. Above all, assistance from microfinance organisations which is our main focus in this study.

**Development:** In the context used here, this refers to all the positive impacts or improvements on the living conditions of a group of people due (partly or wholly) to poverty alleviation strategies

## 1.6 Methodology

The research methodology used in this study is based on triangulation, involving primary and secondary data collection and analysis. .

Triangulation refers a combination of methods or approaches to a particular research problem. It is a “multiple line of sight” (Bruce L. Berg/ Howard Lune, 2012). This implies trying to look into a problem with different lenses so as to overcome the short coming of one method over the study of the problem. Triangulation was formerly used in Social Science metaphorically to describe *Multiple Operationalisation or Convergent Validation* (ibid (Pearson Cambell, 1956, Cambell & Fiske 1959)). It was viewed then as data triangulation till (Denzin 1978, P.292) introduced others which were: *Multiple theories, multiple researchers, multiple methodology or a combination of the four in a research study* (ibid). In this study, triangulation was used for data collection and analysis. The use of triangulation in this study was to counter the shortcoming of one research method over the other so as to make the conclusions more realistic. At times the perception of people is not often what exists in real life, so it is important to undertake both methods to critically look into the themes of interest which are; micro finances, women empowerment, poverty alleviation and enhancement of development. Thus, based on triangulation, interviews, group discussions and case study review were chosen for collect data.

**1.6.1 Sen’s theory of poverty.** This theory is based on the capability of an individual what he is able or capable of doing. And entitlement which is the goods and services that a person has at his disposal based on his Capability. This theory will be used to better explain the concept of poverty alleviation and it will be critically studied to show how useful it could be to the development and empowerment of the Cameroonian women. This theory will be used to critically analyse findings in the field and what other writers have written about the Cameroonian women or women in general in this domain and how microfinance and others helps to alleviate poverty.

Primary as well as secondary data collection methods will be used, with interviews and group discussions being the primary data collection method. This consist of the raw data because is it obtained directly from the group of people (women) directly concerned with in the study. On the other hand was the use of secondary data collection amongst which was

literature review. This consists of data earlier used by other writers and are related to the topic under study.

**1.6.2 Interviews and group discussions:** These were deemed necessary because they were the main means by which the voices of these women could be heard, giving them the opportunity to say what they are doing for their country in the domain of development, and how they get assistances from microfinance institutions. Interviews and group discussion also created a forum for the women to explain what they were going through and what their opinions were on the best ways to empower them and help them fight poverty. Although interviews and focus group discussion are carried out in much the same way, interviews are somewhat more intense than focus group discussion. However, in this research, both data collection methods were effectively carried out. Both methods are advantageous in that, the voices and problems of the subjects under study, (that is, women in this case) are directly heard. These methods give room to gather a large amount of data in a short period of time and are thus time saving. Despite the advantages of these methods, they do have some shortcomings in that at times the discussion time might be short depending on how much time the interviewees or those in the group discussion might be willing to grant you. Furthermore, attendance was voluntary, making it at times difficult to meet the right people to interview or discuss with making it time consuming. The choice of these methods was also to get in contact with both groups of people, since some people will express themselves better in a group than when they are alone and vice versa. Hence, the reason behind the use of triangulation was to counteract some of the drawbacks of each method.

**1.6.3 Case study:** This will be another method of data collection. This research method revolves around the selection of a particular group or community of people, to study which will be used to draw conclusion on the general issue of discussion. Hagan (2006, p.240) defined it as: “in-depth, qualitative studies of one or a few illustrative cases”. (Berg, 2004, 2007, 2012) on their part view case study as “a method involving systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions”. Two Microfinance organizations that help in the empowerment of women will be used and their activities critically examined. WINHEEDCAM and MBONWEH women Associations will be used as the main case study. The choice of case study is significant because there was a need to use an association that deals mainly with women and carries out activities that empower them in one way or the other.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Review of literature and theoretical framework**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

After giving a general introduction and the problem statement of this study in chapter one, chapter two discusses the ideas of other writers in relation to the theme under study. A literature review was carried out to examine various views on how women fight poverty and how microfinance is important in this fight. The second part of the paper will be based on the theoretical framework. Sen's theory of poverty will be discussed and applied to the case study.

#### **2.2 literature review**

Many researchers and writers in the field of development and social sciences have investigated on how microfinance may influence the level to which women can contribute to poverty alleviation or in the advancement of their society. This part of the paper, intends to focus on what these researchers have written in relation to the themes of interest in this study; women's fight against poverty and the role micro finances play in assisting them in this fight. The views of other researchers in this field will be critically analysed and will be discussed how it suit the topic and research questions.

##### **2.2.1 Microfinance**

When it comes to combating poverty, micro finances are very instrumental. Most microfinance institutions have as their main objective, to help the underprivileged or the poor to make life more worthy of living by assisting them with seed capital or micro credits for their small business start-ups, petty trade and agriculture. They do so, by giving out small loans to people at very low or no interest rate. The Grameen bank of Muhammad Yunus started in 1976 as a pilot project and then grew into one of the first world bank for the poor because of its numerous effort which helped to assist the people in Bangladesh, especially women who formed about 95 percent of the creditors (Count, 2006). Commercial banks in most societies are responsible for giving loans, but there are often a large number of people who cannot afford paying the interest rates of the commercial banks or want very small loans

which might not be profitable to the commercial banks. Microfinance institutions are more willing to provide loans to such people thereby improving on their standard of living, especially the women who have numerous activities but can afford very little. This goes a long way in the enhancement of development.

### **2.2.2 History of microfinance**

Most microfinance institutions came into being following Mohammed Yunus's initiative in 1974. Mohammed Yunus a Bangladesh professor who in 1974 visited Jorba village, one of the poorest villages in Bangladesh and the situation there made him to realise that a sum of 27 dollars could help a good number of people. He noticed this amount could immensely help 42 people if he granted them a loan with this sum to pay the money and some interest later. He then gave out this amount of money to the people and later it lead to the creation of Grameen bank which became very popular in the fight against poverty both in Bangladesh and worldwide<sup>3</sup>, This became almost like the birth of microfinance because most microfinance institutions today came into existences through this initiative or were created in much the same way.

In Cameroon, microfinance organisations date as far back as the early 1960s with the work of Anthony Jansen, a Dutch priest who created the first credit cooperative in the country which later led to the creation of the CAMCCUL (Cameroon Cooperative Credit Union League) in 1968 which became the first microfinance institution in the country. Then came a financial crisis in the whole of Africa in the 80s, which had a crippling effect on many financial institutions., Following a reconstruction program after the financial crisis, the cooperatives were strengthened and became more independent than ever before. There was a revision of the law in 1992 which gave more independence to the microfinance to govern their activities. A new law was put in place in 1998 which reduced the autonomy of the microfinance organisations. (Zangue, 2009) In Cameroon, microfinance are classified into three categories; the first being the cooperative institutions in which members have saving opportunities and the money can be given out as credit to other members to run their projects. The members are the sole beneficiaries. The second type of microfinance is the profit seeking institutions. They differ from the former in that they offer both the opportunities to save and provide credit to non members and the general public as well. The last type is profit-seeking microfinance

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.microplace.com/learn more/microfinancehistory](https://www.microplace.com/learn_more/microfinancehistory)

which provides credit to the general public but do not give them the saving possibility. (Zangue, 2009)

### **2.2.3 Importance of microfinance**

Micro finances play a vital role in development. They take the initiative to give out small loans to the very poor. Those who cannot afford to get loans from the commercial banks can get loans from microfinance to carry out their activities before repaying, with little or no interest. They are a very important tool to fight poverty especially as far as the women are concerned, since they form a large proportion of those who are more exposed to poverty because of their position in the society.

Micro finances do a lot to eradicate poverty in developing countries. Commercial banks give out loans but are not often willing in most cases to give out small loans to the very poor with the fear of not getting their money back in time or at all. Micro finances are very vital to women and development per se because, they give out loans to these women and thus “*significantly increase their security, autonomy, self confidence and status within the household*” (UN Secretary General, 1997). This fact is true to a greater extent because women from developing countries, Cameroon inclusive (which is our case study), have potentials but lack support especially with finances to run their own activities. Microfinance initiatives also promote women empowerment and in the long run enhance development.

### **2.2.4 Microfinance and women empowerment:**

The empowerment of women is a very important tool for enhancing development. The empowerment of women requires a multi-faceted approach involving the economic, socio-political and even cultural domains in order to achieve sustainable development by creating avenues for the women to be pro-active in the society. According to fourth UN conference on women, “empowerment of women and gender equality are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among all people” (UN, 1995). It implies that, women empowerment is also in the same way a prerequisite to attain development.

In most African cultures and societies, there is often a feeling of inferiority by the African woman, as there is a tendency for women to be relegated to the background. Through micro finances, women are not only economically empowered but also socially, culturally and politically, as these women are no longer relegated to the background but can also take active

part in nation-building . Therefore, in most countries, women association or women in general depend on micro finances as their main funding source in times of need. “.. From the early 70s, women movement in a number of countries indentified credits as a major constraint on women’s ability to earn an income...” (Mayoux, 2000)<sup>4</sup> most of these credits were taken from microfinance institutions because they assist the women with these loans at low interest rate or at no interest or without collaterals. Despite this, most writers contradict this idea. Goetz and Sen Gupta ( Goetz and Sen Gupta, 1996) question the level to which microfinance benefit the women. They do not really see the activities of microfinance institutions to be profitable to women empowerment. Baham, E.K. (Baham, 1995) also argues that micro finances divert the attention of the women rather than assist them. So according to them, they have more to profit from their activities with women than they contribute. According to these critics, some microfinance institutions may even have other hidden agendas. Although they in a way help or assist the women, they in the long run also profit in one way or the other. Thus it is like more of a give and take relationship though the local women benefit much from it. Empowerment is more an issue of change, choice and power. It involves a process of change in which people or a particular group with little or no power gain power and ability to part-take in decisions that concern them. (Susy Cheston et al, 2002). Women empowered requires a multi-faceted approach, including the law, working conditions, freedom of choice, and every other aspects of society affecting/involving women. Micro finances are very instrumental in this domain because they act like facilitators for the women to achieve their objectives.

### **2.3 Drawbacks of Microfinance**

Thought micro finances empower, assist, support the poor, and in the long run enhance development, they also have some shortcomings which are important to look into. This is because at times their efforts might rather make thing worst than before. One of the main criticisms of most microfinance institutions is the fact that funds given to their customers are not monitored at times or not well monitored. The main reason why they exist is to fight reduce poverty, improve on the economy and enhance development, but they fail to investigate very well on how funds given especially to women, who are dependent on their

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<sup>4</sup> Linda Mayoux. Microfinance and the empowerment of women. She made a review on the key issues about how important Microfinance important in empowering women and also bring out some critical points about their activities. In this paper she discusses the importance of Microfinance in empowering women and their short coming as well.

husbands, are used. These women come to demand funds with the honest commitment to embark on a trade or other profitable activities. However, at times they fail to put the money into use as promised. Though the money may be used for a good purpose like education of the children, feeding, and so on, they have not used it in the appropriate way that might bring them more profit or a turn over to grow (Taneja, July-December 2009).

Thought microfinance put in a lot of effort to assist the poor, there is high probability that they cannot reach all the poor, especially the very poor in the remotest areas and villages who are more in need. They may not be able to help in situations where poor living conditions are due to bad government regulations (Buss, T.F, Suffolk University., 1999).

The credit offered by microfinance to its members or the poor can sometimes rather get them into a credit or poverty trap than remove them from it. For example, some people might take loans and carry on business activities which may fail or they may not use the money appropriately like in the case of women who use the money for family matters rather than investing it into a business. In this way, the microfinance can in a way make life worse for some than before because they cannot meet up with their debt and may suffer psychological problems at times (ibid).

## **2.4 Theoretical frame work**

This part of chapter two is based on the main theory that will be used to analyse the study. The main theory in use will be Amartya Sen's theory of poverty. This will be applied on some of the activities of the microfinance in order to see to what extent they are applicable or important in helping alleviate poverty.

### **2.4.1 Capability approach**

Just as the name implies, the capability approach is based on a person's capability in achieving a particular objective. Capability can be related to the ability of someone to get something or attain an objective mainly based on the existing opportunities around him/her (Sen 1985). It is also about what people are able to do (or to be) in life or the society in which they live. What one is able to do or to be relates to other factors in the society. For instance, the law, health conditions, education and so on. The capability approach states that human development has as aim, to realise human potentials in a way that efforts put forward by poverty alleviation programmes must focus on of the participants and not only extra goods or services provided by the donors. This implies that not only the donor's effort is important, but

also the capabilities/potentials and well-being of the people. More so, donor approaches which are based exclusively on monetary terms are not considered the best by this theory because the individual's potential and well-being is underestimated. Sen argues that "...a person's capability reflects her potential well-being, or her *well-being freedom*, in contrast to the actual well-being which she has realised, her *achieved well-being*, which is reflected in the achieved functioning" (Sen 1985)

The capability approach is against the idea that people be viewed by the donors organisation like patients who need assistance, can be dictated upon and influenced in any way. Rather, it wants people to be organised in such a way that they can or should be given power into their own hands so that they can direct their own life and activities the way they like. This can make the help from the donor organisations to be more productive and long lasting. In a nutshell, this theory emphasis that what is important for the people is not the goods and services per se but what it can lead them to be, that is the capacity that a person can generate from it. Empowerment has an upper hand in the capability approach.

#### **2.4.2 Capability and functioning**

In Sen's theory of poverty, capability and functioning are interdependent, that is, one affects the other and vice versa. Every human being has his/her own life values, and so because of this opportunity (capability) which should be acceptable and respected by all, they have the right to lead the type of life they want. To do what they want how they want it. If someone has this capability or opportunities, they are then free to choose the various options that exist. In other words, with one's capability, they can function the way they want. Functioning involves various aspects: education, being healthy, resting, working, belonging to a particular community and being respected by all, and many other aspects where one can express his capability. Everyone is free to use his capacity to function the way he/she likes. Thus the capability approach is more of a liberal theory. For instance each and everyone should have the capability or freedom, opportunity to be respected by the society in which he lives, be educated, work, etc (Royens, 2005).

Sen. argues that capability is a set of vectors of functioning which reflects a person's freedom to live a particular type of life (Sen. 1992). It was stated earlier that capability and functioning are interdependent or interrelated. Sen's idea that they are like set of vectors support this fact because they can be used to correlate each other. One can be used as a reference for another. "Functioning is an achievement whereas capability is a ability to achieve. Functions are in a sense more related to living condition, since there are different

aspects of living condition. Capability, on the other hand, relates to one's ability and freedom to achieve: what real opportunities you have regarding the life you may live.”<sup>5</sup> Relating back to Sen's notion of function and capability like set of vectors, one's achievement-functioning can to a great extent related to his ability to get what he achieved or in other words related to his capacity. For example, the rate at which the Cameroonian woman will be able to alleviate poverty in the community in which they live will depend on her ability or the rights at her disposal. An individual will attain a certain level of education because of his/her ability to read, or afford money to go to school. A close examination of these two concepts can be looked upon like a set of vectors because they are closely related, though distinct.

A good distinction between both concepts can be explained using Sen's classical illustration of two people who stay away from eating. One does not eat because of a natural phenomenon which cannot be controlled, one being a victim of famine in Ethiopia and the other in a hunger strike in front of the Chinese embassy in Washington to protest against the occupation of Tibet. Though both men have gone hungry and are malnourished, and also lack the achievement of being well nourished and hungry free, or lack functioning, the person who have gone on hunger strike has the capability to achieve the functioning which the other person lacks. All what he needs is put his capability in use in order to achieve its functioning. This can also apply to someone who stays away from eating because he is fasting and another who does not eat because he lacks the money to eat. Distinction can also be made in terms of commodities.

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<sup>5</sup> Sen 1987 p. 36

Graphical representation of the Capability approach.

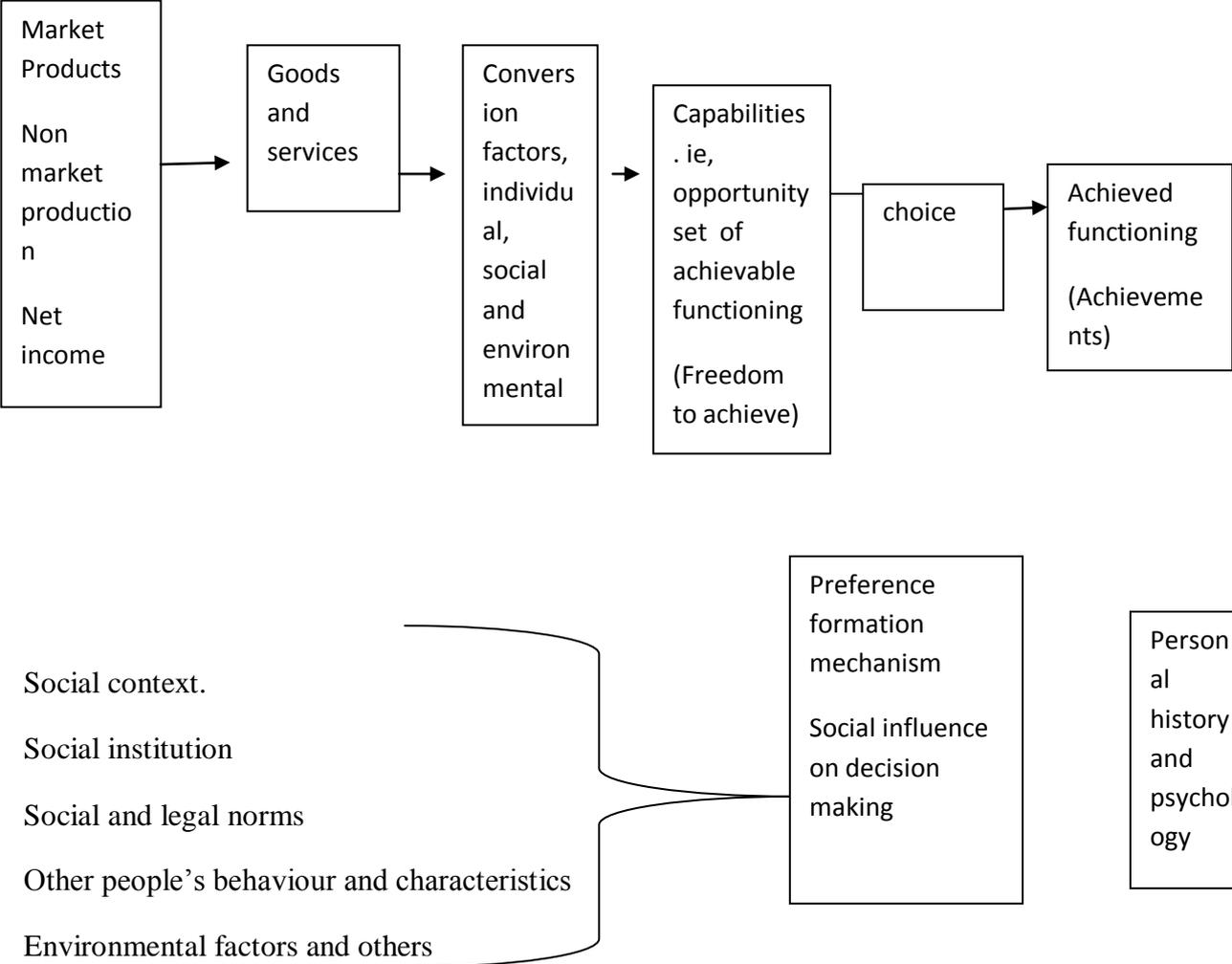


Figure 1. A chain representation of the working of capability and functioning adapted from Ingrid Robeyn, in *Capability approach; A Theoretical survey*, March 2005, p. 98.

**2.4.3 The entitlement approach**

The entitlement approach focuses on the amount of goods and services that a person can possess, the satisfaction that can be derived from these, and finally the transition from the goods or services and utility.

The entitlement approach can be defined as “the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces”.<sup>6</sup> This implies that the opportunities or rights that a person possesses can greatly

<sup>6</sup> Sen A 1984,p. 497

influence the goods and services that might be at his/her disposal, those with more rights will likely be in possession of more goods and services than those who might be discriminated upon or have less rights. This is just an example, not only rights influence endowment and entitlement. Other factors that might also influence it will be discussed in the later paragraphs. The entitlement approach in other words focuses on the goods and services that a person can possess the relationship with it and the society. This will be understood best when the distinction between entitlement, endowment and E-mapping (entitlement mapping) will be made.

The entitlement approach is based on three main themes or concepts:

- Endowment set
- Entitlement set
- Entitlement mapping or E-mapping.

Endowment set refers to the totality of the goods, commodities, assets, labour, etc, in fact all that is owned by an individual according to the law and practice. That is, the goods and services that are legally owned by an individual according to law and practice. They can be goods, services, power, etc, that he holds.

Entitlement on its part refers to the possible totality of goods and services that this person can enjoy or get from his or her endowment set according to law and practice, i.e. the possible achievements he can get from his endowments. Finally, Entitlement mapping or E-mapping can be term the transition from endowment to entitlement. In other words, it is the relationship between endowment and entitlement. The rate at which the endowment set can lead to possible entitlement is based on the E mapping. This can take place through three methods: production, exchange or transfer.<sup>7</sup> In order to, for instance, get a house, you have to work hard to build one, that is production, or you buy one depending on your money that is exchange or you can inherit it which is transfer.

A person can be entitled to something through the following ways; by buying it, i.e. *trade-based entitlement*. In this case the person is entitled to a thing because he bought it from another person, as in the above example of the house. A person can also be entitled to something that he has produced with his endowments; this is known as *production based*

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<sup>7</sup> Sen 1981, p 2

*entitlement*. That is, he is entitled to what he possesses or a particular endowment because he produced it, it could be with the resources that he has or that he hired from another person. But what is important with the production entitlement is that the person produced it. Another way that a person can be entitled to something can be through inheritance, which is known as *inheritance and transfer entitlement*. In this case a person is entitled to something because he inherited it. For example a son who inherits his father's company so the company was transferred from his father to him. The last but not least way that a person can be entitled to something is through the person's own labour. This is known as *own-labour entitlement*.<sup>8</sup>

The entitlement methods discussed above may differ from economy to economy; the above example will work mainly in a market economy where ownership of factors of production like land, labour capital and entrepreneurship can be owned by all. This may be different in a socialist economy where factors of production might not be owned by an individual.

The entitlement approach or concept can best be understood with starvation, famine or lack of food supply. Some people suffer from starvation at times not because there is no food available, but because of the lack of the ability to get the food.<sup>9</sup> This also goes with poverty. Some people are poor because they cannot afford some basic goods and services, whereas others are poor because of their inability to control the goods and service they have at their disposal. Others may not suffer from it because they may inherit wealth while some may work to be rich. Being poor does not mainly apply those who do not have goods or services or good jobs- *endowment*, they may have it at their disposal but they may undertake a business which turns out to be a failure and make them to become poor, or the society may impose very huge taxes on the business, or seize one's assets (e.g. house), and the person will then become poor. In this case, E-mapping is the reason for the person being poor. This implies that a person can become poor because of the following reasons; endowment loss, failure of production, exchange failure or transfer failure. A person's entitlement can also be influenced or defined by the socio-political, economic and legal structure either positively or negatively.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sen 1981,p.2

<sup>9</sup> Sen 1982, p.1

<sup>10</sup> Sen 1984

#### 2.4.4 Entitlement failure

Earlier, some of the circumstances under which a person can become poor were discussed. Here a graphical representation of starvation will make this more understandable. A person can become poor because of an unfavourable change in E-mapping or a reduction in endowment bundle. To illustrate this graphically, a model with two commodities non-food and food will be used and a shift in the endowment and failure of E-mapping will be monitored. The minimum food requirement is given by the region OAC, the starvation set given by OAB, in this case if endowment is at  $x$ , starvation can be avoided. This situation can be altered negatively to cause starvation if there is a shift in endowment set from  $x$  to  $x_1$  because endowment is not enough to avoid starvation.<sup>11</sup> This for instance may be as a result of the ill health of a farmer who cannot cultivate or his harvest gets bad in the farm because of one reason or the other, e.g. poor health condition. Starvation can also be as a result of a negative or unfavourable movement in E-mapping from OAB to OAC and endowment  $x$  remain unchanged. The change in a person's E-mapping may be as a result of a decline in food supply, a constant supply of food but lower purchasing power or other related factors that may lead to price increase.

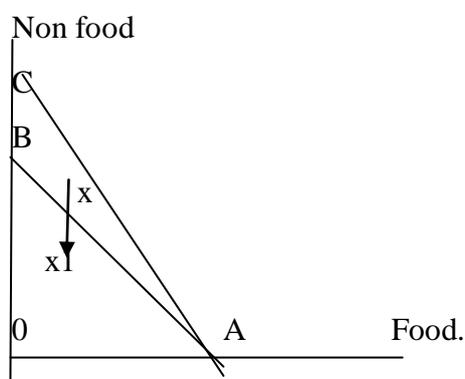


Figure 2. *Graphical illustration of entitlement and endowment.* Source: Sen, Amartya, *Poverty and famines: An essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, 1982, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> Sen 1984, p.456f

## **2.5 Some shortcomings of entitlement approach to poverty**

Though the entitlement approach can explain poverty and can be helpful in this domain, it does have some shortcomings. Entitlement emphasises a lot on the legal system. According to the entitlement approach, goods and services that individual possess must be acceptable by the legal system. It is against activities or things that are against the legal system, this implies that it will be difficult to apply it to a society that has become lawless.<sup>12</sup>

Another shortcoming is that it might be difficult at times to define a person's entitlement. It is regarded as the possible goods and services that a person can legally enjoy with its endowment. Looking at someone's endowment it might at times be difficult to define the possible goods and services that he can enjoy. In a pre-capitalist economy for example, there might be too much uncertainty about ownership relation because the government might not guarantee these rights. This ambiguous nature of entitlement makes it difficult for it to be used to empirically study poverty. This will result in too much generalisation when it comes to giving conclusion to situations, which at times might be incorrect.<sup>13</sup>

People's food consumption reduces because of a variety of reasons which cannot be discussed in the entitlement approach.

Also entitlement is not the only reason why people go poor, ignorance can also be responsible for this

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<sup>12</sup> Sen 1982, p. 49

<sup>13</sup> Sen 1982 48-49.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Findings and discussion

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the case study on the role of microfinance institutions in Cameroon and starts by introducing the reader to the country, Cameroon. This will be followed by a discussion of some projects from the microfinance organisations under study.

#### 3.2 Geography of Cameroon

Cameroon became a republic in 1961 when the former French Cameroon and a part of British Cameroon merged. Cameroon is a country which has never suffered a major war; this stability has in a way permitted development of agriculture, roads, Petroleum industry and even the creation and existence of microfinance organisations which help to alleviate the country from its poor condition. It is a West African country which covers a surface area of about 475,440 sq km sharing boundary with Central African Republic, Congo republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Nigeria to the east, south east, south west, south and west, respectively.<sup>14</sup> Cameroon has a population of approximately 18,897,956.9 million people with approximately 4,077,566.8 rural poor, of which women compose a greater proportion.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> <http://geography.about.com/library/cia/blccameroon.htm> (accessed on march 9 2010)

<sup>15</sup> IFAD "Cameroon Statistics" [Rural Poverty Portal](http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/statistics/tags/cameroon)  
[http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/statistics/tags/cameroon.](http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/statistics/tags/cameroon)



Figure 3. Map of Cameroon. Source: <http://geography.about.com/library/cia/blccameroun.htm> (accessed on March 9 2010)

### **3.3 WINHEEDCAM (Women’s Initiative for Health, Education and Economic Development in Cameroon)**

This is a microfinance organisation in Cameroon that is based in the North West province of Cameroon. As the name implies, WINHEEDCAM seeks to assist the very poor especially women and children, this microfinance operates in the North West province of Cameroon. They have as one of their main objectives to improve the living conditions of women and children through education, health and economic development so as to help alleviate poverty.

This association was born in 1997 by Dr Monroe Proctor, an American cardiologist who had worked in Cameroon for several years, and Dr, Pius Tih a Cameroonian who was the then Director of Health Services at Cameroon Baptist Convention. These two in the course of their health work noticed the need for financial assistance for the women in the North West province of Cameroon and decided to form this organisation. It all started in July 1997 with five groups of 69 women who were mainly involved in some little economic activities like petty trading or farming. WINHEEDCAM mainly works with women groups, which implies that to benefit from the facilities of this organisation, a person has to belong to a women

group which gets financial support from them. It assist women in mainly five divisions of the North West province (region) namely: Mezam division, Momo division, Boyo division, Bui division, and Ngoketunjia division.<sup>16</sup> Being a small and new organisation, it works in partnership with WIHEED in New Hampshire, End Poverty Organisation, Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Board, Hope for African Child Initiative (HACI), Socio Economic Empowerment of Persons with Disability (SEEPD) and Mutual Guarantee Financing Company PLC (MUGFIC PLC). WINHEECAM gets some of its fund from its partner organisations and from national and international donors.

### **3.3.1 Some activities and Achievements of WINHEEDCAM**

WINEEDCAM has contributed a lot to removing the Cameroonian woman out of poverty. WINHEEDCAM has as its primary objective to promote the image of the Cameroonian women by assisting them financially and otherwise to remove them from the web of poverty. WINHEECAM does this by giving small loans to the women in the North West region at very low interest rate to carry on petty trades (small trading activities) or rear animals so as to take care of their families and to send their children to school. The women also undergo trainings which do not only teach them how to excel in what they are doing but also how to be good housewives, on how to educate their children, cook for their families, in fact, how to make life better. The activities of WINHEEDCAM all aim at satisfying mainly the desires of the members in the various divisions and villages where their services are provided.

WINHEEDCAM since its creation has started this project to empower and promote the effort of women in the Bamenda region so as to make them more active in their communities and to alleviate poverty. The project that WINHEEDCAM has started with the women of this region also improves their business skills as it gives them more insight in book-keeping and other business skills to make them more commercial. Its projects also aim at improving the health condition of these women by teaching them good hygienic conditions, especially as some of the women that they deal with are HIV patients. It as well aims at teaching the women ways

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<sup>16</sup> The above infor about the back ground knowledge about WINEEDCAM was extracted from <http://winheedcam.org> accessed on 2012-03-14.

to improve on their nutrition since it is also very important for them and their entire families.

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The women are given out loans which they use to cultivate their farms or carry out petty trade, and use the turnover for the education of their children, family up-bring, etc. Loans up to about 100.000FCFA [currency of Cameroon] can be given out to the women, depending on the collateral security that one can present. In case of big loans up to 100.000FCFA, a collateral security is needed, but in case of small loans like 10,000 FCFA or 20,000 FCFA they do not really need a collateral security. The money given to these women is often at “very insignificant interest rate” said Miss Mbamu. This shows that WINHEEDCAM projects help to promote the effort of these women.

Though the loans are almost given free to the women, they have a condition which they have to respect; saving is made compulsory to every member. All the members are expected to save every week they have meetings. This was meant to create funds that could be given to them back as loans and also to ensure the success of the association’s projects. Alongside this compulsory saving, there is also a voluntary saving where each member saves for her future use. No interest is gotten from the money under compulsory saving, but interest payment can be received with voluntary savings. In order to make the project moving and to create more funds that could be given out as loans, WINHEEDCAM has another strategy that, each time a person takes a loan, 3% of the loan given is kept in the “retention fund” also known as the borrowing fee, the money in the retention fund is used for the running of the association projects. Money needed for any minor things like buying of writing materials, buying of papers are gotten from the retention fund.

Members are trained on many things which can help improve their standard of living. Since most women in this region are farmers, the training on farming methods is very important for them. They are introduced to new seedlings that can give them better harvest. Those who rear animals profit from facilities like pesticides and feed. They are also taught how to make animal feeds by themselves when the feed is very expensive in the market. These women are not only given information about farming but they are also taught how to be good housewives, given that most of them are house wives. They are taught hygiene, how to take

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with miss Germain. She was one of the women who dedicated her time to give us a good knowledge of what WINHEEDCAM is doing to the women in Bamenda especially in Bali where she leaves. Starting by here own self, she said she has benefited much from the association.

care of their health, and most importantly about clean water which is a problem to most people in the village. Indeed, those who are illiterates greatly profit from their activities as they acquire some education in one way or the other. Most importantly, the women are taught how to carry out their petty trade successfully and profitably by recording all what they have in stock and what they sell. Book-keeping is a very important and helpful offer for the women in WINHEEDCAM.

The projects and activities of WINHEEDCAM have greatly enriched the women of the North West region of Cameroon. In spite of this, some women have left the group along the way while more have also joined the group.

### **3.4 Mbonweh women development association**

Mbonweh is a women's group created in 1988 by Mrs Dorothy Atabong which, like other women's groups, has as objective to help fight for the empowerment of woman, to make the voices of the women heard. It is a self help, community-based not-for-profit organisation that helps to assist women in the domain of human rights, economic self sufficiency, health, and other women related problems. Most importantly, Mbonweh offers microcredit to the very poor and vulnerable women to carry out petty trade and other activities that bring them profit which can help them make life better. They as well hold seminars where they teach women various activities that can make them more lucrative. Women are for instance taught how to rear chicken, snails and other activities which can improve in source of their income. The microfinance of Mbonweh women group has immensely helped to improve the lives of many Cameroonians, especially in the South West region.

It has done a lot in the field of education as it assists the women to send their children in school.

### **3.5 Bamenda (North West Province/Region)**

Bamenda is the capital of the North West province, which today is known as the North West region following a presidential decree in 2008 transforming the provinces into regions. Bamenda, fondly known as Abakwa, has a population of about 446,000 inhabitants located at a distance of 366 km (227 ml) northwest of Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon. Bamenda is one of the two main English-speaking regions in Cameroon and also the birth place of SCNC (Southern Cameroons National Council) a group of Anglophone Cameroonians that was born in 1994 and who want the restoration of the former British Southern Cameroons which is a

territory that covers the English speaking province of North West and South West regions of the country. Bamenda has a tropical climate with an average temperature of 28 degrees Celsius, which makes agriculture favourable; it is also blessed with fertile soil though not as fertile as the South West region which has the black volcanic soil from the volcanic activities of Mount Cameroon. For this study, interviews in the North West region were conducted in Bali, Akum and Mankon villages. Most of the inhabitants in these villages, like others, depend mainly on agriculture as their main source of income, e.g. from the cultivation of food crops like maize, beans, cocoyams, etc, and from the rearing of animals like goats, chicken and pigs, etc.<sup>18</sup>

### **3.6 Buea (South West Province/Region)**

The South West region with its Capital Buea has an average population of approximately 1,153,125 inhabitants occupying a surface area of about 25,410 km<sup>2</sup>. Buea is blessed with very rich volcanic soil that has made the region to be very fertile. Just like Bamenda and the whole of Cameroon, Buea has two main seasons which are the rainy and the dry seasons. The rainy season runs from March to September and the dry season from October to February. Interviews in the South West region were conducted in Buea town and Bokwango. The South West region of Cameroon is bordered partly by the Atlantic ocean in resort town of Limbe, which has made fishing the means of survival of most families in Limbe. The South West region can be said to be blessed because it harbours the sea and Mount Cameroon which gives the opportunity to the local population to carry on agricultural activities and fishing which helps to boost the economy.

### **3.7 List of interviewed women and analysis of the various functions that affect their membership.**

A group of 15 WINHEEDCAM women were randomly chosen and interviewed on different aspects which affect their membership and how the association influences them and how it helps to improve their situation and the fight against poverty in general. Snowball sampling was used to choose interviewee. This is a sampling method recommended to find people with specific range of skills that are determined as being useful. This is referred to metaphorically as snowball sampling because there is a chain or connection of relationship created from the existing relationship to another. Though this method has the short coming that it might be

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<sup>18</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bamenda>

strenuous and time consuming, snowball method is advantageous in that the surveyor can involve people in the research he might not have none. The real people of interest in a research can easily be contacted. Wikipedia(encyclopedia) accesd 24/8-2012). The orgainsation was contacted and list of some of the clients taken where by some members were selected and other selected from the other parts of study area following the snowball sampling method.

*Table 1. WINHEEDCAM women who were interviewed, along with their respective ages, occupation, marital status, educational level, source of income, and the number of children they have.*

| No | Name         | Age   | Occupation      | Marital Status | children | Education | Source of y                |
|----|--------------|-------|-----------------|----------------|----------|-----------|----------------------------|
| 1  | Ma Ngwe      | 35yrs | housewife,      | married        | 4        | 3         | husband,FP,AR,PT           |
| 2  | Ma Majah     | 40    | housewife,      | married        | 4        | 6         | husband,FP,AR,PT           |
| 3  | Ma Relindis  | 45    | housewife,      | married        | 6        | 6         | husband,FP,AR,PT           |
| 4  | Ma Grace     | 48    | housewife,      | Widow          | 5        | 6         | FP,AR,PT                   |
| 5  | Ma Vero      | 38    | housewife,      | married        | 6        | 8         | husband,FP,AR,PT           |
| 6  | Ma Mary Lum  | 50    | buyer-sellam    | married        | 9 X      |           | husband,FP,AR,PT           |
| 7  | Ma Frenika   | 60    | housewife,      | Widow          | 10 x     |           | FP,AR,PT                   |
| 8  | Ma Meji      | 37    | housewife,      | married        | 5        | 9         | husband,FP,AR,PT           |
| 9  | Ma Azah      | 27    | teacher         | married        | 3        | 12        | teaching , husband PT      |
| 10 | Ma Evelyne   | 30    | tailor          | single         | 1        | 10        | sewing                     |
| 11 | Ma Hoonorine | 37    | trader          | divorcee       | 4        | 10        | trading in varied articles |
| 12 | Ma Wamboh    | 32    | nurse           | married        | 2        | 14        | her salary husband         |
| 13 | Ma Bih       | 40    | housewife,      | married        | 6        | 7         | husband,FP,AR,PT           |
| 14 | Ma Felicia   | 65    | retired teacher | married        | 9        | 14        | retir't money, husband     |
| 15 | Ma Adeh      | X     | housewife,      | married        | 10 X     |           | husband,FP,AR,PT           |

Key:

X- Means no answer or don't know

FP-farm products

AR- Animal rearing

PT- petty trade

Y- income

Buyam- sellam- A term attributed to people who do petty trade of buying and selling different type of articles or commodities.

Table 2. Mbonweh women who were interviewed, along with their respective ages, occupation, marital status, level of Education and source of income.

| No | Name           | Age | Occupation     | Marital status | Children | Education | Source of income                    |
|----|----------------|-----|----------------|----------------|----------|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| 1  | Mme Dorothy    | 35  | teacher        | married        | 2        | 15        | teaching, husband, biz              |
| 2  | Relindis       | 40  | housewife      | married        | 6        | 6         | husband, petite trade               |
| 3  | Mme Tanjong    | 45  | housewife      | married        | 5        | 6         | husband                             |
| 4  | Forfeke        | 30  | midwife        | single         | 1        | 15        | from her job,                       |
| 5  | Mme Nkengfua   | 40  | teacher        | married        | 2        | 15        | teaching, husband, biz              |
| 6  | Mme Nkenglefak | 50  | trader         | widow          | 9        | 5         | sell vegetable and other food items |
| 7  | Mme Atabong    | 43  | biz woman      | divorcee       | 3        | 10        | from her biz                        |
| 8  | Amanda         | 32  | farmer         | single         | 4        | 6         | sell vegetable and other food items |
| 9  | Felicia        | 29  | student        | single         | 0        | 13        | from her parents, do hair           |
| 10 | Wasee Jelindis | 25  | trader         | married        | 1        | 5         | sells cryfish and dry fish          |
| 11 | Docas          | 25  | student        | married        | 0        | 10        | from husband                        |
| 12 | Miss Emilia    | 45  | teacher        | divorcee       | 7        | 12        | teaching, petite trade              |
| 13 | Graceline      | 31  | hair dresser   | single         | 3        | 5         | from her hair dressing job,         |
| 14 | Seraphine      | 41  | own a restaura | widow          | 7        | 7         | from her restaurant                 |
| 15 | Mme Edith Wole | 48  | tailor         | married        | 7        | 5         | from her job, sew dresses and sell  |

Key:

- Most of the women who were said to be traders or business women were mainly carrying out petty trade.

- Biz means business

Table 2 shows the list of interviewed Mbonweh women. From the above tables, it can be noticed that most of the women who were interviewed, unlike others are married and are mainly housewife. They do not really have a good source of income apart from depending on their husbands. Alongside what their husbands give them, they also carry out petty trade from the crops they get from their farms or from the animals they keep. It is very common that most of the women do not do formal work but depend only on their husbands and from the petty trade (small business) they do for survival. In Table 1, all of the women are housewives, apart from women no 9,10,11,12 and 14 who got another job alongside their housewife duties. In Table 2, there is a very big difference as only two are housewives though most of them are married as well.

### **3.7.1 Age and marital status:**

In Table 1, the average age of the interviewed women was 39 years, with the youngest being 27 and the oldest being 65. Interviewee 15 refused to disclose her age. Most of the women were married which reflects a typical rural community in Cameroon. A woman gets a lot of dignity when she is married. More to this, they highly depend on their husbands who often support them. This is probably why most of the women are mere housewives. All interviewed women were married except interviewee numbers 4, 7, 10 and 11 who were either widows, singles or divorced.

More than half of the interviewed women were housewives, with only one teacher and a retired teacher, a nurse, a tailor, and a “buyer sellam”.

On the other hand, in Table 2, the average age of interviewed women was 37, with the youngest being 25 and the oldest 50 years old. In terms of marriage, 7 women were married amongst those who were interviewed. This might have been a coincidence but it could also reflect reality, which is that marriage is not really cherished by the South West women though it is seen to be very important.

### **3.7.2 Education and no of children**

Education can greatly influence the number of children that someone may have. In Table 1, the educational level of the interviewees ranged from 3 to 14 for those who answered the question based on this subtopic. Interviewee numbers 6, 7 and 15 did not give the number of years they have been to school. In Cameroon the primary level of education is 6 years (it used to be 7 years), after that there is 5 years of secondary level, two years of high school, and three or four years in the university depending in the programme of study. So, 3 years of education implies that the person acquired just the basic level of education. In Table 1, the most educated went to school for 14 years which means then they quit school from high school. Hence, none of the women went to the university. The most educated amongst those who responded to the question on education were interviewee numbers 12 and 14, with the least educated interviewee being interviewee number 1 (Table 1). Looking keenly, it was noted that on average, those who are more educated have less children, depending on their source of income. This also make them to suffer less from poverty because they may have more skills that can permit them educate their children and make living condition better as

compared to those who have merely acquired the very basic knowledge in school or nothing at all.

In Table 2, the level of education of the interviewees ranges between 5 to 15 years. With interviewees 1, 4 and 5 being the most educated, and interviewees 6, 10, 13 the least educated. In relation to the number of children they have, those who have fewer years of education have more children, which might also in the long run affect their standard of living as far as poverty is concerned.

All the women, both those who have acquired many years of education and those who have not, greatly acknowledged the fact that they have gained a lot of knowledge from the various microfinance organization they belong to. Interviewee number 6 from Table 1 made it very clear that she has greatly profited from book-keeping which she learnt from one of the training sessions. She said the book-keeping has greatly taught her how to know when she has made profit or a lost compared to before. This goes same with the other women, as all of them said they have greatly improved from the activities and loans of their various microfinance organisations and that is why they are still members. Interviewee number 6 from Table 2 who is a widow, acknowledged the fact that she was able to educate her children after the death of her husband because of the loan she got from this association which permitted her to employ people to work in her farm, to buy feed for the animals she is rearing and to booster the petty trade (small business) she does. She said, her in-laws seized all the properties of her husband after his death and the loan of WINHEEDCAM was her last resort.

### **3.7.3 Income**

Most of the interviewees were from the rural area in Cameroon whereby farming (cultivation of crops) and animal rearing is one of the main activities carried out by women for survival. From all the 15 interviewees, more than half of the women do farming or rear animals. They do not really own large hectares of land or a big farm of animal but they are in possession of a reasonable quantity that helps them to 'make ends meet'. All the women own at least a small piece of land that they have inherited from their family members or from their husbands. This made the activities of microfinance organisations very helpful to the women, because they learned many things that helped to improve on their farm products, the animals they kept and finally the profit from their petty trade. Most of the women told me the training sessions taught them how to make their farms more fertile by introducing them to varied types of manure. It also introduced new seeds and fertilizers that helped to improve on their output.

Interviewee number 17 from Table 1, who is a widow, told me that if she is surviving today it is thanks to the farming techniques and the offers of WINHEEDCAM. Given that most of the women interviewed are in the rural areas, they all have a common source of income which is farming, and many of them rear animals. All the women depend on their husbands, whether they are working or not. Even interviewees 9 and 12 from Table 1 and interviewees 1 and 5 from Table 2 who are working class still depend on their husbands and so they still look on their husbands to add something to what they already have. Almost all the interviewees expected something from their husbands irrespective of whether they were working or not.

### **3.7.4 Source of Capital loans**

All the interviewed women in a way had almost the same source of capital. Apart from interviewees numbers 9, 10, 12 and 14 from Table 1 and interviewees numbers 1, 4, 5, 12, and 15 from Table 2 who get a monthly salary which in a way help to make them raise some money to start up a business or carry on with farming or keep animals, most of the women get their capital from small microfinance associations popularly known as “njangi”. This is a type of microfinance association whereby women group themselves, contribute money either weekly, monthly and give to one of the members on no interest basis. It rotates until each and every member has had her turn.<sup>19</sup>

Another way to raise capital is through money given by their husbands. As mentioned earlier, marriage is a very important union in Cameroon especially in the rural areas. Likewise, in other African countries, it is very important and almost compulsory for a woman to be married. Given the custom that husbands have to take care of their wives, they also can provide money for them to carry on small trade, rear animals or carry out other profitable activities. Thus, another way through which the women raise capital for their activities.

Thirdly, loan taking is a very popular way of getting capital. Two main methods of loan acquisition is through microfinance organisations like WINHEEDCAM and Mbonweh women associations, and the “njangi” groups which most of the women belong to. All the women that were interviewed were both members of WINHEEDCAM and Mbonweh women associations, so they used some of their loans as capital to set up businesses or start an activity that is profitable. In order for a person to get a loan from any of the associations, she needs to

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<sup>19</sup> Mah Akeh. One of my interviewee, a member of WINHEEDCAM. She mentioned this was also very beneficial to them.

be a registered member. Loans from WINHEEDCAM range from 5000 to about 50.000FCFA, given the fact that the women do not really carry out any activities that need a large amount of capital.

Another vital means of getting capital could also be through borrowing from individuals. It is very common in the rural communities for people to borrow money from private individuals. Such individuals could be family members or friends. Such people give out loans most of the times at very low interest rate or at no interest at all.

It is a problem at times for most of the women to get capital because they are scared to take loans because of the fear that their businesses may not be successful and so they may not be able to pay back the loans.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Analysis and results from findings**

#### **4.1 Data Analysis and results**

This chapter presents the results from the case study examining the vital role that micro finances play in helping to eradicate poverty. To this regards, two microfinance organisations in Cameroon were chosen to represent what happens in Cameroon specifically in two regions of the country North West and South West, with headquarters in Bamenda and Buea respectively. The data that were collected through interviews, group discussion and the other data collection methods will be analysed in this chapter using Sen's theory of capability and entitlement, relating it to the research questions.

#### **4.2 Importance of health**

Health is very important as far as the capability and functioning of an individual is concerned, because without good health, an individual will be able to carry out his or her activities. Women from both groups greatly express their gratitude to the efforts of the associations which they belong to, for helping them improve on their living conditions especially as far as health is concerned.

Seminars on hygiene and on how to take care of their families are a very important thing and a big plus to the lives of these women, given the fact that most of them live in the rural areas where they know very little about good hygienic conditions which can help them prevent illnesses. Most rural communities suffer from water problems, are more exposed to air born diseases, in case of any outbreak of illness in the community are the vulnerable, so assisting them health wise, like WINHEDCAM and other micro finance organisations do is a very important effort and indeed helps to make life worthy of living by most of the rural settlers. In other words, good health is directly related to someone's capability and his/her functioning in society. One cannot function well or be able to carry on with daily activities if he\she is ill. If any of these women is sick, she will not be able to go to the farm or to the market to sell and this will render her dysfunctional and her capability will also be affected. Not only will she be handicapped, but also her entire family, village, community and it might be a whole chain that

can go to the national level. A good example is one of my interviewee who was unable to register her child for a public examination because she was seriously ill and her husband could not afford because all the money they had had been used on her.

### **4.3 Standard of living**

Keenly looking, all the women who were interviewed in both organisations greatly improved after they came in contact with the microfinance organisations or since they started taking part in their activities. There was a great improvement in their life style, making also an improvement in their living standard. Micro finances have greatly influenced their life style and have led to an increase in their standard of living. Through the programmes of the microfinance organisations, they have learnt a lot. They have learnt diverse methods of farming and cultivation which has helped to boost their harvest for those who are farmers, and for those doing petty trade and other types of business, they have been taught good saving method which help to make their revenue to grow. They have learnt more advanced book-keeping methods which have helped to make their trading to boom. As a result, they can educate their children, live good lives, make them less dependent and contribute to the advancement of their families and community at large.

One's capability and how he/she functions can be directly proportional to his or her standard of living. A high standard of living will likely lead to more capability and a person's functioning will also improve and vice versa. Interviewee no. 14 from Mbonweh women association (Table 2) made it very clear that since she became a member of the association, her life has never been the same. "My life style has improved since I became a member of Mbonweh women association. I have learned how to manage the little restaurant which is the main source of revenue for my children and me after the death of my husband". Not only she but almost all of them acknowledged the fact that their lives have never been the same since they became members of the respective microfinance organisations. Given the fact that these women have become members of the microfinance organizations, their standard of living has improved and so their functioning and capability. Belonging to microfinance organisations has not only made them more functional and capable, but have improved their standard of living and this goes beyond their family to the entire country.

### **4.4 Educational standard**

Both tables from the interviews and discussions with the women can to a greater extend make one conclude that the educational level of the women is not really the best. This is a typical example of a rural community. Whatever be the cause, their membership at the microfinance organisations has

helped to make life more worthy of living with this “handicap”<sup>20</sup> of education. A person’s literacy level can greatly influence her functioning and capability.

From Table 1 and Table 2, the women who took part in the survey dropped out of school at very early stage. Very few of them completed the secondary school and very few of them went to the university. This normally affects their life style, their functioning and their capability. From both tables, the women dropped out of school at very early stages. Table 1 shows that the most educated women completed high school (interviewee no. 14 and 12) and the least educated dropped out of school from class three. On the other hand, the most educated in Table 2 studied till the first year of the university (women no. 1, 4 and 6) with those who spent less years at school (women no. 6, 10, 13, and 15) dropping out of school from class five. Though the statistics obtained from this interview may not really reflect the country as a whole, it will to some extent show how the situation in the rural area looks like. This is because the situation of all the women at large especially in the rural area was taken into consideration when choosing study sample.

Linking this back to Sen’s theory, it can be noticed that the absence of knowledge or, in other words, limited knowledge or illiteracy can make one to be dysfunctional. It might be a big handicap as it might hinder someone from actively partaking in activities that concern his/her well-being. It can also hinder them from enjoying some goods and services that may be at their disposal. Whatever the case, failure to achieve one’s well-being due to educational level differs from individual to individual, as some might have other factors that might make life easy for them, e.g. support from their husbands, but other women who are widows for instance or have nobody to rely on may face it differently.

Educational standard is not the best in this study sample, also a general phenomenon in most rural communities. This is due to financial and socio-cultural factors also making the women to be dysfunctional. Microfinance organisations like WINHEEDCAM and Mbohweh women group come in as saviours to these women by transforming their lives, making life worthy of living by assisting them with loans and teaching them ways to improve their living despite their educational levels and living conditions.

#### **4.5 Microfinance and Empowerment**

Empowerment consists of activities or efforts that can help to promote an individual and to make him or her more independent, be heard, be respected and fully be part of the community in which he or she lives. After researching on micro finances in this study and interviewing a good number of women, it was noted that microfinance organisations are very instrumental in promoting the well-being of

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<sup>20</sup> Most of the women interviewed termed poverty a handicap. Meaning they could not do many things as a result of it.

women. This is done through their efforts as they give out loans to them which permits them carry out lucrative activities that make life worthy of living for them and also make their voices heard. Alongside giving out loans, microfinance organisations have varied activities that help to empower the women in the society. Empowerment has a lot of influence on a person's entitlement and capabilities as it gives one room to carry out many activities that can make him/her independent and less reliable on others for survival. A good number of the women who were interviewed were nothing before they came in contact with microfinance organisations but became something afterwards. They were previously mostly dependent but became more independent after they came in contact with these organisations, and have greatly contributed in the development of their communities in many ways, directly or indirectly. These organisations have helped to give them loans, taught them many things which have enabled them to move from being dependent to being independent. Above all, they have empowered them and made them respectful, responsible and active contributors of development in their societies.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### 5.1 Conclusions

The main goal of the research presented in this thesis was to investigate the role of the Cameroonian woman helping poverty alleviation through microfinance organisations. The study equally aimed to act as an eye-opener to other stake-holders, including the state, microfinance organisations and the world in general to see the efforts of these women and to know their capabilities in order not to continuously put them last but to give them the opportunity to partake in the development of the society in which they live.

It is noted that the women are very important to the development of their societies, though with limited resources and rights, and also their efforts are underestimated. They play a vital role in the fight against poverty but they face problems which at times hinder them from achieving their objectives. Finance, segregation in all its forms, a lot of responsibilities and others are examples of such problems which women face on a daily basis. After interviewing the women of WINHEEDCAM and MBONWEH women associations, it was noted that their activities are very important in the advancement of the society. Some women and families live by the mercy of these associations, and their lives has never been the same since they became members of the microfinance organisations.

The Cameroonian woman puts in a lot of efforts in fighting poverty. Their petty trades, farming activities, and other profitable activities that they carry on enable them to assist their husbands to send their children to school for those who are married and also for those who are single parents, it enables them to feed, clothe and send their children to school. In fact, it helps to improve their standards of living.

Looking back at my research questions and the initial aim of the research, it can be concluded that Cameroonian women, specifically those from Bamenda and Buea where the research case study was carried out are empowered through their belonging to microfinance organisations and this enable them to be functional improve on their capability, resulting in their contribution to the development of the country in many ways.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Despite the efforts of microfinance organisations in assisting the Cameroonian women through loans to carry on lucrative activities, by training them in different fields which help to boost their economic situations and improve their standards of living, it is recommended to put in more effort to meet the most needy women, especially those in the interior and widows who have no one to assist them and their families.

Education and good health is a very important factor for development, and it is recommended that microfinance organisations and their partner organisations increase their activities or multiply their efforts in giving the women an upper hand in this domain of poverty alleviation. They should also make membership to the microfinance organisations to be more favourable and flexible so that most of the women can have room to partake in the activities that concern their well-being so as to mount an even more effective fight against poverty and to come out of the web of poverty.

## APPENDIX

### **Sample of questions that were used in both the interviews and focus group discussion.**

Though in the interview, the question and answer session was more intense at times than the other, almost the same questions were discussed. In order to ease analysis, they were divided into sub topics. However, at times the order was not followed due to the academic level interpretation of some of the interviewees or group discussion members or other interruptions.

Part one was based on Personal information:

-Name (not compulsory since some did not want to disclose their identity. Confidentiality was greatly respected.

-Age. The age group ranges was made.15-25, 25-35, 35-45, 45+. There was fix criteria on the choice of age range. But it started from 15 because it is averagely the age that most children can stand on their own in these communities.

Sex. Women were the main interest but this was necessary concerning their family

-Marital status- single, married devoiced or widow.

-Educational level

-Number of Children. (Details about the personal information of the kids were also asked in order to know how it influences their activities and the importance of microfinance to them relating to this. This was because male children and female children might have different impact on their activities.

Part two of the questionnaire was based on household and living standard, where it was required to know:

What are their housing conditions? If they are comfortable with it or not and why?

What is their source of income? If they are satisfied with it or not and why?

How they manage to educate and cater for the needs of their children. Problems they encounter and how they revolve them financially.

What they do for a living, how many hours and days they work per week and their income. Satisfactory income or not.

How their living partners (husbands, boyfriends and others) influence their living financially?

Satisfied or not in the life they are living. Why/ why not.

Health condition: what is their health condition? Satisfied with it or not. How do they work to improve on it?

Water supply method ; this question might be irrelevant but was important to me to know because it is one of the factors that might influence life style, health, living standard and all these are interwoven, related to the economic situation of an individual.

Do you know what a microfinance organization is? Anyone in your community? How important are they to you?

The third part was on microfinance, loans and more on their financial situations.

Do you take loans? Why and from who? Have this been of help to you?

Do you pay back your loans on time? Why/ why not?

Have you ever failed doing so? What was the consequence?

Do you think loan taking improve on your living standard? Why/ why not.

Does your husband know when you take a loan? What is your relationship with him?

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